

Design and Inspiration

I began my art and craft career before I completed high school. Clothing was my passion so I just began making my own clothes. My mom was a pattern maker so she quickly directed my actions to learning how to design a garment, choose the right fabric for me and my design and make a pattern. As time went by and I took on an adult role, working, wife, motherhood, volunteering, I gathered more training as I rolled along. Every mentor and instructor placed a great emphasis on design. It seemed like that at each turn in the road of my creative journey I was learning how to express myself in different media. What began as a lucrative business in fiber art in the 60's turned to metal and clay jewellery making in the 90's. More learning experiences.

Looking back I can see similar trends whether it was in fiber, metal or clay. I am an aboriginal artist and my designs look to culture, heritage, the land, the sea, and books for inspiration; colour, shape, texture. The people I meet, my family and friends influence quite a bit of what I create. My sister says that often when she is talking to me I get "that look" and my mind goes somewhere else, I am not even in the same canoe with her apparently. Sometimes a word from someone can spark a new idea—not even related to what we were discussing.

As the need for souvenirs based on culture and heritage grew in Labrador I found I was looking backward for form and embellishment designs.

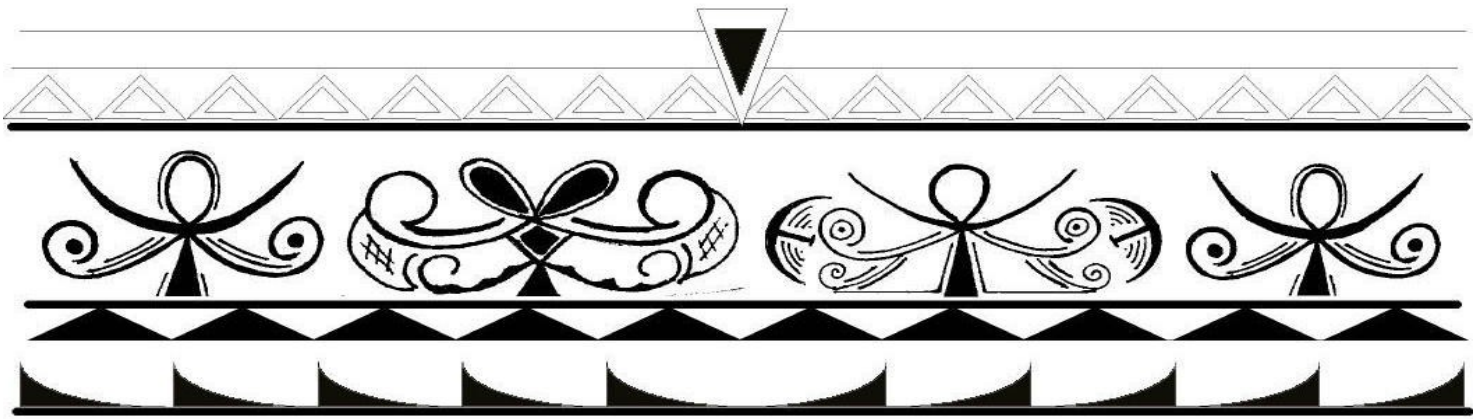


The Innu Painted Coat

A Personal Journey

In 2005 when I first heard about the painted Caribou coats I was researching my own aboriginal roots and a seed was planted in my mind. I would design a line of clothing and accessories based on these coats. I kept the idea alive by reading any new piece of information on the internet and jotting down my ideas. It was my goal to have some pieces of work ready for our gallery in Cartwright at its 10th anniversary in 2009.

As often happens with design ideas, they change, get added to, you face reality. I downsized my ideas, upscaled them, brought in the element of canvas Cossacks, and actually began the process of producing a couple of prototypes – jewelry, in 2008.



The drawing became more important than the actual garments. I sat back and looked at what I had on paper. I could see pendants, broaches, hair pieces. I wore my first piece to get comments, what people liked, their reaction.

One young lady looked at it and said she could see it as a motif on the sleeve of a woman's cut tee shirt. Bing! All of those sketches, a new life.

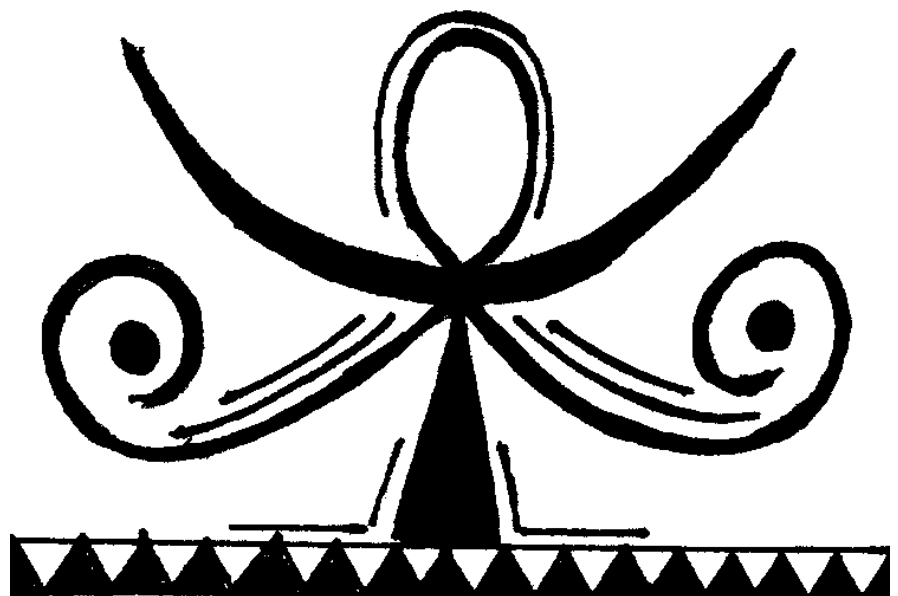
Where am in the design plan now? I have focused on a small number of the images, interpreted some, copied others and will have a few pieces ready for our gallery, Mealy Mountain Gallery, by our 10th year, 2009. In 2017 we have a limited supply of cotton tees, jewellery and Woodlands style moccasins that have the images painted on the toe.

The designs for this artwork is based on the Innu pishakanakup (Caribou Skin Coat).

The painted Innu coats represent the rich culture of the Innu worn by the Naskapi, Montagnais, and Cree Hunters of the Quebec-Labrador Peninsula of Labrador. The coats were the interpretation of a hunters dreams, a tribute to the caribou, a sign of respect. They were constructed and painted by the women

Originally the skin was painted with mainly 4 – 5 colours. The yellow was derived from fish roe, the ochre colour from the rich clay. Blue and Red were pigments that came by way of trading with the Europeans. The drawings were the written dreams.

I have been fascinated by the double curve for years so that was where I began. I read Symbols of North America by Heika Owusu and To Please the Caribou by Dorothy Burnham. All of my readings on the subject have influenced my design.



Colour was carefully applied with a bone stylus instead of a brush; parallel lines were drawn with a stylus shaped like a fork. The yellow colour was made of fish-roe, black from burnt bones, most of the red pigments was acquired from fur traders. The reddish-brown around the upper part of the sleeves is a native pigment, absent on later coats. The total absence of "laundry blue" supports the pre-1850 origin of this coat. All the pigments, including the imports, were held in a fish-roe binding medium. ...The off-white colour of the tanned skin is the symbol for caribou, and also in other parts of the Canadian North the Indians have stated that the caribou are attracted by white dress. Basic to many of the painted designs is a double curve, symbolic of caribou antlers. Parallel lines stand for trails of the caribou herds, and for tracks of toboggans loaded with meat. Red paint symbolized blood. The sophistication of women's aesthetic values are manifest in this art work. In prayer and blessings the new coat acquired magical powers to ensure success in hunting, though these powers were believed to disappear gradually (William Jamieson Tribal Art)



Hand painted on muslin
Embellished with copper charms



Copper Clay Pendants
Recycled wine bottle cabochon

My first product broach/pendants, screened and hand painted on cotton muslin. Each piece was encased with recycled copper and porcupine quills. These were followed by hand painted cotton tees.



The Jewellery design shapes mainly came to me through the line images I was drawing.

The second product Design I have chosen to write about is a body of work that I began after I went to Nain in September 2016.

This I call the **“Inuit Tattoo”**

Down through the ages Inuit women have been adorning their body with tattoos. Over the last century the Inuit Women of Labrador have lost most of this tradition.

There have been some evidence of the women still tattooing along the coast of Labrador in the early 1800. There has been no recent documentation to show that it continued after the arrival of the Moravian Missionaries. Today Labrador Inuit are bringing back old traditions and learning more about their culture.

Some of tattoo images are showing up in embroidery patterns. While living in Nain I was intrigued with the history of the tattooing in Labrador (I had been introduced to it in Greenland and the Eastern Nunavut Land) Peggy Anderson and Heather Angnatok influenced my work as I began sketching the markings that I would later use as embellishment on copper, bronze and silver.

The designing this time was a little different , the tattoo drawings were not directing the shape.

The first pieces of jewellery were plain oval or rectangle shaped and the lines were etched in the metal. It kept pushing me to do something different . I started to take icons from the culture such as the ulu and the inuksuk, the quliq, and harpoon were some of the sketches but I raised the line images because, although they were originally tattoos, I was seeing embroider which lay on top of the material

The Ulu was an obvious shape as the tattoo adorned Inuit woman and the Ulu is known as the “woman’s knife”

Am I finished with this design? Not a chance. The product lists keep growing.





Pete Barrett