

Press Release

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For immediate release

The Changing Scope of the Museum Display

Nelson, BC (July 14, 2021): In 2006, Touchstones Nelson Museum was loaned a pair of Sinixt baskets, two stunning examples of incredible skill and ingenuity that we have been honoured to share with the community. The baskets were on loan from Marilyn James, a member of the Autonomous Sinixt, and they will be returned to her this week at her request. We thank Marilyn for sharing these family baskets, and to show respect for this generosity Touchstones Nelson has made a donation to the Indian Residential School Survivors Society to support the survivors of the Kamloops Indian Residential School and their families.

Touchstones Nelson Museum would like to acknowledge the long history of activism by Marilyn James, and her daughter Taress Alexis. They, along with the Settler-Indigenous group, The Blood of Life Collective, have worked diligently over the last 30+ years to raise awareness regarding cultural genocide and dispossession of land, to protect land and water, to work with organizations in the region, and so much more—this work, and the family history of the Autonomous Sinixt, is an integral part of our local living history.

It is with regret that we notify our community that Marilyn James, the Autonomous Sinixt, and The Blood of Life Collective have chosen to discontinue conversation or collaboration with Touchstones Nelson Museum, on current or future reconciliation conversations. The catalyst for this action seems to be the decision we made to not carry the map that was recently created by the Blood of Life Collective. The map is beautifully created, and we do not fundamentally disapprove of the map – rather, we deferred in order to have time to consult with Indigenous academics, elders and community leaders to ensure that the information represents the thousands of Sinixt in this region, on both sides of the border. The Museum regularly collaborates and co-develops programs and exhibitions with the Sinixt (Sh̓ ʔaʔckstx) Confederacy through the Colville Confederated Tribes, the Ktunaxa Nation, and the West Kootenay Métis Association.

What the Sinixt have always known, and what the Supreme Court of Canada has recently validated, is that the declaration of extinction of their people existed on paper only, and that the Sinixt are still here, still participate in cultural tradition in this place, and exist in the thousands, south of the 49th Parallel, and within the families and governing structures of several regional Indigenous Nations in Canada.

While we are aware of the long-standing challenges faced between the Sinixt Confederacy and the Autonomous Sinixt, we do not believe that co-development with the regional Indigenous Nations ought to be seen as negative. Getting involved in this very complex, difficult issue that exists as a result of colonial history and current policies, is not our role. Rather, as a colonial institution we are endeavoring to deeply understand the history and context of museums, art, archives and local history – not only from an academic setting, but guided by the TRC Calls to Action and UNDRIP, determined to create meaningful, tangible changes in our organization.

By working with Indigenous Elders, Knowledge Keepers and Educators, and through professional development opportunities such as *The REDress project*, and the Orange Shirt campaign, we have learned as an institution - and as individuals - that lifelong learning is a pinnacle of Indigenous knowledge, spirituality, values and pedagogy. To engage in true reconciliation, we need to listen and learn, and understand that while we may house the artifacts and photographs and ephemera, we are not the experts on the histories, stories or lived experiences of others.

We follow regional Indigenous law and protocol in collaboration with regional Indigenous community leaders, academics, Elders, and youth. Through our ongoing learning, we as a museum understand that Indigenous concepts of land, land use, relationships, family and ownership are vastly different from the colonial approach to ownership and individuality. We know that our government has enacted laws and imposed governing structures such as reserves, Band Council systems, and residential schools, to further separate Indigenous peoples from their traditional ways of life. The 49th Parallel is another construct used by the government to cut off connections between nations, and exclude Indigenous voices from this territory.

Working toward true reconciliation means that we as an institution can, and must, re-dress our understanding of history and ways of being, knowing and doing. We share the Indigenous belief that the value of a nation is found in conjoined support, shared knowledge and Intergenerational transferal of knowledge. As a historical society, we strive to ensure the highest standard of ethical inclusion is observed in all facets of research, public programming and project development. We work to elevate Indigenous voices, and to honour all Seven Generations. To achieve this, we have engaged with the leaders of regional Nations with a true goal of reciprocity and reconciliation.

We approach our work with an understanding that we live in a place where Indigenous and colonial histories intersect, and are connected by a shared history. It may feel like these two opposing ideologies can never co-exist, but these feelings are driven by fear-based bias and

trauma. During this time of reconciliation, we need to recognize we cannot change our past, but we can shape our future. We must examine our current status quo with an extremely critical lens, and apply the morals, ethics, social justice protocols and Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing, to all aspects of our institution and governance.

As a Museum and Archives, we will ensure when Indigenous information is collected, stored and shared, that the highest ethical, academic and political standards are observed - this includes free, prior and informed consent of the Indigenous Nation in accordance with the [First Nations Principal of OCAP](#). We will ensure paths for safe and valued cultural exchange are created, so that Indigenous academics, Elders, artists and leaders can lead the way. Prior to the return of Marilyn James' two Sinixt family baskets, we had identified a need to re-develop our space and to work in collaboration with the Nations, to change the museum exhibition located on the second floor, to be a more inclusive space, which fully aligns with the TRC Calls to Action, UNDRIP and guiding principles of diversity, access and inclusion. We have made this commitment with the hope that over time we will build better relationships with people traditionally marginalized by museums in our community, so everyone will feel agency and ownership of the stories being told in this public space. We hope to work with Marilyn James and the Autonomous Sinixt to include the history and living culture of the Autonomous Sinixt in this new museum space. We recognize the responsibility to do better lies on our shoulders.

Touchstones Nelson: Museum of Art and History acknowledges that the Museum resides on the traditional unceded territory of the Sinixt and Ktunaxa Nations. We would like to thank and acknowledge the Sinixt, Yaqan Nukiy Ktunaxa, and the Métis people for the opportunity to live, learn and share in cultural experiences in this beautiful place.