The Northern Rockies Arts Council Presents:

The Artist Spotlight Series

Amber Lloyd
of RAW North Crafts

Stitching with Intention and Story

In Fort Nelson, BC, Dene artist Amber Lloyd sits with needle and thread in hand, working slowly and deliberately through moosehide. Each stitch is careful, steady — guided by a teaching she has carried with her since childhood.

"You're putting your energy into your work. So you need to put in good energy."

For Amber, creating is never rushed or distracted — it is intentional. Whatever you bring to the work, she believes, carries through it.

Through RAW North Crafts, Amber's work — most notably her moccasins — carries not only craftsmanship, but lineage.

Artist Profile

Artist:
Amber Lloyd

Business / Studio:
RAW North Crafts

Location:
Fort Nelson, BC, Canada

Years Creating:
10+ years as a full-time artist

Medium / Craft:
Moccasins, mukluks, beadwork, fur garments

Signature Work:
Hand-sewn moccasins with traditional beadwork

Materials:
Moosehide, beadwork, fur, leather

Artist Quote:
"Success is being excited to start the day, and to know that people are grateful that you do what you do."

Available At:

Fort Nelson Visitor Centre

Fort Nelson First Nation Health & Wellness Building

548° Trading Co., Fort St. John

Spirit of the Lake Boutique, West Kelowna

Online:

Facebook
Instagram
Manitobah Mukluks

Starting Young

> "Although I didn't go to business school and I didn't do any formal training, my whole life was training."

Born in Fort St. John, Amber moved through Calgary and Osoyoos before settling in Fort Nelson at twelve years old.

"We moved up to Fort Nelson and it was a big change — the temperature changed, and you went from clear water to muddy water, and rattlesnakes to moose."

Long before she lived there full-time, Fort Nelson was part of her summers.

"Every summer we'd go up to Fort Nelson and that's where my mom would get most of her materials because there wasn't anything like any stores for materials in the south for that."

Art had always been part of her life. As a child, Amber's mother would save paper towel rolls, scrap paper, string, pipe cleaners, and small craft supplies. With those simple materials, Amber would spend hours creating.

Even visits to family in Vancouver fed her imagination. At her grandparents' house, she would pore through books about famous artists.

"I loved how wild and imaginative Salvador Dali's work was — like melting clocks and things that didn't make sense but still told a story."

Those early experiences gave Amber a deep appreciation for creativity, even though she never initially imagined becoming a professional artist herself.

Still, creativity remained constant.

By five years old, Amber was already selling her own small projects — necklaces, bracelets, and tiny "healing frogs," fabric frogs filled with small pellets that her mother would sew and Amber would help finish.

"Although I didn't go to business school and I didn't do any formal training, my whole life was training."

Weekend trips to Rock Creek became part of her routine.

"We'd go up there and I'd do an inventory of what sold that week and what I needed more of. Then I'd go home, work through the week, go to kindergarten — and restock the following weekend."

There were no formal classes. Amber learned by watching — studying the movements of experienced hands.

"That's the Native way to learn — to watch. That's the respectful way. You don't take people's time out of their day. You just watch what they do or shadow them."

Now, her own sons are growing up the same way — observing their mother at work.

Her children remain her greatest motivation. Much of what she builds through her work is rooted in a desire to support them and encourage them to follow their own paths.

"I want them to do so much more than me and be so much more than me. I want to set them up for success in this life."

Just as her parents nurtured her creativity and resilience, Amber now raises her own children with that same philosophy — encouraging them to follow their passions, even if the path is unconventional.

For Amber, respect is one of the

most important values within the artistic community. Respect for the work, for the culture it comes from, and for each other.

"Art is not a competition," she says. "Every artist is unique and deserves success."

She hopes emerging artists remember that their differences are not weaknesses, but strengths — and that supporting one another strengthens the entire community of makers.

Craft, Culture, and Identity

> "My grandma sewed, and my grandpa was a trapper. They went hand in hand and lived out in the bush."

Amber's patterns include designs passed down through her family, as well as ones she has developed herself. In many ways, patterns function as signatures — identifiable markers of lineage and creative identity.

It is, at its core, a family practice. Each member works independently, but knowledge and creativity are shared.

"It's really a family business. We all work on our own, but there's quite a few of us."

The work stretches back generations.

"My grandma sewed, and my grandpa was a trapper. They went hand in hand and lived out in the bush."

Amber's grandmother, Mary Needlay, ensured her daughters learned to sew — not just as an art, but as a means of survival.

"You'll never starve if you learn how to sew." — Mary Needlay

Amber's mother remains one of her greatest influences.

From her, Amber learned not only technical skills, but the deeper teachings around spirit, intention, and the energy that flows through creation.

"She taught me everything about vision quests and how to be calm, and energy, and how it goes into your work and who you are as a person."

From an early age, Amber stayed close to her mother's side.

"I was always by my mom's side. I was always learning from her."

That closeness remains today.

"Still even to this day, me and my mom are very close."

Her Aunty Mimi Needlay was another formative influence.

"My Aunty Mimi was so wonderful to me growing up. She had a store in Fort St. John called Fontas Native Crafts. She would buy things from me — which was really nice — and keep them in her store, and we would sew together."

Her aunt's example extended beyond encouragement. At a time when securing financing as an Indigenous creator was especially difficult, she successfully obtained a business loan — demonstrating that creative work could also be sustainable work.

The teachings she carries from her family — patience, respect, and perseverance — would later shape not only her craft, but the way she built her business.

Crafting by Hand

Amber's creative process is intuitive and guided by the materials themselves.

She works entirely by hand using thread and needle, carefully shaping each piece to make the most of the hides and furs she works with.

"I look at my materials and adjust my patterns so I can get the most out of the hide."

She especially enjoys working with colourful furs, beads, and feathers, often preferring larger pieces where she can fully explore those materials.

Over the years she has created a wide range of handmade pieces including moccasins, wrap-arounds, mukluks, mitts, fur hats, vests, shawls, baby belts, purses, dreamcatchers, medicine bags, keychains, and card holders.

"Pretty much everything except earrings," she laughs. "Earrings are just not fun for me to make."

> "I look at my materials and adjust my patterns so I can get the most out of the hide."

Building a Business

Amber has been a full-time artist for ten years.

The early days demanded relentless commitment — often working from six in the morning until midnight. She built her business from the ground up while navigating divorce, foreclosure, and the uncertainty of starting over — challenges that were not uncommon in Fort Nelson during recent economic downturns.

"I didn't access any grants or funding. I just started with what I had."

Finding places willing to sell her work was one of the first major challenges. At the time, Fort Nelson already had many established artists.

Amber would travel as far as Yellowknife carrying tubs of her work, visiting stores one by one.

"In one trip I think five stores said no to me — not because they didn't like my work, but because they couldn't buy from outside the Northwest Territories if they received government arts funding."

Those early experiences left a lasting impression.

"My beginnings have kept me grateful and humble."

Eventually Amber turned to the internet, where geography mattered less.

Online sales brought their own learning curves — navigating payments, shipping logistics, customs, taxes, CITES regulations, and more recently tariffs.

Without formal business training, every step became part of the learning process.

"I didn't know how to use PayPal or e-transfer at first. My customers actually helped teach me."

Today, Facebook and Instagram remain her primary sales platforms, where she hosts product releases and connects directly with clients.

Her work can now be found across Canada and internationally.

Creating for Stories

> "It's pretty amazing — the amount of work that's out there and the artists. The world stage Indigenous artists have now... we didn't have that when I was small."

Amber prefers her creations to be worn and lived in.

She hopes they gather stories — carried across the land, through snow, across seasons and journeys. For her, it is wearable art meant for living.

That philosophy also shapes how she values her work. Pricing, she explains, is about recognizing the full process behind each piece — the materials, the time, and the intention behind it.

The act of sewing is time spent with purpose. Each piece carries not only skill, but hours of focused attention — energy stitched into hide.

Amber's work now extends beyond Fort Nelson through her role as a Storyboot Artist with Manitobah Mukluks, an Indigenous-owned company that collaborates with artists to share their designs and stories on a national stage.

Her creations have travelled as far as England, Peru, Africa, Mexico, New Zealand, the United States, and across every province and territory in Canada.

She credits the internet and social media as powerful tools for Indigenous artists.

"It's pretty amazing — the amount of work that's out there and the artists. The world stage Indigenous artists have now… we didn't have that when I was small. When I was five, we had to wait for the local Christmas craft fair. There was no internet."

Looking Ahead

The past decade has been about survival. Now, as her children grow and her oldest nears eighteen, Amber is entering a new chapter.

She hopes to spend more time on the land with her partner — possibly working a trapline together — and expanding her skills even further. One of her goals is to begin processing her own moosehides, deepening her connection to every stage of the materials she works with.

She would also like to shift her focus toward fewer, more intricate pieces — creations that allow for detailed beadwork and deeper meaning, such as ceremonial shawls.

Rather than weekly product releases, Amber has begun moving toward monthly sales, allowing herself the time and space to create these more meaningful works while also enjoying life beyond her studio.

"Now that I feel like I've gotten everything sorted and comfortable, I'm ready to slow down," she says. "Our kids are almost grown — the oldest is nearly eighteen. We're still young, but we just want a simple life."

Her children remain her greatest motivation, and much of what she has built through her work has been with them in mind. She hopes to support and nurture them as they discover their own passions, just as her parents once did for her.

Amber also hopes that emerging artists remember that art is not a competition.

"Be prepared to do the work," she says. "But if you're doing something you love, you'll never work a day in your life."

For her, one of the most important values within the artistic community is respect — respect for the work, for the culture it comes from, for ourselves, and for one another.

"Every artist is unique and deserves success," she says. "Our differences are not weaknesses. We would all benefit from supporting each other."

In Fort Nelson, where generations of makers have worked quietly and steadily before her, Amber Lloyd continues to sew — each stitch carrying story, culture, and lineage forward.

Where Her Work Can Be Found

Amber's creations can be found on Facebook and Instagram under RAW North Crafts by Amber, as well as in person at the Fort Nelson Visitor Centre, the Fort Nelson First Nation Health and Wellness Building, Manitobah Mukluks, 548° Trading Co. in Fort St. John, BC, and Spirit of the Lake Boutique in West Kelowna.

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