

NEWS RELEASE

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Coast Salish design & Hul'q'umi'num language create connection at Beban Pool

New artwork by Eliot White-Hill, Kwulasultun, installed this month

The City of Nanaimo is pleased to announce the commission of new artwork by Eliot White-Hill, Kwulasultun, for Beban Park pool. White-Hill's project takes the ecosystems of the Nanaimo River Estuary as inspiration. He has designed a series of seven distinctive banners and three new murals which are being installed this month while the facility is closed to the public.

Eliot White-Hill, Kwulasultun, is a Coast Salish artist who comes from the White family of Snuneymuxw, the Rice family of Penelakut and with roots in the Nuuchah-nulth world through the Hamilton family of Hupačasath from whom he carries the name Kwaayas. He is a recent graduate of Vancouver Island University, works as a Project Coordinator with Petroglyph Development Group, and is a storyteller, published author and artist.

White-Hill's project communicates knowledge about the cultural heritage and the biodiversity of this region. Large-scale murals feature the movement of the dog salmon run and the ecosystems sustained by the herring run and the eelgrass. Creatures, including littleneck clams, sea lion, bald eagle, octopus, and others, appear in his designs, informed by a worldview about the interconnectedness and sacred nature of all life. White-Hill thoughtfully considers how swimmers use the pool, and also wishes to reinforce the Hul'q'umi'num language learning happening in schools across the region, creating an opportunity and level of comfort for learners to practice their vocabulary. Interpretive signage with English and Hul'q'umi'num words, and a take-away guide will be made available to share information, language, and stories related to the artwork.

Of this project, White-Hill says, "my goal is to create a connection between the audience and the art, to create a deeper understanding and appreciation of the history, culture, and nature of Snuneymuxw and our territory—I want to show other people who we are, I want future generations of Coast Salish people to grow up surrounded by our art. I want to honour our territory by wrapping it in the blanket of our art once more. I feel strongly that it will form a connection between all peoples who live in our territory and see it, a connection that will create space where empathy and understanding can flourish across cultural divides."

The project at the pool is among White-Hill's first major art commissions. "Eliot has a powerful voice and is a gifted storyteller," says Julie Bevan, Manager of Culture & Events, "we wanted to empower him to realize an ambitious vision and tell stories through art in this well-used community facility, where so many different people gather." As part of his process, White-Hill consulted with the Snuneymuxw First Nation Elders Advisory Committee, and with Hul'q'umi'num language teacher Gary Manson and Elder Bill White. The City convened a small team to support White-Hill, which included Nanaimo Art Gallery curator Jesse Birch, as well as Cory Landels, a graphic designer and owner of Common Foundry. Painter Jesse Campbell is translating White-Hill's designs onto the walls at the pool.

Installation of the artwork is taking place now while the pool is closed to the public. The project is one of the proactive initiatives the City has undertaken to improve and enhance community facilities during closures related to COVID-19. A date for re-opening of the pool is yet to be determined.

On improvements currently underway at the pool, Mayor Leonard Krog says, "this project will contribute to a welcoming environment for the thousands of people who use Beban pool each year. This young and talented artists' work communicates stories, values and language that are critical to our understanding of the history of this land, our understanding of the present, and ultimately our shared future. I know this beautiful work will provide inspiration and joy, and I congratulate and thank the artist."

Continued... Coast Salish design & Hul'q'umi'num language create connection at Beban Pool

Learn about more art in Nanaimo for 2020 at www.nanaimo.ca > Culture & Environment> Public Art Program or by following the Culture & Events team on Instagram @Culture_Nanaimo.

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Contact:

Julie Bevan
Manager
Culture & Events
julie.bevan@nanaimo.ca

Main Office
Culture & Events
City of Nanaimo
cultureandevents@nanaimo.ca
250-755-4483



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