

MMIW + G – Heart Spirits
Prince Albert MMIW Project
Artist Statement

My orientation to media is tactile. Although I have worked with a variety of art materials my longest history is with clay. An inherently organic and ancient medium, clay has been a staple for the production of functional aesthetic objects for thousands of years. It has played a role in the social development of culturally distinct societies. The physical qualities of clay and its cultural history are part of the content of my work.

This project is one where each participant makes a clay heart named for a missing or murdered woman. Throughout the hour of workshop time, a narrative is presented, weaving meaning and understanding that crosses cultures. The clay hearts are bound to the narrative and neither individually is complete without the other. There is dedication, commitment and hope offered up in these works.

What I know for sure is that missing and murdered Indigenous Women and Girls is not solely a First Nations issue, not a women's issue but a human one, a Canadian one and we all have to care about it.

This project is about women, but the scope goes beyond the female demographic. It is a general call to action, a subtle call to action. An invitation to view our world with softer eyes and kinder thoughts. As nuanced as it is a call to action it is a gentle reminder to all women that we matter; it is a reason for women and girls to be encouraged that equality awaits. It is a whisper to listen intuitively to the voices of our lost sisters, to help them with their pain and to commit to moving forward with strength and wisdom.

The shape we refer to as the heart is called a cardioid and has endured many incarnations to be recognized as the cultural icon it is today. It is interesting to note that artistic interpretations of religious art helped to define the shape of the heart through the depiction of the Caritas, virtue in a human form offering a heart shaped object to God, representative of his love. The Caritas is most often female.

The oldest known representation of a heart is a 3000 year old Olmec effigy vessel found in Mexico. This may have served as a sacrificial receptacle, perhaps for blood, but the actual use is unclear. What is clear though is that the effigy is female in form.

The iconic heart shape is rooted deep in history. It has been firmly connected to the belief that the heart is the keeper of the vital spirit and is the visual symbol of love. As far back as the 14th century romantic love has been celebrated on Valentine's Day, replete with heart symbols and cherubs.

These historical references firmly connect the heart and its metaphorical content to women. This is a significant thread, as this project uses the heart shape to represent the spirits of missing & murdered women.