



Kakatshu Utshishtun Art Hive, Sheshatshiu, Labrador

### **Art Hives with Indigenous Peoples and their Communities**

Art Hives are community spaces that welcome everyone as an artist and place-maker. This model of public practice arts therapy creates intergenerational homeplaces that centre and celebrate the strengths, stories and diverse forms of knowledge that readily exist within every community (Timm-Bottos, 2017). Utilizing a strength-based approach provides a corrective lens to view individuals and communities endowed with strengths and resilience. It requires cultural humility and the ability to lead from behind requiring a deep understanding of the needs of the community while promoting community members interests, strengths, and leadership. The model of Art Hives understands health and environmental symptoms as intrinsically linked to social and political context, colonization, and intergenerational trauma.

An Art Hive is designed as an open source model, and a warm and welcoming Hive in of itself offers many therapeutic benefits for all involved. When an Art Hive is facilitated an art therapist, public practice arts therapy can be a cost-effective and accessible form of mental health care, supporting individual, family, and community mental and physical wellbeing through the creative arts. While only an art therapist can provide art therapy services, other related professionals and community members are invited to facilitate Art Hives in their neighborhoods with support of training and networking.

Utilizing a strength-based approach provides a corrective lens to view individuals and communities endowed with strengths and resilience. It requires cultural humility and the ability to lead from behind, so that the community's interests, strengths and needs are what shines through. The model of Art Hives understands health and environmental symptoms as intrinsically linked to social and political context, colonization, and intergenerational trauma. These un-programmed cultural spaces are open 4-5 hours at a time, several times a week, for anyone inclined to join in. The art hive offers trained facilitators to hold a nonhierarchical space that welcomes participants as both teachers and students for each other. Non-directed art making is available through providing abundant materials located on accessible shelving. This bounty includes sensory rich natural materials based on the region, such as stone, bone, leather,



Eastmain Art Hive, Cree Nation of Eastmain, Quebec

shells, glass beads, etc. Materials used for creative reuse, such as discarded fabrics, cardboard, cans, plastic, as well as other Western and Indigenous tools and art supplies may also find a place within the art space. There are also warm beverages and snacks to enjoy, as art making and conversation happen around the tables. Making art together stimulates the renewal and creation of social economies at the local level, which can then have a far-reaching ripple effect through the Art Hives National Network.

Mohawk art therapist Megan Kanerahtenha:wi Whyte describes the experience of the use of materials in her research project called: *Walking on Two-Row: Assessing Acculturative Identity through Material Interaction An Indigenous Art-Based Heuristic Inquiry* (2018). She writes: "Returning to the First Nations media and lowering the structure and complexity of my approach, I instead allowed myself to experience the simple touch of the natural materials to ease the tension. Shedding the need to create symbolic meaning or cognitively explain the experience, I remained present in the moments of burning wood, squishing berries and pressing into the leather" (Whyte, 2018, p.19). Interestingly, she found that the need for affective expression decreased as the use of sensory and kinesthetic materials increased. These qualities were found through interaction with what she calls First Nations' materials.

Vanya Hanson (in Chainey, 2018), an art therapist working with the Art Hive located Cree Nation of Eastmain, states that the Art Hive is a space where the community can put in practice the Cree values of respect and pride (for each other, for our stories, for our culture and art products). The unstructured nature of the space allows for the community to take ownership and transform it according to who they are and want to be. Inuit art therapist Jennifer Vivian (2018) suggests that "due to the productive interaction between creativity and wellbeing... art therapy may enhance relations between our Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities in Canada, leading to a spirit of reconciliation" (p. 43). She invites settlers to critically examine their role in perpetuating colonization and to enter into collaborative, long-term relationships with indigenous communities with humility and respect for cultural



“Reconciliation:What Does It Mean To You?” Traveling Exhibition in Eastmain (QC),Vancouver (BC) and at the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts (QC).

healing traditions and the teachings of the elders. Timm-Bottos (2017) states that “*enabling spaces* (such as Art Hives) are necessary in healing relational divides. It is important for settlers to take time to uncover and question layers of racism and hegemony and witness the resulting pain in order to disrupt colonization practices that continue to play out today” (p. 97).

Vivian (2018) calls mental health care practitioners to engage in an ongoing process of decolonization. This includes developing approaches that respect the cultural and spiritual traditions of indigenous communities, honouring the knowledge of elders and of indigenous practitioners, and thinking of wellbeing as holistic, spiritual and communal.

One of the ways in which Art Hives, as a national network, have invited listening and dialogue between indigenous, settlers, and immigrants on Turtle Island, is by hosting a series of listening circles around the theme of “Unsettling the Settler Within” (Regan, 2010), culminating with a traveling, participatory art exhibition entitled “Reconciliation:What does it mean to you?” and the publication of an open source Listening Circles Toolkit (<http://arthives.org/resources/listening-circles-toolkit>). Art Hives are committed to a process of decolonization, as spaces of possibility where we can explore together what is working today while learning from each other how to do better tomorrow.

### **Art Hives within Indigenous Communities:**

Kakatshu Utshishtun Art Hive (Sheshatshiu, NL):  
<http://arthives.org/arthives/kakatshu-utshishtun>

The Eastmain Art Hive (Cree Nation of Eastmain, QC):  
<http://arthives.org/arthives/eastmain-art-hive>

## References:

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