February 5, 2018

**Researcher aims to reclaim the lost tradition of Caribou Coats**

Edmonton – Dr. Carole Charette says she was blown away the first time she saw the hand-painted, intricate designs on a 18th-century caribou skin coat.

“The beauty of the composition, the complexity of the patterns, the structure of the design and the use of colour took my breath away says Charette.” The experience was so impactful that Charette decided to use them as the basis for a research project that led her to photograph and document more than 70 coats over the past five years.

She says the coats were made by Naskapi, Innu and Cree women. “Everything about these coats is so defined, so carefully thought out, so beautiful and so powerful.”

But as with all good design—regardless of the century it was created in—Charette says the significance of these coats extends far beyond aesthetics. “Design isn’t just about beauty, it’s about combining elements in a powerful way that creates an emotional connection to a piece. These coats have a function—each tells a unique story—and you immediately get that when you see them.”

Charette, an assistant professor in the Design Studies program at MacEwan University says that while the earliest coats were painted using natural pigments to create the intricate shapes over time artists moved away from hand painting to embroidery and beading. But locating the artifacts has been a challenge. Of the 175 coats that Carole estimates are in collections around the world, only 25 are in North America. She has photographed and documented coats in collections at the Royal Ontario Museum, the Smithsonian Institute, and at museums in Scotland, England, Switzerland, Germany, Austria and France.

Charette is partnering with Jimmy Sandy Memorial School, from the Naskapi First Nations in Quebec to develop a series of workshops around Indigenous iconography. “There are many things the design elements in these coats, and the partnership that comes from studying them, can teach us. I hope this work illustrates how we can reinvent and reimagine using very basic elements—dots, circles, squares and lines. How these things can come together in completely different and powerful ways.”

The opening of Allard Hall in September 2017 marks the beginning of a year of celebration for MacEwan University. With the relocation of the Faculty of Fine Arts and Communications to City Centre Campus, our university community has come together in downtown Edmonton. Allard Hall features exciting new purpose-built learning spaces for students and dynamic performance and exhibition spaces for the community, including a 419-seat theatre, theatre lab, recital hall, art gallery and recording studio. MacEwan University is moving the arts downtown. MacEwan.ca/ComeTogether.

Founded in 1971, MacEwan University inspires its students with a powerful combination of academic excellence and personal learning experiences. Offering more than 65 programs including undergraduate degrees, applied degrees, diplomas, certificates, continuing education and corporate training, the university provides a transformative education in a creative, collaborative and supportive learning environment where creativity and innovation thrive. Located in Edmonton, Alberta Canada, MacEwan University offers a unique student experience that opens up diverse pathways for achievement and growth.

**For more information, please contact:**
David Beharry, Media Relations Advisor  
780-497-5586  Cell: 780- 231-5954  Email: beharryd@macewan.ca

Get MacEwan University news delivered to your inbox. Sign up for our weekly e-newsletter.