

Arts

Anishinabe artist down under

By Rick Garrick

Rolande Souliere has gone a long way in her life.

Not only has the Michipicoten band member moved down under, she has also begun delving deeper into her creative abilities.

"I've just started my Masters of Visual Arts degree," Souliere said, adding that she completed her Bachelor of Visual Arts with Honours last year at the University of Sydney after four years of study.

"The interest has always been there. I grew up with a lot of creativity around me."

Souliere and her siblings attended a First Nations after-school program in Toronto where they learned about their culture, including the creative aspects of traditional crafts, dance and cooking, created mini-films and pottery, and practiced karate.

When Souliere left Toronto in the early 1990s to move with her Australian husband and daughter to Chicago and San Francisco, where her second child was born, and finally to Australia, where her third child was born, she also began a journey towards a different art form.

"I was introduced to installation art here in Australia in the first year of my undergraduate degree," she said, noting that a well-known installation artist gave her class a project to create a fantasy world within a given space.

"I found this most intriguing and was pleased that I could incorporate anything, paintings, sculptures and/or objects, as well as make use of the floor, the ceiling and the walls.

"I found my creativity flourished within this type of art, as one could cross pollinate painting, sculpture, and performance

in installation art. It's kind of like the sky is the limit and I really liked that. I found the more I experienced making installations, the more I wanted to do it. So, in that sense it's addictive," she said.

Souliere sees her art as being in the world and experiencing everything: food, nature, feelings, love, her culture and other cultures.

"I'm not sure if it's a message I'm actually delivering (or) more of an experience, an experience for the viewer that is," Souliere said.

"I'd like the viewer to experience something different, different from what's out there in the physical world," she said.

"I feel good about my artwork. I find it interesting and fulfilling, I'm always learning, and that's the great thing."



Michipicoten band member Rolande Souliere lives in Australia. "The idea with the costumes is that you can if you like put them on and become part of the artwork," Souliere said.

McKenzie stopped abusing art and alcohol at same time

By Rosalind Raby

MISSISSAUGA FN – There are many First Nation artists to be found across the Americas.

However, there is one who is hoping to see his work highlighted at one of the world's most prestigious events. Hugh McKenzie, 62, is a modest man, an Elder of the Temagami First Nation on Bear Island.

While his work may grace walls around the globe, he remains true to his roots, and it is those roots he hopes to see grace the 2010 Winter Olympics to be held in British Columbia.

"I'm hoping to have my work accepted for various commercial uses, such as post cards, gift cards, posters, t-shirts, that sort of thing," said McKenzie. "They want our designs by April, so I've been focusing a lot of my work in that direction over the last few months.

"It could be some very good contract work and I'm thinking positive about it."

McKenzie's work is well known throughout Canada and overseas, especially in France and Japan. His blue jay design has been adopted by the Toronto Blue Jays baseball team's corporate office, to be used as gifts. Linda Lunstrum, a leading clothes designer, has also used his designs on her outerwear.

When he's not working on winning designs, he is sharing his craft with others. McKenzie oversaw a weeklong art seminar on Mississauga First Nation in mid-March, sharing his unique stencil-style of drawing with artists from the area.

It was a difficult journey to get to the point where he is the success he is now. McKenzie was born on the Ojibwe Reserve on Bear Island, Lake Temagami, which is still his home and studio.

He attended Temagami Public School, but only until grade seven. McKenzie said he learned his craft by watching his father's hands.

"It was magic to watch my father's hands, while he carved toys for me out of wood. "Growing up on the family trapline was another early inspiration for my interest in art.

"Dad would make me the most wonderful animals, even little cars and planes. He made larger pieces too, like a crossbow and a guitar. It was inspiring to watch his hands," he said.

McKenzie had no formal art or musical training, but he also became proficient in the guitar as well. Chet Atkins is one of his favourite artists.

McKenzie said he remembers beginning to draw around eight or nine years of age.

"I would get scrap paper from the lumber yards and draw all kinds of things, including portraits. I used to leave the paintings in the cabin. When we came back from the traplines, they would be gone. Someone liked them," he joked.

One of his best friends was also an artist, Benjamin Chee Chee. Their childhood friendship was to endure much. "Ben and several of my other friends were forced to leave their families and go to the residential schools. He was forced to go to the residential school in Spanish.

"I was lucky, I hadn't been sent

away. I guess it was because I had a fairly decent home. I didn't get into trouble. I actually wanted to go to the school because I wanted to be with my friends," he said.

In their late teens, the two moved to Hull, Quebec and shared an apartment.

They learned from one another and perfected a style of artwork using a sponge/stencil. The work was considered unique and popular.

"The Canadian government would buy all the art we would produce through the Markets Service," recalled McKenzie. "We had art shows in Ottawa, all over the place.

"Chee Chee really hit it big. He

became famous for painting a mural for Expo '67."

This success led to a dark side for both men.

"We were alcoholics, well, me more than Ben. Ben was more into drugs. We would paint once a week because we didn't have to worry about selling our work, it sold itself. We sold enough to keep us happy in our alcohol and drugs," he said.

This topsy-turvy lifestyle would eventually get them into trouble.

"We both were jailed at various times. It almost got to be a seasonal thing, for us to spend a stint in jail, then go back to painting. It was just the way our life was," he said.

However, this life would lead to a tragic loss for McKenzie. Chee Chee died in jail.

After his death, several writers approached McKenzie to get information for a book on Chee Chee, but McKenzie would not talk to anyone.

McKenzie's first agent arranged tours and shows across

Canada. Several Canadian galleries also helped bring McKenzie into prominence.

However, he still wasn't happy. Returning to Bear Island, McKenzie shared his life with a woman he cared for, but the alcoholism led to the end of their relationship. McKenzie realized he would have to be the one to take the first step to get his life under control. He turned to Alcoholics Anonymous for help.

"What Ben and I did with our work was an abuse of the art, and of the music I also loved. I sought treatment on my own, it was not court appointed. The biggest influence for me to quit drinking, besides the loss of my partner, was the old-timers in jail. I didn't want to end up like them," he said.

Now sober for decades, he no longer abuses his art.

"It was an awakening that I answer to a higher power. I feel I'm here for a reason. I have purpose, to share my art, my love of music with others. I no longer abuse my art. It's now a labour of love. I'm happy."



Artist Hugh McKenzie

Red Sky plays tour Ottawa Valley schools

TORONTO – Red Skies are coming to Ottawa Valley schools.

Red Sky is a dynamic company shaping contemporary Aboriginal performance in theatre, dance and music, created by Artistic Director Sandra Laronde of Temagami First Nation.

In April, Red Sky productions of Caribou Song and Raven Stole the Sun will be touring the Ottawa Valley region and the Greater Toronto Area (GTA).

Caribou Song, written by Tomson Highway with music by Rick Sacks (chamber version), Caribou Song tells the story of two



Cree children in Canada's north who follow the caribou by dogsled with their family.

Raven Stole the Sun is a fabulous piece based on a traditional story of the Tlingit Nation as recounted by Sháa Tláa Maria Williams. Raven is a magical creature of impulse and curiosity, who is obsessed and intrigued by three

mysterious boxes.

April 25 - Manor Park Public School, St. Anthony Catholic School

April 26 - A. Lorne Cassidy Elementary School, A. Lorne Cassidy Elementary School

April 27 - Connaught Public School, R. Byrns Curry Public School

April 28 - Buckingham Elementary School (Buckingham, QC), Blossom Park Public School

For more information please visit redskyperformance.com