

# INDIGENOUS RESEARCH FAMILY

a collective story  
winter 2020

Dear Reader,

This collection of reflections is a culmination of the first Native American / Indigenous Research Family. The Burke Museum of Natural History and Culture alongside the Center for Native American and Indigenous Studies have collaborated to create this Indigenous Research Family to bring Indigenous undergraduates to the Burke's collections. For the 2019-2020 Research Family, Dr. Sven Haakanson and Owen Oliver have led the group through their own independent research projects.

My name is Dr. Sven Haakanson, Sugpiaq from the Village of Old Harbor, Kodiak AK, Associate Professor in Anthropology and Curator at the Burke Museum, University of Washington. Establishing our new research family was modeled after Dr. Holly Barker's Oceanic Indigenous Research family that she created and has been supporting it through the Burke Museum since 2014. Our goal with our Research Family is to give Indigenous UW students access to and a place where they can safely research collections from their communities and learn more about their own cultural histories, through our collections, our books and each other. Each student was invited to participate in this initial research family to learn how we can support them in this process. Most early museums were founded to collect and exhibit the exotic "other" cultures of the world. The Burke is no different. So we are not seen as an inviting place for Indigenous students. We want to change this and the only way we can do it is by inviting Indigenous scholars (like our UW students, their elders and teachers) and communities into our space to help guide us in best practices for collaborating with them -one on one- and in an open and honest way. We want to collaborate, not consult, we want learn together and not be seen as exploiting living cultures and community members, and by starting with our next generation of Indigenous scholars they can learn from this experience on how to change other institutions that continue an old practice of "othering" Indigenous peoples. By giving them a platform to explore, see, touch, learn, and even make and understand the embodied knowledge within every cultural piece we care for, they can then use this knowledge to empower themselves, their communities and future so that they are interpreting their own histories and wisdom that was set aside during a time of survival.

It is a personal and ongoing goal of mine to continue to grow our research family into our future so that we can ensure our Indigenous communities are writing and interpreting their histories, that we can learn from and share in a respectful way. I was honored to participate in this family and look forward to seeing what they do with the knowledge they learned and will continue to learn as they become scholars in their own right.

‘My name is Owen L. Oliver and I come from the Chinook people of the lower Columbia River basin however I am enrolled Quinault. I’m currently a 3rd year undergraduate at the University of Washington studying American Indian Studies with a focus on Indigenous Education. It’s been my honor to help join this project with Dr. Haakanson and facilitate, build, and grow the foundation for continuing the support of Indigenous student researchers in and outside the Burke Museum.



We, at the University of Washington, are privileged to be able to use the Burke’s vast collections. However, while this resource has been serving the UW and larger academic community for over one hundred years, it has been my goal throughout co-leading this project to ensure that Indigenous undergraduates have a spot and voice at the Burke. The most important element to this relationship, between Indigenous undergraduates and the Burke, is for the students to be able to interact with their communities’ artifacts, treasures, and knowledge systems with their hands. It’s time to begin to build and reinforce bridges that empower and develop more Indigenous leaders at the University of Washington. The Indigenous Research Family is just one way we’ve been able to achieve this.

Photo taken by: Sven Haakanson

To be an Indigenous student at the University of Washington takes grit, resiliency, and flexibility. However, when Indigenous students come together, visibility is gained, successes are made, and innovation happens within a matter of weeks. I've had the honor to witness these alongside my Burke student advisor Sven Haakanson (Sugpiaq). Dr. Haakanson and I had the goal of introducing and carrying another Research Family alongside Dr. Barker's Oceanic Research Family within the Culture Department at the newly opened Burke Museum of Natural History and Culture. We've learned through Dr. Barker's Research family that community needs to be extended throughout all facilities of the University of Washington and it starts at places like the Burke. The Indigenous Research Family allowed the us to find a place on campus outside of academics, to have a voice and feel we didn't need to explain ourselves alongside their peers and engage with their ancestors who may be miles away. We began the Research Family by inviting all the participating students in and touring around the newly redesigned Burke. We pointed out progress the Burke has made towards decolonization through the galleries' language, staging, and narrative, but also the weak spots where additional content would better represent their communities' voices. Afterwards, we discussed our goals as a group and laid out important ground rules we should all follow while working with one another. Some of the ground rules were but not limited to:

- Don't be afraid to step outside the collections, all these treasures and artifacts have spirits and it's important to feel your emotions while working with them.

- It's crucial to believe everyone's stories, we all come from different places and have different upbringings. Whether you identify as urban, rural, or a reservation Native. We all have something to bring to the table and nothing we say gets questioned. This ground rule is similar to rule four of the canoe: the gift of each enriches us all.

- Make sure you capitalize your I's in Indigenous.
- Mitákuye Oyás'íŋ





Photo taken by: Sven Haakanson

For Indigenous students and communities, it's important to create these ground rules together as it helps everybody engage dynamically. Additionally, this community exists outside of the Burke museum and within all the work we do as educators, leaders, and artists on campus and beyond. I encourage all educators to begin their classes with a document that is shared through the class and that there is time set aside during class to create ground rules.

As we began as a Research Family, we became familiar with the collections together. Showing our excitement to see a family member's art or marveling over the intricateness and weaving of different Indigenous knowledge systems that goes into a particular piece.

We were able to move the saddle bag outside the collections and into a working space where we could connect with it personally, talk about the patterns, and take photos on as we felt appropriate. Not only did this move the students emotionally, it allowed for the students to engage Indigenous materials and art with cultural sensitivity, without someone else handling the pieces for us. Visitors to the Burke were able to see Indigenous people learning through their own material culture.

Here in this photo we're able to see the effort and precision that goes into each piece. Sierra and Autumn were able to take their learning from their experiences beading and begin to understand the reasoning and placement of each bead. We asked questions about why these designs are a certain way and what can Indigenous people learn from these materials.





Photo taken by: Sven Haakanson

Students were asked as part of their learning design and implement their own projects. We found that we could use artifacts as a catalyst for raising our voice in our own community. One of the best moments that we had as a Research Family was when Rebecca Andrews, Collection Magager for the North American Collections, for over 25 years gave us a tour of the basketry room. Only when we held the woven coils could we understand how much physical and emotional energy had gone into the baskets. Our cohort of inspiring Indigenous students all started to see and understand, the effort and care that goes into making these baskets.



Photo taken by: Sven Haakanson

Photo taken by: Sven Haakanson



The Indigenous Research Family became an important part of our weekly routine because of the place it allowed us to explore our ancestors knowledge and spiritually. As Indigenous students who might not be taking Indigenous related courses, this once a week class provides us with a moment of emotional relief and a time for self-reflection. Relief that we knew our ancestors' artifacts are carefully cared for and that we always have access to them. I'm thankful for the students and staff at the Burke to help that grounded me in a place that normally represented and carried stories of holds harm done to and onto Indigenous peoples. At the end we all realized how much we grew together, here are their stories.



## Theron Wahkinney (Comanche / Kiowa)

American Indian Studies

In the Winter quarter of the 2019-2020 school year, I had the opportunity to participate in an Indigenous Research Family at the University of Washington. Undergraduate students from the Native American community at UW met on a weekly basis at the Burke Museum. We worked closely with Owen Oliver and Sven Haakanson in the Ethnographic/Contemporary Cultures collection. During our sessions, we acquainted ourselves with the archives, discussed current events, developed techniques for research and art, and identified areas of study that we found interesting. The course focused heavily on what you, the student, wanted to get out of it. For myself, I sought to develop my artistic skills while gaining valuable cultural knowledge and methodologies for research.

Participating in this research provides valuable insights into the world of museums. Prior to this class, my only exposure to museums was as a visitor. I had no idea what operations took place behind the scenes. As students, we were exposed to some of the daily operations and studies that take place in the Burke.

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*We learned how to utilize the Burke's database and identify artifacts that piqued our interest.*

The database, known as Argus, is quite extensive. It is a useful tool for cataloging because it can provide photos, dimensions, techniques and materials used, culture, location, persons, and much more. This data is provided by the amazing researchers within the museum.

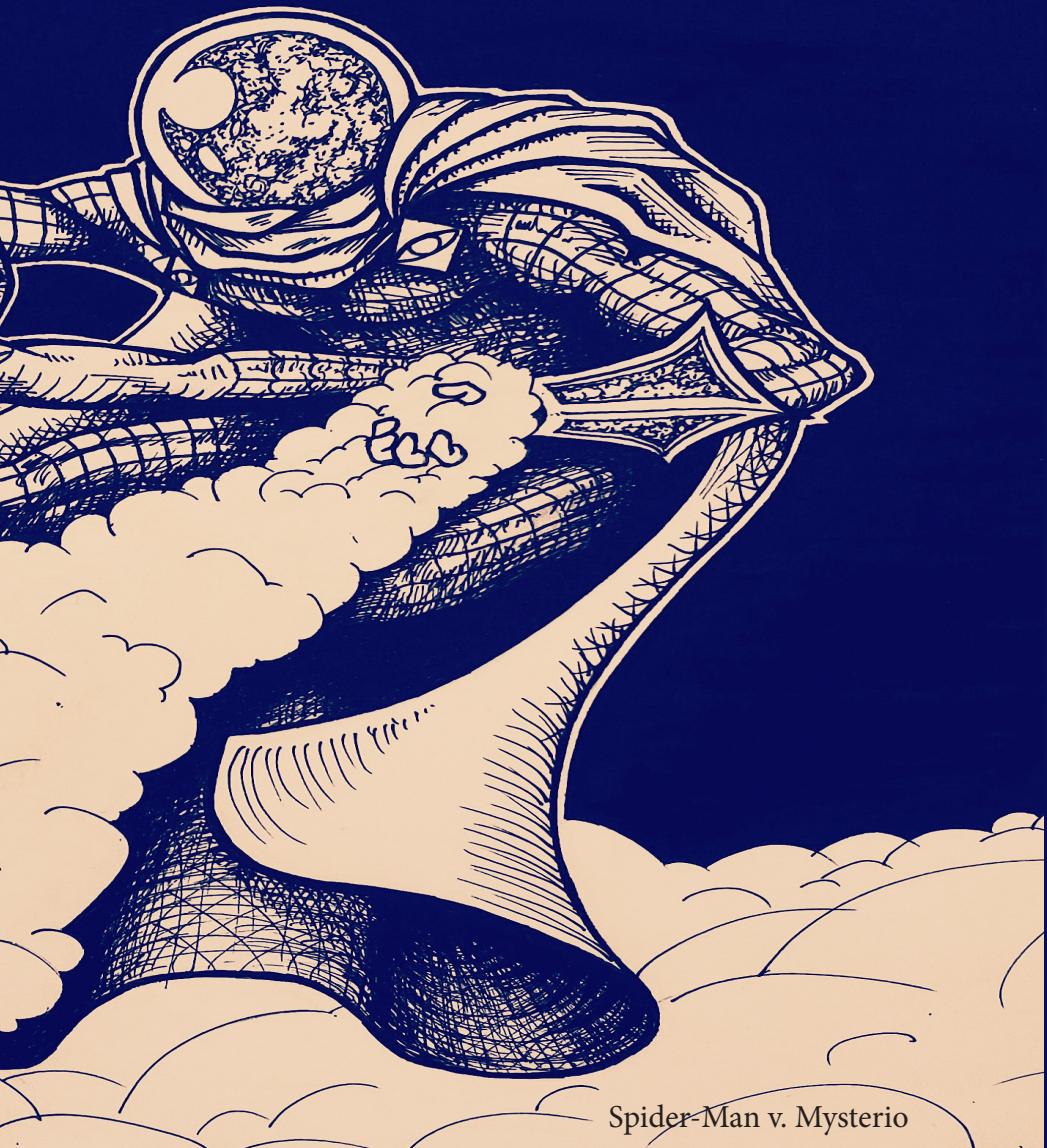
The Burke's Contemporary Culture collection highlights various cultures from around the Pacific. I was fortunate enough to discover some objects within the collection that came from my own community (Comanche/Kiowa). These items included 2 pairs of beaded moccasins, a beaded necklace, and 2 gourds. It was important for me to connect with my cultural identity and gain knowledge to take back to my community. Even back home (in Oklahoma), I was never given the chance to interact with similar cultural objects. It was a powerful moment to be present with these items. For myself, it was like returning home. It is possible that by being with me, these items were able to return home for a moment as well. It was an honor and a humbling experience.

Learning to interact with the collection was simple. In many ways, these items need to be treated the way you want to be treated: with respect, care, and admiration. You must exercise caution when handling items. This includes using gloves, handling with care, and remaining aware of your surroundings. For myself, these objects possess spirit. They were made by a person for a purpose and in order to create that item, that person had to project their experience, their expression, and their spirit onto that piece, and thus, that piece was born. Every item has a story to share. As we observed, the stories began to reveal themselves.

Being involved with other Native students enhanced my experience, enjoyment, and learning. Outside of American Indian Studies classes, it can be difficult to find other Native students. Being involved with my community on campus is important for my holistic health. It can be difficult to approach certain subjects or feel comfortable speaking in a classroom where you are the only Native student. Representation is crucial for our success. The beauty of an Indigenous research family is the comfort, vulnerability, and understanding that comes with being from the same minority. When we are together, we are indigenizing the space. We provide a space for open discussion, critique, and empowerment. We don't have to explain ourselves, argue, or provide additional context. We respect each other's boundaries and encourage each other to speak our truth or be present with whatever thoughts or emotions we may encounter.



*When we are together,  
we are indigenizing the space.*



Spider-Man v. Mysterio

One of the most important messages we received was that we are all artists. Some people may discount their ability or mentally limit themselves, but one of the points in this course was to show that we are all capable and talented artists. Sven is a talented carver with many years of knowledge and experience. Through his guidance, we crafted paint brushes that were modeled after Tlingit brushes found in the Burke. During our carving sessions, we worked in the artists studio. This room provided the space and tools necessary for multiple people to work comfortably. We had opportunities to teach visitors about our studies and expose people to new cultures. It was nice to explain what we learned because it reinforced the knowledge within ourselves. The time we spent together in the studio was irreplaceable. In many university settings, classes are taught through lectures and online practice. This method works in short term scenarios, however, I believe it lacks in long term effectiveness. This is because there is less time spent observing, applying the knowledge, making mistakes, and learning from those mistakes. Studio time was invaluable. We learned from each other. We observed. We had the ability to ask questions when we encountered problems and we learned techniques to fix or prevent the issue. We also spent that time telling stories. I learned more about my peers and felt a stronger connection to them through these studio sessions. I already knew most of my peers from previous quarters and we are all involved with organizations within the Native community at UW, but this time together was different. The atmosphere we created within our research family was like a family. We were free and present to the moment. I'm a creator, so if I get to use my hands, I am all for it! I can say with great joy that there are many opportunities to create art within this course! The Burke possesses thousands of handcrafted objects from hundreds of cultures. Many of these items are masterfully crafted, well preserved, and beautifully decorated. We gained valuable insight with each visit, whether it be cultural knowledge, design elements, techniques, uses, and more. My favorite items within the collection were functional and beautiful. Items such as halibut hooks, baskets, clothing, canoes, and paddles were strikingly beautiful, elegantly designed, durable, and vital for the individual cultures' way of life. These items inspired me to create art that possessed balance (design), functionality, and greater techniques.

I typically work within traditional media (drawing, inking, and painting).

The Burke provided access to hundreds of books that exposed me to new forms of Indigenous art. One form of art that really spoke to me was printmaking. I browsed the collections of Indigenous art books in the office and saw a large section of Inuit prints and art books. The art of printmaking stands out to me for many reasons. Many prints depict the life and stories of the Inuit communities. This art is precious for many reasons. I love the boldness of every piece. The ink holds a high contrast to the background. Many pieces utilize both negative and positive space to create a sense of balance and flow. The ink can often flow organically, leading to bleeding in porous paper. I think this is quite appealing. It gives the piece life and uniqueness. The official term for this technique of printmaking is known as relief printing. A relief print is created by carving or etching a surface (wood, linoleum, or metal), leaving the desired image. The remaining surface (uncarved) is covered in ink and pressed against another surface, leaving the impression of the print. This is similar to a handmade stamp. The uncarved surface is the positive space (or the ink) and the carved areas produce negative space (blank space). While the process may seem fairly simple, the execution can take years to master. A quarter of school is not enough time to become a master, but it was great exposure to the art and I'm excited to pick it back up. I look forward to working with the team in the future. Unfortunately, due to unforeseen circumstances with COVID-19, we were unable to meet towards the end of the quarter. We were unable to share how our work has progressed over the quarter and at this time, we may not meet again for the remainder of the school year. Regardless of the current circumstances, this course was the highlight of my quarter. I looked forward to every session and I treasure the moments we shared with one another. This exposure to the museum has opened new pathways for me. The museum provides opportunities to study, practice, and refine my art, while still teaching me important life lessons and cultural knowledge. It is important to establish a community where students feel safe, represented, and respected. The Burke and its employees are world-class. I hope to take the knowledge and experience I gained back home so my tribe and local community can embrace our heritage and artistic expression.



## Sierra Red Bow (Lakota)

American Indian Studies and Environmental  
Science & Resource Management

Hán mitákuyepi. Pheži Íhóta Nağí-win emáčiyapi kštó. My English name is Sierra Red Bow. I am an Oglála Lakóta student double majoring in American Indian Studies and Environmental Science & Resource Management. Do not let my introduction fool you. I did not grow up on the reservation, I am just an Urban Native trying to learn my language. In fact, the Indigenous Research Family has pushed me to reclaim my language as I should. It is one of the many reasons I think this is an essential program for Indigenous students at UW. To put it plainly, this program is long overdue. Until now, I have always had to read through someone else's eyes about my own culture in the classroom. Sometimes it is the eyes of an ignorant anthropologist, other times it is the dense jargon of a linguist. Then, once in a while, I find an answer I did not even know I was looking for. While researching for this class I came across a YouTube video of a beader named Vanessa Jennings (Kiowa/Apache/Gila River Pima). Unlike other majors whose research finds itself in books and journals,

*“Indigenous knowledge gold is often in videos and recordings”*

So often when I am researching, I am not reading as much as I am listening to elders practicing the oral tradition and sharing their intergenerational knowledge. What was amazing about this video was that at the end of it, she described her grandmother giving her a wishbone to practice beading (2012). Coincidentally, I had found a similar item in the museum, a red and white beaded piece displaying a myriad of different beadwork styles. For me, it was these kinds

of synchronicities that made this program worthwhile. It felt like Tunkasila was leading me down the right path if only I continued to listen. Until now, I have done everything alone. Being a Plains

Native in Coast Salish territory means I do not have the same resources or community to lean on to dig deep into my own culture.

This is a similar reality for Urban Natives too who have left and/or been removed from their traditional lands. It is also hard to engage with my culture when the mainstream media is chock-full of stereotypes and misrepresentations. Museums though have Indigenous peoples treasures, incredibly impactful belongings that I can relate to directly instead of looking through settler biased texts.

While there is something uncomfortable about seeing Indigenous belongings behind glass cases, this research project always put me at ease. Having the ability to interact with my ancestor's belongings is not something I get to do every day. What I hope others recognize is that this program is more than education, it is healing. Urban and Reservation Natives alike are dealing with intergenerational trauma. In an institution like UW, it is even harder. The pressures are multiplied and finding one's sense of self has a tendency to get put on the back burner. Finding community also remains a challenge when trying to find the ~1% of Natives in a sea of 46,000+ (2019). This class shoulders aside the pressures of academia to prioritize cultural revitalization and community. Credits for revitalization?

That's how it should have always been. Like Leanne Simpson's book title says, As We Have Always Done. Indigenous people have our own epistemology, our own pedagogy, and for once this research family lets us put these practices to work. Intentionality is embedded in Indigenous knowledge (IK) and that is weaved into everything we do in the Indigenous Research Family. Indigenous ways of knowing (WOK) are about actions. We are actively building relationships, practicing our culture, and sharing that knowledge with our community. There is no other class I have taken that can say the same. I am extremely grateful to have the privilege of taking this class. I am not oblivious to the questionable acquisition of Indigenous belongings in the museum nor am I oblivious of the sheer cost it





takes to attend UW. There is active work being done to welcome elders, community leaders, and knowledge holders to campus but the reality is that it remains a work in progress. This program is a step in the right direction. If Indigenous students feel welcome in a museum, we are one step closer to making the entire Coast Salish and Indigenous community welcome to commune with their rightful treasures. Indigenous people have survived diseases, boarding schools, potlatch bans, marginalization, extermination, termination, assimilation and the many other political agendas of United States Presidents. If we are to decolonize we must begin by healing.

*“Revitalizing my culture and language is healing for me. Through this program,*

*I have been able to engage with Lakota beadwork hands-on. Few understand that beading is ceremony.*

*Beading is a space I can learn and practice my culture in the same space”*



As well, it is a creative outlet that contributes to my well being. I have always left my time at the Burke feeling refreshed and beaming to share what I learned with others. I am honored to have taken this class with such inspiring Indigenous peers including Theron Wahkinney, Stephanie Masterman, and Autumn Forespring who's stories have taught me so much. I would also like to thank Owen Oliver and Sven Haakanson, who's time and effort made this class a reality. My hands go up to all of you! Philámayayapi.

#### References

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My name is Stephanie Masterman and I am Tlingit from Southeast Alaska. My family is from Hoonah and Juneau and I belong to the Wooshkeetaan clan from Hoonah, although I was born and raised here in the Seattle area. I'm a student of American Indian Studies and Arctic Studies in my first year at the University of Washington. For about the last five years I've been determined to learn as much as I can about my culture, to be involved as much as I can in my community, and to be engaged in cultural revitalization and empowerment as much as possible. As an Alaska Native born and raised in the Pacific Northwest, this journey has been a challenge. Much of my Alaska Native community is home in Southeast Alaska, but those of us here in Coast Salish territory work hard to nurture our relations and thrive in our culture here too. I think that one of my community's biggest challenges is that many young people are now growing up outside of Alaska, seeking opportunities outside of Alaska, or are disengaged or displaced from the culture.

In an effort to connect with my culture I am learning my Tlingit language, protocol, leadership, art forms, and traditional ways of harvesting. Part of nurturing that connection includes learning the history of my people and our presence in communities outside of Alaska, like here in Coast Salish territories. Tlingit people and other tribes from Southeast Alaska have come to live, trade, travel through, and even war with tribes in Washington state and that history is often unacknowledged. It is one of my many goals to educate myself and teach others about this history and work toward honest, dignified representation of northwest tribes.

The Burke Museum at University of Washington is home to one of the largest collections of Northwest Coast artifacts and art pieces including ancestral and contemporary items. This year, an opportunity was created for Native students to have access to the Burke's collection for independent research. The Indigenous Research Family is the first ever program for Native students at the UW to develop their own close relationships with the collections in the Burke, and in essence, give new life to these items. Collections within museums, from my understanding, are typically donated to the museums, are purchased by the museums, or are commissioned by the museums.

The trouble is that much of the collections donated to museums were first acquired via theft.

Missionaries and explorers would raid Native villages and "collect" things they personally found valuable, including burial items, while Native peoples were forcibly removed from their homes and

assimilated or killed. This is why it is crucial to have young Native students engaged in the research, care, and storytelling of these collections. This is why I joined the Indigenous Research Family. I want to be able to tell a story of how Tlingit people came to Coast Salish territory, how our communities thrive together today, and how



Photo taken by: Sven Haakanson



My grandfather and I visiting the Burke collections during a Tlingit language class hosted by the Burke Museum and the Sealaska Heritage Institute

In the foreground is a watercoloring I painted from a photo of my mom, an example of the art I like to do.



we can do even better. That means I am obligated share the good, the bad, and even the ugly truth in that history. Acknowledgment of that story creates a platform for righting current and ancestral wrongs, which is a cultural value that we all must live up to. When we can take responsibility for implications of the past it allows us to come together to create strong relationships for the future. The best way I know how to communicate this message is to bring people together and create a dialogue using art. Acknowledgment of that story creates a platform for righting current and ancestral wrongs, which is a cultural value that we all must live up to. When we can take responsibility for implications of the past it allows us to come together to create strong relationships for the future. The best way I know how to communicate this message is to bring people together and create a dialogue using art.



Art is a language that all people can relate and connect to. Some of the first items I came across in my independent research that I had never seen before were a collection of Tlingit paintbrushes. Carved from cedar with copper bands pinching porcupine hairs for bristles and fastened tightly with spruce root wrapping. I was amazed. Of course Tlingit people made and used paintbrushes, as we are well known for our formline art style, but I had just not seen any before. I decided that this was a project I could take on and learn not only how to carve and secure a paintbrush, but also how to harvest the materials traditionally used to mix the paints. Although I most enjoy admiring the work of others, I like to draw and sometimes paint too. My particular art style is drawing from photographs using ink and watercolors. I'd like to be able to use the paintbrushes I'm making to create my own pictures.



I expect that this project will evolve in directions that I haven't imagined yet and I am excited to continue my research with the Indigenous Research Family during my time at the UW. I believe that securing space for Native students in institutions such as the Burke Museum will only strengthen our will to succeed in these institutions and beyond. Considering that these spaces weren't originally intended for us, let alone for allowing us to tell our own stories (we're supposed to be extinct, right?!), even more the need for Native people to be active and vocal here. I truly appreciate the efforts of Sven Haakanson, Owen Oliver, and all those who worked hard to put this program together and I look forward to seeing and learning from the work of my new friends in the Indigenous Research Family.

- Stephaine Masterman

Photo taken by: Sven Haakanson



## Autumn Forespring (Cowlitz)

Enviromental Science Resource Management  
and American Indian Studies

The Indigenous Research Family at the Burke museum gave me the opportunity to think beyond “standard” classroom structures. While I did not complete the quarter in the program, I still gained valuable experience and connections that have helped me feel closer to my ancestors and culture. Sven and Owen exemplify Indigenous educators. They facilitated our interactions with our ancestors, and allowed those artifacts to be the educators in lieu of simply presenting information to be absorbed. I got to hold a Cowlitz-made basket, one that my own people had touched, used, and interacted with; it reminded me of some of my earliest memories of learning about my heritage. My grandfather used to tell me stories about his grandmother’s waterproof cedar-root baskets when he was still living. Basket making runs in the family, but hasn’t been practiced by anyone I am closely related to in decades. Holding the basket has sparked my desire to learn how to weave in the Cowlitz style.

*I want to honor my great-great grandmother's memory, which still lives on thanks to my grandfather's stories. The Indigenous Research Family opened my eyes to what I can do to*



This was my first experience with a decolonial learning environment. It helped me realize that I CAN find identity and strength in the culture that I was not able to connect with in my youth. This was my first

Beading is something that has helped me connect to my family and community; the first time I showed my dad a medallion I made, he said his grandmother would have loved it. All my designs so far have been simple and geometric, but without much substance except that I could make it all work well together. This piece is more deliberate: I've always loved the way the shapes in my tribe's seal work together to make such a dynamic impression of a salmon, and I wanted to incorporate that into a beaded design. The design in white and red is a beaded interpretation of the trigons common in Coast Salish art.

Masi to everyone that helped and supported me on this project, I'd like to give a big thank you to the whole Culture department at the Burke Museum including Sven Haakanson, Rebecca Andrews, Holly Barker, Kathy Dougherty, Katie Bunn-Marcuse, Bridget Johnson, Todd Clark, Racquel West and the countless students and volunteers that engaged with the Indigenous Research Family. My hands especially go up to Jean Dennison at the Center for American Indian and Indigenous Studies. It's amazing to see the work the center funds and the support of all Indigenous students across campus. My hands go up to Yoli Ngandali for the continuous editing of the design. Lastly this wouldn't be possible without the support of the students who participated, Sierra Red Bow, Theron Wahkinney, Stephanie Masterman, and Autumn Forespring. All of your insight and questions continue to drive my work as an American Indian Studies major and it's my goal to see us all continue to succeed together.

