

# REMARKABLE WOMEN

HONOURING WOMEN FROM OUR VANCOUVER COMMUNITIES



Photo courtesy: Dawn Friend

## Charlene Aleck

Charlene Aleck is a hard-working and devoted artist who inspires many with her love of culture and the arts in its many forms. Born into the Tsleil-Waututh Nation, Charlene comes from a family strong in the fine arts.

Charlene began her acting career on the television series, *The Beachcombers*, playing Sara Jim for 15 years. She has won two Peoples Choice Awards: in 1987 for Best Actress, and in 1988 for Best Supporting Actress.

She also played a variety of character voices on CBC radio, worked with director Margo Kane in *Dzählaron*, and as a guest instructor for Spirit Song Native Theatre. Sharing her love of acting, she co-founded a summer youth camp focusing on Native Culture and Theatre Arts.

Charlene performed with the Karen Jamieson Dance Company, and as the main guest dancer created an infused performance of traditional and contemporary dance. They toured internationally, performing for the Prince of Japan in the late 1990s. A graduate from the Blanche McDonald School of Modeling, she spent several years as a model for Dorothy Grant.

Returning to Tsleil-Waututh, Charlene joined our Children of Takaya Dance troupe, taught as a cultural preschool teacher, and performed at various festivals throughout the coast. She is one of the main coordinators for the annual Tsleil-Waututh Nation Cultural Arts Festival at Whey Ah Wichen (Cates Park) in North Vancouver.

As a mother of four, Charlene also designed and made regalia for her daughters and had the honour of designing regalia for our principal players in the 2010 Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games Opening Ceremonies.

Currently, Charlene is sharing her artistic gift in the area of culinary arts and is the co-founder of Red Raven Catering which specializes in First Nations cuisine.

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Photo courtesy Barry Peterson. © Writers in Focus. Author: Susan Poulting

## Kate Braid

After years of working at traditional “women’s jobs” as receptionist, secretary and childcare worker, Kate Braid spent fifteen years working as a labourer, apprentice and journey carpenter building houses, high rises and bridges and doing renovations as a non-union, union and self-employed carpenter.

During her early years in the trades, with no other women to talk to, she began talking instead to her journals to try and understand the male culture of construction. As the working days grew longer and her lines shorter, she realized she was writing poetry. This led to her first book, *Covering Rough Ground*, which won the Pat Lowther Award for best book of poetry by a Canadian woman.

Inspired by the life and work of Emily Carr, Kate wrote her second poetry book, *To This Cedar Fountain*, nominated for the BC Poetry Prize. Her next book, *Inward to the Bones: Georgia O’Keeffe’s Journey with Emily Carr*, was nominated for several prizes and won the VanCity Book Prize. Kate has also written *Emily Carr: Rebel Artist*, a biography of the iconic painter.

Other books include, *In Fine Form*, co-edited with Sandy Shreve, the ground-breaking book of Canadian form poetry; *A Well-Mannered Storm: The Glenn Gould Poems*; *Turning Left to the Ladies* (also about her experiences in construction) and *Red Bait: Struggles of a Mine Mill Local* with Al King.

Since leaving construction in 1991, she has taught creative writing at UBC, Simon Fraser University and Malaspina University College (now Vancouver Island University) and has given readings, lectures and workshops across Canada. Her memoir of being a carpenter, *Journey Woman*, will be published in fall 2012.

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Photo courtesy of Peggy Dow

## Jan Derbyshire

Jan Derbyshire is a performer, playwright, theatre maker, director, teacher, and comedian. Her work involves solo performance, community and artist collaboration, traditional playwriting, experimental storytelling, video, words on paper, event creation, and stand-up comedy.

Jan's unique and unconventional view on life, coupled with her direct style, has her tackling taboo subjects head on. Her one woman show, *Funny in the Head*, deals with mental illness, psychiatric assessment and treatment, hallucination, alcoholism, lesbianism and pharmaceuticals with great humour and compassion. The show enjoys successful runs and excellent reviews wherever it plays, including at the 2010 Cultural Olympiad in Vancouver. Her works have been produced locally, nationally, and internationally appearing at such festivals as Women in View, Summerworks, Rhubarb, and the Dublin International Gay Theatre Festival. Her plays have been produced at Buddies in Bad Times (Toronto), The Belfry (Victoria) and The Great Canadian Theatre Company (Ottawa).

A prolific writer, Jan's other plays include *Dog of My Understanding*, *Audition of The Embarrassed Woman*, *The Opposite of Everything is True*, *Under The Big Top* and *A Modern Woman's Guide to Female Impersonation*, just to name a few. She has been Artist in Residence with The National Film Board of Canada, the Firehall Arts Centre and Playwrights' Workshop Montréal. Currently she is an Artistic Associate with PTC (Playwrights Theatre Centre) and Screaming Weenies Theatre, both in Vancouver. She has performed stand-up comedy on A&E, CBC, CTV and her creation companies include Loco Motion, Squid Theatre, Myth Universe and Human Writes.

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Photo courtesy: Anna Nobile

## *Jessica Jone and Lorita Leung*

Mother and daughter Lorita Leung and Jessica Jone are Vancouver-based dance artists who have been promoting Chinese dance culture in Canada for two generations.

A former professional dancer with a career in China and Hong Kong, Lorita immigrated to Vancouver in 1970 and began teaching to a handful of students in the basement of her home. Several years later, toddler Jessica began following in her footsteps. Lorita's hard work and dedication led to the dynamic growth of The Lorita Leung Dance Academy, now celebrating its 42nd anniversary.

Lorita is a true pioneer of Chinese dance in Canada. In 1984, she established the Lorita Leung Dance Association, a non-profit society dedicated to promoting, preserving and enhancing Chinese dance culture in Canada. The dance association successfully brought the Beijing Dance Academy Chinese Dance Examination Syllabus to Canada, and now every year, hundreds of young dance students across Canada benefit from this training and examination program. In 1993, Lorita was awarded the 125th Anniversary of the Confederation of Canada Medal for her significant contribution to her community.

Jessica is an award-winning dancer who studied dance at the Beijing Dance Academy and Simon Fraser University. She has carried on the family tradition by taking over stewardship of the Academy and has forged new artistic ground by bringing together Eastern and Western dance styles. In 2004, she and husband Chengxin Wei, co-founded Moving Dragon Dance Company, a contemporary dance company with emphasis on cross-cultural fusion. Moving Dragon has toured across Canada and has been featured at the National Arts Centre in Ottawa and the CanAsian Dance Festival in Toronto. In 2011, Jessica became Canada's first Senior Instructor of the Beijing Dance Academy Chinese Dance Examination Syllabus.

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Photo courtesy Daniel Gorman

## *Sharon Kallis*

Sharon Kallis works with green materials that others throw away, repurposing garden waste and invasive species to create site specific installations that become ecological interventions. Involving community members in traditional hand techniques like weaving and crochet, Sharon's philosophy is to work with what you have at hand.

A member of Vancouver's CORE artists' live/work co-op in the downtown eastside, Sharon began working informally with the groundskeeper's green waste pile in CRAB Park in 2002. Since then Sharon has worked with local community members to transform and enhance public spaces around Vancouver.

In 2009, Sharon worked with the Stanley Park Ecology Society on The Ivy Project. With the assistance of community members, a bio-netting erosion control blanket was crocheted from the English ivy that overruns the park, and was successfully installed after drying on a steep bank in Stanley Park to help prevent landslides. In 2010, she transformed green waste in CRAB Park into woven orbs that became habitat for native birds. As a founding member of Means Of Production Artists Raw Resource Collective in 2007, Sharon continues to facilitate community creative engagement with the art materials grown at the Means of Production Garden in the Mount Pleasant community.

Currently, Sharon is working with other artists on the Urban Weaver project researching how traditional weaving techniques can be linked with local invasive plant species for community use. Sharon continues to look for ways that city green waste can be creatively up-purposed, as well as provide opportunities for building community and turning waste into resource.

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Photo courtesy Vancouver Adapted Music Society

## *sylvie macCormac*

sylvie macCormac creates soundscapes by weaving together various elements: her rich Celtic heritage, her love of music and sound, and inspiration being born and living in Coast Salish Territory, Vancouver, Canada.

She began performing music in the early 1980s while working in children's theatre, taking up songwriting, playing Vancouver's folk circuit and composing soundscapes. She published four albums and an online ebook about WB Yeats and Japanese Nō Theatre.

Sylvie's music is heard internationally and her compositions have been published in such collections as the Canadian Music Centre and Canadian Electroacoustic Community, with commissions and film credits from KickStart, CBC and the National Film Board of Canada.

In 1982, when she was 21 years old, sylvie was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis. Aware that she would lose the ability to tour and play guitar, she took up studies at Simon Fraser University where she was introduced to computer music, soundscape and composition. In 1999, *Waves of Kokoro*, one of sylvie's soundscapes, garnered international acclaim by receiving Honourable Mention at Concours International de Musique Electroacoustique, held in Bourges, France.

Her production credits include the 2004 CD, *Uts'am/Witness* that includes artists Buffy Sainte-Marie, Bruce Cockburn and the Squamish Eagle Song Dancers. She is also the creator of *WHEELS Soundscapes: Voices of People with Dis Abilities*, at the Vancouver Adapted Music Society. Sylvie volunteered with the Vancouver Folk Music Festival for 30 years, and composed *VFMF Soundscapes 1999-2002: Festival Quartet for Solitude*, a labour of love in honour of the Festival.

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## *Paromita Naidu*

In 2010, Paromita Naidu combined her love for dance and fashion design and called it Lotus Eye. Rooted in the belief that fashion, visual arts, music, and dance are all inextricably connected, Paromita chose her company name based on the ancient and symbolic pairing that represents beauty, grace, knowledge, perseverance and growth—qualities she was drawn to through her arts background. Her goals include increasing the public's understanding of different fashion traditions, showcasing talented South Asian models, designers and artists, and bringing together and supporting innovative companies that have conscious, creative, and revolutionary business models.

Along with her rich academic career (BA, MA, MHA), and position of healthcare research manager (UBC), she is currently a Director on Diwali Celebrations Society and Vancouver Asian Heritage Month Society. She is also a past director of BC Multicultural Health Services Society.

Paromita also has a long history and career in dance. Stemming from her background in ballet, she has studied Bharata Natyam (Indian Classical dance) under established gurus in North America. She studied ballet at the Royal Winnipeg Ballet School, and the Tisch School of Performing Arts (New York). She furthered her classical training and completed an arangetram under Jai Govinda.

Paromita has completed many group and solo performances, which have included original choreography and folk dance. Cutting edge works have included collaborations with rock bands and modern dance companies. She is well-respected in the dance community and is currently teaching and producing dance shows and a South Asian arts festival. She recently performed at the BC Victory Celebration for the 2010 Winter Olympics. She is also the recipient of two BC Arts Council scholarships.

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Photo courtesy Thomas Cannell

## *Susan A. Point*

*with daughters Kelly Cannell (middle) and Rhea Guerin (at left)*

Susan is a Coast Salish artist who lives and works on the Musqueam Reserve in Vancouver, BC. From birth she has been taught the importance of Coast Salish values, traditions, and stories. Susan has been instrumental in re-establishing Salish art, drawing inspiration from the designs of her ancestors and exploring the use of non-traditional materials, inspiring a new generation of Northwest Coast artists. Possibly her biggest reward has been the opportunity to meet elders and teachers from other Salish communities, and to see the current renaissance in Salish culture.

Susan has exhibited internationally, and has been awarded many public art commissions, including works in Stanley Park, the National Museum of the American Indian, Vancouver International Airport, and the Museum of Anthropology UBC.

Her awards include the Order of Canada, an Aboriginal Achievement Award, appointment to the Royal Canadian Academy of Arts, and is elected to the International Women's Forum. Susan has honorary doctorates from the universities of Victoria, Emily Carr, Simon Fraser, and the University of British Columbia.

Susan has four children and eleven grandchildren, all artists in their own right, and through her family Susan has become a teacher. "The task of my generation is to remember all that was taught and pass that knowledge and wisdom on to our children," says Susan.

Susan's daughters, Rhea Guerin and Kelly Cannell, have been immersed in Coast Salish art since their mother began practicing wholeheartedly in 1981, and have been largely influenced by their mother's teachings. However, both have achieved their own distinct style and have also begun teaching their own daughters. Rhea and Kelly often assist their mother on large pieces by painting and carving, as well as collaborating on many large scale works.

This project was made possible by the Vancouver Board of Parks and Recreation Arts, Culture and Environment Dept.

Biographical information provided by Susan A. Point; written by Thomas Cannell; edited by Anna Nobile

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Photo courtesy Tom Gauran

## *Marina Szijarto*

Marina Szijarto is a visual and celebration artist with a diverse and eclectic arts practice. She works within the mediums of theatre, dance and performance, creating sets, costumes and poster design, and community-engaged rites and celebrations. Much of her work is site specific, being created for, and with, a particular landscape, community or season.

She is the Art and Technical Director at Vancouver's Mountain View Cemetery All Souls event and the Creative Director of A Midsummer Fete, a celebration of art, environment and organic farming at Colony Farm Regional Park. Marina has been exploring the artist's role in rites of passage, specifically death, funerals and mourning, for the last 12 years and has pioneered the use of shrines to honour the dead in Vancouver community-based events.

Marina also works with different communities to envision and produce both public art and community celebrations. She was the artistic director of mosaics for the Footprints project, co-designer of the Welcome Walkway for the Moberly Arts and Cultural Centre, and designer for the Heart of the City Community Play in the Downtown Eastside. Her giant puppets, lanterns, stilt costumes, and parade props have been used in festivals throughout Vancouver, including the PNE, Pride Parade, Vancouver Folk Music Festival and Illuminares.

She has received two Jessie Richardson Awards, plus seven nominations, for outstanding costume design, set design and mask/puppet design for her work in the Vancouver professional theatre community.

Marina has a degree in Fine Art Embroidery, has been known to belly dance on stilts and make millinery for drag queens and little dogs. She dreams of travelling the world making community flower mandalas to heal the planet and human soul.

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Photo courtesy: Pamela Fodor

## *Jan Wade*

Jan Wade was born and raised in Hamilton, Ontario, moving to Toronto to attend the Ontario College of Art and Design where she graduated with honours. She arrived in Vancouver in 1981 and began working and collaborating in the underground art and music/club scene that was full of innovative performances and spontaneous happenings.

Jan was raised within a close-knit segregated community, experiencing and witnessing many of the dramatic changes brought on by the Civil Rights Movement. She was also heavily influenced by the Black Church, and by the southern black aesthetic of her great-grandmother and grandmother, through quilts, crochet and hand-painted signs. Jan's mother always encouraged her creativity, cutting up brown paper grocery bags when there wasn't enough money for drawing paper. To this day, she harbours a love of drawing on brown paper.

Jan has exhibited her work locally, nationally and internationally. Her wall of crucifixes, *Epiphany*, premiered at the Walter Phillips Gallery at the Banff Art Center as part of the AfroCubanismo Festival, the first major festival of Afro Cuban Culture in North America since the 1959 Revolution. In 1995, it was shown at the 1st International Arts Biennial in Johannesburg, South Africa. She participated in the first major group exhibition of African Canadian Artists at the Art Gallery of Ontario, and then travelled to Haiti to participate in a group exhibition of Artists from the Diaspora at the National Gallery of Haiti in Port Au-Prince.

Jan's current work explores the creative work of people of the Diaspora and its significance and influence and meaning within a larger social context.

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Photo courtesy of Squamish Nation Education

## *Tracy Williams*

Sesemiya Tracy Williams is a young Skwxwú7mesh / Squamish mother, weaver and high school / home school counselor. She was initially inspired by her late grandmother, Eva Nahanee, who was a well-known cedar basket weaver.

Tracy pursues her education in the cedar weaving arts in many ways. She has learned to collect the inner bark of the cedar and its roots to process them for use in weaving baskets and now regalia clothing. She continues to learn the techniques to make capes and tunics, as well as hats, mats, and adornments. She has incorporated fireweed, stinging nettle, and rush fibers as well as animal fiber to enrich and strengthen the pieces she makes.

She has completed pieces for use in the Vancouver 2010 Winter Olympic ceremonies, and for museum display and education. She is an invaluable role model to those she learns with as well as the students she works with.

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Photo: David Bessie, Courtesy of Catrona Jeffery Gallery

## Jin-me Yoon

Jin-me Yoon is a renowned visual artist who uses photography, video, and installation. As a professor at the School for the Contemporary Arts at Simon Fraser University, she shares her passion for contemporary art with her undergraduate and graduate students.

Born in South Korea, she came as a child immigrant to Vancouver in 1968. This profound difference between one culture and another within the space of a plane ride has informed her collage aesthetic: cutting one thing from one context and combining it in another context to see what new formations arise. Her work centers around conceptualizing the body, history, and place, which often entail questions of identity.

Her earlier work, such as *Souvenirs of the Self* (1991), questions Canadian national identity and belonging. One of her best-known projects is *A Group of Sixty-Seven* (1996), a portrait of 67 Korean-Canadians looking into an Emily Carr painting and looking out from a Lauren Harris painting. This work has been exhibited many times in Vancouver as it is in the permanent collection of the Vancouver Art Gallery. *Welcome World* (2010) was produced in Vancouver during the 2010 Winter Olympics. Her current work explores the complexities of globalization through projects in Korea, Japan, Austria, and Mexico.

As a mother of two, her artwork also encompasses contemporary motherhood as a subject. She is involved in various aspects of her local community as a citizen and a member of the arts community. Her work has been extensively exhibited locally, nationally and internationally and is represented in permanent collections in many major institutions across Canada. For Jin-me art is essential to understanding the past, in the present, to imagine the future.