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WIIGWASITIG / WASKWAY / HONOURING THE BIRCH TREE

PAT BRUDERER, HELEN PELLETIER, AMBER SANDY, SETH ARCAND, ANGELIQUE MERASTY

09.12.26 – 01.03.27



Image Credit: Amber Sandy, Cut Me, 2025. Winter birch bark, glass seed beads, 13 x 16 in.
Image Credit: Jake Kimble. Courtesy of the artist.

WIIGWASITIG / WASKWAY / HONOURING THE BIRCH TREE

PAT BRUDERER, HELEN PELLETIER, AMBER SANDY, SETH ARCAND, AND ANGELIQUE MERASTY
CURATED BY ALBANY SUTHERLAND

Reflecting on themes of intergenerational knowledge and healing, *Wiigwasitig / waskway / Honouring the Birch Tree* includes the works of five First Nation artists focusing on birch bark (Wiigwas/waskway). Coming from Anishinaabeg and nêhiyawak communities over several generations, the exhibition features bark biting, baskets, film, photography, and wearable art, through an intersection of traditional and contemporary forms. The works of Pat Bruderer (Halfmoon Woman), Helen Pelletier, Amber Sandy, Seth Arcand and the late Angelique Merasty are curated by Albany Sutherland, opening conversations on the significance of knowledge systems in sustaining relationships with the Land and kin.

As Indigenous knowledge systems continue to be actively revitalized, Wiigwasitig / waskway creates space for cultural continuity by positioning the gallery as a site for learning, exchange, and the ongoing presence of Indigenous ways of knowing within contemporary art contexts. Each artist featured has strong community ties, as well as a deep connection to the materials they work with, highlighting their responsibility to Land through artistic practice.

Pat Bruderer, an established birch bark biting artist with over thirty years of experience, is inspired by the work of the late Angelique Merasty, who was believed to be one of the few birch bark biters of her generation. Her intricate designs are created by folding thin layers of bark harvested from birch trees and biting to make imprints. Bruderer has taken the responsibility of sharing this practice by teaching youth across the region.

Helen Pelletier is from Fort William First Nation and specializes in working with Wiigwas. For this exhibition, she presents Wiigwas baskets, a rifle case, and wearable art made from birch. Her practice is grounded in ceremony, harvesting bark, and spruce roots used for her work. Pelletier uses etchings to transform natural materials into intricate works that honour the beauty and resilience of Wiigwas. By sharing her creations with others, Pelletier contributes to the ongoing transmission of Anishinaabe knowledge, demonstrating how artistic practice can serve as a form of medicine and connectivity. The work is further informed by the sacred mountain Anemki Wajiw (Thunder Mountain) on Fort William First Nation, where she harvests annually.

Amber Sandy's *Enchantment* reflects intergenerational knowledge sharing, with two rows of quills from two different porcupines – one harvested by artist Jean Marshall and the other by her and her niece last year. *Enchantment* highlights the deep material significance of continuing traditional practices such as quill work and hide-tanning. Sandy's working methods are central to her practice. She has been taught how to tan hide, harvest quills and Wiigwas by mentors, one of them being Helen Pelletier. *'The Mary' Birchkin Bag* is made from birch bark, home-tanned hide, and dyed porcupine quills, raising questions about the value of community, knowledge, and traditional skills. *Mashkiki*, meaning medicine in Anishinaabemowin, is created from home-tanned bear hide which speaks to clan roles, and our inherent responsibilities of caretaking in relation to ourselves, our body, spirit, and Land.

Seth Arcand's work is a series of photographs, 16mm film, and digital video work that explores how Indigenous peoples interact with waskway. Slow media, which is the intentional production and consumption of media, is used to capture the natural environment's movements and sounds. His work reflects nêhiyaw (Cree) laws such as wahkohtowin (understanding), defined by Arcand as "the law that states we are in relationship with people, land, animals, and water". While working closely with his community, visiting and reciprocity are central to his practice to document the experiences of Indigenous people across generations.

The work of **Angelique Merasty** is significant to this exhibition as it demonstrates the early continuance and preservation of birch bark biting as a vital cultural practice. Her work reflects a deep commitment to sustaining cultural knowledge through periods where these practices were at risk of being lost completely. Angelique continues to inspire future generations of artists to carry the skills and cultural knowledge of birch bark biting forward.

Wiigwasitig / waskway / Honouring the Birch Tree exhibits cultural continuance of knowledge sharing, memory, and relationships across generations. While systems of cultural transmission have been disrupted, these artists are actively engaged in revitalization by sharing their practices with future generations, offering reflections on the resurgence of Indigenous knowledge systems through their practices of making.

BIOS



Photo Credit: Brandy Bloxom.

Pat Bruderer

Pat Bruderer (Halfmoon Woman) is a leading keeper of the rare Indigenous artform of birch bark biting. Self-taught and inspired by the late Angelique Merasty, she has spent more than three decades preserving and sharing this ancient practice, which she calls "Passing a Tradition." She is a proud member of the Peter Ballantyne Cree Nation in Saskatchewan. Her intricate birch bark designs have been shown internationally and are held in museums, galleries, and private collections. Now based in Winnipeg, she continues to teach, exhibit, and inspire through cultural workshops and exhibitions such as Biting Back Our Cultural Resilience, celebrating the strength and beauty of Indigenous art and knowledge.



Image Credit: Pat Bruderer, Healing the Spirit, 2019. Birch Bark, 16 x 20 in.
Photo Credit: Hilary McDonald. Courtesy of the artist.



Photo Credit: Chondon Photography.

Helen Pelletier

Helen Pelletier is an Anishinaabe kwe from Fort William First Nation. Helen has worked with Wiigwas for twenty years and recently developed a relationship with winter birch bark and sgraffito style etching. Helen credits her Wiigwas knowledge to family, community, elders, and friends. Helen has exhibited her work in "Their Breath in Beads" (2019) and the Northern Ontario Juried Exhibition in 2019 and 2022 at the Thunder Bay Art Gallery. Helen also exhibited her work at Indigenous Fashion Arts Festival marketplace in the Northern Ontario Spotlight in 2020.



Image Credit: Helen Pelletier, Dagwagani Mawandochige (detail), 2025. Winter birch bark, spruce root, moose antler, deer hide, seed beads, rivets, 43 x 2 x 10 in. Photo Credit: Chondon Photography. Courtesy of the artist.



Photo Credit: Zoya Lynch Photography.

Amber Sandy

Amber Sandy, a proud member of Neyaashiinigmiing, the Chippewas of Nawash First Nation, is an artist and passionate advocate of land-based education. Her artistry, which focuses on leather, beadwork, tufting, and fur, is deeply rooted in her culture. As a hide tanner, she meticulously transforms moose, deer, and fish skin into handcrafted leather. Her work is a harmonious blend of Indigenous and Western science, reflecting her unique approach to conversation, environmental science, and education. Amber's fervor lies in increasing access to traditional land-based knowledge, practices, and art for Indigenous people.



Image Credit: Amber Sandy, 'The Mary' Birchkin Bag, 2024. Birch bark, home-tanned deer hide, dyed porcupine quills, seed beads, cotton lining, artificial sinew, 15 x 4 x 12 in. Photo Credit: Julie Riemersma. Courtesy of the artist.



Photo Credit: Verily-Marie Laurie.

Seth Arcand

Seth Arcand is a Cree filmmaker from the kipohtakaw Cree Nation (Alexander) in so called Alberta. His interests lie in exploring Indigenous stories through film and photography. As a filmmaker, he hopes to open more opportunity for other Indigenous filmmakers interested in the industry. This means creating spaces on the prairies where Indigenous filmmakers are comfortable and supported in taking risks, while challenging what is expected of Indigenous Creatives. Visiting and reciprocity are important aspects of his creative process. Seth completed a certificate in the Indigenous Digital Filmmaking Program at Capilano University and was selected to participate in Write Over Here: Indigenous Screenwriting Residency 2025 at Banff Centre for the Arts. Residing in kipohtakaw, Seth is connected to his community and is still learning about his culture as he believes this is a lifelong process.



Image Credit: Seth Arcand and Kiona Callihoo Ligtvoet, êpêkiyokêyân (coming to visit), 2025. Film Still: Courtesy of the artist.



Image Credit: Seth Arcand and Kiona Callihoo Ligtvoet, êpêkiyokêyân (coming to visit), 2025.
Film Still: Courtesy of the artist.

Angelique Merasty

Angelique Merasty was born in 1924 in Beaver Lake, Manitoba, and was a member of the Peter Ballantyne Cree Nation. She learned the traditional art form of birch bark biting from her mother, Susan Ballantyne, and developed her own style and patterns inspired by flowers, animals, and insects. While birch bark biting began as a pastime, museums and collections sought her exceptional work. As she gained more experience, she could visualize the entire picture she wanted to create before beginning and would pause only after completing the entire design. The Thunder Bay Art Gallery has a significant collection of Merasty's work and presented her first solo exhibition in 1983 entitled "Wigwas: Bark Biting by Angelique Merasty", including an educational display across the region. Her work can be seen at the Museum of Man and Nature in Winnipeg and is on permanent display at the Smithsonian Institute in Washington, D.C.



Image Credit: Angelique Merasty, Biting Box, circa 1980. Birch Bark. 1983.10.001. Collection of the Thunder Bay Art Gallery. Courtesy of the Thunder Bay Art Gallery.

PUBLIC PROGRAMMING

At the AGB, learning is in the making. Through hands-on workshops and courses, artists can build a greater personal connection to their craft and experience professional growth by learning new techniques, discovering other artists' practices, and understanding contemporary art in greater depth.

Go to *www.agb.life/learn* to read more about the programs and to register.
Friends of the AGB enjoy discounted registration fees for course and workshops – visit www.agb.life/support to learn more.









Photo Credit: Ema Walters.

PROGRAMS

ALL PROGRAM FEES INCLUDE MATERIAL AND EQUIPMENT; REGISTRATION IS REQUIRED.

BIRCH BARK ETCHING WITH HELEN PELLETIER

Friday, September 11, 2026
6:00 – 8:00 pm
$57 – Registration required

Join artist Helen Pelletier, for a hands-on workshop introducing the foundational skills of birch bark etching. Helen will share more about her relationship with birch bark and her harvesting practices. Participants will have the opportunity to work with bark from Helen's personal collection to learn how designs are etched using specialized tools. Her designs connect to storytelling, by drawing examples from her baskets, hats, and vests. This session is suitable for beginners.

BIRCH BARK BITING WITH PAT BRUDERER (HALFMOON WOMAN)

Saturday, September 12, 2026
9:30 – 11:30 am
$40 – Registration required

Join artist Pat Bruderer (Halfmoon Woman) for an introduction to birch bark biting. The workshop will begin with a presentation exploring the history and cultural significance of birch bark biting, the legacy of renowned artist Angelique Merasty, and Pat's own learning journey as a practicing artist. Participants will learn techniques and traditions connected to birch bark biting before having the opportunity to create their own designs. Using folded pieces of thin birch bark and biting techniques, attendees will learn how to create intricate symmetrical patterns. This hands-on workshop offers a chance to engage with the traditional art of birch bark biting.

MENTOR-IN-RESIDENCE VISITING THROUGH FILM WITH SETH ARCAND

September 14 – 18, 2026
$50 – Registration Required
Indigenous participants only

Join filmmaker Seth Arcand from kipohtakaw Cree Nation (Alexander) for *Visiting Through Film*, a five-day intensive mentorship opportunity grounded in relationship-building, reciprocal learning, and creative exploration through film and photography.

Centered on the practice of visiting, as a cultural and creative methodology, these gatherings invite Indigenous artists and creators across disciplines to come together in conversation to experiment with new approaches to filmmaking. By drawing on Seth's filmmaking practice, participants will explore how storytelling can emerge through connections with place, process, and community. Participants will engage with analog and digital tools through AGB's studios, while exploring how creative processes can be guided by curiosity.



Photo Credit: Ema Walters.

WORKING WITH LAND-BASED MATERIALS: ARTIST TALK WITH AMBER SANDY

Saturday, October 3, 2026
1:00 – 2:00 pm
Free – Registration required

Amber Sandy's artist talk speaks to her evolving practice working with birch bark, home-tanned hide, quills, and other land-based materials. Participants will learn about her hide-tanning process, how she works collaboratively with her mentors, and gain insight into her artwork featured at AGB. This session emphasizes intergenerational learning and the continuation of Anishinaabe practices in contemporary forms.





CURATORIAL TOUR WITH ALBANY SUTHERLAND

Wednesday, September 23, 2026
6:30 – 7:30 pm
Free – Registration required

Join AGB's Associate Curator, Albany Sutherland for a guided tour of *Wiigwasitig / waskway / Honouring the Birch Tree*. Albany will share insights into her collaborative curatorial process, relationships with artists and community, and the significance of Wiigwas (birch bark). This event is supported by Culture Days, where programs are designed to connect the public with artists and ideas through learning experiences that highlight rich artistic traditions.

GALLERY GUIDE TOURS

Saturdays at 1:00 pm (drop-in)
October 17, November 14, December 19
Free – No registration required

Bring your curiosity and join the conversation on a free guided tour of *Wiigwasitig / waskway / Honouring the Birch Tree.* This is an opportunity to learn more about the ideas and connections behind the artworks and get answers to any questions you may have.



Photo Credit: Darren Rigo.



Photo Credit: Darren Rigo.

EVENTS

CONTEMPORARY ART BUS TOUR

Saturday, September 19, 2026
2:30 – 8:30 pm
$20, includes transportation
and admission

Hop aboard for a special art excursion beginning at the Textile Museum of Canada (55 Centre Ave) in Toronto and traveling to the Art Gallery of Burlington and Cambridge Art Galleries before returning to Toronto. With the chance to explore *Made By Many: 50 Years of the Textile Museum of Canada* and *Always In Fashion, Wiigwasitig / waskway / Honouring the Birch Tree,* and *Next in Fibre: Fibreworks 2026*, this trip offers a unique opportunity to experience contemporary practices that bridge textiles, craft, and fashion. Reserve your seat and enjoy an inspiring afternoon across three leading art institutions.

OPEN FAMILY STUDIOS

Sundays from 1:00 – 4:00 pm (drop-in)
September 20 – December 20, 2026
Free – No registration required

Celebrate culture, imagination, and the power of storytelling through art this fall! This season of family-friendly programming is inspired by the works featured in *Wiigwasitig / waskway / Honouring the Birch Tree*.

Our knowledgeable artist-instructors will be present to offer guidance and support to develop new ideas, or you are welcome to explore independently and create in your own unique way. For full program details, please visit our website.



ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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The AGB is grateful to the volunteer Gallery Guides for their exemplary dedication to bringing the exhibition to life and to our members for their ongoing support of all the AGB's programming.

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The Art Gallery of Burlington is located on the ancestral territory of many Indigenous Nations including the Anishinaabeg, Haudenosaunee, and Métis peoples. The territory is mutually covered by the Dish with One Spoon Wampum Belt Covenant, an agreement between the Iroquois Confederacy, the Ojibway, and other allied Nations to peaceably share and care for the resources around the Great Lakes. We acknowledge that the land upon which we gather, to create and learn, is part of the Treaty Lands and Territory of the Mississaugas of the Credit.

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