

Photo Credit: GNWT



Other Materials

Although moose hair is the most common material used for tufting, hair from the beard of caribou and porcupine quills have also been used. Moose hair is preferred

because of its stiffness but caribou hair is often used as well. Porcupine quills are rarely used as the end product is very coarse and not as attractive as tufting produced from moose and caribou hair.

FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT:

Arts and Fine Crafts Section
Department of Industry, Tourism and Investment
Government of the Northwest Territories
P.O. Box 1320
Yellowknife, NT, Canada
X1A 2L9

Phone: 1-877-445-2787
Email: nwtarts@gov.nt.ca

Website: www.nwtarts.com

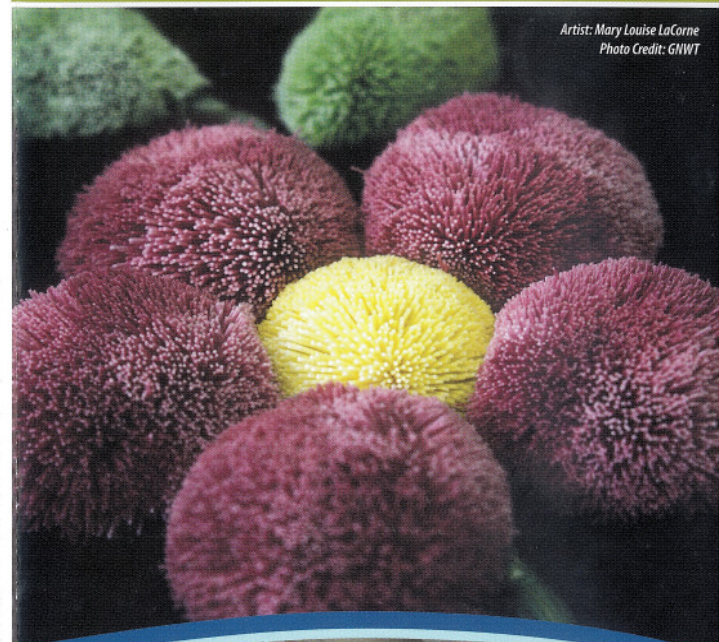


Photo Ribbon - Artist/Photo Credit: (L-R) E. Whane/Tessa Macintosh, Acho Dene Native Crafts/Pat Kane, Crazy Legs Contemporary Dance/Jeremy Childs, Inuvik Visitors Centre/Vicki Boudreau, Derrald Taylor/Roth and Ramburg Photography, Antoine Mountain/GNWT.



Tufting

From Canada's Northwest Territories



*Artist: Mary Louise LaCorne
Photo Credit: GNWT*



Trade-mark owned by the Government of the Northwest Territories



No two tuftings are alike - each is designed to its maker's unique vision.

Twisting moose and caribou hair for decorative use

is an old Athapaskan art predating European contact. However, the craft of tufting did not come into existence until shortly after World War I. The earliest documented examples of Dene tufting are from the 1920s and 1930s.

Tufting

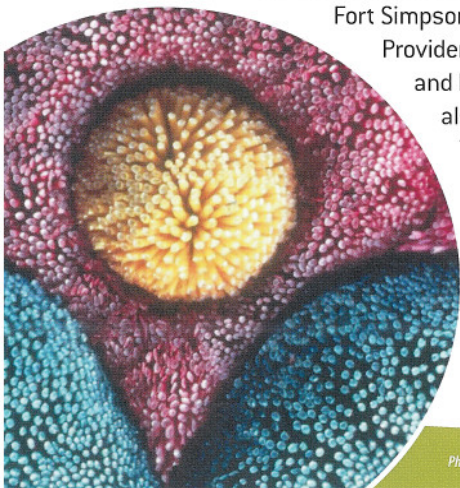
Mrs. Boniface Lafferty, a Métis woman from Fort Providence area, was inspired by a resident nun who used wool in a type of work called "punch work". Imitating this technique using moose hair, Mrs. Lafferty refined the art of "tufting". She taught her daughter-in-law the technique. Over the years, the practice spread across the North.

Tufting produces soft, three dimensional images by stitching and trimming bundles of selected moose hair on to fabric, hide or birchbark. Flower designs are traditional in the Fort Liard,

Fort Simpson and Fort

Providence areas. Leaf and bird designs are also common.

Tufting is painstaking work that requires great patience and a sure, steady hand.



The Art of Tufting

Moose hair is the most common material used for tufting. The most sought-after moose hair comes from the shoulders and rump area. The hair is picked from the pelt by hand and only the white hair is used. The hair can be dyed deep jewel tones or left natural to give a feel of the land. As the hair ends in a dark tip, only a portion of its length can be dyed.

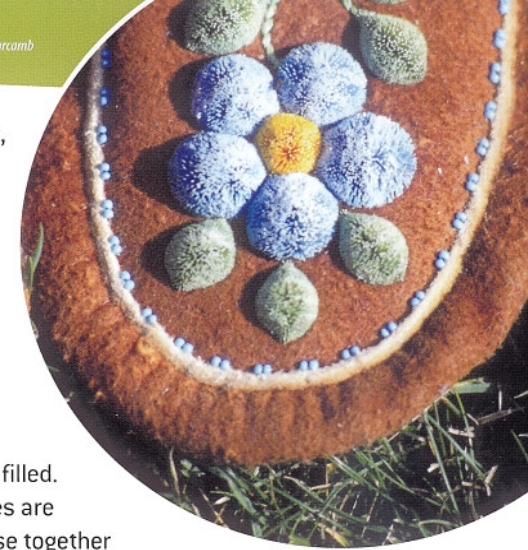
The hairs are sorted according to size, length and colour. Then they are washed and soaked. When there are enough sorted hairs, the difficult task of dyeing can begin. The hairs are tied into bunches and dipped into the dye. However, some can miss getting coloured. The hairs can also be thrown loosely into the pot and dyed individually.

Traditional dyes were made from roots, lichen, flowers, bark and various assorted berries gathered in the wild. These dyes are rarely used anymore as the colours are subject to fading over time. Today, commercial powdered dyes and crepe paper are the most commonly used dyes. These produce vibrantly coloured hairs.

Tufting is usually done on tanned hide or velvet reinforced by canvas. The pattern is drawn with a pencil, piece of bone or a small stick dipped in a mixture of flour and water. The outlines are drawn freehand so no two designs are identical.

While sewing, the sorted hairs must not dry out or they will break. Hairs are kept moist by putting them in the mouth or keeping them rolled in a damp cloth.

To create the tufts, about 15-20 hairs are grouped into a small bundle of uniform size and colour, and laid on the backing material. A thread is passed up through the backing, around the bundle of hair about 1/4 inch from the end, and back through the backing. The thread is pulled tight, causing the bundle of hair to stand up in a



bristly tuft, and then knotted. The hair is cut and the process repeated until the area to be covered is filled. The bundles are placed close together so no division between tufts is visible. The ends of the tufts are trimmed until the desired shape has been sculpted.

Line Work

Another moose hair technique called line work is often used in combination with tufting to create borders and stems.

To create a line, approximately half a dozen hairs are held together and secured to the backing with evenly spaced diagonal stitches. Before each stitch is pulled tight, the hair is given a slight twist producing a bead-like effect.

