



Raven Davis, artist and consultant with Friends United, performs during the opening of the organization's exhibition of Aboriginal art at People's Place Library Friday evening. The month-long show is co-hosted by the St. F.X. German Society. They are selling tickets on three limited edition prints from artists in the show as a fundraiser for their annual trip to Berlin. (Corey LeBlanc photos)

Celebrating Aboriginal art

by Corey LeBlanc

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It was a feast for art lovers Thanksgiving weekend at People's Place Library.

Friday night, a unique month-long exhibit opened as part of a fundraiser for the St. F.X. German Society.

"Friends United is a collective of aboriginal artists," Raven Davis, artist and consultant for the art organization, said before the official opening.

While sitting with the colourful and powerful images over each shoulder, she noted the group started primarily with Maritime artists, but it now has membership from communities across Canada.

Davis and Jay Bell Redbird, who both have pieces in the People's Place exhibit, are Ojibway artists.

"As opposed to the other artists who are Mi'kmaq," she noted.

The founder of Friends United is Rolf Bouman, who moved to Cape Breton almost 30 years ago.

"He was really inspired by the Canadian culture and heritage... so he started collecting art, trying to find pieces of the culture he could learn from and he fell in love with aboriginal art and started collecting it," Davis explained.

The work on display at Peoples' Place Library this month is part of Bouman's personal collection.

With such exhibits as part of Friends United, Davis noted artists can generate revenue in three ways: sell the original piece, a reproduction or a print of

their work.

For this exhibit, Bouman has coupled his love of aboriginal art and strong connection to the St. F.X. German Society by donating three signed limited edition prints to the group.

The society is selling tickets on the works as a fundraiser for its annual trip to Berlin.

"Friends United showcases a wide range of indigenous art in the Maritimes," Marlis Lade, St. F.X. German instructor, told the gathering during the exhibit opening, noting the "power" of the works.

"It is a reflection of personal empowerment through art," she noted.

Lade said Germans are long-time "admirers of Aboriginal art and culture."

Back in the 1800s, when Germans travelled to Canada, they returned home with clothing, art and crafts of Aboriginal origins.

"That spirituality never really stopped," Lade said, adding that connection with art continues in galleries and museums in Germany.

Along with the enjoying the art display, visitors were able to get an up close look at Sandra Simon at work. The Mi'kmaq artist from Paqtnek First Nation, a noted quill box maker, also has creations in the Friends United collection.

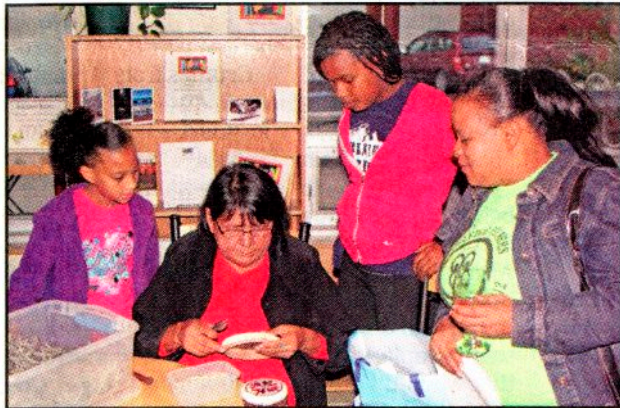
Davis opened the event with a smudging ceremony, which involves the burning of one of four traditional medicines – sage.

"It is a purification ceremony... but it is also to welcome in our ancestors into our events – to bring them here to be part of this and also... to help people see the work in a good way," she explained before the ceremony.

Davis also sang the *Strong Woman Song* as part of the opening, dedicating to all the "fallen" Aboriginal women across North America.

To purchase tickets for the fundraiser, contact a group member of email mlade@stfx.ca

For more about Friends United, visit www.friends-united.ca



Mi'kmaq artist Sandra Simon, working on a quill box, was a main attraction during the opening of the Friends United exhibition of Aboriginal art at People's Place Library Friday.