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'elements of indigo'

Beechworth Arts Council art-to-artwear transformation project

Project timeline

August – November 11, 2018

Entries open / close

August 1 / September 22

Exhibition

November 10-11 (coinciding with Beechworth Celtic Festival)
Beechworth town hall – exhibition opens
November 10



This Arts Council initiative is a visual and upshot artwear project which coincides in 2018 with the 22nd Beechworth Celtic Festival. It has been devised to encourage artists to explore expressions of place and identity and create works which reveal 'elements of indigo' – the name of the shire in which we live in Victoria's North East.

As an artistic idea it's inspired by traditions of cultural 'badging', where particular forms and styles of clothing throughout history have evolved to identify a people's tribe, clan, community, place, culture and even country. In this project participating artists are particularly encouraged to tease apart the idea and tradition of *tartan* and re-work it to identify the communities of Indigo.



Why 'elements of indigo'?

The word *indigo* speaks of the unique and diverse region that is the defining 'country' and home of our people and their history: Indigo Shire.

The name 'Indi' was used by First Peoples to describe what in colonial times was named the Murray River. 'Indigo' in its local context derives from Indigo Creek and Valley where an endemic plant called *Indigofera australis* grows. The First Peoples used its flowers to obtain a blue dye and are thought to have turned its bark into string. (They also used the plant's root as a fish poison.)

In a wider context the word *indikon* in Greek described 'blue dye from India' – extracted from *Indigofera tinctoria*. It came in Old French (13 c.) to be spelled *inde* and define colour in the blue-violet spectrum. From the 15th century a chemically-identical dye derived from woad – the plant *Isatis tinctoria* – was used in Europe to yield the same colour.



In Japan indigo is derived from the plant *Polygonum tinctoria*. It has been used to colour linen for more than a thousand years and *ai-zome* – the practice of indigo-dyeing – has a deep interpretative history.



Indigo is also dramatically evident in North East skies where a spectacular star array on clear nights lights a remarkable canvas of distinctive navy-black.

How does the project relate with the Celtic Festival?

Tartan is an integral expression of Gaelic culture and manifests as woven fabric worn as a *kilt* or *plaid* (an over-shoulder cape, or blanket). Until the 19th century distinctive tartans in Scotland and Ireland were associated with places or districts and produced by local weavers using natural dyes available only in those areas. In Victorian times the Scottish Highland and Lowland clans began to adopt tartan patterns as particular 'brands' of identity.



But it seems the word might have a much deeper lineage. In Central Asia...

'Tartar cloths' were 'conspicuous for the brilliancy of their colouring and design. Their brilliant effect was produced in three different ways, apparently: either by weaving designs of various colours in the material on the loom; or by making what is known as a 'shot' surface; or lastly by means of embroidery or appliqué on a plain ground...' [from a discussion of Dante's reference to 'Tartar cloth']

Supporting this contention, etymonline.com identifies these word sources:

tartan (n.)

'kind of woollen fabric' (mid-15 c.), perhaps from Middle French *tiretaine* 'strong, coarse fabric' (mid-13 c.), from Old French *tiret* 'kind of cloth', from *tire* 'silk cloth', from Medieval Latin *tyrius* 'cloth from Tyre' (see **Tyrian**).

If this is the source, the spelling is likely influenced in Middle English by *tartaryn* 'rich silk cloth' (mid-14 c.), from Old French *tartarin* 'Tartar cloth', from *Tartare* 'Tartar', the Central Asian people (see **Tartar**). Specific meaning 'woollen or worsted cloth woven with crossing stripes of colours' is from c. 1500, formerly a part of the distinctive dress of Scottish Highlanders, each clan having its particular pattern.

kilt (n.)

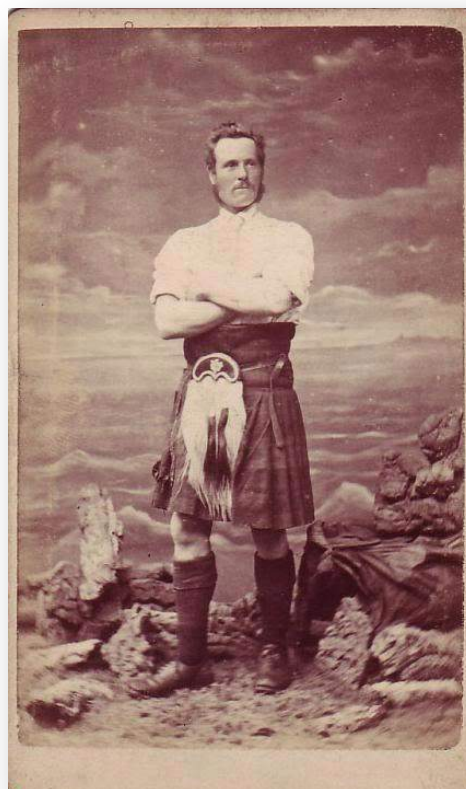
'plaited tartan skirt', originally the part of the belted plaid which hung below the waist, c. 1730, *quelt*, from Middle English verb *kilten* 'to tuck up' (mid 14 c.), from a Scandinavian source (compare Danish *kilte op* 'to tuck up'; Old Norse *kilting* 'shirt', and *kjalta* 'fold made by gathering up to the knees').



So why is this information important for project participants?

Entrants will be asked to create a visual work that:

- fills a rectangle measuring 600 x 420 millimetres (A2) and depicts or expresses 'elements of Indigo' – its sky, landscapes, colours, seasons, geology, topography, plants, crops, animals and birds, and other inspirations, and
- can be translated into 'artwear' *interpreting* the form of a kilt – a traditional skirt that covers from navel to knees and which has a deep history in Gaelic, Norse, Mediterranean, Tartar and First Peoples' cultures. The Old Norse word *kjalta* means 'pleated'; of a 'garment or cloth tucked up and around the body'. Australia's First Peoples wore skirts or coverings made from grass, bark, and kangaroo, wallaby and possum skins decorated with feathers and echidna quills and tooled imagery.



The project has **two** parts:

In the *first*, entrants create their visual work, which can take the form of:

- Drawn, painted, digital or video image in two dimensions
- A sculptural or topographical expression in three dimensions

In the *second*, the Arts Council invites selected artists to translate the visual work as artwear which interprets the *form* of a kilt, or a garment from navel to knee.

'Get yer kilt on'

As a leading participatory feature of the exhibition the Arts Council will work with Indigo schools to encourage students to design, devise and 'kilt' paper cut-out 'people'. These designs will be assessed and leading works exhibited in Beechworth with the support of participating stores in 'Celtic Week' (November 3-11).



Key dates

July 30

Launch the project in Beechworth

Invite participation

September 22

Participants submit documentation and a digital image of the visual work with entry fee. Note: *selected works must be able to withstand transport and delivery*

Entrants must provide a written description of the elements of their design, its inspirations and meanings, and information about the materials required to translate the visual work as 'artwear'. They must also provide a brief cv.

September 23

Arts Council advisory panel shortlists visual works for exhibition, and informs entrants of their inclusion in the competition.

September 24

The panel asks each shortlisted entrant to make up their design, or cause to have it made up, by interpreting it the form of a kilt. They might use paper, calico, hessian or other cloth or materials which can be worn and modelled. Entrants using video imagery must supply body projections to show their work.

At the same time the advisory panel will select the **winning entry** and ask the winning artist to arrange with a maker to construct it as artwear. The Arts Council is looking to fund this work.

November 2

Entrants deliver their original visual work, framed and suitable for exhibition, and their finished artwear.

November 8-9

Beechworth Arts Council mounts its 'elements of Indigo' exhibition.

November 10

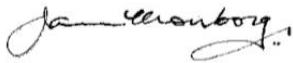
Exhibition opens with visual designs displayed, artwear modelled and competition prizes awarded. These (likely) include recognition for:

- Winning design (the A2-sized depiction)



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- translation as artwear
 - Exhibition (people's) choice
 - School entry/ies

Exhibition runs through **November 11.**



JAMIE KRONBORG

President

Beechworth Arts Council Incorporated