

Button Blanket – the Journey Begins

March 16, 2010

My clan sister Laura (Desert Fire Hawk) had a request for me, to make a Button Blanket. I was greatly honored by this request and started to do some research



into this ceremonial art form. There is a great book about Button blankets, "Robes of Power: Totem Poles on Cloth" by Doreen Jensen and Polly Sargent. I also picked up a child's activity book, "The Button Blanket: Northwest Coast Indian Art Activity Book" by Nan McNutt. And to further my understanding of Northwest Art I found the book, "Northwest Coast Indian Art: an Analysis of Form" by Bill Holm to be very helpful.

Hawk and I started to Skype and I listened to her stories of the Sto:lo, or River People of the Pacific North West. She sent pictures of the beautiful river, with the majestic mountains hugging the river valley. The bull rushes waving along the shore, and the importance of the Salmon to the way of life. Fishers would go out at night in their dugout canoes, wearing cedar hats, and at night there would be a lantern on the bow. There is a "story rock" with many faces and a very long history. I thought on all of these ideas and began to sketch out an idea.

April 15, 2010



Looking at the books on the art of the Pacific North west, I came up with this idea. Parts I liked: the salmon, the salmon eggs, and the idea of two large salmons and a center crest.

I wasn't pleased with the center crest so started to rework the salmon.



The center crest still wasn't coming to me so I left the salmon sketch up on the wall and did other art work. I knew an idea would come to me; I traveled to Boise to see my BFF and do artwork and hike.

May 20, 2010

I had an idea for the center crest come to me in a dream. I liked this salmon, so I decided to get red poster board and my craft knife and to try the salmon the size I thought would go on the blanket. Working in the real size made a big difference.



I cut out the salmon and put the large abalone shell buttons in place, I was happy with this so moved on to the center crest. I really was intrigued with the idea of night fishing and thought that an image in red on the black field would be cool.



This is what I came up with: A woman in a cedar hat paddling her canoe at night down the river, with a lantern, the story rock and bulrushes on the bank and the mountains in the background giving strength, and a salmon moon in the sky.

May 31, 2010

Using Photoshop I put the images together and came up with the final design idea.



June 12-19, 2010

I went to California and met with Hawk at our clan retreat. I was able to take measurements and was confirmed that the crest design was good, we discussed the use of buttons along the borders and decided that "less is more" is a good rule of thumb so simple and elegant would be the mode.

July 2010

I spent up in Banner Elk, North Carolina; I made notes in my journal of how to proceed with making the Button blanket a reality. So I returned to Florida and was ready to begin the actual sewing!

August 8, 2010

I had ordered all the materials on line (finding wool at a Jo Ann's here in Florida, was a non starter) and they were in my studio.

Black wool Melton cloth, red wool felt, black silk and black cotton fabric, Black and red cotton threads, and four sizes of Abalone shell buttons.



I began by cutting the black Melton cloth to the right size, and then cut strips of the wool felt for the borders. I have never worked with wool before so needed to get a feel for it, so practiced with stitches and methods.

I decided on mitered corners, I used black cotton as hem tape on the hem, got the zigzag stitch the size I wanted. I was feeling confident so dove right in to sewing the borders and doing the hem.

I use my Grandmothers dress form to see how things are looking.





I got the borders and hem done then added the black silk at the neckline.

Now I had the basic blanket done and was ready to start on the crest.





I needed to make a working pattern to cut the red wool felt. I had my red poster board templates.

Then put this together on paper to make the actual pattern.



August 9, 2010



I took this pattern and cut the red wool felt, and then I had to position the crest on the blanket.

I pinned the red wool felt in place and checked it out on the dress form.



August 11, 2010

I was pleased with the position of the salmon and crest, so began to appliqué the red wool felt in place.



August 22, 2010

I finished appliquéing the two Salmon and began the center crest.



September 3, 2010

All the appliqué is done and I start to sew on the Abalone shell buttons. I started with the large buttons on the salmon. And the small buttons in the crest.



September 16, 2010

I finished sewing on all the buttons! Over 300 of them!



I made my own label.



And I made a storage bag for the blanket.

The End of the Journey

So a journey that began back in March has reached its successful conclusion. I spent 30-50 hours in designing the crest, and over 120 hours of hand sewing. I smudged my work space with sage to bless the work to be done that day. I had



my supervisor Tippi Chantey, and her quality control experts Josa and Purdit overseeing the project at every step. I sweated through working with wool in August and September in Florida. I challenged myself with always coming to the project with a happy heart and open mind. Time seemed at times to stand still, I would sit down

and begin stitching then look at the time and five hours had gone by. I put on some of my favorite music and would just be in the zone of sewing. The Button Blanket is now on its way to Hawk in Thunder Bay, Ontario, Canada. I have started cleaning up my studio to get ready for the next project.

Salmon Button Blanket

55 x 58

