



Impact Story: Saskatchewan Craft Council

by
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Saskatchewan
Arts Alliance

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SAA’s Arts Work series highlights an arts organization making a positive impact in its community: This month features the Saskatchewan Craft Council.

Ceramics, wood-turning, stained glass, weaving, tapestry, jewellery...and many other forms of fine craft – they’re all thriving in Saskatchewan, and all are represented by the Saskatchewan Craft Council.

Most people know the craft council primarily by its Saskatoon gallery on the busy Broadway commercial strip. But behind the scene, the council and its staff’s main task is supporting the province’s crafts artisans and artists to develop their skills, market their work, and bring the sector alive for the public

As Carmen Milenkovic, the SCC’s executive director tells it, a key moment in the development of a “crafts culture” in Saskatchewan was the inaugural Dimensions show in the Battlefords in 1976, “a celebration of crafts,” out of which emerged the council – 57 artisans who wanted to build a community to showcase their creative work.

“The ‘70s were a key period for the arts in Saskatchewan,” Milenkovic says. “Everything around the arts was just blossoming at that time,” including the emergence of craftspeople around the province. “Most of them worked independently, many of them rurally, and were isolated, and there was a real desire for community.”

It helped, too, that the government of the day was eager to invest in the arts. “Fine craft had a special friend in then-

Premier Allan Blakeney”, Milenkovic says.

More and more, as professionalism has increased in the craft world, “people are pursuing craft as a way of making a living. We play an important role in that.”



Saskatchewan Craft Council executive director Carmen Milenkovic in the SCC Gallery boutique.



The council purchased its current home at 813 Broadway in 1991, giving it a visible place for exhibitions in its gallery and sales through the busy boutique at the rear, with office space on the second floor. The council also operates the Christmas-time Wintergreen Fine Craft Market in Regina, participates in SaskGalleries' Art Now, manages an online shop and provides opportunities for Saskatchewan craftspeople to reach national and international markets.

While the need to find markets for their work was one of the driving forces behind the creation and growth of the craft council, that need has changed over the years. "There are now art markets everywhere," Milenkovic says. "We used to be the only game in town. Now there are craft sales all over." And with craft

burgeoning, both as a hobby and a professional pursuit, "it's hard for the public to distinguish between professional and amateur work."

The SCC works hard to educate on the difference. "It is our responsibility to showcase craft which meets a high standard," Milenkovic says. The council also sees "a responsibility to educate the public to understand what excellence in the arts is," which, in a neat bit of synchronicity, nurtures both markets and professionalism for its members.

Although the council has had its Broadway gallery for over 25 years, "A lot of people still don't know about us. But we get a lot of tourists. The gallery allows the public to see what fine art can be.

And the boutique is a great place to buy gifts. Every piece we sell is unique. And invariably, either at an exhibit in the gallery or in the boutique, the response is "Wow".

Dave Margoshes is a fiction writer and poet living in the rural Saskatoon area after many years in Regina. He was a newspaper reporter and editor, in New York, San Francisco, Calgary, Vancouver and points between, before escaping to the literary life.