

## The Life of Beads by Maureen Matthews

Lecture by Maureen Matthews MAWA, Jan. 6, 2017

<https://vimeo.com/199054733>



Wall pocket by an unknown Gwich'in artist, Yukon, pre-1901, is an example of the dispersal of Métis style beading throughout the far north, which accelerated after the Riel Resistance. From the Hudson's Bay Company Collection.

In the Ojibwe language, beads are grammatically animate and beadwork artists often say that to work with them you must speak to them. They will understand. Anyone who has beaded will know that beads can be willful and yet, when they wish to cooperate, the result can be astonishingly beautiful. Beads speak volumes. Bandolier bags, leggings, moccasins, jackets, wall pockets, bridles, saddles and tea cozies tell of the astonishing technical skills of Indigenous women. They instantiate the talent of Indigenous women and argue powerfully for a place in the art conversation for these inspired artists—past and present. Drawing upon the Manitoba

Museum's extensive collection, this "show and tell" lecture will bring artifacts to MAWA to illustrate the rich history of Indigenous beading.

- **Maureen Matthews**

Dr. Maureen Matthews is Curator of Cultural Anthropology at the Manitoba Museum where her most recent exhibit, developed in collaboration with First Nations elders, won a national award for exhibit excellence. Before joining the museum, Dr. Matthews made award winning CBC radio documentaries featuring native language speakers and has continued to emphasize the value of native languages, and the wisdom and humour of native people. Her theoretical work brings together Ojibwe philosophical and metaphorical thinking with contemporary anthropology related to the nature of personhood, and the animacy and agency of objects in museums.

## Métis Beadwork Traditions Throughout History

### *Grassroots News*

On January 6, 2017, Mentoring Artists for Women's Art (MAWA) hosted a lecture on *The Life of Beads* by Dr. Maureen Matthews, Curator of Cultural Anthropology at the Manitoba Museum. The lecture provided insight on the types of materials, techniques, and colours used by Métis craftswomen throughout history. As well as being an identifier for a family or clan, the colours and patterns used were often a good indicator of when the designs were created. Dr. Matthews demonstrated a notable difference in colours of beads used before and after 1850. Brighter colours often signified the artwork was created before 1850. After 1850 it became chemically possible to make different colours and this was evident in later beadwork. The type of hide used is another indicator of Métis artwork origins; the hide used linked to animals native to the region. The stunning and complex beaded designs were commonly used during the fur trade era for decorating jackets, vests, bags, leggings, gloves, and sashes. Other items decorated with beadwork were saddles, saddle blankets, halters, and bridles, signifying the valued relationships the Métis had with their animals. These designs are still widely admired and used today to embellish modern retail items such as moccasins, mukluks, gloves, bags, and jewelry.

The Louis Riel Institute (LRI) has worked to continue this Métis tradition through the Flower Beadwork Circle, a group who meets weekly every Wednesday evening to keep the craft alive. In addition to beadwork, the Flower Beadwork Circle offers a variety of Métis cultural workshops throughout the year. Last month, members of the group had an opportunity to participate in a Capote workshop taught by Métis Artisan Nancy Gouliquer. Group members learned how to make Capotes – long coats with hoods made from woolen blankets. These were worn by the historic Red River Métis and French Canadian Voyageurs to keep them warm in winter. Nancy's next Capote workshop is scheduled for January 14th, 2017. A quillwork workshop taught by Master Beader Jeanine Krauchi is also scheduled for January 14th, 2017. If you are interested in participating, or learning more about Métis beadwork and cultural workshops being

offered, contact the Flower Beadwork Circle group coordinator Louise Gordey by calling (204) 984-9480 or emailing [lgordey@mmf.mb.ca](mailto:lgordey@mmf.mb.ca)



Dr. Maureen Matthews, Curator of Cultural Anthropology at the Manitoba Museum explains that one of the things that turns up a lot, especially in flower beadwork is hidden messages such as the infinity symbol in the centre of the rose pictured above.