



Rediscovering Traditional Textile Methods Of Tsleil-Waututh Nation

By Tia Rose

Introductions

I acknowledge that I am working on the traditional, ancestral, and unceded territories of the Coast Salish peoples, including the territories of the x^wməθk^wə́yəm (Musqueam), Sk̓w̓x̓wúʔmesh (Squamish), and s'əlílwətaʔt (Tsleil-Waututh) Nations.

As a member of Tsleil-Waututh Nation, I seek to deepen our understanding of sustainable and culturally rooted design practices, it is vital to acknowledge the rich textile traditions of Tsleil-Waututh Nation. Rediscovering and revitalizing these traditional methods not only honours the wisdom of the ancestors but also fosters a connection between the past, present and future of Indigenous craftsmanship. These techniques are a living testament to the ingenuity, resilience, and artistic expression of the Tsleil-Waututh peoples, whose practices have been long interwoven with the land and their way of life. By incorporating and learning these methods, I can contribute to the preservation of cultural heritage, while fostering respectful, collaborative relationships with Indigenous communities.

Cultural Background of Tsleil-Waututh Nation

The Tsleil-Waututh Nation, often referred to as the "People of the Inlet," is one of the Coast Salish peoples whose ancestral lands span across the Burrard Inlet in what is now known as Vancouver, BC. As part of the Coast Salish cultural group, their history is intricately connected to the lands, waters, and resources of the region. The Tsleil-Waututh people have long been known as stewards of the land, living in harmony, with their environment through sustainable practices, spiritual beliefs, and a deep cultural knowledge passed down through generations.

Historically, the Tsleil-Waututh peoples were a part of a vast network of trade, culture, and diplomacy across the Pacific Northwest, with strong connections to neighbouring Indigenous nations. This interconnectedness fostered a vibrant cultural identity that includes artistic expressions such as beading, carving, weaving and storytelling. Among these practices, textile production has played a vital role, reflecting not only the community's craftsmanship but also its cultural values and social systems.

Tsleil-Waututh Textile Practices

Textile traditions among the Tsleil-Waututh people, as with many Coast Salish nations, were closely tied to their relationship with the natural world. Materials for textile production were harvested from their immediate environment, including plant fibers, animal furs, and wool. Wool from mountain goats and the now extinct wooly dog was especially prized for weaving and crafting ceremonial and everyday items.

Historically, Coast Salish weavers, including those from Tsleil-Waututh Nation, were renowned for their mastery of the loom, producing intricate woven blankets, garments and ceremonial regalia. These textiles were not only practical items for warmth and protection but also rich in cultural meaning, with patterns and designs conveying stories, family lineages, and spiritual connections.

The arrival of European settlers in the late 18th and 19th centuries disrupted many aspects of Tsleil-Waututh life, including traditional textile practices. As colonial powers took over Tsleil-Waututh lands and imposed foreign systems of government, many cultural practices were suppressed. However, despite these challenges, the Tsleil-Waututh people have retained and revitalized key aspects of their cultural heritage, including their textile traditions, which remain a vital symbol of resilience and identity.

The Role of Textiles in Tsleil-Waututh Culture



Photo: <https://www.instagram.com/tsleilwaututhnation/p/CRo9NMUMCXe/>

Textiles in Tsleil-Waututh culture served as more than utilitarian items.

They were deeply embedded in social, spiritual, and economic life.

Handcrafted garments and blankets were often used in significant ceremonies, symbolizing status, wealth, and sacred connections to the ancestors. For example, blankets were commonly given as gifts during potlatch ceremonies, where their craftsmanship reflected the wealth and generosity of the giver.

Textiles were also central to trade practices, as the Tsleil-Waututh engaged in a robust exchange of goods with neighbouring nations. Their high-quality woven items, adorned with culturally significant patterns, were highly valued as trade goods across the Coast Salish region. This trade allowed the Tsleil-Waututh to strengthen ties with neighbouring communities and reinforce their place within a broad and interconnected cultural landscape.





The Significance of Textiles in Daily Life, Ceremonies and Trade.

In daily life, textiles were essential for providing warmth, protection and comfort, particularly in the cooler and wetter climate of the Pacific Northwest. Capes, blankets, and woven hats were used to shield against the elements, while finely made garments reflected a person's standing within the community.

In ceremonial contexts, textiles took on even a greater importance. The symbolic value of regalia worn during dances, feasts and spiritual gatherings was immeasurable. These garments, often made with intricate weaving techniques and adorned with fur or feathers, were seen as extensions of the wearer's identity, connecting them to their ancestors and the spiritual world.

Trade practices also saw the exchange of woven items, which became valuable commodities due to the labour-intensive processes involved in their creation. The Tsleil-Waututh traded these textiles for food, tools and other goods, furthering their relationships with neighbouring nations.



Traditonal Clothing and Regalia

Historically, the Tsleil-Waututh people wore clothing made from a variety of natural materials, including mountain goat wool, wooly dog wool and cedar bark. Cedar bark, in particular, was highly versatile. It was softened, woven, and used to create hats, baskets and other garments that were lightweight, water-resistant, and durable. These garments were both functional and beautiful, often decorated with geometric patterns and animal motifs that held cultural significance.

Regalia used in ceremonies often included capes and blankets made from woven wool, adorned with symbols and designs that conveyed the wearer's connection to their family lineage, wealth and community. These garments were not only artistic expressions but also spiritual items, crafted with the utmost care and respect for the materials and traditions involved. In conclusion, rediscovering and revitalizing the traditional textile methods of the Tsleil-Waututh Nation is an important step towards honouring and preserving their cultural heritage. These textiles represent more than just material goods, they are symbols of identity, resilience and community, deeply embedded in the fabric of Tsleil-Waututh life. Through the resurgence of these practices, the Tsleil-Waututh people continue to weave together the past and present, ensuring that the knowledge and traditions of their ancestors remain vibrant and relevant for future generations.



Mountain goat
Credit: painting by Elizabeth McClelland from
Kays and Wilson's Mammals of North
America, © Princeton University Press (2002)



Side view of a 14 year old dog which was
shorn each year for its hair. [Source:](#) Ian
McTaggart-Cowan fonds, UVIC.



Peeling red cedar bark from the tree
Photo: <https://www.molliemcmillen.co.uk/news/how-to-harvest-cedar-tree-bark>

Natural Resources:

The Foundation of Tsleil-Waututh Textile Traditions

The Tsleil-Waututh Nation, like many Coast Salish peoples, developed an intimate connection with their surrounding environment, using natural resources in sustainable ways to meet their everyday needs. The land, sea and forest provided a wealth of materials for food, shelter, clothing and art. The Tsleil-Waututh people cultivated a deep respect for these resources, understanding that their survival depended on maintaining balance with nature. Traditional textiles were created from a variety of plants, animals and other natural materials, each chosen for its unique qualities and prepared with care.



Photo: Pexels

Indigenous Plants, Animals and Natural Materials Used for Textiles

The primary materials used in Tsleil-Waututh textile traditions included plant fibers, animal wool and other natural materials.

Among the most important resources were:

Western Red Cedar Bark: Cedar was often referred to as the "Tree of Life" due to its versatility and importance in daily life. The inner bark of the Western red cedar tree was harvested and woven into garments, ropes, mats and ceremonial items. Cedar bark was prized for its durability, water resistance and flexibility, making it an essential material for Tsleil-Waututh weavers.

Mountain Goat Wool: Wool from mountain goats was another crucial material in traditional textile production. This wool was highly valued for its warmth, softness and versatility. Weavers would collect shed wool left on bushes during seasonal changes or acquire wool through trade with nations in more mountainous regions.

Wooly Dog Hair: Historically, the Coast Salish people also bred a unique type of small, long-haired dog known as the "wooly dog." Its fur was carefully harvested and mixed with mountain goat wool to create textiles. The extinction of the wooly dog in the 19th century led to a decline in this specific resource, but it remains an important part of the Tsleil-Waututh Nation's textile history.

Nettle and Other Plant Fibres: Stinging nettle and other fibrous plants, such as fireweed and wild flax, were also used to create textiles. The fibers of these plants were spun into thread and woven into baskets, ropes, and other utilitarian items. Plant fibres were often combined with wool to strengthen the fabric and give it different textures.

Preparation of Materials:

Traditional Harvesting Methods and Processing

The Process of gathering and preparing these natural materials was carried out with great care and respect for the environment, following practices passed down through generations. Each step, from harvesting to weaving, has cultural significance, reinforcing the Tsleil-Waututh people's connection to the land.

Harvesting Cedar Bark:

Cedar bark was traditionally harvested in the spring, when the sap was running, making the bark easier to peel. Care was taken to ensure that only a portion of the tree's bark was removed, allowing the tree to continue to grow and thrive. Harvesters would peel long, vertical strips of bark from the tree, only taking what was needed. The outer bark was dried, then soaked and pounded to soften for weaving.

Collecting Mountain Goat Wool:

Unlike sheep, mountain goats were not domesticated, so their wool was gathered in the wild. Wool was collected from bushes where it had been naturally shed or through trade with mountain-dwelling nations. This method of collecting wool was sustainable, as it did not harm the animals or deplete their population. After collection, the wool was cleaned, sorted, and spun into yarn, often mixed with other fibres like dog hair or plant fibres to create different textures and strengths.

Processing Plant Fibres:

Stinging nettle, fireweed, and other fibrous plants were harvested during specific seasons when their fibres were most supple. After harvesting, the stalks were dried, then pounded or soaked to separate the fibres from the woody material. These fibres were spun into thread, ready to be woven or braided into textiles. The careful preparation ensured that the resulting fibres were strong and durable.

Sustainable Practices in Gathering and Preparing Materials:

One of the most remarkable aspects of traditional Tsleil-Waututh textile practices is their inherent sustainability. The Tsleil-Waututh people, guided by a deep respect for the environment, practiced sustainable harvesting methods that ensured the resources they depended on would remain abundant for future generations. Key sustainable practices included:

Selective Harvesting:

Only the amount of material needed was taken, whether it was bark, wool, or plant fibres. This ensured that the source – whether a tree, animal, or plant – was not depleted or harmed. For example, when harvesting cedar bark, only narrow strips were removed to allow the tree to continue growing, preserving the health of the forest.

Seasonal and Cyclical Harvesting:

The timing of harvesting was crucial. Resources were gathered during specific times of the year to ensure the materials were at their best and to avoid interfering with the natural life cycles of plants and animals. For instance, mountain goat wool was collected during molting seasons, and cedar bark was harvested in the spring when it was most pliable.

Minimal Waste:

The Tsleil-Waututh people used every part of the materials they harvested. For example, cedar trees provided not only bark for textiles but also wood for canoes, homes, and tools. This minimal waste approach reduced the need for excessive harvesting and ensured that no part of a valuable resource went unused.


Cultural Protocols:

Harvesting materials was not just a physical process; it was also a spiritual one. Before gathering resources, Tsleil-Waututh people would often perform prayers or ceremonies to give thanks and ensure that the land was treated with respect. This reciprocal relationship with nature reinforced the importance of balance and responsibility in the use of natural resources.



Traditional Weaving and Textile Techniques of the Tsleil-Waututh Nation: Weaving Techniques

The Tsleil-Waututh Nation has a rich tradition of textile creation rooted in skillful weaving techniques that reflect their cultural heritage and deep connection to the land. Two notable methods are finger weaving and twining, both of which predate the introduction of mechanical looms and demonstrate a mastery of intricate handwork.



Finger Weaving:

Finger weaving involves interlacing threads by hand without the use of a loom. This method is highly versatile and often used to create straps, belts, or decorative bands. The process requires precision and patience, with each thread placement contributing to the strength and design of the piece.

Twining:

Twining is another prominent technique, in which two or more threads are twisted around the warp fibres to create durable, patterned textiles. This method allows for the incorporation of vibrant patterns and is often used for functional items such as mats, baskets, or garments.

Other traditional methods:

Other methods include plaiting and looping, which further showcase the creativity and resourcefulness of Tsleil-Waututh weavers. These techniques often use natural fibres like cedar bark, wool and plant materials gathered from the local environment,

The role of Handmade Tools and Looms:

While early weaving techniques heavily relied on hand manipulation, tools such as drop spindles and simple looms eventually became integral to textile production. Looms, often handmade, enabled weavers to produce larger pieces with greater efficiency. Tools like bone needles, carved combs and natural dyes were crafted with care and respect for the surrounding environment. These tools facilitated the Tsleil-Waututh values of sustainability and harmony with nature.

Patterns and Symbolism

The textile of the Tsleil-Waututh Nation are more than functional items – they are visual narratives that carry deep cultural meanings and reflect the community's relationship with their lands, waters and ancestors.

Symbolism in Traditional Designs:

- Patterns often depict elements of nature, such as waves, mountains, animals and plants, representing the Tsleil-Waututh's close bond with the natural world.
- Geometric shapes and motifs may symbolize interconnectedness, unity and cyclical nature of life
- Certain designs are linked to spiritual practices or are used in ceremonial contexts.

Storytelling Through Patterns:

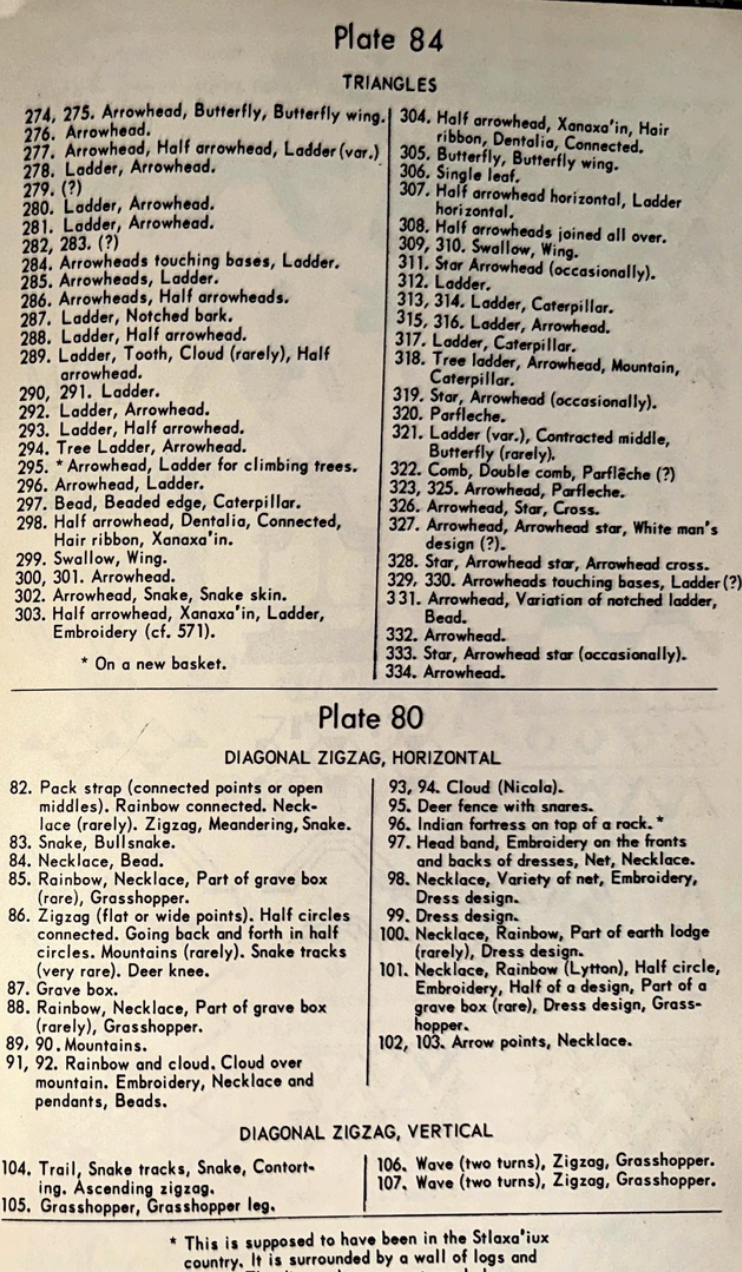
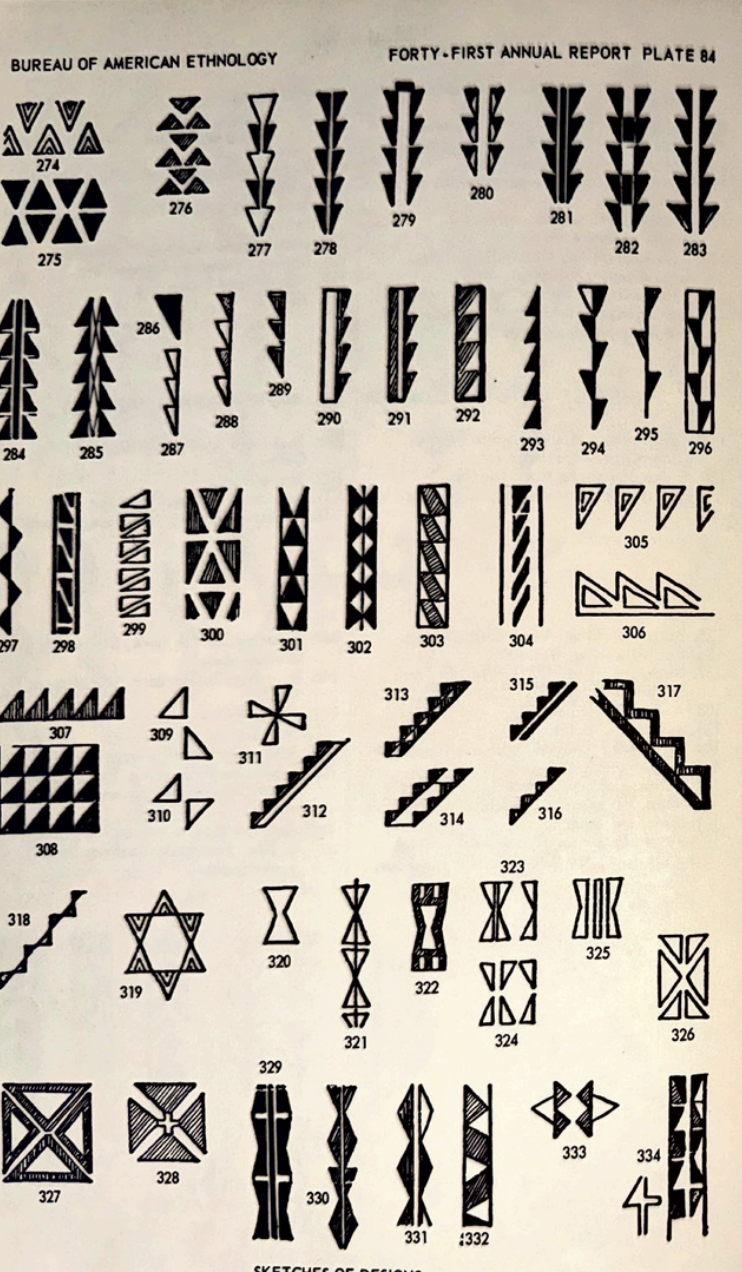
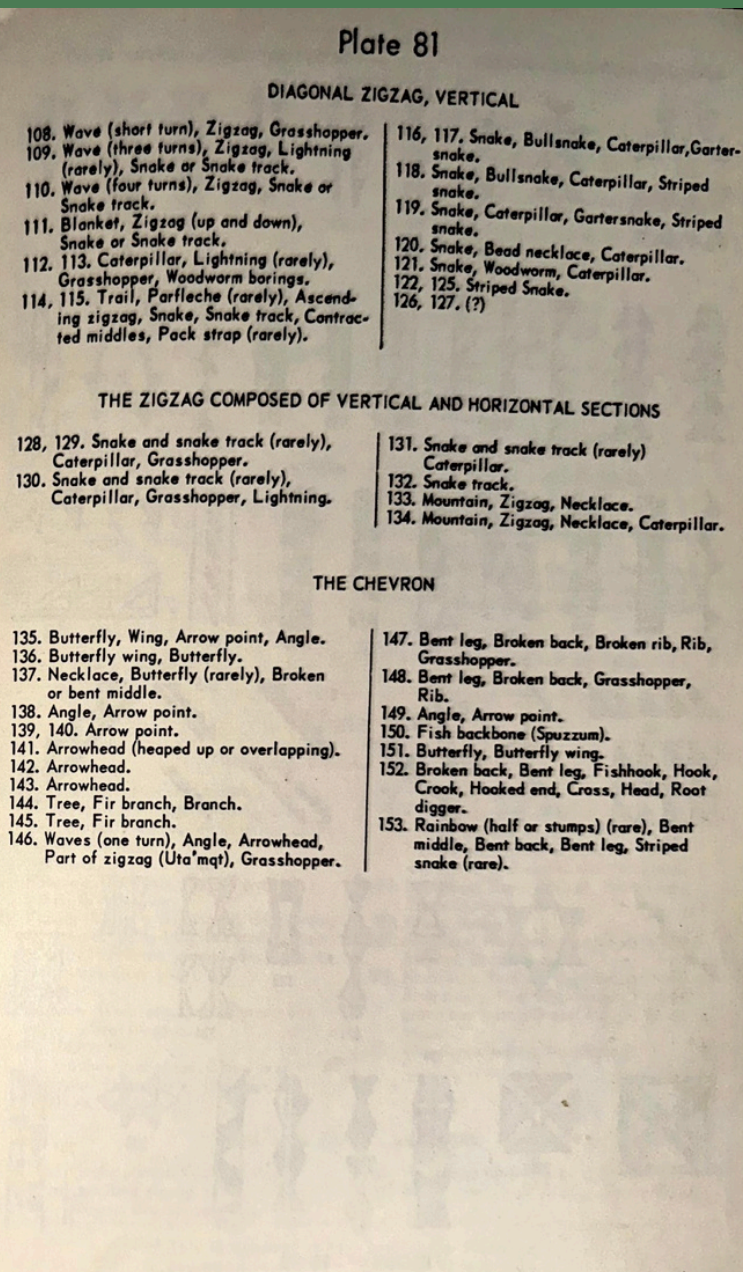
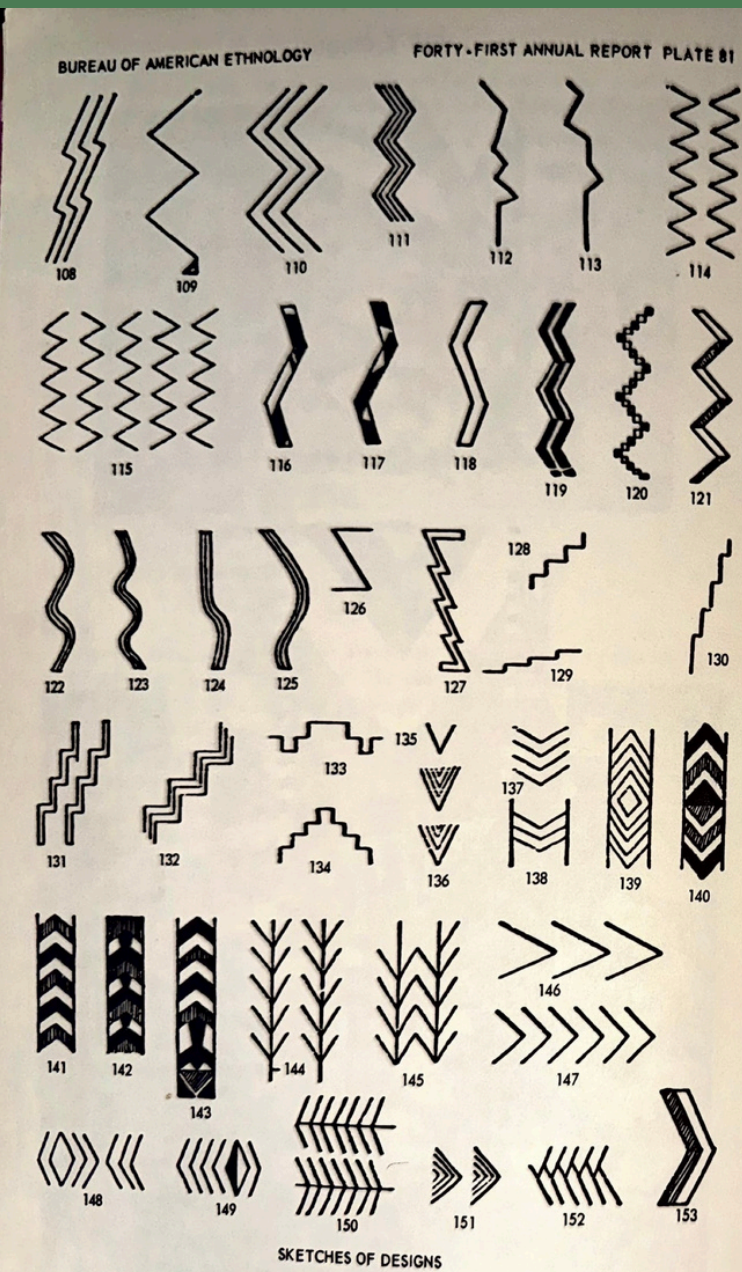
- Each pattern tells a story, whether it's a family lineage, a historical event or a representation of Tsleil-Waututh beliefs.

Reflection of Land and Waters:

- Patterns are deeply influenced by the local environment, echoing the textures, shapes and colours of the land and sea.
- This connection ensures that every piece created is not only functional but also an homage to the Tsleil-Waututh's ancestral territories and resources.

By preserving and revitalizing these weaving traditions, the Tsleil-Waututh Nation continues to honour its heritage while fostering a deeper understanding of the cultural significance embedded in each thread, tool and pattern.

Pattern and Motif Examples



These pattern and motif examples were found in:
"Salish Weaving Primitive and Modern" by Oliver N. Wells

Dyeing Techniques in Traditional Textile Methods of the Tsleil-Waututh Nation:

The Tsleil-Waututh Nation has long utilized natural dyeing techniques to infuse textiles with vibrant colours, connecting their creations to the land and its resources. These methods reflect a deep knowledge of local plants, minerals and sustainable practices, ensuring that every step of the dyeing process honours the environment.

Plant Based Dyes:

- The Tsleil-Waututh people gathered dye sources from the surrounding environment, carefully selecting plants for their specific colours and properties.
- Berries such as salal, elderberry, or Oregon grape provided shades of blue and purple
- Roots and bark, like alder bark yielded warm, earthy tones such as red and brown
- Leaves and flowers, including stinging nettle or dandelion, were used to produce greens and yellows

Mineral-Based Dyes:

- Natural minerals and earth pigments played an essential role in achieving unique colours
- Ochre, a clay rich in iron oxide, was used for shades of red, yellow and brown
- Ground minerals or charcoal provided black or gray hues, adding contrast to textiles.

Sustainable Harvesting Practices:

- The collection of dye materials was guided by a respect for nature, ensuring that only what was needed was taken and resources were allowed to regenerate
- Seasonal knowledge was critical; plants were often harvested at specific times to ensure optimal colour extraction

Methods for Achieving Vibrant Colours in Traditional Textiles:

Extraction of Pigments:

- Dyes were extracted by boiling or soaking the plant or mineral in water to release their pigments. The process could take hours or days, depending on the desired intensity of the colour
- Sometimes, mordants (natural substances like urine, ash or tannins) were used to fix the dye to the fibres and enhance colour fastness.

Layering and Blending Colours:

- To achieve richer or more complex colours, materials were often dyed multiple times or dipped in different dye baths. For instance, a textile dyed with yellow could be over dyed with blue to create green.

Preparation of Fibres:

- Before dyeing, fibres such as wool or cedar bark were cleaned and softened to ensure even absorption of the dye. This step was crucial for achieving vibrant, long-lasting colours.

Immersion and Drying Techniques:

- Fibres were immersed in dye baths for extended periods, allowing the colour to penetrate deeply
- After drying, textiles were dried in the sun, which sometimes further deepens the colours through natural oxidation

Cultural and Spiritual Significance:

- The dyeing process was often accompanied by prayers or rituals, underscoring the connection between the weaver, the materials and the environment. The vibrant colours produced were not just decorative but carried meanings tied to spiritual beliefs, status or the environment

By mastering these dyeing techniques, the Tsleil-Waututh people created textiles that were not only visually striking but also deeply symbolic, representing the beauty and abundance of their lands and their profound respect for the natural world.

The Decline and Disruption of Traditional Textile Methods of Tsleil-Waututh Nation: Impact Of Colonization

Colonization deeply disrupted the traditional textile practices of the Tsleil-Waututh Nation and other Indigenous communities, leading to a loss of cultural knowledge and traditions that had been passed down for generations.

Colonial Policies and Displacement:

- The forced removal of Tsleil-Waututh people from their ancestral lands disrupted access to the natural resources essential for textile creation, such as cedar trees, plants for dyes and other materials
- Land restrictions and the establishment of reserves severed the connection between weavers and their environment, making traditional practices nearly impossible to sustain

Assimilation Policies:

- Government assimilation policies, such as the banning of cultural ceremonies under the Indian Act, discouraged or outright prohibited traditional practices, including textile creation
- Indigenous textile art was devalued or dismissed as "primitive" by colonial authorities, leading to its marginalization

Industrialization and Loss of Knowledge:

- The rise of industrial textile production introduced mass-produced fabrics and garments, reducing reliance on traditional weaving methods.
- Displacement from traditional ways of life resulted in a loss of technical skills and knowledge about natural fibres, dyes and patterns, as younger generations were not exposed to these practices

Cultural Suppression

Colonial efforts to suppress Indigenous cultures profoundly affected the intergenerational transfer of knowledge in textile arts and eroded the cultural significance of traditional practices.

Residential Schools and Forced Assimilation:

- Residential schools, a tool of forced assimilation, aimed to erase Indigenous cultural practices, including textile arts
- Children were removed from their families and communities, cutting them off from elders who would traditionally teach weaving, dyeing and other textile skills
- In some cases, cultural expression through art and clothing was punished, leading to fear and shame associated with traditional practices

Decline in Knowledge Transfer:

- The suppression of cultural practices resulted in a significant decline in the transmission of knowledge between generations
- Elders who held expertise in traditional methods often lacked opportunities to teach their skills due to assimilation policies, economic hardship or the prioritization of survival over cultural preservation

Impact of Fast Fashion and Synthetic Textiles:

- The global rise of fast fashion introduced cheaply made synthetic textiles, diminishing the demand for handcrafted, time intensive traditional textiles
- The influx of synthetic materials further displaced natural fibres like cedar and wool, leading to a decline in the use of traditional techniques

Economic Pressures:

- Colonization brought economic hardships that prioritized income generation over cultural preservation. Many Tsleil-Waututh people had to focus on subsistence or wage labor, leaving little time or resources for practicing textile arts

Cultural Appropriation:

- The appropriation of Indigenous designs and motifs by non-Indigenous individuals and companies devalued the cultural significance of these creations
- Mass produced imitations stripped traditional textiles of their spiritual and cultural context, contributing to a lack of recognition and respect for Indigenous artistry

Despite these challenges, there has been a growing resurgence of interest in revitalizing traditional Tsleil-Waututh textile practices. Community efforts to reconnect with weaving, dyeing and storytelling are not only reclaiming lost knowledge but also fostering cultural pride and resilliance in the face of historical disruptions

Modern Applications of Traditional Textile Knowledge

The rediscovery and revitalization of traditional Tsleil-Waututh textile methods have opened exciting pathways for integrating this rich heritage into contemporary contexts. By blending tradition with modern innovation, these practices are finding new life in fashion, sustainable design, and economic development.

Vancouver Indigenous Fashion Week:

- Events like Vancouver Indigenous Fashion Week (VIFW) have become platforms for showcasing traditional textile methods in modern fashion
- Designers incorporate elements like traditional weaving, natural dyes, Indigenous art and patterns inspired by Tsleil-Waututh nation and other Indigenous communities into contemporary garments, bridging the gap between cultural tradition and global fashion trends

Adaptation for Modern Indigenous Fashion:

- Traditional techniques such as finger weaving, twining and natural dyeing are adapted to create unique wearable art pieces
- Designers collaborate with weavers and knowledge keepers to ensure the authenticity of designs while making them accessible and relevant to today's audience
- Textiles are used in both haute couture and ready-to-wear collections, celebrating indigenous culture on the runway and in daily life

Collaboration with Artists and Designers

- Partnerships between traditional artisans and contemporary designers allow for innovative designs that honour the past while addressing current fashion aesthetics
- These collaboration amplify Indigenous voices and promote cultural pride through creative expressions

Sustainable Fashion Practices

Relevance in Today's Ethical Fashion Movement:

- Traditional textile methods align seamlessly with modern sustainable and ethical fashion practices. They emphasize the use of natural, biodegradable materials and low impact dyeing techniques, setting a precedent for conscious production

Use of Natural Fibres and Eco-Friendly Methods:

- The reliance on natural fibres like cedar bark and wool, paired with plant-based dyes, creates textiles that are eco-friendly and non-toxic
- These methods reduce environmental harm, contrasting with the synthetic materials and chemical processes commonly used in mass fashion

Promoting a Slow Fashion Ethos:

- Traditional textile making is inherently slow and deliberate, fostering an appreciation for craftsmanship and quality
- This approach challenges the unsustainable fast fashion industry, encouraging mindful consumption and valuing hand-crafted garments

Cultural Tourism and Economic Development

Opportunities in Cultural Tourism:

- Traditional textiles can be integrated into cultural tourism initiatives, such as workshops, exhibitions and interactive experiences where visitors learn about Tsleil-Waututh weaving and dyeing techniques
- Textile products like woven scarves, shawls and regalia can be offered as unique, meaningful souvenirs that celebrate Tsleil-Waututh culture

Economic Development Initiatives:

- The production and sale of traditional and contemporary textiles provide economic opportunities for community members, from artisans to entrepreneurs
- Incorporating textiles into broader initiatives, such as cultural centres or eco-tourism ventures, can generate income while preserving and promoting cultural heritage

Showcasing Indigenous Creativity:

- Textile-based products can be positioned as luxury or artisanal goods in broader markets, elevating Indigenous craftsmanship and creating economic value
- Through partnerships with local businesses, art galleries and global fashion brands, Tsleil-Waututh te

Revitalization and Rediscovery of Textile Practices

Community-Led Efforts in Revitalization:

The revitalization of Tsleil-Waututh textile-making is led by the community. For generations, the effects of colonization disrupted traditional practices, limiting access to materials, techniques, and knowledge. Today, there is a strong effort to reclaim and reintroduce these skills as an essential part of Tsleil-Waututh identity.

These efforts are driven by artists, knowledge keepers, Elders and community members who recognize the importance of bringing back ancestral textile methods. By fostering collaboration and engagement, the community is rebuilding a connection to traditional ways of making and using textiles, ensuring they remain a living, evolving part of Tsleil-Waututh culture.

Some key initiatives include:

- Hosting community cultural and textile working.
- Documenting oral histories and knowledge related to traditional textiles.
- Creating public exhibits and fashion events that celebrate Tsleil-Waututh textile artistry.
- Encouraging young people to learn and practice these skills.

By approaching textile revitalization as a community endeavour, these efforts not only strengthen cultural pride but also create opportunities for intergenerational learning and artistic expression.

Traditional Tsleil-Waututh textile-making techniques were highly skilled and incorporated natural materials found in the surrounding environment. Through research, hands-on practice, and guidance from Elders, these methods are being rediscovered and integrated into contemporary life.

One of the key aspects of reclaiming traditional textile methods is understanding the materials historically used by the Tsleil-Waututh people. Wool from mountain goats and wooly dogs were both primary fibres used for weaving. Plant based fibres such as stinging nettle and cedar bark were also utilized in certain textile applications. Today, textile artists and weavers are experimenting with hand-spinning wool and plant fibres, exploring traditional loom and finger weaving techniques, and reviving the use of cedar bark in textile applications.



A reconstruction of the Coast Salish dog with sketches of Arctic dogs and spitz breeds in the background for comparison.

Photograph: Karen Carr

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2024/jan/27/salish-wooly-dog-extinct-indigenous-people-canada>

The Role of Cultural Programs, Workshops and Knowledge Keepers

Cultural programs and workshops are essential for transmitting knowledge and providing hands-on learning experiences. These initiatives allow younger generations to engage directly with traditional methods and gain a deeper appreciation for the cultural significance of textile-making.


Key components of cultural revitalization programs:

1. **Workshops & Classes:** Offering step-by-step instruction on weaving, dyeing, and fibre preparation.
2. **Knowledge keeper led teachings:** Bringing in Elders and skilled artisans to share their wisdom.
3. **Youth engagement:** Encouraging younger community members to take an active role in learning these skills.
4. **Public showcases and celebrations:** Hosting community events where finished textiles are displayed and honoured.

By integrating traditional textile practices into cultural programs, the Tsleil-Waututh Nation is ensuring that this knowledge is not only preserved but also continues to evolve within a modern context.




Photo: <https://stanleyparkecology.ca/event/weaving-with-red-cedar-woman-studio/>



Elders and Indigenous textile artisans are vital in the process of revitalization. Their role goes beyond instruction - they carry cultural memory, historical knowledge, and the lived experience of textile traditions. Elders and artists contribute by oral storytelling, hands-on mentorship, intergenerational learning, and recreating historical textile patterns. Collaboration between Elders and textile artisans ensures that these skills are reclaimed in a respectful, authentic way, while also allowing room for adaptation and innovation.

Textiles have long played an important role in Tsleil-Waututh cultural practices, serving as symbols of identity, status, and connection to the land. The resurgence of traditional textile-making reinforces these cultural values and strengthens the sense of belonging within the community. Revitalized textiles are being reintegrated into Tsleil-Waututh ceremonies, reinforcing their role by honouring ancestors and traditions, marking significant life events, and strengthening cultural pride and visibility. The act of wearing, displaying, or gifting traditionally crafted textiles connects individuals to their heritage and reinforces cultural resilience.



One of the most visible expressions of revitalized textiles is their use in regalia. Whether worn for ceremonies, powwows, or public events, regalia embodies cultural identity and pride. The use of traditional textiles in regalia reaffirms a connection to Tsleil-Waututh traditions, honours the craftsmanship and labour of textile artists, and serves as a form of resistance against cultural erasure. By wearing revitalized textiles, individuals make a statement of resilience, continuity and cultural strength. In my work with an Indigenous fashion designer, we often take orders to make traditional regalia for local Indigenous communities. These orders would include paddle vests or capes. Traditionally one would spin the wool fibres themselves and create the regalia from scratch. In modern day, for a successful Indigenous Fashion House there are some more modern techniques that are used to create the regalia. For example, to keep up with industry standards and economic pressures we will purchase rolls of wool fabric instead of creating it from scratch ourselves. The traditional process is time consuming and costly to pay an employee a fair wage to create the fabric themselves. We still use traditional cedar paddles, instead of hand carving each individual paddle we use a laser-cutter to, again, save time and money. These are just a couple of examples of what we do to revitalize traditional textile methods using modern day techniques.

Examples of Traditional Textiles in Modern Contexts

To highlight the continued relevance of Tsleil-Waututh Textiles, images will showcase how these revitalized methods are being incorporated into contemporary Indigenous fashion, ceremonial wear, and everyday clothing.

Key Examples:

- **Modern Clothing & Accessories:** Artists are integrating traditional weaving patterns into contemporary garments, making them accessible for everyday wear.
- **Ceremonial Regalia:** Revitalized textile methods are used in regalia for cultural celebrations, powwows, and naming ceremonies, reinforcing identity and tradition.
- **Community Art Installations:** Woven textiles are being displayed in public spaces, celebrating the craftsmanship and resilience of Tsleil-Waututh artisans.

By blending traditional practices with modern applications, Tsleil-Waututh textiles continue to serve as powerful symbols of cultural strength, continuity and innovation.

Challenges and Opportunities in Revitalizing Tsleil-Waututh Textile Methods

While the revitalization of Tsleil-Waututh textile methods is making progress, there are several challenges that must be addressed to ensure the long-term survival and growth of these practices.

- 1. Limited Access to Traditional Materials:** Many of the natural materials historically used in Tsleil-Waututh textile-making such as mountain goat wool, cedar bark fibres, and plant-based dyes are increasingly difficult to access due to environmental changes, habitat loss, and restrictive policies around harvesting. This creates barriers for weavers and artisans who want to work with authentic, locally sourced materials.
- 2. Loss of Knowledge:** For generations, colonial policies such as residential schools and bans on cultural practices disrupted the transmission of traditional knowledge. As a result, many weaving techniques and textile traditions were nearly lost. With fewer knowledge keepers remaining, there is urgency in documenting and passing down these skills before they disappear.
- 3. The Impact of Modernity on Traditional Practices:** Modern lifestyles and economic pressures can make it difficult for individuals to dedicate time to learning traditional textile methods. Fast fashion and mass-produced textiles have also shifted perspectives on clothing and textile production, making it essential to reinforce the cultural and spiritual value of handmade textiles.

Opportunities for Revival

Despite these challenges, there are significant opportunities to revitalize and sustain Tsleil-Waututh textile-making. By combining traditional knowledge with modern tools and strategies, the community can ensure these practices continue to thrive.

1. Leveraging Technology for Textile Education: Digital tools and online platforms offer powerful ways to preserve and share knowledge.

- **Virtual Workshops & Online Learning:** Recording Elders and knowledge keepers demonstrating weaving, dyeing, and fibre processing techniques can create lasting educational resources for future generations.
- **3D Mapping and Documentation:** Using digital scans of traditional textiles to analyze and recreate patterns with precision.
- **Social Media & Digital Storytelling:** Showcasing revitalized textiles through social media can inspire broader community engagement and cultural pride.



2. Community Engagement & Hands-On Learning: Encouraging community involvement is key to revitalization.

- **Weaving circles & Skill-Sharing Gatherings:** Creating spaces where people of all ages can come together to practice textile making.
- **Mentorship Programs:** Pairing young learners with experienced weavers to pass down knowledge in an interactive way.
- **Cultural Events & Fashion Showcases:** Publicly celebrating revitalized textiles to increase awareness and appreciation.



3. The Importance of Reinvesting in Traditional Methods for Future Generations: To ensure these traditions continue, it is crucial to create long-term support systems for Indigenous textile revitalization.

- **Incorporating Textile Education Into Schools:** Introducing traditional weaving and fibre arts into community and school curriculums.
- **Sustainable Sourcing of Materials:** Encouraging ethical harvesting practices and the revival of traditional materials.
- **Funding & Support for Indigenous Artisans:** Providing grants and business opportunities for weavers to sustain their craft.


By addressing these challenges while embracing new opportunities, the revitalization of Tsleil-Waututh textile methods can continue to grow, ensuring that future generations inherit and carry forward this rich cultural heritage.



The traditional textile methods of the Tsleil-Waututh Nation are deeply rooted in sustainable practices and respect for the environment. By rediscovering and revitalizing these methods, we can gain valuable insights into how ancient cultures harmonized their needs with the natural world. The use of materials such as cedar bark, mountain goat wool and plant fibres illustrates the resourcefulness and creativity of the Tsleil-Waututh people, who transformed these natural elements into beautiful, functional textiles that were an essential part of everyday life, ceremony, and trade.



Today, the resurgence of these practices not only preserves an important cultural heritage but also offers lessons in sustainability and environmental stewardship that are increasingly relevant in the modern world. Through this rediscovery, we honour the wisdom of the Tsleil-Waututh people and their enduring connection to the land and its resources.

The background is a light green, textured surface with faint, larger green leaf shapes. In each of the four corners, there is a detailed illustration of a branch with several pointed, green leaves.

Woven Blanket Project

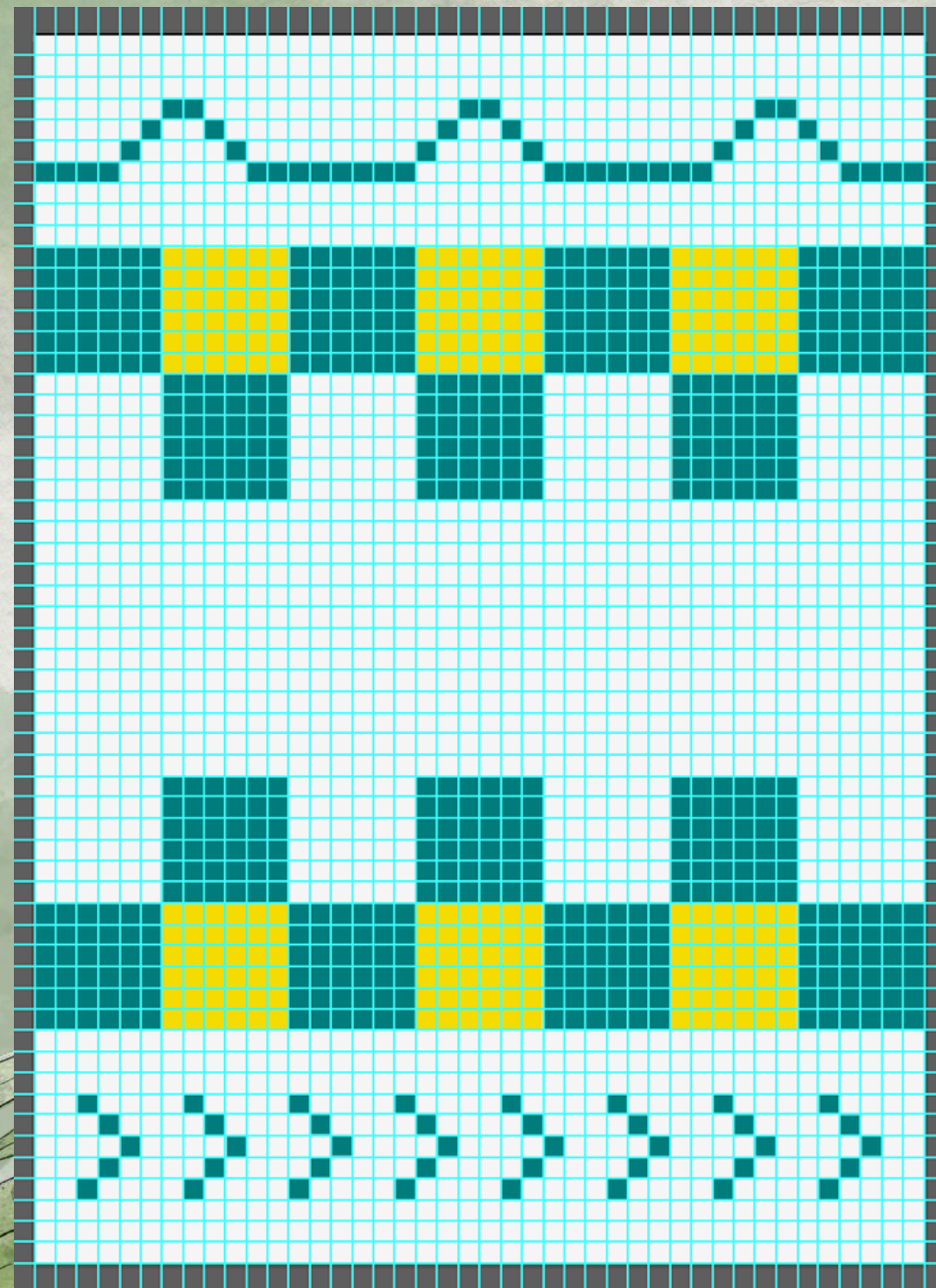
Woven Blanket - Tia

This motif represents mountains.

This represents a pattern similar to a plaid which was traditionally used in salish blankets. This is where I will incorporate the yellow which I will naturally dye with onion skins.

This represents a pattern similar to a plaid which was traditionally used in salish blankets. This is where I will incorporate the yellow which I will naturally dye with onion skins.

This motif represents waves.



I designed this on Adobe Illustrator. I used guidelines to create a basic grid and from there added motifs into the blanket to add the traditional elements of the blanket.

As a beginner weaver I tried to keep a less complicated pattern while still utilizing traditional motifs and colours that could have been made with local resources.

Colours used: Teal, Yellow and White.

Photo Documentation



Supplies Used:

- Loom 58 x 42 cm
- 100% Wool in colours 2 x natural and 1 x navy
- Alum
- Onion Skins

I purchased 2 x natural colour, one of which was used for natural dyeing with onion skins. The alum was used as a mordant when dyeing with the onion skins.

Photo Documentation



Once I set up the warp on the loom I started a basic weave using the natural colour as the base of my blanket. I then incorporated my first motif in navy which represented waves. Adding the motifs into my project as a beginner was difficult and I felt lost some of its shape along the way as I pulled down the weft of the blanket.

Photo Documentation



I then started the natural dyeing process. I first created a mordant bath with alum (potassium aluminum sulfate), which is used for protein and cellulose fibres and fabrics. This process improves light and wash fastness of natural dyes. I simmered the wool in the alum at about 90 degrees C. for about 2 hours gently turning the fabric regularly. Then I let it cool in the bath for 20 minutes. Once I removed the wool from the bath I rinsed it well in cool water and stored the yarn in a damp white cloth for 24-48 hours.

After storing it for 24-48 hours I started the dye bath. I simmered the onion skins for about 1 hour and then removed the skins. I added my wet yarn to the dye pot and simmered at about 90 degrees C and held the temperature for about an hour. Once this step was complete I allowed the dye bath to cool down slowly and removed the yarn from the dye bath, rinsed gently in cool water and hung to dry out of direct sunlight. Once this process was finished the once natural coloured yarn became a golden yellow colour which I incorporated into my blanket.

Photo Documentation




I incorporated the golden yellow wool into my blanket in a sort of plaid-like pattern which was traditionally used in Salish blankets and added my second motif in navy which represents mountains. Throughout my design process I wanted to bring in my traditional landscape of Vancouver and Tsleil-Waututh heritage. As I continued along pushing the weft down I did lose some more of the shape but as a beginner I feel good about the end result. At this stage I was ready to remove my blanket from the loom.

Photo Documentation



Once I removed the blanket from the loom I was left with some loops at the ends from the warp. I gently loosened my weft yarns to finish the edges of my blanket. Throughout my project I learned how to weave for the first time and practiced my natural dyeing skills.

The image features a light cream background with soft, painterly green washes in the corners. In each corner, there are detailed illustrations of green leaves and branches, some with fine outlines and others as soft, blended shapes.

The journey of rediscovering and revitalizing Tsleil-Waututh textile-making is both a cultural reclamation and an act of resilience. By engaging in community-led initiatives, collaborating with Elders and artisans, and ensuring the transmission of knowledge to future generations, the Tsleil-Waututh Nation is actively strengthening its cultural fabric. These efforts not only restore ancestral practices but also create opportunities for innovation, adaptation, and cultural pride. Traditional textiles, once nearly lost, are now being woven back into the identity and daily lives of the Tsleil-Waututh people, ensuring that this knowledge continues to thrive for generations to come. I encourage all to learn, listen and respect the traditional textile methods of Tsleil-Waututh Nation. My role in revitalizing these traditional textile methods, I will be teaching traditional regalia making for Squamish Nation later this year and continuing my exploration into the traditions of my Tsleil-Waututh community.

The background is a light green watercolor wash. In the four corners, there are detailed illustrations of green leaves and branches, rendered in a style that blends with the watercolor texture. The leaves are various shades of green, with some having darker outlines and others being more translucent.

Thank You