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Daron Letts

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SOMBA K'E/YELLOWKNIFE - For many years, textile artist Shawna Lampi-Legaree didn't want to submit an art quilt to the prestigious International Quilt Association's (IQA) annual juried competition in Houston. She didn't think her work was good enough.

She finally entered a hand-dyed and hand-painted quilt this year.

It was accepted as a finalist for contention among 380 other traditional, experimental and art quilts from around the world.

"It's been a goal to get my designs to the point where I can get into an IQA show," she said.

"It's a massive show and this is the first time I felt I had a design worth entering."

The three-day art show is attended by about 50,000 people each year. Lampi-Legaree's challenge was to design a quilt that would be noticed and remembered.

Her entry, titled Nuliajuk (Sedna), portrays the Inuit legend of a girl who refuses to marry until she is seduced by a bird spirit she thinks was a man.

Her father casts her overboard into the ocean as they flee her lover.

Nuliajuk clings to the side of the boat but her father cuts off her fingers. The digits fall into the sea and transform into all the fish and marine mammals that sustain the Inuit.

"I had to think about how the eyes travel and keep the quilt visually and texturally interesting," she said.

She used a variety of hand-dyeing techniques with lots of inking and stitching to achieve this task.

The artist composed her artwork in such a way that a viewer's eye is drawn first to Nuliajuk's tattooed face, sewn with silk thread and delicately painted in the centre of the quilt.

One's gaze is then attracted to the sponge-dappled back of a narwhal and along its ivory tusk, which points into a pod of belugas.

The contrast of a pair of dark brown walrus against the various hues of the water pulls the eye back down into the quilt, leading to a school of Arctic cod accented with shimmering Organza fabric, then to a painted seal and back again to Nuliajuk's sombre stare.

The ocean floor uses brown cloth over-painted with blue to give a sense of light shining down from the surface of the water.

The quilt, the first in a series, symbolizes the Arctic ocean "before we've polluted the planet, before the missionaries came and told the Inuit their faith was a sin, before climate change and before over-fishing," Lampi-Legaree explained.



Shawna Lampi-Legaree holds a ribbon she received as a finalist in the annual International Quilt Association judged show in Houston for her work titled Nuliajuk (Sedna). - Daron Letts/NNSL photo

