

# ALTERNATOR

centre for contemporary art

Kokum

## Interpretive Essay by Shannon Lester

As you enter Brittney Bear Hat's exhibition you will see three major elements in her work: blown-up family photos, familiar physical objects, and handwriting on the wall. All of the objects displayed in the gallery were given to Bear Hat by her kokum. The photographs were also provided by family; the handwriting on the wall is her own.

This exhibition is a tribute to Bear Hat's grandmother who is no longer with us. It is a testament to the inspiration that family brings, and the Elder's role in teaching the importance of tradition to younger generations. The writing on the wall creates continuity between the mounted physical objects and the photographs, playfully hung with camouflage tape. This method of display gives us an interactive experience, like visiting a living museum. Unlike a museum, however, the experiences presented here are not from the distant past; they exist in the now and are very tangible.

Most of the objects displayed are related to hunting or being on the land. A self-professed city girl, Bear Hat said that her grandmother was key in encouraging her to make long-lasting connections with nature. She recounted a story of learning how to skin a moose at the age of seven, and how she is now learning how to hunt and tan hides.

Speaking to the artist about the personal nature of this exhibition, Bear Hat revealed she has reached a point where she feels more comfortable going inward and sharing her own personal narrative. This is in stark contrast to her previous work in which she explored stereotypes and topics that she felt were more surface-oriented.

This exhibition is not only about Indigenous culture – hunting and camping are experiences that most Canadians can relate to. Indeed, the desire to honour past loved ones, especially in acknowledging the importance and power of the matriarch, is a universal inclination (or perhaps more accurately should be). The title of this exhibition is very appropriate. Kokum, which means 'grandmother' in Cree, is a reminder that we should all acknowledge the wise women of this earth and the traditions that they hold in their hands, hearts and minds.



The Canada Council  
for the Arts | Le Conseil des Arts  
du Canada



City of  
**Kelowna**



CENTRAL OKANAGAN  
**FOUNDATION**  
*empowering generations to give.*



BRITISH  
COLUMBIA



BRITISH COLUMBIA  
ARTS COUNCIL  
An agency of the Province of British Columbia

We acknowledge the financial assistance of the province of British Columbia