



Writing Sample

ROSARY SPENCE BEADWORK DESIGNER

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BY JESSE YARDLEY

Cree fashion designer demos indigenous beadwork techniques for Manitobah Mukluks Storyboot School.



Rosary Spence travels from Toronto to Calgary and Edmonton showcasing artistic, indigenous-inspired fashion design.

Rosary Spence, a Cree artist and designer, is set up at a small worktable near the front window inside Gravity Pope, a shoe store on Calgary's trendy 17th Avenue. She's busy creating an intricate and colourful flower motif on a piece of deer skin.

"This piece is called the vamp. It's part of the boot, the toe piece, and it's backed with cotton just to keep the beads nice and sturdy," Spence says. "It's all hand beaded with pinks and reds and greens, and just the beautiful colours you see in nature. These are colours that my grandma always

used when I was growing up." Spence grew up in Fort Albany First Nation, on the west coast of James Bay in northern Ontario. It's a small community with less than a thousand people and is only accessible by plane. Her grandmother raised her and taught her how to bead at an early age.

"As I got better and learned more intricate techniques, then I started to get into larger projects like making mukluks, moccasins and moose hide mitts," Spence says.

Spence currently lives in Toronto and began working with Manitobah Mukluks in 2011

when she met Tara Barnes, the company's communication director, at an art show.

Manitobah Mukluks was founded by Sean McCormick in 1997 and is an Aboriginal-owned company. It's now one of the fastest-growing footwear brands in Canada. Part of the company's mission is to keep Aboriginal values and traditions alive. That mission inspired the company's Storyboot School, which offers customers a chance to support Canadian artists while learning about traditional beadwork techniques.



Manitobah Mukluks footwear sells from about \$60 to \$350 with Storyboots selling for as much as \$1200.

“Manitobah Mukluks contracts artists from different locations across Canada to create one-of-a-kind mukluks such as these. They sell them on the website and 100% of the proceeds go to the artist,” Spence says. She adds, “Any opportunity I get to talk about my culture, where I come from and the traditions behind making mukluks is important to me. It’s all about educating and creating an awareness of a culture that’s so beautiful.”

“I think they are such a fashion statement. You can wear them with jeans, you can wear them with dresses, you can wear them with snow pants, you can wear them with anything you want.”

Manitobah Mukluks are sold at Cabela’s, Nordstrom, Holt Renfrew, Free People, Town Shoes, Victoire and Gravity Pope.

Sanja Lukac, Gravity Pope’s store manager, says bringing artists to the store is a great way for customers to gain insight into all the “love, sweat and tears” that go into designing footwear.

“I think they are such a fashion statement. You can wear them with jeans, you can wear them with dresses, you can wear them with snow pants, you can wear them with anything you want,” Lukac says.