

Prof. Allan Ryan Receives Professional Achievement Award from the University of Arizona



Melinda Burke, president of the UA Alumni Association, presented Ryan with the 2017 Professional Achievement Award at a brunch hosted by the School of Anthropology in May 2017.

Allan J. Ryan, professor in [Indigenous and Canadian Studies](#) and the [Department of Art History in the School for Studies in Art and Culture](#), recently received a 2017 Professional Achievement Award from the [University of Arizona \(UA\) Alumni Association](#).

To accept the award Ryan returned to his old stomping grounds, the UA campus located in Tucson, Arizona, to attend the 2017 convocation ceremony for MA and Ph.D. students in UA's College of Social and Behavioural Sciences held at the Fox Tucson Theatre, beautifully restored to its former art deco glory.



Ryan at the Fox Tucson Theatre with a poster for an upcoming Gordon Lightfoot concert.

"Much of the UA campus looks the same as it did 40 years ago, with towering palms and saguaro cacti that account for much of the magic of the locale," said Ryan.



After convocation, Ryan and his wife Rae, who accompanied him on the trip, attended a brunch at a nearby hotel for all Anthropology graduates and their families where he received an exquisitely engraved wooden plaque to represent his Professional Achievement Award. Upon presenting Ryan with the plaque, Melinda Burke, President of the UA Alumni Association enthusiastically remarked: "Dr. Ryan's contributions in the field of indigenous art and culture are of immense significance. We are proud to recognize him and know he is a Wildcat for Life!"



Ryan addressed the students and their families and Anthropology faculty by opening with an acknowledgment that the AU campus is located on the traditional territory of the Tohono O'odham and Akimel O'odham peoples and before them the Hohokam. It was, at UA, an uncharacteristic public gesture of respect for the Indigenous peoples of the region not lost on those in attendance. He went on to express his thanks to the University of Arizona Alumni Association, the College of Social and Behavioral Sciences and the School of Anthropology.

"It is hard to believe, but it's been forty years since my wife Rae and I were last in Tucson – forty years! – and we are happy to be back. Our time here left an indelible mark, and if you are graduating today this might be your experience too. I have a turquoise earring to remind me of my time here ... but you don't have to go that route," Ryan said to the crowd.

"In the summer of 1975, we drove to Tucson from Winnipeg, Manitoba, in an old Dodge pulling a U-Haul trailer. (By the way, Winnipeg is north of North Dakota.) The car was a gift from my father-in-law, and it did make it to Tucson but died while we were here."

Ryan continued to reflect, explaining to students that his time and journey as a student of Anthropology at the University of Arizona was truly magical.

"I'd been accepted into the Master's program in Anthropology, with a specialization in Museum Studies and an assistantship in museum display. This meant that I got to design and refurbish exhibits in the Arizona State Museum. How cool is that?", Professor Ryan asked.

Before embarking on graduate studies at the University of Arizona Ryan attended the Ontario College of Art in Toronto, now the Ontario College of Art and Design University ([the university recently honoured him with an Alumni of Influence Award for Distinguished Educator](#)), where he pursued a dual dream of becoming a graphic designer and singer/songwriter. It was when he was given Dee Brown's book, *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee*, that he became compelled by Indigenous issues, and enrolled in Native Studies at Brandon University ([Ryan was also recently honoured with a Distinguished Alumni Award for Career Achievement from Brandon University](#)).



Inaugural OCADU Alumni of Influence Award for Distinguished Educator, 2015.



Brandon University Distinguished Alumni Award for Career Achievement, 2016.

Ryan believes that it was his artistic credentials from the Ontario College of Art coupled with his degree in Native Studies from Brandon University that caused UA to trust him with the prestigious assistantship in museum display. His student experience at UA not only helped Ryan to acquire a wealth of knowledge about Southwest Indian arts and anthropology but ingrained in him the confidence to share his increasing expertise. Which is precisely what he did, returning to Canada to teach in several northern Indigenous communities. Now certain that teaching was the path he wanted to take in life, Ryan went on to complete a Ph.D. in Anthropology at the University of British Columbia, researching humor and irony in contemporary Native art.

Ryan discussed this process in his remarks:

"My Ph.D. brought me back to the Southwest to look at ritual clowning, and later Navajo cartoonists. I also added a critical ethnographic component, interviewing artists, actors, elders, and anyone else who could offer insights into Native humour.

When the thesis was later published as *The Trickster Shift*, I cited the words of the late UA professor Barbara Babcock at the top of the book's Introduction. She wrote: 'clowns are rarely asked what they're up to and seldom listened to when they're asked.' The book was intended to correct that perceived oversight."

Not long after the book earned an American Book Award, Ryan was offered a new position at Carleton University as the New Sun Chair in Aboriginal Art and Culture, a role he has occupied for the last sixteen years. At Carleton, Ryan teaches courses on Indigenous peoples, Canadian Indigenous cinema and a range of First Nations and Native American visual arts, but the highlight of his academic career so far has to be the Annual New Sun Conference on Aboriginal Arts, which he has organized and hosted since 2002.

"The New Sun Conference is less formal than a conventional conference and more academic than a cultural festival," Ryan explained. "It focuses on the personal stories of artists in a range of creative endeavours. It is entertaining, enlightening, heartfelt and hopeful – and in the end, inspiring, at a time when mainstream media coverage of Indigenous experience still tends to revel in the tragic, bypassing the wondrous and profound."

Ryan wrapped up his address to the assembled gathering with some well chosen words of encouragement for the current cohort of UA Anthropology students:

"What I get to do is a small part of a much bigger journey of cultural reclamation and cross-cultural healing. Many of you are embarking on your own personal journey today, and a degree in Anthropology is an invaluable tool in fostering greater empathy and appreciation for cultural difference – something the world is in dire need of right now. Make no mistake, you can definitely make a difference, and I wish you much success. Again, thank you so much for this great honour. Chi miigwetch."

To further solidify this newly minted connection between UA and Carleton University, Prof. Ryan gave the Director of the School of Anthropology at UA copies of two of his books, to go along with copies that the university already holds in its main library.



Director of the School of Anthropology Dr. Diane Austin holds a copy of Allan Ryan's *The Trickster Shift: Humour and Irony in Contemporary Native Art*, which he presented to her at the ceremony. Ryan displays his Professional Achievement Award.

He also took with him four copies of the limited edition silkscreen print, *Shining Through*, which was commissioned from Northwest Coast artist Mike Dangel to mark the 10th anniversary of the New Sun Conference in 2011. The copies were gifted to the UA Alumni Association, the College, the School of Anthropology, and the Arizona State Museum. At Carleton, framed copies of the print hang in the School of Indigenous and Canadian Studies, and the School for Studies in Art and Culture, as well as in several faculty offices.

As a note of interest, framed copies of the *Shining Through* print were first given to former FASS Dean John Osborne and Joy Maclaren (New Sun) at the end of the 10th anniversary New Sun Conference. In a surprise but most appropriate gesture recalling the important role of witnessing in West Coast potlatches, copies of the print were also given to everyone else in attendance. Ryan subsequently gave copies to fellow 2016 inductees into Ancaster High School's Hall of Distinction, and to fellow 2016 award recipients at Brandon University. For the last few years, he has also given copies of the print to all of the presenters at the New Sun Conference.



Former FASS Dean John Osborne and Joy Maclaren (New Sun) receive framed copies of the print, *Shining Through*, at the 10th New Sun Conference, 2011



In 2016 Dr. Ryan was inducted into Ancaster High School's Hall of Distinction by student Semiah Smith who, in 2008, travelled to the New Sun Conference with her mother, renowned dancer/choreographer Santee Smith, a presenter and performer at the Conference.

7th Annual
New Sun
Conference on Aboriginal Arts
Reaching Back + Reaching Out

Featuring:

Michael Greyeyes
actor/choreographer

Santee Smith
dancer/choreographer

Taqralik Partridge
lyric-poet performance artist

Tracey Deer
documentary filmmaker

Clealls (John Medicine Horse Kelly)
heritage language conservationist

Elaine Keillor
ethnomusicologist and pianist

Opening and closing by
Elder, Jim Albert

**Dance performance by
Santee Smith**



**Saturday, March 1, 2008, 9 a.m. - 4:30 p.m. Room 5050, 5th Floor,
Minto Centre, Carleton University**

Registration: Students \$25; non-students \$35 (\$30 & \$40 at the door), includes a gourmet luncheon of Native cuisine.

Limited Seating • Pre-registration STRONGLY advised • Free Parking • OC Transpo nearby

To register call 613-520-2600, ext. 4035, or e-mail: allan_ryan@carleton.ca

For a registration form and more information visit www.trickstershift.com



A presentation of the New Sun Chair in Aboriginal Art and Culture with the support of the Dean of Arts and Social Sciences and the New Sun Fund administered by the Community Foundation of Ottawa .

Poster for the 7th Annual New Sun Conference on Aboriginal Arts: Reaching Back + Reaching Out featuring a photograph of choreographer/performer Santee Smith.

As Ryan has said on more than one occasion, "it has been a remarkable journey for a kid from art college with a guitar, and it's not over yet."



**ALUMNI
ASSOCIATION**

Professional Achievement Award

Allan John Ryan

Allan Ryan is one of North America's most important scholars, teachers, and promoters of aboriginal art. He has a master's degree from the University of Arizona in museum studies and anthropology and a doctorate in anthropology from the University of British Columbia. Since 2001, he has been the New Sun Chair in Aboriginal Art and Culture at Carleton University in Ottawa, Ontario.

Allan is a man of many talents, including singing, songwriting, graphic arts, and television satire, but his greatest passion is the study and promotion of contemporary indigenous art. He has curated art exhibits, such as "About Face: Self-Portraits by Native American, First Nations and Inuit Artists" at the Wheelwright Museum of the American Indian in Santa Fe, and written award-winning books such as "The Trickster Shift: Humor and Irony in Contemporary Native Art."

An innovative educator, Allan has worked to bring aboriginal pedagogy and diverse native voices into the classroom. He has given numerous presentations at conferences around the world. In 2002, he founded the New Sun Conference on Aboriginal Arts at Carleton, which he has organized every year since. The conference features indigenous artists and researchers from across North America who represent a wide variety of fields and media.

The Professional Achievement Award is given to a University of Arizona alumnus or alumna who has attained prominence in his or her field. Allan Ryan is an inspiring leader whose extraordinary achievements in the field of indigenous art and culture bring honor and pride to the University of Arizona. The University of Arizona Alumni Association is proud to honor him with this award.

May 12, 2017

Tuesday, July 18, 2017 in [Awards, Indigenous and Canadian Studies](#)
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