

The Two of Us

Aidan Cartwright

The black spruce of the Northwest Territories (NWT) are gnarled, toughened trees with age and experience that's hard to determine at first glance. The younger trees are sturdy and fresh and full of potential. Growing up in the NWT I have developed a deep love for these trees and have often found myself anthropomorphizing them as I engage in outdoor activities such as hunting, exploring, camping, travelling, etc. The trees themselves have so much to teach us about living on the land, and like any good teachers, ultimately offer themselves to their environments and their students. Whether it's spruce gum for healing, boughs for tent floors or sitting, poles for building, or wood for fire and much more, the spruce tree has so much to offer. The Two of Us depicts a taller, more senior spruce tree bent over a shorter younger tree, as if to nurture, offer guidance, protection, or affection.

As an educator and father, whenever I see an old spruce tree bent over a young one, I can't help but relate it to my experience of caring for my students and my own children as they grow. As a visual artist, I wanted to capture the sentiment of youth and Elder, student and teacher, child and parent, in a painting where the focal point is the offerings made by one to the other. When in that moment, nothing else seems to matter besides the reciprocity of care and education. Whether teaching, parenting, offering wisdom, or receiving these gifts from another, the moments that matter most are those when it's just *The Two of Us*.



Aidan Cartwright is from Yellowknife, Northwest Territories and is a non-Indigenous resident of Treaty 8 territory. He was born in Yellowknife and currently resides in his home community with his wife, two kids, and two dogs. Aidan holds a Bachelor of Fine Arts from the Alberta Arts University and a Bachelor of Education from the University of British Columbia. He is working towards a professional Masters of Education from Queens University. Inspired in both his artistic and education practice by the lands he grew up on, Aidan enjoys sharing and exploring stories through his teaching and art that are shaped by the North.