

“Skin On Frame Kayak”

Crafted by Brandon Stewart

Painted by Safina Stewart

Traditional skin-on-frame kayaks, relative to modern-day fibre-glass kayaks, may appear as fragile and irrelevant relics of the past. But are they!

Inspiration of Traditional Greenland Kayaks

While traditional Inuits built their kayaks from drift wood tied together by seal-gut yarn, covered in seal skins, using very simple hand tools, their boats were remarkably strong and sea worthy hunting craft, more than equal to freezing seas and dangerous seals, walrus and polar bears. While small in stature and pitted against very challenging circumstances, traditional Inuit hunters proved highly skilled, brave and effective in providing for their families.

The kayak timber frame flexed symbiotically with the waves; the sewn-together outer seal skin hull was water-tight and strong: and their remarkably efficient paddle 'sticks' propelled the kayak with surprising power and precision. Though rustic in appearance, these traditional kayaks were indeed beautifully shaped and remarkably sea worthy craft, proving effective in sustaining the life and culture of traditional Greenland communities well before impacts of colonial invasion. Their kayaks were in fact the products of a shared team effort, being works of art as well as utility. Their construction also reflected family identity, communal values as well as adaptive construction ingenuity.

This kayak

This replica kayak has also been crafted and decorated by a husband and wife team following the design, techniques, tools and materials (mostly) of traditional West Greenlanders. It too, represents the creative efforts and story of a family who not only appreciate the traditional Inuit values of simplicity, utility, beauty and collective endeavour, but who also embrace the innate ethical and ascetic application of these values to contemporary life. This project was a way of connecting to country, creation and Creator through the adventures of sea kayaking and creativity.

