



Medicine Hat Clay Industries  
National Historic District

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## Media Release

For Immediate Release

### New Artistic Director in the Historic Clay District

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Medicine Hat –The Historic Clay District is pleased to announce the appointment of Aaron Nelson as Artistic Director for the Shaw International Centre for Contemporary Ceramics. Nelson succeeds Les Manning, who served in a voluntary capacity as the District’s Artistic Director for the past eight years.

Nelson first came to Medicine Hat in June to participate in the Medalta International Artists in Residence (MIAIR) program and led a kiln-building workshop during which students from across Canada built two new kilns at the Medalta Potteries site. Most recently, Nelson worked as a Consultant for the Archie Bray Foundation, a leading ceramic arts centre in Montana. Nelson, the Historic Clay District’s first full-time Artistic Director, acknowledges Manning’s remarkable contribution to Medicine Hat’s growing arts community. “Les has exhibited and taught around the world for the past 20 years. Those experiences and contacts were instrumental in attracting hi-calibre international artists to a quality program in Medicine Hat,” he explains.

During his time as Artistic Director, Manning oversaw the expansion of MIAIR and was a driving force behind the development of the Shaw Centre. While he is leaving the post of Artistic Director to focus on his art, Manning will remain with the District as a consultant and senior artist in residence. “There is a time in each program when new energy is needed,” says Manning, adding that “the facility is now in place, which leaves the opportunity for young leadership to take it to its next level. Aaron’s international experience and awareness of art issues will be valuable tools in building a world-class program.”

The establishment of a contemporary ceramic arts program in a place known more for its historical significance may seem like an odd pairing, but Barry Finkelman, Executive Director of the District, explains “one of our major goals is to celebrate clay and its importance to Medicine Hat and Canada. Although historic preservation has been a major focal point for us, we have also worked to develop a world-class ceramic arts centre. By bringing the past and the future together, we are able to showcase Medicine Hat as a major heritage, artistic and cultural centre in Canada.” Finkelman adds that hiring Nelson as the Artistic Director allows Historic Clay District to continue its growth and properly showcase Medicine Hat as an artistic and cultural community with international appeal.

*The Historic Clay District is one of eight tourism attractors in the Canadian Badlands, featured in AMA’s “Alberta 100 Journeys” and is Western Canada’s largest National Historic Site. The museum – in the Medalta Potteries National Historic Site – provides visitors a unique opportunity to visit a restored 1912 pottery factory, which once produced three-quarters of all stoneware in Canada. It is operated under the stewardship of the Friends of Medalta Society.*

*The Shaw International Centre for Contemporary Ceramics is a world-class ceramic arts facility situated in Medicine Hat’s Historic Clay District. The facility, which is part of the iconic Medalta Potteries National Historic Site, provides year-round residency opportunities and has many unique kilns, including soda, salt and wood in addition to gas and electric kilns. Programming in the Shaw Centre attracts some of the top ceramic artists in the world.*

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