



Artwork by George Gingras

Q is for Quillwork

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First Nations women had been doing quillwork centuries before the arrival of the Europeans. They passed this art form down to their Métis children. Porcupine quills were used to make the quillwork. In **Michif**, the porcupine (*Erethizon dorsatum*) is called “aen portipik.”

Porcupine quills are sharp, flexible, and easy to dye. Once a porcupine was caught, the quills were removed from its skin. They were then dried out. The women used different colours to dye the quills. Natural dyes were made from bark, roots, and mosses mixed together with berries, urine, or wood ash and water. These natural dyes made many bright colours. Lively designs were then traced onto hides or onto **birchbark**. Holes were then punched into the material. The quills would then be sewn into the design. Some of the clothing adorned with quillwork included hats, **leggings**, vests, jackets, shirts, and **moccasins**. Personal items were also made into quillwork. These included pouches and various containers.

Métis quillwork was usually in the form of flowers while the First Nations preferred to use diamond, square, and triangle shapes (geometric designs). The popularity and ease of beadwork caused quillwork to decline slowly, and it is no longer a common art form.

Other Resources:

Troupe, Cheryl. *Expressing Our Heritage: Métis Artistic Designs*. Study Prints and Teachers' Manual. Saskatoon: Gabriel Dumont Institute, 2002.

_____. (Narrator). *Our Shared Inheritance: Traditional Métis Beadwork*. Video. Saskatoon: Gabriel Dumont Institute, 2002.

The Virtual Museum of Métis History and Culture (www.metismuseum.ca).

