FROM OUR HANDS
Exhibition of Native Crafts
Organizer: Anita Aarons
Contemporary Art Gallery at Harbourfront, Toronto
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For four days in early November the Harbourfront complex in Toronto paid tribute to the rich cultural heritage of Ontario's Woodland Indians. Rene Highway's modern dance troupe launched the festivities with the performance of a new work, and other activities included a sweetgrass burning ceremony, social dancing, storytelling, and sale of native foods and handicrafts. The focal point of these celebrations was the grand opening of 'From Our Hands' - an exhibition of more than four hundred traditional and contemporary native craft items.

Gathered together over the past two years from numerous native communities throughout Ontario, (with some spillover from Quebec and upstate New York) the artifacts are in Toronto until early December, after which they will tour major galleries across the province into 1984. A scaled-down version of the show will travel to smaller native centres. After commitments within Ontario are fulfilled, it is hoped that the main exhibit will tour beyond provincial and national boundaries before arriving at its permanent home - the newly opened Centre for Indian Art of the National Exhibition Centre in Thunder Bay.

Unlike many museum or gallery exhibitions, this one was initiated by the native craftspeople themselves. With the assistance of the Ontario Arts Council, the Ontario Crafts Council, the Native Community Branch of the Ontario Ministry of Citizenship and Culture, and The Art Gallery at Harbourfront, a first-rate presentation of quality crafts was mounted. Its twofold purpose was to encourage craftsmen and women to produce their finest work for inclusion in the show, and in so doing, make the general public more aware of the rich and living heritage of Ontario's native population.

Happily, these two objectives have been admirably achieved. There is more than ample evidence here to show just how rich and diverse this heritage really is - from the brightly beaded mittens and mukluks of the James Bay Cree to the finely quilled bark boxes of the Manitoulin Island Anishnabe, and the woven black ash and sweetgrass basketry of the Six Nations Iroquois. A wealth of beautifully made artifacts abounds in a wonderfully arranged mosaic of textures, shapes and colours: feathered jewelry, leather clothing, ribbon shirts, cornhusk dolls, calico quilts, silver brooches, shiny snowsnakes and bark canoes, to mention just a few. A true celebration of the creative imagination, this exhibit testifies to the native craftsman's inventive resourcefulness. Time and again the simplest of natural materials have been boiled, bent, stripped, folded, scraped and serrated to produce a variety of articles as handsome as they are useful. No less impressive are the strikingly unique items forged from a blending
of traditional designs and techniques with more modern materials, methods and needs. The cultural importance of these more recent creations should not be underrated. They not only confirm the native presence in our lives, but affirm its continuing worth and relevance. All artforms evolve, and all creative artists assimilate new ideas, seeking new avenues of expression. The native artisan is no exception.

Of the more than four hundred articles on display a few deserve special mention:

- a series of eight finely-quilled birchbark boxes by Josette Debassige of West Bay, Manitoulin Island. Josette Debassige has produced several works of restrained elegance merely by varying the length and direction of undyed natural quills in the creation of her geometric and floral applied designs.

- a curious black ash splint and sweetgrass basket by Mary Adams of Akwesasne. In addition to preserving the strawberry or popcorn weaving technique, this item (measuring 11" in diameter) is unique for its embellishment with more than one hundred and fifty miniature baskets. One cannot help but admire the maker's skill in producing this intriguing work of whimsy.

- clothing by Deborah Pitawanakwat of Sheshekwaning, especially a beautiful white deerhide wedding gown with feathers, satin veil and beaded feather headband. Ms. Pitawanakwat is in the vanguard of young native designers taking traditional decorative concepts into the world of high fashion. She joins the ranks of Edmonton's Tim Sikyea and several Oklahoma designers also working in this field.

- a wolfskin headdress by an unknown maker. It is indeed unfortunate that the maker cannot be given credit for this splendid creation. An almost complete wolf pelt, adorned with feathered tassels, is suspended from a horned crown, decorated with glass beads and brass bells. A sumptuous contrast of textures and rich tones of red, brown, cream and gold, it is a truely sensuous feast for the eyes.

- a hair ornament by David White of Walpole Island. Combining serrated blue feathers, rainbow coloured binding, a filigreed silver medallion, and a miniature bone bird effigy suspended from a silver and bone chain, this superb piece is reminiscent of the finest Oklahoma 'peyote' art.

- a large shallow ceramic bowl by Carl Beam of Manitoulin Island. On a terra cotta base, a broad band of painted black and white plant/earth symbols encircles the interior wall, framing a finely drawn portrait in the centre of the bowl - an unusual one-of-a-kind creation by a man known primarily as an abstract painter and printmaker.

- a series of twenty-one miniature effigy dolls by Lucian and Sabrina Jourdain of Sept-Isles, Quebec (on loan from Whetung Ojibwa Crafts, Curve Lake, Ontario). These charming figures, averaging 8" in height, and fashioned with meticulous attention to detail, depict various aspects of daily life among the Montagnais people - from tanning hides to cooking bannock and checking the traphne. Craftwork at its finest.
- snowshoe furniture from Akwesasne Mohawk Handicrafts, Akwesasne. This is perhaps the most delightful surprise in the entire show, and an innovative adaptation of a traditional craft. With only slight modifications in size and design, the artisans have used the bentwood framing and gut lacing techniques normally employed in the construction of snowshoes to create a straight back chair, rocker and loveseat. Impressive to view and comfortable to sit on, these furnishings could herald the beginning of a popular new cottage industry.

- a special audio-visual presentation, 'Not By Beadwork Alone' by Rhoda Migwans of Manitoulin Island. A sophisticated self-portrait is set in the wider context of a statement on the changing role of the Ojibway woman. Conceived and produced by an employee of the Ojibway Cultural Foundation working in the world of high technology, this lucid documentary aims to dispel the myth that the modern Ojibway woman aspires to little more than filling her days with so much beadwork.

- several finely made articles by Gordon Sixpipe Nightseout. A quilled pipe, cradleboard, hide shirt and other items have all been fashioned with great attention to detail, and in fact, some are historical reproductions. However, Mr. Nightscout admits to having no native ancestry and one questions his inclusion in the show. It would appear that the quality of his work has earned him acceptance by the native community.

In the presentation of these many artifacts the human element has not been overlooked. Two features immediately spring to mind. The first is a Children's Corner where dolls, baskets, beadwork, quillwork and birchbark have been laid out for the express purpose of being touched and handled. The second feature is the symbolic 'people space' - a large circular area in the centre of the gallery set aside for demonstrations of craftwork, singing, ceremonies or whatever else the participants in the show might wish to do. This space has been imaginatively defined by a tent-like arrangement of fabric bands suspended from the ceiling. To one side is a special display case containing a beautifully beaded traditional dance fan - symbol of the exhibition. Created by Ruth Shawanda of Wikwemikong, it represents cultural healing through a revival of the arts. A large colour photograph of this fan is used on the exhibition poster, as well as the front of the show's catalog.

This catalog, while attractive, contains several irritating features which invariably hinder the enjoyment of the exhibit the more one refers to it. A number of black and white photographs are included (some of which are out of focus) but none are keyed to the items listed. One is left to guess which articles are being featured. To compound difficulties, the pages aren't numbered. Most annoying, however, are sections of the accompanying commentary by Anita Aarons, Director of The Art Gallery at Harbourfront. Her informal anecdotal style is acceptable enough (albeit, somewhat unusual for a catalog of this type) but her oft-stated contention that ritual usage is the key factor elevating a utilitarian object to the status of art belies a misunderstanding of both ritual and art. Finely made accessories may well take on additional cultural significance
through ritual use, but functional considerations cannot replace esthetic standards in determining whether an object qualifies as a work of art. Ultimately, it is only esthetic standards which can be and, it would appear, have been used in selecting the items for this collection of "things of beauty we make with our hands."

One final comment: Few if any of the articles in this show can be classed as sacred art - in fact, in deference to the wishes of the Six Nations Iroquois, there are no False Face masks on display. However, one late addition to the exhibition, scooped up from a nearby craft sale, may well fall into this category inadvertently. The item is a quilled birchbark box by Mamie Migwans of West Bay, Manitoulin Island. Articles of this type are usually made for tourists, and often decorated with geometric, floral and animal motifs. This one is different. On the lid, emerging from the centre of a natural white quilled background, and defined solely by natural brown quills, is the shadowy form of a horned spirit being flanked by two lesser figures. It is a strange and powerful image - its visual impact made all the more startling by its appearance in a so obviously non-religious setting. Is this piece a daring experiment? A cautious departure? Is the sacred imagery of the pictographs, petroglyphs and scrolls, already found in the graphic works of Norval Morrisseau and his followers about to make inroads into the field of the craft arts? That aside, one is again reminded that the artistic traditions of the Woodland peoples go much deeper, and are indeed far richer than even this superior exhibition would suggest.

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During the Nineteenth Century, hundreds of seamen from America and England made ports of call in the Queen Charlotte Islands. They admired the remarkable aesthetic of the seafaring Haida; powerful cedar sea canoes, great houses, totem poles, splendid tools and utensils and exotic ceremonial gear, all elaborately carved with images meaningful in Haida tradition. Undoubtedly the seamen admired Haida images more than they understood them. Perhaps because it is hard to remember an image you fail to understand, the sailors were eager to acquire Indian artifacts to take back home. Their mementos had to be compact enough to fit into a sea chest without displacing any of the sailor's gear and effects. An essential part of a sailor's kit was the pipe he fondled in moments of repose and contemplation. In the very first years of the Nineteenth Century, sailors began returning to Europe and America from the Charlottes with decorated pipes carved by Indians, as companions to the seafarer's own smoking implements. These pipes were neither clay nor briar. They were carved from argillite, a soft fragile black slate found at Slatechuk Mountain near Skidegate, at the southern end of Graham Island. Although these "pipes" had drilled stem holes connected to their bowls, the sailors knew better than to smoke them. The pipe form was merely a conventional artifact upon which to place a gallery of images, like those the sailors admired in indigenous Haida objects. As they puffed on their own trusty smoking pipes, one can imagine these sailors also brought these portable miniature Haida art galleries out of their sea chests during the long days at sea, and fondled them in contemplation of the strange sea world lodged like a gem stone in the setting of their memories.

One such early argillite pipe, now in Calgary's Glenbow Museum (AA 1888), was the opening study piece, (Cat. no. 1), for the Glenbow's important show of Haida argillite that resulted in an even more important book by the show's curator, Carol Sheehan. The show, which ended its run in September, 1982, may still be studied through Sheehan's beautifully produced book Pipes That Won't Smoke; Coal That Won't Burn, a reference to how the late Wilson Duff, Sheehan's teacher, mentor and colleague, described the argillite tradition. In the show, the study pipe was displayed outside the gallery entrance suspended within its case by a slowly rotating wire mount. The pipe is only 12.5 X 3.5 cm., about the size and weight of a large pocket knife. When I first saw it, I could almost feel the pipe would nestle in the hand, as my curious fingers and eyes might have turned it this way and that to gain the best vantage from which to contemplate each of its many images. In fact, this one tiny object contains over a dozen figures or parts of figures, artfully connected to one another with astonishing economy of design, an artistry that sailors who themselves carved bone and ivory must have appreciated immensely. This tiny pipe in its case was
surrounded by enlarged detailed photographs of its separate images. The camera revealed what the sailor's eye would have seen. These tiny forms are monumental in design and execution. As the caption explains, "these are intimate objects", but as the eye discovers, they are also monuments capable of speaking largely for themselves and their creators. This pipe, and the other Haida argillite pieces brought together for the show, are truly miniature galleries of the Haida visual imagination, as it responded to changes brought on by their contact with these very white men for whom the art was produced.

Every surface of the often oval early pipes, like AA 1888, was carved with images from the Haida cosmos, but unlike images on totem poles and ceremonial objects, these figures and faces were not articulated in any way that reflects Haida cosmology or social reality. According to Sheehan, in pipes like AA 1888, "There is a scramble of faces and appendages that cannot logically be aligned one with the other. These illogical alignments are what Duff described as "non-sense" in the pipe images from the first period." (Sheehan, 1981:79). Sheehan points out that an apparently traditional Haida crest image, the killer whale, is portrayed on pipe AA 1888 with segments like the body of an insect, a visual pun. According to Duff's analysis, this kind of pun was a deliberate scrambling of an otherwise highly coherent Haida visual code. Duff argued that during the first period of artistic flowering following first contact with Europeans, Haida artists created portable galleries of their own images as they imagined the sailors might have seen them - but not as they really were. Thus, they gave the sailors approximations of sacred images without prostituting the authentic crests to which only specific Haida could have access. Duff called this period "Haida non-sense". The tradition of carving argillite for sale has continued to the present but the style and content of the imagery has changed as Haida culture has experienced a series of major transformations.

Sheehan's impeccably scholarly treatment of the argillite tradition begins with a survey of important studies by Marius Barbeau, Carole Kauffman, Robin Kathleen Wright and Wilson Duff. This scholarly tradition revealed a correlation between stylistic and cultural changes. The key to understanding how these changes evolved was Duff's discovery that the first pipes, produced between 1800 and 1830, were studies in "Haida non-sense". During the following period, 1830 to 1865, artists working in argillito appeared to have turned to depicting scrambled images from the white man's world as they saw it. Duff and Sheehan call this period, "white man's nonsense" because of its absurd renditions of European architecture, domestic animals and activities that made as much sense to the Haida as Haida images had to the first sailors. Some of the pieces from this period suggest the work of M. Escher, the 20th Century paradoxical realist, in their relentlessly graphic depiction of paradox and impossibility.

In one pipe panel, (AA 2051, Cat. no. 27), two white men sit across a table from one another. They are sculpted as carefully realistic portraiture down to the fine details of their hair and beards, characteristics that obviously fascinated the Haida. At first glance the scene might appear normal, but on closer inspection, the impossibility and absurdity of this scene becomes obvious. White men take for granted that a table should divide upper and lower limbs. Feet should
be under the table, hands above or on it. But to the Haida, tables and most other European taken-for-granted assumptions, were strange and ridiculous. The European would not consider the possibility of sitting at a table without a chair. Tables and chairs go together as part of the coherent fabric of reality, but in this scene, that coherence is demolished. All the rules about what is normal in the European world are madly scrambled in this piece. There is a table and two figures are seated at it, but there are no chairs. The figures sit stiffly on the floor, their legs bent into a triangle that articulates with the triangles formed by arms bent beneath the table's surface. The result is to transform the human limbs into triangular trusses like those of Nineteenth Century bridges. These curious whitemen are literally bound into their own architectural forms. In a final indignity, the heads, resting at beard height on the table top, begin to look more like the heads of canes or the carved caps of posts as they rise from bodies whose backs resemble the turned legs of tables or chairs. In this piece, like others from the second period of argillite carving, the artist is telling us how he perceived the white men's enslavement to their own manners and customs.

Work from the second period of argillite carving explores the gamut of white man's nonsense, focusing in particular on the odd relations these strangers seemed to have with useless ridiculous domestic animals and with equally ridiculous domestic artifacts and architecture. Panel pipes which evolved from the oblong pipes during the first period were perfect vehicles for these cartoon like caricatures. Sheehan has chosen four of the best and most ridiculous to illustrate in a full page colour reproduction. During this period, Haida artists also explored new forms that were not related to the earlier pipes. These included sculptures in the round of animals and humans as well as replicas of European artifacts like a Welsh loving spoon, (AA 2012 Cat. no. 55), a shot glass carved in imitation of cut glass design, (AA 1961 Cat. no. 57), or an elaborate plate ornamented in compass drawn circles and floral designs (AA 2030 Cat. no. 61).

The whim and exuberance of the first and second periods of nonsense carving ended abruptly when between 1862 and 1865 the very survival of the Haida as a people was assaulted by a catastrophic epidemic of smallpox that reduced population from 6,000 to 1,000. During the third period of argillite carving (1865 to 1910), survivors seem to have turned their attention back to the old images of a life that now lived largely in memory. The free standing figures were now of shamans and chiefs; the designs on plates were illustrations of mythic themes or crests such as the dragonfly crest of the Eagle clan carved by Tom Price on an oval plate (AA 1900 Cat. no. 90). This is the image Sheehan chose, carefully extricated from its ornamental border, to face us, mask-like, on the book's cover.

Some of the most powerful images that have come down to us from traditional Haida art are argillite pieces from this period. Among the many fine pieces included in the show, at least three are masterpieces that should rank among the world's greatest art treasures.

The first one, (AA 1946 Cat. no. 70), is a large, (27.5 cm. long), super-
natural Eagle Crest figure, bearing a human face on the tail fan. In her introduction, Sheehan chose this strong and far-seeing sky creature, to represent the third period, just as she chose the first oval pipe (AA 1888) as the first period's type piece, and a stupid looking chicken against whose neck rests a still and flexed European to represent the period of whiteman's non-sense. Seen from above the back, the Eagle of the "Haida-sense" period looks almost like a study of the American Eagle as seen on the face of a coin, but from an angle more to the side, it is a powerful sky creature inclined toward its own realm and about to fly away. Eagle's neck is massive. His head is turned at right angles to the body and faces right unlike the American Eagle which faces left. Single bold ovoid and split U designs are worked into each wing. The piece is great because of its monumental strength. It is big enough to let you stare directly into Eagle's far-seeing eyes, here portrayed with the look of a visionary. For the first time, the artist used a new free-standing sculptural form to depict the power that in earlier work was represented in the traditional code. The result is an artistic statement of far-seeing power.

The second astonishing image from this period is carved in high, almost free-standing relief, like the bays, points, beaches and mountains of the perfect islands formed, according to myth, of the bodies of supernaturals. It is carved on the top of a 29 X 17 X 13.5 cm. box by John Robson (Gwaikunagiaflens) (private collection, Cat. no. 85). According to the caption, Bear and Eagle adorn the sides of the box, beaver heads, the sides, but Sheehan has chosen to illustrate only the side from which a bear watches from the forest. Perhaps she left Eagle to the imagination and to the power of the Great Eagle just described, in order to show how artist Robson showed the battle of Raven and Giant Crab as if they were islands awash in a figured sea. The sea is like a canvass that invites an abstract flowing modernism reminiscent of a European master like Picasso. Raven's talons, body and wings lie in the same plane as the Crab who has been reduced to an abstraction of his essentials, pincers, shell and streaming legs. Only Raven's beak, face and eyes rise up out of his body's plane to look with the look of his power at the opposing force of the sea bottom. Their struggle is larger than life, longer than time. As they appear to be demi-gods with the power to burst out of time, the artist chose to show them literally bursting out of the frame of the picture, in this case a simple hatched border with squares at each corner. Like the anonymous creator of the Eagle Crest sculpture, John Robson has discovered new ways of stating old truths. In these works, the old figures of Haida cosmology transform themselves once again into forms of renewed energy that fly again above the confines of a single time and place. The results are breathtaking images capable of communicating deeply with the modern viewer and thinker.

The third commanding image from the period of "Haida-sense" is a boat shaped dish (AA 1947 Cat. no. 98), containing Eagle and Raven lying in a repose like suspended animation. They are like Chrysalis forms of themselves riding out the storm of History. They lie on their backs. Their bodies are robed in a few large ultimate forms, ovoids and split U forms, that merge with the same designs worked into the sloping sides of the boat-dish. They lie side by side but
face to face, beaks nearly touching, forming an are like the Haida sky dome. Each beak’s upper arc gives way to a spreading triangular star form at the centre of each forehead. The eyes and faces are drawn within themselves to a source of energy beyond action. This Raven has finished with Giant Crab or has yet to encounter him; this Eagle flies in the dream of the egg. They appear to be drifting in the dream-like condition of potentiality from which they emerged at the beginning of time. The artist of this period has portrayed them in their essential forms. The portrait evokes their presences as strongly as John Robson’s scene evoked Raven caught in a moment of action, and the other anonymous artist’s portrait looked far-seeing Eagle in the eye. These three great pieces were created by artists masters searching for enduring representations of their Haida-sense vision.

The fourth period of argillite carving identified by Duff and illustrated by Sheehan is represented by pieces made between 1910 and 1981. Outstanding among these is an ivory and argillite Eagle pipe inlaid with abalone (private collection, Cat. no. 164). It was created by George Yeltazie in 1980. Unlike the far-seeing Eagle of the previous period, this one favours an inward vision. It is yet another transformation of the ancient sky being as well as a break from the earlier tradition of creating non-smoking pipes. This pipe was created for personal use rather than for sale and was intended to be smoked although not with tobacco. Sheehan invites us to contemplate this pipe that does not smoke by presenting it as the first of her full page colour plates.

Another recent piece from the contemporary revival of Haida art is a small self-portrait of artist Reg Davidson (private collection, Cat. no. 166), performing the Eagle dance in the 1980 potlatch, “Celebration of the Living Haida”, given by his brother Robert Davidson. In the book, a full page photograph of Reg Davidson performing the Eagle Dance illustrates the connection. Because we are living within the fourth period of argillite carving, it is hard to know what direction the tradition will take in the future. The best of the modern pieces show a thoroughly contemporary reflexivity. They mirror personal inner thoughts and meanings in forms created by the artist from his understanding of tradition.

Pipes That Won't Smoke; Coal That Won't Burn is beautifully produced and illustrated. In addition to a catalogue of every piece, there are 8 pages of fine colour plates. Black and white reproductions are exceptionally well photographed and printed. Glenbow’s chief of photography, Ron Marsh and his assistant, Pauline Andrushuk did a fine job of capturing the subtle details of pieces that are very difficult to represent two dimensionally. David Scollard’s sense of design and Rose Veighey’s editorial work complemented Sheehan’s understanding of Northwest Coast artistic language.

Throughout the book, key images are reproduced to illustrate the developing argument. In addition, the book makes excellent use of archival photographs to create a visual understanding of the times and places from which the argillite tradition emerged. Two double page photographs vividly capture the contrast between Native life on the Coast and the purposes of Empire. One shows the village of Masset in 1880, a complex if somewhat weathered forest of Haida
Images. The other shows Esquimault Harbour in the 1860's; a squadron of British warships at anchor, wharves, a false-fronted building, storage sheds and the stark framing of a few tall forest trees in the close foreground. Another single page photograph makes the same contrast even more succinctly. It shows Haida artist and interpreter, Johnny-Kit-Elswa in 1866, his chest and strong arms bare to reveal a tattooed Haida frog and other images from the traditional visual repertoire. He is photographed, not among the totem poles and house fronts of his own village but against Judge James Swan's cluttered collection of Victorian artifacts and ornaments including an argillite totem pole hung next to the framed photograph of a somber bearded gentleman.

The book also includes a series of photographs taken in 1954 by Wilson Duff, showing argillite being cut from the steep slippery slopes of Slatechuck Mountain. They evoke Duff's own respect for the enduring qualities of stone as a medium that he articulated many years later in *Images: Stone: B.C.* (Duff, 1974). The photographs reveal both a source of material in the physical sense and also a source of ideas that hold the book together. Sheehan's text provides a clear introduction to Haida history as well as to the history of scholarship relating to argillite, but the major interpretive framework is a product of her collaboration with Wilson Duff. The interpretation began with Duff's realization that early argillite images were a form of carefully studied non-sense, and matured as Duff and Sheehan worked out the relationship between previously recognized periods within the tradition and changes in Haida experience. The present book demonstrates persuasively that argillite carving provided a medium in which Haida artists recorded and interpreted their own essential history. The visual language of this history is worthy of careful study. If I were looking for a compact treasure to study and contemplate on a long sea voyage, I could think of no better companion than *Pipes That Won't Smoke; Coal That Won't Burn*.

NOTES

1. Before beginning this review I planned a special trip to Calgary to see the show and talk with its curator, Carol Sheehan. When I arrived at the Glenbow, the show was temporarily closed and I was denied access to it without any explanation. After several hours of frustrated waiting, I managed to contact Sheehan who obtained permission from the Assistant Director of Programmes to take me through the show in the few minutes remaining before closing. I planned to return the following day and conduct an audio interview with Sheehan for broadcast and teaching as well as to study the show for this review. During the course of that interview we were interrupted by a security guard who informed us apologetically that the Museum Director had specifically ordered that we were to be denied access to the show. The reason for its closure turned out to have been the discovery of moths in a Chilcat blanket, but by the time I arrived it had been removed for fumigation and the area thoroughly vacuumed. I am certain our presence
in the gallery for an hour or two that day posed no threat to the Museum. I wish to express my thanks to Carol Sheehan for doing what she could to introduce me to the show. I am sorry the Museum Director was unable to make it possible for me to give the show the study it deserved.

REFERENCES

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The artistic language of Northwest Coast Native people has long fascinated and confused non-Native observers. Even the great Franz Boas failed to devise a language of translation to unfold both the form and the meaning of this esoteric treasure house. The real measure of understanding the Northwest Coast imaginative legacy is an ability to work within it as an artist. That ability is displayed to full advantage in a show of traditional and contemporary work by Northwest Coast masters entitled, "The Legacy", mounted by the British Columbia Provincial Museum, and first shown in its present form at the Edinburgh Festival in 1980.

To accompany the show and make it more widely available, curators Peter Macnair, Alan Hoover and Kevin Neary have produced a beautifully illustrated catalogue entitled simply, The Legacy. The text, written by Peter Macnair, provides a basic ethnographic and historical description of Northwest Coast cultures and introduces the reader to the analysis of form devised by Bill Holm in 1965. Macnair then describes the work of traditional and contemporary artists by region, giving particularly good coverage to the continuous tradition of Southern Kwakiutl art with which the British Columbia Provincial Museum has been associated since Mungo Martin worked with them in the 1950's.

The book provides an ideal introduction to the Northwest Coast artistic imagination. For people who have admired Northwest Coast art, but been unable to penetrate its densely packed imagery, this book is an invaluable point of entry. Once such an entry has been accomplished, the art stands out and speaks for itself. We are able to look back at traditional masterpieces through the eyes of today's mature artists whose work reflects their own rediscovery of the Northwest Coast legacy. The text's commentary gives us just enough information to allow the artists themselves to take over as teachers. These artists are able to speak an artistic language that non-Natives can begin to understand. Their work reflects participation in modern Western society, as well as a connection to their own traditions. As contemporary Native people, they draw strength from the past, in order to participate successfully within the modern world.

In many cases the kinship between old and new is physical as well as spiritual. Anthropologist Macnair nicely conveys the sense of family that is so important in Northwest Coast society. He also traces the connections of apprenticeship that have brought together artists from different local traditions, and of different ages. Robert Davidson, for instance, is the great grandson of Haida master Charles Edenshaw, but received his apprenticeship from Bill Reid - whose own rediscovery of his Haida heritage was inspired by his study of
Edenshaw's work. Guided by the text of the book, one can refer to the fine colour plates of every piece in the show to see how the legacy comes alive in the discoveries of contemporary native artists.

The pieces brought together in this show are astonishing in their effortless mastery of an esoteric and ancient form of communication. It is clear that lines of communication remain open between old and new masters of the tradition. They also reach out to touch and enrich the lives of non-Native people. The work offers the viewer an opportunity to share in the excitement of discovery that inspired contemporary artists like Reid and Davidson.

Beyond their mastery of the formal conventions of Northwest Coast design, contemporary artists also share an understanding of their legacy's spiritual and intellectual meaning. Nowhere is this more clearly evident than in the work of Westcoast (i.e. from the west coast of Vancouver Island) artists Joe David and his cousin Hupquatchew (Ron Hamilton). Although by the time these artists were born in 1946 and 1948, the Westcoast tribes had stopped creating work like the magnificent flowingly painted dance screen illustrated in a 1907 photograph (PN 7260), their traditions of song and dance maintained a spiritual continuity that shines with brilliance in the pieces collected for "The Legacy". Joe David's finely crafted tambourine drum (16622) was obviously made to be used. The artist has crafted it knowing the power released in Westcoast music and dance. On the drum's face are painted images of a wolf's head within a whale's body, representing the connection between these hunters of the land and sea realms. The accompanying drumstick is itself a finely carved image of a cannibal bird consuming a human skeleton. Together, these ceremonial instruments of song and dance are intended to bring forth the power of the cannibal society's ritual. Like the rest of Joe David's work, this drum makes manifest an image of power that is a living part of his personal experience, and only incidentally a work of art in terms of the secular commercial art world. Like any other great art, this work's authenticity lies in its relationship to the artist's experience. In this case, that experience is instructed by the depth of Westcoast tradition.

Hupquatchew's work as represented in "The Legacy" also shows a combination of consummate technical mastery and spiritual depth. Two pieces in particular are among the most powerful in the entire show. One, a massive dance screen (13960) of delicately adzed red cedar, cannot be appreciated fully in a photograph, since much of its impact comes from the texturing of the wood itself. In order to convey the monumental quality of the screen, it should have at least been given a full page photograph in the book rather than being placed in the corner of an otherwise blank page. Painted on the screen, in larger than human size, is the powerful image of Thunderbird flying away with a huge whale in its' talons. The work is finely executed in a detail that stands up even to intimate inspection. Subtle blue form lines punctuate the strong black contours of the principle figures. The bird's wing feathers are rendered in oblongs and wedges similar to the wooden feathers in a Haietlik (feathered serpent) headdress fan (16626) by fellow Westcoast artist, Tim Paul. In coming to understand Hupquatchew's wonderful screen, one's eye swoops in close and
then soars back to view a scene that is larger than life. The screen, together with Joe David's drum, evokes the dances that are themselves evocations of enduring Native presences of the coast. In bringing these presences to those of us who are not native to this coast, artists like Hupquatchew honour us with the intelligence of their vision.

The second notable piece by Hupcluatchew is a silkscreen print (15416), the only medium in which he offers his work for sale. The print, entitled, "The Whaler's Dream", illustrates, according to the artist, "some of the images that might flow through a man's mind, the last few days before he joined a whale hunt off the West Coast." These images seem to float on an open surface like the ocean of a dreamer's mind, quartered by the Westcoast star design, the image of the North Star which the natives used for navigation, according to Hupquatchew. The piece is representational and narrative, but its design elements are true to the dreamer's imagination, not to a photographic realism. It is like an animistic chart of the Westcoast whaling venture, in which the spirit of each element is given graphic form and brought together in the dreamer's concentration on his purpose. Hupcluatchew has taken particular care to give form to every important element of the enterprise, and his choice of what is important reveals something important about the Westcoast experience. The harpoon and seal bladder floats seem obvious, but the moon as a woman calling the tides to rise and fall and the elements of wind and rain reveal something of the Westcoast world as experienced by people who have lived there from time immemorial. Although the hunt is no longer practiced as it was in the days of Maquinna, its teachings remain. Each element contributes equally to the overall pattern that is a whale hunt, just as each element now contributes to the creative life of a Westcoast artist named Hupquatchew.

Every piece in this wonderful show deserves and rewards careful study. All display both technical mastery and a sense of connection to the spiritual life of Northwest Coast people. Other works that stand out are masks by Haida artist Freda Diesing and her Tahltan student, Dempsey Bob, who has been moved to work in a Tlingit style.

In a complex mask by Diesing (16606), the palm of a hand is centered over one eye of the mask while a paintbrush held by the hand extends over the other eyebrow. The effect is to create a reflection of the artist in the act of painting a dancer's face, but in this case the dancer's face is actually a dance mask. This apparently simple image suggests the dance ritual's many levels of meaning. The artist's hand is mirrored on the face of the mask she has created, while the mask itself reveals more than it disguises. There is an intriguing hint of paradox in this multiplicity of perspectives. The artist paints a face with her own hand and brush in the act of painting. The face is wooden, a mask. Unseen but present by implication on either side of this creation, are the artist and the dancer. Perhaps Diesing is telling us that art and the dance are one, opposites that reach out to connect in a circle.

Another mask (16610) by Diesing's student, Dempsey Bob, explores Tlingit design ideas to illustrate a story told to the artist by his Tahltan grandmother. The face of the mask is a hauntingly beautiful portrait, carved so that the wood's
grain appears to have grown into a set of features the carver released. Close-edge grain rises elegantly over the bridge of the nose while it flattens toward the contour lines of face grain around the curve of the cheeks. Above the dancer’s face, but integral to the mask, is a hawk headdress. The hawk’s wings cradle the dancer’s temples, while its face mirrors that of the mask. The resemblance between the dancer’s two faces is close; the likenesses are those of members of a single family, but they are different in the way that supernaturals differ from people as they appear ordinarily. Together the two faces ask and also answer the question of the relationship between these two modes of being.

"The Legacy" is more than a show of traditional and contemporary Native art. It is a celebration of the intellectual and spiritual vitality of Native experiences on the Northwest Coast. The legacy is neither a few priceless objects from the past nor galleries full of pricey consumer items for thoughtless collectors. It is ideas that continue to nourish the creative spirit of Northwest Coast artists and thinkers today. The strength of vision shown in these works is a glimmer of hope for us all.

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THE FOUR SEASONS
A Travelling Exhibition
Curator: David L. Pokotylo
University of British Columbia Museum of Anthropology, Vancouver
1982

The Four Seasons display is a graphic depiction of the seasonal subsistence rounds practiced by two prehistoric Indian groups exploiting the resources of two very different ecological environments - the wet Pacific coast and the dry interior of British Columbia. The display is in the form of freestanding panels which can be arranged in any open space. The display information consists of eight painted "Artist's Reconstructions" showing subsistence activities typical of the four seasons, Spring, Summer, Fall and Winter, on the coast and in the interior of B.C. These scenes are accompanied by explanatory texts, archival photos and a few of the actual tools and artifacts used by the prehistoric people in these areas. Several panels are devoted to the explanation of various techniques used by prehistorians to develop their scenarios of past events. The purpose of this display is to present a reconstruction of the seasonal activities of prehistoric people living in the two ecologically divergent environments.

The display incorporates an excellent balance among four of the traditional means of communicating information which are frequently used by museums. The artistic reconstructions of seasonal activities are well conceived and executed. The supporting text is relevant and serves to interpret the scenes which are depicted. The archival photographs have been well chosen for relevance and clarity and the few artifacts which have been mounted in the display lend an air of authenticity to the scenarios which unfold as the visitors make their way through the display. The careful juxtaposition of artwork, text, archival photos, and artifacts make this display a dynamic example of the curator’s art.

This excellent presentation is flawed by a somewhat parochial approach to the archaeological literature. Virtually all of the credits in the display refer to work by U.B.C. archaeologists. It is an unfortunate oversight that the extensive research undertaken by faculty and graduate students from Simon Fraser University and the University of Victoria, and staff archaeologists from the B.C. Heritage Conservation Branch, and their resulting contribution to the fields of paleoecology and subsistence strategy on the B.C. coast and in the interior has been ignored.

The section dealing with survey sampling implicitly suggests that a reliable estimate of sites in an area can be obtained by means of a survey which records surface finds of archaeological material. While there are pragmatic reasons - principally monetary and time constraints - for conducting surface surveys, the simplistic notion that they constitute a reliable estimate of the number and nature of the sites in a diverse ecological area must be seriously questioned. Any such survey will inevitably be biased in favour of areas which by nature of soil or topography are subject to deflation, and against areas which are subject to deposition. Surveys of this nature generally record materials on slopes,
ridges, well drained terraces, and along cut banks and roadways or trails. These surveys rarely locate sites on floodplains, in valley bottoms, in depressions, or on rich soils carrying a heavy cover of vegetation.

While the reconstruction of seasonal subsistence patterns is generally well conceived and accurate, three points do require some critical evaluation. These criticisms relate to the reliability of evidence, the accuracy of interpretation and the soundness of methodology.

The citing of charred cherry pits as evidence of subsistence activity falls into the first category. A natural fire in the late fall, while the cherries are still hanging, or in the early spring when the fruit is lying on the ground surface can produce an abundance of charred pits. The author has observed charred pits as a part of the soil matrix in many non-cultural contexts.

The representation of clam gathering as an undifferentiated year around subsistence activity falls within the second category. It is probably true that in a given year some individuals could be found digging clams at some location at any season of the year. However, the ethnographic literature contains abundant references to this activity as being seasonal in tradition and practise. Drucker (1951) and others have detailed variables such as meat quality and danger of paralytic shellfish poisoning which were important seasonal determinants in the pattern of shellfish harvesting. These lines of evidence suggest that during summer, especially late summer, clams would not be collected.

The third criticism is directed towards the section on meat weight estimates. The use of a whole panel to describe the techniques for estimating meat weights and the subsequent reconstruction of diets must be called into question. Casteel (1978) and others have shown such estimates to be capable of errors in excess of 2000% where the actual number of animals is known. Certainly an archaeological assemblage which has been subjected to taphonomic factors which are largely unknown and therefore beyond any reasonable quantification scale will yield results of the most speculative nature. The generalities of subsistence can be extracted with some degree of accuracy from the archaeological record, but specifics such as proportions of meat, fish and vegetable foods can only be guessed at and any attempt, however rigorous the methodology, will only produce deceptive figures which are masked by an illusion of reliability.

While these shortcomings may be apparent to the serious student of these regions, they do not detract from the usefulness of the display as a source of interest and information for the general public. The reconstructions are, in terms of a generalized subsistence round, essentially reliable and they reflect what is known of subsistence activities and practices through the archaeological and ethnographic records.

The Four Seasons is a successful attempt to communicate to the public at large the results of archaeological science. The format Dr. Pokotylo has chosen is suited to a travelling display. The art work is clear and well executed and accompanied by a concise, informative text. The archival photos and artifacts lend an air of authenticity to the reconstructions. Dr. Pokotylo is to be congratulated on this successful effort to discharge the professional archaeologists' responsibility to the general public, particularly to those, who by reason
of where they live, may not have access to a major museum.

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