

RAVENS AND EAGLES: Haida Art

Two 13-part series · 2003 & 2002



RAVENS AND EAGLES PRODUCTIONS

Shot on British Columbia's rugged north coast, the two *RAVENS AND EAGLES: Haida Art* series delve into the roots of traditional Haida art and trace the genesis of today's generation of Haida carvers, singers, dancers, weavers and performers. Both series explore some of the wider historical and political issues of the repatriation of Haida artifacts, the vital potlatch ceremony once declared illegal by the Canadian government, and the fight to preserve old growth forests on Haida land. Created by Haida filmmaker Marianne Jones and Jeff Bear, *RAVENS AND EAGLES* approaches Haida art and culture from the Haida perspective.



2003 series

Stone Carver (24:00)

Alfie Collinson is a stone carver who transforms the Haida people's creation stories into art. Using argillite, a stone indigenous only to Haida Gwaii, he is among the best of contemporary carvers. Alfie journeys to sacred ground to quarry the stone, slabs of which are delicate and difficult to come by.

On the Trail of Property Woman (24:00)

It's rare to find a female carver of monumental art, but in the 1960s, Freda Diesing was among the vanguard of Haida artists whose talents sparked a revival of her culture's artwork. At the age of 42, she took up carving and established herself as not only an exceptional carver, but also an enthusiastic teacher and mentor. Some of today's emerging masters like Dempsey Bob and Stan Bevan thank Freda for their success. In recognition of her achievement, she received a National Aboriginal Achievement Award in 2002.

In Our Blood (24:00)

Geoff Green, Tony Green and Eric Olson are brothers who share a passion for art. Geoff is a student of design and would one day like to teach. Tony carves both wood and metal and paints, but his specialty is pencil drawing. Eric, the youngest, was motivated by his brothers and only recently began to carve. The three discuss their connection to their own work and the inspiration they receive from their culture, their traditional home and one another.

Haida Jewelers (24:00)

Carmen Goertzen and Frank Paulson are two contemporary carvers who specialize in silver and gold. Both are motivated to pursue jewelry making by a desire for independence. They discuss their own processes and inspirations, how Haida jewelry fits into the larger tradition of Haida art, and in a highly competitive marketplace, the need to maintain a profile with the city's galleries and private collectors.

NaXine Weaver (24:00)

The granddaughter of weaver Selina Adams Peratrovich and daughter of Dolores Churchill, also a renowned weaver, Evelyn Vanderhoop creates the highly prized NaXine robe, or Chilkat blanket, a cedar bark and goat's wool textile that takes many years to complete. Traditionally, Chilkat blankets were a treasured item of First Nations nobility. While many assert that this weaving style is the domain of the Tsimshian and Tlingit people, Evelyn believes there is a strong connection between Tlingit, Tsimshian and Haida weaving. She details the history of this textile art and discusses her own process.

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RAVENS AND EAGLES: Haida Art 2003 series continued...



From Hand to Hand:

The Legacy of Charles Edenshaw (46:30)

Perhaps the most prolific Haida artist to have ever lived, Charles Edenshaw played an enormous role in preserving his people's ancient art forms at a time when their very survival was in question. He endured the enormous challenges of his era—the onslaught of disease, the growing influence of Christianity, and the prohibition of the potlatch by the Canadian government—to become a great innovator in Haida art. In this powerful documentary, his descendants Robert Davidson, Carmen Goertzen and Christian White, celebrated artists in their own right, discuss his legacy as Haida elders have passed it down to them. Art historians from UBC's Museum of Anthropology and Seattle's Burke Museum add insights culled from their research.

Athlii Gwaii:

The Line at Lyell (46:30)

In the fall of 1985, a small but resolute troupe of Haida elders journeyed by helicopter to Athlii Gwaii (Lyell Island) to join their young counterparts in a stand against clearcutting. Industrial invasion in



the remote archipelago had gone too far. Ancient cedar giants and rare spruce trees—lifeblood of Haida art and culture—had been leveled indiscriminately for too long. Buoyed by their courageous Haida elders, protesters united in peaceful resistance. A total of 72 people were arrested, but their tactics garnered global attention and won change: in 1987, the government established the Gwaii Haanas Park Reserve/Haida Heritage Site. Archival footage features poignant interviews with elders Ada Yovanovich and Adolphus "Fussy" Marks. Surviving elders Ethel Jones and Watson Pryce share their recollections. Miles Richardson, head of the BC Treaty Commission, Guujaaw, Council of the Haida Nation president, and Allan Wilson, a Haida RCMP officer at the scene, provide further insight into these pivotal events.

The New Collectors: Repatriation, Pt 1 (24:00)

More than two-dozen Haida delegates travel to New York City to reclaim their ancestors' remains from the American Museum of Natural History. As part of their pilgrimage, they are invited by the Smithsonian to view and handle precious Haida artifacts housed at the National Museum of the American Indian and have the opportunity to use these pieces in ceremonial dance. Their journey culminates with the return to Skidegate and burial of the centuries-old remains.

The New Collectors: Repatriation, Pt 2 (24:00)

Nika and Vince Collison, Haida repatriation committee members, visit the British Museum in London to open a discussion on repatriating Haida artifacts. This vast historical museum, sticking to their mandate of delivering a "global story to an international audience," does not warm to the topic. Representatives point to the 1963 British Museum Act that prohibits the removal of artifacts from their collection. Although gracious, they are cautious even about letting the Haida visitors touch and photograph pieces. For Nika and Vince, it's all part of a process that has taught them to exercise patience and diplomacy.

Giihlgalang: The State of the Haida Language (24:00)

Pre-contact, the Haida language flourished with as many different dialects as there were villages. Today, few fluent speakers remain. Some worry that the Haida people stand to lose a unique worldview that is embodied in their indigenous tongue. Diane Brown, coordinator of the Skidegate Haida Immersion Program, points out that one of the biggest challenges is a lack of interest on the part of young people, despite the fact that through her program they have the rare opportunity to study with fluent elders. Elementary school teachers try to remedy a waning interest in the Haida language by making it part of everyday lessons, bringing elders into the class to assist in teaching songs and prayer.

Finale: Defining Haida Art (24:00)

The final part of this series examines how the foundations of Haida art were shaken after the intrusion of Europeans on Haida Gwaii and also looks at the robust revival of the Haida people's rich traditions taking place today. An impressive array of artists—Robert and Reg Davidson, Guujaaw, Frank Paulson, Nika Collison, Irene Mills, April Churchill, Victoria Moody and Evelyn Vanderhoop—discuss the importance of form and process, the recovery from the repressive influences of church and government, the excavation of songs and language, the spiritual connection to art through dance and ceremony, and the vital relationship to the land when carving and weaving.



RAVENS AND EAGLES: Haida Art 2002 series

What is Haida Art? (23:00)

This introduction to Haida art from the Haida perspective follows five themes—formline, ceremony, function, preservation, songs and language. The artists and themes featured here are more fully explored throughout the series.

Spruce Root Weaver: Isabel Rorick (21:30)

Weaver Isabel Rorick uses spruce roots and makes some of the most intricate and beautiful hats and baskets in the Pacific Northwest. Related to both Florence Edenshaw Davidson and Selina Peratrovich, Isabel comes from a long line of artists. Her great-great grandmother was the legendary weaver, Isabella Edenshaw. Taking a personal journey to North Beach on Haida Gwaii, Isabel harvests her own roots annually in a grueling and exhaustive process.

Cedar Bark Weaver: Victoria Moody (22:00)

A weaver from Skidegate, British Columbia, Vicki Moody uses cedar bark in the creation of a new style of art that brings together bold designs with her political views. Vicki came to cedar as a teenager and has woven stories into her work. Her Transition robe features the marriage of wool and cedar in new and innovative ways. She has also used her art to help educate people about the importance of cedar to Haida culture.

Argillite Carver: Christian White (20:00)

Multi-disciplinary artist Christian White carves elaborate Haida stories, imbued with a sense tradition, into the indigenous slate argillite. A descendant of Charles Edenshaw, Christian learned to carve from his father, the late Morris White. In this documentary, Christian works alongside his apprentices at his studio in Masset, BC. The mystery of his art unfolds and his passion surfaces during a quiet conversation about his latest panel pipe.

Carrying on the Tradition (21:30)

April Churchill and Gladys Vandal stand out as highly gifted and talented Haida artists, both of whom have worked to preserve the Haida weaving tradition. The eldest daughter of legendary teacher Delores Churchill, April discusses why safeguarding tradition is important to her. Gladys Vandal also has roots deep in the basketry that grows out of the cedar tree. At her kitchen table, she demonstrates one of the oldest weaving techniques on earth.

The New Masters (22:30)

Like their weaving counterparts, young carvers in Haida Gwaii have their predecessors' impressive legacy to match.

The New Masters features three leading carvers from a new generation, some of the last apprentices that worked with the late Haida Master Bill Reid. Tim Boyko and Garner Moody work out of the same carvers' shed in Skidegate, BC, a structure originally built by one of their elders. They discuss the part they played in a recent project that saw the completion of six totem poles. Working alone, Clayton Gladstone carves on wood and precious metals. He shares his views about contemporary and traditional art.

Portrait of a Mask Maker: Reg Davidson (23:00)

A maker of the most elaborate and sometimes outrageous masks, Reg Davidson is at the top of his class. At work in his studio, he carves and shares his views about Haida art. Reg does not consider himself an artist, though he has produced an impressive body of work and enjoyed a demand for his many masks. A singer and dancer of Haida traditional compositions, he collaborates with his older brother Robert in the interpretation of stories and characters. His unique personality allows for a broad, often comical, theatrical presentation of dance.

Journey of Song

(22:00)

Songs remain one of the strongest links to the nearly extinct Haida language. Terri Lynne Davidson is re-learning the ancestral songs once sung by her Nonnie ("grandmother" in Haida), an exploration that brings the singer closer to her heritage and to Haida art, history and lineage. Nika Collison and Irene Mills work together to learn their people's ancient and sacred songs. They delve into the meaning of Haida dances, highlighting the significance of crests on blankets and the songs to which they are connected.



Chiefly Possessions (23:00)

The accumulation of wealth has been linked to the collection of high art throughout most of human existence. In the potlatch system, a practice outlawed by the federal government during the early 20th century, the display of crests and the carving of totems were usually at the behest of

important chiefs. In 1998, Jim Hart became Chief 7Idansuu (Edenshaw), taking possession of a chiefly name along with the range of art that is part of the chief's regalia. Hart recalls the event two years later, offering a glimpse of the process during a trip to his clan's traditional village site at Kiusta.



RAVENS AND EAGLES: Haida Art 2002 series continued...



Robert Davidson: Eagle of the Dawn (47:00)

One of the most intriguing contemporary artists of his generation, Robert Davidson stands apart internationally with his innovative and staggering output of high art. In his quest to make beautiful objects, Robert has inspired a new approach to Haida art, becoming a master of several media and pursuing a lofty cultural objective. After raising the first totem pole in Haida Gwaii in 1967, Robert began to learn many of the Haida songs and dances existing on record. This remarkable work has spurred Haida dance groups up and down the Pacific coast. Robert returns to his early years and reveals the direct and indirect influences of his Nonnie ("grandmother" in Haida), Florence Edenshaw Davidson, the daughter of the 20th century master Charles Edenshaw.

Yahgu dang ang: "To Pay Respect" (22:00)

Many Haida cultural treasures currently housed in museums around the world were looted from old Haida village sites. In their zeal, early explorers to Haida Gwaii took away grave goods and human remains, a questionable academic practice that continues to perplex aboriginal people. Today the Haida have begun the process of repatriation and the first to return are the ancestors themselves. Although they've encountered resistance, negotiators have brokered arrangements with local and Canadian museums, the first of these with the national museum in Ottawa. In *Yahgu dang ang*, the Haida prepare to rebury the remains of seven of their ancestors with a traditional burning of food.

Paradox of Attribution (24:00)

Haida art had reached a very sophisticated stage of development by the time of the Haida people's first contact with Europeans. Nearly every household item was adorned with carved or painted crests. Missionaries saw the art as the work of the devil; but ethnologists were looking for material culture they could use in museum dioramas in New York and Chicago. There has been debate in academic circles about who created turn of the century masterpieces of Haida art. Director Marianne Jones, herself a Haida eagle clan member, poses the question from her own perspective, leading a tour of the old village sites and re-visiting many historical masterpieces in this sweeping overview.



About the filmmakers

Jeff Bear, a First Nations producer/writer, is one of Canada's leading factual storytellers. His documentary *Burnt Church: Obstruction of Justice* won the 2001 APTN/Telefilm award for best English language production at the 2001 Banff Television Festival.

Most recently, he created and produced the award-winning current affairs series *First Story* for CTV.



Marianne Jones, writer, producer and director of *Ravens and Eagles: Haida Art*, was also the creator of the series concept. She is perhaps best known for her work in front of the camera on such television programs as *Beachcombers*, *MacGyver* and *North of Sixty*. She has been a principal dancer and singer for 15 years with the Rainbow Creek Dancers, a traditional and contemporary Haida performance group led by Robert Davidson.

