

quaint life of the folk for the benefit of other urban antimodernists: she lived there authentically. “I get more pleasure from having my works bought for homes around here than I would for having it in the National Gallery. Far more,” she wrote. After reading this biography, it is very difficult to doubt her sincerity.

What Rosenfeld has done here is to allow us to see not just Jarvis’s paintings, but the philosophy of art that underpinned them, one that was simultaneously a philosophy of life since, as Jarvis said, “if it isn’t life, it isn’t art, somewhere it’ll prove it’s not.” At times, I wish Rosenfeld had pushed further into the intellectual roots of this philosophy, exploring the annotations of Jarvis’s astonishingly eclectic personal library or the occasional allusions in her letters, but I suspect that this kind of pedantry would have been anathema to Jarvis herself: “I will always find it impossible to keep rational in a discussion,” she said, “One needs poetry to tell the truth, not statistics.” At the end of the most explicit written expression of her ideas, which Rosenfeld reproduces in its entirety, Jarvis explains: “The word ‘culture’ seems to signify an artificial manipulation of something good. It is here that *value* finally comes in. Art is valuable to people in arid soil. Outside of that it is like participating in a dance – a communication of what all the dancers know already.” Jarvis preferred to show rather than tell, and with Rosenfeld’s guidance we are able to see what Jarvis called the “natural vision” manifested in her paintings.

“There is no great or small art,” Jarvis wrote when she was 84. “There is only the striving to make tangible some visual experience that one feels could be thirst quenching to humanity and to oneself.” Jarvis spent a long lifetime slaking her considerable creative thirst. Revisiting her journey in this thoughtful biography is a quenching experience. Jarvis said she did not teach, but Rosenfeld shows us that we have much left to learn from her.

Communal Spaces: *Emerging Through the Fog* into a New Place for Northwest Coast Arts

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Not a First Thursday, not even a Friday, 30 March 2016 was not your typical art opening. The exhibition had quietly been open for nearly a month. Today, however, was the thirteenth anniversary of Art Thompson’s (Tsa-qwa-supp, 1948–2003) passing. Hjalmer Wenstob (Tlehpik, b. 1993), a young Nuučaan’ ul (Nuu-chah-nulth) artist, had brought us all together to celebrate Thompson on this day at his exhibition, *Emerging Through the Fog: Tsa-qwa-supp and Tlehpik – Together*, at the University of Victoria’s Legacy Art Gallery. The exhibition featured a selection of prints by Thompson intermixed with several of Wenstob’s carvings. By the time I arrived a large crowd had already gathered,

with all the hallmarks of an arts event visible. A tall podium stood before rows of chairs that crowded one wing of the gallery space. Groups of in-the-know people milled about and hobnobbed. Wenstob, as he is often spotted, held court with a group of admirers and family.

As the night unfolded, the traditions of the art world and the Indigenous community comingled, seamlessly weaving into each other. A speech by the gallery director, Mary Jo Hughes, was followed by gift-giving from Wenstob. Carolyn Butler-Palmer, Williams Legacy Chair and facilitator of the exhibition, thanked the university administration and held up her hands, saying, “' eekoo, ' eekoo” (or “kleco, kleco,” which means *with deepest thanks*), to all those who came to celebrate, honour, and participate. Stories about Art Thompson became memorialized when we all took home the remembrances of familial histories shared throughout the night. Victoria’s small arts community was fully represented, with University of Victoria administrators, public servants of the city, and curators from the Art Gallery of Greater Victoria in attendance. Yet, the local Indigenous community dwarfed their number. Wenstob’s and Thompson’s families, who had traveled to Victoria especially, chatted with local Indigenous artists and community members out to support an Indigenous art show. Alongside the fizzy water – and in lieu of the standard cheese platter fare – an array of bannock, mussels, salmon, and chowder

was served inside a massive, articulated Lightening Snake Feast Bowl. In 2013, Wenstob organized the carving group that created the bowl in an effort to build campus community through the university’s First Peoples House.

The evening and the exhibition offered many monumental successes. Art Thompson is one of a significant group of artists from the later twentieth century who radically transformed the visibility of contemporary Northwest Coast First Nations arts and culture. His works have not had such a prominent focus in a public art gallery at least since the 1980s, if ever. Wenstob, who at twenty-two graduated from the University of Victoria with a Bachelor of Arts, embedded himself on campus insisting upon his own visibility, and the importance of his community’s arts to university culture. This exhibition grew out of a class assignment for a course with Butler-Palmer. For his curatorial début, now as a Master’s student in Fine Arts, Wenstob presented something ambitiously personal to encourage engagement with Nuučaan’ ul communities, arts, and culture.

The exhibition broadly negotiates familial, communal, and public spaces. The gallery was divided into four spaces, each organized by Nuučaan’ ul supernatural animals: Wolf, Raven, Lightening Snake, and Thunderbird and Whale. Wall text designated the spaces in both English and orthographic Nuučaan’ ul, making the words knowable but unpronounceable to the majority of audiences. Kingfisher, Wenstob’s family



1 | Hjalmer Wenstob, *Thunderbird Mask*, 2014. Cedar, cedar bark, paint, iphone video. (Photo: Courtesy of University of Victoria Legacy Art Galleries)

crest, dominated the central space with a house front, a crest pole, and the only hanging mask in the show. Wenstob's other masks rested on wood blocks with small placards entreating visitors – something so rare in a gallery space – to pick them up and wear them.

These pieces suggest the potential of Wenstob's still nascent career – they are transformative. Beautifully designed, carved, and painted, the masks

also finally address the conundrum of presenting regalia in a museum context, where it often seems lifeless and disembodied. Once worn, the piece lets the gallery goer feel its weight and smell the carved cedar and paint (Fig. 1). An iPhone fixed into the nose of the mask streams a looped video. Each video shows Wenstob's younger brother Timmy wearing the mask and learning to dance as the animal represented. He

crouches low to the ground as Wolf and hops along as Raven, sometimes draped in a robe, and other times in jean shorts and a tee-shirt. The videos illustrate how the masks look when danced, offer glimpses of other pieces of material culture, and the landscape of the Tla-o-qui-aht First Nation. Mash-ups and overlays in the video production merge Nuučaan' ul and art world cultures and create points of entry for those foreign to either the former or the latter.

No Thompson masks or carvings were on exhibit. Despite his status within the coastal art world, few of his carved pieces are held in museum collections. However, Thompson's own "mash-ups" of cultures rimed the gallery walls, in effect, framing Wenstob's carved pieces. Twenty-five of Thompson's screen prints were displayed, most sourced from the university's Vincent Rickard (b. 1946) bequest, and some from Wenstob's family collection gifted from Thompson himself. Rickard, in collaboration with Indigenous artists, silkscreened Northwest Coast fine art prints for over forty years. His studio and commercial gallery in Victoria were critical to defining and supporting the infrastructure of the contemporary Northwest Coast Native art market. Originally an appropriated medium, screen prints are now as integral to coastal arts media as weaving and carving. Rickard printed nearly all of Thompson's works, 127 of which are in the university's collection. He and Thompson's centrality to the Northwest Coast market underpin the significance

of their representation at the Legacy Gallery. Beginning in the late 1940s, in relation to regional and national political shifts, Northwest Coast Indigenous artists began to claim a space for themselves in the art world. Already established as craftsmen both within the tourist market and for ethnographers, artists began to construct art practices that aligned with art world values, creating greater visibility for their culturally-rooted works and economic stability. The 1950s and 1960s were decades of development. In the 1970s, a new generation of fresh-faced young artists – Robert Davidson (b. 1946), Roy Henry Vickers (b. 1946), and Joe David (b. 1946) – set about establishing a definitive art world for contemporary Northwest Coast Indigenous arts.¹

Working alongside equally emerging art dealers, including printmaker Rickard, Thompson and his generation of artists cultivated a new art market. As heirs to more than a century of scrutiny from anthropologists, these artists elected to largely circumvent the interests and hierarchies of museums, choosing instead to focus their attentions on the market. The print medium was foundational to establishing and defining this new art space. Nuučaan' ul artists used prints to rewrite their visual vernacular into Northwest Coast art. Art Thompson, Ron Hamilton (then Hupqwachew, now Ki-ke-in, b. 1948), Joe David, Tim Paul (b. 1950), Patrick Amos (b. 1957), and Frank Charlie (b. 1952) emerged as young West Coast artists in the 1970s.² As new to adulthood as they were to arts careers, some carved,



some engraved, and they all made prints. They called themselves West Coast artists, which gave them a cool, non-ethnic, but geographically-specific

identity. Their silkscreens decidedly invoked the bold, graphic style of the coast, which connected them broadly, for uninitiated audiences, to “Northwest

2 | Art Thompson, *Serpent Dancer*, 1980. Silkscreen edition 125. (Photo: Courtesy of University of Victoria Legacy Art Galleries)

3 | Art Thompson, *Crawling Wolf*, 1980. Silkscreen edition 60. (Photo: Courtesy of University of Victoria Legacy Art Galleries)



Coast Native” style. Yet, they borrowed from each other, and from pieces in the historic record, to create something now identifiably Nuučaan’ ul.

This newness, this very hip, contemporary graphic, deployed colours and forms relatable to mainstream 1970s audiences. The avocado green, orange red, and disjointed geometry of *Serpent Dancer* (1980; Fig. 2), for example, embraced a popular palette and a postmodern sensibility that deconstructs forms into parts. At the time, Nuučaan’ ul artists were critiqued for these bold, geometric forms that did not conform to historic, Northern formline aesthetics.³ While anthropologists and artists alike pointed to the historic record of Nuučaan’ ul paintings on house fronts and dance screens, these graphics likewise embraced that which was accessible, legible, and popular.

Observable in David’s *Eats_qwin* (1977), or Paul’s *Thunderbird Dancer* (1979), West Coast artists were notable for architectural geometries that define the space of the paper, hint at coastal landscapes, and cultural architectures and objects. Exhibited both in Thompson’s original watercolor sketch and as a print, *Crawling Wolf* (1980), presents a dancer, partially transformed into a wolf, wearing a mask and crouching between a minimalist tree made of s-forms and two bold, black rectangles that nod to the frame of a long house (Fig. 3).⁴ In the nineteenth-century high period of Northern style the s-forms would be integrated into a larger design, but here are radically free floating alongside leaf shapes that have no specific cultural antecedents, but which obviously denote a plant. West Coast artists revisioned the use

of these graphic forms to separate their cultural aesthetics from Northern design while carving themselves a space in the emerging market for contemporary Northwest Coast arts.

Thompson would continue to drive graphic style within his community and within the larger market for the next three decades. Most of the prints in the exhibition are from the 1970s and 1980s, and illustrate Thompson's contributions to the evolution and codification of West Coast/Nuučaan' ul style. Several explicitly reference dancers, masks, and headdresses to tie them to Wenstob's carvings. A handful of later works hint at broader conceptual evolutions in the history of Northwest Coast prints. *Kwaht-Yaht Is Born* (1989) and *Not a Good Day* (1993) both include representational figures. *Kwaht-Yaht* (the first human) emerging from a mussel and the bubbles issuing from the blowhole of Whale enhance the narratives of the Nuučaan' ul stories being represented. Representational imagery remains relatively uncommon in the Northwest Coast art world. In both media and design, coastal artists prefer to cultivate stylized, historically-grounded pieces that locate their culture and geography.⁵ Wenstob's pieces carry on the legacy of Thompson's generation. In form and design, they communicate Nuučaan' ul cultural heritage.

However, Wenstob's approach to the art world dramatically breaks from Thompson's generation. Both Thompson and Wenstob attended art school, both apprenticed with elder artists, and both ground their practice within their

culture. Both kinds of works in *Emerging Through the Fog* are geared towards community engagement, and employ media legible to broad audiences. Still, Wenstob's exhibition insists upon the primacy of the Nuučaan' ul community occupying a public space, and a space for "universal" education. Where Thompson and his peers moved through (primarily anthropological) museum spaces, they cultivated popular appeal with arts practices centred in the market. This exhibition and its reception, suggested by the audience at Thompson's memorial gathering, participates in a new era for Northwest Coast arts. Coastal audiences, now fully comfortable in the exchange of cultural practices communicated through objects, welcome markedly cultural exhibitions in public art spaces. *Emerging Through the Fog* might be taken as a metaphorical step into a new, expansive art world where Northwest Coast Indigenous arts occupy the central space.

NOTES

- 1 *Northwest Coast Indian Artists Guild: 1977 Graphics Collection* (Ottawa: Canadian Indian Marketing Services).
- 2 Early colonial encounters led to a lasting misnaming of the Nuučaan' ul. Until the 1970s Nootka was the prevailing name. In the 1960s and 70s, the community (actually comprised of fourteen distinct bands) began to refer to themselves as West Coast. Today, these communities comprise the Nuu-chah-nulth Tribal Council.
- 3 Edith Ross interview by Edwin Hall, 11 Jan. 1978. "A Study of Northwest Coast Indian Serigraphs" transcript;