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Indigenous Influences

Exhibition catalogue for Indigenous Influences held at the Museum of Northwest Art from January 14 to March 26, 2017 in La Conner, Washington.

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Published by Regan Shrumm

420 Raynor Avenue

Victoria, BC

V9A 3A6

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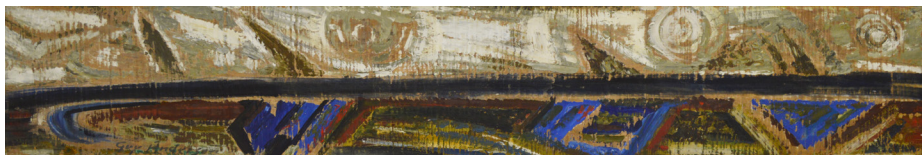
Cover image: *Sea Bear Panel* by Jesse Campbell

Printed in Canada

Library and Archives Canada Cataloguing in Publication

ISBN 978-0-9958600-0-1

Indigenous Influences



Guy Anderson
Night of the Whales
1957
Oil on wood panel
Gift of John Hauberg and Anne Gould Hauberg

Courtesy of the Museum of Northwest Art (Collection no. 1985.009.016).

Table of Contents

Introduction

1

The Northwest School's Interests In Indigenous Art

5

Swinomish Tribe

9

Petroglyphs

13

Helmi Juvonen

15

Understanding Northwest Coast Indigenous Art

17

Sincerest Form By Elissa Washuta

26

Contributors

31

Acknowledgements

33



Pioneer Square totem pole and pergola, Seattle, n.d. Photographer: Calvin F. Todd.

Courtesy of the University of Washington Libraries, Special Collections, Calvin F. Todd Photograph Collection (Negative no. Todd 12383).

INDIGENOUS INFLUENCES

REGAN SHRUMM

Introduction

“A lot of people don’t understand that when they are appropriating our artwork that our history, our culture and even our laws are codified into this, so that when you take it and you manipulate it and you bastardise it and you put it out there as your own without understandign the meaning, you’re doing significant damage.”

– Janet Rogers, Mohawk/Tuscarora poet, 2016¹

In 1953, *Life Magazine* published an article, “Mystic Painters of the Northwest,” that moved four painters into the national limelight: Mark Tobey, Morris Graves, Guy Anderson, and Kenneth Callahan. The magazine stated that the four artists, whom where deemed the Northwest School, had one connection between them: “... they embody a mystical feeling toward life and the universe. This mystical approach stems partly from the artists’ awareness of the overwhelming forces of nature which surround them in the region...”² While the article solely refers to the “forces of nature” as Asian and Asian-American art influence,³ the language the magazine uses implies an association to what the 1950s public would have considered Indigenous spirituality. Although researchers have acknowledged that these four artists, as well as their fellow artist acquaintances like Hemi Juvonen and Wesley Wehr, began to collect Pacific Northwest Indigenous art and visit local Indigenous ceremonies, a connection between the Indigenous peoples and non-Indigenous artists from this region is missing. Art historian Sheryl Conkelton proposes that Indigenous and non-Indigenous evolving histories responding to cross-cultural pressures “...[have] yet to be integrated into our sense of mid-century Northwest art.”⁴ *Indigenous Influences* examines the significance of Indigenous design and spirituality on Tobey, Graves, Anderson, Callahan, and Juvonen, as well as the problems and complexities that come with appropriating Indigenous styles.

Cultural appropriation is the act of a person from one culture taking culturally distinct items, aesthetics, or spiritual practices from another culture. The item is adopted without permission or contact, and often imitated without being a direct copy. Cultural appropriation has been occurring for hundreds of years, as people from various cultures interact and create hybrid communities, foods, clothing, art, and ceremonies. While appropriation is not always a negative concept, it often becomes harmful when a dominant culture appropriates from a minority culture.⁵ Throughout the world, Indigenous nations in particular have been subject to negative cultural appropriation. For example, Indigenous imagery is used in the city of Seattle throughout the 19th century, from the city's annual Potlatch, named after a gift-gifting feast practiced by many Pacific Northwest Indigenous peoples, to the Tlingit totem pole in Pioneer Square. By examining this imagery, historian Coll Thrush explained that Seattle crafted a narrative that states it was the premier city of the Northwest Coast.⁶ However, the city would often use Indigenous imagery to depict Indigenous people as cannibals, uneducated, or drunken, creating misconceptions that would last decades.⁷

Cultural appropriation can hurt Indigenous artists financially as imitation Indigenous art does not create a new category of artwork, but instead only adds to an existing market.⁸ Therefore, customers may buy non-Indigenous artwork that fills their desire to own a 'Native-looking' piece. However, cultural appropriation can also misrepresent Indigenous cultures. Those who are appropriating might not fully understand the cultures and therefore create potentially harmful or false meanings and ideas about Indigenous cultures. Philosopher Elizabeth Burns Coleman explains that since traditional lands, ceremonies, and general ways of life have been confiscated from Indigenous peoples, "...the only thing left for Aboriginal people is identity through art, and this is now being abused."⁹



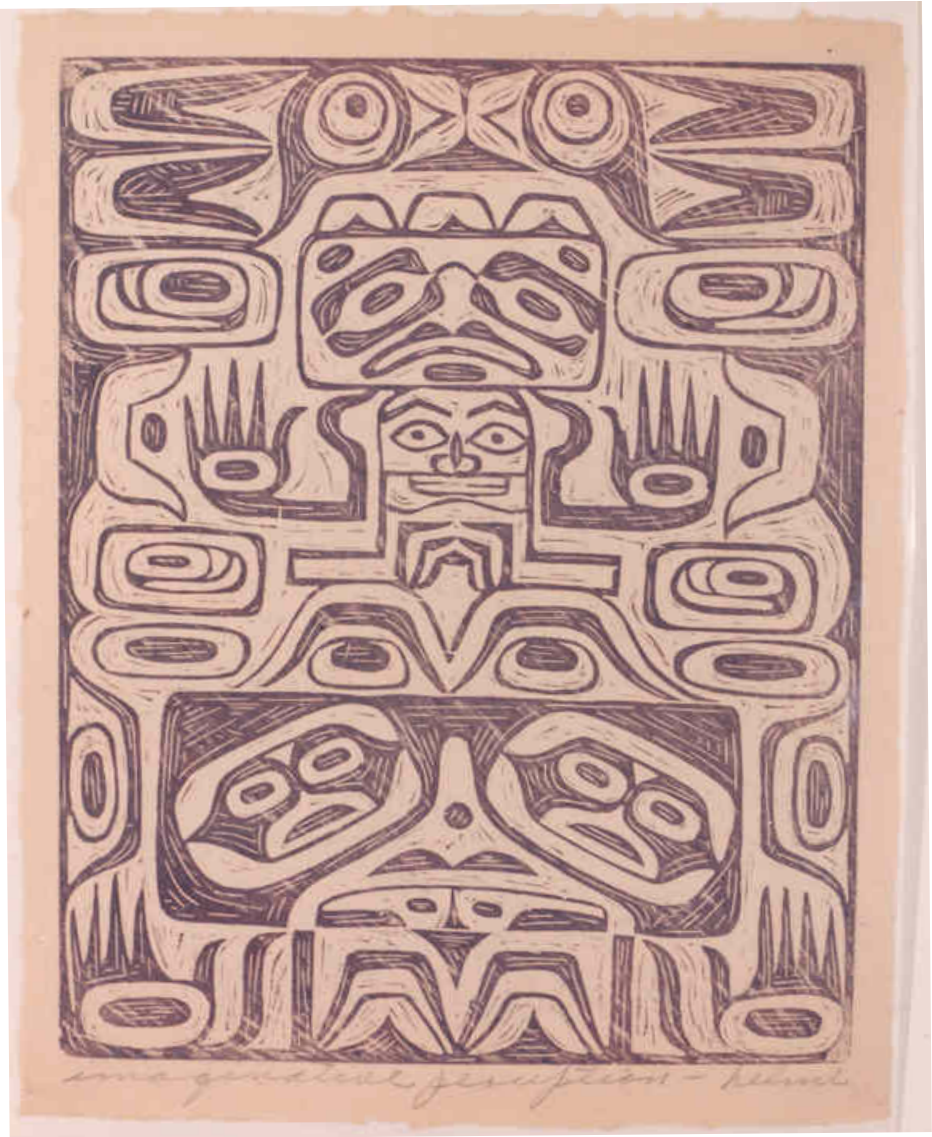
Seattle Potlatch Parade with parade participants wearing totem pole costumes, 1912.
Photographer: unknown.

Courtesy of the University of Washington Libraries, Special Collections (Negative no. UW 313).



Official postcard invitation to the Seattle Golden Potlatch, 1912. Printed by The Hopf Brothers Company of Seattle.

Courtesy of the C. L. Morgan Postcard Collection.



Helmi Juvonen
Imaginative Perceptions
c. 1953
Linoleum print
Bequest of Dr. and Mrs. Ulrich Fritzsche

Courtesy of the Museum of Northwest Art (Collection no. 1986.002.006).

The Northwest School's Interests in Indigenous Art

“Art, if Pacific, must have roots either in the Orient or the American Indian as no environment per se gives ‘Art.’”

– Mark Tobey, artist, 1956¹⁰

The Northwest School is an artistic movement based in the Puget Sound area. Though the defining artists of the movement are Mark Tobey, Morris Graves, Kenneth Callahan, and Guy Anderson, the inspirations are traceable to many artists who hung around the four men's social circle, as well as contemporary artists today. A defining characteristic of the Northwest School is the artists consciously respond to the events, cultures, and landscapes of the Pacific Northwest.

Before the Northwest School artists became familiar with each other, many of them were interested in Indigenous art. By the early 1920s, Mark Tobey began collecting Indigenous art in thrift stores, and even bought several pieces from Seattle harbor's Ye Olde Curiosity Shop.¹¹ As a boy, Guy Anderson was taken to the Washington State Museum (now the Burke Museum), where the totem poles and wood carvings by the Haida and other northern tribes were said to have left a lasting impression on him.¹² Kenneth Callahan was a childhood neighbor to Ralph Breckenridge, a Blackfoot painter and local bronco champion, who encouraged Callahan to paint.¹³

However, an interest in Indigenous art broadened for all four artists in the 1930s. With the spread of fascism and the onset of World War II, the four artists felt that the modern 'Western' world was marked in irrationality. The Northwest School started to meet once a week to discuss and create art using their anti-war thoughts and their ideals of world unity.¹⁴ Instead of referencing European art history, which the Northwest School felt was created in a culture that bred hatred and unreasonableness, they looked at Indigenous arts for inspiration. However, according to curator Laura Landau, Indigenous arts

and cultures were seen by the artists as “living in a prehistoric age, uncorrupted by Western civilization.”¹⁵ This very declaration is ironic as by the 1930s, Indigenous people around the country had been forced to give up their some traditional cultures due to two hundred years of oppression. Tobey, Graves, Anderson, and Callahan may have had a particular interest in Northwest Coast Indigenous culture as they thought that their spiritual beliefs of universal humanity as well as their faith in the primacy of the laws of nature were in-line with Indigenous culture.

Interest in Indigenous art was not just found in the Northwest Coast of the United States, but also in Surrealist artists like Max Ernst as well as New York Abstract Expressionists like Jackson Pollack. However, this Indigenous influence was more at the conceptual level compared to the Northwest School, who occasionally used specific formal or design terms in their artworks. The Surrealist and Abstract Expressionists artists wanted to use Indigenous artworks as influence to evoke the origins of natural and human history, revealing the foundations of the modern mind through a universal psychology.¹⁶ Not surprisingly, the Surrealists and Abstract Expressionists of New York came to know Indigenous artworks from museums and books, yet this was also true of most of the Northwest School. Although the Northwest School had a chance to meet and talk with Indigenous artists, most of the Northwest School observed from afar. Like most enthusiasm for Indigenous art, the Surrealists, Abstract Expressionists, and Northwest School’s perception of the art were based more on what they thought of it rather than on an understanding of the realities of the cultures.

While many Northwest School attended ceremonies, such as the Swinomish Nation’s Treaty Day, most of the artists had no connection to Indigenous arts. In an interview with curator Patricia Svoboda for the Seattle Art Museum’s *Northwest Traditions* exhibition, Guy Anderson admitted that he never personally talked to any of the artists from the Northwest Indigenous nations while he witnessed the ceremonies. Instead, he left anthropologist and friend Erna Gunther to be an ‘interpreter,’ who would describe

the meanings of the ceremonies to all members of the Northwest School.¹⁷ When observing the notebooks that Helmi Juvonen, an artist associate of the Northwest School, used to sketch Indigenous peoples and ceremonies at the University of Washington Special Collections, the information is anthropological in nature. Juvonen has noted down questions on imaginary and symbolism in wardrobe and artifacts. She appears to look at Indigenous people as curiosities, constantly questioning their 'savage' and 'un-godly' practices in her notebook. One notices, however, that most of the Northwest School use a much more literal interpretation of Indigenous motifs than in the work of Surrealists and Abstract Expressionist. One can only guess at the reasons, but perhaps the regional artists were more concerned with creating a sense of place and home.

While these three artistic groups wrongfully interpreted Indigenous arts, by taking an interest in Indigenous arts, they significantly changed the way that Indigenous art was looked at by non-Indigenous people. By the 1940s, rather than being limited to anthropology and natural history museums, Indigenous art was beginning to be shown alongside non-Indigenous artists in art museums in major exhibitions like the Museum of Modern Art, the National Gallery, and the Seattle Art Museum.¹⁸ Ironically, while the artistic world was recognizing the beauty and power of Indigenous art, it was during a large period of cultural oppression for many Indigenous nations.



The Swinomish Totem Pole, carved by the Paul family. This new pole was raised on May 19, 1989 is a replica based on Charlie Edwards' 1938 W.P.A. Totem Pole . Photographer: Joe Mabel.

Courtesy of Joe Mabel.

Swinomish Tribe

“We are overcoming the broken cycles that have challenged and impacted our way of life. Our strength comes from the values and principles of cultural teachings that keep our spirit and mind balanced as we continue to walk in two worlds. We are committed to providing a prosperous future for generations to come.”

*– Dianne Edwards, Swinomish citizen, 2013*¹⁹

Although the Northwest School and its associated artists were not heavily involved with Indigenous communities, many of the artists did attend ceremonies held by the Swinomish Tribe.

For thousands of years, the Swinomish people maintained a culture through living off the natural resources that are found around what is now known as Skagit County, Washington. They are known as the People of the Salmon, and their way of life and teachings are connected to the land and waters, still to this day. However, by the mid-19th century, the Swinomish Tribe was overwhelmed by the number of white settlers who wanted to possess their land in the region. In 1855, after much discontent from the Indigenous peoples that white settlers were encroaching on Indigenous lands, the Swinomish Tribe, along with several other nations, signed the Treaty of Point Elliott. This treaty gave fishing rights, reservation land, promise of Indigenous schools, and payment for the lands that were given up by the tribes. However, it took decades for the federal government to fulfill any of its treaty promises.²⁰

In 1883, the federal government established the Code of Indian Offenses, thereby outlawing and/or restricting traditional ceremonies in many reservations.²¹ This code specifically hurt the Swinomish community’s connection to their land and ancestors, making it difficult for both culture and the Lushootseed language to develop in younger generations. This hardship was only made more difficult by the fact that Swinomish children were taken by Federal Indian Agents to over 40 miles away from their homes to attend the Tuliap Nation’s boarding school, where children were forced to

assimilate and become ‘civilized.’²² Contact between students and their families was restricted by the boarding school employees and Federal Indian Agents, therefore making the teaching of traditions nearly impossible. The boarding school and the lack of traditional teachings caused emotional, spiritual, and psychological trauma that persists to this day.

In 1912, the Indian Agent Charles Buchanan allowed for a slight resumption of these ceremonies, called Treaty Day, as a way to commemorate the anniversary of the Treaty of Point Elliott. While the Swinomish Tribe embraced the resumption (though not due to the celebration of the treaty), Buchanan again shut down the ceremonies referring to them as non-progressive “pagan” rituals.²³ When Buchanan died in 1920, Treaty Day resumed by the 1930s, and were opened to the non-Indigenous friends and community members in Skagit County.²⁴ This open summons continued until the 1960s, allowing artists such as Mark Tobey, Morris Graves, Guy Anderson, and Helmi Juvonen to view the ceremonies.

While the Swinomish Tribe has been through a lot of pain, they are also resilient. The Swinomish Tribe is currently working with the La Conner High School to teach the Lushootseed language courses to both Indigenous and non-Indigenous students.²⁵ In 2016, the tribe was honored with a Climate Adaption Leadership Award for Natural Resources by the federal government for implementing adaptive actions for natural resources in the Pacific Northwest.²⁶ The Swinomish Tribe is currently one of the largest employers in Skagit County, and also hosts numerous community events, such as the Skagit River Salmon Festival.



A coiled Swinomish basket, n.d.

Courtesy of the Burke Museum of Natural History and Culture (Catalog number 7926).

Petroglyphs

“I think still one important thing is to see great drawings, and not just contemporary ones, but to see all the greats, beginning with the Altamira Lascaux Caves; beginning 10,000 years ago.”

*– Guy Anderson, artist, 1987*²⁷

One interest with the Northwest School that developed alongside Indigenous-style art was linguistic signs such as petroglyphs, carvings found on rocks that were created by ancient Indigenous peoples. Petroglyphs marked the beginning of humans and their relationship to both art and nature. Therefore, the Northwest School used petroglyph symbols to refer to the prehistoric age that was “uncorrupted by Western civilization.”²⁸

Some artworks like Helmi Juvonen’s *Pictograph* (n.d.) are based on actual petroglyphs that artists had discovered in books. Kenneth Callahan’s interconnecting rock-forms and figures in artworks like *Clashing Rocks* (c. 1950s) or *Creation* (n.d.) were supposed to be inspired by the petroglyphs he would encounter while hiking as a boy in Raymond, Washington.²⁹ Tobey’s symbols in works like *Characters* (1954), are simplified outlines of many Northwest Coast animals such as the orca (top right) or deer skull (top left) that look reminiscent of petroglyph pictures that depict great scenes involving humans and animals.



Kenneth Callahan
The Clashing Rocks
c. 1950s
Tempera on board
Bequest of James Odlin Estate

Courtesy of the Museum of Northwest Art (Collection no. 1999.059.002).

Helmi Juvonen

“Case after case of this [Indigenous] material makes us aware of the fact that these supposedly simple people once were creative artists and expressed themselves in such a way that we can marvel at, and appreciate, their handicraft.”

– Erna Gunther, anthropologist, 1947³⁰

Out of all the artists associated with the Northwest School, Helmi Juvonen was most connected with Indigenous artists. Between 1938 to 1940, Juvonen joined the Works Progress Administration, a progressive federal program that helped employ artists and many other types of workers to help the country get out of the Depression.³¹ With the WPA, Juvonen helped create dioramas of Indigenous life for the Washington State Museum (now the Burke Museum) with anthropologist and friend Erna Gunther. Juvonen’s interest in Indigenous art and culture intensified after the WPA, when the artist would often spend weeks at a time at the Makah, Yakama, Swinomish, Lummi, Muckleshoot, and Tlinght Tribes where she recorded ceremonies. When she was not able to travel outside of Seattle, Juvonen would draw hundreds of Indigenous art sketches of works in the Seattle Art Museum and the Washington State Museum. Although she did spend much time with various tribes, there is a lack of evidence that Juvonen really got to know the people, often relying on Erna Gunther to supply her with contacts and information.³² Juvonen’s drawings and prints were not completely copied, and are often embedded with the artist’s own interpretations, such as added Scandinavian folk art flowers,³³ background, dynamic lines, and the simplification of shapes.

Although Juvonen should be recognized for her visting to various tribes, there is a problematic nature to the artist’s work. Firstly, though Juvonen was invited to view the ceremonies by various Indigenous nations, the ceremonies were still sacred in nature, and therefore should not be viewed by the general public. Yet Juvonen’s prints are circulated in museums around the world revealing scenes that only certain individuals from that tribe should be able to view.

Secondly, Juvonen's simplified sketches of Indigenous art make many of the works look unintentionally child-like. While pieces like *Sisioohl Figure* (n.d.) depict the realistic detail that Juvonen was able to draw, other pieces, such as *Indian Family* (1953) are more cartoonish in imagery, giving the appearance of an untrained artist. To the average viewer, some of Juvonen's works may suggest they were created by Indigenous artists, thus perpetuating the stereotypical perspective that Indigenous artists were 'primitive' people, who could only create 'crafts' and not 'fine art'.



Helmi Juvonen
Indian Family
c. 1953
Linoleum print on rice paper

Courtesy of the Museum of Northwest Art (Collection no. 1986.002.014).

Understanding Northwest Coast Indigenous Art

“The observer must be mindful of the simple fact that there are three ‘spaces’: phenomenal space (the world of nature), the space ‘outside’ of us; the space ‘outside’ of us; the mental space, the space in which dreams occur, and the images of the imagination take consciousness are revealed. From this space of consciousness come the universally significant images and symbols of the greatest religious works of art.”

– Morris Graves, artist, 1950 ³⁴

Northwest Coast Indigenous art covers a large range, from what is now known as Washington and Oregon, Vancouver Island, the lower mainland and western coast of British Columbia, and the southeast Alaska. More than one hundred Indigenous tribes inhabit this area, each with their own distinctive culture and language. Similar to the Northwest Coast Indigenous cultures, the art is far from a homogenous style. It ranges from a close realism to complete abstraction, and there are many different artistic styles among different language groups in the area.

For many decades, art and anthropology museums, art dealers, and even tourist gift shops have been exhibiting work from the Tlingit, Haida, and Kwakwaka’wakw Nations in Alaska and British Columbia, over Coast Salish art from Washington State and southern British Columbia. While the Northwest School artists lived near and interacted with Coast Salish artists, they would more often reference Haida, Tlingit, and Kwakwaka’wakw art.

Coast Salish art usually employs geometric symmetry with the use of circles, crescents, and trigons (a triangle with curved sides), and is often more minimalist in style compared to other Northwest Coast Indigenous art. Art from the Haida, Tlingit, and Kwakwaka’wakw Nations on the other hand, such as the Burke Museum’s Tlingit bentwood box, use ovoid and U form shapes, with thicker contoured lines that give the impression of continuity between the various



Mark Tobey
Woman in a Market Stall
1946
Tempera
Gift of the Blair and Lucille Kirk Collection

Courtesy of the Museum of Northwest Art (Collection no. 2004.138.066).



A carved cedar Tlingit bentwood box inlaid with operculum shells.

Courtesy of the Burke Museum of Natural History and Culture, catalog number 1396.



Guy Anderson
Fishing Boat- Evening
1962

Oil on board
Gift of The Blair and Lucille Kirk Collection
Courtesy of Museum of Northwest Art (Collection no. 2004.138.001).

elements of the design.³⁵ The use of these thick black outlines, as well as the common use of black, red, and blue, connects many of the Northwest School's artists to Haida and Tlingit art, and can especially be seen in works like Anderson's *Night of the Whales* (1957) and Tobey's *Woman in a Market Stall* (1946).

The Northwest School not only used Indigenous styles in their artworks, but also what they misconstrued as Indigenous spirituality. With a lack of interaction from Indigenous artists directly, the Indigenous art and ceremonies that the Northwest School attended was perceived more as a form of entertainment of a 'vanishing' people, and an opportunity to convey identities onto the Indigenous population.³⁶

Tobey, Graves, Callahan and Anderson each identified an interconnectedness between humans and all aspects of the universe, which can be seen in their pieces. Nature became a central presence, and was the source of stability,³⁷ even though the artists often portrayed the living activity of organic matter. Throughout his career, Callahan noted his attempt to visually convey the "interrelationship between man, rock, and the elements."³⁸ In both *Clashing Rocks* (c. 1950s) and *Creation* (n.d.), Callahan's human figures blend in with the geometric rocks, creating a flux of dynamic movement between the two and therefore representing an interconnectedness. With Tobey's white writing, a method that overlaid white lines and symbols to create an abstract field, the artist created a multi-dimensional web that abstracts a higher state of consciousness. Or, as Tobey stated, the white writing gives "awareness to the smallest detail of [Earth's] vastness as through the whole world were contained therein and from a leaf, an insect, a universe appeared."³⁹ The hypnotic repetitiveness of Tobey's white writing is similar to Coast Salish spindle whorls, a tool that weavers use to create thinner wool. The spindle whorls are more significant to the Coast Salish than mere practicality—these objects are also spiritual in nature. The whorls are decorated on the convex side, which faces the spinner when in use, with floral, geometric, anthropomorphic, or zoomorphic designs.⁴⁰ Some evidence suggests that the creatures are associated with the ancestors who act as spiritual helpers for the spinner. Due to the pulsating movement of the whorl,

the spinner often reaches a trance-like state.⁴¹ While in this capacity, the weaver may see a spirit guide emerge from the whorl.

Transforming is also a common motif in Northwest Coast Indigenous art that was used by the Northwest School. In many creation stories in the Northwest Coast, creatures were essentially all alike, but donned the cloaks of various animals to adopt different appearances and behaviors.⁴² This belief in transformation is often connected to oneness of all things in Northwest Coast cultures. Gitksan carver Ken Mowatt created a bentwood bowl that depicts an owl/human hybrid. Although there are feather designs surrounding the piece, the face has smaller eyes and defined eyebrows which could indicate that the owl is transforming into a human. This artwork also demonstrates the multiple perspectives that Northwest Coast Indigenous artists often use as viewers can see the owl's wing feathers both in the front of the bowl and on the sides. This is very similar to Graves' pieces, where his bird figures, like with *Spirit Bird* (1950), are ensnared in a mysterious "cosmic atmosphere," therefore depicting more than perspective of a bird in motion.⁴³

While the Northwest School artists tried to accurately adapt Indigenous design and spirituality, they also creatively misread their understanding of Indigenous art. The Northwest School assumed that Indigenous artists lived in a "primitive" world in need of preservation and representation,⁴⁴ prompting to the adaption of Indigenous designs. However, this has led to contemporary Indigenous artists finding themselves confined by cultural assumptions not of their own making. It has also produced a continuation of cultural appropriation of Indigenous arts.



Morris Graves
Spirit Bird
1950
Tempera on paper
Gift of The Catterall Collection

Courtesy of the Museum of Northwest Art (Collection no. 2004.142.013).



A contemporary carved bentwood bowl made by Gitksan artist Ken Mowatt in 2004.
Courtesy of the Burke Museum of Natural History and Culture (Catalog number 2004-2.418).

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Sincerest Form

ELISSA WASHUTA

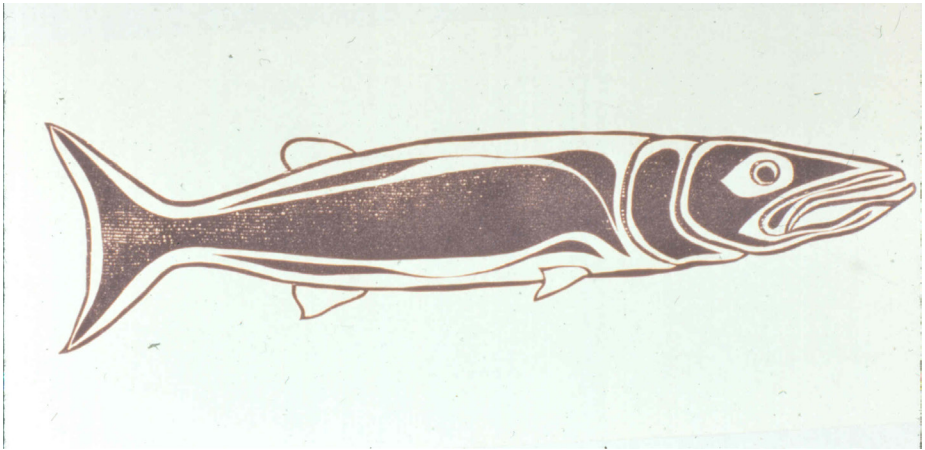
The walls of every room in my house display formline prints—two-dimensional Northwest Coast Indigenous art with characteristic curvilinear shapes that are combined according to a logic older than the settler colonial states¹ from which contemporary non-Indigenous artists now emerge with borrowed elements: an ovoid here, an S-form there.

Daisy Sewid-Smith writes,

“When non-Indigenous people, and some of our own non-traditionalists, take cognizance of what we now know as ‘Northwest Coast Native art,’ they scrutinize and they analyze the object or painting as you would a Rembrandt. They study the light, the shade, the brush strokes, and then they proceed to interpret what they are viewing in European art terms. They see the paintings, carvings, and dances as visual art and nothing more. [. . .]To the traditional Indigenous Kwakwaka’wakw, our carvings and representations are not just art objects or paintings. They are alive: they teach, they reveal knowledge of the past. The symbols and carvings cause a spasmodic action in the brain, and torrents of stories and meanings flow to the surface of our remembrance. They explain our existence in the universe. They reveal who we are, where we originated, who our ancestors were, and whom and what they encountered.”²

Native-style aesthetics have become so trendy that even the Seahawks logo is rendered in mock-formline style, inspired by a Kwakwaka’wakw transformation mask.³ I live in Seattle, and imitative formline is everywhere: on travel mugs, in galleries, and in downtown tourist shop windows where it’s splashed across t-shirted mannequin chests.

In American settler culture, imitation is, as the cliché goes, considered the sincerest form of flattery. But imitation of Northwest



Philip McCracken
Spirit Fish
1952

Woodcut on paper
Gift of John Hauberg and Anne Gould Hauberg

Courtesy of the Museum of Northwest Art (Collection no.1986.009.001).

Coast Native art can be a violence. Without participation in a lineage of the careful transfer of intellectual property—the knowledge of how to use individual elements to craft a whole work, deliberately passed on by a skilled artist-teacher—the use of a few echoes represents a ripping of visual elements from the culture that birthed them.

Between 1884 and 1951, Northwest Coast Indigenous peoples in Canada were legally prohibited from practicing potlatch⁴ and the dances associated with it. Fearing jail time, many Indigenous people stopped passing on traditions that had shaped their cultures for thousands of years. In the United States, the potlatch wasn't officially outlawed, but through the efforts of government agents and missionaries, the practice was seriously wounded and diminished.⁵

Nearly every day, I encounter instances of non-Native people wanting to plunder our cultural practices for what they see as the most precious nuggets, which they take freely without the burden, blessing, and lives-long responsibility of Indigeneity. To be Native is to have relations, to be responsible to those relations, and to contribute to the continuance of cultures that have endured on this continent for thousands of years.

Reducing Native art to a cluster of related elements and appropriating a selection thereof is an act rooted in the colonial policies designed to eliminate us. Those who wish to erase us do so by reducing our existence to parts. They tear us limb from limb. Some parts, they kill. Some, they take, and before long, they begin to call them their own. The parts become disposable when they work them into passing fads, like Western films and warriors painted on black velvet. In truth, though, when they take a part, they don't take anything at all, because there are no parts: there are only wholes, and the wholes can never belong to anyone, but the people who risked their lives for them.

Because Northwest Coast Native art was never intended simply to please the eye, it is meant to be used—and my understanding is that,

at least in some communities, the works themselves have a spiritual need to be used: masks for dancing, baskets for gathering, bentwood boxes for holding.

What are the spiritual needs of works built from plundering?

The same, maybe, as a nation built from plundering—a nation sickened by the wounds that birthed it, a nation that has never been well. There are people who have the remedy. They will not reveal it outside the walls that keep it from leaking into the changed world that only knows how to dismember, to leech, to absorb until there's nothing left. The sincerest form of flattery: to respect the closed door of the smokehouse. To trust that the people inside know their lives, histories, and culture better than anyone seeking to visit. To pray for an end to plundering. To know that it hurts us, but it hasn't killed us yet.

Notes

- 1 The U.S. and Canada are considered settler colonial states because these nations were built upon stolen land and with the labor of the Indigenous people displaced and exploited by foreign colonists.
- 2 Daisy Sewid-Smith, "Interpreting Cultural Symbols of the People from the Shore," in *Native Art of the Northwest Coast*, edited by Charlotte Townsend-Gault, Jennifer Kramer, and Ki-ke-in (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2013), 16.
- 3 Robin K. Wright, "The Mask that Inspired the Seahawks Logo," Burke Museum Blog, <http://www.burkemuseum.org/blog/mask-inspired-seahawks-logo>
- 4 Potlatch is a gifting tradition and economic practice among Northwest Coast peoples. Wealth is redistributed during a ceremony involving food, dance, and other ceremonial elements.
- 5 Amy Rolph, "Ask the Burke: What's a potlatch?" *Seattle P-I*. <http://blog.seattlepi.com/thebigblog/2011/01/26/ask-the-burke-whats-a-potlatch/>

Contributors



Photographer: Chris Felver.

Courtesy of the artist.

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Photographer: Andrew Paquet.

Courtesy of the artist.

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Jesse Campbell is...



Photographer: Kirk Schwartz

Courtesy of the artist.



Guy Anderson
Eclipse
1960
Oil on board
Bequest of the James Odlin Estate

Courtesy of the Museum of Northwest Art (Collection no.1999.059.001).

Acknowledgements

The Museum of Northwest Art is a non-profit museum in La Conner, Washington that opened on October 3, 1981, originally called The Valley Museum of Northwest Art. Its mission is to "connect people with the art, diverse cultures, and environments of the Northwest."

Both the exhibition and publication, *Indigenous Influences*, is generously funded by the Dana and Toni Ann Rust Curatorial Fellowship, with the support of the Museum of Northwest Art staff.

Thank you to the Museum of Northwest Art staff, in particular to Curator Kathleen Moles and Associate Curator Chloe Dye Sherpe, whose expertise was much appreciated. Thank you to Swinomish Cultural Director Aurelia Washington and Swinomish Tribal Archivist Theresa Trebon for advising on Swinomish's history and the artwork selection. Thank you to Elissa Washuta, for writing a wonderful essay amongst her busy schedule. Thank you to Jesse Campbell for allowing for his artwork, *Sea Bear Panel*, to be used for the cover of this publication. Thank you also to Dr. Victoria Wyatt and Adrian Paradis for graciously editing the texts and giving through comments. Finally, thank you to the Burke Museum of History and Culture for allowing their artifacts to be on display for *Indigenous Influences* as well as the University of Washington Special Collections for assisting with the publication's research.