An Introduction to Indigenous Art of the Northwest Coast

The continuity between traditional and contemporary

with Jane Horner, MA
Today

Introductions
The Pacific Northwest – geography, history
Five Indigenous Peoples of the NWC
Coast Salish Art
Indigenous regions, Pre-Contact

Point to All
Contemporary Indigenous communities on the west coast

Our focus: Coast Salish, Nuu-Chah-Nulth, Kwakwaka’wakw, Tsimshian, Tlingit and Haida.
Point out Vancouver & Alert Bay, Cowichan locations!
Geography
BC Coast – Many Mountain ranges throughout BC, rugged shoreline, rivers winding through – Fraser, Columbia, Thompson
Multi-coloured starfish and seaweed at low tide

Rich marine life – clams, oysters, mussels

(Al Harvey)
Ancient trees – 700 years old in a few places – Carmanah, Claquot Sound, Haida Gwaii
Growth so thick made it difficult to move from one place to another. Rivers were the original highways.
Sea animals

Variety of sea creatures: seals, sea otters, salmon, cod, halibut, sea lions, orcas, large whales
Wolves, mountain goats, elk, cougars, wolverines, marmots
All kinds of bears

All kinds of bears. Black & brown bears, grizzlies and these spirit bears

These creatures appear in most NWC art
Favourite artworks from all of Northwest Coast
Bill Reid, Haida, Raven and The First Men, 1980
(1920-1988) Museum of Anthropology, UBC
Yellow cedar, creation story of the Haida people
Spirit of Haida Gwaii, Washington
Haida Chief’s Rattle

Handle on left, Raven with sun in beak, shaman talking to animal. Owned by an individual chief and passed down to next chief.
Beau Dick, Mask

Contemporary, raven looking out from cedar bark hair
Kwakwaka’wakw Alert Bay (1955-March 2017)
Susan Point, Salish, Looking Forward, 2000

Glass, wood, spindle and whorl, whirlpool
Today’s focus
Robert Davidson, Child of Mouse Woman, 1983

Contemporary interpretation of Haida design
Distinctive northern NWC shapes – trigon, U-shape
Debra Sparrow, Salish Weaving

Vancouver Indigenous Fashion Week
Lawrence Paul Yuxweluptun, 
Portrait of a Residential School Girl, 2013

Acrylic, gold leaf on canvas. 177 X 135 cm
Salish & Kamloops
halo
Northwest Coast History
• 12,000 years ago – early footprints (Calvert Island)

• 5000 years ago – earliest artwork (human figure bowl, Fraser River delta)
History con’t.

• 1500 AD– mud & plank houses

• 1774 Spanish arrive on Vancouver Island, fur trade begins (sea otter fur)

• 1778 Capt. Cook visits Vancouver Island
Typical NWC longhouse 1778

Drawing by Cook's artist

Large, for several related families. House posts, box drums, blankets worn
History con’t

• 1884 Residential schools began, run by Canadian churches & government
• Students 4-16 years of age
• Conditions varied: no Native language allowed, hair cut short, no sibling contact
• Taught religion, farm labour & chores
• Goal: assimilation
History con’t

• 1860’s smallpox kills 1 in 3 BC Indigenous people
• 1885 Indian Act outlawed potlatches
• 1951 Indian Act amended. Right to potlatch & pursue land claims
• 1960 right to federal vote
History con’t

• 1982 Constitution guaranteed Ab. rights

• 1999 Delgamuukw decision- Gitsan & Wet’suwet’en right of ownership of ancestral lands. BC gov’t & Nisga’a agreement

• 2015 Truth & Reconciliation Report & Calls for Action
Susan Point, Welcome to Vancouver International Airport

Monumental. For people arriving from outside Canada Coast Salish House posts and enormous whorl 16’
Coast Salish Location

• Vancouver - Fraser River Delta

• Victoria & Southern Vancouver Island

• Washington State, northern Oregon
Coast Salish Art

• Least known art form on NWC

• Different from other NWC traditions: no tradition of public art (like totem poles)

• Art traditionally made only for private family use and sacred ceremony
Traditional Coast Salish Art

- Massive interior house posts, tiny figures & delicate engraving on ritual implements & personal adornments

- Ritual items remain cherished

- Found in museums around the world
Qelemteleq, Human Figure Bowl, 5000 years old (Now at National Gallery)

Shaman’s ancestor spirit. Early NWC eyes, snake up back. Pecked. Approx. 10”. MOV. Given Traditional welcome and renaming at NGC 2017 by Coast Salish and Kitigan Zibi elders. Agreement with NGC: red blanket each night, return to Coast Salish community when requested. Found Fraser River 1920 by farmer Skytte. 60 exist. See at CMH visit.
Salish Human Figure Bowl

1 - 500 CE, 38 cm. (15in.) Fraser R. & Van. Is. often rattlesnakes, skeletonized shamanistic markings, elaborate coiffures. Here a mouth pursed in song. Found Victoria garden. Marpole. RBCM (Ruth)
Musqueam grave box

Musqueam = one of several communities within Coast Salish First Nation
3D Carved fishers decorate grave boxes and mortuary houses for important families. Four fishers (weasel-like, 50 inches, carnivorous) = spiritual cleansing = high status family MOA
Coast Salish Effigy Figure

MOA. Saanich, (CMH VII G 357?)
Ancestor. Fisher? Memorial held a year after the death. Rewrapped for final burial
Salish Bear and Ancestor house post

MOA, interior house post. Art always had a meaning and a function. Here it would have related an ancestor’s story about a bear. Their common origin. We’ll see this house post again later!
Susan A. Point, Musqueam, Coast Salish, OC, RCA

In the 1980’s Salish art was unknown, had disappeared into museums around the world. Susan Point began her research at MOV, MOA, RBCM, then AMNH and BM
Salish artist. Spindle Whorl, before 1870

Left side - Eagle, concentric circles, ovals Right: tri-negs, 4 eyes. before 1870. Musqueam/Sto:ll0, Fraser R. diameteer 20 cent. Height 65 cent. British Museum
Creating wool with a spindle whorl

Anyone know how it’s done? See spindle and whorl, loom, blanket. Twirling whorl. wool made of dog wool, mountain goat wool, sheep wool, fillers could include fireweed, cotton and waterfowl down.
Sulsultin (Coast Salish Spindle Whorl), before 1912

Eyes, eye brows, crescents, trigons, open mouth (song)

Cowichan. Her research: her desire for traditional foundation for her contemporary works. Close connection between human & animal
Salish design elements

• Oval
• Crescent
• Extended crescent
• U-form
• Positive & negative Trigons
Coast Salish design elements
Oval, crescent, extended crescent, U-form, positive & negative tri-gons
Salish spindle whorl found at Sardis BC

Eagle with straight leading edge to its wings of extended trigons, crest, hooked beak, tailfeathers, and claws. Fish have round eyes, curved snouts, straight mouths, crescent gills and sometimes fins and crescent tails RBCM. Fraser Valley.
Snake Spindle Whorl found at Cowichan, Vancouver Is.

Blunt snout, protruding tongue, tapered tail. RBCM
Crescents, trigons
Detail of engraving on Cowichan whorl

See NWC eye and crest, 3 trigons
Susan Point, Salmon, 1981

Her first print. Contemporary Coast Salish art.
Circle, Whorl design. Circle, Crescent, trigon, movement!
Salish life focus on fishing
Susan A. Point (Musqueam) OC, RCA

• Born 1952 Alert Bay, Vancouver Is.
• Attended Residential School 4 years
• Legal Secretary
• Influences: mother, Edna Grant and uncle, other artists, especially carvers
• Lives on Musqueam First Nation, Vancouver
Musqueam First Nation & City of Vancouver
• 1980’s Began with prints and jewelry

• 1986 exhibition at Museum of Anthropology, UBC “New Visions”

• 2017 solo exhibition at Vancouver Art Gallery: Susan Point: Spindle Whorl
only gallery owner who encouraged Susan from the beginning, offering to purchase every second print of hers etc.

VAG catalogue she acknowledges his support & encouragement
Qulqulil, 1986

The Coast Salish legend: “the ordinary could not suffer the extraordinary”
Susan Point, Out of the Shadows

movement
Susan Point

Colour, house post

Any Salish elements??? Trigons, circles, split U-forms, pronounced eyebrows, open mouth singing - ceremony 3D
Susan Point, Abstract
Susan Point, Scanned Salmon, 2008
Susan Point, Beyond the Edge, 2015
Serigraph 33 X 33 National Museum of the American Indian, DC
What do you see?
Susan Point, No Title (Butterfly Grid) 2016
Forton polymer  207x154X6 cm

“Impossible for me to title...it represents the disconnection from the wisdom and teachings I lost as a young child as well as our Hunquemi’nem language...butterfly wings overlapping...the cycle of life...on wings are salmon, eagles, ravens. Edges: wings clipped from the FN children taken from their families & put into Res. Schools as I & siblings were.”
Susan Point
Frog Spindle Whorl Pendant and Earrings 1992
Gold and ?
Susan Point, Tree Grate, Seattle
Susan Point, Spawning Salmon, 1990

Sechelt, BC – House of Hewhiwus. Salmon bodies & tails make fluid turns through currents. Geometric stair steps at side evoke basketry patterns & rapids as salmon leap their way up concrete river.
Point, Lil’wat Cultural Centre, Whistler

12’ diameter
Coast Salish house posts (interior)

Burke Mus. Seattle. Left – Cowichan 2 figures, centre – Songish figure holding mink; right Nanaimo figure holding mask & shell rattle
Susan Point, Salish Welcome Figures, 1996
Vancouver International Airport
Susan Point, Salish Welcome figures, Vancouver International Airport

Female and Male house posts (interior)
Susan Point, Flight, YVR

Largest – 4.8 m or 16ft.
Susan Point at Vancouver International Airport
Installing her whorl, Flight
Coast Salish house post

Bear & ancestor
Salish Housepost, c. 1800’s.  
Museum of Anthropology, UBC

Bear & ancestor (interior)  
15’
Susan Point Salish Houseposts,
Friday Harbour, San Juan Islands, WA
Musqueam Housepost, AMNH

Circles, trigons, cresents
Susan Point’s son Thomas & Brent Sparrow carving in Susan Point’s studio

Thomas: “Mom always takes her work to the extreme, far beyond her original intention. Because she sees new opportunities...and would betray herself if she did not follow those new visions to create a better piece.”
Susan Point houseposts at Brockton Oval
Vancouver

Gateway to Brockton totem poles from around BC
Susan Point. Salish Footprint. Entrance to Museum of Anthropology UBC
Entrance, Museum of Anthropology, UBC

Susan Point mosaic c. 2017
Point, Ancestral Guardian, 2005

glass
Whorl found in Sardis BC
Susan Point, Legacy, 2003
Autumn Moon, 2008

Trip to Kootenay Lake BC. Landscape. With family. School of Kokanee (land-locked salmon) getting ready to spawn. Swirling beneath surface rich colours illuminated by reflection of the full moon (soft gray backgrd)
Qulquil, 1986

The Coast Salish legend: “the ordinary could not suffer the extraordinary”
Qulqulil’s Basket, 2016
Lawrence Paul Yuxweluptun

Contemporary Coast Salish Artist
Lawrence Paul Yuxweluptun
Red Man Watching White Man Trying to fix Hole in Sky
1990
Lawrence Paul Yuxweluptun

• Born 1957, Kamloops BC

• Salish and Kamloops heritage

• Honours degree: Emily Carr Art and Design University, Vancouver

• Exhibits around the world
Lawrence Paul Yuxweluptun
Scorched Earth, Clear-cut Logging on Native Sovereign Land. Shaman Coming to Fix, 1991
Scott Watson, art historian, on Yuxweluptum

“[His Surrealism] animates these design forms as actors in the historical struggle over land and the fight for human rights.”
Leaving my Reservation, Going to Ottawa for a Constitution, 1986
1995, NGC
Impending Nisga’a Deal Last Stand, 1996
Shooting the Indian Act, 1999

England, 2 bullets. People took turns
NGC collection
Tweaker, 2008
Rules of Ovoidism by Yuxweluptun

“Political statements
And joyous statements
Can be made.
All modern equipment and materials
Are allowed to create an ovoid.
You should at least
Be an Indian to create an ovoid. Ha!”
Lawrence Paul Yuxweluptun,
Portrait of a Residential School Girl, 2013

Acrylic, gold leaf on canvas. 177 X 135 cm
Salish & Kamloops
halo
Traditional Salish weaving
Salish Chief’s Blanket

Before 1906. triangles wedges typical
Debra Sparrow, Salish Weaver
Debra Sparrow, Salish weaver
Debra Sparrow Woven Dress

Vancouver Indigenous Fashion Week
Woven dress and coat by Debra Sparrow, Salish
Vancouver Indigenous Fashion Week
Debra Sparrow, Woven dresses
LESSlie, wHwOl w(((h)))orl(((d))), 2013
LessLIE at National Gallery of Canada, 2017

Canadian & Indigenous Art
Kelly Cannell
Kelly Cannell, Sea to Sky

See: face on right and leg, salmon, owl, bird. Crescents & trigons
Dr. Michael Kew at Museum of Anthropology, UBC
Susan Point’s mentor along with Stan Greene (Coast Salish)
Stan Greene, Coast Salish artist

Stan Greene, Coast Salish Welcome Figures, Expo ‘86 Vancouver
Coast Salish comb collected in Washington State, 1792

Drawing by Robin Wright, Burke Museum, Seattle. BM collection
Unknown Coast Salish artist. Comb

Found Nanaimo. Acquired by BM in 1851
Stan Greene, Thunderbird Weaving Comb

Alder, abalone 8 X 5 in, crescent & trigon, eye, waves, Thunderbird’s crest or topknot
Stan Greene, Wolf Comb

Red cedar, abalone, eye, crescents, trigons, lazy s, wolf’s flat nose
What Coast Salish do you see here?
Eye, crescent, trigons wolf nose, oval, circle
Susan Point: Bringing Salish Art Back to the World, 2017
Less LIE, Coast Salish Artist, video

13 mins.