

The Baldwin Gallery

First Nations Now: Between Worlds

in conjunction with Origins Festival

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June 9th - 25th, 2017.

Four indigenous Canadian artists, from the Northwest Pacific Coast to the Cree heartland, explore hybridity and autobiography. Traditional art practices and iconography meet remix culture, performance art and corporeal narrative, reconstructing personal and shared identities betwixt realities. Lithographs by Robert Davidson, Haida; sculptural photography by Meryl McMaster, Plains Cree; digital interventions by Kwakwaka'wakw Sonny Assu; and panel and hide paintings by Kwakwaka'wakw Steve Smith.



top left:
Robert Davidson,
Frog,
12" x 22 1/2", 1977.
£500

top right:
Robert Davidson,
Eagle,
12" x 22 1/2", 1976.
£500

bottom left:
Robert Davidson,
Raven with Broken Beak,
12" x 22 1/2", 1977.
£500

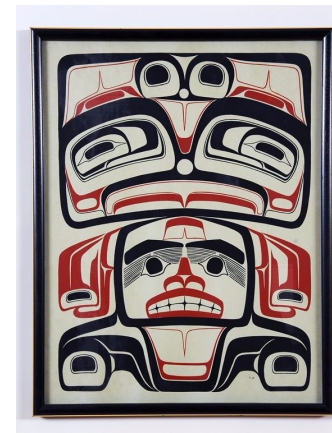
top left:
Robert Davidson,
Killer Whale,
12" x 22 1/2", 1977.
£500

Robert Davidson

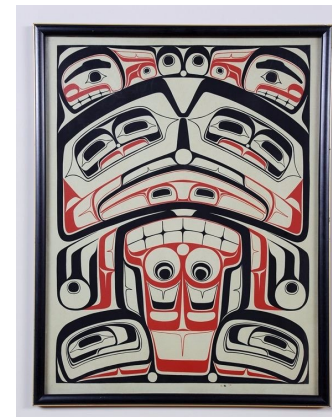
Robert Davidson, of Haida and Tlingit descent, is one of Canada's most respected contemporary artists and central to the renaissance of Northwest Pacific indigenous art. He has championed the rich art tradition of his native Haida Gwaii, consistently searching 'for the "soul" he saw in the art of his Haida elders'. As he works in both classical form and contemporary minimalism, Davidson negotiates the edge between the ancestral and the individual, infusing traditional forms with an evolutionary spirit. Davidson's awards include National Aboriginal Achievement Award for Art and Culture, Order of British Columbia, Order of Canada, Queen's Golden Jubilee Medal, British Columbia Aboriginal Art Lifetime Achievement Award and Governor General's Award.



Humming Bird,
Serigraph,
26.5" x 29.5", 1978.
£1950



Sea Bear Box Front,
Serigraph,
20.5" x 26.5", 1969.
£1950



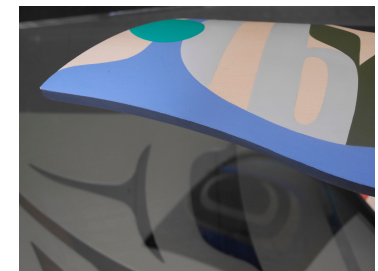
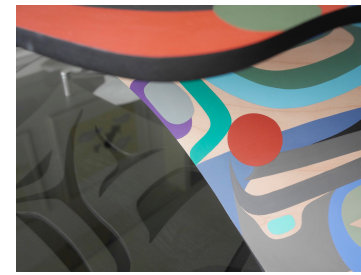
Sea Bear Box Back,
Serigraph,
20.5" x 26.5", 1969.
£1950

Sonny Assu & Steve Smith

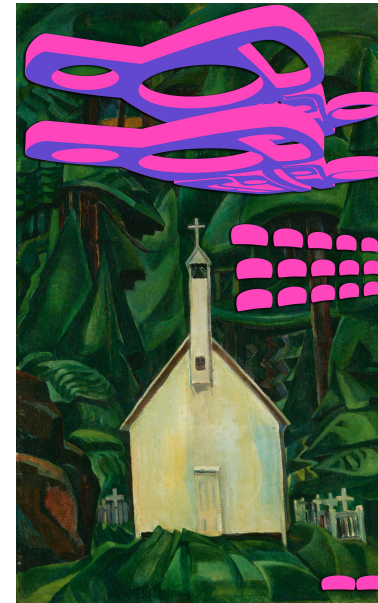
Robert Davidson has opened the door for younger artists to integrate their history and longstanding customs into contemporary art movements. Like Davidson, Kwakwaka'wakw artists, Sonny Assu and Steve Smith are inheritors of the 'formline' art tradition, defined by a complex stylistic vocabulary of shapes, geometrics and topographies, historically employed in totem poles, house fronts and transformational masks. Reshaping the formline in the face of the personal and political, artist Steve Smith individualizes his tribal identity, while Sonny Assu elides Kwakwaka'wakw and Pop Art, challenging corporate and nation-state colonialism.

In the tradition of mentorship, **Steve Smith** was originally taught by his father. Painting his father's traditional carvings, his work was meant to pass for his father's, and when his 'self' entered into his work, he became a contemporary artist. Today, these origins remain the foundation beneath bold experiments in form and colour. Smith interprets formlines through the changes and challenges of personal history. He credits a recent heart attack and the visions experienced during a triple bypass surgery for altering his palette from the red, green and blacks of Northwest Pacific indigenous art to a polyphony of colour.

Detail of *Harmony*, acrylic on Russian birch, 33"W x 10"D, 2016. £4750



Sonny Assu, graduate of Emily Carr College of Art and Design, uses painting, sculpture, large scale installations, digital constructions and photography to challenge monolithic commercial culture. ‘Consumerism, branding, and technology are new modes of totemic representation,’ writes Assu. Exploring the effects of colonisation on the Indigenous people of North America – loss of land, language and cultural resources – Assu deconstructs perceived identities and overturns the myth of the virgin continent and its vanished peoples. His digital series, *Interventions on the Imaginary*, imposes the traditional formline on pre-existing narratives, challenging colonial depictions of the receding Indian and the empty continent. Like alien spaceships, neon formlines hover above early colonial landscapes, interrupting the imperialistic tale of the ‘other’ and inverting the gaze.



Top:
Re-invaders,
digital intervention on an Emily,
Carr painting, 22.5” x 35.5”, 2014.
£2050



Middle:
Skeena, Beam Me Up!,
digital intervention on
an Edwin Holdgate
painting, 22.5” x 22.5”, 2015.
£1450



Bottom:
*#fangasm, Pabs was TOTALLY inspired
by meeeeeeeee111!*,
digital intervention on Pablo
Picassopainting, 22.5” x 22.5”, 2014.
£1450

Meryl McMaster

While Assu, Smith and Davidson contemporize traditional art practices from the Northwest Pacific Coast, **Meryl McMaster**, employs dominant-culture photographic practices to explore history and identity. McMaster is half Plains Cree and half of Scottish descent, with a BFA in photography from Ontario College of Art and Design. Confronting the fiction of fixed identity altogether, McMaster pits hybrid inheritances and constructed selfhoods – native, European, female – against the immediacy of the lived body in the natural world. A sculptural-photographer-performance artist, she inserts and distorts her own body inside a landscape at once familiar and ‘betwixt’. She expresses her heritage as a synergistic strength of unities, rather than a struggle between opposites.

From abstraction to performance realism, at once political and personal, all four artists extend the traditional and hereditary into the contemporary impulse, redefining history and pre-history, the colonial and post-colonial, and the multiple and liminal self.



Meryl McMaster
Brumal Tattoo, C-Print,
36" x 50", 2013.
£3,450.

Totem Poles and The Formline

The totem pole is a towering art form, belonging to the indigenous peoples of the Northwest Pacific Coast, in what is now Canada and The United States.

Comprised of family crests – from the bear to the mosquito – the pole gives voice to kinships, human and animal, and speaks to both identity and interdependency. Carved from a giant redwood, home to a vast forest ecosystem, in the pole's stillness we are reminded of motion. Be it a memorial pole, a house post, a portal pole, a welcoming pole or a mortuary pole – some of which have been purposely allowed to weather, fall and rot, become a seedbed for salmonberry bushes and the saplings of further redwoods – the totem pole can be perceived to mark a transition: an exit or entry, both cosmic and mundane.

In its carving, forest and ocean fauna meet: wolf, shark, killer whale, raven and frog are found resting on each others shoulders. As in the dense forests, perspective is not the primary visual element, and one creature interlinks visually, ecologically and even spiritually with another. Comprised of 'formlines' – a compressed and refined vocabulary of calligraphic shapes – they are equally discreet and conjoined. Typically painted in red (from ochre and hematite) or black (from charcoal, graphite or lignite coal), formlines are sharp and solid, yet always in motion: they swell and diminish.



Waum Gana'o, 1845, Skeena River, BC.

The formline ovoid – a rectangular oval inspired by the elliptical pattern on the skin of a young skate (fish) – is used to create eyes, heads and joints. The formline U opens into negative space, or seams it in. Between these two elements a dynamic world takes shape. Whether on a totem pole, a drum or a panel painting, formline representation is mobilized through symbolic ambiguity. Creatures merge and distort to create symbiotic identities, so that no single interpretation of space and object is held as absolute.

Like most indigenous Canadian art practices, totem pole art was illegal between 1876 and 1951. The art's survival, and renaissance in the 1960s is a testimony to indigenous resilience in the face of colonialization and systematic cultural genocide.



Steve Smith
Unity;
acrylic on basswood and Russian birch,
24" x 36", 2016.
£3500

The Drum

Whereas the totem pole is specific to the Northwest Pacific Coast, the drum is ubiquitous across indigenous North America. In the drum hall, Steve Smith's Kwakwaka'wakw formline drum paintings on elk hide, originally commissioned by the Vancouver airport, sit side-by-side with Robert Davidson's tiny drum-like lithographs. In Brumal Tattoo, Plains Cree artist, Meryl McMaster, is seen bloodied and exuberant and half-subsumed by a massive drum, referencing both the European use of field music to control troops in battle, and the beating of the drum that, in her indigenous tradition, represents the beating of the heart.



Steve Smith, *Painted Elk Hide Drum for Vancouver Airport I, II & III*, acrylic on elk hide, 41" x 41", 2011. £5250 each.

Defining Indigenous

The word indigenous – like native or first – is problematic, but English doesn't offer us a better alternative.

The dictionary definition is: 'originating or occurring naturally in a particular place' or 'naturally existing in a place or country rather than arriving from another place.'

Both definitions and their applications are suspicious when applied to humans.

Why?

Because the word can be used to falsify an immobilising history, one that stagnates a people in both time and space, and one in which any kind of change – from innovation to migration – equals the dirtying or diminishment of a mythical state.

Also, the definition pits nature against culture – a dichotomy that justifies colonial and patriarchal power – rather than viewing nature and culture as so intertwined that even the horrors of an all-plastic world could never fully untangle them.

What to do?

The English language needs a better definition.

We need the word to express the legacy of deep and abiding relationships between people and places, and the resilience of traditions sensitive to their environment. It needs to reflect the centrality of origin to a culture which has been marginalized by an

incoming power.

I suggest some tweaking to the OED. (I hope the dictionary writers are listening.)

Indigenous: originating or occurring in an historical and ongoing relationship to a particular place,

or

experiencing oneself and one's culture as naturally existing in a place or country rather than arriving from another place.

Here, at least, the word has a little subtlety and breadth. And it can be used to embrace both the hardiness and the natural dynamism of cultures, reflected in the work of First Nations artists, like Sonny Assu, Meryl McMaster, Steve Smith, Lawrence Paul Yuxweluptun and Robert Davidson, who are, at once, rooted in tradition, contemporary realities, and a creative and innovative practice.

Robert Davidson, *Beaver Serigraph*, 8.25" x 23.2", 1977. £600

Robert Davidson, *Wolf Serigraph*, 8.25" x 23.2", 1977. £600

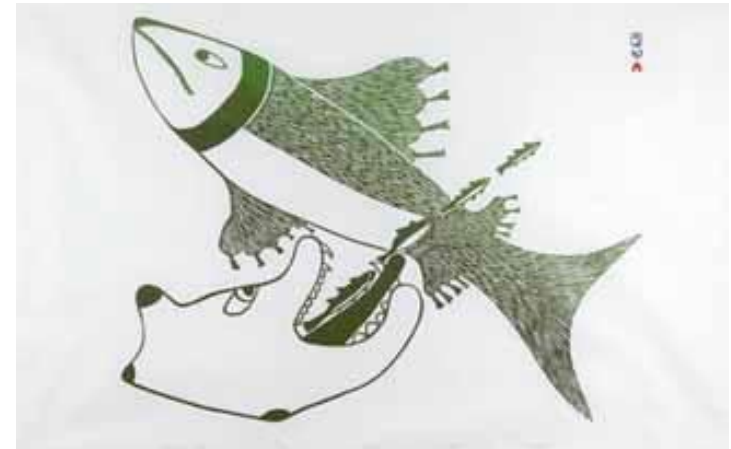




Top Left:
Pitseolak Ashoona, *Taleelayu and Three Seals*,
stonecut, 24.25" x 33", 1975.
£800

Bottom Right:
Pudlo Pudlat, *Fish & Bear*,
stonecut on paper, 24.5" x 40", 1971.
£850

Bottom Left:
Agnes Nanogak, *Senaktok*, stonecut & stencil on
paper, 18" x 24", 1979.
£500



The Inuit Collection

Though the Canadian government does not designate the Inuit as First Nations – but rather as an aboriginal group distinctly their own – The Baldwin has chosen to consider the broader meaning of First Nations, and thus have included in the exhibition a collection of Inuit block prints.

While Robert Davidson was first translating Northwest Pacific formline painting into modern lithographs, the Inuit were making block-printing into an art form distinctly their own. Print making was a late-import technique, with no historical precedent for their culture, and from it, the Inuit created a unified tradition of contemporary indigenous art.

High Arctic relocation in the 1950s forced Inuit into government-built villages. Debate continues as to whether the Canadian government's intentions were humanitarian – to avoid starvation during a low hunting cycle – or a Cold War strategy to plant human 'flag poles' in the North, asserting Canadian sovereignty in disputed areas. If intentions were in part humanitarian, the effort was poorly implemented, leaving new communities impoverished.

In 1957, James Archibald Houston, himself a printmaker and painter, introduced printmaking to the Arctic in an attempt to create an economy of art. Sponsored by the Canadian government, Houston modeled his program on Japanese ukiyo-e workshops and helped Arctic artists organize themselves into cooperatives, which released annual catalogues of their limited edition prints. Art in the Arctic quickly became a sustainable survival technique, both economic and cultural. Cape Dorset is today Canada's largest arts community with 22% of its labour force being artists, amongst them many masters of the craft. Most Arctic-based artists continue to disseminate their work through cooperatives and

The Baldwin Gallery's collection includes:

Agnes Nanogak, from Holman in the Northwest Territories. Nanogak, who died in 2001, attempted to help her people remember their stories. Translated into 'bold colors, fluid lines, and nervous energy', we 'hear' the tales of shape-shifting animals and shamans.

Pudlo Pudlat, born 1916 in Ilulirlik, led a semi-nomadic life until he settled in Cape Dorset. Often humorous, Pudlat's themes blend the traditional with the fantastical and the contemporary. His works are held by most Canadian Museums. He died in 1992.

Pitseolak Ashoona, CM RCA (1904 or 1907 or 1908 1983, Cape Dorset). Ashoona belonged to one of the last generations to grow up hunting and gathering in the frozen tundra. With unpretentious authority, she depicted the daily life of her people. She was awarded the Order of Canada and was a Canadian Royal Academician.



Pitseolak Ashoona, *Women Hunting Goose*,
stone cut and stencil on paper,
14.7" x 61.3", 1977. £800

The Collaborative Spirit

Sabina Hill's designs are a dialogue between First Nation artists and her personal aesthetic of place. Descended from four generations of Pacific Coast Canadians, through fusion and collaboration, she expresses a rootedness that is consistent with respect for the nations that preceded hers, and whose artists continue to define the visual culture of the Northwest coast. Former president of the Bill Reid Foundation (Reid, like Davidson, was a Haida, seminal to the late twentieth century renaissance of traditional art), Dr. George MacDonald praises Hill's design as 'the next phase in the development of Northwest Coast art and design.' Working in tandem with indigenous artists, Hill translates the visual language of the Pacific Coast First Nations tradition into the laser-cut clarity of museum-quality contemporary furniture and art. Her collaborations reflect an enduring legacy of exchange and cross-fertilization between artists.

First Nations Now: Between World includes Hill's Prow Coffee Table, referencing the historic dug-out canoe. Laser cut bronze anodized aluminum, tempered glass, stainless steel standoffs, legs available in local woods or salmon leather. Prow is held in the permanent collection of The Royal Ontario Museum, in Toronto, Canada. This second edition of Prow was created with Mark Preston Tenna 'Tsa 'Teh Master of the Copper, who is of Tlingit and Irish descent.

Hill's work appears in high-end homes, executive offices and boutique hotels and is held in the collections of The Royal Ontario Museum, in Toronto; The University of British Columbia, in Vancouver; Canada House High Commission, in Trafalgar Square, London; and the Canadian Joint Delegation to NATO in Brussels.



Sabina Hill with Andy Everson, *Prow Coffee Table Redux*,
H 16" x L 63" x W 32" Ed 8/10. approx £8000



Sabina Hill with Mark Preston.
Longhouse Wall Mural Skwachay Lodge.

PRICE LIST

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Curation:

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Production:

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Gallery Management:

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Catalogue:

Designed by Oceana Masterman-Smith

Written by Dennison Smith

