BILL REID AND THE STORY OF Haida Gwaii

No other contemporary Northwest Coast artist has received the critical acclaim accorded Canada's Bill Reid. Reid's celebration of the myths and traditions of his Haida ancestors through art and story-telling has been warmly welcomed by Canadians and appreciation for his pivotal role in the rebirth of northern art and culture is seen in the use of his masterwork sculpture, "The Spirit of Haida Gwaii," on Canada's twenty-doll-

Haida Gwaii, the people's islands, is the traditional homeland (since the end of the most recent ice age) of the Haida people—Reid's forbears on his mother's side. Known colonially as the Queen Charlotte Islands, Haida Gwaii is an archipelago of over 200 islands perched on the edge of Canada's Pacific continental shelf 100 miles off the shore of British Columbia. It is an environment abundant in natural resources—a remote area of old growth rainforest surrounded by fish-laden seas (and dubbed Canada's Galapagos). Haida economy was based on hunting and fishing but quickly expanded to include harvesting shellfish. They established permanent beachfront settlements with large wooden plank houses and became skilled artisans of wood and metal as their designs gained renown through trade with other Northwest coast peoples. The Haida are now best known for their canoes and totem poles that tell stories through inclusion of mythical characters from Haida oral tradition. However, the effects of colonization decimated the Haida and their population was reduced by more than 5% by 1900 and continued exposure to Euro-Canadian influences afterwards brought Haida cultural traditions close to extinction. Recent court battles have kept logging giants like Gwaii Haanas from utilizing Crown land for timber without first consulting the Haida and significant action is being taken to ensure the Haida Nation's rights and title to the land.

Bill Reid's efforts as well as initiatives by the Haida, the Canadian government and art community has revived and at least ensured Haida cultural survival. Reid helped introduce the art traditions of the aboriginal peoples of the Northwest coast of North America to contemporary audiences. He infused Haida tradition with modern ideas and has a new appreciation expressed in his work such as The Raven and the First Men, commissioned for the University of British Columbia's Museum of Anthropology and The Spirit of the Haida Gwaii, commissioned for the Canadian Embassy in Washington, D.C. Although Bill Reid has been the most prominent of Haida artists, the last 50 years have seen a growing number of others who are gaining international recognition and Haida Gwaii has firmly retained its place as a land of mystery and magic in the Canadian psyche.

(Source: Bank of Canada and Canadian Museum of Civilization websites)

THE SPIRIT OF Haida Gwaii

Here we are at last, a long way from Haida Gwaii, not too sure where we are or where we're going, still squabbling and crying for position in the boat, but somehow managing to appear to be heading in some direction: at least the paddles are together, and the man in the middle seems to have some vision of what to come. As for the rest, they are superficially more or less what they always were—symbols of another time when the Haidas, all ten thousand of them, knew they were the greatest of all nations.

The Bear... eyes firmly and forever fixed on the past, tries to believe that things are still as they were. The Bear Mother, being human, is looking over his shoulder into the future, concerned more with her children than with her legend... Next, doggishly paddling away, hardwooding if not very imaginative, the compulsory Canadian content [beaver], big teeth and scaly tail, perfectly designed for cutting down trees and daming rivers.

And here she is... [Dogfish Woman;] the most desirable and fascinating woman from myth-time... [Dogfish Woman] stands aloof from the rest, the enormous concentration of her thoughts simpering smoke dreams behind her inward-looking eyes.

Tucked away in the stern of the boat, still ruled by the same obsession to stay concealed in the night shadows and lightless caves and other pockets of darkness, in which she spends her immortality.[is] the Woman Mouse.

No human, beast or monster has yet seen her in the flesh, so she may or may not look like this. Not so the Raven. There is no doubt what he looks like in this myth-image: exactly the same as he does in his multiple existences as the familiar carrier bird of the northern latitudes of the earth. Of course he is the steersman, So, although the boat appears to be heading in a purposeful direction, it can arrive anywhere the Raven's whim dictates. A culture will be remembered for its warriors, artists, heroes and heroines of all callings, but in order to survive it needs survivors. And here is our professional survivor, the Ancient Reluctant Conscript, present if seldom noticed in all the turbulent histories of men on earth....

The Wolf of the Haidas was a completely imaginary creature, perhaps existing only over on the mainland, but never seen on Haida Gwaii. Nevertheless, he was an important figure in the crest hierarchy. Troublesome, volatile, ferociously playful, he can usually be found with his sharp fangs embedded in someone's anatomy. Here he is vigorously chewing on the Eagle's wing while that proud, imperial, somewhat pompous bird retaliates by attacking the Bear's paws.

That accounts for everybody except the Frog who sits partially in and partially out of the boat and above the gunwales: the ever-present intermediary between two of the worlds of the Haidas, the land the sea.

So there is certainly no lack of activity in our little boat, but it is not a sight any of us would ever care to describe in a price tag of $11.8 million, as it was described in 1980—Lux bill 7812, Haida Memorial Sculpture, Government of Canada. (Photo Credit: Alain G. Audet, 1983 (Photo credit: www.flickr.com))
Upcoming Presentations and Displays on Canada

Professional Development Workshop for Educators
Canadian Geography in a Global Context: Canada in the World, the Circumpolar North & the Klondike Gold Rush
Thursday, September 28, 2006 (4-8pm)
8P Energy Center, Birch Room, Anchorage, AK (in conjunction with the ACSIS-in-Alaska conference)

National Council for Geographic Education
Annual Meeting
Notable Session: Picture Canada—Learning About Canada’s Physical Regions Through Pictures
October 5-8, 2006
(R. Rees, K-12 STUDY CANADA Teacher-Associate) Lake Tahoe, NV

K-12 STUDY CANADA Display at the WCSS
In-Service Conference
Social Studies: Reading & Writing with a Purpose
Saturday, October 14 (8am-4pm)
Edmonds Woodway High School, Edmonds, WA

NCSS Embassy Tour
Thursday, November 30, 2006 (9am-1pm)
(335 event tickets must be purchased in advance)
The International Activities Committee is sponsoring a bus tour that includes consular briefings on international relations and free resources for teachers. Stops include the Embassy of Canada, South Africa, and Beomea and Herzegovina. Convention Center, Washington, D.C.

National Council for the Social Studies
66th Annual Conference
Promise & Practice
December 1-3, 2006
Friday, December 1 activities on Canada: (1) Poetic License Required: Teaching Canada with Poetry and Prose* (T. Streer & N. Feltman); (2) Patriots and Loyalists: Who Were the Good Americans? (D. June & K. Willet); and (3) Teaching About Canada SIC Meeting in Room 148 (1:15-3:15pm). Convention Center, Washington, D.C.

Professional Development Workshop for Educators
STUDY CANADA Summer Institute: Experience B.C. from the 5 Themes of Geography to the 2010 Olympics
June 24-29, 2007
Registration is already open for teachers to earn either 40 clock hours or 3 university undergraduate quarter credits. $530 (IN State) or $140 (out-of-state) includes tuition, housing, breakfasts & RT transportation Vancouver-Whistler, Simon Fraser University Harbour Center and Delta Vancouver Suites, Vancouver, B.C.; Crystal Lodge, Whistler. B.C. http://k12studycanada.org/sci.html

WEBSITES
The Haida: Children of Eagle and Raven — Information by Dr. George McDonald is an excellent Internet resource. www.civilization.ca/aborig/haida/haindee.html.
The Kids’ Site of Canadian Settlements: Haida (Grades 4-6) — This educational site explores the history, daily life and culture of the Haida. www.collectioncanada.ca/settlements/kids/021013-2061-e.html
Canadian Broadcast Corporation - CBC Archives explores the career of Bill Reid through 2-10 minute film clips. http://archives.cbc.ca/180-1-68-1273/art_entertainment/bill_reid/
National Film Board of Canada — View a 2-minute profile on Bill Reid and his work or a clip of him creating a carved pole from a bare cedar trunk: www.nfb.ca/canadianfilm/fichefilm.php?id=17982&gn=en&exp=sh or www.cnn.com/enclose/docs/misc/society/index.html&template=0060language=english

BOOKS AND VIDEOS
CBC Life and Times Series - Raven in the Sun: The Life and Times of Bill Reid — This award-winning documentary follows Bill Reid’s quest for identity and mission to revive his rich ancestral past. It originally aired in 2003 and can be ordered via the distributor, Peace Arch Television at http://www.peacearch.org/docs/film.html.

K-12 STUDY CANADA is a quarterly publication of the Pacific Northwest National Resource Center for Canada (NNR) - a joint center linking the Canadian Studies Center, Henry M. Jackson School of International Studies, University of Washington, and the Center for Canadian-American Studies, Western Washington University. The NRC offers quarterly workshops on specific Canadian topics: the annual, week-long STUDY CANADA seminar held the last week of June, and an extensive Resource Library for the use of local educators. The NRC is funded through a Title VI Grant from the U.S. Department of Education and an annual Program Enhancement Grant from the Canadian Embassy, Washington, D.C.