

## **Marian Penner Bancroft and Patrik Andersson on Christos Dikeakos**

**Marian Penner Bancroft** 03:19

Hi, my name is Marian Penner Bancroft, and I'm an artist here in Vancouver. And today I'm going to be speaking with Patrik Andersson about an artwork done by another Vancouver artist, Christos Dikeakos. This image is in the SFU Collection and is one of a number of 38 images making up the work called *Sites and Place Names* in Vancouver. And this photograph is a contemporary image of an historic village site in Stanley Park, and that particular location is what we now know as Lumbermen's Arch and which now has a waterpark, it used to have a swimming pool and before that it was one of the largest Indigenous villages in the Lower Mainland. So, with me is Patrik Andersson, and I'll let him introduce himself.

**Patrik Andersson** 04:26

Well, yes, thanks for inviting me to have this conversation with an artist that I respect and admire and talk about another artist I respect and admire. So, it's really interesting artwork at that. I'm an art historian and a curator and I just wrapped up an exhibition for Capture Photo Festival, which included work from both Marian and Christos. So, this conversation sort of slips in to the larger conversation, I think, of pictures and landscapes that we've been involved in for a bit. So yeah, it's a pleasure to talk about this image. Before we dive into the image, maybe I have a bit of a question. I don't know if it's a question or a comment, I was really interested in, Marian your, your choice of images from such a vast collection at SFU, the type of work that you could have chosen. And the more I thought about this, I mean, it obviously made sense why you would be interested in talking about this particular work. You know, here's an artist, I guess I could say, of your own generation, I don't think you're that far apart...

**Marian Penner Bancroft**

Yes, I think we're about a year apart.

**Patrik Andersson**

So that was interesting. Not only that, from what I know, you've lived for a very long time not too far from each other in Kitsilano. So, you know, it made sense on that level, I suppose. But

there's more to it. Both of you have consistently in your work, consider the intersection of the photographic image, as well as text. As well as employing all kinds of mapping territories. And in, almost by now botanical fashion, kind of gone in to look at all these sites and places as this work is called, but in different ways.

06:31

And Christos' work from the late 60s and early 70s, you know, when I think back to that kind of work, he started with Jeff Wall, another colleague from Vancouver, would call the Defeatured Landscape through a vehicular lens. And I think of Christos, early work, looking at landscapes of Vancouver, or the cityscape of Vancouver, it was through the window of a moving car. When I think of your work, I think of your work and I could, you know, maybe I have a limited view. But it's generally I would say, with some exception, taken standing on the ground, rather than moving through the landscape. And that's maybe like a minor little detail. But I think it's interesting with this work by Christos, I think this is the first body of work by him where he actually gets out of the car, so to speak. So there's a kind of an intersection to me between your practice and his practice in this work from the early 90s.

### **Marian Penner Bancroft**

It's true. I mean, I think of Chris's work earlier consisted of many kinds of collages and other photographic works. But what we both share is this interest in the place where we live, and the history of this place, and the history of settlement, and the communities that existed here in a very broad form and have been hugely restricted by the colonial presence of all kinds of, what would you call them, those guys who come for real estate...

### **Patrik Andersson**

Surveyors

### **Marian Penner Bancroft**

Well, surveyors, and also people looking to make a lot of money. You know, it was that kind of impulse that led to the demise of these villages, and in large part to the populations, but not entirely, but there was, you know, a lot of sickness in the form of smallpox that happened in the 19th century that contributed to the decimation of some of these villages. So, what we're looking at is this particular site, and I'm going to just read one account recorded by the city archivist, a well-known figure in Vancouver in the 20th century, Major Matthews, who

recorded conversations with a number of different Indigenous people from this region, and he talks about an account of the arrival of Captain Vancouver. And he says,

09:40

“As your great explorer, Vancouver progressed through the first narrows, our people through in greeting before him clouds of snow-white feathers, which rose, wafted in the air aimlessly about, then fell like flurries of snow to the water's surface and rested there like white rose petals scattered before a bride. It must have been a pretty welcome. Then there were presents of fish, all to invoke the all-powerful arrivals to have pity on them. It was the seventh year. You see there was a motive behind it, they were expecting a calamity and were anxious to avoid it. Read what Vancouver has to say about the conferences which took place, the meaning of which he did not understand but which he reports as, quote, ‘they did not seem to be hostile.’ I'm informed that the ceremony of casting the white eider down before him took place as Captain Vancouver's ship passed through the First Narrows and was passing X wáyxway, the big Indian village in Stanley Park where the Lumbermen's Arch is now. X wáyxway must have been a very large village for it spread from Brockton Point to Prospect Point, it must also have been a very ancient village. None know its age, but there must have been hundreds, perhaps 1000s living there at one time.

So that's a quote from a man named Andrew Paull, whose Indigenous name was Xwechtáal. And he was a secretary of the Squamish Indian Council in North Vancouver, and that was recorded in the 1930s. So, we have a sense of a location that is redolent with history and meaning, and what we see in the photograph.

11:36

Starting from the top is a wide horizontal band of blue sky with puffy clouds hanging low over the North Shore mountains. And then below that we see the sulfur piles in North Vancouver. And also we see a patch of green lawn that is part of the waterpark, and some yellow curved sort of candy cane shaped pipes that are part of the water pipe park. And then in blue concrete, this fake stream, undulating through the water park, and then the gray concrete. So you have three basic horizontal bands of information: the sky, the mid ground, and the foreground.

12:34

And this artwork, this photograph, which is 21 by 41 inches in size, has in front of it a piece of glass that is larger than that I would say most likely about, oh 28 by 48, something like that with words etched into the glass. And the words are masks and X wáyxway. And these two words, cast shadows that fall upon the actual photographic print. And also, if you look very carefully in this image, you will see the shadow of the photographer.

### **Patrik Andersson**

Right, which is if one knows Christos' work is not surprising because in his earlier work, you often see little hints of maybe the edge of the car window or where he shoots from and so on. There's a kind of self-reflexive nature in the work. That was a nice description. When I look at this image, I was not born in Canada and I came in 1978 as a 12-year-old, I was here on vacation a year prior. So, I was 11. And on both of those landings in Vancouver, besides you know, noticing the different smells I remember, and that the sidewalks looked funny. Those are my early impressions of Vancouver. The rest was really like memories of places like this, like going around the tourist sites of Stanley Park and getting these vantage points. And we ended up when we moved here settling on the North Shore. So this picture to me reminds me not only of arriving and being a tourist, this is a site that by that time by 1978 had become a tourist site as opposed to a village, let's say or many other things that it would become. And I look across and I see, yeah, I see the industry I see. Peculiar in the image, of course is there's a playground but no one's playing. There's something kind of absent there's an absence here, which I think is quite striking despite all the things going on in the image.

### **Marian Penner Bancroft 15:03**

While you can also see in a very fine line a row of shrubs above the lawn that are completely leafless. So that may be a clue to the time of year. I mean, one thing that I love to do with photographs is look at every single detail in them, and allow those details to accumulate as sources of meaning. So that everything that the photographer has chosen to include, within the frame has a role to play in creating some kind of effect that the artist wants the viewer to be able to experience. I think it's when you say that, you know, and, you know, it's easy to overread these images, because they lend themselves to want it, you want to read into them, and I see those yellow water pipes, in the summer, of course, would be spouting water and having children running around hope, you know, most likely.

16:17

Here they stand almost like sentinels or figures, they're, you know, like a grouping, as opposed to the red piece of detail, which I'm not even exactly sure what it is. But I think it's a fire hose

**Marian Penner Bancroft**

I think it's a fire hydrant

**Patrik Andersson** 16:34

it seems kind of separated from that group. And, you know, so, you know, it has these kind of subtleties, which I would imagine are kind of framed in this picture, again, sort of addressing these relationships that are kind of absent in the image at the same time.

**Marian Penner Bancroft**

And the central placement of the name of the village makes you understand that that is a really significant part of the image. And the word X wáyxway, which means *masks* is also the word masks is included. But the word X wáyxway refers to a kind of mask that we're in, that non Indigenous people are, and people who are not connected to the group from which the mask emerged are allowed to see anymore.

17:41

What I find interesting is how Chris is asking us to imagine that which we cannot see that which used to be such a substantial presence in this particular location, and actually, throughout the Lower Mainland with his other works in the series of *Sites and Place Names* in Vancouver.

**Patrik Andersson**

I also think the choice of typefaces, the fact that X wáyxway is written in a serif, as opposed to the sans serif of the Anglophone version, it sort of sets up kind of something that, you know, something that's a bit more reads a bit more, how should I put it, personal narrative based, as opposed to sign, or, you know, place name?

18:42

Not exactly, sure. But there is that kind of like, tension between those two things that are saying the same thing. But they're slightly different. I'm wondering, do you know, because I should know, I should, I should go into a conversation like this knowing a bit more, but I blame my being a foreigner on this stolen land. Masks, am I right to, do you know, it's my understanding that the village that was there, I mean, over time, it disappeared. And in fact, by the late 1800s the city decided to burn down the village. It they claimed it was in order to prevent smallpox, which had already killed, you know, a large part of the population and the mask as being also this, somehow tied to that history of protecting oneself from smallpox and, and so on. I don't know enough about it, but I seem to recall, so it has these kind of layers of history that as a tourist, of course, coming to, or a newcomer coming to this site, let's say in 1978, I'm going to play on my own example.

20:00

Yeah, but you know, the only thing I knew, certainly I would not have known that there was such a name as X wáyxway. You know, I would know Stanley Park. Right? We'd know Sir Stanley even because there's a statue of him

**Marian Penner Bancroft**

or you would know Lumbermen's Arch, you know, which was originally kind of ceremonial arch celebrating people like Lord Stanley himself, they wanted to have this kind of

**Patrik Andersson**

but it's a sign of prosperity too you know, this place that can be harvested, in a sense

**Marian Penner Bancroft**

but it was also trying to kowtow to, you know, Britain and those origins by presenting this ceremonial arch upon his arrival in Vancouver, which, ultimately, which was made of large large pieces of wood, only some of which are part of the current structure that's there now called Lumbermen's Arch. But there was a real effort to obliterate the communities in Stanley Park, they wanted the park as this jewel that wasn't to be seen and somebody's residence.

**Patrik Andersson**

Yeah. That was going to say, you know, with the word mask, you know, to, to someone like myself coming here and so on. I mean, it's, it's what I knew, what in 1978 would be referred to

as Indians here Which was this, again, tourist, things you bought, like, you know, in tourist gift shops, and hang on your wall as kind of touristic trophies, if you will. And I think your work like this, you know, both the image itself, as well as the payoff, those typefaces and so on, they sort of evoke that more difficult history. Speaking of Lumbermen's Arch, I think prior to Lumbermen's Arch, there was actually also a, there was a gate wasn't there?

**Marian Penner Bancroft** 22:20

No, the original Lumbermen's Arch. Yeah.

**Patrik Andersson**

Which was where the lumber looked like Doric columns.

**Marian Penner Bancroft**

Exactly. Exactly. This was the ceremonial welcome for Lord Stanley.

**Patrik Andersson**

And when I think of Doric columns, or various kinds of columns, I think back to the conversation I had with, with Christos about talking how this whole,

22:46

you know, project of 37, 38 images, how many there are. Which was him going back to where his family comes from, which is Greece. And, you know, thinking about all those ruins, whether it's the Parthenon or others. This was kind of like a kind of a thinking about sacred and secular kinds of structures and traditions and how they are local, but at the same time, they exist elsewhere.

**Marian Penner Bancroft**

And I know that for Chris that was really important in that he recognized, through his own research and careful attention to this place, that this was a holy spot, in a way and that the masks, the X wáyxway masks were sacred and are sacred objects, and that they were possibly the name even could have come from their cleansing qualities in terms of the disease that had occurred there. So, I mean, it was and it was in the 20s, that the

24:15

infection health officer told everyone who was still there that they had to leave. So, 1920 so there, there were still people living there at that, at that point.

### **Patrik Andersson**

Fast forward in time to 1991, '92 when he's making this work. Just want to go back to thinking about, it's framed in a very particular way at the time, one might say, maybe nowadays, it's not so. And I think that's something worth pointing out that you'll notice more when you're standing in front of the actual work, is that the work has, there's a quality to the presentation. There is this, you know, quite a beautiful, almost poetic, literally moving quality to it. Because as light moves, the shadows cast move across the image. So there's a kind of a time, this times there. But, you know, generally speaking, when I first saw these works, I have to admit, I thought they were rather tacky. I mean, you know, they look like something that the aesthetic of the presentation was, it seemed to be the kind of glass that the corporate skyline was full of, or corporate lobbies, like presentations, sandblasted glass letters have a logo. It's an aesthetic, that sort of 1990 or something. But I think it's an interesting tension that he brings into that.

### **Marian Penner Bancroft 26:01**

Yeah, well, I think that what is intriguing about that, those decisions is that they, they make the work seem very accessible. Because you recognize all the materials, you recognize the colour image, you recognize the glass, and then it's only as you get closer, and begin to look at all the details, that the meaning starts to unfold. And so it's a subtle way of inviting you to think about some of the issues and the aesthetic that's not a kind of hit you over the head and kind of slash you with anger kind of effect. It's the effect of being quiet and being able to move in and say, oh, oh, oh, right, of course. And yet, what we're looking at is the blue sky and a water park, it all seems very innocent. And yet, when you think about the word, X wáyxway, when you think about the idea of masks, the idea of a village, and sitting in what we now know as a tourist destination, you begin to adjust your ideas of what it means to be a settler in this part of the world. And what drew me to this piece in the beginning, when I was given a choice of what I wanted to talk about was that it's a conversation that I've been interested in for about the same amount of time which is, understanding what it means to be a settler here. And how do we respect the history, the present, all of that in our every day? How do we reconcile, there is no reconciliation in some ways, the wrongs continue to be wrongs.



**Patrik Andersson 28:22**

It reminds me when we think of the sandblasted text that's casting a shadow onto the image, the image being somehow equated with a document, truth and so on, so it's casting. It reminds me of a work from around the same time put on the Vancouver Art Galleries facade by Lawrence Weiner called *Placed Upon The Horizon (Castings Shadows)*. And I think there is this just as in Lawrence Weiner's work it doesn't come and tell you, he's not telling us a lesson. He's providing a kind of a space for us to engage in that history and read it from our own perspective. And that's something that's pretty similar, I think.

**Marian Penner Bancroft 29:16**

Yeah. And it's how do you make visible that which is no longer visible? And this is his way of creating a kind of cinematic moment in your imagination while you're standing in front of this artwork, and, you know, literally being in two places at once. A well-known academic and professor Charles Hill-Tout, wrote to Major Matthews in 1932 after having received a photograph of this location, he says,

Dear Major Matthews,

The photograph you sent me, which records the demolition of one of the largest of the old time middens in Stanley Park, is most interesting as well as worthy of preservation. I had no idea anything so reminiscent of the early days of Vancouver was in existence. The road around the park ran right through this midden, which was situated about where Lumbermen's Arch now stands. And its material composed mostly of calcite shells and ashes, was used largely for priming the road bed around the park.

So here we have, you know, they're dredging up the midden and using it as road fill.

In carting away the midden mass, numerous skeletons were brought to light. The bones of these were gathered up by the workmen and placed in boxes for the Indians to take away and bury in their burial grounds. I recall making selections of these bones and sending them to the museum at Ottawa. This ancient campsite formed one of the largest of the native villages of the Squamish in earlier days. So the Indians informed me, but had been practically abandoned since the period when smallpox first attacked the native people of this region. This scored struck this village very severely and practically depopulated it, hence its abandonment here after. Yours sincerely, Charles Hill-Tout.

31:39

So there you have a description of this very complicated site that Chris has chosen to depict.

**Patrik Andersson**

Well, thank you, Marian for digging it up out of the archives of SFU Art Collection. Thank you.