Rez Erect: Native Erotica

The Bill Reid Centre for Northwest Coast Art Studies
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This short assemblage of images and text was put together during the initial stages of the Rez Erect exhibition at the Bill Reid Gallery. It is a compilation of items located in the Bill Reid Centre's digital collection and from various online sources.

This small contribution to the show arises from the research sessions we had in preparation for the exhibition. These meetings were often full of jokes, anecdotes, and plenty of laughs. In discussions between the Gallery and the Centre, we determined that the best way to share the fun and the humour we experienced in these sessions was to display some of the conversation provoking images that we encountered.

Enjoy!

The Legacy

Bill Reid himself drew heavily upon historical and archival photography from the Northwest Coast to inform his work. His career has proven that early traveler's sketches and paintings along with photographs and slides from museum collections can be an invaluable treasure for today’s First Nations artists in the creation of art both for sale and for ceremonial use.

The Bill Reid Centre is fulfilling a dream of Bill Reid’s to bring the Northwest Coast visual record together and make it accessible to artists and scholars who will ensure its continuity. The Centre holds tens of thousands of digitized photographs and slides dating back to the 1860s, and copies of early travelers’ drawings, sketches and paintings dating back to the first European contact with the Northwest Coast.

The Bill Reid Centre website (www.sfu.ca/brc) is the primary point of access between the Centre and its users. It provides information about the Centre, its objectives, collections and projects. Currently, the most notable feature of the site is the Virtual Village Project, which focuses on researching and documenting the monumental art and architecture of First Nations’ communities along the Northwest Coast.

Mission

Establish a globally accessible learning centre for the study of Northwest Coast art

Promote an appreciation and understanding of the artistic traditions, cultures, and histories of the Nations who first inhabited the Northwest Coast

Inspire the development of contemporary First Nations’ artistic expression.

Engage First Nations people, students, scholars, artists and others to explore this unique artistic tradition

The Bill Reid Foundation and the Senate of Simon Fraser University jointly established the Bill Reid Centre for Northwest Coast Art Studies in 2005. The Centre is within the Department of First Nations Studies in the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences.

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"Haida Myth of Bear Mother" Dish created in 1972 by Bill Reid.
Collection of the Canadian Museum of Civilization, Ottawa, Canada.

Figure of a man standing with legs apart. The space between them is caved as an arch and used as a house entrance. The legs end in rough wood blocks where they were buried in ground. Face with deeply carved eye sockets, and carved rope all around face. Hands hold genitals. The face is painted red and there are traces of red on the body, face, and rope. There is a large spike and nail in the chest. The backside is carved in body contours with small adzing lines all over.
Large Nuxalt, figure of a standing bear about 10 feet tall. In its paws are human faces.

The condition of the figure suggests that it never stood outdoors for a lengthy period (although it was displayed outdoors for six months at the Chicago World’s Fair in 1893). It is unknown if the figure provided a doorway between its legs. It probably had prominent genitals as there are indications of their removal and a patch applied and secured with nails.

The figure is now on display at the Field Museum in Chicago.
A house can function in the secular realm as a dwelling, as well as in the spiritual realm as a ceremonial centre. It is the abode of the living as well as that of the ancestors. In symbolic terms, it is a manifestation of the ancestors. On ceremonial occasions one enters into the body of the ancestor through its mouth, the oval door, or emerged through the vagina of the ancestress, such as the displayed woman on Chief Gold’s house-front. However, house front paintings are rare among the Haida, and entry to the house was generally through the oval entry in the stomach of the crest animal at the base of the frontal pole. Nevertheless, the symbolism of entering into the realm of the ancestors is the same.
Field Museum of Natural History, Chicago

Model of Captain Gold's House detailing the entry portal. The model was commissioned for the Columbian World Exposition in Chicago in 1893. James Deans hired most of the artists active in Skidegate at the time to make models of their own lineage houses.
Chief Shakes' Bear Screen. The screen depicts the story of Bear Mother. In this, a young woman was taken to the home of the Bears as a punishment for insulting them; she married the Bear-chief's son and gave birth to two semi-human cubs. The two figures in the bear's ears represent the twins.

Unknown Photographer. Southwest Museum of the American Indian, Neg No. 20018.
Close up of Chief Shakes' bear screen at Wrangell, Alaska. The bear shown is the Brown Bear clan crest of Chief Shakes and is a good example of two-dimensional Tlingit art. Similar to Captain Gold's house on the previous page, the door into the sacred realm is through the vagina of the crest figure.
Haida Argilite Panel Pipe. Photo: © Bill Holm.
Argilite pipes were carved by the Haida for sale to European traders perhaps as early as the 1820’s. They were collected by explorers, traders, settlers, curio hunters, and dealers from across Europe and America, and now reside in private and museum collections all over the world.

The medium was expressly reserved for intercultural objects that were purposefully carved for Western consumption. The popularity of the carvings among traders was perhaps a result of the unusual medium or the intriguing iconography of interlaced humans and animals that the Haida incorporated.
Some researchers believe that this image represents a bear woman, but what looks like whiskers on the side of the face might indicate that this is an image of mouse woman, a character in oral traditions of the coast (http://danielleen.org).

This petroglyph has distinct notches around the edges of the vulva shape in the stone, giving the appearance of a toothed Vagina (http://danielleen.org).
Hermaphrodite: Photo © Daniel Leen.

The split forehead design is a stylistic form used in human faces at Coast Salish petroglyph sites. Possible hair depicted on one side of the head, a possible breast, and genitals that are ambiguous at best are features that may indicate a hermaphrodite (http://danielleen.org).

Female Figures: © Daniel Leen.

Three complete human figures are readily identifiable. The depiction of breasts on the central female figure is a very rare example of such a motif in Northwest Coast rock art (http://danielleen.org).
Petroglyph rubbing from Clo-oose on Vancouver Island. Unknown photographer. This rubbing was likely done by Beth and Ray Hill and was published in their volume, *Indian Petroglyph of the Pacific Northwest*, 1974.
Tlingit carved wooden figure with human hair pegged into the head and loins. Painted with black eyes and eyebrows, red penis, hands and facial painting.

British Museum
Am1976.03.6

Acquisition date: 1976

This object was purchased from Robert Bruce Inverarity in 1976. In his accompanying notes he records that he obtained the object from Fenton Radford, whose father Colin Radford had acquired the object in Alaska before 1900.

Unidentified figure with an erect penis.

Photo: © Bill Holm
Sea Mother. Wooden carving, possibly Kwakwaka’wakw. Located at the National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa.
Below: Human Figure, Northwest Coast. Marischal Museum, University of Aberdeen, Scotland. Photo © Bill Holm.

Above: Human Figure, possibly Nuu-chah-nulth. Marischal Museum, University of Aberdeen, Scotland. Photo © Bill Holm.
Kwakwaka'wakw, Human Figure with genitals removed or censored. Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology. Photo © Bill Holm.

Raven Transforming into a Man
Granite sculpture by Tony Hunt, 1982
Collection of the Canadian Museum of Civilization.
Photo: © CMC.