

lessLIE:

Salish Modern/Tradition

Support Material

JAN 25 - SEP 25, 2022

TECK GALLERY

Exhibition Text

lessLIE's artistic practice is grounded by a sustained interest in language and the basic human need to make marks as a means to communicate with one another. This investment is complicated by what the Central Coast Salish artist describes as a "passionate ambivalence" for the English language. Cognizant of the ways in which the written word has been weaponized by colonizers to discriminate against and dismantle Indigenous ways of life, lessLIE is interested in its duality as an instrument for both cultural oppression and cultural survival of his People.

Through the evolution of his practice lessLIE has developed a unique articulation of the relationship between written English and the visual symbols of his culture. He argues that individual Coast Salish design elements, such as circles, ovals, crescents, trigons and u-forms, are like the letters of an alphabet, which can be used to visually "spell" any image.

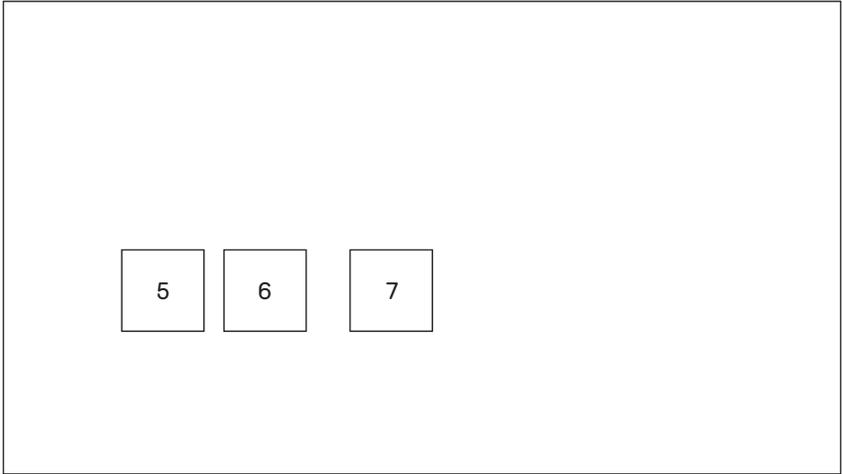
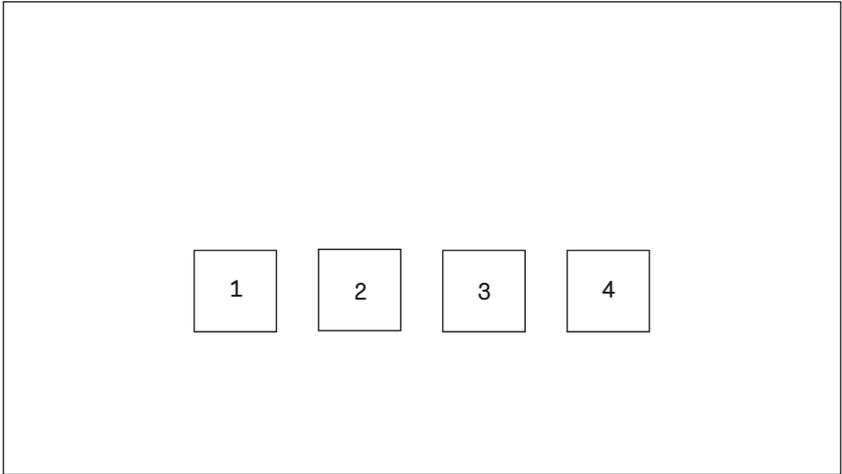
These seven acrylic paintings on paper — all recent acquisitions to the SFU Art Collection from the Salish Weave Collection of Christiane and George Smyth — re-interpret traditional Coast Salish stories through a lens of contemporary urgencies like the accelerating ecological crisis and capitalist greed. Compositionally, they draw from lessLIE's close study of spindle whorls — important elements of Coast Salish weaving technology and tools of cultural communication — through his deft use of colour and positive and negative space. Together, these paintings propose a new form of literacy that mediate between the written English language, Coast Salish Oral Traditions, and visuality, which underscore the artist's ongoing process, as he asserts, to "accept literacy on my own terms."

List of Works

SFU Art Collection. Gift of the Salish Weave Collection of George and Christiane Smyth, 2021.

1. *Song of Serpents*, 2005
acrylic on paper
2. *Sun, Salmon, Frogs and Ravens*, 2006
acrylic on paper
3. *communiTIES*, 2010
acrylic on paper
4. *Thunderbird and Killerwhale*, 2004
acrylic on paper
5. *Spawning Salmon Cycle*, 2006
acrylic on paper
6. *Serpents*, 2005
acrylic on paper
7. *heART*, 2006
acrylic on paper

Exhibition Map



Biography

lessLIE is the decolonized name of Leslie Robert Sam, a Coast Salish artist from the Cowichan Tribes. He works across a variety of media, with artwork that draws on traditional iconographic elements and often employs titles fused with humour and irony. While working on his undergraduate degree in 1995, lessLIE began studying Coast Salish art. He holds a Bachelor of Arts degree in First Nations Studies from Malaspina University-College (now Vancouver Island University), and alongside writing, curatorial projects and guest lectures, he has undertaken graduate work in Interdisciplinary Studies at the University of Victoria. His work has been exhibited both nationally and internationally, and is held in numerous collections, including at the Art Gallery of Greater Victoria, Simon Fraser University, and the National Gallery of Canada.

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