

"WHY SHOULDN'T WE LIVE IN TECHNICOLOR LIKE EVERYBODY ELSE..."¹
EVOLVING TRADITIONS: PROFESSIONAL NORTHWEST COAST
FIRST NATIONS WOMEN ARTISTS

by

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¹Quote by Corrine Hunt (1994)

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ABSTRACT

In this study I interviewed fourteen professional, First Nations women artists who work predominantly in the so-called men's style of Northwest Coast art. I conclude that these artists challenge the rigid dichotomy set forth in the literature between men's and women's art by successfully working as carvers and designers in the formline style.

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Two styles may be distinguished: men's style expressed in the art of wood carving and painting and their derivatives; and the women's style which finds expression in weaving, basketry, and embroidery. The two styles are fundamentally distinct. The former is symbolic, the latter formal. The symbolic art has a certain degree of realism and is full of meaning. The formal art has, at most, pattern names and no especially marked significance (Boas 1955 [1927]:183).

-----Franz Boas, Anthropologist

My work marks events in my life. I have a respect for native traditions, but I refuse to be bound by them in my art work and my life. My life has been spent crossing boundaries: one of the first half-breed kids in the village, obtaining advanced degrees in art [BFA from Oregon State University and MFA from University of Washington].... I like crossing boundaries in my art work: making mask forms out of cast cedar paper, taking traditional geometric basket designs to make large pieces of art work using hand-manipulated paper techniques, weaving traditional patterns in cedar and wool to use in my mixed-media pieces (Fitzhugh & Crowell 1988:336).

-----Edna Davis Jackson, Tlingit artist

INTRODUCTION

In the numerous studies of Northwest Coast art particular art forms are strictly divided between men and women (see above quote [Boas 1955(1927)]). Few of these studies discuss, let alone focus on, individual female artists and their work. In the past century, Northwest Coast formline¹ style has become more popularly categorized in the art discourse as fine art rather than as material culture or ethnographic art.² This particular design style is usually expressed through carving, jewelry engraving, painting and stenography (silk screen printing).

Professional First Nations women artists today are increasingly taking advantage of the general appeal and accessibility of Northwest Coast carving and designing, choosing to express themselves in what Boas defined as the men's style. This choice is as much a response to their lives as First Nations women surrounded by the dominant Western society as it is to the

lucrative-ness of these art forms on the fine arts market. This paper is an ethnographic study about these women based on interviews and personal observations.

Professional Northwest Coast women artists challenge the absolute gendering of Northwest Coast art by crossing boundaries and confronting an existing ideology that works to categorize and exclude them from the profitable, prestigious realm occupied by men's art. The history and lives of these women illustrates the need for a re-evaluation of the overstated categories perpetuated by the master-narrative of Northwest Coast art.

BRIEF BACKGROUND

Early Northwest Coast Art Scholarship - Establishing Boundaries

The Northwest Coast art discourse is written in numerous academic and ethnographic texts.³ These studies provide the foundation of the discourse of Northwest Coast art that influences the contemporary situation of Northwest Coast First Nations' art and artists.

The assertions and codification made by Boas and later scholars regarding gender and Northwest Coast art forms comprise the master-narrative of Northwest Coast art. The concept of a master or metanarrative as a totalizing system has come under scrutiny in postmodern literature (Lyotard 1984; Jameson 1991; Hutcheon 1988). For the purposes of this paper I will use the term as defined by Hutcheon (1988). She states that the totalizing metanarrative is a system "by which we usually unify and order (and smooth over) any contradictions in order to make them fit.... [It] foregrounds, for instance, how we make historical 'facts' out of brute 'events' of the past..." (Hutcheon 1988:x). Generally, master-narratives "assume the validity of their own truth claims" (Rosenau 1992) and serve to legitimize knowledge. Northwest Coast art has been studied and documented by people who have had minimal interest in First Nations women and their

creative work. This study will challenge their totalizing conclusions. The intent of this paper is neither to reiterate nor to deconstruct the capable studies of Northwest Coast art and culture that comprise the master narrative, except where specific concepts relate to Northwest Coast First Nations women artists.

Franz Boas, one of the first anthropologists to study the cultures of the Northwest Coast, initiated the ordering of the "brute" facts (Hutcheon's term 1988:x) by establishing a dichotomy between men's art and women's art. In his words, more value is placed on the "symbolic," "meaningful" art of men than on the "formal," utilitarian art of women which Boas states has "no especially marked significance" (1955 [1927]).

The Boasian paradigm of Northwest Coast art is now being challenged as having been based on overly general, limited information about First Nations cultures (Halpin 1994). Boas' lack of understanding of the intricate relationships between oral tradition, art, and the value, meaning and belief systems of the people who produced it resulted in a problematic rule-based paradigm. Marjorie Halpin argues effectively that Northwest Coast art is in fact "imaginative, unstable, poetic, endlessly variable, changing, and productive of the new, the unexpected" (1994:6).

The division of Northwest Coast art by sex has become a common ordering technique in later studies (Holm 1990; de Laguna 1991; Blackman 1993). There is no doubt that the majority of carving and designing has been done by men, and basketry and textiles by women. The two have also been aesthetically dichotomized. "Zoomorphic and anthropomorphic crest designs were not a woman's domain, and this division of aesthetic labor has persisted well into the twentieth

century" (Blackman 1992:40). Echoing previous studies, Blackman underscores the absolute gendering of the art and finds that it is applicable to the twentieth century.

The data in this paper strongly indicates that role division by sex is a general observation made about Northwest Coast societies, and not a rule strictly maintained by them. Other studies have indicated that there are significant flexibilities in gender role division in First Nations' societies (Miller 1995 in press). There is historic evidence that women were not completely excluded from entrepreneurial art production, carving and designing. Roles have changed through history between the types of art socially accepted for each sex to make. As this study will illustrate, a strict dichotomy is not representative of Northwest Coast art in the late twentieth century.

Context of Contemporary Northwest Coast Art - Crossing the Boundaries

Studies of Northwest Coast art have primarily focused on the obvious categories of wood and argillite carving, formline design and jewelry making.⁴ The promotion of these forms fits neatly into the Western ideology of fine art, in which sculpture and painting are valued over textiles and basketry (Parker and Pollack 1981; Price 1989). The migration of Northwest Coast art from curio shops and ethnographic art institutions to fine art institutions began in the 1960's. Anthropologists, artists and community leaders worked to restore and revive aspects of First Nations' art that had been driven into secrecy or extinguished by assimilation legislation (Ames 1992; Hawthorn 1993; Nuytten 1982). During this time tourist art was also being produced. Individual artists chose the type of work they wished to make, and to which realm or realms to cater: scholarly, for educational institutions; tourist, often small scale mass production; or fine arts, meaning original work sold in high end art galleries.

Relationships between scholars and First Nations artists acquired new dimensions during this so-called renaissance of Northwest Coast art. Scholars both interpreted existing art and influenced new art production. Success on the fine arts market, then and now, relies in part on the construction and celebration of the individual artist's persona outside the context of his or her community (DeMott and Milburn 1989).⁵ Consequently, scholarly retrospectives and biographies were written as testaments to the emerging importance of these personae - the most celebrated being Haida artists Charles Edenshaw (Macnair 1993), Bill Reid (Duffek 1986; Holm & Reid 1975; Shadbolt 1986); Robert Davidson (Halpin 1978; Thom 1993); and Kwakwaka'wakw⁶ carvers Mungo Martin (Holm 1983), Willie Seaweed (Holm 1983) and the Hunt family (Jonaitis 1991), all master carvers of wood and metal.

Marcia Crosby observes, "external interest in Native communities would logically produce work that has more to do with the observers' own values" (Crosby 1991:27), thus establishing the power of the expert. These scholars situate First Nations' art within Western academic and public institutions. The discourse of Northwest Coast art relies upon the precedent set by anthropologists, ethnographers and art historians and upon the ideology of the contemporary art market, in which craft is less than fine art and authenticity is based on perceived antiquity (Price 1989).

Women carvers and designers speaking from the margins of the fine arts discourse actively contribute to redefining Northwest Coast art categories. They negotiate their position in what Clifford describes as the art/culture system (Clifford 1988). The most successful and prolific women in the contemporary fine art market are Dorothy Grant, Susan Point, Dale Campbell and Francis Dick. These women are commercially successful, well-documented artists. They precede

aspiring women artists working to establish themselves. They all build upon previous generations of women artists, namely well known carvers Ellen Neel, Freda Diesing and Doreen Jensen.

In this study I aim to demonstrate three main points: (1) that First Nations women carvers and designers in the Northwest Coast formline style challenge the dichotomy between so-called called men's art and women's art; (2) that the type of art made by these women reflects the context of their lives and; (3) that their work demonstrates that Northwest Coast art is dynamic.

The similar themes expressed by these women are presented from their own perspectives and focus on: their ability to work as professional carvers and designers in a reluctant market; the values constituting recognizable Northwest Coast cultural art forms; their abilities as good businesswomen; the innovations in their work that combine Native and Western art forms and appeal to a diverse audience on multiple levels; and the role their personal lives play in their art.

SCOPE AND METHODOLOGY

This study is based on fourteen interviews⁷ conducted between 1992 and 1994.⁸ I spoke with women who are, or aspire to be, professional artists carving and designing in the formline style. In this study I will also include those women represented in the literature with whom I was not able to speak.⁹ Appendix 1 is a comprehensive list of all the professional women artists of whom I have heard; those who were interviewed are indicated.¹⁰ I came in contact with these artists through four significant events that mark the beginning of their noticeable presence on the fine arts market in Vancouver, British Columbia.

In 1992, the now defunct Granville Native Art Gallery held a show of Northwest Coast women artists entitled *The Spirit of Women*.¹¹ Though the exposure was short lived the event gave the seventeen participants an opportunity to meet and share experiences. One year later, in

1993, The University of British Columbia Museum of Anthropology held an exclusive Christmas sale called *Evolving Traditions: First Annual Sale of Selected Works by First Nations Artists - Women of the Northwest Coast*. First Nations women artists were invited to sell their work and demonstrate their art. I was fortunate enough to be involved in the envisioning and execution of that sale. It was at this event that I met most of the artists I interviewed.

Nineteen ninety four boasted two exciting events. Dorothy Grant opened her shop of high fashion clothing in the prestigious Sinclair Center, downtown Vancouver. Susan Point was annual guest artist in a gallery on Granville Island also in Vancouver. Both of these women are established professionals.

The data for this paper comes from taped interviews with the artists and the writings that feature them, such as exhibit catalogues, reviews in popular publications, biographies, press releases, and the rare academic reference. For each point made in this paper I use the most explicit quotations available from the artists and those in agreement are noted. This technique is not designed to favor one artist over another, nor does it single out one voice as representative of the entire group. Rather, it is intended to emphasize the evident commonalities amongst a diverse group of artists.¹²

The women I spoke with are from different Northwest Coast ethnic groups, practice varying degrees of professionalism and work in different mediums (see Appendix 1). There is no homogeneous community of women artists, and the women that I interviewed are not self-proclaimed spokeswomen for all Northwest Coast women artists. Although this makes it difficult to generalize, significant commonalities emerged between the artists and provide the basis for this paper.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Northwest Coast First Nations women have been involved in commercial art production since contact. New artists build upon previous generations and their art evolves within a changing economy. An historical overview of women designers and carvers establishes the foundation of contemporary professional woman artists and illustrates the shifting concerns as well as the consistencies from one generation to the next.

Early literature of the Northwest Coast documents women actively involved in trade and a later cash economy through the production of crafts, curios and fine art. In early trade, Tlingit women were shrewd and in control of negotiations, to the dismay of the European traders (Klein 1980; Norton 1985). Women were also in charge of wealth management during the potlatch (Klein 1980). Klein states, "the manipulation and saving of wealth was, and remains, in the hands of the women; this is considered their duty and responsibility" (Klein 1980:93).

In regards to post-contact tourist art production and the cash economy, women not only handled the revenues but helped with or assumed production responsibilities. They contributed to the household economy by selling woven baskets, blankets, moccasins, carvings and like-goods to traders, sailors and tourists (Jones 1914; Klein 1980; Kraus 1956; Norton 1985). In households where tourist art provided the main income, the whole family contributed to the business (Nuytten 1985; Diesing 1993). In earlier times it was not uncommon for a young woman to be married to a considerably older man. Haida carver Freda Diesing recalls that one young wife, finding herself married to an old carver who had become too weak or too sick to carve, learned to assist him and to carve for herself (Diesing 1993; Blackman 1993).

This one man, Captain Brown, was still carving argillite and selling it at the tour boats when he was practically blind. His wife used to have to finish them [the carvings] so at least they looked half-way decent because he was still carving when

he was blind. I think a lot of women had their hands on those argillite poles!
(Diesing 1993).

Margaret Blackman suggests that women did not carve openly because of menstrual taboos (1993). Diesing dismisses these taboos, saying that if they existed they would only have been in effect for a short time during a woman's life. Diesing thinks that women were not discouraged from carving by their First Nations communities but by the church which promoted Victorian social values.

They tried to make Indian people in a Victorian image. They started teaching Indian women how to knit and crochet and sew and look after the children. But in the olden days they [women] used to row canoes and steer canoes and go on travels (Diesing 1993).

Klein supports Diesing in her analysis of Tlingit gender roles during colonization (Klein 1980). Missionization imposed strict European gender roles on the Tlingit. They were not entirely acculturated, however: "The missions' most successful converts became Christian women, but they were active, in the image of the female missionaries [that of relatively independent women], and often financially shrewder" (Klein 1980:101).

First Nations women and men shared many different types of work that the missionaries would have considered unbecoming to women.

My grandmother could use an adze, my grandaunts, they could use an adze. And they used to help....They could all use tools, they could use knives. My grandmother married a successful canoe maker who was sick with TB [tuberculosis]. She used to help him with the canoes because she was young and she was strong and he was old and he wasn't very strong.... But she wouldn't be famous for doing it, her husband was famous for doing it, not her (Diesing 1993).

Early observers noted that women on the Coast carved small objects on their own (Riobo 1918 and Sturgis 1978[1799] as cited in Norton 1985). In the late 1700's, a Spanish trader wrote, "...So great the eagerness of the Indians for iron that even the women carried a little knife hanging

on their neck with which they make and carve from wood, trays of different shapes, very beautifully worked" (quoted in Norton 1985:79). Blackman notes other early examples, an iron dagger was said to have been crafted by a Chilkat woman, a Tlingit woman was taught to paint by her father, and Charles Edenshaw's wife painted crest designs on her own spruce root hats after her husband passed away (1993). Edenshaw's daughter, Florence Edenshaw Davidson, was asked to paint a canoe in the 1930's. She had a hand in the patterning and stenciling the design and later painted the boat's bow. She was asked to participate because the community assumed she had artistic skills by virtue of her lineage¹³ (Blackman 1992).

These examples, though exceptional, imply a less rigid dichotomy between men's and women's roles than earlier scholars have stated. Until Ellen Neel emerged as a professional carver in the late 1920's no women are named as carvers in the literature. This is not necessarily an oversight in the ethnographic and historic records. In the past, there was no need for women to be master carvers. Their role as basket makers and weavers was socially valuable to their communities and necessary both for decorative and utilitarian goods. As ethnic art and curios on the later collector and tourist markets, basketry and weaving were bought for a nominal price. But, since indigenous arts have become part of an expensive high arts realm and judged by Western fine arts aesthetics, it has become difficult for artists to make a living weaving baskets and textiles. Both are time consuming, labor intensive tasks rarely priced in accordance with the effort involved in their making. The domestic arts, as they are sometimes called, attract minimal attention on the fine arts market compared to sculptural forms and two dimensional images (Parker and Pollock 1981).

In the post-contact cash economy women learned how to conduct successful businesses in arts and crafts. Klein states that Tlingit women in the work force excelled because they were reliable and already skilled at handling wealth (Klein 1980), whereas Coast Salish women did not always have the experience to carry them easily into a cash economy. Miller makes the point that among the First Nations social and economic change coupled with flexible gender roles have resulted in women crossing boundaries in the powerful political and economic realms of many different First Nations cultures.¹⁴ These skills of managing wealth and public relations have been valuable to women artists throughout their history.

Carving and designing are lucrative commodities on a high-end, exclusive market. It makes sense that an entrepreneurial artist making a living from his or her artwork would choose these media. But money is not the sole motivator. Many women artists are creative individuals seeking to express themselves in their culture's art forms while simultaneously utilizing the new and exciting materials available to them. Carving and designing are both practical and personal choices.¹⁵

Ellen Neel (1916-1966) and Her Generation

Beginning with Ellen Neel, a written history of professional women carvers and designers can be constructed to contextualize the art of contemporary women working in the men's style as being part of an historic continuum. Kwakwaka'wakw artist Ellen Neel apprenticed in Alert Bay, British Columbia, with her grandfather, Charlie James (who also taught the well-known artist, Mungo Martin). She is the first woman carver to be profiled in the literature (Nuytten 1982), and continues to be an inspiration to other women carvers.

Neel worked at a time when First Nations people were beginning a cultural resurgence, recovering from the anti-potlatch law and working with Western institutions to revitalize their art and culture (Nuytten 1985; Ames 1992). I spoke with Dora Sewid Cook, who learned to carve in the 50's, and knew Ellen Neel. She described Neel's life as follows:

She did beautiful work. She was a really good carver.... At the time they were living in Vancouver it was a really difficult time. There wasn't very much money and there was no interest in the art. Then,... we were not accepted as Indians. We were like dirt. It was a time when "Indian" was a dirty word (Cook 1994).

Neel and Cook were taught to carve during a time when First Nations communities were struggling to rebuild their cultural identity and pride, combating the prevalent anti-"Indian" sentiment. Skilled individuals, willing to invest in healing their wounded culture, were encouraged by the elders, regardless of their sex. If social taboos against women carving did exist in the past they were overlooked at this time to promote efforts toward cultural rejuvenation:

Years ago, when I was still living in Alert Bay, in the 1950's, the art was disappearing. There were no people around interested in carving and doing art work. Henry Speck and Charlie George and Jimmy Dixon from Kingcome Inlet and Andy Bean from Village Island and my father [Chief James Sewid] ... worked on [the revival of the art] together. So I used to hang around quite a bit in the shed in Alert Bay where they were carving the poles.... They were very interested that a young woman, I was young then, was interested in the art. So I asked them 'do you mind very much if I learn and come and work with you?' They were really pleased. They made me an adze and then they made me knives which I still have today. And that is when I carved with the men (Cook 1994).

Cook continues working to strengthen Kwakwaka'wakw culture at the Kwagiulth Museum in Cape Mudge, B.C., today. She was the only woman to carve a section of the world's then-largest totem pole still standing in Alert Bay. Today, she designs all her family's button blankets and acts as a mentor to her niece, artist Pam Holloway (Holloway 1994; Cook 1994; Jensen and Sargent 1986). In the past, designing blankets was primarily a man's role in the

collaborative effort between men and women to create ceremonial garments (Jensen and Sargent 1986).

Ellen Neel was faced with a different dilemma, as an artist. Much of the cultural advocacy work in the 1940's involved the copying and restoration of old carvings. Institutions like the Royal British Columbia Museum in Victoria, B.C. and the Museum of Anthropology, Vancouver, B.C. sponsored artists in residence to restore decaying carvings, copy totem poles or make new ones (Nuytten 1985; Hawthorn 1993). Neel had an opportunity to restore poles at the Museum of Anthropology but eventually abandoned the project to pursue her own art and expand her business.

She wanted to turn out new, original work that would bear her name and allow *her particular art style* to continue to develop. As she had passionately stated the year before, Ellen didn't believe that the efforts of an artist should be confined solely to the preservation of the old work (Nuytten 1982:53; emphasis added).

Neel believed that as a culture changes and grows so should its art (Nuytten 1982). In a speech for the *Conference of Native Indian Affairs*, Neel states,

For if our art is dead, then it is fit only to be mummified, packed into mortuary boxes and tucked away into museums. Whereas to me it is a living symbol of the gaiety, the laughter and the love of color of my people, a day to day reminder to us that even we had something of glory and honor before the white man came. And our art must continue to live, for not only is it part and parcel of us, but it can be a powerful factor in combining the best part of the Indian culture into the fabric of a truly Canadian art form (Neel 1948:12).

After marriage, Ellen Neel moved to Vancouver, British Columbia, to establish her Northwest Coast Native art business with her husband, Ted, and their children.

It should be remembered that although Ted had set himself up as the business head and general manager, the 'new' business was anything but new to Ellen. She had been well-trained by her grandfather and could turn out fine work when the time and sale price warranted. Good work on a near-production basis and at least acceptable work on a production basis. It was obvious to everyone that Ellen was skilled, warm and charmingly articulate. What was obvious only to her close

friends was that she was also ambitious and fiercely determined to succeed (Nuytten 1982:46-7).

Financial savvy occasionally coincides with the freedom to innovate and express oneself creatively. Ellen Neel was both business-wise and an advocate of artistic freedom. She wanted to create her own work, not simply meet various art institutions' definitions of First Nations' art (Nuytten 1982).

Women Carvers After Ellen Neel

A decade or so later, women artists were also committing themselves to cultural rejuvenation. In 1967, a training program for artists was created at 'Ksan, also known as the Kitanmax School of Northwest Coast Indian Art, near Hazelton, British Columbia. This program was the result of local initiative and functioned to "revive an interest in the art and cultural traditions of the area and to provide graduates with the means of livelihood" (Duffek 1993). Freda Diesing (Haida) and Doreen Jensen (Gitksan) were part of the first group of artists trained at 'Ksan. Other women participated in classes but Diesing and Jensen were the only two women, from that group, who later established themselves as carvers (Diesing 1993). 'Ksan continues to play an important role in training future women carvers.

Doreen Jensen first became involved with carving and cultural rejuvenation through Polly Sargent and community leaders who felt that it was important for Native people to "feel good about their things again" (Jensen 1992). Jensen recalls,

Remember, in 1951 the potlatch ban was rescinded, so again we could claim ownership to different things. Even in the early 50's our people still didn't feel proud to own these things, they were still trying to get rid of them (1993).

Art was one of a number of aspects of First Nations culture they felt were important to strengthen, including songs, stories, language and dance. As Jensen describes, "Art is not separate, you couldn't just do art" without knowing its cultural relationships (Jensen 1993).

Jensen describes the beginning of 'Ksan as a time when everyone adopted various tasks necessary for cultural growth - ranging from learning to carve, driving elders from place to place, recording oral traditions or doing administrative work (1993). Jensen used her organizational skills to coordinate these aspects of the 'Ksan project. "I spent a lot of time bringing the old people back and forth from the different villages, tape recording them, and I would learn the songs and then I would try and teach the group [of other artists]" (1993).

Jensen was never able to forgo her administrative tasks and concentrate solely on her art. She works today to promote First Nations art, coordinating retreats, serving on artist boards and speaking publicly for First Nations' and women's arts (Blackman 1993; Jensen 1992). She finds only enough time to carve one piece a year. Jensen is particularly interested in traditional women's arts and working within art institutions to promote them. One of her accomplishments was co-curating the *Robes of Power* exhibit at the University of British Columbia Museum of Anthropology, a tribute to button blanket makers which focused on the voices of individual artists (Jensen and Sargent 1986). In 1992 she received an honorary doctorate from the University of British Columbia for her achievements.

Freda Diesing completed the 'Ksan courses and became a full time carver. She apprenticed with now famous Haida artist, Robert Davidson, and spends her professional time carving and teaching. She is known affectionately as the "mother of carvers" and has taught well-known artists such as Dempsey Bob, Don Yeomans, and Dale Campbell.

I asked both Jensen and Diesing how their carving was received by their communities and peers. Jensen responded that it is traditional for everyone to pitch in and do what is necessary to get an important job done. Diesing said, in regards to preparing for a potlatch,

When it came to doing things like argillite carving or small things that they could do in the house and they were trying to get stuff ready for a potlatch, they had to get help from whomever. They would say 'well o.k. if you can do this you do it,' men or women (Diesing 1993).

In the early 1960's (as in the previous decade) elders were supportive of anyone with the motivation to help preserve and advance Northwest Coast culture. Diesing said her granduncle, Chief Willie Matthews, told her, "Your uncles would have been proud of what you are doing to revive the culture" (1993). Here again the basic community needs took precedent, gender roles were obviously flexible.

Diesing and Jensen began to appear in fine arts exhibits in the early 1980's. They first exhibited their work at the Heritage House, a Northwest Coast art gallery in Vancouver (Blackman 1993). Diesing's carvings appeared in *The Legacy* exhibit (Macnair, Hoover & Neary 1984) and *Hands of Creation* (Inuit Gallery 1987). Both women exhibited in the *Spirit of Women* exhibit (Granville Native Art Gallery 1992). Jensen and Diesing continue to participate in gallery exhibits and significant art events. They, along with Haida artist Sharon Hitchcock and Tahltan/Tlingit carver Dale Campbell, are documented as the first women after Neel to produce Northwest Coast art as professional carvers and designers.¹⁶

The Next Generation

Sharon Hitchcock and Dale Campbell begin the third generation of Northwest Coast women artists. Sharon Hitchcock has been an artist since she learned to carve argillite as a young girl in Masset, Queen Charlotte Islands. She appeared on the Vancouver art market in 1974,

when she produced several serigraphs, and four years later she began her silver work (Blackman 1993). Hitchcock received her initial design training from Haida artists Robert Davidson and Bill Reid. She later pursued studies at both the Emily Carr College of Art and Design and the University of British Columbia. Throughout her creative training Hitchcock was committed to combining non-traditional media with Haida formline design. Her current projects reflect this. In 1993, when I last spoke to her, Sharon Hitchcock had completed an animated film about Raven Child using Haida formline style for the illustrations.

Dale Campbell took her first carving course from Freda Diesing and Dempsey Bob in 1972. In 1976 she began selling her work. Today she carves masks, full size totem poles and engraves jewelry. Her skills at carving wood have earned her respect in the gallery world. Her work is sold through the Leona Lattimer Gallery in Vancouver and appears in the 1995 calendar of *Northwest Coast Artists* (Garfinkel Publications Inc. 1994). Campbell is well on her way to becoming a master carver in the traditional sense and she is committed to these traditional forms.

Haida artist Dorothy Grant and Coast Salish artist Susan Point take a somewhat different approach to their art. Their goal has been to establish themselves in as artistic entrepreneurs within the broader context of the commercial art market.¹⁷

Dorothy Grant combines elements of Northwest Coast formline style with Western couture clothing.¹⁸ Grant draws on ten years experience sewing button blankets, which have sold through the Inuit Gallery (Inuit 1987) and Derek Simpkins' Gallery of Tribal Art. She finds her expression in appliqueing Haida formlines onto Western-style clothing to create unique, valuable garments that she markets as exclusive pieces of fine art (Grant 1994, Blackman 1992). Grant was formally trained in fashion school, and graduated from Vancouver's Helen Lefeaux Design

School in 1988. She has won numerous awards, and has studied as well as participated in the European fashion world. Her well known button blankets and her original *Feastwear* line are collaborative efforts with the highly regarded Haida designer Robert Davidson (Thom 1993). Davidson is responsible for most of the complex designs applied to Grant's clothing patterns. Grant has designed some images herself and her new line, the *Dorothy Grant Signature Collection*, is all her own, featuring a more subtle Northwest Coast influence than the bolder *Feastwear*. In this line, jewelry and less elaborate formline designs, appliqued and stamped on leather, complement her clothing designs. In her new boutique Dorothy Grant continues to innovate and excel as a fashion designer, button blanket maker and artist.

Susan Point champions Coast Salish art in a mainstream art market¹⁹ distinguished mainly by Haida and Kwakwaka'wakw images.²⁰ She interprets and redefines the Coast Salish formline into a variety of mediums and markets her work through professional distribution and business management. Her ambition has made her one of the most widely recognized and prolific Northwest Coast women artists. Point sells in galleries throughout Canada and the United State, in cities such as Vancouver, British Columbia; Halifax, Nova Scotia; and Seattle, Washington, among others. One of her most significant pieces is the Coast Salish totem pole in the First Nations House of Learning, at the University of British Columbia.

The women described above are applying their knowledge of Northwest Coast formline styles to a wide variety media and techniques. This can be seen amongst other artists to be highlighted in this paper: Kwakwaka'wakw carver Lorraine Charlie (interview 1993); Kwakwaka'wakw painter Francis Dick (Blackman 1993; interview 1994); Connie Dickens, carver from the Port Simpson Band (North Island Women Magazine 1993; interview 1994); Allie High,

Haida/Tsimshian/Aleut carver (High 1994); Pam Holloway, Kwakwaka'wakw designer and painter (interview 1994); Corrine Hunt, Kwakwaka'wakw jewelry carver (interview 1993); Edna Davis Jackson, Tlingit designer and multi-media artist (Fitzhugh & Crowell 1988); Maxine Prevost, Sto:lo (Coast Salish) carver (interview 1993); Musqueam (Coast Salish) weaver and jewelry engraver, Debra Sparrow (Johnson & Bernick; interview 1993); and Cheryl Lynn Wadhams, Kwakwaka'wakw carver (interview 1993). See Appendix 1 for a list of more artists.

Advocacy has shifted in today's generation from internal cultural development to cross-cultural communication in the public domain. Point, Grant and the others are concerned with making a name for themselves as artists and it is in their best interest to educate the public and fine arts communities to recognize Northwest Coast women artists as adept in all artistic media.

WOMEN IN THE "POST-RENAISSANCE" ERA

During the "renaissance" of Northwest Coast art the relationships between artists and scholars changed as anthropologists assisted young artists in their explorations of their cultural art and began influencing the type of art that emerged (Ames 1992; Duffek 1985). By establishing themselves as the experts, the interpretations of anthropologists included

both a *codification* of the elements or principles of Northwest Coast design, and a *redefinition* of its meaning or aesthetic quality, from a 'primitive' or curio art to a 'fine' or 'high' art comparable to the arts of Western civilization (Ames 1992:60; emphasis Ames').

With this redefinition the professional possibilities increased for the artist (DeMott and Milburn 1989), even if the definitive and interpretive control lay in the hands of the scholars.

Non-Western art is legitimized in the fine arts discourse according to its perceived authenticity, based on the degree to which it reflects the past forms (Clifford 1988). Ethnic art is considered especially authentic if it has direct cultural and ceremonial value (ie: used in dances

and rituals). Art made specifically for sale on the commercial market is usually perceived as less valuable than that which is made for cultural purposes (Macnair 1993).

This codification and redefinition of Northwest Coast art affects women artists in a number of ways. A conservative ideology is maintained among the experts who rely on the paradigms rooted in the historic literature - notably the Boasian paradigm (Halpin 1994). The assertions made by early scholars legitimize contemporary Northwest Coast art and help to determine the degree to which it is traditional and authentic. "Traditional" art is considered pure while those forms that exercise artistic agency and are blatantly intended for the commercial market are perceived as a betrayal of this purity (DeMott and Milburn 1993; Macnair 1993).

Of course even the old art was not static and embodied a wide array of variation in both style and content (Halpin 1994). Certainly there is room for creative, innovative expression by artists working in a contemporary fine arts market. Duffek writes:

Tradition and innovation are often seen as mutually exclusive components in art, one belonging to the past and the other to the present or future. Yet both are part of a continuity, and artists build one upon the other as they develop their art through experimentation and learning. Today, Northwest Coast artists can experiment with aesthetic boundaries as well as participate in cultural traditions (Duffek 1993:228).

The art of contemporary artists reflects a certain degree of cross-cultural aesthetics. Northwest women artists express themselves by linking non-traditional forms such as couture, film, ceramics and multi-media with Northwest Coast design elements. By using art forms recognized by both the Native and non-Native audience they appeal to a wider aesthetic sense, as well as cross the boundary between traditional and contemporary art. For these women, Northwest Coast art is both part of continuum and a reflection of change.

DISCRIMINATION

Most of the artists I interviewed did not feel discouraged by fellow artists from working in the men's style, and many women could name at least one established male carver who had taken the time to instruct them. For example, Cheryl Lynn Wadhams was put to work by her uncles after she dropped out of school and began hanging around the carving shed. She comes from a long line of master carvers and is quickly excelling as a carver in her own right. Dale Campbell remembers Dempsey Bob's instruction.

In the past decade opportunities outside the immediate community have also changed for women pursuing the arts. 'Ksan does not segregate its students to different art forms based on their sex and there is the option of learning from Western institutions. Lorraine Charlie and Connie Dickens tell of special instruction received at 'Ksan from both teachers and male students.

Debra Sparrow found encouragement from Dr. Michael Kew at the University of British Columbia Department of Anthropology and Sociology. Sharon Hitchcock, Dorothy Grant and Edna Davis Jackson received formal training in Western institutions.

Many emerging women artists choose to cross the boundary between men's and women's art and explore their creative pursuits through carving and designing, often unaware of any social stigma against their media of choice. Freda Diesing herself was first introduced to carving by Ellen Neel. "I had never heard anyone saying that women couldn't do it [carve] and I saw a woman doing it!" (Diesing 1993). Haida/Tsimshian/Aleut artist Allie High states,

I came to carving from a different perspective (from most traditional carvers) in that I received a Bachelor degree in art education first, and while I was teaching for the Anchorage School District, I was able to participate in some studies with Jack Hudson in Metlakatla under a Traditional Native Arts Apprenticeship grant (ASCA). I loved wood working.... After having studied many different kinds of media in college, I really like the cleanness of wood and I was hooked on it. *It*

wasn't until I returned to Alaska full time that I realized that women didn't carve (High 1994, emphasis added).

The main complaint the artists I interviewed had was that they were treated as anomalies by Western audiences. Dale Campbell recalls:

The only funny thing that I will tell you about being a woman artist is that a lot of people don't expect it. For instance we [Campbell and her brother] were finishing off our 30 foot totem pole...at a PNE exhibition. We were there for three weeks painting and doing the final touches on the carving. People were coming in every day to watch us work. And just about every person there would ask me if I just did the painting. Because I am a woman they thought that I could never have roughed out the pole and carved it. So when I would tell them that actually I designed this pole and roughed it out from the very beginning and I did the carving and the painting and everything right until the end, they were always really surprised (Campbell 1993).

Diesing comments, "The only feelings I had that people objected to my carving came from strangers, or from non-Haida," though she has never actually met with direct resistance (Blackman 1993:238). Blatant discrimination is only recalled by Sharon Hitchcock, who almost gave up as an artist after her first encounter with the art market, over fifteen years ago. She and Robert Davidson (her friend and teacher at the time) visited a Vancouver gallery to sell a miniature argillite pole. The shopkeeper was eager to buy it and assumed Davidson was the carver. "When told it was Hitchcock's, he declined, explaining that he would have a difficult time selling a pole made by a woman" (Blackman 1993:240; Hitchcock 1992).

In general women artists find it difficult to meet the demand for their work. Some of them find they cannot produce quickly enough because their creative time is taken up by household and community involvement (Prevost 1993; Wadhams 1993; Dickens 1994; and Jensen [in Blackman 1993] all expressed these sentiments). The full time artists whose sole income is from their work have established a solid reputation and clientele, and their art is in demand (for

example, Hunt 1993; Grant 1994; Campbell 1993). Those with shops keep busy maintaining a healthy stock with a variety of pieces in different price ranges (Charlie 1993).

EVOLVING TRADITIONS

Although new media are avidly explored, Northwest Coast First Nations women artists consciously maintain a strong element of Northwest Coast traditional style in their work. "I *do* stay within what I believe is the structure, the core elements of the culture because they are what I am made up of. When I create something I hope that it's within those boundaries" (Hunt 1993). An illustration of this is found in Hunt's jewelry designs. In one striking example, a silver pendant, Hunt depicts a *zumuq'wa*.²¹ The wild woman of the woods is engraved in formline detail with colored gems hanging freely as her breasts. The *zumuq'wa* is a key figure in Kwakwaka'wakw oral tradition. She is a great pendulous-breasted ogress associated with wealth who lives in the woods and steals children (Suttles 1990). Feast bowls and masks depicting her are common but she is not as popular a theme in jewelry as are animal figures. Hunt interprets the wild woman's strength and power in a delicately crafted pendant reflecting a subtle feminist agenda.

The artists who use crest and mythical imagery are careful that they have the cultural rights to those images (Charlie 1993).²²

I use only family crests. And with every piece that I do, I have this link somewhere along the line, maybe to a family dance or legends that have been passed down from generation to generation. Although the picture might not be exactly like a story or a legend, the symbols are there in different parts of legends and stories (Holloway 1994).

Corrine Hunt says that the *idea* of the image is more important than the medium used to represent it. A well composed design is culturally meaningful whether it is put on a chair, worn as jewelry

or a ceremonial dance mask (Hunt 1993). Thus, images move easily through time and retain cultural significance whether they are painted on cedar boxes or etched into glass plates.

Dorothy Grant innovates to appeal to a diverse audience. Yet, she is careful not to betray her traditional Haida art form.

Through Feastwear, I want to communicate that we are a progressive people. While our ancestors adapted to fit changing times, they always kept their cultural values - and so do we as their successors (Grant press release 1994).

Though her chosen medium is Western couture, she embellishes it with the time-honored Haida craft applique.

Debra Sparrow is an accomplished Musqueam weaver who etches geometric designs from Coast Salish weaving onto silver jewelry, rather than transpose more common zoomorphic designs. These pieces are conceptually interesting, a noteworthy culmination of the past and the present, "women's art" literally meshed with "men's art." The combination of Western and First Nations aesthetics is evidence of evolving traditions. The change in art forms reflects the changing context of Northwest Coast First Nations cultures in which these women live.

TRADITIONAL ART IN A CONTEMPORARY CONTEXT

Leading Northwest Coast artists emphasize the creation of art within centuries-old conventions of form and composition. Some artists go even further in their exploration of ancestral traditions.... At the same time, however, they are clearly twentieth-century artists, immersed in the dominant culture of North America. They respond to the challenge of innovation and creativity inherent in the structures of both Northwest Coast art and the Western avantgarde. Their work cannot simply be dismissed as tradition-bound. It has its roots in recognized forms and philosophies of Northwest Coast art, but is also part of new genres developing out of present-day experience (Duffek 1993:222).

The freedom to create anything they find interesting, exciting and new is as important to contemporary artists as it was to Ellen Neel, who stated,

In short the art was a living art. New techniques were adopted; new material was incorporated; new ideas were welcomed and used. I can find no instance where an idea, a material or a tool was not used simply because it had not been used before (Neel 1948:13).

For contemporary artists, art has a role outside the ceremonial or the utilitarian realms of their society. In the dominant North American culture, First Nations art appears as a way of asserting and controlling the interpretations of cultural identity. As more possibilities for this expression become available, First Nations women artists embrace experimental forms to achieve their own creative visions and communicate cross-culturally.

Lorraine Charlie, dismayed by the restrictions she felt on the market for Northwest Coast art, opened her own store in Chemainus, British Columbia, a popular tourist stop along the east coast of Vancouver island. She describes the ideology she and her husband, also a carver, reject.

Eight years ago we saw the frustration of marketing our products. And not only marketing our products but Native art as a whole. You've got the typical store keepers or even the gallery people that have these beautiful galleries and they only want certain things that they think are right. [They say] 'we don't want that, it isn't traditional.' Traditional is maybe like a Tony Hunt design or maybe Bill Reid. You know, things that they know are safe. And so they want you to just bring in things that are safe. But then when you do that, all you are doing is copying what is out there. You're not bringing out anything that comes from just inside you (Charlie 1993).

By selling her own work she can create anything that interests her and her clientele.

Lorraine Charlie carves traditionally shaped spoons, bowls, masks and carefully paints her formline designs on plaques and drums. She often uses a deep turquoise blue which has become her signature color, and one new to Kwakwaka'wakw art. She says some people buy her work specifically for that color while others cannot see beyond its contemporariness. Charlie also paints, sews, and designs clothing and wall hangings reminiscent of button blankets. She believes

that a good artist must be versatile and innovative. In turn, to maintain a successful retail business she must produce a variety of salable items with a range of prices (Charlie 1993).

Pam Holloway paints ceramic tiles and vases with both Northwest Coast formlines and realistic animal silhouettes (1994). Francis Dick turns her stenography and paintings into collage by sculpting tissue paper and gluing rocks onto them. And Sharon Hitchcock has made an animated film. Susan Point's experiments include glass etching, reproductions of old spindle whorls on paper and in larger-than-life carvings, and pattern designs for cloth. As noted earlier, Dorothy Grant cuts wools, leathers and other fabrics into pattern shapes to function as challenging canvases for different formline designs.²³ Edna Davis Jackson uses hand-made paper collages for mask-like reliefs and painted Tlingit designs. These are a few of the more obvious innovations. But to what extent do these explorations keep within the traditions of Northwest Coast art?

Corrine Hunt reminds us that the concept of tradition is limiting for those who wish to push the limits of artistic expression.

Traditional is really an erroneous idea. You know bracelets have only been made for as long as we have had silver and then they were made without the equipment that we use now, as were totem poles. They say 'well, is this traditional jewelry?' O.K., what is traditional jewelry? Most of my market is along the Coast with Native women so if they dictate that, that is what they perceive for themselves as being traditional, then it is.... And then some of these people say 'well, I don't think you should use those colors.' We started with basic primary colors because those were the only ones available. Why shouldn't we live in technicolor like everybody else? It's always everybody else's pigeon-holing. It's annoying.... Obviously what I am doing is traditional for myself (Hunt 1993).

Metis film maker Loretta Todd states:

When we articulate the dichotomy of traditional versus the contemporary, we are referencing the center, acknowledging the authority of the ethnographer, the anthropologist, the art historian, the cultural critic, and collector (Todd 1992:75).

These women artists create by referencing their history and their lives. To them, art is cultural and personal expression. It is not an expression to be limited solely by the tools of the past or the dictates of the central art market. They actually follow a tradition of innovation rather than deviate from it.

WOMEN'S ART

Women working in the "men's style" are not simply copying male artists. Their styles and mediums may be similar but their themes are unique and stem from their life experiences. Connie Dickens stated, "Whatever is going on in my life reflects into my work" (1994).

These women draw their inspiration from their culture, family crests, stories and personal experiences. Some of them see their themes as relating specifically to women and reflecting a type of femininity. For example Holloway (1994), Dickens (1994), Hitchcock (Blackman 1993), and Dick (1994) think their art is different from men's because it is "flowing" and "soft" in composition (the adjectives are their own) and their themes are primarily of family, motherhood and children. Dale Campbell finds inspiration in mythic women as did Corrine Hunt (explained earlier). Campbell told me the stories of three of her masks: Frog woman, Shaman woman and Owl woman. "I guess I end up doing a lot of woman masks," she laughed (1993).

Jensen (1992) and Dick (1994) have both made specific remembrances of their grandmothers. In 1993 at *Granville Native Arts* gallery Doreen Jensen displayed a Gitksan portrait mask entitled *Agwii ts' iits*, meaning "grandmother." She said that during the process of carving a mask the image of her grandmother appeared in her mind.²⁴ She thought about the space in *Agwii ts' iits'* lip where she once wore a lip labret, a symbol of nobility. Jensen described her fascination with her grandmother's wrinkles but chose to remember her in this portrait mask as

young because as a young woman she wore the labret. This symbol of nobility was banned during *Agwii ts' iits'* life, and by portraying her with the labret, Jensen envisions herself as restoring the pride and prestige of her grandmother through this mask.

Francis Dick became an artist after the death of her grandmother. She created her first painting in honor of her grandmother. Her second piece was completed after the suicide of her younger brother, with whom she was very close. These designs are expressions of Dick's sadness and a key part of her healing process as she copes with personal tragedy. Dick's images are about both her life and larger issues in her community.

My work has been about honoring my process, about honoring where I come from; about acknowledging the pain and the contradictions and misconceptions within my family, in my culture, in my Nation and the communities that I come from (Dick 1994).

Dick approaches this process by using mythic Kwakwaka'wakw figures which she interprets according to their relevance to her own experiences.

Everyday practicalities also influence women's art. Some of these women found that a full time dedication to art is not possible with a household to maintain, small children to take care of, and a strong commitment to community service. Connie Dickens is currently concentrating on drawing, stenography and designing drums. While raising three small children she found it difficult to keep sharp carving tools around the house, so she set aside her carving. Cheryl Wadhams (1993) and Maxine Prevost (1993) also have small children and expressed the same concern. They both carve when the children are in bed or at school. Women used to respond to these safety concerns by weaving and sewing, using less dangerous materials which are easily abandoned to supervise curious children (Smith 1992). But young artists today still find it easier to carve. Carving materials are more readily available than the complex materials a weaver must

gather. Gathering, itself, is time consuming and tedious, and specialized knowledge of plants, seasons and locations is needed to attain the right materials (Jensen 1992). Another significant deterrent to contemporary weaving is observed by Sto:lo master-weaver Rena Point Bolton:

The roots are... not that easy to come by. The big trees are gone now and you have to go farther and farther away to get the materials. Most of the big trees are on private property and you are not allowed to dig. So it is really getting difficult to find the materials now to make these things. That is one of the reasons why it [weaving] is becoming a lost art. Because the materials are not accessible anymore (Bolton 1993).

Young women with jobs, households and/or family obligations find carving and designing easier and more rewarding. A number of carvers I interviewed know how to weave and/or sew (Charlie 1993; Dickens 1994; Holloway 1994; Cook 1994; Sparrow 1993; Jensen 1992). Dickens once combined carving and weaving in a spoon she made for the 1994 Commonwealth Games' exhibit by weaving the handle onto a wooden bowl.

Carving is less time consuming than weaving for its monetary return on the market. As it is, the complex lives of these women lend little time to realize their artistic desires. Maxine Prevost often wonders how successful she would be if she could devote herself to carving full time. At this stage, however, her life is busy with her own children, foster care, traditional dance, plus her carving. Cheryl Wadhams recounts her routine:

[Being an artist and homemaker] is time-consuming, you have to split your time up. I find that I only get to work about an hour or two everyday on my carving. My older son goes to school and the other one stays at home so I try to keep the one at home occupied while I'm carving, that's the time I do my carving when my older son goes to school. It's ...a lot quieter and I do a lot of it at night, which is nice. I'm a night time carver (1993).

To see their art in terms of the end product and to judge it divorced from its process and context does these artists a disservice. The cultural context of art gives it meaning and life

(Halpin 1994). Today, artists produce work that is meaningful to both Western and First Nations communities.

This generation of women feel as Jensen did, regarding art as intricately related to other aspects of their culture.

I have always been interested in art, ever since I was quite young. I lived in Alert Bay and there were always a lot of people carving. The older men carved masks and totem poles, that type of thing. The ladies worked on button blankets. So I actually started when I was quite young. I was also exposed to the culture. My grandfather played a big part in building the traditional big house up in Alert Bay. My grandfather is the late Chief James Sewid. So we were up there quite a lot, my sisters and I and the rest of my family, being taught the language and dances. It all goes hand in hand I guess, the art as well (Holloway 1994).

I saw and I heard it. The images that were created were also expressed through dance and song. Everything just wove in together and it was complete. It was around me all the time and as I was growing up I would just imitate or mimic and copy. I didn't think that I would become an artist. It was just something that it seemed like a lot of Native children did (Dick 1994).

For young women growing up in two cultures, art becomes a means to strengthen their cultural identity and sense of history as they move out of First Nations communities.

I don't even remember making a conscious effort to do it [become an artist] but I felt like I needed to have some connection back to where I came from. I have lived in the city since I was 15. I don't meet a lot of Native people in my social life... So I got into art (Hunt 1993).

I was eighteen, so at the same time I was more or less learning about myself. And by getting started in carving it helped me to get more interested in who I was and where I came from. The whole thing started happening for me at the same time (Campbell 1993).

Initially, becoming an artist was part of growing up in a First Nations culture and a way of remaining connected with that community. The vocation seemed to sneak up on them. However, to become a professional artist requires a conscious decision. These artists approach the market with considerable shrewdness and forethought. By understanding the commercial aspects of the

market for Northwest Coast art they can become successful professionally. Earning their livelihood as artists becomes a means to define themselves, share their culture and reaffirm their own identity in the dominant North American society.

THE COMMERCIAL MARKET

Carving and designing have wider commercial appeal compared to the so-called women's arts that usually do not depict the popular formline crest designs and are commonly viewed as utilitarian, material culture. Women artists who carve and design have chosen mediums that are readily marketable and attractive to the Western aesthetic and imagination.

A commitment to the commercial aspects of art production has been met with skepticism by collectors and scholars (Macnair 1993). Ethnic art made for the market is viewed as less authentic than those pieces made for ceremonial use or which represent the past (Price 1989). By assuming that commercialization is a bastardization of original art forms, the fine arts ideology not only brushes aside the changing contexts of First Nations artists but also ignores the historical relevance of Northwest Coast artists who have always carved for sale or commission.²⁵

The history of professional First Nations women artists began with a commercial market. Cheryl Wadhams' miniature work is akin to the miniature argillite figures and totem poles made specifically for early visitors to the Coast.²⁶ She is accomplished at carving miniature frog and loon bowls from wood and aims to expand her repertoire. When I spoke with her (1993) she was developing a design for miniature seal bowls from a feast bowl she had seen in the collection at the University of British Columbia Museum of Anthropology. These small replicas allow the consumer to buy an original carving reminiscent of the past and meaningful in Kwakwaka'wakw culture, namely a feast bowl. She stylizes and interprets the material culture she sees represented

in institutions around her. Her carvings are not mere copies of the past but reflections of an established tradition that has changed and has contemporary significance.

The feast bowl is a powerful image in all Northwest Coast cultures. The abundance of resources and the value placed on hospitality result in huge ceremonies of giving in which the feast bowl is a practical, symbolic and elaborate component. Susan Point's renditions of the feast dish are not hollowed wooden containers but glass. They are sand etched rather than carved. Yet, they are still feast dishes with well formed, stylized Coast Salish images. There is a difference between stylization and ceremonial objects. The art's rendition may not have direct cultural significance outside its concept and the market.

Dorothy Grant says, "I represent an age-old art form" (1994). And she sees her modern styles accentuating the button blanket. But, button blankets were never intended as a fashion statement and her couture designs are not intended to replace them in a ceremonial context. Grant rarely has time to make button blankets any more but she tries to return to them occasionally, finding the traditional form "grounding and inspiring" (Grant 1994).

In their own way, each of these women represent their culture on the commercial market. Catering specifically to a market is not a betrayal of cultural uses of art. The art these women make is not replicated or mass produced for a lower quality market. Instead, they produce original work in a tradition of careful technique.²⁷

FROM MARGIN TO CENTER - GOOD BUSINESS

Advocating innovation and change is one thing, but actually surviving in the market with that mandate is another. This generation of women who are and aspire to be professional artists must be able to sell their work in order to establish an exclusive, supportive clientele. They must be

adept at the business aspects of art production to sell on an exclusive market and to afford the luxury of innovative, creative expressions.

Since the movement of Northwest Coast art into the fine arts market, a paternalistic tendency has developed among collectors, dealers and scholars towards First Nations artists. DeMott says this stems from the artist's

lack of understanding of career development. Some native artists lose themselves in the 'Friday art' syndrome (as [Robert] Davidson calls it). The artist lives from piece to piece, marketing his work from shop to shop whenever he has to pay the week's end bills. Obviously, this approach prevents the artist from exploring his/her career as a unity and mitigates against artistic risk-taking (DeMott and Milburn 1989:10).

"Artistic risk-taking" is a conscious part of these women's innovative work, and being a woman working in the "men's style" increases the risk. "I can just say that there are not too many women who carve totem poles. I would say that is pretty innovative," Dale Campbell states (1993). And innovation is not encouraged when "safe art," that is, art recognized as obviously traditional, is what sells.

Establishing a solid business and gaining financial security are important goals to these women. To successfully maneuver in the commercial art market they employ common marketing techniques. Art is packaged and presented along with the individual artist's persona (DeMott and Milburn 1989), and it is widely distributed as part of a reliable business. Through successful marketing and exposure, women artists can afford (literally and figuratively) to control their representation and express themselves more freely than if they continuously cater to the traditional images of "women's art." They can innovate from the margins and centralize their work.

You know I can create almost anything I want by having the financial security that I have. I can take time to create whatever I want and not have to worry about making standard pieces for galleries or worry about selling pieces (Hunt 1993).

Hunt has her own company called *Gwa'wina, Atta'nam & Co.* Her workshop is efficiently arranged, employing two assistants and accommodating the occasional apprentice. Hunt supplies galleries in Vancouver, including the *Wickininish*, and galleries in Germany where she frequently visits. Her business is her only source of income.

Susan Point is also a successful businesswoman. Point is committed to educating the public and reinterpreting the Coast Salish style. In her exhibit catalogue *From Periphery to Center, the Art of Susan and Krista Point*, Danford states, "Education and marketing have, from the beginning, gone hand in hand in Susan Point's artistic strategy..." (1990:12). Because she has successfully been able to combine quality art production with marketing and educating her audience, Point has been able to bring the commonly ignored Coast Salish design forms to the central art market (Danford 1990). She constantly tries new and catchy mediums. On a recent trip to Seattle I saw her designs on Polartec Fleece pullover jackets (a popular outdoor fabric and style). She also designs banners and posters, including one for the 1992 International Women's Day, which gives her added exposure.

When Dorothy Grant began making button blankets she was interested in "taking traditional art forms and innovating on that form by putting in new concepts" (1994). Professional artists are masters of technique, she told me. She said her work in applique "pushed the technique beyond normal realms of what we call traditional" (Grant 1994). Through her clothing Grant "plans to reach and inform a new audience about the cultural, artistic and spiritual values of the Haida people" (press release n.d.).

'If we can translate the roots of our culture into fashion it creates a bridge between two cultures,' she [Grant] said. 'Everyone identifies with clothing. Someone might not understand a totem pole, but they'll understand a coat' (Lawrence 1993).

Grant's success as a businesswoman and entrepreneur has put her well on her way to achieving her goals. She is careful to make each of her pieces from fine quality fabrics. She considers each piece to be an individual work of art. Grant perceives her market to be in the realm of high fashion and is careful not to undersell her work in price or quality. She employs a marketing consultant and a team of women to realize her goals.

To become a professional artist on today's market requires considerable planning. The above examples illustrate the forethought of these artists who maintain control of their representation. The fine arts ideology may be discriminatory but these women are not victims. By establishing a business, they can work from the margins to their personal and professional advantage.

CONCLUSION

As well as identifying the continuity of past traditions, we must accept the validity of newly invented traditions as legitimate expressions of a Native presence in the contemporary world (Jonaitis 1993).

Professional Northwest Coast First Nations women artists who work primarily in what Boas defined as the men's style (1955[1927]) are interpreting a tradition in ways that are relevant to the context of their lives.

"Northwest Coast Indian art is essentially a wooden art," writes Bill Holm (1965). He then proceeds to describe, analyze and celebrate carving, design and painting as the truly complex art for which the Northwest Coast Indigenous people are famous. These kinds of analyses have led to the migration of Northwest Coast First Nations' art to the realm of fine art, where the artist is individualized, and directly reaps the monetary benefits from this prestigious market. Those who work in these styles can live as professional artists. However, they are then susceptible to the

established codification written primarily by the non-Native expert. In this system innovative women artists are, at best, acknowledged grudgingly.

My argument is twofold. First, the growing number of woman artists challenging the master-narrative of the Northwest Coast and Western fine arts ideology illustrate that there is a need to re-examine the gender categories which up to now have defined the art. Second, by paying attention to these women we can learn that gender boundaries are not as rigid as once believed and that the codes within Northwest Coast meta-narrative art are malleable. By continuing to innovate, make their work accessible, and communicate to a diverse audience, Northwest Coast First Nations women artists are actively and consciously redefining Northwest Coast art using the institutionalized art world as a vehicle. They create an arena in which their work is valued.

NOTES

1. In his classic study, *Northwest Coast Art: An Analysis of Form*, Bill Holm defines formline as "the characteristic swelling and diminishing linelike figure delineating design units. These formlines merge and divide to make a continuous flowing grid over the whole decorated area, establishing the principal forms of the design" (1965:29). He views this to be "one of the most important characteristics of the art" (1965:84). The formline principle represents a complicated design technique and is a distinguishing characteristic of the art of the indigenous peoples of the Northwest Coast.

2. Ames 1992; Blackman 1993; Danford 1989; DeMott and Milburn 1989; Duffek 1983, 1986a, 1986b, 1992, 1993; Gerber and Katz-Lahaigue 1989; Holm 1965, 1972, 1983, 1990; Holm and Reid 1975; Inuit Gallery of Vancouver 1987; Jonaitis 1993; Macnair, Hoover and Neary 1984; Seltzer 1976; Thom 1993.

3. Blackman 1976, 1985; Boas 1955[1927]; Cole 1985; de Laguna 1991; Drew and Wilson 1980; Duff 1964; Feest 1980; Gunther 1966; Hawthorn 1979; Holm 1972, 1990; Jonaitis 1991; 1988; 1986; Macnair 1993; Macnair, Hoover and Neary 1984; Macnair and Hoover 1984; Nuytten 1982; Samuel 1982, 1987; Sheehan 1976; Stewart 1973, 1984; Wardwell 1978; Wingert 1949; Wright 1982, 1986; Wyatt 1984.

4. Duffek 1992 & 1993; Gunther 1966; Hawthorn 1979; Holm 1990; 1983; 1972a; 1972b; 1965; Holm and Reid 1975; Jonaitis 1986; Kew 1980; Macnair 1993; Macnair, Hoover and Neary 1984; Macnair and Hoover 1984; Nuytten 1982; Thom 1993.

5. For an analysis of the changing categories of ethnic art as it migrates within Western institutions see James Clifford (1988).
6. Kwakwaka'wakw is the name preferred by the people who are commonly referred to in the literature as the Southern Kwagiulth or Kwakiutl .
7. I interviewed over twenty artists during this time; the select fourteen are those who work in the men's style. The others, including Rena Point Bolton (quoted in this paper), are basket makers, weavers and beaders.
8. Taped copies of these interviews are stored at the University of British Columbia Museum of Anthropology (Vancouver, B.C., Canada) under the supervision of Dr. Marjorie Halpin. They are available only with the permission of Dr. Halpin, myself and the interviewee.
9. I interviewed all the artists I could locate and who agreed to participate in this project. Practical constraints such as time, distance and inaccessibility prevented me from interviewing every artist mentioned in this paper (see Appendix I). I did not exclude any artist who wished to participate.
10. This is not a master list of all professional Northwest Coast First Nations women carving and designing. I continue to add to these names based on recommendations by artists, collectors and galleries. No one is knowingly excluded.
11. Participating artists were: Salish weaver Rena Point Bolton; Tahltan/Tlingit carver Dale Campbell; Kwakwaka'wakw jewelry designer Nancy Dawson; Francis Dick, Kwakwaka'wakw printer/painter; Haida carver Freda Diesing; Marian Hunt Doig, who sews button blankets; Shelley Hageman and Tracy Auchter, designers of applique fashion clothing; Haida designer Sharon Hitchcock; Kwakwaka'wakw jeweler Corrine Hunt; Gitksan carver Doreen Jensen; Nuu-chah-nulth carver Rose Elsie John; Alfreda Nahanee who knits Cowichan clothing; Coast Salish artist Susan Point; Haida artist Stephanie Price, who, displayed a button blanket; Haida carver Bernice Williams; Tutchone-Tlingit weaver Ann Smith; and Ojibway painter Raven Wilson, whose subject matter is inspired by Northwest Coast images.
12. Not all the artists I interviewed are quoted. Quotes were selected to emphasize a point or to maintain the flow of the paper. Not being directly quoted simply means that one artists may have stated an idea more articulately than another. The ideas and beliefs of all the women I interviewed are represented here in some capacity, however, whether in my words or theirs.
13. On the Coast, artists learned as apprentices and were often taught by family members.
14. As I suggested earlier, there are different First Nations cultures under the umbrella label, "Northwest Coast." This diversity accounts for stylistic differences in the art as well as women's responses to it. But that is another paper.

15. There are women who choose basketry and weaving today, and they sell on the art market. These forms are not extinct and have a place within the art community and First Nations cultures. For analyses of women in these fields see Samuels 1982 & 1987; and Gustafson 1980.

16. Blackman 1993; Brooks 1991; Coe 1986; Inuit 1987; Jensen & Sargent 1986; Jensen 1991; Macnair 1984; Pollack 1990; Pollack 1991; Slainsby 1994; Sultzer 1976; Thompson Gallery 1979.

17. This is not to imply that Campbell and Hitchcock do not seek recognition on the commercial market. Point and Grant are not the only artists with this goal; however, to date, they are the most successful.

18. Blackman 1992; DeMott and Milburn 1989; interview 1994; Inuit Gallery 1987; Tant 1993.

19. Blackman 1993; Duffek 1986 & 1993; Gerber & Katz-Lahaigue 1989; Holm 1990; Danford 1989; DeMott and Milburn 1989.

20. Coast Salish art has been consistently neglected by scholars and connoisseurs. Boas and others considered it a less complex form than the better known Haida and Kwakwaka'wakw styles (Macnair 1993). Point fights on two fronts: against those who reject innovative women carvers and those who undervalue Coast Salish design.

21. The spelling of *zumug'wa* is the same used by Dell Hymes in the *Handbook of North American Indians* (Hymes 1990:595).

22. On the Northwest Coast certain images, stories and names are culturally copyrighted, owned by individuals. It would be inappropriate for someone without this socially acknowledged right to use an image, name or story.

23. Part of the challenge of Northwest Coast design is to meet the spacial requirements of various decorative fields (such as a blanket, house front, hat or in this case, fabric pattern). See Holm (1965) for further descriptions of how artists design to meet such requirements.

24. In Loretta Todd's latest film, *Hands of History* (1994), she describes reaching this point in an artistic creation when an image manifests itself.

25. Even before trade and tourist art carvers were commissioned to make specific pieces by crest owners and the elite.

26. Drew and Wilson 1980; Macnair and Hoover 1984; Sheehan 1981.

27. Tourist art is still produced. The women discussed here are professional, fine art producers. They primarily make original work though in some cases there is some minimal mass production.

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APPENDIX 1

| ARTIST'S NAME¹ | NATION² | TYPE OF WORK³ |
|----------------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Tracy Auchter | | Applique |
| Dale Campbell* | Tahltan/Tlingit | Carving/Engraving ⁴ |
| Lorraine Charlie* | Kwakwaka'wakw | Carving/Design |
| Dora Sewid Cook* | Kwakwaka'wakw | Design/Carving |
| Nancy Dawson | Kwakwaka'wakw | Engraving/Carving |
| Francis Dick* | Kwakwaka'wakw | Painting/Prints |
| Connie Dickens* | Kwakwaka'wakw | Carving |
| Freda Diesing* | Haida | Carving |
| Dorothy Grant* | Haida | Applique/Design |
| Sandi Grey | | Carving |
| Shelley Hageman | | Applique |
| Allie High** | Haida/Tsimshian/ Aleut | Carving |
| Sharon Hitchcock* | Haida | Carving/Engraving/ Painting |
| Pam Holloway* | Kwakwaka'wakw | Design/Prints/ Painting |
| Corrine Hunt* | Kwakwaka'wakw | Engraving |
| Mia Hunt | | Design/Clothing |
| Edna Davis Jackson** | Tlingit | Painting/Sculpture |
| Veronica Hackett/James | Carrier | Carving |
| Doreen Jensen* | Gitksan | Carving |
| Rose Elsie John | Nuu-chah-nulth | Carving |
| Mollie Jones | Haida | Argillite Carving |
| Stephanie Kewstep | | Prints/Painting |
| Lavina Lightbown | Haida | Argillite Carver |
| Dawn Magnussen | | Carving |
| Fedelia O'Brian/McKenzie | | Carving |

| | | |
|-------------------|---------------|-------------------------------------|
| Shelly Moss | Gitksan | Carving |
| Gladis Mountain | | Carving |
| Ellen Neel** | Kwakwaka'wakw | Carving |
| Elsie Nelson | Kwakwaka'wakw | Engraving |
| Marjorie Pearson | Haida | Argillite Carving |
| Betty Ann Pennier | Coast Salish | Applique |
| Susan Point** | Coast Salish | Prints/Design/ Carving/Engraving |
| Mildred Pollard | Haida | Argillite Carving |
| Maxine Prevost* | Sto:lo | Carving |
| Faye Russ | Haida | Argillite Carving |
| Ann Seaweed | Kwakwaka'wakw | Engraving |
| Sandra Seaweed | Kwakwaka'wakw | Engraving |
| Debra Sparrow* | Musqueam | Engraving/Weaving |
| Sharon Shorty | Tlingit | Applique |
| Cheryl Wadhams* | Kwakwaka'wakw | Carving |
| Bernice Williams | Haida | Carving |

1. This list includes artists whose work I have seen and those recommended to me by other artists and gallery owners.

* Artists interviewed for this study

** Artists featured in this paper but not interviewed

2. In some cases I do not know the First Nations affiliation of the artist.

3. I have only listed the dominant types of work for each artist. They may produce other types of artwork.

4. Engraves jewelry