

FREDERICK ALEXIE: EURO-CANADIAN DISCUSSIONS OF A FIRST NATIONS' ARTIST

Ronald William Hawker

#104-8180 Colonial Drive
Richmond, British Columbia
Canada, V7C 4T7

Abstract/Resume

Frederick Alexie was a Coast Tsimshian artist active in the last part of the 19th and the first part of the 20th centuries. His work is interesting, not because of the artist's control of form, but because it reflects the social-historical milieu. His work was also selected and promoted by Euro-Canadians in partial satisfaction of agendas probably quite removed from the intentions of the artist.

Frederick Alexie, artiste à la côte Tsimshian, était actif dans la dernière partie du XIX^e et dans la première partie du XX^e siècles. Son oeuvre est intéressante, non pas à cause du contrôle de la forme par l'artiste, mais parce qu'elle reflète le milieu socio-historique. Son oeuvre a été choisie aussi et favorisée par des Euro-Canadiens pour satisfaire en partie aux programmes qui ne répondaient pas, probablement, aux buts de l'artiste.

Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to analyze and contextualize the art historical discussion focusing on the art of the Coast Tsimshian artist Frederick Alexie. Alexie is not an artist noted for technical aptitude in either his conventional Coast Tsimshian or European-influenced work. This qualitative assessment is not important. An examination of his art illuminates particular circumstances and incidents important in the history of First Nations' art in British Columbia, especially in its relation to the Euro-Canadian artistic community, and is a step away from what Phillips calls the domination in Native art history of "...a paradigmatic matrix of male artistry, ethnic purity, and stylistic evolution" (Phillips 1989:170).

The body of writing on Alexie is small by Euro-Canadian artistic standards and yet large in comparison to most material available on individual Native artists practising prior to 1950 in Canada. There are three works, two major and one minor, on Alexie. The earliest writing dates to 1928 and the travelling *The Exhibition of West Coast Art Native and Modern* in eastern Canada. Marius Barbeau, who was involved with the West Coast exhibit, wrote an article on Alexie for the *Canadian Review of Music and Art* (1945). This article was based on unpublished material collected by Barbeau's Coast Tsimshian assistant and informant William Benyon which was contained in a letter from Benyon to Barbeau dated November 17, 1944. More recently, and less relevant for this present study, George MacDonald (1984) used Alexie's paintings of old Fort Simpson as part of his evidence for early housefront paintings. Concentrating more upon Alexie as an artist than as an historical chronicler, Deidre Tedds, in an unpublished paper delivered at the NASAC/ACEAA conference in Victoria, Canada in 1986, put Alexie in a pan-Canadian context, relating him to other artists such as George Clutesi, Judith Morgan, Francis Batiste and Zacharie Vincent, all artists who worked in western-influenced, non-conventional styles prior to the 1960s.¹ My own background as a Euro-Canadian has provoked my interest in the influence of Euro-Canadian society on British Columbia Aboriginal culture. This in turn has led to the questioning of accepted premises concerning the so-called "Renaissance" of Northwest Coast art, which hinges on the concept of the death of traditional art in the last decade of the 19th century and the first few decades of the 20th century.

The concept of a hiatus in art production in the first half of the twentieth century is over-stated and relates in part to a hiatus in Euro-Canadian interest. To paraphrase Foucault, our accepted definition of tradition enables us to isolate the new against a background of permanence (Foucault, 1972). Stereotypes developed by dealers and scholars with vested interests in Native art maintain the idea that the only valid art produced by Native

cultures in British Columbia incorporates stylistic characteristics evident in Native art prior to the 1880s. If the art deviates from this accepted norm, it is no longer traditional and therefore no longer interesting. The focus on the background of permanence is misleading, or as King puts it, "Indian art traditions cannot, even when viewed as a whole, within a totally Indian context, be seen as discrete entities that develop independently" (King 1986:76). The absorption of European influences was part of a natural continuance in First Nations' cultures and not indicative of a death or decline. Neither does the use of Euro-Canadian visual idioms necessarily signal the complete abandonment of conventional forms. As well, Euro-Canadians involved in the development of a "Canadian" artistic ideal adopted Native art as a "prehistoric" precursor to a nationalist movement in Canadian art during the 1910s and 1920s, ignoring most of the work produced by Native artists of the time and perpetuating the myth of the death of First Nations' cultures.

This paper thus presents two related arguments exemplified by different thematic explorations in the Euro-Canadian literature on Native art, specifically the art of Alexie. First, Native art production did not cease in the 20th century. It was, however, affected by both different White commercial market conditions and different White scholastic examinations. Second, Native art was selected and exhibited in a context relating directly to the interests of the Euro-Canadian cultural community. In this sense, I share Tedds' interest in Alexie as a post-missionary, post-Reserve system and pre-1960s Native artist, and here discuss Alexie in terms of historical conditions and Euro-Canadian perceptions, writing and participation in the Native art market and academic or cultural milieu.

The first part of this paper provides a brief biography of Alexie and a background to the history of the market in Native art in British Columbia. This is important to understand in order to put into perspective the material written on Alexie. This small corpus of literature also has its own historical context.

Biography

According to Barbeau, Frederick Alexie (also sometimes spelled Alex-*cee*, Alexei, or Alexee) was born in Port Simpson in 1853. His father was part of a small group of Iroquois brought to the Pacific coast in the 1820s by the Hudson's Bay Company. His mother was a Coast Tsimshian, and thus Frederick belonged to the *gispawadawada* clan of the Giludzar Tsimshian. His Coast Tsimshian name was *Wiksammen* (meaning Great Deer Woman) and he was apparently trained as a halait carver responsible for

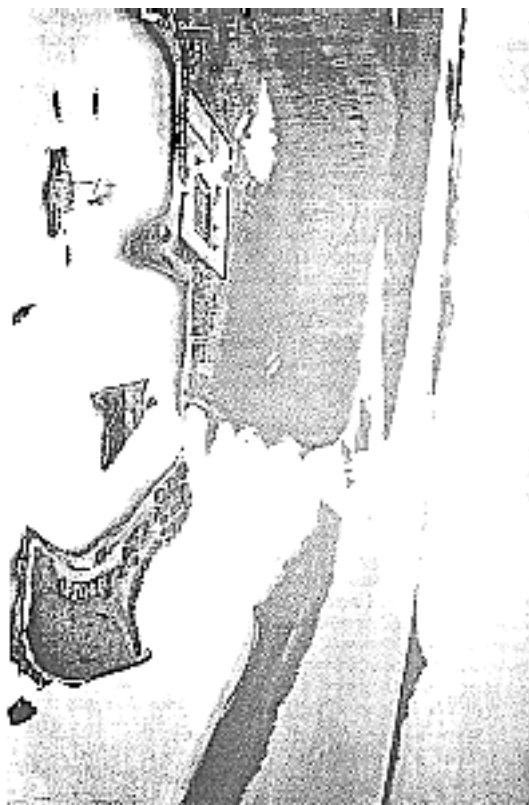


Figure 1: View of Port Simpson by Fredrick Alexie



Figure 2: One of a series of lantern slides by Alexie.

This one depicts an oolachon fishing camp.

the production of *naxnox* or secret society paraphernalia. His surviving art shows strong influences from the Western tradition. This is particularly true of some canvas paintings (for example, Figure 1) and a group of lantern slides now in the collection of the Vancouver Museum (Figure 2). He did curio pieces for the tourist trade. As well, carvings of two priests in the Museum of Northern British Columbia and a baptistry (Figure 3) originally housed in a Port Simpson church and now at the University of British Columbia's Museum of Anthropology, are attributed to him. He passed away sometime in the early 1940s (Benyon, 1944; Barbeau, 1945; Tedds, 1986; Simmons, 1991).



Figure 3: Baptistry from Port Simpson attributed to Alexie

Background

Europeans were interested in Native art quite early in the history of contact. The maritime fur trade even encouraged the creation of a new genre of art in Haida argillite carving in the first half of the 19th century as European sailors sought to bring back "curiosities" or souvenirs to their home ports. The Haida consciously incorporated motifs outside of their conventional visual vocabulary in response to this new market. These argillite carvings included naturalistic depictions of New England sailors, block and tackle motifs obviously related to equipment on the European ships, and European floral motifs.

The maritime fur trade peaked between 1792 and about 1812 and was followed by the establishment of permanent trading posts run from 1821 on by the Hudson's Bay Company (Fisher, 1977:2-23). Although trade in curiosities or curios continued, the land-based fur companies did not collect in large quantities as did some of the government-sponsored explorers like Malaspina and Vancouver earlier in the 18th century (Cole, 1985:1-6). The land-based fur trade began to change in 1843 with the establishment of Fort Victoria on southern Vancouver Island and the instigation of immigration and settlement programmes. The string of posts from Fort George on the Columbia to Fort Rupert on north-eastern Vancouver Island and the original Fort Simpson on the Nass River was better serviced. During this time period as well, the economy of the area was beginning to diversify with settler farming and the discovery of coal on Vancouver Island. The Fraser Valley gold rush of the early 1850s put British Columbia on the outside world's map and the European population began to balloon. By the late 1850s, the first Anglican missionaries were arriving (Fisher, 1977). In addition to spreading the Christian religion among the Northwest Coast peoples, these missionaries were also interested in introducing the advantages of a European-like economy based upon industry and agriculture.

As more Europeans went to the Northwest Coast, more was written about the First Nations people there. This attracted the interest of museums in the eastern United States and then later Europe. By the 1870s, collectors were sent to the coast or contracted locally in the hopes of assembling collections of authentic, conventional Northwest Coast art and artifacts before the people were wiped out by disease and the culture lost to the swamping influence of Europe. The earliest major exhibition was assembled by James Swan for the Smithsonian Institution for the American Centennial celebrations in Philadelphia in 1876. Swan was followed by such other collectors as Jacobsen, Dorsey, Boas, and Newcombe throughout the rest of the century. The art was shown in museums and at world fairs and exhibitions (Cole, 1985).

The confluence of three situations in the 1880s created a second major market for Northwest Coast art: healthy Euro-Canadian economic conditions, the collection and exhibition of Native art by major cultural institutions that began in the 1870s, and the beginning of tourism in western Canada. Tourism was basically a nineteenth century invention resulting from the Industrial Revolution together with the creation of a new, wealthier middle class and improvements in transportation technology. The acquisition of Alaska in 1867 encouraged an interest from the rest of the United States to the south, and a boat tour of the inside passage along North America's northern coast was begun. Originating in San Francisco, Portland or Tacoma, the tour stopped formally in Victoria and informally at Fort Rupert in Kwakwaka'wakw territory, Port Simpson, Port Essington and Metlakatla among the Coast Tsimshian, and Skidegate or Masset among the Haida before continuing on to the Alaskan and Tlingit communities of Fort Wrangel, Sitka, Juneau and Douglas. The tour was extremely popular. In 1884, there were 1,650 tourists on the line; in 1890, there were 5,007 (Hinckley, 1965:69-70). In addition, this meant a boom in the curio industry. Cole writes:

Indians and their curios rivalled scenery as the major attraction of the tour. A chief and seemingly infectious activity of the summer visitors was curio collecting (1985:97).

This led to two circumstances. First, the growth of a tourist and curio industry encouraged the establishment of stores dedicated to selling Native art objects. During the 1880s and 1890s, five major dealers operated in Victoria, the main port on the Canadian coast (Hawker, 1989). At a more local level, it was common to see Native people selling their wares on the wharfs or streets of the smaller communities where the tour boats stopped. William Duncan, the influential Anglican lay-missionary, even encouraged the operation of a summer gift shop in the Christian Coast Tsimshian village of Metlakatla (Cole, 1985:97). This conformed to Duncan's belief in replacing the traditional Coast Tsimshian economy with a market economy run along the same lines as Victorian Britain. In many cases, missionaries were not as interested in stamping out social expressions of Native culture as they were with what they saw as the old religion. Therefore, missionaries tolerated or even requested, for example, the presence of crest poles and boxes in the first church in Metlakatla and elsewhere actively patronized and collected Native art. The University of British Columbia's Museum of Anthropology and the Royal Ontario Museum, for example, can both be thankful for Reverend George H. Raley's provision of large segments of their Northwest Coast collections. Raley also expressed interest in the marketing and promotion of Native art as a means of economic improve-

ment in the 1930s (Raley, 1935). Second, the curio trade cut into the collection activities of the museums. As early as 1881, Jacobsen had found Skidegate affected by the influx of tourists (Cole, 1985:96), and the question of authenticity became an issue for the first time as collectors worried about purchasing objects created for trade as opposed to objects created for conventional, personal or ceremonial use.

This period is generally seen as one of cultural and social decline for the Native peoples of the coast. Certainly, it was a period of significant exposure and adaptation to White ideas, with the Northwest Coast feeling the full-scale imposition of Euro-Canadian systems and institutions. The question of whether or not this was a time of artistic loss has not yet been satisfactorily resolved. One might argue, for example, that artists continued to work during this period, producing objects both for sale and for ceremonial use. This can be documented for both Frederick Alexie and Txahoget among the Coast Tsimshian people. Two ceremonial frontlets by Alexie reside in the collection of the Royal British Columbia Museum (Figure 4) while Txahoget sculpted a conventional talking stick now in a private collection. There are also indications of continuity in social structure. Garfield found that the Coast Tsimshian in Port Simpson during the 1930s had adjusted conventional ceremony to Euro-Canadian form. Fraternal clubs and societies, such as the Firemen and Soldiers, were led by Chiefs and were prominent at New Year's celebrations, funerals and other occasions when display was in order (Garfield, 1939:320). The kind of social rivalry evident between these fraternal groups had previously been seen between moieties. Even now, the leaders in the Klemtu United Church are hereditary nobles (Miller, 1981:31). Gravestones of the time display clan crests and served basically the same function as the earlier wooden crest poles (Hawker, 1988). Even the wooden poles had not entirely died out by the First World War. Barbeau notes the erection of crest poles on the upper Skeena River at Gitwinkul until 1916, and at Gitsegyukla, Gitemaks and Kispayaks past 1925 (Barbeau, 1950:821) while Hawthorn reports a pole commission on the Skeena in 1944 recorded by Benyon (Hawthorn, 1961:66). Indeed, Natives also recognized the potential economic value within the tourist industry of their own heritage and culture. After the conservation programme, co-sponsored by various government agencies and the Canadian National Railways, re-erected poles in Kitwanga in 1925, John Laknitz, a Gitksan, opened a museum adjacent to the poles dedicated to Gitksan costumes and musical instruments (Barbeau, 1950:858). The Nisga's still use ceremony clearly derived from conventional sources in the erection of contemporary gravestones; to this day it is not uncommon to see crests painted on the doors of the nuclear family homes in places like Kincolith on the Nass River (Hawker, 1988:130).



Figure 4: Frontlet by Alexie

If so much of conventional society continued or was adapted, the logical question then is from whence comes this idea of a dying culture? The myth of the dying Indian relates to Euro-American ideals stemming from 19th century social evolutionism, but was probably further encouraged specifically in British Columbia in the 1860s with the devastating small pox epidemic. While the introduction of previously unknown diseases deeply affected all Native peoples on the coast, the Tsimshian² themselves saw population increases from 1895 on (Duff, 1964:39). Pam Windsor, in an effort to determine the reasons for the lack of discourse on the art of her own Heiltsuk people, finds that "... they were subject to an inordinate amount of European influence ..." and in order to "... counter this influence, they not only resisted the attempts of early anthropologists to penetrate

their culture, but also those of explorers and missionaries" (Windsor, 1990:2). Like the Tsimshian, the Heiltsuk "... acculturated in some spheres and resisted in others ..." (Windsor, 1990:24) and in response to both legal attempts at repressing their society and missionary attempts at invoking assimilation, they displayed a guarded attitude towards outsiders. Windsor cites the specific example of Chief Charlie Moody-Humchitt's refusal to work with the anthropologist Ronald Olson, who speculated in response that the middle-aged of the community had neither interest nor knowledge of the old ways (Windsor, 1990). It was not that the Heiltsuk had lost something, but rather that they were reluctant to share information with people in whom they had little trust. The outsiders then made their own judgements based upon an incomplete understanding. The idea of a dying culture is an example of this misunderstanding.

With respect to art, one might argue that at least part of the concept of cultural death comes down to economics as well. Frederick Landsberg, one of the Victoria curio dealers at the turn of the century, tried to drum up a local market based upon two premises: first, Native culture was dying, and, second, what was left was being bought by foreign museums. Criticisms were particularly levelled at the lack of a local buying policy on behalf of the Provincial Museum. On November 1, 1903, one newspaper published the following:

I have seen the grand collection of Mr. Landsberg of this city...I estimated his collection to be worth not less than \$20,000, but I am led to believe that as he is desirous of leaving the country, he has offered the collection at a far lower figure than that, and that it has been declined. It will be a sad day for British Columbia if that noble collection be allowed to join those in New York and Washington...(British Colonist).

Obviously, Landsberg and the others stood to make more money if they could act as intermediaries between collectors and Native artists. Also, the foreign museum market was beginning to wane by this time and a local market would have supplemented the seasonal tourist trade. The "dying culture" idea was therefore a useful marketing slogan as early as the turn of the century.

In the period after 1910, the real estate market in British Columbia was exceptional and speculation in it was heavy. Some of the art dealers left the curio trade in favour of land. Landsberg became one of Victoria's wealthiest and most respected citizens through his involvement in real estate. With the news of the First World War in Europe, the land market collapsed and the provincial economy suffered severely. While one or two curio stores continued to operate in Victoria, there was not the same

concentration as there was in the last decade of the nineteenth century and the first decade of the 20th. According to Lohse and Sundt, large-scale collecting on the coast ceased by the late 1920s. Collecting continued but was limited to acquiring old pieces from collectors, dealers, deaccessioned museum pieces and repatriated items or heirlooms (Lohse and Sundt, 1990). We thus see a pause in Euro-Canadian interest in Native art and a slow-down in the Native art market, probably due more to poor economic conditions than the actual loss of Native culture or the stoppage of cultural material production.

The Exhibition of West Coast Art Native and Modern

The next stage in Euro-Canadian attitudes towards Native art in general is associated more closely with White artists, as opposed to White traders. Artists such as Emily Carr and the Group of Seven were searching for a Canadian cultural identity. This general trend of nationalist thought was perhaps already appearing in the turn-of-the-century writings and actions of the curio dealers and those advocating local public collections. The landscape was an obvious and much publicized avenue for this "Canadian" expression, but a number of artists became interested as well in using Native art as subject matter. As Margaret Atwood noted, "The problem is what do you do for a past if you are white, relatively new to the continent and rootless" (quoted in Halpin, 1983). One solution was to adopt the culture of the First Nations as a Canadian past. Carr made visits to Alert Bay, the Skeena Valley and the Queen Charlotte Islands and painted studies of Kwakwaka'wakw, Haida and Tsimshian villages and crest poles. Jack Shadbolt became interested in Native art through his contact with Carr. A.Y. Jackson also visited the northern coast with Marius Barbeau in the early 1920s and both were involved in setting up an exhibit of Native and Euro-Canadian art in eastern Canada in 1927 and 1928. In general, this new "Canadian" art was actively promoted by the National Gallery under the directorship of Eric Brown during his tenure from 1913 until 1939. In the words of his wife "... (p)ainters were becoming dissatisfied with the academic approach to art, realizing that the rugged majesty of our landscape could not be portrayed with the brush of a Corot or even a Constable" (Brown, 1964:55). Thus, emerging groups like the Group of Seven and the Canadian Art Club became fixtures in the Gallery's exhibitions, and by the late 1920s, Brown had expressed interest in Carr and Varley starting a similar group movement on the Pacific Coast. The mandate of the National Gallery was to promote a cultural identity which in turn would generate a feeling of national unity. There should be no doubt that Brown took this goal

to heart and pursued it with a degree of single-mindedness. According to Florence Maud Phipps Brown, he felt that the "... growth of an individual or an institution should be part of that inherent rightness of purpose, which unopposed, operates spontaneously and ceaselessly all the way from the germinating seed to the circling of a planet round its sun" (Brown, 1964:112).

The *Exhibition of Canadian West Coast Art* was an initial step in the promotion of a Canadian artistic expression from western Canada. It travelled to Ottawa, Toronto and Montreal and was co-sponsored by the Art Gallery of Toronto, the National Gallery, the National Museum, the Royal Ontario Museum, the Art Association and McGill University. Although the introduction by Brown clearly states the consideration of art by White artists as more sophisticated, the exhibit is significant on a number of points. First, it recognized Native art in an institutional setting for aesthetic as opposed to ethnographic reasons. Second, by placing in the same exhibition Native art and Euro-Canadian art, it attempted to make a statement about the acceptability of Native art within a more universal Canadian cultural context. Brown stressed that one of the main goals of the exhibit was to "... enable this primitive and interesting art to take a definite place as one of the most valuable of Canada's artistic productions" (Brown, 1928:3). Third, it called for the continuation of Native art production. Brown wrote:

The disappearance of these arts under the penetration of trade and civilization is more regrettable than can be imagined and it is of the utmost importance that every possible effort be made to retain and revivify whatever remnants still exist into a permanent production... (Brown, 1928:3).

While this apparently altruistic motive laid out in Brown's introduction is admirable on the surface, the exhibition continued to perpetuate stereotypes about Native art and was certainly condescending - if not racist - in its treatment of Alexie. Qualitative aesthetic assessments of Northwest Coast art abound in it. Brown quotes the French art critic Thiebault-Sisson in his comparison of Native Canadian art of the Pacific Coast with the Aztecs of Mexico and the Bantus of Africa. According to this eminent French critic "... the art of the Canadian tribes has advanced further than the others and discloses a much finer culture" (Brown, 1928:4). Brown felt the art of the northern groups was "... smooth, elaborate and refined. Their most accomplished artists have left works of art that count among the outstanding creations of mankind..." (Brown, 1928:4), while the Nuuchahnulth and Kwakwaka'wakw to the south "... could not boast of like refinement" (Brown, 1928:4). He even goes as far as to say "... (t)he grotesque style of the Nootkas (Nuuchahnulth)... is either a degenerate form of the northern art

or, else, it represents an early stage, beyond which the southern West Coast tribes did not advance" (Brown, 1928:9). The aesthetic preference of Brown and the other curators thus centres around the conventional art of the northern coast. This kind of aesthetic hierarchy existed at least as early as the 1870s when James Swan expressed his preference for northern carvers over the southern Salish and Nuu-chah-nulth. The opinions expressed are open to argument and are powered by the European fascination with the idea of stylistic and cultural evolutionism and their own self-appointed, exalted position in its scale.

Alexie was Coast Tsimshian, although the exhibit catalogue does not credit his work with the same flattering descriptions given to the other anonymous, more conventional Tsimshian art objects. He is instead put within the European context of "primitive." There are two definitions for primitive: one has to do with the tribal art that influenced the likes of Picasso, Kirchner and other European painters working in a "primitive" style. The other relates to the "primitive" painting of someone such as Henri Rousseau or even Grandma Moses, who does not display technical academic training in his or her work. In Brown's words:

In European countries primitive paintings have been prized for their naivete, their charm, and the historical perspective which they confer upon the development of art. In Canada this category has so far eluded search, if we except Indian art pure and simple. Alexee's work possesses something of the quality which we should expect from such primitive painting, and he himself is an old Tsimsyan half-breed of Port Simpson (Brown, 1928:13).

While Alexie's work is accepted as charming, the word primitive is transferred from a description of his art to a kind of racial slur on his ethnic background. The phrase "old Tsimsyan half-breed" hangs in the air without dignity, suggesting a less than desirable standing for Alexie. Exactly these kinds of references show the exhibit's thinly-veiled feelings of racial and cultural superiority in the trappings of visual liberalism. He was, in a sense, a bridge between the more conventional Native art objects and the more "sophisticated" painting of the "Canadian" artists Carr, Harris, Holgate, Jackson and the others. Alexie could paint in a western style, but he could not do it very well, which should be expected because, after all, he was an "Indian." This must have been comforting for the White Canadian artistic community, particularly as it was felt that Carr, whose use of Native subject matter was in a sense a type of cultural appropriation, formed "... one of the most interesting features of the exhibition" (Brown, 1928:3). The *Exhibition of Canadian West Coast Art Native and Modern* reflects the inconsistent and unresolved feelings of Euro-Canadians towards Native peoples

in the post-World War One period. It is an example of cultural colonialism where the White artistic community granted itself a position of control and higher sophistication. Carr is given credit by Brown for having "... succeeded in getting them (Northwest Coast First Nations) to revive many of their native arts" (Brown, 1928:13). This, quite simply, is fanciful thinking on behalf of a self-supposed cultural elite. Perhaps the exhibit represents a step forward in the perception of Native people and their culture, but it also indicates how much farther there was (or is) to go.

Marius Barbeau: Frederick Alexie: A Primitive

The Oxford-trained Charles Marius Barbeau was hired by Edward Sapir in 1911 for the Victoria Memorial Museum, successor to the Geological Survey of Canada's museum. Barbeau was then sent to the Skeena and Nass River valleys to do fieldwork among the Tsimshian, as concerns had been expressed about the potential influences of the foundation of the Grand Trunk Pacific Railway along the Skeena and the establishment of Prince Rupert as its terminus on the coast. In addition to research, Barbeau also did considerable collecting, primarily for the Victoria Memorial Museum, but also for the National Museum and the Royal Ontario Museum of Archaeology. After the First World War, Barbeau returned to the Skeena area in 1920-21, 1923, 1924, 1927 and 1929 (Cole, 1985). Barbeau cannot easily be separated from the National Gallery and its inner circle. Travelling with Jackson, he was therefore linked to the Group of Seven. He also introduced Emily Carr to Eric Brown and was interested in contributing to the development of the Canadian expression. In addition to researching the First Nations' cultures of the Pacific Coast, he wrote articles on folk art in Quebec and listed Native art alternately as a precursor to the modern Canadian expression and a valid source for contemporary Euro-Canadian painters (Barbeau, 1932, 1941).

Barbeau played an instrumental role in disseminating Alexie's art among White viewers. He was an important participant in the West Coast exhibition and he published the 1945 monologue on Alexie in the *Canadian Review of Music and Art*. In many ways, Barbeau repeats the same kind of derogatory allusions found in the 1928 catalogue, but his interests are not as aesthetically focused as were the exhibitors. This is probably due more to the participation of William Benyon, Barbeau's Coast Tsimshian interpreter, informant and aide from Port Simpson, and to Barbeau's own anthropological interest. Most of the factual information in Barbeau's article is gleaned from a letter Benyon wrote to Barbeau in 1944. However, Barbeau still cannot refuse the temptation of condescension. To him, Alexie

is "... a fisherman of humble extraction...", "... a primitive, an Indian primitive...", or "... (s)imple Alexie..." (Barbeau, 1945:21-22). Apart from these asides and on a more positive note, Barbeau also eloquently captures why Alexie's art has interested so many people:

The totem-like features and plastic treatment of the figures shown here belong partly to the art of the North West Coast Indians and partly to the conceptions of the white people within the fold of the church. This blend of two cultures in Alexie's carvings is a rare accident at the frontiers of two worlds. It makes his paintings and carvings exceptional, fascinating, significant... (Barbeau, 1945:22).

In addition, this indicates Barbeau's vision for the future of art in Canada. He advocated the combination of ethnic artistic streams in the creation of a "Canadian" art. He once wrote of a commission granted to Edwin Holgate, in which the artist was asked to depict the natural and ethnographic scenery of the Skeena River for the tea room of the Canadian National Railway's Chateau Laurier Hotel in Ottawa, "... it constitutes a striking departure from the beaten path and a step forward in Canadian art and culture" (Barbeau, 1932:205). Of the side by side display of different art traditions in the West Coast exhibit, Barbeau writes,

Each borrowed its inspiration from the same backgrounds. One enhanced the beauty of the other and made it more significant. Indian craftsmen had been great artists in their way and the most original. The moderns had responded to the same exotic themes, but in terms consonant with their own traditions (Barbeau, 1932:203).

Barbeau's article on Alexie may be put into the context of work done by White organizations in promoting Native art during the second quarter of the twentieth century. This begins with Barbeau himself and his participation in the 1925 programme co-sponsored by government agencies and the Canadian National Railways, a Crown Corporation, for the *in situ* conservation of Native crest poles along the old Grand Trunk rail line in the Skeena Valley (Barbeau, 1950; Cole, 1985).

The Grand Trunk Pacific Railway went broke with the real estate collapse at the outbreak of the First World War and was subsequently resurrected by a government buy-out scheme as the Canadian National Railway. The original idea of the Grand Trunk Pacific was to form a land and maritime trans-continental bridge from Britain across Canada to Hong Kong. In a sense, it replicated the grand vision of the Canadian Pacific Railway, although it secured as well the contract for the transportation of the Royal Mail. The contract later became obsolete with the laying of trans-

Atlantic telegraph cable lines. Prince Rupert, the proposed terminus, had been promoted as the largest harbour facility north of San Francisco (Bowman, 1980). The end result was a rail line crossing Canada and a city, indeed a region, with little industry to support it. Thus the *in situ* conservation of crest poles was not altogether a selfless project. "Totem" poles were a hot tourist attraction from the last part of the 19th century on and the Tsimshian were among the northern groups who produced them. In addition, the railway passed through or across from many Native communities where they still stood. So, for someone like Barbeau, such a programme combined a number of favourable results. First, the Native arts were restored. Second, the tourists got to see totem poles and the rail company had customers. Third, the resulting tourism promoted employment and industry among both White and Native communities in the district.

Canadian Natives were a political fact of life from the first days of Canadian confederation. In the overwhelming waves of European immigration, this was sometimes forgotten. By the 1900s, with the shifting of economic bases and practices, it was in the best interests of everybody to more efficiently exploit the market potential of Native culture, which could also be assumed into a national identity. Two major wars interfered during the first half of the century, although efforts were nonetheless made. The totem pole restoration project was one example. The West Coast exhibition was another. In 1935, Raley outlined a proposal for organizing efforts at marketing Native art (Raley, 1935). In 1939, Barbeau announced that a project aimed at restoring the "lost arts" of the Northwest Coast people was in the works. In 1940, the British Columbia Indian Arts and Welfare Society was established by the British Columbia Provincial Museum under the direction of Alice Ravenhill and with close similarities to the organizational structure advocated by Raley. It actively educated school children on the value of Native culture and throughout the 1940s attempted to focus public attention on Native art through conferences, radio broadcasts, articles in newspapers, books and demonstrations. By the late 1940s, Harry and Audrey Hawthorn from the Anthropology and Sociology Department at the University of British Columbia had outlined a survey on the economic role of arts and crafts in Native society. They suggested the educational value of books for the lay public and the contribution of museum projects in educating local communities on British Columbia Natives and their material culture. White education and patronization programmes, in an institutional environment influenced by the proposals of the Massey Commission, began to raise the profile of Native arts in the eyes of the general non-Native public. Judith Morgan, a young Gitksan woman, was exhibiting in Victoria, Vancouver, and the United States and in 1949 had a solo show at the National Gallery in Ottawa. Ellen Neel, a Kwakwaka'wakw woman receiving

support from the British Columbia Indian Arts and Welfare Society, opened a show room in Stanley Park and carved masks and model poles for tourist consumption (Dawn, 1984:29). By the early 1950s, totem pole restoration and training programmes were under way at the University of British Columbia and the British Columbia Provincial Museum.

Barbeau was part of this movement of White patronization. He played a significant role in the earliest projects. Alexie is therefore the first of the British Columbian Native individuals promoted nationally as an artist. He is the direct predecessor of such artists as Neel, Morgan, Mungo Martin and even Bill Reid. Barbeau's reasons for writing the Alexie article should be seen in this light, especially since he solicited the information on Alexie from Benyon in 1944 rather than in 1928. His interest in promoting Native artists working in a western style, in this case Alexie, may stem from hope for the creation of a Canadian identity, a hope he shared with Brown and artists like those in the Group of Seven. He stated, "... there are semi-autonomous elements of culture in various parts of the country, some of which are old and in a state of decay, others in ferment, and not a few show signs of growth or fusion into a pattern that may eventually spell national character and unity" (Barbeau, 1941:29). To Barbeau, Alexie represented a kind of fusion as he was a Native depicting the landscape in a western style.

Brown and Barbeau, particularly with their connections to the federal government, are both reminiscent of McMaster's reference to the Department of Indian Affairs during the 1920s in the organization and supervision of Native exhibits at industrial and agricultural exhibitions. McMaster wrote:

One role of the Indian Affairs' agent (to ensure that these Indians were being "civilized", i.e., becoming good farmers and tradesmen), was to exhibit their products to show their civilized qualities rather than their traditions, assuming that this would instil a Euro-Canadian spirit of competitiveness and motivation. Beneath the veneer, however, lay the chilling fact that the Indian was a showcase for the Department's policy of assimilation (McMaster, 1989:209).

Deidre Tedds (Simmons): A History for Contemporary Canadian Indian Art

The so-called Renaissance of the 1960s was in part a media event. Even if one accepts it as a reality, the Renaissance still had a long build-up, beginning with Marius Barbeau, the pole restoration project and the West Coast exhibition in the 1920s. People involved with the Native cultural scene, particularly Euro-Canadians, incorporated education and writing programmes into their patronization strategies. Altruistic motives or otherwise, marketing through print became an integral part of realizing the creation of strong local buying conditions. The same museums publishing research by their staff were providing funding and employment for Native artists and the acceptance of the death of Native culture was a necessary step for the interested White community in assuming responsibility for its revival.

White patronization of Native arts has provided a valuable impetus in their development. This cannot be denied. In comparison, the Native communities do not carry enough economic weight to invest the same amount of money in conventional art. This does not mean that ceremonialism and therefore art production died out in all Native communities. However, interested Euro-Canadian parties, such as Walter Koerner, who actively patronized Bill Reid thus allowing for the production of at least one of Reid's best known and most monumental works, the Raven and the First Men at the University of British Columbia's Museum of Anthropology, have up-graded the White and international market for Native art from touristy souvenirs to so-called "fine" art. The Renaissance of the 1960s took Native art from Landsberg's Indian Bazaar in Victoria through the West Coast exhibit and patronization schemes to major private collections and galleries around the globe. Where previously it had been sought after either as travel souvenirs or ethnographic data, now it was seen as art. Bill Reid, for one, is proof of this.

The Renaissance has also clouded the question of whether or not Native culture stopped. This in turn leads us to a present re-examination of Native cultural history in British Columbia during the 20th century. Tedds, who seems to have come upon this topic through researching the British Columbia Indian Arts and Welfare Society, presents two main points for consideration in her paper. The establishment of these points also forms the main purpose for her research. First, there exists a "... continuity of an artistic tradition from the time of European contact..." and second, there existed "... Indian artists working in a Western style prior to the 1960s" (Tedds, 1984:1). She then cites five artists as evidence. The main difference between Tedds' work and those of Brown and Barbeau is the growth of

Native art history in the forty to sixty years that separate these articles. Barbeau and Brown were among the first to write about First Nations' material culture in aesthetic, as opposed to ethnographic, terms and to identify and discuss an individual Native artist. Their intentions were thus more intimately tied up with the promotion of Native art as an art accessible to the Euro-Canadian general public. Tedds, in discussing individual artists, helps re-shift the focus away from so-called traditional art, a focus that had become particularly important in Northwest Coast art history with museum restoration and promotion programmes in the early 1950s, Holm's identification of an ideal, northern Northwest Coast formal system in 1965, and the renaissance of non-Native Canadian interest from the mid-1960s.

Tedds does nothing more than bring up the problem. She adds nothing to its solution, although one must acknowledge the modest intent of her paper. The information she gives on the five artists can just as easily be found published elsewhere. She offers no contextual analysis for clarification. She does not discuss the artists within this idea of continuity. Of course, it is true that Alexie painted in a Westernized style, which puts him within her second category. We also know that he produced work in a conventional style, which puts him under her first category as well. This is not discussed.

Nonetheless, it is significant that the discourse is turning its attention to the "pre-Renaissance" artists of British Columbia. The obsession with three widely separated artistic eras, that of initial contact, the late nineteenth century and the contemporary scene, should thus be reconciled with an understanding of a dual nature of Native art. Art was produced both for sale and for conventional use. Ceremonial use continues for many communities. This was not always readily accessible to the general Canadian public given the political, economic and social distinctions between Native and Euro-Canadians. Assaults on conventional practices from, for example, residential schools, the *Indian Act*, and Christianization, have not killed all the ways of the past. A perusal of current ethnographic literature supports this. As well, the history of art for sale is a history of the fluctuating tastes, interests and market strategies of Euro-Canadian consumption. If it appears that Native art died out, it is at least partly because Euro-Canadian demand was not as keen and Natives were reluctant to discuss activities seen unfavourably by Euro-Canadian authority figures. Tedds talks about the Reservation Period from 1874 to 1951. It cannot be argued that artists did not produce art both for ceremony and for sale during this period. One person that Tedds mentions, Alexie, is documented as having done so. Alexie also worked in different traditions and modes of expression as it suited him.

Conclusion

One can examine the literature on Alexie within the context of Euro-Canadian thought towards Native art in the twentieth century. Alexie worked in a number of styles and functional categories, but without fail those who have examined his art have focused on his Westernized painting. This precedent was first established by Brown, Barbeau and the 1927-28 West Coast exhibition in eastern Canada. It was re-emphasized by Barbeau in the 1940s and picked up again by Deidre Tedds some forty years later.

Alexie was the first individual Northwest Coast artist actively promoted by White institutional patrons in the White community. The writings of both Barbeau and Brown were intended in this vein and thus Alexie stands as the first in the company of Neel, Morgan, Clutesi, Martin, and Reid. The promotion of artists working in a western style may have initially been a conscious effort to integrate Native artists in the mainstream art markets and to appropriate their art in the creation of a national artistic expression. In this respect, Barbeau and Brown selected a stereotype for Alexie understandable to the general Euro-Canadian public. In their writing, he became a Native equivalent of the European primitive. Unfortunately, this also has racist implications as Native art at the time was generally and consistently referred to as primitive. Barbeau and Brown created a kind of *double-entendre* and applied it to Alexie: the primitive who is a primitive. Tedds' efforts represent a renewed interest in the art of the twentieth century that has either been looked on with disfavour or completely ignored, primarily because many see the inclusion of western elements in Native painting as something less than authentic. With hope, we will not repeat the racism of Barbeau and Brown; Tedds' work represents a shift towards a less exclusive history of Native culture.

Notes

1. This paper was subsequently published by Deidre Simmons (nee Tedds) in 1991.
2. In the interest of pursuing a general discussion, Tsimshian is used in this paper to refer to the people who speak the four related Tsimshian languages, Coast Tsimshian, Southern Tsimshian, Nisga'a, and Gitksan, as a whole.

References

- Barbeau, Charles Marius
- 1932 The Indians of the Prairies and the Rockies; A Theme for Modern Painters. *The University of Toronto Quarterly* 1(2).
 - 1941 Backgrounds in Canadian Art. *Proceedings and Transactions of the Royal Society of Canada Third Series*, 35.
 - 1945 Frederick Alexie: A Primitive. *Canadian Review of Music and Art* 3(11 and 12).
 - 1950 *Totem Poles*. Two Volumes. Ottawa: National Museum of Man.
- Benyon, William
- 1944 Personal Correspondence to Charles Marius Barbeau, unpublished.
- Bowman, Phylis
- 1980 *Whistling Through the Wind*. Prince Rupert: P. Bowman.
- British Colonist*
- 1903 Victoria, British Columbia. November 1.
- Brown, Eric
- 1928 *Catalogue of An Exhibition of Canadian West Coast Art Native and Modern*. Toronto: Art Gallery of Toronto.
- Brown, Florence Maud Phipps
- 1964 *Breaking Barriers: Eric Brown and the National Gallery*. Ottawa: Society for Art Publications.
- Cole, Douglas
- 1985 *Captured Heritage: The Scramble for Northwest Coast Artifacts*. Vancouver and Toronto: Douglas and McIntyre.
- Dawn, Leslie Allan
- 1984 *The Northwest Coast Native Print: A Contemporary Tradition Comes of Age*. Victoria: Art Gallery of Greater Victoria.
- Duff, Wilson
- 1964 *The Indian History of British Columbia: Volume One. The Impact of the White Man*. Victoria: British Columbia Provincial Museum.
- Fisher, Robin
- 1977 *Contact and Conflict: Indian-European Relations in British Columbia, 1774-1890*. Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press.

- Foucault, Michel
1972 *The Archaeology of Knowledge*. New York: Pantheon.
- Garfield, Viola
1939 Tsimshian Clan and Society. *University of Washington Publications in Anthropology* 7(3).
- Halpin, Marjorie M.
1983 *Jack Shadbolt and the Coastal Indian Image*. Vancouver: University of British Columbia Museum of Anthropology Museum Note Number 18.
- Hawker, Ronald W.
1988 *In the Way of the White Man's Totem Pole: Tsimshian Gravestones 1879-1930*. Victoria: University of Victoria. Unpublished Master of Arts thesis.
1989 The Johnson Street Gang: Early Native Art Dealers in Victoria. *British Columbia Historical News* 21(1).
- Hawthorn, Harry B.
1961 The Artist in Tribal Society: The Northwest Coast, pp. 59-70 in Marian W. Smith (Editor): *The Artist in Tribal Society: Proceedings of a Symposium Held at the Royal Anthropological Institute*. New York: The Free Press of Glencoe.
- Hinckley, Ted C.
1965 The Inside Passage: A Popular Gilded Age Tour. *Pacific Northwest Quarterly* 56(2).
- King, J.C.H.
1986 Tradition in Native American Art. *The Arts of the North American Indian: Native Traditions in Evolution*. New York: Hudson Hills Press.
- Lohse, E.S. and Frances Sundt
1990 History of Research: Museum Collections. *Handbook of North American Indians*. Volume 7: *Northwest Coast*. Washington: United States Government Printing Office.
- MacDonald, George F.
1984 Painted Houses and Woven Blankets: Symbols of Wealth in Tsimshian Art and Myth, pp. 109-136 in Jay Miller and Carol M. Eastman (Editors): *The Tsimshian and Their Neighbours of the North Pacific Coast*. Seattle and London: University of Washington Press.

- McMaster, Gerald
 1989 Tenuous Lines of Descent: Indian Arts and Crafts of the Reservation Period. *The Canadian Journal of Native Studies* 9(2): 205-236.
- Miller, Jay
 1981 Moieties and Cultural America: Manipulation of Knowledge in a Pacific Northwest Coast Native Community. *Arctic Anthropology* 18(1).
- Phillips, Ruth B.
 1989 What is "Huron Art"?: Native American Art and the New Art History. *The Canadian Journal of Native Studies* 9(2): 161-186.
- Raley, George H.
 1935 Canadian Indian Art and Industries: An Economic Problem of Today. *The Journal of the Royal Society of Arts* 83.
- Simmons, Deidre
 1991 A History for Contemporary Canadian Indian Art. *European Review of Native American Studies* 5(1).
- Tedds, Deidre
 1986 A History for Contemporary Canadian Indian Art. Unpublished paper presented at the NASAC/ACEAA Conference in Victoria (see Simmons, 1991).
- Windsor, Pam
 1990 Reasons for the Lack of Discourse About the Society and Art of the Heiltsuk People. Unpublished manuscript prepared for Anthropology 545, University of British Columbia.

Figures

1. View of Port Simpson by Frederick Alexie (Canadian Centre for Folk Culture Studies, Museum of Civilization Negative #57004).
2. One of a series of lantern slides by Alexie. This one depicts an oolachon fishing camp (Vancouver Museum 1042).
3. Baptistry from Port Simpson attributed to Alexie (UBC MOA A1778).
4. Frontlet by Alexie (RBCM CPN 18700).