

Dr. Andrea Walsh Interviewing Chris Paul

Including Artist Statements

Artist: Chris Paul

Cultural Group: Coast Salish

AW: OK, so this was the piece that you did for the University that is installed in the Cornett building.

CP: Um, hmm.

AW: And we did it together as a part of the first [Visiting Artist Program], the First Salish artist in residence at UVIC. And maybe you can talk a little bit about the piece itself, like some perspective in terms of how you conceptualized it, what your design was and what your thoughts are now that it's up in the building.

CP: Well the main part that I think is important about it is it was part of a class with [you] Andrea Walsh, and I think it was really important to... the idea at the beginning seemed to do a relevant topic that had to do with [your] Andrea's class of... Anthropology?

AW: Um, hmm.

CP: Anthropology, and had to do with current topics that have cultural or historic bases to them, and that seemed to be where the class was heading as I remember anyways. And one of the main parts that came up at the time were of course the rabbits and the deer and of course UVIC was great rabbit territory and definitely really great deer territory and one of the things I think we talked about is how well they were protected at the time, the rabbits and the deer, or now, as opposed to... the predators that are like sharks and other things like that, that are really important or like cougars which are, you know, there's a cougar in Combat Bay? It's like headline news. Right?

AW: Yeah, right.

CP: And the people around. There's the rabbit in the middle, or the rabbits and the deer in the middle of the piece and the humans are around the edges. Originally I put all the predators around but I think the relevant point became as I developed the project... it was the humans and the rabbits and the deer trying to find balance and how much of a hot topic was for that time.

AW: So the human face figures.

CP: These are the bodies.

AW: And the bodies are surrounding the animals?

CP: Um, hmm, it's like, it's almost looks like a debate, a discussion or a gathering of humans around, around the rabbits and the deer.

AW: So what about the choice of your materials?

CP: For me it wasn't hard because at the time... as of lately I'm really enjoying glass and sand blasted cedar and the graphic nature and also the design of the frame was just really excellent for the piece, it really enhanced it as well.

AW: Have you... are deer and rabbits things that have appeared in your work before, or is this kind of a move....

CP: Deer have already made their way in but rabbits in this case hadn't. One of the things I think is a design element that I think people should really look closely at is the little human faces on the deer's tail, or I mean the rabbits' tail.

AW: Oh! Ok, yeah I never saw those before... that's hilarious.

CP: It just kind of puts... you know in any discussion my father Phillip Paul, he use to always, and this is a Native thing, they always use to put something humorous in. Something that became so serious to actually blend or connect those. And I think that's a Native thing. And I really enjoy the humour. And of course we had the Dean, three of the Deans came down to have a discussion before we had the unveiling and also it was like, it was kind of shocking to them to start with but they slowly became ok with it. I think Richard loved it from the start.

AW: I think the... the piece really speaks to a particular time at the University because of course the rabbits are no longer there. The deer still wander through but I'm pretty sure in a certain number of years that we won't be seeing the deer on campus. So I think it does mark a particular time at the University when these animals were prolific. And it talks about aspect of contested terrain.

CP: And of course the name is finding balance and I think as a culture around UVIC and a learning center that has debates and all that sort of thing, I think it's really important to keep those sorts of things alive. And I hope it's part of a tour or something all the time, so people can get a sense of the history.

AW: It is, it's on a tour, this bits and pieces you just talked about we'll put that on the website that goes with the self-guided tour.

CP: Nice.

AW: Ok , so... let's look at a couple of these other pieces... this one doesn't even have an image, do you remember.

CP: If you go to the website, it's on the website.

AW: OK.

CP: On the UVIC website.

AW: On the UVIC website, OK.

CP: Under Chris Paul.

AW: Ok, so **Matriarch Totem**.

CP: Yes, sanded blasted glass that's in the First Nations House it's in the most important spot in my opinion, is the student lounge where... I absolutely love the piece, it was one of those funny pieces that found its own way there, it's really interesting I was trying to donate it to the First Nations trail at the Glendale Gardens and they wanted to auction it off or do something to that effect with UVIC, because UVIC had that event that came up, it ended up at UVIC and then something happened and it ended up in the student lounge as a place holder. It wasn't even supposed to be there, and it found its own way there, and I think that's an incredible part in itself. And of course the matriarch in my understanding is the main woman in the family that guides you through your life, is always a guide in your life even when you feel alone you still think of that person. And for me to put the matriarch in the students lounge is, and this is what I wanted to describe was... I'm trying to think of how this goes... when your away at school, when your alone all of those times, or when you have to call home and maybe there's nobody home or there's at least one person you want to call it's usually the matriarch of the family, it's usually the mother or the grandmother, one of those really important people in your life that when your feeling alone you need to talk to somebody or you're going through a very important decision in your life you will always call that person, and that's the matriarch of your family. And I think it's very fitting to have it where it is and like I said this piece found its way there so... and of course the Smyth's made that happen which I thought was really cool too.

AW: So **Thunderbird and Killerwhale Copper**.

CP: Well, that was a piece I did for Sydney Pier, no the court of Sydney and George and Christiane came in a saw it and fell in love with it. But it's a piece that for me, if you go to my website you will also find a story of the thunderbird and killerwhale you can add some pieces from there. Is that for me it's the mythical being that we need in our life to smooth over the transition in life from being a child to being an adult. It's a really, it's also an awakening when you have a spiritual experience, when you have an awakening as a person even if it's like a car crash or many of things that people have that really strike them in their life that make them feel a certain way and of course the story for me, like if you read the story on the website you'll understand how it was for me as child you know for me. In Brentwood Bay an eagle, or a Thunderbird and a Killerwhale having their fights.

Returning, or **Return**, I don't know what to say about that one. Return is just a piece that is supposed to be the dark and the light. It's when the salmon come up stream, but then die. The thing that catches me most, most of all that piece is the salmon go up stream knowing they're going to die. And for me, like I said, as a kid [it] just use to just profoundly affect me, knowing ok, you know, you're going upstream, you're going to die. That return is even, just when you think about it, for me, it's like our own lives. We're born into this life knowing one day we are going to die.

And **Eagles**, let's see, oh this was... I don't think this has the right name on it.

AW: Oh.

CP: It is Eagles but I think this one was, I think, if you read on the back I think its call The Lookout or something.

AW: Ok.

CP: Its called Eagles right now, but its called The Lookout.

AW: It's called The Lookout?

CP: Lookout.

AW: Oh, just **Lookout**

CP: It's essentially the four eagle heads looking out in different directions or opposite directions to the one below it. And it's like when you come into a village or any of that sort of thing there's always a lookout. Like in Brentwood Bay it was always known, for like, when an enemy was entering your territory is was always a great place to be so you could really [see] them coming from a long way and it was a good advantage point. And the eagle symbolized the lookout because it was always really important and I think in this culture we don't realize how important those roles are, we don't even think about them, we don't even visualize them, we don't even put ourselves in that.

AW: When you say roles, what do you mean, like the role of someone who is vigilant or watching or....

CP: In that sense yes, but also in a sense there was a time where we actually had to have a lookout in case the Haida came down and wanted to kill us.

AW: Oh, ok.

CP: You know, if you put yourself in that position for a second to do that as a young man or as a person it's pretty serious.

AW: Definitely.

CP: It also made you responsible for your village.

AW: Right.

CP: And then **Salmon Blanket**, a lovely piece I really enjoy looking at this piece, especially on their website, have you saw it?

AW: I've seen it.

CP: It's at UVIC now, they installed that at UVIC.

AW: Yeah, and the knitting is next to it in this year. Yeah, I like the fact that you enjoy your work after seeing it. There's certain pieces that you know, you like looking at.

CP: Well, in this case I worked with wood and I sanded blasted it, and I originally painted it as one color and then sand blasted everything away to bring out the design. And for me what I see immediately is a blanket, and it's called Salmon Blanket, but it's just the connotations of the word blanket gives me. Being wrapped in a blanket when you turn a certain age you're always given a blanket, your community wrapped you in it and it was always that connectedness. In Salish culture when you're given a blanket to some degree it means you are part of the family now, or you reached a certain age or any of those kinds of things, your new as a person in this world. So, anyways that gives me that certain feeling.

AW: I like the way in which you've used the grain of the wood like you know it does remind me in some ways of a blanket like having that kind of background.

CP: That's the **Conservation**. Conservation is a lot like the Return, they're actually kind of brother and sister pieces. And of course this was commissioned back in 2004 by the Smyths, beautiful print, Conservation as opposed of the Return, the dark side of the conservation is that we're always worried about what's going to happen to the salmon in the future and as Native people it's one of those things that are important, really important and not just yearly but the next generation as well. And we always need to look towards that and focus on that. And if you look at the piece it kind of focuses you on the center, it kind of draws you in.

AW: To me it's also cyclical, like there is a movement to it, even though it's a square, there is that kind of, um, yeah...

CP: In a square piece.

AW: Yeah, in a square piece.

CP: And this is that same story, and the last one here is **Salmon Run**, the table. I loved doing the table. I didn't do the table myself; I designed it and had somebody build it. A boat builder, he knew exactly what I was talking about. There's a pin, inside there's a U pin, you just slide the two pieces together and you tap the pin and put the glass on top of it and it's a table. I just think that's incredible. It's a beautiful, beautiful piece and of course the salmon run itself is always to me when I use to go down to Goldstream or any of the different streams even way up in the interior by where Roger John is from where they see the red backs and that sort of thing, ah my god, it's like for any tribe it's like a joyous time it gives you a certain feeling. And even if I go up to Goldstream and I'm not going to catch fish, it's just beautiful to sit on the shore and take the time to watch, it's a feeling and incredible feeling. I wonder where that piece is because I went up to their house recently and I haven't saw it.

AW: Oh, you should find out.

CP: Yeah.

AW: The um, how do you, this isn't part of it, this is just looking at your work and you think it's going in this direction goes back 10 years. What would you say, how would you define the evolution of your work as an artist, do you, when you think of that process of growing and evolving do you think of that in a... well I know you're really interested in technology, how can you push these different kinds of mediums,

how can you push different types of technology to bring the work about? Or are you guided conceptually, like when you think about the evolution of your work, if you were to say something about in the 10 years, how would you respond to that?

CP: How would I respond to that? Hmm, well this point in my career, I've begun the next stage of it and I think it's an important stage and that's to give back, give back to the kids and giving back literally to anyone who is willing to listen in Canada in general, and try not to see myself as so important that I'm going to change something but I'm going to be one piece in a part in a puzzle that helps this place change in terms of exactly what we we're talking about today about the integration of Canada into First Nations lands of Canada. Even who I choose to marry and the kids I've chosen to have all of that is reflected because, you know this world is becoming one big melding pot. I think all these, you know, anything that I do, you know I hope it affects something.

CP: I think that's interesting that you reflect your role as an artist rather than the specific pieces you're putting out, I think that really indicative of where you're at.

CP: And it's vast, you know, I'm not bragging but it's so vast. I picked up a piece the other day where I knew I was doing a piece beside it 10 years ago and it's of a new-er-ish totem pole and I just pulled it out the other day. And I know it was a drawing of 10 years ago because I knew when I did this one drum, it's pretty cool that I was thinking that far ahead back then, and it's good to see this today.

AW: Yeah.

CP: It makes me think...

AW: Where you going to be in another 10 years? Very good, very good, ok.