

Interview with Maynard Johnny Jr.

Including Artist Statements

Artist: Maynard Johnny Jr.

Cultural Group: Coast Salish/ Kwakwaka'wakw

Training/Mentors: Self-taught

LD: You're the artist Maynard Johnny Jr.

MJJ: Yeah.

LD: Do you have an Indian name?

MJJ: No I don't.

LD: Ok, and would you consider yourself Coast Salish, Straight Salish?

MJJ: Coast Salish.

LD: Coast Salish.

MJJ: I'm actually Coast Salish and Kwakwaka'wakw

LD: OK, is your mom or dad Kwakwaka'wakw?

MJJ: My mom is Kwakwaka'wakw and my dad is Coast Salish, I chose to do Coast Salish art.

LD: I'm going to ask you the first question, your training, your technical training or traditional training.

MJJ: Self taught, typically I'm self-taught. I first started out looking at a lot of books, studied other artists; Robert Davidson and Art Thompson were probably the biggest artist I studied when I first started doing Native Art. And then I think that's where a lot of artists, when they get started, unless they are taught by their father or their grandfather, they sort of just start by looking at what other artists have done. That's where they get... I don't want to say lost, but lack of a better term "lost," knowing what traditional art is, and I was just as guilty as anyone else. When I started studying, I studied Art Thompson who was Nuuchahnulth and Robert Davidson who is Haida, and I do not belong to either of those. So, I had a heavy Northern influence on my art, which I was also sort of permitted to do because Kwakwaka'wakw is considered Northern, and then I started to realise I wanted to do Salish art because there was not many Salish artists when I started doing art. Susan Point was pretty much just breaking the

barrier as a Salish artist, and creating an opening for Salish art, where it wasn't considered an art form.

LD: No, is that because of a dominance overpowered by other nations?

MJJ: Well, that's just it because when Europeans or Americans come over to Canada or the West Coast they automatically assume that Native art, West Coast Native art is Haida, which isn't the case. And that's where I started to learn, ok, I am Salish and Kwakwaka'wakw, you do what you belong to. I choose to do Salish because when I started there was 100 Kwakwaka'wakw artist already, and there was maybe five Coast Salish artists; Charles Elliot, Simon Charlie, Susan Point was just starting to come into her own, Stan Greene, and there was a couple that were before me like; Joe Wilson sort of doing it too. So that when I sort of decided to say enough with the Northern influence and focus on what Coast Salish art looks like. So I started to study spindle whorls and rattles.

LD: From old times.

MJJ: Yeah, yeah. Old, old pieces like old Salish combs.

LD: So researching in archives?

MJJ: Mostly books that had photos, anthropology books, art books all kinds of books that deal with Native art, any book I found that had Salish pieces in it, like old spindle whorls, rattles, fish clubs, anything that was Coast Salish. Every time I found a Native art book I would look for the Coast Salish stuff, I slowly started to realise what our elements were and how they were used. Whereas Native art, a lot people use to say that we didn't have an art form, I think people like Susan and myself, Joe Wilson and few others have sort of proven them wrong. Now, it's funny, I'm not trying to say we're better, I appreciate Haida art, Kwakwaka'wakw and Nuuchahnulth, but it's funny when Salish broke the barrier and became its own sort of entity of art, I noticed Haida and Kwakwaka'wakw simplified their forms and designs because Salish is a very simple design. The two main elements are trigons and crescents, so you don't have a lot of elements to use when you're designing your design, so I noticed a lot of the Northern styles simplifying their ovoids and u-shapes to very simple forms whereas a u-shape had probably 6 or 7, well maybe not that many, maybe 3 or 4 U's to separate colors and give it more design, more detail and the ovoids, the same thing. There was 3- 4 ovoids in one ovoid shape and it just separated color; black, red, white, and that was their form, but as Salish became popular and Salish design is more simplified, it's not as detailed or busy as Northern styles, I noticed a lot of the Northern styles started to simplify their work, because it just looked more powerful, more visible as an art form. I learned number one in in the art world, under none written rules, practice where you come from, so I'm not going to go out and practice Haida art because I'm not Haida, so I started studying a lot of the old pieces and got inspiration from fellow artists like Susan Point and there was another gentlemen named Manuel Salazar, just before he started, Manuel started, he kind of had a different type of Salish art as well. And it was pretty neat because I didn't have anyone to teach me anything, I had to figure out what kind of paper to use, what

kind of brushes to use, what kind of paint to use, and I would also ask artists when he would meet them. I don't know if it was a threat or if I was just being a nuisance but maybe they say me as becoming a competition, I don't know but it was hard to get anyone to help me understand how art was done, how Coast Salish art was done. A lot people... I either got lied to my face, they were like "yeah, come on by," they never answered or returned my call, because I wanted to sit down and learn what they know. So now, which made me a better person, well, I shouldn't say made me a better person. So whenever anyone ever asks me how did you do this, what kind paints do you use, what kind of paper. I never shy away from letting them know this is what I use, this is what I've been using for years to get split designs to look even and symmetrical. So I have a hard time when people don't want to help or share with other artists that are starting out. So, I've never had that problem because I felt like people are stunned when I say that I am self-taught, because I basically studied everything I could in books and museums and I have a little hint here and there from other artists.

I did a hawk design one time and I painted the eyeballs red, the whole design was red and so I painted the eyeballs red. And Reg Davidson, Roberts Davidson's brother, I went to see Robert Davidson one day actually, a friend of mine was apprenticing him and he wasn't in the shop, but Reg was there, and he was like "Oh, so what are you doing here?" I said, "Oh, I just wanted to talk with my friend who's apprenticing with Robert." "Well they're out right now, what do you got?" He wanted to look at my art, and I was like, "Cool, Reg Davidson wants to look at my art." So I showed him, and he said, "Well, you got really nice clean lines, you do really good work, the only thing I would advise you on is your hawk design here, you have a red eyeball," he said. In his culture the only things that have red eyeballs are the rabbit or the mouse or the mouse woman. So, normally when you do Native art you should do all the eyeballs black. It's not a complete written rule, because now this was years ago when if you did a black and red design then your eyeballs may end up black...or red... on top of black. But it was sort of a neat guideline that they had followed over the years and if you really look at the old Haida pieces a lot of the eyes are black. And of course back before European contact that was because that was what we had access too. It was all natural from the earth type stuff, but now there is every color under the sun that you can use when you go to the art store, you can buy 12 different reds and 6 different blacks, you know, so that's one thing that I've adopted into my art, is using different colors. I still stick to black and red but I also like to throw in some blues and greens and just have a different look on how things come out as opposed to just always black and red or just being black and red, or black red and white.

LD: I guess, hmm, I guess we talked about influences.

MJJ: Yeah.

LD: Goals, your primary... when you're creating work are you trying... what are you trying to achieve when you're working and you're in that process? What are you driven by, what are you motivated by?

MJJ: Um... I think the biggest thing for me as an artist is trying to always strive to do something different then everybody else... or.... you always try... when you get a drum. Like somebody

wants to do a drum, the drum more often than not is in a circle, so, I always say stuff like this... I can draw a raven in my sleep, or I can put a wolf on a drum, I can put a bear, eagle, thunderbird, salmon, whatever you want I can do, you know? I've been doing this almost 22 years. It is like second nature to do a design of a eagle, raven or a bear. But when you get a drum or you get a shape on a piece of paper my ultimate goal is to do a design of a bear in a circle that nobody has done and I think my biggest inspiration for that is Robert Davidson because he has always fits designs, and circle, rectangles, and squares, he's always done something different other than just having an eagle with the head, wings or tail feathers, and the body in the middle, it's sort of a basic design in a sense, but to do it to make it fit that circle perfectly is the challenge and fun part for me.

LD: Because you're looking at composition and how this fits and that.

MJJ: Yeah, you want it to, you know. This design I did for the Smyth's on the drum it's making that killer whale look at you, but also fit at the bottom of the circle and filling the rest of the circle with the Thunderbird. Doing that, I could of basically just done a killer whale of a side view, but doing it looking at you, and filling that bottom part of the circle was the challenging part and making it look, when you look at it, oh that's a killer whale, but still it's a different way of looking at the killer whale as opposed to just as side view of the big dorsal fin and tail part. So that's the fun part, that's what inspired me the most, and especially when people come to me and say I want an eagle catching a salmon with a whale and the water kind of thing or something, I've never had that but that's just an example of people wanting something specific. They tell you what they want and it's your, his job to come up with a way to make them go wow! You did an amazing, that's why I chose you as the artist to do this design, you know exactly what I want without telling you what to do really. I just want a beaver to look like child, I want the beaver to look feminine, you know so, it's a pretty challenging thing to do, to make a beaver look feminine or like a child.

LD: Right, Right.

MJJ: So, that is actually one I just had a couple months back from a client in Scotland who had grandkids. And every grandkid she had chosen one of her crest to be for that grandchild. So the first one was an otter, and she wanted the otter to be very playful and child-like. And I'm like, how the heck do you do an otter, and then the second one was sea serpents which was even harder because sea serpents are revered as powerful, respected, as super natural beings, so to soften them up to look like a child or to look playful is quite a challenge. And then the next one was a beaver, so it's like, make it look like a child make it look feminine, because the child that was born was a girl. So those are the biggest challenges those are the biggest inspirations when they say, I want a beaver, well yeah I can do you a beaver no problem, but I want it to look like a child, I want it to look feminine, it's like wow, that's the challenging part. So that feeds me inspiration as well, as people offer challenges to me and come up with a design that is not normally done, it's like I say, you can pump out a beaver, a raven, a bear anytime you want, but when somebody offers a way for you to do it, well I want this to fit in this rectangle, I want it to fit the circle and you don't want it to look like everybody else's work out there; you want it to

look like Maynard Johnny Jr. when you see that it's a Maynard Johnny Jr. print. That's not a Susan Point, that's not a Robert Davidson or Art Thompson, that's Maynard Johnny Jr.'s, you can tell. And that's the fun challenge part about being an artist is establishing myself when somebody sees my work they know it is mine and when they see Roberts work, its Robert's, Art Thompson, I always use those two as examples, nine point nine times out of ten, when I see a piece that I've never seen before I can almost tell it's Robert Davidson's design or Art Thompson design, you know, even though Art is not with us anymore, I mean he's had pieces I've never seen and to see his work, you just already know, that's Art Thompson. So that's where I want to be as an artist, when people look at my work they say, that's a Maynard Johnny Jr. you can tell right off the bat, that's a Maynard Johnny Jr. right there. Those are my inspirations in terms of when people present challenges; I want people to know that's my work.

LD: Um, list of materials you have worked in?

MJJ: Um, I've dabbled a bit in everything I'm mostly a graphic artist, designing and painting, whether it be paper, drums or paddles or boxes or even just wood panels, I think I'm safe to say that I've mastered design, Coast Salish design and created my own sort of twist on it. I take a lot of pride in how I do the eyes of my characters. In this design you can see the whole design is colored but the eyes balls, but inside the white of the eyes is really white, so they pop right out, I do that in a lot of my work especially now a days. You can have the whole design painted in color but the eye around the white, is the white of the eyes, so that it pops right out. So that is sort of a signature that I take pride in.

MJJ: Um... But... I'm actually lost where we are at..... (laughing)

LD: Oh, your preferred medium and materials.

MJJ: Oh yeah, so right now I'm mostly into graphic creating designs, whether it be on paper or other materials like drums or wood. I've tried carving. I got to practice more, I would love to carve wood. But it takes years of practice and that is where I get frustrated. I've done precious metals – so gold and silver.

LD: Like jewelry carving.

MJJ: Yeah, so engraving bracelets and pendants and rings. The guy who was teaching me was actually non-Native who learned how to carve wood from a gentleman named Francis Horne and he learned how to carve Native style wood.

LD: Cedar?

MJJ: So just like carving a mask, like Francis Horne would do Coast Salish style design. But he was non-Native so he thought nobody's going to buy Native art from a white guy.

LD: Is that true?

MJJ: Pardon me?

LD: Is that true?

MJJ: What do you mean?

LD: Nobody would buy Native art from a white guy.

MJJ: Um... Not so much anymore.

LD: Not so much anymore.

MJJ: Especially in the states. Um, but, and that's a whole can of worms that could take forever to talk. Um, I use to be offended by it, at the same time, well now, it's not a big deal. The only thing I find hard, is when you meet someone like John Livingston who is not Native but who's adopted into the Kwakwaka'wakw nation. That man is one of the most amazing men I ever met in terms of he knows what he's talking about. He's learned everything there is to know about not only Kwakwaka'wakw but working with Susan Point he's learned a lot about Salish culture, Salish beliefs. He knows a lot about Kwakwaka'wakw culture and their beliefs, you know, their dancing and their songs and their regalia. He's learned everything there is to know about it. He's probably the most educated Kwakwaka'wakw background there, you know. So that I highly respect, because he respects the culture, he respects where those people are from. Whereas you get a lot of people, especially in Seattle, a lot of non-Natives that go to the School Of Bill Holm is a... Bill Holm, there's nothing wrong with Bill Holm, he's taken an interesting Native culture, especially Northern, Haida, Tsimshian was the biggest part of his learning about Native art and culture. But a lot of these guys they just jump on a back wagon. So a lot of people like Dale Fostage who is a non-Native artist who was heavily influenced by Bill Holm was doing Northern styles, so they'd do a lot of the old bentwood boxes with all these symmetrical split designs from a Northern influence, ovoids, u-shapes, you know, all kinds of really cool stuff. But once Susan Point broke the barrier as a Coast Salish artist, and then Coast Salish art blew up as an art form they just decided there going to be Coast Salish now and do Coast Salish art. Well, to me that's sort of you know what, you need to learn not just because you feel like... it's like me saying, I'm going to do Haida art because I like Haida, but I'm not Haida. Haida people would be pissed off, because I'm deciding I'm going to do Haida now, but I don't belong to that culture. They call it the Seattle tribe, and that's what pretty much it is, they are not even, they don't know what they're doing and that's offensive to me. It's not the fact that they do Native art, you know, they are very talented at it, they carve wood amazingly and they sort of just study the design forms, but they think... they're American they think they can do whatever they want and it's ok, it's not going to offend anybody... but it does. Um, and it's sort of an aspect of where do you draw the line, where do you say enough is enough. I don't know how true it is but I heard that they're trying to make songs now they're trying to do performances and dances. They don't belong to that they have no right to that, and that's what offends me the most is when they try and start their own culture and it derives from something they don't belong to.

So that's sort of offended me a bit as... um... and that's, getting back to where I learned to do gold and silver the guy who taught me was non-Native. He was Scottish actually and he decided nobody is going to buy Native art from a white guy and he started, when he first started carving wood, he decided he wanted to learn how to carve silver, so he really taught himself everything there is to know about carving silver the way West coast Natives do, but then he thought nobody was going to buy, is going to buy from a non-Native person, so he decided to study his background, and he started doing bracelets and rings with Celtics knots in it, then he took me under his wing to learn how to do engraving. He was actually a really wicked guy, one of the nicest guys I've ever met, but he was also a big bear, if you met him you might think he's a grumpy old man, but once you get to know him he is the sweetest guy ever, he ended up getting cancer and lost his battle with cancer, and it was sort of in the middle of me doing the gold and silver, so I took a kind of speed bump and decide not to do it, because I was sort of sad that I lost my friend, so I put it on the back burner and now I am getting that itch to want to try do it again, I'd love to get back into doing precious metals. I actually took a course a couple of years ago now about replise and chasing which is a different form of doing precious metals. So it's quite an intense form of doing precious metals it takes a lot of time, effort, patience. So eventually I would like to move into that. I think now my goal is to further my name or further who I am as an artist in the art community, in the gallery community and the community itself, just to be a successful, well rounded, well-respected artist.

LD: How do you do that in a practical way? Like strategically, like, ahh... you know, like a game plan to do that in terms of expansion.

MJJ: I think that's what I'm trying to figure out is how to do, I want to get, I'm learning that to make money, I'm an artist for a living, you got to be starving and you got to spend money to make money. And that's, you know, it's funny because every time I say that I feel like that's all I'm about is making money as an artist and it is, that's what I do that's how I feed my family I try to sell myself as an artist. I just want to get to a point where I can paint, but, I don't want to be like Robert Davidson, but I want to be on the same line as Robert Davidson, respected as an artist in terms of what I do. Whenever I do something, every time Robert does something and I see it in a gallery or somehow find it online or whatever, um, it just blows my mind away. I want people to respect me that way in a sense of, not that I want people to praise me or have people bow down to me, but I just want people to say, "Wow! Look at what Maynard just did."

LD: You want to inspire people the way you've been inspired.

MJJ: Yeah, yeah and that's just... whenever I see a new piece by Robert. I'm like HOLY CRAP! Even when it's really simple it just blows your mind away and I think with Robert now, he can almost do anything he wants and it will inspire people, it doesn't have to be. In the 80's he did some really unique carvings and paintings and just, blew your mind away. Where did he come up with this, you know? Same with Art Thompson, every time I seen his work, um, before he passed away...it's like out of your mind like out-landish crazy even the littlest details were just amazing. I would sit there and look at his piece, because he was so amazing at taking a design and making it his own. You could do ovals, ovoids, u-shapes and... like I say you can do an eagle

as an artist you become good at what you do, you can do an eagle anytime you want or bear or raven, it's taking that design and making it twisted and different that when people look at it they're like, "Cool! Wow! That's really different, it's really cool and fascinating, I can't stop looking at it." Or sometimes you can do a design that's a bear, cool, and that's it. You want people to be just in awe and look at it and not stop looking at it. I think that's what Art and Robert do quite a bit in their work, taking the forms and making it so that you're awe inspired by it. But yeah, I mean for now I am a graphic artist and I would really like to move into wood and precious metals. A lot of artists went into glass and other forms of metal, taking sculptures and putting them into metal or casting in bronze, or there's this powdered stuff too, I don't know, there's some sort of powdered metal or something where they conform the eagles head or something, almost like a 2-D design. You know there's lots of mediums you can mess around with; I would like to get to that point, I really love designing, being able to design something and it's funny, I think Robert's kind of inspired by that too – the 3-D stuff, the masks and totem poles, all derived from 2-D stuff or flat art. And it's really amazing what you can do, I think it's harder to do flat art than it is to do a sculpture, because you have stuff you can work with in wood or clay or, you know, to come up with it to make it look like a human and a wolf is the challenging part because it's flat, you want it to look like it's human but you also want it to look like there's a wolf in there, so that's the fun part for me. And I think that's why I'm so attached to graphic art, learning how to use those shapes and manipulate them to look like something else. So...

LD: Kay, your exhibition history

MJJ: I've participated in a lot of art shows with different galleries. Or, ones that stick out in my mind is the S'abadeb show in Seattle which was the all Salish, including old pieces from 5 - 10 thousand years ago and then contemporary artists like myself and Susan Point. That was a huge, for me it was one of the best Salish shows, it was all Salish, it was not about different types of a.... Haida wasn't there, Kwakwaka'wakw wasn't there. And it's not that I have resentments towards those styles of art, but they have always dominated, even when you do an art show at the gallery, or the Museum of Anthropology or... they've always had their presence, this was just for Salish art and to me that was cool, it wasn't the very first, and another show I did was "Awakenings" at the Gallery of Greater Victoria, which was also a Salish show. But also, next to our show was Marianne Nicholson, and her work she had her own show, which was totally fair, nothing against with that, but the Kwakwaka'wakw had their presence, you know, so with the S'abedeb show it was all strictly Salish, it was all recognizing Salish art – where it came from and where it is now, to me that was the most poignant part of my career to date. I've been fortunate enough to do other shows with other artists like Kwakwaka'wakw artists or Haida artist through different galleries and stuff; I've had a number of shows at the Alcheringa Gallery, galleries in Vancouver, galleries in Seattle, which has always been fun. And I don't know if it's there, but they have a New World Trade Center and rebuilt at Ground Zero. I had a did a huge salmon in 2004, 2006 I can't remember anymore, it was just a fiberglass salmon, a shape like a Coho salmon, it was a realistic shape, and fiber glass molded and they wanted me to paint a design on it. So I painted this design of a whale, an eagle, and a human on the back of a salmon, and a bunch of elements and design all throughout the head and body

and tail and stuff. They decided, a bunch of artist did different interpretations, so it wasn't just First Nations artists, there were non First Nations and they had all kinds of different, some people did mosaic tiles on one, another guy did a graphic, almost like a grid, a computer grid of a design of design, like it was just a bunch of squares that were all painted different shades of red, purple, blue and green, like a peer, like digital... it was really cool. So they were auctioning all these pieces off to raise money for the Steelhead society which focused on keeping fish and salmon thriving, but they decided to donate mine to the new World Trade Center in New York, so it suppose to be there. I don't know where, but once they completed building the new World, the 4 towers, my salmon is to go there, somewhere, I don't know where it's at. So that's another thing. I did a design for a box for the Juno awards 2009, so that was kind of cool. They put it in a swag bag for all the performers and artists who were coming to the awards, so people like Nickleback, Sarah Mclachlan and Bryan Adams they all have a cedar box with my design on it. Which is really cool to say that Bryan Adams has my work. So those are the types of things I think were really to me, kept me inspired to be an artist, sometimes you get down, you're not selling much work, you're not able to put as much food on the table as you'd like, you start to get down, but then there's times like that where things like that happen and they pick you up and make you realize that in the end, I'm good at what I do and maybe I shouldn't stop. So I think along with those things, S'abadeb, is probably my most favorite to this date, best show I've ever participated in, just because it reflect[ed] Salish art and it really pumped Salish artists, as an art form, for a long time we weren't respected as having an art form, and you know, I'm not trying to be negative but it was true, other tribes did not respect us because we didn't have an art form, they said we didn't have an art form, but now we do. And now people like Susan, and myself, lessLIE, Chris Paul, Luke and John Marston, they are all thriving and perpetuating that art form saying yes we do, there is an art form that is Salish. We have the proof.

LD: Great, maybe we can... would you like to go through these.

MJJ: Yeah, are those listed in the email you sent me, because you know I can send you the email for that, because you said you have something to do at 2 or 3.

LD: No.

MJJ: Oh, ok. I thought you said you were free from 1-2

LD: Did I?

MJJ: In an email, I could of...

LD: I said 9-11 I was...

MJJ: Maybe it was the last time I said I was going to come down, ok, no, that's fine.

LD: Alright, so let's just talk about the symbolism, the process, the meaning to you and if there is any political, environmental, social or otherwise which you would hope the viewer would consider when looking at particular works or anything particular you would like to say about the work.

MJJ: Um yeah, so **Answer to the Call** was a reflection of the design that the, is the Thunderbird carrying a Killerwhale and on top of a Thunderbird was sort of a skull image. There is an old story from the Cowichan area where a whale gets caught in the bay and it's eating all the salmon before they come up the river. So all of the villages along the river are starving and dying because there is no fish coming up to feed the villages. So they call upon the Thunderbird to come down and take the Killerwhale away because they know Thunderbirds prey upon Killerwhales. So the skull sort of symbolises those that were lost because of starvation and not being able to catch the fish to feed the villagers. Then Thunderbird represents the Thunderbird coming down to take the Killerwhale away. The Thunderbird is the actual answer to the call, we need help to take the Killerwhale away so the fish could come back up river and we can feed our villagers. So it's kind of the background to that design. There's more to it, the frog is involved. The frog is a communicator between man and the spirit world, so that the people asked the frog to ask the Thunderbird to come down. There are many different versions of this story. One is that the Thunderbird takes the Killerwhale, takes them up to mount Tsu-hay-lum and eats him at the top of the mountain. Another story actually involves Mount Provost (Duncan) it use to look like a regular mountain or had a mountain peak, but now it has a big dip in it, so another versions of that story is that the Thunderbird brought the Killerwhale and when he dropped him on the mountain it created a dip, so the dip makes the mountain actually look like a frog. So there's just all kinds of twist and variations of that story that tie into together, so that is answer to the call is the Thunderbird coming and answering the call to come and take the Killerwhale away. So, that so why I call it Answer to the Call.

Phases of the Moon. It's funny because a lot of stuff I do as an artist come from challenges, as I need you to do me a moon, but I don't want it to look like everybody else's moon, I don't want it to look like a moon in the middle of a piece of paper, with just a face in the middle of a circle. So the first time I got challenged on that was when I was working with a publisher in Vancouver. He wanted temporary tattoo designs but he wanted them to be like an arm bar. He says, yeah, it would be really cool to do a frog, a bear, wolves and what would be really cool would to do a moon, like how can you do a moon. He was like, well, just come up with ten designs for me, you know, he really wanted a moon. So I'm like, how the hell do I do a moon design as an arm bar tattoo. So I came up different phases inside the moon lined up so it went across, like, horizontally. So the first one was six circles, and it was just different phases in each circle that represented the quarter moon, half moon, full moon, an eagle in the moon kind of thing. And it just built up from there, people really enjoyed that different interpretation of the moon. And moon phases, it got to the point where phases of the moon, where it was quarter, half, three quarters and the full, and that's the fun challenging part as an artist to come up with a different way, even though I did six different faces, everyone really liked that design, how can you interpret that again without doing it the exact same way as what you did before, so that's the fun challenging part of doing interpretations of different characters. So Phases of the Moon was

mostly just a different way and showing the reflection of the moon. The moon is respected as the guardian of earth and lights the night, it's the controller of the tides, so these are different things you can relate to the moon in terms of the story behind the moon. Yeah, so Phases of the Moon was just a way of looking at the moon in a different interpretation. Just having a round circle in the middle of the paper with a face, maybe make it look like a crescent, well there's your moon. Doing it different that nobody else has done was the fun challenging part of it.

MJJ: Protecting Mother.

LD: No, No.

MJJ: Oh you have that one.

LD: Yeah, when it says AS it means Artist Statement.

MJJ: Oh, ok.

LD: This is my favorite one.

MJJ: Oh yeah, really.

LD: I love that one, ok maybe we'll go down.

MJJ: Again, so sometimes you just do this design in a horizontal shape so it's horizontally, I believe 18 inches long and only 3 inches wide, so to fit a character in that skinny long shape was something I sort of, what do you call it a niche, I'm not the first one to ever do it, I'm not the only one to ever do it but it was a niche that started and it all goes back to doing those temporary tattoos, it was almost like a bracelet design, but he wanted it for an arm bar, a temporary tattoo. So I did these 10 designs of a wolf, moon, bear, eagle, frog, hummingbird all in this long skinny shape and then we had printed some on prints, and that was sort of my niche as an artist as people thought it was cool. Way back then it was 60 bucks for a print, all in with a frame. People were looking at 200 bucks and for an inexpensive piece of art that's really well done with a frame, you get it framed and carry it on the plane if they were coming from Europe or from the States. So it kind became a niche of mine. And this it's sort of, well, an eagle, how do I fit an Eagle on this long skinny shape. The Eagles are respected for its symbol of peace and leadership qualities. So it's always, and that leadership quality aspect is always revered as the highest respect. I always call it a tie between the Thunderbird and an Eagle, those are the two characters that are most revered in West Coast Native art from my opinion, um, because people have crest, Northern tribes have crests there family belongs to the beaver and the whale, or whatever, so it's not... well, everybody belongs to the eagle or the thunderbird, right. So, that's kind of the idea around the eagle, fitting it into the long skinny shape.

Great Blue Heron that was again another challenge in fitting this design in the long skinny shape. The heron are sort of magical and respected for their fishing abilities. Which is funny, a

lot of people get the misconceptions of herons being family oriented, but they're not. Sometimes they kill their own babies; because like, in today's society it's so hard in today's economy to survive as a family or as a... not that you go off and kill your kids or anything, but it's almost like they can't afford to feed their newborn, I don't know what you call it, baby herons, but it's been known that they'll drop them out of their nest because they cannot feed all of them, so they'll just drop them out of their nests and leave it to die. But I found that fascinating once I started studying more about herons and stuff, kind of a dark twist to take on that.

And **Raven's Moon**, again the moon is the protector of mother earth, lights the night. There the oldest story in West Coast Native art and cultures is the raven releasing the sun and moon to the earth and to the world. So often you'll see the raven with a moon or the sun or the raven with both. The typical story is that the Raven stole the chief's chest and it had the sun and moon inside of it, and the world was black before the raven stole the chest. There are so many interpretations of this story where the raven was originally white, and when the raven stole the chief's chest in his longhouse he flew up the smoke hole and the soot turned him black. Another version is he stole the chest and when he opened the chest and released the sun and the moon, when the sun came out it burnt him black. So there are so many different interpretations. When the raven was flying away with the sun and the moon in the box they were colliding and chips of the sun and the moon came off and when he opened the box the chips of the sun and the moon came out, the chips represent the stars. So there are so many different interpretations of that. And that's just sort of why is common theme amongst artist is when you do a raven you do the moon or you do the sun, not all the time but it's sort of lends itself to be able to do a design, when you do the raven, you do the center of the moon.

Um, the **Three Frogs** just if you see the design reflects that there are three frogs in the design. And again frogs are respected as a communicators from man and spirit world, they are also a symbol of spring is coming, when the frogs start to croak it's a sign to stop winter ceremonies and get ready for the spring and summer seasons. Frogs, you can also say that they were also used as a warning of danger coming, when they start croaking, it's a sign that someone is in the mists. It's believed that they catch evil spirits with their long tongues. There are different interpretations of the frog. This design called Three Frogs is because there are three frogs in the actual design, you might not see them right away and that's the fun part of designing, people have to look at it and study it and say, oh they're three frogs in there.

Um Answer to the Call is the print of the drum, so you have that story on here now.

Thunderbird Paddle, um, that was funny – the Smyth's always put forth... um... we're looking for a design to put in our collection, the Salish Weave collection. Yeah, and they say you know, we want the design to be 22" X 22" because it fits that Salish weave format. So I actually start goofing around with the Thunderbird design, it's funny as an artist you go through stages, moon's all my first stage, always doing different ways of doing the moon. So I just wanted to do an interpretation of the thunderbird that wasn't completely the same as everybody else. It's funny when I drew this design, when you do split designs, so this design is a split design which

means that both sides have to look the same. So I drew the first thunderbird the half of it, and to get them to look the same I trace it with tracing paper, flip over the tracing paper and trace it back on so both sides, you know, to the naked eye they look exactly the same. So I drew this thunderbird without knowing that, when I flipped it over to the other side and transferred the same design, it looked like a paddle. So..I.

LD: I thought that was thought of.

MJJ: Yeah, and that's the great thing, so of course I shouldn't even be saying this but that's what sells the piece. People that love to go out, whether it's tribal journeys or just out on the water on the canoe, they're like wow that's totally me and it was by accident sorry to say, I shouldn't say that but, um, so inside the center of the piece is a circular piece, it's the spindle whorl hole. Spindle whorls were used to spin the wool that made blankets, the sweaters, and whatever we used way back before European contact. So a lot of designs that were inspired from spindle whorls always had that circle, that hole in the middle of the circle, yeah like I said, after I completed the design the Smyth's were like what do you want to call this design, I said well it looks like a paddle, Thunderbird Paddle.

LD: That's my other favorite actually, I do paddle and when I see that, I was like. A paddle!!

MJJ: Yeah, it's a total different way of showing a paddle without it looking like a just a paddle.

LD: Exactly!

MJJ: Raven moon's again is relating to the story, rather than talk again about the whole thing it's relating the story of the raven bringing out the sun and the moon, so you always have your interpretations of how you can put the moon in with the raven.

And **Salmon's Moon**, um, because the moon is the controller of the tides, or to let you know when it's a good time to go fishing, or when it's a not a good time to go fishing. And same with anything else the moon plays a huge part in how we do our tradition things like clam digging. The moon is the controller of the tides, so when it's low tides it's the best time to go clam digging. So that's kind of the interpret.... it's kind of just fitting that image that long skinny image, having a salmon well, I always had a salmon, doing a salmon with something that's different, you don't really see the moon with the salmon. So that's kind of why I like that idea having the moon with the salmon, because it's not always you have the moon with the salmon. So it's kind of that idea for that design.

Um, young eagles, **Eaglets**. Again, I was just coming up with a different way of interpreting the eagle, in that long skinny format. Sometimes, like I say this happens by accident. I wanted to do an eagle design in a long skinny format and when I drew the eagles out and then transferred the other side to make it look even, I realized they look like baby eagles. And that's kind of where it came out as eaglets as opposed of just an eagle design, and again respected as a

symbol of peace and strength, leadership is what the eagle is. They're baby eagles, eagles in training.

LD: Yeah...yeah.

MJJ: **Ate Salmon** is one of my favorite pieces because, this again in this long skinny format, but there's eight salmon heads inside that long skinny format. And I called it Ate Salmon, it's now the number eight, which means we use to eat salmon in the past tense. And this was a time when a lot of my mom's family were fish men and losing their jobs and not going fishing because there was not enough fish. So it's sort of a political statement in terms of, you know we depleted our fishing you know, we fished too much, we raped our ocean of fish and we need to learn how to control that and this is like an interpretation of that. It was one of the main food sources, it was, we ate salmon, and can't so much anymore. And so it's a play on words and also a political statement in a sense that we ate salmon and that there's not enough to eat anymore. There's eight heads and it's sort of just a play on words, so...

And **Mating Eagles** again was just something that....

LD: Is that a painting? I've seen it.

MJJ: This Mating Eagles was originally, it was actually my very first canvas painting, painting on canvas that I had done for a gallery in Seattle, and then I decided to print it, so I did some prints. The only reasons why I started out is because, I couldn't even remember who said it, I think it was actually Stonington Gallery said how come you don't do an eagle, we haven't seen you do an eagle in along time, you're always doing the moon or the frog. And I said oh ok, so I'll come up with an eagle design. And again you start out to make the design symmetrical; you start out with drawing half of it, So I drew out half an eagle very, a very traditional Salish style design. Inside the body cavity is a human face and that is to reflect our connection with nature and humans, our respect for the eagle, that's sort of the reflection. So when I drew the other side I flipped it around, so that looked like they were going in a circle, because that was my interpretation was to have it look like a spindle whorl, like they're going in a circle. But it turned out and I did the background like a Salish weave blanket, so it looks like weaved blanket, just to have the creation be a little bit different than to have just an eagle in the middle of a piece of paper, right. And it turned out after I got it designed out, that it looked that they're... I don't know if you've ever seen eagles mating, they grab each other's claws and twist and turn in the sky. It's kind of what it looked like to me, and that is why I called it Mating Eagles. So....

And **Bear Transformation**. Again, long, skinny design in the center. The design is a human face and the hands are also the bear's claws and representing that the man is sort of transforming into the bear. So if you look, especially at Northern styles, masks, they have transformation masks that when the masks opens, it could be a raven closed but when it opens it could be a human face in the middle. And that human's transformation is transforming into the raven. It's kind of my interpretation, this design represents this human transformation into the bear. And the bear is respected for authority, leadership abilities and protected the animals in nature, a

very powerful being that walks our earth amongst us, right. So that's kind of this human's connection, and this human's, I guess for lack of a better terms power with the bear. This design reflects his transformation into a bear, um.....

LD: Is that a teaching of the bighouse, when people use animals?

MJJ: Well, that's just... one thing about the Salish culture is that we don't have, the only way I can say it performance dancing. We don't have... we have a lot of stories about the bear or the eagle and then raven in our culture, but we don't reflect them in song and dance. So we don't have regalia, we don't have masks and dances that reflects out stories from, like the Haida, Kwakwaka'wakw and the Tsimshian, their family belongs to the eagle so their crest is the eagle, and they have representation of the eagle dance, you know. And um... Salish people didn't really have that in our culture. But we do have similar stories of beings presenting themselves to our human people, our Coast Salish people, we just won't reflect on that in our songs and dances. Which actually I'd like to change, I'd like to actually be able to do that at some point. But I have to remember our language too, which is the, I think the most difficult part, which is the most important part. Without language there is nothing. There's no art, there's no language you can't reflect the stories, which means you can't reflect the stories of art, which means you can't reflect the stories song and dance, you can't reflect how this being looked on a mask you know. That's I think the most important part in any culture is language.

Black Frog again is the story of the frog. When the frog croaks is a sign that spring is coming. I call it Black Frog because it is a black frog. So things sort of become simple as well. Again these are long skinny formats. Grizzly respected for its authority, its power and ability to protect their surroundings.

Thunderbird Killerwhale Canoe, so it's a canoe design with a Thunderbird and Killerwhale in it. And again it can reflect the answer to the call story, with the Killerwhale getting caught in the bay. The Thunderbird comes to take the Killerwhale away. So that sort of reflects this would be a Cowichan canoe, maybe, reflecting that story of the Thunderbird and Killerwhale.

Spa Eth, Spa Eth is Coast Salish, hul'qumi'num for bear, and this design was actually commissioned by the Smyth's because George, well obviously the husband is sort of a grizzly looking man and he wanted something to reflect that. So I came up with a really simple yet powerful design of a bear looking at you, it's sort of a realistic look to it as opposed to the symbols of crescents and trigons, it's almost a realistic feel to it. This was my interpretation of George being a bear. Spa Eth is the hul'qumi'num term for bear.

Salmon Spawning... I had this period using primary colors. So each salmon, there are four salmons heads that represent the 4 primary colors; red, blue, green and yellow that are very bright very striking. And in the center there is an orange circle of the salmon head so that represents the salmon egg. So the salmon are circling in a square, the salmon egg and that just represents the salmon spawning.

Wuhus, it's actually suppose to be a H.

LD: And not an F.

MJJ: Yeah, it probably look like an F the way I wrote it on the print.

LD: Wuhus.

MJJ: Yeah, Kwakwaka'wakw call it Wuhas, but we have like a gun rool, like a....(makes sound), wuhus and that represents, it's hul'qumi'num for frog. And again related to George's bear Spa Eth reflecting who George is and have a bear type of man. This represents his wife Christiane, she's from.. which I thought if I would have said that out loud to her, because I don't know if it offends people when you call them a frog. She's from Quebec and she, that's... she said because I'm from Quebec the frog would represent me. I kind of laughed I thought that might insult a Frenchman, so, but that's what they wanted. Again a representation on Christiane being a Quebec person, French frog.

LD: It's nice someone can have a sense of humor about that stereotype, eh.

MJJ: Yeah, so to have that, this design was to have that same look as the bear. I wanted them to look as a pair, George and Christiane are a great couple. So that's kind of, again, the frog representation of when the frog croaks spring is coming type of thing.

Flight is one of my favorite designs. It has a human face in the center, intertwined in that face is the eagle, raven and at the bottom the owl is looking at you. When you really look at this design all you really see is a bunch of designs and circles, but if you really look hard you can see the human face in the middle. His eyes are also the eagles' eyes facing that way, the raven is below the eagle and below that the owl is looking right at you. So our connections to the spirit world, our connection to animals reflect who we are as a people. So Northern tribes often say that their crescent is a thunderbird and whale and so on the front of their house that families totem would be a thunderbird on top of a whale. So this is sort of my interpretation this person or this family's connection to the natural or spirit world is animals, these birds of flight, which is why I called it Flight. So his connection to this world or the spirit world is through the birds. So the eagle, raven and the owl... again the eagles is a representation of peace and honor. And ravens are often referred to as tricky and sly, yet most respected in Northern cultures for their creation of humans and different from the Coast Salish peoples. But, again ravens are often known for releasing the sun and moon to the earth. And then the owl in Coast Salish culture is related to death. I like the story, the one I always sticks to is that the owl is the guide to the spirit world. So when we pass on it guides us to the spirit world, because that journey is dark and you can't see, but owls can see in the dark, so they guide us to the spirit world the guide us to our ancestors. So, that's the story I'm going to stick with.

Summer Catch was just a fun design I had done of an eagle. And his wing looks like a hand and eagles prey upon salmon obviously. So if you look closely there is a salmon design inside the eagle's wing and it looks like the eagle's wing looks like a hand catching a salmon.

LD: Was that intentional when you were doing that?

MJJ: Yeah, that was actually intentional, well... not really. I had the idea of having the wing like a hand and filling the wing with the design was the part, I'm like ok what can I do, well eagles eat salmon so it was sort of intentional and at the same time, I was like, what can I put to fill in this design of the hand, the wing to look like a hand. I always knew I was going to have an eagle and his wing was going to look like a hand. And again this is that the idea of having the white in the eyes. So this whole design, even in second journey, the whole design is painted with color except for in the eyes. And same with summer catch the eagle's eyeball is white and that's the only thing in the whole design in the whole painting that is white.

LD: I've seen that original actually.

MJJ: It's one of my... I wish I didn't have to sell it. I wish I could of kept it.

LD: Yeah, because actually where that eye was is in like the perfect place.

MJJ: Yeah.

LD: Where it's not like a focal point, where it allows you to still look around other areas.

MJJ: It just pulls you right in. But it's not.

LD: I thought it was really a good piece.

MJJ: Yeah, so it's a play on the words, it's baseball terms. I'm sort of into playing softball and having, it's more of a fun thing, not a competitive. So it's just having fun; it was summer time and eagles catch salmon so I called it Summer Catch. So that was kind of the inspiration for that design, was just to have fun and to get the whole thing that eagles eat salmon so that's why it looks like his catching the salmon in his wing, it's obviously a claw. But that's the idea of that design, I wish.... I'm glad it is where it is, the Smyth's are the perfect people to have that painting and that design. But I wish I could have afforded to keep it for myself. It actually hung up in my place for about 3 months before I sold it to the Smyth's. I was very sad to see that blank wall, but it's to this date one of my favorite designs, I'm glad the Smyth's have it, so... but yeah.

LD: I guess the last part of this interview is anything in general you want to say about yourself as an artist as a Salish artist. Which direction you're moving towards, you talked about expansion.

MJJ: Yeah, basically I'm very proud to be one of the pioneers, one of the people who perpetuate Salish art as an art form, as a style. Like I said before, a lot of different tribes did not respect us as having our own art form, they believed that they didn't. I think, you can say that Susan was credited for breaking that barrier and for presenting that style to be an art form. She was not the first to do that; Stan Greene was out there long before Susan Point was, Charles Elliot. I believe that Charles Elliot is the most under-rated artists, not Coast Salish, but artist under-rated artist of the West Coast. He has being doing it long before anybody did it, except for Simon Charlie. Simon's work was a different style of Salish; it was more of a realistic style with crescents and trigons in it. A bear looked like a bear as you see it in nature but it would have some trigon designs on the back, but his eyes, his eyeballs would look like a real bear, his mouth was like a real bear, his nose was like a real bear. But you'd have little crescents inside the, that form. Where as Charles Elliot has always been doing this twist from the spindle whorls and old rattles and he would use the trigons and crescents throughout the design and that was done thousands of years ago, in that old comb, or in that old spindle whorl and the old rattle. Charles to me was one of the first people to do that, and Susan was the one to sort of break into that mainstream, art world, art market, to say that we are Salish people and we do have a form and this is it. I'm is happy to say the George calls us the Salish renaissance; we sort of came into having our own form. At the beginning I didn't feel as strongly as I do now, I'm glad to be part of the renaissance to perpetuate our art form as a Coast Salish artists. And my plan is to expand into different mediums, whether I succeed or not is not really the case. It's just being able to say I did precious metals or I did [a] wood piece, something different other than graphics, so whether it be next year or ten years from now hopefully we will see Maynard Johnny Jr. Woodwork or precious metals or different mediums. I feel I've mastered the design part and the painting part. To this day I still get people say, "How do you do it, do you stencil it on?" Even when I paint it, they're like, "How do you paint it like that, do you use a stencil, like do you put a sticker on it and just paint over it and peel it off?" I'm like, "No! It's all free-hand, that's why I'm an artist." So it feels really neat, because in the beginning you feel insulted, "No! I don't use stencils, are you crazy!" But at the same time it makes me feel good because people are amazed at how I can do those forms and shapes freehand without any help from a computer or a stencil, or whatever else people use but, um. So I'm very proud to say I have mastered that form, that design, that design part of it.

LD: That's a success all in its own, to be able to be confident in that.

MJJ: Yeah, and I'm not trying to be arrogant, and um. I'm just being honest. I've done this over 20 years, over 20 years. I think I've perfected that part, and that the reason I say that I'm not trying to brag but I know there's a tonne more for me to learn. And I think even Robert Davidson, who's a master of North West Coast artist, he still learns. Whether it be someone from me... I haven't apprenticed with him but I'd love to. But he has apprentices, I'm sure he learns and picks up things from them as he teaches them.

LD: You interested in having apprentices?

MJJ: I totally would be, yeah I totally would be. I doubt with... I worked with lessLIE, he hasn't needed a lot of help but he'd ask how did you do this, or what do you use for this, what kind of paper do you? And I had no problem telling him. So that aspect has always been there for me, I never have a problem helping a fellow young up and coming artists. But if anybody wants to come and sit down, I think that's the hard part for me at this point of time, everything I do I have to get finished, I have to get it out there.

LD: Do you have a specific relationship with a specific printer?

MJJ: I do, I do. It was always with Vince Ricard or with Eric Borquin. Vince had Pacific Editions but he is retired now, he shut the shop, he closed the shop down. And Eric Borquin owns SeaCoast Printing, and he's actually the best Native art printer out there. But um... and whenever I do a print I'd like to work with Eric, it's just the money factor is pretty expensive. But not that he doesn't deserve it, my any means, he is the best at what he does.

LD: He hand screen prints?

MJJ: Yeah he does....and that's what makes him the best. I mean his done prints with Susan that have 17 colors and fades going every different way. That takes a lot of talent, yeah, I think he said he did one print, it took him 97 pulls or something like that.

LD: I do print-making so I can understand.

MJJ: Yeah, so if you look at some of Susan's work you got a fade going this way, you got a fade going this way, and then a bunch of other colors on top of that coming, a big fade coming this way from gray to dark grey, or whatever. So he said, I remember he said, I think it was a huge print that Susan did, yeah I think he said it had 97 pulls. So he's the best at it, which is why he charges what he charges. Actually he's not too much, it's not too expensive it's just I can't afford it right now. But um, it's not yeah, I'm not trying to insult him by saying he doesn't deserve what he charges, he probably deserves more, but um, it's just that the fact that the market has died down quite a bit. But I try not to let that keep me down, I try to keep creating. And that's the whole idea as an artist, not stop showing other cultures who you are.

LD: And in relation the economy and being an artist and trying to sustain your life on your art and the economy, how does that... how do you...??

MJJ: It's definitely really tough, it's really tough...

LD: Who's buying your work?

MJJ: Mostly private collectors now, which is great but they're not... you can only have so many private collectors, um, the Smyth's have been a huge support for me. But they can't keep buying my art they have nowhere to put it. And that's the hard part, it's getting more collectors like the Smyth's where you can say, ok, I don't have to burden the Smyth's to try and ... you

know... they also love the art. It's not that they don't want to buy it, they have nowhere to put it now. So, now unless a piece really strikes them and takes their breath away, that's when they decide they want to buy it. So to find more collectors like that is the hard part.

LD: Are you interested in even going like international? Like Europe?

MJJ: Oh yeah, I totally....

LD: Like Germany?

MJJ: Yeah, I totally would love to go to Germany.

LD: Switzerland?

MJJ: It's just finding that connection with somebody that's willing to do that. Like I say I'm learning that it costs money do make money and to do something like go to Germany or France or wherever, I would probably starve for a long time to get to that point, but once that point is succeeded then I can see the benefits from it, but yeah, so it's finding something that you can keep your head above water and finding away to do that. I'm trying to learn, I'm trying to research and study how Robert does it, how Susan does it, you know... all these successful artists, how they achieve what they achieve, and they won't tell you. It's not that I deserve or I feel they should, it's just, ok... I want to know how they did it, how did they get to that point. I mean Robert doesn't have to sell to a gallery ever now. He has a five year waiting list for his pieces.

LD: Shit.

MJJ: So, and he charges a lot.

LD: Wow!

MJJ: I've seen paintings of his that are 4 X 36 and he sells them for \$45,000 so... I mean I've seen larger pieces that he sells for \$75,000- \$100,000. That's just the paintings, and masks sell for \$80,000, \$120,000, totem poles he sells \$25,000 per foot kinda thing. SO I mean that's where his at, and those prices are actually about five years ago now, I don't know if he's still selling those prices now or if their more, maybe a bit less because of the economy I don't know. But he had waiting lists, five years ago he had 3 year waiting lists. So....

LD: Well if you're looking up to people like that and really seeking that, you'll eventually find it. You think you know why people don't... because people have an authentic way of the route that they need to go to get to where they are. It's all about the self in that process, I think it manifests itself individually.

MJJ: Oh yeah, you have to be willing to stick it out, that's one thing I'm learning now is to not give up and not feel sorry for yourself basically.

LD: Right, it's that type of thinking that actually blocks...

MJJ: Yeah.

LD: Our own selves in our own way?

MJJ: Yeah.

LD: Yeah.

MJJ: But now learning to stay positive, keep going, so that's the plan.

LD: That's the plan and your sticking to it?

MJJ: Oh yeah, as far as I know, so there you go.

LD: Alright...

MJJ: I hope that helps you.

LD: Well yeah it does, thank you very very much, I really appreciate that.

