

Interview with lessLIE

Including Artist Statements

Artist: lessLIE

Cultural Group: Coast Salish

LD: Kay, we're going to start now, so just hold it like this so you get all the information in and I'm going to ask you some questions.

L: Ok.

LD: Ok, just state your name, your full name, even if you have an Indian name you can state that name and your cultural group and then any training or mentors.

L: Ok.

LD: Ok.

L: OK, my colonized Catholic name is Leslie Robert Sam and my decolonized artist name is lessLIE, and what's the next one?

LD: Your cultural group, where you're from.

L: My roots are mostly Coast Salish, Irish, Italian and French and then my Coast Salish roots on one side of my family are mainly from the Cowichan tribe and Penelakut, and from one side of my family, the Alphonse, and I also have Esquimalt from Victoria, Tulalip, Snuw'quamiun and Ya'quima from Washington State.

LD: You're from all over the place.

L: Yeah.

LD: Yeah, ok, so any training, trainers, mentors? How were you taught? And when were you taught? And when did you start making art?

L: I started drawing when I was a kid, when I was about six years old. Gary Rice who was my Grandpa and the first cousin of Susan Point, he instilled in me the desire to be a contemporary Northwest Coast artist. He basically made a living carving stuff for the tourist industry in the Kwakwaka'wakw style of Northern Vancouver Island. And he had a basement, he worked in the basement and when I was a kid I use to go down there and watch him carving and he encouraged me to be an artist. And I began to carve and sand a little bit but I never got seriously into it, but from that time on it was my dream to become an artist so I just continued to drawing when I was a kid. It got to the point where one of my school teachers, one of my other friends, his name is Zara, the schoolteacher she put a paper on the desk so we wouldn't draw on the desk and we'd draw on the paper instead. So we we're able to draw on the desk

which I thought was really cool, because I always loved drawing Pac Man, Popeye, dinosaurs and gory horror movie scenes.

LD: Comics and stuff? Or no comics?

L: No comics, I like comics but never really got into drawing anything from comics, it was only Pac-Man, Popeye, dinosaurs and gory horror scenes. So I continued drawing as a kid and when I was about thirteen I also wanted to follow my dream of being a contemporary First Nations artist and into my teens, but at that time I seen it as a lucrative means of making money as a oppose of having anything to do with culture, politics, or any significance beyond something that would be lucrative and that would make money and where I would be self employed and didn't have to worry about having an employer. So my perspective was a bit different then, but I continued drawing into my teens and when I was in my... after I graduated from high school I decided I wanted to move back to BC because I grew up in Seattle. I decided I wanted to learn more about my heritage and learn more about traditions and learn more about the art, so I moved back to BC and from my late late teens until I'd say my early mid-twenties I had literary aspirations I wanted to be a writer and write poetry and short fiction and maybe essays. So I began my bachelor's degree, and I was originally intending a Bachelor's degree in English or creative writing. As I got further along in my bachelor's degree I decided I wanted to go to First Nations studies and in when I was in First Nations studies I began to study Coast Salish art.

LD: Which school were you at?

L: Vancouver Island University and when I was there Ryan Hamilton was one of my instructors and he gave me, in some ways he gave me that value of not creating directly for market, because his approach to art was that he creates for his community and doesn't really create work for the commercial market. My work straddles these two approaches to art, is that I'm involved in the commercial market, but at the same time I try not to create work that is deliberately marketable, so I pretty much create what I want to create. So when I was in my mid-twenties I began to create designs to silk-screen onto T-shirts, because there wasn't alot of T-shirts with Coast Salish designs on them. I said, ok, there's not, any out there I might as well create some for myself.

LD: So you did all the stencilling all yourself or you designed it and brought it to a printer.

L: I would design it and bring it to the printer. And so the printer began printing the designs with my, like the designs of my work on T-shirts and from that point on I began printing T-shirt sand with those I saw that I had the potential to make a living as an artist, that my T-shirts could be a supplement to my income. So I began to print those T-shirts and began to sell those and then from that point on I decided, ok, I wanted to do my Masters degree in between I started to paint my first drum. I finishing my Bachelor's degree in First Nations studies, I was creating T-shirts and then I volunteered to paint a drum for one of my elders, I never painted a drum at that point, and I was really excited about it and I never really painted a drum, I was like "what did I get myself into!" – deciding to paint a drum for an elder.

LD: Right, that meant a lot to you?

L: Yeah, it was an honor to do that. I felt some cultural obligation to create something that was visually appealing and culturally significant, so I painted the drum for an elder and from that point on it gave me the confidence to think that I could paint. Because I painted that drum and it took me three weeks to paint it, and so that was in between my Bachelor's degree and my Masters degree. I waited out for the right Master's program and when that came up at UVIC it was the interdisciplinary program.

LD: Oh, you did that? Was it a PHD program? Or a Masters?

L: Masters, so I was working on that I was with a focus on Coast Salish art and I was creating my work at the same time, which was a component of the interdisciplinary degree. I was working at Thunderbird Park carving studio at that time, Luke Marston and John Marston were there. In some way they inspired and encouraged me. I entered into some logo contests at the Victoria Native Friendship Centre and I won several of them and it also gave me a lot of confidence that I could become an artist. At some point in my second year in my Master's degree I decided to make a living as a full time artist. I moved into my apartment and I was 29 then and I said, "ok this is it, I'm going to be a full-time artist", and just take the gamble and see if it works out and it did.

LD: And it did?

L: Yeah.

LD: That's amazing, ok so, did anybody teach you when you were looking at Coast Salish art and you're looking at all of the trigons and crescents and all of the forms that you're using in Coast Salish art specifically, where did you look and who did you look to for those forms and how to use them and make them your own did you have anyone to talk to or any places to go? Museums? Books? Or anything else like that?

L: Yeah, it was mainly through books where I learned the design elements and design principles. I also learned a bit from Maynard Johnny Jr. and Manuel Salazar and my cousin Joe Wilson early on in my career. So they inspired me and encouraged me. It was mainly through books, like books on Northwest Coast art books and sort of self-taught and that's where I learned traditional design elements and principles from it.

LD: OK, training or mentors, have you ever mentored anybody or had any apprentices under you?

L: No, I'd be honored if that ever happened, I'd only ever really taught art to grade 12 students in Colwood one year a few times. I've given guests lectures at Camosun, at Vancouver Island University, at the Washington University and guest speaking at the University of Victoria. In my community I've never really had the opportunity to mentor anybody. But one of my neighbors who was aware that I was an artist, he approached me and he wanted to learn design from me so I felt really honored that he came to me and acknowledged me as an artist so I taught him some of the design elements and principles and I saw the progress in his work and I, to encourage him, I also decided to make T-shirts with his designs, so I paid for the printing costs and then he went out and sold the shirts. He never really emerged as an artist but I think he has the potential to; he definitely has the sense of design and strong understanding

of the design elements, so I think he has the potential of becoming a better artist. He hasn't really found that focus yet, but he's one person that I've mentored, but besides from that, no not really.

LD: Kay, we'll move to goals, goals an artist, goals in terms of where you want your work to be, where to be shown or how you see this manifesting in your life?

L: My overall goal as an artist... sometimes I feel like I can be complacent, like once you start making a living as an artist and getting income as an artist it can be for some people they can become a bit complacent, self-satisfied and say ok I've done it, I've achieved everything I needed to achieve. I always... into my thirties I felt like basically that was the beginning of my career and now that I'm going into my 40's I still feel basically it's the beginning of my career and that there's a long way still that I could go. I'm the type of person who likes to think I can beat the odds which is probably one of the reasons why I [like] lotteries, I likes to play lotteries. But I like to believe that I can do something that can really defy expectations of me because I think as a First Nations person that has been the story of my life, having to strive and succeed in a lot of adversity in society. As an artist I feel like I've attained a good degree of success within the commercial art market. I remembers at one point in my mid-twenties when I went to the Inuit art gallery in Vancouver, somebody was wearing one of my T-shirts in there and one of the staff members thought it was Susan Point's work and I was just really honored that they'd think it was Susan Point's work, because for me that was like a great compliment to have that happen in that gallery. Five years later I found myself working with that gallery. I think I've done as much as I can with the commercial art galleries and now there is potential to gain more recognition with public art galleries and possible museums because I've had one solo public art show in a gallery in Prince George; it was Two Rivers Art Gallery. I was in Transporters that was at the AGGV in 2007, and for that was very significant in my career because it was at a public gallery. So Two Rivers Art Gallery and the Victoria Art Gallery were significant points in my career. And I have something coming up, this coming fall, assisting with the AGGV with co-curating an exhibition and creating works for the exhibition as well as possibly writing an essay for their exhibition catalogue (Urban Thunderbirds). I feel really honored that they approached me for that so that...

LD: Is it a Coast Salish show?

L: It's Coast Salish, Kwakwaka'wakw and Nuuchanulth, the First Nations of Vancouver Island. So I'll be involved in that in the fall. And then the Nanaimo Art Gallery also has talked with me about possible co-curating an exhibition basically the same opportunity of a solo show up there and maybe writing and essay or visiting my work space, so...

LD: Do you have a studio?

L: I live in my apartment where basically where I work at, I have a table, I have a den that use to be my work space but as I've begun to work on larger works, I have like a floor that I work on or a table, so that's basically my work space.

LD: OK, I guess different... adding to that different materials and mediums you use in your work.

L: I'm basically a graphic artist. I work with acrylic on canvas and paper. Occasionally on drums and paddles and limited edition serigraph prints. I've designed some logos. I've used gauche before but I'm at a point where I'd like to experiment with different techniques, graphic techniques and carving.

LD: Interested in sculpture at all?

L: I have some interesting... I was looking at something that Rande Cook created a water fountain in Duncan, a water fountain in City Hall. I was admiring the artistry in that and how much of a challenge that would be to transfer, so something, like make that transition from being a graphic artist into doing something that's three-dimensional. I'd like to start like making a carving with large panels.

LD: What about collaborative work with other artists, like to do really collaborative work with others, have you thought about that?

L: I thought of it a few times, there was somebody in Germany who wanted to have one of my designs in silver, I don't really do silver but I really admire Dylan Thomas's in silver work. So I talked with him.

LD: Is that one of his?

L: No, this is Stewart Paradon, his from Cowichan, from Duncan.

LD: Yeah, Dylan Thomas, he does silver too.

L: Yeah.

LD: Ok.

L: Yeah, so I was talking with a gallery staff member about collaborating with Dylan on a silver piece, which is sort of a minor collaboration, but also an acknowledgment of my admiration for Dylan Thomas's work in silver. And at one point I've considered working with, well, approaching a couple of artist working in – what do you call it, appliqué work with fabrics. Charlene George, I was thinking about approaching her about possibly collaborating with me designing and her working with the designs in appliqué with wool type material. There's another artist I was thinking of approaching with the possibility of doing that, aside from that I've never really considered collaborating with another artist. Which is sort of ironic because as an artist I believe in being humble and acknowledging other artists. And I thought to collaborate with other artist but never really thought about it until recently. Because I've been so involved with what I've been doing with my career and living my personal life.

LD: Do you live more of a personal life or more of an artist life?

L: I think the two are sort of intertwined. I certainly...

LD: Sorry continue, it's still going.

L: Sorry I can't remember what the last question was.

LD: Me either, we'll just continue, exhibition history, you've talked about that already.

L: Well, I've had maybe 4 or 5 solo exhibitions at the Alcheringa Gallery here in Victoria.

LD: How much work do you produce, like given in a week, are you producing final prints or you start off with paintings, so how long does it take you to create a painting? How fast are you producing this work and how fast is this work going out?

L: I know, you were asking me about my personal life and my artistic life.

LD: Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

L: We'll get back to that question, ok, the time depends, like I've had some paintings where it's only taken me a day or two and I've had another painting that was like 5ft X 5ft, and that took a while because I had to draw the design, have it blown up by a printer and transferred and then re-drafted and paint it.

LD: Do you use a projector ever?

L: No, I've never used a projector, I've heard of other artists use a projector to enlarge works but I've never, I basically take it to a photocopier and have it enlarged at Island Blue Print.

LD: How do you transfer that print onto the canvas?

L: Well, I have the photocopy, I trace that with tracing paper and retrace that into the canvas and then re-draft in onto the canvas and start painting that.

LD: Oh, takes a while, eh?

L: Yeah, I like the methodical aspect of it.

LD: Yeah, I like that I use to do printmaking, so I really like that step 1, step 2, kind of process.

L: Yeah, it gives me lots of time to think while I'm drafting the design and transferring a design and even going over alternate design possibilities, or different colors with the design, color potential with the design.

LD: Where do your colors come from?

L: I've been trying to use different colors and... I think one of the frustrations of being an artist is that I use really subtle hues of different colors and like when I use my perception is that if I use a dark green, its dark green, or if I use a navy its navy not black. Or if I use a variation of red or basically I use lots of black, red, navy, dark green, but when people look at my prints for some reason they always look at it like it's black and red. They aren't really seeing the green in it or the blue in it. So, Coast Salish art is really open to different colors. In the past it was more of a carved art form and not really a graphic art form. I mean there was some gauche used on the carvings, but it wasn't really a graphic art form, so that gives a lot of leeway and flexibility for contemporary Coast Salish artists to work in different colors. But for me, I've tried to challenging myself getting out and saying, ok don't use any more black and red for a while because I want to get away from those colors. But the colors comes from all over, the inspiration

comes from all over the place, from what people where, to what I over all perceive over all, because I am always visually perceiving the world and finding inspiration everywhere that I go and everywhere that I look, so that's where some of the colors come from.

LD: Commission work. Do you ever do commission work? Anything significant in your career?

L: Let's see. Off my head I can think of maybe a few – I've got some low commissions in Victoria, I had a commission for Camosun, it was for their registration building, it was like 6 feet by two feet, it was sort of a large acrylic on canvas painting. And at the University of Victoria, they also commissioned a painting that they end up putting on there as one of their entrances to one of their building there.

LD: Which one? The Clearihue?

L: I think so.

LD: I've seen your work, I'm sure I've seen your work. I use to go up there and study psychology and you have all of these prints.

L: Yeah, yeah.

LD: Your personal and artistic life and how those are intertwined and how do [you] manoeuvre and balance all this stuff?

L: Well that's like one of the core problems, struggles I've had in my life. I think when I was in my late teens I've always had it set in mind that if I got distracted by a relationship or a family life, whether it's the family I grew up with or creating my own family, it would somehow take away my focus as an artist and I... I made the decision that I wasn't going to be involved in any relationships and there wasn't really a clear-cut decision though, I mean I think if I could of been in a relationship I was just like too self-conscious and shy back then in my early twenties, early to mid-twenties. But I felt like if I did that I might of been distracted from my, doing my Bachelor's degree or working on my Master's degree or beginning my career. As an artist I feel like being an artist, it's so involved, not only is it creating the works, actually sketching or drafting or painting the works, but it's also dealing with the galleries and also it's like an intellectual process that I am always involved in. So I've ended up in my life where I've had one significant relationship that I really regret walking away from but I'd say we both inextricably intertwined my personal and my art career. Like I think I find inspiration in my personal life as an artist and it's hard to differentiate at times because I think as an artist I really motivated by adversity and transforming negative things that I see in society into something positive in the form of creativity in my work, but also trying to bring... I have a love for nature, for kids and animals.

I'm just starting to value my family now, but I'm standing at a cross-roads, I feel like I get to say, ok well, sometimes I just want to forget about society and about human beings in general, and just like be creative. Like living in Duncan is like...

LD: Isolating?

L: Isolating and just not really, I mean in some ways I guess it's inspiring in a sense that I see lots of adversity, negativity, racism and internalized racism, and politics and problems that exist in my community, somehow I find inspiration within. But I'm going to move on from Duncan at some point in the near future, just because there's not really anything there for me.

LD: Where would you go?

L: Probably Victoria or Vancouver, I envision myself moving to Vancouver for my career. But I think Victoria is a nice middle ground, I mean I guess so, I'm not really a city guy but it's also easy access to Vancouver and Seattle and the galleries that I deal with, the one gallery I deal with in Victoria and then the galleries in Vancouver and Seattle.

LD: How did you get into the galleries in Victoria, how did all of that happen?

L: That was like really intimidating to approach Alcheringa Gallery.

LD: You approached them?

L: Yeah, they were aware of me because I was always felt like I always lied to go into galleries; I always liked to go into Alcheringa Gallery and the other galleries in Seattle and Vancouver. Just to admire some of the works there, so they were familiar of my face at Alcheringa before I made my living as a full-time artist and I also was hanging around with Luke and John Marston early in my career so they were aware of me being around Luke and John Marston. And just by chance one of my first commissions from the Cowichan tribes, they commissioned a painting that they wanted as a logo and as a limited edition serigraph print and so they were printed and I was over at Pacific Editions here in Victoria.

LD: Is that still open?

L: No, is closed about a year or two ago, I was at Pacific Editions and I was signing one of the prints and Elaine Bons came in and she saw me signing one of the prints and was kind of impressed by what she saw, so she just gave me her card and to come into the gallery and I felt really intimidated by that but I also fortunately had a good, I had some photographs of my work that I could show her. So I showed her all of those works and I impressed her with my intelligence and the ability to articulate things about my work, so she was really impressed about my work and my overall knowledge, just the impression that I gave her. She said she liked to take more works and even talk about a solo show some point in the future.

LD: That's so great.

L: Yeah.

LD: There's so many artist in this city and in the world and just to have the opportunity to be welcomed and greeted that way, it's nice.

L: Yeah, I take it for granted sometimes, early on in my career I felt really fortunate to be... I thought anybody who makes a living as an artist is really fortunate. And then as I become more comfortable

being an artist I think I started to take it for granted, but sometimes I watch people working at places – they can't stand their job. It reminds me of how fortunate I am. I had people tell me that when you're at a job you're paid to shut up and don't express yourself, do what you're told. I've been in that position when I was in my twenties. I've worked at labour jobs where I was an employee and I felt like I was a tool. Like I was in a rat race and just not really evolving or being appreciated or valued by society, so that really gave me the desire to be an artist. I have those reminders, like I was saying when I walk into places and see world working at their jobs and how they can't stand their jobs. Being on the sky train in Vancouver is really surreal for me at times over there and just watching people over there with their iPods and being isolated from each other, looking miserable and it's like, this is their daily routine going to and from work. And for me it's like I'm feeling good about life, listening to music and enjoying the music and I'm like, man this is my life I have the freedom as an artist to go where I want to go and work when I want to work and do what I want to do and not have anybody tell me what I should be or what I should think or say or anything like that. So I find lots of freedom from that and empowerment.

LD: That's amazing.

L: Yeah.

LD: I am an artist too and I've been, it's just this decision of am I going to do this as a living or not and then having no security in that or no tools in how to maneuver in just being an artist and making a living off just your art. It's really just a life process how to figure out how to maneuver in that day by day. The necessity of security, having jobs that I hate and the end conclusion in that is this is not who I am, this is not what I want to be doing, I just want to make art. So, my solution is to write grants and get that money to make work and write another, so that's been kind of my solution to sustaining my art practice.

L: So, yeah, I think that's been another goal that I've had in my career aside from working with public art galleries, potentially museums and applying for more grants.

LD: What about teaching, teaching in institutions?

L: Yeah, I'd like to teach at the college level but I had one unfortunate incident in my Master's degree, so I'm not sure if I'm going to finish that, so... I don't know if I'll be able to finish that anytime soon.

LD: So what's keeping you from completing your degree?

L: Well, I guess I'm sort of afraid I might not be able to continue on with my grad supervisor that maybe she's lost faith in me just because I've dragged it on for over a decade now, and I don't know what the time limit is on Master's degree, if I can resume it after a decade or whatever.

LD: What do you have left to do though? Anything you want is possible, if you're like this is what I want, this is what I'm here for; this is why I want to complete. Everything you internally desire will manifest itself; all we have to do is just remove the blockages. Like I see my dreams and I see my desires and believe that I can fulfill them all, all I have to do is constantly keep weeding as they grow out, because that's what builds up and builds up and I can't see, my perception is... I can't see passed my nose, is constant pruning and allowing that new life to come.

L: Yeah, so I'm open to the possibility of finishing my Master's degree, but I'm so involved right now with the things I'm involved in. It's almost like I like the pressure of having exhibitions coming up.

LD: Do you do submissions for that, or you're already in?

L: I'm already in.

LD: Yeah, it sounds like that.

L: Yeah, for me it's a leap of faith, I'm a part of the gallery, to say ok we want to exhibit your work but we don't know what you're going to exhibit or what your ideas or themes that you're working with. I really want to create something that is new and different. Initially for the exhibition at the Art Gallery of Greater Victoria they're talking about Marianne Nicholson, myself, Rande Cook, they're talking about trying to find a Nuuchanulth artist to represent Nuuchanulth people. But Marianne Nicholson's ideas were a bit too ambitious for the exhibition, so she wasn't able to be part of the exhibition so at this point it's going to be myself, Rande Cook and we still haven't decided who the Nuuchanulth artist is going to be.

LD: Cool, busy, so let's dive into this stuff, you're just going to talk about it, actually there's ten, so there's not too many, so on and so forth, so tell me about that one.

L: Ok.

LD: **Songs of Serpents.**

L: Songs of Serpents is a circle design that is in the spirit of drums. The face in the center is a singing face, with the eyes both closed and the mouth open. The serpents are circling the human, and encircling the human symbolizes being a guardian spirit. But the depiction of the serpent is visually vague and ambiguous, and that's in keeping with the Coast Salish spiritual traditions, that any depictions of a guardian spirit, dancers guardian spirit are rendered visually vague and ambiguous to retain the power of the guardian spirit and to not immediately reveal the guardian spirit, what species or what type of animal it is. So with this the design the serpent is vague, when you first look at it a person might not immediately think of serpents. The proportions are sort of disproportionate because that's what I studied in older Coast Salish artifacts that are in museums. So that's basically what I can say about that design.

LD: Ok.

L: **Eight People, Eight Ravens**, and it's in the spirit of spindle whorls with the circular design with the circle in the center. It's not spindle whorl design per-se but it's in the spirit of spindle whorls because a spindle whorl in the center it would be smaller, but the mouth in the center is a bit larger than a spindle whorl would actually be. So there's eight people and eight ravens and the overall intention of this design was to create visual punning that would symbolize inner connectedness. So there's four faces that are obvious where you can see the mouth, nose, eyes and eyebrows and the head. And then there are other faces that are less obvious where you see the two eyes and the suggestion of a mouth and the C-forms that are on the four ends of the more obvious human faces and there's... it's sort an abstract but also and visually vague and ambiguous depiction of ravens. So the eye there and part of the naked space of

the eyebrows defining the mouth of a raven and then in front of the beak, so there's the visual punning in the design symbolizes the interconnectedness. So, that's basically that design. Serpents, that's basically two serpents and they are vague and ambiguous. And the proportions are sort of exaggerated and distorted. It's also in the spirit of the spindle whorls; it's a circular design with a hole in the center representing the spindle whorl.

Wolves, this one is wolves, two wolf heads and the abstract depiction of the anatomical features of the wolves. There are ovals, trigons and the crescents within the design and the overall design is inspired by a Coast Salish carved comb. The overall design, that's where that design came from, so that's basically the explanation of that there.

LD: **Four Serpents**.

L: This one here.

LD: Yeah, some of them are doubles on here, but it's the same design.

L: Ok, so this one is, four serpents and this is inspired by a design that I saw on a pamphlet in the Cowichan Tribes band office. It's why I basically depicted the four serpents in a circle, in the spirit of spindle whorls. It's like goes beyond that because the circle in the center is quite large, so it couldn't really be a spindle whorl design. But it's an expression of respect towards animals and nature through a visual depiction of serpents. So that's the explanation of that design there.

LD: Is this one a flag, I think I've seen it in a mall?

L: Yeah, I'm not too sure, that was one of my popular prints. I think that's Chris Paul. Yeah, Chris Paul I'm really admire some of his work and inspired by some of work.

LD: I spoke with Maynard already and Charles Elliot, you know Charles?

L: Yeah, Maynard he inspired and encouraged me earlier in my career, and Charles Elliot in my studies I really admired his reputation as being an artist who was perpetuated Coast Salish art in the late 70's and early 80's

LD: We just did this one, Four Serpents.

L: **Salish Community**, I wrote an artist statement for it and then I guess the email was lost and then I wrote it again and I think it was just lost again. I decided for like the exhibition of the Art Gallery of Greater Victoria Travelling exhibition that being part of, I decided to write about it, just because it would be easy for me to write about my own work, as opposed to writing about another artist work is more challenging because I know clearly what I'm thinking and what I was doing to express, but at the same time people bring in new meaning to the work when they look at it. So, this one's significance that is both traditional and contemporary. So, the traditional significance of the design is it's a lot more of a spindle whorl design than any of my other works because it's circular as the hole, the spindle hole in the center. It has the four faces that are in the design and the circle and the number four having to do with wholeness and balance, so that's what that significance of those four faces. It's also; Salish Community also has to do with differences in community with past and the present. How family is very important traditionally and still valued in Salish communities, family and at the same time it is an expression of

contemporary Native issues, internalized racism, nepotism, band office politics – those in how that divides First Nations communities. That reality that I see in my own community, so it is an expression of a traditional sense of community and a bit more of contemporary community where things are a bit more divided amongst people who are traditional and non-traditional, or people who are working in the band office and people who are able to be involved in tradition but also work at the band office at the same time. So, that design is the expression of those traditional and contemporary realities of Coast Salish communities.

Sun, Salmon, Frogs and Ravens. That one was, overall it's a sun design, but it's like one of my previous designs where the visual punning depicts the inner connectedness of the world. So, in the design there is the sun, which is the overall design, the salmon which this lower part of the design where you can see the eye in front of the head and the mouth and then the frog. The frog can be like a half frog and half human from the frontal perspective and there's the two eyes there and the mouth, or else there's a bit more of the obvious frog at the bottom where you see the two eyes on the chin and the mouth and the raven is at the top of the design where there's the bottom of the mouth in the negative space of the mouth and the beak and eye in there, so that symbolizes the interconnectedness of nature and of life on earth.

LD: I love that one.

L: Yeah really enjoyed working on the yellow hues and doing the bleed in the design was a bit different for me.

LD: Are those painted?

L: Yeah.

LD: Is it your canvas that is white and then you put the circle in the middle and then you paint the design?

L: Yeah, it was on paper so I that I painted the white paper and painted the yellow in there. And I asked the printer to do... what's called a bleed, a gradation of the color goes to the different color, from one color to another color and that's really popular in contemporary West Coast graphics and that's something that I... I think because of the popularity of it I think it's over-used; it's like an over-used technique so I try to avoid it as much as I can. Every once in awhile I like to use that technique, but I for me in evokes contemporary graphics, where it gets this sizzler, sizzler steakhouse or I don't know for some reason it evokes those weird feelings, contemporary graphics within contemporary Canadian visual culture. I mean it can be effective, but I think it can be over-used at times; it's something that I like to use every once in awhile.

LD: This one?

L: OK, **THEIRS** is a counter part to **YOURS**. I painted two drums for my solo exhibition at Two Rivers Art Gallery in Prince George. I very rarely paint drums because I like to paint contemporary media, like acrylic on canvas or paper. And drums and paddles I feel have a bit more of a traditional context, although an artist can create works that are traditional implements that can add some contemporary significance. But in the case of this design I wanted to create two painted drums that has some significance aside from the fact that they're painted drums. It has to do with cultural property, I like to

play words, like the word THEIRS, as in it belongs to them; it belongs to the people who buy it, who collect the work. And the neo-colonial aspects of the commercial market and “heirs” as in who is the heirs of that art tradition and the counter point of the other work the other part of the design is yOURS and THEIRS, it’s almost like the answer is within the title, it is one of THEIRS and the other one is yOURS.

LD: Very clever.

L: So there is that significance in some part of me is expressing that aspect of the commercial art market in contemporary Northwest Coast art; but at the same time I feel some sort of obligation to share my culture in some way with members of Canadian society or the world in general, because with that understanding there becomes for of appreciation and a cultural bridge that has been built between First Nations and Canadians and Americans and other collectors of Northwest Coast art. So that sharing is symbolized in the design by the visual punning of that design where there’s two faces and they share the same mouth in the center, so that signifies the sharing as well as the visual punning of the design outside of the two faces, where there’s the raven, the eye and the beak and the mouth. It’s an expression of cultural property and also of sharing; it’s what the overall significance of THEIRS is.

LD: OK.

L: Yeah.

LD: **communiTIES?**

L: It’s like so crazy, I created these works and some of these works I remember. And then it’s like, earlier on in my career when I was creating these works it was so much a part of my life it was hard to part with the work. And as I create other works and as I become more productive as an artist, sometimes I even forget about works some of these works it’s like, I get so busy; I can even remember working on that.

LD: Can you remember that one?

L: Vaguely.

LD: Vaguely.

L: I’m surprised to see this design.

LD: Well, that’s was only two years ago.

L: Yeah, two years ago, I guess that was a different part of my life, it’s the reason I can’t fully remember the design. CommuniTIES is basically the interconnectedness and ties within communities, that’s the overall significance of the work.

LD: OK.

L: Yeah.

LD: Yeah, we’re finished, any last thing, questions or anything that you want to say to sum up everything?

L: It's been really great to work with the Smyth's private collection and really thankful that they're patrons of Coast Salish art and that they're really passionate of being founders or representing our Coast Salish art and understanding of Coast Salish art. And something that I've always been passionate about, like in the time that I've been, the past two decades I really started studying Coast Salish art, I've been really passionate about perpetuating or promoting Coast Salish art because there was a lack of understanding of Coast Salish art even in the 90's, even up to today there's still a lack of knowledge of Coast Salish art amongst people who understand Northwest Coast art in general. Even within our own communities there's still people that aren't really aware of differentiating our traditional art form from Haida art, or Kwakwaka'wakw art or other art forms in the Northwest Coast. So, I'm just really thankful to see that the Smyth's are doing something to promote the understanding of Coast Salish art and they even collect my work and it's an honor to have my work being represented alongside these other artist that I've always admired, like we talked about earlier it's even a dream for me to be an artist. It's my childhood dream to make a living at it; it's really something I feel fortunate to be able to do. It's something that is really up my alley to be able to represent Coast Salish art, so I'm basically summarizing my thoughts on the Smyth's private collection.

LD: Thank you.