

## Letter to the Editor\*

### Response to Aaron Glass' 2009 Review Essay on The Bill Reid Gallery of Northwest Coast Art

Mike Robinson

New human ventures of any kind bring special promise, special vexations, and earnest hopes for sustenance to the hurly-burly of cultural, institutional, and economic life. This is especially so today for public art galleries who face unparalleled challenges in the philanthropic marketplace as governments at all levels inject Keynesian stimuli to built environment infrastructure like roads and bridges while simultaneously strangling the arts. If art is truly the creative spirit of a culture, these are truly times of spiritual “economic cholera.” At the Bill Reid Gallery of Northwest Coast Art (BRGNCA) we are buffeted by these storms as we try and survive on admissions revenue, gift shop profits, rental fees, and small-scale private philanthropy. We have no operations support from government. We do, however, have all of the institutional freedoms common to non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and a burning desire to survive.

The BRGNCA has experienced the predictable birthing angst, staff turnover, and operating model realignment that any start-up venture must embrace, especially in its first year of life. And considering the global economic carnage of the last year, imagine the world viewed through our eyes—those who must run the Gallery. Aaron Glass' Review Essay (2009) provides a kind of body-scan diagnostic imaging of our birth ailments, citing several negative and false positive prognoses. Reading his article gave the staff both cause for alarm, but also hope for the future, because what he describes has in large measure already morphed in terms of philosophy and direction. We now operate with four full-time staff, two grant-based consultants, and some twenty volunteers. In this environment we have redesigned the core collection exhibit on *Bill Reid's Journey*; started sponsoring new exhibitions, beginning in June 2009 with *Continuum: Vision and Creativity on the Northwest Coast*; embraced publishing (with the *Continuum* catalogue [Assu 2009] and a new and expanded edition of Bill Reid's *Solitary Raven*, edited by Robert Bringhurst [2009]); initiated artists' talks with the *Continuum* artists and critical curatorial thinkers; and stopped all plans for producing size-reduced, new materials applications of posthumous Bill Reid castings using surmoulage and digitization techniques.

Our vision for the future is economic sustainability predicated on non-governmental organization management, featuring exhibitions and programming that bring fresh eyes and critical curatorial practice to the continuum of Northwest Coast Art in whatever ways it develops as a practice and a genre. I believe that we will succeed, and I look forward to continuing the work that we have now begun. Aaron—it's time you came back for an encore tour!

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*Mike Robinson is the Executive Director at the Bill Reid Gallery of Northwest Coast Art and CEO of the Bill Reid Trust.*