

S'abadeb—The Gifts: Pacific Coast Salish Art and Artists.* Barbara Brotherton, ed. Seattle: Seattle Art Museum in Association with the University of Washington Press. 280 pp.

Reviewed by Aldona Jonaitis

Wayne Suttles, my friend and mentor, always defended Coast Salish art from the disparaging remarks, or even, the complete disregard of these groups by aficionados of the more flamboyant central Wakashan works or more refined and elegant northern style creations. He had good reasons to praise the art of the southern Northwest Coast, even if others felt it lacking in comparison to the north. It is truly unfortunate that he is not alive to celebrate this wonderful book and the beautiful exhibit that it accompanies.

S'abadeb—The Gifts: Pacific Coast Salish Art and Artists opened at the Seattle Art Museum in October 2008 to considerable critical acclaim. The show then went on to the Hearst Museum in Phoenix in February 2009 and continued on to the Royal British Columbia Museum in November 2009. As is now standard, a good number of Salish collaborators assisted in the creation of this exhibit, and even selected its name. The Lushootseed term *s'abadeb* refers to exchange in both daily and ceremonial contexts, and embodies a fundamental aspect of Salish philosophy. Its relevance to the exhibit and catalogue is that in the Salish worldview an artwork is considered a gift.

The catalogue contains a good mixture of academic and first person essays. Powerful statements on art and culture by Vi Hilbert, Jay Miller, Ellen White Kwulasulwut, D. Michael Pavel, and Qwalsius Shaun Peterson offer the necessary perspectives of those from whose cultures these artworks emerged. Pavel's essay engagingly presents his uncle's teachings about art and Salish worldview. Especially effective is Pavel treatment of the questions his uncle asked him, which turn into questions Pavel asks of the reader: "What story does the basket [she is looking at] tell?...What does the maker of the basket want you to know?" (p. 32). One is forced not only to look at the beauty of these artworks, but to try to penetrate their meaning.

Pavel also points out how his uncle explained the four elements of Salish design, which have multifaceted meanings. Summarized far too cursorily in this brief review, the elements include the outline that brings the whole together, the circle that is unity, the crescent that is history, and the trigon that is completion. This last element may appear confusing, as the trigon has three points, but four signifies completion for the Salish. Pavel's uncle explained that there is a forth "inner point" within the trigon that brings its elements to four. This reference to Salish philosophy as expressed in visual art offers a welcome complement to a strictly formal analysis.

Intriguing insights into Salish art are provided by an in-depth interview by editor and curator Barbara Brotherton of Susan Point, arguably the most well known contemporary Salish artist, and Michael Kew, professor emeritus of the University of British Columbia and a respected anthropologist of the Salish. The interview took place at the Museum of Anthropology.

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Discourse on how the artist and scholar first began looking seriously at Salish art demonstrates the interconnectivity between tradition and the academy. Point indicates that she had originally worked in the northern style until her husband asked why she was not making Salish art. As Point explains, little existed in the library on Salish art, but her Aunt Della was married to Kew, who was already collecting an archive of information on this material. The anthropologist and artist shared understanding and insights on Salish art, and both grew.

One aspect of Northwest Coast art that has in the past often been overlooked is work by women. This is not the case in this catalogue, as there are many examples of basketry and textiles, which form a major component of Salish art. As Carolyn Marr points out in her essay on Southern Coast Salish baskets, spiritual powers assisted in creating these works that may superficially appear purely decorative; in this way, they are not unlike the powers necessary for men to make canoes.

Other essays in the book cover the history of collecting Salish art by Brotherton, baskets by Sharon Fortney, textiles by Crisca Bierwert, and canoes by Steven Brown. Archaeologist Astrida Blukis Onat provides an interpretation of four archeological figures, two dated between 900-1,200 years B.P. Effectively using ethnographic information and oral history, Onat proposes that these figures were examples of prehistoric gifts, bringing us again to the cultural importance of gifts.

The highlight of the book, for me, is Wayne Suttles' posthumously published essay, "The Recognition of Coast Salish Art," edited by his son Cameron Suttles from two papers given on this topic in 1998. With his usual elegance and profound knowledge, Suttles gives an historical review of why so many scholars and connoisseurs have dismissed Salish art in the past, identifying the essentialism inherent in the notion of "culture" as in large part responsible for such judgments. This is a most important essay that embodies clearly the paradigmatic change in attitudes towards Salish art.

The illustrations in this book are splendid, and extensively interpreted. It is a pleasure to turn each page and discover archaeological, early contact, 19th and 20th century works, contemporary baskets, textiles, paintings, carvings, and prints by the ever-growing number of Salish artists who work in their traditions, as well as innovative creations by artists such as Lawrence Paul Yuxwelupton and Marvin Oliver. My one complaint about the publication—and it is certainly a minor one—is the absence of a list of illustrations which would help in locating images.

Far more important is my overall judgment that this stunning and substantial catalogue will educate a great number of people who have not yet recognized the impressive quality of Coast Salish art. Brotherton, the Seattle Art Museum, and the group of individuals who together assembled the exhibit and wrote essays for the catalogue have done a great service to Native American art history and ethnology by presenting an exceptional Northwest Coast tradition.

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