

S'ABADEB THE GIFTS

PACIFIC COAST SALISH ART AND ARTISTS

4 Discover the gifts of family, tradition and nature as we explore Coast Salish culture through ancient and contemporary art and artifacts. This is the last chapter of a four-week series brought to you by Newspapers In Education and Seattle Art Museum.

Gifts of our Artists

“Has this been our goal for the past two hundred years? To become part of the American culture that invaded our lands, made war against our ancestors, and to this day continues its assault on our cultural heritages?” (Roger Fernandes, 2002)

According to the Coast Salish First People of Washington state and British Columbia, works of art are gifts created to inspire, uplift and teach. Artwork, the gifts of contemporary Coast Salish artists, raise questions about tradition, innovation, survival and revival. In “New Spirit Journey” (see image), artist Roger Fernandes, a member of the Lower Elwha Band of the Klallam Indians in Port Angeles, Wash., illustrates the effects he feels money has on the traditions of Coast Salish people. On the left is the face of a Coast Salish person. Above the face is a canoe that travels on top of a series of traditional Coast Salish designs. On the right side of the artwork there is a pair of figures with eyes staring outward. Long ago Coast Salish tribes used figures like these in a healing ceremony called the Soul Recovery Ceremony. Through this ceremony, spiritual doctors would go to the land of the dead to retrieve the soul of an ill person and restore their health. Figures like the ones in Fernandes’ artwork helped the spirit doctors along their journey. The canoe on the right side of the artwork is filled with the souls who were recovered during the ceremony. In the

New Spirit Journey,
2002, Roger Fernandes,
b. 1951, Lower Elwha
Klallam, paper,
pencil, collage,
20 1/4 x 25 3/4 in.
Courtesy of the Burke
Museum of Natural
History and Culture,
Seattle, 2005-61/1
© Roger Fernandes.



center of the artwork, contrasting these images of a traditional Coast Salish ceremony, the artist puts poker chips, bingo cards, cigarettes and fireworks. He says these are “elements that now drive many tribal economies.”

In the United States, Indian tribes are sovereign nations, meaning they have the power to govern themselves and to control and regulate the actions of their citizens. Many tribes have signed treaties, or contracts, with the government that make sure they have rights to land, hunting and fishing. Despite these treaties, many activities by non-Native people have degraded natural resources and forced Native peoples like the Coast Salish to look for new ways to survive. Some of these new ways include building retail businesses, casinos, fisheries and tourist and recreation centers. In his artwork, Roger Fernandes places poker chips and bingo cards next to the face of a Coast Salish person and images from a traditional ceremony to get us to think about how casinos and other mainstream activities are affecting Native people’s relationships with their traditions.

“Art raises questions,” Fernandes says. “There are many tribes now that are doing very well, making money, but money isn’t free. Money comes with a cost. Money has power in this world. But that power is only one kind of power. There are many powers in the world. Individuals have power. The question is, ‘is money totally good?’”

DISCUSS

- ▶ What is going on in this work of art by Roger Fernandes?
- ▶ What different points of view is Fernandes presenting?
- ▶ What does this work of art say about power? What is power? Are there different kinds of power?

EXPLORE

- ▶ Roger Fernandes says “Art raises questions.” Create your own work of art based on a question that concerns you. Think about the recent presidential election or some other major issue in your community.
- ▶ Listen to Roger Fernandes discuss “New Spirit Journey” by visiting the Seattle Art Museum’s interactive Web site for the exhibition “S’abadeb — The Gifts: Pacific Coast Salish Art and Artists” at seattleartmuseum.org/exhibit/interactives/sabadeb/flash/index.html. Under “Gifts of Our Artists” look for the “New Spirit Journey” section. After hearing the artist talk, does this change what you think about his work of art?
- ▶ How do treaty negotiations relate to the issues of power which Roger Fernandes raises in “New Spirit Journey”? Learn more about the status of treaty negotiations between First Peoples and the United States and Canadian governments. Start by exploring the American Indian Policy Center at airpi.org/projects/history.html and the British Columbia’s Ministry of Aboriginal Relations and Reconciliation at gov.bc.ca/arr/treaty/negotiating/why.html.

Teens! Celebrate fresh perspectives from young stars of local Native communities during SAM’s ARTattack: Teen Night Out! *Seattle Sound*. ARTattack is a fun cultural party for teens, by teens. Check it out **Friday, November 14, 2008 from 6 - 9 p.m.** at SAM downtown. Find out more online at seattleartmuseum.org.



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