

Artist Interview with Aaron Nelson-Moody  
Conducted 3.12.2015 - 9:54am

**So before we jump right in, I'm gonna be recording this phone call if that's okay with you?**

Sure, yes!

**Cool. And if at any point you don't want to interview anymore or if you don't want me to record anymore that's totally fine.**

Okay. And remind me, you're a student yes? Or you're doing research?

**Yeah. I'm a student at the University of Washington. I'm in my 3rd year and I'm taking a course called Indigenous Knowledge Visualization and we are looking at how Native artists use their art and encode knowledge systems within their art pieces.**

Hmm. Cool.

**Yeah, it's been a lot of fun. I'm really enjoying the class and we've been looking particularly at pieces in the Here and Now and I actually chose your spindle whorl to look at. So I'm really excited to be talking to you, this is really cool.**

Yeah, well thanks for calling.

**And this is like my first interview type thing ever so forgive my rudimentary questions.**

Okay. How about in a general way just tell me what you're kind of curious about and then we can move to your questions.

**Yeah so some of the things that we've been talking about in our class are questions of authenticity and responsibility on the part of Native artists to either represent their culture or to fall into the "traditional" way that Native art is supposed to look or how Native art has been presented in museums and that sort of thing. So my first question is: Why did you want to participate in the Here and Now exhibit and what was the process like? How did you get involved, how long was the process, etc?**

I think all the artists have been recipients of the Bill Holm Scholarship. So I have been doing a lot of research on some of the older Coast Salish artwork. In my community we grew up with very few pieces in our homes. A lot of things had just been stolen. Like you'd leave your house and come back and all the pottery would be gone or all the baskets would be gone. That was quite common in my grandparents time and I've got three generations who went to residential

schools. My mother went she was like 5 or something and came out when she was about 16 so there was this real break in contact with the older generation and there was a real loss of the physical objects from the older generation. So when it came to when I came along there was almost nothing to look at and there was very few stories to go on of what used to be done and why it was done. So a couple friends and I, we saw how few people were doing the old style of artwork, which Shaun Peterson calls the "classic Coast Salish," where very few people were doing old style so we spent a lot of time going to museums and looking at old stuff and speaking to people. Sometimes a family member would have a very old piece and they would tell us about it. Sometimes they would just have a story about it a very old piece that they would tell us about. Sometimes they would tell us a story about how it was carved and why it was carved and how it was used, we tried to piece together as much as we could from our historic culture. We inferred from that. We're not just trying to recreate the past, we're trying to infer from that how art can be used today. How it had been done in the past, it's just a guide for how we can continue our artwork. When I found out about the Bill Holm scholarship I was thrilled to go down and spend two weeks at the Burke. Mostly I've been directing my study towards spindle whorls because it was actually taken or sold -- I think it was sold from our community into the Burke Museum's possession. I can kind of understand it because it's an older piece, it's kind of worn down, and objects wear out and they have a life span. So even though it's a beautiful piece I can see why they sold it because I think at the time they were thinking "well we'll just make a new one and we'll carry the new one for 200 years" or whatever but it was at that point that things stopped being made people -- for a variety of reasons -- people in our community stopped making stuff. So what may not have been a big deal then, like selling it to a museum, suddenly became a big deal for future generations but luckily the Burke was really open to letting me come down and handle the piece and measure the piece and study the piece and just spend some time with it so I could recarve it.

**Was there anything that drew you specifically to the spindle whorl? Or were there other pieces that you were looking at and something about that piece in particular, you were just like "I wanna look at that one"?**

Well that one's a beautiful one. It's got a lot of interesting qualities. I was in particular studying the human forms and how they were done. Generally speaking there are two aspects of that piece, at least that's how I looked at it anyway. I looked at it as just an art piece, as a decorative motif. I was studying the composition, I was studying the use of elements, I was studying the depth of carving, like the use of space. And the other way I was looking at it is as a tool. Because a lot of contemporary carvers, they carve for sale or for museums, or sorry art galleries, and the [] tools were not being used as much. So I know weavers who want to use spindle whorls, and spindle whorls are fairly consistent in size and fairly consistent in weight, if the spindle whorl moves a certain way it creates a certain kind of wool so to study it just as a tool, to ignore the

motif for a moment and just look at how the tool was shaped, was the other way that I was looking at that object.

**Yeah, that's something that we've been talking about in our class as well about the different layers of meaning that are encoded particularly in native art. We've been talking about, when looking at different pieces, what are the materials that are used and how does that show where it comes from, what does the design mean, what are the skills needed to create the thing, what is the chemistry needed to create the thing, is it merely functional, is it just decorative? We've been really trying to dig deep into those sorts of questions as well.**

Yeah. And, y'know, some of this stuff is a little bit um, it's a little bit invisible within a culture. Sometimes it's just understood that a thing is looked at a certain way and it's never explicitly explained because everyone seems to agree this is how it's used. So I think there's a lot of stuff in our culture where perhaps it wasn't explained explicitly but everyone knew, y'know you know that if you're gonna make a paddle, it's gotta work. So nobody is gonna carve a bad paddle because that could be potentially life threatening. Nobody would want to give away the bad spindle whorl because it wouldn't be useful. I think it was viewed within our cultural framework and our cultural framework has changed, because our environment has changed, our society has changed, our government has changed; everything about our community has been under tremendous pressure over the last 150 years so we can't just look at our culture as a [] time in the history that we're trying to recapture because our world is too different to totally recapture it. But the way that I was taught about our work is that it is first of all it has a function. It has to work to fulfill that function. Secondly, it's visual communication. So if writing is very specific, I know people argue about the definitions of words and how they're used and stuff but it's pretty specific it's pretty explicit what each individual word means; there's a dictionary for it, for what people agree on what that word means. And in visual communication I'm not sure that the intent is to be so specific, I think the intent is to instigate conversation. Is to, for very different cultures to look at a picture of an eagle, for instance, the depiction of an eagle, and start talking about eagles together. It brings them a step closer as human beings. And part of the context for our artwork is, just within British Columbia now there's 230 different nations and those nations are made of actually smaller nations so there are hundreds and hundreds of nations just within our one province of British Columbia. So if we all wrote, which we do now, we write our language down, but it's indecipherable, we can't read each other's languages at all, even though their tribes of Coast Salish we can't read their dialects. But when we look at our artwork suddenly I know that that person is a wolf person, or that person is a bear person, or an eagle and suddenly we're a little bit less different I think when we look at each other's artwork.

**Yeah. You sort of hit on something that we've also been talking about in class is how do you determine what the intent of the artist's artwork is and if you have a different interpretation how do you begin to have that conversation?**

In our culture, in Coast Salish culture, have you been to a Coast Salish ceremony?

**I have not, actually.**

Well we do this thing, let's say a boy was getting a name, he was getting an ancestral name, he would often do it in front of the community in a ceremony. So the family would hold a feast and they would invite lots of people and they would call people as witnesses. So if someone came from Africa they would seek them out and make sure they called them as a witness really specifically, even if the person was a total stranger they would really want someone from a completely different culture to be a witness. But then the work of the ceremony, to explain this boy is getting a name and they would say what the name is and explain the history and how the person has the rights to the name and then they would open the floor to all the witness who were called. And let's say they call 20 witnesses, the boy would stand in the middle in a blanket and these 20 witness would speak to him, or they would speak to the crowd, or they would sing him a song, they would do whatever they wanted, but they would try to explain from their own culture how a boy becomes a man and how a man carries a name. They would give him a variety of teachings. So there's people there from 20 different cultures and they would give him 20 different perspectives on what it means to pick up a name as a boy and become a man. And that boy would be considered rich because he has so many different teachings. So that's integral to our culture, is this idea of not only looking at things in one way. It is an absolute necessity in our culture to have a variety of different ways. And that boy doesn't have to, he can't listen to 20 people, you can't follow 20 different sets of instructions. What we do is we listen to all the points of view and then it's up to us to figure out how we'll use those teachings. Some cultures they view women as, they don't want women to have any power, some cultures view women as being absolute authorities - it's a completely different perspective. So young women in our community have to decide how they want to carry themselves. Do they want to follow someone around or do they want to stand up and speak their mind, I mean, no one can really tell them what they're going to do, they have to decide based on those teachings.

**That's pretty powerful.**

It is and it's hard to explain quickly but if you come to one of ceremonies you would see. My cousin did actually did this for his granddaughter, a coming of age ceremony, and he had women from all over the world speak to her. They keep her inside for four days, and the young woman just meets these women. So women from Africa came, women from China came, women from all over the world came and spoke to her. Not because they know Coast Salish culture, but because they know what it means to be a woman in the modern world who comes from an old culture and sort of balance those two ideals. They spoke to her and that's vital information for a young person, for anyone really. So we apply that to our artwork. If we're a culture that likes to

see diversity and cross-cultural communication and we have a point of view also, if you look at my piece and you see something, why isn't that just as valid as anything I had to say is what I think. The only kind of problem for Aboriginal people came when people start to write down in books, they'd say "this is what the Indians think" and then they started to judge what they saw us doing. They called us "simple" and "primitive" and when a Native person did something for his community he has applauded but when he sold something in a gallery he was demonized. People have all sorts of opinions about First Nations people. In some ways who cares like anyone can have an opinion, but when people use those opinions to keep us on a reservation or to put us in a residential school, suddenly those opinions about us had real impact on our daily lives. People said, "those people are worshipping those carvings, that means their devil worshippers," people still say that to me and they make it their mission in life to force me into a religion or to take our kids, that's the excuse to take our kids away from us. So we became a little less open, just for survival. But when we looked at the old art, we realized there was a very strong cross-cultural component like, we do an eagle we want people to see what it is and talk to us about how they see eagles in their country or whatever.

**That's awesome. I'm super excited it makes me really happy to learn about this. You mentioned that it was hard to hear some of the stories about your ancestral past just because there weren't very many objects around or in the home because they had been taken so how did you get started in native art and started to learn about your culture and where you came from?**

Well I said there wasn't a lot around but there was some things. Like my family we carved river canoes, we fished on the Suquamish River. My uncles made nets, they would carve these little net needles and [] they would make the knives we used to clean the fish, they would carve the canoes and the paddles and the fish clubs. We didn't have a lot money so if I wanted to play with a bow and arrow my uncle would make me one or if we were going fishing they would make a gas hook or a salmon spear, they were constantly making things. I got to see them, carving a canoe is an amazing feat, like it's hard to do. There's a lot of technology that goes into carving a canoe. So we could stand on a rushing river, stand in the canoe and pull on a really heavy net, and fill the canoe with fish and it wouldn't tip over so it's a pretty good piece of technology. I heard stories about the old stuff and had actually seen a few old things in museums. [] I kind of got excited and I realized that, I'm not sure when I realized it, our artwork was how we wrote down stuff and I wanted to write stuff down too. It took me awhile and some of the other Northern art styles started to overlap ours and cover us up for a variety of reasons, but I wanted to make some of the old stuff because it matched up with our stories better.

**Do you have a favorite story that you can share?**

We've got a story about Copperman. We have these supernatural or magical men, we call them the Hai and they're sort like demi gods or something. They're much more powerful than human beings, they're not really human beings, and they can transform themselves they can change from an eagle into a Raven, into a human being, into a canoe, and back into a human being, y'know they're these magical beings. And we have a lot of stories about them teaching us things and helping us sometimes or punishing us sometimes when we act dumb. These guys they were going through the woods, these four brothers, and they saw this giant ring of copper roll down the hill, almost a huge doughnut of copper, rolling down this mountain. It was crashing through the bushes and the woods and it rolled right past them and then a tremendous wind came and blew it back up the hill. And they were stunned by it, it was so beautiful, it's shining in the sunlight, this beautiful copper. So they went closer and then they saw it roll down again and this wind blew it back up the hill so they followed it up and they saw that Windman, kind of our incarnation of wind, wind man was playing with this big piece of copper. And the Hais were so stunned by the beauty of this thing and they really wanted it. So they devised this crazy scheme and they managed to steal it away from Windman and they got away it. It's kind of a long story but they managed to get this thing away from him. This copper was so beautiful and they were so inspired by it that they hammered it out into the shape of a human being. Once it was in human form they breathed life into it, they breathed a spirit into it. And we talk about Copper Man as possessing all the best qualities of human beings. So he became a man who was a brave man, he was a generous man, he was a kind man, he was a strong man, just think, in terms of the Coast Salish, of all the things that we think of as being valuable like not just being strong but also being kind and not just being able to scout for salmon but also able to walk the Earth with a big heart. He had all of these amazing qualities and they brought him to the Squamish people and they left him with us to inspire us and show that this is an example of a good man. So I like this story a lot because it talks about some of the qualities that man is supposed to possess and it talks about the supernatural world, but in particular I like it because it talks about us working copper. There's a lot of people on the coast who will show up with a book in their hand and say "you people never had any metal," but some of the first recorded uses of metal anywhere in the world are aboriginal people here using copper so I wanted to depict that when I translated that spindle whorl at the Burke. I used copper because that's from our old stories we worked in copper, we made forms out of copper, quartz copper was extremely valuable so when I made that piece that's how I thought of doing it.

**That's a great story! It actually reminds me a lot of stories that my dad tells me. My dad is from Nigeria and he met my mom when he immigrated here to go to school. And so, it's been an interesting cultural exchange in my family because my parents met in Alabama and they moved here to Washington not even knowing that Washington existed but my Dad was in the army and was stationed in Ft. Lewis so that's how they ended up here. And so, my mom really, because she had no family here, she really attached to my dad and took on his culture and they passed it on to myself and my brothers. My dad tells us stories like**

**that all the time about qualities in people that we really value and it has really influenced how my brothers and I were raised. So I really like that story.**

Good! Yeah, I think those types of stories, they can really bring people together. Like we have old stories of fighting with people, like having wars and stuff, well not really wars but on going battles. And then we were able to smarten up and stop fighting. I like those kinds of stories. I like that our people are always striving to act a little bit better and to inspire each other. Those are important stories. And I think they're told through the old art style, the old stories are told through the old art. So we kind of wanted to bring that back, we've lost enough; we've lost all kinds of stuff.

**So, one of the questions that was asked of the other artists in the exhibit, was “do you think of yourself as a carrier of the culture, and do you think of yourself as an ‘Indian’ artist and do you think of your art as ‘Indian’ art?” And so I wanted to pose that question to you as well and see what you thought of that.**

I think so. I mean I'm one of the people. There are a lot of people who carry our culture. I'm the person, some people see my work but it doesn't just come from me it comes from quite a few people. I had a lot of elders encourage me, I had a lot of people tell me stories, I had a lot people teach me how to make a knife or how to work in metal or whatever it is. People give me all sorts of things and the result of all that [] effort has been some of this artwork. So, maybe I'm the first person you meet when it comes to seeing the artwork, but the deeper you go, the more you realize that maybe I'm helping to carry it but it comes from a lot of people. A lot of people have been behind me. I mean, I guess I'm carrying it, but just so it's really clear, whenever we do something in our community there are a lot people behind the scenes. My mother, she went to a residential school. That's like the worst place in the world. Not every kid survived there, they were being starved and abused and kids died there all the time. The government was running experiments on them to see how long they could starve them before they died. It was really a terrible place. And she came out of there with a really strong sense of fairness and justice. She didn't think people should be treated bad because of the color of their skin; she didn't think people should be beaten for having a different religion. She came out of that place with a very strong ethic around inclusion and generosity so I owe a lot to her. I wouldn't be anything close to what I am now without her supporting me and encouraging me. The stories I'm telling, the fact that I'm willing to talk to you, a lot of artists don't, they've been hurt so badly that they don't want to talk to nobody, but I can speak to you and be really open with you because of the strength of my mother. Her stories are a part of everything that I do.

**I'm actually in a class where we're talking about multiethnic nations and how people who are not part of the dominant culture either try to preserve their culture or share their culture as a way of participating in their society. So we talk a lot about how artists can use**

**their art to spark conversation and as a form of healing for themselves and their community and I guess try to subvert the common narrative in regard to their own culture and also participate in it.**

Yeah. I come from, there's not a lot of Squamish words to talk about how different people are. Like, there's this really funny construction when we talk about Chinese people or people from Africa. They're not real Squamish words, they're awkward constructions. Like our word for "white people", it almost translates as "spoon people" or "people who are hungry all the time" because they wanted all the trees, they wanted all the fish, they wanted all our food, they wanted all the land, they wanted everything. So it's kind of funny; we call them "people who are always hungry" and there's not a real word for them but it's sort of like a funny nickname. But we've got lots of words for where people come from. We're always really curious about where people come from. Our culture is really focused on, the first question you get when you meet Native people is "where are you from," "who are your people?" We're kind of creating a map in our mind of the world and all the cultures and all the cultures are seen as richness. So the more relatives you have in more places the richer you are. So there's been a lot of, y'know we also got put on reserves. We had to get a letter from an Indian agent to get off our reserves at one point. When we left the police would drag us back. They kind of thought that there would never be any love between Native people and non-Native people and then some elders told me that I'm living proof that there can be love between those two kinds of people. My father is Scottish and my mother is Squamish. I am the product of love from two completely different people. But that doesn't make it easy. Like a friend of ours says when you're a bridge between two cultures, people walk all over you going back and forth. A lot of people seem to know what I mean when I say that right? Like if you're the only Asian person in the class, every time something Asian comes up everyone looks at you to answer questions about Asia right? As if you represent all of Asia or something right?

**Yeah and you're like "I've never even been to China..."**

Yeah so you get the same thing when you're Native. Anytime anything Native comes up everyone turns as looks at you as if you're an expert right? They think you can shoot a bow and arrow and ride a horse and make a teepee and transform into an eagle or something. There are so many expectations.

**So how do you think exhibits like the Here and Now can impact people both inside your community and outside of your community? I think we've touched a little on it, but that was one of my thought-about questions.**

Right, right. Well what I like about it, what I think I like about it the most is it shows how we take inspiration from an old piece and use it in our daily life. Like there was a guy doing some

leather work and stuff and I did pretty direct translation from an old piece to a new piece. I was mostly, my art style and where I come from, was in such danger, our first priority was to find old pieces and learn from them so that's what I did. For some people, maybe their artwork isn't in as much danger of disappearing so their first thought was to look at an old piece and interpret it in a very modern way. But I think, because, I guess because of the politics at one point, if people could prove we were primitive savages they felt better about taking our land away from us or taking our children away from us. So there's all of this effort put into proving how primitive we were. Do you know what eugenics is?

### **I've heard of the term.**

I think it was largely a North American science, but they would measure people's heads to see how smart they were and then measure their skin color. There's a lot of talk about racial purity in the eugenics. So Hitler and the Nazis used eugenics to prove their case. But the Canadian government still measures my Indian status by blood quantum to see how pure blood am I. You get this card, this Indian status card, that says whether or not I can live in my community. On my way down to the Burke Museum, the first question that the border guard asked me was how pure blood I was. So it's still very much a part of the debate. So I guess I like that the exhibit challenged some of the stereotypes about native people and got them thinking about us in a way that wasn't historical. Because Chief Seattle was a Coast Salish chief, the whole place is named after a Coast Salish person and a lot of people have no idea that that's what it's named after. So it got people thinking about us in a modern context. A few other artists and myself, we're quite fair skinned, and people will come up to us and say "well you don't look like a real Indian," that's like the first thing they'll say to us. So we've got all these responses y'know because it comes up a lot, so we'll just say "thank you." So they'll say "you don't look like an Indian" and I'll say "thank you" and they won't know what I mean. They're a little confused by it. And I'm like the government tries to measure our skin color to see how pure we are but that's not how we measure our family. Like does it matter if you're dad comes from Nigeria, does that not make you a family member? You've just got two sides to your family, that's all. But it still comes up in terms of, y'know someone said "your skin is too dark you can't live in this country" and suddenly you feel horrible. And that's kind of what they're saying to us, they're saying "your skin is too fair, you can't live here." So I guess I like the Burke because it challenges those ideas, people see that we're not all dead and gone and static and our culture is historic and backwards. I liked that people looked at the copper and got confused by it and started a conversation about why I worked in copper and I can tell the ancient story that we've always worked in copper. Sorry, I know I'm giving you all of these long answers.

**Oh no! It's great. It's giving me a lot to work with. Our professor, Miranda, actually showed us her card that says that she's Zuni. And she was telling us that her relatives were teasing her and asking her which part of her body is , is it her arm, is it her left toe**

**on the right side, like which part of her is ? So we've been having that conversation about blood quantum as well.**

Yeah. If you get a nosebleed you wonder how much Indian you still are right? How much blood can I lose?

It's a [] conversation but I mean the law of the time, 100 years ago 200 years ago, well even here in Canada, we were a British colony for a long time. So America had the War of Independence but Canada didn't have one. So in 1982 we finally became a separate country from Britain and we had our own Constitution for the first time and they were arguing about whether to put the word "person" next to the word "Native." They were arguing about it. It hadn't really been done before. We became actual people in the eyes of Canada for the first time in Canada's history.

**That's crazy. In 1982? Wow.**

Yeah it's weird to date right? Only in the last 20 years have we had any, within the last 20 years we finally had the ability to stop the government from taking kids out of our communities. The last residential school closed in 1985 here. The year that I graduated high school. There were still kids being taken from their families, being forced to speak English, and follow a different spirituality. Yeah, it's really recent history. I can remember the looks my parents got, when they walked down the street people stared at us. I guess America went through the same sort of thing but... It was a funny thing, but you wouldn't think it but it was a government, the Canadian government commissioned a study, from a university, I think it was in Saskatchewan, which is another Canadian province, and they hired an anthropologist to study Aboriginal people, and he concluded that natives were stone age people and shouldn't be using metal tools. So they took the [] away and made them use stone tools.

**What?**

That's crazy right? But the link between how the academic world sees us and how that's formed policy and public opinion around what kind of rights we have, has always been a part of the public debate. Canada had some laws, potlatches are our word for our big ceremonies, like Seattle is a giant, historically, was a very large potlatch village, which is why it is still a gathering place today, but Canada formed an anti-potlatch law and it allowed them to confiscate anything that had an Aboriginal motif on it. So if someone was wearing a button blanket, they could legally confiscate it, if someone had a totem pole in their village they could take that or [] or a paddle or whatever they wanted. What used to happen, Canada had Indian agents who dealt with us, and the police the [] would go with the Indian agents and confiscate all the native stuff and sell it to museums. And they would make thousands and thousands of dollars by stealing stuff. So there's always been this weird link between the political world, the academic world, and

first nations. There has been a lot of mistrust so for us to be treated so fairly and respectfully by the Burke is actually sort of a recent phenomenon for us and its more than welcome. I'm glad they were, I mean there were fantastic to me when I went there.

**Wow. That's really, I had no idea that any of those things were taking place so recently.**

Yeah. It's all within my lifespan right? Like I'm the first generation in my family to go to public school, the first one legally allowed to go to public school. I met the people natives who went to college for the first time, the first ones legally allowed to go to college. My mother is of the generation that was the first legally allowed to vote in Canada, for native people. It's all really recent. And then, there's so many people involved in the debate about what makes us real Indians. Because if they can say that we're not real Indians, they don't have to recognize our rights. You can't say blood quantum in Coast Salish language, you can't say how pure blood someone is. It's a foreign concept.

**Yeah, Miranda was saying that before the idea of blood quantum was even a thing, if it was not a part of the rhetoric and a part of policy, she would probably be considered Suquamish now because she's lived here for so long and she's participated in that community and she's been involved in that community so traditionally she probably would have just been accepted into the community and considered Suquamish but because of the blood quantum she has to stick to her Zuni title. Which she's proud of but also wants to incorporate those other elements of where she lives currently.**

Yeah. In the old days you couldn't just live in someone's village because you felt like it, you're either a part of it or you're not really, but pretty quickly they'd find some way of adopting you.

**Well I quickly wanted to go back to your spindle whorl and talk a little bit about the design. Were you able to figure out sort of what the design means or if it was any particular symbolism? I know you mentioned you were studying some human forms.**

Mhmm, I was. Y'know there's a lot of ambiguity in that one. When I was first researching it I asked a lot of people and I got a different answer from everyone. Which kind of fits, I mean, some of the stuff is like that. It's not really, there may be a very specific story behind why it was carved, but just equally there's a lot of story about how people perceive it. I kind of think about the sort of fishy-looking creatures in the background -- they're not done the way salmon are traditionally carved. Like in almost every other case I looked at, salmon had this one large gill right behind the eye, there'd be a big gill there, a crescent shape. In this case those are absent. So in my mind they're not salmon, but I know a lot of people interpret them as salmon. I kind of think of um, eulachon fish because they have a story here, it comes from here, it comes from the Squamish people. We have a story here about how the eulachon fish come to our territory. And

they're quite numerous. In the old days you could catch eulachon fish by throwing a bucket in the ocean [], it'd be full of fish. And there would be millions and millions of these, kind of like sardines, eulachon fish. And eulachons are a real source of community health, like its a very healthy fat that derived from the fish, kind of a grease. Kind of like our equivalent of olive oil, its kind of good for everything. But eulachon was also a major source of wealth because people would trade it, like they would carry it pretty far into the interior and trade it with the people there. And everyone like this stuff so much, you could trade a lot for it. They called it Indian gold on the coast, []. And a lot of the roads from the coast to the interior, I think 80 percent of the roads in North America, are Aboriginal trails. A lot of the river crossings and mountain passes are the quickest way from this part of the coast to that part of the interior are historically all Aboriginal roads. So what they used to call a grease trail from the coast to the interior. Anyways, when I look at that that's what I think. But other people look at it and they see frog and salmon and all sorts of things.

**Yeah when I first saw it I thought it looked sort of like a frog but also human - I had no idea what it was.**

Yeah, they call it fetal composition sometimes. Human beings are often depicted with these big heads and tiny little bodies. So, it definitely has a sort of froggy aspect to the human figures, but you see that in a lot of Salish work, there's all of this emphasis on the head and sort of little, skinny little bodies, almost like an after thought.

**I also wanted to learn a little bit about how a spindle whorl is used. I know it's used for weaving, and I was looking for a few videos on YouTube and found a couple but I couldn't really tell what was going on. So it's placed on a needle right, and then it's just spun around?**

Basically yeah, that's the gist of it yeah. I can't actually do it myself but I've seen people do it. It's used for a couple of things: it's used to spin the wool initially, but wool is, from what I understand, wool is actually made of two strands. Like you look at a rope and it's often made of maybe two or three or four strands that are coiled together. So my understanding of a spindle whorl is that you spin, it all twisting one way and then you spin a big ball twisting another way, and then you use the spindle whorl to combine the two strands into wool. I think it's called twinned wool or something, and that wool would be used for the [] So the spindle whorl was actually part of a tool kit, there was a comb, there was a tension ring, there was a spindle, there was the whorl itself, there was a [], there were wool beaters (?). Our traditional wool was from mountain goat and dog hair for the most part with some plant fibers, and um, I don't think they're the easiest wool in the world to use their kind of tricky, they're a little bit slippery, so they're hard to combine, so there was a wool beater used to beat the dye to make sure it's [] into the wool. There was all kinds of stuff going on but anyways there was a whole tool kit that men

would make for women here. The women would make these beautiful linens so a lot of men would help gather the wool or gather the wool for them and make the tool kit for them. So from what I understand, the spindle whorls were often a gift to women in our community because we prized their weaving so much we would help make all the stuff and there's other things too like women's canoes, I think there's another name for them, but anyway usually the carvers were men which was more common but I think everyone could make stuff. Like men could weave as well but they didn't really specialize in them as much and women could carve stuff as well but they didn't really specialize in it the way some of the [] men do.

**Okay that makes a little bit more sense. I knew it was used for weaving but I wasn't sure how you weave with it.**

Yeah, I'm not much of a weaver, I just get all tangled up and stuff. But someone at the University of Washington did a thesis on spindle whorls and it's super in depth, to the point where I can't understand most of it, but she was talking about how spindle whorls would typically, I mean go to almost any Coast Salish village, and spindle whorls are almost identical in terms of size and weight and diameter. So it's a little bit less about just making something pretty and it's more about making a tool that creates a certain kind of wool and certain quality of wool. And they're surprisingly consistent across the different nations, which leads me to believe, I mean another example is you can look at canoes from up and down the coast. So from California to Alaska they are typically made in certain sizes, like the 18ft canoes, the 12ft canoe, the 50ft canoe and that's a function of the wavelength in the ocean. So waves are spaced differently in freshwater than they are in saltwater so the canoes function better if they're a certain size. So there's a lot of design put into these things right? So carvers didn't just learn the motifs they also learned the technical aspects. So if you make a bow and arrow for instance you don't want it to snap when you pull it back you want it to flex along the whole length. The same goes for a paddle. Like I've seen elders they can carve a paddle and they'll put their foot on it on one end and hold one end, they'll step on the paddle and if it breaks they'll say "Oh yeah, that one's no good. Make a new one."

**Well yeah, it's broken.**

Yeah, you just keep making them until they don't break.

**Yeah, I was reading a reading an interview with Susan Point and Michael Kew I think, from a long time ago when there were some pieces in the SAM I think. And they were talking about spindle whorls and one of them had mentioned that they're all pretty identical in form and function and the designs made them different. But they were assuming that spindle whorls were probably pretty ubiquitous in the village or the area that they were coming from and that everyone probably had one, but nobody was**

**collecting the bland ones, they wanted to collect the ones that had designs on them and those were the ones that ended up in museums for the most part.**

Yeah. I mean there was always, I think we saw four or five spindle whorls that we know come from Squamish. The records were kept, and we asked how they came to here. And there's one that looks totally blank, except it's a very beautiful color but it looks blank. But then I got to see the original one, and it uses texture to create a bit of a design on it. You can't really see the texture from most photographs, but if you get up close to it, you can see that [] they didn't carve a shape they carved it in a very specific way to leave a bit of a pattern on it and it's really subtle. Like some of our blankets, it looks totally bland, compared to button blankets right, which are quite colorful. But if you get up close to a Coast Salish blanket, you'll see that the meaning will change because of a kind of pattern on it. So our culture, the aesthetic of our culture, [] big lazy neon signs, it's also some real subtle things and sometimes maybe only you would know the difference, like if your mother made you something you only you would really recognize it as her handiwork but you would still kind of a pride in it right? I has a little personal meaning. So there were some really, there's a lot of stuff like that. Some of the small expeditions and lesser museums, they have the pieces that look blank or bland or whatever but I still think they're quite beautiful.

**So the last thing that I wanted to ask, and I've been doing some research on why spindle were designed and why they have designs on them and some of the things that I have come across was that when they spin around they make this sort of mesmerizing design and it was used to I guess, either speak to the powers of the weaver, or give powers to the weaver so I'm wondering if you have any stories about those or any reasons for why there would be designs on the spindle whorls themselves.**

Well, everything we made had patterns on it. Even the fish hooks, if you've ever been fishing you know you lose fish hooks, but even our fish hooks had designs on them. Sometimes it's just so you could distinguish it, like your family they'll go to someone's long house and go visiting someone and you could tell your spindle whorl a part from theirs. And with that also comes some pride. People were proud to display their own personal stories, people were proud to display their own craftsmanship. And some families were really showy and want the blingiest stuff available and other people are low key and they like sort of more simple things. This story about the patterns appearing when they spin, I've never actually come across one like that, but that might also be because I haven't seen one in firelight. If you go sit by a fireplace, and see the fire sparkling off the pattern then maybe it looks different than it does in a well lit room. But everything, like our spoons and our cups and our bowls are all highly decorated [] to the world. Partially you just want to see that it's yours and other times, you make something really beautiful or your family has this one particular pattern and then maybe you give it away, it would show

your connection to another people as well. Things were created and moved around all over the place.

**Cool. Well those are all the questions that I had. Do you have any questions for me or is there anything that you want to people to know in particular about your piece or any last comments?**

Um. I'd be curious to see what you produce, like if you're writing a paper I'd like to see a copy.

**Yeah, for sure I'm actually doing a presentation on Monday on the paper that I'm writing so I can send you both the slides and the paper if you'd be interested in reading it.**