

ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT

GIBSONS PUBLIC ART GALLERY

Indigenous artwork invites conversation across cultures

Shain Jackson exhibit on at Gibsons gallery

MICHAEL GURNEY
Arts & Culture Writer

A new exhibition at the Gibsons Public Art Gallery illustrates the vitality of Coast Salish art while revealing the pervasiveness of Indigenous law and history.

On June 4, Shain Niniwém Salepem Jackson presented a public talk about his artworks to an audience of almost two dozen gallery visitors. Jackson is a Coast Salish artist from the shísháhlh Nation.

The exhibition *Unity Within Diversity* includes works by Jackson and others he curated from a group of his friends, including Xwalactun (Rick Harry), Ximiq (Dionne Paul) and *Splashing Eagle* (Aaron Nelson-Moody), Ray Natraoro and Chief Janice George.

Jackson is a lawyer who formerly practiced with Mandell Pinder LLP, which he describes as Canada's premier firm dedicated to litigating for Indigenous title and rights. "I'm so proud to have been part of that fight for [Indigenous] rights," he said. He lives in Vancouver but is planning a home on the Sunshine Coast.

After retiring from the legal profession, Jackson assumed the leadership of Spirit Works Limited, a company that focuses on the design, creation and distribution of Indigenous art. He also leads the Golden Eagle Rising Society, the company's charitable arm. The society recently produced a trauma toolkit for the legal profession, which Jackson described as a "game changer" for judges and lawyers working with Indigenous communities.

Jackson's works explore the intersection of Indigenous culture and jurisprudence. He admits that as a young lawyer, he was skeptical that historic Indigenous communities maintained a body of law, let alone one that was codified as legibly as Canadian statutes.

His view was shaken during an encounter with an Elder and storyteller from the shísháhlh Nation.

"He just smiled and he started pointing out artworks in our community, on the wall, and on people's bodies — dangling from their ears, on their

fingers, on their wrists," Jackson recalled. "That's how we write down our history, our worldview, our culture and even our laws. I had such an amazing epiphany. I come from a family of artists, I live by these laws. But I didn't know the beauty and the normative value of having your laws all around you all the time, constantly being reinforced."

One of Jackson's featured works is *Double Headed Golden Eagle* (Ch'as-kin), a framed mixed media exhibit that has toured the country as part of an initiative to train Canadian lawyers in understanding that Indigenous heritage has a written shape—in cultural artifacts and art. In the piece, a double-headed eagle (or thunderbird) hovers above text extracts quoted from Canadian legal codes. Jackson said the work functions as a latter-day Rosetta Stone.

"I wanted to translate Indigenous human rights law, which is really depicted in this one symbol," he said. "Behind it you see examples of constitutional law, common law, civil law, statutory law, anything that relates to this one symbol."

Other works by Jackson include examples of Coast Salish weaving and large-scale friezes, one depicting a teeming school of salmon with bodies woven into a billowing three-dimensional tapestry. A display of baskets and carved bowls sits atop a monumental sculpture of a bentwood box. Underneath is a rug fashioned by Jackson for the recently-filmed television premiere of *Bear's Lair*, a television competition for Indigenous entrepreneurs (covered by *Coast Reporter* in its February 4 issue).


Jackson believes that eradicating stereotypes — a key function of his art and legal activism — promotes reconciliation. "[Colonial legislators] didn't understand who we were," he said. "But the truth necessitates. 99 percent of people, when they are furnished with the truth about what's happening, they're going to do the right thing. They're going to seek justice."

Unity Within Diversity continues at the Gibsons Public Art Gallery until July 3.



Shain Jackson, in the shadow of a monumental Coast Salish figure he designed, speaks at the Gibsons Public Art Gallery.



MICHAEL GURNEY PHOTO



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PUZZLE FOR JUNE 10

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41. Network of nerves
43. Monetary unit
44. Showed old TV show
46. They help you hear
48. One who eliminates
52. Congress' investigative arm
53. Parties
54. Most supernatural
56. Takes illegally
57. Breathes while asleep
58. Sea eagles
59. German surname

24. Traveled rapidly
26. Long upholstered seat
28. Set wages
30. Peter Gabriel song
32. Sides of a jacket
34. More beautiful
35. Actress Kate
37. Furniture with open shelves
38. Indicate
40. The cost of a room
42. Gets rid of something
43. Impudence
45. No No No
47. Drunkards
49. Middle eastern country
50. High energy lasers (abbr.)
51. Primary component of ribosomes
55. An informal debt instrument

CLUES DOWN

1. Looks at for a long time
2. Solution for diseases
3. Belonging to a thing
4. Former Packers fullback
5. Contemptible person
6. One billionth of a second (abbr.)
7. Helps
8. Final section of the large intestine
9. Invests in little enterprises
10. Look for
11. Unbeliefs
12. Susan and Tom are two
14. Female sheep
15. A poet writes it
18. Affirmatives
20. "Full House" actress Barber

ANSWER TO JUNE 3 PUZZLE

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