

UCLA

American Indian Culture and Research Journal

Title

Connecting to the Art Market from Home: An Exploration of First Nations Artists in Alert Bay, British Columbia

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/3p44w4j8>

Journal

American Indian Culture and Research Journal , 33(1)

ISSN

0161-6463

Author

Neufeld, Margaret

Publication Date

2009

DOI

10.17953

Copyright Information

This work is made available under the terms of a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial License, available at <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>

Peer reviewed

Connecting to the Art Market from Home: An Exploration of First Nations Artists in Alert Bay, British Columbia

MARGARET R. M. NEUFELD

Historically, Northwest Coast First Nations artists have been active participants in local and external economic markets. In Alert Bay, British Columbia, home of the ‘N̓amgis People of the Kwakwaka’wakw Nation, artists have sold their work in urban centers since the 1950s.¹ Now they are more rigorously involved in selling their work to local shops and art galleries, in addition to the markets in Vancouver and Victoria, and in selling to international collectors. Based on the narratives of artists and local community members, this article examines why some ‘N̓amgis artists choose to remain in Alert Bay despite profitable economic opportunities that exist beyond their local community. This article also considers the mechanisms artists use to develop and maintain connections to both local and nonlocal art market centers and looks at some of the tensions that arise from artists’ simultaneous involvement in both areas. In particular, the discussion points to the ways in which artists make use of brokers and create personal connections to patrons and clients in order to remain in local communities. As they participate in different types of brokered relationships with their audiences—the local community, brokers, urban art galleries, and collectors—they confront and create varying concepts of “authenticity” and assessments of the quality and aesthetic value of their work. Through their own direct contacts and through brokers, artists seek to move among local, regional, and international markets and among what Fred Myers has identified as differing “regimes of value,” while actively seeking to express their own agency.² Whether they create art pieces for local markets, ceremonial purposes, or nonlocal markets, artists attempt to maintain control of their work by aligning it with traditional and contemporary interpretations

Margaret R. M. Neufeld has a master’s degree in cultural anthropology from the University of British Columbia. Her research focuses on First Nations artists’ interaction with commercial art markets, and her areas of interest include cultural and ecotourism and collaborative research between First Nations communities and museums.

as ceremonial objects, market commodities, and artistic expressions of Native aesthetics.³ This article will demonstrate that new and experienced 'Namgis artists seek recognition from their community for their economic contributions as professional artists while seeking recognition by members of the non-Native art world for their artistry, cultural productions, and community involvement. 'Namgis artists are entangled in webs of interconnected value and work between Native and non-Native worlds, much like indigenous artists worldwide.⁴

THE STUDY OF NORTHWEST COAST ARTISTS: THEORETICAL POSITIONINGS

Since the 1960s, the resurgence of Northwest Coast art as a form of cultural expression and economic development has stimulated research in anthropology, art criticism, and economics. Previous studies regarding Northwest Coast artists and their art focus on collection and classification; tensions between traditionalism and modernity in Northwest Coast art style; and the life and biography of individual Northwest Coast Kwakwaka'wakw artists.⁵ Previous literature has also examined the opposition between commercial or indigenous tourist arts; patrons and brokers' perceptions, tastes, and expectations about artists and their work; and the concept of authenticity and the commoditization of Northwest Coast art.⁶ Although previous research offers significant insights into aspects of First Nations art production, this article focuses on artists' perceptions and experiences in maintaining simultaneous ties to local and nonlocal art market centers. As seen in the narratives of First Nations artists residing in Alert Bay, artists employ effective and ineffective adaptable strategies to gain status in the eyes of their community, the gallery owners, and their clients simultaneously.⁷

Stuart Hall contends that we can use theory to "illuminate concrete historical cases or political questions, or think larger concepts in terms of their application to concrete and specific situations."⁸ Myers, whose work has focused on cultural production, material culture, and Aboriginal artists, and Arjun Appadurai, known for his work on the exchange and circulation of material culture, ideologies, and patterns of consumption in global contexts make similar arguments; both provide a useful framework when looking at artists and their work.⁹ Myers and Appadurai contend that objects circulate in "multiple, coexisting, and variously related regimes of value."¹⁰ As objects enter into different and overlapping contexts, they take on a "social life" as they travel through these regimes.¹¹ Although it is important to conceptualize and identify possible sociocultural and economic value systems in which artists and their work are involved, it is also necessary to see artists as active agents participating in the creation and intertwining of these spheres of evaluation. This study provides a starting point to examine the complex relationships of First Nations artists in local and global aesthetic and economic networks.

INTRODUCTIONS TO THE FIELD: IDENTIFYING THE “ARTIST”

The material for this article is the result of fieldwork conducted in Alert Bay in the summer of 2004. After being granted permission from the ‘N̄amgis Band Council to conduct fieldwork in the community, I carried out informal discussions and semistructured interviews with self-identified artists, local art gallery owners, band members, and other community members in private residences, artists studios, places of employment, and public spaces around town. These discussions focused on how artists define and differentiate themselves from other artists in their community and how community members understand the artist’s role in their community, both of which assisted in identifying the types of economic transactions that artists participate in. My research questions and list of potential informants developed out of my three years of experience working with First Nations artists in urban commercial contexts in Vancouver.

I conducted thirteen semistructured interviews, eight of which were with ‘N̄amgis artists and five of which were with community and band members. The majority of artists interviewed ranged in age between thirty and fifty. Artists in this category tended to have more family and community responsibilities, and, as a result, they traveled less frequently to nonlocal art gallery centers. Younger artists were more difficult to contact and tended to have greater flexibility to travel more frequently to galleries outside of the local area to sell their work. In addition to interviews, I gathered data by participating in and observing social activities, ceremonies, and community events.

Although I was directed exclusively to male artists, I can only speculate that this was based on the presumption that male forms of material production—carvings, poles, and masks—are typically categorized as objects of “art” and are produced and displayed in more public settings.¹² In contrast, although women’s forms of material production such as cedar-bark weaving, regalia making, and blanket and basket making are sold commercially, their work is historically categorized as objects of “craft” and are largely produced and displayed in more private, domestic settings, or the “domestic interior.”¹³ The dominant focus on male forms of production is reinforced in academic literature and commercial markets, but academic interest in the women’s contributions and role in material production is growing.¹⁴

With this in mind, I set out to locate local “artists,” a task that provided extensive insight into the categorical frameworks used by community members and artists to define an “artist.” Initially, my understanding of a Kwakwaka’wakw artist came from seminal literature such as Audrey Hawthorn’s *Kwakiutl Art* (1979) and Richard Hunt and Kevin Neary’s *Through My Father’s Eyes* (2000).¹⁵ Hawthorn notes that before contact, artists were community members, particularly males, who demonstrated special artistic skills; they were “encouraged to develop their craft by observing, and imitating the work of established expert craftsmen.”¹⁶ Hunt and Neary describe artists working within a system in which a “family’s status was measured not by how much wealth they possessed, but by how much they distributed at potlatches . . . the ceremonial display of family rights and crests demanded the creation of

numerous decorated items.”¹⁷ According to Hawthorn, these artistic specialists were “commissioned and well paid” by families inside their community to make regalia and masks for ceremonies; to make totem poles and heraldic carvings to mark rank and special occasions; and to produce pieces for gift giving at the potlatches.¹⁸

Given this framework, I asked community members and self-identified artists what an artist was. Artists began with similar descriptions of the historical role of an artist and transitioned to descriptions of their current role. They characterized an artist as someone who was familiar with the stories, legends, dances, and language; attended and played a role in ceremonies; and did all the work on a piece himself. Moreover, when artists were asked to identify other artists in the community, they responded based on the role of the artist in the community (for example, keeper of masks, songs, dances), their degree of artistic skill level (locally referred to as a new and/or beginner, intermediate, and master and/or established artist), their mentor, their art forms and specialization, and their residence. When asked the same question, Andrea Sanborn, the U’mista Cultural Centre Executive Director and previous manager of the gift shop, noted that a First Nations artist was someone with a status card.¹⁹ This comment was made when discussing her encounters with new artists who were not necessarily from among the group of artists she works with regularly. Current descriptions from ‘Namgis artists focus on one’s familiarity with local cultural knowledge, in contrast to historical anthropological descriptions of artists.

AN ECONOMIC HISTORY OF ALERT BAY, BRITISH COLUMBIA

Alert Bay (‘Yalis) was used as a burial ground by the ‘Namgis First Nation (Nimpkish Band) until they relocated there from their traditional village site near Gwa’ni (translated as the Nimpkish River) to provide a source of labor for the fish saltery established in the 1870s.²⁰ Helen Codere notes that from the late 1700s to the 1900s the Kwakwaka’wakw took an active part in trade and exchange.²¹ As early as the 1800s, however, Kwakwaka’wakw populations declined by almost 72 percent due to the introduction of diseases such as smallpox.²²

First Nations residents of Alert Bay encountered significant economic and cultural changes similar to those experienced by others up and down the Northwest Coast in the late 1800s and early 1900s. Churches and residential schools were established, the reserve system was developed, and laws against potlatching were implemented.²³ In the midst of assimilation practices, such as the Anti-Potlatch Law of 1884, non-Native collectors, anthropologists, and museum professionals collected Native objects in order to salvage what they believed to be the remnants of this dying culture, although potlatching continued during the time of the ban.²⁴ At the end of the nineteenth century, during these sociopolitical and economic shifts, attempts were made for the Kwakwaka’wakw to be “assimilated into the Canadian economy and [be] dependent on money income . . . wealth became widespread, primarily because the old organization of production, knowledge of local resources

and industrious habits fit the new opportunities offered.”²⁵ In this context, however, customs and attitudes of the prevailing culture were not fully adopted, but “new sources of wealth and European goods were quickly incorporated into aboriginal society and used to elaborate the potlatch system.”²⁶ This increase in wealth and material goods fostered artistic activity.²⁷ A number of Northwest Coast artists continued to work on local commissions for ceremonial and social purposes despite the ban on potlatching, and they began to produce work for sale to non-Natives.²⁸

After the 1950s, with the reversal of the Anti-Potlatching Law in 1951, First Nations artistic production flourished with the encouragement of non-Native collectors and galleries. Although there was a growing connoisseurship and concentration on the talents of individual First Nations artists by non-Native patrons, concern grew about the authenticity of Native arts. This was coupled with alternative goals of assimilation and appropriation.²⁹ Despite these obstacles, contemporary ‘Namgis First Nations continued to assert the continuity of Kwakwaka’wakw culture while they worked toward cultural, social, economic, and political autonomy.³⁰ To this end, the U’mista Cultural Centre, a Native-run community museum, was established in Alert Bay in 1980 to house the majority of the repatriated potlatch material that had been confiscated in 1922 from the Daniel Cranmer potlatch.³¹

Through the early 1990s, Alert Bay struggled to cope with the closing of a large number of fisheries and growing job losses up and down the Northwest Coast. With the continual existence of underemployment, reliance on the welfare system, and the disparity of income between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Canadians, there was a movement by First Nations groups to “cash in” on the tourism and ecotourism potentials in their traditional territories.³² Consequently, many First Nations men and women in Alert Bay turned to established artists in the community for training with hopes for employment in the arts. The rising number of First Nations artists residing in local and urban centers created a flood of goods in the art market that varied in style and quality.³³ This inflation in artistic production affected the ability of new and established artists to sell their work locally and in wider markets.

STAYING CLOSE TO HOME: “GAINING-WHILE-GIVING”

In Alert Bay there are several routes for artists to sell their work and gain commissions. Artists can sell to a growing local market, including several local gift shops, pawnshops, and the local pharmacy, which caters to the local inhabitants and tourists who visit the island. Complementing these outlets, they have opportunities to complete private commissions for local community members and their families, visiting tourists, or the local band office when funding is available. The local market in Alert Bay is limited. With fifty to sixty practicing artists selling their work in Alert Bay coupled with the limited number of local buyers, there are constraints in the quantity and frequency that artists can sell their art in their local community.³⁴ As a consequence, it is difficult to earn a sufficient income selling exclusively in Alert Bay. This leads the majority of artists to sell their works to various art galleries located in

Vancouver and Victoria. This situation raises some important questions: Why and how, then, do a large number of artists continue to remain in Alert Bay?

For First Nations artists living in Alert Bay, particularly those who live on the reserve, Alert Bay provides significant networks of support that enable artists to remain in the community. Artists have access to food sharing, housing, and utilities such as phones and the Internet. As Gloria Cranmer Webster notes, this type of support system reflects the “onset of comprehensive welfare and unemployment benefits in the 1960s [that allow] Natives to pursue traditional seasonal economic patterns.”³⁵ Not only does living in Alert Bay allow for the development of support networks, but also Native communities and especially reserves offer a place where there is a “strong commitment to preserving fundamental philosophies and principles.”³⁶ I found in Alert Bay what Elizabeth Povinelli describes within the context of Australian Aboriginals as an “indigenous moral sensibility . . . or the social fact of the feeling of being obliged, or finding oneself under an obligation to something or to a complex of things.”³⁷

In a culture where “giving away” is a measure of gaining success, prestige, or status, First Nations artists’ participation in cultural activities can be framed as “gaining-while-giving.”³⁸ This concept is similar to the Trobriand Islanders of the South Pacific who employ a strategy of “keeping-while-giving” “inalienable possessions,” a term identified by Annette Wiener that explains the capacity of material objects, property, or knowledge to bestow social identity and rank when given away.³⁹ ‘Namgis artists give back to the community by remaining close to family, teaching others, and learning cultural knowledge instead of focusing solely on receiving money for services rendered. By remaining in the community, in part for these reasons, they gain honor and prestige.

Remaining in Alert Bay for Family

Most artists interviewed stated that it was essential that they stay close to home to fulfill family obligations and maintain family ties. Wayne Alfred, a ‘Namgis artist who is well known in his community for his role in teaching and dancing, notes his strong commitment to his home and family: “It’s mine, this is our, this is our world. I could never leave it. I can never leave my mom, she’s 65, my dad’s 67 and just leaving them for all those years I could have, for what? Personal ambition? No, I don’t think so.”⁴⁰ Similarly, Randy Bell, artist and youth employment officer for the ‘Namgis First Nations, states that leaving the community “is somewhat of a barrier because your family is all about who you are. Everything you do is about your family. The ceremonies, the food, the culture, the education, the recreation, all is family, it’s a family unit.”⁴¹

Insights such as these reflect historical understandings of the family unit. ‘Namgis villages have been described as being organized into *‘na’mimas*, or extended kin units, each with their own mythical ancestor. The *‘na’mima* “organized and controlled the economic activities and the social relations of its members in their daily and ceremonial lives within the village.”⁴² Each *‘na’mima* or family unit had its own specific resource sites, obligations to specific supernatural owners of these resources, and claims to crests and

titles. A person's societal rank was based on their *'na'mima* and their degree of closeness in descent from the original group of founding ancestors. By demonstrating their responsibility toward family members, showing their generosity in ceremonies, and displaying crests in masks, songs, and dances, artists reaffirmed their rank and social position through their connection to their *'na'mima*.⁴³

Remaining in Alert Bay to Teach Others

For many Native artists living in Alert Bay, not only are family obligations ordered in part by the *'na'mima*, but there is also a "quest for a sense of place, of belonging, of community and identity . . . and a sense of duty to teach others."⁴⁴ Alfred recounts coming home from Vancouver after an extended period of time away and states his reasons for returning: "I thought, well, I better go home now and all the elders are starting to die now . . . I could have easily stayed [in the city] and played the [famous artist] game, signing today at four o'clock, but no, I'm going to go home. I am going to show those kids."⁴⁵ Sanborn emphasizes this strong commitment by more experienced artists to teach the younger generation of artists: "Established artists are very good at helping emerging artists, the real young fellows. They try to get them to learn the traditional stories about the art before they even start on the art, because unless you know about the culture, it is difficult to complete the piece authentically."⁴⁶

First Nations artists establish recognition through their relationships with their mentors. Younger artists apprentice with older or more established artists, and others choose to formalize their training by taking courses with experienced artists or enrolling in art classes at art schools, colleges, and universities in urban areas.⁴⁷ The qualification to work with an established artist often has to do with personal drive, skill, commitment, and, above all, respect for the culture and the teacher. By working with more experienced artists, students and their work gain legitimacy in the community and marketplace; in turn, the teachers gain respect for their actions and dedication and the students for their willingness to learn. Wayne Alfred reinforces this idea and stresses that he gains honor from his fellow community members by teaching others, stating "the only thing I can say is that [students] show me respect and honor now and that's the pay I got [*sic*] . . . when we're thinking of wealth, there's something that lasts a lot longer than that, and I'll be remembered for helping all these people out." He says that although other artists may go for "big money," he goes for prestige: "My ancestors threw away their money to get big names. Anything they made, they threw it away to get big names because your big name stays, but your wealth goes all the time."⁴⁸

At the same time, artists who lack this "moral sensibility" or who do not give back to the community by teaching others are viewed as exploiting their culture. Alfred makes this point clear: "Learn your culture! You need to start going to the Big House, you need to know who you are and then that makes you an authority on what you make. But if you don't, then you are not going to know what you have the right to make and what you don't have the right to

make, you exploit your culture if you're taking out of it and you're not putting back in it."⁴⁹ The act of giving back to the community points to larger values of duty and honor and to a value system in which social fame and prestige is established. For many 'Nāmgis artists, maintaining social ties not only establishes rank and position but also demonstrates their strategic alignment with cultural values that favor family and community, which affirms rights, honor, and social reputation.

Remaining in Alert Bay to Learn Cultural Knowledge

Along with maintaining family ties and the need to teach others, artists stated that they came back and/or stayed close to home in order to have continued access to the cultural knowledge that plays a significant role in the production of their work. In discussing this aspect, 'Nāmgis artist Bruce Alfred, who specializes in premium bentwood box making, notes:

Everything's here in place. To me, this is the Mecca for the culture and every aspect you want to do. People come here from all over the world to study the language, the art, the potlatch. This is the Mecca. At the same time, I'm a student of my own culture. I lived in Victoria for a while and I just said, I can't do this, because it's just so watered down. You get so caught up in the city life that you can't even get together one night to sing and stuff like that.⁵⁰

Moreover, just as Alert Bay offers a place for artists to be "students of [their] own culture," artists are, in turn, understood to be products of past instruction.⁵¹ They are active members in the continuation of cultural traditions in their communities while they establish their own individual artistic styles.

Although a concern for the continuity of embedded traditions exists, this duty or moral sensibility to give back comes into conflict with the necessities of the urban-based commercial indigenous art market on which they depend for their livelihood. Some artists maintain family ties, teach younger artists, and feel the need to be close to home in order to continue learning about cultural traditions, but they do this with the knowledge that the potential for professional exposure, fame, and fortune lies outside their community in larger market centers. William Wasden Jr., 'Nāmgis artist and important figure in the community for preserving cultural songs, dances, and language, commented on the financial opportunities outside Alert Bay: "A lot of people move away. I went down there to Vancouver, not too long ago to sell some artwork and you know, Vancouver's very fast. I mean, it's nice to go there for a while, but this is home for me so I always come home. But if you're good in the art world, you can really make a lot of money for sure."⁵² Similarly, Bruce Alfred remembers giving up a profitable job in the fishing industry, before the fishery's collapse, to take an apprentice course offered by well-known teacher and 'Nāmgis master artist Doug Cranmer in the early 1980s. Alfred believes that he is not as famous as other artists who do his kind of work because he lives in Alert Bay. Maintaining the rights and responsibilities based on one's

family unit and social obligations comes with its share of sacrifices: although the measure of value that Alert Bay offers artists is the provision of a solid foundation for maintaining connections to family and culture and respect from its community members for their social role, it does not always provide a secure financial base for selling their work. As a result, some artists place more importance on their social role and perceived obligations in the community, while others focus more on the commercial side of the art industry.

STRATEGIES USED BY ARTISTS TO STAY CLOSE TO HOME

If many artists in Alert Bay choose to live and work in their local communities to be close to family, teach others, and learn cultural knowledge, then how do they make connections to commercial art markets beyond their community? Artists' relationships to economic art markets are most commonly established by creating indirect or brokered relationships by way of family members, other artists, gallery owners, and managers.

Brokered Relationships

Instead of simply delivering the message, brokers "re-package the product" or "manipulate the [artist's] original message or product" for the consumer based on the brokers' own understandings of the market place, artist, and piece they are selling.⁵³ The most recognizable of these relationships is the brokered relationship among artists, local and nonlocal art gallery owners, and consumers. Sanborn describes her role as a broker between the artist and consumer:

If someone brings me something and I don't think it's suitable, then I will have a discussion with the artist. I will come back here and point out the shortcomings of the piece and explain to them what needs to be fixed, why he needs to fix it. It's an educational process. All of the young artists are very receptive to that. Sure they look at me like who the heck are you . . . I'm the one who is going to sell it. I know what the market wants and I tell them . . . do the changes or clean it up. I say what I could sell it for, and if he says no, then I say I'm sorry, I can't take it today.⁵⁴

Some artists, such as 'Namgis artist Joe Wilson, actively choose this brokered method of selling art. He uses a manager who sets prices in comparison with other pieces on the regional market and promotes his work while he concentrates on producing pieces.⁵⁵ Brokers mediate the transmission of the cultural features of the art and the artist's reputation based on client and market demands.

Artists in Alert Bay not only make use of art gallery owners and managers as brokers, but they also align themselves with other artists and family members to communicate indirectly with art gallery owners and consumers. Mungo Martin, a renowned Kwakwaka'wakw artist practicing in the 1950s, is

known for his role as a cultural broker working among these various groups. In his article, "From Cultural Salvage to Brokerage: The Mythologization of Mungo Martin and the Emergence of Northwest Coast Art," Aaron Glass contends that through his work, Martin demonstrates the formation of "relationships between disparate communities and negotiates cultural knowledge through facilitating the movement and transformation of objects, values, and information."⁵⁶ His identity as an artist who worked in local and nonlocal art market circles as a culture broker allowed him to maneuver through the differing markets and their regimes of value. As a translator of his culture, "Martin did not . . . embody two substantially different worlds as much as he was articulating their intersection."⁵⁷

Following Martin's example, Bell is one such artist who chooses to act as a cultural broker on behalf of newer artists. Using his family ties, Bell introduces younger artists to art gallery owners, discusses their pieces, and helps newer artists develop relationships with buyers. He recalls, "because I was part of coordinating shows with my cousin . . . everybody [art gallery owners] was well aware of who I was and what I do. Occasionally that happens where someone will come to me with a piece and they're stuck with it, I'll make a few calls and help them or I can move it internationally through my family."⁵⁸ Not only do established artists provide contacts and credibility for less experienced artists, but they may also assist as mentors and patrons, providing newcomers with important knowledge of the ins and outs of the business. As Wayne Alfred remembers, "I'm the one who told them where to go, what galleries to try out. I didn't just teach them how to carve, I taught them how the markets can be out there. I told them who to go see and who not to see. I said, I think you should start here first and work your way up there."⁵⁹ In these cases, when "artists, and the consumer are culturally, geographically, or temporally far apart, the mediating agent [broker] assumes greater importance"; they are the ones who control the type of information about a piece of work and then transmit selected elements to the consumer.⁶⁰ As a result, artists purposely develop brokered relationships in order to widen their selling market while giving them the ability to maintain connections to home.

Nonbrokered Relationships

Although the majority of artists' transactions in and outside of Alert Bay center on personal connections with brokers, based on my observations, more established artists in Alert Bay play an increasingly active role in selling their work as direct agents in economic transactions with end purchasers (or consumers). These buyers include visitors to Alert Bay, local community members, local administrative offices, and national and international clients. By keeping the phone numbers of people they meet and networking with other artists, artists become more involved in communicating information about their work, including how the piece was made and what they were inspired by, along with messages about who they are as an artist directly. One local artist states, "I don't deal with a lot of galleries now. I still deal with them, but not as much because I have people coming to me directly and telling me what they want . . . people

who commission pieces off me know what they are after. They tell me what they want and then I discuss it with them a bit and then we discuss the price.”⁶¹ As artists build relationships with visitors, many encounters lead to private commissions, thus eliminating the need for brokers or other mediators. Artists who become more involved in marketing their own work have more control over how it is presented in the marketplace and in turn gain valuable insight regarding the demands of the global marketplace and their position in it.

Although artists often make use of both brokered and nonbrokered relationships to sell their work, establishing these relationships is a long process in which newcomers begin at the “bottom of the totem pole” and work their way up.⁶² With the proliferation of First Nations artists currently working in the art market, this process is fragile and demanding as artists work on direct networking, marketing, and “getting your name out there,” a process that may take many years for younger artists who are not yet established in the art market scene.⁶³ Wilson stresses that when he was younger he had to make a name for himself by “pounding the pavement” and “doing the rounds” and by visiting and making frequent calls to tourist shops and high-end art galleries not only to show the increasing quality of his work but also to demonstrate his reliability as a product supplier. He also remembers the time he spent working on private commissions from home, doing little business with art galleries in the city. In doing so, he had indirectly severed relationships that had previously been built and maintained by frequent visits. Choosing to unlink himself from the task of developing relationships with art gallery owners, Wilson was forced to rebuild those relationships in Vancouver or Victoria after completing commissions at home.⁶⁴

The Internet has become a tool of choice for some artists in order to create and maintain working relationships with brokers such as gallery owners and is a vehicle for establishing nonbrokered relationships with buyers. In contrast to traditional advertising, such as brochures and print advertising that require additional costs for printing, distribution, and storage, the Internet as a medium for advertising provides an inexpensive infrastructure for global distribution of products and information.⁶⁵ The Internet allows those who are located in remote and peripheral destinations to communicate directly with prospective customers and creates greater flexibility in getting work into the marketplace.⁶⁶ Artists can reach and communicate with several clients at once while remaining in their home community by creating personal Web sites where clients can be introduced to their work and by using e-mail. As Wilson states, “the ‘net,’ is a wonderful tool . . . I can go to 20 places in an hour, it’s efficient. I can [send] some designs . . . then [give] them the piece, and the deal [is] done. . . . The ‘net,’ is efficient to manage these types of things.”⁶⁷

Art gallery owners, from my experience working in a marketplace setting, will at times ask artists to send an electronic picture of a piece in order to determine whether the piece is something they would want to purchase and would be able to sell in their gallery. Although this may save a costly trip for an out-of-town artist if the piece is not bought, this leaves little opportunity for the artist to describe and showcase elements of the piece directly to the art gallery owner. Tourism products, such as art pieces marketed using the

Internet, can be viewed as intangible; they cannot be physically displayed or inspected by gallery owners or clients prior to sale.⁶⁸ As a result, there is a growing dependence on images, texts, and descriptions provided by the artists. Artists must reorganize the delivery and information presented in their sales pitches in order to suit Web-based transactions.

Internet technologies are opening new means of negotiating relationships with brokers and clients; however, for some artists, the Internet's usefulness is limited due to difficulties in access, a lack of computer knowledge, and/or the poor quality of images on the monitor. Connectivity to the Internet is infrequent in Alert Bay. During my fieldwork, there were discussions of a new tower to be built by a well-known cable company, but decisions regarding the development of land and the location of the tower were being disputed. Sufficient infrastructure does not yet exist and the accessibility and affordability of computer technology, the skills required to create and post digital images, and the need for more Web-page design experience limit sophisticated Internet usage to only a few artists.

Despite the advantages of Internet communication recognized by some artists, others, like Wayne Alfred, who is known for his fine detail, find this route of direct contact detrimental to the sale of his work: "Nowadays, I just usually send a mask down and they'd say that it was really beautiful and they would buy it almost all the time but in this case we are going through the computer now and there are digital cameras which don't show my fine paint lines. . . . I don't think it's working because when I send it directly, it's 'ya' right off the bat . . . so I don't even want to play the computer game."⁶⁹

Encounters such as these continue to reemphasize the significance of more personal contact with middlemen and the clients. For some artists, personal relationships with clients and art gallery owners are important marketing strategies. By creating brokered and nonbrokered relationships, artists are involved in the "re-organization of the capital basis and the structure of the cultural industry brings with it the harnessing of new forms of technology and of labor processes; the establishment of new types of distribution."⁷⁰ The Internet allows some artists to fuse their desire to stay close to home with their ambition to remain connected to art gallery systems and selling markets.

ISSUES RAISED BY ARTISTS AS THEY PARTICIPATE IN ECONOMIC TRANSACTIONS

Even as artists develop brokered and nonbrokered relationships to external art markets there is still a strong inclination to produce art for their community. These works are created within the constraints of formal cultural styles in order to meet the expectations of buyers and yet are also aimed toward continuing to produce work reflecting family crests, rank, and membership. With many local artists participating in renewal projects in their communities and in projects that showcase their culture on an international scale, there is a sentiment of cultural preservation that brings up notions of the authenticity of artists, the quality and standards of their work, and their perceived status in their communities.⁷¹

Definitions of an “Authentic” Kwakwaka’wakw Artist

The concept of authenticity is one that has been discussed at length in anthropological and art history literature.⁷² Discussions have centered on the problematic nature of determining what is genuine, real, or authentic. These debates are in part reflections of the Western world’s struggle to make sense of First Nations people and their art.⁷³ For the past century, scholars, anthropologists, museum curators, and patrons have described First Nations objects as either “ethnographic artifacts or pieces of art.”⁷⁴ Cultures and objects have been classified into bounded binary classifications such as pure versus impure, authentic versus inauthentic, original versus replica, and traditional versus modern. The nature of this binary classification system fails to see culture and tradition as “an interpretive process that embodies both continuity and discontinuity.”⁷⁵

In particular, James Clifford contends that viewing culture in this way “brushes aside long histories of indigenous survival and resistance, transformative links with roots prior to and outside the world system.” Rather, by using Clifford’s theory of articulation to understand cultural change, cultural objects and their makers become part of social and cultural elements that are in a constant state of “unhook[ing] and recombin[ing]” within the context of a historical moment. Articulated historical moments are considered much like “a political coalition, or in its ability to conjoin disparate elements.” The following section follows the idea of articulation to identify the moments and circumstances in which artists strategically articulate concepts of tradition and authenticity as they participate in cultural and marketplace activities. The selective process of the artists reveals shared, distributed, and withheld cultural elements, thus reflecting the “productive processes of consensus, exclusion, alliance, and antagonism.”⁷⁶

The marketplace is a key arena in which the concept of authenticity is debated, canonized, dismantled, and re-created. In “‘Authenticity’ and the Contemporary Northwest Coast Indian Art Market,” Karen Duffek observes that conceptualizations of authenticity or Indianness are still often imposed on Native art production and Native artists.⁷⁷ Although I found that this is generally true, I also discovered that artists in Alert Bay actively engage in reworking notions of Indianness, thus creating their own concepts of what constitutes authentic, true, or genuine Native art production.

For buyers, one of the main elements in determining the authenticity of a piece is confirmation that “the object [is] created by an ‘Indian.’” Issues arise as a result of these ethnic criteria of authenticity, particularly how to define and determine the Indianness or authenticity of the artist and how to decide what kind of Indian is the “right kind.”⁷⁸ In this vein, Sanborn contends that solving authenticity is easy in that “all you have to do is ask for their band card or status card. If they do not have an Indian status card for whatever artwork or cultural object they are trying to sell, then it is not authentic. All gallery owners should respect that.”⁷⁹ The idea of ethnicity is, however, not always directly discussed by artists as one of the criteria that defines the authenticity of an artist. Whether this is underplayed because it is seen as an obvious or

necessary requirement to being a First Nations artist or whether it is seen as a secondary requirement to artists is unclear. These definitions derive not only from artists' encounters with clients and art market brokers but also arise from attempts to differentiate among themselves. Their criteria for establishing an authentic, true, or genuine Kwakwaka'wakw artist focuses on the artist's ethnicity and the need to be socially and culturally involved in an Aboriginal community in order to learn cultural protocols, family copyrights, and stories embedded in the art. The continual process of self-definition is "captured by changing alliances, hooking and unhooking particular elements."⁸⁰

Although the ethnicity of the artist is central to brokers and clients, community participation increasingly has become a major criterion of art gallery owners and First Nations artists for valuing indigenous artists and their work.⁸¹ Artists in Alert Bay, especially the senior artists, evaluate authenticity in terms of one's connections to an Aboriginal community and the work's identity as an artistic and cultural production. As Wilson suggests, there is an obligation on the artist's part to "be near the source"; he explains that if "someone has moved into urban society and away from it all and don't even hear it, see it, taste it, at anytime, you eventually forget it."⁸² Being near the source and belonging to an Aboriginal community, by the artists' definitions, means that artists should participate in cultural ceremonies and community activities to learn cultural protocols and laws of ownership. For some artists, to adhere appropriately to cultural protocols and observe laws of copyright is to adhere to tradition. As Reid observes, "tradition becomes a cognitive way of assuming or reinforcing cultural identity . . . tradition does not refer simply to facts but to intents, to motivations predating these facts. Objects alone do not make the tradition. Thinking makes tradition."⁸³

Most artists in Alert Bay make it clear that it is important to stay within the bounds of what is considered traditional while also establishing their own style. Traditional elements are often discussed in terms of one's adherence to rules of protocol concerning laws of copyright for designs. In Kwakwaka'wakw culture, laws of copyright are linked to the *'na'mima* or family unit. Each family unit has its own set of claims to food resource sites and rights to use particular crest designs. These claims manifest in different forms ranging from designs on ceremonial and everyday objects, to privileges such as the use of certain kinds of songs, names, and titles.⁸⁴ One artist expressed an understanding of copyright guidelines as they link to family and cultural affiliation:

I don't do anything out of my culture. Everything you see is from my ancestors. They've already set the protocols that we have to follow. We can't, we don't, at least, I don't do Haida work, or Tlingit work, it's not how it's to be done and if anybody does our work that ain't from here, it's wrong. We all have our unique style, but we all stay within the boundaries that our ancestors have set for us. We don't go and try and make something else.⁸⁵

In this sense, maintaining traditions by learning cultural knowledge is seen as necessary in order to represent Kwakwaka'wakw culture accurately to the

larger public. Innovation to tradition takes the form of an artist's personal interpretation of traditional elements. To be an authentic artist in Alert Bay many artists maintain that "you have to be groomed in the history, know who your relatives are, and know what would be appropriate to use."⁸⁶ It is, however, the artists' own prerogative as to whether this is a priority in their production. Opinions vary on the authenticity of an artist, as some artists will place more importance on some features of authenticity than others. By using their conceptions of authenticity artists extend these criteria to their involvement in the art gallery scene and feel as though they should be valued as living treasures and recognized for their roles in maintaining traditional protocols.

Artists connect to local and global geographies at different points of time and under different circumstances. Travel is common, and there is a constant interplay between local and urban locations. Artists in Alert Bay reflect a mixture of three sorts: (1) those who are born and brought up there; (2) those who have either moved to the town and continued to live there or have returned after an extended period of time outside the community; and (3) those who are born and raised in urban areas and have since moved back to their ancestral community. These observations reflect the articulated nature of artists' lives and "recognize patterns of visiting and return, of desire and nostalgia, of lived connections across distances and differences."⁸⁷

Though they put an emphasis on place, community, and land, artists reflect these various groupings as a way of asserting criteria of an authentic First Nations artist when differentiating themselves from artists residing in urban areas. Although they create this juxtaposition in order to solidify their position as authentic or genuine artists, they create an additional complexity by emphasizing their metropolitan and international connections (whether it be in their training, commissions, travel, or clientele) in situations and circumstances in order to demonstrate to a client or art gallery owner the extent of their success in the marketplace. In doing this, artists are actively defining parameters of group membership by establishing a set of rules on what it means to belong to an Aboriginal community, how long one can be away, how one should keep in touch and how often, and appropriate ways one can become involved in the community again. Adhering to notions of tradition and living out the realities of socioeconomic and historical circumstances that First Nations in British Columbia face, artists in Alert Bay differentiate themselves from artists outside their community and "reconfigure themselves by drawing selectively on remembered pasts." The dialectical nature between urban and rural First Nations artists indicate that the notion of belonging or concepts of "'indigeneity,' [are] both rooted in and routed through particular places."⁸⁸

Evaluation and pricing of art is affected by their own terms of authenticity and credibility as Native artists, which in part reflects living in and maintaining affiliation with the Alert Bay community. As Wilson notes, living far away from urban art market centers drives your asking prices up so that you can cover the cost of your trip into the city. Wilson suggests that because authenticity is "guaranteed" for the art gallery owner and potential clients and is often used as a selling point by art gallery owners, artists who live in their local

community deserve higher prices for their pieces.⁸⁹ Alternatively, I observed that when selling their work locally artists' works are evaluated according to their technique and aesthetic characteristics rather than by an artist's connection to a Native community.⁹⁰ Although this type of evaluation usually takes place with emerging artists, some of the more established artists have stated that the technique and aesthetic traits of their works are, at times, compared to those of beginner artists. More established artists who are accustomed to prices determined by their reputations by nonlocal art gallery owners find this type of evaluation frustrating.

In an interview with an established First Nations artist in Alert Bay regarding pricing at the U'mista Cultural Centre gift shop, Sharon Fortney was told that "the Shop haggles over prices and wants to pay everybody the same. They don't recognize that some people are . . . masters like Doug Cranmer."⁹¹ It should be noted, however, that local venues, such as U'mista, have limitations in what they can purchase. Sanborn contends:

Especially with the more established artists, they come in and tell me what they want for a piece and since I've studied the market, I know what other pieces of his are out there, I know what he is getting. I very seldom doubt his word, but in a lot of cases, I can't afford to buy those pieces anymore. We have a very limited buying budget and with the lack of permanent staff working in the gift shop, it is harder and harder to make those larger sales.⁹²

The frustration of more established artists whose works are valued differently by local and nonlocal art gallery owners illustrates their simultaneous entanglement with alternate systems of value. These conflicting assessments suggest that artists and art gallery owners actively make distinctions and place values on "parts of the culture" and differentiate between the culturally and socially complex local system of values and the transactional and monetized values of the regional and international art market system. These examples demonstrate that cultures and objects, along with their makers, have always been a part of an articulated and discursive space of social change and innovation.⁹³

Artists' Perspectives on Quality and Standards

Along with differing ideas about what constitutes an authentic artist and artwork, artists in Alert Bay also have conflicting ideas about the appropriateness of selling art in the commercial art market. Some artists make linkages to market standards in order to determine what is appropriate to sell in the art market, while others make distinctions based on technique and pricing. For instance, Bell notes that selling art is an opportunity to educate others about his culture:

[I have been] faced with some pretty hard criticism as an artist for selling it [my art] and that's always a question, but I've always gone on what my grandfather told us right from when he started working

for the museum, when people complain to him about him selling out our art, our culture, you know, sometimes we need to create an understanding between people or between cultures so that we can all live together. In selling one piece of art, a piece of art does that, then everybody wins and that was always my answer back to people of “well how come you’re selling your art work, it should only be for ceremony . . .” we create a better understanding and educating all of society . . . that’s why I’m always willing to share my stories because it’s all about teaching others and bridging gaps.⁹⁴

In contrast, some artists are selective in the types of pieces they sell in the commercial market. Some artists maintain that rights to resource sites held by family units cannot be given away, but ceremonial property can be given away. Although each family unit holds certain titles, crests, property, and social features around copyright that relate to elements such as “corporativity, membership, position holding, ranking, marriage, and residence,” these become “confusing and contradictory when lumped together without regard for demographics and other historical developments” and continue to be problematic in current Kwakwaka’wakw society.⁹⁵

Reflecting on this, Wasden discussed the tensions and conflicting positions concerning copyright and selling works for local traditional use and the art market:

Most of what I’ve done has stayed within the cultural Potlatch system. I’ve made a couple of different masks and cultural objects and I gave them to my uncles because they needed them for certain ceremonies; all of my dance curtains were made for my relatives, they all stayed within the families and the culture. I know my cousins, who carve for a living, would be very offended with me or very hurt but I don’t believe in selling masks and spiritual things on the commercial market. I’ve always been against that and I’ve said it in front of my cousins and uncles and I honor that they have a difference of opinion, but I believe in my culture and we were taught that if you play with the sacred things that our Creator gave to us, it’s going to come back on us. Also, Ada, Mrs. Chief Henry Speck taught us is that our old people totally honored “business,” when we sell something especially our family mask or crests, we no longer own that privilege; if you sell it, you sell the right to that prerogative.⁹⁶

Instead, Wasden chooses to sell works such as flat, two-dimensional designs such as paintings and prints, drums, t-shirts, and stickers, which for him have no sacred significance or ceremonial function. There is a deliberate intention to incorporate these objects that display aboriginality into the art market. Charlotte Townsend-Gault (2004) notes that such objects are often discussed as cheap, degraded, or commercialized but demonstrate an artist’s capacity to withhold elements of cultural knowledge. Wasden deliberately deploys these works to limit the type of cultural knowledge that is shared with others.

This kind of withholding, the linking and unlinking of traditional elements in new and unexpected ways, demonstrates a “form of protection, offering access behind which cultural practices can be continued.”⁹⁷ In this case, “the question of what is borrowed from here or there, what is lost and rediscovered in new situations can be discussed within the realm of normal political or cultural activity.”⁹⁸

Although some artists use the action of withholding as a way to define their standards, other artists may use different criteria to determine their standards. As Wayne Alfred noted, his personal standards are based on his skill as an artist and his connection to his culture: “A standard is . . . ok, say I made this beautiful piece that was flawless. I can’t go any lower than that after that, you know? Standards is first and foremost, remember who you are, who your people are and one important standard is it you take out, make sure you put back in, in the culture.”⁹⁹ Artists determine the quality of a work by assessing the technique used by the artist.

Moreover, artists use the concept of standards when setting prices for their pieces. The price of a piece is often determined by artists’ levels of experience and skill, who they have worked with, and their overall reputation in the art market. Pricing is crucial to any artist’s career. As artists gain more experience and build a reputation, they can demand higher prices for their pieces. As one artist notes:

A lot of artists when they first start, they want to start at the top, and it obviously doesn’t work that way. You’ve got to put in your time and get your name out there, and get your pieces selling and have it at a reasonable price when you’re starting from the quality, and then as you get better, of, course, the price goes up, and you’ve got to be careful not to price yourself out, or it might become hard to sell your pieces.¹⁰⁰

Similarly, Sanborn also notes the fine line between artists pricing their pieces too high or too low. She contends that

[artists] have to set a standard for themselves in a price range that is acceptable in order to themselves, you know, to support themselves, and they shouldn’t steer away from that standard because it just gives a real uncertainty to the market and to the advantages that their art can have in the market place. Whereas if they go up and down in their price in desperation, nobody is going to take them seriously and I think that if you want to be an artist creating pieces from our culture, you have to set your standards high, you have to be aware of the whole cultural background of the art and culture.¹⁰¹

As one local shop owner observes, if artists price their pieces too low, they will find out that “once you’ve done that, it’s really tough to get the price you want.”¹⁰² Although artists differ in their assessment of the types of pieces that

are appropriate to sell in the art market, how personal standards are defined, and how pricing is determined, most artists have a strong commitment to educating others, preserving cultural traditions, and safeguarding artists against unfavorable economic outcomes.

Artists' Responses to Perceptions of Their Roles in the Community

Whenever artists are discussed in the community, conversations focus on their roles as producers of artwork for the community and as experts in traditional knowledge. For instance, 'Namgis community member Barbara Cranmer, who is also a filmmaker and member of a local dance group, stresses that "artists here play an important role in social and ceremonial events. It's kind of like everyone does their part to make it happen in the community, and people are very giving. I feel the [artists] that we've worked with are very giving of knowledge and time and their artistic ability because there are some really good artists here."¹⁰³ Similarly, Bell notes:

[Artists] play a really important role because they know the dance of the mask, they know how it's danced, they know the "do's" and "don'ts" of wearing a mask and what you can and cannot do. The whole preparation for putting a mask on and how you take it off and how you take care of it and how it's wrapped and all of the little things that people in the audience don't see, those are very critical roles and then also, they are the caretakers, you know, making sure the dancers who go out in masks, nothing is going to happen to the mask, it's well secured and it's taken care of. I guess you could call them the attendants and guardians of those masks that go onto people. When the artists are in the back, that's their role, it's a big responsibility.¹⁰⁴

Artists play a pivotal role in ceremonial and community activities, and their participation is one of the reasons they choose to stay in their local community.

Although members of the local community tend to focus on artists' participation in community activities, this is often at the expense of recognizing their important role in the local economy. The concentration on artists' social roles likely derives from two factors: (1) the central multiplex role they play in the traditional ceremonial life of the community and in the art market and (2) differences in perception and definition of what it means to be a professional artist. Based on my observations, some artists in the community focus their attention on making art for their community and see earning a living through art as a means that facilitates their local cultural activities. Others are more business focused; they emphasize generating income by selling art to customers to support themselves, and the cultural significance of their art is often secondary. On one hand, artists rise to prominence in the eyes of their communities because they create pieces for ceremonial and local use and play a vital role as teachers and mentors. Due to their extensive involvement in community activities, artists' transactions in the marketplace are downplayed with the potential to be labeled as economically or professionally unsuccessful. On the other

hand, artists who focus too much of their attention on making money and do not commit to cultural activities by giving back to the community have the potential to be viewed as culturally weak or even selfish.

Although artists are involved in what they view as two separate, but inter-related arenas of value, artists express that they feel as though local community members tend to see only one dimension of their role. Community members stress the social nature of an artist's work when describing what it means to be a professional artist. They describe the professional artist as someone who has extensive cultural knowledge and who plays a role in ceremonial and community activities. Artists, however, characterize a professional artist by using different criteria. They make a distinction between their social roles in the community and their professional or business role in the marketplace. With the majority of artists' economic transactions taking place outside their local community in urban centers in the lower mainland and internationally, some artists feel that their professional, economic, or individual business roles are often hidden or overlooked by members of their community. As Wasden observes:

Artists here, whenever there is a Potlatch . . . if they're commissioned for things, they don't get the greatest price for their work or even pay at all. But they'll do it for the families. . . . In the olden days, artists were hired and paid with blankets and things of value at the time, because the artwork was really valued and the artists were very highly respected. Nowadays, I think the artists have really been taken for granted . . . people don't appreciate how much work and time that really goes into carving. . . . [I]n the art market, our artists have had to learn to be really tough, they have been forced to become aggressive and even demanding in their dealing tactics.¹⁰⁵

Artists are not always seen as moneymakers or business people with marketing knowledge, negotiating skills, and business experience. This in part reflects the complex milieu in which artists find themselves and the different understandings between community members and artists regarding the concept of the artist as a professional.

The notion that artists' contributions have been taken for granted is likely also a reflection of different understandings of what the term *real jobs* means. Most artists understand having a real job to mean professional flexibility and freedom. However, Bell believes that, for most members of the community, having a real job usually means a job that has steady, predictable, regular pay and holiday time. Moreover, he states, "when people say a real job, a real job is when you're paid every two weeks, you're your own boss, you're not dependent on anybody else, you're not dependent on funding or funding sources, you're not dependent on anyone else acquiring funds to hire you."¹⁰⁶ Although this statement seems contradictory, it reflects Bell's attempt to explain his role as an artist and as a paid employee of the 'Nāmgis Band.

The presence of multiple understandings of what is meant by *real job* reflects a situation in which artists are stuck between conventional understandings of employment that center around seasonal work and capitalist

understandings of employment that center around hourly wages and a cash economy. Bruce Alfred, who continues his occupation as an artist in Alert Bay, expresses:¹⁰⁷

People come to me and they say “What do you do?” “I’m an artist.” Well, why don’t you get a real job? They really don’t know what it entails, I say, ‘come and hang out with me and you will have no time to spare.’ You don’t know what 14–18 hours a day of working or carving is like. It’s work for me, but they think I’m just joking. They think artwork is not serious, but it is; you’re having to constantly create things, you’re only as good as your last piece.¹⁰⁸

The struggle here is for recognition. With most of artists’ economic transactions occurring in nonlocal or private settings, it is not surprising that their role as economic contributors is frequently overlooked. It is the long hours and the creative yet unpredictable nature of their job that allows artists the flexibility to be nurturers of cultural knowledge. To reclaim, revitalize, make use of, and control their domestic economy, First Nations artists focus on economic development in combination with occupations that “are based on the rhythms of a seasonal lifestyle,” thus allowing them to stay at home.¹⁰⁹ To be a successful artist in Alert Bay, artists walk a fine line; they seek recognition for their commitments to community and culture and individual economic achievement in the art market. Artists struggle to find a middle ground as they deal with these issues.

Artists also feel that the community fails to appreciate the role they play in the community’s economy as journeymen and masters to apprentices and trainees. With a high number of artists in Alert Bay being in their fifties and sixties and with the long process and patience it takes for younger artists to become established in the art market, there is little community interest in allocating resources for apprenticeships and artistic training programs. In terms of younger generations pursuing the role of artist Bell notes:

I think there is an interest, but I don’t know if it is a priority. There’s a lot of other priorities right now and I think because we have so many master carvers and carvers here that if a young person really wants to carve, that they could. A structured program would only enhance that and could offer more room for artists, but it’s not the number one priority in the community . . . carving comes in behind all those academic and all those [industrial] certifications.

Filling current employment opportunities in industrial trades and entrepreneurial positions are areas of immediate concern in the community.¹¹⁰

Given that a large number of successful artists already work in Alert Bay, members of the community believe that the artistic traditions of ‘N̓amgis culture are well preserved, strong, and stable. Economic resources are needed to continue to promote other aspects of ‘N̓amgis culture, such as the

language, traditional fishing practices, and management of natural resources. Many artists, however, teach about the proper collection and preparation of natural materials, recite the stories and songs, and perform dances as part of their art production. They see their professional role as artists as an important way to preserve these aspects of culture, despite the limited recognition they receive from the community as a whole. Artists also consider preservation of language and natural resources as a critically important part of their role.

Many artists I spoke with believe that because programs were not developed around artistic endeavors, their profession and their contributions as instructors in traditional knowledge and as contributors to the economy of the community were somehow being dismissed as less important. Wayne Alfred stated, "I might stop teaching now because people don't appreciate it and I've taught a lot of guys and it's like wasting time you know like two and three hours out of my time! That's a lot of time where I could be doing my own thing. But of course I say that and the first guy comes asking me, I'll be teaching again."¹¹¹ In sum, successful artists in Alert Bay participate in two different but interconnected communities: the local community in which they are key members of traditional ceremonial activities and the commercially oriented local and nonlocal art market of collectors and galleries. They continue to create pieces for both these communities while maneuvering through different sets of values and standards put in place by each.

CONCLUSIONS

This case study illustrates that First Nations artists in Alert Bay, like indigenous artists elsewhere in Canada and worldwide, are "attempting to merge the legacy of a dynamic and affirming bond of community with the individualism of the market place."¹¹² Artists in Alert Bay actively incorporate the notions of individual entrepreneurship and community participation with the goal of succeeding at both. Amid the long history of economic, political, and societal shifts in their community, artists "no longer see the appeal of being marginalized iconoclasts but prefer to become active participants, where community and individual growth are not incompatible but complementary goals."¹¹³ 'Namgis artists in Alert Bay remain in their local community to fulfill social and moral obligations to give back to the community. Although there is a larger market for their work outside their community, many artists choose to live and work in Alert Bay in order to maintain family relationships and play active roles in the transmission of cultural knowledge within their cultural community. Their actions translate into social capital in the community in which they are recognized for their roles in actively maintaining traditional artistic culture and contributing to ceremonial life.

Artists and their work are understood in the context of historical, ceremonial, commercial, and aesthetic interpretative traditions. Clifford's articulation theory helps to frame the artists' struggle amidst these interpretations to define themselves and their works as authentic. As a "moment of arbitrary closure," articulation theory provides a "non-reductive way to think about cultural transformation" and to understand the transformative nature

of artists' transactions in their community and in the marketplace.¹¹⁴ Although artists in Alert Bay are a geographically diverse group of individuals, they emphasize locality, community involvement, and the adherence to tradition as markers of authenticity. They also seek to differentiate themselves from the First Nations artists who live in urban centers. The complex interconnectedness of Alert Bay artists places them at the intersection of several systems of evaluation. As they circulate through diverse contexts and move between local and nonlocal borders, artists encounter differing opinions regarding how their role as an artist and their work is understood, valued, and accepted. Artists' presence and active participation in representing themselves in these differing regimes shows that some artists in Alert Bay are not prepared to sacrifice their culture, land, or identity in order to develop economically but want to develop in such a way that the two structures are complementary. These transactions "produce problems that manifest themselves in intensely local forms, yet they have contexts that are anything but local."¹¹⁵

In future studies, it will be increasingly important to examine how and under what circumstances artists create and re-create particular relationships with local and nonlocal artists, brokers, and clients. With this in mind, additional areas of study could include artists' involvement in reconfiguring cultural knowledge and ideas of authenticity in the city, examining how art gallery owners conduct business with artists located in different venues, assessing artists' and communities' changing notions of authenticity, quality, and standards, and perceiving how artists' roles in their communities might change over time. With increasing tourism and ecotourism ventures developing in the Alert Bay area, the increasing use of the Internet by some artists and community members, and changing employment strategies affecting young people in Alert Bay, it will be crucial to examine the effect of shifting local and global economic conditions on the economic role of artists within their communities and in their relationships with their commercial markets.

Artists in Alert Bay are part of a process in which culture is "made, unmade, and remade." This process of cultural survival is often entangled with political, social, geographical, economic, and historical issues; these issues are "inherent in the transformative life of all societies."¹¹⁶ Describing this dynamic and historical process Hall notes that "the struggle continues; but it is almost never in the same place, over the same meaning or value . . . they are conceived not as separate 'ways of life' but as 'ways of struggle' constantly intersecting."¹¹⁷ Artists introduce and teach others about carefully selected elements of their culture by selling and showcasing their work locally and globally. They recognize their own role in creating and re-creating cultural associations at the nexus of several systems of evaluation. Following in the steps of artists before them, artists in Alert Bay are living examples of their community's cultural survival, revival, resistance, and sovereignty. As Bell teaches us, "the past is what we're leaning on, we've always survived. Whatever has happened or however society has evolved . . . we've always survived that. So that's what's keeping [our] young spirits going."¹¹⁸

Acknowledgments

My heartfelt thanks are given to the 'Namgis First Nations in Alert Bay, especially to those artists and community members with whom I worked and who shared their extensive knowledge. I thank Dr. Jennifer Kramer and Dr. Bruce Miller for their advice and comments on my research, my father, Dr. William McKellin, and my husband, Andrew Neufeld, for their intellectual encouragement and comments on earlier drafts and Karen and Nora for their continual support. Financial support of my fieldwork was made possible by the Department of Anthropology at the University of British Columbia and the Francis Reid Scholarship.

NOTES

1. Although the term *Kwakiutl* is often used in anthropological literature to describe this northern cultural group, I use the current term *Kwakwaka'wakw* (translated to "Those Who Speak Kwak'wala") that is used by the U'mista Cultural Society of Alert Bay. For a detailed discussion on group identification, see U'mista Cultural Society, "The Kwak'wala Speaking Tribes," <http://www.umista.ca/kwakwakawakw/index.php> (accessed 14 September 2005); James Clifford, *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), 355.

2. Fred Myers, ed., *The Empire of Things: Regimes of Value and Material Culture* (Santa Fe, NM: School of American Research Press, 2001).

3. James Clifford, "Indigenous Articulations," *The Contemporary Pacific* 13, no. 2 (2001): 472.

4. Margaret Dubin, *Native America Collected: The Culture of an Art World* (Albuquerque: The University of New Mexico Press, 2001).

5. Douglas Cole, *Captured Heritage: The Scramble for Northwest Coast Artifacts* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1985); Ruth Phillips, "A Proper Place for Art or the Proper Arts of Place?: Native North American Objects and the Hierarchies of Art, Craft, and Souvenir," in *On Aboriginal Representation in the Gallery*, ed. Linda Jessup (Hull, QC: Canadian Museum of Civilization, 2002); Ruth Phillips and Janet Berlo, *Native North American Art* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998); Bill Holm, *Northwest Coast Indian Art: An Analysis of Form* (Vancouver, BC: Douglas and McIntyre, 1965); Bill Holm and William Reid, *Form and Freedom: A Dialogue on Northwest Coast Indian Art* (Houston, TX: Institute for the Arts at Rice University, 1975); Erna Gunther, *Art in the Life of Northwest Coast Indians* (Portland, OR: Portland Art Museum, 1966); Charlotte Townsend-Gault, "Art, Argument and Anger on the Northwest Coast," in *Contesting Art: Art, Politics, and Identity in the Modern World*, ed. J. MacClancy (Oxford: Berg Press, 1997); Scott Watson, "Two Bears," in *Bill Reid and Beyond: Expanding on Modern Native Art*, ed. Charlotte Townsend-Gault and Karen Duffek (Vancouver, BC: Douglas and McIntyre, 2003), 209–24; Bill Holm, *Smoky-Top: The Art and Times of Willie Seaweed* (Vancouver, BC: Douglas and McIntyre, 1983); Phil Nuytten, *Totem Carvers* (Vancouver, BC: Panorama Publications, 1982); Richard Hunt and Kevin Neary, *Richard Hunt: Through My Father's Eyes* (Victoria, BC: Art Gallery of Greater Victoria, 2000).

6. Charlotte Townsend-Gault, "Circulating Aboriginality," *Journal of Material Culture* 9, no. 2 (2004): 183–202; Nelson Graburn, "Ethnic Arts of the Fourth World:

The View from Canada,” in *Imagery and Creativity*, ed. Dorothea S. Whitten and Norman E. Whitten (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1993), 171–204; Nelson Graburn, *Ethnic and Tourist Arts* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976); Christopher Steiner and Ruth Phillips, “Art, Authenticity and the Baggage of Cultural Encounter,” in *Unpacking Culture, Art, and Commodity in Colonial and Post Colonial Worlds*, ed. Ruth B. Phillips and Christopher B. Steiner (California: University of California Press, 1999), 3–20; Karen Duffek, “‘Authenticity’ and the Contemporary Northwest Coast Indian Art Market,” *BC Studies* 57 (1983): 99–111; Christopher Steiner, *African Art in Translation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994); Dubin, *Native America Collected*, 126; Aaron Glass, “(Cultural) Objects of (Cultural) Value: Commodification and the Development of a Northwest Coast Art World,” in *On Aboriginal Representation in the Gallery*, ed. Linda Jessup (Ottawa, ON: Canadian Museum of Civilization, 2002), 93–114.

7. Although I am aware of Eric Wolf’s warning that “what people say and what they do” can be two different things, an anthropologist should be prepared to take note of both. Eric Wolf, *Pathways of Power: Building an Anthropology of the Modern World* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 51.

8. Stuart Hall, “Gramsci’s Relevance for the Study of Race and Ethnicity,” *Journal of Communication* 10 (2002): 5–27.

9. Fred Myers, ed., *The Empire of Things: Regimes of Value and Material Culture* (Santa Fe, NM: School of American Research Press, 2001); Arjun Appadurai, ed., *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

10. Myers, *Empire of Things*, 6.

11. Appadurai, *Social Life of Things*, 6.

12. Helen Codere, “Kwakiutl: Traditional Culture,” in *The Handbook of North American Indians*, ed. Wayne Suttles (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution, 1990), 364; Bill Holm, “Art,” in *The Handbook of North American Indians*, ed. Wayne Suttles (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution, 1990), 603.

13. Barbara Cranmer, interview by Meg Neufeld, 17 August 2004, Alert Bay, BC; Codere, “Kwakiutl,” 364; Audrey Hawthorn, *Kwakiutl Art* (Vancouver, BC: Douglas and McIntyre, 1979), 5; Ruth Phillips, *Trading Identities: The Souvenir in Native North American Art from the Northeast 1700–1900* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1998), 205.

14. Phillips, *Trading Identities*.

15. Hawthorn, *Kwakiutl Art*, Hunt and Neary, *Through My Father’s Eyes*.

16. Hawthorn, *Kwakiutl Art*, 5.

17. Hunt and Neary, *Through My Father’s Eyes*, 8.

18. Hunt and Neary, *Through My Father’s Eyes*, 5; Codere, “Kwakiutl,” 365.

19. Andrea Sanborn, interview by Meg Neufeld, 17 August 2004, Alert Bay, BC.

20. The crescent-shaped Cormorant Island is known to the ‘N̄amgis as “Yalis” or “Spread Leg Beach.” It is named after the image or shape of the island that resembles a woman who is sitting on the beach with her legs open. Dara Culhane Speck, *An Error in Judgment: The Politics of Medical Care in an Indian/White Community* (Vancouver, BC: Talonbooks, 1987), 68; Ira Jacknis, “Repatriation as Social Drama: The Kwakiutl Indians of British Columbia,” in *Repatriation Reader: Who Owns American Indian Remains*, ed. Devon A. Mihesuah (London: University of Nebraska Press, 2000), 267.

21. Codere, “Kwakiutl,” 363.

22. Speck, *An Error in Judgment*, 72.
23. Jacknis, "Social Drama," 268; Codere, "Kwakiutl," 363–64.
24. Cole, *Captured Heritage*; Jacknis, "Social Drama"; Gloria Cranmer Webster, "Kwakiutl Since 1980," in *The Handbook of North American Indians*, ed. Wayne Suttles (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution, 1990), 387.
25. Codere, "Kwakiutl," 363–64.
26. Speck, *An Error in Judgment*, 78.
27. Holm, "Art," 602.
28. Peter Macnair, Alan Hoover, and Kevin Neary, *The Legacy: Continuing Traditions of Canadian Northwest Coast Indian Art* (Victoria: British Columbia Provincial Museum, 1980), 67.
29. Phillips and Berlo, *Native North American Art*; Watson, "Two Bears"; Glass, "(Cultural) Objects of (Cultural) Value."
30. In addition to the U'mista Cultural Centre, other 'Namgis First Nation-run facilities demonstrate their continual goal to be self-sufficient. Facilities include the 'Namgis Health Centre built in 1983, the T'lisalagi'lask School built in 1994, the Recreation Centre built in 2001, and the Dental Clinic built in 2002. For details, see 'Namgis First Nations, Facilities, First Nations, <http://www.namgis.org/community/facilities.html> (accessed 19 March 2005); Jacknis, "Repatriation as Social Drama," 268.
31. The U'mista Cultural Centre's mandate is to "insure the survival of all aspects of the cultural heritage of the Kwakwaka'wakw." U'mista Cultural Society, "Home." U'mista collects, preserves, and exhibits cultural and artists' artifacts; displays the repatriated collection; features traveling exhibits; has a gift shop/gallery with a variety of artwork by local Kwakwaka'wakw artists; and promotes a range of cultural activities. Artifacts were divided between the northern Kwakwaka'wakw First Nations (placed at U'mista) and the southern Kwakwaka'wakw First Nations (placed at the Kwagiutl Museum in Cape Mudge).
32. James Frideres and Rene Gadacz, *Aboriginal Peoples in Canada* (Toronto: Pearson Education Canada, 2005), 377; Joe Wilson, interview by Meg Neufeld, 17 August 2004, Alert Bay, BC; Michael Harkin, "Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Landscape," in *Coming to Shore: Northwest Coast Ethnology, Traditions, and Visions*, ed. Marie Mauze, Michael E. Harkin, and Sergei A. Kan (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2004), 385–406.
33. Aaron Glass, e-mail message, 28 February 2005.
34. Sanborn interview.
35. Webster, "Kwakiutl since 1980," 387.
36. Gerald McMaster, ed., *Reservation X* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1998), 20–22.
37. Elizabeth Povinelli, *The Cunning of Recognition: Indigenous Alterities and the Making of Australian Multiculturalism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002), 4–5.
38. In Kwakwaka'wakw culture, "by giving, a person shows he is a moral person." George Speck Jr., "Gwa'ni," 'Namgis First Nations, <http://www.namgis.org/namgispeople/index.asp> (accessed 19 March 2005).
39. Annette Weiner, *Inalienable Possessions: The Paradox of Keeping-While-Giving* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 6.
40. Wayne Alfred, interview by Meg Neufeld, 9 August 2004, Alert Bay, BC.
41. Randy Bell, interview by Meg Neufeld, 19 August 2004, Alert Bay, BC.

42. Codere, "Kwakiutl," 366.
43. Speck, *An Error in Judgment*, 68.
44. McMaster, *Reservation X*, 20.
45. Wayne Alfred interview.
46. Sanborn interview.
47. In some cases, if younger artists have a relative (uncle, father, grandfather, or cousin) who is an artist, they will often start their training with them.
48. Wayne Alfred interview.
49. Ibid.
50. Bruce Alfred, interview by Meg Neufeld, 6 August 2004, Alert Bay, BC.
51. Ibid.
52. William Wasden Jr., interview by Meg Neufeld, 20 August 2004, Alert Bay, BC.
53. Robert Paine, ed., *Patrons and Brokers in the East Arctic* (St. John's, Newfoundland: Institute of Social and Economic Research, 1971), 21.
54. Sanborn interview.
55. Wilson interview.
56. Aaron Glass, "From Cultural Salvage to Brokerage: The Mythologization of Mungo Martin and the Emergence of Northwest Coast Art," *Museum Anthropology* 29, no. 1 (2006): 22.
57. Glass, "From Cultural Salvage," 34.
58. Bell interview.
59. Wayne Alfred interview.
60. Graburn, "Ethnic Arts of the Fourth World," 349.
61. Interview with local artist, 10 August 2004, Alert Bay, BC.
62. More established artists also have to work at maintaining their status by keeping connected with art gallery owners and providing the quality of work expected of them by these groups. Sanborn interview.
63. Bell interview.
64. Wilson interview.
65. Elizabeth Dorsey, Leslie Steeves, and Estella Porras, "Advertising Ecotourism on the Internet: Commodifying Environment and Culture," in *New Media and Society* 6, no. 6 (2004): 753–77.
66. Chris Cooper, *Tourism: Principles and Practice* (Essex, UK: Addison Wesley Longman, 1998), 472; Dorsey et al., "Advertising Ecotourism on the Internet," 760.
67. Wilson interview.
68. Dorsey et al., "Advertising Ecotourism on the Internet," 754–55; Cooper *Tourism*, 425.
69. Wayne Alfred interview.
70. Stuart Hall, "Notes on Deconstructing the Popular," in *Cultural Resistance Reader*, ed. S. Duncombe (London: Verso Press, 2002), 230.
71. Specifically, the construction of the new Big House in 1999 after the previous structure was lost to a fire in 1997. Several artists, including Bruce Alfred, Joe Wilson, and Stephen Bruce traveled to the Netherlands to work on a Northwest Coast Native theme park for an aquarium, the Dolfinarium Harderwijk. They created big house fronts, totem poles, and statuettes.
72. As noted in Steiner and Phillips, "Art, Authenticity"; Duffek, "Authenticity"; Townsend-Gault, "Art, Argument"; Townsend-Gault and Duffek, "Bill Reid"; Dubin "Native America"; Glass "(Cultural) Objects"; McMaster, "Reservation."

73. Michael Ames, *Cannibal Tours and Glass Boxes: The Anthropology of Museums* (Vancouver: The University of British Columbia Press, 1992), 70.
74. Steiner and Phillips, "Art, Authenticity," 3.
75. Richard Handler and Jocelyn Linnekin, "Tradition, Genuine or Spurious," *The Journal of American Folklore* 97, no. 385 (1984): 273.
76. James Clifford, "Indigenous Articulations," *The Contemporary Pacific* 13, no. 2 (2001): 472, 482, 478, 473.
77. Duffek, "Authenticity," 99.
78. *Ibid.*, 101–3.
79. Sanborn interview.
80. Clifford, "Indigenous Articulations," 476.
81. Glass, "Commodification," 104.
82. Wilson interview.
83. Martine Reid, "In Search of Things Past, Remembered, Retraced, and Reinvented," in *In the Shadow of the Sun: Perspectives on Contemporary Native Art*, ed. Canadian Museum of Civilization (Ottawa, ON: Canadian Museum of Civilization, 1993), 75.
84. Codere, "Kwakiutl," 366.
85. Interview with local artist, 21 August 2004, Alert Bay, BC.
86. Wasden interview.
87. Clifford, "Indigenous Articulations," 469–70.
88. *Ibid.*, 471, 469.
89. Wilson interview.
90. This is most likely to be the case in local venues as artists' connection to an Aboriginal community is already established.
91. Sharon Fortney, *First Nations Cultural Centre in the New Millennium: A Case Study Project* (Vancouver, BC: Department of Canadian Heritage, 2001), 74.
92. Sanborn interview.
93. Hall, "Deconstructing," 234; Steiner and Phillips, "Art, Authenticity," 3.
94. Bell interview.
95. *Ibid.*
96. Wasden interview.
97. Townsend-Gault, "Circulating Aboriginality," 186, 190.
98. Clifford, "Indigenous Articulations," 480.
99. Wayne Alfred interview.
100. Interview with local artist, 10 August 2004, Alert Bay, BC.
101. Sanborn interview.
102. Interview with local shop owner, 21 August 2004, Alert Bay, BC.
103. Cranmer interview.
104. Bell interview.
105. Wasden interview.
106. Bell interview.
107. Codere, "Kwakiutl," 364.
108. Bruce Alfred interview.
109. Frideres, *Aboriginal*, 316.
110. Bell interview.
111. Wayne Alfred interview.

112. McMaster, *Reservation X*, 23.
113. Ibid.
114. Clifford, "Indigenous Articulations," 473.
115. Arjun Appadurai, "Grassroots Globalization and the Research Imagination," in *Globalization*, ed. Arjun Appadurai (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001), 6.
116. Clifford, "Indigenous Articulations," 479, 473.
117. Hall, "Deconstructing," 237.
118. Bell interview.