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even much of that, there is little to link this text to a Delaware source.

In sum, I am reminded of the Piltdown find, which scholars were so ready to accept until it was exposed as a hoax. Combining a treated human skull with the jaw of an ape, Piltdown "man" had a large brain capacity but many primitive features. Everyone wanted the larger brain case and so accepted flimsy evidence. Since Charles Darwin was also involved and was a supporter of the find, important reputations were at stake.

In purporting to the trek of a famous tribe, the Delaware, from Siberia to the Atlantic, the *Wallam Olum* has a similar appeal to scholars and others seeking to justify both the theory of the Bering land bridge and tribal origin sagas. But it is too good to be true. The Delaware know only too well that they have always lived on this land, this back of the turtle.

*Jay Miller*

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**Robert Davidson, *Eagle of the Dawn*.** Edited by Ian Thom, with essays by Aldona Jonaitis, Marianne Jones, and Ian M. Thom. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1993. 180 pages. \$50 cloth.

*Robert Davidson, Eagle of the Dawn* is a catalog of the recent one-man exhibit of retrospective works by this highly developed and inspired leader in contemporary Haida art. Only the second one-person show of First Nations artwork to be held at the Vancouver Art Gallery of British Columbia (the first was the Bill Reid retrospective in 1974), the show and catalog contain artworks by Davidson that span a period from 1959 through the time of the 1993 exhibit. Davidson's work includes sculptures and relief carving in wood, argillite, and bronze; engravings and fabrications in silver and gold; serigraphs; and paintings on paper as well as on traditional skin hand drums. The catalog is well organized around the essays, separating the body of works into three chronological sections (1960–79, 1980–87, and 1988 to the present) that alternate illustrations of works from these periods with each of the differently focused articles. Thom's essay, which is the one to address Davidson's work most directly, employs a number of pieces from the exhibition within its text to illustrate progressive changes over time in Davidson's conception of and skill in work-

ing with traditional art in a variety of media and for differing purposes.

Ulli Steltzer's excellent photographs of Davidson, his family, and his various apprentices at work are intermingled with the texts, providing, among other views, graphic illustrations of the scale of some of the objects, from delicate and tiny to monumental. Such glimpses of the human involvement with the materials and processes that create the finished visual works furnish a welcome and valuable insight. The object photographs are mostly by Trevor Mills (the majority of the serigraphs and paintings are photographed by Robert Keziere, with other photographers providing images as needed). For the most part, Mills's photographs are of excellent quality, allowing the viewer to fully appreciate both the bold and more subtle modeling of forms, the rich colors of wood and paint, the details of fine painting, and the textures of natural materials such as cedar bark, feathers, and hair. However, certain of the images (especially the Thunderbird Panel, p. 145, and the Dogfish Platter, p. 81) suffer from pathetically flat lighting and/or overexposure that greatly diminish the effect of the pieces. In person, the Dogfish Panel is deeply relieved and full of subtle undercuts and the soft doming of forms, none of which is apparent in the washed-out photo presented. This piece could have been better treated with color, sculpture-enhancing lighting (as was the case with most of the masks and totem maquettes), and possibly some details, in order to reveal the true nature and excellence of the work. Viewed in the context of the exhibit as the latest of several large relief panel carvings included, this masterful example constitutes an incredible culmination of experience in sculpture as applied to an essentially two-dimensional object and, as such, deserves much better recognition.

Missing from both the exhibition (with one or two exceptions) and the catalog are photos of the full-sized monumental works to accompany the beautiful maquettes, a couple of which are only shown unfinished. As interesting as even the incomplete models are, especially to other sculptors, one's interest in and appreciation for the scale and massiveness of the many monumental totems is neither fully addressed nor satisfied, and this seems an unfortunate omission. I can imagine that some casual viewers of the VAG exhibit may not even have been fully aware that twenty-, thirty-, and fifty-foot versions of these incredible scale models even existed, nor how impressive and beautiful they truly are. The reason given for this (in a short endnote to the Thom essay) is that

Davidson and Ulli Steltzer soon will come out with a book specifically about the poles and their making. It seems, though, that the full thunder of such a volume would not have been precluded by some shots of the full-sized poles here, and especially in the VAG exhibit itself.

The three interesting and valuable essays each address aspects of Robert Davidson's career and development from different viewpoints: Jonaitis's on the evolution and status of Haida art in the generations from whom Davidson inherited the traditions, Thom's on the progression of Davidson's working lifetime, and Jones's on the relationship of Robert Davidson to the greater universe of contemporary Haida culture and tradition. Each contains worthy insights into both the artist and the intriguing traditions of which he is such an exemplary practitioner.

Certainly, however, the most revealing commentaries come in the words of the artist himself, as well as those of Haida elders and artistic contemporaries, which are thoughtfully designed into columns at each margin, flanking bodies of the associated texts. These are quoted from interviews conducted by various scholars and/or from recordings of addresses given by the artist at public events such as pole raisings and exhibit openings. The understanding and the articulate and intuitive points of view that Davidson and his Haida contemporaries hold regarding the role of the artist in Haida culture both today and yesterday add a great richness to the texts.

Jonaitis's essay, entitled *Traders of Tradition: The History of Haida Art*, endeavors to put a historical perspective on the evolution of Haida art traditions: from the time of first interaction with Europeans until the lifetime of the well known nineteenth- and twentieth-century master and great grandfather of Robert Davidson, Charles Edensaw; through the transitional years of the twentieth century when art production was at an ebb; and the connection of this cultural and historic background to the work of Davidson and his contemporaries.

The essay discusses and challenges the commonly expressed though not wholly accurate notion that Haida art, and Northwest Coast native art in general, declined after the deaths of Edensaw and his contemporaries to a dormant, even nonexistent state, where it remained until its "rediscovery" (too often characterized as being initiated by outside sources) in the last thirty or so years. In addition to Jonaitis's own arguments, the essay quotes profusely from a wide variety of historical accounts and art historical

theoreticians. (In fact, it appears as though the obviously well-read author has included at least as many words and character bytes in the endnotes as there are in the body of the text!) The essay emphasizes, very appropriately, that the arts of the Haida did not totally cease with the passing of Edensaw and his generation as its last “traditional” proponents, but rather evolved throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, re-forming into productions less numerous but, by certain standards, no less traditional than those created during the artistic florescence of the nineteenth century. Jonaitis makes note of the fact that Haida (and certainly other Northwest Coast) art traditions were passed directly to Davidson’s generation through the hands of their own native relations. (Among the Kwakwaka’wakw, for instance, there has been a pretty solid, continuous line of artistic production since the nineteenth century.) That interest and scholarship from outside native culture should refocus on the kinds of positive change and evolution that have come about as a response to the forces of acculturation, rather than blindly regretting the demise of the pure, traditional forms of the past, is a timely and worthwhile message. To quote from Jonaitis’s text,

The discourse of colonialism, with its message of deteriorating cultural presences that situates the dominant society in a superior and victorious position has, happily, begun to be dismantled, to be replaced by a more liberating discourse of post-colonial cultural endurance in the global community (p. 5).

Today, of course, as the work of Davidson highlighted in this volume demonstrates, an explosion of Haida artists in the last thirty years has picked up where the older and highly esteemed masters such as Edensaw left off. These artists were preceded by a generation or more among whom very few were the carriers of these traditions, and even fewer were encouraged to pay attention to them. A number of these transitional period artists are given mention in Jonaitis’s essay, and this is welcome recognition. (This writer was particularly pleased to see mention of the art and influence of argillite carver Pat McGuire, a contemporary of Davidson who provided mutual support and inspiration. McGuire was evidently a tortured soul, a skilled and talented artist somewhat before his time, and one for whom the elevated respect and support for Haida art and artists of the revival came a little too late.

Henry Young, an argillite carver who did quite admirable work as late as the 1930s, is not mentioned but also played a role during this important period.)

Jonaitis's arguments are worthy, mostly valid, and important as part of a reformation of the study and understanding of native culture and art by nonnatives. Some of the arguments, though, seem to rely on varying semantic interpretations of the subject at hand, such as frequently making a blanket connection, rather than a distinction, between statements concerning the demise of cultural practices and institutions that traditionally motivated the art, and statements concerning the demise or maintenance of specifically art traditions themselves. This results in her quoting some experienced scholars and historians in a manner that is slightly out of context. Loss of "cultural traditions" in the general sense—social structure, language, and institutions such as the potlatch where the social structure, beliefs, and expressive traditions of dance and song were reinforced—ought not be equated with loss of technologies and expressions that are specific to art, for one concept is not entirely contained or limited within the other. Knowledgeable scholars with decades of direct experience with native art and artists have gotten somewhat misrepresented in the process.

Haida culture in the general sense was immensely impacted and became essentially dormant (as remarked upon in many of the quotes from native speakers), while the visual arts, once largely motivated by internal cultural practices, continued under response to new motivations that were largely external. Art's continuation and maintenance in an essentially new world is ultimately the gist of the essay, and overall it accomplishes this quite well.

In addition to the kinds of influences that are discussed in the article are others of perhaps equal importance that do not receive direct mention. Among the subjects touched upon in the quotes from Davidson and others and in the Jones essay is the psychological and spiritual climate of the postcolonial holocaust. During the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Haida tradition as a complete entity was discouraged not only by missionaries and government workers but by the dominant culture as a whole. Nativeness and traditional culture were denigrated on a daily basis in the lives of the First Peoples, from the residential schools and churches to the stores and workplaces of villages, small towns, and urban centers. If not regarded by the majority as merely backward and useless,

native culture was deemed downright evil by the spiritually righteous (and it still is in some fundamental circles today). The stories of depression, despair, alcohol, and abuse reflect the diminished status of traditional native culture and art and frame the resultant loss of pride and self-esteem to which whole generations were subject.

That great inspiration and art were seldom seen in this sociological climate should come as no surprise, regardless of the persistent efforts of the few who carried the traditions through this long, dark period. The low monetary value placed on native artworks in this period can also be considered a factor in the manner of artistic expression: In the 1880s and 1890s, a dollar a foot for wooden poles or a dollar an inch for argillite went a lot farther than the same prices did fifty years later in the midst of a world-wide depression and the loss of traditional resources. That art, language, tradition, and oral history survived at all is the miracle that is being celebrated today. The current revival of the visual arts within these cultures owes more to the passing of suppressive colonial attitudes resulting from reeducation of the majority society than to the "rediscovery" of traditional art conventions by Bill Reid, Bill Alamo, and others. Although their work certainly has supported and assisted the revival, it is more a reflection of this pivotal change than the cause of it. The immensely increased respect for native traditions that began with the cultural revolution of the late 1960s and has grown geometrically since then has had a lot to do with the depth and intensity of their revival.

Jonaitis's essay contains a lengthy discussion concerning the qualitative status of that too-frequently misunderstood category of art "made for sale," an unfortunate distinction that is often made without regard to certain realities, at least in Northwest Coast art history. One can appreciate Jonaitis's intent to reexamine the concept and its usual expression. She comments, "The internal contradiction between authenticity of style and inauthenticity of function of Haida argillite . . . may be more imaginary than real." Her assertion, certainly appropriate, is that argillite and other for-sale commodities should be viewed as part of a larger Haida tradition of making such items for trade, beginning with the first contact. Not all are necessarily degraded efforts for outsiders. A careful look, though, at what actually exists in many museum collections is very revealing. The common assumption is that only certain kinds of objects fit this category, such as argillite, model totem poles or houses, portrait masks, and the like, and that

everything else was made for native use and therefore must be of better artistic quality.

The fact is that a great number of objects that look like pieces made for use do not show any signs of such use. Many wooden bowls, horn spoons, masks, boxes, chests, and fishhooks were, in fact, produced as for-sale objects. When one becomes truly aware of the work of both the known and the unnamed majority of artists of the past through the "signature" of their styles, it becomes apparent that great artists made great work, whether it was created for use or sale. It would be difficult to find a true qualitative difference in an Edensaw argillite plate or in one of his ivory, silver, and wood walking sticks made for sale, compared to a more traditional object he made exclusively for native use. Today the same applies to Robert Davidson's art.

In addition, not all traditional art made in the past was particularly great, although the aura of an object that was used and therefore culturally "validated" seems illogically to enhance its value. If one looks carefully at all the Northwest Coast art, including Haida, made for internal cultural use and now contained in museums worldwide, it becomes apparent that aesthetic greatness is neither possessed by all nor intrinsic to its internal cultural value. The true cultural value of Northwest Coast art lies in what it says about the history and status of the person, family, or clan that owns it; the physical appearance of an object, while certainly appreciated and capable of enhancing the human value of a piece, is secondary to its cultural function. As pointed out in a quotation from Navajo artist Conrad House in Marianne Jones's essay, native cultures often "have no word for art . . . because there is no need . . . to separate these concepts from our real life."

Ian Thom's essay charts the expressive career of Robert Davidson, illustrated by the amazing progression of works produced by his hand in response to an ever-widening variety of influences and changes in his life and work. Viewing the selected pieces from the exhibit, one sees, step-by-step, the astounding acceleration in Davidson's grasp, mastery, and playful sense of invention and innovation within the Haida tradition. Like his great-grandfather and the most inspired of his contemporaries, Davidson continually redefines the borders of this tradition. The title of Davidson's 360-degree-view totem pole "Breaking the Totem Barrier" aptly describes what he does with so much of his art: He stretches the conceptual boundaries of Haida tradition, tempering these moves with intuitive knowledge, understanding, and sensitiv-



ity to the central truths of the art form. As Thom remarks, Davidson has experienced "a growth in consciousness and awareness which has led to an expansion of [the Haida artistic] vocabulary." Thom has a good understanding of Haida art and Davidson's treatment and mastery of it, and he skillfully articulates little insights that reveal some of the inner workings of Davidson's designs.

For the most part, Thom is careful to widen his focus on Davidson to include references to other important historic landmarks in the overall Northwest Coast revival. One gets the feeling at times, though, that his knowledge of Davidson's art in particular is more complete than his awareness of the entire Northwest Coast tradition. In a few cases, he appears to credit Davidson with the invention of certain aspects that he uses in his work, rather than with employing these aspects, which have always existed in the tradition, in new and masterful ways. Quoting Joan Lowndes, Thom writes, "On silver bracelets, Davidson 'decided sometimes to tilt his central motif, thereby setting up a different form flow'" (p. 73). The slanting of design movements across the width of a bracelet was, in fact, a regular trait of Edensaw's engraved work, of which Davidson certainly is aware. Similarly, Thom asserts that Davidson was the first to explore asymmetry in bracelet designs, when, in fact, asymmetrical Northwest Coast bracelet designs, though certainly rare, have existed for a hundred years (see *Box of Daylight*, #211, p. 124, for a Haida example) and were the norm in Tlingit silver bangles made in the 1950s and 1960s by engraver Billy Wilson and others.

Other techniques are introduced in the description of Davidson's work as if they were new to the tradition, from single-hatching in eye sockets to blue primary formlines, when they, too, can be noted in the efforts of artists long ago (blue formlines were originally made famous by the old Haida "Dying Warrior" mask now in the DeMenil collection). Of course, Davidson certainly has invented some truly new applications: radial single-hatching around main ovoids (in the areas called "tertiary" by Alamo), and the asymmetrical placement of inner ovoids or U-shapes within parent formlines (both seen in the bracelet on p. 42). Further, he has treated all of the Haida tradition in new and refreshingly original ways that have helped the world to see the art's conventions and perceived limitations in a new light. For these and his other accomplishments, Robert Davidson richly deserves the spotlight that a

catalog and exhibit of this magnitude focuses on him, his family, and his associates.

Marianne Jones's essay sheds light on Davidson's career and leadership that balances nicely with the other articles. She describes in straightforward, personal terms the kinds of adaptations, new motivations, and continued developments that Haida art—and Davidson's in particular—has undergone in the time since first contact. This perspective from one of Davidson's contemporaries (talented in her own right as a speaker and actor in numerous film productions) perfectly complements the other articles and brief quotes contained in this volume and fills in the picture of Haida art and Robert Davidson's place in it.

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**Sáanii Dahataal: The Women Are Singing: Poems and Stories.** By Luci Tapahonso. Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1993. Volume 23, Sun Tracks. 100 pages. \$19.95 cloth; \$9.95 paper.

Luci Tapahonso's work possesses a truly authentic voice, and for that reason alone it sets some refreshing standards in today's multicultural reality of emerging alternative poetic traditions. This book—volume 23 of the redoubtable Sun Tracks Series—illustrates that point exceptionally well. These poems alternately sing and speak with poetic purity and linguistic authority, as they describe the full spectrum of everyday Navajo life on and off the reservation.

Let me first explain why I call Tapahonso's voice authentic: Her language rings true; it is that of Diné people employing *bilagáanaa bizaad*, or Anglo speech, in their own peculiar way. By employing singular phonic configurations, distinctive patterns of syntax, and a disarmingly unpretentious diction, these poems display a uniquely Navajo brand of English capable of transmitting complex ideas and deft word play characteristic of that tribe's own *dinébizaad*.

"The combination of song, prayer, and poetry is a natural form of expression for many Navajo people," Tapahonso declares in her introduction. This statement reaffirms their love for language and their special way of using it to generate the power that accompanies knowledge, awareness, and feeling. "The value of the spoken