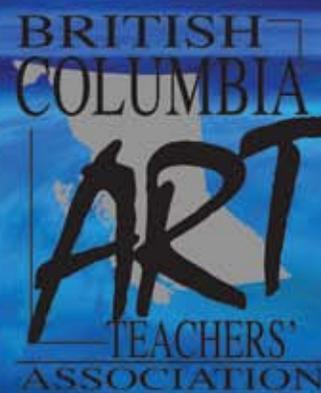


ECO ART 2



BCATA

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Editors' Message

We greatly appreciate the interest generated in this second issue of Eco Art. It was obvious there were many more voices to be heard and many more stories to tell. Our attendance at the joint conference of the BC Art Teachers Association and the Canadian Society of Education through Art held in Vancouver last fall took us to sessions where presenters were dealing with art and sustainability, recycling, and the aesthetics of special places in Nature. We encouraged some of the presenters to prepare articles for the Journal and here they are.



As we shift our gaze from Eco Art, we are confronted by another compelling topic, Art and Design to be featured in the next issue of the Journal. The Call for articles related to this topic is outlined on a special page; we encourage you to respond.

Design has many connotations and meanings. One definition suggests it is a way of organizing visual experience, bringing order, consistency and unity to the things we invent, fashion or construct. In art education, it represents a core of teaching and learning. Design affects many aspects of our daily lives: the places we inhabit, what we wear, and even our means of travel. It is a driving force in the unique ideas brought forth by architecture, an integral part of the best planning that goes into the production of vehicles, and it is a central aspect of the inventiveness found in fashion and garments.

Please assist us in producing another fine issue of the Journal by reviewing videos, books, or websites dealing with outstanding designers and programs. Share an experience from a fashion show, critique a new building that appears in your community or better yet, write an article that tells us how novel design ideas are being incorporated into your art program. We encourage you to use visual examples at every opportunity to tell your story.

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This Journal is submitted to ERIC: The articles appear in RIE - Resources in Education, and are available on microfiche and hard copy through EDRA - ERIC Document Reproduction Service.

Manuscripts are welcome at all times and on any topic related to Art Education. Preferred format is Microsoft Word for the PC, in regular, full-page type layout. Photos may be sent by regular mail or as attachments as high resolution JPEGs (300 dpi.).

CONTENTS

- 4 ISLANDS OF KNOWING: MAPPING A SENSE OF PLACE
Linda Apps
- 12 SPIRIT OF THE BOW
Bill Zuk
- 24 THREE RIVERS / WILD WATERS, SACRED PLACES EXHIBITION
Scott Marsden
- 32 RIVERSONG: CELEBRATING LIFE ALONG THE COLQUITZ
Diane Thorpe
- 38 TED HARRISON: TEACHER - PAINTER
Katherine Gibson
- 44 ECO-YOUTH: enVISIONing A GREEN FUTURE
Regan Rasmussen
- 48 WASTE NOT, MAKE ART: AN HOMAGE TO MATERIAL ARTS EDUCATORS SUE BARTLEY AND STAN HORNER
Laurel Hart and Zac Kenny
- 53 ECO ART 2 REVIEWS
Bill Zuk
- 56 WHY ART IS ESSENTIAL FOR SUSTAINABILITY
Sharon McCoubrey
- 62 ART EDUCATION IN UGANDA: TAPPING LOCAL RESOURCES FOR SUSTAINABLE EDUCATION THROUGH ART
Mike Sembiro



SPIRIT OF THE BOW: GAZING AND IMAGINING

by Bill Zuk

Bill Zuk is Professor Emeritus in art education at the University of Victoria. He spent part of a summer as artist-in-residence at Num-ti-jah in the picturesque Bow Lake area of Alberta's Rocky Mountains.

Introduction

Parts of this article were extracted from journal notes and sketchbook entries. They appear here in italics and are therefore written in the first person and present tense.

We are journeying to the heart of the Canadian Rockies where the thunderous roar of avalanches echo from valley to valley as spring in the high country slowly emerges from a thick blanket of winter. It's early June and the run-off waters of surrounding glaciers are trickling and flowing vigorously into Bow Lake, the headwaters of the Bow River which wends its way through Lake Louise, Banff, and Calgary.

I tell everyone who wants to know our general destination, especially Calgarians, that much of the water that flows through the foothills of the Rockies comes from the waters of the Bow and other glaciers. The word Bow or *Makhabn* refers to reeds that grew along the banks of the river and were used to make hunting bows by local indigenous people, the Peigan.

For the more curious, my exact location will be Num-ti-jah whose name in the Stoney language means *pine marten*, a small fur bearing animal (Wooding, 1982). There is much to learn about local indigenous languages and also a great deal to learn about the ancient peoples who travelled through the Rocky Mountains on their way to hunting and trapping grounds or to participate in rituals and ceremonies such as spirit quests and sundances. Wade Davis (2009) reminds us there is a continuous chain of knowledge and wisdom available to us from ancient cultures that offer "other options, other possibilities, other ways of thinking and interacting with the earth (p.2)."

Num-ti-jah, a large rustic, log-hewn lodge was constructed by guide and outfitter, Jimmy Simpson and his family in the early part of the last century. In the 1940s, artists were invited to participate in an artist-in-residence program leading to the establishment of a permanent collection. Artist Carl Rungius painted wildlife in the region as noted by Whyte and Hart (1988) and Render (1974). Well known for his prints and paintings, W. J. Phillips also spent time in the area recording the spectacular beauty (Boulet, 1981; Cochran, 1988). I am humbled by the reputation of these artists and although my assignment involves creating art on site, it will also include sharing ideas with staff and guests, installing an exhibition, and leaving a piece of work in the permanent collection.

The aerodynamic pizza slice

A curious looking arrow shaped box (Figure1) sits on the roof of our car. It contains several pieces of sculpture for the exhibition at Num-ti-jah. People waiting at the ferry and other stops ask: “What’s in the box?” I smile impishly and reply: “It’s a streamlined slab of mountain. Can you imagine that?” They look quizzical. I go on: “It’s actually a giant pizza slice that will feed us on our trip.” This usually produces smiles or gales of laughter. The pizza slice box actually contains a set of triangular figures to be assembled into a pyramid structure celebrating mountains and wildlife.

I take great delight in the playful generation of ideas (Zuk, 2008), the nonsense word play with bystanders is a perfect example of how my imagination connects with exaggerated humour and creative ideas.



Figure 1. Aerodynamic pizza slice

Arriving at Num-ti-jah

As we turn off the main highway and bump along the gravel road leading to the lodge, I am awed by the presence of towering mountains and their magnificent beauty. This stirs me to pen a poem called ‘Corridors of Power.’

Corridors of Power

The corridors

Of power

Are in the Rockies

From Jasper to Louise

Towering, triangular

Faceted and scarred

They lift our spirits

Beyond

The wranglings

Of everyday life

No greater power

Than in their midst

Protecting and preserving

Questions raised by naturalists would invariably involve protecting and preserving wilderness areas. However, I also have questions related to my role here as a sculptor and landscape artist. How will I explore the grandeur of sweeping vistas? Capture the essence and purity of sparkling ice and clarity of spring water? The glory of ancient mountains rising in celestial space? As these questions swirl in my mind, the tranquility of the surroundings settles my thoughts. I concentrate on mountains (Figures 2 and 3) that appear as illuminated energy forces distilled into simplified shapes and forms (Bullock, 1968), rising into ethereal, sunlit space.

These metaphysical abstractions remind me of comments made by Swann in Piper (1975) who suggests that some artists objectify their thoughts about the cosmos without

portraying them realistically. I sense that the life force of these mountains is extraordinary; communicating this idea to anyone who will listen is important.

In its preamble, the website for the United Nations Earth Charter (2009) emphasizes that we have reached a critical moment in Earth's history; our response must be that of joining together to declare our responsibility "to one another, to the greater community of life, and its future generations." The preamble also stresses that Earth is our home and "has provided the conditions essential

to life's evolution." We depend on a healthy biosphere with all its ecological systems being kept in harmony and balance. The Bow Valley is no exception and should be guided by the principles of the Earth Charter which states: "We need to protect and restore the integrity and diversity of ecological systems and adapt patterns to safeguard the sustainability of regenerative capacities of our planet." The task of protecting and caring for the Bow is as important at its headwaters as it is downstream where water quality has been compromised.

Gazing and imagining

The experience of gazing and imagining are key elements in bringing purpose and clarity to my artwork. Gazing engages my attention in several ways: it focuses me on formal qualities of detail, movement, and composition. However, it also nurtures a relaxed and unhurried attitude (Freke, 2000) allowing for intuitive wisdom to rise to the fore.

To become more intimately acquainted with the wilderness of the Bow, I seek out high places where I can see far into the distance. At other times I peer into the close-up world of rocks, lichens and other forms of plant life for an intimate view of my surroundings. My camera and sketchbook are readily available but I usually defer putting pencil to paper or camera to eye until my thoughts are given a chance to linger and become thoroughly absorbed by the sights, sounds and aromas. Moments will often pass into minutes and minutes into longer passages of time. It seems like the physical world melts away as a mental shift in consciousness takes hold, allowing for daydreaming and imaginative thinking to occur.

Imagining involves inspirational thinking and toying with fanciful ideas. I recall an instance when my thoughts ran wild on the edge of Bow Lake:

As the ice melts, I envision brook trout (Wooding, 1994) hidden deep in its waters. Beyond the ideas shown in Figure 4, I visualize fish stirring lazily and then rising slowly from a pudding stone bottom to welcoming rays of sunlight. Gathering strength, they break the surface and leap high in the air in a joyful burst of energy, their shiny bodies twisting and landing with a rainbow splash that fades in the translucent mist.

This anecdote reveals some of the dynamics of inspirational thinking that, for me, grows out of gazing and imagining.



Figure 2. *Sun glow peak.* Artist proof 2 1/2 x 3"



Figure 3. *Radiant mountain.* Artist proof 2 1/2 x 3"



Figure 4. *Imagining fish*. Lightbox (16 x 20 in/ 40.6 x 50.8 cm)

Awakening

Notes from my sketchbook highlight some revelations about the Bow during one early morning:

I awaken to the soft glow of early morning sun streaming into our room. The rustic window of the lodge is open and I breathe deeply of the cool, crisp fresh air. Across the wide expanse of lake, the Crowfoot Glacier stands proudly with its saddleback crust of snow; its talus slopes plunge deeply into ragged edges of shoreline ice. A few patches of open water invite the first migrating birds; the high pitch sound of a sandpiper breaks the stillness on a sandy shore and the tremulous cry of a loon wavers through the milky mist. This sight awakens my senses to the realization that birds have migrated to the Bow for thousands of years; it is indeed a special place if not a sacred one.

Numerous mountain ranges surround the Bow. Tree and Crowfoot (Figure 5) is typical of the steep rock faces and pockets of snow that gather to form glaciers. A tall tree fills the sky with its spreading branches, gathering clouds into its bosom. The distant lake is overrun with floating pans of ice.

Weathered trees often venerate the pathways of the lake with their silvery grey. They have long lost the ability to regenerate but season after season they stand proudly, defying the avalanches, the punishing snows, and the grinding piles of ice that push forcefully from the nearby lake. Cloud Tree, St. Nicholas (Figure 6) depicts one of the smaller mountains in the area. Its gentle slopes and smooth mounds of snow spread like a skirt around its base. A tall, curving alpine spruce arches over the peak in an embrace that ensures its spiritual connection with the sky.



Figure 5: *Tree and Crowfoot*. Artist proof (17.5x25 in./44.5x63.5 cm)

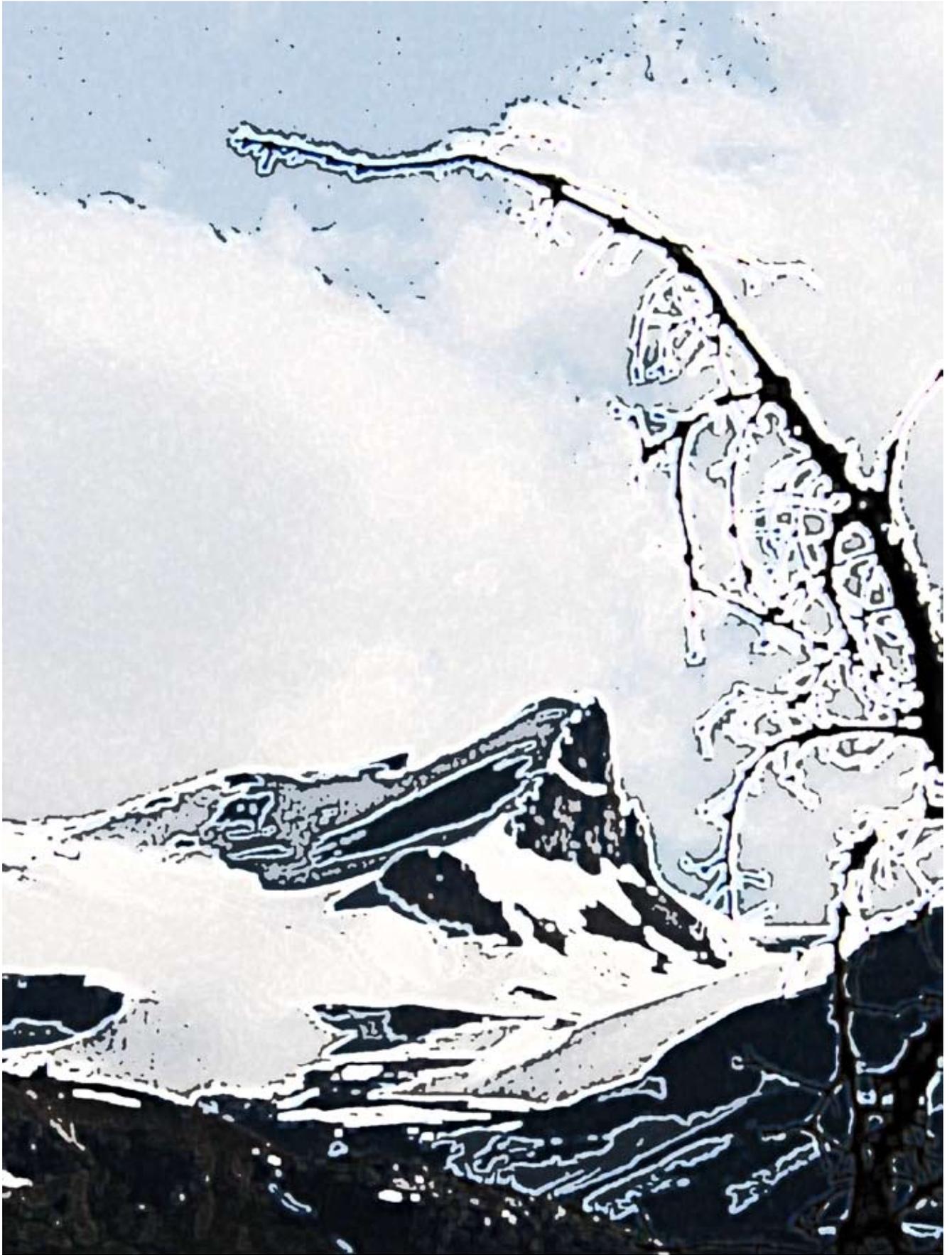


Figure 6: *Cloud tree, St. Nicholas*. Artist proof (17.5x25 in./44.5x63.5 cm)

Cameras and opticals

Kraulis (1980) explains that the camera is not only a device for recording what we see; it also serves as a way of expressing a mood, evocative feeling or the strength and character of a subject. When the camera was invented over 150 years ago, it created a new way of seeing, very different from direct experience (Coke, 1978). Of course, the recent development of digital cameras with a speed, efficiency and ability to connect with a computer environment has opened up the range of artistic possibilities (Davis, 2009).

My digital camera is always at my side on outings. Interchangeable lenses (Figure 7) are readily available; a macro lens allows me to “zoom in” on glittering ice crystals, delicate blossoms or tiny inclusions in a glacial pebble. A telephoto lens is also invaluable; there is nothing more satisfying than capturing the lumbering movements of a distant bear plundering a patch of blueberries, raking its claws through tangled bushes in a frenzy of feeding. And what could be more delightful than capturing the glow of the Aurora Borealis shifting and twisting like a diaphanous curtain dancing in the night?



Figure 7. Camera with macro and telephoto lenses (personal photo)

Decisive moment

Grundberg and Gauss (1987) suggest that photography has attained unprecedented prominence and ceased to be regarded solely as a tool for objective documentation. An account in my sketchbook readily supports this contention:

As we stroll the winding pathways of the lake each morning, we see the water frozen with a wafer thinness. Along a steep embankment, ragged pieces of ice lie strewn like a broken necklace. The sun emerges from a cloud and transforms the scene into a scintillating diamond chandelier. Light bounces from one ice sheet to another into wide crevices and shallow pools.

A website dedicated to celebrated photographer, Henri Cartier Bresson (2009), contains the words “decisive moment where photography is the simultaneous recognition, in a fraction of a second, of the significance of an event as well as of a precise organization of forms which give the event its proper impression”.

My sketchbook notes align with the “decisive moment” of Bresson’s words:

I position myself strategically with my camera held at shoulder level. The shutter clicks with wild abandon as I shift and tilt in a variety of positions that would puzzle an exercise specialist. A guest from the lodge approaches, camera in hand, and hails: “What are you doing? What do you see? A brief conversation ensues and soon, he too, discovers the captivating abstractions created by sun mingling with ice and snow. We continue like boxers dipping and weaving in slow motion capturing the glinting contrasts, the textures of smooth and rough, and the subtle reflections and translucencies of this fantasy world. Suddenly, the sun goes into hiding. The wonder of the moment is lost but a thrill remains in pouring over images displayed on the LCD (liquid crystal display) monitors of our cameras.

Drawing materials

According to Simmons and Winer (1979), drawing comes from a desire to create an image, express a feeling or simply engage in a leisurely activity. It offers ways to develop visual awareness and increase our understanding of the immediate surroundings and the broader world. Simpson (1987) indicates that drawing ideas, tools and techniques play a fundamental role in the artistic process that cannot be overemphasized.

In the history of drawing, a variety of materials such as pencils, pens, charcoal, and chalk have been used by artists (Brommer, 1972; Leslie, 1984). I always have a simple collection of basic materials at my disposal contained in a handmade, roll-up fabric carrying case shown in Figure 8:

- Lead pencils: 2B – 9B (soft lead) and 4H – 6H (hard lead)
- Graphite pencil with holder (2B)
- Technical pencils: .05 – .33 (fine lead)
- Tortillons (blending stumps)
- Pencil sharpeners: mechanical, sanding pad, X-acto knife or jack knife
- Pens: ballpoint pen and micron markers for fine ink drawing
- Erasers: Pink Pearl, white drafting plastic, and kneaded
- Small ruler (6 inch)
- Scissors

Other materials can be added to the kit such as paint brushes and watercolours but there is merit in using simple materials to quickly and efficiently gather first impressions that can be used for later development.



Figure 8. *Drawing materials.* (photograph of my sketch kit)

Sketchbook

Over the years, I have championed the benefits of small sketches as proposed by Hamm (1972) because they represent a quick and efficient way of expressing a sequence of ideas within the format of a single page. Small sketches that fit into several bordered areas encourage fluency and the kind of sequencing found in the panel art of comics (Eisner, 1985). My choice of sketchbook is an 80 lb., 11 x 14 inch (33 x 23.3 cm) coil- ring that easily fits into my backpack.

A mat board template with window openings is ideal for creating sketches with borders. Purchased templates with a variety of openings including circles and triangles, add to the diversity of formats. One sequence in my sketchbook shows mountains distilled into geometric shapes and pyramid forms (Figure 9). Dark shaded areas were produced with soft leaded 2B pencils while light shaded areas were created with hard leaded 4H pencils. The addition of fine lines and textures required a 0.3 mm mechanical pencil while tortillons were used for blending areas of light and dark. Sometimes my sketches are developed into sculptures by creasing, folding and cutting pieces of paper to mimic the sharp angles of mountains in a fashion similar to those shown in a video *Between the folds* (2009). This gives me a stronger sense of how to interpret my artwork in three dimensional form.

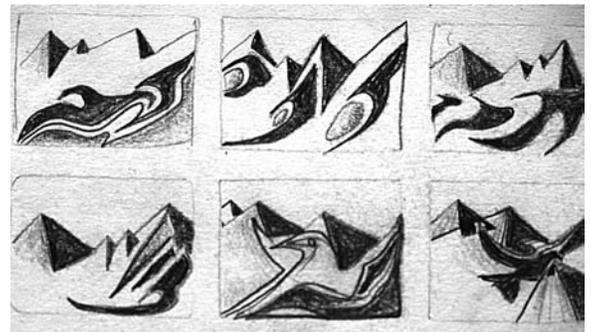


Figure 9. *Mountain sketches* (personal photograph)

Some of my notes provide an analysis of the mountain images in Figure 9:

I am becoming much more aware of the basic structure of mountains and the forces that created them. Triangles and pyramids emerge as dominant forms. Some spread out in a chainlike fashion, others stretch into elongated triangles, expressing the tensions and forces of upheaval over millions of years. Some sketches show precipitous inclines, slippery smooth slopes, and razor thin peaks exaggerating the unique quality of mountains. Accompanying some of the images are undulating, hidden bird forms (Seckel, 2004) that blend into the rhythms of the mountains. A few amorphous shapes appear in the sky, a strong reminder of ravens flying over the Bow Valley.

Musical sounds in ice

The changes in the season are becoming dramatically noticeable with a warming trend that deteriorates the ice, sending rivulets of water churning and bubbling into Bow Lake.

It is late evening and the gentle breeze is tinged with the fragrance of alpine needles. Its soft breath drifts over a dried creek bed of pebbles on the valley floor, absorbing the heat of the day. The nearby lake is still held captive by large, free-floating pans of blue and green ice but deep crisscross scratches and widening crevices are sure signs of a melting destiny. On the shore, jagged slabs force themselves into angled piles where they drip and trickle incessantly, a strong indication of the impending summer.

A tinkling sound breaks the silence as spiny needles of ice break, plunge and then pop up to the surface in a bobbing ballet motion. The return of a gentle breeze merges the ice particles into a dancing symphony of slushing and sliding with high pitched creaks and squeaks like no other I have known.



Figure 10. *Bow mist*. Artist proof (17.5 x 25 in/44.5 x 63.5 cm)



Figure 11. *Bow glacier*. Artist proof (17.5 x 25 in/44.5 x 63.5 cm)

The Bow has sustained life for millennia; its musical ice dramas have awed audiences for as long as anyone can remember. Whatever dramas occur within the lake are matched by the rumble of thundering avalanches in higher terrain. Some glaciers nestle among the mountain ranges in saddleback dips while others hang precariously on cliffs waiting for an accident to happen. Figure 10 emphasizes bold architectural forms cast in a soft glow of misty light while Figure 11 features sheets of spring ice spreading like a stage below the glacier. The soft blue tones, slivers of soft grey, and gaping crevices strongly suggest that winter is shedding its coat. To complete the scene, a lone, twinkling star rises above a dip in the glacier, pinpointing the sacred source of water.



Figure 12. *Spirit bear*. Lightbox. (10 x 13 in/25.4 x 33 cm)

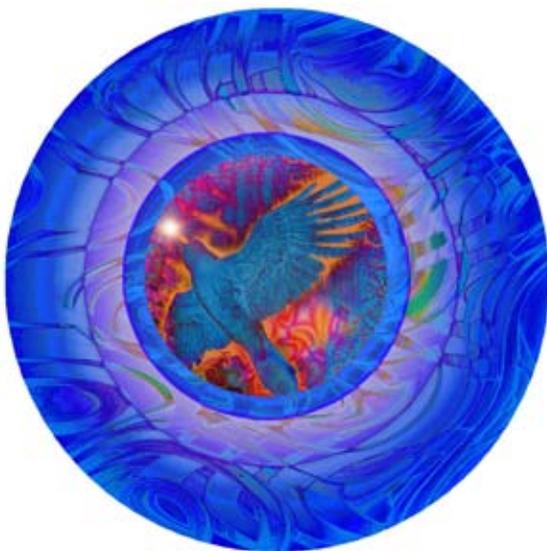


Figure 13. *Raven sun*. Print (17.5 x 25 in/44.5 x 63.5 cm)

Iconic symbols

Wildlife on the Bow has provided us with many enthralling experiences ranging from the dandelion-eating black bears living in the meadow areas to the more rarely seen grizzly that occupies remote areas of the national parks. Of course, the raven is a common sight with its shiny jet-black coat and deep-throated gurgle. Both the

bear and the raven have become poster favourites and their graphic silhouettes appear on a multitude of signs, bulletins and banners (Ibou, 1991).

My notes reveal a poignant anecdote recounting some activities with bears and ravens:

A grizzly mother and her two cubs roamed the grounds below the second story window of our lodgings in the wee hours of the morning. Staff members were cautious and feared for their safety as they made their way from nearby accommodations to the lodge. Fortunately, park wardens responded quickly to the call to disperse the intruders, which they quickly did with noisy “poppers.” Ravens watched the scene with avid interest and within a short time resumed their activities, strutting back and forth on the grounds as if they owned the place.

It is no small wonder the National Park system in the Rockies regards the bear and the raven as iconic symbols.

Bear and raven mythology

There are numerous mythologies associated with bears and ravens that are worth noting.

The poster and website campaigns of the 2009 United Nations International Year of Astronomy encourage us to experience the awe and wonder of the stars and galaxies and to become informed about the richness of constellation myths from around the world. Ursa Major, commonly known as the Great Bear, is a common sight in the northern hemisphere and is the subject of numerous myths. I have always imagined the constellation as a spirit bear (Russell, 2002) that roams the skies, dancing through twinkling stars and shafts of blue tinted light (Figure 12).

On British Columbia’s West Coast, the raven (Angell, 1978) is an important aboriginal symbol in the hierarchy of clan systems. Raven mythology contains numerous stories about heroic deeds, trickster antics, and events related to stealing the sun (Reid in Brighthurst, 2000). In Figure 13, Raven is featured in a circular format stealing the sun, while the bottom of the print contains a sequence of images, some showing the bold personality of the bird strutting with an air of confidence and assurance.

To create a luminous drama celebrating the glorious radiance of the sun, a cedar cabinet construction topped with a round chrome-encased lamp is featured in Figures 14 and 15. At the center of the dome is a mandala portraying a blue raven catching the sun in its beak. Around this centerpiece, several tiny ravens circle in full flight. To emphasize the importance of the *stolen* sun, several wooden raven cutouts are juxtaposed with yellow amber cabachons (suns) set in sterling silver bezels or rims (Untracht, 1982) on the front and sides of the cabinet.

As a final tribute to the Bow, a tall, eight-foot wooden veneer construction of dancing figures (Figures 16 and 17) extends upward and leans inward to form a pinnacle. Between each animated figure stands a mother bear and her cubs; they symbolize a call to protect wilderness areas and their diversity.



Figure 14. Raven cabinet (24x50 in/61x127 cm)

Departure

My artist-in-residence stay on the Bow is rapidly coming to a close. The hospitality of the staff has been generous; they embraced our coming with openness, graciously shared their knowledge and expertise about hiking destinations, wildlife

lore, mountaineering, and day-to-day responsibilities. As we gaze over the panorama of water and ice, we continue to be struck by the tranquility and solitude. It has left us with a deeper sense of the spirit of the Bow and how its life forces provide nourishment, care and protection. And we are awed by the cosmic energy and evening dramas that transform its dazzling, starlit nights into the magnificent beauty of constellations and the enchanting glow of the Aurora. As we slowly make our way from this sanctuary on our homeward journey, our thoughts turn to a time when we will return to be cast under its hypnotic spell again.

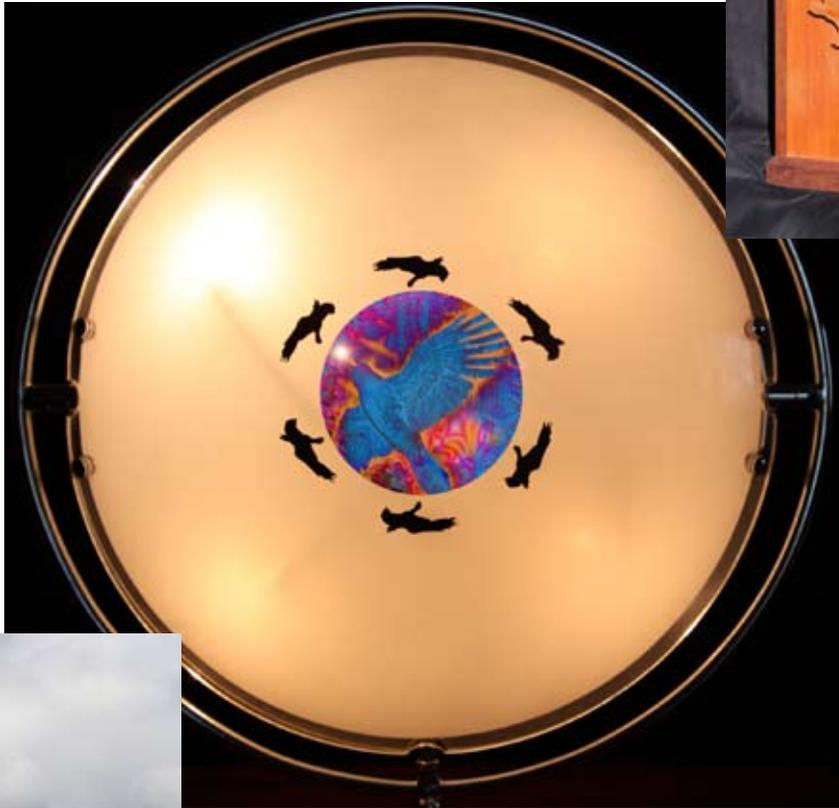


Figure 15. Raven circle (detail) (Diameter 18 in/45.7 cm)



Figure 16. Celebrating bears. Wood sculpture (8 ft/244 cm)

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Figure 17. *Celebrating bears* (detail)