AN EXPLORATION OF FIRST NATIONS ARTISTS IN ALERT BAY, BC:
CONNECTING TO THE ART MARKET FROM HOME

by

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ABSTRACT

Historically, Northwest Coast First Nations artists have been active participants in local and external trade from their communities. Today, many Northwest Coast First Nations artists work in large art centers, such as art galleries in Victoria and the Lower Mainland, and/or in their local communities. In Alert Bay, B.C., home of the 'Namgis People from the Kwakwaka'wakw Nation, artists continue to create economic ties to art centers within and beyond their local community. The objective of this study is to a) explore why some First Nations artists choose to be based in Alert Bay while participating in the art market, b) identify the mechanisms that are used by artists to develop and maintain connections to both local and non-local art market centers and, c) analyze the kinds of issues or consequences that arise as a result of being involved in these types of transactions.

In conducting fieldwork over a period of one month, participant-observation and semi-structured interviews with First Nations artists living in Alert Bay, I have found that artists place importance upon belonging to an aboriginal community that influences how they develop and that they maintain economic ties within and beyond their community. I intend to show that artists seek recognition for their economic contributions as artists from community members at home while they simultaneously seek recognition for their socio-cultural participation by members of the non-native art-world. By analyzing the narratives of artists, tensions over the “authenticity” of the artist, the quality and standard of their work and their perceived recognition in the community arise as they attempt to participate and gain recognition in both local and non-local economic arenas.
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INTRODUCTION

Northwest Coast First Nations artists have been and continue to be active participants in local and external trade from their communities. In Alert Bay, B.C., home of the ‘Namgis People from the Kwakwaka’wakw Nation, artists are involved in developing and maintaining economic ties to art centres within and beyond their local community. The majority of artists sell their work to art galleries and clients outside of their local community because it is difficult to earn an adequate income selling their work exclusively in Alert Bay. When, then, do some artists choose to remain in the community? How do they create and maintain connections to economic art gallery centers from their local community? What are some of the issues that arise during these encounters? Previous studies regarding Northwest Coast artists and their art have focused on topics such as collection and classification (Cole 1986; Phillips 2002; Phillips and Berlo 1998; Holm 1965; Holm and Reid 1975; Gunther 1966), tensions between traditionalism and modernity in Northwest Coast art style (Townsend-Gault 1997; Watson 2003), and have described the life and biography of individual Northwest Coast Kwakwaka’wakw artists (Holm 1983; Nuytten 1982; Hunt 2000). Literature has also focused on commercial or indigenous tourist art (Townsend-Gault 2004; Graburn 1976 and 1993; Steiner and Phillips 1999), perceptions, taste, and expectations about artists and their work by patrons and brokers in the art market (Duffek 1983; Steiner 1994; Dubin 2001), and authenticity and the commodification of Northwest Coast art (Duffek 1983; Glass 2002). While these sources offer significant insights on aspects of First Nations art production, I intend to focus my attention on the perceptions and

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1 While the term Kwakiutl is familiar in anthropological literature, the U’mista Cultural Society of Alert Bay has proposed the name Kwakwaka’wakw ("Those Who Speak Kwak'wala") to identify their larger cultural group (U’mista Cultural Society 2005; Clifford 1997: 355). I use this current terminology throughout this paper.
experiences of First Nations artists residing in Alert Bay, B.C. as they create and maintain connections to economic art market centres inside and outside of their community.

Not only are artists continually “negotiating their personal and cultural identities” (Glass 2002:103) and are concerning themselves both with the “continuity of embedded tradition and the commercial necessity of making a living” (Graburn 1993: 172), I contend that First Nations artists in Alert Bay work between native and non-native worlds, much like other Canadian and worldwide indigenous artists (Dubin 2001:126); as a result, they become entangled in webs of interconnected value.

This thesis opens with a discussion of some of the theoretical perspectives that provide useful ways of thinking about the research data, a description of the research methods and an overview of the economic history in Alert Bay, B.C. Next, I introduce the research findings, turn to a presentation and interpretation of the research data and conclude with a summation of the research findings. This case study highlights that as artists participate in local and non-local art market centres, they are attempting to bridge and intertwine economic and social systems of value. By analyzing the words of artists in Alert Bay, tensions over the “authenticity” of the artist, the quality and standard of their work and their perceived recognition in the community are expressed.

**Theoretical Perspectives**

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” (1986: 413). Inspired by Hall, Clifford makes use of the theory of articulation: the idea that social and cultural elements are in a constant state of “unhook[ing] and recombin[ing]” within the context of a historical moment (2001:482). As a “moment of
arbitrary closure," articulation provides a "non-reductive way to think about cultural
transformation" (Clifford 2001:473). In this way, I explore how belonging to a place or
community interacts with and impacts perspectives on the social and economic role of the
artist. Throughout this case study, articulation theory is used as a strategy for undertaking a
cultural study about how artists in Alert Bay make connections to the art market. Not only is
it used to identify the types of characteristics that are strategically hooked, unhooked,
recombined, and selected by artists and others such as art gallery owners, clients, and
community members, it is also used as a way to identify and analyze the issues artists face in
their transactions with local (i.e. local shops, museums, ceremonial and community
commissions) and non-local economic art market centres (i.e. urban art galleries in Victoria
and Vancouver).

While participating in the art market and simultaneously being connected to their
local community and cultural responsibilities, artists can be seen as operating in
interconnected or fused ‘regimes of value.’ In his edited volume The Social Life of Things
(1986), Arjun Appadurai’s premise is that objects circulate in different contexts where they
embody or instantiate varying regimes of value, and can be considered as having a ‘social
life’ (Appadurai 1986:6). I have used this theoretical position to conceptualize and identify
possible socio-cultural and economic ‘regimes of value’ in which artists are involved, but
have moved beyond classificatory divisions to maintain that artists are actively intertwining
these ‘regimes of value.’ As First Nations artists in Alert Bay attempt to gain recognition in
socio-cultural ‘regimes of value’ and simultaneously in economic ‘regimes of value’, it is in
their narratives that tensions around authenticity, standards of work, and local perceptions of
social and economic roles and status are present.
Research Methods

I draw inspiration from anthropologist Eric Wolf's defense of the importance of "attending to what people report in their own words about the hopes and predicaments of their condition" (2001:54). Seen in their narratives, artists employ strategies, both effective and ineffective, to gain status in the eyes of their community and economic art market personnel (gallery owners and clients) while defining their authenticity in opposition to artists outside their community. While I am aware of Wolf's subsequent warning that "what people say and what they do" can be two different things and anthropologists should be prepared to take note of both, this provides a starting point in thinking about deeper understanding of a complex system, and much can be learned from those most deeply involved in it (Wolf 2001:54). By focusing on the words of my informants, and attempting to analyze the similarities and differences in their perspectives, my method reflects what Wolf calls "one of the virtues of the anthropological enterprise," namely "its long-standing proclivity to pay attention to what others left unheeded" (Wolf 2001:50).

The data for this paper is a result of fieldwork conducted in Alert Bay, B.C. between July 24th and August 27th 2004. My initial research questions were: How do First Nations artists in Alert Bay, B.C. learn and train to be artists? How do they make use of facilities and programs in Alert Bay? What is their connection to the art market in and outside their community? Do they transmit knowledge to younger generations of artists? If so, how and why? After being granted permission from the 'Namgis Band Council to conduct fieldwork in the community, I conducted informal and semi-structured discussions and interviews with willing participants to provide information on the kinds of social roles artists fulfill, the types of economic transactions artists are involved in, within and beyond their local community.
Informal discussions with non-artists from the community have also been used to provide information on how artists are understood in the community. Additional research methods such as participating in and observing social activities and community events add to these observations.

The majority of interview participants were chosen using the snowball effect, whereupon meeting and interviewing one participant, I was directed to additional participants by their recommendation. While I was directed exclusively to male artists, I can only speculate that this is based upon the presumption that male forms of material production in terms of carvings, poles, masks and other objects are typically categorized as objects of ‘art’ (Codere 1990: 364; Holm 1990: 603) and are produced and displayed in more public settings. Women’s forms of material production, such as cedar bark weaving, regalia, blanket and basket making (Barbara Cranmer August 17th, 2004, pers. comm.; Codere 1990: 364) are typically categorized as objects of ‘craft’ and are produced and displayed in more private settings (Hawthorn 1979:5), such as the “domestic interior” (Phillips 1998:205). The dominant focus on male forms of production are reinforced in academic literature but the concept of genre and women’s contributions and role in material production have increasingly been the focus of analysis (Phillips 1998).

The majority of the interviews took place either in participants place of work or at alternative designated areas around Alert Bay, including the beach, coffee shop, and private homes. I conducted thirteen semi-structured interviews, five of which were with the following self-identified ‘Namgis artists: Bruce Alfred, Wayne Alfred, Joe Wilson, Randy Bell, and William Wasden Jr. It should be noted that several have also held additional forms of employment along with being artists. Currently, Randy Bell is the Youth Employment
Officer and Outdoor Recreation Director, and William Wasden Jr. is working with the U’mista Cultural Centre and is an intern at the Museum of Anthropology at the University of British Columbia. Four interviews were done with community members: the U’mista Cultural Centre’s Executive Director Andrea Sanborn, a ‘Namgis Band member, a local film maker, dancer and instructor Barbara Cranmer, a local elementary school teacher at the T’lisala’gilakw School, and local shop owner. While two of the artists were in their 30s, the average age of the artists interviewed were in their 40s and 50s. Community members that were interviewed ranged from 30-50 years of age.

With the increasing levels of research being undertaken by First Nations communities, the relationships between academic institutions, museums, and First Nations groups has begun to shift more towards a “two-way process,” where information is now being returned to source communities (Peers and Brown 2003:1). In this respect, where specified by the participants, informants have received and reviewed their interview sections and will receive copies of their interview transcriptions in full along with a copy of the final publication.

**The Economic History of Alert Bay, B.C.**

Northwest Coast First Nations Peoples have historically been involved in different types of economic activities; artistic production for ceremony and for sale within and outside their communities are but some of them. In her book *Kwakiutl Art* (1979), anthropologist and founding curator of the Museum of Anthropology at the University of British Columbia, Audrey Hawthorn, notes that in Kwakwaka'wakw society those community members

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2 Built in 1994, the T’lisala’gilakw School is located on the ‘Namgis reserve in Alert Bay and is run by the ‘Namgis First Nations Band. This school offers classes at the nursery level to grade eight and includes “cultural dance, song and language components” in its curriculum (‘Namgis First Nations 2005).
demonstrating special artistic skills would be “encouraged to develop their craft by observing, and imitating the work of established expert craftsmen” (Hawthorn 1979: 5). These artistic specialists would be “commissioned and well paid” by families inside their community to make regalia and masks for ceremony, totem poles and heraldic carvings to mark rank and special occasions and would produce pieces made for gift giving at the potlatch (Hawthorn 1979: 5; Codere 1990: 365).

According to their origin legend, the Kwakwaka’wakw were “placed in the central coast region of British Columbia by the Creator when time began” (Culhane Speck 1987: 67). Alert Bay (‘Yalis’ 3) was used as a burial grounds 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 1870’s (Jacknis 2000: 267). Helen Codere notes that from the late 1700s to 1900s the Kwakwaka’wakw took an active part in trade and exchange (1990: 363). As early as the 1800s, however, Kwakwaka’wakw populations declined “nearly 72% due to the spread of diseases such as smallpox” (Culhane Speck 1987: 72).

First Nations residences of Alert Bay have encountered significant economic and cultural changes similar to those up and down the Northwest Coast in the late 1800s and early 1900s; Saint Michael’s, an Anglican mission and school was established, the reserve system was developed, and there was the implementation of a law against potlatching (Jacknis 2000: 268; Codere 1990: 363-364). In the midst of assimilation practices, such as the Anti-Potlatch Law of 1884, non-native collectors, anthropologists, and museum staff collected native objects in order to salvage what they believed to be the remnants of this

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3 The crescent-shaped Cormorant Island is known to the ‘Namgis as ‘Yalis or ‘Spread Leg Beach.’ It is named after the image or shape of the island that resembles “a woman sitting on the beach with her legs spread open in front of her” (Culhane Speck 1987: 68).
dying culture (Cole 1985; Jacknis 2000), although potlatching continued during the time of the ban (Cranmer Webster 1990: 387). At the end of the 19\textsuperscript{th} Century, during these societal shifts, the Kwakwaka'wakw were also becoming “assimilated into the Canadian economy and 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” (Codere 1990: 363-364). In this context “new sources of wealth and European goods were quickly incorporated into aboriginal society and used to elaborate the potlatch system” (Culhane Speck 1987:78). This increase in wealth and material goods fostered artistic activity (Holm 1990: 602); a number of Northwest Coast artists continued to work on local commissions for ceremonial and social purposes and began to produce work for sale to non-natives (Macnair 1980:67).

With the reversal of the Anti-Potlatching Law in 1951, salaried employment and commissions for First Nations artists were encouraged largely by non-Native agencies, such as anthropologists, and museums. Several publications and exhibitions on the aesthetics of native art added to a growing connoisseurship, apprenticeship, patronage and concentration on the individual talents of the First Nations artist by non-native patrons. At the same time, a decreased reflection on the “history and socio-cultural circumstances of Native art objects and the peoples who made them” (Fleming 1982: 18-19 cited in Ames 1992:71) developed (Glass 2002; Watson 2003). While the commercial arena was one of the few safe places for the expression of native identity and the articulation of traditional beliefs and values, the quest for defining the authenticity of Native arts was also coupled with alternative goals of assimilation and appropriation (Phillips and Berlo 1998: Watson 2003; Glass 2002). First Nations were, however, continually involved in “meeting market demands by trading and
selling old and new objects4" (Glass 2002:95).

Despite these obstacles, the ‘Namgis First Nations continue to assert the continuity of Kwakwaka’wakw culture and work towards cultural, social, economic, and political autonomy5 (Jacknis 2000:268). For instance, in 1980, the U’mista Cultural Centre6, a native-run community museum was established in Alert Bay to house the majority of the potlatch material that was confiscated in 1922 from the Daniel Cranmer potlatch. Through the early 1990s, Alert Bay has, along with other Coastal communities, struggled to cope with the effects of the Mifflin Plan that “cut the fishing fleet in half in an attempt to conserve fish stocks and ensure the viability of remaining fisheries operators” (Tenove 2004:2). In an attempt to deal with “the decimated fisheries and the social problems that come with chronic underemployment,” First Nations artists have increasingly been joined by others who seek income and employment though the arts. In addition, alternate forms of entrepreneurial employment, such as ‘eco-cultural-tourism,’ are being developed in Alert Bay (Tenove 2004:3) and can be seen as an example of “one component to fill the economic collapse of the fishing industry in [the] community” (Randy Bell, Aug.16th, 2004, pers.comm).

4 Glass notes that while objects were sold, the rights of ownership were retained and objects “may have been seen as a renewable resource” for Native communities both with the increased value placed on them by European collectors along with the increased conversion of First Nations to Christianity, who may have taken advantage of the “financial opportunity of selling objects that were now considered ‘useless’” (Glass 2002: 95).
5 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 (‘Namgis First Nations 2005)
6 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 2005). 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 art work by local Kwakwaka’wakw artists, and promotes a range of cultural activities. Artifacts were divided between the northern Kwakwaka’wakw First Nations and placed at U’mista and the southern Kwakwaka’wakw First Nations and placed at the Kwagiulth Museum in Cape Mudge.
Nelson Graburn7 makes the observation that the majority of First Nations artists in British Columbia during the 1990's "fell between these two extremes, typically being Indian artists concerned both with the continuity of embedded tradition and the commercial necessity of making a living" (1993: 172). Similarly, Glass observes that it is in this current context that artists are increasingly faced with "complex and often contradictory intersections of self, global markets, public expectations and community responsibilities" (2002:103).

Over the past ten to fifteen years, there has been an increase in the number of practicing First Nations artists, a rising number of First Nations artists residing in urban centers such as Vancouver and Victoria and a flooding of the art market with a range of First Nations art that varies in style and quality (Aaron Glass, February 28th, 2005, e-mail). In response to my research observations about artists in Alert Bay, Glass8 agrees that artists in Alert Bay, particularly senior artists are "rearticulating their own 'authenticity' or value against the younger ones now" (Aaron Glass, February 28th, 2005, e-mail) as well as against artists living in urban areas. In sum Kwakwaka'wakw artists have always participated in their local economy and have increasingly been participants in non-local markets. Alert Bay was founded on the fishing and logging industry, and from early settlement, First Nations artists have actively participated in the tourist trade by performing for and selling goods to outsiders both locally and non-locally. As they continue to do so, issues of authenticity, quality, and standards and the (re)evaluation of the artist's status arise.

7 Nelson Graburn is the author of one of the first comprehensive studies on the social context, production and circulation of tourist art in Ethnic Arts of the Fourth World (1976).
8 Aaron Glass, currently pursuing a Ph. D at New York University, has done extensive fieldwork in Alert Bay and surrounding Kwakwaka'wakw villages between 1993 and 2003. His research focus in Alert Bay has been on the ‘Hamatsa Dance Society (Aaron Glass February 9th, 2005, e-mail).
RESEARCH FINDINGS

General Observations: Current Artists in Alert Bay, B.C.

Through my inquiries about artists in Alert Bay, I have found that there are different understandings of what a First Nations artist is and how artists differ. Most artists I interviewed understood artists to be those familiar with the stories, legends, dances, and language, who attend and play a role in ceremonies, and do all the work on a piece. In contrast, Andrea Sanborn, the U’mista Cultural Centre Executive Director and previous manager of the gift shop, notes that a First Nations artist is someone with a status card (Andrea Sanborn, Aug. 13th, 2004, pers. comm). When artists were asked to differentiate artists in the community, they responded based on the role of the artist in the community (keeper of masks, songs, dances etc), by their degree of artistic skill level (locally referred to as beginner, intermediate, and master artist), by the form of art or types of commissions they specialize in, and by residence. Artists in Alert Bay are of three sorts: 1) those who are born and brought up there, 2) those who have either 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 the community.

Local Economic Opportunities for First Nations Artists in Alert Bay, B.C.

First Nations artist and scholar Gerald McMaster notes in Reservation X (1998) that the idea of a contemporary community is no longer to be thought of as "fixed, unified, or stable . . . it exists in a state of flux (McMaster 1998: 20). The artists with whom I spoke have historically made connections to economic art markets both inside and outside their local community. Currently in Alert Bay, there are several ways in which artists sell their work and gain commissions. Artists can sell to multiple venues in Alert Bay, some of which
include the U’mista Cultural Centre gift shop, the local pawnshop called the Mermaid’s Purse, K’uaweekeela’s Treasures, and the local pharmacy. They also have opportunities to complete private commissions for local community members and families, visiting tourists or can arrange to complete commissions for the local Band office when opportunities arise.

Artists in Alert Bay face many challenges. They are limited in how much they can sell in their local market. Andrea Sanborn notes, there are limits to financially supporting artists: “Sometimes we just can’t afford it. The budget doesn’t allow for it.” Similarly, a ‘Namgis Band member notes that the Band tries to support as much as possible the local artists in the community through commissions... because the artists that are working and selling their wares in the urban setting have better opportunities, a bigger market. Our guys struggle quite a bit and actually have to travel every several months to either the Lower Mainland or Victoria and meet with the galleries there and try to sell their work that they’ve been carving. It’s much more challenging for our people here locally, so we try to help in any way that we can in terms of their meeting our needs as well, but we are limited in what we can do (‘Namgis Band member, Aug. 12th, 2004, pers.comm).

Sanborn estimates that there are approximately fifty to sixty practicing artists, mostly male, in Alert Bay, with another estimated one hundred Kwakwaka’wakw artists residing outside of the community (Andrea Sanborn, February 22nd, 2005, e-mail). As a consequence, it is difficult to earn sufficient income selling exclusively in Alert Bay, leading the majority of artists to sell their works to various art galleries located in Vancouver and Victoria. Why do fifty to sixty artists continue to remain there and how do they create and maintain connections to economic art gallery centres from their local community?

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9 The U’mista Cultural Centre received funds from the Department of Canadian Heritage through its Museum Assistance Program (MAP) to initially build and operate the cultural centre (Fortney 2001:83; Andrea Sanborn, August.13th, 2004, pers.comm). Currently, the centre no longer receives core federal operating funds, but project specific funding. U’mista relies heavily on smaller grants, administration fees and revenues from the gift shop to pay for the centre’s daily operating costs (Andrea Sanborn, August.13th, 2004, pers.comm).
Why Artists Stay Close to Home

I asked artists this, and inquired what was unique about Alert Bay, and if and how it added to the artist’s production. For First Nations artists living in Alert Bay and particularly those who live on the reserve, being stationed in Alert Bay provides artists with significant networks of support that takes forms such as access to food sharing, places to stay, and access to utilities such as phones and the Internet. As 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” (Cranmer Webster 1990:387). Artist’s ideas centred on being closer to family and relatives, and in addition, on having the opportunity to learn and teach cultural knowledge and give back to the community by participating in community and ceremonial life. In common with other studies on indigenous communities and artists, artists in Alert Bay can be seen as making a “strong commitment to preserving fundamental philosophies and principles” of the local culture (McMaster 1998: 22). As with McMaster’s observations about indigenous artists in Canada, choices of staying home are about “maintaining some sense of order and coherence...an established sameness ” (McMaster 1998:20). Moreover, congruent with Elizabeth Povinelli’s (2002) observations about Australian Aboriginal communities, among artists in Alert Bay, there seems to be the presence of a “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” (Povinelli 2002:4-5). As in Povinelli’s study on Australia, artist in Alert Bay can be understood in this sense, as “find[ing] himself or herself obliged to a feeling, a practice, a person or an idea” (Povinelli 2002:5). In sum, artists in Alert Bay find themselves
simultaneously ‘oblighed’ to stay in Alert Bay to be close to family and to ‘give back to the community’ while also attempting to make a living.

Obligations to Maintain Family Ties and Responsibilities

Some artists have lived off reserve and have since moved back to their local communities in order to, as ‘Namgis artist and Youth Employment Officer Randy Bell puts it; ‘get back to the roots of who [they are]’ (Randy Bell, Aug. 16th, 2004, pers.comm). For those stationed in Alert Bay, it is essential that they stay close to home to fulfill family obligations and maintain family ties. Wayne Alfred, a ‘Namgis artist who is also well known 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. This island here is a world like Canada and all the little kids and all the older people, 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 had, what? Because of personal ambition? No, I don’t think so. Life is life” (Wayne Alfred, Aug. 9th, 2004, pers.comm). Similarly, Bell notes 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” (Randy Bell, Aug. 16th, 2004, pers.comm). In sum, maintaining your family ties not only establishes and strengthens reciprocal relationships; it builds one’s identity as an artist.

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10 ‘Namgis villages have been described by Dara Culhane Speck (1987) and Helen Codere (1990) as being organized into ‘na’mima, or extended kin units (Culhane Speck 1987: 68; Codere 1990:359); each having their own mythical ancestor (Culhane Speck 1987:68). The ‘na’mima “[organizes] and [controls] the economic activities and the social relations of its members in their daily and ceremonial lives within the village” (Codere 1990: 366). Each ‘na’mima or family unit had its own specific resource sites, obligations to specific supernatural owners of these resources (Culhane Speck 1987: 68), and claims to crests and titles (Codere 1990: 359, 366). 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 (Culhane Speck 1987:68). By demonstrating generosity in ceremonies, displaying crests in masks, songs and dances, members of a ‘na’mima re-affirmed their rank and social position (Culhane Speck 1987: 69).
Obligations to Learn and Teach Cultural Knowledge

For indigenous artists, such as artists in Alert Bay, there is not only a “quest for a sense of place, of belonging, of community and identity, there is a sense of duty to teach others” (McMaster 1998: 20). Alfred remembers coming home from Vancouver after an extended period of time away and states his reasons for doing so:

I thought, well, I better go home now and all the elders are starting to die now and I don’t want to miss out on that. I could have easily stayed there and played the [famous artists] game, signing today at four o’clock, everybody lines up and you sign your calendars for them ... I could have played that whole bloody game, but no, I’m going to go home. I am going to show those kids” (Wayne Alfred, August 9th, 2004, pers. comm).

Sanborn emphasizes this strong commitment by more experienced artists in teaching 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” (Andrea Sanborn August 13th, 2004, pers. comm).

Another significant reason artists give for coming back and/or staying close to home is to have continual access to cultural knowledge that helps in the production of their work. In discussing this aspect of Alert Bay, ‘Namgis artist Bruce Alfred, who specializes in premium bent wood box making, notes that

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 on one night to sing and stuff like that (Bruce Alfred, August 6th, 2004, pers.comm).

Moreover, just as Alert Bay offers a place for artists to be “students of [their] own culture” (Bruce Alfred, August 6th, 2004, pers. comm.), artists are, in turn, understood to be products
of past teachings and are active members in continuing cultural traditions in their communities while establishing their own artistic styles. As Bell expresses

In this community, you have traditions that have been passed down for a very long time and being passed on to the younger generation. They all have their own skills and techniques; the forms are similar but different. Everybody creates their own style but because this community has such strong cultural history, and it’s right here, and you’re living and breathing it all the time, you can see it in the artwork. In the young generation, you can see the past is still there. There’s not really outside influence and a lot of the teachers here, are, have old souls, I guess you could say. So that’s the difference because most of the artists here participate in our ceremony, our potlatches, our feasts, our welcoming, so those teachings go into the carvings and that’s the thing that keeps them the same in that regard. Their artistic expression changes with everybody establishing their own techniques of how they carve, but you can see that the message is still the same and at work, it’s still a strong hold from past generations” (Randy Bell, August 16th, 2004, pers.comm).

An artist’s role in Alert Bay is to see that future generations of artists are well groomed in both family and cultural knowledge in order to pass on artistic and cultural knowledge to those who are to come.

Sacrifices?

While there exists a concern for the continuity of embedded traditions, this duty or ‘moral sensibility’ to ‘give back’ has the capacity to come into conflict with the commercial necessities of making a living. Some artists maintain family ties and teach younger artists but they do this with the knowledge that the potential for professional exposure, fame, and fortune lies outside their community and in larger art market centers. William Wasden Jr., ‘Namgis artist and important figure in the community for preserving cultural songs and dances, notes 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 (William Wasden Jr. August 20th, 2004, pers.comm).

Similarly, Bruce Alfred remembers giving up a profitable job in the fishing industry to take an apprentice course offered by well-known teacher and ‘Namgis master artist Doug Cranmer in the early 1980’s. He notes:

One of the main reasons I’m not as well known as [two famous bent box makers] is because I’m here and they’re in Vancouver and are in the middle of the buyers market. You know, that doesn’t bother me, I know what I know and it’s not so much about the money, it’s about doing something that I have the passion for . . . I am doing everything my grandmother taught me. I know who my family is and I help people who don’t have the means and if they say, well, we really can’t pay you, I say, all I want you to do is do the same for someone else, that’s all (Bruce Alfred, August 6th, 2004, pers.comm).

As it was for his cousin Bruce, Wayne Alfred’s decision to be an artist and to live in Alert Bay was a “big gamble” (Wayne Alfred, August 9th, 2004, pers.comm):

I could be really famous right now if I wanted to be, just go down there and play this game. But no, there are still some people to show and teach and I’m here for them and I don’t need anybody to give me money to teach either. They all take off once they learn a little bit. Every one of them, if only they stayed like I did . . . but I would like to believe that it is not about the galleries, it’s not about the market, it’s about culture, it’s about how we use the culture, why we use it, the standards and protocols we have with the masks, carving . . . I’ve got something here for them when they come back to the land and even if that means staying broke, but making sure that everyone else is alright (Wayne Alfred, August 9th, 2004, pers.comm).

The measure of value that Alert Bay offers artists is not the provision of a secure financial base in selling their work, but the provision of a solid foundation for maintaining connections to family and culture. However, while some artists place more importance on their social role in the community, others focus more on the economic side of being an artist.

“Gaining-while-Giving”

In a culture where “giving away” is a measure of gaining success, prestige, or status, artists’ participation in cultural activities can be framed in terms of “gaining-while-giving.”

In her book Inalienable Possessions (1992), Annette Wiener outlines the study of reciprocity

11 In Kwakwaka’wakw culture, “by giving a person shows he is a moral person” (Speck 2005).
and exchange in Oceania societies such as Polynesia. Her main thesis is that in transactions of exchange and reciprocity there are overlays of politically powerful strategies of "keeping-while-giving." Inalienable possessions, whether they are material objects, property, or knowledge, bestow social identity and rank when given away (Weiner 1992: 6). First Nations artists in Alert Bay are "gaining-while-giving:" as artists give back to the community by teaching instead of focusing on money as compensation for services rendered, it is the idea of gaining honor and prestige that is sought.

Wayne Alfred focuses on ideas of gaining honor from his fellow community members for offering his services as a teacher: “the only thing I can say is that they show me 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”(Wayne Alfred, August 9th, pers. comm.). Moreover, when recalling a fellow artist’s financial success in the late 1960s, Alfred recalls “he was getting a lot of money for those pieces. That didn’t really impress me, it was the fame that he was getting . . . that really inspired me more than money. We go 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, your wealth goes all the time” (Wayne Alfred, August 9th, 2004, pers. comm.).

Artists who lack this ‘moral sensibility’ or responsibility of learning cultural knowledge and who do not ‘giving back to the community’ are viewed as exploiting their culture. When teaching others, 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’re not going to know if you are going too far out or not far out enough. You’re not going to know any of that if you don’t learn your culture . . . it’s not just the art. You exploit your culture if you’re taking out of it and you’re not putting back in it . . . "(Wayne Alfred, August 9th, 2004, pers. comm.).
Similarly, Bruce Alfred recalls that “in the past artists used to work a lot more with each other to complete pieces for upcoming potlatches” as a way of “giving back” to the community (Bruce Alfred, August 6th, 2004, pers.comm.). Now, he says

If you were to try that again, there would only be a couple of guys doing this, whereas we used to just drop everything at the shop to help out... people want to be compensated for what they do, it’s not about the community, about helping out as much anymore... people want to be paid, the money’s more important than, you know, they focus on the price not the prize. The prize is that family unity and strength when you have a potlatch” (Bruce Alfred, August 6th, 2004, pers.comm.).

In sum, artists in Alert Bay are working within two main value systems, that of their own culture and community and that of the capitalist market economy. The act of “giving back” to the community points to larger ideas of duty and honor, and the establishment of social “fame” and “prestige.” While there is an understanding among artists and community members that one should ‘give back to the community,’ it should be noted that not all artists equally stress the importance of this perceived obligation.

STRATEGIES ARTISTS USE TO CONNECT TO THE ART MARKET FROM HOME

First Nations artists who remain in Alert Bay establish direct relationships with end purchasers (or consumers) and/or establish indirect relationships by way of brokers (family members, other artists, gallery owners, managers).

Indirect Contact

Artists’ relationships to economic art markets are most commonly established by indirect or brokered relationships. Paine (1971) distinguishes brokers based on their tendency to “re-package the product” or “manipulate the original message or product” of the artist for the consumer based on their own understandings, instead of simply delivering the message (1971:21). The most recognizable of these relationships is the brokered relationship between
artists, the local and non-local art gallery owner and the consumer. In purchasing the piece from the artist, the art gallery owner will sell the artist’s product to consumers. For example, ‘Namgis artist Joe Wilson uses a non-native manager who acts as a broker and looks at pricing compared to other pieces on the market so he can concentrate on producing pieces, not on how to market them (Joe Wilson August 17th, 2004, pers. comm.). It is the manager and the art gallery owner who control and articulate the messages about an artist and their work to the consumer. Formerly the gift shop manager for the U’mista Cultural Centre, Sanborn makes reference to 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 (Andrea Sanborn August 13th, 2004, pers. comm.).

In addition, Sanborn’s role as broker also involves “try[ing] to help the artists establish other markets for their work elsewhere in Canada and around the world” (Andrea Sanborn March 22nd, 2005, e-mail). The middleman or broker here transmits the demands of the market place and the ideology of the collector on concepts such as price, content, color and materials back to the producer (Graburn 1993: 349).

I found that artists not only make use of art gallery owners and managers as brokers, but also use other artists and family members as a way of making connections with art gallery owners and consumers. For instance, more experienced or established artists will, at times, act as brokers between less experienced artists and art gallery owners. Bell is one such artist who recounts making use of his family ties as a way of making contacts for newer artists to sell their pieces:
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, so it’s kind of fortunate to be in that place . . . the point I bring across to people is the important significance of the piece and then we’ll do the business side of it . . . then we sit down and say ok, this is what this artist or myself would like for this piece and then it’s that’s that (Randy Bell August 16th, 2004, pers. comm.).

Likewise, Wilson remembers when starting out in the urban art gallery business that he gave a few pieces to his friends going down to the city. He notes, “they’d be heading back down to the city selling because they’d been in it for a while longer than me, so I’d just say, here you go, take it down and get what you can (Joe Wilson August 17th, 2004, pers. comm.).

Not only does the established artist provide credibility for the less experienced artist, but making use of another artist’s experience in the art market provides newcomers with important knowledge of the ‘in’s and out’s’ of the business. Artists not only teach others cultural and technical knowledge in artistic production, but also serve as examples for younger artists wanting to get in the business of selling art. As Alfred recounts, “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” (Wayne Alfred August 9th, 2004, pers.comm.).

In these cases, non-native managers, First Nations and non-First Nations art gallery owners, First Nations artists, and family members act as brokers. When “artists, and the consumer are culturally, geographically, or temporally far apart, the mediating agent [broker] assumes greater importance . . . it is he or she who not only transmits the physical art object from the producer to the consumer, but who also controls the important flow of information about the object’s origin, age, meaning, and the producer” (Graburn 1993: 349). As a result,
brokered relationships are developed in order to widen artists' markets while maintaining connections to home.

**Direct Contact**

The majority of artists' transactions in and outside of Alert Bay centre upon personal connections with brokers. Graburn observes however, that in British Columbia, while the “physical and social distance between the artists and craftspeople and the ultimate consumer is still great, it is diminishing rapidly . . . social distance is breaking down” (1993:175).

While artists use brokers as a way of connecting to clients, older, more established artists in Alert Bay are increasingly playing an active role as direct agents in economic transactions between visitors to Alert Bay, local community members, local administrative offices and non-local clients. By “keeping numbers,” of people they meet and networking with other artists, artists are becoming more involved in communicating messages and meanings about themselves and their work directly with the consumer. For example, Bruce Alfred makes a point of carving in the basement of what was previously Saint Michael’s Residential school because visitors to Alert Bay and the U’mista Cultural Centre often pass by. Similarly, another 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 (local artist August 10th, 2004 pers. comm.). As artists build relationships with visitors, many encounters lead to private commissions.

Although the ‘social distance’ may be breaking down for more established artists, in order to become an established artist, the process is long and includes many stages; you begin
at the “bottom of the totem pole” and work your way up (Andrea Sanborn August 13th, 2004, pers. comm.). With the proliferation of First Nations artists currently working in the art market, this process is fragile, and demands hard work in creating 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 (Randy Bell August 16th, 2004, pers. comm.):

The art world is a very unique job, it’s a very difficult market to get into as a young person because it takes time to establish yourself and you have to meet the right people and you have to have very good social and communication skills to be involved or have success in the art world. Artists who do art work, there are only a very few who have success where they can actually make a living off it because it takes a long time. So it’s a very patient world being an artist... for the young artists now, it’s a trying time. The possibilities are still there, but it’s a longer process now (Randy Bell August 16th, 2004, pers. comm.).

While it is important to keep in contact with visitors to Alert Bay, it is equally important for artists, especially younger artists who have yet to establish a strong reputation, to maintain personal relationships with gallery owners by frequent visits or calls. As a young artist just starting out, one artist remembers having to “pound the pavement” and “do the rounds” to the various art galleries: "I would start by going around to the different art galleries just to give [the art gallery owners] a look to see what I’m doing so they can watch my pieces as they get better and then I would continue to talk to them because you need to talk to them in order to get into the galleries and so they start to know the quality of your work" (local artist August 10th, 2004, pers. comm.). Similarly, as Wilson remembers, he spent some time 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 and communication. The impact was that he had to start building those relationships back up: “In commissions, I was back ordered three years
... my mistake on that was that I didn't talk to any of the galleries or anything. They thought that I was dead or had quit and then when I went back on the scene, they're like 'Where have you been,' their nose was out of joint. So I can see why, it was my fault. I apologized. I should have kept in contact more but I just got so busy” (Joe Wilson August 17\textsuperscript{th}, 2004, pers. comm.). As artists become more established and their work becomes more familiar to art gallery owners, one needs to maintain communication, but it is not as essential for established artists to make frequent face to face visits to art gallery owners as it is with younger artists just starting out in the business. This allows more established artists to use more direct methods of transaction with other clients in their local community.

Consequently, in order to ensure communication between clients and gallery owners, some artists are starting to use the Internet. In this way, they can maintain connections and keep in continual contact while being based primarily in their local community. When talking about ways in which he maintains direct and effective communication with consumers and gallery owners, Wilson states

The “net” is a wonderful tool. . . I can go to 20 places in an hour, you know and give 20 people an option to but . . . the web, as everyone knows, it’s efficient. Now I can talk to you on the phone, 2 seconds later you can get my mail, you can see my piece and then I can be in Vancouver at 10:00 and at 10:03 I could be in Seattle and at 10:10 I’m in California, I could be in all three places at once! . . . I’ve basically finished a deal from a concept over the net and the guy said what he wanted and I sent some designs . . . we’ve never met in person until I walked in and gave him the piece, the deal was done. I mean, the net can be good if it’s properly used, it’s just that you need guys that know how to use it efficiently to manage these types of things (Joe Wilson August 17\textsuperscript{th}, 2004, pers. comm.).

Moreover, a local shop owner notes that the Internet has the potential to subsidize the slow times of year in the shop:

It’s a seasonal business, because we’re not big enough to carry a lot of stuff, I’m open probably seven months of the year depending on when the market falls off and when the people start to come around again. That’s where the Internet could help me. There’s a world wide market that I haven’t touched yet . . . I know a lot of friends and they sell their pieces on the internet all year long. I know that’ll probably be another twenty percent of my business
which is a big percentage of that time of year, it could increase my case flow by twenty percent (local shop owner August 21st, 2004, pers. comm.).

For some artists, however, the Internet is not a viable option for communication because of one’s access to it, a lack of knowledge of how to operate a computer or the poor quality of images the screen produces. While some artists use the Internet exclusively to sell their art, others find this route of direct contact detrimental to sales:

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 tell a thousand stories. You don’t get perspective for one thing. You can’t get my fine paint lines in there because it’s just a little bit fuzzy because it’s a computer screen right? So now when we send it, they have a chance to say no and they’re saying no may more than they used to because not it’s on, it doesn’t hit them the same way it usually does and so 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 and I’m mad at the beast because it’s not going my way. This is all new to me” (Wayne Alfred, August 9th, 2004 pers. comm.).

While the Internet can give gallery owners a decent idea of an artists’ work (local artist August 6th, 2004, pers. comm.), pictures do not always do the work justice.

In sum, First Nations artist in Alert Bay form both indirect and direct relationships with brokers and clients and as a result, they “have the chance to see the whole market chain through visits to cooperatives and middlemen’s warehouses, galleries, and retail stores and the final placement of their works in homes (Graburn 1993:175). As Graburn found, First Nations artists from British Columbia, like those in Alert Bay, are not only “aware of the market value of their work and the awe in which it (and they) are held, they are developing an understanding of the categories and values in the culture of the Euro-Canadians who control the system” (Graburn 1993: 177). Encounters such as these continue to bring new awareness of the art market, the middleman and the clients, and that this “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" (Hall 2002: 230). In this process of restructuring, the narratives of artists illustrate issues over the ‘authenticity’ of an artist, the quality and standards of their work and their perceived status in their community.

ISSUES RAISED AS ARTISTS MAKE ECONOMIC CONNECTIONS IN AND BEYOND THEIR LOCAL COMMUNITY

Artists in Alert Bay are constantly constructing, and deconstructing notions of cultural identity as they make connections to economic markets in and outside their community. Local artists identified these issues based on their experiences in developing and maintaining connections from their local community to local and non-local art centers. They are: the ‘genuine’ or ‘authentic’ nature of the artist, the quality and standards of their work and their economic status in their local community. These issues arise as artists make connections to art market centers through “diverse institutions and social fields that classify them, that give them their meaning and value,” and as they become involved in cultural or community endeavors (Myers 2001: 55). In short, as artists move between regimes of their own community to art markets, there is a “re-organization of the values of each” (Myers 2001: 57). In relation to articulation theory, the issues that arise in artists’ narratives describe the context in which artists form economic relationships and point to the conditions they face (Hall 1986: 142). As a result, artists become ‘entangled’ in different tensions at different points in time (Clifford 2001: 468).

Artists’ Determination of an ‘Authentic’ Kwakwaka’wakw First Nations Artist

Even as artists develop relationships to external art markets, there is still a “strong predilection to stay within the formal restraints of the traditional style regardless of medium and subject matter, and there is an equally strong feeling that the art, including the commercial productions, must serve or be connected to the community-giving spiritual,
ceremonial, and genealogical heritage of the culture” (Graburn 1993: 186). Because of the historical involvement of Kwakwaka'wakw artists in past artistic projects soon after the potlatch ban was lifted, Graburn (1993) suggests that First Nations artists in British Columbia, feel as though they are “struggling for the survival and revival of their culture” (Graburn 1993:187). In Alert Bay, for instance, the community has been ‘given-back’ the art they had lost,” with the confiscation of potlatch material and as a result, “artists strongly believe that they should never again depart from the ancestral style and that spiritual continuity is the way to keep on this path” (Graburn 1993:187). These sentiments are still present in the narratives of First Nations artists and continue to be made, unmade, and remade (Clifford 1999: 479).

The Artist’s Ethnicity

Karen Duffek (1983) makes the point that conceptualizations of ‘Indian-ness’ are often imposed on native art production and native artists (1983: 99). While this is true, I will add that First Nations artists in Alert Bay also have their own conceptions and understandings of ‘authentic,’ ‘true’ or ‘genuine’ native art production. These understandings derive not only from their encounters with clients and art market brokers, but from differentiating themselves from other artists. Their criteria for establishing an ‘authentic’ Kwakwaka'wakw artist focused on a) the artist’s ethnicity, b) the need to be near the source of cultural information, and to be connected to an aboriginal community, and c) the need to participate in community and cultural ceremonies and learn cultural protocols, family copyrights and stories embedded in the art.

As Duffek points out, “one of the most important and obvious criterion of authentic native art for many buyers and views is that the object be created by an Indian” (1983:103).
Moreover, she states that there are several issues that arise as a result of these ethnic criteria of authenticity; particularly how to define and determine the Indian-ness or authenticity of the artist himself; and how to decide what kind of Indian is the "right' kind" (Duffek 1983:103). Sanborn notes that solving 'authenticity' is easy: "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" (Andrea Sanborn August 13th, 2004, pers. comm.).

While issues concerning the ethnicity of the artist are central to brokers and clients, community participation has increasingly become a major criterion for valuing indigenous artists and their work (Glass 2002:104) both by art gallery owners and First Nations artists themselves.

The Artist’s Connection to an Aboriginal Community

Artists in Alert Bay, especially the senior artists evaluate "authenticity" in terms of one's connections to an aboriginal community. The idea of ethnicity, is, however, not always directly discussed by artists as one of the criteria that define the “authenticity” of an artist. Whether or not it was 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 others remains unclear. What is stressed is that a Kwakwaka'wakw carver must be near the cultural source for inspiration:

If you are a Kwakwaka'wakw carver than you must learn from a Kwakwaka'wakw person, one that has done it. You have to go to the source and what's out there is a lot of people copying from books and don't know the first thing about our culture...you have an obligation to go to this culture and learn from the source...if someone who 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 (Joe Wilson August 17th, 2004, pers. comm.).
In additionally, Wasden Jr. notes the difference between local artists and urban artists in their connection to a local aboriginal community:

Not all, but a good percentage of the urban artists you’ll never see them do anything for their own culture unless it’s for money and all the rez boys that you know or the rez girls that are artists that were raised here with that Indian heart, they will always contribute and do something, maybe not on a regular basis, but you see it, and that’s what I admire” (William Wasden Jr. August 20th, 2004, pers. comm.).

The Artist’s Involvement in Cultural Ceremonies to Learn Cultural Protocols and Laws of Copyright

Throughout their narratives, the majority of artists interviewed expressed the importance of an artist’s involvement in ceremonies in order to learn cultural protocols and laws of copyright. For some artists, to appropriately adhere to cultural protocols and observe laws of copyright, is to adhere to “tradition” or the way things were thought to be done in the past. 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 (1993: 75). In staying within the bounds of what are considered as “traditional” elements regardless of medium and subject matter, Wasden Jr. comments that

It’s good to have your own personal style but there’s alot of rules that are being broken. We all play by the same rules . . . we just have different styles . . . What [the art] originated as and what was ours in the very beginning was given to us. The Creator gave us our artwork from the very beginning. The laws and rules have been followed for thousands of years (William Wasden Jr. August 20th, 2004, pers. comm.).

This relates closely with what Wilson says about the idea of tradition:

If you get too far from the path, you get lost and that’s something I’m afraid of with our culture, is that you see a lot of guys with some nice clean pieces of something that don’t [sic] exist. You can stay within the rules and make traditional pieces, there are enough characters, basically the whole animal kingdom and under the sea kingdoms. There are enough mythical characters there that you could never carve them all in life so why even bother inventing crap” (Joe Wilson, August 17th, 2004, pers. comm.).
Being connected to an aboriginal community and participating in ceremonial activities teaches artists rules of "tradition."

Likewise, artists also expressed notions of "authenticity" in terms of learning the appropriate rules of protocol concerning laws of copyright. Wayne Alfred states:

I knew back then that we have the right if you have the blood, you know what I mean. If it’s in you it’s yours. A lot of people say, ‘Well, how come I can’t do that stuff, you guys are prejudice!’ No! No! No! These are copyrights! Each family paid for that, owned it and if anyone touched it before, they used to attack your village if you did that. You know what I mean, it’s copyright...I grew up wondering who owns that and who has the right to that kind of stuff (Wayne Alfred August 9th, 2004, pers. comm.).

Another local artist discusses their idea of upholding copyright laws:

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 now 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" (local artist August 21st, 2004, pers. comm.).

Bruce Alfred also expresses the importance of learning cultural knowledge in order to fulfill the role of an artist:

I believe when a person becomes an ‘artist,’ not a crafts-person, not just a mechanical carver, is when he understands, first of all, pursues to learn the language, which is really important which is a dying art. To learn the language so you can understand the words that they are saying at the Big House and get involved, learn the history, the copyright, the songs that go with it, who it belongs to, and where and when and how and why. That’s the whole package (Bruce Alfred August 6th, 2004, pers. comm.).

As artists articulate their ideas on personal standards, ideas of copyright arise.

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12 In Kwakwaka'wakw culture, laws of copyright can be looked at in relation to each 'na'mima or family unit having their own claims to food resource sites, crests. These claims manifest in different forms such as designs on ceremonial and everyday objects to privileges such as the use of certain kinds of songs, names, and titles (Codere 1990: 366). Although rights to resources sites cannot be given away, ceremonial property can be given away (Culhane Speck 1987:68). Although each family unit holds certain titles, crests and property, social features around copyright “concerning corporativity, membership, position holding, ranking, marriage, and residence,” become “confusing and contradictory when lumped together without regard for demographics and other historical developments” (Codere 1990: 366) and continue to be problematic in current Kwakwaka’wakw society.
In this sense, maintaining traditions by learning cultural knowledge is seen as necessary in order to accurately represent Kwakwaka'wakw culture to the larger public. Wasden Jr. adds, “I’m very careful in what I use. I don’t just use anything. It’s not about being negative, it’s just out of respect for those families that do own those things, you know, and if they ask me to do it, then I would” (William Wasden Jr. August 20th, 2004, pers. comm.). He continues, “there’s a thing called birthright, there’s a thing called protocol, there’s a thing called respecting one another, respecting what the creator gave us, you know. There are rules in our culture and what we do and they’re slowly being broken as we go along and people are making a thousand excuses why they can bend ‘em” (William Wasden Jr. August 20th, pers. comm.). Artists are using their own conceptions of “tradition” as a way of defining what it is to be an “authentic” First Nations artist. In this case, to be an artist in Alert Bay, some maintain that “you have to be groomed in the history and know who your relatives are and to know what would be appropriate to use. ‘Authentic’ means that you are from the cultural heritage that you are creating and you have the right to ‘do business’ from that style (William Wasden Jr. August 20th, pers. comm.)

In sum, by being stationed in their local community, artists have the opportunity to learn the stories and cultural knowledge behind the pieces they make from other artists and community members that might otherwise be hard to access in an urban setting. It is, however, the artist’s own prerogative 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 categories over others.
Using Notions of Authenticity in the Art Market

As we have seen, artists tend to use their connection to an aboriginal community and their involvement in community and cultural activities as a way of differentiating themselves from other artists. When selling work outside of their community, artists express that their participation in an aboriginal community should be recognized and reflected in the price of their pieces. Using their conceptions of authenticity, artists apply them to the art gallery scene and feel as though they should be recognized and valued for being ‘from the source.’ For some artists, the advantages of being in Alert Bay are that “you’ll know the stories of what you’re carving . . . it’s all about learning about what that mask is used for and why and what’s the significance of it. That’s really important when you’re telling that story from here” (Randy Bell, August 16th, 2004, pers. comm.). Staying in Alert Bay in order to learn and grow in cultural knowledge about art pieces has its trade off’s with traveling into the city to sell a piece. As Wilson notes,

That’s one of the major . . . cons of living here. Like I said getting to the galleries. If you want to keep prices in a realistic market place, you can’t expect a guy to offer $1000 for a piece when you have to leave Alert Bay, fuel up your vehicle, drive to Nanaimo, eat the whole way, catch the $100 ferry, pay for a hotel room, feed yourself the whole time, run around the city the next day trying to sell your piece so that you can run home only to put $500 on your table . . . the gallery owners get insulted when you ask for more, saying I can get it from this guy because he’s here in town. But he’s never left Vancouver, and he’s never worked with anybody . . . maybe [his piece] is pretty, but he doesn’t know what he’s talking about and that is why you need to go back to the source (Joe Wilson August 17th, 2004, pers. comm.).

When referring to gallery owners in general and commenting on this idea of gaining credibility by being connected to an aboriginal community, Bruce Alfred notes, “Everything [they] know, [they] read, but I live it, so there has to be some credibility there, but they don’t want to hear about that (Bruce Alfred August 6th, 2004, pers. comm.). Similarly, Wilson argues that belonging to an aboriginal community both legitimates them as artists, but is also an added benefit for art gallery owners. He holds the view that art gallery owners in urban
centers should use the artists’ connection to an aboriginal community as a way of
‘guaranteeing’ authenticity for both the art gallery owner and for potential clients (Joe
Wilson August 17th, 2004, pers. comm.):

I would say that most artists don’t live in Vancouver. Most artists live from the source, which
is kind of better for the gallery owners, and so they should make it more friendly for the guys
that do that...If you can’t provide proof of who you are, where you’re from, where you’ve
learnt, I don’t think you should be allowed to call yourself a traditional artist. (Joe Wilson
August 17th, 2004, pers. comm.).

Alternatively, when selling their work to local art markets in their community, it has
been my observation that the reputation of the artist or their connection to an aboriginal
community is not always discussed. This is most likely to be the case in local venues as
artists’ connection to an aboriginal community is already established. Rather, artists’ works
are evaluated based on the technical and aesthetic qualities of a piece. Sanborn points out
that the process of evaluation based on technique and aesthetic characteristics usually take
place with emerging artists: “If an emerging artist has a little bear mask and he has seen
another bear mask priced at $1,400.00, sometimes he will think he should get the same price
as the established artist. This is when I would constructively point out to them that perhaps
some extra work is required to bring his piece to the same standard as the other. Unless they
are prepared to do this to make their mask as acceptable as the professional artist's then I can
only suggest a different price level for them” (Andrea Sanborn August 13th, 2004, pers.
comm.).

Although this type of evaluation is said to take place the majority of the time with
emerging artists, some of the more established artists have expressed that the technique and
aesthetic traits of their work are at times being compared to those of young beginner artists.
At the same time, in my discussions with more established artists in the community, whose
work is more often than not priced in relation to their reputation and their connection to an aboriginal community by non-local art gallery owners, they find this type of evaluation frustrating. In an interview with an established First Nations artist in Alert Bay, Fortney (2001) quotes an artist’s thoughts towards this type of pricing evaluation:

The gift shop [at the U’mista Cultural Centre] has become their mandate, but 90% of what’s in there is junk . . . The Shop haggles over prices and wants to pay everybody the same. They don’t recognize that some people never attain the high standard that Masters like Doug Cranmer have, [they indicate a student in the corner who has only been carving for 10 years] they would want to pay them the same price for their work (cited in Fortney 2001: 74).

These perceptions are likely to reflect that for more established artists it is more difficult to sell large pieces locally because they usually have higher asking prices based on their established reputation. 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 (Andrea Sanborn August 13th, 2004, pers. comm.).

The frustration of more established artists in regards to how they are evaluated both locally and non-locally by art gallery owners illustrates their simultaneous entanglement with alternate systems of evaluation. This examination leads one to believe that both artists and art gallery owners are actively making distinctions and placing values on “parts of the culture, the cultural heritage, the history to be transmitted, from the ‘valueless’ parts” (Hall 2002: 234).
Artists’ Perspectives on Quality and Standards

Artists have different ideas on which art pieces are acceptable to sell in the art market, and why. Some artists sell masks, rattles, or objects that would have been and continue to be used in a ceremonial capacity. For instance, Bell states

[I have been] faced with some pretty hard criticism as an artist for selling it [his 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 (Randy Bell August 16th, 2004, pers. comm.).

Moreover, in discussing his personal standards on what he will create or not create for the art market, Wasden Jr. notes

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. The only pieces that I would sell in the outside market, and 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 (William Wasden Jr. August 20th, 2004, pers. comm.).

Instead, Wasden Jr. chooses to sell works such as flat designs, drums, t-shirts, and sweatshirts without sacred significance. On this note, he states:

I also acknowledge that we live in rapidly changing times and that our people have so little as far as traditional resources or economics that benefit our people. But I do know that some of the great artists of old such as Willie Seaweed, used to sell “masks” and sculptures, however, he did not carve his pieces if they were objects from the culture such as a mask, to be worn or functional. He made them more like a sculpture, or a carving that would be displayed on a wall and not functional or wearable to the owner, who more than likely did not have the right to wear the piece (William Wasden Jr. March 23rd, 2005, e-mail).
Furthermore, in defining his idea of personal standards, Wayne Alfred notes that, “A standard, 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” (Wayne Alfred August 9th, 2004, pers. comm.).

Another way artists’ discuss the idea of ‘standards’ is in relationship to an artist’s level of experience in relation to pricing. 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 form 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 (local artist August 10th, 2004, pers. comm.).

Art gallery owners will also connect the standard of a piece with a price range. Sanborn 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 (Andrea Sanborn August 13th, 2004, pers. comm.).

Similarly, in terms of pricing, a local shop owner observes that “there’s always room for competition if somebody wants to sell their pieces for a lower price, they’re welcome to do that, but they’ll find out, once you’ve done that, it’s really tough to get the price you want” (local shop owner August 21st, 2004, pers. comm.).

Although different stances exist on whether and what to sell in the art market, how standards are defined, and how pricing is determined, it is clear that these multiple points of views suggest a strong commitment to educating others, in preserving cultural traditions and
in safeguarding others against unfavorable economic outcomes; it is the ways in which to do it and the elements that are stressed that are different.

Artists' Perceptions of Status in their Community

Artists in Alert Bay simultaneously attempt to assert and maintain their social role in their community and also to establish their individual identity as an artist in their participation in the art market economy. Although artists participate in economic transactions in their local community, the majority of their economic transactions take place in non-local environments such as art galleries and businesses in urban centres in the Lower Mainland or internationally. As a result, when artists are discussed in the community, it is largely upon their social or community role rather than their economic contributions to the community.

For instance, when asked about the kinds of roles artists play in Alert Bay, ‘Namgis community member Barbara Cranmer, who is also a film maker and member of a local dance group answered; “the 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” (Barbara Cranmer August 17th, 2004, pers. comm.). 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 such 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 (Randy Bell August 16th, 2004, pers. comm.).
Artists are known in their community for their distinct roles and responsibilities in specific potlatch ceremonies and articulate that this is one of the reasons they choose to stay in their local communities.

With emphasis placed on an artist’s social role in the community, their economic or professional contributions and the struggles they encounter as artists working in the art market as artists have a tendency to be overlooked. As Wasden Jr. 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, and being paid for your artwork for Potlatching is another part of our tradition . . . in the olden days, it was the same thing. 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. The carvers today, the ones at home at least, I know, create pieces for Potlatching, this is because the hometown people believe in the culture they are making a living from. They usually do it from the goodness of their hearts and this is where I have a real admiration and find acceptance to their livelihood and the selling of our artwork. If we need something for ceremonies, they will do it for their culture and their people. In the earlier days, artists were really treated well amongst the people because artwork is considered a spiritual gift from the Creator and what they created were sacred objects to carry out spiritual ceremonies. Young men were chosen and groomed by a mentor chosen by the family to teach the young apprentice. Natural ability was identified at an early age and the family would acknowledge the gift and assist in enhancing that young person’s talent by carefully selecting an appropriate and respected teacher for them. Nowadays, I think the artists have really been taken for granted. You know, people don’t appreciate how much work and time that really goes into carving . . . in 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. This has been forced on them by the crude business people who want to give our artists bottom wholesale prices. (William Wasden Jr. August 20th, 2004, pers. comm.).

The notion that artists’ contributions have been taken for granted is likely a reflection of different understandings of ‘real jobs.’ Most artists equate having a ‘real job’ to mean professional flexibility and freedom. Bell, who works as the Youth Employment Officer for the ‘Namgis First Nations and as an artist expresses that having a ‘real job’ usually means a job that has regular pay and holiday time (Randy Bell August 16th, 2004, pers. comm.).

Moreover, he states that, “when people say a real job, a real job is when you’re paid every two weeks, you’re your own boss, your not dependant on anybody else, you’re not dependant on funding or funding sources, you’re not dependant on anyone else acquiring funds to hire
you (Randy Bell August 16th, 2004, pers. comm.). Although this statement seems contradictory, it reflects Bell’s attempt to explain his role both as an artist and as a paid employee of the ‘Namgis Band.

The presence of multiple understandings of what is meant by a ‘real job’ reflects a situation where artists are stuck between “traditional” understandings of employment that centre around seasonal work (Codere 1990: 364) and capitalist understandings of employment that centre around hourly wages and cash economy.

Bruce Alfred, who continues his occupation as an artist in Alert Bay expresses

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. (Bruce Alfred, August 6th, 2004, pers. comm.).

It is not surprising that their role as economic contributors has the possibility of being overlooked as most of artists’ economic transactions occur in non-local or private settings.

Another way in which artists feel overlooked relates to local programming priorities in the community. With a high number of current artists in Alert Bay in their 50s and 60s, and the long process and patience it takes for younger artists to become established in the art market, there is less of an immediate demand to allocate funding and resources into apprenticeship and artistic training programs. Although there have been several apprenticeship training workshops, and international commissions in the past, with the allocation of funds being used for specific projects, there are a number of areas of priority.

Bell notes, in terms of younger generations pursuing the role of artist,

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
Because of the large number of artists already working in Alert Bay, artistic traditions are considered to be an aspect of 'Namgis culture that is being well preserved, is strong and stable. Filling current employment opportunities in industrial trade and entrepreneurial positions (Randy Bell August 16th, 2004, pers. comm.) and preserving other aspects of 'Namgis culture, such as the language, and natural resources like fish, are areas of immediate concern in the community. Although some artists discuss the language, the use and collection of natural materials, the stories, songs, and dances in conjunction with art production, and see their profession as a way to preserve these aspects, pursuing the profession of artist is not considered an employment priority.

While the preservation of language and natural resources are also critically important to artists, many of the artists I spoke with expressed that because programs were not being developed around artistic endeavors, their profession and contributions both as instructors and economic contributors was somehow being categorized as less important. Wayne Alfred articulates “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” (Wayne Alfred August 9th, 2004, pers. comm.). In sum, as artists from Alert Bay continue to create and participate in local and non-local ‘regimes of value,’ they will continue to seek professional and economic recognition in the community.
Adhering to notions of “tradition” and living out the realities of socio-economic and historical circumstances that First Nations in British Columbia face (Graburn 1993: 186), artists in Alert Bay differentiate themselves from artists outside their community and “reconfigure themselves by drawing selectively on remembered pasts” (Clifford 2001:471). As Hall brings to light, “the active work on existing traditions and activities; their active reworking, will come out a different way; they appear to ‘persist’ yet, from one period to another, they come to stand in a different relation to the ways working people live and the ways they define their relations to each other, to ‘the others’ and to their conditions of life” (2002: 228). As artists in Alert Bay enter into new relationships with local and non-local artists, brokers and clients, they will be continually confronted with the issues of authenticity, quality and standards and their perceived role as an artist in their community while new ones are created (Clifford 2001:471).

CONCLUSIONS

This case study shows that First Nations artists in Alert Bay, B.C., similar to current indigenous artists in Canada and worldwide, are “attempting to merge the legacy of individualism with the dynamic and affirming bond of community. They 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” (McMaster 1998:23). As with other indigenous peoples (McMaster 1998; Povenelli 2002), one of the main reasons that First Nations artists in Alert Bay remain in their local community is because of social obligations or moral sensibilities to ‘give back to the community.’ Although there is a larger market for their work outside their community, artists choose to be based in Alert Bay to be close to family, to learn and teach cultural knowledge,
and to participate in socio-cultural community activities. Their actions in doing so translate into social capital where artists gain status and prestige by giving back to the community in these ways.

In order to remain connected to their community, artists in Alert Bay develop economic strategies and create indirect and direct forms of relationships to maintain connections to local and non-local art markets. Brokers such as art gallery owners, family members and other artists are used to create indirect relationships between artists and clients or end purchasers. Direct relationships also develop between artists (particularly among established artists) and clients in the artist’s local community. For some artists, the Internet is used as a medium to maintain communication with these groups.

The narratives of artists demonstrate that tensions around definitions of the authenticity of the artist, the quality and standards of their work and their perceived status in the community arise as a result of direct and indirect transactions with art gallery owners and clients. The majority of artists in Alert Bay articulate a language of cultural difference (Dubin 2001:141) by emphasizing community involvement and the adherence to tradition as markers of authenticity; they use these categories to differentiate themselves largely from First Nations artists living in urban centers. In local economic settings the quality, standards of their work, and pricing is often evaluated based on technical and aesthetic characteristics whereas in non-local economic settings artists’ works are often evaluated based up their ethnicity and community involvement. Artists are evaluated based on their social role in some settings and on their economic and professional role in other settings, and are “forced to engage in contradictory discourses (Dubin 2001:145). As a result, artists who attempt to
maneuver through these alternative ‘regimes of value’ and attempt to bridge the two together are often left dissatisfied and frustrated and feel underappreciated in both ‘regimes of value.’

As artists in Alert Bay continue to be based out of their cultural community while simultaneously working in economic arenas inside and outside their community, it will be increasingly important to observe the specific issues that arise in their doing so. In this way, upcoming artists wishing to pursue similar ventures will not only be aware of the types of transactions taking place, how they take place, and the issues that artists are faced with, but by learning from the words and experiences of artists in this case study, upcoming artists and gallery owners will also be better equipped in dealing with these issues as they encounter them. This cultural struggle is dynamic, it is a historical process; “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” (Hall 2002: 237).
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