

BILL REID



Haida Beaver

Bill Reid '78

Silkscreen, edition of 195
signed and numbered by the artist
issue price \$750.00, printed on
Arches 100% rag, four deckle edges
paper size 56cm x 76cm (22 1/4" x 30")
10 artists proofs, 10 remarque prints
Available approximately
November 1st, 1978

Haida Beaver
Original print by Haida artist Bill Reid



Haida Beaver

Over the past thirty five years Bill Reid has executed Beaver in many media, from massive totem to delicate earrings. In each case he infused the design with that monumental quality which distinguishes him as the greatest living master of Haida art, one of the world's richest art heritages. This graphic is an example of his skill in synthesizing the traditional Haida repertoire of tense line and form in a harmonious new way.

As a young man curious about the art of his ancestors Reid first "met" Beaver carved on the great totem pole collected from Tanu and installed in the stairwell of Toronto's Royal Ontario Museum. Later he was to carve his own classic Beaver pole for the University of British Columbia. This year, in a gesture symbolic of the renewal of Haida culture, a pole carved by Reid took its place beside the famous old Beaver pole of Skidegate and became the first pole to be erected in that historic village in over a century. It is altogether appropriate that Beaver, with its large stylized incisors and checkered tail, should be Reid's 1978 graphic work.

Text by Bill Ellis



Photo by Ulli Steltzer

BILL REID

Born in Victoria, B.C., Bill Reid is the oldest of three children. His father was a naturalized Canadian of Scottish and German parentage, his mother a Haida Indian whose parents lived in Skidgate Mission, Queen Charlotte Islands.

The Reid family lived at varying times in Victoria, on both sides of the B.C.-Alaska border at Hyder, and at Stewart in B.C. Bill Reid's schooling went from kindergarten in Victoria (conducted by Emily Carr's sister Alice), to Grade 6 in Alaska and on through to high school in Victoria.

Lacking the motivation and the finances for further education, he drifted into an unpaid job as announcer with a local radio station. But his deep resonant voice and his good command of English brought him a paying position and took him to the CBC in eastern Canada.

Before leaving the broadcasting industry in 1958, Bill Reid wrote and narrated a television film documenting the salvage of the last of the totem poles from the Queen Charlotte Islands. He also wrote and narrated a film record of a major exhibit of Northwest Coast art at the Vancouver Art Gallery: "People of the Pottlatch."

Surprisingly, interest in his Indian ancestry was not aroused until quite late in Bill Reid's life. He says "I was actually in my early teens before I even became conscious of the fact that I was anything other than an average caucasian North American. My mother had learned the major lesson taught the native peoples of our hemisphere during the first half of this century, that it was somehow sinful and debased to be, in white terms, an "Indian", and certainly saw no reason to pass any pride in that part of their heritage on to her children. I never visited her native village, or saw my grandmother when she was alive, or my grandfather, till I was an adult. But gradually, probably through contact with my mother's brothers and sisters, I began to become more conscious of the Haidas, and as I never knew any of my father's people, they became my only relatives."

Awareness of the great art tradition of these relatives first came to him through the gold and silver bracelets owned by his mother and his aunts. In his early twenties he at last got to know his grandfather, and began what was to become a lifelong series of visits to the Queen Charlottes. "My grandfather spoke little English, and of course I spoke no Haida, so communication was difficult, but I did learn he was in fact the last in a direct line of silversmiths, having

learned from Charles Edenshaw, the greatest of them all, with whom he'd lived as a youth. He also was a commendable slate (argillite) carver. He says "Through him I also gained the friendship of many of the old men and women alive at that time who still remembered something of the great days of the Haida past. And I began to identify more and more with them."

Bill Reid's return to Toronto resulted in his discovering the collection of Northwest Coast art in the Royal Ontario Museum. He was particularly impressed by the great Haida pole from Tanu, the birthplace of his grandmother, and he felt the desire to emulate his grandfather and other silversmiths and goldsmiths.

While still working in radio, he studied jewellery making at Ryerson Institute of Technology for 2 years, then apprenticed in a good platinum and diamond workshop for a year and a half.

Following his return to the west coast, his knowledge and understanding of the underlying dynamics of Haida art grew, and he was able to create his own personal designs rather than copying the masters of the past, at the same time staying within the traditions.

He worked for a few short weeks with the late Mungo Martin, then he plunged into the mammoth 3-year task of recreating a section of a Haida village for the University of British Columbia, with the assistance of Kwakiutl carver Douglas Cranmer.

After that, Bill Reid again turned to jewellery-making in a business of his own, but still carved in wood, making a totem pole for the Shell Oil Centre in London, England. This pole was recently given by Shell to the Skidegate Museum.

The most comprehensive exhibition of Northwest Coast art ever to be assembled was the now famous "Arts of the Raven" at the Vancouver Art Gallery in 1966. Bill Reid played a major role in the

selection of the material from museums and private collections throughout North America, contributed to the catalogue, and worked with designers and staff on many aspects of this great exhibit. Some of his own pieces were included in the display.

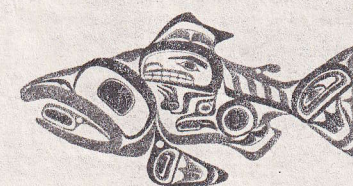
Centennial year saw the creation of a large gold casket surmounted by a three dimensional eagle that was displayed in the Canadian Pavillion at Expo '67, and a commission to carve a large wood screen 7 ft. square for the new Provincial Museum in Victoria.

The followed a year in Europe (on a Canada Council fellowship grant) with studies in the metal trades and working on a long felt desire, the making of jewellery in contemporary, universal design, rather than the Haida tradition.

The London experience brought about a marked improvement in all his subsequent work, and when, in 1969 he returned to Canada and settled in Montreal, it was to produce many of the best works of his whole career, both in Haida and contemporary design, in gold and silver, and in wood and slate. Many of these are now part of private and museum collections.

In 1974, a retrospective exhibition of a quarter century of Bill Reid's work was held at the Vancouver Art Gallery. In 1976, he received honorary degrees from the University of British Columbia and from Trent University. 1977 saw him receive the \$20,000 Molson Award for his contribution to the arts. In 1978 he received a further degree from York University. He also completed carving a 55 ft. totem pole for his mother's village of Skidegate, the first pole to be erected there in over 100 years.

No one living today has produced such an abundance and variety of great art within the tradition of the incomparable Haida of the Queen Charlotte Islands.



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