

pulse

NORTH SHORE GUIDE TO ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT



NEWS photo Paul McGrath

ROY Henry Vickers is the latest of many significant Canadian artists to sign on in support of the vision and activities of Artists for Kids. His new print, *Twin Sisters*, is part of *Stories of Our Time*, an exhibition of contemporary aboriginal art on view at the gallery until May 10.

ARTISTS FOR KIDS

Stories of our time

■ *Stories of Our Time*, Artists for Kids Gallery, until May 10.

Michael Becker

Contributing Writer

THE standard description of Roy Henry Vickers goes something like this: world-famous printmaker, painter, carver, author and designer; an artist whose signature style fuses the traditional images of his West Coast native ancestry with the realism of his British heritage.

Vickers is all of that, but at 62 years of age, he knows that the arc of his own personal narrative places him in a fundamental role. At his core, when all the accolades and creative tactics are reconciled and appreciated, he is a storyteller. The experience of decades as an inspired artist straddling multiple cultures tells

him this. Many stories from many places remain to be told.

Vickers was in North Vancouver recently to help launch *Stories of Our Time*, an Artists for Kids Exhibition of First Nations art. The show runs to May 10 in the Artists for Kids Gallery at the Leo Marshall Centre. Compact and compelling, this little gem of an exhibit presents the art of prominent contemporary Canadian First Nations artists.

Among the artists represented in painting, print, sculpture and carving: Bill Reid, Brian Jungen, Kenojuak Ashevak, Robert Davidson, Jane Ash Poitras, Roy Henry Vickers, Lawrence Paul Yuxweluptun, George Littlechild, Xwalacktun and Ashevak Tunnillie among others.

Vickers is the latest of the many significant Canadian artists to sign on to support the vision and activities of Artists for Kids.

At the heart of Vickers' contribution is a new print, *Twin Sisters*, released with the exhibition to help the ongoing effort of Artists for Kids in schools and

See Teachers' page 41

Teachers' stories inspiration for Vickers

From page 13

throughout the community. He has gifted 100 copies of the work for the cause.

The print integrates influences of one of his great inspirations, Katsushika Hokusai, with ghostly traditional West Coast native images, muted by misty hues of grey and bisecting lines of rain. It tells a story familiar to Vickers since childhood.

The composition speaks of this familiar place, the iconic "Lions," in an unexpected way.

Vickers' father was a fisherman with half-Tsimshian, half-Heiltsuk ancestry. His mother was a teacher from Britain. He remembers his English grandfather, living in Vancouver, reading him stories from *Legends of Vancouver*, a collection of short pieces told to E. Pauline Johnson by Squamish Chief Joe Capilano.

Says Vickers, "So this story goes back to the early 1950s and even further back than that to another half breed like me, E. Pauline Johnson, who befriended Chief Capilano. He told her the stories of those two mountains and who they were.

"The story is about two sisters who brought peace when they were alive. The Salish people were at war with the northern people, the Tsimshian people. The two daughters were tired of the war and they went to their father Chief Capilano and they said, 'We know how to end the war.' They made up their minds that they would find two Tsimshian men and marry them and then there could be no war. And they did and there's been peace between the Salish and the Tsimshian ever since," he says.

And so this story was read to Vickers at age five by his English grandfather, who knew that his grandson should be introduced to these stories. And Vickers' grandfather from Bella Bella shared his stories.

As a child growing up Vickers heard other storytellers. He heard them speak at feasts and wondered how they could ever say things that he needed to hear.

He struggled as a student going through school. "Some of my teachers got together and they helped me get through



photo submitted

GEORGE Littlechild's On Sacred Ground, 1996, is part of the Stories of Our Time exhibit.

high school. They were determined to get this little Indian kid through Oak Bay High School.

"As it turned out not only did they get this Indian kid through high school but I was the first Indian kid from my village to graduate from high school. Years later what I realized is that three teachers, out of all the teachers I had, they told me their stories and they inspired me. It was their emotion that got me through high school.

"And so now as an elder of 62 years of age, looking at a career that spanned 40 years I realize that it's time for me to connect with people who believe in children. And Artists For

Kids, when I heard what they're doing for children, I knew I had to do this and here I am. It's very exciting for me," Vickers says.

Says Bill MacDonald, managing director, Artists For Kids: "All the money from this print goes to our programs for kids. So that's a huge gift and it will carry us for the next couple of years. We're really delighted to have this."

The Stories of Our Time exhibit will be a launch pad of inspiration for many.

More than 2,000 students and their teachers will work directly with the show to support a greater appreciation for the art of First Nations cultures and artists. Participants will also discover new ways to tell stories by creating their own art.

Says MacDonald, "It's really building on what Roy does, as a teacher to share stories. So we built a whole show around this notion of different kinds of stories. Stories from the Plains Cree Nation, stories from the Inuit and others, and then the curriculum of the different kinds of stories the kids are learning. We've developed follow-up activities for the teachers to take ideas from this show and move it beyond. They'll be building their own stories and pictures."

Vickers is moved by what he sees in the exhibit. "What I'm hit with is people growing in our country from a First Nations history and speaking from their unique perspective. So you find someone (Brian Jungen) making a skull from the skins of baseballs. What's that about? Well the skull is about rebirth and it's about death and spirit. I love what he's created. Robert (Davidson) continues to move into new areas and he's created this massive piece out of steel and cut with water and we think that water is so soft and it cuts steel. So there are many layers of meaning here."

He sees beautiful, inspired creation all around him. The Creator breathes through it all. Stories are being told.

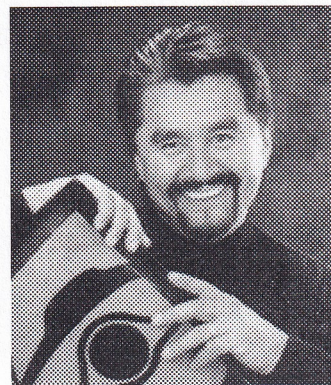
Visit Stories of Our Time to May 10. The Artists for Kids Gallery is located in the Leo Marshall Centre, 810 West 21st St., North Vancouver. Admission is by donation. Hours are 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. weekdays; noon to 4 p.m. weekends. Learn more about Artists for Kids at www.artists4kids.com.



ROY HENRY VICKERS

Canadian artist Roy Henry Vickers is best known around the world for his limited edition prints. He is also an accomplished carver, design advisor of prestigious public spaces, a sought-after keynote speaker, and publisher and author of several successful books.

In addition, he is a recognized leader in the First Nations community, and a tireless spokesperson for recovery from addictions and abuse. Roy has received many awards and honours for his art and community involvement. Among them are a hereditary chieftainship and several hereditary names he has received from Northwest Coast First Nations.



In 1994, Maclean's magazine included Roy as the first artist ever in its Annual Honour Roll of Extraordinary Canadian Achievers. In 1998, the Province of British Columbia appointed Roy to the prestigious Order of B.C.

In 1987, at the Commonwealth Summit in Vancouver, the original of Roy's painting A Meeting of Chiefs was the official gift of the Province of British Columbia to Queen Elizabeth II. Limited edition prints of the painting were presented to the 48 Commonwealth Heads of State.

During their Vancouver Summit in 1993, former Soviet leader Boris Yeltsin and former U.S. president Bill Clinton received artist's proofs of Roy's print The Homecoming as the Province's official gift. Roy's work can be found in private and public collections and galleries around the world including the National Museum of Man (Ottawa, Ontario), University of British Columbia's Museum of Anthropology (Vancouver), the McMichael Canadian Art Collection (Kleinburg, Ontario) and the National Museum of Japan (Osaka.)

Roy Henry Vickers was born in June 1946 in the village of Greenville, in northern British Columbia. Roy has stayed on the northwest coast of British Columbia ever since, residing at various times in Hazelton, Kitkatla, Tofino and Victoria.

Roy's love and respect of the magnificent natural beauty of this area is clearly evident in his art. His boldly colourful sunsets, subdued misty rivers and peaceful winter scenes reflect the essence of the west coast of Canada.

Roy's father was a fisherman with the blood of three northwest coast First

Nations — Tsimshian, Haida and Heiltsuk — flowing in his veins. Roy's mother was a schoolteacher whose parents had immigrated to Canada from England. This unusual mixed heritage has had a strong influence on Roy's art.

Roy studied traditional First Nations art and design at the Gitanmaax School of Northwest Coast Indian Art in Hazelton. Using these building blocks Roy, through hard work and intensive research, created his authentic and personal style of expression — a harmonious fusion of traditional and contemporary, old and new, personal and universal.

In many of his pieces, Roy uses superimposed "shadow images" that add another layer of depth, history and myth to his clear, clean images. His signature Eagle Moon and various suns appear on many pieces as well.

The resulting art touches deeply and is accessible to people all over the world regardless of their background, age, beliefs or traditions.

The success of Roy's Eagle Aerie Gallery is a remarkable example of the universal appeal of his art. The Gallery is a traditional northwest coast longhouse Roy built in 1986 in the village of Tofino, on the extreme west coast of Vancouver Island.

An artist-owned gallery was — and still is — a rarity and at best a risky business, let alone one built far away from the media and the art-buying public. Today, Eagle Aerie Gallery welcomes more than 200,000 visitors a year from around the world and it is one of the area's main attractions.

In 2004, Roy's second gallery - Roy Henry Vickers Gallery - opened in Sidney, near

Victoria on Vancouver Island.

Also in 2004, Roy returned with his family to Hazelton, where he now lives and works by the majestic Skeena River.

Roy has completed more than 20 totem poles including the 10-metre (30-foot) Salmon Totem for the 1994 Commonwealth Games' aquatic centre near Victoria. In addition, Roy was the artistic advisor to the architects and designers of the entire venue.

In 1987-1995, Roy was the artistic advisor for the Vancouver International Airport's new terminal. He was also commissioned to create retail storefronts at both the domestic and international terminals.

Roy's designs and carvings can also be found in luxury hotels and private homes, on airplanes and motorcycles, canoes and paddles and glass pieces.

Roy is the author of Solstice: The Art of Roy Henry Vickers (1988) and Spirit Transformed: A Journey from Tree to Totem (1996), and the illustrator of the best-selling book The Elders Are Watching (1990.) In 2003, Roy published his long-awaited second milestone book *Copperman - The Art of Roy Henry Vickers*, which is a substantial retrospective of his work and images of the past 15 years.

Roy Henry Vickers is a prolific artist who in addition to his many other artistic endeavours and community interests creates a steady flow of new limited edition prints each year. Many are sold out within months to regular collectors and fans who feel a personal connection with not only the art but with the artist.

By Tuija Seipel

Eagle Aerie Gallery P.O. Box 10, 350 Campbell Street, Tofino B.C. V0R 2Z0 (250) 725.3235, Toll Free: 1.800.663.0669
www.royhenryvickers.com