Carey Newman: Artist Statement & Bio

Under the influence and support of his family, Carey began to develop his artistic ability and cultural knowledge from an early age. His father Victor, great, great grandfather Charlie James, and great aunt Ellen Neel, all renowned wood carvers, each contribute to the artistry in his blood. With a strong belief in the importance of traditional ways, Carey is active within his culture, a role for which he has been given the traditional name Ha-yalth-kingeme (face of a chief).

Being of British, Kwagiulth and Salish descent, Carey draws upon each of these cultures in his work. While this adds a contemporary flare to his work, he is careful to adhere to traditional rules of design. Always looking for ways to improve his artistic repertoire, Carey has spent time mastering as many techniques and mediums as possible. Wood, stone, gold, silver, gems, glass, steel and bronze are all mediums that Carey has worked with. This idea of continual learning eventually led him to work in the area of community engaged art and monumental installation.

In 2008, Carey was selected as the master carver of the Cowichan 2008 Spirit Pole, a journey that saw him travel the province of BC sharing the experience of carving a 20’ totem with over 11,000 people. In 2009, Carey was selected from a national call by VANOC and won the right to create a large installation. His piece entitled “Dancing Wind,” featured during the 2010 Olympic Games, consists of four large panels, made from stainless steel, cedar and glass.

Carey’s involvement with the cultural community extends beyond his artwork. He is continually learning about his history and traditions and has taken a leadership role in mentoring young artists. In 2011 and 2012, he completed two different totems with the “EAGLE Project,” a life-skills and employment program that incorporated carving with Aboriginal youth as a cultural component. Those totems now stand in front of the Victoria Native Friendship Centre, eternal reminders of what those youth have accomplished.

In 2012, Carey envisioned a national monument to Residential School Survivors called the Witness Blanket. This large-scale art installation, which incorporates actual pieces of Residential Schools, churches, government buildings and traditional structures from across Canada, was selected to be one of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s Commemoration Initiatives. The process of creation took over two years and was by far the largest community outreach he has ever undertaken. The project now includes a mobile app and a documentary is in the works. It is both artistically and personally the most important work he has ever done.

In 2015, Carey saw the Witness Blanket tour across Canada stopping in Calgary, Regina, Ottawa, Hamilton and Cape Breton. The next installation on the 7-year tour is at the Canadian Museum of Human Rights in Winnipeg. He also completed a public commission called the Humble Frog for Wood Buffalo, Alberta and a major installation called Mind, Body and Spirit, an acoustic ceiling that he and his wife gifted to the new home of Pacific Opera Victoria.

Carey lives in Victoria, BC where he enjoys spending time with his wife Elaine, playing with his daughter Adelyn and walking his dog Haley. A lifelong artist, his goal is to follow the footpaths of those who influence him the most: his father, for his artistic integrity and self-respect, and Bill Reid, for his mastery of many mediums.

“I consider myself a contemporary artist with a traditional soul. I try to innovate, creating movement while working within the conventions of tradition. I often try to distill things to their essence. I am rooted in past, looking to the future and trying to reflect the world that we live in today.”

- Carey Newman 2015