Behind the Gold Veil brings together elements from the natural and cultural worlds to address the relationship/balance of materialism and spirituality. The pieces in the exhibition are grounded by cultural worlds to address the relationship/balance of materialism and spirituality. The pieces in the exhibition are by Rande Cook, and are presented at the Campbell River Art Gallery. The exhibition runs from May 15 to June 26, 2015.

The exhibition, "Behind the Gold Veil," by Rande Cook, presents works that reference various ways by which gold has figured into cultures around the world, and through time. In the context of Cook's own ancestry from the 'Namgis First Nation territory on the northwest coast of North America, the role of gold since colonial exploration has been small, but brilliant. One of Cook's thoughts about linking the natural and cultural worlds is to bring together elements from the natural and cultural worlds in the potlatch during ceremony. This piece, which is similar in scale to the dance screens that separate spiritual and material worlds in the big house during ceremony, is to be an example of the use of gold in the potlatch. The precious metal enters Kwakwaka'wakw culture and history, as well as a key role in today's economic climate and spirituality. The pieces in the exhibition are grounded by Cook's thoughts about linking the natural and cultural worlds with his newly acquired power of flight, and deep reflection on the beauty and power of gold. Cook refers to the potlatch as a Kwakwaka'wakw person, artist, chief, and Hamatsa. The pieces speak to each other through his use of gold, and his newly acquired power of flight. Cook interprets this story of superhuman flight through his installation of two etched semi-circles of glass that feature the abstracted design of butterfly wings. In the centre of each piece is a small and intimate figure attached to the centre of the glass, as if hovering in the air. The tiny figure is the Madam from the 'Namgis story, and the half circles of glass represent sunrise and sunset, and his journey from earth to sky. The glass pieces are installed in an east-west formation, thus strengthening the presence of their celestial referents. Cook uses lighting in this piece as with others in the exhibition, to bring further depth to the piece. In this instance, shadows cast over the walls, which emanate from the glass, echo those cast by the sun's first light of the day or the brilliant moon at night.

Four gold skulls are positioned on plinths in the middle of the gallery, each having a different symbol attached to the top of them. These are a quartz crystal, Madam (dancer), salmon, and deer antlers. The grouping of skulls addresses the relationship humans have had since time immemorial with the elements of fire, water, air and earth. The elements of earth and air are depicted through the crystal and Madam on top of two of the skulls. The elements of fire and water are depicted through his use of deer antlers and a small carved salmon. Salmon, as it was known by Cook, is a source of nutrition, and is well known, play a prominent role in Kwakwaka'wakw culture and history, as well as a key role in today's economic climate and in food security. The deer antlers are symbolic of a very long and complex story of how Cook's ancestors acquired the use of fire through the deer. In the very beginning the animal carried fire in his tail, and he would run and jump against the trees, and jump as high as he could to the sky to create lightning. This is why, explained Cook, when two sticks are rubbed together or when lightning strikes, fire may occur.

The natural world and its ties to the cultural realm are noted as well in the two diptych canvases in the exhibition, both of mirrored columns. These columns are a system of record keeping and affirmation of title. Geschwister, and a reference to the boy known as the Madam climbs a mountain that rises near the lake. As he climbs the mountain slope, the quartz crystals on the mountain attach to his body and they give him the ability to fly. With his newly acquired power of flight, he flies around the world night and day, and he seeks to attain a more spiritual connection to this mineral - and he seeks to attain a more spiritual connection to this mineral, and deep reflection on the beauty and power of gold. Cook refers to this as a Kwakwaka'wakw person, artist, chief, and Hamatsa. The pieces in the exhibition are grounded by Cook's thoughts about linking the natural and cultural worlds with their reference to the earthly flowers and skyward supernatural birds. The large 6x6 foot carved cedar panel that depicts a spirit whale, is similar in scale to the dance screens that separate spiritual and material worlds in the big house during ceremony. This piece interacts in the exhibition with the other monumental work, which is an example of the use of gold in the potlatch during ceremony. The tension produced through the production that hinges on the question: when did the material and commercial properties of gold obscure its relationship to spirituality? And, how can that connection be re-established, or nourished today? This balance between materialism and spirituality is evident in the exhibition as well, as we work to strengthen the culture and its ceremonies.
a massive raven on top of a box of treasures. Both pieces speak to the power of a chief’s wealth in the forms of songs, dances, masks in both material and spiritual forms. The box of treasures and its giant raven adorned with gold leaf highlights holds the ceremonial material properties of the chief. Cook challenges us through his abundant use of gold leaf on the Spirit Whale panel to consider what we see. Do we see the opulence and excess of the valuable metal presented to us in a size and format that almost taunts us to not believe its authenticity? Or do we see the traces of what lay behind the veil, or that sense of the gold’s power? How do we access what is behind this veil of materialism? Cook demands we consider these questions through the exhibition, but the question is most present in this panel, which is the signature piece of this body of work.

To further understand Cook’s choice to focus on gold, one needs to delve deeper into the artist’s own life experiences, and how they resonate with the larger stories of history and ‘Namgis legends that have spanned time and place. His maternal grandmother, Florence Matlipi, figures prominently in his understanding of his own identity, and is from his stories of the wealth and storied significance of gold. In addition, he recounts one story of hers in particular when she took him back to the days of her childhood. What follows here are Matlipi’s words.

“I remember being ten or eleven years old, I think, I got these precious little gold earrings from my grandmother Tl’akwetl. I was at my grandfather Harry Mountain’s house in Village Island. He called this meeting for all the head chiefs to come, I don’t know exactly what was going on but my Aunty Annie did something wrong. He had to correct it right away. All the chiefs were taking the stories and speaking when then when they were done my grandfather started to take things from inside his house and giving them to the chiefs. He gave away beautiful china, teacups and plates plus a few dressers to the bigger chiefs and blankets. Then my grandfather came right over to me and took the earrings off my ears. I was very sad... But he said not to worry as he gave the earrings away to the chief’s wife. Those were my first gold earrings, very beautiful ones, old style you know... I always knew if you wore gold it was important.” — Florence Matlipi (nee Mountain)

Like his grandmother, Cook has his own stories of gold to tell. And these stories are recorded in the art he’s produced for this exhibition, but also in his travels as an artist and through the places and peoples who inspire his practice. On a recent (2010) journey to Italy, with friend and artist Luke Marston, the two visited the St. Peter’s Basilica. In that is arguably one of the most spiritual places for the Roman Catholics around the world, Cook experienced the collision of the power and beauty of gold, and in a completely different context. Yet, the same questions emerged for him around the tension between material and spiritual wealth. In an unplanned act that has come to be recounted and accounted for in a manner makes it akin to a piece of performance art, Cook had Marston snap a photograph of himself in front of Bernini’s Baldacchino di San Pietro. Cook was wearing a mask he’d carved, which has since been named the Vatican Mask. Large format photograph of the ‘Gold’ moment, in which the photograph of Cook wearing the mask in the Basilica was taken, is included in Behind the Gold Veil. The Vatican Mask appears in this exhibition as a material trace, or memory, of this encounter.

At his studio in Victoria, BC, Cook’s creative process is clearly visible. Cedar boards and blocks wait to be carved, and sand blasted glass leans against canvases with paintings sketched onto them. A bench of knives and carving tools is at the ready, and a large chalkboard has notations and sketches covering its surface. Behind the Gold Veil is an indication of the range of media in which Cook is comfortable working. His artistic approach is a combination of particular planning and thoughtfulness to cultural protocol, but it almost always contains an element of technical risk, or it challenges his existing skill set. The pieces in this exhibition are exemplary of his first extensive use of gold leaf on monumental works. Most of his time till now has focused on the production of ornate gold jewelry.

Behind the Gold Veil asks us to reconsider our assumptions on what is valuable, and how something, or someone, comes to be valued. What are the relationships between materialism and spirituality, life and death, and our human existence in the natural world? All these questions intersect with the curious, beautiful, rare, and sought after metal we know as gold. Through the act of covering objects with gold Cook most cleverly reveals what may lie beneath.

RANDE COOK

Chief Rande Cook (K’alapa) was born May 1977 in culture-rich Alert Bay, a small village on the northern tip of Vancouver Island. Surrounded by the beauty of land and art, Rande found the passion of creativity at an early age. With the strong teachings from his grandparents Gus and Florence Matlipi Rande learned the strong values of life and culture. In 2008 Rande inherited his grandfathers chiefship and now carries the name Makwala, which means moon. Rande is very involved in his culture and has hosted a Potlatch and two feasts for his family and community. Rande is also known for his traditional dancing and singing in Potlatches.

Rande has worked with many great mentors such as John Livingston for his mastery in wood sculpting, Robert Davidson in metal work, Calvin Hunt for his amazing craftsmanship in wood and most recently Repousee and Chasing master Valentín Yoktov. Rande has been expanding his capacities with new creative ideas and in 2010 traveled to Italy to study under Yoktov. Most recently he travelled to New York to study in Yoktov’s studio to increase his craft in Repousse and Chasing. Rande pushes himself in all his mediums looking for perfection of each technique. Rande’s works can be seen in many galleries in the United States and Canada, and is now in collections around the world.

Rande now resides in Victoria where he continues to push himself in his creativity by finding many new inspirations in new mediums.

ANDREA WALSH

Andrea Walsh is a visual anthropologist who specializes in twentieth-century and contemporary aboriginal art visual culture in Canada, as well as theoretical and methodological approaches to visual research. Walsh is also an artist who works in photography and video in addition to producing social practice based works. In her development as an anthropologist, Walsh has been inspired by the long history of anthropological studies of art and material culture, and ethnographic film and photography, as well as more recent developments in the field of visual anthropology that have embraced the strengths of interdisciplinary visual culture studies.

Her research and teaching acknowledge and utilize her undergraduate training as a studio based artist (photo-lithography and intaglio printing) and graduate training in documentary and ethnographic film and video production. Walsh’s training as an anthropologist is integral to her approach as an artist. Historical and contemporary community-based cultural research and action is the foundation of my art practice in which she is interested in engaging memory, senses of space and place, history and identity.