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TRANSMITTAL MEMORANDUM

TO: The Honorable Mayor and City Council

FROM: Lacey G. Simpson, Assistant City Manager

DATE: January 25, 2021

RE: **Totem Heritage Center Image featured in January/February 2021
Smithsonian Magazine**

Attached for City Council review is the article “Inspiring Awe in Alaska” published in the January/February 2021 edition of *Smithsonian* magazine. The photographic article features contemporary Northwest Coast Native artists including Tlingit master carver Nathan Jackson of Ketchikan photographed at the City’s Totem Heritage Center and Totem Heritage Center instructor and Tsimshian master carver David A. Boxley, originally from Metlakatla (online article only). The inclusion of the Totem Heritage Center is a testament to the Center’s enduring relevance in promoting and perpetuating the art and culture of Northwest Coast Native peoples. Many of the contemporary artists included in the article have connections with Ketchikan and the Totem Heritage Center. Ketchikan Museums is working with the photographer and journalist who plan to donate the images to the Museums’ collection later this year.

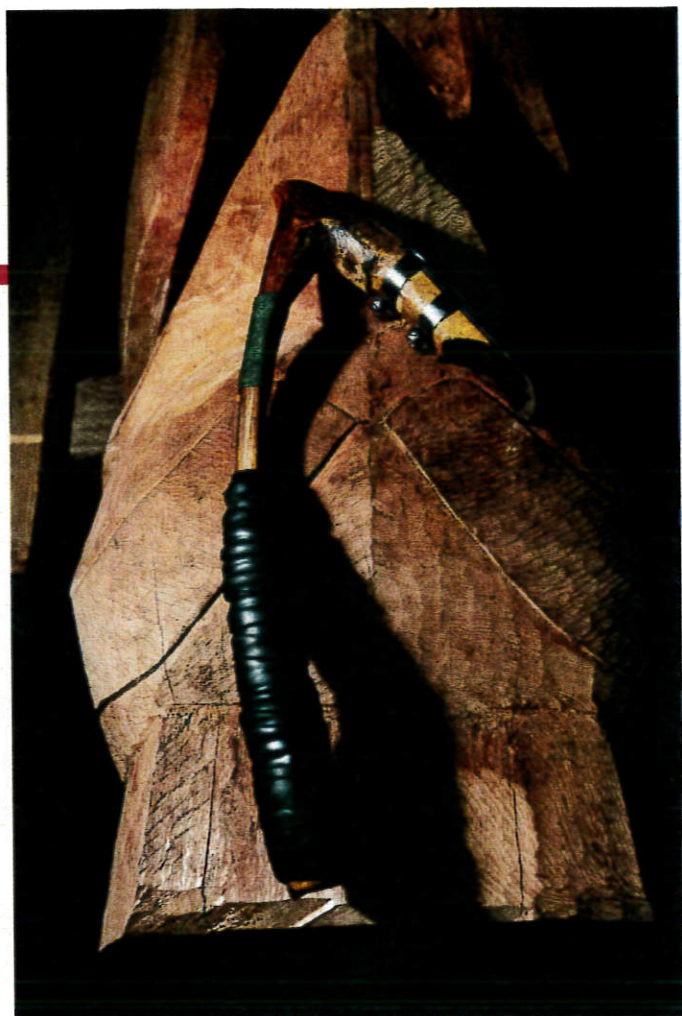
Additional images and information can be found online at <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/arts-culture/native-artisans-alaska-innovation-humor-craft-180976519/>

photographs by
FERNANDO DECHILIS

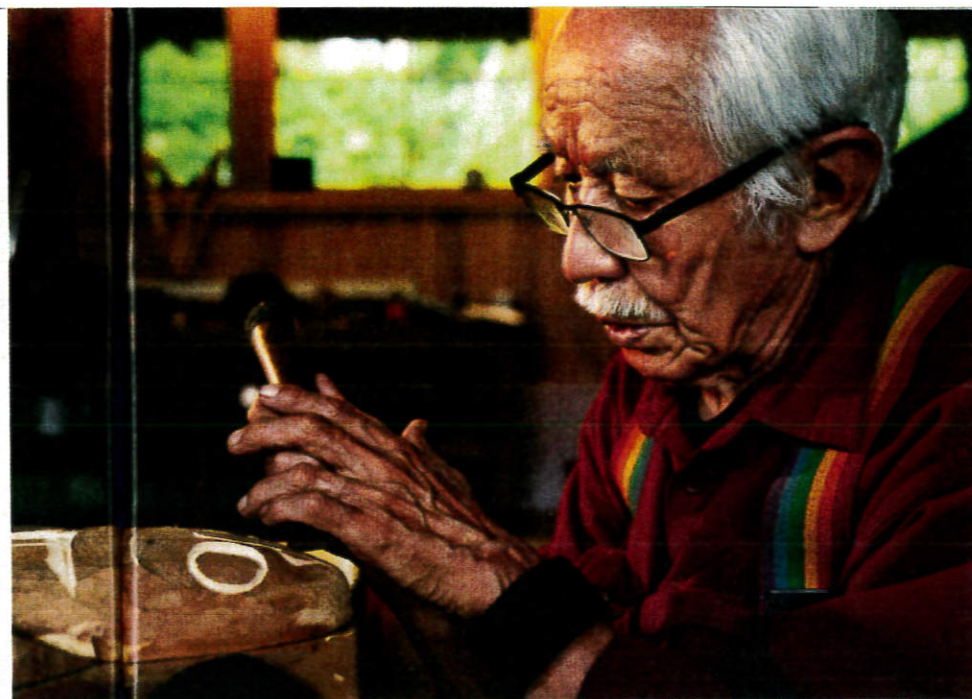
text by
KIMBERLY R. ELLISON/ACU

INSPIRING AWE *in* ALASKA

IN NATIVE COMMUNITIES ALONG THE COAST, A LIVELY ARTISTIC MOVEMENT DRAWS ON INNOVATION AND HUMOR AS WELL AS TRADITION



NATHAN JACKSON, a Chilkoot Saksye clan leader, found his way back to his heritage circuitously after a boyhood spent at a boarding school that prohibited native languages and practices. A carver of monumental art, he works with a tool, above, called an adze. Above right, Jackson, who also goes by Yel Yedl, his Tlingit name, carves a cedar panel depicting an eagle carrying a salmon in its talons. Inset at right, a raven helmet, inlaid with abalone shell. Previous page: At the Totem Heritage Center in Ketchikan, Alaska, Jackson wears ceremonial blankets and a headdress made from ermine pelts, cedar, abalone shell, copper and flicker feathers.



AMONG THE INDIGENOUS NATIONS of Southeast Alaska, there is a concept known in Haida as *litl' Kunlisii*—a timeless call to live in a way that not only honors one's ancestors but takes care to be responsible to future generations.

The traditional arts of the Haida, Tlingit and Tsimshian people are integral to that bond, honoring families, clans, and animal and supernatural beings, and telling oral histories through totem poles, ceremonial clothing and blankets, hand-carved household items and other objects. In recent decades, native artisans have revived practices that stretch back thousands of years, part of a larger movement to counter threats to their cultural sovereignty and resist estrangement from their heritage.

They use materials found in the Pacific rainforest and along the coast: red cedar, yellow cedar, spruce roots, seashells, animal skins, wool, horns, rock. They have become master printmakers, producing bold-colored figurative designs in the distinctive style known as “formline,” which prescribes the placement of lines, shapes and colors. Formline is a visual language of balance, movement, storytelling, ceremony, legacy and legend, and through it, these artisans bring the traditions of their rich cultures into the present and ensure their place in the future.



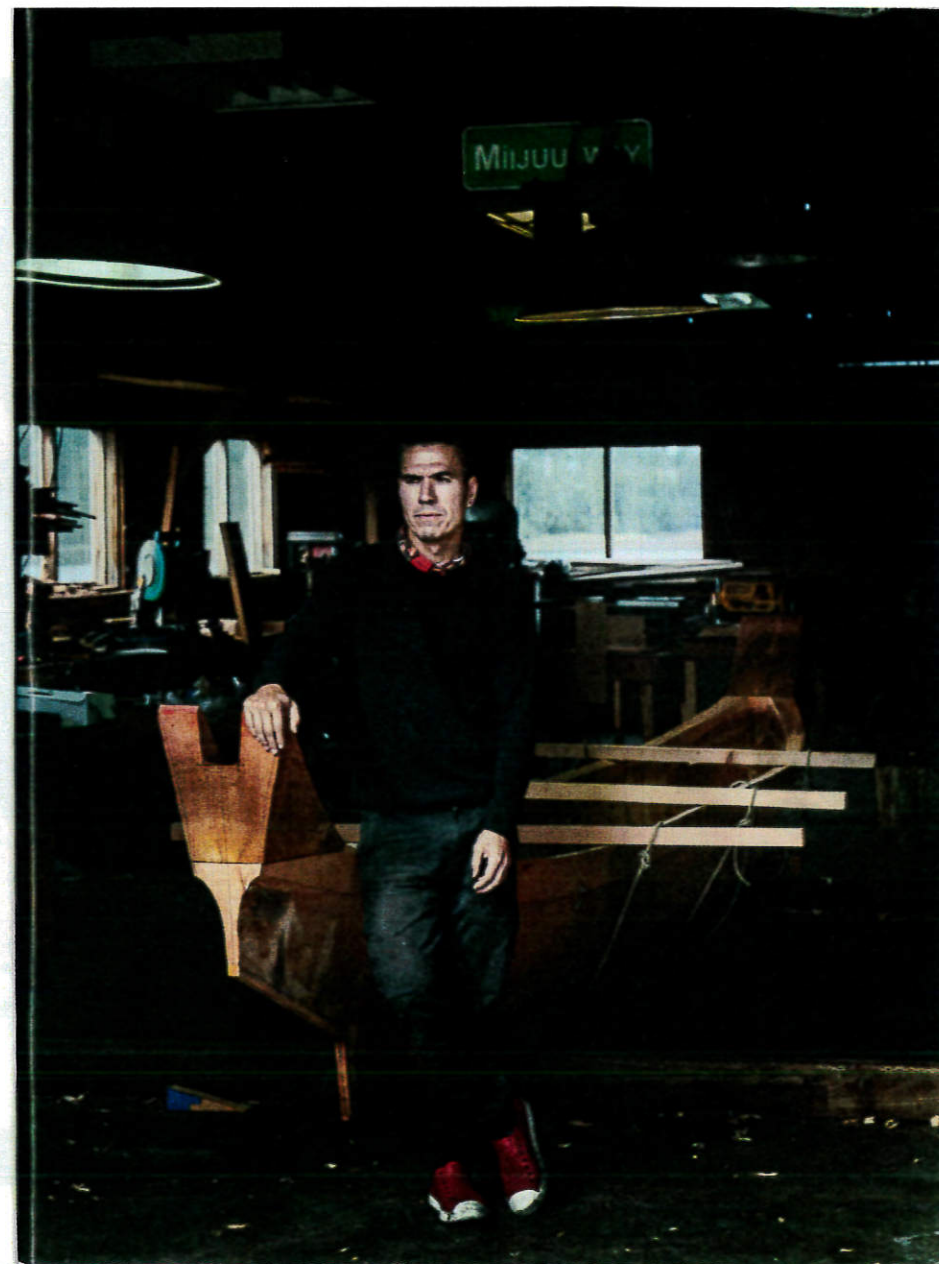
ALISON BREMNER apprenticed with the master carver David A. Basley, a member of the Tsimshian tribe. She is thought to be the first Tlingit woman to carve and raise a totem pole, a feat she accomplished in her hometown, Yakutat, Alaska. Now based in Juneau, she creates woodcarvings, paintings, mixed-media sculpture, ceremonial clothing, jewelry, digital collage and formline prints. Her work is notable for wit and pop culture references, such as a totem pole with an image of her grandfather holding a thermos, or a paddle bearing a tiny nude portrait of Burt Reynolds in his famous 1970s beercoke pose. Below, a silkscreen titled *Decot/Regular*.



ALISON BREMNER / COURTESY STINEBUCK / NATIVE GALLERY (2)

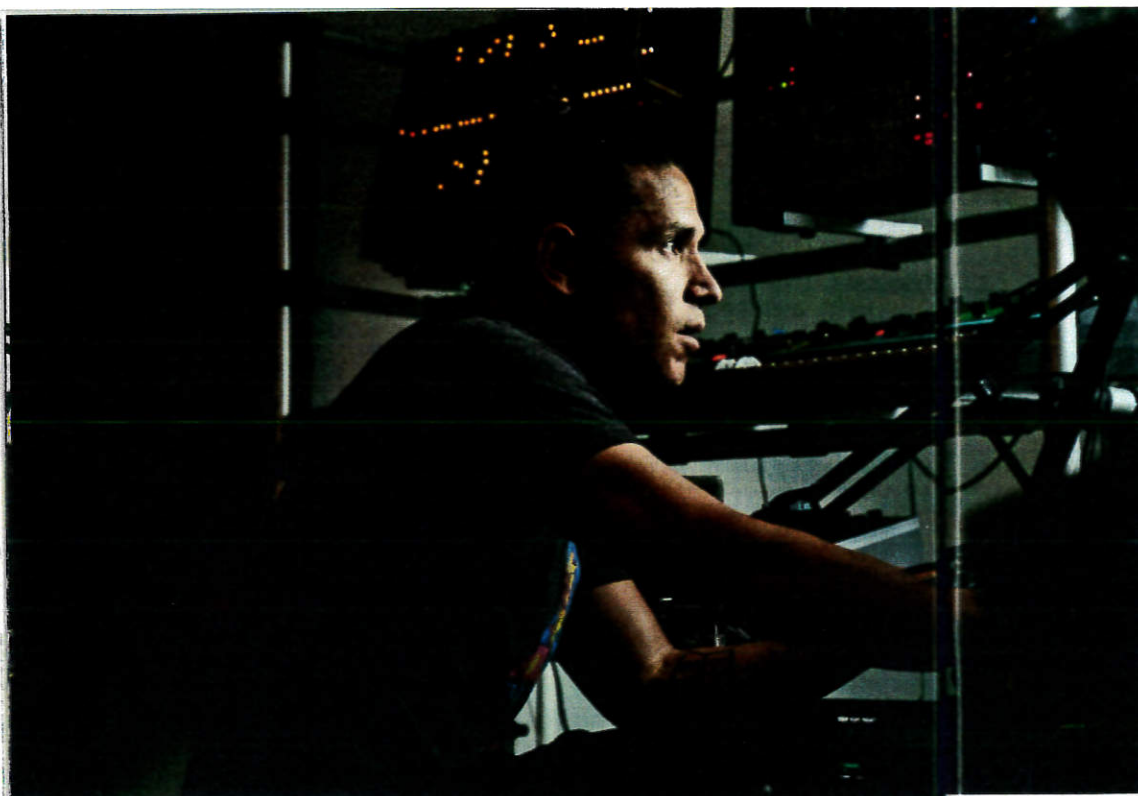


SGWAAYANS, a Kaigani Haida artist, carved his first totem pole at age 19. Last year, he made his first traditional canoe, from a red cedar estimated to be 300 years old. Once the canoe was carved, it was taken outside to a lot near the Hydaburg River. Above, heated lava rocks were lowered into a saltwater bath inside it, to steam the vessel until it was pliable enough to be stretched crosswise with thwarts. Haida community members then carried the canoe back to the carving shed. Historically, the Haida were famous for their giant hand-carved canoes; a single vessel was known to carry 60 people or ten tons of freight.

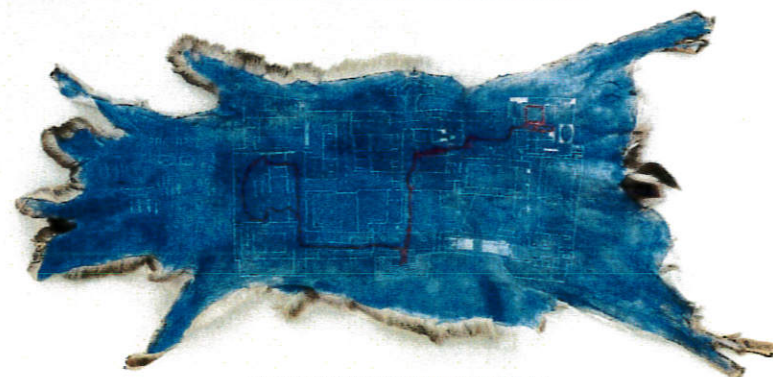




LILY HOPE, a designer of Chilkat and Ravenstail textiles, lives in Juneau with her five children. She is seen weaving Tlingit masks during the Covid-19 pandemic. Hope is well known for her ceremonial robes, woven from mountain goat wool and cedar bark, and often made for clan members commemorating a major event like a birth, or participating in the mortuary ceremony known as *Ku.áas*, held one year after a clan member's death. An educator and a community leader, Hope also receives "repatriation commissions" from institutions that return a historical artifact to its clan of origin and replace it with a replica or an original artwork.



NICHOLAS GALANIN, a Sitka-based artist and musician, draws on his native heritage to create conceptual artworks that diverge from tradition while also commenting on it. Examples include ceremonial masks carved from anthropology textbooks and a totem pole covered in the same wallpaper as the gallery wall on which it hangs, causing it to nearly disappear. Below, *Architecture of Return, Escape* (Metropolitan Museum of Art), is his map of the Met on a deer hide. It shows in red paint where the "Art of Native America" exhibition's 116 artworks are located and suggests a route for them to "escape" from the museum and "return" to their original homes. ♦



COURTESY THE ARTIST AND PETER BLUM GALLERY, NEW YORK, 2020

BYLINES

Fernando Decille photographed the annual Scape Festival in Dayton, Tennessee, for Smithsonian.

Kimberly B. Fulton Orsco, a descendant of the Kaigani Haida nation, is a photography producer in Atlanta.