

Artists Visiting Artists

A Haida Gwaii Tour

Sheila Karrow

To be an artist is to embrace the unknown, and to fearlessly and passionately enter into a relationship with the material nature of various aspects of our lives. It is to sit with ideas (and stay rooted in contemplation of an idea) and imagine an array of possibilities that extend from such a single thought. It is not to self-identify as “talented” because it demands more than a projection. Thinking artistically is offered to all of us as part of the gift of living inside a kaleidoscope of senses. I have been charmed by the ideas and creations of my artist friends on Haida Gwaii and my mind dances with conversation, connections and a shared acknowledgement of belonging to place. I have been dwelling inside their studios, their art, and their minds, living fully and



I am the visitor. And it spoke to me and said, “I am looking at you while you are looking at me” – *Sheila Karrow*

feeling at home.

“Aw yes, this warm yellow you see on the edge of the late day spruce, I see it as well.”

“I can taste those berries with you in this painting; I feel their flavour through colour. You have awakened my thoughts about traditional harvesting and Indigenous plant species.”

“Your walls are covered in the art of others while you sit in conversation with each one. Do they accompany you while you work on your pen and ink?”

A creation of art is an unfurled conversation, an invitation into dialogue. Artists who work alone dive deeply into an individual commitment to work until something is born. Yet even still, as we work, we sit and wait for the words to come. And when another artist replies, we emerge fully out of the nest, as Pema Chödrön noted, and we are fully alive.

There was no time to paint on this last trip to Haida Gwaii. Everything that needed to be created was. This art journey was a metaphysical and relational event. No canvas needed.

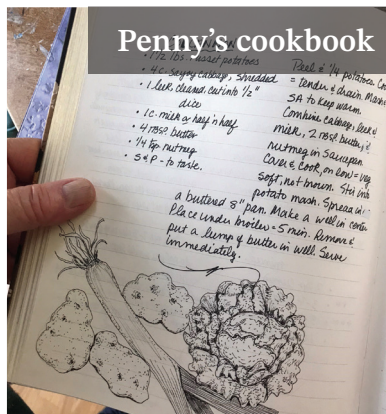
The journey began with a visit to **Maryanne Wettlaufer’s** beautiful new studio in Masset and a lengthy conversation about painting, studio building, and the artist way (hopes, struggles, challenges, needs). It ended with an agate smile.

Penny Richardson brought the artists together in her stack wall studio in Tl̓l̓l̓l̓. I was fortunate to be on island at the time. This tradition began with Katie Borserio many years ago - evenings with treats in her art room at the high school. Today, we enjoyed homemade goodies while we created art and shared creative conversations. Penny is working on a family cookbook. Intergenerational love in the making.

A stunning creation by **Barb Lawrence** from Masset, the moonsnail faces back but the crab holds the view with its ancient spiral. Classic ‘Barb’ motifs and colours are recognizable at once.



Penny Richardson’s studio



Barb Lawrence’s mosaic



Evelyn Vanderhoop's pattern board

Evelyn Vanderhoop, Masset Haida weaver, shared her pattern board with me and I was overwhelmed with her visual math sense...just incredible. I sit with the idea of how this concept could become a visual pattern lesson for students. This would not involve copying any Haida art designs but rather repeating a design by shifting the visual field and using memory and proportion. Students who are not of Haida ancestry can learn to appreciate First Nations art without copying it.



Peter Sloan's rings

A visit to **Peter Sloan's** studio: one could walk right by his cedar home in Masset without realizing there is a jewellery workshop and kiln in the basement. Peter has a full casting studio downstairs and runs workshops teaching silver jewellery techniques and casting to local artists. The rings shown in the photo are castings of hand made wax carvings. There are movable parts on these as well.

Dorothy Garrett, Daajing Giids. The hand woven blanket shown here is a labour of love and time, made from wool she washed, carded, dyed and spun. To rest it on your body is to feel something alive, almost like the animal it came from.



Dorothy Garrett's blanket



Judy Hilgemann's painting palette

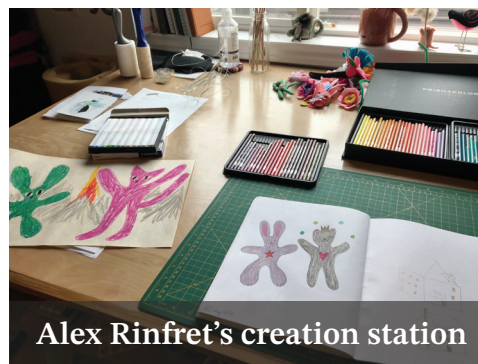
Daajing Giid's **Debbie Gardiner**. I wonder what does time become when working on a beadwork piece like this? Does it stop?

Judy Hilgemann, also in DG, is preparing a body of work for a solo show and thus, I have not revealed any of her paintings. Shown here is her palette of colours.

A visit to **Alexandra Rinfret** in Tll.aal *Tlell* leads to art of a different sort... enter playful childhood innocence (with a wink) through designs that skip their way into cookies, cakes, paintings, and felt creations. Do not fear the playfulness and the silliness that must come out. She loves patterns, and repeating themes, Andy Warhol hints, colour palette pairings and opposites. Everything highlights the elements and principles of design.



Debbie Gardiner's beadwork



Alex Rinfret's creation station



One of Alex's purr-fect paintings



Sheila Karrow lived on Haida Gwaii from 2004-2021. She taught at Sk'aadgaa Naay and was involved with the arts through the Haida Gwaii Arts Council, Gwaii Trust, and the HG museum. "It is my hope to return to the field of education on Haida Gwaii and reconnect with the arts community. My area of research is in developing a relational pedagogy through decolonizing both my art and teaching practices." Sheila has a keen interest in Haida-inspired education, reconciliation, and place-influenced learning. She is currently living in the Cowichan Valley, teaches elementary students in Lake Cowichan, paints and offers workshops in a studio gallery at her home. www.sheilakarrow.com