Shawn Hunt: The Beginning of Something

October 10 to November 14, 2020

Equinox Gallery, Vancouver

Socially-distant Opening Reception: Saturday, October 10th from 12pm to 4pm

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Equinox Gallery is very pleased to present *The Beginning of Something*, **Shawn Hunt's** first exhibition with the gallery. Shawn Hunt is a Heiltsuk artist born in Waglisla (Bella Bella), British Columbia. His practice is directly informed by his Scottish, French and First Nations background and the visual culture and traditions that accompany it.

Hunt works with the traditional northwest coast design principle known as formline to create abstract, surreal, and sculptural paintings based on ancestral Heiltsuk Cosmology. The formline is an unbroken outline in traditional design employed to contain different motifs into figures and patterning. Hunt's work explores new ways of using this structure while still maintaining the fundamental characteristics of the traditional formline. Creatures both human and animal, and sometimes mythological, hide in both the positive and negative spaces created. His images are ever-changing, moving, morphing, transforming, and shapeshifting. In his paintings, Hunt intertwines animal and human portraits set against a black backdrop as if the beings are being swallowed by the night sky.

> I have never felt like I really belonged to any one particular movement, culture, category, or clique. As an artist this has given me an incredible amount of freedom. I don't feel that my work is conceptual, traditional, artifact or craft. It is neither ancient nor modern. Instead, I feel as though my work has elements of all of these categories. This is a freedom that allows me to distort, subvert, hijack and remix these categories in order to offer new points of view. I want to challenge the viewers' preconceptions. I like the idea of art being like a catalyst, or a flash point. I think art is most powerful when it poses questions, not when it gives the viewer the answers. My goal is to make the viewer think.
>
> – Shawn Hunt

Hunt very much sees his cedar carvings as sculptures which play a significantly different role than a mask in that they allow him to expand on traditional mythologies and incorporate new and unexpected elements. The scalloping seen throughout these sculptures represents feathers and shows the process of transformation as it is taking place. The neck is based on the idea of a totem pole; however, Shawn has only used abstract forms here, removing the hierarchical and narrative elements that are normally seen in a totem pole. Hunt is always seeking to push the boundaries of the art form, often combining non-traditional ideas with innovative uses of materials and motifs in his work.

EQUINOX GALLERY

3642 Commercial Street

Vancouver, BC V5N 4G2

604.736.2405   t

info@equinoxgallery.com   e

www.equinoxgallery.com   w

After graduating from the University of British Columbia, Vancouver, Canada, Shawn Hunt apprenticed with his father, Bradley Hunt, a prominent Heiltsuk artist, for five years. Later he apprenticed with Coast Salish painter Lawrence Paul Yuxweluptun from 2012 to 2015. Hunt's work has been exhibited throughout Canada, including solo shows at the Audain Art Museum, Vancouver Art Gallery and the Burrard Arts Foundation. His work has also been featured in many important group exhibitions both nationally and internationally, including *Potlach 67-67* (Comox Art Gallery), *Transformation Mask* (Vancouver Art Gallery/ Museum of Anthropology), *Cultural Conflation* (Richmond Art Gallery), *Challenging Traditions* (McMichael Canadian Art Collection), *Continuum* (Bill Reid Gallery), *Changing Hands: Art Without Reservation 2* (Museum of Arts and Design, New York), and *Bites Back* (Art Labor Gallery, Shanghai). In 2011 Hunt was awarded the BC Creative Achievement Award for First Nations' Art.

Shawn Hunt lives and works on the Sunshine Coast, BC.