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# CANADIAN ART



Installation view of Brian Jungen's exhibition at Kunstverein Hannover with (from left) Eero (2011), Five Year Universe (2011) and My Decoy (2011) / photo Raimund Zakowski

## Brian Jungen Shows Continuity & Contrast In German Survey

Kunstverein Hannover April 20 to June 26, 2013

By Michael Turner

POSTED: MAY 15, 2013

Brian Jungen's recently opened exhibition at the Kunstverein Hannover is comprised of eight years of work, almost all of it produced since the artist's survey at the Vancouver Art Gallery in 2006. That survey, which included touring stops at the New Museum and Museum Villa Stuck, was comprised of 13 years of work, much of it drawn from the artist's first solo exhibition—at Calgary's Truck in 1997—forward.

While the temporal before-and-after quality of these periods—before 2006 and after—has the critical eye on contrasts between the two exhibitions, continuities pervade. Indeed, it is situations like these that remind us why an artist's work should be assessed with respect to the larger practice, particularly an artist for whom time and space are less a linear—or divisible—construct than a dialectical one.

The Kunstverein Hannover is a space divided into seven rooms connected in a fairly linear fashion.

The first room is sparsely arranged and features three works: *The Prince* (2006), *Skull* (2006–2009) and *Blanket No. 2* (2008). While these works are unmistakably Jungen (a cigar-store Indian “greeter” made of baseball gloves, a skull made of softballs and baseballs, and a warp-and-weft blanket made from football jerseys), it is their supports as much as their narrative source material that preface what follows: free-standing works, works atop plinths, and wall works. In other words, no masks on armatures and nothing hanging from the ceiling—modes of display with which Jungen initially became associated.

In the next room, a larger display consists of plastic gasoline and water canisters into which designs have been drilled; an arrangement of women's gloves; and a deer hide stretched over a jumble of drum frames. Just as the minutely drilled designs deny each canister

its utility, the same could be said of the muted (perhaps interior) relationship between the hide and the drum frames.

If a prompt is required to signal these inversions, it can be found in Wieland (2006), where a handful of red leather gloves have been modelled to approximate a bird, or an angel, or an inverted maple leaf, like the one at the centre of an upside-down Canadian flag. Either way, Wieland can be read as both an homage to influential Canadian artist (i.e. Joyce) and a critique of the Trudeau-era nation-building project that Wieland was considered to be included in (a project that did not, for the most part, include the work of First Nations artists).

With material and political-economic inversions in place, the room that follows is the most ambitious one in the show.

For *Five Year Universe* (2011), Jungen used five stretched elk hides to create 20 silver-ink relief mono prints on large rectangles of thin black foam. These prints are arranged vertically, aligned side-by-side and top-to-bottom to form two horizontal rows of 10, making it the largest work in the exhibition. Past configurations of this work have left the images of the hides relatively intact; in this new configuration of the work at the Kunstverein, the prints suggest antlers more so than hides, and they occasionally meet to suggest new forms (like birds' wings, say), though mostly they do not. Instead, this is an abstract composition, concerned not with the noun form of process, but its verb.

At the groundbreaking 1999 show of Jungen's *Prototype for New Understanding* series at the Charles H. Scott Gallery in Vancouver, it was not just the Nike-trainer masks that drew attention, but also the wall murals which were sometimes reflected in the masks' museum-style vitrines. These murals were based on drawings solicited by volunteers on the city's Granville Island, who stopped passers-by to ask what they think of when they think of "Indianness."

With *Five Year Universe*, however, the primacy of the wall is undeniable. On the floor before it, atop plinths made not of wood but of metal (think autopsy lab), elk hides have "body-snatched" that which Jungen once reconfigured to make his whales. Not blow-moulded plastic chairs, in this instance, but something less disposable, more "refined"—expensive chairs made not by Wal-Mart but by modern designers in service of a discriminating clientele, items such as cone chairs and womb chairs sold (at the lower end) by outlets like *Design Within Reach*.

For those seeking a more spectacular, less abstracted reconfiguration, the room's final element, *Blanket No. 7* (2008), provides both a road in and a road out. This symmetrical (and equally stretched) work is comprised of LA Lakers and Denver Nuggets basketball jerseys.

Continuing on this road is a grove of five free-standing totem poles made of golf bags. Each one is named for the decades since First Nations people earned the right to vote federally in Canada, and each one is a monument as much to time as to space.

For fans of Jungen's masks and whales, and admirers of the artist's uncanny ability to find in tailored materials the northwest-coast ovoid motif, this totem-pole room (the largest and longest of the gallery spaces) will come as a respite from the mesomorphic abstract sculptures that preceded it.

But for those wanting more of Jungen's elk hides, the room that follows marks a return to form, with hides stretched over car parts set atop unplugged freezers, the same freezers used by consumers who purchase their meat in bulk (or those who bag, skin and apportion it themselves). On the wall at the end, visible through the totems, is the exhibition's first instance of electricity: a blue LED tube light arranged in loops around a stretched deer hide.



Brian Jungen *Eero* 2011 Womb chair seat, elk hide, tarred twine, steel, granite 168.9 × 94 × 108 cm Courtesy Gluskin Sheff + Associates Inc.



Brian Jungen *My Decoy* 2011 Cone chairs, elk hide, tarred twine, granite, steel 170.2 × 86.4 × 58.4 cm Courtesy Casey Kaplan, New York

While the penultimate room is the smallest in the gallery and functions as something of an intermezzo, it is in *Thunderbirds* (2006), a wall-mounted array of five rear-view mirrors, that the last trace of the ovoid appears—and in found form, no less. (Could this be the artist's last "look back" at his use of a motif associated not with his native Dane-Zaa, but with the Haida, Kwakwaka'wakw, Tlingit, Salish and Tsimshian?)

As for the final room, the inversion that has run through much of Jungen's work since the late 1990s (and certainly through this exhibition) completes itself in a series of commercially produced multi-coloured feedbags bound with belts and placed upon on the floor—the same type of bags, I understand, that are thrown from pick-up trucks to nourish the farmed elk and deer that have supplied Jungen with his hides.

Also included in this final room, as in most of the rooms in the exhibition, are blankets, as well as the exhibition's oldest piece: the oxymoronic *Portable Still* (2003–2005), a poignant work that is improvised (as only a still can be) from materials that include a baby carriage.

When it was announced in 2003 that Jungen would be the subject of a touring survey organized by the VAG, some of his sharpest supporters wondered if such an exhibition was premature—that despite the artist's astounding modulations from masks to whales to Minimalist palettes, additional movements, as opposed to additional works, were required.

Similar questions were raised over the Hannover exhibition given that much of the work debuted not at public institutions (be they artist-run centres or the National Gallery of Canada) but commercial spaces, where a perception continues to exist that work presented in these settings is geared more at ends than at means.

However, what is most apparent from this exhibition is an artist who, regardless of the setting, continues to make work using the same processes (both poetical and political) that informed his masks and whales. Only now, his source materials are increasingly less mediated, the forms closer to an earlier (Arpian) modernism, their presence gentler, quieter, more open to outcome.



Installation view of Brian Jungen's exhibition at Kunstverein Hannover with (from left) *Sound Space I* (2010), *Wieland* (2006), *Cut Lines* (2012), *Seed* (2012) and *Water Hemlock* (2008) / photo Raimund Zakowski

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Chicago Tribune

“Waxman, Lori, “Review of Modest Livelihood”,  
*The Chicago Tribune*, January 16, 2013”

## A Review of Brian Jungen and Duane Linklater’s film *Modest Livelihood*

By Lori Waxman  
Tribune reporter



Still from Brian Jungen and Duane Linklater’s *Modest Livelihood* (2012), courtesy the artists

Not a whole lot happens during the 50 minutes of “*Modest Livelihood*,” a film that follows Brian Jungen and Duane Linklater on two hunting trips they took in northern British Columbia in the autumn and early winter of 2011.

This isn’t entirely true, however. Try sitting in the forest for the better part of an hour. Say little. Look. On some level, a level that might be termed contemporary urban consciousness, hardly anything occurs. On other levels, though, a sunset explodes through long grasses; bare treetops dance in the wind; leaves of gold and fire clash against cool green pines; spindly trunks sway darkly against the setting sun.

If such understated naturalist observations were the whole of what “*Modest Livelihood*” conveyed, that would in a sense be enough. A 50-minute reprieve from traffic and cellphones and crowds and clocks ought not be rebuffed; certainly this one is more accessible than an actual trip to the wilderness.

But Jungen and Linklater aren’t naturalists or outdoorsmen. They’re artists, Jungen one of Canada’s most famous, with solo exhibitions of his trenchant, fanciful sculptures — Native American masks fabricated from Nike Air Jordan high-tops, whale skeletons constructed out of plastic chairs — at the Tate Modern in London, the New Museum in New York and the Musée d’Art Contemporain in Montreal, among others.

They’re also part of the First Nations, the Native peoples of Canada. Jungen, who is of mixed Dane-zaa and European descent, grew up on Dane-zaa land in northern British Columbia. Linklater says he is an Omaskeko Cree, born in Moose Factory, on a Native reservation located near the bottom of James Bay, in northern Ontario. They met on a residency at the Banff Centre, an arts incubator in Alberta.

Like all First Nations people, Jungen and Linklater have the right to fish and hunt on their own territory, based on treaties dating back to the mid-1700s. But these freedoms have been as fraught as the rest of the history to which they belong,

beginning with the decimation of Native populations from European infectious diseases, followed by the virtual extinction of the North American buffalo on which many bands depended for food and clothing. Forced acculturation, the expropriation of communal lands, and federal prohibitions on potlatch and sun dance ceremonies bring this history up to the mid-20th century. Native Canadians couldn't even vote until 1960 without forfeiting their "Indian" status.

But "Modest Livelihood" is no polemic on the current or past state of Native life. It wouldn't exist but for it, I don't doubt, nor would its title, which refers to a 1999 Supreme Court of Canada decision confirming First Nations' hunting and fishing rights but clarifying their limitation to the earning of a "moderate livelihood" and not the "accumulation of wealth."

Instead, "Modest Livelihood" is more like an invitation, a generous gesture on the part of the artists to include the patient, attentive viewer on an expedition that most do not have the legal right to join, never mind the necessary ancestral and cultural knowledge.

Through the camera's lens, Jungen and Linklater share a tradition of major significance to their two cultures, but they open it up in a way that is neither anthropological nor educational. On the contrary, it's paradoxical, as quiet and slow and enigmatic as an excursion into a rainbow- and sunset-filled wilderness can be, one whose participants wear baseball caps and drive an old pickup truck on roads formerly used for oil exploration.

Their camp includes a beat-up trailer, a blue plastic cooler and those ubiquitous folding chairs with cup holders, but also a shelter mounted from three felled tree trunks with the help of Jungen's uncle Jack Askoty, a Doig River elder.

Romantic nostalgia for a lost way of life this is not. Tenacious persistence of it in the present tense — that it is.

Not much seems to be said between the men, and in any case none of it is audible. The film is absolutely silent, making no personal drama out of the artists' conversation nor any narrative drama out of the constant, careful listening so crucial for moving knowingly through the wilderness.

We watch the artists listen for the sounds of animals, and watch them respond to what they hear. Meanwhile, a 16 mm projector, running a short companion film in an adjacent gallery, whirs constantly, a reminder that "Modest Livelihood" was shot by a cinematographer (Jesse Cain) on celluloid. Though the film was eventually transferred to Blu-ray to make large-scale projection easier, the artists decided to forgo the immediacy and pervasiveness of video on the actual hunt, in favor of the patience and acceptance of uncertainty demanded by film — and hunting.

And hunt they do, though for the first three-quarters of the film it isn't clear what Jungen and Linklater intend to shoot with the rifles slung over their shoulders. When three plump deer hop aimlessly by in deep snow, they watch them go. Finally, in the dark of a winter dawn, light flashes from the ends of their guns and a moose falls to the ground. The film's longest scene intimately follows the artists as they skin and dress the animal's steaming body, brown and blood red against crisp white.

The film ends not with people but with animals, two crows flying high in the sky. Nothing could be more fitting. The Dane-zaa traditionally believe that an animal must choose to give itself to a hunter. "Modest Livelihood" may be a gift from the artists to their audience, but the livelihood itself remains a gift from the moose to them.

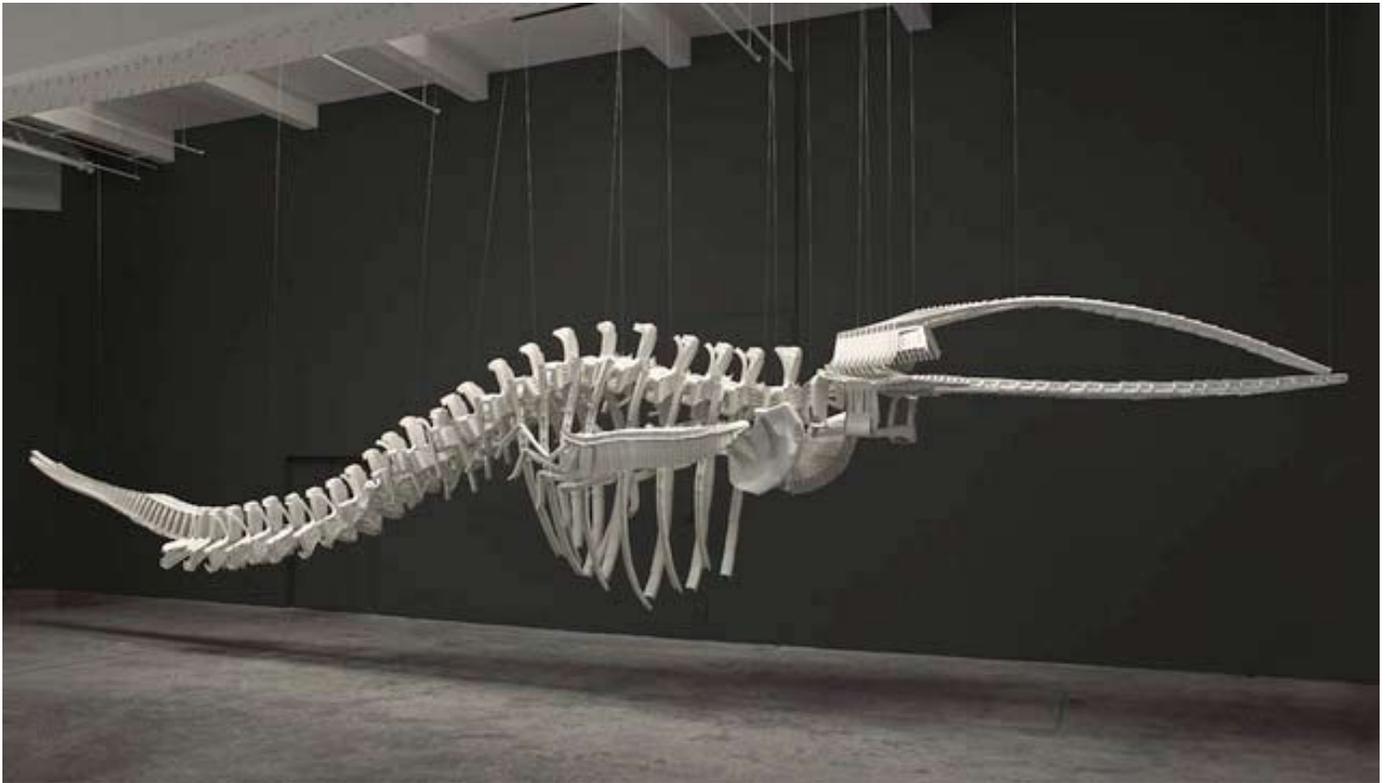
"Brian Jungen and Duane Linklater: Modest Livelihood" runs through Feb. 3 at the Logan Center Gallery, 915 E. 60th St., 773-702-6082, [arts.uchicago.edu/logan/gallery](http://arts.uchicago.edu/logan/gallery).

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# Vancouver Artgallery



Brian Jungen, *Cetology*, 2002, installation with plastic chairs, Collection of the Vancouver Art Gallery, purchased with assistance from the Canada Council for the Arts Acquisition Assistance Program and Vancouver Art Gallery Acquisitions Fund.

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

Sept. 19, 2012

**Vancouver Art Gallery Presents Work of Brian Jungen at Shanghai Biennale  
Only Canadian Gallery Invited to Participate in Prestigious City Pavilions Project**

Vancouver, B.C. – The Vancouver Art Gallery will feature the work of award-winning Canadian artist Brian Jungen at the Vancouver Pavilion of the 9th Shanghai Biennale, which is presenting city pavilions as part of its program for the first time in its sixteen year history. Vancouver is the only Canadian city to be selected for the major international art forum. “We are very honoured to be invited to represent Canada as one of the Biennale’s international pavilions.” said Gallery director Kathleen Bartels. “This prestigious event represents a unique opportunity to showcase one of our pre-eminent artists on the international stage, and we’re delighted to take part in this important presentation with colleagues and other major art institutions from around the world.”

Daina Augaitis, chief curator/associate director at the Vancouver Art Gallery, is curating the Jungen exhibition at the Vancouver Pavilion. Opening on Oct. 2nd, it will feature some of the artist’s signature works, including Prototypes for New Understanding and *Cetology*. Many of the works on exhibit will be from the Gallery’s permanent collection. Jungen,

an artist of Aboriginal and Swiss ancestry, has emerged internationally as one of Canada's most acclaimed artists, and was the subject of the internationally touring exhibition eponymously titled Brian Jungen, which travelled to New York (The New Museum, 2005), Rotterdam (Witte de With Centre for Contemporary Art, 2006), and Munich (Museum Villa Stuck, 2007).

The theme of the 9 Shanghai Biennale is reactivation. Jungen exemplifies this idea by repurposing everyday, mass-produced objects into unexpected sculptural forms that are at once familiar yet strange. In the works presented in the exhibition, Jungen reconfigured Nike sports shoes into startling evocations of Northwest Coast Native masks and crafted cut-up plastic patio chairs into an enormous suspended whale-like skeleton. In his witty, conceptual inversions, he transforms commodities into new hybrids that reactivate the original source materials, inviting viewers to re-imagine the possibilities of extending the life of abundant consumer products. As Jungen observes, "Almost everything in our society is disposable, and I want to slow down that mass deterioration into the landfill, and channel it into another direction, into the museum."

The Vancouver Art Gallery's participation in the Shanghai Biennale is part of its commitment to showcase work from the Asia Pacific region and promote collaborations around the Pacific Rim. This focus is reflected on an ongoing basis in Gallery exhibitions and programming, with prominent recent examples including: Yang Fudong: Fifth Night, Song Dong: Waste Not; Michael Lin: A Modest Veil; House of Oracles: A Huang Yong Ping Retrospective; and Home and Away: Crossing Cultures on the Pacific Rim.

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**Brian Jungen**  
**b. 1970 in Ft. St. John**  
**Lives in Vancouver**

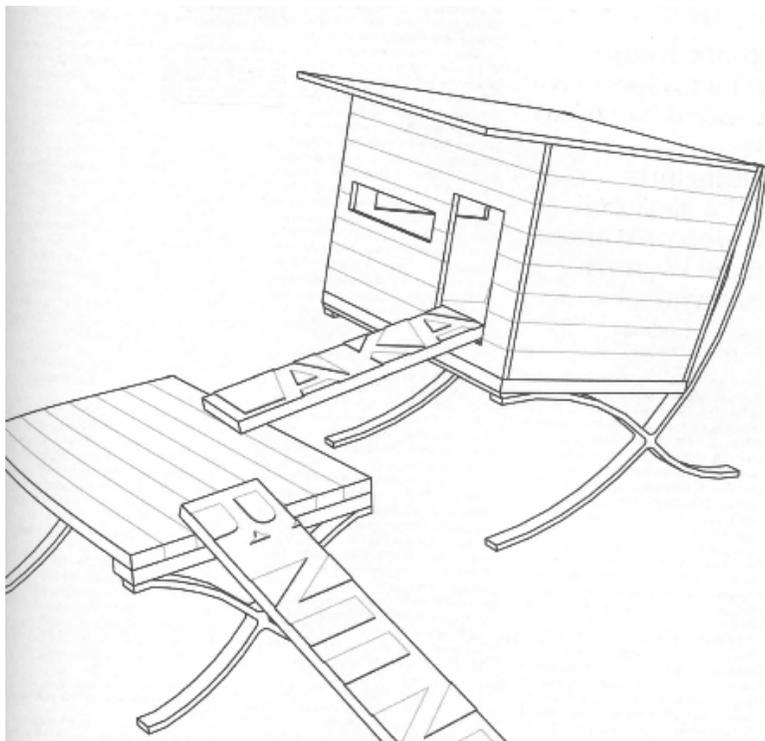
“Das Begleitbuch / The Guidebook dOCUMENTA (13), exh. cat, p.2 66-267”

Brian Jungen is renowned for his early sculptures, which hinge on the simple act of re-purposing banal consumer goods into art objects. His indigenous heritage has informed much of his decision making: in his early *Prototype* series (1998-2005), for example, Nike running shoes were taken apart and then reconstructed into objects similar to West Coast First Nations masks. His monumental, suspended skeletal, whale-like sculptures—such as *Shapeshifter* (2000) and *Vienna* (2003) were fabricated from fragments of common plastic patio chairs. With these works, Jungen established an aesthetic language that resides in the tensions between disparate ideas and ready-made objects. More recently, he has wrapped iconic modernist chairs with skin and gut to transform them into drums.

His *Dog Run* (2012) for dOCUMENTA(13), installed in the Karlsruhe park, appropriates a section of this formal garden and turns it into a play zone for dogs and their owners. If the park typically demands that canines remain leashed, here they will be free to explore various sculptures as a respite from the confines of urban life. Canines and their owners are the sole visitors to this space: others will only be able to peer over the fence. Several of the sculptures are based on the iconic form of Ludwig Mies van der Rohe's Barcelona chair, one of the great modernist designs of the twentieth century. If Mies sought to produce an ergonomic form ideally suited to the civilized human body at rest, Jungen playfully returns it to nature, to an animal world foreign to the antiseptic minimalist interiors of the great Bauhaus master.

The impulse at work in the Karlsruhe park installation, where the bond between people and dogs animates a sculptural space, reflects Jungen's long-standing interest in the intersection of the built environment and animal life. It has a clear affinity with Cats Radiant City Habitat 04 (2004), a site-specific project for a Montreal gallery. At the time, the local humane society was dealing with an overpopulation of stray cats. To support its adoption program, Jungen made a huge structure that was a hybrid of Moshe Safdie's innovative prefabricated social-housing project Habitat 67—built as part of Montreal's Expo 67—and the carpeted plywood forms of a cat condo. Inhabited by some of the city's strays and overseen by the humane society, *Habitat 04* provided a temporary home for abandoned cats that would otherwise have been euthanized. *Dog Run* creates a place for people to be with their animals, to experience unconditional love and trust—and even if dogs are domesticated animals, there is nevertheless something wild reinstated within the landscaped terrain of the park.

-Ohne Titel/ Untitled, 2012



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Fung, Amy, "Mass production made unique," *Vue Weekly*, January 26, 2011, Issue #797

# Mass production made unique

Brian Jungen shapes store-bought materials into expansive artwork

AMY FUNG

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Known for his deconstruction and reassemblage of mass produced consumer goods such as Nike Air Jordans and plastic lawn chairs into critiques on museum-ready artifacts, Vancouver-based Brian Jungen has been internationally heralded for his work, and was the first living artist to receive an exhibition at The Smithsonian National Museum of the American Indian in Washington, DC.

Taking a short break during an intensive three-week installation at the AGA for three of his past major works, *Carapace* (2009), *Shapeshifter* (2000) and *Cetology* (2002), Jungen sat down for a chat about his old works, new works, the weather, and some insights about contemporary Canadian art.

**VUE WEEKLY:** It's a pretty big year for you. First, congrats on the Gershon Iskowitz prize.

**BRIAN JUNGEN:** Thank you.

**VW:** I was curious about how you feel about having a retrospective in the same year you have this commission to do new works?

**BJ:** Well, I don't really like the term retrospective because it seems that's what happens after someone dies. I tend to think of it as a survey of older work, or a showing of older works in a new context.

**VW:** Will the new works be a continuation of this style?

**BJ:** No, the show at the AGO will be a whole new direction and a whole new body of work that I recently just started



and showed in Vancouver last month at Catriona Jeffries. A lot of the new work is using found or unconventional materials, but very different from this kind of store-bought, mass-produced material. They are materials I think you would be familiar with through the landscape of rural Canada, like car body parts, animal skins, and things like that.

**VW:** Does your sense of place and home seep into your work?

**BJ:** It's becoming more important in my new work, this sense that I'm from Northern Canada. I've lived in Vancouver for about 15 years now, and though I really like the arts community in Vancouver, I find myself returning to Northern BC a lot, especially in the last few years. Maybe it's because I'm approaching middle age, and want to make connections to the place I grew up. I don't know if it's that, I just like the environment and the folks up there. I generally like the climate, believe it or not. There's hot summers, cold winters, probably just like Edmonton, but it's sunny and it's a proper winter. In Vancouver you don't really get a winter, you get a cold mon-

soon, and it's a different type of cold. I really miss winters like this. I've been here for the last two weeks, and folks in Edmonton have been saying how unusually cold and how much snow it's been this year, but I totally like it!

**VW:** Well I'm glad somebody likes it.

**BJ:** I guess I get to leave, but place is becoming more important in my work, I'm doing less site-specific work and building everything on-site, which I've been doing for the last several years.

**VW:** You're also showing in *Close Encounters*, the largest exhibition ever organized in the world on contemporary Indigenous art, happening in Winnipeg right now. Can you speak about that?

**BJ:** Sure, what I really like in Canada is that there is no division. You can be a contemporary artist and making work on Aboriginal issues and identity, but you're still a contemporary artist, whereas in the States, there's a huge division. That became really apparent to me when I did this project at The Smithsonian last year, *Strange Comforts*. It

made me realize how much more wide open the Canadian contemporary art field is. Like with *Close Encounters*, I think it's amazing. If that show was curated in another country, it would be generally ignored by the contemporary art press, but not in Canada, which is great. It's very inclusive that way.

**VW:** Let's talk about the works in this show.

**BJ:** We have two of the whale skeletons, *Shapeshifter* and *Cetology*, both on loan, and *Carapace*, which I initially made in France two years ago. I was working in this old chateau that was converted into a contemporary art space and it had been surrounded by idyllic farm land, except the last few years it was all being converted into suburbs, just like what you would see in Calgary, Edmonton, Fort St. John. In these suburbs I kept seeing these new garbage bins that just became a symbol for the sign of the times and a symbol of unbridled housing excess that I decided to use the bins as source material. I also thought it would be a nice pairing of this idea of this waste of garbage bins with the structure of a tortoise, which is a symbol of the Earth in many cultures, and is a house and home.

**VW:** Can you tell me about the construction of these works?

**BJ:** I keep working with material until I feel some sort of resolution with it, that a way of working with the materials has been realized. So with *Carapace*, instead of making a new one three different times, I decided to use the same materials three different ways over three different times. After the first time

in France, I saw a completely different way of constructing it that would be a lot more dynamic, so I made it a second time last year at the Smithsonian, and when Catherine [Crowston] invited me here I proposed making it a third and final time. This will be the final configuration of the materials.

**VW:** What do you think viewers can expect from this, who generally will not have seen the first two configurations?

**BJ:** Because the piece is quite large, there's usually an immediate response. People want to go inside it, and they have this very strong physical reaction to it. People want to touch it and climb it—which you can't do—but the last two times, people sometimes saw it just as the materials and so they don't see it as art works. They think they can be interactive with it, which they can't, so now I'm actually cutting up the materials enough that you can't really recognize at first what it's made out of it.

**VW:** How many bins are you actually using?

**BJ:** I don't know. We usually deal directly with the manufacturers, but we basically take what we can get. Same with the chairs. When I was making those, I was just driving around to all the Canadian Tires, buying them up and clearing them out. If I need more, it's something so plentiful that you can just go out and get more. I bought some new bins here in Edmonton. There are certain things that are global products that you can basically get anywhere.

**VW:** And that really is the impetus of

your work, how everything has been globalized, including art.

**BJ:** Yeah, there's a discourse about that. Art has taken on a much stronger profile in the last 10-plus years with museums wanting a much bigger presence in cities, to become a tourist attraction, like this place, the AGO, the Bilbao Guggenheim, that's how it's changed a lot, I think. Not sure if it makes art more accessible to the general public, but it has made a certain type of style or international strategy around art institutions. ▽

SAT, JAN 29 – SUN, MAY 8

**BRIAN JUNGEN**

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# Media Release

For Immediate Release  
January 24, 2011

**World-renowned artist in Edmonton to create new work at the AGA**  
New exhibition features spectacular large-scale sculptures by Brian Jungen

**BRIAN JUNGEN**  
January 29–May 8, 2011

Media Previews available by appointment on Friday, January 28, 2011  
Please confirm with Alison Bulloch, Media Relations and Communications Coordinator  
E: [alison.bulloch@youraga.ca](mailto:alison.bulloch@youraga.ca) T: 780.392.2468

**EDMONTON, AB – The Art Gallery of Alberta (AGA)** will begin a new year of exhibitions with the opening of **BRIAN JUNGEN**, running **January 29-May 8, 2011**.

This exhibition features three large sculptural installations by internationally celebrated artist **Brian Jungen**. Throughout the month of January, Jungen has been working on site at the AGA to develop a new, unique configuration for *Carapace*, one of three works included in the exhibition. The entirety of the AGA's 6,000 square foot (557 square meters) third floor gallery has been devoted to this major exhibition.

Winner of the inaugural **Sobey Art Award** in 2002 and the **Gershon Iskowitz Prize for Visual Arts** in 2010, Jungen has exhibited in galleries and museums world-wide, including the National Gallery of Canada, Tate Modern in London and the New Museum in New York City. Best known for transforming everyday manufactured goods into compelling and often paradoxical works, Jungen gives rich cultural and social meaning to common objects.

"Jungen is one of Canada's leading artists and a significant contributor to international art and culture," says **Catherine Crowston**, Chief Curator / Deputy Director at the Art Gallery of Alberta. "His work reveals the tensions between contemporary material culture and traditional symbolism, often linking his First Nations heritage to political and social issues."

*Carapace* was first created in 2009 for an exhibition at the FRAC des Pays de la Loire (France) and completely reconfigured for an exhibition at the Smithsonian National Museum of the American Indian (Washington, D.C.) later that year. The work is inspired by the geometries of the geodesic dome and the tortoise shell, and unites Jungen's interest in modernist architecture with his ongoing engagement with animal imagery.

The exhibition also includes two renowned works by Jungen, *Shapeshifter* (2000) and *Cetology* (2002). Made from white plastic lawn chairs that have been cut, deconstructed and re-assembled, the works, based on whale skeletons, hang suspended in the gallery space. Oscillating between objects of natural history and critiques of consumer culture, the works reference and call into question the traditions of artifact display typical of natural history museums.

Born in Fort St. John, B.C. to a Canadian-Swiss father and a Dunne-za mother, Jungen graduated from Vancouver's Emily Carr Institute of Art and Design in 1992. He has exhibited extensively nationally and internationally, and his work has been included in many publications and museum collections. Solo exhibitions of his work have been organized by the Tate Modern, London, Museum Villa Stuck, Munich and the Witte de With Center for Contemporary Art, Rotterdam in addition to participation in numerous group exhibitions. Jungen is the first living Native American artist to exhibit at the Smithsonian National Museum of the American Indian in Washington, D.C., with the exhibition *Strange Comfort*.

A public lecture on Brian Jungen will take place on **Wednesday, February 23 at 7 pm**. This special lecture will be led by **Paul Chaat Smith**, the Associate Curator at the Smithsonian's National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI) in Washington, D.C. and the curator of the exhibition Brian Jungen: *Strange Comfort*. Tickets are available online at [youraga.ca](http://youraga.ca).

The AGA's popular late night art party series, *Refinery*, will draw inspiration from BRIAN JUNGEN with an event on **Saturday, March 5 from 9 pm-2 am**.

Please see the attached Backgrounder for a full list of programs.

**BRIAN JUNGEN** is organized by the Art Gallery of Alberta and supported by funding from the Canada Council for the Arts.

#### Visitor Information

The AGA's hours of operation are: 11 am to 7 pm on Tuesday to Friday; 11 am to 5 pm on weekends; closed Monday. Admission is \$12.50 for adults; \$8.50 for students and seniors; \$26.50 for families (two adults and up to four minors); free for children six years old and under and free for AGA Members. AGA Memberships cost \$55 for adults; \$85 for families; \$35 for students and seniors and \$70 for senior couples.

#### ABOUT THE ART GALLERY OF ALBERTA

The Art Gallery of Alberta is a centre of excellence for the visual arts in Western Canada, connecting people, art and ideas. The AGA is focused on the development and presentation of original exhibitions of contemporary and historical art from Alberta, Canada and around the world. The AGA also offers a full-range of art education and public programs. Founded in 1924, the Art Gallery of Alberta maintains a collection of more than 6,000 objects and is the oldest cultural institution in Alberta. It is the only museum in the province solely dedicated to the exhibition and preservation of art and visual culture. The AGA recently underwent a major re-building project. Designed by Los Angeles architect Randall Stout, the 85,000 sq foot (7,900 sq metres) new AGA opened to the public on January 31, 2010. The new Gallery features three floors of premiere exhibition space; the City of Edmonton Terrace; the Singhmar Centre for Art Education; Zinc restaurant; Shop AGA; Ledcor Theatre and an Art Rental and Sales Gallery.

*The Art Gallery of Alberta is a not-for-profit organization that relies on the support of its Members, donors, sponsors and government. The AGA is grateful for the generous support of the many public and private donors and sponsors who have made the AGA's New Vision possible, as well as the ongoing support of the City of Edmonton, the Alberta Foundation for the Arts, The Canada Council for the Arts and our Members.*

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## New Works by Brian Jungen to Go On View in the AGO's Henry Moore Sculpture Centre



Brian Jungen, *Tomorrow, Repeated*. 2010. Moose hide, car fenders, chest freezer, steel. 96 x 61 1/4 x 29 1/2 inches (244 x 156 x 75cm). Courtesy Catriona Jeffries, Vancouver. © Brian Jungen.

(TORONTO - March 31, 2011) Canadian artist Brian Jungen, internationally renowned for creating artwork that repurposes objects from contemporary culture to reflect aboriginal symbols and traditions, will exhibit new work at the Art Gallery of Ontario (AGO) this spring. Presented in celebration of Jungen's receipt of the \$25,000 Gershon Iskowitz Prize at the AGO in 2010, ***Brian Jungen: Tomorrow, Repeated*** will feature seven works by Jungen exhibited alongside works by legendary British sculptor Henry Moore in the AGO's Henry Moore Sculpture Centre. The exhibition will be on view from May 5 through August 7, 2011.

The works in ***Tomorrow, Repeated*** build upon the sculptural shape-shifting in which Jungen's previous work engaged: four works feature animal hides stretched and mounted over cut-up car parts and displayed on white chest freezers; other works include police barricades built from cedar and Douglas fir, and prints made from hide left over after the artist cut out circular shapes for drum skins.

Many of the works included in the exhibition were created during an exhibition at Vancouver's Catriona Jeffries Gallery between November 2010 and January 2011, when Jungen turned the gallery into his provisional workshop, creating and installing works throughout its run.

"Brian Jungen is an artist of international significance whose work challenges us to merge images, objects, traditions, and geographies that we might consider to be worlds apart," says Matthew Teitelbaum, the AGO's Michael and Sonja Koerner Director, and CEO. "It is with this spirit of connection that we present Jungen's works alongside those of Henry Moore, another artist whose visionary blending of divergent sculptural traditions shaped a new visual language for his time."

"When Brian Jungen came to the AGO to receive the Iskowitz Prize last spring, he responded immediately to the Henry Moore Sculpture Centre," says Michelle Jacques, the AGO's acting curator of Canadian Art. "***Tomorrow, Repeated*** offers the viewer a chance to consider two artists who, although separated by time and geography, share a connection to non-European sculptural tradition, an astute understanding of sculptural form, and an intimate relationship to their materials."

The AGO currently holds four works by Jungen in its collection: *Prototype for new understanding #6* (1999), from the artist's *Prototypes* series, in which he transformed Nike Air Jordan sneakers into masks connoting the colours and styles of those of the Aboriginal Northwest Coast; and *1960, 1970, and 1980*, three large-scale sculptures made from golf bags and assuming the form of totem poles.

Born in 1970 in Fort St. John, British Columbia to a Swiss father and a Dunne-za mother, Jungen has risen to prominence over the last decade by creating artwork that recasts traditional Native imagery and symbolism using ordinary objects such as plastic lawn chairs, golf bags, and Nike Air Jordans. He has exhibited extensively in Canada and internationally

in such venues as the Tate Modern, the Smithsonian's National Museum of the American Indian, and the Art Gallery of Alberta, where a retrospective of Jungen's work is on view through May 8.

The Gershon Iskowitz Prize at the AGO recognizes an artist's outstanding contribution to visual arts in Canada and is awarded each spring. The winner receives \$25,000 and an exhibition of their work at the AGO. Toronto-based multidisciplinary artist Shary Boyle was awarded the prize in 2009. The winner of the 2011 Iskowitz Prize will be announced in mid-May.

In 2009, a commemorative volume celebrating the first 20 years of the Iskowitz Prize was released. Titled ***The Gershon Iskowitz Prize: 1986-2006***, the 112-page book spotlights the first 21 artists to receive the prize, including Gathie Falk, Betty Goodwin, Rodney Graham, Vera Frenkel and General Idea. It is available for purchase at shopAGO.

A public opening to celebrate ***Brian Jungen: Tomorrow, Repeated*** will be held at the AGO on Wednesday, May 4. The artist will be in attendance.

Contemporary programming at the AGO is supported by the Canada Council for the Arts.

#### **ABOUT THE ISKOWITZ PRIZE AT THE AGO**

In 2007, the AGO and the Iskowitz Foundation joined forces to raise awareness of the visual arts in Canada with the renaming of the annual award established twenty years ago by Canadian painter Gershon Iskowitz (1921-1988). Iskowitz recognized the importance of grants to the development of artists and acknowledged that a grant from the Canada Council in 1967 enabled him to formalize his distinctive style. The AGO is home to the artist's archives, which include early works on paper, sketchbooks and memorabilia, and holds 29 paintings by Iskowitz (spanning the period from 1948 to 1987) in its permanent collection.

#### **ABOUT THE AGO**

With a permanent collection of more than 80,000 works of art, the Art Gallery of Ontario is among the most distinguished art museums in North America. In 2008, with a stunning new design by world-renowned architect Frank Gehry, the AGO opened its doors to the public amid international acclaim. Highlights include Galleria Italia, a gleaming showcase made of wood and glass running the length of an entire city block along the Gallery's façade; and the feature staircase, spiraling up through the roof of Walker Court and into the new contemporary galleries above. From the extensive Group of Seven collection to the dramatic African art gallery; from the cutting-edge works in the contemporary tower to Peter Paul Rubens' masterpiece *The Massacre of The Innocents*, a highlight of the celebrated Thomson Collection, there is truly something for everyone at the AGO.

For more images and more information, contact:

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The AGO acknowledges the generous support of its Signature Partners: BMO Financial Group, Signature Partner of the Canadian Collection Program; Amex, Signature Partner of the Contemporary Collection Program; and Aeroplan, Signature Partner of the Photography Collection Program.

The Art Gallery of Ontario is funded in part by the Ontario Ministry of Tourism and Culture. Additional operating support is received from the Volunteers of the AGO, the City of Toronto, the Department of Canadian Heritage, and the Canada Council for the Arts.

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Jacques, Michelle, "Tomorrow Repeated," *Art Gallery of Ontario Exhibition Brochure*, May 2011

**BRIAN JUNGEN'S** recent works, comprised of white chest freezers topped with varying arrangements of animal hides and car parts, extends his practice of transforming existing objects into new arrangements. In the work titled *Eye* (2010), the hide is simply draped over the freezer, but in others the animal skin – whether in its natural shape or cut into circular patterns resembling drum heads, which are sewn together with rawhide – is stretched and laced over the metal armature. Four of these freezer works are on display in this exhibition, along with *Barricades* (2010) – Jungen's interpretation of road barriers, albeit meticulously crafted from Douglas fir wood, a contrast to actual barriers, which are typically banged together with cheap lumber – and two large prints, one on white paper and one on black foam. The prints were created using a template fashioned from the hide left over after Jungen cut out the circles that were stitched together for *The Men of My Family* (2010), one of the freezer sculptures.

Though there are inferences of animals and highways, and even people in certain forms and some titles, Jungen's new work seems more abstract, more metaphorical, than his earlier creations. Yet at its core, it is motivated by the same sources of inspiration that have defined his career: traditional native imagery and ideas, and mass-produced consumer goods. While he had been exploring these concepts through an urban lens, Jungen has now returned to his origins in British Columbia's interior, both literally and figuratively. In addition to spending several months every year in northern BC, the content of his new work stems from his experiences there and creates an evocative, if indirect, picture of a northern landscape and its people, a setting where venerable native customs and contemporary mainstream conventions inevitably coexist.

The convergence of traditional and contemporary has characterized Jungen's practice from the start. In the late 1990s he rose to prominence with his series *Prototype for New Understanding*, for which he deftly transformed Nike Air Jordans into interpretations of Northwest Coast native masks. In his new work, there is a material shift from repurposed commercial leather items such as running shoes (and the gloves, golf bags and sofas of subsequent works) to raw animal hides, which were produced during Jungen's visits up north, where he has started hunting again with his relatives. While his earlier works used consumer products to visually refer to conventions of native imagery and symbolism, the corporeal quality of the hides – skinned and cured by elders on Jungen's reservation – embodies these processes by inferring the active (i.e. living) customs that are necessary to its production.

Jungen has lived in Vancouver since the late 1980s, but he now spends a significant amount of time each year near Fort St. John, British Columbia, where he was raised and where his

extended family still lives. Jungen notes the new materials – freezers, car parts and stretched animal hides – comprise a vocabulary familiar to people from this region and other native communities across northern Canada. He has also acknowledged that his facility for combining and altering objects is borne out of the inventive manner in which his mother's family makes useful things of discarded items. Over the course of Jungen's recent exhibition at Catriona Jeffries Gallery, he occupied the exhibition space with his materials and tools, sharing his processes of making with the audience. By importing the methods of production as well as the setting from the reserve to his urban situation, he transformed the gallery into an open, social and improvisational space that paid homage to how and where things are created up north.

Despite the personal origins of Jungen's new work, he has always envisioned it within a modernist context, which underpins his decision to insert his AGO exhibition into the existing installation in the Henry Moore Sculpture Centre. At first the juxtaposition seems unexpected, but parallels soon emerge. Alongside Moore's work, Jungen's freezers read more clearly as pedestals for the forms on top of them. His circles of hide – and even more so the voids left behind in the leather that became the stencil for the prints *Me and My Brother* (2010 – 11) and *Returns* (2010) – call to mind the openings that characterize many of Moore's sculptures, including *Large Two Forms* (1966-69). Although Moore could not investigate the visual imagery of Aboriginal cultures with the same intimate perspective as Jungen, it is undeniable that Moore's work was enhanced by the time he spent in the British Museum sketching art and artifacts of non-European indigenous origin.

These formal alliances are compelling in the own right, but the most profound link between Moore's sculptures and Jungen's new work relates to their deep roots in family, personal history, and human relationships. This is evident in Moore's commitment to the figure, even in his most abstract expression, and in the mother-and-child theme that runs throughout his oeuvre. In Jungen's work, the materials and methods embody the artist's narrative of his personal reconnection with family, home and cultural roots. Whereas Jungen's earlier pieces claimed the viewer's attention with humour, bold images and easily discernible references, this new work uses a language that is subtler and more enigmatic. But if we pay close attention, it tells a candid and compelling story of where Jungen comes from and perhaps, where he is headed.

—Michelle Jacques, Acting Curator, Canadian Art



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Enright, Robert, "The Tortoise and the Air," *Border Crossings* 2011, Issue no. 118, cover page, p. 20- 36



# The Tortoise and the Air



Brian Jungen, installation view of *Carspace*, 2009, at the Art Gallery of Alberta, plastic recycling containers, dimensions variable. Courtesy Catriona Jeffries, Vancouver.

**B**rian Jungen is a shape-shifter. He is what he makes. The practice of shape-shifting draws attention to his gift for seeing the transformative possibility of the world and the objects in it. When he looks at something- a pair of sneakers, a plastic lawn chair or garbage bin, a baseball glove, a food tray, a golf bag or a sports jersey- he sees something else. He is a visionary of the everyday. For him, looking is a prelude to invention.

Few contemporary artists are able to produce a body of work that brings them instant success. Jungen's "Prototypes for New Understanding," his Air Jordans reassembled into versions of West Coast masks, did exactly that, and with good reason. They went from the Banff Centre, where they were made, to Vancouver's Charles H. Scott Gallery in an exhibition curated by Cate Rimmer in 1999, and then to Turin's Castello di Rivoli Museo d'Arte Contemporanea in 2003. The "Prototypes" were a brilliant turn, at once obvious and magical. Jungen's sculptures provide the recognition that the imagination is both simple and layered and, in this regard, his work is inestimably generous.

It is also inescapably political, but that dimension of the work can be overshadowed by the ingenuity of his material transformations. This is not the artist's fault, but it is a problem for the viewer. A sculpture like *The Prince*, 2006, is a classic example of this interpretive problem. *The Prince* is made from baseball

gloves, reconfigured in the anachronistic likeness of a cigar store Indian, and our initial reaction is to smile in recognizing the re-make. We might be aware of the critique that resides in the glove-to-figure shift if we think of the repeated appropriation of Aboriginal names by major league sports teams. (This is an issue Jungen has recently focused on in his *Blanket* series, Aboriginal blankets fashioned from the jerseys of professional football and basketball teams.) But Jungen doesn't stop at a single resonance; he picks the title for the piece through his reading of Niccolo Machiavelli's study of Renaissance power politics, *The Prince*, published in 1532, which makes him think of the reign of President Bush, a man the artist calls "an out-of-control, ruthless leader." Finally, he constructs the figure to correspond to a Japanese Samurai warrior, a style of armour that he personally finds attractive. All these meanings are embodied in the work and each is inseparable in its making. For Jungen, meaning is not hierarchical, even though one interpretation can supercede (or be overridden by) another. As he says in the following interview, the subject that has most concerned him is his Aboriginal background, and trying to figure out what that means in the context, not just of the art world, but of society as a whole. His quest for the nature of that identity, and what form it should take, has already resulted in some of the most delightful and compelling work made by any Canadian artist of his

generation. Since his invention shows no sign of dissipating, there is every reason to believe that the shape-shifting he was born to will continue to pique and prod our attention. What is equally assured is that the objects he makes will embody, in the fullest and most necessary sense of the term, a tension.

*The following interview was conducted by phone from Guelph to Vancouver on March 17 and March 21, 2011.*

**BORDER CROSSINGS: I have a notion that you see the world and everything in it as a series of transformative possibilities.**

BRIAN JUNGEN: I guess that would be pretty accurate. I do look at how things are made and at their structural possibilities. But some things escape that. I need a sofa, so I'm not going to take that apart. Although I have used a sofa in another work... so I guess everything does become grist for the stones. Almost everything in our society is disposable, and I want to slow down that mass deterioration into the landfill, channel it in another direction, like into a museum. I won't say it's motivating, but it is something I like to think happens to the work I make.

**Is that process of retrieval an ethical one?**

I don't look at it that way. Some writers have been eager to cast me as a recycler and an environmental artist. I'm not. I am interested in how my work gets interpreted. I don't want to control what the media and individuals say, and I'm open to all sorts of interpretations, but it is remarkable how some of the things I make have been used politically. That has been a bit frustrating at times. I never intended to make any grand statement about environmentalism, but my work has been taken in that direction.

**A more consistent casting of your work has been to plug it into a critique of consumer culture.**

I would say that's right. I made a point of talking that way in the late '90s when I made the Nike work. When I started-I was 28 at the time-the only reason I could afford to buy Air Jordans was because I had funding from grants, so a lot of it was about economies and commodities and finding parallels between the two different markets. Those trainers were between \$250 and \$300 a pair, which is pretty high for sneakers. More recently my work has to do with a different kind of economy, with this idea of traditional knowledge and using materials in a traditional way. These are things I've learned from my family. I've started to use moose and deer hides, and what I really like about this new work is that I'm showing the process. I've always worked on site-I've been doing that since I made the whale skeletons-and I've always made the installations in the gallery space, but I've never shown that. In Catriona's show in 2010, I wanted to allow the hides to dry and change shape within the installation and then make prints from them. There was a lot of experimentation, and I didn't really know what would happen. I still make studio work that is more about product than process, but in this work I've also been leaving a lot up to chance and that has been reviving in a way.

1. *Habitat 04- Cité radieuse des chats/Cats Radiant City*, 2004, plywood, carpet, cats. 132 x 180 x 336". Courtesy Catriona Jeffries. Vancouver.
2. *Arts and Crafts Book Depository/Capp Street Project* 2004. architectural model. 3/4" to 1/2" plywood sectioned into four quadrants, locking casters, bookshelves, two framed glass cabinets with electric source and lighting unit, hand-made fabric pillows for seating benches, video monitor, ongoing accumulation of library inventory of magazines, journals, books and videos/ DVDs, 16' x 21' x 9' 8". each quadrant approximately 7 x 7'. Courtesy the artist and Casey !aplan. NY.



**Was there something in this notion of family memory that would have encouraged you to move in that direction?**

My work is not autobiographical, and I've always been very private about my life, but I spend a lot of time with my family in the summer. I also had a big show at the Smithsonian National Museum of the American Indian last year, and I had never shown in that type of environment. I was there for several months on a fellowship and a lot of people came through. I met a number of Native American artists, and Native American art operates completely separately from American contemporary art. They are mutually exclusive markets and cultures. There is no shame or guilt associated with being successful and selling, whereas in the contemporary art world that is seen as negative.

**Success is a sign that you've somehow sold out?**

Yes. That doesn't exist in the Native American art world. People have multiples of their work, and making and selling prints is very popular in the Native American art world. I was meeting these artists and they were asking me if I wanted to trade prints, and I said I don't make prints. The only other artists they knew in Canada were Inuit, who have a tradition of printmaking. So I read about the history of the Cape Dorset print shops and really liked the idea of making prints, which I hadn't done since art school. Mainly what I liked is that it transformed something three-dimensional into something two-dimensional. So I thought I'd make my own prints using three-dimensional material, like a skin that has become flat, and also printing on something three-dimensional, like thick blocks of foam. I quite like them, but I don't really see them as paintings or prints; they are more like sculpture. It's pretty funny how we do it. We use this big sod roller filled with water and it's all done on the floor. It's not a meticulous process, and a lot of the time you're not really sure what's going to happen.

**I want to talk about your reputation. "Close Encounters: The Next 500 Years," the largest exhibition of Aboriginal art that has ever been mounted in Canada, recently opened in Winnipeg. There are two pieces of your in the exhibition and they are placed at the beginning of the show. That placement seemed right because I think of you as a progenitor for a lot of First Nations artists. Do you regard yourself as being any kind of a forerunner?**

**My inspiration comes from innocent experimentation. It's hard to make good work if you go in with an overly didactic purpose. I always have to find some persuasive way of getting the message across.**

I've always considered myself just an artist. I can see my influence in the work of some young First Nations artists, some of whom have contacted me and told me how much my art meant to them. I love the fact that they have been able to pick it up and run with it. Young coastal artists in BC never could have tampered with the traditional motifs the way I did with the Nike work because it would have been considered sacrilegious. But I'm interior and not Northwest Coast and I wasn't referencing a specific culture. All I did was take these shoes apart and re-sew them, and everyone else puts together in their head what those lines and colours mean. A lot of young artists from Tsimshian, Haida or Tlingit lineages knew their elders would be upset if they did what I did. What it allowed was the door to open a bit, so that young artists could say, "Look, this work is hugely popular with a lot of different people-traditional, non-traditional, white and Native." If the work has had an influence on young artists, then that is its best legacy. I don't feel I need to make that direct a statement any more and I also didn't want it to get stale.

**Were you lucky that Michael Jordan's jersey number was 23 and not 99 like Gretzky because it saved you from making a lot more masks?**

I would have killed it before then. I started to get invitations to do installations in museum spaces, so that made me go in another direction.

**Did you have any idea that the "Prototypes for New Understanding" were going to be as successful as they were?**

I made them at the Banff Centre in 1998 and showed them to Sara Diamond, and she said these are going to be really, really popular. I came back to Vancouver and showed them to Cate Rimmer, a curator at Charles H Scott Gallery, and she immediately gave me a solo show. It kept snowballing, and a year later they were at the Castello di Rivoli. It happened really rapidly.

**Was it the colour of the shoes that initially attracted you?**

As well as the design and how they were marketed. I was aware of them in high school, but I couldn't afford them. But I stumbled across a Niketown Store in Manhattan the month before I was at the Banff Centre. I had also been visiting the Metropolitan Museum and the Museum of Natural History, and Niketown was showing their shoes in the same kind of display cases the museums were using.

**Because they were collector's items?**

Yes and because they were aggrandizing their own product. To me it made so much sense, looking at the design and colours of these trainers and the fact that they were displayed behind glass. That's where the spark came. I always wanted to show the "Prototypes" in that way. We tried other ways of showing them, but when you remove them from the glass cases, they look like retail displays. I liked seeing all of them on a plat-

form like that. It was the first time we showed them without glass, and they look like retail displays.

**How did you feel about the New Museum installation where they were shown as a group in their own space?**

I liked seeing all of them on a platform like that. It was the first time we showed them without glass, and they were exhibited in a similar way at the Secession in Vienna in 2003. People want to touch them when they're not behind Plexi and I understand that. After all, they're shoes. They feel they have a right to touch art that is made out of common material. The "Prototypes" are a pain in the ass for the conservation department.

**You made them over seven years. Was that a carefully orchestrated block of time?**

I did them casually. They're constantly changing the trainers and only release them twice a year, so I had to wait for that. The Air Jordans are a separate brand from all the other Nike shoes. It's like a new version of software, like Air Jordan 12.2. I would go to different stores here in Vancouver and they all knew me.

**I know the masks differ in complexity and size, but was there an average number of pairs you had to dismantle to construct a mask?**

No. Some of them used only two or three; others used a lot more. If I found a design I really liked I would buy up the stock. I worked with a woman here who came out of costume

design, and she knew textile and materials much better than I did. We would meticulously dismantle them and while there were short cuts-I would use a band saw to take off some of the soles-basically they had to be unstitched. I liked to use the same stitching holes when I was re-assembling them, so they looked like they were mass produced.

**Did that ever present a problem for you in recombining them?**

Definitely. The other thing I wanted to show was an anterior/posterior relationship. I wanted people to see the layering on the inside and the ripping apart of the foam lining. I wanted it known that all the stitching was done by hand because the inside doesn't look pretty and the outside is very, very slick and looks like it is done on a production line. I always wanted there to be evidence of some relationship to the idea of the handmade, to the labour that went into it.

**Crossing the iconography of sports with Aboriginal iconography turned out to be a pretty potent combination.**

Actually, one of the best interviews I ever had was with Sports Illustrated. When I had my show at the New Museum in 2005, the American media really covered it, including Time and all the big media outlets. Sports Illustrated ran a whole page. The guy was from Pennsylvania and he phoned me up and said, "I don't know anything about contemporary art," and I said, "Well, I don't know anything about sports culture, so we're on a level playing field." They also picked up on the "Talking Sticks," my carved baseball bats. Being in Sports Illustrated really impressed some of my cousins.

**One critic has written that you're almost dissecting the shoes. so the implication is that you're involved in ornate kind of forensic activity, like an autopsy. Did you ever have that sense?**

I never saw it like that, but looking at photos of my studio when we were working on them I can see how that would occur to someone. In 2006, when I made the black leather sofa tipi called Fumihle Sculpture for the exhibition at the Vancouver Art Gallery, we shot a video. and there are scenes where I'm gutting and scraping the leather off the sofa. It's very much like skinning an animal.

**I'm reluctant to play on the other half of your ancestry, but it's like taking a watch apart. If you take it apart, you know better how to put it together again.**

I don't think I could put those shoes back together. But it's funny that you mention that whole Swiss thing because I'm making work for Basel right now and I've never been to Switzerland. My father left when he was just a baby and I don't really have any connection to that part of my family. But I like the idea of these land-locked mountain people sitting on top of Europe looking down, so I'm making new works based on ideas around musical instruments. I've been looking at alphorns and trying to figure out possibilities with this ridiculous instrument. What I like about Switzerland is that it has these very strange customs. I don't know if I'll have enough

Brian Jungen, *Talking Sticks*, 2005. Courtesy of the artist and Casey Kaplan, NY.



time because everything has to be shipped out two months before the exhibition. But I have been making these fucked-up drums with deer and moose hide. That's the direction the new work is taking. I'm good friends with Jennifer Allora and Guillermo Calzadilla, and they made this fantastic piece with a piano called Stop, Repair, Prepare: Variations of Ode to Joy for a Prepared Piano No.1, where he walks around playing the piano from inside the instrument. I remember talking to them about making work with musical instruments years ago, and they kept going with it, so I've got some catching up to do.

**There is a Bill Woodrow piece where he takes apart a tove and out of it he make an electric guitar. In all his work, Woodrow insists upon the recognition of the source object even after the transformation. How critical is it that the viewer can still recognize the source object after you have reconfigured it?**

I don't want to take something apart so much that it is not recognizable. I like the transitions that happen when people experience my work. They see the new object, and then there is this switch when they realize what it's made from. That is happening less now. The work at Catriona's was big free-standing sculptures that have a very strong Modernist feel to them. I wanted some sort of macho Modernist sculptures, so

## INTERVIEW BORDER CROSSINGS 2011

so I made these hide pieces using car fenders, and you can't tell what they are. You come in and you see these imposing sculptures, and when you start examining them you realize they're made from animal skins, car parts and they're on deep freezers.

### **So is there much more delay in the recognition of this new work?**

Yes, the recognition is still there, but it is more obscured. I didn't do anything to the freezers; they're just not plugged in. But they work perfectly as plinths. That work to me is very much a landscape. On my rez, on my friends' rezes, and on all the rezes across the country, everyone has deep freezers and they're often outside. There are also car parts and bone and hides everywhere. My family and the folks on my reservation are big hunters, and so it's very common to see stretched hides and antlers. I show this stuff to my friends, and they start laughing because they recognize a language that I don't think a lot of non-Natives would understand. It's a hidden reference.

### **I think of the way you carefully carve pallet boards out of cedar, and here you use an unplugged freezer as a plinth, which requires no investment of time or craftsman hip. Yet it's just as functional in doing what you want it to do.**

I'm a big fan of the readymade, but I also like to physically make things with my own hands. I don't consider that as any better or less important than my conceptual or readymade art. When I did the sweatshop/basketball court, I just pushed all the tables together and painted lines on them. But I always have the impulse to start making things; it's something I can't stop. Then there are times when you can express a gesture, an idea or a concept by changing very little.

### **When you do Court, which you installed at Triple Candie, an alternative space in Harlem, it is clearly loaded with political implications.**

Yes, Court was entirely based on the concept of the exhibition space. That work and the cat shelter I did in collaboration with the Montreal SPCA and the Arts and Crafts Book Library were all done within a four-month period, one after the other. They all responded to location and they all had political meaning. It is really exhausting to work like that, especially in a large scale. I don't know the site, so I don't go in with a pre-conceived idea. It's always a case of arriving, coming up with an idea and basically having a month to work on it. It's an exciting, high-stakes marathon, but it really burns you out. Geoffrey Farmer and I are good friends, and he has really developed that process as a way of working.

### **What was it about the garbage bin, an object of abuse in our culture, that made you decide you could do something with it?**

Well, it's universal, it symbolizes waste in a direct way, and it's also a great building block. It's a very versatile material that you can buy anywhere, like the white plastic chairs. But I've wanted to make a tortoise for a long time because it is a symbol of the earth in many different cultures. When I made this shelter thing I had these other projects coming up, so I thought I might as well use the same material in three different ways.

### **The tortoise is icon, animal and also a structure you can inhabit so it becomes functional in many ways. Does Carapace represent a deliberate attempt on your part to complicate the functionality of your work?**

Yes. I liked that it was some kind of shelter and that it was very peaceful in there. I would like to make more work that is interactive. Nobody can touch the work that ends up in museums. People want to so badly, and it's a big problem when we have exhibitions. I did a commission for the Banff Centre for their new building and I designed benches, which are based on three different types of antlers—a moose, an elk and a caribou. They are 12 to 14 feet long and are quite complicated. They're bent stainless steel wire, like a Harry Bertoia chair from the '60s, and they look like a drawing. But you can sit or recline on them. I finally got to make something that is tough and durable and is meant for people to interact with. We had one made for the opening of the new building last summer, and the final two are still in production and will be placed in June. I had never done public work before and I liked doing it. I should say that I designed the antler chairs but didn't make them. I'm shitty at welding and those things have 30,000 welds.

### **When you did the skeleton pieces, the photographs show you surrounded by hundreds of pieces of plastic chairs. It looks to me like you're doing the work there.**

I did make those and I also had people helping me. The nice thing about the chairs is they were cheap, and if I needed more, I could just run out and get them. I need parameters when I make things. Marc Mayer, Director of the National Gallery, asked me last year why I always make stuff out of something that pre-exists and I was dumbfounded. At first I didn't know what to say, but when I talked to him later I realized it can't be too wide open. I can't stare at a block of wood or a lump of clay, or sit there and chisel away. That's not how I make anything.



Brian Jungen, *The Evening Redness in the West (2)*, 2006 baseballs, softballs, leather furniture, home theater system, DVDs dimensions variable, unique. Courtesy of the artist and Casey Kaplan, NY

**So the birdcage piece constructed from Ikea magazine files is an example of using prefabricated pieces as the basis for a work?**

I made that piece for a show about architecture. I'm a big fan of Modernist architecture, and when Catherine Crowston at the Edmonton Art Gallery asked me to be part of the show, I didn't really know what I was going to do. Like most cities, Edmonton is ringed by big box stores, so I drove out there looking for materials. There was an Ikea store next to a big pet store, and maybe it was because they were the same colour scheme, but I was struck by this idea of mass-produced furniture and mass-produced pets. I started thinking about animals as decor. I've also been interested in shelters built for animals.

**You've built *Habitat 04* for cats, there is *Inside Today's Home* for birds, and you were thinking about building a run for dogs in England. You're a menagerie kind of guy.**

Yes. When I saw those magazine files in Ikea, I recognized they were already birdhouses. All I did was stack and arrange them so they became this hanging birdhouse. Then I went next door and bought a whole bunch of finches. That was the budget.

**That's an example of what I was getting at in my first question. You're thinking birdhouse, you see magazine racks, and you come up with birdhouse. That's why I asked is anything ever just what it is, or is it always potentially something else?**

Mainly it has the possibility to be something else. There's another thing: when something is broken, there is a way that it gets liberated from its use. When it has no use value anymore, it becomes an object that could be sculpture. That's what led to my using the chairs. You can't fix those chairs, so people always throw them out. I kept seeing them as broken and I liked the way they looked.

**But how did you go from liking the way a broken chair looks to these dramatic plastic creatures like *Shapeshifter* and *Cetology*?**

I tried other things. The Vancouver Aquarium had one killer whale left and she was leaving, so I went down to videotape her. I was looking at the exhibit, I was reading about the whaling industry, I was looking at images of whale skeletons hanging in the Natural History Museum in London, and that's when it all happened. It just clicked. Sometimes, even though I'm interested in a material, it has to wait for the content. And you can never force it. Even if I have a really good material I may not know how to use it until something happens.

**I look at a piece like *Mise en scene* and see it as consistent with the way you have employed minimalist strategies.**

*Mise en scene* is basically a light fixture that was made for Barr Gilmore's Window Project Gallery in Toronto in 2000. It was a response to a very small exhibition space, and it fit perfectly in this window on Queen Street West. Along that stretch of Queen Street there were all these furniture stores selling Modernist furniture and light fixtures, so I wanted to play on that. If you look at that work, which is now in the Agnes Etherington Art Centre, you miss a lot of the original context in which it was first shown. I

like that these works can operate in a minimalist lineage but that there is also a hidden meaning to them.



Brian Jungen, *The Prince*, 2006 Baseball mitts, dress form 82 (H) x 24 (W) x 19-1/2 (D)"/ 208.28 (H) x 60.96 (W) x 49.53 cm, unique. Courtesy of the artist and Casey Kaplan, NY

**Were minimalist and conceptual strategies operating at Emily Carr when you were there?**

Not at all. My time at Emily Carr was wasted. I don't have anything against the school but thank god for Ian Wallace and my peers. That's where I met Geoffrey Farmer, Steven Shearer, Damian Moppett and Ron Terada. We were all there at the same time, all very serious, and all very frustrated with the school. But Ian taught art history and Senior Studio and he was serious about being a practicing artist. I didn't really know that you could go out in the world and do what Ian does. I was very young. I had just turned 22 when I graduated from Emily Carr, so I really had no world experience. I came out of high school in Northern BC and went right to Vancouver. That's why I say that art school was wasted because I had to catch up on so much learning just to figure out how to be in a city. I almost failed second year. I had barely turned 18 and I went nuts partying for a couple of years. All through public school I coasted on my ability to draw and paint, and I got a scholarship to go to art school. But I was challenged by the idea of contemporary and

conceptual art, and I was intrigued by things like minimalism. I simply hadn't been exposed to enough. I remember the discovery of Felix Gonzalez-Torres was an epiphany because he was using minimalist strategies but infusing them with politics. And I could ask Ian about him, and he would riff on for an hour talking about how great the work is. What drew me to minimalism was the pure aesthetics. I was also really influenced by this idea of earthwork and land art, which came back to me years later. I remember writing an essay on Heizer's DoubleNegative, which I then forgot about. I had gone to New York after Emily Carr, and when I came back to Vancouver I was 25 and had no money. So I went back to my family north of Fort St John, and my chief gave me a job flashing for the summer. I worked on a flashing crew cutting a 15 kilometre long cutline through the foothills. I basically made this huge earthwork with eight other guys, and that's when it hit me that I wanted to make sculpture, I wanted to work threedimensionally, and I wanted people to be able to physically experience an art work by walking around it. By then I knew the limitations of drawing and painting. So I came back to Vancouver and got a studio with Geoffrey, who was making videos and doing installations out of stuff he was finding on the street and in thrift stores. To me it doesn't seem that long ago, but when I tell that story to my young artist friends it's like legend. We had a studio in the Downtown East Side and the rent was cheap—we paid \$100 for the whole floor. It's not like that now. There were fewer people coming out of art schools then. By 2000 there were lots more, and this frenzied "get rich" thing was being promoted in the art world. We know how that ended.

**I want to talk a bit about your upbringing. Were those years in Fort St John formative?**

Yes. I was born in Fort St John, but I never grew up there. It's an important distinction. Fort St John is a big centre, but I grew up in Montney and Chetwynd, small farming communities and sawmill towns around there. When I was a kid I was an active drawer and was always making small things. I was in my own world, I was in heaven with a box of Lego or drawing on anything—wood, paper, walls—and everyone said I was going to be an artist. I drew in a very accurate, representational way from a young age. Every one of my elementary and high school teachers was impressed by how prolific I was and how well I could render. I would fill sketchbooks full of drawings and I would make up stuff in my head. I drew landscapes and pictures of bears and horses and dogs, and when I came to art school, it was all discredited. That to me was a big shock because I didn't know what else I was supposed to draw.

**Was racism a problem around Fort St John?**

It still is. The reserves are very far from town and Fort St John always had a transient work force. There are a lot more enlightened people now than there used to be, and the reserves were different then, too. The governance wasn't as tight; there weren't any social programs on the reserves for addiction therapy, so there were lots of stereotypical drunk Indians. There is still alcohol and drug abuse, but what has changed is that you see much more positive representation of Indian folks in town.

**Do you think growing up in that kind of context would have necessarily disposed you to deal with politics in your art?**

I think so. I was angry, but when I went to art school in the early '90s, it was the apex of political correctness.

**So you didn't encounter racism?**

No. What I encountered was all these marginal, minority artists wanting me to join the PC crusade against straight, white males. There was this army of extreme politically correct students who wanted a revolution. I got chastised for being friends with Steven Shearer because he was a white, straight male. There were all these controls and restrictions about who could do what, and I didn't see things like that. I was angry about experiencing racism and homophobia, but I wasn't prepared to make work about it in the way my peers were making work about it, which was through very direct action. It was activist but it wasn't art.

**Did queer politics play into this mix?**

Yes. But to me race has always been much more of a battle.

**I guess there are a number of ways to be political. When you put the "Prototypes" in a museum context you use the museum's methodologies against itself. So many of your moves have political implications. Is that a conscious residue of your experience?**

Definitely. I learned that persuasion was much better than force. If you can seduce somebody into believing something, you can communicate more and be more subversive than by going in with guns a-blazing. Which was the popular strategy of a lot of my peers back then. There was a sense of urgency with AIDS activism, but I never felt like I was part of that camp. A lot of my inspiration also comes from innocent experimentation. It's hard to make good work if you go in with some sort of overly didactic purpose. The work will get overwhelmed. I always have to find some persuasive way of getting the message across.

**Do you mean that a sense of indirection is generally a more effective way of making art?**

In general, yes.

**I want to talk about *The Evening Redness in the West* and *The Prince*. One uses leather from chairs and the other uses baseball glove leather. I imagine you becoming a connoisseur of the material.**

Using leather as a raw material is a recent thing. I have taken apart leather chairs and sneakers and leather gloves, but I was interested in the product and it just happened to be made out of leather. I'm not an expert on leather and leather craft, and I certainly don't do leather tooling.

**But those look like awfully convincing saddles.**

Actually, I have a buddy who makes new saddles and repairs old ones, but I made mine before I met him. There is this book, though, written in the '50s that is still the classic used by people who work in saddlery and tack, and that's what I took to New York to make the saddles.

**You followed the manual?**

Yes. The saddles are made from overstuffed chairs that are part of home theatre systems. They have these motors in them that are



Brian Jungen, *Blanket no. 2*, 2008, Professional sports jerseys, 53 x 51-1/2" (134.62 x 130.81cm) Unique. Courtesy of the artist and Casey Kaplan, New York.

patched into the system like a subwoofer. I had never seen this before, and when I saw them in New York, I immediately wanted to make something out of them. My idea was to use the way Hollywood portrays the western and the spectacle of the war film. That was the basis of the installation.

**Did you use one chair per saddle?**

Pretty much. Then we used the wood that was in the sofa to make these little frames for them to sit on and we re-attached the motors and ran them to DVD players and home theatre receiver systems. We ran it through an amp so it was super loud. The sounds are from recent big budget Hollywood spectacles, westerns and war films, and then there are little skulls made out of softballs and baseballs that sit on the floor with little speakers in them. The sound is this cacophonous mixture of dialogue and horses and sweeping music and helicopters and machine guns.

**So you're not hearing Custer's Last Stand as much as you're hearing Vietnam and the war in Iraq?**

Yes, it's a combination of films, like *Young Guns* and *Dances with Wolves* and *Thin Red Line*, all these late Hollywood blockbusters, but they're played at the same time and there are no images. But the sound is so loud that the saddles physically shake and move around the gallery space. They moved quite a bit, and the gallery staff would have to rearrange them because they would get tangled up in their cables, or get stuck in the corner. The piece has to be shown in a soundproof room.

**Am I right in thinking that the provocation for it came out of Cormac McCarthy's Blood Meridian, a novel about Indian bounty hunters?**

Yes, I love that novel.

**You turn the tables on white barbarism because the idea of scalping has always been associated in the popular imagination with what Indians did to whites and you reverse it.**

A similar thing happens with the whale skeletons: an endangered animal is made from an indestructible material. There is the same kind of ironic contradiction operating here. I always do the kind of reversing you're talking about. The hard part is finding a material that suits the idea I'm trying to communicate, whether it's some racial role reversal, or some idea about representing nature and the natural world. I'm always trying to find some kind of commonality, to match up what might seem to be separate things. That's where I want the connection to be. I have to say it's not very easy.

**So either the idea or the material can be generative?**

Yes. Sometimes I will discover a new material and it will take me a couple of years to actually figure out the direction I want to take it and the idea I want to marry it with. It can be frustrating because there are times when I want to communicate something around an idea. Right now I am working on a piece with these moose hides, a material I've been interested in for a long time, but I hadn't really figured out how to use. Now I'm doing these prints with it and I really like them, but it took a few go-arounds making other work before I could settle on a way to resolve using the material. But there are times when things come together in some kind of perfect storm. With *The Evening Redness* I read the book a couple of times and made the skulls. I was reminded

of the image of these skulls hanging in trees from the book, so I thought I would work with the idea of the American West and its brutalities. I went to New York to make the work for my first show at the Casey Kaplan Gallery. I was there for three weeks and I was looking for different materials to use. I shop for very different reasons, and I saw those chairs at a big box store or something, and thought they would be perfect to make some sort of weird saddle out of.

**So your idea of shopping is not to go to a high-end store to buy a Drie Van Noten shirt but to scour a big box store for some leather furniture?**

Sometimes I do go to high-end stores. Like with the Nikes, and I made some antlers out of expensive men's Italian shoes. When I make small works, and they're usually for art fairs, I like this idea of macho male luxury. I wanted to make some terribly phallic thing, like an antler, out of male fashion. I can't even remember what brand I used, but it was probably Prada, or something similar.

**My guess is it wasn't cheap to buy golf bags either?**

Sometimes you can swing deals if you're buying in bulk, or if you're working with a museum. That was the case with the sofas.

**What provoked the frenzy of totem making you went through in 2007?**

That was for a show at Catriona's. At the time I had four full-time assistants, and I started to feel like a floor manager in a factory. I was getting a lot of exhibitions. When I finished the Nike work, the totems were a way to pick up a similar project but with a much shorter commitment of time. So I did one show for Catriona and one for Casey. We made the totem tubes, and then we made the NFL blankets and that was it. After that I didn't have an assistant for two and a half years.

**I think the golf bags were the most resistant to being transformed. They look more like golf bags than the Air Jordans look like shoes.**

Yes. I didn't really have to do anything to the golf bags except take the straps off them and stack them. We had to secure them to Sonotubes, which took a while, but it wasn't nearly as involved a project of deconstruction as the shoes. The "Blankets" were also very labour intensive. I actually like the "Blankets." The totem tubes operate more like minimalist objects because I didn't really do anything to them, but I really liked making those patterns on the "Blankets." I think people read them as being too crass and too direct a way of calling up the whole controversy around the Native American names of American football teams. I always wanted the blankets to be active, but instead we just pinned them on the walls, which was a mistake.

**How would they have been more active?**

I would have had them on forms. I also underestimated how long they would take to make. We had to build these special looms for them and had to sandwich together multiple jerseys of that polyester material, and then back them, and stitch a lot of the cuts. It was a lot of work. That was in 2008 when I still had those four assistants.

**When we talked earlier you said you don't know anything about ports, but in *Blanket No.7* you do a cheeky bit of needlework in combining the jerseys of Allen Iverson and Kobe Bryant, the greatest rivals in pro basketball. You must have known enough about that sport to understand that would be a pretty contested blanket.**

That is the only NBA one. Actually, the NBA jerseys, because they are tank tops, work much better. That was the last one we made, and I knew about placing those two guys together. That *Blanket* was the star in the whole exhibition. When we showed that at the Smithsonian American Indian Museum, we put it with other Navajo blankets, outside of the exhibition. At first you couldn't tell, but when you looked closely you realized they were made from NBA jerseys. Then it was all Bryant and Iverson. Their names do appear, but they get really abstracted.

**In a number of First Nations cultures, the Trickster is a prominent figure. Does he play into your tradition as well?**

The Trickster is a contentious figure for me. He's not benign and he doesn't play a positive role. Personally, I hate the term. It's pejorative and disingenuous because it has been completely abused and co-opted out of Native culture and into general culture. A lot of my Indian pals use the term as a joke, like dream catcher. I think the term trickster has been lost to Disney images of foxes and coyotes. It has been made cute and cheesy.

**Where does your abiding interest in architecture start? I mean why does it interest you?**

I like spaces. I always have, even as a kid. I was fascinated by the way buildings were built. I was always making constructions, forts and stuff. Then in high school I started reading about architecture, so I knew about modern architecture by the time I got to art school. Going into architecture was my back-up in case art school didn't work out.

**So is the Arts and Crafts Book Depository/Capp Street Project in 2004, where you mix Gordon Matta-Clark with the Gamble House, a piece where the language of architecture and specific examples of architecture direct your formation?**

Pretty much. I was interested in the California Craftsman style, a vernacular import of the Arts and Crafts Movement in England that got watered down into the West Coast bungalow, which then spread all the way up the coast. I liked the idea that the craftsman who lived there was also the person who built it, which was totally not true. At the time, I was the artist in residence at the California College of the Arts, and they had just removed the word "craft" from their name. It used to be the California College of Arts and Crafts and suddenly it was the California College of the Arts. I also saw Matta-Clark's *Splitting: Four Corners* at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art and thought it would be nice to make something that comes apart in quadrants. The school there has a large architecture program, so there are models everywhere, especially in the library. I thought why not make a big model and put the library in it? Initially, it contained the periodical collections from the library, and then after it came down, I started buying strange books on architecture and adding them to the library. I had a pretty good collection to begin, which I also donated to the piece. The library includes books on Matta-Clark and other artists who worked with architecture

**So is it a structure in which you can sit and read about architecture?**

Yes, but it is like a fort, especially when it's all closed together. You don't really want to be in there. It's made of plywood. I thought we would dismantle it when the exhibition was over, but it turned out that it was purchased for the Kramlich collection in Napa.

**Why didn't the dog run piece get made in England at the Tate Modern?**

That was another botched thing because of too much red tape. Anything outside of the Tate Modern falls under the jurisdiction of City of London and that's a labyrinth. There was a public safety thing because dogs were involved. It was a shame. It's funny that you bring that up because I'm thinking of reviving it for a project in Europe. I like the idea that you need an animal to gain access to a place. I especially like the idea of making a place that you can't even see into, and that you can only get into if you have an animal, like a dog.

**Which is the opposite of the social norm where you can't get into places because you have a dog?**

Exactly. I thought it would be nice to reverse that and build a space only for humans and dogs. If you don't have a dog, you can't get in. I like the idea that people will suddenly be looking for dogs as a way to gain entry.

**You're often concerned with site specificity, and you use architecture in that context as well. Your cat shelter was based on Safdie's housing design for Expo 67?**

That was a collaboration with the Montreal SPCA, and initially it was for cats and dogs. We were going to have some kind of separation, but then we realized that would have been too much work for a shelter. I wanted to revive this socialist spirit that went into the development of Habitat 67. We were going to make it out of cat-climbing furniture, similar to what I did with the Ikea boxes and the birds, but they don't come apart very well, so we contacted the manufacturer in Ontario. I designed it and he built it. They ended up looking like these carpeted Donald Judd boxes. Then we just stacked them in these arrangements because it is based exactly on Habitatfour variations on a rectangular box that can be stacked in several different combinations.

**You do tend to draw on a wide variety of sources. One of the points of departure for *The Prince* is obviously the conventional statue of the dime store Indian?**

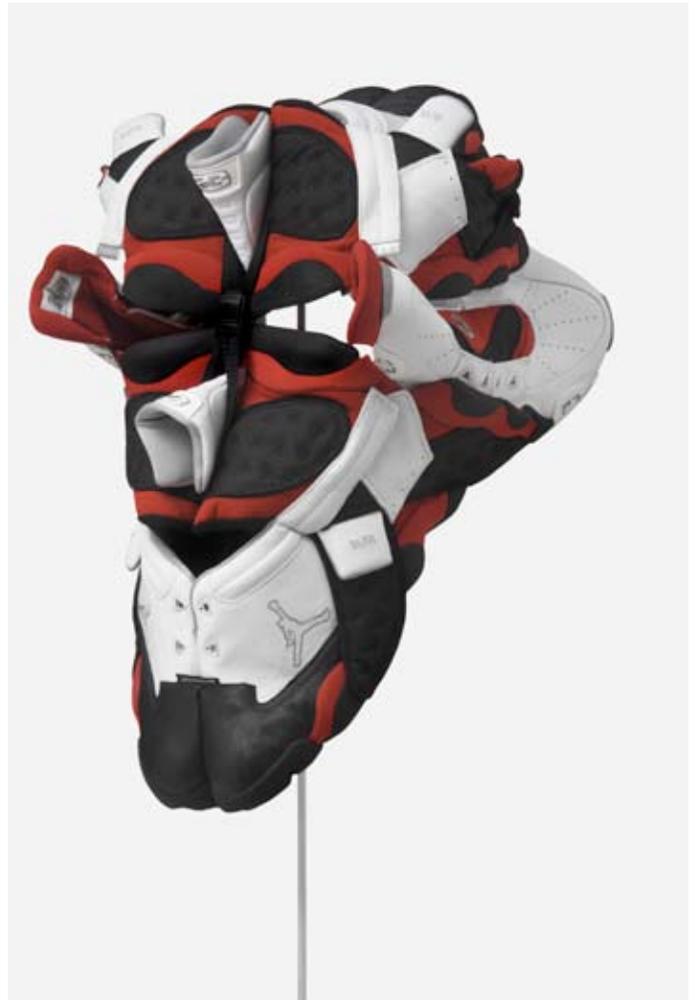
I had also read Machiavelli's *The Prince*. I made the piece right after *The Evening Redness* installation at Casey Kaplan, and I still had this idea of an out-of-control, ruthless leader like George Bush, and I wanted to use an American product, which is why it's made from baseball gloves. But I've also been a huge fan of Japanese armour. I love the idea of going into these chivalrous battles with all this insane pageantry. When you look at Japanese armour, it's very constructed, like Russian Constructivism. It does not feel like something you can put on your body.

**It's not so different from Japanese women's fashion if you think of Issey Miyake?**

Yes, it's not really about the body.

**In Blake Gopnik's review in the *Washington Post*, he looks at your work and suggests it is being read through the lens of identity politics coming out of First Nations culture. Where do you situate yourself inside this huge frame that got labelled identity politics?**

As I was saying before, when I was at Emily Carr I felt a lot of pressure to be part of this hyper-pc army that was intent on destroying the patriarchy of white, male painters. I can understand their anger because if you've ever been oppressed and have experienced racism, then you know how motivating that anger can be. But understanding the impetus didn't mean I agreed with the methodology, or with the tactics used by a lot of the artists, and with the direction identity politics took. Identity politics has become a dirty word, and people don't like to make work that can be seen as identity based. I was always hesitant to make work that could be categorized within that framework, but at the end of the day I just didn't care. This is the work I'm making; this work is about my experience of being First Nations and trying to figure out what that means at this time. There are a lot of questions that First Nations people ask about themselves, and there are First Nations people who like to grade you on how Indian they are. There are a lot of Indians who do battle with one another. But I know who the enemy is and it's not other Indian people. All I want to do is open things up a bit for First Nations people to come to terms with their identity, not just First Nations artists, but also the culture in general. I want them to see the incredible diversity in First Nations art and culture. It has been very frustrating. For the longest time I was criticized by other Indian artists because I wasn't participating in the National Indian dialogue, or I wasn't being part of the urban shaman community. But from the beginning, I always said I was an artist. I've never been comfortable saying I'm a Native artist, any more than I've been comfortable saying I'm a queer artist. I refuse to label myself that way.



Brian Jungen, *Prototype for New Understanding #21*, 2004, Nike Air Jordans, 50 x 36 x 33 cm (19 ¾" x 14 1/8" x 13")  
Courtesy of the Artist and Casey Kaplan Gallery, New York  
Photo: Trevor Mills, Vancouver Art Gallery

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“Canada in Miami: Not-So\_Cold Comforts,” *Canadian Art*, December 8, 2011

## THE ABMB ARTISTS AND ARTWORKS

ART BASEL MIAMI BEACH  
DECEMBER 1-4, 2011

Many works by contemporary Canadian artists were also on offer (or often, sold or on reserve) at the booths of American and European dealers at ABMB.

In the realm of Canadian artists new to the fair, young Calgary-raised artist Ryan Sluggett, who received his MFA from UCLA this year, had success with two large works sold by **Richard Telles Fine Art**, his Los Angeles dealer. The works, priced at \$14,000 apiece, translate Sluggett’s previous successes in paper collage and painting into a sewn and dyed fabric medium.

“There’s a huge collector base in Los Angeles, and the response to his work is fantastic,” said Telles, noting that his gallery will open a solo show of Sluggett’s work in January.

Another ABMB debut belonged to an artist already quite well known at home and abroad: Edward Burtynsky.

Though Burtynsky’s dealers have shown his work at the other Miami events for several years, this was his first time having work at the central fair, where prints from his Oil and Dryland Farming series found successful sales.

“It’s good [to be in the show] because an incredible audience comes through here,” said Burtynsky at the booth of his New York dealer, **Howard Greenberg Gallery**—one, he said, of just three photo-exclusive galleries among the 200-plus showing at the fair.

“Artists hate talking about it, but it’s good to have a market that is broad,” Burtynsky said, as it permits one to continue with one’s work.

Canadian artist **Scott Lyall**, based in Toronto and New York, had a strong showing, with four large new untitled works premiering at the booth of his UK dealer, **Campoli Presti**. Gallery representative Cora Muennich said that Lyall’s current London show, up until December 17, had already sold out, and that three of their ABMB works were placed by the second day of the fair.

To create the new series, Muennich said, Lyall sent algorithms directly to a UV printer to be translated into 6 layers of colour ink on canvas. The results are subtle, minimal-seeming and spectral canvases mounted on thin, hand-painted wood bases. Two related works shown by New Yorkdealer **Miguel Abreu** also sold.

New York’s **Andrea Rosen Gallery** was showing four new works by David Altmejd, two of which reflected a rawer exploration of inner and outer figuration than seen previously—these two figures were formed largely out of bent chicken wire and resin fruits. (By the second day of the fair, three of the four works had been sold.)

**CANADIANART**



\*Brian Jungen, *My Decoy*, 2011, Two Cone chairs, American elk hide, tarred twine, steel, granite; 67 x 34 x 23" / 170.2 x 86.4 x 58.4cm; Courtesy of the artist & Casey Kaplan, NY

**Galleria Franco Noero** of Turin was displaying two new Canadian works they sold at the fair—Steven Shearer’s massive salon-style installation *Bad Cast #1*, which revived Shearer’s collection of Leif Garrett ephemera as large, brightly coloured screenprint-style images, and Andrew Dadson’s *Black Restretched*, in which countless layers of coloured and black oil paint were scraped over a linen support.

New York’s **David Zwirner** created a small room of Marcel Dzama works, highlighting five new small paintings dubbed *Forgotten Terrorists* and a new drawing, *Weighed with Tiredness and Defeat*, alongside a large diorama from 2008 and two smaller shadow boxes from around that same time period.

Winnipeg artist **Karel Funk** was represented by a new work, *Untitled #52*, at the booth of New York’s 303 Gallery; the painting continued his carefully rendered portrayals of coat-obscured figures. In the same booth, a characteristically humorous lightbox self-portrait by Rodney Graham, *Basement Camera Shop c. 1937*, recast the artist as yet another figure from a vaunted art-historical past.

*My Decoy*, a 2011 sculpture by **Brian Jungen** of elk hides stretched over two cone chairs, was showing at the booth of New York’s **Casey Kaplan Gallery**, as was *Shadow and Grow*, a tall, typically precarious figure by **Geoffrey Farmer** made out of wood, fabric, a cardboard box, a magazine cutout, LED lighting and a hat.

Vancouver artist Ken Lum was represented at the fair by a 2003 mirror work, *Ohhh baby. You are looking good!* which was popular with fair photo-takers at the booth of Paris’ **Galerie Nelson-Freeman**.

Toronto’s Evan Penny, whose survey “Re Figured” is touring Europe and is soon to open at the Museum der Moderne Salzburg, continued to fascinate fair viewers with his hyperreal sculptural practice as exemplified in *Young Self: Portrait of the Artist as he was (Not) Variation #2*, a 2011 work on display at the booth of New York dealer **Sperone Westwater**.

Finally, works by internationally revered Vancouver artist Jeff Wall continued to flourish. **Marian Goodman Gallery** sold a 2009 photograph by Wall, *Vancouver, 7 December 2009: Ivan Sayers, costume historian, lectures at the University Women’s Club. Virginia Newton-Moss wears a British ensemble c. 1910*, while **White Cube** had his 2005 lightbox *Hotels, Carrall St, Vancouver* on prominent view and was also offering his 2008 work *Intersection*.

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**BRIAN JUNGEN**  
**SEPTEMBER 8 – OCTOBER 22, 2011**

OPENING: THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 8  
6:00 – 8:00PM



Casey Kaplan is pleased to begin the 2011–2012 season with an exhibition of new sculpture by Canadian artist, Brian Jungen. Preceded by Brian Jungen: Tomorrow, Repeated, a solo exhibition at the Art Gallery of Ontario (May 5 – August 7, 2011) celebrating Jungen's receipt of the 2010 Gershon Iskowitz Prize, this presentation marks the debut in the United States of an important evolution in Jungen's work. Within the past few years, Jungen has focused his practice on modernist concerns and contexts, redefining his object making through the use of new materials and processes that reflect this shift, a more intimate relationship to the body, and his family's traditions and history.

Since 2006, Jungen has lived and worked between Vancouver, British Columbia, and the Doig River Indian reserve in northern BC, where the First Nations Dane-zaa (pronounced "dan-ney-za") side of his family is located. Reconnecting with friends, family, and the landscape of the Peace River Valley, has increasingly personalized the vocabulary of his practice. Previously, Jungen was most well known for deconstructing Westernized, mass-produced commodities such as leather goods, sports paraphernalia, plastic lawn chairs, and reforming them into sculpture. For this exhibition, Jungen presents two series of works that combine objects of natural and manufactured form, drawn from a range of influences and references, including: modern furniture, Marcel Duchamp's readymades, Andy Warhol's silk screen prints, and traditional Dane-zaa drum making.

Situated in the galleries are five iconic Mid-Century Modern chairs designed by Charles and Ray Eames, Eero Saarinen, and Verner Panton that have been bound and enveloped in circles cut from commercially farmed, American elk hides. Jungen has a penchant for modern furniture (many of the chairs coming from his personal collection), finding inspiration in the organic compositions and the designers' ideologies. The corporeal quality of the chairs' form and function, the skins of the elk, and the communal process of hand sewing the elements together is compounded further by the resulting object – a drum – which inherently implies ceremonial and social contexts, movement and sound. In Brian Jungen: Tomorrow, Repeated, the hides used in works such as *The Men of My Family* (2010) were sourced from animals that were hunted and skinned by the artist and his relatives. Covering aluminum car parts, they shape abstract volumes that are positioned on pedestals made from freezer chests, all materials familiar to the region of northern BC. The works were installed alongside the AGO's collection of Henry Moore sculptures, juxtaposing the two artists' investigations of form and figure, material, presentation, and process. Here, the dialog between these previous works and modernism is explored further within the combination of Jungen's current subjects.

Additionally present is a new series of modular silver ink prints on polyethylene foam panels that lean on to and hang from the gallery walls. Utilizing the remainder of the elk hides, with their cut out, empty circular forms, Jungen saturated one side of each hide in silver ink. With the aid of an assistant, and their combined weight, each inked hide was then pressed into the surface of industrial foam, leaving a textured and ghostly impression of what the skin had previously housed.

Brian Jungen was born in 1970 in Fort St. John, British Columbia. Along with his exhibition at the Art Gallery of Ontario, Jungen recently completed a series of public sculptures commissioned for the Canada Plaza, the main entrance of The Kinnear Centre for Creativity and Innovation, at the Banff Center, Alberta. Titled, *The ghosts on top of my head* (2010–11), the works are three white powder-coated steel benches that reference Harry Bertoia's furniture design and assume the shapes of elk, moose and caribou antlers. Other solo museum exhibitions include: the Art Gallery of Alberta, Edmonton (2011); *Strange Comfort*, a mid-career retrospective at the Smithsonian's National Museum of the American Indian, Washington DC (2010); *Le Frac des Pays de la Loire, Carquefou* (2009); Museum Villa Stuck, Munich (2007); the Tate Modern, London (2006); Vancouver Art Gallery (2006); Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal (2006); *Witte de With*, Rotterdam (2006); and the New Museum, New York (2005). The artist has also participated in recent group exhibitions, such as *Hard Targets*, Wexner Center for the Arts, Columbus (2009); *Moby Dick*, CCA Wattis Institute for Contemporary Arts, San Francisco (2009); *Revolutions – Forms that Turn*, curated by Carolyn Christov-Bikargeiv, 16th Biennale of Sydney (2008); and *NeoHooDoo: Art For A Forgotten Faith*, The Menil Collection, Houston (2008). In 2013 Jungen will have corresponding solo exhibitions at the Kunstverein Hannover and the Bonner Kunstverein, Germany.

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Rosenberg, Karen, *Brian Jungen*, The New York Times, September 29, 2011, p. C28

# The New York Times

## Brian Jungen

By KAREN ROSENBERG

*Casey Kaplan*  
525 West 21st Street, Chelsea

*Through Oct. 22*

The Canadian artist Brian Jungen has always had a profound way with the most prosaic materials, applying aboriginal traditions of object-making (he is partly of Dane-zaa descent) to cheap mass-produced goods like sneakers and plastic chairs. But too often these building blocks have dictated the meaning of his work, making it seem to be all about sports and consumer culture.

His latest show represents a conceptual step forward, though as a visual statement it sometimes falls flat. Mr. Jungen is now working with higher-end goods that come pre-approved as art objects, namely mid-century modern chairs by the Eameses, Eero Saarinen and Verner Panton. He has also invested more heavily in process, referencing a specific tribal tradition (the making of ceremonial drums).

On view are two related bodies of work, sculpture and paintings. The sculptures consist of classic mid-century modern chairs covered in hand-sewn elk hides, in a method borrowed from Dane-zaa drum-making. For the paintings, Mr. Jungen re-used the hides left over from the sculptures. He dipped them in silver ink and then made impressions on sheets of black foam, creating Rorschach-like blobs with central voids.

The recycling of the hides is admirable, the recycling of Warhol predictable. The sculptures work better. Some of them do resemble drums, if strangely lumpen ones; a pair of Panton's Cone chairs, for instance, make a more or less conventional support. And some look too much like chairs, albeit with peculiar upholstery. But over all, their marriage of factory produced fetishes and indigenous craftsmanship creates a new design category, or at least makes us question the ones we have.

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## Brian Jungen Wins the 2010 Gershon Iskowitz Prize at the AGO

\$25,000 prize includes solo exhibition at the Gallery

(TORONTO - April 14, 2010) Internationally renowned Canadian artist Brian Jungen is the recipient of the 2010 Gershon Iskowitz Prize at the AGO for his outstanding contribution to visual arts in Canada. The Gershon Iskowitz Foundation and the AGO will celebrate the \$25,000 prize at a public reception on May 6, and the AGO will mount an exhibition of Jungen's work in the coming year.

Born in 1970 in Fort St. John, British Columbia, to a Swiss father and a Dunne-za mother, Jungen has risen to prominence over the last decade by creating artwork that recasts traditional Indian symbology using ordinary objects such as plastic lawn chairs, golf bags, and Nike Air Jordans. He has exhibited extensively in Canada and internationally in venues including Tate Modern, the Vancouver Art Gallery, and the Smithsonian's National Museum of the American Indian, which is currently staging a major retrospective of Jungen's work.



"Over the past decade, Brian Jungen has emerged as a leading Canadian artist of international significance," says David Moos, the AGO's curator of modern and contemporary art. "His work forces a reconsideration of the everyday object, which he infuses with sociopolitical commentary, historic symbology, and an ingenious sense of play."

The AGO currently holds four works by Jungen in its collection: Prototype for New Understanding #6 (1999), a work from Jungen's celebrated Prototypes series in which the artist transformed Nike Air Jordan sneakers into masks connoting the colours and styles of those of the Aboriginal Northwest Coast; and 1960, 1970, and 1980, three large-scale sculptures made from golf bags and assuming the form of totem poles.

Jungen was selected by the board of the Gershon Iskowitz Foundation. Board member Jay Smith says that Jungen was chosen "because of his singular vision, his technical innovation, and his stunning narratives, which are at once provocative, troubling, whimsical, and complex. Brian Jungen is wholly deserving of this and every accolade sure to come his way in the future."

The May 6 reception celebrating Jungen's win will be held in Baillie Court, and Jungen will be delivering a talk about his work at 7 pm. The talk is free and open to the public. More information can be found at [www.ago.net/lectures-and-talks](http://www.ago.net/lectures-and-talks).

The Gershon Iskowitz Prize at the AGO was last awarded in December 2009 to Toronto-based interdisciplinary artist Shary Boyle. Beginning this year, the winner of the annual prize will be announced in the spring, with an exhibition by the winning artist to follow within a calendar year. An exhibition of Boyle's work will open at the AGO this September. Françoise Sullivan: Inner Force - Winner of the 2008 Gershon Iskowitz Prize at the AGO is on view at the Gallery until May 30.

In 2009, a commemorative volume celebrating the first 20 years of the Iskowitz Prize was released. Titled The Gershon Iskowitz Prize: 1986-2006, the 112-page book spotlights the first 21 artists to receive the prize, including Gathie Falk, Betty Goodwin, Rodney Graham, Vera Frenkel and General Idea. It is available for purchase at shopAGO.

## ABOUT THE ISKOWITZ PRIZE AT THE AGO

In 2007, the AGO and the Iskowitz Foundation joined forces to raise awareness of the visual arts in Canada with the renaming of the annual award established twenty years ago by Canadian painter Gershon Iskowitz (1921-1988). Iskowitz recognized the importance of grants to the development of artists and acknowledged that a grant from the Canada Council in 1967 enabled him to formalize his distinctive style. The AGO is home to the artist's archives, which include early works on paper, sketchbooks and memorabilia, and holds 29 paintings by Iskowitz (spanning the period from 1948 to 1987) in its permanent collection.

## ABOUT THE AGO

With a permanent collection of more than 79,000 works of art, the Art Gallery of Ontario is among the most distinguished art museums in North America. In 2008, with a stunning new design by world-renowned architect Frank Gehry, the AGO opened its doors to the public amid international acclaim. Highlights include Galleria Italia, a gleaming showcase made of wood and glass running the length of an entire city block along the Gallery's façade; and the feature staircase, spiraling up through the roof of Walker Court and into the new contemporary galleries above. From the extensive Group of Seven collection to the dramatic new African art gallery; from the cutting-edge works in the Vivian & David Campbell Centre for Contemporary Art to Peter Paul Rubens' masterpiece The Massacre of The Innocents, a highlight of the celebrated Thomson Collection, there is truly something for everyone at the AGO.

For more images and more information, contact:

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The Art Gallery of Ontario is funded in part by the Ontario Ministry of Culture. Additional operating support is received from the Volunteers of the AGO, the City of Toronto, the Department of Canadian Heritage, and the Canada Council for the Arts.

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# ARTFORUM

## REVIEWS

WASHINGTON, DC

### Brian Jungen

NATIONAL MUSEUM OF THE AMERICAN INDIAN

In a gallery adjacent to Canadian artist Brian Jungen's survey "Strange Comfort" is a show called simply "Our Lives." In this exhibition, to quote the introductory text, "members of eight communities describe how they work to remain Native in an ever-changing world"—a powerful condensation of the museum's charter. The National Museum of the American Indian recognizes expressions of native cultures not as strictly historical phenomena, preserved in and understood through dusty artifacts and aging fables, but rather as mutable and alive, with the potential for being creatively perpetuated in contemporary life. Jungen's work, as demonstrated by this exhibition, evidences a related commitment.

The literature on Jungen, whose mother is a member of the Dunne-za First Nation of Alberta and British Columbia and whose father is of European stock, invariably notes that the artist is principally concerned with the seamless subsumption of native iconography into Western capitalist image culture—the "vast heaving mass of ephemeral and disposable forms," to quote art historian Charlotte Townsend-Gault's essay on the artist. While this is an unmistakable, even central, dimension of Jungen's ongoing project, the experience of his work en masse suggests both a greater urgency and a greater depth of feeling than this very rote critical position would indicate. The endgame for Jungen is not

simply critique. Critique is implicit in the work, of course, but it is the consistently propositional quality of his sculpture that defines his practice, and those propositions more often than not articulate a commitment to finding new possibilities for native expression in, quite literally, the fabric of contemporary culture.

For example, Jungen's well-known "Prototype for New Understanding," 1998–2005, is made from Nike Air Jordan basketball shoes, cut apart and restitched to resemble Aboriginal Northwest Coast Indian masks. Installed under glass atop immaculately finished pedestals, these sculptures don't—or don't only—take aim at the museological conventions that have objectified native artifacts in institutions historically. The pedestals also propose a contemporary "native" culture worthy of serious consideration. Jungen incorporates and instrumentalizes the pedestal as vigorously as his Minimalist forebears rejected it. While the Minimalists' disavowal of the pedestal ushered in an era of sculpture in the expanded field that still resonates today, Jungen's use of rarefied display techniques to frame his artifacts reflects a desire for his work to be understood as a determined extension of native traditions into the present, a purpose only amplified by the commitments of the museum in which this exhibition is housed.

Other works evincing native culture in transformative, craft-based manipulation of consumer culture's banal detritus include *Skull*, 2006–2009, made of well-worn softballs and baseballs; *Blanket #7*, 2008, composed of two systematically interwoven professional sports jerseys; and works like *1960*, *1970*, and *1980* (all 2007), grand, totemic structures made of stacked golf bags. *Carapace*, 2009, the newest work in the exhibition, however, signals a shift in emphasis: It moves away from a questioning of the display and consumption of cultural objects and provides a site for the physical and discursive participation in culture. Composed of green and blue plastic trash containers, the room-size sculptural habitat takes a shape approximating a tortoiseshell, igloo, amphitheater, or adobe home, but does not fully register as any of these things. The structure invites the audience to enter and compels one to stay, not because there is anything to do or to look at, but because the interior feels like a gathering place. While many of Jungen's sculptures elaborate on and animate historical native imagery by incorporating contemporary material culture, *Carapace* is more indeterminate, neither of the past nor the present, neither an object for display nor a structure to be used, but rather a model—or, better, a proposal—for a function that has yet to fully crystallize. The best description of the sculpture is also the most speculative, dovetailing nicely with the National Museum of the American Indian's charter, and amplifying Jungen's ongoing propositional address: It is the site for a ritual yet to exist.

—Christopher Bedford



Brian Jungen,  
*Carapace*, 2009,  
industrial waste  
bins, 11' 7½" x  
26' 3" x 21' 10¼".

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“Goings On About Town: Art, Galleries—Chelsea,” *The New Yorker*, April 14, 2008. Available: [http://www.newyorker.com/arts/events/art/2008/04/14/080414goar\\_GOAT\\_art?currentPage=3](http://www.newyorker.com/arts/events/art/2008/04/14/080414goar_GOAT_art?currentPage=3)



GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN

## ART

APRIL 14, 2008

### GALLERIES—CHELSEA

#### BRIAN JUNGEN

Jungen, a member of the Dane-Zaa Nation of northern British Columbia, is best known for making replicas of ritual objects out of consumer products like Nike sneakers or cheap plastic chairs. Recently, a stint on a reservation brought him closer to tribal culture—and to oil fields controlled by corporate interests. For this show, Jungen drilled holes in a red plastic gasoline can like those that litter the landscape (where gas stations, ironically, are scarce), recreating the look of beading on animal hides. N.F.L. and N.B.A. jerseys rewoven into mock trade blankets make an even more pointed comment on the clash between culturally imposed and traditional tribal identities. Through May 3. (Casey Kaplan, 525 W. 21st St. 212-645-7335.)

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

BRIAN JUNGEN

OPENING: THURSDAY, MARCH 20 6:00 – 8:00PM  
EXHIBITION DATES: MARCH 20 – APRIL 26, 2008  
GALLERY HOURS: TUESDAY – SATURDAY 10:00 – 6:00PM  
EXTENDED HOURS: THURSDAY, MARCH 27 6:00 – 8:00PM

Casey Kaplan is pleased to announce the second solo exhibition of acclaimed Canadian artist, Brian Jungen. A member of the Dane-Zaa (pronounced “dan-ney-za”) Nation of Northern British Columbia, Jungen has temporarily relocated from his home in Vancouver to live and work with his family on the Doig River Indian reserve. Close to his birthplace of Fort St. John, the reserve is located on the Western edge of the oil and gas territories that stretch across Northern Alberta and North-eastern British Columbia. Inspired by his recent experiences, Jungen presents a new body of work that continues to explore cultural symbols of corruption and question the developing political and geographical landscape of Canada.

Jungen’s works often begin as highly recognizable, fetishized consumables associated with capitalism and Western culture: such as professional sports paraphernalia, mass-produced domestic commodities, and expensive leather goods. Chosen because of their color, material, and intended use, the objects are deconstructed by hand, and then re-crafted into transformations that imply cross-cultural, social, and political relationships. This metamorphosis recalls Jungen’s own observations of life on reserves, where certain discarded objects are often converted or recycled into other usable forms due to a lack of commercial and financial resources.

In this exhibition, the artist uses a standard five-gallon, red plastic gasoline can as the basis of his sculpture. A necessary and ubiquitous object, the “jerrycan” litters the landscape of Northern Canada; land that is rich in petroleum fields, yet lacks an adequate number of fueling stations. Presented on a pedestal, the singular tank stands alone at the entrance to the gallery, just inside the plate glass façade, where sunlight can shine through the thousands of tiny holes drilled in its skin. Based on Jungen’s observations of family members beading designs onto animal hides, Jungen has meticulously created a pattern of countless dragonflies onto the “non-green”, petroleum-based plastic jug.

A new series of artworks in Galleries I and II are initially inspired by the First Nation’s traditional, communal practice of constructing garments for ceremonial rituals. Cutting into strips various professional sports jerseys from the NFL and NBA, Jungen weaves a sequence of artworks that are reminiscent of stereotypical, Native American trade blankets. With the identities of the jerseys and the brands of the teams literally stripped, the blankets merge ceremonial histories, and re-contextualize the fetishization of American sports gear. Hanging on the wall under the guise of a traditional museological or ethnographic display, these works embody a hybrid aesthetic that allegorically represents the present-day globalization of culture.

In 2008, the artist will participate in group exhibitions including: “Hard Targets: Sport and Contemporary American Masculinity,” at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, CA; “NeoHooDoo: Art For a Forgotten Faith,” The Menil Collection, traveling from Houston, TX to PS1 Contemporary Art Center, Long Island City, NY; and “Revolutions – Forms that Turn,” the 16th Biennial of Sydney, curated by Carolyn Christov-Bikargeiv, in Sydney, Australia. In 2005 – 2007, Brian Jungen’s survey exhibition traveled to the Museum Villa Stuck, München; the Witte de With, Rotterdam; the Musée d’art contemporain de Montréal, Montréal; the Vancouver Art Gallery, Vancouver; and the New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York. Other recent solo exhibitions include the Tate Modern, London in 2006.

FOR FURTHER EXHIBITION INFORMATION PLEASE CONTACT THE GALLERY.  
NEXT GALLERY EXHIBITION: LIAM GILLICK, MAY 8 – JUNE 14, 2008

HENNING BOHL, JEFF BURTON, NATHAN CARTER, MILES COOLIDGE, JASON DODGE, TRISHA DONNELLY, PAMELA FRASER, ANNA GASKELL, LIAM GILLICK, ANNIKA VON HAUSSWOLFF, CARSTEN HÖLLER, BRIAN JUNGEN, JONATHAN MONK, DIEGO PERRONE, JULIA SCHMIDT, SIMON STARLING, GABRIEL VORMSTEIN, GARTH WEISER, JOHANNES WOHNSEIFER

Hoffmann, Jens, "Brian Jungen," *Ice Cream: Contemporary Art In Culture*, Phaidon, 2007, p. 188-191



Born in Fort St John, British Columbia, Canada. 1970. Lives and works in Vancouver, Canada. **Selected Solo Exhibitions:** 1999 'Brian Jungen', Charles H. Scott Gallery, Vancouver 2002 'Brian Jungen', Catriona Jeffries Gallery, Vancouver 2003 'Brian Jungen', Secession, Vienna 2005 'Brian Jungen', New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York; Vancouver Art Gallery; Musee d'art contemporain de Montreal; Witte de With, Rotterdam/Museum Villa Stuck, Munich 2006 'Brian Jungen', Tate Modern, London **Selected Group Exhibitions:** 2001 'ARS or, Kiasma, Helsinki 2002 'Watery, Domestic', Renaissance Society, Chicago 2003 'The Moderns', Castello di Rivoli Museo d'Arte Contemporanea, Turin 2004-5 'Baja to Vancouver: The West Coast in Contemporary Art', Seattle Art Museum; Museum of Contemporary Art, San Diego; Vancouver Art Gallery; CCA Wattis Institute, San Francisco 2005 'Material Time/Work Time/Life Time', Reykjavik Arts Festival, Kópavogur Art Museum Selected Bibliography: 2000 Reid Shier, 'Cheap', *Brian Jungen*, Charles H. Scott Gallery 2001 Jeff Derksen, 'From universal reification to universal culturalisation', *Springerin*, October - December 2003 Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev, *The Moderns*, Castello di Rivoli Museo d'Arte Contemporanea; Matthew Higgs, 'Brian Jungen in conversation with Matthew Higgs', *Brian Jungen*, Secession, Vienna 2005 Cuauhtémoc Medina, 'High Curios', *Brian Jungen*, Vancouver Art Gallery and Douglas & McIntyre

Brian Jungen is best known for his sculptures and installations that address issues of cultural hybridization and globalization. One of the first works to address these themes was **Prototypes for New Understanding** (1998-2005) for which the artist took Nike Air Jordans apart and reassembled them in the style of native Canadian masks. These were followed by **Shapeshifter** (2000) and **Cetology** (2002)—massive suspended sculptures resembling two gigantic whale skeletons made out of countless pieces of generic white patio chairs. The chairs were cut apart and reassembled to form the skeletons. Both works are exhibited as if displayed in a cultural or natural history museum, the masks in glass vitrines, the life-size whale skeletons hanging from the ceiling on thin fishing wires. It is not surprising to learn that Jungen himself is a cultural hybrid: born in northern British Columbia to a Swiss father and an Aboriginal mother. The now well-known 'masks' not only express the existing conflict between a homogenizing global culture and the traditions of the artist's ancestors; they also examine and criticize the representation of aboriginal cultures and their commodification. The traditional masks have become not only a ceremonial element but also a commodity for the tourist industry. What marks Jungen's work the most is a critical and two-fold form of recontextualization, not only with the objects but also with history.

Yet, not all of Jungen's work explores issues of cultural identity on the basis of his own experience; he has begun to incorporate issues of globalization on a wider and more complex level with works that clearly demonstrate a multitude of interests, **Arts and Crafts Book Depository / Capp Street Project 2004** (2004), a site-specific work by Jungen, was created at the end of a residency at Capp Street Project—part of the California College of Arts and Crafts in San Francisco. The artist produced a 1/5-scale plywood model of a well-known Californian Arts and Crafts house, which he then sliced into four equally large pieces, clearly referencing the practice of Gordon Matta Clark, to create a resource and storage system for books relating to the study of architecture and crafts,

For an exhibition at the Edmonton Art Gallery Jungen created **Inside Today's Home** (2005) where he worked exclusively with material bought at a local Ikea furnishing store. The artist used the prefabricated materials, such as file boxes, napkin holders and other Ikea home accessories, to create an aviary for six domesticated finches. In order not to disturb the birds, the viewers had to view the work and observe the birds through peepholes and on a closed-circuit television—implying a relationship to reality TV as well as to modern Scandinavian design. \* **Jens Hoffmann**

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Griffin, Kevin, "Cultural Intersection," *Vancouver Sun*, Saturday, May 5, 2007, F3

# Cultural intersection

VIEWFINDER | Brian Jungen is fascinated by the overlap of western and first nations artifacts

BRIAN JUNGEN  
Catriona Jeeffries Gallery  
274 East First Ave., Vancouver  
Until May 26

BY KEVIN GRIFFIN  
VANCOUVER SUN

In less than a decade, Brian Jungen has become one of the country's most interesting and provocative artists. It's difficult to believe that it was only in 1999 that his show at the Charles H. Scott Gallery at Emily Carr Institute on Granville Island announced that an artist with a new and original vision had arrived.

The most striking part of that show consisted of nine sculptures in museum-like vitrines that looked like traditional northwest coast masks. But instead of being carved out of cedar or other organic material, the *Prototypes for New Understanding* were made from recycled Air Jordan trainers. In the trainers' red and black colours and ovoids, Jungen saw what no-one else had seen before; patterns and colours that reminded him of traditional northwest coast art.

The show created such a buzz that people still remember it years later. What set Jungen's work apart was the way it crossed the boundary between high and low culture; members of the public "got it" right away while art critics could talk theory about the various meanings of his works.

Besides the *Prototypes*, the other works in later shows that brought Jungen to the attention of a wider public outside the usual gallery walls including *Shapeshifter* and *Cetology*. In those sculptures, Jungen took commonplace white \$4.99 lawn chairs and linked them together so that they resembled giant whale skeletons. Hanging in a gallery, the remarkable sculptures hovered somewhere between works of art and commodities.

Jungen's international stature has grown steadily to the point that his work was celebrated in a survey show that was seen in Munich, Rotterdam, Montreal, and New York. Last year, *Brian Jungen: A Survey*, came to the Vancouver Art Gallery. He recently had a solo exhibition at the Tate Modern in London.

Jungen's latest show is both similar and different from many of his other installations that recycle consumer goods in inventive and unexpected ways.

This time, Jungen has taken standard golf bags and turned them into what look like truncated totem poles. In the main room in the gallery are five sculptures, each one the height of five golf bags stacked on top of each

other. Because the circumference of each pole is wrapped entirely in golf bags, Jungen has used between 10 to 15 bags for each sculpture.

Unlike the *Prototypes*, which invited close inspection almost immediately because of their compact size, the totem-like poles are much bigger, towering over the observer. Although initially intimidating in the gallery space, the poles become familiar and approachable over time and you realize that you can go up and look at them more closely.

On one pole, a flap has been opened to suggest the mouth of some totemic creature with the handle becoming a nose and the rings eyes. Burnished metal rings and clips designed to hold golf towels or other golf paraphernalia have been reconfigured so that they suggest ovals and ovoids from traditional northwest coast art. Like so much of his work, it makes you marvel at Jungen's ingenuity and playfulness.

In the gallery's adjoining room are several flat, red shapes on the floor that at first look haphazardly put together. But if you stand at one end and look for a moment, your eyes and brain give the shapes meaning; you're looking at a map of British Columbia. What's different is that Jungen has made the map out of the shapes of 18 native reserves in the Lower Mainland.

In an interview at the gallery, I asked Jungen why he became so interested in golf.

Jungen, whose father was Swiss and mother Dunne-za, said that he arrived at golf by starting to research Treaty 8, which covers most of northern Alberta and his traditional territory in northeastern B.C. Because treaties cover only parts of Vancouver Island and northeastern B.C., Jungen is in a unique position as an artist and B.C. resident covered by treaty.

While reading about the land claim issue in B.C., Jungen, now a Vancouver resident, realized that he knew the location of only a couple of reserves in Vancouver and on the North Shore.

He wondered where the rest of them were. He also wondered why no one talked about reserves unless they were brought to public attention by some kind of conflict, such as the controversial issue of billboards near the Burrard Street Bridge.

"I wanted to find out where these reserves are in metro Vancouver," he said.

"I was also curious about land use and I do have a fascination with sports culture—it runs through all of my work."

He said he was interested in the resources that go into maintaining golf



Detail from the Taylormade as presented in Jungen's unique fashion.



Detail (above) from an assembly of the red and black OGIO line of golf gear. Map (left) of reserves assembled by Jungen

courses as carefully groomed land for

Often in my work I pair things that are very different, that come from opposing places. I thought, well, there are instances where there are golf courses on reserves. To me, that kind of intersection is interesting.

ARTIST BRIAN JUNGEN  
Referring to his new show at Catriona Jeeffries Gallery

a game traditionally played by the wealthy—a system of land use entirely at odds with how land is used on reserves.

"Often in my work I pair things that are very different, that come from opposing places. I thought, well, there are instances where there are golf courses on the Musqueam land in south Vancouver and the driving range on Squamish land in North Vancouver.

"To me, that kind of intersection is interesting."

Jungen admits that he doesn't play golf, watch it or have any interest in the game. He prefers snowboarding. When he started looking at golf equipment, he was struck by how close its

designs and colors were to northwest coast native art.

Jungen said he's also noticed how totem poles are being used throughout Vancouver as a local symbol when the original first nations—the Musqueam, Squamish and Tsleil-waututh—didn't make them. Totem poles were created by Indians on Vancouver Island and farther north on the coast.

"It's become a tourist icon of B.C. When someone arrives in Vancouver from anywhere, it's the first thing they're confronted with at the airport," he said.

"It's interesting how something that has incredible meaning, that's married to such a beautiful location such as the north coast, has become removed from there in the same way that the masks were."

In a previous interview, Jungen said that when he made the *Prototypes* from the Nike runners, he felt as if he was almost being sacrilegious by taking apart such an expensive consumer item named after a celebrity like basketball star Michael Jordan. With the golf bags, he said he felt a "kind of illicit pleasure" from "skinning" them, some of which cost up to \$300 each.

What's striking about Jungen's sculptures is the way consumer goods are recycled in such creative ways. His best works manage to be well crafted

objects that embody complex ideas and question existing relationships between indigenous people and consumer culture.

In an interview with Matthew Higgs published in 2003 by the Vienna Se-cession, Jungen attributed his ability to reshape materials and objects to what he learned as a youth growing up in Fort St. John.

"I would imagine that my approach to working with existing objects and altering them as directly related to a material sensibility I experienced in my childhood, the way my mother's family would use objects [in a way] that was not what was originally intended, a kind of improvisatory recycling that was born out of both practical and economic necessity," he said in the interview.

In the show at the Catriona Jeeffries Gallery, Jungen calls the sculptures tubes rather than totem poles. He pointed out that they differ from totem poles because they're not meant to be displayed outside; and unlike totem poles carved from a single tree, his tubes are hollow cardboard Sonotubes.

He's made one additional tube sculpture for an exhibition in Montreal. He thinks it will have even more relevance in Quebec because of the Oka crisis in 1990, which started when the nearby town tried to expand a golf course on to traditional Mohawk land.

As for the jigsaw-like map of B.C. made from maps of native reserves, Jungen said it was inspired by the Challenger map, the huge topographic map of B.C. made by George Challenger out of 986,000 pieces of wood.

"When I was a teenager I went to see the map," he said. "I thought it was incredible that one person made it. It's amazing that someone had the wall to represent a land mass in plywood. It's incredibly ambitious. It's also a time capsule of 1960s B.C."

Like the Challenger map, Jungen's map used plywood that he cut in the shape of the reserves, which to him have the shape of countries. He used red wood because he liked the "heavy symbolism" of red—green would have been too obvious.

His next big project is an installation for the Sydney Biennale in Australia next year. He expects the finished work to investigate the similarities between how the British settled the area around Treaty 8 and in Sydney.

"I'm interested when they're exhibited elsewhere and people won't have the immediate cultural reference. They won't see them as totem poles but as something completely different. They have a sense of kind of heraldry."

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Sheets, Hilarie M., "Critic's Picks: Brian Jungen," *ARTnews*, Summer 2006, p. 208



Brian Jungen transformed Nike Air Jordans into masks for his series "Prototypes for New Understanding," 1998-2005.

On a trip to New York in 1998, the Canadian artist Brian Jungen spent a morning at the American Museum of Natural History and the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and then wandered into Niketown, a store that was unfamiliar to him. "After being in these two other institutions, I was overwhelmed by going into this corporate institution, with its very similar museum like didactics and displays," says the 35-year-old artist, who is of Native American and Swiss parentage and grew up in a farming community in the foothills of the northern Rocky Mountains. "I was strangely inspired by how they were canonizing their own merchandise."

During a residency later that year at the Banff Centre near Calgary, he began disassembling Nike Air Jordans and refashioning them into masks evocative of the Native American objects shown in ethnographic museums. "What I find fascinating about sports in contemporary culture is that it has replaced a lot of typical ceremonies in Native American cultures," says Jungen, whose works are inventive hybrid objects that explore the intersection of Western and indigenous customs. "There are a lot of parallels—this intense sense of loyalty; this ceremony with spectators and specific costumes, colors, and classical rivalries."

The series "Prototypes for New Understanding," some two dozen pieces made between 1998 and 2005, had its New York debut last fall at the New Museum of Contemporary Art in a survey show organized by the Vancouver Art Gallery. The exhibition, currently on view at the Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal (through September 4), also includes three gigantic whale skeletons made from white plastic outdoor chairs that Jungen suspended from the ceiling like a display in a natural history museum.

Surprising, humorous, and a little ominous, Jungen's works, which sell for \$18,000 to \$150,000, bridge the distance between authentic and mass-produced artifacts, and between museum and retail experiences. At his recent show at Casey Kaplan Gallery in New York, for example, he displayed prehistoric-looking skulls cobbled together from dismantled baseballs.

Jungen, who also has a show at London's Tate Modern through July 16, lives and works in a small converted warehouse in East Vancouver, where he experiments with materials and creates prototypes. But his finished works are often fabricated by professionals: "A lot of people have latched onto the idea that I personally hand-make things," says Jungen, who emphasizes that his process changes with the needs of each project. "There are still such ingrained, romantic ideas about art production from 'Indian folk'—that's part of the problem I'm interested in."



-Hilarie M. Sheets

Hilarie M. Sheets is a contributing editor of ARTnews.

ALL IMAGES COURTESY THE ARTIST AND CASEY KAPLAN GALLERY, NEW YORK. TOP: TREVOR MILLS/VANCOUVER ART GALLERY (3); BOTTOM: JONATHAN WELLS

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

BRIAN JUNGEN

OPENING: WEDNESDAY, MARCH 8TH, 6-8 PM  
EXHIBITION DATES: MARCH 8 – APRIL 15, 2006  
GALLERY HOURS: TUESDAY – SATURDAY 10-6 PM

Casey Kaplan is proud to present the first solo gallery exhibition of Brian Jungen in New York. The Vancouver based artist utilizes mass produced consumer goods and common materials in innovative and critical transformations that speak to a range of cultural, social and economic issues. Born in Fort St. John, British Columbia to a Swiss father and an Aboriginal mother from the Dane-zee tribe, Jungen is well known for projects such as the *Prototype for New Understanding* series (1998-2005), where disassembled Nike Air Jordan sneakers were reconfigured into twenty-three different simulations of Northwest Coast Aboriginal masks; and *Shapeshifter* (2000), one from a series of three large-scale whale skeletons constructed from white plastic lawn chairs. In new sculpture and installation work, the artist continues to evoke specific cultural traditions while exposing complex relationships with contemporary global commerce.

For this exhibition, Jungen transforms the outer skin of used baseballs and softballs into human-like skulls. The artist utilizes the scuffed white surface of sports balls to craft a unique 'artifact.' By doing such, he complicates the 'identity' of a consumer product, acknowledges its relationship to late capitalist production methods, and responds to corporate branding that uses "Indian" sports team tokens in a manner that best suits their purposes.

In his current exhibition at the Vancouver Art Gallery, Jungen pushes the concept of employing animal 'skin' in a 20-foot teepee made from skinned black-leather sofas. Jungen approaches furniture, a leather upholstered commodity, as if it were an animal sought after for survival. Using its leather as hide for shelter and clothing the artist creates a tribute to the fundamental traditions of nomadic hunter/gather societies.

This exhibition will include additional new work, currently in production for its site-specific presentation at the gallery.

Jungen graduated from the Emily Carr Institute of Art + Design in 1992. In 2002, he was awarded the inaugural Sobey Art Award. Solo exhibitions include, CCA Wattis Institute for Contemporary Arts, San Francisco, CA; Triple Candie, New York; Catriona Jeffries Gallery, Vancouver; and the 2003 Vienna Secession, Austria. The first comprehensive survey of work by Brian Jungen is currently at the Vancouver Art Gallery after its debut at the New Museum of Contemporary Art in New York. The exhibition, organized by the Vancouver Art Gallery, will travel to Musée d'art Contemporain de Montréal, Quebec. The artist's upcoming exhibition in the Level 2 gallery at Tate Modern, UK opens in May 2006.

FOR FURTHER EXHIBITION INFORMATION PLEASE CONTACT THE GALLERY.

CASEY KAPLAN IS PLEASED TO PARTICIPATE IN THE ARMORY SHOW, NY, MARCH 9 – 13, 2006, PIER 92 BOOTH 307

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Cano, Santiago J., "Brian Jungen Revised Anthropology," *The European Magazine* (Spain), July 2006, p. 90-95

MUSÉE D'ART CONTEMPORAIN MONTRÉAL , UNTIL 4TH SEPTEMBER, TATE MODERN LONDON, UNTIL 16TH JULY

# BRIAN JUNGEN

## Revised Anthropology



*Cetology, 2002*  
plastic chairs

Collection of the Vancouver Art Gallery  
Photo: Trevor Mill, Vancouver Art Gallery

*Brian Jungen, a remarkable emergent artist from Vancouver, presents his work at both the Museum of Contemporary Art of Montreal and at the Tate Modern of London, where he is showcasing one of his most extraordinary installations to date. The visual effect of the way that he transforms consumer goods and common materials into impressive symbolic pieces*

*stirs reflection, contributing to his reputation as a unique artist. His works refers and suggests both cultural facts and creative pieces of art—as can be seen in his recreation of Northwest Coast Indian masks, made with disassembled Nike Air Jordan athletic shoes and the colossal construction of suspended whale skeletons made with pieces of plastic deck chairs.*

*“As the artist explains, his “approach to working with existing objects and altering them is directly related to a material sensibility I experienced in my childhood, the way my mother’s family would use objects in ways that weren’t originally intended, a kind of improvisatory recycling that was born out of both practical and economic necessity.”*



**Prototype for New Understanding #16, 2004**  
**Nike Air Jordans, human hair**  
**Collection of Joel Wachs, New York**  
**Photo: Trevor Mills, Vancouver Art Gallery**

In the present time we are living a very complex and interesting process of change in relation to the perception and legitimization of art productions on several fronts. Even when recognized works and artists from the west continue having a huge presence in the world of art, we can find very often, both in institutions and in private galleries, pieces that come from what we could call, “the non western world”. Meanwhile the interests of collectors has now also placed a focus on contemporary productions from emergent contemporary artists from both Asia and Africa—revealing

how investors are beginning to recognize the lucrative prospects and low-capital-risk factors involved in the market concerning new and emerging cultural objects from abroad.

One of the possible reasons for this global phenomenon is related to the way in which post-modern culture has affected disciplines such as modern ethnology or anthropology. These specialities have extended their ideas to society and allowed people to understand the fact that the construction of western culture is based on a fictional

history and a sum of misunderstandings about other cultures and their customs. This allowed us for centuries to think about our western culture as the zenith of civilization and progress. After this age land in an exercise revising the meanings of our cultural ideas and taking a view from the exotism and paternalism learnt in the past), we can confront the production of works of art with ethnic roots, within which is discovered a meaning more profound, when compared to works of art that relate to the dictations of the ordinary consumer market. However, it is also important to understand how such



Installation view of Brian Jungen's  
*Prototypes* (1998-2005)  
 Photo: Trevor Mills, Vancouver Art Gallery

concepts are simply cultural constructions and that the ethnic roots, to survive in the world, need to be embedded with contemporary facts and fiction. In this arena of changing cultures, affected also by economic globalization and the break-neck speed at which information travels, there are plenty of contemporary voices reflecting upon encountering different cultures.

The work of Brian Jungen can be considered one of the most important artistic contributions to recent perspectives about ethnological and cultural reformulations. Born in Fort St. John, in north-eastern British Columbia, the artist has a particular family background with his mother of aboriginal descent (Dàne-Zaa Indians from the First Nations) and his father of Swiss origin. His work challenges social, economic and cultural values of the western world and creates a dialog between ancient cultures and global culture.

In addition to this, the emphasis in the significance of an aesthetic language as a tool is inside every piece, in the way that he engages the categories of art institutions, museum practices and ethnographic display in a profound critique. Oeuvres like "Cetology" or the "Prototype for New Understanding" series seems to transform the space of the exhibition into a Natural History or Ethnology Museum room, with all its inherent meanings. The materials used as point of departure for his artwork are industrial products available everywhere and contain in themselves the double function of objects of everyday use and symbols of how global capitalism affects human labour—Nike athlete shoes and plastic chairs are manufactured mostly in the poorest countries of the world by under-paid workers.

His imaginative process of creating pieces of art transform the materials adding disorder to the order and redirecting the

attention to the object itself, deconstructing ideas of items of contemporary culture and their meanings. One of the most interesting parts of his work—and the one that established his reputation within the world of art—is the series, "Prototypes for New Understanding". Made with pieces of Nike Air Jordan shoes, the 23 prototypes are variations on the subject of ritual aboriginal

**"His work challenges social, economic and cultural values of the western world and creates a dialog between ancient cultures and global culture."**

masks from West Coast British Columbia. The artist creates a remarkable resemblance between the motifs of these masks and their traditional colours (black, red and white) and those in the sports shoes. The new artefacts are therefore derived from two different iconic sources that come together to confront their own nature and connotations. In any case, the artist has alleged that his work is neither within nor counter to the discourse of ethnology, but rather, it discusses hybridism as a condition of cultural history.

Another piece that talks about perceptions of everyday objects is the work *Untitled* (2001). The installation is composed of a stack of pallets, identical in size and shape to those used for transport, but made of red cedar wood, one of the most expensive and valuable types of wood. Indicating that the object has become an aesthetic article reminiscent of Minimal Art of the 60s.

As the artist explains, his approach to working with existing objects and altering them is directly related to a material sensibility I experienced in my childhood, the way my mother's family would use objects in ways that weren't originally intended, a kind of improvisatory recycling that was borne out

of both practical and economic necessity. Witnessing that resourcefulness continues to exert a deep influence on how I relate to the world as an artist."

For the Tate Modern, the artist presents a massive red flag constructed out of an assortment of mass produced materials. Bags, hats, clothes, small plastic kitchen tools and

umbrellas were brought together to form the huge quilt-like creation. Inspired in part by Jungen's interest in the Greenpeace movement and, in particular, by the banners made by the members of this group, which began in Jungen's hometown Vancouver. The colour and shape of Jungen's flag is also a reference to the poem by Jim Connell—an Irish political activist of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, "The Red Flag".

Jungen is part of a younger generation of artists that have emerged over the last few years amid an active scene in Vancouver, Canada. In 2002, he was awarded the inaugural Sobeys Art Award, the most important prize in Canada for emerging artists under the age of forty, in recognition of outstanding achievement. He has had recent solo exhibitions at the Vancouver Art Gallery and at Casey Kaplan Gallery in New York.

In a world of constant changes voices like Jungen's are a significant sign in the crossroads of contemporary culture, and allow us to reflect on identity, consumerism, cultural heritage and the challenge as humans of trying to understand the world and representing it.

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Burnett, Craig, "Brian Jungen. Owls, Inuits, and Cultural Collision; Museums, Marketing, and Clichés." *Frieze*, no. 98, April 2006, p. 142

## Brian Jungen

Owls, Inuits and cultural collision; museums, marketing and clichés

by Craig Burnett

In 1963 an Inuit artist created a doll that the Canadian government later tried to market as a symbol of the country. As it looked vaguely like an owl it was called *Ookpik*, the Inuit word for snowy owl. Cute, made from fur—usually seal, sometimes wolf—and with a plaintive gaze big enough to reflect the hopes of a fledgling culture, this small, slapdash Frankenstein was described in a contemporary promotional song as 'native and new and bi-cultural, too.'

Brian Jungen is in the business of making *Ookpik* antidotes. His sculptures and installations may be equally hybrid things, but while the *Ookpik* was a tiny object recruited to fix and define the identity of a vast, fragmented country, Jungen creates objects whose beauty rests in their power to resist labels. He rips apart ideas, cultures and objects, then wraps up the mess in exquisite, slippery surfaces. The *Ookpik* took on a mission to purify; Jungen is bent on contamination.

A prophetic note was struck over 100 years ago, when a French fur trader bestowed a nickname on Jungen's thumbless great-great-grandfather. The trader, perhaps the campfire wit, noticed the missing digit on this senior member of the Dane-za nation, and dubbed him *Pouce-Coupe*, or cut thumb, still the family surname on the maternal, aboriginal side of his family (and the name of the town in the north-east corner of British Columbia where some of them live).

The anecdotal label in a foreign language is, of course, a gruffly typical example of colonial violence, but Jungen tells this story with a whiff of delight and amazement, revelling in its absurdity. Even if the tale is apocryphal, it's a good yarn, both fruitful and cruel. And this collision between European and aboriginal Canadians is the car wreck that Jungen has refused to look away from, and which provides much of the subject matter for his work. A day of Manhattan sightseeing prompted his first brain-wave. After a visit to the American Museum of Natural History, with its dusty cupboards stuffed with masks

and artefacts from Canada's north-west coast, he went across the park to the Metropolitan Museum of Art, before rounding off the day at Niketown, that anti-sanctuary of glitz and newness. All these elements—anthropology, art history, consumerism—came together about a month later back in Canada. He went to a local athletics shop, bought some Nike Air Jordans and took them back to his studio, where he tore them up and reassembled them, transforming a shoe synonymous with sweatshops, fame, wealth, inequality and envy into objects reminiscent of a Haida or Kwakwak'awakw mask. He called the series 'Prototypes for New Understanding' (1998-2005) after the process that designers must go through when they present a market 'prototype' to corporate box-tickers.

Museums and marketing departments transform mundane things into objects of reverence, but so do artists. Questions of value and authenticity are central here. Although Jungen's 'Prototypes' look like north-west coast masks, they are neither reworkings of a tradition nor direct parodies. Jungen has no direct cultural or family link to the people who made and still make—mostly for

the tourist market—these Haida masks. He plays with a cliché of aboriginal culture, corrupting its so-called authenticity with the flash, trans-cultural blandness of Nike. For 'Talking Stick' (2005), a similar series, Jungen transformed baseball bats into objects that look like north-west-coast talking sticks—a kind of hand-held totem pole that gives the person holding it the power to speak to an assembled group. Instead of thunderbirds and killer whales, however, Jungen's sticks are carved with 'Work to Rule' and other political slogans. In a game of baseball everyone holds their breath in anticipation of what the person holding the bat will say or do; similarly, a talking stick, placard or manifesto is lifeless unless gripped with conviction.

Jungen's work gives form to one of Hamlet's best aphorisms; there is nothing either good or bad but thinking makes it so. *Shapeshifter* (2000), *Cetology* (2002) and *Vienna* (2003) are immense yet elegant sculptures that look like the whale skeletons you might encounter in a natural history museum. While the beautiful, seemingly natural forms stir our awe and wonder, we may recoil in contempt at the busted white plastic lawn chairs that form their skeletons. Jungen's transformations show that our reaction to a thing lies in thoughts provoked by its surface and presentation as much as any understanding of its essence.

About the same time that Modernism was brewing in Europe, some of Jungen's ancestors signed a treaty that promised them and their descendants five bucks and a handshake every July. It's not a lot of money these days, yet he still likes to collect it from the local Royal Canadian Mounted Police officer when he goes home for the annual rodeo. The five-dollar handshake is part of his history, one of the many hyphens that link the fabric of his identity together. A compromise for purists, for Jungen the hyphen is a lightning bolt of inspiration.

**Left:**  
**'Prototypes for New Understanding'**  
 1998-2005  
 Nike footwear and human hair  
 Installation view

**Middle:**  
***Isolated Depiction of the Passage of Time***  
 2001  
 Plastic food trays, television monitor, DVD player, wood  
 127 x 119 x 102cm

**Right:**  
**'Talking Stick'**  
 2005  
 Carved baseball bats  
 Installation view



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Milroy, Sarah, "Shaman of the Sofa," *The Globe and Mail*, February 14, 2006

## Shaman of the sofa

Masks made from Nike shoes, a teepee stitched from cheap leather couches: Brian Jungen turns cultural friction into extraordinary art

**SARAH MILROY**

From Tuesday's *Globe and Mail*

VANCOUVER - At the press opening for Brian Jungen's outstanding new exhibition at the Vancouver Art Gallery last week, a reporter was asking the show's curator, Daina Augaitis, for some help in fleshing out a sidebar for her forthcoming Jungen review. Who were the other native art stars in Canada that one could name, she asked, her pencil poised? Augaitis hedged, and finally answered that she thought such categories did a disservice to aboriginal artists. What was the point of such pigeonholing if not to delimit the scope of their accomplishments? Jungen, she implied, is a major contemporary artist of the 21st century, a citizen in global culture. He deserves that wide stage. White artists routinely assume for themselves that claim to universality.

She had a point, and yet beside us rose the 20-foot (6-metre) teepee made from skinned black-leather sofas from The Brick discount furniture store, a structure saturated with irony that Jungen and his colleagues had erected in the traditional way, without the aid of the gallery's mechanical lift. During the week before the opening, the artist could evidently be found in the gallery, bowie knife in hand, scraping down the hides (removing the foam lining) and extracting their wooden armatures in order to reconfigure the lumber as supporting staves.

Everything had been recycled and reconfigured from available materials at hand and, in the process, those materials had undergone an almost magical-seeming transformation. You can't get any more aboriginal than that.

Also, teepees come from the prairies. Jungen is half Swiss, half Dane-zaa, from northern British Columbia. What is he doing erecting a teepee if not to provoke such essentialist presumptions about his ethnicity as a force shaping his production?

Of course, Jungen is playing with precisely that. This work is not best understood as native art (I can understand Augaitis's reluctance; this has been the media's prevailing view), but rather as a hybrid art arising from the friction between white culture and aboriginal culture. Like a number of artists who have been most successful in the white mainstream (one thinks of Carl Beam and Bill Reid), Jungen comes from a mixed background, and his work can be seen as expressing equally both sides of the cultural divide.

In this new work, for example, the animal of the hunt (that most essential commodity in a hunter/gatherer society) is reimagined as a consumer good (the sofa). From the anthropological standpoint, they function the same way in the society—as sought-after objects required for subsistence—and Jungen helps us to hear the rhyme between them.

His now famous masks, fashioned from cut-up Nike sneakers and ingeniously reconfigured, are the result of a similar move. Here, the mask, an object imbued with power from the spiritual realm, is made from dismembered Nike shoes, similarly imbued, in contemporary consumer culture, with transformative powers, or so their

multimillion-dollar advertising campaigns would have us believe. The power of the mask and the power of the brand are conflated into one tight package, the sacred and the secular fused together.

Perhaps the most magnificent of Jungen's accomplishments so far, though, is his series of whale skeletons fashioned from dismembered white plastic lawn chairs. These reflect his indisputable brilliance at understanding and manipulating form—his ability to see materials in new ways—that calls to mind the sculptural improvisations of Picasso, who famously fashioned a bull's head from the conjoining of a bicycle seat and a set of handle bars (along with a thousand other dazzling manoeuvres).

In these enormous whale-skeleton sculptures—and the show includes three of them, suspended dramatically in midair—Jungen marries contradictory signifiers in an ingenious way. The whale is the ultimate sign of the freedom and magnificence of nature, endangered by commerce and environmental degradation. Perhaps it even serves here as a stand-in for beleaguered indigenous culture, likewise commodified for the tourist industry. The plastic lawn chair, on the other hand, is the paradigmatic mass-produced consumer product. In myriad shipping containers, it, too, roves the seas; manufactured in China, these endlessly replicated commodities travel outward to Bahrain, Berlin and Santa Barbara. Into one concise visual idea, then, Jungen has packed a bundle of meaning, creating objects that comment on the displacement of the natural by the synthetic, while also invoking the awe-inspiring scale of global commerce and our place within it.

The show offers other, smaller-scale pleasures, like the superb gouache *Bush Capsule Study* (2000), in which Jungen explores the Haida-like ovoid shapes to be found in moulded plastic furniture (in this case reformatted as a kind of igloo). His series of cartoon drawings of Indian braves from the mid-1990s reveal a raunchy and irreverent take on aboriginal identity, deftly drawn. But so far, Jungen seems to be at his best when he works the seam between native and white cultures. Some of his other projects in the show -- such as his metal screen-printed replicas of Air Jordan shoe boxes (among other things, a homage to Andy Warhol's Brillo boxes), or his *Arts and Crafts Book Depository/Capp Street Project* (a homage to Gordon Matta-Clark and the arts and crafts movement architects of Gamble House, Charles and Henry Greene) -- feel conceptually laboured and visually dry, largely without the pleasurable visual surprise and ingenuity to be found in the other work. These seem like ideas that work better on the page than they do in three dimensions.

The exception to this are his *Modern Sculptures*, a suite of blob-like shapes that are silver and quilted like the skin of a soccer ball. Nike swooshes are found here and there scattered across their shiny surfaces, along with the odd bar code, and their presence leads us to consider the "brand" at issue: modern minimalist sculpture, beginning with Constantin Brancusi (whose work *The Kiss* is loosely quoted in one) and running through to the biomorphic abstractions of, say, Anish Kapoor, working today. These creations also seem to borrow something from the grotesqueries of Vancouver sculptor Liz Magor, a mistress of the ever-so-faintly horrific. Intriguing and hard to pin down, they satisfy endless speculation—the works of a major artist in his prime, at home and at play in the history of modern art.

*The Brian Jungen exhibition is on view at the Vancouver Art Gallery until April 30*

<http://www.theglobeandmail.com/servlet/story/RTGAM.20060214.wxjungen14/BNStory/Entertainment>

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Melendez, Franklin, "Brian Jungen: Millennial Totems," *SOMA Magazine*, The Design Issue, Vol. 20.6, August 2006, p. 36



## BRIAN JUNGEN: MILLENNIAL TOTEMS

Text by FRANKLIN MELENDEZ

The work of Brian Jungen strikes with an unsettling familiarity, an uncanny sense of "having been seen before." Displayed serenely behind glass vitrines, his ornate masks seem like remnants of an intimate yet inscrutable past. But under contemplation, individual elements come into focus: a lace strap here, a red swoosh there, and finally that familiar silhouette, a man in mid-jump triumphantly holding a ball. Suddenly, our vague recognition turns as the form flutters before our eyes to reveal an unexpected history. For in fact, we are not viewing long forgotten tribal relics, but the very traces of our own present: Nike Air Jordans dissected and reassembled to simulate native artifacts.

Jungen first caught the attention of the contemporary art scene with this compelling series of sculptures. Completed between 1998 and 2005, these "Prototypes for a New Understanding" present not only a powerful critique of Canadian colonialism, but an apt exploration of global commerce. Jungen's skillful appropriation targets those commonplace goods we harbor as so many totems. And in the design of a shoe, he unearths an archeology of our collective fantasies, tracing the intersection of cultural icons with exploited labor, displaced geographies and primitivist fears.

This territory is perhaps all too familiar ground for the Vancouver-born artist whose mixed Swiss and Dunne-za ancestry seems inextricably linked to his practice. He admits to an early fascination with the mutability of objects, their adaptation for unexpected uses. Whether in a child's simple game or in the resourcefulness of reservation life, this "improvisatory recycling" shaped a view of form as always compound and unstable. His initial forays produced hybrid objects—for example, baseball bats embossed with shamanistic runes—that articulate the unexpected intersections of cultures.

However, biography inadvertently limits the scope of work that expands beyond individual identity to address global consumerism, curatorial prac-

tice and minimalist objectivity. Equally versed in art history and aboriginal lore, Jungen draws from various lexicons to produce highly charged pieces. Such is the complex scope of his dazzling series of whale skeletons produced from stackable, plastic lawn chairs. Entitled *Cetology* (2002), *Vienna* (2003) and most aptly *Shapeshifter* (2000), these skeletons display an ingenious ability to transfigure the banal into a pointed nexus of aesthetics and history. Finally exhibited as a group in 2005 by the New Museum, the sheer structural complexity of these pieces recasts the possibilities of appropriation art while providing the most innovative approach to the ready-made since Jeff Koons.

For his latest exhibition at New York's Casey Kaplan gallery, Jungen revisits a familiar topography with a large-scale installation. Divided into discrete sections, the back gallery features saddles made of skinned leather couches, while the front is littered with human skulls made from the outerskins of baseballs, set to the layered soundtrack of Terrence Malick's World War II epic *The Thin Red Line*. A complex network of references, the dispersed installation unfolds as a layered dialogue, questioning the status of luxury items, the validity of artifacts and lingering traces of colonialism in Hollywood cinema. Jungen manages to weave these strands into a fluctuating network, integrating layers of criticality into the ingenious design of his ever-morphing objects.

Ultimately, Jungen's work reflects a master craftsman with a keen sense of social dynamics. Inverting Donald Judd's call for "specific objects," he produces non-specific compounds that open onto global networks. Things are never what they seem as the curves of a chair blend into the contours of vertebrae, or the graphic colors of sneakers invoke aboriginal magic. And in these very flexible forms we discover alternatives and glimpse at new modes for grasping the world around us.

# Brian Jungen

**Tate Modern**

**Level 2 Gallery**

**20 May - 16 July 2006**

Brian Jungen is part of a younger generation of artists who have emerged over the last few years amid an active scene in Vancouver, Canada. He was born in Fort St John, British Columbia to a First Nations mother and a Swiss-Canadian father. This dual heritage, and the tensions and links between aboriginal traditions, pop culture and consumerism, often provide the themes and subject matter for his work.

Characterised by a startling use of materials and meticulous craftsmanship, Jungen transforms everyday objects into thought-provoking works which bring together the contemporary and the historic, the material and the spiritual.

For Tate Modern's Level 2 Gallery, Jungen has created an enormous red flag constructed from an assortment of mass-produced materials: bags, hats, clothes, small plastic kitchen tools, umbrellas and other things are stitched together into a patchwork quilt. Inspired in part by Jungen's interest in Greenpeace, and in particular the banners made by the members of this group, the colour and form of Jungen's flag also refers directly to the workers' anthem 'The Red Flag', originally written as a poem by Jim Connell, an Irish political activist of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.

## *The Red Flag*

The people's flag is deepest red,  
It shrouded oft our martyred dead,  
And ere their limbs grew stiff and cold,  
Their hearts blood dyed its every fold.  
(chorus)

Then raise the scarlet standard high.  
Within its shade we'll live and die,  
Though cowards flinch and traitors sneer,  
We'll keep the red flag flying here.

Look round, the Frenchman loves its blaze,  
The sturdy German chants its praise,  
In Moscow's vaults its hymns are sung  
Chicago swells the surging throng.

It waved above our infant might,  
When all ahead seemed dark as night;  
It witnessed many a deed and vow,  
We must not change its colour now.

It well recalls the triumphs past,  
It gives the hope of peace at last;  
The banner bright, the symbol plain,  
Of human right and human gain.

It suits today the weak and base,  
Whose minds are fixed on self and place  
To cringe before the rich man's frown,  
And haul the sacred emblem down.  
With heads uncovered swear we all  
To bear it onward till we fall;  
Come dungeons dark or gallows grim,  
This song shall be our parting hymn.

Jim Connell (1889)

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Grande, Jon K., "Brian Jungen: Prototypes for a new understanding," *Vie des Arts*, Été 2006, No. 202, p. 75

## VANCOUVER

### BRIAN JUNGEN: PROTOTYPES FOR A NEW UNDERSTANDING

January 28—April 30  
Vancouver Art Gallery  
750 Hornby St.  
Tel.: 604-662-4700  
www.vanartgallery.bc.ca

An inveterate fabricator of objects out of objects, Vancouver-based Brian Jungen plays on and with readily available products and items of Pop culture giving them an ironic Native twist. Born of Swiss and Aboriginal (Dane-zaa) parents, Jungen recycles new store bought materials and reinvents them. They can become powerful objects that allude to the icon and its power in societies new and old, or alternatively literal reconstructions of what look deceptively like natural history display items, as in they hover in the air so elegantly. Jungen extends the definition of art into natural history, and in so doing develops an environmental discourse purely out of the materials he uses. This brings his art into the realm of contemporary anthropology, and plastic chairs being made from oil, reconstructed as they are into whale skeletons, could allude to the oil spills that inadvertently kills sea water culture including whales and destroy entire biocultures. All these effects are the result of human greed, and the objects themselves represent greed recycled into heritage and objectified meaning. The elongated form of a whale, the first of which was given the name, *Shapeshifter* (2000) looks like the vertebrae of some huge marine mammal and it is installed as it would be in a natural history museum. Instead it is actually a skeleton ingeniously made of plastic (oil-based) chairs. The *Shapeshifter* title could make one think of how elements, objects and materials are endlessly transformed, ourselves included, as we pass from life to afterlife, for instance, or the way products endlessly reform and redefine nature's materials.



*Cetology* (2002) is simply named after the branch of science devoted to the study of whales while *Vienna* (2003) the third whale skeleton was named after the city where it was first exhibited. As artistic process, Jungen's art shares similarities with Shinto and other Asian religious viewpoints as does West coast native culture, for all materials—natural or synthetic—are conceived as being equal, while rational categorization of matter can be less important...

Born in Fort St. John, B.C. in 1970, Jungen is an ingenious craftsman whose art involves the deconstruction of the fetish objects of consumer paradise, or alternatively, a consummate re-construction of form out of product. A pair of Nike Air Jordan trainers are basketball shoes with a difference (prestige item) are not so different from age-old Native masks. They animate our culture in a similar way, causing us to envision a hierarchy of meaning, and placing a value in some abstract (read fetish) symbols associated with sport. Jungen has disassembled these cult objects (almost a sin in our consumer culture) and reconstructed them into ceremonial masks akin to North West coast native artifacts. As Jungen states, "I was interested in the ubiquitousness of native motifs, especially in Vancouver, and how

they have been corrupted and applied and assimilated commercially, e.g., in the tourist industry. It was interesting to see how by simply manipulating the Air Jordan shoes you could evoke specific cultural traditions while simultaneously amplifying the process of cultural corruption and assimilation."

These artworks recycle Pop icons just out of the box to redesign them into archaic icons we associate with museum collections, while many masks and artefacts traditionally simply decayed and returned back to the nature they once were extricated from as raw wood, to then be carved into masks... Icon begets icon.

A new series that Jungen refers to as the *Talking Stick* (2005) series involve baseball hats, and these have been engraved into by the artist. His carvings move into the field of linguistics, integrating word fragments or "words with a social weight" into the bats. Jungen thus builds a defense for what anthropologists call a material cultural analysis, thus challenging a linguistic theory of culture, and the claim that entire constructs or worldviews are based on the development of language (while largely ignoring other aspects of cognitive structure(s) that precede the development of language in so-called primitive cultures).

While Jungen is very much esconced in today's culture, and realizes the power of brand name, of the logo, and the role fetish plays in capitalist culture, his *Prototypes* (1998-2005) and *Variant I* (2002) reconstruct artefacts out of the new logo-ized matter of Pop culture, even the Nike *Swoosh* symbol is applied to the reconstructed objects to resemble Native U-form and ovoid shapes characteristic of traditional North West coast formline design, something Lawrence Paul likewise has exploited in his paintings. Breaking down stereotypes can involve reassembling a similar set of stereotypes, and this craft-like character of the re-manufacture may be a weak aspect of this art in the long run, but at least it amuses in the same way Kim Adams assemblages out of Canadian Tire and consumer objects detritus can do.

Recently on view at the New Museum of Contemporary Art in New York, where the show was well received, Brian Jungen's current exhibition is by one of Canada's most interesting multi-disciplined artists of our times, and one who has a new-old world sense of what art is or can be. These object/artefacts look like they carry a code, a history and some iconic and purposeful meaning...

John K. Grande

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Baird, Daniel, "Air Jungen," *The Walrus*, February 2006, p. 90-96

Art

## Air Jungen

*How one Vancouver artist is breaking down cultural and consumer stereotypes*

by Daniel Baird

In order to reach the permanent display of Northwest Coast Indian artifacts at the American Museum of Natural History in New York from West 81st Street, you have to descend a stairway and walk through a newly renovated, glass-enclosed gift shop stocked with kitschy facsimiles of the tools, jewellery, clothing, and head-dresses of the peoples represented in the museum's vast collection. From there you enter the damp, poorly lit bowels of the nineteenth-century museum. There, bison set behind thick panes of glass gallop in front of painted sunsets; mangy grizzly bears rear back on their hind legs, long claws chipped and brittle, dark glass eyes off-kilter. And in the next room, in beautiful old wooden cabinets, is what was at one time regarded as just another instance of the flora and fauna of North America: crudely sculpted, faceless Tlingit tribesmen in fringed robes and beaver-fur hats; dancing Nootka shamans in heavy bear costumes; and brightly painted Kwakiutl masks. What is not on exhibit, but is still part of the collection, are the thousands of skulls and skeletons of native Americans that were exhumed from graves by archeologists during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and even boiled down from fresh corpses strewn on battlefields.

Vancouver artist Brian Jungen stands in the doorway of a room at the New Museum of Contemporary Art in New York near the installation of his *Prototypes for New Understanding*, a series of twenty-three masks cunningly fashioned from Nike Air Jordan sneakers and human hair that bear a striking resemblance to the

masks of Northwest Coast Indians. With his stocky build, broad face, and deep, dark eyes, Jungen casts a humble yet formidable presence.

It is just a week after an important mid-career survey of the thirty-five-year-old artist's work opened at the New Museum (the show will subsequently travel to the Vancouver Art Gallery and the *Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal*). But it is merely the latest step in Jungen's ascent; over the past three years, the artist has had solo exhibitions in Montreal, Vancouver, Seattle, San Francisco, New York, and Vienna. It's a long way from the interior of British Columbia, where Jungen, the child of a Swiss father and an aboriginal mother, was raised on a family farm on traditional Dane-zaa lands, before moving to Vancouver in 1988 to study at the Emily Carr College of Art and Design. Still, despite the exposure, the reserved, intense Jungen—hands in the pockets of his jeans, eyes fixed on the floor—is clearly ill at ease speaking in public. When asked about the relationship between his work and the art of his native ancestors, Jungen looks annoyed and impatient. "I was sort of pressured to make work about my identity, but then a lot of my exposure to my ancestry is through museums," he says. "And the objects and artifacts in museums are not actually ceremonial."

One of the most striking things about *Prototypes for New Understanding*, before the rich irony and cutting humour become apparent, is how beautiful and finely crafted the fierce, confrontational masks are. Clearly that is part of the reason they were such a catalyst for Jungen's career.

In "Proto Prototype for New Understanding #4" (1998), for instance, the artist has unstitched the padded white leather tops of the shoes and splayed them out into a face, the black sides stretched and stuffed to form a pair of goofy ears, and the plush red interior pulled out to form a thick, curled tongue. Long strands of coarse black human hair hang from the back of the mask; in its otherwise empty white eyes is the Air Jordan logo, Michael Jordan leaping mid-air for a slam dunk.

"Prototype #9" (1999) has a grotesque, even menacing bent snout and lurid red lips; in "Prototype #11" (2002), buckled red leather bands strap shoes around a crinkled mouth hole to look like outstretched wings from which hair cascades; and the hooked beak in "Prototype #13" (2003) gives the appearance of a prehistoric bird, with a long shiny tail of hair attached to the back. Many of the sculptures in *Prototypes for New Understanding* resemble the distorted, shapeshifting animal forms—now demonic, now obscene and comic—common in Northwest Coast masks. But Jungen considers this series to be at least partly an exploration of material and form, and works such as "Prototype for New Understanding #20" (2004), a mandala-like wheel of shoes, as well as the closely related wall relief *Variant I* (2002), are almost wholly abstract. "My work is not about my personal relationship to these [native] traditions," Jungen told me, "but about the interface of traditions with wider contemporary culture. I am interested in the role of native art in culture rather than in an interpretation of that culture."

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*Prototype for New Understanding #21 (2005) Nike Air Jordans. Photograph by Trevor Mills, Vancouver Art Gallery*  
All images courtesy of the artist and Casey Kaplan Gallery, New York

*Not all of Jungen's work is overtly about the stereotypes with which First Nations peoples have typically been cast, but these issues have a way of creeping into his work.*

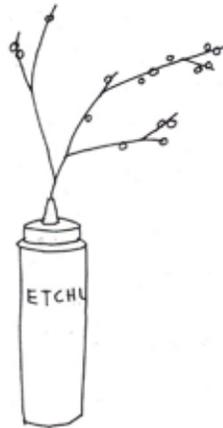
In a 1999 exhibition of the *Prototypes* in Vancouver, Jungen also included mural-sized wall paintings based on sketches he solicited from passersby, who had been asked to draw what they thought of as “native art.” Rendered in cheerful colours, the works reflect crude stereotypes of both aboriginal people and the range of aboriginal art: there are eagle heads, Indian braves in war paint wearing feathered headbands, teepees, totem poles, and frolicking whales. These drawings are fantasies about what historian Daniel Francis calls the “Imaginary Indian,” a romantic figure created since the middle of the nineteenth century by the depictions of First Nations peoples and culture by writers, painters, anthropologists, filmmakers, politicians, and others. *Prototypes* addresses a similar issue, but from a different and more complicated angle.

Northwest Coast masks have been fetishized and obsessively collected as shining instances of authentic aboriginal art. Jungen, on the other hand, has taken a popular line of a brand that has itself become a collector's item and transformed it into one-of-a-kind works of “native art” that might in turn be mass-produced. “Before products are outsourced for production,” Jungen told me, “a design team creates several prototypes of which one is selected. I liked this idea of reversing it by using the mass-produced object to create a singular handmade prototype. I thought the Jordan trainers were a perfect icon to illustrate the idea of a global product reworked by the local.” Yet Jungen's masks also suggest a different kind of prototype—one for a native art, and a native identity, that are not paralyzed by the past, that have the impurity and flexibility to move into the future.

For another series of sculptural works, which includes *Shapeshifter* (2000), *Cetology* (2002), and *Vienna* (2003), Jungen crafted what look like huge whale skeletons made out of white plastic lawn chairs. Like *Prototypes*, Jungen's skeletons do not initially appear to be constructed out of familiar, mass-produced material, a fact

that comes as a revelation to most viewers, complicating an otherwise pristine illusion. In *Shapeshifter*, the tail has a long, slow undulation, but the central portion of the body is compacted and the head sharp, a ribbed cartilage at the top like a fin. *Vienna*, on the other hand, has an intricate body composed of curved parts that seem captured in a whipping, forward motion, its head long, elegant, and open.

Jungen's refined formalism and meticulous craftsmanship are counterbalanced by the materials he employs and the histories his images evoke. The whale skeletons are not meant to be anatomically correct, but they are modelled after skeletons typically housed in natural-history museums. Indeed, the giant plastic sculptures are suspended from the ceiling and bathed in clinical white light that self-consciously evokes



the style of presentation in museums, and they are closely related to the concerns of *Prototypes*. After all, whalebones are the remnants of a species driven to the edge of extinction by white North America's voracious appetite for the fuel oil extracted from whales, and they are also part of the collections of museums whose storage vaults are stocked with the artifacts and bones of aboriginal peoples.

In these works, Jungen is interested in

the way the skeletons evoke the stories and myths of the Northwest Coast tribes. In addition, the petroleum used in the manufacture of the plastic chairs nods not just to the whaling industry but more generally to the expansion of European civilization on the Western frontier that irreversibly disrupted the lives of First Nations peoples. These are among Jungen's most lyrical works. Suspended from barely visible string, the white of the plastic chairs is cool and ghostly, and a sculpture like *Cetology* looks fragile, held together by a delicate balance. It is a triumph that something eerie and beautiful can be salvaged out of material as mundane as plastic chairs.

Not all of Jungen's work is overtly about the stereotypes with which First Nations peoples have typically been cast or about questions of identity in a global society, but these issues have a way of creeping into his work. This may be because Jungen's art subtly raises the question—without answering it—of the possibility of a regional culture and identity that moves beyond nostalgia in a world where a kid can grow up on remote Dane-zaa lands and learn less about First Nations culture than about the television programs and pop music and hip-hop fashions worshipped by kids in Toronto. Jungen has often insisted that the work he makes out of Air Jordan trainers is not inspired by a passion for the player or for basketball but rather by the branding and celebrity-endorsement issues that arise from professional sports.

The somewhat cagey Jungen now admits there is probably more to it. “I only considered this idea of ceremony a few years ago,” he said. “It occurred to me that I was making facsimiles of one kind of ceremonial garment out of another and that the role of sport in culture in a way fulfills a kinship ritual that ceremonial competitions once did in non-western societies.”

In a society where religious ceremony no longer creates a sense of collective identity, sport is the secular ritual that provides fantasies of excellence and moments of transcendence. For *Court*, which debuted

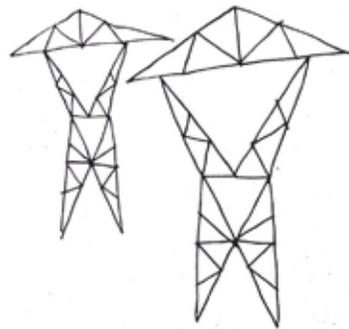
in 2004 at Triple Candie gallery in Harlem, New York, Jungen built a basketball court to scale out of 224 wooden tabletops that had been used in sweatshops, leaving open the rectangular holes and notches where the industrial sewing machines would normally be set. The three-point arc is carefully painted in; there are hoops suspended at either end. The laminated wood of a basketball court, waxed and polished to a mirror shine, has a sleek, seamless elegance, but Jungen's court is thick and even brutal, and the ironies it embodies are equally blunt. The sewing machines that would have been screwed into the tabletops could easily have been rattling in front of workers in the crowded sweatshops of China, cranking out the beautiful and heraldic white, black, and red Air Jordans that would eventually be on the feet of NBA stars or those of native kids fantasizing about those NBA stars.

Jungen's court is one that the viewer figuratively trips over. It is more than simply a statement about the brands and endorsements of big-money sports and the hard economic realities that underlie them; its metaphors are far more ambiguous and suggestive than that. Perhaps basketball courts stand in for the ceremonial spaces—religious, political, social—that have traditionally served to bind a people's identity. Perhaps what Jungen's fractured, makeshift court implies is the great extent to which such spaces have become compromised.

**B**rian Jungen's art inevitably has an ambivalent relationship with museums, even those devoted to contemporary art, where curators are sensitive to the suspicion with which artists often approach institutions. A lot of Jungen's early work is fuelled by an interest in the institutional presentation of First Nations culture as an appropriate object of scrutiny for scientists rather than students of human history. David Hurst Thomas's seminal history of anthropology and archeology, *Skull Wars*, was premised on the idea that native culture was essentially extinct. Art works such as *Shapeshifter* and *Cetology* were in part inspired by visits to Vancouver's aquarium, a different kind of museum, its thick glass windows providing an underwater view of the resident killer whale. Jungen commented, "I wanted to ref-

erence the aquarium and the captivity of the animals," and that seems more apt: works of art in museums often feel as though they are being held captive, in a kind of solitary confinement, unable to engage with the world unfolding around them.

In recent years, Jungen has become increasingly oriented toward temporary works set in less institutional environments—what he likes to call "structures for habitation."



His interest in architecture, in the aesthetics and politics of the spaces in which we live, is by no means new. *Isolated Depiction of the Passage of Time* (2001) is modelled after a hollowed-out stack of blue lunch trays that were used in a 1980 prison escape from the Millhaven Institution and which are now part of the collection of the Correctional Service of Canada Museum in Kingston, Ontario. In Jungen's piece, each of the approximately 1,200 trays represents an aboriginal male incarcerated in a Canadian prison, the different colours correspond to the length of sentences meted out, and the sounds one hears represent the televisions provided in the windowless cells. For *Little Habitat I* (2003) and *Little Habitat II* (2004), Jungen meticulously cut up Air Jordan boxes and assembled them into compact geodesic domes. Both *Isolated Depiction of the Passage of Time* and the *Habitat* works are about alienation and failure—of architecture used to isolate and repress, of a mode of high-modernist formalism that Jungen is clearly drawn to but that is disconnected from the character of living communities.

Several of Jungen's recent projects, on the other hand, propose a more symbiotic relationship between "structures of habitation" and the world that surrounds them. *Habitat 04—Cit  radieuse des chats/Cats Radiant City* (2004), first shown at the old Darling Foundry in Montreal, consisted of stacked plywood units covered with carpet that served as temporary housing for some of the city's many stray cats. Jungen and staff at the Darling Foundry worked with the local humane society in an effort to arrange for the adoption of the cats.

Echoing the title of Le Corbusier's never-realized Radiant City, and alluding to Moshe Safdie's Habitat 67 housing project in Montreal, *Habitat 04* introduces the indeterminacy of life into modernist forms. For *Inside Today's Home* (2005), Jungen constructed a suspended birdhouse for domesticated finches out of IKEA periodical-file boxes and shelving brackets. The exhibit was viewed from the outside, through peepholes in a plywood wall or on closed-circuit television.

Compared with *Court*, *Habitat 04* and *Inside Today's Home* are optimistic works. They suggest that we need to stop thinking of the divide between nature and culture as sharp and unequivocal, that we need to give up the idea that history offers us identities and ways of living that have stable boundaries. Perhaps what it means to be part of a live culture, rather than terminally relegated to the storage facilities of museums of natural history and anthropology, is to be part of something that is unstable, ephemeral, and continuously transforming.

At the end of his talk and walking tour of his exhibition at the New Museum, Jungen glances at *Modern Sculpture*—blobby floor sculptures made from silver soccer balls filled with lava rocks he created for a group show in Iceland—and moves on to *talking stick* (2005). Jungen may be drawn to the kinds of site-specific installations that are popular with critics, but he is at heart a sculptor and a consummate craftsman.

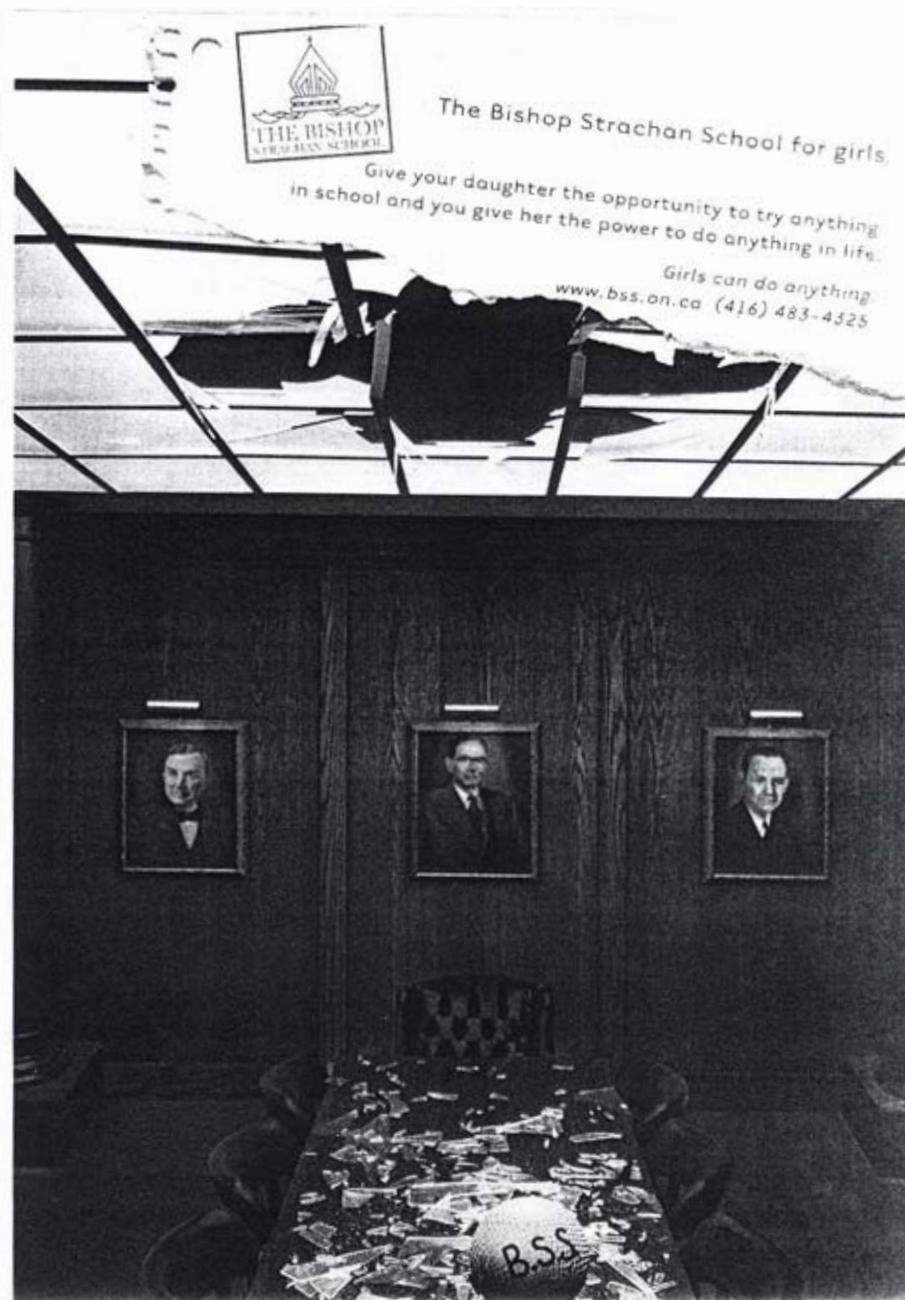
Jungen's creation *talking stick* is a series of works made from baseball bats carved with what look like the designs found on Northwest Coast totem poles and batons, but are in fact politically charged slogans

such as "Unite to Crush" and "Work to Rule." Like *Prototypes for New Understanding*, *talking stick* contains conflicting and irresolvable associations between batons used by Northwest Coast medicine men and sports, between healing and violence, between the finely crafted and the massproduced—between the local and the global.

At one point an earnest-looking woman raises her hand, introducing herself as someone from Vancouver living in New York. She suggests that audiences outside Canada are not likely to understand how controversial Jungen's use of First Nations culture really is. This is not an altogether

naive comment. Jungen's relationship to First Nations culture is never straightforward, and he always insists upon the impure and hybrid over the "authentic." He is not a West Coast native craftsman, but an artist whose work is rooted in European and North American sculpture of the past fifty years. Perhaps his art suggests that the distinction itself is becoming less and less meaningful. "[Some native people] think it's a cunning way of addressing these issues," Jungen says, not missing a beat. "They think it's a funny joke." ■

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“In Conversation: Brian Jungen and Simon Starling,” published in *Brian Jungen*, essays by Daina Augaitis, Cuahtémoc Medina, Trevor Smith, Ralph Rugoff, Kitty Scott, Vancouver, British Columbia: Vancouver Art Gallery and Douglas & McIntyre, 2005

# In Conversation

## Brian Jungen and Simon Starling

In 2002, the British artist Simon Starling exhibited two models of two modernist concrete houses from Puerto Rico in a New York gallery. Starling's roughly made architectural structures that doubled as birdhouses prompted Brian Jungen, who has recently been developing his own environments for animals, to invite him to take part in a dialogue. What unfolded between January 28 and February 12, 2005, was a wide-ranging discussion around the two artists' practices, their mutual interests in architecture, zoology, ornithology, transmutations and the conflating of diverse culture references.

**BRIAN JUNGEN:** I recognized some familiar components in your work that I have been investigating, such as environments built for animals, the process of making/transforming objects and modern architecture and design. Of course we have different approaches to these common themes, but let's talk about the points of relation as well as the separations.

Given your surname, I always thought it was sweet that you made these amazing birdhouses. I read that starlings were first imported to New York by a British birdwatcher who released some in Central Park. They now cover the continent and flock together in large numbers. Did you have an interest in a specific type of bird when you made the *Inverted Retrograde Theme, USA* piece?

**SIMON STARLING:** The idea for the birdhouses developed in a rather convoluted fashion. Essentially the work attempted to collapse two “architectural” forms, the first being the modular concrete houses designed by the Austrian émigré

OPPOSITE  
*Untitled, 1997*  
ink on manila paper  
35.8 x 27.3 cm (14" x 10 3/4")  
Collection of The Morris and Helen  
Belkin Gallery, Vancouver  
Purchased with financial support  
from the Canada Council for the Arts  
Acquisition Assistance Program and  
the Morris and Helen Belkin Founda-  
tion, 1998  
Photo: Trevor Mills, Vancouver Art  
Gallery



architect Simon Schmiderer for Rockefeller's International Basic Economy Corporation in Puerto Rico and the other being the modular twelve-tone music of Arnold Schoenberg. The tropical songbirds that I used gave the project its scale, and in a very playful way alluded to music and by association to Schoenberg.

As for the American Starling, it has been a fantastically successful "weed," an "alien" population on the scale of Australia's rabbits, but less damaging. Actually, the flightless Starlings, my Canadian relatives, made it as far as British Columbia. My aunt used to send my grandparents a calendar every year illustrated with images of First Nation masks; your *Prototypes [for New Understanding]* were immediately familiar to me on my first encounter with them. I know that animal forms have appeared in your work in the past but in these cases—I'm thinking of the whales you built with plastic garden furniture and the animal-like forms of the masks that inspired the *Protos*—the animals were heavily mediated, shall we say. I sense more of a live engagement with animals in your new work. I know very little about what you are planning for your forthcoming show in Vancouver, and perhaps the best place to start would be to ask you to talk about your current interest in birdhouses.

**BJ:** I have always had a fascination with animals. It began when I was a child on our family's farm. In terms of art making, there was a huge lapse from when I was a child drawing animals to when I began making the *Prototypes*. This lapse had something to do with the art education that was part of my life from public school through to art school; that is, representations of animals were frowned upon. I began to investigate the animal form when I first started making the *Protos*. Most of these investigations were associated with mythology and storytelling, more specifically with how Aboriginal history is reproduced in the traditional carving of the Northwest Coast nations and in turn how it is represented to the general public through the authority of anthropology and mass media. A lot of this research took place in the Museum of Anthropology at the University of British Columbia, so it was in the context of the museum space that the *Protos* were born.

I also began to look at the Vancouver Aquarium and its exhibits and specimens. I was curious about how these two institutions generated so much identity for the city and the region. I was particularly interested in the mid-twentieth-century architecture of both spaces as some sort of manufactured modernist by-product and began investigating what qualities worked or failed. Perhaps it was in a reaction to this product, but I have an urge to associate and collide seemingly dis-separate but related topics, something I see in your work as well.

When I was hanging out at the aquarium, I discovered a badly neglected and vacant polar bear pit, which is part of an old zoo that used to be adjacent to the aquarium. This sad pit was literally a torturous example of such a failure where polar bears were confined on raw concrete in a mild climate until they died. I have since studied environments and habitats that humans build for animals, in particular how such structures are designed to display the animal for public observation/entertainment or for scientific surveillance.

My first project about this theme was the creation of a shelter and adoption centre for abandoned cats in Montreal in 2004 [*Habitat 04: Cité radieuse des chats/Cats Radiant City*]. I have also started designing a park for dogs, and most recently, birdhouses. I have not engaged in working with wildlife yet but am thinking that the birdhouse is a step in that direction.

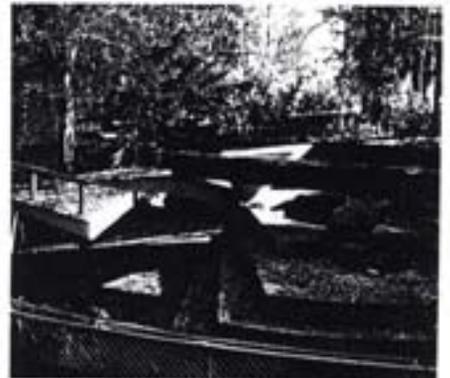
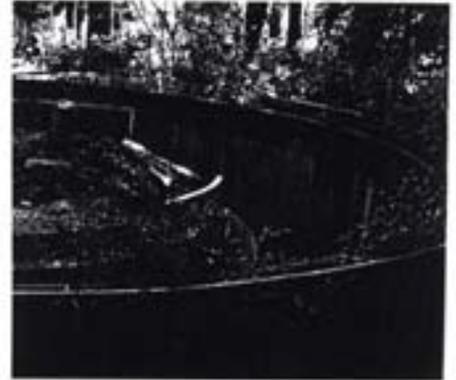
I like how your Schmitter's houses were perched next to the ceiling so the songbirds were out of view, as a kind of logic.

**SS:** I felt most comfortable working with the birds if they had their own space, so to speak. It's never easy using live animals in this context.

It's interesting to me that you talk about aquarium architecture and the bear pit in particular. I've just been reading about Bauhaus design in Britain in the 1930s and its relationship to ecology and more specifically animal welfare. The Norwegian writer Peder Anker is currently developing a historical account of the relationship between architecture and ecology, and one of his areas of interest is the collaboration between the Bauhaus (as it regrouped in London in the thirties) and various ecologists and zoologists of the day. We generally think of the Bauhaus as having its roots in "Machine Age" thinking, not in the realm of ecology. I suppose the clearest manifestation of these collaborations would be the penguin pool in the London Zoo, designed in 1934 by the Tecton Group led by Berthold Lubetkin. While Lubetkin, who was passionately political, would have jumped at the chance of displaying modern architectural forms to a mass audience, he also believed that geometric forms were fundamental building blocks of nature and, in turn, that forms in nature ought to be the model for functional design.

Although the penguin pool has been criticized for turning animal welfare into a "circus act," the relationship between the architects and their client was a very rigorous and well-intentioned one, and what was produced was a wonderfully exuberant modernist jewel of a building dominated by its famous double-helix ramps. It's interesting that the building was recently in the news again when, no longer considered to be suitable for penguins—who, according to the zookeepers, find its pool too shallow—it was turned over to a group of Chinese alligators. It is clear that in such cases the architects acted largely with the animals' best interests at heart, and what has changed, perhaps, since the thirties is our understanding of animals and their needs. Is there a sense that your Vancouver Aquarium simply developed from a rather half-hearted and less rigorous deployment of modernism in the service of animals—a sixties prefab tower block of the zoological world?

**BJ:** I'm glad you brought up Lubetkin and his Tecton Group. After reading some of his writing, I was astounded with his approach to zoological design, which comes across as a slightly corrupt evolutionary manifesto, I think he had a strong compassion for animals but held tight to the superiority of humans over animals (and nature), expressing this a bit like the control of a reformist at a prison. I came across some amazing images of the construction of the penguin pool and the gorilla house, and I can see why his designs were controversial in his day and became so influential. When I arrived in London last year for a



Polar Bear Pit, Vancouver Aquarium  
Photo: Brian Jungen

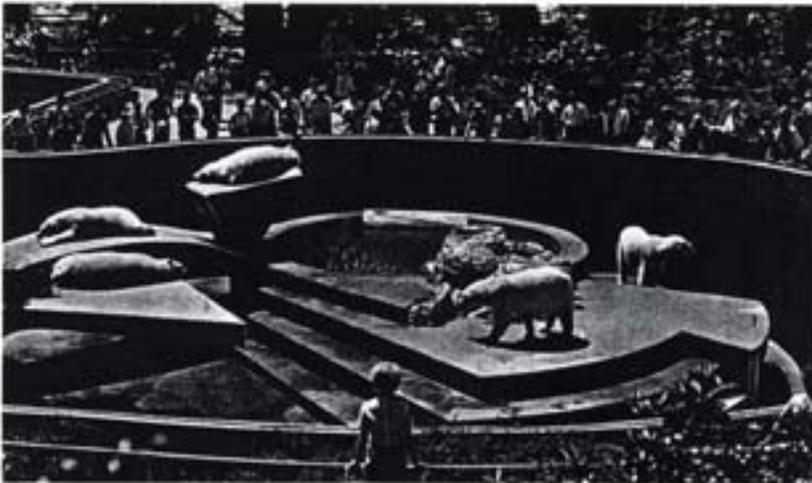
residency, one of the first places I went to was Regents Park Zoo to see the penguin pool. It had just been painted, and I was surprised (and relieved) not to see any penguins in it. It is a marvellous structure, with a strong sense of incarceration.

I would suggest that the design of the Vancouver Aquarium was a benign version of modernism, attempting to consider the welfare of the animals in its collection. This was a daunting task, as the prime specimens/attractions were killer whales. It is accepted that the global decline of the whale population, and the crisis this generated in the scientific and environmental communities in the sixties, was the key motivation in the development of the aquarium. Vancouver became one of the first centres for marine biologists to study killer whales in the wild, and it also launched the environmental group Greenpeace. Both groups were vocal in creating awareness about the threat of extinction of whales but carried out widely varying strategies on the captivity of whales for research. The aquarium building designed to house sea life looks like a tower block, as you say, but over the decades it has been dressed up to be more friendly. Most of the brutalist concrete has been veneered with colourful panels and imagery of aquatic life. My interest in this place came primarily out of a comparative relationship to the development and inception of the Museum of Anthropology, because I felt that both institutions were born from an impulse to salvage and that both package an idea of nature and this region's "natural history" as cultural commodities.

**SS:** I would also like to return to your whale skeleton piece, as it is central to the development of your current projects. For me it has a very particular relationship to a series of strange events that occurred in Scotland a few years ago. A male sperm whale was trapped in the upper reaches of the Firth of Forth where, too frightened by the noise from the Forth Road Bridge to reach open water again, he eventually died. The imaginative Scottish press christened him "Moby." Moby's remains ended up in the hands of the Department of Zoology at the National Museum of Scotland and in a matter of days after his death his skeleton was presented in the Edinburgh museum for all to see. The extraordinary thing was that the skeleton was still extremely fresh and not completely clean. What you saw, and more importantly smelled, was a pile of bones in a makeshift piece of exhibition architecture, made by lining the decorative pool and fountain in the museum's magnificent vaulted entrance space with black plastic. It was the middle of the summer and very quickly the entire museum was filled with the stench of Moby's still-fleshy bones. Moby's celebrity had somehow compelled the museum to make him instantly available to the public. It was such a magnificently incongruous image within this otherwise staid institution. Somehow this urgency to assimilate nature into the world of culture seems to have a parallel sense of pathos to your elegantly fashioned whale skeleton constructed entirely from petroleum-based plastics—an opposite but perhaps complementary collision?



Regents Park Zoo  
Photo: Brian Jungen



**BJ:** Your account is quite telling of this salvaging I refer to, although the museum's haste to get Moby's skeleton on display to take advantage of the media's attention adds a revealing twist, that they chose to exhibit the raw bones of this whale as if it were the body of a celebrated public figure lying in state. The public has a strong empathy and respect for whales, and this has been exploited by Hollywood and the news media. It is not surprising that the museum's marketing people would take advantage of such pathos, expediently serving up Moby as a cultural offering to a hungry public. When I made my first whale work, *Shape-shifter* [2000], I was curious to see whether a reproduction of an object from the natural world could be made from something completely inorganic. Using these mass-produced, petroleum-based plastic chairs proved to work well for what I was interested in.

**SS:** It seems that in many of your previous projects there is a very direct dialogue between a motif and the material that you choose to "reproduce" it in. Is it a way of problematizing a traditional understanding of sculpture, where the material is no longer at the service of the subject but rather in dialogue with it? It's almost as if the work is trying to pull itself apart—and is unstable.

Recently I've been dealing with specific sculptural languages in a very direct way, in works that, perhaps in a similar way, try to collapse art history onto current economic situations. I'm thinking particularly of *Bird in Space* [2004], I took the story of the importation of [Constantin] Brancusi's 1925 bronze sculpture of the same name into the United States by Marcel Duchamp and the subsequent court case between Brancusi and U.S. Customs, and used it as a framework to investigate the more contemporary story of U.S. steel tariffs. My imported hunk of Romanian steel was pushed into the sculptural realm of Brancusi by simply floating its vast weight on helium-filled cushions—a kind of parody

of his attempts to make heavy metal fly. What's interesting about that court case is that on one level U.S. Customs read the work in a very correct way, in that it was indeed an attempt to simulate the perfection of the Machine Age. It was Brancusi's propeller, or so the story goes.

Perhaps it's completely off the mark, but I can't help thinking about Brancusi when I see your *Pratos*—of course, Brancusi's materials are there to be transcended and dematerialized, whereas your cut-up Nikes or plastic chairs remain an incisive or even disruptive presence.



**BJ:** It's an interesting comparison, and I can see how you would be interested in the tension that developed around justifying an artwork in aesthetic/economic terms to a monster like U.S. Customs. I saw an exhibition of Brancusi's work at the Tate Modern last summer, and it led me to consider that the sources for much of his carving were not only from his Romanian heritage but from external influences in Asian and African art—how modern. Brancusi's desire to transcend matter, and the desire to move beyond the material, are qualities that could be applied to the traditional carved masks of the Northwest Coast and the ceremonies they were intended to serve. My *Pratos* are built with the understanding that they have a secular existence, that the materials guide the composition and are pushed to the forefront, but not necessarily in a disruptive manner. I am interested in creating and transforming relationships between materials and subjects, but perhaps the polarities in these relationships are not so disparate.

There are plenty of historic examples in the artwork of First Nations cultures where European products were modified and used for their aesthetic qualities, thereby changing the intended use value of these products. This type of exchange accrued as contact with European traders spread across the continent, but I am curious to know why this component of history is not "revived" in today's carving and regalia. It is accepted that the institutionalization of First Nations "artifacts" by the anthropologists in the nineteenth and early twentieth century had the effect of dictating what was to be constituted as authentic. This generally meant that the oldest examples of whatever anthropologists or sociologists could scavenge would become the foundation for theories and be used to identify lineage. Contemporary ways of looking at First Nations art and identifying movements demand that lineages are more fluid and are determined by examining both the similarities and differences in aesthetics, as well as the associative relationships between different cultures, without overtly emphasizing barriers of race, gender or sexuality. Would you agree with this?

**SS:** Yes, this idea of fluidity is absolutely at the heart of what I do and is reflected almost literally as objects are physically fused, realigned or juxtaposed and both time and space are constantly rejigged, reformulated and collapsed.

**BJ:** I like to think of my work as a relationship between the accepted idea of a traditional form and the embracing of a very contemporary material. I don't think such relationships create a disruptive or discordant presence, but rather expand

parameters and blur some social boundaries. To bring up the natural world again, this is where hybridity often produces endless and harmonious varieties.

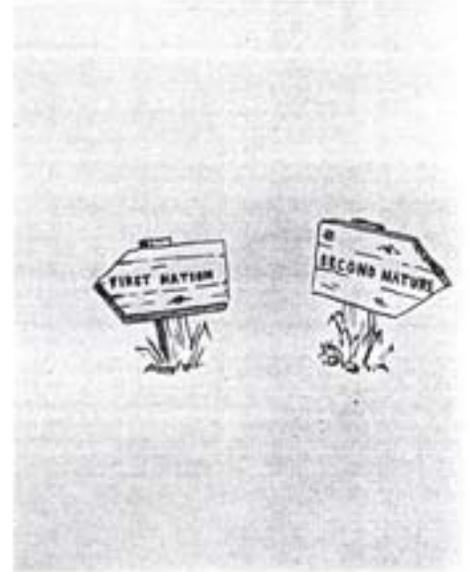
**SS:** Perhaps my projection of a disruptive or unstable sense in the work is not so far from your sense of fluidity and complexity. It is a response in part to what I see as the apparent ease of your work. The key works seem to be persistently bipolar in their structure. From the whale made in plastic garden furniture to the treacherous basketball court laid out with sewing-machine tables, the work has an extreme economy of means. This is both seductive and engaging but also, perhaps on the face of it, seems to run contrary to its potential for the kind of fluidity and complexity of meaning that you propose. One critic has referred to it as a “sleight of hand.” In many ways it is formally very stable work—very resolved—and yet it seems able to throw up a wealth of associations, references and meanings.

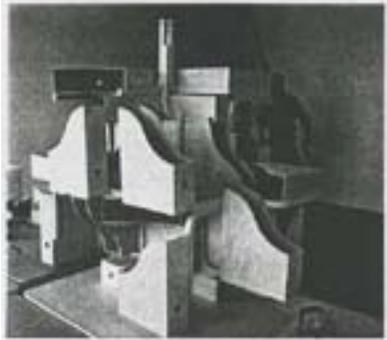
I’m wondering if when European objects were incorporated into the First Nations sculptural language, were they used for specific critical or reflexive purposes or, rather, were they adopted in the spirit of “making do and getting by”—an opportunistic pragmatism?

**BJ:** From what I understand, the methods of incorporation of non-Native objects into Native cultures are as diverse as the different cultures of the continent, and varied insofar as the uses to which they were adopted. Some things like tobacco tins were extremely versatile and could be manipulated into many uses, from adornment to utensils. I suppose this is what Claude Levi-Strauss identified as an example of bricolage, as new meanings and narratives were assigned to such objects and motifs. I consider such creative ingenuity to serve a critical purpose, as it represented a counter-logic to colonialists. I also think that this part of the world has a harsh climate and treacherous geography that forced all of its inhabitants to live life with an opportunistic pragmatism of sorts.

**SS:** I was also very interested to discover Reid Shier’s text in the catalogue for your exhibition at the Charles H. Scott Gallery in 1999 and his foregrounding of an economic model in relation to your work in the form of potlatch. I’m interested to know how this text sits with you and your understanding of your work. I suppose [Georges] Bataille’s *The Accursed Share*, notably the first volume, has been a big influence on my thinking. Is the notion of the kind of “anti-economy” embodied by the potlatch of interest to you?

**BJ:** As to Reid’s essay and his reading of the Nike work in relation to the potlatch ceremony, I will say that, although there is a parallel in an economic sense, there was no predetermined cultural link that I was trying to make. I read [Franz] Boas and Bataille’s enlightening essays about the potlatch, but I have a mixed opinion about the perceived relationship of the potlatch and my work. It has been argued that the potlatch, in its history before it was outlawed between 1884 and 1951, was a resourceful economic system that redistributed goods and commodities to those who had none, and put an emphasis on generosity over accumulation.





It was the destruction, or “waste,” of goods and the economy that these events represented that was the controversial aspect of the potlatch and that led to the outlawing of this and other ceremonies, [Dan] Cranmer’s super-potlatch of 1921 being the ultimate example. It was also this aspect that was the most culturally important, as a means of establishing rank through a kind of competitive waste. The potlatch is very specific in its meaning, and I have been more interested in the diffusion of meaning of coastal First Nations motifs into the public domain. Reid also locates my position as being more about transformation and power, and less (if at all) about humiliation and social status.

**SS:** Is it possible to talk about the new projects? Are they establishing a new kind of internal logic? I sensed in some of the recent projects that there is a shift of some sort going on, a move towards a more reactive/site-specific practice. Perhaps this is simply another strand in your work that is surfacing again in the new work?

**BJ:** I was recently in a show at The Edmonton Art Gallery that was looking at how artists interpret architecture, My contribution was an installation that was focusing on the domestic environment and mass-produced, interior-design products. I felt that the show was based around the idea of interiors and the structures marketed to create personal living environments. I thought it would be an interesting opportunity to fuse some of the ideas that I have been speaking to you about. My installation involved creating an aviary for some domesticated finches (mass-produced living products from a pet store), using ubiquitous and identifiable IKEA products. I basically sealed off my designated exhibition space in the museum and built a suspended birdhouse using birch periodical-file boxes and bent-plywood shelf brackets. I did not alter or cut the IKEA products, as I wanted the materials to retain their recognizable and familiar shape, so I suppose this is a new approach for me.

The installation could only be viewed through small peepholes in the plywood barricade, or through closed-circuit television cameras that were attached to the birdhouse. The birdhouse was initially conceived to go outside the museum so that it would be used by chickadees and other wild birds, but it was the wrong season and location for this. By isolating a space inside the museum, I was able to work with the architecture of the building to create a separation similar to an indoor/outdoor thing.

I feel like I have come to a resolution with a way of working that emphasizes a binary, object-viewer relationship. I am curious about some older ideas that I have investigated in past work, in particular ideas that involve some interaction with the public. Having located most of my work in the institutionalized arena of the museum, a new direction will lead me to experiment with less stable environments.

OPPOSITE:

*Inside Today's Home*, 2005 (detail)  
Installation at The Edmonton Art Gallery, Edmonton, Alberta, 2005  
IKEA products, video cameras, birds  
106.7 x 134.6 x 340.4 cm (42" x 53" x 32") sculpture only  
4.27 x 7.62 x 7.0m (14' x 25' x 23')  
room enclosure  
Photo: Hutch Hutchinson, Courtesy of The Edmonton Art Gallery

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Glueck, Grace, "Art n Review: Brian Jungen," *The New York Times*, Friday, December 23, 2005, p. E40

# The New York Times

## Brian Jungen

*New Museum of Contemporary Art  
556 West 22nd Street  
Through Dec. 31*

Aware that the Nike Air Jordan trainers worn by the basketball star Michael Jordan are a fetish item around the world, Brian Jungen, a young British Columbian of partly Northwest Coast Indian descent, has cleverly refashioned these trophy sneakers into ceremonial masks that strikingly suggest the artifacts produced by Northwest Coast tribes.

He wastes no scrap, making some parts into bird-like beaks, arranging others to form yawning apertures, working still others into headdresses and soon, to brilliant effect. The masks might be seen as a sardonic view of the cultural takeover and commercialization of aboriginal art so widespread in Canada and the United States, and also as a comment on the need for fetishes—in this case, the exalted Nike—that is every bit as strong in modern societies as in so-called primitive ones.

Another example of Mr. Jungen's skill at making mundanities into art is his elegant transformation of banal white plastic modular chairs into three full-size whale skeletons. These float benignly above the viewer's head, like specimens in a natural history museum. He has said that in making the first one, "Shapeshifter" (2000), he wanted to see if a reproduction of an object from the natural world could be formed from something completely inorganic. He succeeded wildly, to the point at which a viewer might ponder what miracles could be wrought by nature if it had modular chairs to work with.

Several less awesome objects continue Mr. Jungen's interest in tweaking what he calls traditional forms by means of new materials, techniques and ideas, in the process attacking cultural clichés. Unfortunately, the gallery's space doesn't really allow for amore extensive account of his doings, especially past projects having to do with architecture. But if it's hard to get the full scope of his societal investigations, you come away with a sense of a wizardly craftsman whose skills are equal to his vision.

GRACE GLUECK

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LaBelle, Charles, "Brian Jungen," *Frieze*, 2004

## Brian Jungen

Triple Candie, New York

Situated in the centre of Triple Candie's cavernous main space in a former Harlem brewery, Brian Jungen's untitled installation was as much a proposition as a self-contained work. It was composed of 214 sewing machine tables placed side by side to form a single surface two metres off the ground, punctuated by 12 white lacquered columns. Jungen set two basketball hoops mounted on freestanding ladders at each end and painted lines over the surface of the tables, creating a half-size basketball court. Yet, bathed in bright lights, the glowing expanse is also a stage that would be perfectly suited for a Pina Bausch performance or Samuel Beckett's *Endgame* (1957).

Echoing the empty gallery space, this empty court/stage is an anxiety engendering void demanding to be filled. Fools, they say, rush in, and part of the subtle brilliance of Jungen's installation is the way it lures us close and encourages us figuratively to place ourselves on this stage. Thus the 'theatricality' inherent in Minimalism, which so outraged Michael Fried in 1968, is, by way of Bruce Nauman and Felix Gonzalez-Torres, made the very heart and soul of the work. With a deft economy of means Jungen activates both the space and the viewer, creating an environment in which participation is not without consequence. The numerous associations, histories and ideas that he introduces all have their moment, yet are quickly dispatched. Their gutted remains pile up like bodies in *Macbeth* (c.1606).

Site-specific in the best sense of the term, Jungen's installation positions itself at the junction of socio-economic and geo-political forces. Its layered spaces are not only physical and geographic but also historical and cultural. How can we not look at a basketball court in Harlem without thinking of the Harlem Globetrotters? Or of David Hammons' seminal *Higher Goals* (1982).

Disenfranchised minority members of the population have tradition-

ally found successful avenues into the mainstream via the alignment of sports, entertainment and fashion: for example, Harlem's history of sweatshops. Globalism has redefined Harlem and the US workplace as clothing companies export their labour needs to distant Third World countries. The irony of these goods returning to adorn the bodies of the disenfranchised reflects how well the notion of planned obsolescence applies not only to commodities but also to consumers. Dichotomies of absence and presence, nearness and distance, difference and sameness; nonsequiturs such as Comte de Lautréamont's famous meeting of an umbrella and a sewing machine on a mortician's table.

The 'theatricality' of Minimalism, which so outraged Michael Fried, is the very heart and soul of Brian Jungen's work.

(1993), which performs a similarly powerful disappearing act. As ambitious as it is restrained, Orozco's work goes to the very core of art's reception and value. Is the box a hollow joke or a vessel of contemplation full of meaning? Like Orozco's, Jungen's practice is embedded in the realm of the everyday and frequently uses ordinary objects, remaking ready-mades to call attention to their underlying politics and poetics, drawing lines of connection between late capitalist production methods,

tion and reification of an often dubious 'history'. These hybrid forms, exercises in sculptural détournement, play havoc with the way that capitalism seeks to inscribe the sign value of all things within the culture. Funny, intellectually rigorous, celebratory, self-critical and disobedient, all of Jungen's work refuses to sit quietly and be still.

Finally, it is significant that Jungen chose to use new sewing machine tables rather than used ones, which



A cornucopia of art-historical references from Minimalism, 'women's work' and issues of female labour to Body Art, the 'arena' of Action Painting, commodity fetishism, Performance and black/'post-Black' art and the struggle of self-representation—these myriad thought channels are all evoked with an almost magical sleight of hand. Now you see them, now you don't.

In this sense perhaps the most significant precedent for Jungen's piece is Gabriel Orozco's *Empty Shoe Box*

postcolonial deterritorialization, identity politics and institutional critique. His series of sculptures, each titled *Prototype for a New Understanding* (1997-ongoing), transforms NikeAir Jordans into Canadian First People's tribal masks, while for his large-scale *Shapeshifter* (2000) Jungen used cheap white plastic chairs to create the hanging skeleton of a whale. Thus commodities whose transience is palpable become the source material for mock ethnographic displays—investments in the reclama-

would have been overburdened with the weight of their respective histories, too marked by their use(d) value and evidence of the body. Shiny and unblemished, the tables/court/stage, while referencing a pointed, problematic past, create a sense of immediacy and an awareness of how we continue to be determined by the specific forces of control—vicious cycles of production and consumption—that shaped our predecessors.

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Whyte, Murray, "Finding Art In Sports and Sweatshops," *New York Times*, February 8 2004, p. 29

# The New York Times

## ART

# Finding Art In Sports and Sweatshops

By Murray Whyte

IN 1998, Brian Jungen, a 27-year-old artist in Vancouver, took apart a heap of identical Nike Air Jordans, splayed them open and restitched them into an improbably accurate rendering—complete with real hair—of a ceremonial mask used by the Haida people of British Columbia. He called it "Prototype for New Understanding."

Curators and viewers alike were drawn to "Prototype," finding it both playful and provocative. It rounded up a number of contemporary ideas: an obsession with brand-name products, references to a global economy that allows them to be mass produced cheaply, and a postcolonial angst resulting from the buying and selling of North American native culture like so many Air Jordans themselves. The last of these Mr. Jungen knew well, living in Vancouver, where native products are a major part of a thriving tourist economy.

Soon Mr. Jungen, who is of European and Native Canadian heritage (his father, a Swiss, and his mother, a member of the Dunne-za tribe, both died when he was 8), was showing masks (he started with 9 and later expanded to 12) and other work in Canada, Europe and the United States. Currently he has a new site-specific installation at Triple Candie in Harlem. There he has shoved together 221 industrial sewing tables—remnants of Harlem's sweatshop past—and reconfigured them as a half-size, college regulation, though unplayable, basketball court.

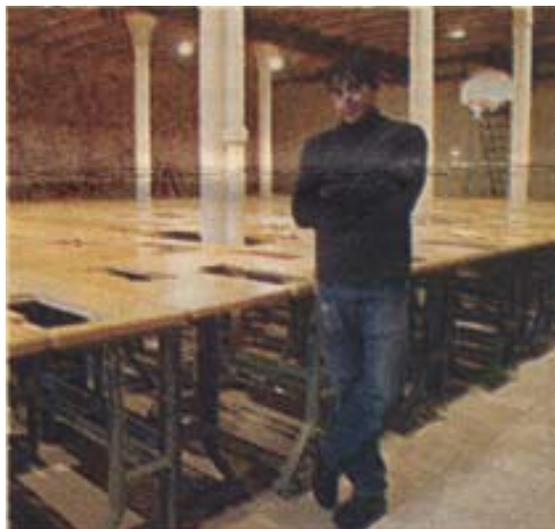
Where he once used Native Canadian references, he has now stepped into the heavily freighted history of another North American minority culture, African Americans. "A lot of sports gear was mass-produced right there in Harlem 40 years ago," Mr. Jungen said. "I'm drawing parallels between the history of industry and sweatshop production there and the attention given to sports as a way of escaping that manual labor, that manufacturing life."

The rift between aspiration and reality is a potent artistic motif for Mr. Jungen. In "Shapeshifter" (2000), for example, he dismantled hundreds of white plastic stackable chairs and reconfigured them into the skeleton of a full-size right whale, a weighty spiritual symbol among Northwest native cultures. In another recent piece, "Beer Cooler" (2002), Mr. Jungen carved a host of traditional native images into a disposable polystyrene cooler, filled it with Budweiser King cans and took it to the Hammertown art exhibition in Edinburgh.

At the opening, the perplexed crowd looked on, not sure what to make of it. "That's because it was in an art museum," Mr. Jungen said. "People knew not to interfere with the work."

But keeping people away was hardly the idea behind "Cooler." Mr. Jungen was giving alcohol back to the Europeans, centuries after European colonialists had introduced it to native North Americans, with ruinous results. So he took it upon himself to break the ice, withdrawing a beer, pulling the tab and taking a sip. "I wanted to make sure that people knew this was my gift so I helped myself," he said, chuckling.

Was he kidding? Yes and no. Sanctity is not one of his priorities. As, with the



Brian Jungen's new installation turns sewing tables into a basketball court; below, his "Prototype for New Understanding No.5."



### Brian Jungen

*Triple Candie, 461 West 126th Street. Through March 14.*

Nike masks, or the Triple Candie project, "Cooler" treads a line between humor and the politically incorrect. "I don't think all my work employs humor," he said. "Some of it does, but incidentally. It's more a sense of the absurd." Mr. Jungen's dual heritage could be interpreted as a license to take jabs at both sides of it, but it's a notion he disavows. "There are so many people willing to burden me with certain ideas of identity politics," he said. "So it's very tricky. There's a certain nuance of Native Canadian identity, but I'm not necessarily interested in exploring my identity as an individual. I'm more interested in cultural identity in general."

Mr. Jungen sees the Harlem work as a broadening, not abandoning, of his basic themes. "A lot of people will look at what I've done and predict that I'll be doing a "certain kind of work all my life," he said. "But I'm interested in all sorts of things. If I could reduce it down to my most basic take, I would say I like to dismantle reality and absolutes."

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Rugoff, Ralph, Essay from brochure for the exhibition “Brian Jungen: Capp Street Project 2004,” CCAC Wattis Institute for Contemporary Art, San Francisco, CA, January 15 - February 14, 2004

## CAPP STREET PROJECT 2004 BRIAN JUNGEN

With disarming conceptual economy, Brian Jungen’s sculptures fuse seemingly opposite ideas and aesthetics. Transforming readymade forms and objects, they conflate tropes of the contemporary and the traditional, the mundane and the precious, the spectacular and the museological, the handmade and the mass-produced. The Vancouver-based artist has reconfigured Nike sneakers into “prototypes” of Northwest Coast masks, fashioning headgear out of footgear. Remaking a disposable artifact of the global economy—the wooden shipping pallet—he has handcrafted sculptures that recall the industrial elegance of Donald Judd’s minimalism.

Animated by such sly semantic and formal reversals, Jungen’s approach comprises a rhetorical mode of art making. It troubles, and complicates, the ways in which we assign identity and meaning to material objects and visual codes. It questions the categories we use to make sense of our culture(s), and of contemporary art as well. In the process, it also communicates a heady sense of the impurity of all aesthetic and cultural production, including our most cherished models of authenticity.

Jungen’s Capp Street Project, an untitled sculptural installation, further elaborates this hybrid approach of artistic and social inquiry. It is inspired by an unlikely pair of artistic and architectural monuments from the twentieth century: Charles and Henry Greene’s 1908 Arts and Crafts-style Gamble house, and Gordon Matta-Clark’s 1974 *Splitting*, a New Jersey suburban home that the artist cut in two, from top to bottom. The Gamble home provides the basic blueprint: Jungen’s project is essentially a crude scale model of the house’s exterior, constructed with inexpensive plywood sheeting and bereft of even major details such as windows and doors. Additionally, Jungen’s model has been roughly quartered, with each section placed atop two-foot-high plywood pedestals that are equipped with casters. When pulled apart from each other, the four sections suggest an exploded architectural model.

The structure’s interior has been turned into an idiosyncratic library housing materials on architecture and crafts. Shelves and glass-encased cabinets, as well as upholstered plywood reading benches and a study table, have been built into the scale model’s existing nooks and corners. The books on display include rare publications lent by the artist, in addition to bound volumes of periodicals and various tomes borrowed from the California College of the Arts library. Students and faculty at the college who wish to read these publications will use Jungen’s installation as a study center. Thus his project will partially transform the function of the Logan Galleries: no longer simply a space

for exhibiting contemporary art, it will now serve as an integral part of the school’s research facilities, a place where people come to study the recent history of crafts and architecture. At the same time, Jungen’s sculpture-cum-library indirectly raises questions concerning the educational value of contemporary art itself, while reminding us that we inevitably “read” aesthetic artifacts through our knowledge of the past.

Beyond doubling the gallery’s functional identity, Jungen’s project also provokes us to reconsider the ways that we categorize or pigeonhole works of art. His Capp Street Project confounds such attempts on account of its ambiguous, multiple identity: it is at once a contemporary art installation, a library annex, a type of hybrid furniture including seating and shelving, and an architectural model. Its composite aesthetic is equally difficult to pin down. Though based on the Gamble house, the structure’s walk-in scale removes it from the realm of conventional architectural models, leaving its appearance in a kind of no-man’s-land between playhouse, shelter, and three-dimensional representation. Its windowless exterior, meanwhile, gives the impression of a slightly abstracted form, evoking an eccentric wooden crate as much as a house.

The work’s most jarring aesthetic fusion, though, is its use of raw, factory-produced plywood to represent an icon of Arts and Crafts architecture. With the Gamble house, Greene and Greene had sought to elevate a “low” architectural form, the bungalow, into a kind of protomodernist *Gesamtkunstwerk* in which every meticulously crafted detail and handfinished surface served a unified design statement. In contrast, Jungen’s model evinces a funky, lumpenproletariat demeanor: instead of intricate joinery, its structural seams betray the use of nail guns and glue. Rather than offering a symphony of rare woods such as the mahogany, redwood, maple, and cedar employed by Greene and Greene, it presents a haphazard medley of knotty, spray-painted, and stenciled plywood sheets.

Initially, this aesthetic reversal might seem like an ironic gesture—as if the artist were mocking the naive idealism of a movement that protested the dehumanizing effects of industrialization by reviving the production modes of medieval guilds. Against this blinkered and impractical utopianism, Jungen’s industrialized version of an Arts and

Crafts landmark spins the high-low dial yet again and wryly returns the bungalow to its 'working-class roots.

At the same time, however, Jungen's hybridizing approach also looks back to—or elaborates upon—the kind of stylistic morphing practiced by Greene and Greene, whose architecture amalgamated diverse influences ranging from Swiss chalets to Japanese temples to English cottages and Adirondack camps. (In fact, it is precisely this aspect of their work that initially intrigued the artist.) Instead of merely poking fun, Jungen's model denatures our stereotypical image of Greene and Greene's work and reinvents its polyglot character as a contemporary figure of cultural impurity.

An underlying irony here is that Greene and Greene's bungalow architecture currently functions as an emblem of an "authentic" California aesthetic, providing a template for countless real estate developers (as well as for the hotel Disney recently built alongside its California Adventure theme park). This kind of commodification of cultural history, with its attendant gross simplification of meaning, provides a background for Jungen's reference to Matta-Clark's *Splitting*. In cutting open a prosaic, boxlike house, Matta-Clark put into question the seemingly "transparent" values represented by such a single-family residence, transforming the image of a suburban home into something defiantly ambiguous. Was it a cradle for the sanctity of domestic life, or an isolating container for passive consumers? Matta-Clark's disorienting cuts served to open up its potential meanings in a dialogue around terms such as public and private, urban and suburban, stability and instability.

Physically as well as conceptually, *Splitting* created a type of "mutable space."<sup>1</sup> Jungen's Capp Street Project echoes this approach in different ways, including its nomadic mode of display: taking advantage of his sculpture's mobile pedestals, the artist has chosen to periodically change the orientation of its different sections. Occasionally they will be shown with their interiors facing out—an arrangement that makes it extremely difficult to read the four sections as pieces of a single architectural model. Through this ongoing spatial recontextualization, Jungen routinely unsettles the appearance of his "model," as if subverting its capacity to function as a representation, while making certain that its visual identity is as diverse as the many rooflines that enliven its upper structure.

The intertwined and concatenated logic of Jungen's work ensures that there is no central reference or issue around which its significance revolves. Though it plays with ideas associated with "social sculpture," its impact is not determined by its use as a prop of conviviality or education. Nor is it ultimately "about" a specific idea or subject. Instead it forges a visual language that accommodates the contingency of meaning, that foregrounds its cultural and historical variability. The borrowed and conjoined aesthetics that the artist puts into play serve as rhetorical hinges, or turning points, in a conceptual maze of linked ideas and allusions. There is no "solution" that we might discover upon escaping this labyrinth; rather, we are prompted to continually revise and adjust our perceptions as we proceed through it.

This process includes our reevaluation of a term such as "crafts." In developing his Capp Street Project, Jungen was initially inspired by the recent name change of California College of the Arts (formerly California College of Arts and Crafts). The decision to drop the word "crafts" reflected, in part, a growing suspicion that it conjured anachronistic and negative associations for prospective applicants to the school. With its tree fort funkiness, however, Jungen's installation reframes the meaning of "craft," aligning it with a DIY anti-aesthetic that stands in stark contrast to the sheen and gloss of high-tech culture. On another level, this project also rewrites Jungen's own prior history—or at least the critical reception of his earlier work that stressed the value of the artist's painstaking craftsmanship. Here it is obvious that what distinguishes Jungen's approach is not a fetishistic mode of manufacture but a conceptual craftiness and a strategic engagement with the volatile nature of cultural identities.

That engagement entails, naturally enough, overturning, or commingling, many of our seemingly autonomous and clear-cut categories. 'And while the blurring of distinctions typically suggests a type of entropic activity, a passage from order to disorder, in Jungen's work it ultimately serves as a tool of critical and creative inquiry, provoking us to look, and think, with a curious, hybridizing vision of our own. It is a perspective from which no aesthetic language appears to be pure or authentic or natural, but from which, instead, we glimpse culture's profound intimacy with struggle and perpetual change.

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# BRIAN JUNGEN

## PROTOTYPES FOR A NEW UNDERSTANDING

Jens Hoffmann

**JENS HOFFMANN:** *Please tell me a little more about your personal background and your upbringing in Northern British Columbia. When did you move to Vancouver and how did you get involved with visual arts?*

**Brian Jungen:** I was raised in small communities in remote regions of northern BC. My mother was Dane-zaa, and my father was Swiss. When my parents married in the '60s, the government of Canada took away my mom's Indian Status and treaty rights because she married a white guy. At the same time, leaders in our Indian band [tribe] felt jilted by members renouncing (as they saw it) their culture by marrying outside the community. I think the erasing of her identity had a deep effect on her, and the family. She took steps to assimilate us kids into white Canadian society, which is why I went to public school, where I developed an inclination toward visual art. In 1988 I moved to Vancouver to attend Emily Carr College of Art and Design. In the last 15 years, my band has made huge advances in recovering from my mother's afflicted generation.

**JH:** *One of the main concerns in your work seems to be the issue of your own ethnicity. Being native-Canadian, you create works that deal with your cultural heritage and at the same time incorporate everyday items and pop cultural references that are strongly related to our global society. In particular I am thinking about works such as Prototype for New Understanding, which you have been making for a couple of years, that resemble native-Canadian ceremonial masks but are made out of deconstructed Nike sneakers. Can you speak a little bit more about this aspect in general and the masks in particular?*

**BJ:** *The work I have produced over the past four years exemplifies my ongoing interest in using the readymade object as a device to merge paradoxical concepts. Often, such concepts have raised questions of cultural authenticity and authority while simultaneously comparing the handmade over the mass produced. I attempt to transform these objects into a new*

hybrid object, which both affirms and negates its mass-produced origin, and charts an alternative destination to that of the landfill. I made the first "masks"—or "Prototypes" as I prefer to call them, as they don't function as masks, only mimic them—in 1998 at a residency at the Banff Centre in Alberta. The first couple were quite rudimentary, until I got a feel for the material. These were my first trials at object making. A lot of work before then was drawing-based, and was concerned with identity and representation. I didn't have much money back then, and drawing was an inexpensive and immediate method of communicating some of the ways I wanted to fuck with identity politics. I am not interested in connecting my work with specific claims to my ancestral history; I am more fascinated by the uncertain path of hybrid unions.

**JH:** *I am very interested in the way you exhibit the masks, usually glass vitrines, presenting them as anthropological relics. The works from the series Prototype for New Understanding are all based on Nike sneakers, especially the Air Jordan model. These shoes are made in South-East Asia, named after an African-American, sold all over the world, and you use them to create very specific cultural artifacts. I wonder if you see your work as a continuation of traditional mask makers in a globalized and overly commercialized world?*

**BJ:** *The vitrines reference the hermetic displays of traditional masks in anthropologic collections. I wanted the "Prototypes" to have the same institutional "authenticity." When I first exhibited the series in Vancouver, there were a few iconoclastic accusations, but most people understood my secular position. As I stated earlier, I do not call them masks, because they have never been used for ceremonial purposes (Native or basketball). I think the Prototypes suggest a new direction in looking at the commodification and marketing of specific cultural objects and practices, but I don't think traditional mask makers registered my position as a monumental shift. I always thought it was*



**From top:** Prototype for New Understanding #5, 1999. Nike Air Jordans, hair, 22 x 27 x 5; Prototype for New Understanding #12, 2002. Nike Air Jordans, hair, 23 x 11 x 12. **Opposite, from top:** Cetology, 2002. Plastic chairs. Installation view at Henry Art Gallery, Seattle; Shapeshifter, 2000. Plastic chairs. Courtesy Catriona Jeffries, Vancouver.



**Beer Cooler, 2002. Installation view at Fruitmarket Gallery, Edinburgh.**

interesting that in the past, as new European objects entered the commodity trade in the Americas, some common things like tobacco tins and buttons were incorporated into decorative motifs. Years ago I read some Levi-Strauss texts where he wrote about bricolage, and the endless variety of allusions applied to objects in totemic societies. In that respect, I could see my work as a continuation of an approach to object making, as seen from Levi Strauss' structuralist position (aside from the inherent problems with his anthropological observation).

**JH:** *Are the masks also a critique of the commercialization of your own cultural heritage?*

**BJ:** I never actually considered them to be a critique, or at least a censorious critique of commercialization. Of course I realized how the work would be read, but in terms of a critique of my own cultural heritage, I'm not sure what you mean. I am both dismayed and impressed by how the information technology arm of globalization has opened up possibilities for remote native reserves like mine. My band has discovered the marketability of its location and cultural heritage; and leaders are using platforms like eco-tourism, and destination game hunting to encourage members to launch commercial enterprises. Such ventures might confuse autonomy and community pride with profit margins, but it puts the individual behind the wheel of his or her own cultural exploitation. I think this kind of relationship is preferable to developing positive identities, especially considering the disparaging alternative: welfare.

**JH:** *Two pieces that suggest specific forms of cultural hybridity are Shapeshifter (2000) and Cetology (Bowhead) (2002). They both resemble two life-sized whale skeletons (one twenty-three feet long, the other forty-five feet long), as*

*one would find it in natural history museum. If one looks closer one realizes, however, that the skeletons are actually made of bits and pieces of cheap, white, plastic patio chairs. Can you tell me more about these works and their relation to the mythology of native Canadians?*

**BJ:** In the summer of 2000, I became fascinated by two museums in Vancouver: The Aquarium, and the Museum of Anthropology. I was interested in their shared roles in producing a kind of didactic and "super natural" mythology for the region. I thought it would be interesting to draw some parallels between the public's fascination with whales and Indians. Of course there is a long whaling tradition in the Pacific Northwest Nations cultures. Instead of presenting the work within the sympathetic framework of local mythology, I thought it would be more interesting to construct the pieces to resemble scientific specimens, but with a futuristic glossiness.

**JH:** *The topic of cultural hybridity, the so-called Third Space, the local versus the global, and so on, seem very much worn out these days. Do you see a danger of constantly being identified with a certain type of work and discourse? When I see the pieces you made most recently, I get the impression that you also feel the need to move on to other grounds.*

**BJ:** I know what you mean when you say that there is a danger of being typecast as an artist working in a specific discourse. My work follows my interests and investigations into many divergent directions. The work I made following art school was concerned with ways to overcome a kind of PC hangover, which I felt like I resolved with the Prototypes. The work I have been making recently has been more about formal investigations into the physical and symbolic dissecting of products and less concerned with the pathologies of globalization.

**JH:** *Can you tell me more about the exhibition at the Contemporary Art Gallery in Vancouver in 2001 and the two works you made for it? One was an outdoor and rather site-specific piece, Unlimited Increases the Divide, and one piece was exhibited in the gallery, Untitled, a stack of specially fabricated pallets.*

**BJ:** *Unlimited Growth Increases the Divide* is titled after Kathryn Walter's text piece on the facade of the old Contemporary Art Gallery (CAG) in Vancouver. The former CAG was close to the downtown eastside, and was on the ground floor of a welfare hotel. Walter co-authored the piece with George Rist, the owner of the hotel. In 1990, Rist refused to sell his building to developers who demolished the rest of the block to build an office tower. At the time of my exhibit, the CAG had moved to a new building in an area of Vancouver that was and is in complete redevelopment. The new space is attached to a condo high-rise, and three more towers were in mid-construction during my show. Because of all the construction, there was temporary hoarding built to cover the sidewalks, and this hoarding stretched almost around the entire block. There was a lot of publicity when the CAG moved into its new digs, so much in fact that I thought it detracted attention from the artwork, and the history of the CAG at its former site. Curator Keith Wallace worked with me to try to have this project realized; however, we ran into complications with the city and condo owners. We managed to compromise, and have a portion of the hoarding built on about half of the exterior of the gallery. The piece *Untitled* was also related to the construction sites in the neighborhood. I was interested in using Western Red Cedar, as it is the traditional carving wood of the West Coast, its meaning is very specific here. I had never actually built something from wood, and I was curious about the process of making a piece out of a classical sculptural medium. I built ten shipping pallets from the cedar, and stacked them casually in the gallery near the window. I wanted them to be displayed for the public, yet totally invisible. •

*Jens Hoffmann is a critic and curator based in Berlin.*

**Brian Jungen** was born in Fort St. John, British Columbia, in 1970. He lives and works in Vancouver. Selected solo shows: 2003: Henry Art Gallery, Seattle; Bard College, Annandale-an-Hudson, New York; Secession, Vienna; 2002: Catriona Jeffries, Vancouver; 2001: Contemporary Art Gallery, Vancouver; Art Gallery of Calgary; Canada.

Selected group shows: 2003: *The Moderns*, Castello di Rivoli, Turin; Nation, Frankfurter Kunstverein, Frankfurt; 2002: *Watery, Domestic*, Renaissance Society, Chicago; *Beachcombers*, Gasworks, London; 2001: *ARSOJ*, Kiasma Museum of Contemporary Art, Helsinki; 2000: *Message by Eviction: New Art from Vancouver*; Illingworth Kerr, Calgary; Konstakuten, Stockholm.