DECODING TONY HUNT

Making and wearing the masks of his people, he's the most complex figure in an unbroken family and tribal tradition

By SEÁN VIRGO

The culture heroes of the First Americans are shape-shifters, transformers, jokers. Raven, Coyote, Trickster, Mink, Howler: approach each of them with irony, for he'll dance gleefully out of reach the moment you've pinned him down.

His *voyou* grin mocks from the heart of a street gang or through the judas window of a penitentiary cell. You'll glimpse him in a baseball crowd, a beer parlour, the home of a chief of industry. He'll dock beside you in a fishboat, set up store in the high street, pass like a mask through seven generations of a chosen family. He's on the kids' cartoons (in both roles, naturally— Roadrunner and Wily Coyote rolled into one), but he's just as likely to be sprawled on a couch, watching those cartoons in a new town house, vodka and Orange Crush in hand, still dressed in the finery of the tacky-tourist party he hosted the night before. Hanging in his closet are the state robes of a prince of the realm. He's an ambassador, a boozer, a family man; and his faces stare with arch composure from the images of his kind that spring from the hands of his Elect: the artists of his people.

As Tony Hunt is certainly one of the Elect, and as he is, I believe, a culture hero of the Kwa-Gulth, I approach him with due irony, stealth and indirection. It's a question of history, artifice and tradition. History's sole constant is irony. Its only anchor is artifice. And Tony Hunt's art, always distinctive and sometimes luminous, can only be understood within a tradition.

June 28, 1914. The Archduke Ferdinand, in comic-opera regalia, bleeds to death in his open limousine. The chain reaction is under way: within four years the toys of the new century, the machine gun, the tank, the plane, the motion picture, will have changed everything. The Manchus have fallen, the Young Turks are in control, Lenin watches the headlines in Zurich, Zapata is riding in Mexico.

The day of Sarajevo, Edward Curtis was shooting Indians on the north-east tip of Vancouver Island. The author of the monumental *The North American Indian* had saved the "unspoilt" Kwakiutl till last, and had been planning a motion picture, *In the Land of the Head-Hunters*, for more than three years. A "village" had been built on Deer Island, across from Fort Rupert—four house-shells, roofless so that filming could be done by daylight. The traditional cedarbark clothes were no longer obtainable and were copied in raffia; the men were paid an extra 50 cents each to shave off their moustaches, and the women the same to wear nose-rings.

In the eternal present of Edmund Schwinke's still photos of the set there is always a figure beside Curtis, megaphone in hand, directing, interpreting, organizing. It is George Hunt, son of a Hudson's Bay factor and a Tlingit (Alaskan) noblewoman. Many of the cast are his relatives, or children by his Kwakiutl wife. And though the film impersonated a lifestyle that was mostly gone (after 100 years of contact and a 90 percent population loss from disease), the masks and the dances that Curtis preserved were authentic and familiar, and the housepoles—two of them carved by Charlie James for the set—were magnificent.

June 28, 1987. Three kilometres across the water from Deer Island is a small beach on the Fort Rupert reserve called *Mayudlstalis*, The Birthplace of Man. Above it stands a Kwakiutl big house. It is 15 metres long, 14 metres wide, and inside it a great-grandson of George Hunt is making a copy of one of the Charlie James poles.

The copy will be exact. "They know from me they'll get work that isn't a quarter inch out, anywhere."

The pole is in a style that has since been refined and developed by three generations of the Hunt family. In that sense it's primitive. But Tony Hunt sees the job as inseparable from his own, original work. "Copy-ability" is the prerequisite for an artist in his tradition. He insists on this: from copying come both technique and understanding, and both must be perfected before "creative-ability" can begin. They are never superseded—"In some ways," he says, "copying is finer work"—the job keeps the tradition breathing within the artist.

It pays well, too, needless to say. And the high-quality log demanded of, and supplied by, the commissioner will provide a fair number of offcuts from which masks, boxes, seats and screens can be made.

All round the big house workshop are other projects in various stages of progress. Spirit masks, canoe paddles, chief's seats, bentwood boxes. Some is journeyman work, some experimental; one piece (a Crooked Beak, the fourth in the great Cannibal Bird Mystery, the centrepiece of Kwakwala ceremony), is a major commission for a Canadian collector, for which Hunt will receive a five-figure sum. It is not markedly different from the one seen in Curtis's film 70-odd years ago.

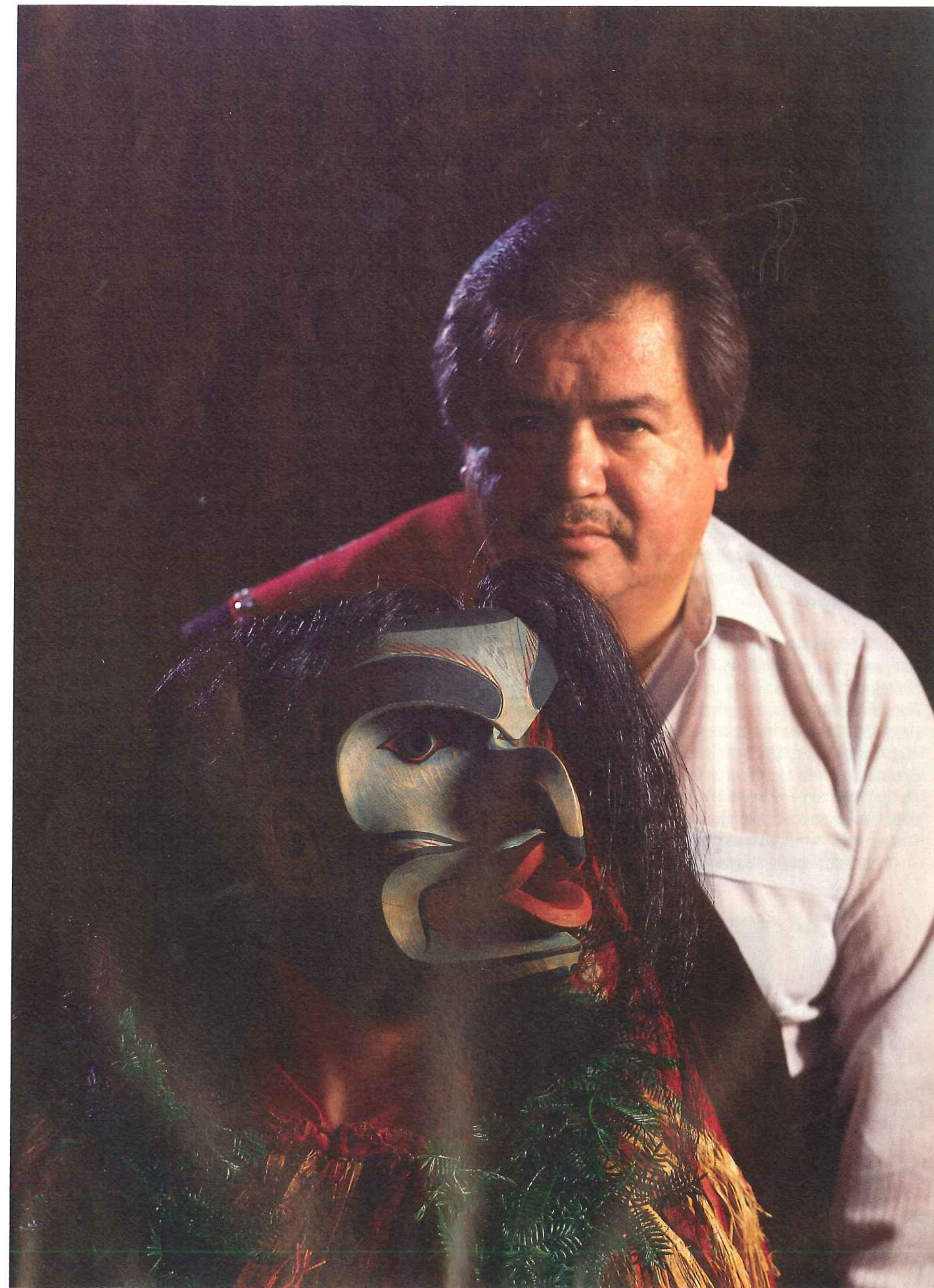
Tony Hunt moves from project to project, or pauses to talk, make coffee, load up the oil-barrel stove, stare out through the sliding glass doors at The Birthplace of Man. All the time, from a cassette deck on one of the work tables, come the drumbeats of the old *Tsetseka* dance-songs, and the singing of Tony's maternal grandfather, Mungo Martin.

Without Mungo there would be nothing here.

"When they put a tape-recorder in front of him at UBC, he knew right away what he could do with it. He told them: You can have the songs—I want one of those."

When Tony Hunt speaks of Mungo you sense that the love and respect in his voice is a still-evolving thing: that his understanding of the old carver's role has deepened since his death in 1962 and that now, as a chief and grandfather and atelier-head himself, he must copy, and refine for the times, that role.

"He would say on the tape: This is such and such a dance, and this is where it came from and this is how it was found and brought back to the



Tony Hunt and his son, Steven: descendants of George Hunt and, like him, preserving the culture.

JURGEN SVENDSEN PHOTO

people. And it is all right for me to tell you these things, because in 20 years' time you will understand why I did tell them."

October 16, 1987. Tony addresses the crowded big house in Alert Bay, as the Hamatsa (Cannibal) initiation ends and the family's great memorial potlatch for his father, Henry, gets under way. He speaks first in formal Kwakwala and then, for relatively few non-elders are fluent in the language, in English: "Some of you will not understand all that you see and hear now, but I want you to attend, because this is what our people have always done. This belongs to you."

Mungo's apologia becomes clear: these dances are, in the true sense, mysteries, supernatural heritage-gifts revealed to the people by small initiate societies at major potlatches and, especially, during the Tsetseka ("supernatural time") Winter Festival. "Progress" and the outlawing of the potlatch meant that even more of this heritage would be lost. Mungo Martin's tapes (he got most of the Kwakiutl elders to contribute) were more than a record—they were an initiation by the dead.

At a party after the Alert Bay potlatch, squeezed into the recreational vehicle rented by a friend for the weekend, I asked Tony to explain something in one of the dances (a weirdly hilarious sequence involving two women dancers and a jack-in-the-box tokwit *puppet).*

The Trickster gleam came into his eye, he began a mock hey-heya-heya-ha-hwa *deflective chant, and reached for his drink. It was a "mandatory" (an evil blend of Baileys and peppermint schnapps), in a half-pint plastic tumbler. The warning glint was replaced by a goofy Bugs Bunny grin: "Time for some power drinking," he said.*

Edward Curtis didn't have a tape-recorder—just the shorthand skills and phenomenal ear of William Myers, an ex-reporter who accompanied him to all the surviving tribes in the United States and Canada. Like Franz Boas before them, they got most of their information from George Hunt. Legends, stories, history, detailed and comprehensive explanations of custom and ritual. The Hunts have always played a major role in the preservation of the culture, and the most striking thing about their tradition is its conservatism. Many dances, songs, costumes and rituals could be reconstructed from the excellent documentation of Boas and Curtis, but they've refused to attempt this.

Only material that is indisputably family property (whether ancestral, won, bought, stolen or obtained through marriage) and which has been preserved intact without any shade of surmise, has been kept alive. The dances do not change, there are no new songs. It's not beyond the realm of possibility that some supernatural visitation in forest, beach, dream or, god knows, hotel room, could add to the store of song and dance and mask, but it seems unlikely. Tony's reaction to the claim by Robert Davidson, the Haida artist, that he receives ancestral songs from the wind at the bow of his boat, is a cynical shrug. The spiritual base of the Hunt Kwa-Gulth tradition, then, seems fixed.

But the material contribution of the artists to that base—the masks, the designs, the celebratory poles—does develop: refined, adapted, sometimes with flair and daring, extending but reinforcing the tradition. Copy-create-copy-create-copy-create....

It's a genuine sorrow to Tony that his children do not speak Kwakwala (though Tony Junior is already a fine carver and Steven an electrifying dancer). But it's only accident or, if you will, Destiny working through Mungo Martin, that preserved the language for *him.*

1952, Fort Rupert Village. *The kids are all playing with bows and arrows and Tony, aged 10, hasn't got one. "I was mad, and crying, and Mungo said to me:* Come on. *We went walking, he was looking for a yew tree, and we went down on the beach and he cut me a bow. It was only this long.*

"He took this envelope from his pocket. It was a letter from the museum, eh? Well, he could hardly read, and I was just starting to learn, and together we tried to make it out. I guess they want me to go down to Victoria and carve for them, *he said. Yeah, I think so, I said."*

The little yew-wood bow shot arrows twice as far as the other kids'.

A month later Tony had moved to Victoria with Mungo and his wife, Abaya'a.

His mimicry is wonderful. His first day at school, a scared and sullen child: "My name is Toony Hnt." And the teacher: "No, your name is Eugene Hunt." Doggedly: "I am Toony Hnt." And he was left-handed too.

Hunt's workshop is the Kwakiutl big house he built on the small beach known as The Birthplace of Man.

"I turned into a rowdy." He ran with a James Bay gang, tough, have-not kids in a town that pretends to English gentility. They made, and got into, lots of trouble and Tony was a prime instigator. He says that race wasn't relevant just then—all of the prejudices his buddies had, he shared. But all the time he was living in a house where Kwakwala was spoken exclusively, where the old man carved for himself, even after an eight-hour day at the Provincial Museum, where Abaya'a practised traditional crafts and sang the songs, and where Doug Cranmer and other determined elders of the people would meet to debate the protocol of potlatches (legalized in 1951). And Tony was making a few bucks himself, carving souvenir miniature paddles, and making a start at jewellery. Most of his work then (indeed, the initial emphasis of Mungo's copying and restoration job) was in the Northern Style: Haida, Tsimshian, Tlingit. Unknowingly, or perhaps unwillingly, he was being trained for something more than the toughest-kid-on-the-block award.

He was certainly that. As he grew older, race did become significant. When I was first getting to know him, in 1967, I mentioned his name to a lawyer, the late Robert Price.

"Oh, I know him," he said. "I defended him once. Three loggers picked on this little native guy on Yates Street, and wound up charging him with assault."

"Oh yeah," Tony says. "I got 11 assault charges in one year, but they only made one stick."

That one put him in Oakalla, where being native was no advantage at all, and when Mungo said: You going to be a convict all your life, or a carver? *it was a lifeline. The old man started to teach, and make formal gifts of, the spirit-gifts that were Tony's birthright.*

Tony's Aunt Helen (a child star in *In the Land of the Head-Hunters*) came down to The Birthplace of Man in 1986 for the opening of the new big house, and named it at once *Nawalagwatsi*, "House of the Supernatural," traditionally the name for a clan's ceremonial house in a village. That name, with that of the beach, is displayed on a computer printout, pinned to a crossbeam. Below it is an easel with the words of one of the Hamatsa songs scrawled on it, so Tony can memorize the words as he works. (They're in magic language, with only the faintest resemblance to modern Kwakwala, mostly *hey-heya-hup* to my ear. They're spirit-songs, after all.)

Above, slung from the two great spruce beams, is a hanging room—office space and a jewellery workshop with its own long window—which does not break up the space and authenticity of the huge room below. One day the vertical houseposts will be carved and painted; one day there will be a house-pole outside, facing the beach. Meanwhile an extension has been built along the south wall to house a hot tub, bathroom, laundry facilities, the generator.

Even in the House of the Supernatural, Tony's a gadget fanatic. There are log-splitters, numerous power tools, state-of-the-art devices and toys. "I just love tools," he says, and he collects them wherever he goes. An axe from Japan, a knife from Germany, blades from the United States. Like Mungo with that tape-recorder, like all his people when iron, glass, engines appeared, he sees the *use* in them: new technologies are to be taken in by the culture, not to replace it.

He claims this pragmatic acquisitiveness is what made the Kwakiutl (and especially the Kwa-Gulth, the distinctive, southern branch of that people) survive. That and the ability to discriminate—to see what was not of use. It sounds sectarian to me, but he insists that the second main reason they survived better than the other coast peoples was "We knew we had no use for the Catholic Church."

It's comical, really—he has gadgets for everything. *From the pockets of his L.L. Bean down vest spring Swiss army office kits, camera/tape-recorders, clock radios, voltometers, buzz-bombs, shavers, walkie-talkies. Cute and functional.*

His four-wheel-drive pickup has whistles to scare deer off the road ahead (range 180 metres), a compact disc player, cellular phone, seat-warmers. And in his town house, near the Port Hardy airport (he has a house in Victoria, too, with a robotic burglar alarm) there are three TV sets (one of them always on), every household appliance, and a telephone answering machine that takes your fingerprints. On the other hand, the closets in the town house are quite likely to disgorge ancestral and modern spirit- and art-treasures. Most of these form the wardrobe of the Hunt Family Dance Group. A priceless Chilkat blanket, a 1.5-metre hok-hokw *Cannibal Bird mask, an exquisite alderwood Raven rattle with a hawkfaced belly and a shaman and a*

The artist's tools, carved like miniature houseposts, rest on an unfinished chief's seat.

SEAN VIRGO PHOTOS

frog tongue-kissing on its back.

And the real *tools, the ones with which he does his finest mask and detail work, are themselves carved wonderfully, like miniature houseposts.*

Modern white artists, with neither atelier-training nor a tradition they choose to celebrate, would envy the assurance with which Tony Hunt embarks on a new project; the absolute confidence that the work will be, at the very least, good. "My role is no longer to prove quality," he prefaced a recent brochure for his atelier/store, *Arts of the Raven Gallery* in Victoria. "That battle has been won. Now we have standards, our standards, by which to judge Northwest Coast Contemporary Art. The future is limited only by the imagination and skills of the artist. These, coupled with love and respect for our ancestors, will maintain the art."

He can use that kind of language, just as he can, at need, use the formal chief's style of oratorical Kwakwala. But the James Bay vernacular says more, I think, and says it better: "I haven't been taught to fuck up. Everything I was taught was taught right. I don't know how to design wrong—I wasn't taught to design wrong."

In any case, most artists would recognize the work habits: the intense bursts of activity, punctuated by walks to the door, attention to the fire, tightening up cans of paint, simple daydreaming. As if any distraction, any evasion of the job, were welcome. And there are so many works in progress around the House of the Supernatural (atelier members just call it the workshop), that he can move from one to the other, make a few cuts or brush-strokes, amble away again. "If you look at it too long, you lose it." Rationalization? I think most artists (not exclusively visual ones) know that the real work is often being done in the "evasion" spells.

It's during one of these time-outs that he starts a new mask.

Bukwus. It begins as a technical exercise. Becomes a challenge and demonstration for the atelier.

A useless piece of wood. Split off from a cedar bolt and discarded because the grain flares and waves off diagonally. "I wanted to show them that you have to be able to master your material."

Then, as it progresses, the side-knife shaving into the stretch-marks of the grain (and contradicting the very qualities of red cedar that made it a carver's dream and the material basis of west-coast cultures), "I decided to try out some angles I've had in my mind for a while now."

Bukwus. *The wild man of the woods. A spirit as important to the Kwa-Gulth as its medieval equivalent, the Woodwose, was to European masons.*

He's a spook, I suppose; lurking in the forest and offering ghost-food (fox fire and rotten wood) to humans. But the only takers are ghosts already, for when, as he sometimes must, he leaves the trees and scuttles down the beach to gather cockles, the spirits of the drowned cluster around him and follow him home.

Out on the beach he's exposed, fearful of being surprised from behind, crouched, looking over his shoulder. He's always disappointed—the dripping ghosts come to him out of the kelp beds, but he fears the living more than they fear him. When he's brought in, heralded by buffoons, in the Dluwalakha *section of the dances, he huddles behind his blanket, peering out over his shoulder and cringing back into cover again. He's the shyness of the wild, trapped and paraded.*

Often Bukwus *is hidden, not just by the blanket and the ward of his shielding arm, but by a tangle of long hair. The audience sees brief and partial glimpses of his face. Marvellous, understated theatre. There's irony in Tony Hunt's investment of weeks of concentration and work on a mask that will be almost wholly obscured when it's used.*

He could make an excellent Bukwus, *carved and painted, in a day. This one will take five months.*

It sits on a bench in the workshop. Members of the atelier (all trained by Tony, but many, like Calvin and Richard Hunt and John Livingstone, now master carvers, achieved artists, running their own workshops as well as working together) check it out when they visit. It was started in May; in late June, Calvin comes down on some other business. He pauses for a moment before it. "Uh-huh," he grunts casually, and moves on. But his eyes were greedy, and *noting.*

"It's not the cuts, see—it's the angles that make the difference." Tony says this about five times. The tradition evolving, copy-create.... There are already *Bukwus* masks of genius. One in the Koerner collection at the University of British Columbia (A5268) is as disturbing and yearningly subhuman as one could imagine. One, by Willie Seaweed (the other real genius of Mungo Martin's generation) in the MacMillan Collection (A6242) is a rakish hint that some Kwa-Gulth performances had the flash and verve of a Kiss concert.

But though anyone working with Cannibal Bird masks owes a debt to Willie Seaweed, in the main Tony Hunt and the atelier members work in their own, distinctive tradition. It's a family one, with Mungo Martin's images as the prototypes. Mungo trained Henry Hunt trained Tony trained Calvin, Richard, John, trained Tony Junior. It goes on.

The permutations between mask, music, singer and dancer are almost limitless. A great mask, learned and used by a great dancer, is awesome and transformatory. Someone should sidestep the anthropology—the Kwakiutl have been done to death anyway: there are more data in the university libraries than the people themselves will ever need. Someone should concentrate on the theatre arts.

A good starting point would be Steven Hunt, say in the Bee Dance (Tony's first potlatch property and his first gift to his son), wearing his father's mask.

But this Hunt tradition, it's been sophisticated, I'm sure, by the years spent copying northern styles (and in Tony's case teaching young Haida and Tsimshian artists their own traditions and techniques). It goes back, too, to the first of the Hunts at Fort Rupert: Robert and his Tlingit wife, Mary Ann Ebbets. She brought the art of Chilkat blanket weaving. She was not prepared to share it, but trying to keep a Kwakiutl's hands off something that's useful and new is like trying to stop Raven from stealing the Sun. And she also brought two slaves who were artists.

To simplify: it seems to me that the Tlingit viewed and presented their art frontally. Their best poles had a stoic, staring quality reminiscent of Central American Toltec steles, while their house screens (like the Raven design that dominated the epochal Arts of the Raven *show at the Vancouver Art Gallery in 1967, or the frog-screen captured in the photo of Chief Shakes lying in state) are breathtaking two-dimensional artifacts: complete house walls, in fact.*

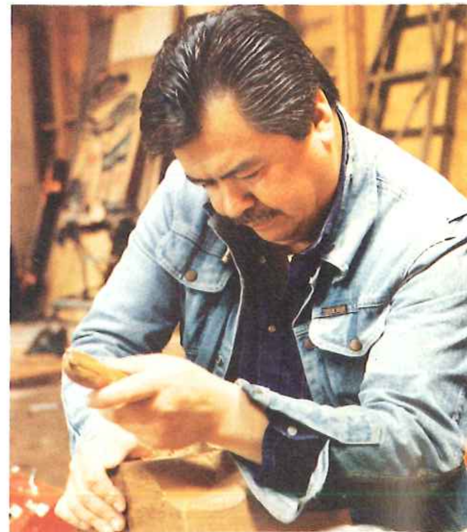
By contrast, the Haida (whose best poles had taken an abstract and monumental fluidity to its purest state) and the Tsimshian (who'd gone beyond formal mastery into rococo extravagance) always seemed to look around *their art. (A starting point with their poles is to see them as flat designs, wrapped round a half-cylinder and emphasized with relief carving.) Even their graphic design is at its best when applied, often deconstructedly, to a curving surface, as in some of their spruce-root hat paintings (Tom Price's Haida work, for example).*

But Kwakiutl carving was always, I think (Northern aficionados would say had not yet evolved beyond) three-dimensional, mimetic sculpture. And the possibilities for decorating those sculptures were not codified. "Kwakiutl artists," says Tony Hunt, "were not restricted to space or colours." So, the impact of Tlingit frontal design was vital to the evolution and refinement of Kwa-Gulth carving and decoration, especially in Fort Rupert.

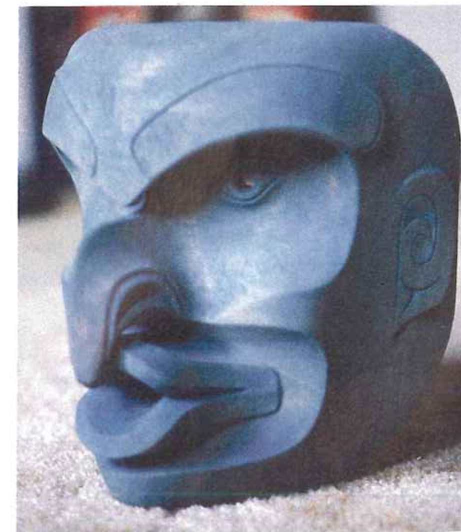
October 14, 1987. The House of the Supernatural is full of Hunts, furiously concentrating on their trade. There are only two days till the Henry Hunt potlatch down in Alert Bay and there's so much to do. Richard, John Livingstone and Tony Junior are turning out Wolf masks at a frightening rate (and they're beautiful ones, red and black brush-strokes pointing to the elegance of the slate-grey snouts). Children and teenagers are helping: sanding, laying down the basic paint surfaces. Copying and learning as the production line hits top gear. Symmetry being the essence of west-coast art, an apprentice can always be set to copy the other half of what the master has done.

All over the floor are the paraphenalia of the dance, and at sunset the mask-making will have to stop and the dance practice begin. Outside, at the south end of The Birthplace of Man, there's a boulder. It has been moving across the shingle since anyone can remember. When it reaches the north end of the beach, Time will stop. The world will be over.

The light fades, hurricane lamps are lit in the workshop, the headlights of cars and pickups twist down through the forest on the rocky track to the house. And for the next four hours the extended family, nearly 40 people, four generations, dance, while Tony Hunt stands, rattle in hand, betraying no impatience, encouraging the kids. It's both casual and formal, irreverent and deeply serious. Tony's Uncle Bill sits on a half-finished chief's seat, beats the drum, and sings. You remember that



It starts as a demonstration: from a defective cedar block Hunt begins the side-knife carving of the *Bukwus* mask.



It will take five months to complete. By October, *Bukwus* is a wood-skull with a base coat of blue-green paint.

with these people the old are respected—the title of "elder" is not an empty one.

As an elder himself and clan chief, Tony is most watchful of the young children, looking as Mungo did for signs of grace in them. His nephew Maurice delights him and fills him with awe. All the coast peoples believe in reincarnation, and the uncanny sophistication and zest in the little boy's dancing brings the past ("See—he knows all this stuff already") into the future.

The Bukwus *mask will not be ready for the potlatch. It's a personal exploration, and must take its own time. It sits on a chest up at the town house, all of its features refined and polished, the wood-skull taking on flesh already with the base coat of blue-green paint.*

It was raining outside this afternoon, and I had to crawl around on the broadloom, trying to photograph the mask without including a TV set or a dishwasher or a stereo in the shot.

Tony won't have time to think about this Bukwus *for a while, but there's another one that'll do just fine, down at the workshop.*

The hurricane lamps hiss, the male dancers move counterclockwise with the characteristic finger-fluttering cupped hands of *Hamatsa* initiates. The women move backward, palms outstretched, gesturing gracefully: inviting, supporting, controlling. The drum in Uncle Bill's hand, painted with a man's form wreathed by the two-headed *Sisiutl* serpent, is the heartbeat of the family.

The dancers need this kind of lighting. The first time I saw them, at The McMichael Canadian Collection in Kleinburg, Ontario, it wasn't until the power failed and the dance went on in the glow of emergency exit lights that I was able to forget the Adidas shorts and wristwatches, and see the power of that Cannibal Bird trio. I teased Tony about the Adidas that time and he answered with untypical moderation. Yes, he said quietly, it would be better to have underclothes that looked more like cedarbark. In fact, at the Alert Bay potlatch (on what must have been one of the most solemn occasions of his life—remembering his father, showing, claiming and "offering for criticism" all the artistic and spiritual rights and properties of his family) Tony wore jeans under his chief's regalia.

I think he knew from the start that my criticism had been foolish—maybe he had to think it through too. I see now that a complete dress-up would acknowledge a split between what was and what is. There is no such split, though as Tony Hunt exemplifies, there are bewilderingly different facets. But the potlatches and dances are not a kind of Colonial Williamsburg. The spirit world is not a part-time reality. The art is not a question of "good taste."

No wonder the Fort Rupert people thought Curtis "cranky" in his obsession with concealing any post-neolithic "intrusions" on their lifestyle.

October 20, Dusk. *The potlatch is over, much of the family dispersed. Tony Hunt, back in Fort Rupert, is exhausted and more than $50,000 poorer. The Birthplace of Man is quiet, empty; the House of the Supernatural is littered with cups, plates, bottles and coolers from the rehearsal. Here and there among the mess the unfinished pieces wait for their time. From this beach you can see two kinds of sea lions, eagles, often killer whales, all manner of birds. Tony is keeping a book for his grandchildren, a record of all the wild things he sees here. "When they grow up, it could all be gone."*

We walk down to the waterline. "You know," he says, "I saw a kingfisher last week. The first time I ever saw one." I'm dealing with the irony of a west-coast native not knowing one of the flashiest and noisiest birds in the region, when he goes on: "And I watched him hovering over the water, and then diving forward, hovering and diving, and I realized that the Kingfisher Dance does exactly that."

He locks up the workshop and we climb into the pickup. Marvin Gaye on the stereo. As we move away the lights glide down a cedar log by the door: Indian Log is spray-painted on its end. "Loggers get a real kick out of knowing a tree's going to be used for a pole," he says. Spanish moss hangs like wool from the trees at the forest edge behind us; the lights throw wavering shadows.

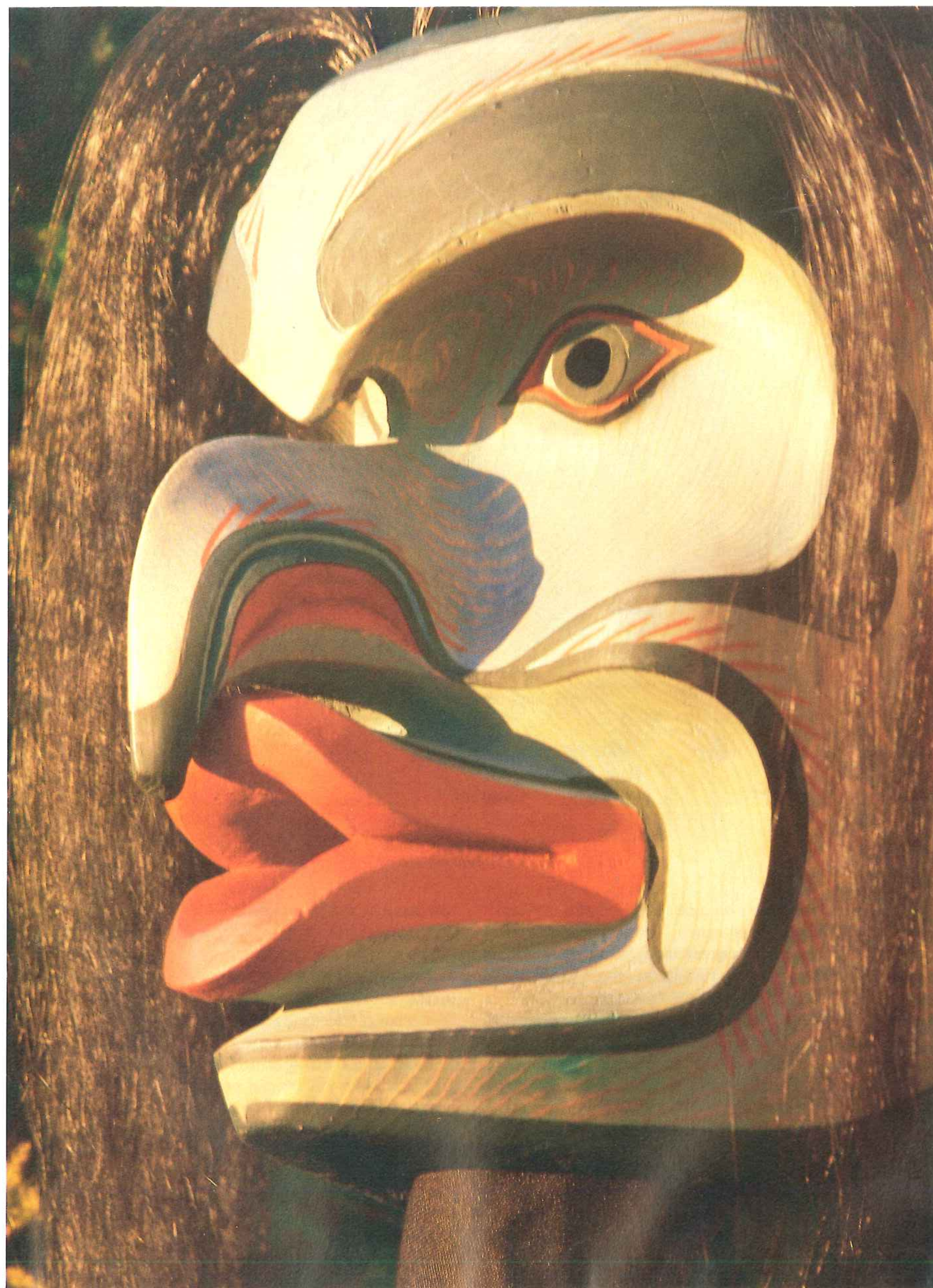
"Hell, Tony," I say, "you were kidding me about never having seen a kingfisher. What were you trying to say?" His grin is foxy in the lights from the dash. He turns the bend in the track, shifts out of four-wheel drive on the fly and rockets up through the forest toward the airport. Now the lights are bouncing back from the trees into the cab. He looks down at the notebook on my knee and the pen vainly jabbing and skating on the page, and he starts to laugh. "This road was designed for fast writing!" he says, and turns Marvin Gaye up loud.

Three footnotes. First, my insistence that native art must be judged within the tradition. I believe this, but I'm convinced that useful and valid judgments can be made without prolonged study. One only needs to look at a few masterpieces, to treat the museums as if they were art galleries. The basic exercise of looking at the two bracelets juxtaposed in Bill Holm's *Northwest Coast Indian Art: An Analysis of Form* is truly illuminating. One bracelet is good, the other (a Charles Edenshaw piece) is a masterpiece. That small example of comparative art criticism is the best entrée I know to this field.

Second. Almost conversely, as my deliberately naïve, even romantic, approach to the *Bukwus* indicates, I would argue as strongly for a childlike approach to the Kwa-Gulth masks and figures. A simple response to what works, emotionally and dramatically, in a human, even melodramatic, sense. The innocent eye, in fact. Anthropologists are apt to imply that native people all understood their mysteries—almost by definition, if you think about it, this could not have been true.

And thirdly, an update. When I phoned Tony Hunt in November to check a few facts, he had gone down to the United States to watch some football. He's got this wonderful cushion, see—posturepedically designed for stadium terraces. And inside there's this neat compartment with room for a bottle, glasses, mixer. Polyurethane, so you can have ice cubes too. The *Bukwus* hangs now in the Arts of the Raven Gallery on Douglas Street, eyebrows painted in kelp-green, lips and ears picked out in vermilion. And between touchdowns and nips from the cushion (not mandatories, surely) maybe Tony will get a handle on those cheek patterns he's been thinking about for a while.

SEAN VIRGO IS A POET AND FICTION WRITER. HIS LATEST BOOK IS SELAKHI *(EXILE EDITIONS).*



The finished *Bukwus* mask: the spirit world is not a part-time reality: the art is not a matter of "good taste."

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