







**Society of Yukon Artists  
of Native Ancestry**

PRESENTS

# **NANGHÁGHINDĀ**

(Watch over the Earth)

A KASKA NATION ART EXHIBITION

May 22 – July 20, 2003

YUKON ARTS CENTRE GALLERY

## **The Soul of a Nation**

Kaska art speaks volumes. It speaks of our land. It speaks of our people. It depicts the very soul of our nation.

For Kaska artists, most materials come from the land that sustains us. A well-tanned caribou hide, a moose horn, a good birch tree – these serve as our canvas. Inspiration surrounds us in the mountains, rivers, and forests that we call home. Our artists revel in the mountain cathedrals of our landscape more awe-inspiring than any works touched by the hand of mere men.

If you listen as you examine our antler carvings, you will hear a splash as a grizzly bear dips his great paw into a pristine river with lightning speed to catch a fearless trout.

If you listen as you glimpse at our masks, you will hear the old stories that the elders still pass on to the young.

If you listen as you gaze at Kaska beadwork, you will hear the primeval rhythm of life, like the beat from an ancient prayer song.

These are my people, and this is our art. This is the song of our single soul. It is a song as old as the stones, the sky and the water, and it will echo in our people forever.

**by Dave Porter**

## **A Kaska Nation Art Exhibition**

Nanghághindā (Watch over the Earth) is an exciting collection of Kaska art from communities throughout the Kaska territories. The Kaska people have always been closely partnered with the land and the exhibition illustrates this fact. The Kaska artisans often use materials that are indigenous to their traditional territories such as moose antler, sheep horn, wood, hide, fur and feathers. The imagery is usually based on their surroundings, the animals and the flowers, and related to the Kaska oral history.

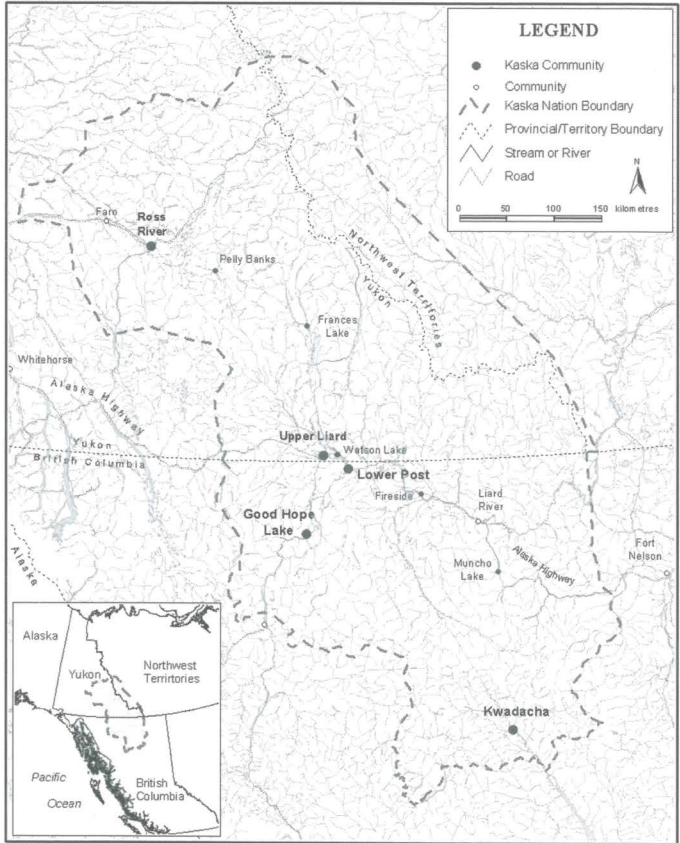
This collection is a blend of art based on a long history of Kaska traditions and art influenced by the present day world. Some artists are producing work learned decades ago from their grandparents, while others

are taking a more modern approach to their creations, using new material and images, and getting more formal training.

With all the works presented here, the more traditional and the modern, we do see a common link with every artist, their desire to preserve the Kaska culture.

The Society of Yukon Artists of Native Ancestry is proud to present this exhibition in cooperation with the Yukon Arts Centre and the Kaska Dena Council and the Kaska Tribal Council.

**by Ukjese van Kampen  
Linda Polyck**



**Kaska Nation  
Boundary Map**



## THE KASKA DENA

### Geography

The Kaska Dena have lived in their territory for tens of thousands of years, long before the existence of provincial and territorial borders. In B.C., the Kaska Dena belong to the Dease River Band Council at Good Hope Lake; the Daylu Dena Council near Watson Lake, Yukon, and the Kwadacha First Nation at Fort Ware, north of Prince George. Kaska Dena also live in B.C. communities of Fireside and Muncho Lake, between Watson Lake and Fort Nelson. Two Yukon First Nations – the Ross River Dena Council and the Liard First Nation are part of the Kaska family as well.

The artists included in this Kaska Nation art exhibition are from the communities of Ross River, Watson Lake, Upper Liard, Lower Post and Good Hope Lake.

These communities share a history marked by several major events. As with many aboriginal people, the fur trade brought the first major changes to the hunting and gathering society that was prominent in the North. As a result of the fur trade, seasonal camps often became permanent settlements. Ross River began to attract permanent residents after a trading post was built there in 1903 (*Dene Dechen Tah Néde', Living in the Bush*). In 1942 the American army built the Canol Road from Norman Wells in the NWT to Whitehorse (Ross River, Yukon). This road opened up Ross River to the rest of the world.

Watson Lake is the service community for the southeastern Yukon. The community of Watson Lake was established in 1939 when the government decided to build a series of airports across the north to open it up. Upper Liard adjoins Watson Lake and both communities lie within the

traditional territory of the Liard First Nation, which is part of the Kaska Tribal Council. The B.C. Kaska community of Lower Post is about 15 minutes south of Watson Lake.

Kaska territory is located within the high plateau country of the Subarctic Cordillera. The Cordillera is an area distinguished by boreal forests, large numbers of rivers and lakes, both large and small, muskeg swamps, extensive icefields, glaciers, grassy patches, tundra and mountains (McClellan, C. & Denniston, G., *Environment and Culture in the Cordillera*).

## **Culture**

The Kaska were a semi-nomadic culture, dependent upon hunting and gathering. The social structure and spiritual life of the Kaska people helped create a balance with the environment that enabled survival. Reciprocity was

part of the social structure. Respect for the land and animals that were harvested were believed to contribute to success in hunting (*Dene Dechen Tah Néde', Living in the Bush*). Everyone could expect to eat and also to share in the work. When the men left on a hunt, women managed the camps (*Donnessey, M., personal communication, 2003*). When chores were complete, the women would tell children the stories passed down through generations. Sometimes the stories would go on for days (*Atkinson, W., personal communication, 2003*).

Society was arranged into two moieties, Wolf and Crow. Traditionally Kaska society is matrilineal. Intermarrying within clans was not permitted; a Wolf marries a Crow, preferably from far away. Such practices kept trade lines open and allowed for interacting socially. Historically, children took the name of their mother (*Dene Dechen Tah Néde', Living in*

*the Bush*). Poole Field (1913) includes in one of his letters home, the statement that, "The country is owned by women – any man from a foreign tribe taking a wife is supposed to hunt in the country his wife belongs to" (*Dene Dechen Tah Néde', Living in the Bush*).

The semi-nomadic culture of the Kaska Dena did not provide the time or opportunity to create monumental works of art such as you will find among the aboriginal settlements along the B.C. coast. A readily available food source is required before a permanent residence can be established. To survive in the North the people followed the caribou and set up fish camps according to seasonal runs. This had a very specific affect upon Athapaskan "artwork". Anything that didn't have to be carried was left behind so art was incorporated into utilitarian items. Clothing, hunting packs, and gun cases were among the most embellished of items.



Hunting equipment such as quivers, knife sheaths and later gun cases and ammunition belts were often beautifully decorated with quillwork, seeds, pieces of bone, paint, fringes and fur (Honigmann, 1954). Hunting bags or packsacks were also decorated, although not as elaborately as the gun case and ammunition belt. Sewing bags were also decorated. Smoking bags worn with ceremonial costumes were worked very elaborately (McClellan, 1975). It is not surprising that a culture that depends on the environment and lives as closely to it as does a hunter/gatherer society would choose to give the greatest decoration to the tools which it depends upon to survive.

The fur trade introduced beads in the late eighteenth century which were immediately accepted as a valuable trade item and quickly replaced the porcupine quills and seeds that were being used at that time (Duncan, 1989).

The size and shape of the beads changed the styles and designs that were formerly popular. Quillwork was used to fashion geometric designs, which were replaced by beaded flowers, leaves and berries (Duncan, 1989).

The acceptance of beads was probably due to several factors, the most obvious being economics, and the availability and appeal of a new medium. Trading posts encouraged the creation of beadwork in floral motifs, popular during the Victorian era, for sale to European markets (Duncan, 1989). The patterns of the day could be copied from magazines and catalogues. In 1910 one observer noted that the Ladies Home Journal inspired some of the Athapaskan bead workers (Sheldon Jackson Museum, 2002).

According to W.L. Hardisty (*The Loucheux Indians*, 1867, pp. 311-320), beads were used as currency among the middle and upper Yukon Athapaskans (Duncan, 1989). Wealthy Athapaskans

wore beads, which could be several yards long, around the neck, thrown over the shoulder and twisted in the hair. Henry N. Michael (*Lieutenant Zagoskin's Travels in Russian America*, 1967, p. 246) tells how in 1840, ten pounds of beads, not an unreasonable amount for a rich man to wear, would be worth around 150 beaver pelts or around 1,000 silver rubles (Duncan, 1989). Beads weigh more than quills so it is possible that the amount of beads worn may not have been so plentiful had there not been a fairly recent technological innovation in transportation – the dog team (Graham, A., *personal communication*, 2002).

Only a very skilled hunter and trapper, a male ideal in Athapaskan society, could afford a wealthy display of beads. Detailed and skilful sewing and beading, a feminine ideal, enhanced a man's status and spoke of his wife's devotion (Duncan, 1989).

What we know of the history of the Kaska culture and art is a result of the oral traditions, or stories of events, memories, and customs passed down through the elders. With respect to written accounts there are the diaries of those who lived in, and operated the trading posts, during the years the fur trade flourished. The Kaska Nation is mentioned in the written accounts of many academics that spent time in the Yukon.

### **Kaska art and handcrafts**

The written accounts from the early 1940's by anthropologist John Honigmann who spent a year in Lower Post and another in Upper Liard is considered the most complete academic work. His ethnography, *The Kaska Indians: An Ethnographic Reconstruction*, contains detail about culture and artistic conventions at that time.

Honigmann noted that color was significant. The Kaska derived the color they used from natural sources, the red from ochre, black from charcoal and blue from places in the earth around the Pelly Banks area. The pigments were mixed with either grease or pitch and then applied with fingers. Red ochre was highly valued and believed to possess spiritual power (*Honigmann, 1954*).

Most of the materials used were readily available in the environment around them or were trade items. The white spruce was used for 60 different purposes including tanning smoke, dye for moosehide, carving out utensils, tools, toys, weapons and fishtraps (*Nelson, 1983*). Some of the other commonly used and available materials were animal skins such as moosehide, caribou and the white hare; willow root and spruce root; porcupine quills, bone, sheep horn, hooves and birch bark.

In the 40's when Honigmann was working on his ethnography, the Kaska of Upper Liard were still using porcupine quills for decoration. The women sometimes used paint to decorate the clothing they made. The designs were symmetrical, often diagonal stripes within a band or zigzag bands. Pieces of bone painted blue and red were hung from coats. Fringes and fur trim was used. Ornamental outer belts and headbands were worn by men and women. These were sometimes solid quillwork, woven on bow looms (*Honigmann, 1954*). Porcupine quills had another use. They were used with charcoal for tattoos. Either sex wore tattoos, which were short parallel lines on the upper surfaces of both arms (*Honigmann, 1954*).

We can assume that what Honigmann recorded was an account of customs, which had for the most part survived generations. In collective cultures the memory for traditional

design was considered more important than being original (*Mills, 1957*).

## **Contemporary Kaska art**

Many contemporary Kaska artists are inspired by images related to the legends and stories that are part of their culture. They are very clear that they do this to pass on the oral culture that has already survived against incredible odds. The Athapaskan culture has a strong oral tradition that is flexible without loss of cultural meaning and significance (*Cruikshank, 1990*).

Not all artists are focusing on Kaska legends as their inspiration. There are artists who make political statements by recording what they see around them, and who they are with in that social environment. There are artists inspired by the animals and the land they grew up in. Some of the work being done is to preserve the

traditional garments and accessories made with the home tanned hides, cloth, and beaded with certain motifs. Still other artists are interested in doing something non-traditional with, and without, traditional materials. Many of the materials such as birch, tanned hides, and antler are available within the community. Most of the carvers make their own tools.

The majority of Kaska artists have not had any formal training, with the exception of an occasional carving workshop. Although he no longer lives here, Dempsey Bob, a well known Tahltan / Tlingit carver who works in the northwest coastal style (*First Nations Art, 1999*) presented a carving workshop in the north that many of the artists featured in this exhibition attended. When an artist presents a workshop, the style the artist works in is also presented and as a result many contemporary Kaska carvers also learned the coastal style,

but they are rejecting it, as they strive to return to a distinct Kaska style.

In many ways this is a time of self-definition for the Kaska Nation. They are setting up governing bodies, speaking and recording the language of their people, and preserving traditions and stories in text, clothing, and visual art.

**by Marlene Collins**



**WILLIAM ATKINSON**

*Untitled* 2002

birch, horse hair and moose teeth

COLLECTION OF DAVE PORTER

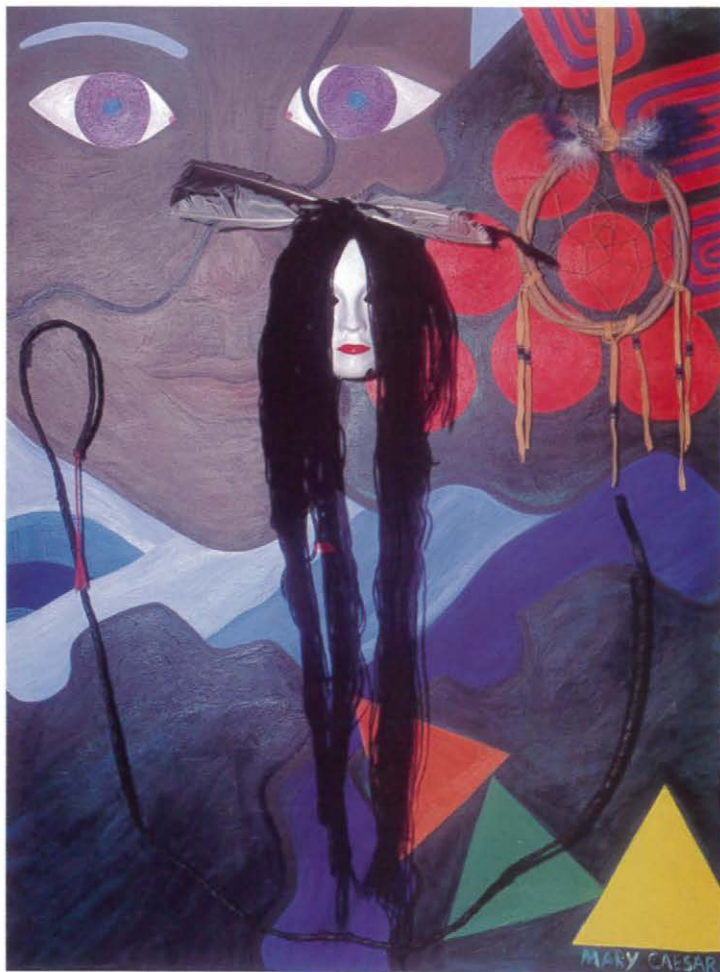


PHOTO BY UKJESE VAN KAMPEM MODEL: KARI DICKSON

**JOSEPHINE CAESAR**

*Grad Dress with Eagle slippers* 2001  
deer hide and beads

COLLECTION OF DOROTHY DICKSON



**MARY CAESAR**

*Childhood Memories* 2003 36 x 48  
mixed media on canvas



**MINNIE CAESAR**

*Untitled* 2003

moose hide, beads and beaver fur



**FRANKLIN CHARLIE**

*Fannin* 2003  
moose antler

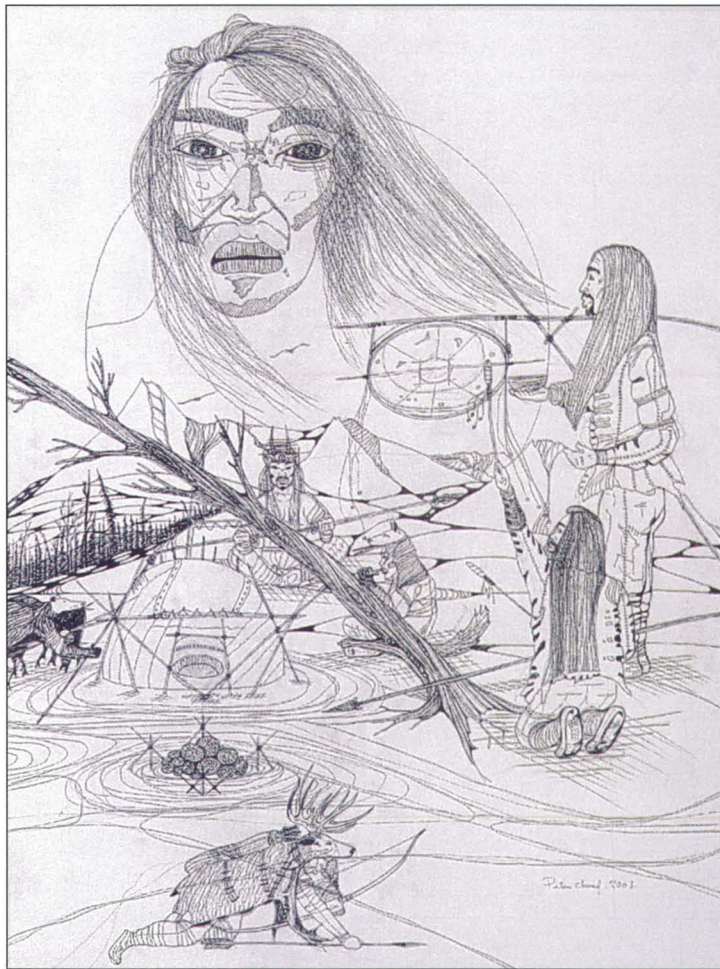




**PETER CHARLIE**

*Untitled* undated  
hide and beads

COLLECTION OF LIARD FIRST NATION



**PETER CHIEF**

*Dena ya gee chot*  
*(Before Hunting very dangerous animal)*  
2003 18" X 24"  
ink on canvas



**GERALD DONNESSEY**

*Untitled* 2003

pine, hide, beads, eagle and hawk feathers



**MIDA DONNESSEY**

*Untitled* 2001

moose hide, silk thread, cotton and sinew

COLLECTION OF ALLEN EDZERZA



**JOSEPH GLADA**

*Sha-Dena (Bear-man)* 2002  
birch, horse hair and eagle feather

PRIVATE COLLECTION



**LEDA JULES**

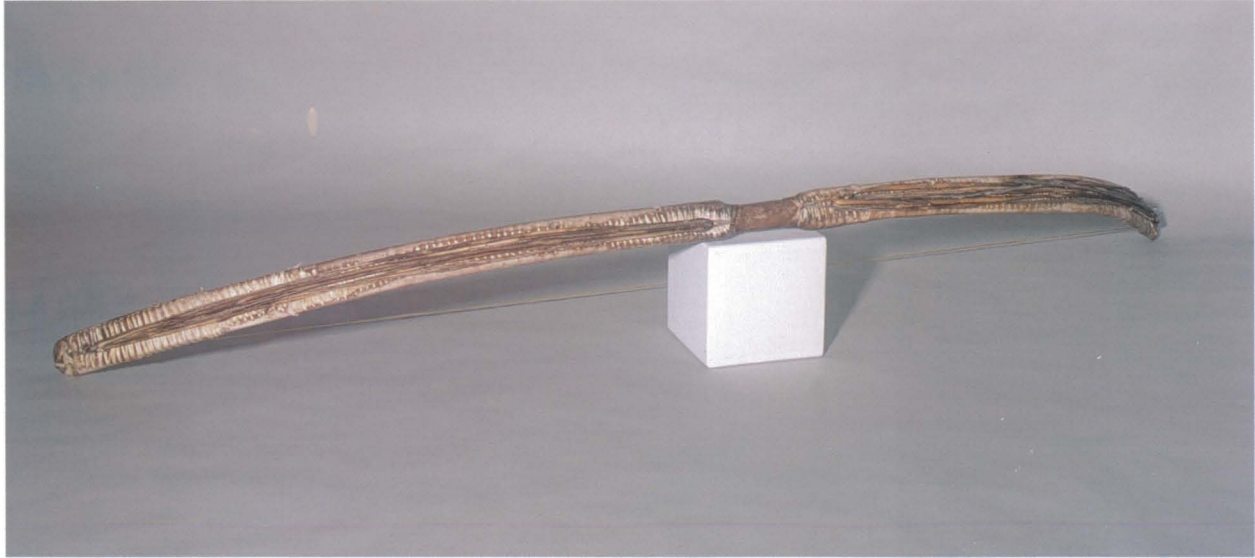
*Untitled* 1999  
moose hide, felt and beads



**DENNIS LUTZ**

*Northern Knight* 2001 16 x 20  
acrylic on canvas board

COLLECTION OF HAMMOND DICK



**RUSSEL MAGUN JR.**

*Bow* 2003

birch, moose and caribou raw hide





**GORDON PETER**

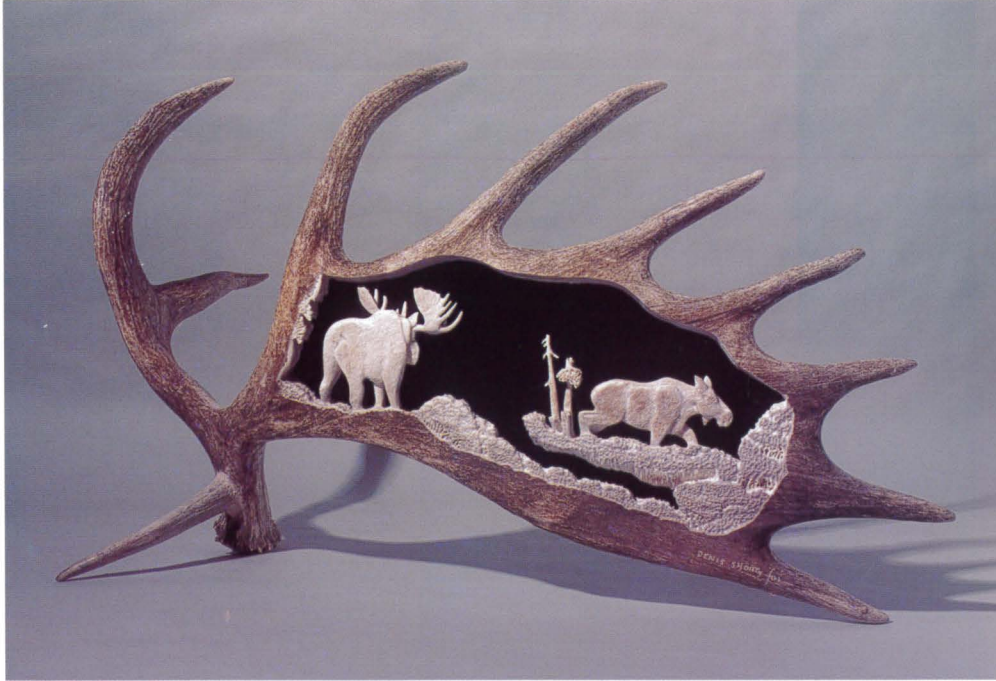
*Untitled* 2002  
moose antler, buffalo horn,  
horse hair and eagle feathers

COLLECTION OF KASKA DENA COUNCIL



**SYDNEY PYE**

*Bush Man* undated  
poplar, horse hair and paint



**DENIS SHORTY**

*Untitled* 2002  
moose antler and felt

COLLECTION OF KASKA DENA COUNCIL



**NORMAN STERRIAH**

*The Negotiators* 2002  
birch and horse hair

COLLECTION OF DAVE PORTER



**KEVIN STEWART**

*Eagle Nest* 2002  
wood

COLLECTION OF KASKA DENA COUNCIL



**EARLY RAY STONE**

*Knife & Sheath* undated  
moose hide, bone and steel

## **WILLIAM ATKINSON**

William Atkinson was born in the old Ross River village and lived there until he moved to Watson Lake in 2002. He was given the name Nezedi Ta (Standing Man) by his grandfather. William works as a Kaska interpreter and language teacher when needed, and at his art the rest of the time.

The masks he carves represent stories he grew up with. He re-creates spirit-forms from Kaska legends, giving them distinctive features and expressions, such as the mouth turning downward in a howl. William's masks are created using natural elements including birch, cedar, horsehair, porcupine quills and natural plant dyes. He also makes his own carving tools with birch handles and steel blades bound in nylon cord and epoxy. Aside from wood, William also carves in mastodon ivory and uses sheep horn for spoons. The work that he is doing now is helping to keep the legends of his people alive.



PHOTO BY MARLENE COLLINS

## **JOSEPHINE CAESAR**

Born in Watson Lake in 1963, Josephine Caesar was raised by her aunt and uncle, Jenny and Hudson Caesar. She describes her upbringing as both traditional and very religious. She spent summers hunting, boating, fishing and swimming and her winters attending residential school.

As an adult she learned to make hide slippers and to couch beads from her mother-in-law, elder Bessie Dixon. Later, elder Isabell Tisiga taught her how to sew and Josephine feels very honoured to have inherited the sewing cans of both elders when they passed away. Though much of her material is ordered in, Josephine says she uses home-tanned hide when her grandmother, Minnie Caesar, has any to spare. Most of Josephine's work is hand sewn and she designs her own clothes.

As well as clothing, she makes packs, assorted bags and pouches. She remembers when children all had packs and moccasins that had been made for them, a custom that died about 20 years ago, and one that Josephine would like to see brought back. Josephine works on her crafts with other women and shares skills and patterns.



PHOTO BY UKJESE VAN KAMPEN

## MARY CAESAR

Mary Caesar is a Kaska Dena of the Liard First Nation. She was born in 1955 in Upper Liard, Yukon. She is in her second year of a Fine Arts Program at Malaspina University College in Nanaimo, B.C. and has trained in painting, drawing and sculpture.

Mary prefers to use acrylics on canvas because of the variety and expressive potential of the paint colours, the pleasure she gets from a brush stroking canvas and the freedom of movement this medium gives her.

Equally comfortable working with representational or abstract forms, her inspiration comes from her own experiences, her culture and her imagination. Her influences are varied, coming from a broad spectrum of artists and artistic styles over the course of art history: Leonardo da Vinci, Michelangelo, Cezanne, Picasso, Artemesia Gentileschi, Grandma Moses and Emily Carr. Mary plans on attending the Emily Carr Institute of Arts and Design next. She still returns home every summer and plans to eventually teach art to the Kaska Dena. She feels that it's important to address the issues that affect First Nations peoples and to promote awareness of them through her artwork.



PHOTO SUPPLIED BY ARTIST

## MINNIE CAESAR

Born of the wolf clan in 1924 in the Frances Lake area, Minnie Caesar has lived all her life throughout the Kaska Territory. She was very young when she lost her parents. Her sister and her grandmother, Minnie Donnessey, shared in her upbringing.

From them and from Kaska elders, she learned traditional values and beliefs. She learned the Kaska laws, the language and respect for all things. She was taught how to make dry meat, to tan moose hides, to sew and to fill out snowshoes.

At a very young age, she learned, by watching her sister and other women, to sew traditional footwear, vests, pack-sacks, dog-packs, coats, and other items. She practiced her craft every day. Minnie followed patterns and created her own by observing nature. From the summer and fall hunts, she would gather materials for her projects: beaver, moose, and caribou hides. She would tan the hides and also use the sinew for sewing.



PHOTO BY UKIESE VAN KAMPEN



## FRANKLIN CHARLIE

Franklin was born in 1946 on the banks of the Pelly River just upstream from Ross River. He grew up with his family, speaking the Kaska language and living off the land. His childhood was spent in Ross River until he attended the Baptist Mission School in Whitehorse. A trained carpenter, Franklin has also worked as a miner, and began carving in 1992.

Franklin believes that every part of the animal can be used for the creation of art. He particularly enjoys working with antler as it provides an unexpected frame for the image being carved. Franklin loves the lofty nature of sheep and uses them often in his carving.



PHOTO BY UKJESE VAN KAMPEN

## PETER CHARLIE

Peter was born in Whitehorse in 1960 but lived all his life in the Watson Lake area. During his youth, summers were spent living in the bush with his family. It is here, helping his mother, that Peter learned to tan moose hides which led to making the leather garments that he creates today. Peter prefers to use home-tanned moose hides which are easier to sew, but he often resorts to commercially-tanned hides, which are more readily available.

Peter learned to sew by watching his mother. His skill has developed to a point where people now ask him to teach them as well. Even the elders are surprised to see a man that can sew as well as Peter.

He gets design ideas from many sources – friends, fashion, books and patterns. He sews almost everything by hand, but is considering working with a sewing machine. This is Peter's first exhibition.



PHOTO BY UKJESE VAN KAMPEN

## PETER CHIEF

Peter Chief came into this world in August 1966, the third child of ten children born to Jack and Grace Chief. He spent his early years on the family trap line, living the traditional lifestyle of the Kaska people. Peter learned the stories and oral culture and history of his people from his parents and grandparents. He often draws on traditional Kaska stories as well as his own research for his art. He is a self-taught artist with no formal training. He works in oils, acrylics, charcoal and India ink.

Peter lived on his traditional land until 1996 when he suffered massive kidney failure and had to move to Vancouver for regular treatment. It is his dream to receive a kidney transplant so that he can return to the home of his heart, the Kaska land.



PHOTO SUPPLIED BY ARTIST'S FAMILY

## GERALD DONNESSEY

Gerald Donnessey was born in Whitehorse in 1961 and has lived in Watson Lake all his life. His father is German and his mother is Kaska. Gerald inherited the family trapline, near Simpson Lake and the North Canol Highway, and he makes a living doing a mix of wage labour and trapping.

He is a relatively new carver, having previously carved a candle holder from caribou horn, as well as the rattle in this exhibit that is made from wood, leather and crow beads. He gathers the materials he uses from hunting and likes to create images of animals. This is Gerald's first art exhibition. He created the rattle for ceremonial purposes and it holds deep spiritual meaning for him.



PHOTO BY UKJESE VAN KAMPEN

## MIDA DONNESSEY

Mida Donnessey was born in a tent near Lower Post in 1928, into a family of 16 children. She was raised in the Kaska traditional territories around Lower Post, Pike Lake and Moose River. Mida's childhood was spent learning the Kaska way of life, growing up in camp where men hunted and women looked after the camp.

The use of traditional materials played a major role in life. Animal skin tents, moss for insulation and diapers, and bone scrapers for the hides were the realities of Mida's early life, before the Alaska Highway was built. Mida still tans her own hides and uses the beadwork patterns she has learned as a child on the items she creates. The patterns she uses for her flower designs and clothing were passed down to her. Designs were also created from studying the plants and flowers in the area.

Mida teaches all that she knows to the youth, and emphasizes the extreme importance of preserving the Kaska culture and language.



PHOTO BY UKIESE VAN KAMPEN

## JOSEPH GLADA

Born in the wolf clan and raised in Ross River, Joseph Glada is a mix of Kaska, Slavey and Northern Tutchone. He has been carving since he was a child and making his own slingshots. He uses a power tool to shape out a piece, but prefers to use carving knives for the remainder of the work. Even though the traditional methods take longer, it is easier to follow the grain with a knife and it is less likely to bruise the wood. He says carving is good medicine.

Joseph wants to make masks based on legends passed down from elders, legends about "Wolverine Man and Martin Man, who talked as we do, or Eagle who also talked, and was as big as a house, and killed people. There is a story of a woman who was pregnant and ate a salmon tail. She gave birth to a man who grew fast, in a week he was grown. That man said, 'I'll go out there, fix up everything, fix up the world so trees don't grab people and salmon don't eat people'."

Elders are important to Joe and set an example through prayer and taking care of land. Joe hopes that some of the young people can carry on that tradition.



PHOTO BY MARLENE COLLINS

## LEDA JULES

Leda Jules was born in a tent on the trail from Frances Lake and Finlayson Lake in 1945. She spent the early part of her childhood growing up in the Pelly Banks and Ross River areas. Then in 1953 Leda went to Lower Post to the residential school. In 1954 her family moved to Upper Liard to be closer to her. Leda spent the time out of school living a traditional life with her family. After earning her GED, she went on to teach for Yukon College in Watson Lake and moved on to work with the Aboriginal Language Services as an interpreter.

Leda began sewing as a child, learning from her grandmother and other elders. Now she teaches her daughter and grandchildren. Her designs come from the elders and from designs shared in the sewing group to which she belongs. Leda has created many beautiful works during her life and has never sold an item – all her work goes to her family and friends. Leda is very interested in preserving Kaska culture and is often called upon for her knowledge.



PHOTO BY UKJESE VAN KAMPEN

## DENNIS LUTZ

Born in 1959 of Kaska heritage, Dennis Lutz spent his summers with his grandparents learning the traditional lifestyle. His Kaska name is Inobah (weasel).

While Dennis has no formal art training he is influenced by many different art forms and styles. Other influences include the people around him, stories and nature.

Dennis uses a variety of media to express himself. He paints using watercolours and acrylics. He also carves and makes other three-dimensional works. As it is difficult to access art supplies where he lives, many of Dennis' works are created from found objects.



PHOTO BY MARLENE COLLINS

## **RUSSEL MAGUN JR.**

Russel was born in Watson Lake in 1971. He grew up in the Watson Lake area attending school and spending the rest of his time on the trap line or at fish camp. During these times with his grandfather, he began learning more about his culture. Since then, he has been researching his culture and has made drums, hide fleshing and scraping tools. His desire to preserve the Kaska culture has led him to research how things were made.

For this exhibition, Russel has created a traditional Kaska bow based on descriptions provided by his aunt and grandmother. For his next project, Russel is planning on making a hide boat. He is also helping preserve the Kaska culture, by teaching Kaska in school, when asked.



PHOTO BY UKJESE VAN KAMPEN

## **GORDON PETER**

Born in 1956 near Sheldon Lake and the North Canol Highway, Gordon Peter has lived in Ross River all his life and has picked up skills from both the Kaska and the Slavey sides of his family.

Over the years, he has learned how to make snowshoes, drums and to carve. Now he is learning to tan hides with his wife. As a carver, Gordon uses mainly moose antler and sheep horn but he also works with mastodon ivory and wood.

Gordon's materials of choice are tied to tradition and his art is influenced by Kaska legends and history. He describes his style as realistic, more Athapaskan than West Coast.



PHOTO BY UKJESE VAN KAMPEN

## SIDNEY PYE

Sidney Pye was born in Lower Post, B.C. and much of his life was spent on a trapline near Coal River. At the age of 12, he became interested in Kaska carving. He had seen elders carving sheep horn and totem poles and he would ask questions about how things

were done a long time ago, questions about what is done and what isn't done and was told to use bright colours when he painted. He learned that all the elements that went into carving had significance. Colour was representational on a spiritual level. For example, blues are connected to the sky and water, orange is part of the sunset and certain colours are more powerful than others.

Sidney tries to learn what he can from elders before the knowledge is lost and he also tries to research Kaska history in books. It is important for him that his carvings look distinctly Kaska. His carvings are influenced by the many stories he's been taught – stories about creation, and how things came to be a long time ago, when animals were people and the Creator could make himself into anything he wanted to be.



PHOTO BY MARLENE COLLINS

## DENIS SHORTY

Denis Shorty was born in the bush around Ross River in 1958. His grandfather gave him his Kaska name, Ghasa, meaning "rabbit's cousin". Other than attending residential school in Lower Post and Whitehorse, he spent all his time in Ross River.

According to Denis, the language he speaks identifies him as Kaska, not his actual lineage which is Kaska, Tagish, Tlingit, Slavey and Dogrib. Denis expresses himself through art, music and a little writing. Carving is a tradition that has been passed down to him from his grandfather. His grandfather carved for spiritual purposes, for his medicine bag and protection. He never carved for money and, although sales can be part of that, Denis doesn't work expressly for the money either.

Denis says that he doesn't remember making a conscious choice to carve. He has worked in many media: caribou, moose, sheep horn, soapstone, poplar burls and other wood. He uses many materials because he doesn't believe in wasting what comes his way. The moose antler he uses is part of his identity, part of everything traditional for him. The realism in his work is important to him. Through his work, Denis is capturing nature as it appears to him on his traditional land.



PHOTO BY UKJESE VAN KAMPEN

## **NORMAN STERRIAH**

Norman Sterriah's family comes from the Ross River area, Frances Lake and Pelly Banks areas. His grandparents raised him and it was his grandfather, Dena Choe, who taught him to make snowshoes and tools.

Norman first studied under West Coast carver Norman Tate and carved for about ten years in the coastal style. Gradually, he started to make the transition into more traditional regional art forms, and he prefers to leave his wood carvings unpainted with just an oil finish. Norman likes his work to tell a story or make a cultural, social, or political statement. To Norman, Kaska art is slowly re-emerging, serving the cultural identity and well being of the Kaska community. He is interested in passing on his skills and knowledge to the Kaska youth and hopes that one day he can work as a full time artist.



PHOTO BY UKJESE VAN KAMPEN

## **KEVIN STEWART**

One could say that Kevin Stewart likes to work under the influence of nature, expressing it in his art. Born of Kaska parents in 1964, Kevin Stewart has lived in Watson Lake his whole life, only leaving to attend residential school in Lower Post and later, in Whitehorse. His family, the Caesars and the Stewarts, have lived in this region for generations.

Kevin has been employed doing small engine repair, welding, forestry, carpentry, log house building and makes beautiful furniture using a combination of Yukon woods. Carving is a spiritual responsibility for Kevin. When he wants to carve a piece, he goes out into the woods and when he finally picks a tree, he offers tobacco and prays before taking it. He particularly likes using diamond willow. The shape and the grain of the wood itself influences what Kevin carves. He carves animals and tries to capture how they make him feel.

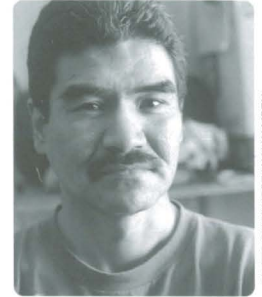


PHOTO BY UKJESE VAN KAMPEN

## EARLY RAY STONE

On October 16, 1963 Early Ray Stone was born in a boat, making its way down the Liard River to the hospital in Watson Lake. Oldtimers still call him "Boatman". His grandfather (Maggie Stone's father) was a medicine man while his father, Nick Hendrix, is an American from Florida. Both helped shape Early Ray into the person he is today.



PHOTO BY UKJESE VAN KAMPEN

Early Ray's childhood was spent in Florida, then, as a young teen, he lived among his mother's family in the Muncho Lake area. While he was there, he learned to hunt and trap and how to use traditional plant medicine. The family worked as outfitters and it was at this time that Early Ray also learned about horses and guiding. Early first learned carving from an African American in North Carolina. He went on to study West Coast style silver engraving with Ron Jackson in Prince Rupert, B.C. He soon realized that the "s" and split "u" shapes, ovoids and circles of the West Coast art are not Kaska and has since avoided using them. He believes that there is a definite Kaska style, especially noticeable in the work of Ross River Kaska carvers.

His material of choice is silver, though he also uses copper and hard-to-find ivory.



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