

SELF GUIDED TOUR

SELECTED STORIES

1980 – 2020

WORKS FROM THE COLLECTION

Within this exhibition, RAG seeks to bring attention to the depth and breadth of works by local artists while taking the opportunity to highlight those who have been previously underrepresented within its permanent collection, and within society at large. This tour is designed to share some of the stories of artists in B.C. who have, at one point or another, experienced migration or cultural exclusion, and whose works are evidence of incredible tenacity and creativity.

Curator: Sophia Stalner

Gu Xiong**1**

Within his work, Xiong both explores and challenges common conceptions of migration and cultural identity. With an interest in tracing the origins of early Chinese migrants who first arrived during the mid-nineteenth century, and whose stories are scarcely told, Xiong finds parallels within his own story as he is one of many people from China that have settled in Richmond. Within her writing on Xiong, Jennifer Jihye Chun describes migration not as a break from the past, but as a union of cultural identity. *"The challenge, then, is to conceive of migration not simply in terms of linear trajectory but as a dynamic and historically contested set of meanings and practices that gain traction and resonance through space and time."* Xiong's work invites viewers to re-examine and bring nuance to their understanding of the experience of immigrants.

Arthur Renwick**2**

Renwick's Mask series is in direct conversation with the romanticized historical images of early painters and photographers, such as George Catlin and Edward S. Curtis. Their early representations of Indigenous Peoples featured historically inaccurate portrayals of "authenticity" under an ethic that assumed the demise of cultures and legitimized the European settlement of land. The artist's contemporary photographs therefore complicate the representational history of Indigenous Peoples in North America. Within his project, Renwick asked artists and others from Indigenous communities to think about this history and convey their feelings through their facial expressions as a response. The result are images that distort the depicted individuals, and mock the absurdities of Romantic ideal.

Alan Wood**3**

Wood describes his work as *"a kind of social realism to do with my Northern England and industrial background. English landscape painting that was partially abstract, but nevertheless totally dependant upon the landscape and using paint in a very expressionistic manner, almost bordering on action painting."* Modernists were largely responsible for reviving the popularity of landscape painting, which, until the nineteenth century, was not considered a high-brow genre. Following the modern tradition, Wood's study, drawing, and trial proof represents his appreciation for British Columbia as an endless source of inspiration, using relief techniques to express his profound enjoyment for the landscape.

Susan Point**4**

Point created her first pieces of Salish art from silver and gold and has since become widely known for her silkscreen prints. The artist uses traditional stylistic conventions found in weaving and wood carving while also adding her own personal style. Point's work seeks to revive the lost histories of the Coast Salish Peoples, as there is still a great deal of mystery that surrounds their traditional creative expressions – the significance of some designs beyond their general form and function has largely been lost. The yarn made from the spindle whorls would have been transformed into woven blankets, which were important symbols of wealth and prestige. It is not known why spindle whorls were so elaborately carved. Perhaps the designs were meant to be observed while spinning and relate to traditional Salish concepts of spirituality as well as health.

Ngan's raku, stoneware, and porcelain works were fired in a large Sung Dynasty wood kiln, which he built himself. Influenced by the environment of British Columbia's Gulf Islands, the artist worked with natural materials to reinvigorate classical Chinese art production, using salt glazes, minimal surface decoration and principles of abstraction. Ngan took a philosophical approach to his work, and with the consideration of his recent passing, a quote from him is shared here to pay tribute to his prolific career.

"Art is about telling the truth of your life. Knowing what is the gift you are born with, and what you know, and how to transcend this to your artistic process. It is not just looking at nature; nature is part of it, but a lot of things in life are very difficult. Like a volcano. It needs time to overcome this, to settle down and it's hell, but some way, somehow, if one can transcend and transform this hell into art, it is like forgiveness. It is knowing how to accept hell into your life. To transform it into art and craft. It is about telling the truth of yourself, what you are born with and what you know in life. Your being is to transcend the outcome from the internal to the external. Most important though is love. Love can transcend into joy, into beauty, into simplicity, into harmony, into celebration of life. That is my power. That is what it is to be an artist."

Girard's work offers insight into the cultural and economic shifts that have occurred within the city of Richmond. The city has recently evolved from rural community farms, single-family homes, and small businesses to comprising condominium and office towers, multilingual businesses, and public transit systems. Increased development, urbanization and immigration has propelled

rapid growth in the last few decades. It now has a 60% immigrant population, the majority coming from China, Hong Kong, and Philippines, and other Asian countries. This series reveals nuanced visions of a city in transition.

Wong's work illustrates an intriguing tension between stylistic, architectural and natural elements, reflecting the contrast between the serene nature of British Columbia's West Coast and the bustle of New York city. The artist's experimentation with process, mark-making, style and medium, make it difficult to encapsulate her practice to one single movement or aesthetic. Throughout her long and rich artistic career, Wong revisited and recast lessons learned from Chinese brush painting traditions as well as iterations of abstraction with her visual language. *"To be curious and to strive for the work of a pro – to do one thing well – this is my personal goal... Teaching art has certain parallels, both seem to be a process of search and discovery. To continue to grow, to learn to expand our awareness of ourselves and the universe. My work tries to elucidate "moments in time" when one grasps intuitively the complexity and paradox of existence and nature. To push beyond the obvious, to investigate and attempt to understand that realm beyond the apparent is an adventure that I find exciting and rewarding."*

