

## NORTHWEST COAST ART

evolved over several thousand years in the rich and complex indigenous societies of the Pacific Northwest of North America. Art adorned everything from monumental structures and ceremonial regalia to basic utilitarian objects. The simplicity of the design components—elements of a system known as formline—belie the complexity and sophistication that was achieved in this two-dimensional NWC art tradition.

From the earliest contact with Westerners, wood carvings, weavings, and other cultural pieces depicting NWC art were aggressively collected by museums and visitors and acclaimed as one of the most distinctive and unique art traditions in the world. Today, this ancient tradition continues to evolve through the work of contemporary NWC artists.

## NATIONAL TREASURE

NWC art occupies an important position in America's artistic traditions and cultural history. Most importantly, it plays a significant role in maintaining the cultural diversity of the nation and the cultural survival of the region's indigenous populations. Like jazz music, which was designated a national treasure by Congress in 1987, NWC art should be designated a national treasure of the United States.

## A VISION FOR THE FUTURE

SHI's quest to establish the Northwest Coast Arts Capital began with the construction of the Walter Soboleff Building that is in itself a work of art, and is adorned with monumental art pieces by three master indigenous artists of international acclaim. The creation of the NWC Arts Capital ensures the survival of NWC arts, providing untold sustainable social and economic benefits to the region and state. SHI's NWC Arts Capital plan includes the following programs and initiatives:

- Training new NWC artists
- Teaching NWC art in schools
- Ensuring excellence of NWC art formline
- Educating the public about NWC art
- Expanding the NWC art market
- Integrating NWC art in public places
- Designating NWC art as a national treasure
- Protecting clan crest ownership



SEALASKA HERITAGE INSTITUTE, a Native nonprofit, has achieved a record of excellence and is positioned to create the Northwest Coast Arts Capital along with partners to support the region and state. Founded in 1980, SHI operates programs to perpetuate Native art, incorporate Native languages and culture into educational materials, care for ethnographic collections and archives, and promote study of Native cultures and history.

Above: The Walter Soboleff Building in Juneau (Photo by Ken Graham). On the cover: A glass totem by Tlingit artist Preston Singletary (Photo by Russell Johnson). Inside cover: Artwork by Haida artist Robert Davidson (Photo by Ken Graham). Inside photos by Brian Wallace, Nobu Koch, Steve Quinn, Kathy Dye, and Zoe Urness.





## NWC ART TRAINING

### Building on the master-apprentice model:

The traditional method of training younger artists was through the master-apprentice approach, and this model still provides the best instruction. SHI has implemented master-apprentice teams in totem pole and canoe carving and will seek to expand this approach.

**Sustainable arts programming:** SHI is re-introducing traditional arts and crafts, such as spruce-root weaving and skin sewing, that have been in decline through its Jinéit Art Academy community workshops. These arts are based on the use of natural resources that are readily available in Southeast Alaska, and provide a much-needed source of income in economically depressed villages.

**Native Art in the Alaska prisons:** A significant population of Natives are in correctional institutions. This program introduces NWC art to this population.

**Designated artists' spaces:** SHI operates an artist-in-residence study room at the Walter Soboleff Building named after master artist Delores C hurchill to encourage study of NWC art. It also leases the Gajaa Hít building in Juneau for arts training. SHI will seek funding for art studios in other communities.

## NWC ART SALES

A 2013 study reported that arts are an important component of Southeast Alaska's economy, with total annual spending estimated to be \$57.8 million. The NWC Arts Capital will expand this market.

**Expanding the NWC art market:** Alaska Native arts are sold through SHI's retail store and website as well as its First Friday markets. SHI also sponsors a biennial Native Artist Market.

In 2014, SHI organized its first Tináa Art Auction, showcasing donated masterpieces of NWC art. SHI will host a second auction Sept. 29, 2017.

**Promoting authentic Native art:** To maintain the integrity of NWC art and to protect consumers, SHI works to ensure compliance with the Indian Arts and Crafts Act of 1990 to prevent the sale of art that is falsely represented as made by Alaska Natives. SHI also works to ensure that Native artists have access to natural resources that are used in arts and craft production.



## NWC ART EDUCATION

**SHI-UAS-IAIA collaboration:** SHI established a three-way partnership with the University of Alaska Southeast (UAS) and the Institute of American Indian Arts (IAIA) in 2016 to provide enhanced and expanded Northwest Coast art opportunities for Alaska students.

**Visual and performing arts in schools:** SHI collaborates with elementary and secondary schools to integrate NWC arts programs into their classrooms. Outside of school, SHI organizes programs that promote learning and language development through arts activities such as song, dance, and storytelling.

**Arts instruction for teachers:** SHI provides training to art teachers in Southeast Alaska schools to build an understanding of NWC arts and to train a cadre of Native artists to work as art teachers.

SHI also organizes cultural orientations for teachers in public schools and at UAS that incorporate an introduction to NWC cultural arts with an emphasis on an introduction to formline design.

**Development of arts curricula:** SHI develops curricula and supplemental material on various forms of NWC art for use in all grade levels. SHI offers downloadable lesson plans for teachers on its website.



## EXHIBITIONS

**Walter Soboleff Building:** The Nathan Jackson Gallery, located within SHI's headquarters in downtown Juneau, features a permanent exhibit, "Enter the World of the Tlingit, Haida, and Tsimshian Peoples," which includes a display of highly valued clan treasures. The temporary gallery currently features a show of Alaska Native masks.

The building also houses SHI's collections, which include art objects, books, and archives. The collections provide a basis for continued scholarship through SHI's research and visiting scholars programs.

**Juried Art Show and Native Fashion Show:** SHI sponsors a biennial NWC Juried Art Show and Competition, a Juried Youth Art Exhibit, and a Native Fashion Show featuring established and emerging artists.



## PERFORMING ARTS

NWC art historically included a rich performing arts tradition. SHI organizes Celebration, a biennial dance-and-culture festival that draws more than 5,000 people. It has also established partnerships with Perseverance Theatre and integrates performing arts programs into the schools.

## PUBLIC ART

**Walter Soboleff Building:** SHI's headquarters in Juneau features the largest monumental art representing the Tlingit, Haida, and Tsimshian in the state.

**Native Artist Park:** To complement the artistry of the Walter Soboleff Building, SHI has developed a plan for a park to create and display monumental NWC art.

**NWC art in public places:** SHI has embarked on a campaign to encourage the use of NWC art on public facilities and is seeking an amendment to the state's Percent for Art in Public Places statute to require the use of Alaskan artists.

## PUBLICATIONS

SHI publishes a wide variety of publications on Southeast Alaska Native art, culture and history. It also produces children's books and educational curriculum material.

# SEALASKA HERITAGE ART PROGRAMS & INITIATIVES