

Interwoven Radiance

Center for Contemporary Native Art

November 10, 2017 – June 24, 2018

LARGE PRINT TEXTS AND LABELS

Introduction by Lily Hope, Tlingit artist and weaver

Chilkat and Ravenstail weaving are two of the most complex art forms in North America. These textiles are woven primarily by women, using geometric basketry designs and imagery from nature as well as adapting formline art. They record history, honor clan relationships, and bring communities together.

Most robes take one to four years to complete, involving months of preparation including harvesting cedar bark and processing mountain goat hair. The weavers spin the earth and animal together by hand for over six weeks to create one thousand yards of warp needed to weave ceremonial robes. Robes are woven on an upright loom with all tension controlled by the weavers fingers only.

While Northwest Coast art has attained worldwide acclaim, these weavings remain less understood and evaluated, and weavers working today often struggle to make a living. This exhibition strives to elevate the mastery and ingenuity of women artists of the Northwest coast.

Special thanks to the Confederated Tribes of the Grand Ronde, the Native Arts and Cultures Foundation, and the Native American Art Council of the Portland Art Museum for their generous support of this exhibition.

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Clarissa Rizal (1956-2016)

Polymath

Takdeintaan Snail House

Recipient, NEA National Heritage Fellowship
Award, 2016

The multitalented Clarissa Rizal was a polymath— one with great and varied learning. Her art ranged from the beading, button blankets, Ravenstail and Chilkat robes usually done by women to two-dimensional graphics previously restricted to men.

Clarissa added new or surprising elements to seemingly conventional works, resulting in decidedly original creations. Devoted to her own mentors, Clarissa thrived when educating others, and took on many weaving students and apprentices.

“After learning Chilkat, I gained the art of patience, the way of gratitude, and the act of compassion. The universe opened its doors with a flood of information; the kind of information not definable, yet powerfully written in our Native art, in the ways of our people, and in our commune with nature.”

Teri Rofkar (1956-2016)

Scientist

Takdeintaan Snail House

Recipient, NEA National Heritage Fellowship
Award, 2009

Teri Rofkar's Ravenstail robes, while similar in technique and style to their 18th century inspirations, reflect a decidedly 21st century mentality. This environmentalist and naturalist studied the cycles of seasons, mentally recorded the natural world's production of raw materials, and integrated into her work ancient Tlingit knowledge.

Historic weavings, with their geometry and mathematical foundations based on binary codes, embodied for her a "pure science" that influenced every robe Teri wove. Her textiles address varied topics: the nature of earthquakes,

the destruction of tsunamis, the DNA of a certain local mountain goats.

“I am following the steps of my Ancestors, striving to recapture [their] woven arts ... gathering and weaving natural materials help me link past, present, and future. The arts and our oral history together bring knowledge of ten thousand years of research to life. My goal is to continue the research, broadening awareness for the generations to come.”

Object Labels

Location: Gallery Walls, Clockwise Direction

Forty-Six Tlingit, Haida, Tsimshian, and non-indigenous weavers

Weavers Across the Waters Community Robe,
2016

Mountain goat, merino, cedar bark, sea otter fur,
hand dyed merino, hand dyed mountain goat

On loan from Lily Hope, and slated to live in the
weaver's studio at Evergreen Longhouse
Education and Cultural Center.

Made from donated squares by nearly 50
weavers, this robe honors weaving traditions and
constitutes a unique and unconventional artwork.
This robe is intended to be worn by dignitaries
whenever a newly carved dugout canoe makes
its maiden journey on the waters in the Northwest
Coast. No contributor was paid, which speaks

volumes to the spirit and generosity of the weavers and the work.

Clarissa Rizal, the mastermind behind this robe's creation, said, "In the purity of this power, I feel immense grace and lovingness. I feel such excitement and peace. I feel strength and healing. I feel the connectedness of all beings through the anticipation of connecting all of these weavers' weavings together."

Marie Laws

(Tlingit, born 1931)

Ravenstail Leggings, 1950/2015

cotton, fur, and hooves on leather

Museum Purchase: Funds from the Native

American Art Council, 2015.53.1a, b

These leggings were woven by Teri Rofkar's mother, who is a multi-talented artist living in Sitka, Alaska. She utilizes traditional Ravenstail patterns of concentric boxes, with spiral weft vertical borders and compact twined top and bottom designs. Marie notes that her granddaughter, Violet, is the 7th generation weaver in their family.

Teri Rofkar

(Tlingit, 1956-2016)

Lituya Bay Robe, 2000

merino wool, sea otter fur

On loan from family of Teri Rofkar

Recording the 1958 Lituya Bay earthquake, fault lines zig-zag across the body of the robe. The quake caused a 1720-foot tsunami. Down each side, designs fill the top third fading into a white emptiness, representing, to scale, the mountainsides which lost 2/3 of their vegetation when the huge waves hit.

Lily Hope

(Tlingit, born 1980)

Lineage Robe, 2017

thigh-spun merino wool, cedar bark, hand-dyed merino wool, and beaver fur

Museum Purchase: Funds provided by bequest of Elizabeth Cole Butler by exchange, [2017.51.1](#)

This robe commemorates the traceable lineage of Chilkat weaver-teachers all in the permanent collection here at Portland Art Museum, including Clara (sometimes noted as Cora) Benson, Jennie Thlunaut, Clarissa Rizal, and Lily Hope. Top center is master teacher 'holding' the smaller robe and the space and teachings for student weaver.

Tsimshian artist

Chilkat Leggings, ca. 1820

mountain goat wool, puffin beaks, fur, and leather

Museum Purchase: Indian Collection

Subscription Fund, Rasmussen Collection of

Northwest Coast Indian Art, 48.3.550A, B

Tlingit artist

Chilkat Robe, ca. 1880

cedar bark, cotton yarn, and mountain goat wool
yarn

The Elizabeth Cole Butler Collection, 87.88.80

Tlingit artist

Chilkat Robe Pattern Board, late 19th century

paint on wood

Museum Purchase: Indian Collection

Subscription Fund, Rasmussen Collection of

Northwest Coast Indian Art, 48.3.537

Object Labels

Location: Platform in Center of Gallery

Clarissa Rizal

(Tlingit, 1956-2016)

Resilience Robe, 2014

cedar bark, merino wool

Museum Purchase: Funds given in memory of
Virginia Waterman, 2013.43.2

Resilience is a “document” depicting icons of Western influences that changed our Northwest Coast indigenous peoples during the past 300+ years, as well as Native logos reflecting cultural integration and strength.

Clarissa Rizal

(Tlingit, 1956-2016)

Chilkat Child Four-Piece Ensemble, 2014

merino wool, cedar bark, hand dyed merino, fur,
.22 magnum bullet shells

On loan from Lily Hope

This was the first (and only) of many ensembles Clarissa intended to create for each of her nine grandchildren. She said dimples and eyebrows are likeness to her grandson, Louis. Clarissa created this traditional yet contemporary work by blending Ravenstail and Chilkat patterns on each piece and incorporating variegated blues.

Clarissa Rizal

(Tlingit, 1956-2016)

Lily Hope

(Tlingit, born 1980)

Copper Child Ravenstail Ensemble, 2012

merino wool, rabbit fur, sea otter fur, copper
cones

On loan from Sealaska Heritage Institute

Created with intent for children to dance it, this ensemble includes Lily's Ravenstail robe, leggings, and apron, all with concentric *standing at the top of the mountain* pattern repeating across the body of the robe, and Lily's 2002 design, *shaman eyes*. Clarissa wove the tunic/top with traditional *lightning* and *Haida spider web* designs.

Teri Rofkar

(Tlingit, 1956-2016)

DNA Robe, 2014

seven mountain goat hides, hand dyed & hand
spun goat hair, glass seed beads

On loan from family of Teri Rofkar

DNA strands document the Baranov Island mountain goats, whose wool Rofkar used for this robe. Recently, research revealed that this flock descended from goats residing 20,000 years ago, when the island was a refugium from the glaciers. The robe represents Rofkar's call to conserve and protect such precious wildlife.