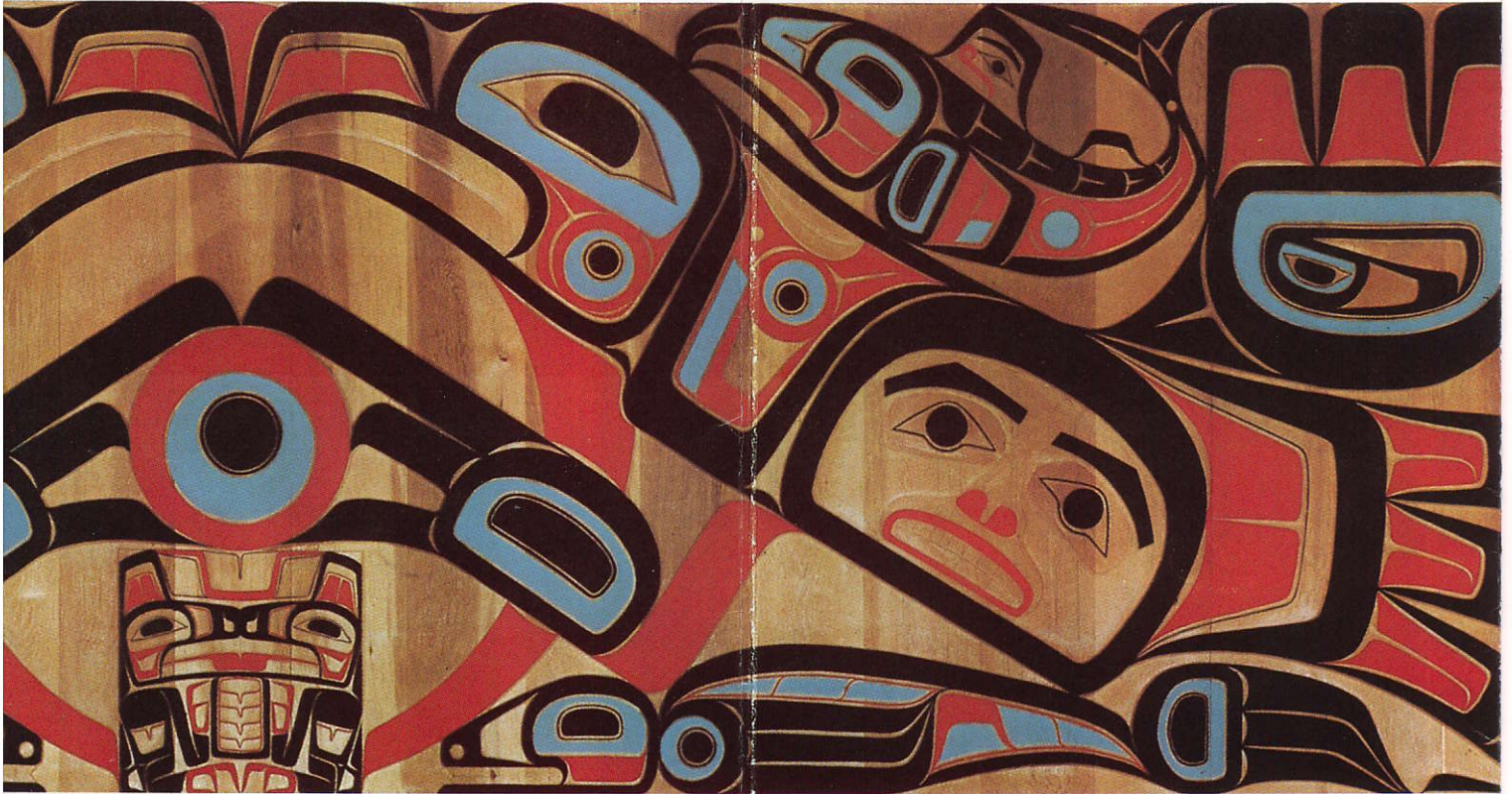


THE 'KSAN MURAL



“Walk on, walk on, walk on, on the breath of our grandfathers”.

These words of the Gitksan follow the *wsinaaxhl*, the songs sung beside the dead*. They proclaim the strong sense of continuity, the belief in the constant reincarnation of thought, deed and man; the knowledge of the presence of yesterday in today, of today in tomorrow.

In this spirit is offered the arts of 'Ksan: inspired by the past, born in the present, bequeathed to the future.

“Walk on, walk on, walk on, on the breath of our grandfathers”.

*from “'Ksan, Breath of our Grandfathers”, published by the National Museum of Man.



serving British Columbia



ROYAL BANK

Main Branch, The Royal Centre, Vancouver, British Columbia



THE FROG



THE WOLF



THE KILLER WHALE

THE 'KSAN MURAL

The mezzanine floor of Royal Bank of Canada's Main Branch in Royal Centre, Vancouver, houses an extraordinary work of art — the largest single work of native design ever undertaken by the North Coast Indians of British Columbia.

This is the 'Ksan Mural, 120 feet long and 8 feet high, a magnificent frieze carved in Western Red Cedar and intricately painted by hand. Nine sculptured panels — three massive central designs flanked on each side by three subsidiary panels — form an entire wall in the branch and create a dramatic focal point for the spacious banking mall.

Commissioned by Royal Bank in 1972, the 'Ksan Mural took five carvers three months to complete. The carvers of the 'Ksan, all of Indian heritage, are Chief Walter Harris, hereditary chief of the Fireweed Tribe of the Kispiox, Chief Alfred Joseph of Hagwilget, Earl Muldoe, Ken Mowatt and Art Sterrit.

This major work of art depicts the many exploits of Weget (or Man-Raven), the legendary culture-hero of the Gitksan. Only a people who could laugh at themselves could accept a folk hero of Weget's cut.

Weget rambled through the world, changing its face through blunder and subterfuge. He created by mistake — not by any grand design.

For instance, he stole the box containing the sun, then clumsily dropped the box in his haste to escape — thereby bringing light to the world. Trees, rivers and lakes were also Weget's invention, often evolving from yet another clumsy getaway after mischief. He gave the halibut its unusual eye, the deer its funny tail, the lynx its striking eyebrows.

The art style has been described as "eye" art. The eyes also represent joints, limbs and entire bodies of Weget's creatures. Its origin pre-dates the European invasion and was used primarily to signify ownership: for example, a man with an exclusive beaver, frog or bear family crest would thus identify his property and that of his family. Transgressors suffered summary death!

The three centre panels of the nine depict individual episodes with Weget as the main character; the supporting side panels illustrate various creatures of his domain — the frog, the wolf, the killer whale, the owl, the human and the bear.

The creation of the 'Ksan Mural, the brainchild of now retired W.D.H. Gardiner of the Royal Bank, then District General Manager of British Columbia, is the climax of a long association between the Bank and the people of 'Ksan.

The tiny Indian village of 'Ksan nestles at the confluence of the Bulkley and Skeena Rivers in North Central British Columbia, sheltered by the awesome Roeher Déboulé mountain.

This is the place of the Gitksan . . . The People of the River of Mists, Master Carvers.

Here stand the Frog House of the Distant Past, the Wolf House of the Grandfather, the Fireweed House of Masks and Robes, the Carving-House of All Times, and the Today House of the Arts — for 'Ksan has become a modern-day museum and craft village that stands where Indian villages have stood for centuries, possibly for as long as 4,000 years.

The museum recalls the long and colourful history of the Indian people of the Hazelton area; the craft village is a centre for the creation of new and beautiful art in the great tradition of the Northwest Coast Indians.

This art form has been described as highly unified . . . very imaginative within its own frame . . . exact and sophisticated. It is a unique Canadian heritage; yet one which came perilously close to tragic extinction.

Because of 'Ksan and those dedicated people who made it happen, this culture survives.