

A Conversation with K̓i-ke-in

Charlotte Townsend-Gault

Charlotte Townsend-Gault (CTG): K̓i-ke-in, a couple of years ago I heard you say “the conversation hasn’t even begun” and you were talking, I think, about the conversation that was not taking place between First Nations people who were concerned with their culture and its expression, and non-Native people who were also interested in your culture and its expression. Sometimes the word “art” is used in this context, but it is not necessarily the right word. You are a good person to talk about ways of getting round the art label, as you do with your own work when you use the words “creation” and “creator”. The conversation might well begin with your ideas about opening up this rather limited term, “art”. It could be one of the ways in which an exchange could get going.

K̓i-ke-in: Well I think it’s important to go back to the question, or at least the statement, that we haven’t even begun the conversation yet. My reason for talking that way is quite simple. In my community when we meet people, when we run into people on the street, when a stranger comes into our midst, when somebody was passing our doors when I was a child, my mother used to say to people as they went by, “Who are you?” We’d meet someone ... my mother would say, “Who are you? Who are you?” The person would say who they are. They’d say what their name is. My mother would say, “What village are you from? What tribe are you from?” The person would answer that and my mother would say again, “Who are you?” Until they said who their mother and father were, who their grandparents were, and where their lines of descent originated ..., they were born over here among the ... but their mother actually comes from ... and her mother was from.... Until a network – a mental picture of the tree that this person sprouts from – is created in people’s minds, we don’t really know each other. There isn’t a terrible lot of room to begin sharing any time or conversation. So before we begin a conversation, we always ask people who they are and where they’re from. Then they, in return, ask who we are and where we’re from. And if people don’t have enough respect to ask



This contemporary dance robe was designed by Kì-ke-in and sewn by Deborah Cook (Huu-ay-aht) in 1999. It features Thunderbird, Serpents, a canoe and a whale. The crests are symbolic of events that happened in Kì-ke-in's family history. (Janet Dwyer photograph. This robe also appears in *Out of the Mist* by Martha Black [1999], page 141.)

who we are and where we're from, then we know, in this instance at least, we'll refrain from a conversation. Because they don't care who we are. They don't care where we're from. They don't care where our grandparents were born. It doesn't matter to them. It's immaterial. In Canada, the colonizing peoples that have come here, have had every opportunity to know where we're from. When they come onto the land, they know precisely where we're from. We're from right here. We're not from anywhere else. However, they've never asked us about that. They've never said, "Who are you?" And when we read the earliest accounts of Europeans and their interacting with our people, we read, "Chiefs, how are your children. We hope they're well." As a statement, not as a question. As a statement. "I am here on behalf of King George. I am here for the Queen." So they say, "This is who I am. This is my authority." And they're already clear in their minds what they're here for. It's to take. It's not to give anything at all.

Later, as guilt develops and different kinds of political and legal machinations arise, there's this sense that we have to pretend that we're giving some

thing, that there's a give and take, or that there's been due consideration, or something, but in fact, Europeans came to take. In the case of our area, they came to take sea-otter robes, then they came to take seal robes, then they came to take whales, then they came to take salmon, then they came to take trees, and they're very aggressive in doing each of those things, and not particularly efficient. A tremendous amount of waste. We have consistently called out from a distance, and I think from a dark place, a place that Canadians see as dark, and said, "This is my land. You're stepping on my toes. This is my daughter. You're abusing my daughter." And Canadians consistently have said, "I don't care. I came from Europe to get rich. I'm here in this country. I'm getting rich right now. I don't give a damn what happens to you." I recall as a boy attending public school in Alberni, I remember seeing German, Dutch and French students – people who ran from the war in Europe. People who, two days after arriving in Canada, knew that the fact that they had blond hair and blue eyes allowed them to call me "a fucking Indian". They knew they could do that and whether this kid was Yugoslavian, British, French, or anything else, he was allying with you against me. So I grew up with that.

Those people – and we're not talking Cook and the 1700s. We're talking my time. Those people said, "I don't want to know who you are." It's useful for them to call me an "Indian" and to name me "Indian". Then every interaction they have with me, every need they have in any way, shape or form to think about me, the place they go to think about me is called "Indian". It's this dark place where they have all this litany of social ills that they shove into that box.

There's the alcoholism ... that universal alcoholism. There's the poor education. It's not real schools but "Indian" schools. There's the dishevelled, backward, decrepit housing on the "Indian" Reserve. So, there's this place that Canadians have constructed for their own use to get us off our resources, our territories, our land. Pocketed us by calling us "Indians", by creating a body of legislation called the "Indian" Act, created "Indian" reserves, created "Indian" schools, made sure that "Indians" didn't vote, and so on. Well, all of those things are designed to make sure that there isn't a conversation, that there isn't any respectful sort of approach whereby the people who are here and the people who come, meet and negotiate some sort of social arrangement.

That's what I mean when I say, "We haven't yet met", because what's happened has been essentially a very long, very aggressive gang rape. The victims of that gang rape are the people who come from my community, the perpetrators are the people out there called Canadians. So we haven't met because no one has ever said, "Who are you and what's your understanding about this place?"

CTG: But one thing that those newcomers *have* been interested in, for different reasons, and some very interested, is the cultural expression of the Native people. Not usually the people, not the makers, but the objects that

could be acquired and that went to museums all around the world from the earliest days. So they were interested in the stuff that they could pillage.

K̓i-ke-in: Souvenirs.

CTG: But, out of collecting the treasures, the great treasures, has grown a sort of scholarly interest in what some have called Native art, completely cut off from the sorts of issues you're talking about. Many of the people who collected, didn't give the issues a second thought. So this field of expertise has built up, amongst non-Native people, about so-called Native art. These may or may not be bad people who are doing the scholarship, but they haven't been thinking about the makers or the context. A whole area of connoisseurship has grown up amongst a non-Native cognoscenti but there is very little conversation with a Native cognoscenti. It's a detached and intellectualized sort of knowledge.

K̓i-ke-in: It's a reflection of the things I was just talking about. They haven't met. They haven't met.

CTG: But there is a kind of meeting now. The RBCM [Royal British Columbia Museum] is putting on its first major Nuuchah-nulth exhibition as a collaboration. Lots of exhibitions now happen, large and small, pursuing different ideas about Native art, as curators, some of them Native, grope around for ways of doing it properly, aware that things have not been done properly in the past, with no regard whatsoever for the history. Although it's still possible to have an art-type conversation and ignore the history of colonialism, which is itself a history of pig ignorance as much as anything else, I would like to think that there is more chance for conversation *now* than there used to be.

K̓i-ke-in: Well, I think that's a good place to start. I think we can understand the reason that those things, which are now called art, were collected ... it was precisely to take back souvenirs to the civilized place, of the dark place that they'd been. So these early visitors came to our coast – they were in the dark place where the dark people are, where the pagans and heathens are – and they took back things to show the civilized, the clean, what the unwashed were doing. They brought along John Webber and his sort to make representations, to draw, to etch, to paint what the Natives were doing, and to exhibit again just how far away from civilization the visitors had been. They'd really been on the other side of the world. So that the first collecting of these things I don't think in any way, shape, or form represents any interest in creativity or in art. It represents a need to have a souvenir, some material, portable proof of having been where the devil still reigns, and to be able to bring that back to the civilized, the clean, the white, the Christian, and say, "This is where I've

been." I think this is the need that was fulfilled originally. Proof indeed that we really had been to the other part of the world.

Over time, there's prestige associated with the collections, and so on. They have given us some historical significance. This was collected back when the colony was still wild. There's a history of passing the authority over these things down, until ultimately you have the establishment of museums that are official bodies of government. You have the RBCM in Victoria, the National Museum in Ottawa. (Canada has no history of private museums.) So these institutions are there at the behest and with the support of government, yes. And these objects then come to be the great symbols of the success of the colony. They are no longer things that are just over there in Britain and in Spain, collected by the explorers who went to the dark place. They are now symbols in this civilized place. This place that reproduces the system that Europeans ran away from. Everyone runs away from Europe where their older brother inherited the land. After all, they're just younger brothers who don't inherit anything. So why not go out to the colony? You can have land there. Why not reproduce that social system, that class system, that existed in England where you're not at the top end of it at all or in any particularly significant part of it. Why not reproduce it here and you will be in a significant place. You'll be one of the those upper-crusty white folks running around with all those dark people whose land you take.

And at that point, Canada's having the Indian reserve commissions, and doing the treaty-ing and stuff ... it's at that point that the major collections in this country are made. Canada is collecting symbols of the people that it's defeating. So, now Canada's having its way with these people – treaty-ing with them, putting them into smaller and smaller pockets ... controlling them in every way ... and naming them. Even the Inuit people. I don't know if you know that. In Canada, Inuit people were legally Indians by law. Did you know that?

CTG: I did actually.

K̓i-ke-in: Does that sound a little absurd to you? That that would prevail today is rather astounding, but it's fact. So you name us. You determine what will and what will not happen. Who will and who won't deal with us. And who can and who can't buy or sell us things. Who can and cannot be in our communities. You determine that. You arrange that by law. You call it the "Indian" Act. You then do that business I talked about earlier, where you create this place called the "Indian" reserve, and then the "Indian" school. So what about the objects you have that come from our communities? At one time, they were grotesque. The very same mask that was once a grotesque representation of a pagan god and worshipped by the dark-skinned, dark-haired, dark-eyed, is *now* in the eyes of some, this beautiful, symmetrical, wonderfully exciting, textured, expressive, lovely, historically important thing ... however many labels you can

attach, as long as it's *you* attaching the labels, and as long as it's you who's creating this exhibition, and it's you who's curating it, and it's you who's handing out token places for Indians to participate.

It continues to be that the manipulation, the interpretation, the picking up of these things is done by strangers to our community, because they know damn well they have them, they have the possession of them. What they don't have and can't *ever* have is ownership of them, in the bottom of their souls as spiritual beings, they know damn well that that's true. They feel it and it makes them crave all the more to endlessly carry on in meticulous detail about the physicality or the historical nature of these things, to look for where they were collected, by whom, under what circumstance, is there a label? Is there any old piece of documentation that lets them know that, indeed, this mask was collected by this white man at this location? And then they can tell people about that, and that gives it real meaning. What they don't want to do is to put these things in the hands of the people they belong to and let them *move*, come to life again spiritually. If this exhibition is to do something interesting, if it's going to put those objects into a different light, I think the different light should be to take them off those shelves and to dance with them. Make them move. Give them life. Inject them into a system that exists outside of that museum and at the same time, inject into that museum some of what exists out here.

CTG: Art Thompson [Tsa-qwa-supp] was saying, just the other day on this very topic, how his mother absolutely cannot understand how the British Museum or any other museum thinks that they own, say, the Cook collection. She just doesn't have the concept of museum. She doesn't need to have it. As far as she's concerned, all they have to do is to go to London and take those things away because they don't belong to the British Museum and they never could. No amount of transactions with bits of paper or money or speeches is going to change that. However, Art said, his children have a different view of this. They understand that – and I don't think he's speaking of it as capitulation, he's just talking about change – his children see the educational value of masks, of things being in museums where people, Native and non-Native, can learn about them. For them, the ownership isn't the key issue. Ownership for them is that they're there and that they can be either in an exhibition or a museum – it doesn't matter – some public place, where they have an educational potential. That's a different way of thinking. In speaking of his mother's generation, then himself and his children, he's giving a picture of things in the world – a sort of biography or a social trajectory of ideas about material culture. So that it's not that they belong here or they don't belong there, but that the older the things get, the longer and more complicated their history is, that they go through various sorts of cycles of understanding and meaning. But you may say, those are weasel words. There can't be any weaselling around because the facts remain. They're yours. And the museum people of the world will never own them. Do you think they're weasel words?

K̓i-ke-in: Yeah, I do. I think that all of that kind of talk is argument to defend having taken our things. I think it's really important to talk about this idea of possession, ownership ... the Royal B.C. Museum, the British Museum, museums in Spain and other parts of the world ... definitely possess those things. They possess the physical object. They do not possess what that object represents and they never can, which is what Art's mother is saying, I think. To me, it's important that we say, from our community, what I've just said. What really needs to happen is that those objects need to be brought back to our communities, and used in our communities. They need to be used the way we use them, and they need to be recognized for what they are by the people who see them. It's important for me to say that. External authorities can forever analyse and talk on and on about what they see when they look at an object. Mostly, none of it matters even a little bit to me. Not even a little bit. Because whether or not an object has split U's, or tertiary fields [terms devised by Bill Holm], or can be identified as being by "a great Haida master from Masset in the 1870s" because of similar pieces collected by people that are dated and authenticated ... doesn't affect what it is. Not that much. However, I do want to know what family, what place, what event, what story that object has to do with. What is that rattle about? What is its purpose? What is its use? What is its application? In what instances has it been used in the past?

CTG: So that's not a good place for the conversation to start.

K̓i-ke-in: Well I don't think it has any meaning. It doesn't. It doesn't have any meaning. That drum up there, sitting up there against the wall, was made by my wife's father's brother. His name is Alphonse. Alphonse Beaver. Lives at a place called Wabaska. He made that drum. He's been singing with that drum. He's handled that drum. He's 98 years old. I was with him a month ago and when he heard me sing, he was kind of thunderstruck. Young guy sings. Sings very differently than we do. Don't understand any of the words in those songs he's singing, but I really like them. And I still want you to have this drum. He gave me his drum. What went on between us and what will go on between myself and whoever ends up with that drum, gives that drum ... oh God help us, it doesn't have a killer whale on it, or an eagle, that some idiot somewhere can attach some meaning to and then begin to interpret. It doesn't matter. It doesn't matter. If it had the most fabulous painting on it, it would mean not this much more to me. That sensibility about things – what they are and what their uses are – seems to be far, far, far away and long ago. People don't seem to want to know, and they don't want to hear about it in our language. They want to restrain, re-phrase, and re-route our expressions about ourselves. They want to call these creative things "art". So when we talk about something having to do with someone's rights, as an example, rights of ownership over territory, I have yet to see an instance anywhere, where anyone has given free rein to that question, how does this relate to that? Because that's

too politically loaded and too far away from the genteel discussion of art, which somehow refines things.

CTG: Yes, but it could also be, if you're looking for cultural reasons for these sorts of interests, it could be that the Western idea of art in the post-Renaissance period has tended to be focused on things. It's tended to be based on material, tangible objects that can be discussed in ways that you might disdain, but still, people do that. As opposed to another way of thinking about this stuff, which is to say that the material thing is a token of something else – I don't know whether we want to use this word "spiritual", but there's something intangible that's part of it or that it's a token of ... it's hard to find the right words. But it's an understanding that takes into account a lot besides the material object. If you want to use two words, it's material versus spiritual.

Kì-ke-in: I like the word *spiritual*.

CTG: It seems to me that that's where there might be a conversation. And I do not mean, and I know you don't think I mean, anything new age-ish. We are not talking about dream-catcher earrings giving you good vibes. In what you wrote about your own drawings, for example, weren't you trying to show your own way of making connections between material object and the spiritual? As I understood it, you were putting your drawings out there, in a museum, for the public to look at, so that they could learn something about a Native cosmology; there was a possibility that they could actually learn something. That the wall you speak of isn't forever. That it can be broken down. That people will learn, and that one of the things to be learned from these tangible objects – in this case, your drawings, your representations – is a different sort of relationship with the physical universe, which is largely a spiritual relationship. And that can be learned, it can actually be transmitted. In other words, a conversation can be engendered by your works. Am I right so far?

Kì-ke-in: Absolutely.

CTG: If that possibility is opened up, where do you see it happening? Can it really happen? If the exhibition of your drawings and the book are examples of how to make these ideas more accessible, isn't there a danger that they will lead to your purpose being travestied, turned into something to be consumed, like sea-otter pelts, yet one more *commodity* to be abused?

Kì-ke-in: I think that to the degree that resources and processes can be made available to people in our community, I think that the public will learn – to the extent that publishing houses say, "We want to know." Look at this discussion booklet right here. This is an amazing thing. It's not pretty. I think the drawings are some of the most powerful I've seen in my life. They're not what I

think anyone would call artistic. They conduct, they transmit tremendous stories. There isn't much left to the imagination. And when you read the material associated with this, what isn't clear becomes clear. So if you didn't know it, and you might look forever and not know it, this is a boy with a girl's panties on. He talks in here about a priest who liked to put panties on him before raping him. That's a real story from a real person – Matthew Williams from Clayoquot – about a real time in his life. Here's a list of names on this strap of the people who wielded it against him while he was at school for eight years.

I guess to me it's important that he be allowed to tell this story, that he be helped in publishing it. I think that this should be well bound, well presented with a very good introduction that places it in the midst of the body of literature on Indian residential schools. As it sits, it's kind of shoddy. There are all kinds of errors in spelling. It's a shoddy, cheap, hobbyish, back-home publication that no one in their right mind typically would ever pick up and pay any attention to. So it's not going to get a wide distribution. I think that if it was picked up by a publisher and run with, I mean it literally, I think it would be a best-seller. It's not a pretty story but it's absolutely true, it's unedited, it hasn't been touched by anybody but this man. The only thing it really needs is an introduction that places it relative to other stuff, other material, other published matter about Indian residential schools. I don't know of any other publication anywhere that wasn't edited, that wasn't prettified, that wasn't organized by somebody else for some other reason ... so "It's my MA thesis and that's really what it is ... you're my vehicle, I ride your back, I use your pain to get my senior degree." People are riding on other people's backs.

As for what you are talking about here with regard to the story, the subject matter of spirituality, relative to the larger or the more limited picture of creative production ... how do we begin that? Well, a good way to begin would be not to judge, not analyse, not endlessly go on with a need to re-form, to shape in a way that's acceptable to some set of standards that are external to our community. So we say, we want to do an exhibition of our stuff, Nuuchah-nulth stuff, but we'd kind of like to elevate it a little and not just have a bunch of nobodies talk. Get people who *know things* to talk. Get the ones who are acceptable to our communities to talk, who have something to say. Wouldn't that be a way to start getting at that stuff that we are talking about – the relationship between creative production and our belief system, or the spiritual side of our objects? We have the objects, the people who handle them, who they come from, whose ancestors used them, and we have their words. Not my nipping and chewing at *their* words, but their words. But if we think about spirituality and the question of the spiritual aspect of these beautiful things, are we going to learn about the spirituality only from those people who speak scientifically about them, and are we going to only see spirituality if it fits into the social sciences framework – thesis with a body, discussion, argument, conclusion? Or are we going to try to learn about where those

things come from and what they say and what they symbolize – from the point of view of the communities where they originated.

Many times, I used to sit with my mother's brother. He was a Jehovah's Witness. I'd sit with him for three-quarters of an hour listening to him talk about Jesus and Mary, Joseph, the ten commandments, psalm this, and whatever, all those Bible things. What would happen is that a bunch of us would be together, brothers and sisters and cousins, everybody would scam and I would stay and put up with that stuff. That's how I felt about it, putting up with it, but he was my uncle and I loved my uncle. I put up with that stuff. When he got off his Bible discussion, you know what he would do? He'd start talking in our language and he'd talk about our stories, histories, myths ... Those who scattered, who didn't want to listen to that, today, often *want* to know.

So, to answer your question again, I think that one way to facilitate that process is to give people resources to do things in a way that is purely in and of themselves, and comes from the same place that the objects come from. And hopefully, at some point in time, we will have passed the road sign in our conversation that went, "We now own it. We don't just possess it. We own it. We know more about it than anybody, even the people who created it. We have greater right to it. In fact, it's a piece of Canadian culture. It's not just Native anymore. It belongs to all of us. We can all be proud of it." We have to get beyond that because those were all lies. When you steal something from somebody that has great meaning to them, and sometimes actually has critical importance in their community, it cannot ever become the possession of other people. It can never become other people's culture; their endless claims that it is so, notwithstanding. But the *stealing* of them can be their culture, can be their history. I hope I haven't missed the mark in answering your question.

CTG: You haven't. No, what I'm now thinking about is that a conversation implies something with two sides. Having a way of organizing thought, as an end in itself, is, one could say, what post-Enlightenment thinking in the West has been trying to do. Trying to find a way of being open to knowledge, and then having ways of organizing that knowledge, so that it can be used. Now we know that many of the results of that aspiration have been appalling. But they're not all appalling. Being able to organize the mind, organize knowledge. The Greeks did it. Of course, the Nuu-chah-nulth do it too. Right?

K̓i-ke-in: Absolutely.

CTG: What we need to know, and I'm talking about myself, is other ways of organizing thought. Not, let me wander around the world until I find a way of organizing knowledge that I can recognize as being like mine. But tell me another way of understanding the world. Now, you can say when I speak like that, that I'm just acting like a Westerner, an inquisitor. I'm just acting like

Captain Cook. Trying to find new stuff for one kind of thrill or other. Hopefully, a benign intellectual thrill, but still, a thrill nonetheless. So, you can accuse me of that and I stand accused, correct? But I actually can't help wanting to know other ways of doing things. However, there's got to be a way – if somebody hasn't been to school or been to a vile school, or maybe they don't speak in perfect English sentences or, as you said, write with *an opening, a body, and a conclusion* – of getting around that. That's only one way of learning other knowledge. So let's be open to the other ways and it might be children, as you say, it might be an old person who's never been to school but who tells stories. We've got to hear that. I'm not saying anything that's not often said now. It's recognized. The Supreme Court's Delgam Uukw decision recognized, if you want that sort of authority, recognized the value of spoken knowledge.

K̓i-ke-in: To a degree. What the Delgam Uukw government decision says is that the courts have to give more weight to the oral histories. It doesn't say how much, in what situations, or to what effect.

CTG: And it's still very much open for all kinds of weaselling around.

K̓i-ke-in: But it does say that, yes, more weight has to be given to oral history.

CTG: Would you talk more about Nuu-chah-nulth ways of valuing objects?

K̓i-ke-in: Well, take this rattle that I have in my house here. It's very precious to me and one of the strings on it is seine twine and one of the things on it is paint. There's cedar bark on it. It's made of wild-cherry wood and it's got some eagle down on it. Well, we could go on endlessly about the quality of the faces and describe the physical nature of this thing forever, and be really cute and relate it to northern things and how it seems to be a copy of northern style design, and imply that those Nuu-chah-nulth people don't know how to draw a proper ovoid so the mouth isn't really an ovoid but it's somewhat reminiscent of more northern style and that kind of stuff. It does nothing to help me understand this. It says nothing about this thing's relationship with myself and my family and others who have held it and used it, and why, and where, and when. But if we look only at these little fluffy things and know that they are eagle down or swan down and talk about that ... that's the stuff that's interesting to me. I don't care if anybody thinks it's perfectly well made and exhibits all of the skills of a great carver. I don't care about any of that. I like that it's very well done. I really do. I like that. There are rattles I've seen that are just about as crude as you could possibly get, which have functioned in a place of need that are every bit as important for the people, and the time, as this rattle is. This has been used in hundreds of potlatches over a very long

time. I remember once having Alice Paul, a particularly knowledgeable Hesquiaht elder and accomplished basket-weaver, ask me if I could make a whistle. She said, "I need a whistle during this funeral for what we're going to do." I said, "I can make you a whistle." I immediately grabbed a curved knife and a straight knife and made a whistle that sounded like she wanted it to sound. She wanted a certain pitch of sound so I made it for her. She liked that. I don't know where that whistle is today or what's happened to it, but it could be in some museum somewhere and called a Hamatsa whistle or something else. Then, again, I know that what I carved it for, what I made it for, was the use that she needed it for, which was dealing with her brother's death. Her brother died and she wanted to acknowledge her brother and to put him away in a respectful way. Part of the process of doing that and acknowledging the change, the transformation from the *kuu-as* (real living human being) that we knew, to *ch'ihaa* (a being of the spirit world), involves ceremonies that deal with our spiritual system. To send him on his way. Likewise, the same woman on another occasion asked me to make a rattle and I had no tools with me. So what I did was, I got a snuff can, some wire and a piece of wood that already existed – I sawed off a piece of a broom handle – that made a perfectly good rattle. Perfectly good functionally. I don't know what anyone else might think about it, but for her, that rattle was used to invoke a spirit, to call her ancestors to her, to come and acknowledge what she was doing and to give her strength when she was doing what she was doing. It satisfied her as much as having proper old things on hand would do. In a more temporal way, this is more pleasing. In a more spiritual sense, the makeshift rattle did absolutely adequately.

Let's say I'm a *ch'ihaa*, someone who no longer wears a body visible to others, I am in the universe, and my sister calls me. Do I, as a spiritual being, care whether she calls me with a beautifully symmetrical, well finished, slightly-northern-looking, somewhat-reminiscent-of-the-master-of-the-Chicago-settee's-work rattle* or calls me with a snuff can with some pebbles in it? Well, I think that all of those things really don't matter. However, in the process of doing it, of calling a *ch'ihaa*, this stuff, this white fluffy down, has great significance. It's not there as a decoration. Some individuals spend a great amount of time walking around in nature picking up nothing but clean eagle down. Have you ever seen a piece of eagle down anywhere in nature? You walk around a long time looking for it.

* This is a designation devised by Bill Holm, and followed by others, to identify work by the hand of a 19th-century Haida artist – which includes a remarkable settee in the Field Museum, Chicago – whose real name has not, to date, been recovered. ("Will the Real Charles Edenshaw Please Stand Up?: The problem of Attribution in Northwest Coast Indian Art" by Bill Holm, in *The World is as Sharp as a Knife*, edited by D.N. Abbott, 1981. Victoria: BC Provincial Museum.) – CTG.

When I was growing up, I was told how to prepare myself to do certain things. How to conduct myself in certain circumstances. I was told by an old man that after bathing in the salt water of the sea – which is a rather pleasant thing to do, and is close by most of our villages – that if you really want to do well, if you want to prosper, if you want to attain goals that you set for yourself, if you want to make a target and want to reach that target, if you want to do that, one of things you have to learn to do is to look after yourself spiritually, to prepare yourself for what you want. You don't only have to be successful, don't only have to go out there and make a good living and good life for yourself, but be prepared to live that life once it arrives. Anybody can go out and slaughter seals all over the place and be a great seal hunter. Not everybody can go out there and make a living out of doing that and then know what to do with that money. Dealers who went around buying the hides could do that, made a lot of money. But how do you put that money to its greatest use? During the fur-sealing era, numbers of our people went out and got very wealthy indeed, and drank themselves to death. Wasted themselves away. Did things with that money that weren't particularly useful, productive, socially redeeming.

In order to take care of ourselves, we pray and we pray in different ways. We move around the world in different ways, and one of the things that I've been told was that depending on what I want, if I really want something and I pray and bathe over a period of time in salt water, then there's a proper *order* to the fashion in which I do it.

We were talking about how the mind is ordered earlier. We were talking about ways of organizing thought, and then we were talking in a large sense about spirituality. So the ordering of our lives, the ordering that matters isn't logical. It isn't that introduction-body-conclusion stuff. That's not what matters. How we organize ourselves spiritually so that we can be strong when something needs to be done ... that's what really matters and that's what matters to me as a human being. That's why I'm here talking with you.

CTG: So this spirituality is not *instead* of an organized knowledge. These matters are not either/ors.

K̓i-ke-in: Definitely not.

CTG: But it does precede everything else?

K̓i-ke-in: Yes. It's where we stand in the world. It's what we stand on. It's what keeps us solid. It's what makes us able to proceed. You have to step away from somewhere to go somewhere. We have to start somewhere, and where we start is not a place that stands still. It's something that's going on. Part of a very old and very all-consuming cycle. Eagle down is the single aspect of this rattle that I find interesting, that means a lot to me, means the *most* to me.

To return to where I was a moment ago.... After preparing oneself and bathing in the ocean in salt water, one spends time in the mountains, climbing higher and higher in the mountains. I was told to go as high up in the *highest* mountains as I could possibly go, find the *coldest* water I could possibly find, find water that isn't traversed by people, that isn't canoed over, or walked over, or waded in, or swum in by other people, and bathe in those places. As well as places that I've been shown by other people and been brought to bathe in – I had to find places for myself. So I do that.

I was also told what the old people used to do, the *yakwiimit**, when they really wanted to do something. A young man would go, and upon fasting and praying, and bathing, and being prepared, and getting himself ordered, having gotten past the point of being lectured and talked to, past the point of bathing in salt water and listening to the lessons – the teachings related to that kind of preparation – and then bathing in higher and higher streams and pools of water, higher and higher mountains, ultimately to find a place close to the edge of a cliff, if at all possible, a spot that has a long view seaward, where there's an eagle's nest ... then, climb that tree, get into that nest, stay there for four days, don't eat, and collect whatever eagle down I could find there. Eagle down has huge significance. Eagle down is a blessing, not just to you, but to your family, your extended family, to any and all touched by it in ceremony and ritual.

When there are ceremonies, you see people spread eagle down on the floor before masks dance. There's a proper way to think about eagle down: the spreading of down is to create a sacred space, whether it's a motel room, a funeral home, a church where there's a wedding going on, or the middle of a big house with fires and small masks. Eagle down makes a space sacred, suitable for what we call *ch'ihaa* to walk about on. And when we show masks, things of that sort, those are *ch'ihaa* walking around. Many people think those are dances or those are entertainment, or dramas, or whatever. That's okay if that's how they see it. It's not for me to judge, but what I was taught is that those things – the down, the masks – and what I do when I put on masks is to facilitate the embodiment in this world of something that exists, but is invisible to us. My mother has been dead for over twenty years but that doesn't mean that my mother isn't sitting here as we talk. I would be a fool to live my life thinking that.

It would take a long time, I think, to talk about eagle down in a way that was meaningful, educational, respectful and understandable. I wouldn't care whether or not what I was doing pleased someone else's sensibility about how thought should be organized. I would hope that if there was a desire for them to *learn* about that, that in the course of my talking about it over a very long

* Our earliest ancestors, people unaffected by European contact, our idealized forebears – K̓i-ke-in.

time, using stories to talk about the different pieces of it, that they would come to understand that this stuff isn't just a physical trapping. So I hope that's a way to talk about what you meant when you said, "How do we organize thought?" I organize everything in my life around what I live by, what I was told in stories.

CTG: You use the word "process"; it's a word to remember when thinking about Native art. Take a mask: to a non-Native viewer it can appear to be, just another mask, just another copy or version of the same thing. That idea runs exactly counter to the Western idea of originality, innovation, everything must be a new thing in order for it to *make sense* in terms of important Western art. A simplistic version, no doubt, but that's how progressive Western art goes – one innovation after another. Masks don't belong because they seem to be basically more of the same. Obviously, making that judgement is using one criterion to judge something that's coming from a completely different place. So here's a conversation stopper. It's got to be understood that these masks are valued in a different way, part of many other intangible things, part of a spiritual process. As far as I understand that's where the difference lies. And so you may, or we may all end up having to say, "Okay, difference." Too different. There's nothing we can do about that. It's like the Two Row wampum. There's this strand and that strand. They can be harmonious, or not. One can dominate the other or devour the other. Perhaps they can be braided together. I don't know, maybe they can't be braided together.

K̓i-ke-in: They are never to be braided together, and they are, according to the story, to run forever side by side and not cross.

CTG: Yes, but what about hybridity? One idea of a solution is to make a third thing that is a bit of one and a bit of the other, to produce a hybrid stuff, as though that would somehow bring cosmologies closer together. Or stop racism, for example. That's the way the thinking goes. Well, it might bring something together, but there is also going to be a travesty of both rows in the process. So maybe that isn't the solution. We can both of us think of examples of art made by First Nations working in Canada today that are hybrids in that sense.

K̓i-ke-in: Everything made *today* is hybrid.

CTG: And some of it is more hybrid than you making a mask. You could think of Lawrence Paul Yuxweluptun's work.

K̓i-ke-in: I think people *can* label his work as hybrid. I know Lawrence. I know who he is. I knew his mother very well. I knew his father very well, and I know exactly who he is and where he comes from, and why he's producing

that. Now, someone says, "But he's using acrylic and canvas." I say, "Yeah, his world has acrylic and canvas in it." So where's the hybrid? "Well, he's using Western art language. He uses a Salvadore Dali-esque manner and Coast Salish motifs?" "Yeah. He knows about those things. He's seen them. What's your point?" "He also talks English." "Yeah. Well. It's what he speaks. It's the only language he speaks." So where's the hybrid? Externally, people look at it and say, "Of course it's hybrid because there's this old tradition and he doesn't use it. He doesn't even use Salish design. He uses a design system that's based on Bill Holm's book."

CTG: Right. That's exactly what upsets the people who are interested in maintaining authenticity. They've got very upset by what he does. It's undeniable that his work has been contentious. It's got people....

Kì-ke-in: That's the whole point of it. For it to be contentious. But I don't see anything contentious about it at all. I don't see anything hybrid about it at all. I just see Lawrence's work.

CTG: Does that mean that anything a First Nations person does, because it's a First Nations person doing it, is going to be First Nations, in a sense?

Kì-ke-in: I think that depends on whoever, again externally, wants to say that. If someone wants to say that, then that's so for them. If someone else says, "Well no, it isn't at all. The only things that are really First Nations are things that are carved with stone by people who are Native and don't know English. And if those situations don't exist, then they're not real Indians, then that's so for them."

CTG: Okay. So people can say both of those things.

Kì-ke-in: Yeah. It doesn't matter to me. It's what they're saying. But I think in relation to this exhibition and where we want to go and in talking about spirituality and creativity, I don't think those things are really questions. I haven't heard anybody say, in looking at a screen in my community, "Whoa! That has a real contemporary flair to it." I've never ever heard that. However, I have heard people say when they see it – and I hear it all the time – I've heard people say, "Wow! It has a really old style to it ... It's a really old-looking thing." And they're talking about the fact that I have pointedly gone out and adopted bits and pieces from all over the place, in old painters', in old carvers' ways of doing things. Because as a young man – and I don't know where I told this story, it's been published somewhere – when I was doing silver work, old women ... I would see old women look at things that I did, and the tone in their voices, it sounded like they were ready to cry ... they were nostalgic for something that used to be. But what it was, was that when they

were younger, everybody had jewellery like that. And it used to be so nice to see men in our community who could take a silver dollar or a gold coin and with a hammer and a piece of metal, make a beautifully engraved bracelet. They longed also for the popularity of that beautiful stuff that spoke to them, that had Thunderbird and killer whales and things that meant something to them on it – stuff that wasn't an agate wrapped in a floral design created by someone in Italy or anything else. It spoke about our way of doing things. "I make baskets. I sell my baskets to tourists. I get money and when I have enough money, I go to this man and I give him a silver dollar. What he does, in his time, with his hands and his tools, is return to me a beautiful bracelet for my baby daughter." There are very few places where people are able to do that anymore. So there's a nostalgia in the voice. There's a longing in that voice that's based on the appropriateness, the localness, the ownership of our way of doing things – the understanding that this is made by one of ours, using our methods, with our things, for our people. There's the localness of it, the appropriateness of it, but there's the *social thing* that there's a man in my community who does that, and he's my uncle. I go to my uncle and say, "Uncle, I really want a bracelet for my daughter." He takes the silver dollars, and bang, bang, bang, and then you have a silver bracelet.

I saw old people that way as a boy, watching them talk about things, watching the exuberant expressions of joy when, as a boy, I saw people sing and what it did to old people. I then see, as I go through my life, drunken men picking up guitars and singing cowboy songs, and pleasing people at a certain kind of level. None of that heartfelt joy, exuberance, expressed anywhere. In fact, it's kind of a cry-in-your-beer. Look what we've become. Everybody's dying of alcoholism, and the white people don't like us. And we don't have a right to vote. Who-stole-your-best-gal kind of country and western wallowing that goes on. That's what was going on when I was a boy.

I went through a period of watching people do things in a right way. That was right only for us. Not because some external authority said it was right. Not because father so-and-so, or this priest, or that brother, or that minister said, but because it's right for us. I saw people behaving that way. Doing what was right because it was what they were taught was right, and knowing that it was right, and having the efficacy of it. I went from that, to watching songs be used for crying and for expressing the hurt that's here in our lives today and surrounds us everywhere.

I have always very pointedly tried to take bits and pieces of what my ancestors did, to do activities that were done before.... I made a stone hammer. I pecked away at a pebble until I made a stone hammer. And when my uncle saw it, George Clutesi, he said, "Can I have this hammer? Can I have this, nephew?" I said, "You can have it, uncle." Then he says, without ever saying it to me, I'm sure he goes away and says, "In this world, there continues to be people, or at least my nephew, who will peck at a stone long enough with another one ... banged them together and look what he made." He just got such

a charge out of it, such a huge charge out of it. My mother, I gave my mother the very first silver bracelet I ever made. I gave it to my mother. She never ever wore that bracelet in public. Ever. She wrapped it up in a piece of old nylon stocking that she had and she had it in her closet in a bag, hidden from everybody. Never ever wore that bracelet in public. Never. And I've watched that.

CTG: So, what's the real reason you create things?

Ki-ke-in: For me, the reason that I do the things I do, everything, in the way of creative stuff, is this. When I was a boy, I heard men sing who still sang because they loved life – what that life was still able to provide. It was still possible for them to say, with all of the stuff, the filth that surrounded them and was going on in their territory, they were still able to say, "I'm grateful for what I have. At the end of my day, I can give a feast and I can say, 'Thank you. I'm grateful for what I have.'" When their daughters became women, they were still able, even at that point – and this was important for them – to feast and to sing. When somebody died, it was important for them to feast and cry, to give voice to that feeling. At the same time, in my lifetime, I've watched that go away from my community – that ability to be grateful for what we have, as opposed to what's been taken from us, and continues to be taken from us and to recognize that we're part of a very large picture. We've been confused mostly, as a community, into believing that Jesus is the answer. Or that Jesus was the answer for my mother's generation or my grandmother over there.

Now it's on TV. You get to watch Oral cry on TV and heal people, and ask for 28 million dollars. That has come in my lifetime. I've been with people who did what we call *ts'its'ikink* [pray aloud] when I was a boy. Who took my hand in their hand when they talked to me. They patted my hand like this, as a way of telling me that they loved me. Old people talking to me in a nice way. I grew up with that. I see old people today who scream at young people, "You should respect me. I'm your elder. What's the matter with you?" I grew up and watched old people go from those lovely, embracing, warm, generous souls to embittered, pale, conflicted, angry people who demand and command constantly. And who don't know how to potlatch. Don't know how to feast, oftentimes because they do not have in their hearts any gratitude. They don't feel grateful for their lives. And why should they? They have a very strong conviction that life is not good now. It's not even nostalgic thinking; it's not even a matter of looking back and saying, "Well, it was this way, or I saw that." Because for the most part, our elders today are people who, when they were young almost every single one of them went through "Indian" residential schools. They were told that they were "Indians" and that "Indians" were garbage. "You're the bottom rung of the social ladder and what we're doing here is creating a pool of cheap labour. You're going to wipe our children's

bums and we're going to call your women 'squaws'." And that's what happened. When that was happening, logically, the thing for someone to do as much as possible in that situation, in order to prosper, to survive, would be to adopt the behaviour of those white perpetrators of abuse, control, oppression, suppression. To adopt those behaviours. So what most of our elders really wanted, and many are now finally admitting it, they wanted more than anything to be white, whatever that was. White.

Many of the people from that generation, including my mother, would talk English to their children whenever they were in control. If they got extremely happy, extremely sad, hurt, or otherwise shocked, they would be their real selves and talk in our language. That's an amazing fact. I grew up through all of that, so what I do, everything I do, is constructed, is created to put back what's been sucked out. There's been a big vacuum cleaner go through our community. The people who own that vacuum cleaner are Canada and Europe. The people who have everything that was collected up in the vacuum, are Canadians and Europeans. They have our treasures in their museums. They have them all over the place. Rich ones have them in their private home collections.

I grew up only wanting to do one thing, create beauty. From when I was very young, I liked beauty. I loved beauty. I have a way of seeing beauty. I have a version of beauty that has every right to be what it is and doesn't need to be measured by anyone. And I don't care what anybody else wants to say about it. I enjoy when people are respectful and want to understand. I really enjoy trying to help them understand things. But anybody who says to me, "That's great or that isn't" ... I don't care. Critics don't make or break my day.

CTG: Was the snuff-can rattle less beautiful than the other one?

Ki-ke-in: Well of course, that's an external question. What do you mean?

CTG: No. What do you mean?

Ki-ke-in: It functioned *absolutely* as well for that old lady, brought joy to her, brought pleasure to her, brought peace to her, and functioned to call that brother of hers to her, exactly as it was meant to. For me, that was a very beautiful thing.

CTG: Yes. You said that very well, very beautifully before. You made it totally clear what its meaning was. And that was its beauty?

Ki-ke-in: Absolutely.

CTG: Your use of "I have a great sense of beauty" – that's what you mean by it?

Ki-ke-in: Yes. So when someone says, "Yeah, but that's a snuff can and it's not as pretty, and it's not as well made", I think of Bill Reid's phrase, "the well-made object", and how we will forever hear about that, and be beat up with that.

CTG: Native art has been in favour at various times in this century – in the 1920s, in the 1930s, and in the U.S. as well. We saw it here around ...

Ki-ke-in: 1970, '80 ...

CTG: ... and the early 1990s was another high point. Now I would say it is losing some standing. Not, of course, amongst collectors and that specialized market for ...

Ki-ke-in: ... baubles ...

CTG: ... or souvenirs, to use your words. But I'm more interested in the world that paid attention to James Luna and Edgar Heap of Birds and Lawrence Paul. It's a question of, "Where are they now?" in the terms of that world.

Ki-ke-in: Well, that world, that art world, has fashions, fads. People struggle to garner attention in that world by whatever means. Making Princess Diana masks ...

CTG: ... or making works that deal specifically with colonialism. That has been a strategy, a post-colonial positioning.

Ki-ke-in: Well, it's all the same thing, though. To create something that garners attention, that is purely of the external world – "Look at that, Charlotte! Beautiful big eagle! See him? That was nice." Anyway, whether you get any attention by creating a mask and then burning it, or creating a mask and going to jail – you know, the whole Norval Morisseau thing – I am the pathetic Indian. Watch me get drunk in your community and then the next day when I get out of jail, open an art show. I once cracked a joke at a tribal council meeting when we were trying to raise money for pursuing land claims. I said, "Well, if you would give me 50 per cent of everything that I make, I guarantee you, I promise you, I'll make you millions." People said, "What are you going to do?" I said, "Well, I'll go to the East and cut off one of my legs and run across Canada. In every town, I'll go to bed with white girls. I'll drink and become pathetic, and I'll flop around. But, regularly, as the movie goes, I will rise as Rocky. We'll have a van with the Rocky theme ... and I'll be sober again having maybe smoked a peace pipe with someone, or gone to a sweat lodge, or had some sweet grass from somebody. I'll rise up again as the Indian

and just run on. And who knows, when I get to Vancouver, I'll end my run at the Planetarium and wear Joe David's Diana mask." Well, there it is. I see people doing the most absurd things.

I laughed earlier about the mask. It seemed to me that somewhere between 1970 and 1978 was the high point of playing to the external world, and we still see flourishes of it. There was this time ... I remember First Nations artists carving masks, a whole crew carving masks, when I was in Victoria. Blocks of wood shaped like masks had painted and carved designs on them. Then someone said, "If you cut the mouth through, pierce it, pierce the nostrils, cut the eyes through, we'll give you this much more." Then someone said, "If you do all of that and have ears on it, I'll give you this much more." Then someone said, "There seems to be a trend here, so I'll start in-laying abalone as well." Then someone else said, "I'll peg hair into it." So you've got a mask with abalone, pierced mouth, nose, eyes, and ears, and hair on it. Somebody else said, "Well, I'm going to do all of that, but I'm going to put straps of copper on the eyebrows." Then somebody else said, "I'm going to engrave the eyebrows. It will have copper eyebrows but mine will be engraved." Then another artist said, "I'm going to use silver on mine, not copper. I'm going to use silver." Somebody else said, "I'm going to make a mask and have it gold-plated and put in the Canadian Museum of Civilization with a laser beam on it."

It's *all* gymnastics for the people who pay. I pays the piper and I names the dances. External control over a conversation that really is all *out there*, and isn't about this place at all. Isn't about where we live, and how we relate to the world, and where we come from, and where we go when we die. If we need to pretend that, we'll bring that in too, and we'll say, "It's been danced. It's been potlatched. It's been used by my son."

CTG: But couldn't it be argued that these trends or gestures, represent a kind of conversation? They may be commerce, and other things too, but they are a way of getting non-Native people to pay attention.

Ki-ke-in: Yes. I think you can say that.

CTG: Therefore, they are not without some redeeming feature.

Ki-ke-in: Yeah.

CTG: Okay, so they're not without some redeeming features. But they're also a travesty. So they can be two things that seem to be in conflict.

Ki-ke-in: I don't think so. I don't see any conflict.

CTG: They can be both things simultaneously. They can be both a travesty and a sort of advocacy.

K̓i-ke-in: I think that when people externally create or make something, something else ... so, for example, Bill Reid's work is a renaissance, and he drives the renaissance. That rankles me. That's bunk. It denies everything that my life has been – what I've seen around me. There's not a Nuuchahnulth potlatch yet that's been exhibited anywhere in public that I'm aware of. But the Kwakwaka'wakw in Alert Bay I don't think they have a potlatch that isn't videoed, that doesn't show up on a film or national TV somewhere. Likewise, the Haida in Skidegate or Massett, they do so little, it's so rare that they do anything, that when they do, it makes national news. Bill Reid makes a canoe, a Haida canoe – it's the beginning of the renaissance! People have been making canoes in my community forever. Their reason for making a canoe is to go fishing – so that's not a renaissance. But, you see, he played to that public so that creates *that* conversation. It doesn't matter to me whether or not someone says something about it, whether or not it's externally socially redeeming, whether or not there's something more there complicating it, or intellectualizing it. None of that's important.

If Bill Reid had said, "I don't like the idea of logging on Lyell Island and therefore I'm going to do this" and he was vociferous about it, I'd be impressed by that. I'd say, "Well, that has some value." But to wait until the moment, and to ride on the back of those kinds of events ... I don't know. I'm not impressed by those kinds of things. I have a hard time with external voices creating what something is. So, in my mind – what goes on in our communities, what people are doing in our communities to reconstruct, to re-strengthen more than reconstruct, to revitalize what exists – that's the stuff I care about. I care about my own community and what goes on in my community.

I also am a citizen of the world. I'm very aware of what goes on in the world. I've been all over the world. I don't pretend for one second that that world doesn't exist, but it seems to me that you can create great Haida art and give it to white people, and the white people will laud you and applaud you, and at some point it gets back through their teachers, and their education system, that this is greatness, and then the young Haida people know what greatness is. Or, you can work at home not doing any of that stuff, but concentrate your efforts on the immaterial. Concentrate your efforts in a way that is invisible and will never leave a mark, and no one will ever be able to say, "This is so-and-so's work, this was so-and-so's life." Because those individuals, they really don't matter. They're grains of sand. But, the Western world needs the great man. Needs the historic epic. Needs to contain, control, codify, so that renaissance is very important and that renaissance man ... damn ... that's what it was all about, that Haida art. And the greatness of it all was that shared conversation between those three pinnacles, Reid, Duff and Holm, because they had a conversation.

Well, those are some of my thoughts on that stuff.

CTG: Let me ask you. Is it a white man's codification to see a difference, to identify a difference between a Nuuchahnulth style and some other?

K̓i-ke-in: I think absolutely.

CTG: It's a white man's construct?

K̓i-ke-in: Yup.

CTG: So you don't want to make any claims for there being something special about the way your work looks.

K̓i-ke-in: You mean mine, personally?

CTG: Yes. I now mean yours.

K̓i-ke-in: Or Nuuchahnulth people's?

CTG: Well, which shall we take first? Perhaps the Nuuchahnulth people.

K̓i-ke-in: Well, clearly it is very distinct. So is our language. Our relationship with the resources we are in, the places we live, and what comes to our home to be eaten.

CTG: So there's something distinct?

K̓i-ke-in: Of course there is.

CTG: So there are visible distinctions. I mean it's not difficult to identify a Nuuchahnulth mask visually. I wouldn't say I could identify them all, but I can recognize what can only be Nuuchahnulth. But I'm recalling what you said earlier in this conversation about the "northern style" and the "southern style", and how they are frequently distinguished in terms of a Holmian formalism, in terms of connoisseurship. So we don't need to talk about it in that way, but there *is* a sense in which they are distinct.

K̓i-ke-in: A whole range of ways in which they're distinct.

CTG: And these visible signs are not to be mistaken for the *whole* picture. Isn't that the important thing?

K̓i-ke-in: An important thing. Not *the* important thing, but it's important.

CTG: Because otherwise, we are presented with an essentialized Native cosmology. If one of the themes here, for me, is another way of understanding the world, is how a culture organizes its knowledge, it has to be understood as something specific to the Nuu-chah-nulth and maybe even specific to communities within the Nuu-chah-nulth.

Another thing I glimpsed when you talked about the exchange of a silver dollar, which would then come back later ... could be expected to come back formed into a bracelet ... was that it could be *counted on* to happen. There was a sort of dependability in that community that that was how it had always been. There was a closeness, a localness. Some would say, and I think I'm beginning to be one of them, that a lot of what this refers to and that now seems to be missing, has been caused by modernity. We're talking about two or three centuries of modernity. Some sort of force that changed everybody's lives, diminished local meaning. In the part of England that I come from, there is still evidence of animism, of pre-Christian belief. Things like the reverence for harvest festival and use of bonfires – things that were seen more in my father's childhood, before the First World War. And of course, even in a settled and re-settled, and re-settled part of southern England, there are hill circles, there are ancient clumps of trees. Many people had deep feelings for a particular place and then suffer terribly when it's disrupted. This is an unfixable trauma that has happened to many people in Europe. Those are the people who may be looking closely at the connections that *you* have to the land. Many people are now realizing that there's a problem. Do you have any sympathy for that, that search that might be going on now?

Ki-ke-in: What do you mean by sympathy?

CTG: I don't mean much, except an acknowledgement.

Ki-ke-in: I recognize very clearly that that's the situation. I've seen people ... when I was a boy, I saw people come past my mother's home. They were swimming in the river, and throw handfuls of change, and then take pictures when the "Indian" children dove for the coins. Because that's what Natives all over the world do. They scramble after white people's shiny coins.

CTG: That's something different.

Ki-ke-in: I saw that. I also saw people coming and saying, but when do the "Indians dance?" I've also seen professional scholars, anthropologists, and others, come and long – and they wear their longing, they wear it – they wannabe. I've seen that in my lifetime. I've watched not just that rather obvious and vulgar expression, that longing, but also seen in young people who are very sincere, that recognition that we still have something that they no

longer have and have no connection with whatever, and they want it. They want a spirit helper. They're sincere. They really are. They will go to some ass and say, "Channel me up a spirit helper." "Ogwana", on his weekend retreat in Vancouver from Los Angeles, will, for \$3,500, tell them who their spirit helper is. "It's 'Shimook' the bear. You are of the bear clan." Then they will go away and get the drum, or the mask, and suddenly they become ... "Shimook" people.

CTG: That's a weak-minded approach and that's not what I was trying to get at.... I'm talking about economic and social forces that have endangered, say, salmon in the Fraser.

Ki-ke-in: When you said, "Do you sympathize with that?" I said, "What do you mean by sympathy?" and you said, "Do you recognize it?" Oh certainly, I recognize and I've seen the whole range of manifestations of that longing for something that people think *we* have that they no longer have. I see it everywhere and I see it in every way.

CTG: I remember one of the first times I heard you speak. You were brilliantly excoriating about turquoise-jewellery wearers, as a sort of "fashionable" demonstration of something else. But if people have some sort of need and you show your drawings and ask people to engage with them and actually go some way towards telling them about your cosmology, they are bound to react, respond....

Ki-ke-in: That was the business of the conversation again. In the first place, none of those drawings was done for the public to see. None of them. I do those drawings and I give them *constantly* to people who come to my home. I doodle and give them the drawings. I doodle, draw, whatever. Some people were here the other day, Japanese exchange students, and they said they'd like something and I said, "Well, I don't have a lot of time, if you're leaving in three hours." But I made a print ... there were seven of these students. Six of them. I kept a copy for myself. Did an instant little doodle and did a print ... a way of printing that I've been doing for some time, and dashed it off with a wax crayon. Some little representation of some of the elements of Nuu-chah-nulth design ... animal that comes from my area. It's a crest that I have a right to use. I get to tell them that. Then, because I have only an orange crayon handy, well, I make it orange. No, it isn't on acid-free paper and all of the rest of that, but they were very interested. They all wanted them numbered and signed, and so on. They have some sense of something about it that they need to get out of it. All I was trying to do was be helpful and give them something to take home that came from here, that didn't cost them an arm and a leg. Gave it to them. Threw the stencil away.

In some conversation somewhere, somehow, with Marjorie Halpin, I mentioned that I keep journals.* She jumped on that, and constantly was at me about these things, these journals, and I was very clear that I was not talking to any kind of a dumb person, but a very, very bright person who sincerely was interested in trying to get something out of that. She said to me many times, you know, "These things have to be shared with lots of people." I never ever thought that. Ever. She's the one who planted that. That's a rather amazing thought ... that she thinks they're of some value, some worth. And her sincere interest in them is the only reason that exhibition came to be. She said, "I really believe that people could get something from this." So away we go. She reads the poems and sees from time to time in the journals doodles, drawings that I'm doing. She says, "Some of these are very interesting." She says, "Do you have many?" I said, "Every nephew and niece I have probably has a drawer full of them. Many, many people have those." So, she thought it would be an interesting thing to put together drawings that were never meant to be seen by anyone in any public fashion or to be criticized as art or anything else, and poems. The only reason I call them poems is that they have a certain meter to them. They have a construction to them that has a rhythm. They are usually done in four-line pieces, stanzas if you want to call them that. You can construct all sorts of reasons to identify them as poetry or as absolutely not poetry. I know how I think about them, and how I generate them. Marjorie thought it would be interesting to take these two raw materials and present them. I said what I would like to do is to ask five or ten people who have good brains to take these things, look at them, read them, and generate some kind of a statement. Charlotte, your reaction was respectful. It was insightful. It was completely different from anything that I'd have to say. Yet there's none of that expertise, that *taking* ... I didn't feel that you took anything from me in writing what you wrote. So you don't claim to be the expert on this thing. You're reacting to it, and I like that.

But I don't need to be constructed as something beyond reproach or criticism or anything. What I wanted to do was to see what people who have these drawings think of them – what my nieces and nephews, my aunts and uncles, my sister and brothers, people around me who I come into contact with in different places and different settings, oftentimes at potlatches or in restaurants, or somewhere other than in home and in the case of my nephews and nieces, in my home – what they think of them. And then also, what would it be like for people who weren't considered when the drawings were made? What would it be like for them to see some of these things? So we arranged to have guest books where people would have the opportunity to converse about

them. What was interesting to me was that there was never a point offered in that exhibition, at the Museum of Anthropology, where I would talk about those things from my point of view. It was an interesting thing.

CTG: What happened in *Topographies: Aspects of Recent B.C. Art* at the Vancouver Art Gallery, where one of your *thliitsapilthim* (ceremonial screens) was included and hung on the wall? Did you feel it was compromising your idea that the screens are not "art", and that you are not an "artist" so much as a "creator"?

K̓i-ke-in: No. What happened was that I was approached to lend something to the exhibition by a really good friend.

CTG: Anything at all? Anything you'd made?

K̓i-ke-in: Yeah. Doreen [Jensen, one of the curators] came and she spent time with me. We've had a conversation for over 30 years.

CTG: But she didn't ask for a screen?

K̓i-ke-in: No. She said, "What are you doing these days?" "Well, I'm preparing for a year from now when one of my cousins is going to do something with the story of our family, which comes out of our joint background, so I'm in the process of just painting a screen." She saw it and she said, "Oh my God, I'd love to borrow that." I said, "Well, you can borrow it." She borrowed it. She hung it up in the gallery and there's a photograph in the catalogue. She had insisted that this exhibition should include all sorts of creative people, like Isabelle Rorick and Rena Point Bolton, both basketmakers. "We're going to have some things, some work, that isn't usually considered art. But we want creative minds, people who have something, who have done something significant." Doreen seemed very respectful of what I think.

CTG: It isn't difficult to understand why you wouldn't want to have anything to do with this term "art", which has been foisted on Native production with the idea that it was a great accolade – the ultimate. But what would you rather the conversation were about?

K̓i-ke-in: I think of what I do, and what my ancestors did, as making cultural things, full of meaning and usefulness and power. I suppose we might attempt to create a new vocabulary – agree on some terms, definitions and attempt to understand what I do from my point of view, attempt to understand what my ancestors created from their point of view. We might get at the use, meaning and power of the projects and processes you call "art" – and try to understand them from the point of view of their creators.

* Marjorie Halpin is a Professor of Anthropology at UBC and a Curator at the Museum of Anthropology, where she curated an exhibition of K̓i-ke-in's drawings and poetry in 1996 – CTG.