

The background of the entire page is a close-up of a wooden surface with a vertical grain. Several fish-shaped cutouts are arranged in a pattern, overlapping each other. The cutouts are dark, possibly black or dark brown, and have a white outline. Each fish has a prominent black eye and a pointed snout. The lighting is warm, highlighting the texture of the wood.

VANCOUVER PARK BOARD

Truth-Telling: Indigenous Perspectives on Working with Municipal Governments



Truth-telling:
Indigenous Perspectives on
Working with Municipal Governments

Vancouver Park Board
Report Prepared by:
Kamala Todd

Based upon five community consultations
between June and November 2016.

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Inside cover:
Susan A. Point—Untitled

Photo: Lisa Walker

Cover:
Susan A. Point—People Amongst the People (detail)

Photo: Lisa Walker

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We thank the Indigenous artists and cultural knowledge holders who graciously shared their experience and wisdom with us on the unceded territories of the Musqueam, Squamish and Tsleil-Waututh peoples.



Susan A. Point—People Amongst the People (detail)



Community members working on regalia for the *Songs for Reconciliation* project, 2014.

Photo: Brian Lye



Susan A. Point
—People Amongst the People (detail)

Photo: Lisa Walker

PREFACE

We gathered together —about the consultations

Calls to Action. In 2015, after many years of facilitating difficult sharing about residential schools and their ongoing impacts, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) published 94 Calls to Action. The document outlines 94 concrete steps that Canadians can take to support Indigenous people, and to bring us from a painful past and ongoing disparities, into greater healing and equality.

In June 2015, City of Vancouver Council passed a motion directing staff to provide recommendations on how to move forward on actions recommended by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC). Following this, the Urban Aboriginal Committee passed a motion requesting the Park Board also undertake a review of the TRC Calls to Action. In January 2016, Vancouver Park Board directed staff to take on 11 strategies which fall within Park Board jurisdiction. The recommendations were as follows:

THAT, in response to the Calls to Action provided by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC), the Vancouver Park Board direct staff to:

A. *Adopt the "United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples" as a reference framework for Park Board's Reconciliation initiatives;*

B. *Work with First Nations people's and other civic bodies to identify, create, and deliver appropriate and actionable staff training on indigenous issues and reconciliation;*

C. *Take a 360 degree approach to programming, including in the areas of culture, health, public dialogue, physical activity, and sport in order to increase public knowledge and awareness of reconciliation and to provide support to indigenous peoples including children, youth, Elders and families;*



Susan A. Point—People Amongst the People

Photo: Lisa Walker

D. Continue Park Board's precedent-setting intergovernmental approach to the future stewardship of Stanley Park and other relevant lands;

E. Review the donation of monuments, memorials, and public art processes and policies to ensure integration of Indigenous history, heritage values, and memory practices;

F. Review archaeological protocols to ensure that "Aboriginal protocols shall be respected before any potentially invasive technical inspection and investigation of a cemetery site" or soil disturbance of a midden site takes place on park lands;

G. Acknowledge that Aboriginal rights include Aboriginal language rights; that preservation, revitalization and strengthening of Aboriginal languages and cultures are best managed by Aboriginal people and communities;

H. Review partner and business contracts, relationships and procurement policies for alignment with TRC Calls to Action;

I. Establish and fund as a priority a program for Indigenous and non-Indigenous artists to undertake collaborative community-engaged projects and produce works that contribute to the reconciliation process;

J. Review event permitting and sports hosting opportunities to ensure that Indigenous peoples' territorial protocols are respected and that, if appropriate to the scale of the event, that local Indigenous communities are engaged;

K. Maintain current policy of no charge for changing a name on the OneCard, especially in relation to Indigenous people reclaiming names changed by the residential school system.

To view the full document of the Park Board response to the Calls to Action, please visit:

<http://parkboardmeetings.vancouver.ca/2016/20160111/REPORT-TRCCallsToAction-20160111.pdf>



*Nuu-chah-nulth Arts Association
—Hupakwanum The Chief's Treasure Box*

As an important starting point regarding art and culture in the city, the Park Board Arts, Culture and Engagement Team began the work of initiating the following strategy:

I. Establish and fund as a priority a program for Indigenous and non-Indigenous artists to undertake collaborative community-engaged projects and produce works that contribute to the reconciliation process.

A special allocation of \$35,000 was assigned to support the initiation of the new Indigenous/Non-Indigenous Community Engaged Reconciliation Program. Before proceeding with this collaborative arts program, staff felt it was important to first reach out to Indigenous artists and cultural knowledge holders.

Between June and November 2016, a total of five community meetings were held with Indigenous artists and cultural leaders from the three local First Nations—Musqueam, Squamish and Tsleil-Waututh—and urban Aboriginal communities, with a total of twenty-four Indigenous attendees. This was the first series of conversations of its kind in Vancouver.

The conversations were intended to open up space for Indigenous artists and cultural knowledge holders to share their perspectives on Indigenous/non-Indigenous artist collaborations. It was intended as an opportunity for listening on the part of staff, and for laying the foundation for ongoing relationship-building. It was, in many ways, a beginning.

Park Board staff were there to listen. Other than providing a brief overview of the

context for the meeting and details about the collaborative art opportunity, staff did not direct or curtail the flow of conversation. Kamala Todd, Metis-Cree community planner, writer, and filmmaker with a background working for the City as well as within the Indigenous arts community, was there to help facilitate four of the sessions. For some people, this was their first chance to speak directly to Park Board staff, and, thus, many larger issues arose for participants. This was welcomed. Given the spirit of openness and respectful sharing, each conversation took its own path, and people shared what was of importance to them when it comes to Indigenous-non-Indigenous relations in Vancouver, and the Park Board's role in these relationships.

It became clear that for most participants, there were bigger issues that needed to be discussed as part of the groundwork, before getting into specifics about the collaborative art fund itself. The conversations were rich, and full of diverse ideas and concerns. Certainly, people were glad for the chance to speak directly to staff, but there was also the sentiment that the process of building healthy, inclusive relationships will take time, and an ongoing willingness by Park Board to keep the conversation going, with a similar emphasis on listening and making space for Indigenous people.

This document represents the key issues and themes that arose during those preliminary conversations, and it serves as a starting point to the ongoing work of building relationships, understanding, and inclusion. Comments in quotations come from the conversations, as do the comments in the text boxes.



Community member wearing regalia from
Songs for Reconciliation project, 2014.

FRAMEWORK

Notes on Reconciliation

Many Canadians are talking about “reconciliation”. The term has been circulating for some time, as communities work to overcome the barriers that keep us in states of misunderstanding and inequality. In large part, the movement to reconciliation has come out of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, and the work of Indigenous people to heal from Residential School traumas (lived or inherited), and raise awareness and understanding amongst wider Canadian society about our painful past and ongoing inequalities. The term reconciliation has become a shorthand for amending relations, for working through some of the walls that have divided Indigenous and non-Indigenous people for generations.

“
Restitution must come before reconciliation. Returning what was taken – children, lands, language...—Participant

In 2014, the City of Vancouver was designated a City of Reconciliation. The term reconciliation is commonly used to describe the many efforts to work together, and to form relationships of “mutual respect and understanding with local First Nations and the urban Aboriginal community” (City of Vancouver).

The term reconciliation forms the basis for this particular Park Board call to action, which will support Indigenous and non-Indigenous artists to “produce works that contribute to the reconciliation process.” However, as each of the conversations revealed, the term itself should not be taken for granted. The term itself needs to be “unpacked” and talked about. Participants in the consultations provided

insightful feedback about the limitations of this concept and the issues that need to be discussed first in the work that lies ahead. This section covers some of the fundamental concerns that were raised about the term reconciliation, and Indigenous-non-Indigenous collaborations more generally.

“
We have to stand on solid ground before we can concile.
 —Participant

For many participants, ‘reconciliation’ is not the right term. They argued that ‘reconciliation’ assumes that we are returning to a state of being conciled, as if things were good before. Instead, for many people, we are just at the “truth-telling” phase of Truth and Reconciliation. With our country’s history of colonialism, we have never been ‘conciled’. In addition, this process means re-living pain, “re-traumatizing” as one participant named it. It means opening wounds. As such, we have to move carefully and with lots of supports in place — creating safe places for Indigenous people as we do this challenging work. We all have to go at our own pace. As some people noted, not everyone is ready to ‘reconcile’.

While many agreed that the ultimate goal is co-existing, and walking together in a good way, it was also shared that not everyone is ready to work with non-Indigenous artists, because the relationships are not equal. Trust has to be established. “We’re not at that place of ‘making nice’... the blood and tears need to flow first,” said one participant. To jump into collaborations might overwrite the fact of healing needed.

Many people expressed that the majority of Canadians still don’t know the realities of what Indigenous people face, and there are often very negative attitudes towards

Arlene Roberts and Jil P. Weaving,
TRACKS Symposium, 2015
Photo: Tom Quirk



Arts and Health 10th Gala, 2016

Photo: Riz Herbosa



Susan A. Point
—People Amongst the People

Photo: Lisa Walker

Indigenous people. The pains and oppressions that Indigenous people have lived with and continue to live with are not widely known or acknowledged. The same goes for the enormous contributions that Indigenous people have made to Vancouver, and Canada.

Most of the participants who are Indigenous to Vancouver—belonging to one of the local First Nations—expressed a sense that they are still invisible, unacknowledged on their own lands. It was shared many times that there is a need for non-Indigenous people to listen, to step aside and support Indigenous people in genuine ways. In addition to sharing the truths about the many-layered and multi-generational “impacts of colonization”, people also stressed that sharing Indigenous stories and art can be an important part of reminding the public of the beauty and strength of Indigenous people—challenging the many negative stereotypes and hurtful narratives that say otherwise.

For some, reconciliation has become a “buzz-word” being defined and pushed by non-Indigenous institutions. Often Indigenous people are being asked to do the “heavy lifting” of reconciliation, and are often brought on to projects as “token” Indigenous members to “check the box” of reconciliation and collaboration. People felt that this difficult work will take time, commitment, and genuine inclusion. As one participant said, Indigenous people have been reconciling and deconstructing and decolonizing since they left residential school, they have always been doing the work. It’s now time for the rest of society to “open their mind” and create fundamental shifts in the “old world view of privilege.” Reconciliation can’t be a passing fad or academic exercise: “This isn’t just research. This is our lives and we live it.”

“

You have to deconstruct what you believe you know in terms of being a Canadian.—Participant

”

Some people identified that government institutions have to change, since they were “designed to dispossess Indigenous voices”. People pointed to “systemic oppression” and “acts of exclusion” which have resulted in Indigenous people being viewed as “non-participants” in Canadian society. It was noted that colonial impacts include more than residential schools—such as “the potlatch ban, fisheries act, criminalizing gathering, criminalizing law”, all of these things which were done “with intent”, and which are affecting Indigenous people to this day. Like one person shared, “Reconciliation is the fact that you were lied to. You have to do real work in seeing us and who we are.”

Given that many participants expressed a feeling of invisibility and unequal access to resources, it’s good to ask: How can this work contribute to greater awareness about this history, and healing from these impacts? And how can this work help to change the colonial narratives which have excluded and mischaracterized Indigenous people and cultures for generations? One important first step people identified is the full acknowledgement and participation of the local First Nations, as the foundation of Vancouver, and any work on Indigenous-non-Indigenous collaborations.



Susan A. Point—*People Amongst the People*

Photo: Lisa Walker

FIRST NATIONS

Musqueam, Squamish and Tsleil-Waututh First Nations

The City of Vancouver is located on the unceded territories of the Musqueam, Squamish and Tsleil-Waututh First Nations. As many of the consultation participants affirmed, the local host Nations are the foundation of this City, and as such, must be central within this work. The following information about the local First Nations is from their respective websites.



Musqueam X^wməθk^wəyəm

The Musqueam people have lived in our present location for thousands of years. Our traditional territory occupies what is now Vancouver and surrounding areas...We are

traditional **həh̓qəm̓iñəm̓** speaking people and have descended from the cultural group known as the Coast Salish. Our people moved throughout our traditional territory using the resources the land provided for fishing, hunting, trapping and gathering, to maintain their livelihood. Today, the Musqueam people still use these resources for economical and traditional purposes...Although a metropolitan city has developed in the heart of Musqueam territory, our community maintains strong cultural and traditional beliefs. Our community historians and educators teach and pass on our history to our people, which has always been the way of our people, to keep our culture and traditions strong...Today our population flourishes and we are a strong community of over thousand members. We live on a very small portion of our traditional territory, known as the Musqueam Indian Reserve, located south of Marine Drive near the mouth of the Fraser River.



Squamish

Skwxwú7mesh Úxwumixw

The Squamish Nation is comprised of descendants of the Coast Salish Aboriginal peoples who lived in the present day Greater Vancouver

area; Gibson's landing and Squamish River watershed...The Squamish Nation is a vibrant and dynamic Coast Salish Nation, with a strong culture, rich history and bright future. The Squamish Nation has existed and prospered within our traditional territory since time immemorial. We are Coast Salish people. Our language is the Squamish language. Our society is, and always has been, organized and sophisticated, with complex laws and rules governing all forms of social relations, economic rights and relations with other First Nations. We have never ceded or surrendered title to our lands, rights to our resources or the power to make decisions within our territory.



Tsleil-Waututh

mi ce:p k^wətx^wiləm

We are the Tsleil-Waututh Nation, "The People of the Inlet."

We have inhabited the lands and waters of our traditional

territory surrounding the Burrard Inlet in British Columbia since time immemorial. Many generations of men, women and children have lived, had families, and thrived in this area, and we have a sacred trust, a commitment to care for our lands and waters. Our vision is to once again put the Tsleil-Waututh face on our traditional territory, to be active participants in all social, economic, cultural, and political activities that take place on our lands by building strong relationships based on trust and mutual respect. We welcome you to learn more about us.



Susan A. Point—*People Amongst the People* (detail)

Photo: Lisa Walker



Thunderbird Sharing Ceremony, 2017

Photo: Pablo Cesar Palma

Foundations

For many years, there was a limited relationship between the City and the local First Nations, with the common view that First Nations were a “treaty” issue, i.e. federal responsibility, and did not fall within the City’s jurisdiction or mandate. Thankfully, those attitudes have changed, and there has been growing effort to build relationships, to learn local protocols and to work with the Nations as governments in their own right.



The foundation is the Indigenous people of this land.—Participant



In 2014, the City officially recognized Vancouver as being founded on the unceded traditional territories of the Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh Nations. This was a significant step which has opened the door to ongoing dialogue, of which there are many recent examples. This section discusses points raised within the conversations about the important place of the local First Nations in Vancouver.

Policy and action must necessarily be grounded within the specificities of place. But what understanding do decision-makers, staff, and the community at large have about this place? What Vancouver identity shapes their perceptions of the stories, art, histories and culture that should be visible? The majority of partic-

ipants—including those who are not from the local three First Nations—stressed the importance of this work being grounded within the foundation of where we are; on whose land. Many people remarked that most residents and visitors don’t know that this is unceded Musqueam, Squamish and Tsleil-Waututh territory. People from these Nations shared the pain of feeling silenced and excluded from the shaping of Vancouver—its landscape and its stories. The relative invisibility of Indigenous people is a major hindrance to reconciliation and equality—and it was identified by many people as the crucial first step to the work of building cross-cultural relationships in Vancouver. It’s crucial to address the “local” and “that which is missing”, to restore a strong and visible Coast Salish sense of place.

Thus, it was widely felt that the work of collaboration and understanding must begin with “the true stories of the land”. Art, expression, stories, signage, events, etc.



Vancouver is a really multicultural city but that identity erases and casts in the shadows the Aboriginal presence—Participant



should much more clearly and visibly reflect the First Nations. It was noted that residents and visitors are hungry for the history of this place. Several people mentioned the importance of local Indigenous place names in public places, like parks. Overall, people felt that there needs to be a clear effort to publicly



Wade Baker—Canada's North Star

Photo: Lisa Walker

acknowledge the local First Nations, histories, and realities of colonization.

“What identifies a people is their language.” Language was emphasized by several people, affirming the importance of government support for language revitalization—with very few fluent speakers of the *hən̓q̓əmi̓ñəm* and *Skwxwú7mesh* languages today. Having the language supported and more visible would be one way to help recognize the ongoing continuity of the local Coast Salish people within their territories, and support the strengthening of culture, amid the legacies of Residential Schools and other means of dispossession. In particular, it was mentioned that youth should be supported to learn and share their language. Public realm expressions could be more inclusive of the local Indigenous languages.

While there have been some efforts to have more Coast Salish artworks in Vancouver—such as the Susan Point house posts in Stanley Park (created through the Aboriginal Storyscapes project), and several commissions during the 2010 Winter Olympic Games—many people expressed the urgent need to have much more visibility for the local people’s cultures, including language and artworks. It was suggested that stories and other information should be placed alongside these artworks, so people can learn the history and meaning behind those pieces. One person also noted that an archive or guide to existing Indigenous artworks is important—so that the general public can learn where those pieces are, and the stories behind them.

It’s worth noting that there are some initiatives happening in this area. The City of Vancouver is engaged in government-to-government dialogue with the local First Nations. In addition, Park Board is part of the ‘Intergovernmental process’ which is helping to involve the local Nations much more in decision-making, and ensuring that

the City learns and follows local protocol in its business. So, as an example, ideas around public realm visibility could also be addressed within another area of the Park Board’s eleven identified Call to Action strategies:

E. Review the donation of monuments, memorials, and public art processes and policies to ensure integration of Indigenous history, heritage values, and memory practices.



How do you know us?—Participant



Not only is it important to make local First Nations’ stories visible in order to raise awareness amongst non-Indigenous people and to “decolonize” Vancouver, but it was also felt that this work should be about supporting the local First Nations to have their relationships to their lands restored. For example, one participant felt this work should help local people “reconnect to villages we were removed from”. How can this kind of initiative and relationship-building “support local Indigenous people to be able to practise their culture on their lands again”, and have a visible presence on their land? Indeed, Indigenous art in this context is much more than just art—it’s about restoring relationships; voice and visibility; carrying languages and ancestral teachings forward. One of the major consequences of colonialism was that local Indigenous people were written out of the story, and pushed out of the urban landscape. Thus, efforts at ‘reconciliation’ through art offer the chance to rewrite those colonial narratives, and to make it visible and widely known that Vancouver is an Indigenous city, a Musqueam, Squamish and Tsleil-Waututh city.



Rose Cole Yelton Memorial Pole
Created by seven carvers led by Squamish artist Robert Yelton

Photo: Lisa Walker

Protocols

One important aspect of the First Nations foundation of Vancouver is protocols. All across North America, there are laws, rules, expectations of how to conduct affairs on someone's territory, and how to acknowledge whose territory you are entering/inhabit. Local protocols and laws have been largely ignored/broken since non-Native arrival on these lands.

As was cited by several participants, the placement of totem poles from other people's territories—such as Haida Gwaii and other Northern Coast people—in places such as Stanley Park, was a breach of protocol, as well as a disrespectful act. It was noted that Coast Salish people have their own unique art forms, and many do not traditionally carve totem poles, and so placing a pole of Northern Coast people on Coast Salish lands, with the relative absence of Coast Salish carvings and other cultural markers, further erases the very people who make up the host Nations. As affirmed by one participant, "True reconciliation starts with permanent acknowledgement."

It was also noted that urban Aboriginal people—those who come from other territories

—need to know and follow protocols that acknowledge the host Nations, being mindful when they create art or otherwise write themselves onto the land. One participant spoke about the tradition that many Indigenous people have of acknowledging and thanking the ancestors of the local people when they come into their land. Again, people stressed that we cannot jump into reconciliation without learning and following local protocols and incorporating them into how things are done, in order to heal past ruptures and establish respectful relationships.

Many people expressed that they want to see plaques, signage and other permanent acknowledgements of the local First Nations, there is no ambiguity about whose territory this is. Because Vancouver has such a diverse, multicultural population, it is essential that the local First Nations are clear and visible within the fabric of the city so that when other people's artworks and cultures are displayed, they don't erase or overwrite Indigenous people. As one person noted, increasing awareness about the local people's histories, cultures and protocols will go a long way to change the prevailing "colonial mindset".



Shore to Shore—Ts'uts'umut! Luke Marston

Photo: Lisa Walker

Stanley Park

Stanley Park was a symbolic and geographical centre in this discussion, as for local people this is a sacred site rich with cultural meanings—yet with a painful recent history of loss and disconnection. Many people mentioned the disrespect of having this place named after Lord Stanley, who was part of the colonial government, as Governor-General of Canada, and never lived in Vancouver.

The totem pole site—the most visited tourist attraction in BC—was mentioned by several people as a contentious site, for many reasons, including: the loss of important villages, the forced removal of their ancestors from their homes, and the prevalence of totem poles from other Nations. As one participant noted, this place is known as pah-pee-ak, and doing work to amend the painful colonial events that have taken place here would be an important step in reconciliation.

“

*Bring the women of pah-pee-ak
back to the space of their homes.
That would be reconciliation.—*

Participant”

It was noted that the Park Board itself has been part of colonization, in the removal of people from their homes in the making of parks, and in the erasure of Coast Salish people from these spaces, with little or no representation in public art, names, signage, etc. Several people felt that the Park Board needs to look at its own role in the history of dispossession in the name of ‘parks’ and how the creation of those spaces “for all” have been made at the expense of Indigenous people who not only lost access to those spaces but also a visible presence and voice upon their lands in these very public realms.

Several people mentioned naming as a good first step to redress—why is the park named after Lord Stanley? It was suggested that local people should be able to perform ceremonies in their sacred spaces again, as a way to maintain relationships with their lands. Opportunities like the gift shop were also mentioned as important vehicles for reconciliation and restitution for the local Nations. For example, someone noted that while Indigenous groups applied to manage the gift shop at the totem pole site, the contract went to a non-Indigenous company. There is frustration with those kinds of decisions and missed opportunities: “We should be selling our art, not trinkets that come from China.” Signage should make clear whose land visitors are on, and share stories of the artworks, and the history of this place.

It should be noted that some of this work is currently being done by the Intergovernmental process, in which Park Board and City of Vancouver staff are working with representatives of the three local First Nations—and Stanley Park is an important area of discussion.

All in all, there was a shared sense that reconciliation is about ‘decolonizing’ the city—undoing the erasures and exclusions and discriminatory systems which perpetuate the myth that Vancouver was founded by Anglo settlers just over 125 years ago. While there are many areas in which this work can be done, many people expressed that the first round of this fund should begin with the local First Nations as the foundation of Vancouver, and until the Musqueam, Squamish and Tsleil-Waututh are again known, respected and empowered as the caretakers of this land, with uninterrupted continuity upon their lands (however urbanized), reconciliation cannot be achieved. The next section addresses some of the key themes that arose in people’s ideas about enacting reconciliation.



Butterflies in Spirit Dance Group at
Thunderbird Sharing Ceremony, 2017

Photo: Pablo Cesar Palma



First Nations Elders Arts Men-
torship—Arts and Health Project
led by *Master Carver and Cultural
Leader Mike Dangeli, 2014-2016*

Photo: Lung Liu

THE CONVERSATIONS—KEY THEMES

“

All arts are healing.—Participant

”

During the five consultation circles there were many diverse perspectives amongst the twenty-four participants, and many ideas and concerns shared. This section is a distillation of some key themes and ideas which arose from the five consultations. These conversations are just the beginning—the first round. It is hoped that through the ongoing outreach and relationship building, the listening will continue, and Park Board decisions around arts and culture will have the benefit of much greater inclusion of the views and needs of Indigenous residents. As the consultations made clear, Indigenous artists and cultural leaders have much to contribute to shaping a more inclusive planning process that supports Indigenous people.

Honouring women

Many people stated that women should be given priority with this work, as women have been most heavily impacted by colonization. As one person said, “women were most harshly affected by the Indian Act”. It was noted that women are the “protectors and guardians of

this place” and need to be honoured. In many Indigenous societies women are traditionally the leaders, and as such should have leadership roles in this work. It was recognized that women’s voices need to be included in conversations about art production, healing, reconciliation, collaboration, etc. In addition, since women do so much of the community work of helping others, initiatives such as these should go out into the community and support that work already being done. As one participant noted, these kinds of initiatives should “honour the work of Indigenous women by going where they are and shining a light on their work rather than building something big and new.”

“

I'm tired of our youth being called 'at risk'. They are not at risk they are culturally deprived.— Participant

”

Youth + Elders

As part of a holistic cultural approach, youth and Elders need to have a voice in this work, with an emphasis on listening to the Elders, and building greater inclusion for all ages. We are all part of the circle. As one person said, arts can be a way to help youth and Elders

“

Women founded Canada because they took care of the men.— Participant

”



Talking Stick Festival—Roundhouse 2017

Photo: Ergun Caliskan

avoid isolation, and be brought into community circles of support. Traditional relationships between Elders and youth transmit stories and knowledge. Several participants echoed their support for these connections and ways of learning. As one participant said, young people become “leaders who are capable of anything when they are out on the land, connected to Elders and others in community.” One participant stated that youth should have opportunities to learn and work within

intertwined with cultural identity and sharing Indigenous values, stories, teachings, etc. It’s not “just art”.

A few people commented about the healing nature of art, and its spiritual nature. Art has the possibility of “lifting us up”. As one speaker said: “Creative work can be truth telling.” A few people referenced Louis Riel, as he believed that artists would help bring healing and strength. In 1885, Riel said, “My people will sleep for one hundred years, but when they awake, it will be the artists who give them their spirit back.” Several people talked about Indigenous art as part of resurgence, especially in response to oppressions like the potlatch ban and other colonial prohibitions which saw certain art and cultural practises outlawed, leading to many Indigenous people being disconnected from their artistic and cultural traditions. For one participant, for example, drum making is a “way to find voice”, especially since drums have been taken away in our history.

“
In our culture it's artists who connect us to spirit and place.—
 Participant

their language, and to be trained as cultural ambassadors with a strong presence in the city, to raise awareness of local Nations.

Art/Cultural practise

There was a good deal of discussion about art practise itself. For example, many participants noted that there is no word for “art” in their languages. For many communities, creating is an essential, normal part of everyday life, connected to culture, cosmology, learning and sharing stories. One person expressed, “This is what we do. How we live.” Art “transmits culture”. Art was described by many people as

“
How do stories rebuild landscape, imagination, relationships?—
 Participant

In general, Indigenous cultural expression was seen by many participants as central to



Talking Stick Festival—Roundhouse 2017

Photo: Ergun Caliskan

decolonizing, to having a voice and being culturally strong in visible ways. Making and sharing art was seen as an important way to show the world the beauty, strength, and inherent knowledge of Indigenous people, after centuries of being invalidated, silenced, stripped of culture, and being told they had nothing to offer. Regarding collaboration, it was noted that the arts have the ability to bring people together, thus helping to combat “invisibility and isolation”. As one participant stated, everyone has a weaving tradition, a carving tradition, etc. We can “bridge cultures” through shared cultural practise and creating together.

Stories

“Our narratives are art.” Indeed, for many participants, stories are central to their cultural expression and art-making. Many people talked about the importance of cultural values and stories: “You can’t work without learning your history, your place, your way of seeing.” It was noted that youth should have opportunities to learn their stories, to be guided by their stories, and share their stories, which are the core of cultural identity. Someone referred to stories as our teachers—the ways in which Indigenous people transmit knowledge, history, law, science, etc. Indigenous people have their own cosmologies, world views, cultural values, which are shared through story. When wider society learns the stories, this can contribute to greater understanding of Indigenous world views, laws, protocols, contributions, etc. Art work and the process of community arts can be an engaging, positive way to share these stories. For example, one artist spoke about the great weaver Spider Woman who taught people to get along. These kinds of stories can provide guidance as we move forward, as reminders about how to conduct ourselves—and they can welcome people into better understanding.

Telling our stories also relates to voice, and inclusion. As one person said, “Our voices haven’t been heard yet.” It was widely agreed that Vancouverites need to learn more about the stories of this place, and, as noted above, sharing and making Coast Salish stories visible was expressed as a priority for most participants. The deep listening work that many people talked about, was seen as central to repairing relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. But, it’s important to ask: “Who’s telling the story?” Many people stated that the dominant narratives of Vancouver do not include the Indigenous Coast Salish people, or the realities of how they have been impacted by colonization, nor do the narratives accurately reflect the urban Aboriginal people who have their own unique experiences of Vancouver.

Art and earth wellness (aka sustainability)

Many people talked about the fundamentally sustainable nature of Indigenous ways of living, and seeing the world. There was a fair amount

“

We have given up a lot—our food table, our security, our land.—
Participant

”

of sadness, and anger, expressed around the ways the land and waters have suffered since colonization and urbanization. Loss of species, loss of access to healthy food to harvest—and a discounting of Indigenous world views which are based upon balance and kinship with the land and animals. Indigenous people have “powerful connections to animals and land”. Many people reflected the important role of the land itself — how the land is the culture, the truth, the place of learning and connection.



Songs for Reconciliation Project, 2014

Photo: Brian Lye



Christie Lee Charles rapping in Henqeminem in front of the Totem Poles in Stanley Park

Photo: Tom Quirk



Peter Morin Singing to the Land
Culture and Community Conference, 2013

Photo: Vancouver Park Board

Art can't be separated from the land and its well-being. Many artists expressed a commitment to sharing Indigenous teachings about balance and responsibility through their artistic practise. Indeed, this is a gift of dialogue and relationship building—great learning about making a healthy society can come from Indigenous knowledge.

Accessibility — who defines/decides?

Questions of voice and authority came up for several people. Who chooses the jury? Who writes the requirements? Who defines 'art'? Who defines Indigeneity? There were some concerns about different forms of art being valued over others. For example, one artist noted that there is a "hierarchy that prizes monumental works", with carvings being more valued than weaving which is treated as "craft". Also, some artists are seen to be more 'skilled' and experienced than others—so how can we give lesser-known artists opportunities and training to share their work? People are at varying stages in their healing, in their skill levels — including their familiarity with applying for grants and liaising with funders.

In terms of the application process for artist opportunities, many people agreed that the process should be simple, and stripped of the many barriers that have contributed to exclusion and an imbalance of access. Paperwork can be a barrier. Attending information meetings can be a barrier—though it was mentioned

that holding information sessions in Indigenous community spaces with Indigenous presenters can help make this less intimidating. Having a certain required number of exhibits can be a barrier. Since there is a need for redress, measures must be taken to "ensure real power balance". Not everyone is at the same comfort or skills level when it comes to engagement, and putting one's work 'out there', but an effort should be made to reach out and support a range of experiences and backgrounds. There are "different ways to be involved", which may not look like what has been done before with artist engagement.

Some people suggested things like more experienced artists teaming up with artists who have little experience, in a mentoring-type role where the lesser experienced artist still gets to have their vision come to life. As one person noted, "people who aren't used to applying for grants will offer something new." Other ideas were things like oral applications and video applications. In general, people felt it was important to find ways to build inclusion so that artists are "not closed out by bureaucracy".

Another issue around accessibility has to do with the ongoing struggle with 'permissions'. A few artists talked about the unfairness of certain bodies — such as the port and parks — being empowered to grant permissions and permits, which puts Indigenous artists in the uncomfortable position of asking to place their own art on their own lands. How can artists

Carver working on the *Survivor's Pole*

Photo: Susanne Tabata



Thunderbird Sharing Ceremony, 2017

Photo: Pablo Cesar Palma



Thunderbird Sharing Ceremony, 2017

Photo: Pablo Cesar Palma

have a voice on the urban landscape without having to ask permission from colonial institutions, and without being labelled “protestors”? Several people spoke of the need for those who traditionally hold the power and authority to “step aside”.

“

Aboriginal people should be in the drivers seat.—Participant

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When it comes to collaboration with non-Indigenous artists, there is a need to redress the imbalance of power and opportunity. A few people commented that often it’s non-Indigenous companies who bring on an Indigenous artist or address an “Indigenous theme” who get the funding: “Non-Indigenous companies need to understand they’ve been living in privilege.” One way to address this is to make sure a larger percentage of Aboriginal people are “in the power positions”. Indigenous participants in a collaboration should be “foregrounded”, leading the “artistic lens”. In order to redress the longstanding imbalance of power, several people felt that the Indigenous voice should shape the projects, and the process.

It was noted that given the often difficult nature of what many Indigenous artists work with, and are healing through—as well as community members who might be witnessing or

engaging with the artwork—there should be “healing support” in place to avoid re-traumatizing people, and to “create safe spaces” for this work and these conversations. As such, it was noted by most participants that \$35,000 is not enough money for artistic projects and good supports to the process. Many people asked if this funding could be used to leverage further funding. In general, people were concerned about this being a short term initiative, or even an “empty relationship” that doesn’t actually change things. People were very keen to see a commitment to long-term relationship-building and opportunities.

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We are here to be in relationship, not in hierarchy.—Participant

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Process-oriented — building relationships

We find ourselves here together, on this land, in this point in time. And, as one person said, “we have to find a way to co-exist.” To most participants, this means focusing on relationships, not the end product. Many emphasized the importance of this work as being process-oriented, not product-oriented.

A few people pointed to the 2010 Winter Olympics, as a time when several Indigenous



Trees are Portals—Aeriosa and the Spakwus Slulem Eagle Song Dancers

Photo: Scott Alpen

artworks were commissioned, but it was very much about “creating product”, as opposed to really creating any meaningful change or long term benefits for Indigenous artists. In addition, because art and creative expression are so linked to culture, story, history, world-view, etc. it was felt that art works created in isolation from this important cultural context would miss the mark in terms of reconciliation. The truth-telling phase means working through and talking about the painful stuff, and building new relationships that are not structured upon traditional colonial power relations. And this work takes time. Many people hoped that this would be the beginning of an ongoing conversation — a means to create relationships that can bring about meaningful shifts in how things have been done by the Park Board up to now.

Indigenous people have much to share around community engagement. As one artist noted, Indigenous people have always been “community engaged”—traditionally spending long

As several people commented, Indigenous people have their own healing supports in place, and many people have done a lot of work on their own healing. There is a readiness amongst many people to do this work, to build relationships—but how will this happen? As one person said, it’s important to ask: “What are we doing this for? Who are we doing this for?” Many people agreed that the way to deepen the relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people is through artists.

What does collaboration look like? It can be many things to many people—for some, it could be “collaborating with the land”; it could be collaborating with non-Indigenous people as an audience. How best to bring cultures together? How to cultivate deep understanding and respect, rather than perpetuating tokenism or, “putting feathers on policy”? Several participants talked about ceremony as important to building relationships. One participant discussed the need to ceremonialize this work, to “make it valid to our spirit”, to make it part of us. And, as has been discussed above, many people felt strongly that Indigenous people need to lead this process, these collaborations. “We need to be in the forefront. Have been held back and pushed down for too long.” There were several metaphors for doing this work together. We can strive to walk together. We can all be in the same canoe—working together to identify a common destination/goal, and setting our sights on that healing journey.

“

Effective community engagement cannot be rushed.—Participant

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periods of time together in spaces like the big house, in ceremony or in council. Indigenous people have long histories of working together and having good governance in group decision-making and community planning.



Arts and Health Gala, 2016

Photo: Riz Herbosa



Drum is Calling Festival, 2017

Photo: Lisa Walker

*Walk for Reconciliation Featuring
Meb'k - Coast Salish Puppet*

Photo: Lisa Walker

CONCLUSION — HOW CAN WE WALK TOGETHER?

Different cultures coming together to build a bridge, this is at the heart of what community engaged projects do—walk with someone different, build something with someone.—Participant

Amongst participants there was a clear interest in working towards greater co-existence. There were shared sentiments that the first steps need to be the hard work of healing and truth-telling and setting the foundation of Coast Salish people—and, ultimately, working towards a more peaceful relationship of equality and reciprocity. Some people expressed that they have their own cultural supports in place for their healing, so they are looking to the wider community and government to do their own work of listening and decolonizing. In addition to the many themes discussed already, some specific ideas were raised as possible ways to do this work and build better relationships. This section will cover some ideas proposed by participants for bridging cultures and understanding, and then conclude with reflections on how we might walk together.

Given the overwhelming view from respondents that we are at the truth-telling phase in our “Truth and Reconciliation journey”, creating the conditions where Indigenous artists are supported to explore and share their own ideas about reconciliation and healing is a form of collaboration—with non-Indigenous people collaborating as listeners and witnesses committed to making things better. This, as many people noted, will be a long road that will only work if all parties are willing to do the deep listening and “heavy lifting” required to work through a complicated history with many painful legacies, and to shape an inclusive vision of a healthy future for all.

Longhouse

Over the years there have been many visions for a longhouse in Vancouver, as a place of welcoming and sharing cultures, a safe place for Indigenous people, a place to reflect the people of this land. Given that this is Coast Salish territory, and longhouses are commonly used for ceremony, gathering, special events, etc. it is a huge gap that nothing like this exists in Vancouver. In the past some of these proposals have been “pan-Indian”, whereas in today’s time of territorial acknowledgement, more people realize that this kind of cultural centre needs to be hosted by, and reflective of, the local host First Nations. A place of understanding and cross-cultural learning would be a big boost to reconciliation efforts. While this Park Board fund is a small amount designated to support Indigenous/non-Indigenous artist collaborations, perhaps this fund, and the parallel relationship building with Indigenous artists could be a process to work towards this vision of a safe space for Indigenous cultural expression and intercultural sharing. Given that such a building might need to be built on park space, Park Board would be an important body within these efforts.

Perhaps this work is best for the Intergovernmental process in which the Park Board and local First Nations are engaged, but artists could also be part of furthering and shaping how such a vision could happen, and how collaborative community-engaged art could take place in this kind of space. As one participant said, “figure out your wish list—GO BIG—and from that figure out what’s doable”. With a longhouse space as a goal, all kinds of place-based conversations and explorations could happen to help further that vision.



Aaron Nelson-Moody - Plenty (detail)

Photo: Lisa Walker



Talking Stick Festival—Roundhouse 2017

Photo: Ergun Calisgan

Special Event/Feast

One way for different communities to come together is through special events like a feast—sharing food together. As one participant noted: “human interaction is so important”. Vancouver is traditionally a place of potlaches and sharing wealth. In addition, many non-Coast Salish residents feel a deep sense of gratitude to the host First Nations. Can the Park Board support cultural sharing and reciprocity through a feast event? One idea was to create an event of cultural sharing and feasting which brings artists and cultural people together—and through this event, creative pieces can result. In other words, the event itself is part of the art-making and, as a collaborative process, can bring people together and generate dialogue and creative content. Such an event would help people to “build shared experience”. The cultural exchange and dialogue aspects of the Vancouver Dialogues project could provide a possible model for building of Indigenous/non-Indigenous relationships with an emphasis on artists and creative process. This kind of cultural sharing would be a great way to foster dialogue, since, in many ways, “we are so new at learning how to talk to each other”.

Aboriginal History Month

A few people noted how Vancouver celebrates Black History Month, which is very helpful in raising awareness. The question was asked, “Why don’t we have an Aboriginal month?” A month of events and programs aimed at raising awareness could make a big difference

in addressing the invisibility, and lack of knowledge of Indigenous people and histories and contributions that many participants raised. As another example, in Vancouver we publicly celebrate events like Chinese New Year or Diwali, so perhaps we could create a distinct Indigenous (Coast Salish) cultural celebration that happens every year in the city. While June 21st, National Aboriginal Day, was mentioned as a good way to share culture and make Indigenous people more visible in the city, several people felt these celebrations and cultural spaces should be in place for much more than a day.

Mentoring

There are many talented artists who just haven’t had the experience or opportunities with formal government-sponsored artistic processes. Several people spoke about mentoring as an important relationship for nurturing less experienced Indigenous artists, or people who may not be as familiar/comfortable with the grants process, community engaged art, navigating the City bureaucracy, etc. (This idea is discussed at more length in Section D above.) This could be addressed by pairing them with more experienced Indigenous or non-Indigenous artists mentoring Indigenous artists. It was strongly felt by many that no matter what the configuration of the collaboration, Indigenous people had to hold the leadership role, and shape the vision. Non-Indigenous artists could support the Indigenous artist(s) and collaborators would learn from each other.



Gathering of Canoes, 2017

Photo: Pablo Cesar Palma

First Nations Elders Arts Mentorship project led by *Master carver and Cultural leader Mike Dangeli*

Photo: Lung Liu



Infinite Raven—Carey Newman

Photo: Lisa Walker

As one person said, this way of working can “deepen relationships of good faith”.

We’re all in the same canoe

So, how can we continue to walk together, to widen the circle of collaboration and unity? Given that the Park Board is an institution created within our colonial past, there is much to undo, especially in terms of historical ideas about the ‘host’ and ‘founding’ culture—that dominant culture is the caretaker and gatekeeper of the stories, images and landscape of Vancouver. Can we set our sights on a decolonized future? What will it take to build a Vancouver that reflects the much deeper story and cultural continuity of the local First Nations whose stories and cultures have been erased/invalidated/overwritten for generations? What will it take for all Indigenous residents to see themselves reflected, to be empowered participants in place-making and storytelling about their city?

This process of making space for Indigenous people to share their ideas, concerns and needs is an effective step forward—as evidenced by the rich, honest conversations held during the five sessions in this first round of consultations, and by the respectful active listening of staff in those sessions. Perhaps this process reveals that those in positions of power and decision-making authority are

beginning to let go of previous assumptions and ways of doing things, to genuinely open things up to direction and input from Indigenous people: who have traditionally been invisible, or had relatively little representation and voice in Vancouver’s arts and culture landscape.

As these conversations and other reconciliation efforts reveal, there are opportunities to rewrite the colonial narratives of Vancouver, to disrupt the silences that have kept Indigenous people on the margins and obscured the important, powerful voice of Indigenous people. And so we begin the long, complex work of deep listening, of dialogue and sharing that hold the potential to upend the traditional balance of power that has kept other people setting the agenda and deciding who gets to do what in Vancouver’s public arts and culture landscapes. Imagine the possibilities, imagine the ways that Vancouver can transform as Indigenous cultural expressions and voices are once again reflected in the land, songs, stories and images of this place. What kinds of shifts can happen when we are guided by a vision of unity built on mutual respect and equality? As local writer Lee Maracle has said about the work of restoring relationships, “this is our cultural bundle and we need to pick it up.”

APPENDIX



About the Author

Kamala Todd was born and raised in Vancouver, and is a grateful guest on these Coast Salish territories. Her ancestors are Cree-Metis and German. Kamala has a Masters degree in urban

cultural Geography from UBC, and upon graduation, she was brought on to the City of Vancouver as Aboriginal Social Planner, where she worked building bridges with the Aboriginal community for six years. This was at a time (2000) when there was little to no connection with the local First Nations, because First Nations were still seen as a 'Federal' and treaty issue. Kamala worked diligently to raise awareness amongst City staff about the need to build relationships with the local First Nations, as a matter of protocol, and of moving past the decades of erasure and silence which kept Vancouver in a very colonial state. Her first initiative was Storyscapes, because, as filmmaker, she knew the power (and necessity) of story to transform assumptions and disrupt dominant colonial narratives. This project involved training youth in skills such as video production, audio recording, cultural protocols and interviewing skills, to conduct oral history interviews with their Elders and leaders in their communities. The National Film Board partnered with Storyscapes to support a video project, *Our City Our Voices*. This project led to dozens of youth-recorded videos with local Elders from the three First Nations and the urban Aboriginal community. In addition, DTES community members were supported to produce two short videos of their community stories—*Follow the Eagle* and *Slo-pitch*. In her work at City Hall, Kamala tirelessly petitioned

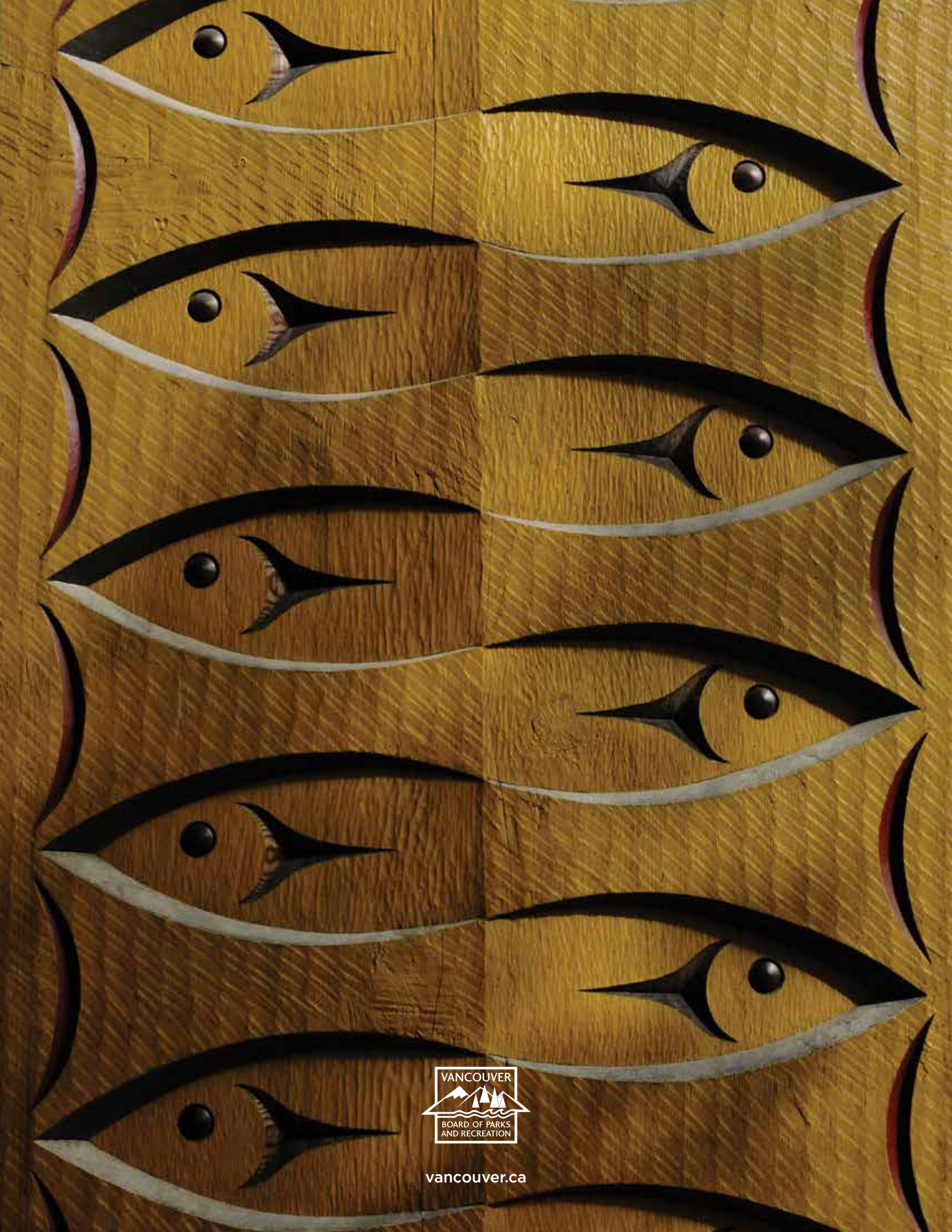
planners and other staff to reach out to the local First Nations in planning consultation and other big decisions about place and narrative. Kamala was thrilled that she was able to encourage the Public Art department to initiate a process to increase the amount of Aboriginal public art in the city. As a first step, she conducted outreach and consultation with local people and was directed that any Aboriginal public art project must start with Stanley Park—as a cultural centre of the local Coast Salish Nations, and a locale where totem poles of other Nations dominated, and there was nothing to represent the host Coast Salish cultures. And so the Storyscapes proposal was to create a public art call for the totem pole site. The Director of public art at the time was able to garner over \$100,000 to support the project, and for the first time in history, this artist call specified that applicants must be from Musqueam, Squamish or Tsleil-Waututh First Nations. A jury made up of Coast Salish representatives and experts on Coast Salish art was assembled, and Susan Point's *People Among the People* house post archways were selected to greet visitors to this important site.

After leaving the City in 2006 to have her second child, Kamala continued to write about and engage in Indigenous issues through her documentary films, commentaries, and facilitation work. She was consultant and filmmaker on the cross-cultural Vancouver Dialogues Project. She was honoured to be asked to facilitate the first government-to-government dialogue between the City of Vancouver and the Tsleil-Waututh First Nation in 2013. Kamala lives on the Sunshine Coast with her family, but continues to write and find ways to decolonize Vancouver and its region, through her company Indigenous City Media.



Untitled—Susan A. Point (detail)

Photo: Lisa Walker



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