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INSTR. CHRISTOPHER SMITH: All right, guys. So I guess we are going to go ahead and get started. Today I will not be talking instead we have a very special guest Eliot White-Hill. He is a Coast Salish artist will curatorship and about decolonizing museums. He's going to be speaking about his work he has a lot of exciting things that he is working on right now projects that he completed things that he will be doing in the near future in two week, two and a half weeks he has a show of Salish art both interior and Salish opening in the Bill Reid, in April he semi permanent at the field museum he is a curating. In Chicago on say learn art going to talk about woolly dogs and that material as well he has a show he is in at artist and contributor at Burke museum on Salish... and woolly dogs with that welcome Eliot White-Hill.

ELIOT WHITE-HILL: Thanks Chris ... [indigenous language spoken]... Hello everyone I'm Eliot white little *Kwulasultun* I'm artist and storyteller the Snuneymuxw First Nation my family roots with Rice family in Penelakut I'm Nuu-chah-nulth from my grandmother from Hupacasath. Really excited to be here with you all today. I'm going to be talking a bit about my own art practice, my curatorial practice and kind of tying it into the reading that I sent Chris which is an article that my dad wrote in the book native art of the Northwest Coast that was co-edited by my uncle Ron Hamilton. Yeah, so I

guess my whole art practice has really emerged from the passing of my late great-grandmother Dr. Ellen White *Kwulasulwut*. She was an incredible person, a midwife and healer and storyteller, linguist, activist. She just did it all, you know, she spent her entire life serving our communities and sharing with people about who we are as Hwalma [phonetic] as Coast Salish peoples. I was raised with teachings from her and when she passed I realized how spoiled I'd been being able to go and sit with her whenever I wanted to learn from her about what it means to be Coast Salish and so when she passed I wanted to do more to learn, to try and be the kind of person that she was and to continue her work. And so I started researching Coast Salish art and culture. And really was more on the cultural side. I was reading all the anthropological texts, readings stories and look at I started studying Hul'q'umi'num our language our dialect and I was noticing so many barriers accessing knowledge about ourselves. These barriers are in so many different forms but in reading the academic side there's all these academic barriers that where we can't access knowledge about ourselves. For instance being interest *Snuneymuxw* over the course of history there's something like 50 or 55 different ways that the word Snuneymuxw has been spelled that my ancestors in Nanaimo have been called if you don't have access to one of those names or different spellings you are

missing out on knowledge from that point in time. And on top of that, pretty much always when the knowledge is documented it's done so by somebody who isn't Snuneymuxw, who isn't Coast Salish or Indigenous. So you really have to take it with a grain of salt in that sense. And so I started looking at this and realizing if you want to learn who we are as Indigenous people you have to go to our own forms of self-expression and that is our art our stories and our language. And that is where it's really held, the knowledge really is. And so that is what I did. And I felt really pushed to look at Coast Salish art and. I'm both Salish and Nuu-chah-nulth but at that point in time I felt really drawn to my Salish side grieving my great-grandmother's loss and learning more about our culture there. So I started looking at Salish art, I spent six or seven months just looking at images of it online, googling it pretty much and looking at museum archives online databases. And I started to learn through that process of the uniqueness of what Salish art really is. And that you know, I had this general sense growing up that Salish art was its own thing I didn't know what it was. I remember when the Olympics happened here and I remember being outraged I think I was 13 or 14 or something. But that there was the inukshuk that was the logo of the Olympics in Vancouver how ridiculous that was, that we are here in Musqueam Squamish and Tsleil-Waututh territory

and what are they choosing to represent themselves with. I didn't know what Salish art was at that time. I always felt very identified with Northwest Coast art the general Northwest Coast art style. And so when I started to really learn what Salish art was I realized how much there's so much richness and uniqueness and depth there and the whole history of disrespect and erasure and suppression of Coast Salish art in the territories it's been successful to the point where I didn't know what Salish art was as a kid and many people who live here don't know what Salish art is. So I focused on that and I made it a project for myself to celebrate and share what I was learning about Salish culture by making my own art. It's very strict. In Salish art the visual art form that I practice, there are three major shapes. The circle, the crescent, trigon. I want to acknowledge Sean Peterson *Qwalsius* who is a Salish artist from Puyallup based in Seattle down in Washington State he did a video talking about the basics of what Salish art is he talks about the importance of these three shapes they are distinctly Salish and that Salish art we use these shapes supposed to using shapes like the ovoid or shapes that you see in formline design. And the other difference it's more figurative, more realistic. And as opposed to using formline shapes to populate a design, you would have a silhouette of a person or animal or a supernatural being and then these shapes would be

used within the body to show the details of the face or. I really like to think of them as honouring and representing the flow of energy and movement within the body and the design. And I really just dove in, I spent six or seven months just looking at Salish art and it's very strict. It's very these shapes are used in very specific ways and the flow of it is very specific. And there's a grammar to it and even though I had no artistic skills or ability whatsoever prior to this, I knew what a salmon should look my in Coast Salish style, I knew how the shapes come doing together to make a salmon, I started doodling that, that was 2019 or 2020 and it became this whole transformative thing in my life. I didn't know how anatomy works or perspective or colour theory or any of the things that you need no know who to you draw I knew how these shapes came together, I started to understand the visual language of it. And that was kind of the beginning of me being an artist and through that it became an outlet and a new way to use my voice in sharing what I was learning. Telling the stories that I was learning. Sharing our world view and the teachings that have been passed down to me. That is really the driving force of my whole creative practice is to tell those stories and then it became more in-depth from there where I started working with different materials. I mostly do digital art, I work with this iPad and my great grandma she always spoke so much about how when

we are working with materials and we are making something, you speak to the materials that you are working with. She said if you are weaving cedar or if you are weaving wool, you speak to the bark, you speak to the wool, and you introduce yourself. You say what you are doing, what you are making it into how going to be used and you ask it for help. This is part of opening yourself to the energy of the world around you and when you do that, you'll find the help is there and that the material is responsive and people have been trained to do in that way can speak in a sense to the wool because in our world view it's not just an object. It has a spirit. It has a soul, it has sentients and agency, and this is part of what we call our I can squall win. ^ Sp? it's a philosophical concept in Coast Salish culture where it means to be of good mind. Squall win ^ is more than mind, it's your mind, body, being, you know. And for artists not just art, it's also in every day life we are taught to be present and keeping negative energy away, focus on opening yourself and connecting with the energy that around you because that goes into what you are doing that is going to live in the art that you make and the work that you make. And these are living things. So even though I work with an iPad, the materials come from god knows where. I still try to keep that basic idea in mind and that this is opening and facilitating the flow of work in a good way. And that's

really like a basic concept in Salish culture is that not just these materials but all things around us are living and we can communicate with them in different ways. There are different levels of energy and consciousness and when it comes to understanding what our art is, that is really important that these are living things and that in our language in Hul'q'umi'num there isn't a word for art. And it's I describe it as art what I do is definitely art but what my ancestors did was almost esthetic thing they are making things very beautifully but made to be used in very specific contexts. When they carve a mask the mask is meant to be danced and used in certain context. When they are making a tool they are making that tool to be used by specific people in a specific way to a specific end, you know. And so if you really want to understand what our art is you have to experience it within these contexts that they are meant to be used. And I'll talk about that more in the context of museum collections because if you are trying to understand what something is that comes from my culture and it's in a case in the museum that is the furthest possible place from the context of its use.

And so that is kind of the esthetic side, but the alongside the -- it's own living thing our art also contains within it our stories and our connection to place and our identity and who we are. It's a visual language in that

sense that is meant to be used in that way. So when you see in Salish art specifically we are also unique we didn't do totem poles, so the totem poles that are exterior monumental sculpture that tell stories, I'm not I haven't I don't know too much about totem poles to be honest with, that is not what I do. With Salish culture we did house posts that were on the interior of the house. Immediately when you think about what that means, it means that the house post is not something that is meant for the public necessarily because you are inside the house, you are within the home of its owner. And it tells deeply personal content. The stories and the speaks about who are the beings who have helped us who are the beings who have helped us be who we are today. Our connection to land, to our ancestors, this is all knowledge that is carried down and shared through that. And I think about in the reading that I shared my dad talks about the potlatch screens and potlatch screens are on our Nuu-chah-nulth side. The potlatch screen is something that transforms space, it creates a new space where the work and the public facing side is where the potlatch is happening and behind the screen is a space that is sacred and where the transformation is taking place and just really thinking about what that means and the rights and prerogative that are expressed through that. What the potlatch really is. My dad describe it as meta event where all important transformations

and parts of our life take place, when we are born when we come of age when we receive a name, when we are married, when we die, these are all things that are celebrated and recognized through potlatch. And it's facilitated through the art, through the culture that and the knowledge that is contained within our art that facilitates that so that context is very important.

there are a couple of quotes that are really important as well. The quote that is kind of the title of my dad's chapter in the book that comes from my late uncle George Clutesi. This is he talks about in the book potlatch how where mere words failed and talking about the role of the artists within governance and Nuu-chah-nulth culture how the chief would have a council and the artists had a special place on that council where if there was a difficult decision or they couldn't come to a conclusion, they would invite artists to come and speak. That the artist could think profoundly and think in a way where words failed to come to a conclusion and to help make a decision. That is really important. I really love that quote. And the other one that I want to share is -- it comes from elder Bill white in my community, my uncle. He was talking about what Salish art is and he says that Salish art is to make the sacred visible. And I find that really interesting. There's so much there to unpack. And I based my masters degree research around that

quote. I did my MFA at Emily Carr, I graduated just about three years ago now and I did my thesis on revitalizing Coast Salish art and seine tarring it on what does it mean to make the sacred visible and think being that through my own art practice and through the stories that I tell. And I did research that was both personal while I whereas at Emily Carr and concurrent to that I curated a museum exhibit about Salish art that was hosted at the Nanaimo museum, I did these two hand in hand. It was really interesting because I saw the Emily Carr work as very personal about my own art practice and then I saw the museum curation about me creating a platform to share and celebrate about Salish culture and we had 14 artists from the mid islands from stay Salish nations on the mid island who contributed work and it was museum collection objects alongside contemporary Salish art and telling stories. I kind of was miserable because I given myself so much more work to do at the same time but I really enjoyed that aspects of it where it was flip sides that was my first time curating and I would say that my curatorial practice has really emerged more out of necessity than deciding I'm going to be a curator or anything like that. It was just opportunities that exist and there is a need to share these stories and so few people doing the work. So I reached out to the Nanaimo museum and we were talking about this. It turned out that they had this enormous collection

of material from Snuneymuxw kind of makes sense being a local museum people find something in their backyard building a deck they bring it to the museum and drop it off, they end up with hundreds and thousands of objects, stone objects and different cultural belongings that have been donated over the years. So I spent two years working with them curating this exhibit. And again that work was all about recontextualizing the cultural knowledge and the context it was shown where from my research from my perspective as Snuneymuxw person I worked with a group of elders on the exhibit Bill white was one, Geraldine and Gary Manson. How can we share about ourselves in a way that aligns with our own values. And that is what we did ^ I kind of categorized everything and going from the oldest to the present and I tried to dish thought about the ways that people were navigating space and one thing that I often do is I use the colour of red ochre, tum you have is sacred to us in Coast Salish culture. It's used as protection, one of the main pigments that we paint with. I painted all the walls in the space that colour and tried to think about that and use that intentionally. And was a really great experience. Some of the stories that I told were stories that hadn't been shared in Snuneymuxw for a long time. One of the stories was the Salish woolly dog. Has anybody heard about it? A few head nods, yeah. The Salish woolly dog was a unique breed of

dog that our ancestors raised on the islands and Lower Mainland ray down in Washington State and the history with them is that we didn't have sheep prior to contact and mountain goats which were one of the other main sources of fibre were only up in the mountain range so you had to trade for fibre to weave with. Instead we had thighs fluffy little dog that is looked like Pomeranians and we sheered them like sheep and weave blankets with their hair and we call them squawk may ^ sp? the woolly dogs. And they are very important to us. They were symbols of wealth in a way, owned and passed down matrilineally from mother to daughter, only high ranking families were allowed to have them. The blanket that is were made with their hair are very culturally significant in Salish culture, the squawk /WA*T ^ nobility blankets they are called sometimes. These blankets are almost like currency to us. At potlatches they are one of the main things that give away. Through potlatch you become wealthy by giving away that is kind of a fundamental thing in social and the economy and kind of this other way of looking at wealth is in Salish and Northwest Coast culture. So these dogs were very important so we shared stories about them and in Snuneymuxw there's is place called Cameron Island today and in our language we call that place /SKWEUBG me and that means little woolly dogs. That island was like a dog sanctuary for the village that lived downtown and where they

kept all of their dogs and we shared one of the stories that Gary Manson shared with me about the woolly dogs that it's one of my favourite stories honestly. And I'm working on a children's book right now that I'm writing and illustrating with that story. And it talks about the woolly dogs and how they were so pampered, they are so important and so well looked after they are all in the village but they were feeling dissatisfied, they were unhappy. And it's because they didn't want to be cute little dogs anymore. They wanted to be wild. They wanted to roam free and the land like the wolf. But they didn't know how to be wild. They were cute little wool dogs but they all felt this way they had a big meeting and every woolly dog came and they were asking each other how can we be wild do you know how to be wild. I don't know thousand to be wild. And he the elder woolly dog said we have to sneak out of the village and go find Raven. Raven is the chief of the wilderness. He can show us how to be wild. That is what they do they sneak out in the middle of the night and go looking for Raven. And they find him eventually and so Raven says oh little wool dogs you want to be wild, I'll show you. And he says come over here and I'll take off your butts then you'll really be wild. And the dogs are uncertain at first then I think there is a kind of a joke there where by taking off the woolly dogs butts Raven is getting a big pile of fibre he is like I am going to get rich

offer the dogs. The dogs go with it Raven takes off the butts they don't feel any different. They say Raven give us our butts back. He says okay he put them back on. They are all mixed up no one knows whose butts is whose that is why dogs sniff each other's butts. That is one of the stories it comes from the oral tradition in Snuneymuxw. I love it there's no cheeky. Human aspect, there's a pump line. Generally with our stories they are a lot more serious where in our traditional stories there's always moral and ethical teachings there about how we should be how we shouldn't be. And that is a really prominent feature across a lot of Salish stories where people are behaving in a certain way and something happens and they are changed. And there's a teaching in our ^ there. I love this one. It's so lighthearted clearly meant to make kids laugh. That story was shared with my by the elder Gary Manson he heard it from the late elder Anderson Tommy who heard it from his mom going back how many generations in Snuneymuxw I don't even know. So getting the chance to share those stories and share about art in our own voice is so meaningful it's some of the most important work that I can do and working towards doing and that is the whole drive of it for me is to share those stories to talk about who we are from my own perspective and there's huge responsibility there. It's not easy work but I think the important part is to try to do it in the best way

that I can. To approach everything moment by moment and try to do it in a way that would make my great grandma proud, I think would try to make our ancestors proud and share it the way it was passed down to us. Yeah.

ELIOT WHITE-HILL: I don't think how long that was.

INSTR. CHRISTOPHER SMITH: Half an hour.

ELIOT WHITE-HILL: Right. I think if anybody has any questions I'd be happy to answer questions and kind of usually when I do talks I like it more of a dialogue. Yeah, love to open it to questions or we can take a moment to breathe.

INSTR. CHRISTOPHER SMITH: Anybody have any question for Eliot, he knows that you also read Jordan's material as well and I filled him in on what we've been talking about.

STUDENT: Do you have takeaways or particular experiences of going to Emily Carr and going to a formal university but really focusing on a craft that is significant to you in your specific culture and is not adherent to western standards of art.

ELIOT WHITE-HILL: Yeah, absolutely. For me the choice to go to Emily Carr was very intentional, it was kind of that -- I wasn't an artist at all prior to this, I've been practising art for a year and I quit my office job. I used to work in business with Snuneymuxw in my nation. And I knew that I wanted to commit two or three years and really see if art was even a possibility. Like if there was any trajectory there and whit

commit myself to making art learning more about it. And doing a degree made sense to me at the time. There was funding and there was kind of the stability there. So that was my focus with going to Emily Carr. Then I got there and I realized I had no idea what an MFA really was. You know, I knew that I already had an undergraduate degree. I did liberal studies in philosophy at VIU and graduated in 2018 with that. I knew I didn't want to do another undergrad degree so I figured I would apply for a masters yeah, I'll learn about making art at a masters letter. Not at all what an MFA is. It's way more of a theory degree that is meant for artists who are established and are now looking to think about their art career and why it is what they do, you know. And to I kind of went in not knowing at all what I was getting myself into and but I made it work. I really just focused on developing technical skills. I found that being in this incredible community of artists was really valuable. Emily Carr didn't teach me anything about Indigenous art or culture or anything like that. It was entirely self-driven. But that was kind of the expectation. We did do -- we had studio classes and studio critique and that was really great. Making stuff and getting feedback but when it came to the faculty, I felt like I kind of missed out because the faculty wasn't equipped to critique Salish art. I did all sorts of weird stuff. I felt like I was doing something different

every single crit when I was going, I did these sculptures using pizza boxes originally they were maquettes that were small scale models or larger sculptures that could be public art. And then I started using pizza boxes because I spent 40 bucks getting this really expensive cardboard from opus I was pissed off at myself for doing that. I was talking to my friends well if you need cardboard I have cardboard at home in my recycling. I'll bring it for you. I was like yeah, I started using pizza boxes from home and it really breathed new life into the work where it became an artefact of my own life and I was respond together this archeological dig that was on Gabriola island on my territory the art was inspired by forms from that. I did that and I did painting for a little while and it was when I started doing painting all of the faculty just breathed a breath of relief because oh my god okay we can talk about painting. I can talk about a painting. So that was funny, my experience. And I kind of felt like I could have done anything that I wanted and they would have been this is great because they didn't want to come off as politically incorrect by critiquing my work.

So that is my experience at Emily Carr but I would do it again. The institution is whatever but I got out of it what I wanted. It was a good use of two years I think.

STUDENT: I was wondering how you find the experience of self-teaching and maybe not having I don't know, I think about Deborah sparrow

because she gave a little talk for a volunteer group that I'm in she was talking about how she and her sister, they were self-taught in weaving and everything and it was only later they were talk together their family member and yeah, your grandma used to weave or I don't remember exactly who, she was like suddenly there's this connection like someone you didn't even know in our own family who did this but couldn't pass down that knowledge to you and I was wondering how you find that process self-teaching and reconnecting almost without that guidance.

ELIOT WHITE-HILL: Yeah. I'd say my experience has been kind of unique in that I was very self-taught but I also don't consider myself to be self-taught in a true sense because I learned by looking at what our ancestors left and it was very important to me to focus on as Coast Salish as I could get for what I was looking at for source material. So I when to the museum collections I looked at stone carvings, petroglyph forms and I really tried to spoke us on that. Modern Coast Salish has changed quite a lot. What I want today do was reach as far back as I could and learn from that and then share it in my own way in my own style and I feel that is what I've done is I created my own style that is very Salish and inspired by the really old style Salish but then I have all my own influence, I'm inspired by animae and manga and a lot of western artists who I really admire. So I -- it was

definitely like self-taught but I was -- I think one of the big things too is that there are artists in my family who I look up to, they are more on my Nuu-chah-nulth side I was able to learn a lot through talk together them and asking them questions. People in my family who I could ask where should I be looking they were able to tell me, oh you got to read this book, you need to look at this exhibition catalogue, read this writer. And then the teachings from my great grandma and while she didn't do visual art she taught me about the ways to that we should be and go about that work. So really just trying to emphasize that aspect.

STUDENT: Have there been any pieces either older or more modern that have really stood out to you through time, that you remember that stick out to you.

ELIOT WHITE-HILL: M'mm-hmm. Yeah. I think Susan Point has a sculpture, Susan Point is from Musqueam and she has a sculpture that stands out to me as one of my favourites and I forgot to see it in person. It's at the Bill Reid gallery downtown and I had no idea it was there. I guess it's only there actually because Douglas Reynolds is loaning it right now. It's way bigger than I thought it was, I only seen a photo of it. It's like probably 5 or 6 feet across, a round panel and it has deer going around the outside and then the inside is like a moon face but it's made using cast paper mache or casted paper pulp. Incredibly striking and it's such a traditional

Salish face but the way that the material speaks and the use of paper is so cool. Susan Point in general she has just been so prolific. She has to be one of the most represented public artists in Canada and her work just she looking at her work taught me so much. Looking at what she has done, I kind of joke sometimes as a Salish artist Ivan idea for a design or for a piece and I look, it's oh, Susan Point has done it already. And so then I am okay. I do it anyway. I do it my own way but it's kind of like the Simpsons already did it. Susan Point has already done it.

INSTR. CHRISTOPHER SMITH: Anybody else have their hand up?

STUDENT: I was curious of you said you kind of got into curation out of necessity but I was wondering if you come to enjoy it more and how did you get into it in the first place, did you get invited to do something.

ELIOT WHITE-HILL: Yeah, absolutely. So the Nanaimo museum when they I reached out to them because I wanted to look at their collection and then through that relationship they asked me if I would be interested in curating, and that is kind of how it's gone where it's like these museums have really significant collections of material that has been taken from our community and I want to go look at it and I go there and visit the museum and I end up talking to them. And so as I was saying, it's so decontextualized our cultural belongings when they are in museum collections. I did a trip to England

last year with Jordan Wilson who wrote the walking book about quicken ^ sp? the house post, he was curating an exhibit that I'm in over in Cambridge right now, so we did a tour of three museums in England. We did the British museum in London, Pitt Rivers museum in Oxford and Museum of Anthropology and archaeology in Cambridge where the show was hosted. So it was like went and visited all the final bosses of colonization museums, it was crazy. I visited museums all around North America, Boston, New York, Chicago, Washington, every single museum that I've been to has something that comes from Snuneymuxw that my ancestors made, which is crazy to me. I was in Cambridge, famous university in England why the hell do they have a stone that my ancestor in Snuneymuxw carved. What benefit does this bring to them holding this. The British museum in London has a significant collection of Snuneymuxw spindle whirls, other carvings and we are in this unmarked warehouse in east London where we had to go thirty-two awe security check respondent to get in no signage anywhere that indicates the British museum warehouse, seven story thing run down and ancient and falling apart has all of the treasures of every civilization that ever lived on the planet and it was I felt like I might as well have been on mars. And so for me working with these museums in Chicago at the field museum is a major example of this. So much of the material is mislabelled. The collector who was working with

the field museum at that time Charles Newcomb and others, for instance where I'm from, Vancouver Island and Nanaimo there was a period of time they called all of us Cowichans this was a generally accepted term for Salish people, oh they are Cowichan. You have all of this material and all these cultural belongings in the museum collection identified as Cowichan, you think about what that means, say we want to talk about reoperate regeneration, Cowichan could show up and say hey we want all of your Cowichan stuff we got tons. You know, it's really important to point these things out within we see them and fortunately I am not the first person who has been there in the last 80 years so there has been a lot of work done to remedy that. But really it's like recontextualizing what it is while it's there is very important. For a long time I felt that my art practice and my work was really significant here in the Salish world back home in Nanaimo and I was like what is the point of me sharing my art in some other Indigenous people's territory or sharing. Doing that. As I spent time with these museums I realized they have so much stuff of ours that is not being acknowledged in the right way and while they have that it's imperative that they bring in younger working artists from our cultures to help recontextualize that to share knowledge to something as simple as rewriting the panels. My friend Shashana Green is a Haida artist she's been doing work with

museums rewriting panels about the stuff that is on display. That is really significant work. And curation kind of came into it where for the exhibit that I have at the field museum about woolly dogs, it was just an opportunity where I was at their collections and someone was familiar with my work with the woolly dogs so they threw me in a room with all the exhibitions people you should pitch a show about woolly dog that is would be fun. I was like okay. I was just were tee much there on my own dime. I got a travel grant from YVR next thing I know I'm talking to the president of exhibitions at the museum and they are asking me all these questions and so I am telling the story and talking about doing a show that shares about the woolly dog because they have so much stuff there at this museum. And that is how that came together. And I remember one of the questions they asked me because they also started asking all these generalized questions about sharing Indigenous material, about the state of the Northwest Coast hall that is at the field museum, it's incredibly out of date, it's really bad. And it needs to be totally redone. So they are asking me how do you feel about sharing all of this with us and I was like well you know if I was here as a paid consultant I'd feel better about it. I was a random Indigenous person who walked in the door and hanging out in the museum practically. That has been about my experience working with museums.

INSTR. CHRISTOPHER SMITH: That is where I was going I was going to ask you what your experience working with museums is. So Tuesday we had read Michael Ames who talks about a glass box for everyone. You touched on that. About the decontextualization of being in these glass boxes. He has a metaphor of western museums as cannibals, as consuming other peoples' cultures. Towards the ends he never says colonialism it's what he is getting at. So we were just discussing several things one of which was if you could take off on any of these, the idea of Indigenous curators in the spaces who has the right to represent who how collaboration Indigenous people representing themselves in museums you spoken about your experience with that a little bit. We talked about deaccessioning where objects that are not identified were deaccessions they didn't have a provenance which you touched on by talking about how all of these provenances are all of these descriptions of objects are wrong. So therefore there is a lot of work to do. You could take off on any of those topics. What is your experience, can you contrast for us Canada versus the US versus England in terms of how is your knowledge received and how is your presence as an Indigenous person doing that work received in those different contexts.

ELIOT WHITE-HILL: In North America it's always been very much I go to the museum and I'm visiting the collection and they always want

to bring out the repatriation team to meet me. Which is very kind of them. I love meeting people but the work of repatriation really goes over my head. I'm an individual artist, I come from Snuneymuxw, I come from the places I come from. The work of repatriation is between my band office and the institution but what I do appreciate is that as an artist I can kind of instigate and point fingers and shed light on what belongs to us what is out there. I do like meeting the repatriation people for that reason it was interesting when I went to England there was no talk of repatriation and I asked them about it and had he said it's a top down mandate from the British government that they don't talk about that. And that is who funds them and that is just the way it goes. And the experience was kind of weird when we went to Cambridge, they brought out some really sacred cultural belongings or us to look at and they are all in the room for Jordan and Athena and I to look at and as we were looking at these belongings that are very sacred the entire administrative staff of the museum starts parading through the room to see us. It's just like.

INSTR. CHRISTOPHER SMITH: So you became part of those artifacts that are being watched in that way.

ELIOT WHITE-HILL: We were collected for a moment there.

INSTR. CHRISTOPHER SMITH: Voyeuristics. You were collected.

ELIOT WHITE-HILL: In general my experience working with museum people has

been really good. Especially my work with the field museum. The team there is really lovely. They have been so hospitable and accommodating and asking ^ questions that unprompted like we were talking about stuff that is going be on display in the exhibit that I'm curating and they said is there any spiritual hygiene that we should be doing think being the people who are going to be navigating the space, think being the well-being of the objects themselves spiritually. Is there anything, somebody that you would like to bring or is there anything that you would like us to do. That was something where I was really impressed that they are talking about that. That was something that came to mind. And just the people when I was there were really great to work with and I've had a good experience working with them on this exhibit.

INSTR. CHRISTOPHER SMITH: Great.

ELIOT WHITE-HILL: And I think in terms of consuming culture and everything, it's just the western archive is so at odds in a way with the way that we understand material belonging and the kind of sovereignty and agency of these objects where for us if you have a mask or a totem pole or a carving, it's meant to live a life and it's meant to have an end to that life. When it's decaying you are meant to let it down and decay. That's critical. And that doesn't go with the archival kind of urge to preserve everything to infinity.

INSTR. CHRISTOPHER SMITH: Thank you. And we talked a little bit about that last week when we are talking about different strategics in Seattle with the Steinbrueck pole at Pike Place Market. Anybody else have any other questions.

STUDENT: You mentioned that you find some influence or fun in animae and manga. Have you ever considered those forms for your art.

ELIOT WHITE-HILL: Absolutely. I'm working on illustrated kids book right now I'm really interested in kind of developing a graphic novel style. I think when it comes to storytelling, it's such a unique medium that interweaves visual art and written story. I remember when I was a kid I saw Michael Nicoll Yahgulanaas his exhibit at the Vancouver Art Gallery or MOA, he with is a Haida artist who does Haida manga, such an awesome way of interweaving different kind of cultures, art styles and doing something that is new but also very traditional to us. His is really cool where it's like each panel of the economic if you take all the pages air apart it becomes a large formline design which is just wild but I really like thought about that. I think in terms of telling traditional stories it's such a cool way to interweave the story with say there's supernatural beings in the story that we depict in our art. You can do that. And similarly for creating the context, the context of the story, like the setting. If you were to film something that needed an old growth forest in my territory in Nanaimo there's pretty much

no old growth forest left in the entire area. But you can do that when if you draw it, you can create these contexts if you draw it. It's something that is exciting to me, I really admire there are artists who I know Cole Pauls, he is from up north. He is a economic artist. My friend Mia Mcgibbon is Indigenous comic artist. Their work is awesome. Yeah. ^ Sp?.

STUDENT: Do you ever come into conflict or how do you feel about a lot of the art world being for profit in many ways and how do people seeking to make a profit or encouraging you to make a profit clash or not clash with your art process.

ELIOT WHITE-HILL: That is a good one. Yeah, I think at the core of it we've got to make a living as artists and we can make art and one person who I really admire is my uncle Ron Hamilton. He is a really incredible Nuu-chah-nulth artist, he is about 80 now. I think 25 or 30 years ago he decided to stop making commercial art. And so he stopped selling his art at a commercial galleries and stopped doing private commissions. He focused on making art for community. And that is a really powerful thing for an artist kind of at the peak of his career to say I'm going to stop doing commercial sales. But I think there's also privilege that goes with that too where he had established himself to the point where he started working more as a cultural worker where he was working with museums, he was writing. He is a very prolific writer. He

was able to support himself he owned his house already at that point where he didn't have to do commercial art. For me like I've got to pay rent every month I need to line up contracts for the next few months at least, you know. But I think the important part is to really be thinking about how are we doing our work and to try to do it in a way that isn't exploiting ourselves. And sometimes you might get a really great job offer but then you look and the client is a really awful organization. And you've got to think to yourself, is this worth at what cost is this, you know. And that is kind of part of it. That is part of navigating being an artist or being a working artist. So yeah, it's always navigating that space.

STUDENT: Also wondering if you ever get if anybody questioning your police especially when it comes to when you are not working with maybe traditional materials or self-taught or anything do you ever come into conflict in that way?

ELIOT WHITE-HILL: A little bit. I've been pretty fortunate where I haven't had anybody really grilling me about what I do. Solve the stuff I do is so out there. I am oh my god if an elder comes in here and starts grilling me I might start crying. Most of it has been really really responsive. I did my first ever public commission was bed man park swimming pool in Nanaimo. We did six murals and the whole inside of the pool is my art, it's playful and meant for kids to be in

the space, I incorporated Hul'q'umi'num language. And there is a salmon run mural that is very abstract. I remember when the news article went out about the installation, I was looking at Facebook one of the top comments being this guy this isn't native art, what the hell is this. And I mean, just doesn't know anything about what they are talking about. That is pretty much it. For me I know who I am and I was raised with teachings from my family about how we should carry ourselves and with Salish art there's a significant portion of our art so to say that isn't meant for the public and it's very important to recognize what is meant for the public and what isn't. And one thing that makes me really proud is that in the Salish stuff that isn't meant for the public I don't see it, in the public. We are all kind of together on that. And there's nuance to that but in a general sense there's stuff that isn't meant to be talked about and I don't see it when I go to the Vancouver Art Gallery. I saw your hand up.

STUDENT: I don't know how related my question is but I was wondering I was reading about how there's a lot of projections of philosophy in the western after World War II and the idea of formalist coming out in art I was wondering if there's anything similar in relation to line in Salish art.

ELIOT WHITE-HILL: In relation to the line sorry.

STUDENT: Line or forms. I'm thinking about I don't know after world war

2 a lot of line seeming as wounded First Nations I was thinking if there's anything similar, not necessarily the same but in general.

ELIOT WHITE-HILL: I think sorry if I'm misunderstanding the question, I think that there's been a lot of shift in more modern Salish art where we are all being influenced by all sorts of stuff. For instance, northern art style and the whole era where Salish artists couldn't make a living making Salish art, people expected to see totem poles, they expected to see formline, they expected to see all the masks and stuff that aren't traditional to us. That had a really profound impact on Salish art and it wasn't until the 1960, 70s, when people like Susan Point and Simon Charlie Stan green Charles Eliot, the sparrow family, Salish weavers guild all these people brought traditional Salish back to the surface. All these different influences have had an impact on what Salish art today looks like. As well as looking at other people's art, other cultures art, western art. But what is really remarkable to me is that you can look at Salish art today and you can look at stone carved spinel whirl that could be 2,000 years old and there's a through line. There is a direct connection between what we are doing today and what our ancestors were doing.

STUDENT: I didn't explain the question right.

ELIOT WHITE-HILL: Sorry.

STUDENT: I'll try to think about it.

STUDENT: Is there any particular or more unique medium that is you find yourself working with.

ELIOT WHITE-HILL: Yeah, I think ceramics I really love. There's not a traditional ceramic practice in any way in Salish culture but the medium speaks to me and speaks to Salish philosophy around making art so deeply where you are connecting with the land quite literally as you are working with the clay, you have to be present. I really love wheel throwing and it's like every time you throw on the wheel you centre the clay when you centre the clay you centre yourself. It can get destroyed and ruined every single step of the process, you have to let go of that and be okay with it. I love ceramics my dad was one when he was young he apprenticed under a Potter on Hornby Island. That artist Wayne Gan inspired me as well. I want to work with stone, carving stone that's is something that I want to lean into that I haven't done before.

STUDENT: Going back to curatorial practices, throughout like I am an art history major one of the things that fairly drilled into the is importance of the space around an object. So I'm curious you were talking about before about the red observing Kerr painting all the wall, what is your ideas of what do you do to curate these spaces, obviously studying up the objects is important but also the space itself, how do you go about

think being that.

ELIOT WHITE-HILL: I think with that one I'm inspired by the work of the Japanese American artist Isamu Noguchi, his writing and work informed the way I look at that kind of stuff. He talked about art as in not just an object but the ways that people experience art and navigate through space. And really think being that and I think that is in line with traditional Salish culture in the sense of there is a stage in a sense. There's a way that people navigate space. In Salish culture we are taught that you go counterclockwise through space or right to left. That is very important traditionally when we are dancing in the long house you go counterclockwise around the fire. Things like the number 4 is very significant in Salish culture, ha ha then ^ sp? my great-grandmother said the word ha ha then which is 4 is derived from had he had he which is sacred so repetitions of 4, groupings of 4. These are some very simple and small ways but are deeply rooted in the way of look at the world from a Salish perspective. I think that some of the other interesting stuff is breaking away from the white cube in terms of curating. Thinking about the spaces and the lighting. I was working on a show and I just had this sense where it was way too bright in the room. And I felt like something was asking why is it so bright and just this urge to really dim the lights down. We don't have to see it so clearly, you know. And in terms of

that it's also -- my preference as a cure rater is more in bringing together artists as opposed to the art that they make. Or a specific artwork. That has been my approach so far is to create a prompt that inspires the artist and then ask them to respond to that and then figure out how to put it all together in the space. I think it would be fun to do something that is really focused on bringing together a handful of specific artworks into a space but I haven't gotten to that show yet.

INSTR. CHRISTOPHER SMITH: I had a question for you. You have artwork in the contemporary section of the reinstall of the Museum of Natural History in New York you had your painting there.

ELIOT WHITE-HILL: Yeah.

INSTR. CHRISTOPHER SMITH: I know they worked with several communities to reinstall that space which hadn't significantly been changed since Franz Boas's time it had been over a hundred years. And then that was it radically reimagined by Indigenous communities and non-Indigenous ally curators. Can you talk about some of your process and experience in working with that reinstall there with the contemporary end of it how do you think they did how do you think that turned out, what would you give how do you think that worked.

ELIOT WHITE-HILL: So I got to see the Northwest Coast hall or they used to call it the Boas hall at the American Museum of Natural History. I saw it 15 years ago before the redevelopment and

then I was in a show there last year so I've seen it before and after. And my uncle Ron Hamilton was one of the lead co-curators of that redevelopment. I think they did a really good job. I think that when you are bringing together such an enormous diversity of Indigenous cultures in the Northwest Coast it's really really not easy to do it all perfect. There were a couple of misses. I think the interior Salish exhibit doesn't exist anymore but having seen it prior where the way that Boas set it up there were things on display that should never be on display and as an exhibit it caused harm. That is exactly what it did. And so through the redevelopment they worked with actual people from each community from each culture and I think that they did a pretty good job of it. It feels totally different. That stuff has no business being in a hall in New York. It should all be coming home but in terms of working collaboratively I think that the drive of the project was good and I know my uncle he said that towards the end of the project he felt totally tokanized. So I don't know what the actual policy or what that looked like but what I do know is that that project has spurred on other institutions to look at doing something similar and to re-address the ways that they are showing stuff in a way that is informed by people from those cultures. That is important work.

INSTR. CHRISTOPHER SMITH: Yeah that is hugely important. When you were

talking about again the space that you are creating and working with Indigenous space how do you bring that into a kind of a white cube into curation. I was thinking about we've talked quite a bit about Jennifer Kramer. She is working with the Nuxalk. That is what I did my MA, Clyde Tallio worked with Jennifer to make sure the Nuxalk section -- how many have been to the AMNH? You come into this the grand hall Heiltsuk canoe with a Haida painting, you walk down the centre of this hall you have all different cultures to the right and to the left and Nuxalk is towards the front and something interesting about Nuxalk is that they are a northern Coast Salish people they don't talk about it much they have a Coast Salish language and they have an emphasis on the number 4 and this idea of moving counterclockwise through their space and they have set up their exhibit their portion of the exhibit to be experienced that which in this Nuxalk cosmological way that reproduces what Eliot is talking about. So that is that it's contained in this one little section and then that is the Haida section and Tlingit section and they embody different values from those communities which is kind of awkward because it's all under one roof and obviously we've talked about this a lot Indigenous people are not monoliths but it does try to embody all of these sort of different cosmological and ontological viewpoints for Indigenous people. Thank you for sharing your

thoughts on that.

ELIOT WHITE-HILL: Yeah. It's really personal to me too with there are two potlatch screens that are on display now permanently in the hall that belong to my family that come from my family in Hupacasath in Port Alberni, my dad wrote about those screens in the chapter he wrote and the complex and conflicting feelings that I had where my art was going on display in the same hall as these panels that were taken from us where it's like I made my art to be shared it was meant to be seen in that context. My ancestors art was meant to be in our house in Hupacasath and it was such a weird feeling where I feel in a really serious way that those panels are part of who I am as a Hupacasath person and while they are there there's part of me that I can't understand or there's part of me that I can't truly know until those are returned home to us.

INSTR. CHRISTOPHER SMITH: And your dad wrote powerfully about being confronted with one the screens during the totems for turquoise he turns around the corner there it is and he addressed -- him and his sister addressed the panel in physical and specific ways, so something that is another aspect of curation and museum work that in North America and all over the world when you are working with Indigenous communities like thinking through how your display is impacting people in and the display of these prerogatives. Because we talk about intangible property certainly that is

an intangible property of that object is this powerful emotion that comes from it. Working in museum context and while you are working, things to think about.

STUDENT: You mentioned how you shared how you spent months looking at Coast Salish art to study it to observe it to experience it. Was there a moment you felt like you had the authority to produce it yourself and what was that like and also would you say to someone who might feel like so alienated from any roots that they might not have ever feel like they have an authority.

ELIOT WHITE-HILL: Yeah. I think that for me the movement was when I felt this urge to create and it was when I described I think it was with salmon understanding the shapes and I don't know how to draw a salmon. I couldn't I'd only do stick figure drawings prior to that but I knew how the shapes came together how a salmon head should look where you generally would have the eye which is a circle and crescents for the mouth there might be embellishments trigons here and there, the body I like to do a trigon down the body. That was the moment for me when I felt like I wanted to doodle and to draw something. But in terms of feeling, having the authority to create, to contribute, that is a tough one. I feel like I really struggled with imposter syndrome in that sense. I'm not an artist, what the hell am I doing. I never intended to have a career as an artist, I was just expressing what I was

learning and it became an outlet through that and then it really became this obsession and transformational journey in my life where it really took over my life.

INSTR. CHRISTOPHER SMITH: We've got about five minutes, anybody else have a question for Eliot? So I guess I have a couple of questions super fast. Number 1 what would be your dream exhibit all things being equal where would it be what would you do as an Indigenous person. We've been talking about heavy stuff, let's talk end on.

ELIOT WHITE-HILL: One of my life goal social security to build a cultural centre for *Snuneymuxw* and to create a space where we can house things in our own way. To share from our own perspective an exhibit would be part of that. That talks about our creation stories, connection to place. Like a place that can be used socially for gathering, for hosting other events and stuff. Because it's not just the exhibit. It's that it's facilitating all of this other cultural and social stuff that is critical to who we are.

ELIOT WHITE-HILL: Bruce just mentioned that another community upper Skagit are also trying to do that as well. That is a wonderful answer we are also talking about in context of the rights of Indigenous people to represent themselves the emergence of community centres and heritage centres and how that doesn't negate the responsibility of museum professionals and museums to continuing to engage thank you

for that and my second question is if these guys want to follow along with your career and exhibit and your artwork where is the best way for them to do that. You got to give a plug.

ELIOT WHITE-HILL: Instagram. I'm on Instagram my handle is my traditional name, *Kwulasultun*. I share everything there. Mostly food picks.

INSTR. CHRISTOPHER SMITH: He has got two cats, Momo de jour photos. Salish woolly cats. All right. Thank you so much, this is a huge honour, we really appreciate. Everybody let's give Eliot a round [applause]... we'll see you on Tuesday.

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