

Spirit Bear

Western Red Cedar, Columbia Valley

I was fortunate to grow up in North Vancouver and on the Pacific West Coast at a time when things weren't as hectic and chaotic as they are today. We spent endless hours riding our bikes through the many parks and natural forested areas around our home and thankfully there was an abundance of aboriginal art including many totem poles in those public spaces. Learning about this art form and the people that created it was also a big part of our education during grade school.

When I was about 10 years old I tried carving a totem pole slightly smaller than this one with my father's help and although it was crude and mostly unfinished it became something of a family heirloom. When we moved to Calgary 23 years later it was stolen from outside my art studio never to be seen again.

In 2007 while collecting some firewood, I recovered this piece of clear cedar from a log sort by the Revelstoke Dam. In the winter of 2008 I decided it was time to try wood carving again. Unlike most native totem poles whose design content is based on family history or community status, I wanted this pole to be a personal totem, an expression of who I am. It has been observed that I can be a bit of a bear at times and it has even been suggested that my spirit animal is a bear which resonates with me just fine.

The figure of the man contains some elements used in West Coast native carving although the human form was not very common in totem pole iconography, so I had to come up with my own design. The figure of the grizzly bear is based on west coast Haida and Kwagiutl design elements blended together to form the complete depiction.

The orientation is such that the man is supported or carried by the spirit or energy of the bear, a boundary between the two exists but they remain inseparable. This would reflect my understanding of the spirit realm and I believe it is in keeping with the traditions of the Native peoples that created this art form. Their heritage has become part of my heritage and this work is intended to honour the role that their culture has had in my life and my creative journey.

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Sculptor