



COMOX VALLEY ART GALLERY
CONTEMPORARY GALLERY
MARCH 15 TO MAY 2, 2014

Andy Everson

Comox Valley, BC, Canada

 **Like?**
prints, mixed media, sculpture

Indigenous Musings in a Digital Age



ARTIST TALK: Saturday, April 12 at 11 am

LIKE?: INDIGENOUS MUSINGS IN A DIGITAL AGE combines prints, mixed-media, sculpture and wearable art. Utilizing pop culture references combined with First Nations imagery, the work focuses on raising awareness and stimulating dialogue in relation to issues faced by First Nations people today. Andy draws forth issues surrounding appropriation, ownership, power, resistance and worth, while presenting his work in a way that is accessible to the viewer through often-humorous undertones. Many of the pieces in the exhibition have had a viral existence through social media and thus encapsulate much of what it means to be an Indigenous artist in the world today.



An expanded field of sensory figuration makes evident full native participation in the modes of display, promotion and marketing of the late capitalist liberal democracy. Simultaneously, it maintains limits — protecting renewed definitions of aboriginality — by offering meanings that are both tangible and opaque.
— Charlotte Townsend-Gault, "Circulating Aboriginality", *Journal of Material Culture* 9(2): 183-202.

ANDY EVERSON was born in Comox, BC in 1972 and named Nagedzi after his grandfather, the late Chief Andy Frank of the K'ómoks First Nation. Andy has also had the honour of being seated with the 'Namgis Tsitsa'walagame' name of wamxalagalis l'nis. Influenced heavily by his grandmother, he has always been driven to uphold the traditions of both the K'ómoks and Kwakwaka'wakw First Nations. In this regard, Andy has pursued avenues where he can sing traditional songs and perform ceremonial dances at potlatches and in a number of different dance groups, most notably the Le-La-La Dancers, the Gwa'wina Dancers and the K'umugwe Dancers.

Pursuing other areas of traditional culture has also led Andy to complete a Master's degree in anthropology. Because the K'ómoks First Nation lies on the border between the larger Salish and Kwakwaka'wakw realms, his thesis focused on notions and expressions of contemporary Comox identity. His work in anthropology provided him with a background in linguistics which subsequently inspired him to create a company, Copper Canoe, Inc., that specialized in the creation of Aboriginal language media.

Andy feels that his artwork stands on par with these other accomplishments. Although he began drawing Northwest Coast art at an early age, Andy's first serious attempt wasn't until 1990 when he started designing and painting chilkat-style blankets for use in potlatch dancing. From these early self-taught lessons, he has tried to follow in the footsteps of his Kwakwaka'wakw relatives in creating bold and unique representations that remain rooted in the age-old traditions of his ancestors. The ability to create and print most of his own work has allowed Andy to explore and express his ancestral artwork in a number of contemporary ways.

www.andyeverson.com



fb post: *IdleNoMore - No words needed. Use, share and tag as you see fit...* In his 2013 Huffington Post article *Idle No More Art: Posters Promote A Revolution*, Jesse Ferreras notes, “artists have become a vibrant part of Idle No More, illustrating the movement in bold colours as it sweeps across Canada.” See more on Andy’s fb album *Idle No More* and at http://www.idlenomore.ca/andy_everson

These women refused to be Idle.



Kevin C. *The Chiefmakers...the knowledge keepers...wonderful, humble, Noble Matriarchs... good one all right. (fb comment)*

These men refused to be Idle.



Karen H. *I'm honored to have known several of these noble men as a child. They modeled strength in respect to the ancestors and pushed forth the power of tradition and culture for those of us who came after. They were never idle. (fb comment)*

When there was going to be an Idle No More protest here, I thought I'd do up a design that morning. So I sat at my kitchen table, took a photograph of my hand holding my stylus and used that as a reference for this image of a hand holding a feather. A hand holding a feather had been used previously for Idle No More, and so I wanted to continue on with that theme, but I wanted something that represented people from the coast. I didn't feel that the other logos represented us from this side of Canada, I wanted something with Northwest Coast formline design that represents here. So I created this image and put it up on Facebook and it went crazy, absolutely viral, all over. By that afternoon it had started to pop up everywhere, people were making pins and t-shirts, posters, everything, all around the world. I even saw it in Czechoslovakia in protest pictures that appeared in Rolling Stone!

It was all because I had put it up on Facebook, and people had started to 'like' and 'share' it. It contributed to the movement and started a life of its own away from me. I still see it out there, occasionally I'll just see my fist in the background!

IDLE NO MORE

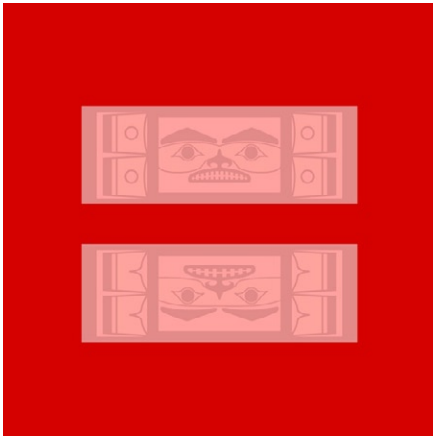
Giclée

Kwakwaka'wakwized Item
fb post, 2013



KWAKWAKA'WAKWIZED ITEMS: (fb)like, use, share & tag as you see fit...

I have a section on my Facebook page that I call Kwakwaka'wakw Art' that takes pop culture images and puts a Kwakwaka'wakw slant on them, viewing them from our perspective. The Canucks brand is a perfect example because it's vaguely Northwest Coast art, especially to somebody that's unfamiliar with our artforms. They might look at it and say "oh, that's a native Orca." I wanted to create a logo that really is Northwest Coast art! This really is Kwakwaka'wakw Art, this is what it should look like, when I put it up on Facebook that's what most people say. — Andy Everson



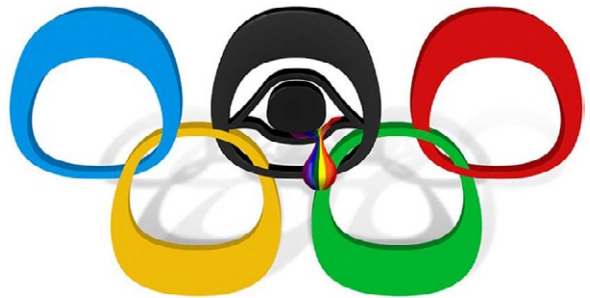
EQUALITY, Giclée, 2013 *fb post: Absolutely, I believe in marriage equality.... Feel free to share or use for your profile pic.* (In 2005, the Government introduced Bill C-38, extending the right of marriage to same-sex couples)



BOX OF TREASURES Giclée, 2011
Dianna K-C: Natives should have the option of having this on their fb in stead of the boring blue one, love it! (fb comment)



APPARITION Giclée, 2011
Part of fb series Kwa-nucks Disappearing Act: In recognition of what could have been



BLACK EYE Giclée, 2014 *fb post: Feel free to share, if you'd like....*
In support of the LGBT human rights 2014 Olympic focussed protests. When I let these pieces go out into the world, people are able to imbue their own identity onto them. People will use these images as their profile pics, their cover pics, and that's a really important thing for me because it's showing that they identify and it's part of their own identity.
- Andy Everson



SONS OF BAXWBAKWALANUKSIWE

Giclée / t-shirt and hoodie screen prints, 2013

Overtaken by this spirit, the initiate becomes consumed with the desire to eat human flesh. Enticed by an assistant—usually his sister—the young initiate is persuaded to go back to his village. There, guests have assembled in a traditional bighouse and await his return. Slowly and apprehensively he enters the house with arms alternately stretched out reaching for food. With his body clad only in hemlock branches, his eyes roll back into his skull while his lips remain pursed, ostensibly in a wild trance-like state whose only desire is to seek out human flesh. Going wild he runs into a back room that has been set aside for him. He then emerges out of a hole in the room's dance screen—a kind of rebirth that is repeated four times.

Finally he is surrounded by older hamatsas who shake their rattles to calm him down. Fire is passed over his head four times and he is stripped of his hemlock. Mountain goat tallow and charcoal are then applied to his face and dyed red cedar bark headpiece, neckrings and other items festoon his body. Finally a layer of eagle down coats the top of his head—a white crown that comes from the heavens. It is then that specially composed songs are sung to pacify the dancer. Slowly, the hamatsa begins to dance. Initially he merely crouches, but eventually begins to rise in response to the syncopated rhythm of the music.

During the final phase of his taming, the hamatsa enters the dance floor one last time clad in a glorious robe, headdress and neckring. He is then joined by all other hamatsas that are in attendance. This is done to not only show everyone who the hamatsas are, but also to welcome the new dancer into the fold of this most sacred society. Hamatsas are our highest dancers as they have journeyed deep within themselves, become possessed by the most fearsome spirit and have returned to their community where their transformation can guide them in their role as community leaders. I dedicate “Sons of Baxwbakwalanuksiwe” to all of the hamatsa dancers out there who continue to uphold the most revered laws and practices of the Kwakwaka’wakw people. Hap! —Andy Everson

These will ONLY be for hamatsas. If you are NOT a hamatsa I will NOT give or sell one to you. If you don't know what a hamatsa is, chances are you are not a hamatsa. ... I'm sorry to make it so exclusive, but hamatsas have a great deal of responsibility in our culture, so they deserve a little bit of exclusivity for a change (Indian Country Today 2012). — Andy Everson

In his essay “Appropriation (?) of theMonth: Andy Everson’s “Sons of Baxwbakwalanuksiwe”, Adam Solomonian observes, “Everson’s Sons of Baxwbakwalanuksiwe’ employs forms of appropriation to present a particular surface, one that riffs on the over-commoditization of particular imagery, while at the same time restricting access to both the image itself and the knowledge it embodies. It is a reminder that intellectual and cultural property rights are continually re-articulated at the intersection of numerous groups and categories of difference.” (<http://www.sfu.ca/ipinch/outputs/blog>) .

KWAKWAK'WAKW
I T E M S

PORTRAITS OF THE TREATY EMPIRE

I belong to the K'ómoks First Nation and we are (light) years deep into the British Columbia treaty process. I truly have mixed feelings about our involvement in this. By choosing to engage in the process, we enter a world of consultants and negotiators and other strange, scary and wonderful creatures. We partake in a world of borrowing and debt; of meetings and fights. We enter without knowing whether we are journeying into the dark side or are on a path towards the light. What I do know is that under the treaty process, our community has begun to fracture. Our very future as a people is at stake. Will treaty define who we are or will our culture do that? Will treaty lead us to form a "Treaty Empire" or a "Treaty Rebellion"?

- Andy Everson (and stories following on pages 8-9)



PORTRAITS OF THE TREATY EMPIRE is a series of six prints, depict imagery of Star Wars characters in combination with Northwest Coast art imagery, representing aspects of the Treaty process.

The titles of the works serve to call attention to the issues that are at stake and embodied in the series:

Wisdom, Fear, Control (top: L to R)

Power, Money, Language (bottom: L to R)



Wisdom, Giclée, 2012



Fear, Giclée, 2012



Control, Giclée, 2012



Power, Giclée, 2012



Money, Giclée, 2012



Language, Giclée, 2012

WISDOM

The backbone of our community has always been our elders--the keepers of our traditions...the knowledgeable ones. We look up to them with their deep-set wrinkles and greyed hair. We look into their eyes and see experience and wisdom. We listen to ancient stories falling from their lips and we hear recollections of the way things were and the way things ought to be.

Yet, we often overlook this wisdom. We think we know it all. We live in modern times and the elders' outdated ways are for the past. We get our elders out to meetings and pay them in order to validate anything we want to push through our treaties. Give up traditional governance? Sure! Relegate traditional ways to insignificance? Of course! However, true elders can't and won't be bought. They will speak up for the old ways because the old ways are all that differentiate us from the rest of the world. I trust that they will use their wisdom to keep us on the right path and put strength back into our community.

FEAR

What particularly irks me about the treaty process is that the Federal and Provincial governments have no qualms about invoking fear during negotiations. They'll come whirling in, evil in their eyes, and come up with things like: "You better hurry up and sign treaty or there won't be any land left for settlement" It's sad: our ancestors have been here since time immemorial, we haven't yet extinguished title over our land (as outlined by the Royal Proclamation of 1763) and we live in the second largest country in the world. Yet, the governments have the gall to scare us into hurrying up with treaty.

We need to look fear in the eyes and let it know that we can't be frightened into signing treaty. We won't jeopardize our children's children's future by adhering to a government timeline. When confronted by fear, we need to slice it in two with the strength of our ancestors.

CONTROL

Our ancestors had a system of governance determined by and suited to our culture. It involved hereditary lines that were rooted in families, clans or houses. Everyone had a place in society and leadership roles involved each and every family in the village. Each line within a tribe had the right to determine its own future and its own destiny.

Democracy in the western sense was a foreign concept to our people. While it forms the basis for a passable system on a national level, it is poorly suited to First Nation communities. With the introduction of voting on our reserves, the families with the largest populations began to gain control over the community. We see it all the time on the reserve: parents, aunts or uncles instruct their automaton children, nieces, nephews and grandkids to vote for their family members and they dutifully do. What this means for treaty is that one clan line can essentially wipe out the Aboriginal rights of the other clan lines simply because they have more troopers at the polls. That is control.

I realized, at first with the Star Wars images, and then later with other images, that putting the 'Form Line' on it allows me to take on ownership of it. Star Wars is copyrighted and trademarked, but as soon as I've drawn in Form Line, the representation is transformed. It takes on a different set of meanings, not only for me but also for other people from our culture. With Star Wars, we recognize the characters, we already know what the stories are. Using the Form Line changes the context of the symbols. With the Portraits from the "Treaty Empire" series I really wanted to make them look like they are here on the coast. Treaties are about the land, and I showed them in this landscape as opposed to some fictitious landscape from the movies. —Andy Everson

POWER

Politicians often start out with good intentions. This is true for both natives and non-natives, alike. They get into politics with the idea that they can change the world and make it a better place. The fortunate few succeed in their mission. Many others, however, fail. They become enamored with ego and entranced with power.

They give in to the dark side. They forget about the principles that define us as Aboriginal people. They ignore the wisdom of the elders and instead listen to the counsel of the lawyers. They cater to their family to keep their voter base intact. They ignore the state of our language and instead focus on the state of their bank account. They would rather sing the praises of their accomplishments than sing the songs of their ancestors. They lead us into treaty instead of leading us into unity. We know that this power is simply just a mask; a mask that can be removed to make them one with the people once again.

MONEY

There is an industry in this province that doesn't rely on natural resources. It doesn't rely on the market economy and it doesn't rely on tourism. It is self-sustaining and self-preserving. It manages to produce reams of legal documents, yet fails to produce anything tangible for our communities. It is driven by the glut of the legal, academic and Band systems. The real meetings take place over cocktails or on golf courses, in hotels or in resorts. It is fueled by money that comes in the form of loans taken on the backs of First Nation communities. It is the treaty industry.

In this industry, consultants and negotiators swoop into our villages like vultures looking to rip the least piece of meat off of our dying carcass. Succeed or fail in their bid for treaty settlement, it doesn't matter. They will move on to the next village with money. Bounty hunters, hired guns--they will work for whoever is willing to pay their exorbitant fees. As long as the taps to the money keg remain open, they will be on your side....

LANGUAGE

My grandfather, like so many other First Nation's kids, went to residential school where his language was literally beat out of him. Speak in K'omoks? He was beat. Speak in Kwakwala? He was beat. Share our ancestral stories? He was beat. Do this to enough generations and you wonder how anyone can speak our languages anymore. The fact remains that here in K'omoks, we have 0 speakers of the Pentlatch language; we have 0 speakers of the K'omoks language and we have, what, 2 speakers of the Kwakwala language? While money gets squirreled away into the pockets of the consultants, we are doing absolutely nothing to preserve our language. This is unacceptable and all of us are to blame!

Sure, we might ask an elder to say a prayer in Kwakwala or throw a few words into a speech to make it sound "authentic," but we sit back and watch our language die daily. With language, goes culture; with culture, goes identity--a slippery slope that all the money in the world can never rectify.

One day I created a stormtrooper image using formline design and just threw it up on Facebook to gauge the reaction. It was immediate! Everybody just loved it. It brought out this sense of identity that they had locked up inside, from when they were kids as well, they knew the stories. So I decided to create a few more images and weave in a bit of a backstory about it, talking about the BC treaty process and how it affects us. We all identify with the characters from Star Wars. Placing a character next to this treaty process gave it more meaning to the average viewer. I recognize that some of the people that would purchase these prints because of the way they look, but with every image that I print I always include a story or a piece with it. - Andy Everson

HERO (or Infiltrator of the Colonial Empire?) / VILLAIN (or Suppressor of the Indigenous Rebellion?)

(images - page 9 and 10) Giclée, 2013

At the time of this writing, I reflect on the fact that in just one week our family will be hosting a potlatch. We will thrust open the doors of the Bighouse and invite people from throughout our territory and beyond to gather together. We will set aside our jobs and pop music and TV shows and video games. We will forbid the interference of fast food and Facebook and ego. Instead, we will focus on what it means to be Indigenous --what it means to be connected to each other and to place. Story, song, dance and community will come together to remind us of who we are.

Potlatches are valuable lessons in Indigeneity. Outsiders may only see the spectacle of the dance or hear the penetrating rhythm of the song. For us, though, it is a reminder of our place in the chain of humanity. We feel equal responsibility to our ancestors as to our descendants. We pass on names and songs that transcend time as we bind our children to the territory that surrounds us. They come to learn of their responsibility to the land. Where the colonial mindset is to move in, exploit and eventually move on, the Indigenous ethos is to stay put and protect.

Our warriors no longer raid other villages for revenge. Instead, we stand outside in the cold, demanding justice for our peoples and protection for our land. We stand alongside our non-Indigenous brothers and sisters who realize, too, that the world cannot sustain the kind of destruction that corporate greed wishes to exact. We also infiltrate the system wearing the suppressor's guise. We don suits and go to law and graduate school not to blend in, but to pick up another weapon. We make these choices, not for ourselves, but for the generations to come.

We enter the world with little input in how we are going to look, but significant say in how we are going to act. Will we be able to gaze into our children's eyes and say that we did all we could to protect the land and to safeguard their heritage? Flesh and blood and bone connect each one of us together. While we may look similar from one person to the next, looks can be deceiving. It is our action or inaction that increasingly defines who we are. The question remains: will you choose to be a hero or a villain?



HERON ARMOUR Andy Everson and Ron Pogue, 2014



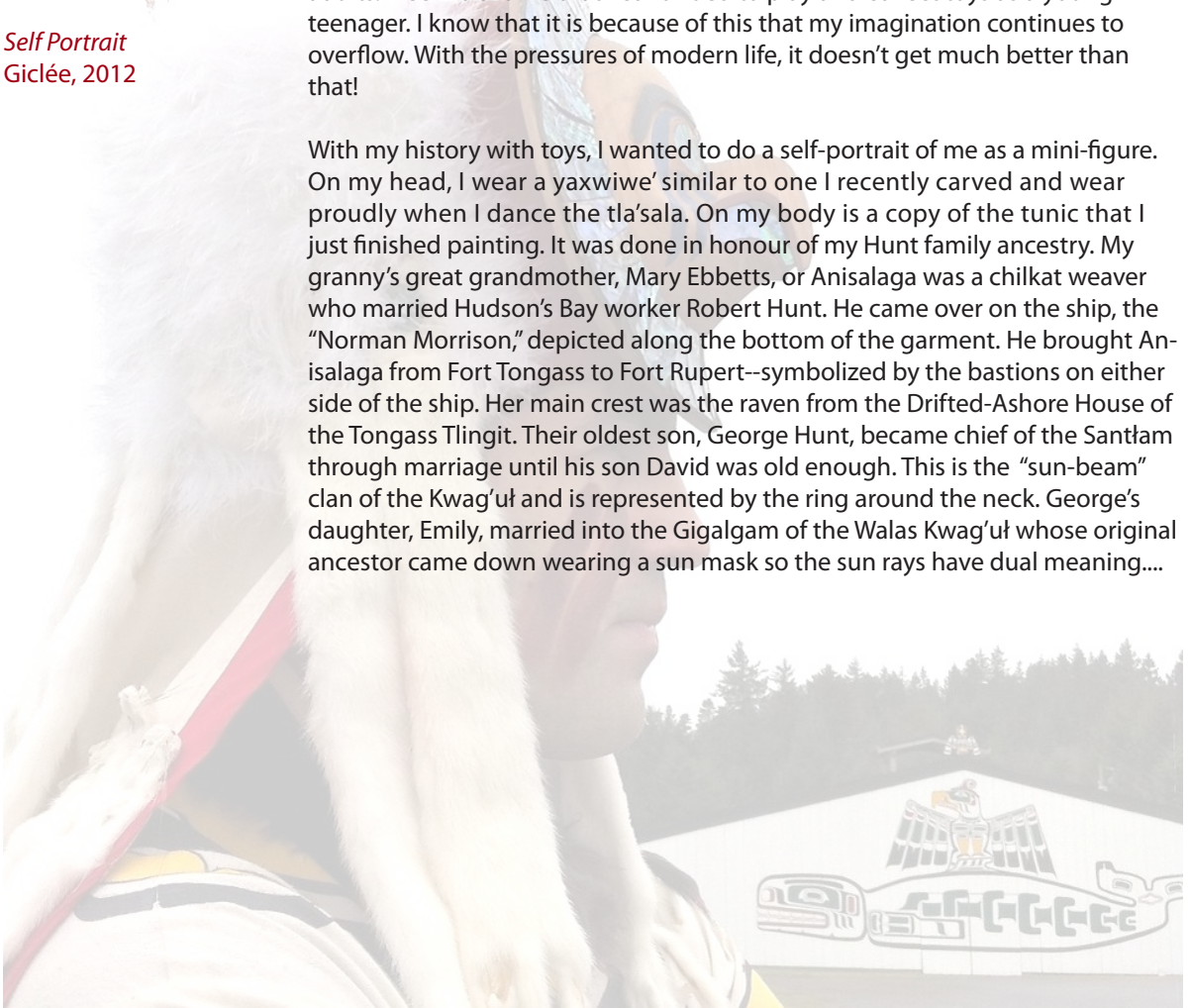
Self Portrait
Giclée, 2012

SELF-PORTRAIT

For those of you that know me, I grew up obsessed with toys. Although I did play some video games later on in life, toys were my escape. I could and would entertain myself for hours. I would build, construct, setup and play. I would collect and, most importantly, I would imagine. It is this imagination--more so than any artistic talents or abilities--that has gotten me to where I am as an artist today.

Now, as an adult, I encourage kids to play--to not give it up so easily. Our society rushes kids too much nowadays. They're encouraged to put down their toy guns and pick up real ones. They're enticed to drop their dolls in order to apply their makeup. They're teased and pressured to eschew their toys in favour of adult pursuits. **For far too many, their imagination is cut short in a rush to be adults.** I feel no shame that I continued to play and collect toys as a young teenager. I know that it is because of this that my imagination continues to overflow. With the pressures of modern life, it doesn't get much better than that!

With my history with toys, I wanted to do a self-portrait of me as a mini-figure. On my head, I wear a yaxwiwe' similar to one I recently carved and wear proudly when I dance the tla'sala. On my body is a copy of the tunic that I just finished painting. It was done in honour of my Hunt family ancestry. My granny's great grandmother, Mary Ebbetts, or Anisalaga was a chilkat weaver who married Hudson's Bay worker Robert Hunt. He came over on the ship, the "Norman Morrison," depicted along the bottom of the garment. He brought Anisalaga from Fort Tongass to Fort Rupert--symbolized by the bastions on either side of the ship. Her main crest was the raven from the Drifted-Ashore House of the Tongass Tlingit. Their oldest son, George Hunt, became chief of the Santlam through marriage until his son David was old enough. This is the "sun-beam" clan of the Kwag'uł and is represented by the ring around the neck. George's daughter, Emily, married into the Gigalgam of the Walas Kwag'uł whose original ancestor came down wearing a sun mask so the sun rays have dual meaning....





GALLERY TALKS: Saturday, April 12 at 11 am

Andy Everson discusses his current show *Like? Indigenous Musing in a Digital Age*.

Join us for gallery talks, conversations, performances and readings. Artists, Curators and Cultural Workers share their work, process, vision and inspirations. Learn about contemporary cultural practices, ask questions and share your ideas.

Saturday, April 12 from 2 - 4 pm: take part in **DISCOVER ART SATURDAY**, CVAG's drop-in family **MAKE ART PROJECT** event.

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Idle No More Art: Posters Promote A Revolution

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Appropriation (?) of the Month: Andy Everson's "Sons of Baxwbakwalanuksiwe"

2013 | By Kristen Dobbin