



JOHN POWELL / WINIDI
NUMP MA NOCH GYAI YOO LAHSS

WE ALL COME FROM ONE ROOT
OCTOBER 16 – NOVEMBER 17 2018

“Photography, archive and memory are intimately connected. Memory and photography both involve the process of recording images that may be used to recall the past. Memory itself is often characterized as an archive: a store house of things, meanings and images. This gives the impression that one can appeal to memory in order to recover the past. Memory, however, does not take material or physical form in the way that photographs and archives usually do. It is not a photograph or a series of images to be gazed upon and it is not a library or database where records might be retrieved. Rather, memory, as we prefer to see it here, is mediation. It is the set of processes through which the past comes to us, but not just the uninterrupted transit of the past to the present. Memory is, in a sense, designed and shaped by the laws and practices of the present, which provide the structures for remembrance to take place.”¹

As witness, orator, community knowledge carrier, and oral genealogist, Kwakwaka'wakw artist John Powell / Winidi, proposes *Nump Ma Noche Gyai Yoo Lahss / We All Come From One Root*.

The concept of 'One Root' is manifested in an extensive body of work that articulates the powerful interconnectedness of First Nations identities, embedded within cultural practices, diversity, ceremony, art and the everyday. At the 'Root', family lineages and origins are pulled, held, shared, transformed, and recreated through a rigorous art and cultural practice. The exhibition is materialized through the interweaving of exhibition components – oral and video storytelling narratives, archival documentation, family photographs, portraiture, and First Nations Regalia.

The exhibition offers a multiplicity of entry points. Guided by ancestral knowledge and teachings, historical stories and photographs serve as a way of remembering one-another, honouring truths, and instigating a retelling. The core of the exhibition is comprised of life-size and larger-than-life fibre-based and hand-tinted family portraits, integrated with a selection from John's elaborately crafted West-Coast Button Blanket Regalia. The work is further activated and deepened through a collection of video narratives in relation to the family portraits. As a result, identities are recorded, connected, reclaimed and redefined. Emerging from this transformation is a deep understanding of *Nump Ma Noche Gyai Yoo Lahss / We All Come From One Root*.

Nump Ma Noch Gyai Yoo Lahss was first co-curated for the Campbell River Museum (2016), by Liz Carter and Ken Blackburn. The project continues with an expanded iteration at CVAG, including local Kómoks First Nations connections as part of the presentation. It is important to note that George Littlechild has been instrumental in this project since its inception.

In their introductory exhibition notes, Liz and Ken brought our attention to the importance of the 'personal is political', noting that "it is evident the work draws from a collective past, resides in a personal present and questions the future." They elaborated on this perspective, and further stating how cross-cultural experiences unfold in the work, describing the exhibition as a "historical journey through Powell's family lineage – representational of his traditional First Nations background, combined with a response to his cultural diversity. Powell descends from two intriguing cultures: his mother was Mamalilikulla and Kwakiutl of Village Island and Fort Rupert. His father was Welsh/Irish and English. This diversity shows in Powell's manipulation of traditional forms, where hints of his Celtic origins mix with his Mamalilikulla roots." With gratitude, we receive the work that has been done to shape this exhibition thus far, and to hold its form, here at the Comox Valley Art Gallery, as part of its ongoing journey.

– Angela Somerset / Denise Lawson, CVAG collaborative curators

¹Karen Cross & Julia Peck (2010) Editorial: Special Issue on Photography, Archive and Memory, *Photographies*, 3:2, 127-138, DOI: 10.1080/17540763.2010.499631 <https://doi.org/10.1080/17540763.2010.499631>

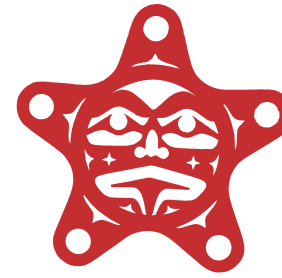
In a special issue of the online journal *Photographies*, Karen Cross and Julia Peck consider the intertwined relationship between past, present and future in which memory plays the important role of mediator within the intimate relationship between photographic image, archive and memory, proposing that memory can be seen as "the set of processes through which the past comes to us, but not just the uninterrupted transit of the past to the present. Memory is, in a sense, designed and shaped by the laws and practices of the present, which provide the structures for remembrance to take place." John Powell lays out his personal and collective memories and interconnections, and in doing so invites us to consider our own relational pathways.

GEORGE LITTLECHILD

I have watched John Powell's journey through these incredible Honourings of his Ancestors – connecting the dots, the stories, moieties and his family standings within the Kwakwaka'wakw nation.

John is blessed to come from a strongly ranked seating position within the nation and he holds up these Ancestors with great esteem and pride. They are his tie, his connection to the land, sea and sky. His roots have informed him, nurtured him, allowed him to stand connected to the land and people of Village Island, where his people lived for thousands of years.

His gift to us is the body of art full of mystic mastery and brilliance. He has captured his ancestry so beautifully. Each portrait bursts, evokes grand lineage



JOHN POWELL / WINIDI

I would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge George Littlechild for motivating this body of work. I believe his words were something like this – 'you are always speaking of your ancestors and nobody knows what they look like. You need to make their images real through your art' ...and so this journey began.

— John Powell



and strength while his regalia / button blankets tie into today's traditions as they are danced at Potlatches and gatherings. When needed, John has freely lent out the crests from his own dance order and that of his ancestors. He honours home, lineage and the stories that lie within, which he graciously has shared in this exhibition.

I am proud to have witnessed this body of art being conceived, created, born. I "Stand John Up" and am content to act as a cultural witness to his art-making practice that connects him to culture. I am very proud of you Winidi.

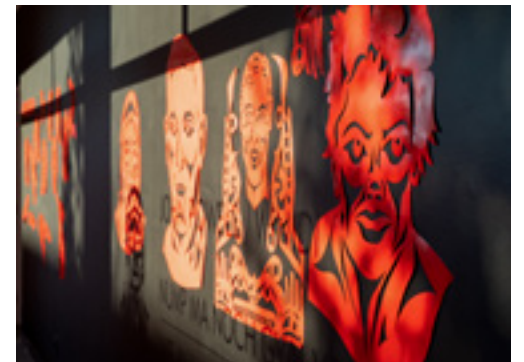
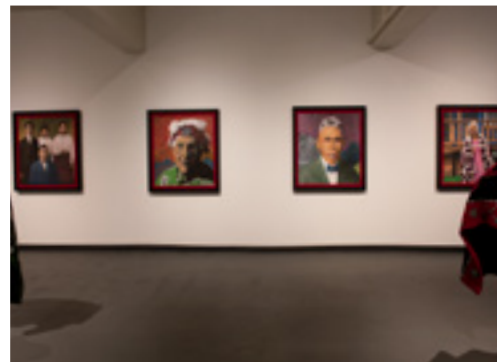
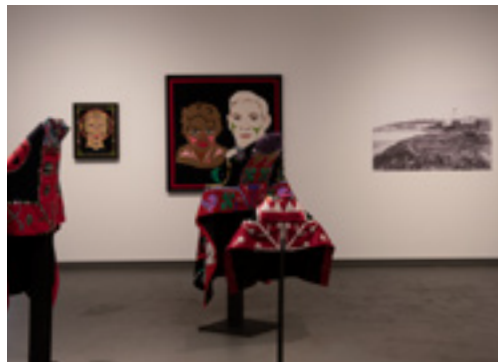
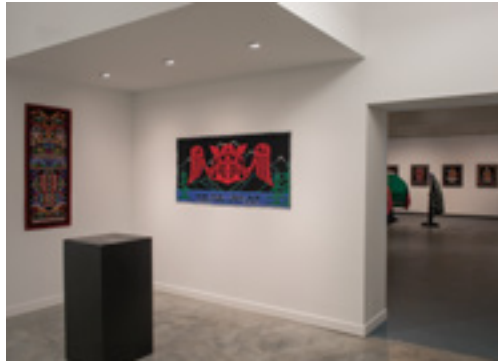
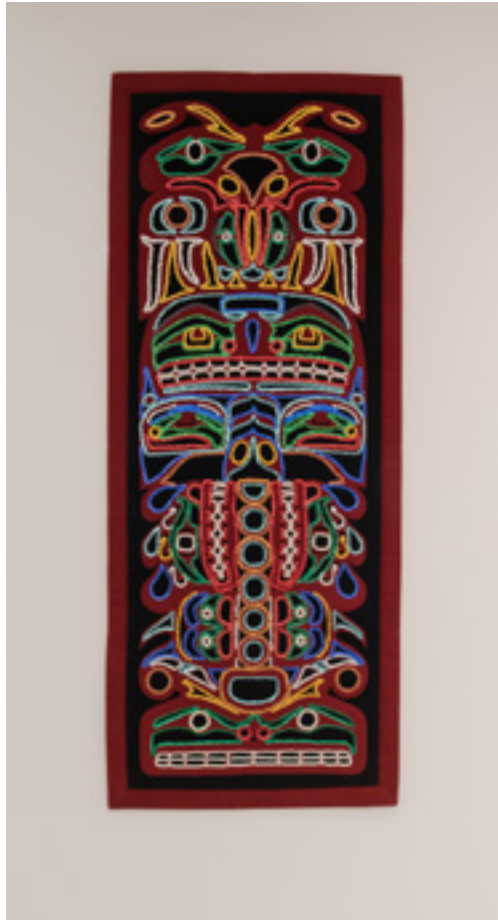
– George Littlechild / Nanekawasis

I have enjoyed art-making all my life. My usual inspiration is my mother's First Nations culture. I have fortunately lived all of formative life in the presence of this great culture. My other training comes from schooling in Costume, Fashion, Interior, and Graphic Design. I am also a Traditional Regalia Maker. I have worked in design for nearly 30 years.

My design education has enabled me to work in some very diverse areas: theatre, opera, residential design, graphic design, teaching, Northwest Coast design classes and Regalia-making. I have created costumes for numerous theatre productions, the most recent being "The Ecstasy of Rita Joe" at Firehall Arts Centre in Vancouver. I was co-costume designer for the Vancouver Opera Society's rendition of Mozart's "The Magic Flute" at the Queen Elizabeth Theatre in Vancouver. And in 2009 – 2010 I was the design coordinator for the Vancouver 2010 Olympic Opening Ceremonies.

One of my names is Winidi (fights wars for his people). I am a Mamalilikulla member of the Kwakwala speaking people. In addition, I was trained as an oral genealogist from a very young age. My art practice generally carries with it a responsibility to educate the larger world about my culture and the belief systems associated with being from the Mamalilikulla First Nation.

At the present time I am working in a political world. I sit as chairman of the Executive Board for the Kwakiutl District Council, which oversees work with eight of our Kwakwaka'wakw bands, six of which fall under health transfer. In addition, I am an elected councillor of the Mamalilikulla First Nation. I also sit as the chairman for the Aboriginal Coalition to End Homelessness in Victoria and I am currently speaking with First Nations Health Authority to work in the capacity of Health benefits change champion for dental, vision and medical supplies roll out. All of this work is also motivated by my desire to bring about positive, healthy, growth and healing and to assist developing capacity for our First Nations people. In this way I hope to inspire through my work a gentle understanding of our people and the importance of connections and cooperation to enable of us to move forward with confidence and success.



Nump Ma Noch Gyai Yoo Lahass (We All Come From One Root), installation details, 2018
Photographs courtesy of Alun Macanulty



COMOX VALLEY ART GALLERY
ENTRANCE



EXHIBITION KEY

1. Welcome Pole

Thunderbird – Killerwhale
With Double Headed Sea Serpent

2. Ancestor in Flight Over Queneesh

3. Winidi / John Lawrence Powell

Alert Bay (Yalis) 1959 –

Materials: ultra-suede, cashmere, embroidery thread, abalone buttons, mother of pearl buttons, plastic sequins, velveteen.

4. John's Parents

Ah Nee Doo Gwa / Janet Caroline (Bell) Powell / Mother
Alert Bay (Yalis) 1935–1999

John David Powell / Father

Mission, B.C. 1930–1969

Materials: cashmere, Melton wool cloth, embroidery thread.

5. Fort Rupert, 1881

Village of my maternal grandmother, her father's and mother's great grandfather and great, great grandmother
Image B-03566 courtesy of the Royal BC Museum and Archives.

6. Gee Tlah Lah Gah / Grandparents

Eliza Lucy Bell (née Wah Lahss)

Grandmother (maternal) 1901–1970

Tlah Tlea Lee Dlah

Henry Abel Bell

Maternal Grandfather 1902 – 1983

Fort Rupert (Tsakis)

Materials: ultra-suede, cashmere, embroidery thread, plastic buttons, metallic sequins.

7. Henry Abel Bell / Oo Dzee Sta Lees

Grandfather (maternal)

Village Island (Mim Qwam Lees) 1902–1983

Materials: ultra-suede, cashmere, embroidery thread, plastic buttons, metallic sequins, velveteen.

8. Eliza Lucy Bell / Wa' dzi da' laga

Grandmother (maternal)

Fort Rupert (Tsakis) 1901–1970

Materials: ultra-suede, leather, embroidery thread, plastic buttons, plastic sequins.

9. Mary (Speck) Wallas / Ah Dahqw'ih Nees / Pa' ti la'enukw (heals with plants)

Great Grandmother. Turner Island 1861 - 1960

10. Walas K'yayu'tla'las

Great Grandfather. Fort Rupert 1853 - 1959

11. Ya m'gwas

Great, great grandmother's father's mother
William's Sound 1823- 1910/12

12. Village Island, Village Island, Mim Qwam Lees
Courtesy Library & Archives Canada.

13. Dlah Kwa Gyee Lo Gwa / Whonnock(née Siwidi)

Married Dlah soo tee' wah lees

Great-grandaunt (maternal)

Village Island (Mim Qwam Lees) 1862 – unknown

Materials: ultra-suede, Melton wool cloth, cashmere, embroidery thread, mother of pearl buttons, abalone buttons, metallic sequins.

14. Goo Tlah' Lahss

Mamalilikalan / Jim Siwidi

Great-granduncle (maternal)

Village Island (Mim Qwam Lees) 1864 – unknown

Materials: ultra-suede, Melton wool cloth, cashmere, embroidery thread, plastic buttons, plastic sequins.

15. Mah Q'wa Lah Oh Gwa

Married Dawson (née Siwidi) of Kingcome Islet

Great-grandaunt (maternal)

Village Island (Mim Qwam Lees) 1866 – unknown

Materials: ultra-suede, Melton wool cloth, cashmere, embroidery thread, abalone buttons, mother of pearl buttons, plastic sequins.

16. Dlah'Dlah Gwotl / Mary Bell

Married Jim Bell

Great-grandmother (maternal)

Village Island (Mim Qwam Lees) 1868 – unknown

Materials: Melton wool cloth, cashmere, velveteen, embroidery thread, abalone buttons, mother of pearl buttons, metallic sequins.

17. Family group circa 1870's

Tlah bah num / Robbie Bell (standing on left)

Emma Mabel Bell (standing in middle)

Married Aul Sewid

Rachel Constance Bell (standing on right)

Married Ed Wonnock

Henry Abel Bell (seated in front)

Married Eliza Wahlahss

Materials: cashmere, Melton wool cloth, embroidery thread.

18. Ax' Ah Wah

Granny Axu / Agnes Alfred (née Joe)

Great-grandaunt (maternal)

Numgis + Village Island 1889–1993

Materials: canvas, Melton wool cloth.

19. Noo Mahss / Jim Roberts / Cultis Jim

Great Grandmother's Brother Married Tattie Alfred

Turner Island 1870 - unknown

20. eWyai Yahtl

Great Grandfather's sister

Married Willie

Kingcome Inlet born circ 1843

Materials: canvas, Melton wool cloth.

21. Wah Dzee dah lah gah

John Powell's mother's mother

She is painted in the style in the style of pointillism, composed completely of dots.

22. Eagle in Rays of Sun

It is said that when our people die they return in the form of eagles.

When we perform ceremony, if what we do is done in a good way and follows the protocol of our ancestors then they will come and fly above us or roost and witness our ceremony.

When they are present it is said they sanction our work.

23. John Powell Speaks Remembers Ancestors

(to view individual videos, touch icon on the screen)

Courtesy of Museum at Campbell River.

24. Maggie Frank

Married Andy Frank of K'ómoks in 1940's

Fort Rupert 1897 – 1997

Lived in K'ómoks until her passing at 100 years less twenty three days.

25. John Powell with Ancestors and Their Crests

Left of centre window:

Fort Rupert, Grandfather with Thunderbird Crest

Grandmother with Killer Whale Crest, Great

Grandmother + Great Great Grandmother with Raven + Wolf Crests.

Centre Window:

K'ómoks and Fort Rupert

Maggie Frank, Father, John Powell with Double Headed Sea Serpent Crest, Mother with Thunderbird Crest.

Right of centre window:

Knight Inlet, Great Great Aunt with Five Pointed Sun Crest, Great Great Uncle with thunderbird Uncle, Great

Great Aunt with wolf Crest, Great Grandmother with Thunderbird Crest.

All windows:

Salmon Crests represent the 29 sets of Twins born into family since 1890.

(Salmon Dance is the exclusive birthright of twins and does not require initiation. Twins in family are considered good fortune.)

26. Thunderbird Sequin Button Blanket

/ Goo Tlah' Lahss

This blanket features a Thunderbird design representing the first ancestor of Powell's grandfather, Maliqalla. On the breast of the Thunderbird and grasped in its talons are copper designs signifying the wealth and nobility of the wearer. A wave design at the bottom of the blanket symbolizes a connection to water. The three stars resting above the Thunderbird represent the house of Goo Tlah' Lahss Lee Ch'eetl (Powell's great-granduncle), was the highest chief to rank in his time at Village Island. On the front of this house there were no painted designs or carved figures, only three cut out stars. At night, the light of a fire in the house gave the appearance of twinkling stars to passers-by. Along the border of the blanket are designs of fiddlehead ferns and four-leaf clovers, representing Powell's great-grandfather and great-grandmother, respectfully. Materials: wool gabardine, plastic and metallic sequins, cotton.

27. Abalone Button Blanket / Lee Ch'eetl

This button blanket, lavishly embellished with abalone, is a traditional wedding blanket. Abalone was the prerogative of high-ranking individuals and they wore it when they married. The blanket features the design of two Thunderbirds facing each other. At the centre are the three stars representing the house of Powell's great-granduncle in Village Island. The name for the house was Lee Ch'eetl meaning 'a broad floor to spread your wealth'. The house is also referred to as "Star House". The designs along the border of the blanket symbolize a connection to plant life, as well as the Tree of Life, and a connection to the land.

Materials: wool crepe, wool Melton cloth, abalone buttons.

28. Plastic Button Blanket / Tree of Life

This blanket features the Tree of Life design, or the cedar tree. The circular patterns around and on the tree represent the seeds of life, or cedar. Along the border of the blanket are designs symbolizing plant life, the Tree of Life, and the four-leaf clover. The layering of buttons on a blanket is a symbol of wealth and high rank. The use of large buttons layered with the smaller attests to the high nobility of the wearer.

Materials: cotton, wool Melton cloth, plastic buttons.

29. Trade Bead Blanket / Copper T-Bird

This blanket features a copper with a Thunderbird design representing Powell's grandfather, Henry Abel Bell. The two 'T's on either side represent the hearts of coppers. At the base is a Sisiutl design. The designs bordering the blanket represent a connection to plant life. The floral-patterned fabric used at the top not only represents a connection to plant life but also represents the smoke hole of a house, through which our voices are carried to the spirit world. The button blanket as a

whole represents the house. While dancing, the dance spirit enters the dancer at the base and exits freely through the top of the blanket as it would through the smoke hole of a house.

Materials: wool crepe, wool Melton cloth, glass beads (replica trade beads).

30. Mother of Pearl Button Blanket / Sisiutl

This blanket features a copper with a four-rayed sun design. The sun represents the ancestor of Powell's grandmother, Sint Leh, who was absorbed by the sun. At the bottom of the blanket is the design of the double-headed sea serpent, Sisiutl. The tongue of the human and both sea serpents are copper; a total of seven coppers are stitched into the blanket. The four 'T' shapes represent the hearts of coppers. Bordering the blanket are designs of mountains, symbolizing a connection to the land; four-leaf clovers, representing Powell's great-grandmother; and the Tree of Life, or cedar tree. The floral-patterned fabric used at the top of the blanket symbolizes a connection to plant life.

Materials: Kasha lining material, Melton wool cloth, mother of pearl buttons, abalone buttons, Abalone and tortoise shell buttons, copper.

31 + 32. Twin Button Blankets

These two smaller button blankets featuring salmon designs were worn by Powell's great nephews. Born twins, the nephews automatically inherited the salmon dance. The first blanket features a standing salmon design with symbols along the border representing plant life. The second blanket features a salmon swimming forward design. The symbols along the border indicate a connection to the land and plant life.

Materials: cotton, wool gabardine, plastic buttons, metallic sequins.



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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS



JOHN POWELL / WINIDI

NUMP MA NOCH GYAI YOO LAHSS (WE ALL COME FROM ONE ROOT)

OCTOBER 16 – NOVEMBER 17, 2018

This Exhibition is part of CVAG's Convergent Program *In This Place*

The Comox Valley Art Gallery is grateful for the support of Canada Council for the Arts Engage and Sustain program + New Chapter program, BC Arts Council, Government of Canada, Province of BC, City of Courtenay, Town of Comox, Comox Valley Regional District, BC Gaming, Museum at Campbell River, Royal BC Museum, Library and Archives Canada, and our local businesses and community partners. We especially thank all of our volunteers, donors, and members. CVAG is located on unceded traditional territory of the K'ómoks First Nation. This exhibition was originally presented at Museum at Campbell River, co-curated by Ken Blackburn and Liz Carter. George Littlechild has supported the work since its inception.

Photographs courtesy of Alun Macanulty