

## Jack Shadbolt / COAST INDIAN SUITE

*Ann Rosenberg and Jim Roberts of The Capilano Review interviewed Jack Shadbolt about his new twenty-segment charcoal and coloured chalk mural called the Coast Indian Suite, exhibited at the Bau-Xi Gallery November 29 - December 11, 1976.*

*The background to the form of this piece may be found in the multi-part Homage to Emily Carr of 1971, The Chilkoot Experience of 1973 and the Indian Suite of 1976. We asked Jack to talk about the subject, the energy and the mood of his most recent mural.*

### IMAGES

*Coast Indian Suite* (panels 13-18) 1976, charcoal and coloured chalk on paper, 5' x 70' (20 panels).

*Photography: Bau-Xi Gallery*

## INTERVIEW

*AR* You have always been interested in shamans and things that go *bump* in the night.

*JS* Yes, that's a part of the world that I'm interested in, now that you mention it. It's the ritual transformation business, the projecting of our traumas and the acting them out, the fetishes that hold up our *living*, one way or another. I like to find a vehicle for the releasing of them which is, I suppose, one of the prime functions that art can perform. . . .

*AR* Your discovery of local native art that influences the subject of *Coast Indian Suite* came very early in your career. . . .

*JS* My concern with coastal art goes back to my boyhood in Victoria. My first real drawing place was the Victoria Museum and my two main motifs as artist were set by that institution and by the presence of Emily Carr. In the museum they had the Indian objects displayed together with Natural History exhibits of animal and bird skeletons and so when I drew I moved between these worlds. Emily Carr reinforced my emotional response to the image of the forest.

When I get to Hornby, I just let the forest take me over . . . it's just too big to fight. It's just so good to be *on location* again after years of working in my studio out of my head. I got into forest rhythms when I did *Homage to Emily Carr* and let them flow all over me; the *Coast Indian Suite* I've just completed seems to be the last big heave of something, the putting together of a lot of residue images in my sub-conscious. The suite also continues in its way the sense of grandeur that I tried to capture in the *Indian Suite* that I completed last year as a way of paying tribute to the great monuments and sculptural programs that I saw on my trip to India. . . .

AR And why the recent return to objects? In the fifties your work was more abstract.

JS Objects have powerful associatory connections one way or another; they carry powerful *manna*. Pop art helped us get back in touch with the objective world, turning an anthropological eye upon everything and allowing everything we use or touch to become exciting. The two great new sciences of our time are social anthropology and psychology. For me the psychological interest is expressed by dealing with tensions, the inside states. Fetishes like these give me a way to let another aspect of the psychological interest out. I am working from what is familiar to me and to many of us on the West Coast. . . .

I like to find a form congenial to the image I choose to shape. Often when I start, I have no idea how something will turn out; I just begin drawing one or two objects because I like them. So when I began the *Coast Indian Suite*, I drew a mask because I loved the thing and wanted it up in my place at Hornby; then when I finished I said, boy that's terrific, so I started another and put it beside the first, then another for the other side and the rhythm got bigger. I have developed a cumulative process for myself through which I can stretch out further than I could under ordinary circumstances and the conclusion will be unpredictable as I work from known to unknown. For several years I have found the traditional triptych form useful as a way of enlarging or extending an idea beyond a one-piece image. The side wings can comment on the centre panel or the three panels can be equal . . . the mural form I use extends the idea far beyond that to 10 or 20 parts, beyond an easy capacity for viewing and certainly beyond the one picture, one eyeful concept that dominated my thought, as painter for years. 20 units is often the place where I consider that the concept is whole. 20 has an abstract *rightness* that the number 19 does not. . . .

AR Perhaps between your present work and the work you used to do is the same kind of contrast that exists between a novel and a poem. . . .

JS Well, we recognize that both activities are good, but sure there is a difference between *Paradise Lost* and Burns' poem "To a Mouse," a difference between *haiku* and Michaelangelo's *Last Judgment*.

AR Sustaining an image energetically, moving representational material over a multi-panel work, is consistent with the fondness for energy that you express in your book *A Search for Form*.

JS *Energy* is a clue to what I feel art is about. Energy can be a fulfilment of a desire we all share to live *all out*, to have the excitement of the feeling that everything is flowing, that everything is *in the act*, whatever that act is. I suppose that is why sex remains so enormously compelling an activity, for, compared with other experiences, the sexual act is *total*. We lose ourselves in a paroxysm and the whole being is involved completely, beyond consciousness. Anger or fear are other emotions that take us over. Yet most of us live in a *withheld* state, banked down in order to carry out the practical demands put upon us by the world outside. And you can't be *all out*, all of the time, in any case.

But you should be able to allow yourself a rhythm that lets you respond freely when the moment requires it, so that you are able to slip into free-wheel quickly. The act of art can make this requirement of you. Although you do lots of grunting and groaning, cogitating, and technical building, there is a point at which the experience demands/presents you with a climax. And you must go with the moment where all the forces have come together to urge that you follow the excitement.

AR What emotion did you follow in the *Coast Indian Suite*?

*JS* I am not making a comment on a West Coast Indian theme, but upon my experience of that theme, my dread, my fascination of and with the objects. There may be no authenticity to it from a native person's point of view; he may think the mural is a piece of nonsense. But he might find it interesting and think, my god, is that the way this artist sees my cultural evidence? But even if he says to me, "I don't see your reaction as authentic," nevertheless the mural is my reaction, my improvisation, my response to the forces which I sense the objective materials of the mural embody.

And, after all, the West Coast Indian theme is one of my resources and in this mural I have just decided to let it out, extend myself through it. I am like the athlete who is not content to run the hundred yard race over and over again but tries the 220 and then the 440. . . .

I am also not trying to make a grandiose comment on the nature of man through this mural. It presents, rather, my way of getting into a particular world and becoming lost in it. Yet the piece is epic in structure. You have to walk down it and experience it through a time sequence. . . .

*AR* It's so great to see you working full tilt.

*JS* I'll tell you, the great thing about being an older rather than a younger artist is that you no longer have any doubts about your technical capacity to do things. When I started the idea was that if you studied and worked hard you would learn something, build something. For over thirty years I haven't minded doing that. Now I just don't have any anxieties about whether I can do the thing that I set about doing. My resources are sure.























