

Davide Pan and T'Uy'Tanat Cease Wyss - *K'Ayacht'n! We hold our hands up to you!*

T'Uy'Tanat Cease Wyss has been on a personal journey of decolonization where she has moved through many communities and studied the teachings of many nations. Combining her studies of ethnobotany with her artistic practice in media arts, she has connected to her own sense of spirit, as well as to that of other peoples.

The focus of her art practice has been community, health and healing practices. She recently worked with Vancouver Native Health Society on two urban native food security projects. Through this work she has been able to continue her journey in understanding the relations between arts and culture, as well as how it all comes together in the form of community holistic health. She is currently working for the Urban Native Youth Association (UNYA) as a youth worker.

Davide Pan is a sculptor who lives in Vancouver. He has been a working artist for over twenty years and is most notable for his onsite, large scale sculptures created for public and private commissions. Pan often works with discarded and recyclable materials found in the surrounding community and environment. <sup>i</sup>



T'Uy'Tanat Cease Wyss and Davide Pan onsite in Stanley Park

John K. Grande (**JG**): Davide, have you been involved in earlier commissions?

Davide Pan (**DP**): I made a series of works from found materials for the Belkin family at a golf course near Pemberton. Some of the works are twenty feet tall and are a combination of animals and figures.

**JG**: And I believe you made a series of works last year near the old totem area in Stanley Park.

**DP**: It was mainly Cease who thought that would be an interesting area, not only because of the old totems but also because of all the cedar stumps in that area too. The idea behind our project had to do with nurse logs and nurse stumps. This year our carvings were all done with a chainsaw and a grinder to make nurse stumps. It was somewhat of a departure from the original proposal.

**JG**: What was the original proposal?

**DP**: It was to work with what was there, with the stumps themselves and transplant local vegetation. Cease is actually Squamish, so her people used to live here in the park. One of her main interests is native medicinal plants because of the tradition passed on from her mother about them. So the focus of our piece was to let people learn about these plants, and natural elements. We actually found a great stump with a hole in it and another log beside it at this site. We ended up carving the names of the medicinal plants into the bog stump in Native and English languages. Part of the plan with these other pieces, is to carve the names on these dots we have carved on the stump exterior...I think this one I like just the way it is ...We can have artistic freedom to make some choices...Not everything has to have a name. One piece I definitely want to make and which was not part of the original proposal is carved letters CMT on one of the bigger log pieces. CMT is a commonly known term for culturally modified tree. Of course maybe a lot of tourists will think it means Country Music Television, as somebody pointed out.



Daide Pan at work on *K' Ayacht'n!* Photo by Paul Colangelo

**JG:** So you strip the stumps down and debark them for visibility?

**DP:** It just happened as we worked on them, they sat here in the rain. The outside was pretty weathered before we worked on them because they fell with the big storm in December 2006. Even though we weren't planning to use any wood, when the project organizers selected the artists, they made an open offer to use whatever wood we wanted. It wasn't part of our plan to carve but I can do that, so we went with it.

**JG:** I can see all the configurations for your nurse log sculptures are different, which is kind of fun. You play with them...

**DP:** There is a basic idea but I enjoy that part of the process. I am so fortunate to have these mature logs to work with. I took a chainsaw to it, and cut it as I wished.

**JG:** Hi, Cease. We have been talking about the planters. Some of them are quite humorous.

T'Uy'Tanat Cease Wyss (**CW**): I know they are fun and playful.

**JG:** And what project have you been involved with on your own, Cease?

**CW:** Well, I worked on saving the Elaho Valley,<sup>ii</sup> and I heard you wrote a text on that.

**JG:** And did you save some of the Elaho Valley?

**CW:** I personally feel we saved a quarter of the valley. They pretty much wiped out the grizzly bear habitat. Only a third of the bear habitat remained once they were finished with it. I spent eleven years doing workshops up at the Elaho Valley. Though I live in Vancouver, I am Squamish, I am from the Skwxwu7mesh<sup>iii</sup> Nation so I committed to familiarizing the public through workshops in the Elaho.

**JG:** Tell me about the history of Stanley Park, the history of Lost Lagoon in Stanley Park?

**CW:** This was originally an island. Lost Lagoon was a tidal pool originally. E. Pauline Johnson<sup>iv</sup> wrote about Lost Lagoon being a tidal pool because she hung around with Joe Capilano<sup>v</sup> and he told stories of that place.

**JG:** Stanley Park must have been a thoroughfare and meeting place for the Squamish people and Coast Salish in general for centuries.

**CW:** My family were some of the people who were kicked out of the park. You are right about that. This whole park had such a food supply: the shellfish, the huge seaweed beds, the bull kelp beds over by Xway Xway, aka, Lumberman's Arch. And then the numerous berries: the huckleberry, the salal, the thimbleberry, and the salmonberry. This was a giant shopping centre for the native peoples. It was like a giant Costco so "bring your canoe and your bentwood box and fill it up."

**JG:** So this relates to your day job working with food.

**CW:** I do this traditional food job. I work doing an aboriginal good food box. We are really looking at sustainability and the seasonal foods and community buying clubs. We see what is in season, buy or gather it and learn how to store it. We learn how to cook better foods

that will see us through, so we are not so dependent on food and vitamins and minerals supplements.

**JG:** Is the food you gather usually within a hundred mile radius?

**CW:** I actually work off the *100 Mile Diet* and use that yearly guide for what is in season and what I will put in the food box each month. I cannot just go to the grocery store because everything is always available there. You really have to get your mind attuned. I am really trying to get my urban aboriginal clients into remembering the seasons. A lot of people don't know what is in season at any given time.

**JG:** And what are you going to be planting in these container sculptures?

**CW:** We are going to put mosses, ferns and berries in these containers, implementing similar techniques as the nurse logs.



T'Uy'Tanat Cease Wyss at work on *K'Ayacht'n!* Photos by Paul Colangelo

**JG:** Your approach is partly aesthetic and partly natural. You are playing off the aesthetic and practical – ecological above all.

**CW:** We are giving the nurse log a more human touch. The nurse log is a simple plain

organic thing. The tree falls down and twenty trees spring to life. It is like you are walking by and you think that could almost have happened by itself and then you say, 'No! No! It was altered by nature, not a human!'

**JG:** These storms probably happen every century, and might be part of the process.

**CW:** I will tell you a little story that I tell people when we talk about it. From a First Nations perspective, and the indigenous experience, if this was 150 years ago before contact, and this storm happened, we would not be devastated, we would celebrate. Let's go invite people. We are going to build houses. We are going to build canoes. We are going to get some clothing made. We are going to pick berries, because the berries are really lush when they get the sun.

**JG:** Home Nature Depot!

**CW:** Yeah! I think it is like that even today, because even the artists from the three neighbouring tribes have all benefitted from receiving the cedar wood from the park after the storm.

**JG:** And what are you calling your Stanley Park project for 2009?

**CW:** There is a welcome figure at Ambleside Park,<sup>vi</sup> whose gestures says 'I hold my hands up to you, I honour you.' Our latest semi-permanent piece is called *K'Ayacht'n! We hold our hands up to you!* We hold our hands up because we are holding up the plants. We are holding up that relationship between the human and the plant world.

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<sup>i</sup> This conversation begins between John and Davide. Cease joins in part-way through.

<sup>ii</sup> The Elaho Valley lies entirely within the Squamish First Nation's traditional territory

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iii Meaning Squamish in the Squamish language.  
See [www.native-languages.org/squamish.htm](http://www.native-languages.org/squamish.htm)

ivE. Pauline Johnson (1861-1913) was a Canadian writer who celebrated her First nations heritage with poems and performances

v Joe Capilano (1850-1910) was a Squamish Chief recognized for his work on Native rights and the preservation of the Native lifestyle.

vi Ambleside Beach is across the water from Stanley Park northwest, and the welcome figure can be seen from prospect point.