



JEREMY LEE HUMPHERVILLE photos

JEREMY LEE HUMPHERVILLE ART FOR HEART'S SAKE

BY DAVID MORRISON

It's very flattering when people say I've a way with words. But as grateful as I am to be blessed with a modicum of skill in this direction, I harbour a deep-seated frustration that I'm otherwise creatively useless, especially with my hands. Oh, how I've tried, but cannot draw even a stickman without him appearing deformed. Put clay in my hands and the resultant shambles would undoubtedly terrify you all. Yet I guess this situation serves to considerably amplify my appreciation of those to whom this elusive brilliance comes naturally. People exactly like Jeremy Lee Humpherville. Now, here's someone who possesses the talent, creative vision, dexterity and patience I so crave, and they're his in abundance.

Thirty-seven year-old Humpherville and his wife Darlene are the proprietors of the stunning Coastal Carvings Gallery, located close to Coombs' Old Country Market. Representing nearly forty Aboriginal artists – including, natch, Humpherville himself and his skilled brother Jerett – the gallery is certainly handily sited as a tourist attraction, but also happens to be amongst the finest collections of Pacific Northwest Native art in the province.

Raised in Haida Gwaii of Cree and Metis descent, Humpherville boasts an awesome physical presence, delightfully at odds

with the delicacy displayed in his beautiful carvings and paintings. And he's been creating art since he was knee-high to a potato bug, as he explained when I asked how and when this all kicked off for him.

"I was raised with a pencil in my hand, drawing for fun from since I can remember," he began. "I sat with my brother and we were always being presented with animals to draw by our father, Keith Humpherville. He was an artist and, although he did not sell his work commercially, he was very prolific at painting in oils and making small carvings."

Humpherville Sr. tragically passed away in a helicopter accident when Jeremy was just seven, but he'd be mightily proud that his sons have taken the baton of artistic expression from him and veritably sprinted with it, now selling their dazzling creations to art collectors all over the world.

I asked how Humpherville made the transition to carving, the field of art for which he is best known. "The carving came later on when we watched our uncle Ken Humpherville carve traditional Northwest Coast Native items," he told me. "I helped bend the "bentwood" boxes and learned to carve and work with wood. I did not have a strong desire to carve my designs at that point, but I was still actively sketching."

The catalyst propelling him headlong into creating to his own templates was Jerett. "I saw my brother move on to a career as a full-time artist, and a year later I took a piece of wood home and carved my first mask. I have not looked back."

He certainly has not looked back. Humpherville carved that mask in 2000 and "was forced to keep it" by Darlene, who later struck a trade with him for it in exchange for his first carving tools. Now, however, he makes his own, a craft he learned from Master Toolmaker Eli Milton. "He's a great friend and I apprenticed with him for six months," Humpherville explains. "I drove down to Anacortes, Washington, and learned how to forge my own tools. It really is an art in itself to create a very functional tool, and Eli has always been very industrious in using modern techniques to better the traditional tools."

Clearly able to recall the rush of receiving my first remuneration for a piece of writing, I've spoken to creative sorts about those breakthrough moments in fledgling careers when they made their first sales. Humpherville's story is particularly satisfying, involving a cheeky put-that-in-your-pipe-and-smoke-it element he surely revels in today.

Undergoing physiotherapy for an injury, he'd shown photographs of his work to

clinic staff, only to be shot down by the clinic's owner who told him: "Come and see me when you're in (such-and-such) gallery," as if his art bore no validity unless it was displayed there. So Humpherville scooped up his then current work – a wall panel – and promptly sold it to one of the top Native art galleries in Vancouver, who demanded more pieces.

"I returned to physiotherapy the next day and stopped by to see the owner with a pleasant: "Oh, and if you're interested, my work is now in (such-and-such) gallery!" I've only seen a few jaws drop to the floor that fast!" Humpherville reminisced, providing me with a vicarious thrill in the process.

It was a turning point for the big man. "The motivation was overwhelming and actually has not diminished yet," he gushed. "I still pinch myself once in a while to make sure that it has not all been a dream!"

It was late in the summer of 2004 that the Coastal Carvings Gallery opened for business. "On our opening day my wife and I were thinking: "What have we gotten ourselves into? Nervously, I sat and designed while Darlene passed between windows to see if anyone was coming!" Humpherville recalls. "One by one, the brave crossed the narrow bridge between us and the Coombs market. It did not take too long before we received our first order for custom art, then the dominoes started to fall."

Today, the gallery and resident artist are doing good business, but so they should. The collection is fantastic and Humpherville's own art is powerful, moving and inspiring. Why, just gazing upon it I feel genuinely compelled to try anew with these stumpy digits of mine to craft something of worth. No, really, I do! What's more, Humpherville has every confidence I can pull it off, that anyone is capable of producing great art.

"I'm a firm believer that what one man can do, another can, too," he says. He might well be spot on in this declaration, but I could introduce him to an army of stickmen that would definitely disagree!

The Coastal Carvings Gallery:
6 - 2345 Alberni Highway, Coombs
250-954-0554 www.coastalcarvings.com
Please refer to the inside front cover for more information.



HMCS ORIOLE

BY PAULINE HANNAFORD

The oldest commissioned ship, and only yacht, in the Canadian Navy arrived in Port Alberni on June 11th during their circumnavigation of Vancouver Island.

HMCS Oriole, launched in 1921, is a Marconi rigged Ketch which is responsible for training regular and reserve members of the Navy and many students go to sea for the first time aboard her.

Based in Esquimalt, BC, the Oriole takes part in several races a year and like 2005 will take part in the Tall Ships races in 2008.

The Oriole will arrive in Port Alberni again on July 10th, 2008 for the Port Alberni Tall Ships Festival which is open to the general public during July 11th and 12th. ~

Pauline Hannaford photo


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