



ON CENTER

WIINTER 2012

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Artist Call for Strait Art 2012

MARCH 18 – MAY 13

STRAIT ART 2012 returns to its annual spring slot from March 18 through May 13. This year the showcase of artists who make their homes in Clallam and Jefferson Counties will again have expanded space through a simultaneous satellite show at nearby Peninsula College. In a biennial collaboration with PC's art department forged by associate art professor, Michael Paul Miller, the show will spill over into the Peninsula College gallery in the Pirate union Building, reaching out to a new and youthful audience and encouraging them to find their way to PAFAC to see the entirety of the offerings.

Strait Art is never a competition. There are no entry fees or prizes. It is rather a curatorial exploration of art being made in this most Northwest corner, a search for relationships and contexts that provide a sampling of our own regional flavor of contemporary art.

We are looking for original visions, developed style and mastery over materials, in any medium that can be successfully installed in the Webster House or the immediate surrounding grounds. Each artist will be represented by up to four works, enough to convey a honed and established vision.

This year will also see the return of the performance series, Enter Stage Left, inaugurated last year. On Friday nights, throughout the exhibition's run, the Center proposes to host musical, literary, and theatrical presenters from diverse genres and disciplines, performing while surrounded by Strait Art. This is an opportunity, not only to sample some of the best work being done in the area but for artists and performers to come together in a multi-disciplinary arts community.

Visual artists please submit images of 8-20 examples of your best work. Of these at least four should be available for the show. Digital images are preferred, but prints and slides are acceptable. Performing artists (musicians, actors, comedians, poets, raconteurs, undefinables) please submit a demo CD or other appropriate documentation of your act. All artists please include a resume or short bio and relevant press clippings and reviews. An artist's statement is optional.

Email your application materials to pafac@olypen.com preferred. Alternately you may drop off or snail mail to PAFAC, 1203 E. Lauridsen Blvd., Port Angeles, WA 98362. If materials need to be returned by mail please submit a stamped, pre-addressed mailer.

SUBMISSION DEADLINE

GHOST STORIES

Erik Sandgren probes the Northwest landscape with sensitivity to myth and origins.

ERIK SANDGREN's paintings appeared memorably in PAFAC's 2009 exhibition *Envisioning Cascadia*, and in 2011's *The Back Country*, shows that comprised a summer trilogy along with 2010's *Safe Harbor*. Nearly one hundred artists were chosen to reflect our regional character; the three shows offered many elemental threads that weave an identity for the modern Olympic Peninsula. Some of those threads are multiplied and braided into a colorful fabric in Sandgren's current solo exhibition of three-dozen paintings, prints, drawings and sculptures culled from over two decades of the artist's vast *oeuvre*.

Sandgren finds resonance in the landscape — primarily the Northwestern coastal zones, with occasional excursions into drier climes such as the desert Southwest or the Old World panoply of town and garden encountered in extended European stays. He often works in the plein aire mode for direct observation and inspiration, and hews more layered compositions in the studio with loose brushstrokes that accrue like a kind of freeform brickwork of daubs and slashes.

Looking at Sandgren's paintings one can decipher translucent veils of imagery that form a scrim of sorts. It gives the impression of a projection and that we're bearing witness to an expanded view of history. Sandgren's highly expressionist imagery fractures the Northwest landscape in both space and time. He probes beneath the visible surface with vaporous layers, searching out the ghosts of ancestral spirits embedded in the human history along these rugged shorelines and in the thick forests of the Cascadian realm.

His recurrent subject is a swirl of earth, water and sky, in which mythic figures loom and fade. His fluid eloquence with the vocabulary of light and color speaks in visionary passages where the borders between the solid, the wet and the airy dissolve into churning currents of primal soup.

Sandgren was born in Corvallis, Oregon in 1952 and grew up there in the environs of Oregon State University. His father, Nelson Sandgren, was a noted painter and OSU art professor, whose major influence stems from the American regionalist master Grant Wood through his own mentor and Wood trained David McCosh.

Erik was raised in a happy household saturated with visual culture that fostered his early interests and education as a painter. That inspired atmosphere attracted a parade of creative house guests that included artists and writers. Bernard Malamud, in his years of far west academic exile at OSU, was a frequent dinner guest.

As he embarked on manhood Erik sought an even denser intellectual milieu and left the recently tamed frontier of his Pacific boyhood to attend Yale College, where he completed his BA in 1975. There he was exposed to Atlantic canons through the faculty of New England painters, whose European spawned classicist Ivy League liberal arts traditions were tempered with frequent

access to the contemporary art world in New York City and other nearby urban centers. He expanded his technical prowess and refined his artistic identity through post-graduate studies in painting and printmaking at Cornell (MFA, 1977).

Sandgren thrived in the academic world and not surprisingly he has followed his father's career trajectory, bringing him to Aberdeen, Washington in 1989. There he has served as a one-man art department at Grays Harbor College to the present day, teaching foundation drawing and design courses, painting, printmaking, and art appreciation.

The academic life has treated him well, providing an economic foundation that has allowed him to indulge what is often a fickle muse, as well as providing him dynamic interplay with impressionable, questioning young minds who serve as a welcome counterpoint to the solitude of the studio.

The world of higher education has also afforded him opportunities for travel. Awarded a Fulbright Teaching Exchange, he was visiting faculty at the Hastings College of Art and Technology on the south

cont. page 2, Ghost Stories



Erik Sandgren
acrylics on linen

Excavation: Archaeologists, 1988
44" x 54"

2011 – A Year of Celebration, Challenge and Change

Our Port Angeles Fine Arts Center celebrated its 25th Year in style with liberal dashes of silver throughout - our Strait Art show ("Slivers of Silver"), our benefit ("Silver Threads and Golden Memories"), and our Silver Milestone Exhibition, "25!" Board members donned silver wigs for the 4th of July Parade, the CULTURE sign out front was stuffed with silver painted greenery, and silver dancing figures appeared on black PAFAC T-shirts!

Unfortunately, our year of celebration was also fraught with financial challenges. Belt tightening on the local/state/national level resulted in a decrease or disap-

pearance of grant and sponsorship money - support heavily relied upon by PAFAC as a non-profit. When our fund raiser in June, Rummage for Art, did not bring in the revenues we had planned, and we could see a potential shortfall in other budget areas, the Finance and Budget Committee began to reevaluate our ability to meet our 2011 financial obligations.

After the City was informed via our Quarterly Budget Report, we began to realize that we needed to encourage the City to take a larger financial role

Ghost Stories, cont. from page 1

English coast in 1995-96. On another sabbatical leave, he was artist-in-residence in Rochefort-en-Terre across the channel in Brittany. Opportunities like these have served as a basis for European travels devoted to *in situ* painting and expanding firsthand his knowledge of the history of Western art and architecture.

Sandgren's work has evolved through inherent curiosity powered by a keen intellect and has assimilated wide-ranging influences from Northwest regionalism, to European painting from the Renaissance through the early 20th century, to the nature-saturated aesthetics of the Asian Far East, and to the animism of First Nations art. His work is always cognizant of and indebted to painterly traditions, but at the same time references experiences beyond the concerns of pure painting, striving for comprehension of the world itself.

He has exhibited broadly in many solo, two-person, group, and juried shows and his work is held in numerous private and public collections including those of the Franklin Furnace Gallery of the Museum of Modern Art, Yale University Art Gallery and the China National Academy of Fine Art in Hangzhou.

Sandgren's paintings have found their way to a more monumental scale and public visibility as well. In 1989 he assisted his father in realizing one of the largest murals in the Pacific Northwest, covering over 4,000 square feet of terminal wall in the Eugene/Springfield Airport with expansive and quintessential Oregon landscapes. His mural for Montesano's Timberland Library is a Chehalis River panorama from which the shape of a large salmon emerges, as if it is of the land itself and not merely depicted in it.

His frieze at Aberdeen's Timberland Library draws on his broad experience with North American petroglyphs and is closely integrated with the architectural motifs of the building. And he has recently completed a 75-foot mural for the Port of Grays Harbor's Commission Room, commemorating one hundred years of marine commerce, while accentuating the natural riches of the vital estuary as the context for the productive harbor.

Like a homing salmon Sandgren returned to the headwaters of his art and of his early life in the Pacific Northwest, drawn by a vivid landscape where raw nature is always close-at-hand and the history of industrialization is little more than a century old. His paintings are always aware of the gyre of nature, but also court the evidence of human intervention.

A painting titled *In the Shadow of Industry: Chehalis Gill-netter* presents a skyline view of the working waterfront of the Chehalis River as it flows through this hard-scrabble town. Here nature appears as little more than a vestigial ruin. The gritty silhouettes of smokestacks and cranes appear to be in a state of dissolution under the heavy cloud cover of marine air that for extended periods engulfs the coast of southwest Washington. Sandgren has repeatedly scraped and blotted the painting's surface, distressing and aging the pigment to invest his forms with a sense of the decay and environmental degradation that is the toll of industrialization.

Techniques of erasure and effacement are a recurring expression of Sandgren's fascination with the palimpsest, which is both a technique and a philosophy that encapsulates his artistic sensibility. A term drenched in history, palimpsest comes from the Greek and means to scrape smooth. It refers to a manuscript or document whose original contents have been scraped away, but the traces of which remain visible after it has been overwritten by the words or

designs of a later author.

The palimpsest is the underlying structure for many of Sandgren's paintings and in some it becomes in itself a theme. Take *Palimpsest: Forest of Signs at Sunset*, a canvas that reveals only a scant landscape that is overrun with a crush of animal spirits. The totemic silhouettes of raven and killer whale, as well as more ambiguous related forms, are outlined with thickened strokes reminiscent of the form-line draghtsmanship that is the hallmark of the aboriginal North Coast art.

Sandgren scrapes and sands the hardened acrylic surface — digging down into earlier layers and letting the accretions resurface as part of the image. The effect is emotionally tactile, not only because of the way light plays on the textured strokes, but also because the undisguised layering reveals the evolution of his process, imparting a distinct impression that these images exist in time as well as in space.

A more literal impression of time's passage is found in *Mortuary Poles at Sgaang Gway*

Gway, one of many paintings drawn from Sandgren's sailing voyages to Haida Gwaii, the ancestral home of the Haida people on the Queen Charlotte Islands. As he — and artist wife Kathryn Cotnoir and painter colleague Dee Vadnais — explored, sketched and painted the craggy island landscapes and ancestral remains they often felt like time travelers themselves.

The hollowed mortuary poles — still standing but listing as if from the weight of the ashes of tribal leaders once interred in their trunks, and weathered by the relentless passage of the seasons — remain in the living forest as ghosts from another history. The aboriginal past is ubiquitously present in spirit and/or body throughout the artist's Northwest portfolio.

Raven is a frequent player in Sandgren's mythscapes. Sometimes he is quite solid as in a watercolor straightforwardly titled *Raven People by the Stream*. It depicts two robed figures wearing long beaked Kwakwaka'wakw articulated raven masks, who loiter by a log next to swift water with the casual equanimity of dancers taking an intermission break from the winter ceremonial, returning momentarily to the 21st century.

In other works the tone is more archeological. *Mask and Mist*, a small black and white etching reproduced on the back of the show's announcement card, illustrates the details of a raven mask — now retired from the dance — as a specimen whose origins are shrouded as if in a timeless aether by the artist's feathered wiping away of the ink across the plate.

Having accepted corvids³ as his preferred familiar⁴ — a more European brand of totem perhaps — Sandgren traces his personal affinity for the inky messengers to the Norse mythology of his own ancestral Sweden. In his painting *Hugin and Munin* he casts into North Coast guise the twin ravens that served the warrior god Odin with reconnaissance flights bringing news of the human world.

A matched pair of long beaked dance masks flanks and frames a vaporous hole that's opened in the atmosphere. Our bird's eye view is drawn downward where murky figures stand watch upon a fertile plain that stretches towards a great volcano in the distance — a distinctly Cascadian scene.

Hugin translates as thought and Munin is memory. Together they span a constellation of mind that spreads over both space and time. Sandgren strives to invest substantial amounts of both to give us works where the present meets the past and the earth is alive with what has passed there before. His attitude is that of historian and anthropologist as much as artist.

A canvas titled *Excavation: The Archaeologists* glimpses a group of figures, some digging and some observing the uncovering of a ceremonial raven beak. It will soon join an aptly named “murder of crows” — the specimen pile of articulated dancers' masks previously unearthed and massed at the edge of the dig. The sky is alight with streaky auroras of yellow and orange that form spirit faces imbedded in the glow.

The scene brings to mind a local ghost field laid out where downtown Port Angeles hugs the Juan de Fuca shoreline. The history of Tse-whit-zen, the Klallam village that preceded the present town, was brought to the public eye by the graving yard debacle of 2003-04. The State Department of Transportation had selected twenty-two acres of Port Angeles waterfront as the site for the erection of a massive drydock where replacement pontoons for the refurbishing of the Hood Canal Floating Bridge would be constructed.

Shortly after excavation for the dock's foundation began human bones were unearthed. Archaeological assessment had been hurried and woefully inadequate. It was soon made evident that the site lay on top of a major Klallam burial ground that had been covered by earlier industry in a less respectful era.

After many months of archaeological excavation of ancestral remains and political skirmishing to push the project forward — a story told by Seattle Times reporter Lynda Mapes in her book, *Breaking Ground*⁵ — the Elwha Klallam tribe was able to impeach the state to abandon the site and Port Angeles.

It is a story of lingering karmic legacies left over from 2700 years of habitation by the area's indigenous

people and from the two centuries of “settler” culture that pushed them aside. In Colleen Boyd's analysis of the historical, psychological and cultural ghosts stirred by this episode⁶ she contends, “North America is a settler society based on colonization, dispossession and violence. Indian ghosts are functionalist devices. Exhumed — consciously or unconsciously — to explain lingering colonial doubts and even to “reassure” settler cultures they too are historical.”

Sandgren's universe is filled with persistent afterimages of aboriginal spirits. His long-practiced eye is quick to find the essentials of the Cascadian topography that's so dear to him. And his loose and confident brushwork allows him to coax ghosts from most any scene that grabs his interest.

Needly forest canopies, rippling rocky outcroppings, churning surf and the dense atmospherics of perpetually occluded skies are rich ground for phantoms. As if his paintings were inkblots that psychologists employ to plumb the psyche, Sandgren opens himself to currents of free-association and projects a heretofore-subconscious history upon the scene.

In works like *Island of the Dead*, a small painting that might serve as a précis for his larger works, a spirit face has taken hold of the land itself. The windswept slopes and rocky bluffs are massaged into a grimacing head that is not unlike a Tlingit war helmet, the avenging ghost of the land's dispossessed former stewards perhaps. The presence of the ancestors is always just beneath the surface.

In a painting titled *Journey*, reprised here from *The Back Country* exhibition, the artist lays on his chalky brushstrokes in gauzy layers to concoct a rheumy atmosphere alive with totemic spirits that are translucently imbedded in the clouds and sea. On the indistinct horizon a ghostly Native long canoe emerges from the mist, its shrouded crew bobbing on currents that tatter the fabric of time and push them into the Present.

In another painting, representing the Sandgren brand on the face of the show's announcement card, we've entered the territory of pure allegory. The canoe has evidently landed somewhere off-frame and disgorged its time travelers. Now a quartet of rag-tag figures approaches the viewer with the hubris of a drum & bugle corps, emerging from a smudgy field where groups of faceless figures roam an expanse of openness without clear purpose.

Are these not the tidelands just below Tse-whit-zen? Sandgren's invention of an allegorical non-place

Ghost Stories, cont. on page 3



Erik Sandgren
acrylics on canvas

Palimpsest: Forest of Signs at Sunset
30" x 40"



Erik Sandgren
acrylics on panel

Mortuary Poles at Sgaang Gway
24" x 36"



Erik Sandgren
acrylics on canvas

Hugin and Munin
31" x 41"

Ghost Stories, cont. from page 2

he's named *No-Place-Like-Home* might stand in for the ancient non-town buried beneath the fill and concrete of Port Angeles. Here the notion of the palimpsest stretches across the frame as the spectral elders in one painting have been assimilated and overwritten by another ensemble of familiar archetypes borrowed from the movies.



Erik Sandgren
acrylics on canvas

Journey
44" x 54"

There is the pierrot in pointed party/dunce hat (Tin Man), the tawny strutter with a bristly mane (Cowardly Lion), a green spirit dancer whose identity is hidden in the recurring raven mask (Scarecrow) and the red-ridinghooded pilgrim maiden (Dorothy). At the same time flesh and symbol, they accost the viewer with forefingers pressed to their lips hushing any questions posed by us intruders to their spirit realm.

It is an engaging work that references a disturbing tale of grand illusion. What might their secret be in this coma dream journey? Is it that in the end this Ozean rock candy paradise is populated by stable boys and dotty aunts who have decided to stage a play?

In a Sandgren painting the border between fact and fiction, between history and the future is only lightly scratched in the sand. And like this beach the story is always ready to be redrawn after the next tide has scrubbed the canvas almost clean.

- 1 Coined by Bill Holm in his 1965 book *Northwest Coast Indian Art: An Analysis of Form*, the formline is the primary design element on which Northwest Coast art depends, distinguished by the rhythmic use of characteristic shapes referred to as ovoids, U forms and S forms.
- 2 Formerly known as the Kwakiutl, this First Nations people are indigenous to northern Vancouver Island and the adjoining islands and coastal BC mainland.
- 3 The family Corvidae includes crows, rooks, ravens, jays, and magpies.
- 4 A spirit (usually in animal form) that acts as an assistant to a witch or wizard.
- 5 Lynda V. Mapes, *Breaking Ground*,
- 6 Colleen E. Boyd, Ball State University, "You See Your Culture Coming Out of the Ground Like a Power": *Uncanny Narratives in Time and Space on the Northwest Coast*.



in their stewardship of the Center if we are going to survive. After many meetings within the Foundation Board and with City Staff, as well as appeals to the City Council, we received good news in December that we would again receive the same amount of support as last year plus an additional \$14,000 totaling \$38,750 for 2012. In addition, a City Council/PAFAC Task Force will be formed soon to work on ways to financially sustain the Center in the future.

At our November Foundation Board meeting, in the midst of all this other activity, we learned of a huge change facing PAFAC. Jake, our intrepid leader and Director for the past 23 years, has decided to retire at the end of June 2012. There's no way to replace such a uniquely talented person and we know that! While we will miss Jake, we are also happy that he will now find the time to pursue his own artistic gifts. For now, we will work with the City to search for a person or some people with a new vision to take us into the next 25 years!

Things will change and it will be okay!

I am proud to say that, throughout this celebration, challenge and change, the spirits of our wonderfully talented and hard working staff and volunteers (including Foundation Board, Trustees, and Docents) have never dampened. My thanks to each one for giving it your all! I look forward to serving again in 2012 and am optimistic that PAFAC will continue to play a key role in making Port Angeles and the region a great place to live.

Linda Crow
PAFAC Foundation Board President

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Art Is a Gift, cont. from page 1

Strokes



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1203 E. Lauridsen Blvd., Port Angeles, WA 98362
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In 2011 all new memberships will be matched 2 to 1 by a grant from the Benjamin Phillips Memorial Fund

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