

“I want to tell you about an experience

I recently had with a Canadian icon. As you may know, the masterwork of sculptor, Bill Reid, stands in the courtyard of the Canadian Embassy directly across Pennsylvania Avenue from the U.S. Capitol building in Washington. The Spirit of Haida Gwaii is a 6 meter long black bronze sculpture of a dugout canoe loaded with many of the creatures that figure prominently in Haida mythology – Raven, Grizzly Bear, Eagle, Wolf, Beaver, Frog, Mouse as well as several figures that shift between the human and animal worlds. A Shaman holds a staff upright and gazes deep into the voyage ahead. Tucked along one side and helping with the paddling is a small human figure the artist calls, the Ancient Reluctant Conscript.

For three days, morning and night, I passed this spiritually luminous creation on my walk to and from the Washington Convention Center. I had long known of this sculpture, but had never seen it, and did not know it was here at the seat of overweening human empire, bearing witness to an entirely different way of being in the world.

I was stunned ... and spent increasing lengths of time in its presence as the days went by. “Presence” is the right word. By the last night it came to me again, full force: This commonwealth of life, this voyage of the great canoe is a sacred journey. Solidarity is the key. Right relationship is the guide. Economic adaptation that enhances life’s commonwealth and advances the sacred journey is our moral assignment and ethical responsibility. It seems reasonable to think this is what the Creator must have in mind.”

Keith Helmuth (Religious Society of Friends),
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