Git Skee‘een Niidiit
People of the Skeena River

Gitksan History in Art
By J.P. MORGAN, Gitksan Artist
Git Skee’een Niidiit:

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Judith P. Morgan, Gitksan Artist
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Dedicated in memory:
to my father, Wallace B. Morgan and
to my mother, Martha Morgan, both high Chiefs in their day, and
to my faithful supporter and husband, Willis Fitzpatrick.
GIT SKE’EEN NIIDIIT: PEOPLE OF THE SKEENA RIVER

GITKSAN HISTORY IN ART

by

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Bachelor of Art Education, University of Kansas, 1976

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+Moon Collage (by my permission) Erica Williams (9x12) computer-2002...
This Book was Planned for the First Nation teachers as they teach First Nation History. If you go to Japan, you would expect and see Japanese teachers teaching Japanese students. More Gitksan teachers need to rise up and start teaching their own people. Many books have been written by First Nation Authors admonishing such a task. The last few years the Powers that be (Indian Act) have allowed teachers uncertified to walk into a classroom and perform classroom management that should have been learned in college. These courageous people have had the burden to pass on the language and culture of their people in a classroom setting.

I taught in a public school of 90% First Nations students for ten years and had no problems with discipline. Because we were from the same Reservation we openly discussed problems without tension. Often there was laughter. The Non-Native teacher was always an outsider that only served to remind us of our “place in Society”.

Living on a reservation and attending public school is like coming from the wrong side of the tracks and facing the elite. Through no fault of the students of the Caucasian teachers, the skin barrier is just “there”. Being “different” and living under the Indian Act instead of the Constitution puts a stamp similar to that of a cattle brand. Many students that have survived welfare and leave for college fail because the stigma of reserve life follows them.

What is the answer? Both Canada and the United States have enough Natives to fill their own colleges. Not all Native students may want to attend such a college, but it should at least be an option.

I attended a meeting once to discuss the problems faced on reserves. A businessman stood up and said that he, “thought the brown people were being taken care of.” The enormity of the Socioeconomic plague faced by the First Nations is the planarian that has been dissected many times by the “Powers”. Each dissected part grows a new head or tail and stymies the First Nations yet again.

This book has taken years to complete. It is a small Frontier that will hopefully lead someday to “us teaching ourselves”.

Preface
Chief Stephen Morgan – oils by Judith P. Morgan

Wii Gyet – Fireweed House from Gitsegukla, B.C. Skeena River
Chief Stephen Morgan – oils by Judith P. Morgan

Sea Lion whiskers on the crown of the headdress hold in
down feathers that were dropped on other chiefs as a sign
of peace during welcome ceremonies.

Carved headdress of an owl figure with inlaid abalone shell
and ermine skins hanging from the sides.

He was an excellent hunter and trapper and later fished at
the Belmont cannery off the Pacific Ocean.

The totem pole in the background belonged to him. He also
had a pole in Gitsegukla.

The G'wila (Gwill-æ) is a heavy wool blanket made from
mountain goat wool.

Notice the hand-stitched fireweed design and the pearl buttons.

The House in the background was his first home after leaving the
old longhouses. Notice the hole in the roof before chimneys were
introduced to the Skeena river area.
Stephen Morgan Barricade – oils by Judith P. Morgan

Kitwanga Village, B.C. Canada
Stephen Morgan Barricade – oils by Judith P. Morgan

Three events threatened to change the way of life of the Gitksan people. Traditionally all natives were cremated and ashes were gathered and placed in a small dugout hole and covered with earth in a small area set aside for a gravesite along the banks of the Skeena River.

Early Missionaries encouraged the burial of the dead put in cedar or pine boxes and covering of the gravesites with small buildings. Small lumber mills that made and supplied the lumber for the small buildings brought in lumberjacks and the logging industry. Before only what was needed for shelter or warmth was harvested.

The Grand Trunk Railroad came through in 1912 and went through the graveyards in Kitwanga. Stephen, his wife, and some of the other women from the village tried to stop the railroad from tearing up the newly built graveyards, by barricading the railroad. As a reprimand and punishment by the Government in Victoria, B.C. Canada, Stephen Morgan was imprisoned for four months.
Chief Stephen Morgan - Grouse dance
poster paint by Judith P. Morgan age 17

Dance performed at a Feast in a Long House
Chief Stephen Morgan - Grouse dance
poster paint by Judith P. Morgan age 17

The Grouse Headdress shown here is different than the Owl headdress in the last two paintings. The face is round and surrounded by inlaid abalone shell, but still retains the sea lion whiskers, down feathers, and ermine pelts of the previous.

A singer sits and beats the moose hide drum to the rhythm kept by the dancer.

The Hand carved cedar rattle with a grouse head represents the Fireweed legend.

The apron is made from leather hung with deer hoofs on the ends that act as rattles when the dancer moves.

The leggings here are larger than moccasins and are called mukluks (muck-lucks.) They rise much higher near to the knee instead of the ankle to help keep out snow during winter.

The Chilkat blanket (made on a stand-up wooden loom) has a wool fringe all around the bottom edge made from mountain goat wool. Charcoal was used for black dye.

The Grouse Dance itself was a means of welcoming visiting chiefs or important people.
Chapter Two

Dax ga’gyet’m Hanak

The power of women
Three moons – oils by Judith P. Morgan
“Three moons”- oils by Judith P. Morgan
Technique: Spatula knife

First Moon: The moon above the Mountainous Territory of “T’ sim thol’x,” a fireweed chieftain name that she owned.

Second Moon: Hand carved cedar moon face mask “T’ sim thol’x”

Third Moon: Her chieftain name “T’ sim thol’x” means woman of the sun or moon.

This is an Ovoid Owl design on the back of her blanket

Gitksan women can be high chiefs, own totem poles and territories.
Tuberculosis has its own Sunset oils by Judith P. Morgan

Wrinch Memorial Hospital in Hazelton, B.C. Canada
Tuberculosis was widespread among the Gitksan people during the 1950’s leaving behind many orphans. Many were sent to hospitals to be quarantined. Very few of them left to return home because there was no cure.

The only way to visit loved ones was for the patients to stand out on the small balcony and talk to the visitors on the lawn below.

It was the custom of Gitksan women to cut their hair when a close relative died as a sign of mourning.
Princess Picking Berries – oils by Judith P. Morgan

Wolf Legend of the Princess Picking Berries on a Burn-off Mountain
Princess Picking Berries – oils by Judith P. Morgan

This is an illustration of the “Bear Morgan Legend” that belongs to the Gitksan wolf tribe. My father Wallace Morgan had the Head Chief’s name “Axdi Hiix.” At the time of his death, the name was passed to some one else. The Chief’s names are thousands of years old and are jealously guarded. The person that gets the name must "Take care of the name" by attending feasts.

The princess is picking huckleberries with the village women. She is carrying a cedar box that is waterproof and carried on the back with woven straps made from mountain goat wool.

Children were told to yell to keep the bears away while berry picking.

Snags or burnt trees that are left standing. The chiefs usually burned an area on the mountains so berries could grown and not be choked out by the over growth of the bushes.

A basket made from birch bark.

See the walking stick she is using? Everyone carried one for balance when climbing the side of the mountain.
Princess Spilt Berries - oils by Judith P. Morgan

Wolf Legend of Princess Picking Berries
The Three Bears heard the Princess cursing and making fun of the Bears dung. When they heard her, they cursed her and made her Huckleberries spill out on the ground.

Straps used to carry bent boxes were very strong. Their strength came from narrow cedar strips of Bark wrapped with hand spun mountain goat wool. These straps were used by men as well for their heavy packs.

The Princess’ dress is made of white Deer skin which is much whiter and softer than moose hide.

Birch basket with berries spilled. Huckleberries grow where the weather is cool. The berries are dark blue and the leaves are red and green.

The Cedar box has only one seam. It is made of one long cutting of a thin rectangle shaped cedar sheet. Each corner is steamed to soften and notched out and then bent smooth side out, then the two sides are connected with wooden pegs. The bottom board is cut a little larger using a notched angle and fitted inside flush making it waterproof. The lid is made the same way as the bottom but just set on top.

Moccasins were made with moose hide.

The Repeat patterns of the Cedar tree branches and grass roots indicate movement for a dramatic visual effect.
Soapberry Time – oils by Judith P. Morgan

Soapberry Picked along the Skeena River
Soapberries are picked in June. They are so juicy and tart and very fragile, that bushes have to be tapped so the red berries fall onto a cedar mat on the ground. Soapberries are a dessert. A small amount of berries are put in a greaseless bowl and as it is whipped with hand or spoon foaming up to the top of the bowl; similar to whipped egg whites. Small amounts of sugar and water are added as it is whipped to fill a bowl. Soapberries aid in digestion.
Elizabeth Lowry – oils by Judith P. Morgan

Usk, B.C. Canada Along the Skeena River
Elizabeth Lowry was my grandmother. She was a Gitksan who lived in Usk, B.C. Canada and originally came from Kitselas Canyon. The missionaries had an effect on her life because she observed the Sabbath and didn’t cook on those days.

These are spring salmon (first run) that come up the Skeena River from the end of June to the end of July. The Gitksan people believe the creator sends them up the Skeena River. These fish are very large and oily. The average weight is 60 lbs.

The dugout canoe is made of a cottonwood tree. First you paddle across the river and then you throw out the net and let the canoe drift down the river. When the corks on the net are all under the water the net is pulled in and the catch is taken.

Women wore three long skirts one on top of the other with an apron. When the outer layers were soiled they were removed and washed. Elizabeth wore her hair long pulled back into a bun. She was also somewhat short but was extremely strong.
Gitksan Woman - Heavy Pack
oils by Judith P. Morgan

Along the Skeena River
Gitksan Woman - Heavy Pack
oils by Judith P. Morgan

Birch tree bark is used to make baskets.

A Stick for balance while climbing

A very heavy cedar box covered in blankets.

Being strong was the envy of other Gitksan women. Some were known to climb steep hills with heavy pack on their backs. Some were known to carry cradles atop the packs or even hang them in front of their chest.

There was once a Frenchman who owned a Mule pack train to pack his supplies. The mules got sick and died so he hired native women to replace his beast of burden for the completion of the trail. The trail went from Hazelton to Quesnel. Many natives experienced blindness caused by the strap that was placed on their foreheads to support the weight of the heavy load.
Smokehouse’s were built along the Skeena River
The Whole fish is gutted, tail and head removed. Then hung with scales out. Pyramiding cedar kindling is used to start a fire with slow burning cottonwood logs.

After hanging for two days the fish is flipped.

After a time, a constant slow smoke makes the meat firm enough to place on an angle board and filleted into thin strips then hung to make a jerky like texture.

Through the door of the smokehouse you can see the Skeena River. When a smokehouse is this close to the river it is usually used as living quarters throughout the summer.
Celebration – watercolor by Judith P. Morgan

Along the Skeena River
Celebration – watercolor by Judith P. Morgan

This maiden is celebrating the fact that she has survived suppression.

The leggings are worn as a part of her dress and only chiefs or chieftesses' can wear these robes.

Owl design: This shows her house to be the Fireweed.
Celebration Ovoid Design – ink by Judith P. Morgan

Along the Skeena River
The first half of the 20th century was a turbulent time for First nations people in Canada. It was a time when the foundations of our cultural ethics, traditions, and way of life were in jeopardy as a result of the Government’s forced legislation of assimilation, The Indian Act. In essence, it was considered a crime to be an Indian, to practice the “old ways”, to speak our own language, and to carry on and participate in our traditional ceremonies. This act was developed to assist the government in dealing with its “Indian problem.” It gave them a colonial mechanism identifying who was “Status Indian” and who was not. The government set aside small tracts of crown land called “Reservations” and forcibly moved natives there, which still exist today.

Residential schools were set up to help speed up the assimilation process and attendance was supposed to be involuntary, however, it was not uncommon for the government to forcibly remove children from their homes. It was felt that such isolation and the introduction of a paternalistic Western belief system would erase the “Indian” and turn these children into good upstanding Canadian citizens.

Over the years, my work began to include reflections of the changing social and economical climates and the effects they had on my environment and community. In the triptych, “Monuments of Gitanyow”, I paid tribute to the old abandoned village of Gitanyow. Unlike the often post impressionistic paintings of Emily Carr’s abandoned Indian villages, I acknowledge the changes in the native community life brought on with the influx of Western progress, namely, Railways and Fishing Canneries. The evidence of change is noticeable in my additions of glass windows to longhouses and the use of burial rather than cremation as identified by the grave houses. The paintings document a time when families moved away from the villages to work in the canneries located at the mouth of the Skeena River. The lure of money was an attraction given by the oppressive Indian Act that disrupted traditional Economic customs.

My goal has always been to break the barriers of Native people and allow them to come forward to show what and who we really are, and to challenge the preconceived notions that the rest of society has of us.
Going Home - watercolor by Judith P. Morgan

Pacific Ocean
Gitksan women were on the Pacific Ocean as much as men. Distances didn’t matter. The average distance traveled by Gitksan people was from Victoria Island to the Queen Charlotte Islands as well as up and down the Skeena and Bulkley Rivers for the common trading runs. If paddlers got tired at night they would just lie down and sleep on the ocean or ride out the storm.

When the missionaries came there were approximately 300,000 Natives along the Pacific Coast. The diseases that western culture brought with them such as smallpox nearly wiped them out.
The Girl Packing Water – oils by Judith P. Morgan

Gitwancool or Gitkanyow
The Girl Packing Water – oils by Judith P. Morgan

This is a longhouse with a totem pole in the doorway. There is a hole cut into the pole for the entrance. The hole on the roof allows the smoke to escape from the fireplace below. A square hide is hung under the hole to keep the rain off of the fire.

Most villages were situated close to a river. Totem poles were along the riverbanks. Packing water was everyone’s responsibility and there were times when mother made us pack water for elders.

This is a graveyard house built after the missionaries came. To this day the dead are buried and fences are put around the grave.

The large totem pole is of a man from Gitwancool or Gitkanyow as it is called today.
Anticipation of bad news during World War II
oils by Judith P. Morgan

Kitwanga, B.C. Canada
Mother had two boys in the army. Every Thursday she walked a half-mile to meet the train and check the mail. She had a total of fourteen children, but her countenance during this time was one of anxiety. One day she did receive a letter that her oldest son was wounded. He was driving a tank and ran over a mine.

On the walk home she sang the old war song, “Just before the battle, Mother.”

“Just before the battle mother, I am thinking most of you while upon the field. We’re watching, with the enemy in view. Comrades brave are ‘round me lying, filled with thoughts of home and God. For well they know that on the morrow, some will sleep beneath the sod.”

Mother always walked with her hands behind her back. She made our moccasins, and the green skirt on the girl was made from an umbrella. Walking home was restful because the small farm kept us very busy. She canned fresh food, knitted our sweaters, put in gardens, and taught us to welcome the hungry at our door. She was indeed a virtuous woman.

Howard her son is picking “gem” or Saskatoon berries. Her daughter Judith picked dandelions along the way.
Mother Weeping-oils by Judith P. Morgan

Kitwanga, B.C. Canada
Martha Morgan had many things that made her anxious. Food scarcity, lack of money and two boys in the army were a few of her worries. She chose midnight after all her children were in bed as the time when she could cry.

Reserve life was hard even with a cellar for potatoes. Meat was hard to come by.

One of her girls on the step’s listening to her mother cry. The table is bare. Mother usually sat on the chair sideways close to the potbelly stove when she cried.
Chapter three:

Dax ga’get

Powerful men
Dancing Simoogyet No. I - oils by Judith P. Morgan
Dancing Simoogyet No. I - oils by Judith P. Morgan

This chief is dancing by the fire inside a long house. The red in the painting is from the fireplace while the yellow is the reflection of smoke. He welcomes the guest chiefs by letting down feathers fall on them. This means “welcome” and “peace.”

The Gitksan people used to have many wars with other tribes. Each tribe would kidnap young people and use them as slaves. Sometimes slaves were stolen back in other wars.

This painting shows the excitement that is created by the drums and the singing. A feast usually follows the dance. Men and Women often practiced the songs first in a secluded area in the woods; each step of the dance must be accurate. Some dances imitated the animals that are on the totem poles that belong to the chief dancing i.e. a grouse, or grizzly bear.

The dancer shakes a rattle while the deer hoofs that hang around the legs clack together as well. The voices of the women as they tap the drums while watching the dancer are very exciting.
Dancing Smoogyet No. II – ink by Judith P. Morgan

Welcome Dance
Dancing Smoogyet No. II – ink by Judith P. Morgan

The Background reflects the Ovoid Design and repeats the design on the blanket. The Ovoid Design is unique because it does not appear in any other culture.
Two Chiefs in Gitsegukla inviting other Chief's to the Feast
Two chiefs set out to invite other chiefs to the winter feast. The first chief is wearing a cedar headdress ring. The second chief is wearing a chilkat blanket.

The winter snow is creating a “White Out”

The Chiefs collect two-dollar bills from each chief they invite and give it back at the feast with some additional money.

Coal oil lantern.  A carved walking stick called a “Talking Stick.”  Leggings to keep the snow off the legs.
Early Morning Catch – oils by Judith Morgan

Kitwanga, B.C. Canada
Early Morning Catch – oils by Judith Morgan

Kitwanga totems used to face the Skeena River. However, the floods forced the Gitksan people to move the poles away from the riverbank. The hill in the background is called snake hill, every spring the hill was burned off and wild green onions would grow all over it. The wolf tribe owns this Kitwanga village and the surrounding areas. The missionaries from England taught at a day school in the village.

Old Kitwanga had an Anglican Church, A church army building, and an Indian day school and a parsonage. The parsonage was for the teacher and the preacher.

The Skeena River was and still is very important to British Columbia because of its abundance of food it provided such as spring salmon sockeye and pinks (Coho.)

The dug out canoe made from Cottonwood trees, has a net used to drift for salmon.

Large salmon were laid on the harp shaped willow and cooked over the fire.

Empty syrup cans from Hudson's bay store were used to make tea in but first they were burned out to remove toxins.
Howard and Judith Net Fishing-oils by Judith P. Morgan

On the Skeena River
Howard and Judith Net Fishing-oils by Judith P. Morgan

In this painting Howard was 10 years old and I was 11 years old. The canoe is a dugout canoe made from cotton wood trees.

I guided the canoe with a paddle from the stern on the swift Skeena River. One person (in this case Howard) throws out the net and then pulls it in when salmon are caught in the net. On a good run, net drifting can catch 40 to 60 salmon.

We were very young and we both did not know how to swim, but we went fishing because our two older brothers were serving in the army in World War II. Howard and I were the only ones left to “drift-net” on the Skeena River.
The Trapper – oils by Judith P. Morgan

Trapper on His Trap line
The Trapper – oils by Judith P. Morgan

The winter nights shows the northern lights. Evergreen trees are covered with deep snow. The snow is too deep to walk in but the trapper still has to walk miles to his territories so he uses wooden snow shoes laced with rawhide. The trapper carries a heavy pack. He carries an axe, rifle, and food. The empty syrup can is for making tea. The dog is named “Red.” Dogs were used to pack supplies.

Survival Skills are a part of the training of boys. Fire was built by cutting poplar trees and lining them up on the ground on top of the deep snow. A fire was then built on top. Trappers knew the boundaries of their territories and never over stepped their land.
Mountains along the Skeena
The Mountain goats live high up on the mountain. The young hunter waits to kick the goat off the high cliff as it passes by on the trail. His partner below will kill the goat. After skinning the goat, the meat is smoked and carried down the mountain.

The hunters were taught not to overkill or the native people believed they would be punished by the goat people or the creator. The stories that the elders tell remind us to respect all the animals.

The people never wasted the animal, the horns were made into spoons and the wool was used to weave blankets.

The mountain goat hooves were used to make rattle sounds on the dancers’ blanket.
Hunting Mountain Goats No. II - oils by Judith P. Morgan
Before contact with the Europeans the young hunters climbed up the highest mountains in order to find tasty mountains goats. Their method did not require the use of guns. The hunter would hide in a crevasse in a rock and he would kick them off to their fellow comrades below.

There are many waterfalls on the B.C. Mountains. The young Princes were warriors and they were trained to hunt the animals of the area. It was their responsibility to supply the village people with wild game meat.

The young mountain goat, also known as a “kid” follows the adult mountain goat.
"Xsu" - oils by Judith P. Morgan

Mountains between Gitanyow and Kitwanga.
“Xsu” - oils by Judith P. Morgan

Xsu' was a Gitksan warrior, who belonged to the fireweed clan. One day Xsu' was out in the surrounding areas of the village. When an enemy spotted him they pierced his side. Wounded and bleeding, Xsu' ran 13 miles back to the village to warn them of the oncoming attack. Xsu represents the bravery and courage of the Gitksan warrior. He ran bare foot 13 miles to the village.

Wounded stomach with blood stained bandage.

The flowers and the beautiful scenery are in sharp contrast to the wounded warrior. Tragic events would sometime happen on nice days in the surrounding areas.
Chapter four:

The Cannery Life
The Cannery Life

The canneries began in the 1890’s to the 1970’s. There were many Salmon Canneries at the mouth of the Skeena River. The Skeena River comes from the mountains inland and empties into the Pacific Ocean. The early Cannery at the mouth of the Skeena was Port Essington. It was heavily populated with Native people from the Pacific Coast and the Skeena River as well as the Nass River. The boardwalk town had many business stores such as a drug store, clothing store, post office, grocery store, and a church army building besides the cannery. The large paddle boats docked there supplying the people with everyday necessities. The town was in its glory days. On weekends the Big Dance Era attracted fishermen from other canneries. As far as the Pacific Coastal area Port Essington was the place to go. It was famous for the dance “Boogie Woogie” and young people danced all night long. The dress was the Circle Skirt with the Penny Loafers. Young Native men mimicked the Big Bands of New York using trombones and trumpets, as well as the saxophone.

As the Canneries started to slow down, having over-fished the ocean, and the paddle boats were replaced by trains, the new dock was Prince Rupert. The cannery era gradually faded out. The fish canneries had given the many Reserves a chance to go to work. Whole families went to the coast and earned money, as well as seeing their many friends from other reserves. Canneries interrupted the usual stagnant life because of no work on the Reserves.

Today, the life in the reserves has no challenge for the adults or the young people. The canneries I believe served its purpose.
After Hours – oils by Judith P. Morgan

Cassiar Cannery, B.C. Canada
After Hours – oils by Judith P. Morgan

The Cannery paid the china men very little for their work. So in order to survive they fished for crabs. They would work for many hours and then go out fishing at the end of the day.

The sunsets are very beautiful at the canneries, because the sun would set in the west. Unfortunately the Chinese men were not allowed to bring any women to Canada with them.

In this scene the Chinese man is very relaxed. It is shown by his slipper being half way off his foot and his catch of crabs running away. These planks are called wharves. In order to fish the Chinese man ties a fishing line to a stick. He uses chunks of raw fish as bait.
Chinaman cooking noodles – oils by Judith P. Morgan

Cassiar Cannery, B.C. Canada
Chinaman cooking noodles – oils by Judith P. Morgan

The Chinese would use a metal bowl for cooking noodles. This bowl was called a wok. A brick stove held the very large wok. Then, noodles were brought over from China. The one or two pigs were brought over from China. The pigs lived in the same bunk house with the men. The pork meat was used in chow mien with the noodles.

The Chinese were excellent workers. However, they did extremely dirty jobs and they were paid poorly. So they lived together in one large bunker house. The row of buildings in the back of the picture are cannery buildings. The pilings are under the wharf and stand in the water. The whole cannery was built on these pilings.
Chinaman selling peanuts – oils by Judith P. Morgan

Cassiar Cannery, B.C. Canada
They brought raw peanuts, pigs and noodles for chow mien. They sold the roasted nuts to the native children. At that time the children would pay 5 cents and would get a cone full of nuts. The roasted peanuts were wrapped in a cone made from Chinese newspaper. The Chinese newspaper was not made in Canada but shipped in from China. The Chinaman’s hat is made from woven straw. The Chinaman would holler, “Peanuts! 5 cents!” The children would run to buy the fresh roasted peanuts.

Many small shacks were built for native families to live in during the fishing season. They slept on wooden beds and used boards for tables and benches. The cannery was above the water but when the tide came up it made it treacherous for children when parents were away at work. Sometimes the children would fall and drown. That’s why my mom didn’t want us to go with her to the canneries for safety reasons.
Chapter five:

Gitksan Villages
Monuments of Gitanyow I—oils by Judith P. Morgan
Monuments of Gitanyow I – oils by Judith P. Morgan

The tilted totem pole in the painting has a small carved wolf on the pole.

These two long houses belong to the wolf clan. The first pole is named “hole in the ice.”

The structure in the foreground is a small grave house. This custom started after the missionaries came. The Gitksan used to cremate the deceased but the missionaries encouraged burials. The missionaries introduced a lumber mill and provided the boards for the grave houses.
Monuments of Gitanyow II - oils by Judith P. Morgan
Monuments of Gitanyow II - oils by Judith P. Morgan

The long house on the left belongs to the wolf clan. The right long house belongs to the frog clan. The poles pictured belong to either the wolf clan on the left, or frog clans on the right. The pole had different birds carried and placed on top of poles. These poles were standing before the missionaries came. Notice the glass windows. When the trains came in 1912 they brought glass to Gitanyow. Notice the deserted village. The trains took everyone to the canneries located at the mouth of the Pacific Ocean.
Monuments of Gitanyow III - oils by Judith P. Morgan
Both long houses belonged to the frog clan. In this totem pole the carvings of the frog can be seen. Again the small building in the forefront of the picture is a missionary grave house. Kitwancool (Gitanyow) was isolated and spared the cutting of their totem poles. Every pole has a story that belongs to a chief of that territory.
Morning Mist – wax crayons by Judith P. Morgan
Morning Mist – wax crayons by Judith P. Morgan

Totem Poles: Some totem poles are short, some are tall. Other poles have holes cut at the bottom to use as a door or entrance to a long house. Before contact, during this period, the door was guarded in the inside and as visitors stooped to come in they were clubbed if they were the enemy. Totem poles are like a certificate of possession. The chief carved his territorial story which was an incident that happened on his territory therefore no one else could claim his land. Cedar trees were chosen and properly seasoned for carving. A grand feast was held in honor of the Totem pole. Announcing the prestige of the chief, Carvers were chosen and paid to carve the pole.

Totem poles in Gitanyow, B.C. Canada

Left pole is an eagle.

Middle pole is a man.

Top figure is a man.

Under it is a bird.

Right pole is a man.

Wavy lines represent smoke from homes burning wood.
Wooden bear – chalk by Judith P. Morgan
Wooden bear – chalk by Judith P. Morgan

The carved wooden bear belonged to the wolf tribe. It stood with the row in Kitwanga, B.C. Canada. The carved wooden bear deteriorated because of its unfinished cedar wood. The carved wooden bear as well as other animals have ears on top of its head. Blackberry vines grow wild in B.C. Canada and are used to help the composition of the painting.

In this painting, the bear is sitting upright. Bears have similar characteristics as humans. They can stand up and reach for a branch or stand and look around. Sometimes they carry food in their arms and walk upright. The cubs play by running around, rolling about, or climbing in trees. They can sound like children when they are playing. The mother bear teaches her offspring to run and hide if danger is near.
Tall Tales of Kitwanga – oils by Judith P. Morgan
This totem pole belongs to the wolf clan in Kitwanga. At one time it belonged to the late Wallace Morgan. It illustrates the story of the kidnapped princess in the Bear Mother Tale.

The mountain lion in the totem pole killed many natives. It came up from the coastal area.

The wolf’s tale is vertical going through the body of the mountain lion on top of the totem pole to honor the wolf clan warrior that killed it.

The bear’s eyes are closed and it is called the ensnared bear. His ears are of ovoid design.

The wolf on top represents the wolf tribe crest in the totem pole. There are the three black bears that kidnapped the princess.
Old Kitwanga – watercolor by Judith P. Morgan
The early Gitksan village people lived in Longhouses on the banks of the Skeena River. Tall totem poles stood in front of the longhouses facing the river. The beach and rocks below allowed the many canoes to beach and be protected from the swift Skeena current. The tall mountains surrounded the valley. During the summer months, mountain goat can be seen above the tree line. The Skeena flows westward to the Pacific Ocean while the salmon swim eastward to spawn in the numerous lakes such as Kitwancool Lake and Lake Babine.

The first salmon to come up are the large “springs” or “Ye’e”. The second salmon to come up are the Sockeye that are the most prized and more plentiful. The homes along the river were summer homes. Smokehouses were built to dry the salmon. Salmon during the summer months are plentiful. I painted a cut away piece of the river to show how plentiful the river was at that time.

During this time, Mountain berries and local berries were gathered for the winter. As the summer wore on, the Gitksan people readied themselves to move back into the forests before the snow fell.

Winter for the Gitksan people meant trapping small animals. The larger animals, like deer, moose, and mountain goat were hunted for the winter meat supply.

Potlatch feasts were really estate settlement feasts held during the winter months in the evenins. The estate of a deceased chief was carefully executed. The territory was passed down to the person chosen. Because there was no written language, the chiefs memorized the legacies. Theses were told to the people seated who were also witnesses to the decisions made. The totem poles also held the stories as proof of possession of the land. The totem poles, the land, and the chiefs are inseparable.

Large canoes could hold 40 to 50 people. There were many boats for the large population of skilled Gitskan but when the small pox epidemic hit it killed nearly the whole village.

The small pox killed thousands of people.
Welcome – watercolor by Judith P. Morgan

Walking from village to village to attend a Potlatch
Welcome – watercolor by Judith P. Morgan

This painting portrays the month of December when the smoke goes straight up. The Chief welcomes the guests who walked from another village to attend a potlatch. Icicles are a common sight during the winter months. The weather is often sunless. Gitksan people took their children with them as they walked from one village to the next. The building is a longhouse with a hole on top for the smoke from the fireplace directly below to escape. The Gitksan people were excellent builders and used large cedar poles and wide cedar planks.
Old Village of Gitsegukla – watercolor by Judith P. Morgan
Old Village of Gitsegukla – watercolor by Judith P. Morgan

The only sound you can hear is the water rushing downstream. The closeness of the mountains keeps the village cool. The Gitksan people as a whole were very quiet as they worked by the Skeena River catching salmon or attending to the smokehouses. Looking across the river, black bears can be seen grazing on wild onions. The people referred to this land as paradise and even today Gitksan people believe this is God’s country. Center pole is a man with a top hat, possibly a Caucasian. All the poles you see here no longer exist—they were all burned by a fire in the village.
The Pyre – oils by Judith P. Morgan

The Pyre—Big Bonfire
The Pyre – oils by Judith P. Morgan

When the epidemic of smallpox hit North America thousands of Native people died. The Gitksan people didn’t have time to take care of the dead bodies, so they dug a large hole and built a bonfire. The sick people that were dying were made to climb the plank and fall into the fire.

Bad things happen on beautiful days. In the forefront on the Plank above the fire, a woman is helping the sick up. Three chiefs sing the ‘dirge’ song for the dying and the dead.

The three Crests are represented on their blankets, the owl, frog, and wolf.
Chapter Six:

Vancouver Island Collection
Ts'noqua: Wild Woman of the Woods I – pastel by Judith P. Morgan
This is Calk a Carving that was done by the people of Alert Bay, B.C. and is now standing in the Royal Museum in Victoria, B.C. Canada.

Ts’noqua’s job was to scare the children if they came into the woods. Mountain Lions were present and could attack and kill children. She is known for her big lips and was very ugly so the children would stay away. The mist around her shows her power to appear or disappear. The scared children are shown.
Wild Woman of the Woods II – oils by Judith P. Morgan
Ts’noqua, Wild Woman of the Woods, has big lips, eyes, ears, hands and is very ugly. The flowers in her hands show that even though she is ugly she enjoys beautiful things. The background shows the forest that she lives in.
Hamatsa Dance – poster paints by Judith P. Morgan
Hamatsa Dance – poster paints by Judith P. Morgan

This dance belongs to the people of Alert Bay and was in the Provincial Museum of British Columbia. Drummers and singers use a large board instead of a drum. The dancer wears a cedar blanket. All four parts of the headdress have sea lion whiskers and ermine skins and are equipped with movable mouthparts. The hands of the dancer hold the strings that control the beaks of the raven. This Early painting depicts women without clothing, which was not fact but merely a suggestion by an art teacher. The needles on the crown of the headdress in the forefront are sea lion. The one to the left of that is made of woven cedar bark.
Initiation of the Wolf Society on Vancouver Island – pastel by Judith P. Morgan
Initiation of the Wolf Society on Vancouver Island – pastel by Judith P. Morgan

The Secret Society on Vancouver Island initiated a man by scratching his back with barnacles to cause it to bleed. He was left on the beach to attract wolves with the smell of his blood. His bravery allowed him to join the wolf society. This is a night scene with the moonlight on the beach. The Pacific coast is shown as well.

This story was on display at the Provincial Museum in late 1947.
Thirst – batik by Judith P. Morgan

A Thirsty Animal
Thirst – batik by Judith P. Morgan

All colors appear red when you are looking against the sun. The yellow and black lines are ripples from the animal drinking. The animal has no discernable features because the reflected light causes a shadowy distortion. The material used was cotton dyed in red with wax painted on it. After the dye is applied the wax is removed using heat from an iron.
Chapter Seven:

By and About the Artist
"Us" teaching "us"

This book Git Skee'een Njidiit, (in Gitksan) meaning People of the Skeena River aims to teach students history of the Gitksan people of the Skeen'an or Skeena River with a collection of over forty years of my paintings.

I believe and know, without a shadow of doubt, that the same Creator that guided my forefathers helped me with each brush stroke. I choose to use "realism" in style of art so my students and grand students could see and get a glimpse of what their forefather went through. It took me a long time to reconcile the place the Creator had in my life. He ruled in my grandfather Stephen's life as well as my father's life. Their lives were vibrant with supernatural testimony. This testimony was Supernatural because the old Gitksan laws were there later to combine with the new belief that the missionaries had which were the Ten Commandments. The Ten Commandments came along and gave proof that the Gitksan laws were not strangers on this planet. The Eastern civilization pushed itself into the western hearts of these proud Gitksan people. The Christian doctrine was welcomed and recognized as being related. The missionary message became one with the Gitksan and overcame the copper wall that existed not only in that day but threatens to shine through today. The so-called civilized invasion with its illusion of true democracy has never championed the absolute, "truth" that the Gitksan and the missionaries had. The feast system that housed the laws could never be torn down anymore than the Ten Commandments could be erased. The so-called, "Message from the Creator" found its companion when it crossed the continent and embraced its brothers and sisters in the Creator.
This was and is what I call reconciliation.

**The Gitksan Artist**

The talents that the Gitksan people had were guarded and passed down to the next generation. While Michelangelo worked with stone, the Gitksan worked with wood. Michelangelo looked at a block of marble and envisioned the human form within, then proceeded to free that "being" by chipping away until his vision stood before him. The Gitksan artist was no different.

My father, Wallace Morgan, sat on my porch many years ago and explained the Gitksan carver. He looks at the wood for a long time and mentally sees the human or animal inside the wood, then he takes his adge and chips away until the vision stands before him.

Not all Gitksan people were born artists. Talents were nurtured whether you were a fast berry picker or a physically strong person. Your talent identified you as the very best because, after all, you were born with your talents. For example, the Haida people from the Queen Charlotte Islands were the best carvers when it came to carving large canoes. The Alaskan Tsimshian were the best in weaving chilkat robes and blankets. These artists were hired by other tribes to perform their arts and were rewarded through the feast system. For example, a chief by the name of "Pila" from Port Simpson was singled out as one of the best carvers and was used by the Skeena River chiefs to make totem poles.

**The "Twain" has Met**

If you want to know who you are, go back in time and examine your roots.
If you are continually making bad choices in life, find out where you came from. Your forefathers were all on a certain path and through a process of elimination kept the best. Ask yourself, “What were their talents?” “Can your findings add fulfillment to your life?” Ask the question, “What were their weak and strong characteristics?” “What did they do with what they had?” “Were they honest?” “Did they labor under difficulties?” Looking into the past can teach you a great deal. My own background has everything to do with my talent today. My birthright came from both the Creator and my Parents. They walked in the forest of beauty as well as the forest they believed the Creator made for them. Because they were thankful, they took care of everything around them. Their habitat, when compared to the rest of the world, was paradise. It was clean and healthy. They lived and believed their behavior on earth was mirrored by the judgment handed down by the Creator. Their legends reflect this. Their catastrophes were checkpoints, to reconsider their rebellious actions, i.e. breaking their own strict laws and being punished through starvation, floods etc.

The new era my parents had to adjust to was oblivious to me as a young energetic girl. While their old world was crumbling around them they looked ahead and tried to see which path to put their daughter on.

Wallace Morgan, a high chief, was having a difficult time. He hung on to some old laws of the past and was forced to consider the new educational system brought in by the newcomers. Language was going to be compromised. Classrooms pushed the aunts and uncles back into the shadows and different dwellings were built. His beloved “longhouse” was crumbling. His wife as well
as high chief, Martha Morgan, my mother, had an uncustomary decision to make. What to do with twelve children, seven boys and five girls (one died at birth). The old law envisioned them filling the back of the feast hall. In the years to come the grandchildren would bring prestige, as they would host the feasts in great numbers.

In desperation, Wallace allowed his oldest daughter to adhere to the old law and “arranged” her marriage. It was a total disaster. The residential school soon surfaced with a new alternative solution. Wallace knew “Tsuux” (meaning small and Judith’s nickname) had a good mind because he had made her memorize and quote poems and Bible verses at the ages of 8, 9, and 10. The decision to pursue education was the choice.

Mother said goodbye and closed the door to the old laws, especially to the language and set Judith off to residential school. She had dealt with the presence of the Hudson’s Bay Company and learned to use their Carnation milk, which revolutionized the feeding of babies. “Tsuux” left but never lost her Gitxsan language.

**Residential School**

Sometimes something good can come out of the bad. The Creator sent a chart and a path to further my parent’s prayers. My dad, who was a high chief, prayed many times. The only good that came out of the residential school was the beginning of my endeavor in art.

One day George Sinclair, a crippled man and a genius, came to the school. He didn’t come to save the poor Indians or even to teach them. He came to rest
from his stressful job of teaching. He was the superintendent of Art in the British Columbia correspondence school from Victoria, B.C. Canada.

With nothing else to do while his wife taught school, (one of the only “qualified” teachers,) Mr. Sinclair started up an art class. A few students attended and more later, with perhaps five junior high boys and girls remaining. It was made clear that this art class time would not interfere with chores or the two hours of school each day. Our small group sat around a model “classmate” wearing a heavy carved “Flying frog” headdress. We were instructed to keep our drawings large rather than small, also to try and make the young model look old and wrinkled. Drawing was never a problem because my English missionary teacher in the village used to allow me to draw greeting cards, which she had received from England. My favorite one was of pine needle branches with a candle lit and wax dripping down. It was so realistic that I never questioned what a burning candle was doing in a pine tree.

Our class was so enjoyable that it took my mind off the misery and loneliness of the residential school. There was no money for sketch pencils or any other paints so Mr. Sinclair let us use his pastels and large wax crayons. We drew on large sheets of poster board and colored with the wax crayons or drew on large sheets of pastel paper. Both were very difficult to work with, it took a lot of rubbing and layering of paints. Later, we could use poster paints. This medium required more planning because it was difficult to paint over colors. My method was to mix the paint thick and spread it on the paper creating a texture. We were encouraged to paint what we remembered of the life we had on the reserve, which
was not so difficult because my young life on the reserve was a world I loved. The mind boggling moment came when my short stay in the school had brainwashed my mind that my culture was not worthy of display. In fact the whole idea of segregating us in a building far from contact with local people meant that we were savages to be hidden. Even the staff and their very formal dining room meant that we were subservient to the whites.

I questioned Mr. Sinclair’s madness, didn’t he realize native art or culture was taboo? Weren’t the elders told not to hold potlatches? Didn’t the missionaries take away all the masks from the chiefs because they believed them to be demonic?

The art class continued. It was so enjoyable. After promising not to slack off on my chores, I could swing down three flights of stairs and continue my art at 7 am until 8 am. Then, we had to line up for cod liver oil before breakfast.

Mr. Sinclair did not comment on our progress. He was a man of few words. The months rolled into spring. He casually announced that our art would be exhibited in the Provincial Museum in Victoria, B.C. Canada. This was too much for me. To see my work up on a wall was an embarrassing thought. It would humiliate all of us. Nevertheless, our large paintings were framed and hung on partitions in the Provincial Museum.

The opening was held in the afternoon with the Governor General giving a speech. My only thought was to hide or at least be inconspicuous. After his speech the Governor General announced the winners in the art scholarship fund of $150, which was awarded me two summers in a row. The Native Arts and Crafts
Society of Victoria had set up this whole exhibit and attached a condition. There was very little money to buy clothing. I had only two outfits that I wore all summer. I had to work at the Museum in the summer as a tourist guide, while studying all the artifacts displayed in the museum. I took many notes on the coastal works and was surprised to learn that the Natives on the island bound their heads into a cone and wove cedar hats to fit their heads.

My inhibitions gradually disappeared as I guided the many United States tourists through the museum and explained the regalia of the many tribes. Mr. Sinclair and his family spent the summer with his parents. They saw to it that a bed was set up in the basement for me. When I think back on these years it was the apex of my career. I was held high on a pedestal. People looked at me as if I was an amazing specimen. The notoriety alone was mixed with questions of exhilaration and proof that this Indian, after all, wasn’t a savage.

**Gitksan Art - Does it stand alone?**

The ovoid design of the Northwest Coast has never found its place in “regular art.” Gothic Art of the tenth century exhibits some form of geometric shapes that eventually point upwards to heaven. Their Cathedrals were built not only to point heavenwards but the interior of their buildings were supposed to put the person in contact with God. Not only did the person look upwards to heaven but God’s presence was felt by looking at the beautiful stained glass on the windows. The following gives a panoramic view of the many styles of art that followed and changed before the camera was invented. Then, Artists had art studios. Portraits were popular, which were realistic. Along came the draftsmen with their
accuracy in dimensions. Perspective set the world straight. Depth made you feel like you could walk inside the painting. This was realism in its perfection. Soon classical art was so exact that artists broke loose and painted color to shape their objects. Eventually artists decided to throw the doors open and paint the great outdoors. Renoir and Monet painted ripples in the water, colors of the sunlight, forcing the viewer to squint their eyes in order to experience the glare of the sunbeams.

**The man that stood at the apex was Picasso.**

Picasso broke all the conventional techniques and for a time became a martyr. People threw eggs at his art in New York City. They accused him of being a communist. After traveling to Africa he painted shapes and used colors arbitrarily. He copied the elongated shapes of the African masks. This was referred to as "primitive art" or back to basics. Simplicity through lines and shapes influenced his later famous works. By putting masks facing each other and drawing only the lines of shapes he changed the whole world of art. Forsaking the traditional use of color he again used the primitive African painting of faces and applied blue or green to the faces of the subjects. Was Picasso a genius, or were the African black people? (And why? 

The same can be said of the Gitksan masks: only the ovoid shapes are more superior because the ovoid shape becomes three-dimensional. Bill Reid tackled the ovoid parentheses shape and recognized it as spiritual. He used the same idea taught in the art classrooms today, that a small dot on a picture plane can become a line that can leave the page and go on into infinity or space. The concept that
the ovoid became three-dimensional with kinetic energy may seem far fetched but note that the Gitksan used the same shape for thousands of years. If one totem pole falls the replaced pole has to be exactly the same for reasons of land ownership.

In Wilson Duff’s book, *Bird of Paradox* (1996) he became obsessed with Haida art. He researched the Edenshaw materials. He came to the conclusion that the Haida art and the coastal art were in existence long before contact. The long-houses had entrance totem poles covered with beautiful carvings. It seems that Duff was trying to convince the civilized world to realize that these Natives were true artists. Their works had expressions to illustrate their innermost human feelings. A professor in an art class said, “If you don’t have the vocabulary in your mind, you won’t be able to express yourself in your art work.” Here we see the mind of the Native that his language and words are more than adequate to guide his hand as he carves. His genius lies in the ability to squeeze complete human figures in any shape or volume. This is a talent jewelers all over the world are expert at. Their minds can shrink their objects into a tiny world, whereas the carvers can blow their figures up and carve them dimensionally correct. There is no boundary in their ability to portray feelings, i.e. the teardrops falling down on a woman’s face.

Could Michelangelo or Picasso equal this? The whole nations of Northwest coast were not primitive in their minds. They exercised the use of the right brain. They were surrounded by art long before contact and before iron was brought to this continent. Their totem poles became forests of art. Where is the evidence
that we’re savage? Who was ignorant when contact was made?

**Michelangelo - Comparison to our “Ovoid”**

It should be mentioned that Michelangelo was a genius. He stopped at
nothing when it came to painting. He painted while he lay on his back suspended
close to the ceiling in the Sistine Chapel. He mixed egg yolks with paint to get
the necessary texture. His paints have withstood many years of adverse condi-
tions that have existed inside the temple.

It was his method to see the finished product before he started painting, and
then I’m sure he painted very fast. He would not divert from his vision until he
was finished and emptied his mind. He portrayed the great Creator as being in
touch with the created and in control of not only of the vision but also of the
world, i.e. his painting of God reaching for the hand of Adam with His finger and
his painting showing that Adam was receiving from God. Such Godly visions are
very demanding and plague the mind until every area is complete. Michelangelo
held onto his style of realism and did not change.

Picasso on the other hand looked around him and saw the change in the in-
dustrial world. His canvas attempted to record the machines that had black shapes
with power. He did not stay there but went through other changes, i.e. simple
body shapes not too realistic as his “bone color.” This was interesting. He also
reacted to the cruelty of war to his country. His large bull painting in stone that is
in New York City meant to tell the world how cruel the enemy was. Spain was
suffering under a strong tyrant. There was no television to report the world news
so he used his art. Gradually, he became known for his simple mask like faces
that only the beholder could interpret. An artist looking at both sides of the face with its side view is impossible to paint. Even the back view of a person cannot be painted with the front view. He defied the law of vision and exposed all sides of the person’s head. In other words, the head became transparent or “See through.” His mind overcame the hurdle of “Opaqueness.” At first this was just too new and different for the American viewers and they threw eggs at his work. Was he a forerunner of cyberspace? Or virtual reality?

The Native artist tackled this problem when it came to realizing the ideal that man had a soul. The house pole of Hlangweth showed a man holding his soul with both hands around a face in front of his body. The question the carver had to tackle was, “How do I show this invisible part of man?” The hands of the man revealed the face as still a part of the person as well as showing the head as being alive. The totem pole in Gitanyow has a head that is split in half to show a person with two personalities. Native artists showed transformations of humans so they could transcend space. The two cousins that went to the Creator’s Kingdom to seek the most perfect wives became woodpeckers and flew through the sun. They sat on a tree until two girls appeared in front of the chief’s longhouse. Then they changed back to men so they could meet the girls.

The mind of the Gitksan carvers and artist had no barriers. The people were no strangers of the world in space. They considered the seas as having its own world. Because they once spoke the same language as the animals they understood both worlds. Through it all they recognized the Creator as being in control of all life. To a carver in that day, like Picasso, opaqueness was not a
problem. They could carve large teardrops coming down a woman’s face to repeat itself all the way to the ground. Tears come from within the eyes to express a feeling of sadness. Tears became the most important part of the head of the woman on the totem pole. A totem pole in Gitsegukla, shows a mother grouse hen with three small chicks behind her. The carver portrayed the protectiveness of the mother hen as well as trustfulness as the chicks to follow her. The carver used soft lines of the grouse to show beauty in her and her chicks. Animals could be beautiful in the carver’s mind and great care was taken to portray this.

Artists all over the world have special gifts of seeing and visualizing first. The Orientals call it “Enlightenment” and could change the way people think. There is no such thing as “Primitive Art.” What they bring forth comes from a special gift they were born with. Even in music, the most gifted musicians wrote what was already in their heads, and we say they created it.

The errors of the ignorant that cut down totem poles must have grieved the Gitksan people.

Are Gitksan artists being recognized today? To be recognized means to study the art functions, to encourage the young people to grasp it and challenge them to go beyond. The Gitksan people are being held at bay to stand beside their longhouses while tourists take pictures of them. The tourists like this scenario and the government encourages it. Meanwhile, the carvers are being stifled.

The comments on Picasso and Michelangelo are the original critiquing and conclusions of myself, as any artist would do. Having taught art history in school,
observances of the great artists stood out as to their objectives. I also taught cultural art for many years and concluded that the average art history books ignore Native art completely.

The style that I have chosen to use in my own painting is "Limited realism." Students of today understand photographic television. All students have a listening span of 10 to 20 minutes. Like adults they look at paintings and pass judgment but withhold their "critique."

This doesn’t mean Picasso was never taught. Art history allows teachers to use the same vocabulary the artist uses and apply it to any subject. For instance, Picasso’s bone period used the color peach, shaping the body with no shading. The students enjoyed choosing other subjects and using the peach color scheme. Many of their works were framed that they took home.

The art lesson learned was of course, the Great artist Picasso and application of his bone period. The basic vocabulary was the introduction of the basic shapes with no detail or abstract shape and arbitrary use of color. Even the totem poles express the same art theories, simple ovoid shapes and often the natural color of forest trees.

Emily Carr and Landon Keen painted our villages but stood afar off. Emily Carr was a postimpressionist artist following the "Group of Seven Canadians."

Recently the United States has opened the door to Canadian artists and purchased a painting of Landon Keen, a Canadian artist; this is definitely a milestone.
ARTIST STATEMENT

JUDITH MORGAN, BA.

The various art programs that were required in the Cottey Jr. College, Kansas City Art Institute, Johnson County Community College and the Kansas University’s Art Department presented the whole spectrum of Art Education. Both the two dimensional and the three dimensional art media in all the mediums plus an in-depth study of Oriental, Flemish, and other Histories of World Art teaches the student where he or she stands in the style and techniques on the picture plane. In this way, the artist is aware that the produced Art is really a part of the Global trends of Art. The expression that Art schools would only spoil the talented local Artist is in error and blocks the Artist from charting a new course. Of course, today we also have the frontier Art of the fourth dimension which is a challenge for the Veteran Artist.

The sum and substance of Art studies is that after learning the many different styles of Art from the Fifteenth Century to today, the Artist is free to do whatever he wants to do, and in whatever medium he chooses.

The overall subject of my work is the History of the Gitksan people that live along the Skeena River. The majestic Cedar houses lined the Banks and in front of them stood the tall Cedar Totem Poles. Heralding the Legends of our Territories.

The Government of the Gitksan people are intertwined with the legends, the owners or Chiefs and the laws that they lived by.

In order to illustrate this History, I have chosen to paint realistically, in order to preserve more accurately our customs. The closest I have come to modern art is to use a pallet knife and the swift stroke of the watercolor brush which leave out detail. I am always aware of what period of Art History that I am pulling from.

The color schemes are also very important. Because colors can set the mood of the subject, I am very careful to make them work for me. My pallet holds only those colors that I have planned ahead. All my paintings are envisioned before putting them on canvas, even the colors are included. Because of this, it is truly a joy to paint. The other satisfaction comes from the feeling that I am recording my own History that has never been taught in schools. Why? Perhaps because it has been a negative spot in the Governments history. Sad to say it is an ongoing and an uncompleted injustice.

One observer of my artwork commented, “All the faces are sad, there is no laughter”. Remember we are and have been a suppressed Society for a long time and still are. What is there to celebrate? Unlike other cultures, we have no thankfulness of harvest to show because where we live the best harvestable land belongs to our neighbors outside the Reserve.

A teacher in British Columbia cannot go to the library and pull out a book to teach the Gitksan culture. After teaching for many years in a classroom that was 95% Gitksan students, this book is a small gesture of a “native teaching natives.”
Bibliography

Janson, Horst W.

Anderson, Eugene N., ed.

Cove, John J., and Macdonald, George F., eds.
March 7, 1997

Box 97
Kitwanga, BC.

Dear Ms. Morgan:

Apologies for my tardiness. Below is my brief and I am afraid inadequate review of your wonderful paintings. I hope to see many more of them in the future. As well, I would like to thank you for donating your painting Morning Mist to the University. I expect Pat Appavoo, the Library Director, and others from UNBC will thank you properly for your gracious gift and for your exhibition.

Best regards,

Rudy Traeger


From early November to the end of February, UNBC's Library walls were brightened with an exhibition of paintings created by Judith Morgan, a noted Gitksan artist from Gitwangak, BC.

The collection of prints and original oils depict a wide range of themes from Gitksan mythology, culture, and history, all of which highlight Ms. Morgan’s wide range of artistic skills and techniques.

Ms. Morgan’s passion for telling a story on each canvas is evident in the carefully chosen palettes for each theme, the intricate interpretations of the motifs on the totem poles, the pleasantly striking variety in the choice of the landscapes, as well as the vivid portrayals of the subjects of her the paintings.

Although I have found all the works pleasing and thought provoking, I have chosen to comment on a few of the groups or individual paintings. The comments below can apply to all or many of the paintings in the exhibition, however, and their exclusion from my critique should not be considered a criticism of those paintings.
The story in the triptych entitled Monuments of Gitanyow is powerful and moving. The exhibition notes describe the three paintings as a depiction of a native village around 1912, empty of villagers, who are away working in the fish canneries. Using muted or pastel browns, reds, blues, grays, and yellows, Ms. Morgan has recreated a village that not only appears empty of life, but also feels deserted. Richly recreated totem poles stand testament to the once vibrant history of the village, but left alone, no one is there to read them. Some of them are on the verge of tipping over, because no one is there to care for them. Carefully described buildings in browns and grays, some with European glass, are cold, quiet and forlorn. The grass is not green, but brown. The sky is cold with grays, light blues, and browns. With the mood created here, the onlooker can only feel alone and sad as their eyes slowly and painfully move from one end of the lonely village to the other.

In stark contrast to the village triptych, Ms. Morgan has painted two vibrantly coloured studies telling the story of the Princess who picked huckleberries, and through misadventure found herself kidnapped by bears. The brush strokes are powerful and full of energy and life. Greens, bright blues, and deep browns express the fruitful bounty of berry picking season, and the vitality of the berry pickers working their way up a steep and treacherous mountainside, rich in foliage and obstacles. The careful crafting of light and shadow, which creates much depth to the paintings, is masterful. This is most evident with the work Princess picking berries, a painting which has rich Rousseausque, impressionistic, and Group of Seven influences, as do its companion piece, Princess spilled huckleberries, and the portrait of Elizabeth Lawry, the artist's grandmother.

The painting entitled Morning mist is an ingenuous portrayal of smoke wending its way around a beautifully sculpted totem pole. The work received a great deal of appreciative commentary from its viewers, eliciting pleasant recollections of notable totem pole studies by Emily Carr. Bathed in subtle grays and blacks, the painting produces a haunting, yet thoughtful image that is both mystical and surreal, and presented many onlookers with complex and personal interpretations.

In all, Ms. Morgan’s paintings are superb, and often thought-provoking art works, which received fine reviews from the many onlookers.

Thank you,

Respectfully,
Rudy Trachsel, Gifts Librarian
University of Northern British Columbia Library
TO: Museums and Galleries Considering a Judith P. Morgan Exhibit
FROM: Ken Milloy, Curator, Kitimat Centennia/1 Museum

5 October 1987

Dear Colleague:

It is with pleasure that I write this letter of recommendation to other museums and galleries considering an exhibition of the works of Judith P. Morgan.

In mid-August through mid-September of 1987, the Kitimat Centennia/1 Museum exhibited a collection of Judith's work, which in addition to the artist's personal collection, included five works from the Public Archives of British Columbia and works held by private collectors. In total more than 30 pieces, representing some 40 years of work were brought together.

The variety of media involved, and the quality of work made this show one of the most successful in the history of our Museum. Adding to the overall quality and character of the exhibit was an appearance and lecture by Judith on her culture and art.

I have no reservations in recommending to you the artwork of Judith P. Morgan for exhibit in your institution. If you have any questions or concerns please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours Truly,

Ken Milloy
Curator
Judith Morgan, of the Gitksan Nation, was born in 1930 at Kitwanga, B.C., Canada. At an early age, Judith grasped onto creative expression as a means to fully comprehend the turbulent times that she and her people were faced with. The imposition of the Government of Canada's Legislation; the Indian Act, had a deep effect on her community. Its colonial mechanisms and oppressive nature changed the lifestyles of Aboriginal peoples in Canada. Judith Morgan's work reflects upon these times as she provides strong social commentary on the 20th Century.

I had the opportunity to coordinate Judith Morgan's exhibition at the Indian Art Centre's Indian and Inuit Art Gallery in Hull, Quebec in 1999. I was amazed by her strong will and conviction in producing, experimenting and developing her art and career. Her achievements in acquiring and education in the arts and to maintaining a humble career are commendable. She is among many senior artists who contribute so much to the development of a contemporary Indian art history, yet who remains relatively unknown. It is for this reason that I, with co-nominators Lynn Hill and Evelyn Hope, wish to nominate Judith Morgan for a Governor General's Award in Visual and Median Arts.

Judith Morgan's work does not fit into the same mold of other artists of British Columbian's west coast. She is not a carver or a weaver, and does not depict killer whales and other clan's symbolism. Her work depicts a naive realism that had the ability to allow viewers a chance to see a transition from traditional to contemporary in all aspects of her life and experiences. Her rendering of totem poles is not at all in the same veil and perception of Emily Carr's paintings of totem poles where no one is left to interpret them. Her long houses have glass windows, evidence that Morgan is working in modern times. Her palette relies on her environment, and her painting style allows Morgan to be free to produce often thought-provoking work.

In her exhibition at the Indian Art Center, Judith Morgan exhibited works that complimented her book, CELEBRATION: paintings and history, a history of the Gitksan through her paintings. Her very own publication gives insight to the work Morgan has produced since the early 1940's. Her artistic career seems to have been ignored by critics and curators specializing in BC art. Her voice, through very dynamic, wasn't heard in the same capacity as George Clutesi, Bill Reid, Robert Davidson or Frieda Diesing. Yet Morgan continues to paint and has exhibited in many prestigious institutions in Canada: National Museum of Man, Ottawa, Ontario, Royal Museum of Victoria, B.C., Vancouver Art Gallery, Greater Victoria Art Gallery, University of Northern B.C., Prince George, B.C. A painter whose narratives convey Gitksan tradition and Nationhood, Morgan's strong statement reflects her pride.

"My paintings are my reflection of a very proud people called the Gitksan. To paint accurately would be to portray a Nation under siege and put aboard a spaceship that has an umbilical cord to a snag that was once a green tree and labeled 'Reserve'. The other image is that of a broken mirror reflecting multimillion dollar Museums that house the finest three-dimensional art, representing this Northern Hemisphere that was made by hands that owned land. The question that needs to addressed is this, 'What crime did this Nation do to be uprooted and left afloat without land to pass down to their children?'

The above summation may sound harsh, but the Gitksan people have been downtrodden because they lived under the Indian Act Laws which is separate from the Canadian Constitution. To live in valleys surrounded by mountains of forests that once was theirs and watch logging trucks hurry by and wake up to see another mountain grazed, is to kill the heart and soul of the Elders.

Her paintings do not convey her strong words literally, but they do convey her survival, her memories and her reasons to celebrate.

I am including an essay by Lynn Hill (curator and co-nominator) in addition to complete the nomination statement. The essay was compiled through a studio visit with Judith Morgan in 1999. It expands on and adds strength to our nomination of Judith Morgan, for an Artistic Achievement Award.

Ryan Rice
EXHIBITIONS:
1999 - Resident Artist, Inuit Museum, Ottawa, Canada
1997 to Present - Gitksan Paintbrush Gallery and Craft store, Kitwanga, B.C. Canada
1997 - Commissioned to illustrate “Traditional Healing” for Gitksan Health Authority.
1996 - University of Northern British Columbia, Prince George, B.C. Canada
1995 - Women’s Artist Show in the Greater Victoria Art Gallery, Featuring Women Artists from 1885 to 1995, 5 paintings from the Provincial Archives, B.C. Canada
1993 - Royal Museum, Victoria, B.C. Canada
1993 - McPherson Gallery, University of Victoria, B.C. Canada
1991 - British Columbia Creative Art Show, Vancouver, B.C. Canada
1991 - Exhibition Federation of Canadian Artists, Vancouver, B.C. Canada
1990 - ARTROPOLIS ’90, Roundhouse, Vancouver, B.C. Canada
1990 - Spirit of the Land, Heritage Hall, Vancouver, B.C. Canada
1990 - Northwestern National Exhibition Centre, Hazelton, B.C. Canada
1988 - Douglas College, New Westminster, B.C. Canada
1987 - Kitimat Centennial Museum, Kitimat, B.C. Canada
1987 - Northwestern National Exhibition Centre, Hazelton, B.C. Canada
1985 - British Columbia Women’s Artist Show, Greater Victoria Art Gallery, Victoria, B.C. Canada
1984 - Department of Indian and Northern Affairs Ottawa, Ts’oqua Oil Painting
1984 - Exhibit in the Skeena Mall, Terrace, B.C. Canada
1982 - Teaching Art and Culture at the Kitwanga Elementary High School
1976 - Bachelor of Art in Education, University of Kansas
1976 - Various Sales of Paintings in B.C. Canada
1972 - Johnson County Library, Overland Park, Kansas, U.S.A.
1967 - Prince Rupert Museum of Art, Prince Rupert, B.C. Canada
1962 - Various Exhibits, Enid, Oklahoma, U.S.A.
1952 - Art Gallery of Greater Victoria, Co-Exhibitor, Mr. Jack Shadbolt of Vancouver, B.C. Canada
1951 - Designed cover for Provincial Normal School ANECHO, Victoria, British Columbia
1950 - National Tour, Calgary Allied Arts Council, Canada
1950 - Coste House to the National Museum, Ottawa, Canada
1950 - Illustrated a calendar for the Hudson’s Bay Company
1950 - Purchase of painting by the University of British Columbia
1949 - Victoria Memorial Museum, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada
1949 - Geological Survey of Canada, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada
1949 - Parliament Building, Victoria, B.C. Canada
1947 - Pacific National Exhibition, Vancouver, B.C. Canada
AWARDS:
1948 - Best Art Exhibit, Arts and Crafts Society, Victoria, B.C. Canada
1947 - First Prize, Pacific National Exhibition, Vancouver, B.C. Canada
1947 - Scholarship, Provincial Museum, Victoria, B.C. Canada
1946 - Tuberculosis Art Contest, Vancouver, B.C. Canada

COLLECTIONS:
University of British Columbia
British Columbia Provincial Archives
Skeena Mall, Terrace, British Columbia
University of British Columbia, Vancouver, B.C. Canada
Vancouver Art Gallery, Vancouver, B.C. Canada

PUBLICATIONS:
1999 - Book, Celebration
1997 - The Interior News, Short story on “The Last Trapper”
1996 - The Interior News, Short story on “Gitksan Native Women”
1996 - Western Gitksan Health Authority, B.C. Canada
1992 - Aboriginal Calendar and Date Book
1951 - Calendar, Hudson’s Bay Company

PRESS RELEASES:
1997 - The Interior News, Short story on “The Last Trapper”
1996 - The Interior News, Short story on “Gitksan Native Women”

BIBLIOGRAPHY:
Artscraft Magazine, Volume 11, No. 3
About the Artist Judith P. Morgan

Judith was born in Kitwanga Village, that borders the Skeena River in Northwestern British Columbia. She attended a one-room schoolhouse that was taught by a Mrs. Hayhurst. Mr. And Mrs. Hayhurst were missionaries from England. The school taught only through grades six, so other arrangements had to be made. The alternative was to go to the Alberni Indian Residential School on Vancouver Island.

The segregation and isolation at the Residential School years were the loneliest six years of her life. Lack of Ethnic food and unable to see relatives except for the summer months left many unanswered questions. Perhaps the classroom attendance of two hours a day and entering high school with eight subjects and tests were the most difficult of all those years. It was at this time that her art classes began.

After High School she attended the Provincial Normal School in Victoria, B.C. Canada. This awarded her with an Elementary Teaching Certificate. In the summer of 1950, she received a two year scholarship to attend Cottey Junior College, Nevada, Missouri. Following that she received a scholarship from the Kansas City Art Institute, K.C., Missouri. That same year she met her husband, Willis Fitzpatrick. Putting her family first, Judith did not complete her education until 1976.

From 1976 to 1982 Judith taught in the schools in the United States. Her name had been struck from the Kitwanga Band list and feeling that she was no longer a Native, she took out U.S. Citizenship, but was later reinstated on the Band list in 1985. She moved back to the village and began teaching. Her years of painting earned her many one man shows in Canada, and many sales. Her work depicts her culture and are found hanging in such places as Ottawa, Provincial Archives in Victoria, Vancouver Art Gallery, University of Victoria, and the University of British Columbia. Many individuals have also purchased her work.

Judith feels that her people are so misunderstood and so little known about their way of living, and their struggle just to survive as a Nation. Her work primarily portrays the traditional cultural background and haunting legends of her people. Much of her subject matter is still carried out today. One example is the large oil painting called, “Tets” which relates the inviting of the Chiefs from other villages for the purposes of attending a potlatch. Her personal experiences of her people are so meaningful that she will continue to represent them in her Art.
"The lady that has brought this wonderful creation is my wife. The accounts given by her I have heard many times over the last fifty years never changing only becoming more alive each time in which we talked of them. When one thinks of this young Native girl coming from a village so small and remote and becoming so well known as the whole world unfolded before her is somewhat mind boggling. Poor does not describe her economic condition to say the least. Her mother, Martha Morgan saw these traits in her and scraped together small amounts of money to see to it she stayed in school by selling her hand made Indian sweaters. All the years we have been together I have witnessed a talent so engrained in her, when she paints, she becomes a totally different person almost like an out of body experience. The ideas first are born in her head and then to the canvas as if she was looking directly at that subject matter. The smell of oils permuted our homeland in a very surprising short time the idea in her head was dancing on the canvas. At first I not knowing the culture of the Gitksan, it was hard for me to understand but as I learned of that rich culture I to would get all excited. In the early years I would sometimes speak of different ideas of the painting only to be told, "You paint one!" Needless to say, my critiquing of her work came to an abrupt halt. No more the role of critic by me. Her thought of the subject seemed each time to just flow with every stroke of the brush. I was so amazed at how quick these ideas would appear in full detail on her canvas.

Judith's aspiration for education was another area she excelled in. First the Residential School experience then one year of Normal School. Her unusual ability was first discovered in Residential School and her work was displayed all over Canada and abroad. Her desire for more learning came in the form of going over 3000 miles from her remote village to Cottey College on a full 2 year scholarship which is where I met her. We married in early 1953 and started our family of five children. After all the children were in school her learning began again at the University of Kansas, where in she obtained her Bachelor Degree and taught part time. We moved back to her village (Kitwanga) in June 1983 and her years in school manifested itself even more in that she now taught not only Native Art but her language as well. In June of 1995, I built her Gallery and Studio (The Gitksan Paintbrush) but her learning was not finished as she started to pursue her Masters Degree at the University of Northern British Columbia out of Terrace, British Columbia. So, at the present time, she is now thinking about her Ph.D.

And oh yes, I am still smelling the oils.

Willis O. Fitzpatrick
Judith P. Morgan, Gitksan Artist

Judith P. Morgan, 1953
While attending Cottey Junior College, Nevada, Missouri
Judith P. Morgan, Gitskan Artist and her husband, Willis O. Fitzpatrick

In Beautiful British Columbia, Canada
1. Big Man Chief .... Simoogyet
2. Sea Lion Whiskers .... Yimk'm
3. Whiskers .... Yimk
4. Weasel .... Miksihl
5. Head ... Timges
6. Head dress .... G't'm
7. Nose .... Ts'ak
8. Eyes .... Ts'a'a
9. Eyebrow .... Ligil
10. Moon .... Hloxsim axxw
11. Tanned moose hide .... Hliyun
12. Blanket .... Gwla
13. House .... Wilp
14. Totem pole .... Pts'aan
15. Flower .... Majagalee
16. Button .... M'ala'an
17. Button blanket .... Gwissgan mâlâa
18. Hand .... An'on
19. Sky .... Lax'ha
20. To sit .... T'aa
21. Railroad .... Steambot
22. Grave house .... Wilp luu-lak
23. Ghost .... Luu-lak
24. Mountain .... Sganist
25. Popular trees .... Am k'ooxst
26. Drum .... Anuuhl
27. Mountain goat .... Matx
28. Down feathers .... Mix k'aax
29. Rattle .... Haseex
30. Grandfather .... Ye'e
31. Mother .... Nox
32. Lady in the moon .... Tsim thlox
33. Three .... Gwla'i
34. Red ochre color .... Masxw
35. Hair .... Ges
36. Sick .... Siipxw
37. Hospital .... Wilp siipxw
38. Window .... Anlluu goy p'ax
39. Bed .... Tsim woktis
40. To cut .... K'ots
41. To be sad .... Gitxw ga goot
42. Sunset .... Sk'éexxw sa
43. Black bear .... Sim smex
44. Box .... Xbiist
45. Cedar box .... Gar linkx
46. Box (for storing food) .... Ink
47. To scream .... Wax waa'atxw
48. Woven strap .... Ga'deckhl
49. Berry basket hung from the neck...
50. Berries ... Maay
51. To pick berries .... T'aaahlxw
52. Trees .... Gan gan
53. Skirt .... Naak'
54. Woman .... Hanak'
55. Cane .... Kaat'
56. Clouds .... Yeen
57. Burn .... Mihl
58. Princess .... Higu wilksihlxw
59. Grass .... Habasxw
60. Angry .... Alax
61. Ankle .... Hooni
62. Shoes .... Ts'awaxs
63. To break .... Ihlagan
64. To move .... Hlantxw
65. Soapberries .... Is
66. Canoe .... Mal
67. Spring salmon .... Ya'a
68. Rocks .... Lo'op
69. Creator .... Sim moogit'm Laxha'
70. Smoke house .... Wipsihon
71. Smoked salmon slices .... Huxws
72. Smoke .... Mi'in
73. Door .... Aats'ap
74. Fillet board .... Hani'gel
75. Dance .... Miluxw
76. Water .... Aks
77. Totem pole with a man .... Gettim gan
78. Saskatoon berry .... Gam
79. Small girl .... Tsuux'm hanak
80. Floor .... Hanii wan
81. Chair .... Hanii taa
82. Wall .... Haahlxan
83. Stove .... Sduup
84. Table .... Hanii txookxw
85. Snowing .... Maadim
86. Snow on the ground .... Maaxws
87. We're going home .... Hawm
88. Bleeding .... lhee' atxw
89. Paddle .... Waax
90. Snow shoes .... Nax
91. Northern lights .... Gitsook
92. To set traps .... Silinaxw
93. Mountain goat .... Matx
94. Waterfall .... Ts'itxs
95. To get hurt .... Sgeksxw
96. Ocean .... Lax moo'on (salt)
97. Hat .... Gayt
98. Crab .... K'al moos
99. Chinaman .... Jayn
100. Houses .... Huwilp
101. Children .... Kuba tk'ihtxw
102. Money .... Daala
103. Basket .... Yuusilt
104. Piece of Board .... T'aa gan
105. Wolf crest .... Lax gibuu
106. Frog .... Ganaaw
107. Frog crest .... Lax ganada
108. Dirge song .... Limx'oo'y
Crossing the Icy Skeena River to Attend Feast – ink by Judith P. Morgan with Moon Collage—computer (by my permission only) Erica Williams