



To: General Purposes Committee

Date: December 9, 2009

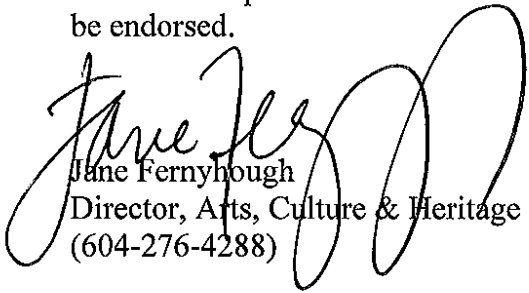
From: Jane Fernyhough  
Director, Arts, Culture & Heritage Services

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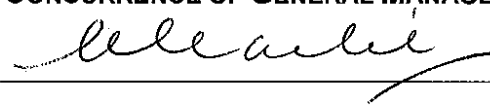

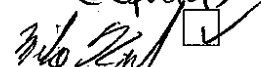
Re: VANOC Sponsorship Program for Aboriginal Artworks at the Richmond Olympic Oval Precinct – Youth Mentorship Artist Selection

Staff Recommendation

That the selection of Coast Salish artist Sonny Assu for the Youth Mentorship Program for the VANOC Venues' Aboriginal Art Program at the Richmond Olympic Oval Precinct, as outlined in the staff report dated December 9, 2009 from the Director, Arts, Culture & Heritage Services, be endorsed.

  
Jane Fernyhough  
Director, Arts, Culture & Heritage Services  
(604-276-4288)

Att. 2

|                                                                                                                               |                                                                                                                                  |                                |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| <b>FOR ORIGINATING DEPARTMENT USE ONLY</b>                                                                                    |                                                                                                                                  |                                |
| <b>CONCURRENCE OF GENERAL MANAGER</b><br> |                                                                                                                                  |                                |
| <b>REVIEWED BY TAG</b>                                                                                                        | YES<br> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | NO<br><input type="checkbox"/> |
| <b>REVIEWED BY CAO (Deputy)</b>                                                                                               | YES<br> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>  | NO<br><input type="checkbox"/> |

## Staff Report

### Origin

On June 8, 2009 Council endorsed the VANOC Venues' Aboriginal Art Program for the Olympic Oval Precinct (the Program). The Program identified four aboriginal art opportunities for the Olympic Oval Precinct.

At that meeting, Council endorsed the concept proposals for the first two of the four art works in the Program, a Contemporary Feature Art Work *Hupakwanum* by the Nuuchahnulth Art Association, and the Inuit Tapiriit Tapestry. Both of these works are now installed, in Riverside Gathering and the Legacy Room, respectively.

On July 28, 2009, Council endorsed the third art work, the Welcome Work, entitled *The Killer Whale in the Salish Sea*, by Musqueam artist Chrystal Sparrow, to be installed in front of the River Road entrance, currently in production. This report presents the recommended artist to lead the fourth and final component of the Program, the Youth Mentorship Program.

### Analysis

The Venues' Aboriginal Art Program fulfils the vision identified in the *Oval Precinct and Surrounding Area Art Plan* for leveraging the Olympic opportunity to collaborate with VANOC in showcasing the region's culture and history. The Youth Mentorship Program will support the goals to recognize the presence and history of Richmond's aboriginal peoples and develop an educational art program to motivate and inspire youth

The Youth Mentorship is an opportunity for an established Aboriginal artist to mentor a cross-cultural group of Richmond youth in developing art reflecting their personal histories, for integration into the building or site. A project budget of \$55,000 has been previously endorsed, with funding by the City.

The public art terms of reference for the Youth Mentorship Program, issued May 8, 2009 by VANOC in consultation with City Public Art staff, describes the art opportunity, site description, scope of work, and budget. Background information was provided on the venue history, the sport to be played at the Games, project themes, and building form and character.

### Recommended Artist

The recommended artist identified by VANOC in consultation with City staff is Sonny Assu. Sonny Assu grew up in North Delta and currently lives in Vancouver. Since graduating from Emily Carr University of Art + Design in 2002, Sonny has created an exceptional body of work. He has exhibited across Canada, including works shown at the Richmond Art Gallery and the Vancouver Art Gallery (**Attachment 1**).

### Youth Mentorship Program

Staff have worked with VANOC to further define this opportunity, and propose a youth workshop to be held in the Cultural Centre at the Richmond Art Gallery. The lead artist will produce a signature work prior to the start of the workshop. The workshop will be held concurrently with the O Zone, to allow visitors to observe the work in progress and the artist and youth to display their works to an international audience.

Artworks to be produced through the Youth Mentorship program will include a feature work by Sonny Assu in the form of a painted longhouse front responding to the Oval and the site, and similar in scale to the examples shown of the artist's previous work (**Attachment 2**). Additional works produced by the students in the Program will be determined in consultation with the youths, with either longhouse fronts or drums as the preferred art works.

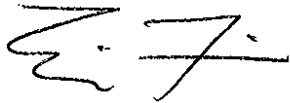
The feature art work will be displayed after the Games in an indoor location within the Richmond Olympic Oval. Determination of the location will be undertaken in consultation with the Richmond Olympic Oval Corporation (ROOC), with consideration of pedestrian traffic, Oval programming and operations, and maintenance of the work. The proposal has been reviewed with the General Manager, Richmond Oval, and is supported.

**Financial Impact**

On June 8, 2009 Council endorsed a total project budget not exceeding \$55,000 for the Youth Mentorship Program. No additional funds are required.

**Conclusion**

The Youth Mentorship Program as identified in the VANOC Venues' Aboriginal Art Program is consistent with the intent for legacies projects envisioned in the *Oval Precinct and Surrounding Area Art Plan*. Participation by artist Sonny Assu to lead the Youth Mentorship Program expands on the public art already commissioned for the Oval Precinct, through its form, materials and story, and provides an opportunity to involve youth in the telling of their personal histories.



Eric Fiss, MAIBC, MCIP  
Public Art Planner  
(604-247-4612)

EF:ef

**VANOC Venues' Aboriginal Art Program  
Youth Mentorship**

**Weka'yi First Nation (Cape Mudge)  
Campbell River**

**Sonny Assu**

**Artist Background**

## Biography

Sonny Assu  
(b.1975)

Painter, sculpture/installation and mixed media artist

Regarded as a 'Vanguard' for his piece in the Vancouver Art Gallery's exhibit, *How Soon Is Now?*, Sonny Assu continues to push the boundaries of contemporary art by challenging the perception of Aboriginal art. A multi-disciplinary artist, Assu merges Northwest Coast Aboriginal iconography with the aesthetics of popular culture to challenge social and historical values that we as a society face on a daily basis. His work is an exploration of his mixed ancestry and creates a discourse on we use items of consumer and popular culture to define our personal lineage.

His current body of work examines how we use everyday consumer items and icons of pop culture to define our personal lineage, discussing the use of branding, brand loyalty and technology in conjunction to the ideals of totemic representation and helps educate people on the issues that the First People of North America face.

Sonny grew up in North Delta, a suburb of Canada's third largest city and many kilometres away from his ancestral home of Campbell River. It wasn't until he was eight years old that he discovered his mixed heritage in a rather unique way. It was during a grade three history lesson about a particular group of BC 'Indians', the Kwakwaka'wakw. He ran home that day to tell his mom about the lesson, about how he was drawn to the culture and the art: she simply looked at him and said "Well, that is who you are".

After completing high school in 1994, Sonny set out to find his placement in the world. Three years went by, and Sonny started to yearn for something more than working in a shoe store in a mall. His late teens and early 20's brought him into an exploration of his dramatic flair, performing in many theatre productions with companies such as the Theatre Under the Stars and the Fraser Valley Gilbert and Sullivan Society. Although he loved performing on stage, he would soon discover that visual arts were his true calling. His scholastic art exploration began in 1997 at the Kwantlen University College. He gained his Bachelor of Fine Arts degree at the Emily Carr Institute in May of 2002, majoring in Print Making and a minor in just about everything else that piqued his creative curiosity.

Assu's work has been featured in several group shows over the past years, notably *How Soon is Now?* at the Vancouver Art Gallery, *Comic Relief* at the National Gallery of Canada and *Changing Hands: Art With Reservation Part 2* at the Museum of Arts and Design in New York City. Sonny's first solo exhibit, *Sonny Assu: As Defined Within the Indian Act*, was held at the Belkin Satellite Gallery in Vancouver, in April 2006. It garnered him considerable attention and landed him a partnership with the Equinox Gallery in the fall of 2006. Assu's work has been accepted into the National Gallery in Ottawa (*Breakfast Series* and *Death Blanket*), the Seattle Art Museum (*Breakfast Series*), the Museum of Anthropology at UBC (*Coke Salish*) and in various other public and private collections across Canada and the United States.

**Radio, TV, Print and the Web:** His successful art practice has netted exposure on a variety of media platforms and he has received grants from Canada Council, the BC Art Council and in 2007, he was honoured with the Emily Award, from the Emily Carr University, for his devotion and success on his path as an artist.

His ideas, thoughts and processes are fluidic and ever changing. Ask Sonny what he's working on and he might give you the step by step, or he might keep tightlipped in hopes of creating the element of surprise in his work. Either way, his work and personality will draw you in.

Sonny Assu is Laich-kwil-tach (Kwakwaka'wakw) of the Weka'yi First Nation (Cape Mudge), the artist has lived in Vancouver since 1999.

## Artist Statement

My current body of work examines how we use everyday consumer items and icons of pop culture to define our personal lineage. This series of work juxtaposes two polarized cultures and theorizes how branding, brand loyalty, and items from pop/technology culture to relate to the ideal of totemic representation.

This body of work combines social, economical, and environmental issues with subtle humour to speak to the notion of conformity by not conforming to the commonly perceived "Indian" Identity.

### *1884/1951 (support text)*

67 spun copper cups, grande size  
2009

In 1884/1951, Assu has rendered 67 disposable coffee cups in copper referencing everyday objects that are given away during a potlatch. His use of copper refers specifically to its unique value to the Aboriginal people of the West Coast. "Copper was a form of wealth for the First People of the West Coast. However the basis of wealth for the Aboriginal people was significantly different than what the European settlers were accustomed to. As a Western society, we hoard to prove our wealth, keeping it for ourselves or buying objects that demonstrate our placement in society. The First Peoples of the Pacific North West (specifically those who practised the Potlatch) saw wealth in a dramatically different way; saving for years, hoarding wealth only to give away. It was that demonstration of giving that deemed you wealthy.

The status of wealth for a Chief was his copper shield; I've heard stories of Chiefs who felt they were so rich after a potlatch, that they destroyed parts of their Copper to prove it. Chiefs would commonly one-up themselves by breaking off pieces of their copper and tossing them in the fire. One story I heard gave rise and relevance to 1884/1951. It was a story of a Chief who felt he was so wealthy after a potlatch that he no want of anything. He proved his bravado by tossing his full copper in the fire. I found it an interesting juxtaposition of culture, were we as a western society will happily spend \$5 on a latte and walk around town displaying our wealth in these disposable cups, only to toss them away in an unconscious act of proving ourselves."

With 67 cups in total, 1884/1951 presents a cup for each year that the potlatch ceremonies were banned by Canadian law. The positioning of the cups started to play heavily on the meaning of the piece for him. The systematic discarded piling of the cups references the act of the banning and our momentum toward become a disposable society.

"The Potlatch moved underground in those 67 years of the ban. But the will of the people remained strong, knowing it was their right to practice their beliefs. An Indian agent would be sent to confiscate all the regalia, materials and gifts to be given away during a Potlatch. Jailing the host and piling up the regalia and other materials to be given away. Taking photo's of confiscated wealth, like trophies, to be hoarded away in museums."

To view his latest work, view his CV or to find more information on the artist, please visit <http://sonnyassu.com>

To inquire about commissions or sales, please contact  
Equinox Gallery,  
2321 Granville St., Vancouver, BC.  
V6H 3G4,  
(t): 604.736.2405  
(f): 604.736.0464  
[info@equinoxgallery.com](mailto:info@equinoxgallery.com)

Sonny Assu

604.351.1165  
[info@sonnyassu.com](mailto:info@sonnyassu.com)  
<http://sonnyassu.com>

#311 447 E.6th Ave,  
Vancouver, BC, Canada  
V5T 1K8

**Solo Exhibitions**

- 2009 **IDrums**  
Equinox Gallery (Gallery 2), Vancouver, Canada
- 2007 **IPotlatch**  
Art Gallery of South Western Manitoba, Brandon, Canada
- 2006 **Sonny Assu: As defined by the Indian Act.**  
Belkin Satellite Gallery, Vancouver, Canada
- 2/3-Person Exhibitions**
- 2009 **Pop Goes the World**  
The Red Shift Gallery, Saskatoon, SK Canada
- 2005 **Futuristic Regalla.**  
Campbell River Art Gallery, Campbell River, BC, Canada
- 2004 **Futuristic Regalla.**  
Grunt Gallery, Vancouver, BC, Canada

**Group Exhibitions**

- 2010 **Alternorthern - Feb-March, 2010**  
The LAB - San Francisco, CA, USA
- 2009 **Challenging Traditions:**  
**Contemporary First Nations Art of the Northwest Coast**  
The McMichael Canadian Art Collection - Kleinburg, Ontario, Canada  
**Continuum: Vision and Creativity on the Northwest Coast**  
Bill Reid Gallery of Northwest Coast Art - Vancouver  
**Beat Nation: Hip Hop as an Indigenous Culture**  
Grunt Gallery, Vancouver, BC, Canada  
SAW Gallery, Ottawa, Canada  
**Blue Like an Orange**  
Ottawa Art Gallery, Ottawa, Canada  
**How Soon Is Now?**  
Vancouver Art Gallery, Vancouver, Canada
- 2008 **Winter Group Exhibit**  
Equinox Gallery, Vancouver, BC, Canada  
**INFLUENCE**  
Equinox Gallery, Vancouver, BC, Canada  
**World Histories**  
Des Moines Art Center. Des Moines, IA, USA  
**Comic Relief**  
National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, ON, Canada  
**Changing Hands: Art Without Reservation, 2**  
Tucson Museum of Art. Tucson, AZ, USA
- 2007 **SAM at 75**  
Seattle Art Museum. Seattle, WA, USA  
**Changing Hands: Art Without Reservation, 2**  
Anchorage Museum of History & Art, Anchorage, AK, USA  
Weisman Art Museum, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, MN, USA
- 2006 **The Altered Image**  
Equinox Gallery, Vancouver, BC, Canada  
**Changing Hands: Art Without Reservation, 2**  
Naples Museum of Art, Naples, FL, USA  
Eiteljorg Museum, Indianapolis, IN, USA  
Institute of American Indian Arts Museum, Santa Fe, NM, USA  
**Past to Present**  
Equinox Gallery, Vancouver, BC, Canada  
**Earth: the World Urban Festival**  
Great Northern Way Campus, Vancouver, Canada  
**90° (Talking Stick Festival)**  
Roundhouse Community Centre, Vancouver, BC, Canada
- 2005 **Changing Hands: Art Without Reservation, 2**  
Museum of Arts & Design, New York, NY, USA  
**HIVE: A New Works Group Show**  
Studio #1 - 901 Main St. Vancouver, BC.  
**Dem(ouse)graphics**  
New Perspective Gallery, Passmore, BC.  
**Evolution (Alumni Exhibition)**  
Emily Carr University, Vancouver, BC
- 2003 **Thinking Textile**  
Richmond Art Gallery, Richmond, BC, Canada
- 2002 **Urban Red Wire. (Talking Stick Festival)**  
Round House Community Centre, Vancouver, BC, Canada  
**Emily Carr Graduation Exhibit**  
Emily Carr University, Vancouver, BC

**Artist Talks**

- 2009 **The McMichael Canadian Art Collection**  
Kleinburg, Ontario, Canada  
**Art + Identity (Panel discussion)**
- Hotshots Gallery, Toronto, Ontario, Canada  
**REMIX, Open Education Conference**  
Vancouver Art Gallery, Vancouver, Canada  
**Pleasure and Doom (Panel discussion)**  
Vancouver Art Gallery, Vancouver, Canada  
**Current Body of work**  
Vancouver Art Gallery, Vancouver, Canada  
**2008 World Histories**  
Des Moines Art Center. Des Moines, IA, USA  
**2007 Contemporary Traditions: The Work of Sonny Assu**  
Seattle Art Museum Lecture, Seattle, WA, USA  
**Museum of Anthropology**  
UBC Museum of Anthropology, Vancouver, BC, Canada  
**Contemporary Art Society of Vancouver Studio Visit.**  
Vancouver, BC, Canada  
**2006 90° (Talking Stick Festival)**  
Round House Community Centre, Vancouver, BC, Canada  
**2004 Full Circle (Talking Stick Festival)**  
Grunt Gallery, Vancouver, BC, Canada

**Artist in Residence**

- 2009 **The McMichael Canadian Art Collection**  
Kleinburg, Ontario, Canada  
**2008 Des Moines Art Center**  
Des Moines Art Center. Des Moines, IA, USA  
**ArtStarts in Schools**  
Kitsilano Secondary, Vancouver, BC, Canada  
**2007 ArtStarts in Schools**  
North Delta Senior Secondary, North Delta, BC, Canada  
**2003 NEW MEDIA INNOVATION CENTRE**  
Vancouver, BC, Canada

**Grants and Awards**

- 2009 British Columbia Arts Council  
Mid-Career Production grant  
2007 Canada Council for the Arts  
Production grant  
British Columbia Arts Council  
Production grant  
Emily Carr University  
The Emily Award (Distinguished alumni award)  
2005 Canada Council for the Arts  
Travel grant  
2004 British Columbia Arts Council  
Artist production grant  
2003 First Peoples' Cultural Foundation  
Production/Development grant  
Vancouver Foundation (VADA)  
Production/Development grant

**Peer Assessment Juries**

- 2008 British Columbia Arts Council -Level 1 & 2 Awards jury.  
2007 Visual Arts Development Awards (VADA) - Awards jury.  
2005 Canada Council for the Arts. - Emerging artist grant jury.  
2004 Art Underfoot Selection Panel -City of Vancouver

**Permanent Collections**

- The National Gallery of Canada  
Museum of Anthropology at the University of British Columbia  
The Seattle Art Museum

**Community Services**

- 2007-Now  
Grunt Gallery  
Vice President, Board of directors.

**Publications + Catalogues**

- 2009 Challenging Traditions ISBN# 978-1-5536-414-8  
How Soon IS Now? ISBN# 978-895442-74-8  
2008 World Histories ISBN# 978-1-879003-53-8  
2005 Changing Hands:  
Art Without Reservation 2 ISBN# 1-890385-11-5  
2004 Thinking Textile ISBN# 0 - 9692572 - 8 -7  
Futuristic Regalia ISBN# 1 - 895329 - 60 - 4  
2002 Grad Catalogue Emily Carr University

**Media (print/tv/radio/web)**

- 2009 Pushing the line:  
Art without reservations Bravo!  
beckoningforchange.org Featured artist  
The Vancouver Review Fall  
The Vancouver Review Summer  
Socket CBC Radio One  
North by Northwest CBC Radio One  
2008 Art Papers Vol. 5, Issue #32  
The Vancouver Sun Sept. 10th  
2007 Common Ground August  
The Olympian May 5th  
Seattle Post-Intelligencer May 3rd  
2006 Socket CBC Radio One  
The Vancouver Sun July 3rd  
The Vancouver Sun June 22nd  
The Vancouver Sun June 17th  
The Georgia Straight March 2nd  
2005 The Vancouver Courier March 6th  
The National Post January 6th  
2004 Colour TV CityTV  
North by Northwest CBC Radio One  
2004 Westender February 26th  
Richmond News January 7th  
2004 Art Zone (Season two) APTN  
2003 The Georgia Straight December 4th  
The Richmond Review December 4th  
North by Northwest CBC Radio  
Red Wire Magazine Vol. 5 Issue # 3  
2002 ZeD CBC TV  
Art Zone APTN  
Westender March 28th.  
Red Directions. Vol. 2 Issue #4  
2001 North by Northwest CBC Radio One

**Education**

- 2002 **Emily Carr University of Art + Design**  
BFA (Visual Art: Print Making, Painting, Digital Arts)  
Vancouver, BC, Canada  
1999 **Kwantlen Polytechnic University**  
Transfer credits to Emily Carr  
Surrey, BC, Canada

**Representation**

- Equinox Gallery**  
2321 Granville St.  
Vancouver, BC, Canada  
V6H3G4  
604.736.2405  
<http://www.equinoxgallery.com/>

**VANOC Venues' Aboriginal Art Program  
Youth Mentorship**

**Weka'yi First Nation (Cape Mudge)  
Campbell River**

**Sonny Assu**

**Art Works**





Longhouse series (working title) #1  
Acrylic on panel.  
30"(at peak)x96"  
2009



Longhouse series (working title) #2 -  
Spawned  
Acrylic on panel.  
30"(at peak)x96"  
200

Sonny Assu

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<http://sonnyassu.com>

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Vancouver, BC, Canada  
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iDrum: Nude  
Acrylic on Cow hide, wood.  
22"  
2009



iDrum (Red)iscovery .  
Acrylic on Cow hide, wood.  
20"  
2008



Disconnected#3.  
Acrylic on Cow hide, wood.  
32"  
2009



iDrum: Sea Festival.  
Acrylic on Cow hide, wood.  
20"  
2008



iDrums (installation view)  
from the exhibit iDrums  
@the Equinox Gallery  
Various  
2009