

RAVEN PUTS THE LIGHT IN THE SKY

IAIA WELCOMES THE KEN MOWATT CREST POLE TO CAMPUS

With powerful images, Mowatt's piece reveals how darkness was defeated in Gitksan folklore:

"The light of the world was held by a powerful Medicine Man, and the world was in darkness. Raven tricked the Medicine Man into opening the box where he kept the light. Raven grabbed the light in his beak and fled. As the Medicine Man chased him, Raven became tired. He broke off pieces of the light and threw the stars into the sky. And then Moon. And finally, he took the largest light and threw Sun into the sky. The People honor Raven today for bringing back light to the world."



Ken Mowatt (b. 1944) selecting the red cedar pole for carving (1980)

Artist Ken Mowatt

A master carver and one of the most creative and experimental First Nations artists working today, Vancouver native Ken Mowatt creates cedar poles, drums, jewelry, masks, rattles, and sculptures, as well as oil and watercolor paintings. A Tsimshian/Gitksan artist of the House of Djokaslee (Frog Crest), Mowatt illustrated the children's book *Returning the Feathers*, based on five famous Gitksan legends. His work is celebrated for its attention to detail and often features surreal and abstract elements.

Why a "Crest Pole" and Not a "Totem Pole?"

The term "totem pole" is a misnomer when referring to Northwest Coast poles. Totem, or "dodem," is a Northeastern Algonquin word referring to a sacred society's or family's animal emblem. Traditional Algonquin dodem poles stand only 10–15 feet at their highest and are typically comprised of one carved image at the top. We use the term "crest pole" because it is the closest English wording related to the true meaning these majestic pieces embody. The term is widely used by originating communities when not referred to in the traditional language.

About Northwestern Crest Poles

Northwestern poles are more elaborate, usually narrating stories through multiple figures carved from the bottom to the top. Standing as high as 30 feet, the size of crest poles reflects the towering trees of the Pacific Northwest.

At the top, Northwestern crest poles often feature society or family emblems, which frequently correlate to the pole's main story or a related one. However, they also may be used to honor one person or even an event, such as a particularly memorable potlatch (ceremonial feast).

History of the Mowatt Crest Pole

The raising of a pole is a community event, often celebrated with songs, feasts, and performances. In this tradition, Geraldine Barney will be sharing an original prayer and musical performance at the Institute of American Indian Arts' (IAIA) September 29, 2021 event to welcome *Raven Puts the Light in the Sky* to a place of honor on IAIA's campus. This particular crest pole is carved from red cedar and stands 20 feet high.

A gift of JPMorgan Chase, the pole was commissioned in 1980 for the Chase Manhattan Plaza in New York City. In 1997 it was moved to New York City's Wagner Park and has now been graciously donated to IAIA as part of the IAIA Public Art collection.