

David Boxley

Tsimshian Artist

"Artists from long ago inspire new generations of Native people to carry on the traditions which they began. I'm determined and dedicated to become the finest artist I can be, while at the same time helping to revitalize and carry on the rich culture of my tribe."

David Boxley is a Tsimshian artist from Metlakatla, Alaska. Born in 1952, he was raised by his grandparents. From them he learned many Tsimshian traditions including S'malgyak (the Tsimshian language). In 1974, he earned his Bachelor of Science degree from Seattle Pacific University and began his professional career as a teacher and basketball coach at middle schools and high schools in Alaska and Washington.

In 1979, while teaching in Metlakatla, David began devoting a considerable amount of time to the study of traditional Tsimshian carving. Researching ethnographic material and studying artifacts in museum collections, David learned the traditional carving methods of his ancestors. In 1986, he made a career decision to leave the job security of teaching and to devote all of his energy toward carving and research, and revitalizing the cultural traditions of his people.

David Boxley has become a nationally recognized artist who has shown in the United States and Europe. He is the first Alaskan Tsimshian artist to achieve national and international prominence. In all of David's work he emphasizes Tsimshian style. Having carved 46 totem poles in the last twenty five years, David is particularly well respected for his totem pole carving.

Most important to David is his deep involvement in the rebirth of Tsimshian culture. In 1982, he was the first to hold a potlatch in Metlakatla, Alaska. Since that time he has held many other historically significant potlatches and been directly involved in the formation of two successful dance groups, the Fourth Generation Dancers in Metlakatla, Alaska and the Tsimshian Haayuuk in Seattle, Washington. He has written over 35 songs in his the Tsimshian language and carved over thirty masks and other items that are used for traditional purposes by the dancers. The cultural resurgence of the Alaskan Tsimshian people is a direct result of David's effort to actively reclaim the traditions of his people and share this knowledge with many generations of Tsimshians.

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