

Magic and Transformation *an interview with bill bissett*

by Roxane T.Strasbourg

There are no seats left in Duncan's Cowichan Valley Art Council Gallery and stragglers have to stand as bill bissett reads and performs many selections from his latest book, *sublingual*. Surrounded by his paintings the shaman artist plugs into the electric source where there is no distinction between life and art. The man is art and art is the man. Connected and grounded, he meanders through soulful poetic metaphor and concrete matters of fact. The concrete sound poet embraces words, partitions their sounds into fluid symphonies, launches into jazz cacophonies, pitching every so often the one word note. By evening's end, many of his books, CDs and 26 of 35 paintings are sold.

bill bissett taps into life's free flowing energy. His works in constant movement, in continual transformation engage pure life force. There's a kindred spirit to Norval Morrisseau and the art of the Huichol.

"Norval Morrisseau is one of my heroes. His work moves me very much. There is a definite magic space in his work. That's what I like to do. I would say the magic space that Norval Morrisseau does and I hopefully do is a lovely idea, a beautiful idea and the similarity was there before I actually saw it. I first saw his work, a man becoming a thunderbird, at the AGO almost twenty years ago. I sat there and watched it for hours. It's almost an animation. It's incredibly beautiful, the transformative change, the person actually becoming Thunderbird."

Strokes and colors vibrate and scintillate on the surface of bill's paintings. "I like to be right on the picture plane. Sometimes I vary from that. I go inside and behind the picture plane but most of the paintings in the show are on top of the picture plane. These paintings are a combination drawing, painting and action painting. If the stroke goes all right and there's music and sound in the stroke then the painting is rockin' for me."

bill usually works on large canvases but all the paintings in the show are small ten by eights. "I was on interferon, AZT, and megatron program while doing these paintings. Interferon is quite a strong drug, it leaps to the joints and lymph nodes like stealth bombers so my arms weren't strong enough to do a large stroke on a canvas or work at an easel. These paintings were all done by sitting and they are what got me through the experience (side effects). There are a few ones with Chinese strokes, they're barely pictographic. They're like letters, telegraphic maybe. Those I would do because I like doing them. I love the music they can have by themselves. They were also like doing scales to see if my fingers were doing well enough to do some painting. It took months to do all these paintings and I love doing them and the whole experience." –end- rts 16/12/09