

# Artistic Alliance

Richard de la Mare and Artie George have been collaborating for 44 years

STORY AND PHOTOS BY  
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**I**F YOU'VE WATCHED THE FOX TV SHOW *Murder in a Small Town*, you might have noticed a distinctive First Nations wood carving of a sun on the set's interior police station wall, filmed in Gibsons.

That memorable piece was created at Coast Raven Design Studio in Davis Bay, the workspace and retail store of collaborative artists Richard de la Mare and Artie George. Artie carved the sun design, then Richard painted it and provided finishing touches.

In the 44 years they've worked together, this artistic duo has created 39 design motifs for miniature carved wooden masks that appear as brooches, necklaces and bolo ties and on spirit boxes and shadow boxes. While Artie carves in pine, alder and cedar, Richard has carved intricate designs in bone, horn and walrus tusk. >>

TOP: RICHARD DE LA MARE WITH A SILVER NECKLACE HE DESIGNED AND CREATED.

BOTTOM: ARTIE GEORGE CARVES INSIDE COAST RAVEN DESIGN STUDIO'S WORKSHOP IN DAVIS BAY.





CLOCKWISE, FROM TOP LEFT: A DIVERSE ARRAY OF MINIATURE CARVINGS; THE CARVED MASK *EAGLE JOURNEY* WITH THE *SUN* PLAQUE; ONE OF COAST RAVEN'S MANY MASKS CARVED BY ARTIE AND PAINTED BY RICHARD.

As a jewelry artist, Richard works in silver and gold and has used beads collected from his global travels, which include time spent in Mexico, Venezuela, Denmark and beyond. Artie, married to a Balinese woman, has learned from mask carvers in Bali and spent three months in Oaxaca, Mexico doing carvings with local folk artists.

Artie, the great-nephew of Chief Dan George, is from the Tsleil-Waututh Nation (Burrard band). Since starting to carve in school at age 12, he has produced both miniature pieces and full-sized masks, wall plaques, totem poles, bowls and rattles.

Primarily self-taught, Artie does not limit his artistic style to one Indigenous tradition but instead, interprets many different ones including Coast Salish, Haida, Kwakiutl and Tlingit. This has brought criticism from some traditionalists, he says, but Artie feels he should have the freedom to carve an elephant, for instance, and not be accused of cultural appropriation.

"I've been doing this for 40 years: it's my tradition," he says with a laugh. "Almost every area has a form of the thunderbird. It [each one] is a different interpretation. None of them are wrong. We can do it in whatever way feels right."

Born in North Vancouver, Richard says he sold beaded jewelry and small papier mâché pieces in the 1970s as "an old hippy lying on a bunch of straw" at Renaissance fairs at Cates Park. His wholesale business began with sales of necklace-and-earring sets to The Bay. He found it ironic, he says now, to be selling beads back to the same institution that once traded its own beads to First Nations peoples for furs. >>



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As an artist and designer, Richard draws on combined years at the University of B.C., Simon Fraser University, University of Washington and the Rudolph Schaeffer School of Design in San Francisco. He chose to finish six years of studies in architecture rather than continue as a drummer for the band that later became Chilliwack, which performed at venues like Vancouver's Smilin' Buddha and a Hell's Angels clubhouse.

He worked at an architectural firm in Vancouver but says he soon realized, after six months of bohemian travel on a leave of absence, that life in a suit with a briefcase was not his destiny. "[I] moved on to creating my own ideas that allowed me a life of exploration."

Part-Iroquois, with a dad from Guernsey and an adopted mom who never learned her family origins, Richard says, "I'm part of the human tribe, the lone-wolf tribe."

Richard and Artie co-founded Sechel's Hackett Park Artisan Fair in 1985, along with Carole Rubin and Creek Clayworks' Elaine Futterman and the late Mike Allegretti. Richard remembers that event's first summer, which had about a half-dozen booths: "The lawn sprinklers went off. We had water all over the booths. We were in a panic and had no idea of how to shut the sprinklers off. I wasn't the brainiac who quickly solved the dilemma by placing garbage containers over them."

Richard first opened the studio in North Vancouver in 1970, the year Artie was born. Almost 40 years later, he and Artie moved to Davis Bay and opened their existing studio in 2008.

Both men have exhibited their works in juried craft shows, including Vancouver's Circle Craft, and at Indigenous events, museums and galleries. The Canadian Crafts Association accepted two of Richard's pieces, identified as "master" status, to exhibit at the Vancouver Museum.

Artie's creations are in collections around the world and can be found at Calgary's Glenbow Museum, the UBC Museum of Anthropology and the Smithsonian Native American Museum in Washington, DC. Indigenous leaders such as Phil Fontaine, former national chief of the Assembly of First Nations, and George Erasmus, former co-chair of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, have received his artistic works.

For decades, Richard and Artie have operated a successful wholesale business, supplying their art to realtors, architects, interior designers, tourism accommodations and operators and corporations.

Now that he's in his eighties, does Richard have any plans to close up shop? "I'll shut down the day I die," he says.

In the meantime, you might find him upside down. After doing headstands daily since age 20, he achieved global recognition at age 77 on Aug. 26, 2022. That day, he received official confirmation that he held the Guinness World Record as the oldest man to do a headstand. The feat lasted one minute, certified by two official witnesses, at Kalijo Pilates studio in Davis Bay.

Since then, Richard says he thinks another man has captured the title. He says: "Maybe I'll try again when I'm 85." **CL**

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