

Richard Watts
Artist Statement for "Run", Kelowna commission

This project is an extension of previous work. When I first made "Canoe" it was as a sculpture in its own right, but also a sketch for further exploration. The materials—wood and metal—create a relationship between permanence and decay, which is a relationship between natural processes, and urbanization and industrial culture. For an outdoor installation "Canoe" was intended to be transformed into permanent materials, while evoking the presence of loss in the process—that of an historic cedar canoe.

The installation uses the metaphor of movement along a river as symbolic of movement through life and through time. It connects the movement of people with the migration patterns of fish and aquatic animals; in this it relates to a much earlier work, "Toronto Map", in which I took 700 snapshots of my own memory/movement patterns around the city and turned a room into a map, like a map of the mind. Everyone has their own idiosyncratic migration patterns through the landscape in which they live.

These sculptures are no longer canoes, but become strange and new bodies: they are boats, they are fish, they are whales, they are us. These bodies are archaeological, positioned along the Creek like skeletal relics of creatures uncovered by the receding waters. They go back in time and project into the future. They are myths. They move up and down and side-to-side, like a creature in the water.

The skeletal structures form a cityscape when light shines through them, and as outdoor works subject to the movement of the sun and the moon create an everchanging representation of the relationship between nature and urban culture.

My work often begins as self- or family- portrait. Before anything these sculptures—like all boats or skeletons—are like cradles and relate to personal archaeology. They then become cultural portrait and exploration of light, how light passes through a form, so that the sculptures become conduits for the passage of time. The work is figurative, implying the body's presence through its absence, in vessel form. This allows viewers to project themselves into the sculptures rather than experiencing them from the outside only.

Viewers can interact with the forms and enter them physically. The "Ark" sculpture may be inverted to create a "Jonah and the Whale" experience, which is the experience of going into oneself. Many of the drawings and proposals involve vertical boat-like skeletal forms with human gestural qualities which viewers could literally enter. I seek to reflect the way people move, as well as create situations in which they move in a different way.

There are also strong architectural references, as overturned boats formed the structural framing pattern for curved architecture. These are design-based applications for the work and could take a variety of forms. The water meter sculptures and the large "Plan" drawing could be graphically stylized patterns laser cut into steel panels.

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