Echo Valley Ranch & Spa

Guests’ Guide to Artwork

Artist in Residence
Michael D. Blackstock

www.blueecology.com
michael@blueecology.com
A member of the house of Geel, Michael Blackstock of Kamloops is a carver, visual artist, poet, forester and mediator. Blackstock has a Master of Art degree in First Nations Studies and he has served as a member of the UNESCO-IHP Expert Advisory Group on Water and Cultural Diversity.

Blackstock’s most recent book *Oceaness* is a book of social commentary that includes poems, essays and art works. It includes his new theory of Blue Ecology which was developed with Elders, by interweaving their perspective with that of Western Science. The themes of his book are water, ecology, oral history, human rights, music and humour.

**Visual Artist:** Michael began exploring his First Nations heritage through visual art in 1986. He is a Northwest coast Gitxsan artist. He has studied under the Gitxsan Master Carver, Walter Harris, who won the Governor General’s award for his artistic contribution to Canada. Michael expresses his vision through paintings, carvings and photography. Pacific Editions of Victoria has printed Michael’s work over the past 20 years, and he has sold his prints in galleries which include: Hills, Inuit, Ksan, Prince George Friendship Centre, and Hummingbird. A summary of juried art shows and commissions listed below.

- Look 1992, Victoria Regional Art Show: Honourable mention;
- Sooke Fine Art Show 1993: Two pieces selected;
- Central Interior Regional Art Show 1995: Honourable Mention;
- Images and Objects BC Provincial Show 1995;
- Circumpolar Art Show, Prince George Art Gallery, 1995;
- Central Interior Regional Art Show 1996: Honourable mention;
- Selected artist in the BC Lottery Corporation Art Contest 1998;
- First Peoples Collaborative Exchange Program 1999;
- Selected artist for the Kamloops Art Gallery “Solstice Art Show” poster 2002.
- Commissioned logo from the Entymological Society of Canada 2003
- Commissioned logo for the Canadian Tree Improvement Society 2004
- Michael was a trustee on the Kamloops Art Gallery board for six years.
- Echo Valley Resort Commission of a number of carved masks (2011-12)
**Writer:** Michael’s first book *Faces in the Forest: First Nations art created on living trees* (McGill–Queen’s University Press 2001) explores the tree art form within the intended viewing context—the forest. His second book “Salmon Run: A Florilegium of Aboriginal Ecological Poetry” was published by Wyget books in 2006 (3rd edition). Michael has also published several journal and magazine articles:

- *Where is the Trust?: Using Trust Based Mediation for First Nations Dispute Resolution* Conflict Resolution Quarterly (Vol. 19–1, 2001).  
- *Water: ‘...a living, willful, and sacred member of our community?’* FresH2Outlook Magazine (Issue 10, February 2001);


You can find a copy of Michael’s books *Oceaness* and *Faces in the Forest* in the living room of Dove Lodge.
Adams River Salmon Run

This hand carved wall mural sculpture is made from famous British Columbian wood such as Yellow Cedar, Red Cedar and Cherry as well exotic woods such as Zebra wood and Walnut. The piece also uses patinaed copper as the skyline, and water-worn Thompson River rock for the river bottom.

The world famous Adams River Salmon Run has been a strong inspiration for the artist for the past 15 years. Michael has been commissioned by local people to paint pictures of the Salmon Run, and now he has specially created this wonderful piece to represent the life force that drives the salmon home to the Thompson–Okanagan region, year after year. The piece measures 5ft x 3ft in size, and has 32 individually carved salmon.
The great anthropologist Mircea Eliade named a spiritual place where you can travel between worlds as an *axis mundi*. They are rare physical locations which offer a bridge or ladder to another spirit world. Room 12 is one such place. Michael noticed this when he looked at the paint patterns on the walls. Each mask is placed beside the image on the wall that inspired the carving. Michael was tasked with one of the great challenges for any artist. That is, to make the intangible into something tangible. In this case, to allow the guests in Room 12 to see or understand the intangible. These spirits are helpful souls from a by-gone day that have agreed to share this wonderful place with you! The “Chief” was the first face he saw on the wall; “I have never carved a mask like this one, and to be faithful to the image I saw, I had to develop new carving techniques, like cutting the contoured cheek bones.” The next image Michael saw was Lynx Woman near the bathroom door; he viewed her as the matriarch. The warrior was the next mask he created. Michael felt he died here probably a few hundred years ago and was a great warrior. That is why he put diamonds in his eyes. Finally Michael saw the Water Being. He/she is the reason Room 12 is an axis mundi. There is a spring right below this lodge that possesses very powerful medicinal power, attracting these spirits to this room. The “Water Being” is the Guardian of this axis mundi. Secwepemc people who died long ago, travel between this world and the spirit world from this location, and have left their presence on the wall of room 12. The fountain in the spa is a tribute to the spring water that comes from Mount Bowman.
Chief
This mask is made of maple, copper, human hair and cedar bark. It was the first image on the wall that caught the artist’s eye. It is a stately strong image with a headdress. The layered cheek images are strong features that the artist saw in the wall image, and thus inspired him to create a new carving technique that required careful cuts with a power saw to create the initial cheek design. The red cedar bark was collected on Vancouver Island. This spirit was probably a past chief long ago of the Secwepemc Nation, as were the other spirit images in room 12.

Lynx Woman
This was the second image on the wall to catch the artist’s eye. The mask is made of maple, copper, and human hair. It is of a strong feminine fertility spirit, the Lynx. First Nations people hold women in high regard, so this mask shows the regal nature of this woman. The design includes a copper lip labret. There are some subtle Egyptian references in the design of the eye. The artist left the maple bark on the mask to mimic the lynx’s fur.
**Warrior**
This is the third image on the wall to catch the artist’s eye. It is a strong warrior spirit. This mask is made of black walnut, copper, a diamond in each eye and human hair. The artist wanted to use a darker wood which is atypical of Northwest Coast Art to highlight the skin tone of the warrior.

**Water Being**
This is the fourth image on the wall to catch the artist’s eye. This mask is made of ash, copper and human hair. Copper was mined and used by First Nations prior to European contact. The ash was chosen because the wood grain resembles ripples in the water, and the under-cut cheek design is a wave. This image plays a central role in Room 12, as there are very strong undercurrents of water (spring water) flowing right under, near the surface, of this lodge. The water being’s image is in the centre of the wall. The author feels these ancestors inhabited this geographic location where Echo Valley Ranch now resides because of the abundant and available water, and its beauty. Water and this image have a unifying role for this room. Spring water has a strong spirit.
Tree Carvings • Guardians of the Springs

Tree carvings are a dynamic art form, with two artists: the carver and the tree. Michael started the process, and then everyday thereafter, the tree shapes the image with pitch, bark and healing-scar sapwood. Michael wrote a book on tree carvings in 2001 (Faces in the Forest: First Nations Art Created on Living Trees (McGill–Queens Univ. Press)), but it was not till 2012, here at Echo Valley Ranch, when Michael and his sons began to carve them. We Gitxsan people call these tree carving Gytem Gan “Person in the tree.”

Copper Drop Spring
Edge of the fish ponds

This face was carved on July 2-4, 2012 by Michael D. Blackstock to honour the spring that emerges just a few meters away from this spruce tree. Indigenous peoples around the world in places like the Cook Islands, Sweden, the Eastern United States, and British Columbia, Canada have carved images on living trees for thousands of years. Echo Valley Ranch and Michael Blackstock, author of “Faces in the Forest: First Nations Art Created on Living Trees” (2001) have collaborated to revive this art form and to create this guardian of “Copper Drop Spring”. First Nations people show respect to the living spirit of all water but especially that of spring water. This spring is located on the traditional territory of the Secwepemc people of the High Bar Band. Please leave a small offering of tobacco, food or coins as a sign of respect to the spring and this tree carving.
Laughing Spring  
Near the pool building

Carved on a majestic “tree of life” (Aspen or Cottonwood), this carving is meant to evoke smiles from children of all ages playing around the tree. A ceremony lead by Secwepemc Elders blessed this carving in 2012 shortly after it was carved.

Ancient Spring  
On Trail#4

This tree carving on a Douglas-fir tree watches over the spirit of the oldest spring at Echo Valley Ranch. It is meant to greet horseback riders, hikers, bikers and wandering souls. Don’t forget to leave an offering or tobacco, coins or your favourite trinket as a sign of respect to the tree and spring.

A very impressive future living tree mask in the planning stage
Mount Bowman Flowform Fountain
This Brazilian soapstone fountain was carved by Michael to represent the water flowing from the Mable Mountain Range (i.e. a Karst geology), over and under the surface of Echo Valley Ranch. The design was inspired by the work of Theodor Schwenk. He wrote a book “Sensitive Chaos” in which he describes the meandering path of water through Nature’s flowforms. He believed water got its kinetic and spiritual energy from flowing through the natural whirlpools, eddies and meandering path of rivers. On the other hand the human’s straight-line pipes and canals, robbed water’s energy. This fountain is a place to meditate. This fountain also pays homage to the many springs on the Echo Valley Ranch property, where you can also go to meditate. Spring water is a healing water. One of the most important reasons why Echo Valley Ranch has such a special “feel” to it, is because of the underground spring water that flows beneath the whole ranch.

Face in the Tree
This smiling soapstone face watches over the BBQ area as a watchman. Many first nations have a watchman that oversees the village to protect it. This happy character is meant to especially watch over the children.

Sometimes you will see watchman carved atop crest (totem) poles. This face is inset into the bark so the tree will eventually grow right over it, and it will become one with this Douglas-Fir tree. See if you can find it?
Scavenger Hunt

Face in the Tree

Clues:
- You don’t have to leave the Echo Valley Ranch Property;
- You don’t have to wander into the forest;
- The soapstone face is looking at a view of the EVR hay barn, riding ring and Baan Thai; and
- Start at the building with a name that is a synonym for "viewpoint".

Scavenger Hunt Clues:
1. Find a copper number one at "Pump up the volume"
2. Wind your way on well trodded to the gate with the "28"
3. Find a copper number "2" at the place where a whisperer works;
4. Now go just up slope from a leafy artesian;
5. Next look for a place where a copper wonky "3" witnesses travelers pass thru; and
6. Now if you said "Marco" here at the "3" you could hear the carved face say "Polo".

To get your prize you need to bring back photos on your digital camera of the copper 1,2,3 and the carved face. Good Luck!
Native murals cradle Room 12

It is curious and worth noting that Room 12, where the masks created by Michael Blackstock are placed, is cradled by two large wooden murals embedded on the exterior of the Lodge. Esteemed aboriginal artist Theo Mahood of the Gitskan band of the Tsiamshian Nation created both exterior murals a decade before Blackstock noticed the images of aboriginal beings appearing to him inside Room 12; Blackstock carved masks to depict the faces for four of many of these aboriginal beings he envisioned on his visits to the ranch.

Echo Valley Ranch owners Norm and Nan Dove first discovered Mahood’s artwork in Vancouver. Mahood was asked to come up to the ranch to look at creating some possible new work. Mahood had already carved several large murals in the resort of Whistler and his work had been displayed at the prestigious Smithsonian Institute. (http://bcartisan.com/Artists/Mahood/Mahood.htm)

Mahood’s previous work for Echo Valley Ranch included a 7-foot carved totem pole currently found in the lobby of the Lookout Lodge; on the west wall of the Lookout Lodge, a giant bird is heading in a direction that will take it directly over Room 12.

The entire north wall of the lodge, adjacent to Room 12, is covered by a large mural. The top shows the sky and the moon/sun in the sky. A mountain looms in the background with a lake in front of mountain. Water flows from the lake through a ravine, and salmon swims up the river. Either side of the river is rugged terrain. A bear and 42 birds are embedded into the terrain. In the bottom right corner a native Shaman can be seen creating Mother Earth, and cradling Room 12.

Materials used by Mahood to create the north wall mural include driftwood from the west coast, primarily red and yellow cedar. All colouring was done with natural dyes. The artwork took approximately 8 months to create.