

The image shows four bronze paddles standing vertically in a row on a sidewalk. Each paddle is intricately carved with Indigenous designs. The paddles are arranged in a perspective line, receding into the background. The background features a row of bare trees and a cloudy sky. The text 'Indigenous Walking Tour' is overlaid in large, bold, white letters with a black outline. The text 'at the University of Washington' is overlaid in smaller, bold, white letters with a black outline at the bottom.

# **Indigenous Walking Tour**

**at the University of Washington**

Dedicated to Indigenous students; *past, present, and future.*



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This piece of work was written, created, and curated within multiple Indigenous lands and waters. Not limited to but including the Musqueam, Duwamish, Suquamish, Tulalip, Muckleshoot, Tlingit, Haida, and Tsimshian territories

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The beginning of this tour starts with a testament of knowledge. Specifically, Indigenous knowledge systems, and how they are grounded in place on the University of Washington campus. This is especially important as these systems are not sprinkled around like many visitors and guests to the land may view it. These knowledge systems are rooted in the natural landscape that ties language and sacred history into what we call '*Place*'. Place of the first peoples has been intentionally and continuously entangled with colonial assimilation and destruction.

What few people explain though, is how resilient these Indigenous Knowledge Systems are. Ultimately, forgetting to showcase how these Indigenous communities alongside welcomed community members, allies, and all peoples take action and responsibility to prune out historical disenfranchisements.

## Stop 1:



### *Guests from the Great River*

I come from the people of the Lower Columbia River. This is a sentence that states my ancestry to the Chinook people since time immemorial. The Columbia River, or Great River, is one of the largest rivers in North America. It weaves through several states, international borders, and discharges into the largest ocean in the world, the Pacific. I've been there - I've felt the changes in tide and the rush of my family's canoe spit-balling between the river and the ocean. Few people get to experience the gravity of these forces coming together. While commercial tankers and cruise ships get the chance, I'd argue you're a tad bit more connected when it's just you, nine other paddlers, and your skipper in a 36-foot canoe that was made by a community of loved ones. The entrance into the Pacific Ocean opens the curtains to Indigenous knowledge systems of all the Indigenous people on the Columbia River and to the tens of thousands of Indigenous peoples across the Pacific Ocean; each with their unique languages, connections to land, and stories.

Imagine a canoe coming out of the Columbia River, paddling north along the territories of the Washington Coast, turning the corner of Neah Bay, continuing parallel strokes alongside Vancouver Island and Washington, and entering into the Puget Sound.



*The Guest from the Great River* created by Tony Johnson and Adam McIssac photo by Owen L. Oliver

Imagine landing on the tide flats of the Southern Lushootseed speaking Coast Salish people's territory.

Imagine a canoe filled with Pacific Ocean treasures.

Imagine the declaration of intent upon these shores and what Chinook people would be doing here.

Now look up, you don't have to imagine, it's right here.

*The Guest from the Great River* is a piece that describes the intricacies of the land that the University of Washington was built upon. This land wasn't uniquely one peoples'. It's an active eco-region filled with relationships of peoples building on the foundation of landscape learned knowledge. The land explains the trade and movement of stories, language, and ceremony throughout the region. Here, the artists Tony (naschio) Johnson of the Chinook People and Adam McIsaac designed with these elements in mind. This canoe, filled with ten paddlers and the skipper at the stern, is landing at the *Burke Museum of Natural History and Culture*. Each set of larger-than-life paddles cascades a different story from the Chinook People. 3-D printed models were cast in bronze to bring a futuristic vision to this landing. At the back is a single paddle representing the skipper, who is depicted as the matriarch leading this story, community, and canoe.

The tour begins here because *Guests from the Great River* is a welcoming onto campus, and spatially pushes you into the Burke's collections to learn more about Indigenous knowledge systems through artifacts and treasures. In the Burke, you'll find remarkable contemporary Native artists' works in engaging spaces that uplift the voice of the Indigenous people of the area. Look

for the portrait of Chief Seattle in the Burke to tie another visual component to the welcoming of the *Guest from the Great River*.

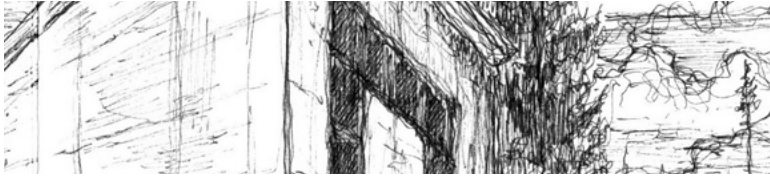


Chief Si'ahl painted by unknown photo by Timothy Kenney

Once you've landed and been welcomed into the community, you'll need a place to warm up, eat, and share your stories. Canoes serve as a connection to water - a transporter of Indigenous knowledge systems through physical movement and energy. Longhouses, on the other hand, serve as a stationary place that welcomes these systems into its halls and continues to saturate the floors and walls with every dance, song, and conversation that occurs.



## Stop 2:



### *Longhouse Welcome*

One of the largest longhouses in Coast Salish lands was in Suquamish territory, across the water from where the present day University of Washington stands. This longhouse was called ulman, which translates from Chinook Wawa (trade jargon) to Old Man House and was home to the Suquamish and Duwamish Chief Si'ahl, who is Seattle's namesake. However, due to assimilation practices, Old Man House was burned down to the ground in 1870 after Chief Si'ahls death. Longhouses didn't return to the Pacific Northwest until a century later. The consequences of these actions lie in the strained ties to culture and the washing of cedar walls from previous generations' traditions.

There was a dream in the Native community at the University of Washington for a space dedicated to the original caretakers of the land, promoting Native student wellness, and fostering the continued of education of Native people. It took years upon years to reach agreements and fight upon fights to reserve a space for Native people to be on campus. Finally in 2015, 145 years after the intentional destruction of Old Man House, the Intellectual House was ceremoniously opened on behalf of the generations that fought for this interjection of Indigenous knowledge systems into everyone's consumption. The celebration was a heartfelt renewal

for the Native community at the University of Washington. The following years saw the Intellectual House become a staple for many events and gatherings. Though it's modeled after a Coast Salish traditional longhouse, it's not limited to Coast Salish traditions, but built with the Coast Salish values of relationships, respect, and reciprocity. With that in mind, throughout the decades of having the Intellectual House as a dream, each and every piece was thoughtfully examined and decided upon amongst the tribal community and Elder consultant teams. On the University of Washington campus, I challenge you to find a building with the same intentions that the Intellectual house provides. (And, if you do find that place, take the time to document it and share it with everyone.) Within the next passages, I will be sharing my own discoveries as a Native student on campus and my connection to the Intellectual House.



"Potlatch at Old Man House" painted by Raphael Coombs, 1897

Longhouses are centralized *Living in Place* beings. *Living in Place* is the notion that you are connected to a place through various physical, emotional, and spiritual elements. *Living in Place* is also the idea that you understand that the connection and intent that goes into a place creates community and fosters healthy relationships.

for example:

I don't remember the first time I smelled cedar  
it must have been my first time gifting a paddle  
no, it must have been the first time I carved that paddle  
no, it must have been the first time I went into the forest and  
touched a cedar tree  
no, it must have been when my father gifted me that paddle  
no, it must have been the first time he carved me a paddle  
no, it must have been the first time he smelled cedar

The smell of cedar is intergenerational, it's connected throughout all of our ancestors and throughout place. That's why the longhouse on campus serves as a safe place for all our people and kin. It reminds us where we've come from and where we'll go. We can relate to it through time, reminding ourselves to live in place.

To build a place like the Intellectual House, you need a relationship and a team that believes in each other. Building a place on Coast Salish lands or Indigenous lands in general means listening to those inter-generational connections. While the dream was in motion, the Elders needed to be informed. The Intellectual House 'House of Knowledge Elder's Committee' consisted of Ed Thomas, Alma Chastain, Connie McCloud, Elaine Grinnell, Lillian Chappell, Andy Joseph Jr., Marylin Wandry, and Vi Hilbert. Vi Hilbert taq<sup>w</sup>šəblu was one of most esteemed Coast Salish Elders who spearheaded Lushootseed revitalization in Washington State

and beyond. Before her passing in 2008 she gifted the Intellectual House with its honored name 'wələbʔaltx<sup>w</sup>'. Lushootseed is the language that Vi Hilbert learned as a child, the language her Ancestors speak, the language steeped in Coast Salish lands, and the language that Chief Si'ahl once spoke in his longhouse. On April 10th, 2009 before any construction of wələbʔaltx<sup>w</sup> began a Land Blessing Ceremony marked the beginning of this intergenerational relationship. At this ceremony, roles were created and responsibilities were ensured.

"In some ways, a land or house blessing is similar to a marriage ceremony. The responsibilities of the various parties are spelled out, and the people who are brought together promise to cherish and protect this union. This is their responsibility as participants in the blessing. Witnesses also have important responsibilities to carry on the stories or legacy of the land for the future generations"(Spoken at Land Blessing Ceremony, April 10th 2009).

The site of wələbʔaltx<sup>w</sup> had permission from the Elders and team to begin construction and soon they were on track to open their doors in the only way they knew how -- by putting on a potlatch and inviting witnesses to watch the Native communities' successful attainment of place.

Chief Si'ahl was no stranger to potlatches. It is without question that potlatches were a factor in how large someone's longhouse was. Old Man House was told to be as long as 600 feet, which meant it not only held many families, but hosted a wide variety of potlatches and ceremonies. Outside could have been seen, on a normal day as a canoe parking lot, just as you'd find transportation outside a wedding or graduation. The longhouse was the final destination for all in the area. The destination for exchange.

To understand the value of Old Man House and longhouses it's necessary to understand the potlatch system. Potlatching is a crucial element of Coast Salish and Northwest Coast traditions and economy. The word 'potlatch' is a gift from the great river, specifically from Chinook Wawa, meaning to 'give away'. Potlatches in these coastal regions were the ultimate sign of wealth through feast and display. Chiefs would be challenged by other high-ranking members or chiefs outside their communities to outdo their potlatches. Once they accepted, they understood the commitment, the business, and distribution of wealth that would occur. Within each potlatch, there might have been a different agenda each night, followed by multiple days of feasting. They all began with the discussion of business between the different parties that were present. Friend or foe, there were always politics involved. After business was discussed, dancing and songs were performed followed by a gift-giving at the end. The gifts served as a helping hand to everyone in the community, with the caveat that if you accept the gift, you knew you had to repay it in the future. Potlatches helped enrich a society that was based in hospitality. Potlatches were so empowering for Indigenous people along the coast that once Western settlers and institutions learned about them they sought to ban them, destroy the regalia, and throw the potlatching perpetrators in jail. This violence against Indigenous people was another outcome of Western culture believing and violently acting on the belief that Indigenous people couldn't be successful if they were 'throwing away' their resources. But in actuality, Native communities were not 'throwing away' but distributing resources across social ranks. The razing of Old Man House represented the attempted extermination of culture and stories that were once spoken into existence to teach the seven generations. Opening wələbʔaltx<sup>w</sup> was nothing short of an act of resistance in the most appropriate way, by putting on a potlatch that would keep the fire lit.



Photo by Owen L. Oliver

In 2015, when wələbʔaltx<sup>w</sup> opened to the public, there was a constant stream of engagement and community building. The ribbon-cutting was inherently tied to the Indigenous connections the campus has - it was no ordinary ribbon, but a cedar ribbon woven by Elders and the caretakers of wələbʔaltx<sup>w</sup>. After the ribbon-cutting, there were opening ceremonies to clean the floor. This marked the ending of the business portion of the potlatch and the partying began. Hundreds of community members conversed while eating indigenous foods. At the opening, they reminisced about old stories and friends. However, it was a hard time for many because the opening of the wələbʔaltx<sup>w</sup> marked the realization that some community members hadn't made it to see the dream realized. It's our job as community members not to forget their stories, but to pass them on to each generation of students and faculty that interact with this place. One of our passed members was Julian Argel. Julian, who comes from the Tsimshian and Haida peoples, grew up with stories of longhouses and it was with



his intentions in mind that grew wələbʔaltxʷ into a reality. Julian worked at the University of Washington for almost 20 years, where he was an outstanding community member who recruited Native students to campus and retained them by explaining the meaning of higher education. I was able to hear Julian's stories when I was just a kid, spending time at the University of Washington while not yet a student. His regalia now sits in wələbʔaltxʷ to remind us that Native students and community members don't do this work for the individual gain, but the collective accomplishment.

This collective work is seen in the annual Tribal Leadership Summit hosted by the University of Washington and the wələbʔaltxʷ staff. Where tribal leaders from all across Washington State attend and air their grievances and demands for the University of Washington administration. The UW President and Tribal Liaison listen to the tribal leaders on issues that affect their tribes, enrolled students, and research that may be conducted on and off tribal lands. This summit also provides a status update for all the American Indian / Alaska Native focused constituents at the University of Washington to talk about their struggles and successes. Equally as important, Native students are encouraged to speak in an open forum, creating a dialogue within the community and the intention of building a stronger Indigenous presence on campus that relates to the Tribal Nations that steward Washington State lands.

These are just a few foundational aspects connected to wələbʔaltxʷ. There isn't a limit to what happens in the longhouse, and each event creates a stronger position for the second phase of the wələbʔaltxʷ project. Initially, the University of Washington promised the Native community a second phase that would be another subsequent longhouse facility that would be solely focused on Native students, Elders, and resource building instead of event hosting. As of 2021, we haven't seen the second phase of the longhouse completed.

The longhouse represents a stationary place of Indigeneity on the University of Washington campus. A place to remember Indigenous success, a place to forget colonial harms, and a place to meet one another. Summed up, it's a place of education. While using this place remember who it was built for and why. Yet, don't stray away from using it yourself if you are non-Native. Continue to learn more about Indigenous people in your community. Remind yourself that the Native leaders that worked so hard to keep the longhouse on track were rewarded. The students who longed for a place that was their own were rewarded.

And lastly, the University of Washington needs to continue to reward Indigenous knowledge and give these knowledge systems the same respect as their Western counterparts.

### Stop 3:



### *A Changing Story*

After being in wələbʔaltx<sup>w</sup>, you should understand that the place and harmonies of the longhouse represent a dream coming to life and a continual story being written by students and mentors. Our next stop on the tour is the 'Aye-Aye-Esh Girl' Mural in Miller Hall. This will help us understand where these dreams and stories are rooted.

On the 3rd floor of Miller Hall, in the Department of Education, stands four panels seamlessly connected on the wall. Painted in collaboration, Toma Villa (Yakama) and Roger Fernandes (Lower Elwha Kallam) tell the Plateau story of the aye-aye-esh girl. The story about the aye-aye-esh girl is about situating yourself with the land as a teacher and a constant reminder that Western knowledge isn't the end-all result of progress, nor should it be the only qualifier of success.

Sit in front of the mural, just like the girl, and discover the intricacies that the artists created. Under further inspection, you find a girl surrounded by the natural world and Ancestors that help guide her learning. You see the aye-aye-esh girl sitting next to grandmother Cedar tree after being sent away from her tribe for not knowing anything. She sits and listens to the tasks that Cedar asks of her.



"Aye-Aye-Esh Girl" painted by Toma Villa and Roger Fernandes 2018

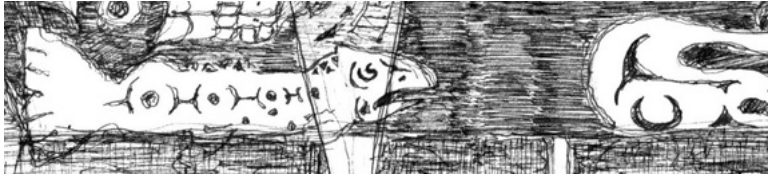


Slowly, but surely, grandmother Cedar teaches her how to weave a basket and recognize designs in the natural world to incorporate them into aye-aye-esh's baskets. The symbols of rattlesnakes slither across the top and the mountains are reflected in the base of her basket. With a proud grasp of the basket, she dunks it into a nearby stream to test if her work will hold water. Unsuccessful with her first renditions of the basket, her third and final basket achieves the skill of holding water. The girl goes back to her village to show off what she has accomplished. At first, her community doesn't believe her, but as the girl tells her story, shows off her watertight basket, and complexity of the design, the doubt, shame, and the name aye-aye esh are taken off of the girl. She isn't shunned as a less intelligent child, but welcomed as a source of knowledge. Her dream of not being the aye-aye esh girl is realized in the land and she's transformed through telling her own story.

This story is about listening and realizing that we all have something to teach each other and that just because something is different doesn't always mean it's bad, or it should be discounted. Throughout life, people learn at different paces and across various mediums, yet we all come together to tell our own stories.

At wələbʔaltxʷ, we saw a dream come to life. The aye-aye esh girl story teaches us how knowledge is transferred from the land. The next stop on this tour is the land itself. Follow me along Stevens Way to stop 4 of the tour to understand the Shoreline Connection.

## Stop 4:



### *Shoreline Connection*

Sit and listen to the birds and plants that sway within the wind of the Union Bay Natural Area. Pristine and natural, isn't it? The aromas of seasonal change are carried throughout the wetland. As a student, I felt myself drawn to the area, especially as a place for meditation, sinking my thoughts into the natural world instead of textbooks. Now close your eyes and imagine, you are placed back a couple hundred years,

years before the Denny Party landed at present day Alki in 1851,

years before Governor Isaac Stevens stained the land with Indian blood and the coercion of treaties,

years before the 1854 treaty of Medicine Creek,

years before the 1855 treaty of Point Elliot,

years before the 1855 treaty of Point No Point,

years before the 1855 treaty of Hellgate,

years before the 1855 treaty of Walla Walla,

years before the 1855 and 1856 treaties of Quinault,

years before you followed the street named after him to get here,

years before there were Western settlers and you feel like a guest on Indigenous land for the first time in your life.

What do you see now?

Is it what you were expecting?

I hope you're a good swimmer.

You are sinking downward as water rises around your peripheral vision, closing the vacuum of visibility. Your feet are still where you last stood on the earth now with nine feet of lake water above you. You propel yourself upwards, into a glide, reaching the surface of the water, but before you can press your fingers through the air on the other side, a hand grabs your wrist, pulling you upward. You see a woman, she pulls you up and you're able to rest your belly on the side of her canoe, pushing yourself up, turning over, and laying on your back. You look up to the woman. Silky black hair flows alongside her woven cedar tunic. You're confused. She brings her paddle to a neutral position resting it parallel to herself. The woman readjusts space on the canoe, moving the various containers holding materials, tools, and food. Pointing to an empty seat, you know she wants you to sit down as she paddles the canoe around what you thought was the Union Bay Natural Area.

She dips her paddle in and out of the water. Pulling forward with a movement that seems foreign to you, the woman executes the fluid motion swiftly. As you look back towards the stern of the canoe, you can see gray smoke billowing towards the sky and turning into the pulse of the clouds. Squinting, you're able to trace the longhouse settlement with your finger. The Indigenous people like a mirage in the distance are smoking fish, drying clothes, and preparing the youth. You realize, it's an active settlement. You blink, University Village flashes momentarily, then you fade back into the People of the Large Lake's world. As you lowering your



finger, the woman humbly says,

## “slu?wił”

*Understand that's the name of the village site that bordered Ravenna Creek and washed into Lake Washington. Now covered up by concrete and capitalism, it may be your favorite destination to eat, play, and shop.*

You shake your head and take in the meaning, looking south towards the bow of the canoe, it glides upon the water, the quietest thing around you. The sounds of frogs ribbiting alongside the marsh and red wing blackbirds with their distinct *conk-la-ree* act as a foghorn into the large lake. You wonder where you are going, but you aren't in control. Slowing to a drift, the woman stops paddling. She takes her paddle, flips the handle towards the water, and inserts it into the muddy soil. This anchors the canoe next to a bank of tule with cattail growing towards the sky. She paddles towards the bank laterally until she can hold onto the land, digging her right hand into the mud.

The woman opens the drawstrings of a woven cedar bag and tosses it towards you. You catch it and keep it open. As the woman straddles between the land and canoe, she begins to harvest tule and cattail from the rich green marsh. While she is harvesting, she exchanges it to her other hand and gives you the plants to stuff the bag with. A while goes by and you notice that this woman is not only fast at collecting, but strategically knows where to harvest. Not in the same spot for too long, not the youngest ones, not the oldest, not the ones hiding in the shade. An almost razor like vision allows her to efficiently pinpoint the plants that need to be

harvested to allow more to grow in the future. After filling three bags worth, you place them in the bow of the canoe. She takes her paddle, pushes off the bank, and you both drift back into the residual current of Ravenna Creek. Not too long after, she places her paddle down, turns towards the marsh that you'd collected from, and without saying anything, she nods and places her palms in and upward, gesturing her appreciation.



Photo by Owen L. Oliver

*Understand that Coast Salish people don't always express 'thank you' with words. Sometimes it's the actions of stewarding the land, renewing relationships towards non-human kin or they simply put their hands up in appreciation.*

Back on route to the mysterious unknown, you find friendship with the woman. Unable to understand each other, you're still able to learn from her emotions. She seems to love this land and care for you as a passenger. The silence in the middle of the lake creates the feeling of a symbiotic environment you wish you'd always had, but this is interrupted by a yell. You notice two men dressed similarly to the woman ahead in the distance. She waves, they wave, you wave. She begins paddling towards the men with no paddles or canoe of their own, just baskets on their backs. The

village site seems so distant, but you can still see the smoke acting as a way point. The woman slows her paddling, taking shorter strokes each time, and lands the canoe along the pebbled shore. She greets the men, conversing with them, and showing each other the food and materials they've collected. Nodding to each other, they work together and pull the canoe onto the land. The woman digs into a berry basket and grabs the biggest salmon berries that she can find and gives them to each person. Ripe and orange like salmon eggs themselves, you hold them in your hands, admiring the consistency of seeds throughout each one. Twirling it in your fingers, the woman raises her hands and nods towards you.

The woman and the two men carry the canoe slowly and surely on each side. The canoe is in the air and able to be transported. Looking back down at your salmon berry, you decide to plop it in your mouth. The combination of sour and sweet override your senses, you close your eyes and savor the moment.

Water rushes away from you. The woman and men carrying the canoe slowly disappear into the forest like watercolors fading. The ground you stand on is exposing itself. The water is disappearing, like being sucked through a straw into nowhere. You look around in a daze, Husky Stadium returns, the 520 bridge reconstructs itself back together, and the smoke of *sluʔwił* disappears into a sunny day.

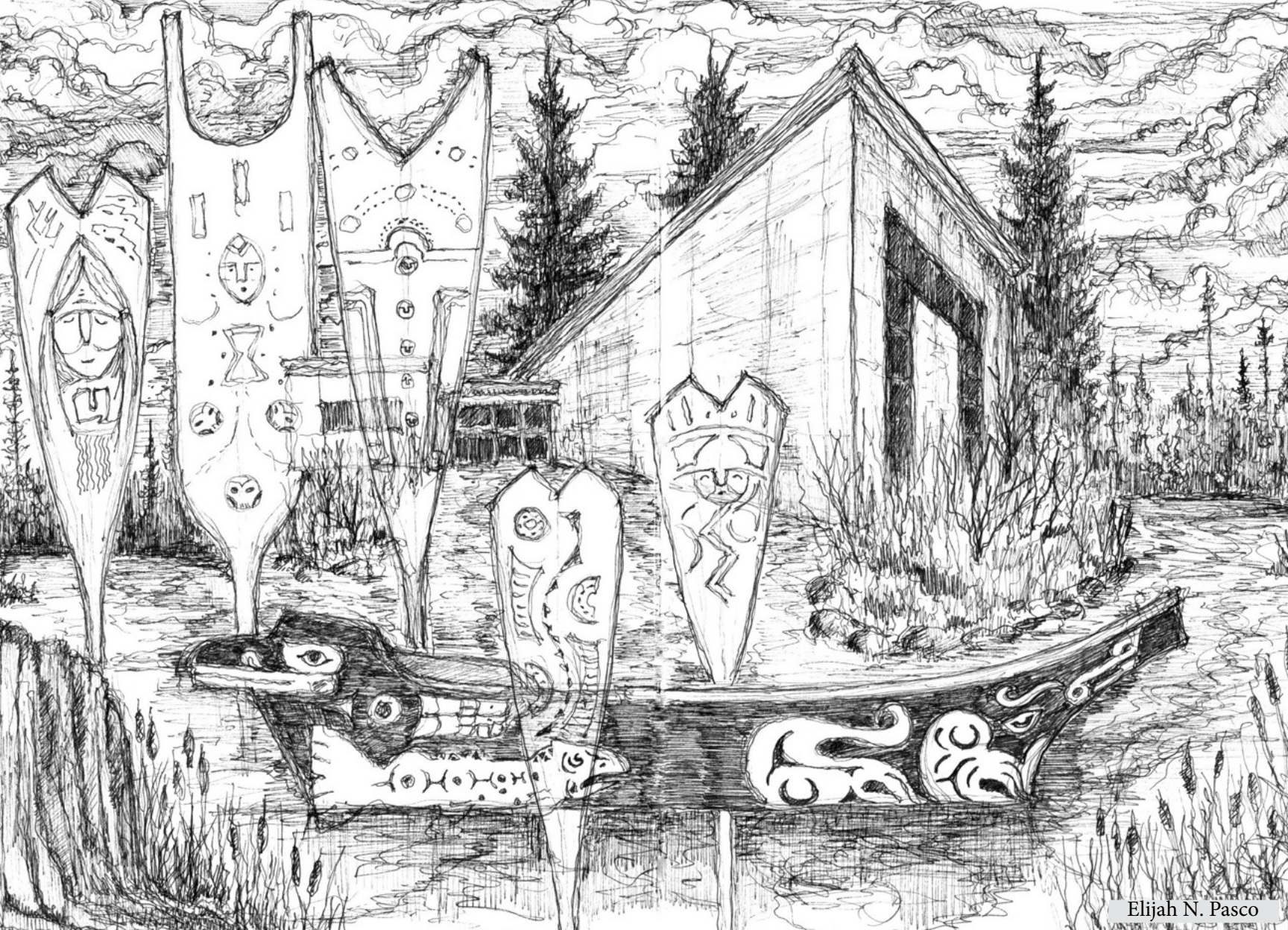
The water is gone, the woman is gone, and you're standing on top of a concrete walkway, metal rails now guard your fall into the Montlake Cut.

*stəx̣ʷugʷił*

*Understand that this is the place called 'Carry a Canoe' stəx̣ʷugʷił which is no longer. The opening of the Montlake Cut in 1917 destroyed this place, lowering the water of the lake. 'Carry a Canoe' was shadowed by writers of history, traders, businessmen, city planners, and instead of carrying a canoe, they carried the misrepresentation of Native history forward. Understand that the opening of the Montlake Cut caused a ripple effect across Duwamish and neighboring lands. Stories are told of Natives in their canoes at the time, sinking with the water miles away from the Montlake Cut much like you had just experienced. Understand that the opening of the Montlake Cut dried up the Black River, rerouted Lake Washington's aquatic system, and changed the course of Seattle forever. Understand that this is just one story out of thousands that are connected to the Montlake Cut.*

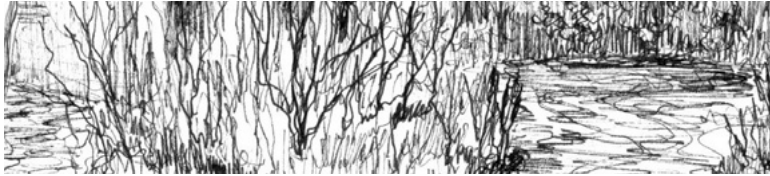
The history of shoreline from the Union Bay Natural Area that stretches to the Montlake Cut is an exploration of how Indigenous knowledge systems are tied to the environment and how colonization has dismissed these knowledge systems' legitimacy, resulting in a story that for a long time was rarely heard. The Shoreline Connection also serves as a teacher of resiliency. To this day, students are surprised to learn that Union Bay Natural Area used to be a garbage dump where cars would back into arranged spots and unload their family garbage into a grove. However, before this, the shoreline was underwater and feeding the people. Today, it gives hope and light to community-driven environmental protections and resource allocations. The shoreline here is a teacher if you're willing to learn and a student if you're able to give back.







## Stop 5:



### *Rest and Relaxation*

Before my first year of college, in freshmen orientation, I was told that there are sixteen libraries across the University of Washington. I was instantly hooked and have filled my time between all of them. As I'm graduating, it has come to my realization that one of the libraries I've found isn't labeled as such.

The UW Medicinal Herb Garden is nestled between Bagley, Life Sciences, and pathways leading to Tahoma Vista and Anderson Hall. The garden's size alone is worth mentioning. At 2.5 acres, the garden uses all the space available. While walking past, you may have missed its complex design. Originally planted by the School of Pharmacy in 1911, this garden has been meticulously manicured for over a hundred years to showcase a library of trees, berries, leafy greens, and all the plants that may complement your studies. Guarded by two carved monkeys looming up high on poles, this garden familiarizes students with plants using plaques that hold scientific names, physical hints, and the ability to use all one's senses to engage with over thousands of plants cataloged in this library. Recently, there has been a push to Indigenize the garden with Lushootseed name tags. This is an important step to continue the advocacy for Indigenous knowledge in this unofficial library. I visited the garden throughout the year, marking the changes in the



Photo by Owen L. Oliver

seasons, and I always get drawn to the same area. Near the entrance marked by the monkeys and across from the Life Science building is a grassy area that encapsulates you with native and non-native plants. Without looking upwards, you'd almost guess you were in a closed rotunda. Yet, looking more closely, you'll find a koi pond. My hidden spot throughout all of the campus was here at the koi pond. I would sit next to it and hearing the koi gulp the air with their curious, never-ending hunt for food. I had found solitude on campus. I encourage you to find a place that accomplishes this for you because without it campus can feel overwhelming and perpetuate a frenzied state. The medicinal garden is one of the most unknown spots on campus, but one of the most requested on this tour. While the connection to the shoreline seems to be more of an intimate get-away, the medicinal garden is just a stone's throw away from the center of campus, making it an accessible spot to relax and take time for oneself. An oasis amidst textbooks and academic readings, the garden creates a tranquil atmosphere for all students, staff, and faculty.



## Stop 6:



### *Building coalitions, Inspiring others*

The Samuel E. Kelly Ethnic Cultural Center (ECC) is the second to last stop on the tour and manifests its purpose in a different way than all of the previous stops. Its connection to nature isn't profound nor is it centered on art. Its purpose stands on the foundation of its predecessors and leaves students empowered to lead their communities. The ECC is about extending a home to students of color at the University of Washington campus and creating lifelong relationships in any way that the students may deem fit. In addition to being a site of many opportunities, it's somewhere on campus that students may finally see someone that looks just like them.

The year was 1968 and America was in turmoil. It was the height of the Vietnam War, Martin Luther King Jr. had just been assassinated, and students protested across the country advocating for peace and civil rights. A few of the UW students involved brought the issues to the UW's President at the time - Dr. Charles Odegaard. Members of the Black Student Union occupied the President's office and awaited his signature on their list of demands for underrepresented students of color. One demand was that the University create an office for minority students and their pursuits. Another demand required the University to fill the absence of a

cultural center felt by the underrepresented students of color. Up until this point, over 107 years after the University of Washington was established, there had been no official place or funding for students of color to come together in community. The ECC brought about its own community, and most importantly, retained these students.

In 2013, a new renovated ECC was opened and honored Dr. Samuel E. Kelly, who was the founding Vice President for the Office of Minority Affairs and Diversity. The new ECC is a continuation of a home for many students with memories made in the first ECC that didn't fade but were rejuvenated. In the original ECC, there hung 22 murals from all of the diverse student groups on campus. Each with its own stories. These murals were preserved and reinstalled in the new ECC.

If you aren't a person of color, I respectfully ask you to not enter the ECC, but admire it from the outside. This is a home away from home for the students it serves and doesn't need any uninvited traffic. However, if you are invited by a community member of the ECC, revisit this tour and learn from the stories inside.

When you enter the ECC, you may find yourself in awe of the open design. It gets loud in here, both metaphorically and physically, the ECC only amplifies the community members' discourse. As you make your way through the center staircase, pay attention to the rooms and their purposes, whether it's offices or spaces dedicated to communities. For instance, the Native undergraduate organization -*First Nations*- has their own office for having meetings and collecting past years' history, allowing them to have the ability to create their own aesthetic.

A key aspect of having your community's aesthetic is the

representation of art and even though I previously said that art isn't the center piece of this building, the absence of art for ethnic groups impacts our storytelling. Throughout the ECC, the murals take on legacies. Each from a different community. Some are small and some take up a whole wall, yet they all bring about both history and contemporary elements, mimicking the traditions and innovations of the students who enter.

As you wander through the ECC for the first time or hundredth, think about the representation, diversity, and wealth of the communities that belong here. Fixate on a mural and study it as you would have at the *Shoreline Connection*, *aye-aye esh Girl*, *wələbʔaltxʷ*, or the *Guest from the Great River*. Try connecting them - any way you'd like. A starting place can be through senses or memories. The way that I like to think of this exercise is by imagining a physical and an artistic expression of emotion being pulled together through knowledge systems, like yarn woven into a blanket. Each thread that's held is tightly grasped with intentionality. Each art piece has a reason for being here. There's no error or miscalculation because each thread has its unique thought brought alive by the community itself. Once we can understand that these art pieces are stories, communities, and dreams, we can begin to understand the ECC's purpose of cradling solidarity between students and their communities.

The ECC may just technically be a building, but it's what's inside that allows for people to come together; events, advocacy, mixers, and feasts are shared among the members of the ECC. They are preserved through the murals, like sponges soaking up the next generation of leaders' voices and ambitions. If the traditional definition of solidarity isn't happening between groups at a given time, it's still present within the murals, even if the students aren't paying attention. If you work together and uplift each other, the

results go beyond the visuals and will be an addition to everybody's stories. This is why when I enter the ECC and engage in community time or meet new people I am reminded of a rule I was taught as a young Coast Salish boy on the annual Canoe Journey. This rule in particular has guided my college experience and opened doors I never knew were there. The rule follows as:

Every story is important. The bow, the stern, the skipper, the power puller in the middle – everyone is part of the movement. The elder sits in her cedar at the front, singing her paddle song, praying for us all. The weary paddler resting is still ballast. And there is always that time when the crew needs some joke, some remark, some silence to keep going, and the least likely person provides.

The gift of each enriches us all, the gifts of storytelling, dancing, sharing cultural values, talking about traumatic experiences, empathizing, and reclaiming. The gift of each enriches us all because we have a place on campus envisioned by the ones who didn't.

## Stop 7:



### *Onward*

As a child growing up in Seattle, I spent a lot of time in the Husky Union Building (HUB). More often than not, classmates of mine would have their birthday parties in the game room downstairs and I would be lying if I said it hadn't steadily increased my bowling skills. Additionally, I spent a lot of time at the HUB because of my father. My father, Marvin E. Oliver, was an Emeritus Professor in American Indian Studies for over 30 years. I was occasionally brought along to his classes. He would then take me to the HUB to get a meal. I like to think that it was his way to get me to attend the University of Washington, as I got to pretend to be the student I am now at such a young age.

The HUB today was renovated in 2012 and an important call to Native artists was sent out to tie the modern space with the original caretakers traditions. As you enter the West entrance of the HUB, look to each side and be greeted by the stories of *North Wind* and *Storm Wind*. These story panels, carved by Shaun Peterson (Puyallup), tell the stories of the original caretakers of the land, the Duwamish People. Through the mythologic stories shown here, it's a stark reminder that Native art is rarely front and center despite Native peoples' desire for it. Many people who pass by to get to their next class are staring down at their phones and don't see the



*Raven's Journey* created by Marvin Oliver, photo by Owen L. Oliver

welcoming diversity and honoring storytelling traditions. Turn the corner to the right, and you're lead towards the end of this tour.

A canoe appears to sit in motion along the south end of the HUB, waiting for the viewer to take a paddle and join along. Raven at the bow guiding the canoe and Wolf sitting in the back anchoring the canoe to the representation of place. *Raven's Journey*, carved by my father and installed in 2015, represents the journey that students embark after their studies at the University of Washington. Many people have their own interpretations of the canoe. Through this tour and my reflections on the University of Washington campus, we've learned about my relationship with canoes and how canoes have been influenced by this natural landscape we call Coast Salish lands. *Raven's Journey* is a fundamental part of the HUB as a building because it ties together the stories we've listened to throughout this tour and displays them in a multi-medium art fixture. Using red cedar and glass is not just pushing the bounds of Indigenous art but situating it within traditional and contemporary motifs. For Native students passing by it, it represents an affirmation of being true to who you are, where you can be both traditional and contemporary and that you don't have to walk in two worlds, as institutions often imply. For my father, when specifically asked about *Raven's Journey*, he describes the physical canoe as "a means of sharing... food, regalia .... our environment. It is critical to make the canoe move. That means you need to have paddles. Those paddles are your education. And it takes a collective effort for your education. The canoe is your journey. You'll be pullers, and as you graduate you will be a skipper. You will have your family, your friends, and the career. Those are the ones that will help you make it work. There is days you can paddle far. There's days you cannot paddle. It's an amazing, exciting venture"(Visible on Ancestral Lands).

For him, the canoe was a metaphor of how to live your life and a mode of your own transportation. He'd always say 'find your own canoe and share your paddles with all'. For Coast Salish people, sometimes it's not about saying anything, but it's about the intentions placed within our Indigenous knowledge systems. This is why the harms of Western institutions cut deeper than just what one sees upon the land itself. This isn't just because our land was hurt, our stories silenced or assimilation tactics being forced upon us, it's because these systemic intentions placed against us were meant to be a constant reminder that we're less than people. Western society was built on the belief that there is no guilt in attempting to exterminate Indigenous knowledge systems, which in turn acted to kill us through deprivation. However, through this tour, we've seen Indigenous knowledge systems at their best, being revitalized by each generation of students that passes through this University. We must make sure that the passing of the information is respectful and appropriate alongside the original caretakers' stories. Once this is done, we'll discover that Indigenous futures benefit all.

This may end here, but the stories that have been collected will continue to grow just as they have since time immemorial. My tour shouldn't be seen as an absolute guide of Indigenous UW, but as a starting point to the dozens of other nearby places and stories I didn't include.



Indigenous Walking Tour  
at the University of Washington

Owen L. Oliver

Owen Lloyd Oliver (Quinault / Isleta Pueblo) comes from the Chinook people of the Lower Columbia River and the Isleta of the Southwest Pueblos. Owen graduated from the University of Washington in spring 2021 with a double major in American Indian Studies and Political Science. Through these majors and experiences at the UW he's been able to do a range of advocacy work on and off campus. Mainly focused on Indigenous education and 'Place' learning, Owen hopes to be able to weave more of his creative writing into all of his political work in the future.

You can find Owen across all socials @owenloliver or owenloliver.com

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