

Artists' Bios, Courtesy of Stonington Gallery

Tom Hunt (Kwakiutl/Kwakwaka'wakw)

The son of Hereditary Chief George Hunt and Mary Hunt, Tom D. Hunt is a member of the Kwakwaka'wakw Nation who was born in Victoria in 1964. Tom began apprenticing in Kwakwaka'wakw art with his father at the age of twelve and later worked with his brother George Hunt Jr. When entering his teenage years Tom spent several summers in Campbell River working with his maternal grandfather the late Sam Henderson. Tom has also been an assistant carver to Susan Point on several of her large sculptures. He moves comfortably from massive wood sculptures to very small, intricate pieces.

Rande Cook (Kwakwaka'wakw)

Chief Rande Cook (K'alapa) was born May 1977 in culture-rich Alert Bay, a small village on the northern tip of Vancouver Island. Surrounded by the beauty of land and art, Rande found the passion of creativity at an early age. With the strong teachings from his grandparents Gus and Florence Matilpi Rande learned the strong values of life and culture. In 2008 Rande inherited his grandfathers chieftainship and now carries the name Makwala, which means moon. Rande is very involved in his culture and has hosted a Potlatch and two feasts for his family and community. Rande is also known for his traditional dancing and singing in Potlatches.

Rande has worked with many great mentors such as John Livingston for his mastery in wood sculpting, Robert Davidson in metal work, Calvin Hunt for his amazing craftsmanship in wood and most recently Repousee and Chasing master Valentin Yotkov. Rande has been expanding his capacities with new creative ideas and in 2010 traveled to Italy to study under Yotkov. Most recently he travelled to New York to study in Yotkov's studio to increase his craft in Repousse and Chasing. Rande pushes himself in all his mediums looking for perfection of each technique. Rande's works can be seen in many galleries in the United States and Canada, and is now in collections around the world.

Rande now resides in Victoria where he continues to push himself in his creativity by finding many new inspirations in new mediums.

Dennis Allen (Skokomish (Twana))

Dennis Allen is a member of the Skokomish (Twana) Tribe. He was born in Shelton, Washington in 1935. He is the son of William Allen and Rose Pulsifer (Allen). His grandfather, Henry Allen, was one of the last carvers on the Skokomish Reservation and also one of the major informants for an extensive anthropology study of the Twana (Skokomish) people. Dennis has lived on the Skokomish Reservation all of his life. At the age of seven, his mother died, and he went to live with his aunt for three years.

Then he was sent to boarding school for a year. At the age of eleven, he returned to the Skokomish Reservation to live with his grandmother (Katie Pulsifer). His grandmother was blind so he took on the role of being her provider and caregiver. At an early age he learned how to hunt and fish, not only to provide food for himself and his grandmother, but also to give to other community members in need. While living with his grandmother he was exposed to his culture in every aspect. He made baskets with different elders, prepared traditional foods, gathered materials and medicines, listened to legends, and took part in canoe carving. He also learned how to build boats, (which entailed steaming wood). This was his first encounter with bending wood.

Throughout his adult life, Dennis was a logger and a fisherman, until he decided to become an artist. For years he watched his son, Andy Peterson, carve and paint thinking he personally would never be able to accomplish making such beautiful art. As time passed, he watched his Andy, Andy's wife, Ruth, and their children create Native art in many different forms, and he became inspired. So Andy showed him a few different designs and he took them home and worked on them and made some changes. At that point, he decided to learn how to make steam-bent boxes and drums and started grafting on designs and painting them. After being involved in different art forms for years, he decided to expand his art career and start carving. Allen's work is inspired by the many legends that have been passed down to him. He creates from his heart and enjoys every piece that he creates. He looks forward to expanding his career in many different mediums and dimensions. He continues to be an active community member and feels honored to take part in the revival of Salish art.

Preston Singletary (Tlingit)

The art of Preston Singletary has become synonymous with the relationship between European glass blowing traditions and Northwest Native art. His artworks feature themes of transformation, animal spirits, and shamanism through elegant blown glass forms and mystical sand carved Tlingit designs. Singletary learned the art of glass blowing by working with artists in the Seattle area including Benjamin Moore and Dante Marioni. As a student and assistant, he initially focused on mastering the techniques of the European tradition. His work took him to Kosta Boda (Sweden) where he studied Scandinavian design and met his future wife. Throughout his over thirty years of glass blowing experience, he has also had opportunities to learn the secrets of the Venetian glass masters by working with Italian legends Lino Tagliapietra, Cecco Ongaro, and Pino Signoretto. In 2010, he was awarded an honorary Doctor of Arts degree from the University of Puget Sound. Recognized internationally, Singletary's artworks are included in museum collections such as The British Museum (London, UK), The Museum of Fine Arts (Boston, MA), The Seattle Art Museum (Seattle WA), the Corning Museum of Glass (Corning, NY), the Mint Museum of Art and Design (Charlotte, NC), the Heard Museum (Phoenix, AZ), and the Smithsonian Institution (Washington, DC). Singletary maintains an active schedule by teaching, lecturing, and exhibiting internationally. In 2009, the Museum of Glass in Tacoma, WA, launched a major mid-career survey of his work, entitled Preston Singletary: Echoes, Fire, and Shadows. In 2018 he launched a new traveling exhibition with the Museum of Glass, titled Raven

and the Box of Daylight, which pushed the boundaries of glass as a medium for storytelling.

Taylor Wily Krise (Squaxin Island)

Taylor Krise is a self-taught artist from the Squaxin Island Tribe. He is primarily a carver, but also produces drawings and digital designs for use on clothing and print work.

Krise is a fisherman and geoduck diver and lives with his partner and children on the Olympic peninsula. He is proud to continue learning about his heritage and to carry forward his culture in his everyday life and through his artistic practice.

Susan Point (Musqueam)

Susan A. Point is a Coast Salish artist from Musqueam, a First Nation in Vancouver, British Columbia. Born in 1952, from childhood Susan has been taught the traditional values of her culture and legends of her people by her many aunts and uncles, but above all by her late mother, Edna Grant-Point, and her late uncle, Dominic Point.

Susan began her artistic career in January 1981 designing and creating gold/silver jewelry. At this time, Coast Salish art was an almost lost art form (due to European contact) therefore much of the native artwork produced and sold through various galleries and museums consisted of northern First Nations art. Eager to learn more about her own peoples art style, Susan chose to concentrate on the traditional designs and elements created by her ancestral artisans.

Through research and consultation with various museums and libraries (both in Canada and the U.S.), Susan began her study on the design and art style of traditional Coast Salish artifacts. Consulting with her uncle, Professor Michael Kew, at the University of British Columbia, who focused in "Coast Salish Art and Culture", Susan then began her career as a Coast Salish artist (representing "all" of her Coast Salish peoples) creating designs reflecting traditional images of the past in jewelry, limited edition serigraphs, and paintings. She takes much of her imagery from the spindle whorl an elaborately carved bone or wood disk that was used in the spinning of wool by Coast Salish women.

Coast Salish women have used the spindle whorl for centuries to spin their mountain goat wool into yarn. The oldest whorls discovered by archaeologists were carved from stone. Shell, bone, and whale vertebra were also used, but wood became the most common material from which they were made. Spindle whorls consist of a circular disk and a center pole. They came in various shapes and sizes; the size of the disk and the center pole determined the thickness of the diameter for the strands of yarn.

Ironically, although Susan researched and tried to understand the art style of her ancestors, her very first two-dimensional image using the silkscreen process was a "contemporary" print entitled "Salmon".

Over the past 3 decades, Susan has been instrumental in re-establishing Coast Salish art both in Canada and the United States, drawing inspiration from the images of her ancestors and commencing the use of non-traditional materials and techniques in paper, glass, bronze, wood, concrete, polymer, stainless steel, and cast iron; Inspiring a whole new generation of Northwest Coast artists. Susan's biggest reward has been the opportunity to meet elders and teachers from other communities around the world, and to see the current renaissance in Coast Salish art and culture.

As a result of Susan's willingness, drive, and love of experimentation, she has been awarded numerous public art commissions, including building facades and large sculptures in Canada and the U.S. To name a few, these large scale works welcome visitors at the Vancouver International Airport, Stanley Park in Vancouver, B.C., the National Museum of the American Indian in Washington, D.C., the U.B.C. Museum of Anthropology as well as numerous public buildings and corporate developments paying tribute to the native peoples that once inhabited these lands as well as all peoples from the four corners of the earth (past, present and future) who also share and inhabit these same lands. Susan also has collections worldwide in various museums as well as within homes of private clientele.

For Susan's hard work over the years, in educating all people on Coast Salish art, which is unique to the lower mainland of Vancouver, the southern tip of Vancouver Island and the North Coast of Washington State, she has been awarded the Order of Canada, in addition to a National Aboriginal Achievement Award, a YWCA Woman of Distinction Award, a B.C. Creative Achievement Award, appointed to the Royal Academy of Arts, was elected to the International Women's Forum, and has received four Honorary Doctorates from the University of Victoria, Simon Fraser University, University of B.C. and Emily Carr University of Art and Design.

Amber Spindel (Port Gamble S'Klallam)

Amber Spindel was born and raised in Washington, she is a Port Gamble S'Klallam Tribal member. Her passion for native design originated in her childhood; growing up around the artwork in the community, as well as the many artists in her family. Amber was able to learn and practice different mediums including weaving, painting and design at an early age.

Amber graduated with a BFA from DigiPen Institute of Technology in Redmond, WA. Combining her knowledge, experience and skills in fine art, digital painting and design she creates a blend of traditional and modern Northwest art. Her use of traditional shapes, modern technology and love for pop art allowed her to push the boundaries and weave together elements from each part of her artistic passions. Breathing her designs to life with dynamic compositions and vibrant splashes of color.

To this day she works in several types of mediums, including acrylics, watercolors, charcoal and digital.

Marie Alfreda “Freda” Diesing (Haida, 1925 – 2002)

Freda Diesing was a Haida artist from Prince Rupert, BC. She was given the Haida name Skil Kew Wat, ‘magical little woman’, a name that reflects the influence and power of her talent.

One of the first female carvers on the modern northwest coast, Freda began her carving career at the age of 42. She studied at the Vancouver School of Art and at the Gitanmaax School of Northwest Coast Indian Art at ‘Ksan Village.

In the 1960s, Diesing and a handful of other artists were responsible for the re-awakening of Northwest Coast art and culture. She worked with other master artists including Robert Davidson, Dempsey Bob, and Tony Hunt. In the 1980s, her work was included in the ground breaking exhibition “Legacy – Tradition and Innovation in Northwest Coast Indian Art”, assembled by the Royal British Columbia Museum, and exhibited internationally, bringing awareness and appreciation to her culture’s art and history to the world.

Diesing was an exceptional carver, teacher and mentor. Her students include many of the most acclaimed artists working in First Nations art today. She generously contributed many works of art to local communities.

In 2000, she was awarded an honorary diploma from Northwest Community College. In 2002, she received a National Aboriginal Achievement Award and an honorary doctorate from the University of Northern British Columbia.

Qwalsius-Shaun Peterson (Puyallup/Tulalip)

Qwalsius – Shaun Peterson is a renowned Coast Salish artist and a member of the Puyallup Tribe who has been practicing his craft since 1996. Peterson was born in Puyallup, Washington in 1975. He began pursuing the art of his Native heritage shortly after graduating from high school. He works in wood, glass, metal, and digital media, embracing historical and contemporary influences throughout. In 2008, Seattle Art Museum mounted “S’abadeb, The Gifts: Pacific Coast Salish Art and Arts”, a major exhibition of historical and contemporary artwork which he contributed to. In the fall of 2005 the artist received the Native name that belonged to his Great Grandfather; Qwalsius. In the tradition of receiving the name Peterson accepted responsibility to honor not only his immediate family through his art, but the community of which he is part, as well as the ancestors who brought the art to where it is now. In 2010 Peterson’s ambitious 20 ft tall, Salish-style “welcome pole” was raised in Tacoma, WA in Tollefson Plaza. As part of a public art collaboration between the City of Tacoma, the Tacoma Art Museum and the Puyallup tribe, it was ten years in the making. He currently serves on TAM’s board of trustees. Peterson has recently been commissioned by the city of Seattle to create a permanent monumental work for the city’s waterfront project. It consists of cedar and bronze in the form of three figures in the ancient sculptural style standing on concrete bases with decorative elements that honor the Coast Salish textile art tradition. Most recently, he is working on a permanent installation for Kobe, Japan

and three major works for his tribal community. The approach uses a mixture of traditional and modern materials to showcase that Native art can honor the past in the present with modern innovation. The artist states, "Innovation is part of tradition because, as storytelling teaches us, the hero is often the one in question for making us change what we thought was the way. Art is just an extension of that, always in motion." He has recently collaborated on a collection of re-imagined Coast Salish myths with writer Andrea Grant, entitled "Killer Whale-Wolf & the Isle of Women." The Coast Salish people of the Northwest have historically believed that they were surrounded by supernatural beings interfering with the natural world. In their culture, spirits were connected to all living things. Their customs, beliefs, and history were passed down orally through stories, songs, and dances. This illustrated collection is a modernization of some of these traditional Coast Salish stories. "Native people have survived many obstacles with attempts to erase them from history," Peterson says. "I am filled with pride knowing the work I make has a history that the ancestors of the land will relate to and the coming generation will grow up with, and bridge that gap as we continue to survive, as we always do."

Jim Schoppert (Tlingit, 1947-1992)

A versatile contemporary artist, Jim Schoppert expressed his Tlingit heritage through sculpture, painting, etching, drawing, and carving masks and wood panels. He received a BFA from the University of Alaska/Anchorage in sculpture/printmaking and an MFA from the University of Washington in sculpture.

His abstract paintings are inspired largely by the "pictographs" drawn on ivory by the coastal Eskimos, before 1800. He described his carved panels, which are typically clean pure shapes with smooth finishes, as "minimal art." His masks are interpretations of native ceremonial pieces, vividly painted and usually feathered.

Throughout his career, Schoppert was actively involved in the development of native art. He was inspired by a revitalization of interest in various forms. "It is a spiritual reawakening, not political or economic, it's purely intuitive rebirth." Represented in private and corporate collections worldwide, James Schoppert was truly one of the most innovative and talented artists of our time.

Maynard Johnny Jr. (Penelakut/Kwakwaka'wakw)

Maynard Johnny Jr. was born April 4, 1973 in Campbell River, British Columbia. He is of Penelakut (Coast Salish) and Kwakwaka'wakw descent and has been designing Native art since the age of seventeen. His paintings and serigraphs exemplify the gracefulness of the Coast Salish two-dimensional design system. Being more of a painter than a carver, the elegance of line and boldness of color in Maynard Johnny Jr.'s art has made an important contribution in bringing these ancient forms into the contemporary realm. Johnny's work has been strongly influenced by Robert Davidson, Susan Point, Mark Henderson and Art Thompson.

Tom LaFortune (Tsawout First Nation)

KAtēwhaḡet, Tom LaFortune, is from STAUTW (Tsawout First Nation). He has ancestral ties to many nations of what's known, for now, as southern Vancouver Island.

Tom has been carving since he was 11 years old, and his decades of work includes masks, rattles, paddles, dishes, talking sticks, single figures, and countless story poles.

Tom's esteemed designs can be found in collections the world over, and he typically has many projects on the go. His most notable works include: the Harvest Time and Owl Spirit poles completed for Duncan's City of Totems project; a CBC commissioned totem pole broadcasted in the 1994 Commonwealth Games; a single owl figure overlooking the Ross Fountain at the world-famous Butchart Gardens in Victoria; S'ael, a twenty-five foot pole completed as part of Royal Roads University's 75 years of changing lives celebrations; and a Salish archway in Fort Rodd Hill.

(Biography sourced from https://wsanec.com/avada_portfolio/tom-lafortune/)

Allie High (Tsimshian/Haida/Aleut)

Allie High was born in Ketchikan, Alaska. Allie is Aleut and a Tsimshian Raven Killerwhale crest Haida from Massett, B.C. Her great grandparents were among the first to follow Father Duncan to establish New Metlakatla in the Alaska territory. Ms. High apprenticed with Jack Hudson of Metlakatla, Alaska in 1984 through the Alaska State Council on the Arts traditional Native arts apprenticeship grant. She took additional university classes at the University of Alaska in Juneau, Alaska, which included mask making with Marvin Oliver, Northwest Coast Indian Design with Bill Holm, tool making with Nathan Jackson, and spruce root basketry with Delores Churchill. She has a Master's degree in interdisciplinary studies (art, theater, and sociology) from the University of Texas in Tyler, Texas. She also has a bachelor's degree in art education from the University of Oregon. She has taught art in public schools in Alaska and Texas as well as University courses in Alaska and Louisiana. Allie has been an artist in residence and lecturer in museums and other cultural venues. Alaska Airlines, the Anchorage Historical, and Fine Arts Museum, the United States Department of Agriculture, Alaska State Parks, and private collectors have purchased Allie's artwork. She has shown her work locally, nationally and participated in an international show. Her work was recently included in the exhibit "Alaska Passé/Présent" in the Musée Boulogne-sur-Mer, France, a large group exhibition of Alaska's most important contemporary artists. Allie's particular passion has been Northwest Coast Indian Theater. She has made masks for the Juneau, Alaska-based Naakahidi and Raven's Voice Theater.

Michael Nicoll Yahgulanaas (Haida)

Michael Nicoll Yahgulanaas' wide-ranging artistic practice explores themes of identity, environmentalism and the human condition. Influenced by both the tradition of Haida iconography and contemporary Asian visual culture, he has created an artistic practice that crosses diverse cultures, generations, and disciplines. "Haida Manga" is the innovative combination of Haida formline design and Japanese comics (manga) to create a pan-Pacific narrative art form. He made his American debut in 2015, showing his monumental work RED: A Haida Manga at the Seattle Art Museum as part of their exhibition Indigenous Beauty, with a concomitant solo exhibition at Stonington Gallery. He created lectures and programming on Haida Manga at the American Museum of Natural History in New York the same year. In July 2015 he was an invited guest at the first Seattle Art Fair, and his work was seen across the city on Art Fair billboards.

Yahgulanaas uses art to communicate a world view that, while particular to Haida Gwaii, his ancestral North Pacific archipelago, is also relevant to a contemporary and internationally-engaged audience. Working in multiple forms including painting, sculpture and illustrated publications, his artistic practice is acclaimed for its vitality and originality.

Raised in Delkatla, Haida Gwaii, Yahgulanaas began working as an artist after many decades in the leadership of the Haida Nation's successful campaign to protect its people's indigenous culture and environment. In the past decade, Yahgulanaas' work has been presented in museums across Canada and all over the world, including at international exhibitions in Asia, Australia, the Middle East and Europe. His art works are in numerous public and private collections including the British Museum (London, England), the Vancouver Art Gallery (Vancouver, Canada), the Glenbow Museum (Calgary, Canada) and the Museum of Anthropology (Vancouver, Canada). His large sculptural works are part of the public art collection of the City of Vancouver in Canada. In 2011/2012, Yahgulanaas was the Audain Professor in Contemporary Arts of the Pacific Northwest at the University of Victoria.

Yahgulanaas' publications include A Tale of Two Shamans (2001), The Last Voyage of the Black Ship (2002), Hachidori (2005), the internationally awarded Flight of the Hummingbird (2008), RED, a Haida Manga (2009), The Canoe He Called Lootas (2010), and Old Growth (2012). He is also the illustrator of David Suzuki's The Declaration of Interdependence: A Pledge to Planet Earth.

Joe (Wahalatsu?) Seymour Jr. (Squaxin Island/Pueblo of Acoma)

Joe (wahalatsu?) Seymour, Jr. is the son of Joe Sr. and Faye Seymour. Joe was born in Albuquerque, NM. He was formally trained as a commercial diver at the Diver's Institute of Technology in Seattle, WA in 2002.

Joe's ancestral name, wahalatsu?, was given to him by his family in 2003. wahalatsu? was the name of his great grandfather William Bagley.

Joe started his artistic career by carving his first paddle for the 2003 Tribal Journey to Tulalip. Also in 2003, he carved his first bentwood box. After the Tulalip journey, he then learned how to stretch and make drums.

Joe participated in the international gathering of Indigenous Artists, PIKO 2007, in Hawai'i. He also participated in the Te Tihi, 4th Gathering of Indigenous Visual Artists, in Rotorua, New Zealand, in 2010.

“In my career, I’ve worked with glass, photography, Salish wool weaving, prints, wood, and rawhide drums. I’ve been very fortunate to have a community of artists that I’m able to work with and who are very supportive of my career. If it were not for their caring and sharing of ideas, I would not be the artist that I am today.

“I hope that as I continue in my artistic career, I can pass on the teachings and nurturing spirit that have been shown to me.”

David R. Boxley (Tsimshian)

David Robert Boxley is an esteemed Ts'msyen artist from Metlakatla, Alaska. Born on July 27, 1981, David Robert is the eldest son of the renowned carver David Albert Boxley.

From a very young age David Robert was passionate and proud of his culture. David Robert began carving under the instruction of his father at six years old, and around this same time he also began to travel around the United States to assist his father in raising totem poles and teaching people about Ts'msyen culture.

As an adult, he has continued to express the love and respect he has for Ts'msyen culture through his art, cultural performance, and teaching. David Robert's elegant design style is drawn from a strong tradition of Ts'msyen carving and design, and has been heavily influenced by the teachings of his father. Since 2009, David Robert has carved alongside Haida artist Robert Davidson, and with his guidance, David Robert has honed his craft to compare with the very best in Northwest Coast art.

In addition to carving fulltime, every year David Robert and his father lead their dance group, the Git-Hoan Dancers, in performances around North America. In addition to performing at the annual Eiteljorg Museum Indian Market and Festival in Indiana, the Git-Hoan Dancers have spent time in New York, Santa Fe, Haida Gwaii, Los Angeles, North Carolina, Vancouver, Portland, Seattle, Anchorage and Italy. He has taught S'malgyax (Ts'msyen language), Ts'msyen culture, and Northwest Coast design in his hometown of Metlakatla, as well as in Anchorage, Juneau and Seattle.

David Robert is well respected for his artistic abilities, and for being one of the most prominent Native leaders of his generation. In 1982, David Robert's father was the first man to hold a potlatch in his village of Metlakatla in modern times. At twenty years of age, David Robert followed in his father's footsteps by being the first of his generation to hold his own potlatch.

In 2012 he and his father carved a 22-foot totem pole for the Smithsonian National Museum of the American Indian, where it is on display in the atrium as part of their permanent collection.

Alano Edzerza (Tahltan)

The Tahltan nation is located in the North West corner of British Columbia, Canada, and is the largest traditional territory in the province. Tahltan culture reflects a mix of both Athabascan and Coastal traditions. They have two clans: *Tsesk'iye* (Raven clan) and *Ch'iylene* (Wolf clan). Alano Edzerza belongs to the Raven clan and feels a deep connection to the Tahltan creation story featuring the Raven.

He has been an artist since he could hold a pencil and received a sculpture award at the age of thirteen from the school board of Victoria. This early talent developed rapidly into a professional career with pieces being sold internationally. Edzerza began working in Northwest Coast art under the tutelage of his family member, fellow Tahltan artist, Terrence Campbell.

In 2002 Edzerza furthered his education by attending school in Arizona for jewelry making under the instruction of Rick Charlie. He has also had the opportunity to work with artists Jay Simeon, Marcel Russ, Philip Gray, Corey Bulpitt, Beau Dick, Mark Preston and Dempsey Bob.

Edzerza was given his first solo show by Stonington Gallery in 2007. In 2010 he was commissioned by the Vancouver Olympic Committee to create a large scale glass installation at Rogers Arena. ASICS and the Dutch Olympic Team contracted him to help design their uniforms for the 2010 Olympic Winter Games. Since then Alano has been involved in many commissions, including law firms and development projects on traditional native land.

Edzerza has taught and volunteered with the youth organizations KAYA (Knowledgeable Aboriginal Youth Association), the Freida Diesing School for Northwest Coast Native Art, and NYAC (Native Youth Arts Collective) as well as been a judge for the YVR Art Foundation Scholarship for young Native artists. In 2009 he was the recipient of the 2009 30 & Under Entrepreneur of the Year Award.

If you were to walk around, two hundred years ago, from California to Alaska you would see, wear and live Northwest Coast art and Culture. I want to be a part of the movement that will allow this to happen once again.

Peoples of the Northwest Coast did not develop a written language, they developed an art form to tell the stories of our histories. This art form developed into one of the most advanced art forms in the world. This is also what makes this art so beautiful. The ways that balance is used within the formline. When you look at a piece your eye subconsciously continues to move studying the design because one shape flows into the next using variation of curves and thicknesses. This is the art of a once-dying

culture. It's the art that is bringing the culture back alive. This is the reason why I work so hard towards my goal.

-Alano Edzerza

James Madison (Tulalip)

Tulalip Tribes member James Russell Madison was born December 7, 1973, into a family steeped in traditional Salish and Tlingit Northwest-coast Native art. He began carving when he was 8 years old, his first lessons learned from his grandfather Frank Madison (1923-2002). An uncle, Steve Madison, was also an early teacher, and James learned abstract painting and sculpting from his father, Richard Madison (b. 1952).

Following graduation from Everett High School in 1992, James Madison went on to study art at the University of Washington, receiving a bachelor's degree in fine arts in 2000, followed by a bachelor's degree from the Pratt School of Fine Arts in 2004. His studies included courses in Native American Northwest-coast art history; Northwest-coast two-dimensional design and carving; metal sculpture; and glass blowing, fusing, and casting.

While James Madison is a master wood carver, he also works in a variety of contemporary media, including glass, bronze, and stainless steel, and seeks to combine the new with the old. He described his method as trying to "create art with an open mind in the sense that I am always thinking of new ways to add a modern twist to a traditional piece. This allows for me to help to keep my culture alive. As we move into the future, so do the teachings of my ancestors" (Madison website). One of Madison's major works is a 24-foot story pole in the hotel lobby at the Tulalip Resort and Casino. His artwork can also be seen at Tulalip's Hibel Cultural Center, the Tulalip Health Clinic, Cabela's at the Tulalip Mall, Lighthouse Park in Mukilteo, Kayak Point Regional Park, Providence Hospital in Everett, and the Burke Museum on the University of Washington campus. Pieces by Madison can be found in downtown Everett; Stanwood; Marysville; Shoreline; Whistler, British Columbia; and New York City.