



Totem Pole Virtual Gallery

Small Carved Totem Poles

Unfinished Pole, Alert Bay pole, Thunderbird Large Carved Totem Poles

Small totem poles were carved when it was illegal to carve large totem poles as a way of keeping the traditions alive.

Large Carved Totem Poles

Look at the carving styles of the large poles and compare them with each other. Can you see the different figures and animals?

One way to begin to see the different figures is to look for the eyes and mouths, then sort out the ears and other parts of the body. Expect to find the forms contorted to fit the space.

Tsimshian Pole Section

Collected from Kitsegukla, B.C. in 1953. Can you see the three figures? What do you think they represent?

The three figures on the top of poles often depict 'watchers'. "Watchers" were people who stood guard for the community. Today, some 'watchers' look out for damage being done to archaeological sites.

Nuu-Chal-Nuulth House Post

One of a set of 4 houseposts found at Ucluelet, B.C. This is the twin to another to figure made at the same time. Do you think that twins are an important symbol? Can you think of why?

Some duplicated house posts are simply a copy, used to make the house symmetrical. Twin children are important in many parts of the world.

Haida Mortuary Pole

Stood before Driving-A-Weasel-House at Ninstints before removal to the Royal British Columbia Museum in Victoria in 1957. Which animal do you think is represented here? How is this totem pole similar and different from the other culture's poles?

This animal is a bear. The distinctive characteristics of the bear are a curly nose, large eyes and ears above the level of the eyes. Note also the long claws. Haida poles are typically carved closer to the trunk, with the pole retaining its basic cylindrical shape. Compare this to poles from other parts of the coast like the Bella Coola Mortuary figure that have attached arms and wings.

Bella Coola Mortuary Figure

Made at Talio, B.C. What do you think this figure symbolizes? What relationship is the artist depicting?

This figure represents a bear with a beaver on its head.

Salish House Post

From house at Quamichan, B.C. How is this house post different in form from other house posts and totem poles? Look at the main figure of the person with wings. Do you think house post was carved after the arrival of European missionaries? What do you think the figure represents? What else might it represent?

This Salish house post was carved from planked wood rather than a pole. The figure may be construed as being a person who has died and gone to heaven (the wings may be symbolic of angel's wings) an example of syncretism or a blending of spiritual beliefs.

Coast Salish Housepost

One of 5 houseposts which decorated the outside of a house at Quamichan. The figure holds a mink, a guardian spirit of certain Cowichan people.