

# Inhabit the Contradiction.

Vancouver's supernatural setting of rainforest, ocean, mountains, and beaches is the stuff of big ad campaigns: panoramic vistas, robust fleece-insulated outdoorsiness, and epic narratives that involve "Grinds" or cliffy ocean-edge Instagram selfies.

Decades ago, Vancouver's urban planners locked in the city's aesthetic appeal to make sure there would always be more view cones than highrises and more green space than thoroughfares. It's probably why this city features on so many "Most Liveable" and "Most Unaffordable" lists and why you hear so many people muttering about their love/hate relationship with Vancouver. There's even a "Love it or List it" TV show featuring Vancouver real estate though the decreasing affordability makes people pose the more binary question, "Love it or Leave it?"

These 25 paintings are done in a bright and cheerful van Gogh style but the themes are somewhat darker: industry vs. nature, gentrification, densification, commuting, class changes, and the resentment at foreign capital's effect on the local real estate market. The pretty colors and swooping curves of each scene will sink in before the subject matter does, just like Vancouver's spectacular scenery draws the eye away from problems at ground level. Superficial beauty helps distract us from what we may find offensive or unbearable, whether it's a rodent infestation or a frustrating economic reality.

And yet the very contradiction of loveliness and ugliness in the same space makes both seem fragile, fleeting, and somehow forgivable. It gives us the sort of grace we might bestow on a beloved pet or adorable child even though that pet or child is source of our frustration.

*Inhabit the Contradiction* is on display at Blueshore Financial at 1080 Marine Dr, North Vancouver, BC until May 10, 2017.

Note: Titles marked with \* are at my studio, 316 W. 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue, Vancouver, BC. Items marked with "•" are sold.



8" x 8", \$275

## \*Bait Station

Vancouver has a rat problem. These ubiquitous black boxes aren't traps, though. Bait stations keep poison secure so undesirable animals – rats, mice – can access the poison and then go off to die while "desirable" animals like birds and pets stay safe.

The bait stations are a reminder that there's a dark side where unwanted and often unseen living creatures exist.



8" x 8", **SOLD**

## Food Chain•

The current City Hall government wants Vancouver to be the greenest city in the world by 2020 and zero waste by 2040. That means there's a big program in place to change the local population's lifestyle and behaviour.

The human population, that is.



8" x 8", **SOLD**

## Mirage•

Vancouver was built on industry. Vancouver also prides itself on its spectacular natural setting.

Even the most industrial structures can look gentle and unthreatening in the soft early morning fog.



10" x 10", **SOLD**

## Piles•

Vancouver's sulphur piles mirror the North Vancouver mountains above them and are often the brightest thing seen on a rainy day. These particular piles are a byproduct of the oil sands business in Alberta. Sulphur is also a good binder in concrete, so it's handy to have what with so much big tower construction going on.

"Piles" is a colloquial term for hemorrhoids. And "sulphur" used to be called brimstone.



8" x 10", **SOLD**

## Feeding Frenzy•

This is Siwash rock, one of Stanley Park's natural landmarks. There is an old Squamish nation legend which describes this sea stack as the symbol of a father-to-be who risked defying the gods to purify himself for his child's birth. Nowadays, English Bay is often filled with tankers queuing for spots in Vancouver's busy port.

Siwash Rock looks like a small child tree who wants to wander off into the dangerous unknown.



10" x 8", \$325

## \*Great White

Vancouver's cruise ship port is big business. On a busy day, Vancouver gets an influx of ten thousand tourists on focused souvenir searches.

The phrase "Great White" brings three concepts to mind: Great White North, Great White Hope, and Great White Shark. One is a destination, one is an emotion or sense of ethnic divide, and one is a living thing that is both feared and hunted.



8" x 10", \$325

## \*4/21 Morning, Unleashed

4/20 is a coded term that refers to the consumption of cannabis. Vancouver enjoys a healthy cannabis culture as well as a rallying spirit with which to defend and celebrate it. Every year on April 20<sup>th</sup>, there is a sort of protest/trade show/festival and 2016's was held at Sunset Beach. As always, the morning after requires some cleanup.

It's comparable to the morning after a Fireworks Festival except with fewer liquor containers and more food wrappers.



10" x 8", **SOLD**

## The Grind•

Endorphins are the biggest drug in Vancouver and rightly so: it is a beautiful place to go for a run after a long day. Sometimes the freedom comes from running and sometimes it comes from something else. The biggest cash crop in the lower mainland is cannabis. Psilocybin mushrooms also grow exceptionally well here. And, as a port city, Vancouver's opium trade is brisk.

Escape is often an uphill struggle, whether cultivated or naturally grown.



10" x 8", \$325

### \*Inukshuk

Vancouver's English Bay Inukshuk statue was also the 2010 Olympic games symbol. It was intended as a welcome to the world. Historically, inukshuk may have been used as markers for travel routes, fishing places, camps, hunting grounds, or just a way to say, "Hey! There are people here."

Locally, it seems more like a west side insignia for pretty beach volleyball players.



10" x 8", NFS

### \*East Van X

Ken Lum's light statue, *Monument for East Vancouver*, is installed at East 6th Avenue and Clark Drive and was part of the Olympic Public Art Program. It delineates the start of Vancouver's working class neighborhood and is positioned so that it faces the financial capital of Vancouver.

It's an emblem of light which is both a threat and a beacon.



10" x 8", \$325

### \*Crowsl i ne

Crows are a big symbol in Vancouver. They are social, intelligent, and opportunistic. Their menacing blackness bisects the city when they make their daily migration to their night roost spot in Still Creek. Crows are fiercely protective of their young and will attack humans during breeding season. They also recognize their relatives and tend to steal less from them.

Crows represent our dark and feisty domestic urban lives.



10" x 10", SOLD

### Bi rds of Prey•

East Van has seen a lot of aggressive development in the past few years. The Main Street area in particular has dozens of new luxury condominium projects in various stages of development.

The nature of predatory behaviour is that you live on the surplus of others. The biggest complaint with Vancouver housing is that there isn't any surplus.



10" x 8", SOLD

### Densi ty•

Density is a contentious topic in Vancouver. The population is growing. There's a housing crisis. The city appears in both the world's Most Liveable and Most Unaffordable lists. Vancouver's postcard beauty and "super natural" setting attracts growth but also limits it. As the cranes multiply along the skyline, Vancouver's natural setting will be forced to change.

Culture will always determine how we see nature but nature doesn't change as swiftly as neighborhood culture does. Maybe that's a good thing.



10" x 8", **SOLD**

## Wel come to the Jungle•

The concrete lions at the south end of the Lions Gate bridge are regal and stony-faced. They signal homecoming to North Shore commuters, particularly those living west of Westview. Lions are associated with royalty and bravery and these ones often get dressed up when the local sports teams are doing well.

There aren't any lions on the north side, however, so these lions are more like a subtle North Shore defense mechanism.



10" x 8", \$325

## \*Bi furcati on

BC Hydro employs several Certified Utility Arborists. They trim Vancouver's trees in a bifurcated – split – way so the trees don't interfere with the power lines. Meanwhile, East Van kids like throwing old shoes over the same power lines. The shoes depicted here are Fluevogs, which is a nod to gentrification.

It's a literal environmental footprint.



10" x 8", \$325

## \*FTW

The Woodward's W is a sign that became a symbol. In 2002, the Woodward's building was occupied for several months – "Woodsquat" – when people grew frustrated with the lack of affordable housing while that building sat empty on prime space. Nowadays, the whole area is gentrifying rapidly and changes drastically from block to block. There's even a walking tour to point this out.

To a younger web-savvy generation, "FTW" means "For The Win!" To an older generation "FTW" is a punk epithet: "Fuck The World." Some people see the Woodward's W symbol as a victory, and some see it as anarchy.



8" x 10", \$325

## \*Mono No Aware

People love cherry blossom season in Vancouver. Vancouver's original 500 cherry blossom trees were a gift from Japan in the 1930s. Vancouver has enjoyed a long and mostly consistent friendship with Japan. "Mono No Aware" is a Japanese term for the pathos of impermanence and transient beauty. It is associated with Japanese cultural tradition and cherry blossoms in particular.

In practice, "Mono No Aware" means appreciate what you have because it never lasts.



8" x 10", **SOLD**

## The National Dream•

In the 1880s, Canada's National Dream in the 1880s was unity. The Canadian Pacific Railway was going to become the spine of our new nation. However, the rugged BC part of the railway project was especially problematic so CPR and its contractors hired thousands of "guest workers" from China who were paid less to do tougher jobs in worse conditions than everyone else.

Most immigrants dream of a better life than the one they left. The bottle pickers in East Van seem to be mostly older Asian women; I wonder what their national dream is.



10" x 10", **SOLD**

## Save the Trees (Not the Wood) •

These orange tree-protecting fences always herald an impending demolition. Vancouverites have started to call them the "orange fences of doom." It is a sad irony that many of the houses being demolished are old 1900s character homes which were built with old-growth wood. The replacement houses are usually Craftsman-ish boxy constructions of MDF and engineered wood products. Meanwhile, the floors and planks and walls from the old house – beautiful old-growth pine and fir – often gets separated and ground up into chipped wood called hog fuel. Hog fuel is used to power industrial boilers in factories that make MDF.

It's an ouroboros of consumption.



14" x 11", \$600

## \*Pork House

The SOLD sign beside this 1912 barn-style craftsman house was quickly followed by an ever more common tear-down sign. Then graffiti artists added the emblematic "PORK" tag. The word PORK is associated with consumption and excess. It also brings to mind that classic "Capitalist Pig!" epithet, not to mention Vancouver's horrible history with a certain pig farm.

Pork Bellies are a commodity. Vancouver housing isn't.



10" x 10", \$400

## \*River District Circus

The River District is a new neighborhood in Fraserview. It is being redeveloped and branded as the next Yaletown and marketing brochures trumpet it the last waterfront property available in Vancouver.

Most of the vendors at this Farmer's Market aren't farmers. A few stalls sell home-grown fruits and vegetables but most of the items available are artisanal luxury items like hand painted baby clothes, essential oils, gourmet ice cream and homemade soap.

The River District is actually an industrial site on built on reclaimed swampland.



10" x 10", **SOLD**

## STEM Cell •

Science World is one of the coolest places in Vancouver. In biology, a stem cell is a blank cell that has the ability to turn into any kind of cell. STEM is also an acronym that refers to the academic disciplines of science, technology, engineering and mathematics. "Stem" is an organic metaphor but more of a corporate movement because there's an economic and sometimes a cultural imperative to pursue a STEM curriculum more than a soul one.

The dragon boats next door provide an interesting juxtaposition.



12" x 12", **SOLD**

## VPL •

Places where people read and learn are full brightness. Vancouver Public Library's downtown branch design was considered the most radical by architects but was chosen by the public in a democratic referendum. Perhaps Vancouver wanted a departure from its usual the generic green glass buildings -- something that felt more monumental than temporary.

Architect Moshe Safdie wanted the look to be warm during the day. A mix of granite and concrete chips from the North Shore gives it a unique reddish color. The Colosseum-inspired design has a weighty mass during the day but at night it is totally transparent.



11" x 14", \$600

## \*The Sky's the Limit

Vancouver has industrial roots but, unlike Hamilton or any of the "rust belt" cities, the past few decades have seen Vancouver become more of a capitalist city than an industrial one. Until recently, Vancouver's real estate market was a somewhat laissez-faire system with houses flipping faster than fingers at a Main Street cyclist. Fortunately, some regulations were put in place to tether the sky-high price escalation and the escalation slowed, for now

But the sky's the limit because real estate marketing is based on lifestyle and promises for the future while valuation is based on estimating an inevitable scarcity of supply. It's an impossible equation: dreams of future security against an out-of-reach probability.



12" x 16", **SOLD**

## Drive-In Theatre•

Oil tankers and sunsets: there is nothing more symbolic of End of Days.