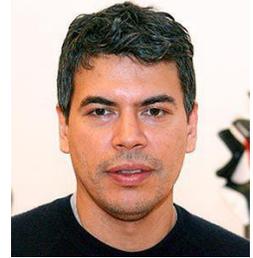


# Brian Jungen

- Canadian, b. 1970 in Fort St. John, British Columbia, Canada
- Lives and works in North Okanagan, BC, Canada
- 1992 BFA Emily Carr College of Art & Design, Vancouver, BC



## Body of Work

Brian Jungen draws from his family's ranching and hunting background, as well as his Dunne-za heritage (Athabaskan First Nations), when reimagining consumer goods into modernist assemblages. Jungen transforms Nike Air Jordan shoes, plastic chairs, garbage bins, sewing tables, and golf bags into semblances of Northwest coast ceremonial masks, totem poles, whales, etc. His goals, however, are secular rather than spiritual. He stated in a 2011 interview with *Border Crossings*: "Almost everything in our society is disposable, and I want to slow down that mass deterioration into the landfill, channel it in another direction, like into a museum....When I first started – I was 28 at the time – the only reason I could afford to buy Air Jordans was because I had funding from grants, so a lot of it was about economies and commodities and finding parallels between the two different markets...more recently my work has to do with a different kind of economy, with this idea of traditional knowledge and using materials in a traditional way." Conflating the transformative power of ceremonial masks with Nike consumers' desire to emulate or become sports stars by wearing a particular brand of trainers, Jungen plays with economic and cultural values, revealing the power of contemporary "idols" and linking colonial history with today's Third World sweatshop labor. In 2016 Catriona Jeffries gallery in Vancouver presented a solo exhibition featuring his most recent iterations. Using new Air Jordan trainers, which celebrated its 30th anniversary in 2015, the recent works are more abstract and colorful, continuing to allow the shoe itself to guide his decision about their form and assembly. Utilizing as much of the shoe as possible in their production, these objects minimize extraneous material and armatures and act as freestanding sculpture. The resulting works are less a direct representation of animal and human faces, taking advantage of how viewers innately search for recognizable facial features.

Jungen has had major exhibitions at Hannover Kunstverein and Bonner Kunstverein (2013); Art Gallery of Ontario (2013, 2011); Documenta (2012); Shanghai Biennial (2012); Smithsonian Institute—National Museum of the American Indian (2009); Sydney Biennale (2008); Witte de With, Rotterdam (2007); Lyon Biennial (2007); Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal, Tate Modern, London, and Vancouver Art Gallery (2006); New Museum, New York (2005); and the Vienna Secession (2003). He is scheduled to present a solo exhibition at the University of New Mexico Art Museum, Albuquerque in 2018. Jungen has works in the permanent collections of the AGO, Toronto; Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden and the Smithsonian National Museum of the American Indian, Washington, DC; Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago; National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa; Seattle Museum of Art; Tate Modern, London; and Vancouver Art Gallery, B.C. He is represented by Casey Kaplan in New York, where he has shown work since 2003.



2007, 1980, 1970, and 1960, golf bags with golf balls and painted golf tees, Art Gallery of Ontario

Casey Kaplan gallery website:

Since his last show in the gallery in 2011, Jungen has relocated his home and studio to a more remote location outside of Vancouver. While his earlier work laid the groundwork for a commentary on indigenous stereotypes and notions of dual heritage, his more recent and continued experiences with his native culture prompted a palpable structural and material transformation in his practice. With his more frequent returns to Northern B.C. in recent years, Jungen learned the traditional techniques of his First Nations people, including animal hide crafts and drum making. He also resumed skills cultivated while growing up on his family's farm among the Doig River community, such as hunting and horseback riding. (As an avid horseman, some of the mask-like works presented in this exhibition were tailored specifically for one of his horses.) Untying himself from a refined treatment of resources, while maintaining his own presence with hand-sewing and carving, the works presented are liberated in an honest portrayal of material metamorphosis which is in direct engagement with the artist's lifestyle. Residing now on his ranch, his process includes the use of varying shop tools such as industrial sewing machines (originally used for horse saddles) and band saws (operated daily on the ranch). Jungen uses only preexisting hardware in an attempt to minimize the visibility of extraneous materials and display devices. Incorporating all of the components of the shoes in an increasingly autonomous approach to modernist composition, the consumable, wearable objects have self-generated as sculpture.

More quotes from Jungen's 2011 interview from Border Crossings:

"Young coastal artists in BC never could have tampered with the traditional motifs the way I did with the Nike work because it would have been considered sacrilegious. But I'm interior and not Northwest Coast and I wasn't referencing a specific culture. All I did was take these shoes apart and re-sew them, and everyone else puts together in their head what those lines and colours mean. A lot of young artists from Tsimshian, Haida or Tlingit lineages knew their elders would be upset if they did what I did.

"They're constantly changing the trainers and only release them twice a year, so I had to wait for that. The Air Jordans are a separate brand from all the other Nike shoes. It's like a new version of software, like Air Jordan 12.2. I would go to different stores here in Vancouver and they all knew me...

"I worked with a woman here who came out of costume design, and she knew textile and materials much better than I did. We would meticulously dismantle them and while there were shortcuts – I would use a band saw to take off some of the soles – basically they had to be unstitched. I liked to use the same holes when I was reassembling them, so they looked like they were mass produced...

"I wanted people to see the layering on the inside and the ripping apart of the foam lining. I wanted it known that all the stitching was done by hand because the inside doesn't look pretty and the outside is very, very slick and looks like it is done in a production line."

"All I want to do is open things up a bit for First Nations people to come to terms with their identity, not just First Nations artists, but also the culture in general. I want them to see the incredible diversity in First Nations art and culture...I always said I was an artist. I've never been comfortable saying I'm a Native artist."

2011 National Post interview

“My work is pretty secular. My belief system is very private and I don’t want to make work that’s preachy. But it’s also really hard to make a work of a spiritual nature in contemporary art...I tend to keep my spiritual beliefs to myself. I like to just make work, and if it moves people to see the world in a different way, then I’m happy.”

2011 Vue Weekly interview

“I keep working with a material until I feel some sort of resolution with it, that a way of working with the materials has been realized.”

Interview with Matthew Higgs, Vienna Secession, 2003

“The Nike ‘mask’ works emerged initially from a casual observation. I saw a pile of snowboard boots in the back of a friend’s truck and I was struck by the extent to which they resembled or echoed West Coast First Nations artifacts: largely due to their red, white and black color scheme. Sometime later, in 1998, I was on a residency at the Banff Centre and started to investigate the possibility of using athletic equipment as a sculptural medium. Researching into Nike’s use of exploited labor – which was being widely discussed in the media — and thinking about the iconic status of their Air Jordan range of shoes fuelled my interest. I started to make connections between issues of exploitation, production, and commodification and started to think about how this might relate to native art generally...I went to a sports store and purchased a number of pairs of Air Jordan sneakers and began to dissect them, which in itself was interesting – in that it was almost a sacrilegious act: cutting up and ‘destroying’ these iconic, collectible (and expensive) shoes. I enjoyed that tension.”

“I was interested in the ubiquitousness of native motifs, especially in Vancouver, and how they have been corrupted and applied and assembled commercially, e.g. in the tourist industry. It was interesting to see how by simply manipulating the Air Jordan shoes you could evoke specific cultural traditions whilst simultaneously amplifying the processes of cultural corruption and assimilation. The Nike ‘mask’ sculptures seemed to articulate a paradoxical relationship between a consumerist artifact and an ‘authentic’ native artifact.”