

# Surfer Girl statue joins Ukee's Raven Lady

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A stainless steel sculpture garden is blooming on Bay Street.

Bruce Schmalz's corner of Bay and Peninsula Road has long been the standing spot of Ucluelet's popular Raven Lady statue, sculpted by Mike Camp. In 2014, Schmalz commissioned Camp to create a Wanderers' Tree, from which locals and visitors enjoy hanging messages written on oyster shells.

Last week, a roughly three-metre tall Surfer Girl, also sculpted by Camp, joined the perspective-changing party.

Camp told the Westerly News he spent roughly six months sculpting Surfer Girl at his North Ontario cabin.

"I was working outside most of the time in the middle of winter with a generator in the snow and cold and there's no road to my property so all the materials went in by snowshoes," he said adding he enjoys working within his remote cabin's isolation.

"In my life, I've worked at different times as a professional fur trapper and prospector and those experiences have made me realize that time alone can be a very wonderful time."

He said the roughly 200-kilogram piece was inspired by a small statue of a running woman he created many years ago and had always wanted to evolve. With the West Coast in mind, he began putting together a larger-than-life-size version of the running woman on a surf board.

He crafted her from stainless steel, his preferred medium because of the lasting impact it creates.

"Raven Lady has been up for 24 years and she's as good as the day she was made. Don't tell me you can do that with a piece of wood."

He cited creating life from lifeless material as the medium's largest challenge.

"You're working with dead materials and inanimate objects so the challenge for a sculptor is, can you somehow convey a feeling of movement," he said. "Secondly, when you're dealing with the female figure, you're trying to get some sensuality out of it."

As he sculpted, he let Schmalz know about the potential piece and Schmalz agreed to help him sell the statue on the West Coast.

Camp completed the statue and then took her apart to transport her pieces in large canoes before carting her to the Coast in a trailer.

"After it was here for about a week, Bruce and I were talking and he said, 'People seem to be enjoying it, let's try to make a deal on it,' so we did," Camp said. "Now, an artist always thinks he's worth a lot more than he is and I'm no exception but we arrived at a figure where he was happy and I was happy."

Schmalz told the Westerly he had not planned to purchase Surfer Girl but fell in love when he saw her.

"When I looked at her, she had that consistent thing Mike has in his work; that ecstatic relief. When you look at it you go 'Wow,' and, just for a second, she takes you to another dimension," he said.

"Mike says I didn't pay him enough and I thought I paid



ANDREW BAILEY PHOTO

Bruce Schmalz, left, was thrilled to score this Surfer Girl sculpture from sculptor Mike Camp, right, last week. The vivid surfing statue joins Camp's Raven Lady and Wanderers' Tree at the corner of Bay Street and Peninsula Road.

him too much so I guess we got an equal deal."

He added he was thrilled to add to his collection of Camp sculptures.

"It would have been hard for me to let her go because I think Mike Camp is an unsung hero of Canadian art," he said adding he enjoys the instinctive and interactive presence Camp instills in his work.

"He has immersed himself in nature and lived that life in the wilderness and what he portrays is something that is very instinctual. In other words, very close to what we are and who we are as people and that's what impresses me about his art."

He suggested Camp has not yet reached the fame he deserves.

"He spends most of his time in the northern wilderness from B.C. to Ontario so he's not been exposed to the art world and the sale world and, in my little way, I'd like to see him more exposed and see him achieve what he could as an artist," he said. "He's a wonderful artist that will be recognized in years to come."

Schmalz added that Surfer Girl fits well within the West Coast's vibe.

"For me, it's tipping my hat and acknowledging that we have a fantastic sport out here on the West Coast that is going and growing and we have to acknowledge that it is a basis of our existence out here," he said.

"We came out of the ocean, supposedly, and now we ride on the ocean and that's a phenomenal thing that we've come to terms with our environment in one way or another, so it's an exciting piece."

He added the Raven Lady and Wanderers' Tree are frequently photographed features in Ucluelet and he is excited to see locals and visitors react to the area's newest addition.

"She belongs to the surf. She's part of the ocean and therefore should be out there and be observed...Mike's art is big and it needs to interact with people," he said.

"It's the 'Wow' factor that I like...That's why we have artists. Artists take us to another level and Mike has done that and portrayed that in his work."

Camp hopes Surfer Girl brings "movement, sensuality and creativity" to her new home.

"You get into the bigger question of what is an artist's goal or job and mine has always been to try to portray the beauty and the joy of life; try and help people appreciate every day," he said. "Life is about fun. Art should be fun. I just want people to enjoy it and go home with a good feeling."

Camp has been sculpting and painting for roughly 45 years and said Schmalz's three-piece sculpture symphony is the largest collection of his work in one place.

"I'm grateful to Bruce for the support and the confidence he's shown in my work," he said. "I really enjoy seeing the three pieces here together; it's like a sculpture garden."