



Beaver-Eagle Totem Pole; Robert Davidson; 1985; Yellow cedar; 40", 6" at base, tapers to 5"

Beaver-Eagle Totem Pole by Robert Davidson

Totem poles are images that stand in front of the houses of the Northwest Coast Indians. There are various types of totem poles: legend totem poles, crest totem poles, and memorial totem poles to chiefs or high-ranking persons.

Crest totem poles stand in front of the houses of families belonging to the Haida tribe. A crest is a family emblem. Amongst the Haida nation, there are two main totem pole crests: Eagle and Raven. These crests are broken down into sub-crests. This Eagle-Beaver totem pole represents a crest totem pole—Eagle being the main crest and Beaver being the sub-crest. On the very bottom of this totem pole, at the base of Beaver's tail, is Frog, which is also a sub-crest to Eagle.

In Northwest Coast style, there are two main shapes, the *ovoid shape* (which is an oval shape that is symmetrical from side to side) and the *U-shape*. The ovoid shape quite often represents eyes or joints in the arms or legs. In this case, Frog is a very exaggerated abstraction of the ovoid, which symbolizes the joint at the base of Beaver's tail.

Above Frog is the cross-etching of Beaver's tail. Further up the totem pole is Beaver holding his chewing stick, a very common feature for Beaver. Another common feature of Beaver is his incisors. Creatures are quite often illustrated as part human being. The eyebrows on the forehead of Beaver are an example of that.

Above Beaver is Eagle. Frog is again illustrated, this time at the base of Eagle's tail. Coming through Beaver's ears are Eagle's feet. Along the sides of the totem pole, you can see Eagle's wings. The ovoid is the joint of Eagle's wing. Above the wings is Eagle's head with a very pronounced hooked beak, which is unmistakably Eagle.

Between Eagle's ears is Watchman. Watchman insures the safety of the village from invaders. One of the strong features of Haida totem poles is the illustration of Watchman on the very top. Sometimes there are two or three Watchmen.

Robert Davidson