

## **Strait Lines + Disrupting Currents**

*A Review by Jennifer Dysart, Interim Executive Director of the Haida Gwaii Museum  
May 27, 2013*

The danger of telling a single story is that you risk misunderstandings and disinterest. It may not be heard by all ears. In our highly specialized world, the telling of a story through one medium or one perspective often occurs when we talk about science or art. Each discipline seems to develop as disparate systems, operating as fundamentally distinct. But the reality is many thinkers are inspired by both. Einstein said, "All religions, arts and sciences are branches of the same tree. All these aspirations are directed toward ennobling man's life, lifting it from the sphere of mere physical existence and leading the individual towards freedom."

That is the beauty of *Strait Lines + Disrupting Currents*, the exhibition currently installed at the Haida Gwaii Museum. Created by Dr. Ruth Beer and Dr. Kit Grauer, in collaboration with Soledad Munoz, Miles Thorogood, Andres Wanner and Phillip Robbins, it explores the significance of salmon to the people and ecosystems of the West Coast through myriad avenues that reach across audiences.

I was instantly intrigued by the approach Ruth, Kit and their collaborators used to share their stories. Having spent 6 years studying engineering in university, I was well aware of the siloed thinking that can isolate the arts from the sciences. But *Strait Lines + Disrupting Currents* has attempted to cross those borders. The show features sculpture, video, photography and interactive media, with several pieces combining scientific and artistic considerations. One piece, *Disrupting Currents*, is projected onto the darkest wall in our gallery, its real-time measurements of temperature, oxygen, salinity and current from NEPTUNE marine sensors in the Georgia Strait are translated into a visual representation of the numerical patterns being observed.

It's important to remember that the way a story's told is as important as what the story tells. Thomas King, the distinguished Canadian writer, said in his 2003 Massey Lectures, 'Each time someone tells a story, it changes. Sometimes it changes simply in the voice of the storyteller, sometimes it changes in the details, sometimes in the order of events. Other times it's the dialogue and the response of the audience.'

This is apparent in *Strait Lines*. A striking piece in the exhibition, *Copper Currents* immediately attracts your attention with its brilliant shine contrasting against the cinnamon coloured background. Comprised of thin copper wire woven together, it mimics the display of graphs from NEPTUNE devices monitoring the state of the ocean. Dr. Beer could have easily printed the same graph on a sheet of paper, but it would have told a different story to different people.

*Strait Lines + Disrupting Currents* proves to be a timely show on Haida Gwaii. Confronted with the threat of an Enbridge pipeline and supertankers filled with oil traversing the waters around the archipelago, people are re-examining their connection to place. The Joint Review Panel hearings saw hundreds of people tell stories of their connections to their home and the need to protect it. Similarly, *Mosaic* is a video matrix of interview segments from a diverse range of

people who speak about their connections to salmon. These include a Haida carver, a former cannery worker, a marine biologist, and a commercial fisherman. The JRP hearings and *Mosaic* are parallel examples of the ability of scientists, artists and everyone in between to speak to the same issue, but from different perspectives without reducing their validity.

This show has inspired me to see familiar stories through a different lens and to learn new stories that will offer fresh perspectives. It was a pleasure working with Dr. Beer and Dr. Grauer during the installation of *Strait Lines + Disrupting Currents*. They reminded me that crossing borders is always possible.