

ÇOSINIYE Paul and Sage Paul on Susan Point

ÇOSINIYE Paul 00:02

Hi, my name is ÇOSINIYE Paul and my pronouns are they/them. I'm a Coast Salish artist and two-spirit individual born and raised in Tsartlip, BC. I'm a painter, singer, songwriter, illustrator, digital artist, and I work with wood, metal glass, and digital printmaking, and sandblasting, and laser printing are my main mediums. Besides art, I enjoy spending time with my four cats and in nature, and when I was asked to do this podcast, the director told me it was really important for them that younger voices be involved in this project. So, I asked my sister Sage to be here.

Sage Paul 00:50

Hi, my name is Sage Paul. I'm just going to point this out that I'm the older sister. [Laughter] My pronouns are she/her. I'm also a Coast Salish artist from Tsartlip, BC. I work in mediums like prints, sandblasting in glass and cedar, laser cut earrings and pendants. I also do beading, drum making, moccasin making, and digital art and design. Between making art and crafting, I am also a dog handler to my two Australian Cattle Dogs, and I run and own Sage Brush Hair Design. ÇOSINIYE and I belong to Coast Salish Creations, our family run website and company. That can be looked up online at Coast Salish Creations, and you can find all of our information on that website. When ÇOSINIYE asked me to be a part of this podcast, and showed me what it was about, I was super excited to talk about Susan Point. Because from a young age, I really looked up to her and her work and took inspiration by the way she paved a path for young Indigenous femme presenting artists.

ÇOSINIYE Paul 02:12

Especially for us, too. I feel like we don't take the time to recognize just like you know, how far back it was that femme people can be in the art world, like it wasn't that far back.

Sage Paul 02:27

Yeah, it's more of a recent thing.

ÇOSINIYE Paul 02:31

Yes, certainly. Anyways, before we get into the podcast and break down of the piece, I'd just like to acknowledge the land we are on of lək̓ʷəŋən and Saanich People, Sage and my People, and today we will be talking about *Written in the Earth* by Susan Point. I wanted to talk about *Written in the Earth* today because I believe it's political and spiritual meaning grows ever more relevant in these times. If you are unfamiliar with the art and it is a large scale, four-piece cast aluminum, and red cedar structure. They tied together in a shape reminiscent of the Coast Salish people's U shape alternating facing up and down, creating a connected flow between them. As we get more into the podcast we would like to talk about Susan Point's art journey up until she made *Written in the Earth*. A breakdown of the piece, the political significance, how we as Indigenous People write in the earth today, and in the past how we've written in the earth, and how Susan Point paved the way for femme presenting people in the art community.

Sage Paul 03:54

One other cool thing is the piece actually comes from the Salish Weave Collection and both COSINIYE and I have artwork within that collection.

ÇOSINIYE Paul 04:05

Don't look at pictures. Please don't look at the pictures of us. We look nothing like that anymore.

Sage Paul 04:09

Oh, we were so young when we first started out and they still have quite young-looking photos of us. They're not that bad, c'mon.

ÇOSINIYE Paul 04:21

Pretty bad.

Sage Paul 04:23

But anyway, we're very thankful for them as well. The Salish Weave Collection is George and Christiane Smyth and they're just such awesome people and really close to our family.

ÇOSINIYE Paul 04:34

Absolutely.

Sage Paul 04:36

So getting into it Susan Point, she is a Coast Salish artist from Musqueam ancestry born in Alert Bay, May or sorry, April 5, 1952. Alert Bay is a small island just off the coast of Port McNeil on Vancouver Island. This is where Susan Point began her art journey in 1981. Ever since childhood, Susan was interested in art and the creative process. After going on maternity leave, from her secretary job, she finally had the chance to start creating. Her phenomenal career started on our kitchen table making limited edition screen-prints and knowing how messy that is...

ŦOSINIYE Paul 05:23

Yeah, I would just like to take a moment to appreciate where she started because screen printing is really hard, especially by yourself and like with limited space.

Sage Paul 05:36

I'm sure she had limited, you know, help.

ŦOSINIYE Paul 05:39

And resources.

Sage Paul 05:40

Yeah, like, we're so thankful because we have a lot of help.

ŦOSINIYE Paul 05:45

[Laughter] Yeah, from our dad.

Sage Paul 05:47

Our dad is just right there. Totally.

ŦOSINIYE Paul 05:50

Yeah. Backing us up.

Sage Paul 05:51

Letting us know what we're doing wrong and what we're doing right. Yeah, totally.

ÇOSINIYE Paul 05:56

Anyway, anyway. Her first work was a piece titled *Salmon* depicting four salmon swimming around a spindle whorl. In 1983, Susan began using a more wide range of colours. This started an uproar from critics, because the colours were non-traditional. I think this is really interesting, because we don't even think about using non-traditional versus traditional colours these days.

Sage Paul 06:27

It's true, we're just like...

ÇOSINIYE Paul 06:27

And it's pretty crazy that was like, a significant part in her career that people were surprised.

Sage Paul 06:35

Yeah.

ÇOSINIYE Paul 06:35

Like in an uproar that he was using non-traditional colours.

Sage Paul 06:37

Nowadays. You're just like, I just gonna throw in like a bright, I don't know, lime green or something.

ÇOSINIYE Paul 06:42

Yeah, yeah, exactly. We don't even think about... yeah.

Sage Paul 06:46

Another cool thing about it, too, is with traditional colours, a lot of it would be based off of plants and how we would have made them.

ÇOSINIYE Paul 06:54

Exactly, exactly, resources.

Sage Paul 06:56

Even like before paint and stuff.

ÇOSINIYE Paul 06:56

Yeah exactly. Yeah. So anyways, it didn't seem to faze her. Because after that, she jumped right into new mediums and techniques like foil embossing, paper casting, liner-cut printing, and lithography.

Sage Paul 06:58

Yeah.

ÇOSINIYE Paul 07:15

So for those who don't know, paper casting is like paper mâché in the sense that you're using a paper pulp to make a cast of almost a pop out version of the image, as far as I'm understanding. And liner printing is another form of printmaking where you carve out, it's almost like a big stamp, and then you roll it through a printing press. Lithography is very hard to explain, and I recommend you look it up, but it is a type of screen printing.

Sage Paul 07:52

In the 1990s, is when Susan began to make three dimensional pieces. She did lots of glass and bronze and wood and concrete and polymer. She even ventured into many large scale pieces from all these mediums, including the one that we're talking about today. In 1999, Susan, made *Written into the Earth*, it is located on the east wall of Saywell Atrium at the Simon Fraser University in Vancouver, BC. The faces in the middle of each panel represent people of different cultures. And then, on either side of the faces, there's different birds representing different parts of the world. From left to right, the phoenix represents the sun, the thunderbird represents the stars, the hummingbird represents the earth, and the owl represents the moon. In our interpretation, the faces in the middle bring life to these different places, and what we mean by this is in the Indigenous culture, we treat everything with the same amount of respect. The trees, the plants, the earth, are just all as alive as you and I. We respect them just the same, and this makes people think twice. If the tree's a being, there's good reason... Is there a good reason to end its life? Do we need... do we need it? Do we need

all the bits, all the pieces? Can we use each part? Are we honoring the life of that tree the way that we're using it?

ÇOSINIYE Paul 09:36

I think that's really interesting too. Because in like European ways, I feel like it's really masked the different life force forces in our world. I feel like there's kind of this misconception that like, you know, plants don't have a nervous system. So, you know, who cares? But... I think cedar is medicine to us, like cedar is a being.

Sage Paul 10:05

Yeah, I think it's cool, like the way that we grew up, you know, our father, we would get a salmon delivery each spring, and our father would let us know exactly how he wanted us to bring the salmon in. And we would prepare it in a specific way, and we would use every bit of it. And any bits that we couldn't use, or we didn't use, we would be feeding to some animal like either our pets, or...

ÇOSINIYE Paul 10:33

Seagulls, we've had so many seagulls in the yard.

Sage Paul 10:36

Well and eagles too.

ÇOSINIYE Paul 10:38

True, true, true.

Sage Paul 10:39

Eagles and ravens like we've got, I think a pair of ravens that hang out in the field.

ÇOSINIYE Paul 10:44

Yeah, I've seen them recently.

Sage Paul 10:45

Quite often, yeah.

ÇOSINIYE Paul 10:47

So beautiful. Yeah. So, bringing you back to the art, I really appreciated the attention to detail Susan took by making each face different. Even down to the expression, how she started on the left side with one looking up and look up to the sun, and then on the right side with one looking down to the earth. From what we understand they aren't in any specific order, or like how you might think they should be like, earth, moon, sun, stars, so [Laughter]. It will be interesting to hear what people have to say. We spent a long time pondering the order, and we still don't have the particular answer. I really love how this piece makes you think.

Sage Paul 11:38

Totally yeah, we really did go back and forth on that, and just the placement. We just came to the conclusion that in a whole, every part of the world is in there. Like the Medicine Wheel, it's got balance, and... yeah

ÇOSINIYE Paul 11:56

Yeah. The four pieces make me think of, yeah, the Medicine Wheel and how it often represents balance. For those who haven't seen one before, it's a circular symbol with four quadrants. Each quadrant is a colour: white, yellow, black and red. Each colour symbolizes a direction: north, west, east, south. And the number four is very important. There's four seasons, there's four elements, there's four common medicines: sage, sweetgrass, tobacco, cedar. Colours in the wheel represent different cultures and races in the world, and the circle around the edges also represents the circle of life.

Sage Paul 12:43

It's kind of cool too, because in her piece, she's got all the faces and that really makes me think of the different colours on the colour wheel as well. Like, it really does have that different cultural abundance and just kind of bringing it all together.

ÇOSINIYE Paul 12:59

Yeah.

Sage Paul 13:02

Yeah. Susan also used cedar on the panels and in our culture, cedar's a medicine. It's used for lots of many different things, including clothing and baskets and rope. It also has been used for

smudging, it has protective properties... and it could also be steeped in tea as like a cold remedy.

QOSINIYE Paul 13:31

Yeah. So I wanted to get into the political significance of the art. It stems from the 1996 exhibit at the Museum of Anthropology named by Musqueam artist Deborah Sparrow, in response to Pierre Trudeau saying, I don't see it written in the earth, that this land is yours. This is a significant statement because it directly invalidates them, the way we lived our lives and it completely minimizes the violence that Indigenous people in Canada faced when our land was taken from us. So I just thought it was good to pay homage to where the name of this piece stemmed from.

Sage Paul 14:15

And reflecting on what Pierre Trudeau said. Let's talk a little bit about how Indigenous people wrote on the earth. Today, we still see ways that Indigenous people write on the earth with art pieces like this one, and even I recall when we were watching different videos on Susan Point and trying to get more information we saw and heard her even say like, my artwork is like a big sign that's like we're here.

QOSINIYE Paul 14:50

Yeah, we're still here.

Sage Paul 14:51

We're still here.

QOSINIYE Paul 14:52

That's the one thing I got the most growing up was when I told people I was Indigenous, they were like, oh, like Indigenous people still exist. It's, it's just crazy to me that. Yeah.

Sage Paul 15:06

Totally.

QOSINIYE Paul 15:07

They don't know.

Sage Paul 15:09

Yeah.

ÇOSINIYE Paul 15:10

Or they used to not know I should say? I feel like...

Sage Paul 15:13

We're kind of coming to a different turning point in the world the way it is.

ÇOSINIYE Paul 15:17

Yeah, exactly. One way we did write in the earth was farming. As Coast Salish People, we farmed by thinking of the future, next year. Asking ourselves 'How do we help the land as it provides for us? How do I care for the earth as she cares for me?' The title Susan chose for her piece makes me think about Indigenous Peoples farming and the way Camas grows in Beacon Hill Park of Victoria, BC. Over the years before settlers came, our people cultivated and maintained the garden of Camas encouraging it to grow, for years to come, and it still grows today, going strong. And whenever you're walking there, remember that that used to be our farming.

Sage Paul 16:25

Yeah, this was true about every part of our lives, these beliefs of sustainability for future generations. For example, even when we were fishing, we purposely had holes in our nets, and this would allow... allowed us to create generational wealth by letting some fish through for the next year. We believe that Indigenous People live the way that we did, because we wanted to and not because we didn't know how to advance but because of the way that we lived was gentle to the environment. And fulfillment is about community. As a young kid, we were always taught to help build each other up and feed one another. Like even when we like, see our dad or pretty much anyone in our family, they're like you want some food?

ÇOSINIYE Paul 17:10

Yeah.

Sage Paul 17:10

You wanna take some to go.

ÇOSINIYE Paul 17:11

Yeah, exactly. That's, that's such a big way, like, we feed our connection to each other is food.

Sage Paul 17:18

Yeah.

ÇOSINIYE Paul 17:18

Even on our property. We all live on the same property here. Like constantly we're sharing food.

Sage Paul 17:24

Always like it's like there's only a little left, you want some?

ÇOSINIYE Paul 17:30

The way we mark the earth now is through art, and I feel like it's so important that we had... have pieces, like Susan Point has created in Vancouver, not just *Written in the Earth*, but all the other large-scale pieces in Vancouver. A mark on the city to recognize whose side you're on.

Sage Paul 17:55

Do you want to say anything else before I start kind of wrapping up?

ÇOSINIYE Paul 17:59

Um, yeah. Um, I kind of wanted to talk about how Susan Point is self-taught?

Sage Paul 18:08

Hmm.

ÇOSINIYE Paul 18:11

I don't think people take into consideration the like time and energy it takes to number one perfect an art style. Also, like Susan Point, taught herself everything. She did not have a mentor. She... she had to learn from books, and in a way that's really sad. Because our art

form was so extinguished, or extinct in a way, when she was starting to get back into the art form and teach herself and, I just think it's phenomenal.

Sage Paul 18:54

She would have had to really search for resources. It's quite impressive. Yeah.

ÇOSINIYE Paul 18:59

Absolutely, yeah.

Sage Paul 19:03

In conclusion, it is written in the earth, that we were here and we are here. It may not be in a way that European settlers make themselves known by marking their arrival with a flag or a building. Because we've lived our lives covering our footsteps. Our culture has taught us to leave it better than it was. We even had moccasins with extra-long tassels to hide our footprints. No wonder some people think we weren't here, because that's what we were taught to not leave a trace.

ÇOSINIYE Paul 19:40

So thank you so much for joining us in talking about this piece today. If you have a chance to check it out. Please go check it out. It's gorgeous.

Sage Paul 19:52

Awesome. Yeah.

ÇOSINIYE Paul 19:54

Thank you so much.

Sage Paul 19:55

Thank you, yeah, and thanks for inviting me, ÇOSINIYE. I really appreciate it. It was a really fun experience to get to work with you.