

THE FRONT

ANDY EVERSON (SALISH & KWAKWAKA'WAKW)

Resilience, 2018. Print, giclee edition, 22 x 17 inches (56 x 43 cm).
Photograph courtesy of the artist.

WHEN I THINK ABOUT my grandparents, my mind turns to thoughts of resilience. I try to imagine what they went through during their lives and the struggles that they faced. They survived the great flu epidemic of a century ago and witnessed the increasing marginalization of Indigenous peoples in our own lands. They persevered through the illegality of the potlatch and came through on the other side disappointed, but still eager to teach their children the ways of their ancestors. My grandfather went to residential school and was punished for speaking his language. He later came back to K'omoks and raised my mom surrounded and immersed in the Kwak'wala language. They were the very epitome of resilience.

I then think about their parents, grandparents and great-grandparents alike. They watched as settlers slowly moved into their territories and gained control over their lands in the name of a never-seen foreign king or long-reigning queen. They saw their friends and family quickly suffer and disappear from introduced disease. They went to war with other tribes as greed from the new economy invariably spread as rapidly as any epidemic. Though our numbers dwindled to a mere five percent of our original population, we continued on because of my ancestors' resilience.

Today, our culture is a well-worn, battered set of armour that surrounds and protects us. It shows the marks from all of the preceding generations. Dented and scarred, it stands as a testament to the old peoples' resilience. Our culture is a gift from our ancestors. It has withstood suffering, death, attack, malice, racism, and attempted genocide and, yet, it still guides us to this day. Our culture is resilience personified.