

charges that the enemy is not respecting the medical “rights” of the combatants and non-combatants. Participants often refer to various Geneva Conventions to support their arguments, even when those Conventions may not actually pertain to the events in question.

One of the book’s most controversial chapters focuses on torture, ill-treatment and interrogation. Gross spans the spectrum of argument from eschewing all medical involvement in such activities, to finding examples of justification using various conceptual approaches to traditional medical ethics. He cites the tension between the arguments for a total prohibition of torture and the potential roles of physicians and its use in com-

PELLING situations, “While international conventions make a strenuous effort to safeguard life and self-esteem as fundamental primary goods, the contemporary dilemma of torture and ill-treatment sets the lives of some against the self-esteem of others.”

Gross, with potent arguments and cogent examples, delves into the roles of physicians in armed conflict held by some ethics scholars and how they collide with the recommendations of the World Medical Association within the context of actual “low-level” hostilities.

The last chapter of the book, “The moral dilemmas of medicine and war,” presents a compelling summary of dichotomies that arise from various posi-

tions taken about “ethically” acceptable activities. Whatever preconceived and contrary strong opinions one may have about medical ethics in armed conflict, Gross provides an excellent historical, socially sensitive, sound, stimulating and provocative overview of the subject. For readers interested in exploring this complex matter in depth, Gross’s book provides an excellent and most readable opportunity.

#### Michael Gordon

Vice President, Medical Services  
Baycrest Geriatric Health Care System  
Professor of Medicine  
University of Toronto  
Toronto, Ont.

## Lifeworks

### Exploring beyond our limits

#### Robert Davidson: The abstract edge

Curator: Karen Duffek

Organized by Museum of Anthropology at the University of British Columbia

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When is the last time you explored beyond the limits, to the edge, of your experiences? Perhaps you travelled somewhere in the past year and encountered different cultural, linguistic and gastronomic experiences. Or you took up a new sport, read a new author, gave birth to a child, chose to walk a new route to work.

*The abstract edge* is an exhibit of works by Haida painter, printmaker, jeweler and sculptor, Robert Davidson. The exhibit is the first collaboration between the Museum of Anthropology and the National Gallery of Canada, and is touring across Canada.

Davidson grew up on the northern coast of British Columbia at Old Massett, Haida Gwaii (Queen Charlotte Islands) where he erected his first totem pole in 1969. He was taught by his grandmother, grandfather and father,

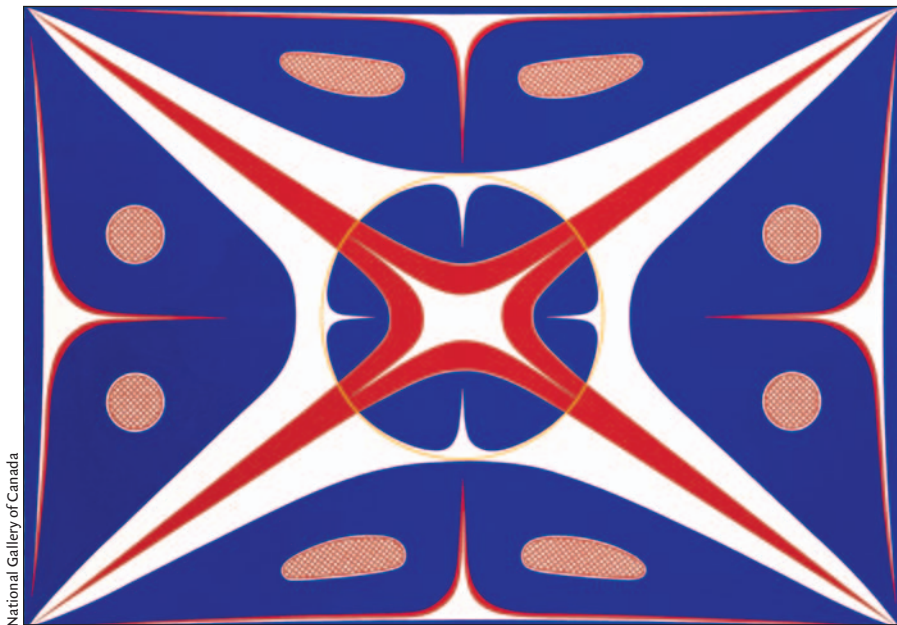
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**Robert Davidson, *Ravenous* (2003).** Red cedar and acrylic. 68.6 × 52.7 × 10.2 cm. Private collection, Goderich, Ont. Photograph: Kenji Nagai. In *Ravenous*, Davidson draws on Haida mythology to make a statement about the myopia of our behaviour in contemporary society. Davidson depicts the Haida story of a trickster raven who eats one eye from each person in a fishing village. Davidson remarks, “Raven creates an imbalance with his voraciousness, because if you take away one eye, you take away depth of vision” (quoted in Duffek<sup>1</sup> [page 36]).

apprenticed with Haida artist Bill Reid, and later studied at the Vancouver School of Art (now the Emily Carr In-

stitute of Art and Design). A recipient of the Order of Canada (1996), Order of British Columbia (1995), National



National Gallery of Canada

**Robert Davidson, *The world is as sharp as the edge of a knife* (1992).** Gouache and watercolour on paper. 73.7 × 101.6 cm. Collection of John and Penelope McCaig. *The world is as sharp as the edge of a knife* is Davidson's interpretation of an old Haida expression about treading carefully through life. He suggests that, at our core, we are our pasts, but we have the potential to venture beyond: "I see the knife's edge as the present moment. The abstraction is the thin yellow circle: the edge of the knife. What's inside is the past — the knowledge and experience — and what's outside is yet to be experienced" (quoted in Duffek<sup>1</sup> [page 26]).

Aboriginal Achievement Award for Art and Culture (1995), and 5 honorary doctorate degrees, Davidson challenges us to open our minds to new ways of seeing.

We experience an infinite number of mundane to fantastic events in our lives that continuously and uniquely shape our senses of self and our understand-

ings of the world around us. Yet we are frightened of change; there is comfort in the familiar, in stasis. For historical and political reasons, we are reluctant to acknowledge that languages, beliefs and practices are fluid. Hence the ubiquitous museum dioramas that capture societies and cultures in a moment of time: "This is it. End of story."

Robert Davidson, OC, grew up at Old Massett, Haida Gwaii, BC. Also known as the Queen Charlotte Islands, Haida Gwaii is an archipelago of islands on the west coast of Canada. Renowned for its spectacular natural beauty and wildlife, both on land and sea, it is referred to as the homeland of the Haida people. The village of Ninstints (Nans Dins), located on the small island of SGang Gwaay, is a UNESCO world heritage site. It was a thriving Haida community for thousands of years, but disease devastated the population on the island in the 19th century, and the village has been deserted for over a hundred years. The haunting remains of houses, together with carved mortuary and memorial poles, are a testament to the power and artistry of a unique society, with a spiritual relationship to the land and the sea.



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Davidson moves beyond the limits of his own experiences with Haida art and encourages us to join him on that journey. His work in *The abstract edge* evokes traditional Haida motifs — sea monsters, ravens, killer whales — but the forms are manipulated, stretched, lose their symmetry and take on new meanings in the context of the 21st century.

Davidson challenges the dualisms of past and present, traditional and contemporary: he alternates between the public, ceremonial space of potlatches (music, dance, gift exchange as ritualized redistribution of wealth) and the private, high-tech space of his studios. He uses ancient forms with modern materials. His work is informed by his Haida heritage but is transformed and interpreted through his own lens. Commenting on one painting, *The world is as sharp as the edge of a knife* (1992), Davidson asserts, "What's inside is the past — the knowledge and experience — and what's outside is yet to be experienced."

His work bears relevance for physicians: medicine has its corpus, the knowledge and practices that each medical student inherits from his or her predecessors. Ongoing medical research builds on that knowledge at a staggering rate, often requiring physicians to open their minds to new ideas. Patients may also challenge physicians to see or act differently. The adage that more than 50% of what students learn in medical school will be outdated by the time they graduate is testimony to the inherent uncertainty of medicine.

*The abstract edge* is a reminder that exploring beyond the limits of our experiences can be unsettling but also exciting.

**Nili Kaplan-Myrth**  
Anthropologist  
Medical student, class of 2008  
University of Ottawa  
Ottawa, Ont.

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