



Billy Yovanovich



Halibut Hook © Canadian Museum of History

This halibut hook was made of yew and yellow cedar, and was bonded with a handmade cedar rope. Some are bonded with spruce roots but, unfortunately, I didn't have any on hand while I did this project. Using the two different types of wood helps the hook float upside-down: the carved side made of heavier yew faces down, while the hook side made of cedar or alder rises up, making the hook more accessible for the halibut to bite.

The bait for the hook is usually tied to the cedar end, so the halibut has to ingest the whole piece in trying to get the bait. Once it engulfs the piece and hits the end, it tries to spit the hook back out but, given its angle, the hook ends up piercing one lip and catching the fish.

The figures carved on halibut hooks identify their owners, which is why we see Raven and Eagle hooks. But figures believed to bring good luck, like Octopus and Otter, might also be featured, since a big part of fishing involves having luck on your side.

Another advantage of such hooks, compared to commercial metal circle hooks, is that they float up from the ocean floor. This means the bait is a better target for fish, whereas further down, the hook might be picked clean by crab or other crustaceans that troll below.

This tool was of huge importance to our society. With a long line, some bait, and hooks, a string of hooks could be set to catch not only fish, but a species other than salmon that would yield a very large volume of food within a short amount of time.

Sufficient in food, our people could then spend time developing our culture through, for example, carving or sharing stories.

In practical terms, Haida people also had time to harvest other forms of food, which helped villages gather a reserve of food, and allowed them to hold large potlatches. Extra food also allowed trade, for example, with inland villagers, who would not have regular access to halibut. Overall, our ability to harvest halibut had a great practical and cultural impact on sustaining our population.



Raven LeBlanc



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Raven LeBlanc is from Skidegate, Haida Gwaii, and is of the Naa Saagaas XaaydaGaay Eagle clan. Raven got her start in Haida art working under Robin Rorick and Ben Davidson, after graduating from high school. Following secondary school, she attended Emily Carr University of Art & Design and the Freda Diesing School of Northwest Art. She has also worked at the Haida Gwaii Museum, and enjoys learning about her culture and sharing it with others. She now works under master carver and chief Jim Hart and his crew, carving monumental Haida art.

In her work, Raven strives to share stories that engage an audience's curiosity, memories and imagination. She also wants to share the visual language of her culture, as her ancestors did for hundreds of years.

Raven was contacted by Sean Young of the Haida Gwaii Museum to be a participating artist in the History Box project for the Canadian Museum of History. She was asked to make four traditional halibut hooks. This was Raven's first time making halibut hooks, and she was greatly inspired by the Haida Gwaii Museum's collection, as well as the book *Indian Fishing* by Hilary Stewart.

The materials used to make the hooks are both traditional and contemporary. The wood is from Haida Gwaii, and includes red cedar, alder and yew. Some of the other materials are spruce-root twine, braided nylon fishing twine, deer bone/metal barbs, a glass bead, and an abalone shell.

Different Indigenous peoples along the Northwest Coast have used halibut hooks as a highly effective fishing implement for many years. One of the methods Raven used to create a hook was the steam-bending method. It was a very delicate process, with a lot of trial and error. However, with the help of her partner, she was able to produce the hooks.

Fishing has long been an integral part of life for many Indigenous peoples, and remains just as prominent today. By being able to create these hooks, Raven feels more connected to her culture's heritage and its traditional practices.