

# WSDOT BLOG

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## Coash Salish tribal culture alive at new Mukilteo ferry terminal

*By Diane Rhodes*

He began carving out of necessity, making tools needed for daily life. From watching his father, a master carver, he learned the cuts and techniques that would lead him to become a master carver in his own right with a long and storied career. For Tulalip master carver Joe Gobin, his work has, in many ways, swung back around to necessity as a force for keeping his tribe's stories and its rich Lushootseed language alive.

"I started out carving pins for our fishing nets and fish sticks that we used to grill fish," Gobin said. Utilitarian stuff of daily life. As he grew in skill, his work grew in size to 30-foot story poles, ornate doors, canoes, and other works on display at museums and studied by others. Still an angler and a carver with multiple commissioned works to his name, Gobin resists the title master carver. "I learn from others every day," he said.

Go to the Tulalip Tribe's administration building and you will see his giant story poles. His twin hand-carved doors beckon visitors inside the Tulalip's Hibulb Cultural Center in Marysville. These stunning pieces tell of his tribe's spiritual connection to the region's land and water. In 1988, he helped carve the first canoe of modern times with Jerry Jones, another Tulalip master carver, for the tribe's annual canoe journey. Many of his pieces feature tribal totems – water, salmon, orcas, eagles.

When the new Mukilteo Multimodal Ferry Terminal opens in 2020, ferry riders will see Gobin's work throughout the passenger building and indigenous tribes' stories told throughout the site.



The design of the new Mukilteo ferry terminal passenger building (above left) takes the form of a Coast Salish longhouse; the photo at right marks its progress toward that end.

### **Tribal cooperation and cultural influence**

The new Mukilteo terminal sits on the traditional lands of the Snohomish people – present day Coast Salish Tribes – along the shores they've used as a hunting, fishing, and gathering spot for generations. It's also the site of the 1855 signing of the Point Elliott treaty between the U.S. government and Puget Sound native tribes. Without tribal approval and cooperation, the project would not have been possible.

Our agreement with the Samish, Sauk-Suiattle, Snoqualmie, Stillaguamish, Suquamish, Swinomish, and Tulalip tribes directly shaped all elements of the project's design. Tribal motifs infuse the site – the passenger building, tollbooths, waterfront promenade, landscaping, and even in the holding lanes' permeable concrete that filters stormwater runoff. Native plantings, important to tribal life, will fill the grounds where signs will describe their native importance and their Lushootseed names.

Gobin has carved an eight-foot diameter spindle whorl that tells the story of his tribe's ancestral connection to the water, orcas, and salmon. It and a working canoe he is currently carving will hang in the gathering room of the new passenger building, which is designed in the form of a Coast Salish longhouse. Gobin is also at work on male and female figures that will stand sentry outside the restrooms. Two more spindle whorls, mirroring the design of the one inside, will be made of metal and hang outside at the east and west ends of the passenger building.



An eight-foot diameter spindle whorl shows a man holding tails of two salmon and surrounded by two orcas. The red outer ring depicts water, key to Tulalip life and art. The spindle whorl will adorn the interior of the new Mukilteo passenger building.

"The killer whale is spiritual for us," Gobin said. "It was spiritual before it was art. We used it on everyday things, tools, boxes, weaving, clothing. It was on our smoke house (longhouse). It evolved into an art form."

#### **Welcoming from land and water**

The tribes asked us to make the terminal welcoming from land and water. A ride up one of the twin elevators offers sweeping views of Possession Sound toward Whidbey Island through expansive glass windows decorated with orcas, kelp, and other water motifs designed by James Madison, another Tulalip artist and Gobin's nephew. Two Coast Salish welcome figures from Suquamish artist Kate Ahvakana will greet all who enter by land through the four tollbooths.



Gobin carved the front doors of Hibulb Cultural Center with a "people of the salmon" design; its bronze handles sculpted into orcas, the tribes' totem animal.

Gobin's cultural pieces for the Mukilteo terminal are more meaningful than simple decoration. They honor a living site of his ancestors on the Mukilteo waterfront and stand as permanent reminders that the Snohomish tribes were there and still very much are.

"We are still representing our culture in these pieces," Gobin said.

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