

# AMERICAN VISIONARY ART MUSEUM

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## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

## AN ARMY OF POETS HELPING TO SAVE THE SPIRIT BEAR COAST RAINFOREST

*“Destroying rainforest for economic gain is like burning a  
Renaissance painting to cook a meal.” – E. O. Wilson*

BALTIMORE, MD (January 2, 2013)—Following its mission to increase awareness, and to inspire creative and visionary acts to better key environmental and social issues, the **AMERICAN VISIONARY ART MUSEUM (AVAM)** has launched an **ARMY OF POETS** campaign to address an urgent global concern in Canada. Twenty-two poets have answered AVAM’s call to gift one original line in a protest poem against oil giant Enbridge’s proposed plan to install a pipeline through the heart of Spirit Bear Coast in British Columbia—the rarest of pristine Northern temperate rainforests remaining on Earth. Many responding poets are well-known, award-winning laureates and activists. All are caring. With the generous support of the **Jim and Patty Rouse Charitable Foundation**, AVAM is proud to release the resulting communal “cento” protest poem, composed by individual poet activists from Baltimore, Maryland, to British Columbia, Canada.

The poem’s first line was penned by Apache elder and “White Spirit Bears” painting creator, **Judy Tallwing**. It states the prophecy, given to her by her late Grandmother and mentor, surrounding the need to safeguard the Spirit Bear homeland. Tallwing’s work of art, encrusted with crushed garnet, copper, prayer beads and diamond dust, is featured in the American Visionary Art Museum’s current exhibition, **THE ART OF STORYTELLING: Lies, Enchantment, Humor & Truth**, now through Labor Day 2013.

## SPIRIT BEAR DEFENSE CENTO

Creator promised the white bears they could live on this land in peace and in  
 harmony forever <sup>1</sup>  
 Men using greed as their compass threaten the diamond green isle where the  
 spirits hold potlatch with white bears <sup>2</sup>  
 These slick men come seeking gold, killing memory, digging graves in their  
 children's backyards. <sup>3</sup>  
 Only a fool trades beauty for the convenient false facade of easy answers <sup>4</sup>  
 In the distance mourning doves wail, Raven barks <sup>5</sup>  
 In winter solstice night Woman changes into White Bear walking forests of snow  
 stars . . . Would you kill the Woman inside the Spirit Bear inside the heart of Earth  
 our Sparkling Mother? <sup>6</sup>  
 God must be an owl, electricity coursing through the hollow bones, a white white  
 brushing the building. <sup>7</sup>  
 A chorus from 7 generations to come cautions: who-who-whoooo will answer for  
 this new rape of Earth? <sup>8</sup>  
 Is there redemption for the devastation human greed has wrought in the wild  
 places? <sup>9</sup>  
 Even a stone, and more easily a flower or a bird, could show you the way back to  
 God, to the Source, to yourself. <sup>10</sup>  
 Ancient forest shade sacred bears as albino crows watch over this pristine island  
 that must not be destroyed. <sup>11</sup>  
 When the albino crow flies to the other side of Spirit Bear Island it shall forever  
 see its beauty <sup>12</sup>  
 Spirit Bear in a wilderness of infinite protection, may her fierce love guide us. <sup>13</sup>  
 As we frame our survival on an island called Mother Earth, that which we  
 tear apart will surely close our future. <sup>14</sup>  
 My disdain is for the wasteful passing of the great white spirit to earthen ash; for  
 the fallen elders slain to the wilted floor. <sup>15</sup>  
 enchantment is the default destiny but you break your own spell as the stonecold  
 unkissable wretched treeless loveless one by your own magic wand-drill <sup>16</sup>  
 na dots ehmoghn baeh neh hesgotseo ehmin  
 i will walk upon the ashes of the earth singing <sup>17</sup>  
 To understand-remember. See with the eyes you were born with. <sup>18</sup>  
 Something looks back from the trees and knows me for who I am. <sup>19</sup>  
 Under the great NightStar our spirits gather in numbers of blazing fire knowing  
 every memory cannot be erased or burned. <sup>20</sup>  
 Honoring the Sacred of the Soul <sup>21</sup>  
 I begin to believe the only sin is distance, refusal. All others stemming from this. <sup>22</sup>  
**THIS GIFT CANNOT BE RETURNED - IF LOST, IT IS LOST FOREVER.**  
**HANDLE WITH CARE.** <sup>23</sup>

## CONTRIBUTING POETS:

- |                                 |                         |
|---------------------------------|-------------------------|
| 1 Judy Tallwing                 | 13 Janet E. Aalfs       |
| 2 Jon Graham                    | 14 Elliott F. Bratton   |
| 3 Kwame Alexander               | 15 Marcellus Nealy      |
| 4 Olatundji Akpo-Sani           | 16 Olu Butterfly        |
| 5 Michael S. Glaser             | 17 Lance Henson         |
| 6 Susan Deer Cloud              | 18 Deanna Nikaido       |
| 7 Martín Espada                 | 19 Jane Hirshfield      |
| 8 L. Nef'fahtiti Partlow-Myrick | 20 E. Ethelbert Miller  |
| 9 Linda Kavelin-Popov           | 21 Julia Butterfly Hill |
| 10 Eckhart Tolle                | 22 Jane Hirshfield      |
| 11 Ebum Adelona                 | 23 Naomi Shihab         |
| 12 Barbara Buckman Strasko      |                         |

## ABOUT THE ARMY OF POETS PROJECT:

When AVAM's founder and director, Rebecca Hoffberger, first saw Judy Tallwing's "White Spirit Bears" painting, the paint was not yet dry. Neither woman could have imagined the extent to which the subjects of the painting and the land they inhabit—one of the last temperate rainforests on Earth—would soon be threatened. Learning of plans to lay an oil pipeline across Canada terminating at Spirit Bear Coast Rainforest, Hoffberger and AVAM conspired to raise a small ARMY OF POETS in protest of this commercial intention. Esteemed poets and writers from the U.S. and Canada, including **Eckhart Tolle** and Maryland Poet Laureate **Michael Glaser**, have each contributed lines to this impassioned protest poem to be read publicly for the first time at AVAM in March of 2013. **Judy Tallwing**, participating poets and representatives of Native sacred traditions will also be featured at this special reading, which is made possible by generous support from the **Jim and Patty Rouse Charitable Foundation**.

## THE KEY FACTS ABOUT SPIRIT BEAR COAST & PRINCESS ROYAL ISLAND:

1. Only 400 Kermode bears, or white "spirit" bears exist, most on this precious island and along the coast of British Columbia. They are born about every tenth cub to black bears—they are NOT albino—and can themselves birth either black or white cubs.
2. This sacred island also has albino crows, some of the largest and oldest trees in the hemisphere, and many sacred and rare plants.
3. The company proposing to lay the Northern Gateway Pipelines project is energy giant Enbridge. The channel through the island & coastal waters that an industrial barge would have to pass through is six times narrower than the straight where the horrific Exxon Valdez spill occurred.



4. This island is long protected by treaty, belongs to nature and all future generations, and we join others in the belief that it should never become vulnerable to corporate exploitation. Rarer than the greatest artistic masterpiece, this island is simply irreplaceable.

*For more information on the efforts to save the Spirit Bear Coast, please visit the National Resource Defense Council (NRDC)'s website & campaign page at:*  
<http://www.savebiogems.org/save-the-spirit-bear/>



*Judy Tallwing, White Sprit Bears, 2012, Resin, silver, garnet, sterling, acrylic, copper and diamonds, Collection of the artist, Photo by Dan Meyers.*

By utilizing Judy Tallwing's painting to inspire poets' artful and articulate voices in public protest and alarm, AVAM hopes to speak directly to the hearts of all those who together can prevent environmental devastation of one of Earth's most extraordinarily pristine and rare Northern rainforests and animal sanctuaries.

## ABOUT THE ARTIST:

### JUDY TALLWING

(1945 – )

Apache elder Judy Tallwing was born Judy Browning in Glendale, Arizona, the daughter of Ruby Browning and Archer Donoho. Judy holds vivid childhood memories of living in the desert with her parents and seven half brothers and sisters, helping to hunt rattlesnakes, and selling rocks by the roadside. From their five-acre home in Washington state, Judy, like many Native American children, attended both Catholic girls' school and Indian school. Tallwing now has six children, 23 grandchildren, and seven great grandchildren.

Judy started making art as far back as she can remember. “We didn’t call it art, we called it making things to sell along the road to help the family survive. I used to watch my Grandmother, Grandfather, and my Mother all doing various forms of what I now know is art, to sell, and I wanted to help.” Her first thing that sold was a bee sitting on a flower, painted on a rock. It sold for .25 cents.

In her youth, Judy did a little bit of everything, from running her own construction and leather production companies to being the executive director of a domestic violence victims program and running an animal rescue for 13 years. “I think an ‘aha moment’ for me was realizing I could go to college, even without much other schooling.” Starting college at age 32 changed her life; she now holds both an AA and BA degree.

Judy always painted or created some form of art. “I love trying to bring the stories I’ve heard to life and to add the spiritual aspects of the stories through the medicine of different elements of nature. Each thing that lives on the earth has its own energy and I try to put those energies together to create a healing.” Judy travels to power places on the earth and brings back tiny fragments from those places to put in every painting or sculpture that calls for them, including copper, silver, turquoise, garnet, prayer ashes, and minute crystal prayer beads.

Judy believes that stories are the most important way we pass on our histories and they’re our most powerful teaching tools. “Stories can be used to guide us; to help us heal; to make us laugh. I’ve been telling stories all my life, whether it was from a stage, in front of a campfire, on canvas or to a room of kids...I want to do as my grandfather said—make the world a bit better because Creator let me be here for a while.”

## ABOUT THE MUSEUM:

**AMERICAN VISIONARY ART MUSEUM (AVAM)** is America's official national museum and education center for self-taught, intuitive artistry. Since its opening in 1995, the museum has sought to promote the recognition of intuitive, self-reliant, creative contribution as both an important historic and essential living piece of treasured human legacy. The one-of-a-kind American Visionary Art Museum is located on a 1.1 acre wonderland campus at 800 Key Highway, Baltimore Inner Harbor. Three renovated, historic, industrial buildings house wonders created by farmers, housewives, mechanics, retired folk, the disabled, the homeless, as well as the occasional neurosurgeon—all inspired by the fire within. From carved roots to embroidered rags, tattoos to toothpicks, the visionary transforms dreams, loss, hopes, and ideals into powerful works of art.

## CURRENT EXHIBITION:

***THE ART OF STORYTELLING: Lies, Enchantment, Humor & Truth***  
October 6, 2012 – September 1, 2013

From scripture to fairy tale, cartoons to cyberbullying, the raw power of stories to inspire and enchant, spread lies or to inform, simply has no equal. *THE ART OF STORYTELLING: Lies, Enchantment, Humor & Truth* is the American Visionary Art Museum's brand-new, supremely original exhibition featuring embroidery, diorama, sculpture, film, graffiti, and PostSecret confession—promoting all manner of acute 'visual listening' and delight for the whole family. For more information, visit: <http://avam.org/exhibitions/art-of-storytelling.shtml>

## VISITOR INFORMATION:

**AMERICAN VISIONARY ART MUSEUM (AVAM)** is open Tuesday through Sunday, 10am–6pm. The museum is closed on Mondays,\* Christmas Day and Thanksgiving Day. AVAM is located next to historic Federal Hill park at 800 Key Highway, Baltimore Inner Harbor, 21230. Admission prices, general museum info, directions, and parking info can be found online at <http://avam.org> or by calling 410.244.1900. \**OPEN Monday Martin Luther King, Jr. Day—January 21, 2013 (10am–6pm)—as AVAM's celebration of all of life's possibilities! Free admission & special programming.* Find AVAM on Facebook at: <http://www.facebook.com/theavam> & follow us on Twitter: [@TheAVAM](https://twitter.com/TheAVAM).

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## PRESS IMAGES:

Available at AVAM's website: <http://avam.org/news-and-events/media-info.shtml>, email [nick@avam.org](mailto:nick@avam.org) for password.