

*Raven's Reprise: A Significant Juncture in the Developing
Exhibition Practices of Canadian Museums with
Regard to First Nations Art*

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ABSTRACT

Raven's Reprise: A Significant Juncture in the Developing Exhibition Practices of Canadian Museums with Regard to First Nations Art

Annie Khatchadourian

This thesis deals with exhibition practices of Canadian cultural establishments regarding First Nations art at the turn of the twenty-first century. I consider *Raven's Reprise*, which was held at the Museum of Anthropology at the University of British Columbia from January 26th 2000 to January 14th 2001, as a case study for discussing the juxtaposition of historical Northwest Coast objects and contemporary art. The thesis describes the Northwest Coast area and discusses the different peoples and their culture and it examines the history and development of their artistic production. It also deals with the formation of the Task Force on Museums and First Peoples, including its report and recommendations from 1992. This thesis also discusses contemporary First Nations art from 1960 until 2000, and demonstrates that *Raven's Reprise* was representative of work being done by contemporary artists at the time it was shown. Furthermore, this thesis focuses on one of the central issues of *Raven's Reprise*: exhibiting contemporary work in an ethnological environment. It is my premise throughout this thesis that *Raven's Reprise* was a significant effort to educate the museum-going public about the continuing presence of contemporary Northwest Coast art and artists, and that it was an influential and groundbreaking exhibition because of its attempts to educate and its success in creating lasting dialogue and debate.

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INTRODUCTION

The specific aim of this thesis is to examine a significant juncture in the shifting exhibition practices of Canadian museums pertaining to First Nations art at the turn of the twenty-first century. In particular, the focus is on the juxtaposition of historical Northwest Coast objects and contemporary art. For this, the exhibition *Raven's Reprise*, which was featured at the Museum of Anthropology (MOA) at the University of British Columbia and was on display from January 26th 2000 to January 14th 2001, will be used as a case study. *Raven's Reprise* was curated by Lynn Hill and featured thirteen works by five Northwest Coast contemporary artists. The contemporary works, each one defined by a purple raven label, were displayed in MOA's Ramp, Great Hall, and Visible Storage areas. Hill, a Cayuga artist and curator, was sponsored by a Canada Council for the Arts Initiative program promoting up-and-coming curators; given the proposal to work at a museum or gallery of her choice, she decided on MOA and was curator-in-residence from 1997 until 1999. During this time, she worked with the artists and MOA's permanent staff, but maintained independent curatorial responsibility for *Raven's Reprise*.

Hill negotiated and planned a one-year exhibition for which she invited five contemporary artists, four of them of Kwakwaka'wakw descent and one of Tlingit and Nisga'a, to display thirteen works amongst works from MOA's permanent collection; none of the historical objects on permanent display were moved for the exhibition. The pieces from the five artists were commissioned by MOA. The artists were chosen in part because of their relationship to one another; four of the five were cousins, a bond that symbolized a sense of community, which was an important aspect that Hill wanted to emphasize. The

arrangement Hill had with the artists allowed each of them to decide where they would like to locate their pieces in the permanent collection display. The goal was to create situations and dialogues between the contemporary works and the historical objects to which they were juxtaposed.

Hill stated that the work produced by these five contemporary artists “acknowledges the contradistinction between the traditional Northwest Coast formal design concepts and contemporary materials and technology.”¹ The thirteen pieces in *Raven’s Reprise* were produced using contemporary media ranging from interior and exterior installations to multi-media works, photography and textiles, and according to Hill offered “an understanding and concept of Northwest Coast material culture including oral histories, craftsmanship and aesthetics with concepts of their own urban histories and realities to reflect the here and now.”²

In order to coherently address the objective of this thesis, a discussion of contemporary First Nations artistic production from the 1960s until 2000 is necessary. This study also examines the history and development of the Northwest Coast peoples and artistic production, in an effort to offer both an historical and an historiographical context for the entire thesis. Some important bibliographical sources include writings by such authorities on the Northwest Coast as Karen Duffek, Lynn Hill, Ruth Phillips, and Martine Reid. The main archival source I consulted extensively was MOA’s Darrin Morrison fonds in Vancouver, where the exhibition files of *Raven’s Reprise* are located. Primary literary sources include newspaper and journal articles, written by people such as Michael Scott, who reviewed the exhibition. Among secondary sources used in this discussion, I found Aaron Glass’ article “(Cultural) Objects of (Cultural) Value”, M.A.

theses by Stephanie Bolton and Kelly Legge, and the writings of Duffek, Reid and Phillips to be especially helpful. Legge's 2003 thesis also focused on *Raven's Reprise*. Entitled "Trickster Amuck in the Museum: A Case Study of the UBC Museum of Anthropology's Collaborative Contemporary Native Art Exhibition *Raven's Reprise*," the thesis has as one of its main objectives the discussion of how the Trickster aesthetic in an exhibition is a curatorial strategy and can be used as a bridge to create an avenue of progressive collaboration and instruction in a Western institution.³ One of Legge's stated purposes for her thesis is "to provide a forum for the artists and curator involved in *Raven's Reprise* to discuss their experiences and amplify the positive effects of the art and exhibition while exploring the obstacles in exhibiting at MOA."⁴ As such, she offers a lengthy collection of the thoughts and commentary of three of the artists involved in *Raven's Reprise*, along with Lynn Hill's. Legge's thesis also states as an objective the discussion of the categorizing term 'postmodern' with some of the artists from *Raven's Reprise*, to gather whether such Western terminology has meaning in the way that they represent themselves.⁵ While I do present some of the thoughts from people directly involved with *Raven's Reprise*, my focus in writing about this important moment in the exhibition of First Nations art in Canada at the turn of the twenty-first century is on the history and development of Northwest Coast artistic production, the events leading up to the formation of the Task Force on Museums and First Peoples, along with discussion of its report and recommendations from 1992, and contemporary art from 1960 until 2000 - demonstrating that *Raven's Reprise* was representative of work being done by contemporary First Nations artists at the time it was shown. This thesis also focuses on

one of the central issues of *Raven's Reprise*: exhibiting contemporary work in an ethnological environment - in this case MOA.

Stuart Hall's "Old and New Identities, Old and New Ethnicities", written in 1997, provided a foundation for an examination of postcolonial theory. Postcolonial literature, such as Hall's writings, along with Homi Bhabha's and Cornel West's, all from the 1980s and 1990s, helped shape the museological changes regarding the display of First Nations art in Canada at the turn of the twenty-first century. This literature influenced exhibition practices during the time of the planning and mounting of *Raven's Reprise* seven years ago. Thus, these writings offer an important theoretical base indicative of the type of museological shift that was happening during this recent history. Personal communications and interviews with Hill, along with all five of the artists exhibiting in *Raven's Reprise*, provided insights and information without which this study could not have been successfully completed.

Chapter I of this thesis describes the Northwest Coast area and discusses the different Northwest Coast peoples and their culture, along with an explanation of the issues and events leading to a formation of a Northwest Coast art history. This section is meant to function as an historical framework for the whole thesis. Chapter I also discusses suggested alternatives in the most common display techniques for Northwest Coast objects; for example, one of the suggested viable techniques has been to involve First Nations curators, and such is the case with *Raven's Reprise*. Such suggestions are in line with the recommendations found in the 1992 Task Force report entitled *Turning the Page: Forging New Partnerships Between Museums and First Peoples*, a document that presented guidelines for improved harmony between Canadian museums and First

Nations peoples.

Chapter II demonstrates that the works exhibited in *Raven's Reprise* were characteristic of work being produced by artists from 1960 until the beginning of the twenty-first century. After the oppressive nineteenth-century ban on ceremonial gatherings was lifted by the Canadian government in 1951, many First Nations people had a restored feeling of freedom, since speaking their own language and honoring their own culture and traditions were not considered crimes anymore.⁶ In the Northwest Coast area, Mungo Martin (1881-1962), a traditional carver, was able to openly produce traditional and ceremonial art for members of his community. Well-known for his carving skills, Martin also sold some of his work to museums and private collectors, and was first hired by MOA's Audrey Hawthorn in the 1950s to undertake the restoration of poles, and then by the Royal British Columbia Museum in Victoria to work on its extensive Northwest Coast collection, repairing and carving poles. Lynn Hill noted in 1995: "[T]his renewed sense of cultural and artistic freedom appeared to encourage and motivate the spirit of both contemporary and traditional artists."⁷ Starting from 1960, when the Canadian Bill of Rights granted status First Nations people citizenship and the right to vote in federal elections, there was the onset of a new artistic practice – a contemporary art form that reflected the changing cultural, political and social aspects of First Nations peoples.⁸ Many of these new artworks had themes that were culturally based and looked back to old traditions and ways for inspiration. As such, artists were producing art that was based in both Western and First Nations aesthetic traditions, and painting in a variety of styles and techniques, influenced by Western movements such as

Cubism and Abstract Expressionism. Indeed, a new contemporary art movement was burgeoning among First Nations people in Canada. As Lynn Hill explained:

The popularity of this new movement on the contemporary art scene, took critics, curators, and dealers by storm. Artists soon realized the power of their artistic voice and began to use it to their advantage. Through their works they addressed issues of cultural identity as well as the changing social and political events of their time...Scholars were unable to label or categorize these new contemporary works as they did not seem to derive from any one particular Western doctrine of art, nor were they characteristic of any previously produced Native handicrafts...First Nations art, whether traditional or contemporary, cannot be categorized with a Western perspective. This is mainly due to the fact that the respective arts are born out of entirely different aesthetics, each reflecting separate histories and experiences.⁹

Furthermore, during the late 1960s and early 1970s, artists were attaining acknowledgment from the federal government, as well as from private and public galleries. Particularly significant art exposure came in the year 1967, when some artists were invited to participate in Expo '67 in Montreal; they were exposed to an international audience when they organized an exhibition for the "Indians of Canada" Pavilion. And in the same year, the Vancouver Art Gallery's exhibition *Arts of the Raven* endeavoured, for the first time, to present traditional Northwest Coast art as *fine art*.¹⁰ The 1970s and 1980s were a period of political awareness for First Nations people across Canada; several organizations and political groups addressed broken treaties, land claims and social injustices, and Hill believes this new-found brotherhood "raised peoples' inner resources/spirits and strengthened the political voice of the First Nations in North America."¹¹

Karen Duffek wrote in 1983 about contemporary Northwest Coast art from the 1960s to the 1980s:

Contemporary Northwest Coast Indian fine art has emerged in the

commercial art market as a synthesis of two apparently contradictory sets of artistic values: on the one hand is an emphasis on creating native art within centuries-old conventions of form and composition, and on the other hand is a Western academic avant-garde tradition. That these values may be viewed as contradictory brings into focus the current role of Northwest Coast art within the non-native context, and the challenges that face twentieth century native artists as they attempt to develop their art while maintaining a continuity within the past. The success of producing art for a non-Indian consumer within the market has led to an investigation by some artists into the traditional functions and meanings of the art, and is being accompanied by a revival of art production for the *native* context.¹²

Many artists during this period were revitalizing contemporary art and participating in a creative continuity of tradition by producing pieces for personal, spiritual, community, and potlatch purposes. Active participants in the creative continuity of tradition, these artists sought to form a more significant milieu, both personally and culturally speaking, for contemporary Northwest Coast art; as such, the work produced for these reasons were often for little or no economic advantage.¹³ The early 1990s also proved to be a time of political significance for First Nations peoples in Canada. The Meech Lake Accord marked the first time that a First Nations person, Elijah Harper (N.D.P. member of the Manitoba Legislature), changed the Canadian government's course of action, when he refused to give his approval (1990); this event, along with the Oka crisis in the same year, was highly significant. These examples helped establish that "both nationally and internationally...First Nations people were no longer meekly standing aside, they were regaining control over their own self-determination."¹⁴

Chapter II provides a narrative in which I incorporate the pieces in *Raven's Reprise*, which were representative of artworks being produced by contemporary artists between 1960 and 2000. This chapter therefore also focuses specifically on a detailed description of the exhibition and includes a formal analysis of the contemporary works in

it. Each of the contemporary works was created using media such as installation, photography, and mixed media. But they also drew heavily from traditional and personal histories and motifs found in Northwest Coast art and culture. The desire was to reinforce the relationship between the historical and the contemporary pieces, and to showcase a continuing Northwest Coast artistic production and a thriving culture. The works in *Raven's Reprise* illustrate the importance of tradition in post-1960 art. Although there was a diversity of production in the art practice during this period, ranging from the revival of traditional artforms and media, to politically-charged art, to the use of Western styles, the over-riding constant was building bridges between historical and contemporary art.

Chapter III focuses on one of the key issues of *Raven's Reprise*: the exhibiting of contemporary works in an ethnological space. There is also an examination of the MOA's mandate as this pertains to the permanent collection of the Northwest Coast art and artifacts. Finally, I attempt to characterize the exhibition and its aftermath with discussions of critical responses to *Raven's Reprise* garnered from media reviews and relevant articles, as well as interviews with the curator and the artists involved. According to Hill, the main idea behind the juxtaposition of the historical objects and the contemporary works was to use MOA as a resource; she describes *Raven's Reprise* as a vehicle towards educating the public on Northwest Coast art and culture, both past and present.¹⁵ Along with discussing *Raven's Reprise* as an intervention in MOA's space - a disruption of the permanent collection - this chapter examines the exhibition's educational potential. Exhibitions have the potential to educate by opening up critical discussion and dialogue. *Raven's Reprise* intended to act as an educational tool, and

attempted to show the continuing vitality of Northwest Coast art-making and culture. But it had to overcome the difficult barrier of audience expectations in an ethnological institution such as MOA, where the average visitor may not have been familiar with contemporary art. Thus the art in *Raven's Reprise* may well have been too jarring for many visitors at MOA, and by extension the educational potential of the exhibition was diminished because of this.

Raven's Reprise was ground-breaking and an important example of an exhibition attempting to act as an instigator for meaningful discussion and dialogue about present-day Northwest Coast art and artists, along with dealing with the issue of exhibiting current art that is not 'traditional' in an ethnological space. As such, it was a significant effort to educate the museum-going public of the continuing presence of contemporary Northwest Coast art and artists.

NOTES TO INTRODUCTION

¹ Lynn Hill, 1999, transcript, “Raven’s Reprise: Project description and Justification of Current Request; Installation/Presentation” application to The Canada Council for the Arts Project Grant to Visual Arts Organizations: Exhibitions/Dissemination Assistance, n.p., *Darrin Morrison fonds*, Ac # 2002-11, Museum of Anthropology at the University of British Columbia Archives, Vancouver, British Columbia.

² *Ibid.*

³ Kelly Legge, “Trickster Amuck in the Museum: A Case Study of the UBC Museum of Anthropology’s Collaborative Contemporary Native Art Exhibition Raven’s Reprise”, (Winnipeg: M.A. thesis, University of Manitoba, 2003), 14.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ Lynn Hill, “Historical Confluence,” in *AlterNative*, (Kleinburg, Ontario: McMichael Canadian Art Collection, 1995), 10.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ *Ibid.*, 10-11.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 11.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² Karen Duffek, “The Revival of Northwest Coast Indian Art,” In *Vancouver: Art and Artists, 1931-1983* (Vancouver, British Columbia: Vancouver Art Gallery, 1983), 316.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ Lynn Hill, “Historical Confluence,” in *AlterNative*, (Kleinburg, Ontario: McMichael Canadian Art Collection, 1995), 12.

¹⁵ Lynn Hill, telephone interview by author, 10 July 2003.

CHAPTER I: THE NORTHWEST COAST - A DISCUSSION OF THE AREA AND ARTISTIC PRODUCTION, AND SUGGESTED ALTERNATIVES IN COMMON DISPLAY TECHNIQUES OF OBJECTS

Northwest Coast Area and Early History

Northwest Coast art and culture has a rich history that dates back thousands of years. As Martine Reid states:

Northwest Coast art was a fluent visual and symbolic language, whose variation and subtlety were shared by those who made the art and those who cherished it. Art forms were meaningful to everyone and imbued with social, cosmic, and mythic resonances.¹

The Northwest Coast region of North America (figure 1) is comprised of a thin strip of land, roughly twenty-four hundred kilometres long, spanning the Pacific coast of Canada and the United States of America, and contiguous islands and inlets. It extends from the Copper River in Southern Alaska down to British Columbia, and then south to the Oregon-California border, and eastwards to a chain of mountain ranges that effectively isolate this area from the rest of the continent. Although the area's geography has rendered it mostly remote, most notably in the north, the interior is more accessible through a number of sizeable rivers: the Skeena in Northern British Columbia, the Fraser in the south, and the Columbia River in Washington State. These and other waterways have allowed trade, migration, and cultural exchange with First Nations peoples: fairly restricted trade in the north and more widespread in the south.² Anthropologists have determined that humans first settled on the Northwest Coast some ten to twelve thousand years ago. It is estimated that the ancestors of most of the contemporary peoples of the coast had arrived by about 3,000 BC. By the time of the first European contact in the late eighteenth century, the coastal area was one of the most densely populated in the world.

Instead of farming, the Northwest Coast inhabitants relied on fishing, hunting and gathering for subsistence. The very versatile red and yellow cedar was the most important wood for carving utensils and art objects, and for constructing the big multi-family plank houses found throughout the Northwest Coast region.³ Historically, the Northwest Coast was characterized by linguistic diversity: there are six different linguistic groups, at least forty-five different languages, and countless dialects, spoken by the inhabitants of this area.

Northwest Coast art is generally portrayed by scholars in terms of three sub-areas; these *style provinces* are characterized by parallels in both style and ceremonial and spiritual frameworks for art.⁴ The northern *province* includes the Tlingit of Southern Alaska, the Haida of the Queen Charlotte Islands and Southern Alaska, the Tsimshian-speaking peoples who, along with the coastal Tsimshian, include the Nisga'a of the lower Nass River, the Haisla (who are linguistically related to the Kwakiutl), and the Gitksan of the Skeena. The central *style province* includes the Nuxalk (Bella Coola), who speak Salish, and most of the groups whose languages belong to the Wakashan family: the Kwakiutl, northern Heiltsuk, Oweekeno, Nuuchahnulth, Ditidaht, and Makah. The southern *province* is the most linguistically and culturally varied, and is comprised of the Coast and Straits Salish-speaking peoples (whose ancient homelands are now the modern cities of Seattle, Vancouver, and Victoria), along with more minor groups to the south, including the Chinookans, Tillamook, Kalapuyans, and Alseans in Washington and Oregon. As these groups differed in language and other cultural characteristics, each had a different version of an origin myth to explain their own existence as well as that of the rest of the world. For example, within the single ethnic group of the Kwakiutl, each of

the twenty-eight tribal subgroups had its own origin myth. In these tales, supernatural ancestors in the form of a Thunderbird or another great being came down from the sky, or up from the sea or the underworld, and would then take on human shapes by taking off their costumes or masks.⁵

Historically, the formation of the main features of Northwest Coast art and society reaches back at least 4,500 years, as there is an archaic style that underlies all of Northwest Coast art.⁶ Between 3,500 BC and 1,500 BC, artfully worked stone, bone, and antler objects began to appear along the Fraser River in southern British Columbia. Janet Berlo and Ruth Phillips wrote in 1998 about archaeological evidence suggesting that ancestors of the Coast Salish, Nuuchahnulth and Kwakiutl peoples of the central *province* held potlatch-like feasts, and that some individuals wore lip ornaments, known as labrets, which are both characteristic of social systems manifested by apparent features of status or class, and comparable to those of post-contact times. Also during this time period, people began to engrave geometric designs on their tools and to sculpt objects such as hand mauls, which were used to split planks into artistically worked forms, some of which were representational. Basketry and weaving works were found in Fraser River delta wet sites that preserved from decay; these date back to 2,500 BC. By about 800 BC, some elements of the formline style (to be explained in detail in Chapter II) were already present in the art of the Coast Salish of the Fraser River delta, which is modern-day Vancouver.⁷ Some significant stone carvings were also produced in the Fraser River region by 1,000 BC, including objects such as bowls and effigies featuring animal and human representations such as the Raven which were conceptually akin to those carved in historic period art and oral tradition. According to archaeological research, all the

major stylistic elements and object types of historic northern art were in place by the year 1,000 AD.⁸

A History of Northwest Coast Artistic Production

In the late eighteenth century, two centuries after Europeans first made contact with First Nations peoples on the Atlantic Coast, Europeans began to visit and interact with the population on the Northwest Coast. Karen Duffek wrote in 1983 about the importance of art in that time: “Art in the traditional Northwest Coast was an integral part of the culture, expressing social and ceremonial privileges, and manifesting beliefs about the relationship of man to his universe.”⁹ Much of the art during this period centered on the winter potlatch ceremony. Almost from the onset of the first European contact in the 1770’s, Europeans’ presence affected traditional Northwest Coast art and culture. Initially, the effect was positive; with increased wealth and more efficient tools, Northwest Coast art production flourished. However, along with assimilation, and the introduction of new diseases, firearms, and alcohol, a subsequent decline in the fur trade, and an increasing dependence on the part of First Nations peoples on a wage economy, a progressive breakdown of traditional culture occurred. An effort was therefore made to collect objects, which in turn both fuelled assimilation and raised the cultural and market value of more and more hard to find objects.¹⁰ By the nineteenth century, the general assumption amongst missionaries and ethnographers alike was that First Nations cultures were disappearing. By the end of the eighteenth century, the production of artifacts for the European market had begun, and it continued throughout the nineteenth century. While some types of Haida argillite carvings were created and flourished during this period, traditional artistic production and styles were also sustained.¹¹ Argillite carvings

got their name from the unique type of black carbonaceous shale, known as argillite, found at a quarry in the Queen Charlotte Islands. The Haida used this fairly soft material, suitable for carving and able to take a high polish, to invent a new art form to meet external demands for collectable curios during the pinnacle of the fur trade that began in the 1820s.¹² Haida carvers used argillite into the 1860s to make ceremonial pipes for their own use at first and then developed a series of new curio forms for sale, including European design-inspired pipes, elaborate plates, platters, and candlesticks. Carvers also used argillite to make miniature versions of totem poles and other ceremonial objects. Tourists visiting the Queen Charlotte Islands ardently collected these commoditized arts.¹³

By the end of the nineteenth century, there were government laws, culminating in 1876 when Canada passed the Indian Act, making traditional rituals illegal, though it must be stated that this did not yet make the potlatch illegal. Potlatches included feasts during which rights to the inheritance of wealth and power were displayed and validated. However, a later amendment made by Order in Council did make illegal this fundamental institution of Northwest Coast society; Section 149 first appeared in 1884, but under a more powerful revision in 1921, the first arrests on the Northwest Coast peoples were made. Also, from 1867 to 1880 the government of Canada undertook jurisdiction over First Nations people, including resource and land management. The government asserted its hegemonic authority and a process of assimilation was implemented, in which children were taken to live in church-run residential schools; these schools were often situated far from the children's families. The children were prohibited from speaking their language or even talking about the old ways. People experienced a deterioration of

their traditional social structure, which had both supported the art production and given it meaning. Consequently, most groups lost the knowledge, resources, and skills required to sustain a viable and developing artistic tradition. Throughout much of the nineteenth century, however, contact and trade with Europeans also shaped the circumstances for a remarkable artistic creativity in the Northwest Coast region; new goods made by Europeans added to the supply of materials and tools accessible to artists.¹⁴ There was a greater availability of metal and metal tools, seemingly resulting in the enlargement of the size of some types of carvings, such as totem poles. The importance and numbers of the shield-shaped plaques called coppers were also increased; historically, coppers symbolized a family's wealth during potlatches. New art forms, namely the button blanket, and engraved silver bracelets, were also created using other materials, such as trade cloth, mother-of-pearl buttons and silver coins. Moreover, new objects were being produced during this time, stemming from a demand for curios made of argillite and specifically intended for sale to tourists and travelers.¹⁵ By the mid-twentieth century, few artists who had been trained in the traditional apprenticeship system remained on the coast, and although some production of traditional art continued through the early decades of the twentieth century, namely among the Kwakiutl, the demise of a culture based on deep-rooted traditions appeared inevitable.¹⁶ In the second half of the twentieth century, however, there was a reversal of this history, when the Northwest Coast people reasserted their cultural and artistic energy.¹⁷

An important part of this reassertion occurred in 1951, when the Indian Act was amended and the ban on the potlatch was eliminated. In addition to being present in the carving of crest or 'totem' poles, the complex groupings of humans and animals known

as crests were also represented on a family's clan hats, on head-dresses, and on button blankets; the potlatch included a display of the complete set of crests belonging to a family. During a potlatch, a family demonstrated its merit to inherit and hold titles in three ways: by extravagant feasting, bountiful sharing of gifts to guests, and displaying its crests while vividly re-enacting and narrating their stories.¹⁸ The occasions for having a potlatch differed from one group to another. The Kwakiutl potlatch was renowned because it included some of the most spectacular and theatrically complicated masked performances on the Northwest Coast.

In the 1960s, therefore, there were new audiences and consumers for Northwest Coast art, and a new economic and social support system was beginning to arise in place of those of the past; these new systems helped support a high degree of art production. Karen Duffek wrote in her 1983 essay "The Revival of Northwest Coast Indian Art" that the renaissance of Northwest Coast art started partly in response to political, economic, and social factors – such as the 1951 amendment of the Indian Act - both internal and external to First Nations society. Duffek noted that the years from 1960 until the 1980s were witness to continuing political activity that contributed to "a realization of the value of heritage and tradition for native people."¹⁹ By the 1970s, the Northwest Coast art market had developed into quite a profitable industry, backed mainly by a non-Native consumer public and involving many artists. Revealing the weight of its cultural traditions to producer and consumer alike, Northwest Coast art had surfaced in a new social context. Duffek wrote about the revival:

The meaningfulness of contemporary Northwest Coast Indian art for viewers seems to be based, to a large extent, on its successful communication of an identifiable ethnicity (Indianness). For many viewers, this ethnicity is most recognizable and understandably

presented by means of forms and subject matter that viewers can identify as traditional or appropriately Indian. For others, innovative and modern forms and subject matter can also present this identity successfully.²⁰

The Events Leading to the Formation of the Task Force on Museums and First Nations

Aaron Glass wrote in 2002 about the need to contextualize Northwest Coast artworld discourses within larger artworld practices in order to “better assess our current predicament and to suggest viable alternatives in the display of Northwest Coast objects.”²¹ One of the suggested approaches to accomplish this has been to involve First Nations curators, as was the case with *Raven’s Reprise*. Lynn Hill was sponsored by the Canada Council for the Arts to be curator-in-residence at the MOA from 1997 until 1999. The specific Canada Council program was called Project Grants to Visual Arts Organizations: Exhibition/Dissemination Assistance, with MOA applying and receiving a 10,000-dollar grant in 1999. Hill worked with the artists and MOA staff to organize the exhibition. This approach of involving First Nations curators was also one of the main recommendations made in the 1992 report by the Task Force on Museums and First Nations. In the 1980s, escalating First Nations discontent with museums was brought to the forefront of national attention after the Lubicon Cree of northern Alberta called for a boycott of the exhibition *The Spirit Sings*, at the Glenbow Museum, organized as the major cultural event of the 1988 Calgary Winter Olympics.²² Funded primarily by the Shell Oil Company, this exhibition was to bring together First Nations art and artifacts from around the world (mostly from European institutions) representing the period of first contact with European traders and explorers. At the time, the Lubicon Cree were involved in a land claim dispute with the federal and provincial governments regarding

treaty rights and traditional land titles. Also, Shell Canada was staunchly refusing to put a stop to commercial exploitation of disputed land claimed by the Lubicon Nation. Feeling that their needs and interests as contemporary First Nations people were being ignored, the Lubicon launched a protest and called for an international boycott of *The Spirit Sings*, including an urging to museums worldwide not to lend pieces to the Glenbow Museum for the exhibition.²³ The issue of the indifferent attitudes of Canadian policy makers in the late 1980s regarding the concerns of First Nations peoples was made public. A highly publicized debate ensued among anthropologists concerning how museums should respond to the boycott.

The issues were disputed amongst scholars, theorists, and museum personnel; there was even a famous back-and-forth debate in 1988 between Bruce Trigger, a professor of anthropology at McGill University and Michael Ames, the director of MOA.²⁴ The continuing debate was made public with written arguments in 1988 from both sides in the Canadian Museums Association's publication, *Muse*, the anthropological journal *Culture*, and on CBC Radio's talk show *Morningside* with Peter Gzowski, the text of which was transcribed in the publication *Vanguard* the following year. Trigger supported the boycott, stating during the radio interview:

These oil companies, together with the governments of Alberta and in Ottawa, have torn apart the traditional lands of the Lubicon, and yet one of these oil companies is, in fact, sponsoring 'The Spirit Sings'. They have big, glossy advertisements in magazines saying that this exhibition is a tribute to the vitality of native cultures at the time of contact. Yet, here they are destroying the way of life of native people at the present time. In my opinion, it is an absolute obscenity for a company to do this to living native people - to sponsor an exhibition not of their present life, but of their remote past. An exhibition which I'm afraid has the effect of reinforcing a lot of traditional stereotypes: that somehow native people were part of Canada's past, but they're not part of the present.²⁵

Ames was against the boycott. He has said he would accept sponsorship of an exhibition at MOA from a company even if he were troubled by its actions. His stance on the issue was:

One might wish to condemn the governments, and perhaps, fairly so. But where are we if we can't accept government money, or sponsorship money? It is perfectly acceptable to complain, if you want to, about what corporations are doing. But that doesn't mean that we shouldn't accept their financial sponsorship. We couldn't operate without sponsorship anymore. That's the way the world has gone. I'd love clean money, but there isn't any clean money that I know about.²⁶

The Canadian Museums Association and the Assembly of First Nations banded together and hosted a symposium entitled "Preserving Our Heritage: A Working Conference Between Museums and First Peoples," held at Carleton University in Ottawa in November 1988. One hundred and fifty representatives, both Native and non-Native, attended from all over Canada in order to discuss issues of cultural and historical representation of First Nations peoples and art in Canadian museums. Consequently, the Task Force on Museums and First Peoples was set up in 1989 in order to sort out unresolved issues between cultural institutions and First Nations communities.²⁷ The twenty-five members of the Task Force teamed up with the mutual objective "to develop an ethical framework and strategies for Aboriginal Nations to represent their history and culture in concert with cultural institutions."²⁸ After two years of consultations across the country, with both Native and non-Native contributors, a report was written detailing certain recommendations, and the report was submitted in late 1991 to the Assembly of First Nations and the Canadian Museums Association. In February 1992, the Task Force on Museums and First Peoples presented this report during a second national conference (also held at Carleton University), entitled "Turning the Page: Forging New Partnerships

Between Museums and First Peoples.” There was an estimated two hundred Native and non-Native attendees during this conference. The Task Force report provided over thirty recommendations, which would serve as guidelines for policies addressing issues that included the following:

[M]useums and First Peoples share a mutual interest in the study and interpretation of the cultures and histories of the aboriginal peoples of Canada...[M]useums should recognize the desire and authority of First Peoples to speak for themselves, and First Peoples should recognize the value of the empirical knowledge and approaches of academically trained workers in museums...[M]useums and First Peoples should work as equal partners in all activities related to the histories and cultures of First Peoples which are undertaken in museums...First Peoples of Canada have different histories and cultures and they cannot be expected to all have the same needs and interests with regard to museums.²⁹

Construction of a Canadian National Identity and Misrepresentation of First Nations' Cultures and Histories

Roberta Jamieson, the Ombudsperson of Ontario, noted in 1998 that museums have a responsibility to help Canada come to terms with equity and diversity:

Museums have an almost fiduciary responsibility here - having been victims of cultural suppression, First Nations have nowhere else to go to learn about the richness of our cultures. I recognize the special problems that First Nations present to museums, and I also recognize and congratulate the steps taken in the right direction by the First Peoples and Museums Task Force. We have come a long way since the embarrassing boycott of The Spirit Sings exhibition that caused the task force to be created.³⁰

In fact, new museological studies, such as the Task Force report, have been paving the way for First Nations people to be able to express their cultural identities like never before. Historically, their identity has been misrepresented and manipulated to play an important part in the formation of a collective Canadian identity. Each successive government in Canada has recognized that the construction of a unique Canadian identity

is a valuable part of their mandate. Furthermore, in order to maintain its citizenry, the Canadian government felt a need to differentiate Canada from other countries by ways of something other than just a line on a map.³¹ This has not been an easy task to say the least, and it is not an exaggeration to conceive that the development of a Canadian collective society has been troubled with the issue of a national identity. It would seem almost expected, for a country as tremendously diverse as Canada, to lack a certain focus in terms of fostering a national identity.³² Canada's northern climate became, beginning in the mid-nineteenth century, one of the most distinctive features around which Canadian nationalists extolled the influence of the snow and cold upon their character. The adjective 'northern' came to symbolize energy, strength, health, self-reliance and purity while its opposite, southern, was soon equated with effeminacy and decay; an extensive catalogue of enviable national traits ensuing from the Canadian climate was collected.³³ This struggle to find a Canadian national identity was present in the visual arts as well. For example, the paintings of the Group of Seven were distinct from the European tradition from which they emerged.³⁴ In their work, the settler viewpoint of nature as wild and unmanageable plays a key role in defining Canadian identity.³⁵ The Group of Seven painted wilderness areas as impenetrable, uncontrollable and ignoble. Contrary to picturesque, traditionalist landscape painting, their landscape paintings do not sustain and construct colonial national identity by inviting colonizing humans to penetrate nature. Instead, their paintings support the construction of a nationalist aesthetic based on the sense of an uncontainable and destructive wilderness, while rejecting the European aesthetic. The celebrated author Margaret Atwood also dealt with these issues in the short story *Death by Landscape* from her 1991 book "Wilderness

Tips". Atwood describes:

[T]hese paintings are not landscape paintings. Because there aren't any landscapes up there, not in the old, tidy European sense, with a gentle hill, a curving river, a cottage, a mountain in the background, a golden evening sky. Instead there's a tangle, a receding maze, in which you can become lost almost as soon as you step off the path. There are no backgrounds in any of these paintings, no vistas; only a great deal of foreground that goes back and back, endlessly, involving you in its twists and turns of tree and branch and rock. No matter how far back in you go, there will be more. And trees themselves are hardly tress; they are currents of energy, charged with violent color.³⁶

Throughout this ongoing discourse of the construction of Canada's national identity, an extended program of cultural identification in which First Nations people are an important element has been given particular significance.³⁷ From the start, the colonized First Nations have been represented as illegible symbols without ideological signification; they figure as voided signifiers because they have been situated outside the movement of history.³⁸ The appropriation on the part of the colonizer began with something as basic and fundamental as the choice of Canada's name, deriving from the Algonquian word for settlement or village, Kanata. Furthermore, in colonial discourse, Europeans tended to view First Nations as being synonymous with – or part of – nature. In fact, the construction of First Nations as more pure and natural and therefore less civilized was one causal factor towards the creation of a civilized western identity in Canada.³⁹ Thus, Nature was at first idealized and projected upon by early colonizers in North America, as were First Nations people; part of this idealization was the construction of stereotypes of First Nations people, and the splitting of those stereotypical images into the noble and the ignoble savage.⁴⁰ Lynn Hill wrote in 1995:

Visual images of First Nations people have inspired generations of artists who traveled to North America to draw, paint, and interpret the Canadian experience. Generally, these depictions portrayed the people

as a race of noble/ignoble savages or as exotic creatures of the wild...Emphasizing and aligning the relationship of the 'Indian' to nature was another popular artistic interpretation. This act of depicting them as merely 'a part of nature' had a tendency to dehumanize First Nations people and to strip them of any intellectual rights as human beings.⁴¹

This dualistic dynamic of the noble and the ignoble savage is also manifested in a similar construction of nature in Canadian nationalist discourse. Historically, colonialist and orientalist images of "others" have been used to rationalize class, race and gender inequities. In addition, such images function in a dualist manner and are integral to constructions of complex forms of western identity.⁴² Bhabha states that "[a]n important feature of colonial discourse is its dependence on the concept of *fixity* in the ideological construction of otherness."⁴³ As the sign of cultural, historical, and racial difference in the discourse of colonialism, fixity is a paradoxical mode of representation since - at the same time - it suggests rigidity and an unchanging order as well as disorder, degeneracy and daemonic repetition.⁴⁴ According to Bhabha, it is this force of ambivalence that grants the colonial stereotype its prevalence and guarantees its repeatability in changing historical and discursive conjunctures. Moreover, it has been suggested that modern nations, and in particular former colonies, often use the myth of primitivism when they display the arts of their indigenous minorities as symbols of a national identity.⁴⁵ This issue is deeply entrenched in Canadian national identity; as Lynn Hill stated in 1995:

Myths and misconceptions have haunted First Nations people throughout the history of European contact and can be attributed to the images that were produced from a Euro-centric perspective...These seminal images, both written and pictorial, were responsible for establishing stereotypes of First Nations people - stereotypical viewpoints that would take years to overcome.⁴⁶

Franz Fanon explained that the Native person must realize that colonialism never gives anything away for nothing.⁴⁷ Furthermore, “whatever the Native may gain through political or armed struggle is not the result of kindness or good will of the settler; it simply shows that he cannot put off granting concessions any longer.”⁴⁸ The Task Force report was a big step in the right direction, paving the way for the possibility of real and significant change in the practice of Canadian museums and the display of First Nations art. The Task Force report was an important development for First Nations Canadians, because it began to counteract historical misrepresentation of their cultures and history by White Canadians. The Task Force report dealt with the long-standing issue of such misrepresentation in Canadian museums:

The Task Force report calls for museum exhibits that will both accommodate the desire and authority of Native peoples to speak for themselves and, as well, respect academic research. It is a challenge, but not one which has thus far proven impossible. Many collaborative exhibits have been developed and a sampling of such projects is cited in the Task Force report. These projects have included the Native voice without being unduly misinterpreted by the general public.⁴⁹

Stephanie Bolton wrote about the report in a 2004 thesis entitled “An Analysis of the Task Force on Museums and First Peoples: The Changing Representation of Aboriginal Histories in Museums.” She noted that the Task Force changed perceptions and successfully transformed the ways Canadians see and think about the representation of First Nations life in museums by targeting all fronts: government, museums themselves, and the public through popular media. According to Bolton, one of the most important contributions of the Task Force was to give guidelines and an effective framework for museum professionals to provoke change in their institutions.⁵⁰

The noted twentieth-century anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss compared the

arts of the Northwest Coast with classic works of art from ancient Greece and Egypt.⁵¹

Martine Reid's essay "Silent Speakers: Arts of the Northwest Coast" includes an introduction by Bill Reid - an unpublished message in which he stated:

Art can never be understood, but can only be seen as a kind of magic, the most profound and mysterious of all human activities. Within that magic, one of the deepest mysteries is the art of the Northwest Coast – a unique expression of an illiterate people, resembling no other art form except perhaps the most sophisticated calligraphy. If it were the product of some great urban civilization, it would have still been an amazing creation, the result of a constant dialogue between a rigidly structured convention and the questing genius of the artists, controlled and amended by a cool, sometimes ironic, intellect. Being what it was, the work of a handful of sea hunters living in tiny communities, it exists as one of the most inexplicably dazzling facets of human creativity. It was made to serve the compulsive need to proclaim the power and prestige of the old aristocrats, a power which might extend in some instances over as many as a hundred individuals; and yet so strong was their conviction of that power that even today it radiates undiminished from the great works of the past, whether they be as exquisitely small as a goat-horn spoon handle, or as monumentally huge as a totem pole, or if you like, monumentally small or exquisitely huge.⁵²

To be sure, the art of the Northwest Coast rivals that produced anywhere in the world, both in its impressive quantity and in its wonderful aesthetic quality. A discussion of this history provides the opportunity to understand where Northwest Coast contemporary artists and their artistic production came from, and this was my main intention with this chapter. As Lynn Hill observed in a 1995 essay entitled "Historical Confluence":

An understanding of the past helps shed light on the realities of today. The ability of contemporary First Nations artists to deconstruct and challenge history has created an awareness of an *AlterNative* perspective on matters of cultural importance. These viewpoints address past and present concerns pertinent to the artists themselves, their families, their communities, and their cultures. They reflect the dynamism of First Nations cultures, and the will to grow and change with the social and political climate of the day.⁵³

The next chapter will look at contemporary First Nations artistic production in Canada

from 1960 until 2000; this period can be characterized by artists' concerns with issues of identity, race, and ethnicity. I will show that the pieces exhibited in *Raven's Reprise* were representative of work being produced by artists at the time it was shown.

NOTES TO CHAPTER I

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- ¹ Martine Reid, "Silent Speakers: Arts of the Northwest Coast," in *The Spirit Sings: Artistic Traditions of Canada's First Peoples*, (Toronto: McLelland and Stewart, 1987) 236.
- ² Janet C. Berlo and Ruth B. Phillips, "The Northwest Coast," in *Native North American Art*, (Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 1998) 175.
- ³ *Ibid.*, 177.
- ⁴ *Ibid.*, 178.
- ⁵ Martine Reid, "Silent Speakers: Arts of the Northwest Coast," in *The Spirit Sings: Artistic Traditions of Canada's First Peoples*, (Toronto: McLelland and Stewart, 1987) 204.
- ⁶ Janet C. Berlo and Ruth B. Phillips, "The Northwest Coast," In *Native North American Art*. (Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 1998) 179.
- ⁷ *Ibid.*, 180.
- ⁸ *Ibid.*, 181.
- ⁹ Karen Duffek, "The Revival of Northwest Coast Indian Art," in *Vancouver: Art and Artists, 1931-1983*, (Vancouver, BC: Vancouver Art Gallery, 1983) 312.
- ¹⁰ Aaron Glass, "(Cultural) Objects of (Cultural) Value," in *On Aboriginal Representation in the Gallery*, eds. Lynda Jessup with Shannon Bagg, (Ottawa: Canadian Museum of Civilization, 2002) 95.
- ¹¹ Martine Reid, "Silent Speakers: Arts of the Northwest Coast," in *The Spirit Sings: Artistic Traditions of Canada's First Peoples*, (Toronto: McLelland and Stewart, 1987) 208.
- ¹² Janet C. Berlo and Ruth B. Phillips, "The Northwest Coast," in *Native North American Art*, (Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 1998) 203.
- ¹³ *Ibid.*, 204.
- ¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 182.
- ¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 183.
- ¹⁶ Karen Duffek, "The Revival of Northwest Coast Indian Art," in *Vancouver: Art and Artists, 1931-1983*, (Vancouver, BC: Vancouver Art Gallery, 1983) 312.

¹⁷ Janet C. Berlo and Ruth B. Phillips, "The Northwest Coast," in *Native North American Art*, (Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 1998) 202.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 199.

¹⁹ Karen Duffek, "The Revival of Northwest Coast Indian Art," in *Vancouver: Art and Artists, 1931-1983*, (Vancouver, BC: Vancouver Art Gallery, 1983) 312.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 316.

²¹ Aaron Glass, "(Cultural) Objects of (Cultural) Value," in *On Aboriginal Representation in the Gallery*, eds. Lynda Jessup with Shannon Bagg, (Ottawa: Canadian Museum of Civilization, 2002) 94.

²² Trudy Nicks, "Partnerships in Developing Cultural Resources: Lessons From the Task Force on Museums and First Peoples," *Culture* XII (1) 1992: 88.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ It should be noted that the director of the Museum of Anthropology during the making and exhibiting of *Raven's Reprise* was Ruth B. Phillips.

²⁵ Bruce G. Trigger and Michael Ames, "Share the Blame," *Vanguard* 17 (2) 1988: 15.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ Trudy Nicks, "Partnerships in Developing Cultural Resources: Lessons From the Task Force on Museums and First Peoples," *Culture* XII (1) 1992: 88.

²⁸ Task Force on Museums and First Peoples, *Turning the Page: Forging New Partnerships between Museums and First Peoples*, (Ottawa: Canadian Museums Association and Assembly of First Nations, 1992), n.p.

²⁹ Trudy Nicks, "Partnerships in Developing Cultural Resources: Lessons From the Task Force on Museums and First Peoples," *Culture* XII (1) 1992: 89.

³⁰ Roberta Jamieson, "Toward the Future: Promises and Compromises," *Muse* 15 (4) 1998: 47.

³¹ Leanne S. Pupchek, "True north: Inuit Art and the Canadian Imagination," *American Review of Canadian Studies* (31) 2001: 192.

³² Raymond II Samuels, *National Identity in Canada and Cosmopolitan Community*, (Ottawa: The Angora Cosmopolitan, 1997), 1.

³³ *Ibid.*

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- ³⁴ Dennis Reid, "Tom Thomson and the Group of Seven: 1913-1931," in *A Concise History of Canadian Painting*, (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1988), 140.
- ³⁵ Eva Mackey, "Death by Landscape: Race, Nature, and Gender in Canadian Nationalist Mythology," *Canadian Woman Studies* (20) 2000: 125.
- ³⁶ Margaret Atwood, "Death by Landscape," in *Wilderness Tips*, (Toronto: McClelland Bantam Inc, 1991), 145.
- ³⁷ Leanne S. Pupchek., "True north: Inuit art and the Canadian Imagination," *American Review of Canadian Studies* (31) 2001: 195.
- ³⁸ Azzedine Hadour, *Colonial Myths: History and Narrative*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), 105.
- ³⁹ Eva Mackey, "Death by Landscape: Race, Nature, and Gender in Canadian Nationalist Mythology," *Canadian Woman Studies* (20) 2000: 127.
- ⁴⁰ *Ibid.*
- ⁴¹ Lynn Hill, "Historical Confluence," in *AlterNative*, (Kleinburg, Ontario: McMichael Canadian Art Collection, 1995), 8.
- ⁴² *Ibid.*, 125.
- ⁴³ Homi K. Bhabha, "The Other Question: Stereotype, discrimination and the discourse of colonialism," in *The Location of Culture*, (London & New York: Routledge, 1994) 66.
- ⁴⁴ *Ibid.*
- ⁴⁵ Diana Nemiroff, "Modernism, Nationalism and Beyond: A Critical history of Exhibitions of First Nations Art," in *Land, Spirit, Power*, ed. Diana Nemiroff et al. (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 1992), 32.
- ⁴⁶ Lynn Hill, "Historical Confluence," in *AlterNative*, (Kleinburg, Ontario: McMichael Canadian Art Collection, 1995), 8.
- ⁴⁷ Franz Fanon, "Spontaneity: Its Strength and Weakness," in *Postcolonial Discourses: An Anthology*, (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2001), 22.
- ⁴⁸ *Ibid.*
- ⁴⁹ Trudy Nicks, "Partnerships in Developing Cultural Resources: Lessons From the Task Force on Museums and First Peoples," *Culture XII* (1) 1992: 91.

⁵⁰ Stephanie Bolton, “An Analysis of the Task Force on Museums and First Peoples: The Changing Representation of Aboriginal Histories in Museums”, (Montreal: M.A. thesis, Concordia University, 2004), 78.

⁵¹ Claude Levi-Strauss, *The Art of the Northwest Coast at the American Museum of Natural History*, (Paris: Gazette des Beaux Arts, 1943), 175-183.

⁵² Martine Reid, “Silent Speakers: Arts of the Northwest Coast,” in *The Spirit Sings: Artistic Traditions of Canada’s First Peoples*, (Toronto: McLelland and Stewart, 1987), 203.

⁵³ Lynn Hill, “Historical Confluence,” in *AlterNative*, (Kleinburg, Ontario: McMichael Canadian Art Collection, 1995), 12.

CHAPTER II: CONTEMPORARY FIRST NATIONS ART AND *RAVEN'S REPRISE*

This chapter provides a context, based on contemporary art history, in which the works exhibited in *Raven's Reprise* can be understood. Specifically, the discussion focuses on contemporary First Nations art production in Canada from the 1960s until the turn of the twenty-first century. Joan Reid Acland wrote in 2001 about the development of a specific field of study around the art production from 1960 until 1999, and stated that it constituted “a pivotal juncture, characterized by politically-engaged art in which both the art and the surrounding discourse were shaped by Amerindian artists.”¹ Identity politics, particularly issues of race and ethnicity, was a major concern for contemporary artists during this time period.

Charlotte Townsend-Gault noted in 1995 that many First Nations artists produced contemporary works that could be characterized, in very broad terms, as navigating the boundaries surrounding issues of ethnicity along with conveying these issues in cultural forms.² Their methods included mining historic pieces for themes, conventions, materials, and iconography. Janet Berlo and Ruth Phillips wrote in 1998 about the role of art in the contemporary politics of identity; this function of art had deep roots on the Northwest Coast, “where visual art has long been a key means of expressing group identity and political power.”³

An Art Historical Contextualization of Contemporary First Nations Artistic Production from 1960 until 2000

As soon as European contact was made in Canada in the fifteenth century, First Nations people began to deal with issues of colonialism, and by extension, identity, but this chapter deals only with a much later period in Canadian history, during which

postcolonial literature was highly influential. Postcolonial theory by such authors as Cornel West, Stuart Hall, and Homi K. Bhabha provided theoretical structure and helped to contextualize contemporary artistic production by influencing exhibition practice – though not necessarily the creation of the work itself, since historically, First Nations artists have been producing these works prior to people reading West, Hall, and Bhabha. Postcolonial theory in the 1990s was concerned with working through issues of identity, and the notion that identity was not as unproblematic and transparent as perhaps had previously been thought. Stuart Hall wrote about the old logics of identity - the Cartesian subject - often being thought in terms of the origin of being itself, the ground of action.⁴ Hall explained that there was a new set of theoretical spaces in the 1990s from which one might begin to think about questions of identity. He suggested in an essay entitled “Cultural Identity and Diaspora” that instead of thinking of identity as an already accomplished fact, identity could be thought of as a *production* that is never completed, one that “problematizes the very authority and authenticity to which the term cultural identity lays claim.”⁵ The notion that identity is constituted in a struggle between indigenous and colonizing forces is nearly a universal one in postcolonial studies. With regard to *Raven’s Reprise*, issues of cultural identity certainly played a role in the works by the five contemporary artists. For these Canadian artists, the issues surrounding identity in a postcolonial context were complicated; Hall’s concept of identity being a process, a never-completed production, was clearly demonstrated in the exhibition by the fact that each of the artists worked through issues of identity, that of their Northwest Coast heritage, and issues of representation by combining both their family’s historical objects found at the MOA and the contemporary nature of their own work.

The first half of the twentieth century saw a number of Northwest Coast artists whose art can be considered transitional. According to Janet Berlo and Ruth Phillips, in the 1998 book *Native North American Art*, these artists represented a new era in Northwest Coast art, which included producing traditional art for use in potlatches, the carving of traditional architectural sculptures and masks, as well as the introduction of new genres such as printmaking and public sculptures.⁶ One such artist was Bill Reid (1920-1998), born and raised in Victoria. Reid's mother was Haida and his father was an American of Scottish-German heritage. After a career as a radio broadcaster, he became interested in Haida art and he learned traditional Haida jewellery-making. He studied the art of his ancestors, including his great-uncle Charles Edenshaw (1839-1920), the celebrated Haida carver. Reid also studied museum collections, and ethnographic literature, and remains best known for his large-scale sculptures. One of his most important works was *The Raven and the First Men* (74.31 inches height x 75.83 inches diameter) from 1980 (figure 2); made of yellow cedar wood and on permanent display at the MOA, it is an innovative and modern piece even though it represents several characteristics of traditional Northwest Coast mythology.⁷ Reid represented the Haida culture's hero, Raven, in the act of discovering the first men inside a clamshell; the Raven is in the process of opening the clamshell in order to coax the little people out into the world. This was classic behaviour for the Raven, bearing in mind its trickster character. Reid dealt with issues of identity, representation, and appropriation in this piece, because the subject matter was the representation of the ancient Haida belief that people emerged on Earth by virtue of the Raven's curiosity. *The Raven and the First Men* encompassed both the old and the new; the old in that it used traditional Northwest

Coast art and its formal vocabulary, and the new in that its size was unprecedented. Its scale similar to historic poles and architectural sculpture, Reid represented a traditional Haida story in the form of a monumental sculpture. However, it was created and portrayed as a Western sculpture: a self-supporting and self-sufficient artwork.⁸ Other artists, who could also be considered transitional in that they helped keep some of the deep-rooted Northwest Coast traditions thriving, were Mungo Martin (1881-1962), Willie Seaweed (1873-1967) and Ellen Neel (1916-1966).

In the second half of the twentieth century, and mainly in the 1960s and 1970s, the careers of some young artists were being encouraged by a number of local initiatives; one example was the founding by the Cree artist and poet Sarain Stump (1945-1974) in 1972 of the Ind[ian]art Program at the Saskatchewan Indian Cultural College in Regina, now the Indian Federated College. This programme influenced the artistic formation of a number of prominent artists in the 1980s, including Gerald McMaster (Plains Cree, b. 1953), Edward Poitras (Plains Cree, b. 1953), and Bob Boyer (Métis, 1948-2004). At the same time however, many other artists were being trained at non-Native art schools: “The late modernist visual languages in which they were trained provided the foundation for the new postmodern and anti-colonial rhetorical strategies they would develop during the 1980s.”⁹

The second half of the twentieth century saw resurgence in the interest towards traditional Northwest Coast art. Authors Janet Berlo and Ruth Phillips propose that this renewed interest was both unexpected and significant, and was part of a new creative epoch born out of the severe disruption of colonialism.¹⁰ This resurgence was considered to exemplify the two key aspects of the Northwest Coast world-view and art: “a strong

sense of the paradoxical nature of the human condition, and an awareness of possibilities for transformation hidden within the mundane.”¹¹ Karen Duffek wrote in 1983 about the revival of Northwest Coast art that began in the 1960s:

In attempting an understanding of the contemporary context for Northwest Coast Indian art production, it is vital to recognize that the revival of the art has involved not only the artists who create the objects, but also the consumers, anthropologists, museums, and dealers, who have participated with the artists in the development of an audience and a market to support art production, and in a reconstruction and redefinition of “Indianness” and tradition. Northwest Coast Indian art has taken new forms and functions relevant to the changed social context in which it is now located, and Northwest Coast traditions have acquired a new significance for both the consumer and native societies.¹²

There were different ways in which contemporary artists during the period from 1960 until the turn of the twenty-first century worked out issues of identity politics. These artists were going back to their roots. This chapter discusses contemporary artists’ use of Northwest Coast historic conventions, materials, and iconography in their artistic production.

Bill Holm wrote the first clear account of the historic conventions underlying coastal forms (the system of composition and stylization used in painting, carving and textiles) in his 1965 landmark book *Northwest Coast Indian Art: An Analysis of Form*. The book was based on the author’s study of the northern region (Haida, Tlingit, and Tsimshian) of Northwest Coast art, where what he called the *formline style* had been the most fully fleshed out in the centuries preceding European contact. Holm identified the three basic approaches to the unique manner of representing animals and humans in Northwest Coast art. The *configurative* described a being represented in profile; the *expansive* was used when some of the body parts were absent or restructured; and the

distributive was used when there was a major reorganization of the features and limbs, which would often make the represented subject difficult to identify. Holm characterized Northwest Coast art as a predominantly wooden art,¹³ with two-dimensional surface decoration on wood being carried out in three ways. Painting was the most common, and possibly the earliest method. The second method was shallow relief carving, which gave the appearance of two-dimensionality and followed exactly the apparent rules for painted design. The third method consisted of a combination of the two: relief carving, totally or partially painted. Holm also identified the three design units that are the most important elements of Northwest Coast compositions: the *ovoid*, the *U-form*, and the *formline*. He introduced concise terms for the basic shapes and practices within the category of two-dimensional art of the Northwest Coast. For example, where authors had previously tried to describe the round-cornered rectangle or the slightly squared-off oval with a concave bottom contour, Holm used the single word *ovoid* (figure 3). This nomenclature for the basic components, or design units, around which the compositions of Northwest Coast art were formed also includes the terms *inner ovoid* (figure 4), *U-form* (figure 5), *split U-form* (figure 6) and *S-form* (figure 7), and has become firmly established in the vocabulary of the art. Holm also identified and described another crucial design unit of Northwest Coast compositions, the *formline* (figure 8). An artist would create the primary formline, according to Holm, by using equipment that included different sized templates of ovoids and U-forms; the artist would draw the designs with so much accuracy that an uninterrupted smooth line would be formed by the spaces between the main design units.¹⁴ In two-dimensional compositions, this line would invariably be painted black. A composition would also include red secondary formlines (figure 8) and

subsecondary and tertiary formlines (figure 8). A work of Haida painting or relief carving was built primarily of known, re-combinable parts and the “total effect of the system was to produce a strong, yet sensitive, division of the given shape by means of an interlocking formline pattern of shapes related in form, colour, and scale.”¹⁵ Holm was white and he did not learn the fundamentals of his technique from First Nations artists; instead, his interest in these art forms derived first from publications and museum collections. His influential book was particularly helpful to young artists retrieving historic conventions for use in their contemporary works.

Contemporary Artists’ Use of Historic Conventions

Contemporary artists between 1960 and 2000 incorporated historic conventions such as ovoids and U-forms in their art as a way of looking back to their roots and dealing with issues of race and identity. In *Raven’s Reprise*, Connie (Sterritt) Watts (b. 1968) made use of Northwest Coast historical conventions in her sculptural pieces as a way to refer to her past. Watts grew up in Campbell River and is of Nuu-chah-nulth, Gitxstan and Kwakwaka’wakw (Kwakiutl) descent. *Radiant Raven* (figure 9) is made of aluminum, maple wood, and enamel paint (30 x 22 x 36 inches). The Raven is represented perched and in profile. Because aluminum is used to fashion this creation, it has a shiny surface. On the silver-toned body of the Raven, there are accents of painted red: the feathers on top of the Raven’s head, around the neck area, and around the feet. Watts used contemporary media, but the design of the piece was greatly influenced by historical conventions of Northwest Coast art: she used ovoids, S-forms, and U-forms to portray the Raven. Watts’ *Whimsical Wolf* (figure 10) is made of brass, maple wood, and enamel paint (60 x 24 x 96 inches). In this piece, the animal is represented in profile and

is resting on its hind legs, with its front legs extended. It is looking straight ahead, its neck also extended. The wolf's body, made of brass, is smooth and glistening. Its costume is painted in tones of blue, from pale baby blue to a rich royal blue. While the materials used are contemporary, the design of this animal is heavily influenced by historical Northwest Coast artistic conventions, such as partially or totally painted relief carving.¹⁶ Watts brought Northwest Coast art to the turn of the twenty-first century by using historical techniques on new media, in this case brass painted with enamel. Moreover, she used historical conventions (formline techniques) to create her wolf. For instance, she used an ovoid for the wolf's eye and several more, in different sizes, for the limbs and the body. Other historical Northwest Coast conventions included the inner ovoid, S form, and U form.

Contemporary Artists' Use of Historic Materials

Contemporary artists between 1960 and 2000 also utilized historic materials in their art as a way of looking back to their past and their roots and working through issues of identity and ownership. Historically, Northwest Coast artists employed materials such as copper, and carved and painted wood (to make masks), and abalone shells, among other materials. Connie Watts' *Baroque Bear* (figure 11) measures 48 x 36 x 84 inches. She used the Northwest Coast historical material copper, along with maple wood, wool fabric, and enamel paint. This piece has a golden sheen to it because of the copper. There are also accents of green: on top of the animal's head, in spirals and on the tail, also in spirals. The bear is portrayed in profile, and standing on its hind legs.

John Powell (b. 1959) is a fashion designer of Kwakiutl descent. His mixed media on canvas work entitled *Renaissance in Red* (figure 12) from 2000 was featured in

the exhibition and is described in the catalogue as being inspired by the works of three Renaissance masters: da Vinci's *Mona Lisa* (c. 1503-05), Donatello's *David* (c. 1430-32) and Michelangelo's *The Creation of Adam* (c. 1508-12). The period of time during which these three works were produced (1430-1512) coincided with the time frame during which European and First Nations cultures first came into contact with each other. Powell explained that the word Renaissance in his work's title referred to: "First Nations rebirth into the larger global context with pride and power, as equals and not the subordinates that we were once considered to be."¹⁷ He believes that contemporary First Nations artists are Renaissance men and women because of their ability to adapt their cultural lifestyle to the current Canadian and global environments.¹⁸

During a telephone interview, Powell said this piece was the most labour-intensive of the three he showed during *Raven's Reprise*. *Renaissance in Red* is on a copper coloured canvas, in reference to the historically used material. Like many artworks produced during the Renaissance, *Renaissance in Red* features three figures set in a pyramidal composition, but it was reworked in contemporary First Nations graphics. Powell explained that the three figures in this piece are Mona K. Coast, David C. Plains and Adam C. East and represent, respectively, himself, artist George Littlechild and curator Lynn Hill. Mona K. (Kwakiutl) Coast wears a classic cedar bark or spruce root hat; she is fashioning the cedar bark into a rope. Also, she wears strings of cobalt blue, pomegranate red and amber trade beads around her neck, and abalone earrings; these materials were also historically used in Northwest Coast art. David C. (Cree) Plains is in black cowhide and sports a full-length hand-embroidered eagle feather bonnet; on his feet are beaded moccasins, and he stands on copper and has a double-headed serpent

embroidered at his feet. Adam C. (Cayuga) East is in red suede, and wears a guinea fowl roach and wampum and bear claw necklace and bracelet; these were all historical materials. A copper border decorated with raised Iroquois beadwork, and embroidered with floral patterns from the Plains, surrounds *Renaissance in Red*; there is also button and sequin work from the coastal peoples.¹⁹ *Renaissance in Red* is about three people trying to make a difference and using the tools available to them to make a change in the world.²⁰

Another piece by Powell in *Raven's Reprise* was *Metamoravinyl* (figure 13), once again a mixed media work (72 x 24 x 24 inches); it is a large-scale, dark-coloured female figure with one arm outstretched and the other arm against the body. The figure is dressed in a black faux leather couture-inspired and avant-garde dress with glass beading and layers of feathers. The figure is all in black except for an image of quilted copper on the whole front of the bodice; this image has an embossed design that makes it appear almost three-dimensional. The catalogue states about this piece:

The positioning of this piece amongst the ancient pieces in the Great Hall [of MOA] is not intended to be presumptuous or offensive. Rather, its purpose is to bring attention to the fact that we, the Kwakwaka'wakw people, still exist in today's large contemporary context and that, like our ancestors, we continue to be innovative and feel the same need to express ourselves in what the majority culture terms art.²¹

Powell has said that this piece was originally called *Metamo-Raving-Lunatic*, but he decided to mellow it down to *Metamoravinyl*.²² Of course, the first thing that comes to mind with such a title is the word metamorphosis, and that was what the artist intended: more specifically, one from Raven to human. Right below the figure is the word (METAMOR)A(VINYL), and beneath each letter are words meaning to transform,

change, transmute and metamorphosize. Starting with the letter *M*, the words are, multi, effect, trans, alters, morph, others, raven, adopts, views, inside, nests, yields, and lives. Contemporary media, such as leather, is used, but the piece is also definitely influenced by historical Northwest Coast art-making techniques, such as the quilting in the ribs and face of the figure. The mannequin is bronze-coloured, the material used being copper; this choice of colour implies wealth and nobility, and “is meant to echo the bronze statues of antiquity.”²³ Moreover, copper is a word used to represent both the colour and the image of the historical Northwest Coast object called a copper: the shield-shaped plaques that symbolize a Kwakiutl family’s wealth and nobility when presented at potlatches (figure 14); the importance and amount of copper were enhanced after European contact increased the availability of metal and metal tools.²⁴

Contemporary Artists’ Use of Historical Iconography

Contemporary artists between 1960 and 2000 utilized historical Northwest Coast iconography in their art as a way of looking back to their past. In 1987, Martine Reid wrote about the Northwest Coast artform and iconography:

The context of Northwest Coast art production includes life-style, social structure, wealth, and world-view. An understanding of the iconography and iconology of the Northwest Coast embedded in this belief system and world-view will give us a deeper appreciation of this distinctive art style, its local variations, and that hidden dimension, meaning.²⁵

Images and symbols often used by contemporary artists are those of the Raven, and representations of clan affiliations, such as killer whales and wolves. In *Raven’s Reprise*, all five of the artists made use of Northwest Coast iconography in the art they exhibited. The three pieces Connie Watts contributed for the exhibition were *Whimsical Wolf*, *Baroque Bear* and *Radiant Raven*, all from the year 2000; they are collectively called *The*

Carnival Series. The three animals used by Watts are part of historical Northwest Coast iconography; all have particular meanings and are symbols supporting belief systems; the Raven, for example, symbolizes creation and knowledge. The title of this series refers to Northwest Coast nations' customary potlatches, which were used to document events with the use of dramatic performances. The animals depicted were represented with a distinct flair, reminiscent of carnival costumes. Watts was acknowledging this with her choice of title for this series. Watts presented the three animals as part of a story: that of the Northwest Coast nations' present situation. She achieved this through the use of new materials for the sculptures. Watts used the contemporary and delicate-looking thin metal, as opposed to heavy wood, which was traditionally used in historical Northwest Coast art, to highlight the newness and apparent fragility of her culture today.²⁶ But even though the metal employed in this series is thin, and therefore seemingly delicate, it was also strong and resilient, just like Northwest Coast culture. Furthermore, each animal was placed alone, on its own plinth, instead of in ground-level interactive areas. The plinths were meant to stimulate viewer participation and understanding. But beyond that, the animals on their plinths looked as if they were on display; Watts intended to make the animals appear to be on a stage, like at a carnival, hence the title. For Watts, this was symbolic of how Northwest Coast people are viewed, today and in the past: they are put on display and studied and analyzed.

The story that Watts was weaving with these sculptures was one about the emergence and growth of Northwest Coast communities; it was about "a nation's ability to adapt and create in any environment."²⁷ By utilizing contemporary art concepts and materials, Watts attempted to change the public's stereotyped perception of Northwest

Coast art being associated only with the past. According to Watts, when she conceived these works, she felt the need to have some fun with Northwest Coast design, which she calls *stoic*, and to play dress-up, placing her creations on pedestals with their vivid costumes flowing from their shiny bodies.²⁸

John Powell's *Sanctuary* (figure 15) measures 118.11 inches x 137.8 inches and was created to cover part of the permanent Hamatsa mask collection at the Museum of Anthropology for the duration of the *Raven's Reprise* exhibition. *Sanctuary* is a very large piece and is divided into fifteen parts: rectangular and square shapes of different sizes and incorporating photographic images and blocks of text. For instance, the second block from the top on the far right of the piece features the image of a woman from Powell's family, and the accompanying text reads: "I listened to all my ancestors and that's what I tried to teach my children and grandchildren." Many of the other texts refer specifically to the Hamatsa masks. The Hamatsa is an elite Kwakiutl dancing society. Their dances can be described as extremely realistic dramas during which masked being represent cannibalistic spirits and don transformation masks (to signify the transformation from animal to human) which are constructed with hidden strings that the masker manipulates.²⁹

Another block of text appears near the bottom right of Powell's piece and quotes Kwakiutl artist Audrey Hawthorn:

The beings associated with the winter dances are rarely portrayed outside of these dances and rarely if ever shown in representations of lineage myths but are reserved for the most sacred parts of winter ceremonies.³⁰

The artist carefully chose each of the numerous colours and images used to create this mixed media on canvas piece. One of the colours used is copper, in reference to both the

colour and the image of the historical Northwest Coast object called a copper. Like the Hamatsa bird masks (or Humsumtl), these coppers (or Dlah'qwah) were not often seen in Powell's family, except when they appear for a brief time at potlatches, in connection with transfers of dowry in marriage arrangements; or when they are used as marks of prestige or status against rivals during property fights.³¹ Another colour use in *Sanctuary* is black; this signifies darkness, referring to the fact that both the Hamatsa bird masks and the coppers were kept in isolation by their owners when they were not in use. Green is used in reference to the natural world from which comes the whole of Kwakiutl culture, both secular and supernatural. Lastly, gold and silver are used to shed light on the "world of confusion" about Kwakiutl practices. The photographic images are of the artist's mother, Janet, his grandfather, Henry, and his great-grandmother Mary, who was of a noble family of the Mamlilkulla and was married to Powell's great-grandfather, Jim Bell (Makwa lah gyeh lees). The artist described this work as paying "homage to those who fought to keep our ways."³² Powell also stated that this piece was a protest piece, and the most political of all the pieces shown in *Raven's Reprise*.³³ He was protesting against the fact that the Hamatsa masks, part of the permanent collection at the Museum of Anthropology, were never meant to be shown in public.

Larry McNeil (b. 1955) is an artist and Assistant Professor of Photography at Boise State University in Idaho; he is a member of both the Tlingit and Nisga'a Nations from Canada and the United States. The pieces selected for inclusion in this exhibition were from his *Raven Series* and reflected upon historical and contemporary aspects of mythological stories.³⁴ More specifically, they are about the iconographic and traditional Northwest Coast creation story protagonist, Raven the trickster, "who was brought into a

contemporary context with new stories and images.”³⁵ Thus, McNeil used the iconographic image of the Raven, along with representations of creation myths, in the four pieces he displayed in *Raven’s Reprise*. Though the works contain a traditional style of narrative that most First Nations people readily comprehend and appreciate, there is also a wider-ranging appeal to the pieces, intended to help people from other cultures understand the art.³⁶ The four works McNeil displayed in *Raven’s Reprise* were *Cosmology Report*, *Kincolith*, *Raven Creation* and *Cosmological Status*. All were produced in 1998.

Cosmology Report (figure 16) is a black and white digital stochastic print made with archival paper and inks (36 x 48 inches). This was made using state of the art equipment to produce a superiority of detail and tonal gradation not often seen in other printing processes.³⁷ *Cosmology Report* is a reproduction of an actual scientific report (“Smithsonian Report, 1900. –Aerodome” is printed on the upper left-hand side of the piece), which was taken from a Smithsonian book pertaining to the scientific origins of humans. There were also images of both the raven’s and the human’s skeletal frames, a reference to evolutionary theory. Two more images are at the bottom of the piece: the heads of two ravens. The following text appears on the print: “Scientists have proven that the Heavens and Earth were made in approximately one day. It was a heck of a day”; and: “The creator made humans in the image of the Raven. Kind of. It was another heck of a day.” McNeil used text as an important aspect in this series in order to, according to him, “conjure up images, feelings or flashes of insight from the viewer. If I can help to spark a moment of clarity for the viewer, then the art is effective.”³⁸ *Kincolith* (figure 17) is a digital stochastic print (24 x 48 inches) that depicts the story

about where the artist's father was born in Canada. This piece is in colour; the background is black, and the images and text are blue and red. Amidst the six lines of text, there are five human skulls and their reflections. The text reads: "kincolith, the name of our village, translates to. 'Place on the beach where our enemy skulls are planted.' It helped us live in peace and an added bonus was that we didn't have many Jehovas witness types ringing our doorbells. It was a dark time in our history. Anyone got any spare skulls hanging around?"

Raven Creation (figure 18) is comprised of a figurative image and an accompanying artist's statement. It is a black and white digital stochastic print (36 x 48 inches) representing the Raven, wings spread, with its beak open, holding the sun; this is a reference to the traditional Tlingit Raven creation story. This piece was displayed in juxtaposition with Haida artist Bill Reid's *The Raven and the First Men* (1980). *Raven Creation* was placed on a wall in the hallway leading to the center of the round gallery, the rotunda, where Reid's piece is permanently displayed on a raised platform. McNeil's work created an interesting juxtaposition for visitors walking through the hallway leading to Reid's sculpture. Whereas McNeil's piece was a representation of a Northwest Coast traditional mythology story using contemporary media, the artist employing historical Northwest Coast iconography and belief systems by using the Raven creation story as the subject, Reid's sculpture - though instantly recognizable as Northwest Coast - differs from traditional Coastal art. The reason for this was Reid's European-inspired arrangement of the Raven and the figures in a clamshell, all of them caught in a moment of intense activity; this was a convention seldom used by Northwest Coast artists of the past.³⁹

Cosmological Status (figure 19) is a piece about the Raven's role in the scientific and mythological realms.⁴⁰ It is a digital stochastic print (24 x 48 inches) with the title of the piece written on top, and the following text right below it: "The creator made humans in ravens image. Sort of. It was another heck of a day." Beneath it, on the left side of the piece, there is an image of Billy Graham cruising around in Tlingit country in his Cadillac. An equation appears at the bottom of the print and is referred to as *the rules of cultural diffusion*. McNeil playfully described the rules of cultural diffusion as a real mathematical formula that fits into the question of the *Cosmological Status*. In the middle of the print, there are the two skeletal figures of the Raven and the human from *Cosmology Report*. Next to them, on the far right hand side, there is a profile of a Raven's head, sporting glasses. Within this series, McNeil presented a pervasive narrative that was also reflected in its visual aspects. McNeil was dealing with complex issues of race and identity, and one of the strategies was to incorporate historical Northwest Coast iconography and themes, such as the Raven and the Creation Story, in his artistic production.

Mary Anne Barkhouse (b. 1961) is a descendant of a long line of artists from the Nimpkish group of the Kwakiutl nation; she is a mixed media artist and metalsmith. Her series entitled *Pelage I, II, III; IV* from 1999 is a mixed media installation (figure 20). Barry Ace, Chief Curator and Acting Chief of the Indian and Inuit Art Centres at the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development in Ottawa (1994-2001), likened the motif of the Raven to Barkhouse herself, since like the Raven, she amassed and stored stray fragments that many others had rejected, and presented her collection of memories and experiences as a visual autobiographical travelogue.⁴¹ Each of the blankets features

the historically iconographic Northwest Coast image of the Raven. This compilation of memories was represented by the artist in the form of button blankets documenting four decades of her life. References to each decade are incorporated unto the borders of each robe; for example, motifs of horses, books (such as Dr. Seuss' *Cat-in-the-Hat*), guitars and art tools were strewn around the periphery. Ace stated that the Raven "appears central, as guardian, orator, and witness to her cache of memories."⁴² These blankets recall the button blankets used for ceremonial purposes by many Northwest Coast people (figure 21).

Pelage I is made of wool, cotton and resin buttons. This blanket refers to Barkhouse's early years. Even though she had severe allergies to animals, she acquired various pets. The images on this blanket represent some of those animals. For instance, there are small paw prints alluding to her poodle and bird tracks in reference to a chicken; these are all along the border of the piece, in white and against a black background. There are also two images of the Cat in the Hat, also on the border, alluding to the artist's love of reading. Horse hoof prints, on the border once again, serve as a reminder that Barkhouse wanted, but never had, a pony. In the middle of the piece is an image of a Raven in black, against a red backdrop. *Pelage II* is made of leather, satin, cotton, nickel studs, zippers, safety pins and acrylic. This blanket refers to the period in Barkhouse's life characterized by her growing interest and passion for punk rock music, starting from the age of sixteen. She actually played in some of the first punk rock bands on the Canadian scene, and toured for many years with different bands. On the side panels of the blanket, against a red background, are bits of phrases coined by some of her punk rock friends; for example, "Talk – Action = 0", which is from the band DOA, and "who

killed Bambi?”, from Malcolm McLaren (the ex-manager of the Sex Pistols). A phrase from an old anarchist publication is also included: “Neither God Nor Master”. As with *Pelage I*, at the centre of the blanket there is a Raven in red and outlined in nickel studs, against a black backdrop, also outlined in the studs. *Pelage III* is made of leather, satin, moleskin (fabric), and nickel studs. This blanket refers to Barkhouse’s life after she returned to school at the Ontario College of Art. She spent time casting bronze and making jewelry. Again, there is a Raven represented in the centre of this piece, this time in black and against a white backdrop outlined in nickel studs; the Raven is also outlined in the studs. *Pelage IV* is constructed with wool, moleskin (fabric), copper, and resin buttons. This blanket refers to the artist’s current association with the metal arts, which are represented by anvils at the top of the blanket. Her renewed interest in investigating her family history is symbolized by the images of the coppers on the side of the blanket.⁴³ The images of wolves, a recurring theme in her work, are used as metaphors for both the environment in general and for First Nations people and their situations. Much like many other First Nations artists in Canada in the 1980s and 1990s, Barkhouse used these historical symbols and themes from Northwest Coast art in her contemporary piece in order to deal with issues of race and identity.

All four of the blankets measure the same (52 x 68 inches) and have the same image at the top, in the centre. The inspiration came from a stylized design of a killer whale that the artist’s great-great grandfather included on the chests of thunderbirds he carved. This was in reference to Barkhouse’s family being both Thunderbird and Killer Whale clan and would function as an identifying feature of the older artist’s work.⁴⁴ As a reminder of the presence and his support of her family, Barkhouse took that emblem

and further stylized it and included it on each blanket in *Pelage*. The four blankets were all produced using contemporary materials (such as nickel studs, zippers, and safety pins) and images (such as Cat in the Hat and punk rock phrases) all the while also incorporating historical Northwest Coast iconographic imagery, such as killer whales, the Raven, and wolves.

A suite of four bracelets entitled *Four Legs Good* (figure 22) by Barkhouse was also included in the exhibition. These were from 1999, and according to the artist refer to dogs she has had in the past. The first bracelet refers to the dogs the artist had as a child, and is a handmade chain made of sterling silver; it has charms attached to it, made from sterling silver and copper. The second bracelet in the series is made from leather and nickel studs with sterling silver and copper tags. This was in memory of a mixed terrier Barkhouse had when she first started playing in punk bands. The third bracelet is made from layered and patinated sterling silver. This piece was in memory of a large and gentle dog that the artist once had. The fourth bracelet refers to the dogs Barkhouse had at the time she made this series of bracelets. They were two Jack Russell terriers, a German short-hair pointer and a mixed hound-pointer puppy. Although Barkhouse used some contemporary subject matter and materials such as leather and nickel studs to produce these bracelets, their design had been influenced by historical Northwest Coast jewelry pieces, including similarities in the materials used (sterling silver and copper) and techniques and design, for instance the sculptural, smooth forms of the subjects depicted.

Marianne Nicolson (b. 1969) is from Comox, British Columbia; she is also of Kwakiutl descent. The only piece by Nicolson in the exhibition was a mixed media photo-based installation entitled *Waxemedlagin Xusbandayu'* (figure 23) from 2000

(59.65 x 43.5 x 2.36 inches for the panel). The title translates to *Even Though I am the Last one, I Still Count*. This is one of two paintings in a series created to be exhibited with the artist's grandfather's bumblebee masks. During *Raven's Reprise*, this piece was shown in the MOA's visible storage area, in the area where her grandfather's masks were also permanently displayed. The artist's grandfather, Charles Eaton Willie, sold the eight masks to MOA in the 1960s. These eight masks formed part of this piece, four of them on top of mixed media photo-based installation by Nicolson, and the other four below it. The bumblebee masks belonged to a dance performed by children and were an expression of the care and valuation of children in Kwakiutl culture. "Even though I am the last one, I still count" is a phrase from a children's rhyme and Nicolson used it in reference to the bumblebee dance: a children's dance that amongst the Musgamagw Dzawada'enuxw group of the Kwakiutl nation, is one of the first dances a child participates in during the Winter Ceremonial.⁴⁵ During the dance, both the father and mother bee lead progressively smaller bees on the dance floor one after the other. Then, one child is discovered missing after the children are led back in their 'beehive' at the end of the dance; circling the floor four times, the father bee looks for the lost child. The child is found on the fourth round of searching, hidden amongst the spectators, and is brought home.

The central photograph in this piece is of Nicolson's aunts and uncles as young children. The surrounding image is of old growth trees near Gwa-yi, Kingcome Village, their home community. The border photographs are of children performing the bumblebee dance at the artist's Uncle Ernie Willie's potlatch in 1998. Nicolson's Uncle Don, the small boy pictured on the left in the central photograph, created some of the

replica masks used at that potlatch. Nicolson created this piece “to recognize that the rights and privileges that they embodied are still active and integral to the Musgamagw Dzawada’enuxw People,”⁴⁶ even though Nicolson’s grandfather was forced to sell the original eight masks in the early 1960s. Nicolson stated that her grandfather sold the masks at a time when the future of their traditional culture was in doubt: “It is with great pride that I am able to look back and know that each generation of my family has participated in this dance, and feel assured that the continuance of its practice is now without doubt.”⁴⁷

This piece allowed Nicolson to address the cycle and the concept of ownership, including the different ideas of ownership between First Nations and White Canadians. There was also the aspect of the economics of ownership being explored by the artist; at a time when traditional First Nations economy was suffering in Canada, people like Nicolson’s grandfather were not able to make ends meet and fully support their families, so the masks were sold out of necessity to survive. The bumblebee masks were called treasures by her people, because they represented wealth. But even though the objects, symbolized by the masks, were sold, what they represented, the right to perform the children’s dance, was something that could not be sold.⁴⁸ In fact, the dance continued to be passed on to the following generations. Nicolson wanted to celebrate that fact by making a new work, incorporating historical elements along with contemporary media and subject matter.

Even Though I am the Last One, I Still Count was purchased by the Museum of Anthropology, the only work from *Raven’s Reprise* purchased by the Museum. Nicolson explained that her piece was also the only one in the exhibition chosen by the Museum to

be enclosed inside a case, a somewhat awkward decision, especially for a contemporary piece; it was basically treated more like an historical object. The fact that her piece was inside a case also meant it resembled the way in which her grandfather's masks were originally stored in visible storage. However, it does seem fitting to have the piece enclosed in a case since it highlights the awkwardness First Nations people feel, as if they are being studied behind glass.⁴⁹ This sentiment of being studied and analyzed from a distance, and that idea being transmitted in contemporary works, was shared by Connie Watts in her *Carnival Series*, as is evident from her comments cited earlier in this chapter.

Although Northwest Coast artists borrow historical themes, iconography, conventions, and materials, their artistic production is also characteristically different from other First Nations art since 1960. Karen Duffek explained in a 1993 essay what she believed to be the one overriding feature of the development of Northwest Coast art in the past four decades, until the turn of the twenty-first century: “[I]t is the art’s connection to tradition and a cultural imperative that charges the artist with expressing not only a personal but also a collective identity.”⁵⁰ During this time period, Northwest Coast artists strove to identify their art as contemporary self-expressions, all the while working with conventions of form and composition that were centuries old.

My intention with this chapter was to demonstrate that although there has been a shift in tradition and convention in Northwest Coast artistic production during these last decades, which is to be expected since culture is always changing and shifting, there were some elements of the past that these contemporary artists held on to, and incorporated into their contemporary art. In the following chapter, I will first look closely at MOA and

its mandate; then, the chapter will focus on locating contemporary First Nations art in this ethnological space. My aim is to capture some of the responses to *Raven's Reprise* at the time it was shown, and shortly thereafter. A discussion of one of the central issues of *Raven's Reprise*, exhibiting contemporary art that is not 'traditional' in an ethnological space, will enable me to emphasize *Raven's Reprise* as a groundbreaking exhibition and a crucial point in the exhibition and display of First Nations art.

NOTES TO CHAPTER II

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² Charlotte Townsend-Gault, "Translation or Perversion?: Showing First Nations Art," *Cultural Studies* 9 (1) 1995: 91.

³ Janet C. Berlo and Ruth B. Phillips. "The Northwest Coast." in *Native North American Art*. (Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 1998) 175.

⁴ Stuart Hall, "Old and New Identities, Old and New Ethnicities," in *Culture, Globalization and the World-System; Contemporary Conditions for the Representation of Identity*, ed. Anthony D. King, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 42.

⁵ Stuart Hall, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora," in *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*, ed. Jonathan Rutherford, (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1990), 222.

⁶ Janet C. Berlo and Ruth B. Phillips, "The Northwest Coast," in *Native North American Art*, (Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 205.

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⁸ *Ibid.*, 174.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 232.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 173.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² Karen Duffek, "The Revival of Northwest Coast Indian Art," in *Vancouver: Art and Artists, 1931-1983*, (Vancouver, BC: Vancouver Art Gallery, 1983), 312.

¹³ Bill Holm, *Northwest Coast Indian Art: An Analysis of Form*, (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 1965), 14.

¹⁴ Janet C. Berlo and Ruth B. Phillips, "The Northwest Coast," in *Native North American Art*, (Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 184.

¹⁵ Bill Holm, *Northwest Coast Indian Art: An Analysis of Form*, (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 1965), 92.

¹⁶ Historically, this technique would have mainly been used on wood, as Northwest Coast art used to be mainly a wooden art.

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- ¹⁷ Museum of Anthropology at the University of British Columbia, *Raven's Reprise*, (Vancouver: Museum Note, 2000), 6.
- ¹⁸ John Powell, telephone interview by author, 14 November 2005.
- ¹⁹ Museum of Anthropology at the University of British Columbia, *Raven's Reprise*, (Vancouver: Museum Note, 2000), 7.
- ²⁰ John Powell, telephone interview by author, 14 November 2005.
- ²¹ Museum of Anthropology at the University of British Columbia, *Raven's Reprise*, (Vancouver: Museum Note, 2000), 9.
- ²² John Powell, telephone interview by author, 14 November 2005.
- ²³ Museum of Anthropology at the University of British Columbia, *Raven's Reprise*, (Vancouver: Museum Note, 2000), 8.
- ²⁴ Janet C. Berlo and Ruth B. Phillips, "The Northwest Coast," in *Native North American Art*, (Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 183.
- ²⁵ Martine Reid, "Silent Speakers: Arts of the Northwest Coast," in *The Spirit Sings: Artistic Traditions of Canada's First Peoples*, (Toronto: McLelland and Stewart, 1987), 208.
- ²⁶ Connie Sterritt Watts, telephone interview by author, 22 June 2006.
- ²⁷ Museum of Anthropology at the University of British Columbia, 1999, transcript describing Connie Sterritt Watts' work for *Raven's Reprise*, "Exhibit Design – File: *Raven's Reprise*," n.p., *Darrin Morrison fonds*, Ac # 2002-11, Museum of Anthropology at the University of British Columbia Archives, Vancouver, British Columbia.
- ²⁸ Museum of Anthropology at the University of British Columbia, *Raven's Reprise*, (Vancouver: Museum Note, 2000), 4.
- ²⁹ Janet C. Berlo and Ruth B. Phillips, "The Northwest Coast," in *Native North American Art*, (Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 200.
- ³⁰ Museum of Anthropology at the University of British Columbia, *Raven's Reprise*, (Vancouver: Museum Note, 2000), 7.
- ³¹ *Ibid.*, 8.
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- ³³ John Powell, telephone interview by author, 14 November 2005.

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³⁵ Larry McNeil, "Revisiting Raven's Reprise at the Museum of Anthropology University of British Columbia/The Politics of Representation: Kelly Legge Thesis; Responses by Larry McNeil, Tlingit and Nisgaa Artist,"
<<http://www.boisestate.edu/art/lmcneil/artist/Politics%20of%20Representation.pdf>>, 1.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ Larry McNeil, "Larry McNeil Exhibitions MOA," 2005,
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³⁸ Museum of Anthropology at the University of British Columbia, *Raven's Reprise*, (Vancouver: Museum Note, 2000), 2.

³⁹ Martine Reid, "In Search of Things Past, Remembered, Retraced, and Re- Invented," in *In the Shadow of the Sun: Perspectives on Contemporary Native Art*, (Hull, Qc: Canadian Museum of Civilization, 1993), 208.

⁴⁰ Larry McNeil, "Raven Trickster Larry McNeil Creation Stories Raven Stories," 2005,
<<http://www.larrymcneil.com/artravenpages/index.htm>>.

⁴¹ Barry Ace, "Urban Skins," in *Pelage: Mary Anne Barkhouse 11/04/99-11/30/99*, (Ottawa: Indian Art Centre, 1999), 7.

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ Museum of Anthropology at the University of British Columbia, 1999, transcript describing Mary Anne Barkhouse's work for *Raven's Reprise*, "Exhibit Design – File: *Raven's Reprise*," n.p., *Darrin Morrison fonds*, Ac # 2002-11, Museum of Anthropology at the University of British Columbia Archives, Vancouver, British Columbia.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ Museum of Anthropology at the University of British Columbia, 1999, transcript describing Marianne Nicolson's work for *Raven's Reprise*, "Exhibit Design – File: *Raven's Reprise*," n.p., *Darrin Morrison fonds*, Ac # 2002-11, Museum of Anthropology at the University of British Columbia Archives, Vancouver, British Columbia.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ Marianne Nicolson, telephone interview by author, 28 June 2006.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ Karen Duffek, "Northwest Coast Indian Art from 1950 to the Present," in *In the Shadow of the Sun: Perspectives on Contemporary Native Art*, (Hull, Qc: Canadian Museum of Civilization, 1993), 213.

CHAPTER III: *RAVEN'S REPRISE* - A CASE STUDY IN EXHIBITING CONTEMPORARY FIRST NATIONS ART IN AN ETHNOLOGICAL SPACE

The Museum of Anthropology at the University Of British Columbia: Past, Present, and Future

The University of British Columbia (UBC) began collecting ethnographic material in 1927; twenty years later, this material was brought together to establish the original collections of the new Museum of Anthropology (MOA), which launched in the basement of UBC's main library in 1949. MOA's initial director was Dr. Harry Hawthorn, the first anthropologist appointed to the UBC faculty, with his wife, Audrey Hawthorn, acting as the first curator. MOA's collections remained in the library until 1976, when they were moved to their current location in a purpose-built structure. The creation of a new museum was achievable through a grant from the Government of Canada, commemorating the 1971 centennial of British Columbia's entry into Confederation. UBC granted corresponding funds to finish the installations and to arrange the academic components of MOA. It should be noted that Walter and Marianne Koerner's 1975 gift of their large Northwest Coast art collection to MOA was influential in enabling these financial commitments.¹ From 1974 until 1997, Dr. Michael M. Ames served as MOA's director. Dr. Ruth Phillips held the position from 1997 until 2002, after which time Ames served as acting director for two years. Dr. Phillips was the director during the planning and mounting of *Raven's Reprise*. A leading scholar in First Nations art, her own groundbreaking research encouraged the creation of the exhibition. Dr. Anthony Shelton, MOA's current director, took over the position in August 2004. A publicly funded museum, MOA has a collection of 35,000 objects, including contemporary and traditional arts from all continents, most significantly from East and

South Asia, the South Pacific, the Americas, Africa, and Europe. In the visible storage galleries, where the geographical range of collections is evident, 13,000 objects and their records can be viewed. Although MOA's collections include both archaeological material and ethnographic objects from around the world, it is best known for collections from the Northwest Coast. For example, in the area of MOA called the Great Hall, the objects exhibited, including monumental sculptures, are mostly from the mid-nineteenth century and come from several Northwest Coast nations, including the Haida, Kwakiutl, Gitksan, Nisga'a, Haisla, and Oweekeno. Adjacent galleries also highlight Northwest Coast artists.

MOA's current building was designed by Canadian architect Arthur Erickson.

James Clifford describes:

The University of British Columbia Museum of Anthropology is itself a famous artifact. Arthur Erickson's glass-and-concrete adaptation of a dramatic clifftop, looking out toward Vancouver Island and the setting sun. In early evening the reflected light makes visible a towering wall of windows between crowds of old totem poles within the building and new ones scattered outside.²

The structure of this building is reminiscent of "the monumental aspects of Northwest Coast carving and spatial design."³ Although there are both small and larger spaces, the dominant space is the Great Hall. The design of the Great Hall was inspired by the post-and-beam architecture of the Northwest Coast; with its massive concrete beams, it resembles a traditional big house. The Great Hall has one wall made exclusively of glass, allowing it to be immersed in daylight during the day. Given the size of the space, the objects in the Great Hall are assured maximum visibility, and can be seen from many different sides. The Great Hall houses old totem poles, house posts, boxes, carved figures, and feast dishes. The museum offers visitors a printed guide; the first sentence

states: “The Museum of Anthropology displays Northwest Coast Indian artifacts in ways that emphasize their visual qualities, treating them as works of fine art.” The labels for the historical objects in the museum include identifications of the following: cultural group, place, date, object, and description; most labels also include a small drawing of the work in its original setting. These labels are meant to be terse and unobtrusive, if somewhat idealized, and are specifically “designed not to compete with the visual impact of the artifacts.”⁴

According to MOA, its mission is “to investigate, preserve, and present objects and expressions of human creativity in order to promote understanding of and respect for world cultures.”⁵ What MOA strives for is threefold: to provide information about and access to cultural objects from around the world, with emphasis on the achievements and concerns of the First Peoples and British Columbia's cultural communities; to stimulate critical thinking and understanding about cross-cultural issues; and to pose questions about and develop innovative responses to museological, anthropological, aesthetic, educational, and political challenges. And finally, its mission statement also maintains that:

As both a university and public institution, the Museum of Anthropology is committed to balancing research, teaching, public programs, visitor services, and the development, documentation, and preservation of collections through its unique blend of professional and academic staff, students, and volunteers.⁶

In an effort to extend its role as a public and research institution, MOA is currently undergoing a major expansion, increasing its size by 50% by 2009, thus creating new opportunities for research and teaching. Budgeted at \$52 million, the Renewal Project has received \$34.4 million in funding from the Canada Foundation for Innovation and the

British Columbia Knowledge Development Fund, plus commitments from UBC, the UBC Faculty of Arts, and MOA. Approximately \$10 million remains to be funded through public sector donations to ensure the project's overall success. The new facilities are being developed by UBC Properties Trust and designed by Arthur Erickson and Stantec Architecture. Plans for the Renewal Project include a dramatically redesigned research centre and a digital network, known as the Reciprocal Research Network (RRN), linking Northwest Coast collections in institutions worldwide. The RRN is a distributed network that will support collaborative research in museums and communities. Initially, the RRN will be devised to link MOA, First Nations communities in British Columbia, and major Canadian and international museums. It is being developed in partnership with three First Nations communities: the Musqueam Indian Band, the Sto:lo Nation, and the U'mista Cultural Society.⁷ These groups have agreed to work with MOA to develop the necessary intellectual and technical infrastructure for the RRN. According to MOA, this partnership will be instrumental in planning and developing a research tool that meets both First Nations research needs and the needs of other interdisciplinary scholars. For community researchers, the RRN offers access to objects, images, and knowledge, and intends to overcome a major existing barrier to cross-cultural research by adapting electronic tools to culturally diverse traditions of knowledge management and by accommodating indigenous rights to traditional knowledge in a powerful search engine.⁸ I am including information about this project because I believe it demonstrates MOA's ongoing commitment to its policy to work with and empower First Nations communities both in exhibitions such as *Raven's Reprise* and in major projects like the RRN.

The Museum of Anthropology and the Task Force on Museums and First Peoples Report

It is important to discuss MOA both in terms of a teaching institution, as it has labeled itself, and with regard to the Task Force on Museums and First Peoples report from 1992. Annie E. Coombes described in 1998 the way in which public ethnographic museums have historically been caught between two conflicting roles:

On the one hand, the museum still perceives itself as both purveyor of 'objective' scientific knowledge and as a potential resource centre for a broad-based multicultural education. On the other hand, it is clearly hostage to and sometimes beneficiary of the vagaries of different state policies and political regimes, and aware of the necessity of being seen to perform some vital and visible public function to justify its maintenance, while fighting to preserve a measure of autonomy.⁹

Correspondingly, MOA does seem to be struggling to balance the two roles as described by Coombes as far as *Raven's Reprise* is concerned. Specifically, the exhibition aimed to utilize MOA's permanent collection of historical Northwest Coast objects as a resourceful way to help the general audience relate more easily with contemporary art, but some believe it did not succeed and the reasons for this are explained in this chapter. I would not describe the MOA as being *hostage* to different state policies as stated by Coombes, but rather beneficiary of some of the important Task Force report's recommended alternatives in the display of First Nations art, as is demonstrated with *Raven's Reprise*. This is discussed in the following section of this chapter.

Tony Bennett explained in 1995 how Eilean Hooper-Greenhill had argued in a 1989 essay entitled "The Museum in the Disciplinary Society" that the public museum was shaped as an apparatus with two deeply contradictory functions: firstly, that of the elite temple of the arts, and secondly, that of a utilitarian instrument for democratic education.¹⁰ Bennett also addressed the birth of the museum; specifically, he discussed

the trajectory embodied in the museum's development and how it was the reverse of that embodied in the roughly contemporary emergence of the prison, the clinic, and the asylum. He explained:

Whereas these [the prison, the clinic, and the asylum] effected the sequestration and institutional enclosure of indigent and other populations, which had previously mixed and intermingled in establishments whose boundaries proved relatively permeable or [...] had formed parts of elaborate dramaturgies, the museum placed objects that had previously been concealed from the public into new open and public contexts. Moreover, unlike the carceral institutions whose birth coincided with its own, the museum – in its conception if not in all aspects of its practice – aimed not at the sequestration of populations but, precisely, at the mixing and intermingling of publics – elite and popular – which had hitherto tended towards separate forms of assembly.¹¹

Bennett wrote that the “division between the hidden space of the museum in which knowledge is produced and organized and the public spaces in which it is offered for passive consumption produces a monologic discourse dominated by the authoritative cultural voice of the museum.”¹² In order to break this discourse down, Bennett suggested that it is crucial that the curator's role be shifted from that of the source of an expertise whose function is to organize a representation claiming the status of knowledge, “towards that of the possessor of a technical competence whose function is to assist groups outside the museum to use its resources to make authored statements within it.”¹³

The Task Force on Museums and First Peoples report also made suggestions with regard to curators, and specifically about the increased involvement of First Nations curators in Canadian galleries and museums. To what extent did the MOA utilize the recommendations outlined in the Task Force on Museums and First Peoples report? By considering MOA's mission statement, mandate, and the support of exhibitions such as *Raven's Reprise*, it seems that some of the major issues as outlined by the Task Force on

Museums and First Peoples report have been and continue to be taken seriously by MOA, while others are still being worked through. MOA acknowledges the Task Force report in its mandate, describing itself as:

A teaching and public museum which endeavours to promote understanding and respect for world cultures. MOA undertakes to balance its role as a teaching and research museum with a commitment to the appropriate care of the collections it houses. The Museum continues to pursue, in a respectful manner, a close and collaborative relationship with the originating communities of the collections and related materials connected to them. Throughout this, the Museum is guided by the Task Force report of the Assembly of First Nations and the Canadian Museums Association.¹⁴

The issue of First Nations involvement in museums can be argued to have been successfully implemented, at least to a certain degree by MOA, as evidenced by exhibitions such as *Raven's Reprise* and projects such as the RRN; the Task Force report outlines this issue in the following way: "the need for increased involvement of Native peoples in all activities concerning the interpretation of their cultures and histories in museums."¹⁵ However, when it comes to other important objectives set forth by the Task Force report, MOA still seems to be working towards fulfilling them; these issues are: "the need for Native people to have improved access to collections, and to all levels of employment and policy development in museums; and the repatriation of some museum collections."¹⁶ MOA falls short in accommodating Task Force priorities in the area of integrating First Nations permanent staff into its administrative framework. MOA counted only one person of First Nations heritage on its permanent staff in 2006: curator Pam Brown, who is of Heiltsuk ancestry.

Curator Lynn Hill's Proposed Intentions with *Raven's Reprise*

With respect to *Raven's Reprise*, Lynn Hill has maintained that one of the central

ideas behind the juxtaposition of the historical objects and the contemporary works was to use MOA as a resource. *Raven's Reprise*, along with being educational for the general public, was also intended to challenge viewer's perceptions of Northwest Coast art and culture. MOA's Darrin Morrison fonds include all exhibition files relating to *Raven's Reprise*. Included in the files is the project description and justification submitted by Hill in 1999 - during her curator-in-residence position at MOA - as part of The Canada Council for the Arts *Project Grants to Visual Arts Organizations: Exhibition/Dissemination Assistance* program application; she asserted that in the past century, the visual artistic production of Northwest Coast artists has been studied and discussed within a "constructed formal analysis."¹⁷ The project description for *Raven's Reprise*, written by Hill in 1999, states that:

A select few non-Native people such as Franz Boas, Wilson Duff and Bill Holm, have been appointed *experts* in the field of Northwest Coast art and they have established and reinforced a stratagem that has been used to identify and comprehend the multitude of visual material created by the people of the Northwest Coast.¹⁸

Even though historical Northwest Coast artistic production, by individuals or old masters, is recognized, Northwest Coast art tends to be located within an unchanging anthropological framework. This approach does not recognize contemporary and innovative artistic endeavours in the Northwest Coast art milieu. In planning *Raven's Reprise*, Hill wrote in 1999:

The installation of this exhibition will question the polemics of museology and First Peoples. The location of individual works will not be confined to a separate gallery space, but will be installed throughout the museum amidst the permanent collection of historic Northwest Coast art. This interruption of *sacred* space will incite a visual dialogue between the contemporary and historic pieces. This juxtaposition of the historic and contemporary will also provide the viewer with a visual

reference and set the context from which the contemporary piece art stems from.¹⁹

She also described *Raven's Reprise* as “an exhibition that will examine the work of those contemporary artists whose work dares to step outside the “rules” that were strictly bound by ‘tradition’.”²⁰ As both a curator and a culture producer, Hill intended the exhibition to be one of site-specific installations that would challenge ‘traditional’ boundaries and expectations of Northwest Coast art. *Raven's Reprise* also tried to function as an educational tool for the public, to show people that Northwest Coast art and culture is alive and thriving. Any attempt to use the museum as a forum for intervention and experimentation challenges the general public’s level of acceptance, given the public’s perception of “the image of the museum as a temple, a source of timeless, universal truths.”²¹ And this is the perception many people have of museums. As Trudy Nicks pointed out in 1992, “No better example exists, perhaps, than the public expectation that the Native peoples of Canada will be portrayed according to a set of idealized categories, in an idealized time, and outside of mainstream Canadian culture and history.”²² Thus, in an exhibition such as *Raven's Reprise*, where one of the goals was to challenge these stereotypes of Northwest Coast culture and art-making, it was seen as imperative that some educational programming be incorporated, in order to counteract the public’s long-held and erroneous beliefs. As Ivan Karp notes:

Cross-cultural exhibitions present such stark contrasts between what we know and what we need to know that the challenge of reorganizing our knowledge becomes an aspect of exhibition experience. This challenge may be experienced in its strongest form in cross-cultural exhibitions, but it should be raised by any exhibition. Almost by definition, audiences do not bring to exhibitions the full range of cultural resources necessary for comprehending them; otherwise, there would be no point to exhibiting. Audiences are left with two choices: either they define their experience of the exhibition to fit with their existing categories of

knowledge, or they reorganize their categories to fit better with their experience. Ideally, it is the shock of nonrecognition that enables the audience to choose the latter alternative. The challenge for exhibition makers is to provide within exhibitions the contexts and resources that enable audiences to choose to reorganize their knowledge.²³

This was especially challenging for Hill with *Raven's Reprise*, since MOA is an ethnological museum, and some of the general public visiting MOA may have trouble understanding contemporary art. Contemporary art is jarring in any setting for some people, and to have it displayed amongst historical Northwest Coast objects was probably confusing for some visitors to MOA during the exhibition. However, that does not detract from the importance and value of *Raven's Reprise* as a groundbreaking juncture in the exhibition for First Nations art in Canada; indeed, it demonstrates the importance of it.

Hill's plans to have a strong educational component for *Raven's Reprise* were not realized. She wrote in the 1999 project description and justification for the show:

Educational components will be developed in collaboration with the Curator of Education and will be compatible with the new Provincial Curriculum. This exhibition is ideally suited to developing educational and interpretive strategies on contemporary First Nations art. Issues addressing historical, political and social concepts of art and its [sic] production will be part of the collaborative project between the curator, educator and artist. The public programming for this exhibition will be inclusive of other forms of contemporary expression by [Northwest Coast] artists including performance art, theatre, film & video, music, and fashion shows.²⁴

While preparing *Raven's Reprise*, the curator of education at the MOA, Jill Rachel Baird, corresponded electronically with Hill and Darrin Morrison, MOA's exhibition director at the time. In the Darrin Morrison fonds, I found a transcript of electronic mail that Baird wrote on December 9th 1999, just before the opening of the exhibition:

I do think it is lamentable that we are having an exciting exhibit of

contemporary emerging First Nations artists which does not have programming attached to it. It seems like a lost opportunity. But at this point, it is not something I can see myself doing alone. If I can work with Marianne Nicolson (as I have discussed with her) and create an artist in residency programme that may be the best approach for school and/or public programming.²⁵

Baird could not be reached for comment: several unsuccessful attempts were made to contact her at MOA where she still holds the same position. Morrison no longer works at MOA, and attempts to communicate with him about this aspect of the show were also unsuccessful. Nicolson confirmed that there was no educational or public programming in conjunction with the exhibition.²⁶ Hill talked about this aspect of the exhibition in 2003, with Kelly Legge:

[F]or me, education is an extremely important part of any exhibition. There are so many different kinds of histories and things that people are talking about and it's a history a lot of us don't know so it was primed for education and there was absolutely no education component to it. I had no help from the education department. I don't know if they didn't feel it was worthy or what...²⁷

The only documentation published for *Raven's Reprise* was a short seventeen-page catalogue printed in two colours. The catalogue was in a brochure format, on slightly textured paper. There were 3000 of these printed, at the cost of \$3200. The museum contracted Susan Mavor to design a ten-panel brochure using existing texts, which were on display as part of the exhibition; these include the curator's statement, the artists' biographies, and artists' statements. Images in two colours of each of the works accompanied the relevant texts; there was also a floor plan in the catalogue, with the location of each artwork indicated on it using a number system. This catalogue was created and printed six months after the opening of the exhibition, which may seem surprising but is not unusual. Presently, MOA does not have any of the thirteen works in

Raven's Reprise reproduced in colour in their archives. And in fact, there is no other documentation of the exhibition, aside from the exhibition files found in the Darrin Morrison fonds, which is kept in the archives.

Participating Artists' Thoughts on Their Experience with the *Raven's Reprise* Exhibition at The Museum of Anthropology

Larry McNeil, one of the participating artists in *Raven's Reprise*, discussed his experience regarding the exhibition and also his thoughts on MOA. He said:

[The] Museum of Anthropology was very open to my input as to how, where and what to exhibit for *Raven's Reprise*. I was impressed with their overall professionalism that was accorded me as both a First Nations person and professional artist. Therefore, I could say that our relationship was professional in every way and I was left with a favourable impression of how we worked together. I believe that Lynn [Hill] had a lot to do with maintaining a higher level of interaction with the artists than may have been likely the norm and she is to be commended for her dedication. The Museum of Anthropology is also to be commended for allowing her to implement her curatorial ideas for the show, which may have been a new idea for them to show contemporary work in such close quarters with more traditional historical works. I could be mistaken on this point, but their exhibitions appeared to have been placed in specific areas that seem to be designated as 'exhibition areas' for work not a part of their collection.²⁸

I interviewed Connie Sterritt, another participating artist in *Raven's Reprise*, on June 22nd 2006, and she told me she had a great overall experience with MOA and *Raven's Reprise*; however, the reaction from some visitors was less than positive, according to her.²⁹ She believed the reason for this was because the exhibition was "too ahead of its time", and some of the museum visitors were not open to that. I believe this may be due to the some of the public's lack of knowledge and understanding of contemporary art, along with the fact that many visitors to MOA may not be regularly exposed to contemporary art. Sterritt stated that *Raven's Reprise* sought to bridge the gap between art and culture, and attempted to show the harmony that existed in Northwest Coast culture, the unity

between Northwest Coast people of all ages.

I interviewed participating artist John Powell in November 2005 about the exhibition. He believed it was a monumental show, bringing the Northwest Coast artforms to the forefront, helping to create dialogue and giving First Nations people a voice.³⁰ Powell stated that *Raven's Reprise* was about contemporary Northwest Coast artists helping pave the way for new museum practices regarding the display of First Nations art. He also believed that this exhibition made a statement about the booming contemporary Northwest Coast culture and artworld.

Marianne Nicolson described her experience with *Raven's Reprise* in a personal communication I had with her on June 28th 2006. She also viewed her exhibiting at MOA as being a great opportunity for her to reflect on complex issues, such as ownership, that were important to her.³¹ Mary Anne Barkhouse, who decided to be involved with this exhibition because many of her family's works from previous generations (Charlie James, Mungo Martin and Ellen Neel for example) are housed in that facility.³² She says of her experience:

I thought it would be nice to be exhibiting in the same space as their work, even though my pieces are very different in format. As I am in Ontario and the exhibition was in British Columbia, I'm not too sure what the overall feedback was; [however] people from my family who have seen it, and are familiar with the artforms that form the background to my installation, were quite pleased with it and saw the humour in it that I had intended. Of course there's always one sour apple in the bunch (not from my family!) [who] thought my button blankets were heresy [...] but there you go. Better to provoke a response than none at all, I say ...³³

Critical Responses to *Raven's Reprise*

As far as critical responses to *Raven's Reprise* go, the *Vancouver Sun's* visual art critic, Michael Scott, wrote one of two articles reviewing the exhibition; it was entitled

“Gallery’s Rebirth a Messy One: Museum of Anthropology’s Former Masterpiece Gallery Suffers as Curators Expand its Role and Diminish its Beauty,” calling *Raven’s Reprise* a less-than-successful case in point of the museum’s capacity to manage its often competing anthropological and fine-arts agendas.³⁴ Scott wrote on March 14th 2000:

Connie Sterritt’s light-hearted, ovoid form animal figures [Radiant Raven, Whimsical Wolf and Baroque Bear] are simply embarrassing hung next to the great art works of the past. The Louvre would never hang a young artist’s playful efforts next to the Mona Lisa. Why does the Museum of Anthropology hang Sterritt’s wolf next to an ancient totem figure? The juxtaposition seems an insult in both directions. Even worse is John Powell’s regrettable black-leather Raven-inspired dress on a mannequin in the midst of the Great Hall. How sad that (Ruth) Phillips and her designers would cavil so in the face of the important heritage conundrum raised by this new gallery - how to marry the museum’s past and present needs. There is no doubt that the stories the museum wants to tell at the beginning of the 21st century are worth our consideration. But to tell them well, the institution needs to raise money to build a proper exhibition space that will add to the museum’s stature, not diminish it.³⁵

The only other review of *Raven’s Reprise* was written by Joan Richardson, and was published in *Vie des Arts* in 2000. Richardson’s review had a distinctly more positive tone than Scott’s. According to her, the exhibition presented: “A remarkable diversity of traditional and contemporary techniques interact[ing] in different ways with the museum setting, generally to eloquent effect.”³⁶

Some negative comments from visitors to the exhibition included: “It is jarring to see the contemporary art among the older stuff...All the new art should be together...I noticed [the contemporary works] but was more interested in the older stuff...I couldn’t understand the humor of the artist.”³⁷ The intent, as far as Hill was concerned during the planning of the exhibition, was clearly to interrupt the *sacred* space of the permanent collection at MOA and to provoke a visual dialogue between the contemporary and

historic pieces.³⁸ This was obviously not successfully relayed to the some of the general public, resulting in a number of negative impressions. However, had the educational and public programming been implemented in conjunction with the show, as was the original plan, *Raven's Reprise* could have had a very different effect on the average visitor. The potential for education with this exhibition was significant, but without the additional programming, the public was confused and there was some backlash. To include contemporary works using contemporary media, even when they have obvious traditional Northwest Coast artistic and cultural influences, without the necessary educational support, left some visitors confused.

While the above review by Scott presents some of the pieces in *Raven's Reprise* in a negative light, he believed that Powell's *Sanctuary* and Nicolson's *Even Though I am the Last One I Still Count* were more successful:

Raven's Reprise presents [...] site-specific works in the Great Hall and the museum's visible storage area. Some of those are powerful, thought-provoking installations, such as John Powell's canvas cover of the museum's collection of hamatsa masks. These items were part of the regalia of the most sacred and secret society in Kwakiutl culture and were never intended for general public display. Powell's *Sanctuary* draws a screen over the masks as a one-year respite from their glass-fronted storage space. Marianne Nicolson's piece also acknowledges the sometimes difficult relationship between a collecting institution and the ravaged cultures from which it drew its material.³⁹

Although Scott's objections with Sterritts' pieces and Powell's *Metamoravinyll* seem to be based on his belief that they are inferior works of art, it is interesting to note that the only works Scott writes about favourably were the ones that were placed in visible storage during *Raven's Reprise*. The reviewer received the pieces that were juxtaposed with older objects in the Great Hall less positively than the pieces from *Raven's Reprise* exhibited in visible storage. What could be the reason for *Sanctuary* and *Even Though I*

am the Last One, I Still Count inducing positive reactions, and those displayed in the Great Hall incurring more negative feelings? As discussed in the Chapter II, the objects in the Great Hall had minimal labelling and background information attached to them, emphasizing them as great works of fine art. Thus, visitors have learned to identify this sort of exhibit within a recognized paradigm.⁴⁰ It is possible that *Raven's Reprise*, and more specifically the works displayed in the Great Hall, challenge Western categories of artifact and art, highlighting "how the struggle for control over cultural representations by First Nations people occurs within a Western framework, which is deeply embedded."⁴¹ *Raven's Reprise* sought to disrupt the objects in MOA with which they are juxtaposed, objects that the general visitor to MOA would recognize as a traditional masterpiece. Though not representative of the entire public, what Scott's review and some visitors' negative reactions suggest is that without the proper educational or public programming, this challenge left some visitors, and indeed at least one critic, uncomfortable and confused.

During a telephone interview on July 10th 2003, Hill discussed with me the critical response she had garnered from the exhibition. The one article she spoke of was the one by Scott discussed above. She also mentioned the debate surrounding some of the contemporary pieces when the exhibition opened. For example, Hill stated that Powell's *Metamoravinyl* got some negative responses because it was an avant-garde statue being exhibited in MOA's Great Hall, amongst the historical Northwest Coast objects. Hill explained that the work was placed strategically amongst historical objects that were from Powell's family; also, this piece is about transformation, and transformation is not always beautiful.⁴² This may not have been clear to those who

criticized Powell's work, who were perhaps only looking at the formal characteristics of the work without considering its placement and meaning. Hill also discussed some visitors' negative reactions in an interview with Kelly Legge:

People get comfortable with their works being in the same place and when you switch it up, they don't know what to do. So that again was part of the whole exhibition – to switch things up. It's not like we covered the entire Hamat'sa display [with John Powell's *Sanctuary*]. You could go in, and if you really wanted to look at it you could call and somebody would let you go in and look at it...It really upset some of the straight and narrow people who didn't want their histories challenged.⁴³

Hill explained the meaning of *Raven's Reprise* being chosen as the title of the exhibition: the first part, *Raven*, is easy to understand since it is the trickster in Northwest Coast mythological stories; *Reprise* refers to the part of a song that is repeated by the singer. Thus, there is a certain parallel with the way in which the *Raven sings again* and the contemporary works in the exhibition picking up on elements from the historical objects at MOA.⁴⁴ But beyond that, *Raven's Reprise* is a significant title because it symbolizes the Northwest Coast culture's triumph in the world today. The Raven is symbolic of Northwest Coast culture, and the "reprise" is an affirmation, a declaration and indeed a triumph of contemporary Northwest Coast culture.

Hill also described the process leading up to the exhibition, in terms of the placement of the contemporary works. Since the works were to be up for a year, placement was carefully chosen after the artists were invited to see the space and decide for themselves where they wanted to place their works. Since one of the main ideas behind the juxtaposition of the historical objects and the contemporary works in *Raven's Reprise* was to use MOA as a resource, according to Hill, the contemporary works were placed near objects such as totem poles, which were instantly recognizable as being from

the Northwest Coast by the audience. Thus, the historical objects, which were deemed more accessible to the general audience, were used in the hope that they would enable people to relate to the contemporary work found next to it, making those works more accessible as well, according to Hill.⁴⁵ However, some of MOA's visitors may have trouble understanding contemporary art, since they are not necessarily an art gallery audience. The ensuing dialogue and debate generated from this criticism contributed to the lasting influence of this exhibition; *Raven's Reprise* challenged its audience to rethink the nature of Northwest Coast art and culture. Furthermore, Hill explained to Kelly Legge in 2002 that her intentions with regard to *Raven's Reprise* had little to do with the anticipated reaction of the audience. Even though according to Hill, both visitors and staff offered mixed reviews to the exhibition, she "was adamant that any reaction was valuable to the reconditioning of the audience's mind towards the role of the museum."⁴⁶ According to Darrin Morrison, MOA's exhibition director at the time, *Raven's Reprise* helped MOA step out of normative expectations, for the public and staff alike:

I think a lot of people isolated an art gallery aesthetic or approach from a museum approach and don't necessarily combine the two. And I think with this exhibit, it was really successful. If it had been without controversy, then something would have been wrong. It needed to create the dialogue that it did and people to realize that it was challenging...People see the great hall as being a special place and when something is imposed on it...I know visitors came and would ask, "what is that doing there in the great hall?" but I think that was part of it.⁴⁷

Since one of the purposes of the exhibition was an interruption, or a disruption of MOA's "sacred" space, namely its Great Hall, it stands to reason that backlash, and negative reactions generated from the part of some visitors would have been one of the desired results. Simply put, people don't like disruptions. Therefore, it would not have

been surprising for the people involved with *Raven's Reprise* to be faced with some degree of controversy generated by some of the audience's off-putting responses. Indeed, the juxtaposition of contemporary and traditional work continues to jar viewers. The insertion of contemporary work in the First Peoples Hall in the Canadian Museum of Civilization in Gatineau asserts continuity and continued presence, but since viewers are programmed to look for or expect a clear narrative line or chronology and to see certain kinds of things in certain kinds of museums, there may be some level of controversy. Similarly, the insertion of traditional First Nations pieces into the narrative of Canadian art history at the National Gallery of Ottawa sometimes works, and sometimes doesn't, for instance with a controversial pairing such as Anishnabe beadwork and Group of Seven paintings.

Legacy of *Raven's Reprise*

Hill claimed that "this exhibition is not meant to disclaim past artistic traditions or scholarly explorations, but rather to offer some insight into current art practices that venture beyond an analysis of traditional forms and genres."⁴⁸ Cornel West believes we can explore the mechanisms and ideological underpinnings of an issue, position, or any venture undertaken by culture producers; he thinks it is possible to show the underlying positions of where the cultural producer is working. West stated that the most important idea of a cultural politics of difference is the agency and capability of people who have been culturally dishonored, politically oppressed and economically exploited.⁴⁹ West wrote that a cultural politics of difference:

affirms the perennial quest for the precious ideals of individuality and democracy by digging deep in the depths of human particularities and social specificities in order to construct new kinds of connections, affinities and communities across empire, nations, region, race, gender,

age and sexual orientation.⁵⁰

And these ideas are very much at play in *Raven's Reprise*. By juxtaposing the contemporary Northwest Coast pieces with the historical objects, Hill is in fact constructing new connections for the viewer, and also aiming to preserve the artists' agency, to empower them by having them choose where to place their works amidst the historical objects.

Kelly Legge wrote a thesis on *Raven's Reprise* in 2003; it was entitled "Trickster Amuck in the Museum: A Case Study of the UBC Museum of Anthropology's Collaborative Contemporary Native Art Exhibition *Raven's Reprise*." Legge wrote about what she believed the exhibition set out to accomplish, along with her views on its less successful aspects:

The exhibition dispersed edgy, sometimes confrontational contemporary work throughout the museum in provocative juxtaposition with permanent pieces. In so doing, the exhibition meant to challenge the museum's mechanisms of display, each piece subverting and transgressing the permanent installations. Even the museum itself as political forum and an architectural *object* [sic] *d'exotique* was called into question by the art and the artists...*Raven's Reprise* was an effort to redefine the relationship between the museum and the communities whose material culture it has on display...For a number of reasons [...] the collaboration between the curator, artists, and the museum was not a successful one. The shift of power onto the First Nations artistic team from the museum proved difficult and a growing pain for the museum and its visitors, which seemed not yet prepared for such a paradigm shift. Rather than pursue the kind of evolutionary direction that *Raven's Reprise* invited, however, after the year-long exhibit was disassembled, the exhibition seems now to have been an anomaly in the museum's temporary contemporary art exhibition practice.⁵¹

Legge also discussed some of the negative reactions the exhibition received during the time it was shown. She also included personal communication with Hill, such the curator's thoughts on visitors' responses to *Raven's Reprise*. For instance, Legge asked

Hill in a 2002 interview if she had pictured whom her audience would be when preparing and mounting this exhibition:

I didn't really care. Really, I didn't. I felt that it was the museum people, who generally came to the museum to learn and to see something different, to be challenged...but it really upset quite a few people because they would say, "I was here and I come here every year and I went to look [at the Hamat'sa mask exhibit] and, it's covered now!" It was just like, good god, I'm sorry. And see, that's the thing – people go to museums and they get comfortable.⁵²

In order to understand the way in which *Raven's Reprise* challenges visitors' expectations about the display practices of museums regarding Northwest Coast art, and the unique nature of this exhibition, one just has to take a look at previous exhibitions of Northwest Coast objects, and the developing Northwest Coast artworld. One such exhibition was the 1967 *Arts of the Raven: Masterworks by the Northwest Coast Indian*, in honour of the one hundredth anniversary of the Canadian Confederation; it was shown at the Vancouver Art Gallery and was curated by Doris Shadbolt with Wilson Duff, Bill Holm and Bill Reid. Doris Shadbolt, acting director of the VAG at the time, writes in the catalogue foreword:

The intent of this exhibition is to make an explicit and emphatic statement [...]: this is an exhibition of art, high art, not ethnology. It proposes to bring together many of the masterworks of this art, to show the wide range and aesthetic excellence of its forms, and to explicate and establish its claim to greatness.⁵³

This exhibition was discussed in Aaron Glass' article "(Cultural) Objects of (Cultural) Value" as a turning point in the discourse surrounding the display of Northwest Coast objects because of its proposed intent. The goal was "to shift evaluation of Native objects from ethnographic artifacts or tourist curios to fine art."⁵⁴ And this shift was successful for some time since more ethnographic institutions followed suit in the next

decade by organizing revised exhibits of Northwest Coast objects applying fine-art approaches.⁵⁵ Specifically, in 1976, they were the new British Columbia Provincial Museum, the Canadian Museum of Civilization and the new MOA.

Stephanie Bolton wrote in 2004 about one of Montreal's McCord Museum's highest-profile exhibitions, *Across Borders: Beadwork in Iroquois Life* in 1999. It was curated by Moira McCaffrey, hired in 1990 as the McCord's first permanent curator of the ethnographic collections, in conjunction with, among others, Kanataкта of the Kanien'Kehaka Raotitiohkwa Cultural Centre in Kahnawa:ke, Trudy Nicks of the Royal Ontario Museum (and co-chair of the Task Force on Museums and First Peoples) and MOA's Ruth Phillips. The exhibition presented a brief history of early Iroquois beadwork, and then approached its main subject: commercial beadwork production. Along with largely featuring historic tourist art such as souvenirs and beaded art, *Across Borders* also consisted of current trends in beading and beaded clothing.⁵⁶

Some other exhibitions have also incorporated both historical objects and contemporary works. One well-known example is *Down from the Shimmering Sky: Masks of the Northwest Coast*, a 1998 exhibition at the Vancouver Art Gallery. For this exhibition, historical masks, primarily representing the human face, were shown alongside contemporary masks produced by artists "who have made a substantial contribution to their own culture by producing ceremonial art for the use of their chiefs as well as for the commercial market."⁵⁷ *The Legacy*, an exhibition that opened in Victoria at the British Columbia Provincial Museum in 1971, was another exercise in the combination of displaying both historical pieces and contemporary ones together for one show.

Since *Raven's Reprise*, other exhibitions have also juxtaposed historical objects and contemporary works. For example, an important exhibition showing Haida art from the past two hundred years was mounted in 2006, from June 10th until September 17th, at the Vancouver Art Gallery. *Raven Travelling: Two Centuries of Haida Art* proposed to present nearly three hundred of the finest Haida artworks created over the past two hundred years, ranging from monumental poles and carved masks to argillite carvings and spruce root weavings; it was the first major survey exhibition to bring together examples of Haida art from public and private collections throughout North America. One of the themes the exhibition pivoted around was the continuity of the unique Haida formline. It also sought to reveal how Haida art is reflective of the mythic realm, with many examples of Raven as the trickster, the transformer and creator. *Raven Travelling: Two Centuries of Haida Art* explored how crests - the iconic figures that appear in Haida design and refer to one of the two defining Haida clans, Ravens and Eagles - were used in poles, ceremonial regalia, feasting utensils and tools to mark belonging and place within the larger social structure.⁵⁸ While examining the broad themes of mythology, form and use, the exhibition also focused on individuals, profiling key figures in the history of classical Haida art. More than fifty renowned artists were featured in the exhibition, with particular emphasis on such innovators as Charles Edenshaw, Bill Reid and Robert Davidson (b. 1946). Also represented were works by a generation of artists who have expanded on the Haida tradition, including Reg Davidson (b. 1954), Jim Hart (b. 1952), Isabel Rorick (b. 1955) and Don Yeomans (b. 1958), among others, as well as works by several emerging artists. With the increasing prominence of Haida art, this exhibition was “an exploration of the emergence of new directions for Haida art in a contemporary

global context.”⁵⁹

Raven's Reprise was a significant exhibition because it paved the way not only for new museum practices with regard to First Nations art, but also for curators. Museums have followed *Raven's Reprise's* lead by hiring First Nations people to guest curate exhibitions. For example, on the team of curators for *Raven Travelling: Two Centuries of Haida Art* was Vincent Collison, who is of Haida descent. Collison was awarded a 2005 Canada Council for the Arts grant as part of the Assistance to Aboriginal Curators for Residencies in the Visual Arts program. Other curators who have received the same grant in the last few years include Steve Loft (in 2001 and 2002), Elwood Jimmy (2005), and Ryan Rice (2005). Museums have also since hired First Nations people as full-time staff members. For instance, around the time of *Raven's Reprise*, Dolorès Contré Migwans was hired as the Assistant to Native Programs at the McCord Museum in Montreal. Along with working on long-term policy-affecting projects with Moira McCaffrey, the McCord's permanent curator of the ethnographic collections, Migwans acts as a cultural liaison officer to various local First Nations communities.

By capturing and reviewing a sample of the responses to *Raven's Reprise* when it was shown and during the period right after it, both from the people involved with the exhibition and MOA visitors, my intention was to offer an overview of the different reactions to this exhibition.⁶⁰ This exhibition - where contemporary work was shown in an ethnological space - was seen by some as a disruption of MOA's permanent space, but I believe it also had great potential to educate. *Raven's Reprise*, intending to act as an educational tool, endeavoured to show the continuing vitality of Northwest Coast art-making and culture. *Raven's Reprise* was faced with the difficult task of dealing with

expectations of the audience in an ethnological institution such as MOA, the average visitor most likely not familiar with contemporary art and also not expecting to see such works at MOA. I believe that the educational potential of the exhibition was diminished because the art in *Raven's Reprise* was probably too discordant for many visitors, in relation to their expectations, at MOA. However, the disruption created by *Raven's Reprise* being exhibited at MOA and some of the backlash it generated should be considered important factors in determining its long-term success. When curators shake things up it becomes uncomfortable because it jars the viewer into thinking about these expectations and categories. But discomfort can be a good thing because it can generate lasting debate and dialogue. I believe such is the case with *Raven's Reprise*, and it is one of the main reasons why it can be called successful, influential, and groundbreaking. Expressions of discomfort, even anger can be a measure of the triumph of the curatorial project.

NOTES TO CHAPTER III

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³ *Ibid.*, 218.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 219.

⁵ “MOA: Mission,” *Museum of Anthropology at the University of British Columbia*, n.d., <<http://www.moa.ubc.ca/history/mission.php>>.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ Located in Alert bay, British Columbia, the U’mistá Cultural Society was founded in 1980 as a project to house potlatch artifacts, which had been seized by the Canadian government. The Society works towards fulfilling its mandate to ensure the survival of all aspects of cultural heritage of the Kwakiutl.

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⁸ “MOA: The Reciprocal Research Network Overview,” *Museum of Anthropology at the University of British Columbia*, n.d., <<http://www.moa.ubc.ca/renewal/rrnoverview.php>>.

⁹ Annie E. Coombes, “Museums and the Formation of National and Cultural Identities,” *The Oxford Art Journal* 11 (2) 1988: 66.

¹⁰ Tony Bennett, “The Political Rationality of the Museum,” *The Birth of the Museum: History, Theory, Politics*, (London: Routledge, 1995), 89.

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¹² *Ibid.*, 103.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 104.

¹⁴ “Repatriation Guidelines,” *Museum of Anthropology at the University of British Columbia*, n.d., <http://www.moa.ubc.ca/pdf/Repatriation_guidelines.pdf>.

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¹⁷ Lynn Hill, 1999, transcript, "Raven's Reprise: Project description and Justification of Current Request; Installation/Presentation" application to The Canada Council for the Arts Project Grant to Visual Arts Organizations: Exhibitions/Dissemination Assistance, n.p., *Darrin Morrison fonds*, Ac # 2002-11, Museum of Anthropology at the University of British Columbia Archives, Vancouver, British Columbia.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ Trudy Nicks, "Partnerships in Developing Cultural Resources: Lessons From the Task Force on Museums and First Peoples," *Culture* XII (1) 1992: 91.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ Ivan Karp, "Culture and Representation," in *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display*, eds. Ivan Karp and Steven D. Lavine, (Washington and London: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991), 22-23.

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²⁵ Jill Rachel Baird, December 9th 1999, "raven's reprise" E-mail to Lynn Hill, Darrin Morrison and Ruth Phillips, exhibition files, n.p., *Darrin Morrison fonds*, Ac # 2002-11, Museum of Anthropology at the University of British Columbia Archives, Vancouver, British Columbia.

²⁶ Marianne Nicolson, telephone interview with author, 28 June 2006.

²⁷ Kelly Legge, "Trickster Amuck in the Museum: A Case Study of the UBC Museum of Anthropology's Collaborative Contemporary Native Art Exhibition Raven's Reprise", (Winnipeg: M.A. thesis, University of Manitoba, 2003), 71.

²⁸ Larry McNeil, "Revisiting Raven's Reprise at the Museum of Anthropology University of British Columbia/The Politics of Representation: Kelly Legge Thesis; Responses by Larry McNeil, Tlingit and Nisgaa Artist," <http://www.boisestate.edu/art/lmcneil/artist/Politics%20of%20Representation.pdf>, 1.

²⁹ Connie Sterritt Watts, telephone interview by author, 22 June 2006.

³⁰ John Powell, telephone interview by author, 14 November 2005.

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- ³¹ Marianne Nicolson, telephone interview by author, 28 June 2006.
- ³² Mary Anne Barkhouse, electronic letter to author, 3 July 2003.
- ³³ *Ibid.*
- ³⁴ Michael Scott, "Gallery's rebirth a messy one: Museum of Anthropology's former Masterpiece Gallery suffers as curators expand its role and diminish its beauty," *Vancouver Sun* 14 March 2000: E1+.
- ³⁵ *Ibid.*
- ³⁶ Joan Richardson, "Raven's Reprise: Contemporary Works by First Nations Artists," *Vie des Arts* 44 (178) Spring 2000: 69.
- ³⁷ Kelly Legge, "Trickster Amuck in the Museum: A Case Study of the UBC Museum of Anthropology's Collaborative Contemporary Native Art Exhibition Raven's Reprise", (Winnipeg: M.A. thesis, University of Manitoba, 2003), 35.
- ³⁸ Lynn Hill, 1999, transcript, "Raven's Reprise: Project description and Justification of Current Request; Installation/Presentation" application to The Canada Council for the Arts Project Grant to Visual Arts Organizations: Exhibitions/Dissemination Assistance, n.p., *Darrin Morrison fonds*, Ac # 2002-11, Museum of Anthropology at the University of British Columbia Archives, Vancouver, British Columbia.
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- ⁴¹ *Ibid.*
- ⁴² Lynn Hill, telephone interview by author, 10 July 2003.
- ⁴³ Kelly Legge, "Trickster Amuck in the Museum: A Case Study of the UBC Museum of Anthropology's Collaborative Contemporary Native Art Exhibition Raven's Reprise", (Winnipeg: M.A. thesis, University of Manitoba, 2003), 64.
- ⁴⁴ Lynn Hill, telephone interview by author, 10 July 2003.
- ⁴⁵ *Ibid.*
- ⁴⁶ Kelly Legge, "Trickster Amuck in the Museum: A Case Study of the UBC Museum of Anthropology's Collaborative Contemporary Native Art Exhibition Raven's Reprise",

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⁴⁷ Kelly Legge, "Trickster Amuck in the Museum: A Case Study of the UBC Museum of Anthropology's Collaborative Contemporary Native Art Exhibition *Raven's Reprise*", (Winnipeg: M.A. thesis, University of Manitoba, 2003), 43.

⁴⁸ Museum of Anthropology at the University of British Columbia, *Raven's Reprise*, (Vancouver: Museum Note, 2000), 1.

⁴⁹ Cornel West, "The New Cultural Politics of Difference," *Out There: Marginalization and Contemporary Cultures*, eds., Russell Ferguson, Martha Gever, Trinh T. Minh-ha, Cornel West, (New York: The New Museum of Contemporary Art, 1990), 34.

⁵⁰ *Ibid*, 35.

⁵¹ Kelly Legge, "Trickster Amuck in the Museum: A Case Study of the UBC Museum of Anthropology's Collaborative Contemporary Native Art Exhibition *Raven's Reprise*", (Winnipeg: M.A. thesis, University of Manitoba, 2003), 12.

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⁵³ Doris Shadbolt, "Foreword," *Arts of the Raven: Masterworks by the Northwest Coast Indian*, (Vancouver: The Vancouver Art Gallery, 1967), 1.

⁵⁴ Aaron Glass, "(Cultural) Objects of (Cultural) Value," in *On Aboriginal Representation in the Gallery*, eds. Lynda Jessup with Shannon Bagg, (Ottawa: Canadian Museum of Civilization, 2002), 99.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ Stephanie Bolton, "An Analysis of the Task Force on Museums and First Peoples: The Changing Representation of Aboriginal Histories in Museums", (Montreal: M.A. thesis, Concordia University, 2004), 64.

⁵⁷ Peter L. Macnair, Robert Joseph and Bruce Grenville, "Curator's Statement," in *Down from the Shimmering Sky: Masks of the Northwest Coast*, (Vancouver/Toronto: Douglas & McIntyre; Seattle: University of Washington Press; Vancouver Art Gallery, 1998), 12.

⁵⁸ "Raven Travelling: Two Centuries of Haida Art June 10 to September 17 2006," Vancouver Art Gallery, <http://www.vanartgallery.bc.ca/exhibitions_raven.cfm>.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ Unfortunately, since MOA did not have a comment book for *Raven's Reprise*, there was no way to review visitor responses on a large scale.

CONCLUSION

Through this thesis, my intention was to study the display of First Nations art in Canada at the turn of the twenty-first century, using *Raven's Reprise*, which featured five contemporary Northwest Coast artists and was exhibited at the Museum of Anthropology (MOA) at the University of British Columbia, as a case study. In order to accomplish this, I described the Northwest Coast area and the different Northwest Coast peoples and their culture, and outlined the developing and changing discourses in Northwest Coast artistic production. My goal was to offer an historical framework for the whole thesis by discussing the issues and events leading to a formation of a Northwest Coast art history. I also presented suggested alternatives in the display of Northwest Coast objects; for example, one of the recommended possible alternatives has been to involve First Nations curators, and such is the case with *Raven's Reprise*. These suggestions are in accordance with recommendations found in the 1992 Task Force report entitled *Turning the Page: Forging New Partnerships Between Museums and First Peoples*, a document that set criteria for cultural sensitivity to First Nations concerns, particularly regarding interpretation and access of material culture.

I drew on postcolonial literature from the 1980s and 1990s, such as writings from Stuart Hall, along with those by Homi Bhabha, and Cornel West, since they helped shape attitudes to museological display of First Nations art in Canada at the turn of the twenty-first century.¹ This literature affected exhibition practices during the time of the preparation and creation of *Raven's Reprise* from 1999 until 2001.

Raven's Reprise signalled a crucial point in exhibition practices of Canadian

museums regarding the display of First Nations art at the turn of the twenty-first century. The juxtaposition of contemporary art and historic Northwest Coast pieces resulted in a significant and influential exhibition that is still being discussed today, six years later. The thirteen pieces by the five artists featured in *Raven's Reprise* were representative of work done by artists from the 1960s until 2000. Namely, the artistic production during these decades focussed on issues of identity politics, race, and ethnicity. Artists were producing politically engaged art, while also shaping the discourse surrounding the art. As Joan Reid Acland noted in 2001:

Well beyond making art and inflecting it with meaning linked to First Nations cultures and histories, aboriginal artists in Canada have effectively worked to reform and restructure the social context in which Native people live. They have addressed elided histories and concomitantly composed new and emergent subject positions for First Peoples in Canada.²

In order to deal with these complex issues, artists looked back at historic pieces; their works drew from historical themes and iconography, and they used historical conventions, materials, and iconography in their contemporary art. The five artists in *Raven's Reprise* looked back at and pulled from historical pieces in making the thirteen works for this exhibition. Thus, they incorporated some elements of past Northwest Coast artistic traditions in their contemporary art.

By showing contemporary art in an ethnological space, *Raven's Reprise* attempted to demonstrate the continuing vitality and innovation of Northwest Coast culture and contemporary artistic production. Functioning also as an intervention or a disruption, exhibiting contemporary art in an ethnological space also confronted the viewers who may have been conditioned to look for or expect a clear narrative line or chronology and to expect to see only historical objects in museums such as MOA.

Raven's Reprise was a highly influential exhibition, the effects of which are hard to measure, but in my opinion it was a groundbreaking achievement in the display of First Nations art in Canada. *Raven's Reprise* was intended by the curator Lynn Hill to employ MOA as a resource in helping the audience relate to contemporary art, by way of juxtaposing it with historical Northwest Coast objects. That the educational and public programming proposed by Hill did not end up being fully realized meant that most visitors were not given the proper tools or aids to help them navigate through *Raven's Reprise*, a show dealing with complicated issues of identity, cultural vitality, and ownership.³ The less positive reactions from some of the visitors to MOA during this exhibition probably stemmed from a lack of exposure and understanding of contemporary art. Furthermore, some of the visitors to MOA may not be comfortable in a gallery setting, where contemporary art is generally located, which also helps explain the less positive reactions from some. *Raven's Reprise* functioned on many different and complex levels, depending on the particular audience and their previous knowledge of contemporary art and Northwest Coast art.

Raven's Reprise was a successful exhibition because it created lasting debate and dialogue. It was a groundbreaking exhibition since it challenged viewers to rethink their notions on the nature of Northwest Coast art and culture, along with dealing with issues of ownership, identity, and the role of museums in the exhibition and display of First Nations art in Canada. Furthermore, *Raven's Reprise* was an influential exhibition, effectively leading the way for new museum practices with regard to exhibiting First Nations art. Moreover, other Canadian museums have since followed MOA's lead by hiring First Nations people to guest curate exhibitions. *Raven's Reprise* asserted the

prevalence and vitality of the contemporary artistic production of Northwest Coast artists. Although some may question the success of the exhibition, especially given some of the visitors' less than positive reactions, for the reasons stated above I think *Raven's Reprise* was a landmark exhibition and a pivotal moment in the exhibition and display of First Nations art in Canadian cultural establishments at the turn of the twenty-first century; it was for this reason that I chose to use *Raven's Reprise* as a case study for this thesis. Thus, it is my desire that this examination of *Raven's Reprise* contributes to the study of the changes in the exhibition practices of First Nations artists and curators, and to the greater scholarship surrounding the presentation of First Nations art in Canadian museums.

NOTES TO CONCLUSION

¹ It should be made clear that post-colonial literature influences exhibition practice, not necessarily the creation of the work itself, since First Nations artists have been creating this work long before people started reading Hall, Bhabha, and West.

² Joan Reid Acland, "Introduction: First Nations Art in Canada-1960 to 1999; A Pivotal Juncture," in *First Nations Artists in Canada: A Biographical/Bibliographical Guide 1960 to 1999*, (Montreal: The Gail and Stephen A. Jarislowsky Institute for Studies in Canadian Art, 2001), XIII.

³ It should be mentioned that the fact that the educational and public programming as envisioned by Hill was not realized points to the marginalized or temporary position of Hill's curatorial role. Hill's may well have found her curatorial residency and *Raven's Reprise* project to be outside the parameters of the overall budget and programming priorities of MOA. Externally funded projects such as *Raven's Reprise* often have varying degrees of difficulty integrating with the various museum departments and personnel.

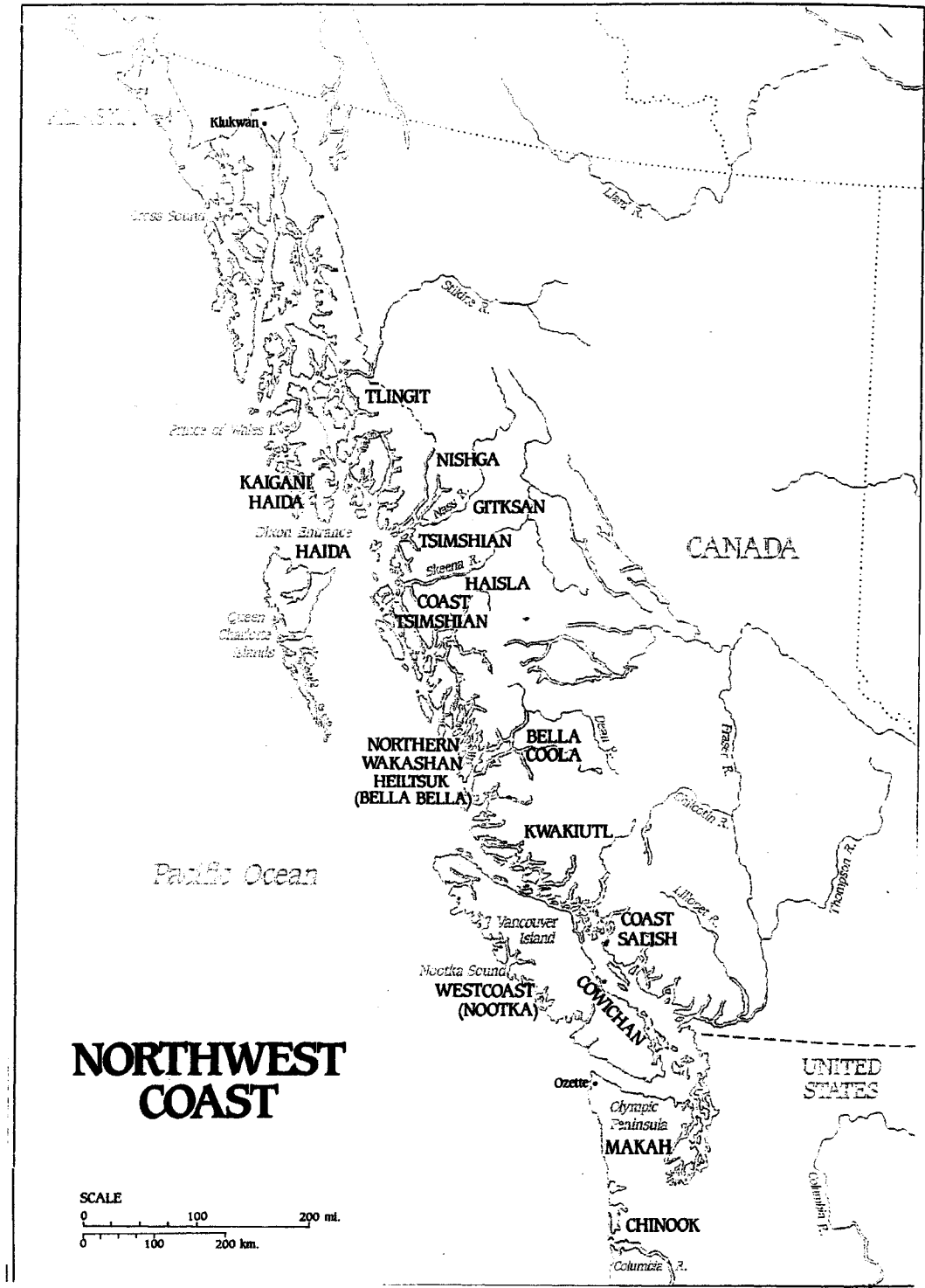


Figure 1. The Northwest Coast region of North America. 1987. [In *The Spirit Sings: Artistic Traditions of Canada's First Peoples*, p. 202.]

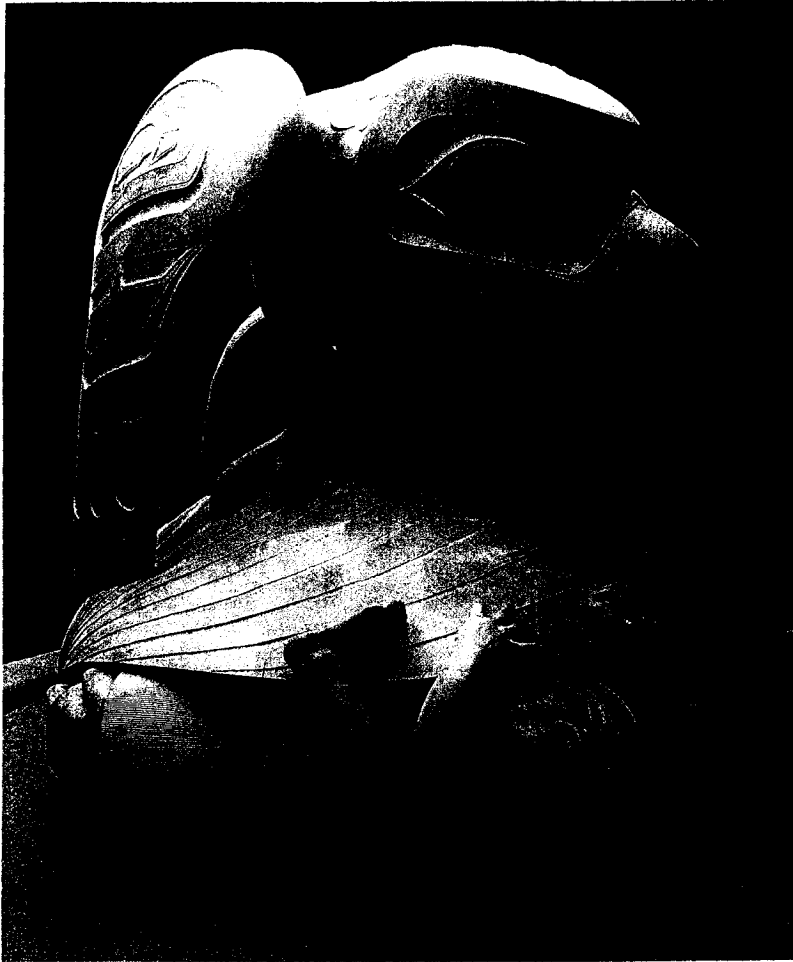


Figure 2. Bill Reid. *The Raven and the First Men*. 1980. Yellow cedar wood sculpture.
74.31 inches height x 75.83 inches diameter. [Janet C. Berlo and Ruth B. Phillips,
Native North American Art, p. 174.]

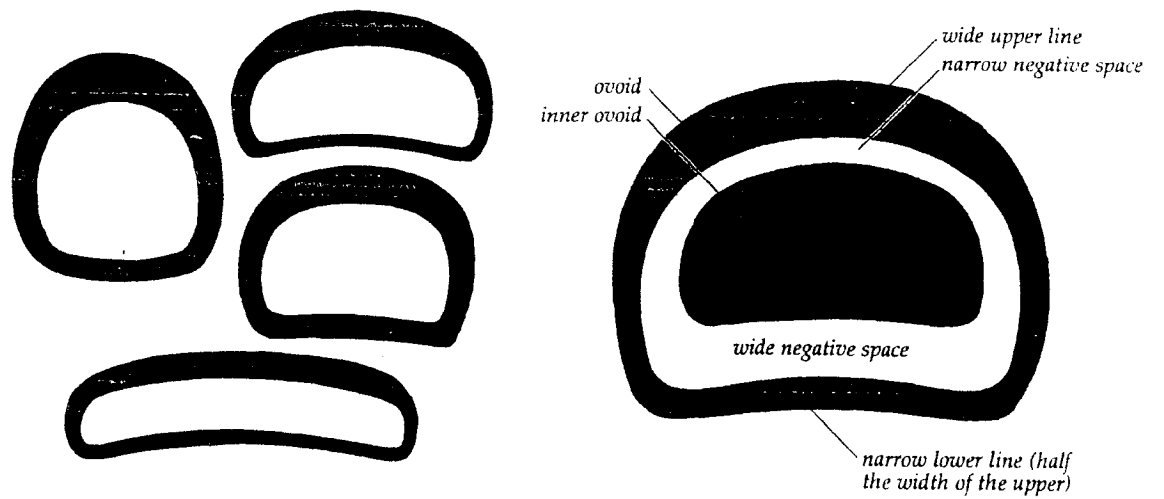


Figure 3. *Ovoid*. [Hillary Stewart, *Looking at Indian Art of the Northwest Coast*, p.21.]



Figure 4. *Inner Ovoid*. [Bill Holm, *Northwest Coast Indian Art: An Analysis of Form*, 34.]

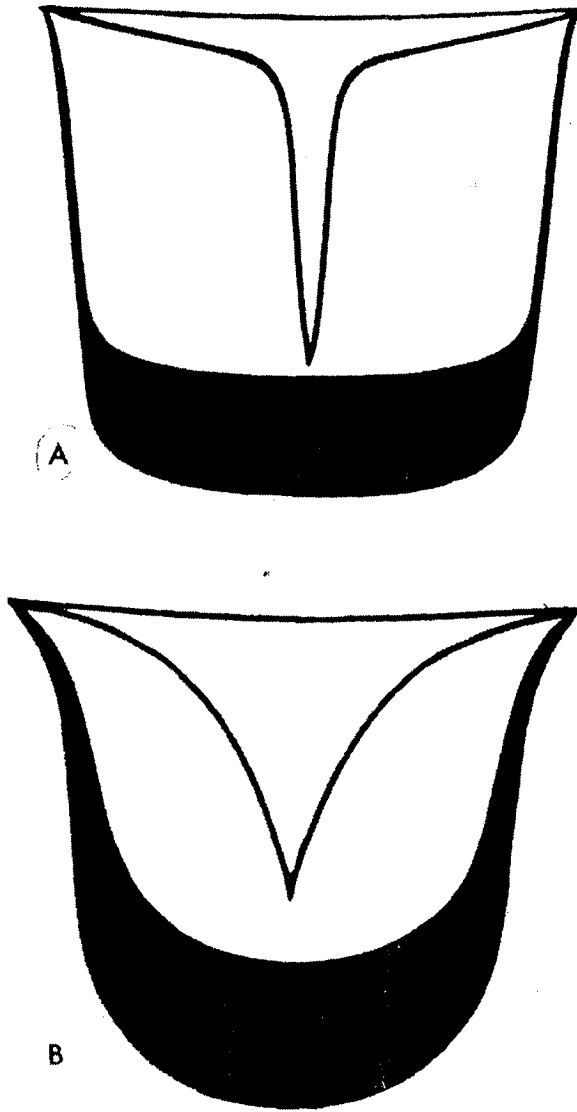


Figure 5. *U-Form*. [Bill Holm, *Northwest Coast Indian Art: An Analysis of Form*, 42.]

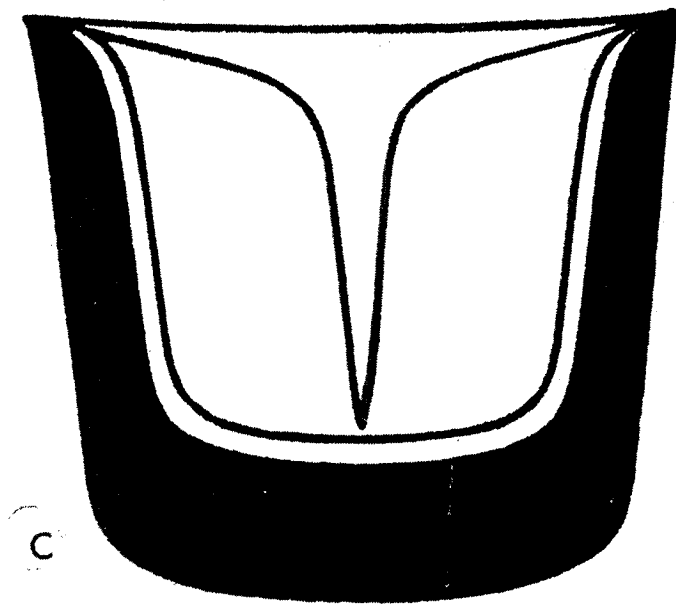


Figure 6. *Split U-Form*. [Bill Holm, *Northwest Coast Indian Art: An Analysis of Form*, 42.]

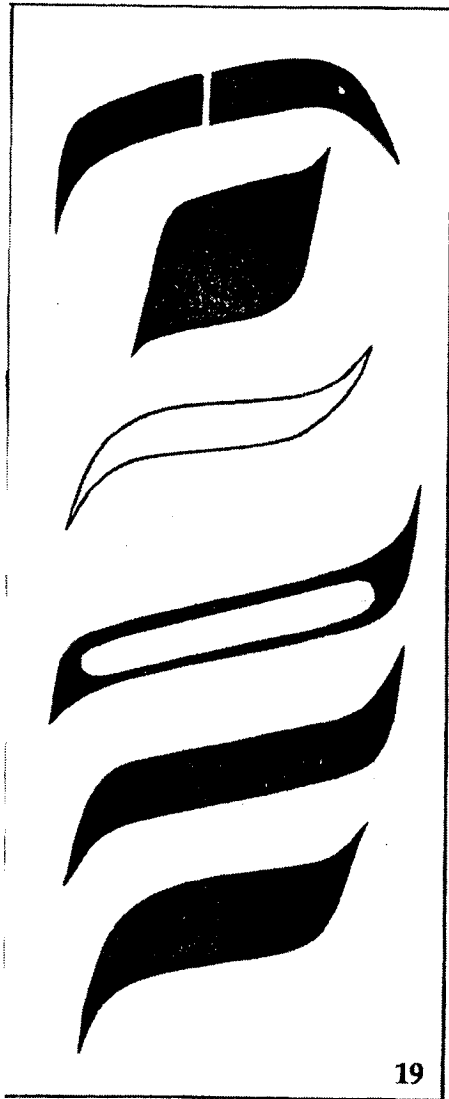


Figure 7. *S-Form*. [Hillary Stewart, *Looking at Indian Art of the Northwest Coast*, p.22.]

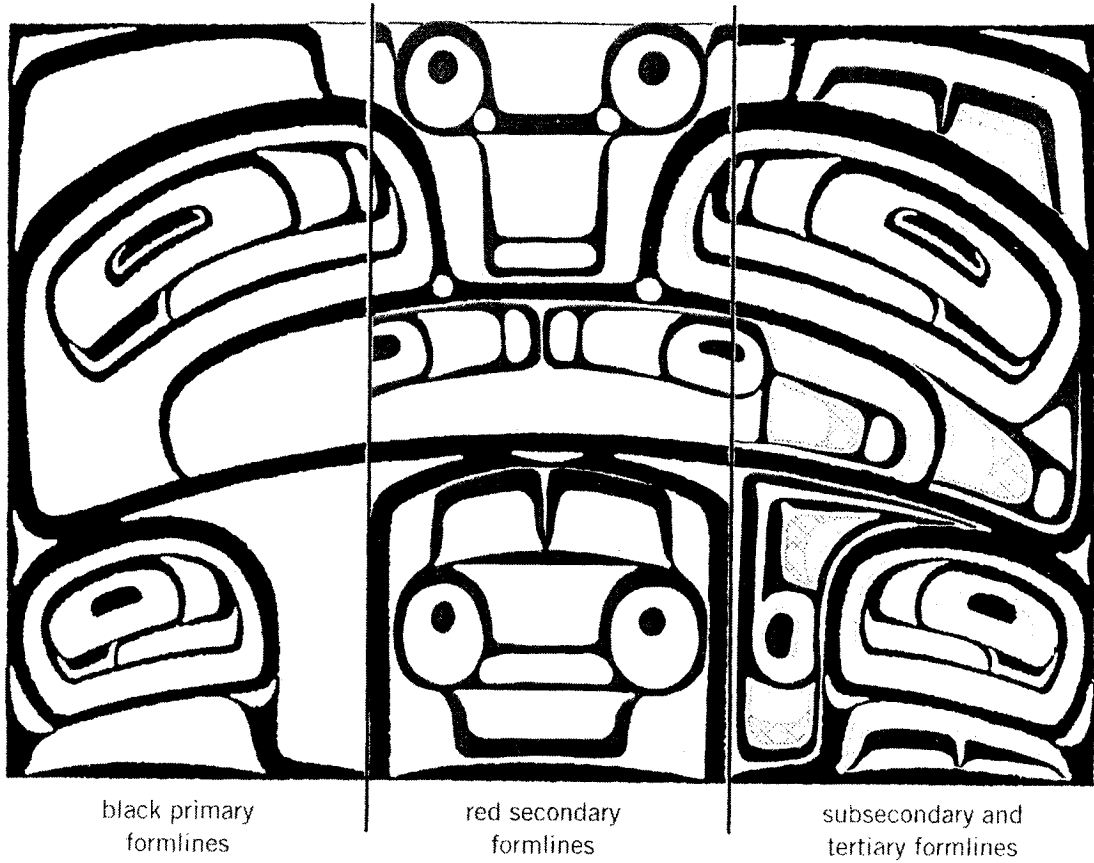


Figure 8. *Black primary formlines, Red secondary formlines, Subsecondary formlines.*
[Janet C. Berlo and Ruth B. Phillips, *Native North American Art*, p. 185.]

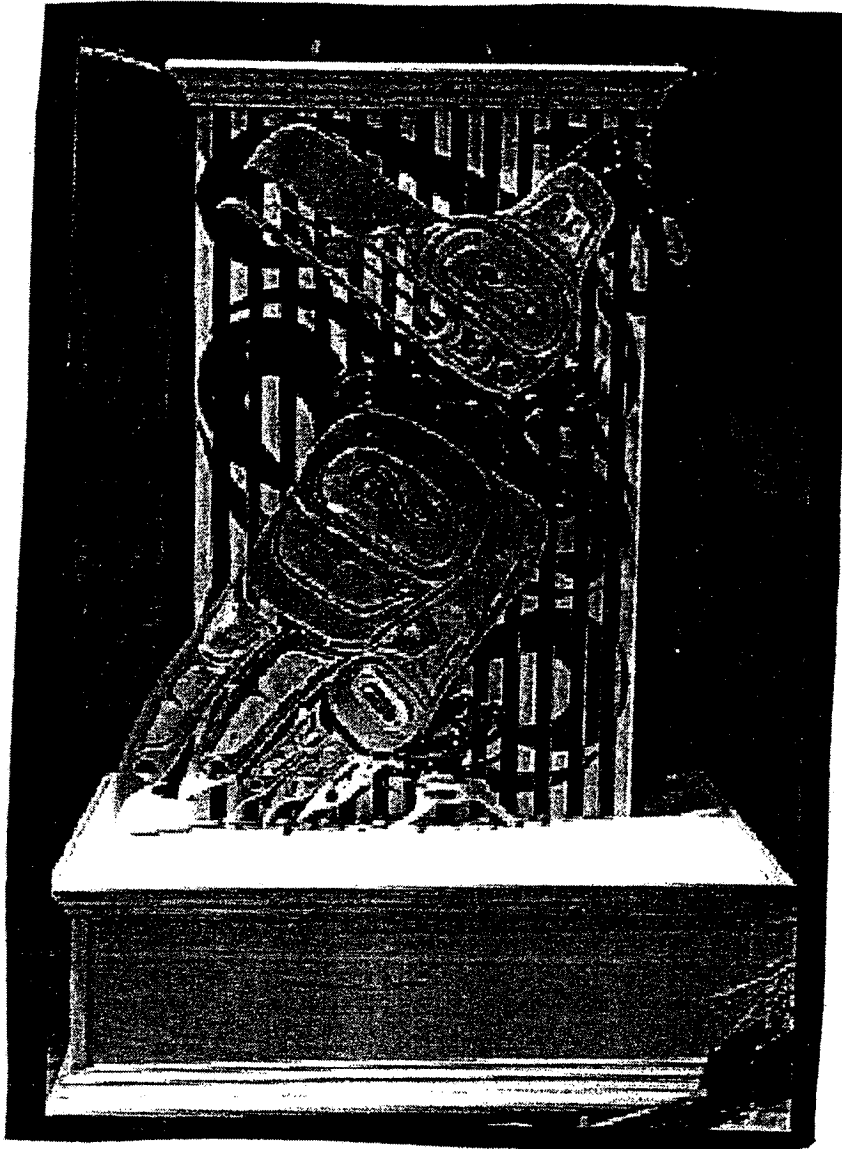


Figure 9. Connie Watts. *Radiant Raven*. 2000. Aluminium, Maple wood and Enamel paint sculpture. 30 x 22 x 36 inches. [Connie Watts <http://www.conniewatts.com/index2.htm>.]

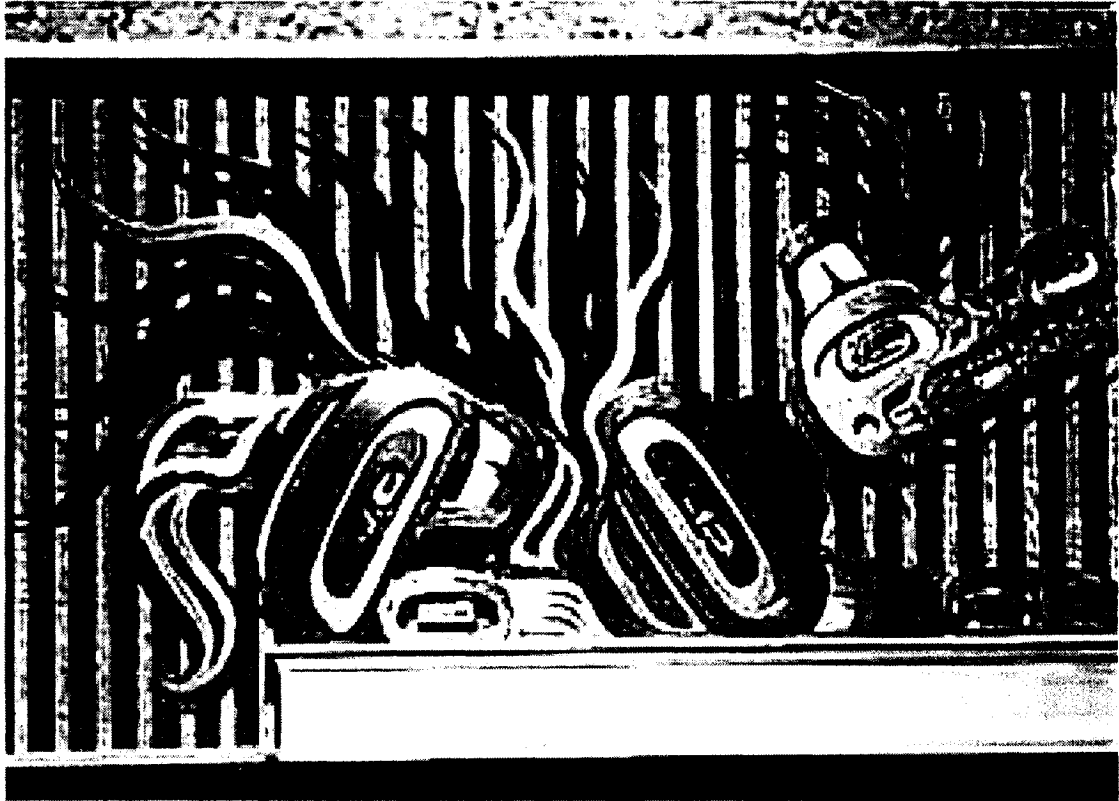


Figure 10. Connie Watts. *Whimsical Wolf*. 2000. Brass, Maple wood, and Enamel Paint sculpture. 60 x 24 x 96 inches. [Museum of Anthropology at the University of British Columbia, *Raven's Reprise* (exhibition catalogue), p.5.]



Figure 11. Connie Watts. *Baroque Bear*. 2000. Copper, Maple wood, and Enamel paint sculpture. 48 x 36 x 84 inches. [Connie Watts, <http://www.conniewatts.com/index2.htm>.]

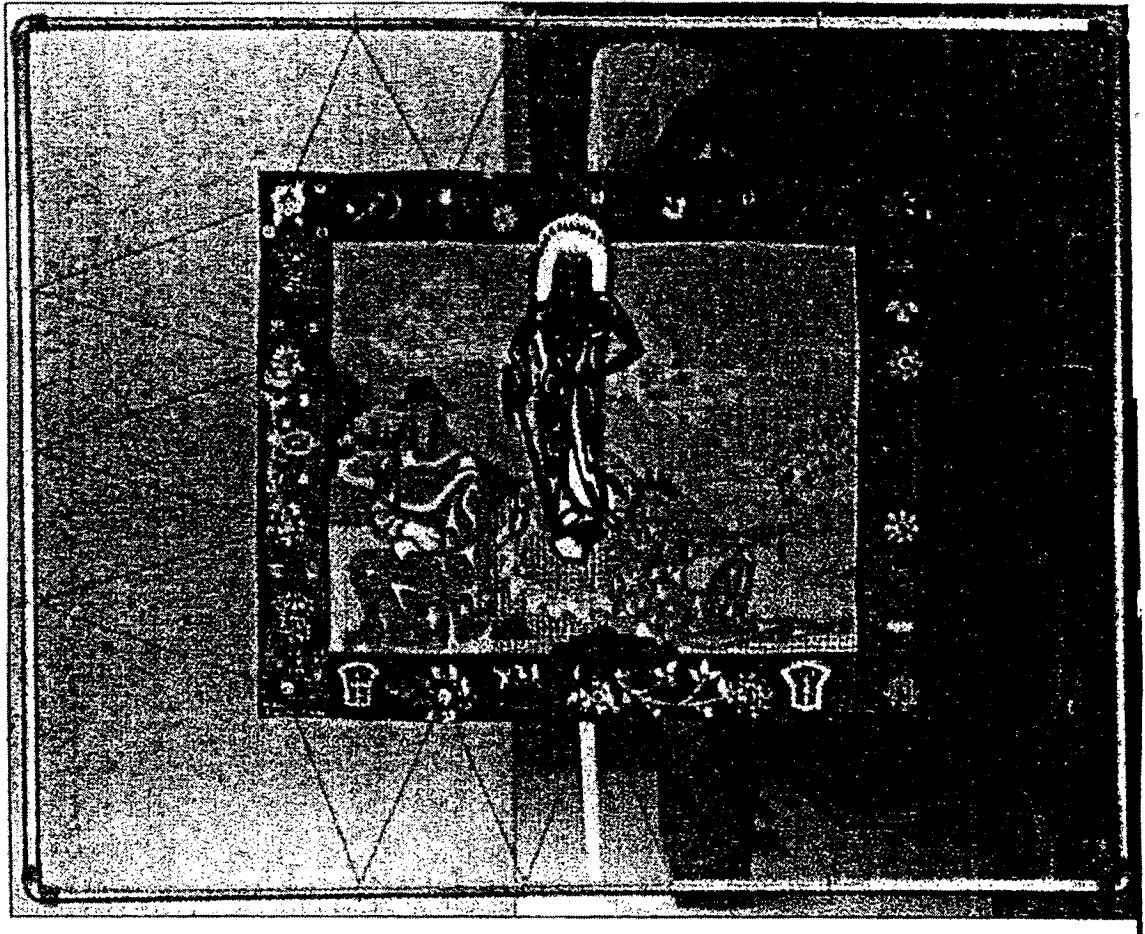


Figure 12. John Powell. *Renaissance in Red*. 2000. Mixed media on canvas. [Museum of Anthropology at the University of British Columbia, *Raven's Reprise* (exhibition catalogue), p.6.]



Figure 13. John Powell. *Metamoravinyl*. 2000. Mixed media. Approximately 72 x 24 x 24 inches. [Museum of Anthropology at the University of British Columbia, *Raven's Reprise* (exhibition catalogue), p.9.]



Figure 14. Copper. [Janet C. Berlo and Ruth B. Phillips, *Native North American Art*, p. 183.]



Figure 15. John Powell. *Sanctuary*. 2000. Mixed media on canvas. 118.11 inches x 137.8 inches. [Museum of Anthropology at the University of British Columbia, *Raven's Reprise* (exhibition catalogue), p.7.]

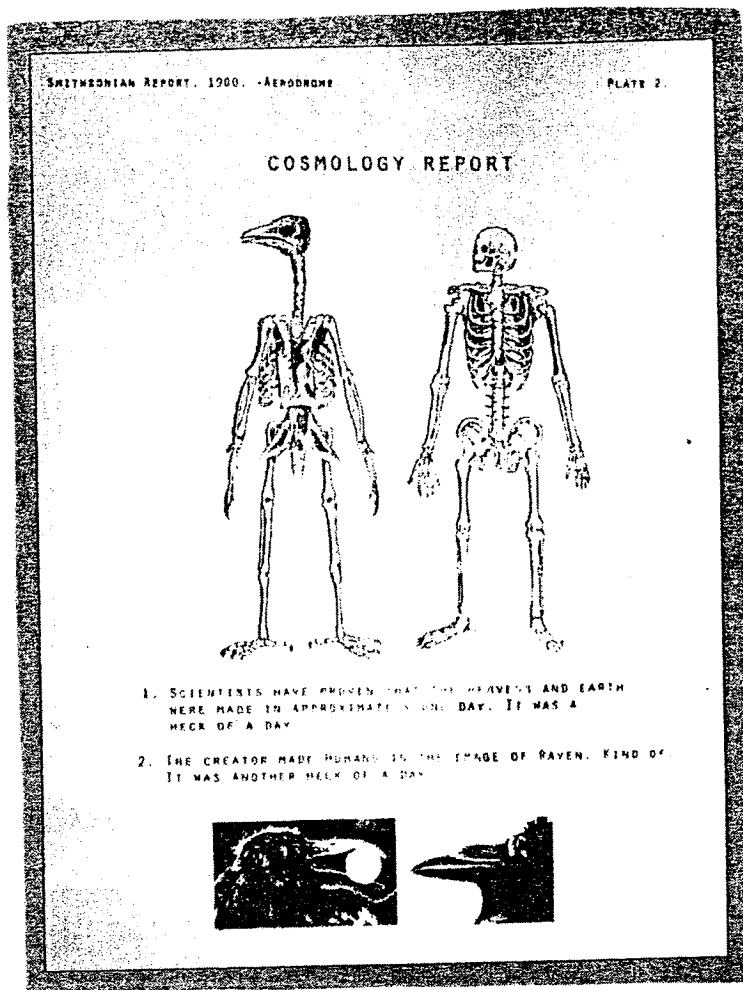


Figure 16. Larry McNeil. *Cosmology Report*. 1998. Black and white digital stochastic print with archival paper and inks. 36 x 48 inches. [Museum of Anthropology at the University of British Columbia, *Raven's Reprise* (exhibition catalogue), p.7.]

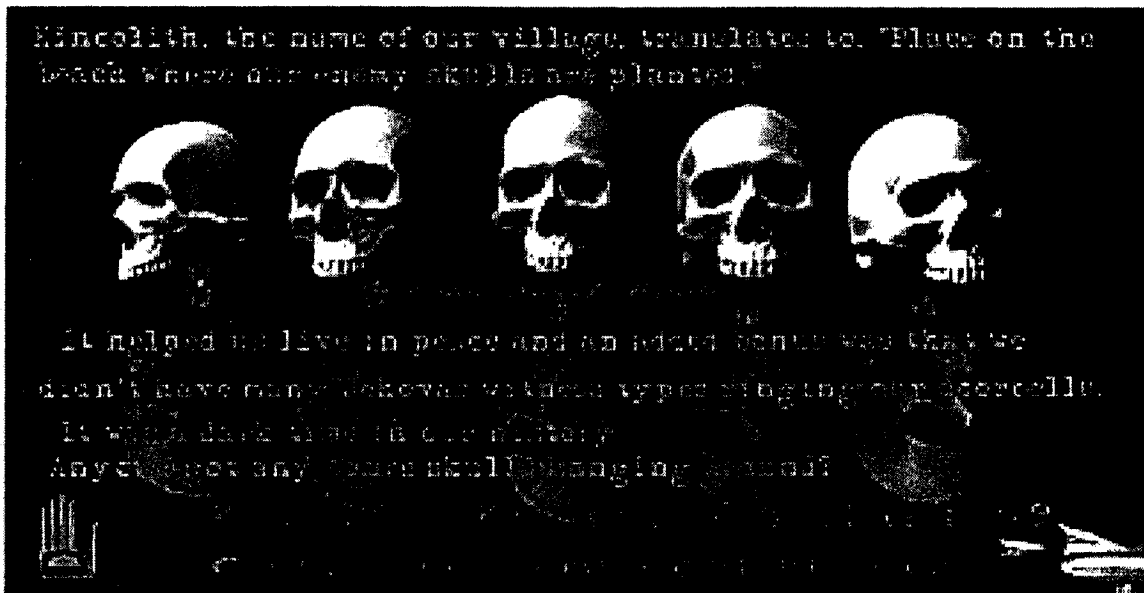


Figure 17. Larry McNeil. Kincolith. 1998. Colour digital stochastic print with archival paper and inks. 24 x 48 inches. [Larry McNeil, <http://www.larrymcneil.com/artravenpages/index.htm>.]



Figure 18. Larry McNeil. *Raven Creation*. 1998. Black and white digital stochastic print with archival paper and inks. 36 x 48 inches. [Larry McNeil, <http://www.larrymcneil.com/artravenpages/index.htm>.]

Cosmological Status

The creator made humans in reverse image.
Sort of. It was another heck of a day.



$\sum_{n=0}^{\infty} d(n) = k_d$
Reflected Inverted Silhouettes

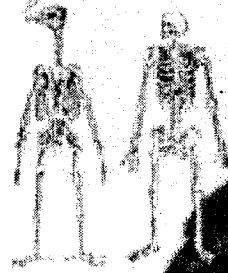


Figure 19. Larry McNeil. *Cosmological Status*. 1998. Black and white digital stochastic print with archival paper and inks. 24 x 48 inches. [Larry McNeil, <http://www.larrymcneil.com/artravenpages/index.htm>.]



Figure 20. Mary Anne Barkhouse. *Pelage*. 1999. Mixed media installation. Each of four blankets measure 52 x 68 inches. [Ontario Association of Art Galleries, http://www.oaag.org/programs/2004_2005/springfocus/maryanne/pelage1.html.]



Figure 21. *Button blanket*-Photo of Shirley Hunt Ford wearing a button robe, Kwakiutl. 1985. [Janet C. Berlo and Ruth B. Phillips, *Native North American Art*, p.198.]

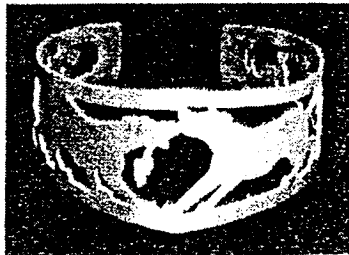
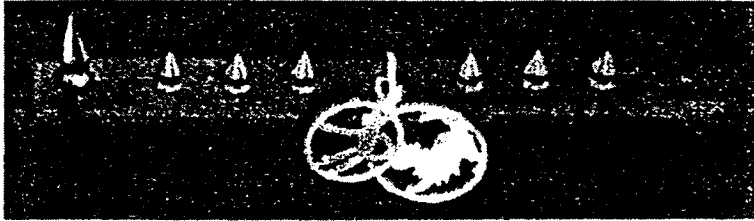
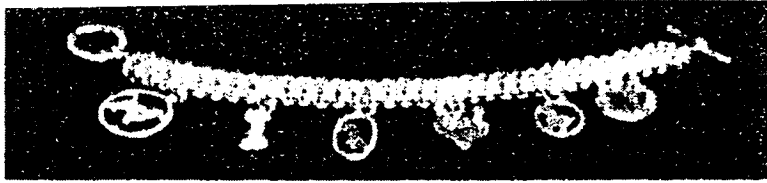


Figure 22. Mary Anne Barkhouse. *Four Legs Good*. 1999. Suite of four bracelets.
[Museum of Anthropology at the University of British Columbia, *Raven's Reprise* (exhibition catalogue), p.13.]



Figure 23. Marianne Nicolson. *Waxemedlagin Xusbandayu'* (*Even Though I am the Last One, I Still Count.*) 2000. Mixed media photo-based installation. 59.65 x 43.5 x 2.36 inches for the panel [Museum of Anthropology at the University of British Columbia, *Raven's Reprise* (exhibition catalogue), p.16.]

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