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Vancouver Art Gallery Presents
75 Years of Collecting: First Nations Myths and Realities
May 6 to August 27, 2006

VANCOUVER, BC — 75 Years of Collecting: First Nations Myths and Realities examines the representation of First Nations peoples in art from first contact to the present. This permanent collection exhibition on view at the **Vancouver Art Gallery** from **May 6 to August 27, 2006** presents how First Nations have historically been depicted and their culture used as subject matter by non-Native artists in British Columbia and others who visited the province. The exhibition contrasts this imagery by non-Natives with work created by First Nations peoples – works which celebrate and expand Aboriginal cultures and offer a bracing counterpoint to the more mythic imagery of the non-Native artists.

In the 1930s, art created by First Nations cultures was typically collected by ethnographic or history museums rather than art galleries. Consequently, the first works to depict Native cultures acquired by the Vancouver Art Gallery were produced by non-Natives, the earliest being Cornelius Kreighoff's *Indian Encampment* circa 1860. In the following century, such artists and photographers as Frederic Marlett Bell-Smith, Edward Curtis, W. Langdon Kihn, A. Y. Jackson, George Pepper, Walter J. Phillips, Jock Macdonald and, most importantly, Emily Carr turned their attention to First Nations culture as an important source of inspiration. These representations were often tinged with a hint of regret at what was believed to be the passing of Aboriginal people and a misunderstanding of the meaning and importance of their art forms, particularly the totemic forms of British Columbia. In the latter years of the twentieth century, there was a greater reflection on issues of First Nations culture and identity, which can be seen in works by Jeff Wall and Christos Dikeakos, also included in the exhibition.

Building on an earlier exhibition history, the Vancouver Art Gallery began to collect First Nations work with greater regularity in the 1980s. Due to the Gallery's lack of historical material, the presence of major historical collections at the Vancouver Museum, Museum of Anthropology and Royal British Columbia Museum, as well as ongoing issues of repatriation, the Gallery chose to collect

contemporary material almost exclusively. The prints, sculpture, masks and paintings displayed within this exhibition speak of a proud history of First Nations cultural continuity, with strong iconography that reveal linguistic and cultural differences. The works also convey powerful political messages which reflect the conflicts over land claims, First Nations languages, lumber and mineral rights, as well as the friction between the desire to retain traditional ways and to find a place within an increasingly globalized world.

75 Years of Collecting: First Nations Myths and Realities suggests how the messages and the means of conveying those messages used by Native people radically differ from the strategies used by non-Natives. Artists as disparate as Chief Henry Speck, Bill Reid, Robert Davidson, Susan Point, Mike Macdonald, Dana Claxton and Lawrence Paul Yuxweluptun have all produced work which has made distinguished and important contributions to a complex dialogue about place and identity. The work of these artists provides a vivid contrast to the often idealized and romanticized view of First Nations people and culture seen in much historical work by artists of European ancestry.

This exhibition is organized by the Vancouver Art Gallery and curated by the Vancouver Art Gallery's senior curator of historical art, Ian Thom.

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