

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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**Vancouver Art Gallery to be Transformed into Northwest Coast Ceremonial House by
Dzawada'enuxw Artist Marianne Nicolson**

Media are invited to a preview lighting of the work on October 3, 2008 at 8PM

VANCOUVER, BC — Using high-powered theatrical lighting, British Columbian multi-media artist **Marianne Nicolson** will transform the Gallery's Georgia Street architecture into a spectacular re-imagining of a traditional Kwakwaka'wakw ceremonial house. Glowing with increased intensity as day gives way to night, the more than 30-foot-wide site-specific projection titled ***The House of the Ghosts*** will be presented from **Saturday, October 4, 2008 to January 11, 2009**.

The Gallery resides in British Columbia's former Provincial courthouse, a turn-of-the-century neo-classical building where laws banning the cultures and languages of Canada's Aboriginal People were in effect. By imposing the imagery of the traditional Kwakwaka'wakw bighouse on the pillars and lintel of the building, Nicolson symbolizes the survival of Pacific Northwest Coast First Nations cultures and communities, despite active efforts to suppress and eradicate them. She alters the building, to create a site of cultural exchange, emphasizing the Gallery's importance as a transformative space while wryly commenting on its historic role.

"The House of the Ghosts acts much like traditional performances executed within Kwakwaka'wakw ceremonies where, through an exhibition of the spectacular, it is believed that spirits can be enticed into communion with humans, allowing them to conduct extraordinary feats," said **Nicolson**. "In all earnestness, this carefully crafted performance attempts to draw forth the assistance of the supernatural in the healing of First Nations communities and individuals, as well as the conflicted past and present relationships between Aboriginal and Non-Aboriginal groups. Ultimately the work seeks assistance in the healing of the compromised landscape within which all Kwakwaka'wakw, First Nations and Canadians live."

The House of the Ghosts strongly references the traditional Kwakwaka'wakw belief in a balance that underlies nature. It is understood that the world of ghosts is counterbalanced by the world of humans, and that the spirit world is associated with night and the human world is associated with day. While it is believed that spirits are continuously present, they are only thought to be accessible to humans at night. This concept is made eloquently visible in Nicolson's installation. Although the work is continuously present on the building's façade, it only becomes observable in its full form when the sun begins to set.

Though extremely contemporary in its medium, the compositional techniques and subject matter included in **The House of the Ghosts** are strongly based in the traditions of Pacific Northwest First Nations artists. Using form line, Nicolson has created a highly expressive and symmetrical composition, including stylized killer whales, wolves, owls and a ghost puppet, all believed to heal the sick and revive the dead. Also included is the Sisiutl, a double headed serpent with a human face



Test lighting of Marianne Nicolson's *The House of the Ghosts*, 2008 Photo: Rachel Topham, 2008

VANCOUVER ART GALLERY
750 Hornby Street,
Vancouver
www.vanartgallery.bc.ca

MEDIA CONTACT

Andrew Riley
Public Relations Manager
604-662-4722
ariley@vanartgallery.bc.ca

Dana Sullivant
Director of Marketing and
Communications
604-662-4721
dsullivant@vanartgallery.bc.ca

at its centre, which appears as the crossbeam of the Gallery's façade, reinforcing a sense of balance.

Marianne Nicolson was born in 1969 and is a member of the Dzawada'enuxw Tribe of the Kwakwaka'wakw Nations of Kingcome Inlet, British Columbia. She first came to prominence in 1998 when she scaled a vertical rock face in Kingcome Inlet to paint a 28 x 38-foot pictograph—the first in the inlet in more than sixty years—to mark the continued vitality of her ancestral village of Gwa'yi. Nicolson studied at the Emily Carr Institute of Art and Design, the University of Victoria and with Kwakwaka'wakw carver Wayne Alfred. She incorporates the study of Kwak'wala language in her practice and is currently engaged in PhD research on the importance of indigenous language in the development of world view. Her work has been shown nationally and internationally at venues including the Art Gallery of Greater Victoria, Artspeak, the National Gallery of Canada and Taipei Fine Arts Museum. She has also created a number of site-specific artworks for public spaces.

The House of the Ghosts is the eighth work presented as a part of *NEXT: a series of artist projects from the Pacific Rim*. The series highlights work previously unseen in Vancouver and seeks to engage the diverse practices of Pacific Rim artists. The site-specific project is organized by the Vancouver Art Gallery and curated by Daina Augaitis, chief curator/associate director.

Marianne Nicolson: *The House of the Ghosts* is generously supported by the Audain Foundation.

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