

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Vancouver Art Gallery Presents the First Major Survey Exhibition of Iconic Haida Artist Charles Edenshaw

Vancouver, BC – Charles Edenshaw was recognized in his time as an outstanding Haida artist and remains an iconic figure in Northwest Coast art. Working in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (1829-1920), he was an exceptional carver of wood, silver and argillite, combining traditional Haida design with an innovative and elegant personal style, and raising Northwest Coast art to new heights of sophistication. Opening on October 26, Vancouver Art Gallery's exhibition **Charles Edenshaw** marks the first major survey of Edenshaw's work, featuring over 200 pieces in all media from public and private collections around the world.

"We are very proud and honoured to present the first career survey of Charles Edenshaw, one of the greatest luminaries of Haida art," said Gallery director Kathleen S. Bartels. "This exhibition offers a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to view the largest number of works by the artist ever assembled."

Charles Edenshaw's work serves as a testament to a tremendous individual spirit and a singular talent. "This exhibition is important in many ways," said Haida Chief and exhibition advisor James Hart. "All the pieces that Charles created carry the respect of his people, ancestors and his family. To be connected to this line of important Haida cultural prerogatives and the changing ways of our future, we must carry on, in the Haida Way."

Curated by pre-eminent scholar of Northwest Coast art, Robin K. Wright, with Daina Augaitis, **Charles Edenshaw** is organized around five central themes. It begins with **Haida Traditions**, which affirms the Haida foundations of Edenshaw's craft. This section features both traditional objects made for family as well as commissioned objects such as model poles, houses and canoes that illustrated the Haida way of life to far-away audiences.

The way in which Edenshaw incorporated subjects from traditional Haida stories into his work is one of his crowning achievements. His development of overlapping and interwoven forms was unprecedented and brought new vitality to these subjects. The **Narrative** section of the exhibition highlights Edenshaw's extraordinary carved argillite platters and chests, where stories come to life in his design.

The **Style** section is dedicated to the artist's refined approach to line and form. It opens with his masterful painting on spruce-root hats woven by Isabella Edenshaw, and also includes painted baskets, model poles and carved bracelets that raised the art form to new heights of elegance and sophistication.

New Forms sheds light on how Edenshaw incorporated new materials and images that were introduced through increased contact with Europeans. This section includes innovative objects—carved canes, decorative mantle pieces and silver spoons—that feature hybrid forms and untraditional iconography such as floral designs, American emblems and exotic animals.

The exhibition concludes with a consideration of the artist's tremendous **Legacies** among artists past and present. Featuring copies of Edenshaw's designs as well as works by his contemporaries, this section also considers how successive generations of scholars have developed knowledge about Edenshaw's work that was never signed by the artist.

“Edenshaw left a legacy through his work and we are blessed that he committed his whole life to creating art for us to enjoy and study,” said Robert Davidson. “The magic of Edenshaw’s work embodies millennia of development of Haida art. One can relearn the magic and integrity of the history of the art form by studying his work.”

The Vancouver Art Gallery has a longstanding history of presenting First Nations art since the 1940s. Since featuring *B.C. Coast Indian Art* in 1941, the Gallery has continued to present both contemporary and historic Northwest Coast art in landmark group exhibitions such as *People of the Potlatch* (1956), *Arts of the Raven* (1967), *Down from the Shimmering Sky: Masks of the Northwest Coast* (1998), *Raven Travelling: Two Centuries of Haida Art* (2006) and *Beat Nation: Art, Hip Hop and Aboriginal Culture* (2012), as well as solo exhibitions of artists including Bill Reid, Robert Davidson, Marianne Nicolson and James Hart.

The exhibition is complemented by a fully-illustrated book *Charles Edenshaw*, co-published by the Vancouver Art Gallery and Black Dog Publishing (London). The book establishes the foundation of Edenshaw’s practice through essays and interviews with contemporary Haida artists and descendants as well as his far-reaching influence and artistic achievements. Writers and storytellers include Daina Augaitis, Stacey Brown, Kathryn Bunn-Marcuse, Nika Collison, Robert Davidson, Mandy Ginson, Guujaw, Bill McLennan/Karen Duffek, James Hart, Bill Holm, Alan Hoover, Aldona Jonaitis, Terri-Lynn Williams-Davidson and Robin K. Wright.

Organized by the Vancouver Art Gallery and curated by Robin K. Wright, Director of the Bill Holm Center for the Study of Northwest Coast Art and Daina Augaitis, Chief Curator/Associate Director with Haida advisors: Robert Davidson and James Hart.

[A media preview with the curators Robin K. Wright and Daina Augaitis will be held on Thursday, October 24 at 9 am in the Gallery. Media attending are requested to RSVP to Debra Zhou \(dzhou@vanartgallery.bc.ca. Mobile: 604-671-2358\)](#)

RELATED EVENTS:

Charles Edenshaw Symposium
Saturday, October 26, 12 – 5 pm
at the Vancouver Art Gallery

How are Haida traditions carried forward through art within the community? To mark the Charles Edenshaw exhibition, the Gallery is hosting two panel discussions. This day of dialogue will bring together speakers who will expand the understanding of Edenshaw’s practice and his lasting impact. All are welcome but registration is required. The capacity of this event is limited. Free for Members and the Haida community. \$25 for the general public. Tickets are available online at vanartgallery.bc.ca/edenshawsymposium

Exhibition in Context: A special tour with James Hart
Saturday, November 30, 2 pm
at the Vancouver Art Gallery

Artist and Haida Chief James Hart gives a special tour of the *Charles Edenshaw* exhibition, providing an overview and context of the artist’s work and Haida history. Free for Members or with Gallery admission.

Exhibition in Context: A special tour with Robert Davidson
Saturday, December 7, 2pm
At the Vancouver Art Gallery

Haida artist Robert Davidson gives a special tour of the *Charles Edenshaw* exhibition, speaking to the work of Edenshaw and its influence on his own art practice.
Free for Members or with Gallery admission.

Curator's Tour: Robin K. Wright
Saturday, January 11, 2pm
in the Gallery

Guest curator Robin K. Wright, a specialist in First Nations art, tours the *Charles Edenshaw* exhibition.
Free for Members or with Gallery admission.

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Images are available upon request.

MEDIA INFORMATION:

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About the Vancouver Art Gallery

The Vancouver Art Gallery is a not-for-profit organization supported by its members, individual donors, corporate funders, foundations, the City of Vancouver, the Province of British Columbia through the BC Arts Council, and the Canada Council for the Arts. We thank everyone for their continuing generosity

Image Credit:

(Right) Platter, pre-1894, argillite, The Field Museum, Chicago, 17952
Photo: © The Field Museum, (#A114412_05d, John Weinstein)
(Middle) Charles Edenshaw (attr.) *Eagle Cane*, late 19th century, wood, ivory, abalone shell, silver, 91.7 x 9 x 4 cm.
Collection of Museum of Anthropology, The University of British Columbia, Vancouver
(Right) Sea Bear Bracelet, late 19th century, silver, McMichael Canadian Art Collection,
Purchase 1974, 1981.108.1, Photo: Trevor Mills, Vancouver Art Gallery