

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Turbulent memories evoked in a series of black paintings by Gordon Smith



Media are invited to an exhibition preview of *Gordon Smith: The Black Paintings* on **Thursday, October 26, 2017, 9:00 am** at the Vancouver Art Gallery. Please RSVP to Justin Mah (jmah@vanartgallery.bc.ca). Other fall exhibitions will be previewed on this day.*

October 2, 2017, Vancouver, BC – Starting on October 21, 2017 until February 4, 2018, the Vancouver Art Gallery is excited to present *Gordon Smith: The Black Paintings*, a series of contemplative works by one of Canada’s most iconic painters.

The exhibition features a body of work described as black paintings that Gordon Smith began producing in 1990. These densely painted, darkly abstracted paintings—punctuated with occasional colour, text and collaged elements—sometimes refer explicitly to this wartime experience. Smith was deployed with the Allied invasion at Pachino Beach, Sicily (code name Husky), in July 1943, when he was twenty-four. His wartime experience has even named many of the works in the exhibition: *Pachino Beach* was where Smith was severely wounded and *Juno* refers to the beach of the D-day landing at Normandy.

Strikingly different from the landscape images he is primarily known for, in this series of works, painting becomes a visceral, physical process of remembering the world. Thus the black paintings are clearly Smith’s most personal paintings to date.

“The expressive possibilities of abstraction are completely brought to bear in Smith’s black paintings; these complex, layered works reveal Gordon Smith’s ongoing interest in how paint looks and feels and how gesture reverberates when expressed through paint,” says Ian Thom, Senior Curator–Historical.

The exhibition has Smith's works divided into two groupings—a series of early paintings consisting of canvas tarpaulin dating from the 1990s and a later series of acrylic on canvas beginning in the 2000s. The early black works see densely layered paint and tar applied directly onto heavy tarpaulin canvas made from the army kit used by Smith during his deployment, with army dog tags, leather from boots and clothing incorporated into the works.

The later black paintings see painterly forms blurred even further as memory and biographical associations are buried within layers of paint. Ultimately for all lack of recognizable form the black paintings lay bare Smith's notion that, "painting should be a re-creation of an experience rather than an illustration of an experience."

Organized by the Vancouver Art Gallery and curated by Ian Thom, Senior Curator–Historical.

About Gordon Smith

Gordon Smith is a key figure in the history of Modernist painting in Vancouver, with a career spanning over seven decades. Born in the United Kingdom, Smith immigrated to Canada with his family in 1933. Smith taught and did commercial design and illustration in Winnipeg, studying at the Winnipeg School of Art, before leaving for Europe as an intelligence officer in World War II. He returned wounded in 1943, and in 1946 began teaching at the Vancouver School of Art (now the Emily Carr University of Art and Design) after some studies there; colleagues included artists Jack Shadbolt and B.C. Binning. The year 1951 was a turning point: Smith travelled to San Francisco and enrolled in the California School of Fine Arts, where he was taught by Elmer Bischoff and fully adopted Modernist methodologies. Smith returned to Vancouver and made Abstract Expressionist and later hard-edge paintings, teaching at the University of British Columbia until 1982, when he retired to focus on his work. In 1984, he travelled to Haida Gwaii, which inspired a renowned series of gestural landscapes. In 1996, Smith was named a member of the Order of Canada; in 2007, he won the Audain Prize; and in 2009, he received a Governor General's Award in Visual and Media Arts. His work is in the collection of, among others, the National Gallery of Canada (Ottawa) and the Smithsonian Institution (Washington, DC).

Exhibition Funding:

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***Also opening this month at the Vancouver Art Gallery:**

Portrait of the Artist: An Exhibition from the Royal Collection (October 28, 2017 – February 4, 2018)

Carol Sawyer: The Natalie Brettschneider Archive (October 28, 2017 – February 4, 2018)

True Nordic: How Scandinavia Influenced Design in Canada (October 28, 2017 – January 28, 2018)

Image:

Gordon Smith, *Tanu*, 1995, acrylic on canvas, Collection of the Vancouver Art Gallery, Acquisition Fund, VAG 96.13, Photo: Vancouver Art Gallery

IMAGES ARE AVAILABLE UPON REQUEST

MEDIA CONTACT

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About the Vancouver Art Gallery

Founded in 1931, the Vancouver Art Gallery is recognized as one of North America's most respected and innovative visual arts institutions. The Gallery's ground-breaking exhibitions, extensive public programs, and emphasis on advancing scholarship focus on historical and contemporary art from British Columbia and around the world. Special attention is paid to the accomplishments of Indigenous artists, as well as to the arts of the Asia Pacific region—through the Institute of Asian Art that the Gallery founded in 2014. The Gallery's programs also explore the impacts of images in the larger sphere of visual culture, design and architecture. www.vanartgallery.bc.ca

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.