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**VANCOUVER ART GALLERY ACQUIRES MAJOR CONTEMPORARY AND HISTORICAL ART OF  
THE NORTHWEST COAST FROM RENOWNED U.S. ART COLLECTOR GEORGE GUND III**

**DONATION DRAMATICALLY TRANSFORMS GALLERY'S EXISTING HOLDINGS  
OF FIRST NATIONS ARTISTS**



**Vancouver, British Columbia (October 14, 2015)** – On the heels of a successful public presentation of conceptual design for a new museum building by Herzog & de Meuron, the Vancouver Art Gallery is pleased to announce the donation of a comprehensive collection of First Nations artworks from the late San Francisco collector George Gund III, dramatically transforming the significance of the Gallery's current collection of Northwest Coast art. This collection of thirty-seven exceptional objects includes some twenty historical works by Haida, Heiltsuk, Inuit, Kwakwaka'wakw, Nuuchahnulth, Nuxalk and Tlingit artists, dating as early as 700AD. It also includes important contemporary works such as poles by Ken Mowatt, Norman Tait, drawings by Bill Reid and, most remarkably, thirteen carved works by Robert Davidson. The addition of Davidson's works to the objects already in the Gallery's collection gives the Vancouver Art Gallery the most significant collection of Davidson's work in a museum. An exhibition featuring the entire bequest is now on view at the Vancouver Art Gallery until January 31, 2016.

The art of the First Nations peoples of British Columbia and Alaska is one of the high points of culture in the Americas. Masks, totem poles and argillite carvings tended to be collected by museums of history and anthropology rather than art museums. The Vancouver Art Gallery has made a concerted effort to remedy this situation and has many important holdings of contemporary First Nations artists, from Bill Reid and Robert Davidson to Brian Jungen and Dana Claxton. Now it is seeking to acquire key historical works in order to provide examples of art by the First Peoples of this region as well as to offer a larger context for the work of contemporary First Nations artists within the Gallery's collection, many of whom look to historical examples of First Nations art for inspiration.

"The Gund collection greatly enhances our ability to show the history of art making in this part of the world while also providing an important counterbalance to the Euro-Canadian narratives of art making already in the collection," said Kathleen S. Bartels, Director of the Vancouver Art Gallery. "It is an honour for the Vancouver Art Gallery to acquire this distinguished collection of First Nations art and to make it accessible to Gallery

visitors. We are grateful to Mr. Gund III and his executors, Dorsey & Whitney LLP, for their assistance in securing this remarkable bequest.”

“These wonderful objects have been on an amazing journey. Originally made on the West Coast, they have changed hands, crossed borders and remarkably, are now here in British Columbia, never to leave again,” said Inna O'Brian, Chair of Vancouver Art Gallery's Acquisition Committee.

### **About the Gund Collection**

George Gund III came from a family of important art collectors. His sister, Agnes Gund, is a long-time supporter and past President of the Museum of Modern Art, New York. George Gund III was also an important collector of Asian art and a major supporter of film in the Bay area. Remarkably, his interest in the Vancouver Art Gallery was unknown to the staff.

The Gund collection consists of thirty-seven artworks, with eighteen works by contemporary Northwest Coast artists. These include three carved poles: one by Ken Mowatt, a master carver of Gitksan heritage (*Frog Crest*), one by the distinguished Nisga'a (Eagle Clan) carver Norman Tait, and one pole by an unidentified Kwakwaka'wakw artist. These are the first major poles to enter the Vancouver Art Gallery collection. Two important drawings by the great Haida artist, Bill Reid, are also included.

The most singular group of the contemporary works in the Gund collection is a group of thirteen pieces by Robert Davidson, including eight masks: two of alder and six carved from red cedar. This addition makes the Vancouver Art Gallery's collection of Davidson's masks the most significant museum collection in the world.

The historic works in the Gund collection include three Haida objects—two argillite pieces and a *Woman with Labret* mask, all of which are fine examples of Haida artistry.

There are four works attributed to the Heiltsuk First Nation: a striking *Potlatch Figure*, a mask representing Bukwus possibly by Daniel Houstie (c. 1880 - c. 1912), a singular *Headdress attachment*, and an *Eagle Frontlet*.

The Kwakwaka'wakw people are represented by two very fine objects: an early *Copper* and a *Thunderbird Frontlet*.

The Nisga'a nation is represented by an *Eagle Frontlet* in the collection.

Two Nuuchah-nulth objects are included: a large-scale *Human Face* which was formerly in the collection of the Heye Foundation (now the National Museum of the American Indian, New York) and a *Wolf Mask*, a piece of carving from a single piece of wood.

The single Nuxalk mask in the collection is an image of an as yet unidentified spirit figure.

The Tlingit objects include four very different pieces: a *Human Face Mask*, a *Dagger* with bear handle and sheath, a very fine *Pipe* in the form of a beaver and a magnificent wooden *Feast Dish*.

Finally, the Gund collection includes two Alaskan objects: a Yupik mask carved from driftwood and a Punuk ivory *Carving of a Human Head*. These are the first two Alaskan objects in the collection and the ivory work, claimed to have been made 700 AD, becomes the oldest object in the Gallery's entire collection.

### **About the Vancouver Art Gallery**

Founded in 1931, the Vancouver Art Gallery is recognized as one of the most respected and innovative visual arts institutions in Canada and is committed to strengthening ties between artists and diverse communities throughout the city, province and beyond. As the largest public art museum in Western Canada, the Gallery features the work of ground-breaking contemporary artists from around the world and presents historical art of international significance, is committed to exploring the art of Asia, and provides a global platform for British Columbia's dynamic artistic community, including the work of First Nations artists. Its growing collection represents the most comprehensive resource for art in British Columbia and is the principal repository for visual art produced in the region, as well as related works by other notable Canadian and international artists.

The Gallery also places an emphasis on advancing scholarship through major publications and presents a multitude of public programs that offer new ways to consider art for visitors who come from throughout the region and internationally.

Following an in-depth master planning process that was in response to the significant growth in collection, exhibitions and attendance, the Gallery unveiled in September 2015 the conceptual design by Herzog & de Meuron for a new and expanded home in downtown Vancouver. Double the Gallery's current size, the future facility will be a vital catalyst in enhancing Vancouver's cultural community, and will serve as a centre for cross-cultural dialogue and exchange in the visual arts.

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.

***The Gund Collection: Contemporary and Historical Art from the Northwest Coast*** is organized by the Vancouver Art Gallery and curated by Ian Thom, Senior Curator-Historical.

Visionary Partner for Permanent Collection Exhibitions:  
Michael O'Brian Family Foundation

Image credits:

(left) Robert Davidson, *Red Tailed Eagle Feathers mask*, 1997, alder, acrylic paint, horse hair, opercula, Collection of the Vancouver Art Gallery, Gift from the Collection of George Gund III, Photo: Trevor Mills, Vancouver Art Gallery

(middle) Haida artist, *Wasco platter*, 1880 – 90, argillite, Collection of the Vancouver Art Gallery, Gift from the Collection of George Gund III, Photo: Rachel Topham, Vancouver Art Gallery

(right) Kwakwaka'wakw or Wuikinux artist (attributed to), *Thunderbird frontlet*, c. 1850 – 80, red cedar, pigment, abalone shell, Collection of the Vancouver Art Gallery, Gift from the Collection of George Gund III, Photo: Trevor Mills, Vancouver Art Gallery

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**Images are available upon request.**

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