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VANCOUVER ART GALLERY TO PRESENT *RAVEN TRAVELLING: TWO CENTURIES OF HAIDA ART*

Exhibition includes nearly 300 exquisite artworks from the past 200 years
Media Preview – Thursday June 8, 2006

VANCOUVER, BC — The most wide-ranging and complete exhibition of Haida art ever assembled will be on display at the **Vancouver Art Gallery June 10 to September 17, 2006**. Drawing from prestigious public and private collections throughout North America and Europe, ***Raven Travelling: Two Centuries of Haida Art*** will present the finest examples of Haida artistic practice, from 19th century masterworks to groundbreaking contemporary works by today's most renowned artists. Assembled with the guidance of Haida participants and scholars, *Raven Travelling* and the accompanying publication will present Haida art as a distinct art form, reflective of the Haida's unique history.

“The Vancouver Art Gallery has a rich tradition of exhibiting the works of northwest coast First Nations artists and we are delighted to present *Raven Travelling: Two Centuries of Haida Art* in the year of the Gallery's 75th anniversary,” said Kathleen Bartels, director of the Vancouver Art Gallery. “With this exhibition, we have the opportunity to share the history of one of British Columbia's most important and highly-developed art practices, along with new directions in Haida cultural expression.”

Haida Gwaii, a sparsely populated archipelago of more than 250 islands off the Northwest coast of British Columbia – also known as the Queen Charlotte Islands – is both home and a source of artistic inspiration for the Haida, who have inhabited this mystical land from time immemorial. A place of lush rainforests, pristine beaches, dramatic climate and diverse wildlife, the environment and the stories it has inspired throughout tribal history are the constant subject matter of the finely crafted and uniquely stylized art made by Haida artists. Developed as a visual language to document the supernatural world and oral histories passed down through succeeding generations, Haida art is composed of a complex system of symbols and forms that play a central role in the organization of Haida society.

Raven Travelling will feature more than 250 examples of Haida art, offering a compelling mix of historical and contemporary works, including pieces by such luminaries as Charles and Isabella Edenshaw, Tom Price, Simeon Stilthda and other 19th and 20th century Haida master artists. Tracing more recent developments of traditional Haida form, the exhibition will also present major works by Reg Davidson, Robert Davidson, Jim Hart, Bill Reid, Isabel Rorick, Don Yeomans and other contemporary artists. From monumental totem poles and exquisitely carved masks to intricate spruce root weavings, many of the finest examples of Haida art produced over the last two hundred years will be featured. Jewelry, canoes, chests, drums, rattles, wooden clan hats, ceremonial regalia, argillite plates, as well as prints, drawings, paintings and sculptures will be on display.

“*Raven Travelling* will mark the first time many of our people will see such an extensive array of Haida art in one place,” said Vincent Collison, one of the exhibition’s Haida curators. “It is extremely exciting to pull these works together from across the continent and bring them back to our people, and to a place where we can share the work with the rest of the world.”

Raven Travelling explores how Haida art reflects the mythological realm through examples of the Raven figure as trickster, transformer and creator. The exhibition also delves into how the iconic figures of Haida design refer to the two defining Haida clans – the Ravens and Eagles – and how the crests of these clans are used to mark belonging and place within the Haida social structure. Also explored is Haida society’s production of art for trade, as the Haida were the first coastal nation to make art for this purpose in the early 1800s. While the exhibition includes a selection of objects that reveal the importance of mythic and cosmic concepts, it also incorporates objects that reveal how new ideas and forms from outside sources have also influenced Haida art, and profiles key figures in the art form’s development.

As part of the organization of *Raven Travelling*, the Vancouver Art Gallery sought guidance and sanction from the Council of the Haida Nation and the Band Councils of Skidegate and Old Massett. With input from the Haida community, an exhibition team coordinated by the Gallery’s chief curator and associate director, Daina Augaitis, was assembled, including Vince Collison, a member of the Mamaan Gitanee Eagle Clan and an elected representative of the Council of the Haida Nation in Vancouver. Research assistance was provided by Peter Macnair, former curator of anthropology at the Royal British Columbia Museum, Victoria, and Jay Stewart, former director of the Campbell River Museum. The work of this group was aided by further input from Haida advisors Irene Mills, Nika Collison and Lucille Bell. The team’s research included site visits to major collections of Haida art throughout North America, including the Haida Gwaii Museum at Qay’lnagaay; the Royal British Columbia Museum, Victoria; the Museum of Anthropology at the University of British Columbia,

Vancouver; the Canadian Museum of Civilization, Hull; the Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto; the McCord Museum, Montréal; the Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology at Harvard, Cambridge; the Smithsonian Institution, Washington DC; The Field Museum of Natural History, Chicago; the Alaska State Museum, Juneau; the American Museum of Natural History, New York; the Seattle Art Museum and others. In order to ensure the veracity of the research and the quality of works selected for consideration, the group conducted several consultation meetings and studio visits in Haida Gwaii and Vancouver.

The Vancouver Art Gallery has a long history of presenting the works of Haida artists, including the exhibitions *Arts of the Raven* in 1967 and the *Bill Reid Retrospective* in 1974. The 1993 exhibition *Robert Davidson: Eagle of the Dawn* drew on the extensive holdings of Davidson's work in the Vancouver Art Gallery's permanent collection. As well, Haida art has been included in the Gallery's many exhibitions of Northwest Coast First Nations art including the 1941 exhibition *BC Coast Indian Art*, the hugely popular *People of the Potlatch* in 1956 and the critically acclaimed 1998 exhibition, *Down from the Shimmering Sky: Masks of the Northwest Coast*. *Raven Travelling* continues the Gallery's commitment to the presentation of west coast Native art.

The supporting sponsors for *Raven Travelling: Two Centuries of Haida Art* are Scotiabank Group and Phillips, Hager & North. Funding for the exhibition is also provided by *Raven Travelling* Patrons, Gary R. Bell, Teck Cominco Limited and Douglas Reynolds Gallery, with additional support provided by *Raven Travelling* Friends, The Fairmount Hotel Vancouver, Canfor and Hemlock Printers Ltd.

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