

**HAIDA MATERIAL
HERITAGE AND CHANGING
MUSEUM PRACTICE**

this
is
our
life

CARA KRMPOTICH | LAURA PEERS

*With the Haida Repatriation Committee and staff
of the Pitt Rivers Museum and British Museum*



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PREFACE

GAAHLAAY, LONNIE YOUNG, HEREDITARY LEADER, TS'AAHL CLAN

THIS WAS THE first trip with the repatriation group that I had the honour of participating in.

I remember watching the museum staff as they watched the way we reacted to certain objects and how we handled them. Answering their questions and listening to them give their opinion on the reasons for collected artifacts and if they should keep any ancestor in storage. I remember interacting with the crowd outside as we did our performance.

The visits to the museums help to reinforce how lucky we are to live where we do: to live in a place that still has the same raw material that our ancestors had and for us to be able to work with them in the same way.

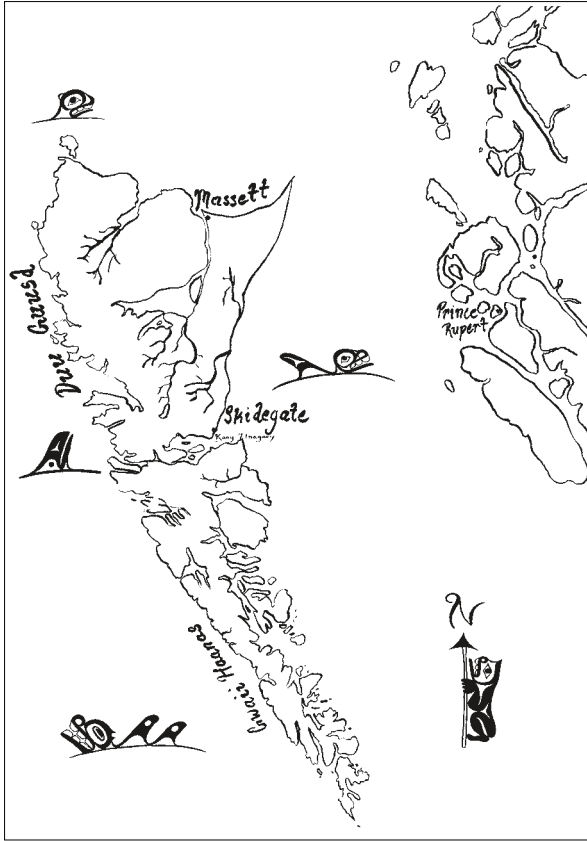
I think that given the chance we should all visit a museum where they display our art so they can learn to appreciate it better. Too few have taken that opportunity, most look in books but that is not the same as seeing Haida treasures in real life, in three dimensions. It was good to see the young people seeing all the artwork. Especially some of the beautiful boxes. It was a learning experience for the younger people but even for us, the Elders.

**JONATHAN KING, THEN KEEPER OF ANTHROPOLOGY,
BRITISH MUSEUM**

Examples of Haida ceremonial regalia have been on display for more than 230 years at the British Museum. They are seen in the context of other cultures, so that poles, feast dishes, and ceremonial articles can be appreciated and understood alongside objects from civilizations across the world. For example, the Goose House pole from Kayang dominates and fills the upper space of the Great Court in a way appreciated by millions of visitors each year. A valuable outcome of the recent Haida visits to the British Museum, especially the one in 2009 documented in this volume, is that it enhanced a very different public purpose – that of building understanding and developing museum databases with Haida representatives. What the project achieved is to skillfully navigate a course that transcends differences between Haida artists and Elders, on the one hand, and museum curators and conservators, on the other. Individuals, as will be seen from their statements, were allowed to maintain their personal and professional identities while articulating and expressing their ideas and feelings as a new shared space emerged from these unfamiliar encounters. All of this is eloquently expressed in the texts recorded as a form of mimetic “empathy in action,” to use Rane Willerslev’s phrase (2004, 647). The Pitt Rivers Museum, and project organizers Laura Peers and Cara Krmpotich, the Leverhulme Trust, colleagues, and, above all, the Haida visitors are to be congratulated and thanked.

MICHAEL O’HANLON, DIRECTOR, PITT RIVERS MUSEUM

If the Haida Project was at times a challenge for the museum, it was – even more so – an opportunity. For a university museum, in which teaching and research are interwoven with collections care and public access, the project has added greatly to our contemporary and historical knowledge of those collections and enabled the development of new public and educational programs. It has also created relationships with Haida who act as advisers and continue to be involved in the life of the museum. Most importantly, the project has reminded the museum’s staff, the Friends of the Museum, students, and the public that the collections we care for are tied to a living culture.



MAP 1 *Map of Haida Gwaii.*

Map by Jaalen Edenshaw.

MAP 2 *Haida Gwaii in relation to British Columbia and Canada.*

Map by Eric Leinberger.

MAP 1



MAP 2

THIS IS OUR LIFE



FIGURE 1.1 *Chief's headdress (PRM 1891.49.11).*

the paths
bringing
us together

Some people call these objects, but this is our life.

VERNON WILLIAMS JR.

RESEARCHERS WHO VISIT museums to study historic artifacts generally come in ones and twos, and they usually work with fewer than fifty items at a time. In September 2009, twenty-one members of the Haida Nation came to Oxford and London to work with eight hundred heritage treasures at the Pitt Rivers Museum and the British Museum. As well as learning from these treasures, and teaching museum staff about them, the Haida came to the UK in response to a specific invitation: to form mutually defined, long-term relationships with staff at both museums, to work together, and to learn with the collections as a way of creating and affirming this relationship in order to support each other in the long term. Indigenous peoples want and need access to their heritage objects to support identities in the present, and museums need help from those peoples to better understand and care for those collections. Both museums had engaged with Haida previously: the British Museum, for instance, made a loan to Haida Gwaii in the 1980s, and small delegations and individual artists visited both museums in the 1990s and then again in the 2000s. The invitation sought to formalize and shore up relationships from these sporadic, project-based

events involving individuals or small groups of visiting researchers, creating permanent, diplomatic relationships.

This was an experiment. It brought together the desire of museum staff to better care for their collections and to create positive relationships with an important originating community, and Haida goals for access to historic treasures and for repatriating ancestral remains. But unlike other similar projects all the partners had undertaken previously, this endeavour specifically acknowledged the need to document and analyze our processes leading up to the visit in order to better understand how long-term relationships between museums and source communities are developed and sustained. The project involved the unlikely alliance of two museums that don't repatriate objects on one continent, with two repatriation committees and a Haida-run museum and cultural centre on another. We think the experiment has been wildly successful so far. This book describes what we did for the visit, how it worked (and what didn't work), what has happened since, and how our relationship has developed. All project participants have contributed to the book, and so our thoughts on what has happened are from sometimes very different perspectives.

These different, sometimes opposing perspectives are at the heart of this book. This is an ethnography of relationships, focusing on the cross-cultural dynamics of encounters between Haida delegates and Haida museum collections and the museum staff who care for these collections.

As we discuss below, the book sits at the juncture of several related scholarly literatures and Haida community and artistic histories. As a book about the study of Haida museum collections, it relates to work on Haida material culture and art by art historians and museum curators. As a book about Haida engagements, or re-engagements, with material heritage items held in museum collections, it also relates to literature on relationships between indigenous peoples and museums, and how these have changed in recent decades. There is also an emerging literature on the process of these re-engagements and on what historic objects mean now to contemporary indigenous peoples. For Haidas, bringing back artistic and cultural traditions to sustain them after the long decades of assimilation policies has meant working closely with museum collections – a bittersweet process, as they discuss in this volume – productive, but deeply frustrating in many ways.

Why museums should be bittersweet or frustrating for Haidas is also a question central to this volume. Museums themselves have become a focus for anthropological study, since they articulate deeply held assumptions about the value and importance of objects and knowledge, about the dynamics and power of cross-cultural representation, and about relationships between mainstream society and colonized or marginalized elements of the nation-state. Bringing together the Haida Gwaii Museum, a village-run museum that is part of a cultural centre working for the preservation and perpetuation of Haida culture, and the British Museum and the Pitt Rivers Museum, institutions with historic collections of Haida objects and international audiences, meant facing up to the very different sets of expectations and agendas within this project.

This book is rooted in these differing literatures and histories, and analyzes these differing expectations and agendas. Certain aspects of the project become focused lenses for understanding the clashes and creative synergies that result from such cross-cultural work. The issue of how museum objects “should” be handled, and why, becomes a fascinating window onto Haida and museum perspectives, and how they come together in such projects. That museum staff feel objects should be handled only by museum staff, or in a very controlled manner under the close supervision of museum staff, and that our Haida counterparts feel objects need to be stroked, held, danced, worn, or performed, goes to the heart of the cross-cultural nature of this work. Museums are about bringing objects and people together – though rarely does this happen in such a physical way as we saw in this project. The issue of handling runs across all the chapters in various ways, providing an opportunity to understand the differing expectations of (and among) museum staff and Haida researchers at all stages of the project, the ways of thinking about what things mean and how they should therefore be treated – their “value” – and the different responsibilities felt by all parties in the project toward these objects.

A second lens is that of the anthropology of emotion, and we focus on how participants felt at various stages of the project, but especially during the study/handling sessions with the collections.¹ All participants experienced very powerful emotions at various times during this project, and we pay attention to them and ask why certain kinds of interactions with each other and with the collections should provoke

such emotions. In doing so, we use this focus on emotion to understand, in another way, what material things mean to people and why. A third focus of the book uses repatriation to understand relationships – between Haidas today and their ancestors, and between museum staff and Haidas – and their dynamics as these emerged across all aspects of the project. The focus on ancestral remains was one point at which the goals of Haida participants and the goals of UK participants came together uneasily, but powerfully, making it yet another way of exploring how the relationships we tried to create and reaffirm through the project actually developed. We use the chronology of the project, from its genesis as an idea to the preparation for the UK visit, the visit itself, and what happened afterwards, as the storyline to show how these issues and processes played out in our interactions.

We should make it clear at the start that this was a particular kind of visit, representing one of many kinds of engagements between museum collections and indigenous people. This history of engagement shows that source community researchers range from individuals who have been raised in their communities, speaking the language, with a deep experiential knowledge of cultural traditions, to specialist makers or artists – weavers and carvers, for instance – who have studied historic objects for a long time and are versed in the art histories of their traditions of making, to community members who are involved in reviving cultural traditions but who are not artists themselves, to individuals who were, perhaps, adopted out of the community or raised within families that became relatively assimilated, and who are studying museum objects as part of a process of learning about their culture. Each visit is different and involves various kinds of engagements with the collections.

The delegation involved in the Haida Project was selected by the Haida Repatriation Committee and was an especially interesting group to work with. The group was composed both of individuals who had specialist knowledge to contribute to understanding the collections to be studied and individuals who were learning about them; it included experienced carvers and weavers, curator/scholars, dancers, people who had worked with museum collections before and some who had never done so. Even for those who had worked with collections before, the Pitt Rivers Museum and British Museum collections are not well known; only a handful of senior Haida artists have had the chance to

study them. The delegation represented a cross-section of their communities, and it worked with a cross-section of staff at both museums, including senior curatorial staff who had studied Haida material culture and conservation and collections staff whose knowledge of Haida objects – and whose experience facilitating indigenous-community visits – varied greatly. It is important to note that many members of the delegation participated not only to look at historic Haida objects but also to further a very different community goal, that of visiting ancestors whose remains were held at the museums and furthering the possibility of repatriation. For many individuals involved in this project, their work with the collections involved a great deal of personal learning, a sense of first encounter and discovery, and a sense of wonder. We have tried to document these processes, to think about the different sets of cultural expectations involved in such visits and about how such visits can be most productively facilitated.

Both the Pitt Rivers Museum and the British Museum have a long history of facilitating research visits by source community members, including senior Haida artists. The Haida Repatriation Committee is building its own history of sending delegations to museums that house important Haida collections. With this project, we felt privileged to be part of a very grass-roots, multi-directional, cross-cultural learning process involving a spectrum of community members and museum staff; we hope that our reflections on the nature of this particular visit will shed light on what museum professionals sometimes blithely call “access to collections.”

Finally, we should note that the Pitt Rivers Museum and the British Museum are very different in kind from each other, and the Haida visit worked very differently at each. The British Museum is a national institution, with 1100 staff members, founded in order to preserve and exhibit collections for the nation. It contains eight million objects in its holdings and hosts approximately six million visitors annually. An additional fifteen million visitors access the collections on-line each year.² As a large institution, the British Museum is highly departmentalized and hierarchical, and the ethnographic storage and conservation areas are nearly three miles from the main offices of the department of Africa, Oceania and the Americas (AOA), which was organizing the Haida visit. It is important to note that only two of the museum’s departments (AOA and conservation) were involved in the project.

Each of these departments is complex and manages annually hundreds of research visits and many research projects, interns, exhibitions, and loans. While each department has a relatively flat internal organizational structure, departments at the British Museum are more bounded than at a smaller institution such as the Pitt Rivers Museum, and interdepartmental communication can be more formal and bureaucratic than at a smaller museum.

By contrast, the Pitt Rivers Museum is a university museum entirely focused on ethnographic and archaeological collections, and is linked strongly to the department of anthropology at Oxford: the museum's lecturer-curators are jointly appointed within academic departments, particularly anthropology, and teaching comprises half of their duties. The Pitt Rivers Museum has a staff of about fifty, collections of approximately 300,000 objects plus about the same number of photographs and manuscripts, and an annual attendance of around 350,000. While it has distinct departments, the museum also has a very flat, non-hierarchical operational structure as an institution, and all staff members work together in the main building. Members of various departments, such as conservation and collections management, routinely meet and work together with the curators on special projects such as this one.

The visit was affected by these structural differences, along with several other significant factors. One of these factors was the schedule, with the Haida delegation first visiting Oxford and then London, during what was a very long time for delegates to be away from home; some chose to miss the London part of the visit to return home to jobs and small children. This decreased the number of people available for the British Museum research and reduced the number of perspectives available to share information about objects. In addition, Laura and Cara were based at the Pitt Rivers Museum for the duration of the project, apart from a brief period when we worked at Orsman Road in preparation for the visit. All these factors have affected the nature of the project and the experience of the researchers and have shaped aspects of this book. Throughout the book, the reader will note that most of the museum-based examples focus on the experiences of the participants in the Pitt Rivers Museum, with additional material from the British Museum. Because Laura and Cara were based at the Pitt Rivers Museum during the project, we are more familiar with

institutional procedures and expectations there. Perhaps most importantly, the Pitt Rivers Museum was able to devote a great deal of staff resources to supplement the Haida Project as a special, grant-funded research project which met the Museum's core goals and mission statement: the project became a focal point for a large number of museum staff for more than a year. At the British Museum, staff in AOA faced their usual very large numbers of international research visitors and an especially difficult temporary exhibit installation immediately prior to the Haida visit. The Haida Project was simply one more project, albeit an important one, to be squeezed into the schedule of a busy department. These varying opportunities, pressures, and institutional organizations are reflected in the ways we discuss the project as it unfolded in both museums.

MOBILE OBJECTS, MOBILE PEOPLE

The Haida Project came into existence because of the determination of UK curators and Haida Repatriation Committee leaders to work together to bring a Haida delegation to the UK. It developed within ongoing historical trajectories: British exploration and colonial expansion, museum collection within these contexts, Haida determination to retain their culture despite pressures to assimilate, and recent changes in the relationships between museums and the communities their collections come from. The histories of the Pitt Rivers Museum and the British Museum, each with its own set of relationships with Haidas that have developed over the past few decades, are also part of the project context. In this section, we discuss the broad historical trends that led to the formation of Haida museum collections in the UK, and more recent history within the UK involving the efforts of museums to reconnect collections with source communities. This work has included a loan by the British Museum to the Haida Gwaii Museum in 1981, a formal Haida delegation to both UK museums in 1998, and ongoing contact since then. Leading members of the Haida Repatriation Committee explain some of the Haida background to the project and the recent history of their engagement with North American and European museums. Haida participants also did extensive preparation and had their own historical trajectories, which brought them to the point where they could join the Pitt Rivers Museum and the British Museum in this work; we discuss these as well. First, though, we address why



FIGURE 1.2 *Haida poles in the courts of the British Museum (left) and the Pitt Rivers Museum (right). Photographs by Max Carocci (left) and Laura Peers (right).*

Haidas need to travel to England to study their own historic material culture.

Haida Collections in UK Museums

Haida totem poles feature prominently in museum displays in London, Oxford, Liverpool, and Cambridge (see Figures 1.2, 3.10, and 3.11). The totem poles, along with other artifacts from cultures around the globe, are housed in British museums because of the complex interactions between British people and peoples around the world over the past several centuries. These collections serve as a kind of

archive: they show where British people have been and what they have thought about the peoples they found there. Most ethnographic collections in Britain were acquired within the general histories of exploration, economic expansion, and the establishment of colonial relations during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (Cole 1995; for an extended history of the Haida collection at the British Museum, see King 1999). Within these histories, artifacts were documentary evidence, souvenirs, personal gifts from indigenous family and friends, confiscated ceremonial items, and diplomatic gifts. Like ethnographic collections more generally, the Haida collections at each museum represent the variety of cross-cultural relationships between the British and Haida over time. Haida collections in the British Museum and the Pitt Rivers Museum, for instance, include material acquired by Captain George Dixon (who gave Haida Gwaii an English name, after his ship, the *Queen Charlotte*), naval surveyors, missionaries, a photographer, amateur collectors, and contemporary collectors. All these men and women had various kinds of relationships with the Haida – some more positive than others, some deeper than others – because of their position and experiences.

Once objects arrived in museums, most of the information about these interpersonal relationships was suppressed, along with the circumstances of collection: this kind of information was seldom recorded in museum accession registers except in the most basic way.³ What mattered within museums was the ways in which material culture represented aspects of social structure, religion and world view, and livelihood. Objects also represented differences between Western and non-Western societies, or “primitive” societies, as they were then seen.

During the nineteenth century, comparisons between societies took on a hierarchical and evolutionary structure (Arnold 2006; Barnard 2000, 27-46; Gosden and Larson 2007; Stocking 1985 [especially chapters by Chapman and Hinsley]). “Stone age” societies, and other societies with ceramics or writing or metal-working technology, were assumed to exist on a kind of vertical “ladder” with “primitive” peoples at the bottom and industrial societies, like England, at the top. Objects entering museums were thus classified as examples of certain technologies and as representative of their originating cultures; museum records highlighted the materials, technology, and culture of production. As the objects were considered examples of “primitive” societies, the

... *Cara Krmpotich*

IN 1907, HENRY Balfour, the curator of the museum, described one portrait mask (PRM 1884.84.76, Figure 1.3) in the journal of the Royal Anthropological Society as “one of the most successful examples of realistic carving which I have hitherto seen from the hands of a savage sculptor ... the carving is life-sized and has been executed with very considerable skill, and the close attention manifestly given to detail affords evidence of an unusual appreciation of the surface modelling of the human face. The general contour is excellently rendered, and the eyes and other features are skilfully treated. The facial wrinkles have been represented with care and give considerable character to the face.” What seems to matter most to Balfour is not the meanings of the mask to Haida but, rather, its relationship to Western traditions of realism in art.

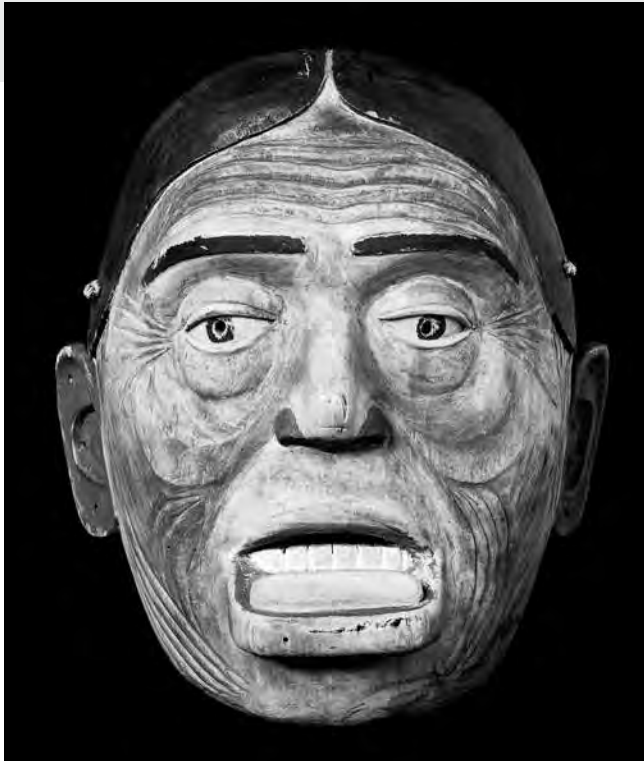


FIGURE 1.3
*Portrait mask
of Haida
woman (PRM
1884.84.76).*

... *Diane Brown*

ACCORDING TO OUR Elders, missionaries and Indian Agents just went along mowing totem poles down and heaped them up in front of Skidegate and set fire to them. But also some of our poles made it down south, too: white people picked the select few that they thought were the best ones and took them to here, there, and everywhere. But it was a really horrible time in our history. You see old pictures of Skidegate and Massett and there are hundreds of poles. Nang King.aay 'uwans said his father said they mowed them all down or they were certain to go to hell. They said we worshipped them.⁴

names of individual makers or sources of objects were rarely recorded: collectors and curators were interested in group names and in the way that an object represented its culture. In contrast, museums diligently recorded the names of donors; museums still often know the name of the donor of ethnographic objects, but not that of the maker.

The imposition of such meanings onto Haida objects by museums in Britain had the effect of introducing intellectual and political distance between objects and their originating communities. There has also been a great geographical distance between museums and source communities and a lack of ongoing relationships between museums and these communities. People in originating communities often have vivid memories of the removal of objects but until very recently have seldom had any idea where those objects went.

Sometimes for a century or more, collected objects existed only within the perspectives of the society that had acquired them: they

... *Cara Krmpotich*

SETTLEMENT OF THE Pacific Northwest by Euro-Canadians and Euro-Americans, the nascent years of anthropology as a discipline, and a worldwide growth in public museums all converged in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Cole 1995). The result is an abundance of Haida art and artifacts in museums and galleries around the world, and a strong presence of Northwest Coast objects in both anthropological and art historical discourse. Frequently, the study of the Northwest Coast blends these two discourses. John R. Swanton's (1905) seminal study on Haida ethnology was the result of his work for Franz Boas at the American Museum of Natural History, and is today reprinted by the Council of the Haida Nation. Boas himself spent considerable time writing about and exhibiting Northwest Coast material culture, appreciating its aesthetic qualities as well as its functional qualities, including symbolic or representational forms (reproduced in Jonaitis 1995). Marius Barbeau undertook early important work on both totem poles (1990 [1950]) and argillite (1953) – including individual carvers (1957) – during his term with the National Museum of Canada in Ottawa, Canada. George MacDonald continued the tradition of the National Museum, now called the Canadian Museum of Civilization, investigating the artistic traditions and social meanings of Haida material culture in *Haida Monumental Art* (1983) and *Haida Art* (1996). MacDonald's latter volume in particular reflects the relationship between exhibition and scholarship, between catalogue and research publication. This is a pattern we see repeated in Sheehan (1981); Macnair, Joseph, and Grenville (1998); Macnair and Hoover (2002); and Augaitis et al. (2006). Scholarship among curators, art historians, anthropologists, and Haida artists owes much to emeritus curator Bill Holm, who drew heavily on historic Haida material to generate a vocabulary for the forms and "grammar" of the Northwest Coast aesthetic (Holm 1965). An artist himself, Holm also worked closely with eminent Haida artists, including Bill Reid (Holm and Reid 1975), and was formative in the training of contemporary art historians. Among these is curator Robin Wright, whose own work on argillite, attributions, and patterns of apprenticeship (1977, 1998, 2001) among Haida artists continues

to shape both Haida and non-Haida ideas on these topics. Aldona Jonaitis and Aaron Glass's (2010) "intercultural history" of the totem pole is representative of the productive confluence that occurs when art historical, anthropological, and museological approaches are brought together in order to help us understand how this archetype of Northwest Coast material culture has been viewed through multiple lenses at specific points in time and space. (See also Duffek and Townsend-Gault's [2004] volume, which positions Bill Reid and his legacy in a similar intercultural perspective.)

... *Jonathan King*

THE MOST IMPORTANT of these scholar-curators of Northwest Coast art were Marius Barbeau at the National Museum in Ottawa; Wilson Duff at the Provincial Museum in Victoria, BC; and Harry and Audrey Hawthorn, who were instrumental in the development of the Museum of Anthropology in Vancouver, BC. Through the 1950s, a carving program was resumed through the support of these individuals and museums, involving initially mainly Kwakwaka'wakw artists but then also Bill Reid, who travelled throughout the islands and villages on Haida Gwaii with Wilson Duff. Both the Provincial Museum in Victoria (now the Royal British Columbia Museum) and the Museum of Anthropology (which was founded in 1949 and opened in its current building in 1976) partnered extensively with First Nations artists in the creation of exhibits. These included especially the Hunt Family Big House in Victoria and the monumental carvings created by Bill Reid and Doug Cranmer in the 1950s and 1960s for the University of British Columbia. 1967 was a crucial year: the Montreal Expo featured Northwest Coast art and in Vancouver, the *Arts of the Raven* exhibition was held, curated by Bill Reid, Bill Holm, Wilson Duff, and Doris Shadbolt (Duff 1967). At the time, and through the remaining decades of the twentieth century, these developments were seen as part of a revival and renaissance, but now the history of these events is seen in a rather more nuanced light (Duffek and Townsend-Gault 2004).

were never visited by people from their originating communities, and there were few, if any, ongoing relationships between these communities and museums in Britain. There was, on the other hand, a lively scholarly interest in Haida culture and art. This interest left evolutionary and “primitive” assumptions far behind and sought to understand Haida culture and objects in terms of curatorial and art historical perspectives, and equally on cultural terms within Haida perspectives.

In the second half of the twentieth century, there emerged a group of Haida scholars who studied museum collections and worked with oral traditions. Given the extent to which Haida art was collected and removed from the communities, museum collections were crucial for the continuity of knowledge about Haida art. In addition to Bill Reid, artists such as Robert Davidson, Reginald Davidson, Jim Hart, Christian White, Dolores Churchill and her daughters April Churchill and Evelyn Vanderhoop, and Isabel Rorick began to work with these collections and to engage in important conversations with curators and art historians. As Jonathan King notes below, this new strand of scholarship emerged within Canadian museums but eventually led to exhibitions of Haida material in England.

JONATHAN KING

Collaborative exhibitions with First Nations began in the 1970s, and of these the most important was *Legacy*, curated from the then Provincial Museum, and furnished for its Edinburgh showing with a catalogue (Macnair, Hoover, and Neary 1980). This was exceptional in including details of late-twentieth-century artists as well as historic Northwest Coast art ...

Carole Kaufman’s careful analysis of the evolution of argillite forms and styles led to several exhibitions resulting from her work. The first of these was mounted at the Museum of Mankind, then the home of the British Museum’s Department of Ethnography between 1970 and 1997. Between February 1980 and August 1983 in Room 9 around 50 pieces of argillite were placed on display. The title *Art Made for Strangers: Haida Argillite Carving* was taken from a chapter heading in Erna Gunther’s *Art in the Life of the Northwest Coast Indians* (1966, 165). The scholarship derived directly from three new sources, but especially from Kaufmann’s published article derived from her dissertation (Kaufmann 1969, 1976). Both the sequence of periods and styles




FIGURE 1.4 *Argillite pipe, British Museum (AM 1954.5.1019)*. Photograph by Laura Peers.

were Kaufmann's, and many of the insights were also taken from Kaufmann. Further assistance was provided by Leslie and Frank Drew while working on their book *Argillite Art of the Haida* (Drew and Wilson 1980), which includes a number of British Museum pieces (see Figure 1.4). Robin Wright and her master's dissertation, "Haida argillite pipes," placed specific British Museum pieces, such as a pipe copying an American clay pipe used in a presidential campaign, in historic context (Wright 1977, 101). . . .


In addition to the exhibitions, visiting scholars continued conversations about the collections. Bill Reid visited the British Museum in 1968 and 1976, and curators Steve Brown, Alan Hoover, Bill Holm, George MacDonald, Peter Macnair, and Robin Wright all worked in the British Museum and with other UK collections, including those of the Pitt Rivers Museum and the National Museum of Scotland, and drew on these for their publications. Beginning in the 1980s, collections of Haida material in major UK museums became integrated into scholarly discussions about the history and nature of Haida art.

Anthropological and art historical ways of understanding Haida art are not the only sets of meanings that Haida museum collections have, however. More recently, another kind of community-based visit has occurred, in which community members with a range of interests in heritage, not always tied to artistic technique, re-engage with these important collections in the UK. For the Haida and for the many other societies whose historic treasures are housed in UK museums, objects are also archives: of histories, relationships with outsiders, survival of

colonial regimes, and genealogies. In many indigenous communities, the study of heritage artifacts is seen as an important way of reclaiming cultural knowledge suppressed during the colonial era (see Collison 2006), and thus of strengthening cultural identity for community members today. Haida artists have suffered from a dearth of historic art, especially artistic masterpieces, to study and to use as reference points for their own artistic development because such items were collected from Haida Gwaii and now reside in museums around the world. It is often difficult to gain access to these widely dispersed collections: travel overseas is expensive, and the ways in which objects are described and stored by museums can create other barriers. As a result, repatriation has come to be an important goal for many of these communities, as a means of gaining physical and intellectual access to heritage items, as a way of correcting historic injustices, and as a way of showing respect to ancestors and to community members today. As members of the Haida Repatriation Committee discuss below, the repatriation of ancestral remains has become a paramount concern for many Haida, and visiting museums to discuss repatriation, honour their ancestors, and bring them home has also offered important opportunities to study historic artifact collections at a number of institutions.



“**AT THE FIRST** community meeting, the large group of people expressed deep sorrow, anger, and bewilderment when they learned about the hundreds of their relatives’ remains that had been so disrespectfully collected. There was no question that we had to bring them home. The elders spoke of how we express *yahgudang*, respect to our ancestors. Little did we realize that in doing so, we would also significantly impact our lives and the lives of so many others who worked with us. *Yahgudang* became the founding doctrine for the Haida Repatriation Committee.” (Bell and Collison 2006, 141)



These histories, contradictions, and potentialities underscore the fact that ethnographic objects are rich in meaning and politically powerful. These collections are valued in UK museums because they provide narrative details about British histories as well as Haida histories. But they are also sometimes seen as sensitive and “difficult”⁵ to use because their meanings might be contested, their display might offend source community members, and the objects themselves may become the focus of repatriation claims. At the same time, indigenous researchers have been coming more frequently to work with collections in museums across Britain, and developing productive relationships with staff in those institutions. Often, though, due to travel costs, source community researchers spend only a few days at each museum they visit. After they leave, they have little contact with these museums.

The Haida Project addresses these issues by making historic Haida collections in UK museums the basis of a long-term and mutually beneficial relationship between source community researchers and museum staff. We hope to ensure that the Haida collections are something that brings us together rather than simply fostering tension. The relationship is intended to support and respect the needs of both communities – the Haida community and the museum – for access to collections, for learning from them, and for interpreting and caring for them. We hope that our work together will inspire Haida artists and strengthen Haida culture, and that it will spark changes in the way UK museums think about ethnographic collections.

HAIDA PATHS AND OUR NEED TO WORK WITH MUSEUMS

Our ancestors are sacred. If it wasn't for them, we wouldn't be here.

When I think of my ancestors, it is with respect first, and gratitude.

GWAAGANAD, DIANE BROWN

VINCE COLLISON

We originally started working with museums ten or twelve years ago, when we were writing letters to museums all over the world about the kinds of collections they had and whether they had any Haida objects. In doing all that work initially, we found out that there are collections all over the world that also have human remains. There was no way we could continue the research work and learn about the master artists

from the past until we had finished repatriating the human remains from these museums in the United States and Canada. In the UK there were two ancestors: one who is still in London at the British Museum, and one who was at the Pitt Rivers Museum until July 2010.

For a period of about eight years, we travelled constantly to places as strange as Ottawa; New York City; Chicago; Washington, DC; and Victoria and Vancouver in British Columbia in order to repatriate our ancestors. It was quite an emotional experience, but on every one of those visits to repatriate our ancestors we also made sure that the Elders and artists we brought with us were able to view the collections (even though we were never going to start talking about repatriation of any artifacts at that moment; we were not focusing on that at that time). Now we are in that stage because we've repatriated more than 460 of our ancestors back to Haida Gwaii. Now we're in the process of working toward the next stage of bringing our artifacts back.

We are really looking forward to the next stage. It has a lot of emotions attached to it as well. Emotions aren't only for the ancestral remains; they are also triggered by the fact that our people created these beautiful, wonderful Haida treasures. It's a bittersweet experience that museums, by design, have ensured that the pieces retain a certain level of integrity: for the most part, our treasures are still very strong and the way those people did their work is quite evident in all the pieces.

One answer we give to people when they ask why we do this is "Who else is going to do this work?" One of the reasons why my colleagues and I have worked so hard to repatriate our ancestors is that we did not want to leave this work for the next generation. ...v c

The Ancestors' Call

LUCY BELL

I believe the spirits of our ancestors have been calling us since they were taken away to museums in the 1800s. Over a hundred years later, we began our passionate journey to bring our ancestors' spirits to rest.

It was during my internship at the Royal British Columbia Museum in 1994 that I learned about all of the ancestral remains in museums. I was shocked and sickened to learn about the four hundred-plus Haida remains scattered throughout the world. At the end of my internship, I packed my bags and headed home to Haida Gwaii, wishing that I could have taken the seven Haida remains from the Royal BC Museum.⁶

... *Nadine Wilson*

WHAT IS A Haida treasure? We might call something a treasure that's in our family, or it might be a Haida treasure because it was a family member's, or belonged to someone very dear to you. Maybe your partner made it, or it was your sister's first bag that she wove. It's simply something you really like.

... *Vernon Williams Jr.*

ANYTHING WE MAKE and use will become a treasure as long as it continues to exist, because then it becomes a teacher. The main thing I call Haida treasures are Elders and children. Boxes, masks, songs, tools, blankets, regalia - those are all treasures too.

Shortly after, the Old Massett Repatriation Committee [now called the Haida Heritage and Repatriation Society] was founded and the repatriation journey gained momentum. I called a community meeting to ask for advice and to create a committee. Our Committee was made up of some hard-working and passionate Elders, artists, language teachers, and youth. Looking back, us younger folks were so fortunate to work side by side with Elders Dorothy Bell, Rosa Bell, Leona Clow, Ernie Collison, Margaret Hewer, Ethel Jones, Mary Swanson, and Gertie White. These Elders taught us how to show respect, how to be diplomatic, how to be humble, and how to have fun. Vince Collison, Candace Weir, and Christian White have been there from the start as well. Meetings, auctions, raffles, dinner sales, and merchandise sales were a regular part of our schedules for over twelve years.

Finding out where the Haida ancestors' remains and Haida collections were held was a big task, especially since this was before we had

the Internet on Haida Gwaii. The Old Massett Village Council and the Haida Gwaii Museum often tasked the summer students with letter-writing to ask museums and universities around the world for inventories of their Haida collections. This was when we realized that there were Haida collections in the UK.

I curated a Haida exhibit for the Canada Pavilion at Expo 1998 and Expo 2000, bringing a small delegation to celebrate the exhibits and research the European Haida collections. Our little delegation went to the museums in Germany and the UK. It was an eye-opener for us since we were used to the good relationships we had with Canadian museums. It took many phone calls, letters, and even the involvement of the Canadian High Commission to get to meet with the European museums and visit our ancestors' treasures and the remains of two *kunisii* (ancestors) in the UK.

Our first meetings in 1998 with the UK museums were very formal. This was our introduction to tea and crumpets and we heard from museum officials that they are protected by their laws and not obligated to repatriate anything. We left feeling deflated but determined to see the return of our *kunisii*. Shortly after we visited the Pitt Rivers Museum, Laura Peers began working there. She later became a dear friend of the Haida and a great advocate.

We regrouped, and strategized. The Skidegate Repatriation and Cultural Committee had formed with the leadership of Nika Collison and Andy Wilson. The Council of the Haida Nation passed a resolution giving the Haida Repatriation Committee (our two committees together) authority to repatriate Haida ancestral remains. We continued to repatriate our *kunisii* from North American museums.

Although we started out with the single intention to bring home the ancestors, our involvement with North American museums grew. For instance, when we went to repatriate ancestral remains from the Canadian Museum of Civilization, the American Museum of Natural History, the Laboratory of Archaeology at the University of British Columbia, and the Field Museum in Chicago, we also took the time to study the museums' extensive collections of Haida artifacts. Haida artists gained inspiration and knowledge from studying the baskets, hats, carvings, and musical instruments. It was also a chance to share our culture. We were honoured to share a dance performance featuring some of the ancient treasures from the museum collections. And

we were amazed that the repatriation of the ancestral remains also led to the long-term return of artifacts.

Each repatriation effort had its share of challenges and rewards. We were gaining strength to pursue our repatriation requests in the UK. With the successful North American repatriation efforts under our belts, we continued to network with the Pitt Rivers Museum and the British Museum.

In 2005, Vince Collison began talking about Cara Krmpotich, a doctoral student from Oxford, who wanted to write her thesis on the Haida repatriation effort. He introduced her to the Haida Repatriation Committee, and I strongly believe she was sent to us for a reason. She moved into my house for about a year, spending time studying the repatriation effort, slinging coffee at my Haida Rose Cafe and making Haida Gwaii her second home. It was then that we began to dream about taking a group of Haida to the Pitt Rivers Museum to study the amazing ancient Haida collection. A couple of years later, the exchange with the museum became a reality.

We realized that we had to build relationships with the UK museums. It was important for us to build trust with the institutions and staff if we were ever to bring our ancestors home. Cara and Laura played a big role in this and were our hosts while we were in the UK.

As we were planning the exchange, we were advised by Pitt Rivers Museum staff to keep our desire for the repatriation of our ancestors separate from the research visit because a number of UK museum professionals and researchers are still filled with uncertainty and fear when they hear the word “repatriation.” Setting the repatriation request to the side was extremely difficult for me. I prayed often to our ancestors for forgiveness and for patience. Even though we promised to not make the trip about repatriation, we kept it in our minds and made small gestures toward the return of our ancestor from the Pitt Rivers Museum. ...LB

Yahgudang.gang⁷ (Respect) and Building Relationships with Museums

NIKA COLLISON

In 2006, while Cara Krmpotich was living with us on Haida Gwaii and learning about Haida repatriation, her academic supervisor, Dr. Laura Peers, visited with hopes of initiating a formal partnership

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