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Surviving the Dark Years

*TRANSFORMATIONS OF KWAKWAKA'WAKW
COSMOLOGICAL EXPRESSION, 1884-1967*

by

ZACHARY B. ROBINSON, B.A.

A thesis submitted to
the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research
in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

Department of Sociology and Anthropology
Carleton University
Ottawa, Ontario

April 2001

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the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research
acceptance of the thesis

**Surviving the Dark Years: Transformations
of Kwakwaka'wakw Cosmological
Expression, 1884-1967**

submitted by Zachary B. Robinson, B.A. Hons.
in partial fulfilment of the requirements for
the degree of Master of Arts
Department of Sociology and Anthropology

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April 25, 2001

ABSTRACT

Between the years 1884 and 1967, there was an incredible transformation in the plastic and graphic cultural expressions of the Kwakwaka'wakw people from the Pacific Coast of Canada. With social rituals being the primary focus for art and art production, the effects felt by the sudden enforcement of the anti-potlatch legislation in 1922 altered the course of earlier artistic trends. Throughout the dark times of potlatch prohibition, artists continued to carve, despite ceremonial suppression. Master carvers continued to not only teach younger generations the skill of carving, but also created vast amounts of 'illegal' material allowing underground potlatching to continue. Although ceremonial paraphernalia was still in demand during prohibition times within Kwakwaka'wakw communities, by the middle of the twentieth century Northwest Coast art had exploded outside Native communities, intended for a new audience. Outside of its traditional context, Kwakwaka'wakw art was redefined as was its meaning.

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Zac Robinson, April 2001

For Rebecca,

Who let me come out and paint her house.

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CHAPTER ONE

Graphic and Plastic Cultural Expressions among the Secret Societies of the Kwakwaka'wakw, 1884.

My fancy was first struck by the flight of imagination exhibited in the works of art of the British Columbians. ...I divined what a wealth of thought lay hidden behind the grotesque masks and the elaborately decorated utensils of these tribes.

Franz Boas, The Kwakiutl of Vancouver Island

Introduction

The purpose of this essay is threefold: (1) to examine the continuity and change in Kwakwaka'wakw¹ art and art production from 1884 to 1967, (2) to show that even under conditions of oppression, social actors could move freely and influence the outcome of events that in turn would shape their lives and the lives of later generations, and finally, (3) to examine the life and times of four particular artists: Willie Seaweed, Charlie James, Mungo Martin, and Ellen Neel, all of whom would live to greatly contribute and affect the artistic traditions of the Kwakwaka'wakw people. To do this, two key concepts and issues will be explored, such as the development and maintenance

¹ The name Kwakwaka'wakw means 'speakers of Kwak'wala,' which is the main language spoken by more than twenty sub-groups. Previously, the group was known as Kwakiutl by non-natives, but the term is no longer used because it specifically translates into Kwagu'l, which is the name of a linguistic group that resides at Fort Rupert, British Columbia (Macnair 1986:586-7).

of the traditional² art, as well as the development and maintenance of art for the tourist market. To explore these themes, visibility becomes an important index. Where was this art being seen, and for what reason/purpose was it being displayed? Between 1884 and 1967, the visibility of Kwakwaka'wakw graphic and plastic expression was greatly affected and forever changed, as was its audience. Notions of production were changing, as were notions of clientele.

By concentrating on the transformation of graphic and plastic cultural expression, I will examine the lives of four artists who restored and revolutionized art on the Northwest Coast, during a time of great social pressure. As Webster passionately notes (1995:193), "There was, however, a significant loss of knowledge during this period, about which our old people say, '*Lul'padax'idan's 'nalx'*'³(when our world became dark)." The efforts of Willie Seaweed, Charlie James, Mungo Martin, and Ellen Neel were significant and unique, but together formed a crucial element in not only the revitalization of Northwest Coast art, but also in the maintenance of a traditional line that was on the verge of breaking.

In 1884, the government of Canada made it an offense for the indigenous peoples of the Pacific Northwest Coast of Canada, to engage in what was called the "Potlatch." A central institution to Native societies of the Pacific Coast, the potlatch was an event at which traditional names, rank or hereditary privileges were claimed through ritualized dances, speeches and the distribution of property to those in attendance (Cole and Chaiken 1990:5). Although at this point the very shape of the potlatch had been greatly

² The term "traditional" appears in numerous places in this paper. Although it is problematic, I have used that term to refer to customs and/or practices as they were in the late 1880s. This does not imply that such customs were static previous to that period.

affected by outside influences, some First Nations accepted the laws as progress while others fiercely opposed the legislation. Northwest Coast society was based around the ideological conception(s) of spiritual wealth: wealth that was inherited, displayed, and then passed on to younger generations (see plate 1.1). This system came under attack, and for all essential purposes, was deemed illegal by the Canadian government. With this in mind, this paper is an examination of the historical relations between the Natives and non-Natives of British Columbia, with the particular emphasis on Kwakwaka'wakw art and art production, during the time of potlatch prohibition. To do this, one must go beyond the simplistic model of the colonizer and colonized to begin to understand the multi-leveled dynamic relationships that occurred on the Northwest Coast. What is often missing from such examinations of the past is the realization of the extent to which Native peoples have controlled their own lives, in view of the vastly changing world in which they existed within. As Miller (1990: 402-3) suggests,

...Indian peoples of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were actors who pursued their interests and struggled to preserve their identity. They resisted, evaded, and defied efforts to control their decision making, limit their traditional rites, and deprive them of their children. If we distinguish between intentions of the churches and government, on the one hand, and the effects of the policies, on the other hand, we might find that Canada's native peoples persist throughout time as active, if lamentably ignored, actors in the country's history.

As actors within their reality, the methods, strategies, and transformations employed within Kwakwaka'wakw ritual life have been examined (See Cole and Chaikin 1990). This form of resistance can be seen as pervasive, but within a more holistic view can be seen as a logical response to the attempts by the Department of Indian Affairs to suppress what one *Kwagu'l* called, "...one of our oldest and best customs"(Cole 1991a:52).

³For the purposes of this essay, Kwakwaka'wakw characters and terms will be given in U'mista orthography (Webster 1991:227-48).

Plate 1.1 Neg./Transparency no. 106707 (Photo by O.C. Hastings, 1894)
Courtesy Dept. of Library Services, American Museum of Natural History.

Kwakwaka'wakw society was based around the ideological conception(s) of spiritual wealth; wealth that was inherited, displayed, and then passed on to younger generations or heirs. The copper represented great wealth and prestige among many of the Pacific Coast Native groups. They were made from sheets of copper acquired through trade, and came to symbolize prestige and high social rank (Stewart 1990:41). In this photo, 'Nak'waxda'xw chief *Tutlidi* is giving away a copper in honor of his son on the beach at Fort Rupert.

According to Macnair (1986:600), the potlatch law "...tore away most of the traditional social fabric of the Kwakwaka'wakw people." Building on the work of Joseph Masco (1995), I suggest that resistance to the potlatch law went beyond simply trying to restore or retain a portion of Kwakwaka'wakw society, but it was an attempt to maintain a universal order built on perceived ideological notions of the cosmos and their role within it. It was the art of the Kwakwaka'wakw ceremonial world, displayed in dramatic and chiefly fashion, that helped transform many social ideals into concrete realities. With the ceremonial world under tremendous pressure and change, there was a massive shift in not just the visibility of plastic and graphic cultural expression, but also a change in the notion of production itself.

Between 1884 and 1967, the visual and social landscape of the Canadian Northwest Coast underwent an awesome transformation. In 1884, Canada was still a young nation of only seventeen years under the government of Sir John A. Macdonald. By the time that British Columbia entered confederation (1870), Vancouver did not yet exist, and Victoria was still only a small town. Fort Rupert had been established in 1849, after the Hudson's Bay Company constructed a trading post, which attracted four Kwakwaka'wakw villages to move to Beaver Harbour, forming what would become the center of Kwakwaka'wakw commerce and activity for what remained of the nineteenth century. Alert Bay was formed in 1870 with the building of a cannery on Cormorant Island. This attracted Kwakwaka'wakw peoples from the mainland of Vancouver Island, but Alert Bay did not reach any prominence until after 1900 (Jonaitis 1991:39). In 1884, many of the Natives living on the northern end of Vancouver Island still lived in traditional houses, traveled by canoe, and lived off the bounty of the oceans. It would

have been impossible for anyone in 1884 to imagine the amount of change that would occur over the next one hundred years. By 1967, Canada was celebrating its one hundredth birthday, and from ocean to ocean, was linked by two railways. Vancouver had become one of the largest cities in the country. Native economies, social structure, housing, clothing, and transport had all drastically changed in less than one hundred years. Potlatching was once again legal, and took place in Big Houses that were used by the whole community: a sharp contrast from earlier times when potlatches and other ceremonies took place in private dwellings. Because not all communities had Big Houses, sometimes people had to go to other communities to hold a festival. The relentless onslaught of change completely transformed the social and visual landscape of the Northwest Coast within less than a century. Indications of this change, and certainly testimony to the cultural adaptations made, can be seen through an examination of Kwakwaka'wakw art and art production.

As Macnair (1993:49) suggests, "Trends in Northwest Coast Indian art between 1880 and 1950 can be better understood after a brief examination of the preceding period." An indication of how much had changed in regards to ceremonial art and art production among the Kwakwaka'wakw may be found in the descriptive ethnographies of Franz Boas, specifically "The Social Organization and the Secret Societies of the Kwakiutl Indians," first published in 1895. Based on the anthropologist's ethnographic work in the mid to late nineteenth century, the publication vividly details much of the Kwakwaka'wakw ceremonial realm, in which art is an important vehicle. From Boas's early accounts, the anthropologist reveals the types of graphic and plastic designs which were carved and displayed for particular ceremonial practices during the mid-to-late

nineteenth century. Using what Boas documented in his ethnographies as a base, this study will examine Kwakwaka'wakw art and art production, as well as its transformation, during the time of potlatch prohibition and well into the 1960s, where there occurred a resurgence of Northwest Coast art. A study of this nature is worthwhile because it could advance an understanding of Kwakwaka'wakw history, emphasizing a period of great adaptive transformation.

Art and the Northwest Coast: A Brief History

Wedged between the coastal mountains of British Columbia and the Pacific Ocean, there lies a strip of land that at first glance would have seemed quite dark and foreboding to any early mariner. Lying in the shadow of the Coast Range (Mountains), the forbidding coast line, with rocky crags and dark interlocking inlets, resisted approach and travel by land. Despite this, cultures have flourished for thousands of years along this narrow strip utilizing the ocean and all of its bounty.⁴ These sea travelling people developed distinct and complex societies, and by the time they were contacted by Europeans (late 1700s), they were the most populated group of people on the continent. The earliest population estimates were based on census information collected by Hudson's Bay Company employees around 1835, but as Taylor (1963) assumes, these head counts can not be regarded as precise statistics. Nevertheless, they are helpful as starting points when trying to understand the great population differences between Coastal tribes and those tribes from Central and Eastern Canada. According to the census information, the Native population of British Columbia in 1835 was around 70, 000

⁴ The archeological record, although incomplete, suggests that people inhabited the Northwest Coast of Canada for more than three thousand years (Duff 1969: Unpaginated).

(Harris 1997:26). It must be remembered that by this time contact had occurred, and epidemics, wars, and other such occurrences were well underway, and so it is acceptable to assume that prior to the nineteenth century, the Native population of BC was most likely well over 70, 000 (Duff 1997:53-4). According to Harris (1997:29), the population of the province just prior to contact was approximately 200,000. Although at first glance the Northwest Coast may have seemed like an inhospitable tract of land, there was no other region in the country that was so densely populated.⁵

Related by the utilization of a common environment, the cultures living on the Northwest Coast shared many similar elements, but differed from each other in certain ways as well. Duff (1969) notes that, "It is only in the most general and inexact sense, for example, that we may regard the art of the area as a single entity or a single style." Duff (1969) describes the emergence of artistic growth within the Northwest Coast, developing from three different geographical sub-areas or cultural provinces. The first is the Northern province, which is most commonly represented by the Haida, but also includes the Tsimshian, Tlingit, and the Northern Kwakiutl. Second is the Central province, which is represented by the Southern Kwakiutl and the Nootka, and finally, the third province, which encompasses the Coast Salish groups. Although many of the names of groups have changed since Duff's publication (1969), the three geographic areas each produced a distinctive array of graphic and plastic cultural expressions.

As Duff (1969) suggests, graphic representation on the Northwest Coast, "...may be viewed as responses to two powerful and pervasive impulses, one essentially religious

⁵ According to Duff (1997:55-6), the Native population of British Columbia represented forty percent of the entire Native population in Canada. Life on the coast was probably much more congenial due to the sheer abundance of resources, than a nomadic hunting existence or an agricultural life in other parts of the country. Another important factor is that contact on the Northwest Coast happened very late in comparison

and the other essentially social.” The distinction between the two styles was that social art made social structure visible, while religious art made the supernatural visible. The graphic and plastic expressions that may be considered religious paraphernalia, are those that aid in the dramatization of certain rituals: those which portray the relationship between humans and supernatural beings.⁶ By doing so, the rituals make this relationship visible and tangible. Rituals of this particular nature are the focal point of winter ‘dancing societies,’ where human figures wearing elaborate masks and costumes would emerge through painted screens to impersonate mythic supernatural beings for assembled guests. Of all the Northwest Coast tribes, dancing societies reached the greatest development among the Kwakwaka’wakw, a group who occupy the north end of Vancouver Island, and the adjoining mainland directly across the Queen Charlotte Strait. Graphic and plastic expressions were used to make social structure visible. Thus, such pieces would display heraldic crests of kinship groups and would publicly, as well as visually, proclaim the acquired privileges of high ranking nobles. Crest designs were made visible on a host of items which included house front designs, canoes, headdresses, robes, staffs, boxes, and many other things. Even feasting dishes and spoons were elaborately carved (see plate 1.2).

During the post-contact period, or historic period, a great amount of Northwest Coast material has been collected and examined in museums all over the world. According to Cole (1985:244), “The pace of cultural change, of the integration of the Northwest Coast Natives into European economic and cultural systems, seemed

to the rest of the continent, leaving other Native populations susceptible to European diseases and war long before such things hit the coast.

⁶ Paraphernalia that belonged and was employed for shamanic purposes is also considered to be of ‘religious’ character.

**Plate 1.2 Catalogue no. 16/8964, AMNH 1902-46 (Collected by George Hunt, 1902).
Courtesy Dept. of Library Services, American Museum of Natural History.**

This sea otter feasting dish was discovered in a cave near an old '*Nak'waxda'gw* village. It is constructed of red cedar and would have been used at feasts. This type of carving, although it serves a functional purpose, is an example of the vast stage that the Kwakwaka'wakw social medium created. From functional bowls, such as the one depicted here, to the large ceremonial masks, carved figures were created and expressed on many social planes depicting both the social and religious. This was collected by Hunt during the Jessup Expedition, 1902.

remorseless.” Alarmed by the rate of assimilation, anthropologists and museum collectors alike scrambled to the Northwest Coast to preserve pieces of cultures that seemed destined to disappear (see Cole 1985). These ‘salvage missions’ would dominate and shape ethnographic pursuits on the Coast starting in the late 1800s, only to eventually lose strength in the 1930s. During this time of change, the reactions of indigenous groups to new technologies, encroaching labor markets, and new religious systems differed across the board. Some quickly adapted to the industrial or entrepreneurial wage system with ease, while others converted to Christianity with great conviction. Not all groups would take these paths with such ease; in fact, some were opposed. Cole (1980:245) notes that, “Others clung with remarkable tenacity to selected aspects of their indigenous culture and mode of life, continuing to practice the customs of their tradition and to create the ceremonial items required by it.” In regard to those who persisted, Cole undoubtedly was referring to the tenacious Kwakwaka’wakw. Not only did the Kwakwaka’wakw cling to their traditions amidst a time of incredible change, they did so against the rule of law.

The Social World of the Kwakwaka’wakw, 1884.

(a) Early Epidemics and the Kwakwaka’wakw Numaym System

Population dynamics had an undeniable effect on art and art production. As Macnair (1993:49) suggests, “While we lament the destructive influence of White Society and the irretrievable loss of cultural information through disease, warfare, and indifference, we cannot dismiss the fact that the White man’s presence on the Northwest Coast stimulated an unprecedented movement of ideas and people throughout a territory

where change and exchange had previously occurred at a slower rate.” One factor that had a dramatic effect on the social system was the massive population loss due to epidemics that had hit the Coast in the early part of the nineteenth century. As previously mentioned, the Kwakwaka’wakw population was approximately 10,700 in 1835. Before this date it is difficult to make any estimations due to the fact that contact on the coast occurred in 1792, which was late in comparison to the rest of the country. The population would have been substantially larger, but the introduction of alcohol, firearms, and various diseases had already begun to take its toll. According to Harris (1997:147), “Among the Kwakwaka’wakw, the decade and a half following the construction of Fort Rupert in 1849 stands out as a period of dramatic population decline associated, probably, with a series of wars and the effects of the ready availability of alcohol, as well as the smallpox epidemic.”

With the land-based fur trade still in full swing, the epidemics spread like wild fire all over the province. As trade routes opened, Native traders would travel south to the cities, such as Victoria, where they would stay in encampments on the outskirts. The sanitary conditions in such encampments were poor, and due to over crowding, it was places such as these that the fevers would hit first. The indigenous peoples would evacuate, heading northward towards their respective villages spreading the disease along the way. Harris comments (1997:146), that by the time the anti-potlatch law was passed, the Kwakwaka’wakw population had declined to 2,281. The epidemics which ravaged the Island communities had a massive effect on the social ranking of the Kwakwaka’wakw thus affecting potlatching frequency. The Kwakwaka’wakw population

low point did not come until 1929. Within only one hundred years their population dropped from 10,700 to 1,854.

Ranking among the tribes is an important aspect upon which the social world is created. The system of ranking was similar to that of a clan system, which Boas (1920) refers to as the *numaym* system, deriving from the Kwak'wala word *na'mima* meaning "one kind" (Suttles 1991:86). Every tribe consists of a number of *numayms*, which are each founded or identified by a certain creation story of how the world came to be. Within each *numaym*, there is a hierarchical ranking system which consisted of high ranking chiefs to commoners. Each rank came with a name, attached to certain privileges, with the highest ranking chief being the direct spiritual descendant of the founding ancestor. The potlatch served as the system for inheriting, displaying, and passing on social rank and prerogatives. A Native person could be entitled to a name at birth but never be able to claim it as his own, until he did so formally at a potlatch where the witnesses would verify his claims. Even to a person who was of low-birth, the potlatch served as an important event giving the individual security of identification with his group, as well as a shared pride in the group's chief (Drucker and Heizer 1967:33).

Important to the transfer and bestowal of names and privileges was the Kwakwaka'wakw marriage system. According to Suttles (1991:92), "for the Kwakiutl, marriage was not simply the way to establish a new nuclear family. Marriages were the means by which another large class of names and ceremonial privileges were transmitted, and marriages were often arranged simply for that end." Marriages were carefully planned alliances negotiated between families. The "appearance" of a noble wedding was always that of a suitor making war on a chief so for the chief to give over his

princess and privileges. Accompanied by a large party, a suitor would paddle to the prospective bride's village, whereupon he would formally announce his intentions (see plate 1.3). During the next stage of the marriage rites, the groom would come for the bride with a catamaran made of planks laid across two canoes. The village and the suitor's party would all participate in staged mock battle. After such events, the suitor would pay the bride's father a bride price, and the bride's father would return a gift, usually one of much less value than the bride price, and one or more privileges (Suttles 1991:92). The groom then takes the bride home to publicly display his victory. It is important to note that custom did not always dictate that the groom had to return home right away with the bride. Suttles (1991:94) points out, that in many cases, the groom would stay with the bride's family for a duration of time before returning home to his village with his new wife.

A marriage was not fully complete until the bride's father fully repaid the bride price. The return gift that is given to the groom on the wedding day is just the beginning. Some time after the wedding day, the bride's father repays the bride price to his son-in-law, giving considerably more than he originally received from the groom in the form of material goods as well as names and ceremonial prerogatives (Suttles 1991:94). Thus, when a wedding was finalized, the groom became significantly more powerful in status and spiritual wealth. Privileges were transferred to another person through the marriage of a daughter, or in some cases a sister. Although there were some exceptions to this system, it regulated the passing down of prerogatives, as well as building alliances between families from other locales.

Plate 1.3 Photo by Edward Curtis/NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF CANADA/C-030924

Accompanied by a large party, a suitor would paddle to the prospective bride's village, whereupon he would formally announce his intentions.

An important aspect for future consequences was the fact that, “ranked seats, if left unoccupied, can be lost; and since each seat was created by a founding ancestor, no new seats can be produced”(Masco 1995:47). This was a crucial aspect, especially for pre-colonial times, because the state of the *numaym*, with a certain number of ranked seats, reflected the stability of the cosmos. This reflects the cyclical world order which Kwakwaka’wakw society was structured to maintain. It is important to note that new names, associated with new privileges and dances, could be created not just through marriage, but also through vision quests, and warfare. With the introduction of European diseases, coupled with the influx of western trade goods, the entire ranking system had to adapt. What is important in regards to these new factors is that the cosmology of the Kwakwaka’wakw world was undergoing massive changes, and was no longer under their control because of the population loss. Thus the system which regulated and structured the world had to change in order to bring balance to disastrous turns of events.

As Masco (1995:49) points out, “...the second half of the nineteenth century produced several potentially apocalyptic moments, from epidemic disease to colonial assaults on Kwakwaka’wakw religious practices, which could easily have been interpreted as fulfilling this implicit threat of catastrophe.” According to George Hunt, there were 658 seats or positions in the various *numayms* of the Kwakwaka’wakw (Boas 1925:91). With a massive number of those seats vacant due to the rapid decline in population, commoners who could acquire enough wealth to potlatch could lay claim to a ranked position where there was only a tenuous hereditary link. With a new influx of western goods, as well as new opportunities in the way of cheap labor, potlatching frequency increased as more and more commoners attempted to emulate the chiefs.

Having to respond to such claims, the chiefs themselves were forced to have better and bigger potlatches to retain their prestige in the community.

While some aspects remained fixed, such as the concept of the gift, the outer face of the potlatch changed dramatically during the nineteenth century. In earlier times, it was only the highest ranking Chiefs of a *numaym* that would host a potlatch, thus, there were far fewer potlatches being held.⁷ In these times (early to mid nineteenth century), the Chief of the group could draw on the entire *numaym* to amass wealth, which would reflect the prestige of not only the Chief, but of the entire group. Not only did this system of potlatching, and certainly potlatch frequency, reflect a stability in the fixed ranking scheme, but it also reflected a scarceness in potlatch materials. The influx of trade goods, population loss, as well as the end of warfare dramatically changed this, and certainly had great effect on the Kwakwaka'wakw ceremonial world. More importantly, such factors infused Northwest Coast cultures with new ideas intensifying economic reorganization, population movement, and intertribal marriages. This created a huge change in the potlatching system, "...increasing the movement of privileges and ceremonial gear from one linguistic group to another"(Macnair 1993:49).

(b) Feasting and the Northwest Coast Potlatch

Suttles (1991:104) notes, "although similar, feasts and potlatches were clearly distinguished." Simply put, a feast was a gathering of people who would come together to share food. Many graphic and plastic expressions were clearly evident at such events.

⁷Charles Nowell notes that on some occasions a chief that is second in rank may throw a potlatch. According to Drucker and Heizer (1967:36), Nowell was referring to an instance where the *numaym* was splitting due to group tension, and the younger Chief, who was considered to be second in rank, took a portion of the junior ranking persons and together formed the *walas kwagyul*.

Each *numaym* had its own feasting songs, and *numaym* chiefs would present food in great carved feast dishes and bowls which were designed to represent crest animals. Different from potlatch names, chiefs would have feast names without which they could not attend. According to Suttles (1991:104), "the most honorable feast foods were eulachon oil, high-brush cranberries (*viburnum* berries), and seal meat, in that order, but other valued foods were huckleberries, salmonberries, crabapples, and cinquefoil roots." Such feasts were presented to visiting chiefs in elaborately carved bowls as well as small canoes, while commoners were served foods from smaller boxes.

Different from a feast, the Northwest Coast potlatch is an elaborate event in which the host makes claims to names, rank, hereditary privilege through an elaborate set of dances and feasts, followed by the distribution of material wealth. The primary goal was to present these claims in front of a large audience of chiefs and other people and thus have those claims validated. The host is successful if the audience accepts his gifts, or payments, during the final stage of the potlatch. The potlatch was never an isolated event, in the fact that as a validator of status, it usually went hand-in-hand with another event (Suttles 1991:92). According to Cole and Chaikin (1990:5), examples of such events would be "...the naming of a child, the acquisition of a traditional family name, a girl's first menses, marriage and the redemption of a bridal payment, and death, with the raising of a memorial pole and the assumption by a relative of the name and position of the deceased." More often than not, potlatches traditionally occurred in the winter months during the winter ceremonials, a time when the acquisition of certain privileges and rights are bestowed on individuals such as the initiations into certain dancing

societies. As an institution, the potlatch has changed and adapted over the years along with rapidly changing Kwakwaka'wakw world. According to Macnair (1986:596):

The potlatch was society; it was all-inclusive, encompassing things economic, political, social, religious, ritualistic, and ceremonial. Simply stated, a potlatch involved a payment of goods and food to assembled guests gathered to witness a host's claim to ancestral rights or hereditary position. The transfer of rights from one generation to the next, the acquisition of privileges through arranged marriage, or the assumption of new position could only be concluded through such public events. Thus, the guests, or witnesses, were the ultimate arbitrators; by accepting gifts, they validated the claims of their host and confirmed his status.

(c) *Kwakwaka'wakw Cosmology: Secret Societies and the Dancing Complexes*

The social system of the Kwakwaka'wakw was built on a foundation concerning the idea of spiritual wealth. This system linked both the sacred and the secular, the two seasons of the Kwakwaka'wakw world, together and gave meaning to their lives. According to Boas (1966:172), "The contrast between the sacred and secular seasons is expressed by the Indians by saying that in summer the secular quality is on top; in winter, the sacred quality." Summer months made up the more secular season on the coast, in which families would spend much of their time harvesting food which would support them through the winter season festivities which was the sacred season, or the *tseka*.⁸ Beginning in the late fall, and lasting well into the winter months, the *tseka* would involve heavy ritualized dances and ceremonies, which were designed to tame the supernatural spirits threatening the cosmos. The winter ceremonies were religious in character, and were always intimately linked with non-religious events, such as potlatches and feasts (Boas 1966:172). During this season, the members of the secret societies, would take on new roles within the community, placing them within this sacred world order.

⁸ Although the term has never accurately been translated, Holm (1990:378) notes, "...it seems to imply 'acting', or perhaps 'making manifest the powers of the spirits'."

During the summer or secular season social ranking within the community is hierarchical and based on clan membership, rather than positions in the dancing society of the winter ceremonials (Suttles 1991:94). This of course would seem like two seasons in opposition, but as Masco (1995:46) contends, this is not the case. According to him (Masco 1995:46), "In total, the seasons present a ritual cycle which demonstrates and reinvents the social order: The barren winter months, in which the collective spiritual energy of all the tribes must be focused on regenerating the natural world, are turned into the fecundity of the summer months, when the animal world, placated by continuing ritual, offers itself up for human consumption." The cosmology of the Kwakwaka'wakw world was in need of constant maintenance, and so, purpose was given to their lives, for they were active participants in the maintenance of the cosmological order of things.

Also called the 'Red Cedar Bark Dance,' the *tseka* or winter ceremonials of the Kwakwaka'wakw have retained much of their ceremonial traditions despite the overt government opposition that outlawed them (specifically *hamat'sa* ritual⁹) with the potlatch under the Indian Act of Canada in 1884. According to Holm (1990:378), "The traumatic cultural upheavals of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries resulted in the eradication of many of these traditions and the drastic curtailment or modification of others." The dramatic winter complexes of the Kwakwaka'wakw were never static, even in pre-contact times. There is ample historical evidence, corroborated by oral tradition, that many ritual acts and concepts were diffusing from group to group along the Coast in early times. One example that will be discussed in greater detail later in this

⁹ Under the Canadian legislation in 1884, the tamananawas dances were made an illegal practice as was the potlatch. The term "tamananawas" is a rather omnibus word, derived from lower Chinook trade jargon meaning "being endowed with supernatural power." It also comprised all performances which made up the secret societies (Cole and Chaikin 1990:12).

section, is the cannibal or *hamat'sa* dance, which was, and still is, considered to be one of the most important initiations to take place at winter ceremonials (Boas 1966:174).

As Holm (1990:37) points out, "Kwakiutl dramatic arts cannot be separated from the potlatch. The dance and dramatic presentations that characterize *ceqa* [the *tseka*] and other ceremonial festivals of the Kwakiutl must be validated by public showing and the payment of witnesses." As previously mentioned, the potlatch institution revolved around social ranking, which was presented at ceremonials by Chiefs, shouting out names, ranks, and acting out other inherited prerogatives. The performance itself was not a display of art, nor was it for entertainment purposes; but instead, was a display of privilege. The theatrics of such events, shown in the continued elaboration of masks, and other ceremonial paraphernalia, added even more prestige to a particular person's claim to nobility. Thus, the winter ceremonials became the stage for a chief to show all assembled guests his greatness.

Privileges and positions within the dancing societies were what was important during the *tseka*, whereas secular rank according to *numaym* membership was not. It was usually the high ranking chiefs that would most likely occupy many of the more important positions within the dancing societies. The privileges were said to be the motivations from supernatural beings who contacted the dancer's ancestor. Thus, the dancer has the inherited right to display that union. The dance itself would usually be a re-enactment of the meeting between the supernatural being and the dancer's ancestor in which certain mythological motifs are portrayed, such as hero adventures, the transfer of spiritual power (from the supernatural being to the dancer) and demonstrations of that power, now held by the dancer, as he makes his triumphant return to society. The two

principal spirits that are involved in this drama are *Baxwbakwalanuxsiwe*’ who is the Cannibal-at-the-North-End-of-the-World, and *Winalagelis*, the Warrior-of-the-World spirit; however there are a number of other lesser supernatural spirits, animals and monsters, who were also impersonated by dancers (Holm 1990:379). According to Boas (1966:173), “These and other spiritual beings capture and initiate men and women of the tribe, and the object of the ceremonial is to recapture those taken away and imbued with the qualities of their captors and to restore them to a secular condition.”

During the late nineteenth century, it was common for certain younger individuals to disappear for a considerable amount of time before and in preparation for the *tseka*. Such novices who were chosen to be initiated into the dancing societies were usually said to be under the influence of *Baxwbakwalanuxsiwe*’, and were preparing for their new role in the dancing societies. The novice(s) would usually disappear for approximately four months, and the disappearance would usually be marked by some staged event, where they would be magically taken away by spirits. Not only would the public display of the disappearance mark that fact that a *tseka* was coming up, but it was also an important step in the ritualized rite of passage for the initiate.

By this time, the host of the *tseka* would be deep in preparation. Such preparations included the gathering and hoarding of large quantities of food for feasting. A crucial preparation would be the gathering of objects that manifested privileges to be worn in the festival. Masks, rattles, and blankets had to be collected, and in many cases had to be made. Items of this nature would be constructed by specialists, who would be paid for their time and achievements. Huge piles of bark had to be stripped from cedar trees, dried out, and then dyed red using an a mixture of alder bark and urine (Boas

1966:136). The bark would be used as head rings by the participants, as well as hung from many of the carved masks and other ceremonial objects.¹⁰ Other preparations were slightly more involved, in that it sometimes involved years in order to amass and hoard enough material wealth required for payment and distribution.¹¹ Finally, after most of the preparations were completed, the invitations had to be made. This in itself was an elaborate ritual, and during the late nineteenth century, strict measures were taken in order to follow the proper protocol.

To invite others from nearby villages, an invitation party was sent out in a great canoe. This group would primarily be made up of high ranking individuals, often of chiefly status, from the host's tribe. The inviters would paddle close to the village, and while still out of sight, they would dress in the ceremonial gear and begin to paddle towards the village. Singing a paddling song traditionally sung by inviters, the canoe would make its way close to shore in front of the village. Often in such cases, there was a person who danced on top of planks that were laid down perpendicular to the gunwales of the canoe (Holm 1990:380). Such a person would perform one of the many dances that would be displayed at the upcoming *tseka*. Having heard the commotion, villagers would come down and gather by the beach to witness the arrival of the invitation party. The chief inviter would then stand up and shout out to the assembled people that they were invited to come and witness the initiation of the host's children. After delivering what Holm (1990:380) calls a "...richly metaphorical speech, delivered in dramatic style...", the chief of the village responded by inviting the visiting group to come into the

¹⁰ According to Boas (1935:82), red cedar bark was the principal symbol of the winter ceremonial

¹¹ Holm (1990:380) makes the important distinction that although the payment and distribution of goods was associated with the ceremony, functionally, it was part of the potlatch business that would commence towards the end of the festival.

village for a feast, at which time the group is paid for their services with food and material wealth. The inviters would visit many villages in such a fashion, after which they would return home to report on their adventures to the rest of their village, and specifically to the host of the upcoming *tseka*. When the guests finally arrive at the host's village for the *tseka*, the same sort of ritual displayed by the inviters was repeated. This dramatically staged approach involved songs, dances, speeches, and thanksgiving to the host and the host village. After this drama, the guests would paddle their canoes ashore and disperse among the village to dwell with friends and/or relatives.

During this time, the host of the ceremony would gather all of those who were going to coordinate their own displays with him, as well as the privilege holders who would conduct various activities at the festival, to sit down and plan out the ceremony. As previously mentioned, people set aside their clan affiliations and identify themselves within the ceremonial system that governs the winter dances. Within this system, there are three groups: (1) common people and the uninitiated; those who were without privilege and thus, did not take part in the ceremonials, (2) the dancers and initiated, or 'seals', and finally, (3) the managers or 'sparrows;' those who had dance privileges but were inactive. It was this final group that was in charge of the proceedings, and took such titles as Master of Ceremonies, Cedar Bark Distributors, and Song Leader, as well as others (Holm 1990:380). The managers were further divided into groups based on sex and age, while the dancers and the initiated were divided into groups based on the types of dances performed (Boas 1966:175).

The first thing that was done that marked the beginning of the ceremonies was the singing of mourning songs for friends and/or relatives who have passed away. This was

done in order to “clear the air of sorrows”(Holm 1990:380). In some cases this involved a ceremony in which a person donning a particular mask, which represented one of the deceased chief’s prerogatives, was led into the house by men of high rank. The dance that ensued was said to be the last earthly appearance of the deceased chief, after which the masked figure is led out. Soon after, the high ranking escorts return into the house with the mask and other ceremonial paraphernalia, which symbolizes that privileges being passed down to heirs. As Holm (1990:380) notes, the mourning ceremonies were always completed before sunset, and as of the 1980s, were still being preformed at the beginning of ceremonies.

Usually four days after the host’s planning meeting, four managers are dispatched to go house to house in the community summoning people to a meeting. Of all the people to come, it is the dancers and initiates who are the last to enter the great house, whereupon they bring forth their emblems and ceremonial paraphernalia that will be displayed and used during the ceremonials. At this early stage in the festival, tallow and charcoal are produced and applied to the faces of the participants. Shredded red cedar bark was used to construct head rings. Eagle down was placed on the top of the head within the cedar head ring, and also on the drummers batons (Holm 1990:380). The distribution of the red cedar bark signifies the beginning of the ritual; a ritual in which many of the participants don the cedar neck and head rings (Suttles 1991:94). Certain rights and privileges are needed to wear such items and are considered highly sacred.

The Cannibal Dance is one of the major dance complexes to take place during the winter ceremonials. This dance involves the ritual taming of a novice who was captured from the village and taken by powerful beings, the most powerful being

Baxwbakwalanuxsiwe' (the Cannibal-at-the-North-End-of-the-World), but there are many others as well. In reality the initiate is taken by someone who has earned the right or the privilege to that performance and is taught the songs and dances required to play the role. Usually for a duration of four months or shorter, the young initiate would spend his time in the woods hunting or fishing. During these months away, the novice would return to the village on prescribed occasions blowing sharp whistles and crying "hap, hap, hap, hap", meaning "eat, eat, eat, eat." According to Boas (1970:438), the novice tries to capture his female relatives whose job it is to procure food for him. At these points, the *hamat'sa* will even try to bite people both on their arms and chest. Immediately upon entering the village, twelve predetermined men surround the wild *hamat'sa* while swinging rattles to pacify the cannibal. These rattles were usually shaped and carved in the likeness of human skulls, and were employed by men whose hereditary office deemed it so. Abated, the *hamat'sa* would disappear back into the woods.

During the actual ceremony, and only at the right time, the *hamat'sa* would enter the house completely possessed with the spirit of the cannibal which causes the initiate to cry, tremble, and dance clockwise around the fire, all of which are signs of possession. In front of the assembled guests in the house, they have become the *hamat'sa*, and are completely possessed with the violent desire to consume human flesh (Boas 1970:437). At this point, the *hamat'sa* is naked save the hemlock bows that are wrapped around his waist, wrists, and forehead (see plate 1.4). According to Suttles (1991:97), "The performance demonstrates two things: first, that the initiate had received great power from the nonhuman being that possessed him, and second, that the ritual procedures could control this power and restore the initiate to human society. Many performances

Plate 1.4 Neg./Transparency no. 334020 (Photo by George Hunt, 1902)
Courtesy Dept. of Library Services, American Museum of Natural History.

Photograph of a *Hamat'sa* Initiation at Fort Rupert, 1902. In the early stages of the ceremony the initiate dons hemlock boughs.

included actions calculated to horrify the uninitiated, but most of these were illusions achieved with extraordinary inventiveness and skill.”

According to Kwakwaka'wakw mythology, the Cannibal-at-the-North-End-of-the-World or *Baxwbakwalanuxsiwe*, dwelled in the sky-world with his bird-monster attendants, all of who are present at a certain point during the ritual. Certain mythical ancestors would travel into the mountains to have encounters with the supernatural being in order to gain his power as well as songs and rituals. The novice, that had been taken away by this spirit, was suppose to have lived in *Baxwbakwalanuxsiwe*'s house in the mountains. Thus, totally possessed by the spirit of his keeper on his return, the *hamat'sa* would be crying out “Hap, hap, hap, hap...”, as he would run around biting people, removing small pieces of flesh from their arms. According to Boas (1970:439), George Hunt, as well as others, believed that slaves may have been killed in more traditional times, as well as the desecration of certain corpses. As Suttles (1991:97) points out, this is not known with any certainty because there existed so much slight-of-hand activity during these ceremonies that the human flesh may not have been actually consumed, but more likely hidden away somewhere.

After the initiate makes his first rounds around the fire he disappears once again either into a separate room or behind a large screen. It is at this point that the crowd gets its first glimpses of the attendants that belong to the Cannibal-at-the-North-End-of-the-World. Cries are heard from behind the screen and the masked dancers then come out backwards. They are not out for very long, but long enough to be able to dance around the fire four times after which they exit from where they first came. The arms and hands of these dancers are concealed under their cedar costumes so that they may pull the

strings that manipulate the mouth parts of the masks causing them to open and close. These supernatural beings included the *Hamat'sa*, who was a cannibal in human form, the Raven-of-the-North-End-of-the-World, the *Huxwhukw* which is the long-beaked bird monster servant, and *Galokwudzuwis* or the Crooked-Beak-of-Heaven (see plates 1.5, and 1.6). These three seem to be the most prominent of all of the servants to the Chief Cannibal, however there are others that may be present in this ritual. The somewhat lesser servants include the cannibal grizzly bear, *Baxwbakwalanuxsiwe's* two attendants; a rich woman and the slave woman, and *Nulamal* the fool dancer, popular for his large foolish looking nose (Hawthorn 1967:51). *Nulamal* was the messenger for the *hamat'sa* and would run errands for him (see plate 1.7). They are usually violent, and very non-human. Of all the servants, the bird-monsters and the *Nulamal* wore carved masks, while the rest of the servants would paint their faces black, and they were all adorned in their *hamat'sa* regalia consisting of red cedar neck and wrist rings, skirts, and capes. However, the *hamat'sa* himself wore a different set of head and neck rings for every stage of the initiation (see plate 1.8). After the servants circled the fire four times they would disappear, followed by a reappearance of the *hamat'sa* still in a wild craze. At this point the initiate would be wrapped in a blanket and with the male attendants rattling, would slowly be calmed and thus makes his spiritual return to the society, or returns to his normal state. Many wooden skulls that become accessories of the *hamat'sa* regalia will hang from his costume representing and appeasing the cannibal spirits. "The small wooden skulls affixed to it [the costume] are indicative of the number of times he had danced as *Hamatsa*. Skulls were a symbol of the *Hamatsa's* grisly concern" (Hawthorn 1967:129).

Plate 1.5 Catalogue no. 16/8944 AMNH 1902-46 (Collected by George Hunt, 1901)
 Courtesy Dept. of Library Services, American Museum of Natural History.

Raven *Hamat'sa* Mask. This mask represents one of the attendants of *Baxwbakwalanurwsixe'*, the Cannibal-at-the-North-End-of-the-World. Hunt collected this mask from a cave close to a old '*Nak'waxda'wx*' village site.

Plate 1.6 Neg./Transparency no. 336132 (Photo by O.C. Hastings, 1894)
Courtesy Dept. of Library Services, American Museum of Natural History.

Kwakwaka'wakw dancer wearing the mask of the *Huxwhukw*, who is one of the mythical bird monster attendants of the Cannibal-at-the-End-of-the-World. The *Huxwhukw* has a long pointed beak, with which it cracks human skulls in order to devour the brains. The dancer wears a skirt and leggings of dyed red cedar bark. Photo was taken in Fort Rupert, 1894.

Plate 1.7 Catalogue no. 16/2337 AMNH 1897-43 (Collected by George Hunt, 1897)
Courtesy Dept. of Library Services, American Museum of Natural History.

Nulqmal Mask. Also called the Fool Dancer, *Nulqmal* has various positions in the winter ceremonials. Most importantly, this character is the messenger of the *hamar'sa*, but also enforces the laws which govern proper potlatch behavior (Jonaitis 1990:82). The masks representing *Nulqmal*, as seen here, all emphasize the character's large exaggerated nose. The red ring that is carved around the face of the mask is representative of red cedar bark. On this particular mask, the eyebrows can be raised by manipulating cords, to reveal copper which would reflect the light of the fire, enhancing the mask's dramatic display while danced.

Plate 1.8 Neg./Transparency no. 104469 (Photo by George Hunt, 1902)
Courtesy Dept. of Library Services, American Museum of Natural History.

Photograph of a *Hamat'sa* initiation in Fort Rupert, 1902. As the initiate is progressively "tamed" the hemlock boughs are replaced with cedar bark neck rings.

Although the Cannibal Dance was the highest ranking performance, as well as first to be shown at the ceremonial, there were other dances. Many of the dances, such as the Cannibal dance, were inspired by *Baxwbakwalanuxwsuwe'*, however, not all were. Another important dance was the *tuxw'id*. This dance was inspired by the Warrior-of-the-World, who was described as a tall, thin, black man who was constantly travelling in his invisible canoe. According to Suttles (1991:100), the *tuxw'id* is often a woman who, as a show of bravery, wishes for a terrible death. Showing the assembled guests that she can withstand anything, the *tuxw'id* is disembowelled on stage, burned to ashes, or takes a wedge which is driven through her skull. As Holm (1990:381) comments, "...the *tuxw'id* gave the Kwakiutl dramatic flair its greatest opportunity." One can immediately understand why! Finally, after the gruesome ordeal is over, much to the delight and amazement of the crowd, the *tuxw'id* returns to life and completes her dance. The demonstration of the power of invulnerability is one of the supernatural abilities that is given to the woman from an encounter with the Warrior-of-the-World. She also had the ability to give birth to frogs, allow birds to fly, and to make puppets and carvings move.

Another important dance that demonstrated the acquisition of power was the War Dance, which allowed the dancer to be suspended above the audience by his pierced skin, showing his insensitivity to pain. A great amount of pain would have been endured by the dancer, for it was customary to sew small wooden paddles onto his arms and chest. Slits were cut into the back, as well as the legs, through which attendants could pass ropes through which would proceed to lift the dancer up off the ground. The climax of the ceremony was when the dancer was suspended by the house beam, showing all the power of the Warrior-of-the-World (Suttles 1990:383).

Immediately following the last dance of the ceremonies, wealth objects were distributed to the witnesses of the event. This would happen after all of the initiates had demonstrated their privileges, and the closing songs were sung (Holm 1990:383). During these final songs, a man would walk around the room and collect the cedar bark head rings, which signalled that he intended to host the next *tseka*. The business of distributing the goods to all those who attended would take usually be concluded the following day, and the order and amount that was given to each individual depended on social rank. However, it is important to stress that during the *tseka* the secular power of the chiefs, as well as the clan membership, was suspended. In other dancing ceremonies, this was not the case.

According to Suttles (1991:113), family histories show that the Kwakwaka'wakw had been part of a social network of exchange for generations with tribal groups who dwelled beyond the limits of the *Kwak'wala* language. With the expansion of potlatching and joint winter ceremonials, new complexities entered the Kwakwaka'wakw ceremonial system during the nineteenth century. Through marriages with the Heiltsuk and the Oowekeeno, Kwakwaka'wakw chiefs acquired dances of a new series which were erroneously called the 'summer dances.' This error was most likely due to the seemingly diametrically opposed seasons of the Kwakwaka'wakw world. Somewhat lower in esteem than that of the winter *tseka*, these dances were based around the appearance of figures that had the status of clan crests, rather than supernatural affiliations. Called the 'Weasel Dance,' or *Xa'sela*, the dances were never held at the same time as the *tseka*, and active dancers in the winter ceremonial complex were not allowed to attend the

Xa'sela (Holm 1990:384). By the mid twentieth century, the two ceremonies were performed back to back, in the same house and with the same participants.

In this dance, the initiate would appear from behind a curtain wearing a dancing blanket, apron, and headdress with a carved frontlet that often was shell-inlaid and was adorned with that members crest figure. Stiff sea lion whiskers were usually applied to the top of such head-dresses in order to hold the eagle-down in place that was customary at such ceremonials. In some cases, deer skin or cloth was draped down the sides and back of the head-dress covering the back of the neck and the shoulders adding to the chiefly design of the head-dress. Different animals and other supernatural figures were carved onto the front piece of the head-dress and they were painted with traditional colours. The initiate also carried a rattle, similar to the classic Northern Northwest Coast raven rattle, rather than the more globular rattles employed in the *tseka*.

During the dance, the dancer was teased and ridiculed by his attendants who mock his movements, until the point when the initiate finally loses his temper and rushes out of the house. His attendants then left the house to find the initiate but would return unsuccessfully carrying only his headdress and blanket. The initiate was nowhere to be found. Soon after this revelation, rumors begin to quickly circulate (alluding to the fact) that the initiate has been kidnapped by the figure from which his *Xa'sela* privileges had derived (Holm 1990:384). With the sounds of whistles and horns, the initiate would return to the house in the form of his crest figure. Singers would begin to sing the appropriate song, while the initiate dances around the fire with his attendants blowing eagle down over him.

The masks of this ceremony were often extremely elaborate in design and presentation. Transformation masks were often used in this ceremony and were testament to the elaboration employed by artists, and dancers who presented them. These masks, as well as others, displayed more than one character often depicting the crest figures and their mythical transformation abilities.

The Stage for Dramatic Arts

Kwakwaka'wakw dramatic arts were not simply limited to the dancing complexes. According to Holm (1990:384), "The transfer and bestowal of names and secular privileges; the buying, selling, and breaking of coppers; feasts; and speeches were all elaborated dramatically." The potlatch was the focal point for art and art production, simply because it served as the arena in which ancestral rights or hereditary positions were strengthened and passed down from one generation to the next. To reiterate a point made earlier by Macnair (1986:596), this arena encompassed all things religious, social, economic, political, ritualistic, and ceremonial. Dramatic arts penetrated into every aspect of Kwakwaka'wakw society. From strictly functional objects, such as bowls and feast dishes, to house posts which supported the large cedar beams of roofs, figures were carved on many different planes depicting both the social and religious.

By the late nineteenth century, a considerable amount of change had already occurred in Kwakwaka'wakw society. Documentation from this period shows that there was a distinctive style, and even sub-styles among many of the Northwest Coast tribes, which was a departure from the earlier situation (Macnair 1993:47). Although many groups during the late nineteenth century began to experience a decline in the production

of art, others, such as the Kwakwaka'wakw, began to experience a new vigor in artistic production. New trends, as seen in ceremonial art and art for tourist sale, were beginning to take shape despite declining populations, and religious suppression. The fact that individual styles can be recognized as belonging to a particular artist, suggests a certain flexibility in the art form, despite the rules that govern it (Macnair 1993:47). This was different from the past situation, in that more or different information was being brought to bear in viewing the art. As will be shown in further chapters, individual artistic experimentation and creativity was not only acceptable, but it was crucial in terms of keeping a living form of expression alive. Even so, the art form was governed by certain prescribed boundaries and rules; however, there was room to move and experiment artistically within those boundaries. After 1884, the work of certain Kwakwaka'wakw artists, such as Willie Seaweed, Charlie James, and Mungo Martin, showed an incredible amount of creative innovation, contributing to an overall flourishing of Kwakwaka'wakw art and ceremony which would continue uninterrupted until 1921.

CHAPTER TWO

Flourishing Kwakwaka'wakw Artistic Traditions Amidst Early Potlatch Prohibition, 1884-1921.

Admittedly certain tribes had some success in retaining the old ways but artistically at least, the Southern Kwakiutl were the most successful. Their fierce determination ensured the survival of the potlatch, despite tremendous pressure from authorities. As a result their art remained viable as did the role of the artist in traditional society.

Peter Macnair, *The Legacy*

The purpose of this chapter is to illustrate the visible changes in plastic and graphic cultural expressions that were occurring in Kwakwaka'wakw communities from 1884 to 1921. From the time the anti potlatch legislation came into affect in 1884, until the time that the law was exercised to its fullest extent in 1921, a massive visual transformation was occurring throughout Kwakwaka'wakw communities and has been documented both in historical and anthropological literature, as well as visually through the photographer's lens. Photographs from this time period become an important tool that document such changes. When Boas visited Fort Rupert in 1894, evident signs of change colored the landscape. Kwakwaka'wakw houses were noticeably different, as some had new front walls constructed with milled lumber. Most houses were still of the 'traditional' character, in that they were framed with hand-hewn posts and beams, and the wall planks were lashed onto the posts horizontally. Although the houses themselves

were the same, new 'house fronts' of milled planks, which were consequently all nailed on vertically, replaced the old horizontal hand-hewed cedar boards. Pictures taken from this time period capture the changes of communal appearances, and also, as with Fort Rupert and other Kwakwaka'wakw villages, show the emergence of painted house front designs displaying *numaym* crests.

Another astonishing new feature found in Kwakwaka'wakw communities of this period were free standing totem poles which displayed *numaym* affiliations as well as single figures commemorating potlatches (Suttles 1991:117-8). According to Malin (1986:77), during the mid-nineteenth century there would not have been a pole to see in any of the villages; however, during the late part of that century, there was a large number of poles being carved and raised throughout Kwakwaka'wakw territory; a trend which would be strengthened straight through until the early 1920s. To illustrate this transformation, photographs taken throughout this time period, specifically of Alert Bay, document the flourishing of the monumental carvings during this period.

Referring to this period, Neel (BC Indian Arts and Welfare Society 1948:13) notes, "the Golden Age of totem art had arrived. Totems sprouted on every village beach. Chiefs vied each other in giving potlatches. This made work for the artists who flourished now and plied their trade." One factor that influenced the artistic flourishing of the period was the rise in potlatch frequency, as discussed in the earlier chapter. According to Duff (1997:81), "more wealth was available, and the higher death rate resulted in more positions of importance being open. The competition to fill them was keen." This competition played out visibly in the communities as chiefs boasted their high positions through new displays of rank. House front paintings and frontal poles

emerged during this period displaying high ranking *numaym* affiliations. With new tools allowing artists to work with a greater ease and refinement, art and art production underwent a tremendous transition. For the first time, this visual transformation was also occurring outside of traditional Kwakwaka'wakw communities.

Aside from the visiting anthropologists, missionaries, museum collectors and trade peoples, the Kwakwaka'wakw world remained, for the most part, isolated from the rest until the late nineteenth century. People outside of British Columbia were beginning to catch their first glimpses of Native life on the Northwest Coast from accounts of ethnographers, museum collectors and other early explorers. The first time that Kwakwaka'wakw art and ceremony was substantially seen outside Native communities began with the opening of a Northwest Coast exhibit at Chicago World's Columbian Exposition in 1893. Among the "living Indian" displays, was a group of Kwakwaka'wakw, consisting of fifteen adults and two children amidst ceremonial paraphernalia, canoes, totem poles, and even a traditional Kwakwaka'wakw house! In front of hundreds of ticket buying tourists, the Kwakwaka'wakw group displayed their dances, and at one point, to the disgust of the assembled on lookers, cut slits into the back of one of their members and inserted twine so that the dancer could perform the excruciatingly painful War Dance. According to Jonaitis (1988:120), the show did not get very good reviews. Such displays outside of the traditional Kwakwaka'wakw ceremonial realm would have been unheard of in the decades before.

With a rising interest from the outside world, a new market for Kwakwaka'wakw carvers was opening in terms of art for sale. The miniaturization of the totem pole, an object that quickly became the hallmark for Northwest Coast culture, was an adaptation

that allowed the carver to produce the piece in a relatively short period of time, and also to appeal to the buyer, who was usually a tourist who had no room to carry large purchases (Dawson, Fredrickson, and Graburn 1974:31). For the first time, Kwakwaka'wakw carvers were crafting pieces for reasons other than Kwakwaka'wakw consumption or traditional use.

During the late 1800s and well into the early decades of the 1900s, Kwakwaka'wakw plastic and graphic expressions were not only beginning to transform, but they were also entering new arenas for different spectators and clients. This trend toward transformation in regards to art used for traditional purposes continued well into the twentieth century, as will be seen with the emergence of Kwakwaka'wakw totem poles raised at Alert Bay. Ideas concerning the secrecy of ceremonial paraphernalia also seemed to be changing. Items that were once considered sacred due to ritual association were now being danced at fairs both in Chicago (1893), and later in St. Louis (1904).

1893: World's Columbian Exposition (Field Museum)

Visibility of the expressive nature of Native life was something that was slowly permeating the mainstream of non-Native societies during the late nineteenth century. Popular vehicles of interest portraying Native life such as William F. Cody's (Buffalo Bill) Wild West show drew in millions of spectators from around the world during the production's run from 1882 to 1913 (Blackstone 1986:1). Around the same time, Native artifacts were beginning to be displayed in museums all over the world. With public interest mounting, expressions of Native life and culture were slowly diffusing outside of Native communities.

One example of this rising interest could be witnessed at the World's Columbian Exposition that was held in Chicago in 1893, held in honor of the 400th year anniversary of the discovery of America by Columbus. For the first time at an international exhibition, a building dedicated solely to anthropology would be constructed. Of the many curators and exhibitors, Franz Boas was made an assistant within the ethnology division and thus made the push for a substantial Northwest Coast component. Through years of coordination and planning, Boas, with the help of George Hunt,¹² was able to bring down a group of seventeen Kwakwaka'wakw people from Fort Rupert, who were selected to represent the "standard" of Northwest Coast tribes (Jacknis 1991:181). Along with the Kwakwaka'wakw group, various ethnographic specimens were collected to build the exhibit, mainly by Hunt, which included a large house, canoes, ceremonial paraphernalia, and complete 'traditional' outfits to show what the daily life of Natives was. Consequently, photographs from this period show that most Natives were wearing much the same types of clothing as non-Natives (Suttles 1991:119).

By the fall of 1892, Hunt had completed the collection that was required for the exhibition, which after the Fair, would stay in Chicago to be part of the permanent collections at the new Field Museum. With more than 360 items, heavily emphasizing the winter ceremonials, the shipment of goods destined for Chicago was held up in Fort Rupert for the entire winter due to unfavorable weather. Finally, by mid-April of the next year, the group of Kwakwaka'wakw arrived in Chicago and began to set up their "village" by the anthropology building on the exhibition grounds (Jacknis 1991:183).

¹² George Hunt was the field assistant to Franz Boas, as well as many other early ethnographers, whose research involved the Kwakwaka'wakw. Born of a Tlingit noble woman from Alaska, and an English Hudson's Bay Company man, George Hunt was born and raised in Fort Rupert, BC, and was for all intents

From here, the group would spend the summer demonstrating their crafts and performing their ceremonial dances for the crowds of sightseers and tourists (see plate 2.1). According to Cole (1985:124), every single Kwakwaka'wakw secret society was represented, including the *Hamat'sa*, Grizzly Bear, and *Nulmal*. In all, more than twenty thousand people came and had their first glimpse of the secret societies of the Northwest Coast (Jonaitis 1988:119). For the first time ever, dances that were considered to be sacred, as well as secret, were being performed outside Kwakwaka'wakw communities for a completely different audience.

Among the "living Indians" display, the Kwakwaka'wakw people lived out the duration of their stay in their constructed large house, that was elaborately painted with thunderbird and moon images. According to accounts, the dances and other ceremonial 'shows' went off with out a hitch; however there was one performance that caused quite a stir! Jonaitis (1988:120) describes the performance:

In August 1893, some Kwakiutl cut slits in their backs through which they inserted twine. After dancing for a while to the beat of the drum, these Indians became more and more frenzied and finally started wildly thrashing about, beating each other with clubs, snarling like wild beasts, and biting the flesh of one another Kwakiutl present.

The show itself lasted for over an hour, but by the time it finished a large portion of the five thousand spectators had already left, sickened by what they had witnessed. When the story was written in the *Sunday Times*, the Rev. Alfred J. Hall, an Anglican missionary who had spent considerable time in Alert Bay, protested to Ottawa that the Kwakwaka'wakw involvement in the exhibition should immediately cease.¹³ "At Chicago on his way to London, he [Hall] had personally observed that the U.S.

and purposes raised Kwakwaka'wakw (Jacknis 1991:177-181). His career was that of a middle man and interpreter.

¹³ According to Cole (1985:130), Hall had been successful in 1885, in keeping a group from Fort Rupert from not going with Adrian and Phillip Jacobson to Germany.

Plate 2.1 Neg./Transparency no. 322897

Courtesy Dept. of Library Services, American Museum of Natural History.

Northwest Coast Indian exhibit at Chicago's World Fair, 1893. For the duration of their visit in Chicago, the Kwakwaka'wakw lived in their house that was elaborately painted with thunderbird and moon images. In this photo, George Hunt stands to the immediate right of the house.

government was proudly exhibiting civilized bands from their industrial schools, while from Canada came 'only this display of paganism, chosen by Dr. Boaz because the most degraded he could find in the Dominion'"(Cole 1985:130).

In October, the Columbian World's Fair ended, and the Kwakwaka'wakw troupe headed back for Canada by train. Boas himself was glad to see them go, and according to Cole (1985:131), the anthropologist swore "never again to play circus impresario." With the proceeds from the Fair, Hunt paid each troupe member one hundred and fifty dollars, and then with his people, returned to Fort Rupert, only to suffer from a serious measles epidemic that took the life of his son. While Kwakwaka'wakw life and culture was on stage in Chicago, what was not being displayed was the harsh reality that Kwakwaka'wakw culture was under immense pressure and hardship.

Presentations and productions of the secret societies in front of non-Native audiences was slowly becoming a small industry in itself, despite the vocal objections from missionaries. It was at such events, that Natives could also sell carved, as well as woven, objects. In his autobiography, *Smoke From Their Fires* (Ford 1941), Charlie Nowell, a high ranking Chief from Fort Rupert, talks about the occasion when he and a group of other Northwest Coast Natives went down to an Exhibition in St. Louis in 1904. According to Nowell (Ford 1941:186), "It was Dr. Newcombe that took me and Bob Harris from here, and three men and two women from the West Coast [Nuu-chah-nulth] to the states. We went first to St. Louis to the Exposition. The men was doing some carvings there to sell; the women was doing baskets and mats. We had three or four Indian dances there. We used to make the people that came to see the dance pay so much to come in." Consequently, one of their dances caused quite an uproar that almost landed

some of them in jail. Harris and Nowell had befriended a Pigmy man who was also staying at the fair and was part of the “living displays” as well. On one particular evening, Harris constructed a model of the Pigmy man that was made entirely of mutton and was seemingly lifelike in appearance. For some bananas, the Pigmy man agreed to play along with Harris’s plan. That evening on stage, the Pigmy man was switched with the mutton dummy. The unsuspecting crowd then watched in horror as the Native performers began to roast and devour the Pigmy. Judging from the reactions of the audience, it would seem that the Kwakwaka’wakw theatrics and sleight-of-hand activities of the winter dances proved to be a little overwhelming for the crowds in St. Louis. Even Newcombe was fooled. According to Nowell (Ford 1941:188), “Dr. Newcombe never came near us, he was so scared at what Bob Harris had done. That was a murder, he said; that means he is going to be hanged.” By the time the show/ceremony was over, the Pigmy man came out and it was then realized that nobody in fact had been eaten. “Dr. Newcombe slapped his knee and said in a loud voice, ‘Smart boys!’ Then he got up and made a long speech, telling the people about the Indians in British Columbia and how they could do wonderful things”(Ford 1941:189).

Mungo Martin, Charlie James, and Willie Seaweed: The Early Years

When Boas arrived in Fort Rupert, in November of 1894, he was no stranger to the village or the people living there. His first fieldtrip to the Northwest Coast was in 1886, which involved a brief stay at Fort Rupert. According to Webster (1992:30-1), during this initial visit, Boas was confronted by a chief who questioned his intentions. In a speech made to the first time visitor, the pressures of the anti-potlatch law are evident.

We want to know whether you have come to stop our dances and feasts, as the missionaries and agents who live among our neighbors try to do. We do not want to have anybody here who will interfere with our customs. We were told that a man-of-war would come if we should continue to do as our grandfathers and great-grandfathers have done. But we do not mind such words. Is this white man's land? We were told that it is the Queen's land; but no! It is mine! Where was the Queen when our God came down from heaven? Where was the Queen when our God gave the land to my grandfather and told him, 'this will be thine'? My father owned the land and was a mighty Chief; now it is mine. And when your man-of-war comes, let him destroy our houses. Do you see yon woods? Do you see yon trees? We shall cut them down and live as our fathers did. We will dance when our laws command us to dance, we will feast when our hearts desire to feast. Do we ask the white man, 'Do as the Indian does'? No, we do not. Why then do you ask us, 'Do as the white man does'? It is a strict law that bids us dance. It is a strict law that bids us distribute our property among our friends and neighbors. It is a good law. Let the white man observe his law, we shall observe ours. And now, if you are come to forbid us to dance, be gone, if not, you will be welcome to us (Webster 1992:30-1).

For his 1894 visit, George Hunt had prepared lodging for the anthropologist, and according to Suttles (1991:119), Hunt never left Boas's side, offering him constant guidance. Due to the fact that the ceremonial had already begun, Boas had missed the opening of the dances at which point the red cedar bark would have been distributed, as well as the arrival of the new *Hamat'sa*. In all, the dances went on for over twenty days and are well documented in "The Social Organization and Secret Societies of the Kwakiutl Indians"(1970:544-606). At the festivals, Boas himself gave two feasts at which he presented his Kwakwaka'wakw friends with pictures that had been taken during the World's Columbian Exposition the year before (see plate 2.2). It was also during those festivals that Boas met a young Kwakwaka'wakw boy named Mungo Martin.

Martin was born in Fort Rupert in 1881, three years before the potlatch law went into effect. His father's name was *Yanukwalas*, a high ranking name which means "Nobody Leaves His House Without A Gift," but was later changed by whites to Martin. His mother's name was *Nagayki*, which means "Mountain of Wealth," and she was the daughter of a Kwakwaka'wakw woman and a Scottish man who worked for the Hudson's Bay Company, George Findlay. As a small baby, Martin was taken to a well known

Plate 2.2 Neg./Transparency no. 336121 (Photo by O.C. Hastings, 1894)
Courtesy Dept. of Library Services, American Museum of Natural History.

Kwakwaka'wakw guests at Boas's feast in Fort Rupert. Those who are seated on the top part of the platform wearing the cedar neck rings are members of the Cannibal society.

artist in the community whose name was *Yakutglasomi*, meaning “Gifted One.” It was at this artist’s dwelling where rituals were performed to insure that the young Martin would grow up to be a great artist himself. *Yakutglasomi* took four eyelashes from the baby and combined them with porcupine bristles to make a paint brush.¹⁴ The artist then took the paintbrush and began to paint and in doing so ensured young Martin’s future as an artist (BC Indian Arts Society 1982:1). Other ceremonies were also conducted to ensure Martin’s path. Again as a baby, Martin was placed inside a drum which was lightly beaten to the tempo of a chant during a ceremony. “It is said the drum was a cedar box about three and a half feet square and that Mungo’s father was the drummer, gently tapping the side with sticks and softly crooning family songs handed down from one generation to another”(BC Indian Art Society 1982:2). The rituals were to prepare him to study, absorb and retain the traditional knowledge that was held by the older people. Mungo was also taught from an early age by his grandfather *Kwa Kwa Ga Lis* and by *Omhit*, or “The Maker of Songs.” In time, this early training would serve Martin well, as he grew to become a powerful and talented singer.

As a boy, Martin took a keen interest in the songs and ceremonies of his people, and would spend hours of the day whittling wood, trying to emulate the older carvers. It was during these times that Boas met Martin during his 1894 visit to Fort Rupert, and photographed the young artist who was dressed in the Fool Dancer’s regalia. In the photograph (see plate 2.3), Martin stands second to the left, with his face painted with the designs of the fool dancer’s society (Jonaitis 1988:241). After the death of his father, which happened when Martin was in his late teens or early twenties, his mother married

¹⁴ The traditional Kwakwaka’wakw way to make paintbrushes was done in this fashion, save the eyelashes of the baby which were only employed during such a ritual.

Plate 2.3 Neg./Transparency no. 106706 (Photo by O.C. Hastings, 1894)
Courtesy Dept. of Library Services, American Museum of Natural History.

Fool dancers of the Kwakwaka'wakw winter ceremonials. The child second to left is Mungo Martin, who was steeped in the traditions of his people at a young age due to his high birth.

Charlie James, who by that time was a skilled carver, and only five or six years older than Martin. Due to the close proximity in age, the two became more like 'pals,' rather than father and son (Nuytten 1982:75). Only attending 'school' for two or three weeks, Martin, under the guidance of James, began to create masks, ladles, small totem poles and carved wooden boxes. He assisted James in the carving of many poles, masks, and other objects which were used during potlatches and winter ceremonies, and were still in high demand. Martin soon became an apprentice to his step-father.

Charlie James had been born around 1867 in Port Townsend, Washington.¹⁵ His father was a white man who went by the name Thomas Jameson, and was an owner of a small saw mill. James's mother was Kwakwaka'wakw, whose name was *Kugwisi'la'ogwa*, and was from Fort Rupert, British Columbia. When James was still a boy his mother passed away, leaving both himself and his two sisters in the care of his grandmother (on his mother's side). Although, according to Nuytten (1982:13), *Kugwisi'la'ogwa's* mother wanted to take the children back to her home on the northern end of Vancouver Island, Jameson would have nothing to do with it. It was finally agreed upon that the two girls would stay with their father and thus would be raised as whites, while young Charlie would go with his grandmother back to Canada to be raised among his mother's people. It is interesting to speculate as to why Jameson let his only son go. The boy was blue eyed and fair skinned and thus, could very easily been raised as a white without the stigma of being a "half-breed." James also spoke very good English and only knew a few words in *Kwak'wala*. Nevertheless, the boy, who was not

¹⁵ From the small amounts of literature in publication on the life of Charlie James, there exists a considerable amount of discrepancies about dates and places. One example is in a text titled *Kwakiutl Art*, by the late Audrey Hawthorn. In a short biography of James (Hawthorn 1967:258), Hawthorn suggests that

even ten, left his father and two sisters to travel with his grandmother to her home at Fort Rupert. Soon after the move, Charlie changed his last name to James, simply because it was much shorter and easier than "Jameson"(Nuytten 1982:13).

As a young man, James was involved in an accident that left him disfigured for life. An accidentally discharged shotgun blew off most of his left hand leaving him with only a thumb and forefinger. James was very self conscious about his hand, and even though it was still functional he hid it from view. The people who knew him best always noted that his left hand was always in his pocket, or smock when he worked. Even as he grew older, his sensitivity over his disfigured hand did not diminish. He even had a light mitten that he would occasionally wear, but in the company of strangers he would always act as if he only had one arm, doing absolutely everything with his right hand.

Although his damaged hand hindered his abilities in certain areas, Nuytten suggests (1982:14), that it is probably because of this wound that he got into the world of art production in the first place. Due mostly to his insecurities, and not the actual physical wound, James did not participate in the popular activities that other boys his age engaged in. He kept to himself, and with the basic skills that had been shown to him by his neighbors, James began to carve canoes.¹⁶ From this, his celebrity as a carver began to spread. Nuytten notes (1982:14), that many people would come to help James with the preparation of the cedar log that in turn would be carved into a canoe. This involved removing the tree from the woods and rolling it down to the beach where it would be finished. This task incorporated rollers, the use of rope, and most importantly many

he was actually born in Victoria, and not in Port Townsend, Washington. It is agreed however, that he did grow up as an infant with his father in Washington, rather than in Canada with his mother's people.

helping hands. According to James's son-in-law, Charlie Newman, "Some people helped him chopping out the canoes-some for a few days, some for shorter times-and an awful lot of people watched! Those who helped were paid off by a bit of potlatch"(Nuytten 1982:14).

In and around 1895, James married Sarah Findlay, who was the daughter of a Hudson's Bay Company man named George Findlay and a Kwakwaka'wakw woman named *Kasa'las*. Prior to her marriage to James, Findlay was married at a young age to a man named *Yanukwalas*; a marriage from which she had four sons, one of whom died shortly after birth. The three other boys were named Spruce, Herbert, and Mungo Martin. After Sarah's first husband died, James took on the three boys as his step sons, and together with Findlay had two daughters named Emma and Lucy.

James, unlike many of his contemporaries, was a full time carver. This is most likely because of his hand injury, limiting him from such popular pursuits within the commercial fishing industry (Nuytten 1982:15). It was because of his full time occupation, that he not only carved ceremonial and functional objects commissioned by other Natives, but carved tourist art for a new growing trade market. With his apprentice and stepson, Mungo Martin, the two traveled a great deal creating miniature totem poles. He, accompanied by his apprentice, "wandered," as Ellen Neel called it (Nuytten 1982:15), while living for periods of time in Vancouver and Victoria, but always returning home to the Kwakwaka'wakw villages of northern Vancouver Island.

By 1915, James had returned to northern Vancouver Island whereupon he took up residence at Alert Bay. From a small wooden shed that was built on the beach, James

¹⁶ Canoes on the Northwest Coast were carved from large Cedar trees which were of great abundance. The paddles were carved from Yew wood, which is much harder and more difficult to carve compared to red

carved the majority of works that made him famous. Although potlatch prohibition was in full swing during the early part of the twentieth century, totem poles were being carved and raised in many Kwakwaka'wakw villages in numbers that had never been seen before. This resurgence of totem carving, at a time when the obligatory ritual procedures for raising the pole would land everyone involved in a Vancouver jail, was not seen anywhere else on the Northwest Coast, save the handful of Kwakwaka'wakw villages, some of whose members were actively involved in the underground potlatching complex. Charlie James, as well as his stepson Martin, were directly involved in this drama, and the carved poles standing on the beaches of many of the Kwakwaka'wakw villages, such as Alert Bay, testify to their involvement. This is not to mention the person(s) who commissioned the pole(s), nor the many who would have taken part in the illegal potlatch to commemorating the raising of a totem. The story behind the appearance of so many totem poles during the 1920s is an important key to understanding the transformation of cultural expression during those times, and will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter.

As previously mentioned, James was instrumental in the potlatching complex and was a staunch supporter of it during prohibition times. Described as a quiet and shy man, he was not one to stand and shout out claims of rank and nobility, nor was he a dancer or an initiate into any of the secret societies. He was more comfortable sitting behind the scenes and watching. This does not diminish his great depth of knowledge and perception of his culture, nor does it diminish his role in the potlatching society. From his silent seat he would have watched many of his masks come to life as they were danced around the fire. One example of such masks, was a *Hamat'sa* Multiple Mask that

and yellow cedar, however, the Yew is

he carved for his friend and stepson, Mungo Martin in 1914. Another fine example of potlatch paraphernalia carved by his hands was a twenty foot grease dish used for feasts, that took the shape of a *Sisiyutl*; a double headed serpent which was a powerful Kwakwaka'wakw crest symbol.

Aside from Martin and James, there were other artists during this time period who contributed to resurgence of pole carving, thus finding employment for their creative talents. Some of the most imaginative Kwakwaka'wakw artists from this period could be found among the 'Nak'waxda'xw of Blunden Harbour, as well as from the neighbors to the north, the *Gwa'sala*. Taken together, these artists make up the *Blunden Harbour School*, whose art was characteristically highly detailed, increasingly flamboyant, employed fine craftsmanship, as well as the use of enamel paints.¹⁷ The one particular artist that stands out among the Blunden Harbour school was the 'Nak'waxda'xw artist Willie Seaweed.

By the time that Fort Rupert was established in 1849, the 'Nak'waxda'xw were a strong, and powerful tribe of peoples living on the coastal mainland. Hugging the shores of the northern Queen Charlotte Strait, the villages of the 'Nak'waxda'xw boasted a population of 1,900, with 40 slaves, 500 canoes, 100 guns, and 40 houses (Curtis 1915:303).¹⁸ One of the most prominent 'Nak'waxda'xw villages at that time was *Tigwaxsti*, which means "coming in sight (or hanging) at mouth," (Boas 1934:55) and as the name suggests, was located at the divergence of Nugent Sound from Seymour Inlet. Mainly used in the winter, the village site was located close to Nakwakto Rapids, which

¹⁷ The Blunden Harbour school was made up of such artists as Willie Seaweed (*Hilamus*), Johny Davis (*Lalakanxid*), Chief George (*Pudlidakami*) and his brother Charlie George Sr. (*Xalxidi*), and George Walkus of Smith Inlet. The younger generation constituted of Joe Seaweed, Charlie George Jr., and Charley G. Walkus.

was a narrow entrance used to enter the Seymour Inlet network, which was within a two day paddle from the village (Holm 1983:20). It was the people of this village who in 1865 captured a Kitkatla warrior during a retaliatory raid.¹⁹ This warrior was Willie Seaweed's father.

Living among the 'Nak'waxda'xw, Seaweed's father would become *Hilamas* or the "Right Maker," who was the head of the *Gixsam* numaym (meaning "All Dressed Chiefs").²⁰ Not much is known of him, except that he was a carver despite the fact that none of his work has been identified. Seaweed's father died shortly before his son was born around 1873. What is interesting to note, is that Willie took on his father's name *Hilamas* when he was still a young boy which was not necessarily the custom. According to Boas (1970:341-43), a boy would not take on his father's potlatch name until he was at least 12 to 15 years old. Holm notes (1983:23-4) that, because Seaweed's parent's wedding was arranged, it was, at least in some part, made to ensure that certain privileges would be passed on to younger generations. For this reason, Seaweed's father ensured that his eagle name was transferred to his heir to prevent any chance of losing it, thus showing familial concern for tradition. Willie Seaweed therefore, was given the title *Hilamas*, the chief of his clan which would have been a heavy burden for such a young man due to the ceremonial obligations attached to high rank. A position such as his, required him to uphold it by such ways that governed his forefathers. This was done by holding feasts, and distributing wealth in the prescribed amounts to those whose positions

¹⁸ These figures were gathered by John Work, who was a Hudson's Bay Company trader who prepared a census of all the Northwest Coast tribes in the years 1836-41 (Holm 1983:19).

¹⁹ It was not long after this time, approximately 1873, wars had ceased as different tribes interacted more freely (Holm 1983:22).

²⁰ The 'Nak'waxda'xw were made up of six numayms, with the *Gixsam* being first in rank. The other numayms in the tribe were the *Sisantle*, *Tsitsamilakala*, 'Walas, *Tamlamlals*, and *Kwakwagul* (Boas 1970:329-330).

and names required it. *Tigwaxsti* was abandoned in the years that followed Seaweed's father's death, and the community moved to a remote village called *Ba'a's*, located in Blunden Harbour.²¹ With the end of inter-tribal warfare in the middle of the nineteenth century, potlatching relations with neighboring groups increased. With the new village home at Blunden Harbour, the *'Nak'waxda'xw* began to forge closer ties with the *T'lat'lasikwala* of Hope Island, the *Gwa'sala* of Smith Inlet, as well as the *Kwagu'l* from Fort Rupert, who were only ten miles away, directly across the Queen Charlotte Strait. The move would have also affected and increased potlatch frequency and social interactions among groups.

According to Holm (1983:27), little is known about Seaweed's early years as an artist, however, *Ba'a's* was home to many talented artists. Many were close relatives of the *Gwa'sala*, from whom many talented artists came, thus indicating a societal emphasis on art production. From an early age, Willie was surrounded by many of these gifted people, and thus what emerged from this area was some of the most imaginative carvers of the time. The nineteenth century art from this area was recognizable at a glance due to its flamboyant yet conservative style. Holm (1983:22) attributes this distinctive style to the isolated geographic position of the communities. It is because of the isolated village sites, that many of their customs and traditions were kept intact in comparison to other Kwakwaka'wakw communities.²² By the turn of the century, Seaweed was beginning to make a reputation for himself as a young talented artist under the tutelage of his older half-brother Johny Davis (Holm 1974).

²¹ The approximate year that the *'Nak'waxda'xw* people left *Tigwaxsti* for Blunden Harbour is speculative at best. Conflicting reports from Boas (1921:1050), Blenkinsop (Dawson 1888:65), and Curtis (1915:307) place the exact date somewhere between 1860 to 1897. Despite the discrepancies, Holm (1983:24)

The Golden Age of Kwakwaka'wakw Totem Poles, 1884-1921.

As previously mentioned, many changes had occurred in Fort Rupert when Boas returned in 1894, and signs of that change were visually evident. The houses of the village now had new house fronts that were constructed with milled lumber, rather than the more traditional hand-hewn boards. The milled boards were nailed vertically to the houses, where in the past, the hand-hewn boards were lashed onto the houses horizontally (see plate 2.4). There were also several house front paintings which displayed the *numaym* affiliations of the owner of the house (see plate 2.5). What is of great interest, is the appearance of free standing totem poles which represented *numaym* crests, and carved figures commemorating potlatches. Such objects were not seen in earlier times, and certainly changed the visual landscape of the village. Resulting from an increase in potlatch frequency, discussed briefly in the earlier chapter, large carved columns began to appear representing and reaffirming the nobility of certain high ranking individuals. The earlier forms of totem poles can be generally classified as two main types: (1) carved figures which commemorated potlatches, and (2) plain poles surmounted by a single carved figure. Although totem poles were rising in Fort Rupert in numbers never seen before, photographs taken during the period show that Alert Bay experienced a massive and unparalleled transformation in visual appearance. For all intents and purposes, 1884 to 1921 was the golden age of Kwakwaka'wakw totem poles and the transformation of Alert Bay testifies to this.

estimates that the move most likely occurred close to 1885. It could be possible that the move did not happen at once, but over a duration time that lasted years.

²² *Ba'a's* was even more remote than *Tigwaxsti*, from which the *'Nak'waxda'xw* people moved.

Plate 2.4 Neg./Transparency no. 411810 (Photo by H. I. Smith, 1898)
Courtesy Dept. of Library Services, American Museum of Natural History.

Counting Blankets at a Fort Rupert Potlatch in 1898. The buildings in the background are crafted with gabled roofs and vertical milled planks on the façades.

Plate 2.5 Photo by G. M. Dawson/NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF CANADA/PA-037980

Dawson photographed this house in Fort Rupert, 1885. The house front painting depicts a raven within a circle, accompanied by two bears.

As Nuytten (1982:20) points out, it is the people involved with the pole who make up its real story. It is because of this, that the carving of a pole is serious business right from the start. In the initial stages, there are many lengthy discussions between the artist and the client to determine what will be carved and how those figures will be presented. The figures were all crests that the client had the right, through inheritance and social rank, to display. Charlie James, for example, often constructed many different models for his clients, all having the same figures but with slight differences in their presentation. These discussions would not just occur for the carving of a pole, but also for other paraphernalia that would be contracted for traditional purposes, such as items that are employed during potlatches or other traditional ceremonies. Items such as masks, rattles and headdresses were all commissioned through an artist only after long consultation. The figure(s) had to be presented in a manner that was traditional, yet at the same time different from all of the rest. Artists who were extremely imaginative, as well as having a creative flare were thus in high demand. A dance mask that is visually traditional, and yet is elaborately flamboyant in some new inventive way makes a real statement about its owner. It also makes a real statement about the artist who carved it.

According to Malin (1986:76), when examining the development of monumental carving among the Kwakwaka'wakw, "...we must consider two developmental timeframes: an earlier period of prototype poles continuing to the 1870s and '80s, and a second phase that includes the last decade of the nineteenth century plus the first two decades of the twentieth." Due to the fact that until very late in the nineteenth century many of the Kwakwaka'wakw communities existed in relative isolation from Western influence, they kept their social organization and institutions intact. The isolation from

Western influences, as Malin (1986:76) suggests, is probably the circumstance that provided the Kwakwaka'wakw with the tenacity and a respite from the pressures generated by the anti-potlatch legislation.

According to Malin (1986:76), in contrast to other Native groups on the Northwest Coast, the Kwakwaka'wakw did in general terms remain aloof from the encroaching Christian culture save the acceptance and adaptation of new Western tools and materials, which were advantageous to them. There was never any issue among the Kwakwaka'wakw concerning the propriety of non-traditional paints or tools. New tools such as axes, hatchets, chisels, and knives, were seized enthusiastically and what resulted was an incredible transformation in the art. Totem poles were seen in villages all over Kwakwaka'wakw territory, where there had been only a few poles before. With new forms evolving, and artists in high demand due to the increase in potlatch frequency, the art was alive. Kwakwaka'wakw artist Ellen Neel (Nuytten 1982:50) admits that, "I can find no instance where an idea, a material, or a tool was not used simply because it had never been used before."

The actual transformation of the visual landscape of Alert Bay, in particular, can be better understood by briefly examining Adrian Jacobsen's diaries for a point of comparison. Jacobson visited many of the Kwakwaka'wakw villages in 1881 and was disappointed at the lack of monumental art. According to Malin (1986:76), "He notes his disappointment in what he saw, reporting nothing of significance in the way of totem poles, at least nothing that approached the Haida and Tsimshian practices." Jacobson does report small memorial and house poles, as well as the beginning of the house front poles which at that time were plain poles surmounted by a single carved figure.

The renaissance of Kwakwaka'wakw totem pole carving occurred in the immediate years that followed Jacobson's visit. This renaissance began in Alert Bay, which was still a very young settlement. Named 'Yglis in Kwak'wala, Alert Bay was comprised solely of eleven houses which were identical in size and constructed with traditional design and method. The houses were lined up on the beach facing the ocean, and from early photographs, not a single carved column is visible. Malin (1986:77) asks, "Whether the Nimkish left poles in their former village is an intriguing question that will forever elude an answer." By 1874, photographs of Alert Bay indicate additional activities were occurring (see plate 2.6). Some of the houses in the village acquired large traditional designs on the façade or 'house front' which indicated the *numaym* affiliations and family crests of the house residents (see plate 2.7). House front painting, although new to the Kwakwaka'wakw settlements, was practised sporadically throughout the more northern groups. Despite the adoption of a northern technique, the house front paintings themselves were, in content and style, entirely within the framework of Kwakwaka'wakw artistic design (Laforet 1986:154). Despite the arrival of house front paintings in 1873, the village of Alert Bay was still devoid of anything that resembled a totem pole (Malin 1986:77). From 1873, it would take only twenty five years for the village of Alert Bay to be covered in carved poles.

From a picture taken in 1981 by Dossetter (see plate 2.8), a panoramic view of the village can be seen, showing the edge of the industrial area in the south and the mission in the north. In the picture, one can see that the style of house fronts has changed as indicated by the façades of vertical planks and gabled roofs. Flag poles are now evident in the village, as are two totem poles; one in the north end, which is a plain pole

Plate 2.6 Courtesy of British Columbia Archives D-04293
Photograph by R. Maynard, 1874.

Alert Bay, 1874. Photograph shows the row of houses which have been constructed with broad hand-hewn cedar planks. According to Laforet (1986:150), "with a couple of exceptions the house facades were constructed in the old southern coast style: horizontal planks held in place between slender poles and secured with withes." Compared with photographs of Alert Bay taken in 1881 (see plate 2.8), and later in 1910 (see plate 2.11), one can see the significant changes that occurred in the community.

Plate 2.7 Neg./Transparency no. 329173 (Photo by R. Maynard, 1873)
Courtesy Dept. of Library Services, American Museum of Natural History.

This is a picture taken of the first painted house façade that appeared in Alert Bay in 1873. In front of the door stands the owner of the house. Above him, a sign reads "TLAH.GO.GLASS, NIMKESSE CHIEF."

Plate 2.8 Neg./Transparency no. 42271 (Photo by Edward Domesetter, 1881)
Courtesy Dept. of Library Services, American Museum of Natural History.

By 1881, the village of Alert Bay was beginning to change in appearance. This picture shows the edge of the industrial area in the right of the frame, and the mission located at the far northern end of the village. There appear to be only two carvings similar to totem poles: one at the south end and the other located at the far north end. Both are plain poles surmounted by a single carved figure. The houses are constructed with gabled roofs and facades of vertical planks. Some houses are decorated with geometric shapes painted around the moldings of the facades. By this time, there are only two houses in the village that have house front paintings decorating the facades.

surmounted by a single carved figure, and another pole of similar nature in the far south. Many of the house fronts seem to be painted or whitewashed. There are some house facades that appear to have geometric, or 'checker' like designs painted around the moldings, and two houses now are decorated with house front paintings (Laforet 1986:150).

Harlan Smith, a young self-trained archeologist who was working for Boas at the time, first visited Alert Bay in 1898, and although the general appearance of the village had not changed that much since Dossetter's picture was taken in 1881, there were a few obvious changes (see plate 2.9). The first was the *Wak'as* pole. Chief *Wak'as* was a high ranking '*Namgis*'²³ living in a house at the south end of Alert Bay at the time when Smith first arrived. In Smith's 1898 picture, Chief *Wak'as*'s house has a façade of tongue-and-groove boards, is painted white, and has a dark colored border around the parameter (Laforet 1986:149). There also happens to be a massive, elaborately carved frontal pole! The pole itself was carved with multiple figures, with the bottom-most figure donning a six foot beak which served as a doorway. *Wak'as* by far had the most dramatic and impressive façade at the time Smith's 1898 picture was taken. By this time, the house front paintings, as well as the geometrical designs painted along the house moldings, appear to have faded away. There is a new 'plain' pole near the north end of the village which holds a single bird with outstretched wings. It is difficult to deduce from the picture, but according to Laforet (1986:152), just north of the new plain pole is the frame of a house façade which has a tall pole in front of it. Carved on to the pole, about half way up, is a copper.

²³ Chief *Wak'as*'s father belonged to the *Owikeno* people who lived near River's Inlet. His mother belonged to the '*Namgis*' (Laforet 1986:147).

Plate 2.9 Neg/Transparency no. 411790 (Photo by Harlin Smith, 1898)
Courtesy Dept. of Library Services, American Museum of Natural History.

In 1898, the village of Alert Bay looks very similar to how it appeared in 1881, with one huge exception. Standing in front of a house belonging to a chief named *Wak'as* is a massive frontal pole; the first of its kind in Alert Bay. Other, more subtle changes have also occurred in the village. The mission, located at the farther, more northern end of the village now has a steeple. Just past the mission, five new "European style" houses have been built. The two house front paintings seen decades before have weathered away. Six flag poles are standing in the village, as well as the two plain poles surmounted by single carved figures. The frame of a new house façade is being constructed just south of the mission, and in front of it is a large flag pole with a carved copper attached to it mid way up.

By 1909, the *Wak'as* house has had yet another facelift, this time in the form of an elaborate house front painting. In a picture taken by Smith again, one can see that the façade now dons the wings and tail feathers of the great raven, which is the bottom figure on the pole (see plate 2.10). Laforet (1986:152) notes that the actual painting of the façade must have happened before September of 1900, as the house front painting is clearly evident in an earlier photograph taken by C. F. Newcombe. A considerable change in the visual landscape of the village occurs in the first decade of the twentieth century. By 1910, a picture by T. Davis shows a large number of poles standing in Alert Bay (see plate 2.11). The two buildings to the north of the *Wak'as* house each have a large elaborate totem pole out in front. In fact, there are a considerable number of poles now lining the beach. Although there are still several canoes on the beach, two masted fishing boats now appear directly to the right of the *Wak'as* house. New overhangs have been built above platforms on the beach.

By 1920, the face of Alert Bay changes once again. The earthen pathway that leads its way down the village between the houses and the ocean has now been paved with planks set horizontally by one house, vertically by the next. Above the paved wooden street run hydro wires. Some of the original houses have disappeared as have some of the original poles from ten years before. New windows and doors have been cut into many of the house facades, including the *Wakas* house. According to Laforet (1986:154), "Throughout the period between 1890 and 1920 houses were modified so that their outward appearance became more similar to that of European houses. Windows were introduced, doorways were framed, and even sheds came to have a different appearance. By the 1920s one house had a bay window in the façade."

Plate 2.10 Neg./Transparency no. 46014 (Photo by H. I. Smith, 1909)
Courtesy Dept. of Library Services, American Museum of Natural History.

The *Wak'as* house has gone through yet another face lift. This elaborate house front painting was added to the façade around the turn of the century. According to Kwakwaka'wakw mythology, the 'Body of the Raven', was the house front painting on the house of Raven-at-North-End-of-World in the house of the Chief Cannibal (Laforet 1986:152).

Plate 2.11 Courtesy Royal British Columbia Museum. Negative no. PN 2588-c
(Photo by T. Davis, 1910)

It can be seen that in 1910, there were several frontal poles lining the main street. According to Malin (1986:129), more poles were raised in the years to follow, however, the ones illustrated here were eventually earmarked by Provincial authorities for museums and parks in the south. Consequently, the graveyard where more poles were raised in the 1930s and 40s is located approximately a quarter of a mile to the right of this picture.

During the first phase of poles, that can be characterized as those that were raised in the late nineteenth century, the carved columns were quite simple. They were roughly carved with large sized figures, both animals as well as humans, that were separated from each other in blocked out spaces arranged one above the other. According to Malin (1986:77), there were some attempts at modeling in the round, however, for the most part the poles were not of the elaborate nature as would be seen with later works in the early twentieth century. The rigid figures were rarely interlocking, showed little surface decoration, and were painted only to highlight anatomical features.

With the second wave of pole carving, which began in the early twentieth century a massive transformation in monumental carvings was occurring. Totem poles were appearing much more frequently and with a new mixture of elements that comprised both the characteristics of older poles, but also with newly adapted elements which clearly resembled elements of Haida design.²⁴ Indicative of this new shift, totem poles increased in height and width. With this shift, the individual figures grew in size and elaboration, often interlocking with other figures emphasizing relationships between animals, humans, and the supernatural (see plates 2.12, and 2.13). Aside from this, poles were also beginning to show individual expression which was brought about by distinctive carving adaptations, as well as the freer application of colors. This was testament to the fact that artists were becoming not just improved carvers, but more adventurous (see plate 2.14). Examples of this elaboration can be seen in photographs of Alert Bay from 1910 to 1920. According to Malin (1986:79), "Rather than being bound by the hard and fast rules that

²⁴ During this intensification period, many Tlingit families from the Tongrass village in Alaska were settling in different Kwakwaka'wakw villages. Around the same time, a Kwakwaka'wakw artist named *Hayharnoos* settled in Alert Bay and introduced Haida and other northern styles to the community (Malin 1986:77).

Plate 2.12 Courtesy of British Columbia Archives H-07204

Totem pole on the street of Alert Bay, 1914.

Plate 2.13 Courtesy of British Columbia Archives H-07205

Totem pole on the street of Alert Bay, 1914.

Plate 2.14 Neg/Transparency no. 46027 (Photo by H. I. Smith, 1909)
Courtesy Dept. of Library Services, American Museum of Natural History.

A chief's house with two frontal poles in Alert Bay, 1909. The poles depict Thunderbirds surmounted over grizzly bear crests. European styled houses, such as this one, first started appearing in Alert Bay during the very early stages of the twentieth century.

governed the work of Haida carvers, Kwakiutl carvers adopted a more flexible position, experimenting with new ideas, new colors, new forms. They showed less concern for formal patterns and less restraint in forms and they improvised a great deal. They made their own rules which resulted in freeing their imagination to meet with the larger challenges at hand - the integrity of their traditional culture.”

With such dramatic changes occurring in Alert Bay during the turn of the century, the village set the pace for other Kwakwaka'wakw settlements. With the number of poles increasing on the street in Alert Bay, waves of influence were spread throughout Kwakwaka'wakw communities all of whom tried to participate in the resurgence that was occurring. During the second phase of pole carving, totems were seen in Fort Rupert, Turnour Island, Village Island, Gilford Island, Quatsino, Kingcome, and Hope Island (Malin 1986:77). It was out of this period, that a new generation of carvers emerged, the most prolific being Willie Seaweed, Mungo Martin, and Charlie James.

Emerging New Avenues of Art and the End of an Era, 1921.

With Willie Seaweed learning under his half-brother Johnny Davis (as well as other carvers from *Ba'a's*), and Mungo Martin apprenticing under Charlie James, both men learned the trade under traditional apprenticeship relationships. This sort of relationship dictated that the student watch the master and then try to emulate or copy what their teacher had produced. Through trial and error, the apprentice begins to master the necessary skills needed until which point they can begin to express their own personal flair. Around the late nineteenth century, carvers were learning different and innovative skills due to new technologies, as well as changing markets and clientele. From this shift,

different sorts of 'artists' emerged with their works being aimed not just towards the traditional or communal needs, but towards tourist art. Miniature totem poles created for tourist sale were becoming more common during the beginning of the twentieth century. Seaweed, James, and Martin, had all directed energies to this pursuit to differing extents during their respective careers.

Despite the new emerging avenues of art and the flourishing of monumental carving in the early stages of the twentieth century, a swift sudden act of enforcement under the anti-potlatch laws changed the entire social world of the Kwakwaka'wakw people. Tensions were slowly growing in the beginning of the twentieth century, and factions were starting to become more defined concerning the law banning the potlatch and other rituals connected to the winter ceremonials. Although there had been some prosecutions prior to 1921, the law had been virtually ignored for the first twenty years of its existence. This changed suddenly when the law was finally exercised to its fullest after a potlatch thrown at Village Island, in 1921. The potlatch, hosted by Dan Cranmer, was said to have been the largest ever thrown. The RCMP officer who was posted at Alert Bay, Sgt. Donald Angerman, had many Native informants who considered themselves 'progressive'²⁶ and felt that the potlatch was wrong. With their help a list was made of those who attended the potlatch.

Angerman, with a compiled attendance list, went around to the communities; in all he arrested over eighty people for the Cranmer potlatch. James Sewid, a

²⁶ The idea of the 'progressive' Native, was most likely attributed to the Rev. Hall's legacy. According to Webster, "Hall was instrumental in the breakdown of family units in a society where kinship ties had always been very strong"(1992:32). It was taught, through his school, that the ceremonies and languages of the older peoples were wrong. As a result, he isolated a small but growing faction away from their families who were still practicing the old traditions. "The legacy of Hall's efforts may be seen among older people who know little of their family histories, including names and dances, and have nothing to tell their young

Kwakwaka'wakw chief, comments on what happened in his autobiography, *Guests Never Leave Hungry* (Spradley 1969:54). George Luther, the teacher at the school house in Alert Bay and a student of Rev. Hall, told the students that school would be cancelled for a couple of days because there was going to be a court case held in the class room. The government officials told the people that if they gave up their masks, coppers, and regalia and everything else they owned that was connected to the potlatch they would not have to go to jail, and thus sentences would be suspended. There were only some people from Cape Mudge, Village Island, and Alert Bay who did what they ordered. The items were collected and put in a big building behind the Indian office in Alert Bay, and later shipped to museums in the east. The people who had refused to give up their possessions had to go to court in the classroom. Some of them were from Fort Rupert, Kingcome, New Vancouver, and Turnour Island. The people who were convicted had to stay in the school room and sleep on the floor. The mounted police locked the school up at night and guarded the door, until which time the convicted were sent south by boat where they were forced to serve a two to six month sentence in a Vancouver jail. Many of the high ranking chiefs were sent to jail, which caused great disgrace for their communities and families. With the law cracking down, the potlatch could no longer be openly practiced as it was throughout the early decades of the twentieth century.

The great transformation of Kwakwaka'wakw cultural expression that took place between 1884 and 1921 can be attributed to several factors. In conclusion, I will attempt to outline those factors here, in no specific order due to the fact that the visual

people"(Webster 1992:32). This is the legacy of residential schools, and its effects on northern Vancouver Island were significant in rallying support for the potlatch prohibition.

transformation that occurred was in no part due to one single event or stimuli, but, as this chapter has shown, has been the combination of many.

(a) Increase in Potlatch Frequency

The first, and arguably the most influential stimulus for the increase artistic production, was in fact the increase in potlatch frequency. This increase was seen throughout all Kwakwaka'wakw settlements starting in the mid 1800s and peaking in the early 1920s, thus, this period has been coined 'the potlatch period.' It is interesting to note that right in the middle of this period, the law banning the potlatch came to pass, and despite this, potlatching continued unhindered for the most part. The increase in potlatching was spurred on in part by the massive populations losses and their effect on the Kwakwaka'wakw social ranking system.²⁷ According to Suttles (1991:110), "...the Kwakiutl moved from a situation where there were many adult males without seats to one where there were too few to occupy the seats available." Thus commoners could emulate chiefs by bidding for seats to which they only had a tenuous hereditary link. This situation, combined with the influx of wealth available to anyone who could work, increased the competition for ranked position. Increasing competition meant increasing potlatches, as well as increasing amounts of material wealth hoarded and distributed (see plate 2.15).

(b) New Media of Expression

With renewed emphasis on potlatching and other traditional ceremonies, competition was fierce, and in many ways, played itself out visibly in the communities. Lineage houses started to have large painted facades, and a little later, large frontal poles

²⁷ See chapter one of this essay.

Plate 2.15 Courtesy Royal British Columbia Museum. Negative no. 2307-b
Photo by J. Welsh.

Potlatch on the street at Alert Bay before 1914. In the background, three large frontal totem poles can be seen. New European styled windows have been constructed into the house facades. Although the potlatch was banned under Canadian law, the law was quite weak, and thus huge open potlatches, such as the one depicted in the photo, continued to be practiced until the law cracked down in the early 1920s. According to Jonaitis (1990:159), this potlatch has been identified as Bob Harris's.

indicating that the chief who lived there was of noble rank within his *numaym*. Soon after the first painted house front arrived, more were sure to crop up. The frontal poles spread quickly through Alert Bay, but also throughout the entire region. Not long after, many other Kwakwaka'wakw communities were adapting the same elaborate monumental carvings. At the same time, European influences were beginning to be seen with the clothing worn, and later with the dwellings themselves as they adopted Western styled windows and doors.

(c) Influx of Western Tools and Material

The Kwakwaka'wakw did accept and adapt quickly to new Western tools, as well as other material, which were advantageous to the carvers. New tools such as axes, chisels, and knives, not to mention new paints, were all seized with great enthusiasm, resulting in an incredible transformation of the art. Artists began to take their carvings to new elaborate levels, but all the while remaining, in content and style, within the Kwakwaka'wakw artistic expression (Laforet 1986:154). With new forms growing and evolving over a such a short period, it must have been an incredibly exciting and innovating time for artists. Artists such as Willie Seaweed, Charlie James, and Mungo Martin were becoming innovators and were in high demand during the late part of this period. Many of the poles that were standing on the beaches of Kwakwaka'wakw settlements testify to their involvement.

(d) Increased Visibility Outside the Community

In late nineteenth century, and even more so in the twentieth century, other shifts in Kwakwaka'wakw graphic and plastic expressions were emerging. Art began to enter new arenas for different spectators and different clients. People outside of British

Columbia were starting to catch their first glimpses of Kwakwaka'wakw art, aside from the collections of Northwest Coast artifacts found in museums the world over. Staged sacred ceremonies were shown for entertainment at several exhibitions, such as in Chicago (1893) and St. Louis (1904). With the rising public interest, a new market had emerged for Kwakwaka'wakw carvers, in terms of art for sale, and many artists began to fill this niche. This was the first time that artists had begun to produce works for the consumption of a culture other than their own.

In the years that would follow the Alert Bay trials of 1922, art produced for Kwakwaka'wakw consumption declined but never disappeared. Once again the art and art production transformed due to the social dynamics of the times. Although there was only a few artists that were producing art for Kwakwaka'wakw consumption during prohibition times between 1921 and 1951, certain individuals such as James, Martin and Seaweed stand out. The combined efforts of such artists during those times ensured that the art form did not die out within the Kwakwaka'wakw communities. Due to their efforts, Kwakwaka'wakw art and art production survived to the present in an unbroken manner.

CHAPTER THREE

Representation Within the Kwakwaka'wakw Community

The name Hilamus means "Right Maker," the one who sees to it that things are as they should be, and Willie Seaweed lived up to his inherited name.

Bill Holm (1983:24)

With the potlatch the primary focus for art and art production, the effects felt by the sudden enforcement of the potlatch legislation in 1922 changed the course of earlier artistic trends, as it did the entire potlatching system. After the Alert Bay trials things changed in terms of what was visible. It would be natural to assume that the production of ceremonial art, or art for the community, would simply disappear; however, as this chapter will show, that is far from the case. Despite the fact that potlatching had to be done in secrecy after the events of 1921, artists were still in high demand. It was during this period that Willie Seaweed, as well as Martin and James to some extent, were carving vast amounts of potlatch regalia. Throughout the dark times of potlatch prohibition, artists continued to carve and evolve, despite ceremonial suppression (Macnair, Hoover, and Neary 1980:71-7). Master carvers continued not only to teach younger generations the skill of carving, but also created vast amounts of seemingly 'illegal' material, allowing potlatching to continue underground. Despite the efforts of

such individuals, the golden age of totem pole carving had come to an end. Although some poles were still being commissioned and carved, many of the older ones, as seen in Alert Bay, were being moved into the village grave yard, or sold to collectors for museums in the south.

The general appearance of the communities was changing in other ways as well. New European style houses quickly became the dominant type of dwelling, displacing the large communal houses which housed not only other families, but large festivities such as ceremonials and potlatches. The general shift in dwellings from the larger 'communal houses' to the smaller European styled houses, resulted in yet another transformation of Kwakwaka'wakw social rituals. In fact, by the time the potlatch law was dropped from the revised Indian Act in 1951, many communities did not even have their own big house in which to hold the now 'legal' dances. A picture of the village *Gwa'yasdums* on Gilford Island, taken by Barrow in 1933, shows the gradual desertion of the older style of houses (see plate 3.1).

Kwakwaka'wakw society during this period was undergoing rapid change. With new labor markets opening, many Natives took on jobs within various commercial industries, such as the lumber and fishing industries. In fact, according to Kew (1990:162-2), the technology of commercial fishing was developed by Native expertise. Knowledge concerning migratory patterns of the local fish, as well as local navigation skills in the uncharted channels of the coast, were key to the development of the commercial industry along Vancouver Island. Other economic pursuits that were of particular significance were opportunities in the canneries. Because of new economic

Plate 3.1 Courtesy Royal British Columbia Museum. Negative no. PN 2440
(Photo by F. J. Barrow, 1933)

The village of *Gwa'yasdams* on Gilford Island near Alert Bay, 1933. This photo shows the gradual abandonment of older styled houses. The skeletons of two large houses can be seen. The large house to the left was owned by Dick Webber and was called "The Sea Monster House" (Malin 1986:131). The pole that stands to the right of Webber's house was carved by Mungo Martin around the turn of the century.

obligations, many Natives began to spend less time involved in ceremonial activities. Despite this, illegal Kwakwaka'wakw ceremonies did continue.

The Kwakwaka'wakw Underground Potlatch, 1921-1951

“By stealth, disguise, surreptitiousness and an ingenious use of legal loopholes, they continued an underground resistance that stymied all efforts at enforcement”(Cole and Chaikin 1990:2). In the aftermath of the Alert Bay trials of 1922, the potlatch was pronounced to be dead by Halliday, an Indian Agent (Cole and Chaikin 1990:138). Although this may have seemed to be the case, Halliday regretfully remarked in the latter years of his career that, “...although the prosecutions which took place some time ago killed it for the time being, I am sorry to say that I have reason to believe that it has broken out again”(Cole and Chaikin 1990:138). Quite contrary to the belief of Mr. Halliday, the potlatch never did simply roll over and die. According to testimony, activities did quiet down somewhat immediately after the events following Dan Cranmer's famous potlatch most likely due to the shock on the part of the Native communities that so many of their chiefs were actually arrested, with many of them having to serve jail time in Vancouver. Thus, the potlatch went underground and was not openly practised again until thirty-one years later, in 1953.

The potlatch was thus forced to undergo massive transformation, and in this case, it was a matter of survival. One of the main strategies employed was to hold potlatches at remote locations. With Indian Agents, police officers, missionaries, as well as other Native people who supported the anti-potlatch law, unaware of the illegal activities, the potlatch could proceed uninterrupted. Alert Bay was out of the question, simply because

that was where the Indian agent and police were both posted; therefore distant sites had to be chosen. Chief James Sewid, when commenting on the potlatching scene in Alert Bay, remarked, "Once in a while, if I wasn't too busy, I would go to one of the other villages for some potlatch that was being put on, but I didn't do anything myself or put on anything at Alert Bay. Sometimes something would go on at Alert Bay in a very quiet way, and without calling all the people together someone would go around to the homes and give some things away"(Spradley 1969:146).

According to Cole (1991b:52), one of the most inaccessible villages was that of *Gwa'yi* at Kingcome Inlet. This was the site that the Gilford Islanders moved to in the winter months during the 1920s. Over sixty miles away from Alert Bay, *Gwa'yi* was a site which was built at the end of a long, narrow river that froze over in the winter. It was a perfect site simply because it would be easy to see and hear someone coming in with a gas powered boat, and difficult at best for the agents to penetrate in the winter months. "The village's security was irksome to agents. They proposed to break it by disguise, by stationing a policeman there, even by using seaplanes, but all such proposals proved impractical or too expensive. The Gwayi fortress remained unbreached" (Cole 1991b:52). There were other remote locales that were used (i.e., Cape Mudge, Village Island, and Fort Rupert), but none of them as good as Gilford Island (see plate 3.2)(Cole and Chaikin 1992; Cole 1991a).

Another strategy employed has been termed the 'disjointed potlatch,' and was not really practiced until the early 1930s. This new style of potlatch was conducted in such a way that it could be practised at home under certain guises, so that the authorities could not prosecute. The law at the time stated that it was illegal to give property away at any

Plate 3.2 Courtesy Royal British Columbia Museum. Negative no. 15250-42.

Dancers at a winter ceremonial which took place at Gilford Island in 1946. Interestingly enough, these pictures are said to have been taken by a provincial policeman (Jonaitis 1990:170-1). The man not wearing a mask in the back row (fifth from the right) is Willie Seaweed.

dance, festival, or ceremony. It was because of this, that the Kwakwaka'wakw potlatchers separated the two. "The Kwakiutl simply separated the thing in half, having their dances on one occasion and then giving away later, making it difficult to prove that the one was part of the other"(Cole 1991a:161). The Indian Agent, William Halliday, once witnessed a dance in 1931 at Fort Rupert, but could not make any arrests simply because nothing had been given away. A year previous to this occasion, 1500 sacks of flour had been delivered to Village Island (Cole 1991a:161). When authorities would stop to inquire about the massive amounts of goods being distributed, the Natives would simply state that they were just trying to be good Christians by helping out their neighbors. Other times which were advantageous for the distribution of material wealth were during Christian holidays such as Christmas when people would literally go from door to door handing out goods that corresponded to a potlatch dance that had already transpired or was set for some future date.

Christmas became an especially important time for the potlatchers. Under the holiday guise, they could conduct their feasts, or "Christmas dinners" as they called them, and then distribute the wealth, which was all nicely wrapped with ribbons and bows. "In Alert Bay in December 1934, Moses Alfred simply tagged each item within a great heap of goods with the name of the person for whom it was intended and walked away. Such evasions depended upon the solidarity of the Kwakiutl. No one turned witness, and thus the authorities could obtain no evidence" (Cole 1991b:52).

Some marriages were still held with a traditional potlatch. The first was the marriage of James Sewid and Flora Alfred, in Alert Bay in 1927, at which Sewid's grandfather threw a big potlatch. In order to do this, Sewid's grandfather had to go

around to all of the houses in the community, distributing money and other forms of material wealth, in order for his grandson to be honored. Sewid's mother had all of the women in the community come to her house, whereupon she distributed dishes, pails, and utensils (Cole 1991b). According to Sewid (Spradley 1969:71), "After I got married it was in the Indian custom that I couldn't return to my home at Village Island right away....I was a respected man and they treated me different from any other person because I held a big position and a high name. They all respected me that day." Due to his high birth within the *numaym* system, Sewid admits that the treatment he received that day was different from most, clearly indicating that there were many Kwakwaka'wakw who continued to adhere to tradition.

A groom's payment was given to all of the Chiefs on the day that Arthur Shaughnessy married Jane Nowell. Cole (1991b:52) commented on this wedding by saying: "A church wedding was followed by a feast and a dance 'in the white man's way,'" but Charlie Nowell, the bride's father, announced that everyone could go to the movies free on Saturday night, and he brought candy, cakes, and fruit to distribute there. Later, when one of the couple's daughters died, men were sent around the village with \$300 to give away. Nowell comments (Ford 1941:227), "If the Indian Act hadn't been enforced, I would have called all the people here for a potlatch, and we would have gone through all the ceremonies. As it was, she was buried in the white man's way."

"What is too often neglected in discussions of the anti-potlatch campaign is the role of Indian converts. The initial ban in the 1880s was a direct response from pressure from such Indians, as well as from missionaries and Indian Affairs officers. Observers of the Northwest Coast noted that the Native minority who supported prohibition of the

potlatch were Christian converts and young people who faced many decades of paying out before they could look forward to reaping their reward from the redistributive ritual” (Miller 1990: 392). Not all Kwakwaka’wakw of this time period were active in the illegal potlatches; in fact many of them weren’t. There was a large cohort of Native peoples who by the early part of the twentieth century were in favor of the anti-potlatch law. Many of this cohort had become “Christianized,” and believed that progress could only be attained by turning away from the potlatch and the traditions that it entailed. During those times, Christianity had taken hold in the communities, and many of the younger people saw no benefit in following in their forefathers’ footsteps. Despite factions, none of these illegal events could have gone unnoticed by the authorities if there had not been some sort of solidarity within the communities. To become an informant at this point would have been a betrayal of the entire community and surely that person would have been ostracized.

Although the times were changing, artists were still in high demand throughout the potlatch prohibition years. Not only were their services required within their communities, but the art itself also continued to grow and evolve with the times, showing that despite the overt attempts by government officials to suppress the religious and social Kwakwaka’wakw institutions, social actors still had room to move and influence the outcome of events. It was because of the efforts of a small handful of artists and those who supported them, that the graphic and plastic expressive traditions of the Kwakwaka’wakw were kept alive.

Boas’s last visit to Vancouver Island was in 1930. During the trip he wrote a letter to his son Ernst, in which he said, “I had a council with the Indians, who are really

suffering because of the stupid persecution of their customs by the government....It goes so far that the children in school are not allowed to draw in the traditional style of their people, but according to prescribed models”(Rohner 1969:291-92). Despite this oppression of cultural expression, there were many, more remote groups, who had not felt the law and continued, despite authorities, to commission carvings to be used at illegal ceremonies and potlatches.

Art Production During Potlatch Prohibition

It has usually been the case until recent times that non-western artists have been lumped together in their respected cultural groups and thus have remained nameless individually to mainstream western history. Even when Holm published “The Art of Willie Seaweed: A Kwakiutl Master,” a paper which appeared in an edited volume titled *The Human Mirror: Material and Spatial Images of Man* in 1974, the idea that non-western artists should be seen as individuals was still a very new one (Holm 1983:9). Coupled with this apparent lack in the historical record, it is also difficult to determine the specific artist of some of the more traditional works of art simply because artists did not sign their names on the pieces they carved. In fact, the signing of a piece did not start happening until masks and other works of art began to be sold commercially. In most cases, these sales were to non-Natives and collectors (Holm 1983:35). Even though many of the more traditional pieces do not have the actual signatures of their makers, many of them are “signed” in terms of their stylistic features. Although the art of the Kwakwaka’wakw is all similar in terms of aesthetics, many early artists can be identified by the individual stylistic traits employed.

Seaweed never signed or dated any of the pieces that he created. However, this does not mean that his pieces cannot be identified. His work was not only a seminal component in the "Blunden Harbour school," but was individually distinctive and recognizable as a part of the late Kwakwaka'wakw art tradition (Holm 1983:35). However, his earlier works seem to share many more characteristics with the work of other carvers that made up the Blunden Harbour school. This should be no surprise, for it was within that group of artists from which Seaweed received much of his training and instruction. James on the other hand, always signed his name on the back side of the pieces he sold to tourists. Either CHARLIE JAMES, or sometimes YAKUGLAS, could usually always be found on the back side of the Thunderbirds wings, a figure that James would always employ on his model poles. James never signed anything that was commissioned of him for ceremonial purposes, which traditionally was something that an artist would never do (Nuytten 1982:16).

Although there most likely would have been a lull in potlatching immediately preceding the Alert Bay trials, many artists were still producing art during the 1920s. During that time period, Mungo Martin was just starting to make a name for himself as an prominent artist and carver under the guidance of Charlie James (see plate 3.3). Martin's first commission of a major piece was to John Drabble, or *Kwaksilanukumi*, of Alert Bay. It was a totem pole which stood thirty four feet high, and was titled "The Raven of the Sea Pole"(see plate 3.4) According to Nuytten (1982:77), the pole was carved and sold to Drabble at some time around the turn of the century. The raising of the pole was accompanied by a potlatch, from which Drabble's nieces and nephews received new names and social rank. After finishing carving the pole for Drabble, Martin

Plate 3.3 Courtesy of British Columbia Archives H-07280
Photograph by W. M. Halliday, 1914.

The interior of Kwakwaka'wakw house at Alert Bay. Displayed in the photograph are various examples of paraphernalia employed during potlatches. Mungo Martin stands second from the left.

Plate 3.4 Courtesy of British Columbia Archives H-07203

Commissioned by Chief John Drabble of Alert Bay, the "Raven of the Sea" pole was the first pole carved by Mungo Martin around the turn of the century. In this photograph, it stands in Alert Bay, 1914. Today, the pole is standing at the Museum of Anthropology, UBC.

was immediately contracted to carve and paint a house front for a man named *Kumugwe*. The house front painting was of a killer whale, with the door of the building in the whale's mouth, which was a common design feature in house front paintings. Together, both Martin and James were commissioned to carve huge number of totem poles during these times.

When commissioned to carve a large, traditional totem pole, a cedar log would have to be selected and pulled out of the forest. Another method that James employed to get large cedar trees was to comb the beaches looking for logs that had floated ashore. This beach-combing technique worked quite well once commercial logging began in the area. Such logs broke loose from the log booms during transport and found their way to shore. Once found, they were dragged off the beach during high tide and towed back to Alert Bay (Nuytten 1982:19).

An example of one of James's commissioned pieces stands in the 'Kwakwaka'wakw House' at the Canadian Museum of Civilization (see plate 3.5). The exhibit is a recreation of a living room of a house owned by Ed Whonnock who lived in Alert Bay in the mid 1900s. The recreation was made possible from a picture that is now in the archives of the Royal British Columbia Museum (RBCM) in Victoria taken in 1937. Unlike the traditional Kwakwaka'wakw houses, as seen in Alert Bay around the turn of the century, the big family houses were quickly replaced by small frame European style dwellings starting around 1910. The Whonnock house, an example of these new 'modern' houses, was most likely very similar to any 'modern' house during the twenties and thirties, with one major exception. In sharp contrast to the early Euro-Canadian style of the room is a large house pole, with a bent wood cedar box beside its base. The

Plate 3.5 Courtesy of the Canadian Museum of Civilization
Photograph by Z. Robinson, 1999.

Carved in 1925 by Charlie James, this house post stood in the living room of Ed Whonnock's house in Alert Bay during the potlatch prohibition years. The pole was a recreation of a house post that was destroyed in a fire on Village Island. It was later purchased by the CMC in 1977 (Laforet 1992:56).

pole, carved by James, was commissioned by Ed Whonnock. It is extremely interesting, and most indicative of the times, that Ed Whonnock, who was a high ranking chief, had this house post in his living room! The pole itself was carved in 1925 and was a recreation of another house post that James had carved decades earlier but which had burned down in a fire on Village Island (Laforet 1992:56).

Willie Seaweed was also in high demand during the early to mid-twentieth century. According to Holm (1983:29), "There was a steady demand for masks, and considering that their use was branded either evil or wasteful by church and government authorities, a great many men were spending at least part of their time making them." Of the more than 120 pieces that have been attributed to Willie Seaweed, two thirds of them are masks used as ceremonial regalia. Of those, twenty four of them are the *hamat'sa* or cannibal bird masks (see plate 3.6). Holm notes (1983:29), "there are more from his hand than from any other carver's and at least five of them are still in use." Seaweed carved and painted not just masks, but drums, rattles, whistles, coppers, house front paintings, and totem poles. In 1928, Seaweed painted a huge whale on his house front at *Ba'a's*, enforcing architectural symbols of family identity. The privilege was given to Willie's son, Joe Seaweed, from Nellie Walkus in 1928 as part of her marriage dowry. Seaweed also carved many poles, most of which were used for more traditional practices such as memorial grave markers. Two poles of particular interest, given the political nature of the times due to the potlatch ban, were raised in Alert Bay in 1930, and in Kingcome Inlet in the spring of 1936. The pole in Alert Bay was for the Kwakwewlth Agency buildings, and was jointly carved with Joliff Moon, while the pole at Kingcome was

Plate 3.6 Courtesy Royal British Columbian Museum. Catalogue no. 177377.

Crooked Beak Mask by Willie Seaweed. Traditionally known as *Galowudzu*, this bird monster has flared nostrils, but is unique from the other bird monster attendants in that it has an elaborately curved upper beak that arches above the short lower beak. According to Jonaitis (1990:54), "The bright enamel paint and the flamboyant carving style twentieth century innovations. Earlier Crooked-Beak masks tended to be smaller, simpler, and cruder; only after 1910 did artists start carving in this more baroque style that has become the hallmark of twentieth century Kwakiutl art." The mask is made of wood, red cedar bark, feathers, cord, and fabric. 103 cm x 90 cm. 20th century.

notably raised in honour of the coronation of King George V.²⁸ Although the poles carry on traditional methods of carving and style, they certainly involved traditional ceremonial protocol. These particular poles came to hold new symbolic purposes in the fact that they were not made to display the chiefly prerogatives of their owners. A new development in monumental art; totem poles were beginning to be commissioned and carved for purposes other than social displays of rank.

New Innovations in Art and Style

As the times changed, so too did the styles. Innovations resulting from new technologies and techniques were evident in the art that was produced. According to Graburn (1976:30),

Some degree of protracted change or innovation in formal and symbolic systems is a universal feature in human culture. In this sense, art, as a cultural institution, is no different from the political, economic, and religious structures of the society; although each contains vestiges of earlier stages, it is also a reflection, *in statu nascendi*, of the emerging present-day reality of the community. Part of this process, for better or worse, results from the exchange of ideas, goods, and technology that is a natural by-product of culture contact, an exchange that is magnified by large differences in scale between the respective societies, as well as by their particular expectations and demands in regard to one another.

The works from Charlie James were definitely different, and he introduced many new and innovative ways of doing things which were subsequently more widely adopted by the Kwakwaka'wakw art community. In comparison to other pieces, James's work always stands out as it is very vivid in its presentation. His elaborate use of paints, as well as an innovative style of carving was unlike any other during his time. One such innovation came to James when he was sleeping in the Alert Bay graveyard. According to his granddaughter, Ellen Neel (Nuytten 1982:37), James would often sleep outside in

²⁸ Seaweed was the chief designer and carver of the top figure on the pole. Other artists who worked on this pole were Herbert Johnson and Tom Patch Wamiss (Holm 1983:44).

the graveyard to be close to the Old Indians who had passed away. On one particular evening, James had picked up a brick he had found lying on the ground, only to discover the next morning that it had left an orange residue all over his hands. This sparked an idea in his mind, and from then on James began to use the color in his art work. No one had ever used the orange color before, and soon it was widely employed by other artists.

Traditional paints employed by artists on the Northwest Coast were made from a saliva-salmon roe mixture, which was mixed with different mineral pigments for coloration. This technology led the way to black, red, and white colored paints that once applied to wood, would create a dull, semi-matte coloration which was durable and quick to dry. It is said by many that James was one of the last Kwakwaka'wakw artists to employ the use of traditional paints. Although this is not exactly the case, much of his work was painted using traditional, or "Native" paints. In his carving shack on the beach at Alert Bay, James had a mortar and a pestle in which he ground charcoal with added salmon roe; a mixture that (once ground together) produces a black, chalk-like paint. For the colored paints, James used European watercolors and later, would steal poster paints from the residential school in Alert Bay. It was not until later in his career that James began to use commercial exterior paints, due to the fact that these new polished looking poles were in high demand from clients. This was quite the contrast from his earlier works, many of which were painted very little to accentuate the carving. According to Nuytten (1982:20), it is not known what James's own preference was on this; however many of the personal gifts that he made in his later years for friends had reverted back to this early style.

Seaweed's style was also distinctive in its own right. Like both Martin and James, Seaweed was well versed in the mythological world of the Kwakwaka'wakw, which was inhabited by supernatural spirits and characters. His own upbringing was steeped in the rich myth based traditions of the Kwakwaka'wakw, as well as a strongly defined position coupled with responsibility within the winter ceremonial complex. This was most likely magnified in comparison with other artists of that time due to the remote location of *Ba'a's*. There were still some stylistic differences among the Blunden Harbour school. Seaweed's approach to art was a purely intellectual one. In talking about Seaweed, Holm (1983:35) noted:

He was constantly and consciously aware of form in his work. No carved surface or painted line was ever random. Each was planned, with a draftsman's accuracy, so that each form took its perfect shape and held a precise, balanced relationship to its brother shapes and to the space around and between them. In his passion for perfection he was like some of the box painters of the northern tribes, whose formline system of design epitomized formal space organization in Northwest Coast art.

Seaweed employed the use of a compass to draw the circles in his pieces. A relatively new technology for coastal artists, the compass eliminated the need to draw circles with the free hand, enhancing the visual symmetry of the pieces being carved. He also used a straightedge to aid in drawing straight lines. The fact that he used these two tools to aid in the carving of his art is very telling and indicative of the times, and is an example of a resourceful man exploiting European technologies for his own purposes. One style that was indicative of many of Seaweed's pieces, although it was not exclusively practised by him, was the shape of the eye. "Using a compass, he drew three circles of diminishing sizes inside one another, spacing the centers slightly and evenly apart in a straight line. The resulting eccentric circles were painted black on white, forming a typically Kwakwaka'wakw eye, but of very precise form"(Holm 1983:35). Other artists did occasionally use this technique, but Seaweed employed it extensively,

making it a trademark of his carvings. This meticulous symmetry was indicative of Seaweed's work, and was evident in the forms he employed in both his carvings and paintings. For example, if a line was to be straight, it was drawn with a straightedge. If a line was to be curved, it was done with a deliberate sweep, or a sudden rounded bend. He was always very conscious of space, and the relation of one form to another. Holm (1983:36) has documented this awareness by looking at form relations in Seaweed's earliest *hamat'sa* masks and contrasting them to the *hamat'sa* masks that Seaweed produced in the 1940s. Although in both periods of mask production there is an emphasis on flamboyance, the works of the mid to later part of his career show a meticulous attention to detail.

Another tell-tale stylistic feature of Seaweed's work, and certainly another example of his meticulous nature, was his craftsmanship. In all masks, the inside forms and surfaces were all carefully finished. By this feature alone, one could almost determine whether a mask was made by Seaweed or not. Even among those in the Blunden Harbour school, where stylistic features are similar, a quick glance inside the back of a mask could identify a piece as one carved by Seaweed. This is not to say that the other carvers from *Ba'a's* were sloppy in the finishing of their work. However, Seaweed's careful and distinctive style can be distinguished from others (Holm 1983:36).

Traditional paints were made and used by Seaweed and examples of its use can be seen in his early works. Around 1920, Seaweed made the switch from these traditional paints and began to employ commercial, oil based enamels. From that point on, and for the duration of his career, he used the enamel paints in all of his works. This change happened at around the same time for all the Blunden Harbour carvers. For most

of his pieces, Seaweed began by using a whitewash, another technical innovation, which he would coat over the entire surface. Once this was done, he applied the colors. He employed reds, blacks, whites, and sometimes brown, yellow, green, and very rarely he used blue (Holm 1983:36).

As Holm (1983:36) notes, "The shapes of detail elements in Seaweed's painting are distinctive. U-forms are generally quite angular. Often they float, failing to join other design elements at their bases as is the usual case in Northwest Coast painting." The compass may have been used on the U-forms when they appear round on their ends, as seen in the details of the *Hamat'sa* masks, feathers on birds, or scales on the *Sisiyutl*. Unless they were angular, the ovoids, which can be usually found in joints and eyes, were probably also drawn by Seaweed with the use of a compass. The ovoids could also be angular, and relieved by curved bottom corners. Kwakwaka'wakw artists stylistically were much more flamboyant and detailed than their northern cousins, and it is evident in their treatment of the ovoid shape. According to Holm (1983:37), the Kwakwaka'wakw artists used ovoids much more freely than any other West Coast artists, often employing inner ovoids, which is widely evident in the works of Seaweed.

Although Seaweed's work emphasized a certain amount of continuity throughout his career, there were slight changes in his style. One example of such changes can be seen in the eyebrows of his pieces. In his earlier career, the eyebrows all shared a gentle curve. By 1930, the curve of the eyebrows was much more pronounced. During the 1940s and 1950s, the eyebrows in his carvings began to have exaggerated curves, often with an abrupt upward sweep at the forward inner end (Holm 1983:37). This trend was evident with the other carvers from *Ba'a's*, yet Seaweed's style remained distinctive.

The eye sockets in Seaweed's carvings followed a similar pattern over the duration of his career. In his earlier pieces, the sockets were curved with concave lower edges. During the 1920s, Seaweed began to employ an abrupt drop at the rear of the socket on his *Hamat'sa* masks, however, by the end of his career, he was using a smooth curve along the bottom of the socket (Holm 1983:37).

The art produced throughout the twentieth century shows dramatic stylistic changes. Even so, what was produced still followed specific traditional guidelines making the individual pieces recognizable. For example, while a Crooked Beak mask carved in the late 1880s will most likely look quite different than one carved in the 1950s, both can easily be recognized as Crooked Beak masks. Such changes can be attributed to the artist's individual stylistic flair, as well as new innovations in tools and paints. While the art was undergoing changes, so too was Kwakwaka'wakw society.

The Changing Kwakwaka'wakw World

Western religions, politics, economics, and demographics had a huge effect on Kwakwaka'wakw communities during the early to mid twentieth century. Although there were factions between Christianized Natives and traditionalists, the distinction is not cut and dried, as most people began to adhere to a 'hybrid' value system, which contained elements of both. Thus, many of the more 'progressive' individuals, even though they became Christian still retained some old values, and some still attended potlatches.²⁹ New economies forced a great amount of change as well. Although Martin continued to

²⁹ It is easy to fall into the intellectual trap in thinking that there were two, diametrically opposed groups in contention (cultural or religious groups). This over simplified view is historically inaccurate. One such example of a 'dual life,' and by dual life I am referring to those who take part in both cultures, was Spradley's man, James Sewid. Mungo Martin, as will be seen in the next chapter, was another.

carve, he had to turn to other avenues to support himself, and thus became a commercial fisherman and the second Native from Fort Rupert to purchase a gasoline engine for his boat (BC Indian Arts Society 1982:9). When diesel engines were developed, he was the first in the area to have one. He was very resourceful when it came to most of his endeavors, and fixing motors was no exception. On one occasion, the prop on his motor broke. Martin's solution was to row to shore, carve a propeller out of wood, fasten it to the motor, and then back out to sea to continue fishing.

Martin had an exceptional ability to remember songs, and at one point had memorized over four hundred. He was very well known for this talent, to the extent that other Native groups would ask him for his assistance in their rituals. He memorized songs from the Haida, the Tsimshian, and even the Navaho of Southwestern United States. Of his generation, Martin was a vast store of knowledge and information. The preservation of songs and potlatch related knowledge had been managed effectively for centuries through oral technologies; however, for the first time there was concern that such knowledge had to be written down. A written system was needed because a large cohort were no longer potlatching; thus many names, songs, and dances were no longer in use. English was also being used more frequently. "The lack of written language was overcome by Charlie James who taught Mungo to write in Kwakwaka'wakw, using the phonetic alphabet which had been developed by the Reverend Hall and published in 1888" (BC Indian Arts Society 1982:9). Despite the fact that he was unknown in white communities, much of Martin's work during the dark times of potlatch prohibition, 1921 to 1951, was directed towards ceremonial art: art which was essentially illegal to display in its proper ritualized form (see plate 3.7). It was this practice, during the intermittent

Plate 3.7 Courtesy Royal British Columbian Museum. Catalogue No. 9201.

Cannibal Bird, Raven, and Crooked Beak mask by Mungo Martin. This complex mask depicts all of the attendants of the Cannibal-at-the-North-End-of-the-World: the long beak of the *Huxwhukw* on the top, the Raven looking backwards, and the large Crooked Beak. As Jonaitis (1990:57) notes, this twentieth century mask is far more elaborate than its nineteenth century prototypes, demonstrating the creativity and innovations of Mungo Martin. Mask is made of wood, red cedar bark, and feathers. 138 cm x 57 cm.

period, which equipped Martin with the knowledge to become one of the main figures responsible for the reemergence of Native art on the Northwest Coast, following the lifting of the anti-potlatch law.

Willie Seaweed was in many ways a traditionalist and this is evident in not just his art, but in his life as well. When Joe Seaweed was a young boy, Willie opposed the idea of sending him off to school. According to Holm (1983:30), Seaweed made marriage arrangements for his grandson and even carved a set of masks for his in-laws to be, thus confirming social and ceremonial traditions. He himself was married several times which allowed him to acquire more prestige and status according to the chiefly traditions that he adhered to. Within the *gwamyesap'a*, or "ochre potlatch," Seaweed was known as *Kwaxitola* which means "Smoky-Top," referring to a volcano of wealth. Ochre potlatches were play potlatches and conducted for entertainment purposes. *Kwaxitola* became the most common name by which most people in Kwakwaka'wakw territory knew him. Through marriage, he also had the right to play *Nulmal*, the fool dancer who was famous for his large nose. As *Nulmal* his name was *Xandzasamudayu*, or *Yakulala* (which means "All Bad"). Lastly, Seaweed was also known as *Mukwitalasu*, or "Four Men Come to Fight" (Holm 1983:32).

When Seaweed was at the peak of his carving career, many changes were going on not only in his village of *Ba'a's*, but also all over Kwakwaka'wakw territory. People were living different lives than those of their parents and grandparents. Many of the men and women, like Martin, were involved in the commercial fishing industry. "Jobs took people to distant canneries and logging camps, and fishermen followed the migrating salmon in competition with non-natives and men of other tribes" (Holm 1983:33). The

forces of the changing economy on the Coast accomplished in many ways what the missionaries and the government had tried to do earlier. With the changing economic base, and a new source of economic wealth, people had new responsibilities in terms of their employment and so there was less time for lengthy, traditional festivities such as the potlatches and winter ceremonials. James Sewid voices this economic concern in his autobiography (Spradley 1969:109-10):

It was somewhere around that time [early 1930s] that I began to feel that it wasn't right to have these potlatches. When the people were invited to a potlatch they would be gone for ten days or two weeks and it would spoil it for the people who had jobs. I was busy logging and since I was so busy I didn't attend some of those potlatches. That was the downfall of the villages that started anything. I thought a lot about why I should give up the logging operation and go to a potlatch. We wouldn't be producing any logs during that time so I began staying right in the village even though the other people went. A few of the younger people would stay with me but about 80 percent of our people would go to the potlatch. I thought it was all right if it was a free time but not when there was a job to be done.

Sewid voices a concern that was most likely shared by many. Starting in the earlier parts of the twentieth century, there came to be essentially a shift in values. Wealth, in traditional terms, was based on status within the community and was encapsulated by the rights to names, dances, and songs. Now, economic wealth, a more western ideal, was penetrating the values and attitudes of the Kwakwaka'wakw peoples. Not everybody felt this way of course, but it was certainly a sign of the times and indicative of the social, political, religious, and economic dynamic that made up coastal life for many Native peoples. "Surprisingly, old ideas and values were not destroyed, even though the Kwakwaka'wakw outwardly so resembled the newcomers that many of their close, non-Indian neighbors had no idea that traditional ideas and values still existed"(Holm 1983:33). Throughout Kwakwaka'wakw territory, men and women during the early to mid twentieth century have been noted for their industrious activities. Huge amounts of wealth were being amassed in every type of standard enterprise which

showed a huge amount of adaptability and skillfulness on the part of the Natives. Codere (1950:8) notes, "It is as though the Kwakiutl were able to exploit the new culture to their own ends – a situation almost unique among instances of contact between the so-called civilized and the so-called primitive peoples, and a situation which was clearly exasperating to the Indian agents in particular." This 'exasperation' was directed at the outlawed potlatch and the winter ceremonials, which were going on all over the territory well throughout the prohibition times.

Even though Seaweed was a traditionalist in many ways, he took on a job and spent much of his time fishing for commercial purposes, and took any other job that would come up. He was less involved in these ventures than many other men of his age, simply because of the high demand for his carving skills. He was best known as an artist, but he was also a high ranking chief and completely committed to the potlatch (see plate 3.8). Due to this commitment, he held multiple ceremonial roles as an orator, a singer, composer, actor, and a keeper of traditional knowledge (Macnair 1984:77).

In 1936, a bill was brought before the House of Commons in Ottawa, that would give agents and other officials the power to seize goods that were believed to be for potlatch purposes. This was the last of a dying attempt to stop what could not be stopped. According to Cole and Chaikin (1992:210), "In the House of Commons the independent member for Comox-Alberni, A.W. Neill, himself a former Indian agent who served under Vowell during the period of deliberate non-enforcement, blasted the proposal as unreasonable, unjust, and un-British." This blast was seconded by many other voices in the room and so the bill was immediately withdrawn.

Plate 3.8 Courtesy Royal British Columbia Museum. Negative no. SN 2933.
Photo by Wilson Duff, 1955.

Willie Seaweed with coppers. According to Jonaitis (1991:40), a chief may take revenge on anyone who insulted him or his family by breaking off a piece of their copper. The piece would be given to the rival at a potlatch, who then had to break a copper of equal or higher value. If the rival was not able to do this they would be publicly humiliated. The copper in Seaweed's right hand is believed to have been broken at a potlatch in 1953 held at Gilford Island (Jonaitis 1990:41).

It would have seemed that the victory belonged to the potlatches; yet at this point, the potlatch was in decline due to the Great Depression. According to Kew (1990:164), "The Depression of the 1930s brought a drastic decrease in the value of production in the fishing industry and a decrease in the number of canneries from 76 to 44." This decline would have strongly influenced a drastic decrease in Native incomes. Despite the fact that Kwakwaka'wakw ceremonies were on the decline in the mid to late 1930s, with the onset of the Second World War, the entire economic picture significantly improved. Coupled with this sudden improvement, Native fishermen also benefited from the cheap prices that confiscated Japanese fishing boats were being sold for. According to Kew (1990:164), "This period probably marked the peak of Indian participation as owners-operators in the fishing industry."

During the Second World War, the potlatch seemed to be on the upswing, and it was during this period that artists such as Seaweed and Martin were carving vast amounts of potlatch artwork. The art work that came out of the thirties and forties is quite remarkable, given the ban. Master carvers such as Martin and Seaweed not only taught younger generations the skill of carving, but created vast amounts of ceremonial material so that potlatching could continue. According to Holm (1983:109), it was this period which proved to be the Seaweed's greatest in terms of his *hamat'sa* mask production.

Men like Willie Seaweed and Mungo Martin were not only skilled artists, they were high ranking chiefs who were fully committed to the potlatch. This required them to be orators, singers, composers, actors, and keepers of knowledge. Yet it is as artists that they are best known today, especially outside of Southern Kwakiutl society. And it was as artists that they were able to inspire a new generation of talent, one which has renewed an inheritance with equal artistic integrity (Macnair 1984:77).

Even though the potlatching issue itself was dwindling at the beginning of the 1950s, the potlatch ban was resisted by a large portion of Kwakwaka'wakw society from beginning

to end. It was not until 1951 that the law disappeared when the Indian Act was revised. With the passing of the revised act, potlatching was once again legal on the Northwest Coast of Canada, although no announcements were ever made of the government's decision to erase the law.

With the law simply disappearing in 1951, potlatching was once again legal on the Pacific Coast. Two years later, Mungo Martin would hold the first legal potlatch in Victoria. A milestone considering what Kwakwaka'wakw culture had endured, the event was testament to the fact that art had diffused outside of the community and had created a great interest among Western white culture. It was this interest that spurred on the revitalization of Northwest Coast art that was about to explode in the cities to the south. Although open potlatches were still rare within Kwakwaka'wakw communities, a new transformation in dancing displays was beginning to take shape in Alert Bay during the 1950s. As Ostrowitz (1999:85-103) suggests, such transformations would soon come to revolutionize and revitalize Kwakwaka'wakw dance expression.

Alert Bay "Indian Dances," 1950-1965

During the 1950s and 1960s, a huge adaptation of the traditional dances seen at potlatches and ceremonials was initiated in Alert Bay. Intended for mainly non-Native audiences, residents of Alert Bay organized displays of Native life based on the potlatch, which highlighted time honored artistic abilities as well as selections of songs and dances which were considered to be appropriate and entertaining to the interests of non-Native visitors (Ostrowitz 1999:85-7). There was some initial resistance to the idea of

displaying the chiefly prerogatives attached to the dances and regalia, mostly from the older, more prominent men in the community.

The first "Indian Dance" was suggested in order to raise money for the 'Hospital Week Committee.' For some time, the non-Native residents of Alert Bay formed a committee each year to raise money needed to fund the local hospital. Called the Hospital week committee, the group would assemble every spring to discuss new fundraising strategies. In 1951, James Sewid became the first elected chief of the 'Nan̓gis and thus was also the first Native to sit on the town council. When the fundraising committee met, Sewid suggested the idea:

Before we met again I thought a lot about what we could do, and it just came to me that it would be a good idea to bring the potlatch custom and the dancing out to the surface again and let the public see it because it had been outlawed and lost. I had the idea that we wouldn't go and do it the way they used to do it when they gave people articles to come and watch the dancing. The way I figured it was going to be the other way around, like the theaters, operas, or a good stage production which was put on and the people had to pay money to get in (Spradley 1969:158-9).

Although the committee loved the idea and encouraged Sewid to spearhead the event, the elected chief had to pitch the idea a second time, this time to those who owned the traditional prerogatives to the dances and masks. To do this, Sewid had to call all of the high ranking chiefs from all over the area to a meeting in Alert Bay.

According to Sewid (Spradley 1969:160), there was a lot of resistance at general meeting to the new idea. Such resistance included one chief's voice who said, "Oh, now that we are all here you think you are going to use all our stuff just like that! It cost us money to show it because we always gave away lots of things when we preformed with our masks and other regalia. We have all spent all kinds of money to show our stuff before in the Indian way and you aren't just going to bring us here to ask us to show it in this new way"(Spradley 1969:160). Many others voiced similar opinions, however, by

the end of the meeting, Sewid persuaded the assembled group that the dances would be for a good cause. With prominent high ranking Kwakwaka'wakw people such as Willie Seaweed, Spruce and Mungo Martin, Dan Cranmer, Tom Hunt, Henry Bell, and Ed Whonnock agreeing with Sewid's plan, it was not long before it was unanimously agreed that a show would be put on (Ostrowitz 1999:87). Instead of the chiefs distributing wealth to the assembled guests or "witnesses," it would be the guests who would pay to see the show in order to raise money for St. George's Hospital, which provided health care to residents of Alert Bay as well as the neighboring communities.

On May 24 and 25, 1951, the community hall in Alert Bay was packed with people to see the show.³⁰ William Scow, who was also the president of the Native Brotherhood, was the master of ceremonies and introduced all of the dances. He explained to the assembled crowd that the dances were how the Natives of years gone by had entertained themselves through the long winters, and that the *hamat'sa* dance, which was performed by Herbert Martin and Charlie Matilpi, was one that was traditionally used as a simple device to scare children into making them obedient (Ostrowitz 1999:88). Although such descriptions seem far from adequate, they were downplayed for a reason. It must be remembered that the audience was primarily non-Native. The violence of the *hamat'sa* ceremony was historically linked to the banning of the potlatch in 1884. When considering the type of audience that the dance was intended for, repeats of the "graphic" dances displayed fifty years earlier at the Chicago World's Fair would have been ill-advised and inappropriate. The hospital benefit dance was important symbolically for another deeper reason, as it greatly affected another audience. The production was in

³⁰ By 1951, such dances in Alert Bay had to be carried out in the community center for the village no longer had any traditional Kwakwaka'wakw big houses.

Alert Bay, and was the first time in roughly thirty years that masks and other chiefly prerogatives were openly displayed for the community to see. Regardless of whether the Kwakwaka'wakw people in attendance had supported the anti-potlatch law or thwarted it, the dance production was an important statement for all to witness, and it must have been an extremely emotional event for not just the dancers, but for all Native spectators.

The 1951 performance centered around the *atlak'im*, or the Dance of the Animal Kingdom. A *tuxw'id* dancer also made an appearance conjuring up a war canoe. Dan Cranmer and Willie Seaweed had a great time putting on a comedy routine in which they pretended to be in a boat lost in the fog (Ostrowitz 1999:88). On many different levels, the production was a tremendous success, raising over nine hundred dollars for the local hospital, but also reasserting Native pride in their dancing traditions. After the success of the production, Sewid remained on the Hospital committee for three consecutive years, holding a charity "Indian Dance" every spring. In fact, over the next decade, "Indian Dances" would become standard fare for a large variety of community events, such as the Alert Bay Centennial Celebrations in 1958, as well as the welcoming celebrations which greeted the Union Steamboat *Catala* which came back into service that same year.

According to Ostrowitz (1999:90), "By 1958, the Kwakwaka'wakw had developed distinct ideas about the proper presentation of authentic Native life to non-native audiences." They chose to "historify" certain authentic elements of traditional Kwakwaka'wakw dances, while being very conscious not to allow any fixtures of modern life enter the presentations. By doing so, many outsiders began to attach such labels as 'progress,' 'loyalty,' and 'creativity' to the Kwakwaka'wakw dance troupes because they seemly had cast down their old ways, and were now able to serve the public

in a rewarding way. What nobody [non-Natives] was aware of, was that at these productions there was never any mention of *numaym* membership, and no individual chiefs were ever named (Ostrowitz 1999:90). The Kwakwaka'wakw had become masters of presenting their traditions to the outside world, while all the while reserving the important potlatch protocols for private events.

In 1963, plans were begun to build a Kwakwaka'wakw "big house" to be raised in Alert Bay, modeled after the traditional lineage houses of the late nineteenth century. Malin (1986:179) notes that this endeavor was particularly significant because members of many different Kwakwaka'wakw communities jointly came together to aid in its construction, simply because none of the communities had any traditional big houses left. To tackle this project, the *Kwak'wala Arts and Crafts Organization* was formed (1963) with a mandate to regulate future expressions of Kwakwaka'wakw culture. Once again, James Sewid was at the center of the story. In his autobiography (Spradley 1969:240), Sewid refers to the conception of the project: "In the back of my mind one of the main reasons for building that community house was to have a place where we could try to preserve the art of my people."

The newly built Alert Bay house was inaugurated in 1965 with a potlatch hosted by James Knox of Fort Rupert. It was officially opened a year later, at which time the lieutenant governor of the province returned the land rights to the Alert Bay foreshore back to the 'Namgis people (Ostrowitz 1999:92). It was not long after that the big house in Alert Bay would become the site of many Kwakwaka'wakw potlatches, drawing people in from many different Kwakwaka'wakw communities. The house also became

the popular site where the *Kwak'wala Arts and Crafts Organization* would regularly be presenting "Traditional Indian Dances" to tourists passing through on route to Alaska.

Two years following the inauguration of the Alert Bay Big House, Willie Seaweed passed away. Throughout Seaweed's life, he lived and emulated the great chiefs of old by honoring a timeless tradition (see plate 3.9). During his time, he was thought of by many to be one of the great leaders of ceremonial life, during a period where many would have liked to have seen Kwakwaka'wakw ceremonies and traditions disappear. As Holm (1983:33-4) eloquently points out, "When Willie Seaweed died in 1967 there were television antennas standing on the roofs of the houses in Fort Rupert and Alert Bay. Unmanned spacecraft had landed on the moon and astronauts were training to walk there two years later. Over ninety years before, he was born in a house of cedar planks and carved posts on the shores of an inlet which knew only canoe travel." The time that Seaweed lived spanned the greatest period of social, economic, and technological change for the Northwest Coast Native culture. Through his art, he was, and still is to this day, inspiring new generations of talent, "...one which has renewed an inheritance with equal artistic integrity"(Macnair 1984:77).

From 1884 to 1967, the visibility of Kwakwaka'wakw graphic and plastic cultural expressions within Native communities underwent a massive transformation. From the golden age of totem poles and the fierce competitive times in the later part of the potlatch period, straight through the dark times of potlatch prohibition, the art of the Kwakwaka'wakw continued to change with the times, all the while remaining entirely within the context of Kwakwaka'wakw artistic expression. The powerful expressive nature of Kwakwaka'wakw art, although certainly suppressed through prohibition times,

Plate 3.9 Courtesy Royal British Columbia Museum. Negative no. 1882.
Photo by Wilson Duff, 1953.

Photo of Willie Seaweed wearing his chief's costume at Alert Bay.

remained uninterrupted. So much so, that when the potlatch ban was lifted, the art form rebounded and experienced a second flourishing period, however this time, the trend exploded outside the Kwakwaka'wakw communities in the non-Native world to the south.

CHAPTER FOUR

Representation Outside the Kwakwaka'wakw Community

If we Kwakiutl keep the art only for ourselves it will die. If we share it with the White Men it will live forever.

Chief Mungo Martin (Malin 1986:171)

The purpose of this chapter is to examine four interrelated themes that all influenced and shaped the re-negotiation of Kwakwaka'wakw art and art production outside the Kwakwaka'wakw community. Themes to be examined are (a) the curio market and trade, (b) academic and artistic recognition of Native art, (c) the salvage, restoration and relocation of totem poles, and finally (d) the redefinition of the public image of British Columbia. Starting with the advent of the tourist trade in the mid-nineteenth century, the graphic and plastic cultural expressions of the Kwakwaka'wakw became increasingly more visible in the non-Native world. To accommodate the growing market outside of the traditional realm, carvers began to manipulate the form and function of traditional carved items, as seen with miniature model totem poles. With the gradual increase in mobility starting early in the twentieth century, tourist art became a steady source of income for some artists, and more non-Native people began to show interests in their arts. With the large totems in northern communities beginning to decay,

an attempt was made by the provincial government starting in the early 1930s to save and restore an art form that was seeing a decline. Partly because of a realization of the historical significance of totemic art, as well as proposed economic opportunities to fuel a tourism industry, massive totem pole restoration programs were put into action. This was so much so, that by the early 1950s, the image of the totem pole came to represent not the peoples from whose traditions they came, but the actual region of the Northwest Coast itself. Commercialized and appropriated, the symbol of the totem became a calling card for tourists visiting such major centers as Vancouver and Victoria. As totem poles were slowly vanishing from the northern Kwakwaka'wakw communities, they were being restored and erected in the parks of major southern cities.

During these times (1952-1962), Mungo Martin made his living working for the provincial museum in Victoria, restoring and creating new totem poles. Only two years after the potlatch ban was lifted, Martin, with provincial support, constructed a traditional Kwakwaka'wakw house in Thunderbird Park, Victoria. It was at this house that he held the first "legal" potlatch (1953), an event which drew thousands of non-Native spectators hoping to catch a glimpse of a real Native ceremony (Jonaitis 1986:243). From Victoria, Martin trained many apprentices who today still carry on the traditions passed down from a long line of carvers and artists.

Like Martin, trained under the tutelage of Charlie James, Ellen Neel came to revolutionize the art of miniature totem poles. During the 1940s, Neel moved to Vancouver, where she began this production and became an important link in the continuous chain of Kwakwaka'wakw artistic expression. Not only was she a woman involved a craft that was traditionally exclusively male, but she was a Native living away

from her community. Despite these obstacles, Neel became a pioneer in a newly emerging, and evolving, Native art market.

The visual transformation that took place in Vancouver and Victoria is an important indicator of how the art was being reinvigorated and reinvented. Totem poles were being salvaged by collectors, restored and relocated in major cities to the south. Although traditional ceremonial paraphernalia was still in demand during prohibition times, by the middle of the twentieth century Northwest Coast art had emerged onto a new scene, intended for a new audience. Kwakwaka'wakw art was flourishing for the first time since the early part of the twentieth century, but on a scale never before seen. Outside of its traditional context, the Kwakwaka'wakw art was redefined; however, there were some artists such as Martin and Neel, whose efforts were able to maintain a traditional link with the past, to ensure its strength for the future.

Totem Restoration and the Tourist Trade

According to Malin (1986:172), "If any one symbol epitomized the strange, wondrous, and enigmatic character of the Pacific Northwest, surely that symbol was that heroic figure, the totem pole." Popularized in mainstream society, the totem pole was soon to become the official "appropriated" symbol for the entire Northwest Coast during the mid twentieth century, and in some ways it still is today. This is evident with the emergence of the souvenir trade in the mid nineteenth century.

Simply put, with contact came the development of new art forms and the tourist trade began. Tourist art is that made for sale specifically to outsiders, as were with miniature model totem poles produced by Ellen Neel. Historically labeled as

“souvenirs,” “curio,” and even “toys,” such art has most recently been labeled “tourist art”(Phillips 1998:4). The production of tourist art began on the Northwest Coast as the effects of the Industrial Revolution spread during the mid part of the nineteenth century. With the middle classes now able to experience recreational travel, something previously only enjoyed by the rich, the collecting of the exotic became a growing trend (Phillips 1998:8). Native people of that time, realizing that there was money to be gained by the sale of such items, began to customize their skills to produce items to supply the gradually growing demand. Native art was sought-after by nineteenth-and early twentieth-century travelers on the Northwest Coast for essentially two main reasons: the formal and technical sophistication, as well as the fact that such pieces could be clearly identified as being products that were specifically “Indian”(Phillips 1998:9).

To accommodate this growing market, Native carvers introduced much smaller, “miniaturized” pieces, such as those produced by Charlie James for Alaska-bound tourists who passed through Alert Bay in the summers during the 1920s and 1930s (Nuytten 1982:43). Because of the short time required for their production, pieces could be carved in greater numbers. This accommodated buyers, who undoubtedly were interested in smaller, less expensive pieces because of travel constraints. Dawson, Fredrickson, and Graburn (1974:4) contend that tourist art is, “designed to meet the exigencies of portability, salability, and the décor of middle-class homes.” Not only are these manufactured pieces modified in form, but they are also modified in function. For example, when a member of the Kwakwaka’wakw community commissioned a totem pole, an artist carved the client’s crests and *numaym* affiliations into the pole, which would in turn act as a stage to display that chief’s high lineage. There were strict,

enforced guidelines and procedures that had to be followed not just in the totemic figures that were carved into the pole, but also in how the pole was raised (Malin 1986:90-1). There were clearly defined traditional rules in place that were essentially law, and had to be followed or a considerable amount of shame would be placed on the deviator. Model totem poles followed no such rules. However, they were made for non-Native consumption, and therefore many of the rules governing the carver and client did not apply.

Another major trend that arose with the growth of the tourist trade was the growth of individualism in the commercial arts. Individualism rose out of the common understanding that the creator was someone who was special, in that not everyone was capable of producing such expressions of graphic or plastic design. In saying this, anonymity was certainly not the norm in Kwakwaka'wakw culture, regardless of the fact that artists did not traditionally sign their work. According to Dawson, Fredrickson, and Graburn (1974:16-7), "just because an object is not signed does not mean that other members of the group do not know who created it. In small-scale societies where everything is everybody's business there is little anonymity, for one would know the details of style, aesthetic choices, and even tool marks of one's contemporaries." With the advent of a much larger market, where anonymity was a good possibility, art for tourist consumption was commonly signed with the artist's name.

With the gradually increasing mobility of people, both Native and non-Native, the image of the totem pole slowly penetrated non-Native societies during the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century.³² It was due to this diffusion during this great

³² Much like the image of the totem pole, a number of tipis found their way to Europe and the east coast of the U.S.A, as well as central Canada.

'salvage' period that interest in Native graphic and plastic expressions began to change. It was quickly realized that much of the totemic art that was in the Native communities was beginning to decay rapidly. Launching salvage operations had historically always been to preserve and document Native culture, simply because Native culture was believed to be dying out. Although the motivations were a little different, the primary concern was to preserve an art form that seemed to be slowly dwindling, due to the interplay of factors which included ceremonial suppression, Christianity, economic change, education and moral suasion. Plans were quickly put in place to preserve totem poles in Canada starting in the 1920s. According to Malin (1986:171), "Changes in Provincial and Federal policies toward the Indians were beginning to take shape as early as the mid-1930s. A greater degree of tolerance for cultural differences seemed to take root within the inner circles of government. Moreover, belated recognition of the unique character of the Northwest Coast Indian culture was taking place, a recognition that included acknowledgement of their contribution to the history of the region." These changes resulted in policies devised to preserve Native heritage; a sharp contrast to the ideals which fuelled the banning of the Northwest Coast potlatch fifty years earlier.

According to Malin (1986:172), plans to preserve monumental carvings stimulated an increase in public interest and awareness concerning totem poles. The trend could also be attributed to the growing public appreciation of totemic art, due to the recognition of a vital link with the history of the Northwest Coast. All combined, these factors spurred on great public interest in regards to Native cultures; however, there was one other factor that played an important role in this equation. Malin (1986:172) suggests that, "salvage operations were not inspired by altruism alone. Self interest was a

significant factor. Policies were clearly tied to the need for developing economic opportunities, particularly those associated with tourism.” With the image of the totem pole epitomizing the bizarre, wondrous, and mysterious character of the Northwest Coast, it was only a matter of time before it was appropriated by mainstream non-Native society for a variety of purposes. With funding from the federal government, programs were initiated to gather as much totemic art as possible and to provide sufficient storage facilities for their preservation (Malin 1986:172).

Aside from endless debates surrounding issues such as logistics, preservation techniques, and lack of funding requirements, the first efforts to “save” the ethnological specimens were complicated by unforeseen factors concerning Native responses to the saving of their poles. In the short period of twenty-five years, the government had made a complete reversal, from attempting to suppress ceremonial activities which were inexplicably linked to the raising and displaying of totemic art, to a position from which they were encouraging Natives to assist in the preservation of their monumental carvings. The poles were the property of those individuals who had commissioned them, and although the property rights of the pole were not written on paper, they could readily be seen through the crest or totemic figures displaying lineage and *numaym* affiliations carved into the cedar column. Thus, for the first time, the Canadian government entered into negotiations with communities as well as the individual owners of the material, which in some cases lasted for months on end (Malin 1986:172). Canadian attempts to salvage and restore totem poles, with the approval and support of the Native communities who owned them, eventually created a sense of trust between Native people and

government representatives. A large part of the purchase constituted an agreement concerning appropriate compensation.

The University of British Columbia (UBC) in Vancouver, initiated a totem pole restoration program in the 1940s, from which they built Totem Pole Park at UBC, which consequently featured many Kwakwaka'wakw poles that were acquired with the help of Mungo Martin (Malin 1986:176). By this time, government authorities had in place programs which allowed Native people to assist in the gathering of material. Individuals such as Mungo Martin, were interested and motivated to see that older deteriorating poles be saved. Although such motivations were not traditional views, for the first time provincial representatives were fostering programs aimed at saving and strengthening Native heritage. Instilling Native pride and independence, individuals such as Martin were quick to agree to help. According to Cole and Chaikin (1990:170-1), Martin recognized that many of the younger Kwakwaka'wakw generation were apathetic, even antagonistic towards the traditional rituals, dances, songs, in a language that few knew. Thus, Martin set out to preserve what he could, with the assistance of the University of British Columbia.

An important part of the restoration projects also involved the training of individuals who would become carving staff. Individuals were needed who had the ability, knowledge, and the necessary skills to rebuild many older, deteriorating poles. Martin would come to play a pivotal role in the restoration of many existing monumental sculptures, not to mention the revitalization of Northwest Coast art. According to Malin (1986:176), "If James and Seaweed provided the spark, then Mungo Martin was the fire which lighted the renaissance." Although Martin's participation with UBC, and later

with Thunderbird Park in Victoria will be discussed in detail later in this chapter, Martin became the Provincial Museum's chief totem pole carver, a role through which he was able to train many other younger artists (Duff 1997:124).

In the span of thirty years, roughly from 1930 to 1960, decaying totem poles were taken down and removed from Kwakwaka'wakw villages only to end up in the heart of major cities to the south. With the advent of totem pole restoration, Kwakwaka'wakw totems were being raised throughout Vancouver, Victoria and abroad, with as much enthusiasm as when they were originally raised in northern Native communities decades prior. This led to another important transformation of the visual landscape. By the late fifties, traditional poles that were carved by Charlie James and Mungo Martin in the early part of the twentieth century were standing in Stanley Park in Vancouver, as well as in Thunderbird Park (Victoria), which subsequently would host the first legal Kwakwaka'wakw potlatch in 1953. Poles were shipped to urban centers from the northern communities by whatever means were available to the collectors at the time of purchase. Shipping methods included trucks, steamship, rail, or a combination of all three (Malin 1986:170). By 1953, any poles that were left in Alert Bay were memorial poles standing in the graveyard, paying homage to the chiefs of old. As discussed in the earlier chapter, the enforcement of the potlatch law caused a massive decrease in appearance of new monumental sculptures in Kwakwaka'wakw communities between 1922 and 1951. After the lifting of the potlatch ban in 1951, it would seem strange that restored and replicated totem poles were being raised in Vancouver and Victoria, as well as other cities across the country and abroad, and not in the northern Kwakwaka'wakw villages. However, as mentioned earlier, self interest played a large part in that the

policies of totem pole restoration and replication, and such programs were clearly linked with the development of new economic avenues, specifically in regards to tourism. Although the original hope for most totem restoration projects was to save older poles from immanent decay and decomposition, it was also hoped that by erecting these saved poles the government could encourage an appreciation of Native art. Although such ventures are obviously valuable, it has to be remembered that these poles have been removed from their cultural context and thus have taken on new and different meanings (Jonaitis 1989:237).

As Jonaitis (1989:238) points out, "For non-Natives – except for those relatively few individuals who have studied the literature on the meanings of totem poles have to the Indians who display them – these monuments have a rather different significance. This significance derives not from careful analysis of the ethnographic literature, nor from conversations with an Indian whose family owns one of these monuments, but rather, from the representations of totem poles in non-Native culture." The danger inherent in such projects is that it can create an image of a "captured" art, whereby there is a transformation of the meaning from one that is mediated by Native tradition to one controlled by non-Natives in order to fit differing social needs. This does not mean that the poles standing in Stanley Park are devoid of meaning. British Columbia did things differently than other totem restoration projects had in the past, such as the American 'totem pole project' of the 1930s, which sought to salvage, restore and relocate Alaskan totem poles (see Jonaitis 1989). Ending in disaster, the Alaskan project produced restored poles which, according to Malin (1986:174), "...were lifeless, adhering to the originals neither with any degree of fidelity nor painted in the proper colors."

Fortunately for all involved, the restoration projects in British Columbia were able to hire genuinely trained Native artists, such as Mungo Martin, who were well steeped in the traditions of their people. In the 1960s, the large “real” totem poles standing in Vancouver and Victoria were not only huge tourist attractions, but they symbolically came to represent Western Canada to the rest of the world.

Artists Outside of the Community

In the more than sixty years that Charlie James lived, he accomplished many things that in turn would greatly influence the world of Kwakwaka'wakw art production in many ways. There was his familial connection with his students, Mungo Martin and Ellen Neel, two artists who greatly shaped and maintained the unbroken chain of artistic traditions in the plastic and graphic arts of the Kwakwaka'wakw. James was also one of the first artists to deviate from the traditional path and begin to create a mass of works that were for sale, and directed solely at tourist populations. Consequently, he was one of the first artists who made his living solely from the production of art, and was the first artist to receive recognition outside of his own people as a master of carving traditions. Much of this attention was due to the vast numbers of miniature model totem poles that he carved, and even in them, one can see the obvious skill of a master.

According to Nuytten (1982:38), “he [James] left behind hundreds of carvings scattered throughout the world. He also left behind a new way of doing things. Through the work of those he influenced, Kwakiutl art was never quite the same.” In the late months of 1937, Charlie James was struck with a respiratory disease from which he never fully recovered. In November of that same year, he was admitted to the Mission Hospital

at Alert Bay. On January 29, 1938, Charlie James passed away, but left behind a powerful legacy that was instilled with his apprentice and stepson Mungo Martin, and with his granddaughter, Ellen Neel, who lived to become a great artist in her own right.

Unlike Seaweed, James, or Martin, the work of Ellen Neel was produced almost exclusively for tourist consumption. Neel was born in Alert Bay on November 14, 1916, well into potlatch prohibition times.³³ She grew up to take the potlatch name *Kakasolas*, which means , “People Came From Far Away To Seek Her Advice,” but to most who knew her she was called *Ellen-ah*. (This was kind of a ‘Kwakiutlization’ of the name Ellen.) Growing up in Alert Bay in the 1920s, Neel attended St. Michael’s Residential School, but in many ways, most of her education came from her grandfather. Many days throughout her youth were spent with Charlie James learning the artistic skills that would later change her life. Part of the process of being taught the basics of the Kwakwaka’wakw style of art involved drawing out design after design, something that Neel learned quite quickly under the direction of James. Her perseverance and love for the skill began to pay off, for at only twelve years of age, she began to sell some of her pieces to tourists who passed through Alert Bay en route to Alaska.

During the late 1920s, when Neel was still very young, her mother became quite ill, leaving many household responsibilities to Ellen. Because of her young age, her grandfather moved in to take care of her. Nuytten (1982:43-4), notes that it was more likely that Neel was taking care of James, in regards to keeping the house tidy and fixing the meals. Neel herself commented that,

Spruce and Mungo Martin would come to stay whenever they were in Alert Bay. Spruce had nine or ten children and he would come with his whole family and stay for days. When they came the house was full and I had to sleep on the floor and I didn’t like it much. But,

³³ Neel was born in the *Wak’as* house, at Alert Bay.

someone had to cook and clean everything. My grandfather [Charlie James] was interested in the potlatch and it was important to him that good care was taken of friends and relatives (Nuytten 1982:44).

Neel stayed in school until she was eighteen. Although she was only half Kwakwaka'wakw, she was fluent in both Kwak'waka and English and she was able to paint and carve in the traditional Kwakwaka'wakw style taught to her by her grandfather. Due to her skill, and certainly to her well respected relations, she was accepted by her community during a time when people of dual ancestry were not always readily accepted (Nuytten 1982:44).

At the age of twenty one, she met a young white man by the name of Edward Neel. Known by most as Ted, Edward Neel had left his home province of Alberta and moved to the Northwest Coast where he was working as a sheet metal worker. Soon this occupation took him to Alert Bay, where he found work as a sales person, at which he enjoyed some immediate success. It was not too long afterward, that Ted and Ellen became a couple. In 1937, the Neels had their first child, whom they named David. A year later they were formally married and had two other children who were named Ted Jr. and Bob. Edward Neel continued to make a living through sales, but also took on work as a tinsmith and a sheet metal worker. New houses were being built in the community, and his skills as a laborer were in high demand. Because of construction, there was a constant need for sheet metal products such as stove pipes, flanges, and ducting (Nuytten 1982:45). After the couple's fourth child was born, a daughter whom they named Cora, the Neel family moved from Alert Bay to Vancouver.

During this period in her life, Neel continued to carve small numbers of pieces that she gave away as gifts to friends, or occasionally sold. For the most part, her life was very occupied with her young family because her husband spent much of his time

working. Upon moving to Vancouver, the Neel family opened up a small sheet metal shop that did enough business to put food on the table and cover the costs. This however, did not last long. In 1946, Edward Neel suffered a serious stroke that would be the first of many over his lifetime. With his health seriously impaired, and with a young family to feed, the two were in serious financial difficulty. Naturally, Neel turned to the one thing that she knew best-Native art. According to Nuytten (1982:45), "It was an obvious choice. Ellen had often spoken of how easily her totem poles had sold to tourists at Alert Bay and how the work of her grandfather was always in demand."

With her husband in charge of the sales and business end of things, such as the buying of materials, keeping the books, and managing the work, Neel was in charge of the art. Together, utilizing their different strengths, the two made quite a formidable team. Living on Powell Street in Vancouver, the Neels converted their home into a makeshift studio, workshop, and store. With a small amount of savings, they purchased the raw materials needed, such as yellow cedar, paint, and the necessary tools required for the task. With the carving underway on quality work at a near production basis, it was clear to everyone that Neel had the needed skills to build her business. Her charming personality and her hard work ethic, coupled with her husband's shrewd business plan, allowed their new venture to take shape, and not long after, money began to filter in. In the beginning, with a young family and a low income, things were very difficult.

First, Neel set out to design a line of model totem poles that could be produced in a reasonable amount of time, while her husband went out and began to line up potential buyers among Vancouver's merchants who specialized in tourist arts and souvenirs. A departure from traditional approaches, the line of model totem poles that Neel produced

contained many of the traditional qualities of Kwakwaka'wakw style, while they bore her own distinctive technique. The curio, souvenir, and department stores across the city purchased enough of the model poles so that the family was able to stay afloat financially. During these times, Ted and the children shared much of the house work so that Neel could spend all of her energies on her carvings (Nuytten 1982:46-7).

One of Neel's first large commissions came in 1928 from the City of Vancouver, who had set up a committee to boost the attractiveness of Vancouver on a national level to attract tourism. The committee, which was known as the "Totemland Society," was a group dedicated to publicizing Vancouver to people abroad, with a strong emphasis on the totem pole, which was to be the symbol of the Western city. Neel was commissioned to design and carve what would become the symbol/insignia for the new Society. With the Society's concept in mind, Neel came up with the idea that would eventually be called the 'Totemland Pole.' The pole itself was topped by a thunderbird, who was perched on the world that displayed the geographical coast line of Western Canada. Under the world was a figure representing the first person (Nuytten 1982:47). With the culmination of this project, Neel had made a major departure in artistic form and meaning, even from tourist art. The commissioned piece was not traditional, nor did it fall into previous conceptions of tourist art. Symbolically, and as the name suggests, the Totemland pole was designed and carved to represent Vancouver to the rest of the country, as the 'city of totem poles.' Deviating in form from previous models of tourist art, the Totemland pole incorporated a carving of the globe; on it showing the coast line of British Columbia. Such bold new representations had never before been attempted,

showing not just artistic innovation, but also that the art form was a living medium of expression.

The image of the Totemland Pole soon appeared on the letterhead of the Totemland Society, not to mention T-shirts, place mats, napkins, ties and scarves. Such efforts kept Neel and her family quite busy, not to mention the additional business attracted by all the generated publicity. It was arranged that the family could begin carving in Stanley Park. Tourists would soon flock to see the Kwakwaka'wakw carver, Ellen Neel, and her family carving totems in the picturesque setting of the park. Model poles were displayed and sold to tourists who all wanted to catch a glimpse of what real Natives carvers must have looked like in the times before contact. This new venture, although it was opposed by Parks Board Officials,³⁴ was a huge boost to the family's income.

In the spring of 1948, Neel was invited to speak at a Conference on Native Indian Affairs that was to be held at the University of British Columbia. The people running the conference wanted her to address the subject of Native art and its potential commercial value. The entire Neel family, who at this time were all learning the family trade, began to make dozens of poles to be displayed at the conference for the exposure, which would be excellent for business. In the speech that she gave, Neel raised some very important, poignant issues concerning the emergence, or rather discovery, of Native art. At the time of this conference, there were efforts afoot to begin the Totem Restoration Project at UBC, a project of which Neel would eventually become part, and would involve the

³⁴ Commercial vendors were not allowed in the Park. Officials had agreed to look the other way, on the grounds that it was good for tourism, and thus, good for the city. Harry Druker, the head of the Totemland Society, had originally pitched the idea as more of a display of Native crafts, and not a commercial

restoration of decomposing, weathered totem poles. She addressed the new efforts by reminding the crowd that the art of the Kwakwaka'wakw was far from dead. In her speech, Neel said (BC Indian Arts and Welfare Society 1948:12):

To me, the art is a living symbol of the gaiety, the laughter, and the colour of my people--a day-to-day reminder that even we had something of glory and honour, before the white man came. Our art continues to live, for not only is it part and parcel of us, but can be a powerful factor of combining the best part of Indian culture into the fabric of a truly Canadian Art form.

She commented on the great period of Kwakwaka'wakw art, and how it was followed by a darker time, where cultural expressions were suppressed through the prohibition of the potlatch. Yet, it was during those dark years that she sat beside her grandfather and was taught the traditional ways of a carver. Even at the time her speech was delivered, the law against the potlatch was still in effect.

In her speech, Neel also addressed the emerging tourist trade. That trade, coupled with the interest from universities and museums, in many ways kept the art alive. Neel (BC Indian Arts and Welfare Society 1948:13) stated, "Were it not for the interest created by the tourist trade, the universities and the museums, we would no longer have any of our people capable of producing this art." She then went on to make a plea to the assembled guests by saying that if Native art was ever going to take its place among what is considered to be Canadian art, then it must be a living entity, and not simply just a tool to restore decaying totem poles. Neel said that she felt the old ways should not be ignored, but that a true artist should be allowed to explore new options to invigorate the creative spirit (BC Indian Arts and Welfare Society 1948:13).

She went on to note some of the problems that she encountered producing her own type of work. Totem poles had been the means of livelihood for her grandfather,

venture. Opinions were divided on the Parks Board and it was an issue that continued to be a problem for

Charlie James, and in turn his stepson Mungo Martin. From their teachings, it too had become her family's livelihood, feeding and clothing her family with the revenues brought in from the sale of hand carved, miniature totem poles that were eagerly sought after. The situation however, was slowly changing. During Neel's lifetime, she began to witness curio dealers cheapening the Kwakwaka'wakw art tradition in their efforts to satisfy their desire for profit (BC Indian Arts and Welfare Society 1948:14). Much of Neel's frustration was directed at a growing "art" industry fuelled by imported curios from Japan which were made to look like they were of Northwest Coast Native origins. Based on the abundance of imported look-alike model totem poles, Neel told the assembled guests how she doubted that most consumers, or retailers, really cared about the authenticity of the art, and thus, it was difficult to make even a small portion of the price necessary to carve and paint a really fine piece. Neel beseeched the audience by saying, "certainly, great work could be produced by Native people, if a true appreciation of their art could be instilled into the public. Only when there is an adequate response to efforts to retain the best of our art, will it be possible to train the younger generation to appreciate their own cultural achievements"(BC Indian Arts and Welfare Society 1948:14). The transformation of Native art was already happening all around her, and she acknowledged it. Designs were starting to be printed on sportswear, furniture, and jewelry, which was a sign that the art was being applied to everyday life, and not stuck in the past. Her only concern was that there should be some sort of an organization in place to ensure what was being created was in fact authentic products, and not the cheapened mass produced-objects curio dealers were pawning off as the real thing in order to make a quick profit. What was of the greatest of importance, was that the dignity and honour of

personal and family crests be preserved. In all, the address that she gave to the assembled audience at the University of British Columbia in 1948 summed up her hopes and aspirations for the arts, but also her greatest fears. It was heard that day by many people who decided to help her out. After the conference, the Parks Board offered the use of Stanley Park's grounds to other Native artists who would be interested in setting up shop (Nuytten 1982:51). The offer was good for Native artists, not to mention the large numbers of tourists who came out to see the artists at work. Most of all, it was good for the art.

Those were good times for Neel and her family. The business was soon named "Totem Art Studios," and by then the entire family was involved in the production process. Aside from the fact that they were exclusively based in Vancouver, in comparison to the production processes employed by James, Martin and Seaweed, the Neel family enterprise was unique. Indeed, there were occasions that Kwakwaka'wakw artists would work together on certain projects, but never before was there a group involved in a mass production type enterprise. Each step in the production of a model totem pole was carried out by a different family member. In all there were nine main steps, which included roughing, carving, sanding, painting, and the lacquering of the piece (Nuytten 1982:58-9). Thus, Neel and her family were the first to produce a uniform line of tourist poles which were both authentic and inexpensive.

In the fall of 1948, Neel and her family carved a large totem pole as a gift for the Alma Mater Society of the University of British Columbia. The sixteen foot Thunderbird Pole was presented to the University at halftime during a football game. In front of six thousand cheering UBC 'Thunderbirds' fans, the totem pole was carried out into the

middle of the field, where upon Chief William Scow, of Alert Bay, addressed the stadium. Wearing full ceremonial regalia, Chief Scow said:

On behalf of Ellen and Edward Neel and with the full consent and approval of our tribal council and our people, I present this totem to the Alma Mater Society of this University. I give you also the right to use the name 'Thunderbird' for your team. This is according to the law of my people and (the use of name) is therefore legal for the first time. The totem has been carved for you by our two best tribal carvers. It has a long and honourable history, a totem of which your team has the right to be proud. It is yours now, and if you follow the precepts accepted with it, you cannot fail (Nuytten 1982:52).

The gift was a way for Neel to thank the University for asking her to speak a year before.

It was later that year that the Department of Anthropology at UBC asked Neel if perhaps Totem Arts Studio could be contracted to restore a group of very old Kwakwaka'wakw totem poles. Neel took the position with some misgiving, simply because it would occupy much of her time needed to concentrate on the summer tourist season. Neel eventually agreed that she would spend a portion of the summer working on the restoration project, but that she could not neglect what economics dictated. That summer alone, she was able to restore four large poles that were from Fort Rupert, one of which was a pole carved by her grandfather, Charlie James (Nuytten 1982:52). The pole was carved when James was a young man, sixteen years before Neel was even born.

After starting the job for the University, it was quite apparent that tourist sales were suffering greatly, not to mention the fact that the restoration project was turning out to be far greater task than anyone had thought. The amount of decay was quite extensive on many of the poles, meaning that a simple touch up job would not do. Serious amounts of time and energies were needed to invest into the University's restoration project, and Neel was beginning to feel the burden. A decision was made to make new replicas of all the poles that were beyond fixing, and so Neel was forced to make a decision. Her dilemma was that she wanted to create and explore new avenues as any artist would.

What she was not so interested in was carving replicas. A solution to the problem would soon emerge in the form of an old friend visiting from the North, Mungo Martin. He was not only happy to take on the job, but was also a master in the skill of carving large traditional totem poles.

Referring to Martin, Jonaitis (1988:242) comments that, “few whites recognized his talents until the 1940s, when, in response to a general awakening to the value of Indian Art, several museum curators and academics realized how eminently qualified he was to restore traditional Northwest Coast art that had begun to decay.” It was then that his fame spread beyond the borders of the Kwakwaka’wakw world. To his surprise, among the poles to be repaired was an earlier one that he himself carved around the turn of the century. The pole was Drabble’s ‘Raven of The Sea Pole.’³⁵ It was not long after that Neel returned to her own carving business, and Martin gradually took over the important job (BC Indian Art Society 1982:11-2).

The University of British Columbia soon invited Martin to work on their totem pole restoration project and to begin some new poles for the University’s new three acre Totem Park (Jonaitis 1988:242). A few years later, the British Columbia Provincial Museum (BCPM) brought him over to Victoria to do similar work in 1952 at Thunderbird Park. Duff commented that, “we have come perilously close to losing the traditional skills required to replace the finest old totems. The best poles were carved 50-to-100 years ago, erected outdoors and have reached advanced stages of decay”(BC Indian Arts Society 1983:12). At Thunderbird Park, Martin became a huge tourist

³⁵ After Drabble’s death, his widow sold the pole in 1947 to the University of British Columbia to be restored.

attraction which added to the increasing interest in Northwest Coast Native art. A local newspaper praised Martin by saying:

For the next three years, Victoria will probably be the only spot in North America where one can see the practice of an art that was old when Columbus discovered the continent. Moreover, it is being done in the same manner, with the same instruments, by the descendants of some of the original practitioners. Captain Vancouver may have gazed at practically the same sight that tourists are taking pictures of, this summer (Nuytten 1982:86).

Martin had many students during his time in Vancouver and Victoria. Although he was over seventy years old with a new career, he took on many students from several different tribal groups. His most renowned students were Bill Reid, Doug Cranmer, Henry Hunt, and Tony Hunt who was Henry Hunt's son (see plate 4.1). During their own respected careers, these students turned and trained a new generation of artists, such as Robert Davidson, Calvin Hunt, Richard Hunt, Tony Hunt Jr., as well as others (Malin 1986:176).

Mungo, along with many of his students, carved a great many totem poles, raising them all over the province and abroad. According to Malin (1986:177), "the Provincial Museum Report for 1954 disclosed that replicas had been completed for 2 Haida, 2 Tsimshian, 1 Kwakiutl, and 1 Bella Coola pole while the Report of the following year disclosed 4 Haida poles, one of which was a mortuary type, and 1 Kwakiutl was produced." With his apprentices, Martin was able to carve an impressive number of poles during the time he spent in Victoria.

To commemorate British Columbia's bicentennial in 1957, Martin carved a 106 ft pole for the Queen of England as a gift from the people of British Columbia (see plate 4.2). The 'Queen's Pole' was a new type of totem for a new kind of function in that it was a gift commemorating the province's 100th anniversary, but in Martin's own words,

Plate 4.1 Courtesy of British Columbia Archives I-26830

Master carver Mungo Martin, with his step-son Henry Hunt, and grandson Tony Hunt. Three generations of carvers at Thunderbird Park, Victoria 1961.

Plate 4.2 Photograph by Chris Lund/NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF CANADA/PA-166773

Mungo Martin carving a 106 foot totem pole to be presented to the Queen on the occasion of British Columbia's Centenary in 1958. Photograph taken in Victoria, 1957.

the pole can also be seen as an extension of an older practice. In a message delivered to the Queen of England, Martin said (Nuytten 1982:104):

Your Honour – I have made many totem poles. I have carved totem poles for over fifty years, but this will be a very special one. I have never made one for such a high personage before. I was honored that I was chosen to carve this pole and that the work of my hands will stand in London for many years to come. This will be a real totem pole. I designed this to show the family stories of my tribe, the Kwakiutl. This is the way we show our history. This pole will show the crests of ten tribes.

Weighing over thirteen tons, the pole was shipped to England and raised on the grounds of Windsor Park, where it still stands today (see plate 4.3). During the late 1950s and early 1960s, Martin and his apprentices were carving a large number a large totem poles. Another huge pole of one hundred and twenty seven feet, was carved and raised in Beacon Hill Park, Victoria, in 1958. Another was raised in Maritime Park, Vancouver, around the same time. In 1960, a thirty foot pole was sent to Chapultepec Park in Mexico as a gift from Canada, and several more were shipped that same year to Osaka, Japan, for the World's Fair (Malin 1986:178). That same year, a forty foot pole carved by Martin was raised in Ottawa in front of the main office of the Boy Scouts of Canada. In another venture, he reconstructed five totem poles, all of which are now standing at Kitwankool. During these times, Martin trained many others about what it was to be an artist. For Martin, these included not only the traditional way of things such as the way he prepared brushes from porcupine bristles, or how he made traditional Native paints from oil and charcoal, but also the transmission of stories and songs from the older people that he himself had retained from when he was young.

It was at Thunderbird Park that Martin also built a large communal 'Big House,' which was dramatically painted with crest images (see plate 4.4). On its facade, Martin painted a broad frontal face of the *Tsee'akis*, which is a supernatural sea creature whose

Plate 4.3 Courtesy of British Columbia Archives I-51777

Mungo Martin meets the Queen Mother in Windsor Park, England 1957.

Plate 4.4 Courtesy of British Columbia Archives I-26979

One of Martin's greatest achievements was the construction of a big house at Thunderbird Park, Victoria. The house was inaugurated in 1953, with the first legal potlatch since 1884. According to Webster (1991:227), "the success of Mungo Martin's potlatch encouraged people in Alert Bay to think about building their own big house."

grinning mouth swallows all who enter and spits out all who exit. In 1953, it was in his house, that Martin held the first public potlatch, and in doing so inaugurated the big house in the traditional Kwakwaka'wakw fashion (Duff 1997:124). Martin's "legal" potlatch, according to Jonaitis (1988:242), "...signaled the revival of ceremonialism on the Northwest Coast."

Despite the revision of the Indian Act, many of the older Kwakwaka'wakw invited to the ceremony were understandably nervous, remembering family and friends who had been arrested and prosecuted thirty years previously for participating in such rituals. There were some people who felt that Martin was overstepping his limits within the non-Native community by so boldly re-asserting Kwakwaka'wakw pride and autonomy (Jonaitis 1988:242). These fears were quickly laid to rest. The potlatch was done in a very traditional way, with the exception of the food and the method of payment for the gathered witnesses. Since Martin's newly built house did not have any cooking facilities, the assembled guests had their feast across the street at the Crystal Garden Restaurant. The method of payment had also changed with the times, and instead of Hudson's Bay blankets, guests received newly minted coins and Mandarin oranges (Jonaitis 1988:243). Masks were displayed and danced, songs were sung, and a copper was displayed. After the special event, the doors were opened for the more than two thousand people waiting outside to catch a glimpse of a real traditional potlatch. The sheer numbers of the assembled non-Native audience certainly shows that there was a great amount of interest in Native society and ceremony during the 1950s, but more importantly the generated masses that were present outside of Martin's house were there in a show of support. By the time the law banning the potlatch disappeared from the

revised Indian Act (1951), there was a overwhelmingly large non-Native opposition to the anti-potlatch law. Martin's 1953 potlatch was their victory as well.

With the first half of the twentieth century coming to a close, the Neel family continued carving with more energy than ever before, as the nineteen fifties would prove to be an important time for Totem Art Studios. In the fall of 1950, some of her pieces, specifically a traditional dance mask, and a more contemporary totem, were on display at an exhibition at the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts. The exposure in Eastern Canada resulted in many new orders for Totem Art Studio. The following year, Neel was commissioned to carve a pole for the Vancouver Tourist Association who were to present the pole to Robert Q. Lewis, live on his television show, 'The Show Goes On.' For the first time, one of Neel's poles was featured on National Television in the United States, which turned out to be yet another source for a large number of orders. It was that year as well, that Neel decided to stop carving at Ferguson Point, in Stanley Park, and to use that site for sales only. Although the spot was ideal for tourist sales, it was hardly practical for carving great quantities needed to fill orders. Nonetheless, sales were still not as high as they would have liked, and the larger commissions were still hard to come by. Although the small tourist poles were the family's bread and butter, according to Nuytten (1982:54), it was the larger commissioned pieces that made Neel feel a real sense of pride in her work, not to mention building her reputation as an artist.

The Revitalization of Art on the Northwest Coast

As stated by Graburn (1976:31-2), "All nations, but especially those with a history of subjection to colonialism and oppression, seek to establish a recognizable

image based on the most favorable and highly romanticized characteristics of their people. The arts, as portable and visible as they are, are a major tool in this struggle to provide some sort of unquestionable marker, to assist a new identity or reassert an old one, to ameliorate the past and to secure the future.” As totem poles throughout Vancouver and Victoria attracted thousands of visitors annually during the 1950s and 60s, artists such as Martin tirelessly worked away in Thunderbird Park under the gaze of thousands of inquisitive eyes. Indeed, the meaning of ‘totem poles’ had changed in that they were intended for global audiences, and produced to fuel a tourism industry. In a sense, the image of the totem pole became a marketing ploy for non-Native audiences and non-Native interests. Evidence of this could be seen in every city, town, and ferry terminal along the coast.

What was more important than the appropriated ‘public’ image of the totem pole, was that the traditional Kwakwaka’wakw art form was still alive, held together by a small cohort whose efforts cemented a traditional line that was on the verge of disappearing. Not only had Martin successfully trained many younger artists who would live to fuel the contemporary revival of Kwakwaka’wakw art, he also left a wealth of recorded material on film and audio tape regarding traditional technologies, family histories, and ceremonial songs, which have been preserved and used to educate the younger generations (Webster 1995:202).

On September third, 1959, Martin suffered a great blow. His son, David Martin, drowned at sea on route to Stevenston from Comox on the salmon seiner *Annadale*. Even with an extensive search conducted by search-and-rescue aircraft, the body was never found. With his son’s death, Mungo not only lost his boy, but also his heir. Throughout

Mungo's life, he had tried to keep intact and preserve his family's tradition and history, but after the loss of his son there was nobody to carry it on (Nuytten 1982:108). For the most part, Martin mourned his son's death privately and was very quiet and stoic during the period immediately after the death. It was not until three and a half months later did Martin show the depth of his grief. "In December of 1959, Mungo Martin turned over his family's collection of dance masks and potlatch regalia to the Provincial Museum. These items included the masks that Mungo had painstakingly made, and those he had commissioned others to make, to illustrate his family's privileges at the opening of his house...the 'HAMATSA' pieces. All those things that would have passed down to his son"(Nuytten 1982:108). He spoke about his son's death on that day to a small group of people who had gathered at his Big House in Thunderbird Park. To them he said,

Today I am in darkness – I cannot carry on. All my life I have worked hard so that we would be known by the different nations. I carried on alone when the different tribes had stopped, because I wanted to prove my love for my son... Now he is gone. Now I am alone, I don't want to see these masks anymore (Nuytten 1982:108).

Martin carved a memorial pole that was erected in Courtenay, BC, in memory of his only son.

Martin was over eighty years of age and still carving when, on August sixteenth, 1962, he passed away because of heart complications. Services were held four days after his death at an Anglican Church that was in close proximity to the Esquimalt Naval Base. After the ceremony, Martin's body was taken to the big house at Thunderbird Park, where he lay in state for a day. His coffin was made of yellow cedar, and had been carved a day previously by Henry Hunt, Tony Hunt, Ellen Neel, as well as others who had carved with the man. At six o'clock that evening, his coffin was taken by Navy Pallbearers and a guard of honor and placed on the HMCS Ottawa, where it was covered

in flowers and guarded by four sentries. With every flag in port at half mast, the destroyer left Esquimalt bound for Alert Bay. Never before had the Canadian Navy accorded such a high honor to a Native person. Later, in 1963, Martin was awarded the Canada Council Medal. According to Nuytten (1982:115), "this honor is reserved for those persons in Canada who demonstrate outstanding accomplishments in the arts, humanities, or social sciences. Mungo Martin was the first Indian to be accorded this honor and the second Canadian to receive it posthumously." After Martin's death in 1962, the title of Chief Carver at BCPM was passed on to Henry Hunt. *Abayah* died a year later and was buried in the Alert Bay cemetery by Martin's side. Although no pole had been raised there in more than forty years, in 1970, Henry and Tony Hunt carved and raised a memorial pole honoring Martin. It stands today at Alert Bay in the grave yard.

Four years after Mungo Martin passed away, the world lost another prolific Kwakwaka'wakw artist. Throughout her life, Ellen Neel had carved and sold more model tourist poles than anyone had ever done before. In all, thousands and thousands of her small poles were sent all over the country and abroad, making her one of the first Kwakwaka'wakw entrepreneurs to really break into the Canadian craft scene. As she had learned the skills of an artist at an early age from her grandfather, Charlie James, so too would her own children learn to craft from her. During her life, she had made a tremendous effort to bring life to an art that many felt were dying, by exploring new techniques and artistic avenues, but all the while respecting the age old traditions of her forefathers. She spoke out actively against the commercialization of the art, and its cheapening effect that was having drastic consequences. She was a teacher, an artist, and

a shrewd business woman who left her mark on the Canadian art scene, and would be forever remembered.

In the early fall of 1961, Ted and Ellen Neel lost their first son to a car accident in Washington State, USA. The shock of the death rocked the family, and according to Nuytten (1982:70), Neel never really recovered. In the years to ensue, Neel's health began to rapidly deteriorate which resulted in certain financial difficulties for the family. Hawthorn (1967:259) notes, that near the end, Neel was battling against a limited market, poverty, and a debilitating illness. Many of their close friends tried to help, but when the orders did come in it was difficult for Neel to fill them. In February of 1966, Ellen Neel passed away at the Vancouver Hospital. Mourned by her family, and sorely missed by her friends, Neel was a great credit to her people and to her country. Part of her ashes were spread over the Johnston Strait, the mouth of the Nimkish River, and at the Cluxewe River, which is near Port McNeill. The rest of her remains were buried at Alert Bay (Nuytten 1982:73).

Plate 4.5 Courtesy of British Columbia Archives I-26829

Mungo Martin, carving at Thunderbird Park, 1961.

CONCLUSION

Surviving the Dark Years

If my ancestors from two hundred years ago were able to be with us today, I often wonder what they would think of a contemporary potlatch. Would they be able to recognize what we do as being related to what they did? Would they pity us for having lost so much, or be proud that we are still here? I think that after recovering from the shock of seeing so many changes, not only in the potlatch but in all aspects of our lives, they would tell us that under the circumstances, we are not doing too badly. They would also urge us to keep on strengthening what we have, if we are to survive and continue having our good times.

Gloria Cranmer Webster (1991:248)

In this essay, I have attempted to show the relationship between the Kwakwaka'wakw changing art form and the larger social dynamic, within which art and art production were situated. From early ethnographic descriptions, particularly "The Social Organization and the Secret Societies of the Kwakiutl Indians" by Franz Boas (1970), one can see the incredible transformation that Kwakwaka'wakw art and art production has experienced over the last century. Inextricably linked to the production of plastic and graphic expression(s), the Kwakwaka'wakw potlatch too has endured through the dark times of prohibition, only to experience a resurgence and renewal. The amount of social, political, economic and religious change that took place within Kwakwaka'wakw culture between 1884 and 1967 is quite staggering. Within a changing landscape, Kwakwaka'wakw graphic and plastic expression began to take significant new

directions beginning in the late nineteenth century where the art form celebrated new vigor (Macnair 1993:47). These trends, such as changes in style, are reflected both in traditional ceremonial art and art produced for tourist consumption. For the purposes of this study, I have focussed on the transformation of particular art forms, such as monumental art and ceremonial regalia. Other expressive art forms such as the emergence of prints and jewelry could provide further insights into investigations of this nature.

During potlatch prohibition, 1884-1951, more than two dozen Kwakwaka'wakw artists produced regalia used for illegal ceremonies, and many of those pieces can be identified (Macnair, Hoover and Neary 1984:72). Of these artists, Willie Seaweed, Charlie James, and Mungo Martin were selected to represent this group. During this same period, art and art production was changing and entering new domains outside traditional Kwakwaka'wakw communities. Of the artists who pursued the new emerging market, none was as prolific as Ellen Neel. By examining the life and times of all four artists, a just representation of the transformation of Kwakwaka'wakw art and art production during prohibition times is achieved. With the exception of James, who passed away in 1938, Seaweed, Martin and Neel continued to carve and explore new avenues of Kwakwaka'wakw artistic expression straight through prohibition times and well into the 1960s. 1967 marked the end of this period with the death of Willie Seaweed, the last living artist of the three.

All four artists worked within different contexts, which had an effect on both the art produced as well as its production. Fully committed to the potlatch, Seaweed emulated his forefathers by honoring a timeless tradition. From a young age, Seaweed

was required to uphold his lineage responsibilities by holding feasts, and distributing wealth in the prescribed amounts to those whose positions and names required it. Seaweed continued this tradition all of his life, never leaving the northern Kwakwaka'wakw communities of Vancouver Island. Although he did create a small number of model poles, according to Holm (1983:29), of the 120 pieces that have been attributed to Seaweed, over two thirds of them are masks used as ceremonial regalia. Of those masks, twenty-four of them are *hamat'sa* bird masks. The majority of these were all commissioned and carved during a time when their prescribed application was illegal under the Indian Act of Canada.

In comparison to Seaweed, Charlie James was born outside of the Kwakwaka'wakw world. He could have been a member of either non-Native or Native society. With his mother passing away when James was still a child, the boy returned with his grandmother to his mother's people who were from Fort Rupert. Blue eyed and fair skinned, James was not your typical looking "Native" boy. Unlike Seaweed, James was not born to high rank and most likely became an artist by accident (Nuytten 1982:14). Nonetheless, James had an intricate role in the emergence and elaboration of monumental sculpture. James was directly involved in the underground potlatching complex, as many of the totem poles that were standing in Alert Bay, as well as other Kwakwaka'wakw communities testify to his involvement.

For James, carving was his full time trade, therefore he not only took commissions for traditional artwork, but also carved many model totem poles for the tourist art market. Both James and his apprentice, Mungo Martin spent a considerable amount of time in the early twentieth century travelling across British Columbia carving

and selling tourist art (Nuytten 1982:15). Unlike James, Martin was born to high rank. Growing up in an environment that fostered an emphasis on tradition, Martin took a keen interest in the songs and ceremonies of his people and spent hours at a time whittling wood trying to emulate older carvers. From a young age, he was initiated into the secret dance societies, as seen in O.C. Hasting's 1894 photograph (see plate 2.3), where the young Martin is wearing the Fool Dancers regalia.

During the 1920s, James began teaching Ellen Neel, and by the time she was twelve she was already selling her carvings to tourists in Alert Bay. Utilizing the skills taught to her by James, Neel left the Kwakwaka'wakw community and moved to Vancouver where she began her carving career. Not only was she a woman in a highly male dominated trade, but she was a Native person living away from her community. Despite such obstacles, she became a pioneer in the tourist trade. During her life, Neel trained her entire family to be able to help with what became the family business. In comparison to the production methods of James and Martin, Neel's new family enterprise was unique. They marketed and produced several different lines of model totem poles, differing in size and design. Never before had a Kwakwaka'wakw artist produced art for sale in a mass production fashion. Aside from her production methods, Neel was also unique in her approach to model totems. An example was the 'Totemland Pole.' The meaning behind this model pole was new, in that it was designed to perpetuate the redefinition of the public image of British Columbia. Symbolically, the Totemland Pole was designed to represent Vancouver to the rest of the country, as the 'city of totem poles.' With the culmination of this project, Neel had made a major departure in artistic form and meaning, even for tourist art.

Although it has been my goal to examine art and art production, what emerged from this examination was the story of four very different artists, whose combined efforts formed a crucial element in not only the transformation of Kwakwaka'wakw art and art production, but also the maintenance of a traditional line that was on the verge of breaking. Such individuals, although under a blanket of oppression, resisted and defied efforts to limit their traditional way of life. Willie Seaweed did so by remaining faithful throughout his entire life to the chiefly prerogatives and obligations passed down to him from his father. Living in both Native and non-Native worlds, Charlie James and Mungo Martin remained staunch potlatch supporters by designing and carving ceremonial regalia through prohibition times. Later in Victoria, Martin passed down traditional teachings to apprentices who carried and passed along the knowledge long after his death. Taught by her grandfather, Ellen Neel revolutionized new avenues of Kwakwaka'wakw artistic expression outside of the traditional domain. Throughout her life, she struggled to instill an appreciation of Native art into mainstream non-Native culture. Not only did these artists carry with them traditions which were on the verge of disappearing, but they were also doing things in new ways.

Considering the pressures Kwakwaka'wakw society has endured over the last hundred years, it is an incredible triumph that people today are still creating the art. This particular examination of Kwakwaka'wakw art and art production has run the course of eighty-three years, from the end of the potlatch period of the nineteenth century, through prohibition times of the twentieth century, ending during a period of resurgence and renewal. The story does not end here, nor will it end in the foreseeable future. Art and art production among the Kwakwaka'wakw, along with that of the other First

Nations of the Northwest Coast, will remain an ongoing phenomena, subject to change fuelled by their own intrinsic vitality and dynamism.

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