

S'abadeb – The Gifts: Pacific Coast Salish Art and Artists

Miniature pestle (Coast Salish, ca 1100 BC - 350 AD)

This bird-shaped miniature pestle, perhaps the oldest artwork in the exhibition, appears to be a great blue heron.

Atlatl (Skagit, ca 300)

The figure on this wooden spear thrower is described as a human-headed sea monster. Atlatls were used to hunt mammals, fish and birds; this one was discovered in 1936 by a Skagit River fisherman.

Crouching figure (Coast Salish, ca 800 - 1100)

The arms of this genderless figure are raised in a traditional gesture of thanking and acknowledgement – a motion still used by Coast Salish people today.

Basketry hat fragment (Coast Salish, ca 1430 - 1620)

This ancient rain hat was discovered at Wapato Creek in Tacoma, Washington, along with remnants of a fish weir and fibre netting. With a pointed top and sloping body, this hat would have helped shed water in the rainy northwest climate.

Bracelet (Suquamish, 18th century)

This item is among 20 known Salish bracelets made from goat horn, a material prized for its rarity and unique qualities. To make the bracelet, the horn was first steamed and then carved with the artist's knife.

Club (Klallam, late 18th century)

George Hewett collected this club during the Vancouver Expedition, 1792. Of the whalebone clubs acquired during the Cook and Vancouver voyages, most depict figures of humans or birds – this serpent-shaped club is a rare variation.

Model canoe (Coast Salish, early 19th century)

This model depicts two sturgeon fishermen – one paddling the canoe, the other holding a spear. They appear to be singing – perhaps a power-song to aid them in capturing these large, bottom-dwelling fish.

Spindle whorl with eagle, face and fish (Chemainus, 19th century)

Humans, birds, fish and whales are all forms commonly featured on spindle whorls. It is thought that the designs are associated with the weaver's vision power – a power that nurtures one's artistry.

Canoe paddle (Duwamish/Suquamish, 1882)

Painted on the surface of this paddle is the name of Princess Angeline, Chief Seattle's daughter. During the late-19th century, canoes gathered on the Seattle waterfront and were used for fishing and transporting. Compared to men's paddles, women's paddles are smaller and have a rounded, diamond-shaped blade.

Lunch basket (Squamish, before 1885)

The domed lid on this lunch basket is suggestive of an older style. Red cherry bark and mud-dyed black cherry bark creates the rhythmic designs on its top and sides.

Dagger (Songhees, 19th century)

Coast Salish weapons included stone and wood clubs, spears, daggers and, later, firearms. This Songhees dagger, made from metal and bone, may have been used in hand-to-hand combat.

Earrings (Coast Salish, late 19th - early 20th century)

Iridescent abalone shell, the material of these earrings, was gathered in the warmer ocean waters of California and was the most prized form of currency.

Spoon (Squamish, before 1930)

Ceremonial feasting is an important component of any community or intertribal gathering. Spoons, such as this Squamish example, were all-purpose implements used for both serving and eating.

Berry picker (Squaxin, early 20th century)

Women and children harvested a variety of berries to add nutritional content to diets consisting mainly of fish, shellfish, meat, sprouts and bulbs. This comb-like tool gently pulled fruit from bushes and into baskets. Some berries were eaten fresh; others were dried into cakes to consume during the winter months.

Mat creaser (Cowichan, 20th century)

This compact tool was used to make mats from the fibrous leaves of the cattail plant, found near lakes, marshes and ponds. Many mat creasers are in bird-form – perhaps because the women picking and processing the plants were in the company of ducks, gulls and shorebirds.

Killer Whale silkscreen print (Tsartlip, 1980)

For nearly 40 years, Vancouver Island's Charles Elliot has worked to revitalize and encourage the growth of Coast Salish art, both as an artist and as a mentor for younger generations. This print, depicting a breaching killer whale, uses elements of Northwest Coast design.

Cedar bark dress (Upper Skagit, 1985)

Alice Williams (1907 - 1996) was one of the few elders who retained the knowledge of how to work pliable red cedar bark into dresses. The strong fibres of the tree had to be painstakingly pounded to yield a soft, supple material.

Woman and Killer Whale sculpture (Cowichan, 2003)

Cowichan artist Simon Charlie (1919 - 2005) carved this piece late in his career, using his expressive style of bold sculpture and vibrant colour. Charlie has been credited with the revival of the Coast Salish style.

Soul Recovery Ceremony (Skokomish, 2005)

This large art installation, by Bruce Miller and Delbert Miller (both Skokomish), offers a rare opportunity to view a modern recreation of an ancient Twana (Skokomish) ritual – a ritual that has not been performed in three generations. It interprets a pause in the Soul Recovery Ceremony, when the highly-skilled doctors or shamans with soul recovery power rested on their journeys to the first land of the dead.

Rainbow Mask (Semiahmoo/Chehalis/Nez Perce, 2007)

Artist Stan Greene is well known for promoting the forms and meanings of traditional Coast Salish art. Many of Greene's masks have personal significance – this one depicts a dream about a medicine man with a rainbow-like aura.

Serpent and Moon sculpture (Chemainus, 2007)

This unique sculpture features a double-headed snake wrapped around a human face (moon). Chemainus artist Luke Marston evokes the traditional shape of the spindle whorl while taking a modern approach to visual storytelling.

Eagle and Salmon drum (Cowichan, 2007)

This hand-crafted drum by Cowichan artist Manuel Salazar depicts the eagle and the salmon and is made from deer hide and acrylic paint.

Media contact: Diane Dakers, Communications Manager
Royal BC Museum
250-387-2101
ddakers@royalbcmuseum.bc.ca