



huu ay aht

ANCIENT SPIRIT, MODERN MIND

BACKGROUND

HUU-AY-AHT CULTURAL TREASURES

On November 18, 2016, 17 objects will be transferred to Huu-ay-aht First Nations by the Royal BC Museum:

1. One wooden ceremonial screen;
2. Two Thunderbird masks and a single collection of 37 small carvings of birds;
3. Five objects associated with whaling and whaling rituals (a whaler's cape or charm, head band, rattle, charm and whaling float); and
4. Eight basketry objects (five baskets, two basketry-covered bottles and one basketry coaster).

Details below:

1. PAINTED WOODEN SCREEN



This large painted screen (1.66 m high by 5.38 m. wide; 6' by 17' 3") was a highlight during potlatches and other ceremonies hosted by the Huu-ay-aht at their main winter village at *Nuumaqimyis* at the mouth of the Sarita River. This magnificent and monumental Huu-ay-aht artwork will be placed on public display in the grand hall at the Huu-ay-aht Government Office in Anacla, near Bamfield, BC.

During a dark period when potlatches and other Huu-ay-aht ceremonies were made illegal, the screen was acquired in 1911 by collector Dr. Charles F. Newcombe for the BC Provincial Museum. Unfortunately, neither the Huu-ay-aht owner nor the artist were identified at the time. However, some details of the screen's history and meaning are remembered today.

The painted screen was on prominent display in the Royal BC Museum's First Peoples Gallery, as shown in the photograph above, for decades. The screen was first put on display in the 1940s by the Museum, outside in Thunderbird Park where it



ROYAL BC
MUSEUM

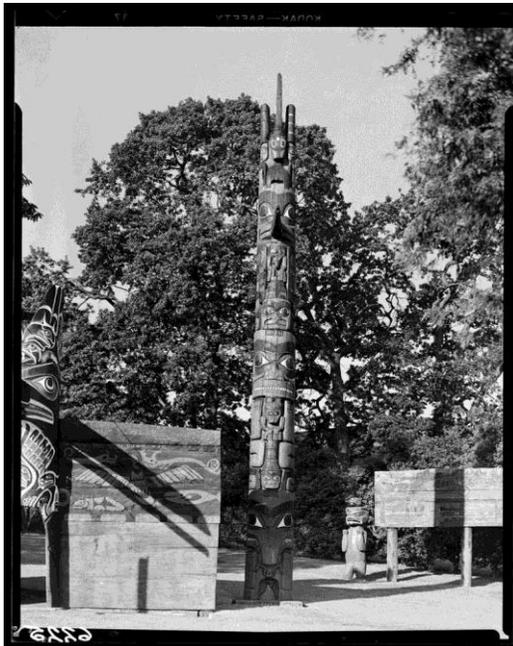
suffered from exposure to the elements. Eventually it was put back into storage. The top two boards on the screen were damaged or lost and have been replaced with replicas. These were copied with the original design by the accomplished Nuu-chah-nulth artist Tim Paul about 30 years ago. Paul used historic photographs of the original screen to guide his work.

Dr. Newcombe wrote the following about the screen:

“Painted Board from Numukamis Village, Barkley Sound. Restored by George Jake of Alberni, Oct., 1911.

These paintings are called *detsginA* and are used for various purposes. At certain parts of the potlatch, they are supported by two men and serve as drums when beaten with sticks. They are used as screens also, behind which the dancers conceal the lower parts of their persons when they are showing their heads covered with masks. At the girls' puberty ceremonies, the young women are kept behind them for a period of four days in concealment. They are only used by the families of chiefs.

There are three parts to the design; the central and two lateral. On each side is seen a scaffold which represents either the house of a chief or the special structure



sometimes erected outside for potlatches. These are called *patsetsimA* if referring to a large house. On the top of the frame on the left side is seen the chief himself holding a box in his left hand and a small stick in his right. The small stick is called *patsets makaiek*. The latter, after preliminary haranguing is thrown down amongst the spectators and the strongest finally secures it after a struggle and then is rewarded with presents.

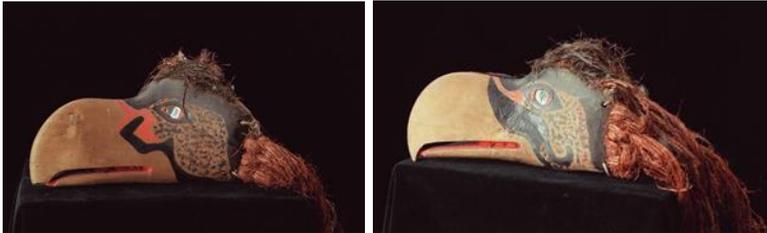
On the right is seen one of the relatives of the chief standing on his head as part of the fun-making. At the top of the central design are two *haetlik*, or lightning snakes, just above the thunderbird (*tututs* or *ditsga*). The bird has its talons fixed in a large baleen whale (*diextob*) in the mouth of which is a shaman, said to have

been swallowed by it. Another shaman is seen below the whale's tail. The irregular line at the bottom represents the sea.”

1952 Photograph of Huu-ay-aht Screen (back, right) outside in Thunderbird Park, Victoria.

Acquired from Sarita by Charles F. Newcombe, 1911.
Painted cedar, metal nails, 5.29 m x 1.82 m

2. PAIR OF THUNDERBIRD MASKS and 37 CARVED BIRDS



This pair of Thunderbird Headdresses and the 37 small carved and painted birds are a set. Huu-ay-aht *tayii haw#* (Head Chief) *λiışin* Spencer Peters recognized these Thunderbird headdresses and the small birds as representing rights that come from the *Tliishin* family. The headdresses and birds were made for use at ceremonial events such as potlatches. The set likely represents a male and female Thunderbird, together with their extended family group, as shown by the many smaller carved birds.

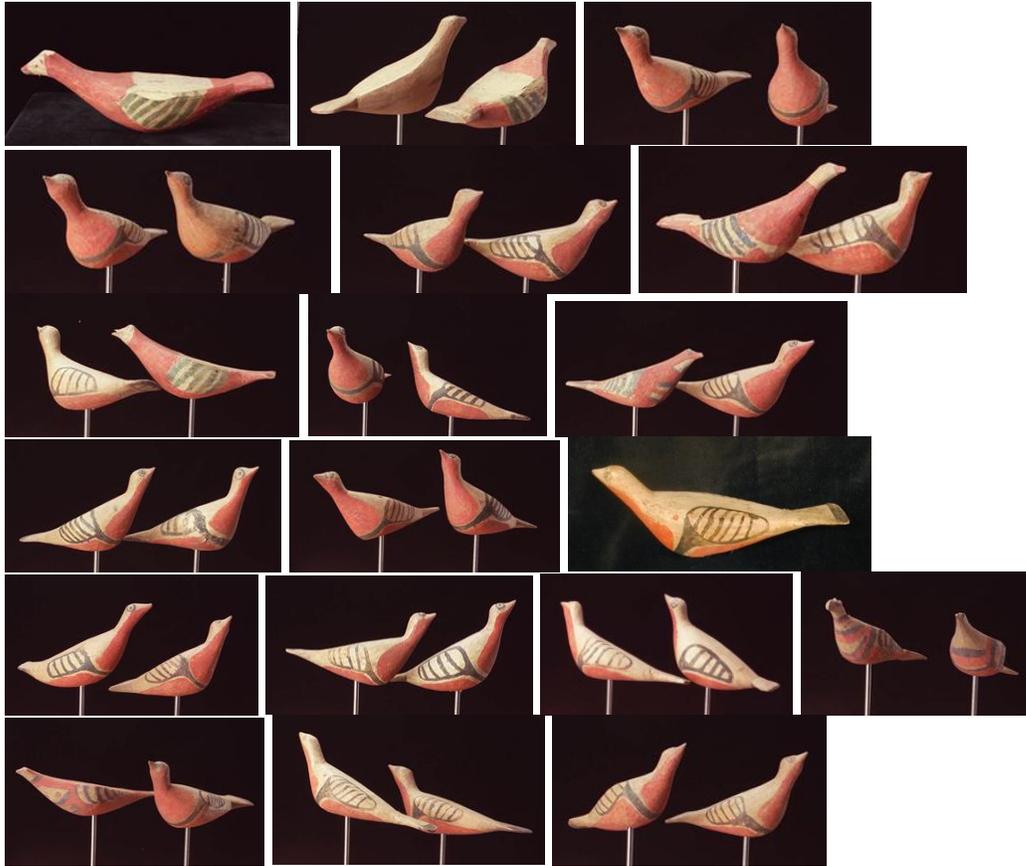
Acquired in Huu-ay-aht Territory by Charles F. Newcombe, 1911.

Wood, paint, cedar bark, mirror glass, brass screw-eye, metal nail, cotton string.

#2115: 23.0 x 15.5 x 12.0 cm (wooden part of mask only). Cedar bark “train” attached to back of head is 78.0 cm long.

#2116: 23.0 x 15.0 x 12.5 cm (wooden part of mask only). Cedar bark “train” attached to back of head is 77.0 cm long.

37 CARVED AND PAINTED BIRDS



These carved birds accompany the Thunderbird masks #2115, 2116. Acquired by Charles F. Newcombe, Bamfield, 1911

Artist Unknown

Wood, with red and green paint

Various sizes ranging from 17.5 x 5.9 x 6.3 cm to

32.0 x 14.0 x 12.5 cm

3. CHIEF JOHN MOSES' WHALING GEAR

Whale hunters were held in the highest regard in by the HUU-ay-aht in traditional times. To be successful, the head whalers had to undergo an extremely rigorous course of preparations that involved prayers, songs, fasting, repeated bathing in lakes, streams or ocean waters and other purification practices. Each whaling canoe held but eight crew members, and it took incredible strength, skill, patience and endurance to hunt down, kill and tow a whale to shore. Each whale brought the successful crew high status - and a lot of food for everyone in the community.

By the mid-20th century commercial whaling had reduced the number of whales to near extinction. Since whale hunting was no longer practical, in 1949 HUU-ay-aht whale hunter John Moses brought his family's treasured set of whaler's gear to the Royal BC Museum in Victoria so that it would be preserved for future generations. John Moses used his rubbing bundles for six days in order to prepare and bring success on his trip to put his whaling gear in the Museum.

Acquired in 1949 from Chief John Moses, Sarita

WHALER'S CEREMONIAL CAPE



Cedar bark, feathers, wood, bone/antler, sinew, rootlets
140.0 cm long x 30.0 cm wide x 10.0 cm deep

WHALER'S HEAD BAND



Cedar bark and cotton string
32.0 cm long x 20.0 cm wide x 4.0 cm high

WHALER'S RATTLE



Metal (aluminum), feathers, cedar bark, cotton string
23.8 cm long x 17.0 cm wide x 3.9 cm high

WHALER'S CHARM



Oregon Grape leaves, cedar bark wrapping
#6670a: 15.5 cm long x 5.0 cm in diameter
#6670b: 15.5 cm long x 4.0 cm in diameter

SEAL SKIN WHALING FLOAT



Seal skin, hemp rope, wooden attachments and cotton string
38.0 cm long x 23.0 cm wide x 16.0 cm high

4. BASKETRY

Huu-ay-aht women are renowned for their fine baskets, made from grasses and cedar bark and decorated with traditional and decorative designs.

TRINKET BASKET AND LID



Collected 1915
Artist Unknown
Cedar bark, raffia, grass, dye
12.0 cm in diameter x 8.0 cm high

TRINKET BASKET AND LID



Collected 1908-1943
Attributed to Mrs. Johnson
Raffia, grass, cedar bark, dye
10.0 cm in diameter x 8.3 cm high

WOVEN COASTER



Collected 1908-1943
Attributed to Mrs. Johnson
Grass, raffia, dye
11.6 cm in diameter x 0.03 cm deep

BASKETRY-COVERED BOTTLE AND LID



Collected 1908-1943
Attributed to Mrs. Johnson
Glass, grass, dye
5.2 cm in diameter x 8.0 cm high

TRINKET BASKET AND LID



Collected 1908-1943
Attributed to Mrs. Johnson
Cedar bark, raffia, grass, dye
12 cm in diameter x 8.0 cm high

TRINKET BASKET AND LID



Collected 1908-1943
Attributed to Mrs. Johnson
Cedar bark, raffia, grass, dye
13.5 cm in diameter x 8.0 cm high

TRINKET BASKET



Collected 1908-1943
Attributed to Mrs. Johnson
Cedar bark, grass, raffia, dye
120.7 cm in diameter x 10.5 cm high

BASKETRY-COVERED JAR AND LID



Collected 1908-1943
Attributed to Mrs. Johnson
Glass, grass, raffia, dye
6.8 cm in diameter x 4.8 cm high

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