Canada Customs, Each-you-eyh-ul Siem (?)  
Sights/Sites of Meaning in Musqueam Weaving

by

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Abstract

This thesis focuses on the production and display of weavings made by a small number of Musqueam women, who in the 1980s began weaving in the tradition of their ancestors. It addresses the way in which these weavings, positioned throughout Vancouver and worn in public settings, build a visual presence to counter the exclusion of Coast Salish cultural representations from the public construction of history in Vancouver and the discourse of Northwest Coast art. The Vancouver International Airport and the Museum of Anthropology at the University of British Columbia both share with Musqueam a history of place. A distinct relationship fostered between Museum staff and members of the Musqueam community has yielded several exhibits since the first, *Hands of Our Ancestors: The Revival of Weaving at Musqueam*, opened in 1986. The presence of Musqueam material at the Museum is part of an extensive history of interaction and negotiation between Canadian museums and the cultural communities whose histories, traditions and material culture are represented – a history which encompasses issues of representation, authorship and authority. The Vancouver International Airport is also situated on Musqueam traditional territory. Designed by representatives from the Musqueam Cultural Committee and the Airport project team, the international arrivals area features works of contemporary Musqueam artists which are intended to create a sense of place with an emphasis on the distinctiveness of its location. Travelers cross several thresholds in the terminal – the sequence of these crossings carefully choreographed so that deplaning passengers pass from the non-space of international transience to a culturally specific space marked by Musqueam's cultural representations, and then past Customs into Canada. Certain incidents at these sites indicate that visibility and self-representation do not in themselves answer the problems of power and history. When the Museum of Anthropology hosted a meeting for leaders of the Asia Pacific Economic Community in 1997, a newly implemented protocol agreement between Musqueam and the Museum was broken; and in a number of instances, achievements at the Airport have also been impaired. Despite these limits, weavings are not examples of token native inclusion as some critics argue. Rather, they are cultural representations strategically deployed by the Musqueam community. Enlarged from traditional blankets to monumental hangings, these weavings participate with other more recognized monumental Northwest Coast forms. They are visual, public signifiers of Musqueam identity which, without violating boundaries between public and private knowledge, carry messages from the community to a broader audience – messages intended to mark Musqueam’s precedence in Vancouver’s past as well as to claim visibility in the present.
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Preface

Not until I met Debra Sparrow in November 1998, while a graduate student at the University of British Columbia, did I learn anything of Vancouver’s history — though I have lived here for much of my life. I was instantly captivated by the manner with which she spoke of her community’s history, and by the skill and beauty of her weaving. In 1999, I attended the unveiling of Debra and her sister Robyn’s contemporary weaving at the Museum of Anthropology, an event which only strengthened my interest in pursuing the revival of weaving at Musqueam for my thesis. Over the next few months I began compiling information and interviewing individuals prominent in weaving’s recent emergence in public spaces throughout Vancouver. I met with Debra at a café in Kerrisdale for our first interview in August 2000, and a month later began working at the Museum of Anthropology as the Education and Public Programmes Assistant. My main responsibility was to manage the Musqueam Museum School, a programme Debra developed with Jill Baird, and which she continues to deliver to local elementary students. As colleagues and friends, we spoke frequently about issues I came across in my ongoing research. Robyn and I also became friends, and in December 2000 I was invited to join five other women in her basement to learn to weave.

My position at the Museum has afforded me a unique opportunity to work with many of the individuals that figure prominently in my thesis — Debra has participated in most of the projects I refer to; my supervisor Jill Baird, who co-developed the Musqueam Museum School, continues to work with many of the weavers at Musqueam; and one of my advisors, Ruth Phillips, is the Museum’s director. With very little material published on Coast Salish history, interviewing these individuals, and others who were involved in the projects I discuss, was essential. To work on a thesis which addresses contemporary issues relevant to the city I have grown up in, with individuals that share this history of place, has been extraordinary.

Figure 1. Debra Sparrow and Robyn Sparrow in front of their weaving on permanent display at the Museum of Anthropology, 1999. Photo by author.
Acknowledgments

To Musqueam’s weavers whose creativity inspired this research – Debra Sparrow, Robyn Sparrow, Wendy John, and Vivian Campbell – I express my deep appreciation for your help, in equal measure with great respect for your weaving. Since I first expressed my intent to write about the revival of weaving at Musqueam, professor and friend Charlotte Townsend-Gault has encouraged, guided and inspired me. Throughout the course of this project Ruth Phillips, Susan Roy, and Jill Baird have lent invaluable assistance and support, advice and insight. To each of you I am profoundly grateful. Victoria Scott and Stacey Mitchell, my thanks for your friendship. To my family, I express my deepest gratitude – your continual encouragement and love is my sustenance.

Hay ce:p qa Siem
Canada Customs, *Each-you-eyh-ul Siem*¹ (?): Sights/Sites of Meaning in Musqueam Weaving

¹ "Each-you-eyh-ul Siem" is the phonetic spelling of a *həqχəməʔəm* word – ʔəʔ ʔəxʷ ʔəw̑ ʔəw̑ ʔəf. The phrase is translated, "How are you?" and is a traditional greeting often extended to distinguished guests. *Həqχəməʔəm* is the traditional language spoken by Musqueam people throughout the lower regions of the Fraser River. It is a dialect of the *Halq'eméylem* language family which also includes the dialects of *Hul'q'umin'um' (spoken on southeastern Vancouver Island) and *Halq'eméylem* (spoken further up the Fraser River). See David S. Smith, "Halkomelem Dialects," in *A Stó:lo Coast Salish Historical Atlas*, ed. Keith Thor Carlson (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 2001), 22-23.
Introduction

Musqueam weaver and cultural educator Debra Sparrow helped to unpack boxes at the Museum of Anthropology when the collections were moved from the basement of the old university library in 1976. As she emptied the crates and looked at the objects around her, she wondered why her own community had nothing to display: “We have the Northwest Coast here, where there are theatricals, dancing, masks, and vibrancy. What was vibrant, what was visual in our community?” Twenty-three years later, Debra Sparrow’s own blanket woven with her sister Robyn Sparrow, was unveiled at the Museum. This thesis focuses on the production and display of weavings made by a small number of Musqueam women, who in the 1980s began weaving in the tradition of their ancestors. It addresses the way in which these weavings, positioned throughout the city and worn in public settings, build a visual presence to counter the exclusion of Coast Salish cultural representations from the public construction of history in Vancouver and the discourse of Northwest Coast art.

xʷmə랫xʷiʔəm: People of the grass

Musqueam or xʷmə罨xʷiʔəm means “people of the grass,” and refers to the sea grass that used to cover the Fraser River delta. The word Musqueam now defines both a people and a place. Today, there are approximately one thousand registered band members, the majority of whom live or have relatives who live on Musqueam Reserve No. 2, located at the mouth of the Fraser River in southwestern British Columbia – 416 acres of land set aside by provincial authorities in 1870. The area has been home to the

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3 Headings given in hən̓q̓əmin̓əm̓ and English are taken from text panels for the exhibit Written in the Earth, which opened at the Museum of Anthropology at the University of British Columbia in 1996. The exhibit was developed with extensive community consultation. I have chosen to use these phrases as headings throughout my thesis to reflect this collaboration. They also serve to highlight the hən̓q̓əmin̓əm language, which with only one fluent speaker at Musqueam, is endangered. The phrases may not reflect current orthography.
4 Information provided on a text panel at the Museum of Anthropology, University of British Columbia, 1999.
Musqueam people ‘from time immemorial,’ with archaeological evidence indicating that the village has been the site of uninterrupted residency for 3,000 years. Musqueam’s traditional territory extends beyond this Reserve to encompass the Fraser River Delta, Burrard Inlet, English Bay, and the City of Vancouver (Figure 2). Non-native settlers began to populate the area in large numbers following the 1858 Fraser River gold rush, and as New Westminster and Burrard Inlet were established as international ports for the area’s lumber and salmon canning industries. Former Musqueam Chief Delbert Guerin notes that “in the short space of a hundred years, the City of Vancouver has grown up to a huge monster which has almost swallowed our whole land.”

As early as 1864, Musqueam representatives protested non-native encroachment onto their traditional lands with written petitions and appeals to government officials. Since the 1970s, challenges have also been made in court. In 1975, the Musqueam Indian Band launched legal action known as ‘Guerin vs. the Queen’ which successfully challenged the Department of Indian Affairs’ administration of the Reserve and resulted in the 1984 Supreme Court of Canada decision in the Band’s favour. By 1990, they had successfully taken a fishing charge, ‘R. vs. Sparrow,’ to the Supreme Court of Canada to assert their aboriginal right to fish. These two cases were landmark legal decisions.

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In 1976, the Musqueam Indian Band issued a declaration to the federal government which delineates Musqueam’s traditional territories and identifies village, resource and cultural sites on a map. A comprehensive land claim submitted in 1984, outlines each area’s traditional and historic use and occupancy. Historical weavings, including those in museum collections throughout North America and Europe, are tangible links to pre-contact technology and culture, and evidence of land use and resource exploitation. The 1984 claim states: “In order to continue traditional dyeing, spinning and weaving technology, the natural resources required include mountain goat wool for blanket weaving, and various plants, trees and fungi for dyeing.”

\textit{sy̱wénəl məstəyəx̑: Long ago people}

Before contact with European explorers, Musqueam women wove blankets from materials gathered from their surrounding environment: wool was spun from the hair of mountain-goats obtained from the coastal mountains; plants such as alder, fern roots and yellow lichen yielded dyes; a white clay was used to clean the wool; looms, spindle whorls and wool beaters were carved from cedar and other woods. In order to weave, women needed access to these resources.

Blankets were used by the Coast Salish for bedding and warm robes. More elaborate weavings were made for potlatches and winter ceremonies – which were and have remained an integral part of Coast Salish life, closely tied to complex systems of exhibiting social status and cultural knowledge. The establishment of Fort Langley in 1827 militated against blanket production along the Fraser River as the Coast Salish were encouraged by missionaries and traders to abandon many of their old skills and traditions. As non-native settlement in Coast Salish territory intensified in the mid-nineteenth century, the availability of machine-made blankets through trade with the Hudson’s Bay Company and other merchants reduced the demand for hand woven blankets. By the early twentieth century, many Musqueam women were working in

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canneries, agriculture or as domestic servants. They also knitted and made baskets for sale, but weaving was practiced by only a few women by the mid-twentieth century. In 1952, there was only one woman known to be weaving at Musqueam.

A revival of weaving began in the 1960s when Sardis resident Oliver Wells and two Stó:lō women, Adeline Lorenzetto and Mary Peters, began a recovery of Coast Salish weaving techniques. They eventually formed the Salish Weavers Guild, a cooperative association funded by the federal Indian Crafts Assistance Program and provincial First Citizen’s Fund. The potential for weaving to become an economic activity was a crucial factor in this government support. Federal and provincial programs were funded as part of employment schemes formed “to maximize economic benefits for Indian people...while preserving an ethnic pride in their cultural heritage of traditional arts and crafts.”

**tənə̓ēx məstq̓a, Today’s Generation**

Wendy John, former Musqueam Chief and now Associate Regional Director General for the Pacific Region of the Department of Indian Affairs, recalls the beginning of weaving’s revival at Musqueam:

*I would have been in my mid-twenties. My grandmother talked about a course that was being held in Chilliwack, where she grew up. She wanted to go, so my sister Debbie, my grandmother and I drove up there and started to learn how to do the basic warping. And then I bought a book called Salish Weaving to try and teach myself, because although we were really interested, the driving got to be a little much. And then from there, not long after that the course was offered out at the Indian Centre.*

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10 Johnson and Bernick, 4.
11 Johnson and Bernick, 4.
14 P. Kendall, “BC Arts and Crafts Program, 1971-72,” RG10, vol. 11465, file 90/14-1, pt. 11, NAC, Pacific Region Federal Records Centre, quoted in Roy, 95. Concurrent with these weaving programs, other projects such as the K’san carving school in Hazelton, B.C. were also receiving financial assistance. Officially opened in 1970, K’san was an attempt by natives and non-natives to “help solve the area’s social and economic problems by promoting better understanding of local First Nations culture and reviving its artistic traditions.” See V. Jensen and J.V. Power, “Ksan,” *The Canadian Encyclopedia* (Edmonton: Hurtig Publishers, 1985), 951.
15 Wendy John, interview with author, 6 November 2000.
Both Wendy John and Debra Sparrow applied to take the weaving course that was to be offered, but neither was accepted. Wendy John recounts:

At that point Leonard George from Burrard was the Executive Director out there. I picked up the phone – he’s a very good friend of mine, but I got really angry with him. I went through all of the arguments about Salish women being there...lo and behold he called me back to say there was one spot available. I phoned Debbie – she was fine with it, so I went down there.\(^{16}\)

A successful proposal by Musqueam Indian Band administrator Howard Grant to Canada Manpower enabled Wendy John to start teaching a weaving class at Musqueam in 1983. As with the revival at Sardis, funding from the federal employment program was intended to create jobs for people on the Reserve and to establish weaving as a viable commercial enterprise for community members. Wendy John and Debra Sparrow specify that its revival was also linked to the revitalization and reinforcement of cultural pride within their community. Wendy John comments: “One of the reasons we talked about it was the whole education process, the lack of pride. Why were our women knitting when they had something like this?”\(^{17}\)

The program began a process of rediscovery and reconstruction for the ten women who participated (Figure 3). Some of them came to the class unaware that weaving had once been such an important part of their culture. Wendy John recalls: “When we started, I’d say over half the women didn’t even realize the type of weaving we were talking about....they thought we were going to be making baskets and were shocked to find out that we had blankets.”\(^{18}\) Weaving then, began a reconnection to the past and the physical manifestation of their ancestors’ labour, cultural knowledge and world view.

![Musqueam weavers](image)

\(^{16}\) Wendy John, interview with author, 6 November 2000.

\(^{17}\) Wendy John, quoted in Johnson and Bernick, 16.

\(^{18}\) Wendy John, quoted in Johnson and Bernick, 16.
Debra Sparrow explains: "We gradually realized that what weaving was really teaching us as a people was to regain something that we had lost in our community, and that was patience, understanding, and the knowledge and wisdom that our people had passed on to each other."

The novice weavers pieced together a history of weaving from written accounts of Coast Salish life, Oliver Wells' instructive booklet *Salish Weaving: Primitive and Modern*, and the publication *Salish Weaving* by Paula Gustafson. They also studied historical blankets in the collections of the Museum of Anthropology at the University of British Columbia, the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C., and the National Museum of the American Indian in New York. These weavings were treated as historic documents – cultural records which revealed the techniques and processes used by their ancestors. Blankets, they discovered, were most often a rectangular shape with a slightly rounded bottom edge, laced with fringe. Geometric design elements ranged from horizontal lines to zigzag and diamond patterns, but nothing has been noted of their possible symbolic meanings as no documentation exists.

In 1991, British Columbia entered into treaty negotiations with First Nations in the province to discuss aboriginal title. Wendy John attended the ceremony when the agreement that established the treaty process was signed. She remembers it for its political relevance, but at the same time describes the significance of the event as a display of cultural continuity and perseverance:

For the first time, our Salish chiefs stood up with their blankets, like they would have done in the 1800s...and they stood out above and beyond, because people have all seen the Haida and the Kwagiulth. There they were standing up getting ready to start the treaty process and they had their blankets again.

Coast Salish leaders had done just this in 1906, when they met on a North Vancouver wharf to show their support for Joe Capilano, Basil David and Chillihitza who were to depart for England to petition King Edward VII for recognition of their land rights (Figure 4). They wore traditional blankets pinned over their shoulders, marking their status as

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20 See Gustafson, *Salish Weaving*, for a comprehensive record of historical blankets found in museums throughout North America and Europe.
21 Wendy John, quoted in Roy, 80.
22 "Appendix 1: Stó:lo Historical Timeline," in *A Stó:lo Coast Salish Historical Atlas*, 167, identifies the leaders as Chief Basil David of Shuswap, Chief Chillihitza of Okanagan and Chief Joe Capilano of
“wealthy, knowledgeable, and respected people – appropriate representatives to carry a petition to the King.”

Debra Sparrow notes: “They presented themselves in a manner that was important to them and they brought their history, education, their reflection of beauty and their intelligence… on their backs.”

Although less recognized as sites of protest, Musqueam woven textiles when worn or displayed in these contexts, challenge the pervasive story of cultural decline. They are visual reminders of the community’s ongoing cultural, political, and historical presence. James Clifford notes that when cultural display is in the hands of aboriginal people themselves, “master narratives of cultural disappearance and salvage [can] be replaced by stories of revival, remembrance, and struggle.”

In her thesis, “Making History Visible: Culture and Politics in the Presentation of Musqueam History,” Susan Roy strongly argues that although non-natives often exclude culture from a political realm where questions of land rights and political organization are located, for many First Nations the division is not as distinct. As Wendy John explains, the revival of Coast Salish weaving at Musqueam involved a rediscovery and reconstruction of the past, but it is also closely linked with the assertion of aboriginal rights and title: “The tying of cultural revival and land claims is not done consciously, but it evolves. I think every community that is involved in land claims [has] to go back and find what you had to represent yourself as a distinct nation from the time before contact.”

Figure 4. Salish leaders gathered on ferry wharf, North Vancouver, 1906. Photo courtesy of City of Vancouver Archives, IN P.41#1 N.23#1.

Squamish. However, Susan Roy notes that Joe Capilano fell ill just prior to their departure and Mathias Joe was sent in his place. King Edward VII met with the men but rebuffed their claims on the grounds that treaty rights were a Canadian matter. See Roy, 78-79.

23 Roy, 79.
24 Debra Sparrow, quoted in Roy, 78.
Coast Salish cultural representations have been underrepresented in art historical and anthropological literature on the Northwest Coast since the earliest writings. The colonizing, homogenizing representations of the Northwest Coast are specific constructions of aboriginal cultural traditions which promote and privilege northern and central forms over Salish ones: "Totem poles quickly came to stand for Native peoples on the Northwest Coast." Anthropologists such as Franz Boas and Marius Barbeau provided an abundance of ethnographic documentation to fuel scholarly inquiry, publications, and museum collecting practices – all with preference given to Haida and Kwakwaka'wakw communities. In a 1930 monograph, Erna Gunther and Hermann Haeberlin state that the Coast Salish "represent a very marginal development in the art of wood working, having essentially the forms used to the north, but none of the artistic finish or even fine technical skill." This comparative judgment is indicative of the gendered and hierarchical Western classification of artistic media practiced throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Crisca Bierwert notes:

Thus, the dramatic regalia and paraphernalia occluded the vitality of Northwest Coast peoples, including the Salish, whose cultures are less material, characterized less by monumental production and more by personal expression, whose possessions are marked by an absence of what was taken to stand for cultural vitality and productivity.

Coast Salish carving traditions are distinct from the well known styles and genres of the central and northern coast. Musqueam carvers have traditionally created houseposts rather than totem poles. The raising of poles in Coast Salish territory by other First Nations groups contributes to the formation of a homogenous, native symbol and erases the specificity of Coast Salish history. Musqueam must declare its presence in

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26 Wendy John, quoted in Roy, 105.
29 See Bierwert, 15-18, for a thorough review of anthropology’s marginalization of Coast Salish culture. See Roy, 64-65, for detailed examples of Musqueam marginalization.
31 Janet Berlo and Ruth Phillips note that if textile traditions, rather than carving, had been used as the measure of artistic development, the accolades would be reversed. See Berlo and Phillips, 189.
32 Bierwert, 16.
33 See Roy, 13-44, for a discussion of Musqueam houseposts.
Vancouver to counter the abundance of these forms given representation in the city—particularly the Kwakwaka’wakw poles in Stanley Park and Haida sculptures prominent throughout Vancouver, including those at the Museum of Anthropology and the Vancouver International Airport.

*Down From the Shimmering Sky: Masks of the Northwest Coast,* an exhibit held at the Vancouver Art Gallery in 1998, made evident another distinction between Coast Salish and northern traditions. It exhibited masks from every cultural group on the Northwest Coast with the exception of Coast Salish sxweyxwi masks, which Musqueam and other Coast Salish families consider improper for display or use outside of a ritual context. Musqueam elder Andrew C. Charles addressed the absence of the mask in his speech to the exhibit’s opening night audience: “*For those of us who belong to the Sxweyxwi, we hold its importance most sacredly and refuse to publicly display it as an art form.***”34 Weaving however, represents the Musqueam community without violating such boundaries between public and private knowledge. Debra Sparrow notes:

*[Before weaving’s revival] my sister [Wendy John] and I had many conversations that revolved around the lack of visual reflections of our people. We looked in awe at the visual images of the other native peoples, that reflected their lifestyles. Ours couldn’t be shared with the outside world because it means too much to us; it has a spiritual value that cannot be seen by the public.*35

Although woven blankets are associated with a complex set of social and cultural values that relate to social standing, respectability, and community leadership, wearing them is not a hereditary right. Consequently, weaving can be constructed as a visual, public signifier of community identity—something to show others without having to negotiate intricate family histories and politics. They convey messages that are intended to cross cultural boundaries.

When during the exhibit’s development, co-curator Robert Joseph met with Debra Sparrow and her sister Chief Gail Sparrow, he learned of this distinction between public and privately disclosed knowledge.36 To compensate for the absence of any Coast Salish

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34 Andrew C. Charles, quoted in Roy, 69. See Roy 69, footnote 72, for more detail.
36 When Robert Joseph went to Musqueam to talk with band officials about borrowing masks for the exhibit, he found the administration offices closed. Recognizing him from across the street, Debra Sparrow invited him over at her house. Her sister Chief Gail Sparrow later joined them.
masks in the exhibit, Debra and Robyn Sparrow were each asked to weave a blanket to be hung in the Vancouver Art Gallery for the duration of the show. Positioned on either side of the entranceway to the *Down from the Shimmering Sky* exhibit with a statement from Chief Gail Sparrow, Debra and Robyn Sparrow's large weavings welcomed visitors to Musqueam traditional territory, helping to build a presence to be offered as a conscious corrective to Musqueam's lack of visibility in the exhibit, in the public construction of history in Vancouver, and in the discourse of Northwest Coast art.

*sqwx dqwtx: Listening to the Messages*

The Vancouver International Airport and the Museum of Anthropology at the University of British Columbia both share with Musqueam a history of place. Each site has an extensive history of interaction and negotiation with Musqueam – histories which encompass issues of representation, authorship and authority. Not only art producers claim identities and constitute social relations through their products, but members of the public often use the same objects, import and infuse them with their own meanings, and use them for their own purposes. Moira Simpson uses the term 'borderland' to define these spaces. They are characterized by contestation and friction, negotiation over identity, and acknowledgment of different political and cultural agendas. The Museum of Anthropology and Vancouver International Airport are two such sites. The messages exchanged through the weavings commissioned for these locations are part of this struggle by producer and consumer to assert both individual and cultural identities, needs and desires. I have attempted in the chapters that follow, to identify the different significations these weavings hold – asking what meaning is produced, and for whom.

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Chapter I

"Museum makes up for bad old days:"39

The Museum of Anthropology at the University of British Columbia

The Museum of Anthropology at the University of British Columbia, is just kilometres from the Musqueam Reserve. Musqueam’s 1976 declaration identifies traditional villages and resource sites throughout its territory – including two fortified sites, q’ôlxw (stockade) and q’íq’ôlxw (little stockade) and others of cultural significance that are located on the university grounds.40 The Museum’s recognition of this history has yielded a distinct relationship between Museum staff and members of the Musqueam community – this chapter chronicles the association. To understand this relationship within a broader context, the following section provides a brief introduction to the history of Canadian museums and their use and display of First Nations material culture.

"Visibility Without Voice"41

The creation of public museums in the early nineteenth century coincided with the consolidation of Western imperial dominion over aboriginal peoples around the world. Often beginning with private collections obtained by elites through conquest and exploitation, museums came to conserve cultural heritage and construct a sense of nationhood and of national identity.42 In many countries where an aboriginal population

40 Point Grey bluff where the Museum is located, was also used as a Battery during World War II to defend the Port of Vancouver. Architect Arthur Erickson worked to incorporate this history of place in the Museum’s design. One of the three gun rotundas, left in place since the Battery was constructed, forms the circular base for Bill Reid’s sculpture ‘Raven and the First Men.’ Site names recorded in Bruce MacDonald, Vancouver: A Visual History (Vancouver: Talonbooks, 1992), 11-12.
42 Jessica Evans, Representing a Nation: A Reader – Histories, heritage and museums (New York: Routledge, 1999), 1.
was colonized, its distinctive cultural forms were appropriated as national symbols – constituting what Nelson Graburn calls the country’s “borrowed identity.”

The first exhibition in Canada to display native cultural representations in a gallery context was *Canadian West Coast Art: Native and Modern*, held at the National Gallery of Canada in 1927. This period in Canadian history is characterized by a conscious and assertive effort to define and construct a distinct cultural identity. The exhibit allowed the country to claim native artistic production as Canada’s art which provided “a longer continuum of cultural heritage in which Anglo-Canadian nationalism could find a historic base.” Situated in the past, native art could be viewed from this nationalistic perspective as a heritage of decorative design, which as Eric Brown, director of the National Gallery said at the time, “[had] the unique quality of being entirely national in its origin and character.”

"Some are being made by history
Some are ‘making’ history"

In January 1988, *The Spirit Sings: Artistic Traditions of Canada’s First Peoples* opened at the Glenbow Museum in Calgary as part of a cultural festival which was planned to coincide with the Winter Olympics. The exhibition brought hundreds of artifacts from foreign museums together with some of the earliest aboriginal materials in the Glenbow’s collection. It was intended to highlight the ‘richness, diversity and complexity’ of Canada’s native cultures at the moment of contact; emphasize the ‘distinctive view’ of these cultures by examining ‘common threads’ between them; and emphasize the ‘adaptability and resilience’ of these cultures in the face of European domination.

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46 Morrison, 24.
47 Eric Brown, quoted in Nemiroff, 25.
Two years after staff had begun work on the project, it was announced that Shell Oil would fund the exhibit. Shortly after this, the Lubicon Lake Indian Band of Northern Alberta called for a boycott of the 1988 Winter Olympics to draw attention to their unsolved but outstanding claim for the return of their traditional lands. Many First Nations organizations, from bands and tribal councils to community organizations, honoured the boycott. Although the Lubicon initially sought primarily to target wealthy and powerful interests, their attention was later drawn more generally to the politics of exhibiting. Chief Bernard Ominayak states: "The irony of using a display of North American Indian artifacts to attract people to the Winter Olympics being organized by interests who are still actively seeking to destroy Indian people seems painfully obvious." The exhibition met with resistance from many of the cultural communities whose histories, traditions and material culture were represented. Their protests challenged the cultural authority of experts and institutions and their entitlements to native material culture, and gained much media attention, popular and international support. *The Spirit Sings* opened on schedule but the controversy surrounding it catapulted relations between museums and First Nations in Canada into a new era.

The Assembly of First Nations and the Canadian Museums Association soon formed a joint Task Force to review issues of representation, authorship and authority brought forward by the conflict. In 1992, *Turning the Page: Forging New Partnerships Between Museums and First Peoples* was published. The Task Force’s mandate, as outlined in the report, was to "develop an ethical framework and strategies for Aboriginal Nations to represent their history and culture in concert with cultural institutions." It discusses issues arising from the boycott, and reports on the process of consultation between First Nations and museums that resulted. The essence of the report recommends an increased dialogue between curators and native peoples and a sharing of responsibility for the management of cultural property. Museums are asked to accord a role and a voice

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50 The Lubicon focused on *The Spirit Sings* because Shell Oil was drilling on land claimed as part of their traditional lands.
to First Nations without denying the work, experience or expertise of non-native museum staff. Co-chair Tom Hill challenges museums to open their doors to those whose material culture is inside. While acknowledging the educational value of museums, Hill states that they must ensure First Nations have a say in the ways their cultures and histories are portrayed and interpreted – arguing for direct participation in all levels of the decision making process.53

Though the Task Force report is lauded as a significant step to improving relations between First Nations and museums, its effectiveness has been questioned. Deborah Doxtator asserts that many of the recommendations by their nature favour institutional rather than Aboriginal interests. Her searching criticism of the report suggests that the recommendations perpetuate a structural imbalance. She notes:

*The recommendations generally reascribe most of the responsibility — and the position of power — to non-native museums, who must out of moral compunction involve aboriginal people by allowing them access to museum collections. Aboriginal peoples are given a somewhat passive role in these recommendations.*54

Doxtator acknowledges the benefits that a collaborative exhibit has in bringing the cultural expressions of a people into a major institution, but notes that it is still an event that spills out, not from an institution based in the native community but from non-native forums. What does this say about who has the ‘authentic’ voice to represent aboriginal culture?

The report represented an important step forward in articulating a constructive set of principles for Canadian museums, but Michael Ames, director of the Museum of Anthropology from 1974 until 1997, notes that developments have fallen considerably short of expectations “as policies are always easier to espouse than to put into practice.”55 The following section chronicles the distinct relationship fostered between Museum of Anthropology staff and members of the Musqueam community as part of this

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extensive history of interaction and negotiation between Canadian museums and the cultural communities whose histories, traditions and material culture are represented.

**mi ce:p kʷəxʷ iləm: Welcome to the traditional territory of the Musqueam people**

The Museum of Anthropology has sought opportunities to work with native people whenever possible since its establishment in 1947. Initially, this collaboration consisted primarily of sponsoring totem pole restoration and carving, and though these kinds of projects continue, the Museum also explores other forms of cooperation. Opened in 1976, the Museum’s present building includes a large visible storage gallery for the public display of the bulk of the Museum’s ethnographic collections. Its purpose is to make the collections accessible to the university community, general public, and native visitors. According to its current mission statement, the Museum strives to:

- provide information about and access to cultural objects from around the world, with emphasis on the achievements and concerns of the First Peoples and British Columbia’s cultural communities;
- to stimulate critical thinking and understanding about cross-cultural issues;
- to pose questions about and develop innovative responses to museological, anthropological, aesthetic, educational, and political challenges.

Though the Museum houses materials from around the world and an archaeological collection from across British Columbia, it is known particularly for its collection of northern Northwest Coast art. The building, designed by Arthur Erickson, features monumental totem poles collected from Haida, Kwakwaka’wakw and Tsimshian communities in its Great Hall – a practice that follows a general pattern that has privileged northern and central art styles as the coast’s highest achievement.

When Vancouver celebrated its centennial anniversary and hosted the World’s Fair in 1986, the Museum of Anthropology was an official off-site venue, and exhibited four temporary shows, including *Hands of Our Ancestors: The Revival of Salish Weaving*

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57 Audrey and Harry Hawthorn, the Museum’s founders, opened the doors of the first Museum of Anthropology in the basement of the old university library in March 1949, under fundamental principles that continue to inform the Museum’s activities today.
at Musqueam (Figure 5).\textsuperscript{59} Co-curators Elizabeth Johnson and Kathryn Bernick note that the exhibit was one of the first ways with which Musqueam’s weavers chose to present their work to an outside audience. In the exhibition catalogue, Johnson writes that one of her most rewarding experiences as a curator at the Museum has been the opportunity to work with people from whose cultures the collections have come:

We are newcomers to the area they have occupied for several thousand years, and over which their activities traditionally extended. We all agreed that the Museum of Anthropology should hold an exhibit of their work, which we would create together. It is appropriate that such an exhibit should take place here, not only because we are neighbours, but also because we are committed to encouraging and exhibiting the work of contemporary native artists. Our purpose is not simply to preserve and display objects from the past, but also to work with those people who are continuing the traditions of their ancestors.\textsuperscript{60}

Though rarely acknowledged, it was among the first exhibits to include the significant participation of native advisors, presenting the issue of native consultation itself in its display.\textsuperscript{61} Johnson and Bernick note:

They were closely involved in every phase of the exhibit, from its first conceptualization to the gathering which they held to acknowledge its closing. All the Museum staff found this to be a valuable experience, and we now see it as one

\textsuperscript{59} One of the three other exhibits, Robes of Power: Totems Poles on Cloth, displayed Northwest Coast button blankets. It was curated by Gitksan artist and writer Doreen Jensen and is the first exhibit at the Museum solely curated by a First Nations person. The remaining two exhibits highlighted works by Bill Reid, and Cowichan Indian knitting. See Michael Ames, “Cultural empowerment and museums: opening up anthropology through collaboration,” Objects of Knowledge, ed. Susan Pearce (London & Atlantic Highlands: The Athlone Press, 1990), 162-3.

\textsuperscript{60} Johnson and Bernick, 1.

\textsuperscript{61} For example, Judith Ostrowitz recognizes the exhibits A Time for Gathering: Native Heritage in Washington State at the Burke Museum in 1991, and Chiefly Feasts: The Enduring Kwakiutl Potlatch which opened in New York in the same year, as the first such exhibits though both opened five years after Hands of Our Ancestors and Robes of Power. See Judith Ostrowitz, Privileging the Past: Reconstructing
possible model for working with other native groups and individuals. It is no longer appropriate that we monopolize the interpretation of their cultures. Rather, we should make our specialized skills available to help them to communicate their own knowledge and experience.62

The contribution that women make to cultural expression has tended to be marginalized and its recognition underdeveloped, but *Hands of Our Ancestors* celebrated the revival of Musqueam weaving and drew it to the attention of an international audience. The weavers gave demonstrations both at the Museum and in the Folklife Pavilion at Expo '86, which they value for the opportunity it presented to dispel many commonly held misconceptions about urban natives. Musqueam elders Vincent Stogan and Dominic Point, wearing newly woven blankets, were also present to greet the Prince and Princess of Wales and welcome them to Musqueam’s traditional territory (Figure 6).

*Hands of Our Ancestors* was funded by support from a number of government sources to construct an economically viable industry for its participants.63 A second project also funded as an employment programme, *Proud to be Musqueam* brought two Musqueam women Verna Kenoras and Leila Stogan to the Museum in 1988 for a four-month work placement. The women chose for their project to research the history of their Band, studying photographs held by families on the reserve and interviewing elders about

Figure 6. Musqueam elders Vincent Stogan and Dominic Point greet the Prince and Princess of Wales at Expo '86. Photo courtesy of Jon Murray. Vancouver Province.

63 These sources were the Department of Communication’s Special Granting Programme for Vancouver to celebrate the centennial, Employment and Immigration Canada which provided funding for
them. Michael Ames notes that the exhibit’s popularity with museum visitors was the result of Kenoras and Stogan’s informal and personal approach.64 Black and white photographs mounted with lengthy captions mixed residential school class pictures with informal family snapshots. The labels were written in the first person, with Kenoras and Stogan notably frank about their intentions:

_We’re from Musqueam and we’re proud to be Musqueam. It seems to me that when you give people the address of Musqueam, they’ll say, “What? Where’s that? I didn’t know there was a reserve out there by the University.” We just wanted to show where Musqueam is._

_I’d love them to think...that we’re civilized. Because a lot of people, kids, come up to me and say, “You’re Indian?” and then they’ll ask us if we still live in teepees. I want to show that we don’t live in teepees or long houses and we’re just like them...I’d like them to really appreciate the pictures, because I really have a good feeling for the pictures._65

A version of the exhibit has remained on display at the Museum since 1988.66 Duplicate panels are hung in the Elder’s Centre at Musqueam, and a laminated copy is available for loan to school groups through the Museum’s education department.

As at other Canadian museums, the strengthening of partnerships with local First Nations became a priority in the years following the Task Force meetings. What is now an evolving, on-going cooperative relationship between the Musqueam Indian Band and Museum of Anthropology was formalized in July 1997. The document was the product of many months of discussion and consultation between director Michael Ames and Leona Sparrow and Howard Grant, representatives delegated by the Musqueam Band Council to work with the Museum. It acknowledges the Museum’s location within Musqueam traditional territory, and formalizes a commitment from both parties to further a relationship of trust and understanding on matters of mutual interest and concern. One of its objectives was to establish and implement a joint plan “to highlight and increase the presence of Musqueam throughout [the Museum of Anthropology] through special acquisitions, exhibits, programmes, and other projects to address the under-

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64 Ames, “Cultural empowerment,” 164-166.
65 Verna Kenoras and Leila Stogan, quoted in Ames, “Cultural empowerment,” 164-166.
66 The original exhibit was installed in the Museum’s Theatre Gallery and also displayed a blanket woven by Barbara Cayou in 1987 and a piece of basketry. See Clifford, _Routes_, 129-131.
representation of works by Musqueam artists from the South Coast regions in the Museum's permanent galleries.\textsuperscript{67}

Two archaeological exhibitions prepared at the Museum in 1995 and 1996, \textit{Written in the Earth} and \textit{From Under the Delta: Wet-site Archaeology in the Lower Fraser Delta}, were developed under the auspices of the Task Force report and this burgeoning protocol agreement. \textit{From Under the Delta} featured basketry and weaving – some examples 4,500 years old – retrieved from waterlogged sites including areas where the University of British Columbia and Musqueam Reserve are situated. \textit{Written in the Earth} displayed artifacts of similar age and provenance. Ruth Phillips notes that these two exhibits represented the Museum’s strongest acknowledgment of the special relationship between Musqueam and the Museum which arose from their shared occupancy of place. She also identifies that they were part of a larger project aimed at rebalancing the received hierarchy of Northwest Coast arts that remains embedded in the Museum’s venerable permanent installations.\textsuperscript{68}

\textit{From Under the Delta} opened in April 1996 and \textit{Written in the Earth} in October 1996, both with approval of the participating bands. The process by which they were organized however, involved radical and difficult negotiations. Both exhibit teams sought consent from those band councils whose heritage was to be exhibited. Each council gave its consent on the condition that its representatives be consulted on the selection and interpretation of materials. Most of the artifacts chosen for the exhibits were excavated in Musqueam traditional territory, and as a result Musqueam’s Band Council took the greatest interest in the proceedings. Musqueam’s consent differed from the other bands in that consultation was required at each stage of the exhibition, from initial preparation to the return of materials to museum storage at the conclusion of the two exhibits. The Council reserved the right to withdraw approval for either exhibition at

any point should the Museum fail to meet the standards of performance agreed to during the consultation process. The withdrawal of their approval would shut down the exhibit as the Museum would be obliged to withdraw all Musqueam objects. The concept of collaboration quickly assumed new meaning – traditional roles were in effect reversed with Museum staff becoming the exhibit consultants, and Musqueam the partner with final authority.  

In November 1997, while these exhibits were still being featured, the Museum of Anthropology was appropriated by the Canadian government to be the site of the prime ministerial meeting of the Asia Pacific Economic Community (APEC). In recognition of the Band’s traditional ownership of territory surrounding the Museum, it had become accepted practice for Musqueam representatives to greet official visitors from foreign nations (including other First Nations) to the Museum. University and Museum officials urged the importance of this protocol on federal government officials during the months preceding the APEC meeting. In response, the Prime Minister’s Office scheduled a prayer by elder Vincent Stogan and a welcome speech by Chief Gail Sparrow at the start of the proceedings, but two days before the event the invitations were revoked. Under considerable pressure from certain APEC members to avoid challenges to their human rights records, the Prime Minister’s representatives had found Chief Sparrow’s prepared speech to be too controversial – and although a much shorter speech was drafted to exclude such references, the Prime Minister’s Office insisted on canceling her welcome and Stogan’s prayer. Instead, Chief Sparrow was permitted a brief informal greeting with each of the leaders in the Museum’s lobby prior to the official opening of the meeting (Figure 7). As the Museum’s newly

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69 Michael Ames notes that an exhibition’s process is now as important as its outcome – although not always easy to accommodate. It takes time to create and sustain a full partnership based on trust. He asserts that consultation properly begins at the outset of a proposal, not after an exhibition concept has been formulated or a schedule outlined. Ames was actively involved in the Task Force at both the regional and national levels. See Ames, “Changing Representations,” 73-88.

70 The meeting provoked large protest demonstrations on the campus – the largest since the 1960s - directed against human rights abuses in member countries and against negative effects of economic globalization. Police handling of the protest, which included the forcible removal and detainment of protesters and the use of pepper spray, proved highly controversial and received sustained national press coverage. See Wesley Vue, Pepper in Our Eyes: The APEC Affair (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2000).

71 Representatives from the Prime Minister’s Office, upon witnessing the prayer and greeting at a rehearsal, found them both unacceptable. See Phillips, “APEC,” 178-180.

appointed director, Ruth Phillips had only just signed the general protocol with Musqueam in July of the same year. She notes: "From the Museum's point of view the absence of a formal Musqueam greeting to foreign visitors [at APEC] constituted a breach of the protocol it had only recently signed and offered a serious insult to one of the most respected elders in the region."  

The long standing historical pattern by which Canada appropriates First Nations to its national identity before an international audience is well recognized, but the high visibility accorded to First Nations cultures on these occasions has also offered First Nations activists leverage to use for their own purposes. At Expo '86 the prominence of First Nations exhibitions focused attention on the renewed vitality of native communities. The installations insisted on the authenticity of contemporary arts and cultural life. Phillips notes that involvement in these periodic international displays also enables the Museum to further several of its long-term goals such as “to facilitate collaborative processes of representation in which First Nations voices are represented and authoritative, to foreground contemporary First Nations arts and cultures; and to make money for the Museum that has been vital to its ability to carry on its broader educational and curatorial programmes.” The anticipation that APEC would deliver some of the same benefits informed the Museum’s positive response to the suggestion that the meeting be held at the Museum. The failure of respect signaled when the federal government canceled the formal appearances, demonstrates that economic globalization is able to disempower local initiatives. Phillips recognizes that the Museum lost the power to enforce its protocols, stating:

![Figure 7. Chief Gail Sparrow greets President Suharto at the Museum of Anthropology, 1997. Photo courtesy of CBC The National.](image)

...it is incumbent upon Museums to point out the new realities that lie behind what may appear to be familiar rituals; they must develop strategies that make clear that these are not mere window dressing or empty gestures but rather the visible signs of rearticulated, reassumed and mutually recognized responsibilities.  

A series of other projects at the Museum represent the ongoing collaborations between Musqueam community members and Museum staff. After extensive development as a pilot project, the Musqueam Museum School continues to be offered by Debra Sparrow in collaboration with the Museum’s Curator of Education, Jill Baird. It is a school programme comprised of six sessions spent at the Museum, Musqueam Reserve, and school group’s classroom, and culminates with an evening celebration held at the Museum. The students are the evening’s hosts – guiding their parents and friends through the Museum, and giving poster presentations to share newly gained knowledge about Musqueam weaving, plant dyes, and the rehabilitation of Musqueam Creek.

The programme demonstrates a commitment from the Museum to restructure its historic relationship of power with the communities of whose objects it displays. It is grounded in the understanding that communities, often the focus of exhibitions and research, should have a major voice in shaping exhibition themes, research questions and education programs – replacing the old hierarchy of authority with a new model of equality and collaboration. This new partnership recognizes and respects the vital knowledge that is held by community members and places it in dialogue with academic scholarship. In the case of the Musqueam Museum School, the programme is delivered by community resource people and supported by Museum staff. Debra Sparrow’s personal narrative and experiences are central, rather than information gathered through curatorial research or other forms of written documentation. Her goals for the programme include the opportunity, in her words, “to give students of Vancouver a glimpse of our world through my eyes and re-interpret some of the wrong, out-dated, misinterpreted information which portrays my community in negative stereotypical ways and which is too often found in text books and other ‘authoritative’ sources used by students.”

76 Phillips, “APEC,” 188.
For the anniversary exhibition *Exhibit A: Objects of Intrigue*, fifty people associated with the Museum over its history (an arbitrary figure that grew to sixty-eight) were invited to identify their favorite objects from the collection, and share the stories, memories and insights they invoked. Of the seven people to choose Musqueam materials, four (Susan Point, Debra Sparrow, Leona Sparrow and elder Vincent Stogan) were from Musqueam. Leona Sparrow, an advocate for aboriginal land claims and constitutional rights who has been involved with the Museum as a cultural advisor since 1995, notes:

> It is encouraging to see over the past few years a recognition of the Musqueam community and an increased presence of Musqueam culture and people within the Museum. Although it does not have a very large collection of Musqueam material culture, there is an emerging working relationship where the Museum actively consults with Musqueam representatives regarding the development of museum exhibits, storage, and display of cultural items, program development, and community access. The Museum has an emerging understanding that where, in recent history, it has been the repository of cultural wealth, it also has an obligation to bring that cultural information back to the community where it originated.

Leona Sparrow selected a blanket woven by Roberta Louis, cedar root basket, cat-tail grass mat, cedar dish and copy of the Musqueam’s 1976 declaration. Writing about her choices, she states:

> [This collection of objects] in a small way acknowledges the presence, resilience, and continuity of the Musqueam community and the contributions of those who have helped weave the fabric of this community over the centuries, and those who continue their efforts to affirm a place for the Musqueam people and the Musqueam culture into the future.

Jill Baird, who has worked closely with many of the weavers, was also invited to select an object from the collection. She chose a weaving by Robyn and Debra Sparrow, commissioned by the Museum in 1992, which replicates a blanket collected by Charles Wilkes during an expedition for the Smithsonian Institute in 1838 (Figure 8). Initial efforts to revive weaving often focused on copying old artifacts, a step the weavers found necessary to relearn the skills and traditions practiced generations before them.

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78 At her graduation ceremony from the Faculty of Law at the University of British Columbia, Leona Sparrow wore one of the first blankets her cousins Debra and Robyn Sparrow had completed. Debra Sparrow, interview with author, 21 August 2000.

79 Leona Sparrow, quoted in *Objects and Expressions: Celebrating the Collections of the Museum of Anthropology at the University of British Columbia* (Vancouver: Museum of Anthropology, University of British Columbia, 1999), 64.

80 Leona Sparrow, quoted in *Objects and Expressions*, 64.
In 1999, the Museum reopened Gallery 3, removing the Masterpiece Gallery which displayed small carvings of curios, combs, pipes, rattles, and jewelry – objects chosen for their quality of workmanship. Renovated to celebrate the Museum’s fiftieth anniversary, the new exhibit Gathering Strength, represents "a remarkable period in the life and art of Northwest Coast First Nations communities."\(^{81}\) The Masterpiece Gallery had shown a mix of old and new objects which portrayed traditional art in process – but the collections were displayed with boutique-style lighting and minimal labels, emphasizing the message that they were fine-art treasures.\(^{82}\) In comparison, Gathering Strength contextualizes this cultural continuity and innovation, narrated by the artists themselves on text panels and a multimedia CD-ROM. Signage at the entrance to the gallery explains its significance:

The period represented here coincides with the Museum’s own growth since its founding in 1949. Two years later, when the ban on the potlatch was dropped from the federal Indian Act, Northwest Coast people were once again able to practice openly some of their most important ceremonies. These continue to be the occasion for the creation and display of songs, masks, poles, regalia and other forms of cultural expression. Each module in this gallery tells a separate story of encounter and creativity. Together they are part of a larger story of the ongoing transmission of knowledge and artistry across generations, which continued even during the dark time of official suppression. The Museum and its collections have played a role in these stories. Here artists, community members, staff, patrons, students and volunteers come together to share their research and ideas.

Figure 8. Installation of Exhibit A: Objects of Intrigue, Museum of Anthropology, 1999. Weaving by Debra and Robyn Sparrow, 1992. Photo by author.

From time to time individual modules will change to present new works, other voices and fresh encounters.\textsuperscript{83}

One of these modules, Weavers at Musqueam, introduces visitors to Musqueam’s shared history with the Museum, and the significance of the revival of weaving:

This Museum sits on Musqueam traditional territory, so we have a special relationship with the Musqueam people. Our ongoing work with the weavers is an important part of that relationship. Many Musqueam people are now accomplished weavers, making a great variety of weavings for use in ceremonies, at home and as a source of income. The art of making large weaving was lost at the beginning of the century, although people continued to make small items of regalia needed for ceremonies.

Since 1983 – the weavers’ learning paths have brought them to the Museum many times to look at the old and new weavings, to share and gather information, and more recently to offer educational programmes to local schools and community groups. Our learning path has taken us a short distance down the road to their community, to the homes and workshops of the weavers, to see their latest work and to enjoy coffee and conversation.\textsuperscript{84}

The first installation of the module displays four blankets and a large wooden loom (Figure 9).\textsuperscript{85} Wendy John chose for the exhibit a blanket collected before 1910, woven with both naturally dyed wool and trade cloth – one she had studied in the early 1980s. The other blankets were made by contemporary weavers Joan Peters, Debbie Campbell and McGary Point. Each weaver is profiled in a text panel that includes a quotation and

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{figure9.jpg}
\caption{Installation of Weavers at Musqueam in the Gathering Strength gallery. Museum of Anthropology, 2001. Photo by author.}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{82} See Clifford, Routes, 107-145.
\textsuperscript{83} Ruth Phillips, quote from text panel, Gathering Strength, Museum of Anthropology, University of British Columbia, 2000.
\textsuperscript{84} Co-curators Elizabeth Johnson and Jill Baird, quote from text panel, Weavers at Musqueam, Gathering Strength, Museum of Anthropology, University of British Columbia, 2001.
\textsuperscript{85} The module is scheduled to change in fall of 2001 and will feature other weavers from the community.
photograph. The module will change periodically to highlight different weavers in the community, but the personal stories of nineteen weavers are featured on the CD-ROM Weaving Worlds Together: Musqueam Weavers, which is accessible from two terminals in the gallery.

In the summer of 1999, elder Vincent Stogan, with the blanket Debra and Robyn Sparrow wove in 1992 draped over his shoulders, gave an opening prayer to those who had gathered to witness and celebrate the unveiling of a large-scale contemporary weaving by Debra and Robyn Sparrow (Figure 10). Commissioned jointly by the Museum and the Musqueam Indian Band, the weaving represents the special relationship between the two. Since 1986, the Museum had purchased eleven weavings from various weavers, but for conservation reasons none were suitable for permanent display, and so this weaving was constructed to allow for long term display – woven with commercially dyed wool and reinforced weft. In their proposal submitted to the Museum and Musqueam Indian Band, Debra and Robyn Sparrow note the significance of displaying a weaving in the Museum:

The weaving will act as a visual support for the educational and public programming at the Museum which seeks to represent Musqueam traditions to schools and the visiting public. We wish to create a unique weaving that will honour the abilities, and academic standards of our ancestors and reflect our contemporary world. The commission will present a strong and powerful visual message to our own community and will be something to give to the Vancouver community, showing our neighbours that the beautiful work of the Musqueam people is comparable to other First Nations art work.

Figure 10. Musqueam bay, Museum of Anthropology, 2001. Photo by author.
The weaving is installed beside the Stogan family housepost in a bay on the right hand side of the entranceway leading into the Museum – positioning which ensures it is among the first objects a visitor encounters when entering the galleries. The installation’s prominence endorses a medium often excluded from institutional display; its dramatic size encourages comparison to the other monumental works venerated in the Great Hall; and its bright, contemporary colours reflect Musqueam’s revitalized artistic practices.

Signage next to the display acknowledges Musqueam as the original inhabitants of the area – giving the connections between history, culture, and politics prominence in a Museum often criticized for its focus on aesthetics. Translating a sense of place into an exhibit is not merely an attempt to present an important theme in contemporary thought – although that is certainly a function of museums – it is a means to welcome wider audiences into galleries and to contest the biases that still pervade some institutions. Compared with what is often perceived to be the most difficult contemporary art for many visitors to understand, there is another perception that art that refers to region, to place, to the local, is more accessible. This is perhaps one reason for the mid-century dismissal of regional art as insufficiently modernist, too populist and inadequately sophisticated. It brings together those who feel ownership of a terrain because their ancestors once lived there, with those who conquered those original inhabitants, and those brought recently to that place by circumstance.\textsuperscript{86} Such wrappings that communicate place have also become components of engaging exhibitions. Aldona Jonaitis notes that “the museum itself stands in, resonates with, and often signifies a particular locale and thus is firmly grounded to place; few museums make this explicit. To do so might inspire thought on the nature of institutions within communities.”\textsuperscript{87}

\textit{"Museum makes up for bad old days"}\textsuperscript{88}

As Robert Lumley suggests in \textit{The Museum Time Machine}, a museum may be thought of as a potent social metaphor “as a means whereby societies represent their relationship to their own history and to that of other cultures. Museums, in this sense,  

\textsuperscript{86} Aldona Jonaitis, "\textit{Art Museums and their Exhibits}," (unpublished paper, nd), np.
\textsuperscript{87} Jonaitis, np.
\textsuperscript{88} McMartin, A3.
map out geographies of taste and values, which is an especially difficult and controversial
task when it is necessary to radically redraw the maps in response to major social
change." When a museum’s audience includes those communities which the museum
represents, then its representations must try to concur with the sense of self this
constituency holds, in addition to that of the wider public. As such intercultural issues
emerge, so the “inherent contestability of museum exhibitions is bound to open the
choices made in those exhibitions to heated debate." In May 2000, the *Vancouver Sun*
became the forum for such a debate. Contributing columnist Pete McMartin writes:

> UBC’s Museum of Anthropology is taking an activist approach in its latest exhibits to
> compensate for colonialism. But should it? Can a museum be an objective form of
> scholarly research, or must it – because of its dependence on the native culture it
> must have access to – be a proxy political voice for that culture? Whose museum is it,
> after all?\(^9\)

McMartin neglects to recognize that the politics of exhibiting penetrates every
museum display – whether such histories are included or not. His suggestion that only
one static, objective form of history exists is also misguided. Revisionist historical views
are not new. They have been the subject of study for more than twenty years, but are still
not widely recognized or discussed outside academic circles.

Michael Ames once outlined the aspirations toward which he wished to direct the
Museum of Anthropology:

> Some may think it unreasonable [and I shall add, inappropriate] to expect museums –
> given their position in society as wards of the establishment – to serve as the
> vanguard of critical theory and practice. They nevertheless still could provide some
> leadership, however, by working towards a more democratic or liberated museology
> and by dealing more directly with the political and economic issues of the day.\(^92\)

There is growing recognition that museum exhibits do not have to present ideal stories of
cohesiveness. They instead tackle the realities of diversity, controversy, and the
negotiation of identities and cultural forms that imply concepts of power-sharing – with
the awareness of the flexibility of individual and group identities, as well as the
permeability of borders and boundaries. But there is, and perhaps always will be, an

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\(^91\) McMartin, A3.

\(^92\) Ames, “Cultural empowerment,” 162.
ongoing struggle over who is to construct meanings, and, what the privileged meanings will be.

Musqueam’s weavers chose in 1986, to introduce their weavings to the public. They were worn by elders to meet royalty, renewing their use as markers of status; and they were displayed at the Museum of Anthropology in the exhibit *Hands of Our Ancestors*, building a visual presence that countered the Museum’s historical exclusion of Coast Salish cultural representations from any prominence in its collections. The weavers continue to be actively involved at the Museum with new commissions, participation in education programs, and exhibition development – collaborations which necessitate the negotiation of such issues as representation, authorship and authority. In documenting this history of interaction between Musqueam community members and Museum staff, this chapter has also traced weaving’s path from its revival to its strategic use as a statement of Musqueam’s precedence in Vancouver. A decade after this tactic began, the Vancouver International Airport opened its newly constructed international terminal building with an arrivals area featuring four monumental weavings – Musqueam’s public declaration to all who pass by of a continued presence in the city. The following chapter documents the historical context surrounding this development, and the events which led to the area’s construction.
"The experience of actual travel is no longer enough:"

The Vancouver International Airport

Whereas the fervor of activity surrounding nation-building in the early twentieth century resulted in museum building, pressures are now directed towards increasing tourism – and to compete for these tourists, “a location must become a destination.”

Countries must define their unique destinations to better market themselves in a competitive industry. This cultural work – to actively promote and advertise attractions that emphasize the distinctiveness of location – is done not only in established heritage institutions but in the more popular ‘museums’ of everyday life such as marketplaces, shopping malls, and airports. In the 1990s, the Vancouver International Airport adopted this strategy of enhancing local identity to attract users. This chapter focuses on an area in the international terminal building through which all arriving travelers must pass – a space that displays an array of contemporary Musqueam visual material.

Modernist planning in airports, as in other spaces, was associated with universalizing and abstract tendencies. Postmodernism draws upon a sense of place, revalidating and revitalizing the local and the particular. On October 29, 1968 the Vancouver Airport’s existing domestic terminal building was opened. In the years leading up to this expansion, Vancouver’s local newspapers hosted a debate between those supporting a place-bound identity for the Airport, and those committed to promoting a modernist vision – a debate which perhaps indicates a moment in the negotiation of the (post)modern. The following section chronicles this debate – identifying a historical context from which to compare the Musqueam Arrivals Area, designed three decades later.

94 Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 152.
"Let's Tell Air Travelers They're Here"95

In the early 1960s, Harold Merilees, general manager of the Greater Vancouver Visitors and Convention Bureau, campaigned for assurance that the decor for the new terminal at Vancouver International Airport (YVR) reflect the geography, history and ethnology of its location. His concern was that arriving passengers know they were in Vancouver, fearing that they would end up with "some faceless type of international art so that a deplaning passenger wouldn't know whether he is in Vancouver, Toronto or Tel Aviv."96 He noted in a 1964 Vancouver Sun article that the new terminal "should reflect our land of big trees, mountains, fast flowing rivers, tide rips and totems. All these plus our people."97 His campaign was taken up by Liberal MP Grant Deachman, who in 1965 asked Ottawa to give native art its place at the Airport. The member for Vancouver Quadra wanted the Department of Transport to showcase the indigenous culture of British Columbia's coast in the new $26-million terminal it was to open three years later. Deachman and Merilees foresaw Vancouver becoming a key national gateway for overseas visitors, and wanted them to have a "Canadian cultural experience," instead of "passing through a junkyard of unfathomable modern art."98

A national advisory committee on air terminal art, whose members were Vancouver Art Gallery director Tony Emery, senior curator Doris Shadbolt and architect Ned Pratt, clarified the committee's stance in a 1968 Vancouver Province article: "The art work, above all, won't be parochial. There'll be no falling logs, or fish heads, or mining shafts or $ signs. The idea is not to forget that Vancouver's airport is international."99 The committee did not accept arguments that the art work should say 'this is Vancouver.' As Emery noted: "If anyone arriving by air here doesn't see the beauty of the area, its staggering view and know it's B.C. -- or isn't told by the friendly aircraft captain -- then he's either blind or absolutely gassed."100 When the new terminal

95 Harold Merilees, "It's Vancouver -- Not Timbuctoo, Let's Tell Air Travelers They're Here," Vancouver Sun, 15 December 1964, 6.
96 Harold Merilees, quoted in "Bureau head worried over air terminal art," Vancouver Province, 9 March 1968.
97 Merilees, "It's Vancouver," 6.
100 Tony Emery, quoted in McCaugherty, 31.
opened it was apparent that Merilees and Deachman’s pleas had been ignored. The $45,000 awarded to artworks was spent on decorative brickwork by Robert Weghsteen, two abstract murals by Bodo Pfifer and Guido Molinari, and an abstract steel-beam sculpture by Robert Murray.\textsuperscript{101}

\textit{"Instead of waiting for the tourists to come to them, museums are going to the tourists"}\footnote{Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 135.}

Frank O’Neill was appointed general manager of the Vancouver International Airport in 1987. A former air traffic controller at Pearson International, O’Neill thought the Airport should reflect some of the nature and culture British Columbia was known for. In the ensuing years, the Airport required the usual renovations and O’Neill used these projects to accentuate First Nations components. Having seen his work featured in a \textit{Beautiful British Columbia} advertisement, O’Neill first commissioned Roy Henry Vickers to design banners to hang in the terminal.\footnote{This led later to the commissioning of longhouse houseboards and houseposts for the Alders Duty Free storefront.} Following this first commission, some of Susan Point’s work was used to decorate departure gates, but there was no major investment by the federal government in the terminal building. O’Neill recalls, \textit{“we started in a small way.”}\footnote{Frank O’Neill, quoted in Paula Gustafson, \textit{“Sculpture in a Traveling World,” World Sculpture News} 6, no. 3 (Summer 2000): 49. Charlotte Townsend-Gault recalls that Air Canada First Class lounges were locally specific across Canada in the 1980s – with native and settler memorabilia. Charlotte Townsend-Gault, telephone communication with author, May 2001. Also, local artist Joe Average designed a departure gate with his trademark designs which suggests that at this time it was not only native art that identified Vancouver’s locality.}

In 1992, Transport Canada turned responsibility for the operation of the Airport over to the newly created Vancouver International Airport Authority (YVRAA) under a 60-year lease agreement.\textsuperscript{105} The old terminal building to which the debate discussed at the beginning of this chapter refers, was designed in 1968 to accommodate 3.5 million passengers, and was coping with 12 million by 1992. O’Neill issued a call in 1993 for architects to design a new international terminal defined by the theme ‘Celebrating Nature and Culture.’ The proposal expanded upon his initial plans to create a sense of place
which would aid in the Airport becoming “North America’s premier gateway” (Figure 11). O’Neill thought that “by establishing a unique theme within an efficient and convenient airport, a strong niche in the global market [could] be established.” Priscilla Boniface and Peter Fowler note that in the area of tourism, “countries have courted a world market; their chosen object of enticement more often than not, heritage.” O’Neill told a reporter from the *Toronto Star* in 1999 that “the old approach, that airports as just processing factories doesn’t work because airports are in competition.”

O’Neill negotiated the purchase of the bronze sculpture ‘Spirit of Haida Gwaii’ by Haida artist Bill Reid, prior to hiring an architectural firm that would be responsible for the building’s design. “I remember a newspaper cartoon that read, ‘Haida Why?’” O’Neill notes, “but the sculpture influenced the design of the terminal.” A YVR media package distributed at the terminal’s grand opening reads: “Recognized as one of the great sculptures of this century, Spirit of Haida Gwaii provides an opportunity for YVRAA to set a standard of excellence in theme development that will establish YVR as a benchmark airport.” O’Neill argues that public art should be a priority in design. Usually in a building of this sort, art work is purchased after interior designs are complete, but O’Neill says, “we bought the art early on and the rest of the building’s interior was themed after it.” YVRAA hired Vancouver-based Waisman Dewar Grout and Carter’s Architectura in 1993. Though the firm had previously never designed an

![Figure 11. Logo from YVR website homepage, www.yvr.ca [accessed 2001]. Reproduced courtesy of YVRAA.](image)

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111. Frank O’Neill, quoted in a media package distributed at the May 1996 opening. In fact O’Neill, now the director of Vancouver Airport Services Limited (YVRAS) a subsidiary of YVR, uses the Airport as a showcase to sell its management services to airports worldwide.
airport, it was selected because of its "sensitivity to thematic issues.\textsuperscript{13} Clive Grout, the project’s main designer notes that "it was not our intention to say "what the hell do we do with this thing, we'll stick it somewhere," but "how can we absolutely celebrate it and make it a focus."\textsuperscript{14}

The proposal to differentiate the Airport by 'Celebrating Nature and Culture' is consistent with the way the province is promoted and marketed by tourism agencies. O'Neill and Grout claimed British Columbia’s scenic wonders – developing the themes of land, sea and sky, and hiring "a variety of prominent BC artists...to work with architects and retailers in creating their vision of the theme.\textsuperscript{15} The Airport’s project team included O’Neill, Grout, Bill McLennan (projects manager at the Museum of Anthropology), and Rudy Kovach (the designer who had worked on the Museum’s building in the 1970s). Working in collaboration with members of the Musqueam Cultural Committee to design the international arrivals area, it was decided that the area should symbolize “the land which nurture[s] Musqueam culture.” Their vision foresaw “passengers at the new International Terminal Building experiencing the impressive artistic talents and natural reflections of the Musqueam, the aboriginal people who still live today at the mouth of the Fraser River near the Airport.”\textsuperscript{16}

Though a display of older archaeological artifacts was first considered, the Cultural Committee and project team eventually decided to highlight the work of contemporary Coast Salish artists. Pictures in the exhibition catalogue \textit{Sculpture and engraving of the central Coast Salish Indians} by Michael Kew, were used to discuss what type of objects would be appropriate to include in the display.\textsuperscript{17} A call for proposals was issued, resulting in the commission of four large-scale weavings, carvings of a spindle whorl and two welcome figures, all from Musqueam artists (Figures 12 and 13). The spindle whorl measures six metres in diameter, carved by Susan Point and assistants John Livingston and Jeff Cannell from a red cedar originating in the Nimpkish Valley. It hangs from a wall of granite shingles, with a waterfall cascading behind. The water

\textsuperscript{12} Frank O'Neill, quoted in Gustafson, “Sculpture in a Traveling World,” 49.
\textsuperscript{14} Clive Grout, quoted in Gustafson, “Sculpture in a Traveling World,” 48.
\textsuperscript{15} O’Neill, “Theme Statement,” 2.
drains between two banks of escalators on a bed of pale jade-green stones. The weavings hang from the ceiling rafters: the two outer panels woven by Krista Point, Gina Grant and Helen Calbreath; the two inner panels by Debra and Robyn Sparrow. At the base of the escalators, travelers are met by two red cedar welcome figures also by Susan Point. Pete McMartin notes: For visitors who have never seen west coast native art before, it is an immediate and powerful introduction to its magnificence.\textsuperscript{118}

These features, the rocks and running water, as well as blue/green carpeting used throughout the airport, are meant to suggest the Fraser River. Columns clad with Squamish stone and evergreen trees sprayed with mist from the waterfall, refer to B.C.’s coastal mountains and rainforests. Land has become something of a “repository of historic memories and associations,” with First Nations often forming part of that heritage.\textsuperscript{119} Such images of the landscape are often used to define a unique Canadian identity; the Group of Seven are well known for their important role in defining the landscape as a form of national identity.\textsuperscript{120}

\textbf{Figure 12.} Installation of houseposts, spindle whorl and weavings. Musqueam Arrivals Area, YVR. Photo courtesy of YVRAA.

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{117} Bill McLennan, interview with author, 10 July 2001.
\item \textsuperscript{118} Pete McMartin, “To the Future: Vancouver International Airport,” \textit{Vancouver Sun}, 25 April 1996, D1.
\item \textsuperscript{120} See Charles Hill, \textit{The Group of Seven: Art for a Nation} (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 1997). University of British Columbia Ph.D. student Leslie Dawn is currently working on this topic. His dissertation is entitled “How Canada Stole the Idea of Native Art: The Group of Seven and Images of the Indian in the 1920s.”
\end{itemize}
“Of all the art that purports to be about place, very little can be said to be truly of place.”

As actual places and localities become blurred and indeterminate, ideas of culturally and ethnically distinct places become even more salient. The challenge is to focus on the way space is imagined as a way to explore the mechanisms through which the conceptual processes of place-making meet actual, lived spaces. Akhil Gupta and James Ferguson note that “important tensions may arise when places that have been imagined at a distance must become lived spaces.”

Though the art and culture of First Nations in B.C. has become a packageable good, residents are not simply passive victims of these processes of commoditization and specularization. As Mary Crain notes, “when locality and community themselves begin to appear as simulations, the stage is set for complex and elaborate symbolic politics, a politics in which resistance can take diverse forms and varied tactical paths.” Such resistance should be recognized as part of the Musqueam Arrivals Area, because although YVRAA now states that the display of this visual material is “to honour the Musqueam people on whose land the Airport is built,” its presence is the result of extensive negotiations, including formal dealings between the Musqueam Indian Band and federal government and collaborations between the

![Figure 13. Installation of spindle whorl and weavings. Musqueam Arrivals Area, YVR, 2000. Photo by author.](image)

Musqueam Cultural Committee and YVRAA. Debra Sparrow notes: "We had a lot more power in there because we made a land deal with [YVR] and it was political." The actual process of negotiation between Musqueam and the Airport began in 1992 when the Airport's control was transferred from the federal government to YVRAA. The corporation's expansion plans for the site included the construction of a third runway which would necessarily extend onto Musqueam Reserve property at the western end of Sea Island. Musqueam was contacted in order to acquire the appropriate usage rights. The agreement that was reached between the two parties included both a direct value recovery in compensation for land usage and unspecified representation in the new international terminal. An in-house publication states:

*Pursuant to the Environmental Assessment Review Process (EARP) commitments pertaining to the construction of the Parallel Runway on Sea Island, an archival/cultural exhibit was required. In 1993 it was decided that Musqueam and YVR would cooperate and coordinate an exhibit in the new [International Terminal Building], rather than a stand alone facility elsewhere.*

Sea Island, located at the westerly edge of the Fraser River delta, was one of Musqueam territory's most productive lands – supporting both permanent and seasonal settlements. Sloughs sustained chum, pink and possibly coho salmon, sturgeon and eulachon; deer, beaver, muskrat and mink; berries and other plant foods – western Sea Island was in fact known as *xits’emol’sem* or blueberry forest. Archaeological deposits are located across the Island – most are shell middens, the remains of habitation sites. Between the 1890s and 1930s salvage digs were conducted at some Vancouver area sites which were facing destruction – such as the Marpole and Lumberman’s Arch middens. Though a report published by Harlan Smith in 1903 identified a number of sites on Sea

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126 Bill McLennan, interview with author, 18 February 2000. With this economic compensation, the Musqueam Indian Band purchased property on S.W. Marine Drive in Vancouver. The acquisition effectively enabled Musqueam to reacquire part of their heritage as a substantial archaeological midden is located at the site. Known as the Marpole Midden, artifacts excavated from the site are in collections at the Museum of Anthropology and American Museum of Natural History. Ann Stevenson, interview with author, 7 August 2001.
127 “4.0 Musqueam,” 91.
Island, an Archaeological Impact Assessment was not conducted until the early 1990s. Artifacts, faunal and human remains were identified at eleven locations.

A sketch of western Sea Island in Joseph Trutch's notebook from the original legal survey in 1859 shows three Musqueam settlements, though in 1862 only a small area on the north arm of the Fraser River was designated a reserve (Sea Island Reserve IR#3). The federal government dealt with Musqueam for many years on issues regarding the Airport, which now dominates Sea Island, including a land swap for property in Tsawassen. The Airport attempted to gain approval for a parallel runway in the 1980s, but the project was abandoned because of lack of support. The EARP commitments refer to environmental hearings for the parallel runway that were published in the report on the hearings chaired by the federal government. Transport Canada and the Federal Environmental Review Office were participants in the public hearings held in 1992.129

“We're all indigenous somewhere”130

Designed by the YVR project team and representatives from the Musqueam Cultural Committee, the international arrivals area is intended to create a sense of place with an emphasis on the distinctiveness of its location. Perhaps the most fundamental element to the area's composition is its actual location in the terminal. Travelers cross several thresholds in this section of the terminal – the sequence of these crossings carefully choreographed so that deplaning passengers pass from the non-space of international transience to a culturally specific space which marks Musqueam traditional territory before descending the escalators to face Canada Customs agents.

The four large-scale weavings use historic Salish geometric design elements, but are woven with white, black, red and yellow wool (Figure 14). The weavers chose these colours because they have come to be associated with Northwest Coast art – a selection which enables Musqueam to welcome visitors on behalf of all First Nations in B.C.. The presence of other First Nations' art in the Airport however, causes a certain amount of discomfort for some Musqueam individuals, including Debra Sparrow and Howard Grant.

The inclusion of such works as the ‘Spirit of Haida Gwaii’ "makes the assertion that the land on which the airport stands is Native land in general, rather than Musqueam land in particular."¹³¹ Social Anthropologist Anthony Cohen suggests that motivation for community assertiveness may derive from a felt need to discriminate it from other entities – that once one group marks out its distinctiveness, others may feel compelled to follow suit.¹³² As such, Musqueam must counter the presence of other First Nations art in public spaces throughout the lower mainland.

The Musqueam Cultural Committee welcomed the opportunity to have visual works included in the new terminal building for myriad reasons. Debra Sparrow’s motivation centres on getting people to recognize Musqueam as part of Vancouver’s history – and therefore titled the group of weavings ‘Out of the Silence’.¹³³ Susan Point hopes that her work will inspire younger Musqueam artists, and hopes to raise awareness of Coast Salish art: “After people see my work, whether at the airport or anywhere, I hope they get a positive feeling about our future and our ability to co-exist.”¹³⁴ Wendy John also recognizes the opportunity that this public exposure has afforded to Musqueam’s increased visibility, stating:

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¹³¹ Howard Grant, quoted in Leddy, 39.
¹³³ "4.0 Musqueam," 91.
¹³⁴ Susan Point, quoted in Barton, 30.
It's a reclaiming of who you are, showing who you are with your art. There is a respect that starts to grow, an acknowledgment about the group of people, based on what they are able to bring forward in the artistic realm. And you see that happening now. People are starting to pay attention to who the Coast Salish people are.\footnote{Wendy John, interview with author, 6 November 2000.}

Art and politics are never truly extricable. However, literature pertaining to First Nations visual culture in public spaces often classifies its presence as a type of token inclusion. Shannon Leddy notes that “the work selected for inclusion [in Musqueam’s airport display] certainly seems to down-play the kinds of social and political issues with which other Aboriginal artists have engaged themselves.”\footnote{Leddy, 47.} She understands them (because they are on display for non-natives) “not to be culturally useful...but to be decorative tourist attractions.”\footnote{Leddy, 54.} Gayatri Spivak proposes that the inclusion of marginalized peoples acts to salve the conscience of the dominant society – that all is as it should be and nothing more need be done.\footnote{Gayatri Spivak, “Questions of Multi-culturalism,” \textit{The Post-Colonial Critic: Interviews, Strategies, and Dialogues}, ed. Stuart Hall (London: Routledge, 1990), in Leddy, 75.} Ghassen Hage argues that ‘multicultural tolerance’ is an active practice of positioning the other in social space, and at the same time limiting and defining the specific limits of tolerated difference.\footnote{Ghassan Hage, “Locating multiculturalism’s other: a critique of practical tolerance,” \textit{New Formations} 24 (1994): 19-34.} Susan Roy suggests that the politics of inclusion are often restricted to artistic or touristic spaces, sites which can ignore or displace political debates over real, tangible land.\footnote{Roy, 103.} And Ed Moody, Nuxalk chief and Native rights advocate who passes through the Airport on frequent trips to Europe, says that the site gives the impression that aboriginal people are well cared for in B.C. – “it doesn’t depict real Native people or real Native culture.”\footnote{Ed Moody, quoted in Barton, 30.}

In western culture, cultural fragments are conceptually divorced from politics and economics and become commodified cultural possessions, a process akin to what Richard Handler calls “cultural objectification.”\footnote{Nevertheless, while spectators (immersed in the western tradition of viewing indigenous production as apolitical) may not see in this material a direct reference to colonial history or contemporary land claims – these objects are implicated in several sets of power relations when considered in their cultural and}
historical contexts. The absence of confrontation should not be mistaken for a compliant attitude towards the dominant social order. Native peoples' images and relations with mainstream Canadian society are constructed along specific and defined lines determined by both sides.

The Musqueam Cultural Committee had a large degree of control in designing the Arrivals Area, deciding with the Airport project team, what type of materials would appear. However, the Airport has been criticized because they commissioned exclusively neo-traditional works, rather than broadening the spectrum to include paintings, installations and other non-traditional art forms that deal with the effects of colonialization and current social realities. Adriana Barton writes that "one does not find the more provocative and politically engaged works of genre-crossing Native artists such as Lawrence Paul Yuxweluptun and Brian Jungen." O'Neill responded to Barton's article in *Vancouver Magazine*, with a letter to the editor published in May 2001. In it, O'Neill comments that the Airport has 40 display cases to showcase B.C. artists and gallery collections. He notes:

>Since 1996, YVR has displayed a wide range of art, some of which could be considered controversial and political. Our criteria for selection are impact and appropriateness for the airport environment. Artists and galleries put forward art for consideration. We would be pleased to consider art from those artists that the writer lists as unlikely to be seen at Vancouver International Airport."

Although O'Neill alludes that the Airport has previously included "controversial and political" work in these display cases, both he and Barton overlook the political nature of Musqueam's cultural material.

The longer-term ramifications of the use of indigenous references in national and tourist culture are only just becoming evident. First Nations motifs and art styles have been widely adapted, contributing significantly to a national and local visual culture. Some condemn this in retrospect as a process of appropriation, but it does at the same time give central place to emblems of First Nations culture in imagining the nation. Nicholas Thomas questions: "What happens when these emblems are reconnected with indigenous people, and regarded as expressions of their power and prestige? If the always

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143 Barton, 28.
144 Frank O'Neill, "Did We Sound Jaded?," letter to the editor, *Vancouver Magazine*, May 2001, 6.
stable ‘and/or’ of the native and/or national sign dissolves and solidifies again, how are native and nation then related?”

Homi Bhabha defines a ‘liminal’ or ‘interstitial’ category in his publication The Location of Culture. It occupies a space between competing cultural traditions, historical periods, and critical methodologies. This ‘third space,’ similar to Moira Simpson’s concept of a ‘borderland,’ results from cultural negotiation – formed by two parties whose agendas, while ostensibly conflicting, overlap enough so that each informs the space but neither dominates it. To recognize this space Bhabha argues, “makes it possible to begin envisaging national, anti-nationalist histories of the people.” From Michel Foucault, many contemporary ethnographers have borrowed the idea that power relations permeate all levels of society with a field of resistance that is coextensive with them. From such writers as Pierre Bourdieu and Michel de Certeau, they have taken a stress on the active practices of social agents who never simply enact culture but reinterpret and reappropriate it in their own ways. Debra Sparrow holds no allusion that those commissioning her work are without their own motives, and suggests “there is room for both.” Yet Talal Asad argues that “the making of hybrid cultural forms, as Bhabha supposes, does not hold any anxieties for the holders of the status quo.” Asad feels they comfortably embrace cultural differences (hybrid or not) as colourful contributions to national culture and tradition. He goes as far to say, “the claim to their having revolutionary potential is absurd.” However, spaces such as the international arrivals area at YVR, create openings for maneuvering – for First Nations to act and negotiate.

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146 Leddy, ii.
147 Homi Bhabha, The Location of Culture (London: Routledge, 1994), 38.
150 Debra Sparrow, interview with author, 21 August 2000.
152 Asad, 266.
At a recent symposium on aboriginal representation in art galleries, Debra Sparrow joked that YVR is now competition for Vancouver’s museums and galleries. Her comment is legitimate. YVRAA’s art consultant Rita Beiks notes that “surveys have shown that only 4 percent of people ever visit an art museum. Airports can pick up where the galleries and museums leave off, bringing art to the people.” O’Neill adds: “More people go through the Vancouver Airport in one week than in all the province’s cultural institutions in a year.” With 16 million annual travelers, art in YVR can boast a worldwide audience – “not even the National Gallery can give you that kind of exposure.”

Ruth Phillips suggests that Debra Sparrow’s comment may have been in response to the notion that airports are quintessential sites in the global village. However, it is difficult to adjudicate what status this space possesses. Travelers cross several thresholds at YVR – the non-space of international transience, the culturally specific space of Musqueam’s welcome, and the gateway to Canada. They are zones people pass through that are without the history with which a museum is burdened, seemingly freer sites where First Nations people are able to make their mark rather than having to overcome this history of representation. Debra Sparrow admits to a discomfort with museums and galleries despite her continuing collaboration with the Museum of Anthropology and past involvement with the Vancouver Art Gallery, Canadian Museum of Civilization and Seymour Art Gallery. Her comments at ‘A Working Discussion of Aboriginal Representation in the Art Gallery’ propose that sites such as YVR offer the alternative – though the Airport is quickly compiling its own history of representation.

Unlike Canadian museums that have come to operate under conditions such as those outlined by the Task Force report, airports have no such obligation. Compare the authority that Coast Salish bands held in the exhibits Written in the Earth and From Under the Delta with the following examples. An article published in 1994 reported that

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154 Stoffman, “Visual delights greet travelers.”
157 Ruth Phillips, personal communication with author, 10 April 2000.
158 Ruth Phillips, personal communication with author, 10 April 2000.
YVR's new terminal would “feature world-class works of native art, highlighted by twin waterfalls and artist-designed carpeting” and that “tenders for carpeting in [blue and green] colours and decorated with patterns by Musqueam weaver Debra Sparrow” had been proposed. Debra Sparrow says she was unable to negotiate retaining the rights to her designs, and as a result YVR dropped the project. Clive Grout refused to consider her designs as cultural property, an inference which demonstrates that their collaboration still existed under YVR’s ultimate control. It is a false assumption that visibility and self-representation in themselves answer the problems of power and history. A longhouse carved by Roy Henry Vickers for the domestic building in the 1980s has recently been dismantled, and various pieces reassembled in the new terminal. Its front boards adorn the entrance to the Alders Duty Free store, while the houseposts flank a Starbucks kiosk in another area of the building.

In March 2000, another installation of Northwest Coast art was unveiled in the international terminal. Pacific Passage is a walk-through diorama for travelers arriving from flights originating in the United States. Passengers walk past a sizable Canadian flag and beneath a sign welcoming them to Vancouver. They pass through a coastal shoreline with water lapping onto a sandy beach and listen to recorded bird calls. The diorama is background for the display of works by First Nations artists Stephen Bruce, Tim Paul, Connie Watts, and Lyle Wilson. Scattered amongst their installations is an assortment of sea-life models including kelp, mussels and starfish. After leaving Pacific Passages, travelers continue through the terminal to the Musqueam Arrivals Area. When asked if the Musqueam Cultural Committee was made aware of the plans for Pacific Passages – which strips Musqueam from being the first to welcome travelers – Rita Beiks replied that: “Permission from the Musqueam Cultural Committee was not required before proceeding with the project. Their participation ended with the installation of the

161 Debra Sparrow insists on maintaining a level of personal attachment with her projects, believing that “there’s too much stuff out there which is nameless, placeless.” She would rather not have the work there if she has to give up any control. Debra Sparrow, interview with author, 21 August 2000.
welcoming area." Rita Beiks is quite clear that the YVRAA Board of Directors consider the 'Celebrating Nature and Culture' theme as a tactic to gain YVR a competitive edge in the industry. She adds that if popular opinion were to change and the installation of First Nations art threatened YVR's standing, it would quickly be removed. Although O'Neill is a staunch supporter of First Nations culture, he is no longer president of YVRAA. The current president and CEO Larry Berg has expressed a determination to leave his own mark with renovations just begun in the domestic terminal. He suggests, in an article published in December 2000, that 'Celebrating Nature and Culture' may already have run its course: "Vancouver airport's new look will have a 'strong urban feel,'" he assured the writer.

"To be both central and marginal, visible and off-stage, seemed once again to be the contradictory situation of indigenous art"

The visibility of signs of Aboriginality in public culture – which are now works for which Aboriginal artists and designers are credited and rewarded – reflect considerable changes in public opinion since the 1960s. In addition to work made specifically for retail, a number of large public commissions have radically increased the visibility of Northwest Coast fine art. Whereas earlier totem parks were designed either to preserve and advertise regional heritage or to provide an opportunity for ethnographic reproduction, these new displays function very differently – as named pieces of contemporary fine art and increasingly, as political statements of First Nations' identity. Although all may serve the same touristic function, Judith Ostrowitz notes that they have been instrumental in the creation of a public image for native groups – "constructed and certified for outsiders." These protests offer a critical opportunity to reconsider relationships among culture, art making, community, and public space and however they

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165 Bruce Constantineau, "Vancouver airport's new look will have a 'strong urban feel,'" Vancouver Sun, 20 January 2001, C1.
166 Thomas, 250.
168 Ostrowitz, 18.
may be manipulated by critics or the press, the encounters are essentially multicultural identity politics made manifest in everyday life and they speak to the complexities of negotiating diverse views on culture and identity in our society.169

Conclusion

Weavings at the Museum of Anthropology and Vancouver International Airport are not typical of the blankets made and collected in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. They are magnified in scale – from the size of these traditional blankets (approximately 180 by 120 centimetres) to hangings of monumental proportion. The tactic to enlarge these cultural representations enables Musqueam to participate in the same register as the abundance of monumental Northwest Coast forms prominently displayed throughout Vancouver and privileged in art historical discourse. Debra Sparrow alludes to this transition:

*It has been our goal to be able, on a large scale, to share and reflect with the whole region and the world, the integrity and intelligence of the people who existed in this land prior to the arrival of the Europeans. We were a functioning people with skills and intellect equal to any other.*

As noted previously, Musqueam has accepted self-imposed limitations in order to keep certain cultural representations out of the public realm and has used weaving to construct an identity that does not compromise this boundary between public and private knowledge. In the book *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection*, Susan Stewart considers the miniature as a metaphor for private, interior space, and analogously, the gigantic a metaphor for the abstract authority of collective, public life. She notes that “the gigantic moves away from the magical and religious toward the instrumental and the material life of the body in this transition from sacred to secular folk culture.” By this account, the weavings at the Museum and the Airport are ‘gigantic’ – created to perform in public spectacle. Featured in the same area at the Airport, Susan Point’s six-metre spindle whorl employs the same tactic, as historically a spindle whorl was an individual weaver’s intimate possession, just 20 centimetres in width.

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172 Stewart, 84.
Not all new commissions are woven on such a large scale. In 1997, Robyn and Debra Sparrow were asked to weave a traditional-style blanket to be hung in Graham House at Green College – a centre for advanced interdisciplinary scholarship at the University of British Columbia (Figure 15). The Green College Art Committee strongly felt that a Musqueam blanket would fulfill their mandate to "seek out and support locally based artists." Chosen especially because it was local, the weaving hangs on the most prominent wall in Graham House to acknowledge the history of place Musqueam shares with Green College.

The revival of weaving at Musqueam became a process of revitalization and reinforcement of cultural pride within the community while producing an economic and cultural commodity to be shared with the public. Debra and Robyn Sparrow recently began a collaboration with the local company Kanata, to manufacture machine-made blankets with designs inspired by their weavings at the Airport and Canadian Museum of Civilization. Unlike the contract offered by Airport representatives, Debra and Robyn Sparrow retain all the rights to these designs. Debra Sparrow notes that the need for blankets has continued, but her community has had to buy Pendleton blankets (often decorated with Navajo designs) to serve what purposes the woven Coast Salish blankets once had. This commercial venture has created an affordable means for the community to acquire their own blankets while introducing another way for Coast Salish history to be brought to the attention of a larger audience.

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Figure 15. Blanket by Debra and Robyn Sparrow installed in the Dining Hall, Green College. 1999 Photo by author.

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173 Victoria Scott and Todd Tubutis, letter to Rosa Ho, Curator of Art and Public Programmes, Museum of Anthropology, nd, np.
In 1948 Della Charles, an eighteen year old student at the Alberni residential school, wrote of the possibility for weaving to visually demonstrate Musqueam identity:

Ours is a culture of which to be proud, we must aid in its survival...In today's world our handicrafts can be used in many different ways...Our artists could well make a place for themselves in decorating halls and lobbies of our hotels, the rooms of our great buildings and perhaps some of our public meeting places...175

Now present in many such places, weavings have recovered a form of cultural capital, making visible Musqueam identity and history. They are also a public relations piece, intended to educate and inform the viewing public. Debra Sparrow notes:

Through weaving we have tried to understand what it is that we need as Native people and how we might right some of the wrongs that have been done to our ancestors.

I have this belief – and I've heard other Native people talk about this too – that each blanket, has a message within. If people have to see to believe, then we now have our weavings to show, something to share with you. It has been the most exciting journey some of us have taken in our lives.176

The subtle processes of interaction and negotiation documented in this thesis reveal an “ethnography of the particular” that traces one case history in the contested field of First Nations identity politics.177 The cumulative effect of early colonization along the Fraser River, preferences in collecting practices given to the stylistic, media and gender traits of northern and central cultures, and self-imposed limitations by the Coast Salish, was to diminish the visibility and intelligibility of Coast Salish culture. Weavings positioned throughout Vancouver and worn in public settings have built a visual presence to counter this hegemonic structure.

The Vancouver International Airport and the Museum of Anthropology at the University of British Columbia both share with Musqueam a history of place. A distinct relationship fostered between Museum staff and members of the Musqueam community

174 Susan Point has collaborated with Pendleton to produce her own blanket with Coast Salish designs. A photograph of her design is reproduced in the catalogue to her 2000 exhibit, Susan Point: Coast Salish Artist, ed. Gary Wyatt (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 2000), 132.


has yielded several exhibits since the first, *Hands of Our Ancestors: The Revival of Weaving at Musqueam*, opened in 1986 – and all have been developed in extensive consultation with community representatives. The presence of Musqueam material at the Museum is part of an extensive history between Canadian museums and the cultural communities whose histories, traditions and material culture are represented – a history which encompasses issues of representation, authorship and authority. The Vancouver International Airport is also situated on Musqueam traditional territory. Designed by representatives from the Musqueam Cultural Committee and the Airport project team, the international arrivals area features works of contemporary Musqueam artists which are intended to create a sense of place with an emphasis on the distinctiveness of its location. Travelers cross several thresholds in the terminal – the sequence of these crossings carefully choreographed so that deplaning passengers pass from the non-space of international transience to a culturally specific space marked by Musqueam’s cultural representations, and then past Customs into Canada.

Certain incidents at each of these sites indicate that visibility and self-representation do not in themselves answer the problems of power and history. Despite these limits, weavings are not examples of token native inclusion as some critics argue. Rather, they are cultural representations strategically deployed by the Musqueam community. Enlarged from traditional blankets to monumental hangings, these weavings participate with other more recognized monumental Northwest Coast forms. They are visual, public signifiers of Musqueam identity which without violating boundaries between public and private knowledge, carry messages from the community to a broader audience – messages intended to mark Musqueam’s precedence in Vancouver’s past as well as to claim visibility in the present.

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4.1 Musqueam Council on behalf of the Musqueam Indian Band will receive a copy of the final thesis and related research.

4.2 All contact with the Musqueam Indian Band administration and band members will be initiated through the Band's designated person.

4.3 The researcher will give periodic updates on research progress to the Band's representative.

4.4 The draft thesis is to be made available to the Band representative for review and comment prior to submission for thesis defence.

4.5 Participation in the project is voluntary and any participant being interviewed can withdraw at anytime.

4.6 Individual participants can choose if the interview is tape recorded or not, and can determine if tapes or draft records of interviews are to be saved, destroyed or donated to the Musqueam Indian Band.

4.7 The researcher will seek written consent from each participant in a form that explains the nature and purpose of the research.

4.8 All individuals interviewed will receive copies of their information for review and comment prior to finalization of the thesis.

4.9 The researcher will provide to the persons interviewed copies of all data, documents, reports, summaries, and tapes that result from the research conducted as well as those pages relating to the individuals interviewed as they will appear in the final thesis.

4.10 The duration of the permit is from August 10, 2000 to August 10, 2001.

4.11 The final document will be in a form useful to the community, as a return or exchange for their participation in the research.

4.12 This permit can be amended and/or withdrawn at anytime. Publication in any other form requires the prior written approval of the participants.

4.13 The researcher is authorized to make contact, through the band representative with the following band members:

Hellen Callbreath
Gina Grant
Howard E. Grant
Wendy John
Krista Point
Rose Point
Debra Sparrow
Leona Sparrow
Robyn Sparrow