

## CROSS-BORDER TRADING:

### *Mungo Martin Carves for the World of Tomorrow*

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LESLIE DAWN

IN THE SPRING OF 1939, the futuristic New York World's Fair opened to the public with the optimistic objective of representing the World of Tomorrow. Canada's contribution was modest. It consisted of a small, somewhat austere art moderne pavilion set in an out-of-the-way location. Yet it attracted attention. This focused on two totem poles commissioned from Kwakwaka'wakw master artist Mungo Martin. Situated against a recessed exterior rear wall, the twin seventeen-foot-high sculptures rested on a raised plinth. Each of the almost identical works featured a mythological thunderbird at the top, a bear holding a halibut in the middle, and a beaver at the bottom. They were considered significant enough to appear in at least two American pictorials documenting highlights of the exhibition.<sup>1</sup>

Yet, in the ensuing years, the poles have been ignored or forgotten in the growing body of ethnographic, art historical, and museological writings on Northwest Coast Native art, writings that extend from Marius Barbeau's comprehensive 1950 catalogue of totem poles to the present day.<sup>2</sup> Even the possibility that they could exist has been denied. Indeed, in a recent scholarly study, Ira Jacknis states that Martin only carved "on a reduced scale" from the 1920s to the 1940s due to a decline in ceremonialism and did not return to carving until 1949, the conven-

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<sup>1</sup> Stanley Appelbaum, *The New York World's Fair, 1939/1940 in 155 Photographs by Richard Wurts and Others* (New York: Dover, 1977), 124-25; and Barbara Cohen, Steven Heller, and Seymour Chwast, *The 1939 New York World's Fair: Trylon and Perisphere* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1989), 50. Parts of this article were presented at the 2002 Native American Art Studies Association conference and the 2003 Universities Art Association of Canada conference in other formats. I owe a profound debt of gratitude to many people who have assisted in the research for this article. I would especially like to thank Cyndie Campbell, Aldona Jonaitis, John O'Brien, Alan Collier, Frederike Verspoor, Brian Grison, John Oxley, Marc Leger, Kathleen O'Brien, Karen Duffek, and Dan Savard.

<sup>2</sup> Marius Barbeau, *Totem Poles*. 2 vols. (Ottawa: National Museum of Canada, 1950). But see also Phil Nuytten, *The Totem Carvers: Charlie James, Ellen Neel, and Mungo Martin* (Vancouver: Panorama Publishers, 1982), 9; Aldona Jonaitis, "Totem Poles and the Indian New Deal," *Canadian Journal of Native Studies* 9, 2 (1989): 237-52; and Jackson Rushing, *Native American Art and the New York Avant-Garde* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1995).



The two poles carved by Kwakwaka'wakw artist Mungo Martin for the exterior of the Canadian Pavilion at the New York World's Fair in 1939. Appelbaum, p. 125. Courtesy of Dover Publications.

tional year for marking the beginning of what has become known as the “revival” of Northwest Coast Native art.<sup>3</sup>

I would argue that Martin’s New York City poles constitute a neglected history, one that substantially modifies the perception of cultural inactivity during the late 1930s and the origins of the “revival.” This period saw a constellation of activities and intersecting histories that formed the foundation for the second, more well-recognized stage, which occurred after 1949. These almost concurrent events took place on both sides of the Canada–United States border as well as in Europe. In Canada, the actual beginning of the “revival” included a sudden and dramatic reversal in attitude towards the viability of Native arts. It followed an American lead, but with substantial differences resulting from conflicting views on the vitality of Native cultures and arts and their role in forming a national image.

The underlying conflicts over this issue, which contributed to the exile and disappearance of Martin’s poles rather than to their return to Canada, can already be seen in the early history of totem poles at international expositions, particularly at American world’s fairs. This history is long and well documented. There is even a precedent for commissioning a new pole for such an event. Douglas Cole reports that Tsimshian, Kwakwaka’wakw, and Haida poles were staged at the Philadelphia Centennial Exhibition in 1876. Because an old Haida pole could not be obtained, James G. Swan, who was in charge of collecting material for the display, had a new one made.<sup>4</sup> Cole and Paige Raibmon have documented Franz Boas’s reconstructed Northwest Coast village at the Columbian International Exposition in Chicago in 1893, which contained both houses and poles.<sup>5</sup> Kaigani Haida and Tlingit poles were also collected and displayed at the St. Louis Louisiana Purchase Universal Exposition in 1904. Most of these were then sent on to Port-

<sup>3</sup> Ira Jacknis, *The Storage Box of Tradition: Kwakiutl Art, Anthropologists, and Museums, 1881–1981* (New York: Smithsonian Institution, 2002), II. Jacknis’s assessment of a reduction in ceremonialism runs counter to the reports from the Indian agent, who, throughout the 1930s, complained vigorously that ceremonial activity was increasing to unprecedented levels. See Douglas Cole and Ira Chaikin, *An Iron Hand upon the People: the Law against the Potlatch on the Northwest Coast* (Vancouver: Douglas and McIntyre, 1990), 147–52. Ron Hawker attributes the lack of significant government involvement in collecting and displaying Northwest Coast objects until after the Second World War to the Depression. See Ron Hawker, *Tales of Ghosts: First Nations Art in British Columbia, 1922–61* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2003), 66.

<sup>4</sup> Douglas Cole, *Captured Heritage: The Scramble for Northwest Coast Artifacts* (Vancouver: Douglas and McIntyre, 1985), 24 and 29.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 129–30; and Paige Raibmon, *Authentic Indians: Episodes of Encounter from the Late-Nineteenth-Century Northwest Coast* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), 50–73.

land's Lewis and Clark Centennial Exposition of the following year.<sup>6</sup> Robert Rydell also reported that poles were exhibited at the Alaska-Yukon-Pacific Exposition held in Seattle in 1909.<sup>7</sup>

However, marked differences separated these exhibitions from the New York World's Fair. In none of the former were the totem poles part of an official Canadian display. Boas's reconstructed Northwest Coast Native village at the Columbian Exhibition featured Kwakwaka'wakw performers enacting traditional ceremonies, which attracted huge audiences and international publicity. The performances outraged and embarrassed Canadian officials.<sup>8</sup> The opposition arose because the ceremonies were in conflict with official government policy at that time, which was dedicated to the principle of complete assimilation and the eradication of Canadian Native identities, cultures, and, consequently, the ceremonies and arts that supported them. Consistent with this repressive policy, at Chicago Canada displayed Native children enacting their prescribed roles as model students within schools.<sup>9</sup> Subsequently, the Canadian government began systematically to deny requests for Native appearances at international expositions, although a small contingent of Northwest Coast Natives was taken to Saint Louis by Charles Newcombe. By 1925, Native arts and peoples were excluded from Canada's pavilion and exhibitions at the British Colonial Exhibitions held at Wembley, while many of the other participants included their indigenous peoples.<sup>10</sup>

The situation changed, albeit temporarily, in 1927, when Marius Barbeau, an ethnologist at the National Museum in Ottawa, initiated an unsuccessful attempt to include Northwest Coast art, as art, within Canada's visual identity. He first insinuated a small sampling of masks and miniature totem poles into a large exhibition of Canadian art organized by the National Gallery of Canada and held in Paris in the spring of 1927. The Parisian art critics appreciated the Haida and Tsimshian objects but disparaged the landscapes of Tom Thomson and

<sup>6</sup> Cole, *Captured Heritage*, 204-5. Most of these poles were then sent back to Alaska to become part of a public display at Sitka. It should be noted that Hamatsa rituals were also staged in Saint Louis.

<sup>7</sup> Robert Rydell, *All the World's a Fair: Visions of Empire at American International Expositions, 1876-1916* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 197.

<sup>8</sup> Cole, *Captured Heritage*, 130; and Raibmon, *Authentic Indians*, 61-62.

<sup>9</sup> E.A. Heaman, *The Inglorious Arts of Peace: Exhibitions in Canadian Society during the Nineteenth Century* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999), 304.

<sup>10</sup> See J.C.H. King, "A Century of Indian Shows: Canadian and United States Exhibitions in London, 1825-1925," *European Review of Native American Studies* 5, 1 (1991): 35-42.

the Group of Seven as lacking mastery, modernism, and nationalism.<sup>11</sup> In the fall, Barbeau and the National Gallery produced the exhibition “Canadian West Coast Art: Native and Modern,” which showed in Ottawa, Toronto, and Montreal. It brought together Native art and non-Native arts that used Native motifs as subject matter. The initiative did not last long and was abandoned for over a decade.<sup>12</sup>

The Canadian 1927 exhibition was built on the premise that Canada’s Native peoples and their arts were either dead or irrevocably disappearing and, consequently, open to appropriation as a uniquely “Canadian” subject by non-Native artists. The possibility that Native arts were still practised or that Native cultures could be persistent and continuous was not considered. Barbeau had already articulated his position and that of the state on the moribund nature of Native arts in 1926 in a series of lectures at the University of British Columbia. He told his audience that Native “art flourished until the advent of the white man. Seeing no hope for the future, the Indians lost interest in their carving and painting – and their art, now, is dead forever.”<sup>13</sup> This unequivocal position of irretrievable loss, which was widely disseminated, remained in place well into the 1930s, when ethnographic activity on the Northwest Coast was largely curtailed due to lack of funds.

Later in the decade, however, the situation altered with the introduction of government support for Native handicrafts. “In 1937 the Indian Affairs Branch of Canada ... [included] the arts as one program of its Welfare and Training Division.”<sup>14</sup> The primary goal of the marketing scheme was to reduce the more than \$1 million in payments being made to Native peoples on welfare. The amount had grown steadily during the Depression and reached a peak in 1937.<sup>15</sup> Art, as a category to be fostered, does not appear to have been a priority for the program; rather, the emphasis was on what at the time were designated handicrafts, with the focus on inexpensive items that would be popular with tourists.<sup>16</sup> Indian Affairs controlled the supply of raw materials, what

<sup>11</sup> L.A. Dawn, *National Visions, National Blindness, Canadian Art and Identities in the 1920s* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2006), 55–115.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 262–63.

<sup>13</sup> “Dr. Barbeau Gives First Lecture,” *The Ubysey*, 26 October 1926, 1.

<sup>14</sup> Jacknis, *Storage Box*, 179. The Indian Affairs Branch was part of the Department of Mines and Natural Resources at this time.

<sup>15</sup> Trudy Nicks, “Indian Handicrafts: The Marketing of an Image,” *Rotunda*, Summer 1990, 14.

<sup>16</sup> Jacknis claims that, “despite the national ambitions ... the Welfare and Training Division [did little] for the Indians of British Columbia.” See Jacknis, *Storage Box*, 179. According to Nicks, “Commercial production was of prime importance: the preservation of arts and crafts for their cultural or historical significance was not even a consideration.” See Nicks,



was to be produced, the sale of the finished objects, and the profits.<sup>17</sup> The Northwest Coast, and particularly monumental wood carving, were, it seems, largely left out of the program. According to Trudy Nicks, the geographic distance was too great to facilitate management of this region. Nonetheless, in the summer of 1938, the head of the program, R.A. Hoey, came to Vancouver to announce its inception at a display of “Indian work” held at the Hudson’s Bay Company store. In a *Vancouver Sun* story entitled “Plan to Revive BC Indian Art,” Hoey is cited as stating: “Young people of today are not able to find employment because they are not trained for new fields in business life ... Indian young people, by reviving old native arts, will find a profitable trade in the tourist industry.”<sup>18</sup>

The shift towards the subsidization of handicrafts was accompanied by a small, but not insignificant, modification to the Indian Act. In June 1938, Section 94A was amended with the addition of Section 94B (1), which read:

For the purpose of granting loans to Indian Bands, group or groups of Indians, or individual Indians and for the expenditure of moneys for co-operative projects on their behalf, the Minister of Finance may, from time to time, authorize the advance to the Superintendent General of Indian Affairs out of the Consolidated Revenue Fund of Canada of such sums of money as the said Superintendent General may require to enable him to make loans to Indian Bands, group or groups of Indians or individual Indians, for the purchase of farm implements, machinery, live stock, fishing and other equipment, seed grain and materials to be used in *native handicrafts* and to expend and loan money for the carrying out of co-operative projects on behalf of the Indians.<sup>19</sup>

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“Indian Handicrafts,” 15. See also Linda Mannik, *Canadian Indian Cowboys in Australia: Representation, Rodeo and the RCMP at the Royal Easter Show, 1939* (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2006), 46.

<sup>17</sup> Model totem poles were part of the long list of souvenir objects that were produced, although, as Trudy Nicks points out: “because British Columbia Indians could not produce model totem poles as cheaply as the Japanese, orders were placed with Indians in eastern Canada who could. Since 1939, when Ottawa placed the first orders for totem poles, the Ojibwa of Ontario have become major suppliers of totem poles to the tourist souvenir industry.” See Nicks, “Indian Handicrafts,” 16.

<sup>18</sup> *Vancouver Sun*, 1 June 1938.

<sup>19</sup> *Statutes of Canada*, 1938, chap. 31, sec. 94B. My emphasis.

Although buried in other economic initiatives, the act of subsidizing “native handicrafts” constituted a reversal in federal legislation, which, up to this point, had been directed towards the suppression of Native cultural expression. It is true that the change was still in line with the policy of complete assimilation of the overall Native population into a larger non-Native capitalist social framework – the work to be underwritten was not directed towards a revival of traditional cultures and identities but only towards selected and modified aspects of that culture that could be readily used for marketing to non-Native consumers. Nonetheless, the insertion of these two words into the amended section was to have far-reaching and unexpected ramifications.

On the Northwest Coast, owing to a complex combination of multiple discourses and histories, the initiative took on a direction that ran parallel to but separate from that established by the Welfare and Training initiative in central and eastern Canada. In 1939, Barbeau resumed his fieldwork in British Columbia after a decade-long absence. He was instructed to examine “the origins and history of the arts of silverworking and the making of argillite totem poles” and to “ascertain ... the names and addresses of Indians who today are able to carve argillite figures and to fabricate silver bracelets and brooches.”<sup>20</sup> In a statement made to the press in Vancouver in the summer of 1939, he presented a different position from that of a decade earlier on the future of Native arts: “To restore the lost arts of the British Columbia Coast Indians attention is to be given to work in slate and in silver, as well as the familiar wood and basketwork to which the average tourist and collector turns in acquiring souvenirs of aboriginal workmanship.”<sup>21</sup> Barbeau was examining these media

with the objective of reviving the dormant arts of the Coast Indians. The authorities in Ottawa, it was explained, are satisfied that there is a good future for Indian craftsmanship. During his present field work, Mr. Barbeau explained, he will instruct some of the Indian craftsmen on types of aboriginal workmanship used extensively in other countries, and particularly by the highly developed tribes of the US Southwest.<sup>22</sup>

At the end of his fieldwork in the fall, he again spoke to the Vancouver press: “Mr. Barbeau has been engaged in applying specialized knowledge to improve the handicraft work of the Coast tribes in order

<sup>20</sup> Laurence Nowry, *Marius Barbeau: Man of Mana* (Toronto: NC Press, 1995), 335.

<sup>21</sup> *News Herald*, 30 June 1939, 8.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

to make them more self sustaining economically ... The matter is now before the Indian department for action."<sup>23</sup> The *Province* quoted him as saying: "The natives of this coast made a considerable art of carving during the early years ... and there is no doubt that with the specialized knowledge now available they would stand to benefit economically from a revival of this art."<sup>24</sup>

Hoey and Barbeau articulated what would become the fundamental themes and identifying label of the postwar resurgence of Northwest Coast Native art. Native art had died, or was close to death, but it was now going to be brought back to life; that is, "revived" through state intervention.<sup>25</sup> Where they differed was in their respective positions on the category of materials to be "revived." While Hoey had emphasized handicrafts, Barbeau's project included media that could be classified as art. The acceptance of this possibility would, however, require successful ratification from the art world, something that had proven problematic in 1927.

Concurrent with the Indian Affairs handicraft initiative, Native art of the Northwest coast was once more involved in the projection of Canada's national image, both at home and abroad, but within limited parameters. In late 1938 an exhibit of Canadian art, again organized by the National Gallery of Canada, was held at the Tate Gallery in London. "Century of Canadian Art," in an echo of the 1927 Paris exhibition, included argillite carvings and two Chilkat blankets.<sup>26</sup> Although they were featured as "art," their interpretation and the role of Northwest Coast Native art were carefully defined.

Graham McInnes, art critic for *Saturday Night*, assisted Eric Brown, director of the National Gallery, in arranging publicity for the exhibition. He wrote notices for two prominent international journals. Each review was accompanied by an image of a contemporary Canadian painter from British Columbia who employed totem poles in her or his works; that is, either Emily Carr or J.W.G. Macdonald.<sup>27</sup> This

<sup>23</sup> *News Herald*, 18 October 1939, 2.

<sup>24</sup> *Province*, 20 October 1939, 10. In Vancouver, Barbeau also gave several public lectures in which he undoubtedly expanded on the topic.

<sup>25</sup> The arts that were to be encouraged – that is, silver and argillite carving – were limited to those that were primarily made for sale to non-Native consumers rather than used for ceremonial or traditional social purposes. Unlike programs in the east, however, these materials were relatively costly and, thus, appealed to a different level of consumer and could easily be elevated to the category of art object rather than handicraft.

<sup>26</sup> Argillite was, of course, one of Barbeau's favoured materials and Chilkat blankets were made mostly in Alaska.

<sup>27</sup> Carr's "Blunden Harbour" was one of two illustrations in Graham McInnes, "Canadians in London," *Magazine of Art* 31, 10 (1938): 588-98 and MacDonald's "Drying Herring Roe" was



replayed the 1927 assumption that Northwest Coast Native arts could serve as a source of subject matter for non-Native Canadian artists, a position McInnes would articulate in 1939 in *A Short History of Canadian Art*.<sup>28</sup> Here, however, he modified his view with the proposal that Native art could occupy an independent place. His opening chapter on “Indian Art” affirmed that this category was ontologically possible but geographically and culturally restricted: “only the North West Coast Indians of British Columbia can be said to have produced an art of high aesthetic worth.”<sup>29</sup> Although he concentrated mainly on totem poles, he did not mention Martin’s contribution at the World’s Fair but, rather, reiterated the widespread premise that these arts “are in danger of complete extinction.”<sup>30</sup> In any case, because Martin’s poles were richly painted, they would have been relegated to what McInnes viewed as a “degraded” expression of a once noble tradition.<sup>31</sup> These traditions were both held apart from and linked to contemporary national expressions. McInnes stated that Native art “has no direct influence on Canadian art, but it has often provided subject matter for Canadian painters who saw in it a certain affinity with their own work.”<sup>32</sup> He added: “Although the Indian work is obviously outside the main stream of Canadian art ... it is interesting as an example of the work of those who were, after all, the first Canadians.”<sup>33</sup> Although McInnes made no mention of a forthcoming revival of Northwest Coast Native art, and hedged on its vitality and direct influence, the Tate exhibition and his comments were important indications of its return to visibility as part of Canada’s national artistic culture.

At the local level, the British Columbia Indian Arts and Welfare Society (BCIAWS) was instituted under the guidance and direction of Alice Ravenhill in 1939–40. Ravenhill and others, such as George Raley, the principal of the Coqualeetza Residential School at Sardis, had begun their initiatives to foster production and to educate audiences in tandem with the first attempts to incorporate Native arts into Canadian identity in the 1920s. They continued their efforts parallel with American developments in the 1930s.<sup>34</sup> It is significant, however, that these activities

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one of three illustrations (the other two of sculptures) in Graham McInnes, “A Century of Canadian Art Exhibition at the Tate Gallery, London”, *The Studio*, December 1938, 294–95.

<sup>28</sup> Graham McInnes, *A Short History of Canadian Art* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1939).

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>34</sup> See, for example, Hawker, *Tales of Ghosts*, 66–89; and Jacknis, *Storage Box*, 179–82.

amounted to little until after the initiatives of the Indian Affairs Branch and the Indian Act amendment, when the BCIAWS began working with the British Columbia Provincial Museum (BCPM) and other institutions in a coordinated program of encouraging, exhibiting, and marketing Native “handicrafts.”<sup>35</sup> As Jacknis has pointed out, the BCIAWS was more instrumental in promoting Native arts on the West Coast than was the Indian Affairs Branch, but the former could never have become effective without the policy changes brought in by the latter.<sup>36</sup> However, the Society’s early focus was circumscribed and was largely devoted to handicrafts and works produced by children at residential and day schools, especially in the interior of the province, although it did carry out some highly influential marketing experiments in the 1940s. These experiments led to an emphasis on authenticity and the rejection of work done by Native artists using non-Native media and conventions, such as the oil paintings of Judith Morgan, a young Gitxsan artist.

It would seem, then, that Martin’s 1939 poles – although they were not argillite or silver, were not small and easily marketable handicrafts, and were products neither of the Indian Affairs Branch nor the BCIAWS – are historically significant since they are among the first visible signs of a change in government policy and mark the beginning of the “revival” of Northwest Coast Native arts, particularly as aimed at tourism and international audiences. They are also significant because they challenged many of the fundamental precepts of the “revival.” Martin’s poles indicate clearly that Native artistic traditions were neither lost nor in need of revival, although this would form the rhetoric that surrounded them. Their position was problematic from the beginning.

How, then, did Martin’s poles end up at the New York World’s Fair? To answer this question, it is necessary to look at events in the United States and their impact on the reversal of Canadian government policy regarding Native arts in general, and Northwest Coast arts in particular. Barbeau alluded to the American Southwest as a model in 1939, but he would have been aware that a movement had been in place since the 1920s that had as its goal the integration of Native traditional arts, especially those from the Southwest, into the fabric of an indigenous, non-European, American cultural identity.<sup>37</sup> These traditions were

<sup>35</sup> The BCIAWS was aware from its inception of the necessity of implementing a multifaceted program that operated on several fronts and that involved several institutions. Its initial mandate called for the use of “Exhibitions ... Conferences, Publications, Radio Broadcasts, Television and the Press.” See Hawker, *Tales of Ghosts*, 87.

<sup>36</sup> Jacknis, *Storage Box*, 179.

<sup>37</sup> Dawn, *National Visions*, 116–46.

seen, at least in part, as both living and ongoing – that is, as neither moribund nor disappearing. The first stage culminated in the important 1931 Exposition of Indian Tribal Arts, held in New York City. Programs carried out through the private initiatives of artists, intellectuals, and wealthy supporters were developed further in the 1930s under Roosevelt's New Deal policies and John Collier's administration of Indian Affairs.<sup>38</sup> In 1935, the Indian Arts and Crafts Act was passed. Its objective was to promote production of Native arts through an Indian Arts and Crafts Board that would operate under the Department of the Interior. While the act was much longer and more detailed in its objectives than what was proposed by the changes to Canada's Indian Act (which followed three years later), Barbeau's reference indicates that the former provided the impetus and model for the latter. Indeed, most of the activities found in later stages of the Canadian revival are clearly spelled out in the American legislation.<sup>39</sup> Although initially centred in the Southwest and Oklahoma, the American initiatives expanded to include totem pole carving and restoration programs in Alaska, which began in 1938.<sup>40</sup> New Tlingit and Kaigani Haida poles produced through the Alaskan initiatives became part of displays of Native arts at the San Francisco Golden Gate International Exposition in 1939, which ran concurrently with and rivalled the New York World's Fair.

The display of Native arts was organized by René d'Harnoncourt, who, in 1937, became the general manager for the Indian Arts and Crafts Board. His innovative exhibition in San Francisco featured an Indian Pavilion that incorporated both contemporary and historic Native material from groups across the continent. It continued the theme of the Indian Arts and Crafts Board in that it was meant to establish the principle of survival and continuity within American Native arts and to foster a market for contemporary productions. Consequently, d'Harnoncourt commissioned John and Fred Wallace, Kaigani Haida artists, to carve two poles that were erected on the site during the exhi-

<sup>38</sup> Jonaitis, "Totem Poles and the Indian New Deal"; and Robert Schrader, *The Indian Arts and Crafts Board* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1983).

<sup>39</sup> Indian Arts and Crafts Act, 1935 [Public-No. 355-74th Congress]. It designated the primary "duty of the Board to promote the economic welfare of Indian tribes ... through the development of Indian arts and crafts and the expansion of the market for the products of Indian art." The board was given the power to "undertake market and ... technical research" and "engage in experimentation." In addition, it was "to correlate and encourage the activities of the various governmental private agencies in the field ... [and] to offer assistance in ... management." It was also to arrange loans, create trademarks and license them, and, in general, administer the business necessary for the program.

<sup>40</sup> Virgil Farrell's 1938 report on the program, which outlined the economic advantages, would have been known to Canadian officials.

bition.<sup>41</sup> The parallel with Mungo Martin's twin poles is unavoidable.<sup>42</sup> In 1941, d'Harnoncourt mounted a large exhibition of Native art at the Museum of Modern Art in New York City. The first item visitors saw was a Kaigani totem pole attached to the flat white modernist facade of the new museum building.<sup>43</sup> Martin's poles at the World's Fair may well have supplied the inspiration for this display.

While d'Harnoncourt's San Francisco exhibition has been covered by Jonaitis and Schrader, a second exhibition of Northwest Coast material at the fair has received less attention.<sup>44</sup> Its importance lies in establishing the cross-border trading that occurred during this period, in showing the state of the revival program in Canada, and in making visible the conflicting views on the state of Native cultures. A large exhibition of "eight long galleries" of works from seven regions, comprising what was termed "Pacific Culture," included works from Japan, China, Southeast Asia, Melanesia, and the three Americas. Organized by the exposition's Department of Fine Arts, Division of Pacific Cultures, and situated within the Palace of Fine Arts, it featured works from the various Pacific Rim cultural areas as "art" – that is, as "masterpieces" of great and equal aesthetic value rather than as ethnographic artifacts.<sup>45</sup>

Unlike in d'Harnoncourt's pan-American Native display, in the North American section of the Pacific Culture Exhibition only the Northwest Coast was represented, and most of the objects did not come from the United States. Despite the fact that the region was extended to include the Alaskan Eskimo and work from the Bering Sea, the peoples represented were primarily Canadian. The works were borrowed from several institutions, including the American Museum of Natural History, the BCPM, the Smithsonian Institution, the University of Pennsylvania Museum, and the Washington State Museum. The catalogue indicates that about one-third of the 170 entries listed came from the BCPM, which made it by far the greatest single source for Northwest Coast material.<sup>46</sup> In all, "ten cases of anthropological specimens" were

<sup>41</sup> Jonaitis, "Totem Poles and the Indian New Deal," 241.

<sup>42</sup> It should be noted that, in the mastery of the design principles, Martin's poles were superior to those of John and Fred Wallace.

<sup>43</sup> This was one of the two Wallace poles from San Francisco. Although Barbeau omitted Martin's New York poles from his two-volume study, he included this pole, with a detailed illustration and description. See Barbeau, *Totem Poles*, 869.

<sup>44</sup> Robert Fay Schrader, *The Indian Arts and Crafts Board: An Aspect of New Deal Indian Policy* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1983).

<sup>45</sup> Golden Gate International Exposition, Department of Fine Arts, Division of Pacific Cultures, *Pacific Cultures* (San Francisco: Schwabacher-Frey, H.S. Crocker, 1939).

<sup>46</sup> "Catalogue of Objects—N.W. Coast America," in *ibid.*, 111–13. The BCPM group included all of the fifteen Tsimshian objects, all but one of the thirty Kwakwaka'wakw objects, all but six

sent from the BCPM.<sup>47</sup> The display differed from d'Harnoncourt's in that the catalogue essay, written by the ethnologist Erna Gunther, director of the Washington State Museum (and the person who assembled the display), recited the "fatal impact" narrative that all Native arts had perished.<sup>48</sup>

While Gunther's views prevailed for the moment, it was d'Harnoncourt's project that had the greatest impact on activities in Canada. The cross-border discourse on the question of the role of Native arts throughout the mid- to late 1930s culminated in September 1939 with a conference held in Toronto that was sponsored by the Carnegie Foundation, the University of Toronto, and Yale University's Department of Race Relationships.<sup>49</sup> The fifth in a series, its title, "The North American Indian Today," spoke to its specific objective, which was to examine race relationships between Native and non-Native peoples within the North American continent. Presenters included Canadian and American scholars and government administrators, including John Collier and his counterpart from Canada, H.W. McGill, Chief, Indian Affairs Branch. But they also included missionaries, anthropologists, and Native representatives who contributed over thirty presentations on a wide variety of topics over the course of almost two weeks.<sup>50</sup> Differences between Canada's policies of forced acculturation and assimilation (through such actions as the ban on Native ceremonies) and the American model introduced in 1934 and 1935 (that encouraged Native cultural expressions) were hotly debated.

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of the twenty-two Haida objects, nine of the twelve Salish objects, but only one of the seven Nootka and none of the Tlingit, Alaskan Eskimo, or Bering Sea objects. The Washington State Museum supplied most of the Tlingit and almost all of the Alaskan Eskimo pieces.

<sup>47</sup> *Report of the Provincial Museum of Natural History for the year 1939*, Victoria, 1940, 7. The Provincial Museum's participation would appear to have awakened a long dormant interest in its substantial but neglected ethnographic collection, largely assembled several decades earlier. Work commenced on Thunderbird Park, large-scale collecting of Native objects resumed, its name was changed to the Provincial Museum of Natural History and Anthropology, and, in 1950, a trained ethnologist, Wilson Duff, was hired, positioning the museum for its close involvement in and identification with the second stage of the revival.

<sup>48</sup> Erna Gunther, "The Northwest Coast of America," in Golden Gate International Exposition, *Pacific Cultures*, 101, states: "It is most unfortunate that the standardization of modern civilization stamps out the life that fosters native arts, and regrettable that one can write of these artists only in the past." On "fatal impact," see Nicholas Thomas, *Colonialism's Culture: Anthropology, Travel and Government* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 15. Thomas notes that these claims of cultural death brought on by contact between "primitive" peoples and Western cultures are frequently exaggerated in ethnographic writing.

<sup>49</sup> Hawker, *Tales of Ghosts*, 68-81, outlines this at the local level in British Columbia, citing the work of George Raley.

<sup>50</sup> C.T. Loram and T.F. McIlwraith, *The North American Indian Today: University of Toronto - Yale University Seminar Conference* (Toronto, 4-16 September 1939) (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1943).

The conference provides an important insight into the situation in Canada at the time when Martin's poles were commissioned and carved, and on d'Harnoncourt's influence. Native art in Canada and the United States was a featured topic. In his opening remarks, Charles T. Loram raised a series of questions on the subject, including: "What is the present and possible future of the so-called 'Indian Curio' trade? Should any of the formal acculturing [sic] agents help in the development of this trade?" and "What are the lessons to be learned from the exhibitions of Indian craft work at the San Francisco World's Fair and the Canadian National Exhibition?"<sup>51</sup> Both (as well as the New York World's Fair, which he did not mention) were then ongoing. A visit to the Canadian National Exhibition, hosted by the Indian Affairs Branch as part of the official proceedings, indicates that the display there was a preliminary step in the Canadian federal government's program to market Native handicrafts, particularly those produced in central and eastern Canada. R.A. Hoey outlined his program in a presentation on the "Economic Problems of the Canadian Indians." He referred to a "reawakening ... of a new interest in Indian arts and crafts" on "a number of our reserves." Noting the prior decline in such work he stated:

There is now in the Indian Affairs Branch an official [i.e., himself] definitely charged with the responsibility of promoting worthwhile handicraft projects on Indian reserves and responsible as well for the sale of these products to the wholesale and retail trade. Under the direction and supervision of this official, groups have been organized on Indian reserves for the production of splint baskets, hand-loom weaving, wrought-metal work, Cowichan sweater production, knitting, crochet work, wood-carving, tanning and leather work. It is the intention and policy of the Department to encourage high-quality production and by the establishment of a central warehouse at Ottawa to assure continuity of supply to the wholesale and retail trade.<sup>52</sup>

In addition, T.R.L. MacInnes, Secretary, Indian Affairs Branch, took the opportunity to announce: "Recently ... the Department has undertaken to promote Indian handicraft on a commercial basis."<sup>53</sup>

<sup>51</sup> C.T. Loram, "The Fundamentals of Indian-White Contact in the United States and Canada," in *ibid.*, 16. Loram died in 1940, leaving the publishing of the proceedings to his Canadian co-organizer, McIlwraith.

<sup>52</sup> R.A. Hoey, "Economic Problems of the Canadian Indians," in Loram and McIlwraith, *North American Indian Today*, 205.

<sup>53</sup> T.R.L. MacInnes, "The History and Policies of Indian Administration in Canada," in Loram and McIlwraith, *North American Indian Today*, 162. His statement is strikingly similar to



Part 9 of the published proceedings was devoted to the “Arts and Crafts of the Indian.” The introduction to this section was written by the Canadian co-organizer, T.F. McIlwraith, an anthropologist at the University of Toronto who had done fieldwork among the Bella Coola (Nuxalk) in the 1920s and who also worked at the Royal Ontario Museum. He stated that, in order to achieve the goal of economic viability, Native arts in Canada must change in keeping with policies of acculturation and commercialization.

If a permanent industry is to be built up, it needs a steady supply of goods of staple quality, and of a type that is suitable for modern conditions. This means that the craftsman must produce goods for their salability not to satisfy the traditional and aesthetic demands of his own culture. Since articles produced commercially tend to deteriorate in quality, one of the problems is the maintenance of standards under new stimuli.<sup>54</sup>

McIlwraith also included recommendations for marketing:

Successful sales today require advertisement, efficient and economical means of production, and a large-scale organization. Above all, the purchaser must consider his purchase for its intrinsic worth, not for its value as an Indian product. Native handicrafts offer possibilities of increasing Indian income, but the road between the individual and the white consumer is a hard one.<sup>55</sup>

Although McIlwraith’s background was in Northwest Coast cultures, he did not single out this area for special comment, an indication that, at this point, its future potential was not fully realized.

René d’Harnoncourt contributed the chapter immediately following the introduction on the “Function and Production of Indian Art.” As opposed to his Canadian counterparts who were primarily interested in “handicrafts,” he carefully distinguished between Native and Western ideas of the artist, and between art, craft, curio, and mass production, particularly with regard to productions from the Northwest and the Southwest. However, his primary interest was in establishing

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that made at almost the same time by Barbeau in Vancouver. Barbeau did not attend the conference.

<sup>54</sup> T.F. McIlwraith, “Introduction,” in Loram and McIlwraith, *North American Indian Today*, 317.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.* Although McIlwraith’s background was in Northwest Coast cultures, he did not single out this area for special comment, an indication that, at this point, its future potential was not fully realized.

knowledgeable markets that would demand high-quality products that qualified as art.

To develop fully the potential market for Indian art, and to organize production to meet the requirements of modern merchandising, will of course be a slow and delicate process. But the moral and economic benefits it could yield to the Indian producer, and the enrichment it would mean for our own world, make it a task that is one of the responsibilities of America today.<sup>56</sup>

As the conference demonstrated, more thought was put into the complex aspects of marketing and “reviving” Native arts within Canada than the minor amendment to the Indian Act would at first have indicated. However, the precedents of the American Indian Arts and Crafts initiatives, the carving/restoration program in Alaska, and d’Harnoncourt’s and Gunther’s concurrent displays of Northwest Coast Native art in San Francisco do not alone explain the inclusion of poles at the Canadian Pavilion in New York City, although they do provide the context and help to define the “revival” that would subsequently follow. An intercontinental influence shaped events in Canada as well. In the summer of 1938, Kurt Seligmann, a Swiss surrealist, visited the Upper Skeena region. During an extensive stay in the small settler community of Hazelton in August and September, he negotiated with members of the nearby Wet’suwet’en village of Hagwilget, situated on the border with Gitksan territories, to obtain a pole for the Musée de l’Homme in Paris.<sup>57</sup> Although proceedings at the local level involved locating, consulting with, and making payments to those who held an interest in the pole, the negotiations were successful.<sup>58</sup> By early September, the pole was taken down, cut in two pieces, crated, and shipped to Paris.<sup>59</sup> Since the sale and removal of any pole from Canada was at that time regulated by law, federal approval was required. In keeping with the shift in attitude towards Native arts, and demonstrating the desirability of showcasing Northwest Coast Native art in Paris as well as in London, the process was expedited and occurred with remarkable speed. The *Daily Province* quoted Seligmann as saying:

<sup>56</sup> René d’Harnoncourt, “Function and Production of Indian Art,” in Loram and McIlwraith, *North American Indian Today*, 322.

<sup>57</sup> Kurt Seligmann, “Le Mât-Totem de Dégem Skanish,” *Journal de la Société des Américanistes* 31 (1939): 121-28. Jacknis incorrectly gives the date of Seligmann’s visit as 1939. Jacknis, *Storage Box*, 127.

<sup>58</sup> Seligmann, “Le Mât-Totem de Dégem Skanish,” 126-27.

<sup>59</sup> *Omineca Herald*, 7 September 1938, 4.

I can't thank the Canadian Government or the provincial body enough for allowing me to purchase the totem. Ordinarily permits are practically impossible to get, but when I applied to the Indian agent at Hazelton, B.C., he quickly referred me in turn to the commissioner of Indian affairs in Vancouver and later to the department at Ottawa. Within four days I was advised I could ship the tribal monument to Paris.<sup>60</sup>

A local paper confirmed the report and provided a significant comment on the non-Native view of the cultural use value of the pole: "Through the courtesy of Captain Mortimer [the local Indian agent] and others and the consideration of the Federal government, he [Seligmann] had been able to arrange for shipping this pole out of the country. It was useless where it was and now it would be a continuous advertisement of British Columbia."<sup>61</sup> It was soon installed in a prominent location in the loggia outside the entrance to the new art moderne museum in the Trocadéro complex, which had been constructed for the 1937 Paris exposition.<sup>62</sup> The parallels in civic site, placement, design of the building, and proximity of time suggest that this validation of the cultural capital of totem poles at the centre of modern art may have served as a precedent for the position of Martin's pole at the Canadian Pavilion in New York. Their recognition by a surrealist also placed them within the borders of modernism, a substantial shift from Chicago when the Kwakwaka'wakw were seen as outside Western modernity.

It was not only in Paris that displaced or replaced poles were becoming more prominent. Earlier, in the spring of 1938, additional Haida poles were mounted in Prince Rupert to supplement those placed there earlier as tourist attractions. By April, the city boasted fourteen poles, some situated on Frazer Street, some on the hillside behind city hall on Fulton Street, and three in the Canadian National Railway Park.<sup>63</sup> It was also hoped that a new museum of Native artifacts would soon be constructed.<sup>64</sup> Demonstrating local awareness of the change in federal

<sup>60</sup> *Daily Province*, 24 September 1938, 19.

<sup>61</sup> *Prince Rupert Daily News*, 19 September 1938, 4. The extensive reporting on Seligmann's acquisition in the newspapers throughout British Columbia would have served to raise local awareness of the value that Native arts possessed on the international level.

<sup>62</sup> The pole has been moved and is now in the lobby of the recently opened Musée Quai du Branley. This was not the first instance of a pole's going to Paris. In late 1929, a twenty-foot pole from the Nass River was collected under the aegis of the Canadian National Railway and installed in the old Trocadéro Museum in the spring of 1930. See *Omineca Herald*, 20 November 1929, 1; and *Prince Rupert Daily News*, 15 March 1930.

<sup>63</sup> *Prince Rupert Daily News*, 7 April, 1938, 1.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 11 March, 1938, 2.

policy towards Native arts, the *Prince Rupert Daily News* reported that the new federal “education plans even include training in woodwork and beadwork, at one time the Indian’s pride.”<sup>65</sup> In addition, in September of 1938, a project to erect a “\$15,000 Potlatch House at Alert Bay” was proposed by American artist Frederick Detwiller to “house an exhibit of Indian relics” as a tourist attraction.<sup>66</sup>

In short, 1938 and 1939 were banner years for the recognition of Native arts and, specifically, totem poles in Canada, the United States, and Europe, as well as for discussion of the continuity of Native cultures and their roles in defining national images. The constellation of local, national, cross-border, and intercontinental attention on poles, extending from Prince Rupert to Paris, would have served as an added impetus for the commissioning of Martin’s poles.

At first glance, however, the New York World’s Fair does not seem an obvious venue for a display of indigenous art. Preceded by the Depression and overlapping the onset of the Second World War, the fair projected an utopian vision of a world transformed for the better by modern technology. Its focus on the future, which was positioned in opposition to the past and the “primitive,” was expressed in its motto: “Building the World of Tomorrow.” It was also embedded in its overall design. Unlike most previous fairs, the architecture of the participating countries’ pavilions displayed little of the unique folk (i.e., “primitive”) heritages through which national identities were frequently represented.<sup>67</sup> Instead, national differences were erased and subsumed under a streamlined art moderne style established and enforced by a design board that included such noted American industrial designers as Norman Bel Geddes, Henry Dreyfus, Raymond Loewy, and Walter Darwin Teague.<sup>68</sup> They ensured that all of the buildings fit into a homogenous, corporate style exemplified by the phallic and futuristic Trylon and Perisphere, the

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 14 July 1938, 1.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 30 September 1938, 2.

<sup>67</sup> Reconciling France’s folk heritage with modernity had, for example, been a primary goal of the 1937 Paris exposition. See Shanny Peer, *France on Display: Peasants, Provincials and Folklore in the 1937 Paris World’s Fair* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998).

<sup>68</sup> This was not the first time that an international exhibition had a modern homogenous style imposed on the pavilions. Glasgow’s Empire Exhibition of 1938 was also noted for the common modern International style of its buildings, which erased national differences by occluding folk references. See comment from The Editor, “What I Think of Glasgow’s Empire Exhibition,” *The Studio*, August 1938, 85-93: “The Empire and Colonial Pavilions, though ably designed as containers for exhibits, bear little external evidence of particular national characteristics” (88).



Exterior shot of the Canadian Pavilion showing Mungo Martin's twin poles. Library and Archives Canada, C008444306.

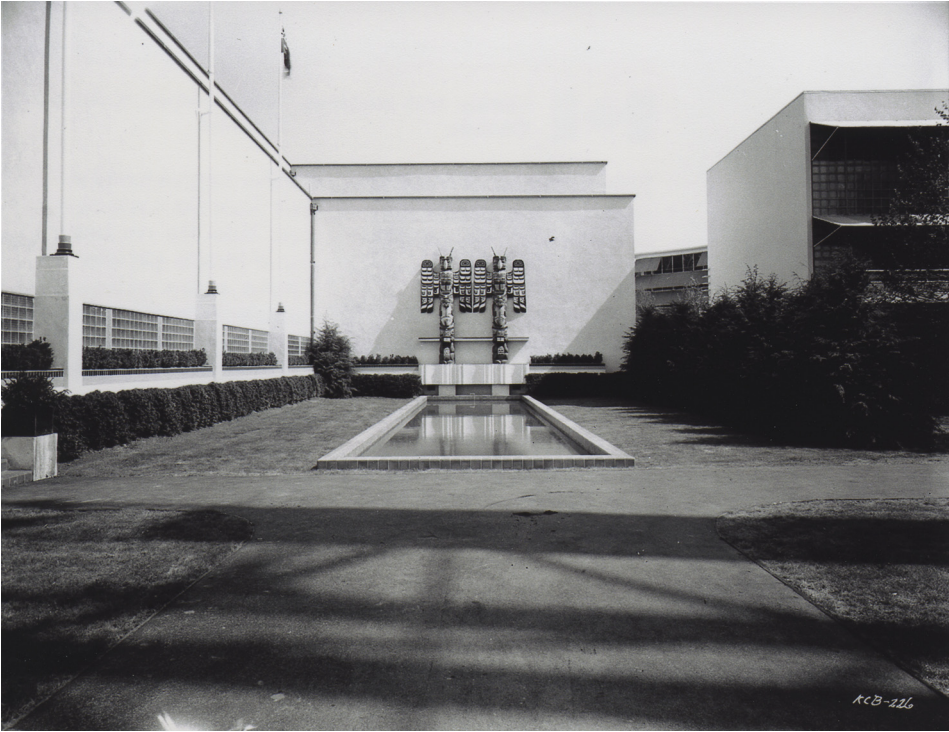
fair's central symbols.<sup>69</sup> Controls were imposed on the designs of the buildings, which tended to look much like each other. Each nation's pavilion was encouraged to have sheer white planar walls, a minimum of decoration, and spare curving and straight lines.

The Canadian Pavilion was designed by William F. Williams, an Australian emigrant architect who had worked in Montreal and eventually settled in Nelson, British Columbia, in the 1930s. It occupied an unprepossessing spot among the second tier of national pavilions surrounding the Lagoon of Nations.<sup>70</sup> Its architecture did not distinguish it. L-shaped in layout, its symmetrical façade, on the left, featured two circular turrets flanking a central entrance. These cylindrical structures echoed the form of the Canadian Pavilion from the previous 1937 Paris World's Fair, where British architects, working on Canada's behalf,

<sup>69</sup> See Elspeth Cowell, "The Canadian Pavilion at the 1939 New York World's Fair and the Development of Modernism in Canada," *Society for the Study of Architecture in Canada Bulletin* 19, 1 (1994): 13-20.

<sup>70</sup> One commentator referred to the location as a "back alley." See Anonymous, "Canada's Pavilion," *Royal Architectural Institute of Canada Journal*, 16 October 1938, 180, n.p.





Exterior shot of the Canadian Pavilion showing Mungo Martin's twin poles. Library and Archives Canada, PA108385.

attempted to produce an image combining modernity and agricultural production through a structure based on large concrete grain silos.<sup>71</sup> They had been noted as emblems of modern design in 1923 by the Swiss architect Le Corbusier, in his influential book *Vers une architecture*.<sup>72</sup> But Williams's design also closely recapitulated the façade of the United Kingdom Pavilion, designed by H.J. Rowse, at Glasgow in 1938.<sup>73</sup> At New York, the twin turret-like forms were enhanced with bas-relief panels of Canada's coat of arms, thereby again identifying the building and the nation as linked to the British Empire.<sup>74</sup> The remainder of the

<sup>71</sup> Cowell, "Canadian Pavilion," 15.

<sup>72</sup> See Stanislaus von Moos, *Le Corbusier: Elements of a Synthesis* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1979), 62-63.

<sup>73</sup> See The Editor, "What I Think." Williams's design also contained many of the features of the Irish Pavilion in Glasgow. Both it and that of the United Kingdom were illustrated in *The Studio*, indicating that the article may have served as a source and that his work may have been a pastiche of these two sources.

<sup>74</sup> Intentionally or not, the combination of rounded vertical surfaces with low relief heraldic carving also echoed the shape and imagery of Martin's two poles.



building had plain, flat white walls, uninflected except for a low row of windows interrupted by a row of flag poles with pennants and some restrained landscaping.

Martin's colourful poles, with their rich and elaborate carvings and their references to the "primitive," not only provided a striking contrast to this austere exterior but also rendered the Canadian Pavilion unique. Their ambiguous position, which both reconciled and opposed the modern and the "primitive," made them a standout. Installed against the rear right wall behind a long rectangular reflecting pool instead of, as was traditional, in front of the building, their less prominent placement did not render them invisible. Rather, they were given additional height and prominence by being placed on a raised platform. Although this severed their usual relationship with the ground and indicated that they were not raised by traditional means, it placed them in the Western category of sculpture, which was designated by a pedestal. They were clearly meant to be viewed as art. Their elevated placement made them, in conjunction with the pool and the framing white wall (which had no other visual distractions), a focus of attention.<sup>75</sup> In fact, many would have seen only this aspect of the Canadian exhibition since the interior displays were pedestrian.<sup>76</sup> The sculpture there was, in contrast to Martin's poles, allegorical social realism at its most banal and pretentious, using, for example, a nine-foot, mesomorphic, semi-nude male clad in a loin cloth with upstretched arms holding lightning bolts aloft to symbolize Canada's electrical prowess.<sup>77</sup> In retrospect, the poles

<sup>75</sup> See, for example, James Grannis Parmelee, "Canada's Participation in the World's Fair," *Canadian Geographical Journal* 19, 1 (1939): 99. Parmelee had been the deputy minister of the Department of Trade and Commerce since 1931 and would remain at the post until 1940. His text gave extensive coverage to the non-Native artists, whom he lists, and their productions for the pavilion, which he saw as representing Canada's identity and "artistic beauty" in terms of its "unlimited resources, thriving industries and outstanding tourist appeal" (85-87). Oddly, he does not identify the architect, declaring of the latter only that the "pavilion was constructed by a Canadian firm from a young Canadian architect, which was awarded first prize in a Dominion-wide competition conducted by the Department of Trade and Commerce" (93-96). Parmelee was one of the jurors.

<sup>76</sup> Cowell, "Canadian Pavilion," 18-19, indicates that criticism of the interior's poor quality and incoherence began almost immediately. See also, Editorial, *Royal Architectural Institute of Canada Journal*, 16 August 1939, n.p.; and Humphrey Carver, "Canada at the Fair," *Royal Architectural Institute of Canada Journal*, 16 August 1939, 184-93. Carver stated: "Let us discard mere politeness and frankly confess that for Canadians the World's Fair is a scene of humiliation. The display which the minister of trade and commerce has placed inside the Canadian Pavilion is the most ineffective piece of work in the whole fair" (184). Carver did not mention Martin's poles outside the pavilion, although his illustration of the building did show them.

<sup>77</sup> Parmelee, "Canada's Participation," 88, 92.

appear to have been the best part of the Canadian display and certainly its most impressive declaration of national identity.

It seems that the idea for the use of poles as icons of Canadian culture began with the architect and was then taken up by the Canadian Exhibition Commission (CEC), which was responsible for the pavilion.<sup>78</sup> The initiative was channelled through the federal Department of Trade and Commerce, which, in keeping with the corporate theme of the fair, oversaw the construction and operation of the pavilion. A.T. Seaman, the commissioner general for Canadian participation, was based in New York. The two Mungo Martin poles were ordered by the CEC through the Indian Affairs Branch of the Department of Mines and Resources. Negotiations included T.R.L. MacInnes, Secretary of the Indian Affairs Branch, who announced the government's intention to underwrite the production of Native handicrafts at the University of Toronto conference; D.M. MacKay, Indian commissioner for British Columbia, who was stationed in Vancouver and who would have assisted Seligmann; and Murray S. Todd, the Indian agent in Alert Bay.

Todd had replaced William Halliday, who had been a key figure in potlatch prosecutions in the 1920s. The most well-known of these resulted from the Cranmer potlatch of 1921, which saw the incarceration of several participants as well as the confiscation of many carved masks, coppers, and other objects and their distribution to museums and private collections, including that of Duncan Campbell Scott, the deputy superintendent of the Department of Indian Affairs. Halliday's actions were part of Scott's failed attempts to eradicate the potlatch and all Native ceremonial life, a policy Scott had pursued with increasing vigor since first assuming his position in 1913. Although Scott had retired in 1932, his policies continued. In 1934, correspondence between Todd and his superiors in Ottawa indicated that he was an ardent supporter of the potlatch ban, especially since he saw ceremonial activity as increasing rather than disappearing, as had been expected.<sup>79</sup> In fact, he went well beyond both Scott and Halliday. In 1936, he proposed legislation that would ensure that any Natives in his agency who acquired any form of wealth beyond their immediate needs for sustenance would have it seized without appeal since such wealth had the potential to be used for potlatch purposes. Furthermore, he advocated the confiscation of all

<sup>78</sup> Cowell illustrates William's competition drawing from early 1938, which shows the poles in place as part of the original design scheme.

<sup>79</sup> Douglas Cole, "The History of the Kwakiutl Potlatch," in Aldona Jonaitis, *Chiefly Feasts: The Enduring Kwakiutl Potlatch* (New York: American Museum of Natural History, 1991), 165.

paraphernalia, whether used ceremonially or not, and the prosecution of those in possession of it. He also reported that he was aware of the secret carving of new masks.<sup>80</sup> In 1938, however, he abruptly abandoned this position and, like Barbeau, reversed his stance. Following the amendment to the Indian Act, he became an agent of the “revival,” advocating state subsidization rather than the suppression of Native art.<sup>81</sup>

Records documenting the negotiations for the production of the poles for the Canadian Pavilion began in late October 1938, when Todd responded to MacKay “in respect to a request from the Canadian Government Exhibition Commission for two totem poles” that MacKay had sent on the fourteenth. Todd’s lengthy letter both clarified and confused the matter.<sup>82</sup> He assured MacKay that, contrary to what appears to have been the initial plan, “there are no old totem poles of that size in good condition that could be shipped for that purpose.” Finding the initial request for already carved poles to be “impossible,” Todd took the initiative of approaching Mungo Martin, whom he called “one of your best carvers in the Agency.” Martin, in turn, provided “a rough sketch” of two new poles, which Todd forwarded to MacKay. Todd reported that Martin had agreed to carve the two “exactly the same,” each seventeen feet in length, and “painted properly and delivered to me at Alert Bay.” Todd assessed the fee of \$250 each a “very reasonable” price “as some years ago a number of totem poles were sold from this Agency for which the Indians realized \$300.00 each.” In his new-found enthusiasm for promoting carving, and mistakenly assuming that the CEC wanted the poles to frame the entrance to the pavilion – that is, in the traditional placement in front of buildings – Todd exceeded the original mandate. He proposed a gate, or “arch,” that would extend between the poles, with a *sisiutl*, or double-headed serpent, surmounted by a thunderbird for a further \$100. Todd presented this option, which would reach “from one totem pole to the other” as a “very wonderful gateway and entrance to our Exhibit [*sic*].” Noting the shortage of time, and the necessity of finding suitable cedar logs, he requested that the process be expedited. Regarding the future, Todd presumed that “the two totem poles will either be sold after the Exhibition or returned to Canada, and kept by the Canadian Government.” Stressing their economic potential, Todd

<sup>80</sup> Douglas Cole and Ira Chaikin, *An Iron Hand upon the People: The Law against the Potlatch on the Northwest Coast* (Vancouver: Douglas and McIntyre, 1990), 148.

<sup>81</sup> Cole and Chaikin noted that his correspondence with his superiors stopped mentioning the increase in surreptitious ceremonialism and carving at this point, but they were at a loss to explain the change.

<sup>82</sup> M.S. Todd to D.M. MacKay, 25 October 1938, Library and Archives Canada (hereafter LAC), RG 72.

noted that if the poles were “sold at the end of the World’s Fair the Commission would have no difficulty in getting a return of their money, as the poles will be well worth the price paid.”

MacKay forwarded the correspondence with Todd to MacInnes in Ottawa.<sup>83</sup> MacInnes, in turn, forwarded it to Seaman in New York, who was to pay for the poles and for the cost of freight.<sup>84</sup> Upon receiving the correspondence and Martin’s sketch, Seaman noted that, while “undoubtedly very effective,” Martin’s design “departs radically from Mr. Williams’s original layout.”<sup>85</sup> Seaman then forwarded the correspondence and sketch to the architect, noting that “the inclusion of the double-headed snake and Thunderbird might prove to be quite effective. The sketch appears to be drawn to a 3/4 inch scale and unless all dimensions were reduced, the whole feature would come above the roof level.” Nonetheless, Seaman gave Williams *carte blanche* in choosing the poles and the gate.<sup>86</sup>

Although an immediate reply was requested, the architect did not respond until February. He stuck to his initial plan to position the poles at the side of the building at the back of a long rectangular reflecting pool and did not mention the gate. He did, however, request a carving for the spray of the fountain in the pool, leaving the design to the carver.<sup>87</sup> Shortly thereafter, Williams confirmed that MacKay had informed him that it was “too late to have the arch and both totem poles made in time” but that he (Williams) had ordered “two 17’ totem poles which will have a wing spread of 7’ 8”” to be erected as previously indicated.<sup>88</sup>

In the meantime, work had progressed in Alert Bay. Although time was tight, and suitable logs had yet to be located in November, the poles were carved and painted over the winter. Martin’s finished poles were shipped by train to New York by late March 1939, in time for the opening

<sup>83</sup> D.M. MacKay to T.R.L. MacInnes, 29 October 1938, LAC, RG 72.

<sup>84</sup> T.R.L. MacInnes to A.T. Seaman, 31 October 1938, LAC, RG 72. See also A.T. Seaman to T.R.L. MacInnes, 11 November 1938, LAC, RG 72, confirming “that this department will defray the transportation costs and also pay the Indian owners for the poles, subject to the price being agreed upon.”

<sup>85</sup> A.T. Seaman to T.R.L. MacInnes, Secretary, Department of Mines and Resources, Indian Affairs Branch, Ottawa, 18 November 1938, LAC, RG 72.

<sup>86</sup> A.T. Seaman to W.F. Williams, 18 November 1938, LAC, RG 72. See also A.T. Seaman to T.R.L. MacInnes, 18 November 1938, LAC, RG 72, telling him that he had asked Williams “to write directly to Major MacKay in Vancouver giving him definitive instructions as to whether or not to have the totem poles alone or the totem poles with the double headed snake and Thunderbird.”

<sup>87</sup> W.F. Williams to D.M. MacKay, 16 February 1939, LAC, RG 72.

<sup>88</sup> W.F. Williams to A.T. Seaman, 24 February 1939, LAC, RG 72.

of the fair in April.<sup>89</sup> Martin was paid \$500 for the two poles, plus ten dollars for a small fountain figure of a whale. By late April 1939, a cheque for the total was issued and sent to Martin via MacInnes and Todd.<sup>90</sup> In contrast to what was paid, the duty value declared was \$1,500.<sup>91</sup>

Over the course of the exhibition, which was renewed and extended through 1940, the poles could be seen by those passing by even if they did not enter the pavilion. Published material suggests they were immensely popular. The photo caption accompanying the illustration of the poles in the article by Parmelee, cited earlier, stated: "These two totem poles, standing seventeen feet high against the Canadian Pavilion, have been much photographed by visitors at the World's Fair. These were done by Mungo Martin, one of the oldest and best carvers of the Kwawkewlth tribe of Indians at Alert Bay, British Columbia."<sup>92</sup> Although brief, the statement says a great deal. It indicates the popularity of the poles and their appeal to a broad public, who photographed them repeatedly. The phrase "one of" recognizes the existence of an entire group of such carvers working in the 1930s, as, indeed, was the case. These included not only Martin but also Charlie James, who had just died, Willie Seaweed, George Walkus, Herbert Johnson, and others. The reference to them, even if unnamed, presupposes a widespread knowledge that Kwakwaka'wakw carving was thriving rather than disappearing or in need of "revival." Holm has reported that the 1930s and 1940s witnessed the greatest production of Hamatsa masks by Willie Seaweed, which, in combination with the number of poles carved and erected, indicate that Kwakwaka'wakw artistic production was reaching unprecedented heights at that time.<sup>93</sup> Furthermore, Parmelee, a high-ranking civil servant, not only knew of this school of active carvers but also was capable of ranking Martin among them, as had Indian Agent Todd. This implies an already existing critical assessment of their works and an

<sup>89</sup> R.W. Buskard, Canadian Government Exhibition Commission, Canadian Pavilion, NYC, to D.M. MacKay, Ottawa, 14 April 1939, LAC, RG 72, confirming arrival and asking for invoice; F.P. Cosgrove, Canadian Pavilion, Canadian Government Exhibition Commission to R.W. Buskard, Canadian Pavilion, NYC, 21 April 1939, LAC, RG 72, requesting information on arrival; R.W. Buskard, Canadian Government Exhibition Commission, New York, to F.P. Cosgrove, Canadian Government Exhibition, Ottawa, 24 April 1939, LAC, RG 72; and F.P. Cosgrove, Canadian Government Exhibition Commission, to Mr. Beesley, Canadian Pavilion, 27 June 1940, LAC, RG 72.

<sup>90</sup> F.P. Cosgrove to T.R.L. MacInnes, Secretary, Indian Affairs Branch, Ottawa, [Invoice] in account with Indian Affairs Branch, Department of Mines and Resources, 27 March 1939, LAC, RG 72.

<sup>91</sup> J. Gerald Cole, Director of Import and Export to A.T. Seaman, June 24 1940, LAC, RG 72.

<sup>92</sup> Parmelee, "Canada's Participation," 99.

<sup>93</sup> Bill Holm, *Smokey-Top: The Art and Times of Willie Seaweed* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1983), 109; see also Cole, "The History of the Kwakiutl Potlatch", 165.

established hierarchy of artistry. In turn, the article implies that Martin's poles, done by the best artist of the group, are the works of a master and that, at that time, an established criterion for determining aesthetic quality in Kwakwaka'wakw art was already in broad circulation.

How would Martin himself have viewed the commission? Although no archival or ethnographic material on the topic has been found, historical evidence indicates that Martin and the Kwakwaka'wakw would have had a sophisticated and complex view of the project's positive possibilities.

Born around 1880, Martin was then in his mid- to late fifties.<sup>94</sup> He had trained under his stepfather, Charlie James, who had died in January 1938. As recognized by Parmelee, Martin was approaching the height of his artistic practice. The opportunities that the commission offered were advantageous and timely in several respects. Money, however, would probably not have been the greatest consideration. The amount offered, \$500, would have been less than he could have made over the four months working in the cash economy. However, it would have been in accord with the payment made to carvers in the Upper Skeena for new poles. William Beynon's 1945 field notes on potlatch ceremonies held in conjunction with the raising of both old and new poles indicate that one carver received \$150, plus other considerations, for a new pole.<sup>95</sup> Although this figure suggests that the \$500 Martin received for his two poles was adequate, it should be kept in mind that, given the abbreviated time frame allowed to complete the elaborate project, Martin may have had to engage paid assistants to work under him in order to meet the deadline.<sup>96</sup> The money was certainly much greater than the amount paid for an individual object under the handicrafts program in Ontario and Quebec.

It is probable that Martin saw value other than monetary reward in the commission. The contract would have carried some prestige since it would have singled him out as the best carver in his field and validated any claim he might have had to stepping into the shoes of his teacher, Charlie James. As Nuytten says, at that moment "Mungo was

<sup>94</sup> Dates for Martin's birth vary widely. Nuytten, *Totem Carvers*, 75, says "around 1880 or 1881"; Jacknis, *Storage Box*, 11, gives c. 1885. The birth registration entry on the BC Archives' Births Index gives his date of birth as April 1884. The death registration gives his birth date as October 1876.

<sup>95</sup> Margaret Anderson and Marjorie Halpin, eds., *Potlatch at Gitsegukla: William Beynon's 1945 Field Notebooks* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2000), 117.

<sup>96</sup> This raises the question of how many and who worked on the pole. No mention of any other participants in the carving occurs in the archival record.



the logical person to take over his work.”<sup>97</sup> The poles could, then, have served as “masterpieces” that demonstrated Martin’s ability to move from apprentice to master. In turn, this may have influenced Martin’s choice for the design. Twin poles had not been specified in the original architect’s plans; rather, the drawings and model simply designate a place for two old poles. Martin’s choice of the paired figures was his own. In opting for a thunderbird and bear as the top two figures, he created a design that would not only stand out against the walls of the pavilion but that would also echo and rival the most well-known work of his teacher – that is, the twin house posts that had been moved to Stanley Park in Vancouver.<sup>98</sup>

In addition, the configuration of James’s poles was recognized by the general public as the generic image of a totem pole. By 1939, the thunderbird was the most commonplace image used in wooden model poles carved by Kwakwaka’wakw artists for non-Native, tourist consumption.<sup>99</sup> It also formed the stereotypical image of a pole that circulated in non-Native contexts.<sup>100</sup> But perhaps most telling, it was the type favoured by the Ojibwa carvers for their model totem poles. It appears, then, that Martin selected images that, to non-Native audiences, would have been instantly recognizable as “Indian” but that, at the same time, would have made them uniquely Kwakwaka’wakw, thus reclaiming the image for the Northwest Coast, his community, and himself.

But the commission would have had a significance for Martin that went beyond his relationship with his teacher and his own personal position. He may also have considered the advantages to his community. It is not unlikely that he would have queried Todd about the government’s reversal in attitude towards Native cultural productions, from one of legislated suppression to one of legislated encouragement and even subsidization. The Welfare and Training Program, the change to the Indian Act, and the totem pole commission would have provoked general discussion among the Kwakwaka’wakw. It can, therefore, be

<sup>97</sup> Nuytten, *Totem Carvers*, 77.

<sup>98</sup> Ron Hawker has recently demonstrated that Charlie James’ Stanley Park poles were part of a larger strategy by the artist for bringing Kwakwaka’wakw art to public attention. For this and more on James’ relationship with Martin, see Ron Hawker, “Charlie James: Bringing Kwakwaka’wakw Art to the Outside World,” *American Indian Art*, Autumn, 2008, 78–87.

<sup>99</sup> See Holm, *Smokey-Top*, 50–53. Although the image of a bird with attached wings may have originated among the Haida, it had not been used extensively among the northern groups and became more commonly identified with the Kwakwaka’wakw.

<sup>100</sup> See, for example, the illustration of a generic drawing of a thunderbird pole situated within southern Vancouver Island on a map of North America in *Life*, 5 June 1939, 52.

assumed that Martin and his community had a reasonably complete understanding of this situation, albeit from their own perspective, and that they were prepared to turn it to their own advantage.

At this moment, in fact, Martin's poles fit into other strategies that the Kwakwaka'wakw were pursuing. The historical record shows that they already had been actively negotiating spaces and generating events by which they could reconcile the display of their loyalty to Canada and the Crown with the preservation of their identity, ceremonies, arts, and culture. Such strategies of speaking back to the Empire included mixing the traditional with the innovative when it came to poles. The erection in Gwayi Village of a memorial pole that featured a thunderbird with outstretched wings on top for King George V in 1936 was one such example. "Carved by several artists, including Willie Seaweed, Herbert Johnson, and Tom Patch Wamiss," it signalled the close relationship that the Kwakwaka'wakw wished to maintain with the titular head of the British Empire.<sup>101</sup> The pole, which positioned the King in the role of a Kwakwaka'wakw chief or noble, with all the duties and responsibilities to his people that that entailed, was followed by a ceremony at Alert Bay featuring traditional regalia held to honour the coronation of George VI.<sup>102</sup> Here a similar appropriation occurred. It seems obvious that such displays of imperial loyalty could not be prosecuted by government officials; rather, they served as carefully articulated statements through which outlawed traditional ceremonies, regalia, and arts could find legitimate venues within the national context. The implication would be that, if traditional ceremonies were permitted to honour a king as a chief, then might not a Native aspire to the same position?

Another expression of royal affinity and political sovereignty through the modification of a traditional practice occurred in May 1939, when Martin participated in a ceremonial greeting of the new King and Queen, who were touring Canada and the United States. As the royal couple were leaving Vancouver for Victoria by boat, Martin and a group of sixteen other Kwakwaka'wakw representatives accompanied them in a carved fifty-foot canoe, one of two from Alert Bay and Fort Rupert, respectively, that were towed to Vancouver and then rowed into the harbour. Participants again displayed traditional ceremonial regalia as a sign of their cultural difference and continuity.<sup>103</sup> The

<sup>101</sup> Holm, *Smoky-Top*, 44. Holm indicates that the various style of each of the carvers is visible in the pole.

<sup>102</sup> Cole, "The History of the Kwakiutl Potlatch," 170, PABC 83576 photo.

<sup>103</sup> Aside from Martin, the individuals have been identified as Willie Seaweed, Harry Mountain, Bob Harris, Tom Ohmid, Tom Johnson, Paul Johnson, Charlie Pangwid, Mary Johnson,

image they projected, including the design of the boat, was meant to stir memories of Edward Curtis's film, *In the Land of the Headhunters*, in which figures in carved canoes land on a beach for a potlatch.<sup>104</sup> The event was designed not only to attract as much non-Native attention as possible but also to convey a particular message. The local newspapers reported it at length, with photographs.<sup>105</sup> One newspaper explained the event as an expression of "loyalty second to none which had its origin when the agreement was made between Queen Victoria and them during colonial days for establishment of British government in this province. To the Indians, the policy laid down by the late Queen Victoria is that a law cannot be legislated out of existence, and to that policy they cling for continued justice."<sup>106</sup> Through widely-distributed images that would resonate with both Native and non-Native cultures, the Kwakwaka'wakw again publically confirmed their loyalty to the Crown at a crucial moment – the threshold of the Second World War. The King and Queen then proceeded back across the continent and, on 10 June, officially visited the World's Fair and the Canadian Pavilion, where they would have seen Martin's poles adjacent to Canada's coat of arms – almost on a par with the latter as an emblem of Canadian identity and culture. Assuming that Martin and the Kwakwaka'wakw were conscientiously negotiating and publicly affirming a close link between themselves and the Crown, while declaring their political autonomy and sovereignty, Martin's acceptance of the commission could be viewed as acknowledgment of the ongoing and continuous nature of their culture and arts. The poles could serve to establish the viability and value of Kwakwaka'wakw art outside of their immediate community and within a national, imperial, and international context. They would have been seen as triumphs for the strategies that the Kwakwaka'wakw had been pursuing for several years. The Kwakwaka'wakw at this moment would have been aware that they had substantial agency in effecting both a

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Sarah Martin, Donovan Cranmer, Spruce Martin, Dan Cranmer, Lucy Harris and James Knox. See notes attached to Royal British Columbia Museum photograph, CVA 6-119.

<sup>104</sup> See *ibid.* Although few non-Natives saw the Curtis film when it was released, recent research has begun to demonstrate that it remains an important touchstone for the Kwakwaka'wakw, especially in terms of their representation to non-Native audiences. See, for example, *Vancouver Sun*, 14 June 2008, H1, H5.

<sup>105</sup> The Kwakwaka'wakw were not the only Native group to use the event to attract attention to their concerns. The Salish, under Chief Capilano Joe, also erected poles and gates and used their presence to assert their claims. Nor were Native peoples the only ethnic group that requested special attention from the King and Queen, but they were by far the most reported in the press. See Scrapbooks of Newspaper Clippings re: Royal Visit – 1939 – Vancouver Committee for the Reception of Their Majesties, add. MSS 73, Vancouver City Archives.

<sup>106</sup> Unidentified newspaper clipping in *ibid.*

reversal in state policy and in negotiating their own position within that shift. In fact, the poles marked the beginning of a close collaboration between Martin and various government agencies that would lay the foundation for the “revival” to follow and see the reversal of legislation that prohibited potlatching and discouraged carving.<sup>107</sup>

In the late 1930s, Martin’s style was still in transition. He was in the process of establishing the markers of his own style while retaining the influence and direction of his teacher. Not as tall as some, his New York poles were among the most flamboyant up to that point in time, in a style already noted for its theatricality. Although there are not many well-documented contemporary pieces with which to compare Martin’s poles, the three figures he employed all became part of his later repertoire.

The thunderbirds – with crests on top of their heads, curved beaks, and outstretched wings—are characteristic of his other depictions of this mythological being. The centres of the thunderbirds’ eyes, as with those of the other two animals, are composed on a flat, circular plane with three concentric offset circles, probably executed with a compass, painted alternately in black and white. The eyes conform to those in Martin’s later works in that the edge of the black central pupil abuts the black outer ring. The resulting slightly cross-eyed effect is typical of most, although not all, of Martin’s works. The eyes are surmounted by large, thick black brows. The painted abstract formline emblems on their chests echo similarly placed motifs found in thunderbirds by Charlie James. The wings are extraordinarily large and appear to be made from panels. They are elaborately painted with a series of ovoids and eye and U-shapes done in black, green, and red on a white ground. More vertical than horizontal, they turn downwards rather than extending out and up at the tips, as would have been common in most miniature tourist poles. The configuration continues and elaborates on several precedents already established among Kwakwaka’wakw carvers. This type of wing had appeared in 1939 in the George V memorial pole mentioned earlier and in other memorial poles carved by Willie Seaweed.<sup>108</sup> It also appeared in the wings attached to the prow of the canoe that was used in the ceremonial entrance to greet the monarchs in May 1939 and that would have been carved and painted at the same

<sup>107</sup> This relationship would find its ultimate expression in the pole carved by Mungo Martin in 1958, which was given to Queen Elizabeth on the occasion of British Columbia’s centenary and erected in Windsor Great Park.

<sup>108</sup> See Holm, *Smoky Top*, 42–43.

time as the poles. The one difference was that the canoe's wings were extended horizontally.

According to Nuytten, the bear was a figure that Martin was entitled to display.<sup>109</sup> Both bears have broad black eyebrows, although these slope downwards towards the centre. The eye forms are like those of the thunderbirds, again with green in the indented area around the eye sockets. Each bear holds in its snout, which has red nostrils, the tail of a gray halibut. Identifiable through the eyes, which are both on one side of the fish, and its offset red mouth, the halibut is gripped by two bear paws. This particular configuration reappears throughout Martin's later works. An almost identical design can be found in a large two-figure pole now in the University of Lethbridge collection but originally carved for the lobby of a tourist hotel at Lake Louise. The previous owners of the hotel date the commission to the 1930s, shortly after the hotel was first constructed, making it a contemporary of the New York poles and hence a good point of comparison.<sup>110</sup> The similarity between the two designs indicates that Martin was responsible for the figure. The bear/halibut configuration also corresponds closely to that found in the pole carved for Beacon Hill Park in Victoria in 1956, which was once famous as the world's tallest totem pole. The halibut distinguishes Martin's image of the bear/fish combination from that of Seaweed, in that the latter usually employed a salmon in the halibut's position.

The halibut's head fits neatly between the upright "ears" of the beaver at the bottom of the pole. Nuytten says that it too is a crest to which Martin was entitled.<sup>111</sup> But it is more.<sup>112</sup> The beaver, like the maple leaf, has long been a national symbol of Canada. Could Martin's choice for this figure at the bottom of the pole have been deliberately ironic? Up to this time, it was an unusual figure in Kwakwaka'wakw art and does not have many precedents, especially in poles.<sup>113</sup>

It did reappear later in two poles carved by Martin in the early 1950s, one at the University of British Columbia (UBC), the other for his house in Thunderbird Park. The eyebrows of the beavers in the two New

<sup>109</sup> Nuytten, *Totem Carvers*, 82.

<sup>110</sup> Personal communication with R. Crosby, December 2007.

<sup>111</sup> Nuytten, *Totem Carvers*, 84. See also 87-88.

<sup>112</sup> Nuytten states that Martin used the image on a pole carved in Victoria for Thunderbird Park, placed in front of his house, which was "to represent all of the Kwakiutl tribes, by showing the main crests of four of them." "Below 'YA'KTLEN' IS 'T'SAWI' the beaver, a crest figure of the 'NAKWAXDA'XE' tribe of Blunden Harbour." *Ibid.*, 88.

<sup>113</sup> None appears in the works attributed to Willie Seaweed as illustrated in Holm, *Smoky Top*, and almost none occurs in Audrey Hawthorn, *Kwakiutl Art*, Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 1979.

York poles vary slightly. In the one on the left, they are separated in the middle of the brow, as are those of the figures above, by a white area. On the right, they converge in a continuous black band. The areas around the eyes on both are in yellow, the colour of the thunderbirds' beak and legs. The beavers' cheek areas are black, and the nostrils, here depicted as doughnut-shaped, are painted red. The prominent teeth, holding a stick, are painted white and divided into four, almost equal, quadrants. The top two teeth do not extend over the lower lip as in northern designs, especially on Haida poles. Martin continued to use variations on this dental convention in the other poles mentioned above. Another variation is that the stick held by the beaver's mouth does not run straight across but, rather, bends abruptly at ninety degrees at each side of the mouth and extends back along the two sides of its head in a U, where it is clasped by the creature's paws. The peculiar configuration is a distinctive feature in Martin's depiction of this image. It reappears in his later poles, including the UBC and Thunderbird Park poles mentioned previously. It also occurs in a model pole in the Royal British Columbia Museum collection. Subtle variations occur in the U shapes painted on the tails. Some are solid black and some only outlined; the subtle variation breaks up the strict symmetry. The bodies of both beavers are painted brown.

The fate of the fountain figure is unknown. It does not appear in photographs of the pool and is not mentioned in the archival material.<sup>114</sup> As for the sisiutl gate proposal, although it was not realized in New York, Mungo Martin apparently did not forget the rejected design that he had drawn for the architect. He would later produce a similar configuration for UBC's Totem Pole Park.<sup>115</sup>

The popularity of the poles with the public is easy to understand. Yet, even given their mastery, beauty, and visibility, and the cash value assigned to them, the Canadian government was ambivalent about their worth and their future role. Even before the fair closed, negotiations were under way to have the poles remain in the United States. The poles were, however, not the first item to be asked for; rather, the Park Association requested the landscape plantings for the Flushing Meadows Park, which was to replace the fair site.<sup>116</sup> This request was denied since "this material will have to be sold for the best price available, like

<sup>114</sup> See note 97.

<sup>115</sup> See Hawker, *Tales of Ghosts*, 133.

<sup>116</sup> Iphigene Ochs Sulzberger, President, Park Association of New York City, to Douglas S. Cole, Commissioner-General for Canada's Participation in the New York World's Fair, New York, 28 June 1939, LAC, RG 72.



all other material in order to satisfy the requirements of the Auditor General.”<sup>117</sup> This fiscal consideration did not, however, seem to apply to the poles. In August 1939, Cole stated that, although the plantings from the pavilion would not be available, there was a proposal to donate the poles. He forwarded the news to Parmelee that:

Commissioner R. Moses and park executives ... have ... been particularly intrigued by the two Totem Poles displayed against the outside wall. Unless these are destined for some particular place in the Dominion, Mr. Jennings has asked if it would be possible for our Government to leave these two interesting pieces of native North American sculpture for educational use in one of the children's playgrounds to be constructed at the termination of the Fair. They would be pleased to see that an appropriate plaque be incorporated with their installation so as to record permanently their source.<sup>118</sup>

Attempting to expedite the situation, Seaman concurred that “it would undoubtedly be less expensive for us to leave these Totem Poles in New York than to dismantle and return them to Canada.”<sup>119</sup> The matter went unresolved until the following year.<sup>120</sup> F.E. Bawden, Acting Deputy Minister of Trade and Commerce, who was now handling the affair, concurred that the proposal “would be a good idea from an advertising point of view ... which might be done on condition that they agree to maintain them in good order, and place them in a suitable position and attach a suitable inscription to the effect that they are the gift of Canada.”<sup>121</sup> He briefed his new minister, James A. MacKinnon, who had succeeded William Daum Euler in 1940, on the situation, adding: “Our Exhibition Commission officials state that they know of no use to which we could put these Poles, if we removed them from New York, and, furthermore, the removal expense would be fairly high.”<sup>122</sup>

Bawden's assessment of the poles as being without cultural or monetary value in Canada is remarkable for what it overlooked. It ran counter to the encouragement from the Indian agent to return them

<sup>117</sup> J. G. Parmelee, Deputy Minister, to Douglas Cole, 7 July 1939, LAC, RG 72.

<sup>118</sup> Douglas S. Cole, Canadian Trade Commissioner, New York, to James G. Parmelee, Deputy Minister of Trade and Commerce, Ottawa, 14 August 1939, LAC, RG 72.

<sup>119</sup> A.T. Seaman, New York, to James G. Parmelee, Ottawa, 28 September 1939, LAC, RG 72.

<sup>120</sup> A.T. Seaman, New York, to F.E. Bawden, Acting Deputy Minister, Department of Trade and Commerce, Ottawa, 12 September 1940, LAC, RG 72.

<sup>121</sup> Memo for the file, F.E. Bawden, Acting Deputy Minister, 17 September 1940, LAC, RG 72.

<sup>122</sup> F.E. Bawden, Acting Deputy Minister, to Hon. J.A. MacKinnon, Minister of Trade and Commerce, 27 September 1940, LAC, RG 72.

to Alert Bay, where they could be sold and their cost recovered and even a handsome profit realized. It also ignored the establishment of Thunderbird Park in Victoria, which was under way by that time, where they could have formed part of the display of old poles that would be placed there. However, Bawden was adamant that the conditions for the donation be observed.<sup>123</sup> Pending these requirements, ministerial approval was announced at the end of the month.<sup>124</sup> Seaman informed the Department of Parks in early October<sup>125</sup> and received a prompt acknowledgment.<sup>126</sup>

The actual transfer of ownership and relocation of the poles went much less smoothly. In fact, it took far more time and effort to keep the poles in the United States than it did to get them across the border in the first place and probably more than it would have simply to return them. Customs was the first hurdle to overcome. The discrepancy between the declared value and the amount paid for the poles had to be addressed. It was noted that, “[a]t the time of entry, in April 1939, a value of \$1500 was indicated on the pro forma invoices.”<sup>127</sup> After lengthy negotiations, duty was waived after the fair had closed and free entry was “granted as an act of international courtesy.”<sup>128</sup> Dismantling and storage was the next issue. Union problems posed the first difficulties but were surmounted by having workers for the Designing and Decorating Division do the labour.<sup>129</sup> Despite the complex and costly negotiations and attention

<sup>123</sup> F.E. Bawden to Hon. J.A. MacKinnon, MP, Minister of Trade and Commerce, 27 September 1940, LAC, RG 72.

<sup>124</sup> L.D. Wilgress, Deputy Minister, Trade and Commerce, Ottawa, to A.T. Seaman, Canadian Commissioner General, New York, 30 September 1940, LAC, RG 72.

<sup>125</sup> A.T. Seaman, Commissioner General for Canadian Participation, New York, to L.D. Wilgress, Deputy Minister, Department of Trade and Commerce, Ottawa, 2 October 1940, LAC, RG 72; and Seaman to James A. Dawson, Park Director in Charge of Design, New York, 3 October 1940, LAC, RG 72.

<sup>126</sup> James A. Dawson, Park Director in Charge of Design, New York, to A.T. Seaman, New York, 7 October 1940, LAC, RG 72.

<sup>127</sup> J. Gerald Cole, Director of Import and Export, The World's Fair of 1940, to A.T. Seaman, New York, 24 June 1940, LAC, RG 72.

<sup>128</sup> R.J. Beesley, Canadian Government Exhibition Commission [New York] to Import Clearance Section, New York World's Fair, 19 October 1940, LAC, RG 72; J. Gerald Cole, Director of Import and Export, World's Fair, New York, to R.J. Beesley, Canadian Pavilion, New York, 21 October 1940, LAC, RG 72; A.T. Seaman, Commissioner General for Canadian Participation, New York to the Rt. Hon. Loring C. Christie, Envoy Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary, Canadian Legation, Washington, 23 October 1940, LAC, RG 72; Illegible signature, “For the Minister,” Canadian Legation, Washington, to A.T. Seaman, Commissioner General for Canadian Participation, New York, 31 October 1940, LAC, RG 72; Illegible signature, “For the Minister,” Canadian Legation, Washington to A.T. Seaman, Commissioner General for Canadian Participation, New York, 16 November 1940, LAC, RG 72.

<sup>129</sup> R.L. Greene, Chief, Designing and Decorating Division to James Dawson, Park Director in Charge of Design, New York, 4 December 1940, LAC, RG 72.

to bureaucratic protocols and hierarchies, the donation to the Parks Board of the City of New York, which would have seen Martin's poles installed and maintained in perpetuity in Flushing Meadows as an advertisement for Canada, went awry. In the end, it seems New York City did not really value or want the poles either.

There was, however, another organization interested in the poles. The Boy Scout Federation of Greater New York also "admired the very fine totem poles which are a part of the Canadian Exhibit" and wondered "if it might be possible for us to secure these totem poles as a gift to one of our Boy Scout Camps."<sup>130</sup> Seaman, however, advised him that the poles had already been donated to the Department of Parks.<sup>131</sup> Within the year, however, the city handed them over to the Boy Scouts. Removed from the site, they were placed at the entrance to a Boy Scout camp on Staten Island, well out of public view. Here they have remained ever since, although no longer on display. The climate of New York was as deleterious as that of the West Coast. Over time, the poles lost their wings and rotted at the base. A local attempt was made to restore them in 1988, but to little avail. They continued to deteriorate and were taken down and put into storage in the hope that money could be raised for their restoration. They have fallen into ruin both physically and historically.

The existence, and fate, of the two poles raise a number of important questions. Why were the poles not welcome in Canada after they had been prominently displayed as icons of national identity in New York City? How did the widely-known fact that Kwakwaka'wakw carving was thriving in the 1930s slip away and become replaced with the fiction that it was in a state of decrepitude and in need of a museum-sponsored "revival"? How was the knowledge of these poles, which were seen and recorded photographically, erased from memory in the ensuing decades? Why is it that the events described above are remembered, if at all, in only a fragmentary way rather than as part of an overall narrative?

In part, the answers to these vexing questions lie in the unique position of the poles, which stand at the intersection of sometimes conflicting histories, discourses, and disciplines. These, in turn, come from a broad variety of contextual frameworks that include not only the local but also the national, the continental, and the intercontinental. Elements from all of these discourses and geographic locations interacted with each

<sup>130</sup> J.H. Brinton, Borough Executive, Boy Scout Foundation of Greater New York, to Douglas S. Cole, Commissioner General, Canadian Pavilion, New York, 2 October 1940, LAC, RG 72.

<sup>131</sup> A.T. Seaman [New York] to J.H. Brinton, 3 October 1940, LAC, RG 72.

other in complex ways. The discourses include the construction of the history of Canada's national identity and the role given to or withheld from Native arts within it. To this is linked the history of the state suppression of Native cultures, identities, and arts, which was followed by the abrupt shift to a position of promoting them as emblematic of the nation. The Martin poles also appeared at the point at which the broadly accepted and even exploited narrative of "fatal impact" fragmented and gave way to a narrative of "revival." But, in both instances, these historical narrative paradigms, although broadly accepted and circulated as given truths in their respective eras, are incommensurate with the actual record. The discrepancy emerges when they are measured against the history of the Kwakwaka'wakw themselves and their goals of maintaining their culture and identity and of making them visible and viable within Canadian and imperial contexts. Here, the facts lead to a discourse of continuity. These questions and answers all point to the need for a re-examination and revision of the standardized history of the "revival."

The "revival" is generally positioned historically as starting after 1950, when Martin began working at the Provincial Museum and initiated the carving program, although it could also be dated to 1949, when Martin was hired to work at UBC to restore and duplicate poles.<sup>132</sup> The evidence offered here, however, suggests that its origins should be repositioned to 1937, when government policy first changed from one of suppression of Native arts to one of support and encouragement. Indeed, it should be apparent that 1938 and 1939 were years of extraordinary significance in establishing the principles and guidelines along which the subsequent "revival" was based. It becomes apparent that events on the Northwest Coast took a different path from that envisioned by the Indian Affairs Branch in its program to promote the production and marketing of handicrafts. There were many contributing factors. Of some importance were the failed programs initiated in the late 1920s to incorporate Northwest Coast Native art into the official image of Canada. Of equal importance were initiatives in the United States, especially the carving program in Alaska and the displays of totem poles and Northwest Coast material as art in San Francisco, which succeeded. The ethnographic and artistic recognition given to poles in the European metropolitan centre of Paris was also a factor. But the most important influence was the availability of any number of masters of Kwakwaka'wakw carving who could produce traditional monumental sculpture of high quality.

<sup>132</sup> See Jacknis, *Storage Box*, 10-11.

They would also require that the commission conform to their strategies for demonstrating the continuity and vitality of their own culture and traditions as well as their loyalty to the nation and Empire. Native agency in this development must not be underestimated.

Yet even with this initial impetus, events did not proceed smoothly. The Second World War intervened. It brought the initiatives, which had marked the beginning of the “revival” in 1937–38, to a temporary halt. They were not taken up again until some years after the war, when they recommenced in earnest with museum displays, totem pole restoration and salvage projects, and carving programs. During this period, the early but necessary groundbreaking work seems to have been forgotten. Nonetheless, Martin’s poles and the programs and legislation that allowed them to come into existence support the argument that 1937 should be recognized as the threshold year when it became possible for the state to underwrite, rather than to suppress, current productions.

The evidence also alters the definition of the “revival.” Martin has always been credited with spearheading and shaping the “revival,” albeit after 1950. The unique relationship between museum and artist is seen as sparking a resurgence of Native art and rescuing it from a near moribund state. Insofar as the New York poles clearly testify to the fact that Kwakwaka’wakw art was neither in decline nor moribund but, rather, flourishing when the “revival” actually began, there was no need to “resurrect” it. The very concept is, then, a misnomer. Rather, the “revival” appears, from the start, to have been a complex and coordinated program that involved the interlocking efforts of various levels of governments, museums, universities, galleries, corporations, and individuals. Radically reversing the state’s previous position on Native culture, this change in policy had as its purpose not only fostering the production of Native art but also the transformation of its audiences from the Native to non-Native communities. In the process of making Native art more visible to non-Native audiences, the “revival” recontextualized it within the art and museum worlds as purely aesthetic object and consumable commodity divorced from its initial cultural meanings. Ultimately, however, the continuity of Native cultures and identities would modify this shift and bring the “revival” back into line with traditional cultural practices. Indeed, Martin’s poles must be seen as his “speaking back” to the nation and the Empire on the issues of the validity and vitality of Native culture in general and the “revival” in particular.

The importance of the poles also lies beyond historical revisionism. The poles not only alter the chronology of the “revival” and its nature but also raise an important question: if such magnificent objects could

slip through the cracks of our histories of Native arts, what else is there yet to find? How much more is still being overlooked or ignored that would testify to the continuity of Native cultures and identities and their effect on historical narratives of this period?