

# TRANSFORMING IMAGE

Education Program Teacher's Notes | Grades 8–10

Student sketching a Northwest Coast bentwood box at the Museum of Anthropology.  
Photo by Alina Ilyasova.



# PLANNING YOUR VISIT

## Booking Information

- Booking information, including details about rates and directions, can be found at <https://moa.ubc.ca/school-programs>.

## Prepare for your visit

- These Teacher's Notes include a program outline, curriculum connections, resources and activities.
- Review and circulate the guidelines for supervising adults (page 5).

## Notes

- This program is led by trained Volunteer Associates (VAs). A Volunteer Associate will meet you in the lobby.
- Upon arrival, please check in with the Admissions desk and make arrangements for payment.
- Supervising adults and First Nations students receive free admission.
- The program does not include a full tour of the Museum, so we welcome you to extend your visit to explore the Museum.



Outside, on the grounds of the Museum of Anthropology at UBC.  
Photo by Cory Dawson.

# PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

Transforming Image helps students develop an awareness of the skills and technologies required to research and create Northwest Coast (NWC) art. This program aims to encourage a respect for NWC cultures, and an understanding of how NWC paintings were created and continue to be created today. During this program, students are introduced to the Image Recovery Project, which explored how infrared photography can be used to reveal painted images on a range of historical artworks. Students will find and observe NWC painted masterworks in the Museum's galleries and have an opportunity to make their own sketches.

## MOA Program Goals

- Develop respect for and recognize the ongoing importance and diversity of Northwest Coast Indigenous cultures, traditions, stories, cultural activities, knowledge, and belongings.
- Understand the importance of helping to recover traditions, histories, and heritage and their integral cultural connections.

## MOA Program Objectives

- Link historical belongings with contemporary artworks as a way of highlighting the use of a range of technologies for image recovery.
- Understand the ongoing relevance of museum collections to artists and communities.



**MOA**

# PROGRAM OUTLINE

## Meet and Greet

The class is greeted in the Museum lobby by an Education Volunteer Associate (VA) who provides a brief introduction to the program and activities. Students are then led to a classroom for an introductory presentation before continuing into the Museum galleries for a tour.

## Slide Presentation

In the classroom, students receive a visual introduction to the Image Recovery Project. They are shown how Museum researchers and contemporary First Nations artists use different technologies to uncover the work of past masters and recreate these historical works. The class is then divided into two groups for the gallery tour and art activity.

## Gallery Tour

In the Museum galleries, the class tours the NWC sections of the Multiversity Galleries, viewing works that were part of the Image Recovery Project, including Kwakwaka'wakw bentwood boxes, Tsimshian housefront boards, and intricately woven Haida hats. Students see firsthand historical and contemporary Northwest Coast artworks and belongings, some which were created as a result of the Image Recovery Project research.

## Art Activity

The program includes a hands-on art activity to further develop students' understanding and awareness of First Nations art. Students are provided with a brief introduction to the complex symbolism expressed through Northwest Coast formline. Using a pencil and tracing paper, students are given an opportunity to learn about and replicate Northwest Coast formlines using an infrared image as a reference.

## Wrap-up

Students review key themes introduced throughout the program. Teachers, students, and supervising adults are encouraged to extend their visit and enjoy the Museum galleries after the program concludes.



# WELCOME TO MOA

## Guidelines for Supervising Adults

Please share these guidelines with all adults who will be supervising students on their field trip to the Museum of Anthropology.

All supervising adults are responsible for the conduct of their group throughout their visit to MOA, including visiting the galleries, MOA Shop, and outside grounds. Supervising adults must remain with the group at all times.

- Please respect all visitors. Please moderate voice levels.
- Please assist with student needs, such as taking students to the washroom.
- NO running, jumping, or shouting.
- Some objects at the Museum are touchable (look for “Touch Gently” signs). All others are not to be touched.
- Food, drinks, and gum are not permitted inside the galleries (including water bottles).
- Pencils and pencil crayons can be used. Oil, acrylic, pens, and felt pens are not permitted anywhere in the galleries.
- When outdoors, please ensure that students respect the shell and pebble beach at MOA. Students are not to pick up or throw rocks or other items into the pond.
- Cellphones, cameras, iPods, and other electronic devices are not permitted during school programs. Photographs are encouraged after the programs.

**In case of a medical emergency:** notify Museum security staff, who are all trained in First Aid.

**Storage Facilities:** Storage for schools is located on the ramp to the right of the Admissions desk. MOA is not responsible for lost or stolen items placed in bins.

**Lunch Facilities:** The Haida House is available for groups who pre-book. Others are welcome to picnic on the grounds or at other campus locations.



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# IN-CLASS ACTIVITIES

Lead your class through some of the following activities before or after your participation in the Transforming Image program.

## Questions to Stimulate Discussion

Visual arts play a critical role in all societies. The arts help foster understanding, open up dialogues across cultures, and are a way to represent histories, culture, and ideas. Using the visual arts from the Northwest Coast, encourage students to consider the following questions:

- What can be learned by studying the visual arts and cultural belongings made by different NWC First Nations artists?
- Research a contemporary NWC artist. Where are they from? What do they create? Why do they create?
- How can technology help us learn more about history? How can infrared technology help us see the past?

## Introduce Your Students to the Northwest Coast

Use the First Nations Map (page 18) or the interactive map found from Native Land (<https://native-land.ca/>) to show students Nuxalk, Tsimshian, Haisla, Heiltsuk, Haida, and Kwakwaka'wakw territories. Students can research contemporary artists from these First Nations. Resources for this research can be found in this list of Indigenous Art Galleries and Studios: <https://www.indigenoussc.com/things-to-do/arts-culture/art-galleries-and-studios>.

## Readings

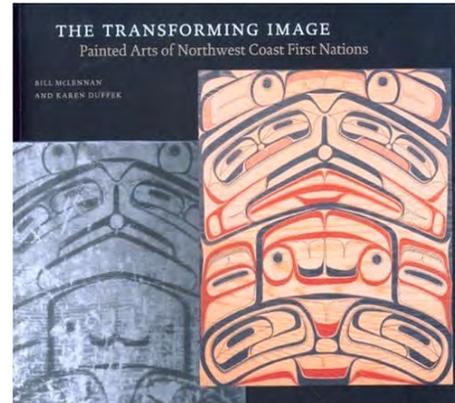
Encourage students to read the short texts included in this resource (pages 8–13). They can answer and discuss the question prompts at the end of each reading.



# USEFUL RESOURCES

## ***The Transforming Image: Painted Arts of the Northwest Coast First Nations*, by Bill McLennan and Karen Duffek**

This book was published to accompany the temporary exhibition, *The Transforming Image*, held at the Museum of Anthropology. It describes the work and origin of the Image Recovery Project, and shares valuable information about the painted arts of the Northwest Coast. Short excerpts from the book are provided as readings at the end of this package.



Chief's seat, by Captain Carpenter, Heiltsuk, c. 1881. Ethnologisches Museum Berlin IV A 2475/76/77. Commissioned by J. A. Jacobsen at Waglisla (Bella Bella).



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# WHAT IS THE IMAGE RECOVERY PROJECT?

**Abridged excerpt from *The Transforming Image: Painted Arts of the Northwest Coast First Nations*, by Bill McLennan and Karen Duffek.**

At first glance, the pile of old, weathered boards stored at the Museum of Anthropology resembles nothing more than aged planks. There are no known written records that tell how the boards were acquired, nor do we know the identities of the carvers and painters who created them. We know that the boards were collected in the early 1900s by a Methodist missionary, Dr. George H. Raley, probably in the Lax Kw'alaams (Fort Simpson) area. They were purchased for the University of British Columbia by H.R. MacMillan in 1948. Their acquisition data describe them as part of a pile of waterlogged boards collected from an old Fort Simpson house.

What images and histories can still be gleaned from these planks of cedar, 150 years or more after their creation? Two periods appear to be represented: while some planks are handsawn and block planed, others are hand split and surface knifed, indicating greater age. Several of the planks are only portions of boards that were once up to a metre wide. Traces of painted forms remain, but these are largely eroded by the weather or are barely discernible on the boards' surface.

A startling transformation takes place when the planks are photographed with infrared and high-contrast orthochromatic films. Where the naked eye sees only darkened, weathered cedar, the camera reveals portions of complex and detailed compositions that once stood as massive house-front screens. Indeed, these are some of the last remaining sections of perhaps three or four different screens. They were probably assembled and painted in the early to mid-nineteenth century by commissioned artists; some may have been family heirlooms already passed down through several generations. Displayed on the large lineage houses of Lax Kw'alaams during its heyday from the 1830s to the 1860s, such screens would proclaim the inherited family crests and histories of high-ranking Tsimshian chiefs.

Painted on house-front and interior screens are one part of the Image Recovery Project. More numerous are the paintings on storage chests and boxes, basketry hats, and other artifacts that are also emerging from beneath the patina of age. Adding to the newly recovered information are the computer-assisted studies of historical photographs and spectral analysis of traditional pigments. The result is a growing inventory of photographed paintings that would otherwise have remained invisible to contemporary eyes. Now their recovery and reconstruction are leading to new questions about the nature of Northwest Coast painting and a renewed understanding of its creative possibilities.



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**Text by Lyle Wilson. Abridged excerpt from *The Transforming Image: Painted Arts of the Northwest Coast First Nations*, by Bill McLennan and Karen Duffek.**

The general public is familiar with Northwest Coast images through the proliferation of silkscreen prints. Most people equate the qualities of a print with the qualities of two-dimensional Northwest Coast imagery. In *The Transforming Image*, we deal with two-dimensional imagery as an act of painting rather than of printing.

Printing and painting are two distinct processes that produce images with different characteristics. In my view, silkscreening, or serigraphy, is much closer to the carved tradition because of the way a print is made: by cutting material away to produce an image. The standard procedure for the creation of a print remains a collaborative effort between two personalities: the artist and the professional printmaker. Generally the artist creates a painted image and brings it to a serigrapher, who carefully cuts out (read carves) an amberlith positive. Then, using photographic techniques a negative is made on the serigraph stencil. When ink is forced through this stencil, the positive, printed image is produced.

The act of forcing ink through the stencil with one smooth stroke produces an even distribution of ink on the paper's surface. This even quality, combined with the two translations of the original painting, has a filtering effect. The painterly nature of the brush stroke and line has been primed and preened to a look of graphic perfection.



Since working on the Image Recovery Project and looking at older Northwest Coast paintings, my original contention has been reinforced: printmaking and painting are distinct processes. The introduction of printmaking techniques profoundly changed the outlook of many Northwest Coast artists. In essence, they came to value the look of graphic perfection, which edits the subtleties of the human touch. Painting has this personal touch – the direct liveliness of the painter’s hand is easily recognized and, once seen, is missing when viewing a print.

Anybody who has ever signed a document knows that individuals can recognize their own handwriting. It is a system of lines that has a personal and recognizable quality. When someone else signs your name you can generally see the difference. The idea of a personal line – how it becomes personal – exists in different cultures. Chinese calligraphy, for example, has some graphic qualities but also incorporates the action of the paintbrush to give it a personal touch. The human quality or personality is very much alive in the lines of calligraphy and in the painted images of the Northwest Coast. In example after example we see that the Northwest Coast artist made no attempt to be precise. He played a balancing act, neither perfect nor sloppy. The acceptance of the qualities of the paintbrush to translate creative ideas into visual form is obvious in the results. Logic dictates that processes usually evolve from simple to more complex forms. Northwest Coast painting is like that. The oldest paintings, for instance, are simpler and have a heavier look because of their massive lines. At some point in this history, an artist stumbled onto a visual phenomenon: varied line textures create visual colour tones. I say “stumble” because I believe an artist was improvising or invention a solution to a specific problem.

The techniques of dashing, hatching, and cross-hatching constitute a system of fine lines placed in a close and particular order. They are usually located in secondary areas of a composition, such as U-shapes, inner ovoids, and negative spaces. My guess is that an artist had already started painting, ran low on paint, and decided the solution to ‘completing’ the painting was to paint the equidistant lines within the given spaces – the space was still, in a sense, ‘filled’ with paint. I assume that parallel dashing may have come first because it is technically easier, followed by the more rigorous hatching, and then by the extremely time-consuming process of cross-hatching.

I suspect it wasn’t immediate, but that an artist stood back to take a look at what was initially a solution to a problem and discovered a new visual effect. Finely painted lines placed equidistantly are still one colour. Stepping back a few paces, however, the artist discovered that the lines ‘blended’ visually with the background and changed the tone of the original colour. Black dashing created a light grey, hatching a middle grey, and cross-hatching a darker grey. Red could also be manipulated in this manner. Moving closer to the painting, the ‘blended’ tone gave way to the fine-line visual texture. Artists could therefore exploit the visual magic of the finely painted line in numerous ways.

I place Northwest Coast paintings somewhere between calligraphic and graphic traditions. They have a painted tension but never quite explode into a released calligraphic line, nor lapse into the static images of graphic perfection. Although such tensions are present in bold, massive lines, they are more easily demonstrated by finely painted lines.



# THE PAINTED LINE

The paintbrush is an ancient tool, remarkable for its sensitivity. The liquidity of paint on supple bristle means that every movement is recorded – whether the painter wishes it to be or not. The intense focus and concentration of the painter is a must. The fineness of line, tight curves, and arcs usually have an artist holding his breath lest the paintbrush reveal the movements of his lungs and impair the path of the painted line. It is, however, human to breathe – the resultant squiggles, wiggles, and bumps the brush imparts to the composition are ultimately an asset. It is this compromise between the idea, the artist, and the medium that is incorporated into the painted line. The brushwork is a device to give the image life and, by extension, a very human quality.

## Questions

- Lyle Wilson describes the artistic process involved in producing a Northwest Coast painting. What are some key ideas that he raises?
- What is the relationship between the painter and the painted line?

**Abridged excerpt from *The Transforming Image: Painted Arts of the Northwest Coast First Nations*, by Bill McLennan and Karen Duffek.**

The Northwest Coast painter's palette was, and still is, formed of three main colours: black, red, and blue green. White and yellow were mentioned in the diaries of early European explorers, although these colours were only rarely used by northern painters. Whereas a more diverse use of colour characterizes the art of southern groups, often only black and red are present in a northern-style composition. Black is usually the primary, or dominant colour. Red is generally used as a secondary colour and is occasionally complemented by blue green. Using this limited palette, nineteenth-century painters employed a wide array of pigment types to produce variations in the tone, hue, and intensity of colour.

Most paintings were prepared by mixing ground pigments with binder, or medium, to give the paint fluency and allow it to form a cohesive film that adhered to the wood or other surface. Protein from fish eggs was commonly used for this purpose even in the mid-nineteenth century, when trade pigments were predominant. The painter would chew salmon eggs – usually dried and wrapped in a cedar bark pouch to catch the egg membranes – and then spit the liquid into the dish. The resulting mixture of saliva and proteinaceous oil would then be mixed with the pigment to make paint. Toward the late nineteenth century, drying oils derived from fish oils or commercial linseed oil became more common binders. Such oils form a solid, elastic film when exposed to air. Commercially prepared paints used at this time were generally based on a drying oil medium.

Trade pigments were adopted as soon as they became available from Europeans, possibly as early as the late eighteenth century. Certainly by the mid-nineteenth century, vermilion had been in use for several decades at least, and most painters were choosing to use such pigments as ultramarine blue, Prussian blue, and red lead in preference to, or in combination with, native mineral-based pigments. Trade pigments allowed painters to expand their palette beyond earth tones into brighter colours with improved adhesion. By the late nineteenth century, commercially prepared oil paints became available. The readiness with which painters saw the potential of these new materials and incorporated them into their kit illustrates the creativity and change that has shaped Northwest Coast painting for 200 years and more.

## **Black Pigments**

Black is the primary colour of northern coast painting, used to create the framework or structure of most compositions. Throughout the nineteenth century, bone black, magnetite, or a mixture of the two was the most common sources of black pigment. Bone black was produced by charring animal bones, while magnetite was obtained as an inorganic earth pigment: black iron oxide. Both were ground into a powder and combined with proteinaceous binder made from salmon eggs. Bone black and magnetite occurred naturally.



# PIGMENTS INTO PAINT

## Red Pigments

On some screens and house-front paintings, figures representing spirit creatures are painted in red above the main figure. In other compositions, painters chose red as the primary colour rather than the usual black. Red is more commonly used for the inner details of a composition. Mouth, tongue, cheeks, ears, and often arms, legs, hands, and feet are painted red in many representations of humans, animals, and other beings. Hematite, vermillion, and red lead dominate as the sources of this colour.

## Blue-Green Pigments

Colours ranging from a dull green to a bright blue green and later a bright blue were used on masks, bowls, and bentwood containers by nineteenth-century painters of the northern and central coast. Contemporary artists, as well, continue to use blue green or blue as a tertiary colour that complements the primary and secondary colours of black and red. Carved and painted bentwood chests often have areas of low relief that are either left unpainted or painted blue green. Blue green may also be applied to the recessed orbs of eyes on masks and to other concave areas of a carved image.

Almost without exception, the ethnographic literature states that native blue-green pigments were derived from copper compounds. Several First Nations references and museum artifact descriptions, on the other hand, suggest that the pigment was derived from other naturally occurring mineral sites. Very few copper-containing compounds were identified among the approximately 110 samples of Northwest Coast blue-green paints tested for the Canadian Conservation Institute (CCI) Native Materials Project in 1990. Two archaeological samples revealed copper corrosion products, and a few others were trade pigments. While it is possible that such compounds were more prevalent in the early nineteenth century or before, none of the pigments examined by the CCI was made up of the copper oxides described in numerous ethnographic sources.

Instead, researchers found that the green and blue-green pigment was a clay-like green-earth pigment, composed principally of either glauconite or celadonite minerals. The pigment seems to have been used primarily by the Haida, Tlingit, and Tsimshian, suggesting that sites may have been limited to the northern region and were rare even there.



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## Social Studies 8



Contacts and conflicts between peoples stimulated significant cultural, social, political change.

Human and environmental factors shape changes in population and living standards.

Exploration, expansion, and colonization had varying consequences for different groups.

Changing ideas about the world created tension between people wanting to adopt new ideas and those wanting to preserve established traditions.



- Scientific and technological innovations.
- Philosophical and cultural shifts.
- Interactions and exchanges of resources, ideas, arts, and culture between and among civilizations.

## Social Studies 9



Emerging ideas and ideologies profoundly influence societies and events.

The physical environment influences the nature of political, social, and economic change.

Collective identity is constructed and can change over time.



- Political, social, economic, and technological revolutions.
- The continuing effects of imperialism and colonialism on Indigenous peoples in Canada and around the world.

## Social Studies/Art Studio 10



Worldviews lead to different perspectives and ideas about developments in Canadian society.

Traditions, perspectives, worldviews, and stories are shared through aesthetic experiences.



- Canadian identities.
- Domestic conflicts and co-operation.
- Image development strategies.
- Traditional and contemporary First Peoples' worldviews, stories, and history as expressed through visual arts.



# GLOSSARY OF KEY TERMS

**Abstract** That which does not represent or imitate external reality or the objects of nature; “a large abstract painting.”

**Anthropologist** A social scientist that specializes in anthropology.

**Artifact** Any object manufactured, used or modified by humans. Common examples include tools, utensils, art, food remains, and other products of human activity. They can be classified into types. These types reflect function or use, styles from a particular time period, or specific groups of people.

**Amberlith** The orange or red acetate material that artists cut into elements or shapes to put on areas of keylines indicating where halftones and tints are to be positioned.

**Asymmetry** Lack of balance or symmetry.

**Bentwood Box** A box made of one plank of cedar, which could be used to store food, ceremonial regalia, tools and other belongings. The sides of the boxes are made from one plank of cedar which was steamed, bent and sewn together using cedar roots or wooden pegs.

**Calligraphy** Elegant, decorative writing. Lines used in artworks that possess the qualities found in a kind of writing may be called “calligraphic.” They are generally flowing and rhythmic.

**Composition** The arrangement of elements, shapes, and colours in a work of art.

**Cross-hatching** A type of shading made up of regularly spaced lines. Cross-hatching is one of several methods for filling in areas of a graphic.

**Curator** At the Museum of Anthropology, a curator works in consultation with diverse communities to develop exhibitions of social and historical significance.

**Graphic** An image or picture.

**Hatching** A series of parallel lines used as shading in prints and drawings A series of parallel lines used as shading in prints and drawings.



# GLOSSARY OF KEY TERMS

- Iconography** The set of symbols and allusions that gives meaning to a complex work of art. The symbolic meanings of subjects and signs used to convey ideas important to particular cultures or religions, and the conventions governing the use of such forms; pictorial material relating to or illustrating a subject.
- Infrared Photography** Infrared film is sensitive to the infrared radiation—or heat—that even small traces of paint and other pigments absorb or reflect when illuminated with visible light. Paints vary in their pigments and media and so will vary in the way they absorb or reflect infrared radiation. There are scientific uses for such films, which include forensic applications and aerial crop and forest surveys. The film is also used in the restoration and investigation of paintings.
- Mylar** A trade name for sheet polyester. Mylar may be used by artists in a number of ways: it can be drawn on or serve as a printing element. Alternatively, photo stencils may be cut out of it or it may also be used in place of paper as a substrate for a drawing or painting.
- Negative Space** In painting or sculpture the “empty” areas are called negative space or background. In figurative sculpture, it is generally referred to as the space around the object or form; unoccupied areas or empty space surrounding the objects or figures in a composition.
- Overlay** In artwork, a transparent covering over copy where colour breaks, or instructions or corrections are marked. Also, transparent or translucent prints which, when placed one on the other, form a composite picture; to put something (either clear or mylar matte film material) on top of something else.
- Patina** A surface colour or texture that appears on wood with age.
- Pigment** Pigments are derived from natural or synthetic materials that have been ground into fine powders. The substance in paint or anything that absorbs light, producing (reflecting) the same colour as the pigment; a powdered substance that is mixed with liquid and used to impart colour to coating materials, such as paint and ink. In Transforming Image, such examples include old, dense, mineral-based pigments, such as hematite (red) and magnetite (black), which also absorb heat.



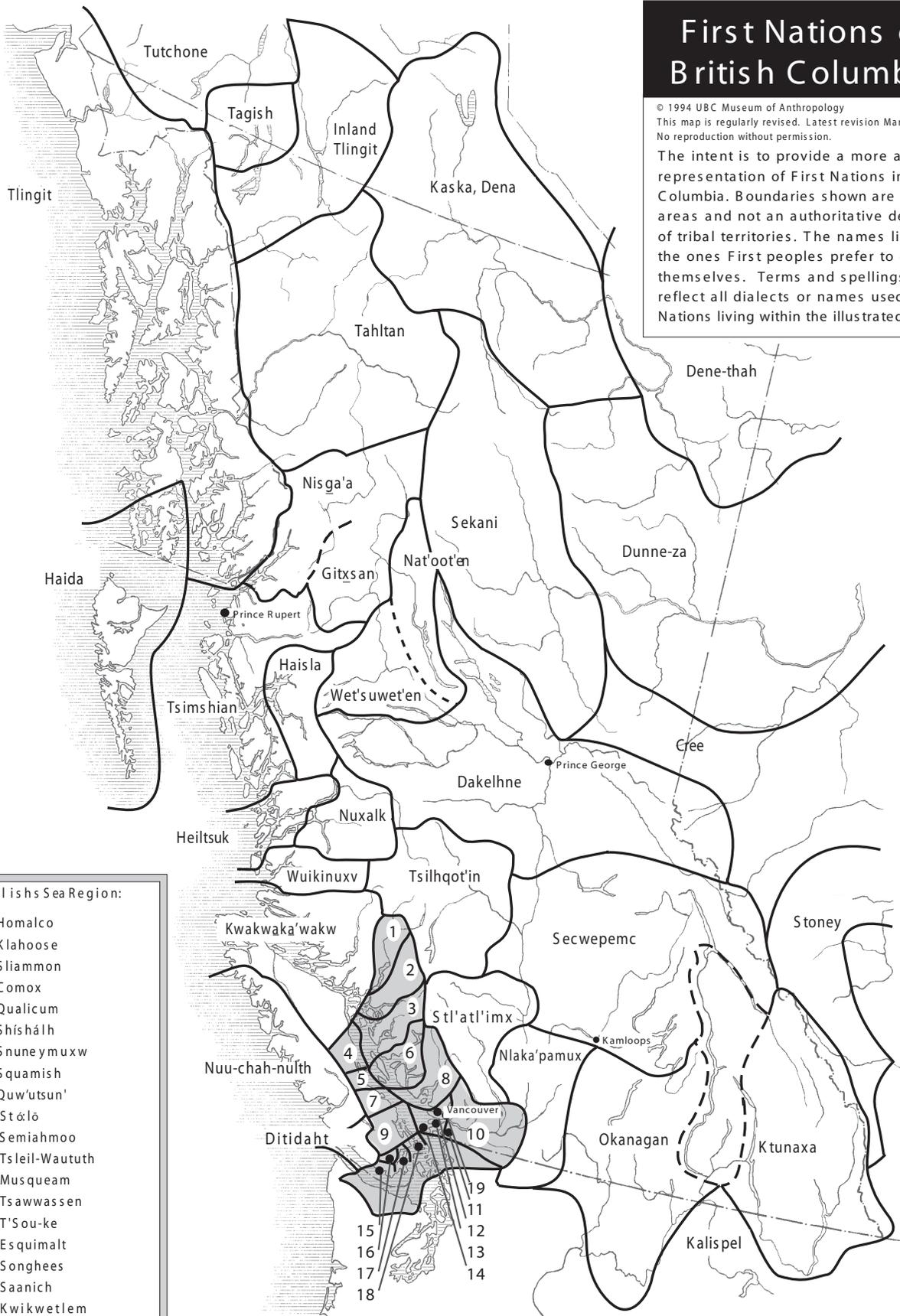
# GLOSSARY OF KEY TERMS

- Positive Space** Shapes or forms on a two-dimensional surface. In figurative sculpture, it is generally referred to as the shape or form of the figure; spatial area which has definite form and shapes.
- Repatriation** Includes negotiated return of ancestral remains, cultural belongings and related cultural materials, and/or sharing authority and responsibility for the care and interpretation of collections in the museum.
- Serigraph** The serigraphic process incorporates the use of fine mesh screens to hand separate the colours of the image. Originally, these screens were made of silk, hence the name by which this process is also known silkscreening. To produce a serigraphic print, a separate stencil-like screen is made for each area that is to be printed in one colour of ink. The ink is then squeegeed through the screen onto the paper. The inks sit on top of the heavy paper on which the final serigraph is produced. Because the ink is not absorbed by the paper as in other processes, the final serigraphic print actually looks like a painting on paper. (The art world name for silkscreen.)
- Silkscreen** A method of printing using a hand-cut or photographically-prepared stencil adhered to stretched silk or polyester fabric through which ink is forced.
- Symmetry** A type of design where one side exactly duplicates the other. An 8-pointed star block is symmetrical because no matter how you rotate it, it looks the same. A figure has symmetry if it can be folded along a line so that the two resulting parts match exactly.
- Template** A pattern or mold usually made of thin strips of wood or metal. Templates are used both for making monotypes in which the same basic image is to be treated individually in a series and for separating areas of different coloured pulp in one sheet of handmade paper.

# First Nations of British Columbia

© 1994 UBC Museum of Anthropology  
 This map is regularly revised. Latest revision March 25, 2011.  
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The intent is to provide a more accurate representation of First Nations in British Columbia. Boundaries shown are language areas and not an authoritative depiction of tribal territories. The names listed are the ones First peoples prefer to call themselves. Terms and spellings do not reflect all dialects or names used by First Nations living within the illustrated regions.



- Salish Sea Region:
- 1) Homalco
  - 2) Klahoose
  - 3) Sliammon
  - 4) Comox
  - 5) Qualicum
  - 6) Shishálh
  - 7) Snuneymuxw
  - 8) Squamish
  - 9) Quw'utsun'
  - 10) St'álo
  - 11) Semiahmoo
  - 12) Tsleil-Waututh
  - 13) Musqueam
  - 14) Tsawwassen
  - 15) T'Sou-ke
  - 16) Esquimalt
  - 17) Songhees
  - 18) Saanich
  - 19) Kwikwetlem