

Figure. Attributed to sdiihldaa/Simeon Stilthda (ca. 1799–1889), Haida. Wood, paint, bone (missing). Courtesy of the Division of Anthropology, American Museum of Natural History, 16/396. Cover: Mask. Attributed to sdiihldaa/Simeon Stilthda (ca. 1799–1889), Haida. Wood, paint, leather, metal. Courtesy of the Division of Anthropology, American Museum of Natural History, 16/376. All photography: Denis Finnin ©American Museum of Natural History.



18 West 86th Street, New York, NY 10024

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Objects of
Exchange:
Social and Material
Transformation
on the Late
Nineteenth-Century
Northwest Coast

Objects of Exchange:

Social and Material Transformation on the Late Nineteenth-Century Northwest Coast

The Bard Graduate Center: Decorative Arts, Design History, Material Culture, is opening its new Focus Gallery on January 26, 2011. Situated at 18 West 86th Street, the Focus Gallery is designed to feature small-scale exhibitions resulting from the explorations of BGC faculty and students and will be the tangible culmination of research seminars. It is hoped that a focus on objects and contexts within the framework of an academic seminar will result in new ways of thinking, teaching, and exhibiting.

The inaugural exhibition is *Objects of Exchange: Social and Material Transformation on the Late Nineteenth-Century Northwest Coast*. The exhibition is on view from January 26 through April 17, 2011. Featuring the collection of the American Museum of Natural History, it explores the latter half of the nineteenth century as a period of rapid and dramatic change for the indigenous peoples of the Northwest Coast of North America. Faced with increasing colonial interventions regarding commerce, Christianity, and settlement, earlier modes of cultural practice and artistic production were refigured to accommodate these new historical conditions. This was also the period of rampant museum collection on the coast, as thousands of objects—both quotidian and ceremonial—were transferred to global metropolitan centers. Yet the resulting exhibitions often dehistoricize the material in an attempt to reconstruct pre-contact cultural

patterns or to classify tribal aesthetic styles. While these collections are typically seen to provide touchstones of “traditional” art, they are rather repositories of objects that were witness to—and results of—significant cultural upheaval.

Objects of Exchange examines the material culture of the period as visual evidence of historical flux and shifting social relations within Native groups as well as between Natives and the settler states that increasingly surrounded them. It focuses on transitional or boundary objects—the ones that don’t fit well-established stylistic or cultural categories but instead document patterns of intercultural exchange and transformation. Drawing on a wide variety of objects from the remarkable collection at the American Museum of Natural History—ranging from decorated clothing and containers, to ritual masks and trade goods—this exhibit reveals the artistic traces of dynamic indigenous activity whereby objects

Chest.
Unknown maker,
Haida. Cedar,
paint. Courtesy
of the Division
of Anthropology,
American Museum
of Natural History,
16/8802.



were altered, repurposed, and adapted to keep up with their changing times.

Objects of Exchange is curated by Aaron Glass, BGC assistant professor. Glass’s publications cover various aspects of First Nations visual art, media, and performance on the Northwest Coast and include *The Totem Pole: An Intercultural History* (coauthored with Aldona Jonaitis). His dissertation, along with a companion film, *In Search of the Hamat’sa*, examines the ethnographic representation and performance history of the Hamat’sa or “Cannibal Dance” of the Kwakwaka’wakw (Kwakiutl) of British Columbia. In addition, he is collaborating with the U’mista Cultural Centre to restore and present Edward Curtis’s 1914 silent film, *In the Land of the Head Hunters*, and to create a digital database to document the Kwakwaka’wakw collection in the Ethnological Museum Berlin.

The Catalogue

The exhibition is accompanied by a fully-illustrated catalogue with essays by Aaron Glass, Margaret Blackman, Judith Ostrowitz, Megan Smetzer, Kathryn Bunn-Marcuse, Mique’l Askren, and Kimon Keramidas, as well as contributions by BGC students.

Exhibition

Objects of Exchange: Social and Material Transformation on the Late Nineteenth-Century Northwest Coast will be followed in Fall 2011 by *Christmas Cards*, curated by BGC professor, Ken Ames.

Gallery hours are Tuesday through Sunday from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. and Thursday from 11 a.m. to 8 p.m. Admission to both the Focus and Main galleries is \$5 general, \$3 seniors and students, and free Thursday evenings after 5 p.m. For more information please call 212 501 3023 or visit bgc.bard.edu.