

Review Essay: Selling the Master (Piece by Piece): Enchanting Technologies and the Politics of Appreciation at the Bill Reid Gallery of Northwest Coast Art*

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Upon entering the new Bill Reid Gallery of Northwest Coast Art in downtown Vancouver, British Columbia, one is immediately presented with a delightful surprise—a miniature teapot, about 2cm tall, with matching cups, all exquisitely, if simply, carved out of everyday blackboard chalk and painted pink with nail polish.¹ The accompanying label mentions that Reid made these around 1932, when he was only 12 years old, and that chalk was also the medium for his first small totem pole. These tiny, humble, yet skillful, objects present such a striking contrast to Reid’s well-known and monumental Northwest Coast-style sculpture, that this viewer at least entered the gallery for the first time hoping that such surprises would continue. I hoped they would, in fact, complicate my knowledge of Reid’s work and through it, my understanding of Northwest Coast art. Despite the welcome presence of rarely seen artworks, I was disappointed to find that the gallery’s inaugural exhibits proved to be predictable celebrations of Reid, rehearsing long-standard views that provide neither a nuanced view of the man nor a thorough introduction to the regional indigenous art style with which he is so closely associated. Although the space largely satisfies the gallery’s mandate to expose its primary visitors—presumably tourists to Vancouver—to Northwest Coast art in a non-commercial and non-museum setting, the exclusion of various cultural contexts, the misreading of anthropological concepts, and the inclusion of questionable “high-tech” displays actually do an artistic and intellectual disservice to the complex man who created many of the noteworthy objects on exhibit. I offer here a detailed and personal response to the gallery while highlighting some conceptual issues relevant to the contemporary display and evaluation of indigenous art.

Entries

First a little background. Bill Reid (1920-98) was born to a Haida mother and Euro-American father and grew up in Canada largely ignorant of his Aboriginal ancestry. He went on to become an accomplished silversmith, writer, and CBC broadcaster. As an adult, Reid began to investigate classic Northwest Coast art by scrutinizing books and catalogues, examining museum collections, and dialoguing with scholars. He trained himself in the 19th-century northern coastal art style and began to produce well-designed jewelry as well as monumental sculpture (the latter, typically on public or government commission). Reid combined his skills as object-maker and communicator—both expressed in various media—in order to promote global appreciation for Northwest Coast art *qua fine art*, and by the mid-1970s he was regularly celebrated by scholars and the press for being the guiding genius of the emergent “renaissance” in Northwest Coast Native art—a reputation that endures to this day (see Glass 2004, in press). Following his death a decade ago, former friends and collectors joined Martine Reid, the artist’s widow, to establish

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the non-profit Bill Reid Foundation.² The Foundation's stated objective was threefold: to consolidate a collection of Reid's work, as well as other contemporary Northwest Coast art; to support projects related to Reid's work in order to "perpetuate his legacy" (for instance, by developing a Northwest Coast art study center); and to establish a permanent gallery space in which to exhibit and educate the public on Reid's work and that of other Native artists on the coast. With the opening of the Bill Reid Gallery of Northwest Coast Art (BRG) in May 2008, this final objective has been met. Located a few blocks from the cruise ship terminal in downtown Vancouver, and only one block from the Vancouver Art Gallery, the BRG is intended as a gateway to other sites (museums, commercial galleries, First Nations cultural centers) that will collectively encourage visitor understanding and appreciation of Northwest Coast art. However, Bill Reid and his artwork have already been so exposed and commented upon—especially in Canada—that the general public, not to mention scholars and First Nations artists as well, genuinely need critical resources with which to better understand his complicated and deeply intercultural role in global art worlds. It is time to go beyond introductions.

As of now, the BRG functions best as a monument to the man himself (although the next exhibition will apparently foreground his legacy among younger artists, and other artists are featured on a rotating basis in the small gift shop). The gallery currently features a tripartite exhibit dedicated to Reid: the first hall introduces Reid's work within the aesthetic context of Haida art; the main room presents examples of his work in various media amidst holographic and interactive digital reproductions of some of his iconic sculptures; and the third hall includes a survey of Reid's jewelry in terms of his stages of artistic development.³ The indisputable benefit of these initial displays is the exposure to many works that have never been exhibited in public (although some had been reproduced in books). However, I question the ways in which specific contexts—cultural, technological, and biographical—are only obliquely presented without deeply informing the objects. Rather than exploring the complex relations between art, culture(s), identity, and commerce that Reid's life and work exemplify, we are sold a glorified and simplified image of Reid himself.

The confusion and conflation of these three contexts is evident in the "orientation" video that plays just beyond the chalk tea set, adjacent to the entrance desk and the gift shop. It begins with a cliché that reiterates tired salvage-anthropology notions and sets up the conditions of Reid's singular salvation, two concepts that have been thoroughly critiqued over the past two decades: "This is the story of a culture and art that nearly disappeared." The pre-contact history of the coast is represented (somewhat anachronistically) by footage from Edward Curtis's melodramatic 1914 film, *In the Land of the Head Hunters*, which further depicts Kwakwaka'wakw and not Haida culture, implying a high degree of regional cultural homogeneity if not substitutability. After European contact, we are told that Haida "art and culture were silenced." Until, that is, Reid was born. After validating quotes from the likes of Claude Lévi-Strauss, dubious invocations of the "magic" of Northwest Coast art, and the suggestion that its presence on the new Canadian \$20 bill puts "Bill Reid's art in your pocket," the video ends with a digitally animated, virtual "fly-through" of the very galleries one is about to enter—a neat discursive and spatial encapsulation of the larger exhibit's rhetorical limitations. The technological stage is set for the redemptive narrative of death-and-rebirth that characterizes the "renaissance" discourse and that celebrates Reid as its main protagonist and "master."

Throughout the three exhibit halls, recurrent curatorial decisions further confound an understanding of Reid's complicated work and legacy. Admittedly, there was a serious challenge in retrofitting the given exhibition space—the mandated “cultural-use” atrium of an office building that formerly, and interestingly, housed the Canadian Craft Museum and the Chief Dan George Centre for Aboriginal education and business development (making the building itself a fascinating cultural palimpsest that could have been used to illuminate Reid's own biography!). However, the display conditions are pretty poor given Reid's stature: inadequate light, exacerbated by printed scrims covering the large windows; somewhat shoddy, likely second-hand, exhibit cases; thin, seemingly temporary walls dividing an open space into the three “halls,” the middle of which rises a couple stories, architecturally referencing the adjacent cathedral for which the whole building complex is named. A good number of objects lack labels (this was still true three months after the opening, though may now be remedied). This is especially troubling in the case of pieces by other artists, whose gifts to Reid are here incorporated into, rather than put in critical dialogue with, his own artwork. Likewise, there are numerous video screens presenting snippets of films whose sources are not clearly identified (many seem to be old and recent CBC television documentaries mixed with additional images and text of unknown origin). Though not intended to be a museum, the educational aspirations of the gallery are thwarted by the paucity of identifying information.

Though there is repeated—and highly welcome—mention of contemporary Haida cultural vitality, there is no sustained attempt to explore or expound upon this. Many of the wall texts communicate long-familiar narratives about Reid—his love of the “well-made object,” his role as a “cultural bridge,” his status as a “renaissance man,” the stages of his artistic development (“pre-Haida, Haida, post-Haida”)—without acknowledging either standard sources for such views (e.g. Shadbolt 1998; Duffek 1986) or recent critiques of them (Tippet 2004; Duffek and Townsend-Gault, eds. 2004). Most disappointing, however, is the repeated deployment of such clichés given the real opportunity to educate audiences on the complex contexts for intercultural exchange and cross-fertilization represented by Reid himself (a pre-eminent culture-broker) as well as much of his work (for example, his whimsical twisted wire sculptures, which invoke Alexander Calder more than Haida precursors). It need not be this way, as there is a middle ground between revisionism and hagiography; witness the more nuanced and complex 2008 exhibit “Fritz Scholder: Indian/Not Indian” at Smithsonian's National Museum of the American Indian, which takes as its subject the fascinating—and eminently *modern*—contradictions of the indigenous artist in the 20th-century working at the interstices of various ethnic and aesthetic traditions (Sims, ed. 2008).

The Main Attractions: Mediating Reid

The two initial halls present the inaugural, temporary exhibit “Bill Reid: Master of Haida Art,” which was curated by George MacDonald, the Director Emeritus of the Bill Reid Foundation and an archaeologist who specializes in the Haida. The first of these rooms consists of three alcoves or bays, each juxtaposing Reid's work with other Haida pieces (mostly older works from Simon Fraser University, with which the Bill Reid Foundation is affiliated) under loose and unannounced themes: “boxes,” “canoes,” and “houses.” Obviously, these are meant to introduce visitors to both Haida aesthetics and “culture” as a background to reading Reid's work, but the

presentation seems slim and haphazard. The three bays also contain large, compelling, mixed media displays, all of which are unattributed and unlabelled: a painted portrait of Charles Edenshaw—a famous Haida artist from a century ago; half of a dugout canoe mounted on a painted seascape; and a beautifully detailed, scale model diorama of a Haida village, presumably Skidegate (Reid's ancestral home). Blending the two and three-dimensional, these 20th-century museum-type displays foreshadow the "high-tech" imaging technologies of the second hall, yet they come across as somewhat quaint by comparison. In the third bay, across from the village model, a video screen presents digitized photos and maps of 19th-century Skidegate with all of the houses and totem poles identified; while this is a fascinating historical and ethnological display, its direct relevance to Reid's work (or to current Haida for that matter) is left unexplained and unexplored.

The real pleasures of this first hallway are twofold. There are a few interesting and atypical Reid pieces that highlight his diverse range of media, designs, and modes of craftsmanship: for instance, a set of abstractly carved oak doors, a painted leather vest and purse, and a large, white cast-paper panel. There is also a video projection of older film clips in which Reid himself challenges many of the heroic narratives being constructed for him throughout the gallery. For example, he downplays his role in the so-called revival and he rejects the "stereotype" of being called an "aboriginal artist," instead identifying "Haida" as an *artistic style* in which he chooses to work rather than an ethnic identity he chooses to claim. Here is a rare glimpse at the slippery relation between art and culture—and the unique challenge of articulating indigenous modernities—but it is not taken up elsewhere.

The second hall moves away from cultural themes to present a wide assortment of Reid's work in various media: model totem poles; bronze maquettes for his monumental works; the wire sculptures mentioned above; prints, drawings, and books. It also includes the full-sized "Celebration of Bill Reid Pole," newly carved for the BRG by Haida artist Jim Hart and others. The room is introduced by a wall display about Reid's work as a broadcaster, film narrator, storyteller, and writer. This is clearly meant to highlight his comfort in "crossing cultural boundaries." (On the day I visited, an adjacent touch-screen—on which one could normally hear audio recordings of his "remarkable voice"—was not working.) The prints and books nearby are further accompanied by a label describing the "new media" with which Reid experimented (lithography, serigraphy, silkscreen, wood-block), thereby going beyond "Haida materials." This presents a somewhat false and essentialized dichotomy (as if Haida artisans had not been integrating borrowed media or materials for centuries), and suggests that Reid was somehow unique in these innovative efforts (when in fact other coastal Native artists of his generations did the same). Perhaps this text is meant to provide a conceptual bridge to the display of high-tech images that command attention in this room and that have received a lot of press.

Long associated with "Disney-like" exhibit technologies at the Canadian Museum of Civilization (where he was director from 1983-98), George MacDonald spearheaded a collaborative project to develop and apply an advanced laser scanning system to create virtual models of Reid's monumental artworks. Two potential applications of this process are on display here (more on a third below). The first is an ultra high resolution, "three-dimensional" computer model of Reid's famous bronze canoe, "The Spirit of Haida Gwaii," casts of which are mounted in the Vancouver International Airport and the Canadian Embassy in Washington DC (and which is prominently

featured on the Canadian \$20 bill). The model is presented on a huge, flat, touch-screen monitor so that viewers can rotate the canoe image 360 degrees and zoom in on it, although it takes a while to do so smoothly as the image tends to jerk around uncontrollably at first. Lacking the luster and sheen of the bronze sources, the desaturated model floats in a black void, unmoored from any spatial (much less cultural) context. While it is highly detailed (one can zoom in on textures of the original cast bronze surface), and it certainly provides views onto the sculpture that would be inconvenient if not impossible in life (from above, from below, etc), the virtual model grossly distorts the *experience* of the original sculpture that one has while standing before it in real social and architectural space. The movable image reduces what is manifestly a spatial, bodily, and material aesthetic into a purely formal and structural one (after all, such technology, here reverse-engineered in a sense, is used to design buildings).

I can see the utility of such digital models for advanced study of immobile artworks at a distance, but to use it as an exhibit technique makes little sense; it distracts viewers with the novelty and veridicality of the technology itself, distorts the experience of the original site-specific art object, and offers no new intrinsic understandings of either Reid or Haida culture. This may remind readers of the famous critique of museum techniques clearly articulated by Franz Boas (1907) a century ago regarding mannequins and scale models. The point is driven home by the presence of an *actual* monumental bronze frieze, “Mythic Messengers,” on the wall high above the touch-screen. This sculpture is glorious in its materiality—its objecthood—as well as its intricate design, with numerous Haida figures intertwined in a complex communicative network (it was originally commissioned by Teleglobe Canada, and it references 19th-century panel pipes originally sold to—and sometimes featuring images of—Europeans). A helpful video screen on the mezzanine opposite utilizes digitized renderings to isolate and identify specific figures, adding to one’s appreciation of the sculptural design. But this virtual mediation only makes sense as a supplement to—not a replacement of—the real thing.

More bizarre than the touch-screen are the holographic reproductions of three of Reid’s well-known sculptures. A wall text sets the tone:

Another View on Bill Reid’s Work: These dynamic prints of Bill Reid’s work are reflective digital holograms that can be viewed with ordinary white light from the sun or a halogen bulb. The prints you see contain 1280 distinct image frames that provide multiple perspectives—miraculously allowing you to see behind and around objects! Rabbit Holes 3-D Motion Art is a new, film-based medium that gives full-color, 3-D, moving images in a 2-D print.

Despite the exaggerated claims, these look to me much like the old fashioned holograms we are all familiar with, albeit with a higher resolution and more dynamic range of virtual motion. Only a small field of colors is evident, and just something approximating a 45-50 degree angle of object rotation as one moves from side to side in front of the print. Very tall or short viewers are out of luck, as the image drops off completely except in a narrow band directly parallel to its center. Despite the purported resolution, one gets little sense of the image as an object with distinctive material qualities; as with the digital model, these complex artworks are largely reduced to visual gimmicks. Their inadequacy as representations is clearly illustrated by the presence of one of the *actual sources* just a few paces away: a remarkable onyx version of Reid’s

famous “The Raven and the First Men,” carved by Reid’s long-time studio assistant, George Rammell (the UBC Museum of Anthropology prohibited the Bill Reid Foundation from scanning the original cedar “Raven,” also seen on the \$20 bill). The crystalline and translucent sculpture is totally misrepresented by its holographic avatar, which gives it a gold cast as if it were metallic. The holographic images also produce an equivalency in scale that betrays the actual size of their referents. A nearby, telling label on Reid’s legacy mentions how younger indigenous artists are furthering his attempts to capture a bit of the “old universal magic” (whatever that is) of ancient Haida art in new media and designs. Yet through the use of these exhibit technologies, the “magic” of simulation replaces a real engagement with Northwest Coast art, while the illusion of “interactivity” only hints at the cross-cultural social engagement to which the BRG ought to aspire.

The casual mention of “magic” in lieu of deep explication continues in the last main display area, despite a veneer of anthropological legitimacy. The third hall presents the permanent jewelry exhibit “Restoring Enchantment: Gold and Silver Masterworks by Bill Reid,” organized by Martine Reid, the artist’s widow and holder of an anthropology degree. A large percentage of the objects on display, many for the first time, come from her personal collection (now part of the Bill Reid Foundation). They are unquestionably skillful and attractive—even extraordinary at times—and the whole array provides the most comprehensive display of Reid’s jewelry ever mounted to my knowledge. This is a real boon to anyone hoping to understand his multilayered oeuvre through direct study of the objects themselves. Nonetheless, curatorial decisions repeatedly frustrate clear interpretation of the jewelry. The exhibit divides Reid’s work into three stages of stylistic and thematic development: “Pre-Haida” (1948-51, represented by only a few objects); “Haida” (1951-68); and “Beyond Haida” (1968-98, which includes the most items). However, each category includes apparent counter-examples: obviously Haida designs in the “Pre-Haida” and “Beyond Haida” phases; and clearly modernist as well as non-Haida (e.g. Coast Salish) designs in the “Haida” period. While such works could productively be used to challenge the apparent naturalness of the temporal and ethnic categories in the first place, instead the disjunctures simply undermine the curatorial basis of the exhibit. In terms of layout, a band of black and white photographs depicting coastal (Haida and non-Haida) totem poles runs behind the individually mounted and spot-lit objects; while these *suggest* possible visual sources of inspiration or cultural precedence, they simply function as unconnected backdrops (much like the first hall’s virtual tour of Skidegate), as if the jewelry evolved naturally from these forms.

The most serious problem, however, is the accompanying text, which discursively frames the jewelry as objects of artistic wonder without telling us much about them or the cultural or aesthetic contexts in which they might be situated. For instance, one panel, on the “Haida phase,” recounts a familiar story about Reid’s first, transformative encounter with the deeply engraved silverwork of his ancestor, Charles Edenshaw. It goes on to clearly invoke (but not cite) the anthropological theories of Alfred Gell to explain the power of Reid’s artwork: “Deep carving is viewed as one of the ‘technologies of enchantment’; a way of looking at art objects as agents of an ideology affecting the form of social relations.” But “viewed” by whom? What’s the “ideology” in question here? Whose “social relations” are changed by looking at Reid’s work, or by Reid’s looking at Edenshaw’s work? The label goes on in typically hagiographic fashion: “His visionary skills coupled with his mastery of the techniques enabled him to restore much of the dynamic power, magic, and possibility to the art.” Aside from telling us very little about

Reid's work—much less about the earlier Haida whom he was emulating—this text completely *misreads* Gell's theory on the agentic power of art.

Gell (1994, 1996, 1998) argued that some objects have certain social effectiveness *regardless of the intentions* of their creators, not because they function communicatively (in a symbolic sense, like a language) or aesthetically (because they are deemed “beautiful”), but because they are *misrecognized* by their viewers due to their skillful, material elaboration. That is to say, some artwork—as a form of technology, as material with a purpose—“enchants” to the degree that its skillful execution misdirects viewers/receivers/users away from the material (or even cultural) conditions of its production. Such an object takes on a life of its own as one social actor in complex networks of exchange, each sequence of which refigures the social (and economic and political) relations of the people (and objects) involved in the transactions. In Gell's sense, the truly “enchanted” (and enchanting) technologies in the BRG are not Reid's artworks at all—as beautiful as they might be—but the virtual and holographic reproductions of them in the middle hall. It is these highly mediated images that best exemplify the power of visual “art” to enact and constitute social relations, to objectify certain, often-hidden, ideological positions, masked as they are by the veneer of “high-tech” if certainly skillful execution. Viewers are sucked in—“trapped,” in another of Gell's formulations—by these apparently immersive and interactive technologies, redirected from the stated goal of cross-cultural encounter and understanding by the shallow awe and appeal of lifelike, digital simulation.

This brings me to the last display area, and a point on the politics and economics of appreciation. There is one final, non-thematic space at the BRG, a mezzanine gallery that includes more of Reid's work, the textual and video-based labeling for the “Mythic Messengers” frieze, additional gifts by other artists, and the elaborately ornamented bentwood box in which Reid's remains were transported to Haida Gwaii (the Queen Charlotte Islands) for burial. In a glass case near this box is a small exhibit of the Canadian stamps and twenty-dollar bills that feature Reid's most iconic sculptures. Since the 1960s—since the so-called “renaissance” of Northwest Coast art—Reid has been increasingly framed by the province of British Columbia and the government of Canada as arguably their most important indigenous artist. The selection of Reid's work for placement on the new currency indicates the apogee of a long process of federal appropriation of Northwest Coast art, typically in the guise of artistic appreciation, multicultural recognition, and overt celebration. Reid himself was one of the major facilitators of this process—the “bridging” function so often attributed to him—so it is fitting that he was chosen to index the work of contemporary Aboriginal artists on the new money.

However, such recognition comes with multiple, often unintended, consequences. First of all, we might ask about the economic benefits accruing to the holders of Bill Reid's work as a result of his apotheosis in the BRG; after all, financial values appreciate in tandem with artistic recognition. While this is a dynamic common to the wider art world, the language of “magic” that attends to Reid's work—as with so much indigenous art—throws up a smokescreen that suggests a transcendent plane. It is also interesting to note that not more than two weeks after the opening of the BRG, a number of important Reid pieces were stolen from the nearby Museum of Anthropology at the University of British Columbia (most have since been returned). The occasion prompted a huge outpouring of typically celebratory pronouncements: that Reid was a “national treasure,” that his works are “priceless” examples of “national heritage,” and so on.

Again, such discourse about famous artists is not unique to Reid or to Northwest Coast art. But the kind of mythologization that occurs at the BRG fuels this sort of hyperbolic rhetoric, which in turn suggests the potential for elevated black-market values in addition to the more desired gains in public recognition.

Multiples/Values/Futures

Finally, let me return to the laser technology in order to discuss its third intended function in the context of this discussion of art's value(s). The Bill Reid Foundation plans to use the ultra high resolution scans of Reid's monumental sculpture to produce limited edition, authorized (read: copyrighted), scaled-down reproductions in various media for sale through the BRG (while hardly secret, this plan is not stated directly in the BRG labeling at this point). Once more, the production of scale models—from limited-edition museum-quality pieces, to multiples produced by artist estate executors, to mass-produced souvenirs—is a hallmark of fine art markets everywhere. Moreover, Reid himself certainly experimented with scale (producing large and small versions of the famous "Raven" sculpture as well as small, plush bears based on a large wooden carving), and he was keenly aware of the material and design significance behind his choices. Yet one can't help but see this commercial plan as an extension of the BRG's exhibit technology itself: it is meant to increase exposure to (and thus value of) Reid's work at the price of artistic experience of the originals. At one level, the question is political (who now decides what to scale down and how?) and economic (who profits from the results?). This move is pitting the Bill Reid Foundation in public battle with others—such as artist George Rammell—who claim to seek protection for Reid's artistic legacy by halting posthumous sculptural speculations based on how and why Reid *might have* reproduced his work in new sizes and different media.

This debate raises a larger question about the fine ethical as well as economic line between authorized reproductions and fraudulent editions produced without the knowledge or approval of artists (for example, such *surmoulage* is illegal for Rodin sculptures in France and is condemned by the College Art Association as pernicious and unethical). Within the Northwest Coast (and other indigenous) art worlds especially, designs have long been appropriated and transformed by commercial interests with little regard for their creator's wishes, identities, or incomes. As opposed to the illicit use of presumably "anonymous" tribal designs for the souvenir industry, here Reid's name will be attached to the resulting objects and his executors will see the profits, yet the acts of dubious decontextualization remain quite similar. In any case, is selling authorized "Spirit of Haida Gwaii" pendants really the way to encourage art appreciation or cross-cultural understanding? At what cost? For whose benefit? Who would produce scaled-down versions of Richard Serra's massive bronze "Torqued Spirals" as a means of helping art lovers understand or appreciate them? Why should indigenous art continue to be treated as more materially or culturally malleable? Is "The Raven and the First Men" to go the way of Michelangelo's "David," made into expensive limited editions or dashboard bobble-head souvenirs of another purported renaissance?

It is not entirely surprising that the BRG began its existence enveloped in an aura of celebration, given the personnel involved and the larger civic and federal context in which Vancouver prepares to host the 2010 Winter Olympics by rallying First Nations art—a long-familiar pattern

in settler states trying to work through their colonial legacies. But I have to wonder how exactly the BRG—in its current, inaugural state at least—further the development of the Northwest Coast art world or general understanding of Reid’s seminal place within its history. Learned voices—both Native and non—have been proclaiming the status and value of indigenous fine art for decades now; this particular discursive and economic battle seems to have been won already.⁴ Likewise, Bill Reid’s enshrinement in official art histories of the coast and Canada is secure (he’s on the national currency!). So what’s next? Most of the First Nations artists and curators I know lament the glacial pace of entry of Aboriginal artists into more *critical* discourses and spaces of contemporary culture-making, where they may be subjected not to the often patronizing tone of aggrandizement but to the honor of deep and thoughtful consideration and critique. Nobody expects the significant artists of every generation—the Picassos and Pollocks and Hirsts—to be treated with kid gloves; their lasting significance is a matter of prolonged public debate, not proclamation. Why should this be different for First Nations? As it looks toward the future, perhaps the BRG can imagine the means to go beyond familiar pronouncements about Reid and instead provide the institutional support for more nuanced dialogue.

By way of conclusion, let me signal my recognition that public exhibitions (not to mention memorial foundations) such as this are not intended to be scholarly endeavors or anthropological exercises in museology. My intent in this review is not to pillory the BRG gratuitously but to prompt its backers into a more complex approach to their subject: a pivotal figure in the ever-emerging histories of Northwest Coast art. As only one member of a much larger community that is deeply invested in advancing the artistic and curatorial discourse and practice surrounding indigenous art from this area, I truly hope that the Bill Reid Gallery will emerge as a site of critical artistic and cultural engagement and not simply celebration in the guise—and toward the end—of various sorts of appreciation and acquisition.

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Notes

1. At the time that this review essay was finalized (February 23, 2009) The Bill Reid Gallery of Northwest Coast Art’s website could be accessed at <http://www.billreidgallery.ca/>.

2. More information on the Bill Reid Foundation can be found at the organization’s website, <http://www.billreidfoundation.org>, accessed February 23, 2009. Information on the Canadian \$20 bill that features Bill Reid’s art and that is discussed in this essay can be found on the foundation’s website at this address: <http://www.billreidfoundation.org/banknote/index.htm>, accessed July 30, 2009. An image of the bill can also be accessed there.

3. As this issue went to press, the BRG was preparing to open its second major exhibit, entitled “Continuum: Vision and Creativity on the Northwest Coast,” which replaces the inaugural exhibit in the first two halls and which will run from June 20, 2009 until January 31, 2010. The third hall, and its exhibit “Restoring Enchantment” as described in this review, will remain as a permanent exhibition along with select works discussed below.

4. Advance press-releases for the new “Continuum” exhibit suggest that the BRG is invested in maintaining the rhetorical struggle: rehearsing a clichéd dichotomy—and a false contrast with anthropology—that has been circulating in Northwest Coast and Native American exhibits and catalogues for a half-century at least, it declares, “We hope this exhibition makes a strong contribution to the way you view Northwest Coast art; not as artifact, but as art.”

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