

# House

*Eagle-human mask*  
Dempsey Bob  
1987  
Tahltan-Tlingit



Photo: Bill McLennan - UBC Museum of Anthropology

For most tribes, carving and other art production virtually came to a halt, or in some cases was driven underground.

The potlatch has become an important element in the current resurgence of Indian identity and art. It is a special ritual occasion in which important hereditary privileges are passed on and social status is publicly affirmed. These privileges include special names, songs and legends, as well as the right to use certain masks and headdresses. Contemporary native artists are often commissioned to create new masks for use in these dance ceremonies. They also produce similar pieces for sale in an avid collector's market.

Prominent Northwest Coast Indian artists work within centuries-old conventions of form and composition that require long training and much sensitivity to master. As 20th century artists, however, they also respond to the challenge of innovating within these conventions. Whether their work is created for contemporary native use or for the market, they are extending the art into new directions.

## **From the Domain of the Raven**

Visitors to the masks exhibition in December can see for themselves the vitality of Northwest Coast art in other forms by visiting *From the Domain of the*

*Raven*, an exhibition in the Side Gallery at Canada House. It shows carved objects from the collection of June Bedford, who has been collecting such artefacts for the last 25 years. The objects date from the 18th to the 20th century and include carved rattles, human figures with animal heads and totem poles with crests. They are carved from wood, argillite, bone, walrus ivory and cedar bark.

In January the Side Gallery continues the Canadian Indian theme by showing Indian photographic portraits by Christine Turnauer. The exhibition consists of 21 portraits taken between 1985 and 1986 of members from various Indian tribes, including the Kiowa, Assinboine-Sioux, Hidatsa and Cree. This exhibition has been organised by the Whyte Museum of the Canadian Rockies, Banff.

In February the Side Gallery will be showing paintings by the Anishnawbe artist Blake Debassige, born in Ontario in 1956. He says of his paintings: 'I feel that I am still carrying on a tradition of picture writing, using art as the way of making a statement. The whole thing is a way of communicating to the world.'

Gallery hours for all exhibitions are Monday to Friday, 11.00 am to 5.00 pm. The galleries are closed on Saturdays and Sundays, and on December 25 and 26 and January 1