



# TOTEMS TO TURQUOISE

native north american jewellery arts of the northwest and southwest

Vancouver Museum, Vanier Park October 27, 2006 – March 25, 2007

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE – Totems to Turquoise: Native North American Jewellery Arts of the Northwest and Southwest, Opens October 27, 2006 at the Vancouver Museum**

Vancouver, BC, Canada, August 23, 2006

VANCOUVER LANDS SPECTACULAR NATIVE ART SHOW

**Exactly two years after opening in New York, *Totems to Turquoise* carries its celebration of Native North American Art to Vancouver, British Columbia**

Together, North America's southwest desert and northwest rainforest account for a surprising proportion of the world's finest native art. Vancouver is poised to host a landmark art exhibition, *Totems to Turquoise*, that does put them together – 500 superb pieces -- the new and the old, the Haida and the Hopi, the Nisga'a and the Navajo, the wet and the dry. You might think this would produce a collision of cultures, but the result is more of a *collusion* of cultures – a conspiracy of beauty.

Mounted by the American Museum of Natural History, *Totems to Turquoise - native north american jewellery arts of the northwest and southwest*, has already thrilled audiences in New York, Atlanta and Los Angeles, where tens of thousands of people have recognized the mastery that connects the coastal artists – so beautifully representing the sinewy and fluid Northwest style, and the desert artists – capturing the intricate geometry and colour of the Southwest tradition. Now the Bill Reid Foundation joins with the Vancouver Museum to bring *Totems to Turquoise* to Vancouver, where it will be the premier exhibit at the Vancouver Museum in Vanier Park from this October 27<sup>th</sup> to March 25<sup>th</sup> of 2007. Vancouver will be the exhibit's only Canadian venue, and the only venue in the Pacific Northwest.

*Totems to Turquoise* is a celebration of extraordinary artwork from the northwest Haida, Kwakwaka'wakw, Tsimshian, Gitksan, Nisga'a, Tlingit, Nuuchahnulth, Nuxalk, Heiltsuk, Haisla, and Coast Salish tribes, along with the southwest desert art of Zuni, Hopi, Santo Domingo, Taos, other Pueblos, Navajo, and Apache. Visitors will also see rare objects from the American Museum of Natural History's (AMNH) collection of priceless artifacts. Many pieces are on loan from private collectors as well as institutions and museums. Also included are videos made by AMNH especially for the exhibition featuring Northwest and Southwest rituals that are strongly connected with the cosmological beliefs of each tribe,

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plus interviews with contemporary artists, and footage showing the artists at work. Through its hundreds of individual pieces, the exhibition honours thousands of years of culture and experience – much of it the experience of the coastal peoples of British Columbia – and uses magnificent displays to place each work in its cultural context.

“*Totems to Turquoise* actually has its roots in Vancouver,” says Lois Dubin, co-curator of the show and author of several authoritative books on native jewellery. “In 2000 there was a seemingly minor cultural exchange between artists from the northwest coast and southwest desert – two completely opposite environments. Yet something clicked. The artists found bonds that went deeper than these differences: similar world views, spiritual values and an ongoing commitment to tradition.” One thing led to another, and the result is *Totems to Turquoise*, the AMNH’s highly successful touring exhibition.

Jim Hart, a Hereditary Chief of the Haida Nation, accomplished carver and jeweller (and advisor to the exhibition) is enthusiastic about this meeting of two worlds. “We’ve made new friends, and now we exchange thoughts about our ways and our workmanship. It helps with our direction for the future of our cultures. As an artist, you’re an ambassador for your people, because this art represents all our people.”

Another advisor is Jesse Monongya, a second-generation Navajo jeweller whose inlay work is considered to be among the finest today. “For us to come together was one of the finest moments among tribes. How the Great Spirit works, how God brought us together to enjoy each other’s culture and each other’s art was just amazing.”

The show’s arrival in British Columbia will be a real homecoming for the art of masters such as Charles Edenshaw, Bill Reid, and Robert Davidson (all from our Northwest Coast) and will provide a rare chance to see the work of Southwest masters Charles Loloma, Preston Monongye, and Kenneth Begay. These masters’ achievements are made all the more vivid when you see the brilliant contemporary works they inspired.

Dr. George MacDonald, President of the Bill Reid Foundation, strongly believes that *Totems to Turquoise* will be an inspiration for young artists and a catalyst for education. “It’s about the evolution of techniques, materials, styles – and how North American native

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artists can continue to transform traditional crafts into a body of art that stands with the best in the world.”

Vancouver Museum CEO Nancy Noble noted that mounting a show of this magnitude is a major undertaking, “We have a great museum, looking out at the mountains and the sea. I can’t imagine a better setting in which to present a first-rate international exhibition which also carries deep significance locally. It’s a wonderful opportunity to encourage understanding of the diversity of First Nations and their contributions to our society.”

“This exhibition brings together some of the most exciting and vital contemporary native North American art forms from two geographic areas where traditional cultures remain very strong,” said co-curator of the exhibition, Dr. Peter Whiteley of the AMNH. “Both the marine Northwest Coast and the desert Southwest feature an uninterrupted tradition of extraordinary indigenous artwork and iconography: transformed into silver, gold, and lapidary jewelry, this tradition achieves a powerful cultural continuation.”

Dr. MacDonald, who is also Executive Director of the Bill Reid Centre of Study of Northwest Coast Art at Simon Fraser University, points out that North American native art is rooted in tradition and much was lost forever. “That’s why it is so inspiring to see it reborn in the work of contemporary artists from both geographical regions. This exhibition brings old and new together and shows that both stand among the most beautiful art ever produced, anywhere. Since so much of this treasury was created here, the Bill Reid Foundation is delighted to help bring it home to our west coast where it can educate and re-inspire us all.”

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