Glenbow Museum
February 14, 2008

Refresh. Reframe. Rethink.
- Extraordinary Art Presented in an Extraordinary Way -

CALGARY – Come see one of Glenbow Museum’s most powerful exhibitions yet. *Honouring Tradition: Reframing Native Art* is a history-making exhibit for the museum, marking the first time Glenbow has shown traditional and contemporary Native art, side-by-side, on such a large scale.

Glenbow invited Aboriginal Elders, leaders and artists to share their perspectives with non-Native museum staff to create this exhibition. Aboriginal artist Frederick McDonald was the guest curator for this exhibit. With his help, beautiful artworks were selected from Glenbow’s powerful collection. The resulting dialogue highlights the complexity of Aboriginal art from the northern plains to the subarctic regions of Canada.

“In our time of mass production, it is special to see things that were lovingly made – one piece at a time,” said artist and *Honouring Tradition* guest curator Frederick McDonald. “These pieces tell stories and it is our duty to let them speak.”

Witness a breathtaking display of over 200 colourful objects. Traditional beaded shirts, moccasins and birch bark baskets are displayed alongside artwork made by some of your favorite contemporary Native artists including Jane Ash Poitras, Alex Janvier, Allen Sapp and Joane Cardinal-Schubert. *Honouring Tradition* encourages past and present to interact and challenges views that define historical art pieces as separate from contemporary Aboriginal art.

“There are so many ‘wow’ moments in this exhibition,” said one of the exhibit’s four curators, Glenbow’s Beth Carter. “In each of the four galleries there is so much to marvel at. In one, 18 pairs of intricately beaded moccasins are laid in a row for visitors to enjoy up close and personal. In another gallery, you will find Wally Dion’s *Starblanket*. From afar, it appears to be a traditional blanket, but upon closer inspection you see it is made from recycled computer circuit boards. It truly takes your breath away.”

*Tracing History: Presenting the Unpresentable* (February 16 – June 22) is a complimentary exhibit featuring four contemporary Aboriginal artists: Tanya Harnett, Faye HeavyShield, Terrance Houle and Adrian Stimson. These artists explored Glenbow’s collections and responded with their own new work. The result is an exhibition showcasing contemporary Aboriginal perspectives on the museum’s collections that have traditionally been interpreted by non-Aboriginal curators, collectors and writers. Their new works speak to a sense of history that shifts between truth and fact, past and present, right and wrong.

“Both exhibitions highlight the significant place Aboriginal people have in Canadian art history, culture and identity,” said Glenbow’s art curator Quyen Hoang. “We need to recognize this history in order to fully appreciate what it means to be Canadian.”
Honouring Tradition: Reframing Native Art opens to the public on Saturday, February 16th and runs until July 13th.

“It is our hope that those who experience this art will acquire a new or a renewed appreciation for the multifaceted nature of these works,” said Glenbow’s director of curators Gerry Conaty. “All the works are about survival, resistance, pride and identity. There are links to the distant past as well as to the future.”

Honouring Tradition: Reframing Native Art is organized by Glenbow Museum. The exhibition is curated by Glenbow Museum director of curators Gerry Conaty, Glenbow Museum ethnology curator Beth Carter, Glenbow Museum art curator Quyen Hoang and guest curator Frederick McDonald.

The exhibition is accompanied by a full-colour book, featuring 75 images and commentary by curators, artists and community Elders involved with the development of the exhibit. An audio guide also accompanies this exhibit.

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For more information and interviews, please contact:
Karin Põldaas
Media & Communications Specialist,
Glenbow Museum
Phone 403.268.4246
Email kpoldaas@glenbow.org

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Glenbow Museum

**Tracing History: Presenting the Unpresentable**

Tanya Harnett, Faye HeavyShield, Terrance Houle and Adrian Stimson

(February 16 to June 22, 2008)

Within a museum setting, objects are put on display to tell us about the larger narratives: who we are, where we come from and where we are going. Yet our understanding of history, culture and identity constantly shifts over time. This shifting, while conceivable in our minds, may ultimately be impossible to present in a concrete way. Does this mean that because these concepts are mutable that we should avoid trying to define them? Talk about them? Métis/Tlingit artist and curator, Candice Hopkins, suggests constant change is part of the Aboriginal worldview, “one in which truth is considered separate from fact, where originality coexists within the copy, where change is an inherent part of tradition.”

Perhaps, one can allude to this paradox by presenting the unpresentable through the idiom of contemporary art.

Tanya Harnett, Faye HeavyShield, Terrance Houle and Adrian Stimson were invited to explore Glenbow’s collections and respond with new work. The result of their explorations are works that attend to this paradox, embracing a present that is blurred with the past and affirming tradition by adapting and changing how they present and, ultimately, understand the past. These works speak to a sense of history that shifts between truth and fact, past and present, right and wrong.

Harnett’s work emphasizes the history about the decimation of 91% of her people (the Assiniboine) through the spread of smallpox and a possible connection to this narrative in one of Glenbow’s ledger drawings. Yet, Harnett finds no absolute stories, “there is no direct evidence to tie the ledger drawing to the smallpox epidemic.” Her photographs depict a fog-enveloped landscape which alludes to an entity that may be menacing or spiritual. She writes, “People gathered at the Skull Mountainettes to pray and to get closer to the Creator, but it was a place of great death.”

HeavyShield’s red beaded dress ornamented with museum artifact tags rather than shells references the anonymity and absence of specificity with the objects she saw in the Museum’s collection “as many of the tags refer only to band or area and date.” The stories behind the objects, the love that went into their craft and the function they were

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2 Lyotard, Jean-François, Lisa Liebmann (Translation). “Presenting the Unpresentable: The Sublime,” Artforum 20/8. April 1982, 64-69. In 1982, Jean-Francois Lyotard wrote an essay entitled, “Presenting the Unpresentable: The Sublime” in which he discussed the desire to present something that is, ultimately, unpresentable, something that can be imagined and articulated but not made visible.
meant for were not visible. Her work re-dresses the artifact with what “were and are specific.” A dress for the exhibit requires the same specificity, connecting to the history and function of the Museum, so instead it is decorated with tags that classify and turn objects into data. While the material here has shifted, the tradition is still the same.

Inspired by a portrait of his grandmother, Many Snake Woman by the German-born artist Winold Reiss, Houle explores issues of time, representation and identity through a video installation. Moving beyond the frame and beyond a static sense of time, Houle creates a new portrait of his grandmother as a layering of multiple stories and multiple voices as he shifts through generations of daughters and inserts his own voice and story into this communal and fluid sense of identity and narrative.

Stimson’s examination moves beyond the content of the collections and explores the presentation of museum objects. His ethnographic display includes his own memories, experiences and objects in response to the controversial exhibition, *The Spirit Sings*, which was organized by Glenbow Museum in 1988. His installation addresses not only what museums do, but demonstrates that the presentation of objects is a story that resonates in our psyche as individuals, as communities and as nations. Stimson’s installation also recognizes that how we remember and analyze these experiences affect our way of knowing ourselves, or our “peepholes.” Stimson straddles between the issues presented by *The Spirit Sings*, between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, fiction and truth, to let the Two-Spirit sing.

The artists appear to endorse a shifting, almost double-vision as a way of moving forward, as a way of presenting the unpresentable, making us see change as an integral part of history, identity and tradition.

Quyen Hoang
Art Curator

**Skull Mountainettes**

To indicate that First Nations people have seen some difficult times is rather too simple and words are not enough to describe all the plights and atrocities that were suffered by too many. Story telling, language, oral history and Indian ways have been damaged. Some of the stories from the Indian people have not been handed down or they have been repressed, but many other stories are being brought back to life and they are stories that want to be told.

The ledger drawings made by the Assiniboinne artist Hongeeyesa provide an insight into the richness of culture and history of the Plains Indians. These drawings are over one

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3 Two-spirit is an Aboriginal term which refers to a person who possesses both a masculine spirit and a feminine spirit. It is also a term used to describe gay and lesbian men and women.
hundred years old. Hongeeyesa was born about 1860, and sometime after the signing of Treaty Four in 1874, he lived on the Carry-the-Kettle First Nation reserve. His home was located on the northeast part of the reserve near a slough some called Artist Lake. There are several Hongeeyesa drawings in the Glenbow Museum collections and they present a reflection on the Assiniboine people's history. More importantly than providing answers about a way of life, these ledger drawings show the spirit of a culture at a particular point in history.

I found a connection to the artist Hongeeyesa when I was making a visit to a sacred space on my reserve, Carry-the-Kettle First Nation. The place is called the Skull Mountainettes. These hills were a gathering place for the Cree and the Assiniboine during both of the smallpox epidemics, which was carried up the Missouri River in 1781 and 1837. People gathered at the Skull Mountainettes to pray and to get closer to the Creator, but it was a place of great death. In *Recollections of an Assiniboine Chief* (1972), a book published by my Great Grandfather, Dan Kennedy, he states "the Assiniboine tribe numbered 28,000 prior to the smallpox epidemics and in the aftermath only 2,600 remained". The loss was approximately 91% of the Assiniboine people, a number that is difficult to comprehend. Kennedy lived for a period of a hundred years from 1876 to 1976. He indicated that these hills were still littered with skulls at the creation of the Carry-the-Kettle Reserve. The slough Hongeeyesa lived near was about 100 yards away from the Skull Mountainettes and he would have lived with the story about the smallpox.

I wondered if Hongeeyesa had illustrated any of the stories about the smallpox in his drawings. One of the ledger drawings by Hongeeyesa was of a steamboat with what appears to be a head of a deer mounted on the bow of the boat and curious blackened passengers. There were many steamboats that traveled up the Missouri during this period and there is no direct evidence to tie the ledger drawing to the smallpox epidemic and there is no one to inform us what Hongeeyesa was trying to depict. The story is lost. Still, I think there are stories that want to be told.

Tanya Harnett

**red dress**

to make this red dress fit to be specific

as the other belongings housed now in compartments
were and are specific in form and function
made with certain intent
be it dance be it ritual
gifts stitched always with good thought

for it to fit into this space  to be specific
the bodice of my red dress is ornamented
not with shells not with elk teeth or beads
this red dress is tagged instead
with archival data  borrowed

Faye HeavyShield

Aakaisttsiaksiinaakii: Many Snake Woman: “The Daughters After Me”

The portrait of Many Snake Woman by Winold Reiss has been an interesting subject for me to tackle. This image has played a significant part in my life from an early age. My mother is from the Kainai Nation in southern Alberta. My grandmother is May Weasel Fat, who is also known by her Kainai name, Many Snake Woman (Aakaisttsiaksiinaakii) and my grandfather was Dan Weasel Fat. I came across two portraits of my grandmother several years ago. I first saw them when my mother found a book on Reiss’s work. I remember my mother telling us, “This is your grandmother when she was 15 or 16 years old.”

Reiss’ portrait shows a Blackfoot woman sitting in a simple pose, staring off into space. I often find that these portraits don’t tell much about the people in it. The subject of my grandmother as a young woman is captured by Reiss’ realistic hand. I wanted to make a video that showed the same woman and her lineage, three generations of daughters. The work is basic. It is simply a portrait of May and her daughter Maxine (my mother), Maxine’s daughter Jolane (my sister) and my own daughter, Neko. The lineage brings life to my grandmother’s portrait and is not just a simple portrait in a two dimensional sense like Reiss’. It tells a story of a Blackfoot woman and the ideas of survival, identity, and time. I wanted to make a work that spoke to the objects in a museum and how those objects still live and breathe and have life and stories to them. This is something that is not often made visible to the viewer.

Terrance Houle

The Two-Spirit Sings: Artistic Traditions of Buffalo Boy’s First Peep Holes

I remember the time shortly before the 1988 Olympics when the Olympic torch was passing through Canadian communities making its way to Calgary. The Lubicon Cree’s boycott of the Spirit Sings exhibit at Glenbow Museum was in full force causing the
media to spin into over-drive; it was a confusing time for a young aboriginal person as loyalties were being tested.

I was torn politically as my Nation (Siksika) was involved in promoting and programming for the Olympics. I was aware of the issues surrounding the Lubicon’s land claim yet was also wrapped up in the excitement of the Olympic movement. The statement “Olympics are not to be politicized” resounded throughout the land; it confused and divided loyalties.

As the torch passed through Thunder Bay, Ontario, I remember hearing on the news about a “protest of insignificance” by artist Rebecca Belmore. I did not understand her protest at that time yet it created within me a feeling of empathy and solidarity for the Lubicon. I was torn between two worlds, each constructing an argument that created polarities, demanding that people take sides. It also brought to light many issues facing First Nations: land claims, poverty and aboriginal representation in the gallery.

It has been my experience that the issues that touch or affect our lives are complex. There are numerous perspectives and layers of history within issues; many are not readily apparent or even discussed. Further, in our times of media domination, those who can afford the price control the message.

I still have mixed emotions, yet I believe that The Spirit Sings was a good exhibition which, perhaps inadvertently, brought to light and into our minds the issues facing First Nation in Canada: issues of appropriation, repatriation, representation and most importantly, the patrimony of indigenous material culture. The result was a plethora of writing and discussions that furthered Aboriginal issues, including representation in mainstream galleries and the Canadian art world.

Belmore’s protest must have had an impact on me. I became an artist who now draws on memories of that time 20 years ago and who has this opportunity to work with the Glenbow’s archive from The Spirit Sings. Belmore’s protest, Artifact 671B, which had been labeled insignificant by the media, did indeed have significance. Through her art she created an awareness that resonates in me today and through this exhibit I pay homage to both aboriginal and non-aboriginal worlds, exposing both within me, seeking to explore the constructions of time, space and the human psyche... and now the Two-Spirit Sings.

Adrian A. Stimson
Curator Biographies

Beth Carter is a curator of ethnology with Glenbow where she focuses on community involvement and collaboration. She has worked on several major exhibitions, including The Spirit Sings; Artistic Traditions of Canada’s First Peoples; Many Faces, Many Paths: Art of Asia; and Head to Toe: Personal Adornment around the World. She has a Bachelor of Arts from the University of British Columbia and a Masters in Social Anthropology from the University of Cambridge in England. Carter worked as the project coordinator for the Nitsitapiisinni: Our Way of Life gallery, which opened in 2001. Recently she has worked with immigrants from Southeast Asia to share their experiences in Seven Stories, part of the Voices of Southeast Asia exhibition.

Gerald T. Conaty received his BA (Hons. 1974) from the University of Alberta, his MA (1979) from Memorial University of Newfoundland and his Ph.D. (1985) in archeology from Simon Fraser University. He has been on development teams for exhibitions such as Inusivut: Our Way of Life; Nitsitapiisinni: Our Way of Life; The Fur Trade in Western Canada; Warriors: A Global Journey Through Five Centuries and Powerful Images: Portrayals of Native Americans. Dr. Conaty has written over 30 articles and books. He is currently Director, Curators at Glenbow Museum and assistant adjunct professor, Department of Archeology, University of Calgary. In 2003, he was inducted into the Kainai Chieftainship and given the name Sikapiistamix (Grey Bull), and received an LL.D. (honourary) from the University of Lethbridge in 2007.

Quyen Hoang is an art curator at Glenbow Museum. Her curatorial practice has emphasized artist and community collaboration and involvement in the curatorial process, as evidenced by such exhibitions as Foreign and Familiar: Reconsidering the Everyday, which examined the visions of five first generation Asian-Canadian artists and an online presentation of Glenbow’s contemporary art collection that extends content creation to users titled ArtPad: A Collection. A Connection. Hoang has a BFA in painting and a BA with Distinction in Art History from the University of Calgary as well as an MA in Art History from Concordia University. Her graduate work focused on post-colonial theory and the politics of representation.

Frederick R. McDonald was born in Fort McMurray, Alberta. In 1995, he received a Bachelor of Fine Arts in painting from the University of Calgary where he returned and earned a Masters of Fine Arts in 2002. McDonald is primarily known for his paintings of native heroes and scenes of traditional family life in northern Alberta. He has participated in many solo and group exhibitions in Alberta, Ontario and British Columbia. He received the Regional Aboriginal Recognition Award in 1995 and, in 1998, McDonald was one of 26 artists included in the Alberta Biennial of Contemporary Art.
Tracing History: Presenting the Unpresentable
Artist Biographies

Tanya Harnett is Assiniboine and a member of the Carry-the-Kettle First Nation in Saskatchewan. Harnett received her BFA and MFA from the University of Alberta. Much of her work is photo-based and incorporates traces of her Aboriginal heritage. In her undergraduate work, Harnett focused her studies on both painting and printmaking at the University of Alberta and is an alumnus from the Grant MacEwan Community College Fine Art Program. In her work, Tanya explores notions of spirituality and materiality, technological modes of representation and hierarchy of media. Harnett is currently an Assistant Professor in the Native American Studies/Art Department at the University of Lethbridge.

Faye HeavyShield was born and raised on the Kainai Reserve in Alberta. She studied art at the Alberta College of Art and Design and the University of Calgary. Her highly acclaimed works have been exhibited extensively in both Canada and the United States since 1986. HeavyShield works with a variety of media, including sculpture, mixed-media installations and text. She draws on a personal experience that encompasses family, culture, language and place. Using everyday materials – grasses, wood, paper, and plaster – they are transformed into simple yet powerful imagery.

Terrance Houle is an internationally recognized multimedia artist of the Blackfoot/Nahkawininiwak Nations. Houle received a BFA in fibre from the Alberta College of Art and Design in 2003. His practice includes painting, drawing, installation, video/film, mixed media and performance. His work has been shown in Canada and abroad, including the USA, France, Germany, Australia and England. Houle was the recipient of the 2006 Enbridge Emerging Artist Award from the City of Calgary Mayor’s Luncheon for Business and Arts.

Adrian Stimson is a member of the Siksika (Blackfoot) Nation in southern Alberta. He received a BFA with distinction from the Alberta College of Art and Design and an MFA from the University of Saskatchewan. Adrian is currently the Associate Curator at the Mendel Art Gallery in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan. Stimson’s practice includes photography, painting, mixed media, installation, live performance and film.