

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
December 6, 2023

**Bill Reid Gallery Exhibits Evocative Retrospective of
Prominent Nuu-chah-nulth Artist, Educator & Activist in
– GEORGE CLUTESI: ḥašahʔap / ʔaaphii / ʕćik / ḥaaʔaksuqʕ / ʔiihmisʔap –**

Celebrated Tseshaht leader George Clutesi's body of work is showcased in a multidisciplinary exhibition that examines the prolific artist's generational impact

VANCOUVER, BC — Bill Reid Gallery of Northwest Coast Art presents the Vancouver premiere of the retrospective exhibition **GEORGE CLUTESI: ḥašahʔap / ʔaaphii / ʕćik / ḥaaʔaksuqʕ / ʔiihmisʔap** from **January 20, 2024 – January 19, 2025**. The exhibition is a contemplative exploration of the life and legacy of Clutesi, whose actions have left an indelible mark on the preservation and celebration of the Nuu-chah-nulth community's cultural traditions and customs. Featuring an extensive collection of Clutesi's artworks, the exhibition also displays archival photographs and news clippings of his achievements, a documentary film about his long-lasting impact, and a curated selection of artworks from contemporary Nuu-chah-nulth artists and scholars, inspired by Clutesi's activism and scholarship.

"Like Bill Reid, who also lived and worked in the mid 20th century, George Clutesi was a huge inspiration for the next generation of Nuu-chah-nulth artists and scholars," says Bill Reid Gallery curator Aliya Boubard. "While they had very different life experiences and approaches to their art forms, these artists helped raise awareness both inside and outside of their communities. George has been instrumental in not only educating others about his community's cultural traditions, but preserving the sacred stories, dances, and masks that are practiced and celebrated today."

The exhibition will showcase 45 artworks by Clutesi, mainly from public institutions and private lenders, which include original drawings, paintings, prints, and some reproductions. Clutesi's work often depicts figures and themes central to Nuu-chah-nulth stories, such as whales, thunderbirds, dances, masks, and spiritual customs. Born in 1905, Clutesi created art from an early age, but didn't begin exhibiting until the 1940s. A featured artist at the Vancouver Art Gallery in 1944, West Coast artist Emily Carr was so impressed that she gifted her paint brushes, oils, and canvases to Clutesi in her will.

Also on display are archival clippings, audio recordings, and photographs, highlighting Clutesi's expanding presence in the B.C. community and across Canada. He was commissioned to create a large mural for Expo 67, anchoring Indigenous voices for international audiences. In addition to his art, Clutesi became known for his writing, when the artist began contributing articles to the Indigenous newspaper *Native Voice*, while recovering from a back injury. He also shared Nuu-chah-nulth stories on CBC radio, and is considered to be one of the first Indigenous writers and scholars in British Columbia to write about their own oral traditions and customs. He later published books, including *Potlatch* and *Son of Raven, Son of Deer*.

But perhaps Clutesi's most impactful role was educator and human rights advocate. A deeply moving documentary filmed/edited by Tsawout filmmaker and actor Dano Underwood recounts childhood memories of seven Alberni Indian Residential School (AIRS) survivors, who were cared for and

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counselled by Clutesi while he was working as a janitor, and later as an educator, at AIRS. Himself a residential school survivor, he often shared cultural stories, songs, and dances with his students to instill a sense of self-pride, offering hope to children who had been forcibly separated from their families and homes.

The exhibition further honours Clutesi's legacy through the striking display of artworks from contemporary artists **Hjalmer Wenstob** (Tla-o-quiaht), **Timmy Masso** (Tla-o-quiaht), **Marika Swan** (Tla-o-quiaht), and **Petrina Dezall** (Mowachaht/Muchalaht), inspired by themes and aspects of Clutesi's life, such as family relationships, healing through ceremony, connection to earth and traditional medicines. Contemporary scholars **Dr. Dawn Smith** (Ehattesaht) and **Dr. Tommy Happynook** (Huu-ay-aht) have created pieces inspired by Clutesi's writing – including cedar bark regalia, influenced by the teachings in *Potlatch* and a set of hanging drums, inspired by *Son of Raven*, *Son of Deer*, inscribed with Clutesi and Happynook's writings, bringing life to a silent song.

The name of the exhibition, written in the Tseshaht language, honours Clutesi's many celebrated traits: ḥašaḥʔap (keep, protective) / ʔaaphii (generous) / ʔačik (talented) / ḥaaʔaksuqλ (strong willed) / ʔiiḥmisʔap (treasure).

GEORGE CLUTESI: ḥašaḥʔap / ʔaaphii / ʔačik / ḥaaʔaksuqλ / ʔiiḥmisʔap premiered at the Alberni Valley Museum in April 2023, and was collaboratively produced by the Visual Stories Lab Curatorial Collective, which was led by Andrea Naomi Walsh, Jennifer Claire Robinson, India Rael Young, and Raey Lee Costain from the Department of Anthropology at the University of Victoria, in partnership with Alberni Valley Museum, the Royal BC Museum, the Bill Reid Gallery of Northwest Coast Art, the family of George Clutesi, Tseshaht speakers, and Nuu-chah-nulth cultural advisors. Following a year-long run at the Bill Reid Gallery, the exhibition will open at Legacy Gallery – the downtown Victoria gallery of the University of Victoria in Spring 2025.

A series of ancillary events will support the exhibition, including an opening celebration on Saturday, January 20, 2024, an artist panel discussion, workshops, a curatorial tour, and a book club event.

Admission information and a full list of events and registration details at: billreidgallery.ca

About Bill Reid Gallery (billreidgallery.ca)

The Bill Reid Gallery of Northwest Coast Art is a public gallery nestled in the heart of downtown Vancouver. It was named after acclaimed Haida artist Bill Reid (1920–1998), a master goldsmith, carver, sculptor, writer, broadcaster, and spokesman.

Since opening in May 2008, the Bill Reid Gallery has remained the only public gallery in Canada devoted to contemporary Indigenous art of the Northwest Coast and is home to the Simon Fraser University Bill Reid Art Collection, as well as special exhibitions of contemporary Indigenous art of the Northwest Coast of North America. Through his art, Bill Reid continues to inspire emerging and established contemporary Indigenous artists. His legacies include infusing the art traditions of the Haida with modern forms of expression, influencing the next generation of artists, and building lasting bridges between First Nations and other peoples.

The Bill Reid Gallery offers public programs including artist talks and artist-led workshops which provide a greater awareness and appreciation of Indigenous values and cultures. Find public programs at billreidgallery.ca.

The Bill Reid Gallery of Northwest Coast Art is an initiative of the Bill Reid Foundation. Established in 1999 as a non-profit charitable organization, the Foundation's mission is to preserve the art and perpetuate the legacies of Bill Reid.

LISTING INFORMATION

**Bill Reid Gallery of Northwest Coast Art presents
GEORGE CLUTESI: ḥašahʔap / ʔaapḥii /
ʔačik / ḥaaʔaksuqʷ / ʔiiḥmisʔap**

Dates:

January 20, 2024 – January 19, 2025

Winter Hours:

Wed to Sun, 11am to 5pm

Address:

Bill Reid Gallery of Northwest Coast Art
639 Hornby St
Vancouver, BC

Website:

billreidgallery.ca

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