

## Contemporary Northwest Coast Art

*"We have to keep learning to keep ourselves from becoming static, for it will show in our work. Every new level in art will bring more excitement and knowledge."*

**Dean Heron,**  
Kaska/Tlingit Artist

Some of Canada's leading Northwest Coast artists of the northern region are represented in this exhibition. There are also exciting new works by a younger generation of artists who are studying at the Freda Diesing School, and continuing the legacy of Northwest Coast art and culture.

*"The primary goal of the Freda Diesing School is to develop First Nation artists as well as community leaders. Our program emphasizes that learners have a cultural responsibility to contribute in their First Nations communities. This is why we stress the importance of learning about cultural heritage and the value of creating works of art that strengthens their First Nations identity at the community level and whenever participating in art exhibitions and public programs abroad."*

**Rocque Berthiaume,**  
Freda Diesing School of Northwest Coast Art

## Canadian High Commission

It is a pleasure to welcome you to an exhibition of Northwest Coast art drawn from the Canadian High Commission's People of the Cedar Collection, and including works for sale from the Freda Diesing School of Northwest Coast Art. This is the first time that such a collection has been commercially exhibited in Australia.

The works in this exhibition express the richness of a learned tradition, reaffirmed in the modern multicultural society that is Canada today. Each piece is unique and a precious link to the heritage of the artists and carvers who made it, including among them the Tlingit, Gitksan, Tsimshian, Haida, Nisga'a, Kwakwaka'wakw, Nuu-chah-nulth and Coast Salish.

We would like to thank the artists and organizers of this exhibition, especially the The Sofitel Melbourne, Global Art Projects and the Freda Diesing School of Northwest Coast Art, who have helped make this exhibition possible.

We would also like to thank the following individuals for their generous support and assistance.

Rocque Berthiaume, Stan Bevan, Dempsey Bob, Ken McNeil, Stephanie Forsyth, Donald Williams, Lisa Warrener, Clive Scott and Annie Dawson.

**Michael Leir,** High Commissioner for Canada

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# People of the Cedar: First Nations Art from the Northwest Coast of Canada.

**Sofitel Melbourne**  
25 Collins Street  
Melbourne, Vic

29 November 2007–27 February 2008



Joe David, Spirit Mask, 1975

This exhibition includes works for sale by First Nations artists from the Freda Diesing School of Northwest Coast Art, Terrace BC, Canada.

*"I am from a heritage of great art. I am inspired by the land, our people, our heritage, and the animals. It talks to me..."*

**Dempsey Bob,**  
Tlingit/Tahltan Master  
Carver



## People of the Cedar Collection

*People of the Cedar* is a collection of native art from the northwest coast of Canada, celebrating the renewed expression of identity, both artistic and cultural, among Canada's First Nation Peoples. The Collection, which has recently toured in Australia and New Zealand, was assembled by the Canadian Government in the mid-1970s with the aim of promoting Canadian cultural diversity abroad.

Many Northwest Coast artists, such as Dempsey Bob, Freda Diesing, Joe David, and Walter Harris, who began making art at this time, went on to establish internationally recognized careers.

A common feature of the art of Northwest Coast peoples is the representations of family crests. Crests are the property of family or kin groups and relate directly to creation myths. These stories, which often include the transformation of an animal into human form, are represented by artistic representations of the animal spirits carved on the object.



Glen Wood  
First Nation:  
Gitksan/Tsimshian  
Naxnox (spirit) mask, 1975  
wood, paint, leather  
High Commission of Canada, Australia



Freda Diesing  
First Nation: Haida  
Moon mask, 1976  
wood, paint, abalone shell inlay, leather  
High Commission of Canada, Australia



Fred Modeste  
First Nation: Coast Salish  
Sxwaixwe mask, c. 1975  
wood, paint  
High Commission of Canada, Australia

## Freda Diesing School of Northwest Coast Art

The Freda Diesing School of Northwest Coast Art was established in 2006 at Northwest Community College and is the first publicly funded art school of its kind to be dedicated to the teaching of Northwest Coast art of British Columbia, Canada.

Named after the late Haida master carver and teacher, Freda Diesing (1925 – 2002), the School is focused on the art of northern First Nations and offers programs at the certificate and diploma level, with work being done on the creation of a degree in Fine Art, the first of its kind to be offered in Canada.

Acclaimed Northwest Coast artists who are working today as instructors at the School, such as Dempsey Bob (Tahltan/Tlingit), Stan Bevan (Tahltan/Tlingit/Tsimshian), and Ken McNeil (Tahltan/Tlingit/Nisga'a) studied with Freda Diesing and owe their success to her.