

PRESS RELEASE

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Haida weaver Lisa Hageman Yahgjanaas visits ancestral collections in UK

Over the past week, Lisa Hageman, an accomplished Haida weaver specializing in Raven's Tail weaving, has been able to learn from a range of ancestral Haida items in the collections of the Pitt Rivers Museum and British Museum. Supported by the Origins and Futures Fund at the University of Oxford, which supports bursaries for Indigenous researchers to visit heritage items, and the YVR Foundation's Masterpiece Study Program for Indigenous researchers from British Columbia and the Yukon, Lisa viewed both woven and carved items. Reflecting on the Pitt Rivers Museum part of the trip, Lisa said,

"This week, spent in intensive study of a wide range of ancestral pieces, from a naxiin apron to my great-great-grandfather Charles Edenshaw's engraved silver cane decoration, has been inspiring and laid the groundwork to begin expanding my current artistic practice into new areas. At the same time, it has strongly reminded me that the standard to which we contemporary artists must strive for is incredibly high.

Studying the naxiin apron [PRM1884.56.82] in particular has reawakened in me the curiosity to explore the dying techniques that weavers employed. I am motivated to try dyeing with wolf moss to achieve the yellow colour on this dance apron. The wolf moss has been gifted to me by my great-aunt Dolores Churchill and I've been saving it for the right moment. The right time has now arrived."

Dolores Churchill's version of this apron has featured in many exhibitions and has become a very visible symbol of the determination to pass on naxiin weaving techniques. Lisa worked with the apron for several days, and says: "This apron has particularly finely spun warp and weft. The weft looks to be the same as contemporary lace weight yarn; the only place that does not hold true are the two blue components which are a heavier weight." She also noted that the apron did not have fur trim when it was made.

Lisa credits the foundation blocks of her artistic practice to her early teachings by Dolores, Lisa's great grandmother Selina Peratrovich, cousins Holly Churchill and April Churchill and her tutelage under cousin Evelyn Vanderhoop as an adult. The incredible teachings of Evelyn Vanderhoop and these other remarkable and gifted women allowed Lisa to forge her own path. "I properly acknowledge and give my gratitude for the knowledge Evelyn and my Eagle relatives shared. They allowed me to achieve my own successes with the tools they empowered me with." Visiting with the ancestral pieces at the Pitt Rivers Museum has "further added to and strengthened my ongoing creative exploration. It has also reaffirmed that the more I learn, the more I realize how little I know."

Working with these items across the week showed the complex, multi-layered research methodology that artists like Lisa bring to such work. With the objects in front of her, Lisa



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engaged with her own experience, knowledge and practice. Museum staff also retrieved books and searched online to find comparative items in other collections. James Swanton's ethnographic field notes were called up online to look up which families possessed certain crests. Conservators were brought in to the research space to consider whether strings used as riggings for masks had been re-spun by Haida women from commercial cotton fibre, and what kind of hair was used on one mask. 3D and infrared imaging were commissioned for several items to retrieve faded designs, "so that when I'm not here I can continue to revisit the piece and continue to learn from it."

In thinking about the week overall, and the experience of coming to Oxford to work with Haida ancestral treasures, Lisa noted, "historically, anthropologists, curators, museums and private collectors held Haida art in high esteem. To me it seems quite normal to have to come here: someone valued it enough to save it and thus we might learn from it and now these pieces might revisit the islands from which they originated."

Lisa Hageman Yahgujanaas is from Masset, Haida Gwaii, British Columbia. She wove the Chief's Robe for Chief dansuu (James Hart) and her latest robe will be installed in the Canadian High Commission in Paris in spring 2018. Her website is at: <http://www.ravenweaver.com>

Notes to Editors

About the Pitt Rivers Museum

- The Pitt Rivers Museum is one of Oxford's most popular attractions, famous for its period atmosphere and outstanding collections from many cultures around the world, past and present. Admission, exhibitions and most events are free.
- The Pitt Rivers Museum was founded in 1884 when General Pitt Rivers, an influential figure in the development of archaeology and evolutionary anthropology, gave his personal collection of some 26,000 items to the University on condition that a museum was built to house the material, and a post was created to lecture in anthropology. Today the collection numbers approximately 600,000 items and the Museum remains an active department of Oxford University, doing and supporting research and teaching in archaeology and anthropology.
- The Origins and Futures Fund supports visits by Indigenous researchers to the Pitt Rivers Museum; see: <https://www.campaign.ox.ac.uk/pitt-rivers>
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About the YVR Art Foundation

- The YVR Art Foundation is a charitable organization dedicated to the development and advancement of BC and Yukon First Nations visual art and artists, supporting the vitality and sustainability of First Nations art for artists, their communities, and the people of BC and the Yukon.
- The YVR Foundation's Masterpiece Study Program supports artist from B.C. and the Yukon to six partner museums; see: <http://www.yvraf.com/programs/masterpiece-study-program-grants>