

# PRESS RELEASE

INDIGENOUS CULTURES



## *Sding K'awXangs—Haida: Supernatural Stories* A Look at Haida Culture at the McCord Museum

Montreal, 23 April 2019—In its latest exhibition, *Sding K'awXangs—Haida: Supernatural Stories*, which runs until October 27, 2019, the McCord Museum invites everyone to visit the archipelago of Haida Gwaii on Canada's northwest coast. With more than 100 rare objects—most of them from the Museum's rich Indigenous Cultures collection—as well as works by contemporary artists, the exhibition immerses visitors in the Haida culture of yesterday and today, as they discover the beauty and priceless treasures of a culture that was almost wiped out in the late 19th century.

In addition to magnificent objects originally collected by adopted Montrealer George Mercer Dawson before they were incorporated into the McCord Museum's collection, the exhibition showcases works by contemporary Haida artists, selected by guest curator Kwiaahwah Jones. Various aspects of Haida culture are highlighted, including its artistic vocabulary, the potlatch and spirituality, always in parallel with supernatural stories that inhabit and animate the artefacts.

“Descended from supernatural beings that emerged from the ocean, our people have occupied Haida Gwaii since time immemorial, surviving many challenges over the millennia. Today, we continue to work hard to build up our culture and our art, to preserve our endangered language and to heal from intergenerational trauma, all the while protecting and respecting the natural and supernatural worlds. The survival of the Haida is a story to be told, retold and celebrated,” said Kwiaahwah Jones, Haida guest curator of the exhibition *Sding K'awXangs—Haida: Supernatural Stories*.

### **The legacy of adopted Montrealer George Mercer Dawson**

The objects in *Sding K'awXangs—Haida: Supernatural Stories* are a testament to the know-how of the Haida culture, from the late 18th century to today. Most of them were collected in 1878 by adopted Montrealer, geologist and early anthropologist George Mercer Dawson on one of his trips through Haida Gwaii. The eldest son of Sir John William Dawson, principal of McGill University from 1855 to 1893, George Mercer Dawson was the source of most of the Haida objects now in the McCord Museum's Indigenous Cultures collection. When his work took him to Haida Gwaii, Dawson was struck with admiration for the Haida people and their culture, which sparked his lifelong desire to preserve it.

“It's a privilege for the McCord Museum to be the custodian of this exceptional collection of Haida artefacts,” said McCord Museum President and Chief Executive Officer Suzanne Sauvage. “Hosting an exhibition like *Sding K'awXangs—Haida: Supernatural Stories* is part of our core mission. As Montreal's museum of social history, we help raise the profile of the various cultures that have shaped our history and we take an active part in recognition and reconciliation efforts by enabling Indigenous peoples to speak for themselves through our exhibitions and other activities.”

### **Haida history told by guest curator Kwiaahwah Jones**

Kwiaahwah Jones, born in Haida Gwaii, is a major figure in the movement to heighten the visibility of contemporary Haida art and this unique culture. As guest curator, she has worked closely with Indigenous Cultures curator Guislaine Lemay to convey her point of view on Haida culture and her unique historical knowledge of the Haida objects in the McCord Museum's collection.

## Emerging Haida culture

In addition to presenting rare objects, some of them for the first time, *Sding K'awXangs—Haida: Supernatural Stories* showcases the vitality of Haida culture today, with more than a dozen works by seven artists carrying on the Haida artistic tradition: John Brent Bennett, Dorothy Grant, Lisa Hageman, Ariane Medley, Cori Savard, Michael Nicoll Yahgulanaas and Evelyn Vanderhoop. The exhibition also features works by Bill Reid (1920–98), one of the best known and most celebrated Haida artists.

## A year showcasing Indigenous cultures at the McCord

With the exhibition *Shame and Prejudice: A Story of Resilience*, by internationally renowned Cree artist Kent Monkman, which runs until May 5, and *there's a reason for our connection*, by multidisciplinary visual artist of Kanien'kehá:ka (Mohawk) and British ancestry Hannah Claus, continuing until August 11, the McCord Museum has made 2019 a landmark year for showcasing Indigenous cultures.

“As we strive to give meaning to the word reconciliation, museums and cultural institutions like the McCord Museum will play a pivotal role in creating safe places for Indigenous truths to emerge,” added guest curator Kwiaahwah Jones.

## The McCord Museum, custodian of the vast Indigenous Cultures collection

The McCord Museum's Indigenous Cultures collection consists of over 16,500 archaeological and historic artefacts recounting nearly 12,000 years of history—eloquent examples of the material culture of the First Nations, Inuit and Métis, primarily from Canada. It explores the deep meaning of the artefacts not just as historical evidence, but as expressions of the development, evolution and constant revitalization of Indigenous cultures. The Indigenous Cultures collection is a key component of the McCord's collections.

## About the McCord Museum

The McCord Museum is the museum of all Montrealers, a social history museum that celebrates life in Montreal, both past and present—its history, its people, and its communities. Open to the city and the world, the Museum presents exciting exhibitions, educational programming and cultural activities that offer a contemporary perspective on history, engaging visitors from Montreal, Canada and beyond. It is home to over 1.5 million artefacts, comprising one of the largest historical collections in North America, organized into the following departments: Dress, Fashion and Textiles, Photography, Indigenous Cultures, Paintings, Prints and Drawings, Decorative Arts, and Textual Archives. McCord Museum: Our People, Our Stories.

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Possibility of interviews with Kwiaahwah Jones, guest curator, Suzanne Sauvage, President and Chief Executive Officer and Guislaine Lemay, Interim Curator, Indigenous Cultures and Decorative Arts.

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