

Director's Foreword

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AFTER MANY DECADES of debate and shifting classifications, art remains a space of contestation. The processes involved in its creation, circulation, and use are inscribed in complex institutional histories of form, technique, aesthetics, and politics. Museums and galleries, apparatuses that the anthropologist Néstor García Canclini has famously described as the headquarters of national and regional patrimonies, have always chosen which inscriptions and positions they make visible and which they ignore. *Lawrence Paul Yuxweluptun: Unceded Territories* seeks to acknowledge some of the resulting elusions and silences. Through his art, Yuxweluptun records a different side of patrimony: the ongoing legacy and practice of colonial despoliation of unceded land and resources in British Columbia, and parallel attempts to destroy the Indigenous cultures of this place. His art is both political act and sovereign, creative expression.

Art galleries and museums consecrate and visualize a distinct patrimony. In the process they define what is and what is not heritage, aiming to fix its values and police its internal organization and presentation. Galleries and museums construct and institutionalize hierarchies of objects to imbue them with differential significance. Inevitably, if not intentionally, alongside the operation of commercial galleries, auction houses, art fairs, and biennales, the self-claimed, dis-invested spaces

of the public gallery or museum are parts of both Occidental and Oriental visual regimes dedicated to ascribing commodity status to creativity, thereby transforming its original impulse. As three decades of critical anthropological and historical scholarship have repeatedly demonstrated, art galleries and museums cannot easily free themselves from being part of Yuxweluptun's monstrous menagerie of "super predators" any more than they can absolve themselves from their past and present ideological insinuations simply by adopting critical curatorship. But they can and are challenging the old regimes, in part by incorporating Indigenous-driven collaborative practices and critical methodologies, which, like Yuxweluptun's art, make visible worldviews that exceed prevailing disciplinary boundaries.

Lawrence Paul Yuxweluptun's work is a key link in an alternative, often repressed genealogical narrative of the twentieth-century rebirth of Northwest Coast art, contesting the simple linear trajectory of a formalist "renaissance" of art making and culture. This book and the related exhibition present a narrative not of the continuity of the established canon of Northwest Coast art, either reiterated or stretched to include individuals like Yuxweluptun, but of the legacy of cultural leaders and artists who, while supporting their own cultural practices, have also directly responded to modernism and modernity. Modernism's incredulity towards established

interpretations of the world, its recognition of the unhinging potential of parody and humour, and its adoption of new materials and graphic styles created a corrosive critical practice capable of telling discontinuous histories.

Yuxweluptun is not alone among modern First Nations artists in defending his freedom to innovate stylistic expressions—a position which only increases the relevance of his work both to contemporary debates on identity and to widening the space for artists outside narrow, ethnically defined boundaries. The alternate genealogy that this artist represents—characterized in part by painting practices undertaken between broken conflates, barbed interstitions, and oversaturated, dripping palimpsests—drags the characteristic conditions of cultural borderlands to increasingly occupy the creative spaces at their centre. Such practices transform the normal into an explosive state, represented by Yuxweluptun's proposed new designation of British Columbia as "Traditional Native Territories." Along with artists such as Rebecca Belmore, Loretta Todd, Dana Claxton, Hock E Aye Vi Edgar Heap of Birds, and Michael Nicoll Yahgulanaas, Yuxweluptun has provoked a lesion in the Western-imposed primitivist/modernist split. He has helped liberate a hard-won critical space for what he calls his "modernity of primitivism," enabling it to shout, curse, and insinuate itself into the urgent process

of cultural translation and reparation. Through doggedly exercising his existential freedoms, and through his fearless and feared sallies into public and private forums, Yuxweluptun has helped fracture and transform the territory of modern art.

Yuxweluptun's art expresses his tremendous love of this land as the source of Indigenous power, freedom, and aesthetics. His paintings refuse the possibility of keeping silent about genocide, internal colonialism, and endemic racism. These works are not the salvage pieces that ethnography museums were historically committed to preserving. Instead, as he says, they are a means of "taking possession of history" in a way that "amalgamates the past with the present," and, as curators Tania Willard and Karen Duffek discuss, help us to "unlearn" colonial ways of thinking. In this at last lies the very real value of exhibiting Yuxweluptun's work in the UBC Museum of Anthropology, a place whose collections and exhibitions include those of "self" and "other" exhibited side by side. The fault lines such collections and exhibitions may generate destabilize dogma and prejudice, lead us to question our accepted perceptions, and nourish a space that empowers potentially new and different futures to emerge. In the process, they may also make the distinctions between museums, art galleries, and patrimonies less tidy. Like the power of Yuxweluptun's art, these are challenges we can't ignore.