

A DREAM INTERNSHIP

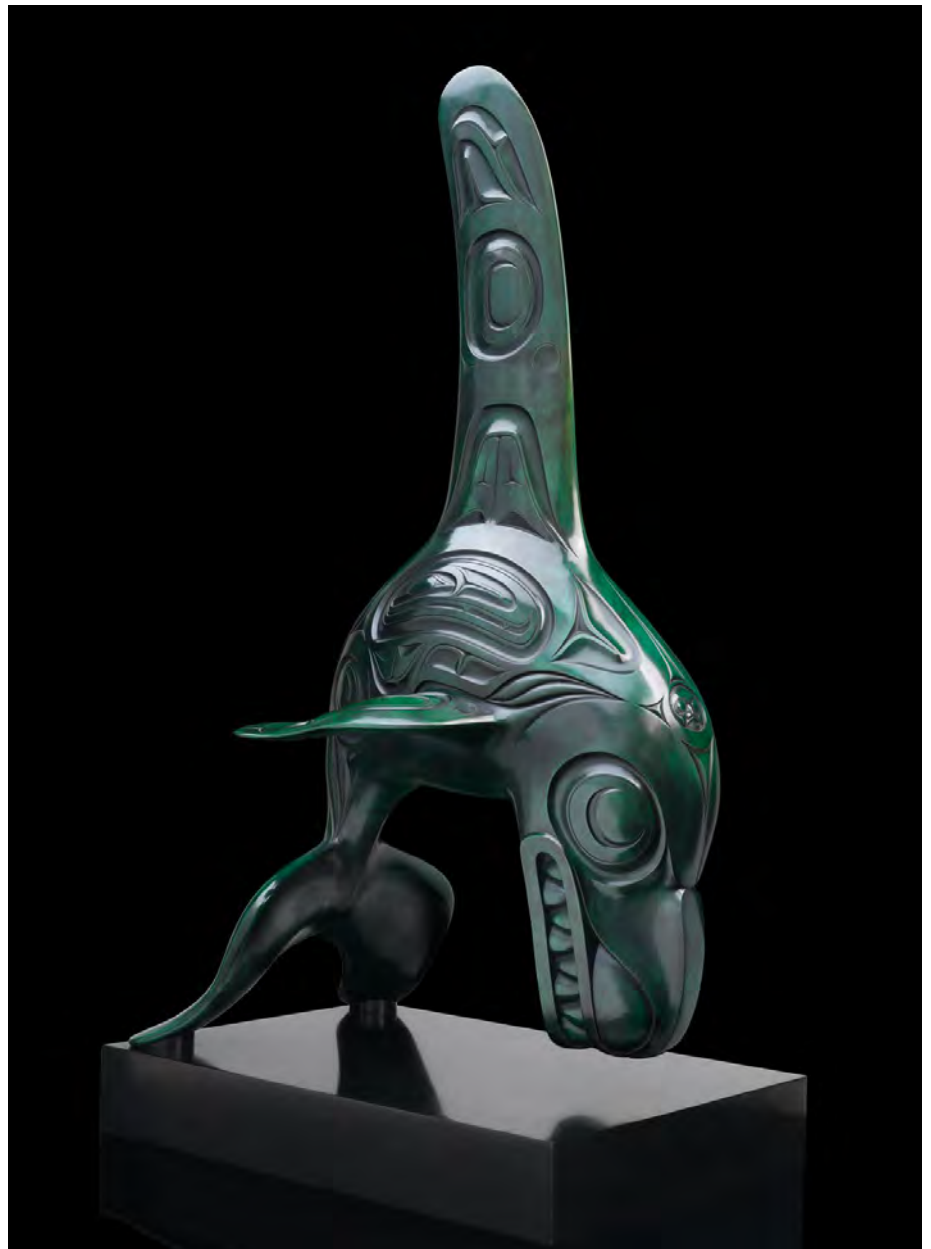
From a Small Indigenous Community to the Audain Art Museum

Teresa Vander Meer-Chassé

Respectfully written within Squamish and Lil'wat Territories.

My Upper Tanana name is Ddhähkít Nelnah. It was given to me by late Elder Mary Tyone and translated by late Elder Ada Gallen who translated it to be “strong woman on a hill,” she added “watching over her people.” It is my aspiration to fulfill this name through the work I do and the legacy I leave. The name I commonly go by is Teresa Vander Meer-Chassé and I am a member of the White River First Nation of Beaver Creek, Yukon and Alaska. I am also the First Nations Assistant Curator here at the Audain Art Museum in the beautiful resort municipality of Whistler, British Columbia.

It was a great honour to be given the good news from Darrin Martens, Gail and Steven A. Jarislowsky Chief Curator, that I would be the Audain Art Museum's initial First Nations Assistant Curator. Prior to



Above: Bill Reid, *Killer Whale*, 1984. Gift of Michael Audain and Yoshi Karasawa; Audain Art Museum Collection, 2015.012
Photo Courtesy of Vancouver Art Gallery (Trevor Mills)

my internship, I was in New York speaking at the well-known international conference, MuseumNext. My speech was directed towards the importance of diversity in the museum workplace as well as encouraging museums to actively engage culturally diverse communities. I received recognition after the short speech and have kept in touch with numerous delegates across North America and beyond.

“The future of museums is the acknowledgement, inclusion, and openness to those always subjects but never storytellers.” - Teresa Vander Meer-Chasse, MuseumNext NYC, 2016

I found it suiting that I had received the position of First Nations Assistant Curator of the Audain Art Museum in conjunction with writing my MuseumNext speech. I believe it is extremely important that museums take the time to engage diverse communities, especially First Nations communities and other People of Colour (POC), with their museums. As you may know, the Audain Art Museum resides on the Traditional Territories of the Squamish and Lil'wat First Nations. Although I am not a member of either of these Nations, it is still important that I, as an Indigenous woman, enhance the First Nations presence at the Museum and provide an Indigenous voice to the collection.

The Audain Art Museum was in its infancy when the decision was

made to hire an Assistant Curator with First Nations heritage. This is an honourable step that the Museum took and a good starting point which can ignite an internal dialogue about the importance of diversity in the workplace. These types of conversations often lead to the discussion of future collaborations with Indigenous communities and other POC. I believe the ideal mandate for all British Columbian museums, is to create a healthy and respectful relationship with Indigenous communities and artists. The hesitation to begin such relationships stems from the unknowingness of how and where to start and this is an aspect I enjoy the most.

I am proud to be the first of many Indigenous interns and feel I have begun to make a small but significant impact on museum proceedings, exhibitions, collaborations, and education. For example, throughout my internship, I was able to develop several training lessons for our docents (volunteer tour guides), specifically on the First Nations art represented in the collection. The training has proven to be effective and the docents have become knowledgeable of the First Nations art in the collection, and are able to respectfully and adequately answer specific questions. As docents are engaging with the public on an ongoing basis, it is essential for museums to ensure that all of their docents are educated when speaking of and engaging with First Nations art. With contemporary artworks, we have the ben-

efit of artists willing to share their stories with the staff, docents, and the public.

Shy of its first birthday, the Audain Art Museum has the ability to adapt and remain open-minded as it establishes itself to be one of the most prestigious institutions in western Canada. I encourage more museums to actively engage the First Nations, Inuit, and Métis communities as it proves to be beneficial for both the communities as well as the museums. Engagement can come in the form of reaching out to community members, First Nations governments, cultural centres; collecting and selling artworks by First Nations artists; or even hiring First Nations employees into influential positions at the museum.

“The future of museums is the ability of letting all peoples in, not only through the doors but through the editing of narrative.” - Teresa Vander Meer-Chasse, MuseumNext NYC, 2016

My intention, during this Young Canada Works internship, is to create a foundation for the position to grow legs and continue for many more years. I believe this curatorial position is extremely important to ensuring diversity in the workplace and that Indigenous voices are consistently present. As mentioned previously, I come from a small border community in the north wedged between Yukon and Alaska. I had never imagined I would have the



Above: Haida Artist, Female Portrait Mask, c.1800. Promised Gift, Audain Collection
Photo Courtesy of Haida Gwaii Museum (Trevor Mills)

opportunity to work as an Assistant Curator of a large respectable institution such as the Audain Art Museum. The support of a community can truly make an impact on a grand scale and I am happy to represent them where ever I may be. It has been a privilege working at the Audain Art Museum and I look forward to what I will learn and accomplish in the final month of my internship.

Teresa Vander Meer-Chassé is a proud member of the White River First Nation of Beaver Creek, Yukon and Alaska. Meer-Chassé is an artist, curator, and columnist currently residing in Squamish, BC and is the First Nations Assistant Curator of the Audain Art Museum in Whistler, British Columbia.



Below: Tlingit Artist, Chilkat Blanket (Robe) [Diving Whale Design], c. 1870s. Photo Courtesy of Haida Gwaii Museum (Trevor Mills)

