



*Bella Coola Mask*, 1980, red cedar, acrylic, cedar bark, 10.5 × 16 × 5 inches



*Bookwus*, c. 1980, red cedar, acrylic, horsehair, graphite, thread, glass, 17 × 8 × 6 inches





*Gwy-Um-Gee Mask*, 1979, red cedar, acrylic, horsehair, 28 × 16 × 3.5 inches



*Bookwus*, 1980, red cedar, acrylic, cedar bark, feathers, 47 × 16 × 18 inches





*Bido-Tla-Kwa-Stalis (Small Copper Giver) Frontlet, 1978*  
Red cedar, acrylic, horsehair, copper, abalone, 9.5 × 7 × 1 inches



*Frontlet*, 1979, red cedar, acrylic, 8 × 5.5 × 1.5 inches



*Gwy-Um-Gee Frontlet*, 1979, red cedar, acrylic, abalone, 13.5 × 10.5 × 3 inches



Left and right: *Box*, 1979, red cedar, acrylic, beads, 4.25 × 6.5 × 3.75 inches







Left and right: *Medallion*, 1978, red cedar, acrylic, 6 × 6 × 1 inches







*Wind*, 1979, red cedar, acrylic, 10 × 7 × 5 inches



*Nu-Tla-Ma (Fool Dancer)*, c. 1980, red cedar, acrylic, horsehair, 26 × 11 × 8 inches



*Raven*, 1979, red cedar, acrylic, horsehair, cedar bark, feather, 3 × 3.5 × 8 inches





*Tlingit-Style Wolf*, 1979, red cedar, acrylic, cedar bark, horsehair, feathers, 6.25 × 6.5 × 13 inches



Right and left: *Transformation Mask*, c. 1980  
Red cedar, acrylic, horsehair, fishing line, cedar bark  
11 × 10 × 11.5 inches (closed), 11 × 14 × 15.5 inches (open)





**63. *Bella Coola Mask*, 1980**

Bella Coola is a Northern style of carving that Beau often visited throughout his career. This mask is a lovely example of a Bella Coola chiefly figure often found on frontlets. The figure's finely carved, hawk-like face is indicative of a supernatural being. Here is an instance of Beau moving outside of his own Kwakwaka'wakw cultural style and into that of the Bella Coola.

**64. *Bookwus*, c. 1980**

Bookwus [Bak'was], also known as the Wild Man of the Woods, lurks on the edges of forests and streams, enticing humans to eat his spirit food in order to lead them into the spirit world. He is often seen wearing the skulls of former victims. During his appearances in the Big House, his slick and dramatic movements serve to remind audiences of his seductive and dangerous nature, as well as to keep one's wits about one's self—especially in the cold, dangerous winter months.

This particular Bookwus mask signals a darker style which Beau will continue to explore into the later decades of his career. In this early rendition of a humanoid face, we see Beau treating the wood with gestural knife marks, allowing the face to appear dark and foreboding. Rather than produce “safe” works with a more palatable look to appeal to tourists, Beau went against the grain and often created edgier works that were not always easy to sell to conservative Northwest Coast markets. Always one to challenge conventional expectations, Beau often added unique touches to his pieces: for example, the green marbles as eyes in this mask. The inclusion of found object harkens back to the often overlooked Kwakwaka'wakw artistic practice of repurposing materials.

**65. *Gwy-Um-Gee Mask*, 1979**

Beau's incredible ability to manipulate wood into multiple dimensions while expressing his painterly expertise is manifested in this mask. He approached it as if it were a canvas, utilizing gestural paint strokes and patterns. Over the years, Beau digested copious amounts of visual inspiration. He had an uncanny

talent for memorizing images for later use, and as a result many diverse visual references can be found in his work. This mask's shiny finish is due to the use of lacquer paint, a practice that went into decline after the early 1980s.

#### **66. *Bookwus*, 1980**

This Bookwus [Bak'was] is a wonderful example of Beau's mastery of Kwakwaka'wakw classical style. It reminds us how his work is informed by tradition, often made to serve a ceremonial function, and yet resolutely contemporary. Beau takes this classical rendition of Bookwus and translates him into a 1980s rock star with flowing, cedar bark hair, marking his fluency in both contemporary and traditional visual languages. Beau had an uncanny ability to innovate. His practice mirrored that of many contemporary artists who explore and play with repetition; he created dozens of masks over his career, but found a way to reinvent each one despite the immutable subject matter.

#### **67-69. *Three Frontlets*, 1978-79**

Because of their intricate nature, frontlets are considered one of the most magnificent forms of Northwest Coast carving. These three frontlets illustrate Beau's incredible eye for detail even as a young artist. They are indicative of a period when he was doing more meticulous work and creating numerous refined pieces on a much smaller scale. These frontlets depict a Shaman, Gwy-Um-Gee (Humpback Whale Chief's crest), and Bido-Tla-Kwa-Stalis (Small Copper Giver), in complex and beautifully ornate designs.

#### **70-71. *Box*, 1979**

Another example of Beau's ability to carve complex formline designs on a small scale is shown in his work *Box* from 1979. A masterfully carved Northern-style box such as this was a high achievement for an artist of such a young age. Beau's precision is highlighted through the carefully detailed carving.

#### **72-73. *Medallion*, 1978**

The front of the medallion features a carved, delicate-faced moon. On the back is a beautifully painted, graphic depiction of Mouse Woman. Being the equivalent of a calendar, Moon holds great significance to Northwest Coast cultural groups. New moons would mark important seasonal changes, such as extreme tidal activity or

the beginning of the salmon spawning season. The very fine carving of the moon's face gives the piece a sense of preciousness, while the unique graphic nature of the Mouse Woman design on the back feels unexpected and special. Mouse Woman is usually a Northern figure who appears in many stories; however, her visual representation is usually abstracted and not easily identifiable. According to long-time Northwest Coast art patron Gene Joseph, Beau might have been influenced by Haida artist Robert Davidson's 1970 version of Mouse Woman, which may have been inspired by Disney's Minnie Mouse. This use of pop culture as inspiration points to the continual life and contemporary ethos of Northwest Coast design.

#### 74. *Wind*, 1979

The Atlakim [*Atlak'ima*], also known as the Dance of the Forest Spirits, consists of some forty different characters. Historically, the masks were burned after a cycle of four potlatches, creating the impetus to carve a new set. This act was considered shocking to Westerners and was discouraged by early anthropologists. In a contemporary context, the destruction of these masks continues to challenge the capitalistic and museological urge to accumulate and preserve. Beau burned a set of Atlakim masks, ceremonially sending them back to the ancestors, in 2008, the first time a set had been cast into the fire in over fifty years. He burned a second set in 2012, and, had he hosted his potlatch after documenta 14 in the spring of 2017, he would have burned that set as well.

Being much smaller than a danceable mask, this particular piece is another example of how Beau participated in the tourist market by making small, take-home items. It is also indicative of the renaissance of Northwest Coast art in the late 1970s and early 1980s, which created a healthy tourist market that peaked in Vancouver during Expo 86. The conventional colour palette has been maintained with striking, precisely rendered minimalism. This piece questions the divisions between ceremonial object, contemporary art object, and tourist curio, creating an opportunity to interrogate the definitions of all three.

#### 75. *Nu-Tla-Ma (Fool Dancer)*, c. 1980

The Nu-Tla-Ma [*Nuḷamaḷ*] mask is a great example of how Beau was able to capture humanistic traits and, much like a caricaturist, exaggerate features. Nu-Tla-Ma's bulbous face and recessive jaw accentuate his round and pudgy appearance. He keeps potlatch guests on their best behaviour, insisting that they pay attention and follow protocol. Anyone behaving poorly will be beaten by Nu-Tla-Ma or, at the very least, receive a flick of mucus from rags embedded



in his nostrils. He reminds us to respect that which we value. This unique and dramatic character is one that Beau revisited over and over again in innovative ways.

#### 76. *Raven*, 1979

This smaller sculpture, like the *Medallion*, *Wind*, and *Tlingit-Style Wolf*, was a piece that Beau would have created with the tourist market in mind. Raven is one of the most important figures in the oral traditions of the Northwest Coast. As a cultural hero, a transformer, and a trickster, his adventures at the beginning of time brought the world as we know it into existence.

#### 77. *Tlingit-Style Wolf*, 1979

In Kwakwaka'wakw Winter Ceremonies, the Wolf is a revered creature who is celebrated in the Walasahakw Dance as an ancestral figure from mythic times. Its long snout and open mouth are supported by pegs standing in for teeth. This mask, like others in the exhibition, illustrate Beau's exploration of other cultural styles—in this case, the Tlingit.

#### 78-79. *Transformation Mask*, 1980

Transformation masks come from the theatrically powerful ceremonial practices of the Northwest Coast, and dramatize the connection between the spiritual, animal, and human realms. Found among many Northwest Coast Nations, they have been imaginatively elaborated by Kwakwaka'wakw carvers like Beau, who was able to realize very complex designs through his technical ingenuity. Carefully carved, painted, and balanced on hinges, these masks are intricately strung. At the climactic moment of the dance, the dancer pulls the toggles, the external shell of the mask splits into sections, and the transformation is completed as an often human form is revealed.

It is unusual for carvers at such an early stage in their career to create masks of this technical complexity and sophistication. Like the *Wind* mask in this collection, this mask's small size reflects the time period of its creation, as well as the circumstances of the market in which Beau was participating.

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*All photographs by Alex Gibson and prepared for press by Rachel Topham Photography. Images and captions courtesy of LaTiesha Fazakas and Fazakas Gallery.*