Berkshire Museum Press Release
For Immediate Release: May 5, 2016
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Images available on request

Berkshire Museum presents Finding Raven: Art and Stories from the Northwest Coast
Opening May 28, 2016

[PITTSFIELD, MA] — The Berkshire Museum will present the new exhibition Finding Raven: Art and Stories from the Northwest Coast from May 28 through October 30, 2016. Travel to the Northwest Pacific Coast and experience the rich heritage of the indigenous peoples, portrayed in dramatic stories and striking art objects. Fantastic tales set in the oceans, streams, and forests of the Pacific Northwest are accompanied by totem poles, carved masks, and other ceremonial and utilitarian objects reflecting the traditions and artistry of the Haida, Tsimshian, Kwak’waka’wakw, and Tlingit groups, among others. The featured objects in the exhibition are from the collection of Joan and Paul Gluck.

This exhibition is funded in part by Mass Humanities, which receives support from the Massachusetts Cultural Council and is an affiliate of the National Endowment for the Humanities. This exhibition is funded in part by the Gladys Krieble Delmas Foundation.

A family-friendly Opening Reception for two new exhibitions, Finding Raven: Art and Stories from the Northwest Coast and Tiny Titans: Dinosaur Eggs and Babies will be held Friday, May 27, from 5:30 to 7:30 p.m. Explore the galleries, discover the interactive stations, and hear the fascinating legends and stories. Light refreshments will be served. Tickets are $10 for adults, $5 for children, and Museum members enjoy free admission. Please RSVP to 413.443.7171 ext. 313.
Finding Raven: Art and Stories from the Northwest Coast offers a unique opportunity for Museum visitors to discover the rich, vibrant cultural life of the indigenous people of the Pacific Northwest. The early inhabitants of this region crafted elaborate, sophisticated stories about the world that surrounded them — an enormous temperate rain forest, with towering trees and access to the Pacific Ocean — which became an enduring part of their artistic and literary legacy. The brightly painted contemporary and historic objects, made both for ceremony and utility, from the Northwest Coast people -- Haida, Tlingit, Kwak'waka'wakw, Tsimshian, Coast Salish -- illustrate these multi-layered stories, drawing the imagery from the characters who inhabit these supernatural tales.

The exhibition opens with a Circle of Totems, some as high 15 feet, to suggest walking into a village on the Northwest Coast. The story of the totems is enhanced by a video of carver Ken McNeil, and photographic images of people of the Northwest Coast, current and past, portray those who made and created the stories.

“We chose to integrate the supernatural stories into the exhibition because they really bring the art alive for the Museum’s core family audience,” says Maria Mingalone, Berkshire Museum’s director of Curatorial Affairs and Collections. “They are fun, fantastic, and central in Northwest Coast culture and illuminate the objects for those familiar, or unfamiliar, with the art by Northwest Coast people, in a sophisticated, yet accessible way.”

Displays of elaborately carved masks, exquisite bentwood boxes, and button blankets illustrate the potlatch, an important ceremony for Northwest Coast native people. The potlatch is a community feast in which a key component is a ceremonial gift-giving. The potlatch may include dramatic costumed storytelling, music, dancing, and singing. A large traditional copper, one of the valuable gifts shared at a potlatch, will be on view, along with ladles and feast bowls. Large and small drums and whistles accompanied by specially recorded music will fill the gallery.
“This will be a wonderful exhibit,” says Aldona Jonaitis, director of the University of Alaska Museum of the North. “The way the Berkshire Museum has interpreted the artworks enhances their ability to communicate universal themes to the public. Those who come to see the exhibit will leave with new understandings of how this body of artwork, which might at first appear to be exotic, actually can be meaningful to them.”

Most of the objects in the exhibition date from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and are represented by historically significant artists including Kwak’waka’wakw artists Willy Seaweed, Blackie Dick, and George Hunt, Jr. A number of the many striking pieces are attributable to living artists who continue to incorporate traditional motifs and techniques into their work. Some of the well-known contemporary artists whose work is on view are Robert Davidson (Haida), one of the more prestigious award-winning carvers renown for monumental cedar totem poles; Don Lelooska, master carver and storyteller; Beau Dick, a versatile and talented Canadian artist of Kwak’waka’wakw descent, who creates masks and other objects in the traditional style but also works in a contemporary style; and acclaimed Canadian First Nation artist Susan Point (Coast Salish), who is an innovative artist working in mixed media and one of the first native artists to work in glass.

The exhibition team
Maria Mingalone, director of Curatorial Affairs and Collections at the Berkshire Museum, led the team that created Finding Raven. Dr. Aldona Jonaitis, director of the University of Alaska Museum of the North and professor of anthropology at the University of Alaska Fairbanks, served as the advisor on Northwest Coast native art and culture. Lucy Brotman acted as guest curator and researcher, and collectors Joan and Paul Gluck generously lent their personal knowledge and scholarship.

About the Berkshire Museum
Located in downtown Pittsfield, Massachusetts, at 39 South St., the Berkshire Museum, a Smithsonian Affiliate, is open from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Saturday, and noon to 5 p.m. on Sunday. Admission is $13 adult, $6 child; Museum members and
children age 3 and under enjoy free admission. For more information, visit www.berkshiremuseum.org or call 413.443.7171.

In association with the Smithsonian since 2013, Berkshire Museum is part of a select group of museums, cultural, educational, and arts organizations that share the Smithsonian's resources with the nation.

Established by Zenas Crane in 1903, Berkshire Museum integrates art, history, and natural science in a wide range of programs and exhibitions that inspire educational connections between the disciplines. In the galleries, Tiny Titans: Dinosaur Eggs and Babies will be on view May 14 through August 28, 2016. Little Cinema is open year-round. Spark!Lab, Feigenbaum Hall of Innovation, Worlds in Miniature, Aquarium, and other exhibits are ongoing.

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