



Ellen Neel:

The First Woman Totem Pole Carver

January 17-April 1, 2017
Legacy Art Gallery,
University of Victoria
Victoria, BC

Exhibition Catalogue

Ellen Neel:

The First Woman Totem Pole Carver

Edited by Carolyn Butler Palmer

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Cover Photo: David A. Neel, *Mask Mourning Ellen Neel*, 1990. Courtesy Camosun College, Department of Visual Arts. (Photo Credit: David A. Neel)

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Acknowledgements

The Neel and Newman families wish to acknowledge and thank the Coast Salish peoples for always making us feel so welcome in their ancestral lands. Our families and communities have been connected for many decades, and we continue to work together to transfer the artistic and cultural teachings of our respective nations to the next generations of artists and cultural leaders.

There are many individuals who have helped transform the idea of an exhibition about Ellen Neel into a reality.

The Williams Legacy Chair would like to thank the members of the Neel and Newman families for allowing works from their personal collections to be shown in this exhibit and publication; for their generosity, encouragement, knowledge, sense of humour, and for being a family of artists. I extend my thanks to Ellen Neel's daughters Cora, Pamela, and Theresa, grandchildren David, Lou-ann, and Travis, her great grandchildren Ellena and Edwin; and to Elders Lily Erford, Vera Newman and Chief Edwin Newman for their guidance, help, and support.

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The exhibit would not be possible without the generous bequest of Michael Williams to the University of Victoria. This exhibition is held in commemoration of his good work and life.

- Dr. Carolyn Butler Palmer, Curator, Williams Legacy Chair, Associate Professor
- Lou-ann Ika'wega Neel and David Tla'tla'klalis Neel, Advising Curators

Curator's Foreword

The exhibition *Ellen Neel: The First Woman Totem Pole Carver* is a collaborative undertaking that celebrates the life of Kwakwaka'wakw artist Ka'kasolas, Ellen May (Newman) Neel and the living legacies of her work across three subsequent generations of artists in her family. The words of Ellen Neel's 1948 UBC Address guide the organization of this exhibition around major themes that she called attention to such as totem arts, new materials, household furnishings, and jewellery.

With the inclusion of multiple generations of artists, the exhibition forwards the idea that the work of Ellen Neel flows down from her to her descendants: it is an unbroken line of artistic tradition. The curatorial strategy was to enmesh the work of Ka'kasolas with that of her descendants.

The spirit of collaboration is evident by the fact that many family members lent works of art from their private collections for this exhibition. Family members Lou-ann Ika'wega Neel and David Tla'tla'klalis Neel (David A. Neel) also guided my curatorial process. David A. Neel also contributed many fine photographs to this catalogue.

- Carolyn Butler Palmer Ph.D.,
Associate Professor of Art History and Visual Studies
and Legacy Chair, The University of Victoria

The Living Legacies of Ellen Neel:

The Neel Family, 2017

(Relationship to Ellen Neel noted first in round brackets)

Back Row: Jamie McCoy (great-granddaughter, granddaughter of Cora Neel Beddows, and daughter of James McCoy), David Neel (grandson and son of David Neel, Sr.), Edwin Neel (great-grandson and son of David Neel), Ivan Beddows (husband of Cora Beddows), Mickey Cook (nephew and son of Margaret Newman), and Victor Newman (nephew and son of Carey Newman).

Middle Row: Lou-ann Neel (granddaughter and daughter of John, aka Ted, Neel), Meghan McClellan (great-granddaughter and daughter of Debra Beddows), Amber McClellan (great-granddaughter and daughter of Debra Beddows), Pamela Creasy Neel (daughter), Travis Neel (grandson and son of Theresa Neel), Debra Beddows (granddaughter and daughter of Cora Neel Beddows), Ellena Neel (great-granddaughter and daughter of David Neel).

Front Row: Cora Neel Beddows (daughter).

Absent: Charles James Neel (great-grandson and son of David Neel) and Theresa Neel (daughter), Wendy Ireland (granddaughter and daughter of Pamela Neel Creasy), Lotus Rose (great-granddaughter and daughter of Wendy Ireland).

- Cora Beddows



Neel Family Portrait, 2017. (Photo Credit: David A. Neel)

Gilakas'daxw 'la!

We welcome each of you to this very special exhibition. We wish to acknowledge and thank the Songhees, Esquimalt and W̱SÁNEĆ First Nations for always making us feel welcome in their ancestral lands; and we extend our sincerest thanks to Carolyn Butler Palmer, Caroline Riedel, and all the staff at the Legacy Art Galleries for all their work and their expertise in making this exhibit possible.

In addition to her business and professional roles, Ka'kasolas, Ellen May (Newman) Neel was a mother, grandmother, aunt, and eldest of Charlie Newman (Nulis) and Lucy James' (La'laxsa) three daughters - Ellen, Margaret (Peggy) and Louisa.

While the 'Potlatch Ban' was not removed from the Indian Act until 1951, Ellen, with her uncles

Chief William Scow and Mungo Martin, and other Kwakwaka'wakw people living in the Lower Mainland continued to conduct ceremonies that served as an act of ongoing governance that continues through their descendants to this day.

Ellen mentored and taught about our art and our culture to countless school children, emerging artists, and the general public in Vancouver and the Lower Mainland. She was a true visionary, well ahead of her time in the way she saw the future of Kwakwaka'wakw art; and she was always ready to take on a challenge – especially when it meant that more people could understand and appreciate the ancient art forms of the Kwakwaka'wakw and other First Nations across Canada.

As exhibitions such as this begin to acknowledge the important work she carried out in her lifetime, we hope that her work and her vision will continue to inspire aspiring and practicing artists to enthusiastically pursue their creative and artistic dreams, as this is what keeps our cultures alive generation after generation.

- Lou-ann Ika'wega Neel and David Tla'tla'klalis Neel, Advising Curators

"She was a true visionary, well ahead of her time in the way she saw the future of Kwakwaka'wakw art."

Introduction

This exhibition commemorates the 100th anniversary of the birth of artist and carver Ka'kasolas, Ellen May (Newman) Neel (Kwagiulth, Kwickwasutaineuk, and 'Namgis) and the 50th anniversary of her death. Born in Alert Bay (1916), she learned to carve from her grandfather, the eminent master carver Yakuglas/Charlie James (c.1867-1938) during the 1920s,¹ at a time when the First Nations art of carving was criminalized under Canadian federal law. By the mid- 1940s, Neel was raising her children in Vancouver, and within a decade she had established her own carving business and retail outlet, "The Totem Arts Shop," in Stanley Park where she taught her children to make art. Neel launched her carving career during the prohibition of the potlatch—a period when carving was rare and the idea of a woman carver was new.² Neel's revolutionary work has prompted many to call her "The First Northwest Coast Woman Carver."

Adamant that First Nations art not be relegated to the past, Neel embraced new materials and forms as a means of expressing the living nature of her artwork.³ Over the course of her career, Ellen Neel carved small-scale and monumental poles, masks, and regalia.

She also designed and created items such as table runners, coasters, trays, skirts, and designs for Royal Albert China and extended her repertoire to include wearable art such as bags, blouses, and skirts. Neel's monumental poles were raised in France, Korea, Denmark, the United States, and in the Canadian cities of Stratford, Edmonton, and Vancouver.⁴

In addition to art making, Ellen Neel held public office and was a regular contributor to *The Native Voice* news magazine. Her extensive body of work was featured in many local, national, and

international newspapers and magazines. She is especially well-known for her keynote address delivered during the first B.C. Arts and Welfare Society conference at the University of British Columbia in April 1948.⁵

Neel was no stranger to Victoria and Vancouver Island. Most notably, she participated in Mungo Martin's 1953 potlatch, the first public potlatch since Dan Cranmer's in 1921, which resulted in a number of people being prosecuted and sent to jail. Within this context, Martin reaffirmed Neel's potlatchname Ka'kasolas and placed the names Tla'tla'klalis, Max'mawisem'game, Xi'xanus, Kwa'xala, La'laxsa, and Ne'gega upon her children David, John, Robert, Cora, Theo, and Theresa.⁶

Although Ellen Neel was a prolific artist, she died in 1966 at only 49 years old. This exhibition seeks to honour her life and work and the artistic legacies that live on in the work of her children, grandchildren,

and great-grandchildren as represented by the different sections of this exhibition that include: Family Crests, Dzonaqua, Jewelry, the Wonderbird, *Totem Ware/Totemland*, Textiles, Silkscreen Prints, and Politics.

This exhibition celebrates a family of artists over six generations, including Ellen Neel and her grandfather Charlie James; Ellen Neel's children: David Neel Sr., John Neel, Robert Neel, Cora Neel, Theo Neel, and Theresa Neel; Neel's grandchildren: Tla'tla'klalis/David, Travis Neel; and two of her great-grandchildren Kasolas/Edwin Neel and Ka'kasolas/Ellena Neel.

- Carolyn Butler Palmer, Associate Professor of Art History and Visual Studies and Legacy Chair, University of Victoria

An Unbroken Line of Tradition

About the Family Tree

As some of the names are repeated across the generations, we have created a colour-coded system of labels that appear throughout the exhibition. Each colour represents a generation of artists as represented in the family tree.

The traditional names held by each member of our family come from their lineage through the peoples.

Each name flows from our family's Kwagiulth and Kwickwasutaineuk Origin Stories, and each carries a range of roles, responsibilities, and obligations, balanced with rights, privileges, and prerogatives. As a family of artists, we continue

to practice the art forms and cultural traditions of our people, and the contexts within which these roles, responsibilities, obligations, rights, privileges, and prerogatives are exercised.

Our names are an inherent part of our peoples' social, political, economic, cultural, intellectual, artistic and legal systems, and we are each very thankful to our old people for allowing us to carry these names until it is time to place them on the next generation.

- Lou-ann Ika'wega Neel



Lou-ann Ika'wega Neel,
Family Tree, 2017. (Photo Credit:
Carolyn Butler Palmer)



Gar Lunney, *Ellen Neel, Kwaguitl, from Alert Bay at Work* in her Studio, 1958. Courtesy Library and Archives Canada MIKAN no. 3516211

Indian Art

In the Words of Ellen Neel

During the time that I've been selling some of my work and in the course of meeting some of the people who deal in Indian artwork, I have come across some very odd ideas concerning it. When I was asked to speak at this conference, I saw a golden opportunity to present my side of the picture.

The point of mine, which I shall endeavour to illustrate, deals with the idea that efforts should be confined to the preservation of old work. This idea is a great fallacy where the art of my people is concerned! If our art is dead, then it is fit only to be mummified... packed into mortuary boxes and tucked away in museums!

To me, the art is a living symbol of the gaiety, the laughter, and the love of colour of my people—a day-to-day reminder that even we had something of glory and honour, before the white man came. Our art continues to live, for not only is it part and parcel of us, it can be a powerful factor in combining the best part of Indian culture into the fabric of a truly Canadian art form.

When the white man came, he brought with him saws, axes, hatchets, steel chisels and knives—paints in brilliant white red, green and yellow. There was no involved question of propriety as to whether the new tools should be used... rather they were seized on, avidly, and with startling results!

The golden age of totem art has arrived—totems sprouted at every village where formerly there had been few—Chiefs vied with one another in the giving of potlatches, making work for artists who flourished and plied their trade. New

forms evolved... in short, the art was a living art. New techniques were adopted, new materials incorporated, new ideas were welcomed and used. I can find no instance where an idea, a material, or a tool was not used simply because it had not been used before.

Unfortunately, then began a period in which this growing and living manifestation of my people's artistry was partially destroyed. Because of economic factors too numerous to mention at this time, an attempt was made to suppress the potlatch. The suppression of the potlatch emasculated the creative ability of the whole nation. The production of art was so closely coupled with giving of the potlatch that, without it, the art withered and almost died.

Were it not for the interest created by the tourist trade, the universities and the museums, we would no longer have any of our people capable of producing this art.

We are gathered here at this conference to attempt to bring about, among other things, a resurgence of the creativity of the Native people. I strongly emphasize a point and, here, make it also my plea;

If the art of my people is to take its rightful place beside other Canadian Art, it must be a living medium of expression!

We, the Indian artist, must be allowed to create. We must be allowed new and modern techniques... new and modern tools... new and modern materials. For, in every instance, creative capacity has increased following the discovery and use of better materials.

I don't mean that we should disregard the old, only that we should be allowed the new.

I'd like to take the time to briefly examine some of the problems that I've encountered in attempting to produce my work.

In my family, carving was a means of livelihood. My grandfather was Charlie James—the famous 'Yakuglas.' He carved for over forty years. To his stepson Mungo Martin, he taught the rudiments of his art... and we, his grandchildren were literally brought up amongst his work. Totems were our daily fare. They bought our food and furnished our clothing. There was no problem of sale, since his work was eagerly sought after.

Now the situation is different. Curio dealers have so cheapened the art in their effort to profit, that I doubt if one could find a single household where the authenticity of the art is important to them. I have strived in all my work, to retain the authentic, but I find it difficult to obtain a portion of the price necessary to do a really fine piece of work.

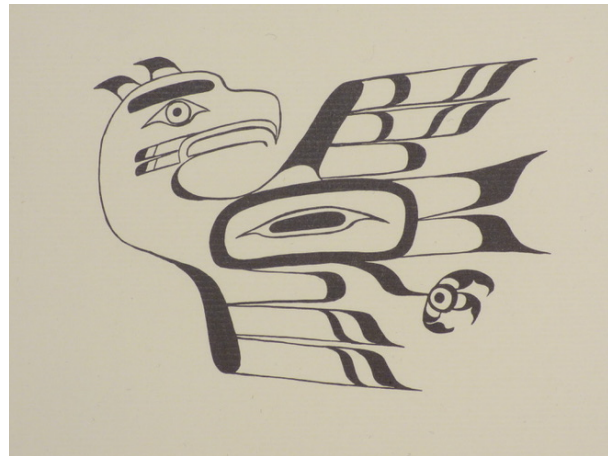
This being so, it's difficult to blame my contemporaries for trying to get enough from their work to live on... though I believe they are wrong in cheapening their heritage. Certainly,

great work could be produced by the Native people if a true appreciation of their art could be instilled into the general public. Only when there is an adequate response to efforts to retain the best of our art will it be possible to train the younger generation to appreciate their own cultural achievements. As far as applying this art to everyday living...I believe it can be used to stunning effect on tapestry, textile, sports wear and in jewelry. Many pieces of furniture lend themselves admirably to Indian designs. Public buildings, large restaurants and halls have already begun to utilize some of this art. We need only to have some sort of organization to which architects, builders and manufacturers could go to guarantee authentic products. Both my husband and myself stand ready to contribute... we have plans, and we are willing to share.

I strongly believe that the Indian people, as a whole, would gladly share... if only the dignity and honour of their personal crests could be

preserved. And so we look confidently to the future... to bring a fuller, a better, a more dignified existence to the Native people of Canada. I personally look forward to being a part of the movement which brings these things to pass.

- Ellen Neel, Keynote Address for the first B.C. Arts and Welfare Society Conference, University of British Columbia — April 1948⁷



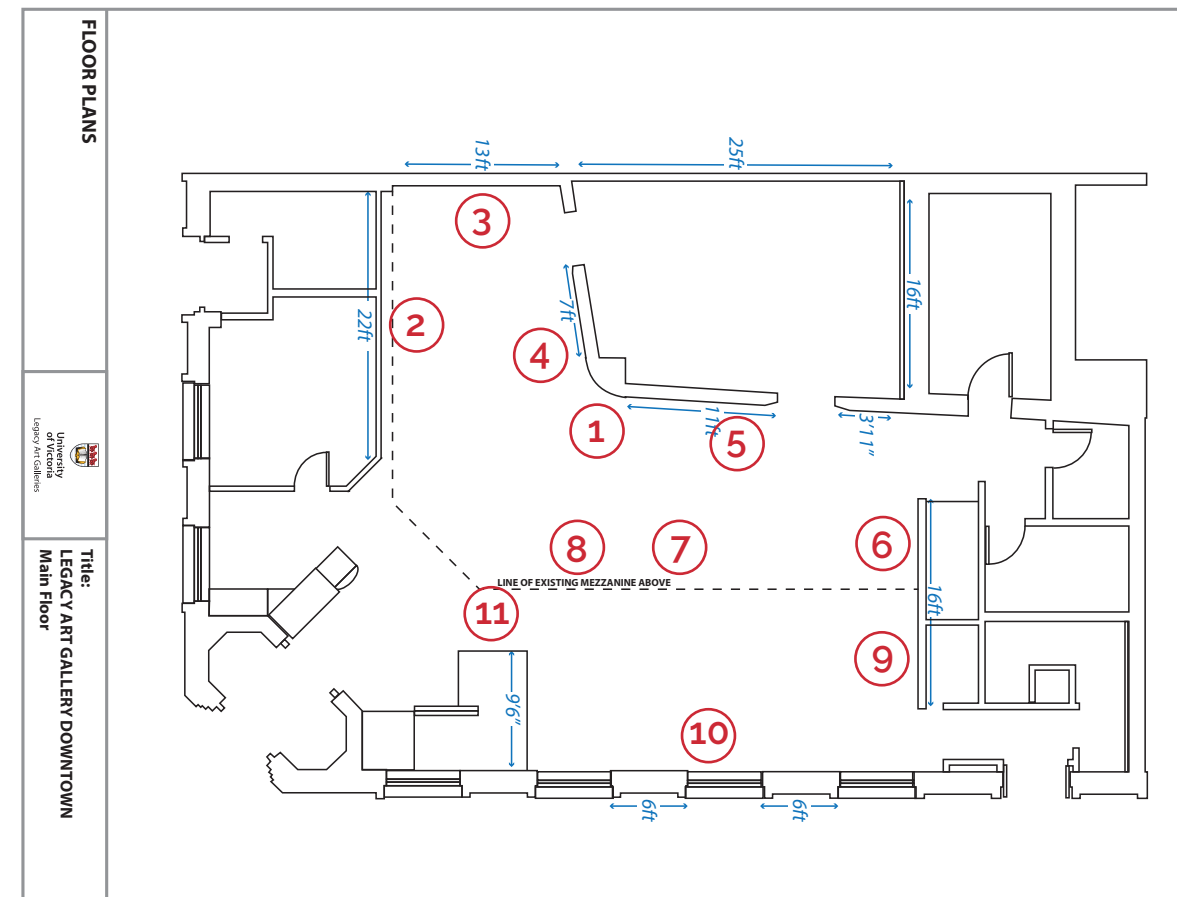
Ellen Neel, *Ellen Neel Kwakiutl Indian Notecards*
Depicting Kolus (Baby Thunderbird), c. 1948 (Left: Recto,
Right: Verso). (Photo Credits: Holly Cecil and Carolyn
Butler Palmer)



Ellen Neel: The First Woman Totem Pole Carver **Exhibit Installation**

SECTIONS

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3. Dzonaqua
4. Jewellery
5. Totems
6. Wonderbird
7. Puppets
8. Textiles
9. Totem Ware
10. Silkscreens
11. Mask of the Injustice System

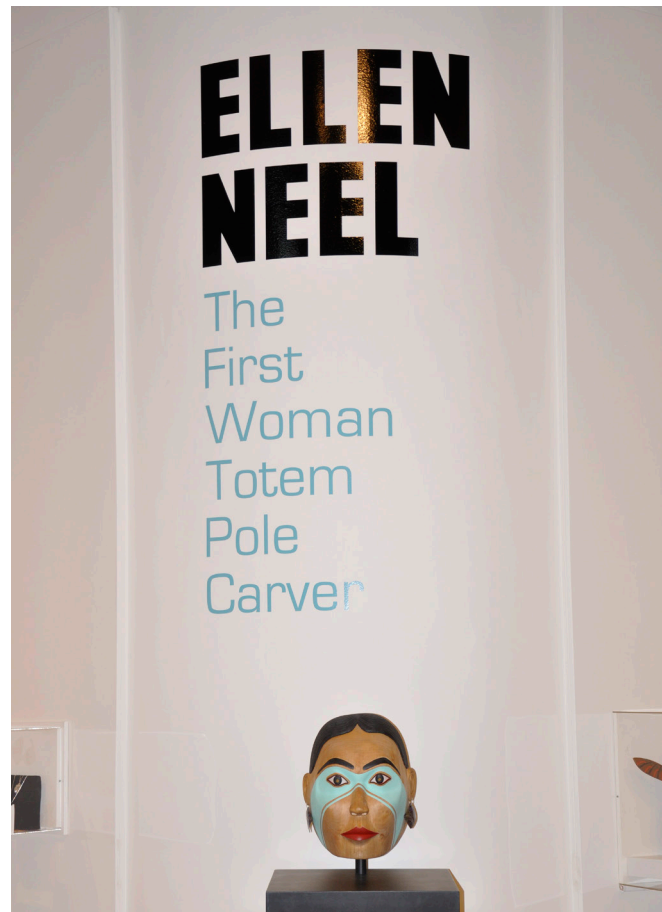


1. OPENING

Left: *Ellen Neel: The First Woman Totem Pole Carver* Exhibition Title, 2017.

(Photo credit: David Neel)

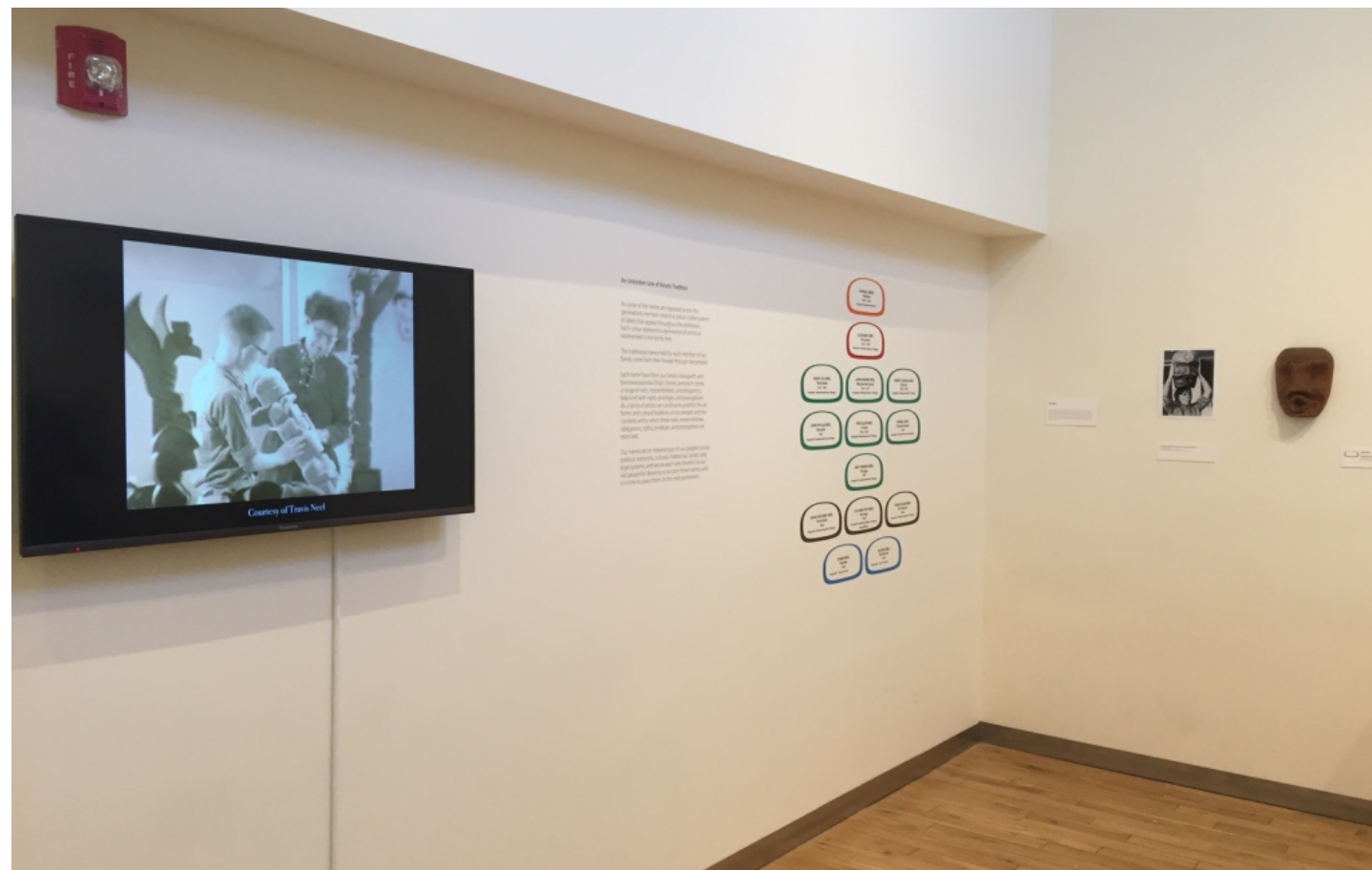
Right: David A. Neel, *Mask Mourning Ellen Neel*, 1990. Courtesy Camosun College, Department of Visual Arts. (Photo Credit: David A. Neel)



2. ELLEN NEEL

Left: Gar Lunney, *Ellen Neel, Kwaguitl, from Alert Bay at Work in her Studio*, 1958. Courtesy Library and Archives Canada MIKAN no. 3516211; Ellen Neel, *Ellen Neel Kwakiutl Indian* (Verso of Notecards), c. 1948. (Photo credit: Carolyn Butler Palmer)

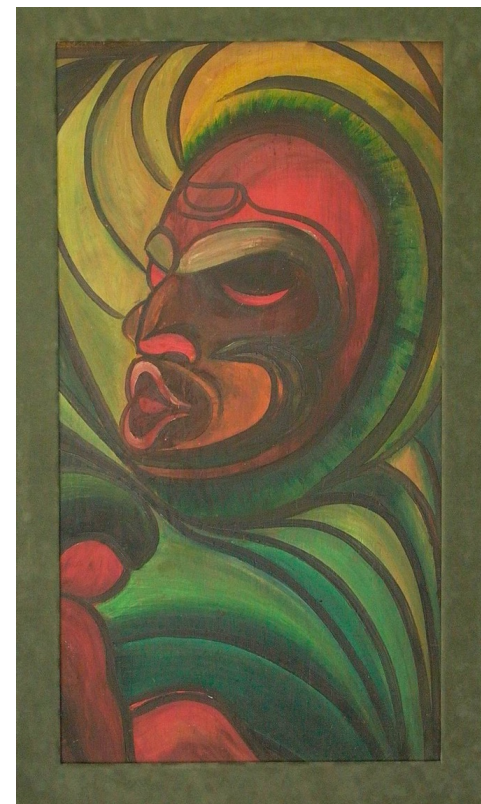
Right: Film excerpt from *The Totem Carvers*, Jack Long filmmaker, 1957. Courtesy Travis Neel; Lou-ann Ika'wega Neel, *Family Tree*, 2017. (Photo Credit: Carolyn Butler Palmer)



3. DZONAQUA

Left: *The Wild Woman of the Woods* Installation (Photo Credit: David A. Neel)

Right: (L to R): Ellen Neel, *Mask - Dzonaqua*, 1962, carved red cedar. On loan from Travis Neel; David Neel, *Sr. Dzonaqua (Northwind)*, c. 1959, acrylic on board. On loan from David A. Neel; Lou-ann Neel, *Dzonaqua*, 2015, Frosted acrylic. On loan from Lily Erford. (Photo Credits: Holy Cecil)



4. JEWELLERY

Left: Jewellery Installation. (Photo Credit: David A. Neel)

Right:

1. *Bracelet - Eagle Design and Brooch - Thunderbird Design*, sterling silver jewelry worn by Ellen Neel, c.1945. On loan from Lou-ann Neel.

2. *Ellen Neel, Earrings - Thunderbird Design and Brooch - Otter Design*, red cedar and acrylic paint, late 1940s, On loan from Pamela Creasy Neel.

3. (L to R): Lou-ann Neel, *Pendant - Salmon Trout Head*, 2002, sterling silver with onyx. On loan from the artist; Bob Neel *Pendant - Abstract Form-Line Feast Spoon*, 1978, sterling silver. On loan from Lou-ann Neel; Cora Neel Beaddows, *Pendant - Copper with Inlaid Stone*, c. 2002, sterling silver. On loan from Lou-ann Neel.

4. David A Neel, *Humming Bird and Bear Necklace and Earrings*, gold and sterling silver. On loan from the artist.

5. (Top): Bob Neel, *Pendant - Sun (Tlisala)*, c. 1970s, sterling silver. On loan from Lou-ann Neel; (Bottom): Travis Neel, *Pendant - Thunderbird Copper*, 2013, sterling silver. On loan from Lou-ann Neel.

(Photo Credits: David A. Neel)



1.



2.



3.



4.



5.

5. TOTEMS

"Totems were our daily fare. They bought our food and furnished our clothing."

- Ellen Neel



(Photo Credit: David A. Neel)



David A. Neel, *Orca and Wolf*, 2015. Acrylic on canvas. On loan from the artist; David A. Neel. *Thunderbird and Whale*, c.1959. Red cedar and stain. Restored by David A. Neel and Edwin Neel, 2016. On loan from David A. Neel. (Photo Credit: David A. Neel)



Charlie James, *Miniature Pole - Thunderbird & Sea Bear*, c.1930, Carved and painted yellow cedar. On loan from Lou-ann Neel. (Photo Credit: Holly Cecil)



Ellen Neel, *Miniature Totemland Pole (Thunderbird, earth and human figure)*, c. 1955-1960. Carved red cedar and acrylic paint. On loan from Pamela Creasy Neel. (Photo Credit: Holly Cecil)



Top Left: Ellen Neel, *Figurine with Candy Dish Souvenir*, Thunderbird Design, c.1945-1960. Carved red cedar, acrylic paint, and pressed glass dish. On loan from Lou-ann Neel.

Top Right: Ellen Neel, *Whale*, c.1940s. Carved red cedar. On loan from Travis Neel.

Bottom Left: John Neel, *Wall Plaque - Kwagiulth Salmon*, c. 1960s. Carved and stained red cedar. On loan from Lou-ann Neel.

(Photo Credits: Holly Cecil)



6. WONDERBIRD

White Spot Restaurants commissioned Ellen Neel to carve *The Wonderbird Pole* in 1953. The pole was also featured on the cover of company's menus along with "The Wonderbird Legend," authored by Ellen Neel.

The Wonderbird Legend

In the beginning, the men of the Pacific Coast were brown men and the totems were brown totems made of brown wood. With the coming of the white men came other white things also and among these white things was a white rooster. The white rooster saw the birds and beasts so wonderfully carved on totems of the Kwakiutl and the Tsimshians. It became his great desire to be the first rooster to be placed on the top of the totem poles. He asked Chief Che-Che-Kin how this could come to pass.

"You will have to do something that no other rooster has ever done before," said the Chief. "You will have to do something that neither Kolus, the Thunderbird, nor Hwahwasa the silver salmon nor Gwa-tum the great whale has ever done." Then the white rooster thought and thought in fact he thought so hard that he brooded. Now everybody knows what happens when a chicken broods. He lays an egg. When the white rooster thought so hard that he became broody, he did something that no rooster has ever done before. He laid an egg. A big white egg. The white rooster was very proud of what he had done, and he took the egg to Che-Che-Kin. I have done what no rooster ever did before, eh, Chief..."⁸

- Ellen Neel



Ellen Neel, *Wonderbird Totem*, 1953. Carved and painted red cedar. Commissioned by and on loan from the collection of White Spot, Ltd. (Photo Credit: David A. Neel)

7. PUPPETS

Puppet Installation. Gifts of Judith Lawrence to UVic Legacy Art Galleries. (Photo Credit: David A. Neel)



Ellen Neel, *Dzonaqua*, c.1950s-1960s, red melton and navy blue wool, plastic buttons, cedar and acrylic paint U016.7.3, Legacy Art Galleries.



Ellen Neel, *Tlisala (The Sun)* hand puppets, red melton and navy blue wool, plastic buttons, cedar and acrylic paint, c.1950s-1960s, U016.7.1, Legacy Art Galleries.



Ellen Neel, *Old Man, Tsekum (Cedar Man)* c.1950s-1960s, red melton and navy blue wool, plastic buttons, cedar and acrylic paint. U016.7.2, Legacy Art Galleries.



Ellen Neel, *Old Man/Elder Figure* c.1950s-1960s, red melton and navy blue wool, plastic buttons, cedar and acrylic paint. U016.7.4, Legacy Art Galleries.

(Photo Credits: Holly Cecil)

8. TEXTILES

"To me, the art is a living symbol of the gaiety, the laughter, and the love of colour of my people—a day-to-day reminder that even we had something of glory and honour, before the white man came."

- Ellen Neel

Lou-ann Neel, *Textile – Celtic Raven Sheer Drape*, 2014. Polyester chiffon, digital fabric printing. On loan from the artist. (Photo Credit: Holly Cecil)



Lou-ann Neel, *Textile – Northern Faces*, 2015. Polyester chiffon, digital fabric printing. On loan from the artist. (Photo Credit: Holly Cecil)

9. TOTEM WARE

*"Many pieces of furniture
lend themselves admirably
to Indian designs."*

- Ellen Neel

Totem Ware Installation
(Photo Credit: David A. Neel)



In the mid 1950s, Ellen Neel secured a contract with Royal Albert China to create the authentic Totem Ware pattern. The pattern featured Neel's Totemland Pole design. The Totem Ware China line was produced in black and white and then in colour and was sold as locally specific souvenirs in British Columbia, Alberta, and Alaska.

(Photo Credit: Carolyn Butler Palmer)



Top: Ellen Neel, *Totem Ware ceramics - Totems, British Columbia* – Creamer, Small Dishes, Large Plate with Handles, c.1954-1970. Black- and-white transfer, bone china; produced by Royal Albert China. On loan from a private lender.

Bottom: Ellen Neel, *Totem Ware ceramics - Totems, Alaska* – Teapot, c.1954-1970. Colour transfer, bone china; produced by Royal Albert China. On loan from a private lender.

10. SILKSCREENS

"We must be allowed new and modern techniques... new and modern tools... new and modern materials. For, in every instance, creative capacity has increased following the discovery and use of better materials."

- Ellen Neel



Silkscreen Installation (Photo Credit: David A. Neel)



Ellen Neel, *Scarf with Family Crest*, "An Original Totem-wear Design," c.1950s, Serigraph on silk. On loan from Cora Neel Beddows. (Photo Credit: Holly Cecil)



Ellen Neel, *Scarf with Illustrated Clan Legend*, "An Original Totem-wear Design," c.1950s. Serigraph on silk. On loan from David A. Neel. (Photo Credit: Holly Cecil)



Silkscreen Installation (Photo Credit: David A. Neel)



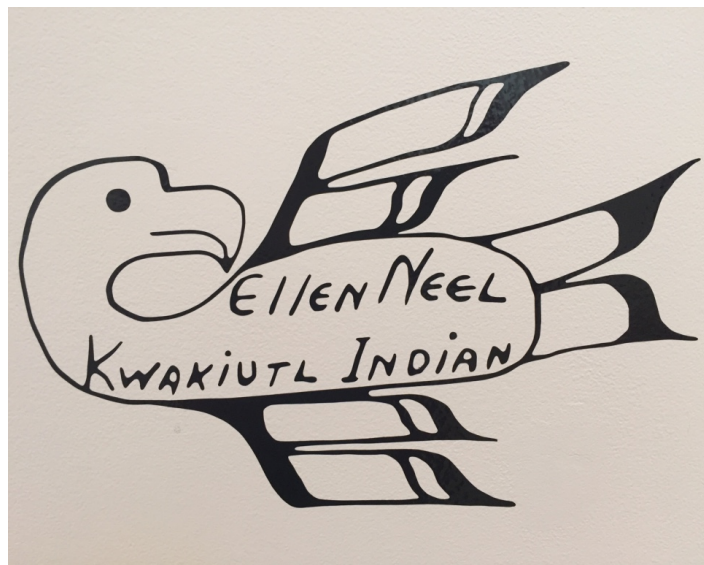
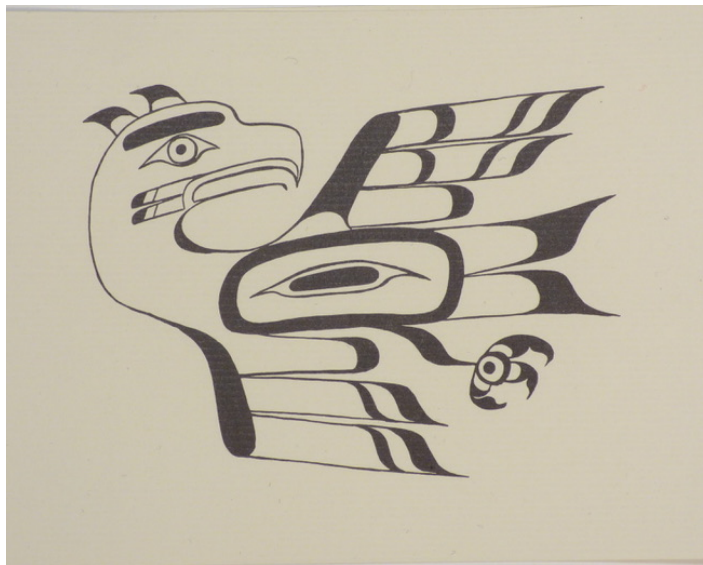
Top Left: Ellen Neel, *Coasters - Killer Whale Design*, late 1940s. Silkscreened coated burlap. On loan from Pamela Creasy Neel.

Top Right: Ellen Neel, *Placemat and Napkin Set - Thunderbird Design*, late 1940s-early 1950s. Silkscreened cotton. On loan from Pamela Creasy Neel.

Bottom Left and Right: Ellen Neel, *Bag - Thunderbird Design*, late 1940s-early 1950s. Silkscreened coated burlap, designed by Ellen Neel, Likely silkscreened by Theo Neel. On loan from Pamela Creasy Neel.

(Photo Credits: Holly Cecil)





Ellen Neel, *Notecards Depicting Kolus (Baby Thunderbird)*, c. 1948 (Left: Recto, Right: Verso).
(Photo Credits: Holly Cecil and Carolyn Butler Palmer)



Left: David A. Neel, *The Trial of Tears*, 1991. Serigraph on paper. On loan from a private lender.

Top Right: Lou-ann Neel, *Weaving of Four Realms*, 2007. Serigraph on paper. Gift from the collection of George and Christiane Smyth, UVic Legacy Art Galleries, U014.3.448

Bottom Right: Lou-ann Neel, *Four Noble Women*, 2000. Serigraph on paper. Gift from the collection of George and Christiane Smyth, UVic Legacy Art Galleries, U014.3.447

(Photo Credit: Carolyn Butler Palmer)

11. THE MASK OF THE INJUSTICE SYSTEM



Installation view. (Photo Credit: David A. Neel)



The Mask of the Injustice System (1991) is a mocking portrayal of the trial judge, Allan McEachern, who dismissed most of the claims brought forward by 35 Gitksan and 13 Wet'suwet'en hereditary chiefs in the Delgamuukw Court Action. McEachern wrongly declared that any aboriginal rights held by the Gitksan or the Wet'suwet'en were extinguished by the colonial government of B.C. He called the pre-colonization life of the Gitksan "nasty, brutish, and short" because they had "no written language, no horses or wheeled vehicles...". *The Mask of the Injustice System* is a companion piece to the David A. Neel's *The Trial of Tears* also created in 1991.

David A. Neel, *Mask of the Injustice System*, 1991. Carved and painted red cedar, cedar bark and currency. On loan from Rick Erickson.

(Photo Credit: Holly Cecil)

Complete List of Exhibited Works

Charlie James

Miniature Pole - Thunderbird & Sea Bear, c.1930.
Carved and painted yellow cedar. On loan from Lou-ann Neel.

Ellen Neel

Bags - Two Handle & Drawstring Styles - Thunderbird Design, late 1940s-early 1950s, Silkscreened coated burlap, designed by Ellen Neel, Likely silkscreened by Theo Neel. On loan from Pamela Creasy Neel.

Coasters - Killer Whale Design, late 1940s.
Silkscreened coated burlap. On loan from Pamela Creasy Neel.

Placemat and Napkin Set - Thunderbird Design, late 1940s-early 1950s. Silkscreened cotton. On loan from Pamela Creasy Neel.

Earrings - Thunderbird Design and Brooch - Otter Design, late 1940s. Red cedar and acrylic paint. On loan from Pamela Creasy Neel.

Figurine with Candy Dish Souvenir, Thunderbird Design, c.1945-1960. Carved red cedar, acrylic paint, and pressed glass dish. On loan from Lou-ann Neel.

Otter Figurine, c.1955. Red cedar and dark stain. On loan from Travis Neel.

Hand Puppet - Bear, c.1964. Brown terry cloth, cedar and acrylic paint. On loan from David A. Neel.

Hand Puppets - Tlisala (The Sun), Dzonoqua, Old Man, Tsekum (Cedar Man), c.1950s-1960s, red Melton and navy blue wool, plastic buttons, cedar and acrylic paint. Gift of Judith Lawrence to UVic Legacy Art Galleries, U016.7.3, U016.7.1, U016.7.4, U016.7.2.

Letter Opener - Woman from the Bear Clan Holding Sculpin, c.1950s. Carved red cedar with acrylic paint. On loan from Pamela Creasy Neel.

Mask - Dzonoqua, 1962. Carved red cedar. On loan from Travis Neel.

Miniature Pole - Thunderbird, c.1945-1960.
Carved red cedar. On loan from Travis Neel.

Miniature Pole - Thunderbird and Dzonoqua, c.1945-1960. Carved red cedar. On loan from Lou-ann Neel.

Miniature Pole - Thunderbird and Dzonoqua, c.1945-1960. Carved red cedar and acrylic paint. On loan from Pamela Creasy Neel.

Miniature Pole - Thunderbird and Man, c.1945-1960. Black resin cast. On loan from Lou-ann Neel.

Miniature Totemland Pole (Thunderbird, earth and human figure), c. 1955-1960. Carved red cedar and acrylic paint. On loan from Pamela Creasy Neel.

Totemland Pole (Thunderbird, earth and human figure), c. 1955-1960. Carved red cedar and acrylic paint. On loan from David A. Neel.

Notecards depicting Kolus (Baby Thunderbird), Hok Hok, Raven, Squatting Thunderbird, c.1948. Silkscreened paper. Private lender.

Pendant & Brooch - Thunderbird and Whale, 1966.
Red cedar and dark stain. On loan from Lou-ann Neel.

Scarf with Crest Design, c.1950s, Serigraph on silk. Courtesy of the Royal BC Museum, unlisted.

Scarf with Family Crest, "An Original Totem-wear Design," c.1950s, Serigraph on silk. On loan from Cora Neel Beddows.

Scarf with Illustrated Clan Legend, "An Original Totem-wear Design," c.1950s. Serigraph on silk. On loan from David A. Neel.

Scarf with Split Raven Design, c. 1950s. Serigraph on silk. Canada Council Acquisition Grant, Acquired from the collection of Vincent Rickard. UVic Legacy Art Galleries, U990.14.1497.

Serigraph printing screen & wooden frame for Eagle Design, c. 1950s. Courtesy of the Royal BC Museum, 17258.

Totem Ware ceramics - Totems, Alaska - Teapot, c.1954-1970. Colour transfer, bone china; produced by Royal Albert China. On loan from a private lender.

Totem Ware ceramics - Totems, Alberta - Cream and Sugar, Cup, c.1954-1970. Colour transfer, bone china; produced by Royal Albert China. On loan from a private lender.

Totem Ware ceramics - Totems, British Columbia - Plate, Cup & Saucer, c.1954-1970. Black-and-white transfer, bone china; produced by Royal Albert China. On loan from Cora Neel Beddows.

Totem Ware ceramics - Totems, British Columbia - Creamer, Small Dishes, Large Plate with Handles, c.1954-1970. Black- and-white transfer, bone china; produced by Royal Albert China. On loan from a private lender.

Totem Ware ceramics - Square Dish with Handles, c.1954- 1970. Colour transfer, bone china; produced by Royal Albert China. Gift of Gary White and John Veillette, UVic Legacy Art Galleries, U005.25.5.

Whale, c.1940s, Carved red cedar. On loan from Travis Neel.

Wonderbird Totem, 1953. Carved and painted red cedar. Commissioned by and on loan from the collection of White Spot Ltd.

Ellen Neel's Children

David Neel, Sr.

Dzonaqua (Northwind), c. 1959. Acrylic on board. On loan from David A. Neel.

Thunderbird and Whale, c.1959. Red cedar and stain. Restored by David A. Neel and Edwin Neel, 2016. On loan from David A. Neel.

John Neel

Wall Plaque - Kwagiulth Salmon, c. 1960s. Carved and stained red cedar. On loan from Lou-ann Neel.

Cora Neel Beddows

Pendant - Copper with Inlaid Stone, c. 2002. Sterling silver. On loan from Lou-ann Neel.

Robert (Bob) Neel

Bracelet - Killerwhale, 1978. Sterling silver (1.75" wide) On loan from Lou-ann Neel.

Bracelet - Killer Whale, 1981. Sterling silver (1.5" wide). On loan from Lou-ann Neel.

Pendant - Abstract Form-Line Feast Spoon, 1978. Sterling silver. On loan from Lou-ann Neel.

Pendant - Sun (Tlisala), c. 1970s. Sterling silver. On loan from Lou-ann Neel.

Pendant - Thunderbird, 1977. Sterling silver and 14k gold. On loan from Lou-ann Neel.

Miniature Feast Spoon, c.1970s. Carved red cedar. On loan from Lou-ann Neel.

Theo Neel

Blouse with Design Based on an Ellen Neel Original, n.d. Private lender.

Theresa Neel

Reprint of Ellen Neel's Eagle Design, 1970. Serigraph on paper. Courtesy of the Royal BC Museum, 14392 A,B

Reprint of Ellen Neel's Split Raven Design, 1972. Serigraph on paper. Courtesy of the Royal BC Museum, 14393 A, B

Ellen Neel's Grandchildren

David A. Neel

Humming Bird and Bear Necklace and Earrings, gold and sterling silver, 2017. On loan from the artist.

Orca and Wolf, 2015. Acrylic on canvas. On loan from the artist.

Mask mourning Ellen Neel, 1990. Carved alder with acrylic paint, abalone shell earrings. On loan from Camosun College, Department of Visual Arts.

Mask of the Injustice System, 1991. Carved and painted red cedar, cedar bark and currency. On loan from Rick Erickson

The Trial of Tears, 1991. Serigraph on paper. On loan from a private lender.

Lou-ann Neel

Dzonaqua, 2015. Frosted acrylic. On loan from Lily Erford.

Pendant - Salmon Trout Head, 2002. Sterling silver with onyx. On loan from the artist.

Pendant and Earrings - Wolf, 2016. Sterling silver. On loan from the artist.

Four Noble Women, 2000. Serigraph on paper. Gift from the collection of George and Christiane Smyth, UVic Legacy Art Galleries, U014.3.447

Weaving of Four Realms, 2007. Serigraph on paper. Gift from the collection of George and Christiane Smyth, UVic Legacy Art Galleries, U014.3.448

Textile – Celtic Raven Sheer Drape, 2014.
Polyester chiffon, digital fabric printing.
On loan from the artist.

Textile – Northern Faces, 2015. Polyester chiffon, digital fabric printing. On loan from the artist.

Travis Neel

Pendant - Thunderbird Copper, 2013. Sterling silver. On loan from Lou-ann Neel.

Ellen Neel's Great Grandchildren

Edwin Neel

Ghost Mask, 2013, carved red cedar. On loan from the artist

Ellena Neel

Kawaii, 2015. Acrylic on canvas. On loan from the artist.

Remember the Children, 2015. Mixed media on melton wool. On loan from the artist.

Canadian Mint Collector Coins, Vernon Brown for *The Indian Heritage Series Coin Set Portrait Coins of Kakasolas—Ellen Neel*, Mary Capilano, and Chief Sahelton, 1979. Verso: Nimpkish Dollar. On loan from Pam Creasy Neel.

Unknown Artists

Bracelet - Eagle Design and Brooch - Thunderbird Design. Sterling silver jewelry worn by Ellen Neel, c.1945. On loan from Lou-ann Neel.

Photographs and Moving Images

Gar Lunney, *Ellen Neel, Kwaguitl, from Alert Bay at Work in her Studio*, 1958. Courtesy Library and Archives Canada MIKAN no. 3516211

Crowd Watching Kwagiulth Carver Ellen Neel Working on a Totem Pole, 1953. Courtesy of City of Vancouver Archives, AM281-S8-: CVA 180-2315

Ellen Neel, Mungo Martin, and Group After Potlach, December 14, 1953. Courtesy of the Neel family.

William Cunningham, photographer for *The Province*, *Ellen Neel Presenting 'Totemland' Pole to Ballerina Maria Tallchief* c.1956. Vancouver Public Library Archives, VPL 62667. Reproduced with permission of the Vancouver Public Library.

Kwagiulth Carver Ellen Neel Carving a Totem Pole, 1953. Courtesy of City of Vancouver Archives, AM281-S8-:CVA180-2361 and 62.

Neel Family Working to Complete Poles for Westmount Mall, Edmonton, 1955, Courtesy of Vancouver Public Library, 62667.

Frank Swannell, *Portrait of Theresa Neel with Dzonaqua Mask*, n.d. Courtesy of the Royal BC Museum and Archives, I-68947. Westmount Mall, Ellen Neel Poles, Edmonton, c. 1955. Courtesy of Provincial Archives of Alberta, BL2396.

Andie Palmer, *Westmount Mall, Ellen Neel Pole in Blanket*, 2015. Courtesy of Andie Palmer.

Jack Long, Film excerpt from *The Totem Carvers*, 1957. On loan from Travis Neel.

Celebration of Ellen Neel



(Photo Credit: Carolyn Butler Palmer)

NOTES

¹ Phil Nuytten, *The Totem Carvers: Charlie James, Ellen Neel, and Mungo Martin* (Vancouver, BC: Panorama Press, 1982), 43.

² Audre Francis, "Ancient Art of Totem Carving Gets Assurance In Expert's Family," *The Daily Province*, July 5, 1951. 20.

³ Ellen Neel, "UBC Keynote Address," 1948. First published by H.B. Hawthorn, ed., *Report of the Conference on Native Affairs* (Victoria: BCIAWS, 1949), 16.

⁴ Ellen May Neal (sic.), "Women's Pow Wow Corner," *The Native Voice*, July 1947, 2.

⁵ Ellen Neel, "UBC Keynote Address," 1948.

⁶ TSAITSUN, "Potlatch in Victoria's Thunderbird Park," *The Native Voice*, January 1954, 5.

⁷ Ellen Neel, "UBC Keynote Address," 1948.

⁸ Ellen Neel, "The Wonderbird Legend," reprinted in Kerry Gold, *The White Spot Cookbook*, (Vancouver: Figure 1 Publishing, 2013), 25.

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Ellen Neel: **The First Woman Totem Pole Carver**

January 17-April 1, 2017
Legacy Art Gallery,
University of Victoria
Victoria, BC

Exhibition Catalogue

Ellen Neel:

The First Woman Totem Pole Carver

Edited by Carolyn Butler Palmer

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There are many individuals who have helped transform the idea of an exhibition about Ellen Neel into a reality.

The Williams Legacy Chair would like to thank the members of the Neel and Newman families for allowing works from their personal collections to be shown in this exhibit and publication; for their generosity, encouragement, knowledge, sense of humour, and for being a family of artists. I extend my thanks to Ellen Neel's daughters Cora, Pamela, and Theresa, grandchildren David, Lou-ann, and Travis, her great grandchildren Ellena and Edwin; and to Elders Lily Erford, Vera Newman and Chief Edwin Newman for their guidance, help, and support.

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- Dr. Carolyn Butler Palmer, Curator, Williams Legacy Chair, Associate Professor
- Lou-ann Ika'wega Neel and David Tla'tla'klalis Neel, Advising Curators

Curator's Foreword

The exhibition *Ellen Neel: The First Woman Totem Pole Carver* is a collaborative undertaking that celebrates the life of Kwakwaka'wakw artist Ka'kasolas, Ellen May (Newman) Neel and the living legacies of her work across three subsequent generations of artists in her family. The words of Ellen Neel's 1948 UBC Address guide the organization of this exhibition around major themes that she called attention to such as totem arts, new materials, household furnishings, and jewellery.

With the inclusion of multiple generations of artists, the exhibition forwards the idea that the work of Ellen Neel flows down from her to her descendants: it is an unbroken line of artistic tradition. The curatorial strategy was to enmesh the work of Ka'kasolas with that of her descendants.

The spirit of collaboration is evident by the fact that many family members lent works of art from their private collections for this exhibition. Family members Lou-ann Ika'wega Neel and David Tla'tla'klalis Neel (David A. Neel) also guided my curatorial process. David A. Neel also contributed many fine photographs to this catalogue.

- Carolyn Butler Palmer Ph.D.,
Associate Professor of Art History and Visual Studies
and Legacy Chair, The University of Victoria

The Living Legacies of Ellen Neel:

The Neel Family, 2017

(Relationship to Ellen Neel noted first in round brackets)

Back Row: Jamie McCoy (great-granddaughter, granddaughter of Cora Neel Beddows, and daughter of James McCoy), David Neel (grandson and son of David Neel, Sr.), Edwin Neel (great-grandson and son of David Neel), Ivan Beddows (husband of Cora Beddows), Mickey Cook (nephew and son of Margaret Newman), and Victor Newman (nephew and son of Carey Newman).

Middle Row: Lou-ann Neel (granddaughter and daughter of John, aka Ted, Neel), Meghan McClellan (great-granddaughter and daughter of Debra Beddows), Amber McClellan (great-granddaughter and daughter of Debra Beddows), Pamela Creasy Neel (daughter), Travis Neel (grandson and son of Theresa Neel), Debra Beddows (granddaughter and daughter of Cora Neel Beddows), Ellena Neel (great-granddaughter and daughter of David Neel).

Front Row: Cora Neel Beddows (daughter).

Absent: Charles James Neel (great-grandson and son of David Neel) and Theresa Neel (daughter), Wendy Ireland (granddaughter and daughter of Pamela Neel Creasy), Lotus Rose (great-granddaughter and daughter of Wendy Ireland).

- Cora Beddows



Neel Family Portrait, 2017. (Photo Credit: David A. Neel)

Gilakas'daxw 'la!

We welcome each of you to this very special exhibition. We wish to acknowledge and thank the Songhees, Esquimalt and W̱SÁNEĆ First Nations for always making us feel welcome in their ancestral lands; and we extend our sincerest thanks to Carolyn Butler Palmer, Caroline Riedel, and all the staff at the Legacy Art Galleries for all their work and their expertise in making this exhibit possible.

In addition to her business and professional roles, Ka'kasolas, Ellen May (Newman) Neel was a mother, grandmother, aunt, and eldest of Charlie Newman (Nulis) and Lucy James' (La'laxsa) three daughters - Ellen, Margaret (Peggy) and Louisa.

While the 'Potlatch Ban' was not removed from the Indian Act until 1951, Ellen, with her uncles Chief William Scow and Mungo Martin, and other Kwakwaka'wakw people living in

the Lower Mainland continued to conduct ceremonies that served as an act of ongoing governance that continues through their descendants to this day.

Ellen mentored and taught about our art and our culture to countless school children, emerging artists, and the general public in Vancouver and the Lower Mainland. She was a true visionary, well ahead of her time in the way she saw the future of Kwakwaka'wakw art; and she was always ready to take on a challenge – especially when it meant that more people could understand and appreciate the ancient art forms of the Kwakwaka'wakw and other First Nations across Canada.

As exhibitions such as this begin to acknowledge the important work she carried out in her lifetime, we hope that

her work and her vision will continue to inspire aspiring and practicing artists to enthusiastically pursue their creative and artistic dreams, as this is what keeps our cultures alive generation after generation.

- Lou-ann Ika'wega Neel and David Tla'tla'klalis Neel, Advising Curators

"She was a true visionary, well ahead of her time in the way she saw the future of Kwakwaka'wakw art."

Introduction

This exhibition commemorates the 100th anniversary of the birth of artist and carver Ka'kasolas, Ellen May (Newman) Neel (Kwagiulth, Kwickwasutaineuk, and 'Namgis) and the 50th anniversary of her death. Born in Alert Bay (1916), she learned to carve from her grandfather, the eminent master carver Yakuglas/Charlie James (c.1867-1938) during the 1920s,¹ at a time when the First Nations art of carving was criminalized under Canadian federal law. By the mid- 1940s, Neel was raising her children in Vancouver, and within a decade she had established her own carving business and retail outlet, "The Totem Arts Shop," in Stanley Park where she taught her children to make art. Neel launched her carving career during the prohibition of the potlatch—a period when carving was rare and the idea of a woman carver was new.² Neel's revolutionary work has prompted many to call her "The First Northwest Coast Woman Carver."

Adamant that First Nations art not be relegated to the past, Neel embraced new materials and forms as a means of expressing the living nature of her artwork.³ Over the course of her career, Ellen Neel carved small-scale and monumental poles, masks, and regalia.

She also designed and created items such as table runners, coasters, trays, skirts, and designs for Royal Albert China and extended her repertoire to include wearable art such as bags, blouses, and skirts. Neel's monumental poles were raised in France, Korea, Denmark, the United States, and in the Canadian cities of Stratford, Edmonton, and Vancouver.⁴

In addition to art making, Ellen Neel held public office and was a regular contributor to *The Native Voice* news magazine. Her extensive body of work was featured in many local, national, and international newspapers

and magazines. She is especially well-known for her keynote address delivered during the first B.C. Arts and Welfare Society conference at the University of British Columbia in April 1948.⁵

Neel was no stranger to Victoria and Vancouver Island. Most notably, she participated in Mungo Martin's 1953 potlatch, the first public potlatch since Dan Cranmer's in 1921, which resulted in a number of people being prosecuted and sent to jail. Within this context, Martin reaffirmed Neel's potlatchname Ka'kasolas and placed the names Tla'tla'klalis, Max'mawisem'game, Xi'xanus, Kwa'xala, La'laxsa, and Ne'gega upon her children David, John, Robert, Cora, Theo, and Theresa.⁶

Although Ellen Neel was a prolific artist, she died in 1966 at only 49 years old. This exhibition seeks to honour her life and work and the artistic legacies that live on in the work of her children, grandchildren, and great-

grandchildren as represented by the different sections of this exhibition that include: Family Crests, Dzonaqua, Jewelry, the Wonderbird, *Totem Ware/Totemland*, Textiles, Silkscreen Prints, and Politics.

This exhibition celebrates a family of artists over six generations, including Ellen Neel and her grandfather Charlie James; Ellen Neel's children: David Neel Sr., John Neel, Robert Neel, Cora Neel, Theo Neel, and Theresa Neel; Neel's grandchildren: Tla'tla'klalis/David, Travis Neel; and two of her great-grandchildren Kasolas/Edwin Neel and Ka'kasolas/Ellena Neel.

- Carolyn Butler Palmer, Associate Professor of Art History and Visual Studies and Legacy Chair, University of Victoria

An Unbroken Line of Tradition

About the Family Tree

As some of the names are repeated across the generations, we have created a colour-coded system of labels that appear throughout the exhibition. Each colour represents a generation of artists as represented in the family tree.

The traditional names held by each member of our family come from their lineage through the peoples.

Each name flows from our family's Kwagiulth and Kwickwasutaineuk Origin Stories, and each carries a range of roles, responsibilities, and obligations, balanced with rights, privileges, and prerogatives. As a family

of artists, we continue to practice the art forms and cultural traditions of our people, and the contexts within which these roles, responsibilities, obligations, rights, privileges, and prerogatives are exercised.

Our names are an inherent part of our peoples' social, political, economic, cultural, intellectual, artistic and legal systems, and we are each very thankful to our old people for allowing us to carry these names until it is time to place them on the next generation.

- Lou-ann Ika'wega Neel



Lou-ann Ika'wega Neel, *Family Tree*, 2017.
(Photo Credit: Carolyn Butler Palmer)



Gar Lunney, *Ellen Neel, Kwaguitl, from Alert Bay at Work* in her Studio, 1958. Courtesy Library and Archives Canada MIKAN no. 3516211

Indian Art

In the Words of Ellen Neel

During the time that I've been selling some of my work and in the course of meeting some of the people who deal in Indian artwork, I have come across some very odd ideas concerning it. When I was asked to speak at this conference, I saw a golden opportunity to present my side of the picture.

The point of mine, which I shall endeavour to illustrate, deals with the idea that efforts should be confined to the preservation of old work. This idea is a great fallacy where the art of my people is concerned! If our art

is dead, then it is fit only to be mummified... packed into mortuary boxes and tucked away in museums!

To me, the art is a living symbol of the gaiety, the laughter, and the love of colour of my people—a day-to-day reminder that even we had something of glory and honour, before the white man came. Our art continues to live, for not only is it part and parcel of us, it can be a powerful factor in combining the best part of Indian culture into the fabric of a truly Canadian art form.

When the white man came, he brought with him saws, axes, hatchets, steel chisels and knives—paints in brilliant white red, green and yellow. There was no involved question of propriety as to whether the new tools should be used... rather they were seized on, avidly, and with startling results!

The golden age of totem art has arrived—totems sprouted at every village where formerly there had been few—Chiefs vied with one another in the giving of potlatches, making work for artists who flourished and plied their trade. New forms evolved... in short, the art was a living art. New techniques were adopted, new materials incorporated, new ideas were welcomed and used. I can find no instance where an idea, a material, or a tool was not used simply because it had not been used before.

Unfortunately, then began a period in which this growing and living manifestation of my people's artistry was partially destroyed. Because of economic factors too numerous to mention at this time, an attempt was made to suppress the potlatch. The suppression of the potlatch emasculated the creative ability of the whole nation. The production of art was so closely coupled with giving of the potlatch that, without it, the art withered and almost died.

Were it not for the interest created by the tourist trade, the universities and the museums, we would no longer have any of our people capable of producing this art.

We are gathered here at this conference to attempt to bring about, among other things, a resurgence of the creativity of the Native people. I strongly emphasize a point and, here, make it also my plea;

If the art of my people is to take its rightful place beside other Canadian Art, it must be a living medium of expression!

We, the Indian artist, must be allowed to create. We must be allowed new and modern techniques... new and modern tools... new and modern materials. For, in every instance, creative capacity has increased following the discovery and use of better materials.

I don't mean that we should disregard the old, only that we should be allowed the new.

I'd like to take the time to briefly examine some of the problems that I've encountered in attempting to produce my work. In my family, carving was a means of livelihood. My grandfather was Charlie James—the famous 'Yakuglas.' He carved for over forty years. To his stepson Mungo Martin, he taught the rudiments of his art... and we, his grandchildren were literally brought up amongst his work. Totems were our daily fare. They bought our food and furnished our clothing. There was no problem of sale, since his work was eagerly sought after.

Now the situation is different. Curio dealers have so cheapened the art in their effort to profit, that I doubt if one could find a single household where the authenticity of the art is important to them. I have strived in all my work, to retain the authentic, but I find

it difficult to obtain a portion of the price necessary to do a really fine piece of work.

This being so, it's difficult to blame my contemporaries for trying to get enough from their work to live on... though I believe they are wrong in cheapening their heritage. Certainly, great work could be produced by the Native people if a true appreciation of their art could be instilled into the general public. Only when there is an adequate response to efforts to retain the best of our art will it be possible to train the younger generation to appreciate their own cultural achievements. As far as applying this art to everyday living...I believe it can be used to stunning effect on tapestry, textile, sports wear and in jewelry. Many pieces of furniture lend themselves admirably to Indian designs. Public buildings, large restaurants and halls have already begun to utilize some of this art. We need only to have some sort of organization to which architects, builders and manufacturers could go to guarantee

authentic products. Both my husband and myself stand ready to contribute... we have plans, and we are willing to share.

I strongly believe that the Indian people, as a whole, would gladly share... if only the dignity and honour of their personal crests could be preserved. And so we look confidently to the future... to bring a fuller, a better, a more dignified existence to the Native people of Canada. I personally look forward to being a part of the movement which brings these things to pass.

- Ellen Neel, Keynote Address for the first B.C. Arts and Welfare Society Conference, University of British Columbia — April 1948⁷



Ellen Neel, *Ellen Neel Kwakiutl Indian Notecards*
Depicting Kolus (Baby Thunderbird), c. 1948.
(Left: Recto, Right: Verso).
(Photo Credits: Holly Cecil and Carolyn Butler Palmer)



Ellen Neel:

The First Woman Totem Pole Carver

Exhibit Installation

SECTIONS

1. Opening

2. Ellen Neel

3. Dzonaqua

4. Jewellery

5. Totems

6. Wonderbird

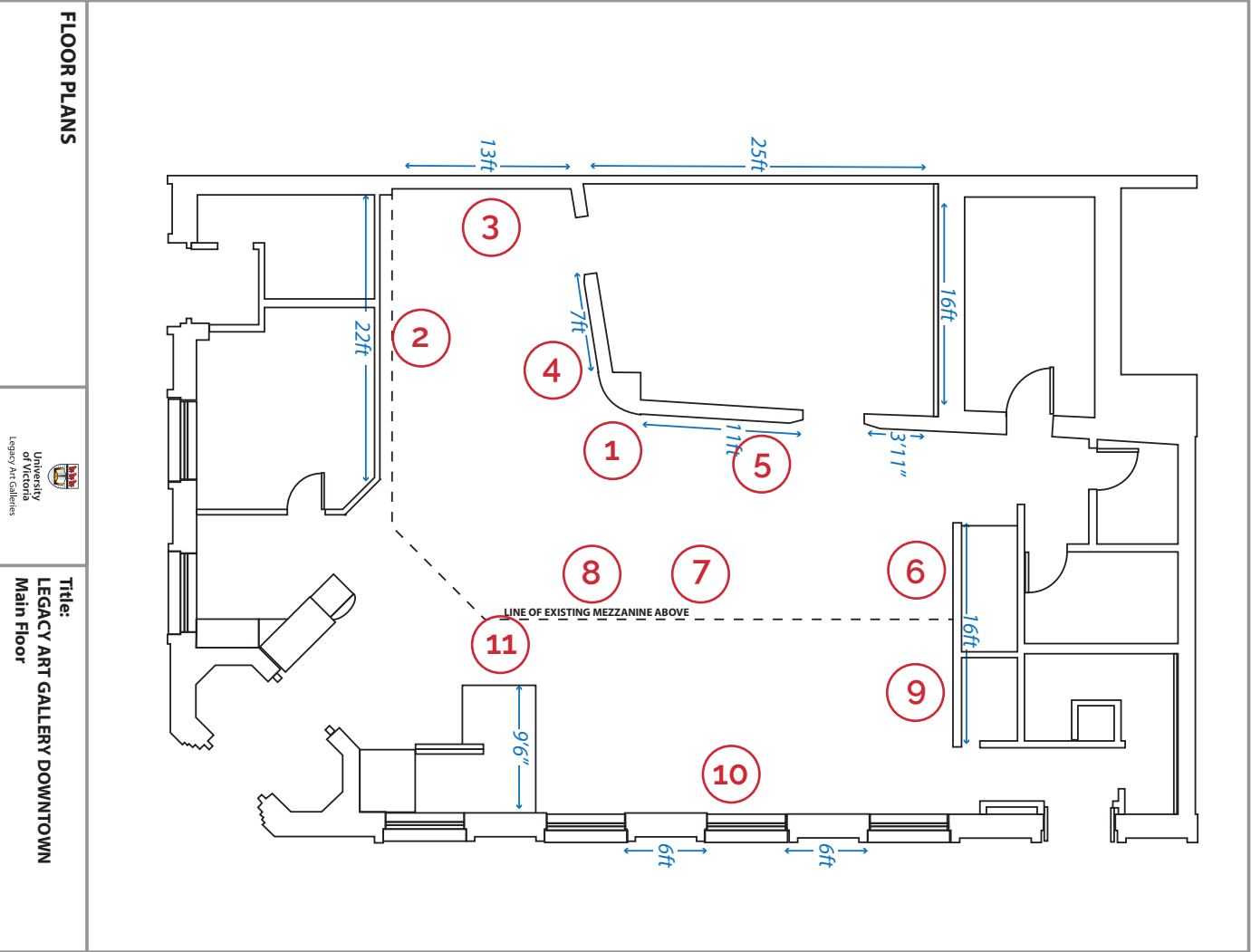
7. Puppets

8. Textiles

9. Totem Ware

10. Silkscreens

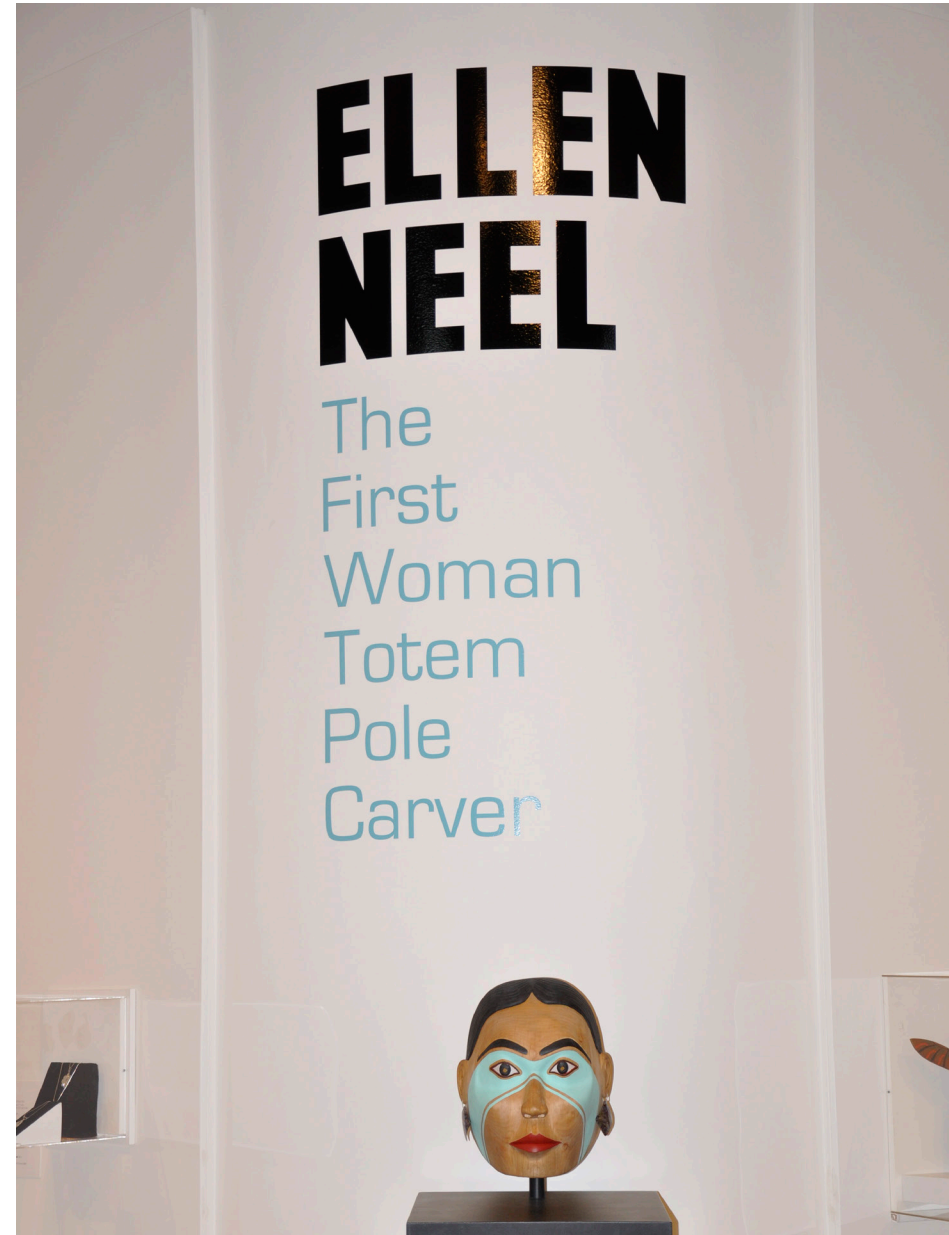
11. Mask of the Injustice System



1. OPENING

Left: *Ellen Neel: The First Woman Totem Pole Carver* Exhibition Title, 2017.
(Photo credit: David Neel)

Right: David A. Neel, *Mask Mourning Ellen Neel*, 1990. Courtesy Camosun College,
Department of Visual Arts.
(Photo Credit: David A. Neel)



2. ELLEN NEEL

Left: Gar Lunney, *Ellen Neel, Kwaguitl, from Alert Bay at Work in her Studio*, 1958. Courtesy Library and Archives Canada MIKAN no. 3516211; Ellen Neel, *Ellen Neel Kwakiutl Indian* (Verso of Notecards), c. 1948. (Photo credit: Carolyn Butler Palmer)

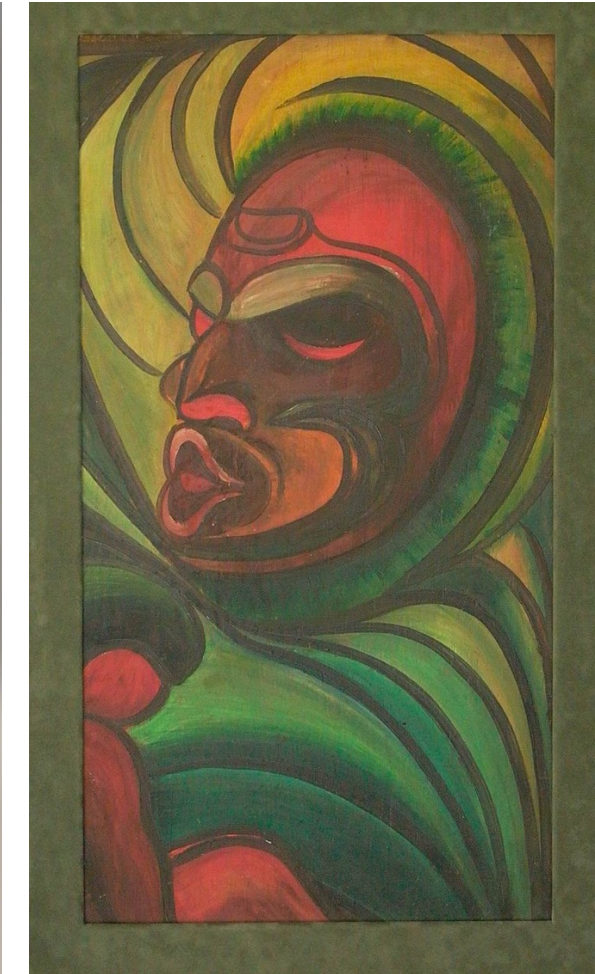
Right: Film excerpt from *The Totem Carvers*, Jack Long film-maker, 1957. Courtesy Travis Neel; Lou-ann Ika'wega Neel, *Family Tree*, 2017. (Photo Credit: Carolyn Butler Palmer)



3. DZONAQUA

Left: *The Wild Woman of the Woods* Installation.
(Photo Credit: David A. Neel)

Right: (L to R): Ellen Neel, *Mask - Dzonaqua*, 1962, carved red cedar. On loan from Travis Neel; David Neel, *Sr. Dzonaqua (Northwind)*, c. 1959, acrylic on board. On loan from David A. Neel; Lou-ann Neel, *Dzonaqua*, 2015, Frosted acrylic. On loan from Lily Erford.
(Photo Credits: Holy Cecil)



4. JEWELLERY

Left: Jewellery Installation. (Photo Credit: David A. Neel)

Right:

1. *Bracelet - Eagle Design and Brooch - Thunderbird Design*, sterling silver jewelry worn by Ellen Neel, c.1945.
On loan from Lou-ann Neel.

2. *Ellen Neel, Earrings - Thunderbird Design and Brooch - Otter Design*, red cedar and acrylic paint, late 1940s.
On loan from Pamela Creasy Neel.

3. (L to R): Lou-ann Neel, *Pendant - Salmon Trout Head*, 2002, sterling silver with onyx. On loan from the artist; Bob Neel *Pendant - Abstract Form-Line Feast Spoon*, 1978, sterling silver. On loan from Lou-ann Neel; Cora Neel Beddows, *Pendant - Copper with Inlaid Stone*, c. 2002, sterling silver. On loan from Lou-ann Neel.

4. David A Neel, *Humming Bird and Bear Necklace and Earrings*, gold and sterling silver. On loan from the artist.

5. (Top): Bob Neel, *Pendant - Sun (Tlisala)*, c. 1970s, sterling silver. On loan from Lou-ann Neel; (Bottom): Travis Neel, *Pendant - Thunderbird Copper*, 2013, sterling silver. On loan from Lou-ann Neel.

(Photo Credits: David A. Neel)



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5. TOTEMS

"Totems were our daily fare. They bought our food and furnished our clothing."

- Ellen Neel



(Photo Credit: David A. Neel)



David A. Neel, *Orca and Wolf*, 2015. Acrylic on canvas. On loan from the artist; David A. Neel. *Thunderbird and Whale*, c.1959. Red cedar and stain. Restored by David A. Neel and Edwin Neel, 2016. On loan from David A. Neel. (Photo Credit: David A. Neel)



Charlie James, *Miniature Pole - Thunderbird & Sea Bear*, c.1930, Carved and painted yellow cedar. On loan from Lou-ann Neel. (Photo Credit: Holly Cecil)



Ellen Neel, *Miniature Totemland Pole (Thunderbird, earth and human figure)*, c. 1955-1960. Carved red cedar and acrylic paint. On loan from Pamela Creasy Neel. (Photo Credit: Holly Cecil)



Top Left: Ellen Neel, *Figurine with Candy Dish Souvenir*, Thunderbird Design, c.1945-1960. Carved red cedar, acrylic paint, and pressed glass dish. On loan from Lou-ann Neel.

Top Right: Ellen Neel, *Whale*, c.1940s. Carved red cedar. On loan from Travis Neel.

Bottom Left: John Neel, *Wall Plaque - Kwagiulth Salmon*, c. 1960s. Carved and stained red cedar. On loan from Lou-ann Neel.

(Photo Credits: Holly Cecil)

6. WONDERBIRD

White Spot Restaurants commissioned Ellen Neel to carve *The Wonderbird Pole* in 1953. The pole was also featured on the cover of company's menus along with "The Wonderbird Legend," authored by Ellen Neel.

The Wonderbird Legend

In the beginning, the men of the Pacific Coast were brown men and the totems were brown totems made of brown wood. With the coming of the white men came other white things also and among these white things was a white rooster. The white rooster saw the birds and beasts so wonderfully carved on totems of the Kwakiutl and the Tsimshians. It became his great desire to be the first rooster to be placed on the top of the totem poles. He asked Chief Che-Che-Kin how this could come to pass.

"You will have to do something that no other rooster has ever done before," said the Chief. "You will have to do something that neither Kolus, the Thunderbird, nor Hwahwasa the silver salmon nor Gwa-tum the great whale has ever done." Then the white rooster thought and thought in fact he thought so hard that he brooded. Now everybody knows what happens when a chicken broods. He lays an egg. When the white rooster thought so hard that he became broody, he did something that no rooster has ever done before. He laid an egg. A big white egg. The white rooster was very proud of what he had done, and he took the egg to Che-Che-Kin. I have done what no rooster ever did before, eh, Chief..."⁸

- Ellen Neel



Ellen Neel, *Wonderbird Totem*, 1953. Carved and painted red cedar. Commissioned by and on loan from the collection of White Spot, Ltd. (Photo Credit: David A. Neel)

7. PUPPETS

Puppet Installation.
Gifts of Judith Lawrence to UVic
Legacy Art Galleries.
(Photo Credit: David A. Neel)



Ellen Neel, *Dzonaqua*,
c.1950s-1960s, red melton
and navy blue wool, plastic
buttons, cedar and acrylic
paint. U016.7.3, Legacy Art
Galleries.



Ellen Neel, *Tlisa (The
Sun)* hand puppets, red
melton and navy blue
wool, plastic buttons, cedar
and acrylic paint, c.1950s-
1960s. U016.7.1, Legacy Art
Galleries.



Ellen Neel, *Old Man, Tsekum
(Cedar Man)* c.1950s-1960s,
red melton and navy blue
wool, plastic buttons, cedar
and acrylic paint. U016.7.2,
Legacy Art Galleries.



Ellen Neel, *Old Man/Elder
Figure* c.1950s-1960s, red
melton and navy blue
wool, plastic buttons, cedar
and acrylic paint. U016.7.4,
Legacy Art Galleries.

(Photo Credits: Holly Cecil)

8. TEXTILES

"To me, the art is a living symbol of the gaiety, the laughter, and the love of colour of my people—a day-to-day reminder that even we had something of glory and honour, before the white man came."

- Ellen Neel



Lou-ann Neel, *Textile – Celtic Raven Sheer Drape*, 2014. Polyester chiffon, digital fabric printing. On loan from the artist. (Photo Credit: Holly Cecil)



Lou-ann Neel, *Textile – Northern Faces*, 2015. Polyester chiffon, digital fabric printing. On loan from the artist. (Photo Credit: Holly Cecil)

9. TOTEM WARE

"Many pieces of furniture lend themselves admirably to Indian designs."

- Ellen Neel



Totem Ware Installation
(Photo Credit: David A. Neel)

In the mid 1950s, Ellen Neel secured a contract with Royal Albert China to create the authentic Totem Ware pattern. The pattern featured Neel's Totemland Pole design. The Totem Ware China line was produced in black and white and then in colour and was sold as locally specific souvenirs in British Columbia, Alberta, and Alaska.



(Photo Credit: Carolyn Butler Palmer)



Top: Ellen Neel, *Totem Ware ceramics - Totems, British Columbia* – Creamer, Small Dishes, Large Plate with Handles, c.1954-1970. Black- and white transfer, bone china; produced by Royal Albert China. On loan from a private lender.

Bottom: Ellen Neel, *Totem Ware ceramics - Totems, Alaska* – Teapot, c.1954-1970. Colour transfer, bone china; produced by Royal Albert China. On loan from a private lender.

10. SILKSCREENS

"We must be allowed new and modern techniques... new and modern tools... new and modern materials. For, in every instance, creative capacity has increased following the discovery and use of better materials."

- Ellen Neel



Silkscreen Installation (Photo Credit: David A. Neel)



Ellen Neel, *Scarf with Family Crest, "An Original Totem-wear Design,"* c.1950s, Serigraph on silk. On loan from Cora Neel. Beddows. (Photo Credit: Holly Cecil)



Ellen Neel, *Scarf with Illustrated Clan Legend, "An Original Totem-wear Design,"* c.1950s. Serigraph on silk. On loan from David A. Neel. (Photo Credit: Holly Cecil)



Silkscreen Installation (Photo Credit: David A. Neel)



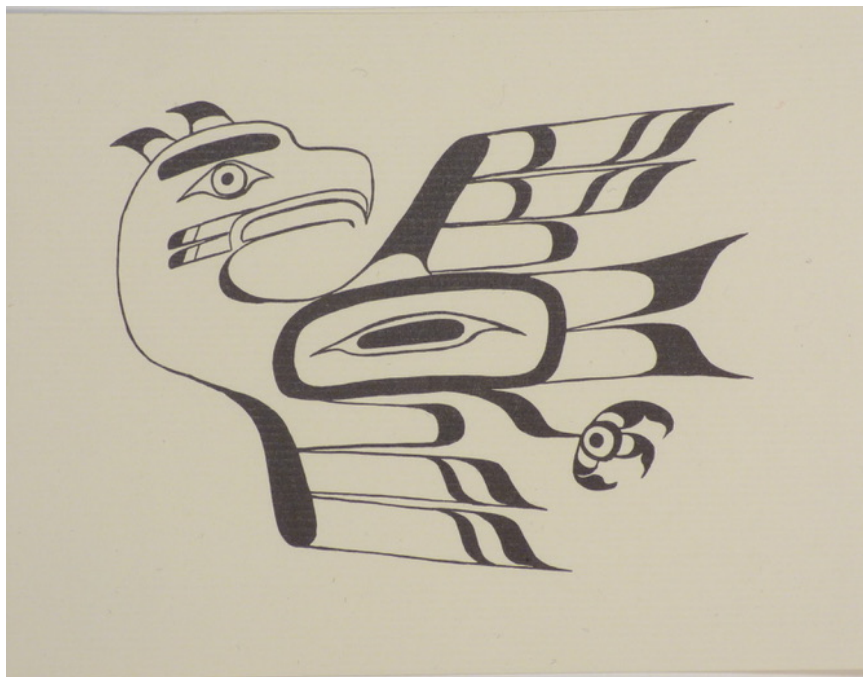
Top Left: Ellen Neel, *Coasters - Killer Whale Design*, late 1940s. Silkscreened coated burlap. On loan from Pamela Creasy Neel.

Top Right: Ellen Neel, *Placemat and Napkin Set - Thunderbird Design*, late 1940s-early 1950s. Silkscreened cotton. On loan from Pamela Creasy Neel.



Bottom Left and Right: Ellen Neel, *Bag - Thunderbird Design*, late 1940s-early 1950s, Silkscreened coated burlap, designed by Ellen Neel, Likely silkscreened by Theo Neel. On loan from Pamela Creasy Neel.

(Photo Credits: Holly Cecil)



Ellen Neel, *Notecards Depicting Kolus (Baby Thunderbird)*, c. 1948 (Left: Recto, Right: Verso).
(Photo Credits: Holly Cecil and Carolyn Butler Palmer)



Left: David A. Neel, *The Trial of Tears*, 1991. Serigraph on paper. On loan from a private lender.

Top Right: Lou-ann Neel, *Weaving of Four Realms*, 2007. Serigraph on paper. Gift from the collection of George and Christiane Smyth, UVic Legacy Art Galleries, U014.3.448

Bottom Right: Lou-ann Neel, *Four Noble Women*, 2000. Serigraph on paper. Gift from the collection of George and Christiane Smyth, UVic Legacy Art Galleries, U014.3.447

(Photo Credit: Carolyn Butler Palmer)

11. THE MASK OF THE INJUSTICE SYSTEM



Installation view. (Photo Credit: David A. Neel)



The Mask of the Injustice System (1991) is a mocking portrayal of the trial judge, Allan McEachern, who dismissed most of the claims brought forward by 35 Gitksan and 13 Wet'suwet'en hereditary chiefs in the Delgamuukw Court Action. McEachern wrongly declared that any aboriginal rights held by the Gitksan or the Wet'suwet'en were extinguished by the colonial government of B.C. He called the pre-colonization life of the Gitksan "nasty, brutish, and short" because they had "no written language, no horses or wheeled vehicles...". *The Mask of the Injustice System* is a companion piece to the David A. Neel's *The Trial of Tears* also created in 1991.

David A. Neel, *Mask of the Injustice System*, 1991. Carved and painted red cedar, cedar bark and currency. On loan from Rick Erickson.

(Photo Credit: Holly Cecil)

Complete List of Exhibited Works

Charlie James

Miniature Pole - Thunderbird & Sea Bear, c.1930.
Carved and painted yellow cedar. On loan from Lou-ann Neel.

Ellen Neel

Bags - Two Handle & Drawstring Styles - Thunderbird Design, late 1940s-early 1950s,
Silkscreened coated burlap, designed by Ellen Neel, Likely silkscreened by Theo Neel. On loan from Pamela Creasy Neel.

Coasters - Killer Whale Design, late 1940s.
Silkscreened coated burlap. On loan from Pamela Creasy Neel.

Placemat and Napkin Set - Thunderbird Design, late 1940s-early 1950s.Silkscreened cotton. On loan from Pamela Creasy Neel.

Earrings - Thunderbird Design and Brooch - Otter Design, late 1940s. Red cedar and acrylic paint. On loan from Pamela Creasy Neel.

Figurine with Candy Dish Souvenir, Thunderbird Design, c.1945-1960. Carved red cedar, acrylic paint, and pressed glass dish. On loan from Lou-ann Neel.

Otter Figurine, c.1955. Red cedar and dark stain. On loan from Travis Neel.

Hand Puppet - Bear, c.1964. Brown terry cloth, cedar and acrylic paint. On loan from David A. Neel.

Hand Puppets - Tlisala (The Sun), Dzonaqua, Old Man, Tsekum (Cedar Man), c.1950s-1960s, red Melton and navy blue wool, plastic buttons, cedar and acrylic paint. Gift of Judith Lawrence to UVic Legacy Art Galleries, U016.7.3, U016.7.1, U016.7.4, U016.7.2.

Letter Opener - Woman from the Bear Clan Holding Sculpin, c.1950s. Carved red cedar with acrylic paint. On loan from Pamela Creasy Neel.

Mask - Dzonaqua, 1962. Carved red cedar. On loan from Travis Neel.

Miniature Pole - Thunderbird, c.1945-1960. Carved red cedar. On loan from Travis Neel.

Miniature Pole - Thunderbird and Dzonoqua, c.1945-1960. Carved red cedar. On loan from Lou-ann Neel.

Miniature Pole - Thunderbird and Dzonoqua, c.1945-1960. Carved red cedar and acrylic paint. On loan from Pamela Creasy Neel.

Miniature Pole - Thunderbird and Man, c.1945-1960. Black resin cast. On loan from Lou-ann Neel.

Miniature Totemland Pole (Thunderbird, earth and human figure), c. 1955-1960. Carved red cedar and acrylic paint. On loan from Pamela Creasy Neel.

Totemland Pole (Thunderbird, earth and human figure), c. 1955-1960. Carved red cedar and acrylic paint. On loan from David A. Neel.

Notecards depicting Kolus (Baby Thunderbird), Hok Hok, Raven, Squatting Thunderbird, c.1948. Silkscreened paper. Private lender.

Pendant & Brooch - Thunderbird and Whale, 1966. Red cedar and dark stain. On loan from Lou-ann Neel.

Scarf with Crest Design, c.1950s, Serigraph on silk. Courtesy of the Royal BC Museum, unlisted.

Scarf with Family Crest, "An Original Totem-wear Design," c.1950s, Serigraph on silk. On loan from Cora Neel Beddows.

Scarf with Illustrated Clan Legend, "An Original Totem-wear Design," c.1950s. Serigraph on silk. On loan from David A. Neel.

Scarf with Split Raven Design, c. 1950s. Serigraph on silk. Canada Council Acquisition Grant, Acquired from the collection of Vincent Rickard. UVic Legacy Art Galleries, U990.14.1497.

Serigraph printing screen & wooden frame for Eagle Design, c. 1950s. Courtesy of the Royal BC Museum, 17258.

Totem Ware ceramics - Totems, Alaska – Teapot, c.1954-1970. Colour transfer, bone china; produced by Royal Albert China. On loan from a private lender.

Totem Ware ceramics - Totems, Alberta - Cream and Sugar, Cup, c.1954-1970. Colour transfer, bone china; produced by Royal Albert China. On loan from a private lender.

Totem Ware ceramics - Totems, British Columbia – Plate, Cup & Saucer, c.1954-1970. Black-and-white transfer, bone china; produced by Royal Albert China. On loan from Cora Neel Beddows.

Totem Ware ceramics - Totems, British Columbia – Creamer, Small Dishes, Large Plate with Handles, c.1954-1970. Black- and-white transfer, bone china; produced by Royal Albert China. On loan from a private lender.

Totem Ware ceramics – Square Dish with Handles, c.1954- 1970. Colour transfer, bone china; produced by Royal Albert China. Gift of Gary White and John Veillette, UVic Legacy Art Galleries, U005.25.5.

Whale, c.1940s, Carved red cedar. On loan from Travis Neel.

Wonderbird Totem, 1953. Carved and painted red cedar. Commissioned by and on loan from the collection of White Spot Ltd.

Ellen Neel's Children

David Neel, Sr.

Dzonaqua (Northwind), c. 1959. Acrylic on board. On loan from David A. Neel.

Thunderbird and Whale, c.1959. Red cedar and stain. Restored by David A. Neel and Edwin Neel, 2016. On loan from David A. Neel.

John Neel

Wall Plaque - Kwagiulth Salmon, c. 1960s. Carved and stained red cedar. On loan from Lou-ann Neel.

Cora Neel Beddows

Pendant – Copper with Inlaid Stone, c. 2002. Sterling silver. On loan from Lou-ann Neel.

Robert (Bob) Neel

Bracelet - Killerwhale, 1978. Sterling silver (1.75" wide) On loan from Lou-ann Neel.

Bracelet – Killer Whale, 1981. Sterling silver (1.5" wide). On loan from Lou-ann Neel.

Pendant - Abstract Form-Line Feast Spoon, 1978. Sterling silver. On loan from Lou-ann Neel.

Pendant – Sun (Tlisala), c. 1970s. Sterling silver. On loan from Lou-ann Neel.

Pendant - Thunderbird, 1977. Sterling silver and 14k gold. On loan from Lou-ann Neel.

Miniature Feast Spoon, c.1970s. Carved red cedar. On loan from Lou-ann Neel.

Theo Neel

Blouse with Design Based on an Ellen Neel Original, n.d. Private lender.

Theresa Neel

Reprint of Ellen Neel's Eagle Design, 1970. serigraph on paper. Courtesy of the Royal BC Museum, 14392 A,B

Reprint of Ellen Neel's Split Raven Design, 1972. Serigraph on paper. Courtesy of the Royal BC Museum, 14393 A, B

Ellen Neel's Grandchildren

David A. Neel

Humming Bird and Bear Necklace and Earrings, gold and sterling silver, 2017. On loan from the artist.

Orca and Wolf, 2015. Acrylic on canvas. On loan from the artist.

Mask mourning Ellen Neel, 1990. Carved alder with acrylic paint, abalone shell earrings. On loan from Camosun College, Department of Visual Arts.

Mask of the Injustice System, 1991. Carved and painted red cedar, cedar bark and currency. On loan from Rick Erickson.

The Trial of Tears, 1991. Serigraph on paper.
On loan from a private lender.

Lou-ann Neel

Dzonaqua, 2015. Frosted acrylic.
On loan from Lily Erford.

Pendant - Salmon Trout Head, 2002. Sterling silver with onyx. On loan from the artist.

Pendant and Earrings - Wolf, 2016. Sterling silver.
On loan from the artist.

Four Noble Women, 2000. Serigraph on paper.
Gift from the collection of George and Christiane Smyth, UVic Legacy Art Galleries, U014.3.447

Weaving of Four Realms, 2007. Serigraph on paper. Gift from the collection of George and Christiane Smyth, UVic Legacy Art Galleries, U014.3.448

Textile – Celtic Raven Sheer Drape, 2014. Polyester chiffon, digital fabric printing.
On loan from the artist.

Textile – Northern Faces, 2015. Polyester chiffon, digital fabric printing. On loan from the artist.

Travis Neel

Pendant - Thunderbird Copper, 2013. Sterling silver. On loan from Lou-ann Neel.

Ellen Neel's Great Grandchildren

Edwin Neel

Ghost Mask, 2013, carved red cedar. On loan from the artist.

Ellena Neel

Kawaii, 2015. Acrylic on canvas.
On loan from the artist.

Remember the Children, 2015. Mixed media on melton wool. On loan from the artist.

Canadian Mint Collector Coins, Vernon Brown for *The Indian Heritage Series Coin Set Portrait Coins of Kakasolas—Ellen Neel*, Mary Capilano, and Chief Sahelton, 1979. Verso: Nimpkish Dollar. On loan from Pam Creasy Neel.

Unknown Artists

Bracelet - Eagle Design and Brooch - Thunderbird Design. Sterling silver jewelry worn by Ellen Neel, c.1945.
On loan from Lou-ann Neel.

Photographs and Moving Images

Gar Lunney, *Ellen Neel, Kwaguitl, from Alert Bay at Work in her Studio*, 1958. Courtesy Library and Archives Canada MIKAN no. 3516211

Crowd Watching Kwagiulth Carver Ellen Neel Working on a Totem Pole, 1953. Courtesy of City of Vancouver Archives, AM281-S8-: CVA 180-2315

Ellen Neel, Mungo Martin, and Group After Potlach, December 14, 1953. Courtesy of the Neel family.

William Cunningham, photographer for *The Province, Ellen Neel Presenting 'Totemland' Pole to Ballerina Maria Tallchief* c.1956. Vancouver Public Library Archives, VPL 62667, Reproduced with permission of the Vancouver Public Library.

Kwagiulth Carver Ellen Neel Carving a Totem Pole, 1953. Courtesy of City of Vancouver Archives, AM281-S8-:CVA180-2361 and 62.

Neel Family Working to Complete Poles for Westmount Mall, Edmonton, 1955, Courtesy of Vancouver Public Library, 62667.

Frank Swannell, *Portrait of Theresa Neel with Dzonaqua Mask*, n.d. Courtesy of the Royal BC Museum and Archives, I-68947. Westmount Mall, Ellen Neel Poles, Edmonton, c. 1955. Courtesy of Provincial Archives of Alberta, BL2396.

Andie Palmer, *Westmount Mall, Ellen Neel Pole in Blanket*, 2015. Courtesy of Andie Palmer.

Jack Long, Film excerpt from *The Totem Carvers*, 1957. On loan from Travis Neel.

Celebration of Ellen Neel



(Photo Credit: Carolyn Butler Palmer)



NOTES

¹ Phil Nuytten, *The Totem Carvers: Charlie James, Ellen Neel, and Mungo Martin* (Vancouver, BC: Panorama Press, 1982), 43.

² Audre Francis, "Ancient Art of Totem Carving Gets Assurance In Expert's Family," *The Daily Province*, July 5, 1951, 20.

³ Ellen Neel, "UBC Keynote Address," 1948. First published by H.B. Hawthorn, ed., *Report of the Conference on Native Affairs* (Victoria: BCIAWS, 1949), 16.

⁴ Ellen May Neal (sic.), "Women's Pow Wow Corner," *The Native Voice*, July 1947, 2.

⁵ Ellen Neel, "UBC Keynote Address," 1948.

⁶ TSAITSUN, "Potlatch in Victoria's Thunderbird Park," *The Native Voice*, January 1954, 5.

⁷ Ellen Neel, "UBC Keynote Address," 1948.

⁸ Ellen Neel, "The Wonderbird Legend," reprinted in Kerry Gold, *The White Spot Cookbook*, (Vancouver: Figure 1 Publishing, 2013), 25.

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