

ART TOUR

THE MICHAEL C. WILLIAMS COLLECTION



SWANS HOTEL

WHO WAS MICHAEL C. WILLIAMS?

“He understood that genuine wealth isn’t money; that everybody can have a bit of money but few people can have wealth and can recognize what it is. He did.”

— Artist Glenn Howarth, reflecting on Williams’ sense of the greater good.



Michael Collard Williams was born in Shropshire, England and arrived in Victoria in 1958. He started his time in the city working as a self-made businessman before moving into building development in the late 1970s. He greatly contributed to the remodelling of Old Town Victoria from a crumbling forgotten district into a bright and thriving cultural center. His crowning jewel was Swans Hotel and Brewpub, which served as his personal gallery and a popular hangout for the multitude of artists who called Williams both landlord and friend. His art collection quickly grew, with his sharp

eye and love of West Coast styles. His estate of paintings, drawings, prints, carvings, and furniture was eventually bequeathed to the University of Victoria upon his death in November 2000. Swans remains an “art hotel” uniquely brimming with Williams’ collection.

Today his art is cared for by UVic’s Legacy Art Galleries, with its main venue located at 630 Yates Street in downtown Victoria.

THIS TOUR REPRESENTS A MERE SELECTION OF THE MORE THAN 400 WORKS OF ART ON VIEW THROUGHOUT THE HOTEL.



ART THOMPSON, *Dididaht Legend of Swans and Wolves*, n.d., painted red cedar with copper, abalone and operculum inlays. **1**

A Nuu-chah-nulth artist, Art Thompson grew up learning the culture and traditional techniques of his people. He was initiated into the Tloo-

Kwalla, or Wolf Society, in a ceremony that has been passed down for generations. His initiation was partially thanks to his extensive knowledge of his traditional culture. This carved and painted red cedar sculpture depicts two wolves, two white swans, and one black one. While wolves are common characters in native stories, swans are seldom mentioned, which lends to the belief that Thompson was commissioned to carve the piece by Williams, specifically to hang in Swans Hotel. The two most likely crossed paths while Thompson was attending art classes at Camosun College, just one of the newly developed art-friendly establishments in the city during the 1960s and 70s.

2



STEPHANIE J. FROSTAD, *June Cycle II*, 1993, oil on canvas.



STEPHANIE J. FROSTAD, *June Cycle I*, 1993, oil on canvas. **3**

Born and raised in Washington State, Frostad is an extremely gifted figural artist who paints in a classic style reminiscent of the 1930s. Her subject matters tend to be traditional themes, simplistic in their rendering, and often depicting a lone figure within a rural landscape. Common events are elevated to a special status by their large-scale rendering on canvas. Her work has been exhibited worldwide, and it was when she showed at the University of Victoria that she was brought to Michael Williams' attention; these two pieces were chosen by Williams to aptly hang here in Swans Hotel.

4



MYFANWY SPENCER PAVELIC, *Blue Sky [Pierre Trudeau]*, 1991, acrylic on canvas.

Born in Victoria, Pavelic is considered one of the greatest Canadian portrait painters of the 20th century and the only one to have her work hung in England's National Portrait Gallery. This is one of several portraits she made for former Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau. While this version was his personal favourite, the office selection committee chose another version to hang in the House of Commons as his official portrait. Mr. Williams bought this rejected portrait along with

all of the other pieces Pavelic made for the former PM, including a few of her design sketches, which are all held by the Legacy Art Galleries.

5

JOHN LIVINGSTON, *Untitled; Tlingit style Brown Bear and Human Panel*, 1973, painted yellow cedar with abalone and operculum.

A non-native, Livingston was close friends with and apprenticed under Tony Hunt Sr. and his father, Henry Hunt, during the 1970s. This yellow cedar carving is a study of a screen from a clan house in Alaska, communicates the legend of how an ancestor took a bear mother for a wife, thus resulting in the adoption of the Bear crest. The faces depicted throughout this carved bear represent the descendants of that coupling. While Livingston is an honorary member of the Kwakwaka'wakw group, he carved this panel in the Tlingit style to be more true to the original source.





UNKNOWN ARTIST, *KIT TIN AA (Killer Whale Copper)*, n.d., copper.

Dating from c.1840 and belonging to noted Tlingit Chief Kininnok of the Wolf Clan in Alaska, this *tinaa* (known to Europeans as “coppers”) depicts two Killer Whale crests on its top half. Made entirely from copper, these kinds of “shields” were representations of extreme wealth.

Smoking the hammered copper over a fire and then etching away the charred layer to expose the shiny copper underneath achieves the design. Coppers are purely ornamental pieces; they are far too valuable to be used as an actual shield on a battlefield and would be displayed similarly to

this one in longhouses that sheltered the people of the Northwest Coast and were built optimally to protect against harsh winters, as well as house several families at once.

KEN FLETT, *Alister Starbuck And His Book of Revelations*, 1995, mixed media.

Alister Starbuck was a homeless man living in Victoria in the 1980s and 90s and is shown here in his usual hangout spot, St. Andrews’ Cathedral on Blanshard St (the interior of which



forms the left-hand side of this piece). Both Flett and Michael Williams shared deep concerns about the homeless population of downtown Victoria. There was a symbiotic relationship; Flett created striking and provocative paintings of familiar homeless locals and Williams promoted both the artist and the issue by publicly displaying them in the pub. Flett drew on Biblical themes in the titles of some of his paintings, perhaps indicating that to him this issue was as important as faith, or perhaps simply that there has always been a close relationship between the Church and homeless populations. The Swans family now regularly serves lunch at the Our Place homeless shelter.

8 **MAX MAYNARD, *Smugglers Cove #1*, 1981, acrylic on paper.**

Michael Williams had a particular fondness for the local scenes of Max Maynard and purchased no less than a dozen of Maynard's paintings, including this scene of Smugglers Cove at Victoria's Ten Mile Point, where Williams owned property and built his home, which he named "The Point."



9 **MAX MAYNARD, *From the Mcdowell Dam*, 1979, oil on paper. University of Victoria Acquisition Fund.**

Born in India, Maynard parents moved him to Victoria in 1912, where he soon began establishing himself as a member of an intellectual circle that included artist Jack Shadbolt. While largely self-taught, Maynard was heavily influenced by the works of the Group of Seven and Emily Carr, whom he knew personally. These influences show themselves in his colourful and lively portrayals of landscapes. This view was taken from the Mcdowell Dam in North Dakota, almost exactly halfway between Victoria and the University of New Hampshire, where he taught English. This painting was purchased by the University of Victoria at his first solo show in 50 years, just 3 years before his death.



10 **GODFREY STEPHENS, *Michael Williams (One of Victoria's very few art patrons)*, 2000, mixed media.**

Born and raised on Vancouver Island, Stephens is and always has been a full-time artist, having largely taught himself how to paint and carve. Like so many others in the 1970s and 80s, he often found himself a patron of Swans Pub; bellying up to the bar with Michael Williams and crowd to discuss anything and everything that interested them. Over the course of their friendship Stephens painted and gifted a few portraits to Williams, with this one having been given mere months before the art patron's unexpected death. This mixed media painting is a nod of thanks to Williams, and is worked through with images of topics of interest to the contemporary Victoria art scene.

TOM HUNT, *Untitled; Sea Monster Mask (Southern Kwagiulth Yagis)*, 1996, painted red cedar with horsehair, cedar bark, and copper.

Following in his family's footsteps and began carving at the age of 12, taught by his father and uncle. This mask is most likely a depiction of Ts'ígis, a monster that lurked beneath a lake near Cash Creek, BC and who ate anyone who came too close. In the story the monster is defeated with

the help of Sisiutl, a two-headed serpent and Hunt's own secondary crest. Masks like this one are typically donned during ceremonial dances, and this particular one has a mouth that opens and closes.



11



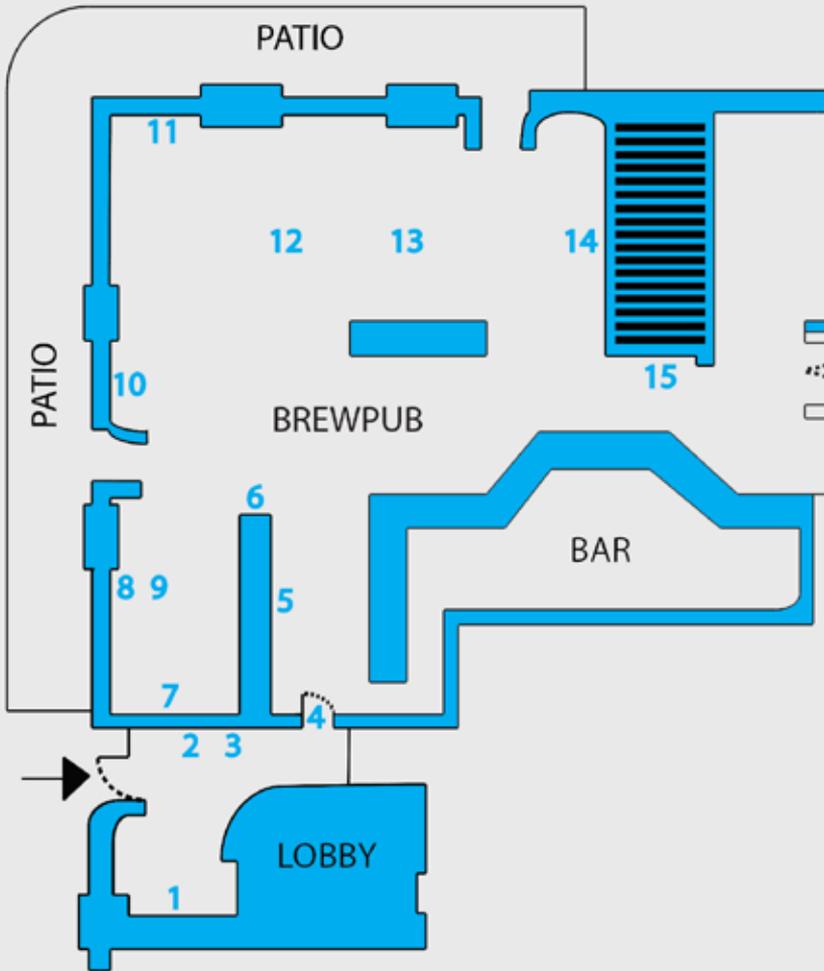
JOHN LIVINGSTON, *Untitled; Hok-Hok (Kwagiulth Cannibal Bird Mask)*, 1996, painted red cedar with cedar bark and eagle feathers.

A non-First Nations, adopted member of the Kwakwaka'wakw group, Livingston was close friends with and apprenticed under Tony Hunt Sr. and his father Henry Hunt during the 1970s. This carved red cedar mask with cedar bark tassels and eagle feather adornments is Hok-Hok, one of the Cannibal Birds involved with the complex four-day winter ritual in which young men are initiated into the Hamasta society. Hok-Hok is one of the accompanying birds to the central man-eating giant, Baxbaxwalanuksiwe, and is said to have a long beak for cracking open the skulls of men to consume their brains.

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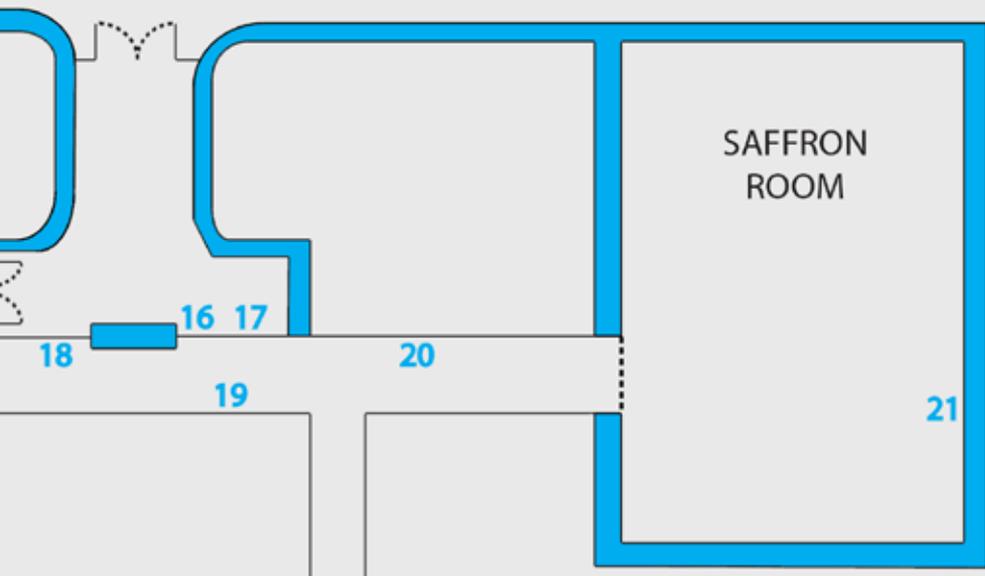
Swans Art Tour

— PANDORA AVE. —



s Hotel Floor Plan

- STORE ST. -



13

CHERYL SAMUEL, *Creation*, n.d., mixed media.

An avid student and teacher of Northwest Coast First Nations weaving techniques, Samuel is also a brilliant painter. Combining her extensive knowledge of textiles and patterns with the bright colours and freedom offered through paints, she custom-made this seven-piece creation for Michael Williams.

Made specifically for where it hangs today, this beautiful piece tells the story of life spiraling out from Seed into Fire, Ice, Animals, and Humans, all hemmed in by Night and Day. Painted with shiny acrylic paints and inlaid with bits of mirrors and metals, *Creation* is a galactic

imitation of the lights and movements of the dance floor it watches over.

14

TONY HUNT SR., *Untitled; Kwagiulth Split Killer Whale*, c. 1986, painted red and yellow cedar.

Hunt is the hereditary chief of the KwaGulth people of Fort Rupert and Kingcome Inlet, BC. While the Killer Whale is not Hunt's main family crest, it is an important and popular presence in First Nations art and culture; praised for its skill as a hunter as well as its commitment to family. This carving shows both the frontal and profile views of a killer whale carved in yellow cedar on a red cedar baseboard.

DENQULHUT, *Frog-in-the-hole Chilkat Robe*, 1890, mountain goat wool and inner yellow cedar bark.

Denqulhut was the most renowned weaver in her village of Klukwan (Chilkat River), Alaska, even to this day. The entire piece was made completely by hand, including the spinning of the thread used (rolling it between the hand and thigh

instead of on a spindle whorl). Robes like this were worn by First Nations nobility and told the story behind the family or clan crest. This robe, one of the last Denqulhut made, was finished sometime in the 1890s and made its way into Mr. Williams' collection about 100 years later. It is made from mountain goat hair and inner yellow cedar bark and dyed using a combination of local plants, second-hand industrial dye, and copper.



15



GODFREY STEPHENS, *Kluk Chitl*, n.d., stained red cedar with a copper-plated wooden base.

A non-First Nations, yet influenced as a young man by prolific First Nations carver Mungo Martin (1881-1962), Stephens dropped out of school at the age of 14 to learn woodcarving and art on his own terms. An avid sailor and sailboat maker, Stephens has traversed the world and the Canadian West Coast and spent much time during the 1960s-90s entrenched in the developing Victoria art scene. Recognizing him as a fast-growing tour-de-force in the Canadian art scene, Michael Williams acquired many of Stephens' works, including this red cedar pole, carved in a way inspired by the Nuu-chah-nulth style.

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17



MICHAEL LEWIS, *Untitled; Apple Tree Gang*, 1992, acrylic on canvas.

This painting reflects collector Michael Williams' concern for homelessness in Victoria. It depicts the community of homeless people who lived between the

Johnson Street Bridge and the Janion Building (across the street from Swans) between the 1960s and 1990s. At one point Williams built a shelter for them near the bridge. However after it caught fire, nearly killing a man, the city tore it down. Notorious in the media and a huge safety issue for City Council, the Apple Tree Gang faced a difficult and controversial life, but they were rich in the relationships and support they shared with each other. Michael Lewis was born in Las Vegas, Nevada. He moved to Canada in 1969 after attending college in St. George, Utah. A self-taught artist, Lewis began painting seriously as a way to cope with working in Victoria's emergency shelter.

18 PNINA GRANIRER, *Untitled (Fantasmagoria with Eagle)*, 1974, printing inks drawn on paper.

Born in Romania, Granirer emigrated to Vancouver in 1965, where she remains to this day.

Captivated and inspired

by the cultures and landscapes of the West Coast, this ink on paper painting of a First Nations-style eagle head is most likely Granirer's version of one of their stories. As well as the prominent eagle head, images of a handful of different kinds of fish, animals, birds, and plants that make their homes on the coast can be seen tucked under the beak. Likewise, an image of a cross-stitch-like cherub resides in the bird's eye. This particular cherub was embroidered on a sheet Granirer brought with her from her childhood in Romania and is often included in her works.



NITA FORREST, *Untitled; Figure*, 1974, watercolour and graphite on paper.

Born in the small town of Quesnel, BC, Forrest moved to Victoria in 1950. She is, for the most part, a self-taught artist, but has acknowledged Maxwell Bates as one of her influences. In 1968 she founded the Print Gallery and was its director until 1972. Through this establishment she was able to help encourage and nurture contemporary local artists. She was also an original member of the Limners Group, a collection of artists that came together to share ideas and work to invigorate the Victoria art scene in the 1960s and 70s. Forrest excelled at simplistic and elegant figural studies and portraits, as seen here in watercolour.



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DUNCAN REGEHR, *Corvus Rex, Nocturn*, 2000, oil on canvas board. Gift of James S. Redpath.

Raised in Victoria, Regehr spent his youth steeped in the arts; as a young man he took up acting and appeared on stages and TV sets around the country, and worked on radio programs for the CBC. In 1980 he moved to Hollywood, where he appeared in many TV and film roles, most notably as Zorro in a TV adaptation in the early 90s and as numerous supporting characters in *Star Trek: The Next*

Generation. Away from the camera Regehr is also a highly skilled painter and poet, and has been showing his work around the world since 1974. In 2008 he was awarded an honorary Doctorate degree in Fine Arts from the University of Victoria.

This painting is one in a series titled *Corvus Rex – Scarecrow Oils* which explores issues of transformation and the human condition, as seen through the inanimate yet eerily human scarecrow figure.

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MARLENE DAVIS, *Brothers at War (For Steve)*, 1989, acrylic and oil on canvas.

Born in Vancouver, Marlene Davis attended both the Victoria College of Art and the University of Victoria in the late 1980s–early 1990s, where her path would cross frequently with Michael Williams.

Extremely talented and working mostly in acrylic and oil paints, and sometimes a combination of the two, she was one of many to have her work shown in one of Williams' Swans Pub art shows. Her bold, colour-rich paintings provide a flair of abstract not often seen amongst the other works on display in the restaurant and pub, but it lends a lovely compliment to the Saffron Room.

SWANS HOTEL & BREWPUB | 506 PANDORA AVE

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The University of Victoria Legacy Art Galleries has a collection of approximately 19,000 art objects which support the teaching and research programs of the University. Since the founding of the collection in 1953 a number of named collections have provided the thematic direction of the acquisition program. The two founding collections were the the University of Victoria Collection and the John and Katharine Maltwood Collection. A third collection, the Michael C. Williams Collection, was received in 2000 as a bequest. Legacy offers a varied, rotating exhibition program downtown and on campus.



TOUR CURATED BY KATE RIORDON, LEGACY CURATORIAL ASSISTANT
COPY PROOFING BY MARY JO HUGHES, KATIE HUGHES

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