

# The Story Box

Franz Boas, George Hunt, and  
the Making of Anthropology

February 14–July 7, 2019



25 YEARS  
Bard  
Graduate  
Center  
Gallery

Lion-type Mask, unknown  
Kwakwaka'wakw maker, 1820-70.  
Painted (?), carved wood. ©Trustees  
of the British Museum, Am +.436.

# The Story Box: Franz Boas, George Hunt, and the Making of Anthropology

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“It is good that you should have a box in which your laws and stories are kept. My friend, George Hunt, will show you a box in which some of your stories will be kept. It is a book I have written on what I saw and heard when I was with you two years ago. It is a good book, for in it are your laws and your stories. Now they will not be forgotten.”

—Franz Boas, in a letter to Kwaguʻl Chiefs, April 14, 1897

*The Story Box: Franz Boas, George Hunt, and the Making of Anthropology*, a Bard Graduate Center Focus Project on view from February 14 through July 7, 2019, explores the hidden histories and complex legacies of one of the most influential books in the field of anthropology, *The Social Organization and the Secret Societies of the Kwakiutl Indians* (1897). Organized by Bard Graduate Center Gallery in partnership with Uʻmista Cultural Centre, a Kwakwakaʻwakw museum in Alert Bay, British Columbia, the exhibition is curated by Aaron Glass, associate professor at Bard Graduate Center, and features designs by artist Corrine Hunt, a great-granddaughter of George Hunt. It will be on view at Uʻmista from July through October 2019.

A culmination of anthropologist Franz Boas's (1858–1942) first decade of fieldwork among the Kwakwakaʻwakw of British Columbia, *The Social Organization* was one of the first holistic portraits of a Native North American society. It was also the result of a deep collaboration with his Indigenous research partner, George Hunt, who was credited on the title page. Commissioned by the United States National Museum as a catalogue of its own collection, Boas and Hunt expanded the text to include hundreds of ceremonial



Franz Boas with the Hunt Family, Fort Rupert, November 1894. Back row, left to right: Sam Hunt, George Hunt, Mary Ebbetts Hunt (George's mother), Franz Boas; standing left to right: Lalax's'a (wife of David Hunt, not pictured), Jonathan Hunt; seated left to right: Emily Hunt (holding Marion Hunt), Lucy Hunt; kneeling left to right: Mary Hunt, George Hunt Jr. Photographed by Oregon C. Hastings. Courtesy of the American Philosophical Society, APS 466.

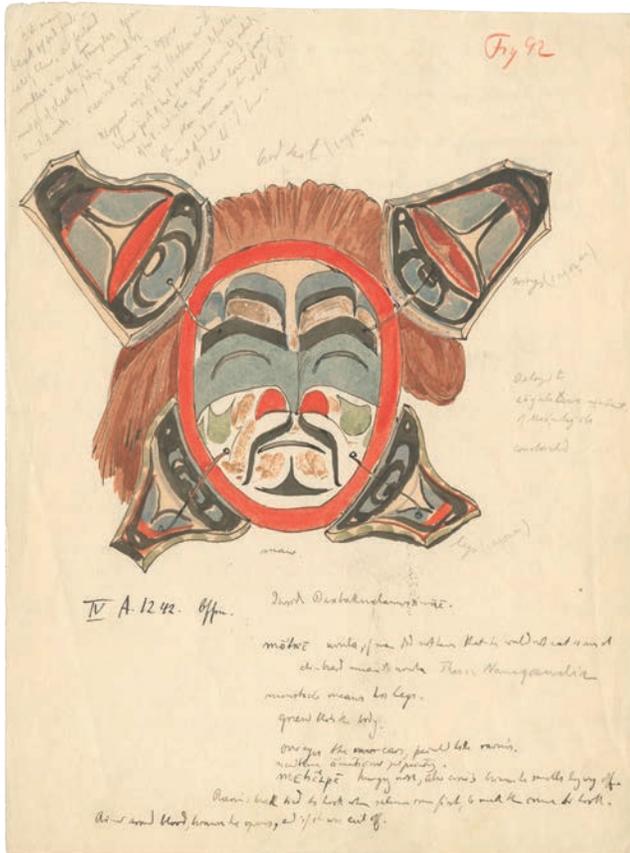
objects from multiple museums; narratives recorded in the Kwakwala language; eye-witness accounts of rituals; musical notation for songs; and photographs of villages, potlatch orators, and masked dancers. The book had immediate and long-lasting influence on the development of anthropological theory and method, on global museum practice, and on the modern concept of “culture” itself.

Yet Boas and Hunt were dissatisfied with the volume. A product of Boas's earliest research on the North Pacific Coast, the book imposed a typological approach that removed masks, songs, and dances from their social and ceremonial structures even as Boas argued, in principle, for the importance of such cultural context in anthropological description. Although Boas recognized the dynamism of Indigenous cultures, the book conceals the three most important historical conditions of its own



Mask, unknown Nuxalk or Heiltsuk maker. Wood. Courtesy of the Division of Anthropology, American Museum of Natural History, 16/1102.

production: Canada’s colonial assimilation policy, which banned the potlatch and its dances from 1884 to 1951; the 1893 World’s Columbian Exposition, where Boas and Hunt conducted much of their original fieldwork; and Hunt’s status as a full co-author. Starting in the early 1920s, Hunt took it upon himself to correct and expand the book, in part by reconnecting hereditary treasures to the families they belong to. However, hundreds of pages of his emendations remained unpublished and were consigned to the archive after Boas’s death.



Kwakwaka'wakw Transformation Mask (open) in the Ethnologisches Museum Berlin Collection, IV A 1242. Paper, ink, paint (watercolor). Courtesy of the Division of Anthropology, American Museum of Natural History, Z/43 I.

*The Story Box* contributes to a larger, international project to re-assemble the widely distributed ethnographic materials that both comprised and stemmed from the original book, and which will result in a new critical edition in print and digital media (a prototype for which is featured in the exhibition). Drawing on a familiar Kwakwaka'wakw metaphor, Boas imagined his book as a storage box for the “laws and stories,” preserving them for posterity in case the culture vanished under colonial onslaught. But the people and their culture survived. After a century of resilience, the Kwakwaka'wakw are reactivating texts, museum collections, and archival records to help safeguard their future.

## The Exhibition

*The Story Box: Franz Boas, George Hunt, and the Making of Anthropology* recounts the history of the 1897 book through the lens of Boas and Hunt’s collaboration. The exhibition opens with an introduction to the two men, Kwakwaka'wakw culture, and Boas’s influential approach to anthropology. This section features a chronological overview of the book’s history presented through Boas and Hunt’s original fieldnotes and correspondence as well as rare archival drawings and manuscripts. Throughout the exhibition are a number of nineteenth-century objects of ceremonial regalia that were pictured in the book, each accompanied by Hunt’s later notes. The first gallery includes an emblazoned chief’s Copper and dancing masks—one of them a very early Kwakwaka'wakw mask from the British Museum—derived from carved lions on European sailing ships.

The core of the exhibition presents three key sites and episodes in the making of the 1897 book: the 1893 Chicago World’s Fair; Boas and Hunt’s fieldwork in Fort Rupert, British Columbia, in 1894; and the preparation of the manuscript between 1895-96 while Boas worked for East Coast museums. Each section features dance regalia used or acquired in these sites, along with photography, facsimile manuscripts, sound recordings, and digital media displays. This gallery closes with a look at the book’s immediate effects in museums, which replicated its illustrations and acquired some of the actual objects pictured in them—including a spectacular painted chief’s seat from the American Museum of Natural History.



The Kwakwaka'wakw delegation at the World’s Columbian Exposition, Chicago, 1893. Courtesy of the Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology, Harvard University, PM# 93-1-33010/100266.1.30.

The final gallery highlights three aspects of the book's legacy: its role in facilitating commercial reproductions of illustrated objects in the early twentieth century; the use of the book, along with Hunt's later notes, by current Kwakwaka'wakw to revitalize long-dormant forms of art and ceremony; and the repatriation of early collections to the Kwakwaka'wakw. The centerpiece of this gallery is a new version of a dramatic transformation mask, carved in 2018 by Corrine Hunt and her relatives, based on one collected in 1882 and previously owned by George Hunt's first wife. The exhibition closes with materials related to the larger Boas 1897 Critical Edition project, including an interactive prototype for the digital edition and a short film featuring numerous Hunt descendants talking about the value of his work with Boas.

## About Bard Graduate Center Focus Projects

Focus Projects are part of an innovative program organized and led by faculty members or postdoctoral fellows through seminars and workshops that culminate in small-scale, academically rigorous exhibitions and publications. Students, assisted by the Center's professional staff of curators, designers, and media specialists, are closely involved from genesis through execution and contribute to each project's form and content. The Focus Project promotes experimentation in display, interpretation, and the use of digital media, reflecting the Center's commitment to exhibitions as integral to scholarly activity.

## About Bard Graduate Center

As the leading research institute in the United States dedicated to the study of decorative arts, design history, and material culture, Bard Graduate Center and its Gallery have pioneered the study of objects as a means to better understand the cultural history of the material world. Offering experiences for scholars, students, and the general public alike, Bard Graduate Center is built on multidisciplinary study and the integration of research, graduate teaching, and public exhibitions. Since its founding in 1993, it has established a network of more than 400 alumni who work in leading museums, universities, and institutions worldwide to advance new ways of thinking about material culture.

In celebration of its 25th Anniversary, Bard Graduate Center will present a series of exhibitions and events that showcase the institution's groundbreaking research and approach to the study of tangible 'things.' Beginning in fall 2018 and continuing through 2020, the 25th Anniversary celebration will include exhibitions on a diverse range of subjects, including *Agents of Faith: Votive Objects in Time and Place*, examining sacred objects and the practice of votive offering; *French Fashion, Women, and the First World War*; and *Eileen Gray: Creating a Total Work of Art*, an in-depth examination of the work and contributions of the iconic modernist designer and architect, presented in collaboration with the Centre Pompidou, Paris. Other initiatives during the anniversary years will also advance research and scholarship, recognize leaders in the field, present engaging programs for the public, and foster a new generation of students and scholars. [bgc.bard.edu](http://bgc.bard.edu).



Sisiut Belt worn by a dancer at the 1893 Chicago World's Fair, unknown Kwakwaka'wakw maker. Wood, cotton, paint, iron. © The Field Museum, Image No. A115416d\_003, Cat. No. 18863, Photographer John Weinstein.



Hamat'sa diorama, source for plate 29, showing the life group Franz Boas produced for the U.S. National Museum, ca. 1895. Photograph. National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution, Neg. 9539.

## About the U'mista Culture Centre



The U'mista Cultural Centre in Alert Bay, British Columbia, tells an epic story of resistance and resilience.

The potlatch ceremony was banned in Canada between 1885 and 1951.

Potlatch masks and other regalia housed at U'mista were all surrendered under duress to the police after

a potlatch in 1921 hosted by Chief Dan Cranmer. After the ban was lifted, the Kwakwaka'wakw people negotiated for decades for the return of their sacred regalia that had ended up in museum and private collections around the world. Most of the regalia have come home and are preserved and shared at the U'mista Cultural Centre, where it now constitutes the most complete and important collection of its type in the world and is a source of great joy and pride for the Kwakwaka'wakw and North Vancouver Island communities. For more information visit [umista.ca](http://umista.ca).

## Bard Graduate Center Gallery Programs

Lectures, gallery talks, and conversations are offered in conjunction with the exhibition. For more information, please call 212.501.3011 or e-mail [public.programs@bgc.bard.edu](mailto:public.programs@bgc.bard.edu).

## Exhibition Tours

Group exhibition tours are offered Tuesday through Friday between 11 am and 4 pm and Thursday until 7 pm. Reservations are required for all groups.

To schedule a tour, please call 212.501.3013 or e-mail [tours@bgc.bard.edu](mailto:tours@bgc.bard.edu).

## Bard Graduate Center Gallery

Bard Graduate Center Gallery is located in New York City at 18 West 86th Street, between Central Park West and Columbus Avenue. Gallery hours are Tuesday and Friday through Sunday 11 am to 5 pm; Wednesday and Thursday 11 am to 8 pm. Suggested admission is \$7 general, \$5 seniors and students.

For information about Bard Graduate Center and upcoming exhibitions, please visit [bgc.bard.edu/gallery](http://bgc.bard.edu/gallery).

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