

AUDAIN ART MUSEUM

NEWS RELEASE

Whistler's Audain Art Museum to showcase historic Ptarmigan vase

Whistler – May 17, 2016 – A large 112-year-old metal vase, with a special connection to British Columbia, was unveiled at a private reception in the Audain Art Museum last night, and starting Wednesday, May 18, it will be on display for the next three years. On loan from the National Gallery of Canada, the “Ptarmigan Vase,” shaped from copper, silver, and gold, was made during an exciting time in Canadian history, when dreams of gold in B.C.’s mountains attracted investors.

A second, almost identical, version of the vase was discovered in 1911 in the United States along with a previously unknown illustrated book detailing how New York resident Paulding Farnham created the two massive vases.

The Ptarmigan Vases, written in 1904, describes how Tiffany silversmiths manufactured two vases from a one-tonne block of precious metal excavated from the Ptarmigan Mine in the Selkirk Mountains in southern B.C., an operation that Farnham had invested much of his savings in. Farnham designed and oversaw the creation of the two vases. The vase at the Audain Art Museum was first given to Farnham’s wife Sally. The other vase was sold to one of his leading patrons, Edward Dean Adams, a well-known American industrial financier and art collector who lived from 1846 to 1931.

The elaborate vases are made from bonding 18 layers of metal. The shape evokes the baskets and pottery produced by First Nations residents in the area of the mine, and this influence is evident in several of the decorative motifs. The gold seal adorning the front bears the British Columbia coat of arms adopted in 1895. The Latin cross immediately beneath is a surveying symbol that indicates the latitude and longitude where the Ptarmigan Mine and Mount Farnham are situated. The sides are engraved with figures, including an eagle, a large stylized mask and a small crescent moon. The neck of the vase incorporates a band of eyes and a projecting bird's beak. The realistic and life-sized figure of the golden-eyed silver bird perched atop the vase is a ptarmigan -- a species of grouse found in the area where the mine adopted the same name.

Darrin Martens, Chief Curator, Audain Art Museum, explains that “the National Gallery of Canada acquired this extraordinary vessel at a New York auction in January 2011 for US \$662,500 as they wanted a strong representation of an older work from British Columbia. In addition to its links with B.C., this masterpiece is important because of its use of B.C. First Nations iconography, constructed by the best crafts people Tiffany employed in the early 1900s, under the direction of Tiffany’s star designer Paulding Farnham.”

“The Audain Art Museum’s permanent collection spans 200 years of art-making in British Columbia – from early First Nations works to artists actively working in B.C. today,” says Executive Director Suzanne Greening. “The Ptarmigan Vase is a fascinating artifact crafted from metals mined in B.C. over a century ago. We are very pleased that the National Gallery has chosen our art venue to share this important artifact of early British Columbia history.”

Paulding Farnham was a master American jewelry designer for Tiffany's in the late 1800s and early 1900s. At an 1889 exhibition in Paris, Farnham's gold and silver creations took the world's top prizes. In a recent biography, John Loring referred to Paulding Farnham as 'Tiffany's Lost Genius.' Many of Farnham's works are coveted by collectors as masterpieces today.

Background:

The Audain Art Museum site is located on Blackcomb Way adjacent to Whistler Village. Designed by Patkau Architects, the 56,000 square foot building is Canada's newest Category A art museum and one of Western Canada's largest.

Officially opened on March 12, 2016, the museum houses a large portion of the personal art collection that Michael Audain and his wife Yoshiko Karasawa have amassed over the past 40 years. Their world-class Northwest Coast art collection is on permanent display, plus there are galleries for temporary exhibitions of Canadian and international art. Open year round, the museum will be an attraction for Whistler's 10,000 residents and the 2.7 million annual visitors to the four-season mountain resort.

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BACKGROUNDER

This is part of the description from Sotheby's catalogue for an auction on January 21-22, 2011 in New York City:

Lot 114

Estimate: \$80,000 — 120,000 USD

LOT SOLD. 662,500 USD (Hammer Price with Buyer's Premium)

The Ptarmigan Vase: A Monumental Copper, Silver and Gold Mokume* Vase, the design attributed to Paulding Farnham, circa 1900-05

of inverted pear form one side mounted with a gold medallion of the seal of the Province of British Columbia above applied silver and copper diagram of the exact geographical position of the Ptarmigan Mines, the sides also engraved with figures including an eagle, large stylized mask, Native American symbols, and a small crescent moon, the shoulders applied with stylized bird's feet below a neck incorporating a band of eyes and a projecting bird's beak, perched on the rim is a 10 1/2 in. ptarmigan with copper beak, talons and gold eyes, the base rim applied with stylized pine trees all derived from Northwest Coast Indian lore, the finished base with concave recess and central silver and copper baluster finial

the base engraved with five signatures HANNWEBER, SWAMBY, THOMA, BARKER, and SPENGLER
height 25in.

63.5 cm

PROVENANCE

Paulding Farnham, *to his wife*

Sally James Farnham, *to their son*

James Farnham, *thence by descent*

***Mokume** -- A style or technique of decorative metalwork made to resemble wood grain, usually by laminating and then manipulating layers of metal of contrasting colours. Also: the mixed-metal laminate (of variable composition) used in this technique.

CATALOGUE NOTE

This exceptional vase has descended in the family of Paulding Farnham, through his wife, sculptor Sally James Farnham. Before her death in 1943, Sally compiled a detailed list of artworks with their makers that she wished to be distributed among her family members upon her passing. The present lot, described as "Ptarmigan Vase (Paul Farnham)" was to be given to her first-born child, James.

George Paulding Farnham was born on 6 November 1859, and it was through family connections that Farnham was hired by Tiffany & Co. His aunt, Julia, was married to Charles T. Cook, president of Tiffany & Co. from 1902-07. It was Cook who recommended his nephew as an apprentice in the "Tiffany School" under head designer, Edward C. Moore. In November 1885 he graduated from his apprenticeship and was made a "general assistant" to Moore. Farnham's rise during his early years at Tiffany & Co. seemed unstoppable and just four years into his career he won the gold medal at the Paris Exposition of 1889 for his jewelry designs. Following this success, Farnham was promoted to head jewelry designer in 1891, and during his tenure he won additional gold medals at the Chicago World's Colombian Exposition of 1893, the Paris Exposition of 1900 and the Buffalo Pan-American Exposition of 1901 Loring, John. *Paulding Farnham Tiffany's Lost Genius*, 200, pp. 7-8).

In 1902, Charles Lewis Tiffany gave control of Tiffany & Co. to his son, Lewis Comfort Tiffany. Tiffany and Farnham were both celebrated and talented designers in their respective styles, but there was not room enough at Tiffany & Co. for both. Although highly respected, Farnham's power and influence in the company was no match for the firm's largest shareholder. By 1907 Louis Comfort had named himself to be the new head jewelry designer, and on 2 June 1908 Farnham officially resigned from Tiffany & Co.

On 31 December 1896, Farnham married Sarah (Sally) Welles James, daughter of Col. Edward C. James, a prominent New York attorney, in her hometown of Ogdensburg, NY. Two years later the couple welcomed their first child, James, born in January 1898. A daughter, Julia Paulding Farnham, was born in November 1900, and a second son, John Paulding Farnham in July 1907. For a short he time shared studio space with his wife, an up-and-coming sculptor, on West 57th Street in New York, but he seems to have abandoned the art world entirely in 1909.

Farnham's first association with the Ptarmigan mines in British Columbia, Canada began about 1898. Also called the "Red Line", the mountain was rich with copper, gold and silver – the same minerals from which the Ptarmigan Vase is constructed. Farnham had initially believed the mines to be an exciting financial opportunity for his family and poured extensive personal resources into the venture (G.P.V. and Akrigg, Helen B., *British Columbia Places and Names*, 1997 p. 78). In 1901 the Farnham family purchased a ranch at the base of the mountains in the town Windermere, BC. The following year it was announced in *The British Colonist* that a prominent peak in the Selkirk mountain range "is now to be known as Mount Farnham, in honor of Paulding Farnham of New York, promoter of the Ptarmigan mines of the Selkirks. Mount Farnham is sentinel of the range, rising 12,000 feet, first to 10,000 feet, then by a perpendicular castle-like rook 2,000 feet higher. Mr. Farnham's property lies at the base of this mountain, and it is indeed well named, for Mr. Farnham has greatly contributed to the development of the mines in this district" (*The British Colonist*, 30 October 1902, p. 2).

Around 1904-05 it became apparent that the Ptarmigan mines were not the successful financial endeavor that Farnham had hoped they would be. Despite the venture's bleak prospects, Farnham continued to sink money into the project. He began to spend considerable amounts of time in British Columbia, especially after his departure from Tiffany & Co. in 1908 (Hassrick, Peter H. *The Art of Being an Artist Sally James Farnham, American Sculptor*, 2005, p. 31). It was written of him: "Mr. Farnham stands out like his mountain among mining men in this- he has lost a fortune like a man and paid every cent he owed (an unusual thing with defunct mining companies)" (G.P.V and Akrigg: 1997, p. 80).

Farnham's prolonged absences began to take their toll on his marriage and family life, and on 27 July 1914 Sally filed a petition for divorce on the grounds of abandonment. The couple officially divorced the following year, and Farnham took up residence in California a few years later (Hassrick: 2005, p. 35). By the time the divorce was granted Farnham had exhausted nearly all of his personal resources. He took very few possessions with him into his post-divorce life and Sally appears to have retained the property in their home and studio in New York, including the Ptarmigan Vase. The Ptarmigan Vase is among the artworks listed in a 1936 inventory of the contents of Sally's studio.

Given Farnham's enthusiasm for the Ptarmigan mines, the Ptarmigan Vase was probably made towards the beginning of the venture. This time period also corresponds with Farnham's burgeoning interest in Native American and Aztec design. Although Tiffany & Co. had been producing Native American-inspired silver wares since the mid-1870's, Farnham revived the firm's design vocabulary in the late 1880's to include bolder motifs, pictograms, and forms directly based on Native American basketwork and pottery. Examples of Farnham's Native American designs include the four "Pueblo" bowls exhibited in the 1893 Chicago Exposition, the "Navajo" vase and "Zuni" and "Hupa" bowls designed for the 1900 Paris Exposition, as well as the "Aztec" bowl finished in 1905 and sold in these rooms on 23 January 2009, lot 105 (Loring, John. *Paulding Farnham Tiffany's Lost Genius*, 2000, pp. 60-67).

Although the Ptarmigan Vase does not bear a Tiffany mark, the complexity of its manufacture would have required it to have been made in the Tiffany factory in New Jersey. Tiffany certainly had the capabilities to produce mokume of this scale – the only other known work of large-scale mokume is the 32 inch tall vase designed by Edward C. Moore for the 1889 Paris Exposition, now in the collection of the Cooper Hewitt National Design Museum, New York. A period drawing of this vase as published in *The Jewelers' Weekly*, is reproduced by John Loring in *Magnificent Tiffany Silver*, 2001, p. 52.

Most importantly, however, the five signatures on the base provide a direct connection with Tiffany & Co. All five signatures, HANNWEBER, SWAMBY, THOMA, BARKER, and SPENGLER can be traced to master craftsmen who worked for Tiffany during the period. Additionally, four of these men - Hannweber, Spengler, Swamby and Thoma- are recorded as contributors to the "Silversmiths' and Goldsmiths' Ware" category of 1900 the Paris Exposition and were important enough in their craft to be listed independently of Tiffany & Co. (Paulding Farnham was also listed independently of Tiffany in the "Jewelry" category). Moreover, they comprise four of the seven individuals named in this category, and were the only individually-listed makers representing the New York area. The 1900 Paris Exposition records also denote the various specializations of the craftsmen's contributions to the fair—Hannweber was a chaser, Spengler a silversmith, Swamby an enameler and Thoma a designer (*Catalogue of Exhibitors in the United States Sections of the International Universale Exposition Paris, 1900*, 1900, pp 435-36). Since it is documented that these craftsmen created the Native American-inspired wares for 1900 Exposition,

they most certainly would have had the technical skills to create the Ptarmigan Vase. Likely their experience with large-scale mixed-metal is the very reason why Farnham chose these specific craftsmen for this personal project.

This description is from Sotheby's catalogue for an auction on January 21-22, 2011 in New York City:

Lot 52

Estimate: \$400,000 — 600,000 USD

LOT SOLD. \$386,500 USD (Hammer Price with Buyer's Premium)

PROPERTY OF A PRIVATE COLLECTOR, CT

THE PTARMIGAN VASE: A Monumental Copper, Silver and Gold Mokume Vase and a leather-bound Book documenting its making, the design attributed to Paulding Farnham, 1904

PROVENANCE

Edward Dean Adams

Luke Vincent Lockwood (by repute), *acquired at a sale of Lockwood belongings by Private Collector, CT*

LITERATURE

The Ptarmigan Vases, 1904

CATALOGUE NOTE

On 21 January 2011, a massive *mokume* vase, descended in the family of Paulding Farnham, was sold in these rooms (lot 114). Referenced in family inventories as the "Ptarmigan Vase", this exceptional example of mixed-metal craftsmanship is now in the collection of the National Gallery of Canada. Aside from a similar 3 ¹/₈ in. version of the Vase, also descended in Farnham's family (to be offered as lot 53 in this sale), the Ptarmigan Vase was believed to be singular in its creation. In the spring of 2011, Sotheby's, New York, was notified of the existence of a second, identical vase and a book documenting the iconography and simultaneous construction of the *two* Ptarmigan Vases. The emergence of the present lot (the second large Ptarmigan Vase) and its accompanying book *The Ptarmigan Vases*, is a remarkable discovery and continuation of the on-going mystery surrounding these intriguing masterworks.

Bound in tooled brown leather and embossed with coordinates identical to those on the large Vases, the accompanying book, *The Ptarmigan Vases*, is dated January 1904. Through text and period illustrations, the book carefully documents the entire creation of the Vases, starting with the discovery of the rich ore, from which the Vases were made, on 13 November 1901 in Tunnel 3 of the Ptarmigan mines in British

Columbia. The book further explains that in the summer of 1902 approximately one ton of ore was shipped to New York, where it was then refined by the Balbach Refining Co., Newark, NJ. The refining of the metal was accomplished in 75 hours and produced 7 bricks of copper, 3.5 bricks of silver and 1 button of gold. Once the metal had been separated, "it was determined to make two vases from the gold, silver and copper, in the same proportions that they had been extracted from the ton of ore received from the mine." The *mokume* was made from 18 layers of copper and silver of equal thickness that had been chiseled to expose the various layers and create an irregular pattern. Disks of *mokume* were raised into a final outline, which *The Ptarmigan Vases* notes "is considered by metal workers a remarkable piece of metal hammering, and as far as known is the largest piece of such mixed metal ever produced."

The Ptarmigan Vases also provides a complete description of the Vases' decoration, which was derived from the basket and ornamental work of the Thompson River Indians, BC. The Vases are each topped by a ptarmigan "of natural size" depicted with plumage the species would display in November, the month in which the ore was discovered. The basket-weave rim is set with eagle eyes and an eagle beak "to suggest the beak of the bird that built its nest on the highest peak of the Red Line." The figures depicted in the etched decoration are also explained, including the large grotesque mask representing "the Old Man of the Glacier, who, according to the legend of the Indians controls the weather... and rejoices in the glaciers he preserves here in great abundance hiding the riches below," and the figure on horseback, which points to the mouth of Tunnel No. 3. Furthermore, the astrological symbols above the mountain depict "the heavenly bodies at the time of discovery." The book's discussion of the iconography concludes: "These two vases are so precisely alike in shape, ornament, weight and color, that it was difficult from time to time for the workmen to determine which was which, in order to fit their different ornaments during the process of completion."

Despite the wealth of information revealed by *The Ptarmigan Vases*, the book does not reference an author or publisher. Nor does it make any mention of Paulding Farnham, Tiffany & Co., or any of the five craftsmen whose names are stamped on the undersides of the Vases. The book does however bear the book plate of Edward Dean Adams (1846-1931), recipient of the famous gold Adams Vase, designed by Paulding Farnham for Tiffany & Co. Adams was a successful financier of various financial, engineering and industrial enterprises, including the Edison Electrical Company, Deutsche Bank, the Niagara Junction Railroad Company and the American Cotton Oil Company. He maintained a residence at 920 Fifth Avenue in Manhattan, and an estate in Rumson, NJ called "Rohallion."

In 1893 the stockholders and creditors of the American Cotton Oil Company commissioned Tiffany & Co. to create an elaborate gold vase to be given to Adams as a token of gratitude as he had recently "saved the company from financial ruin." At the time of the commission Adams was serving as company chairman, a position for which he refused any compensation. It was stipulated that the Adams Vase was to be made entirely of materials sourced in America so that the Vase would be as uniquely American as the company itself. Farnham's design for the 19-in vase demonstrates the same thoroughness of research and thoughtfulness as seen in the Ptarmigan Vases. Renaissance Revival in overall style, Farnham incorporated cotton blossoms with figures representing Genius and Modesty. Farnham described the two figures seated on the base as "young Atlas turning the financial world at his pleasure, his hand resting on the ornamental beaver to convey the idea that he is sensitive to the presence and importance of industry." The Adams vase completed in 1895 and was shown at the 1900 Exposition

Universelle in Paris where it was regaled as "a masterpiece of the goldsmith's art and a triumph for Mr. Farnham" (John Loring, *Paulding Farnham: Tiffany's Lost Genius*, 2000, p. 18). In 1904 Adams donated the Adams Vase to the Metropolitan Museum of Art, where he was a board member.

Adams was certainly keenly aware of Paulding Farnham's talent as a reflective and meticulous designer. His bookplate illustrating the Adams's Vase prominently amongst attributes his various accomplishments and interests is a testament of his esteem for Farnham's work. Adams likely came into possession of the Ptarmigan Vase around 1904. It is enticing to speculate that perhaps Adams acquired the Ptarmigan Vase as a replacement for the Adams Vase which left his collection in 1904. Adams died of phenomena on 20 May 1931 and was survived by his daughter Ruth Adams Lobdell (1891-1959). It is unclear of what became of his possessions following his death.

The present owner acquired the Ptarmigan vase and the companion book at a small auction in Connecticut in the early 1970's. The auction reportedly included works offered by the descendants of the late Luke Vincent Lockwood (1872-1951), which had come from his personal collection of Americana. Lockwood was a collector of 17th and 18th century American furniture and was considered a pioneer in the study of the field. He published *Colonial Furniture in America* in 1901.

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