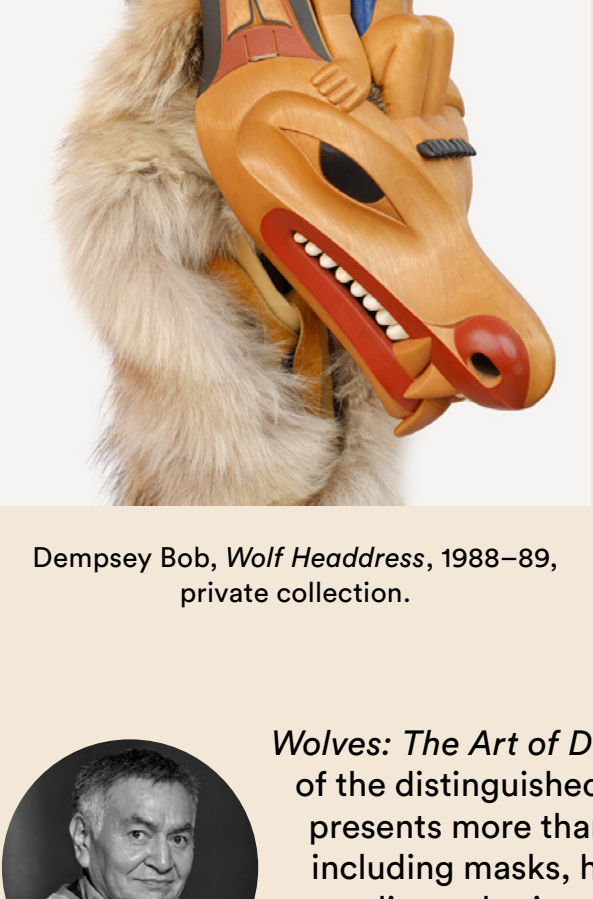


JANUARY 26, 2024

## THE CLOSE-UP: DEMPSEY BOB ON THE NORTHWEST COAST MASTERPIECE WOLF HEADDRESS

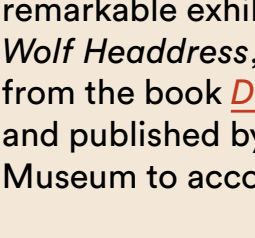
After nearly two years on the road, *Wolves: The Art of Dempsey Bob* is entering its final month at its final stop: the Kelowna Art Gallery. In honour of this major retrospective, we are spotlighting Bob and his Northwest Coast masterpiece Wolf Headdress, 1988–89.



Dempsey Bob, *Wolf Headdress*, 1988–89, private collection.



Dempsey Bob wearing his *Killer Whale Headdress* and holding his *Eagle Human Mask* (left) and *Eagle Bear Mask*, 1987, photograph by Blaine Campbell.

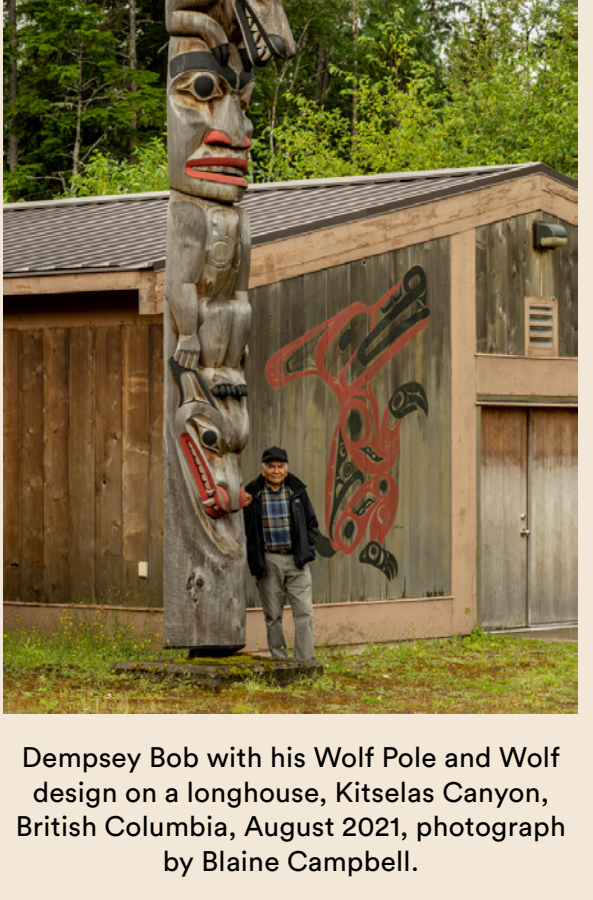


Dempsey Bob

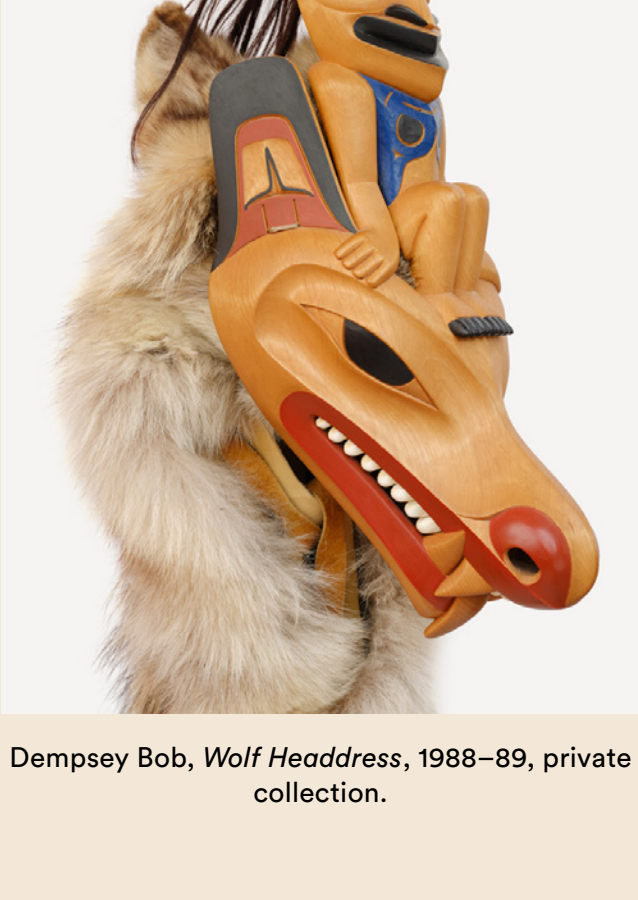
*Wolves: The Art of Dempsey Bob*, the first-ever retrospective of the distinguished Tahltan-Tlingit master carver's work, presents more than one hundred of the artist's pieces, including masks, headdresses, wall sculptures, jewelry, regalia, and prints. A 2021 recipient of a Governor General's Award in Visual & Media Arts, Bob (b.1948) was appointed an Officer of the Order of Canada in 2013 for his contributions as a carver and teacher and for his dedication to Tahltan-Tlingit cultural preservation. *Wolves* is on view at the Kelowna Art Gallery until February 19, 2024, the final stop in a four-city tour that began at Whistler's Audain Art Museum in April of 2022. In celebration of this remarkable exhibition, here is a close look at one of Bob's best-known works, *Wolf Headdress*, 1988–89, via the artist's words. His commentary is drawn from the book *Dempsey Bob: In His Own Voice* (2022), edited by Sarah Milroy and published by the McMichael Canadian Art Collection and the Audain Art Museum to accompany *Wolves*.

—The Art Canada Institute editors

### WOLF HEADDRESS



Dempsey Bob with his *Wolf Pole* and *Wolf* design on a longhouse, Kitselas Canyon, British Columbia, August 2021, photograph by Blaine Campbell.



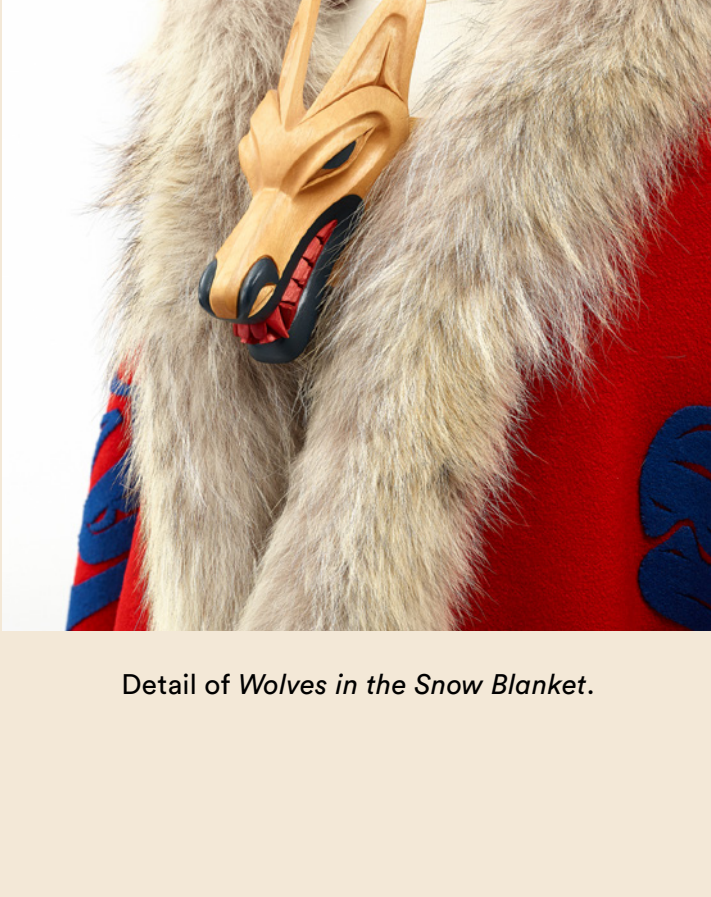
Dempsey Bob, *Wolf Headdress*, 1988–89, private collection.

*Wolf Headdress*, 1988–89 (above right), blends traditional Northwest Coast Indigenous iconography with unique flourishes that are distinctly Bob's. The artist, whose father was a carpenter, combines smooth, rounded surfaces with a variety of secondary materials—in this case fur and operculum shell—that give a vivid, lifelike appearance to the sculpture of a human figure seated atop the skull of a wolf. Bob portrays the agile canine with a long, exaggerated muzzle, [explaining](#), "I try to get those beautiful lines that are flowing, that are moving." Bob's distinctive take on the wolf motif also appears in the *Wolf* totem pole (above left) that he carved to be erected outside a longhouse in Kitselas Canyon, British Columbia.

### WOLF CLAN



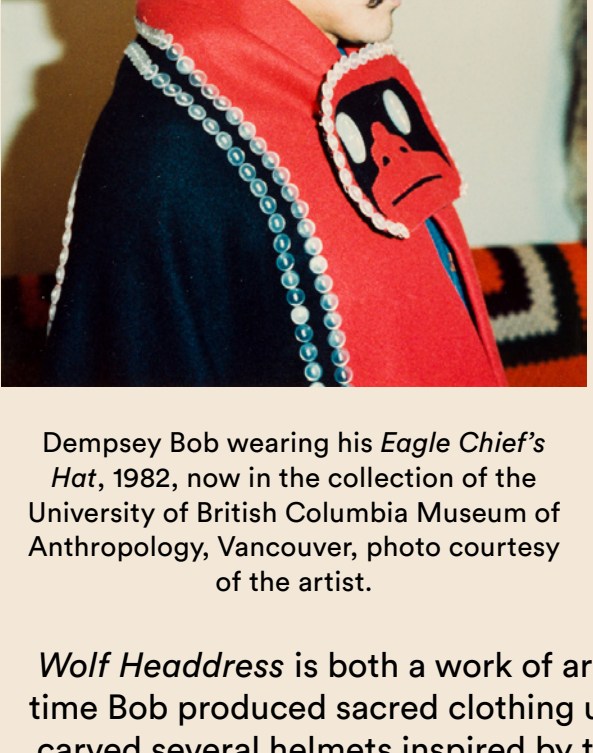
Dempsey Bob and Linda Bob, *Wolves in the Snow Blanket*, 1999–2002 (Blanket made by Linda Bob; mask clasp made by Dempsey Bob), McMichael Canadian Art Collection, Kleinburg, Ontario.



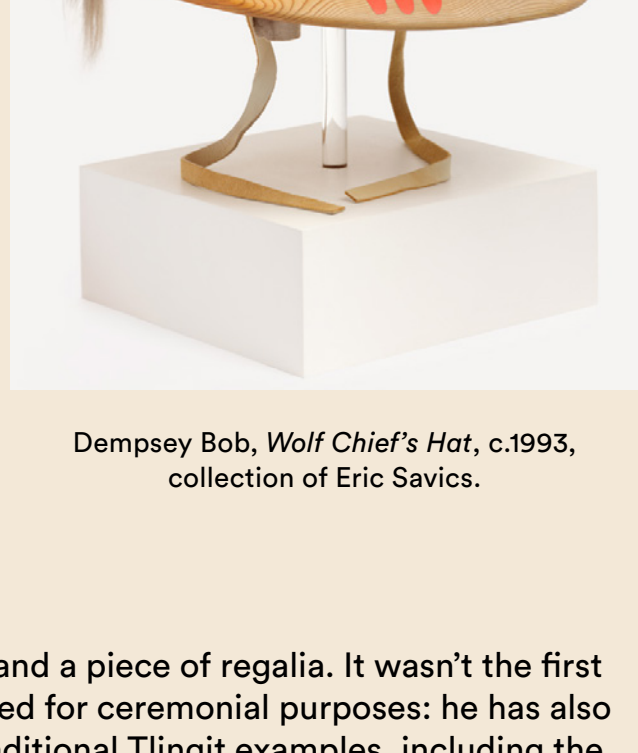
Detail of *Wolves in the Snow Blanket*.

In *Wolf Headdress*, the human figure's kinship with the animal may be a nod to Bob's identity as a member of the Wolf Clan through matrilineal descent. Wolves are among the artist's most personal subjects and often appear in his works, such as in *Wolves in the Snow Blanket*, 1999–2002 (above)—a fearsome portrayal of the animal slyly peering out of a fur collar and bearing blood-red teeth. "When I carve I try to stylize it—what I see and also what I think of [wolves], to bring that together," [says Bob](#). "In the eyes I see the intelligence, the strength too.... The eyes are very important. I've dreamed them. I've seen them looking at me."

### REGALIA



Dempsey Bob wearing his *Eagle Chief's Hat*, 1982, now in the collection of the University of British Columbia Museum of Anthropology, Vancouver, photo courtesy of the artist.



Dempsey Bob, *Wolf Chief's Hat*, c.1993, collection of Eric Savics.

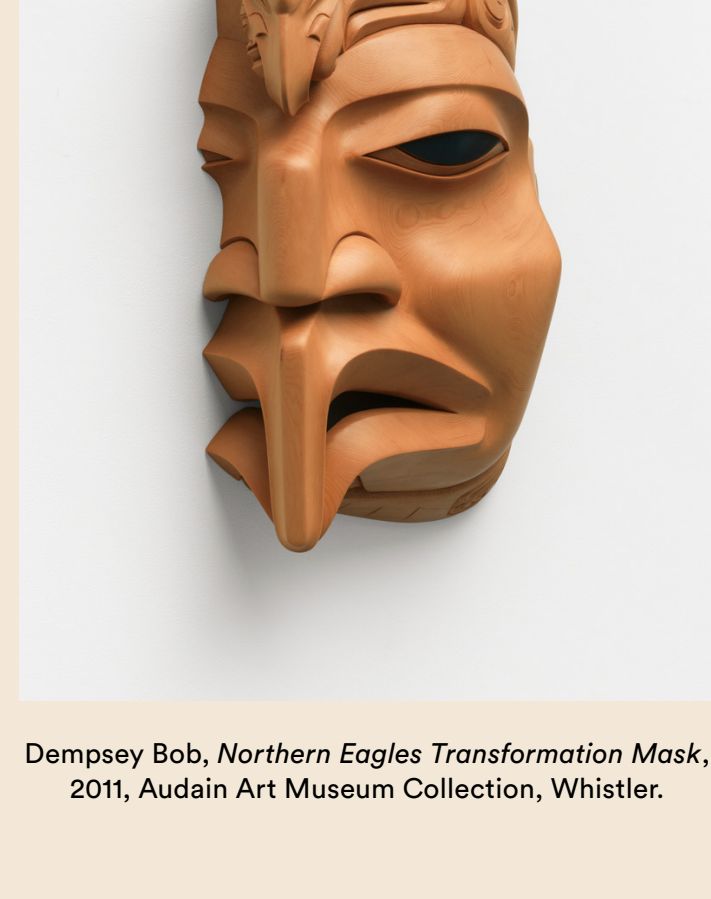
*Wolf Headdress* is both a work of art and a piece of regalia. It wasn't the first time Bob produced sacred clothing used for ceremonial purposes: he has also carved several helmets inspired by traditional Tlingit examples, including the magnificent *Wolf Chief's Hat*, c.1993 (above right). In the above left photograph, the artist is wearing his *Eagle Chief's Hat*, 1982. For Bob, creating regalia is a way of building on the legacy of Tlingit culture—a much-needed continuation given that in Canada, as he says, "we just have the leftovers.... Our culture was outlawed until 1951, when the potlach ban was lifted."

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### MASTER CARVER



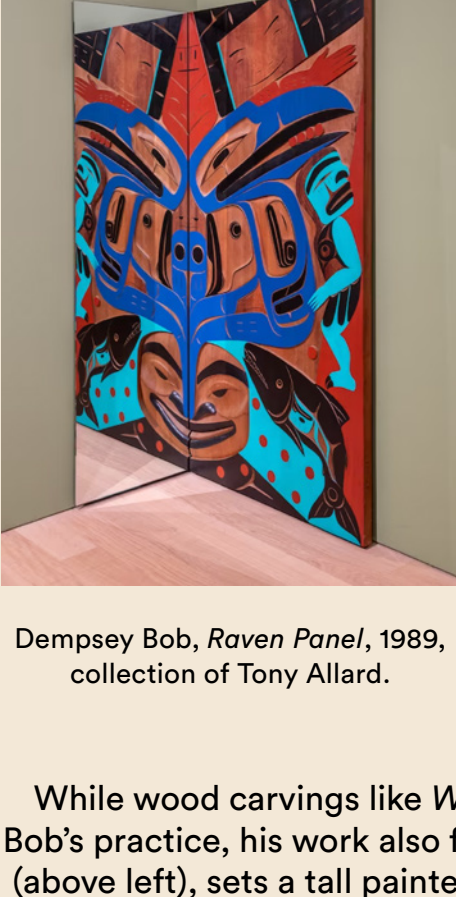
Dempsey Bob, Stan Bevan, and Lyonel Grant, *Pacific Song of the Ancestors*, 2023, installed at Emily Carr University of Art + Design, Vancouver.



Dempsey Bob, *Northern Eagles Transformation Mask*, 2011, Audain Art Museum Collection, Whistler.

"Each wood has its own purpose," says Bob of his use of alder wood in *Wolf Headdress*. "It's one of our purpose, it's really beautiful. It's strong and it's crisp." For Bob, carving with wood is central to the spirituality that supports his work. His mastery of the medium is evident in the wide range of pieces he has created, from the arresting *Northern Eagles Transformation Mask*, 2011 (above right), to the monumental totem pole *Pacific Song of the Ancestors*, 2023 (above left), which was made in collaboration with Stan Bevan and Lyonel Grant. As Bob puts it: "We borrow the beauty of the tree from Mother Nature. We carve our history on our poles.... When it falls down, we give it back to Mother Nature."

### FROM PAST TO FUTURE



Dempsey Bob, *Raven Panel*, 1989, collection of Tony Allard.



Dempsey Bob, *Wolf Headdress*, 1988–89, installation view, *Wolves: The Art of Dempsey Bob* (2023), Montreal Museum of Fine Arts.

While wood carvings like *Wolf Headdress* (above right) form the backbone of Bob's practice, his work also features contemporary elements. *Raven Panel*, 1989 (above left), sets a tall painted cedar carving against a mirror so that its abstract figures and surreal colours are reflected symmetrically. The black salmon in the work refers to the Exxon Valdez oil spill. "What I'm trying to do is to get back to the level of our ancestors, and then go beyond," says Bob. "I was giving a talk in Toronto and somebody asked me, 'Do you still use stone tools?' I said, 'I didn't come here in a canoe. I came here in a jet, and that changes everything about who I am.'"

### THANK YOU TO OUR BENEFACTORS

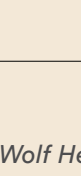
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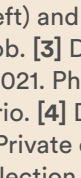
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Image Credits: [1] Dempsey Bob, *Wolf Headdress*, 1988–89, alder, acrylic paint, fur, operculum shell, 40.6 x 20.3 cm. Private collection. Photo credit: Rachel Topham Photography. Courtesy of the McMichael Canadian Art Collection, Kleinburg. © Dempsey Bob. [2] Dempsey Bob wearing his *Killer Whale Headdress* and holding his *Eagle Human Mask* (left) and *Eagle Bear Mask*, 1987. Photograph by Blaine Campbell. Courtesy of Dempsey Bob and Margaret Bob. [3] Dempsey Bob's *Wolf Pole* and *Wolf* design on a longhouse, Kitselas Canyon, British Columbia, August 2021. Photograph by Blaine Campbell. Courtesy of the McMichael Canadian Art Collection, Kleinburg, Ontario. [4] Dempsey Bob, *Wolf Headdress*, 1988–89, alder, acrylic paint, fur, operculum shell, 40.6 x 20.3 cm. Private collection. Photo credit: Rachel Topham Photography. Courtesy of the artist. [5] Dempsey Bob and Linda Bob, *Wolves in the Snow Blanket*, 1999–2002 (Blanket made by Linda Bob; mask clasp made by Dempsey Bob), blanket: felt, wolf fur, buttons, thread; mask clasp: alder, acrylic paint, leather fastening, blanket: 141.5 x 155.4 cm; mask clasp: 20.3 x 15.6 x 6.7 cm. McMichael Canadian Art Collection, Kleinburg, Ontario, Gift from the Christopher Bredt and Jamie Cameron Collection (2014.6.3.A-B). Photo credit: Craig Boyko. © Dempsey Bob. [6] Dempsey Bob and Linda Bob, *Wolves in the Snow Blanket* (detail), 1999–2002 (Blanket made by Linda Bob; mask clasp made by Dempsey Bob), blanket: felt, wolf fur, buttons, thread; mask clasp: alder, acrylic paint, leather fastening, blanket: 141.5 x 155.4 cm; mask clasp: 20.3 x 15.6 x 6.7 cm. McMichael Canadian Art Collection, Kleinburg, Ontario, Gift from the Christopher Bredt and Jamie Cameron Collection (2014.6.3.A-B). Photo credit: Craig Boyko. © Dempsey Bob. [7] Dempsey Bob wearing his *Eagle Chief's Hat*, 1982, now in the collection of the University of British Columbia, Museum of Anthropology, Vancouver. Photo courtesy of the artist. [8] Dempsey Bob, *Wolf Chief's Hat*, c.1993, red cedar, acrylic paint, operculum shell, horsehair, leather, ermine fur, 38 x 45.7 x 45.7 cm. Collection of Eric Savics. Photo credit: Rachel Topham Photography. Courtesy of the McMichael Canadian Art Collection, Kleinburg, Ontario. © Dempsey Bob. [9] Dempsey Bob, Stan Bevan, and Lyonel Grant, *Pacific Song of the Ancestors*, 2023, installed at Emily Carr University of Art + Design, Vancouver. Courtesy of Global News. [10] Dempsey Bob, *Northern Eagles Transformation Mask*, 2011, yellow cedar, acrylic paint, 58.4 x 40.6 x 15.2 cm. Audain Art Museum Collection, Whistler, Gift of Michael Audain and Yoshiko Karasawa (2018.058). Photo courtesy of Trevor Mills. © Dempsey Bob. [11] Dempsey Bob, *Raven Panel*, 1989, red cedar, acrylic paint, mirror. Collection of Tony Allard. Photo credit: Scott Brammer. Courtesy of the Audain Art Museum, Whistler. © Dempsey Bob. [12] Dempsey Bob, *Wolf Headdress*, 1988–89, installation view, *Wolves: The Art of Dempsey Bob* (2023), Montreal Museum of Fine Arts. Courtesy of Lindsay Richardson/APT. © Dempsey Bob.