

Beau Dick

*Walas Gwa'yam / Big, Great Whale*

22 Cortlandt Alley & 394 Broadway

April 12 - May 11, 2024

*"Our whole culture has been shattered. It's up to the artists now to pick up the pieces and try and put them together, back where they belong. Yeah, it does become political. It becomes beyond political; it becomes very deep and emotional."* – Beau Dick speaking in the 2017 film 'Maker of Monsters: The Extraordinary Life of Beau Dick.'

Andrew Kreps Gallery is pleased to announce *Walas Gwa'yam / Big, Great Whale*, an exhibition of works by artist and activist Chief Beau Dick (1955 - 2017; B. Village Island, Kingcome Inlet, BC; Kwakwaka'wakw) made between 1979 and 2015.

Beau Dick's works are deeply informed by the tradition of potlatch, a gift-giving ceremony practiced by Indigenous people of the coast of Pacific Northwest Canada, which focused on the redistribution of wealth as a tool for building solidarity. Outlawed by the Canadian Government for nearly seventy years as part of an ongoing history of forced assimilation, the seclusion of Dick's birthplace on Kingcome Inlet (Gwa'yi) allowed his community to continue practicing customs relatively free from the gaze of colonial authorities. Trained in wood-carving by his father, grandfather, and other master carvers, and completing his education in Vancouver, Dick was acutely aware of inherent tensions between contemporary consumer culture and Kwakwaka'wakw teachings. Refuting his masks as static objects, his carvings reference supernatural figures, like Dzunuk'wa, the "wild woman of the woods," and her counterpart, Bakwas, "wild man of the woods," which are reanimated to combat what Dick saw as capitalism's "ravenous" oppression. Frequently employing his works in dances and performances, in 2012 he took forty Atlakim (Forest) masks to his community in Alert Bay, where after one final ceremony, they were ritually burned, referencing the ongoing responsibility for rebirth, and recreation in the face of erased tradition.

In 2023, Beau Dick's work was included in the major exhibition *Indian Theater: Native Performance, Art, and Self-Determination since 1969*, Hessel Museum of Art, Bard College, Annandale-on-Hudson, New York, curated by Candice Hopkins. Past solo exhibitions included *Devoured by Consumerism*, White Columns, New York, 2019, traveled to Remai Modern, Saskatoon, Canada, 2019, *Beau Dick: Revolutionary Spirit*, Audain Art Museum, Whistler, BC, 2018. In addition, Dick participated in important group exhibitions during his lifetime, such as documenta 14 in Athens, GR, and Kassel, Germany, 2017, *Sakahàn: International Indigenous Art*, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, 2013, and the 17th Biennale of Sydney, Australia, 2010, among others. A lifelong advocate and activist, Dick was inspired by the ongoing movement Idle No More, which was initiated in response to legislative abuses of Indigenous treaty rights by the Canadian Government. In 2013, Dick broke Copper Shields on the steps of the BC legislative assembly, and the next year, gathered even more supporters to break copper in front of Parliament Hill in Ottawa, stating *"In breaking this copper we confront the tyranny and oppression of a government who has forsaken human rights and turned its back on nature in the interests of the almighty dollar, and we act in accordance with our laws."*

The gallery thanks LaTiesha Fazakas of Fazakas Gallery, Vancouver, and the Forge Project, Taghkanic, New York for their support and assistance in the organization of this exhibition.