



CANADIAN
MUSEUM
OF HISTORY
-
MUSÉE
CANADIEN
DE L'HISTOIRE



FRAMEWORK FOR INDIGENOUS RELATIONS

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The *Spirit of Haida Gwaii* by Bill Reid, in the Haida Gwaii Salon at the Museum.



1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Skywoman by Shelley Niro, in the Museum's First Peoples Hall.

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This *Framework for Indigenous Relations* – the first of its kind at the Canadian Museum of History (CMH) – is aimed at redefining the Museum’s commitment to Indigenous peoples across Canada. Its purpose is to create institutional change that will strengthen relationships between the Museum and Indigenous peoples and provide a respectful and mutually beneficial path forward.

This Framework commits the Museum to increasing cultural competence while fulfilling its mandate, supporting a robust research agenda, and bolstering its reputation for museological excellence.

The CMH has a long and complex history of engagement and collaboration with Indigenous communities in Canada. The Framework marks a period of reflection upon past practice and the evolving relationship between the Museum and Indigenous peoples. Incorporating feedback from extensive internal and external consultations, it outlines a multi-year approach to Indigenous relations at the CMH that is proactive, flexible, and

transparent. Intended as a living document, the Framework will be reviewed regularly with a report on progress after three years. It aligns with the Museum’s other guiding documents and takes into account evolving legislation and the role of a national museum. It lays out a set of principles and related strategic objectives grouped under three broad headings, as indicated below.

A. Access

1. Streamlining access to collections
2. Prioritizing Indigenous languages
3. Incorporating Indigenous ways of knowing
4. Making collections available in Indigenous communities

B. Engagement

1. Establishing meaningful consultation
2. Developing protocols
3. Creating networks

C. Knowledge

1. Increasing cultural awareness
2. The hiring and retention of Indigenous staff
3. Respecting Indigenous voices
4. Creating innovative training opportunities

2. INTRODUCTION

Douglas Cardinal, architect of the Museum, speaking at a ceremony in the Grand Hall.

2. INTRODUCTION

Background

The Canadian Museum of History is Canada’s largest museum of human history. With a mandate to “enhance Canadians’ knowledge, understanding and appreciation of the events, experiences, people and objects that reflect and have shaped Canada’s history and identity,” it houses a wide range of collections.

Collections related to Indigenous culture and history comprise the majority of the Museum’s holdings. With approximately 55,000 items in the Ethnology collection and several million items resulting from archaeological excavations, collections include objects of everyday use, sacred and ceremonial material, and associated documentation, photographs and films. While Indigenous ancestral remains are in the care of the Museum as a result of past archaeological practice, repatriation has been ongoing for decades.

Although the Museum’s collections date back to 1856 with the Geological Survey of Canada (GSC), systematic collecting pertaining to Indigenous peoples did not begin until 1910, with the establishment of a formal Anthropology section to document the presumed vanishing cultures and histories of Indigenous peoples. Most CMH collections of Indigenous origin date from the 1880s to the 1940s and represent communities in every province and territory, as well as a small percentage from outside of Canada. Collecting continues today, primarily in the form of contemporary art and craft, and in collaboration with communities and artists.

Collections grew through purchase, donation, and occasional international exchange, by geological surveyors, Museum anthropologists, medical professionals, missionaries, government agents, and professional collectors, among others. Much of the collection was made carefully, deliberately, and with documentation. While the research and acquisition documentation created by early collectors and contributors to the collections form a valuable resource today for Indigenous and non-Indigenous researchers alike, the Museum acknowledges its colonial past and the likelihood that some belongings were acquired under duress or taken without consent. A comprehensive collections history project has been initiated to consider the history of acquisitions in a new light, seek out problematic transactions, and initiate repatriation where this is evident.

History of Practice

In its modern history, the CMH has served as a positive example of Indigenous engagement, partnership, and the co-curation of exhibitions. Exhibitions including the Grand Hall (1989), *Threads of the Land* (1994), the First Peoples Hall (2003), and the recent Canadian History Hall (2017) have had Indigenous advisory committees, strong Indigenous presence in curatorial decision-making (both by staff and by external consultants), and Indigenous artists and craftspeople creating works for inclusion in the exhibitions.

As a means of improving the relationship between museums and Indigenous peoples, the 1992 Assembly of First Nations/Canadian Museums Association Task Force Report on Museums and First Peoples made recommendations related to access, interpretation, training, and repatriation. The Museum's Board of Trustees adopted the Report's recommendations in principle in 1992, resulting in several agenda-setting programs and policies, including the Sacred Materials Project (1993), the Indigenous Internship Program (1993), and the Museum's Repatriation Policy (2001).

In 1996, the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP) made recommendations relating to museums. These included the creation of, and adherence to, ethical guidelines for museum work relating to Indigenous cultures, the involvement of Indigenous people in the development and support of these guidelines, and training opportunities.

The Commission also recommended that collections be well documented and catalogued adequately, and that inventories be made available to communities in order to facilitate the repatriation of cultural material. The CMH has made significant strides in these areas, most recently creating a Repatriation and Indigenous Relations Unit in 2016 which, in addition to undertaking engagements with communities and offering a training program, has a dedicated team focused on repatriation initiatives.

Over the past several decades, the CMH has made efforts in a variety of ways to share both authority and collections with Indigenous communities. Co-curatorship, advisory committees, and Indigenous curators have contributed to richer and more representative exhibitions.

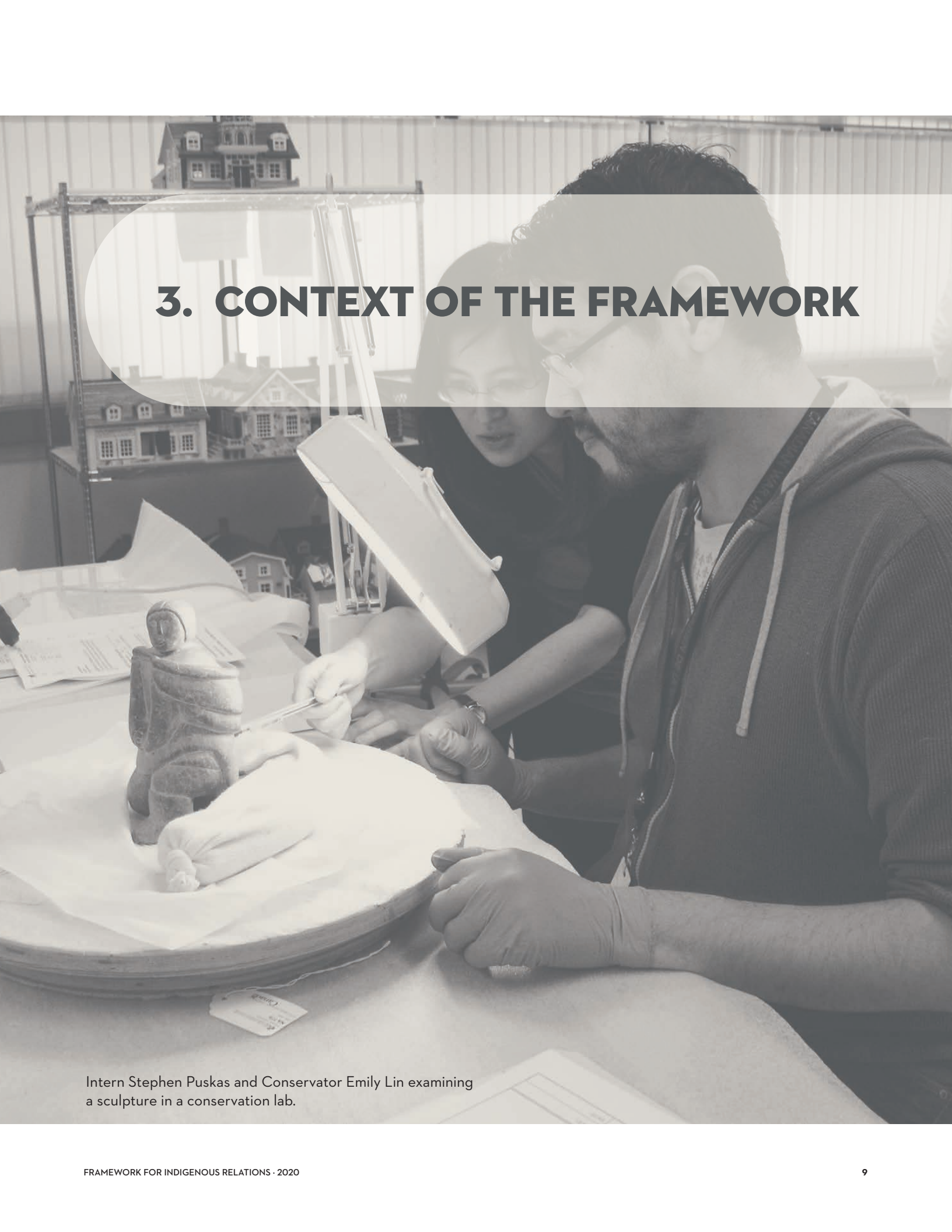
Shared possession of collections, in which decision making, location, and care of cultural material is shared by the Museum and Indigenous communities, has meant that more Indigenous people across Canada have local access to their history in their own communities while enriching documentation and histories for display within the National Capital Region. Joint cultural projects based on material in the CMH collections have also contributed to a revitalization of Indigenous art forms. Since the 1970s, the incorporation of traditional care in museum collections, as advised by Indigenous ceremonialists and knowledge keepers, has privileged Indigenous approaches over purely institutional considerations. Repatriation, continuing since 1978, has returned belongings and Indigenous ancestors to their communities of origin.

More recently, the Truth and Reconciliation Calls to Action (2015) and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People (UNDRIP) served as reminders of the work yet to be done. While many Museum practices were developed in a manner that is consistent with the principles of UNDRIP, they evolved over time and have not been formalized. This Framework aims to formalize and expand these practices, in collaboration with and to better serve Indigenous communities, and to create stronger relationships.

Creating a Framework

The creation of this Framework began with an assessment of the Museum’s processes related to its projects and activities and with numerous consultations with employees from across the Museum to better understand their work, challenges, and cultural competence. Discussions ranged from high-level overviews to in-depth process reviews. External engagements occurred in several ways. Alumni of the CMH Indigenous Internship Program provided their views on the relationship between museums and Indigenous peoples, along with valuable feedback regarding their time at the CMH. Discussions with external experts relating to areas such as repatriation, archives, intellectual property, and Indigenous access to collections were both formal and informal, in-house and off-site. Members of the Indigenous Heritage Circle, an Indigenous-led organization dedicated to the advancement of Indigenous cultural heritage, made recommendations on the content, process, and desired results of the Framework, and provided critical advice, suggestions and wisdom.

3. CONTEXT OF THE FRAMEWORK



Intern Stephen Puskas and Conservator Emily Lin examining a sculpture in a conservation lab.

3. CONTEXT OF THE FRAMEWORK

This Framework is one of several documents guiding the Museum. It reflects the CMH Board of Trustees' Strategic Directions for 2020-2025 – in particular, directives to strengthen relationships with Indigenous peoples through respectful collaboration and shared stewardship of Indigenous collections and intangible heritage.

It aligns with the priorities of the CMH Research Strategy (2013), which focus on museological leadership, contemporary Canada, the changing North, Indigenous histories, and cultural expression. The Framework reflects the guiding principles of the CMH Collections Development Plan (2016), particularly regarding advancing collection knowledge, commitment to Canadians, and museum ethics.

Considering collections within the context of the Framework may address some of the challenges outlined in the Collections Development Plan in relation to access, updating collection practices, repatriation, and new acquisition/deaccession processes. It may also contribute to a better understanding and management (cohesively and consistently) of the archaeology and ethnology collections.

This Framework complements the CMH Framework for Cultural Activities (2019), particularly in relation to matters of engagement and collaboration. Principles of the Framework for Cultural Activities include authenticity, accessibility, and inclusiveness for exhibitions and programs, as well as collaborations that are beneficial, mutual, and inclusive. These principles all speak to the goals of engagement and shared responsibility that underscore the Framework for Indigenous Relations.

4. PRINCIPLES

Intern Skylar-James Wall cleaning a totem pole in the Grand Hall.

4. PRINCIPLES

The Museum’s strength lies primarily in its collections and their associated histories. These collections are a symbol of pride for most Canadians and reflect the country’s complex history.

For some, collections related to Indigenous history symbolize what has been lost by Indigenous communities. The Museum aspires to fulfill its mandated role as a national memory institution with an acknowledgement and reconciliation of its past. The Framework will make the Museum’s efforts more intentional and proactive, based on the three principles below.

Transparency

The Museum is committed to UNDRIP’s principles for prompt decisions, fair procedures, and a transparent process in its operations, and will carry out its work in good faith by openly and proactively sharing information, having clear policies, and respectfully engaging to the best of its abilities with Indigenous communities.

Accountability

Taking responsibility for actions, both past and present, is key to building trust and relationships. The Museum will carefully consider its complex past, and will take the initiative to consult with Indigenous peoples whenever possible, in order to inform future decisions.

Shared Authority

The Museum recognizes its shared interest with Indigenous peoples in Indigenous cultural material and responsible stewardship. Authority will be exercised in partnership with Indigenous communities through interrelated but distinct roles, and clear decision-making processes. The Museum recognizes that these partnerships need to be diverse, honest, and enduring.

5. STRATEGIC PRIORITIES



Some of the alumni of the Indigenous Internship Program during its 25th anniversary celebration, in 2018.

5. STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

A. Access

Cultural material of Indigenous origin at the CMH comprises a unique and valuable collection spanning both time and place. This material is accessed regularly by Indigenous community members, scholars, artists, and the general public.

These materials are both tangible and intangible. Although collections are the heart of the Museum, and are significant to the history of Canada, the Museum acknowledges that these collections are inextricably linked to Indigenous communities of origin and, in some cases, central to the cultural well-being of Indigenous peoples.

Access to Indigenous cultural materials requires a streamlined process that is clear, navigable, and flexible, and that values cultural respect in institutional best practices. Physical spaces should be welcoming and not intimidating to Indigenous visitors.

The Framework will create new or increased opportunities for access to collections within Indigenous communities.

Objectives include:

A1. Streamlining access to collections

To increase ease of access to collections across Museum divisions, protocols and practices will be reviewed, further developed and applied to all collections, regardless of where or by whom they are managed. These protocols and practices will be designed to facilitate the compilation of disparate collections related to a particular group, Nation, or person, and to streamline the provision of information.

A2. Prioritizing Indigenous languages

The Museum houses archival material pertaining to Indigenous languages from across the country. Continuing to identify, evaluate, digitize, and make this material accessible to Indigenous communities will be a priority, as will working with Indigenous communities to adjust past restrictions placed on these materials.

A3. Incorporating Indigenous ways of knowing

The Museum will work to incorporate Indigenous ways of knowing with non-Indigenous concepts of ownership through shared decision-making for restrictions, and shared access to key collections, including sacred and ceremonial material, ancestral remains, and intangible material related to societal, lineage or family rights. The repatriation of items subject to competing claims may be guided by Indigenous legal traditions and protocols.

A4. Making collections available in Indigenous communities

The Museum will continue to develop new models for partnership and collaboration to enable collections access within their communities of origin. As repatriation remains a priority, the Museum will increase efforts towards the proactive repatriation of ancestral remains and cultural material, including items presently on long-term loan.

B. Engagement

Telling the stories of Canadians, and increasing understanding of Indigenous peoples, places, and events, cannot be undertaken effectively without engaging the creators of those cultural materials, stories, and histories. The right of Indigenous peoples to control and protect their cultural heritage under UNDRIP means that engagement and consultation will be integral to the Museum's work.

The Museum will ensure increased opportunities for Indigenous voices and curation, extended engagement for exhibitions and programs, and consultation about collections, without placing an undue burden on Indigenous communities. In addition, the Museum will continue to partner with Indigenous communities and organizations on projects, events, and other initiatives to further understanding of Indigenous histories and cultures.

Objectives include:

B1. Establishing meaningful consultation

Deeper and more focused engagement within curatorial, exhibition, and programming processes will create mutually beneficial projects and enhance shared responsibility for the collections. The Museum will focus additional efforts on Indigenous youth and Northern communities.

B2. Developing protocols

The Museum will formalize protocols that incorporate traditional ways of knowing. Protocols for access to sensitive materials, for public events, and for Elders will incorporate traditional care and knowledge into conventional museological practice.

B3. Creating networks

The Museum will create opportunities to bring together Indigenous communities, scholars, and museum professionals for specific projects and events, and aspires to become a hub for Indigenous engagement.

C. Knowledge

One of the key functions of the Museum is to promote knowledge and disseminate information. The Final Report of Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) highlighted the role museums can play in reconciliation, both with the public and within their own institutions. Public education extends beyond research, exhibitions, and public programs (although these are key) to all areas of Museum operations.

The Museum will strive to ensure consistent messages and values in the ways it communicates with the public. It will begin by strengthening the cultural competence of employees while finding ways to share museological expertise.

Objectives include:

C1. Increasing cultural awareness

In support of the TRC's call for cultural sensitivity training for public servants, and in the pursuit of service excellence, the Museum will work to ensure that all employees receive initial training in cultural awareness. Training opportunities related to cultural competence and consultation will continue to be offered on a regular basis.

C2. The hiring and retention of Indigenous staff

Personal cultural connections and worldviews make for richer and more diverse research, collections, and programs. An increased number of Indigenous employees throughout the Museum would greatly enhance both internal and external cultural awareness. The Museum will work towards establishing flexible and innovative hiring, retention, and promotion initiatives.

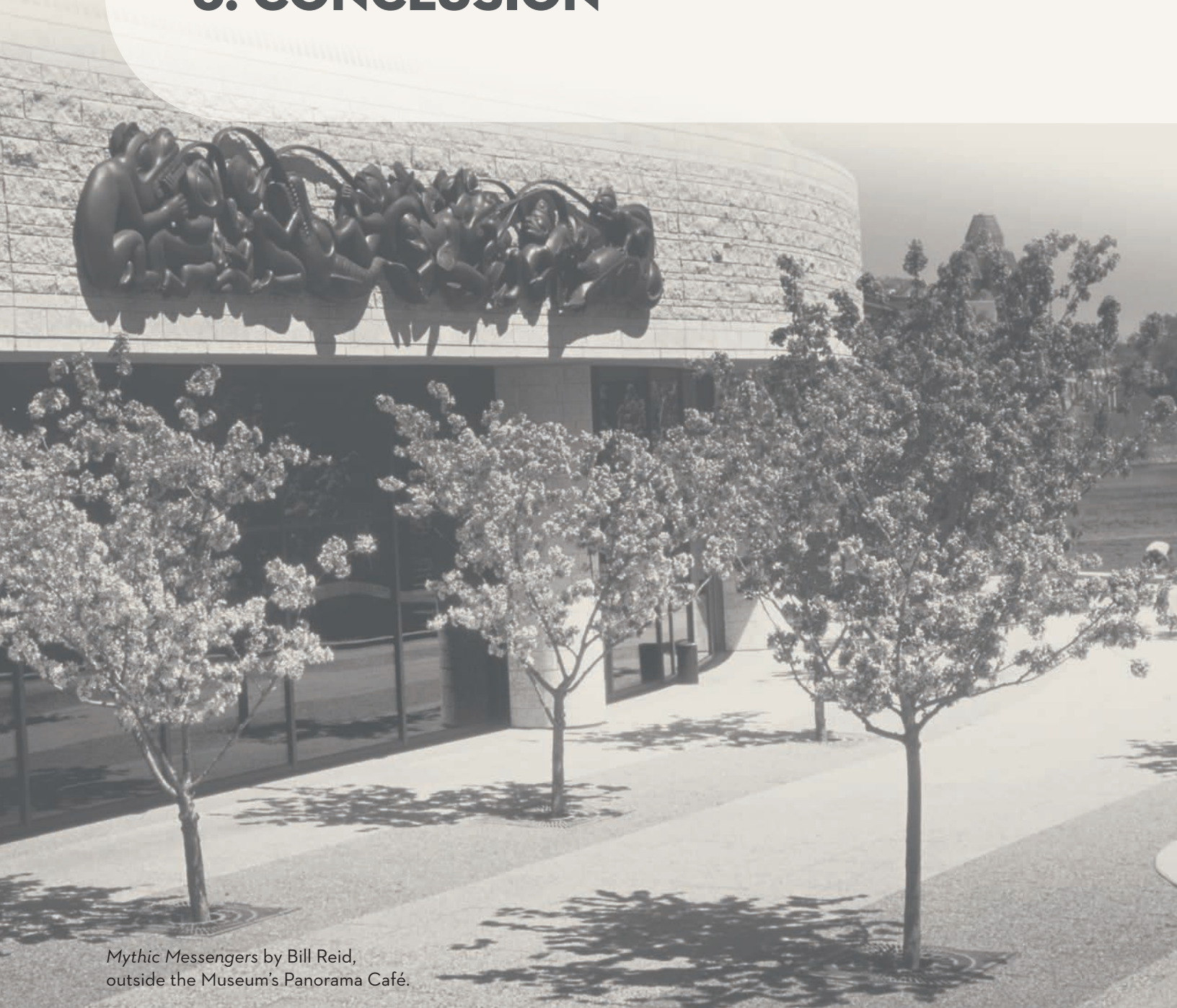
C3. Respecting Indigenous voices

The Museum will work to find new ways of making space for Indigenous communities to tell their own stories in their own voices. The Museum will achieve this through innovative partnerships and exhibition processes, community-driven research, outreach projects, public programming, and public events.

C4. Creating innovative training opportunities

Opportunities to share expertise between Indigenous Internship Program alumni, Indigenous museum and cultural authorities, and community members could assist in building networks and capacity, while also strengthening skills. An expansion and redefinition of the Indigenous Internship Program aims to provide increased opportunities for youth and Northern communities, and increased support to Indigenous cultural centres.

6. CONCLUSION



Mythic Messengers by Bill Reid,
outside the Museum's Panorama Café.

6. CONCLUSION

This Framework is intended to provide a new structure for Indigenous relations at the CMH and will affect most divisions across the Museum. It envisions a renewed approach while continuing to build upon past experience.

Learning from the past, listening to Indigenous communities, and maintaining an unparalleled standard of excellence will enable the Museum to better serve all Canadians.

The intention is to formalize existing practices, while guiding the development of new processes and policies. Clear and consistent guidelines based on sound principles, in consultation with Indigenous peoples, will create confidence in staff across the Museum, improve the delivery of services, and streamline practices. This is key to developing and maintaining relationships, trust, and reputation, and to fulfilling the Museum's mandate.

Intern Kylie Rose Bressette retrieving a bandolier bag from a collections storage room.

