



# REVITALIZING JAPANTOWN



A Unifying Exploration of Human Rights, Branding, and Place

## Revitalizing Japantown?

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Nikkei National Museum & Cultural Centre

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This publication accompanies the exhibit by the same name at the Nikkei National Museum & Cultural Centre, October 24, 2015 – January 31, 2016. A complementary exhibit was held at Gallery Gachet, March 6 – April 12, 2015.

This exhibit is part of a larger project, *Revitalizing Japantown? A Unifying Exploration of Human Rights, Branding, and Place*, sponsored by the Social Sciences Humanities and Research Council.

On the cover:

**Greg Masuda**

*Dispossession*, 2010

Lightjet photograph mounted on aluminium, 1/3, 26" x 113"

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[www.revitalizingjapantown.ca](http://www.revitalizingjapantown.ca)

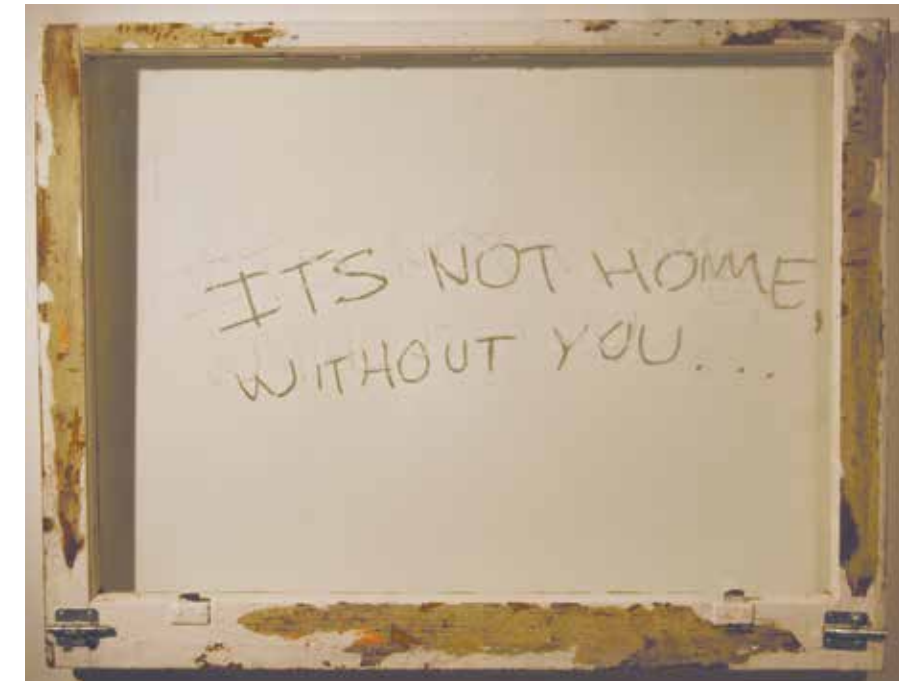
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**Karen Ward**, *Not Home*, 2014, salvaged window, 26" x 32.5"

I work with found – that is, discarded – objects because my work is about people and ideas that are also discarded by a throwaway culture that effaces our stories and histories. I found these words on the street near a provincial welfare office and captured them to embed on this glass, a fragile and unforgiving surface, itself also removed from a home. Collection of the artist.



**Greg Masuda**

*Dispossession*, 2010  
Lightjet photograph  
mounted on aluminium, 1/3  
26" x 113"

This photograph represents three occurrences of dispossession in Vancouver: starting with the colonization of Indigenous peoples, then the Japanese Canadian uprooting that resonated with my family's own experience, and finally, the gentrification of today's Downtown Eastside community. It's shocking what was acceptable to society and endorsed by our government in the past, and I hope that people will realize what's taking place right now on the Downtown Eastside is equally unacceptable. Collection of the Nikkei National Museum 2013.40.1

## UNDER CONSTRUCTION

I go by many names,  
I know it sounds silly,  
But perhaps Hollywood North  
Is most true to me.

I have a troubled past,  
A fact that is plain to see.  
If only I could erase  
My darn history.

Like a photoshopped image,  
It is so easy  
To conceal the blemishes  
That lie underneath.

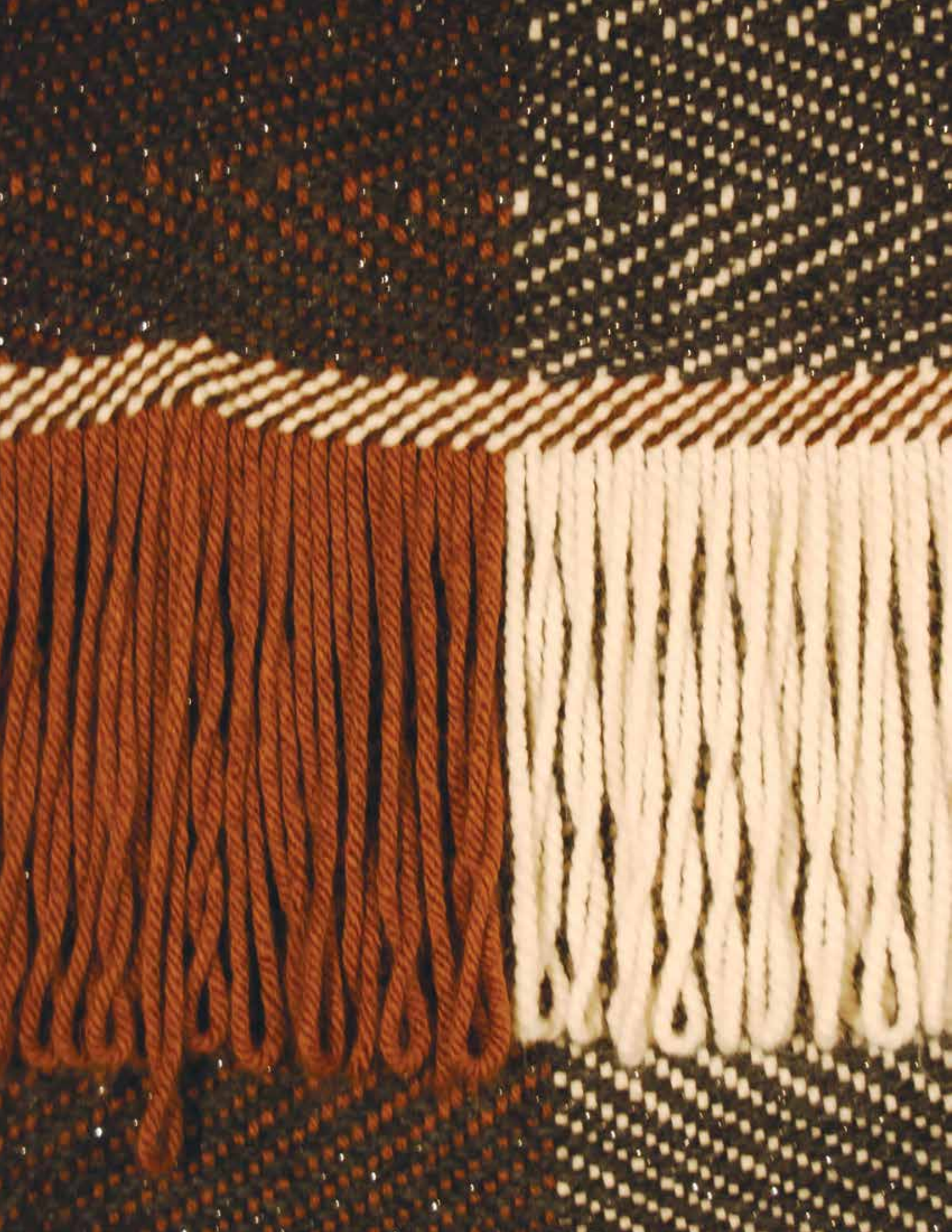
Folks from far and wide  
Come to windsurf and to ski,  
To admire my  
Natural beauty.

If only I could get  
A new identity,  
Oh what a great  
Magic trick it would be!

—Quin Martins

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<i>inside back cover</i>	Domo Arigato! Thank you!



**ni? ce:p kʷətʰiləm ʔə ʔ tə  
ńa šxʷməθkʷəyama:† təməxʷ  
WELCOME TO THIS  
MUSQUEAM LAND**

ni? xe?xe?, ʔa tə ʔi ńa šxʷməθkʷəyama:† təməxʷ  
It is sacred, this Musqueam land.

This Exhibit is important because it ties together the communities that have to fight for their Right to Remain in the DTES. This amazing opportunity to work on a Button Blanket (as part of the exhibit) further unifies and strengthens our bonds and ensures our success in working together to create better days for all. Taking time to sew on a button is an act of love, of support, of unity. This Button Blanket symbolizes our shared struggles and successes. It symbolizes our connection to each other, to this sacred land and our REconnection to ourselves...to our ancestors.

\\o/  
My hands go up to the Nikkei National Museum & Cultural Centre for creating a space for this exhibit.

hay ce:p qə to all who played a role in making this necessary and beautiful exhibit happen.

hay ce:p qə to all who share their time and sew on a button. The energy you share will stay with the Blanket and carry on doing good work when the Blanket is worn.

nəcamət ct  
We are one.

hay ce:p qə! hay ce:p qə! hay ce:p qə!

*sylemtəna:t / S'tagid Jaad / Audrey Siegl*

**Cheximiya Allison M. Burns**  
*Weaving, 2015 (detail)*  
sheep & acrylic wool, silverfoil, 4'6" x 17"

This weaving represents the different layers that come together to make something beautiful. Weavings are worn in multiple ways but always woven with love and good energy to share with those who come in contact with them. Collection of the artist.

**RIGHT TO REMAIN...  
GAMBATTE!**

First Nations planting of Cedar and totem poles, *Sakura* joining and blooming every spring...

The Downtown Eastside (DTES) is where the infrastructures of the City of Vancouver were first developed displacing Aboriginal peoples...

Soon to be abandoned by the European settlers who moved to middle class Vancouver west...

Japanese immigrants began to settle here at the end of the 19th century and built their *Paueru-gai* (Powell Street) community but were uprooted in 1942...

The area left abandoned.

Today, with major increase in Vancouver's population predicted for the next decade, the 21st century opened with great interest in this long neglected area by both the City and the developers. Economic displacement through "gentrification" is therefore not difficult to imagine.

On September 25, 2013, the City of Vancouver passed a Motion of Apology "for failing to protect her residents of Japanese descent" pledging to uphold "the principles of human rights and equality now and in the future...to ensure such injustices will not happen again to any of its residents."

As one of the Japanese Canadians evicted in 1942, I joined with many others to speak on behalf of DTES residents, to appeal to the Mayor and City Councillors, to act without discrimination, and ensure such development proceeds with care, with affordable housing for the various levels of low-income and welfare residents, that social housing be defined as related to welfare rate, to ensure that those on welfare can afford to live in social housing.

Let us continue together to ensure the City honours the pledge made to its residents and DTES residents may look forward to a healthy future.

*Grace Eiko Thomson • October 11, 2015*

# REVITALIZING? JAPANTOWN

What is in a name? *K'emk'emeláy* – The Place Where Maples Grow – Strathcona – Skid Row – Japantown – Powell Grounds – *Paueru-gai* – Downtown Eastside – DTES?

It is time to dispel the prevailing narratives of Vancouver's Downtown Eastside (DTES). One of the oldest areas of Vancouver, it is considered a homeland to waves of people who have each been displaced from this contested territory.

The Coast Salish fished and camped on the shores of the abundant inlet, but were forced out as sawmills polluted their pristine waters and colonialism uprooted their habitation.

Japanese Canadians feel a close affinity with the *Paueru-gai* (Powell Street) area, the first stop for many new immigrants to Canada. In 1942, as part of wartime racism, the entire community was forcibly removed.

The largest community of Black Canadians in Vancouver was ousted when their homes on Hogan's Alley were levelled to create the Georgia Viaduct in the 1970s.

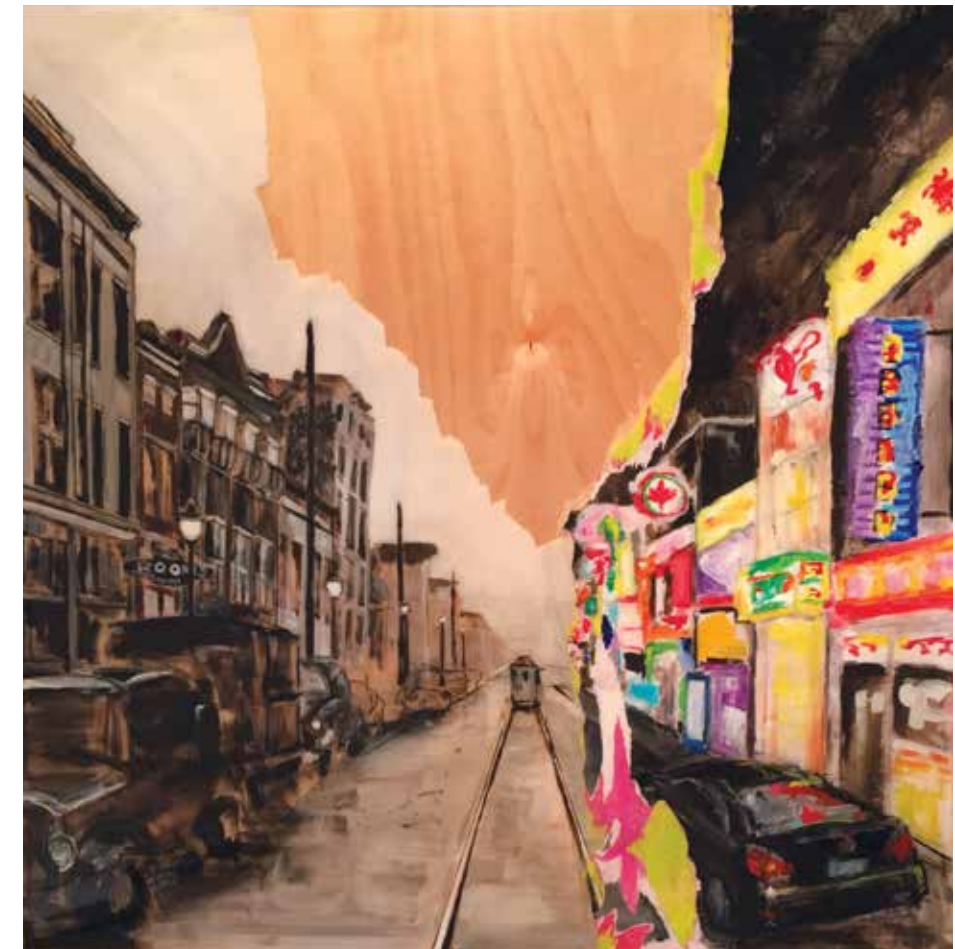
Most recently, low-income people, as well as mental-health system survivors, who rely on local access to social services are being displaced by increasing gentrification and proposed "revitalization."

The DTES is not just a space occupied by buildings, streets, and parks. The DTES is its people, and the people of the DTES do not need to be "revitalized" because they are already vital.

Throughout its history, the DTES is chronicled as periodically abandoned, with each emptying of the space or abandonment of its remaining inhabitants justifying a new wave of development and improvement.

*... it should be mine and everybody's right to be able to remain in their place of origin. I was born and raised here and there's no way I should be gentrified out of the community that I was born and raised in.*

Tom, DTES resident

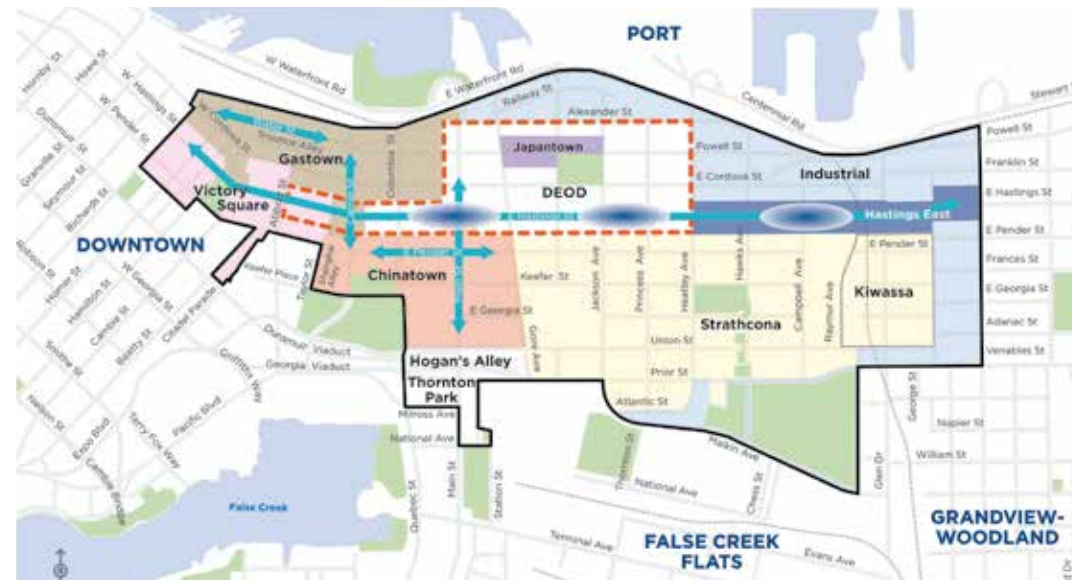


**Mary Anne Tateishi, *Japantown Re-Imagined*, 2010, mixed media on wooden panel, 40" x 40"**

Powell Street, circa 1940, was a bustling neighbourhood for the Japanese Canadian community. On the left side, the painting shows this busy street in the subdued blacks and browns of historic photographs. On the right side, the painting depicts an imaginary Powell Street which bursts to life with the bright fluorescent colours of modern Tokyo or downtown Vancouver. How has history affected this area? Due to the forced uprooting of Japanese Canadians, the new Japantown exists only in a painter's imagination. Collection of the Nikkei National Museum 2010.24.1

# A CONTINUOUS FABRIC OF CHANGE

by Aaron Franks and Jeff Masuda



City of Vancouver, Downtown Eastside Plan, March 15, 2015. The City's fragmented vision of the DEOD, standing for "Downtown Eastside Oppenheimer District." The added heritage value of "Japantown" is seen as a key element of "revitalizing" this district.



City of Vancouver, Downtown Eastside Plan, March 15, 2015. A planner's interpretation of a culturally "revitalized" Powell Grounds/Oppenheimer Park. Such imagery provides a partial representation of the community. Whose cultures are served, and who will benefit?

In 2010, a coalition of community organizations and academic researchers began a project that posed the question "what happens when Japanese Canadian history is appropriated into a cultural brand aimed at revitalizing a neighbourhood?" Over the next five years, and supported by grants from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council and the City of Vancouver, a dedicated group of artists, academics, residents, and students began to make the links between the cooptation of Japanese Canadian culture and history into an urban heritage brand, and the violation of Human Rights in a neighbourhood that has long been a refuge against the prejudices and discriminatory policies of a dominant society.

The Downtown Eastside (DTES) is typically discussed as a succession of separate communities that have periodically abandoned, or been abandoned by, the neighbourhood, with each justifying a new wave of development and improvement. Through our work with the current Low-Income community and *Nikkei* who were forced to leave due to the uprooting and dispossession of 1942, we have heard a more truthful and corrective story of a complex, multi-generational, and crucially, continuous community. We want to ensure that the regenocide facing the neighbourhoods' current inhabitants is not presented as a regrettable but exceptional incident, but instead is seen for what it is – a continuation of the threat to the community of racialized, marginalized, working class people who have lived there from the original colonization of *K'emk'emelá'y* through to what has become some of the most profitable real estate in North America.

The idea for this project stemmed from a previous study that also involved a number of DTES residents. The Strengthening Urban Community Capacity to promote Environmental health Equity through Dialogue-centred research (SUCCEED) project worked with DTES residents to see what their views were on the environmental justice and health of their neighbourhood. While the SUCCEED project took place, the sentiments of an old "Japantown" were being increasingly used to celebrate the neighbourhood's history. Although this history, including that of the uprooting, has been acknowledged in present-day accounts, this history also seems to be "stuck" in the past, with very little regard for its relevance to present-day issues. The removal of the paved the way for the creation of a neighbourhood. How this was done, and the violations of

Human Rights involved in the process, is being repeated but under a different name.

Spurred by these questions, in 2012 Jeff Masuda and fellow project investigators Audrey Kobayashi, Sonia Bookman, Joyce Rock, and Beth Carter were successful in obtaining a SSHRC Partnership Development Grant. This grant brought together six advocacy and cultural organization partners from the Downtown Eastside and the local Japanese Canadian community, and the ranks have since swelled to eight. In alphabetical order, we are: Gallery Gachet, Greater Vancouver Japanese Canadian Citizens' Association, Nikkei National Museum & Cultural Centre, PACE, Potluck Café Society, Powell Street Festival Society, and the Vancouver Japanese Language School and Japanese Hall.

The first phases focused on deepening partnership relationships, conducting archival work on Human Rights in the DTES, and doing extensive interviews with past and present residents of the DTES/*Paueru-gai*. An "arts phase" was always at the heart of Revitalizing "Japantown"? Originally intended to be a collaboration with established and emerging artists in the DTES, this morphed into a peer-led, year-long *Right to Remain Community Fair*, open to all, and eventually engaging hundreds of DTES residents and Japanese Canadians, among others, over a dozen events. Finally, exhibits on Human Rights and the Right to Remain in the DTES/*Paueru-gai* were held at Gallery Gachet (March – April 2015), and at the Nikkei National Museum & Cultural Centre (October 2015 – January 2016).

The continuous story of exploitation and resistance in the DTES ultimately gives shape to a Right to Remain that is the hallmark of the neighbourhood. This is a right not merely to survive, but to live, create, and ultimately, positively influence the conditions of change that have shaped this tenuous but continuous community. For too long, the DTES/*Paueru-gai* has been characterized by mainstream media, political, and research outlets as "Our nation's slum" and "Vancouver's Gulag." By tying this place's long history of resilience and activism toward a Right to Remain denied and a Right to Remain achieved (time and again) into a singular concept, we seek to take on and displace this reputation by representing its past and present inhabitants not on the basis of their vulnerability but as astute and determined political leaders who have created a national legacy of Human Rights achievement.

# DOWNTOWN, EASTSIDE, WHERE THE MAPLES ONCE GREW...

by Aaron Franks, Audrey Kobayashi and Jeff Masuda

First Peoples have occupied the southern shores of the Burrard Inlet for at least 8,000 years. *K'emk'emeláy*, or “Place where maples grow” in the *Sḵw̓xw̓7mesh* (Squamish) language, was an important meeting place for Coast Salish nations for trade and cultural exchange. Two centuries after Captain George Vancouver first gave Burrard Inlet its current name, where the Maples once stood became a new horizon of towering sawmill smokestacks and tall ship masts, heralding the beginning of the City of Vancouver and a burgeoning resource economy throughout the Northwest Coast.

The *Sḵw̓xw̓7mesh* (Squamish), *xʷməθkʷəy̓əm* (Musqueam) and *səl'ílwəta* (Tsleil-Waututh) people never gifted or signed away their land or rights. Yet, the arrival of the Canadian Pacific Railway in 1886 marked the beginning of a long legacy of uprooting, dispossession, and cultural genocide that has since become the shameful birthright of all Canadians today.

By the 1880s, many Chinese men who had worked building the railway began settling in Vancouver. The 1885 “Head Tax” slowed Chinese immigration and prevented women from immigrating, and the remaining workers settled into an enclave around Carrall and what is now East Pender streets. In 1877, the first Japanese immigrant arrived, paving the way for an inflow of Japanese immigrant labourers who would occupy the area around Powell and Alexander Streets, becoming the largest ethnic group in the sawmills.

As these communities matured, tense labour divisions led to a steady onslaught of racist sentiments and policies by the dominant settler society, culminating in anti-Asian riots in 1907. In 1908, the Hayashi-Lemieux “Gentlemen’s” Agreement attempted to also curtail Japanese immigration. Despite these pressures, Chinatown and *Paueru-gai* became vibrant, multi-ethnic, working class communities. In *Paueru-gai*, multiple generations of families worked,



Powell Street decorated for the Royal Visit, 1939. Nikkei National Museum 2010.80.2.64



Hogan's Alley was demolished for the construction of the Georgia Viaduct, 1971. City of Vancouver, CVA 216-1.23, Photographer Campbells Studio, Vancouver



First Nations camp on Alexander Street beach at foot of Columbia St (now Main), c.1898. City of Vancouver Archives, CVA IN N12

lived, and played in the neighbourhood, which became the economic and social hub of a new Japanese Canadian population that stretched up and down the West Coast. Inhabitants in *Paueru-gai* lived in crowded conditions, in converted or purpose-built boarding house-style hotels, or sometimes Japanese-style long houses (*naga ya*) that would house several families. By the 1930s, the *Nikkei* community of *Paueru-gai* was a complex microcosm of segregation and participation, assimilation and maintenance of tradition, in what has been described as both a thriving district and “a ghetto.” Perhaps it was always both.

What happened next – the state-sanctioned expulsion, and eventual liquidation of property of Japanese Canadians – left *Paueru-gai* vacant and derelict. The costs to those uprooted and their descendants are immeasurable: health, infrastructure, livelihoods, education, relationships, community roots, and dignity were all deeply damaged, for some destroyed forever. Many Japanese Canadian properties and possessions, which were meant to be held in trust by the State, were simply stolen outright, or sold off to a new wave of private landlords in the area.

In the postwar period, the neighbourhood took on an even larger negative role in the public consciousness. For some, *Paueru-gai* became a “ghost town” – empty of life, haunted by what had been. For many others, most notably city

officials, planners, and people concerned with morality and welfare, it was indeed a “Skid Row” – the former presence of Japanese Canadians banished from official representations.

The DTES is now too-often represented as a moral and social failure. Today’s residents inhabit the Single Room Occupancy hotels (SROs) that were once *Nikkei* boarding houses. Unchecked rent-seeking, rampant property speculation, gutted social and mental health services, the increased racialization of poverty, the retraction of social housing, discriminatory policing, and the continued cultural genocide of First Peoples might be “regrettable,” but they are painted as facts of life, or even the price of progress. But what might be most poorly understood is the connections among these abuses of Human Rights in the DTES/*Paueru-gai*. They have been poorly understood because they have often been actively denied.

Now we have “Japantown,” a cultural brand formally embraced by the City since before 1982, with an eye to a business-led revitalization of the area. To discover Japantown, in their view, is to experience a façade of all things imagined to be Japanese – *torii*, *kimono*, *sushi* – packaged for an urban consumer who wishes to be taken to a far away imaginary land, blind to the historical irony that every dollar they spend is one part of the next, and possibly final, act of dispossession.

**Herb Varley** worked as a peer artist/facilitator for the Right to Remain project. Born and raised in Vancouver of Nuu-chah-nulth and Nisga'a heritage, Herb was, in his words, "born for this project." An actor, activist, and passionate advocate for the DTES/*Paueru-gai* and Indigenous sovereignty, Herb is also a keen student of Japanese and Chinese philosophy and martial arts.

**Why Right to Remain?** We're artists. We think. We're political beings, we're spiritual beings... I like that idea of getting people to focus on their growth as human beings. It doesn't matter what kind of culture you come from.

*Photograph by Greg Masuda, 2015*

*But they commemorate the social justice here, and that's one of the things I love about the Downtown Eastside, that people stand up for the people, and stand up for issues ... people have lived in this community for a long time, and they have a good memory of what's been going on.* 'Aurora,' DTES resident



## THE RIGHT TO HISTORY

### Why does this keep happening?

*I identify with mostly the Native community here. I partake in some of their Powwows, their cleansings. I'm part of that community, but also I'm part of the whole general community in the Downtown Eastside, in an art form and music form.* Michael, DTES resident

For years, the memories of displacement in the DTES have been silenced, suppressed, and erased from public consciousness. We are now speaking out to remind DTES residents, past and present, about their human rights to health, freedom, dignity, and equality under the law as Canadians and human beings.

Vancouver and the DTES are located on unceded Squamish, Musqueam, and Tsleil-Waututh territories. These people were forced out of their traditional lands and faced brutal suppression of their Indigenous rights.

As Vancouver's population grew and its economy diversified, the areas near the waterfront became associated with the working class. All sorts of moral judgments and social labels were also imposed on those communities.

The DTES is now home to a large gathering of Indigenous people, both from the coast and from many regions across Canada. The recent Truth and Reconciliation Commission encouraged everyone to speak up and share their story, in order that we can all learn and heal.

Canada likes to present itself to the world in a certain way. The image of Canada is often that of an open, tolerant, society; one that anyone can come to and thrive in, just as long as they work hard. We now know that this image of Canada is largely a work of fiction. The question now is: "How do we make this image a reality?"



*Annual Women's Memorial March in the Downtown Eastside, 2014. Photograph by Sharon Kravitz.*



# THE RIGHT TO HOME

**Don't we have a right to be safe and secure in our own home?**

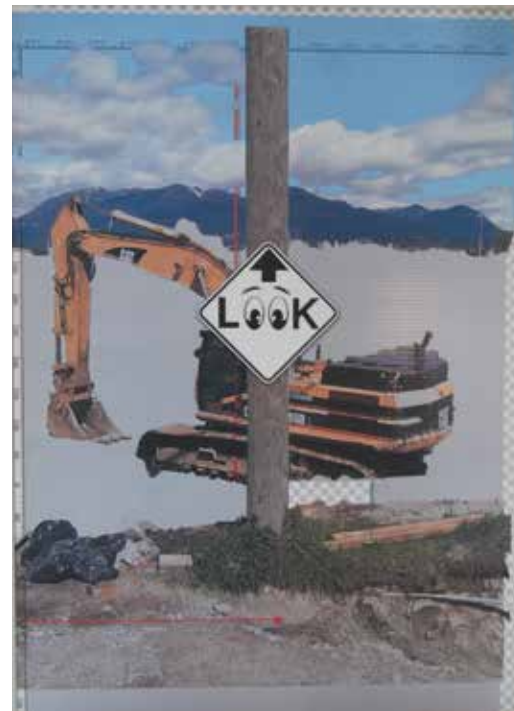
*The landlord... takes whatever excuses to come down so there's not a lot of freedom. The lock is on the landlord's side... there's no regulation, so there's no human rights... often the landlord is just standing outside the door waiting for us... it's kind of as if we're in prison.* James + Iris, Chinese seniors DTES

Everyone wants to live with dignity, safety, and respect. The DTES has sometimes been called a "ghetto" and is often positioned as a useful "dumping ground" for the marginalized, exploited, and most vulnerable.

The neighbourhood's legacy of rooming houses for new immigrants, working class, and low-income citizens can be traced back to the early settlement of *Nikkei* in *Paueru-gai*. Before Japanese Canadians were displaced in 1942, this community was alive with shops, restaurants, and vibrant social activities.

These historic buildings have now become Single Room Occupancy (SRO) housing often run by charitable agencies. Storefronts are covered in security bars and people are forced to live in cramped and filthy conditions, without private bathrooms and kitchens, and with little privacy and independence.

The DTES has some of the most sought after real estate in Vancouver. Instead of displacing residents once again, could there not be substantial public investment in social housing, increases in service funding, social assistance and living wage levels, and a thoughtful urban development process that recognizes history and meets social needs over profit?



**Quin Martins**  
*Under Construction*, 2015  
digital print on vinyl, 34" x 24"  
Collection of the artist.



**Quin Martins** worked as a peer artist/facilitator for the Right to Remain project. He works with installation, painting, and photography. Following his studies at Emily Carr, Quin was drawn to the neighbourhood and became involved at Gallery Gachet and Carnegie Centre.

**Why Right to Remain?** The concept of comparing what's going on today in the DTES to the Japanese uprooting in the '40s... over the past 10 years I've seen the neighbourhood rapidly transform, and it's been mind-boggling just how quickly things change... I see the DTES as sort of being the last area of hope in Vancouver...

*Photograph by Greg Masuda, 2015*

**Andy Mori** worked as a peer artist/facilitator for the Right to Remain project. He works with illustration and cartooning. Andy is the grandson of a *Nikkei* family uprooted from Tofino to the BC Interior. He has lived in the DTES/*Paueru-gai* since 2007, when he began work at Oppenheimer Park.

**Why Right to Remain?** The neglect of Japantown during the war... I consider it a human rights abuse of a community... I wanted to contribute ... out of respect for my immediate forebearers, my ancestors that had to pay a big price for being in that era.

Photograph by Greg Masuda, 2015

*We don't live there anymore but we are coming to have our festival ... remembering that there are now others living there ... In essence, we are inviting ourselves annually through our history to celebrate in their community.* Grace, *Nikkei* Elder



## THE RIGHT TO CULTURE

**How can we continue to claim our place within the community?**

*Temple is still there, language school is still there. But they are not as visible in terms of connecting to our roots, but Sakura ... the flowers have always been in our minds as fond memories of Issei and then Powell Street Festival still happens there.* Kazuo, *Nikkei* Elder

From within, the DTES is a unique and close-knit community. Many people are forced by circumstances to live here, but many other people choose to live in this place where they can be accepted. Even after people have been forcibly removed there is a desire to maintain a connection.

In early 1942, fuelled by war and racism, the federal government of Canada uprooted 21,000 men, women and children of Japanese ancestry from the west coast. Over 8000 lived and worked in the Powell Street area. It was the heart of the Japanese Canadian community in Vancouver, yet that community rarely called it "Japantown." The community members were dispersed across the country and few ever returned to live here. An entire generation of Japanese Canadians grew up in the 1950s and 60s without knowing their roots.

In 1977, the Powell Street Festival was held in the Powell Grounds to celebrate the centennial of the first Japanese immigrant to Canada, and to rebuild the social, cultural, physical, and spiritual connection to this place. It is now the longest running cultural festival in Canada.

Although the government of Canada acknowledged the injustices and apologized to the community in 1988, the Japanese Canadian Redress movement actively advocates "Never Again" will people be treated the way they were in the 1940s.



38th Annual Powell Street Festival Poster, 2014

Designed by Andrea Wan for the Powell Street Festival Society (PSFS). The Society modified the Festival location due to the Tent City, in order to "acknowledge and respect the concerns of the homeless and community residents in the Oppenheimer Park area, located on unceded Coast Salish territory." Courtesy of PSFS.

# THE RIGHT TO HAVE RIGHTS

How can we navigate the double-sided politics of our neighbourhood?

*They'd be putting them in Surrey, in Richmond, you know all these different places, but they don't have the help that you get down here so a lot of them come back, but then they're homeless!...you can take somebody out of the DTES but you can't take the DTES out of them.*

Lorna, DTES resident

There is a rich history of human rights in the DTES and the political right to remain is perhaps our most complex issue. The DTES is where forces of private sector-led gentrification, governmental interventions, and community activism converge.

The DTES is a neighbourhood of juxtapositions. It is both repulsive and attractive. It can be both dangerous and welcoming. To many, it is a refuge and to others a trap. Is it a site of repression or a site of opportunity?

The DTES has long been associated with the working class, labour issues, and uprisings. Nearby Ballantyne Pier was the site of a dockers' strike in June 1935. In June 1938, Powell Grounds (Oppenheimer Park) was the site of a huge citizen protest against police brutality, following the Bloody Sunday strike by unemployed workers. In the summer of 2014, activists asserted Indigenous rights to fight for housing and the right to remain during a tent city "occupation" of the park.

Today, this area is repeatedly rebranded as "Japantown" without a true understanding of the cyclical history of displacement. We have the right to take an active role and stand up to ensure that the rights of present-day inhabitants are prioritized and protected amidst rapid social and economic change.



*Crowds in Powell Grounds demonstrating against police brutality, 1938. Image c-07965 courtesy of the Royal BC Museum and Archives.*



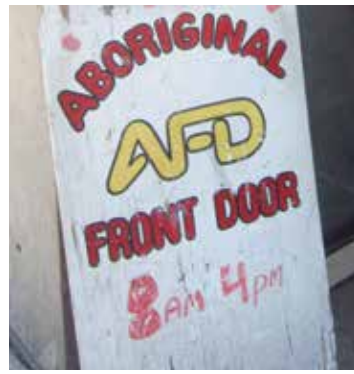
*Homeless people created a Tent City in Oppenheimer Park in July–October 2014 to bring attention to the need for affordable housing in Vancouver. Photograph by Ali Lohan.*



**Karen Ward** worked as a peer artist/facilitator for the Right to Remain project. Originally from Hamilton, Karen works with found and rescued objects. She has lived in the DTES for about 8 or 9 years. Since she moved into social housing, she has been very active in artwork, art organization, neighbourhood politics, and activism.

**Why Right to Remain?** I have a lot of respect for the other artists involved... it's about bringing art and the way that I approach it into a broader community... I don't feel like art belongs in a gallery, art belongs in public...

*Photograph by Greg Masuda, 2015*



Right to Remain Tableau Vivant Workshop, 2014. Photographs by Tom Quirk.



## THE RIGHT TO REMAIN COMMUNITY FAIR

The Right to Remain Community Fair (2014–2015) was a year-long series of arts-based participatory workshops, walking tours, conversations and gatherings. The Art Cart, a collaboration of Oppenheimer Park and Gallery Gaget, was used at many sites and festivals to inspire exposure and creative exchange. Ali Lohan, Quin Martins, Andy Mori, Kathy Shimizu, Herb Varley, Karen Ward, and Trevor Wideman were the original facilitators and peer artists. Photographs by Ali Lohan except those marked.



# THE DTES AS A PLACE FOR ART, EDUCATION, HEALTH AND HEALING

by Gallery Gachet

Gallery Gachet is a unique artist-run centre located in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside (DTES). Gachet is a collectively-run exhibition and studio space built to empower participants as artists, administrators, and curators. We have the profound privilege of representing a resolute community of people who uphold a vision of the DTES as a place for art, education, recreation, health, and healing.

In the spring of 2015, Gallery Gachet hosted an exhibition which showcased artwork and documentation from a series of *Right to Remain Community Fair* workshops. These workshops had been guided by DTES artists who engaged their community in dialogue about human rights. The exhibition at Gallery Gachet, in partnership with Queen's University and the Nikkei National Museum & Cultural Centre, aimed to enliven Human Rights stories of ancestors who once dwelled in the area and to place those stories in conversation with current residents. Spoken through people's histories, voices, and artwork, the exhibition wove together stories of the DTES. These stories were presented as a visually provocative dialogue about the Right of all people to Remain in the places they call home and form community.

The Right to Remain has been enacted by over a century of this community's resilience and resistance to the forces of colonization, racism, violence, and unrestrained urban capitalism. Gallery Gachet, along with community and academic allies, asserts the Right to Remain for the people of the DTES, a place held sacred by many, and that carries one of this country's richest legacies of Human Rights struggle and achievement.

In preceding decades low-income people have found the means to survive and form community, taking refuge in this neighbourhood from an uncaring society. However today, marginalized residents are increasingly being renovicted and dispossessed of their belongings and homes through rampant development, criminalization, stigmatization, institutionalization, and policing. This push is fuelled by efforts to "revitalize" buildings, services, and streetscapes to capitalize on the desires of affluent consumers ultimately furthering displacement and the project of colonization.

At Gallery Gachet, we see a time and place where people who have experienced marginalization feel fully supported in their struggle for a creative life and career, including access to adequate housing, studio space, and economic security. We believe that the expression and practice of art and active participation in culture-building is a human right, and that art and culture are critical elements of a healthy society. We are resolved to continue this work and hope that you will join us!



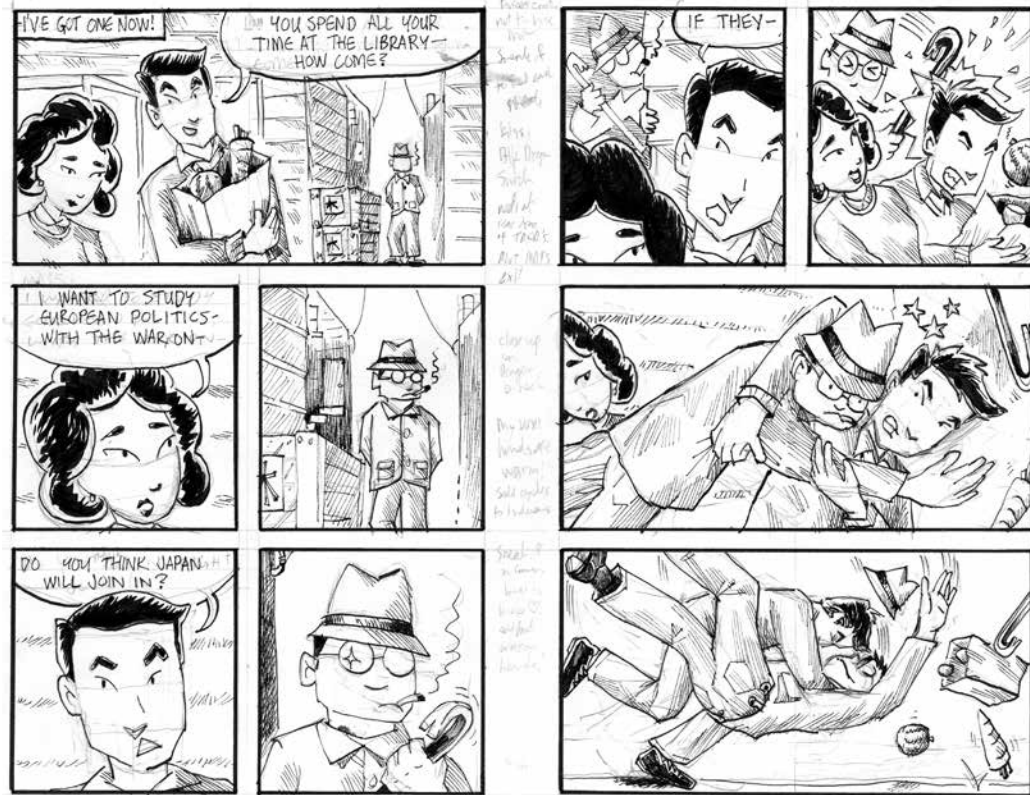
The Right to Remain Exhibit at Gallery Gachet, Spring 2015. Photographs courtesy of Gallery Gachet.



Andy T. Mori

*Japantown Love Story*, 2015  
ink on paper, 11" x 14"

An upcoming graphic novel called "Japantown Love Story" tells how a romantic couple gets separated due to institutionalized paranoia and class divisions during World War II. The loss of the Japanese Canadians from Japantown affected not only the *Nikkei* community but also the surrounding network of relationships, including those with First Nations. Collection of the artist.



## THE VALUE OF COMMUNITY ART

By Ali Lohan

Despite the historical and ongoing forces of displacement, the DTES community has a very strong sense of place and belonging. It's been fifteen years now that I've struggled alongside my peers in the Downtown Eastside (DTES) arts community, while having the honour and privilege of taking part in and witnessing the value and joy that community art and other creative projects have brought to the neighbourhood.

We've been through a lot of challenges and painful times together, but it was entirely worth it when you see how the creative work that we developed together enriched and strengthened our lives. We got in touch with a lot of the meaning and purpose behind forming community while we navigated our projects, despite the personal risks involved. This has played a significant and crucial role in

developing our awareness of where we are from and what we need to protect.

The right to remain is a concept that we could all relate to in some way. We have come together because we had already been left out – displaced, excluded, stigmatized, hurt. The project was another opportunity to continue our discussions, connect with more and different people, creatively work together, and to speak up for each other and ourselves.

The role of the local art community in the DTES cannot be undervalued. Through community art, people become connected and inspired, and share a deeper political analysis and understanding of their own lives, which brings hope and allows us to move together towards further action. This will be very important if our society ever hopes to recover from colonization.



*The Right to Remain Flag*, 2014–2015  
markers and paint on nylon, 95" x 32"

This flag is a symbol of unity among all the people who live, work, or support the DTES. It was created as part of the *Right to Remain Community Fair* workshops.

## WORKING TOWARDS AN OPEN AND JUST SOCIETY

By Herb Varley

Canada likes to present itself to the world in a certain way. The image of Canada is often that of an open, tolerant, society; one that anyone can come to and thrive in, just as long as they work hard. One thing that we have learned over the course of the "Right to Remain" project is that this image of Canada is largely a work of fiction. This is not just based on my personal experiences, but what we've gathered after hearing and sharing the stories of the hard realities of the people in the Downtown Eastside. The question now is, "How do we make the image of a tolerant Canada a reality?"

We have already taken a first step; we have shared some of the hidden history of Canada. When acts of violence are brought upon people because of their ethnic background it is usually treated as a one-off incident. The brutal suppression of Indigenous rights is treated as a thing of the past. As we speak, there are people in Unist'ot'en who may face serious jail time for defending land that neither they nor their ancestors gave up or sold. Similarly, the old days of conjuring up the "Yellow Menace" is said to be an embarrassing thing of the past. But as I write this, the housing crisis in BC is blamed on some vague kind of Chinese foreigner. The simple fact of the matter is that the right to remain is constantly being challenged. The methods are less brutal and not so out in the open as in the past. Does that make these acts of violence any less hurtful? We have to share our stories in order to learn from the past and look out for warning signs that our "Right to Remain" will be challenged again.

One may ask, "What is the right to remain?" People might say that nobody has the right to remain, that it's a "silly idea." They may believe that no group of people should get special treatment. But I argue that the right to remain has a long history. That some groups of Canadians have had special treatment, based on their wealth, the colour of their skin, the God they worship, or their gender, or some combination of these. The "Savage" was made up in order to keep Canada "Civilized." The "Yellow Menace" was made up in order to keep Canada (mostly and often) "White." The list goes on. It seems that the image of Canada only includes people who can successfully assimilate into whatever these "special" Canadians decide is tolerable.

I'll let you in on one last secret. Politicians don't make change, people do, and politicians make policy after change has been made.

So all we need to do to change the image of Canada into an open and tolerant reality is to be the change we want. Eventually the politics should follow.

# QUESTIONS? WITHOUT ANSWERS

Revitalizing Japantown? What is most intriguing about this title is the question mark. Rather than providing substantive answers, what is revealed are more questions. Questions that are inconvenient; questions that are discomfiting; questions that are crucial to ask in a democratic society.

This exhibit invites the viewer to put a face to the place. What is your immediate reaction when you hear the words, the Downtown Eastside or DTES? What concepts, judgments, or feelings arise?

The Revitalizing Japantown? three year study has revealed a continuous fabric of change across events, time, borders, and cultures in the DTES. It has woven connections between Indigenous, Japanese Canadian, Low-Income, and Marginalized communities who have all fought for their human rights.

Will the forces of politics, economy, and power cause more displacement in the future?

*There just seems to be a deep sense of community down here that's being torn apart by high finance. It's sad.* Chanel, DTES resident



**Diane Wood**, *Two of Wands*, 2005  
quilted painting, recycled silk, vintage fabrics, 56" x 46"

This quilt was inspired by one of the Tarot cards and Japanese Canadian history. The yellow suit of rods represents the east and Asian people. I feature cranes, cherry blossoms and pine trees. The yin yang symbol, the two different trees and the couple relate to harmony and balance. We are different but we support each other. Collection of the artist.

The following artworks are included in the exhibit but not displayed in this catalogue:

**Quin Martins**, *Street Sign (#3)*, 2015, acrylic and vinyl on plastic, 26" x 26"

**Greg Masuda**, *King Rooms #31*, 2015, Interactive Panoramic Photograph projected in 10' x 12' room

**Greg Masuda**, *The Right to Remain*, 2015, Documentary Film, available online at cbc.ca

**Andy T. Mori**, *Happyland*, 2015, ink on paper, 11" x 14"

**Audrey Siegl**, *náčamət ct / We Are One Button Blanket*, 2015, wool, buttons (created with visitor participation)

## ARTISTS

**CHEXIMIYA Allison M. Burns** is from the Squamish Nation and lives in North Vancouver. She works as an Aboriginal Ambassador for her Nation and the Squamish Lil'wat Cultural Centre. She started wool weaving in the summer of 2008; She is mostly self-taught, but received guidance from master weavers Chief Janice George and Buddy Joseph. Allison likes to use traditional techniques with a modern flare to help pass on the Squamish Nation traditions.

**Sharon Kravitz** is a documentary filmmaker, community organizer, and educator. She has worked in the Downtown Eastside of Vancouver for the last 20 years organizing large-scale events, community public art projects, and arts and health programs for all ages.

**Quin Martins** worked as a peer artist/facilitator for the Right to Remain project. He works with installation, painting and photography. Following his studies at Emily Carr, Quin was drawn to the neighbourhood and became involved at Gallery Gachet and Carnegie Centre.

**Greg Masuda** has been a community involved photographer, filmmaker, and volunteer since 2007. He mashes his engineering and creative aptitudes together in a DIY approach to tell stories that he hopes may be catalysts for positive social change.

**Andy Mori** worked as a peer artist/facilitator for the Right to Remain project. He works with illustration and cartooning. Andy is the grandson of a *Nikkei* family uprooted from Tofino to the BC Interior. He has lived in the DTES/*Paueru-gai* since 2007, when he began work at Oppenheimer Park.

**sx̣tɛmtəna:t, kʷasəlwət, St'agid Jaad, Audrey Siegl** is a leader, activist, engaged community member of the həl'dəmiñəm speaking, Musqueam people. She advocates for the protection of Indigenous women, land and water and all those who inhabit those spaces, invited or not.

**Mary Anne Tateishi** is a painter whose process involves layers of painting on paper sealed with resin. She excavates her many layers of work, reveals what is underneath the surface of the painting, and explores ideas of time and memory.

**Herb Varley** worked as a peer artist/facilitator for the Right to Remain project. Born and raised in Vancouver of Nuu-chah-nulth and Nisga'a heritage, Herb was, in his words, "born for this project." An actor, activist, and passionate advocate for the DTES/*Paueru-gai* and Indigenous sovereignty, Herb is also a keen student of Japanese and Chinese philosophy and martial arts.

**Karen Ward** worked as a peer artist/facilitator for the Right to Remain project. Originally from Hamilton, Karen works with found and rescued objects. She has lived in the DTES for about 8 or 9 years. Since she moved into social housing, she has been very active in artwork, art organization, neighbourhood politics and activism.

**Diane Wood** is a political activist with the Carnegie Community Action Project, the February 14th Women's Memorial March, and the Downtown Eastside Not for Developers Coalition. Her fabric art has been exhibited in galleries in Montreal, Vancouver, and Ottawa's National Gallery of Canada. Her graphic designs can be seen on posters, banners, T-shirts and leaflets.

# THANK YOU! DOMO ARIGATO!

This exhibit highlights some of the results of over three years of academic research that involved extensive community participation by past and present residents of Vancouver's Downtown Eastside (DTES).

Thanks to the community members, artists, students, consultants, and all of our partners for their invaluable contributions to this project, and for nurturing the collaborative environment between Downtown Eastside residents and Japanese Canadians in Vancouver and the Lower Mainland that made this exhibit possible.

### Partners

Kristin Lantz, Cecily Nicholson, and D. Lee Williams (Gallery Gachet)

Beth Carter, Sherri Kajiwara, Nichola Ogiwara, Linda Kawamoto Reid, Lisa Uyeda (Nikkei National Museum & Cultural Centre)

Doris Chow (Potluck Café Society)

Alka Murphy (PACE)

Rika Uto (Vancouver Japanese Language School and Japanese Hall)

Julia Aoki, Kristen Lambertson, and Emiko Morita (Powell Street Festival Society)

Judy Hanazawa (Greater Vancouver Japanese Canadian Citizens' Association)

### **The Right to Remain Exhibit and Community Organizers**

Many thanks to Gallery Gachet for anchoring this project in the neighbourhood through their members and community networks, inclusive gallery and studio space, and commitment to the goals of this research. Special thanks to Kristin Lantz and Cecily Nicholson.

### **Revitalizing Japantown? Exhibit Organizers**

Beth Carter and Sherri Kajiwara, Nikkei National Museum & Cultural Centre, Burnaby

### **Revitalizing Japantown? A Unifying Exploration of Human Rights, Branding, and Place Project Investigators**

Jeff Masuda, Queen's University  
Audrey Kobayashi, Queen's University  
Sonia Bookman, University of Manitoba  
Joyce Rock, Potluck Café Society  
Beth Carter, Nikkei National Museum  
Aaron Franks, Queen's University

*Back Cover:*  
*Marching to the Balmoral Hotel, which was awarded the "Worst SRO in the DTES" at the SRO Tenant Convention, 2014. Photo by Ali Lohan.*

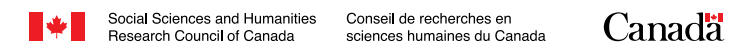
### **The Right to Remain Community Fair Arts Team**

Ali Lohan  
Quin Martins  
Andy Mori  
Kathy Shimizu  
Herb Varley  
Karen Ward  
Trevor James Wideman

### **Community Advisory Committee participants and other individuals and organizations who have helped to make the research and exhibits possible**

Louis Alexander, Hendrik Beune, Carnegie Community Centre, King-Mong Chan, Tom Delvecchio, Downtown Eastside Neighbourhood House, Jenna Drabble, Sarah Godoy, Eugene Harry, Lillian Howard, Derek Iwanaka, Wesley Joe, Abraham Jones, DJ Larkin, Johanna Li, Bonnie Ma, Greg Masuda, Scott McCulloch, Tracey Morrison, Wendy Pedersen, Kerry Porth, Audrey Siegl, Jordan Stanger-Ross, Fraser Stuart, Jean Swanson, Saba Tadesse-Lee, Lisa Uyeda, Chisaki Muraki-Valdovinos, Savannah Walling, Tom Wanklin, Baldwin Wong, and Kahoruko Yamamoto. We extend our sincere apologies to anyone we may have overlooked.

### **Thank you to our funders for their generous support**





*...you can take somebody out  
of the DTES but you can't take  
the DTES out of them.*

Lorna, DTES resident

