One does not have to know much to know that the suave elegance of his carving conceals as much as it reveals—essentially unknowable to a non-Tlingit audience. Narratives recalling how the spirits were originally revealed to a clan are essential to these works, but cannot travel into a collector’s home with a carving. Townsend-Gault points out that this strategy of concealment is shared by many contemporary First Nations artists, for whom there are limits on what can be translated and made broadly accessible. These limits do not signify a “hostile withholding [of knowledge] for the sake of individual or group power,” but rather serve to counter the oversimplification of Native cultures by and for non-Native audiences, and thus protect sources of cultural power. While the formal richness of Bob’s carving/sculpture allows it to cut across cultural boundaries and to engage diverse audiences, this limit to what is revealed in his art also points towards the importance of a definition of self “rooted in cultural distinctiveness [that] must retain [an] untranslatable difference.”

First Nations histories also figure into the work of Christos Dikeakos, although he is careful not to claim these as his own. Dikeakos has photographed the urban landscape of Vancouver for three decades, examining visible evidence of the city’s transformation and the separation of the individual from the past as it is displaced from sight in successive waves of development. The works included in this exhibition, skwáchay’s, “hole in bottom” and Snare Picture/The Great Reserve, Vancouver, are closely related to the Sites and Place Names project that Dikeakos began in 1990, in consultation with Chief Dominik Point, the Musqueam Band Council and their advisor Patricia Beringer. For Sites and Place Names, colour photographs of various sites in Vancouver were overlaid with sheets of glass etched with the names of these sites, and the flora and fauna that once were found there, in three languages: Hunq’um’i’num, Squamish and English. Skwáchay’s, “hole in bottom” expands on Sites and Place Names, with a specific focus on the rapidly changing area around False Creek, which was (and is) referred to as skwáchay’s by the Salish peoples who have inhabited the region far longer than anyone else.

The impetus for this work is not a romantic longing for the pastoral. Rather, it employs a straightforward presentation to point towards the gap between the visible surface of a site and the historical displacements that have contributed to its present form. In acknowledging the Native histories of this area, and the sustenance this land once provided to the Squamish and Musqueam peoples, Dikeakos raises questions as to how value—both cultural and material—is attached to a site. Further, he emphasizes that processes of displacement are not confined to the past but extend through the present; the rising condominium towers that mark the horizon in former site of Expo 86, A memory of sturgeon fishing (page 11) call up the ongoing displacement of industry through residential development on this site, while raising questions as to the new economic exclusions that are at work here and the kind of collective values that are embodied in these structures.
Snare Picture/The Great Reserve, Vancouver (page 10) continues Dikeakos's interrogation of the city and its histories. In the background of the central photograph of this triptych, gleaming office towers rise in front of forested mountains, delineating an aesthetic of the "capitalist picturesque" and evincing the confidence associated with growing prosperity. In contrast, the foreground of the image is in a state of dereliction, layered with discarded objects from both home and work environments that allude to the boom-and-bust cycle associated with resource economies. Dividing these two solitudes is a brick building bearing the slogan "Super Savings," which suggests the "Super Natural" labelling of British Columbia on license plates and in tourist promotions.

Depletion of the province’s natural resources—upon which the optimism pictured in Vancouver’s coat of arms depends—is underscored in the flanking archival images of seedlings, while the colonial history of the region is suggested through the work’s title. Drawing upon a range of motifs associated with the city, Snare Picture/The Great Reserve, Vancouver engages the viewer in a dialogue around prevailing perceptions of the city, the social complexity of inhabitation and a consideration of past uses of the land that “may also inform us about its future.”