

# Jacob Epstein

*La Bohemienne*, 1922

bronze  
38.5 cm x 24.8 cm x 26.9 cm

Vancouver Art Gallery,  
Founders' Fund  
VAG 31.86



© estate of Jacob Epstein  
Photo: Trevor Mills, Vancouver Art Gallery

# Jacob Epstein

## *La Bohemienne*, 1922



Image source: Reproduced in Richard Buckle. *Jacob Epstein, Sculptor*. London: Faber and Faber, 1963.

## Artist's Biography

Nationality: American-born British  
Born: 1880-11-10, New York, New York  
Died: 1959-08-19

Sir Jacob Epstein was an American-born sculptor who worked chiefly in England, where he pioneered modern sculpture, often producing controversial works that challenged taboos concerning what public artworks appropriately depict. Epstein's parents were Polish refugees living in New York's Lower East Side. He studied art there as a teenager, sketching the city, and joined The Art Students League of New York in 1900. Then he worked in a bronze foundry by day, studying drawing and sculptural modeling at night. Moving to Europe in 1902, he studied in Paris at the Académie Julian and the École des Beaux-Arts, where Auguste Rodin was his teacher. He settled in London in 1905, and a few years later became a British Citizen.

Epstein lived in a long-term relationship with Kathleen Garman, whom he married sometime after their daughter's birth in 1926. Their daughter, also named Kathleen, married painter Lucian Freud in 1948 and is mother of two of his daughters. Epstein was knighted in 1954.

In London, Epstein involved himself with a bohemian and artistic crowd. Revolting against ornate, pretty art, he made bold, often harsh and massive forms of bronze or stone. His sculpture is distinguished by its vigorous rough-hewn realism. Brilliantly avant-garde in concept and style, his works often shocked the general public. He often used expressively distorted figures, drawing more on non-Western art than the classical ideal. Such factors may have focused disproportionate attention on certain aspects of Epstein's long and productive career, throughout which he aroused hostility, especially challenging taboos surrounding the depiction of sexuality. Works condemned in his time as obscene and disgraceful today communicate thought and understanding.

London was not ready for Epstein's first major commission—18 large nude sculptures made in 1907 for the outside walls of Charles Holden's building for the British Medical Association on The Strand (now Zimbabwe House). Considered shocking by Edwardian standards, they were later hacked and mutilated for "decency".

His larger sculpture was his most expressive and experimental, but also his most vulnerable. His depiction of Rima, one of author W. H. Hudson's most famous characters, graces a serene enclosure in Hyde Park. Even here, a visitor became so outraged as to defile it with paint.

Enthusiastic about his work, Epstein would sculpt the images of friends, casual acquaintances, and even people dragged from the street into his studio almost at random. He worked even on his dying day.

Source: "Jacob Epstein," *Wikipedia, the Free Encyclopedia*. December 12, 2005. <http://www.wikipedia.org>.

# Jacob Epstein

*La Bohemienne, 1922*

## Artistic Context

Nationality: American-born, British

Training: Arts Student League, New York; Académie Julien, Paris

Groups: London Group (exhibiting society); Expressionism; Vorticism; Modernism; 19th century; 20th century

Provenance: purchased from T.W. Spurr and Son by Charles Scott and Henry Stone on behalf of the Founders in 1931

Subject: portraits



## Bibliography

**Jacob Epstein, Sculptor.**  
Publication

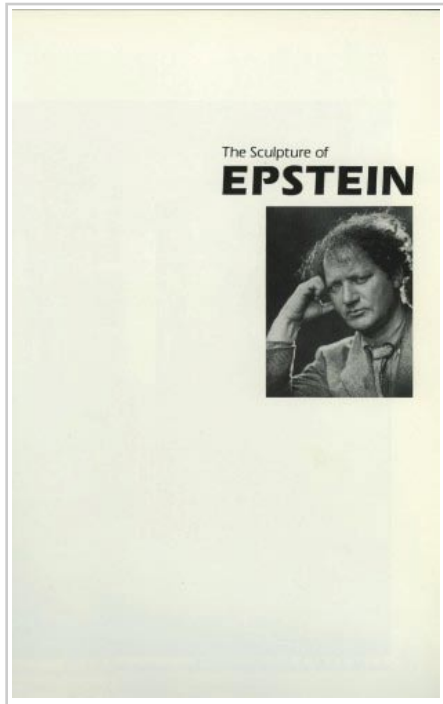
### [transcription]

Because Epstein made five studies of the model Dolores within a year we are able to compare these varied works and follow the progress of his search for her character without interrupting our chronological sequence.

"My first work from Dolores', wrote the sculptor, "I abandoned and thought a failure, and yet years afterwards, when I came across the plaster again, I realised that it was a very vivid and spontaneous sketch of her, and I cast it in bronze. It became instantly popular. This was the bust called LA BOHEMIENNE in which the model is shown hanging slightly forward, but with head raised to flatter the line of the neck, eyes lowered and lips parted in a half smile. One senses that Dolores had not a good figure. In each of her portraits her hair is done differently. In this first it is cut short and hangs in thick untidy streaks, with a heavy straggling fringe combed slightly to the left over a forehead which it conceals entirely. The all-over broken surface is typical of Epstein's 'ætwenties manner'."

Who was Dolores, of whom Epstein made these several Studies? She had black hair and a white skin, and no one knew if she came from the East End of London or the slums of Marseilles. She liked taking off her clothes, lived on anyone who would support her, told cynical stories of her own misdeeds and was an extreme exhibitionist. Of all the girl models, noted for their looks or their lovers and notorious for their bohemian behaviour, the height of whose glory was to pose for Epstein, and the reward for whose adulation was to form part of the circus which toured from Guildford Street to the Eiffel Tower Restaurant and on to the Cafe Royal, none was more flamboyant than Dolores. "She became the High Priestess of Beauty," wrote the sculptor, "and this role she carried to ridiculous lengths. She even gave as an excuse to a magistrate, before whom she appeared for some indiscreet conduct in Piccadilly, that my being in America had disorientated her, and this was taken as sufficient excuse, together with a small fine, by a magistrate indulged to a Phryne of modern times."

Jacob Epstein  
*La Bohemienne*, 1922

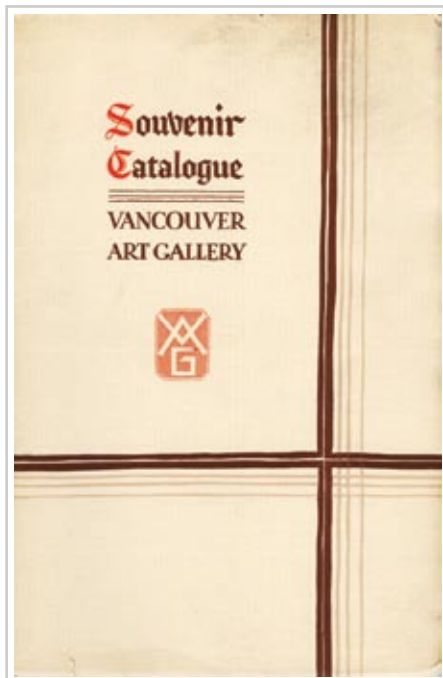


**The Sculpture of Epstein: With a Complete Catalogue.**  
Publication

[transcription]

Provenance:

Version with Head Only, H 32.9;  
4. T.W. Spurr: Vancouver AG, 1931



**Souvenir Catalogue: Vancouver Art Gallery**  
Publication  
1931-10-5

[transcription]

JACOB EPSTEIN

Born in New York of Russian-Polish parents. Studied at the Arts Students' League, New York, and at L'École Des Beaux Arts, Paris. Settled in London, England, in 1905. A vigorous sculptor whose works have aroused much controversy. Represented in many galleries.

89 *La Bohemienne* (Bronze)

'*La BOHEMIENNE* *Jacob Epstein*

# Jacob Epstein

*La Bohemienne, 1922*

## Further Reading

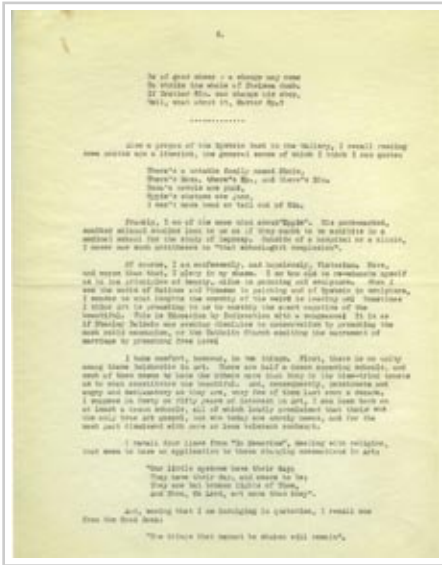
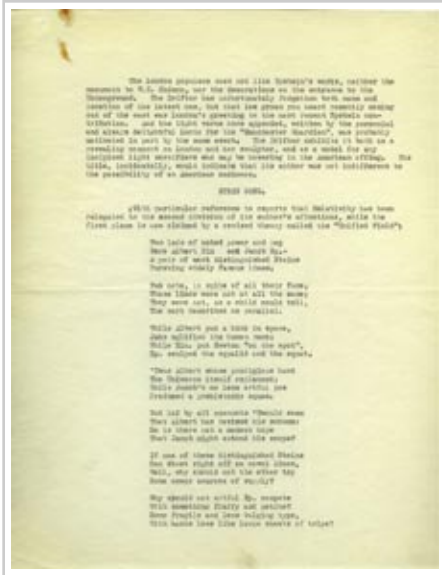
- Buckle, Richard. *Jacob Epstein, Sculptor*. London: Faber and Faber, 1963.
- Cork, Richard. *Jacob Epstein*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999.
- Epstein: an Exhibition Held at the Tate Gallery*. London: Arts Council of Great Britain, 1952.
- Epstein, Jacob. *Let There Be Sculpture: The Autobiography of Jacob Epstein*. London: Readers Union Limited, 1942.
- Gardiner, Stephen. *Epstein: Artist Against the Establishment*. New York: Viking, 1993.
- Jacob Epstein: Sculpture and Drawings*. Leeds City: The Henry Moore Centre for the Study of Sculpture, 1987.
- Rose, June. *Daemons and Angels: A Life of Jacob Epstein*. London: Constable, 2002.

## Exhibition History

### Exhibitions at the Vancouver Art Gallery

- Inaugural Exhibition*. October 5, 1931.
- Sculpture from the Permanent Collection*. August 20, 1980 - October 26, 1980.
- Exploring the Collection: British Modern*. December 11, 1993 - May 15, 1993.
- Face to Face: Four Centuries of Portraits*. June 19, 1999 - September 26, 1999.
- 75 Years of Collecting: British Masters, Group of Seven and Pop Icons*. February 4, 2006 - May 14, 2006.

Jacob Epstein  
La Bohemienne, 1922



## Archival History

### Henry Stone Correspondence Correspondence

#### [transcription]

The London populace does not like Epstein's works, neither the monument to W.H. Hudson, nor the decorations on the entrance to the Underground. The Drifter has unfortunately forgotten both name and location of the latest one, but that low groan you heard recently coming out of the east was London's greeting to the most recent Epstein contribution. And the light verse here appended, written by the perennial and always delightful Lucio for the "Manchester Guardian", was probably motivated in part by the same event. The Drifter exhibits it both as a revealing comment on London and her sculptor, and as a model for any incipient light versifiers who may be hovering in the American offing. Its title, incidentally, would indicate that its author was not indifferent to the possibility of an American audience.

#### STEIN SONG,

With particular reference to reports that Relativity has been relegated to the second division of its author's affections, while the first place is now claimed by a revised theory called the "Unified Field":

Two lads of noted power and pep  
Were Albert Ein and Jacob Ep.—  
a pair of most distinguished Steins  
Pursuing widely famous lines.

But note, in spite of all their fame,  
Those lines were not at all the same;  
They were not, as a child could tell,  
The sort described as parallel.

While Albert put a kink in space,  
Jake uglified the human race;  
While Ein. put Newton "on the spot",  
Ep. sculpted the squalid and the squat.

'Twas Albert whose prodigious hand  
The Universe itself replanned;  
While Jacob's no less artful paw  
Produced a prehistoric squaw.

But lo by all accounts 'Twould seem  
That Albert has revised his scheme:  
So is there not a modest hope  
That Jacob might extend his scope?

If one of these distinguished Steins  
Can shoot right off on novel lines,  
Well, why should not the other try  
Some newer sources of supply?

Why should not artful Ep. Compete  
with something fluffy and petite?  
Some fragile and less bulging type,

Jacob Epstein  
*La Bohemienne, 1922*

With hands less like large sheets of tripe?

Be of good cheer—a change may come  
To strike the whole of Chelsea dumb.  
If Brother Ein. can change his step,  
Well, what about it, Master Ep.?

Also a propos of the Epstein bust in the Gallery, I recall reading some months ago a limerick, the general sense of which I think I can quote:

There's a notable family named Stein,  
There's Rosa, there's Ep., and there's Ein.  
Rosa's novels are punk,  
Eppie's statues are junk,  
I can't make head or tail out of Ein.

Frankly, I am of the same mind about "Eppie". His pock-marked, scabbed skinned studies look to me as if they ought to be exhibits in a medical school for the study of leprosy. Outside of a hospital or a clinic, I never saw such antitheses to "that school-girl complexion".

Of course, I am confessedly, and hopelessly, Victorian. More, and worse than that, I glory in my shame. I am too old to re-educate myself as to the principles of beauty, alike in painting and sculpture. When I see the works of Matisse and Picasso in painting and of Epstein in sculpture, I wonder to what lengths the worship of the weird is leading us. Sometimes I think Art is preaching to us to worship the exact negative of the beautiful.

This is Education by Indirection with a vengeance; It is as if Stanley Baldwin was seeking disciples to conservatism by preaching the most rabid communism, or the Catholic Church exalting the sacrament of marriage by preaching free love:

I take comfort, however, in two things. First, there is no unity among these Bolsheviks in art. There are half a dozen opposing schools, and each of them seems to hate the others more than they do the time-tried tenets as to what constitutes the beautiful. And, consequently, passionate and angry and declamatory as they are, very few of them last even a decade. I suppose in forty or fifty years of interest in Art, I can look back on at least a dozen schools, all of which loudly proclaimed that this was the only true Art gospel, but who today are merely names, and for the most part dismissed with more or less tolerant contempt.

I recall four lines from "In Memoriam", dealing with religion, that seem to have an application to these changing conventions in Art:

"Our little systems have their day;  
They have their day, and cease to be;  
They are but broken lights of Thee,  
And Thou, Oh Lord, art more than they".

And seeing that I am indulging in quotation, I recall one from the Good Book:

"The things that cannot be shaken will remain".

Jacob Epstein  
La Bohemienne, 1922



**Cheque Stub**  
Acquisition Record  
1931

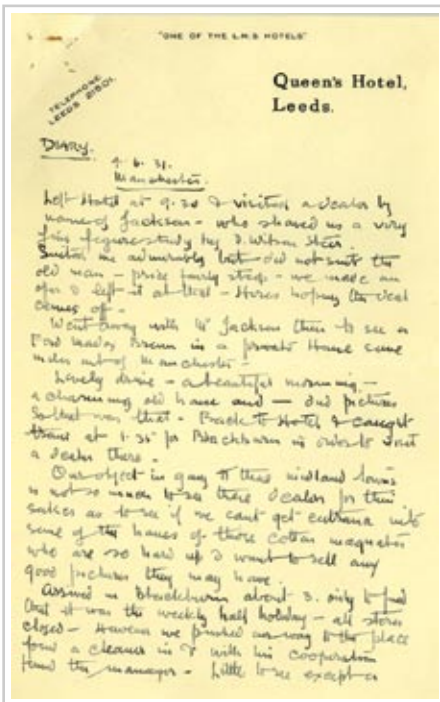
[transcription]

No. B 5875

June 22 1931

In favor of  
J.W. Spurr  
Epstein head

£100.0.0



**Charles H. Scott Diary**  
Correspondence  
1931-06-04

[transcription]

Queen's Hotel, Leeds  
Diary  
4.6.31

Manchester

Left Hotel at 9:30 and visited a dealer by name of Jackson who showed us a very fine figure study by D. Wilson Steer. Suited me admirably but did not suit the old man—price fairly steep—we made an offer and left it at that—Here's hoping the deal comes off.

Went away with a Jackson then to see a Ford Madox Brown in a private home some miles out of Manchester.

Lovely drive—a beautiful morning—a charming old house and—dud pictures. So that was that. Back Hotel and caught train at 1.35 for Blackburn in order to visit a dealer there.

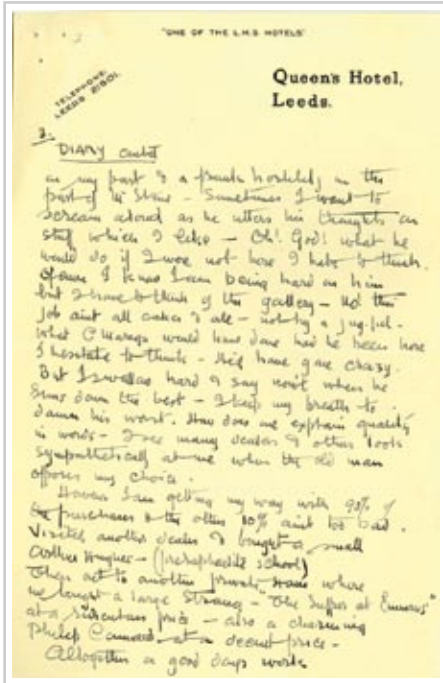
Our object in going to these midland towns is not so much to see the dealers in this sake as to see if we can't get entrance into some of the homes of those cotton magnets who are so hard up and want to sell away good pictures they may have.

Arrived in Blackburn about 3. only to find that it was the weekly half holiday—all stores closed—However we pushed our way to the place found a cleaner and with his cooperation found the manager. Little to see except a

large Brangwyn and a small Sir David Wilke. No details of them—the boss being in Leeds and the manager ends up not much of a manager. Stepped down to the station and caught a train for Bradford—a local—three charges—took us three hours to reach Bradford—arriving about 8:45 pm. Enjoyed the scenery of Lancashire and Yorkshire. Had a bite of supper and then to bed—quite a long day.



Jacob Epstein  
La Bohemienne, 1922



5.6.31 Bradford

Up at 8 am and off to make our rounds at 9:30. First place we visited we saw an admirable Dutch portrait by Ravesteyn in the manner of Rembrandt and a very fine head in bronze by Epstein. To my surprise the old man fell for the Epstein and altogether for the Ravesteyn so we bought the two (the Ravesteyn, is the first old master we have bought.

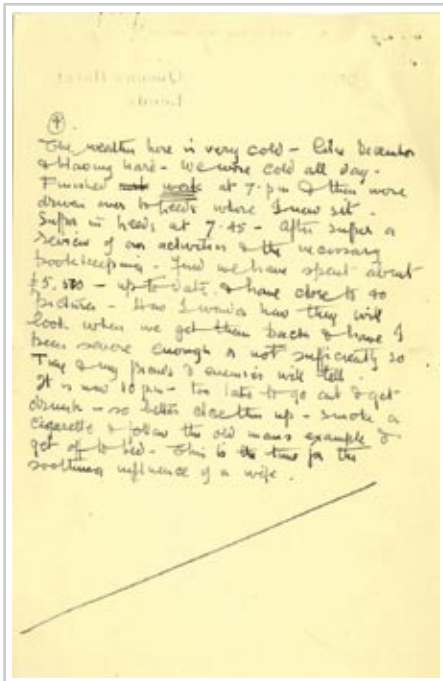
Taken then to a home near Lupton—Hockley Moor way—a drive of about 26 miles—beautiful country where we saw some charming things in a private home. A stunning Strava which we could buy but we bought an early Bamburgh and a drawing and painting by Jacob Kramer.

The last after much mental perturbation

on my part and a frank horseshit on the part of Mr. Stone—sometimes I want to scream aloud as he utters his thoughts on stuff which I like—Oh! God! What he would do if I were not here I have to think. I know I am being hard on him but I have to think of the gallery—No! this job aint all cakes and ale—not by a jug full.

What C. Marega would have done had he been here I hesitate to think—He'd have gone crazy. But I swallow hard and say nothing when he runs down the best—I keep my breath to damn his worst. How does he explain quality in his words—I see many dealers and others look sympathetically at me when the old man opposes my choices.

However I am getting my way with 90% of the purchases and the other 10% aint too bad. Visited another dealer and bought a small Arthur Hughes—(pre-Raphaelite school.)

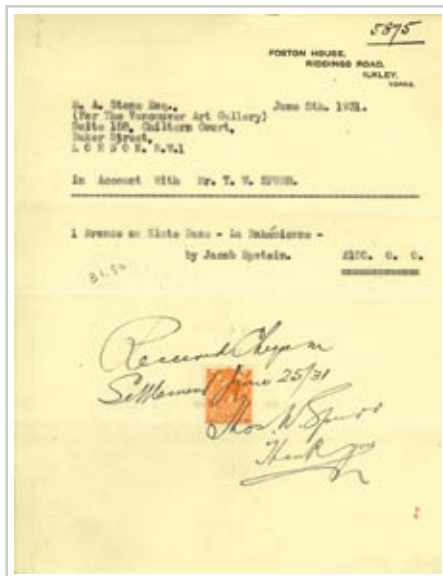


Then on to another private home where we bought a large Strang—"The Supper at Emmaus" at a ridiculous price—also a charming Philip Connard at a decent price. Altogether a good days work.

The weather here is very cold—Like December and blowing hard—we were cold all day. Finished work at 7 pm and then were driven over to Leeds where I now sit. Supper in Leeds at 7.45—after supper a review of our activities and the remaining bookkeeping—We have spent about 5,000 pounds—up to date and have close to 90 pictures—Now I wonder how they will look when we get them back and have I been severe enough or not sufficiently so. Time and my friends and enemies will tell.

It is now 10 pm—too late to go out and get drunk—so better close this up—smoke a cigarette and follow the old man's example and get off to bed—this is the time for the soothing influence of a wife.

Jacob Epstein  
*La Bohemienne*, 1922



**Bill of Sale**  
Acquisition Record  
1931-06-05

[transcription of excerpt]

Foston House, Riddings Road, Ilkley, Yorks

H.A. Stone Esq  
(For the Vancouver Art Gallery)  
Suite 158, Chiltern Court,  
Baker Street,  
LONDON. N.W.1

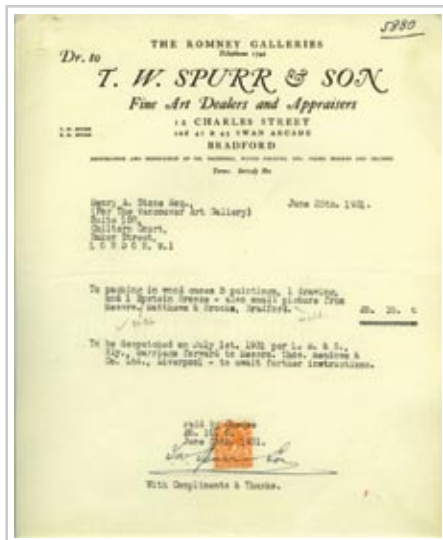
June 5th. 1931.

In Account with Mr. T.W. SPURR.

1 Bronze on Slate Base—*La Bohémienne*  
by Jacob Epstein  
£100.0.0

Received Cheque on Settlement June 25/31 Thos. W. Spurr  
Thank You

[31.86 in pencil]



**Shipping Invoice**  
Acquisition Record  
1931-06-25

[transcription of excerpt]

THE ROMENY GALLERIES  
Telephone 1742  
T.W. SPURR & SON  
*Fine Art Dealers and Appraisers*  
12 CHARLES STREET  
and 41 & 43 SWAN ARCADE  
BRADFORD  
Restoration AND RENOVATION OF OIL PAINTINGS, WATER COLOURS, ETC.  
FRAME MAKERS AND GILDERS  
Terms: Strictly Net

Henry A. Stone Esq.,  
(For the Vancouver Art Gallery)  
Suite 158,  
Chilton Court,  
Baker Street  
LONDON. w.1  
June 25th. 1931.

To packing in wood cases 5 paintings, 1 drawing, and 1 Epstein Bronze-also  
small picture from Messrs. Matthews & Brooke, Bradford £6.10.0

To be despatched on July 1st. 1931 per L.M. & S., Rly., carriage forward to  
Messrs. Thos. Meadows & Co. Ltd., Liverpool - to await further instructions

Jacob Epstein  
*La Bohemienne, 1922*

Paid by Cheque

£6.10.0

June 25th. 1931.  
TW Spurr & Son  
With Compliments & Thanks.

[31.86 in pencil]

## **Terms and Conditions**

The images, texts, documentation, illustrations, designs, icons and all other content are protected by Canadian and international copyright laws. The content may be covered by other restrictions as well, including copyright and other proprietary rights held by third parties. The Vancouver Art Gallery retains all rights, including copyright, in data, images, text and any other information. The Gallery expressly forbids the copying of any protected content, except for purposes of fair dealing, as defined by Canadian copyright law.