



Zoom on the Nisga'a

The Nisga'a are an indigenous population living in the Nass River valley of British Columbia, in Canada. They are one of Canada's First Nations. In 2011, approximately 1860 Nisga'a citizens were living on Nisga'a Lands along the River Nass, and 4500 living off Nisga'a Lands in surrounding urban areas. They speak the Nisga'a Language, and are working to preserve their language teaching it in schools.

In 2000, a Treaty signed between the Nisga'a Nation and the governments of British Columbia and Canada came into force. It provided for the repatriation of Nisga'a artifacts by the Canadian Museum of Civilization and the Royal British Columbia Museum. Those artifacts are now in the Nisga'a Museum (also called Hli Goothl Wilp-Adokshl Nisga'a) which opened in May 2011. This museum's architecture is inspired by the longhouse and the traditional Nisga'a feast dish, and is a Common Bowl metaphor for the Nass valley, which is abundant in natural resources and surrounded by mountains. This museum, in their eyes, is a centre filled with enriching resources. It contains today more than 300 sacred objects and art works.





Repatriation ceremony : Credit : Kitimat Daily Online



Norman Tait (Nisga'a Artist) - Beaver Bowl, 1972. Credit : Lattimergallery.blogspot.fr

Zoom on their culture

The Nisga'a have the tradition of carving wooden sculptures out of cedar trees. They carve poles, masks and canoes (which they sometimes display along the River Nass). They also take part in Feast ceremonies. They practice fishing, hunting and gathering, and obtained in 2000 full control over the natural resources located on Nisga'a Lands. This agreement with the government made the Nisga'a Nation the first to obtain constitutional security of its right to self-governance.



Description: Nisga'a chiefs, elders, matriarchs, youth, and guests celebrate the raising of a Pts'aan (totem pole) in Gitwinksihlkw.

Credit: Nisga'a Lisims Government / Gary Fiegehen

Zoom on the law

In Canada, as of today, there isn't any specific legislation giving indigenous populations the right for the repatriation of their sacred objects. Instead, the repatriations are done on a case-by-case basis, each museum having its own policy. The Nisga'a Treaty was the first to organise repatriations on a large scale.

