



## 12 Rodney Graham

oc 1949 –

### Old Growth Cedar #1 (Seymour Reservoir)

transmounted silver gelatin print, 2002

68 ¾ × 48 in, 174.6 × 121.9 cm

#### PROVENANCE

Acquired from the Artist through the Morris and Helen Belkin Art Gallery, University of British Columbia, by the present Private Collection, Vancouver, October 23, 2002

THE CAREER OF Rodney Graham presents something of a paradox. His name is customarily conjoined as a respected innovator with the Vancouver School of photo-conceptualism. Graham is a photo-based artist, filmmaker, musician, and video and installation artist with recent forays into painting. His works have been widely exhibited in numerous combinations alongside those of Jeff Wall, Ken Lum, Stan Douglas and a cadre of leading international photo-based artists. Yet the artist would have us believe that he does not own a camera, preferring instead to work with technical assistants to orchestrate the creation of his images. Further, the tenor of the aesthetic approach is that conceptualism conjures expectations of theoretic, cerebral investigations. Yet Graham's works are often unabashedly humorous, witty and playful.

Despite his freewheeling, wide-ranging artistic explorations, to many, Graham is most admired for his unique adaptation of the camera obscura. These works, which commenced in 1979, used the elemental imaging technology of the pinhole camera to create photographic exposures on photosensitive paper or a negative. The process inverts the image, and the artist chose not to flip the image “right side up.”

The silver gelatin print from 2002 *Old Growth Cedar #1 (Seymour Reservoir)* ranks among the most memorable iconic works associated with this career contribution to contemporary art. Works of related subject and temperament were shown in his exhibition *A Little Thought*, held at the Vancouver Art Gallery from February 5 to May 8, 2005, and subsequently at the Institute of Contemporary Art, Philadelphia, September 9 to December 22, 2005. Despite Graham's oftentimes persona as a good-natured urban cynic, *Old Growth Cedar #1 (Seymour Reservoir)* presents a respectful reverence and introspection befitting Henry David Thoreau's *Walden*. Graham, as a resident of Vancouver, is constantly surrounded by the beauty of the natural world. *Old Growth Cedar #1 (Seymour Reservoir)* resonates with century-old romantic imagery long-associated with the forests and parklands of his British Columbia homeland. This is a concept emblematic of the spiritual and cultural values of Northwest Coast art.

For over 150 years, visiting artist-travelers have come to Canada's West Coast to experience the ancient coastal forests. More specifically, they have attempted to translate their engagement with nature's majesty and aloneness with God into artworks of lasting merit. These encounters have inspired some of the most moving works of art in Canada's collective history, ranging from the late-nineteenth-century photographs of Notman & Fraser to the landscapes of Thomas Mower Martin to the important chronicles by the Canadian Pacific Railway artists, and perhaps capped by the grand book project *Picturesque Canada*, undertaken

by Lucius O'Brien. His work *A British Columbian Forest*, 1888, watercolour over graphite (collection of the National Gallery of Canada), expresses recognition of our smallness contrasted to the giant firs of Stanley Park.

There is little wonder that a region that shows admiration for the moving First Nations artworks showcased at the UBC Museum of Anthropology should also hold dear countless images of the BC forest interior. Among the prevailing emblems of such forest art of the region are Emily Carr's *Scorned as Timber, Beloved of the Sky*, 1935 (collection of the Vancouver Art Gallery) and numerous works by Jack Shadbolt, W.P. Weston and Arthur Lismer. The subtle tonalities and sensitive understatement of *Old Growth Cedar #1 (Seymour Reservoir)* implore us to count it within this long lofty tradition; the work is also in keeping with the legacy of the landscape photography of Ansel Adams.

Graham has been recognized by his inclusion in the most influential exhibitions of international contemporary art, including *documenta IX* (1992), the *Whitney Biennial* (2006) and the *Carnegie International* (2013). He has had solo exhibitions at the Vancouver Art Gallery, the Art Gallery of Ontario and the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles (2004), among many others. Graham represented Canada at the *47th Venice Biennale* in 1997. He is the recipient of many international awards—among them the Gershon Iskowitz Prize (2004), the Kurt Schwitters Prize (2006) and the Audain Prize for Lifetime Achievement in the Visual Arts (2011). Graham's work is in the pinnacle international collections: the Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris; the Metropolitan Museum of Art and Museum of Modern Art in New York; the Tate, London; and the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles. He is also represented in the principal Canadian art museums: the Vancouver Art Gallery, Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal and the Art Gallery of Ontario. Five of his inverted tree works are in the collection of the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York.

We thank Jeffrey Spalding for contributing the above essay. Spalding is an artist, curator, author and educator. For more than 40 years, Spalding has served in leadership roles at art museums and educational institutions. He is currently an art consultant for the Tao Hua Tan Cultural and Creative Company, and a Lifetime Senior Artist, Tao Hua Tan International Artist Creative Residency, China.

Accompanying this lot is a certificate signed by the Artist stating that this work is number one from an edition of four and two proofs.

**ESTIMATE: \$60,000 – 80,000**