

E.J. Hughes and Jacques Barbeau
Photographer unknown

JACQUES BARBEAU AND MARGARET OWEN BARBEAU

> Buying art, like any other endeavour, requires know-how and focus. It's a stimulating pastime because, unlike others, it combines the aesthetic with the mercantile, a perfect intellectual sandwich.
>
> —JACQUES BARBEAU[1]

HEFFEL IS DELIGHTED and honoured to present this season four distinguished works from the renowned E.J. Hughes collection of the Barbeau Owen Foundation. These special works pay tribute to the remarkable relationship between a reclusive painter and his dedicated patron, Jacques Barbeau (1931 – 2020).

Barbeau was born in Montreal, Quebec, the youngest of three siblings. After his parents separated, he spent his early childhood living with his mother, his maternal grandfather and his older sister, Micheline. He wrote of visiting the nearby Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, which he described as "the cultural pivot of the city." He and his mother moved in 1943 to Vancouver, where Barbeau first attended Vancouver College and then North Vancouver High School. He later studied at McGill and ultimately graduated with a law degree from the University of British Columbia. During these years he met and fell in love with Margaret Owen of Vancouver, and the couple married in 1958.

"Jacques Barbeau … remains a totem to good taste and great humour," wrote the journalist Peter C. Newman in 1983 in *Titans*, the third volume of *The Canadian Establishment*. Barbeau had first met Newman in 1960, when Newman invited him for dinner. Then a recent graduate of Harvard Law School, Barbeau had joined the Tax Policy Division of the Department of Finance in Ottawa. Some years later, Newman called on Barbeau for insight into the "major players" in Vancouver. When *The Canadian Establishment* was released in 1975, Barbeau was included.[2] A later illustrated guide described him as follows:

> Jacques Barbeau is a transplanted Montrealer who has successfully entered the tightly knit Vancouver Establishment. A graduate of the University of British Columbia and Harvard, Barbeau spent five years in Ottawa with government taxation divisions and as a director of research for the Canadian Tax Foundation. He opened his own practice in Vancouver in the early 1960s; today Barbeau, McKercher, Collingwood & Hanna deals with clients around the world. Barbeau divides his time between his heritage house in Vancouver's Shaughnessy district and a summer residence in Point Roberts, Washington. He collects Leica cameras and the works of Canadian artist E.J. Hughes and is a member of the Vancouver Club.[3]

As the story goes, Barbeau's interest in the art of E.J. Hughes was first sparked when he saw one of Hughes's paintings reproduced on the front cover of a 1958 Vancouver telephone directory. "The painting was bold and daring," he later recalled, evoking strong feelings and capturing the "vibrant character of British Columbia."[4] Almost a dozen years passed, in which Hughes was working steadily on Vancouver Island and Barbeau was establishing himself in Vancouver. Barbeau acquired his first Hughes after paying a visit to the Dominion Gallery in Montreal in 1969. Notably, the Dominion had represented Hughes since 1951, after art dealer Max Stern tracked him down at Shawnigan Lake. The Dominion Gallery was also well known to Barbeau, since when he was young he had lived almost next door.

Not content to simply admire his Hughes collection, Barbeau undertook to document and share the works. In the year 2000, he began to self-publish books devoted to Hughes's art along with autobiographies. One title, *A Journey with E.J. Hughes*, charmingly combines information about the artist with stories about how Barbeau accumulated his collection over fifty-odd years. First released in 2000, this title was reissued by Douglas & McIntyre in 2005 in a deluxe coffee-table edition.

When Barbeau became aware of Michael Audain's plans for a new museum of BC art in Whistler, he saw this as a perfect opportunity to bring Hughes's work to a wider audience. In 2015, he loaned 15 masterpieces to the Audain Art Museum, where they have delighted viewers in the Barbeau–Owen Gallery since 2016. Lots 1 to 4 represent a rare opportunity to acquire works by a legendary West Coast artist from a prominent BC collection.

Jacques Barbeau was a long-time friend, mentor and supporter to all of us at Heffel Vancouver. His regular visits to our Vancouver gallery were always filled with passion, inspiration, guidance, friendship and, of course, the mutual love and admiration for the great artistic master E.J. Hughes.

1. Jacques Barbeau, *Facts & Opinions: Truths & Half-Truths* (Vancouver: Barbeau Foundation, 2009), 105.
2. Ibid., 186.
3. Peter C. Newman quoted in ibid., 190.
4. Jacques Barbeau, *A Journey with E.J. Hughes*, 2nd ed. (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 2005), 3.



E.J. Hughes signing copies of Ian Thom's book *E.J. Hughes* with Jacques Barbeau, 2003
Photographer unknown





Installation views of *E.J. Hughes and Depictions of Place* at the Audain Art Museum, Whistler, BC
Photos: Lara Shecter
Courtesy of Lara Shecter