



**SYMBOL AND SUBSTANCE IN
AMERICAN INDIAN ART**

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Zena Pearlstone Mathews

THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART

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On the cover: Detail of a ceremonial blanket (no. 1) illustrated in fig. 1

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FOREWORD

Symbol and Substance in American Indian Art continues the presentation of the art of Native North America at the Metropolitan Museum. Shown in The Michael C. Rockefeller Wing, the objects come from the holdings of the friend and private collector who loaned the works for *Color and Shape in American Indian Art*. That exhibition, held in 1983, focused on the change from the traditional design and restrained use of color prevalent in the late eighteenth century to the exuberant eclecticism and intense hues characteristic of early twentieth-century Native American art. The current exhibition, covering much the same time span, offers a more penetrating view of the meaning of the works displayed.

The highly symbolic nature of much Native American art is often overlooked because many of the forms, indeed the substance, of the objects are so familiar to contemporary viewers as to seem ordinary. Nothing could better exemplify this than the paraphernalia associated with the smoking of tobacco—pipe bowl, pipe stem, and pipe container are to us everyday, commonly used objects. Yet to Native Americans tobacco had great supernatural power, and smoking it was an intimate part of cer-

emony. Pipe bowl, pipe stem, pipe bag all had sacred meaning and were decorated in accordance with honored roles. Another area in which symbol was preeminent was the use of feathers, where material was of inherent and central importance. Today considered ephemeral and ornamental, feathers were of the most explicit conceptual significance to Native Americans and were to be used only as prescribed by tradition. Further, to some groups feathers constituted wealth itself.

Large expanses of North America are represented in the exhibition. Many of the works come from the Northeast and the Plains; California and the Northwest Coast contribute their distinctive notes as well. Materials, as varied as regional origins, illustrate the great diversity and invention to be found in Native North American art.

We are pleased to present this exhibition in the Rockefeller Wing at the Metropolitan, and we are grateful that the collector of such fascinating objects is willing to share them with a broader public.

Philippe de Montebello
Director

SYMBOL AND SUBSTANCE IN AMERICAN INDIAN ART

Moundville was the Big Apple of fourteenth-century North America," according to James Brown, a scholar of precontact Southeastern communities (Walthall, pp. 13–14). A major political, trade, and ceremonial center in the Southeastern United States before the coming of the Europeans, Moundville, near present-day Tuscaloosa, Alabama, reached its peak between A.D. 1250 and 1500. Approximately three thousand people lived on 300 acres, of which more than 100 were enclosed within a palisade. Inside the town walls were twenty major platform mounds, a principal architectural form in the Southeast at the time. These flat-topped, man-made earthen mounds—some of them 100 feet high—served as bases for wooden temples or chiefs' houses. There were, in addition, fifty unflattened mounds, a number of which were used for burials. The rigid social stratification that defined the major ceremonial sites in the Southeast during this period is reflected at Moundville in the organization of the town and in its burials. An elite residential area characterized by large multiroom dwellings is located in one corner of the site, in opposition to the much larger, less elegant public area.

It has been determined from the contents of more than three thousand burials at Moundville that the elite comprised only about five percent of the population. In their burials were rare objects, often of exotic materials, including copper axes, shell and freshwater-pearl beads, and copper ear spoons. In contrast, many of the remaining ninety-five percent of the graves had no associated goods and those that did contained items made of less valuable materials, such as clay. The objects unearthed in elite burials indicate the social standing of the interred individual. Copper axes, for

example, are found exclusively in the graves of persons of the highest status; prestige connotations are embodied in the material itself and in the symbolic associations of the object. Copper was a rare and greatly valued mineral that could only be obtained through trade with the people of either southern Appalachia or the Great Lakes region. The fact that copper axes are nonutilitarian indicates that they had ceremonial functions. Furthermore, their symbolic association appears to be one of authority since as weapons they are naturally connected with warfare, an institution that had the important role of conferring prestige.

Objects related to prestige, as well as those associated with professional accomplishments, ceremonies, and religious specialists, have a long history on the continent. Materials and objects that are symbols of the wealth of an individual or his prominence in the community existed among many peoples before the arrival of the Europeans. With increased archaeological sophistication and excavations, it is now clear that numerous Native Americans lived in stratified communities where specific types of objects were made for and used by certain individuals or social classes.

The ranked societies of the Northwest Coast, noted by the earliest explorers in the late eighteenth century, are now known, as a result of the excavations of some remarkable sites in the state of Washington, to have existed as early as A.D. 1000. One of the most illuminating of these sites is that of Ozette, on the westernmost point of the Washington Coast. At Ozette highly perishable art and architecture of wood and fiber, which are particularly vulnerable to rapid decay in the damp climate of the North Pacific Coast, were preserved more than



1 The highly abstract patterns that compose this ceremonial cloak, or blanket, are actually family crests representing animals and mythological beings. (no. 1)

2 Button blankets, made of re-worked blue and red trade cloth and pearl buttons, are often embellished with family crests and function as ceremonial cloaks. (no. 2)



four hundred years ago by a mud slide that created an oxygen-free environment. Great care must be taken with such objects for unless they are chemically treated, they begin to shrink and warp immediately when exposed to the air. Chemical treatment of materials from Ozette has preserved hundreds of wooden objects, fragments of cedar-bark baskets, and even a single braid of human hair attached to a bowl carved in human form.

From the Washington Coast excavations it is apparent that a society consisting of nobles, commoners, and slaves, as well as occupational and curing specialists, was in evidence at least a thousand years ago. The living quarters of the ranking family of one house at Ozette are clearly indicated by the ceremonial gear found in the area, notably a cedar-bark hat with a knob at the crown, the traditional style worn by a high-status individual.

Prestige items that belong to members of the upper classes have been prevalent on the Northwest Coast since the nineteenth century. Chilkat blankets (fig. 1), named for a branch of the Tlingit people in Alaska, were highly valued throughout the coastal region and were purchased by chiefs whenever possible. They were never actually used as rugs or blankets but rather were worn around the shoulders as cloaks. Unlike earlier cloaks made of sea otter or other fine fur, Chilkat cloaks are woven from mountain-goat wool and cedar bark. The weaving, always done by Chilkat women, reproduces family-crest designs, which the men paint on wooden pattern boards. These designs, generally representing animals and mythological beings, are extremely abstract; in 1927, the eminent anthropologist Franz Boas noted that two Northwest Coast scholars had alternately identified the same pattern as representing a killer whale and a spirit of the sea—beings with quite different meanings to the peoples of the coast.

When European cloth became available, another type of ceremonial cloak known as a button blanket was conceived. Button blankets (fig. 2) were deco-

rated by Native Americans with pearl-shell buttons and red-flannel appliqués. The designs, though less abstract than those on Chilkat blankets, usually represent similar family-crest motifs.

Worn with Northwest Coast ceremonial blankets are headpieces that the Kwakiutl of British Columbia call dancing forehead-masks. These wooden headdresses are sewn to bark-and-cloth rings and rest on the dancers' foreheads. At the top of the headdress a row of sea-lion whiskers stands stiffly upright. Eagle down, symbolizing peace, is held in place by the whiskers, and when the dancer performs, the down drifts around the room. Like those on the ceremonial cloaks, the animals carved on the headdresses signify family crests.

Whereas on the Northwest Coast high-status items took many forms, usually bearing family crests, in central California they were often distinguished by feather decoration. In California, feathers were considered to be the most prestigious of materials, and objects incorporating them generally were the property of the wealthy. To obtain, select, and weave hundreds of bird feathers onto a cordage background was a difficult and time-consuming procedure affordable only to those of means. Feather belts up to six feet in length demonstrated both the wealth of the wearer and his respect for the supernaturals. Similarly, elaborate earplugs of polished and incised bird-wing bones with small discs of feather basketry and quail feathers attached at one end were greatly prized and were worn on special occasions and at ceremonial dances.

Of the many feathered objects from California, it is undoubtedly the baskets made by the Pomo that are most famous. Pomo baskets of all kinds are often tour-de-force productions in their technical virtuosity; there are, for example, baskets so tiny that they can only be appreciated with the aid of a magnifying glass. Feather baskets often had ceremonial associations, and some were visual abstractions of myths and legends. Hanging baskets with abalone-shell attachments representing moon, sun,

and fish refer to an action of the Pomo culture hero, who is said to have hung the sun in the sky to light the earth.

Most feather baskets were made as gifts for young girls by their mothers or other female relatives. Like Chilkat blankets, Pomo baskets were made by women, but in California, as opposed to the Northwest Coast, it was the women rather than the men who owned the designs. The construction of all baskets was subject to certain taboos. Woven horizontal bands, for example, if not broken at some point, supposedly caused the weaver to become blind. Similarly, if a woman wished to work on a basket of any sort while menstruating, a practice believed to bring ill luck, she could weave a few feathers into the basket as a preventive charm. Treasured possessions, feather baskets often were cremated with their owners at death.

The practice of destroying elaborate works of art was not uncommon in North America. Objects might be demolished immediately after completion, as with Navaho sand paintings, or left to disintegrate in the wind and rain, as with the carved poles of the Northwest Coast. Such treatment is alien to the Western mind, which traditionally has taken for granted the preservation of art. Among Native Americans, however, the act of creation was sometimes considered to be of greater consequence than the finished product. This attitude is reflected in sacred paintings that may be layered one atop another in California caves. It is likewise reflected in the Navaho sand paintings, the curative powers of which are absorbed by patients, who, by sitting on the works when they are completed, destroy them.

Prestige objects that glorify the individual according to his rank, position, or wealth are of long-





3 A detailed, energetic, and highly colored drawing style recording specific and recognizable people and events developed among Plains men in the nineteenth century. (no. 25)

4 Pipe bowls in the shapes of animals often depict personal guardian spirits. They were usually made with the animal facing the smoker. (no. 17)



5 The smoking of Native American tobacco was a means of communicating with the supernatural, and the paraphernalia associated with smoking was decorated symbolically. (no. 29)



standing importance in North America. Similarly, objects that celebrate or illustrate an individual's professional skills and achievements in hunting, curing, or artistic endeavors can be determined from the precontact period by an examination of the goods buried with the person. At Moundville, artists were found interred with their tools, and on the Washington Coast, curing specialists with their medical paraphernalia.

In all parts of the country specific objects continued to be linked to particular professions. A deviation from this traditional pattern appeared on the Plains during the nineteenth century when men began to communicate and celebrate their military exploits by painting representational scenes on tipis. This novel artistic development can be seen as a function of historical events of the time. With the acquisition of horses in the eighteenth century, about half the peoples of the Plains abandoned a sedentary life for one of nomadic hunting. Accompanying this change was portable housing in the form of the tipi. The tipi provided protection from the elements while serving the needs of a people who were constantly moving. In addition, it became a vehicle for sacred and military art. This art was distinct from the geometric, apparently nonrepresentational forms that were painted on hides by Plains women.

Although it is certain that the figurative style of the Plains male artists was shaped by European drawing, the extent of direct European influence is unclear. By the middle of the nineteenth century Plains men had developed a detailed, naturalistic mode of expression for recording their feats in war (fig. 3), and stringent rules pertaining to the style of their art had evolved. Details of action, dress, weapons, shields, and face painting had to be exact; individuals could be recognized by the depiction of their clothing and shields. Other elements, however, did not require realistic representation. The colors of the horses appear to have been strictly decorative, and their positions, like the proportions of

the human figures, are non-naturalistic. The horses can often be seen at a flying gallop with all four legs extended, a stance that never occurs in reality.

The flat, two-dimensional style of Plains hide paintings is traditional in Native American art, which employed no perspective until it was learned from the Europeans. On the other hand, European influence is evident in the format of the paintings. The episodic narrative approach, used in the illustration of battles or important events from a military career, was rare though not unknown in precontact North America. When scenes were employed, clear delineations between pictures were not indicated and there were no standard patterns. Plains hide paintings generally followed the tradition of allowing scenes to merge, but when making these items for sale to non-natives, artists would sometimes enclose the episodes within lines, thus making them easier to "read."

Like prestige objects belonging to those of high rank, hide paintings have a strong secular character. Glorification of the individual, however, is seldom the sole purpose of Native American art, and many classes of objects that seem from a Western point of view to be mundane in fact transcend the secular realm. Artistic production was almost always related to religious beliefs and customs. The world of the Native American is populated with supernatural beings, and objects that permit man to interact with these beings or that record his dealings with them account for the manufacture of a large percentage of Native American art.

Interactions with the gods can be seen in various ways in the smoking pipes, musical instruments, items associated with warfare, and clothing made for the Ghost Dance, a Native American movement discussed below. Tobacco, for example, an indigenous plant of the New World, was thought by Native Americans to have been a gift from the gods. Considered to be a remedy for all ills, it was imbued with supernatural power and before the arrival of the Europeans was always connected with ritual



and ceremony. Tobacco was not only smoked in pipes. It was rolled into cigars and cigarettes; mixed into a paste and applied directly to the body as a cure; chewed; snuffed; offered in dry states to spirits; and burned to carry messages to distant deities. When burned, tobacco created an ideal non-material food for the spirits, and when smoked, it made breath, which was equated with life, visible.

Unlike the hybrids available today, native tobaccos were extremely strong and conducive to trances. The explorer Jacques Cartier, who sampled native tobacco in 1535, proclaimed it "as hot as pepper" (Cartier, p. 242). Because of its strength, the natives usually mixed it with other substances to cut the taste or improve the flavor. Missionaries and explorers noted that smoking led to intoxication and that if tobacco was used in an enclosed space, the smoker commonly had to be carried from the room. Some Native Americans still cultivate indigenous tobaccos for ceremonial purposes, smoking "white man's tobacco" on other occasions.

The medicinal and religious properties of tobacco were inseparable in the minds of Native Americans, but the Europeans, who had little familiarity with Native American religious concepts, were first induced to try the herb because of its purported curing powers. The use of tobacco spread rapidly on the Continent, and within two hundred years it was being grown throughout the world.

Curing was also associated with tubes used by healers to suck from a patient objects believed to cause disease or to trap souls that had strayed from the patient's body. The first pipes known in North America were cylindrical and probably developed from such tubes. Pipes evolved into a multitude of forms (fig. 6), extraordinarily diverse in size and decoration and created from many materials, including stone, clay, reed, wood, and bone. Since European contact some pipes have come to be used in a secular fashion, but many retain ritual functions.

Stone pipes, often elaborately sculpted in human and animal forms, are found in precontact Eastern burials. It is not unusual for the platform pipes of the Hopewell culture, centered in Ohio between 300 B.C. and A.D. 700, to be exquisitely naturalistic representations of animals. In one burial, 145 pipes were found in a single cache, 90 in animal shapes. Stone pipes from Southeastern sites such as Moundville are up to a foot in height and weigh as much as five pounds. Many of the pipes depict narrative scenes and display an elegant form and a fine finish. Smoked through a long stem, the flat-based pipes probably rested on the ground and had a ceremonial function. Some Southeastern and Hopewell examples, however, appear to have never been smoked and may have been made exclusively for burial.

From the postcontact period stone and clay pipes of a size suitable to be held in the hand were probably for personal use. Though made throughout the country, the pipes were produced primarily in the East. One of their functions was to allow the smoker to communicate with the supernaturals. The Reverend Peter Jones, who lived with the Ojibwa around the western Great Lakes in the middle of the nineteenth century, wrote, "The old men are passionately fond of their pipes and often times spend many hours in the course of the day in raising the smoke. While thus employed they think a great deal of their manitous [spirits], which causes them to attach a kind of sacredness to this practice" (Jones, p. 135). It is likely that modeled or sculpted animal representations (fig. 5) on the pipes were the personal guardian spirits of the smoker. The beings most frequently depicted—bears, wolves, and birds, particularly owls—generally face the smoker and are situated between the mouthpiece and the bowl (fig. 4). Some pipes have representations of Europeans (fig. 7) or images of European items. Native Americans smoking these pipes may have felt that such representations gave them power over the persons portrayed.

6 (opposite, above): Pipes in sculptural form have an ancient history in North America and are made to the present day in a wide variety of shapes, images, and materials. (no. 31)

7 (opposite, below; detail): A pipe in the form of a ballhead club illustrates the close relationship between smoking and war ceremonies. This example includes a European-derived image. (no. 30)

8 (right): Pipes were often kept in special cases or bags. The beaded elements shown here may refer to the Ghost Dance, a Native American movement of the 1890s and early 1900s. (no. 20)



Another category of pipe, the famous calumet of the Upper Mississippi, Great Lakes, and Plains, is actually named for the stem alone, from the French *chalumeau*, meaning reed, although the term has come to refer to the entire object, including the bowl. The stems—of wood or reed, usually ornamented with feathers, beads, quills, incising, or paint—apparently have a history of ceremonial significance distinct from that of the bowls. The stems could be decorated with powerful supernaturals or assume a spiral shape, symbolizing new growth or life. Those with elaborate openwork carvings are known as trick or puzzle stems because it is said that only the carver knew the exact route by which the smoke traveled from bowl to mouthpiece. The union of any of these stems with a pipe bowl resulted in an object of particular power; peoples of the Plains and the Eastern Woodlands often considered calumets their most sacred possessions. They were used during ratification of treaties (the “peace” pipe); in the greeting of strangers; to ensure safety; and always as appeals to gods and spirits.

Pipes of all varieties commonly had special bags or cases invested with their own symbolism. The Arapaho pipe bag (fig. 8), for example, was probably associated with the Ghost Dance. The bag depicts the morning star, the turtle who supports the earth, and the pipe itself.

Like tobacco smoke, the sound of musical instruments served as a bridge between man and the supernaturals. The instruments of North America are primarily percussive and are played as accompaniments to singing and dancing. Their significance, however, transcends their practical use as rhythm makers. Throughout Native America, drums and rattles were employed by religious figures and in ceremonies of all kinds to summon, communicate with, or imitate the voices of the supernaturals. The sounds of the instruments had the capacity to ward off evil spirits, and the objects themselves were believed to have lives of their own. Raven rat-

tles from the Northwest Coast, for example, are held upside-down when used in dances because it is told that one of them once came alive and flew away when it was held upright. The rattles illustrate a powerful interaction between a man and a kingfisher; the latter seeming to hold the man’s tongue in his bill. This kind of animal/human dynamic is often associated with religious and curing specialists, and raven rattles have served in curing ceremonies, although today they are predominantly prestige items for chiefs, who use them on secular occasions.

Items related to warfare may seem further removed from ritual activity than pipe smoking or the playing of musical instruments, but warfare was an activity that had a large ceremonial component and involved a great deal of interaction with the gods. The stereotype of the Native American as warlike emerged from nineteenth-century books and illustrations, the Plains Indian wars, and Wild West shows, beginning with that of Buffalo Bill, which toured major cities in both Europe and the United States between 1883 and the First World War. The warrior of the Plains came to stand for “the Indian,” an image that was perpetuated by Hollywood Westerns. This stereotype had little foundation in reality. For many native peoples in North America, aggression of any kind was limited and essentially defensive. Typically, the Indian warrior was a hunter who supported his family through nonmilitary activity. Those struggling for survival scarcely had time for organized militancy, and few if any groups could afford to maintain a standing army. Offensive warfare often took the form of feuds or raids, frequently restricted to specific periods of the year. Surprise attacks were the most common procedure, with warriors entering enemy territory on foot with bows, clubs, and spears.

Although wars of conquest were rare, their economic impact surely increased in the postcontact period, when peoples were being relocated and new land, materials, and weapons assumed greater

importance. On the Plains, for instance, the acquisition of horses became a paramount concern. For many Native Americans, warfare was a means of ranking men and creating solidarity.

For individual warriors the cultural incentive to do battle likely became personalized, centering on prestige, glory, and revenge. In the Northeast and the Plains the highest honors went to those who were most daring and ruthless. This kind of behavior could be manifested without bloodshed. Plains warriors had graded honors, of which the most prestigious generally was a "coup," that is, an act of touching an enemy without injuring him but risking one's own life nevertheless. Other honors were awarded for killing, scalping, and stealing, especially horses. Some cultures did have permanent military organizations, war leaders, and public ceremonies associated with combativeness. Members of military associations might have distinctive clothing, such as shirts, that symbolized the office of the owner.

No act of aggression took place without elaborate ritual before a skirmish, as well as while warriors were on the move and after they had completed an expedition. All of this was prescribed behavior to assure supernatural aid and protection. Frequently, objects used in combat indicated which spirits had been summoned. War clubs—often creations with strong, sophisticated designs—could, like pipes, incorporate the figure of an animal (fig. 9), customarily a mythical being, perhaps representing the owner's special patron. Decoration on gun-shaped clubs (fig. 10) referred to the powers of the upperworld, such as Thunderbirds (beneficent supernaturals who bring rain and guard the welfare of man) and heavenly bodies including stars. That smoking and tobacco were usually integral to war ceremonialism is illustrated by a pipe carved in the form of a war club (fig. 7). Like smoking pipes, war clubs continued to be made and employed long after guns and steel tomahawks were available.

The war shields of the Plains were valued more for their painted designs depicting the personal guardian spirit of the owner (fig. 11) than for their practical uses. In Plains culture, which lacked elaborate priesthoods and organized cults, personal guardian spirits were solicited by individuals on a "vision quest." This quest was generally undertaken at puberty by boys who went into isolation and fasted. It was meant to induce hallucinations, usually involving animals, that supposedly endowed the visionary with certain supernatural capabilities or skills characteristic of the animal or being that had revealed itself. Having acquired these characteristics, the visionary was permitted to decorate his body, clothes, and weapons with representations of the power animal.

Shields originally also may have served to deflect arrows, but obviously any protective measure became obsolete with the use of bullets. Before the introduction of horses, large shields were employed in ground warfare; men positioned in two opposing rows, each man behind a shield, would exchange arrow fire. Because there was no close contact, casualties were few. For combat on horseback, shields were reduced to half their former size and functioned primarily to protect vital organs. Most important at all times were the shield's magical powers, which prevented missiles from reaching the warrior.

It is not surprising that shields (fig. 12) were included among the accessories associated with the Ghost Dance, which swept through much of North America from 1890 to about 1905, for the Ghost Dance, along with its related rituals, was in effect a holy war—a "war" in that it aimed to exterminate European settlers and their descendants and return Native Americans to their aboriginal conditions, "holy" in that it prohibited violence. The specialized clothing identified with the Ghost Dance was decorated with signs revealed to its founder, the Paiute Wovoka, or to the wearer. Stars, the most frequently repeated motif on Ghost Dance garb,



9 Animal forms could be incorporated into war clubs, possibly as protective devices; a popular image was that of an animal with a "ball" in its mouth. (no. 37)

10 Wooden clubs made in the simplified shape of a gunstock were a favored form that often included a knife blade and embellishments of added materials. (no. 16)



can be seen on shields, dresses, and shirts. Stars and other designs such as butterflies, birds, and trees were considered to be protective, making the wearer invincible.

While much of the art of Native America was employed by various segments of the population for ceremonial functions, certain classes of objects could only be used by religious specialists. Every community had individuals who had stronger supernatural powers or greater knowledge than the layman—shamans, curers, magicians, diviners, priests. By entering a trance during which the soul leaves the body and travels to meet supernaturals, shamans can communicate directly with the supernaturals and mediate on behalf of man. Shamans, male or female, perform functions concerned with curing, controlling the weather, ensuring success in warfare, and banishing malevolent supernaturals, including witches.

Traditionally shamans were associated solely with hunting and gathering societies. Thus, highly stratified cultures—the Tlingit of the Northwest Coast, for example, whose subsistence depends on fishing and hunting—relied on shamans. Many artistic forms in North America developed from images of the animals hunted; animals that may represent the deity who controls them; helping spirits of shamans; or depictions of the shaman in the guise of an animal. Even when peoples departed from their shamanistic heritage, particular animals continued to be linked with power. As guardian spirits acquired on vision quests or as ancestral beings adopted for clan emblems, animals in Native American art continue to be of great importance.

The origin myths of many Native American peoples emphasize the role of animals. According to legend, at a time before the creation of man the world was populated by beings who were part man and part animal. These beings acted like people and could speak. When mankind emerged, intimate communication and understanding existed between men and animals, but their worlds sub-

sequently diverged, possibly as a result of man's misbehavior. Direct communication was no longer possible, and religious specialists with extraordinary powers were required to intercede.

Among peoples where agriculture rather than hunting predominated, priesthoods came into being; in North America this was the case primarily in the Southeast and the Southwest. Priests deal with supernaturals indirectly by enacting precise rituals and intoning standard prayers. Shamans, on the other hand, behave in ways unfamiliar to Western man. Each encounter with the gods is distinct, dependent on the individual shaman and the function that is being performed. In all cases direct interaction with the gods and the active role assumed by the shaman distinguish him from the priest. Shamanistic objects—extremely variable and having a wide range of roles—often take the form of clothing, musical instruments, and curing paraphernalia.

In general, cultures in which shamanistic concepts are prominent are structured according to religious societies rather than social classes. This was so on the Plains and around the Great Lakes. By the nineteenth century, however, "pure" shamanism was rare since most peoples in North America had to some extent already adopted an agricultural way of life. Still, it was not unusual for these peoples to retain the ceremonial roots associated with a hunting ideology. Thus, religious societies developed, perpetuating shamanistic themes in rituals for fertility, general welfare, and curing. Members of the societies, while holding to many of the basic tenets of shamanism, did not customarily go into trances to contact the supernaturals. Furthermore, like priests, they would often perform prescribed rites. The Mide'wiwin of the Ojibwa of the Great Lakes exemplifies this sort of shamanistic institution. It is organized in four levels or grades, and those who wish to become members of the society must pay to enter and must pay again each time they wish to advance to a higher grade. Initiation

procedures incorporate many elements of shamanism; for instance, initiates are required to undergo ritual death and rebirth, a process indicative of shamanistic ability to experience worlds and conditions inaccessible to the layman.

Members of the Mide'wiwin possess ornamented animal-skin bundles, or bags, and birch-bark scrolls on which the origins of the world or of the society itself are depicted. The bags are constructed from the skins of badgers and otters, important protective animals of the society linked to its founding; the addition of eagle-claw "horns" symbolically brings the animal back to life. Among the Ojibwa, horns signify superior or divine power, and the eagle, a being of particular strength, is often associated with the Thunderbird. The bags were further decorated with dyed porcupine quills, trade cloth, trade silk and beads, brass bells, and metal cones. During use, the bags were filled with small packets of herbal medicine intended either for curing or as appeals to the animal for its aid in curing. Likewise, the prescription sticks of the Prairie Potawatami were curing aids and were also mnemonic devices that recorded herbal prescriptions. Specific plants are represented along the edges of the stick, with additional markings demonstrating which plants to mix for a particular medicine or the length of time to allow between prescriptions.

All Native American art, from that of religious specialists to that of the nobility, bears a close relationship to the social and ceremonial needs of the community and can be understood in part by the symbols displayed on objects, in part by the substances used. The congruity of symbol and substance is apparent in a work such as a Moundville copper ax, where a rare and prestigious material, by virtue of its use in a ceremonial object, serves as a symbol of authority and prestige. Appropriateness of symbol to substance continues to be prevalent in the art of the postcontact period. A Mide'wiwin animal-skin bundle, for instance, represents the founding of the society, and the substances incorporated, such as eagle-claw horns, express the powerful nature of the object.

There is still much to be learned and much perhaps that we will never know about Native American art. The meaning of the works of peoples with no written documentation must be ascertained from diverse sources, including the disciplines of art history, anthropology, and archaeology. Also revealing are myths and legends, as well as reports of early missionaries and explorers. As we learn more about Native American art and life through excavations and scholarship, our comprehension of the significance of symbol and substance can only become richer.



11 (above): Images of guardian spirits were painted on the outer covers of the hide shields of Plains warriors. The owner's individual emblems magically increased the power of his shield. (no. 22)

12 (opposite): Among the ceremonial accouterments related to the Ghost Dance were shields with protective emblems, such as butterflies and birds. (no. 27)



EXHIBITION LIST

Bold-faced numerals indicate pieces illustrated in this publication.

NORTHWEST

- 1** Blanket
Tlingit, about 1890
Wool, bark
Height 51 in. (129.5 cm.)
- 2** Blanket
Tsimshian, last half
of 19th century
Trade cloth, buttons
Height 60½ in. (153.7 cm.)
- 3** Headdress frontal
Kaigani Haida(?), about 1870
Wood, paint, shell
Height 6¾ in. (16.2 cm.)
- 4** Speaker's staff
Northwest Coast, about 1875
Wood
Height 62 in. (157.4 cm.)
- 5** Rattle
Tlingit, last quarter
of 19th century
Metal, other materials
Height 10 in. (25.4 cm.)
- 6** Knife
Tlingit, last quarter
of 19th century
Metal, other materials
Height 16 in. (40.6 cm.)
- 7** Knife
Tlingit, last quarter
of 19th century
Metal, other materials
Height 23½ in. (59.7 cm.)

- 8** Pipe bowl
Tlingit(?), about 1880
Wood, metal, shell
Height 3½ in. (8.9 cm.)

CALIFORNIA

- 9** Belt
California, first half
of 19th century
Fiber, shell, feathers
Length 73¾ in. (187.3 cm.)
- 10** Headdress
Hupa, about 1900
Hide, feathers
Height 40 in. (101.5 cm.)
- 11** Ear ornaments
Pomo, last quarter
of 19th century
Bone, feathers
Length 6⅞ in. (17.5 cm.)
- 12** Basket
Pomo, about 1890
Willow, feathers
Width 4 in. (10.2 cm.)
- 13** Basket
Pomo, about 1890
Willow, feathers
Diameter 6¼ in. (15.9 cm.)

SOUTHWEST

- 14** Woman's dress top
Apache, about 1900
Hide, other materials
Height 36 in. (91.4 cm.)

PLAINS

- 15** Ballhead club
Eastern Sioux, about 1820
Wood, metal
Height 22 in. (55.9 cm.)
- 16** Gunstock club
Brulé Sioux, about 1850
Wood, metal, beads
Height 26 in. (66 cm.)
- 17** Pipe bowl
Plains(?), about 1870
Catlinite
Length 5½ in. (14 cm.)
- 18** Pipe bowl
Sioux(?), about 1890
Catlinite
Height 3½ in. (8.9 cm.)
- 19** Pipe
Plains, about 1880
Catlinite, wood, paint
Length 18 in. (45.7 cm.)
- 20** Pipe bag
Arapaho, about 1890
Hide, beads
Height 35 in. (88.9 cm.)
- 21** Lance case
Crow, last quarter
of 19th century
Hide (fringe replaced), beads
Length 46 in. (116.8 cm.)

- 22** Shield
Nez Percé, about 1850
Hide, paint, feather
Diameter 22 in. (55.9 cm.)
- 23** Shirt
Blackfoot(?), about 1880
Hide, other materials
Height 43 in. (109.2 cm.)
- 24** Pictographic muslin
Teton Sioux, about 1880
Muslin, paint
Height 34½ in. (87.6 cm.)
- 25** Model tipi cover
Plains, about 1890
Hide, paint
Height 21¾ in. (55.2 cm.)
- 26** Ghost Dance dress
Sioux, 1889–90
Muslin, paint
Height 45 in. (114.3 cm.)
- 27** Dance shield
Cheyenne, about 1910
Muslin, paint
Diameter 19½ in. (49.5 cm.)

NORTHEAST

- 28** Pipe box
Penobscot, about 1780
Wood
Length 14¼ in. (36.2 cm.)
- 29** Pipe bowl
Micmac, about 1850
Stone
Height 3¾ in. (9.5 cm.)
- 30** Pipe
Great Lakes, last half
of 18th century
Wood, metal
Length 20 in. (50.8 cm.)
- 31** Pipe
Chippewa(?), about 1800
Wood, metal
Length 12½ in. (31.8 cm.)
- 32** Pipe bowl
Chippewa(?), about 1870
Stone, lead
Length 8 in. (20.3 cm.)
- 33** Pipe bowl
Chippewa(?), about 1860
Stone, lead
Length 9½ in. (24.1 cm.)
- 34** Pipe stem
Chippewa, last half
of 19th century
Wood
Length 28 in. (71.1 cm.)
- 35** Trick pipe stem
Chippewa(?), about 1860
Wood
Length 28¾ in. (73 cm.)
- 36** Pipe stem
Chippewa(?), about 1870
Wood, paint
Length 23 in. (58.4 cm.)
- 37** Ballhead club
Chippewa, first quarter
of 19th century
Wood
Height 23⅝ in. (60 cm.)
- 38** Gunstock club
Great Lakes(?), first quarter
of 19th century
Wood, metal
Height 29¾ in. (75.6 cm.)
- 39** Gunstock club
Northeast or Plains,
first quarter of 19th century
Wood
Height 27½ in. (69.9 cm.)
- 40** Knife sheath
Great Lakes, about 1800
Hide, quill, wood, metal
Height 8 in. (20.3 cm.)
- 41** Knife with sheath
Eastern Woodlands,
about 1800
Hide, quill, wood, metal
Height 9 in. (22.9 cm.)
- 42** Prescription stick
Prairie Potawatami,
about 1870
Wood
Length 14½ in. (36.8 cm.)
- 43** Badger-skin bag
Great Lakes, first half
of 19th century
Badger skin, other materials
Length 26 in. (66 cm.)
- 44** Tail flap from otter-skin bag
Great Lakes, about 1800
Hide, quill
Height 14½ in. (36.8 cm.)

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