VII
2

GILCREASE

JOURNAL

BOX OF TREASURES



Winter 2000
Vol. 7
No. 2
c. 1

Gilcrease Journal
Winter 2000
Vol. 7, No. 2
c. 1

Gilcrease Journal
Winter 2000
Vol. 7, No. 2
c. 1

Gillie Library

MUSEUMS
ARE
BOXES
OF TREASURES

~CHIEF THOMAS
HARRIS HUNT

GILCREASE JOURNAL

VOLUME SEVEN~ NO 2 WINTER 2000

Gilcrease

THE FIFTIETH ANNIVERSARY ISSUES OF GILCREASE JOURNAL ARE MADE POSSIBLE THROUGH THE GENEROSITY OF THE MAXINE AND JACK ZARROW FOUNDATION AND THE LORENE COOPER HASBROUCK CHARITABLE TRUST.

5

Containers of Tradition: Southeastern Indian Basketry



The basket as a carrier of history. Every basketry technique known in the world is represented among some part of Native America. The Southeast is especially rich in reminders of a time when baskets were woven to last for generations and in doing so became metaphoric containers for people's lives.

Jason Baird Jackson *Curator of Anthropology, Gilcrease Museum*

27

Behind the Canvas Curtain

The picture as a Pandora's box full of longing and projection: Eroticism and stereotype in the depiction of American Indians

Noble Savage, Child of Nature, Vicious Marauder: For hundreds of years European artists have imbued the image of the Indian with qualities that say more about the artists and their times than about their subjects.

Kevin Smith *Program Development Coordinator, Gilcrease Museum*

44

Box of Treasures



The mask contains the spirit; the Big House holds the masks. The museum—celebrating both—is a box of treasures. Peter Macnair, curator of the recent Gilcrease-hosted exhibition *Down From the Shimmering Sky,* takes us inside the Big House for a potlatch ceremony, and then backstage at Gilcrease to glimpse some evocative Northwest Coast treasures.

Peter Macnair *Former Curator of Anthropology, Royal British Columbia Museum*



Unpacking Peyote Boxes

54

Peyote boxes hold personal and spiritual histories. Dan Swan gives us a rare look inside the traditional peyote kits used by members of the Native American Church.

Daniel C. Swan

Senior Curator, Gilcrease Museum

FACING: Plaited Winnowing Tray, Creek (Muskogee), ca. 1910-1930, Rivercane; Gilcrease 7127.520

ABOVE: Peyote Box, Oklahoma, Plywood, pine, brass hardware, paint, Gilcrease Museum, Jim Cooley Collection

TOP OF PAGE: Kwakwaka'wakw village of T'sadzis'nukwaame' (also known as New Vancouver), Harbledown Island, 1900. Photo by Dr. C.F. Newcombe, RBCM photo PN 242

Printed in Canada

M. SUSAN SAVAGE *Mayor of Tulsa*

GILCREASE MUSEUM
J. BROOKS JOYNER *Director*
GARY F. MOORE *Assistant Director*
DANIEL C. SWAN *Senior Curator*
MICHAEL SUDBURY *Director of Development*
ANNE MORAND *Museum Collections Manager*
SARAH ERWIN *Curator of Archival Collections*
JASON BAIRD JACKSON *Curator of Anthropology*
KEN BUSBY *Assistant to the Director*
SHELLEY COOK *Membership Coordinator*
SHANE CULPEPPER, JEFF PARK *Photography*

GILCREASE JOURNAL
CAROL HARALSON *Executive Editor and Designer*
KEN BUSBY *Assistant Editor*

The *Gilcrease Journal* is a benefit of membership in the Thomas Gilcrease Museum Association. Published biannually, the *Journal* is copyrighted by the Thomas Gilcrease Museum Association, an Oklahoma corporation, 1400 Gilcrease Museum Road, Tulsa, Oklahoma 74127-2100 (918/596-2700). All rights are reserved. Peter McNair essay this issue ©1999 by Peter McNair. Additional copies may be purchased in the Gilcrease Museum Shop at $10 each. To order by mail, please send a check for $12 (which includes $2 for postage and handling) to the Gilcrease Museum Shop, at the museum address.

BOX OF TREASURES

. . . things made slowly and with skill; things built to last and linked to the past . . .

CONTAINERS OF TRADITION: SOUTHEASTERN INDIAN BASKETRY

JASON BAIRD JACKSON

A quick survey of the spaces that surround our daily lives reveals the plain fact that we live in a synthetic age. The littered desk at which I write is covered by containers made from materials—Styrofoam, aluminum, plastic, processed paper, and pressboard, whose origins in the natural world are, at best, obscured from view.

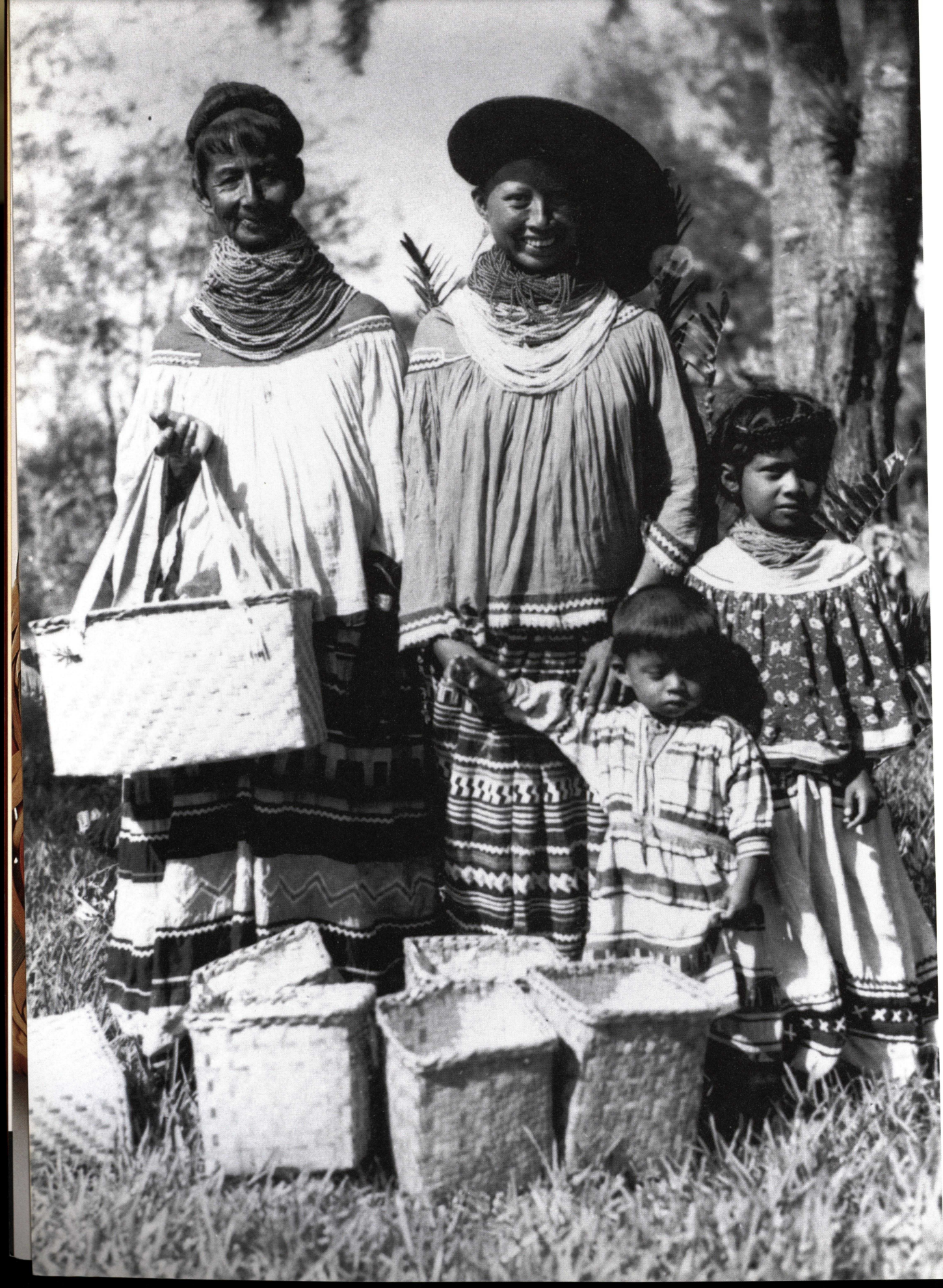
Beyond this artificiality that we have come to live with—to ignore without much reflection—is the disposability of the things we make and use. Think of the time and resources that are invested in the creation of the containers used to hold a serving of French fries purchased at the drive-up window of an American restaurant. Years of growth by a tree and countless processing steps—logging, hauling, pulping, pressing, printing, folding, boxing, shipping—all lead up to a few ephemeral moments of use followed quickly by trash can and landfill.

Such a world and its lifestyles would have surprised our own ancestors living as few as four generations ago and it certainly would have been unthinkable to the majority of the human beings who have ever lived on our planet. **Bags and boxes, bowls and baskets made carefully by hand from natural materials collected by the maker have been the normal stuff of human life throughout our species' history.** Made with great effort, such containers have always been cared for and preserved for long lifetimes of use.



Miniature Ribbed Basket with Handle
Rappahannock, Eastern Virginia, 20th century, Wood splints and ribs
Gilcrease Museum
7127.594

Facing: Carrying Basket with Handle
Eastern Cherokee, Qualla Boundary, North Carolina, early 20th C.
Rivercane
Gilcrease Museum
7127.526



Because they are built to last and because so much human energy is poured into them and into the objects they are created to hold, such containers typically possess deep meaning to those who make or use them. Can we say the same for today's French fry packet?

In our own time, when change, convenience, and speed are our watchwords, things made slowly and with skill; things built to last and linked to the past, evoke feelings of nostalgia and tradition. Look at the old odds and ends that are used by American restaurateurs to give ambiance to their establishments—a mule-drawn plow, a rusted horseshoe, a single snowshoe, a curiously painted mailbox, a strap-on roller skate with metal wheels. These things from our own pasts put us at ease and evoke in us a longing for earlier times. They are things that are gone from our everyday lives. If simple roller skates have given way to high tech roller blades, then we should be amazed that things like hand-woven baskets are still made in our own time. While I can survive a world without roller skates, I am reassured that we still live among people who can create baskets and other things of usefulness and beauty.

The Southeastern Indian basketry collections found at Gilcrease Museum and at other museums provide all of us with an important reminder of the genius of a pre-Tupperware world. For practicing artists, such collections also provide resources for study—strengthening connections between present and past. For people of Native American heritage, the baskets found in such collections are a source of pride and an expression of identity and cultural tradition. Once common parts of our human existence, such baskets are today vessels containing an array of rich meanings and significances.



Florida Seminole Coiled Baskets
Florida Seminole or Miccosukee, South Florida, ca. 1945
Sweetgrass, palmetto fiber, embroidery thread, cloth
Photograph by Deaconess Harriet Bedell, William Hammond Mathers Museum, Indiana University

Facing: Mrs. Squirrel Jumper displaying palmetto baskets in the company of other Seminoles, 1945
William Hammond Mathers Museum, Indiana University
84-06-0179

IF SIMPLE ROLLER SKATES HAVE GIVEN WAY TO HIGH TECH ROLLER BLADES, THEN WE SHOULD BE AMAZED THAT THINGS LIKE HAND-WOVEN BASKETS ARE STILL MADE IN OUR OWN TIME. WHILE I CAN SURVIVE A WORLD WITHOUT ROLLER SKATES, I AM REASSURED THAT WE STILL LIVE AMONG PEOPLE WHO CAN CREATE BASKETS AND OTHER THINGS OF USEFULNESS AND BEAUTY.





Plaited Basketry Fragment
Caddoan Culture, Spiro Archaeological Site, ca. 1000 AD, Rivercane
Gilcrease Museum
7135.170

SELECTED NATIVE AMERICAN COMMUNITIES TODAY



Thousands of years before the arrival of Europeans in the Western Hemisphere, the Native peoples of the Americas had developed a range of technologies that helped them adapt to the staggeringly diverse number of environments and ecosystems in which they lived. Basketry recovered from dry desert caves and preserved in copper at sites like that at Spiro, Oklahoma, illustrates the fact that baskets very much like those made over the last 500 years have a much older history in this land. Every basketry technique known worldwide is represented in some part of Native America. From the enormous diversity of American Indian peoples, speaking thousands of different languages and possessing distinct cultural traditions, inhabiting a great variety of natural settings, flowed a remarkable number of different basketry forms and techniques.

The peoples who live today, or who lived in the past, in those parts of the Americas that are now the Southern United States possess a rich basketry tradition. Southeastern Indian baskets are remarkable both in technique and in range of function. While such



Facing:
Single Woven Storage Basket
Emmaline Garrett Eastern Cherokee, Qualla Boundary, North Carolina, ca. 1996
Rivercane, natural dye
Gilcrease Museum
71.750
Frankie Van Johnson Acquisition Fund Purchase, 1996

CHOCTAW

In an interview in the early 1980s, Mississippi Choctaw weaver Lela Solomon was asked if she has many customers for her baskets. She described the changing market in terms that would also be familiar to the Eastern Cherokee and other weaving communities as well (Brecia and Reeves 1982:45).

Yes, but it is different now. Way back in the old days, we wanted to sell baskets, so we used to go door to door trying to sell baskets, when my father was alive; but now there are just a few people who can make baskets and a lot of people who want to buy baskets. Lots of White people go door to door to the Choctaw people's homes wanting to buy baskets and they sometimes don't have any luck in finding baskets.



Facing: Single Woven Tray
Oklahoma Choctaw (?), early 20th century
Rivercane
Gilcrease Museum
TL1998.5
Frankie Van Johnson Acquisition Fund Purchase, 1998

Below: Gathering Corn
Norma Howard (Oklahoma Choctaw), 1998
Tempera on Paper
Gilcrease Museum
0227.1949
City of Tulsa Acquisition Fund Purchase, 1998

Norma Howard's painting is a valuable evocation of the ways baskets were used in daily life among Southeastern peoples. One of the most important basketry types in the region was the pack basket. It is worn on the back, suspended by a burden strap that crosses the shoulders, chest or head. In this scene it is used during the corn harvest.



Above: Double Woven Basket
Cherokee, North Carolina, ca. 1910-1940, Rivercane
Gilcrease Museum
7126.455

Right: Making Sofkee
Acee Blue Eagle Creek-Pawnee)
Tempera on Paper
Gilcrease Museum 0227.453
Gift of the Thomas Gilcrease Foundation, 1964

Blue Eagle documents the use of sifter and fanning baskets in the processing of corn. Sofkee is an important traditional food to the Creek and many other Southeastern peoples. It is made of dried corn processed with a lye solution prepared by hand from wood ash. It is eaten both fresh and after it has been allowed to sour and ferment slightly into "sour sofkee."



EACH OF THE SOUTHEASTERN INDIAN PEOPLES POSSESSES A RICH LANGUAGE, HISTORY AND CULTURE. WHAT THEY HELD IN COMMON WAS A WAY OF LIFE SUITED TO THE RICH FORESTS, MOUNTAINS, RIVERS AND COASTLINES OF THE SOUTHEAST.

baskets are associated today with tourists and art collectors, they have long served practical purposes not only among Native American societies, but also among Europeans and European Americans who have purchased them not only because of their beauty, but also because of their fundamental usefulness. To take one example, the citizens of Charleston, South Carolina, were purchasing baskets from the Cherokee in vast quantities as early as 1715. Such baskets were valuable because Colonial buyers needed them for their everyday work.

The names of some Southeastern Indian Nations, such as Cherokee, Choctaw, and Seminole, are familiar to non-Native Americans, while others—Alabama, Catawba, Chitimacha, Ofo, Houma—are not widely known. The homelands or present-day locations of some of the Southeastern groups discussed here are shown on the map in this essay. Whether acknowledged by other Americans or not, each of the Southeastern Indian peoples



possesses a rich language, history and culture. What they held in common was a way of life suited to the rich forests, mountains, rivers and coastlines of the Southeast.

Before the encroachment of European peoples and the environmental degradation of the modern era, this Southern environment provided abundant materials out of which a complex assortment of objects was made. For at least 2,500 years, the peoples of the Southeast have been farmers whose lives and livelihood derived from the cultivation of corn, beans, squash, melons, and other crops native to the New World. During early contact with Europeans, new crops, such as peaches and apples, which derived from the Old World, were added to this list. Before and after the arrival of European and African peoples in the Southeast, baskets were an essential tool for the harvesting, storing, and processing of these foods. Baskets served important functions within households, too. Domestic goods were kept in baskets, as were sacred and ritual objects. Baskets continue to be used by traditional Southeastern Indian people for storing plants used in medicine and ceremony.



Carrying Basket with Handle
Probably Choctaw, early 20th century, Rivercane
Gilcrease Museum
7127.524

CATAWBA

The uses and variety of baskets made by Southeastern Indian peoples is only partially reflected in the Gilcrease basket collection. During the 1920s, anthropologist Frank Speck worked among the Catawba people of the Carolinas. He recorded this account of basketry fish traps from Mrs. Samson Owl, who narrated such remembrances in the Catawba language (1946:17).

"A long time ago the people made fish-baskets. They would put it in the water and put corn bread in it and the fish would go in. Sometimes big fish would be caught. The basket was made of white-oak splints. They made both ends cut open. Then the fish would go in. Using a thong they tied the basket, fastening it to earth by tying it to a tree, so that it would not wash away. A big stone would be put in it and it could not drift away."



Single Woven Sewing Basket with Lid
Susan Denson Mississippi Choctaw, Philadelphia, Mississippi, ca. 1996
Rivercane, commercial dye
Gilcrease Museum
71.751
Frankie Van Johnson Acquisition Fund Purchase, 1996

In the warm and wet climate of the Southeast, the ideal material for basketry was rivercane, which grew aboriginally in all sub-regions of the Southeast, except central and southern Florida. Rivercane is tough. Like its foreign cousin bamboo, cane is almost indestructible. The stalk's outer surface is smooth and glossy, virtually waterproof. These characteristics mean that a rivercane basket is strong, long lasting and resistant to decay, virtues that explain the wide use of cane for basketry not only in the Southeast, but also in the Amazon where Native peoples use the same natural material and weaving techniques (Goggin 1949).

Cane grows naturally in thick stands near undisturbed riverbanks and swampy lowlands. In appearance it is similar to foreign varieties of bamboo that have become naturalized in various regions of the U.S. After harvesting wild rivercane stalks, the basket maker splits the stalks into a number of pliable strips. These are thinned down to a small splint and sometimes dyed various colors. The weaving technique used in rivercane basketry is a complex variety of plaiting, in which similar elements pass over and under one another, usually at right angles but sometimes, as in intricate double weave baskets, at more acute angles.

While a great many weaving patterns are found throughout the Southeastern region, two basic variations of the plaiting technique are found in rivercane baskets. The simpler of the two is known in English as single weaving. The more complex is referred to as double weaving. In single weaving, the basket is given one thickness or layer of woven surface. The shiny surface of the cane typically faces out. The inside of the basket shows the dull, woody surface of the cane plant's subsurface (see photos at right). In double woven baskets, the basket form is created as in single weaving, but extra long pieces of cane are used. The vessel's shape is formed, from bottom up, by weaving the cane splints facing inward. After this step is completed, the long splints are folded back down at the rim and another layer of weaving is completed on the outside of the basket. The weaving of this outer layer is completed once the craftsperson reaches the outside bottom of the basket, where the cane is trimmed and tucked into the basket's body. The resulting double woven baskets have two thicknesses of weaving and most importantly, the shiny, water resistant outer surface of the cane protects and beautifies the basket both inside and out. Discussing the double weave technique with me, Sarah Hill, one of the leading students of Southeastern basketry, commented "The fact that it is so difficult to describe should tell us something about how difficult it is to do, and how extraordinary its moment of creation must have been (personal communication, 1999)."



The front (top) and back (bottom) of a rivercane mat
Eastern Cherokee, Qualla Boundary, North Carolina, ca. 1980-1990, Rivercane
Gilcrease Museum
TL1998.35



Storage Basket
Eastern Cherokee, Qualla Boundary, North Carolina, middle 20th century, Rivercane
Gilcrease Museum
7127.516



Baskets created in the past for purely utilitarian purposes such as winnowing corn were typically left undecorated. This is the case with a majority of known Creek and Yuchi baskets, including the two Creek examples in the Gilcrease collections and the Yuchi sifter recently loaned to Gilcrease for the *Children of the Sun* exhibition. Unlike other groups, among whom an arts and crafts market encouraged both the on-going production of baskets and the use of elaborate decoration, the Creek and Yuchi have always used their baskets primarily as tools for food storage and processing. Corn sifters are the most common Creek basket type in museums, presumably because they remained important tools after other containers, for storage and transport, became available to Creek people (Barnes 1984; Douglas 1941). Only a handful of Yuchi baskets are found in museums and little is known about what made the Yuchi tradition distinctive. Among the Choctaw, Cherokee, Coushatta, and Chitimacha, woven baskets, whether crafted in the double weave or the single weave technique, are typically decorated with dyed splints, usually red or black in color (Gettys 1984; Hill 1997; Hunter 1975; Medford 1989). In addition to the Creek examples, baskets for corn preparation from the Cherokee and Choctaw are well represented in the Gilcrease collection.



Facing: Double Woven Basket with Lid
Rowena Bradley Eastern Cherokee, Qualla Boundary, North Carolina, ca. 1996, Rivercane, natural dye
Gilcrease Museum
71.749
Frankie Van Johnson Acquisition Fund Purchase, 1996

Ribbed Handle Basket
Western Cherokee, Kenwood, Oklahoma, ca. 1935
Hickory
Gilcrease Museum
7127.523



For the utilitarian basket forms that have been made and used by Southeastern Indian peoples from time immemorial, rivercane was the most widely used and valued material, but it was not the only weaving element used. During the 18th century, various Creek communities began relocating into Florida, seeking to escape the conflicts brought on by Anglo-American expansion into their homelands. These Creek became the Seminole. Entering Florida, they moved beyond the southern range of cane and began using the palmetto that grows in their new homeland (Deagan 1981). Other groups, including the Creek in Oklahoma, utilized both hickory and dogwood splints when cane became difficult to obtain in the new lands to which they were forced west (Douglas 1941; Barnes 1984).

While plaited baskets of rivercane represent the oldest living basketry tradition in the Southeast, several additional types of baskets are also made today by Southeastern Indian craftspeople. These newer types represent developments that have taken place over the last 400 years. Among the oldest of these innovations is the making of baskets from white oak and other woods. Concurrent with the adoption of white oak splints as a basketry material by the Cherokee, Shawnee, and others was the borrowing from European basketry traditions of carved

IF THE TRAY IS THE BASIC CANE BASKET FORM, THEN WHAT WE, IN OUR OWN TIME, MIGHT CALL AN "EASTER BASKET" IS THE QUINTESSENTIAL OAK BASKET FORM. THIS TYPE CAME TO EASTERN NORTH AMERICA WITH THE SETTLEMENT OF EUROPEANS, PARTICULARLY SCOTS-IRISH AND GERMAN PEOPLES, AND IT FIT WITHIN A DIFFERENT WAY OF LIFE. . .

EASTERN CHEROKEE BASKETS

Most Eastern Cherokee basketry artists market their work through the Qualla Arts and Crafts Mutual, Inc., an artist cooperative gallery in Cherokee, North Carolina, that features the work of Cherokee artists. In the brochure for her 1978 exhibition, Eva Wolfe commented on the changing basket market (Qualla Arts and Crafts Mutual 1987:88):

"In 1963, I was told that ten dollars was too high a price for one of my large singleweave cane waste baskets; now I sell one for a hundred dollars. At one time, the shops wouldn't buy my doubleweave baskets; now they are in great demand. White people sometimes hunt my home to try to buy my baskets, but I sell all my baskets through the Co-op.

I lost interest in basketweaving during the illness and death of my father. But a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts in 1977 rekindled my desire to continue in this craft, which is the tradition of my people, and helped me secure materials for more baskets. I am proud that I was selected for this honor."

For Eastern Cherokee weavers, the double woven river cane baskets are the pinnacle of the basket maker's art. Eva Wolfe's comments reflect this widely shared opinion:

"Rivercane, of the three materials used by the Cherokees in their basket-weaving, has always been the material that challenged me in making the difficult designs that lend themselves to this material. It was in the late fifties that I realized that there were only two older basketweavers who could do rivercane doubleweave baskets. For some time it has been my desire to learn the art of doubleweave in order that it might be retained for future generations of the Cherokee craftworkers" (Qualla Arts and Crafts Mutual 1987:2).



Plaited Sifting Basket
Creek (Muskogee), ca. 1900-1920, Split dogwood shoots
Gilcrease Museum
7126.521

wooden basket handles. **The oldest Southeastern basketry forms—trays, sifters, pack baskets, and lidded storage containers—all shared basic qualities tied to the techniques of cane basketry.** They had square bottoms and round openings and most significantly they had no handles. They were carried on the back or in the arms. Oak splint baskets are made and used very differently. If the tray is the basic cane basket form, then what we, in our own time, might call an "Easter basket" is the quintessential oak basket form. This type came to Eastern North America with the settlement of Europeans, particularly Scots-Irish and German peoples, and it fit within a different way of life—one in which baskets served different functions (Law and Taylor 1991).

A related change is the addition of "ribbed" basketry to the repertoires of Southeastern Indian weavers. Whether plaited in white oak or rivercane, the basic technique of one set of splints passing over and under one or more sets of similar splints produces flat surfaces. In ribbed baskets, a set of splints instead passes over and under a set of round rods—creating a corrugated texture (Hill 1997:129). Although woven of hickory rather than white oak (which is relatively scarce in Oklahoma), a Western Cherokee basket collected near Kenwood,



Plaited Sifting Basket
Yuchi (Euchee), Sand Creek Town, Indian Territory, ca. 1900, Rivercane
Department of Anthropology, American Museum of Natural History, Frank G. Speck Collection, 1904. Neg/Transparency No. 50/5369. Courtesy Department of Library Services, American Museum of Natural History.

Oklahoma, illustrates both the ribbed technique and the adoption of carved wood handles (following page). The community where this basket originates, near Lake Eucha, has long been recognized for its basketry (Foreman 1948:31). While the documentation associated with it is of uncertain quality, perhaps the most valuable basket in the Gilcrease Collection is a miniature ribbed basket identified as Rappahannock (first page of this essay). The Rappahannock are one of the small tribes of Virginia who belonged to the Powhatan Confederacy. Few items of Rappahannock craftwork exist in museum collections, making this tiny basket an important token of Virginian Indian basketry. Lacking good collection records, one is left wondering how it even came to the Gilcrease collection.

Created and used differently, baskets made from rivercane or from splints of split hickory, dogwood, or oak wood are, nonetheless, all intended for work. Such baskets are thus in contrast with a third basic type of Southeastern Indian basketry—the coiled basket of honeysuckle, buckbrush, and grass. Other cultural traditions utilize coiled baskets for work. A Southern example is the coiled sea grass

CHOCTAW AND ALABAMA

An important individual linking the study and appreciation of Southeastern Indian baskets to their manufacture is the late Claude Medford. A bright and energetic man, he was a student of the Choctaw traditions of his family, of the cultures of other Southeastern Indian peoples, and of anthropology, which he studied at the University of New Mexico. One of the most talented 20th-century basket makers, he also lectured, taught, and wrote about basketry and other Southeastern arts and crafts.

"I first got interested in making traditional crafts from my grandfather, while I was growing up in east Texas, near Lufkin. As I got older, I got more and more interested in making these crafts, in keeping them going and not letting them die out. Of course when you're young, you're not all that interested in things like that, but as you get older you start to look around and think what you want to do with your life. You see it's important that these things have gone on for hundreds of thousands of years and haven't died out. I really learned how to make cane baskets from an Alabamu [Alabama] lady named Maggie Poncho. She died in 1979 and she was almost 100, so it goes way back. You can say I was born in 1941, but my life really goes back generations and generations. It's like a genetic memory" (Medford 1989:5).

the same manner as honeysuckle, but the much larger diameter of the buckbrush vine is suitable for larger, sturdier baskets. An interesting method used in some Oklahoma Cherokee buckbrush baskets is to coil two layers one inside the other. This method evokes double woven rivercane basketry, although the technique of coiling is very different from the plaiting found in cane weaving.

For the most part, Southeastern Indian peoples today make basketry to sell to non-Native buyers. If taken alone, this fact obscures the cultural reality of basketry production and significance. There were many decades during the 20th century when Native peoples in the Southeast were dependent on the production and sale of crafts such as basketry in order to support themselves and their families as they were excluded from full participation in the national economy and had been stripped of their productive farmlands. This should not surprise anyone sensitive to the fate of Native peoples in the flow of American history. **While the creation of such basketry has been an economic undertaking, it is also an important expression of tribal culture. Buyers can admire a well-formed basket, but basket makers and their families can look upon the baskets of their community and see unbroken links in a chain of tradition that stretches back in time.** Innovations have emerged in Southeastern Indian basketry, but each tribal basketry tradition is unique, possessing its own characteristics. **Most baskets in museum collections are anonymous; that is, they lack records identifying their makers. Yet in the circle of weavers found in various communities, basket makers easily recognize individual artistic and technical styles.** In the current era, when tribal economic development projects across the South are beginning to generate good jobs for Native and non-Native peoples alike, basket making is less economically lucrative. That basketry is continuing to be studied and practiced by younger people suggests the cultural importance that attaches to its practice.

In contrast to those of other museums located in the region, the Southeastern basket collection of the Gilcrease Museum is remarkably small. Given Thomas Gilcrease's own Creek Indian heritage, this fact comes as something of a surprise. Several basketry traditions that have been widely collected by other museums, including the elegant cane baskets of the Chitimacha and the whimsical basketry animals of the Coushatta (Koasati), are not represented at all at Gilcrease, which possesses only a pair of Creek baskets. Located in eastern Oklahoma,



Plaited hamper
Eastern Delaware, Bartlesville-Area, Cherokee Nation, early 20th century, White oak
Gilcrease Museum
7126.453

home now to hundreds of thousands of people of Southeastern Indian heritage, Gilcrease would be a natural place for a more extensive collection of Southeastern basketry, an area that I am eager for the museum to collect in actively.

The good news is that basketry remains an active undertaking among many Southeastern Indian groups. In recent years several outstanding baskets have been added to the Gilcrease collections through purchase and gift. My hope is that the attention given to such baskets here will awaken new interest among the museum's diverse friends and supporters. With the survival of Southeastern Indian basketry tied directly to the interest of non-Native buyers and collectors, such an increase in attention will have a positive impact on the work of those artists who are committed to preserving their tribal basketry traditions. For new collectors, baskets are a reward unto themselves, but they also provide an exciting introduction to the rich cultures from which they come. If new baskets can continue to be added to the museum's own collections, the experiences of our visitors will be enriched and the resources we can share with artists, students, and researchers of all backgrounds will be strengthened.

Just as the Gilcrease collections are only a sampling of the diversity and beauty of Southeastern Indian basketry, this survey has also neglected worthwhile topics and traditions. Both the cane basketry of the Chitimacha and the stories of its history are captivating and worthy of discussion and illustration. The same can be said for Houma weaving in palmetto and Spanish moss. Also deserving attention are connections linking the basketry of the Southeastern region with traditions rooted further north. The Gilcrease Museum's Delaware

COLLECTING BASKETS TODAY

Southeastern Indian baskets, particularly by Oklahoma Cherokee artists, are regularly available in the Gilcrease Museum shop.

A good source for North Carolina Cherokee baskets is the Qualla Arts and Crafts Mutual, Inc. A catalogue and price list is available. Qualla Arts and Crafts Mutual, Inc., P.O. Box 310, Cherokee, NY 28719. (828) 555-1212.

Mississippi Choctaw baskets can be purchased from the Choctaw Museum, P.O. Box 6010, Philadelphia, MS 39350 (610) 650-1685. (http://allcatalogs.com/choctaw)

A visit to South Florida provides vacationers with numerous opportunities to purchase Florida Seminole baskets. Galleries are found in Hollywood, Florida and on various Seminole and Miccosukee Reservations. Powwows and festivals in Florida and the Southeast are good sources for Seminole arts and crafts. Information is available from the Seminole Tribe of Florida, 6300 Stirling Road, Hollywood, FL 33024, (800) 683-7800. (www.seminoletribe.com)

Baskets from Oklahoma groups can be obtained during each group's annual festival as well as during intertribal events such as Red Earth held each June in Oklahoma City. The Five Civilized Tribes Museum, the Creek Council House Museum, the Seminole Nation Museum, the Cherokee Heritage Center, and similar institutions in the state regularly sell baskets.

The Gilcrease collections would benefit from the addition of baskets from all Southeastern Indian communities. The gift of a basket to the museum's collection is an inexpensive way to make a permanent contribution to the museum's work.



basket was made and used by Delawares who were citizens of the Cherokee Nation in Oklahoma. Such an example should demonstrate that tribal and regional traditions are not isolated one from another. History, like a basket weave, is not explained simply.

Study of basketry evokes in me a respect for the weaver's art. I am envious of those who can look with pride at finished works such as these and recognize the competency of their own hands, eyes, and artistic vision. **Beyond artistic appreciation, there is a recognition that baskets contain larger stories—about work and family, about community and culture, about tradition and change, rich narratives linked to the transformation of grass and wood.** Even if the specific stories attaching to particular baskets have disappeared, the world that they symbolize can be appreciated in the imagination.

Once baskets, not paper sacks, carried picnics and lunches. A laundry basket really was once a basket—made by its owner or a neighbor. Such baskets were once familiar. Unfamiliar today, they can cause us to pause and reflect on the things—soda cans and shopping carts—that we have become accustomed to. Will such things be appreciated in the future when viewed in the light of the past?

Sifting Basket
Western Cherokee, Cherokee Nation, Oklahoma, early 20th century,
Split dogwood (?)
Gilcrease Museum
7127.522

WORKS CITED

Barnes, Lynn (1984) "Creek Basketry." In *Basketry of Southeastern Indians.* Marshall Gettys, ed. Pp. 11-16. Idabel, Okla.: Museum of the Red River.

Blackard, David M. (1990) *Patchwork and Palmettos: Seminole-Miccosukee Folk Art Since 1820.* Fort Lauderdale, Fla.: Fort Lauderdale Historical Society.

Brecia, Bill and Carolyn Reeves (1982) *By the Work of Our Hands: Choctaw Material Culture.* Philadelphia, Miss.: Choctaw Heritage Press.

Deagan, Kathleen (1981) "Afro-American and Native American Traditions in Florida Basketry." In *Florida Basketry: Continuity and Change.* Tallahassee, Fla.: Florida Folklife Program.

Douglas, Fredric H. (1941) "Three Creek Baskets." Denver Art Museum, Material Culture Notes. 15.

Foreman, Carolyn Thomas (1948) *Cherokee Weaving and Basketry.* Muskogee, Okla.: Star Printery.

Gettys, Marshall (1984) "The Choctaw Basket Tradition." In *Basketry of Southeastern Indians.* Marshall Gettys, ed. Pp. 35-42. Idabel, Okla.: Museum of the Red River.

Goggin, John M. (1949) "Plaited Basketry in the New World." *Southwestern Journal of Anthropology.* 5:165-168.

Hill, Sarah H. (1997) *Weaving New Worlds: Southeastern Cherokee Women and Their Basketry.* Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.

Hunter, Donald G. (1975) "Coushatta Basketry in the Rand Collection." *The Florida Anthropologist.* 28:27-37.

Law, Rachel Nash and Cynthia W. Taylor (1991) *Appalachian White Oak Basketmaking: Handing Down the Basket.* Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press.

Leftwich, Rodney L. (1956) "Making Honeysuckle Baskets." *School Arts.* 55(6):27-29.

Medford, Claude (1977) "Chitimacha Split Cane Basketry." *American Indian Art Magazine.* 3(1):56-61, 101.

——— (1989) "Coushatta Baskets and Basketmakers." *Louisiana Folklife.* 13:33-36.

Qualla Arts and Crafts Mutual (1987) *Contemporary Artists and Craftsmen of the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians.* Cherokee, N.C.: Qualla Arts and Crafts Mutual, Inc.

Rosengarten, Dale (1993) "Lowcountry Basketry: Folk Arts in the Marketplace." *Southern Folklore.* 49:240-55.

Speck, Frank G. (1946) *Catawba Hunting, Trapping and Fishing.* Philadelphia: University Museum, University of Pennsylvania.

Tray Basket
Western Cherokee, Cherokee Nation, Oklahoma, early 20th century, Rivercane
Gilcrease Museum
7127.518







Behind the Canvas Curtain

Eroticism and Stereotype in the Depiction of American Indians

KEVIN SMITH

History remains malleable and one generation's truth is the next generation's stereotype.

In 1564 Jacques Le Moyne, a cartographer, arrived in Florida with an expedition of French Huguenots. The watercolor he painted of the leader of the expedition being greeted by local natives is the earliest surviving painting of an American Indian made by a European artist in North America. Le Moyne's Indians with their curiously "lily-white" skin[1] were an apt beginning for what would be centuries of conscious and unconscious distortion of the image of Native Americans by European and Euro-American artists—distortions that often tell us much more about the attitudes and tastes of the artists and their audiences than about their subject.

FACING

George deForest Brush
MOURNING HER BRAVE
OIL ON CANVAS
GILCREASE 0126.1189

Scholars, museum exhibition catalogues and commentary, countless articles, even new artworks, all have pointed a finger at artists who have allegedly romanticized, vilified or otherwise stereotyped the American Indian. These stereotypes have, themselves, been generalized into groups and given titles such as "the Noble Savage," "the Vicious Savage," and "the Vanishing American."

We are increasingly exposed to a revised interpretation of art depicting Native Americans as art historians sift through the past placing each image of Indians in its category of stereotype. Art historian and curator Sarah Boehme provides us with a typical description of one of the most popular stereotypes, the Noble Savage:

> American Indians have come to symbolize communion with nature, in an evocation of a simpler world. Early nineteenth-century accounts, such as those by George Catlin, identified the Indian as a primitive man, whose life was in harmony with the natural world. This concept of the Noble Savage undergirded many representations, such as Joseph Henry Sharp's painting *Great Mystery—Moonlight.* This notion of the Indian as the primitive man echoes the formulation of the eighteenth-century philosopher Jean Jacques Rousseau. The Noble Savage, the man who is elemental, free and natural, contrasts sharply with modern man, who is seen as burdened and disengaged from nature. . .[2]



Sharp, Joseph Henry
THE GREAT MYSTERY
OIL ON CANVAS
GILCREASE 0137.325

Most contemporary viewers would agree that artists such as Sharp have taken liberties with the subject of Indians. We assume that recognizing these stereotypes will at least provide negative examples to further our pursuit of more "correct" perceptions of Indians. However, it is not likely that we will soon be agreeing on a universally truthful depiction. Vastly different, even contradictory, views of Native Americans exist not only on canvas, but also in the critiques of those canvases. Identifying "authentic" Native American culture is problematic for art historians, for anthropologists, and even for members of Indian communities. Nevertheless, we seem to be inevitably drawn toward the proverbial "definitive work" on the subject. That no such definitive work can ever exist is proved by continual revision itself. History remains malleable and one generation's truth is the next generation's stereotype. In any case, simply identifying stereotypes from today's point of view cannot enhance our understanding of Indian pasts. Art is seldom meant to be a visual resource for "real" history, Indian or otherwise. As one expert put it,

> A collection of science is gathered primarily in the interest of the real; a collection of art primarily in the interest of the ideal. The former is a panorama of fact, the latter a paradise of fancy. In the former we learn, in the latter we admire. A museum of science is in essence a school; a museum of art is in essence a temple.[3]

We assume that recognizing these stereotypes will at least provide negative examples to further our pursuit of more "correct" perceptions of Indians. However, it is not likely that we will soon be agreeing on a universally truthful depiction. Vastly different, even contradictory, views of Native Americans exist not only on canvas, but also in the critiques of those canvases.

Why then would we expect realistic artistic depictions of Indians? Granted, with artists like George Catlin we might expect accurate renditions because the artist's stated purpose was, in fact, documentary. Yet, even here, we only know his stated intent, not whether his statement was honest or whether he was successful, even if honest, in his attempt. Catlin scholar Joan Carpenter Troccoli, for one, has indicated that the artist, in this case, is considered to have fallen short.[4]

If paintings of Indians cannot be counted upon to provide us with reliable information about Indians, what can they provide us? Perhaps it is more satisfying to look at these paintings as sources of information about the artists themselves. According to Boehme, "The way Native peoples are portrayed often reveals more about the portrayer than the subject."[5] If this is true, we may do well to abandon a debate over stereotypes that is confined to their relationship to Indians themselves. These paintings are, after all, artifacts of white, not Indian, culture. If we agree that artists are guilty of painting distortions of Indian life, might we not be interested to know why? Were they simply ignorant of Indian life? Did they unwittingly buy into popular misconceptions? Or were they conscious of their inaccuracies, creating propaganda for non-Indian interests? Were there personal motives peculiar to individual artists? These may prove to be the more pertinent questions when considering Native American stereotypes in art.

We may look for answers not only in the artists' works, but also in their statements. Consider the statement of George deForest Brush, painter of *Mourning Her Brave:*

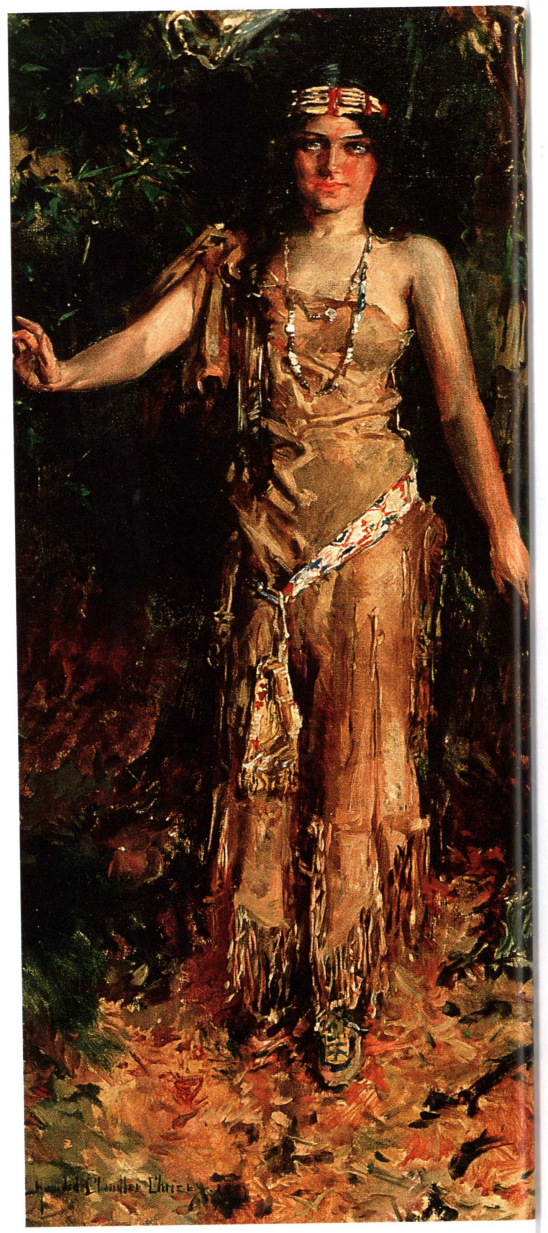
> In choosing Indians as subjects for art, I do not paint from the historian's or the antiquary's point of view; I do not care to represent them in any curious habits and deeds which could not be comprehended by us; I am interested in those habits and deeds in which we have feelings in common. Therefore, I hesitate to attempt to add any interest to my pictures by supplying historical facts. If I were required to resort to this in order to bring out the poetry, I would drop the subject at once.[6]

Through Brush's statement, we have stumbled upon an important point—that the Indian as subject may be secondary to, and may be chosen only in support of, the artist's primary purpose. As such, the Indian's image is malleable and any consideration for historical accuracy may be entirely absent. We don't need to question how successful Brush was in representing reality as we did with Catlin. The question has already been answered by the artist, who makes it clear that his work has much less to do with "Native American reality" than with "universal poetry."

Another artist who made it clear that he took liberties in portraying Native cultures was Ernest Blumenschein. He was a Taos artist, as was Joseph Henry Sharp, whose *Great Mystery—Moonlight* was referred to by Sarah Boehme as an example of a "Noble Savage portrayal." The Taos artists were affected by the idea of the Noble Savage as they reacted to an industrial 20th-century society.

> In the first decades of the twentieth century, writers and artists fled the cities, seeking sanctuary in a variety of rural settings that included the Pueblo country of northern New Mexico. These intellectual refugees hoped that remedies for the ills of modern society might be found in places like Taos, a remote Indian pueblo that epitomized for them the opposite of bustling, harried urban life. They imagined native people to be content with simple technology, bound by organic community and full of insight about 'nature.' [7]

Blumenschein expressed his admiration for the Pueblo peoples and their sacred ceremonies, but he had no compunction about misrepresenting them. Like other artists, he used Indian models and Indian artifacts, but the result was often a surface display of feigned authenticity. Art historian Nancy K. Anderson echoes the opinion of several scholars when she writes, ". . . for decades the surface of realism of western art has obscured the artifice beneath."[8]



Howard Chandler Christy
POCOHANTAS
OIL ON CANVAS
GILCREASE 0127.2258

Ernest L. Blumenschein
SUPERSTITION
OIL ON CANVAS
GILCREASE 0137.531

Interestingly, when patron Thomas Gilcrease first met Blumenschein, he told the artist that he "was not right to take any liberties with the ethnological truths. . . " in his depictions of Native Americans.[9] Whether Gilcrease was referring to the artist's approach generally, or to a specific painting, it is clear that he was disturbed by this aspect of Blumenschein's work. Yet he purchased such works. *Superstition, Enchanted Forest* and *Moon, Morning Star and Evening Star* are all in the Gilcrease collection and all support Boehme's assertion that there may actually be more of the artist in his painting than the subject he is supposedly representing. We see this when we consider Blumenschein's art and words.

In *Superstition,* we specifically see how Blumenschein went beyond mere distortion of Indian reality and used the Native American subject as a vehicle for exploration of his own subconscious world. It is evident that the painting is not so much about Indians as it is about his struggle to understand them:



> The Indian's mind is partly made by Medicine Men who are often fakers who play on all superstitions that have come into his life—and in addition he has the religion of the white man which he gets from a priest that is not always conscientious. Add to that his own Indian religion in which the Beautiful Indian dances are so important, and the result is even more confusing than I can depict in my picture with its vivid colors and shapes.[10]

Superstition is not a portrait of a Pueblo Indian; it is a self-portrait of the artist—not of his physical appearance, of course, but of his psyche.

With Brush and Blumenschein we have the artists' own words to assist us in interpreting their works. Not all artists, and not all authors who write about them, are as revealing in their statements. Sometimes, in fact, the lack of an artist's or author's attention to obvious artistic intent is itself revealing. An example appears in the July 1984 issue of the *Gilcrease Magazine,* which featured an article by Louisa B. Collett about the artist Howard Chandler Christy. The article contains large reproductions of Christy's paintings *Pocahontas* and *Hiawatha's Wooing.* Although the article contains narrative about two other paintings pictured, portraits of Will Rogers and Osage leader Bacon Rind, as well as information about paintings not pictured, it has little to say about the two images reproduced so prominently. The author simply states that the ". . . two paintings are allegorical in style and grand in size."[11] The term *allegorical* when applied to an artwork usually means that it explains ideas or moral principles, or alludes to another work of art, usually literature, that contains those ideas or principles. Yet nothing is said about what value *Pocahontas* or *Hiawatha's Wooing* have either as works of art or as allegory. This lack of information seems curious, especially since the two works are not only blatant in their depiction of stereotypes, but also provocative in their use of eroticism. As interested viewers of artistic images of Indians, we would like these characteristics explained.

We can find at least one clue by comparing the works featured in the article. There is a real contrast in terms of how gender is depicted. Bacon Rind and Will Rogers, two male historical figures, are pictured realistically, dignified and fully clothed. Pocahontas and her female counterpart in *Hiawatha's Wooing* are pictured clearly as subjects of eroticism, and in ways known to be untrue. One may well wonder how much Christy echoed the gender bias of Longfellow's epic poem, "Song of Hiawatha." His painting's title comes from the poem's section X, "Hiawatha's Wooing," which contains these lines:

> As unto the bow the cord is,
> So unto the man is woman;
> Though she bends him, she obeys him,
> Though she draws him, yet she follows;
> Useless each without the other!"
> Thus the youthful Hiawatha
> Said within himself and pondered,
> Much perplexed by various feelings,
> Listless, longing, hoping, fearing,
> Dreaming still of Minnehaha,
> Of the lovely Laughing Water,
> In the land of the Dacotahs.[12]

Christy goes further than Longfellow by painting the sensuality only implied by the poet. When considered together, the poem and the painting reveal very decided views about the place of women—obeying and following, and as objects of desire. This is not just a stereotype of an American Indian. This is use of the imagined Indian to project views of women in general. The view is decidedly a male one. As have Brush and Blumenschein, Christy has revealed more of himself than of Native American life in his art. He also introduces us to the use of Indian stereotypes to facilitate erotic content in art.

Christy is not first to use allegorical content as a context, or pretext, for the nude. Since the Renaissance, the scantily clad or unclothed female form has adorned allegorical paintings that many authors feel also served to satisfy the prurient

...Blumenschein ...used Native American subject as a vehicle for exploration of his own subconscious world. It is evident that [Superstition]is not so much about Indians as it is about his struggle to understand them.



Howard Chandler Christy
Hiawatha's Wooing (detail)
oil on canvas
gilcrease 0127.2081

interests of male viewers. The American artist Thomas Eakins was sensitive to this and critical of the practices of 19th-century artists in their portrayal of women. In an 1868 letter to his parents Eakins wrote, "painters make naked women standing sitting lying down flying dancing doing nothing which they call Phyrenes, Venus, nymphs, hermaphrodites, Kouros and Greek proper names."[13] Eakins's own paintings of women went against the grain of late 19th-century taste for "discreetly vampy, but always passive" female images.[14] The artist is famous for his "precise and uncompromising sense for actuality," and his realism is now considered ahead of its time.[15]

In fact, Eakins's portrait of Frank Hamilton Cushing currently on exhibit at the Gilcrease supplies an example of realism to contrast with Christy's *Pocahontas* hanging in the same gallery. Christy's *Pocahontas* is on exhibit not as an example of an allegorical painting, but rather as a primary example of how, for better or worse, artists remodel fact. The curators have provided the following points in a nearby text panel: "This fetching young woman in Plains Indian style clothing did not exist. The Powhatan Indian, Pocahontas, was a ten-year-old girl when she met John Smith in Virginia." In an early draft of the text for the galleries, the curators added that the fictitious image was "a visually pleasing one" and described the figure's Plains-like garment as generic. That the painting is historically inaccurate and of the "Indian Princess" (or "Child of Nature") stereotype is unquestionable.

But in order to go beyond simple recognition of stereotypes, we might ask, What then was Christy portraying? Christy was heir to the 19th-century tradition of portraying "discreetly vampy" young women. We can similarly consider the nude in *Hiawatha's Wooing,* who actually appears to be more Anglo than Native American in her facial features. It is as if one of the non-Indian "Christy Girls" that the artist was known for painting (clothed) has suddenly been stripped to the waist. What minimal fictitious garb she does wear causes her to resemble a pornographic version of the Land

O' Lakes Butter maid. But as a recognizable Indian stereotype, she is suppposedly safe for us to view without fear of guilt. Her nakedness is meant to be interpreted as allegorical rather than objectionable. Like Blumenschein, Christy has taken advantage of the plastic nature of Indian stereotypes, and the public acceptance of them, to express something beyond the stereotype itself. In both paintings, Christy is perhaps portraying nothing more than feminine sensuality and a view of women that has sold a great deal of "allegorical" art throughout history.

The silence of the author of the Christy article is, perhaps, understandable. To address the artist's intent she would have had to discuss both his Christy Girls and his "Indian Princesses." This would have raised not only a racial issue but also a sexual one. It may be that the author was uncomfortable with the sensual nature of the pieces. After all, it was not an issue that had been well examined in the art of the American West. Indeed, even when sexual content in art is considered commonplace, the academic world is often reluctant to discuss it. Consider the experience of one scholar seeking information about the erotic works of Renaissance artists:

> Sexual representation was part of the cultural production of the Renaissance; my position is that it has equal importance to other historical documentation of the era. This concept is still not universally recognized in Renaissance studies, where at times a disjunction is assumed between accredited study of the era and interest in its representation of sexuality. . . . I arrived at one museum's collection where, in my position of Renaissance scholar with proper credentials, I was warmly welcomed and shown to a table in the front of the reading room. I was generously told that all the materials of the collection were at my disposal and invited to make my request. When the attendants realized that the call numbers indicated 'erotica,' a tense, whispered conference took place among the staff. I was then politely but firmly invited to change my seat to the back of the room.[16]

If mainstream art historians face such disjunctions, an historian of the American West might well fear resistance.

Yet not all art historians have been silent on the subject. Joan Carpenter Troccoli has clearly shown, in an article for *American Art Review* magazine, both gender bias and erotic content in the works of Alfred Jacob Miller. Miller was hired by Captain William Drummond Stewart, a Scottish nobleman, to record an 1837 holiday to the Rocky Mountains. Miller is known to have romanticized his record of the trip, including the image of the Indian. Miller's Noble Savage tends towards the Child of Nature variety common to his period. While the later Taos artists used the stereotype to decry the industrial world, artists of Miller's time were virtually illustrators of the philosophies of the Enlightenment.

> Fundamental to their thinking was the dichotomy between nature and convention. If what was natural was good, then what was civilized was artificial, hence decadent and certainly bad. Nature's plan, moreover, was simple and therefore easily comprehended: if right reason was universal and the instinct for good common to all humankind, then they must be found in the earliest and least sophisticated of peoples as well as in the most civilized. In fact, primitive peoples probably apprehended the laws of nature more clearly than civilized man since they were less corrupted by the practices and prejudices of civilization. . . .[17]

But we will see that Miller, like the other artists we have discussed so far, goes beyond mere perpetuation of Indian stereotype, and Troccoli reveals how the artist used the subject to satisfy male interests. In that sense, his paintings not only allude to socio-political theory but also reflect the attitudes of his society's dominant members regarding the role of the female.

> American Indian women, as any nineteenth-century man would have agreed, knew their place, and their lives, as represented by Miller, seemed to have been designed to gratify male desires. . . . Pictures like *Indian Girls Making Toilet* and *Scene on the River—"Eau Sucre"* have a venerable iconographic pedigree that extends back to classical bathing scenes of woodland nymphs or Diana and her companions, but they also gave Miller a chance to depict a 'natural' nudity that was at once contemporary and ethnographic. These bathing beauties were sufficiently removed from 'civilized' life that the artist could not be accused of catering to prurient interests. But it was, of course, precisely that aspect of these pictures that appealed to Miller's patrons. . . .It is a measure of contemporary taste that, of the handful of prints issued after Miller's western images, one was a version of *Indian Girls Making Toilet* and another was *Indian Girls Swinging*, a picture of half-clothed women engaged in a pursuit long associated with erotic activity.[18]

Christy was not the first to use the Indian subject as a means of expressing sensuality. But neither did Miller originate the view of the passive, exotic Indian Maiden. Miller portrayed what men of the Enlightenment wanted to see. It was also what some had been recording in their travel journals for decades. William Bartram is a perfect example of the American Enlightenment explorer who traveled among Southeastern tribes in the mid 1770s. His description of an encounter with a group of Cherokees is an example of how sexual excitement was interwoven with the "objective" observations of the naturalist explorer and is a literary equivalent of many paintings from the 18th and 19th centuries that deal with the subject of Indian women. He writes of coming upon a "most enchanting view," that contained meadows, green fields, a river, and a field of strawberries where companies of young, innocent Cherokee virgins, some busily gathering the rich fragrant fruit, others having already filled their baskets, lay reclined under the shade of floriferous and fragrant native bowers of Magnolia, Azalea, Philadelphus, perfumed Calycanthus, sweet Yellow Jessamine and ceruliam Glycine frutescens, disclosing their beauties to the fluttering breeze, and bathing their limbs in the cool fleeting streams; whilst other parties, more gay and libertine, were yet collecting strawberries or wantonly chasing their companions tantalizing them, staining their lips and cheeks with the rich fruit.[19]

Romanticism, natural science, and eroticism combine in these words of an Enlightenment writer. It is almost as if the native flora of a region included these flowering young women "disclosing their beauties to the fluttering breeze." Bartram's phrases such as "primitive innocence" in the following excerpt are classic descriptions of the Noble Savage. In a narrative that begins to take on the characteristics of a romance novel, he speaks of nymphs and hamadryades, fantastical figures long associated with those lofty allegorical paintings whose thinly-veiled subtexts Thomas Eakins criticized. Bartram continues, getting closer to what his observation is really all about:

> This sylvian scene of primitive innocence was enchanting, and perhaps too enticing for hearty young men long to continue idle spectators. In fine, nature prevailing over reason, we wished at least to have a more active part in their delicious sports. . . . Now although we meant no more than an innocent frolic with this gay assembly of hamadryades, we shall leave it to the person of feeling and sensibility to form an idea to what lengths our passions might have hurried us, thus warmed and excited, had it not been for the vigilance and care of some envious matrons who lay in ambush, and espying us gave the alarm, time enough for the nymphs to rally and assemble together; we however pursued and gained ground on a group of them, who had incautiously strolled to a greater distance from their guardians. . .



Alfred Jacob Miller
INDIAN GIRLS MAKING TOILET
WATERCOLOR ON PAPER
GILCREASE 0236.1119

The group is pursued, eventually comes out of hiding, "and decently advanced to meet us, half unveiling their blooming faces, incarnated with the modest maiden blush, and with native innocence and cheerfulness, presented their little baskets, merrily telling us their fruit was ripe and sound."[20]

Had he lived a bit earlier, Alfred Jacob Miller may have done a good job illustrating Bartram's adventures among the Indians. The two men shared a fascination with "primitive innocence" as well as a view



Alfred Jacob Miller
SCENE ON THE RIVER—
EAU SUCRE
WATERCOLOR ON PAPER
GILCREASE 0236.1015

of Indian women as what author Edward Lucie-Smith calls the "passive and receptive child of nature."[21]

Artists have indeed revealed more about themselves than they have their Indian subjects, just as Boehme asserted. We have also seen that some themes, such as eroticism, may be common. But we have only scratched the surface of one stereotype, the Noble Savage. Is the assertion equally valid with others? Let's look at works of art that present another stereotype, the Vicious Savage. The motivation for this particular distortion of Indians is summarized by art historian Robert Hughes: "In America the Enlightenment view of Indians as Noble Savages was always unstable: behind it lurked the other stereotype of the Indian as treacherous, cunning, violent, and animal, which instantly emerged in periods of conflict as justification for killing them."[22]

A specific theme was that of the helpless white woman taken captive by "blood-thirsty savages." The captive story became popular in both fiction and in paintings. The most famous painting of the subject is John Vanderlyn's *Murder of Jane McCrea* (1804). In this piece two wild-eyed Indian men attack the helpless, kneeling woman, one holding her by the hair while the other raises his tomahawk to kill her.

Hughes notes that it is possible that Vanderlyn was not so much interested in implying that the Indians in the painting were typical of all Indians, "only that they were the Noble Savage gone wrong, corrupted by the perfidious British."[23] He implies what we have seen, that artists' motivations may not be apparent upon first glance.

However, a first glance at this painting does provide a clue revealing intentions of a sensual nature like those we have seen with other artists. Jane McCrea is pictured with no evidence of struggle except that her dress drops on one side revealing her breast to the viewer. Otherwise, she is fully clothed, and her clothing is in good order. Interestingly, this very same presentation of nudity is repeated in an anonymous painting in the Gilcrease collection entitled *Indian Abduction*. In this piece, a wild-eyed Indian on horseback is holding a white woman captive who has evidently fainted. Whether because of the fainting, or because of a previous struggle, her blouse also is pulled back to reveal a bare breast. In both cases the nudity seems unnecessary and a bit odd. However, it clearly has the power to excite the sensibilities of the male viewer especially. The helpless, passive woman, an object of male desire, appeals to the viewer who is also agitated by the fact that her fate is in the hands of a savage.

The nudity in these paintings is also visited upon non-Indian women. However, this confirms that the artists were using the Indian theme not to portray real Indians but to express their personal views, in this case about women generally. It would have been unthinkable for a 19th-century male artist to cast a female as the Vicious Savage. Women were considered passive, non-threatening. As one art historian commented on how 19th-century artists portrayed this aspect in women, "Sensual abandon in woman was obviously a desired image, connoting uninhibited behavior, but only when its similarity to child behavior is made clear. Rather than a crazed, and thus threatening image of sexuality in America, she was childlike and easily patronized."[24] The Indians must be the crazed ones, partly because the women can't be. Once again though, it is the presence of the recognizable and widely-accepted Indian stereotype that provides the artist license and allows the viewer to feel guiltless. As he considers the helpless, bare-breasted woman, the male viewer can rest assured that it is not his lust that is triggered, but that of the wanton savage.

Ironically, it is a woman painter of the West who is known best for imbuing works with latent sexual content. That artist is Georgia O'Keeffe. Although her eroticism is more subtle than the blatant sexuality presented by Vanderlyn, Miller, or Christy, more has been written about the sexual content of her work than that of the other three combined. That her many depictions of plant parts, cloud forms, and other organic entities resembled the female anatomy is widely



Alfred Jacob Miller
INDIAN GIRL
WATERCOLOR ON PAPER
GILCREASE 0236.1058

Alfred Jacob Miller
TRAPPER'S BRIDE
WATERCOLOR ON PAPER
GILCREASE 0236.1063

In America the Enlightenment view of Indians as Noble Savages was always unstable: behind it lurked the other stereotype of the Indian as treacherous, cunning, violent, and animal . . .



acknowledged. She herself denied that she intentionally pursued the theme, yet as Robert Hughes has written, "O'Keeffe's denials can only have been a way of fending off the prurience of the philistines—which meant, in guilt-crippled America, most Americans—who could make no distinction between the erotic and the pornographic."[25] So, despite her denial and subtlety, critics have come to expect to find sexual content in her work.

Suppose the works of male artists were to be critiqued in the same way? Based on the pattern presented thus far, it would seem likely that we might find paintings that contain similar meanings. It might be interesting to apply the same standards for determining eroticism in an O'Keeffe to a work done by a male Taos artist. Blumenschein makes a promising candidate as he has already confirmed for us that his own subconscious can be the real subject of one of his "Indian" paintings.

Although the Indian content of *The Enchanted Forest* is the Taos Deer Dance, one could argue that this is not the real subject of the work. The artist has taken liberties. We know this partly because in a previous work, *Moon, Morning Star and Evening Star,* he places the same dance and Indians near the Pueblo, but moves them in *Enchanted Forest* because he felt the forest made "a great setting for a primitive."[26] The title of the piece indicates its real focus. In *The Enchanted Forest* we see some of the oddest depictions of western flora done by a Taos artist (besides O'Keeffe), particularly considering that Blumenschein was not generally prone to overstylization. Although odd as a representation of reality, when seen as containing symbols of sexuality, his forest is suddenly easily understandable. It presents an overall composition that may be called vaginal, as many of O'Keeffe's are. Accentuated is the dark interior of the pathway through the forest. Above the green of the oddly spreading foreground trees are representations of other trees protruding upwards from the canopy. They are arranged in three groups, on either side of the painting, and in the center. The center group is the most confusing as flora, appearing in both texture and color as something other than trees. The tree closest to the viewer and immediately above the dark opening in the forest may be considered phallic. As a tree, it is nearly impossible to believe—closer to us than the others, it is nevertheless more vague and less defined as foliage. Rather than seeing more clearly defined green branches as in the others, we see smooth blobs of paint creating only a surface of the form, and that surface is done in the flesh tones of the Indians below, not in the greens of surrounding trees. We could continue with a detailed analysis of this piece to further support the hypothesis that it contains latent sexual symbols and meaning. While this sort of analysis may seem tenuous, it is precisely the sort, that applied to the works of O'Keeffe, resulted in her widely accepted reputation as painter of latent eroticism.



Artist Unknown
INDIAN ABDUCTION
OIL ON CANVAS
GILCREASE 0126.1227

Furthermore, Blumenschein actually has given us reason to suspect our hypothesis may be valid through his words, not only because of his statements about *Superstition,* but because of more sexually related comments regarding another work, *Moon, Morning Star and Evening Star.* As mentioned, it is an earlier work that deals with the same subject as *The Enchanted Forest.* Blumenschein said of it, "There is a virility in the 'Moon, Morning Star and Evening Star' that I believe will live a long time."[27] When pressed to discuss their art, artists use all types of adjectives but "virile" is not among the most common. It is a term with connotations of male sexuality. Yet one is compelled to agree with the artist's assessment and to apply it as well to *The Enchanted Forest*, which is, perhaps, even more virile. But we don't need the artist to confirm our interpretation. It is even possible that he was not conscious of imbuing his enchanted forest with sexuality. Lack of consciousness on the artist's part has not stopped historians from interpreting latent sexuality in their works, anymore than it would stop a Freudian psychologist.

One art historian provides an example from among many. Edward Lucie-Smith has written that Peter Paul Rubens's *Triumph of the Victor* "is an especially fascinating case; it demonstrates how a work of art which does not have an overtly erotic subject can be endowed, unconsciously, with a pervasively erotic tone."[28] Perhaps, so can an O'Keeffe, or a Blumenschein.

At any rate, we have seen that viewers are often ignorant of the true, or at least, complete nature of paintings of Indians. We have also seen that paintings are often not windows into history—or else, if they are, they are stained-glass windows. They may be entertaining and beautiful, but they obscure our view.

Why did we come to accept such images of Indians as truth and only recently consider that they are more likely descriptive of their makers' psyches or of the unexamined attitudes of the societies of their time? That may be a question for another essay, but two possibilities are perhaps worth considering in the meantime. The first is that we have mistakenly expected the art museum to contain a "panorama of fact," rather than a "paradise of fancy." We may have considered art museums to be temples, and as such, containing truths not to be questioned:

> Art museums have always been compared to older ceremonial monuments such as palaces or temples. Indeed, from the eighteenth through the mid-twentieth centuries, they were deliberately designed to resemble them. . . . Museums resemble older ritual sites not so much because of their specific architectural references but because they, too, are settings for rituals. Like most ritual space, museum space is carefully marked off and culturally designated as reserved for a special quality of attention—in this case, for contemplation and learning. . . The museum's sequenced spaces and arrangement of objects, its lighting and architectural details. . . resembles in some respects certain medieval cathedrals where pilgrims followed a structured narrative route through the interior, stopping at prescribed points for prayer or contemplation.[29]

A second possibility is that we, as viewers, are reluctant to challenge paintings not because of fear of desecrating a "temple of art," but because it is simply uncomfortable. As one museum expert has written, "It is also good to remember that many—perhaps most—of our fellow citizens do not have questioning minds. They feel comfortable with received ideas and they are not grateful to have those ideas disturbed or demolished. Whether the

NOTES

1. Hughes, 5-6.
2. Boehme, 53
3. Weil, 47.
4. Troccoli, 112-113. The author makes references on both cited pages of her article that question Catlin's veracity.
5. Boehme, 35.
6. Anderson, 16.
7. Deloria, 394.
8. Anderson, 35.
9. Porter, 188.
10. Porter, 191.
11. Collett, 28.
12. Longfellow, 95-96. This reprint of the epic poem is particularly interesting in that it is illustrated by the artist Frederic Remington.
13. Van Hook, 17. Van Hook's work provides a comprehensive study of the various portrayals of women in 19th-century American art, and a compelling contextualization for the present article.
14. Hughes, 299.
15. Osborne, 352. That this opinion regarding Eakins is widely held among art historians is evidenced in that it appears even in narrative summaries of his career.
16. Talvacchia, ix-x.
17. Berkhofer, 76.
18. Troccoli, 114. Troccoli's article is a rare example of specific inquiry into the exploitation of Indian women in American art, as opposed to the more common focus on women in general in works by Nochlin, Lucie-Smith, Van Hook, and others.
19. Braund, 81.
20. Braund, 81.
21. Lucie-Smith, 146-47. Lucie-Smith refers to a trend that continues into the modernist European and American traditions and is seen particularly in the paintings by Gaugin of South Seas Native women, including the artist's teenage "bride."
22. Hughes, 176.
23. Hughes, 185.
24. Van Hook, 101.
25. Hughes, 394-395.
26. Porter, 191.
27. Porter, 190.
28. Lucie-Smith, 247.
29. Duncan, 7-12. It should be noted that this passage draws from material separated by a great deal of additional information that distracts from the present article, but also that the original meanings are not compromised.
30. Hudson, 459.
31. Nochlin, 5. Nochlin, Bolloch and Van Hook, provide the clearest (and perhaps most sensitive) art historical treatments of the subject of 19th century eroticism in mainstream art. See also, *The Politics of Vision: Essays on Nineteenth-Century Art and Society* (New York: Harper & Row, 1989)
32. Clark, 84.



Ernest L. Blumenschein
THE ENCHANTED FOREST
OIL ON CANVAS
GILCREASE
0137.2191

subject is Russia or railways, banking or Brazil, their minds are conditioned by the information that has reached them as they have grown up and they are likely to resist any attempt to induce them to think differently."[30]

In the end, it may be that we prefer not to have our pleasurable viewing of art disturbed. We may be reluctant to contemplate a beautiful painting of an Indian woman and perceive it as a characteristic expression of 19th-century erotic fascination.[31] According to one author, "The only reason for bringing together works of art in a public place is that. . . they produce in us a kind of exalted happiness. For a moment there is a clearing in the jungle: we pass on refreshed, with our capacity for life increased and with some memory of the sky."[32] If this is ultimately what we want when we look at paintings of Indians, then issues of stereotype, gender, and sexuality might well retreat beneath the surfaces of the painted canvases and remain comfortably out of view.

WORKS CITED

Anderson, Nancy K., " 'Curious Historical Data,' Art History and Western American Art," in *Discovered Lands, Invented Pasts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992)

Berkhofer, Robert F., Jr., *The White Man's Indian* (New York: Vintage Books, 1978)

Braund, Kathryn E. Holland, and Gregory A. Waselkov, eds., *William Bartram on the Southeastern Indians* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995)

Boehme, Sarah E., "Frozen in Time: Euro-American Portrayals of Indians," in *Powerful Images: Portrayals of Native America* (Seattle: University of Washington Press/Museums West, 1998)

Clark, Kenneth, "The Ideal Museum," *Art News,* January, 1954, vol. 52

Collett, Louisa B., "Howard Chandler Christy at Gilcrease Museum," in *The Gilcrease Magazine of History and Art,* Vol. 6, No. 3 (Tulsa: The Thomas Gilcrease Museum Association, July, 1984)

Deloria, Philip J. "Being a Twentieth Century Indian" in *The Native Americans: An Illustrated History,* Betty Ballantine and Ian Ballantine, eds. (Atlanta: Turner Publishing, 1993)

Duncan, Carol, *Civilizing Rituals: Inside Public Art Museums* (New York: Routledge, 1995)

Hudson, Kenneth, "How Misleading Does an Ethnographical Museum Have to Be?" in *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display,* Ivan Karp and Steven D. Lavine, eds. (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution, 1991)

Hughes, Robert. *American Visions: The Epic History of Art in America* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1997)

Longfellow, Henry Wadsworth, *The Song of Hiawatha* (New York: Bounty Books, 1982).

Lucie-Smith, Edward, *Sexuality in Western Art* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1972)

Nochlin, Linda, "Nineteenth Century Representations of Women: Categories and Contradictions," in *Women in the 19th Century: Categories and Contradictions,* Linda Nochlin and Jelle Bolloch (New York: New Press, 1997)

Osborne, Harold, ed. *The Oxford Companion to Art.* (New York: Oxford University Press Inc., 1970)

Porter, Dean A., Teresa Hays Ebie, Suzan Campbell; with contributions by Elizabeth Cunningham. . . [et al.]; general editor, Suzan Campbell. *Taos Artists and Their Patrons, 1898-1950* (Snite Museum of Art, University of Notre Dame, 1999)

Talvacchia, Bette, *Taking Positions: On the Erotic in Renaissance Culture* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1999)

Troccoli, Joan Carpenter, "Alfred Jacob Miller: Watercolors of the American West," in *American Art Review,* Volume V, Number 2, Winter 1993.

Van Hook, Bailey, *Angels of Art: Women and Art in American Society, 1876-1914* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996)

Weil, Stephen E., "Courtly Ghosts and Aristocratic Artifacts: The Art Museum as Palace," in *Museum News,* Vol. 77, No. 6, November/December 1998.

Box of Treasures

BY PETER MACNAIR



More than 900 people fill the *gukwdzi,* the ceremonial Big House, sitting attentively on tiered benches. The only sounds are the crackle of flames from the warming fire in the center of the earthen floor and the soft tapping of drumsticks on the hollowed log drum located at the rear of the house. The front door opens, offering a brief glimpse of sea and sky in the distance. A gesture by a robed attendant signals the entry of a masked dancer.

Even to the uninitiated, the mask is recognizable as the Sun. Six curled rays project from a central humanoid face. The performer's body is concealed by a dark blue blanket draped from shoulders to ankles. His movements are fluid yet controlled: four steps forward, a pause, then in a sweeping trajectory he rises from a crouch and turns to gaze into the crowd. As he moves counter-clockwise around the fire he repeats the motions.

This singular tableau is familiar to most of the onlookers. They know the Sun represents an ancient progenitor who has come down from the heavens to validate the genesis of a lineage. As well, the spirit of a recently deceased patriarch is known to be present, returned from the other world to preside over the ceremonial transfer of his jealously guarded privileges to the next generation.

. . . THE [MASKED] DANCES USUALLY ARE ENACTED INSIDE A CEREMONIAL BIG HOUSE MADE OF MASSIVE CEDAR POSTS, BEAMS, AND PLANKS. . . . ONCE SANCTIFIED, THE HOUSE BECOMES THE CONTAINER FOR THE COLLECTIVE MEMORY OF HOST, PARTICIPANTS, AND SPECTATORS.

PETER MACNAIR

UNTIL THE MASKS APPEAR ON THE FLOOR OF THE DANCE HOUSE, THEY MUST BE KEPT HIDDEN AWAY. IN TIMES PAST, THE CONTAINERS WERE WONDROUS BENT-WOOD CHESTS—BOXES OF TREASURE WITHIN THE HOUSE AS BOX OF TREASURES—

PETER MACNAIR

MUSEUMS ARE BOXES OF TREASURES.

CHIEF THOMAS HARRIS HUNT



ABOVE, INSET: Nuxalk Sun mask, artist unknown, ca. 1870. American Museum of Natural History collection 16/1507

Photograph by Edward S. Curtis, 1858-1952. Volume 10, plate 336 (detail). Gilcrease 4327.973.8.

Cannibal bird dancers assume three positions when performing. They first appear on the dance floor standing upright, moving to the beat of the drums and song, then crouch (as this dancer is doing) and finally complete the cycle seated on the floor. They wear cedar bark capes, kilts, and leggings to shroud the human form and evoke the bird. Prototypic cannibal bird masks were decorated simply, but had great impact in the firelight of the *gukwdzi.*



No suspension of disbelief is needed here, for the manifestations of both mythic ancestor and departed chief are unequivocal. The witnesses remain in absolute awe of the moment.

Masks and the Ceremonial Tradition

The Native Americans who occupy the Pacific Northwest coast of the continent have an ancient tradition of masking, presented in a sophisticated theatrical form. While their languages differ considerably, the life-ways of the coastal Nations are unified through a fundamental institution called the potlatch. All aspects of their culture are inextricably bound up in the potlatch. Polity, law, land tenure, ritual, history, kinship, ceremony, economics, and art are interrelated parts of this complex whole. Theatre is an essential vehicle of the potlatch: oratory, songs, dances and, of course, masks are used to validate and justify the above components of society. Potlatches are held to signal and honor important events in an individual's or a family's life: birth, puberty, marriage, memorialization of the deceased. Central to the potlatch is the recognition and bestowal of privileges—names, titles, songs, crests, dances, and property. Transfer of these rights is valid only if it takes place in front of guests who, in exchange for bearing witness, are paid with gifts of cash, goods, and food. By accepting these gifts, the witnesses verify, in a legal sense, the transfer of prerogatives from one person to another. Potlatches always also include formal feasts at which guests are served in order according to their rank.

FACING PAGE: Kwakwaka'wakw Sun mask by Richard Hunt, 1978; Private collection

The *Kwakwaka'wakw* say that the sun is an old man who, every day, walks across the sky wearing a blanket decorated with abalone shells. He once transferred the responsibility to his son the Mink but the disobedient boy darted back and forth across the heavens causing the protective clouds to part, the seas to boil and the forests to burn. Mink was banished back to earth forever where he continued his mischievous ways.

The masks used in ceremonies come from deep within tradition. Northwest Coast peoples view their universe as having four essential parts, which they define as the Sky, Sea, Mortal, and Spirit Worlds. These worlds are the source of legendary ancestors who transformed into humans from avian, marine, animal, or supernatural creatures when the world was young. The ancestors descended from the heavens and landed with a blinding aura, came trumpeting out of the ocean depths, emerged from brooding rain forests or passed through the thin veil which separates the Mortal from the Spirit World. These personae may be rendered as masks, carved on totem poles, painted on house fronts or applied to blankets, boxes, chests and other regalia.

Masks may represent cataclysmic natural events, actual historical incidents or real personalities.



Heiltsuk Transformation mask (open view), artist unknown, ca. 1860, Canadian Museum of Civilization collection VII-B-20

Many great Northwest Coast masks transform when concealed strings are pulled by the dancer. This mask appears on the dance floor as a bird, then unfolds to reveal a personified sun.



Kwakwa̱ka̱'wakw Crooked-Beak-of-Heaven mask by George Hunt, Jr., 1989

Early 20th-century Kwakwa̱ka̱'wakw artists painted their cannibal bird masks in a flamboyant manner, a practice that increased from 1910 through to the present. This decorative tradition continues today at the hands of consummate artists, such as George Hunt, Jr., who add horsehair, copper, abalone, and non-traditional colors to their works.

Kwakwa̱ka̱'wakw Dzunu̱k'wa mask, artist unknown, ca. 1890; U'mista Cultural Centre collection 80.01.133



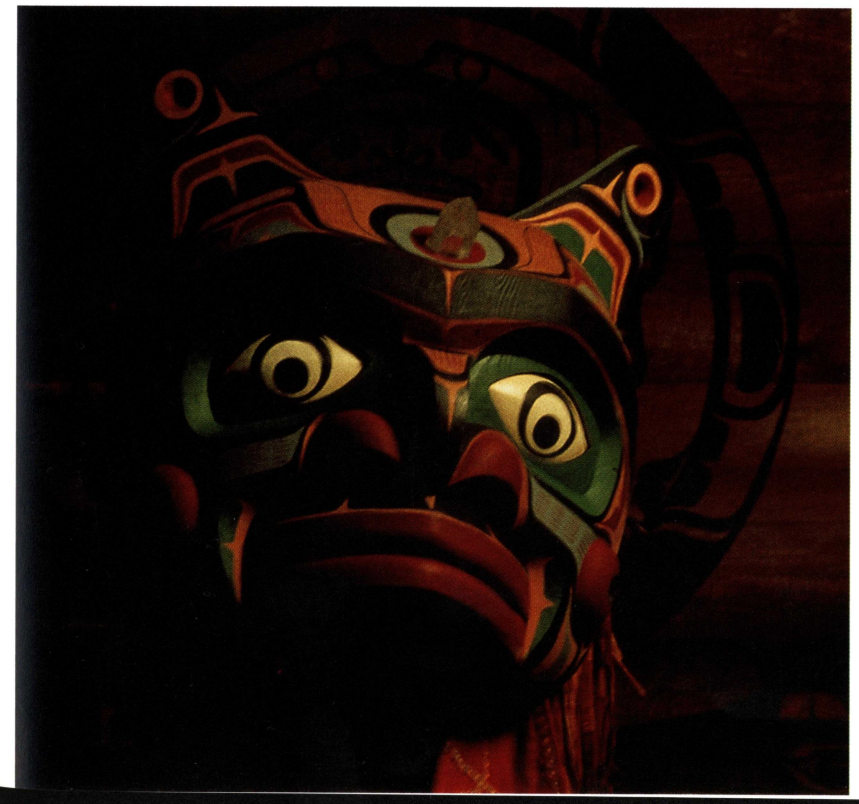
The Dzunu̱k'wa, or wild woman of the woods, is characterized by deeply set eyes that are said to "glow like coals" (hence the inset mirrors in this example that reflect firelight) and pursed lips which indicate her cry "uu-huu-huu, uu." She creeps through the forest capturing children, intending to eat them; however, the children always manage to outwit her and escape home to tell of their close encounter with the ogress who then becomes a crest figure of the family.

One Nisga'a mask is constructed so that its nose grows to a length of nearly three feet as the dancer circles the floor. It is said to represent a benevolent monster that extended its nose across a valley, blocking a flow of lava which threatened a riverside village. Visitors today can drive through the resultant lunar landscape in British Columbia's Nass River valley, whose barren and convoluted formations are testimony to a volcanic eruption which occurred about 350 years ago. The mask obviously commemorates that bygone geological event.

One Nuu-chah-nulth forehead mask combines a mythic Lightning Serpent with the countenance of a white man, one of the first Spaniards encountered off the west coast of Vancouver Island late in the eighteenth century. The intruders were said to have arrived in "houses that floated on water," and their arrival was memorialized in a dance that has been maintained for more than two hundred years.

Other masks representing human foibles and frailties such as avarice, conceit, sloth, pride, stupidity, or arrogance are part of a dance series called Naxnox, exclusive to the Tsimshian-speaking nations. In certain masks, real individuals are represented, for example a missionary with an uncontrollable love of rum or a snobbish schoolteacher who was always scolding her pupils.

In the dancing of masks, staging is all important. While some moving tableaus take place out of doors, the dances usually are enacted inside a ceremonial Big House made of massive cedar



Kwakwa̱ka̱'wakw mask representing ancestral Sea Monster by Tony Hunt, Jr., 1987; Royal B.C. Museum collection 18651, Courtesy of Sophie Cook

In mythic times this sea monster emerged from the water and transformed into the human progenitor of the 'Na̱mgis tribe. A glowing crystal extended from its forehead. When an ancient hero struck the crystal with his spear it became so powerful it could turn enemies to stone.

posts, beams, and planks. Modern examples can measure ninety by seventy feet, twice the size of most historic ceremonial dwellings, and accommodate up to 1,200 guests. The house is sanctified before use. The Kwakwaka'wakw, for example, festoon the building with lengths of braided hemlock boughs dressed with two sacred materials, red cedar bark and eagle down. Other tribes dust the supporting house posts with red ochre and cover the earthen floor with eagle down so that it does not split open and swallow the dancers. Thus sanctified, the house becomes the container for the collective memory of host, participants and spectators.

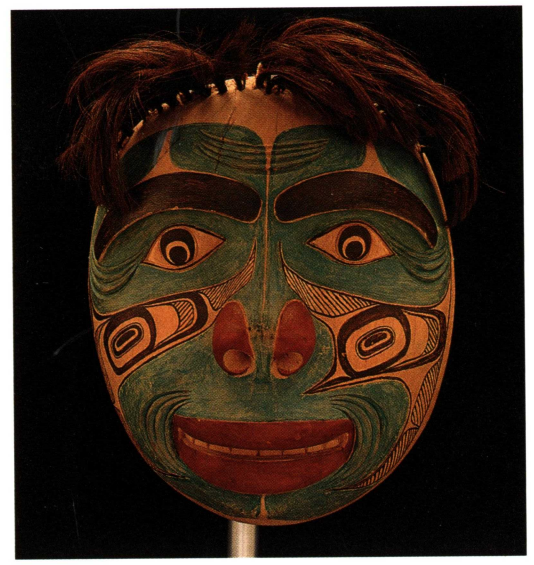
All houses have names. Some are prosaic: Grizzly Bear House, Killerwhale House, Raven House, Moon House. Others reflect the status and authority of their owners: He Orders Them to Come Inside, Where People Are Always Satiated, Where One May Always Expect Food. Still others are lyrically descriptive, such as: Sound of Clouds Rolling Upon It, or House Upon Which



Kwakwaka'wakw Bak'was Mask attributed to Bob Harris, ca. 1890; U'mista Cultural Centre collection 80.01.013

Bak'was is the chief of the ghosts. He offers dried salmon to travelers who are lost in the forest but the food is really rotten wood and when the travelers eat it, they die and become members of his ghostly retinue.

Haida Gagiit mask by Charles Edenshaw, ca. 1905; American Museum of Natural History Collection 16.1/128



The Gagiit is keeper of drowned souls. This is one of only two or three masks known to be carved by the celebrated Massett Haida artist Charles Edenshaw.

Thunder Roars. Many have frontal paintings which reflect the house name or indicate episodes in the owner's family history.

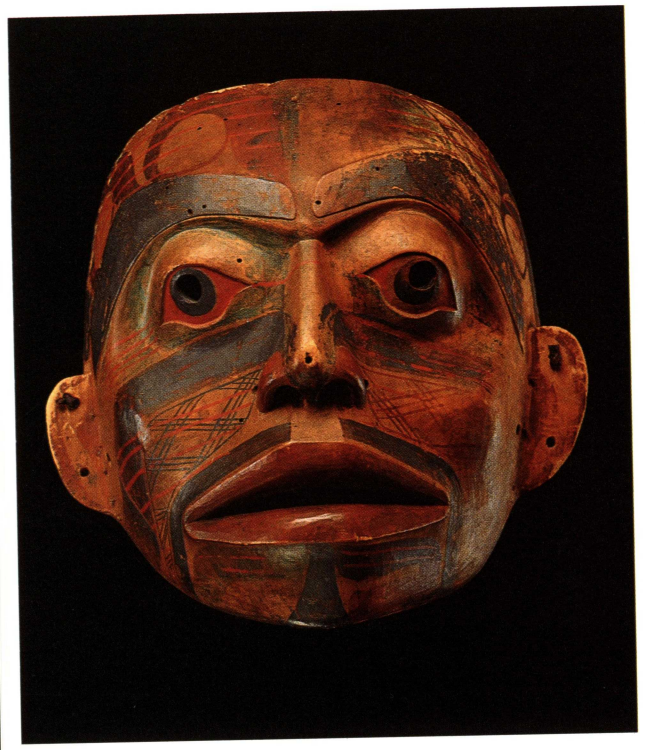
The house itself is a vessel for mystery, and contained within it is a smaller sanctum, a concealed space behind a painted dance screen at the rear of the house. This space conceals the performers as they are preparing for their ultimate transformation. The refuge becomes the "receptacle of spirits"—another box within the house as box of treasures—and within it, the dancers are imbued with the power of those familiars they are about to portray. This complex space serves, on one hand, the divine power, and on the other, the conjurers who manipulate the theatrical props used to enhance the performance. It is these illusionists who cause eagles to fly in through the smoke-hole, snow to fall in summer, thunder to rumble and lightning to flash, puppets to emerge from the floor and dancers to be decapitated, only to return alive and unscathed later in the performance. It is they who create the cries of the spirits using whistles, wooden trumpets and vocalizations.

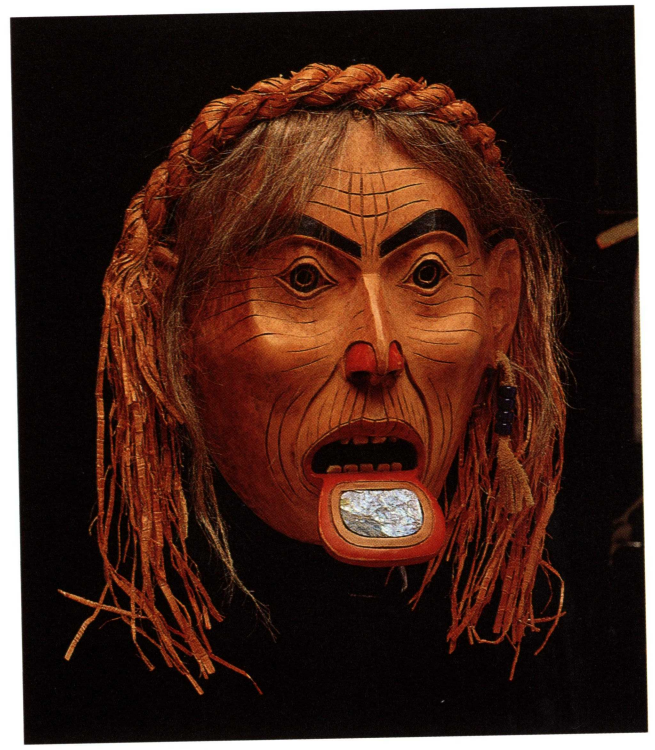
Until the masks appear on the floor of the dance house, they must be kept hidden away. In times past, the containers were wondrous bent-wood chests—boxes of treasure within the house as box of treasures—decorated with flowing painted designs representing the owner's crests: eagles, ravens, bears, whales and the like. These were later replaced with rugged, brass-bound camphor-wood chests manufactured in China and brought to the north Pacific coast as trade items. Today, they are usually steamer trunks, unprepossessing perhaps, but nonetheless functioning to preserve and shelter their contents as carefully as their traditional prototypes. If a mask is too large or too heavy to fit into a trunk, it is wrapped in blankets to protect its secret form during transport.

The rights to songs, dances and masks may be transferred through either the paternal or maternal lines, or acquired as dowry through arranged marriages. As Kwakwaka'wakw chief, author, curator and cultural activist Robert Joseph writes, these rights are valued treasures:

Tsimshian Stone mask from Kitkatla village, collected ca. 1880; Canadian Museum of Civilization collection VII-C-329

This celebrated mask, one of a pair, shows traces of vermillion and blue-green paint. Its antiquity is unknown but it is one of the rarest and most accomplished masterpieces of the Northwest Coast tradition. Holes drilled through the rim indicate it was intended to be worn. It is reasonable to assume that this unsighted mask "transformed" into a sighted mate which features open eyes drilled through the stone.





Heiltsuk mask representing a male ancestor (left), ca. 1865; Canadian Museum of Civilization collection VII-D-25 and Haida mask representing an elderly woman wearing a labret by Freda Diesing, 1974; Royal B.C. Museum collection 15057

Witnessing a Heiltsuk potlatch in the 1830s, a Hudson's Bay Company physician and fur trader, William Fraser Tolmie, noted that all the masks but one that he viewed represented "the human face divine," a phrase from Milton's *Paradise Lost.* The much more recent Haida mask represents a woman of considerable age and rank, as is clear by the size of her labret. At puberty the lower lips of girls from noble families among the Tlingit, Haida, and Tsimshian-speaking tribes were pierced and fitted with a bone or silver pin. Gradually the hole was enlarged and successively larger labrets were worn.

It is a strict law that rules the use and display of masks and the attendant rights which reflect the full measure of a family's legacy. Masks are kept secure in special chests which we call *kawatsi*—"boxes of treasures." When a bride brings masks as part of her dowry, they come both literally and figuratively in these prized containers. The metaphor expands when the masks are danced and the ceremonial house itself becomes a box of treasures. (Joseph in Macnair et al. 1998:28)

When the exhibition *Down from the Shimmering Sky* opened at each of its host sites, a blessing ceremony was performed in the presence of members of local tribes. At Gilcrease chiefs, speakers, and elders of the Cherokee, Creek, Shawnee, Osage, and Yuchi were witnesses to the sanctification and welcomed the masks and strangers to their homelands. Through this ceremony, inspired by the ancient and still living potlatch, the museum became both a treasure house of legend, and a sacred place, reinforcing the long traditions and protocols of the Big House, Square Ground, and Dance Arbor.

The Gilcrease House of Treasures

The Gilcrease Museum is a treasure house of legend in yet another sense. Following my participation in the installation and opening of *Down From the Shimmering Sky*, I was privileged to tour the anthropological storage area. I could not help but think that I was entering another house of treasures when staff led me to the museum's small but significant Northwest Coast collection. Here, I discovered familiar yet unique objects, both ceremonial and utilitarian. While many of them were of interest, I have selected for comment a few which can be considered containers or vessels—the theme of this issue of the *Journal.*



Of immediate interest was a Coast Salish imbricated basketry cradle (left, Gilcrease 7137.16, ca. 1920), a complete ethnographic specimen as indicated by the drainage hole at the base, swaddling straps and protective hoop. Some Coast Salish tribes placed the infant in such cradles on the eighth day after birth, following a small feast to which selected guests were invited. Many museum collections have simpler cradles, made as curios for sale, and so identified because they lack the attachments found on the Gilcrease example.

Nearby rests a Kwakwa̲ka̲'wakw food dish (below, Gilcrease 7337.366, ca. 1900), decorated simply with parallel knife marks. Its elegant shape reflects the serious formality of dining and feasting. Three people might eat from a serving dish this size, each using a personal spoon brought

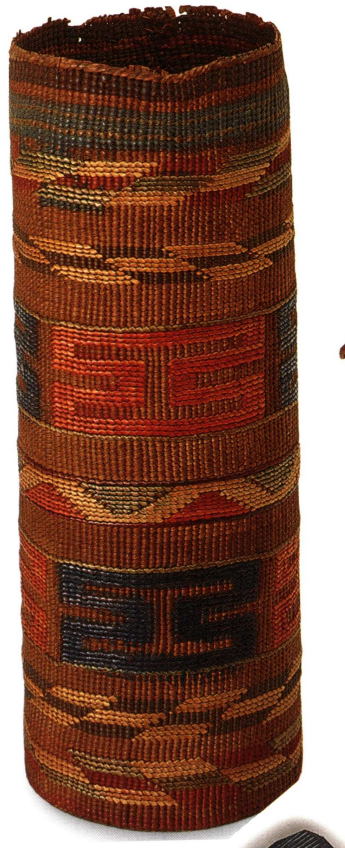


to the meal. At formal feasts among the Kwakwa̲ka̲'wakw, the hamatsas, or cannibal dancers, sat together on elevated platforms and were served first. Next, men of chiefly rank were fed, followed by males of lower status.

Another delightful container was a Makah trinket basket (below, Gilcrease 7137.579, ca. 1900) constructed primarily of cedar bark and bear grass. The latter is applied over cedar bark strands using a twining technique. Some of the bear grass fibers are colored with aniline dyes, and these are used to define the primary designs on the basket. In this case, what appears to be a bald eagle flanked by two smaller birds (perhaps its young?) is balanced upon an arrow. The design on the eagle's chest, while reminiscent of feathers, is also suggestive of a shield. The arrow/shield combination hints that the inspiration for this design was the U.S. silver dollar, well known as a motif on other Northwest Coast tradeware such as silver and gold bracelets and brooches, argillite carving and beadwork.



In the northern extreme of the Northwest Coast, Tlingit women wove complex baskets of





split spruce-root which, like their Makah counterparts, were produced for the tourist trade. The tall cylindrical shape shown above left (Gilcrease 7136.388, ca. 1900) is relatively rare, its colorful geometric designs achieved by first dyeing bands of the twined spruce root ground and then applying dyed grass stems using a false embroidery technique.

Those who saw the canoe installation in the *Shimmering Sky* exhibit will appreciate the model Makah canoe shown above (Gilcrease 733.146, ca. 1890). By the mid-19th century, two canoe types came to dominate coastal waters, the northern type and the Nootkan, built and used by the Nuu-chah-nulth and Makah who occupy the west coast of Vancouver Island and Cape Flattery respectively. Canoes were the primary means of transport on the Northwest Coast. They were graceful and seaworthy vessels, elegantly designed to throw oncoming waves or following seas away from bow and stern. Journeys of more than 1,000 miles between southeastern Alaska and Seattle, were undertaken in such canoes during the 19th century.



The Makah and their cultural and linguistic affiliates, the Nuu-chah-nulth, used varying sizes of the Nootkan canoe to hunt fur seal and whales, to fish halibut and to transport cargo. But real canoes were also ritual containers. Food was served from smaller ones at feasts. At death, they were used as coffins for high-ranking chiefs, and the concept of the spirit canoe which transported the souls of the deceased to the Spirit World is well entrenched in the oral traditions and art of the Makah and Nuu-chah-nulth.

The Gilcrease catalogue entry suggests this model canoe is a toy, but I detect a more serious intent in this carving. The fact that the entire upper bodies of the two passengers are concealed within tightly wrapped blankets, and that no paddles are present, implies that the occupants are engaged in a spiritual journey, perhaps heading for that spiral in the sky, the Milky Way, where some say the souls of the deceased end their journey into night.

A final container from the Gilcrease storeroom is an intriguing work, incorporating flat design, bas-relief and three-dimensional elements (facing page, Gilcrease 6137.6942, ca. 1890). Carved from argillite, a lustrous gray slate quarried on Haida Gwaii, or Queen Charlotte Islands, this small platter was made by the celebrated Haida artist Charles Edenshaw (ca. 1839-1920). Although created as an item for trade, the essential form, that of a skate—a ray-like fish found at considerable depths in north Pacific Ocean waters—is probably based on a traditional serving dish. The artist has reconfigured the skate's anatomy to suit the demands of the design field, placing the eyes on the underside of the flat fish. An elegant bird, unidentifiable because its beak is missing, sits on the skate's tail, peering intently into the shallow receptacle, which contains a female shaman. While the relationship between skate, bird and shaman is unquestionably meaningful, I know of no published narrative that brings these three together.

WORKS CITED

Emmons, George T. T*he Tlingit Indians* (Vancouver/Toronto: Douglas & McIntyre and New York: American Museum of Natural History, 1991).

Macnair, Peter, Robert Joseph and Bruce Grenville. *Down From the Shimmering Sky: Masks of the Northwest Coast* (Vancouver/Toronto: Douglas & McIntyre and Vancouver Art Gallery; Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1998).

Vaughn, Thomas, and Bill Holm. *Soft Gold: The Fur Trade & Cultural Exchange on the Northwest Coast of America* (Portland: Oregon Historical Society, 1982).

NOTES

While some masks are now owned by museums and private collectors, the privileges they represent—together with the attendant songs and histories—continue to be the property of their original owners. For this reason, the development and curation of an exhibition such as *Down from the Shimmering Sky: Masks of the Northwest Coast,* recently at the Gilcrease Museum, observed the ceremonial and cultural protocols of the Northwest Coast First Nations.

When the Vancouver Art Gallery invited me to be the senior curator for the exhibit, I realized that the show could only be achieved with a co-curator from one of the First Nations and asked Chief Robert Joseph to join the curatorial team. As a potlatch chief, dancer and orator, he insists that anthropological collections be considered as part of a continuum, as relevant today as they were when they were acquired. Together we consulted chiefs, elders, and artists on the overall exhibition concept and secured permission to select masks in private and museum collections in North America and Europe for the exhibition. The development of the storyline and selection of works were accomplished in consultation with the home communities through assigned tribal representatives. Living artists were consulted on the selection and choice of their works and descendants of deceased artists were asked for permission to allow works to be exhibited.

Experts from the community, dancers themselves, established the varying heights and angles at which the masks were mounted in order to animate them. These traditionalists insisted that the Sky World gallery have a rectangular floor plan, to replicate the floor of the *gukwdzi,* or ceremonial house. The masks were to be clustered in the center so visitors would see them in the round, in the manner they are traditionally staged. In order to complete the symbolic dance house, a painted ceremonial curtain was commissioned for placement at the back of the "house." Again, Chief Joseph's role was invaluable, because he directed the artist to paint images on the curtain which reflected the history of his own Gwawa'enuxw tribe. In this way, no protocols were broken.

Respect for the prescribed protocols extended to the handling, crating and installing of the masks. Thus, the masks were wrapped when in transit and storage and the beaks of the Cannibal Birds tied shut to ensure they did not come to life at an inopportune time.

Unpacking Peyote Boxes

The Peyote Boxes of the Native American Church

Daniel C. Swan

The Peyote box of a member of the Native American Church becomes a highly intimate, uniquely portable record of personal experience, both spiritual and secular.

In January 1999, Gilcrease Museum, in collaboration with community advisors, opened the exhibition *Symbols of Faith and Belief: The Art of the Native American Church*.[1] The exhibition focused on the traditional arts, folk, and fine arts associated with the manufacture and decoration of ritual instruments, accoutrements, and accessories used by Peyotists in religious worship.[2] The exhibition, its associated publications, and public programs provided an opportunity for Peyote artists to share their life histories and to discuss the various way in which religious participation and experience inspire and influence their work. In this Portfolio, I want to discuss the boxes that are used to store and transport many of these objects and items. Referred to as "Peyote boxes"or "kits" by members of the Native American Church,[3] these containers are an interesting element in the artistic traditions associated with the religion. Peyote boxes perform utilitarian functions, present an additional platform for aesthetic expression, and, when considered with their contents, provide insight into the personal experiences and practices of individual members of the Church. The history, diversity, and collectability of Peyote boxes are well illustrated by examples drawn from the collections of Gilcrease Museum and other institutions.[4]

Almost every participant in the religion uses some type of container to store and carry the various objects, items, and materials that worshippers need during the all-night ceremony, or meeting as they are called by members.[5] At a basic level these objects include gourd rattles, feathers, fans, wooden drumsticks, botanicals, and other ceremonial items. Boxes are also used to carry an array of non-ceremonial items that are useful throughout the night. These include jewelry, neckties, combs, mirrors, handkerchiefs, and other personal items. It is also usual for a box to contain a pen or pencil and some notepaper, important in the exchange of names and addresses with newly made friends and to record the dates and locations of future meetings, with invitations extended at the close of the service. Peyote boxes also serve as repositories for personal momentos, photographs of friends and family members and other objects of individual significance and meaning. Among such objects are baby moccasins, Christian medals and crosses, military ribbons and insignia, personal letters and important documents.

Peyote boxes are generally of two types, either commercially made containers adapted for use by Peyotists or boxes of wood or leather that are constructed for such use. The former type includes musical instrument cases, toolboxes, small valises, and commercially manufactured wooden boxes of various types.[6] Boxes constructed specifically for use by Peyotists have a distinct history that can be reconstructed through an examination of ethnographic narrative, museum collections, and their associated documentation.

Peyote Box, 1997
Dolores Thompson, Navajo, Arizona
Cedar wood, balsa wood, brass hardware, paint, felt
Gilcrease Museum TL1997.93.

Between 1996 and 1998 Gilcrease undertook an acquisitions initiative to support the *Symbols of Faith and Belief* exhibition.[8] Harding Big Bow and Rod Pistokcha, community advisors to the project, purchased this box in Shiprock, New Mexico. The identity of the artist who decorated the box was unknown at that time and it was one of the first pieces of Peyote art from the Navajo community to be added to the collections of the museum. This box is decorated with brightly painted balsa wood appliques of the ritual instruments, a tipi and a peyote cactus. Ready-made, plain cedar boxes are available in numerous stores and galleries in reservation and border communities in Navajoland. The use of red and blue felt as a lining is a common feature of Peyote boxes.[9]

Works Cited

Bittle, William

1969 The Peyote Ritual: Kiowa-Apache. *Bulletin of the Oklahoma Anthropological Society* 18:69-78.

Coe, Ralph T.

1976 *Sacred Circles: 2000 Years of American Indian Art.* London: Arts Council of Great Britain.

1986 *Lost and Found Traditions: Native American Art 1965-85.* New York: American Federation of Arts.

Denver Art Museum

nd. Catalog Cards and Accession Records. Xerographic copies. Native Arts Department.

Ellison, Rosemary

1993 Masters of Beauty, Native American Church Art. Exhibition brochure. Anadarko: Southern Plains Indian Museum and Crafts Center.

Feder, Norman, ed.

1967 The Peyote Cult: Ritual Equipment. Denver Art Museum, Leaflet Series, No. 106.

Fintzelberg, Nicholas M.

1969 Peyote Paraphernalia. San Diego Museum of Man. Ethnic Technology Notes, No. 4.

Howard, James

1965 *The Ponca Tribe.* Smithsonian Institution, Bureau of American Ethnology Bulletin 195. Washington: US Government Printing Office .

La Barre, Weston

1989 *The Peyote Cult.* 5th edition, enlarged. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press.

Milwaukee Public Museum

nd. Manuscript Catalog of the James Howard Collection. Xerographic copy. Department of Anthropology.

Slotkin, J. S.

1952 Menomini Peyotism. Transactions of the American Philosophical Society 42 (4):565-680.

1956 *The Peyote Religion.* Glencoe, Ill.: Free Press.

Spindler, George and Louise Spindler

1972 *Dreamers Without Power: The Menomini Indians.* New York: Holt, Rinehart, Winston.

Stewart, Omer C.

1987 *The Peyote Religion: A History.* Norman: University of Oklahoma Press.

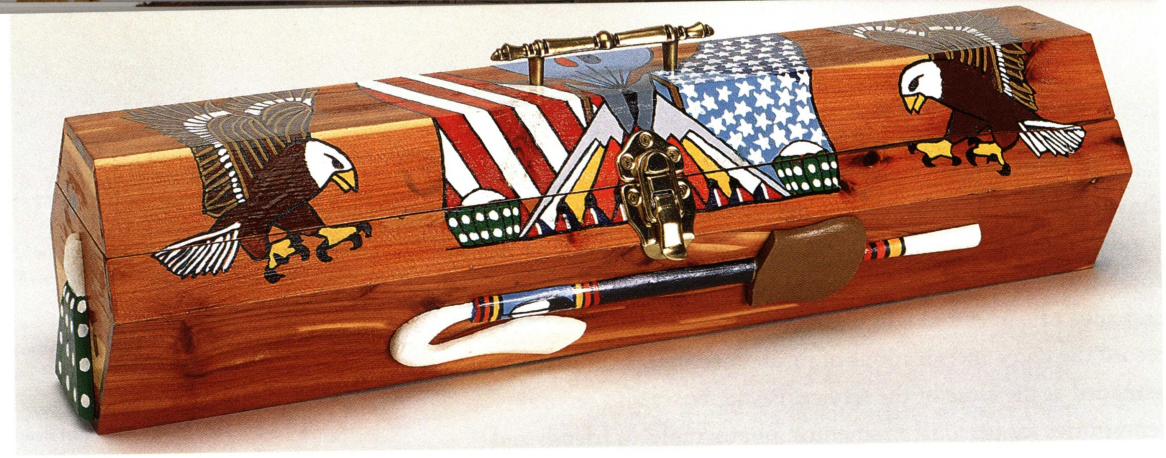
Swan, Daniel C.

1999a *Peyote Religious Art: Symbols of Faith and Belief.* Oxford: The University Press of Mississippi.

1999b Peyote Arts in the Collections of Gilcrease Museum. *American Indian Art* 24 (2): 36-45.

Wiedman, Dennis

1985 Staff, Fan, Rattle and Drum: Spiritual and Artistic Expressions of Oklahoma Peyotists. *American Indian Art Magazine* 10 (3) 38-45.



Peyote Box, 1998
Dolores Thompson, Navajo, Arizona
Cedar wood, brass hardware, balsa wood, paint
Gilcrease Museum
TL 1998.104

I purchased this box at a gallery in Gallup, New Mexico, that specializes in turquoise jewelry. The appliqué decorations caused me to immediately recognize this as another box by the person who constructed the one collected by Harding Big Bow. This box contained a photograph of its maker, Delores Thomson, a Navajo woman from Arizona. The box is unusual for its octagon shape, although not unique, as I know of an undecorated one in current use. Mrs. Thompson has embellished the lid of this box with realistic paintings of eagles and a highly symbolic interpretation of the tipi, surrounded by the form of a water bird that is rendered in a patriotic theme. This painted vignette suggests the strong influence of contemporary easel paintings by Navajo artists of Peyote subjects and themes.

The first containers associated with Peyotism to gain mention in the anthropological literature are satchels or bags used to house and transport the ritual instruments of Roadmen, or leaders, of religious services. Referred to as kits, these containers of cloth, carpet, and leather were later replaced by valises and commercially made wooden boxes (Slotkin 1952: 589; Bittle 1969: 74; Spindler and Spindler 1971: 102; La Barre 1989: 66). Omer Stewart (1989: 344-45, 358) found these "paraphernalia satchels" to be universal among the tribal communities included in his comparative study of the religion, its ceremonies and material attributes. Over time, the use of Peyote boxes became more widespread, perhaps in response to relaxed rules governing the use of personal fans, gourds, and other ceremonial items. Museum collections and associated documentation would suggest that boxes constructed from wood for the specific use of Peyotists were common by the late 1940s, with examples of decorated boxes appearing early in their history (Denver Art Museum, ms.).

Today, almost all Peyote boxes are constructed from red cedar and are available for purchase in stores and galleries in and around Indian Country.[7] In the twenty years that I have been attending religious services of the Native American Church, and in my personal relationships with Peyotists, I have only encountered two decorated boxes in current use. This is in sharp contrast to the boxes found in museum collections, which are almost all highly decorated with carvings, paintings, and appliqués. Many of these boxes were purchased from the artist or through an intermediary retailer and do not show any indication of use. The exceptions to this are the kits, or boxes with their contents, that have been incorporated into museum collections. While it is clear that Peyotists have and continue to use decorated boxes, I would suggest that undecorated boxes have always been more common. My impression is that in Oklahoma, decorated boxes, and the artists that created them, were at their greatest number in the 1950s and 1960s. Today, I am only aware of one individual in Oklahoma who is producing painted boxes, and ready-made cedar boxes are increasingly difficult to obtain.

Peyote Box (detail)
Anadarko, Oklahoma
Museum of the Great Plains 92.11.1912

The design on the end of this box represents the crescent-shaped, earthen altar, or "moon" of the Peyote Religion. The line running through the altar, from tip to tip, is the Peyote Road, interpreted by some as the course of right living and the path for a long life. At the center of the altar is the Chief Peyote. The crossed sticks represent the ritual fire that is carefully maintained by the Fireman throughout the night at a meeting. The single, vertical stick is the lighter, or smoke, stick that is kept smoldering throughout the ceremony and is used to light all prayer cigarettes.

Peyote boxes are also interesting for the ways in which they are used. It is the common practice for worshippers to gather together prior to the service for a supper provided by the host or sponsor of the meeting. As people finish eating, they socialize and complete final preparations for their participation in the nightlong ceremony. This is when the cushions and blankets upon which the people will sit are unloaded from cars and trucks and taken into the tipi or church house. Instrument boxes are also transported into the place of worship, where they are placed behind their owners' seats. Boxes are accessed infrequently during the religious ceremony, mostly after midnight, when it is appropriate to use individual gourds, fans, and drumsticks.

The religious service concludes in mid- to late morning and is generally followed by a noon meal attended by participants, family members, and other members of the community. The time between the close of the service and the meal is spent in casual conversation, with males often staying in the tipi or church house while the women retire to the shade outside or a nearby residence. It is during this period that the participants put feathers, fans and other materials away in their boxes. This is also the time when individuals might offer an object for examination by others. In this casual environment it is appropriate to inquire as to the maker of a particular piece and to learn of the circumstances through which it was acquired.

On a special occasion, based on nothing other than individual decision, someone will share his box with another member of the congregation, most often the one he sat beside during the meeting. This event is a quiet moment spent between friends as one shares the memories of relatives, the story of a fan or drum stick, and events and friendships from the past. The contents of a box provide material testament to a life spent in religious fellowship and spiritual devotion. They are very personal assemblages treated with humility and interpersonal respect, strong virtues in the doctrine of the Native American Church.



Peyote boxes provide a good example of the ways in which museum collections can sometimes fail to adequately reflect the multiple contexts in which objects are created and used. As curators we tend to overemphasize the context of the collector, which in this case focuses on the aesthetic of decorated boxes. While decorated Peyote boxes are certainly important pieces in the larger view of the expressive culture of the religion, we must be mindful of their narrow range and distribution. It is in their functional contexts that boxes present the richest source of meaning and interpretation. †



Peyote Box
Anadarko, Oklahoma
Cedar wood, brass hardware
Museum of the Great Plains 92.11.1912

This box is constructed of red cedar and is somewhat unique in the use of carving as the sole decorative technique.[11] The designs on the lid includes outline drawings of water birds, a feather fan and gourd rattle. The front face of the box has geometric elements at the ends, and a series of three realistic vignettes of widely varied scale. At the left is a tipi, the most common site of the religious ceremony of the Native American Church. In the center is a profile view of a "Chief Peyote," the dried cactus that is placed on the holy altar during a religious service. On the right is a figure of a singer, symbolic of the rounds of individual singing that comprises much of the all night service. The attire and accessories of the singer are very detailed in presentation, showing the ritual instruments in the hands, the blanket wrapped around the waist, a fringed shirt, a bandoleer, and shoulder fan. These are all representative of the attire of Peyotists in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

Feather Box
Oklahoma
Plywood, paint
Gilcrease Museum 73.250

Although not necessarily a Peyote box, boxes of this type are used to store a single fan, most often a loose Peyote fan. The box is constructed of plywood, with a sliding lid. Feather boxes have considerable antiquity in Indian communities from the eastern and southwest regions of North American. The single decorative element is a painting of a scissortail fan that has the outline carved into the wood. There is also an indentation carved at one end to facilitate movement of the lid. A box with an identical design element, with a hinged lid, in the collection of the Denver Art Museum is attributed to George "Dutch" Silverhorn.





Peyote Box, ca. 1954
Gus Mac Donald, Ponca, Oklahoma
Plywood, brass hardware, drawer handle, paint
Milwaukee Public Museum 65024A
James Howard Collection

The maker of this box, Gus Mac Donald, was well known for his early contributions to the Oklahoma fancy dance style and his career as a champion of numerous powwow competitions (Milwaukee Public Museum, ms.). The ends of the box are decorated with images of a tipi, representing the place of worship and the American flag, as a symbol of the patriotism of American Indians. The handle, a commercial drawer pull of red plastic, sits atop a raised water bird. The lid is further decorated with an image of a pine tree, symbolic of the cedar incense used during the ceremony and a peyote plant, the holy sacrament of the Native American Church. The front panel is decorated with traditional geometric elements similar to those found in beadwork and parflesche paintings from the plains region.

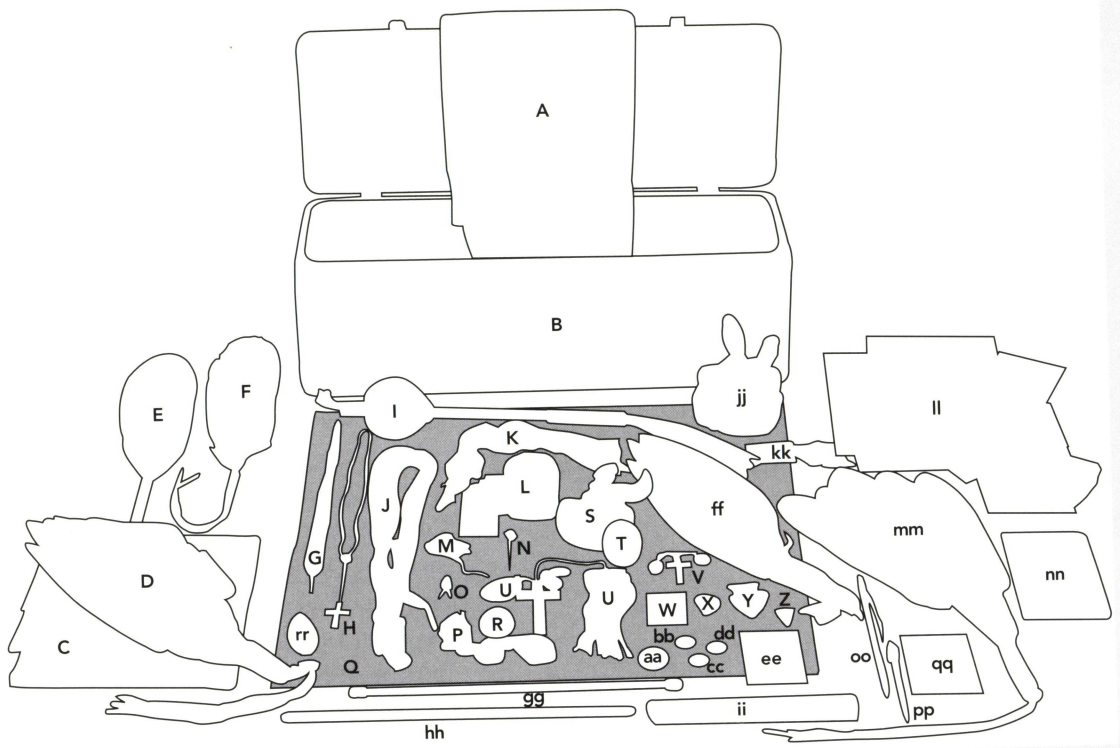


Peyote Box, ca. 1940
Cedar wood, brass hardware, leather, glass beads, paint
Osage, Oklahoma
University of Pennsylvania Museum 59.14.59

This box exhibits a high degree of craftsmanship in its construction and decoration. The handle and clasp would appear to have been salvaged from a suitcase or valise and the handle is beaded with the gourd stitch technique. The design layout and carving techniques exhibited in the decoration of this box resemble those of a box in the collections of the Denver Art Museum that is attributed to Lew Brace, a Kiowa from Carnegie, Oklahoma.

Peyote Box and Contents
Osage, Oklahoma
Gilcrease Museum 84.1166.

This Peyote box is from the original collections of Gilcrease Museum. It includes much, if not all, of the content assembled by its owner, a member of the Osage Indian community of Osage County, Oklahoma. The box was in active use in the 1940s and was acquired by Thomas Gilcrease prior to 1963. This kit provides an excellent example of the numerous Peyote boxes that I see in use by members of the Native American Church.The box itself is a commercial valise with heavy brass fittings and a satin lining with a pocket on the inside of the lid. The kit includes a combination of ceremonial instruments, religious materials and personal items that characterize the functional, spiritual and personal attributes of Peyote boxes. I have seen a number of older members of the church use their Peyote boxes as safe repositories for important documents and correspondence.



A summer "blanket"
B commercial valise
C silk scarf
D owl wing fan
E prayer feather
F prayer feather
G pheasant feather
H rosary
I gourd rattle
J otter fur strips
K cloth bundle
L tobacco and cigarette papers
M paper flower
N pearl stick pin
O mescal bean
P cloth bundle
Q Navajo rug
R cloth religious medal
S dried peyote
T sacred heart medallion
U pouch with peyote button, crucifix, and religious medals
V crucifix with religious medals
W photograph
X finger ring
Y flint arrowhead
Z arrowhead tip
aa photograph pin
bb Indian head penny
cc Indian head penny
dd Indian head penny
ee mirror
ff hawk wing fan
gg drumstick
hh drumstick
ii metal comb
jj dried cedar
kk ribbon
ll defense bond book, war ration book, bus ticket, receipt, letters and envelopes, selective service card, lease
mm loose fan
nn bank book
oo pencil
pp pencil
qq beading needles
rr hawk feather

Schematic drawing by Bobby C. Martin



Tulsa, Okla
Feb. 18, 1945

Dear Friend Dominic,

Just a few lines to you, hope you are well and happy. I am planning on visiting you sometime soon. Joe said he was over to see you the other day, and he said when we hear of a meeting around Hominy, we will come and pick you up and we will all go together.

We are planning on going to Texas soon and get some medicine. You must write and let us know when Dudley has a meeting and we will come. And let us know when George Pitts has a meeting, we would like to come to his meeting too.

How is Simon getting along, and his wife? I hope that they are well.

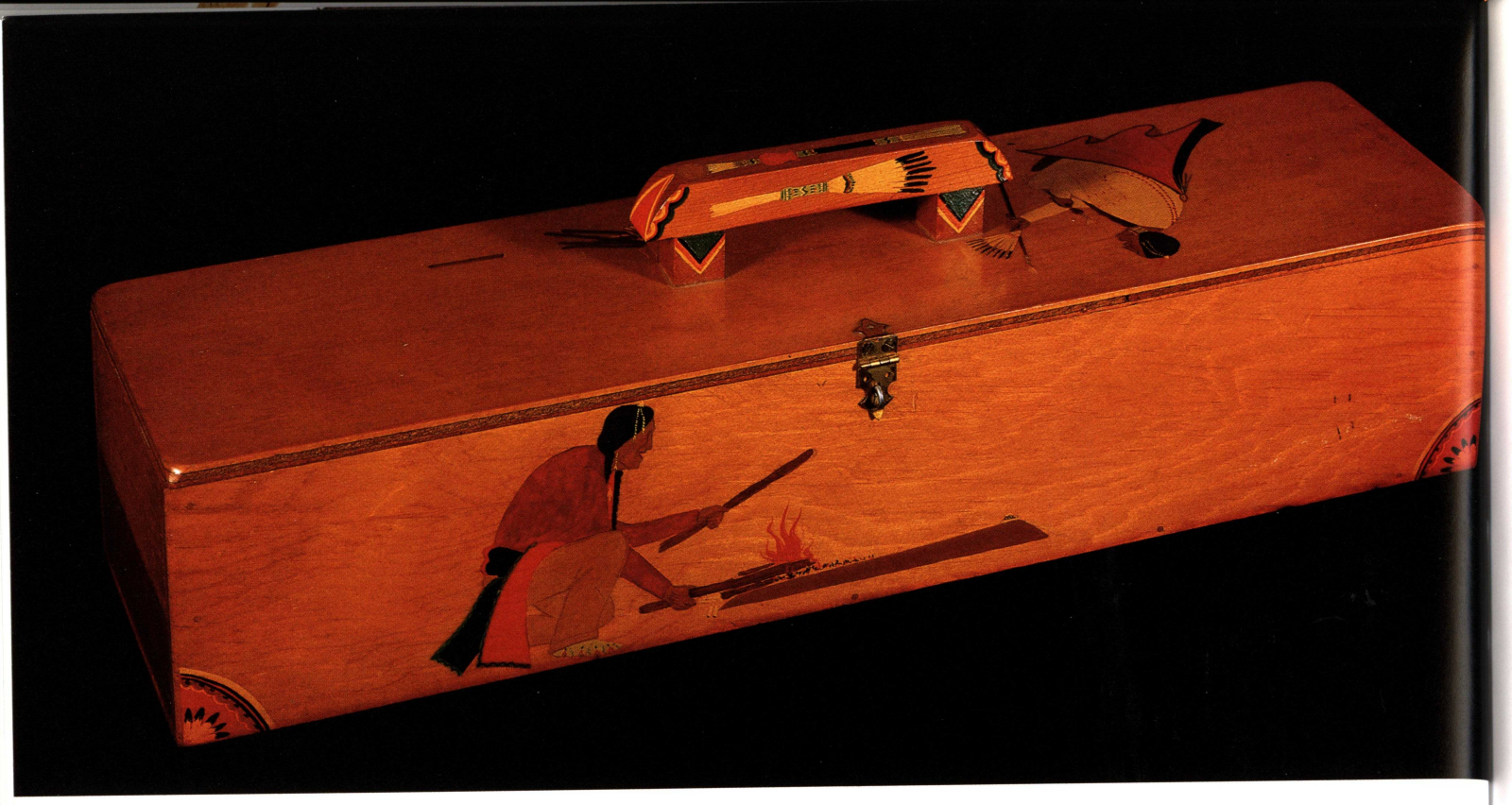
Joe said that they had a house meeting at Otto Hamilton's last night. If I had known in time I would have went. I always thought a great deal of his father, Amos Hamilton, and think of him often.

Well dear friend we will be over to see you soon. And may God bless you and keep you till we meet again.

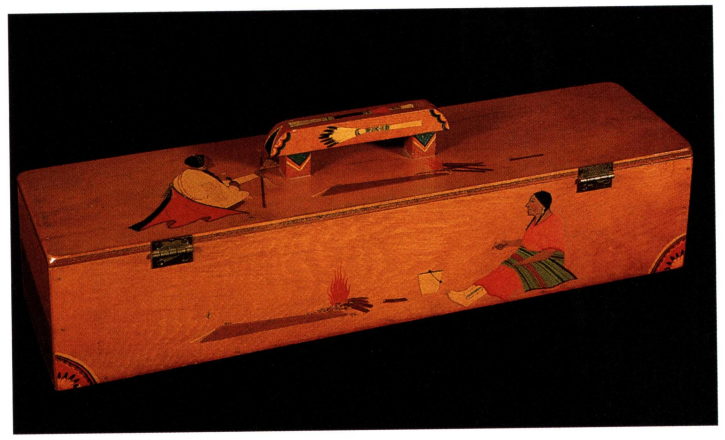
Your Friend.
Frank Doles
15 1/2 N. Main St.
Tulsa, Okla.

And Joe.

Personal letter Gilcrease Museum 77.44a-b



PEYOTE BOX
DUTCH SILVERHORN, KIOWA,
ANADARKO, OKLAHOMA
PLYWOOD, BRASS HARDWARE, PAINT
MUSEUM OF THE GREAT PLAINS
92.11.1165A
TINGLEY COLLECTION



Dutch Silverhorn was one of the most prolific Peyote box artists in Oklahoma. A talented silversmith, Silverhorn also produced gourd rattles and fans. Always working on plywood, Silverhorn produced highly decorated boxes that combine paintings of narrative scenes from the religious ceremony, realistic renderings of the ritual instruments and symbolic representations of birds and other natural elements. He also used carving techniques to enhance the outlines of design elements. This is a fine example of Silverhorn's work which exhibits an engaging composition and sophisticated technique. This box was for sale in Tingley's Indian Store in Anadarko, Oklahoma.[10] The figures on the box represent the central officials of the ceremony: on the lid is the Roadman, or leader of the service; on the front panel is the Fireman, who maintains the fire in strict accordance with ritual procedures; and on the back panel, the Midnight Water Woman is shown using a corn husk cigarette to pray for the water that participants partake of at midnight. The crescent-shaped earthen altar of the Native American Church, ritual fire, and lighter stick appear in each vignette to locate these individuals in their appropriate places during the religious service. The handle is handmade and decorated with geometric designs, fans, and rattles.

PEYOTE BOX FOR CHILD'S USE
YANKTON, SOUTH DAKOTA
COMMERCIAL PENCIL BOX,
BRASS HARDWARE, PAINT
GILCREASE MUSEUM 84.2857A

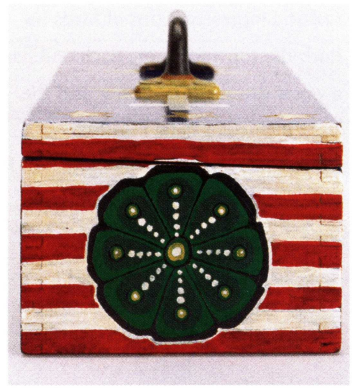
This box is an excellent example of the adaptation of commercial wooden boxes for use as Peyote boxes. Smaller in size than is usual, the box, and the fan and rattle it contains, suggest its intended use by a child. The patriotic theme of the painted box is well executed, with the star and cross motifs on the lid indicative of the incorporation of Christian elements in both Peyotism and the art forms it inspires. The ends of the box are decorated with images of the Peyote cactus, a consistent design element in paintings, jewelry and beadwork created by Peyote artists.





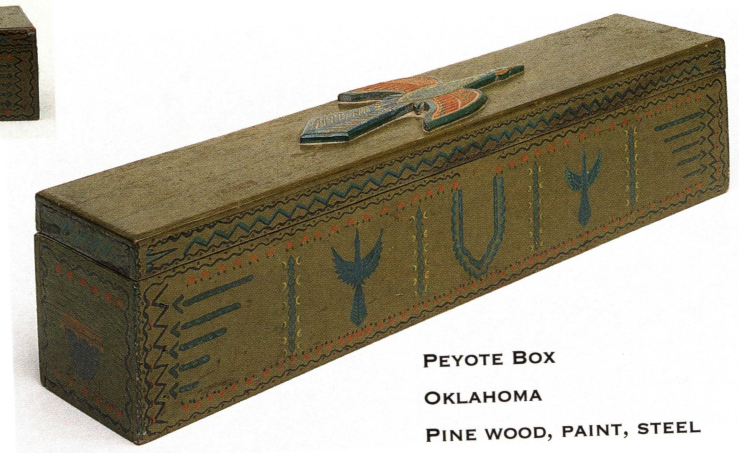
PEYOTE BOX
JOHNNY HOOF, ARAPAHO,
OKLAHOMA
LEATHER, METAL HARDWARE, PAINT
HARDING BIG BOW COLLECTION
GILCREASE MUSEUM 87.60

This box was a gift to Mr. Big Bow from his daughters. It was commissioned from the artist through McKees Indian Store in Anadarko, Oklahoma. The artist also made belts, wallets, and purses with stamped and painted designs over their entire surfaces. The vivid colors and well-executed carving and stamp work on Mr. Hoof's boxes are unique, and his work was highly collectable. This box presents a scene from the religious service when water is brought into the tipi at dawn. Several designs of the peyote cactus and stylized waterbirds are also incorporated into the decoration of the box. I have only seen one other leather box in use, which was decorated with stamped designs that were not painted.









PEYOTE BOX
OKLAHOMA
PINE WOOD, PAINT, STEEL HINGES
GILCREASE MUSEUM 7327.249

This is a beautiful box, possibly a commercial wooden box that has been adapted. The outside surfaces are painted green with a wooden appliqué of a Peyote bird on the top of the lid. There is no indication that the box ever had a handle or clasp. The box is decorated with a combination of symbolic and realistic representations of birds on both the top and front. Each end has a water drum painted on it and the back includes a male figure drumming and another singing, with a realistic rendering of a scissortail in the middle. The use of abstract designs to frame the front and back panels is quite effective and original.

NOTES

1. The exhibition and associated publications and programs were made possible through the generous support of the Phillips Petroleum Company, Founders and Associates, Incorporated and The Oklahoma Arts Council. See Swan 1999a.

2. Referred to as Peyote art, this important genre of Native American art subsumes a wide range of media, techniques, and forms, ranging from the metalsmithing of jewelry to easel paintings. Peyote arts often incorporate multiple media and a wide range of techniques. Nowhere is this better illustrated than in the gourd rattles and feather fans that are emblematic of the religion and its expressive culture. Their design and construction incorporates carving, beadworking, leatherworking and the cleaning, preparation and decoration of the natural materials utilized. See Wiedman 1985; Ellison 1993; Swan 1999a.

3. The name "Native American Church" is used in contemporary American Indian communities as both a generic term for the religion of all Peyotists and in reference to the numerous, chartered organizations that provide formal representation for their members. Today, these organizations include the Native American Church of Oklahoma, the Native American Church of the United States, the Native American Church of North America, the Native American Church of Navajoland, the Native American Church of South Dakota, the First Native American Church of Coleville Tribes, and numerous other state and tribal organizations and hundreds of local chapters. For the history of these see Slotkin 1956, Stewart 1987 and La Barre 1989.

4. Descriptions and photographs of decorated Peyote boxes can be found in Feder 1967; Fintzelberg 1969; Coe 1976, 1986; Ellison 1993, Swan 1999a.

5. Individuals without boxes utilize a variety of methods to protect prayer feathers and fans in storage and transport. These include thin cardboard sleeves and tie boxes. Women often bring canvas tote bags into meetings to carry cardboard feather sleeves, shawls, and other personal items.

6. One of my favorite boxes of this type is used by a Church member from South Dakota. It is a red Craftsman toolbox, the style with a hipped roof lid that has been customized by adding red and blue felt as a lining for the box and lid. A single photograph of the owner's brother, who was serving in the U.S. Navy, was secured at the center of the inside lid.

7. Cedar and other wooden boxes are also used by powwow dancers and participants in the modern Gourd Dance to house feathers, fans, jewelry, sashes, rattles, and other items.

8. See Swan 1999b for a discussion of the acquisitions initiative and for examples of contemporary Peyote arts.

9. See Swan 1999a for a discussion of color symbolism in Peyote arts.

10. Tingley's Indian Store was an important outlet for Indian arts from ca. 1903 until it closed in the 1980s. Many museum collections benefited from acquisitions made at the store. In the 1940s, the Denver Art Museum, under the leadership of Curator Frederick Douglas, built an excellent collection of Peyote arts through Jake Tingley, the original proprietor of the store. The contents of the store as they existed in the early 1990s were acquired by the Museum of the Great Plains in Lawton, Oklahoma. The majority of the inventory, fixtures and furnishings from the store were installed in an interpretive exhibition at the museum.

11. James Howard (1965: 51) suggests that Peyotism is largely responsible for the continuation of several traditional art techniques, and in particular bas-relief carving as seen on Peyote boxes, drumsticks and other items.

Join the Thomas Gilcrease Museum Association today and enjoy the benefits of membership all year long.

Please mail to: Membership Office
Thomas Gilcrease Museum Association
1400 Gilcrease Museum Road
Tulsa, Oklahoma 74127-2100

Thank you for supporting Gilcrease Museum.

Benefits of a Basic Membership for a family of two adults and children under the age of 18 include:

Free admission to select special events and exhibitions.
A subscription to the twice-a-year ***Gilcrease Journal.***
A quarterly, members-only **newsletter and calendar** of events, with information about the Museum and advance notice of upcoming exhibitions and programs of interest to the entire family.
A 10% **discount on Museum Shop purchases,** including mail orders.
Exclusive, **members-only invitations** to exhibition preview parties, lectures and other special events.
Member discounts for educational programs.
Special travel opportunities.
And much more!

QUESTIONS? PLEASE CALL THE MEMBERSHIP OFFICE AT 918 / 596-2758.

MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

Yes! We'll join and enjoy the benefits and privileges of Membership in the Thomas Gilcrease Museum Association.

Mr./Mrs./Dr./Miss/Ms._____
(Please circle the title(s) and print your name(s) above as you would like them to appear in our records.)
Address_____
City_____ State_____ Zip_____
Daytime telephone_____
❑ My (our) check made payable to the Thomas Gilcrease Museum Association is enclosed.
❑ Please charge my (our) ❑ VISA ❑ MasterCard ❑ American Express
Card Number_____Exp. Date_____
Signature_____

Category of Membership desired:

❑ Associate $50
❑ National Associate *(outside Oklahoma)* $40
❑ Trapper $75
❑ Explorer $100
❑ Settler $200
❑ Prospector $500
❑ Moran Circle $1,000
❑ Catlin Circle $1,500
❑ Russell Circle $2,500
❑ Remington Circle $5,000

❑ My company provides a matching gifts program. I have enclosed the necessary forms or information.

GIFT MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

We would like to share the benefits and privileges of Membership in the Thomas Gilcrease Museum Association as a gift to a friend.

Mr./Mrs./Dr./Miss/Ms._____
(Please circle the title(s) and print the recipient's name(s) above as they should appear in our records.)
Gift recipient's address_____
Gift recipient's city_____State_____Zip_____
Gift recipient's daytime telephone_____
❑ A check made payable to the Thomas Gilcrease Museum Association is enclosed.
❑ Please charge my (our) ❑ VISA ❑ MasterCard ❑ American Express
Card Number_____Exp. Date_____
Signature_____

Category of Membership desired:

❑ Associate $50
❑ National Associate *(outside Oklahoma)* $40
❑ Trapper $75
❑ Explorer $100
❑ Settler $200
❑ Prospector $500
❑ Moran Circle $1,000
❑ Catlin Circle $1,500
❑ Russell Circle $2,500
❑ Remington Circle $5,000

My enclosure card should read:_____

BOARD OF DIRECTORS OF THE THOMAS GILCREASE MUSEUM ASSOCIATION

Jack E. Short, *Chairman of the Board*
Debbie J. Branch, *President*
Donald F. Marlar, *President-Elect*
Roger B. Whaley, *Secretary*
Howard E. Janzen, *Treasurer*

Melissa P. Atkinson, *Vice President*
Patricia D. Cappy, *Vice President*
Carole Huff Hicks, *Vice President*
Gail Zarrow Richards, *Vice President*
Lois Romano, *Vice President*
Kathryn Taylor, *Vice President*

Directors
Peer L. Anderson
Philip W. Baxter
Everett E. Berry
Linda L. Bump
Rosemary Clinton
Laura Stauffer Daniel
Brenda B. Davis
Dennis A. Dowell
Robert G. Failing
Gregory A. Gray
Lamar Guillory
E. Blake Hastings
Walter H. Helmerich III
Robert G. Hunt
Susan B. Jackson
Julie S. Kruger
Marcy Lawless
Patrick D. Lester, M.D.
Elizabeth Peterson
Kathleen C. Rooney
Melissa H. Sartin
Milann Siegfried
Steve Turnbo
Thomas A. Vining
James A. White
Randi Stuart Wightman
John H. Williams
David E. Winslow
Joe Worley
Maxine F. Zarrow

EX-OFFICIO MEMBERS

Carolyn Crawley, *Gillie President*

DIRECTORS EMERITUS

Lindsay L. Alexander
Robert F. Biolchini
Marian R. Bovaird
Neva Brannin
Mary Jean Brett
William F. Fisher, Jr.
Gregory Flanagan
Bonnie Henke
Burt B. Holmes
Paul H. Johnson
Patricia W. Langholz
James C. Leake
Roxana R. Lorton
Patsy L. Lyon
Robert L. Parker
Joan Stauffer
Jon R. Stuart
Charles E. Thornton
Terese T. Williams
Jack Zarrow

BOARD OF TRUSTEES OF THE THOMAS GILCREASE MUSEUM ASSOCIATION

Jana L. Shoulders, *Chairman*
Barbara Eikner
William F. Fisher, Jr.
Walter H. Helmerich, III
M. Susan Savage

C O V E R

FRONT: PEYOTE BOX FOR CHILD'S USE (DETAIL, SIDE VIEW). YANKTON, SOUTH DAKOTA. COMMERCIAL PENCIL BOX, BRASS HARDWARE, PAINT. GILCREASE MUSEUM COLLECTION.

BACK: DETAIL OF PEYOTE BOX AND ITS CONTENTS. OSAGE, OKLAHOMA, IN ACTIVE USE CA. 1940s. GILCREASE MUSEUM COLLECTION 84.1166.

THOMAS GILCREASE MUSEUM ASSOCIATION

1400 GILCREASE MUSEUM ROAD
TULSA OKLAHOMA

