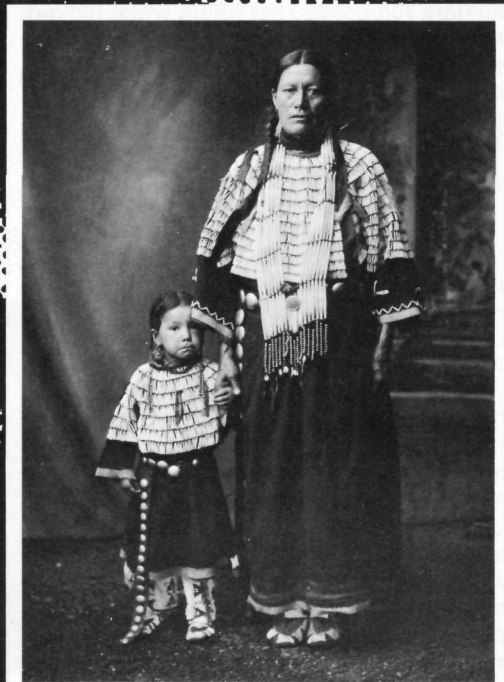


NATIVE AMERICAN ARTS



Two-Hatchet (Kiowa) and Mrs. Left-Hand and girl (Dakota). National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution.

Among Native Americans, the creation of art for its own sake was rare. Beauty was not confined to a small part of living. As a result, artistic expression was joined with the creation of articles for daily and ritual life. The form of these objects and the materials from which they were constructed and decorated were as diverse as these people and the land.

The Woodlands people from the forested regions of the Northeast and Great Lakes used the most available material, trees, in a variety of ways. They used birchbark to cover wood-framed shelters and canoes, and they fashioned it into distinctive storage containers. With other woods they made bowls, utensils, and tools.

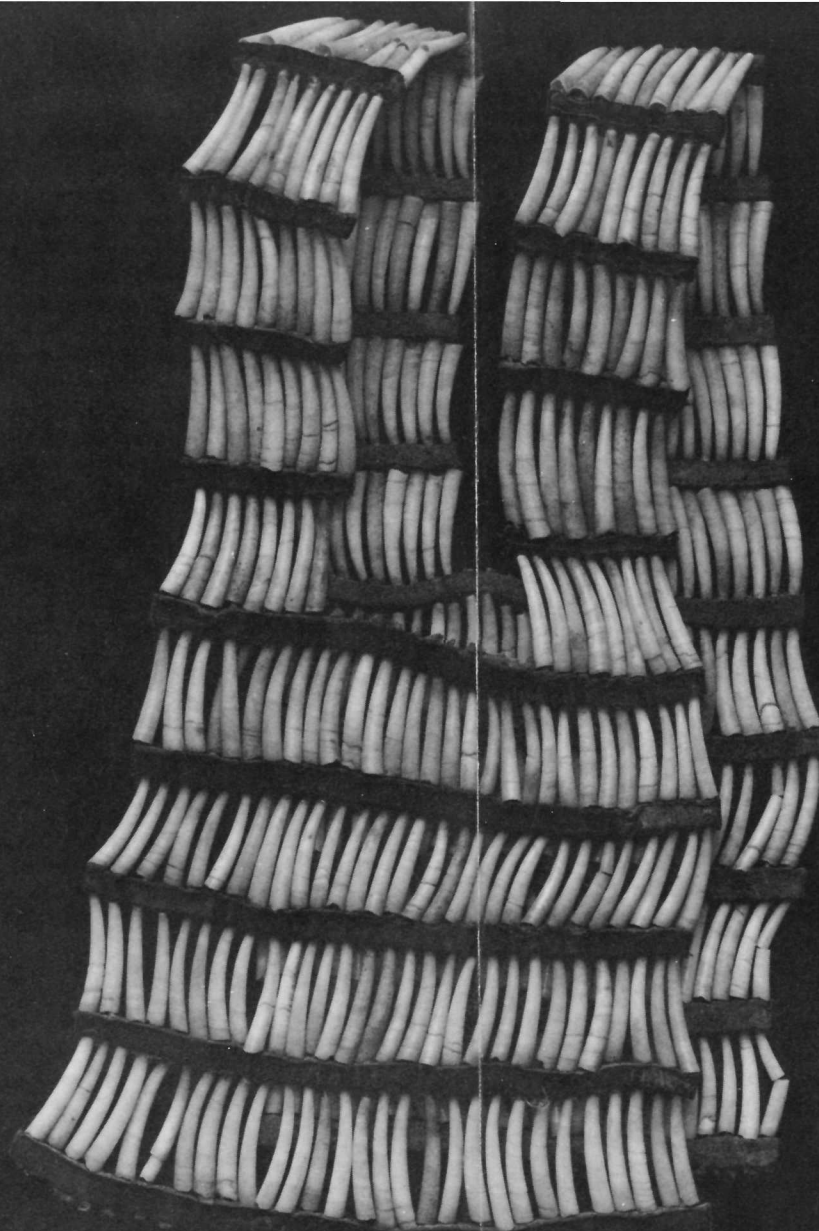
On the Plains, a region of little wood, skilled hunters depended on the plentiful buffalo for robes, tipi covers, and shields; every part of this animal—its horns, bones, meat, and entrails—had a use. Living a sedentary agrarian life, the Pueblo people of the Southwest made extensive use of pottery, too fragile and heavy to have been practical in the nomadic Plains way of life.

Everywhere the natural environment was a rich resource for decorative materials. Feathers, claws, natural dyes, furs, porcupine quills, and many other materials enhanced the beauty of objects and often gave them special meaning.

Intertribal trade of decorated objects and rare materials was prevalent. The dentalium shells of the Crow necklace to the right and those adorning the yokes of the dresses of Mrs. Left Hand and the little girl on the left

were traded overland from the Pacific and were prized by Plains people for their beauty and rarity. After contact with Europeans, glass beads, woven materials, commercial dyes, and metal tools and utensils were traded for furs or purchased. Besides providing colors that had been unavailable before and creating possibilities for design innovations, the beads made it easier to decorate a garment than the traditional process of embroidering with porcupine quills. On the other hand, the old ways were often retained because they satisfied tradition, personal preference, or simply resulted in a superior product.

In traditional Native American societies, the division of men's and women's work was well defined. Although women participated in many religious activities, men generally made ritual objects and articles for activities closely associated with religion, such as hunting and warfare. On the Plains, men painted buffalo or elk hides depicting representational subjects, usually war exploits or hunting, while women decorated hides with geometric designs. Women made those things necessary to maintain daily life, implements for food gathering, preparation, and storage, and all the family's clothing. They thus were involved in weaving, basketry, and pottery. The skill and creativity with which women produced these articles brought them personal wealth and prestige. In this century, potters Maria Martinez of San Ildefonso Pueblo and Lucy Lewis of Acoma Pueblo and Washo basketmaker Datsolalee are representative of many Native American women who have perpetuated these artistic traditions.



The David T. Vernon Collection of Native American Arts emphasizes the arts of tribes from the northern Plains and western Woodlands created mainly between 1850 and 1925. The people of the western Woodlands such as the Chippewa, Kickapoo, Menomini, Potawatomi, Winnebago, Sauk and Fox inhabited the forested land of the Great Lakes area while the northern Plains grasslands was home to the Dakota, Blackfeet, Cheyenne, Arapaho, and Crow. The main exception to these regions in the collection are the baskets made by tribes of the Southwest, California, and Northwest Coast.

David Vernon formed his collection over most of his life. His interest in Native American culture began as a boy in Illinois with a discovery of Sauk and Fox arrowheads. This interest grew as Vernon became acquainted with northern Plains culture while working in Glacier and Yellowstone National Parks and, at 18, on ranches in Wyoming and on the Crow reservation in Montana. Later, as a commercial artist, he began collecting in earnest, visiting many reservations. The preservation of our Native American heritage became his prime concern.

In 1967, the collection was acquired by Jackson Hole Preserve, Incorporated, and made available for display in Grand Teton National Park by Laurance S. Rockefeller, president. The museum at Colter Bay was opened and dedicated in June 1972. Vernon's wish to display the collection in the West, the land of its creation, had thus been fulfilled before his death in 1973.

**Grand Teton National Park
National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior**

THE VERNON COLLECTION

The David T. Vernon Collection of Native American Arts at Colter Bay is loosely organized into various categories, from ornamentation to baskets and vessels. We hope these brief descriptions will serve as a guide to the museum and help you understand how these pieces were made and used.

1 Personal adornment took many forms and served the purposes of ceremony, display of wealth and social rank, belief in the power of an amulet, or simply the pleasure of wearing a beautiful object. Jewelry was fashioned of silver or beads, both obtained through trade, or any adaptable material. The elaborate masks and headgear represent many tribes.

2 Among northern tribes, the smoking of the pipe was often ceremonial and played a significant role in many social and religious events. Reflecting this importance, the ceremonial pipe and its accessories—cleaners, tampers, and storage bags—were highly decorated. The pipe bowl, sometimes carved in an effigy form, was often of catlinite, a red stone quarried near Pipestone, Minn. Feathers, fur, beads, dyed porcupine quills, and horsehair trimmed the often intricate pipe stems.

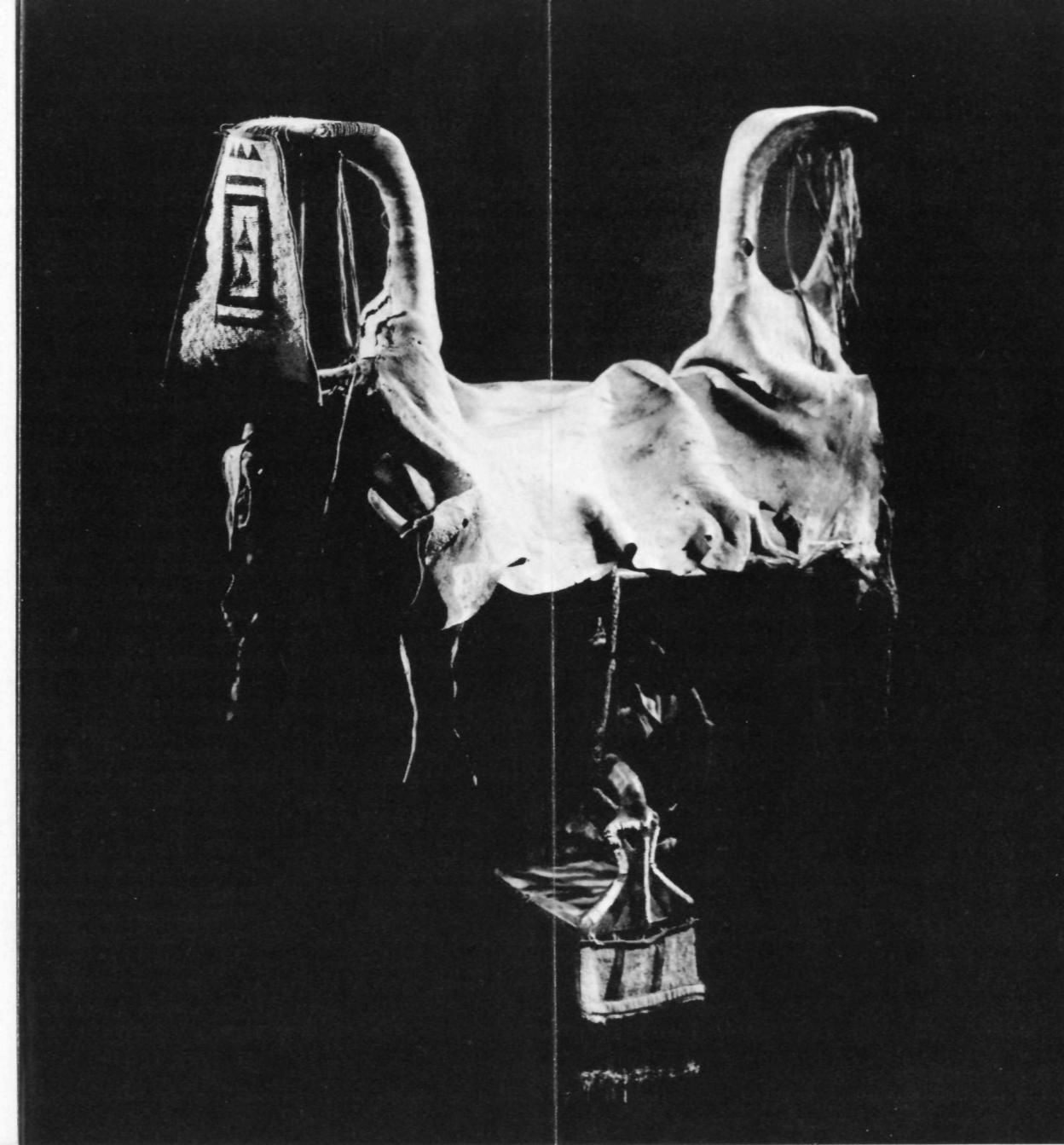
Sashes were popular apparel among many tribes. Usually worn as belts, they were also wrapped around the head turbanlike or hung over the shoulder. Before Europeans introduced commercial yarns, beads, and looms, Native Americans wove sashes of vegetal and animal fibers by finger weaving, netting, and braiding. These earlier techniques continued to be used with the new yarns.

The regalia of warfare was especially impressive on the Plains. Here nomadic life gave rise to intertribal wars and alliances for control of hunting territory as well as tribal and personal accumulation of wealth and prestige. The latter was achieved not only through killing but also by daring deeds such as raiding horses close to an enemy camp or “counting coup,” touching an enemy with a bare hand or coup stick such as the one with six eagle feathers that is on display. Eagle feathers often indicated military success; the “war bonnet” is a classic example. On a shield, a warrior would paint protective designs symbolic of supernatural powers primarily revealed to him in dreams or visions.

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5 Besides a variety of clothing, this display incorporates several cradleboard covers from the Plains, made by female members of the baby's family and highly valued for their fine craftsmanship. Notice the dentalium shell necklace described on the front of the folder.

For centuries, Native Americans made implements of stone, wood, bone, and horn. Later, metal was available through European traders. Beauty of form or applied decoration often denoted a special function; the spoons and ladles like the one shown above are from the Woodlands and Northwest Coast and were used at ceremonial feasts. The wooden heddle, also pictured, was used to weave beaded sashes. The display also includes tweezers to pluck whiskers and a pigmented, porous buffalo bone, a Plains paintbrush.



7 The horse was introduced to North America in the early 1500s by Spanish explorers of the Southwest. Through barter and theft, horses spread to the northern Plains by the 1700s and revolutionized Plains life. More game could be followed all year and as a result the population grew. Greater material wealth also could be more easily transported as the horse replaced the dog as a beast of burden. Wealth soon became determined in terms of horses. For ceremony, the horse was adorned with decorated martingales, cruppers, and bridle rosettes. The leather-covered wooden saddle, shown at left, reflects Spanish influence in its form and was made by the Crow, renowned for their horse trappings.

Loving adults made toys for children's pleasure and learning. These toys reflect traditional tribal weapons, costumes, and tools. Notice the humor in the dolls' faces. Sports such as gambling and lacrosse and guessing games were also favorite pastimes. Percussion and wind instruments were played primarily for ceremonial occasions.

8

9 Moccasins differ greatly in construction and decoration and often can be regionally distinguished by the soles. A pointed toed, soft buckskin sole denotes Woodlands footwear, and sturdier rawhide soles, the Plains and Southwest. Soles in the Southwest also extended up around the foot for further protection. Plains beadwork patterns were usually geometric though sometimes floral like Woodlands patterns. The silk applique on the Sauk and Fox moccasins, right, was adapted from the European style of piecework.

10 A great variety of pouches and bags were fashioned by Native Americans for personal adornment and storage. The larger pieces, including the painted rawhide parfleche, below, were used for storage and transportation of articles. Some of the tiniest pieces were used to hold charms, tools, or pigments. In the Woodlands, bags were woven of yarn, string, and moose or buffalo hair mixed with native vegetal fiber; cornhusk bags were woven in the Plateau region west of the Rockies. Bags from both areas had different designs on each side. Applied decoration of ribbon, cloth, dyed horsehair, tinklers (tin cones that jingle when moved), embroidered moosehair, quills, and beads were widespread. The large bandoliers, or shoulder bags, are of the Woodlands.

11 To survive in a world where life was uncertain, assistance was sought from powerful spiritual beings inhabiting the natural environment. Knowledge of the power of these beings and of its use and maintenance was usually revealed in dreams and visions, obtained from a medicine man, or received from a relative. Materials embodying the real and symbolic nature of beings such as the eagle and the grizzly bear were used to make ceremonial objects. Such objects included fetishes, medicine bags, and bundles which were highly personalized and regarded as sacred. They contained objects such as stones, skins, feathers, bones, and other animal parts that were believed to hold special powers generally to ensure the welfare of the individual or tribe.

12 Among all tribes, careful attention was given to clothing on ceremonial occasions and during other special activities like warfare. The design, materials, and decoration of a garment identified the tribe, status, and wealth of the wearer as well as the pride of craftsmanship and creativity of the maker. The European influence in the design of the boy's buckskin jacket and Woodlands blouse is clear while the form of the Plains woman's dress and Apache fringed cape is traditional. The Dakota war shirt is painted and decorated with embroidered panels of porcupine quill and tassels of human hair.

Basketry and containers of clay, wood, and bark were used primarily for food gathering, preparation, serving, and storage. The coiled Apache basket, left, was used for the latter purpose. Women, predominately, using natural grasses and fibers, wove by plaiting, twining, and coiling. Designs could be made an integral part of the basket by changing technique, materials, or by applying dyed colors or decoration to the surface. From many regions, basketry also provided such utilitarian objects as floor coverings, cradles, pitch-covered water carriers, and hats as well as ceremonial vessels. The pottery displayed is from the Southwest; the styles and decoration distinguish individual pueblos and tribes. The round bowls carved from hardwood burls and the containers of bark are from the Woodlands.

