

THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
11 WEST 53RD STREET, NEW YORK
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EXHIBITION OF INDIAN ART OF THE UNITED STATES OPENS
AT MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

The Museum of Modern Art, 11 West 53 Street, opens to the public today (Wednesday, January 22) an exhibition of Indian Art of the United States. The exhibition, largest and most representative of its kind ever held, has been organized by the Indian Arts and Crafts Board of the United States Department of the Interior with the cooperation of universities and museums of science throughout the country.

The exhibition, comprising approximately one thousand items, has been assembled and installed under the direction of Rene d'Harnoncourt, General Manager of the Indian Arts and Crafts Board in collaboration with Frederic H. Douglas, Curator of Indian Art of the Denver Art Museum, and Henry Klumb, architect. Active support has been given by the Commissioners of the Indian Arts and Crafts Board: John Collier, Chairman; Ebert K. Burlew, Dr. A. V. Kidder, James W. Young and Lorenzo Hubbell. The sponsoring institutions are The United States National Museum, Washington, D.C., and The Royal Ontario Museum of Archaeology, Toronto.

The foreword to the book of the exhibition is by Mrs. Franklin D. Roosevelt, who writes as follows:

The White House
Washington, D. C.

"At this time, when America is reviewing its cultural resources, this book and the exhibit on which it is based open up to us age-old sources of ideas and forms that have never been fully appreciated. In appraising the Indian's past and present achievements, we realize not only that his heritage constitutes part of the artistic and spiritual wealth of this country, but also that the Indian people of today have a contribution to make toward the America of the future.

"In dealing with Indian art of the United States, we find that its sources reach far beyond our borders, both to the north and to the south. Hemispheric interchange of ideas is as old as man on this continent. Long

before Columbus, tribes now settled in Arizona brought traditions to this country that were formed in Alaska and Canada; Indian traders from the foot of the Rocky Mountains exchanged goods and ideas with the great civilizations two thousand miles south of the Rio Grande. Related thoughts and forms that are truly of America are found from the Andes to the Mississippi Valley.

"We acknowledge here a cultural debt not only to the Indians of the United States but to the Indians of both Americas."

(Signed) Eleanor Roosevelt

A span of 20,000 years is bridged by objects in the exhibition. The very earliest are two small salmon-colored stone points, or spear-heads. Another ancient piece is the head of a polar bear carved by an Eskimo from ivory. The age of such prehistoric objects is largely determined by studies of the glacial deposits in which they are found. But even more interesting than these relics of imperishable stone and ivory are a pair of sandals worn some thirteen hundred years ago. Woven of yucca fibre cord in black and red, they still retain their intricate pattern and firm texture. These were made by the Basketmakers of northeastern Arizona.

The exhibition is a cross section of the artistic achievements of the Indians of the United States during the last fifteen hundred years. It contains the finest obtainable examples of all of the many techniques and design styles which have been perfected throughout this period. Some of the more important prehistoric objects shown are great stone pipes in human form from the prehistoric Indians of Oklahoma; exquisite wooden carvings of animal heads from ancient Florida; superb pottery in a bewildering range of shapes. Outstanding in the exhibits from the historic period are finely woven and embroidered textiles from many tribes; examples of the beaded and quilled skin clothing; and examples of the grotesque and elaborate wood sculpture of Southeast Alaska.

The modern items include silver cups and goblets by Navaho silversmiths and service plates of black or red pottery suitable for contemporary dinner tables. The adaptability to contemporary fashions of Indian fabrics, bead and braid work and ribbon applique made by the modern Indian is shown in an evening cape and dress and a ski suit which incorporates the Indian work as part of the design of the clothes.

Simultaneously with the opening of the exhibition the Museum

is publishing an elaborate and comprehensive catalog with 16 color plates, 200 halftones. The book contains 220 pages and has been written by Frederic H. Douglas and Rene d'Harnoncourt. Although the book is complete in itself it also serves as a guide to the exhibition, the arrangement of which it parallels. Like the exhibition it is built around the following general subjects: Tribal Traditions and Progress; Indian Art; Indian Origins and History. In the field of prehistoric art it treats as individual groups The Carvers of the Far West; The Carvers of the Northwest Coast; The Engravers of the Arctic; The Sculptors of the East; The Painters of the Southwest. The living traditions of the Indian are divided into the following sections: The Pueblo Cornplanters; The Navaho Shepherds; The Apache Mountain People; The Desert Dwellers of the Southwest; The Seed Gatherers of the Far West; The Hunters of the Plains; The Woodsmen of the East; The Fishermen of the Northwest Coast; The Eskimo Hunters of the Arctic. There is also a section in the book on Indian Art For Modern Living. The end papers show Indian designs and give a chart of the chronological relationship between the discovery of the various tribal groups and their cultural development.

In the introduction to the book the authors comment specifically on the art of the Indian as follows:

"Fine art in the sense of art for art's sake is a concept that is almost unknown in Indian cultures. There are very few aboriginal art forms that have no established function in tribal life. Some of the miniature ivory carvings of the Eskimo may be an exception to the rule since there is no evidence that they serve any specific purpose, but by and large every product made by an Indian artist has a function and is created by him primarily to serve a given end. Artistic merit is simply considered a necessary by-product of good workmanship.

"The close relationship between aesthetic and technical perfection gives the work of most Indian artists a basic unity rarely found in the products of an urban civilization.... The Indian artist, whose simple tools have always forced him to study his raw material in order to discover just what treatment will best utilize its inherent characteristics, has developed a sense of the fitness of form and material that gives distinction to all his work....

"Beyond general statements little can be said about Indian art that would fit all the various tribes and tribal groups, since each area of Indian culture has an art of its own. Indian art always was and still is regional in the deepest sense of the word. The artists of the Northwest Coast not only portray men and animals of that region but also convey in form and design the very essence of the gloomy fog-bound coast with its dark forests and its

mysterious animation. Even the Pueblo potter, whose most abstract forms abstain completely from representation, still achieves effects in color and design that are essentially of the Southwest and could not be associated with any other part of the country. Indian art from coast to coast actually recreates the land, America, in every one of its countless variations."

Many museums and institutions throughout the country have cooperated in lending material for the exhibition. Individual lenders include:

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