Detail of 86

4

The West

Lakota cosmology merges with modern physics in one sentence that describes the mystery of life: '*Taku skan skan*', rendered imperfectly into English as 'Something that moves moves'. This one phrase encapsulates the idea that the entire universe is in motion, as well as infused with power and mystery.[1] Life was created out of the primal rock that squeezed from within itself its own blue blood to make water and the dome of the heavens, and developed out of the differentiation of earth and sky, sun and moon. Notably, the spatial and temporal ordering of the world was only completed when the Four Winds (represented in Lakota stories as four young brothers) established the cardinal directions and the division of time into day and night and the annual round of lunar months and seasons.

Contemporary artist Colleen Cutschall demonstrates the ritually active potential of a postmodern art installation and the profundity of Lakota epistemology in 'Sons of the Wind' [71]. She depicts the directions as four pillars, tinted with symbolic colours, that link the airy realm of sky and birds to the human domain of solid land. These columns also recall the centring axis of the Sun Dance pole, which is so important to Plains world-view. For some viewers, the columns will also evoke the fundamental orders of the classical tradition in Graeco-Roman art. Cutschall's work is a sophisticated, almost minimalist, construction as well as an unambiguous visualization of Lakota spiritual beliefs. On the Great Plains, as in other Native American traditions, one can only understand one's place as a human being by understanding how the cosmos has been generated.

Introduction

Most outsiders, in considering the Native arts of the American West, do not think about such sophisticated cosmological concepts. Instead, the image of the Plains Indian in fringed hide clothing and feather bonnet comes to mind, perhaps the most common stereotype in the minds of people worldwide when thinking of indigenous America. Yet, in the long history of Native life in the West, this image belongs to a relatively brief period, lasting only from about 1700–1870 CE. At the beginning of this era, wild herds of horses, introduced by the Spanish

71 Colleen Cutschall (b. 1951), Lakota

'Sons of the Wind' (tubing, acrylic, papier mâché), 1992

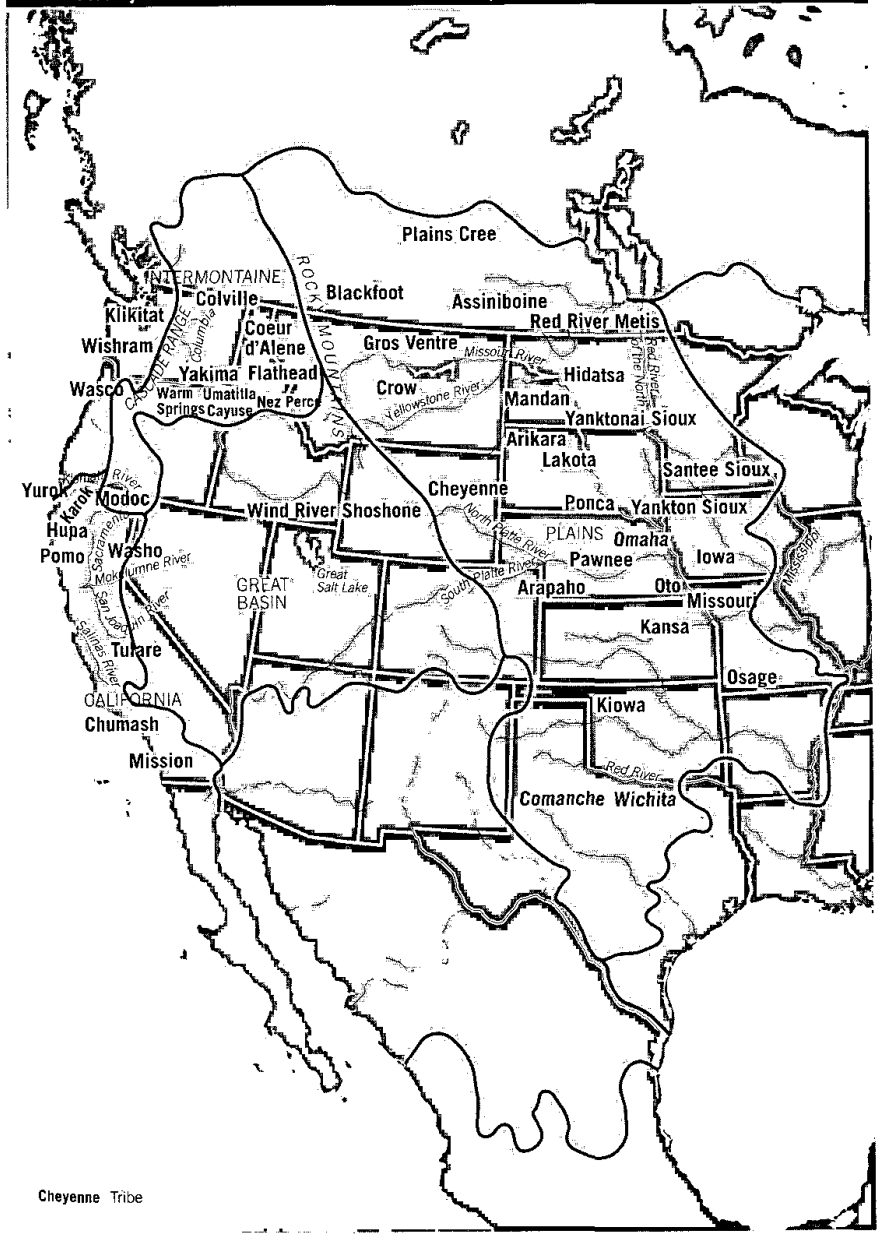
All of Cutschall's work is inspired by the great oral traditions of the Lakota which describe the origin of the world and the supernaturals. The physical experience of this ambitious installation is one of spatial harmony achieved through the understanding of the structure of the cosmos.

to the Americas less than two centuries before, had migrated north. They became available to peoples living at the western and southern margins of the tall grasslands long inhabited by the great, migrating herds of buffalo which were so central to the economy and spirituality of Plains peoples. With horses, and guns (acquired first from tribes further east engaged in the fur trade, and later through direct trade with whites), Plains peoples were able to hunt buffalo in new, efficient ways.

The buffalo-hunting life was a rich and generous one, encouraging the development of a multitude of visual arts in skin, hide, quillwork, featherwork, painting, carving, and beadwork. These represent some of the foremost achievements of Native art. The almost exclusive focus of outsiders on the male warrior societies and their associated arts reflects a particular fixation of romantic nineteenth-century travellers and twentieth-century collectors and has distorted our understanding of Native arts as they were made and used over a far longer period and a greater geographical range in the West.

This chapter considers the arts of diverse cultures in the western half of North America, including the peoples of the Great Plains, the Intermontaine region, and the Great Basin and California (see map). The peoples of these regions and their arts suffered unusually rapid alterations during colonization and settlement by Euro-Americans. From the Spanish settlements in coastal California in the eighteenth century to the incursions on to the Great Plains by Euro-Americans and Euro-Canadians in the nineteenth, many indigenous peoples were

Location of major tribes of the West as referred to in this chapter



Cheyenne Tribe

removed from their homelands and either resettled on distant reservations or forced to accept greatly reduced access to their ancestral lands. Intensive Christian missionizing led to the diminution of arts used for traditional ceremonial purposes, and by the mid-nineteenth century, many of the arts being made were part of a larger intercultural exchange between whites and Natives.

This chapter is devoted principally to art on the Great Plains because it has been so central to this Euro-American image of the Indian. Focusing on such neglected questions as the importance of art as an expression of complementary gender roles in society, we will examine how these roles and artistic expressions have shifted in response to the new social realities of the last 125 years or so. We will also look at the various ways in which quillwork, beadwork, and fibre arts have been central to the expression of cultural values. The uni-dimensional image of the warrior, looming so large in the Euro-American imagination, has not only crowded out discussion of some of these other arts but has also distorted our understanding of men's arts, which are not simply about military prowess. Moreover, it has left no room for an understanding of the complex intellectual underpinnings of indigenous art and life. For example, cosmological concerns and a profound interest in history and time-keeping underlie many of the pictorial arts made by men on the Great Plains.

The Plains extends from the boundary of the Eastern Woodlands (just west of the Mississippi River) to the Rocky Mountains in the west. Stretching from Southern Canada and sweeping down to the Mexican border of Texas, this land was inhabited by more than two dozen different ethnic groups during the post-contact period, among them the Assiniboine, Plains Cree, Lakota, Crow, Mandan, Pawnee, Kiowa, Arapaho, and Cheyenne. Linguistic and archaeological evidence suggests that the historic cultures of the Great Plains grew out of other, prior, ethnic configurations. Some, like the Shoshone and Comanche, arrived from the Great Basin to the west. Others, such as the Lakota and related Siouan peoples, pushed westwards out of the Great Lakes region due to population pressures from other Native groups and whites. Others were migrants moving northwest from the great Mississippian cultures of the Southeast, bringing with them an influential legacy of concepts of leadership and symbolic expression.

Some groups, like the Mandan and Hidatsa, have lived on the Plains for more than a millennium, in semi-permanent villages of spacious earth lodges [**82**]. They had a mixed economy combining horticulture, hunting, and fishing. The Lakota, Crow, and others were true nomads, whose temporary camps followed the migrating herds of buffalo and other game animals across the grassy landscape. Even their architecture was eminently portable, consisting of painted hide lodges or tipis draped over sturdy poles [**79**].

72
Prehistoric shell gorget, Calf Mound, Manitoba, *c.*1500 CE

Archaeology reveals that most of the peoples of the Plains had been involved in extensive trade networks for centuries before the arrival of Europeans: shells from California and the Gulf of Mexico, obsidian and flint from distant quarries, are found together with evidence of intellectual and artistic transmissions. The worked shell pendant excavated from a Plains site in Manitoba, for example, features the forked eye motif that is ubiquitous in ancient Mississippian iconography [**72**]; see also Chapter 3. In Ted Brasser's words, on the Great Plains 'Mississippian cosmology was grafted on to the world-view and rituals of northern buffalo hunters'.[2]

The Spanish explorers who disrupted the Pueblo world in the Southwest (see Chapter 2) also made brief forays on to the Southern and Central Plains. They reported modes of life in the sixteenth century very much like those documented by nineteenth-century explorers and painters. Some communities, like the Wichita, were living in grass-lodge villages while others lived in temporary encampments of dozens of tipis. Everywhere, great herds of buffalo traversed the landscape.

The Plateau or Intermontaine region is a 400-mile-wide area extending from the Cascade Mountains in Western Washington northwards into Southern British Columbia, eastwards into Idaho and Montana, and south to the California border. For centuries it has been the crossroads for many traditions and, predictably, the art styles of this region show correspondences with those of its neighbours in all four directions. Some cultures along the Columbia River had much in common with coastal peoples, while others, further east, were more like their Plains neighbours, including reliance on the horse.

In the area of California and the Great Basin, there are many different ethnic groups living in radically diverse ecological regions, ranging from the rich coastal areas of California to the harsher, more arid interior zone of Nevada. Hunting, fishing, and gathering were the main subsistence strategies here as well, and in the arts there was a great proliferation of basketry, shell, and featherwork used in ceremonial life.

Before the twentieth century, basketry was a central feature of existence, used in all aspects of daily life in the Intermontaine region, California, and the Great Basin. Men caught fish in basketry traps. Women harvested wild seeds using a woven seed beater and a burden basket. Roots were stored in large twined bags. Watertight baskets held liquids, and food was cooked in baskets. Babies were placed in basketry carriers, and various types of baskets were prominent in ceremonies ranging from birth, to marriage, to death. Along with the Southwest, these are among the most renowned basket-producing regions of North America. In addition to their indigenous uses, by the end of the nineteenth century baskets from these regions were a

fundamental part of the lively trade in touristic commodities; indeed, California baskets were among the most prized.

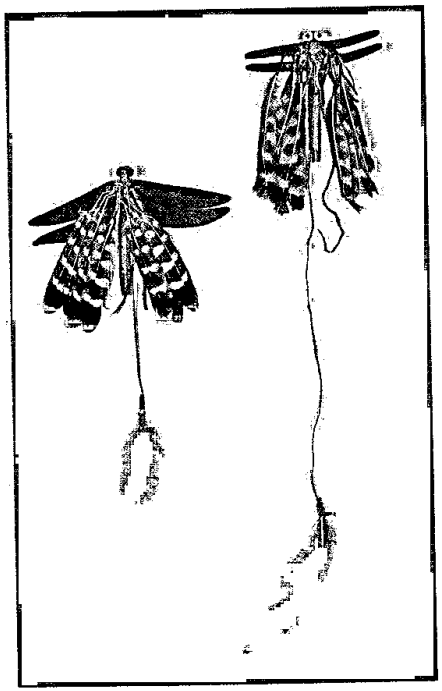
The Great Plains

Until the second half of the nineteenth century, reliance on the buffalo was the defining feature of life across the prairies of Central North America. This animal was the primary source of food, clothing, and shelter for most tribes. Buffalo skin was the medium for almost all arts. Men painted historical and autobiographical accounts on hides and made shields which afforded spiritual as well as physical protection [**80, 81**]. Women made sturdy, portable tipis, storage containers, clothing, and moccasins. Foremost in importance was buffalo hide, although deer, antelope, mountain lion, and other skins were valued as well. Except for the large-scale earth lodges and grass lodges of a few tribes, almost all arts on the plains were eminently portable. The expression of individual identity and achievement through adornment of oneself and one's possessions was one of the most important functions for art. Men, women, children, and horses were all beautifully dressed and adorned with amulets, feathers, claws and other items derived from or modelled upon the natural world [**73**]. A universe of meaning

73 Cheyenne artist

Dragonfly hair ornaments (rawhide, pigment, feathers, and buttons), *c.*1880

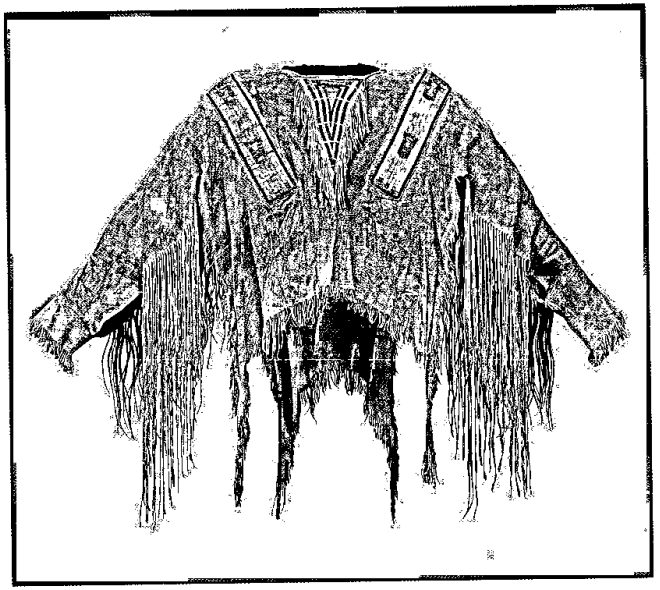
Dragonflies, admired for their speed and agility, are often seen on the shields, clothing, and bodily adornment of Plains Indian men, who desired to emulate such traits when they engaged in warfare and in horse raids. These hair ornaments might have been worn in battle as well as in ceremony.



74 Lakota artists

Man's war shirt (tanned hide, porcupine quills, human hair, pigment, trade beads, and sinew), *c.*1870

All across the Plains in the nineteenth century, men's shirts were decorated with quillwork and painted designs. Here, bearclaw designs are worked into the quilled shoulder strips. Fringes made of human hair locks sometimes represent scalps taken in battle. In other instances, especially among the Lakota, they are often the locks of friends and loved ones, offered in honour of the brave warrior.



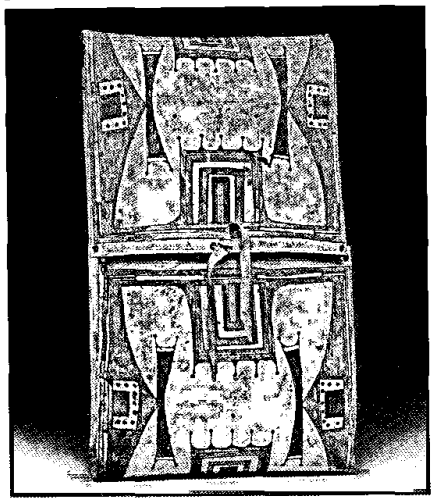
could be discerned in the painted, quilled, and beaded designs on clothing, and in the way that people presented themselves. As mentioned in Chapter 1, phrases in Plains languages reveal that people adorned themselves 'in proper relationship to the gods'; in some cases, powerful items of ceremonial gear were described in words whose approximate translation is 'something sacred wears me', a reversal of ordinary assumptions about who is the wearer and what is worn. Clothing arts also revealed much about cosmological concerns and secular hierarchies. Ideas about the spirit world and humans' relationship to it are expressed in beaded and painted garments. A man's accoutrements composed an easily readable constellation of signs marking his rank in one of the warrior societies, as well as his individual military honours.

Men and women brought complementary skills to the making of ceremonial clothing. In some instances, both men and women might work on one object; a man's war shirt, for example, combined quilled and beaded panels made by women along with painted and fringed ornaments made by men [**74**]. In other cases, as in a pictorial robe depicting a man's war exploits, or a woman's beaded dress, an individual artist would work alone. Men might work communally on a pictorial history, while women would work collectively on a large tipi. We will consider the traditional realms of women's arts and men's arts in turn before examining the changes that have occurred in these two intersecting realms since the Reservation Era.

Women's arts

Individual women tanned hides, and decorated them in geometric and semi-abstract designs which contrast with the narrative, figural designs painted by men (compare **75** and **81**). Women incised and painted abstract designs on their robes, dresses, tipi liners, and storage boxes. Porous buffalo bones, thin reeds, and even buffalo tails were used as brushes. Hematites, clays, carbonized materials, and plants provided natural pigments, and these media were later supplemented by the vivid commercial pigments obtainable from traders. Chokecherry tree resin and boiled buffalo hoof jelly were used as fixatives.

One of the unique features of Plains women's artistry was its organized communal structure. A Crow myth gives insight into Native beliefs about female artistic power and co-operation. It describes a woman who was warned by her fiancé that he would only marry her if she were powerful. He made the unreasonable demand that she tan a buffalo hide and embellish it with quillwork all in one day. As she cried in the woods, numerous animal helpers appeared. Female beavers and badgers staked the hide, while moles, mice, ants, and flies removed the flesh, dried it, and scraped it smooth. A porcupine offered its quills to the ants who completed the quillwork.[3] This tale articulates through analogy with the animal world the ideal response of co-operation when faced with an ambitious artistic task. While individual hide paintings and quilled items reflected an individual woman's artistic inspiration, quillwork was undertaken as a sacred endeavour, within the structure of women's artistic guilds. Large-scale tasks, such as making and raising a tipi, were often undertaken as group endeavours, with specialists performing particular tasks.



75 Cheyenne artist

Parfleche (rawhide, pigment), before 1875

The French term *parer flèche* (*to turn away arrows*) describes the impenetrable properties of sturdy, Indian-made rawhide. The term came to refer to the large storage containers made by Plains Indian women and painted with a variety of elegant abstract designs. This is a fine example of the delicacy of line characteristic of Cheyenne parfleche painting.

Some aspects of skin and hide working were highly specialized, and by doing them women earned both stature and wealth. Among the Cheyenne, to belong to the guild in which women gained expertise in designing, constructing, and ornamenting a tipi was one of the highest female aspirations, even into the twentieth century. Membership in the tipi-makers' guild was a mark of special prestige, and Cheyenne mothers encouraged their daughters to strive for this honour.[4] Membership in the tipi-makers' guild implied stamina, fortitude, and patience as well as artistic expertise. Because of the lavish feasts that were held, and the fees paid to expert designers, it also implied that a woman had achieved a respectable level of wealth.

The making of a tipi or lodge was recognized as so demanding a task that if a woman made one by herself—carrying out every step from tanning and sewing the skins, cutting the lodge poles, and producing all of the interior and exterior quill or beadwork—she was considered to be an exemplary individual. More often, tipi-making was a communal artistic undertaking. The intention to make a tipi was publicly announced and a feast would be held. A high-ranking member of the guild who was an experienced lodge maker would be responsible for the design and fit of the skins, arranging them and tacking them together before the other women completed the sewing. Other Plains groups had similar customs, even if they were not organized into a formal guild as were the Cheyenne. Crow women would commission an expert designer to lay out the tipi. This specialist in both architecture and tailoring, who would be paid for her services with four different types of property, supervised as many as twenty women who collaborated on sewing the skins. In payment for their services, the owner threw a lavish feast.

Blackfoot Indian women made the largest tipis of the Great Plains (up to twenty-eight skins and forty lodge poles). They, too, had regular work teams that would make new tipis in late spring.[5] Before calling together her collaborators, a woman would select and stockpile several dozen buffalo skins, numerous buffalo sinews from which to make threads, and a collection of awls. She would prepare a feast, and announce her intentions to her colleagues. After the meal, the sinews would be distributed, and the day spent splitting them to make thread. The following morning, expert needle women and a designer would commence laying out and sewing together the tipi. Other women would use knives to peel the bark and trim branch stubs from the assembled tree poles, cutting them to the desired diameter. When all work was completed, the poles were raised, and the new tipi stretched upon them. The edges would be pinned to the ground and a fire laid inside the tipi to smoke the skins. This would keep them flexible throughout the repeated soakings and dryings afforded by the harsh weather on the Great Plains.

Tipi painting was, in general, a male art, as discussed below, although individual instances are known in which a particularly talented artist who was female might paint the narrative scenes on tipis. While a family might need a new tipi only once every second or third year, female artistry did not stop with the raising of new houses in the late spring. The process of making and adorning tipi liners, back-rests, storage bags, and robes for the interior, as well as clothing for all daily and ceremonial occasions, continued throughout the year. Quillwork and beadwork were the main forms of artistic elaboration (see Chapter 3, p. 97).

The exchange of women's quillwork and beadwork was central to maintaining relations among neighbouring groups across Western North America. Through the exchange of these arts at inter-tribal gatherings and trading sites, artistic styles were disseminated across a wide area. We know a great deal more about the meaning and social beliefs concerning quillwork on the Great Plains than in the other areas where this work was done. On the Great Plains, quillwork was a sacred art form, the mastery of which gave grace and prestige to the artist. Lakota women teach that the supernatural known as Double-Woman gave them the sacred art of quillwork, by appearing to a young woman in a dream. This young woman taught the art of quillwork to other women. Still practised by Lakota women, quillwork continues to be a sacred art.

The anthropologist George Bird Grinnell, who lived among the Cheyenne in the 1890s, observed of quill- and beadwork: 'This work women considered of high importance, and, when properly performed, quite as creditable as were bravery and success in war among men.' He goes on to relate that, in meetings of the quillwork society, the assembled women recalled and described their previous fine works, 'telling of the robes and other things that they had ornamented. This recital was formal in character, and among women closely paralleled the counting of coups by men.'[6]

Counting coup, the quintessential act of male bravery in warfare, in which an enemy is touched by his opponent with a lance or coup stick, demands courage, finesse, and a great deal of personal style. Apparently women's fine artistic designs demand these traits as well. This idea still persists today among some Plains people. Expert Crow beadworker Winona Plenty Hoops, of Lodge Grass, Montana says, 'A good design is like counting coup.'[7] Beautifying the world by vowing to undertake an artistic project was an act of honour and devotion. As in many Amerindian traditions, the finished object was in some ways less important than the process of undertaking it in a ritually prescribed manner. On the Great Plains, a woman's path to dignity, honour, and long life lay in the correct and skilled pursuit of the arts.

There were set procedures for a young Cheyenne woman to follow

76 Crow artist

Beaded horse collar, *c.*1890–1900

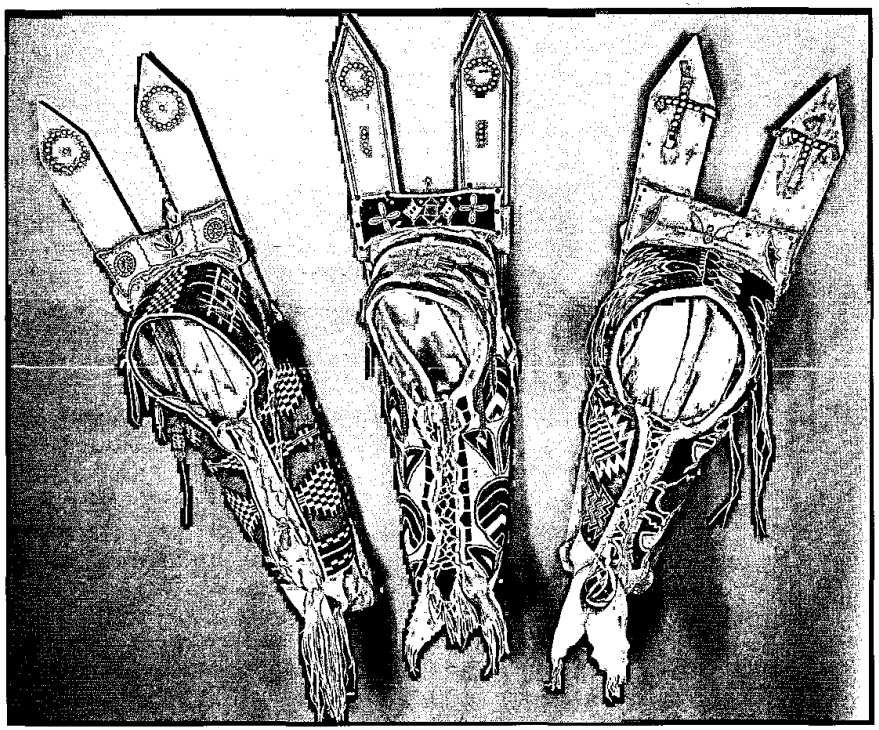
Classic Crow beadwork of the Reservation Era is defined by bold geometric designs of triangles and hourglasses in which pink, blue, and white are the predominant colours. Crow people recount that Old Man Coyote, who created their world, was the first to dress and ornament horses as beautifully as human beings would dress. For this reason, even today Crow horses are more beautifully ornamented than any other horses on the Plains. Every summer at Crow Agency, Montana, horses and people display the finest beadwork of Crow women, some of which is modelled after classic nineteenth-century pieces like this.

when she embarked upon her first major quillwork project. She made a public vow in front of the assembled guild, describing her intention to undertake an ambitious project. She held a feast, and requested aid from one of the more senior guild members, asking the older woman to draw in white clay a preliminary pattern of the intended design on the robe. All these steps show the seriousness with which women approached these arts.

For no other tribe do we have as complete a picture of traditional quillwork societies as we do for the Cheyenne, but some features are similar in other groups. Both the Blackfeet and the Lakota believe that quillwork in ancient times came from divine inspiration. Among the Hidatsa, a young woman's increasing artistic skill was publicly recognized and rewarded by other women. Girls were given 'honor marks': ornaments such as belts, bracelets, and rings for successful completion of artistic works.[8] Rattling Blanket Woman, a Lakota, recalled the year when, during the summer Sun Dance camp, she challenged other women to come and sit in a circle and recount their achievements.[9] Each woman was given a stick for every piece of work she had quilled. The women with the four highest tallies were seated in places of honour and served food before all the others. The tallies, or 'quilling coups', were recorded on the tipi liner of the Red Council Lodge, along with the achievements in warfare of the males.

Early in the nineteenth century, trade beads were such a valued and unique commodity on the Great Plains that one horse would be exchanged for only 100 beads. Indian women quickly recognized beads' artistic potential in terms of individual design units. Often beads were used alongside quillwork for extra richness of ornamentation. But in many regions of the Great Plains, they came to replace quillwork by the mid-nineteenth century. Strong and durable, with a vivid range of non-fading colours, beads were easy to work with, compared to quills. Yet, like quills, beads could be used to form small, discrete colour areas, as well as large monochromatic ones. Easily sewn to both hide and cloth, they could be used to outline a form, or to ornament a fringe. In some areas of the Plains, as in the Great Lakes region, small hand looms were used to weave beads into panels which would then be sewn to cloth.

Distinctive regional and tribal differences exist in style, aesthetics, and technique. Lakota beadwork of the late nineteenth century, for example, usually has a fully beaded background of one colour (often blue or white) crafted in bands of lazy stitch with figural or geometric design. Much nineteenth-century Crow work is boldly graphic in pattern, favouring light blue. Large blocks of colour are outlined by thin stripes of white beads [**76**]. But it is not always so easy to label with confidence an artist's work as coming from a particular tribe. In previous centuries, as today, Plains peoples of different groups gather in



77 Kiowa artists

Three beaded cradles, *c.*1900

Kiowa cradles are often beaded in both geometric and floral motifs in vivid colours, and usually are gifts bestowed upon a new baby by her female relatives. The artists of these masterworks are (left to right) Mrs G. Quiah-tone, Hoy-Koy-Hoodle, and Tah-o-te. All were made in Oklahoma at the turn of the century.

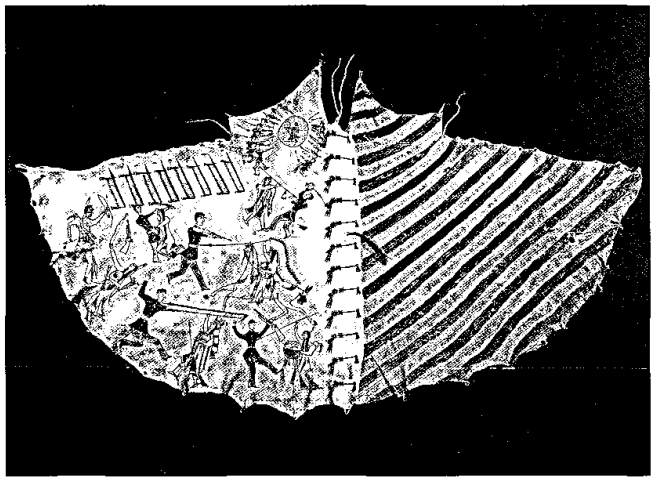
large summer camps for festival occasions. This was a time for feasting and dancing, a time when artists would scrutinize the newest works of their peers from other bands or tribes. Innovative designs might be remembered, adapted, and transformed into a personal aesthetic statement. Long-distance trade among different tribes was common, too. Raw materials, like hides, as well as finished goods, such as moccasins and bags, were exchanged. By the early twentieth century, intermarriage became more common, providing another avenue for artistic change.

While all beadwork speaks eloquently of the Plains artist's sense of colour, graphic design, and craftswomanship, two items deserve special notice: elaborately beaded cradles, and moccasins with beaded soles. Museum catalogues often state that beaded-sole moccasins are made for the dead; in fact, they were made for the living as well. Cheyenne artist Mary Little Bear Inkanish (1877–1963) remembered that her aunt had made such a pair for her when she was small, and that it was a customary gift for a bride. Wealthy horse-riders wore beaded-sole moccasins to indicate that they need not walk on the earth, but would always be astride a mount.[10] The metaphoric intention in all of

78 Kiowa artists

Photo of Black Leggings tipi of the Kiowa warrior society, 1980s

The yellow and black stripes refer to important nineteenth-century war expeditions. The other side of the tipi is painted with twentieth-century military insignia, commemorating the history of modern Kiowa warriors who bravely served their country in every military engagement since World War I.



these cases is to imply that the wearer is so honoured or so wealthy that her feet need not touch the ground.

Fully beaded baby carriers are notable for the lavish artistry expended upon them. Different tribes not only had distinctive beadwork designs, but distinctive methods of cradle construction. The Kiowa and Cheyenne, for example, favoured a V-shaped frame made of two long pieces of wood that extended well beyond the top of the beaded bag [**77**]. These ensured protection for the baby's head if the cradle were to fall. The cradle could be worn like a backpack, or hung from a horse's saddle, a tipi pole, or a tree. A multi-purpose piece of equipment, the cradleboard combined crib, playpen, carriage, and high chair, protecting babies until they were old enough to walk with the other children. Often given as valued gifts from a female relative, and embellished with designs that were personally as well as tribally distinctive, they are among the most beautiful examples of the beadworker's art.

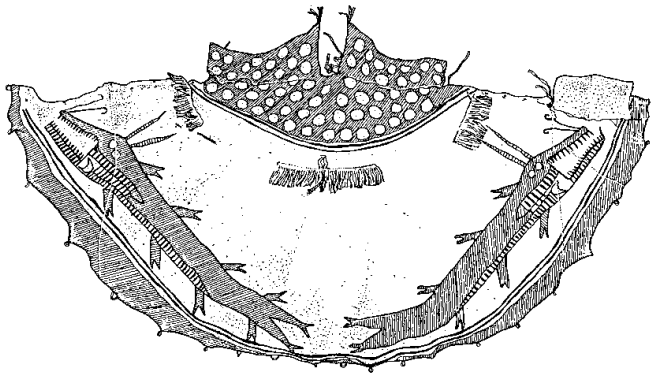
Men's arts

There are very few areas of indigenous North America where art was concerned with the chronicling of recent historical events, or with the keeping of time in a linear sense. Yet on the Great Plains, a profound sense of history has long compelled men to illustrate important events in their lives pictorially. Images chipped or painted on rock faces served for centuries as a large-scale, public way of marking historical events and visionary experiences. Narrative scenes on buffalo-hide robes and tipis validated and memorialized a man's exploits in war or success in hunting [**78**]. Or, as in the Great Lakes, they depicted images from dreams and visions [**79, 81**].

79 Kiowa artists

Drawing of Underwater Monster tipi

The horned, fishlike monsters on this tipi are reminiscent of the horned water serpent of Pueblo cosmology and the *Misshipeshu* of Great Lakes cosmology.

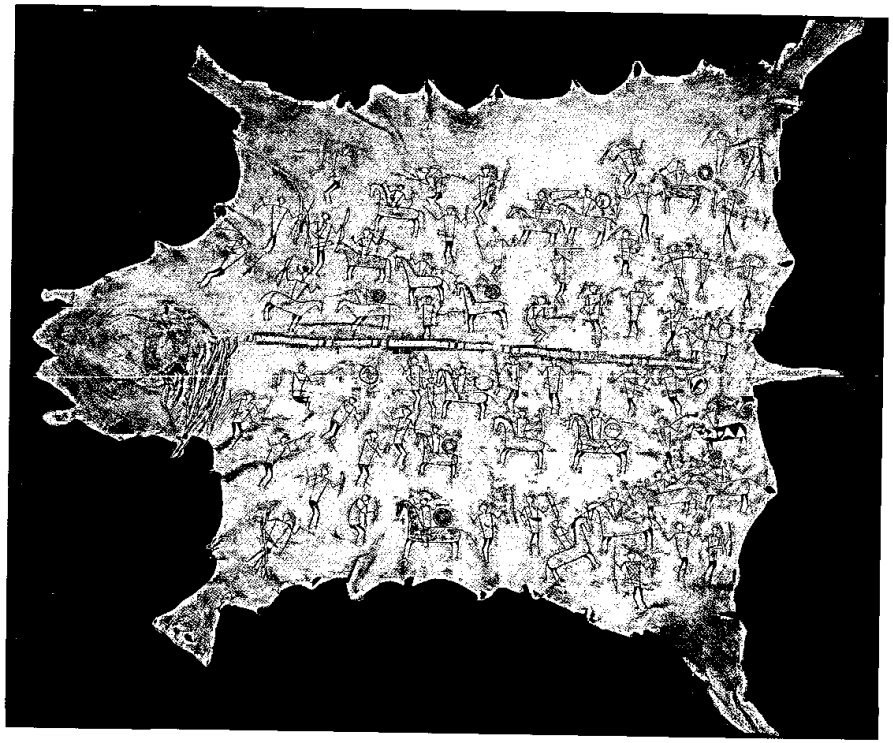


80 Arapoosh (Sore Belly) (?–1834), Crow

War shield (buckskin, rawhide, pigments, stork, feathers, deer tail, flannel), *c.*1820

Because shield designs were often given to men in vision quests or dreams, the rights of ownership of particular designs were strictly observed. Arapoosh, chief of the River Crow in the early nineteenth century, painted this visionary image of a skeletal moon spirit on his war shield. Eagle and other feathers, a deer tail, and the head and body of a stork complete the powerful medicine of this important item of war equipment.

In some nations, such as the Kiowa on the Southern Plains and the Lakota on the Northern Plains, the recorded accounts extended beyond a particular individual's experiences. Family or band history was inscribed pictorially in 'winter counts'—records of the most important events of a year, each distilled into one economical pictographic image which oral historians could use as a linchpin upon which to anchor their memories of all the other important events of



81 Mandan artist

Buffalo robe painted with narrative scenes (hide, porcupine quills, and pigment), *c.*1800

The explorers Lewis and Clark collected this painted hide in 1804, in what is today Central North Dakota, and presented it to President Thomas Jefferson, under whose auspices they conducted their Western expedition. The indigenous men's painting style of the Great Plains is well represented in this ambitious battle scene of some five dozen figures. Semi-abstract pictographic men and horses range across the hide. With the help of painted robes like this, powerful warriors would recount the histories of their battles.

the group. Some pictographic winter counts depict events of many decades, or even centuries.

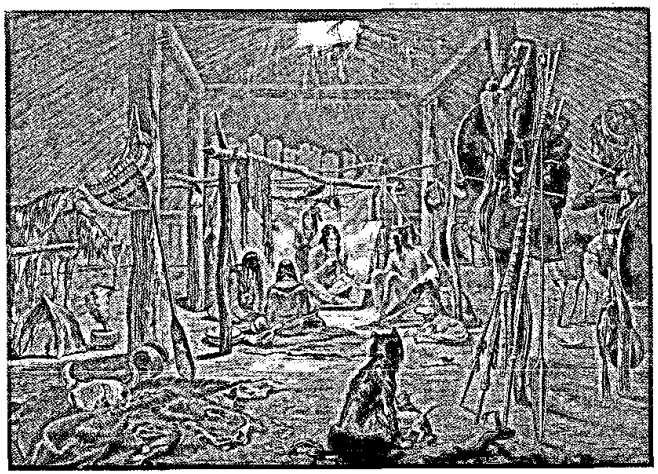
War exploits and autobiographical episodes were sometimes painted on the exterior of tipis [**78**]; alternatively, images from personal dreams or visions might embellish the tipi [**79**]. Such imagery was very much the personal property of one individual and, in effect, he held the rights to such designs, although he might sell or bestow upon another individual the right to paint a particular pattern. Such personal 'copyright' also extended to the paintings on shields which were unique assemblages of painted images and power objects from the natural world, such as animal skins, claws, or feathers [**80**].

Plains narrative painting is relatively flat, and semi-abstract in style [**81**]. Humans are depicted as modified stick figures, and events and actions are illustrated through selective use of details, such as individual hairstyles and weapons, and activities such as hand-to-hand combat or horse capture. A man wearing such a painted robe was publicly displaying his own personal history, and would use it as a visual aid in his autobiographical narrations. During the nineteenth century, the indigenous pictographic style was modified as Indian artists encountered

82 After Karl Bodmer

The Interior of the Hut of a Mandan Chief (engraving with aquatint, hand-coloured), 1836–43

Bodmer's detailed depiction of the interior of an earth lodge shows the four posts and beams which support the slanting roof poles. A skylight allows for light, ventilation, and the draughting of the central fire. War paraphernalia hangs from the pole on the right, while a burden basket and oar rest against the pole at left. Even dogs and horses can be kept snug against the harsh Northern Plains winter within the lodge. Early travellers to the Plains remarked on the orderliness of Mandan villages where dozens of earth lodges surround spacious plazas.



non-Indian artists like George Catlin (1796–1872) and Karl Bodmer [**82** and **19**], and the books and prints circulated by traders, and observed the level of detail and illusionistic renderings in these works. Soon, Plains artists began to experiment, not only with European conventions of perspective and details of portraiture, but with European materials as well.

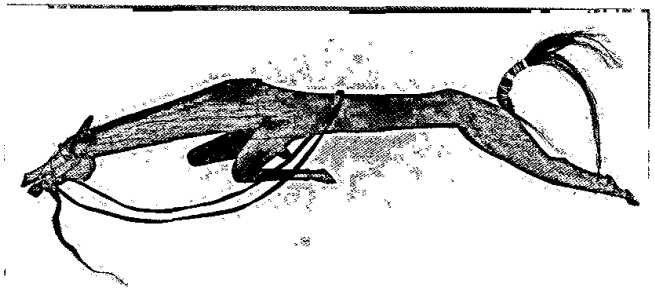
Pencils and paper were provided by explorers and traders early in the nineteenth century and by military men and Indian agents in the second half of the century. Some of the new materials used by Plains graphic artists were trade items or discards. It is not uncommon to see the lined pages of a ledger book, with its list of trading post supplies or military scores in marksmanship, drawn over with images of warfare and the hunt much like those which had long been painted on hides. For this reason, the genre has often been nicknamed 'ledger book art' although many drawings are, in fact, done in regular drawing books and tablets rather than in lined ledgers (see, for example, **16** and **85**). While artists continued to record traditional scenes of horse-capture and armed combat, they also used this genre to chronicle their rapidly changing lives, as will be discussed in the next section.

Another art form, sculpture, has often been overlooked in discussions of the Plains. Yet Plains sculpture presents some compelling forms, and has an ancient history, as archaeological artefacts of buffalo effigies demonstrate.[11] In catlinite, a soft stone quarried principally for the making of pipe bowls, Plains men fashioned human and animal images. War clubs carved of wood and antler combined utility and elegance, while the delicate faces of elk and birds often graced ceremonial whistles. Spoons and feast bowls were carved of wood, or of steamed and bent horn. Among the best known of Plains sculptures are the

83 Lakota artist

Horse effigy dance stick (painted wood, leather, horsehair), 1880s

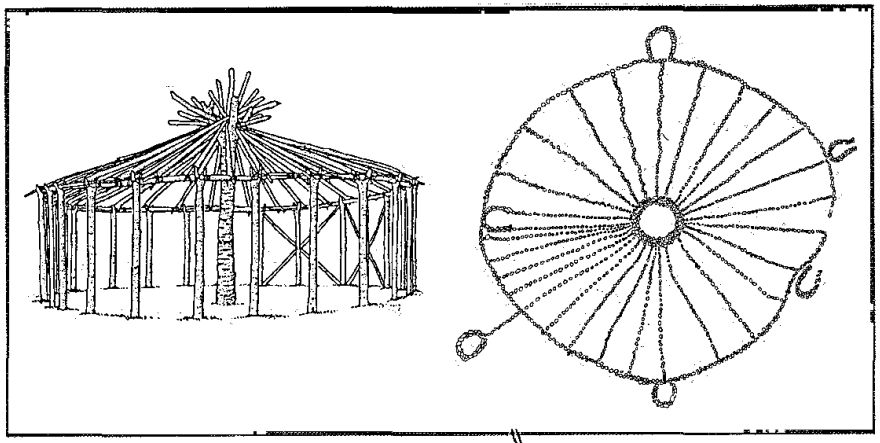
When a Plains warrior had his horse shot out from under him in battle, he might carve such an effigy in honour of his mount. This animal has red paint around its mouth and marking each of the wounds in its body. An enemy's scalp lock hangs from the bridle. Often carved as a kind of club, with a head at one end, and a large leg and hoof at the other, this example is unusual in its vigorous depiction of the entire lunging body of the horse.



handsome horse effigies that were carried in dance performances [**83**], and whose streamlined forms and expressive quality of movement have greatly appealed to twentieth-century connoisseurs.

During the centuries before contact, Plains artists also created medicine wheels, monumental earthworks that we would today call land art. These were giant, round, solar symbols formed of boulders, and were probably used as ritual spaces. All Plains people affirm that it is through ceremony that humans become 'centred'. The antiquity of the circle as a sacred form is evidenced by the scores of medicine wheels that dot the landscape across the prairie, clustering most densely in the Canadian provinces of Alberta and Saskatchewan [**84**]. While they are hard to date, some show evidence of usage going back more than 3,000 years, suggesting that in ancient times, as today, peoples of the Plains gathered in ceremonial performances to mark the summer solstice. In the Sun Dance, humans celebrate their place in the universe, fulfil vows they have made, dance and sing, and mortify their flesh in sacrificial rites. A small number of men make vows to pierce or cut their chest, back, or arm flesh. Though described by outsiders as 'torture', this is perceived by the ritual performers as an affirmation of a profound unity among the powers of the world: man and his life's blood, the sun, and the Sun Dance pole that reaches from the interior of the earth up into the dome of the sky. The great ritual pole represents the axis at the centre of the world, around which all ceremony revolves. The Sun Dance enclosure, a circle made of tree limbs and branches cut in a ceremonial manner, defines the space in which the ceremony takes place [**84**].

In all ceremonial performances, including the Sun Dance, visual display of fine clothing, horse trappings and other art objects was an important aspect. While both men and women had important ritual roles to play, male roles were more public, and often involved impersonating game animals in a kind of ancient hunting magic. Aspects of this are seen in the *Okipa* of the Mandan, the *K'ado* of the Kiowa, and the *Massaum* ceremony of the Cheyenne, in all of which the fundamental importance of the buffalo to human life is affirmed.



84

Comparative drawings of a medicine wheel and a Sun Dance enclosure

Big Horn Medicine Wheel in Wyoming was built on a mountain top, at an altitude of more than 9,600 feet. It may have served to mark the summer solstice and other astronomical sightings. Modern Sun Dance or medicine lodge enclosures are modelled on such ancient cosmograms.

Some Plains performance costume was highly idiosyncratic, for it related to personal dreams, visions, and accomplishments. Other aspects could easily be deciphered, for male warrior societies across the Plains had recognizable codes of dress for different age grades and achievement levels, and men often wore such war regalia when participating in the Sun Dance and other ritual performances.

Art on the Great Plains from the Reservation Era to the present

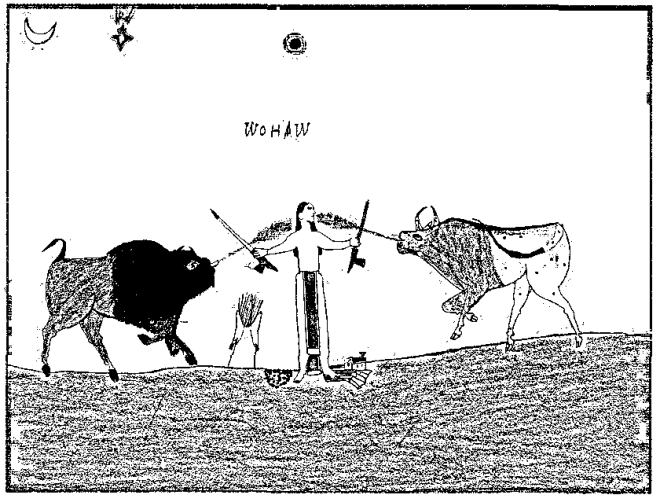
After the Civil War in the 1860s, exploration and settlement of the Great Plains rapidly increased, as did the escalation of US military conflict with Plains peoples. Groups were forcibly resettled on to reservations, their traditional ways of life fractured, especially for men. By the late nineteenth century, the old ways of warrior societies and seasonal migration were in tatters. People lived much more sedentary lives on reservations. They were dependent on whites for much of their food and most materials for clothing and shelter, since whites had hunted the buffalo almost to the brink of extinction.

The Reservation Era of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was a time of profound cultural upheaval for all Plains people. One would surmise that an era when the very foundations of culture were under attack would fragment the arts as well. Indeed, it did change the arts, and many men's artistic traditions went into rapid decline as the men no longer needed the painted hide shirts that boasted of their war exploits, the sacred painted shields to protect them in battle, or the complex paraphernalia of the warrior societies. Men did continue to record their deeds and their changing ways of life in paintings on canvas or muslin, and in ledger drawings. In these works, some continued the age-old practice of memorializing individual achievements in hunting and warfare. Others show an almost compul-

85 Wohaw (1855–1924), Kiowa

'Between Two Worlds' (pencil and crayon on paper), 1876

In an unmistakable depiction of his acute ambivalence at being caught between two ways of life, this Fort Marion artist depicts himself holding out a peace pipe to two animals—a domesticated beef cow, and a buffalo. One foot stands near a miniature buffalo herd and Kiowa tipi, but Wohaw's other foot is firmly planted in the tilled fields of a white settler's frame house. His actions are witnessed by the celestial bodies overhead. This image stands as the single most powerful metaphor and most poignant representation by a nineteenth-century Indian artist of the cultural schisms of that era.



sive interest in documenting scenes of traditional life, as if the artists were all too aware of how fragile some of these traditions were, and how rapidly they were changing.

Many warrior-artists drew pictorial histories in small books which they wore on their persons when going off to battle—in a miniaturization of their age-old convention of wrapping themselves in autobiographical hide robes. Some of these books were 'captured' on the battlefield, or taken from the bodies of dead warriors by white soldiers. Some army men had amicable relations with Indian scouts from friendly tribes, and commissioned these scouts to make drawings for them. For example, many works are known by Cheyenne and Arapaho scouts who worked for the US Army at Fort Reno and Fort Supply in the 1880s.

Most well known of the late nineteenth-century graphic arts are the hundreds of drawings made by Cheyenne and Kiowa warriors incarcerated from 1875 to 1878 at Fort Marion, Florida, far from their Southern Plains homeland [**85**]. As these men learned Euro-American pictorial conventions, their drawings became more detailed, utilizing perspective, overlapping and, sometimes, a landscape setting. They also provide a powerful and eloquent chronicle of dispossession, as these formerly free warriors pictorially record the details of their imprisonment—the manual labour, the army dress, the daily classes, and bible study.

As discussed further in Chapter 7, it was the work of these men, and the next generation of artists, including the prolific Kiowa artist Silverhorn (*c.*1861–*c.*1941), who provided a bridge to twentieth-century painting on the Great Plains. The legacy of ledger drawings remains

86 Arthur Amiotte (b. 1942), Lakota

'The Visit' (collage), 1995

An Indian couple on horseback, at right, arrives to inspect the fine touring car parked in front of the family in the central photo, that of the artist's great-grandfather Standing Bear. In a typical nineteenth-century Plains artistic convention of simultaneous visual narrative, the Lakota couple at right is repeated, seated in the touring car, inspecting the new style of 'horsepower' belonging to Standing Bear. Part of the text reads, 'In 1919 we stand on the threshold of a new and different time. We live in a wooden house.' Above the central scene, standing on the roof of the house, are figures wearing Ghost Dance clothing, and studying the sky for sacred portents.

strong in Plains Indian painting of the last fifty years or so [**86**, **146**, and **148**]. Contemporary Lakota artist Arthur Amiotte, for example, has found in the arts of the Reservation Era a rich vein of iconography to mine in his collage series. Using visual quotations from Fort Marion drawings, family history, and Lakota ritual practices, he continues the venerable male tradition of pictorial autobiography, injecting it with a touch of late twentieth-century wit and irony.

Paradoxically, while the late nineteenth century was a time which witnessed the radical diminishing of male artistic traditions, the Reservation Era became a time of richness in women's arts, a phenomenon that can be understood as a response to the many forces that were threatening Plains cultures. As Marsha Bol has pointed out, in the 'enforced leisure' of reservation life, women had more time to devote to art, and the result was a tremendous blossoming of beadwork arts. Women's arts came to symbolize the ethnicity of the tribe, both for the people themselves and for outsiders, and they became, even more than before, a way of affirming the traditions of the group.

In many regions, beadwork designs became more complex. Items of clothing were lavishly covered with beads; all-over beading of vests, dresses, moccasins, and cradles became common. The penchant for all-over beadwork extended to non-traditional items as well, especially in the early years of the twentieth century. Suitcases, handbags, and other manufactured items were lavishly beaded. Lakota artists were especially well known for this. Historical battles, names, dates, American flag iconography—all were incorporated into the artistic vocabulary of the Plains artist by the end of the nineteenth century [**20**].

As discussed in Chapter 3, the introduction of trade cloth, ribbon, and other manufactured goods modified traditional dress across North America in significant ways. On the Plains, calico fabric and men's tailored cloth coats appeared early in the nineteenth century among the goods of traders and visiting delegations. They later formed an important part of treaty payments made to Indian nations by the US Government. Such items so transformed traditional dress that army officer John Gregory Bourke wrote the following account of the visual impact of one of the last great Lakota Sun Dances in 1881.

> As the crier began to proclaim the orders of the day, the Indians once more closed in spontaneously around him, forming a great ring 50 or 60 yards in diameter, and 8 or 9 persons deep, and aggregating several thousand men, women, and children. The display was no less brilliant than fantastic. Some were on foot, many on ponies, and quite a number in American country vehicles. Nothing could be added in the way of dazzling colors. Calico shirts in all the bright hues of the rainbow, leggings of cloth, canvas, and buckskin, moccasins of buckskin, crusted with fine beadwork were worn by all, but when it came to other garments no rule of uniformity seemed to apply. Many of the men and women had wrapped themselves in dark blue blankets with a central band of beadwork after the manner of medallions; others gratified a more gorgeous trade by wearing the same covering of scarlet or of scarlet and blue combined. A large fraction of the crowd moved serenely conscious of the envy excited by their wonderfully fine blankets of Navajo manufacture, while a much smaller number marched as proud as peacocks in garments of pure American cut.[12]

Although pleasure in the colours and patterns of trade cloth was one reason for changes in Plains clothing, far more tragic circumstances had already made the adoption of these materials a matter of necessity. In 1869 the transcontinental railroad was completed. Within fifteen years, the enormous herds of buffalo that had freely roamed the Plains had been hunted to the brink of extinction; the railroad made possible their slaughter on a scale never before possible. Within just a few years the major source of food, clothing, and shelter for Plains peoples virtually disappeared, at the same time as they were being defeated militarily by the US Army.

The Sun Dance was officially banned by the US Government in 1883 as part of the effort to 'civilize' the Indians, but it continued surreptitiously even after the ban. In the 1880s, as a replacement for the

festive, non-ceremonial aspects of the Sun Dance, summer celebrations on the 4th of July, the US national holiday, began to be common. These summer festivals, as well as the development of the powwow as an inter-tribal dance competition, kept some aspects of traditional arts alive during some extremely harsh decades in which the impulse of the dominant society was to assimilate Indians and to encourage them to leave ancient cultural traditions behind. Today, the Sun Dance is practised as an enduring symbol of traditional values and ideals.

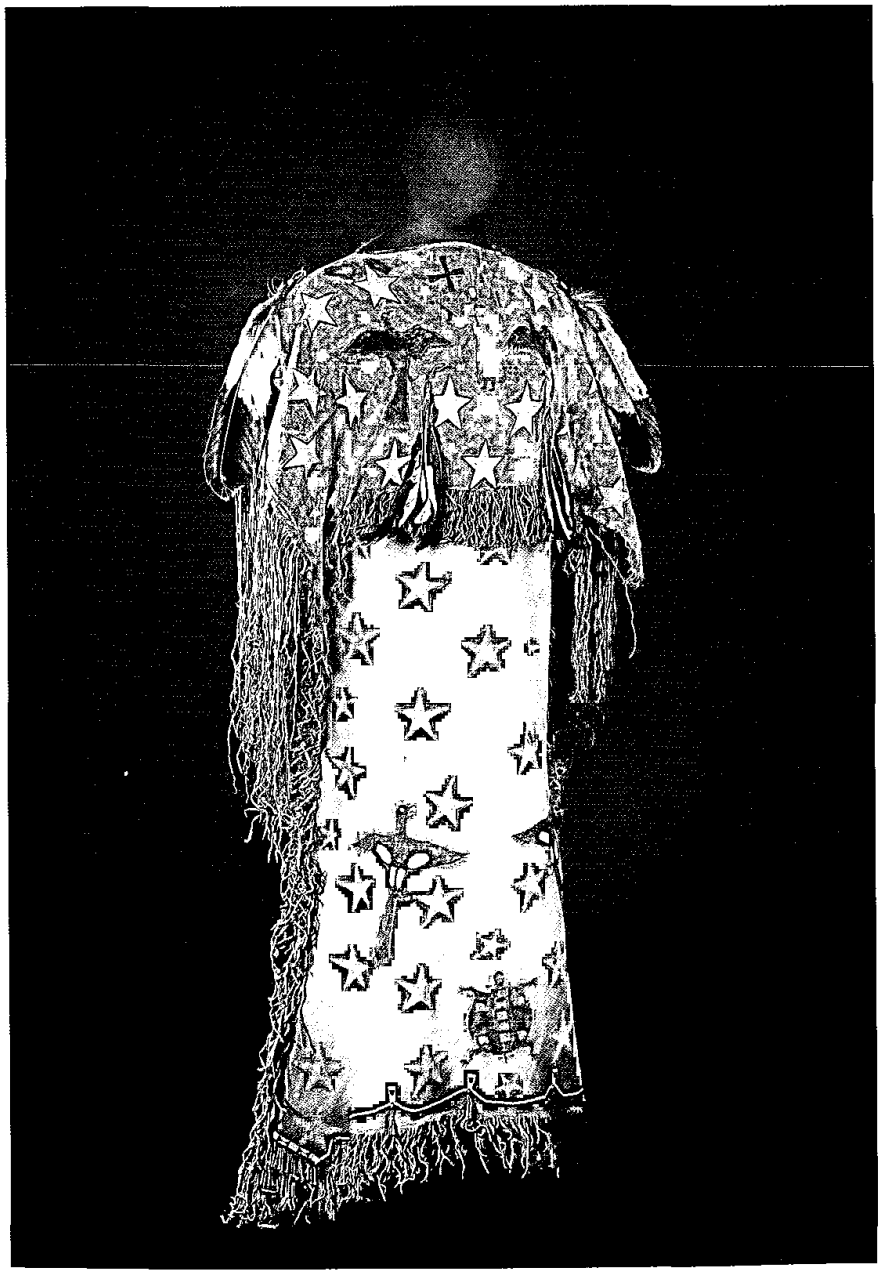
At the end of the nineteenth century, a religious cult known as the Ghost Dance flowered briefly. This was an indigenous response to the cultural holocaust taking place throughout the vast lands of the West. Its immediate inspiration was a series of religious visions by Wovoka, a Paiute holy man. In 1889 he proclaimed that if Indian people lived peacefully, danced a new dance that he introduced called the Ghost Dance, and sang the Ghost Dance songs, their world would be transformed into an ideal place populated by buffalo herds and the ancestral dead. Most importantly, white people, their goods, and the troubles they had caused would disappear. This hopeful message spread across many Western tribes, and was adapted according to the cultural practices of each group. Notably, the Ghost Dance movement also incorporated some features of Christianity, including recognition of a 'Messiah'. Hauntingly beautiful painted clothing was made for Ghost Dance participants, which incorporated many celestial and avian symbols. Among Arapaho adherents, the rejection of white men's goods dictated that the Ghost Dance shirts and dresses should be made from tanned deer skin [87], while most Lakota garments, in contrast, were made of painted muslin. In keeping with ancient beliefs in the protective power of visionary imagery, the Lakota believed that these shirts and dresses would render their wearers impervious to the bullets of white soldiers. But when the Seventh Cavalry of the US Army gathered at Wounded Knee Creek in South Dakota in December of 1890 and massacred more than 200 Lakota participants in the Ghost Dance, it was clear that such a Messianic movement could not stave off the brute force that backed up official US policies of assimilation.

To many, December 1890 marked the true end of an era on the Great Plains. Yet cultural resistance, in the form of adherence to Native artistic practices, has persisted as an important element in the survival of Plains Indian cultures. Today, art remains a vital force in the life of the people. The annual Crow Fair in Montana provides expert beadworkers with an opportunity to sell their finest dance accessories and horse paraphernalia. There has been a revival of quillwork, particularly among the Lakota. All across North America, the powwow remains an important venue for competitive dances and costume-makers to exhibit and make money from their work, and to transmit artistic traditions to the next generation (see 13). In some

87 Arapaho artist

Ghost Dance dress (deerskin and pigments), 1890s

The iconography of Ghost Dance garments includes both four- and five-pointed stars, crescent moons, directional symbols, and many other symbols associated with the sky realm, such as eagles, magpies, and dragonflies. In this example, the coloration invokes the American flag as well.



Métis Art

The term Métis refers to people of mixed heritage whose origins go back to strategic alliances made during the fur trade era between Scottish, English, and French traders and Cree and Ojibwa women. Skilled in the quill- and beadwork techniques perfected by their ancestors, Métis women also had access to European and North American floral embroidery patterns and materials such as silk thread. In the Red River Colony established in the 1820s at modern day Winnipeg, Manitoba, and later in other parts of the West and Sub-arctic, the daughters of Métis families also received direct needlework instruction at missionary schools.

Métis art, then, made by these women and their descendants, reflects the heterogeneous influences to which the artists were exposed. Métis artists specialized in clothing that combined European tailoring with indigenous modes of decoration: vests and frock-coats, buckskin trousers, half-leggings, bags, and pad saddles were embellished in fine quillwork, beadwork, and silk embroidery, usually in a distinctive floral style. Fur traders, Western travellers, and Indian people themselves eagerly acquired such new and stylish garb. Métis-style objects were widely disseminated from the Great Lakes, throughout the Plains, and into the Sub-arctic and were one of the most important artistic influences on the styles of clothing and embroidery that developed in those regions during the second half of the nineteenth century. The Red River Métis produced a great deal of this material. In their work, which derived from Saulteaux, Cree, Assiniboine, and Ojibwa techniques, floral imagery predominated.

In this image [88], Baptiste Garnier, a Métis who lived among the Sioux in the late nineteenth century, makes a statement about his own mixed ethnicity through the stylistic fusion of his handsome vest, tailored jacket and half-leggings.[13]

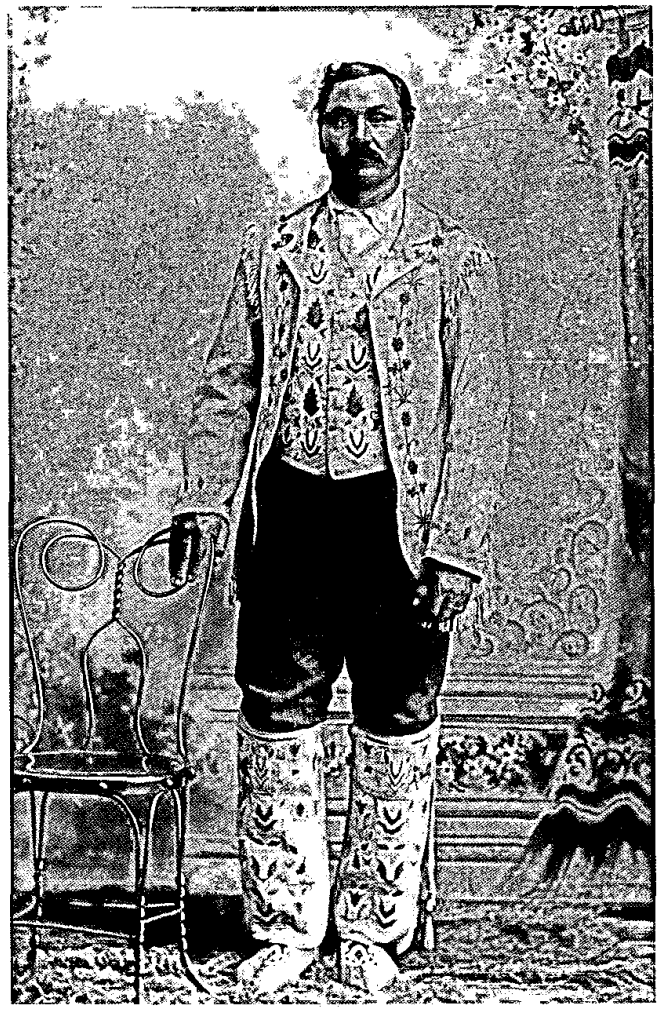
regions, even the Sun Dance is practised once again, and people are making fine ceremonial garb for its observance.

Like their foremothers of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Plains beadwork artists today continue both traditional and innovative styles of beadwork. Stethoscopes for doctors at the Indian Health Service, Nike athletic shoes for young sportsmen, marker-holders for bingo-playing grandmothers—all are beaded in a dizzying array of traditional and contemporary patterns. As Lakota beadworkers are known to say, 'If it doesn't move, bead it!'

The Intermontaine region—an artistic crossroads

Like those of the Plains, Intermontaine or Plateau arts reflect a cosmopolitan mix of influences. Major ancient trading sites along the Columbia River and its tributaries brought together people and commodities from the West Coast, the Sub-arctic, the Plains, and the Great Basin (see map). Dentalium shells from the West Coast were traded inland to the Plains through this region, while catlinite pipes were carried from the Eastern Plains. In the nineteenth century, white traders continued the annual multi-ethnic fairs. Both here and on the plains, the fur trappers held 'rendezvous' which became great centres

88
Photo of Baptiste Garnier in Métis-style clothing, late nineteenth century



for the exchange of commercial goods and Native arts, further enriching the cultural mix with even more exotic materials and styles.

Inhabitants of the Intermontaine region speak diverse languages, and include a number of groups, among them the Wasco, Coeur d'Alene, Nez Perce, Yakima, and Cayuse. In Aboriginal times, people here were seasonally migratory. Some depended on the bountiful salmon of the great river systems. Plant roots were a staple of their subsistence economy, used for food and as the raw materials for basketry. The explorers Meriwether Lewis (1774–1809) and William Clark