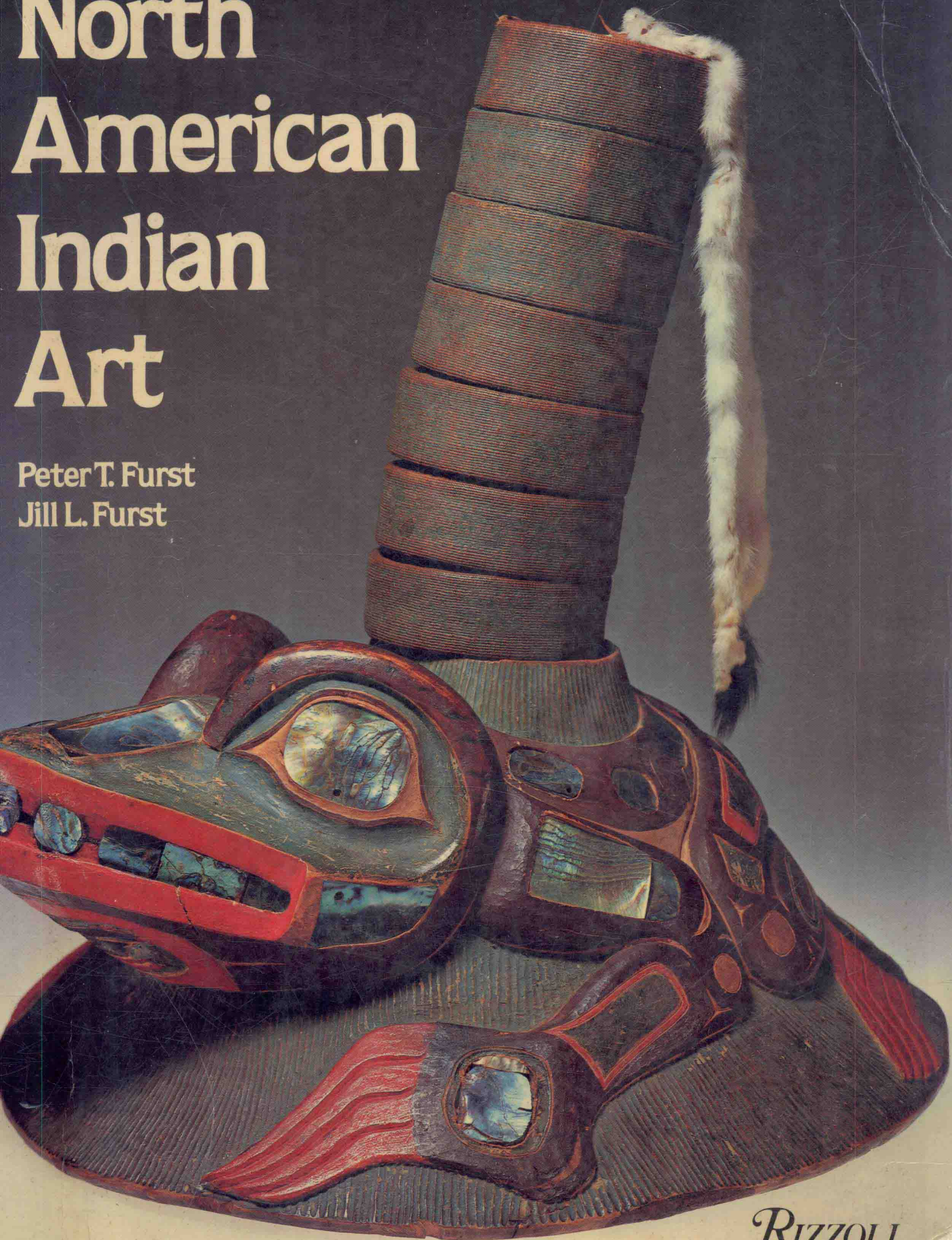


North American Indian Art

Peter T. Furst
Jill L. Furst



RIZZOLI





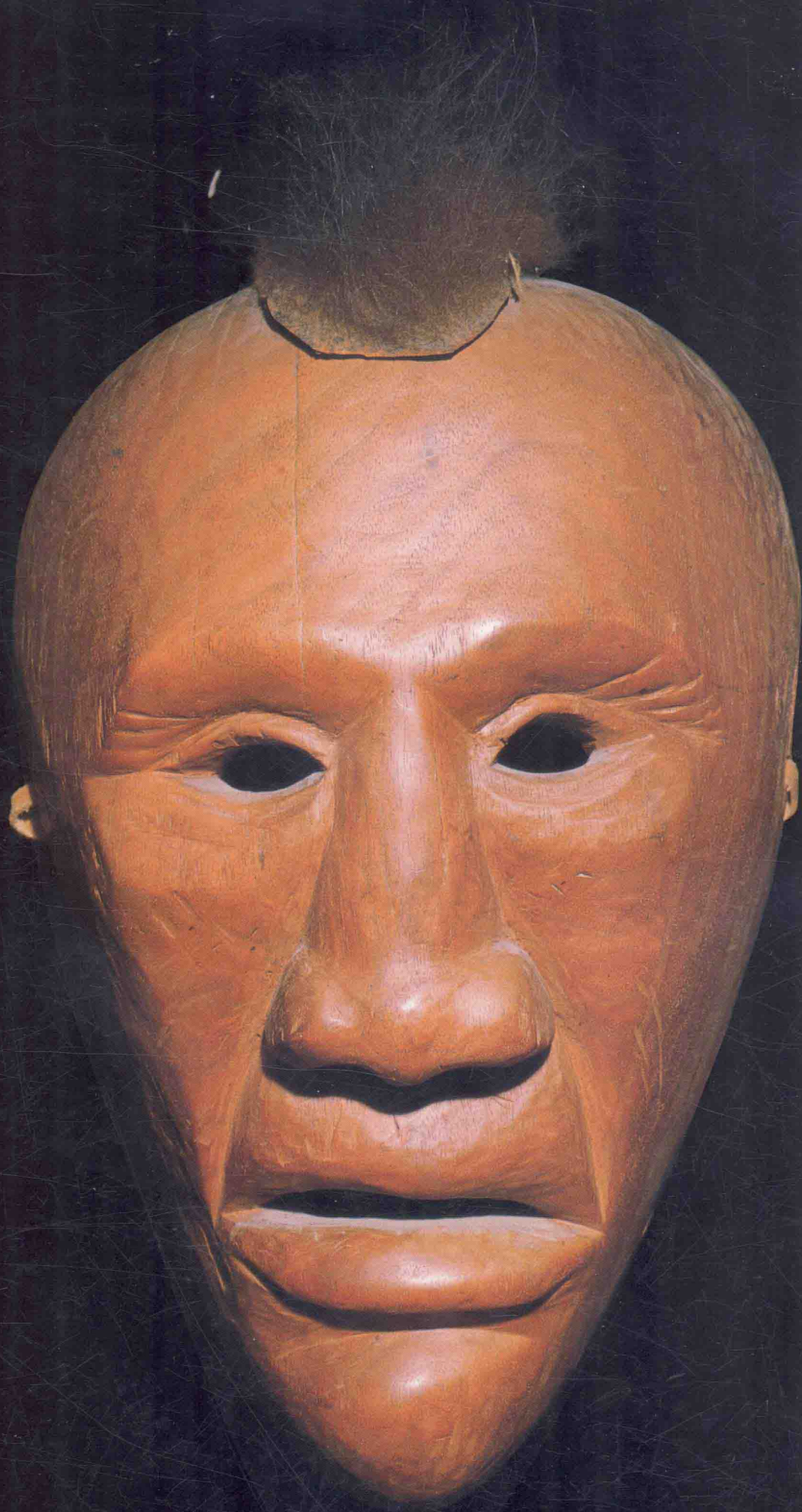












Peter T. Furst
Jill L. Furst

North American Indian Art

RIZZOLI
NEW YORK

An Artpress Book

Artpress Books is the imprint of
Annellen Publications, Inc.
122 East 42nd Street
New York, NY 10022

Chairman: Milton Esterow
President and Editor-in-Chief: John L. Hochmann
Managing Editor: Ray F. Patient
Designer: Kornelia Kurbjuhn

Composition by Dix Type Co., Syracuse, NY
Printed and bound in Hong Kong

Plate 1. Spirited Hopi kachina doll representing Hilili, a guard or warrior kachina who protects the other kachina spirits and also the initiates into the kachina cult. (12" high. Carved in 1979 by William Quotskuyva of New Oraibi, Arizona. Private Collection.)

Plate 2. Wooden sculpture of a long-haired shaman or holy man, attributed to the Caddo, an agricultural people that once inhabited portions of Texas, Arkansas, and Louisiana, in the extreme southeastern Plains. (6½" high. Eighteenth century. Smithsonian Institution.)

Plate 3. Dagger of native copper and mountain sheep horn from Klukwan, a Chilkat-Tlingit citadel near Chilkat Pass in southern Alaska, which preserved its cultural heritage until the Gold Rush of 1898. From their village the Chilkat controlled both the source of copper and the copper trade route. The weapon, dating from about 1800, bears the marks of stone saw cutting on the back. Daggers of this type were given names and passed down from generation to generation. (22¾" long. Private Collection.)

Plate 4. With its feathered pipe centerpiece flanked by sun symbols and numerous pictographs, this extraordinary small-scale buffalo-hide tipi cover, probably Dakota Sioux, almost certainly represents a sacred lodge that contained an important ceremonial pipe. Painted between 1820 and 1830 and acquired shortly thereafter by a German traveler, it suggests that the smaller painted model tipis of the late 19th century had a long history predating the Reservation period. (97" wide. Museum für Völkerkunde, Berlin-Dahlem.)

Plate 5. Ivory dog-sled drag handle in form of polar bear cub, carved by Bering Sea Eskimo, 1870–80. (27⅞" high. Peabody Museum of Natural History, Yale University.)

Plate 6. In a sacred dry painting from the Navajo Shooting-way curing chant, Holy People and animals circle the mountain of the center of the world. Four plants representing blue corn, beans, squash, and tobacco, the last symbolizing all the medicine plants, radiate from the center in four directions (Copy by Mrs. Franc J. Newcomb, 1936. Photo courtesy Wheelwright Museum of the American Indian, Santa Fe, New Mexico.)

Plate 7. Attributed to Will West Long (1869–1946), a famous carver, shaman, and ritual specialist of the Eastern Cherokee band at Big Cove, North Carolina, this mask was made about 1940. It represents a character in the Booger Dance usually called Angry or Apprehensive Indian. The principal aim of the dance is to neutralize the negative influence of Europeans and other strangers through satire and ridicule. But, like the False Face drama of the Iroquois, it is also held to cure the sick or to drive out evil spirits. Some Booger masks depict Indians and game, others are caricatures of whites. The term "booger," like bogey, boogie-woogie, and bug, derives from the West African words *baga* (Mandingo) and *bugal* (Wolof), meaning to annoy, harm, or worry; it was introduced into American English by black slaves. (12½" high. Private Collection.)

© 1982 by Peter T. and Jill Leslie Furst

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopy, recording or any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publisher.

Published in the United States of America by
Rizzoli International Publications, Inc.
300 Park Avenue South
New York, NY 10010

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data
Furst, Peter T.

North American Indian art.

Bibliography: p.

1. Indians of North America—Art.

I. Furst, Jill Leslie. II. Title.

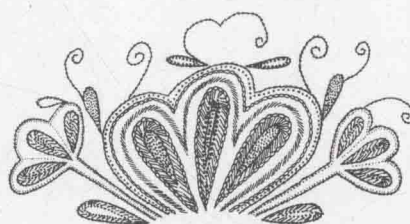
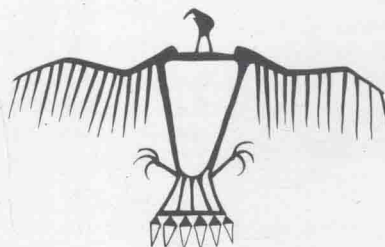
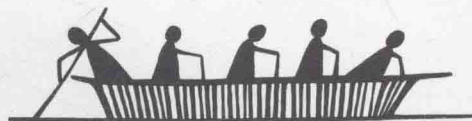
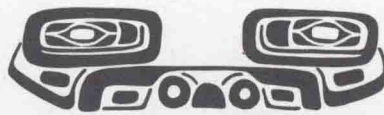
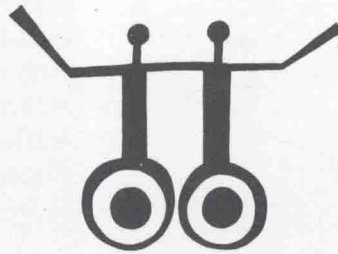
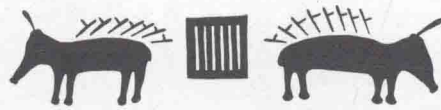
E98.A7F87 1982 704'.0397 82-40343

ISBN: 0-8478-0461-5

ISBN: 0-8478-0572-7 (pbk.)

Table of Contents

1	" . . . To Beautify the World"	13
2	Arts of the Southwest	29
3	Arts of California	73
4	Arts of the Northwest Coast	97
5	Arts of the Eskimos	137
6	Arts of the Plains	165
7	Arts of the Eastern Woodlands	205
	Acknowledgments	230
	Bibliography	231
	Photo Credits	236



“...To Beautify the World”

The Navajos have a saying that the purpose of art is “to beautify the world.” On the face of it, this does not sound so different from the function of art in the West. Yet, pleasure for the senses is only one dimension, and by no means the most important, of what Navajos understand by making the world beautiful. Beauty, rather, means balance, the proper order of things. Its affirmation or its restoration implies that society, the natural and supernatural environment, and the individual are in the normal state of health and harmony.

What we call art has a different meaning for a Navajo, and for Native Americans generally. Because art was functional, serving social and religious purposes, and was never “art for art’s sake” as it became in the West, Indian languages generally lack even a discrete term for art as a category apart from its function as communication of specific ideas and values. Still, the stylistic canons and subject matter of Native American art are not so different and mysterious that non-Indians are unable to enjoy them purely in terms of aesthetics and general standards of good craftsmanship. A Pomo feather basket like those shown in Chapter Three is beautiful and superbly crafted by any measure, whether or not one knows why this or that color feather was chosen by the weaver, or how shell beads fit into the social, economic, and ideological systems of Native Californians. Few carvers in the world could do with wood what the artists of the Northwest Coast achieved even before they had metal tools. To appreciate as art alone their soaring sculptured totem poles or splendid masks does not necessarily require an understanding of their religious ideology, their social organization, or the ways in which the right to commission or carve these works passed from the ancestors to their living descendants.

Yet much of American Indian art does require a suspension of bias toward the European tradition, an opening of the mind to new experiences

in forms, materials, and subject matter, and a willingness even to be jolted and mystified by unfamiliar beauty and power. For many works of the First Americans express and convey magic and mystery as much as beauty. This special spiritual dimension propels us into another world, beyond aesthetics, which may or may not be universal, into the particular social and ideological settings that gave rise to many of the works from the Indian Southwest, California, the Northwest Coast, the Arctic, the Plains, and the eastern Woodlands in these pages.

But if Native American art cannot be understood apart from ideology and religion, it is also true that there is no such thing as “the American Indian religion.” The social and ideological settings varied considerably from region to region and society to society. And the subtle interplay of environment, historical experience, cultural contact and diffusion, forms of subsistence, social organization, and other factors, natural and manmade, led to an enormous variety of localized religious forms, almost as many as there were Native languages and dialects and peoples with shared group values and a sense of their own identity. To appreciate this historical heterogeneity, one need recall only that linguists have identified more than fifty different Native language families, each containing numerous member languages that, though related, were mutually unintelligible. Most European languages, in contrast, belong to just two families: German and Romance.

Nonetheless, whatever their ways of dealing with their environments, and whatever factors contributed to the organic growth of their particular religions and art forms, the Native peoples of North America did share certain basic assumptions about the structure of the cosmos, the natural environment, and the place of human beings within it. However different in emphases, the religions and rituals of the Native peoples—from Arctic sea hunters to seed collectors and cultiva-

tors of the soil—clearly grew from common ideological roots, in what might best be called a shamanic transformational world view that valued above all the personal pathway to the supernatural in the ecstatic spirit vision and that recognized no essential qualitative difference between humans and other life forms. This world view accounted for the origin of the world and natural phenomena in terms of transformation of matter rather than creation out of nothing. The central figure in this religious system was the shaman, who was the specialist in the sacred and mediator between the society and the world of spirits.

In the Native view, human beings were not superior to animals; if anything, animals by their very nature were already in possession of sacred powers which humans sought to acquire. The relationship of people to their environments, to plants and animals, to the dead, to the spirit powers great and small, as to one another, was one of reciprocity: to receive benefits one had to give. What was taken from the earth had to be compensated for by gifts of like worth so as not to anger the spirits and deplete the natural resources. Whatever their specific local forms, American Indian religions were profoundly ecological in origin as well as in their philosophical assumptions.

Archaeological evidence suggests that in a few cases there may have been animal kills greater than were justified by need, but by and large the spiritual-ecological orientation seems to have protected game against overhunting and man-made extinction, at least until traditional values began to break down in the north under the pressures and temptations of the fur trade. It is well known that only a sudden change in fashion in men's top hats saved the beaver from extinction. On the Northwest Coast, the playful otter, an appealing animal that everywhere enjoyed a special status in myth and symbolism and that was also a powerful source of supernatural power for the shaman, was virtually wiped out before its gleaming pelt lost its economic allure. Its near-extinction, though, left a curious mythological residue among the Tlingit. Like all animals, the otter had its human aspect, and it could transform itself merely by taking off its animal skin, revealing the human essence beneath. While shamans might seek out the otter in their initiatory power quests, to take its tongue and preserve it as a magical amulet, ordinary folk feared it as a magical and merciless adversary of human beings that lurked beneath the surface of lakes to kidnap and drown unsuspecting people, especially children. The inoffensive and entertaining otter

seems a curious choice as a dangerous enemy, but the Tlingit had a logical explanation. The otters were only taking revenge because so many of their number had been killed for profit. With their power as transformers, the Otter People inducted their human victims into their own tribe, to replace those otters that had been killed.

Of course, this represents an extreme consequence of the breakdown of the rules of life. Ordinarily, if an animal had voluntarily given up its life to human beings, it was incumbent on the people to see to its regeneration by the strict observance of taboos and rituals of propitiation. Among the Eskimos, for example, the slain animal was not simply butchered but addressed with respect and gratitude and offered its favorite foods. Considering the precariousness of Eskimo life, it is not surprising that hunting taboos and rites for the rebirth of game were most elaborated in the Arctic. Indeed, much of Eskimo art was functionally related to the constant need to placate the spirits of the game and the greater powers who watched over the animals on whom Eskimos depended for virtually everything that made life possible in the frozen North. The Eskimos shared in the general Native American belief that animals were reborn from their bones. To make certain that game was regenerated true to species, the bones of land and sea animals had to be disposed of separately. So complete was this separation that a hunter could not even wear the same clothing or use the same weapons for hunting on land as on sea. Seal were returned to life by uniting the bones with the bladder, which is where Eskimos located the soul or life force of human beings and animals.

To Native Americans, not just animals but all other phenomena were alive and inhabited by an animating spirit. A rock, a tree, a blade of grass, or a deer was no less potentially capable of thought, speech, and action than a human being. In fact, there was no such thing as dead or inanimate matter, although natural objects and phenomena did not manifest their potential for conscious interaction at all times. Thus, the builders of the Northwest Coast communal houses, when they took planks from a cedar, or the Iroquois mask carvers, when they cut the outlines of a mask on the trunk of a basswood tree, begged the tree to excuse them for hurting it.

Every entity was given its outward appearance by a "form soul." The shaggy bark of the cedar gave the tree its appearance, just as the pelt gave form to the otter. Beneath this outer form, however, the spiritual essences of the different phenomena were qualitatively equivalent. When the form soul was removed, natural phenomena re-

vealed their inner identities, and Native American mythology and art, especially in the Pacific Northwest, are replete with themes of supernatural beings who transformed themselves into snakes or trees, bags of paint, or even men to accomplish their tasks. On the Northwest Coast, some peoples graphically expressed this qualitative equivalence in complex hinged masks that represented a spirit being on the outside but, at a given moment in a dance, could be instantaneously opened by the wearer to reveal another face and identity within. If the animals could lay aside their skins and appear as men, so too could a man put on an animal skin and become the animal, at least during a ceremony or while he was hunting.

When the form/soul was forcibly removed, the plant or animal might die in its present form, but its spirit continued to exist and could return and avenge itself, as did the Otter People in Northwest Coast legend. Therefore a hunter accorded respect to a slain animal and propitiated its spirit, often thanking it for giving up its life to sustain the man and his family, and the hunter's wife further honored the game by decorating its skin with paintings or embroidery. Plants harvested or collected were believed to be just as sentient, and to ensure that the plant spirits would not be offended, agricultural peoples celebrated ceremonies of thanksgiving at the different stages of plant growth and maturation. The Algonquian and Iroquoian peoples of the northern and eastern Woodlands held plant life in such high regard and were so firmly convinced of the beneficent effect of the living vegetation on human life that plant and floral motifs literally dominated their sacred and decorative arts.

Many Native Americans believed that, in addition to the spirits animating individual plants and animals, there also existed Masters or Mistresses of the species, conceived as supernatural guardians more spiritually potent than the beings under their care. These guardians took offense if their charges were mistreated, overexploited, or not properly honored in ritual and in the observation of the taboos. In the tradition of Southwestern Pueblos, for example, corn was in the charge of the Corn Maidens, each representing corn of a different color. To this day Zuni tradition tells of a time when food was so wantonly wasted that the Corn Maidens grew angry and withdrew from the pueblo, taking refuge by the sacred lake in the center of the underworld and leaving misery and famine among the irreverent people. Similarly, the Iroquois addressed their principal cultivated staples—corn, beans, and squash—as a trio of female deities known as the

Three Sisters and paid them reverent respect.

Still, much American Indian art falls into the category of "animal art," in the sense that even among people who relied heavily on the vegetable kingdom, animals and their perceived social and symbolic functions constituted major themes in the oral as well as the visual arts. The animals selected for special attention were not necessarily especially important for physical survival or particularly fearsome or respected for physical prowess as predators. These factors, while certainly important, seem not to have been the principal attractions. Rather, people were fascinated by species that mirrored the predominant themes of the general world view, especially the overarching concept of transformation, or species that, like the shaman, the mediator between the natural and supernatural worlds, were not strictly bound to a specific ecological niche or cosmic level but transcended the normal boundaries restricting most species to one environment. Thus, creatures that occur over and over in art and myth are those that undergo dramatic transformations, or while not changing form do equally well in radically different settings: toad or frog, for example, which metamorphoses from aquatic, vegetarian, gill-breathing and fishlike tadpole to terrestrial, four-footed carnivore, or diving birds that seem equally at home in the sky, on the water, and under the water. No wonder, then, that in the Northwest Coast art, the frog is often represented as the direct source of magical power, transferring his or her spirit qualities to the shaman through the tongue. Birds in general were symbols of the celestial journey of the shaman, and water birds, in particular, of the shaman's ability to descend into the watery depths as well as rise into the heavenly realm. This kind of symbolism is well-nigh universal: the prominence of the duck in Native American myth and art all over the continent, for example, stems not from its contribution to the Indian diet but from its uncanny sense of navigation over enormous distances, its ability as a swimmer, and its capacity to remain under water for a long time. On the other hand, economic importance hardly disqualifies an animal from a spiritual role. No species was more essential to the survival of the Plains Indians than the buffalo, and none was more sacred.

Animals that share certain characteristics with humans, such as an omnivorous diet or care for their young, were generally selected for special attention. However, the qualities that made some animals stand out over other species were not necessarily obvious: Native peoples were superb observers of the natural environment, experts in

the ecology and behavior of every creature or plant, from insect to tree, ever alert for characteristics in some way perceived as analogous to their own thinking. It is this constant interplay between close and accurate observation of the natural world and ideology that accounts for the origins of many metaphors and symbols that to us at first glance appear arbitrary, illogical, or the invention of overactive imaginations. If certain animals were credited with special spirit powers useful to the shaman and others were not, the reason might lie buried deep in very old mythologies, reaching back perhaps as far as the ultimate Asiatic origins of American Indians. But it is at least as likely that some special observed characteristic of the species was responsible. On the Northwest Coast, for example, the killer whale was considered a great "shaman-maker." It is a beautiful animal, graceful, intelligent, and "anomalous"—a warm-blooded mammal that acts like a fish, a fact well known to people dependent on ocean life. Perhaps its strikingly contrasting black and white coloration contributed to its mediating role in shamanic cosmology, but no doubt the coastal hunters of the Northwest Coast observed other behaviors that linked this species with the transformational powers of their shamans. Otters, bears, wolves, octopus, and mountain goats were likewise credited with shaman-making powers that unquestionably had their origin in particular observable characteristics in form, life cycle, social organization, food preferences, habitat, even sound, characteristics that associated them with one or another of such dominant themes in the shamanic world view as metamorphosis, simultaneity of different forms inherent in one and the same phenomenon, or physical and spiritual breakthrough from one cosmic plane to another.

If many of the phenomena in the Native universe were capable of change and transformation, people nevertheless had a clear conception of the structure of the cosmos and their place within it. Most peoples divided the world into four sacred quarters, marked the cardinal points, and sometimes added the zenith and the nadir as a fifth and sixth direction, and believed themselves to live at the sacred center, the navel of the world, as the true human beings. Hence, many called themselves in their own languages simply *The People*, while the names by which we know them today are frequently no more than European inventions or versions of the often unflattering names traders or settlers heard from their neighbors. Thus, the proper name of the Navajos (thought to derive from the Tewa *Na'ava-hu'u*, "arroyo with cultivated fields") is *Diné*, Peo-

ple. Small local groups of Eskimos generally named themselves after the place in which they lived, but as a whole they are *Inuit*, People, "*Esquimaux*" being a French transliteration of an Athabaskan word meaning, roughly, "eaters of raw meat."

The idea of an underworld—the Nadir—as the home of the generative Earth as Mother Goddess and of various fertility and germination deities was naturally best developed among such agricultural peoples as the Southwestern Pueblo Indians. Yet there was a comparable conception even among the Eskimos, who, in the absence of agriculture and significant plant resources, replaced the agricultural earth goddess with an ambivalent, half-terrible, half-beneficent Mother Goddess who ruled over all the animals of the sea from her house beneath the ocean. Northwest Coast peoples had a rather terrifying but also sometimes nurturing female spirit of the forested interior, source of berries and other plant foods and materials; curiously, the Northwest Coast peoples also shared with the ancient Mexicans the idea of a female earth spirit in the form of a transforming toad, a frequent motif in Northwest Pacific art. Like other Native Americans, the Kwakiutl and their neighbors on the Northwest Coast also conceived of a multilayered cosmos, with an underworld peopled by the human dead and by the ruling spirits of fish and other sea animals.

Above the four-quartered earth was the sky world, usually conceived as a dome, sometimes with several levels, where Sun and Moon and other sky beings lived. The Sun was usually male and the Moon female, except among the Eskimos, who reversed the sexes. Stars were sometimes thought of as souls of the dead who traveled through the heavens. Most peoples also marked constellations, often quite different from our zodiac, and observed the motions of certain planets, particularly Venus. The Plains Indians and many agricultural peoples believed that rain was brought by the Thunderbirds, large, eagle-like birds whose wings made the sound of the thunder and who used lightning and hail against terrestrial snakes that lived beneath the earth in caves and springs or other bodies of water. Thunderbirds and their cosmic struggles against terrestrial adversaries are prominent in the symbolism of peoples as far apart as the Navajos of Arizona and New Mexico, the Kwakiutl of British Columbia, and the Woodlands peoples of northeastern North America.

Many peoples not only shared in the worldwide tradition of a great primordial flood but visualized the earth itself as an island floating in a