

*The Arts and  
Crafts of the  
North American  
Indian*



# INDIAN ART IN AMERICA

*Frederick J. Dockstader*

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*The Arts and Crafts of the North American Indian*

FREDERICK J. DOCKSTADER

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*Dedicated to the Memory of*

FREDERIC H. DOUGLAS

*A pioneer leader in the efforts to  
establish an understanding  
and appreciation of  
the Indian and his arts*



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Frederick J. Dockstader, *Director*  
Museum of the American Indian  
Heye Foundation

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PLACE OF ORIGIN

PLATE

PLACE OF ORIGIN

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## PREFACE

**T**he various manifestations of the artistic impulse of the American Indian are so limitless and complex that no one volume can hope to do the subject justice. This book is an attempt to gather together a general selection of some of the finest examples of North American Indian art, together with some specimens of everyday craftsmanship which possess unusual aesthetic qualities. The Indian arts of Mexico and Latin American areas have been excluded, for they are essentially quite different, and deserve completely separate treatment.

It has not been possible to represent all art styles and tribal groups; rather, the goal has been to include every important region, most of the numerically or artistically pre-eminent tribes, and all the major techniques employed by Indian artists. Certain unavoidable imbalances result from this manner of presentation, as well as from other factors. The Indian artist achieved a mastery of sculptural techniques in particular, and the selections are perhaps weighted heavily in that direction. Although there was certainly equal competence in other techniques, function or material restricted the artist's freedom of expression, and fewer "masterpieces" resulted. Some art was created in perishable materials, and there are so few specimens extant that it is impossible truly to assess the degree of artistry involved. Lastly, some work cannot easily be reproduced: sand paintings, for example, were created for specific ceremonies by sprinkling colored sands upon a prepared earth surface, then destroyed when the ritual had ended.

But a far graver matter is the treatment of the arts as such, for this study is limited to the visual arts of the Indian. It must be emphasized that the literature, poetry, music, and dance of the American Indian comprise a great part of his total art expression, and that some of his major potential contributions

to American life lie in these fields. Regrettably, we have had to exclude these facets of his culture, with only portions of costume paraphernalia receiving fair attention.

It is hoped that the reader will gain an understanding of what had been done before the white man came—and what has happened to that art since. The effort will be made to present these examples somewhat as seen through Indian eyes, and thereby to interpret insofar as it is humanly possible the aesthetic and ethnological qualities of the object which would have importance in the Indian's thinking. There is no thought of investigating the deep psychological ramifications of human art expression in this volume, nor is it the writer's intention to attempt to analyze Indian character and thought through his art expression. This is much better left to the analytical psychologist, or perhaps to the more imaginative social anthropologist.

This book originally grew out of a project undertaken by the Carnegie Foundation, which in 1955 established the Carnegie Study of the Arts of the United States, under the direction of Dr. Lamar Dodd, of the University of Georgia. The author was privileged to serve as the Consultant on the Arts of the American Indian for that project, and the Carnegie collection forms the nucleus of this volume. That collection was chosen only from public museums in the United States, since the availability of the subjects for visual education use was a major factor in their selection.

Additions to this basic Carnegie collection have given this present work a greater balance, particularly in regard to the work of Canadian Indians. Circumstances make it impossible to canvass the entire North American continent for specimens. To the reader must be left some of the thrill of aesthetic explora-

tion, for many museums possess treasures of equal aesthetic merit. The connoisseur may miss certain favorites or classic examples which have not been included for various reasons; but any selection is arbitrary, and it is hoped that he will encounter a sufficient number of other masterpieces so that he will not begrudge the loss.

Each specimen is presented in its most effective visual form (but without photographic tricks), together with adequate ethnographical information to enable the viewer to understand its use and origin. Its emotional or artistic appeal is a subjective matter, which the reader can best judge for himself. The sources of the articles illustrated are also given in the individual cap-

tions; they came from the many fine collections throughout the country, albeit the majority are in museums east of the Mississippi. Due to circumstances connected with the initial development of the Carnegie study, the bulk of the specimens came from the great collections of the Museum of the American Indian, Heye Foundation.

Most of the illustrations in this volume have never before been published; in providing this debut for many heretofore unknown Indian art objects, it is the author's hope that this volume will make Americans more familiar with a part of their heritage of which they may justly be proud. Perhaps they may also be inspired to explore that heritage more fully.

## *Introduction*



