The Functions of Art in Four North American Indian Cultures

An Honors Thesis (HONRS 499)

by

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PURPOSE OF THESIS

This discussion focuses on the vital role that art plays in four North American Indian cultures. Clearly, art exists and is admired in many cultures for its aesthetic qualities. Besides these qualities, however, art functions in many other ways within societies. For example, art serves as a means of enculturating young people into a given culture. Moreover, art fulfills crucial roles in the religious, social, economic and political sectors of many cultures. Four cultures are explored in detail in order to demonstrate the various functions that art plays in these societies.
INTRODUCTION

When one becomes aware of the rich texture of the functional context of art in a particular society, he or she begins to view it in a way that approaches that of a native member of the society— that is, as a vital and necessary part of culture. (Anderson: 1979:51) Art is a traditional activity in cultures and within each culture it serves various purposes. For some societies, art is used for its economic value either for monetary income or trading purposes. Moreover, art gives reverence to animals or crops of economic and survival importance through visual representation on objects including tools and ceremonial regalia. Certainly, art also is a means of visually representing religious beliefs and deities in order to help make religions more tangible. Art also helps to maintain the stability of societies through its use in social control practices by the elite, and in ethical education for children. Finally, art reflects the changes in cultures through motifs, styles, and techniques. Examples of the various functions of art can be seen in the Navajo, Hopi, Pacific Northwest Coast, and Inuit Indians.
The Navajos live in present day New Mexico and Arizona. Since they were seminomadic when they first settled in the Southwest, they focused their creative energies on blankets, sandpaintings which could easily be erased, and objects for personal adornment which could be taken with them. Although their neighbors, the Pueblo Indians made pottery, the Navajos hardly ventured into it because of the difficulty in transporting it. The Navajos excelled in weaving and jewelry-making. A cherished medium may be used for all types of artistic representations, and the characteristics of the medium shape the style identified with the culture. Technique plays a role in determining style, but predispositions toward expression lead to cultural values, personality factors, and qualitative experiences.

Of the four Navajo media, technique most affects weaving. Alternation, color contrast, shapes, step-like diagonals, and composition reflect cultural values. Early Navajo weaving consisted of natural colors such as brown, white, and black. Most blankets were striped. As time passed, new cloth was imported from overseas and Navajo women began to use it more in their weaving. Outside influences also added new colors of dyes, for instance, deep indigo blue, maroon, purple, pink, green, yellow, and red. The steady influx of traders to the Southwest affected Navajo culture and art. Textiles became more commercialized and foreign designs were often used rather than traditional styles. In the late 1800s, weaving became dominated by the smooth-sided diamond and triangle patterns. Contrary to previous functions, both weavers and customers of the time period considered a Navajo tapestry to be useful as a floor covering. This transformation of blanket to rug changed sizes, textures, and designs. Navajo weavers digressed from traditional abstract designs, and met the public demand for pictorial rugs. These pictures usually displayed ceremonial events or other cultural beliefs or events. The economic importance of weavers and their goods was not crucial to
the Navajo society, but to many individuals it was the only way to make a living.

Navajo sandpaintings are a part of a ceremonial which cures illness as well as creating harmony in aspects of the Navajo world. Sandpaintings are not made except during ceremonials. To the Navajo, their beauty is in their meaning and spiritual power. Sandpaintings represent the visible form of invisible powers and are based on the myths of the Navajo culture. Holy People are represented in the uppermost because they are at a greater distance from daily life. Animals are expressed in unstylized forms if associated with evil powers, and their symbolic value forms a link between the daily life of the Navajo and the animistic world.

The composition and construction of the sandpaintings follow a basic outline which stems from religious beliefs and related symbols. The principal sandpainting colors, white, blue, yellow, and black, are linked with the Four Sacred Mountains of the tribal universe. White is associated with the dawn, blue with the sky, yellow with the twilight, and black with the darkness. Construction of the sandpaintings may occur in a linear fashion.
which depicts figures arranged over a groundbar. Radial sandpaintings denote images in a whirling pattern about a center point. In extended-center patterned paintings, a central motif is enlarged in order to dominate the composition. The compositions often are surrounded by a protective garland symbolic of a spiritual guardian, such as a rainbow, lightning, snakes, and sunflowers. Guardians serve to protect the magical spirit expressed in the sandpainting. Despite cultural changes in the Navajo society, the art of sandpainting has displayed incredible stability. Some variations in design and subject matter have occurred, but since the ceremonial aspects of the sandpainting do not change, the artistic formula must remain somewhat constant.

In the area of drawing, Navajo artists believe that the conception should be clear prior to going to work, and committing it to paper. Because the drawing is fully developed in the mind, the artist is free to concentrate on forms one at a time. Crayon and pencil drawings in hogans express scenes from hunts, ceremonies, of animals, and of people trying to make a living. Drawings are also done by Navajo children who use the arts to learn their culture. Navajo drawings are reflections of everyday occurrences in their society, and therefore serve as artistic documents for the culture itself.

Indians of the Southwest probably used bone and shell to make personal ornaments since their arrival there over 10,000 years ago. Metal working and the wearing of silver did not come into play until the early 1800s when the Spaniards introduced them. Some of the very early metalwork was done using copper or brass, but silver was preferred. Silver coins were used in early jewelry. Silversmiths melted down several coins, cast them into an ingot which was then hammered into a sheet. From this sheet, the smith would create the ornament.

Besides hammering cast silver ingots, into sheets, Navajo artists created pieces directly from stone molds into which designs were sculpted. Sandstone was the main material used for these molds, followed by tuff (or tuffa). The Navajos used a two-piece mold with a sprue hole and air vents. The stone
was then coated with powdered charcoal so that the molten metal would fill the whole design rather than freezing only in deeply carved spaces only. Pieces cast in this way were filed and sanded until smooth rather than being flattened into a sheet. The pieces were then bent over an anvil or another rounded form to make the desired shape. Buckles, bracelets, buttons, rings, najas (crescent-shaped pendants), and ketohs (metal and leather bow guards worn on a hunter’s wrist as protection against the snap of the bowstring) were all created by this technique. Moreover, the use of this technique seems to be uniquely Navajo.

By the turn of the twentieth century, the setting of stones was an important development in silver jewelry. Well into the 1940s, the Navajo smiths emphasized the silverwork rather than the use of stones, but in time, they did use turquoise in their work. Altered and imitation turquoise soon appeared in the art also.

Many of the jewelry-making techniques of the early smiths were assimilations of techniques and designs from other cultures. In fact, the Mexican plateros (silverworkers) are usually given credit for teaching the Navajos stamping because the silver stamps used by the Navajos are similar to stamped designs on Mexican leatherwork. However, based on Navajo oral tradition and extensive visual evidence, it seems that Mexican blacksmiths had more to do with the beginning of Southwest Indian jewelry than did the Mexican silversmiths or leatherworkers.

Other aspects of Southwest Indian jewelry are more related to items of the Southern Plains Indians. The concha belt of the Navajo was probably derived from the Plains Indian idea of metal disks. The Navajo, however, made their concha belts from silver rather than from German silver, which is mainly copper with nickel and zinc added. They ornamented them with techniques learned from the Mexicans. Earlier belts had simple conchas with diamond-shaped slots in the center through which a leather belt was threaded. Later styles were made from more elaborately decorated conchas, often separated by butterfly-shaped pieces of silver. The concha belt may have originally been derived from the disk-shaped silver hair plates that were worn close to the scalp. At first, these ornamented hair plates were worn singly, but over time, several ornaments were attached together. In the 1880s, hair plates often reached six feet in length. If a man wearing a long hair plate was sitting, the ornament crossed under his right arm, and draped across his lap, looking very similar to a concha belt. Moreover, Plains Indian women wore hair plates wrapped around them as belts, and let
the excess length trail down one side. To most people, Navajo silversmiths take credit for the concha belt, while the Plains Indian origin of the idea is seldom mentioned in texts. Other similarities between Navajo and Plains Indian decorative elements include the crescent-shaped naja design and the metal-decorated bridle. Navajo bridles made in the late 1800s were built in a very similar fashion to the metal-covered bridles in use by the Plains Indians throughout the century. Most likely, ideas were exchanged as a result of the raiding and trading which occurred whenever Navajo and Plains Indians met.

To the Southwest Indians, silver and turquoise jewelry represented the finest type of personal adornment. Wearing jewelry secured power and respect for the wearer. It was also considered an asset with a known value that could be used as collateral for securing credit for dry goods with traders, exchanged for religious and medical services, or traded for livestock. It was also a way of accumulating and storing wealth. These uses were the combined first step in the development of the economic importance of silver jewelry. Over time, lightweight silver and turquoise jewelry became extremely popular with the tourists. Thus, jewelry-making began to have an important economic contribution to the Navajo culture.

Works of art are the result of several factors acting somewhat independently: technique, universal practices, inherited styles, training, commercialization, intention, personality, and cultural premises. Navajo drawings relate art and culture because the materials were organized in terms of value, and interpretations showed the level of awareness crossed, which in turn may suggest how the culture is organized. Both drawings and weavings of the Navajo express the animistic philosophy of the culture. By giving meaning to significant traits of the art, usually by referencing their context, these significant traits were related to cultural premises. Just as significant traits and certain aspects of subject matter constitute the core of art, the premises represent the center of culture. Mills stated, (Mills:1959:209) Works of art are valuable because they express meanings that escape the net of language. Judging from the omnipresence of art, these meanings are important in behavior.
The Hopi live north of the Colorado River in northeastern Arizona. Linguistically, they are distantly related to the Aztecs and southern California Indians. From the surrounding area, they harvest abundant fruit and vegetables. Supernatural beings called kachinas govern the productivity of the harvests, and therefore, much time is spent fulfilling duties as part of Hopi relationships with the kachina spirits.

The kachinas have a manifestation as spirit beings first, and second as a physical representation of that spirit. The spirit is given substance and
personality through masks, costumes, paint, symbols, and actions by human impersonators. The third manifestation is the small colorfully painted wooden kachina dolls which are a popular form of Indian folk art. Hopi men carve the dolls from cottonwood root and pay close attention to the distinguishing details of mask, costume, and colors. Color is of great importance to the Hopis because they relate specific hues with the six cardinal directions: white with the east, blue or green with the west, yellow with the north, red with the south, black with the zenith, and gray with the nadir.

Kachina dolls have several functions in Hopi life. On special occasions, the kachinas are given to infants, children, or females of all ages to help them learn the kachinas' characteristics. These special occasions are celebrated with lavish ceremonies expressive of religious doctrines. Another art form, musical instruments made of wood, bone and other materials are employed during these ceremonies. Clearly, in this case, the kachina doll ceremonies function as educational tools. Kachina dolls also assure the recipient the benefits of an intimate relationships with the Hopi supernaturals. Kachinas function religiously as intermediaries between human beings and the gods. They also influence human, animal, and plant life. Perhaps the carving of the kachina dolls and their presentation to
children during the Niman season are attempts to let the children know where they belong, to remind them of the Hopi way and of the importance of kachina spirit relations.

The Hopi also engage in basketry which is one of the oldest of human arts. In the Southwest, all the major basket-weaving techniques, namely, plaiting, coiling and wicker, were perfected probably before Coronado came looking for his Cities of Gold. The flat coiled Hopi wedding plaque called po-ta is one of a few kinds of coiled basketry that only the women of the Second Mesa still weave today. It has thick coils of shredded yucca or grass and fine yucca splints tightly sewn over the foundation. Most colors are of vegetable or mineral origin, but sometimes commercial dyes are used. The po-ta has significant religious meaning in the fact that without a po-ta a Hopi man from Second Mesa would have trouble being admitted into the underworld at his death.

Designs on Hopi baskets range from geometrical shapes representing the four world quarters or clouds and rain to life forms and spirits of kachinas. Crow Mother, the mother of all the kachinas, is the most commonly represented kachina spirit. From a symbolic point of view, the flat plaque is quite interesting. It replicates the flat earth disk, and the Middle World on which the Hopi people live. The coil can be read as the sacred history of the Hopis: their circular migration from the center of the earth called the sipapu, to the horizons of the four world quarters, and back again to their point of origin where they established their first villages. Hopi basketry is a graphic representation of the beliefs and values of their culture.

The creation of pottery is another way in which the Hopi graphically represent their cultural beliefs and values. Pottery-making, like basketry is a woman's job within Hopi villages. The clay used for creating pots is dug from a deposit close to the village in which the woman lives. The clay is treated using water, sandstone and then kneaded until it reaches the correct consistency. The pots are made by rolling and piling coils of clay one on top of another. The seams are pinched together and flattened usually by
applying pressure with a piece of flint. Next, the pottery is painted using traditional colors and designs. Paint colors for designs usually include red, black, brown and a light yellow-brown. The bold patterns are rich with symbolism and imagination. When painting is finished, and the pots dry, a firing oven is built and the pots are fired. Pottery is an important method for expressing decorative styles and also serves as a functional art form within the Hopi culture.

While pottery-making is considered a woman's task, weaving within the Hopi culture is done by the men. The clothing for each family is the man's responsibility and is usually woven in the winter while the fields lay fallow. The men gather the cotton, card it and spin it into thread. However, the
women dye it different colors in pigments gathered from native plants. Tall vertical looms which hang from overhanging beams are used for the weaving the cloth. Women, however, do weave rabbit-fur robes used by the Hopis.

The Hopi people adopted silver-making later than other Southwestern tribes. However, they have developed distinctive jewelry that artistically equals that of the rest of the area. From the beginning of Hopi silverwork in about 1900, their technique and styles have often been influenced by their neighbors and teachers, the Zuni and Navajo. Like the Navajo, the Hopi followed traditions of the Plains Indian metalwork, Spanish metal- and leather-work, as well as using their own motifs and backgrounds. Over time, however, the jewelry became more commercialized and the type of silver and design were modified by economic demands.

Hopi silversmiths were lower in number than the Zuni and Navajo because the Hopi lacked economic help from nearby traders. At Zuni, traders provided silver and tools on credit, and then bought the finished jewelry. In Hopi villages, non-Indian traders did nothing to encourage silver-making. Also, Hopi storekeepers did not have the necessary finances to supply tools and materials on credit. Another factor contributing to the limitation of Hopi silverwork as a minor craft for many years was the competition of other craft work. The carving of kachina dolls, making of pottery and basketry, and textiles were in high demand by other Indians as well as tourists and traders.

In summary, Barton Wright of the San Diego Museum of Man stated, (Kabotie:1977:11) It has often been said that artists are the reporters of the contemporary scene, even reporters of events yet to transpire. How much more are they the identifiers and delineators of a culture. ...for all Hopi design and paint their ceremonial gear, lavishing artistic expression upon every aspect of their religion, their tools, and their homes.
Among the tribes of the Northwest Coast, there is a close relationship between art and society. Phases of life are marked with artistic expression. Northwest Indian culture as a whole believes in a similar concept of the universe in an animistic fashion, and these beliefs are expressed in their arts.

One of the features of Northwest Coast art is its use for hunting purposes. Indians use whale and other sea mammal bones to carve clubs. These clubs are used for killing fish and seals, as well as for bows. The carving of cedar canoes is also an important aspect of Northwest Coast art related to hunting. The canoe paddles are often painted with symbolic features expressing cultural and religious values and beliefs. Red cedar, a soft pink wood, is used for the carving of canoes, totem and memorial poles, house posts, carvings, masks, bowls, and ladles. Yellow cedar, yew, alder wood, maple, and hemlock trees are also used in woodworking. Painting is used to enhance and adorn the basic forms of the carvings. Although early paints and brushes were made from natural elements, contemporary carvings are often painted using more modern materials.

Many household articles are also art forms. Mats are woven from inner red or yellow cedar bark, and are used for blankets, seat covers, placements, and covers for boxes and canoes. Baskets are used for food gathering, storage, carrying water, and cooking. The baskets, made of spruce root, must be finely woven in order to be watertight. Baskets sometimes have designs made of dyed fibers. Soft, even grained, pleasant-smelling alder wood is used for carving wooden dishes. Bentwood boxes used for storing food, cooking, storing possessions, holding remains of high-ranking people, and holding fresh water on long canoe voyages are made from one plank of cedar. The outside of the box may be carved or painted. Ladles and spoons are primarily made from alder wood or mountain goat horn. The handles and occasionally the back of the bowls are intricately carved. Cedar bark is pounded, shredded, and then woven to make soft capes, skirts and dresses. Waterproof hats are woven from spruce roots, and decorations are
sometimes woven in, or painted on the hat. Cedar trees are well suited for art works because the wood is soft, light, and rot resistant.

Religious beliefs play a role in other types of Northwest Coast art. Ivory was sometimes used as a material for carving amulets and charms. However, the material of choice for charms and amulets is usually stone because of its characteristics like shape or coloring which are thought to have some magical quality. The basis for Northwest Coast arts came from the religious idea of the guardian spirit.

Shaman rituals created many demands on the arts. Charms and amulets were used for their magical qualities. During the rituals, figures, rattles and dance wands were used. Hollow leg bones of deer and elk serve as a soul catcher to return souls to a body from which the soul has wandered. These bones are often highlighted with inlay of
Art is a crucial part of the Northwest ceremonialism because it creates visual aspects. In potlatches, the masks and costumes used represent social status and the history of the family. Button blankets, Chilkat blankets, shirts, and leggings are woven out of cedar bark fiber and mountain goat wool. Spruce hats are tightly woven and then painted with a character representing the owner's clan or lineage myth. The number of potlatches given by the owner is indicated at the top by cylindrical figures. Bracelets, necklaces, earrings, nose rings, and labrets are worn in amounts determined by the individual's social standing.

A ceremonial headdress carved of cedar or alder and inlaid with abalone is worn by the chief. Masks usually carved from yellow cedar and inlaid with abalone, copper, or iron, represent personal crests, spirits, and spirit animals. Carved staffs often illustrate incidents from a family's myth of origin. The speaker's staff is tapped on the floor to gain the attention of the audience before important announcements are made.

Males and females of high rank often have crest designs tattooed on their hands, arms, chest, legs, and feet. Wooden whistles with twine, painted rawhide drums, and rattles made of deer hooves, puffin beaks, sheep horn and copper which are filled with pebbles or shells, provide music, voices of supernatural beings, and noise during the ceremony.

During potlatch ceremonies, totem poles are also raised. Heraldic and house frontal poles incorporate many carved figures because they tell stories. Each figure might represent an individual story, or all together the figures may tell a single story associated with a family's history. Animal or symbolic crests can also show the social rank of the family. Figures may represent mythological creatures, but also have very personal meanings to the family using the crest.

Several types of totem poles exist. House frontal poles are carved into the front of the longhouse, and have an opening at the base that forms an entranceway. A memorial pole
is raised by heirs of deceased ancestors in order that they may claim the titles and privileges of their ancestors. Some memorial poles have carved rings to show the number of potlatches given by the ancestors, and others may only have a single nest animal or plain pole. Mortuary poles have a box covered with a plaque that contains the remains of high ranking people. In summary, while ultimately the totem pole became a part of past ancestral history, it served as a reminder of a glorious event as long as it stood. It reflected the prominence, status, and virtue of the family who paid for it, and they took due pride in their achievement. (Malin:1986:91)
The Eskimo race is scattered in territories around the northern ice cap. Their settlements are most often found near the sea, since aquatic game is the main source of food for most Inuit. Anthropologists argue about the origin of the Eskimo, but many regard them as original forest dwellers who later became hunters and fishers. Another argument regarding the origins of the Inuit centers around the question of whether the Eskimos are far descendants of New Stone Age man. Extensive studies of the cultural resemblances between Inuit and the Stone Age man suggest that the art and weaponry are no more related than that of many other primitive peoples.

Europeans moved from both the east and the west toward the middle of the Eskimo territory. Fur traders, explorers, and missionaries brought with them diseases that decreased the Eskimo population drastically. Many Europeans, however, were absorbed into the Eskimo ranks. These racial crossings created new blood that helped to influence Inuit art, while changes in genetic makeup probably helped to promote the rise and fall of that art at various periods of history. Eskimo art may have been enriched by three cultural and genetic contacts with Europe: The Old Stone Age diffusion into circumpolar art, through the Norsemen who were defeated by the Eskimos in Greenland, and through the Norse explorers and colonists of Newfoundland. The Asiatic background of many Inuit most likely influenced the Eskimo arts in the following ways: mastery of machinery, the ability to manipulate the newly developed decorative alphabet which expresses much Canadian Eskimo art and also the talent of the Inuit to work in miniature sizes.

Life in the Arctic modified Eskimo art immensely. The climate affected Eskimo art forms seemingly more than it did the Eskimo character. In many aspects of art, the harsh Arctic climate deprived them of raw materials and tools. Arctic art does have a history of wood-carving. However, since wood was scarce in most Eskimo cultures it was considered a precious material, and therefore was used only for masks of spirits, and essential objects such as kayaks, bows, and harpoons. Iron was imported in very small quantities through Siberia, and was used only for the most essential tools and weapons, including harpoon heads. Tiny pieces of iron were also used as tips for engraving tools. Engraving is much more common in the Arctic than is ivory sculpture. Vegetable products were scarce in the Arctic, and therefore, animal products had to be used. The Inuit invented and adapted techniques to get the best possible products from the available materials. Admittedly,
these materials did place a limit on what could be achieved, but artists often turned these liabilities to assets.

One raw material that the Eskimo possessed in immense quantities was high quality furs. These beautiful furs were used by the Inuit to make extremely attractive garments desired by Europeans of the time. The Eskimos also mixed the fur with mosaics of dyed leather, with hair embroidery, and with woven cloth. Intricate beading, stitching, attached buttons of ivory and other ornaments embellished every garment. Certainly, the art of costume held one of the highest standings among Eskimo arts, as can be seen in many illustrations which display Eskimos dressed at their best.

The physical structure of Eskimos undoubtedly helped to develop some aspects of Eskimo art. Since they could endure extremely low temperatures, they were able to condition ivory and hides in freezing urine. Their characteristic strong, shovel-shaped incisor teeth allowed the women to prepare seal skins by chewing on them thoroughly. Men used these teeth to make a new lash at the tip of their whip while out on dogsleds, and also for holding a bow drill bit while drilling. Finally, their small build allowed them to have a feel for miniature carvings.

Eskimo art was basically ceremonial, religious, or utilitarian in nature. Religion permeated every aspect of Eskimo culture and art often accompanied ceremonies and other cultural events.

Amulets were small objects with special powers derived from the spirit associated with them to ward off evil forces, bring luck, and bestow upon a person strengths and abilities not inherited. Amulets and charms could be worn on a part of the body or displayed in a household to protect the residents from illness and evil spirits. Some were put in a kayak to keep it seaworthy. Whaling charms were usually stored in a wooden box and kept on whaling boats in order to bring successful expeditions. Ivory guards on the deck of a kayak to prevent spears and paddles from falling off were quite often amulets made in human and animal shapes. A charm in the shape of a human face was thought to insure successful hunting. Hunting hats had ivory amulets and charms attached for luck. Amulets and charms of ivory or wood were made in vast quantities by the shamans and even by ordinary people. An amulet was sometimes carved as sculpture, but usually it was a natural object such as a part of a human or animal body, a piece of mineral, a feather, or almost any object thought to contain power. Charms were occasionally natural objects, but more often, they were carvings. Charms were used by the shamans to cure illnesses and perform magic during
Although the shamans did not have elaborate costumes, some accessories and equipment were worn while performing official roles. The shaman's belt was similar to amulet belts worn by other people, but also contained various amulets and charms to aid in protection from evil spirits, to bring luck or to give visions and inspiration. Some shamans also wore breast ornaments during special ceremonies. Fur garments were associated with the shaman's transformation and his relationship to his helping spirit. Bird headdresses were often worn by shaman dancers. Small drum-like instruments made of a round, flat piece of elaborately designed skin were struck with wooden sticks during the shamanic ceremony. Shamans also carried sculpted ivory staffs decorated with feathers which were probably used for divination during ceremonies.

In contemporary artworks, the knife, another shamanic tool is regularly shown. These model knives on his belt protected the shaman from evil spirits, and full-size knives were considered necessary to fight these spirits. Walrus tusks were commonly used as knives, and iron blades were sometimes inserted.

In Alaska, the two wooden kikituk monster sculptures were used in treating illness. The shaman used to put the kikituk under their gut parkas where it gnashed its sharp teeth in order to effect the cure. Other cultural artifacts involved in fighting illness include the sucking tube and utensil kits filled with everything necessary to cure any kind of sickness.

Another ceremonial item worn by the Eskimo shaman was the mask. The wearing of a mask symbolized the shaman's ability to transform, and displayed his relationship to the spirit world. Function and style of the masks varied from area to area. Alaskan Eskimos carved elaborate masks encompassing images of shamanic journeys, comic faces, spirits, humans, and gods, animals and other objects.

Masks carved out of wood were usually decorated with paint, gut, ...
teeth, beads, and fur. A variety of techniques and materials were employed to express the rich symbolism and imagery found in these ceremonial masks. Masks were used frequently by the Alaskan Eskimos. More significant uses of masks came during various festivals. These ceremonies were dedicated to the propitiation of animals, during which the masks functioned as a crucial part of the singing and dancing in honor of the spirits. Finally, masks were used on occasion to amuse or frighten children, and also as part of a costume for certain social gatherings.

Clearly, shamanic activities employed many types of artworks in order to express cultural values and beliefs. Clothing, drums, staffs, amulets, charms, sculpture pieces, knives, and masks were all crucial to religious ceremonies. Undoubtedly, there is a strong connection between the artistry of the Eskimo and the practice of their animistic culture.

Artistic utensils such as shuttles, toggles, fish spears, and sinkers in the shape of game animals or protective spirits played a part in everyday life. Seal oil lamps were made out of carved steatite pottery or pecked stone, and used to produce heat and light. The lamps sometimes had seal sculptures that swam inside the oil representing the importance of these seals to the Eskimo culture. The skilled Eskimo craftsmen made tools of wood, bone, and ivory in a truly artistic fashion. Hunters also created a device for scratching on the ice to lure seals to within striking distance of their harpoons. These functional devices, often shaped like seals and decorated with beads and seal claws, express the cultural importance of seal mammal hunting. Another tool, called a drag handle, used to haul dead seals or heavy objects across ice and snow, were carved out of wood, bone, ivory, or antler in forms that ingeniously represented cultural hunting motifs, while still adapting to the shape and composition of the raw material. Inuit predator-prey symbolism was well developed, and charms often symbolized these relationships and themes. Decorative seal figurines found on some float racks serve as ornamentation as well as magical aids for hunting success. Whale effigies were also carved on ivory brackets used to hold the harpoon constantly ready. Animal heads and shapes were quite often expressed in artworks of the Eskimo, and their common occurrence represents how strongly their culture valued the presence of animals for hunting.

Other shapes and subjects common to Eskimo art include those of masked heads, and mythological designs found in the cultural stories and beliefs of the Inuit. Artists crafted drums and finger masks which they used to accompany the songs and dances, either of the common cultural heritage
or songs which had been created spontaneously for special events. Artists also carved faces and animal heads into walrus ivory to make ceremonial pipes. Seals and other important animals also appear on snuff boxes which hold tobacco, a culturally important product. Clearly, Inuit art expresses their culture by graphically representing aspects of everyday values, beliefs, religious symbols, and ceremonial spirits and by adding concrete imagery to these psychological aspects of the Eskimo society.
Art functions in various aspects of the Navajo, Hopi, Pacific Northwest Coast, and Inuit cultures. Art is a means of visually representing religious beliefs and deities to create a more tangible religion. Art also plays an important role in other areas of culture such as economics, education, and social control. Moreover, art reflects the changes in cultures through motifs, styles, and techniques. Clearly, art plays an important role in enculturation in the Inuit, Northwest Coast, Hopi, and Navajo Indian societies.
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