

# **21<sup>st</sup> Century Learning** | Links to Our Collection

## **HONOURING TRADITION: REFRAMING NATIVE ART**

Welcome to

*21<sup>st</sup> Century Learning – Links to Our Collection.*

This online module and supplemental education guide was developed to allow access to hundreds of digitized images and lesson plans from Glenbow Museum's collections.

Our hope is to extend our vision of

'More people, interacting with art, culture and ideas more often.'

Please visit and enjoy *21<sup>st</sup> Century Learning – Honouring Tradition: Reframing Native Art.*

What is a “tradition”? What traditions do you have in your family? School? Culture? How do you show honour to people in your community? This educator’s package will help students to look at the role of art in the culture and traditions of Canadian First Nations of the plains and subarctic. The information encourages students to examine artifacts from the Glenbow Museum’s collection and connects them to other cultures, communities and environments within Canada.

Included in this guide are:

- Information on **First Nations art** including high-resolution photographs of artifacts, archival photographs and essays.
- **Lesson plans** including discussions for looking at primary sources, curriculum connections and lesson plans for a variety of ages and abilities.
- Detailed listing of **vocabulary and concepts**.
- Suggested **sources for further research** and other information.

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## **HISTORY OF GLENBOW MUSEUM**

Glenbow Museum began with the remarkable vision of petroleum entrepreneur and lawyer Eric Lafferty Harvie. Mr. Harvie came into his fortune when oil was discovered in 1949 on land near Leduc and Redwater, for which he held the mineral rights. With this prosperity, he decided to pursue his favourite passion — collecting — and simultaneously return some of his good fortune back to the region that had been so generous to him. Mr. Harvie's goal was to collect the objects representing the history and culture of Western Canada as well as from around the world.

Eric Harvie began collecting material relating to the history of Western Canada in the 1950s, developing an extensive collection of art, artifacts, books and archival material from North America that tell the fascinating story of Aboriginal peoples, frontier exploration, and the development of western life. He built on these North American collections with extraordinary artifacts and art from Asia, West Africa, South America, and islands in the Pacific, eventually amassing a huge museum collection. Establishing the Glenbow Foundation in 1954, Mr. Harvie's collection became an eclectic blend of western history and international art and artifacts.

In 1966, Eric Harvie and his family donated his impressive collection of art, artifacts, and historical documents to the people of Alberta. Today, Glenbow Museum is one of the largest museums in Canada, playing an essential role in defining Western Canadian culture.

## **PROGRAM PURPOSE**

The intent of Glenbow Museum's Digitization Project is to infuse Alberta classrooms and communities with Glenbow Museum's collection of culture and art. The importance of engaging viewers in primary source investigation is essential to developing creative thinking, visual literacy and observational skills.

This program was developed by the Glenbow Museum with the support of the Alberta Government to establish exciting curriculum connections between the Glenbow Museum and Alberta communities. This program consists of six exhibitions of digitized images from our collections, educational materials for viewers of all ages and online resources.

We encourage you to spend time with each online exhibition and use these resources.

## **EDUCATIONAL GUIDE PURPOSE**

The purpose of this guide is to assist educators and other viewers as they incorporate the Glenbow Museum Digitization Program into the classroom or other educational site. This guide contains education philosophies for looking at and working with primary sources, vocabulary on relevant terms, curriculum connections and ways to gather meaning from the artifacts.

Also included are suggested lesson plans for a more in-depth look at the various areas of content. The lesson plans include questions to encourage discussion and deeper looking, inquiry-based activities, extensions and assessment. All of these lesson plans can be adapted to any age or ability level.

Please take time to preview the Glenbow Museum Digitization website and this educator's guide. We hope you enjoy *Honouring Traditions: Reframing Native Art* from Glenbow Museum's Digitization Program.

# EDUCATION MODULE



**Boy's Weaseltail Suit** [detail], Apatohsippiikani, late 19<sup>th</sup> century,  
Collection of Glenbow Museum, AF 5404

## **INTRODUCTION**

Art has always been an integral part of Native People's lives. It was interwoven with the production of tools, the construction of dwellings and the manufacture of clothing. While European cultures separate art as a practice that is distinct from most aspects of daily life, First Nations people have a more holistic understanding of the world. Visual art has always been integrated with song, dance, ceremony and oral traditions. In these cultures it is not possible to speak of "art"; art is a part of everything. And yet, many non-Natives have an implicit belief that the development of an artistic tradition is the foundation for cultural progress and "civilization." For this reason, it is important to acknowledge the merit of visual art produced by First Nations people, even though we do so in a context outside of their own cultures.

## **HONOURING TRADITION**

Art created by Native people is an expression of honour and respect, both in the past and the present. Traditional art honours all the other living beings with whom we share the world. Spirituality is reflected in everything made by human hands. Contemporary art is honouring past traditions and values, and exploring ways to bring them into the present – urban and rural, national and international. Both traditional and contemporary art challenges all of us to think about the ways in which we honour and respect ourselves and our world.

## **HONOURING COMMUNITY**

Traditional art was made to honour those individuals who were held in high esteem in any community. There were many - from the Elders, to the chiefs and warriors, to the patriarchs and matriarchs, to the great hunters and to the children. Each person was honoured and respected for their unique role. I can honestly say that the children were held in the highest regard; they were and still are considered a gift from the 'Creator.' I should know I have three special gifts myself.

However, many Native people were wrenched away from their families, and contemporary artists are exploring issues of Native identity, relationships, and self-esteem in today's world.



## MAPS



### Aboriginal Territories

Aboriginal presence in Canada and elsewhere in the world is complex and fluid, extending beyond traditional territory to rural and urban communities.

As First Nations assert their cultural and political autonomy, they are rejecting the band names imposed by the Canadian government and identifying themselves by their traditional names. – Excerpt from *Honouring Tradition: Reframing Native Art*

## **LISTING OF ARTIFACTS AND IMAGES**

### **Girl's Coming of Age Outfit**

Deh Gah Got'ine, Fort Simpson

ca. 1890s

moosehide, glass beads, wool, porcupine quills, velvet, cotton, aluminium, bone, sinew

Collection of Glenbow Museum, AC 494, AC 495, AC 496, AC 497 A-B

### **Man's Shirt**

Na Dené

early 20<sup>th</sup> century

hide, porcupine quills, glass beads, feathers, paint, thread

Collection of Glenbow Museum, AC 1

### **Drum**

Siksika

early 20<sup>th</sup> century

hide, wood, paint

Collection of Glenbow Museum, AF 515 A-B

### **Mossbag**

Deh Gah Got'ine, Hay River

ca. 1890s

glass and metal beads, velvet, cotton, hide

Collection of Glenbow Museum, AC 343

Allen Sapp, Nahkawininiwak (Plains Cree) (b. 1928)

### **Traditional Pow-Wow, 1991**

acrylic on canvas

Collection of Glenbow Museum. Gift of Dr. Allen Sapp, R.C.A, O.C., S.O.M., 1998

998.021.001

### **Basket**

Na Dené

mid 20<sup>th</sup> century

birchbark, root

Collection of Glenbow Museum, AC 484

**Basket**

Tsilhqot'in (Chilcotin)

early 20<sup>th</sup> century

cedar root, spruce root, cherry bark, willow, bulrush, hide

Collection of Glenbow Museum, AD 42

**Mukluks**

Deh Gah Got'ine

late 20<sup>th</sup> century

caribou hide, wool stroud, wool yarn, rabbit fur, moose hair

Collection of Glenbow Museum, AC 318 A-B

**Bison Figure**

Northern Plains

ca. 1200

green quartzite

Collection of Glenbow Museum, AX 70

Mrs. Tashoots

Tahltan

**Dance Shirt**

ca. 1920s

caribou hide, glass beads, wool, cotton

Collection of Glenbow Museum, AC 57

**Sootsiman**

Kainai

early 20<sup>th</sup> century

rawhide, paint

Collection of Glenbow Museum, AF 3752 A-B

**Scraper**

Néhiyawak

late 19<sup>th</sup> century

elk antler, metal, hide, cotton laces

Collection of Glenbow Museum, AP 293

**Belt**

Siksika

early 20<sup>th</sup> century

hide, canvas, glass beads

Collection of Glenbow Museum AF 1540

Gerald Tailfeathers

Kainai (1925-1975)

**Blood Camps, 1956**

watercolour on paper

Collection of Glenbow Museum; Purchased, 1956

56.22.3

George Littlechild

Néhiyawak (b. 1958)

**Cross Cultural Examination #2, 2007**

inkjet on paper

Collection of Glenbow Museum; Purchased with funds from the Historic Resource Fund, 2008

2008.111.001

Jane Ash Poitras

Denesuline (b. 1951)

**Living in the Storm Too Long, 1992**

xerox, photographs, newsprint and acrylic on canvas

Collection of Glenbow Museum; Purchased with support from the Canada Council for the Arts

996.025.001

Terrance Houle and Jarusha Brown

Kainai/Nahkawiniwak (b. 1975) and Canadian (b. 1977)

**Untitled # 7 (from the Urban Indian Series), 2006**

c-print on paper

Collection of Glenbow Museum; Purchased with funds from the Historic Resources Fund, 2007

2007.037.007

Judy Chartrand, Néhiyawak (b. 1959)

**Métis Soup Cans, 2007**

low-fired clay, glaze, luster, wood

Collection of Glenbow Museum; Purchased with funds from the Historic Resource Fund,

2008.102.001 A-AW

## VOCABULARY

**Artifact** - An object produced or shaped by humans, especially a tool, weapon or ornament of archaeological or historical interest.

**Aboriginal** – In addition to the definition of Aboriginal Peoples, Aboriginal refers to the first inhabitants of a given area.

**Aboriginal Peoples** – The descendents of the original inhabitants of North America. First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples have unique heritages, languages, cultural practices and spiritual beliefs.

**Ceremony** - The formal activities conducted on some solemn or important public or state occasion; a formal religious or sacred observance;

**Collective Identity** — Sense of belonging to a community or group, established and strengthened through common characteristics and interests. Culture and language are determining factors in the formation of collective identity.

**Community** – A group of people with commonalities that may include culture, language, values and beliefs, interests, practices and ways of life, history and /or geographically defined shared space

**Cultural Diversity** – Differences in groups having a variety of languages, ethnicities, nationalities, with in a shared space.

**Cultural Heritage** – The beliefs, customs, knowledge, values and historical experiences shared by a given group

**Culture** – The beliefs, values, socially transmitted behaviors and traditions, language, arts and other human endeavors considered together as being characteristics of a particular community, period or people.

**Environment** – What constitutes immediate surroundings and can include physical, human and natural elements.

**First Nations** – Refers to the various governments of the First Nations peoples of Canada. There are over 630 First Nations across Canada with 46 in Alberta.

**Group** - People who are together and connected by shared interests and characteristics.

**Honour** - Honesty, fairness, or integrity in one's beliefs and actions: a source of credit or distinction: high respect, as for worth, merit, or rank

**Natural resources** – Elements of the natural environment that are of use to humans. They include nonrenewable and renewable resources. Nonrenewable resources, such as oil, natural gas and minerals,

are limited in quantity; renewable resources, such as forests, water and fish, can be regenerated and can last indefinitely if used carefully.

**Symbol** - A letter, figure, or other character or mark or a combination of letters or the like used to designate something.

**Traditions** – Beliefs, principles or ways of acting which people in a particular society or group have continued to follow for a long time, or all of the beliefs, principles or ways of acting in a particular group or society.

**Traditional** – Of or pertaining to traditions or characteristics of past styles, ways of life. Today, people value their cultural traditions and struggle to keep alive the practices of the past in the face of a rapidly changing society.

# **CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS**

## **ART**

### ***Elementary***

Reflection: responses to visual forms in nature, designed objects and artworks

Depiction: development of imagery based on observations of the visual world.

Expression: use of art materials as a vehicle or medium for saying something in a meaningful way.

### ***Junior High/High School***

Encounters: where we meet and how we respond to visual imagery.

## **LANGUAGE ARTS**

1.1 Discover and Explore

1.2 Clarify and Extend

2.2 Respond to texts

3.1 Plan and Focus

3.3 Organize, Record and Evaluate

3.4 Share and Review

4.3 Present and Share

5.1 Respect Others and Strengthen Community

5.2 Work Within a Group

## **SCIENCE**

Grade 1—Topic E: Needs of Plants and Animals

Grade 2—Topic E: Small Crawling and Flying Animals

Grade 3—Topic E: Animal Life Cycles

Grade 4—Topic A: Waste and Our World

## **SOCIAL STUDIES**

1.1 My World: Home, School, and Community

1.2 Moving Forward with the Past: My Family, My History and My Community

2.1 Canada's Dynamic Communities

2.2 A Community in the Past

4.1 Alberta: A Sense of the Land

4.2 The Stories, Histories and Peoples of Alberta

5.1 Physical Geography of Canada

5.2 Histories and Stories of Ways of Life in Canada

9.1 Issues for Canadians: Governance and Rights

10-1 Issue 1: To what extent should globalization shape identity?

10-1 Issue 2: To what extent should contemporary society respond to the legacies of historical globalization?

20-1 Issue 1: To what extent should nation be the foundation of identity?

20-1 Issue 4: To what extent should individuals and groups in Canada embrace a national identity?

30-1 Issue 1: To what extent should ideology be the foundation of identity?



# LESSON PLANS

## HONOURING TRADITIONS: THE LAND, COMMUNITY, AND STORIES

**Recommended grades:** 1 - 5

**Time required:** 3 – 30 minute class lessons

**Materials:** Paper and pencils or student sketchbooks, printed images

### INTRODUCTION

In this lesson, students will explore the role of art in Aboriginal cultures. Aboriginal people view art not as a separate practice, but as something that is integral to everyday life. Art is incorporated into everything to remind them of their relationship to the land and community. While making connections to their own community, students will learn about the different ways Aboriginal people honour community and the environment their art and designs.

### OBJECTIVES

At the end of these lessons, students will be able to:

- Define the terms “honour” and “tradition.”
- Understand how Aboriginal people view art as part of their daily life and not as a separate practice.
- Understand the role of Aboriginal art as being used to honour their community and environment.
- Create an ecologically-inspired artwork.

## IMAGES

*Artifact Images for use in Activity – Please print in colour if possible*



### **Girl's Coming of Age Outfit**

Deh Gah Got'ine, Fort Simpson

ca. 1890s

moosehide, glass beads, wool, porcupine quills, velvet, cotton, aluminium, bone, sinew

Collection of Glenbow Museum, AC 494, AC 495, AC 496, AC 497 A-B



**Man's Shirt**

Na Dené

early 20<sup>th</sup> century

hide, porcupine quills, glass beads, feathers, paint, thread

Collection of Glenbow Museum, AC 1



**Drum**

Siksika

early 20<sup>th</sup> century

hide, wood, paint

Collection of Glenbow Museum, AF 515 A-B



**Mossbag**

Deh Gah Got'ine, Hay River

ca. 1890s

glass and metal beads, velvet, cotton, hide

Collection of Glenbow Museum, AC 343



Allen Sapp

Néhiyawak (Plains Cree) (b. 1928)

**Traditional Pow-Wow, 1991**

acrylic on canvas

Collection of Glenbow Museum; Gift of Dr. Allen Sapp, R.C.A, O.C., S.O.M., 1998

998.021.001



**Basket**  
Na Dené  
mid 20<sup>th</sup> century  
birchbark, root  
Collection of Glenbow Museum, AC 484





**Basket**

Tsilhqot'in (Chilcotin)

early 20<sup>th</sup> century

cedar root, spruce root, cherry bark, willow, bulrush, hide

Collection of Glenbow Museum, AD 42





**Mukluks**

Deh Gah Got'ine

late 20<sup>th</sup> century

caribou hide, wool stroud, wool yarn, rabbit fur, moose hair

Collection of Glenbow Museum, AC 318 A-B



**Bison Figure**  
Northern Plains  
ca. 1200  
green quartzite  
Collection of Glenbow Museum, AX 70



Mrs. Tashoots  
Tahltan  
**Dance Shirt**  
ca. 1920s  
caribou hide, glass beads, wool, cotton  
Collection of Glenbow Museum, AC 57

# ACTIVITY PROCEDURES

## HONOURING COMMUNITY

**Recommended grades:** 1 – 3

**Time required:** 30 minute class lessons

**Materials:** Images and image descriptions, paper, pencils

*Please print the following images:*

- *Girl's Coming of Age Outfit (AC 494, AC 495, AC496, AC 497 A-B)*
- *Man's Shirt, Na Dene, early 20th Century, AC 1*
- *Drum, Siksika, early 20<sup>th</sup> Century, AF 515 a-b*
- *Mossbag, Deh Gah Got'ine, ca, 1890s, AC 343*
- *Traditional Pow-Wow, Allen Sapp (Néhiyawak), 998.021.001*

## INSTRUCTIONS

1. Ask students to think about where they see art in their community. We might see art in galleries or museums, hanging on a wall at home or in a business, at a park, or even on our fridge! Now ask students how many of them have made their own art. What type of art have you created? (drawings, paintings, etc.) What have you drawn or painted? (maybe landscapes, their family, etc.) Many times we are inspired by the world around us. Have you ever given your art to someone? Sometimes when we give something to someone we are honouring that person. Discuss the term **honour** by using the following suggested questions:

*How can we honour someone? Is it a big gesture or can it be something as simple as giving someone a high five and telling them they did a good job? Think about maybe a handmade card for Father's Day or creating a drawing for someone special. Can you think of any other examples?*

2. Aboriginal people also created art. Their designs honoured their community. However, the idea behind art was different. Rather than seeing art as something separate, Aboriginal people incorporated art into everything they made. Tipis, clothing, tools, etc. were all carefully designed and decorated to show honour to both people and environment. Some garments were also passed down and added to with each generation, honouring both the people from the past, as well as those in the future.

3. Discuss the term **tradition** using the following suggested questions:

*Traditions are beliefs, values and ways of acting that are a part of a community for a long time. Can you think of any traditions in your family? School? Community? (celebrations, special events, holidays)*

4. In some cultures, “coming of age” is a very important tradition. This means that in their culture, that person is now considered an adult. Some cultures, like the Deh Gah Got’ine, had a tradition where a girl would go to be by herself in a dwelling. Older women would visit and teach her the traditions of their culture and important skills like sewing, embroidery, quillwork, and beadwork. At the end of her seclusion, her mother would make her a special outfit and her father would lead her in her first drum dance, which could last all night. Show students *Girl’s Coming of Age Outfit* (AC 494, AC 495, AC496, AC 497 a-b) and ask them to describe what they see.

***Suggested questions for discussion:*** *How does the person who made the outfit honour the person wearing it? How else does this outfit honour the person wearing it? How does it honour their community? (When someone wears an outfit like this, it shows that they are an important part of their community. Because it is made especially for that person for this important event of becoming an adult, it is showing honour to that person.)*

5. Divide the class into four groups. Explain that each group will be given an image to study carefully. As they examine it and discuss the questions, think of ways that this item or image might be honouring both traditions and the people in their community.
  
6. Print out the following descriptions and allow the student's time to research their artifact.

*Please print me and distribute the following artifact descriptions*

**Man's Shirt, Na Dené, early 20<sup>th</sup> century, AC 1**

What materials do you think this is made of? Who would have made this shirt? Who would have worn it? How do you think this might be honouring the person that wore it or their community? Usually women made the clothing and men would have done the hunting. This shirt was probably made by a woman and would have taken a lot of time and careful work to prepare the hide, sew it, and to add details like the porcupine quillwork and fringes. This time and effort shows honour to the person who would have worn it. The man hunting in this shirt would have shown honour to his community by providing food and materials for clothing and tools.

**Drum, Siksika, early 20<sup>th</sup> century, AF 515 A-B**

Who do you think made this drum? Why do you think they made it? When do you think a drum was used? Why would it be important to their community? Drums were often used in ceremonies and dances. Singing songs and drumming were very important to their community. This drum is a medicine pipe drum with a thunderbird and claws. The colours, green and yellow, are Blackfoot colours.

**Moss bag, Deh Gah Got'ine, ca. 1890s, AC 343**

What do you think this object is? A moss bag was used to carry babies and was often stuffed with fresh moss and grass to act as a diaper. Look at how this moss bag is carefully sewn and beaded. How does this honour the baby that would use it? Children were very important to First Nations. Babies grow very quickly and would not fit in a moss bag for very long, but the person that made this would have put a lot of time and effort into making this bag, showing how special children were.

**Traditional Pow-Wow, Allen Sapp, Néhiyawak, 998.021.001**

What do you see in this painting? Imagine that you are in this painting. What sounds would you hear? How do you think the artist is honouring his community? A pow-wow is a very important event in First Nations communities. Communities will gather for these special occasions and singing, drumming, and dancing are very important parts of their celebration. Some dances are traditional and have been in communities for hundreds of years. Sometimes new dances are introduced by visitors from as far away as Oklahoma and the southwest United States. Many of these new dances have been adopted and are now part of the pow-wow tradition.

*Thinking Further*

*Have students find out more about a tradition or celebration in their family, school or community. Find out how it started, why it is important in their community, or what happens at this event.*

*Have students volunteer or get involved in an upcoming event in their school or community.*

# HONOURING ENVIRONMENT

**Materials:** All Images Printed for Part One

1. Discuss how traditions are connected to the environment in which cultures live through the following questions:

*How are traditions influenced by where you live? Are there traditions in Canada that are different from other countries? How are they different? How are these traditions influenced by seasons, landscape or geography? Do you have traditions in your school, family or community that honour and respect the environment? If so, what do you do? Why is it important to honour and respect the land and environment?*

2. For Aboriginal people living in Canada, the environment is very important to them. In the past, it influenced how they lived and the traditions they followed. The land was essential for survival, and in return, they showed respect and honour to the environment. Thinking back to the first activity and how they honoured their community, how do you think they would have shown this respect for the land? Aboriginal people used designs to honour the environment. Clothing, tipis, or tools were all made using materials from the environment, and often special ceremonies were performed before using these resources. The designs that decorated these items often represented plants, animals or other elements that have had their life cycle interrupted for human use. These designs honour this sacrifice.

3. Show **Basket, Na Dene, mid 20<sup>th</sup> Century, AC 484**. What do you think this is made of? What do you think it would be used for? Look carefully at the basket. What do you see? At first glance, this seems like a fairly plain basket. But when you look carefully, you can see a zigzag or mountain design made by carefully scraping away the outer layer of bark. The zigzag design is also repeated at the top in the spruce root edging. The artist that made this has even included a knot in the wood into their design. How do you think this was put together? Do you think it would be able to hold water? The person who made this basket carefully overlapped the seams to make it watertight, and often the seam was covered with spruce pitch to seal it. How do you think this basket shows honour to the land?



4. Divide the class into four groups and assign one object and a description card to each group: Basket, AD 42; Bison Figure, AX 70; Mukluks, AC 318 A-B; Dance Shirt, AC 57.

5. While looking carefully at the objects, ask students to find out what materials are being used, what the materials tell them about the environment, and how the person who made or used the object was showing to the land and environment.

*Please print and distribute the following artifact descriptions*

**Basket, Tsilhqot'in, early 20<sup>th</sup> century, AD 42**

How was this object used? What is this object made of? What do these materials tell you about the environment in which it was made? What designs do you see? Along the bottom, elk or caribou are shown using dark red cherry bark. There is a checkerboard band in the middle, and a plant-like design at the top. A pale root is also used to reinforce the top edge as well as to bring attention to the upper edge. What do the materials and the design tell you about the people that made or used this basket?

**Bison Figure, Northern Plains, ca. 1200, AX 70**

What animal is this object depicting? What is it made of? How long do you think it would have taken to make? How is it honouring the environment? Quartzite is a hard rock that would be difficult to carve. This one has been shaped into a bison. The artist that made this must have valued the bison and perhaps made this to honour the animal. For many First Nations people living on the plains, the bison was a very important animal as it was a valuable source of food and materials.

**Mukluks, Deh Gah Got'ine, late 20<sup>th</sup> century, AC 318 a-b**

What are these moccasins made of? How are they designed? Would they keep your feet warm? What do the materials and the design tell you about the environment? How do you think these moccasins are honouring the environment? These moccasins are made of caribou hide, wool stroud, wool yarn, rabbit fur, and moose hair. They were made by the Deh Gah Got'ine people who live in the subarctic region of Canada. The materials and high-top design of these moccasins would have kept the owner's feet warm in the winter. The moose hair tufting would take a lot of time and skill and shows honour to the environment from the materials that are used and the flower designs.

**Dance shirt, Mrs. Tashoots, Tahltan, ca. 1920s, AC 57**

What is this shirt made of? Who do you think wore this shirt? How long do you think it would take to make? What designs do you see? How does this honour the environment? This dance shirt depicts plants and animals that are found in traditional Tahltan territory in northern British Columbia. Can you see the differences between the male and female deer on top? The outlines, colours, and placement of the designs make it seem like they are moving, and seem to celebrate the environment.

6. Display the First Nations map (Appendix) where students can come and see it. Have one group at a time come to look at the map to find out where their artifact originated from. What can they learn about the environment from this knowledge and their artifact?

7. After students have had an opportunity to discuss, bring everyone back together and share as a class. Suggested discussion questions:
- How did the designs on this object honour the land and environment?
  - How does the location or geography of a culture influence objects, materials and designs?

### *Thinking Further*

*Have students research more about First Nations group they looked at and find out where they live. What kind of plants and animals live there? What is the landscape like? What is the climate like?*

*Take action! Have students brainstorm ways they can honour their environment. Organize a classroom clean-up or volunteer for a local environmental organization in your community, for example Green Calgary: [www.greencalgary.org](http://www.greencalgary.org) if you live near Calgary.*

# THEN AND NOW: IDENTITY IN FIRST NATIONS ART

**Recommended grades:** 6 - 12

**Time required:** 4 to 5– 45 minute class sessions

**Materials:** Large piece of paper, notebooks or paper, pencils

## BACKGROUND INFORMATION

See the article “Connections & Complexities” by Gerald T. Conaty at the end of this package for an overview of First Nations art.

## OBJECTIVES

At the end of this lesson, students will be able to:

- Understand the concept of identity by exploring personal and collective identities in the classroom or group.
- Explore how traditional First Nations identity can be understood by critically looking at the designs and patterns in their objects.
- Begin to understand some of the issues facing Aboriginal peoples in Canada regarding rights, culture, and identity.
- Create an artwork or piece of work that represents their own identity

## IMAGES

*Please print in colour if possible*



### **Sootsiman**

Kainai

early 20<sup>th</sup> century

rawhide, paint

Collection of Glenbow Museum, AF 3752 A-B



**Girl's Coming of Age Outfit**

Deh Gah Got'ine, Fort Simpson

ca. 1890s

moosehide, glass beads, wool, porcupine quills, velvet, cotton, aluminium, bone, sinew

Collection of Glenbow Museum, AC 494, AC 495, AC 496, AC 497 A-B



**Scraper**

Néhiyawak

late 19<sup>th</sup> century

elk antler, metal, hide, cotton laces

Collection of Glenbow Museum, AP 293



**Basket**

Tsilhqot'in (Chilcotin)

early 20<sup>th</sup> century

cedar root, spruce root, cherry bark, willow, bulrush, hide

Collection of Glenbow Museum, AD 42





**Belt**

Siksika

early 20<sup>th</sup> century

hide, canvas, glass beads

Collection of Glenbow Museum, AF 1540

# ACTIVITY PROCEDURES

## CANADIAN IDENTITY

*Recommended Grades: 7 – 12*

*Time Required: 4 – 5 45 minute class sessions*

*Materials: Large piece of paper, notebooks or paper, pencils*

## INSTRUCTIONS

1. Begin a discussion about identity using the following suggested questions:

*What is identity? What are some ways people identify themselves? What does it mean to have a personal identity? A collective identity? Record responses on a large piece of paper.*

*Some factors to consider may include traditions, cultural background, language, religion and spirituality, the arts (music, dance, etc.), attire (clothing, body markings), relationship to the land, ideological beliefs (political views, personal mottos).*

2. Ask students to think about traits, activities, words, etc. that identify who they are. On a piece of paper, allow time for students to individually create a list, a mind map, draw or simply jot down anything that comes to mind of some of the ways they identify themselves.
3. Allow time for students to get together with a partner or a small group and share some of the traits that describe their identity. On the other side of their paper or a new piece, have them record the things that they have in common with each other. Students may continue to add things to their “identity” page as they hear other ideas.
4. After sharing, bring the class back together and discuss the things that the pairs or groups had in common. It may be helpful to record on a large piece of paper.

5. Though there may be some shared commonalities, there will also be some things that are unique to each person.

6. One thing that every student should have in common is that they live in Canada. From their list of commonalities, have students see if they can circle anything that is common to many Canadian.

7. Ask students then what makes someone a Canadian. Record thoughts on another large piece of paper or board. Suggestions questions for discussion:

*Is a Canadian someone who lives within the “physical” boundaries of Canada? Or is a Canadian simply someone who identifies themselves as Canadian? Can you identify yourself as Canadian and something else?*

*What rights and freedoms do all Canadians have? What responsibilities come with these freedoms?*

*Think about some common Canadian stereotypes or symbols (ex. Hockey, Mounties, the maple leaf, the word “eh,” the national anthem). Does everyone who is “Canadian” identify with these things? Why do these stereotypes exist?*

8. What are some other challenges to a collective Canadian identity? In other words, what are some issues that are dividing Canada? (For example, regionalism, separatism, Aboriginal rights, globalization and multiculturalism).

### *Thinking Further*

- Interview people around them or in the community what their idea of a “Canadian” is or what comes to mind when they think of Canada. Create a master list of ideas and thoughts or a collective mind map with students recording responses.

## FIRST NATIONS IDENTITY TRADITIONALLY

**Materials:** Copies of excerpt from “Connections & Complexities”,  
Images and image descriptions

*Background:* An issue that affects some Canadians is Aboriginal rights. These rights stem from the Royal Proclamation of 1763 in which King George III of England recognized that the First Peoples had special inalienable rights regarding the land and all the resources. As Europeans interacted with Aboriginals, some of their material goods began to change, but many traditional beliefs and values remained the same. New materials such as glass beads or firearms did improve their lives, but they did not change their fundamental beliefs but rather adapted the new items to their cultural ways.

1. Read the following quote from Frederick McDonald, a Fort McKay First Nations artist, out loud to the class.

*“As hunting was very important to me as a young man, I gravitate to the art that had to do with hunting, trapping and fishing. Art on everyday clothing reminds me of the loving hands of our ancestors and the strong coexisting relationship between Native Peoples and the plants, animals and Other Beings. Art reminds us that everything is interconnected. Art is not separate from our daily lives and work is not separate from art.” –Frederick McDonald, Fort McKay First Nations Artist*

2. After reading the quote, discuss the following: How do First Nations people perceive art? Is this concept the same as yours? Think about what you consider “art.” Where do you usually see it? Is art a separate part of your culture or is it imbedded into everything you do?
3. Distribute copies of the following excerpt from the article “Connections & Complexities.” Ask students to read the excerpt to further understand the concept of art and identity for First Nations people.

## EXCERPT: CONNECTIONS & COMPLEXITIES

“Art has always been an integral part of Native People’s lives. It was interwoven with the production of tools, the construction of dwellings and the manufacture of clothing. While European cultures separate art as a practice that is distinct from most aspects of daily life, First Nations people have a more holistic understanding of the world. Visual art has always been integrated with song, dance, ceremony and oral traditions. In these cultures it is not possible to speak of *art*; art is a part of everything. And yet, many non-Natives have an implicit belief that the development of an artistic tradition is the foundation for cultural progress and “civilization.” For this reason, it is important to acknowledge the merit of visual art produced by First Nations people, even though we do so in a context outside of their own cultures.

Traditionally, this art was concerned with identity and connections. Stylistic variations of clothing, shelter and design motifs enabled individuals, families, clans and nations to identify themselves. The meanings behind these media and images embodied the connections between human beings and non-human beings within their universe, and embodied the principles of harmony and balance that bring about a successful life. This art was found on clothing, shelters, tools and on the landscape within which people lived.”

From “Connections & Complexities” by Gerald T. Conaty.

4. Briefly discuss the article, summarizing how the First Nations perspective on art is different from Europeans.
  
5. Show students **AF 3752 a-b, Sootsiman, Kainai, early 20<sup>th</sup> century**.  
Faciliate a discussion using the following suggested questions:

*What do you see? What might this be? (A sootsiman (or parfleche) was used as a container for various purposes.) How would it be used? How does this object reflect the identity of the person who made it? Used it? How does this object reflect the First Nations’ view on art?*

Read the following excerpts about this object:

“Sootsiman convey so much that is at the core of Blackfoot culture. They are simply made, yet functional as containers. The designs are symmetrical and the colours subtle and complimentary, embodying the principle of harmonious balance. The use of negative and positive space in an intricate play of images reflects the complex network of relationships in the Blackfoot world. These layered meanings make them fascinating works of art.” –Gerald Conaty

“... The designs all had names. A person would have been able to read these sootsimans and been able to tell where they came from or where they were used...like the Sundance (circle and cross design). Most of this symbolism has been lost. There were family designs and colours. This one is really typical of the Sundance because of its big size. But we don't know what those designs mean, and I don't want to guess.” –Allan Pard, First Nations Piikani

*The knowledge of the symbolism on some items such as this parfleche is restricted to those who have the rights to this knowledge. Why is it important that this knowledge is passed on? How is knowledge of their culture important to Aboriginal identity?*

6. Divide students into four groups. Explain that each group will look critically at a photograph of a historical First Nations artifact. Ask students to study the image carefully, read the accompanying information and answer the following questions:

*Who would have used this object?*

*What designs or symbols do you see?*

*How is this object important to personal and First Nations identity?*

*Please print and distribute the following artifact descriptions*

**Girl's Coming of Age Outfit, Deh Gah Got'ine, ca. 1890s, AC 494 – 497 A-B**

In some cultures, “coming of age” is a very important tradition. This means that in their culture, that person is now considered an adult. Some cultures, like the Deh Gah Got'ine had a tradition where a girl would be by herself in a dwelling where older women would visit and teach her the traditions of their culture and important skills like sewing, embroidery, quillwork, and beadwork. At the end of her seclusion, her mother would make her a special outfit and her father would lead her in her first drum dance, which could last all night. When someone wears an outfit like this, it shows that they are an important part of their community and they are now considered an adult.

**AP 293, Scraper, Néhiyawak, late 19<sup>th</sup> century**

“This scraper is from Loon Lake, Saskatchewan. It is made from an elk antler and the donor’s grandmother used it. You can see the wear. Here are beautifully incised decorations – lines with dots and some x-shaped scratch marks in between the lines. There is an indentation in the base where a wrist strap would have been attached. We know that Native women spent much of their time tanning and preparing hides for clothing, utensils and tipis. I think the very simple curve of the antler and the elegant incised markings were a way to beautify a utilitarian item, and to show respect for the animals she was working with. The designs also identified her unique personal utensil. It makes sense that she would want something beautiful to hold in her daily tasks. That would have been really important. – Beth Carter, Curator of Ethnology at Glenbow Museum

**AD 42, Basket, Tsilhqot'in, early 20<sup>th</sup> century**

“The Tsilhqot'in, a Dene-speaking people who live in the centre of British Columbia, created this distinct style of coiled root basket. These are burden baskets that women would have carried on a daily basis. Even though they are utilitarian, women took the time to create these elaborate designs, to make the baskets both practical and beautiful...I think the design on this basket shows a real connection to the land and the environment in the region where these people live. There are three bands of design. Along the bottom, elk or caribou are shown using dark red cherry bark. A checker board band occupies the middle. A plant-like design is at the top.” –Beth Carter, Curator of Ethnology at Glenbow Museum

**Belt, Siksika, early 20<sup>th</sup> century, AF 1540**

“The swastika is an ancient symbol that is found among many First Nations in North America and in other cultures around the world. It represents harmony, balance and the importance of living a proper life. The appropriation of the symbol by the Nazis turned the meaning to one of hate and racism. Because of this popular understanding, many museums are reluctant to display the symbol – even when it is on Native materials. This deprives people of the right to their own symbols and unwittingly, supports the Nazi supremacist beliefs.” – Gerald Conaty, Director of Indigenous Studies

“What I like about this one...it has a stylized symbol of life. This design reflects the four directions. It is a similar design to the swastika that Hitler used. Native people used this as a symbol of life, a symbol of the four directions and a symbol of the four seasons. It is a very important symbol that one evil person took away from the Native people. If you wore it today you would be accused of loving the Nazis. But if I wore it today it would be with the intent of taking back a First Nations design.

Symbols have dualities...different meanings in different cultures. As an artist you have to recognize why you are putting a design on a piece of art, what it means and who is going to be looking at the art. Back then, when they made the belts, they were incorporating a design that was a family design, a community design or a design of their own people or nation, so it had specific meanings for those people.” --Frederick McDonald, Fort McKay First Nations artist



7. After groups have had time to examine and discuss, have each group share their discussions with the class.

### *Thinking Further*

*Ask students to write an essay on their connection to art discussing the following: How is art used in your culture? Why is art created? What message is art today sending to its viewers? How are these ideas different or the same for the First Nations people? Refer to the excerpt "Connections & Complexities" as well as your discussions about the artifacts.*

## ABORIGINAL IDENTITY TODAY

**Materials:** Images and image descriptions

1. Begin a discussion about the traditional lifestyle of First Nations people, keeping in mind that there are two aspects: the material culture, and the values and beliefs. As they began interacting with Europeans, how did these change? How did they stay the same? (see background information from Part 2)
2. Show Image 'Blood Camps' by Gerald Tailfeathers, 56.22.3 What evidence do you see of their traditional lifestyle? What is more modern? Read the following quotes.

"This scene may just as well have been painted today. Each summer, Kainai gather at Akokaatsin where families and friends meet and where important ceremonies reaffirm Kainai connections with their world. Tipis are erected next to canvas tents. Horses are tethered next to cars and trucks. Ancient ceremonies continue in the context of modern life. Tailfeathers' use of colour reflects the earth paint used by his ancestors. This painting is full of hope and pride." --Gerald Conaty

"In some ways, this image represents the encroachment of western influences on traditional Aboriginal life. This image, set in the Alberta foothills, brings together the nineteenth century (horse) and the twentieth century (automobile) as it juxtaposes a Native tipi and the non-Native tent. In his own life, Tailfeathers often felt the need to assimilate in order to be taken seriously as an artist. He was advised to de-Indianize his name by signing his paintings "Gerald T. Feathers." Conversely, much of his work reflects this strong desire to connect to his cultural traditions, to continue to paint the stories that he had learned about his tribe's history. He eventually moved back to his reserve, signed his paintings with just his Native name, Tailfeathers, and immersed himself in traditional ceremonies." --Quyen Hoang

*How are these two perspectives different? While one feels the painting is celebratory, the other notices discrimination and prejudices of the time. What were some ways in which Aboriginals were pressured or forced to assimilate? (social pressures, residential schools, banning of some ceremonies, etc.)*

1. Divide the class into four groups. Explain that each group will be given two images of contemporary art done by First Nations artists. Each group should study each image silently for a few minutes, giving time to examine and formulate individual thoughts before group discussion. It may also be helpful to look at one image at a time, then compare the two at the end. Before reading the label copy, consider the following questions:

*What do you see? What do you think the artist is trying to say? How does the artist identify himself/herself? What is the artist saying about Aboriginal identity?*

*After examining the second image, compare the two pieces. How are the two artists' messages the same? How are they different?*

2. After discussing the images, have each group share some of their discussion with the class. Together as a class, try to summarize each image with a word, phrase or issue that it is representing. Though each artwork deals with First Nations identity in some way, there may be many different perspectives that are represented, illustrating some of the many varied perspectives on Aboriginal and Canadian identity.

### *Thinking Further*

*Research an artist such as Paul Kane, Karl Bodmer, or George Catlin, 19<sup>th</sup> century artists well-known for their portraits of Aboriginal people. Investigate how they viewed and portrayed these people as a dying race, and the idea of the "noble savage."*

## IMAGES

*Please print in colour if possible*



Gerald Tailfeathers

Kainai (1925-1975)

**Blood Camps**, 1956

watercolour on paper

Collection of Glenbow Museum; Purchased, 1956

56.22.3



George Littlechild

Néhiyawak (b. 1958)

**Cross Cultural Examination #2, 2007**

inkjet on paper

Collection of Glenbow Museum; Purchased with funds from the Historic Resource Fund, 2008

2008.111.001

George Littlechild

Néhiyawak (b. 1958)

**Cross Cultural Examination #2, 2007**

inkjet on paper

Collection of Glenbow Museum; Purchased with funds from the Historic Resource Fund, 2008  
2008.111.001

“In this work, George Littlechild explores his mixed ancestry with historical photographs, one depicting his grandfather’s cousin, Grace Marston, and the other, Eva Pipestem, a Plains Cree woman from Hobbema. While the images recall the painful history of colonization, religious oppression and cultural loss, it is ultimately an examination of change and transition. Together, they represent a shared history that has affected the descendants of both cultures.”

– Quyen Hoang

“Both of these portraits were taken in the 1920’s, but in separate studios and separate locales. I was struck by the beauty of both of these women captured and frozen in time; each wearing their respective styles of the era – the glamorous 20s vs. the hybrid western and Native garb. It is interesting to explore these images for traces of their lives – who they were and how similar or differently they lived. If they had an opportunity to sit over tea ... how would they have interacted? What would they have spoken about?”

From left to right: Grace Marston of Los Angeles, my grandfather John MacKenzie Price’s first cousin; Eva Pipestem, a descendant of Chief Big Bear and is related to me through marriage on my mother, Rachel Littlechild’s, side.” – George Littlechild



Jane Ash Poitras

Denesuline (b. 1951)

**Living in the Storm Too Long, 1992**

xerox, photographs, newsprint and acrylic on canvas

Collection of Glenbow Museum; Purchased with support from the Canada Council for the Arts

996.025.001

Jane Ash Poitras

Denesuline (b. 1951)

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996.025.001

*“Living in the Storm Too Long* is a complex painting that layers contemporary, historical and popular culture perceptions and stereotypes of First Nations peoples. These images are then juxtaposed with images of those who symbolize the cultural and political oppression of these peoples, such as the Pope and Christopher Columbus.

I find this work interesting because it asserts a different sense of time. This painting reads much like a film because the images are presented all at once, suggesting a narrative that has no beginning or end. For Native People, history is simply part of a continuum that has persisted for thousands of years, prior to any notions of “discovery.” Columbus’s arrival merely marked the beginning of a parallel history between Native and non-Native cultures.”  
--Quyen Hoang

“My art is a social statement. It is issue-oriented art. This word colonization is an interesting word. I ask myself, what exactly does this word mean? As we near the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the arrival of Columbus (lost in search of India) we often hear we are living in post-colonial times. That suggests to me that the period of colonization is over and the Native voice is no longer heard. When the Europeans first came to the Americas, [the land was] already occupied by Indigenous people, buffalo and spirits. In the most fundamental way it was impossible for the Europeans to colonize the Americas...Although we did not think of it as colonization, Indian people had already transformed the natural decentralized chaos of the world and given it order according to our vision of what it should be, given it order or cosmos.” --Jane Ash Poitras, 1992





Terrance Houle and Jarusha Brown

Kainai/Nahkawiniwak (b. 1975) and Canadian (b. 1977)

**Untitled # 7 (from the Urban Indian Series), 2006**

c-print on paper

Collection of Glenbow Museum; Purchased with funds from the Historic Resources Fund,  
2007

2007.037.007

Terrance Houle and Jarusha Brown

Kainai/Nahkawiniwak (b. 1975) and Canadian (b. 1977)

**Untitled # 7 (from the Urban Indian Series), 2006**

c-print on paper

Collection of Glenbow Museum; Purchased with funds from the Historic Resources Fund,  
2007

2007.037.007

The *Urban Indian Series* consists of eight photographs that depict the artist performing everyday tasks such as shopping, working and, in this case, riding Calgary transit while dressed in his powwow (Grass Dance) regalia.

I find this work presents links to tradition in a contemporary and provocative way. Terrance grew up powwow dancing and participating in ceremonies. These traditions continue to be a part of his life and serve as sources of inspiration for his work. He questions our perceptions about Aboriginal culture and place within contemporary settings. Terrance makes it clear that identity is not static and that tradition is an ongoing part of contemporary Aboriginal life.” --Quyen Hoang

“The *Urban Indian Series* is a comment on personal identity and cultural commodity in today’s contemporary culture. As a Blackfoot person growing up across the prairies of Canada, I experience many different cultures and the social boundaries we place on identity. I wanted to use regalia as a way to create dialogue and question what it is to be a First Nations person today. What is my culture vs. the mainstream understanding of Native Peoples? The regalia acts as a catalyst in this image, breaking up the sea of mundane western garb. I wanted to use my regalia for a different function other than dancing, but as a representation that is part of my everyday, much like my culture and questioning the suggestion that I am out of place in a world that only identifies with conformity. The words speak on several levels that question ideas of tradition, identity and culture that is often negated or replaced by western cultural standards.” --Terrance Houle



Judy Chartrand, Néhiyawak (b. 1959)

**Métis Soup Cans, 2007**

low-fired clay, glaze, luster, wood

Collection of Glenbow Museum; Purchased with funds from the Historic Resource Fund, 2008.102.001 A-AW

Judy Chartrand, Néhiyawak (b. 1959)

**Métis Soup Cans, 2007**

low-fired clay, glaze, luster, wood

Collection of Glenbow Museum; Purchased with funds from the Historic Resource Fund, 2008.102.001 A-AW

In the 1960s, Andy Warhol produced a famous painting of Campbell soup cans as a commentary on our consumer-oriented society. Chartrand is using soup cans to comment on the place of Native people in Canadian society. Look closely at the labels on the cans. What languages are on the labels? Are these the contents you would expect to find in soup? The mixture of “country food,” such as moose meat, elk and rabbit, with mainstream food helps us think about the role of Native people in our society.

Some people maintain traditional lifestyles and some live in urban centres. Many Native people move between the two settings. The artist wants us to ask questions such as: Is it fair to stereotype Native people as being either “traditional” or “modern?” “What are the effects of modern lifestyles on traditional ways of living on the land?”

As a Metis, Chartrand has both a Native and a non-Native heritage. The soup can is an ideal medium to reflect this. The “country food” names on the commercial icon blends the old with the new. The colour of the can – red and white – might symbolize the blending of the Native (sometimes called “red”) heritage with the non-native (or White) backgrounds.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

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Alberta Historical Resources Foundation.*

**THE GLENBOW MUSEUM WOULD LIKE TO  
THANK THEM  
FOR THEIR CONTRIBUTION.**

## READINGS AND RESOURCES

### READINGS

“*Altering the Goods*” article by Gerald T. Conaty—included in this package

“*Connections and Complexity*” article by Gerald T. Conaty – included in this package

### WEBSITES

Alberta Curriculum Standards: [education.alberta.ca](http://education.alberta.ca)

Historical Artifact-Based Learning: Student Process Guide. [www.glenbow.org/mavericks](http://www.glenbow.org/mavericks),  
Glenbow Museum, 2010.

Historical Photograph-Based Learning: Student Process Guide. [www.glenbow.org/mavericks](http://www.glenbow.org/mavericks),  
Glenbow Museum, 2010.

### PRINT

Boehme, Sarah. *Powerful Images: Portrayals of Native America*. University of Washington Press; 1<sup>st</sup> edition. May 1998.

Carter, Beth; Conaty, Gerald T.; Hoang, Quyen; McDonald, Frederick R. *Honouring Tradition: Reframing Native Art*. Glenbow Museum, 2008

### LINKS TO COLLECTIONS

*To locate the remainder of the collections not provided in this package, please use the following link:*

[http://ww2.glenbow.org/search/collectionsResults.aspx?XC=/search/collectionsResults.aspx&TN=OBJECTS&AC=QBE\\_QUERY&RF=WebResults&DF=WebResultsDetails&DL=0&RL=0&NP=255&MR=10&QB0=AND&QF0=Audience-mediator2&QI0=Main21cHT](http://ww2.glenbow.org/search/collectionsResults.aspx?XC=/search/collectionsResults.aspx&TN=OBJECTS&AC=QBE_QUERY&RF=WebResults&DF=WebResultsDetails&DL=0&RL=0&NP=255&MR=10&QB0=AND&QF0=Audience-mediator2&QI0=Main21cHT)

# Connections & Complexity

Gerald T. Conaty

“Art has always been an integral part of Native People’s lives. It was interwoven with the production of tools, the construction of dwellings and the manufacture of clothing. While European cultures separate art as a practice that is distinct from most aspects of daily life, First Nations people have a more holistic understanding of the world. Visual art has always been integrated with song, dance, ceremony and oral traditions. In these cultures it is not possible to speak of *art*; art is a part of everything. And yet, many non-Natives have an implicit belief that the development of an artistic tradition is the foundation for cultural progress and “civilization.” For this reason, it is important to acknowledge the merit of visual art produced by First Nations people, even though we do so in a context outside of their own cultures.

Traditionally, this art was concerned with identity and connections. Stylistic variations of clothing, shelter and design motifs enabled individuals, families, clans and nations to identify themselves. The meanings behind these media and images embodied the connections between human beings and non-human beings within their universe, and embodied the principles of harmony and balance that bring about a successful life. This art was found on clothing, shelters, tools and on the landscape within which people lived.

Contemporary artists continue to be concerned with connections and the ideals of harmony and balance. For them, the modern world presents formidable challenges that make it difficult to maintain ancient cultural and spiritual connections as the balance and harmony of earlier times is disrupted by environmental change.

## Art Integrated in Culture

It has been suggested that there were over 500 different cultures in North America when Europeans first arrived on the continent. Art was, and continues to be, an integral part of each culture. And yet, understanding this art is not an easy task.

Each of the Native cultures in North America has its own beliefs and its own way of understanding its place in the universe. Generalizations about these beliefs are likely to lead to cultural misunderstandings and stereotypes. We developed this project with people who are knowledgeable about their traditional culture, and were struck by their reticence when presented with First Nations items other than their own cultures, some ideas emerged that are important for understanding both “traditional” art and its contemporary expression.

First, human beings are an integral part of the environment and exist in a world in which almost everything is animate, with a spirit and a vital presence. The non-human or Other Beings each have unique gifts that they have used to help humans survive. Through this aid, human beings have developed a network of connections with all elements of the universe. This network includes plants, animals, rocks, stars, the sun and the moon.

Second, human existence depends on maintaining these connections. A balanced and harmonious life creates the appropriate atmosphere for these connections. Many of the ancient motifs represents the Other Beings (with whom humans coexist) and, therefore, are ways of honouring the connections through which these Other Beings help humans exist.

Third, every individual is responsible for helping to maintain the balance and harmony of life. This is done through ceremonies and prayer for all the Other Beings with whom humans share the earth. Images of these Other Beings were applied to clothing, shelter and a variety of utilitarian tools to remind human beings that their existence depended on harmonious relations. In this way, art was incorporated into all aspects of life. Every individual was expected to show respect for all forms of life by creating art.

### **Art Before the Europeans**

The earliest art recorded in North America is found on tools used for sustenance. For example, stone projectile points were used as spear or arrow tips to hunt game. These were made by carefully removing small flakes from a larger cobble; they really are miniature sculptures. The forms of these tools go well beyond mere function, and their manufacture required considerable knowledge of the material and stone-working techniques. The forms and styles of these tools varied greatly in different areas and at different times. Unfortunately, we understand very little about the reasons for these differences.

Pottery, usually made from locally available clays, was shaped into many different forms and decorated with a wide variety of motifs. Archaeologists suggest that the forms reflect the function of the vessel and serve as a cultural identifier. The designs, whether painted on or inscribed into the surface, seem to indicate the culture or family to which the potter belonged. The designs may have other meanings that have been lost to us.

Throughout North America, images that embody the interconnection between humans and their world have been painted on or carved into rock surfaces. To those from other cultures, this art is perceived as images whose significance is recognized but not understood. But for people whose ancestors created this art, the symbols remain understandable and important to



their present life. The art itself is often highly stylized. Simple lines create minimalist figures and convey powerful images. However, stone is a difficult and unforgiving medium and the artists had no margin for error. "Mistakes" could not be corrected.

The landscape itself was sometimes integrated into artistic traditions. Across the northwestern plains, and especially in southern Alberta and Saskatchewan, large boulders were arranged in effigies of bison, turtles and human forms or in large circles with concentric rings or radiating arms. The localities where these were constructed are often associated with ancient stories that explain how human/non-human connections were made and how these relationships can be maintained. As well, these monuments are often situated near important resources, such as medicinal plants. Once again, the art form is a reminder that human existence depends on integration within the world and not governance over it.

Unfortunately, little remains of the long tradition of Native art created with organic materials. Some desiccated articles of clothing have been found in caves in Nevada and Utah, and items continue to be collected from the surface of melting glaciers in the Yukon. However, the artistic details are largely lost.

Some of the oldest works that have survived were collected by European fur traders and explorers who visited the plains and subarctic in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Many of these men were accomplished artists-or were accompanied by artists-and they created important documents recording how clothing and other items were also used as media for artistic expression. Unfortunately, these explorers or traders were seldom aware of the complex concepts that underlay this art, and their depictions of motifs were seldom rendered carefully or accurately.

Still, we are left with an impression that items created by Native People were highly decorated. Paints came from mineral deposits (ochre) or animal parts (a yellow paint came from the bison gall, for example) with fat used as a fixative. Porcupine quills, grass and hair were coloured with dyes derived from plants. These were then woven into designs and held in place with thread made of sinew.

### **Art After the Europeans**

The arrival of Europeans enhanced the variety of art supplies. Glass trade beads, small bells, brass tacks, copper cones and thimbles were used with-or instead of-quills and hair. Commercial paints and dyes came in brighter and more vibrant colours that did not fade as quickly as earth paint. Red and blue trade cloth was a more colourful canvas than white or

brown buckskin, so artists integrated an expanding palette of bead colours with new background colours. Cloth was also cut and integrated within pieces, creating a collage effect.

The genocide wrought on Western Canadian Native People in the nineteenth century by disease, near-extinction of game and expansion of Euro-Canadian settlement profoundly affected the nature of Aboriginal art. In older times, art was fully integrated with all aspects of culture and everyone was expected to be a competent artist. European-based cultures separated art as a unique practice with little or no applicability to practical items. Enforced culture change led some Native People to experiment with western media (paints and canvas) and motifs (realistic representations). As people were forced onto reserves, and as the traditional economy disappeared, the production of western-style art emerged as a viable economic pursuit.

The forced settlement on reserves brought with it radical cultural changes imposed by the government. Travel was restricted. Responsibility for education was taken away from the family and given to Christian religious authorities, ultimately leading to the removal of children to residential schools. All decision-making was placed in the hands of a government-appointed, non-Native Indian agent. The government, churches and police combined in their efforts to eradicate all vestiges of traditional Native cultures and replace it with European-based tradition and values.

Within this context, art became an avenue of resistance and a way to preserve traditional life. Hongeeyesa, from Carry the Kettle's people in Saskatchewan, used paper and paints supplied by the government agent to record important events in his peoples' lives. Among these is the arrival of a steamboat and scenes from a holy ceremony. Curing the 1920s, White Wolf, and aged Kainai, recorded his exploits on a canvas that was hung in the Prince of Wales Hotel in Waterton Lakes National Park. The hotel owners saw this as a means of enhancing the "western" experience of their guests. White Wolf may have seen this as an opportunity to retell his personal history and encourage young people to continue the Kainai traditions of bravery and cultural pride.

The history experienced by Native People is not well understood by most Canadians. And yet, it is a shared history that continues to shape our relationships with each other. People of Native ancestry are among the fastest growing components of the Canadian population. Many of these people grew up in an urban environment, far removed from their "traditional" culture and the close ties to the environment that their ancestors knew. However, there is an expectation, by both non-Natives and many Natives themselves, that they should have these connections and understandings. Many contemporary artists continue to use their work to comment on the ongoing inequality and injustice faced by Native People. This contemporary

art resists these stereotypes while reclaiming the ways in which these connections can be retained in our world.

### **Honouring Tradition**

The *Honouring Tradition* exhibition and companion publication illustrate the challenge of defining Native art. In traditional cultures art is a part of everything in life; it is not a separate entity. When we speak of “Native art” we are imposing a Western sensibility on other cultures. While this takes the art out of its cultural context, it acknowledges the importance of these works to our common history.

Yet, even when we recognize the work as “art” we do not easily understand the continuity and connections that span the generations. Too often this art is separated into the archaeological, the ethnographic and the contemporary. The temporal distance of the archaeological leads to analysis that removes the human element. It is often assumed that there is no connection with living cultures and living people. Ethnographic collections are considered to be craft, historical or the art of other (“primitive”) cultures and lacking in sophistication. Inevitably, it is implied that if the art lacks sophistication, so does the culture from whence it came and the people who produced it. This stigma is ahistorical and is applied equally to the creators of the art and to their descendants. Contemporary Aboriginal works often suffer the inverse criticism. Because the work does not conform to stereotypes of Native art, critics dismiss its connections with older forms. As the connections to the art are denied, so are the connections among the artists.

*Honouring Tradition: Reframing Native Art* celebrates this artistic tradition in all of its complexity. The more ancient expressions are concerned with a world in which human beings understood their role in the universe and the nature of their environment. Contemporary works show an understanding that the environment has been phenomenally altered; these artists are struggling to understand their new situations and to find ways of belonging.

This project features a variety of ways to understand this art. We are especially concerned that Native People have a forum in which to talk about their culture and history as they understand it-not as non-Natives have interpreted it.

We asked Frederick McDonald to work with us to select items from the Glenbow’s collection and to help frame the context in which these items could be understood. Fred is a Cree from Fort McKay in northern Alberta. He was raised in a family who trapped, fished and, generally, pursued a traditional “bush” lifestyle. Fred is also an accomplished artist and has lived and

worked in Calgary for over 20 years. His viewing of our ethnographic “traditional” art transcended art variations. Some items brought reconnections to his community, others were aesthetically interesting. In many instances, Fred’s selection criteria was very different from a museum curator’s eye; his criteria embodied a much different perspective on what makes a work of art “interesting.”

Knowledge of the art featured in *Honouring Tradition* is often culturally specific and sometimes even individualistic. The layered meanings of pieces may not always be widely understood. We invited people from other Native cultures to view the selections and to offer their comments. Mekwun Awisi (Joe Deschamps) brought a Plains Cree perspective and Allan Pard provided a Blackfoot view. Rosie Firth, who visited Glenbow in 2005, reviewed our Gwich’in material. Their conservatism and willingness to discuss only what they knew and not to speculate is in sharp contrast to many “expert” opinions. We have also asked artists to comment on their work. Unfortunately, not all of the artists whose works are found in the exhibition could be included in this book.

It is our hope that those who experience this art will acquire a new-or a renewed-appreciation for the multifaceted nature of these works. Clothing, for example, becomes performance art when it is worn and connects with contemporary dance and video works. All the works are about survival, resistance, pride and identity. There are links to the distant past as well as the future. Throughout it all, there is a continuing coexistence with all the beings of this world-with the Other Beings as well as other cultures.

This art is about all of us.”

# Altering the Goods

By Gerald T. Conaty

**W**hen people of different cultures exchange goods, these items are often altered and used for purposes which are very different from the original intention. Furs collected by Canada's First Nations had been used as blankets, coats and other articles of clothing. The pelts had been minimally tanned and the fur was barely altered at all. In the hands of the Europeans, these same pelts were transformed. Garments lost all animalistic form and some pelts were made into felt and sewn into a variety of men's dress hats. These changes are to be expected, given the tendency for western industrial cultures to collect raw materials and transform them radically into new objects. It is more surprising to find European goods altered by so-called "non-industrial" societies to form objects which are useful or meaningful to them. Many of these changes indicate that the assumptions about the superiority of western technology need to be questioned.

Wool blankets have become a trademark of the Hudson's Bay Company and records of all the early fur trading companies reveal their popularity as items to be traded for furs. Many of these blankets were used for purposes other than bed clothing. They were cut and sewn into long, hooded coats known as capotes. Other blankets, worn by men, were draped around their shoulders as formal dress. Among the Plains peoples, these replaced buffalo robes and were often decorated with elaborate beaded panels.

Much has been made of the trade musket's popularity. Yet muskets may have been more of a hindrance than a help to the natives. Muskets required constant supplies of shot, patches with which to pack the shot into the muzzle, and quantities of dry powder. All of these could be obtained only from the Euro-Canadian trader. It was difficult to shoot accurately with the early flintlock muskets and a hunter rarely had a chance for a second shot if he missed his prey for the noise would frighten away the animal. The bow and arrow could be made and repaired with locally available material and with no expense other than the effort of collecting stone and wood and shaping new parts. If the first arrow failed to kill, others could be shot without alarming the game. The metal arrow tips were probably of greater advantage for hunting than muskets.

It is not surprising that many of the muskets were altered to make them more useful. Some had the barrel sawn off close to the stock. These foreshortened firearms were easier to maneuver while astride a horse. Unfortunately, the short barrel made the gun even less accurate and increased its tendency to explode when fired.

The metal gun barrels that were cut off were often flattened and serrated at one end. These tools were shaped very much like traditional hide scrapers made of moose or deer leg bone, but kept a sharp edge longer. These scrapers were used to remove the fatty tissue from the underside of the hide. Similar tools are used today by women who continue to use traditional tanning practices.

Copper pots were a very useful European introduction. Traditional cooking methods required that hot stones be put in liquid filled birchbark baskets. These stones eventually brought the liquid to a boil, but left behind a grit residue. Some people made fragile ceramic pots which could be placed near the fire. These, however, broke easily during travel. Copper pots were durable and could be heated directly over the fire. Furthermore, if they wore out, they could be flattened, cut, and rolled into tinkle cones for clothing decoration, made into hinges, or hammered into arrowheads.

The trade items preferred by the native peoples, and the uses to which they were put, suggests that peoples of the First Nations viewed trade very differently than their Euro-Canadian counterparts. The native peoples found some items (such as metal blade and copper pots) to be superior to their traditional material. Other items, such as guns, were very cumbersome and not very useful in the bush, far from the trading post. Natives often demanded scarves, beads, and jewelry which were worn with great display and highlighted the success and status of the individual. Fur trade posts also became known as sources of provisions in hard times. These trading patterns reflected ancient attitudes which pre-dated the arrival of Europeans.

As missionaries and settlers began arriving, many native peoples were drawn into settlements where they became dependant upon the supplies and technology of the white man. Still, patterns of traditional use persist: automobile springs are sometimes converted to hide scrapers; blankets and capotes continue to be worn on ceremonial occasions and are often presented as gifts.

#### FURTHER READING

Janes, Robert R. *Preserving Diversity*, Garland Publishing, New York, 1991