OFFICE OF THE UNITED STATES COMMISSIONER GENERAL
CANADIAN WORLD EXHIBITION, MONTREAL, 1967
800 VICTORIA SQUARE, SUITE 2022
MONTREAL 3, P.Q., CANADA. AREA (514) US 1-1776

THE AMERICAN SPIRIT

INDIAN ADORNMENT

Bead Medallions

The love and use of color was inherent in the life of the American Indian and the early settlers were soon expanding their knowledge of new dyes, design motifs, and art skills in leather, beads, feathers, shells, and seeds as the two cultures came in contact.

The nearly 1,000 beaded medallions on the three panels in the Indian Exhibit were made especially for the U.S. Pavilion Exhibit by members of the Oklahoma Indian Arts and Crafts Cooperative. Eighteen craftsmen, representing six Indian tribes of the Southern Plains Region (the Kiowa, Cheyenne, Comanche, Arapaho, Caddo, Wichita), were responsible for creating the medallions. Each medallion is hand-sewn, utilizing an overlay stitch technique. The medallions vary in size from two to four-and-one-half inches in diameter, and each one differs in design motif and color arrangement.

The East Coast and Southeastern tribes first began using glass beads for ornamentation through trade with European explorers and the early settlers in the 17th century. It spread to the Plains Indians at the beginning of the 19th century. Traditionally, the Plains Indians used beadwork medallions as architectural ornaments to adorn the exteriors of their tipi dwellings. More recently, beaded medallions have been incorporated as decorative elements in men's feather war dance outfits, as can be seen in the 13 war bonnets suspended over the Indian Exhibit, and are made into necklaces to be worn with women's dance costumes.

With the commissioning of the medallions for the U.S. Pavilion, the traditional usage of beadwork as architectural ornamentation emerges as a bold, exciting contemporary expression.

War Bonnets

The Sioux Indian tribe was the first to have made war bonnets such as the thirteen displayed here. Before the peace treaties were signed, the Indians wore their war bonnets into battle, thus the name. In those days, the bonnets were earned feather by feather. One could not have a bonnet until he did enough brave deeds. Sometimes an Indian brave would start collecting feathers in his early teens but not have enough to make a bonnet until his late 20's. The number of feathers could range from 30 to 90. When the Indian tribes were forced onto the reservations in the 1880's, men could no longer hunt or do battle to earn their feathers. So from then on the war bonnet was used ornamentally either by chiefs at conferences or in the Sioux dances such as the grass dance and the sun dance. The

trails on the Pavilion bonnets range from 9 feet to 15 feet, and are much longer than those now in general use.

The Tipi Shop estimates that well over 100 hours of work went into the production of each authentic war bonnet, designed and constructed in the same fashion as bonnets made nearly a century ago. Work began in July at the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation when the entire Joe New Holy family (Mr. and Mrs. Joe New Holy and their children Pearl, Lucille, Evelyn, and Norman) began to match and trim 2,000 turkey feathers. Rawhide strips were folded over the feather tips and bound with felt. Colored fluffs of horse hair were added to the base and tips of each feather. As the feathers were finished, they were mailed to the Tipi Shop at the Sioux Indian Museum in Rapid City, South Dakota. There Mrs. Emma Amiotte and Mrs. Nellie Menard began the tedious job of sewing the feathers onto the head and trails of each bonnet. Then the beaded medallions were made and attached to the sides of each head piece and the beaded drops were hung beneath the medallions. All told, twelve people at the Tipi Shop worked for about five months making these authentic war bonnets. Bessie Wheeler and Alice Dudley made the bead medallions and Mabel Greeley was responsible for making the bead drops. Rena McGhan acted as secretary and ordering agent for this special project of the Sioux Indian Museum and Craft Center for which Mrs. Ella Lebow serves as Director.

Personal Ornaments

The 82 items of jewelry and personal ornaments shown here is one of the most outstanding exhibits of American Indian art craft ever assembled together. Each piece was personally selected with the advice and approval of Mr. Myles Libhart of the Indian Arts and Crafts Board of the Department of Interior and Dr. Frederick Dockstader, Director of the Museum of the American Indian, Heye Foundation, New York City. Mr. Libhart, Supervisor of Museums, Exhibitions and Publications at the Indian Arts & Crafts Board, served as Coordinator for the U.S. Pavilion Indian Exhibit.

The exhibit covers a period of time ranging from the early 19th century to the present day and includes work representative of all the major culture areas of the American Indians, the Eastern Woodlands, the Plains, Plateau, California and North West Coast.

The selection includes contemporary silver and turquoise jewelry, fragile and intricate beaded items, ornaments made from shells, ivory, cedar bark, wood, leather and deer skin, bear claws, woven cloth, porcupine quill work, etc.

Porcupine quill work is completely indigenous to the North American Indians. In no other parts of the world have porcupine quills been used in the highly intricate and ornamental art work portrayed by the decorative motifs seen here in mocassins, shoulder bags, armbands, necklaces, etc. Porcupine quill work was done all throughout the Plains and West Coast areas. The West Coast Indian tribes often wove them into their baskets. In the 19th century porcupine quills were replaced by the glass beads obtained from European traders.

Another of the most unique and rare items in this collection is the Woodpecker feather headdress made by the Pomo Indians in Southern California. Feather work was a relatively rare art among primitive tribes and was carried to its highest degree by the West Coast Indians, the ancient Hawaiians, and the ancient Indian tribes of Peru and Mexico. This headdress was collected in the 19th century from the Pomo tribe who were among the most highly skilled of the West Coast tribes in this work.

The North West Coast Indian tribes were unusual in that their art craft was greatest in three-dimensional carved art as opposed to the applied, or ornamental art forms practised by most of the other American Indian nations. The carved wooden Shaman's charm shown in this exhibit is an exceptionally fine representation of this art. The Shaman, or Medicine Man, occupied a unique and very important position in every Indian tribe. They were often specialists, perhaps in medicine and cures or weather, and therefore, in crops and hunting. The charm was most popular on the North West with the Shamans who often carried them in special pouches.

This necklace belonged to the wife of Kit Carson. It was made for her by the Navajos when the tribe was first settled on the reservation. Interestingly enough, the Navajos were first subdued by Kit Carson.

Another popular feature of the North West Coast culture was the Lip Labret worn as a decorative ornament by the women. Sections of the lower lip were pierced and the labret was inserted. It was a status symbol among these tribes. The one displayed here is an unusually fine one, made of wood inlaid with haliotis shell.