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Greenwich heiress Constantine Beach-Sorsbie collected globally and received “antiquities for her collection” from her uncle, American Museum of Natural History anthropologist, George C. Vaillant.

All of the collectors recognized the importance and the artistic integrity of these objects and acquired them to preserve and share the work of Native American artists.

The ongoing story of the Native Nations is impressive. They have survived random, misguided, and intentional acts, both physical and legislative, that altered their lives. Government policies attempted to erase their languages and cultures. While the policies failed, the Native people prevailed. Art has been one means to express their self-determination, to celebrate their self-defined autonomy, and to remain resolute.

For more information about Native American cultures, please refer to the Association on American Indian Affairs: indian-affairs.org; for a list of individual tribal contacts, refer to the National Association of Tribal Historic Preservation Officers: nathpo.org. For news, visit indiancountrytoday.com.

—Kirsten J. Reinhardt, Guest Curator

Cover:
Bison Hide Hand Drum with Horns
Siyosapa, Dr. Black Prairie Chicken
(c. 1840–1905)
Yankton/Hunkpapa Lakhóta (Sioux), c. 1888
Colonel William H. Tallmadge Collection
00158.11

1.
Chilkat Robe
Kaax'eidei.át (dates unknown)
Tlingit, c. 1900
Gift of Mrs. William A. Davies
67.03.04
Photo by Paul Mutino

2..
Wicker Cradleboard
Artist Once Known: She, Her
Southern Paiute, c. 1945
Gift of Rev. Harold Baxter Liebler
13384

3.
Silver Bowl, footed
Fred Peshlakai (1896–1974)
Diné (Navajo), 1020–1940
Gift of Miss Margaret Cranford
21018.07

4.
Jar, olla
Pauline Trujillo (dates unknown)
Pueblo of Laguna, 1940–60
Gift of Rev. Harold Baxter Liebler
13389

5.
John Milk Vest
Wikan Ska (Hattie Long Horn) (1884– ?)
Oglala Lakhóta, c. 1900
Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Wayne Portanova
82.31

6.
Ring Basket
Pearl Kootswatwa (1927–2007)
Hopi, 1982
Bruce Museum Collection
01834

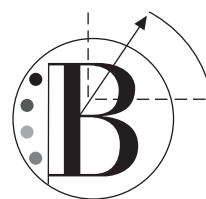
7.
Doll, Mother with infant in cradleboard
Alberta Titla Rope (1925–2013)
San Carlos Apache, 1967
Gift of Miss Marilyn Makepeace
68.09.01

All photos by Kirsten J. Reinhardt except
where noted.



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Resolute: Native Nations Art in the Bruce Collection

November 5, 2021 – January 31, 2022





Native American artists were committed to creating objects that preserved their cultural identities during periods of persecution, displacement, and population loss. Patterns, colors, numbers, and symbols relevant to tribal identity were fashioned into textiles, baskets, pottery, clothing, and other objects. Colors and symbols that appealed to White sensibilities were purposefully included when Native artists made the economic pivot to a cash economy in the mid-nineteenth century.

Native artists organized co-ops and craft guilds after the Great Depression (1929-1939) and World War II (1939-1945) disrupted the previous, sometimes imbalanced, economic arrangements they had with White trading posts, hotels, and gift shops. Artists began signing their work and controlling the process from creation to sale. Determined to utilize their talents for economic success, artists joined other Native Americans who chose to stand resolute and thrive, despite the challenges they faced.

The Bruce collection contains the work of known Native artists including Tlingit weaver Khaax'eidei.át (19th century), Navajo master silversmiths Frank (1903-1965) and Fred Peshlakai (1896-1974), and Yanktonai artist Siyosapa (c. 1840-1902).

During the Reservation Period (1850-1890) artists, including Siyosapa and Hattie Long Horn Milk created works imbued with powerful symbolism. Siyosapa painted hide drums that were gifted



to figures of authority. Perhaps he intended to influence and befriend Special Indian Agent William H. Tallmadge of Stamford, CT who purchased the drums while inspecting Fort Peck, MT in 1889. Whatever his intention, Siyosapa succeeded in preserving his legacy and an important element of his culture.

The deliberate decision made by Native artists to create traditional, collectable artwork to maintain and advance cultural relevance is an expression of “survance”. Coined by educator, writer, and member of the Minnesota Chippewa Tribe Gerald Vizenor, survivance is an active sense of presence through the continuance of Native stories that are renunciations of dominance, tragedy, and victimization.

The idea of survivance can be explored through the *John Milk Beaded Vest*. Hattie Long Horn Milk created the beaded clothing her husband John wore as an actor in Colonel Cummins’ *Indian Congress*, *Wild West*, and *Rough Riders of the World*. She deliberately incorporated colors and symbols that subtly displayed her opposition to forced cultural assimilation. Her beadwork served to preserve her cultural heritage through international circulation in the wild west shows. She succeeded, since even today we acknowledge her artistry and the perseverance of the Oglala Lakota Nation.

In light of important conversations about how museums acquired their collections, the Bruce



Museum examined the acquisition process of its Native Nations collections. Research on the donors uncovered details about the scientists, soldiers, socialites, and soul-savers who ventured across the country to explore, sign treaties, collect art, and share religious beliefs.

In 1865, Major General Samuel Ryan Curtis was appointed as Peace Commissioner to negotiate treaties with the Indian Tribes of the Dakota Territory. Ryan, and his son Colonel Samuel Stephen Curtis spent two years hosting councils, negotiating treaties, and exchanging gifts with tribal leaders of the Gros Ventre, Cheyenne, Crow, Oglala, Dakota and Teton Lakota (Sioux). In a graphic letter to his wife dated May 15, he wrote, “We may have trouble in procuring provisions to feed the Indians that we hear are already anxiously waiting our coming. The Indians are peaceably inclined but they have been eating their ponies and some of them starving. Those who cry “Extermination” will no doubt rejoice at what seems to me evidence of criminal neglect on the part of white people.” His honest observations and condemnation of existing government policies indicate that Curtis was an ideal Peace Commissioner.

Most of the objects in this collection were donated by people who had two things in common—they were women and they were wealthy. Constance Brown, Esther Bird, Alice Taggart, and Margaret Cranford were all well-to-do ladies who travelled extensively and collected the highest quality objects.