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NORTHWEST COAST INDIAN ART: AN ANALYSIS OF FORM

By Bill Holm. Publication date: December 14, 1965

The masterworks of Northwest Coast Indians are admired today as among the great achievements of the world's primitive artisans. The painted and carved wooden screens, chests and boxes for storage and cooking, dishes, rattles, crest hats, and other ceremonial paraphernalia reveal a rare artistic virtuosity and document the unique involvement of these craftsmen with their environment. In a new book, published by the University of Washington Press, NORTHWEST COAST INDIAN ART: AN ANALYSIS OF FORM, Bill Holm, widely recognized as a foremost authority on Indian art and dance, makes some amazing observations about the works of the Northwest Coast Indian tribes --the Tlingit, Tsimshian, Bellabella, Haida, Bella Coola, and Kwakiutl.

After many years of examining countless artifacts, from Bella Coola to Yakutat Bay, and after himself creating objects in the same style, artist-teacher Holm recognized that the pieces, although varied in origin, material, size, and purpose, are related to a surprising degree in the organization and form of their two-dimensional decoration. He presents an incisive analysis of the use of color, line, and texture; the organization of space; the frequent recurrence of such typical forms as ovoids, U forms, eyelids, hands, feet, and wings. Three categories emerge--the "configurative" in which an essentially animal-like silhouette is maintained; the "expansive" in which the animal or bird is distorted, split, or rearranged to fit into a given space; and the "distributive" in which the parts are so arranged as to fill the given space, making it difficult or impossible to identify the represented creature.

The characteristic forms of raven, sea lion, frog, hawk, salmon-trout, whale, thunderbird, and beaver become familiar to the reader through the 76 illustrations and the accompanying text of this handsome book. Bill Holm's pioneering work will provide insights into the accomplishments of these remarkable artisans for anthropologists, art historians, artists, craftsmen, and collectors, as well as for those interested in the Pacific Northwest and the American Indian.

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