

ANTIQUES

And The Arts Weekly

***** October 26, 2012



Newsstand Rate \$1.75

Published by The Bee Publishing Company, Newtown, Connecticut

INDEXES ON
PAGES 66 & 67

'A Song For The Horse Nation'

BY SHARON HAZARD

WASHINGTON, D.C. — Gone are the days when the Indian and his horse regally roamed the American plains, where for centuries they reigned supreme on that wondrous landscape. The special bond they shared has been brought to life in "A Song for the Horse Nation," an exhibition on view at the Smithsonian's National Museum of the American Indian through January 7.

This historic commemoration features an array of 122 historic artifacts, artwork, photographs, songs and personal accounts that pay homage to this unique relationship between the American Indian and his horse.

According to the chief curator, Emil Her Many Horses (whose great-great-grandmother owned many horses), this exhibition was inspired by a book also titled *A Song for the Horse Nation, Horses in Native American Cultures*. Filled with photographs of objects and photographs from the museum's collection, Her Many Horses co-edited it with George P. Horse Capture.

The majestic horse originated in the United States more than 40 million years ago and after migrating to Asia and Europe, it became extinct in its homeland. In 1493, the horse returned to the Western hemisphere when Columbus brought a herd of 25 on his second voyage to America. In their native environment, horses flourished and as soon as the American Indian took them under their wing, their numbers soared. By the late 1700s, every tribe in the West owned a herd, called them a "Horse Nation" and formed an unbreakable bond of loyalty and co-dependence.

The treasures showcased in "A Song for the Horse Nation" present this epic story of the horse's influence on the American Indian tribes and reflects the reverence

felt for them.

The Plains Indian's life was revolutionized by the introduction of the horse. Often called the greatest light cavalry in history by military men, this nomadic group came to rely on this animal to strengthen their tribes, to hunt and travel and protect their land. They were allies in battle and partners in life, and the artifacts exhibited in "A Song for the Horse Nation" illustrate this allegiance that endured, according to Indian legend, into the afterlife. The Pueblo, Navajo, Ute, Apache, Comanche and Shoshone were first to incorporate horses into their way of life, taking advantage of their endurance, speed and mobility for hunting and traveling.

Life-size model horses take stances throughout the exhibit. One is shown pulling a Nineteenth Century Cheyenne travois (a frame used to drag heavy loads over land). According to Her Many Horses, "Dogs were originally used as beasts of burden and were the only domesticated animal owned by the Indians before the horse. Women were relied on along with the dogs to move items from place to place." He added, "With the introduction of the horse, tribes could move larger possessions in greater quantities."

In the 1700s, horses were moving north from New Mexico and guns were moving west from New England and the two commodities were often traded. Now the horse was valuable to the Indian in another way. One good hunting horse could be traded for one gun and 100 loads of ammunition. The Indian became mounted, armed and able to protect himself.

To illustrate this advancement in the Indians' capability to protect themselves, rifles belonging to mounted warriors Geronimo (Chiricahua Apache), Chief Joseph (Nez Perce) and Chief Rain-in-the Face (Hunkpapa Lakota) are on view.

(continued on page 30)



This brightly colored drum was made in North or South Dakota around 1860. Many times used to communicate with the Creator, these instruments contained drawings that memorialized a favorite horse. Using pigment, rawhide, wood, wool cloth and sinew, this instrument vividly depicts an Indian brave in full war regalia atop his comrade in battle.

AN HONORED TRADITION OF THE NATIVE AMERICAN



This photograph taken in Montana shows Spotted Rabbit Apsalooke (Crow) astride his mount around 1905. The horse, along with the rider, is festooned in full war regalia. This fierce warrior was killed while raiding a cavalry outpost.
—Fred E. Miller photo



An example of a contemporary piece of horse culture Indian artistry is a martingale made in Oregon in 2007 by Maynard White Owl-Lavadour (b 1960), a member of the Nez Perce tribe, also known as the Plateau Indians. The Nez Perce often outfitted themselves along with their horses for war and ceremonial gatherings. This piece, made of seed beads, brass bells and red and blue wool cloth, is used today for parades and cultural events. Courtesy Randall and Teresa Willis.

A Song For The Horse Nation'

(continued from page 1)

One of the fiercest Crow warriors was Spotted Rabbit, who was killed leading a horse raid on the United States cavalry. Archival photos, such as the one of Spotted Rabbit, who along with his horse is shown festooned and ready for battle, remind recent generations of how the image of the mounted warrior translated into the world's perception of them through television, movies and Wild West shows.

Much of the artwork done by these tribes depicts scenes of conflict and warrior status.

A Piikuni (Blackfeet) elk-skin robe with painted decoration by Mountain Chief, circa mid-1800s, shows the Blackfeet holding their own against another tribe, as well as bears. Small arcs symbolize hoof prints and the arrowlike marks under them show which direction the horse is moving.

Her Many Horses noted, "Traditionally, the Indian gained more respect from humiliating his enemy than actually killing him." Counting coup was a game played by young warriors galloping alongside an enemy's horse and touching him with his hand, never hurting or capturing him. Quirts, short riding whips made of elk horn, were used to urge a horse to greater speed.

The centerpiece of the exhibit is a Nineteenth Century, 16-foot-tall, 38-foot-circumference Lakota tipi on which 110 hand painted horses in vibrant colors, moving at full gallop, cover the entire surface. According to Her Many Horses, this tipi is made of muslin, but older ones were made from buffalo hides. Warrior society imagery of guns, hatchets and scenes of braves on horseback were popular embellishments. Another Lakota standout is a painted drum depicting a brave on his horse, circa 1860s, South or North Dakota, made with pigment, rawhide, wood, cotton cloth and sinew.

Besides fighting the white man, the Indian often did battle with other tribes for territory and to increase their herds. Raids and stealing another's prize horse became status symbols among the youth. Horse stealing between tribes was considered an honored way for a young warrior to gain experience and recognition for bravery. Horses meant prosperity as well as protection from predators.

On display are examples of horse-raiding charms, formed in the shape of horses that were believed to bring success. Horse-raiding was a proud tradition and survived into the Twentieth Century. A colorfully beaded tipi bag tells the story of a young hero who stole a number of horses and possibly a wife from a rival tribe.

A warrior and his horse were comrades in arms. Portraits of well-loved horses were found on many objects, including drums used to make music and tell stories. A famous warrior and diplomat, Medicine Bear, made an Assiniboine dance stick in the form of a horse "in memory of his war pony, killed in battle in northern Montana in the mid-1800s. The mane and tail on this dance stick came from that pony," wrote George P. Horse Capture (A'aninin) in 2009

Native American peoples had a strong spiritual bond to the "Horse Nation." Images of

horses on ceremonial objects represent this link to another realm. The spiritual and sacred played a large role in the life of the Indian. The peace pipe or prayer pipe often featured carvings of horse heads as a form of veneration. On display are many of these intricately carved wood and stone pieces.

As European and Native cultures met, new styles of clothing and personal items reflected this convergence. Robes were replaced with the American Western-style jacket made of animal hide and embellished with beads. Western-style tribal clothing was decorated with horse motifs that gave a glimpse into the honored place they held.

On display is a Western-cut Lakota hide coat made about 1890. It is beaded with figures on horseback. The horses have had their tails doubled and tied in preparation for war.

When a tribe acquired horses, the women gained more free time. They used this time to create artwork featuring intricate beading and ornamenting hides with porcupine quills. Before the use of beads, quills were used to decorate objects. The women would sit around in sewing circlelike groups called guilds, softening and dyeing the quills, then weaving them into birch bark or animal hides. On display is a quill horse mask from the mid-1800s, enhanced with hawk feathers and brass buttons and seed beads, an authentic example of this now almost-lost art.

The martingales on view were ornamental as well as useful for keeping the saddle from slipping back during uphill travel. Saddle blankets and saddles ranged from roughly hewn wood to elaborately beaded and padded pieces of artwork. On display is a Menominee wood saddle carved in the shape of a horse. Before 1850, most saddle blankets were made of animal hides. They were originally functional but through the years became more embellished and less functional. Bridles of twisted horsehair, rawhide or tanned leather were loosely looped under the horse's jaw and used as a gentle guide. Beaded cruppers used as chest ornaments illustrate how well-regarded these animals were.

Before battle, the war horse was painted with tribal symbols to honor and give protection. These decorations spoke of the brave heart of the horse and its affection for the warrior. Used as instruments of war, the horse was emblazoned with paint just as its rider was. Attributes for battle-readiness and past victories were emblazoned on every part of the horse's body.

Plains tribes decorated their horses from bridle to tail. Masks were used in war and peace times. Indians believed these head coverings made the horse more powerful and intimidating to an enemy. Now, these accoutrements can be appreciated in parades and special events. Her Many Horses commented, "Although the Indian culture no longer depends on the horse, they are still inspired by them and that is reflected in their songs and artwork."

Historic as well as contemporary pieces make up this collection that represents the cultures and histories of more than a thousand tribal and indigenous groups.

The National Museum of the Indian is on the National Mall at Fourth Street and Independence Avenues, SW. For more information, 800-242-6624 or nmai.si.edu.



Belonging to the Northern Tsitsistas/Suhtai (Cheyenne) tribe, this shirt was made around 1865 of hide, porcupine quills, glass pony beads, human hair, horsehair, sinew and tree pitch/gum and paint. The pipe images indicate the number of war parties led by its owner; the human figures on the right represent defeated enemies who are depicted without legs and will never move again.



The intricately beaded horse mask made around 1904 by the Oglala Lakota Tribe features seed beads, hide and sinew. It is unique because its creator incorporated sections that could be remade into other objects, such as a pair of moccasins, a pair of tipi bags, a pair of women's leggings and a pipe bag.

AN HONORED TRADITION OF THE NATIVE AMERICAN



Around 1860, the famous warrior and diplomat Medicine Bear carved this likeness in memory of his war pony, killed in battle in northern Montana. Made of wood and pigment, the mane and tail on this dance stick came from that honored horse.



This crupper, also known as a chest ornament, was made by the Apsaalooke (Crow) Tribe around 1885. Seed beads, wool cloth, tin cones, hide, rawhide, ribbon and cotton thread adorn this strictly for-show object of horse attire.



A Crow war pony is beautifully captured in this painting by Kennard Real Bird (Crow). The horse is painted and ready for battle. The yellow circles around the eyes represent clarity in battle, the red hoof prints on the horse's chest tell the story of how many raids the horse has taken part in and the red lines count the number of enemies vanquished. Horses were painted along with their riders in anticipation of war. —Brady Willette photo

From the Piikuni (Blackfeet) tribe, this elk-skin robe with painted decoration was made by Mountain Chief in the mid-1800s. He was the last hereditary leader of the tribe and led many war parties and raids. His feats of bravery are immortalized on this garment.



Collected in 1891, Kiowa Tribe Chief White Horse's war shield and cover attest to the many war parties led by this warrior. Used for protection in war to deflect bullets and arrows, these shields were also hung at the entrance to the Indian tipi to protect its dwellers from evil spirits and interlopers.



This glass horse mask was made in 2008 by New Mexican artist Marcus Amerman (Choctaw, b 1959). Although no longer used for battle, masks are still made for and worn by horses in parades and cultural events. This glistening, geometrically designed piece done in primary colors is among a few contemporary objects on display.



On loan from the Pine Ridge Heritage Center in South Dakota is an American horse hat. Made around 1890 of beads, feathers and a remnant of an American flag, this prized artifact belonged to an Oglala Lakota chief, whose English name was American Horse. He wore this hat to honor the fact that he took a US Cavalry officer's horse in battle.



No Two Horns (Hunkpapa Lakota) made this dance stick in South Dakota or North Dakota around 1890 out of eagle feathers, metal, wool cloth, pigment and harness leather. No Two Horns fought in the Battle of Little Bighorn in 1876 and his stick memorializes a horse that died in that battle. The red triangular notches indicate the horse was wounded six times and the scalp replica dangling from the bridle refers to bravery in battle. Although badly injured, the horse carried the warrior to victory.