



Gifts of the Forest

Native Traditions in Wood & Bark



January 25—April 27, 2007

"We now turn our thoughts to the Trees. The Earth has many families of Trees who have their own instructions and uses. Some provide us with shelter and shade, others with fruit, beauty and other useful things. Many peoples of the world use the Tree as a symbol of peace and strength. With one Mind, we greet and thank the Tree of life."

(Excerpt from the Iroquois Thanksgiving Address)

Native people of the Eastern Woodlands have been using wood and bark for thousands of years. The rich forests that stretched from the Maritimes of Canada down the Atlantic coast to Virginia and across the continent to the Mississippi River provided Native artists with the raw materials, in the form of wood and bark, for housing, medicine, utensils, transportation and tools. The trees that provided these materials play a prominent role in Native spiritual beliefs throughout the area, from the Abenaki and Leni-Lenape creation of the first man and woman to the Iroquois Great Tree of Peace. The themes of strength, protection, creation and renewal associated with the great forests of the Eastern Woodlands are as important today as they were hundreds of years ago and continue to inspire today's artists.

Native artists use a wide variety of wood and bark, carefully matching the unique characteristics of strength, flexibility, and shape from each tree species to the final product. Hickory and ash are used for their strength and flexibility, prime requisites for bows, snowshoes and baskets. Burls from maple, cherry and ash were prized for their exceptional durability and resistance to splitting

and were used to make bowls, spoons, and war clubs. Bark from the white or paper birch, with its ability to shed water and its leather-like flexibility, was used to make bowls, baskets and canoes. Large sheets of birch bark were used to cover wigwams. The inner bark of the basswood or linden tree and the white cedar



Basket

Mid 19th century, Southeastern Connecticut
Ash splints, paint, 11 1/2" L x 9" W

was woven into bags and mats. These same materials are still used by today's Native artists, continuing traditions that are hundreds of years old.

Many of the objects in this exhibit were originally made to be utilized, not to be viewed solely as works of art. The decoration is meant as a complement to the integrity of the whole piece. The concept of combining art and utility is found throughout the Eastern Woodlands and is different from western European traditions which separate fine art from craft or decorative arts. Perhaps more importantly, the creation of these items involved an awareness of the gift of life. Trees were selected with a reverence and compassion for their sacrifice.

Many of the pieces gathered here were produced during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Most of them were originally collected by missionaries, government officials, wealthy adventurers and fur traders. At the time they were collected, provenance and collection histories were of less importance than the fact that they represented an image of "otherness" to the general European and American public.

Unfortunately, the names and histories of the artists who made these items have been lost to the carelessness of the past. However their value as works of art and as cultural symbols is in no way diminished by this fact.

Native artists throughout the Eastern Woodlands are still creating art from the "gifts of the forest," wood and bark. These artists are following traditions that have been in practice for hundreds of years and that will continue to grow and flourish in the new millennium. The pieces in this exhibit are a testament to the power of art as a medium of cultural expression and as a vehicle for cultural survival. From a nineteenth century Wampanoag ball club to a contemporary sculpture depicting the creation of the first man and the first woman, they stand as a timeless symbol of the artist's vision of life.

First Man and First Woman, 2000
Richard Love and Calvin Francis,
Penobscot
48"H x 26"W





1

1 Birchbark Hamper

Early 20th century

Ojibwa

27 3/4"H x 17 1/2"W x 15 1/2"D

2 Bent Wood Box

Late 18th to early 19th century

Maritime Peninsula

15 3/4"L x 9 1/4"W x 4 1/2"D

3 Canoe Model

Early 20th century

Northern New England

22 1/4"L x 5"W x 4"D



2



3



4



5

4 Birchbark Basket, ca. 1997
Barry Dana, Penobscot
6"L x 5"W x 6"H

5 Cradleboard
Mid 19th century
Iroquois
30 1/2"L x 13 3/4"W x 12 1/2"D



6

6 Timberline, 1999
Acrylic on Birchbark
James Simon, Ojibwa
14 1/2"H x 16 1/2"W x 2 1/4"D

7 Crooked Knife
Mid 19th century
Northern New England
10"L x 1 1/4"W x 3 1/2"H

7

8 Crooked Knife Handle
Early 19th century
Penobscot
7"L x 2"W x 2"H



8



9

9 Mortar
19th century
Southeastern Connecticut
13" Diameter x 14"H

10 Effigy Spoon
Mid 19th century
Northeastern Woodlands
4 1/2"L x 4 1/2"W x 6"H



10



11

11 Effigy Bowl
19th century
Northeastern Woodlands
11 3/4"L x 11"W x 5 1/2"D

The UBS Art Gallery

The UBS Art Gallery
1285 Avenue of the Americas
New York, NY 10019

This exhibition is organized by Mashantucket Pequot Museum and Research Center and sponsored by UBS

Mashantucket Pequot Museum and Research Center

The mission of the Mashantucket Pequot Museum and Research Center, founded in 1998, is to further knowledge and understanding of the richness and diversity of North America's indigenous cultures and societies. Tribally owned and operated, the Museum is located at Mashantucket, the tribal reservation in southeastern Connecticut. The building's design incorporates a number of culturally important themes and allows the facility to embrace the surrounding forest and maintain the ecological integrity of the reservation.

The Museum's engaging exhibits trace the Native and natural history of southern New England from the time of the Ice Age to the present, imparting the story of the Pequot people and other Eastern Woodland cultures. Special exhibits showcase ethnographic and contemporary Indian arts and cultures from across North America.

The Research Center houses an extensive collection of ethnographic and contemporary Eastern Woodlands cultural material, a research department conducting archaeological and other historical inquiries, as well as two research libraries, one especially for children, and archives. The Center also maintains one of the largest collections of Native baskets from southern New England.

Kimberly Hatcher-White, Executive Director
Mashantucket Pequot Tribal Council

Gifts of the Forest: Native Traditions in Wood and Bark can be ordered from The Trading Post, 860-396-6883

Special thanks go to Theresa H. Bell, founding Executive Director, also to Steve Cook, Head Curator; Meredith Vasta, Collections Manager/Registrar; Doug Currie, Head of Conservation; Bob Halloran, Senior Photographic Specialist, and Betsy Peterson, Exhibit Projects, for their invaluable assistance with this exhibition.

The Mashantucket Pequot Museum and Research Center also thanks Colin Thomson, Director, UBS Art Gallery; Linda Florio, Florio Design; Amanda Domizio and Kate Lydecker, Ruder Finn Fine Arts & Communications Counselors.

Mashantucket Pequot Museum and Research Center

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Please call or visit our website for directions and museum hours.

Cover (clockwise from top):

Effigy Ladle, 1998
Cherry Wood
Tina Chrisjohn Wyant, Oneida
2 1/4" L x 2 1/2" W x 10" H

Apple Corer
19th century, Northern
New England
7 3/4" L x 1 1/2" W x 1 3/4" H

Bowl
19th century, Great Lakes
10" Diameter x 3"H

