

A Tribute to The University of Washington Press

In 1965 the University of Washington Press published Bill Holm's *Northwest Coast Indian Art: An Analysis of Form*. Because of its impact on the study of the art of the Northwest Coast, we are inclined to point to this book as one that revolutionized this field of study. Though Holm's book well deserves all the praise that it has been accorded, we might reserve some of our accolades for its publisher. The University of Washington Press has long maintained its commitment to the publication of such works. Its contribution to the study of Native American culture is clear every time one surveys a bibliography of works in the field.

Because of their contribution to the study of the art and culture of the Northwest Coast, we wish to pay special tribute to the University of Washington Press by mentioning some of the books they have published in the last several years. Though we can by no means cover them all, the following few notices will provide an overview of the kinds of work one can expect from the University of Washington Press.

Northwest Coast Indian Art:

The following University of Washington Press books on Northwest Coast Indian Art are reviewed below:

Hawthorn, Audrey. *Kwakiutl Art*. 1979. 292 pp. Photographs, Maps. \$35.00.

Holm, Bill. *Northwest Coast Indian Art: An Analysis of Form*. Thomas Burke Memorial Washington State Museum Monograph No. 1. 1965. xvii + 115 pp. Illustrations, Bibliography. \$14.95.

Holm, Bill. *Spirit and Ancestor: A Century of Northwest Coast Indian Art in the Burke Museum*. Thomas Burke Memorial Washington State Museum Monograph No. 4. 1988. 256 pp. Photographs, Bibliography. \$50.00 cloth; \$24.95 paper.

Jonaitis, Aldona. *Art of the Northern Tlingit*. 1986. 250 pp. Photographs. Bibliography. \$30.00

Jonaitis, Aldona. *From the Land of the Totem Poles: The Northwest Coast Indian Art Collection at the American Museum of Natural History*. 1988. 272 pp. Photographs, Map, Bibliography. \$35.00

Stewart, Hilary. *Looking at Indian Art of the Northwest Coast*. 1979. 112 pp. Illustrations. Bibliography, Index of Artists. \$9.95.

Northwest Coast Indian Art: Deciphering the Code:

Though much of the art of the Northwest Coast that is now housed in museums and private collections was produced during the period from roughly 1850 to 1910 and was collected during a fifty or so year period beginning in the mid-1890s, little attention was given to the formal characteristics of this art until Franz Boas synthesized much of his thinking on this subject in his landmark study *Primitive Art*, published in 1927. We might sum up Boas' objectives by quoting from his text: "The appreciation of the esthetic value of technical perfection is not confined to civilized man" (Dover Publications, rpt. 1955, 19). In his attempts to identify the distinguishable formal and symbolic elements of "primitive" art, Boas clearly demonstrated that many of the purely functional and decorative objects of tribal cultures manifested concerns for and dedication to traditional cultural aesthetic principles. Even though Boas recognized that it was "essential to bear in mind the twofold source of artistic effect, the one based on form alone, the other on ideas

associated with form" (13), he nevertheless tended to gravitate toward the symbolic rather than formal elements.

Not until Holm's *Northwest Coast Indian Art* was there a concise set of terms for the discussion of, or recognition of a clear set of principles governing, the production of the art of the tribes living in the area stretching from roughly Vancouver Island in the south to Yakutat Bay in the north. Aldona Jonaitis, a leading art historian in this field, has praised Holm's work, saying that it "has become the classic work on the topic, equivalent in significance to Franz Boas' earlier writings on art. Holm's brilliant contributions have increased our understanding of Northwest Coast style immeasurably" (*Art of the Northern Tlingit*, 141, discussed below).

According to Patrick Kirch, Director of the Thomas Burke Memorial Washington State Museum, "Bill Holm literally grew up among the storage stacks of the old Washington State Museum . . ." *Spirit and Ancestor*, 7, see below). His post as curator of Northwest Coast Indian Art at the Burke Museum, as well as his work as an artist and teacher, helped gain him access to the 400 objects he studied while doing research for his book.

Though Boas had made a major contribution to the study of the symbolic role of certain subjects represented in the art of the Northwest Coast, Holm was the first to decipher the stylistic elements used in the decorative art of these various cultural groups. Holm introduced a vocabulary that can be applied to the work of the Tlingit, as well as the Kwakiutl-though Holm omitted discussion of the work of this tribe because it varies so much from that of tribes to the north. He identified, as well, principles governing composition and degrees of realism that depended not so much on tribal affiliation as on a particular "artist's preference (more or less strictly bound by tradition) in handling the given space."

The principle elements of composition which Holm identified and gave name to are the formline, ovoid, and U form. He also noted the relationship between three classes of design elements and the three principal colors -- black, red, and green, blue, or blue-green -- applied to the surface of objects. What determines {32} the size and distribution of these design elements, according to Holm, is the way in which the artist wishes to relate his overall design to the space with which he is working. Though bound by certain traditional conventions, the artist has some leeway in this regard.

Holm came up with descriptive terms to identify three categories governing the relationship between design and field: configurative, expansive, and distributive. Animals represented within a configurative design would emphasize the integrity of the animal represented, while those represented within a distributive design might be so distorted or abstracted as to be difficult or impossible to identify.

One work that has benefited demonstrably from Holm's taxonomy is Hilary Stewart's *Looking at Indian Art of the Northwest Coast* published in 1979. Stewart reiterates the basic terms developed by Holm and builds upon his discoveries by relating design elements to design motifs and cultural styles. Based on her study of antiquities and prints done by contemporary artists, Stewart's work contributes immensely to her reader's ability to read and decipher the often extremely complex subject matter represented in the art of the Northwest Coast.

Like Holm's book, which had 78 illustrations, Stewart's book includes numerous examples of design elements and design motifs that clearly delineate the richness and variety of the art of this region. Her 169 illustrations help the reader distinguish among the variety of spiritual and mythological creatures that populate the art of the Northwest Coast. In addition to identifying the design elements associated with the representation of these figures, Stewart provides the reader with information about the role these various figures played in the life of the people that created them. She also gives us some concise but useful pointers on how to distinguish the art of one cultural group from that of another formidable task in a number of instances.

Because of their format, Holm's and Stewart's books could accompany anyone on his next visit to a museum housing a collection of Northwest Coast Indian art, especially anyone who marvels at the grandeur of this art without really understanding very much about it. Both books will continue to be essential reading for anyone interested in the art collected during the latter half of the nineteenth century, but they will also be useful as guides to understanding the works being produced by contemporary Northwest Coast artists.

Cultural areas:

Even though the design elements described by Holm and Stewart are found in the decorative art of the entire region, numerous important tribal differences exist among these groups. Such works as Audrey Hawthorn's *Kwakiutl Art* (1979) and Aldona Jonaitis' *Art of the Northern Tlingit* (1986) help document these important differences. Hawthorn's work includes much material that appeared in her earlier work, *Art of the Kwakiutl Indians and Other Northwest Tribes* published in 1967 and now out of print. Jonaitis' work is the culmination of a number of articles published over the

years and is the first book-length study of the art of the Tlingit Indians.

Historical circumstance has dictated much that distinguishes Kwakiutl art from that of other tribes of the Pacific Northwest. During the period of greatest contact between Europeans and the tribes of the Northwest Coast in the nineteenth century, many tribal practices were eliminated and others greatly modified. The most devastating of interventions was the antipotlatch law passed by the Canadian government in 1884. This prohibition against ceremonial public gatherings led to the decreased production of the paraphernalia associated with these rituals. By the turn of the century, the Haida, for example, had ceased to produce any objects designed for use by members of the tribe.

Such was not the case among the Kwakiutl. Perhaps because the Kwakiutl had some of the most celebrated of these ceremonies, they did not discontinue practices associated with the potlatch or other winter ceremonies for nearly 40 years. This meant that the works of art associated with the rituals continued to be produced up until at least 1921 when the police arrested several of the participants in a ceremony being held at Alert Bay.

Another influence that helped distinguish the art of the Kwakiutl was that of the art of the Bella Coola, a neighboring tribe to the north. According to Hawthorn, Bella Coola sculpted objects were "characterized by deep planes of many levels of depth, each important in building up the whole" and could be painted in a "combination of colors not found in any other examples. . . ."

Kwakiutl mastery of carving is clearly evident in the numerous illustrations of works from the collection held by the Museum of Anthropology at the University of British Columbia. There are 32 color plates and 508 black-and-white photographs including ones that illustrate some of the tools used in the production of these art objects. Especially noteworthy are the illustrations of the masks associated with each of the major groups of dancing societies, the Hamatsa, Winalagilis, Atlakim, Dluwalakha, and the Tsetseka, as well as the Sisiutl headdresses and other ceremonial objects associated with Winalagilis, the war spirit.

The kinds of masks that "reached their highest development among the Kwakiutl" are those "involving multiple identity." As Hawthorn tells us:

One of these, the mask with interchangeable mouthpieces, allowed the dancer to change from one character to another by inserting one of a number of distinctive mouthpieces which he kept concealed under his blanket. . . .

Even more dramatic were the transformation masks, an amazing combination of an imaginative conception with technical ingenuity. These masks . . . carried out the very essence of Kwakiutl mythology by revealing the dual nature of a mythological creature. . . .

Carefully carved and balanced on hinges, the mask was intricately strung. At the climactic moment of the dance, the dancing, the music, and the beat of the batons all changed tempo, speeding up just before the transformation and then halting while it occurred. When certain strings were pulled by the dancer, the external shell of the mask split, usually into four sections, sometimes into two. These pieces of the external covering continued to separate until the inner character was revealed, suspended in their center.

Through such descriptions as this, Hawthorn conveys to the reader the drama and excitement associated with these objects, as well as their function within the ceremonial life of these people.

One topic of debate that has become central to the discussion of Northwest Coast Indian art focuses on the question of interpretation of these works. One side argues that an understanding of the spiritual and religious life of these cultures is essential to any understanding of the iconography of these artworks. Another group argues that the keys to understanding these artworks are to be found in the secular domain, in the way in which these groups order their social lives. It is into this arena that Aldona Jonaitis tosses her hat with her admirable study, *Art of the Northern Tlingit*.

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Jonaitis takes as her topic the relationship between secular and sacred Tlingit art. She begins by defining her two categories: "Secular art is the panoply of carvings, paintings, and textiles that enhanced the social life within the village; sacred art, on the other hand, is the array of articles used by the shaman when he ventured out beyond its limits into the supernatural domain." She then goes on to a discussion of secular art, primarily that which "depicted beings called crests" and that were manufactured for and displayed during the potlatch.

Though a careful study of the iconography of northern Tlingit art, Jonaitis identifies certain stylistic features that she associates with sacred or shamanic art. She characterizes the distinctions by saying,

Secular art tends to be fairly carefully made, with attention paid to the formline principles identified by Holm. . . . Sophistication, restraint, dignity, and elegance in carving, painting, and design characterize much

secular artwork. Shamanic art seems to have a broader range of stylistic qualities. Some pieces are rendered with great attention to northern design principles . . . while other pieces are comparatively crude. . . .

Despite these differences in attention to detail, Jonaitis finds that sacred and secular art share certain features. Both serve to demonstrate concepts of hierarchy, complementarity, exchange, and phases of rites of passage. In her discussion of the potlatch, Jonaitis observes that this ceremony has many features in common with rites of passage and thereby with shamanic seances. What distinguishes the shamanic seance and shamanic art is its manifestation of the shaman's control over a panoply of spiritual animals never represented in the secular art displayed and manipulated during the potlatch. The supernatural world over which the shaman must exercise control in order to ensure the stability of the secular world often manifests itself in an iconography that is opposed to that of the secular world. As a result, one will find that shamanic art includes representations of supernatural beings associated with crest art and noncrest art, demonstrating the shaman's ability to move back and forth between the secular and spiritual realms.

Jonaitis' analysis of the iconography and function of a variety of Tlingit artworks will no doubt influence the way in which all the art of the Northwest Coast is discussed in the future. She has provided what is so often missing from such discussions, an intellectual framework that embraces the diversity and complexity of interaction that characterizes both the sacred and secular life of the Tlingit.

Museum Collections:

Two works that document the history and range of two of the finest collections of Northwest Coast Indian art are Bill Holm's *Spirit and Ancestor: A Century of Northwest Coast Indian Art at the Burke Museum* and Aldona Jonaitis' *From the Land of the Totem Poles: The Northwest Coast Indian Art Collection at the American Museum of Natural History*. Holm's work marked the celebration of the first centennial of what is now known as the Thomas Burke Memorial Washington State Museum in Seattle. Jonaitis' book is the first book devoted to the largest collection of Northwest Coast Indian art, that housed at the American Museum of Natural History in New York.

In a short introduction, Holm traces the history of the Burke collection from the construction of a building on the campus of the University of Washington designed to be the headquarters of the Young Naturalist's Society, a group of Seattle residents interested in the study and preservation of Northwest Coast artifacts. He sketches in the contributions made by such early collectors as Alexander J. Anderson, James T. White, James Swan, Myron Eells, Lt. George T. Emmons, and Caroline McGilvra Burke, whose bequest in memory of Judge Thomas Burke provided the resources for the building that houses the museum's present collection.

Holm provides a description of each of the 100 objects photographed by Eduardo Calderon. Holm, now curator emeritus of Northwest Coast Indian art history at the University of Washington, brings his reservoir of knowledge to bear upon each of these objects and explains their function with such care as to reveal his intimacy with each of these works. Calderon's superb color photographs complement the historical photographs showing how some of these objects were used in their native cultures.

Like Holm, Jonaitis begins her study of the collection of the American Museum of National History with a history of European responses to and early collection of Northwest Coast Indian Art. The 96 color and 86 black-and-white photographs that illustrate Jonaitis's book document this record of early contact between Europeans and the tribes of the Northwest Coast, as well as the donations made by major contributors to the collection. Jonaitis organizes her material around these contributors, beginning with the philanthropic interests of Morris Ketchum Jesup, continuing with the collections of artifacts acquired by such individuals as Heber Bishop and Israel Wood Powell, Lt. George T. Emmons, Frederic Ward Putnam, and Franz Boas, then on to the contributions made by such figures as George Hunt, James Teit, Livingston Farrand, and John Swanton, and ending with a discussion of the Haida artist Charles Edenshaw, a major source of information for Boas and others on Northwest Coast art.

The history of this collection *is*, to a large extent, a history of the art of the people of the Northwest Coast during the past 100 years. Jonaitis' book will no doubt fascinate anyone with an interest in the art of this area.

Linda Ainsworth

Steltzer, Ulli. *A Haida Potlatch*. 1986. 96 pp. illustrations. \$14.95.

In *A Haida Potlatch*, Ulli Steltzer documents a 1981 potlatch or "doing" organized by the well-known Haida artist Robert Davidson of Masset, British Columbia, for the Haida people and their guests. She has edited selections from commentaries about the event by some of the 400 participants to accompany sixty-five of her own black-and-white photographs.

Steltzer explains in her introduction that the text originated as her own contribution to the potlatch. To give a gift at a potlatch, to act there as a witness to the transfer of rights and property, is traditional. For the gift and witnessing to come from a member of the surrounding (and often opposing) non-Native American culture, and for it to take the form of a photodocumentary volume, cannot be considered "traditional." But Steltzer's gift is valuable for the restraint and skill with which she has worked to let the motivations and feelings of a number of Haida participants shine through the pictures she has taken and the words she has selected. At the same time, Steltzer's text quietly reminds us that cultural renewal requires choices among values, and that these may require opting for the "innovative" if the {34} "traditional" is to live. For a culture to be affirmed may require the suppression of some historic aspects of it.

Steltzer's photographs portray Haidas performing actions, performing their "doing," preparing and participating in the potlatch. The one example of a "scene-setting" photograph, one without any human figure at all was chosen by Steltzer to face the first page of text. On the photograph's left border stands the steeple of a Christian church in the Haida village of Masset; the church building extends across the center of the picture. Near the right border the church serves as a background for the Bear Mother clan pole erected by Robert Davidson in 1969. The masses of church and pole balance and harmonize with each other. The photograph makes the implicit statement that the spiritual outlooks represented by these two structures, originating from different cultures, can complement and even augment each other in the life of the Haida community.

But to do this requires choices. Robert Davidson's great-greatuncle made such choices, as Florence Davidson recounts in Steltzer's text: he both became the first ordained minister in the Haida settlement of Hydaburg, Alaska, and raised the tallest Haida totempole ever made. As a number of other accounts by potlatch participants makes clear, most early Christian ministers among the Haida made different and opposed choices: they demanded the end of totempole and potlatch alike, seeing them as "pagan" threats to the Christianization of the Haida.

The "doing" that Steltzer documents performed two primary functions. On its first night, artist Joe David of the Clayoquot band on the west side of Vancouver Island was adopted as Robert Davidson's brother and as a member of the Haida people. On the second night, an opportunity was given to older community members to publicly give Haida names to their children. As a number of participants point out, the public gift of names is itself an innovation, a change in tradition. Ida Smith reports: "This is kind of new to us, all these names given to our children in public. In my growing life I never saw that. But that's the way Robert wanted it."

What emerges most strikingly from Steltzer's text is the connection between preservation and innovation in a Native American culture. Both older and younger participants in the "doing" comment on the necessity for change that the continuation and renewal of tradition seems to mandate, Robert Davidson comments on one of his earlier projects, the Bear Mother pole:

People were very co-operative and also very critical because I am Eagle and carving this totempole I should also put an Eagle on top of the pole. But I said, "No, I want the pole to be for everybody; it belongs to the village, I don't want it to be one man's totempole," That was a radical change. The totempole became a focal point, a school, a vehicle for knowledge.

Joe David notes that innovation itself is a tradition in these Northwest Coast communities. "The fact is, there is always change and our people have always been comfortable with it." He links changes in Haida culture to developments in the surrounding non-Native American culture:

For example, some of our ceremonies are getting shorter, Not all of the old people can sit around any more for days on end to listen to someone layout a history, and to watch the performance of his dance and privileges. Now people come from miles around in cars and at the end of the ceremonies they have to drive again.

One of Steltzer's photographs neatly (perhaps unwittingly) portrays the overlapping of tradition and innovation. It is captioned, "Using his talking stick, Robert announces the adoption of Joe into his clan." It is unclear whether the "talking stick" referred to is the carved staff Robert Davidson grasps in his left hand or the microphone he speaks into held in his right.

Often participants quoted by Steltzer see the artist's interest in working in traditional forms as motivated by his innovative streak, or even by his cosmopolitanism. One older Haida, Adolphus Marks, characterizes Robert Davidson and his project for the revival of Haida art and culture thus:

He is a thinking man now, that Robert. To start things like that is quite something! He's been travelling, he's been away, he's learned quite a bit. If you stay around here today, you see nothing, you learn nothing. I am glad to see them do the potlatch today. It is something the new generation should learn. It makes them happy. They will never do it the way it was, but they are giving it a try.

Comments such as Adolphus Marks' point up some difficult questions. Is a "renewal of tradition" such as the "doing" Steltzer documents a contradiction in terms, a sort of oxymoron of culture? When does renewal become invention of a new and different tradition, even a misrepresentation of former tradition?

Steltzer presents comments from younger Haidas active in Robert Davidson's potlatch who are quite concerned with this problem. Reggie Davidson, a leader of the revival of Haida dance, recalls how difficult it was to reinstitute a tradition almost extinguished. He and other young dancers often had to rely on their own inspiration, submitted always to the correction of surviving older women dancers. He draws the conclusion that in the case of dance the paucity of received tradition means that "cultural renewal" is conceivable only if this process engages the creativity and satisfies the needs of the present generation of Haidas as well as those of older generations. Culture is made for a people, not simply a people for a culture:

We are adding new dances all the time, using the old songs. Robert even composed a new song in English. If they accept it in Masset, well, then it's all right. Some critics say it wasn't done that way, but who is around to tell you how it was done? It is better to do something that we can all relate to and understand. We just go by the little knowledge people gave us and make up the rest. You can tell, when you are doing a new or different dance, whether it works or not. It is like getting in the car and driving; you can drive if you don't hit anything, but if you start hitting things, it doesn't work.

Marjorie Halpin, in her foreword to *A Haida Potlatch*, places the work of Robert Davidson and his collaborators within the context of a worldwide reassertion of ethnicity, "collective human difference." "An anonymous urban multitude," writes Halpin, "for whom ethnicity is not a matter of personal identity took on the role of watchers or witnesses vis-a-vis this phenomenon." It would be a scary prospect for all concerned if such a faceless swarm of voyeurs played the role of readers of Steltzer's book, of "witnesses" to the transmission and renewal of Haida culture. It can only be properly responded to by individuals, whatever their circumstances, who see cultural transmission as people-making, a creative relation between past, present and future generations in which individuals cannot truly engage without the necessity to make decisions among values. This includes the choice of {35} actions bringing creation and innovation as well as those of preservation. Steltzer's work is timely and valuable because it helps a larger audience understand these things based on the experience of Robert Davidson and his fellow participants in the "doing." "What motivated me to give this potlatch is my concern," Steltzer quotes Davidson: "my awareness of what can be changed and improved. . . . The potlatch is our way of transferring cultural knowledge. This cultural transmission is not merely preservation as an end in itself; it becomes the springboard for wider boundaries, for the generation of new and greater values. "You open a door and there are ten more doors," as Davidson remarks at the end of Steltzer's work. "and you open them and there are new ideas for new directions."

The most important thing a reader will take away from Steltzer's book is a sense of the extraordinary efforts Robert Davidson and his collaborators devote to shaping the social context for the production and consumption of their work. The "doing" itself may be considered the extension of these efforts through the medium of drama. *A Haida Potlatch* is thus a resource for artists and students of the arts exploring ways to alter the conditions of exchange between artists and their surrounding cultures, whether these are Native American or not.

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Haboo: Native American Stories from Puget Sound. Translated and edited by Vi Hilbert; foreword and introduction by Thorn Hess; drawings by Ron Hilbert. 1985. 228 pp. Illustrations, Map, Appendix, Bibliography. \$9.95.

The translator of these stories is a Skagit Indian woman fluent in Lushootseed, the Salish language of the Puget Sound region, dedicated to the preservation of her culture, particularly its vanishing traditions of oral storytelling. The 33 narratives by 14 tellers in this volume cover a considerable variety of genres: myth, history, and non-traditional tale. They are translated by Ms. Hilbert with a vivacity that at times makes one feel like calling out the traditional encouragement to a Lushootseed teller, "Haboo!" Representative is the following tale of "Boil and Hammer Are Living There," for which a Lushootseed text is given in an appendix.

Boil and Hammer were sisters. This Boil had long hair, braided down. And she went out and picked berries every day, every day. The two sisters, Boil and Hammer, went out and picked berries.

Each day they went out and came home. That's all they lived on -- berries, berries, every day. One day they were going home, the berries on her back. So Hammer got home and she waited there. And her sister never showed up. Well, she worried.

So she walked back on the trail. Well, she came to find her sister's hair -- just her hair, two braids lying on the trail. Those sharp things, the fir needles, one must have dropped on top of Boil's head. And it busted -- just busted! She had no bones, just a braid.

Yeah, Hammer felt bad and cried and cried going home and got into their house, and she stayed there. Yeah. She quite crying. "Well, I'll go down the river and wash my face." So she went down to the river and washed. She had pretty beads on. Her foot slipped and she rolled down into the river. She was just a rock, anyhow. So Hammer, she got drowned.

That is the end of the story.

Karl Kroeber