

[AAA 110005 Thaw Intro Panel Edited jla 8/18/10]

Art of the Native Americans: The Thaw Collection

To me, American Indian art stands rightfully with Ancient art, with masterpieces of Asia and Europe as their equal.

—Eugene Thaw

This exhibition surveys the great achievements of North America's first artists. You will find objects of transcendent beauty that span the continent—from the Arctic to the Southwest, and from the Eastern Woodlands to the Pacific West—created by Native peoples who spoke hundreds of different languages. The artworks range in age from antiquity to the present, but cluster in the 1880s, a period of tremendous change for Native American peoples.

Native Americans took great pleasure in the visual beauty of objects made with imagination and skill, and they also prized qualities not always visible in the finished work. These vary from place to place and may include the ritual correctness of gathering raw materials; sound construction and usefulness; the power that comes from an object's conception in a vision or dream; or how often an object appears in performances, feasts, and ceremonies, during which oration, dance, song, and movement animate it. These

principles are still valued and the rituals still practiced by the descendants of those artists who created these magnificent works.

Some works bear witness to Native American artists' welcoming embrace of the new materials, techniques, and imagery introduced by European-Americans. Such objects record artists' ability to absorb without being absorbed, despite intense pressure to assimilate into European-American culture. They testify to their creators' ingenuity and resilience, and to the importance of the arts in sustaining traditions that have not vanished, but continue today stronger than ever.