

George Kicking Woman (Three Guns)

Pikuni (Blackfeet), 1913–2005

Black Crow Tipi, 1992

Canvas, paint

Minneapolis Institute of Arts
Displayed with permission of the artist

A painted tipi in a Pikuni (Blackfeet) camp gives distinction and respect to its owner. Traditionally, a painted tipi was an announcement that a sacred prayer bundle rested within. The tipi owner possessed the rites and rituals of that bundle. Bundles and their particular tipi designs were passed from family to family, generation to generation. Today, the exchange of bundles is uncommon, but tipi designs are bought and sold for ceremonial and exhibition use. This tipi design belongs to George Kicking Woman, a highly respected Pikuni elder from Montana. He inherited it from his grandfather, who inherited it from his father. The Minneapolis Institute of Arts acquired this version from the artist, and displays it with his permission.

Like many painted tipis, this one features designs that represent the basic elements of the universe. The red triangles around the bottom indicate mountains, and the white circles within characterize the rocks that form the mountains. Above the mountains, black crows walk in a horizontal line, the significance of which is no longer known. A red line above them signifies a rainbow. The heavens encompass the entire top third of the tipi. White circles on the smoke flaps depict the stars in the Big Dipper and the Little Dipper. The Morning Star is portrayed in the shape of the Maltese cross at the back of the tipi.

["Art of the Native Americans: The Thaw Collection"](#) is on view in the Target Gallery October 24, 2010–January 9, 2011