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Understanding Northwest Coast Art: A Guide to Crests, Beings, and Symbols. By Cheryl Sheerar.

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gathering further documentation on the collection. She discusses the incidents in detail here, and describes the masks, which are extremely rare, in greater detail than was available in her 1936 publication (*American Anthropologist* 1936, number 4: 569–585), the only detailed source on this remarkable and little-known mask type previously in print.

De Laguna is to be commended for working through these difficult issues with tact and candor. To hold her responsible for practices long since abandoned by her and everyone else would risk the far greater sin of presentism. We should be grateful that both laws and attitudes toward museum collecting have changed, and that De Laguna is flexible enough to have changed along with them.

De Laguna's field trip links past and present in other ways. She and her companions ended their three-month journey down the Yukon at Holy Cross, a small village hundreds of miles below Nenana, where it began. Rather than return upriver by the same means, however, they were picked up by Noel Wien, a pioneering Alaskan bush pilot, and flown back to Fairbanks. Thus they covered the hundreds of miles gained during three arduous months in a single afternoon. *Travels among the Dena* allows us to experience the journey from an armchair and marvel at the achievement of De Laguna and her companions. We can only hope that the team of four also appreciated the accomplishment it represented.

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Understanding Northwest Coast Art: A Guide to Crests, Beings, and Symbols.

By Cheryl Shearar. Toronto: Douglas and McIntyre, 2000. 192 pages. \$17.95 paper.

The task the author sets before her in writing this book is not an easy one. Does she accomplish what her title suggests? Is it possible after reading this book to understand the art produced along the coast of Alaska, British Columbia, and Washington? It is a worthy endeavor and certainly a welcomed book if it does realize its promise.

The book contains three main parts: the introduction, which addresses the art and culture along the aforementioned states and province; part one, which is an dictionary section of crests, beings, and symbols; and part two, which addresses the basics of Northwest Coast art in three sections. The first two sections discuss design conventions and design elements, respectively, and the final section discusses cultural groupings and art styles.

The book contains a map of the area regarding the tribes Shearar represents, including the Tlingit, Haida, Nisga, Gitksan, Tsimshian, Haisla, Heiltsuk, Nuxalk, Owekeno, Kwakwaka'wakw (Kwakwiltl), Nuu-chah-nulth (Nootka), Coast Salish, Makah, and the Quileute. It is an interesting map in that it provides the context of the tribes she decides to include. In the introduction, the author mentions the area covered is from Alaska to Oregon, but the map stops just south of the Strait of Juan de Fuca. The introduction's brief

account, two pages total, of northwest coastal cultures and art actually has more historical information than any other part of the book. Perhaps that is important since the author mentions that the revival of art does not occur until the middle of the twentieth century. It is here that history becomes important, since the cultural boundaries for art became blurred and more freedom of expression occurred with regard to representation of heretofore privileged or restricted access materials. A careful reading seems to suggest that money (or the making of money) superseded any cultural and artistic restriction, thus inundating the market with previously restricted images and interpretations of stories. That money had such influence is an interesting idea and perhaps even a correct one, even if it is disguised. Her comment on the worldwide demand for Northwest Coast art affirms this materialistic motivation while holding to the idea of a renaissance of indigenous art.

As the introduction ends, Shearar puts forth a disclaimer: "This is an introductory guide—it is not intended to be, nor could it be, comprehensive or definitive" (p. 11). It is an important disclaimer, though in light of the title ostensibly contradictory. How is it possible to read this book and not be confused about how to understand Northwest Coast art, remembering that the contents are not to be comprehensive or definitive? If the first word of the title were not included, then the book would not have such inherent contradictions.

What I did like about her final comments concerned authority. Shearar acknowledges, "Coast artists (and in some cases the individuals for whom they create works) are the only truly valid authorities regarding the intended function and meaning of a piece" (p. 11). It is a nice admission, though perhaps a bit romantic, since not all artists understand the significance or history of the art they produce.

Part two takes a dictionary approach to the content of the book. It becomes readily apparent that much of her focus is on the Kwakwaka'wakw tribe. It dominates each letter of the dictionary and it is not until the last section that she explains Kwakwaka'wakw used to be known as the Kwakuitl. Most of the crests, beings, and stories represented in the dictionary as well as the illustrations throughout the book are from the Kwakwaka'wakw.

The task she endeavors to perform in part two is to explain the significance of such things as raven or copper in Northwest Coast art and to take into account the significance these elements have to each particular culture. In the case of the raven, she must address how prominent this symbol is along the coastal tribes and the varied importance among the different tribes. This is not an easy task to complete successfully in just a page-and-a-half, but she does a valiant job. I found this section of the book informative, though I was skeptical of some of her explanations and the sources for her comments.

I found that the book's section on the impact of Northwest Coast art on the world lacked references to well-known pieces. She did mention some, such as Spirit of Haida Gwaii, but this was a rare occasion. Since this art is so prominent in many of the museums of the world, as well as government buildings, universities, tribal and First Nations buildings, and even on money (the 1997 \$200 Canadian coin commemorates the raven stealing the light, but refers to it as "Raven bringing light to the world") more references to such

pieces would have been welcomed.

The final section was also informative, but again I was skeptical of some of Shearar's explanations. In the section on design conventions, she fails to acknowledge innovative differences among the cultures, specifically that Haida artists were preeminent in incorporating internal designs within a larger design, such as a raven within the fin of an Orca. Thus, a major part of the Northwest Coast art was ignored. A discussion of art on the houses and canoes, two very important aspects of all cultures along the Northwest Coast, would have added another layer to this discussion.

In the design elements section, I was most disappointed. Since this is only an introductory text, and I was warned that it was such, I should not have been so expectant. But of all the sections in the book, this section should have provided the basic differences among the coastal artists. Shearar describes the use of design like language and provides another disclaimer to the end that though all the elements are understood in a given art piece, the piece as a whole may still present problems in actually understanding its meaning. With the idea that the symbolism represented a language, it would have been nice to see how each group varied their use of the U form, the split U, and the ovoid in order to grasp the nuances of each group. Her correlation could have been strengthened with the idea that each tribe brings different aspects to the language, but this section only contains Haida examples of each of these forms. A comparison of usage along the coast would have been extremely helpful.

Finally, the cultural grouping section is unsatisfying for many reasons. Shearar combines the area into five regions, four of which are located along Vancouver and the Vancouver Island area, and the fifth group includes every other tribe north of Vancouver Island. In her discussion of these groupings, starting from the southernmost area, her descriptions are somewhat detailed, but as she goes north, each section becomes shorter and the final section with the most tribes receives the least attention. Shearar discusses the main differences in the art and there are some pictures of masks, houses, totem poles, and basketry, but not of each of the tribes she mentioned. Thus Shearar does not fully represent many of the cultures she writes about in her book.

Looking at the book as a whole, with all the disclaimers and reservations, I would recommend it since it does contain pertinent information. It serves, as an initial warning suggests, as an introduction to Northwest Coast art.

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We'll Be in Your Mountains, We'll Be in Your Songs: A Navajo Woman Sings.
By Ellen McCullough-Brabson and Marilyn Help. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2001. 168 pages (compact disc included). \$24.99 cloth.

Until recently, writings about Native American music by cultural outsiders have been studies of male musical expression. Researchers devoted few resources to the study of women's musical repertoires, and justified their inclination toward