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THE FAR NORTH: 2000 YEARS OF AMERICAN ESKIMO AND INDIAN ART.
By Henry B. Collins, Frederica de Laguna, Edmund Carpenter, and Peter Stone.

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Author

Graham, Mark

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There are signs that the low point in this history of scholarly neglect has been reached. With the cooperation of the Newberry Library, Garland Press is presently reprinting 311 narratives in 111 volumes, including multiple editions of some. It is to be hoped that this greater availability will not only lead to more systematic use of the narratives by scholars but to carefully prepared editions of the most valuable ones by qualified ethnohistorians. Following Axtell's lead, we should soon be able to employ them for more balanced assessments than literary approaches allow of the Indian-white cultural frontier.

Neal Salisbury
Smith College

THE FAR NORTH: 2000 YEARS OF AMERICAN ESKIMO AND INDIAN ART. By Henry B. Collins, Frederica de Laguna, Edmund Carpenter, and Peter Stone. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1977. 289 pp. pap. \$14.95

Modern attitudes toward "primitive" or tribal art have been characterized by a shift in perspective from the primitive product as artifact and curio to primitive art as the object of aesthetic contemplation, academic inquiry, and commercial speculation. Today, primitive art of "quality" is as often to be seen in art museums, commercial galleries, and private art collections as in natural history collections. Quite often, the first or best publication of a primitive art object occurs in the exhibition catalog of a museum or the sale catalog of a gallery. The publication format of descriptive catalog and explanatory essay has become an important form of documentation for the study of primitive art. The review of a major exhibition catalog is an opportunity to measure the approach and accomplishments of the exhibition against the objective demands of scholarly progress.

The Far North is the record of an "official" U.S. exhibition of the art production of the native peoples of the state of Alaska: the Eskimos, Aleuts, Athabaskans, and Tlingit. The exhibition opened at the National Gallery of Art in Washington in the spring of 1973, and then travelled to Fort Worth, Portland, Seattle, and Anchorage. The catalog entries were written by Edmund Carpenter, Henry B. Collins, John Cook, Frederica de Laguna, and C. Douglas Lewis. Essays of varying length were contributed by Carpenter, Collins, de Laguna, and Peter Stone.

With one exception (a drawing in a private collection), all of the nearly 400 objects illustrated in the catalog are from public collections in the

U.S., Canada, Europe, and the Soviet Union. Although the exhibition was conceived and largely organized by officials of the Amon Carter Museum in Fort Worth, one suspects that assistance of the U.S. government was instrumental in securing the important loans from foreign collections, particularly from the Soviet Union. Indeed, the opportunity to draw on the objects collected by many of the early European explorers of Alaska resulted in the inclusion of numerous pieces which are very well documented. Thus, many catalog entries are extremely informative and valuable, presenting not only the materials, dimensions, ethnic affiliation, and the present location and accession number of an object, but the name of the collector and the place and date collected. Many catalog entries also have an explanatory paragraph or two, frequently relating an object to others in the exhibition, as well as giving references to previous publications of an object. With regard to the primary documentation of the objects, then, this catalog reveals a serious scholarly commitment and establishes a level of excellence which should be a standard for other exhibitions of primitive art.

The essays, however, are uneven in quality and scope. The first, "Eskimo Art" by Collins, is in many ways the best of the lot by virtue of its completeness. A pioneer in Alaskan archaeology, Collins has written a concise and well-documented survey of the chronology and art styles of Eskimo culture, pre-historic and modern, with an emphasis on material culture. The first of two very brief essays by de Laguna concerns the art of the Athabaskan peoples of interior Alaska, touching on the cultural and artistic relationships between Athabaskans and Eskimos, and in a bit more detail on their masking traditions and concepts. Peter Stone's essay on "Tlingit Art" introduces this Athabaskan-speaking people who were the northernmost representatives of traditional Northwest Coast culture. Unlike the Eskimos and the Athabaskans proper, the Tlingit were a more complex "ranked" society, whose economy was based on exploitation of the rich resources of the sea and the northern coastal rain forest. Perhaps too concisely, Stone manages to discuss Tlingit art forms in the contexts of environment, myth, and social organization. De Laguna's second essay, "Tlingit Shamans," would be disappointingly slim in any case, and is all the more so given her previous impressive scholarship in this area. The Tlingit, along with the other ranked societies of the Northwest Coast, were distinguished by a surplus-producing hunting and gathering economy. This anomaly was reflected in the ideological realm, where shamanic themes more appropriate to egalitarian societies coexisted with a spectacular artistic display of social rank. Some of the richest and most complex Tlingit art, particularly rattles and masks, was made to be used in shamanistic ceremonies. The formal and iconographic scope of Tlingit shamanic art is scarcely suggested in the essay, and this is a major shortcoming of the catalog.

The final essay, "Some Notes on the Separate Realities of Eskimo and

Indian Art" by Edmund Carpenter, was apparently intended as a sort of manifesto for a more humanistic understanding of native Alaskan art. He pleads, at times eloquently, for a subjective experiencing of tribal art, advocating an empathetic search for the human realities of the individual artist-craftsman's creative process. Carpenter's emphasis on the non-material aspects of art production poses a fundamental contrast to the more straightforwardly materialist anthropology of the other contributors. His essay not only adds some theoretical balance to the catalog, but also would seem to have a real value for the non-specialist viewing these objects for the first time.

But in broader terms, Carpenter's essay hints at an issue which was rather conspicuously ignored throughout this enterprise: the present condition of the native inhabitants of Alaska, and the end of "authentic" native art of the past. From one perspective, the subjective experiencing of native Alaskan art is about all that remains now, after the people who made it have been acculturated, deculturated, and otherwise had their lives transformed by years of disruptive contact with Euro-American capitalist society. It is probably not coincidental that this lavish and unprecedented exhibition of the art of our 49th state emerged during the national debate over the construction of the Alaskan oil pipeline. At that time, many critics of the pipeline argued that it would have a severely negative impact on the people and environment of Alaska. By ignoring the present, this display of Alaskan cultural and artistic vitality in effect renders it timeless. The message of this exhibition seems to be: "Our Alaskan heritage has been recorded, analyzed, and generally 'dealt with,' and now can be filed away, subject to recall by scholars and other antiquarians."

The Far North is, on balance, an impressively scholarly achievement and a significant contribution to the study of Native American art. But the exhibition and its catalog, like the objects themselves, must be seen in their proper social and historical contexts.

Mark Graham
University of California, Los Angeles

Della Kew and P. E. Goddard. *INDIAN ART AND CULTURE OF THE NORTHWEST COAST*. Seattle: Hancock House, 1974. 96 pp. pap. \$4.95

Ulli Steltzer. *INDIAN ARTISTS AT WORK*. Vancouver, B.C.: J. J. Douglas Ltd., 1976. 163 pp. pap. \$8.95

In comparison to other regions and peoples of Native America, and especially as regards the arts, the Northwest Coast has received what