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Floral Decoration and Culture Change: An Historical Interpretation of Motivation

DAVID W. PENNEY

INTRODUCTION

By definition, an American Indian art history is concerned with historic change. In addition to describing and documenting change that is apparent in the historic record of visual expression, such a history must identify the events and processes that contribute to change or, more properly speaking, innovation. In American Indian art, innovation would seem to oppose the notion of tradition when the latter term is intended to refer to the conservative retention of artistic ideas and techniques from one generation to the next.

In recent years, the term *tradition*, when applied to American Indian art, has become loaded with additional implications, as Jonathan C. H. King has observed in a recent essay.¹ Tradition, or traditional art, connotes authenticity reinforced by associations with cultural purity in the pursuit of time-honored practices. The term *tradition*, then, testifies to connections with the cultural legacy of an ancient past. In order not to threaten these connections, artistic innovation must reconcile tradition and change. When innovation is absorbed into prevailing practice, it becomes part of tradition. How and why is tradition modified by each succeeding generation to coincide with unique cultural and historical experiences? This larger question is addressed in this essay, if only

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by examining in detail the development of an innovative mode of clothing decoration and handiwork known as the floral style.

The nineteenth century saw a complete transformation of Great Lakes Native American decorative arts, particularly in the ornamentation of formal dress. The term *dress* refers to a special category of clothing reserved for formal social occasions. Reverend Samuel W. Pond, who spent some twenty years among the Eastern Sioux of Minnesota, described these garments as follows in his description of the Dakota in 1834: "The ornaments and costly raiments were not worn every day, but were carefully treasured to be worn in some great assembly, as at a medicine dance or at some other great meeting."² George Horse Capture repeats this idea in his description of modern powwow *dress*, meaning special clothing worn for formal occasions such as powwows.³

A visual survey of Indian dress clothing of the larger Great Lakes region throughout the nineteenth century illustrates tremendous change in applied ornament technique and style. Prominent in this transformation were the advent and growth of the so-called floral style, possibly beginning in the eighteenth century but achieving its greatest popularity late in the nineteenth century. The term *floral style* refers to applied ornament—most often in porcupine quill, moose hair, glass bead, or silk floss embroidery, but also visible in silk ribbon appliqué and even loom-woven beadwork—that employs the images of plants and flowers as the predominant motif. The general consensus has it that floral imagery is not indigenous to native North American design but was introduced from European sources. Even so, the actual origins of floral style in Great Lakes Indian art are no less obscure than the historic processes that led to its development and popularity.

The logic of floral style as an example of innovative tradition may be studied from the point of view of a social history of nineteenth-century dress clothing. If clothing design is functionally related to personal and social identities, innovations like the floral style must be tied to changes in such identities among American Indians.⁴ Obviously, many historical factors led to dramatic transformations in Native American culture and, consequently, to the sense of what it was to be an Indian in the nineteenth century. It is possible to view American Indian dress clothing as a particularly eloquent expression of ethnic identity in response to pressures to adjust and adapt those identities to new historical realities. A study of the historical factors leading to innovations

in dress clothing can help illuminate the purposes underlying the advent of floral style ornament.

ORIGINS AND SOURCES

The origins of the floral style have been sought by several generations of anthropologists and historians. Ethnographer Frank Speck believed that the floral style had grown out of indigenous double curve designs prominent in decorative arts of the eastern seaboard and had existed prior to European contact in Penobscot art as prophylactic depictions of medicinal plants.⁵ On the other hand, Marius Barbeau, the Canadian anthropologist and historian, discovered that floral patterns had been taught to Indian girls in mission schools as early as the seventeenth century, and he felt that their appearance on Native American clothing stemmed ultimately from this kind of formal training.⁶ After an exhaustive review of extant collections, Ted Brassler concluded that there was no evidence of plant or flower motifs in the prehistoric arts of the Eastern Woodlands and very few signs of floral decoration in Great Lakes art prior to 1800.⁷

Since Brassler's observations question the conclusions of both Speck and Barbeau, the sources of flower forms used in Great Lakes Indian art remain unclear. But, more importantly, the meaning of floral style as a part of Native American dress and the reasons why floral style came to dominate the decoration of dress clothing of Great Lakes Native Americans by the end of the nineteenth century have not been addressed.

To begin with, one need look no further for sources of floral images than the printed cotton textiles, or "calicoes" as they are called in contemporary literature, received from European traders in exchange for furs throughout the fur trade era.⁸ By 1800, the Indians of the Great Lakes region had been engaged in fur trade activities for more than two hundred years. The fur trade had engendered sweeping changes in the economies of participating Native American groups, who adjusted the seasonal round of activities to accommodate trapping and trading.⁹ Possession of products of European manufacture, particularly those employed in fashion such as manufactured textiles of wool, cotton, and silk and ornaments of silver, communicated high social standing among Indians active within the fur trade system. Fur trade

wealth had social meaning primarily when worn as part of an ensemble of clothing. The tailored cotton shirt, with its colorful floral patterns, and leggings of wool were valued as indications of success in the fur trade. Trade goods represented wealth, which led to social influence.¹⁰ Elements of clothing derived from trade with Europeans did not mimic or depend upon white fashion but were appropriated by the indigenous fashion system, which valued dress as a means for displaying symbols representing acknowledged social standing.

Although the floral designs of cotton prints were integrated into the Indian fashion ensemble of the fur trade era, the designs themselves were not emulated in women's handiwork of porcupine quill and glass bead embroidery until the mid-nineteenth century, with a few important exceptions. Designs that appear in these media around 1800 include curvilinear elements, some suggesting plant forms, but they can be more properly classified as variants on three basic curvilinear forms: the double curve, the trefoil (like the playing card club), and a quadrulobate, radial motif proportioned like an equal-armed cross (fig. 1).¹¹ In contrast, the floral designs on cotton prints and, later, in floral style bead embroidery include serpentine stems, differentiate between blossoms and leaves, and are organized into complex radial or asymmetrical compositions (fig. 2). Floral print textiles were occasionally used as decorative elements applied to clothing or accessories and dominated patterns on cotton shirts, but Indian women artists did not choose to employ the designs visible on cotton floral prints in their own work until the latter part of the nineteenth century.¹² Consequently, it is not sufficient to identify a likely source for floral images employed in the floral style; it is necessary to understand why women artists chose to use them.

When this question was explored during the 1930s and 1940s, most investigators concluded that floral designs represented a by-product of acculturation. Alfred Bailey's wide-ranging study of the conflict between Eastern Algonquian and European culture, published in 1937, discussed the floral style as evidence of European influence on the Indians.¹³ Both Felix Keesing, who undertook an ethnohistoric approach to studying the Menominee in the 1930s, and Sister Bernard Coleman, in her analysis of decorative arts of the Ojibwa of northern Minnesota based on fieldwork in the 1940s, concluded as well that floral style decoration stemmed from white influence and let the question rest at that.¹⁴



FIGURE 1. Pair of legging panels (wool fabric, glass beads, silk ribbon), Ottawa, Michigan, c. 1835. Founders Society purchase, The Detroit Institute of Arts 81.545.1-2.

The early beaded embroidery on this pair of legging panels employs a number of nonrepresentational, curvilinear patterns mentioned in the text, such as small double curves (opposed spirals), four-armed quadrilobate motifs, and three- or five-pointed elements arranged in radial configurations. This kind of decoration anticipates floral style but contains no genuine floral elements.

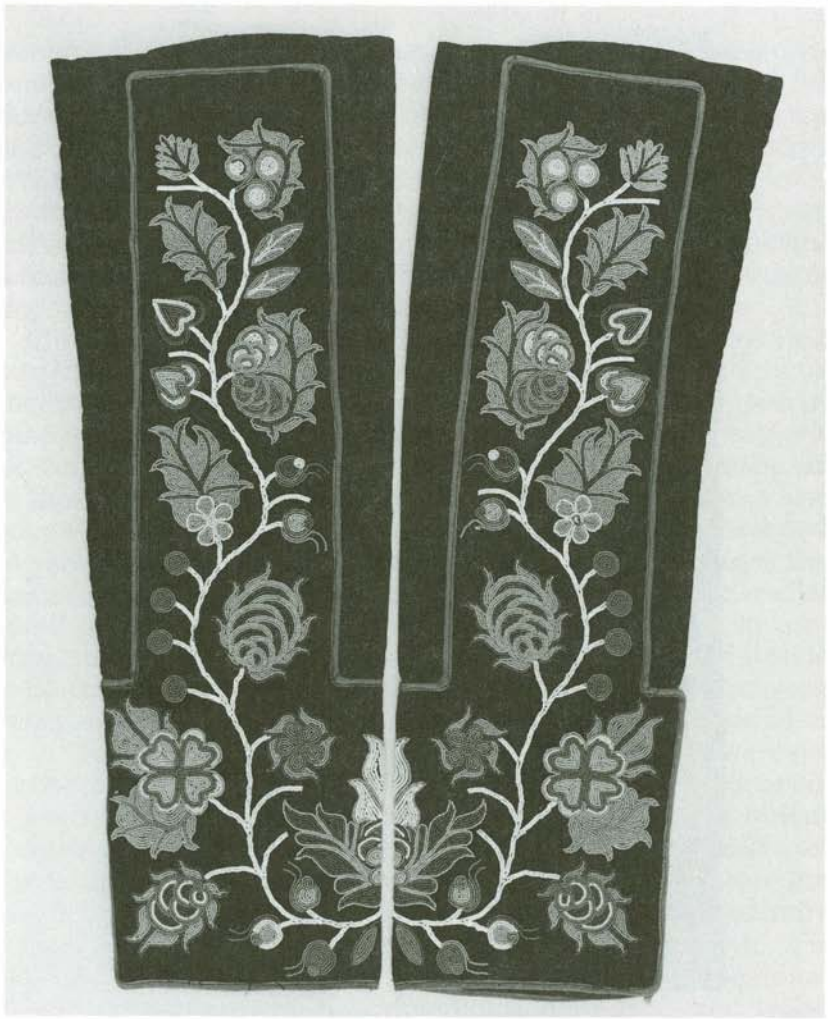


FIGURE 2. Pair of leggings (velveteen, glass beads, cotton military braid), Ojibwa/Chippewa, Minnesota, c. 1890. Founders Society purchase, The Detroit Institute of Arts 81.181.1-2.

The beaded embroidery on this pair of leggings represents floral style in the highly naturalistic manner of the late nineteenth-century Minnesota Ojibwa. Several species of flowers are represented, arranged on serpentine stems and differentiated from green leaves. Note how the designs on both leggings together conform to the older symmetrical convention of organizing the entire composition as a large double curve.

The term *influence*, of course, has passive connotations and does not address the issues of choice or motivation.¹⁵ Studies pertaining to native North American acculturation have focused on social organization, subsistence strategies, and technological development, but not on the arts, except for relatively recent interest in the effects of exterior market economies (tourist art, curios) when introduced into Native American arts traditions.¹⁶ Little attention has been paid to the historical relationships between Native Americans and Euro-American arts traditions beyond evoking the vague concept of influence. The notion of influence is inadequate, because it characterizes Indian artists as the passive recipients of acculturated traits instead of active participants in the genesis of their creations. The motivations of choice and change remain obscure.

FLORAL STYLE AS SIGN: A SEMIOTIC INTERPRETATION

Let us return to the notion of floral style as an innovation in the decoration of nineteenth-century dress clothing. Clothing and its ornamentation functioned on several different levels but can be read effectively as a semantic system. Within the social context, clothing communicates something about the person who wears it. Among American Indians of the Great Lakes, dress clothing signified gender, sexual attractiveness, status, social position, and an expression of personal identity. In some instances, it even communicated specific elements of personal biography, particularly in the realms of warfare and spiritual power.¹⁷ Given the important communicative role of clothing among nineteenth-century Indians of the Great Lakes region, the innovation of the floral style would seem to be a singularly important sociohistorical event.

As a sign, floral decoration operates on two planes, mimetic and semiotic. The mimetic plane refers to the representational function of the sign, its relationship to the thing that it represents. Floral decoration represents flowers on the mimetic plane. Attempts to find meanings for floral decorations in the past, for example in Sister Coleman's study, were confined to the mimetic plane. When informants were asked what floral designs represented, their answers were invariably, "roses, tulips, jack-in-the-pulpit" and so on.¹⁸ On the other hand, the semiotic plane refers

to the social process by which meanings of signs are constructed and exchanged. Meanings emerge through usage—the intent of the individual who employs the sign, and the interpretation of the receptor. And the two are not always the same. This process, or discourse, allows the meanings of signs to be disputed, altered, or reinforced, as the case may be, giving a diachronic dimension to the deployment of signs that can be subject to historical analysis. In other words, the exchange of signs in discourse allows new meanings to emerge that can be understood as historic events.¹⁹

In addition, meanings as construed within the semiotic dimension of signs are particularly sensitive to issues of social domination or deference, as meanings are either acknowledged or contested, enforced or reinforced. It is possible to analyze the semiotic capacities of signs in terms of expressions of solidarity or difference. Clothing possesses strong potential for expressing contention within semiotic discourse; for example, punk fashion of the 1970s and 1980s is at once an expression of solidarity within a certain segment of youth culture in opposition (difference) to the fashion of the dominant, middle-class adult culture of the same society.

By 1800, clothing had become a potent symbol of contention among the Indians of the Midwest. After the Battle of Fallen Timbers in the Maumee Valley in 1794 and the subsequent Treaty of Greenville in 1795,²⁰ Indian residents of the Ohio and newly formed Michigan and Indiana territories faced a quandary with regard to how to deal with the Americans. On one hand, the influential Shawnee leader Tecumseh sought to organize pantribal resistance and enlist British support from Canada. Tecumseh's efforts were aided by his brother, Tenskwatawa, the Shawnee Prophet, who became the spiritual focus of intertribal alliances.²¹ The Prophet required that his followers give up European fabrics in clothing and manufactured products acquired in trade.²² To Tecumseh, the Prophet, and their followers, European elements of clothing had become a symbol of white domination to be eschewed and eradicated.

Other Indian leaders of the period sought peaceful coexistence with the Americans, and clothing became a sign of their efforts at accommodation. Black Hoof, the Shawnee leader of the Maykujay band, solicited aid from the federal government in 1802 to help his people become farmers like their white neighbors in

Ohio. With the help of Quaker missionary William Kirk, Black Hoof's band established an agricultural community on the Auglaize River, where they build cabins, a sawmill, and a gristmill, erected fences to keep cattle and pigs, wore white styles of clothing, and exchanged their "savage" ways for "civilization," in the words of missionary Kirk.²³

The categorization of the world by means of signs can lead to the development of polarities. Things are organized in reference categories of similarity or difference.²⁴ The net result of Indian attitudes toward clothing, played out in the highly visible historical events of Tecumseh's rebellion but also in less prominent social settings, was the development of a new dialectical categorization of clothing: Indian or white. This simplification of fashion as an ethnic statement of "either/or" stemmed from white efforts at social domination fed by Euro-American scientific and theological beliefs that pitted the "progress" of "civilization" against "savagery."²⁵ White fashion became a sign of civilization, while garments such as moccasins, leggings, and turbans, along with colorful, "exotic" patterning, were equated by whites with a state of savagery. From an Indian point of view, of course, Indian dress signified cultural integrity and resistance to the domination of whites.

Dress employed as a symbol of mediation between Indians and whites is well illustrated in the documentary record. Joseph Brant, for example, the Loyalist Mohawk and founder of the Iroquois community at Grand River, Ontario (now the Six Nations Reserve), often would change his dress for calculated, political effect. His recent biographer, Isabel Kelsay, discovered an anecdote related by a man who had traveled with Brant and had observed that he wore "fine western attire" when engaged in negotiations on the American side of the border, but changed into Indian dress and had his face painted when returning to Indian country in Ontario.²⁶ During a visit to the Leech Lake Band of Ojibwa in 1832, Henry Schoolcraft, the first Indian agent of the Northwest Territories, noted in his journal a similar attitude toward dress. Speaking of Aish Kibug Ikozh, the chief of the band, he wrote, "At dinner, to which I invited him at my tent, and also during the public council following it, he appeared in his Native costume. But after the close of the council and before we embarked, he came down to the lake shore to bid us farewell dressed in a military frock coat with red collar and cuffs, with

white underclothes, a linen ruffled shirt, shoes, and stockings, and a neat citizen's hat. To have uttered his speeches in this foreign costume would have been associated in the minds of his people with the idea of servility. But he was willing afterwards to let us observe by assuming it that he knew we would consider it a mark of respect."²⁷

In their attempt to organize a pantribal confederacy, Tecumseh and the Prophet acknowledged dress as a significant symbol of cultural independence, advocating the rejection of all manufactured fabrics and materials. With the death of Tecumseh at the Battle of the Thames on 5 October 1813 and the advent of American domination over the Old Northwest after the Peace of Ghent in 1814, powers of Indian self-determination began to erode steadily. The host of land cessations that followed culminated, after 1830, in the policies of removal, when many Indians of the Great Lakes region were forced to move west of the Mississippi. Those who managed to stay or returned to coexist with whites felt increasing pressure to give up all elements of clothing that alluded to an Indian identity, i.e., that differed from the fashion of whites. Throughout the first half of the nineteenth century, Indians remaining in the Midwest reassessed fashion choices in light of continuing pressure by whites—missionaries who wanted to convert them, authorities who wanted to control them, neighbors who were afraid of them.

EARLY EXPRESSIONS OF THE FLORAL STYLE: THE HURON OF LORETTE, THE CROSS VILLAGE OTTAWA, AND THE RED RIVER MÉTIS

It was within this social climate of changing power relations between Indians and whites after 1800 that the earliest floral style objects appear, but not as elements of an indigenous fashion system. The dichotomy between white and Indian fashion permitted opportunities to market an Indian identity within the cash economy of whites.

The Huron of Lorette were a refugee contingent of Christian Huron who had settled near Quebec after the Iroquois wars of the seventeenth century. By 1800, the Huron of Lorette were supplementing their cash economy through the manufacture and

sale of handicrafts in the markets of Quebec, including moccasins, shoulder bags, fur caps, and mittens decorated with moose hair and porcupine quill embroidery.²⁸ It is among these products that some of the first highly developed floral motifs appear in the Great Lakes area.

When looking for the origins of this style, Marius Barbeau drew attention to the efforts of Ursuline nuns who settled near Montreal during the seventeenth century and taught embroidery to their female Huron students.²⁹ A French source for floral imagery is plausible, but the use of native tanned hide, birch bark, porcupine quill, and moose hair for the manufacture of handicrafts such as moccasins, pouches, and other Indian objects for sale can hardly be attributed to the teachings of French nuns. Huron products were marketable to white consumers in Quebec because of their perceived Indian appearance and ethnic authenticity. Whites whose expectations of Indian clothing derived from fur trade era woolens and calicoes may have associated floral images with their perception of Indians as colorful and exotic. On the other hand, the Huron reciprocally fed back floral motifs as they had been received from whites through training in mission schools, perhaps from printed textile patterns, or from other sources. It is not clear to what extent the market determined design, but there is no question that floral images employed in Huron handicrafts were commercially successful; thousands of articles decorated with floral patterns were sold to Euro-Americans up through the twentieth century, as evidenced by their abundance in museum collections. It is not difficult to believe that white consumers found floral patterns more accessible and desirable than the older, curvilinear style of Huron embroidery visible on some moccasins and pouches collected before 1830. Through the discourse of exchange and marketplace, floral images came to represent an Indian identity that could be marketed to whites by the Huron for advantage in a cash economy.

A similar deployment of floral images as a mediating sign between Indians and whites is visible among the porcupine quill and birch bark creations of Chippewa and Ottawa artists of the Michigan Territory. Northern Michigan bordered the Great Lakes fur trade conduit into the western interior. By 1820 several Indian communities on the lakes, such as Cross Village on Lake Michigan, supplemented their cash income through the sale of maple

sugar packed in birch bark boxes. Early accounts of the maple sugar market report that the boxes were decorated with porcupine quill figures of fancy flowers. The market quickly grew to include various boxes, cups, miniature canoes, and a host of additional object categories made of birch bark and decorated with floral style quill work (fig. 3).³⁰ The appeal of these products to white purchasers was, of course, their Indian identity, which, like those products of the Huron of Lorette, relied upon floral images.

It appears likely, however, that floral images were not mutually understood in this context. At Cross Village, for example, the Christian Ottawa community built an altar of birch bark with porcupine quill floral decoration for their church between the years 1846 and 1848.³¹ This unique object in the history of Great Lakes Indian art combined the formal requirements of liturgical service with the thoroughly Ottawa media of birch bark and porcupine quill. The Cross Village community had long been recognized in Michigan as one of the most promising, "civilized" bands.³² It is tempting to interpret the Cross Village altar as a sign of Ottawa civilization and progress and perhaps an expression of a unique community identity between the worlds of Indians and whites. The documentary record is silent in this matter. In any event, the Catholic church responded with the corrective measure of sending Martin Pitzer, a professional church painter, to Cross Village in 1851 to paint a new altarpiece. Pitzer reemphasized the Indian content of the birch bark altarpiece by replacing it; then he purchased it to circulate throughout Europe as an Indian curiosity for the purpose of raising funds for the Catholic missions.³³ The "otherness" conveyed by this piece of exotica was enlisted to support continued missionizing efforts. Through such means, whites—here the Catholic church—exerted pressure to define symbols of civilization in contrast to symbols of Indian ethnic identity. Apparently, an Indian identity was appropriate as a marketing ploy for handicrafts, but inappropriate for the civilizing trappings of the church.

Further west, flower images in decorative arts were employed in a mediating role by Ojibwa, Sioux, and Cree mixed-bloods, or Métis, who had settled near Winnipeg. These were the offspring of French and Scots men employed in the fur trade and Ojibwa, Sioux, and Cree women. Fairly large communities of Métis had been established at Fond du Lac, Mackinac, and Green Bay, but a unique community emerged after the founding of the



FIGURE 3. Ottawa, near Harbor Springs, Michigan, working with black ash basketry and porcupine quill on birch bark; probably c. 1900. Williams and Miller photograph courtesy of Charles J. Meyers.

Ottawa artists have produced birch bark boxes, canoes, handbags, fan handles, and other items decorated with floral-style porcupine quill embroidery for sale to non-Indian clients from as early as 1830 through the present day.

Red River colony by Lord Selkirk in 1812.³⁴ Although Selkirk's colony ultimately failed, the Red River settlement of Métis became an important supply depot for the Hudson's Bay Company. Métis living in the Red River valley hunted buffalo for hides and meat, which they then sold to the company. Organized into bands, the Métis maintained a cultural position between Indians and whites, although most possessed Ojibwa or Cree affines.

The intermediate position of Métis culture is reflected in Métis clothing; as Rudolph Kurz, a resident of Fort Berthold during the summer of 1851, observed of some visiting Red River Métis, "All were dressed in bright colors, semi-European, semi-Indian in style. . . ." ³⁵ Men dressed in distinctive buckskin coats and trousers (not leggings).

By the 1830s, women of the Métis community had begun to manufacture garments, bags, and pad saddles with floral decoration both for internal use and for sale to outside markets (fig. 4). Ted Brassler and Kate Duncan link the development of Métis floral ornament to the establishment of Catholic mission schools at Red River and Pembina. Nuns who worked at the hospital and schools taught domestic skills, including embroidery, "to prepare young girls . . . to become Christian wives."³⁶ The application of these embroidery skills to distinctive Métis items of dress and accessories, however, illustrates how the Métis appropriated floral style as an expression of their unique cultural identity.

It is also clear that the Métis capitalized upon their intermediate status between the worlds of whites and Indians in the marketing of clothing to whites who wished to identify with the individualism and rigor of life in the western territories. The mid-nineteenth-century frontier was poised, literally, between "savagery and civilization" and many whites saw themselves in the "leatherstocking" position of becoming half-savage in order to prepare the West for the white vision of its destiny. The Métis-style, leather frock coat decorated with bead or quill embroidery in floral style became something of a uniform for this white persona; George Armstrong Custer owned two of them, and William F. Cody rarely appeared in public without wearing one.³⁷ By mid-century, leather coats, moccasins, pouches, and pad saddles, all decorated with "beautiful garnished work of beads, porcupine quills, and silk" were carted down annually in large



FIGURE 4. Octopus bag (buckskin, porcupine quill), Red River Métis, Manitoba, c. 1840. Founders Society purchase, The Detroit Institute of Arts 81.59.

The porcupine quill embroidery on this bag represents a naturalistic style used by the Métis, documented as early as the 1830s among objects in the Dr. Nathan Sturgis Jarvis collection at the Brooklyn Museum. The composition representing a floral spray in an urn is reminiscent of the descriptions of floral designs painted on the walls of the cathedral at Red River by mission nuns.

quantities from the Red River to sell in St. Paul.³⁸ Sioux mixed-bloods in South Dakota or, more properly speaking, their full-blood wives joined in the production of these distinctive items of apparel.³⁹ Evidently, many casual visitors to the West had opportunities to purchase them as souvenirs of their travels and took them home, judging from their numbers in museum collections. The "Indian" reading of these garments by whites is reflected, as Ted Brassler points out, in their modern misattribution to the Cree, Ojibwa, Assiniboine, Eastern Sioux, and a variety of northern Athabaskan tribes.⁴⁰

The Huron of Lorette, the Ottawa and Chippewa of Michigan Territory, and the Métis of the Red River region were primary sources of floral style embroidery in the decades following 1800. In each case there existed a potential for disjunction between white and Indian interpretations of floral style decoration as a sign of social identity. All three communities participated in the missionizing efforts of the Catholic church, and it is plausible to believe that the techniques and imagery of floral embroidery were taught in mission schools. Huron, Ottawa, and Métis artists employed this instruction initially in the manufacture of handicraft products for sale to whites, or in the production of dress as an expression of their ethnic identity as Christian/"civilized" Indians. Whites, however, interpreted the ethnic presentation of the floral embroidery on birch bark or leather garments as signs of Indianness, which of course led to successful marketing of the products. By means of the semiotic dimension of discourse involving presentation, interpretation, and reinterpretation, the Indian ethnicity of floral style decoration was reinforced (or enforced). As floral style developed, it became a mutually acknowledged sign of Indian ethnicity in relation to and in contrast to whites.

FLORAL STYLE AS SIGNIFIER OF ETHNICITY

In the western Great Lakes, the growth of floral design as an ethnic signifier on dress clothing resulted from the bifurcation of Great Lakes Indian fashion after mid-century. Throughout Michigan and Wisconsin, everyday wear after mid-century was largely indistinguishable from that of neighboring (low income) whites.

Native people found, perhaps, that dealings with their neighbors and white authorities ran more smoothly when their dress conformed to standards of white fashion. At the same time, the Great Lakes Indians nurtured a variety of special occasions and events in which Indian ethnic identities could be expressed and celebrated. Adoption and naming feasts, marriages, social dances, vitalized rites of the Midewiwin society, and, later, the Dream Drum, were all occasions for wearing and displaying finery. Dress clothing worn for such events tended to exaggerate the fashion signifiers of Indian ethnicity, and floral design was featured prominently (fig. 5). Women artists applied floral motifs to moccasins, leggings, breech clouts, vests, shirts, sashes, garters, shoulder bags, and other categories of apparel that had never been decorated in the past.⁴¹ The formal, floral style outfit typical of the Minnesota Ojibwa, with glass bead embroidery against dark wool and velveteen, harkened back to the image of the colorful printed calico of the fur trade era. The significance of the late nineteenth century dress clothing with floral style ornament expanded from the earlier expression of prestige and display to include further meanings of cultural vitality and, perhaps ironically, traditionalism.

Thus, Native Americans of the Great Lakes after midcentury successfully deployed two fashion systems, white and Indian, which operated simultaneously and interchangeably, depending on the occasion. One, imposed by the dominant white culture, was an expression of accommodation; the other, employing floral images as white-acknowledged signs of difference, functioned as an expression of Indian solidarity and vitality.

Whites continued to participate in refining floral design as symbols of Indian ethnicity. Sister Coleman reported, for example, that the Chippewa women beadworkers of the 1870–1920 period told her that they had learned their floral patterns from the mission schools.⁴² The designs taught were clearly intended to be employed as signs of Indian ethnicity on clothing, but the missionary teachers strived to “correct” the floral designs with increased naturalism and to impose the conventions of white illustrative arts, such as those found on printed textiles. As a result, late floral beadwork of the western Great Lakes, particularly that of the Minnesota Chippewa, became increasingly naturalistic, with further emphasis on the use of descriptive color, differentiation



FIGURE 5. Ojibwa family, Minnesota, c. 1890. David F. Barry photograph from an original print in a private collection.

The family is photographed wearing dress clothing characteristic of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The men both wear shoulder bags, and one wears a pair of leggings with descriptive floral designs closely related to the beaded embroidery visible on the pair of leggings illustrated in fig. 2. Note the floral patterns visible on the printed calico blouse worn by the woman.

between leaves, stems, and blossom forms, and the use of serpentine stems as an organizational framework for floral compositions (fig. 2).⁴³

Elaborately decorated formal wear with floral ornament emphasized the talents and abilities of women artists, whose prolific industry and mastery over technique and design represented highly celebrated cultural virtues. Formal dress became one of the preeminent symbols of ethnic solidarity and the persistence of tradition during the reservation era. In a 1985 essay, Marsha Bol describes a similar pattern among the Teton Sioux.⁴⁴ The elaboration of dress clothing and the formalization of events for wearing it played an important role in the reassertion of ethnic vitality and served as a restatement of traditional values on the Lakota reservations beginning in the 1880s.

In the Great Lakes region, development of floral style as an expression of Indian ethnicity can be interpreted as a subversion of mission-taught embroidery, which was considered one of the domestic arts of civilization. As a cultural strategy, the reconfiguration of floral embroidery on the dress breech clout, for example, resembles *détournement* as conceived by the situationists, an international group of avant garde artists and social critics active between 1957 and 1968. *Détournement* refers to the deflection of institutional symbols of authority and power back upon themselves by means of extracting them from their habitual associations and "reassigning them to entirely new purposes."⁴⁵ The term as originally conceived describes a strategy of social action advocated by a group of critical thinkers who sought the cultural regeneration of a flagging "establishment" during the early 1960s, but the concept is pertinent to historical analyses of semiotic contention over the meanings of symbols. When Métis women employed the images of "urns of various flowers" that they had seen on the walls of the Red River Cathedral for their porcupine quill embroidery on leather pouches and garments (fig. 3), their appropriation and subversion of the "genre-rule" for European floral imagery represented an act of *détournement*.⁴⁶ When initially promoted by missionary teachers, floral embroidery represented a white cultural dominance called "civilization." By reconfiguring floral embroidery into ornamentation for dress clothing, Indian artists transformed the embroidery into a symbol of cultural resistance they called "tradition."

It is interesting, although beyond the scope of this essay, to glance at styles of embroidered beadwork developed by Great Lakes peoples who were removed to the prairie states of Iowa, Kansas, Nebraska, and Oklahoma after 1830. So-called abstract floral beadwork, or the prairie style, developed simultaneously among the Potawatomi, Mesquakie, Sac, Oto, Osage, and Iowa after 1850; its developmental core is found in the adjacent states of Wisconsin and Iowa shortly after mid-century.⁴⁷ Among early examples of abstract floral style, floral images remain obscure and difficult to decipher. Here there was less of the give-and-take that was characteristic of the fashion discourse between whites and Indians further east. Floral elements, when they appear, are overwhelmed by shifts in figure and ground relationships, radial and bilateral symmetries, and the imposition of double curve, quadrilobate, and additional indigenous design structures. These designs were less involved in processes of mediation and therefore took more independent directions. Perhaps this reflects opportunities for the residents of Indian Territory to remain socially and politically independent, at least temporarily, from white society. Later nineteenth-century designs conform more clearly to floral conventions.

These brief and wide-ranging observations about the emergence of floral style decoration in nineteenth-century clothing constitute only a sketch of an idea. The intention here is simply to advocate for an analysis that would account for active choice and clear motivation on the part of Native American artists, rather than evoking a passive standpoint of influence. Native American artists chose to work in certain styles for historically and socially contingent reasons. These then become innovations that culture folds back into tradition. When our analyses acknowledge acts of creative choice and explore the relationships between tradition and innovation, the richness of nineteenth-century Native American art history can be more accurately revealed.

NOTES

1. Jonathan C. H. King, "Tradition in Native American Art," in *The Arts of the North American Indian*, ed. Edwin L. Wade (New York: Hudson Hills Press, 1986), 65-92.

2. Samuel W. Pond, *The Dakota or Sioux in Minnesota As They Were in 1834* (1908; St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1986), 33-34.

3. George P. Horse Capture, *Powwow* (Cody, WY: Buffalo Bill Historical Center, 1989), 18.

4. The functional analysis of fashion as a communicative medium was pioneered in Petr Bogatyrev, *The Function of Folk Costume in Moravian Slovakia* (The Hague: Mouton Publishers, 1971) and other writings of the Prague School semioticians. See also Mary Ellen Roach and Kathleen Ehle Musa, *New Perspectives on the History of Western Dress: A Handbook* (New York: Nutriguides, Inc., 1980), 13-18, for an updated restatement of similar ideas. For the communicative functions of Great Lakes Native American formal clothing, see Ruth Bliss Phillips, "Clothed in Blessing: Traditions of Great Lakes Indian Dress" (Paper presented at the Symposium on Mesquakie Art and Culture, University of Iowa Art Museum, 28 January 1989); and Ruth Bliss Phillips, "Great Lakes Textiles: Meaning and Value in Women's Art," in *On the Border: Native American Weaving Traditions on the Great Lakes and Prairie*, ed. David Wooley (Moorehead, MN: Plains Art Museum, 1990), 4-11.

5. Frank Speck, *Symbolism in Penobscot Art*, Papers of the American Museum of Natural History 30, pt. 2 (New York, 1927).

6. C. Marius Barbeau, "The Origins of Floral and Other Designs among the Canadian and Neighboring Indians," *Proceedings of the International Congress of Americanists* 23 (1930): 512.

7. Ted J. Brassler, "Genesis and Assimilation of the Floral Style in Native American Art" (Paper presented at the sixth National Conference of the Native American Art Studies Association, Denver, Colorado, 23 September 1987).

8. See, for example, A. B. Hulbert and U. N. Schwarz, eds., "David Zeisberger's History of the Northern American Indians," *Ohio Archaeological and Historical Publications* 19 (1910): 118, 172, note 297; and Thomas L. McKenney, *Sketches of a Tour to the Lakes, of the Character and Customs of the Chippewa Indians, and of Incidents Connected with the Treaty of Fond du Lac* (1827; reprint, Barre, Massachusetts: Imprint Society, 1972), 274.

9. Some recent publications that focus on the Native American experience of the fur trade include Thomas C. Buckley, ed., *Rendezvous: Selected Papers of the Fourth North American Fur Trade Conference, 1981* (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society, 1984); and Carolyn Gilman, *Where Two Worlds Meet: The Great Lakes Fur Trade* (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society, 1982). The most expansive treatment is still to be found in P. C. Phillips, *The Fur Trade* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1961).

10. For some expansion on these ideas, see David W. Penney, "Clothing as a Reflection of History among Great Lakes Native Americans, 1800-1900," in *On the Border: Native American Weaving Traditions of the Great Lakes and Prairies*, ed. David Wooley (Moorehead, MN: The Plains Museum, 1990), 12-18. Of the many references to Native American high regard for personal grooming and clothing, particularly in relation to formal events, see Hulbert and Schwarz, "David Zeisberger's History," 14-15, and Paul A. W. Wallace, *The Travels of John Heckewelder in Frontier America* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1958), 52.

11. Early examples of such motifs in appliqué or embroidery arts can be found in several reference works. See Flint Institute of Arts, *Art of the Great Lakes Indians* (Flint, 1973), cat. nos. 3, 140, 146; Ruth Bliss Phillips, *Patterns of Power* (Kleinberg, Ontario: The McMichael Canadian Collection, 1984), cat. nos.

31, 37; Linden-Museum, Staatliches Museum für Völkerkunde, *Indianer der Prärien und Plains* (Stuttgart, 1987), fig. 37; Grand Rapids Public Museum, *Beads: Their Use by Upper Great Lakes Indians* (Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1977), cat. nos. 27, 82.

12. Some of the notable examples of floral print textiles used in eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Native American creations include an eighteenth-century shoulder bag, the pouch portion made with floral-printed cotton fabric, in the collection of the Musée de l'Homme, Paris, and a Menominee coat with printed textile cuffs, collected in the 1830s and now at the Museum für Völkerkunde, Vienna.

13. Alfred G. Bailey, *The Conflict of European and Eastern Algonkian Cultures, 1504-1700: A Study in Canadian Civilization*, New Brunswick Museum Monograph Series, no. 2 (New Brunswick, Canada, 1937; Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1969), 148-51.

14. Felix M. Keesing, *The Menominee Indians of Wisconsin: A Study of Three Centuries of Culture Contact and Change* (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1937; Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1987), 205-207; Sister Bernard Coleman, *Decorative Designs of the Ojibwa of Northern Minnesota*, Catholic University of America, Anthropological Series, no. 12 (Washington, D.C., 1947), 94-104, 116.

15. This issue was raised by art historian Michael Baxandall in *Patterns of Intention: On the Historical Explanation of Pictures* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), 58-62. Michel Foucault also wrote about the lack of clarity when "influence" was evoked by historians: "Then there is the notion of influence, which provides support—of too magical a kind to be very amenable to analysis—for the facts of transmission and communication." See Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge and the Discourse of Language*, A. M. Sheridan Smith, trans. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972), 21.

16. The seminal study of Native American acculturation is Ralph Linton, ed., *Acculturation in Seven American Indian Tribes* (New York: Appleton-Century, 1940); a more historical approach is offered by Bailey, *European and Eastern Algonkian Cultures*. For a groundbreaking introduction to the realm of ethnic tourist arts, see Nelson H. H. Graborn, ed., *Ethnic and Tourist Arts: Cultural Expressions from the Fourth World* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976). See also Ruth B. Phillips, "Souvenirs from North America: The Miniature as Image of Woodlands Indian Life," *American Indian Art Magazine* 14 (Spring 1989): 52-63, 78.

17. Phillips, "Clothed in Blessing."

18. Coleman, *Decorative Designs of the Ojibwa*, 96.

19. An extended discussion of the semiotic dimension of signs and their relevance to historic processes can be found in Robert Hodge and Gunther Kress, *Social Semiotics* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1988).

20. These events opened the Northwest Territory frontier to settlement after a protracted conflict beginning with the War of American Independence; see Wiley Sword, *President Washington's Indian War: The Struggle for the Old Northwest, 1790-1795* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1985).

21. R. David Edmunds, *Tecumseh and the Quest for Indian Leadership* (Boston: Little Brown and Company, 1984).

22. Jasper Grant, a British officer stationed at Forts Malden and George in

Ontario from 1800 to 1807, recorded such statements from a speech delivered by a follower of Tecumseh on 4 August 1807; see Ruth Bliss Phillips, "Jasper Grant and Edward Walsh: The Gentleman-Soldier as Early Collector of Great Lakes Indian Art," *Journal of Canadian Studies* 21 (Winter 1986/87), 65 and note 19; see also Emma Helen Blair, ed., *Indian Tribes of the Upper Mississippi and the Great Lakes Region*, vol. 2 (Cleveland, OH: Arthur H. Clark, 1911), 277.

23. Edmunds, *Tecumseh*, 67-68.

24. This is a drastic simplification of ideas developed by Ferdinand Saussure, in *Course in General Linguistics*, ed. J. Culler, trans. W. Baskin (London: Fontana, 1974).

25. For a detailed discussion of the meanings of these terms in the history of Euro-American thought, see Roy Harvey Pearce, *Savagism and Civilization: A Study of the Indian and the American Mind* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1988).

26. Isabel Thomson Kelsay, *Joseph Brant 1743-1807: Man of Two Worlds* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1984), 583.

27. Phillip P. Mason, ed., *Schoolcraft's Expedition to Lake Itasca: The Discovery of the Source of the Mississippi* (Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1958), 56.

28. See Christian Morissoneau, "The Huron of Lorette," in *The Handbook of the North American Indians: Northeast*, ed. B. Trigger, vol. 15 (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1974), 389-93. For a descriptive analysis of Huron material culture and moosehair embroidery, see Frank G. Speck, "Huron Moose Hair Embroidery," *American Anthropologist*, n.s. 13 (1911): 1-13; and Frank G. Speck, "Notes on the Material Culture of the Huron," *American Anthropologist*, n.s. 13 (1911): 208-228. For examples of Huron of Lorette floral style embroidery, see Ted J. Brassler, *Bo'jou, Neejee: Profiles of Canadian Indian Art* (Ottawa: National Museum of Man, 1976), cat. nos. 154-56, 163-66.

29. Barbeau, "The Origins of Floral and Other Designs," 512.

30. Thomas L. McKenney made mention of the maple sugar trade in the account of his trip to Fond du Lac in 1824. See McKenney, *Sketches of a Tour to the Lakes*, 160. For examples of early porcupine quill embroidery on birch bark from Cross Village, see Stephen B. Graham and Robin Odle, *Ottawa Quillwork on Birchbark* (Harbor Springs, Michigan: Harbor Springs Historical Commission, 1983), 24-35.

31. Graham and Odle, *Ottawa Porcupine Quill on Birchbark*, cat. no. 1.

32. McKenney, *Sketches of a Tour to the Lakes*, 136-38.

33. I am indebted to Christian F. Feest, curator of the Native American collections at the Museum für Völkerkunde in Vienna for details about the collection history of the altarpiece, and also for a copy of a small pamphlet describing the collection, by Martin Pitzer, entitled *Berzeichnis der Gegenstände und Arbeiten eines Indianer-Stammes im nördlichsten America nebst einer Charakteristik desselben von Martin Pitzer* (Munich, 1854).

34. The standard account of the Lord Selkirk colony is John M. Gray, *Lord Selkirk of the Red River* (London, 1963); see also Marcel Giraud, *The Métis in the Canadian West*, G. Woodcock, trans. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1986).

35. Rudolph Friedrich Kurz, *The Journal of Rudolph Friedrich Kurz*, M. Jarrell, trans., J. N. B. Hewitt, ed., Bureau of American Ethnology Bulletin 115 (Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1937), 82-83; also

quoted at greater length in Ted J. Brassler, "In Search of Métis Art," in *The New Peoples: Being and Becoming a Métis in North America*, eds. Jacqueline Peterson and Jennifer S. H. Brown (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1985), 224.

36. Kate C. Duncan, *Northern Athapaskan Art: A Beadwork Tradition* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1989), 57-59; quote from Sister St. Thomas Aquinas Keefe, 59; Brassler, "In Search of Métis Art," 225. For examples of early Métis floral style, see Brassler, *Bo'jou, Neejee*, cat. nos. 158, 188-90.

37. The frontier "leatherstocking" persona is discussed in Pearce, *Savagism and Civilization*, 201-209. The two Custer coats were gifts of the general to the Detroit Audubon Club in 1869, now in the collection of The Detroit Institute of Arts on permanent loan to the Monroe Historical Society Museum, Monroe, Michigan. Several of William F. Cody's embroidered coats now belong to the Buffalo Bill Historical Center in Cody, Wyoming.

38. The quote is from Frank Mayer, who made his observations in St. Paul in 1851. See Brassler, "In Search of Métis Art," 227; for an account of the Métis oxcart trade between Winnipeg and St. Paul, see Rhoda R. Gilman, Carolyn Gillman, and Deborah M. Stultz, *The Red River Trails: Oxcart Routes Between St. Paul and the Selkirk Settlement, 1820-1870* (St. Paul: The Minnesota Historical Society, 1979).

39. Brassler, "In Search of Métis Art," 225-26.

40. *Ibid.*, 222.

41. These statements are based primarily on historic photographs and surveys of public collections. Useful photography resources include the Potawatomi photographs in the collection of Richard Pohrt in Flint, Michigan, and the photography collections at the Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison. The collections of dress clothing assembled by Milford G. Chandler from Ojibwa, Potawatomi, Winnebago, Menominee, and Mesquakie between 1915 and 1930 provide an unparalleled survey of late nineteenth-century styles. They can be found at The Field Museum of Natural History, the Museum of the American Indian, Heye Foundation, The Detroit Institute of Arts, the Cranbrook Institute of Science, and the Fort Wayne Military Museum, Detroit. See also Cynthia R. Jasper, "Change in Ojibwa (Chippewa) Dress, 1820-1980," *American Indian Culture and Research Journal* 12:4 (1988): 17-37.

42. Coleman, *Decorative Designs of the Chippewa*, 94-95.

43. For examples, see Flint, *Art of the Great Lakes Indians*, cat. nos. 110, 227.

44. Marsha C. Bol, "Lakota Women's Artistic Strategies in Support of the Social System," *American Indian Culture and Research Journal* 9:1 (1985): 33-51.

45. The quotes are from Myriam D. Maayan, "From Aesthetic to Political Vanguard: The Situationist International, 1957-1968," *Arts Magazine* 65 (January 1988): 50; to sample situationist literature, consult Ken Knabb, ed. and trans., *Situationist International Anthology* (Berkeley, CA: Bureau of Public Secrets, 1981).

46. The report of the mother superior at the Red River Mission, who describes how the nuns climbed scaffolds to paint images of flowers in urns on the walls of the cathedral and how Métis women copied the designs, is quoted in part in Duncan, *Northern Athapaskan Art*, 59, and credited to Jan Morrier, "Métis Decorative Art and Its Inspiration," *Dawson and Hind* 8 (1979), 31. The term *genres-rules*, referring to accepted norms for meanings and genres in their expression among a dominant social group, comes from Hodges and Kress, *Social Semiotics*, 6-8.

47. For thorough discussions of abstract floral beadwork of the later nineteenth-century prairies, see Benson Lanford, "Origins of Prairie Curvilinear Beadwork," and Dennis Lessard, "Prairie Art Styles—the Great Melting Pot—The Cooks and the Ingredients" (Papers delivered at the twelfth Annual Plains Indian Art Seminar, "Plains Indian Art: the Eastern Edge," Buffalo Bill Historical Center, Cody, Wyoming, 29 September–2 October 1988. Videotapes of the conference are available for viewing at Cody. For exceptionally early abstract floral style material, collected from Keokuk the younger, see R. Gilberg, "A Sauk Chief's Gift: The Complete Costume of Moses Keokuk," *American Indian Art Magazine* 12 (Winter 1986): 54–66; see also Jonathan Batkin, "Some Rare Prairie Indian Artifacts from the A. C. Vroman Collection," *Masterkey* 63 (Spring 1989): 24–31; for examples of the prairie style, see Flint, *Art of the Great Lakes Indians*, cat. nos. 102, 114, 141, 159, 272, 294, 410, 518.

