

Mitchell Museum of the American Indian
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News

For Immediate Release

Attn: Arts & Entertainment Editors/Museums/Exhibits

Mitchell Museum to Mount 'Dazzling' Exhibit of Plains Native Art July 3–October 17

*'Dazzling Colors: The Evolution of Plains Reservation Art'
Will Look at Native Cultures Next Door*

Editors: Exhibit photos are available. E-mail natsilv@aol.com

EVANSTON, Ill., June 11, 2010 — There's nothing plain about the exhibit of Plains Native art and culture that will be on view from July 3 to October 17 at the independent nonprofit Mitchell Museum of the American Indian, 3001 Central St., Evanston.

Organized by the Mitchell, the new exhibit, "Dazzling Colors: The Evolution of Plains Reservation Art," focuses on tribes of the northern Great Plains during the period of forced removal from ancestral lands and the Reservation Period of the 1880s to the 1930s. The exhibit also touches on how traditional art is kept alive today on Plains reservations and will include contemporary Plains ledger art (created on accounting paper) and animal-hide art.

The exhibit will comprise approximately 50 historic objects from the museum's permanent collection and on loan from private collectors, including pictorial beadwork; beaded bags, purses and moccasins; painted hide bags; clothing; quillwork; and dolls.

Displays will trace changes in designs, materials, and methods of Plains artists, such as the adoption of sewing machines, often introduced at boarding schools that taught industrial arts,

and the cultural interplay between Natives and white settlers and traders.

“Dazzling Colors” takes its name from the written account of a U.S. Cavalry officer who in 1881 witnessed a Lakota Sun Dance attended by approximately 12,000 Oglala and Brulé Lakota. “Nothing could be added in the way of dazzling colors,” wrote Army Captain John Gregory Bourke. “Calico shirts in all the bright hues of the rainbow, leggings of cloth, canvas, and buckskin, moccasins of buckskin, crusted with fine beadwork were worn by all.”

In a departure from most temporary exhibits at the Mitchell, “Dazzling Colors” will be mounted in themed sections, many with their own atmospheric environment. For example, visitors will view some materials by walking into a canvas replica of a tipi flanked by ledger art depicting resistance and battles in the early reservation years. Some items will be displayed in a vignette modeled on a historic photo of a merchandise stand operated by a Native couple selling art and craftwork.

A computer terminal in the gallery will have an interactive program to introduce visitors to the concept of the Lakota winter count, a pictorial calendar with images representing each year’s most memorable event. Users will hear words spoken in the Lakota language when they scroll over the pictures. The winter count was used as a visual aid in retelling oral histories.

Among topics to be explored in the exhibit is the difference in the arts practiced by Plains Indian men and women. According to exhibit curator Laura McDowell, men created representational and narrative art, such as images and scenes documenting historical and current events or illustrating spiritual themes, and they tended to work alone. The women typically worked in groups, crafting domestic items decorated with abstract and geometrical designs.

“As a follow-up to the Mitchell’s recent exhibit about Pacific Northwest Coast Native peoples, it seemed appropriate to look at Native communities closer to home,” McDowell said.

“This is a geographic region familiar to those who drive west on summer vacations, but the history and culture of the indigenous peoples there remain little-known to many of those passing through.”

A private preview of “Dazzling Colors” for Mitchell Museum members is scheduled for 6 p.m. Thursday, July 1.

McDowell will lead a gallery tour for visitors at 2 p.m. July 3.

Admission to the exhibit is included with Mitchell Museum admission, which is \$5 for adults, \$2.50 for seniors, students, teachers (with valid school ID), and children. Maximum admission per family is \$10. Admission is free for Mitchell members, tribal members, and, through Labor Day, for active-duty members of the U.S. military and their immediate families. Everyone is admitted free on the first Friday of each month. For information, phone (847) 475-1030. On the Net: <http://www.mitchellmuseum.org>.

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