
Native Americans' Art

Native American Indian art is deeply connected with spirituality and Mother Nature. The history of this style of art can be traced back to cave paintings and stonework from thousands of years ago. The Native American Indians used material such as rocks and feathers in the early periods. Materials have evolved to cloth, clay, turquoise, silver, glass and fabric. Traditional Native American art began with cave drawings and carvings. As the years progressed, Native American art evolved into intricate forms of jewelry, beadwork, weaving, pottery, basketry, paintings, dolls, carvings, masks, quillwork (embroidery), and totem poles. Native Americans added color and designs with paint, beads, quill embroidery, and by carving and weaving to make items more beautiful. Native American Indians used plant materials to make beautiful, soft colors to dye wool, cotton, and other fibers. Each color had meaning. Black had meanings of night, underworld, male, cold, disease and death and was made from wild grapes and dark tree bark. Blue had meanings of the sky, water, female, clouds, lightning, moon, thunder and sadness and was made of larkspur petals, alfalfa flowers, sunflower seeds. Green was made from moss, algae, lily-of-the-valley leaves, juniper berries and had meanings of plant life, earth, summer and rain. Red made from sumac berries, dogwood bark, beets and cranberries represented wounds, sunsets, thunder, blood, earth, war and day. Yellow representing sunshine, day, dawn was made from onion skins, goldenrod stems and flowers, sunflower petals, dock roots, marigold petals, moss, peach leaves, birch leaves and sagebrush. Throughout Native American Indian history, their art has reflected their culture, lifestyle, and environment. The art incorporates symbols and subjects involving nature. These symbols include the sun, moon, and various animals. The type of art created varies by tribe and is influenced by the region they live in.

Native American Indians are well known for their skill of weaving rugs and blankets. The Native Americans originally wove these blankets to wrap themselves in during cold weather and also for use on their beds to keep warm at night. Some of the first authentic Native American Indian blankets were made from buffalo hides and wool from sheep. Plants and berries were used to make dye for the fibers. Native American men made the loom and the women worked the weaving magic. Native American Indian legend states that the tradition of blanket weaving comes from a spirit person the Native Americans called Spider Woman, she taught the Native Americans to weave on looms that were designed by another spirit person called Spider Man.

Native American Indian basket weaving is one of the oldest forms of crafts in history. Basket weaving involved different patterns, materials, shapes and techniques among different tribes. The designs of the baskets and materials used to create them varied among the different tribes. The baskets were made from things such as grasses, barks and roots. They were made for purposes such as carrying water, storing food and even cooking. It is believed that the Native American Indians covered their woven baskets with mud clay. Once the baskets were put over the fire, the clay hardened leading to the accidental creation pottery. The shape of the pottery was dependent on what purpose the pottery was to serve. The pottery was used to hold water, store grains, and preserve seeds for the next planting season.

Many Native American Indian tribes create beautiful beadwork and jewelry. They originally used natural materials for their beads and jewelry such as shells, turquoise, wood, animal bones,

animal horns, and silver. Turquoise was used because it was believed to represent the sky and is known as the 'fallen sky stone'. It was believed to have life-giving powers and was cherished for its spiritual connection to Mother Earth. Some tribes have "story bead" necklaces. Symbols and figures were carved into flat pieces of turquoise or some other type of stone and strung with other beads. Mothers then used the necklaces to illustrate stories handed down from generation to generation. The beadwork and jewelry reflects the cultural diversity and history the tribes. The beadwork and jewelry was used for adornment as a status symbol and as trade for other goods.

One of the most fascinating traditions and art work of Native American Indians is the dream catcher. The shape of the dreamcatcher is a circle because it represents the circle of life and how forces like the sun and moon travel each day and night across the sky. The dream catcher web catches the bad dreams during the night and dispose of them when the day comes. As for the good dreams, the feathers act as a fluffy, pillow-like ladder that allows them to gently descend upon the sleeping person undisturbed. The beads symbolize the good dreams that could not pass through the web, immortalized in the form of sacred charms.

The most striking form of Native American Indian art are the totem poles. Many Native American Indians expressed themselves with their artwork carved into totem poles. The raising of a totem pole is a big celebration among the Indian tribe. A hole is dug to stand the pole in. The pole is carried to the site in a ceremony where ropes are used to raise the pole into place. The entire tribe would sing and dance as the pole is raised. Once the pole is raised and secure, the carving begins. The totem pole carvings were symbols that tell a story of the carver, such as his part not just in his own family but his standing within a tribe. Carving totem poles is a tradition among many Native American Indian tribes.

I greatly enjoy the jewelry, pottery, blankets and the dream catchers. I remember going to a store that had a real Indian teepee in the front of it when I was very young. They had a real totem pole and real head dresses made of pretty feathers. My brothers got a headdress of feathers and a toy tomahawk. I got jewelry and moccasins. We also got to pick out our own dream catchers that our mom hung over our beds. I can also remember sitting on the couch with my mom bundled up under the blanket she got for herself. It was very pretty and warm. As I got older, I bought myself several turquoise jewelry pieces. I hope to one day own my home and I plan to decorate a room in the Native American theme. I will have blankets and dream catchers hanging on the wall and select pottery pieces on tables and shelves.