

NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART

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NATIONAL GALLERY OPENS MAJOR EXHIBITION OF AMERICAN ESKIMO AND INDIAN ART

WASHINGTON, D.C. February 21, 1973. The first comprehensive exhibition devoted solely to the indigenous art of the Alaskan peninsula from prehistoric times to the end of the 19th century will open at the National Gallery of Art on March 8.

Entitled The Far North: 2000 Years of American Eskimo and Indian Art, the exhibition includes 365 works of art chosen from the four principal Alaskan cultures: Eskimos, Aleuts, and Tlingit and Athabaskan Indians. Numerous objects were collected by early explorers and missionaries and have seldom been out of their later ethnographic storerooms. Others have only been uncovered in recent decades by archaeologists working on the coasts and islands of western Alaska and the Bering Strait.

Loans to the exhibition have been made from national collections in the Soviet Union, Finland, Denmark, Holland, Germany, Switzerland, Scotland, and Ireland, in addition to twenty-three museums in the United States and Canada. Objects from the Soviet Union are among the finest pieces extant, and have never before been exhibited outside Russia.

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The exhibition has been organized in conjunction with the Amon Carter Museum of Western Art in Fort Worth, Texas. The selections were made by Mitchell A. Wilder, Director of the Amon Carter Museum, in cooperation with Erna Gunther, formerly Professor of Anthropology at the University of Washington, Henry B. Collins of the Smithsonian Institution, and Douglas Lewis, Curator of Sculpture at the National Gallery of Art.

After its premiere at the National Gallery, The Far North exhibition will travel to the Anchorage Historical and Fine Arts Museum, Alaska; the Portland Museum of Art, Oregon; and the Amon Carter Museum of Western Art.

Works by the native craftsmen represented in The Far North exhibition reveal a high degree of artistic sophistication in design, carving, and execution. The objects have been carefully chosen to represent Alaskan art before contact with Europeans in the 19th century significantly altered native cultures.

The objects include an extraordinary variety of masks and helmets; carved and painted chests, boxes, and split-willow baskets; ceremonial headdresses with ermine cascades; ceremonial gowns of puffin and cormorant skins; costumes of sealskin, walrus-gut, and buckskin; rare beaded fishing hats; works of carved ivory; and a prehistoric ivory burial mask.

The earliest objects are from the Okvik phase of prehistoric Eskimo culture, and include some of the famous ivory "madonnas" considered to be among the most beautiful figures in primitive art.

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Accompanying The Far North exhibition is an extensive 320-page catalog illustrating all the objects, with 15 in color. Scholarly essays for the catalog were written by Henry B. Collins, Archaeologist Emeritus at the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of Natural History; Frederica de Laguna, Professor of Anthropology, Bryn Mawr College; Peter Stone, Research Fellow, Smithsonian Institution; and Edmund Carpenter, Professor of Anthropology, The New School for Social Research, New York.

The bringing together of works of art from international collections offers a rare opportunity to study and compare the artistic achievements of Alaskan cultures. For example, there is some evidence that three of the masks, seen as a group for the first time in the exhibition, were produced by the same master carver.

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FOR FURTHER INFORMATION or photographs contact Katherine Warwick, Assistant to the Director, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C. 20565, area code 202, 737-4215, ext. 224.