

The Virtual Coe *Being together while being apart...*

June 11, 2021

Marks of the past





The Coe cares for a number of items of clothing, some of which were bought new and thus never fully fulfilled their paths as wearable goods. Instead, these pieces were instantly transformed into “art”. These works have much to tell us, but it is the less defined stories present in the worn clothing that often pulls us in. Some might see this as a marker of “authenticity”. They become “real” because of their use. Far beyond this false categorization, however, is the closeness of life present in an individual piece of apparel that really speaks to us.

This embroidered deerskin jacket is one of those pieces. We have no supplemental information on this jacket beyond it being Huron-Wendat—who made it, when or where; when or where it was purchased; who owned it

before; who wore it? The materials and details give us some strong clues. In particular, the floral embroidery detailing is done in cotton thread, rather than **moosehair**, or even silk thread, which suggests that it is a more recent piece. It is entirely hand-stitched, which tells us more about the impressive skill of the maker, rather than any particular year of production. The buckskin itself is so soft and supple it feels as though it might have never been exposed to the elements. Again, this detail implies skill and the clear difference between deerskin that has been **brain tanned** rather than commercially tanned.

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Artist Unknown (Huron-Wendat), *Jacket*, nd. Deer hide, brass buttons, and embroidery thread, 32 x 18.5 in. (81.2 x 46.9 cm). NA1297

This beautifully delicate piece... who made it?



Much of what has been found from the Old Okvik- **Bering Sea Culture** (200 BCE-500 CE) seems to have stemmed from a culture highly skilled in hunting. Some of the earliest excavation sites discovered revealed sealing and whaling **harpoon heads**, such as this small one, found in the Okvik site of the Puknuck islands. Archeologists have found many objects to have had wings carved into them, such as this harpoon ivory object held in the Coe collection. Harpoon heads could have been highly valued for the owner and kept as good luck omens to receive abundance from the ocean spirits. Much like the concept of the **Inua Spirit in Inuit culture**, this harpoon may have been a being. *A fairy harpoon, perhaps, that flew at all its might to make the catch.*

One cannot be too certain of the origins of this beautifully delicately made piece. Who made it? Who carved the drawings? What was her or his story? Where was home?

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Catch this!



Experience artist John Hagen as he hosts **COLLECTIONS SPOTLIGHT** on Tuesday, June 15, 2021, at 3 pm Mountain time. John Hagen is an Unangaġ, Iñupiaq, Irish and Danish curator, and an artist. He is currently working as the Curator of Indigenous Arts and Initiatives at the Anchorage Museum in Anchorage, Alaska. He is also a photographer originally from Haines, Alaska. The inspirations for his work are people and place, and interactions between the two.

To watch this enriching experience, click [here](#).

COLLECTIONS SPOTLIGHT a program developed in partnership with First American Art Magazine is an interactive, online monthly experience that brings together diverse scholars and Native artists who select artworks from the Coe's collection to interpret and discuss. The virtual Zoom format also brings together attendees from diverse regions. Attendee questions are accepted throughout the experience via chat, and at the end opened to audio. These events are free and open to the general public.

To view past *The Virtual Coe* issues, please click [here](#).

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