

Book Review

By WALLY OLSON

Looking at Indian Art of the Northwest Coast by Hilary L. Stewart, University of Washington Press, Seattle. August, 1979, Price \$6.95 112 pages, paperback.

Hilary Stewart has done it again. This is another fine study of one aspect of Native life and culture on the Northwest Coast by a person who is both a precise researcher, and an excellent writer.

One of the nice things about her writings is the fact that she gets right to the point. The title reflects exactly what is in the book. **Looking at Indian Art**, is meant to be a guide for doing just that and nothing more. It is not a book on "how to" practice the art, just understand it when you see it. The first four chapters, forty pages in all, are devoted to a description of the basic features of the art. She illustrates the various forms used for the eye, the hand or forepaws of animals, the fitting of designs to the areas available.

From here, she goes on to give both ancient and modern illustrations of the basic designs or creatures found in Northwest Coast art- the bear, beaver, eagle, raven, killerwhale, shark, owl, frog and others. The last twenty pages briefly explain some of the cultural variations found among the various people such as the Tlingit, Haida, Kwakiutl and Nootka.

In the past twenty years, there has been a strong revival in the production of art along the Northwest Coast, and it is facinating to see how the traditional forms are being translated into new designs today. In the past, Northwest Coast art was extremely conventional in that each group of people fairly well agreed how a bear or beaver or other animal should be portrayed. Within some rather strict guidelines each individual artist was able to develop his own style and even today one can identify the works of the finer artists both as to their cultural background and individual technique.

For people who simply enjoy looking at Northwest Coast art and want to get a lot more out of their experience, this is an excellent handbook to pack along on trips to museums, or to have at your side in studying this art form. There are nearly a hundred good illustrations, and if one picture is worth a thousand words, then this is a huge volume. For high schools and even grade schools in Alaska this can be an excellent reference work. As one Tlingit artist put it

"Wow, this is a great little book!" I agree.