

Indian Arts Misrepresentation

The Department's Indian Arts and Crafts Board has formally notified ninety-four business firms in western North Carolina and eastern Tennessee of the Federal laws and regulations that protect genuine American Indian handicrafts by prohibiting the misrepresentation of imitations.

The action is in response to continuing complaints from Indian craftsmen in the area. Handcrafts are an important source of income for Indian craftsmen and their families nationwide, and the marketing of these crafts has an annual economic impact on the country of several hundred million dollars.

Some imitation products are made by mass-production methods in this country, and others are made overseas. Most are sold legitimately to consumers who want a low-priced fashion accessory or souvenir.

But some imitations are misrepresented by removing labels and markings so as to conceal the country-of-origin of foreign products; by representing products as made by Indian craftsmen when in fact the products are made by others; by mixing genuine Indian handicrafts together with imitations in such a way as to confuse the consumer; and by representing as handicrafts products which were in fact manufactured by machine and/or mass-production methods.

Contemporary Indian, Eskimo, and Aleut artists and craftsmen are creating outstanding handicrafts, and this is recognized by the increasing public demand for their work. The Indian Arts and Crafts Board recommends these guidelines to those who wish to purchase genuine Native American handicrafts;

1. Buy from a dealer with a regularly established place of business, who will be available to answer any questions or complaints you may have about purchase. Itinerant dealers are not

necessarily dishonest, however you have no practical recourse in such dealings, so this means of doing business is most easily subject to abuse.

2. In any case, obtain a written receipt that includes all the information you understand to be true about your purchase. For example, if you believe the piece of jewelry you are purchasing was handmade by a Navajo craftsman, of sterling-quality silver and turquoise, then you should insist that this information appear on your receipt.

3. Complaints about misrepresentation may be brought to the attention of the Indian Arts and Crafts Board.

Two Source Directories are available that list the major Native American enterprises that retail arts and crafts. Single copies of each can be obtained free by writing to: Indian Arts and Crafts Board, Department of the Interior, Washington, D.C. 20240.