



REFLECTING on the practical uses of baskets, visitors discover the arts and crafts of a distant culture. The different sizes, shapes and colors of basketry help tell the story of a people whose descendants continue old traditions. Exxon USA's Arizona Indian basketry exhibit is presently on tour nationwide.

Exxon sponsors minority arts

HOUSTON—The country has a number of cultural groups which turn everyday items of life into their media of expression. The Indians use baskets, pottery and masks, among other things. Blacks and Chicanos are known for their street art.

But unless a person happens to be a member of the group that produces them, chances are these "everyday" items seem as unfamiliar as Alaskan ceremonial masks. Neither have they always been recognized for their artistic value.

Now, museums across the country are demonstrating that something as practical as a Pueblo bean pot or as unlikely as a mural on a back alley wall can also be a work of art.

"Except for street art, which is notable for its size and relative immovability, actual works are shown," explains Exxon USA Public Relations Manager Dick Howe. "Street art is represented in photography." Exxon presently has five exhibits on tour nationwide.

It's all an outgrowth of grants by the company to foster a greater appreciation of minority art. Subjects include Pueblo pottery, Arizona Indian basketry, Tlingit ceremonial masks and Black street art.

The company also sponsored a contest for Alaskan artists to focus attention on the works of all races in the nation's northernmost state.

"Over the last several years, the art from each of the grants has been featured in, 'Exxon USA,' the company's quarterly magazine," Howe says. "But so those who had not seen the magazine could see the actual art, the company prepared the exhibits and offered them to museums."

Since 1972, company exhibits have appeared in museums and art galleries from New York to Los Angeles and 30 cities in between.

Twenty-five major showings are scheduled this year. Two of the exhibits, the pottery and basketry displays, already are committed through the latter part of 1976.

An ongoing project, the murals of Chicano neighborhoods are being considered for an additional display. A collection of Puerto Rican art is also on tour.

"Museum directors find out about the exhibits through our magazine articles," explains Otto Glade, a staff coordinator in public relations. "We include the curators on our mailing lists whenever there is an article on one of our displays."

That's how the Museum of the Southwest in Midland, Texas, learned of the company's basketmakers' exhibit. "Subject of an Exxon USA article in the fall of 1972, the display appeared in Midland last year because of a high number of requests from museums around the country."

Midland Museum Director Samuel Grove explains the factors which make basketry a good exhibit. "We brought out some

of our own collections of historic basketry for comparison with these current-day baskets.

The Indians were able to take materials at hand and fashion them into usable items. First of all, they were problem solvers. When they not only solved problems but also considered the item's beauty, they created an aesthetic culture.

"There aren't many companies doing this kind of thing, especially at no charge. We're like most museums in that there's never enough money. An exhibit like Exxon's is a real gem."