

Book Review

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INDIAN ART OF THE NORTHWEST COAST: A dialogue on Craftmanship and Aesthetics by Bill Holm and Bill Reid. University of Washington Press, Seattle. Hardback book price \$20.

Oftentimes, as one walks through a museum, the thought occurs "Wouldn't it be great if I could listen to real artists and scholars discuss what I'm seeing?" Well, this book does exactly that two great artists and scholars walk the reader through the Dominique de Menil collection of Northwest Coast Indian Art. Bill Holm is a recognized scholar on the art of his area, but is also a fine craftsman in his own right. Bill Reid is a Haida carver, perhaps the finest, but can hold his own in any academic, intellectual discussion of Northwest Coast art.

The book opens with a brief history of collections made of this region and gives some information seldom presented in most texts. Edmund Carpenter provides this history as an introduction to the dialogue between Holm and Reid. They pick up the items one at a time and discuss them in detail both from the point of view of traditions and craftsmanship. And its true dialogue with a lot of give and take. Holm may think a piece is very good and Reid find it mediocre or vice versa. But there is humor also. Bill Reid has the clever wit of a expert artist who can look at his own work and that of others and the humor in it. For instance, he calls his own little golden imitation box an "arti-fake," but it is really a beautiful work. He ends up his comments on a Chilkat Woven dance shirt by calling it a "gorgeous thing. Saville Row, eat your heart out!" In addition to the dialogue, the book is lavishly blessed with beautiful color photographs of the 102 items discussed. The book is worth its price just for the photographs alone.

This is a true potlatch of ideas. Here are the two great chiefs of art and scholarship sharing their insights and ideas with each other. Those of us sitting around as guests can feast from their discussion. Yet they give to each other in terms of new ideas, suggestions and viewpoints.

Seldom does one get a chance to go through a single collection with such a balanced interpretation. The artifacts --from pipes to boxes to daggers to masks and rattles and many other things-- are very nice. As Bill Reid puts it, "Let's face it. We're not talking about bad things and good things. We're talking about good things and great things."

At first the price turned this reviewer a little cold, but after looking at the photographs and reading (and re-reading the dialogue), I decided it was a fine investment. Since a large number of items presented are of Tlingit or Haida origin, it is especially nice for the Alaskan reader and viewer. Whatever your interests might be culture, art, history, or craftsmanship --this volume is well worth having in any library.