

# Native Art—Magic Draw--

## Whitney Museum Draws Record Crowds



TLINGIT CIRCA 1870's—War helmet worn with hide or slat armor; wood, hair, red, black, and blue paint; 8" high x 11 1/4" deep. Lent by the R.H. Lowie Museum of Anthropology, University of California, Berkeley.

By LAEL MORGAN

NEW YORK, N.Y.—A show titled "Two Hundred Years of North American Indian Art" is drawing record crowds at the Whitney Museum of American Art this month and staffers admit they're surprised.

"It's phenomenal!" marvels Leon Levine who handles public relations for the art center. "It's the third biggest attraction we've had. The first was Andrew Wyeth and then Edward Hopper but this is a totally different kind of thing. Besides, there are already two good Indian museums in New York. We never expected such a reception."

The last Indian art show to hit that town was in 1941, as Levine recalls.

"And that was more of a crafts show with baskets and artifacts. This is actually the first major exhibit to deal strictly with the aesthetics of American Indian art."

The show is limited to works created north of the Mexican border from the 17th to 19th century and although 57 Indian tribes are represented, the art of the Northwest—especially Alaskans—is dominant.

A 12 foot, one inch, Nootka carved house post glowers over the entrance. (He looks like

a super football star which, perhaps, is why the youngsters like him. They call him "Knot Head.")

Painted Tlingit boxes from Klukwan and Sitka flank the main doorway with a number of Tlingit figures.

There are two beautiful, translucent Haida Horn bowls, a striking iron knife from the Auke settlement, unusual Tlingit hats, a halibut club and—biggest drawing card of all—a fantastic collection of Eskimo masks.

What makes these things particularly exciting is that few Natives of this generation have ever seen them.

Norman Feder, guest curator from the American Indian and Native Arts at the Denver Art Museum, took more than two years to assemble this exhibit from collections throughout the United States, Canada, Denmark, England, Germany, Scotland and Switzerland.

The show was funded by a public service grant from Philip Morris Incorporated.

Why were they interested in Indians? George Weissman, president of the company, explains it well.

"It has taken the threat of environmental disaster to make 20th century Americans acutely

aware of our earth, of our animal and plant life, and of the quality of our air and our water.

In contrast, the North American Indian has always been an instinctive environmentalist who never separated man from nature.

"Because the sky, the land, the streams, and man's body were as one to the Indians, the Indian artist could create only in harmony with nature. Too rarely have his distinctive art works been seen in our Eastern museums."

Reviews of the show have been highly favorable. The New York Times did two articles on it, Newsweek was enthusiastic and Time Magazine ran a color spread.

Attendance is estimated at 10,000 to 15,000 per week. Busloads of school children are giving it hearty endorsement and so are the art world elite.

Understandably no one seems too happy about the January 9 closing date.

"But there's nothing we can do about it," Levine laments. "Those who loaned pieces want them back."

Hopefully, though, this is only the beginning for Indian and Eskimo artists.

"Concern about Indians has prevailed the United States for the last few years," Levine observes. "There's the climate. And we hope we can do other shows. Something prior to the coming of the white man and, also, on what Indian and Eskimo artists are doing today."