



Path *to* Beauty





1. Sioux, ca. 1870. South Dakota, #31201.
2. Comanche or Kiowa moccasins, ca. 1870. Oklahoma or Texas, #31185.
3. Crow moccasins, ca. 1885. Montana, #31187.

SANTA FE, NM

Native American moccasins go back to the time when people needed to protect their feet in harsh climates. Common to all tribes, moccasins evolved over the centuries from simple, stitched hide foot coverings to elaborately beaded works of functional art with structural and stylistic differences from tribe to tribe.

Among the structural differences were tough rawhide soles to protect against cactus and stones. Stylistic differences not only varied from tribe to tribe but according to their intended use. Moccasins completely covered in beads were often reserved for marriage or for the burial of the dead.

Moccasins illustrate the development of international trade. Traders who first encountered indigenous North Americans learned that different tribes referred to their leather shoes with similar words. The Algonquin in Virginia used the word "makasin" for shoe. The New England Narragansett used the word "mocussinass" or "mockussinchass" for shoe. The word first appeared in an English language publication in 1612 as "mockasin." A 1709 document refers to them as "morgissons."

Glass beads from Venice were introduced by fur traders in northeastern North America in the 17th



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and 18th centuries. Venetian beads and, later, Czech beads, found their way West as trade items between tribes. When Lewis and Clark explored the West in the early 19th century, they found beadwork among tribes who hadn't had any previous Anglo contact. Beads eventually arrived on the West Coast as trade expanded there. Large pony beads gave way to tiny seed beads and Native women developed techniques to incorporate them into their clothing and footwear.

H. Malcolm Grimmer will feature *The Path to Beauty: The Art of Plains Indian Moccasins* at the *Antique American Indian Art Show* at El Museo, Santa Fe, New Mexico. Spectacular examples of historic moccasins, many out of important collections, will be included in their display.

A pair of Comanche or Kiowa moccasins, circa 1870, come from the collection of Forrest Fenn and later Joseph Rivera, each of whom owned prominent galleries in Santa Fe. They feature a dyed body and tassels. When Hernando de Soto explored Florida in 1539, a member of his crew remarked that the indigenous people dyed their leather "...yellow and red, some black and russet, and every man according to his own fancy." Often, the Kiowa chose colors and motifs that had significance for the maker or for the person for whom they were making the moccasins.



Yellow and green were the most popular dyes and red appeared sparingly.

The story of the collectors often adds to the allure of some of the items. A pair of Sioux moccasins, circa 1870, from South Dakota, is out of the Chandler-Pohrt Collection.

Milford G. Chandler had assembled a collection of Native American artifacts over the course of a decade. He encouraged the young Richard A. Pohrt, whose collection consisted of a few arrowheads, to buy artifacts when he worked among the Montana Indians in the '30s. By the '60s, Pohrt had begun to buy pieces from Chandler's collection. He eventually acquired all 1,500 pieces.

A pair of Crow Moccasins, circa 1885, from Montana, are out of the Gaylord Torrence Collection. Torrence is senior curator of American Indian Art at the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art in Kansas City, Missouri. He

4. Assiniboine, ca. 1875. Montana. #31155.
5. Assiniboine moccasins, ca. 1880. Montana. #31195.
6. Kiowa, ca. 1870. Oklahoma or Texas. #31202.

Images courtesy H. M. Grimmer. Photos by Addison Doty.

curated the exhibition *Plains Indians: Artists of Earth and Sky*, which opened in Paris and traveled to the Nelson-Atkins as well as the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. Torrence has had a large role in elevating Native American art above the stereotype of "primitive art."

More than 60 exhibitors will show at the *Antique American Indian Art Show*, August 17 through 19. The show precedes the 95th *Santa Fe Indian Market*, August 20 to 21. «

H. Malcolm Grimmer

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