



Beauty, Honor, and Tradition: The Legacy of Plains Indian Shirts

Joseph D. Horse Capture, George P. Horse Capture

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To the Plains Indians of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, elaborately decorated hide shirts were symbols of bravery earned only by the most courageous of warriors. Those who had met the enemy in battle or slipped undetected into enemy camps to capture horses were awarded shirts specifically created to honor the wearer and the heroic deeds associated with him. Made from the skins of elk, deer, or mountain sheep, these spectacular garments were adorned with porcupine quills, paint, ribbons, locks of hair, and glass beads. Believed to hold intrinsic spiritual power, these shirts continue to play a large part in American Indian society today. Symbolizing honor, courage, and ancestral tradition, they are worn by tribal leaders at powwows and earned by students according to their academic and athletic accomplishments.

Beauty, Honor, and Tradition, a traveling exhibition organized by the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of the American Indian and the Minneapolis Institute of Arts, presents a new perspective on these garments, their creation and history, and their place in the cultures of the Plains Indian tribes. Through photographs and detailed descriptions of fifty-three representative shirts crafted from the 1820s to the 1990s, this book explores the complex relationship between the shirts, their makers, and their wearers. Throughout the text the voices of individual Plains Indians speak of the personal and cultural significance of these magnificent garments.

Joseph D. Horse Capture is assistant curator in the Department of Africa, Oceania, and the Americas at the Minneapolis Institute of Arts. They are coauthors of *Warrior Artists* (1998).

George P. Horse Capture is deputy assistant director of the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of the American Indian, and author of *Powwow* (1992).

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