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## Plains Indian Sculpture: A Traditional Art from America's Heartland.

George P. Horse Capture  
*Plains Indian Museum*

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*Plains Indian Sculpture: A Traditional Art from America's Heartland.* By John C. Ewers. Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1986. Map, illustrations, photographs, bibliography, appendix, index. 239 pp. \$39.95 cloth, \$24.95 paper.

Many years ago as the beauty and importance of Plains Indian art and history became more essential to my life, I felt the impact of Dr. Ewers long before finally meeting him and his wonderful wife, Marge, in Cody at a Plains Indian seminar fish-fry. We soon made friends and this relationship endures to this day. Knowing of this upcoming work and the extensive research Dr. Ewers devoted to the relatively little-known topic of Plains Indian miniature sculpture, I am elated with this latest publication by a master of the field.

Unlike some of Dr. Ewers's earlier publications that were "government" in appearance, illustrated with line drawings and a solemn cover, this coffee table book is oversize and lavish with clear, sharp photographs, many in glorious color, presenting the material in a just medium. Like many of his other works this one is a milestone in the study of the Plains Indian people. Treading in an area that other prestigious researchers, such as Clark Wissler, Diamond Jenness, and Robert Lowie deemed barren, Dr. Ewers found beauty and creativity in great profusion. He located and integrated references and actual items from prehistory through the Coronado Expedition of 1541 to the present day, and he viewed nearly 2,000 carved specimens in 150 museums and private collections in nine countries, so his topic is well represented.

Organizing the voluminous diversity of forms and functions of the utilitarian art in a comprehensible order is admirable in itself. Some of the major categories range from the glorious pipes, pipe stems, tampers, tree dweller figures and war medicines to love medicines and almost everything in between, even one of my favorites—canes.

As the author explains the cultural significance of each type he adds seemingly minor

details that he has accumulated over his long and brilliant career. Most of these are esoteric and special, often more interesting than the main item. The Sioux Indian people's whirlwind worm form is only one of these rarities. The history of the saw-edge quirts is also enlightening. Long ago they were used by a Minneconjou military society to induce members to dance in the activities—the same item is used by many “whip men” at today's powwows for the exact same purpose. The book is filled with such bits that make the reading more rewarding.

Instead of restricting Indian art to the pre-1900 past, Dr. Ewers outlines the trends in Plains Indian sculpture from before 1830 to the present day and discusses contributive forces. I am grateful that Dr. Ewers identifies by name as many past and living artists as possible in the text and appendix. Once again he leads the field in relating to living Indian people. What a guy!

If you want to learn about Plains Indian sculpture and its role in the culture as well as enjoy some of its beauty, read this book; there is no other like it. Thanks, Dr. Ewers.

GEORGE P. HORSE CAPTURE  
Plains Indian Museum  
Cody, Wyoming