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Summer 2000

Review of *Buckskin and Buffalo: The Artistry of the Plains Indians* By Colin F. Taylor

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Raczka, Paul M., "Review of *Buckskin and Buffalo: The Artistry of the Plains Indians* By Colin F. Taylor" (2000). *Great Plains Quarterly*. 2151.

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Buckskin and Buffalo: The Artistry of the Plains Indians. By Colin F. Taylor. New York: Rizzoli, 1998. Photographs, glossary, credits. 128 pp. \$22.50.

The Great Plains has always been a unique ecosystem throughout whose history the various cycles of human habitation have had to adapt. In *Buckskin and Buffalo* Colin Taylor has provided us with a glimpse of how one period of human habitation, the zenith of Plains Indian culture from the early 1800s to reservation days, incorporated that ecosystem into its art forms.

It was a time when the rich artistic cultures of the Plains people were infused with new artistic materials and tools. The marriage of these new materials with already existing nature-orientated cultures produced an explosion of creativity and artistic quality. Earthpaints and porcupine quills were supplemented with glass beads and trade pigments producing breathtaking results.

The Plains peoples' mystical sense of solidarity between human and animal, and indeed with the landscape itself, is reflected in the book's illustrations. Taylor's stated aim is simply to focus on the use of the buffalo and deer within "the material culture of the Plains Indians—how they lived off the land and how the creatures that fed off it became an art form." In reality the book accomplishes much more. By selecting exceptional pieces from the major tribal cultures of the Great Plains, Taylor has opened the door to viewing the influence of the Great Plains ecosystem on the art forms of people who were in intimate daily contact with that ecosystem. There can be no doubt that designs, colors, and spatial placements were directly affected by the surrounding environment.

Taylor allows the material to speak for itself, which is both a virtue and a drawback. His brief descriptions at times are *too* brief. Readers will find themselves wanting more explanation of the pieces and more detailed descriptions of the materials used. But as Taylor states, "the purpose of this book is straight-

forward: to illustrate simply and beautifully some of the more exquisite items of the Plains Indians' culture which were derived from the deer or buffalo."

Aside from a lack of coordination between close-up illustrations and descriptive text (particularly with the painted robes), a minor irritation, *Buckskin and Buffalo* is an excellent source for the "silent memorials" of the Indian peoples of Great Plains.

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