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Review of *Beauty, Honor, and Tradition: The Legacy of Plains Indian Shirts* By Joseph D. Horse Capture and George P. Horse Capture

Imre Nagy
Ferenc Mora Museum

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Beauty, Honor, and Tradition: The Legacy of Plains Indian Shirts. By Joseph D. Horse Capture and George P. Horse Capture. Washington, DC: National Museum of the American Indian, Smithsonian Institution; Minneapolis: Minneapolis Institute of Arts; Distributed by the University of Minnesota Press), 2001. 159 pp. Map, black and white and color photographs, index, bibliography. \$34.95 paper.

The study of Plains Indian art is currently in a transitive stage. Because of the enthusiasm of several non-Native researchers and scholars in the eighties and nineties—like Norman Feder, Dennis Lessard, Richard Conn, John C. Ewers (just to name those who have already passed away)—the appreciation of Plains Indian beadwork and quillwork almost reached the highest levels of connoisseurship, and prices for these pieces rose to the stars. At the same time, our knowledge of tribal or regional styles clarified to a certain degree, and our vision became less obscured by century-old misconceptions. The presence of Native American scholarship also became apparent during these decades, bringing refreshing voices to the field.

The publication of *Beauty, Honor, and Tradition* is an important contribution to Native American art studies in general and to Plains Indian art in particular. The beauty and elegance of Plains Indian shirts should grip any admirer of Native American cultures. The display and survey of these amazing creations presented here evoke new, informed inquiries.

Father and son, George P. Horse Capture and Joseph D. Horse Capture, members of the A'aninin (formerly known as Gros Ventre) tribe, co-curated the exhibition of the same title at the George Gustav Heye Center in New York, for which this publication served as catalogue. Its format, typography, and photographic quality deserve only the highest praise. Unfortunate is the absence of a single measurement for the selected shirts, although the 2001 *Charter Member Calendar* of the NMAI illustrates thirteen shirts from the same collection (ten of these "participated" in the exhibition), all with exact measurements.

The pieces in the exhibition were selected from more than four hundred shirts, all from the collection of the National Museum of the American Indian. Although it is hard to accept the authors' statement that "relatively few Plains war shirts survive in museum collections or private hands," even this single collection would provide a sufficient number of examples to illustrate the stylistic differences of all Plains art areas. Thus it is hard to understand why only the Crow, as indicative of a tribal style, and the Southern Plains, illustrating a regional style, were selected. Based on Lessard's groundbreaking 1990 paper in the *American Indian Art Magazine*, the co-curators would be able to define and illustrate the characteristics of the Northern and Central Plains art areas as well. Their uncertainty is attested to, for example, by their claim on page 58 that "This shirt is catalogued as Blackfeet, but it could have been created by a member of any number of tribes located in the upper Missouri region in the early nineteenth century."

Declaring that a chronological presentation would be misleading, the authors follow a

“thematic” approach, without defining what this term means for them. In addition, the volume contains some annoying inaccuracies. On page 104, for instance, they describe the magnificent Northern Cheyenne quilled shirt (01.3931), noting that “on the lower portion of the shirt, a series of horse tracks has been drawn with three X’s below,” while actually four X’s are painted. On page 58, describing an early quilled shirt from the Upper Missouri region (02.9035), they declare that the artist plaited the quills onto the shirt’s surface, while a detailed photograph on page 60 clearly shows that the quillwork was done on a separate strip of leather, then sewed to the shirt’s surface. A more thorough editing could have avoided mistakes like these.

These reservations aside, the volume is an important visual source for Plains Indian decorative arts and a starting point for any exploration of the rich heritage of Plains shirts.

IMRE NAGY
Ferenc Mora Museum
Szeged, Hungary