

The plastic arts of the Indians are carving and painting, in which latter we may include tattooing and weaving. Carving is done mostly in wood, but also in stone and horn. It is either in the round, in bas-relief, or, although more rarely, in high relief. There is no art of pottery.

The artists have acquired a high technique, which proves that realistic representations of animals are not beyond their powers. The following are a few exquisite examples of realistic carvings. The helmet (Fig. 1) is decorated with the head of an old man affected with partial paralysis. Undoubtedly this specimen must be considered a portrait head. Nose, eyes, mouth, and the general expression, are highly characteristic. The mask (Fig. 2) represents a dying warrior. The artist has represented faithfully the wide lower jaw, the pentagonal face, and the strong nose of the Indian. The relaxing muscles of the mouth and tongue, the drooping eyelids, and the motionless eyeballs, mark the agonies of death. The conception is so realistic that the mask creates a ghastly impression. Fig. 3 represents a dancing hat decorated with the design of a seal. Fig. 4 is a small float representing a swimming puffin. Fig. 5 is a rattle in the form of a swimming goose. The characteristic bend of its neck and the characteristic color of head and neck are very true to nature.

In these cases the artist has rendered the form of his model faithfully. The object on which the representation of his model was placed allowed him the use of the figure without any alteration. This is not often the case. Generally the object to be decorated has a certain given form to which the decoration must be subordinated, and the artist is confronted with the problem of how to adjust his subject to the form of the object to be decorated.

Before attempting an explanation of the method adopted by the artist in the solution of this problem, we must treat another aspect of our subject. We must premise that in consequence of the adaptation of the form to the decorative field, the native artist cannot attempt a realistic representation of his subject, but is often compelled to indicate only its main characteristics. In consequence of the distortion of the animal body, due to its adaptation to various surfaces, it would be all but impossible to