

World of the Raven people revealed in new hall

A new permanent display entitled *Raven's World*, which will ensure representation of the native cultures of Canada's Pacific coast without risk to the artifacts, was recently opened at the National Museum of Man in Ottawa.

The objects in the new Pacific coast hall were selected for their ability to withstand environmental fluctuations in temperatures and humidity that had begun to endanger artifacts in the *Children of the Raven* hall and led to its closing in 1981. Some of the artifacts that are too fragile have been replaced by photographs or copies.

Supernatural beliefs

For Canada's Pacific coast people, life revolved around a belief in the supernatural character of plants and animals. In a world of forest, beach and ocean, every aspect of nature had its spiritual side. For instance, salmon lived as people in their own domain. At spawning time they assumed the guise of fish and gave their outer selves to the people as food.

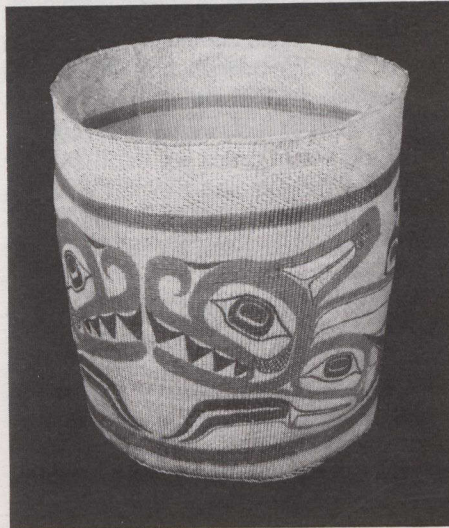
There was the belief that long ago Raven created the islands and the mainland where the Pacific coast people lived. He arranged to be born to the daughter of a chief who lived in the sky, and, as her infant son, he stole the box in which her father kept the daylight. At the mouth of the Nass River he opened the box and brought the sun to the world. Raven was the bird croaking in the forest behind the village, a man who could accomplish what no other man could, a fool whose deceptions and mistakes were as outrageous and comic as his accomplishments were great. He moved through a

world in which salmon and sea otter, bear and mink, were both animal and person. The human beings who were his children came out of the cockleshell into this world.

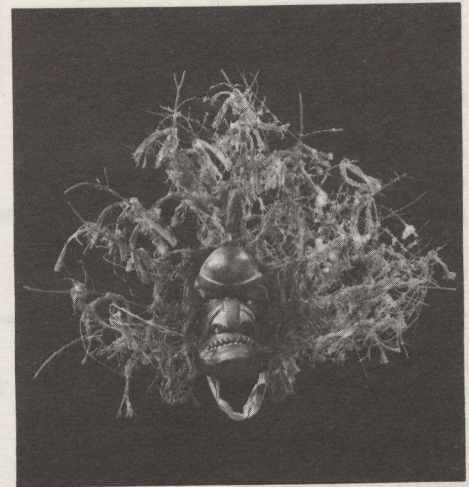
A view of life

In addition to reflecting the beliefs of the Pacific coast peoples, various aspects of everyday life on the west coast are highlighted. Hunting and fishing practices are aptly illustrated.

Tools and domestic items representing a late nineteenth century Haida household are also displayed. Interior posts which supported the house rafters, and memorial totem poles outside, were carved with family crests. On the northern coasts, ancestors passed to their descendants emblems of past encounters with supernatural beings.



Spruce root basket by Isabella Edenshaw from the McCord Museum collection.

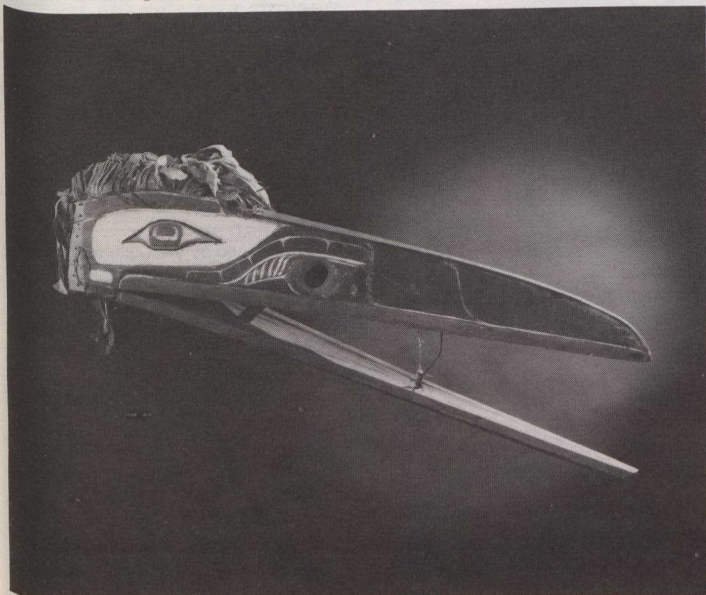


Kusiak mask representing thunder. It is made of wood with leather tongs and twigs that are painted and decorated with cedar bark and eagle down.

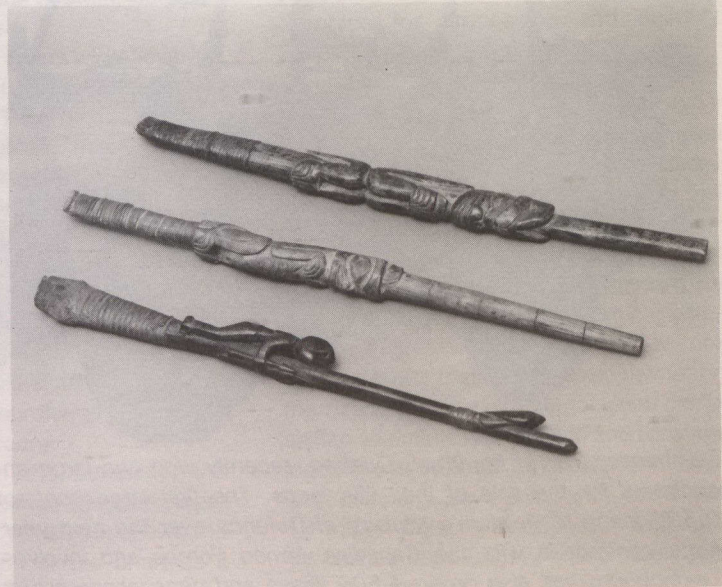
A family of the Eagle Clan might have the crests of raven, beaver or frog which serve as records of their history and identity.

Sculptors and painters in each coastal region developed their own complex styles to interpret the supernatural world and the relationship between human and supernatural beings. Traditionally, men were the carvers and painters, while women expressed their art through weaving and basketry. Red and black were the principal colours used, with the oval being the basic form.

Because of environmental restrictions, *Raven's World* can only offer visitors a small taste of the rich cultural history of Canada's Pacific coast. However, in the plans for the new National Museum of Man, to be opened at Parc Laurier in 1988, is a major exhibition of Pacific coast Indian life with the proposed grand hall re-creating the cedar plank houses and coastal villages of the people.



Raven Hamatsa mask of Kwakiutl in wood, cedar bark hair, and paint.



Paintbrushes of wood and porcupine quill bristle wrapped in roots.