



### Canadian Indian art comes home

After more than three years of negotiations the National Museum of Man has succeeded in returning to Canada the most outstanding collection of Canadian Indian material known to have been in private hands. The Speyer collection is the only substantial collection of eighteenth and early nineteenth century Canadian Indian artifacts now held in Canada.

The material in the collection, which dates from 1760 to 1860, originates mainly from the Great Lakes region, the Boreal Forest and the Plains. The remaining material is from fringe areas and emphasizes the similarities and differences of the cultures that occur across the North American continent.

The 259 artifacts that comprise the Speyer collection were brought together by Mr. Arthur Speyer and his late father over a period of 50 years. The artifacts were gathered piece by piece from European nobility, other private sources and from museums no longer in existence.

The objects in the collection, bear witness to the ingenuity and creativity of Canada's Indians as well as to the quest for knowledge and exotic beauty by early European collectors, recently returned to their home country. Many of these artifacts were taken to Europe during the eighteenth century; practically none of them was made after 1850. Although *circa* 1760 is the accepted base-line date, an even earlier date for a number of these artifacts is very probable. Given this age, their importance is immediately obvious; traditional arts and crafts, enriched by the merchandise of the fur trade, were still vigorously alive at that time.

### Variety of techniques

On weapons, utensils personal ornaments and clothing, the following decorative techniques are represented in the Speyer collection: skin painting; dyeing, of skin, porcupine quills, feathers, hair, fibre (including the extremely rare resist-dyeing); applique work on fur, skin, cloth, and ribbons; porcupine quillwork; embroidered, wrapped, and several weaving techniques; hair embroidery, including 'false embroidery'; weaving, both in native fibres as well as in imported wool; beadwork, including the use of native shellbeads (*wampum*), several techniques represented; incising, in wood, bone and stone; sculpture, in wood and stone; inlay work of metal in stone; and fringing, including netted fringe and a variety of tassels and jinglers.

The decorative designs run the whole gamut from floral and realistic to geometric and abstract. Apparently, many of the Speyer pieces were new when purchased from the Indians as souvenirs by early travellers, who never used them. However, the great age of these perishable objects has made them extremely fragile.

### Outstanding items

A few outstanding pieces in the collection are: a Naskapi Indian paint-



Ritual mat used in the 'makushan' rituals held to propitiate the game spirits. (Pre 1770.)



Dr. T. Brassler (left) and Secretary of State Hugh Faulkner look over Canadian Indian artifacts, some of which are 200 years old.

ed skin mat, most probably used during rituals in honour of the game spirits. Except for some fragments in the Smithsonian Institution, this is probably the only example in existence. It is also one of the most magnificent examples of this Naskapi art style. Also part of the collection is a moose-skin coat, illustrating the distinctive yet barely known painting style of the Northern Ojibway Indians. There are the two examples of a long extinct type of Plains Cree woman's dress, so far known mainly from one example collected by Lewis and Clark on their famous expedition in 1805. A quill-worked belt was made for Sir William Johnson, Superintendent of Colonial Indian Affairs, by one of his Mohawk sweethearts; the beautiful piece is one of the many gems in the Speyer collection.

Since 1968, when the collection was exhibited in Germany and an excellent catalogue produced, 50 pieces have been disposed of (including two to the National Museum of Man). But the 50

Shown at top is a club (pre 1840), carved with representation of a mythical being at the head.