

## Book Reviews

*North American Indian Designs*, by Eva Wilson. London: British Museum Publications, A Colonnade Book, 1984. £4.95.

Eva Wilson's *North American Indian Designs* is the second in a series of pattern books published by the British Museum. According to the back cover, the book is intended for an audience of "designers, craftsmen, artists, needlewomen, teachers and students." If you are a researcher of material culture or native art, expecting from the title that this publication presents something new or at least synthesizes our knowledge of North American Indian designs, read on before you rush out and buy this book.

The contents of the book are divided into four sections: a written text forming the Introduction, a three-page listing of information on the designs, a bibliography and 100 pages of line drawings.

In fifteen pages, the Introduction takes us from the origins of North American Indians and the Bering Land Bridge theory through the development of native designs throughout North America. Wilson has approached this monumental task by dividing the text into five sections each representing a major cultural area: the Southeast, the Northeast, the Plains, the Northwest and a combination of the West and the Southwest. Lacking is a map of these cultural areas and tribes mentioned in the text which would have provided a valuable reference for the non-specialist.

Due to the enormous wealth of material covered in such a short space, the resulting text is extremely general. Thus, beadwork is covered in one paragraph and ribbon appliqué in two paragraphs under the Northeast section, even though these techniques have a much wider distribution throughout North America. The two pages devoted to the art of the Northwest contain a brief reference to Holm's formal analysis (1965), and the remainder discusses the techniques used in making a Chilkat blanket (from Samuel, 1982).

In order to write the text, the author appears to have consulted the basic material culture references. However, most of these sources are not cited in the text or bibliography. The entire section of the Northeast is heavily drawn from Ted J. Brassler's *Bo'jou, Neejee! Profiles of Canadian Indian Art* (1976). Most of the four pages of text are paraphrased from this publication.

The 100 pages devoted to designs follow the same format as the text. The designs are in black and white, very clear and well presented, many showing details of individual motifs. As Wilson states, "the material is primarily based on designs from pottery, basketry, weaving and embroidery" (page 7). This emphasis is clearly shown in the illustrations of objects from the Southwest; of a total of 105 designs, 71 are from ceramics. The other designs do represent a balance of a variety of objects, materials and techniques. The designs from the Northwest are taken from masks, hats, Chilkat blankets and tunics, spindle whorls, boxes, knives and a house front. Noticeably absent, however, is a section on Athapaskan material culture, which produced very fine woven quill and beadwork. The Plateau is also poorly represented.

For the material-culture specialist looking excitedly for objects that have been buried in museum storerooms, there is nothing new here. The majority of the objects have been previously published, some three or four times. Most of the objects appear in the exhibition catalogues *Sacred Circles: Two Thousand Years of North American Indian Art* (1976) and *The Native American Heritage: A Survey of North American Indian Art* (1977). Similarly, the objects from the Denver Art Museum collection have already been richly and clearly illustrated in Richard Conn's *Native American Art in the Denver Art Museum* (1979). The other objects have appeared in general reference articles and books and in exhibition and collection catalogues. This point is not a major concern for the general reader who is unaware of these publications, and the line drawings are certainly clearer than most of the small published photographs. For the material-culture specialist who has (or should have) all of these publications at his fingertips, it would be more valuable to see drawings of previously unpublished material.

Each page of designs is accompanied by a one- to three-line text and a separate section titled "Notes on the designs." Included in some of the comments, although not consistently, are the type of object, one or two dimensions, museum or private collection to which the object belongs, cultural area/tribe, if known, and the century of manufacture. Some designs, however, are referred to in such general statements as "Canada.

19th century" and "South-east. 13th-18th centuries." Not included here but of particular interest to museum personnel would have been the collection documentation, specific materials and techniques of construction. Also surprisingly brief is any interpretation of the design elements.

The illustrations of basketry, wampum, bead and quill weaving techniques are clear and simple. All are from previously published illustrations. The only one I find particularly confusing is Figure 92, which shows the method of imbricating coiled basketry on the Northwest Coast. It is similar to drawings published by Mason (1901, 1902) but shows the sewing element as being too narrow.

The bibliography consists of fifteen titles. Of the works discussed in this review, only publications by Jonathan King, Cheryl Samuel, Bill Holm and one by Norman Feder are listed. Certainly Ted Brassers' *Bo'jou, Neejee!* should have been included. One-half page left blank at the bottom of the bibliography would have provided ample space for inclusion of further references of interest to the general reader wanting to pursue the material to its original source.

In conclusion, *North American Indian Designs* is an overview of native-design motifs which will be of interest to designers, artists and the non-specialist with a general interest in the field. For the material-culture specialist, however, it fails to provide any additional information that is not included in more detail in other publications. With the additional information suggested in this review, the book would have been of interest and value to a wider audience. However, if the designs provide inspiration and a greater appreciation of native art in the general reader, it will have served a useful purpose.

*National Museum of Man*

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*Cedar*, by Hilary Stewart. Vancouver: Douglas and McIntyre, 1984.  
192 pp.

*Cedar* is another of Hilary Stewart's attractive appreciations of traditional northwest coast material culture. Readers acquainted with the author's previous books (*Artifacts of the Northwest Coast Indians*, *Indian Fishing*, etc.) will find the format and style of this book familiar. As usual, the book is competently researched and elegantly packaged. It is aimed at non-specialist readers, and that audience will find it both informative and interesting. A reader with a specialist's knowledge of a Northwest Coast group or some aspect of material culture may find that