

convictions and experience; it fits only partially onto paper." Perhaps if Kirk's audacity had not been so enormous, the result might not have fit so partially onto paper.

U'mista Cultural Centre

GLORIA CRANMER WEBSTER

Robes of Power: Totem Poles on Cloth, by Doreen Jensen and Polly Sargent. Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, in association with the UBC Museum of Anthropology. Museum Note no. 17. 86 pp., 49 figs., 25 colour pls. 1986.

Robes of Power is the first book about the button blanket. In fact, it is probably the first publication devoted exclusively to this distinctive form of native art. For too long the white world has expressed an archaic bias in its passion for Northwest Coast Indian art. Because they are constructed of trade materials — flannel and buttons — these ceremonial robes have gone largely undocumented and uncollected. But unlike Haida argillite, another of the region's "arts of acculturation," they are created for native use. Though their precise history is still poorly understood, button blankets were a creative and imaginative adaptation of exotic materials to traditional ceremonial practices, supplementing and eventually supplanting earlier robe forms of bark, fur, hide, and twined fibres. *Robes of Power* is thus of interest for its attention to history and change, a new focus in the scholarship of Northwest Coast native art, and it goes far in its revision of persisting scholarly biases. Moreover, it is powerful and exciting testimony to the lively union of tradition and innovation among contemporary Northwest Coast peoples.

Essentially an exhibition catalogue, *Robes of Power* was produced in association with a display which originally opened in Australia and was later (March 1986) installed at the University of British Columbia's Museum of Anthropology. Both authors are associated with the 'Ksan cultural centre at Hazelton, B.C. Doreen Jensen, the Gitksan artist, appears to have been the senior author, assisted by Polly Sargent, listed as a "senior researcher for the Book Builders of 'Ksan," and one of the centre's founders. The volume is divided into three main sections (which the authors liken to the structure of a potlatch): "Requests," laying out the defining terms of the project; "Responses," comprising commentary from the blanket makers and historical statements from tribal elders; and "Results," a final summary review. Also included are seven brief essays

exploring selected aspects of the art-form. The volume is rounded out by a foreword from Michael Ames, director of the UBC Museum, a preface by George MacDonald, director of the Canadian Museum of Civilization, and a bibliography. The small book is an addition to the Museum's recently revitalized and expanded series of Museum Notes, and, like others in the series, is beautifully designed and produced.

This is a thoroughly native product — from the original creation of the blankets to the research to the writing. Native meanings and viewpoints are embodied directly in the oral history of the blanket makers and tribal elders. Such presentations of native culture by natives to whites are one of the most important trends of the recent scholarship (and Indian-white relations, more generally), on the Northwest Coast as well as the rest of the continent. This polyphonic or multi-vocal text happens to be a perfect embodiment of a new kind of ethnographic writing. Relatively absent is a single authoritative voice; instead each native expert offers his or her own viewpoint. While their statements often clash (noted in the final section of "Results"), these are less contradictions than alternate statements reflecting differing places, languages, customs, and histories.

Following a sentiment expressed by several natives, the authors avoid the term "button blanket," which they feel connotes domestic use or the plain material, in favour of "robe," stressing the object's ceremonial functions. *Robes of Power* vividly demonstrates the Northwest Coast cultural concept of crests — the association of the name, an ancestral story, and a material manifestation in a range of objects (house fronts, rattles, blankets), which is illustrated especially effectively by the Tsimshian example used for the cover, endpaper, and preface. The book also reveals differing relations to crest display. Some feel that these robes should be only exhibited at ceremonial occasions, while others allow them to be seen at educational displays and entertainments for white audiences.

The twenty blankets illustrated and discussed here were not collected from natives, but were commissioned especially for the exhibition, and nearly all were created in 1985. The designers represent a wide range of tribes: two Tahltan/Tlingit, five Tsimshian (one Nishga, three Gitksan, one Tsimshian), five Haida, one Heiltsuk (Bella Bella), five Kwagiutl, and two Westcoast (Nootka). Unlike the Chilkat blanket and more like the cedar bark blanket, the button blanket was not restricted to any one part of the Coast (though it is still an open historical question whether the form was independently invented or spread from one particular time and place). However, because of the authors' personal involvement there does seem to be a slight Gitksan bias in the discursive essays.

By custom, button blankets are the product of joint male and female work. As with the earlier Chilkat blanket form, traditionally the men created the design, which the women then reproduced in cloth. Both designers and fabricators offer their statements, emphasizing the collaborative nature of this form of art. As this book shows, there has been a recent blurring of these lines as some women have taken to designing their own blankets. The book also gives evidence of a mixture of races and cultures, including several blankets sewn by white women in partnership with native male artists.

The only criticism which can be levelled against the volume is relatively minor. Despite the fact that the authors refer to extensive research with scholars and museum collections, little of this has made its way into the final product. There is still a need for a thorough report on this kind of documentary and historical research. Ron Hamilton's essay, though brief, offers a persuasive model for future work. "Button Blankets on the West Coast?" is one of the best contributions, combining oral history, archaeology, photography, texts, and museum collections.

Robes of Power is an especially important book. It is the first word on the subject, not the last. Aware of this, the authors ask one final question: "who will take over where *Robes of Power* leaves off?"

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West of the Great Divide: An Illustrated History of the Canadian Pacific Railway in British Columbia 1880-1986, by Robert D. Turner. Victoria: Sono Nis Press, 1987. Pp. xii, 336. \$34.95.

At first glance this handsome volume appears to be of interest mainly to railway buffs. With the aid of more than 400 illustrations, maps, timetables, and reproductions, it provides a vivid account of the history of CPR rail operations in British Columbia from 1880 to the present. However, the general reader will find the text of this book well worth reading since it provides much valuable information on the railway which had such a profound impact on the history of British Columbia.

The author devotes his attention to the CPR's rail operations in B.C., for he has previously published illustrated histories of the company's maritime operations in the province.

Chapter 1 deals with the construction of the main line and the improvements and extensions to it in the 1890s. Turner emphasizes the importance