



Beaded Chatelaine Style Purse

Unknown Seneca (Haudenosaunee) Artist

ca. 1840 - 1860

L: 7 5/8"; W: 7.25"; D: .5"

T0688

<http://www.fenimoreartmuseum.org/files/fenimore/collections/thaw/exhibit1/e10689a.htm>

By Leah Shenandoah (Cornell University)

My Grandmother, Maisie Schenandoah - Oneida Wolf Clan Mother (1932-2009), was an avid collector of Haudenosaunee artifacts and historic beadwork. She encouraged me to examine and interact with her collection, enhancing my appreciation for viewing and creating Haudenosaunee art. Her collection included examples of "tourist art" or "souvenir art" made popular during the Victorian era in western New York. The advent of this type of historical beadwork was a direct result of colonization and industrialization. The contemporary remnant of this cultural phenomenon is known as the "Pow Wow," where the commodification of indigenous art occurs. My grandmother owned and operated the "Shenandoah Trading Post" for forty years, selling indigenous arts, crafts and clothing. Her vast collection of Haudenosaunee art was partially obtained through the "Pow Wow" circuit from other artisans and traders. This method of barter is intrinsic to indigenous culture and has been carried forward by myself and my family.

Linear beadwork made from glass beads replaced "quill embroidery on hide in late-eighteenth-and-early-nineteenth-century Iroquois art."¹ Needlework was introduced to the Haudenosaunee by missionaries, which "undoubtedly directly prepared the way for the Iroquois production of

commoditized home crafts.² The consumption of "souvenir arts" by colonial settlers was in tandem with the frenzied motivations of salvage ethnography during that time. Dr. Ruth Phillips (Carleton University) art historian and Otsego Institute faculty states, "despite the widely accepted view that this life was doomed to disappear with the encroachment of civilization- as the writers [Roche] note, the Indians are already 'half-civilized' - its lingering beauties could still be savored and consumed by the sensitive European as touristic experiences or as souvenir arts."³

This Seneca beaded chatelaine style purse exhibits unusual motifs unlike any I have witnessed.⁴ I would argue that the stylistic expression of the Haudenosaunee Skydome symbol is unusual and unexpectedly contemporary for this era. Each side exhibits a unique design that is bilaterally symmetrical, radial and floral in nature with a repetitive patterned border and diamond shapes. Many Victorian era beadwork designs were reminiscent of earlier quillwork artifacts, depicting traditional "cosmology and spirituality."⁵ Phillips contends that the usage of traditional Haudenosaunee motifs on commoditized objects was a form of cultural resistance to oppressive colonial acculturation.⁶ Beadwork as an act of indigenous resistance is a new concept for me discovered during this research, its implications beg for further investigation.

Dr. Jolene Rickard (Tuscarora) Ph. D., Director of American Indian and Indigenous Studies Program at Cornell University and a faculty council of the Otsego Institute states: "did all my grandmothers walk through time to be forgotten in their sleep? They send us reminders, tell us no. A quiet celebration of the initial planting of life is still stitched, woven, shaped, scraped, brushed, danced, and echoed in the song into our memory. Our cultural clues expose both the net of colonization and the ongoing fight/celebration of resistance."⁷ I align with Dr. Rickard's statement, the act of creating with our hands is intrinsic to Haudenosaunee culture and cosmology. Creating art is an indigenous community-based traditional practice, creating kinship and memories embedded deeply within our habitus.

Several questions arose while I was conducting research: what were these artists experiencing during the creation of this object? Was this made for sale or was it used as a ceremonial item, or both? Did the maker of this artifact experience a meditational state due to the repetitive nature of the beading process? Is there a way to test cortisol levels through scientific methods i.e. DNA samples? Further scientific analysis may reveal how this bag was utilized by its owner.

The purse consists of the following materials: dark brown commercially produced, short pile velvet, red silk binding (deteriorated and faded), a woven cotton muslin lining, thread and size 13 glass beads. The bead colors are: chartreuse, terracotta, white, cerulean blue, mustard yellow, transparent amber and forest green. The velvet was most likely beaded with designs and then attached to the muslin lining. The two sides were sewn together, then silk binding was hand-stitched to the sides of the purse with a matching color thread. Edge beadwork was attached with six beaded loops as the final step.

I learned a great deal during the 2017 Otsego Institute including: curatorship, historical object research, as well as valuable input, feedback and connections from the faculty council and student cohorts. I discovered my fine art experience in textiles and metals proved useful in understanding techniques, terminology, materials and processes employed by the makers of the

objects. I am infinitely grateful for the skills gained during the institute that will inform the research I am conducting in Cornell University's Apparel Design Doctoral program.⁸

Bibliography

Phillips, R.B. *Trading Identities: The Souvenir in Native North American Art from the Northeast, 1700-1900*. Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 1998.

Rickard, Jolene K. *Indigenous and Iroquoian Art as Knowledge: In the Shadow of the Eagle*. Doctoral Dissertation: Retrieved from UMI Dissertation Services, 1996.

¹ R. B. Phillips, *Trading Identities: The Souvenir in Native North American Art from the Northeast, 1700-1900* (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 1998) 226.

² Ibid., 215

³ Ibid., 221

⁴ Ibid., 218

⁵ Ibid., 226

⁶ Ibid., 198

⁷ Jolene K. Rickard, *Indigenous and Iroquoian Art as Knowledge: In the Shadow of the Eagle* (Doctoral dissertation, Retrieved from UMI Dissertation Services, 9704926, 1996) 102.

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<https://www.facebook.com/leahshenandoah/posts/10154595252191485.&set=a.435532306484.237473.550456484&type=3&theater>