

THE ART & TRADITION OF  
BEADWORK

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MARSHA C. BOL

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GIBBS  
SMITH

MARSHA C. BOL, Ph.D, is a museum director emerita, curator, and author. She taught at the university level for thirty-four years, and served as Director and Curator of Latin American Folk Art at the Museum of International Folk Art, Santa Fe, New Mexico; Director of the New Mexico Museum of Art; Associate Professor of Museum Studies at the University of Texas in San Antonio; Associate Curator of Anthropology at the Carnegie Museum of Natural History in Pittsburgh, PA; and Curator at the Maxwell Museum of Anthropology at the University of New Mexico. Her academic specialty is Plains Indian, especially Lakota, women's arts of beadwork and quillwork.

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LAKOTA CRADLES TODAY

Nothing is as precious to the Lakota people as a child, the future of their people. Indeed the same can be said about all of the world’s peoples. Although Lakota babies are no longer routinely wrapped in fine beaded cradles as they once were, there are still exceptional Lakota beadworkers who have the skill to make these most complex of all traditional Lakota beaded objects. Some are motivated by the news of the coming of a new baby. Others are motivated by the desire to maintain an important tradition so closely associated with the identity of their people.

Thomas “Red Owl” Haukaas (b. 1950—Sicangu Lakota/Creole) made a beaded cradle for his baby niece in 2001. By that time he had already made two fully beaded cradles. As a trained psychiatrist and an artist who identifies himself primarily with his Lakota heritage, Haukaas has spent much of his artistic career concerned about two issues: 1) maintaining the traditions and issues of identity of the Lakota as a people, and 2) social issues that confront his people, Native Americans at large, and the wider world.

As Haukaas recounts: “Beadwork was in my background throughout my life. My great-grandmother lost her husband early and supported her family by making pictographic and Lakota abstract floral beadwork. Some of her work remains with us . . . and are a source of family pride. . . . Like most Native practitioners, I did not have formal training. Rather, my skills are a result of the kindness and thoughtfulness of many generations of Lakota people. Learning beadwork often allows time for passing on family histories and myths as well as transmitting tribal values and narratives. One does not learn beadwork without a social context. These narratives, and more modern ones, inform our art at a deeper level, imbued with notions of tribe and spirituality.” (Haukaas 2005: 142).

FIG. S1.1  
ANIMISTIC CRADLE & DETAIL, 1992

Maker: Thomas “Red Owl” Haukaas (b. 1950, Sicangu Lakota/Creole)

Brain-tanned elk hide, cotton, glass beads, thread, hawk bells  
Marilyn Eber Collection

“This cradle was purposely designed and constructed for cultural exchange with people from other traditions. The Deer has been a dream symbol for many in our family. Like the Bison, it references love and caring for family. The Horse is my own dreamed figure obtained while falling asleep one night. I have taken it as a symbol that encourages me to adhere and honor Lakota values and customs. My point is all people have these, and more, hopes for their progeny and future generations.” (Haukaas 2017)



FIG. S1.2  
FIG. S1.2  
CREATION STORY CRADLE, 1995

Maker: Thomas “Red Owl” Haukaas

Brain-tanned hide, wool, cotton, glass beads, thread

Denver Art Museum, Richard G. Conn Memorial Fund and the Volunteer Endowment Fund

“All cultures have creation narratives that detail a primordial physical form, during a timeless era, in a particular space. Before being tricked into emergence to the surface world by Iktomi the spider, we were a nation of bison living in the crystal caves in Hesapa, the Black Hills.

The design motivations were three-fold. One, can I make a classic half cradle that is visually balanced? Two, it was an outcome of years of discussion on the definition and value of the then nascent contemporary Native art movement with the late DAM curator Dick Conn. The final and most important motivation is a statement that Native Peoples have our own religions, values and perspectives. These must be respected.” (Haukaas 2017)



FIG. S1.3 A



FIG. S1.3 B

FIG. S1.3 A (LEFT SIDE), B (RIGHT SIDE), & C (DETAIL)  
MITAKUYE OYASIN CRADLE, C. 2005

Maker: Thomas “Red Owl” Haukaas

Brain-tanned elk hide, cotton, glass beads, thread

Marilyn Eber Collection

“This title translates as ‘for all my friends and relatives,’ at once a saying and a prayer. [This cradle] is a large, beaded pictographic ledger [with] figures that are different on each side. It’s a crowd scene about the definition of family in many of our tribes. . . . There are different ways to define family relationships that are valid to our culture. Adoption via Hunka ceremony. Marriage, whether same gender or not. The community witnesses and supports these families.” (Haukaas, August 17, 2015).

“The motivation was to contrast with the then raging DOMA [Defense of Marriage Act] movement and to illuminate that Native People have many differing ways of defining our roles and relationships within our tribes. I also wanted to note we have differing definitions of gender and gender roles.” (Haukaas 2017).

FIG. S1.4  
INTERCONNECTED CRADLE, 2007

Maker: Thomas “Red Owl” Haukaas

Brain-tanned elk hide, cotton, 76 different colors of glass beads, thread, brass bells

24 x 11 in. (61 x 28 cm)

Iris M-L Model Collection

“This is the one with three turtle designs on each side. Each of the turtles has one of the six directions as the primary color. . . . If you look at the composition from a distance, you can see it forms a DNA double helix. So both sides of the cradle represent the grandparents of the child contained within. Children are part of a larger family (Tiyospaye) that helps care for this child. . . . No small part of the underpinning for this cradle was that I was getting tired of artisans passing themselves off as Native or supposed Native work. For me, this was a comment that native works have an inherent content and context [that] reproductions and falsifications can’t. They may be beautifully made, but they don’t SPEAK about US. . . . The issue is more than technical ability.” (Haukaas, May 15, 2015)

FIG. S1.5  
ECONOMIC CONUNDRUM CRADLE, 2010

Maker: Thomas “Red Owl” Haukaas

Brain-tanned elk hide, satin, glass beads, thread, hawk bells

Nerman Museum of Contemporary Art, Johnson County Community College, Overland Park, Kansas, Gift of Barton P. and Mary D. Cohen Charitable Trust

“The cradle is another sociopolitical allegory. The scattering birds speak to many peoples’ reaction to the current economic downturn. No matter what, the birds know they will land on solid ground . . . eventually. Meantime, they look up and forward, even if in a helter-skelter fashion. The top of the cradle has one of those geometric *Iktomi* (trickster) designs and it means that we are in uncharted territory so we must look carefully and logically at proposed solutions. Some are not solutions but a continuance of the rapacious and greedy practices that got us where we are globally. The bottom line is this cradle asks: What have we learned and what will we do?” (Haukaas 2010).



FIG. S1.4



FIG. S1.5



FIG. S1.6 DETAIL



FIG. S1.6

FIG. S1.6  
FLORAL CRADLE & DETAIL, 2012

Maker: Thomas “Red Owl” Haukaas

Brain-tanned elk hide, cotton, glass beads, thread

27 x 10 in. (68.6 x 25.4 cm)

Private collection

“[My] penultimate cradle—it’s a decision to acknowledge and promote one form [floral] of surface design the Lakshota historically used. One that is almost gone. The designs are based on over 40 years of research. My great-grandmother did this kind of work. She also did pictographic work. Clearly, my own work is a furtherance and continuation of a family tradition. . . . Since we were small children, our own father would draw Indian scenes and have us color them. Those are some of the most precious memories my siblings and I have of our early childhood in Puerto Rico, when dad was in the Navy.” (Haukaas, May 15, 2015)

FIG. S1.7  
KIMIMILA (IMMIGRATION) CRADLE & DETAIL, 2014

Maker: Thomas “Red Owl” Haukaas

Native-tanned hide, glass beads, brass bells

23 1/2 x 9 x 10 1/4 in. (59 1/2 x 22 1/2 x 26 cm)

Artist’s collection

“My cradles are clearly meant for enticing dialogue. . . . The Monarch butterfly on top says it all. . . . So does the verbiage: ‘We did not cross the border, the border crossed us’. . . . As a Native person, this makes great sense to me.” (Haukaas, May 15, 2015).

As Haukaas was completing this cradle, he wrote: “The butterfly on the top will be a monarch butterfly, the symbol for immigration. The butterflies on the sides represent the usual themes of freedom, metamorphosis, and positive change. KIMIMILA is the Lakshota word for butterfly. It was our grandmother’s favorite symbol and image. She told me she danced like a butterfly going through the hills. She did. Graceful.” (Haukaas 2014).

PHOTO S1.1  
PHOTO S1.1  
THOMAS HAUKAAS HOLDS HIS JUST-COMPLETED KIMIMILA CRADLE, 2014

Photograph by Marsha Bol



FIG. S1.7 DETAIL



FIG. S1.7





