

Providing a Rich Portrait of Northern Plains Life

MUSEUM OF THE PLAINS INDIAN

BY WENDY WESTON (DINÉ)



COURTESY U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR, INDIAN ARTS AND CRAFTS BOARD

A mid-19th century doll created by an unknown Cheyenne artisan.

IN 1935, CONGRESS ESTABLISHED THE INDIAN ARTS AND CRAFTS BOARD, an agency of the U.S. Department of the Interior, to promote the economic development of American Indians and Alaska Natives through the arts. Today the IACB operates three museums: the Sioux Indian Museum in Rapid City, South Dakota; the Southern Plains Indian Museum in Anadarko, Oklahoma (see July/Aug. 2000 issue); and the Museum of the Plains Indian in Browning, Montana. Each center is regarded as a vital component of the economic, cultural and educational resource base in its community.

Browning, Montana, located in the heart of the Blackfeet Nation, is a quaint town nestled near the entrance of Glacier National Park. The Museum of the Plains Indian was founded in 1941 and continues today as an ideal destination for learning about the Native cultures of the Northern

Plains. Visitors to the museum are welcomed by two large carved wood panels by noted Blackfeet sculptor John Clarke and a series of murals in the main lobby by Victor Pepion (Blackfeet) that set the tone for a meaningful experience. A permanent exhibit features material culture from several regional tribal groups, including Blackfeet, Cree, Crow and Northern Cheyenne. Stories of social and ceremonial life are shared through visual-art interpretations and exhibit narratives. Highlighting this informative and colorful presentation are the life-size figures of Northern Plains men, women and children in their traditional attire. Two changing exhibit galleries present recent works by Native artists throughout the year, providing visibility for aspiring artists.

During the summer months, a display of painted tipis is featured on the museum grounds, and local artisans are on hand to engage in conversation and demonstrate their art or craft for visitors. The museum is also an important part of Browning's annual North American Indian Days celebration each July as visitors enjoy hands-on educational experiences.

"Come see us, and bring your family," invites IACB Director Meredith Stanton. "This museum is a cultural treasure and provides a wonderful opportunity to see both contemporary and traditional art and craftwork of the Northern Plains tribes and to learn about their rich history and remarkable culture."

The museum is open daily from 9 a.m. to 4:45 p.m. June through September, and Monday to Friday from 10 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. October through May. Browning, MT. 406/338-2230 or www.iacb.doi.gov

Selected Exhibitions

Fred Jones Jr. Museum of Art, The University of Oklahoma. From June 28 through Sept. 15, *Hopituy: Kachinas from the Permanent Collections*. Six types of Hopi katsina figures in carvings, baskets and paintings explore the use of color; motifs and geometric shapes within the context of the Hopi aesthetic. Norman, OK. 405/325-3272 or www.ou.edu/fjjma

Mitchell Museum of the American Indian. Through Sept. 8, *New Treasures of Our Collection*. An interesting display of culturally relevant and visually striking works acquired recently. Of special note is the black-on-black pottery of San Ildefonso Pueblo clay artist Barbara Gonzales and a striking watercolor by Crow painter Kevin Red Star. A companion exhibit showcases the museum's education collection, which features works that visitors can handle. Evanston, IL. 847/475-1030 or www.mitchellmuseum.org

Museum of Florida History. Through Aug. 18, *Seminole People of Florida: Survival and Success*. More than 60 artifacts created over the past 100 years provide a glimpse into Seminole history, culture and rich artistic traditions. Featured are spectacular examples of patchwork clothing, dolls, baskets and jewelry. Photographs, graphics and text complete the experience. Tallahassee, FL. 850/245-6403 or www.museumoffloridahistory.com

National Museum of the American Indian, George Gustav Heye Center. Through June 16, *C. Maxx Stevens: House of Memory*. This acclaimed Seminole/Muscogee artist uses found objects, paper, wood and hair; sculpture, installation and prints to address memory through cultural and personal symbols, thus illustrating the complexities of the contemporary Native experience.

Also, through Aug. 11, *Up Where We Belong: Native Musicians in Popular Culture*. An inspiring look at the lives and careers of Native people such as Russell Moore (Pima) and Rita Coolidge (Cherokee), who have been active participants and contributors to the contemporary music scene for nearly a century. New York, NY. 212/514-3700 or www.americanindian.si.edu

Nevada State Museum. *Under One Sky*. Ongoing. Through the perspective of the Paiute peoples of the Great Basin, a story of cultural survival, creativity and contributions is shared through objects, oral testimonies and photographs. Carson City, NV. 775/687-4810 or <http://museums.nevadaculture.org>

Saint Louis Art Museum. Through June 16, *Edward Curtis: Visions of Native America*. Striking photos of American Indians from the Plains and Southwest are on display in this tribute to a significant American photographer who sought to document tribes in the early part of the 20th century as forced relocation onto reservations diminished the ability to continue traditional ways of living. St. Louis, MO. 314/721-0072 or www.slam.org