INDIAN ANTIQUE ARTS

Few objects in the world more clearly proclaim "American Indian" than a weathered leather shield, painted, perhaps, with some jagged streaks of lightning; or a baby's cradleboard, lovingly adorned with colorful beadwork; or a deerskin dress heavy with fringe and elk-horn buttons.

These are but a few examples of the vast field of antique American Indian arts, ranging from pre-Columbian jade masks carved in central Mexico to ancient Moche ceramic vessels of Peru, from wood and ivory figurines carved at the edge of the Arctic Ocean to handsome Navajo chief's blankets woven in the 18th century in New Mexico.

Commanding some of the highest prices paid for any form of Native art, American Indian antique arts are in high demand around the world as examples of lasting craftsmanship, beauty and rarity, providing a tangible link to lifestyles now largely gone.

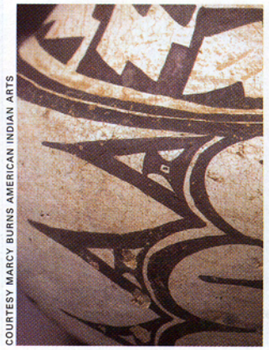
Here's a look at some examples of these extraordinary works, brief profiles of some of the leading figures in the collection and trade of American Indian antique arts, and details on events associated with their sale.

BY GUSSIE FAUNTLEROY

FACING PAGE: COURTESY DONALD ELLIS

MARCY BURNS SCHILLAY

After more than 20 years as a leading dealer in historic American Indian basketry, Marcy Burns Schillay still follows the principle of buying "what moves me. I'm guided by my eye." Burns, whose business name is Marcy Burns American Indian Arts, deals by appointment in New York City. Her love of Southwest and California basketry was sparked by a Pima basket she saw (but couldn't afford at the time) at a trading post while on her honeymoon in Arizona. Later she volunteered at the University of Pennsylvania Museum, with its acclaimed Native art collection, and served as president and board member for the Antique Tribal Art Dealers' Association. Burns also deals in antique Native pottery, textiles and jewelry.



COURTESY MARCY BURNS AMERICAN INDIAN ARTS

DONALD ELLIS

Alongside his prominence in the world of antique North American Indian art, Donald Ellis has the distinction of being the only Canadian appraiser featured on the American version of *Antiques Roadshow*. Ellis, who owns the Donald Ellis Gallery, Ltd. in Dundas, Ontario, focuses on extremely fine 18th- and 19th-century tribal art, with an emphasis on Northwest Coast, Eastern Woodlands and Eskimo art. Ellis first encountered historic Native objects as a boy, collecting potshards and buying arrowheads at Six Nations powwows in southern Ontario. He opened his gallery in 1976, and was the first Canadian to exhibit at the prestigious, invitation-only Winter Antiques Fair in New York.

COURTESY DONALD ELLIS

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LEFT TO RIGHT: Zuni jar, c. 1860's, 9½" x 9½"; Crow buffalo robe, Northern Plains, c. 1850, 85" w.; Chugach mask, Prince William Sound, Alaska, c. 19th century, wood and vegetable fiber 17" h. ABOVE: Navajo eyedazzler rug woven out of 4-ply Germantown wools, c. 1880–1890. FACING PAGE: sun mask, Kwakwaka'wakw, Vancouver Island, B.C., c. 1880, wood, 32" h.