



Totem Poles: An Illustrated Guide (Museum Note No. 3)

Marjorie M. Halpin

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The massive wood carvings unique to the Indian peoples of the Northwest Coast arouse a sense of wonder in all who see them. This guide helps the reader to understand and enjoy the form and meaning of totem poles and other sculptures. Among the illustrations are archival photographs which show the poles in their original settings--on deserted pebble beaches and in front of the now decayed houses which once stood in thriving villages.

The author describes the origin and place of totem poles in Indian culture--as ancestral emblems, as expressions of wealth and power, as ceremonial objects, as mythological symbols, and as magnificent artistic works of the people of the Pacific Northwest. She also suggests ways to interpret the motifs and symbols carved on the poles and shows how to recognize the special features which reveal not only the skill of the carver but also his tribal origin. The works of contemporary artists such as Bill Reid illustrate the change from traditional designs to innovative forms that convey a new and different cultural dimension.

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