



**American Federation of Arts**

**For Immediate Release**

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**UNPRECEDENTED SELECTION OF NATIVE AMERICAN ART ON FIVE-CITY TOUR**  
***Uncommon Legacies: Native American Art from the Peabody Essex Museum***

(February 2002)-***Uncommon Legacies: Native American Art from the Peabody Essex Museum***, an exhibition from the distinguished collection of the Peabody Essex Museum, Salem, Massachusetts premieres at the Iris & B. Gerald Cantor Center for Visual Arts in Stanford, California, on May 8, 2002, and travels to four additional museums across the country. The exhibition is organized by the American Federation of Arts and the Peabody Essex Museum.

Showcasing approximately 100 exemplary art works from one of the nation's oldest collections of native art, the exhibition reveals the richness of indigenous cultures of the Americas in a variety of mediums and forms. Following an introductory section of 13 rarely exhibited objects from European collections, *Uncommon Legacies* is arranged in five thematic groupings: "Nations Within"; "Pacific Coast Traders"; "The Interior Wilderness: Outposts, Explores, and Sojourners"; "The Interior Wilderness: Missionaries"; and "South American Adventurers." Each section examines how Native American artists responded to the changing cultural landscape from 1750 to 1850.

Selected by guest curators John R. Grimes, Deputy Director of Special Projects and Curator of Native American Art at the Peabody Essex Museum, and Christian Feest, professor of anthropology at the Johann-Wolfgang-Goethe Universität University of Frankfurt, and overseen by an advisory committee of eminent Native American experts, this exhibition moves beyond traditional stereotypes and ethnocentric viewpoints, presenting recent research and new scholarship.

According to AFA director Julia Brown, "Since 1909, the American Federation of Arts has produced outstanding programs based upon rigorous scholarship and a fresh, stimulating approach, including exhibitions of Native American art, such as *Uncommon Legacies*. We are delighted to be collaborating with the Peabody Essex in bringing these exceptional works of art to new audiences."

The genesis of the East India Marine Society's collection, as the Peabody Essex Museum was named originally, makes it a powerful vehicle for understanding the creative versatility of Native American artists of this period. The Society was founded in 1799 by an elite group of sea captains who emulated the collecting voyages of Captain James Cook and developed a "cabinet of natural and artificial curiosities," a foundation for what was to become the collection.

Although the collection was inspired by Cook's expeditions, it differs significantly in that it was assembled in the course of regular commercial and missionary interactions between native peoples and non-natives. Ship captains both chronicled the creative output of the people with whom they had contact, and were themselves agents of profound social, political, and economic change.

Salem became the headquarters of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions in 1812, and by 1816-20, missionaries had set out to minister to the Cherokee and other southeastern Native American peoples. Over the next two decades, missionary outposts were established in the Great Lakes region. Seeking to document the lives of the peoples with whom they lived, missionaries at many of these stations collected native works, forming remarkable collections that subsequently became part of the Peabody Essex Museum's holdings.

In the Pacific Northwest, commerce created extensive trade relationships between American mariners and Tlingit, Haida, Kwakiutl, and other native communities. Trading for furs and other natural commodities for the Chinese market, Salem's captains also traded to obtain items for display at the East India Marine Society, including masks, textiles, personal apparel, and many utilitarian objects, both decorated and plain. These

range from the spectacular "Coppers" Chilkat blanket, the earliest known of its type, to ingeniously carved stone pipes and other small items that combine native iconography with images of men and ships of the American trade.

The early 19th-century lumber and fish trade of the New England and Canadian maritime coasts yielded opportunities for assembling the Society's collection of works by Penobscot, Passamaquoddy, and Micmac artists. For example, a magnificent Pawtucket pouch from the 17th century is one of very few extant works from this early period. In many parts of southern New England, a new cultural milieu and new modes of creative expression emerged from the economic interaction of Europeans and Native Americans through hunting, trapping, and fishing.

Both the Yankee merchants and whalers on their passage around Cape Horn visited the ports of call on the Atlantic and Pacific coasts of South America. They brought back a wealth of native art, including ceramics from Peru, an apron from the Caribbean, and a headdress from Brazil.

Over the last two decades, both scholars and connoisseurs have become persuaded that traditional Native American arts are to be viewed as a dynamic continuum of creative responses to new ideas, influences, and materials. These oldest surviving Native American works belong to a complex living tapestry of cultural expression. They are the product of the artists' effort to balance, in a particular time and place, the shifting conventions of the community with their own visions, skills, and mediums.

#### **TOUR**

Iris & B. Gerald Cantor Center for Visual Arts Stanford University, Stanford, California	May 8-August 11, 2002
Cincinnati Art Museum Cincinnati, Ohio	October 10, 2002- January 5, 2003
Virginia Museum of Fine Arts Richmond, Virginia	April 17-July 20, 2003
Peabody Essex Museum Salem, Massachusetts	September 19- November 16, 2003

**PUBLICATION:** Accompanying the exhibition is a fully illustrated catalogue with entries on each object, as well as major essays by Christian Feest on the formation of early Native American collections in Europe and America, and by John Grimes and Mary Lou Curran, Associate Curator of Native American Arts and Archaeology at the Peabody Essex Museum, on early Native American collections. There are also essays on the different regions of artistic activity by Native American scholars and artists, including Richard W. Hill Sr., Doreen Jenson, Ramiro Matos, Duane H. King, and Gerald McMaster. *Uncommon Legacies: Native American Art from the Peabody Essex Museum* is published by the American Federation of Arts in association with the University of Washington Press. 272 pages containing approximately 143 colorplates and 21 black-and-white illustrations. 9 x 12 inches. Softcover, \$42.00; Hardcover, \$60.

**ADVISORY COMMITTEE:** The members of the advisory committee who consulted on the educational materials developed in conjunction with the exhibition are: Richard W. Hill, Sr. (Tuscarora), artist and Director, Haudenosaunee Resource Center, Sanborn, New York; Vernon L. Chimegalrea (Yupik), Vice President of Programs, Alaska Native Heritage Center, Anchorage; Reaves Fred Nahwooksy, Jr. (Comanche), Executive Director, ATATL, Phoenix; Danyelle Means (Lakota) independent curator and Project Manager, Smithsonian's National Museum of the American Indian, New York.

**PEABODY ESSEX MUSEUM:** Founded in 1799, the Peabody Essex Museum, Salem, Massachusetts, is the country's oldest continually operating museum. Now one of New England's largest museums, the Peabody Essex has internationally renowned maritime collections; four centuries of American Decorative Arts and architecture; and arts from China, Japan, Korea, India, and Oceania. It also displays one of the world's largest and most important collections of Asian decorative arts produced for the Western market. The presentation of the exhibition at the Peabody Essex, the final venue of the tour, coincides with the reopening of the new expanded museum in 2003.

**AMERICAN FEDERATION OF ARTS:** Founded by an act of Congress in 1909, the American Federation of Arts produces traveling art exhibitions and educational programs developed in collaboration with the museum community. Through these programs, the AFA seeks to strengthen the ability of museums to enrich the public's experience and understanding of art. Please visit our Web site at [www.afaweb.org](http://www.afaweb.org).