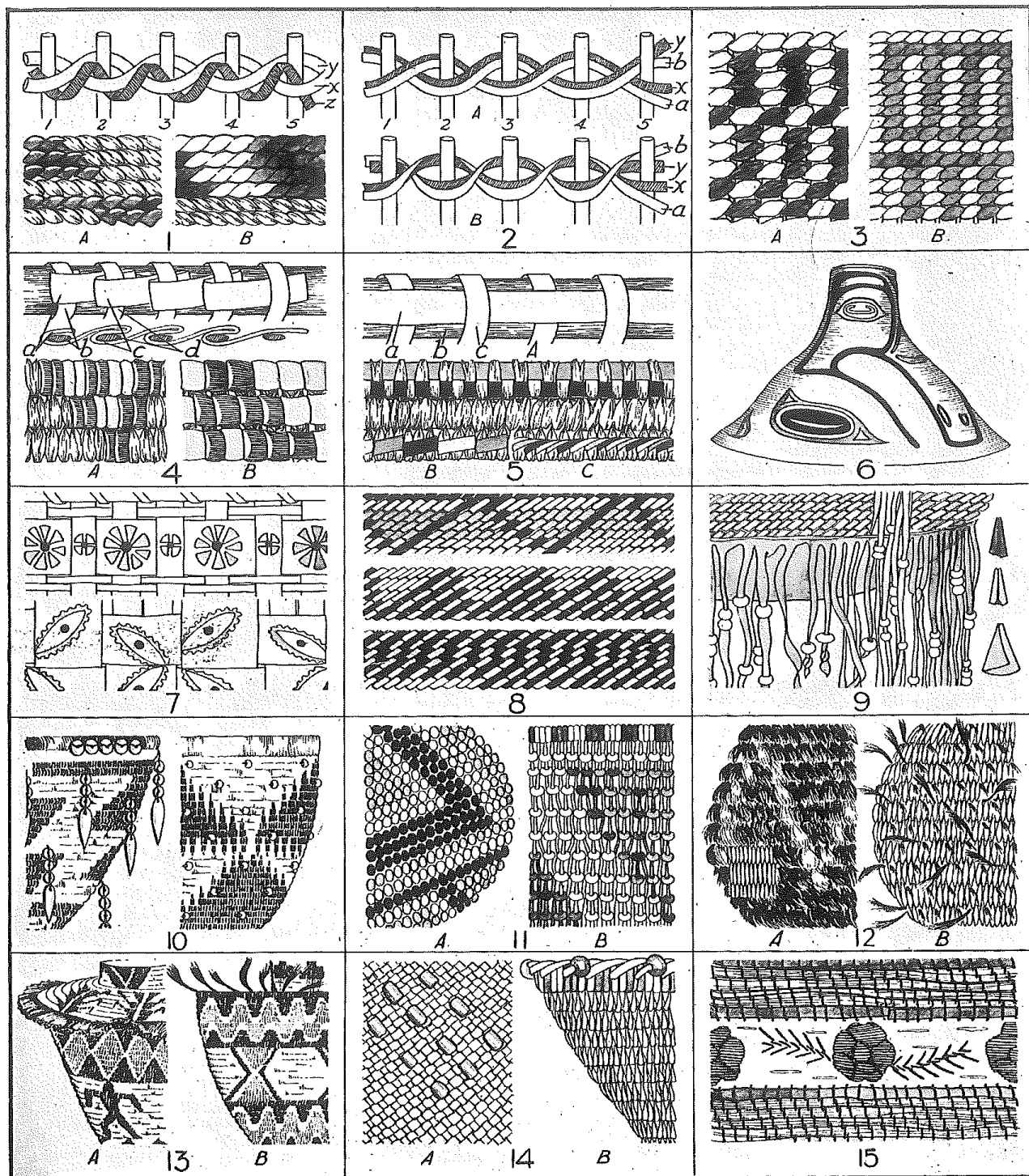


DENVER ART MUSEUM

1300 LOGAN STREET, DENVER, COLORADO

DEPARTMENT OF INDIAN ART

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BASKETRY DECORATION TECHNICS

LEAFLET 68

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1. **INTRODUCTORY.** Indian basketry is almost always decorated either with designs woven into the fabric, with materials applied to the surface, or with combinations of the two. This leaflet describes the technics used in these decorative processes. For details of the distribution and types of basketry see Leaflet 58, and Leaflet 67 for details of construction technics.

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2. **FALSE EMBROIDERY.** (1) This is a technic applied to plain twined basketry. In this structural method a pair of wefts, running horizontally, are crossed between and bind together vertical warps. The false embroidery is applied with a single strand of flexible material (z), usually a grass stem. This is wrapped tightly around the wefts (x and y) on the outside of the basket. Owing to the crossing of the wefts, the embroidery strand wraps around weft x outside warps 1, 3, 5, etc. and around weft y outside warps 2, 4, 6, etc. False embroidery material differs from that used in constructing the basket and stands out clearly. Its stitch shape also makes it very evident, for it is somewhat rhomboidal, while that of plain twining is more elliptical. It may also be distinguished by the slant of its stitches to the right. This slant is evident as the kinds of plain twining on which it is used have stitches which slant up to the left. The individual stitches of grass false embroidery, as on Tlinkit baskets, can be clearly seen (1-A). On that made with corn husk, as on Nez Perce bags, the stitches run together (1-B). The design does not show on the inside of the basket. This is also true of half twist overlay twining—see section 3—but in that technic all stitches are elliptical on both decorated and undecorated areas and slant in the same direction.

False embroidery is most used by the Tlinkit of southeastern Alaska and spreads south into Washington. The Tlinkit use grass dyed with several colors as well as that naturally colored yellow-white. Colored wool threads are also used in this manner on Nez Perce type wallets and both silk and wool on Aleut grass baskets.

3. **OVERLAY TWINING, HALF TWIST.** (2-A) This technic is applied to plain twined basketry, for a description of which see Section 2 of this leaflet and Section 11, Leaflet 67. Overlay twining is applied by laying an extra weft (a and b), of a material different to that used for construction, against and parallel with each of the two structural wefts (x and y). When the wefts—one structural and one decorative in pairs—are crossed between warps only a half twist is given, so that the decorative weft is always on the outside face of each structural weft. Through the agency of this half twist one decorative weft which is on the outer surface of the basket at warp 1 moves to a position against the inner surface of warp 2, and then to the outer surface of the basket at warp 3. At the same time the other decorative weft is outside at 2 and 4, inside at 3. Thus the decorative wefts appear only on the outside of the basket, the inside showing only the structural wefts without a design. The superficial resemblance of this style to false embroidery is discussed toward the end of Section 2 of this leaflet.

This technic is most used by the tribes in the northwest corner of California and adjoining section of Oregon. Karok, Yurok, Hupa and Tolowa are examples (3-B). It is also used by the tribes about Puget Sound, such as the Skokomish (3-A). Shiny, yellowish-white bear grass, *Xerophyllum tenax*, is the most common material, with black maiden hair fern and woodwardia fern dyed red in second place. Some yellow dyed porcupine quills are used.

4. **OVERLAY TWINE, FULL TWIST.** (2-B) In this technic the structural wefts are covered with decorative wefts as described in Section 3. The difference between it and that described in Section 3 lies in the fact that when these pairs of wefts are crossed between warps they are given a full twist. This throws the decorative wefts (a and b) lying against the structural wefts (x and y) on both the inner and outer surfaces of the basket, the design showing on both sides. The common materials are those listed in Section 3. This method of decoration is used only in the northeast corner of California by such groups as the Pit River tribes, the Shasta and the northern Maidu.

5. **BEADING** (5) is a decorative technic applied to coiled basketry. A strip of material (a) different from that used in constructing the basket is sewed on the outer surface of a coil (b) with the structural stitching (c). Before a stitch is pulled tight the end of this extra strip is slipped under it. The stitch is then pulled tight, binding the end of the strip in place. It is slipped under other stitches along the coil, usually, but not always, every other one, until entirely in place. The technic produces a row of colored squares or rectangles on the outside of the coil (A). By varying the lengths of beading on adjoining coils quite elaborate geometric designs can be executed. Beading may also be applied diagonally in two styles (B and C). It should be noted that "beading" in this sense has nothing to do with decoration with china or other beads.

Beading is most used by the Salish tribes in south central British Columbia, such as the Thompson River and Lillooet, and by tribes of a similar culture in Washington, such as the Klickitat. The Alaska Eskimo also use this technic.

6. IMBRICATION (4) is closely related to beading—see Section 5 of this leaflet. The name comes from the Latin word *imbrex*, a tile, and is given to this decorative technic because of its resemblance to rows of tiles or shingles in place. It is a method confined to coiled basketry, though possible to execute on twining as is shown by a specimen in the Laboratory of Anthropology in Santa Fe.

The technic is an elaboration of beading (5), both being basically processes of sewing decorative elements on the outer surface of coiled basketry. In imbrication the end of a strip of material (a) differing from that used in constructing the basket is bent under. The bent section is slipped under a structural stitch (b), which is then pulled tight. The strip is then folded back on itself (c) for the width of the next structural stitch (d), which passes between the two members of the fold so that when it is pulled tight it is completely covered by the decorative strip. This folding back process is continued for the length of the decoration on the coil. Large areas containing many coils may be covered in this manner, which heightens the tiled roof effect. Long, rather narrow bands and small isolated areas may also be executed. The width of the imbricated stitches varies considerably. Two finished sections are shown (4-A and 4-B). The decorative materials may be of several colors. The designs do not appear on the inside of the basket.

Imbrication is restricted to the tribes of south central British Columbia, such as the Thompson River and Lillooet, and of the adjoining area in Washington, the Klickitat and Yakima being examples.

7. NATURALLY COLORED STRUCTURAL MATERIALS account for a good proportion of the designs on baskets. Of the baskets so decorated most have a light background on which appear designs in shades of red-brown, black or both. These colored materials are prepared as strips for sewing or as wefts for twining and serve in the construction just as much as do the light background materials. In the Southwest and in southwestern California and Nevada black is usually from the seed pods of the devil's claw or *martynia* and red from yucca root. Green and yellow yucca leaves are used by the Mescalero. In many parts of California the natural colors are black fern and red red-bud bark. There are other colors which are listed in reference 2.

8. DYED MATERIALS have a rather limited part in decorative technic. In a few areas considerable groups of bright colors are used. The Hopi do more dyeing in wider range of colors than any other group. In recent years they have abandoned aniline dyes in favor of their own. These dyed materials are used structurally and not for decoration only. The Tlinkit, Makah and Nootka of the Northwest coast region are also users of much dyed material, which is decorative among the Tlinkit and structural among the other two. Among these peoples aniline dyes are now largely used. Other groups which use dyeing to some extent are the Jicarilla, the Mission and neighboring groups, some northern California tribes who make a red alder dye, and various tribes in the Southeast, especially the Chitimacha and Choctaw. Except for the northern California tribes all of these groups last mentioned use dye on structural materials.

9. PAINTING of decorations is a technic used but little. The Northwest coast tribes paint their characteristic totemic designs on basket hats (6), which are the most elaborately painted of all Indian baskets. The Apache paint a few simple designs (8) on their twined burden baskets. The Pima use a little red paint on a very occasional basket and the Maricopa sometimes smeared their work with pink. This tribe also paints designs on the basketry hoods of cradles. In the Northeast some Algonkin tribes of New England and the Iroquoian Oneida painted or stamped conventionalized flowers on their splint basketry (7).

10. DECORATIVE TRIMMINGS. By this expression is meant leather fringes, beads of various kinds, feathers and other materials sewed or otherwise fastened to basketry as decorations. This form of ornamentation is not common. The Apache trim their twined burden baskets (9) with skin fringes, often strung with large beads, and with conical tin jinglers. The Pomo use more decorative trimmings than any other tribe. Beads (10), both commercial and native, are sewn on the surfaces and rims of baskets or hang from them in pendants; and brilliant feathers are woven into coiled basketry so as to dot (12-B) or entirely cover the surface (12-A). Several California and Nevada groups entirely cover the surface of coiled baskets with beads. The beads are either sewn in place (11-B) or worked into tight netting which fits the surface closely (11-A). The Nootka sometimes weave a few large beads into their plaited baskets (14-A). The Yokuts and neighboring tribes work red yarn fringes (13-A) or black quail feathers (13-B) into the shoulders of their bottleneck baskets. The Pima occasionally have a few large beads, usually blue, fastened

around the rims of basket bowls (14-B). The delicate basketry of the Aleutian tribes is trimmed with patterns worked with colored silk or wool threads. Commercial yarns are also used for the false embroidery on Nez Perce type wallets. Finally, the Algonkin tribes of the Great Lakes region often insert sections of porcupine quill trimmed birchbark in their sweet grass coiled baskets (15).

Compiled by F. H. Douglas from the following sources:

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6. Yurok-Karok Basket Weavers—L. M. O'Neale. Publications in American Archeology and Ethnology, Vol. 32, No. 1, 1932.
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12. Decorative Art and Basketry of the Cherokee—F. G. Speck. Bulletin, Vol. 2, No. 2. 1920.

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All references have many illustrations. The plate figures are adapted in part from references 2, 3, 9 and 13.