

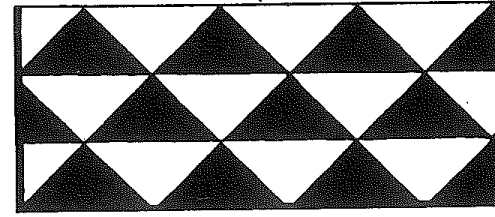
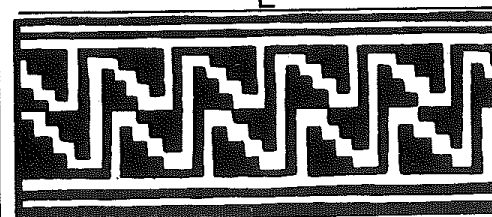
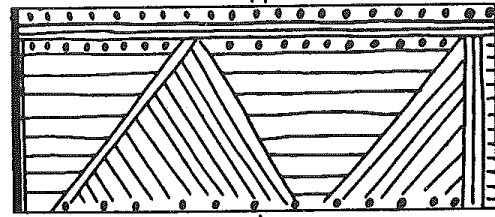
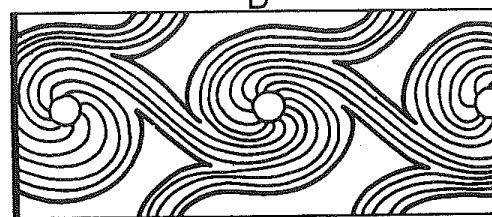
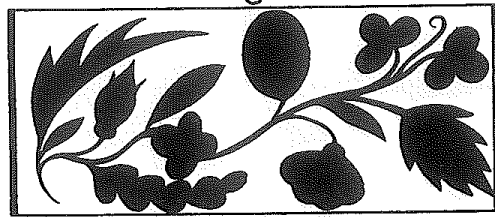
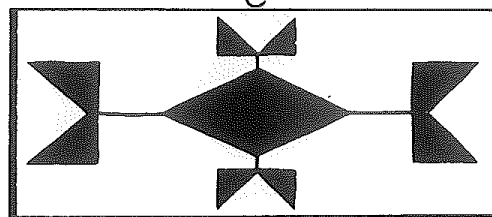
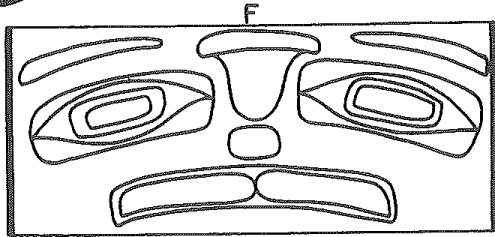
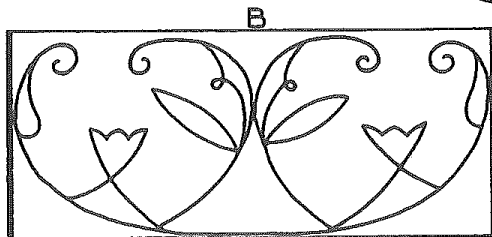
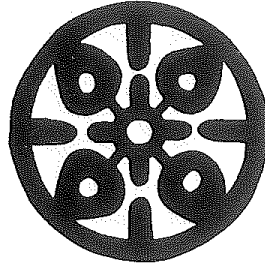
DENVER ART MUSEUM

1300 LOGAN STREET, DENVER, COLORADO

DEPARTMENT OF INDIAN ART

WILLENA D. CARTWRIGHT, CURATOR

FREDERIC H. DOUGLAS, EDITOR



Typical Designs from Nine Design Areas
(Acknowledgments on last page)

DESIGN AREAS IN INDIAN ART

LEAFLET 62

JULY, 1934

5th Printing, July, 1951

1. INTRODUCTORY. America north of Mexico may be divided into a number of areas containing centers of artistic development. Each of these areas is marked by the presence of a design style peculiar to it, of which the elements are designs common in varying degrees to all the tribes in the area. The rather indefinite boundaries of these areas often cut through those of tribal or even culture areas. Where the influences from two or more centers meet are usually to be found designs showing combinations of these influences. Some parts of the country have no definite styles of their own, showing only combinations of the styles of adjoining areas. Thus the Oregon-Washington area makes designs influenced by the Northwest Coast, the Plains and California; the Plateau or Interior Basin of the Rockies is influenced by the Plains, the Southwest and California; the Mississippi Valley is influenced by the Plains and the Northeast.

This leaflet is a brief description of nine of the most important of these design areas. The space available only permits locating each area, giving a general statement of its most important design style, and mentioning the principal kinds of art work. The large number of variations of the basic designs and many kinds of designs not in the prevailing style must be passed over.

2. ILLUSTRATIONS. The designs shown on the cover have been picked at random from a mass of material as characteristic examples of the art of each center. It must be understood that all of the designs from each area do not resemble those shown. Many designs from any area show so little apparent resemblance to each other that only a person familiar with the basic principals of design in that area can trace the relationship. This is especially true of the Southwest, where there are dozens of kinds of designs, and furthermore, a lack of any one basic style as distinctive as is found in the Northeast or Northwest. Nevertheless a careful study of the cover will give students a good idea of the design styles discussed in what follows.

3. NORTHWEST PACIFIC COAST. The coast line of southeastern Alaska and of British Columbia is the home of a design style which is based on more or less conventionalized representations of human and animal figures, or parts of them (F). Birds and sea creatures are included in the term "animal". Carving, both in relief and in the round, painting and weaving are the means of expressing these artistic ideas. Carving is by far the most important, the greatest development of Indian sculpture being found in this area.

The special characteristic of the style is the easily curving line, not moving in regular geometric forms, but enclosing the various parts of the animal designs in subtle and irregular curves. Sharp curves are in the minority and straight or angular lines are rarely seen. Soft, rich primary colors appear in the three technics using this style. The totem pole is the best known artistic product of this area. Scattered throughout the region is an angular, geometric style which appears on basketry. See reference 14 for additional pictures and information. See Leaflet 79-80.

4. CALIFORNIA. Basketry is the great art of this area. The triangle is the foundation of a very large proportion of the designs. Groups or masses of various shaped triangles (I), or sharply angled designs which can be broken up into triangles occur more commonly than any other type of designs. Parallelograms, frequently oblong, are of quite frequent occurrence. Curves are unusual and scarce. Human and animal figures are not uncommon in the southern part of the area. See reference 1-5 for additional pictures and information.

5. SOUTHWEST. This area, which includes Arizona, New Mexico and the edges of adjoining states, is the richest in the variety of art technics and design styles. These are so numerous that a separate leaflet must be devoted to them.

To characterize the art of this area is hardly possible, but a few tentative suggestions can be made. Angular designs predominate (E). Right angles seem to be more common than other forms, perhaps because of the large number of textile arts—including basketry—which by the nature of their construction develop right-angled designs. Acute or obtuse angles are, however, very common. Curves are decidedly in the minority, though plentiful on certain kinds of pottery and basketry. Sculpture, weaving, pottery, basketry, painting, beadwork and even quillwork are all made in this area. See references 22-23 for additional pictures and information.

6. PLAINS. This area includes the territory from the Rockies to the Mississippi and from Texas to well across the Canadian border. The southern portion is very little developed artistically, but in the central and northern sections a strong school of design exists. Bead embroidery is the most important medium of expression, with painting on skin and quill embroidery as minor arts. Quillwork was once the most important art, but it has been almost entirely supplanted by beadwork in the last 100 years.

The triangle is the most widespread and characteristic design element. Here it is used alone or in simple, rather spread out combinations (C) far removed from the massed effects found in California. The tall, acute angled form is the most common, though other forms occur. Square elements are used, especially by the Blackfoot, who use the square almost exclusively. The triangular style reaches its highest development among the Sioux and Arapaho. See Leaflet 73-74.

The fondness for the triangle carries over into the field of painting, for the geometric paintings of the women on rawhide parfleches or carrying cases are largely based on the triangle. The painting art of the men is realistic and forms the secondary design style of the area. See references 17-19 for additional pictures and information. See Leaflet 77-78.

7. OHIO MOUND BUILDERS. From this area, centering in Ohio and spreading to many adjoining states, the only Indian art is that which survives from prehistoric times. The influence of this artistic center spread very widely through the Middle West. Animal sculpture, executed in stone, is the finest product of the area. The best of these carvings, which are in the form of tobacco pipes, rank very high in the list of great sculpture. Thin plates of hammered native copper (A) were cut into curving openwork designs. Similarly cut plates of mica and pottery are the other artistic products of the area.

In this area lies the western edge of the division of the whole country in which curving designs predominate. Generally speaking angular designs are found in the western half of the United States and curving designs in the eastern half.

8. SOUTHEAST. This area is that occupied by the southern states of today east of the Mississippi River. In this large territory once lived many tribes with a high native civilization. The descendants of these people now live elsewhere, but the design style of the region is preserved on the hundreds of pottery vessels which have been excavated from mounds and graves.

The most characteristic design element of this area is the curving scroll (D), appearing in many forms from the tight spiral to bands of parallel irregularly flowing lines. The designs are cut into the surface of the clay. Painted designs are not common except in the Arkansas region. The secondary design style of the area is based on animal and bird forms.

The beautiful, flowing scroll designs, so full of gentle yet ceaseless movement, display a mastery of the problems of execution and artistic expression of the highest order. It is unfortunate that they are not better known to the public. See references 20-21 for additional pictures and information.

9. GREAT LAKES. The tribes living in Canada and in the United States near the western Great Lakes, and in the upper Mississippi Valley have for something over 100 years been developing a design style of much interest and influence.

The style is marked by semi-realistic representations of plants and flowers in bead embroidery on cloth (G). The style is the outgrowth of the meeting of an aboriginal Indian art based on curving lines (see section 10) with the floral style existing in France in the 17th and 18th centuries. While the white man has contributed the materials used in creating the designs and a good part of the artistic ideas, the Indians have made the style so much their own that it has come to be one of the leading design styles and one which is inseparably connected with the Great Lakes region.

The style is called semi-realistic because though each leaf or flower may be quite true to nature, many different kinds of fruit or flowers are often made to appear on one plant.

Designs of a similar character, though usually of a less realistic nature, are executed in silk applique embroidery on cloth and by scraping or painting on birchbark. See references 6-8 for additional pictures and information.

10. NORTHEAST. This area centers in southeastern Canada, in New Brunswick and in Maine. The design style found here has spread over a very large area in the northeastern quarter of the United States, in southern Canada as far west as the Rockies and in central Canada up to Alaska. It has even invaded the western Plains in recent years.

The design style is based on the double curve, or two incomplete incurving spirals (B). This basic design appears in an infinite number of variations which occur in bead embroidery, painted on skin or etched on birchbark. This design is the native element in the floral style described in section 9. See references 11-13 for additional pictures and information.

11. IROQUOIS. New York State was the center of a design area reaching up into southeastern Canada and south through the states adjoining New York. This style is now extinct, but is preserved on pottery vessels. The designs were incised or carved in the clay.

The style is based on the straight line (H), in marked contrast to the common eastern tendency to prefer curving designs. The straight lines appear in angular combinations of groups of parallels. A moderate degree of elaboration is usual.

While the Iroquois preferred the straight line designs for their pottery vessels, their clay pipes were modeled with a high degree of realism, human and animal forms being the preferred subjects. The modeled type of sculpture, in contrast with the carved type, found its greatest development among Indians in these Iroquois pipes. See references 9-10 for additional pictures and information.

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

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Acknowledgments of cover designs:

A, Field Museum; B, Canada Geological Survey; C, American Museum of Natural History; D and G, Bureau of American Ethnology; E, Phillips Academy, Andover; F, *Primitive Art*, Boas; H, New York State Museum; I, University of California.