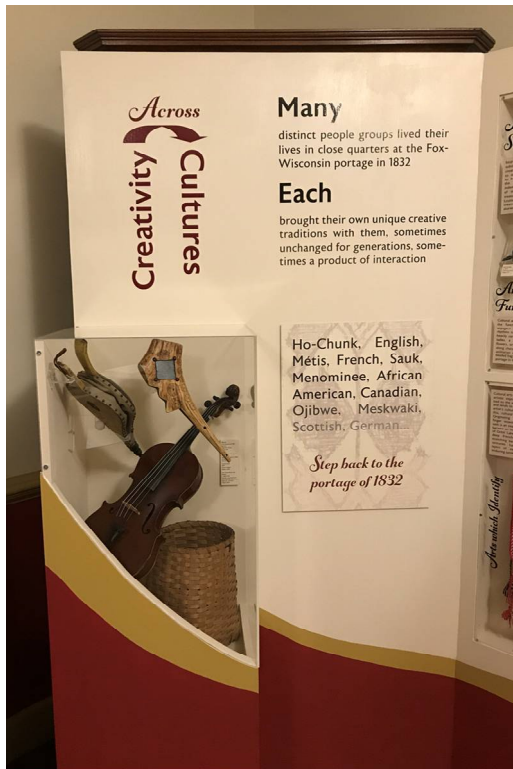


“Common Threads” Special Exhibit

Funded with grants from the Community Foundation of South Central Wisconsin & the Chipstone Foundation



Common Threads: The Creative Arts of 1832

Creativity Across Cultures

Many distinct people groups lived their lives in close quarters at the Fox-Wisconsin portage in 1832.

Each brought their own unique creative traditions with them, sometimes unchanged for generations, sometimes a product of interaction.

Ho-Chunk, English, Métis, French, Sauk, Menominee, African American, Canadian, Ojibwe, Meskwaki, Scottish, German...

Step back to the portage of 1832.

Common Threads Video Series:

<https://www.agencyhouse.org/common-threads>

Arts which Strengthen

Intangible traditions make up a substantial proportion of cultural creative arts. These often serve to strengthen, to lift spirits, or to be a cathartic diversion for the portage's enslaved and indentured community, the arts of storytelling and song were treasured. The Kinzie's servant Louisa frequently referenced the creative and often humorous stories told her by "Uncle Ephraim."



Arts which Function

Cultural arts trend heavily toward the functional, whether it be voyageur paddling songs with rhythms to help oars keep time, heavily carved wooden Ho-Chunk ladles, a bellows painted with flowers, or stories meant to pass along character lessons. Arts with utilitarian purposes, such as this beaded bag, figured strongly at the portage in 1832.

Cultural arts are distinctive. Every artistic expression is inseparably tied to the person who created it and tends to reflect aspects of the artist's cultural realm. Because of this, cultural arts often identify. Originating from indigenous finger weaving roots, the Meis saah is an example of an art which became an iconic personal symbol of Great Lakes Métis heritage. Its deep French-Indigenous history stretching back more than three centuries has combined many layers of meaning, within this enduring symbol of Métis identity.

Arts which Identify



Creative arts play many roles in people's lives. Investigate some of these common threads within cultural creative arts.

When we stand back, diverse creative expressions blend into a beautiful tapestry attesting to our shared human experience. Each connecting thread offers a chance to appreciate the differences which make people unique while reflecting on the commonalities that tie us together across cultural lines.

Value the differences

Appreciate the common threads

Dig deeper with our online video series



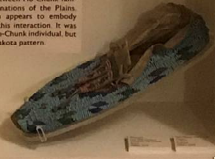
Arts which Strike the Fancy

All cultures at the portage embraced the idea of endowing everyday objects with artistic designs conceived in the imagination, often unrelated to the object's use. The Euro-Americans of the 1800s called a person's imagination their "fancy." Eastern workshops shook up the decorative-arts status quo by designing their wares with concepts from their own personal fancy—something which had always been done, just now on a uniquely widespread scale. These crests are prime examples of such objects whose creative styling extends well beyond their physical use.



Arts which Interconnect

Virtually every artifact is in some way a product of, or influenced by, the interaction of people groups. The tragic history of forced expulsion resulted in Ho-Chunk families being driven from their homeland near the territories of other tribes. This uprooting occasioned close interaction between Ho-Chunk families and the nations of the Plains. This moccasin appears to embody the result of this interaction. It was crafted by a Ho-Chunk individual, but was cut in a Dakota pattern.



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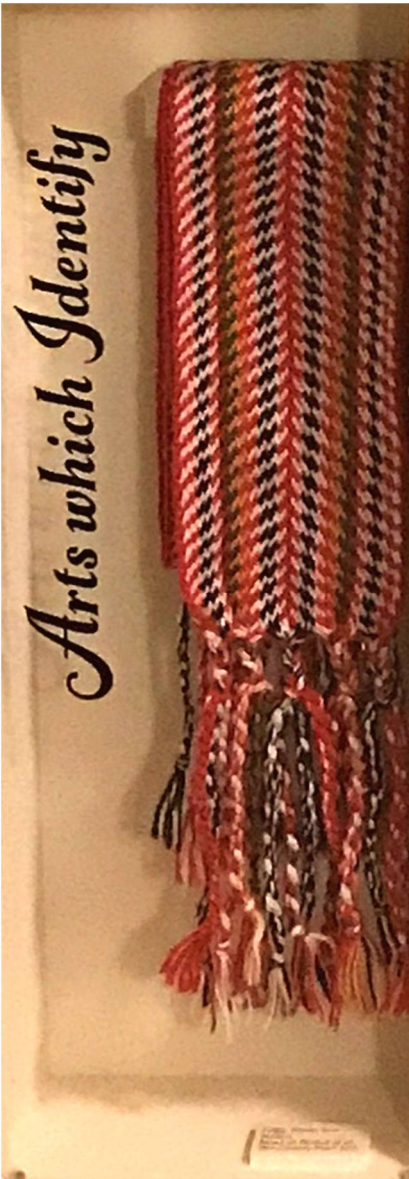
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Arts which Identify

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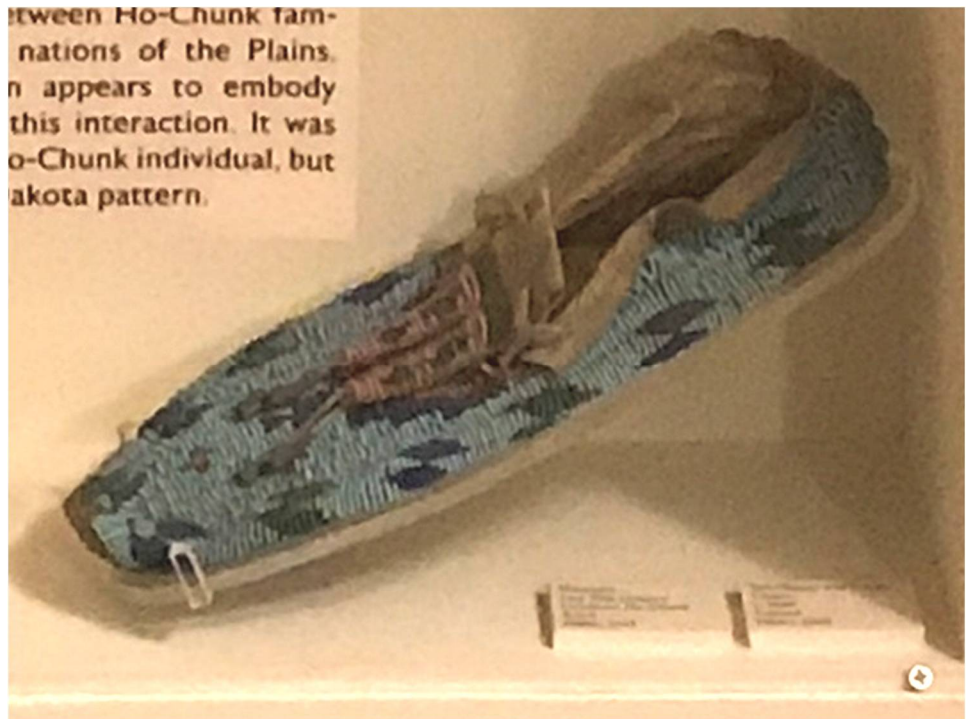
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Ho-Chunk arts that...

convey

Cultural arts often convey intangible meanings in the form of physical objects. These object-based links to cultural ideology are found in many settings. Twined fiber bags often depicted family clan imagery. Ho-Chunk storytelling was often the basis for familiar motifs in physical arts. One prevalent character in these stories was the rabbit, which is memorialized in this beaded hare.

Beaded Hare
19th Century
University of Wisconsin
Madison
Object 1974a

Photo of Twined Bag
1-303
Special Section of 19th
Century
P2326.2



express

The Ho-Chunk flute is a highly expressive instrument with a traditional role in embodying feelings in the context of courting—a role which was adapted to other occasions, from celebration and dancing to mourning.

Beaded Ho-Chunk Flute
1-303
Chicago Art Institute Museum
PMP-10-02-10001



adapt

Ho-Chunk arts were adapted to aid in families' survival. Black ash basketry was transformed from a practical necessity to an externally marketable commodity which was traded and sold to help feed families. What is now an iconic form of Ho-Chunk fine art blossomed from the troubled soils of 19th century hardship.

Ho-Chunk Black Ash Basket
c. 1800-1850
Pencil drawing from Fur Culture
Departmental Records, UW-Madison
Object 2007



and endure

Despite determined efforts to suppress and eliminate Ho-Chunk cultural expression over the course of two centuries, traditional arts endure today. Through the efforts of dedicated teachers, cultural creative arts can span generations, linking the past to the present.

Ho-Chunk Beaded Basket
20th Century
University of Wisconsin
Madison
Object 1974a

Ho-Chunk Black Ash Basket
19th Century
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Object 2007



...both in spite of and because of
Times of Trauma

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Case Study: Flutes of the World

Mechanically splitting air to make the musical tones of flutes runs deep in humanity's history. As families spread across the globe, they took with them strong musical customs on their journeys.

There is perhaps no artifact which so strikingly portrays both creative distinction and common threads as flutes. This type of instrument has been diversified within nearly every culture across the globe as people applied their creativity to innovating, refining, and adapting this musical tradition. Examine this small sampling of replica flutes from all corners of the earth.

Splitting Air, Connecting Cultures