



Carvings and Commerce: Model Totem Poles, 1880-2010

Michael D. Hall, Pat Glascock

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Native carvers supplying curios for the Pacific Northwest souvenir trade in the late 1800s created the first model totem poles. Over time, totem poles came to be perceived as generalized icons of "Indian life" and Native groups all across North America began making model totems for the ever-expanding tourism industry that attended the popularization of automobile travel. By the middle of the 20th century, totems were being produced by a variety of non-Native groups, including Boy Scouts and hobby crafters. Today, Native artists in both the United States and Canada have revitalized the model totem pole tradition, sharing it with a growing fine art audience.

Carvings and Commerce recreates an exhibition at the Mendel Art Gallery in Saskatoon, Canada, in the summer of 2010, which traced the history of model totem poles from the end of the 19th century to the present time. A group of internationally recognized scholars and artists examine the issues of politics, economics, cultural identity, tradition, and aesthetics that have shaped the evolution of the model totem pole for over a hundred and thirty years.

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