

WC 8308013

Sioux-Métis coat, 1870s

This coat is an outstanding example of the art style utilized by Métis living among the Western Sioux in the 1870s. Its tailoring, including the “tail”, is similar to quillworked versions of the 1840s (see WC 8808030), and several design elements are beadworked versions of “Sioux” quillwork. This coat has a cotton cloth lining and red cloth appliqué work on the lapels. It made its first appearance as Lot 264 in Sotheby’s New York auction of October 23, 1981.

In the discussion of the quillworked coat (WC 8808030), reference was made to the many Canadian Métis who assimilated into the Indian population of the Upper Missouri region in the 1850s. Several families were adopted by the Mandan-Hidatsa-Arikara in North Dakota; large numbers of intermarried Métis led to the formation of a “Half-breed” band among the Yankton-Sioux. Among the Teton-Sioux, Métis communities emerged on the Rosebud and Pine Ridge Indian reservations in South Dakota. Changing their identity came natural to the Métis, and their descendents are all enrolled as Indians.

The spread of a curvilinear and floral art style among these Sioux tribes is often ascribed to influence from Cree Indians. Persistent is also the assumption that these whimsical, highly stylized floral designs, often combined with stars and abstract forms, are of eastern Sioux origin in Minnesota. However, none of this work is firmly documented as such. But elderly people among the Teton have explicitly identified this art style as that of the “Flower Beadwork People”, i.e. their own “breed” families. Collecting only “traditional” works, the early museum ethnologists largely ignored this Métis art, or ascribed it to the Cree, etc.

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