

Plains Pictorial Art: Narrative Style

INTRODUCTION TO HIS FIGHT'S HORSE RAID

Recommended for All Grades



Painted muslin by His Fight (Hunkpapa Lakota) depicting a horse raid against the Apsáalooke (Crow), ca. 1880. South Dakota or North Dakota. National Museum of the American Indian. (6/7932)

Background

Pictorial Drawing

Pictorial drawing was originally practiced by the tribes of the North American Plains region. Historically created by men, Plains Indian pictographic works recorded important events of individuals or their community. These would include battle or horse raiding scenes, personal and spiritual experiences, and hunting prowess. Many communities also kept pictorial calendars.

In historical pictorial drawing, bone, stone, and wood tools were used to apply pigments to the surface of animal hides and other media. After new materials became available through trade, drawings were also created with pens and pencils on cloth, such as

cotton muslin, and in sketchbooks. The new materials made it easier for the artists to illustrate important details.

When recording their events, Plains Indian artists only drew elements that were critical to tell the story. As a result, important figures were sometimes large, symbols referenced aspects of the story, and most figures were drawn in profile, with identifiers used to note important players.

Pictorial artists indicated motion in several ways. For example, human footprints show movement in a specific direction.

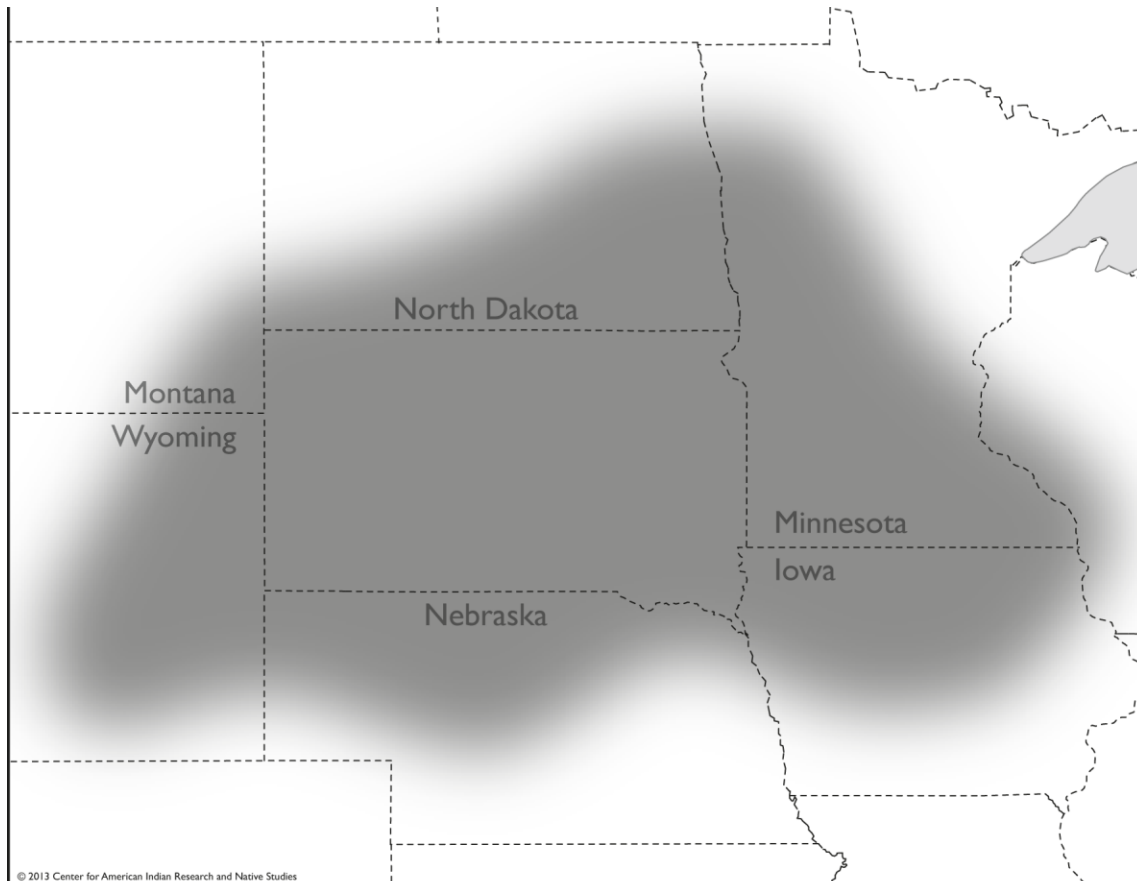


His Fight's footprints, showing motion

His Fight's Horse Raiding Adventure

This piece of artwork comes from the Hunkpapa Lakota (HUNK-papa la-KO-ta) and was created on muslin cloth in about 1880 by His Fight, a Hunkpapa Lakota artist. The Lakota belong to the Oceti Sakowin (O-CHE-tee shaw-KO-wee), a union of three linguistically related groups of people: the Dakota, Lakota, and Nakota. The word *kota* or *koda* means "friend." The Hunkpapa (Campers at the Horn) are one of seven subdivisions, or bands, of the Lakota. The Oceti Sakowin has also been known historically as the Sioux Nation. The Dakota, Lakota, and Nakota lived separately during parts of the year across much of what is now North and South Dakota, Minnesota, Iowa, Nebraska, Wyoming, and Montana. Often, the people came together for trade, ceremonies, marriage, and to support one another in times of danger.

Oceti Sakowin Lands, ca. 1849



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The Importance of the Horse

Since its introduction to North America, the horse transformed life for Native people and made life significantly easier. Because of their value, owning horses and giving them as gifts became a sign of wealth. Horse raids provided an opportunity for young men to demonstrate their bravery. Plains men would often sneak into enemy camp, risking their lives to take prized horses. In order to avoid capture, injury, or worse, they had to be very smart to avoid a negative outcome. The taking of an enemy's horse was a brave achievement that merited praise and honor from family, friends, and the whole community. Returning from a successful raid with many horses elevated the man's status within his community.

Horses are still important to Plains tribes. Today they are given to community members during ceremonies and other special occasions.