

## **The Traveling Medicine Show**

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The Hockaday Museum of Art is celebrating being awarded an *Indian Education for All Montana Implementation Assistance Grant* from the Montana Office of Public Instruction. The \$24,000 grant will finance *Indian Art and Cultural Trunks with Resident Artist* - a collaborative project between the Hockaday Museum and artists of the Blackfeet Nation.

Excitement is running high among Hockaday Museum staff and Blackfeet artists who will work in partnership to design and produce three, traveling trunks for Native American Studies classes in Flathead, Lake and Lincoln County schools. Christened the *Traveling Medicine Show* by its artists, the project will bring artifacts, display materials, hands-on activities, and members of the Blackfeet Nation themselves directly to students. Participating classes will explore the history, culture and traditional practices of the Northern Plains Indians and discover how each has influenced the other across time and territory. Already, nine artists from Browning are collaborating closely with the Hockaday to develop the trunks.

Perspective, spirit, talent and vision characterize the project team membership. David Dragonfly, artist and Director of the Museum of the Plains Indian will consult in the creation of each trunk and assist in contracting with Indian artists to fashion replicas of historical Indian objects and art. Two notable, artist-educators collaborating on the project are Richard Horn and Darnell Rides at the Door, both members of the Blackfeet Tribe. Ms. Rides at the Door will also serve as an ongoing consultant and occasional trainer for the Hockaday Museum's Education Department and Volunteer Docents.

Several project artists from the Blackfeet Nation will play an integral role in a host of educational experiences at the schools – for the purpose of engaging students in projects that clarify relationships between the mundane and a people's place in history.

The first trunk, called the Ancient Case, will focus on early art and artists of the Blackfeet and other Northern Plains Tribes. In it will be artifacts once considered contemporary, including Blackfeet language tapes and cultural games sure to ignite the enthusiasm of school children as they learn new vocabulary and play new games from long ago times. Other treasures planned for the Ancient Case are a parfleche case, bow and arrow, shield, hide scraper, bladder bag, horn spoon and club. Their significance in function, fashion and tradition will be the subjects of many fascinating school lessons.

Traditional clothing design and ornamentation - and the evolution and significance of native dance and drum are central themes for the second trunk. Contents planned for the Traditional Case include moccasins of different materials, a horse stick and stand, dolls with and without a face, amulets for girls and boys, a cradle board, drum and pipe. History will come alive for students as they learn the stories behind each article, and they will experience traditions of Blackfeet and Northern Plains cultures firsthand through modeling everyday and ceremonial dress, doing beadwork, and learning dance and drum techniques.

Artifacts and activities in the third trunk – the Contemporary Case – are intended to strike intriguing comparisons between perspectives of contemporary Indian artists and those of historic times. An antler comb, Blackfeet numbers book, jewelry, boy and girl puppets, a King Kuka print, painting by David Dragonfly, a parfleche case. The old reborn as new, the ancient reflected in the contemporary.

The Hockaday Museum of Art will host a ceremonial opening of the *Traveling Medicine Show* trunks on January 26 from 5-8pm. At that time contributing artists will take center-stage to tell the stories of items in the trunks: their significance in history, how they were made, and what they represent to the collection and the project. Details of inspiration, effort, struggle, and success – each affording a privileged glimpse into the spirit and culture of an artist and a Nation.

The *Traveling Medicine Show* is at once fabulous, authentic and very much alive – a remarkable way for the Hockaday Museum to bring the marvels of art history to greater numbers of young people in Montana schools, and to effectively coordinate the focus of Museum Education Services with Native American Studies curriculum requirements.

Perhaps most important of all, this project is a chance to build a sacred bridge across a chasm of misunderstanding. For surely, as school children meet and experience the proud history and profound culture of the Blackfeet Nation and other Northern Plains Indians, they will gain respect and reverence for their native, fellow Montanans. Then they will teach the rest of us to live as one, diverse and peaceful brotherhood.