

Doug,

I am Northern Tutchone Elder from Selkirk First Nation and belong to the Selkirk First Nation Dance group. I would like to know about the fan feather and facial markings shown in this book. The fan feather was a Ft. Selkirk photo (which I have) of Ft. Selkirk dance group using this fan feather and my dad, the late Charlie Johnson was part of this dance group and facial markings was in another photo of Alfred women with facial marking. So, a group we wanted to introduce fan feather and facial marking into the group, but we need to know the meaning.

Dorothy

Hi Dorothy,

About the fan dance and the face markings....briefly I don't know much more than is written in my dissertation. But basically the use of various feather fans in dance was common throughout the whole region....when I say the whole region I am talking about Northern BC up though into Alaska. It seems that swan feathers were most often used...I think this is because that the swan was quite a sacred animal...its feathers were used by shamans and its thigh bone used as a drinking tube for girls during the puberty ritual....and by men when they had to observe some rituals themselves. Other bird feathers of course were such as eagle feathers but I think this was more to do with their size as opposed to be sacred as eagles were not a such important bird to Yukon First Nations people...they only became popular because of outside influences....one being the demand from American soldiers/miners/tourists in the past as the eagle is the American symbol. Also from Pan-Indianism....the outside Native American influences that became popular from the movies and other media....those things that are considered "Native American" but mostly come from the plains such as the "Souring Eagle" and other eagle images...(along with the sacred fire, sweatlodges, sweetgrasses, etc). I have not seen Raven's feathers used in dances...this is not to say there were not it's just I have not seen them but they were used in girl's puberty ritual as a comb to symbolically keep the girls hair black all her life. It seems that the other birds for the Yukon from most important to least was something like this: Crow, Owl, Swan, seagulls (I think a symbol of trade with the coastal Tlingits)...and then it gets less clear but Camp Robbers, night jays and then wood peckers or eagles...which of course their feathers were favoured for making gopher snares....so it seems that eagles ranked around 7th for Yukon First Nations with the exception of the Inland Tlingits because of their coast links where the clans are Eagle (Wolf) and Raven (Crow)...so for the Southern Tutchone close to the coast the eagle to them is the same as the Wolf clan.

The dance wanes which look like dusters were 1st made of attaching wood pecker feathers to a stick...so when dusters showed up they simply replaced the making of the wanes with simply buying a duster....the one early feather wane I saw was basically stolen from a grave in the White River area so they were quite important at one time....

A major difference between the art from the Yukon and the coast is that on the coast they had many rules in their art while here in the interior the individual was most important as a result the art was very

individual...no two artists creating the identical images...maybe some things overall similar but the details being different. This goes also with the face painting. But there were some common designs such as the "pretty girl" design that enhanced the eyes and mouth....while the coastal Tlingits seemed to have set face designs in the interior a person could make their own designs....some of the basic ones was painting the whole face...red for good times...black for war or other bad times...Yukon First Nations used red as the first colour of choice....made from ochre and as a second common colour, used a lot less, was black made from charcoal. And any pattern could be made...by pressing dots on their face with fingers or drawing lines or covering whole area or parts of the face...

Thank you for identifying Charlie Johnson as a member of the dance group...which dancer is he? Do you know anything more about that photograph? You also mentioned an Alfred woman with face painting? Which image was that? As I do not know which image you are referring to.

OK Dorothy I hope this helps you....let me know if you have any more questions....

Kind regards,

Ukjese