



Date:

1860

Identifier:

T0048

Description:

Excerpt from the Thaw Catalog: The shield of the Plains Indian warrior was one of his most sacred possessions. Each had its own instructions concerning its ritual handling, wearer's face paint, magic songs and taboos to be respected. Revealed in visions or dreams, the painted design was essentially war medicine. As most of these sacred shields were given by spirits of the sky, they were never allowed to touch the ground. Elderly war veterans were blessed with such dreams, and on request they made the shields for young men at the start of their careers. In order to prevent the loss of the shield's magic powers, the old men often did not reveal the precise meaning of its decorations. For the same reason the design painted on the shield was exposed only in warfare, when it was believed to confuse the enemy and protect the owner. This strong emphasis on the magical qualities of the shield may have developed after the introduction of firearms, when the heavy shields proved to be cumbersome in warfare on horseback. As the protective powers were believed to be fully present in every part of the sacred gift, warriors might take only a shield-cover or some of its pendants along on their escapades.

Physical dimensions:

diameter 22.5 in

Format:

Shield

Coverage:

Montana ; Apsaalooke (Crow)

American Indian Art

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