



# CHILKAT BLANKETS

ARTISTIC MASTERPIECES



*The Raven's Tail Robe*



*The Inviter*

Paintings by Bill Holm

# CHILKAT BLANKETS

## ARTISTIC MASTERPIECES

No single artifact more dramatically evokes the richness of northern Northwest Coast culture than the Chilkat blanket. Yet there is no evidence to show that it predates European contact on the Northwest Coast and much to suggest that the blanket as we know it is a nineteenth century development. This does not imply that the classic Chilkat blanket owes anything at all to European influences. Its antecedents were well established on several parts of the coast at the time of contact, and some of the earliest European explorers collected examples of what seem to be experimental textiles that anticipate the kind of control of twined tapestry techniques which eventually enabled northern weavers to copy elaborate formline paintings—the basis of the classic Chilkat blanket.

Excerpted from an article by Bill Holm  
Professor and Curator of Northwest Coast Indian Art  
at the Burke Museum, University of Washington  
As published in *American Indian Art* Winter 1982



Tolon (Chief) Kotlean, Sitka (Baranov) Island, weaving northern geometric robe. The image, painted in 1818 by Mikhail Tilkanov, is the earliest known record of Northwest Coast attire.



Ganyaa  
Painting by Bill Holm

# RAVEN'S TAIL WEAVING

## WOVEN BY DELORES CHURCHILL

Often confused as early examples of Chilkat blankets, Raven's Tail weavings are of a very separate style and construction. Geometric in design, they were the first Northwest Coast robes seen and described in the early contact with European explorers. First recorded by the early expeditions to the area around the mid 1700s and made of similar materials, such as mountain goat wool, they were of a primarily white background and had horizontal elements of black, brown and yellow.

Raven's Tail weavings are rectilinear in shape rather than five-sided, as the Chilkats are, they are completely different in execution and design. Weaving is done in a very clean manner in individual rows across the entire weaving. Each horizontal row geometrically builds from the pattern established in the designer's mind. The weaver moves from side boarder to side boarder, whereas with Chilkats the weaving is separated into small design areas with each pattern being developed individually.

This Raven's Tail weaving is by Delores Churchill of Haida descent, Ketchikan, Alaska. She is a renowned weaver and recipient of numerous awards, including the National Heritage Fellowship Award bestowed upon her by the National Endowment for the Arts.

1996  
61" wide  
From the Kovalik Family Collection



# MITAKUYE OYASIN

## WOVEN BY CHERYL SAMUEL

*A prayer of oneness and harmony with all forms of life: other people, animals, birds, insects, trees, plants, and even rocks, rivers, mountains and valleys.*

*Mitakuye Oyasin*—a contemporary robe with patterns speaking of global community... The name is a Lakota word which translates as “all my relations” or “we are all one.” Using the theme of “oneness,” I gathered representatives from the natural world: animals: buffalo, mountain goat, baby alpaca, merino, silk, deer; beaver; sea creatures: abalone; plants: yellow cedar; minerals: turquoise, copper. ... The black border represents the Dark Matter in the universe that surrounds us all... In the Chilkat panel I have used the black, white, and green of the oldest robes, along with Chilkat blue... and some striking red figures woven in red silk. The central “bib” is an interpretation of kapa patterns from Hawaii, the island of my birth. It is woven in the natural colors of baby alpaca wool... The teal/black geometric border has patterns which depict my passionate relationship with cultures around the Pacific Rim...

The Tlingit “Ancestors” pattern is at the top, honouring my deep connection with [Raven’s Tail] weaving. ... Across the top of the formline design is a pattern inspired by Juan Quesada and the Mata Ortiz potters. ... The bottom border is a taaniko pattern... The formline design is an Eagle... “...a white bird flying between cultures.” [I was] adopted Kaagwaantaan, Eagle/Wolf, in the village of Klukwan, and the “bird” became an eagle. The row of abalone shells rides underneath the kapa bib. I added a floating fringe of deer hide, and copper cones on the bottom of the buffalo and cedar warp ends. Sheared and plucked beaver is wound around the top in the traditional manner. ... This Chilkat weaving is the representation of my journey.

2013  
75” wide



# FROM RAVEN'S TAIL TO CHILKAT



A Tlu'wulahu Costume - Qagyuhl  
Vintage original photogravure  
1914  
Edward S. Curtis  
Courtesy of Flury & Co.

Some time after the weaving of Raven's Tail blankets—geometric in style and shape—the “formline” style of the Chilkat blanket developed. No one is sure when or why the change took place. A completely different method of weaving began with changes in color and shape. The Raven's Tail died out and the Chilkat blanket was born.

“...Formlines are the primary design element on which Northwest Coast art depends...It is the positive delineating force of the painting, relief and engraving (as well as weaving.) Formlines are continuous, flowing, curvilinear lines that turn, swell and diminish in a prescribed manner. They are used for figure outlines, internal design elements, and in abstract compositions.”

Excerpted text by Bill Holm  
“Northwest Coast Indian Art: An Analysis of Form”  
(UW Press, 1965)

Examples of formline design,  
painted and carved:



From left to right:  
Tlingit Painted Provision Box  
Tlingit Shaman's Oyster-Catcher Rattle  
Haida Painted Basketry Hat

Courtesy of James Economos/Economos Works of Art

# CHILKAT PATTERN BOARDS

Pattern boards typically include a little more than half of the blanket design, not including the black and yellow border. Since the designs were invariably bilaterally symmetrical, only the beginning of the repeat was needed. Only the black color of the design was shown. Placement of the yellow and blue was so nearly fixed that skilled weavers knew just where those colors were to be. The weaver placed the pattern board to one side of her weaving frame, though always within reach, and she measured the size and placement of each element from the board. The weaving technique allowed her to work within a narrow section to avoid constant shifting of her position.

Most old pattern boards were made of broad, handmade boards. Although this one is a well-painted board with a traditional design, it is made of milled lumber. The design is an unusual one, seen on only a few blankets. ... This pattern lacks clear definition of the lateral panels because the [whale's] pectoral fins and the tail flukes extend far into them.

Pattern boards are relatively more rare than blankets in collections. ... Any number of blankets might be produced from a single pattern board, so that there were never a large number. New boards were also copied from old blankets, and some variations in them surely resulted from this process.

Excerpted text by Bill Holm  
"The Box of Daylight"  
(UW Press, 1984)



Chilkat Blanket Pattern Board  
Tlingit, 19th Century  
Red Cedar  
21" x 37"

From the collection of Bill & Marty Holm

# CHILKAT WEAVINGS

Called “Dancing Blankets” because dignitaries wore them ceremonially, Chilkat weavings are the epitome of Northwest Coast Indian art. These highly prized textiles, an extraordinary achievement for any culture or period, are universally recognized as masterpieces of American Indian Art.

Chilkat weaving is one of the most complex techniques in the world. Made by the Tsimshian, Tlingit, Haida and Chilkat people of the Northwest Coast area (extending from Vancouver Island to Yakutat, Alaska) and woven on a vertical loom, these textiles take about a year to spin and weave. Fabricated from mountain goat wool and yellow cedar bark, they are naturally dyed from plants, urine and colored cloth that has been boiled. The designs are a highly stylized representational form that features animals, birds, fish and whales primarily in black, yellow and blue colors with long fringes along the bottom. They were sometimes used as clothing, but were primarily used as spectacular blankets worn by very high ranking people. Rare and sought after, they now exist mainly in museums and private collections.

Chilkat weavings are highly regarded for their unique beauty, quality and rarity, but they are seldom displayed. A Chilkat weaving generates excitement amongst those privileged to discover even a single piece. This landmark presentation will display this pinnacle of artistic achievement from historic to contemporary—the most extensive showcase of Chilkat weaving assembled in recent memory.

# ORIGIN MYTH OF THE CHILKAT BLANKET

According to myth, the first Chilkat Dancing Blanket was created by the daughter of a great chief. She had gotten lost while looking for food in the woods. Suddenly, she came upon an incredibly handsome man who offered to help her if she would follow him, which she did, to his village where she became his spouse. He was a member of the Bear Clan, a rival to her own. She became homesick and one day when she could, she escaped through the wood to a lake, where she saw a fisherman in his canoe.

She called out to him for help, and after hearing her tale he agreed to take her away with him if she would become his wife. She agreed and got into his canoe which sped away just as the Bear clan people came out of the woods.

It was then that she discovered that her rescuer was not human but the benevolent sea spirit “Gonaqadet.” They lived happily in his home under the sea for many years. They had a son, and when that son was of the age to learn how to hunt and fish, to make tools and to dance, she took him to the land of her brother to be taught.

During this time Gonaqadet’s wife began to weave. She created a magnificent ceremonial robe that told of her meeting her husband and their courtship. When her son became of age, she left the land and went back to her home under the sea. She presented her husband with the robe. This was the first Chilkat Dancing Blanket.



c. 1870  
65" wide  
From the collection of Nancy Badovinus



c. 1870  
62" wide  
From a private collection

c. 19th Century  
64" wide  
From the collection of KR Martindale  
Provenance: Estate of Donald Judd





c. 19th Century

67" wide

From the collection of James Economos/Economos Works of Art

c. 19th Century  
67" wide  
From the collection of KR Martindale  
Provenance: from the family of a San Francisco sea captain



c. 19th Century  
63" wide  
On loan from Irwin & Marjorie Goodman and Alaska on Madison





c. 1870  
72" wide  
From a private collection

c. 1865  
64" wide  
Courtesy of H. Malcolm Grimmer Gallery, Santa Fe



c. 1850  
68" wide  
From the collection of Andrea J. Grant





c. 1880  
66" wide  
From a private collection

c. 19th Century  
34" wide  
From the collection of Brooke Bennett  
Provenance: Don Bennett collection





c. Turn of the 19th Century  
32" wide  
From the collection of KR Martindale

c. Early 20th Century  
65" wide  
From the collection of Andrea Esty, AETribal Antiques



c. Early 20th Century  
24" wide  
From the collection of KR Martindale



# CLARISSA RIZAL WEAVER OF *CHILKAT CHILD*

Clarissa Rizal Lampe was born in Juneau, Alaska in 1959, a few years before Alaska became the 49th state. A Raven T'akDein Taan (black-legged kittywake) Clan member, Clarissa holds true to her clan identity as a full-time multifaceted artist working in fiber, painting, music, printmaking, and sculpture. She specializes in designs and the creation of Tlingit ceremonial regalia. Since 1983, Clarissa has designed and created more than 60 Chilkat, Raven's Tail, and Button Blankets. In 2015 she wove *Chilkat Child*.

Clarissa continues to fulfill a promise she made to her teacher/mentor, the late Jennie Thlunaut, to help revive Chilkat weaving through workshops and apprenticeships. Clarissa authored, "Jennie Weaves An Apprentice, A Chilkat Weavers' Handbook" which received the HAIL award in 2008. She earned a BA of Fine Arts at The Institute of American Indian Arts, has won Best of Show at Lawrence Indian Art Show, Santa Fe Indian Market, and Heard Museum Indian Market.

She wrote in April 2015, "If all of the Tlingit elders I knew as a child and young adult, such as my maternal grandparents... and my Chilkat weaving teacher/mentor Jennie Thlunaut, saw the Tlingit ceremonial regalia and contemporary art I have created for nearly 40 years, would they be basically pleased with my work? If so, then I know I have listened to them and followed through with their guidance. If not, I wonder what additional guidance would they provide for me?"



# LILY HOPE

## WEAVER OF *LITTLE WATCHMAN*

Lily Hope was born and raised in Juneau, Alaska to full-time artists. She is Tlingit Indian, of the Raven moiety. Following her matrilineal line, she's of her grandmother's clan, the T'akdeintaan, originating from the Snail House in Hoonah, Alaska.

Lily learned Raven's Tail weaving from her mother Clarissa Rizal and Kay Parker, both of Juneau. She learned Chilkat weaving from Clarissa Rizal as well, who is the last living apprentice of the late Master Chilkat Weaver, Jennie Thlunaut.

Lily Has been weaving Raven's Tail since 1995, and Chilkat weaving since 2010. Her ensemble *Little Watchman*, woven in 2014, blends the two styles. Lily teaches weaving in the Juneau School District, and to independent learners.

Her first Raven's Tail ensemble, created in collaboration with her mother, Clarissa Copper Child, has been entered in several art competitions, winning first place in Sealaska Heritage Institute's Juried Art Show, 2012. It is now in the permanent collection at Sealaska Heritage.

"I weave to bring order to my thoughts, to converge with the realms beyond our seeing eye, and to help bring the past into present, and present into future. ... When I start my day weaving, I bounce when I walk, sing as I talk, and smile with everything. Weaving Chilkat is like breathing with the universal consciousness. All is well in the world when I'm weaving."





Bill Holm and Cheryl Samuel

*Sea Bear Tunic*, woven by Cheryl Samuel from 2001-2004, was her first and only Chilkat tunic. The tunic was presented at Samuel's keynote address at the annual Seattle Weavers Guild conference, Seattle, Washington, on February 26, 2004. The tunic was danced on stage by Bill Holm, Curator Emeritus of Northwest Coast Indian Art at the Burke Museum.

From the collection of Charlie and Gayle Pancerzewski



# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The idea for this exhibit occurred spontaneously in a conversation between Kim Martindale and John Morris (M2 Productions) while discussing ways to bring a different aspect to our show. It was enthusiastically endorsed by Jimmy Economos and Gilly Hampton who immediately started assisting us in our efforts. Henry Monahan, Eleanor Tulman Hancock, and Mac Grimmer came through with more information, weavings, and suggestions. Private collectors Nancy Kovalik, Steve Lister, and Wayne & Nancy Badovinus, as well as Andrea Esty, the Goodmans, Brooke Bennett, Ann Lesk, AJ Grant, Melissa Flury, Charlie and Gayle Panczerwski, and David Cook Galleries were invaluable. We thank all the contributors who loaned us their Chilkats. You made it possible with your generosity and trust.

We are very indebted to Bill Holm, the dean of Northwest Coast arts, a brilliant man who was enormously helpful on this project. Bill and Marty opened their home and heart to us for which we are sincerely grateful. Contemporary Northwest Coast weavers Cheryl Samuel, Clarissa Rizal, and Lily Hope who, never having heard of us, listened, offered great ideas, and decided to take part in the exhibition itself. Thank you! You are the ones who create these unique artistic masterpieces and are teaching others to weave and keep alive this very special art form. Bless you!

Shirley Schaufel was invaluable through introductions and suggestions, and hopefully creating an eventual museum show. Blake Hines, our production manager, pulled all our ideas together, photographed, and kept us on track, as she does so well.

Additional photography supplied by Ronn Spencer and Allison Starcher. Photographs of *Little Watchman* by Brian Wallace. Book designed by JC Gonzalez. Thank you all.

John Morris' boundless passion, expertise, and perseverance made this catalog a reality. Thank you, John.



*Dream of Klukwan*  
Painting by Bill Holm

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