



Spirit Faces: Contemporary Masks of the Northwest Coast

Gary Wyatt

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These breathtakingly beautiful and powerful masks depict creatures (such as Eagle or Killer Whale), natural elements and forces (such as Moon or Weather), humans, and supernatural beings (such as Thunderbird or the Chief of the Undersea). Masks are an important part of ceremonial life on the Northwest Coast; they make the supernatural world visible and bring it to life in dance dramas performed at feasts and potlatches, or at winter ceremonies held by secret societies. Some masks embody mythology or history. Others depict shamanic experiences, or are portrait masks that represent personal experience. The most elaborate are transformation masks, which are used to display the transition from one form to another, such as Wolf to Human. At the high point of the dance, the dancer will open the outer mask to reveal another one inside.

The introduction by **Gary Wyatt** outlines the place of art inside Northwest Coast societies and the place of Northwest Coast art in the outside art world. He also explains the importance, meaning and ceremonial use of masks. Each mask is accompanied by the artist's own words describing its creation and meaning.

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