

## A Quillwork Companion: An Illustrated Guide to Techniques of Porcupine Quill Decoration

Jean Heinbuch

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Porcupine quillwork is an art form that is unique to the Indians of North America and, before the introduction of seed beads by Europeans, was the method of decoration that was most common. After the Indians were given beads this craft all but disappeared, except in the most ceremonial kinds of adornment. Still, the craft was handed down from generation to generation and recently there has been a renewed interest in this craft among Indians and non-Indians alike. The modern-day "mountain man" and the traditionallyoriented Indian share a desire to possess and create articles decorated with the quills of the porcupine.

In 1917, William C. Orchard (Heye Foundation) wrote his classic, The Technique of Porcupine Quill Decoration Among the Indians of North America, and this book became the definitive work on porcupine quillwork. Since that time very few books have been published about this unique American art form, but none have gone beyond Orchard and attempted to explain exactly how quillwork is done, how to master the necessary techniques or what the secrets are that are needed to do quality craftwork. Jean Heinbuch has now written an excellent book that does just that.

This book starts with the basics of finding and preparing the quills. The author even presents a technique (not recommended) for obtaining quills from live porcupines; she, of course, explores more conventional ways as well. A good explanation of the necessary tools follows with photographs.

Her chapter on General Work Instructions and Basic Stitches is designed to help the reader understand the basic steps upon which the more difficult techniques are built. She is liberal with her advice in keeping things simple and divulges many of the secrets she has discovered over the past eighteen years. With Orchard as a starting point, she has examined numerous museum pieces in her search for the proper techniques.

The reader is encouraged to master the techniques in the Basic Quilling Techniques Chapter and the book is designed so that each step builds upon the next. Of general interest are the diverse techniques that Native Americans used (use) to create rosettes. The book also includes a fine explanation of the steps used to make brain tanned rawhide and leather, and has a much needed disclosure of how to prepare and use natural dyes on quills. Advanced techniques are explained in text, illustrations and photographs.

This exciting book of ninety-two pages contains 53 black and white photographs, 4 full pages in four color, 39 figures, 2 tables and 115 illustrations.

A text that should be of interest to anyone who enjoys traditional arts and crafts, the culture of the American Indian and the early lifestyle of Native Americans. It may well be the new definitive source of this beautiful art form.

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