A Bag Worth a Pony
The Art of the Ojibwe Bandolier Bag

By Marcia G. Anderson

A celebration, illumination, and study of the spectacular beaded bags made by the Ojibwe of Minnesota.

Bandolier bags, or *gashkibidaaganag*—the large, heavily beaded shoulder bags made and worn by several North American Indian tribes around the Great Lakes—are prized cultural icons here and around the world. From the 1870s to the present day, Ojibwe bead artists of Minnesota have been especially well known for their lively, creative designs. Neighboring Dakota people would trade a pony for a beautiful beaded bag.

Over the years, non-Indian collectors and ethnographers, struck by the bags’ cultural significance and visual appeal, bought them up. Today, there are hundreds of bags in museums around the world, but not so many in the hands of community members. In *A Bag Worth a Pony*, Marcia G. Anderson shares the results of thirty years of study, in which she learned from the talented bead artists who keep the form alive, from historical records, and from the bags themselves.

Anderson examines the history, forms, structure, and motifs of the bags, giving readers the tools to understand a bag’s makeup and meaning. She also offers a tour of Minnesota’s seven Ojibwe reservations, showing the beautiful beaded bags associated with each along with the personal insights of seven master beadworkers.

Advance Praise:

“Beautifully illustrated, carefully researched, and sensitively written, *A Bag Worth a Pony* is filled with valuable information about Ojibwe bandolier bags—*gashkibidaagan*—one of the great glories of Native North American beaded art and an important part of Ojibwe identity. The author uses historical writings, photographs, contemporary interviews, and analysis of technique and designs to accurately place the bags within their communities. Above all, Anderson conveys the spirit behind the bags by honoring the superb artistry of their (predominantly female) makers.”

Lois Sherr Dubin, author of *The History of Beads: 100,000 BC to the Present*

“A Bag Worth a Pony reveals the story behind the Ojibwe bandolier bag, which proliferated throughout the assimilation era when Ojibwe and other Native people struggled to maintain their cultural traditions. Over several decades, Minnesota historian Marcia Anderson interviewed several bead artists whose voices teach us more about the significance of this enduring practice and the strength of a people.”

Karissa Isaacs, associate curator, Tweed Museum of Art, University of Minnesota Duluth

“In this well-researched and richly illustrated history of a distinctive indigenous art form, Anderson does the hard work of connecting specific *gashkibidaagan* to their Minnesota communities of origin and, when possible, to individual artists or families, enriching our understanding of local stylistic variations. By providing context to the circumstances of making, wearing, and collecting these regalia, in the past and today, she also brings much-needed focus to the lived experiences of Ojibwe artists across the generations.”
Adriana Greci Green, curator of Indigenous Arts of the Americas, The Fralin Museum of Art at the University of Virginia

Marcia Anderson was curator of the Minnesota Historical Society's museum collections for 30 years.

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