Title: Hand crafted: creating a market for Canada's Northwest Coast native arts and crafts

Authors: Tepper, Leslie H.

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Abstract: Museum collections contain examples of Aboriginal Northwest Coast material culture that have been categorised as curios, artefacts, tourist art, arts and crafts, or art. This dissertation examines the emergence of Native Northwest Coast Aboriginal objects made for sale as "arts and crafts". The discussion draws on the multidisciplinary field of material culture studies, on the theories of commodification and on the concept of the reinvention of culture. At the end of the nineteenth century the British Arts and Crafts Movement called for a return to the values and practices of an earlier period of hand crafted objects. For the next half-century in North America government agents, missionaries and philanthropic societies encouraged the production of traditional Aboriginal functional objects as a form of arts and crafts. This activity was perceived as a means of economic self-sufficiency, and to promote feelings of self-identity and self-worth among Native producers. At the onset of World War II, various individuals, private organisations, and government departments worked to transform the producer and the marketplace through education and public policy. Change was to be accomplished by establishing new venues, new expectations of behaviour, and a new social relationship between the supplier and the consumer. Today, a growing number of Native studio crafts people create objects of traditional material culture as a means of livelihood, and as participants in the revitalisation of Northwest Coast Aboriginal society. The term arts and crafts, however, has fallen into disuse and disfavour among Western scholars and Indigenous producers who associate the phrase with poor quality and low income. The term of choice today is art and artist. This work suggests that the production of arts and crafts in British Columbia was an important transition stage in the development of the Native art market. The efforts by private individuals, philanthropic societies and government programs during the mid-20th century raised the value of the hand crafted object. The thesis also suggests that the concept inherent in the Arts and Crafts Movement of "doing good when doing craft", is cyclical, reappearing as strategic policy during times of economic and social crisis on the Northwest Coast.
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