



# 1001 Curious Things: Ye Olde Curiosity Shop and Native American Art

*By Kate Duncan*

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## **1001 Curious Things: Ye Olde Curiosity Shop and Native American Art** By Kate Duncan

For more than one hundred years, tourists and residents alike have flocked to Ye Olde Curiosity Shop, located on Seattle's waterfront. Here a mummy nicknamed Sylvester, a collection of shrunken heads from Ecuador, a two-headed calf, and a mermaid preside over walls and cases crammed with an incredible jumble of souvenirs and trinkets, intermixed with authentic Northwest Coast and Alaskan Eskimo carvings, baskets, blankets, and other artworks. The guestbook records visits by Theodore Roosevelt, Will Rogers, Jack Dempsey, Charlie Chaplin, J. Edgar Hoover, Katherine Hepburn, John Wayne, Sylvester Stallone, and Queen Marie of Rumania, among many others.

Ye Olde Curiosity Shop was founded in 1899 by Joseph E. "Daddy" Standley, an Ohio-born curio collector who came to Seattle in the late 1890s during the Yukon gold rush. Although Native American material vied for space with exotica from all corners of the globe, it soon grew to be the mainstay of the shop, which became identified with the whalebones displayed outside and the "piles of old Eskimo relics" within. Also to be found were baskets, moccasins, ivory carving from Alaska, Tlingit spruce root baskets, Haida "jadeite" totem poles, masks, paddles, and other curiosities from the Northwest Coast. Indians from the Olympic Peninsula brought baskets, coming up to the back door of the shop in their canoes. Others, originally from British Columbia but now living on the flats not far from the shop, carved miniature totem poles by the hundreds and full-size poles on commission. Trading companies supplied Indian curios from the Plains, Southwest, and California.

An art historian trained in the classic arts of the Northwest Coast, Kate Duncan became interested in the history of the shop when she learned that it had not only been an active participant in Seattle's 1909 Alaska-Yukon-Pacific Exposition but had also been a major source of important Northwest Coast collections in many museums, including, among others, the Royal Ontario Museum, the George G. Heye Collection (now in the Smithsonian's Museum of the American Indian), the Washington State Museum, the Newark Museum, the Portland Art Museum, and the American Museum of Natural History. Granted full access by the present owners -- grandson and great-grandson of "Daddy" Standley -- to the remarkably

complete archives maintained from the time the shop opened, Duncan has provided a fascinating chapter in the history of Seattle, especially in its early years, as well as a significant contribution to the literature on tourist arts and collecting.

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### Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Berkeley lecturer Dubin deserves congratulations for even attempting a clear overview of her thorny subject: the history and present state of the collecting and exhibiting of the objects created by the world's indigenous peoples of North America. That she has to a great degree succeeded is gratifying, so vast are the potential pitfalls. Dubin moves between the worlds of anthropology and modern art with equal confidence and does not mistake evenhandedness for blandness. Thus, for example, the naïve collectors of "Indian Art" looking for a fix of authenticity are not isolated and condemned, but placed within a broad historical and cultural framework. Indeed, it is the changing nature of that "authenticity" of the West's mercurial requirements of its cultural Other that Dubin records (with 26 half-tones of relevant works), as it has occurred in both the marketplace and the museum. Other essays deal with the history of the surprisingly pervasive government control of the trade in indigenous art as well as the often awkward fit between the style of Native art and Western criticism. Most interesting are Dubin's accounts of the works and views of a number of contemporary artists of native descent such as Harry Fonseca, Edgar Hachivi Heap of Birds and Lawrence Paul Yuxweluptan, who incorporate "traditional" elements into often powerfully critical works of contemporary art. Dubin's knowledgeably poised book is an invaluable contribution to cultural studies. (Oct.) Forecast: To generate browser interest beyond specialists, a possible shelving partner for Dubin's book is *1001 Curious Things: Ye Olde Curiosity Shop and Native American Art*, a fond account of a Seattle store, which has, for more than a century, sold a huge and bewildering variety of goods, including a king's ransom of native art (shown in 125 b&w illustrations). Arizona State professor of art Kate C. Duncan is content to chronicle rather than critique an admittedly fascinating cabinet of Northwest life and trade. (Univ. of Washington, \$35.28 ISBN 0-295-98010-9; July)

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### Review

"An exceptionally appealing volume." *Journal of the West*

"This richly illustrated book is a delight. The general reader will enjoy the story while learning about its deeper implications. The scholar should look upon it as a model for discussing complicated intercultural relations while telling a most readable tale." *Pacific Northwest Quarterly*

### About the Author

Kate Duncan, professor of art at Arizona State University, is also the author of *Northern Athapaskan Art: A Beadwork Tradition*, and coauthor of *A Special Gift: The Kutchin Beadwork Tradition* and *Out of the North: The Subarctic Collection of the Haffenreffer Museum of Anthropology*.

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