



THE ROOM OF THE PEOPLES OF AMERICA IN FIVE MINUTES

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▲ *Alutiiq mask*

The Alutiiq people divided the world into the underground, underwater, earthly and celestial spheres and inhabited them with various spirits. The rituals related to these cults began in October, after the end of the hunting season, and lasted as long as there was enough food. Shaman rituals, aimed at providing successful hunt in the next season, and funeral repasts were mass events. Members of secret men's societies organized ritual performances dedicated to the ancestors' cult. Commemorations of the dead lasted for several years. When they were over, one of the newborn babies got the name of the deceased man. The people believed that the soul of the deceased man was the patron-spirit of the baby and guided him until he became a full member of the society.

Legendary and mythical ancestors, including outstanding hunters and warriors, were worshiped by members of men's unions. During the ceremony they put on masks depicting ancestors and performed ritual dances.



▲ *Wooden cap-peak hat*

Aleut sea hunters wore hats or obtrusive wooden cap peaks. This satisfied several needs: to provide good luck, to protect from evil spirits, to protect the eyes from salty splashes and blinding sun rays. To make a wooden hat a plate was cut that was then steamed out and bended until it took the required shape. The joints were laced with tendons. Hats were painted and decorated with ivory plates and figures, beads and sea-lion whiskers. This animal only has four long whiskers: the luckier was the hunter, the more whiskers he wore on his hat. All the above mentioned details indicated the clan that the hunter belonged to and his social status. Conical hats symbolized birds' or sea-animals' heads.



▲ *Ceremonial Tlingit woven hat*

The front part of the hat's brims is covered with an image of the killer-whale with oblong nostrils and large eyes made in the style of a symmetrically-unfolded image. Such shape of eyes is typical of all killer-whale and other sea animals' drawings. The two "eyes" on the crown of the hat symbolize the animal's breathing outlet; the two "faces" on the sides of the crown symbolize the back fin, and the three-fingered hands – the side fins. The tail is drawn in the form of an anthropomorphic head that symbolized the killer-whale's soul. When depicting this animal, the "eye" figures were usually outlined with light paint.

On the exposition there is a collection of Tlingit women decorations (labrets) and several masks depicting women with labrets in their lower lips.

When a Tlingit girl reached puberty, the shaman pierced her lower lip and inserted a small decoration (a labret) into it. As the girl grew, the labret was changed several times for bigger ones. A noble rich Tlingit woman wore a large labret that reached 5-6 cm in diameter. The labret was a symbol of noble origin and wealth, and also served as an amulet that protected the woman from the evil spirits. Slaves were not allowed to wear labrets.

Large labrets caused a lot of inconveniences. Elderly women often had their lower lip torn apart – then it was tied in a knot and a smaller labret was inserted.



▲ *Woman's mask with a labret*



► *Waterproof basket*

Californian Indians did not know pottery, so to cook food they used large waterproof baskets. They were made of tree branches and roots. For cooking a basket was filled with water and then meat and red-hot stones were put into it. The basket swelled and did not let water through. Stones that grew cool were replaced with hot stones and thus boiled the meat.



▲ *Seneca chief costume*

Among the most valuable exhibits of the hall of North America is the full costume of the chief of the Iroquois tribe Seneca. The headdress is made of dyed horse hair. It symbolizes the blood-stained scalp of an enemy. The scalp is part of skin cut off one's head together with hair. Although it was a shame for an Indian warrior to fight against a woman, scalps of white blond women were of the highest value.

In this costume elements of European and Indian clothes are combined. The shirt and the leggings are made of fabric, while the cloak is an Indian element. It is made of suede and decorated with a pattern constituted by shell pieces.