

Discovering Skλ:ná:





Artist: John B. Thomas



Discovering Skaná:

Stories From the Imaginings of Teouwya (Lynn Bergan),
St. Regis Mohawk 2006 Oneida Sky Retail Gallery Artist

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Welcome Shekólih

SkΛ:n̄λ: is the Oneida word for peace. The Oneida people, who call themselves Onyota'a:ká:, The People of the Standing Stone, have lived in the northeast region for thousands of years. Maintaining an agricultural lifestyle that holds the earth in utmost respect is a necessity to the Oneidas. The Creator has provided abundant resources on the earth in order to not only survive, but to thrive. Many items used at SkΛ:n̄λ:

have significant meaning in the Oneida culture. While in SkΛ:n̄λ:, reflect upon the welcoming nature of the Oneida people and the power of healing herbs provided from Mother Earth. This spa setting is an opportunity to share elements of the heritage. There are native influences throughout the design of the building, including the artwork and menu of services.

Essential Oneida Ingredients

The earth provides healing herbs like witch hazel, dandelion and raspberry leaves to treat wounds, ease pain and soothe tired spirits. As herbs are collected, the Oneidas always leave some sacred Indian tobacco on the plants to ensure the herb's posterity. These simple herbs are still here and important to the Oneidas today.

These herbs are very important in the culture, and are usually burned when prayers are said so the smoke will carry the words up to the Creator.

White pine is the most valued botanical for healing fatigue and mental exhaustion, is an analgesic for sore muscles and joints and is important because it is the Tree of Peace.

When the five Nations (Seneca, Cayuga, Onondaga, Oneida and Mohawk) agreed to live in peace and stop fighting, they buried their weapons under a white pine tree as instructed by the Peacemaker. From that time forward, the white pine was known as the Tree of Peace.

Strawberries are important because they are considered to be a medicine. The berries themselves are tasty and beautiful, but it is the leaves that are used for medicine. They can be boiled in a tea and help with various ailments. All berries are important, but strawberries are the first berries to grow, so are considered the most important.

Dream Catchers

A dream catcher is a circular object with a net or spider-web pattern inside. It's purpose is to catch dreams, both good and bad, and protect the dreamer from nightmares. Some dream catchers are made with leather lace surrounding the circle and are adorned with beads and feathers. The beads on the dream catcher web guide the good dreams through

the web through the center hole so they may gently slide down the feather into the life of the dream. The bad dreams, meanwhile, not knowing the way, become entangled in the web and perish at the first light of the morning sun. In the tradition, a dream catcher is hung above the cradle of an infant, allowing everyone in the home to enjoy good dreams.

Cloud Messenger

It was during the days of the long shadows that young Two Blankets found some time with his mother. Harvest had passed and Shadowfire had some time to dwell in the land of her son's dreamtimes. It was a blue-sky day with puffy white clouds and Two Blankets lay down next to her in the grass.

She handed him a blade of grass and said, "You can draw the sky, Two Blankets." He looked at the tiny blade of grass and his mother. "You're silly!" he laughed, albeit respectfully.

"No," she said with a dark twinkle in her eyes. "You can!"

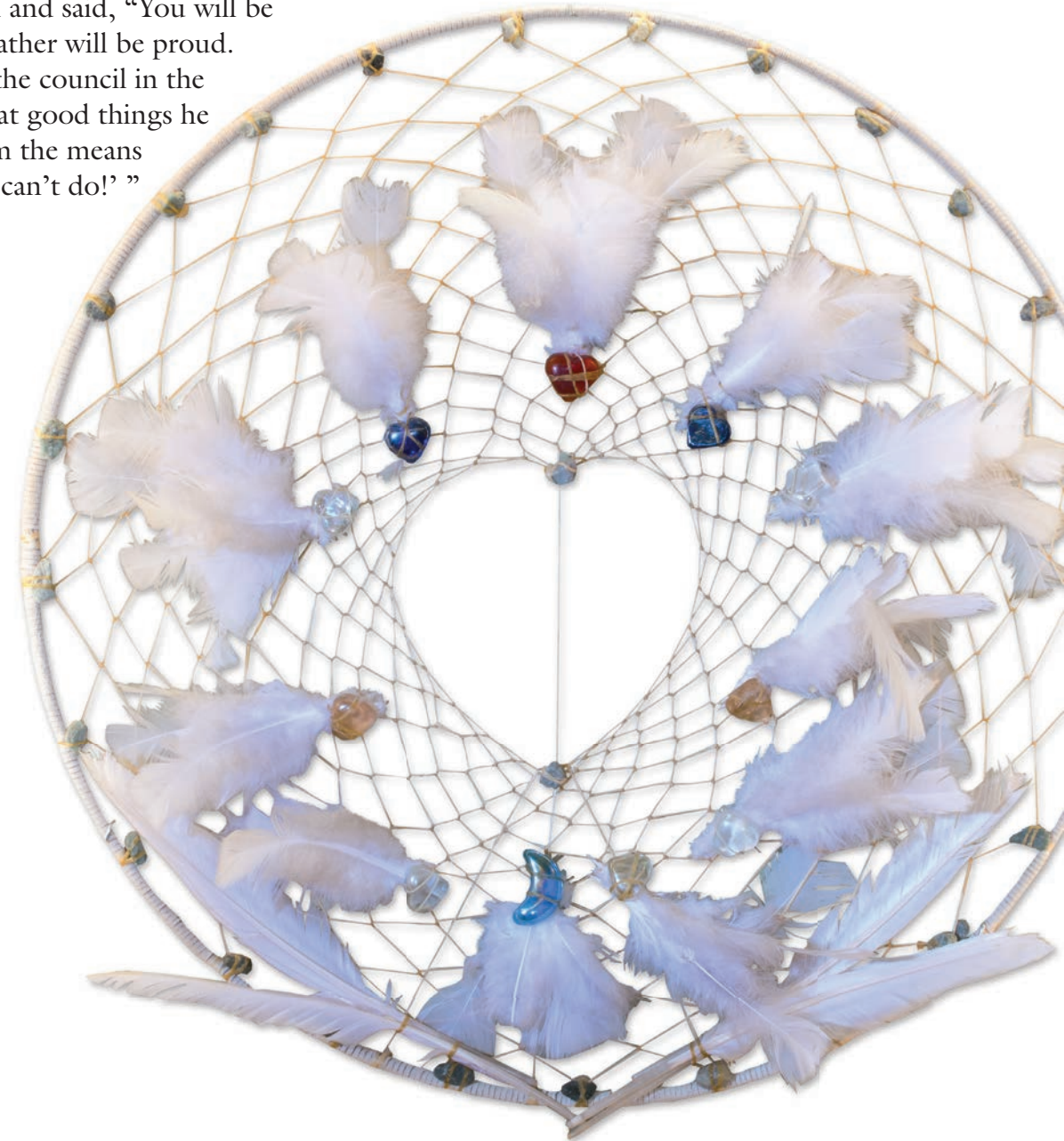
She took one blade of grass and swept it up. There in the sky was a beautiful horse of billowy clouds. Two Blankets watched in silence as she conjured up one beautiful scene after another. She handed the blade of grass to Two Blankets and said, "Your turn."

He looked thoughtfully at the blade of grass and at his mother's profile. He remembered the way she looked when his father had been lost in the hunt.

Two Blankets remembered all the times she had looked away when he had been too shy to speak to the elders to save him embarrassment. He thought long as the shadows lengthened and then he

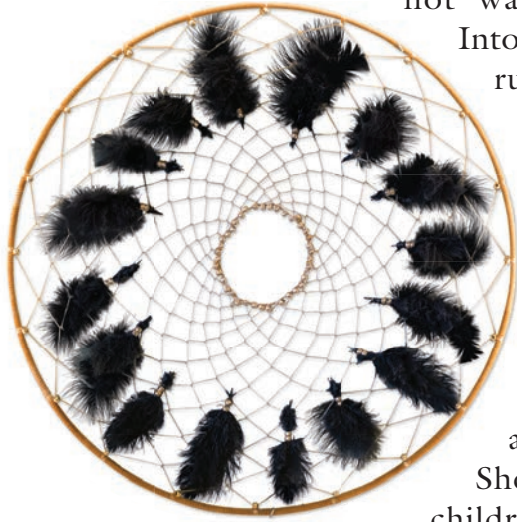
made that blade of grass speak magic. Shadowfire watched as the clouds formed hearts and it melted hers with joy.

She looked at her son and said, "You will be a good husband. Your father will be proud. Even now he speaks to the council in the sky and says, 'Look, what good things he makes of grass! Give him the means and there is nothing he can't do!'"



Black Crow

Rabbit scampered from her burrow with a nose lifted firmly toward the sky, searching for the scent of her little ones. The little rabbits had woken early and ventured out, scrambling over each other and laughing, but not waking their mother.



Into the woods they had run, little tails bouncing everywhere. To the north the wisps of smoke from a distant campfire rose above the trees. Mother Rabbit had also seen Fox pass by the evening before and was filled with dread. She hopped to all her children's favorite places but found nothing. She was relieved not to find traces of panic on the ground and calmed herself. She lifted her nose and found the scent of the distant fire. She knew her babies were curious and without fear. She thought they might have followed the scent, so off she went toward the campfire.

In a shelter by that very same campfire, a young Native woman, North Star, roused and reached out for her husband. Instead she found empty space. Confused she sat straight, and then remembered, Black Crow was in this world no

longer. The sadness that had lifted in her dreams of him engulfed her. She hung her head and her long black hair fell in a blanket over her face, offering her a shield from her shame. She had no right to be sad. Black Crow had been a brave warrior and a good husband. He had lived well, died brave; his had been a good life.

North Star brushed the hair from her face and looked outside. The angle of the sun told her she'd slept too long. Her son would be hungry. She wondered why she had not awakened at his early morning cry. Lifting the skins that kept him warm at night, she found nothing. She tossed them about the shelter in a panic. Sparrow Song had crawled out of the shelter!

Mother Rabbit had lost her calm. She couldn't lose her babies to Fox. Her eyes were wide with panic as she jumped logs and raced through the brush.

North Star tore out of the shelter wailing, sending up a shrill alarm to the village. Mothers tending the morning fires rushed their children into the shelters, and posted old aunties to care for them, as all scrambled to ready themselves for a search. But then there came a cry above their heads. There, flying from shelter to shelter was a single black crow. His "caw" was louder and more urgent than anything they'd ever heard. They all stopped in their tracks and looked at North Star. She nodded and went with them to follow the flight of the crow.

Not far away a little Indian boy was playing with a family of baby rabbits. It was Sparrow

Song. Soon enough the crow landed nearby and the band of Indian women stood aside to allow North Star to be the first to touch her son. Instead she sat nearby and watched. Sparrow Song laughed for the first time in a long time as the baby rabbits played, showing him what it was to be happy for the first time since his father, Black Crow, had disappeared from his life. Not long after Mother Rabbit crept tremulously onto North Star's lap to rest and watch her children.

On this day the spirit of a warrior worked with the four winds to send the scent of smoke to a family of rabbits so he could hear his son's laughter.



The Grandfather

There was a night, just like tonight, and a time, just like this very moment, when a young Indian woman, after a conversation with Coyote, found herself with questions. As was her habit, she looked to Father Sky and Mother Earth for answers, but found none. Raven did not bring a message. The fire did not speak to her. Friend Crow did not leave shiny things to amuse her. She found herself alone.

She covered pine boughs with soft deer skin and tried to find sleep, but could not.

She squeezed her eyes tight, trying to force sleep. What came instead was sadness, so she spoke to the grandfathers, whispering quietly and gave herself to the mist of that which is not-sleep and not-life.

The Indian woman found herself on a Mesa. This was a place foreign to her, as she lived in the forest. There was dust on her bare feet, and in the firelight she saw a Grandfather who wore the blanket of the Navajo. She was frightened and tried to find her deerskin again, but the grandfather gave a kindly laugh. She quieted like a rabbit waiting for a warning sign. The Grandfather said in a gentle voice full of love, "What is your question my child?"

The young maiden thought madly, what is my question? What question is worthy of this moment and this attention from a grandfather? She looked at the Grandfather while she was thinking. His was a kind face; a face with wisdom. She saw

that he was made from smoke and smoked a peace pipe. She smiled mischievously as she thought, is he smoking the pipe or is the pipe smoking him? Hearing her thoughts, he laughed gently, and ask again, "What is your question my child?" The maiden looked at her dusty feet and thought many thoughts but she finally raised her head and asked, "Grandfather? What is Love?" She thought the question too small for such a great moment and immediately regretted asking, but the Grandfather nodded approval.

"Love," the Grandfather said softly to her

with comfort, "is that which enhances your life."

And then he said sternly, "If it does something else, it is something else." With that he waved a hand of smoke and delivered her to her deerskin bed with the heat from the campfire keeping her warm. Crow brought her shiny things while she slept. Rabbit snuggled up under the pine boughs and smiled at the antics she planned to bring the young maiden laughter. Coyote stood at the top of the hill and howled. Never again would he be able to trick her.



The Four Winds

With the drums from the ceremonial dance around last night's council fire now quietly sleeping, this day begins like every other day. The small ones wake; they blink at the sun and rub their dark dream-filled eyes. They take up their water baskets and skip down to the river, happy in the sun-dappled forest where they live.

The screech of an owl carries through the air and they stop. Brother Owl is never awake when the sun is up. They sniff the air like rabbits and tread silently to their goal: the river. Each child steps softly, wondering what strange thing had made Brother Owl send a warning. At the water's edge, they hesitate.

Broken Branches whispers, "There's nothing to fear, Brother Owl ate a bad mouse." The children snicker but Silver Wolf signals for their silence. He sees with dreams and knows this is a moment to be somber. The children watch as the trees begin to

flutter and a north wind brings with it the scent of snow. They clutch their baskets and fill their lungs with the freshest air they've breathed in a season.

The trees are suddenly quiet again and Broken Branches says, "Come! There is bread and meat back at camp. Let's get our water!" The children rise from their hiding places, but stop suddenly. The trees are fluttering again. From the south there is a wind that brings with it warmth and the scent of berries. Too Small lifts off her blanket and wraps it around her waist. She thinks fiercely of going swimming before filling her basket, but Silver Wolf gives her a look that plants her where she stands.

Broken Branches laughs, "What is this? What brings the North Wind and the South Wind to this place?" At this the winds lift and the



scent of pinion wood fills the air from the west, and then comes the scent of salt water from the east. In this place, at this time, the four winds met; witnessed by the small band of children. At this meeting a bargain was struck. Mother Earth, tired of the arguing of her children, commanded that they reach an agreement.

To this day, the wind comes from one direction only. When it comes from the north, cold fresh air will wake you. When it comes from the south, warm perfumed air surrounds you. When it comes from the west, there is dust and dryness. When it comes from the east, brine and moisture wrap you. When there is some confusion, Mother Earth is planning a time-out for someone.

The Night Blanket

There was a time, so long ago that it's not even history, when Mother Earth and Father Sky married. They longed for children but their union was new. Father Sky kept the clouds away so he could admire his new bride. Mother Earth warmed in his love but the thoughts of children were ever-present in her mind.

One soft night the Creator heard Mother Earth crying. She did not love Father Sky less but she longed for children. Mother Earth's soul was only half-full and she understood what Father Sky did not. Without children, their union would not grow. The Creator understood, and when Father Sky slept that night, he created the children of Turtle Island.

Not every child was human. Most were birds and things that crawled on the ground. One such being called Yobehe was made from stone with a soft covering of fur. Mother Earth woke to the shivering body of Yobehe. As she tried to make him warm with a bed of fur she noticed all her tiny children. Some were human, some were birds, others had four feet, others swam in the sea. She was so happy. With the joy of a new mother, she shouted to Father Sky, "Look! We have babies!"

Father Sky was not as happy at this event as Mother Earth was. His bride kept constant vigil over her children on Turtle Island. No longer did she gaze up at him for days on end. She was a busy mother.

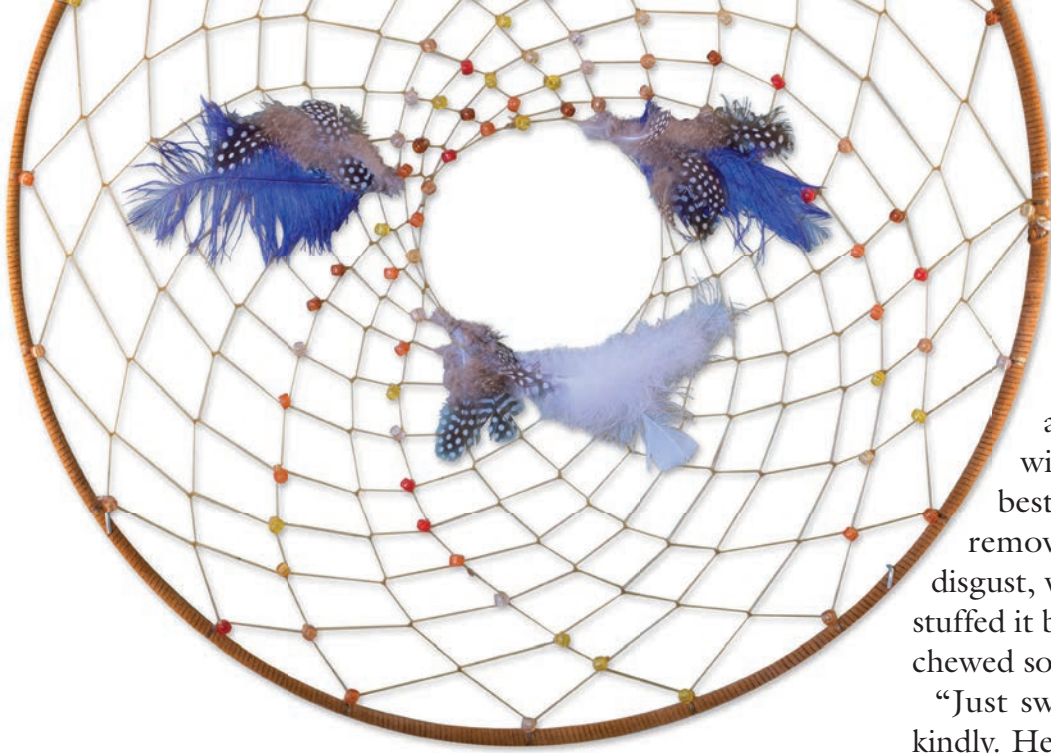
He would have tapped a foot had he had one. Perhaps he might have looked at his watch. In the modern world he might have gone out with other Sky people to complain of his fate. Yet this he did not do. He watched and was sad that his devoted wife had so little time for him. Little by little he began to notice the children of Turtle Island. At first, he thought them just interesting. He wondered why they did what they did. Eventually he found himself sad when they were sad and happy when they were happy. He had become a father. But there was one constant; little Yobehe always shivered at night. Father Sky had kept the sky clear so he could admire his bride. Now he worried for little Yobehe. So he sent warmth all through the day and little Yobehe was happy. But at night the warmth left and Yobehe would shiver. Mother Earth never asked for help with her little charges but she worried for little Yobehe too. Everyone was nearly ready to leave Turtle Island but Yobehe. He could not grow up as he was always fighting for his life.

It was a sad evening for Father Sky when he covered Mother Earth with a sky blanket so that little Yobehe could stay warm. Sacrifice is what parents do. He could no longer see his vision of heaven in the form of Mother Earth. She, in turn, knew he would always be there but the lack of

his presence was a void in her world. Eventually Yobehe grew and all the children of Turtle Island set out on their own path.

Today Mother Earth and Father Sky marvel at the children of Turtle Island and all they have accomplished. When the sky is clear, Father Sky is admiring his wife and she, in turn, admires him. When there is a blanket in the sky, little you and little me – from Turtle Island – are grateful that they both sacrifice the sight of each other to keep us precious and warm.





Maize

Buffalo Woman struggled through the bitter snow with a sleepy papoose strapped over her blankets. Her snowshoes crunched on the sparkling blanket of white that blinded the band of travelers making their way to the winter grounds miles away. Hunger lived in the eyes of everyone, so Buffalo preferred facing the blinding snow to the hollow dark eyes of brother and sister, niece and nephew, grandmother and grandfather, aunt and uncle; all generously sharing their dried meats and berries with each other. Winter had come too early. Some of the band could hardly bring themselves to eat, lest the shaking of their hands betray inability to travel further. There was now nearly nothing left to eat.

As the sun drew down the curtain of darkness, the band of travelers wearily made camp. A fire

warmed the children as Buffalo and her family settled in their shelter. Scraps of dried meat were handed out; too little and too small, but welcomed. Mothers chewed dried berries and roots to a mash for the little ones with no teeth. The toddlers did their best. Summer Sun chewed and chewed, removed the berry and looked at it with disgust, which caused no end of laughter. She stuffed it back into her once chubby cheeks and chewed some more.

“Just swallow,” her mother would suggest kindly. Her advice was not welcomed. Summer Sun scowled and chewed harder, glaring at the fire with determination.

Buffalo’s amusement turned to dismay when she looked at her family. The setting sun sent a cold so hard it stopped her breath. A fog surrounded her as she looked at the gaunt faces around the fire. Then she looked at the big sparkling sky and knew that she needed to make great medicine to save her family. She handed her baby to her sister and stood, raised her arms to Father Sky and began to sing. Summer Sun forgot her berry as she watched the fog from Buffalo’s voice rise up to Father Sky. The others were stunned at first. Buffalo was singing a song of thanks. One and all thought, what are we to be thankful for? We are starving and freezing. But Summer Sun knew, and on tiny moccasins she stood and sang with Buffalo. One by one, they all began to understand, and stood on frozen feet to sing

a song of thanks to the Creator for sparing their lives and keeping them together. They sang of their love for each other. They sang until no one could sing another note and then they retired to their shelters. They were all just as exhausted and hungry as when they arrived, but happier than they had been since leaving the summer grounds high in the mountains.

When the sun called to them in the morning, it was as if they’d been lifted from their cold camp to the low grounds of the winter season. A warm breeze met their faces; the ground was wet and the plants all welcomed them back. They all shed their moccasins to welcome warm Mother Earth beneath their feet. Suddenly a shower began. “Ouch!” Summer Sun exclaimed under the driving golden rain. Buffalo held out a still shaking hand and captured one drop of the golden rain. “Family!” she sang out, “These are seeds! Seeds of maize from the Creator! Quick! Gather them!”

This group would not have made it to the summer grounds, so the Creator delivered summer to them. That is why the sudden warm and golden days after a hard autumn frost are called Indian summer and how the people of the First Nation received the gift of maize which is called corn today.



Native American Art

Art is an integral part of every culture, a powerful means of expressing the spectrum of human thought and emotion, from beauty and joy to disgust and despair. It's a deeply personal yet universal way to share, teach, examine, persuade, celebrate, critique, thrill, shock, and above all, illuminate truths about who Native Americans are and what their purpose might be.

A central theme in the art of the Native American people is the depiction of their three interrelated, matrilineal clans – the turtle, the wolf and the bear. Each plays a distinct yet significant role in the formation of their society, a system built upon dialogue, collaboration and consensus so the clans may live with dignity and respect, in peace and abundance.

The Turtle Clan people are the foundation of our Nation.

The Wolf Clan are workers and doer. They are people who will finish every job with great determination.

The Bear Clan are a sensitive and diplomatic people. Being very sensitive, they are also known as the healers who will know what medicine to use or know someone who possesses that knowledge.

It is our privilege, dear guest, to share with you the artistic heritage of a proud, generous and harmonious people indigenous to this land. A people dedicated to preserving the blessings of the Earth. A people whose ethos inspired us to look to the natural world and bring back some of its secrets. Please then, as you indulge your senses, invoke too the spirit of the Native American during your relaxing and rejuvenating experience at SkΛ:nÁ: today.



Oneida Paintings

In this related series of paintings, the three spirit animals of the Oneida matrilineal clans, the turtle, the wolf and the bear, are each individually represented. One common visual cue is the reddish-orange background, a nod to the seal of the Oneida Nation.

For its role as the pathfinder and for its keen sense of family, the wolf is ever-watchful. And sure enough, even in profile, it's hard not to notice the wolf's intent gaze at something – wisdom from the Creator perhaps? – beyond our view. The ears are perked and bathed in a divine natural light seemingly reserved just for them, as though a voice only they can hear. This symbolic gesture reminds us how the

wolf keeps its ears to the ground as it seeks new knowledge on behalf of the three clans.

Prominently centered in the painting, the turtle, which plays a pivotal role in the Oneida creation story, is depicted as a strong and sturdy upright figure within a mainly formless and timeless space – a fixture in a sea of elementary colors. In the story, Sky Woman falls from the upper spirit realm and plummets into a lower region, where she eventually lands on the turtle's back. The brown patches on the turtle's back remind us of the mud that forms the Earth (specifically, the North American continent and a few islands), gathered by the muskrat.

The Bear Clan are the caretakers of the Earth's medicines. It's an honor bestowed by the Creator who, disguised as a sick stranger, instructed an elder woman how to heal him using certain plants. The stranger fell sick many times in order to teach her how to cure the various illnesses. Since then, the Bear Clan people are known to be healers. While the ability to heal is a symbol of power, the real strength of the formidable bear is hidden in the painting. It's not the menacing look nor its intimidating pose. No, the bear's true power is found in what is not seen – its prudence, its ability not to succumb to the impulse of violence.



The White Pine

Sacred to the Oneidas are the symbols that bind them to the earth, to The Great Law of Peace and to their beliefs. The white pine is the sacred Tree of Peace. Surrounding the tree are the turtle, the wolf and the bear, the three matrilineal clans of the Oneida people. (The Oneidas have always held women in high esteem because they possess

the Creator's gift of giving life.) The Wampum Belt is displayed in the tree to symbolize the formation of the Five Nations Haudenosaunee Confederacy to which the Oneidas belong. An eagle stands above to keep watch over the Oneidas and other nations.



The Sing

Each year, singing groups from every nation come together to share new songs along with the old ones. In this depiction on the ceremonial ceramic cup, the women shake cow horn rattles and sing to the Creator and all the people in the four directions: east, south, west and north. Each direction is assigned a different symbolic color.

The East (yellow) is the direction from which the sun comes and toward which the Oneida send prayers; it represents the Creator's wisdom and understanding.

The South (red) signifies warmth and glowing, and it is the direction through which spirits pass to return to the realm from which they came.

The West (black) is where the day, and hence life, ends. Conversely, it is also the source of water, the harbinger of life.

The North (white) brings a cleansing cold; the harsh winter symbolizes the trials the people must endure to get through it.

The Cradleboard

Most Northern Plains Indian cradleboards feature a hooded cradle bundle made of animal hide. Many have a wooden frame and either slats or a solid headboard form rising from the back; the Lakota version had long wooden slats.

The outer surface of the hide bundle was often adorned with colorful quillwork or beadwork, shells, bells and fringe, as well as animal teeth, claws and other found items; the wooden frame and slats were sometimes embellished with carvings, brass tacks or paint.

Cradles in particular symbolized the continuity of the family, community, tribe and of human life.

Lakota Style Cradleboard

Some carriers also had a mobile of beads and bells suspended from its hood to entertain the baby while in the carrier.

Bead and Quillwork Designs

In a beautiful display of the family's love and adoration, as well as to provide the little one with spiritual protection and wishes for a long, healthy life, design elements ranged from powerful animal images and strong tribal symbols, to ancestral family designs.

Despite the similarities in construction and materials, each was absolutely unique – the beaded or quilled designs on the cradles were never duplicated and were exclusive only to that child.

Quilled Amulet, Amulets

A colorful amulet (usually embellished with quill or beadwork) often accompanied the cradleboard. This little ornament housed the baby's umbilical cord and was hung from the carrier to protect the child and also ensure health and longevity. Many of these amulets took the form of an animal – that of a turtle or lizard were the most common, as they are both associated with the attributes of strength and long life.

Physical Protection

As many Plains Tribes were nomadic, cradleboards also provided the child physical protection when the family was traveling to a new camp site – either carried like a backpack or suspended from a horse's saddle.

During daily camp life, while the mother was working she could keep the baby in her sight by leaning the cradle against a tree; at night, the carrier could be brought inside the tipi and used as a bed for the baby.





Iroquois Woman Doll

The “Iroquois Woman” doll number two in a series of five has played an important part of the artist’s journey as a Native woman. Tammy’s “Iroquois Women” doll series has led to her exploration into the woman’s traditional roles and what the reality of those roles has become today. Tammy hopes that through her work she

can uplift the spirits of women and herself. Her sentiments are reflected in the faces of her dolls by allowing their expressions to emit feelings of strength, power and wisdom.



Onyota'a:ká: The People of the Standing Stone

These three statues represent the three clans of the Oneida people – the Wolf Clan, an honest and straight forward people as ordained by the Creator; the Turtle Clan, characterized by determination and consistency; and the Bear Clan, the healers who possess knowledge of the natural medicines derived from plant life.

One remarkable quality found in all of these statues is the convergence of the human form and animal spirit, creating a unity, as if no distinction

exists between the two. The spirit of the animal embodies the flesh, while simultaneously the person inside embodies the animal spirit.

Interestingly, the wolf's eyes seem almost human, its yellow hue overshadowed by their empathy. Indeed, as we stare into them, trying to understand, we can see in them a quiet yearning to be understood.

In contrast, the bear stands with a nearly blank expression, its arms calmly laid on

its stomach, a recognition of the bear's temperament described by the judicious use of its incredible strength and its non-judgmental attitude. It was the Bear Clan, after all, that welcomed the Creator, masked as a stranger in need of help and healed him multiple times in their home.

Native Turtle

The merging of a woman and a turtle contains deep and resonant meaning in Oneida culture, recalling this proud people's creation story.

In the story, Sky Woman, the daughter of the Great Spirit and resident of the Sky World, is tenderly dropped by the Great Spirit into our earthly realm and lands on a great turtle's back. It is this moment that sparks the forming of the great continent of North America and from whose soil all nourishment for the people would spring forth.

There are different interpretations of this story as told in the oral tradition. Some describe Sky Woman's fall as a fall of grace, quite similar to that of Eve's in the Judaeo-Christian creation story. In this case, she is viewed as a disobedient outcast – a pregnant woman craving food from a strange and exotic fruit-bearing tree she wasn't supposed to disturb – sent to an earthly realm as punishment. Other recounts strictly speak of a Sky Woman as a gift given to the world by her father, the Creator. Either way, the shared idea in these traditions of a sacred tree in the upper (heavenly) region and a woman's irresistible curiosity about it remains striking.

The appearance of 11 turtles on her shell-like body symbolize the 11 young men who developed the Four Sacred Ceremonies and seasonal dances that pay respect to the Creator. The feathers in Sky Woman's hair recounts her gentle descent to the earthly realm. The artist's use of ceramic is drawn from the Oneida tradition of pottery making.





Horse Hair Pottery

Horse hair pottery is the most unique and delicate form of pottery. Handcrafted by the Navajo Indians, horse hair pottery was originally made to honor a fallen horse. Horse hair pottery is fired using a special technique. Fine lines are created with hair from the mane of the horse and thick lines are created from the hair of the tail. The pot is taken out of the kiln and placed on a warm surface. The horse hair is then carefully placed on the surface of the pot and allowed to burn in. As the hair burns it creates squiggly lines and smoky grey colors. The pot cools quickly so the design must be completed within a minute or two. After the pot is fired it is rock polished, using no glaze or paint. Because no glaze is used, these horse hair pots are not for food use and will not hold water. Horse hair pottery is cleaned by simply dusting or wiping it off with a slightly damp sponge or soft cloth. Never scrub or use an abrasive cleaner.

Fancy Baskets

Ronnie-Leigh Goeman, Onondaga Nation/Eel Clan

“When I weave a basket I share the living past of my people. I am able to pass on a traditional art form, as well as the stories of those who came before, intertwining the past, present and future.”

– Ronnie-Leigh Goeman



Originally, baskets were utilitarian in purpose. When it was discovered that the baskets could be used to barter for food, the term “fancy baskets” manifested for their new found value. Each fancy basket is elaborately woven using ash and sweet grass and embellished with moose hair and quill. The black ash’s annual ring is pounded and soaked for approximately six weeks until it is totally saturated. Once saturated the black ash is split and split again until the desired thinness of the piece is obtained. The fancy baskets are double woven, meaning they are woven on the bottom and the sides. Being double woven shows the integrity of the baskets. Ronnie harvests the sweet grass in July from the swamps where the sweet grass grows. She braids the sweet grass into long strands. Ronnie is currently the only artist who does moose hair tufting and porcupine quill tufting. The moose hair is attached to the basket with catgut which is pulled through the weave tightly to form the tuft. During the process of packing the weave will remain tight. Although Ronnie-Leigh uses the traditional Iroquois method of basket making, she has elevated her art to another level, in that she collaborates and incorporates the work of Stone Horse Goeman, Stone Horse sculpts the bases for the baskets, thus creating basket sculpture. All the basket sculptures are inspired and based on Iroquois culture and tradition. The unique one of a kind presentation has become Iroquois Basket Sculpture.

The No Face Doll

The Iroquois people have what they refer to as The Three Sisters, the sustainers of life. These three sisters are corn, beans and squash. The Corn spirit, so thrilled at being one of the sustainers of life, asked The Creator what more she could do for her people. The Creator said that a beautiful doll could be fashioned from her husks. And so The Creator set to work on forming a doll. When he had finished, he gave the doll a beautiful face, and sent it to play with the Iroquois children, and bring them joy. The doll went from village to village playing with the children and doing whatever she could for them. Everywhere that she went, the people told her how beautiful she was. After a while she became vain. The Creator explained to her that this was not the right type of behavior. He told her that if she were to continue on this path, then she would indeed be punished. She agreed to change her ways.

One afternoon she was walking by a creek and glanced into the water. As she gazed at her own reflection, she could not help but to think how beautiful she was. Just then, The Creator sent a giant screech owl out of the sky to snatch her reflection from the water. When she looked again, she had no reflection. This was the punishment he had chosen for her.

When an Iroquois mother gives her child a doll, she tells them this legend. It helps to teach them about vanity and how to treat the special gifts that have been bestowed on us all by The Creator.



Kanuhelatúksla' Thanksgiving Address



These special words of thanks have been given to our people, the Haudenosaunee, which means the Longhouse people. We are comprised of the following nations: Seneca, Cayuga, Onondaga, Oneida and Mohawk.

These words of Thanksgiving were passed on to us from our ancestors, many of whom helped bring about the Great Law of Peace, led by one we call the Peacemaker. We speak these words of Thanksgiving at the opening and closing of ceremonial and Nation gatherings as a way to remember and honor the many gifts of the Creator.

When we speak these words of Thanksgiving, we do so on behalf of all our people. Each one who speaks these words of thanks does so in a way that is unique and special; just as we are all unique and special.

The basic format of the address is quite traditional and pays tribute to all aspects of the natural world and to the gifts of the Creator.

This address conveys our belief that all parts of creation are a blessing from the Creator and must be shown respect as we show our respect to the Creator. It is our way to acknowledge and remember all living things and to keep their great worth locked in the hearts and minds of all people. This address is a representation of the original words of Thanksgiving, but has been modified and paraphrased so as to be easily understood. It is important that these words be heard in the Oneida language to get a true sense of history, and it is equally important that the meaning be shared so that all can breathe words of thanks to our Creator.

Swatahuhsi:yóst oná náhte' ohátú kalihwatéhkwá'

Listen to the words that are laid before you.

We will all wrap our minds as one.
We will all give thanks, the people, that still it
will be possible for us to have peace of mind.
So that's how our minds will be.

We will all wrap our minds as one.
We will thank our mother, the Earth, that still
her mind is the same way. She gives us life.
So that's how our minds will be.

We will all wrap our minds as one.
We will thank the waters that still their minds
are the same, from the springs to the big waters.
So that's how our minds will be.

We will all wrap our minds as one.
We will thank the small plants that still their minds
are the same way.
They will grow when the warm winds return again.
So that's how our minds will be.

We will all wrap our minds as one.
We will thank the medicines that still their minds
are the same way.
They will be picked when the sickness occurs.
So that's how our minds will be.

We will all wrap our minds as one.
We will thank the sacred tobacco that we
are still using it to make a request with.
It will be placed on the fire when it is needed.
So that's how our minds will be.

We will wrap our minds as one.
We will thank the animals that
still their minds are the same way.
They give us help for many reasons.
So that's how our minds will be.

We will wrap our minds as one.
We will thank the trees that still their minds are
the same way. The maple tree is the head one.
So that's how our minds will be.

We will wrap our minds as one.
We will thank the birds that still
their minds are the same. Their many
types of songs entertain our minds.
So that's how our minds will be.

This now, here the matter has
been divided and is taken upward.

We will all wrap our minds as one.
We thank the Thunders. They are in the
West and they make the earth new again (refresh).
They carry the rain.
So that's how our minds will be.

We will all wrap our minds as one.
We will thank our older brother, the sun, that still his
mind is the same way. He is a big warrior, our brother,
the sun. He brightens the earth all of the days.
minds will be.

We will all wrap our minds as one.
We will thank our grandmother, the moon, that still
her mind is the same way. When it gets dark, our
grandmother, the moon, she brightens the earth.
So that's how our minds will be.

We will all wrap our minds as one.
We will thank the stars that still they decorate the sky.
So that's how our minds will be.

We will all wrap our minds as one.
We will thank the four messengers that
they are certainly still watching over us.
So that's how our minds will be.

We will all wrap our minds as one.
We will thank the Creator for
everything he has prepared.
So that's how our minds will be.

This now is as far as I was able to
do of what has been appointed.
We will think of peace in our minds.

This is all the words.



Artist: John B. Thomas



