

H O O D M U S E U M O F A R T | D A R T M O U T H C O L L E G E

Spirit of the Basket Tree

Wabanaki Ash Splint Baskets from Maine



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This essay is about the baskets of the Wabanaki tribes—the Passamaquoddy, Penobscot, Maliseet, and Micmac¹—of what is now known as the state of Maine. It is about different ways of seeing: how objects, events, and history can be viewed and interpreted differently by different cultures. It is about the stories that baskets tell.

The basketry of the Indigenous people of the northeastern coast of the United States and Canada is a complex art form with deep roots in tradition. However, some anthropologists, art historians, and art collectors have labeled these baskets “tourist art,” “curios,” “souvenir art,” or “commodities.” This oversimplification dismisses Native American world views, people, and art forms. It may also lead to the false assumption that the remaining tribes of New England are somehow not “real,” or that they no longer exist as living, thriving cultures. Such views “deny the validity of indigenous peoples’ claim to existence, to land and territories, to the right of self-determination, to the survival of our languages and forms of cultural knowledge, and to our natural resources and systems for living within our environments” (Smith 1999:1).²

As a Penobscot woman, basket maker, and employee of the Maine Indian Basketmakers Alliance, I have been fortunate to meet and work with many Native basket makers from Maine, elsewhere in New England, and across the United States and Canada. Indigenous weavers do not describe their culture’s basketry as “curios” or “tourist art.” Despite a long history of trading and selling baskets, the Wabanaki tribes also have a deeper, more complex relationship to this tradition. The words most often used by Native people in relation to basketry are “pride,” “tradition,” “community,” and “family.” While I do not presume to speak for all Penobscot or Wabanaki, I write here from the perspective of a basket weaver and tribal member who earned a degree in anthropology with the hope that I could help our voices and truths be heard.

Ganessa Bryant, Penobscot, b. 1982, *Point Basket*, 2008, brown ash and sweetgrass. Purchased through the Alvin and Mary Bert Gutman '40 Acquisitions Fund; 2008.46.

THE DEBATE ON THE ORIGINS OF INDIGENOUS ASH SPLINT BASKETRY

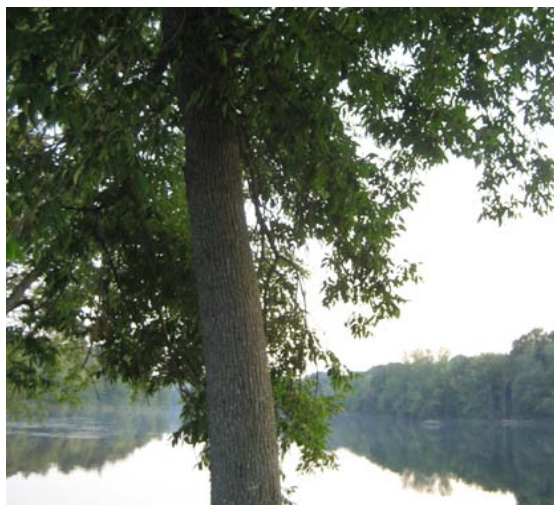
As Gods might, the Europeans believed they had created the New World by their “discovery” of it. If that was so, why couldn’t they just as boldly “invent” the creation myths of its origins? They did.

Stan Steiner, 1987 (Thomas 2000:121)

Early Western accounts of Indigenous basket-making styles and techniques from northeastern North America are rare. Perhaps because they were new and unusual to the explorers who wrote about them, birch-bark baskets and canoes are described more frequently. Nonetheless, it is commonly accepted that during this early contact period twined baskets and mats were woven of basswood, rushes, white cedar, cattail, nettles, spruce root, and sweetgrass (Whitehead 1980:8).

This lack of historical documentation has contributed to the disagreement between scholars and northeastern Native peoples about the use of black or brown ash (*fraxinus nigra*)³ in traditional basket making. Some scholars question the legitimacy of splint basketry to the culture of the northeastern tribes. They dismiss splint basketry as “a bastard child of colonialism” (McMullen 1992:20) that was taught to Native people in the early 1700s by Dutch settlers, and they further claim that Native people could not have made splint baskets while lacking European steel tools (Brasser 1975).

Other scholars counter that not only were Native people capable of making wood splints before contact, they *did* make them for use in lining their canoes (Whitehead 1980:57, McBride and Prins 1990:11). Splints of cedar, ash, or maple used in the construction of birch-bark canoes were (and are) traditional splint basket materials.



1. Molly Ockett, Pequawket, about 1740–1816, twined pocketbook, about 1778, hemp and moosehair or porcupine quills. Collections of the Maine Historical Society; MMN6802. Photo courtesy of the Maine Historical Society.

AN ANTHROPOLOGIST’S ORIGIN OF SPLINT BASKETS

It frequently happens that the historian, though he professes more humanity than a trapper, mountain man, or gold-digger, who shoots [an Indian] like a wild beast, really exhibits and practices a similar inhumanity to him, wielding a pen instead of a rifle.

Henry David Thoreau (Churchill 1997:173)

The notion of “authentic” is highly contested when applied to, or by, indigenous peoples. “Authorities” and outside experts are often called in to verify, comment upon, and give judgments about the validity of indigenous claims to cultural beliefs, values, ways of knowing and historical accounts.

Linda Tuhiwai Smith (Smith 1999:72)

In 1975 anthropologist Ted Brasser published a paper suggesting that Swedish and Dutch settlers introduced splint basketry to Native Americans in the Delaware River Valley in the early 1700s. He speculated that this technology then spread north, reaching the Iroquois and New England tribes sometime between the end of the Revolutionary War and 1800 (Brasser 1975, McMullen 2001:159). Of the Wabanaki he states, “The splint basket industry reached the Penobscot and Maliseet shortly after 1840, and it was slowly spreading among the Nova Scotia Micmacs in the 1860s” (Brasser 1975:29). Brasser’s theory is widely accepted in the academic world despite scanty supporting evidence.

One reason the origins of Native ash splint basketry remain contested is because precious few examples of Native American material culture survived the colonial period. Due to the acidic soils of the Northeast, basket fragments from pre-contact eras rarely survive in the archeological record. However, Seneca splint basket fragments dated between 1640 and 1660 have been discovered at archeological digs in New York and Pennsylvania (Handsman and

McMullen 1987:22), and fragments of pre-contact eastern white cedar splint mats have been found in Red Bank, New Brunswick (Whitehead 1980:52), thereby debunking Brasser's controversial theory.

That so few Native-made baskets survive from the colonial period in New England is not surprising. Epidemics devastated New England tribes in the early 1600s. It is estimated that 75 to 95 percent of the indigenous population died from introduced diseases. The survivors fought to defend themselves and their land in a series of wars that began in the late 1600s and continued through the Revolutionary War. During this time Native American villages were repeatedly ransacked and burned. Massacres of Native people were common, and survivors were often sold into slavery in the Caribbean.⁴ The goal was to clear the land for settlement, and acts of genocide were often justified with the belief that "progress" at any cost was God's will.

Of the handful of surviving Native-made baskets from the colonial period, only one is a twined basket (Ulrich 2001:250). This hemp and moosehair pocketbook was made by Molly Ockett sometime between 1778 and 1785 (Ulrich 2001:266, fig. 1). Ockett was Pequawket, an Abenaki band that lived in western Maine. When she was a child, her people sought protection in the Boston area from the many bounty hunters paid to collect scalps of Native men, women, and children.⁵ Unfortunately for the Pequawket, who tried to remain neutral in the many wars occurring during this period, it made no difference to the bounty hunters whether their prey was friend or foe.

2. Artist unknown, Native American, lined and stamped basket, about 1799, brown ash, silk, and pigments. Hood Museum of Art: Gift of Mrs. Harold Cairnie; 159.56.14479.

Photo by Jeffrey Nintzel.



3. Artist unknown, Penobscot, small hex weave basket, 1800, brown ash. Collection of the Abbe Museum; #1952.

Photo by Julia Clark, Abbe Museum.

Interestingly, the Pequawkets' refugee years in Massachusetts also provided evidence that ash splint basketry making had begun a full century before Brasser credits its spread to the Wabanaki. Some of the Pequawkets were confined on land owned by Noah Sprague in Rochester, Massachusetts. In a letter to the legislature written in 1747, Sprague seeks ten pounds in compensation for "ash & maple Timbers Cut in my Swamp to make Dishes & baskets" (Ulrich 2001:254).

Several New England museums provide evidence that Native splint basketry existed well before Brasser's theoretical dates would indicate. The Hood Museum of Art has a beautiful Native-made ash splint basket from Massachusetts that dates from 1799 (159.56.14479, fig. 2), and the Robert Abbe Museum collection includes a hex weave basket attributed to the Penobscot that dates from 1800 (fig. 3), as well as a number of other Wabanaki baskets that predate 1840.

New England eventually became the cradle of American anthropology and archeology. Unfortunately, many archeologists, historians, and, until recently, anthropologists routinely dismissed

tribal oral histories as source material. This left only the often biased and erroneous accounts of the colonizers—missionaries, explorers, settlers, and soldiers—as “acceptable” resources for understanding Native lives in this era. Upon this shaky base, anthropologists and historians built theories to determine the “authenticity” and “legitimacy” of surviving tribes and their art forms.

A NATIVE ORIGIN OF SPLINT BASKETS

Glooskap came first of all into this country the land of the Wabanaki, next to sunrise . . . And in this way he made man: He took his bow and arrows and shot at trees, the basket-trees, the Ash. Then Indians came out of the bark of the Ash-Trees.

Creation story, Molly Sepsis (Passamaquoddy), published in *Algonquin Legends* by Charles L. Leland, 1884 (Benedict and David 2000:7)

Ash splint basketry is a tradition shared by many tribes. Native people ranging from the east coast of Canada south to the mid-Atlantic region of the United States and west to the Great Lakes areas used (and continue to use) black or brown ash to make splint baskets. Native basket makers in fact believe that splint basketry has always been part of our traditions; the Wabanaki see basket making as a skill that has been passed from weaver to weaver and generation to generation for thousands of years. In one Passamaquoddy creation story, Wabanaki people are born from the ash tree. This tree is favored over all others for the strength and flexibility of its splints.

Splint baskets were also vitally important in food gathering and preparation. Pack baskets made to fit into birch-bark canoes were and still are used on hunting and fishing excursions (fig. 4). Fish and eel traps were made from brown ash splints. Tribes that grew corn used specially woven corn-washing baskets to remove the tough hulls from the kernels, and Mohawk basket makers continue to make and use these baskets today. Ash splint baskets were also woven for sifting flour made from ground corn and acorns. Ashes from black ash are used in the preparation of hominy from flint corn (Benedict and David 2000: i), and brown ash tree bark and leaves are used for medicinal purposes. This specialized knowledge and the technology and tools devoted to gathering and preparing food, trapping fish, and making medicine most certainly predate European contact.



4. Artist unknown, Passamaquoddy, pack basket, brown ash. Hood Museum of Art; 160.35.14544. Photo by Jeffrey Nintzel.

The technology for splint basketry and twined textile basketry most likely existed side by side for thousands of years. Each type of basketry technique has important and specific uses in Native cultures. The only tools necessary are an ax for pounding and a sharp blade for scraping. Stone axes and sharp flint blades both exist in the pre-contact archeological record.⁶

Because so many Native Americans in the Northeast turned to the trade and sale of splint basketry as a means of survival early in the eighteenth century, some historians and anthropologists argue that the technology must have been acquired from the Europeans. However, there are a number of other explanations for the sudden replacement of twined textile baskets by splint baskets at this time.

First, splint baskets are better suited for trade or sale than textile baskets for the simple reason that black ash can be harvested year round. Materials used for textile baskets include nettles, hemp, cattails, basswood, spruce root, and sweetgrass, which can only be gathered at certain times of the year. Many of these materials also require special preparation and storage methods. Black ash has a broad geographic range and can be harvested at any time of year. If basket makers ran out of inventory, they could easily locate an ash tree from which to make more baskets.

Second, splint baskets are faster and easier to make than textile baskets. Woven textile baskets are

impressive, beautiful, and awe-inspiring in their complexity, but the tiny and intricate weaves require hours of intense concentration. Splint baskets are equally beautiful but do not require the same time commitment. Twined baskets continued to be made in some Native communities for personal use, then, while splint baskets were produced in larger quantities to sell and trade.

Third, splint baskets were in high demand. Their strength, flexibility, and light weight made them desirable to Euro-American farmers and housewives. They could be filled with vegetables and dragged through fields; they could be kicked, sat on, filled with wet laundry, bounced up and down on top of a stage coach or train, and made to almost any size or shape. Splint baskets fulfilled the needs of both the settlers that purchased them and the Native people who made them. Adapting existing basketry technologies to a newly developing Euro-American market allowed Native people the independence and freedom to continue existing traditions based on trade and travel.

WEAVING TO SURVIVE

How must we live now, we know nothing but hunting, you white men can live other ways.

From a formal statement by the Micmac and Maliseet protesting white settlement of the hunting lands after the 1783 Treaty of Paris (McBride and Prins 1990:10)

By the turn of the eighteenth century the colonial wars had ended, the American Revolution was over, and the fur trade was gone forever. Passamaquoddy, Penobscot, Micmac, and Maliseet peoples had fought on the side of the American colonists in the Revolutionary War. In return, these tribes were promised that they would be able to keep all their remaining lands. Colonel John Allen acknowledged that “had it not been for the Indians the boundary line would run along the Penobscot River instead of the St. Croix” (Soctomah 2002:142). Despite these promises, Wabanaki lands were divided up in the Treaty of Paris in 1783. An international border now cut through the territories of the Passamaquoddy, Maliseet, and Micmac. To add insult to injury, huge parcels of remaining tribal lands were given away to non-Native Revolutionary War veterans, in violation of previous treaties.

While tribal leaders protested, thousands of new settlers swarmed into Wabanaki territories. They cleared land for farms, dammed rivers for sawmills, and cut old growth forests, decimating traditional hunting and fishing grounds and causing irrevocable ecological devastation.⁷ When Maine gained statehood, life for the Wabanaki went from bad to worse. Between 1831 and 1839, in violation of treaties made with the Penobscot and Passamaquoddy, the Maine State Legislature authorized the sale and lease of almost all tribal lands and the sale of timber from lands that remained without the consent of or reasonable compensation to the tribes.

In this changing world the Wabanaki searched within their own cultures to find new ways to survive, combining hundreds of years of trade experience with Euro-Americans with thousands of years of creativity as weavers, carvers, birch-bark box makers, and canoe builders, into an industry that enabled cultural and economic survival. In a time when church, state, and federal policies were pressuring Native people to reject their own cultures, tribal people instead used their hands to create objects that allowed them to continue living an independent, semi-traditional



5. Photograph of Mary Nicola, known as “Molly Molasses” (Penobscot, about 1775–1867), about 1860. Bangor Museum and History Center.



6. Mary Nicola, known as “Molly Molasses,” Penobscot, about 1775–1867, fancy basket, about 1862, brown ash. Collection of the Abbe Museum; #1914. Photo by Julia Clark, Abbe Museum.

lifestyle, in resistance to social and political forces that sought to dominate and assimilate them.

Wabanaki families traveled together by canoe, foot, horse, train, and steamship to places as far away as Boston, New York City, and Philadelphia, selling their baskets, wares, and medicines along the way. Some peddled baskets door to door throughout New England. Some joined traveling vaudeville shows to earn money entertaining others with their stories, songs, and dances. Wabanaki men found work as guides, and some gained fame working the log drives.⁸

An important example of basketry from this time period is a basket made by Mary Pelagie Nicola, also known as Molly Molasses (figures 5 and 6). A Penobscot woman born around 1775, she lived through all of these changes until the age of ninety-two. In addition to its artistic value, this basket also represents one of the earliest examples of fancy basket work attributable to a specific person. Rarer still is the fact that due to her reputation in the Bangor area, Molly Molasses was painted, photographed, and written about by local authors in books and newspapers.

THE RISE OF THE FANCY BASKET

Many of the tribe have during the fall made improvements in their houses. This they are able to do from their savings in the result of their labor and profits in selling baskets and their other wares at the different watering places.

1872 Indian Agent Report on the Penobscot at Indian Island

By the 1870s hotels had sprung up along the New England coastline and its inland lakes. These summer resorts catered to Victorian tourists seeking to escape to cleaner air and water and cooler temperatures. The new resort hotels were built in Bar Harbor, Northeast Harbor, Deer Isle, Bailey Island, Old Orchard Beach, the Kennebunks, Boothbay Harbor, Moosehead Lake, Belgrade Lakes, and Poland Spring in Maine—all places where Wabanaki traditionally had lived. Tribal people continued to return to these areas to hunt and fish, setting up encampments beside the new resorts. Reminiscent of the traditional division of hunting territories, tribal families each had their own location to which they returned every year to sell their work. Some families also continued to travel out of state to places such as Rye Beach and the White Mountains of New Hampshire (fig. 7), and Newport, Rhode Island, to sell their baskets.

The stability of having a lucrative place to return to every year, combined with the Victorian appetite for collecting from Native Americans, made this a very

creative period for basket makers. Three other factors contributed to the explosion of new fancy basket styles as well. The first was the availability of commercial dyes, which brought an increased use of brighter colors. Second, the summer encampments' proximity to sweetgrass-gathering areas enabled weavers to include larger quantities of this material in their work. Third, men who had jobs in saw mills, or, in the case of the Penobscot, canoe factories in Old Town, were able to use factory lathes to create new styles and shapes of wooden basket blocks.

During this era Maine Indian baskets became extremely popular. Entire families worked all winter in preparation for the summer sales. While utility baskets continued to be produced, fancy baskets were also made to meet every imaginable need, including the storage of hats, gloves, handkerchiefs, stationary, calling cards, jewelry, candy, glasses, yarn, knitting needles, thimbles, scissors, tatting supplies, and even the loose hair that was used to create women's hairstyles of the time. Baskets were made in the shapes of purses, hats, napkin rings, pin cushions, bookmarks, baby rattles, and tea cups, and powder-puff baskets were even made in the shape of miniature hats. The creative possibilities were endless, and baskets that are still sought after today—shaped like barrels, sea urchins, and traditional Wabanaki foods such as corn, pumpkins, strawberries, and acorns—all originated during this time (fig. 8).

Basket making became the primary source of income for many Wabanaki families, and by the turn of the twentieth century almost every Penobscot



8. Artist unknown, Penobscot, pumpkin basket, mid- to late-19th century, brown ash and sweetgrass. Hood Museum of Art: Gift of Mrs. Ida Farr Miller; 44.18.8794. Photo by Jeffrey Nintzel.

and Passamaquoddy household was involved with it. It was truly a community effort. Men often traveled together to the woods to hunt for good basket trees. Sometimes trees were cut and pounded on the spot because finished splints were easier to carry, though logs could also be brought back to the basket makers' homes to be prepared as needed.⁹ Sweetgrass that had been picked along the coast in the summertime was braided into 100-yard increments to be woven into baskets. Women often held sweetgrass braiding parties to keep each other company during this long, tedious job. Basket makers also helped each other with their orders, sometimes specializing in particular tasks such as weaving the bottoms or sides, or binding the baskets. Although many hands may have worked on a single basket, weavers had their own styles, and individuals, families, and tribes sometimes held "rights" to particular basket styles.



7. Postcard of Camilla Sockalexis (Penobscot, 1890–1958), selling baskets in Flume, NH, 1934. Collection of the Hudson Museum, University of Maine.

HOLDING THE PIECES TOGETHER

My grandmother taught me “someday this will keep you from going hungry” and it did.

Madeline Shay, Penobscot basket maker, 1985
(Lester 1987:37)

The Great Depression brought many changes to Wabanaki basket makers. Tourism declined as many summer visitors lost their fortunes. The large hotels closed their doors, and fewer weavers spent their summers at the coastal resorts. Some sold their baskets door to door or from shops on the reservations. Functional needs remained: the Micmac continued to make potato baskets for the potato harvest in Aroostook County, and the Passamaquoddy made fish-scale baskets for the fishing industry.¹⁰

World War II also had an impact on Wabanaki weavers. Native men and women joined the war effort, enlisting in the military or working in factories. After the war many families moved to southern New England, where they found better-paying factory jobs, greater educational opportunities, and less racism. Although the federal government granted Native Americans U.S. citizenship in 1924, Maine was the last state to allow Native Americans the right to vote in national elections, refusing to do so until 1954. The right to vote in state elections was withheld until 1967.

The 1950s to the 1980s were hard times for basket makers. Cheap foreign-made baskets flooded the market, and plastic baskets and containers started to replace storage and fish-scale baskets. The potato industry began using mechanical harvesters, lessening the demand for potato baskets. The sale and subsequent development of coastal land made many sweetgrass-gathering areas and traditional selling locations inaccessible. In the late 1960s, Interstate 95 was extended to Houlton, Maine, bypassing Old Town as a main route to Canada, effectively turning off the remaining flow of tourists to the once-popular basket shops of Indian Island.

The numbers of basket makers began to drop. Children were encouraged to focus on attending college and finding steady jobs. Although it had become considerably harder to make a living from baskets, basket makers kept weaving, keeping the tradition safe for future generations.



Micmac basket makers Donald and Mary Sanipass at the Native American Festival in Bar Harbor, Maine Indian Basketmakers Alliance (MIBA), 2006. Photo courtesy of MIBA.

WEAVING THE FUTURE THROUGH THE MAINE INDIAN BASKETMAKERS ALLIANCE

I learned as a child, but it wasn't until my mother died in '93 that I picked it up again. Basically my father wouldn't leave me alone until I did, he wanted someone to continue making the type of baskets my mother made, and I guess I was the chosen one.

Caron Shay, Penobscot basket maker, 1997
(Bangor Daily News)

The 1990s brought a resurgence of basket making in Wabanaki communities as Maine Indian baskets gained acceptance as a legitimate art form among collectors, gallery owners, museums, and state and federal arts agencies. This resurgence was also due to the hard work of the basket makers themselves. Realizing in the early 1990s that there were fewer than a dozen weavers under the age of forty, basket makers from the Penobscot, Passamaquoddy, Micmac, and Maliseet tribes united to form the Maine Indian Basketmakers Alliance (MIBA) in 1993 to encourage the preservation of the art.

Since its inception, the board, staff, and membership of the Maine Indian Basketmakers Alliance (MIBA) have understood the importance of a holistic approach to preserving this tradition. Teaching, marketing, and access to and the continued health of brown ash and sweetgrass are all interconnected in MIBA's work, which includes rotating workshops to each of the five tribal communities, an annual apprenticeship program, three annual events where basket makers sell directly to the public, and a gallery whose opening inventory consisted of baskets generously donated by MIBA members.

In the fifteen years since MIBA was founded, the number of basket makers has risen to well over one hundred. Two Passamaquoddy weavers have been honored with National Heritage Fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts: Mary Mitchell Gabriel in 1994 and Clara Neptune Keezer in 2004. Many of the young weavers who learned in the very first workshops have grown up and have apprentices of their own who are in turn becoming successful artists as well. Many follow in their ancestors' footsteps, traveling throughout North America to find good markets for their baskets. Today Maine Indian baskets are highly sought after by art collectors and galleries, and MIBA has emerged as an international success story in traditional arts preservation.

Sadly, these successes are now threatened by an invasive beetle species from eastern Asia, the emerald ash borer. First discovered in Michigan in 2002, this insect has spread rapidly, mainly through the movement of infected firewood and nursery stock. The beetle kills all species of ash, including brown or black ash—the basket tree—threatening the basketry traditions of several Great Lakes area tribes and the Iroquois, Abenaki, and Wabanaki as well. The emerald ash borer has killed millions of trees, and foresters warn that damage from this insect could be on the scale of the chestnut blight and Dutch elm disease, causing widespread ecological damage. With the beetle now in Quebec province at the western door of Wabanaki territory, MIBA is working with the U.S. Forest Service, the Maine Forest Service, and tribal foresters to educate the public in hopes of holding off the spread of the emerald ash borer to Maine for as long as possible.¹¹

Jeremy Frey, Passamaquoddy, b.1978, *Sea Urchin Basket*, 2008, brown ash and sweetgrass. Hood Museum of Art: Purchased through the Alvin and Mary Bert Gutman '40 Acquisitions Fund; 2008.51. Photo by Jeffrey Nintzel.

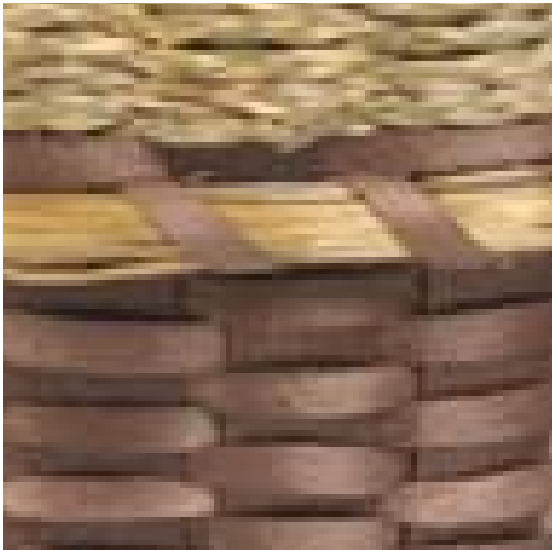


CONCLUSION

From pack baskets tucked in the curves of our birch-bark canoes to exquisitely woven hex-weave sifting baskets, to the utility baskets peddled to farmers and fishermen, to the wild and colorful fancy baskets of the Victorian era, to the works of art produced today, baskets have played an important role in the lives of the Wabanaki. The baskets reveal not only the spirit of the basket tree but also the spirit of the people—our resistance to assimilation, our creativity, our hopes, our sovereignty and strength.

Baskets remain a connection to our past, an unbroken chain of mothers, fathers, grandparents, and ancestors who protected and passed on the tradition for those who would need it in the future. Baskets hold memories of family and tribal stories of those who came before. Baskets are a connection to the spiritual, as many weavers still dream their basket designs and feel the hands of the ancestors guiding their work. Sweetgrass still carries our prayers to the Creator and reminds us of the promise of summer while weaving on cold winter nights. Baskets hold our communities together by connecting young to old, and weavers to apprentices, ash pounders, block and gauge makers, sweetgrass gatherers and braiders, and other weavers and friends in our own tribes and beyond. More than a means of survival, baskets continue to be an inseparable part of the culture and traditions of the Wabanaki.

JENNIFER SAPIEL NEPTUNE (PENOBSCOT)
Indian Island, Maine



NOTES

1. The term “Wabanaki” means “people of the dawn” and refers to the Penobscot, Passamaquoddy, Micmac, Maliseet, and Abenaki tribes of Canada and northern New England. Abenaki populations remain in New Hampshire, Vermont, and Quebec. They continue to weave ash splint baskets, but because this exhibit focuses only on tribes that remain in Maine (Penobscot, Passamaquoddy, Micmac, and Maliseet), Abenaki are not included here. I have chosen to use “Micmac” in deference to the spelling used by the Aroostook Band of Micmac in northern Maine; the alternate spelling of “Mi’kmaq” is the preferred spelling in Canada. I have used “Native” or “Indigenous” in reference to Native Americans in the United States or Northeast in general. Regarding the history of basket making in this region, I have tried to be as specific as possible. However there were and still are many splint basket-making tribes in the Northeast, so I used the general term “Native” to avoid excluding entire cultures. In Maine, tribes still use the term “Indian” (for example, Penobscot Indian Nation, Maine Indian Basketmakers Alliance) and generally find it no less or more inaccurate or offensive than “Native American.” In general, most Native people use, and prefer others to employ, their individual tribal, band, and village names.
2. For more information on these issues see *Native and Academics: Researching and Writing about American Indians* edited by Devon A. Mihesuah (University of Nebraska Press, 1998) and *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* by Linda Tuhiwai Smith (Palgrave/St Martin’s Press, 1999).
3. Black ash and brown ash is the same species of tree, *fraxinus nigra*. Foresters and basket makers in Maine use the term brown ash, while the term black ash is most commonly used outside of Maine to refer to this tree species. Both names are correct and are used interchangeably.
4. For more information on the complex issues and relationships that led to these incidents see *The Embattled Northeast* by Kenneth M. Morrison (University of California Press, 1984); *Dawnland Encounters* by Colin G. Calloway (University Press of New England, 1991); *The Western Abenakis of Vermont, 1600–1800* by Colin G. Calloway (University of Oklahoma Press, 1990); and the *Wabanaki of Maine and the Maritimes: A Resource Book about Penobscot, Passamaquoddy, Maliseet, Micmac and Abenaki Indians* (American Friends Service Committee, 1989).
5. The English were offering bounties for Indian scalps as early as 1694 in Massachusetts, which included what is today Maine. A proclamation issued in July of 1755 against the Penobscots stated, “And I do hereby require his Majesty’s subjects of the Province to embrace all opportunities of pursuing, captivating, killing and destroying all and every of the aforesaid Indians” (Speck 1976[1940]: xix). Bounty premiums for the scalps of adult males were set at forty pounds, while scalps of females or males under the age of twelve were twenty pounds (Speck 1976[1940]: xix).
6. Stone axes and blades are very common in the archeological record of the northeast. For further study see *The Archaeology of New England* by Dean R. Snow (New York: Academic Press, 1980) or *Twelve Thousand Years: American Indians in Maine* by Bruce J. Bourque (University of Nebraska Press, 2001). Other archaeologists who have written extensively on the archeology of Maine include David Sanger, James B. Peterson, Brian S. Robinson, and Arthur E. Spiess.
7. While much of New England has been reforested, there really is no comparison in the health and biodiversity of an old growth forest ecosystem to that of reforested agricultural or logged land. Additionally, Atlantic salmon and other populations of anadromous fish (which migrate up rivers from the sea to breed in fresh water) such as shad, alewives, and shortnose sturgeon in Maine have not recovered from environmental degradation caused by the logging industry, log drives, and the many dams that block their migrations. Woodland caribou and wolves were hunted to extinction in Maine by the beginning of the twentieth century. The Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife currently lists five species of fish and wildlife as extinct, fourteen species as extirpated, and an additional thirty-three species as endangered or threatened. An interesting way to see the impact of the logging dams on the Maine forest is to compare the old survey, logging, and railroad maps from the early 1800s and 1900s to a modern Maine atlas, particularly the areas around Chesuncook, Telos, Mattagamon, and Millinocket. For early survey maps of Penobscot and Maliseet territory in northern Maine see *Wabanaki Homeland and the New State of Maine: the 1820 Journal and Plans of Survey of Joseph Treat*, edited by Micah A. Pawling (University of Massachusetts Press, 2007), which includes a well-researched introduction that puts the survey into political and historical context. Another informative map is the Map of Northern Maine by Lucius L. Hubbard published in 1900. A good resource for locating remaining old growth forest sites in the northeastern United States is *The Sierra Club Guide to the Ancient Forests of the Northeast* by Bruce Kershner and Robert T. Leverett (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 2004). For a description of New England old growth forests in pre-contact and colonial eras, see “A Look Back,” pages 70–73 in *Reading the Forested Landscape: A Natural History of New England* by Tom Wessels (Woodstock, New York: The Countryman Press, 1997). For a historical overview of the forests of Maine see *The Interrupted Forest: A History of Maine’s Wildlands* by Neil Rolde (Gardner, Maine: Tilbury House Publishers, 2001).

8. It would make for a very long essay indeed to list even a fraction of the Wabanaki men and women who gained fame as performers, guides, and river drivers. For more information on the Passamaquoddy see *Passamaquoddy at the Turn of the Century, 1890–1920* and *Hard Times at Passamaquoddy, 1921–1950* by Donald Soctomah. For the Penobscot see *The Penobscot Dance of Resistance* by Pauleena MacDougall (University of New Hampshire Press, 2004). For the Micmac see *The Mi'kmaq: Resistance, Accommodation, and Cultural Survival* by Harald E. L. Prins (Harcourt Brace College Publishers, 1996). For specific information on the Wabanaki men involved in the logging industry, see *The Penobscot Man* by Fannie Hardy Eckstrom published in 1904, *The Argyle Boom* by Edward D. Ives, et al. (Northeast Folklore Society, 1976). Indian agent reports and censuses of the time also list specific individuals. For more information on the lives of Wabanaki performers who traveled the vaudeville circuit, see *Molly Spotted Elk: A Penobscot in Paris* by Bunny McBride (University of Oklahoma Press, 1995), also by Bunny McBride, see *Princess Watahwaso: Bright Star of the Penobscot* [as a booklet published by Charles Norman Shay, Old Town, Maine, 2002, or as an essay in *Of Place and Gender: Women in Maine History*, edited by Marli F. Weiner (University of Maine Press, 2005)]; *Chief Big Thunder (1827–1906): The Life History of a Penobscot Trickster*, by Harald E. L. Prins (*Maine History* 37, no. 3 [Winter 1998]:140–58); and *Life of John W. Johnson*, by John W. Johnson (Portland, Maine: Brown Thruston, 1861). There are numerous articles with references to Maine Indian Guides in sportsmen's magazines from the 1800s and early twentieth century. There were also quite a few books in which Penobscot, Passamaquoddy, and Maliseet guides are mentioned, the most famous of which is, of course, *The Maine Woods* by Henry David Thoreau (first published in 1864) about his trips into the northern Maine forest with his Penobscot guides Joseph Attean in 1853 and Joseph Polis in 1857.

9. There are two traditional methods of preparing brown ash for basket splints. One is the whole-log method used by the Passamaquoddy, Maliseet, and Penobscot. In this method, the bark is peeled from the log, and then the entire length of the log is pounded with the back of an axe. Pounding causes the growth rings to separate into splints. The splints are then lifted from the log in six- to ten-foot strips. The Micmac method is to quarter the log first and then cut it into sections of the desired width and length. These sections are then pounded. Depending on the type of basket to be made, the rough splints are then split to the desired thickness and/or scraped smooth with a knife. Finally, the splints are cut into even strips with a gauge, a tool with sharp evenly spaced teeth.

10. A byproduct of the fishing industry, fish scales were sold as an ingredient in the cosmetics industry.

11. Since its discovery in Michigan in 2002, the emerald ash borer has spread quickly, killing over forty million ash trees in southeast Michigan alone. Infected states and provinces now include Michigan, Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Missouri, Wisconsin, West Virginia, Pennsylvania, Maryland, Ontario, and Quebec. Symptoms of the emerald ash borer include dead or dying ash trees, unusual sprouts on the trunks, D-shaped exit holes in the bark of the tree, and S-shaped grooves under the bark.

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Selected Works from the Exhibition

The checklist is organized according to the thematic groupings in the exhibition.

RISE OF THE FANCY BASKET



Artist unknown, Penobscot

Open Sewing Basket with Porcupine Curls

About 1860–80

Brown ash and sweetgrass

Collection of the Hudson Museum,
University of Maine; HM7007

Photo by Stephen Bicknell, Hudson Museum, University of Maine



Frances Neptune Richard, Passamaquoddy, 1910–1988

Flat Sewing Basket

1973

Brown ash and sweetgrass

Collection of the Abbe Museum; #5012

Photo by Julia Clark, Abbe Museum



Mary Louise Francis, Penobscot, 1913–1980

Fancy Basket

1974

Brown ash and sweetgrass

Collection of the Abbe Museum; #2002-16-0453

Photo by Julia Clark, Abbe Museum



Clara Solomon, Penobscot, 1893–1964

Curly Bowl

1960

Brown ash and sweetgrass

Hood Museum of Art; 160.35.14539

Photo by Jeffrey Nintzel



Artist unknown, Penobscot

Barrel Basket

1939

Brown ash and sweetgrass

Hood Museum of Art; Gift of

Glover Street Hastings III; 181.2.26060

Photo by Jeffrey Nintzel



Artist unknown, Penobscot

Fancy Basket

1939

Brown ash and sweetgrass

Hood Museum of Art; Gift of

Glover Street Hastings III; 181.2.26061

Photo by Jeffrey Nintzel

CHILD-SIZED BASKETS, MINIATURES, AND FRUITS AND VEGETABLES



Artist unknown, Wabanaki
Miniature Handkerchief Basket
 19th century
 Brown ash and sweetgrass
 Collection of the Hudson Museum,
 University of Maine
 Photo by Stephen Bicknell, Hudson Museum, University of Maine



Molly Neptune Parker, Passamaquoddy, b. 1939
Acorn Basket
 2008
 Brown ash and sweetgrass
 Hood Museum of Art: Purchased through the Alvin
 and Mary Bert Gutman '40 Acquisitions Fund;
 2008.50.2
 Photo by Jeffrey Nintzel



Kim Bryant, Penobscot, b. 1964
Pinecone Basket
 2008
 Brown ash and sweetgrass
 Hood Museum of Art: Purchased through the
 Hood Museum of Art Acquisitions Fund; 2008.69
 Photo by Stephen Bicknell, Hudson Museum, University of Maine



Theresa Neptune Gardner, Passamaquoddy, 1935–2004

Indian Corn Basket

1994

Brown ash and sweetgrass

Collection of Martin and Jennifer Neptune

Photo by Stephen Bicknell, Hudson Museum, University of Maine



Clara Neptune Keezer, Passamaquoddy, b. 1930

Strawberry Basket

1994

Brown ash and sweetgrass

Collection of Martin and Jennifer Neptune

Photo by Stephen Bicknell, Hudson Museum, University of Maine

HOLDING THE PIECES TOGETHER



Julia Ann Mell ("Mrs. Joe Mel"),
Passamaquoddy, 1849–1930

Fancy Basket

1920

Brown ash and sweetgrass

Hood Museum of Art: Gift of

Mary Louise Warden Stewart; 996.42.30332

Photo by Jeffrey Nintzel



Mary Mitchell Gabriel, Passamaquoddy, 1908–2004

Large Fancy Basket

1989

Brown ash and sweetgrass

Hood Museum of Art: Purchased through the

Alvin and Mary Bert Gutman '40 Acquisitions Fund;

2007.40.2

Photo courtesy of the Hood Museum of Art



Sylvia Gabriel, Passamaquoddy, 1929–2003

Porcupine Weave Basket

1996

Brown ash and sweetgrass

Collection of Devon Storman

Photo by Stephen Bicknell, Hudson Museum, University of Maine



Madeline Shay, Penobscot, 1915–1993

Bread Tray

1960

Brown ash and sweetgrass

Hood Museum of Art; 160.35.14540

Photo by Jeffrey Nintzel



Caron Shay, Penobscot, b. 1944

Curly Bowl

2008

Brown ash and sweetgrass

Hood Museum of Art: Purchased through the
Alvin and Mary Bert Gutman '40 Acquisitions Fund;
2008.49

Photo by Jeffrey Nintzel



Clara Neptune Keezer, Passamaquoddy, b. 1930
Fancy Sweetgrass Flat Basket
 2007

Brown ash and sweetgrass
 Hood Museum of Art: Purchased through the Alvin
 and Mary Bert Gutman '40 Acquisitions Fund;
 2007.40.1

Photo by Jeffrey Nintzel



Clara Neptune Keezer, Passamaquoddy, b.1930
Handkerchief Pillow Basket
 2008

Brown ash and sweetgrass
 Hood Museum of Art: Purchased through the Alvin
 and Mary Bert Gutman '40 Acquisitions Fund;
 2008.45.1

Photo by Jeffrey Nintzel



Paul "Rocky" Keezer, Passamaquoddy, b.1955
Fancy Basket
 2008

Brown ash and sweetgrass
 Hood Museum of Art: Purchased through the Alvin
 and Mary Bert Gutman '40 Acquisitions Fund;
 2008.43

Photo by Jeffrey Nintzel

WEAVING THE FUTURE THROUGH THE MAINE INDIAN BASKETMAKERS ALLIANCE



Fred Tomah, Maliseet, b. 1951

Eagle's Nest Basket

2008

Brown ash and sweetgrass

Hood Museum of Art: Purchased through the Alvin and Mary Bert Gutman '40 Acquisitions Fund; 2008.42

Photo by Jeffrey Nintzel



Jeremy Frey, Passamaquoddy, b.1978

Sea Urchin Basket

2008

Brown ash and sweetgrass

Hood Museum of Art: Purchased through the Alvin and Mary Bert Gutman '40 Acquisitions Fund; 2008.51

Photo by Jeffrey Nintzel



Ganessa Bryant, Penobscot, b. 1982

Point Basket

2008

Brown ash and sweetgrass

Hood Museum of Art: Purchased through the Alvin and Mary Bert Gutman '40 Acquisitions Fund; 2008.46

Photo by Jeffrey Nintzel

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Dartmouth College shares a long history with the Native American communities of New England. The College counts Mohegan preacher Samson Occom among its founders, and the education of Native Americans was a stipulation of the royal grant King George III bestowed on Dartmouth in 1769. Today, the College has a much respected Native American Studies Department and one of the highest percentages of Native American students among colleges and universities in the United States of America.

The Hood Museum of Art celebrates an important aspect of this legacy, its history of collecting Native American art, through this exciting and visually stunning exhibition. We extend our appreciation to Jennifer Sapiel Neptune, whose scholarly essay, published in this brochure, will be an enduring contribution to the cultural history of the northeastern United States, and whose expertise, insight, and aesthetic sensitivity are displayed in the exhibition itself. We also thank Gretchen Faulkner and Stephen Bicknell of the Hudson Museum at the University of Maine, Orono; Julia Clark of the Abbe Museum, Bar Harbor, Maine; Dani Fazio of the Maine Historical Society; the Maine Indian Basketmakers Alliance; and Dana Lippitt of the Bangor Museum and History Center, for their assistance in producing and lending the images and videos that accompany the baskets and tell us so much about them. We are most grateful to those who graciously loaned baskets to the exhibition: the Hudson Museum, the Abbe Museum, the Boston Children's Museum, the Maine Indian Basketmakers Alliance, Devon Storman, Joan Lester, and Martin and Jennifer Neptune. Finally, thanks go to the Hood staff, in particular Alex Bortolot, assistant curator of special projects, Patrick Dunfey, exhibitions designer, Nils Nadeau, communications and publications manager, and our former colleague Barbara Thompson, for so ably helping Ms. Neptune to realize her curatorial vision.

BRIAN KENNEDY
Director

Kchi'woliwon to our ancestors whose love, courage, and sacrifices kept our traditions safe, to our people who continue to feel a deep responsibility to protect and pass on these traditions, and to those in the future who will do the same—may what you leave behind continue to inspire future generations of the Wabanaki.

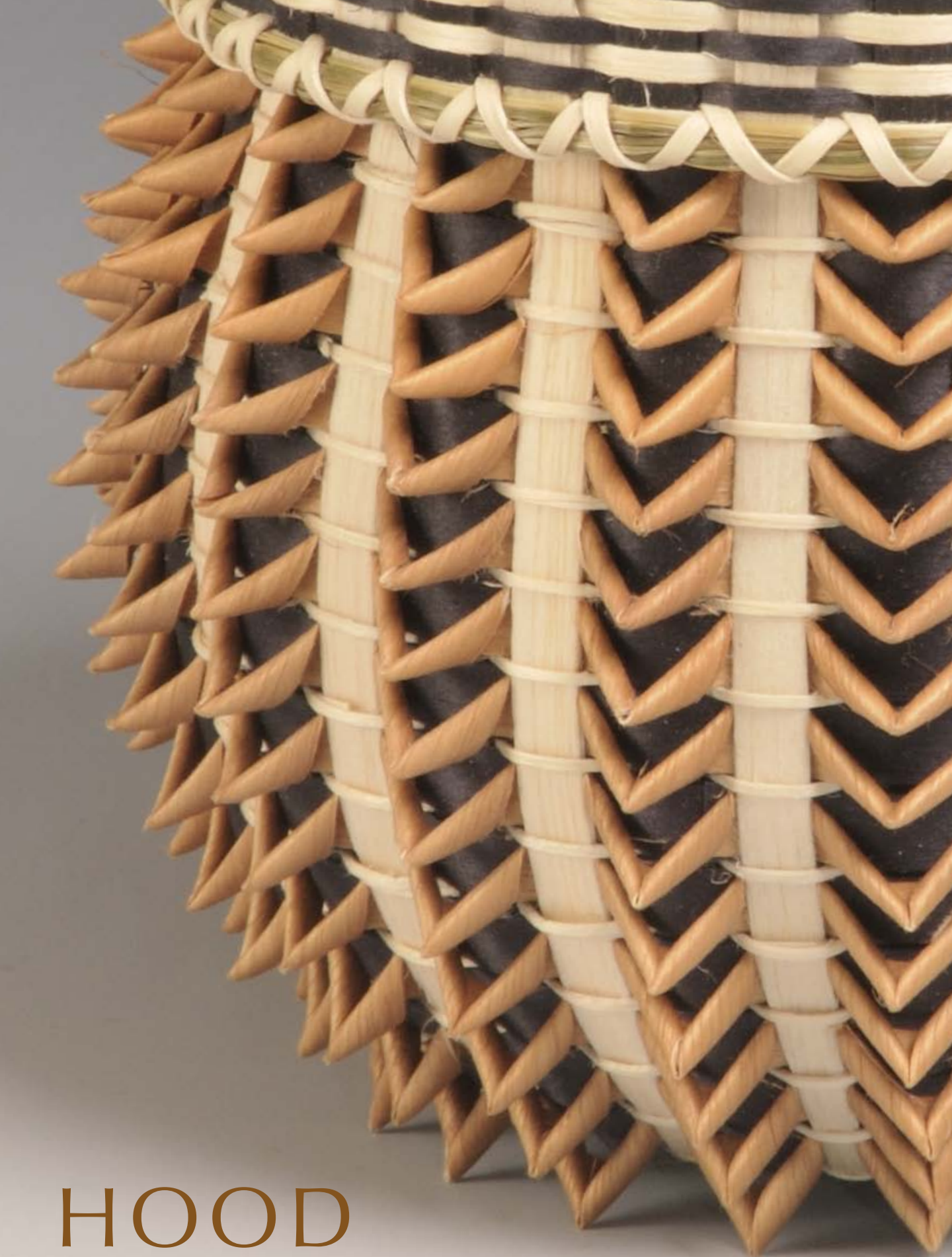
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JENNIFER SAPIEL NEPTUNE
Curator

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