

Title:

The Wild Man and Wild Woman of Canadian First Nations Art

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391

Summary:

Background information on two of the most interesting characters from Canadian First Nations art and culture.

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Article Body:

Two of the more interesting characters from the Northwest coast Canadian First Nations art world include the Wild Man and the Wild Woman of the woods. These two are often portrayed in very dramatic looking masks carved by Northwest coast Canadian First Nations artists.

The Wild Man of the woods from Canadian First Nations art is called Bak'was and is a small human-like creature who lives in the forest. He has deep round eyes that are sunken into his sockets and brows that jut out forward. His cheeks are hollow, his mouth is often grimacing and his nose appears like a hooked beak. It is said that the Wild Man can sometimes be seen early in the morning on the beach collecting cockles which are a type of mollusk as his food. The Wild Man is also considered the chief of ghosts and spirits of people who drowned are often hovering near him. Humans must beware of the Wild Man tempting others to join him for a meal. If one eats some of the Wild Man's food, one will turn into a being just like him.

In contrast to the Wild Man, the Wild Woman of the woods or Dzunik'wa as she is known, is a giant powerful and fearsome figure twice the size of humans. From Northwest coast Canadian First Nations art and legend, she is a dark and hairy ogress with supernatural powers. Her almost blind eyes are also large and sunken like those of the Wild Man but sometimes they have a red glow. She is usually portrayed making her wild call ("Uh, huu, uu, uu") with her open mouth and thick red puckered lips. It is said that if children foolishly wander into the forest, the Wild Woman will capture them and eat them. The Wild Woman carries a basket on her back which contains the children that she caught. Fortunately, she is not considered very bright and usually the children are able to outsmart her in escaping. Interestingly enough, even though the Wild Woman

represents the dark and dangerous side of the forests, she is also a bringer of wealth for some Northwest coast Canadian First Nations tribes. A Wild Woman mask can be considered somewhat of a status symbol that only some powerful and rich Northwest coast Canadian First Nations families have.