

Title:

The Orca Killer Whale in Pacific Northwest Coast Art

Word Count:

395

Summary:

Describes the role of the orca killer whale in Pacific Northwest Coast art.

Keywords:

orca, killer, whale, northwest, pacific, coast, art

Article Body:

One of the most awesome creatures in both real life and in Pacific Northwest coast art is the orca or killer whale. Feared many years ago but now loved by millions of people around the world, the killer whale is one of the most prominent subjects for Pacific Northwest coast artists. The killer whale is regarded as the guardian as well as the ruler of the sea because of its sheer size and power. The killer whale is also seen as the best hunter of the sea.

Killer whales are symbols of longevity and romance since they are believed to mate for life. It is said that if fishermen ever injure a killer whale, it will capsize the canoe sinking the fishermen to the Village of the Whales. It is here where the fishermen will be transformed into whales themselves. Whales near the shore are believed to be humans who were transformed trying to communicate with their previous human families ashore. Others believe that killer whales are reincarnations of deceased native chiefs. Some legends claim that the first killer whale was previously a supernatural white wolf that entered the sea and transformed into a whale. Mother Earth painted markings on the side of the killer whale as a reminder that it used to be a member of the wolf family. Indeed, both the killer whale and wolf share similar characteristics as they both have similar coloring. They both also stay and hunt in family packs. There are also legends that describe the killer whale being able to transform back and forth into a wolf.

Killer whales are thought to be the prey of the mythical thunderbird who is powerful enough to capture and carry a killer whale back to the mountains. The geography of some parts of the Pacific Northwest coast region is thought to be the result of a legendary battle between the killer whale and thunderbird. The Haida have a legend about a raven finned killer whale who is a whale chief carrying a raven perched on top of his dorsal fin.

The orca or killer whale is one of the most popular subjects of Pacific Northwest Coast art. A piece of Pacific Northwest Coast art or jewelry featuring a killer whale is considered a most appropriate gift of romance or a present for an individual who brings harmony into one's life.