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American Indian art--just now becoming widely recognized in the United States--has already found a solid niche abroad.

From the arts and crafts markets of the Southwest, the Plains, Oklahoma, and Alaska, a collection of these "cultural ambassadors" have been touring the world under the joint auspices of the Interior Department's Indian Arts And Crafts Board, the United States Information Agency, and the State Department.

Paintings in oil and tempera, flamboyant with color and rich with spiritual nuance; sculptures of native North Carolina wood, or soapstone, or ivory from the tusks of walruses; basketry and rugs that fingers have woven while mind and eye create one-of-a-kind designs; and jewelry of 80ft-sheen silver, heavy with stone inlays, massive yet superbly delicate in form--these are the silent but eloquent emissaries that have opened the world's eyes to the native culture of America.

From Dakar to Vientiane, from Brasilia to Tokyo, in United States diplomatic quarters on all continents the State Department's "art in embassies" program is also going American Indian. In New Delhi, for example, Ambassador and Mrs. Chester Bowles display an antique Chilkat (Alaska) blanket, woven of cedar bark and mountain goat wool by an unknown artisan. Because these blankets are so unusual, other Indian tribes often acquired them from the Chilkat for use as ceremonial shawls. The Chilkat blanket keeps company in New Delhi with "The Conquerors," a dramatic painting by a modern Navajo artist, Patsy Miller.

So impressed has officialdom in India been with the American Indian arts and crafts on display there, that the Government of India recently presented to the Institute of American Indian Arts (a Bureau of Indian Affairs school in Santa Fe) a group of Eastern arts and crafts from the dismantled India Pavilion of the New York World's Fair.

The Institute, in turn, is planning an East-West Indian exhibition, with the donated collection to be displayed side by side with American Indian arts and crafts of comparable kinds.

Through the Institute, founded four years ago, the Federal Government is helping preserve end foster the artistry of American Indians. Operated on the premise that self-discovery through art is at least part of the answer to the dropout problem, the Institute has gathered under its adobe rooftops an imposing roster of American Indian teachers who, themselves, have made names in the world of art, music and dance. These teachers are helping Indian and Eskimo teenagers to translate their natural artistic instincts into creative modes of expression.

The results of the Indian art education program have captured the interest of professional schools of art and sculpture, and have singled out the Institute as a fount of prize-winning art and literature. Many of its graduates have moved on, with scholarships, to further study. Some have already established their reputations among art lovers. At exhibitions around the country, the work of Institute artists, sculptors, carvers, potters and designers of textiles and jewelry are met with enthusiasm by critics and collectors.

Some of their creations have found their way into international circles - as gifts from the President and Mrs. Johnson to visiting dignitaries.

Merchants in England, France, Germany, and Scandinavian countries have indicated an interest in handling Indian arts and crafts and at home, the biggest department stores in several major cities have already held special exhibition sales.

The reopening in 1964 of the Interior Department's seventh-floor Art Gallery as the setting for what may have been the first major exhibition of American Indian art ever to be shown in the Nation's Capital and the pacesetter for a series of subsequent exhibitions there and in commercial galleries throughout the East.

Secretary of the Interior Stewart L. Udall summed the reason Why Indian art seems to have such universal appeal: "Indian artists possess the gift of sharing the timeless values of Indian culture--love of the land, a tranquil sense of harmony with nature, and the mystique of a time when their people walked here alone. From no other hands and spirits do we receive an artistic contribution more uniquely American."