

THE GLOBAL LANGUAGE OF HEADWEAR

Cultural Identity, Rites of Passage,
and Spirituality



TRAVELING EXHIBITION SERVICE

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ARTS AND ARTISTS



THE GLOBAL LANGUAGE OF HEADWEAR

The *Global Language of Headwear: Cultural Identity, Rites of Passage, and Spirituality* presents 89 hats and headdresses carefully selected from a private collection consisting of more than 1300 pieces of international headwear. This exhibition features hats from 42 countries across Asia, Africa, Europe, the Middle East, and North and South America, and is a tribute to the diversity of the world's cultures. With a few exceptions, the pieces are from the mid-to-late 20th century, and many are still worn today in parts of the world for revelry, ritual, and the rhythms of everyday life. More than utilitarian objects of material culture, each hat is a work of art, not merely because of the skill required to make it, but also as an expression of singular creativity and conveyance of meaning. The profusion of shapes and styles, assortment of materials used to create the hats, and the variety of embellishments used to decorate them are constrained only by imagination. *The Global Language of Headwear* is organized into five thematic sections: **Cultural Identity; Power; Prestige and Status; Ceremonies and Celebrations; Spiritual Beliefs; and Protection.** Hats and headdresses communicate ideas, not only of beauty, but also of what it means to be human.

1. *Bamileke Juju Headdress (Tyn)*, Cameroon, late 20th century, fiber, feathers, string, ©2012 Courtesy of Hat Horizons, Photograph by Matthew Hillman

66 HATS AND HEADDRESSES ARE A UNIQUE AND POWERFUL LENS THROUGH WHICH ONE CAN VIEW THE HUMAN EXPERIENCE. 99

STACEY W. MILLER, Curator, *The Global Language of Headwear*

The expression “to keep it under one’s hat” suggests withholding information or keeping a secret. But contrary to its proverbial sense, a hat is more likely to reveal than to conceal something about the person wearing it. Perched atop the most prominent part of the body, hats announce where we live, who we are, what we believe, and where we fit into our communities. More than a frivolous adornment, the hat is a vehicle for expressing an individual’s identity and place in the world; it can be a badge of social rank, a symbol of faith and values, a personal aesthetic statement, and more.

Hats give clues to the type of environment or climate a person lives in. Dazzling feather headdresses worn by indigenous tribes in Brazil tell of colorful birds flitting through the Amazonian jungle. A *Four Winds Hat* from northern Norway keeps a Saami man’s head warm, and when out on the tundra, its red color makes him more visible in the snow. National, ethnic, or tribal identity can be discerned from the type of attire a person wears. Men across Uzbekistan wear the *Doppilar*, a square skullcap decorated with white pepper or paisley-shaped designs. In Pakistan, the distinctive hoods worn by women and girls from the Kalash tribe—covered with beads and cowrie shells—differentiate them from other Pakistani peoples.

In the English language, the word “head” refers not only to a part of the body, but can signify someone who is a leader or chief. More than other articles of clothing, headwear is worn to proclaim a person’s status and authority. From elaborate designs and upscale materials to a simple logo on a cap, a hat’s elements and symbols can serve to identify status or a particular association.

Worn as emblems of a person’s faith, values, and beliefs, hats may announce one’s religious affiliation, or shed light on other beliefs. The colors of the ribbons used to make the *Alsacienne Bow*—a woman’s headdress from

France—traditionally indicated whether the wearer was Catholic or Protestant. In Nigeria and parts of West Africa, Hausa can be identified by the embroidered caps they wear. Because nearly all Hausa are Muslims, the hat also serves as a skullcap, declaring their Islamic faith.

All societies evolve, even those isolated by geography or governance or hampered by the weight of custom and traditions. Trade, exploration, conquest, and new technologies bring about change and exchanges between cultures. From the spread and assimilation of tribal fashion on the streets of New York or Los Angeles to generic baseball caps, hats travel and transform themselves from culture to culture. A white-beaded crown from Nigeria, in many ways resembles an English barrister’s powdered wig; it endows its owner with power, but its design harkens back to when Nigeria was colonized by Great Britain. The women of Tarabuco, Bolivia, wear a hat that is reminiscent of the helmet worn by the Spanish explorers who arrived in South America in the 1500s.

Because it draws attention to a person, one’s choice of headwear attempts to bestow a sense of dignity, beauty, and grace. The definition of beauty may vary from one person or one culture to another, but its pursuit is universal. Hats and headdresses have the power to shift paradigms, not only about how we see ourselves but about how we view the world around us. They instill an awareness, understanding, and appreciation of diverse cultures and they remind us of personal, spiritual, and social values that we, as humans, all share.

2. *Plains Indian War Bonnet*, United States, late 20th century, turkey feathers, hide, beads, wool, cotton, and horse hair, © 2012 Courtesy of Hat Horizons, Photograph by Matthew Hillman
3. *Tekke Wedding Headdress*, Turkmenistan, early 20th century, metal, beads, cotton, and silk, © 2017 Courtesy of Hat Horizons, Photograph by Stacey Miller



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◊ Cultural Identity ◊

Whether their use survives as an element of everyday dress, or as part of traditional costume worn on special occasions, hats often reflect pride in one's heritage. They announce an affiliation based on nationality, ethnicity, and community; or on peer group or shared interests. Through a sense of common history and the preservation of shared traditions, a person's cultural identity fosters a feeling of belonging, dignity, and self-worth.

Hats also play a role in reinforcing social ties, safeguarding customs, and preserving shared memories. Although the styles of some hats and headdresses may cross national and cultural boundaries, most ethnic groups and subgroups have their own distinctive head coverings. In northern Thailand, each of the six hill tribes has a unique style of headwear that sets them apart from each other. Phami women from the Ahka Tribe are easily distinguished by their ostentatious headwear, covered in silver-studs, beads, and coins.



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◊ Power, Prestige, and Status ◊

Establishing social hierarchies is part of human nature; headwear can reinforce this by identifying a person's status in society. Throughout the world, "the head man"—king or queen, chieftain, aristocrat, or warrior—can be recognized by a particular costume and, most importantly, the headwear. Drawing attention to the top of the head—universally regarded as the most significant part of the body—enhances one's importance and authority and the design of the hat and the materials used to decorate it all contribute to its potency.

Crowns and tiaras are symbols of sovereignty and power. The crown, or *Ade*, worn by Yoruban kings or chiefs in Nigeria is covered with beadwork, which in Africa is an indicator of prestige. Among the Bamileke tribe in Cameroon, the privilege of wearing an *Ashetu*, or prestige hat, is reserved for titleholders. An Iban/Dayak headhunter's headdress from Borneo, Indonesia, celebrates the respect once awarded to a man for the taking of enemy heads. The colors, images, and materials used to make these crowns all serve to emblemize the social status, power, and significance the wearer holds within the community.

◊ Ceremonies and Celebrations ◊

Hats are used to commemorate fundamental stages in a person's life. Rites of passage celebrations, such as birthdays, graduations, and weddings, typically call for a particular type of head covering. The headwear marks transitions in a person's life—from infancy to childhood, puberty to marriage, parenthood to old age.

In nearly every culture, a bride (and sometimes the groom) is obliged to don a special head covering for a wedding. White wedding veils symbolizing purity are worn by brides in western cultures, and, now increasingly, throughout the world. In Vietnam, an open-crowned red turban is part of a bride's traditional wedding outfit, as red is regarded as an auspicious color, symbolizing good fortune. Part of a bride's dowry in Slovakia traditionally included a dozen embroidered bonnets. A bride was "capped" on her wedding day and as a married woman was expected to cover her hair and wear a cap every day.



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Festivals and holidays are favorite occasions for people to adorn themselves in their finest, and give expression to their personal sense of style. Miao girls from China sport an intricately constructed silver headdress adorned with birds and flowers. Special feather headdresses also play an important role in corn festivals and naming ceremonies celebrated by indigenous tribes in the Amazon jungle.

4. *Phami Akha Headdress*, Thailand, mid-20th century, metal, beads, coins, and cotton, © 2012, Courtesy of Hat Horizons, Photograph by Matthew Hillman
5. *Chieftain's Hat*, Nung-Rawang Tribe, Myanmar, mid-20th century, rattan and boar tusks, © 2012 Courtesy of Hat Horizons, Photograph by Matthew Hillman
6. *Bridal Headdress*, Yao People, China, mid-20th century, cotton, glass beads, bone, and silk, © 2017, Courtesy of Hat Horizons, Photograph by Stacey Miller



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◊ Spiritual Beliefs ◊

Covering one's head can also be an expression of faith, humility, and spirituality—one that cuts across religious lines. A simple headscarf, skullcap, or yarmulke may remind the wearer of his or her own piety, while announcing their faith to others.

Within a religious institution, the type of hat—its shape, color and embellishment—may reflect a hierarchy; a cleric or official's hat can indicate one's place within the pecking order of the faithful. In some religions, miter-like hats that point upwards toward heaven may imply a divine link with God. But the tall felt *Sikke*, a hat worn by Whirling Dervishes, symbolizes not closeness to God but a tombstone and the death of the ego.

More mystical traditions are reflected in the brimmed straw hat worn by Huichol shamans in Mexico, and in the design of the *Thunderbolt Crown* from Tibet. The *Dorjie*, or thunderbolt, which appears on the top of the Tibetan hat, the embossed lotus flowers and conch shells on the front (which signify the sacred sound Om) are among the eight auspicious symbols of Buddhism.

7. *Ceremonial Hat*, Tibet, mid-20th century, wool, turquoise, stones, shells, beads, cloth, and metal, © 2012 Courtesy of Hat Horizons, Photograph by Matthew Hillman
8. *Thunderbolt Crown*, Tibet, early 20th century, metal, © 2012, Courtesy of Hat Horizons, Photograph by Matthew Hillman
9. *Calabash Helmet*, Philippines, mid-20th century, gourd, cotton, and beads, © 2012, Courtesy of Hat Horizons, Photograph by Matthew Hillman



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◊ Protection ◊

Many hats and headdresses serve a utilitarian function of protecting the wearer from physical injury and against the extremes of climate and the environment. Helmets and hard-hats safeguard the head, the most vulnerable part of the body, from trauma. Broad-brimmed, straw hats provide shelter from the sun and rain, and fur-lined hats shield us from the cold and wind.

Naga warriors from northeastern India wear fierce-looking rattan helmets with boar tusks and fur for defensive reasons; while in the Philippines, a helmet fashioned from a dried gourd can serve the a similar purpose. The Koryaks in eastern Siberia wear thick fur hats with earflaps that are sure to keep them warm on even the snowiest of days.

Aside from physical safety, the design and decoration of a hat can also be a traditional means of protection against evil spirits and negative energy. Amulets are worn to ward off danger, while a talisman is thought to bring good fortune to the wearer. Symbolic decorations and depictions of Buddha on children's hats from China are intended to bring happiness, wealth, and long life, and to protect the young ones from harm. Mirrors, like the ones decorating the Ile Ori headdress from Nigeria, and other shiny objects, such as coins or metallic pieces, deflect negative energy and repel the evil eye.



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This exhibition takes the viewer on a journey around the world, with the hats bringing into brilliant focus the differences and similarities that define countries and cultures. From beliefs and traditions to gender roles and social status, headwear is the guide. Beyond their aesthetic properties, the hats reinforce cultural ties, and in doing so, provide a sense of who we are and how we fit into the world.



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Stacey Miller is the owner of Hat Horizons and an independent curator of ethnographic headwear. She has spent over 30 years collecting and researching the cultural significance of hats and headdresses.

A graduate of George Washington University, Stacey has held corporate positions in research and marketing, focusing on the exploration and development of diverse markets. Since 2000, she has delivered educational programs, lectured, hosted special events and curated numerous exhibitions based on her collection.

Stacey purchased her first hat in 1979 when she joined a group of Spaniards driving from Madrid to India on a 4 month overland adventure. Learning more about a society, its customs, values and traditions with each new acquisition, Stacey realized that hats and headdresses have significance beyond their decorative qualities. Not only do they instill an awareness and appreciation of diverse cultures, but they act as a bridge, reinforcing personal, spiritual, and social values that we as humans all share.

Today Stacey's collection has grown to more than 1300 hats and headdresses from almost every corner of the world. Her long-term vision is to establish a museum of world cultures as a way to promote cross-cultural interest and understanding.



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- 10. *Naga Helmet*, India, mid 20th century, rattan, goat hair, and boar tusks, © 2012, Courtesy of Hat Horizons, Photograph by Matthew Hillman
- 11. *Rupurero, Shaman's Hat*, Huichol People, Mexico, mid-20th century, palm leaves, feathers, glass beads, velvet, and yarn, © 2012 Courtesy of Hat Horizons, Photograph by Matthew Hillman
- 12. *Tiger Cap*, China, early 20th century, silk, cotton, and embroidery, © 2012 Courtesy of Hat Horizons, Photograph by Matthew Hillman
- 13. *Akkapa-ri, Kayapo Tribe*, Brazil, mid-late 20th century, feathers, cotton, and reed, © 2012 Courtesy of Hat Horizons, Photograph by Matthew Hillman



FRONT *Ceremonial Headdress, Dayak/Iban Tribe, Indonesia/Borneo, mid-20th century, rattan, cloth, glass beads, goat hair, and feathers, © 2012 Courtesy of Hat Horizons, Photograph by Matthew Hillman*
 BACK *Chieftain's Hat (Misango MaPende), Pende Tribe, Democratic Republic of the Congo, mid 20th century, fiber, glass beads, © 2012 Courtesy of Hat Horizons, Photograph by Matthew Hillman*

EXHIBITION SPECIFICATIONS

Number of Works

89 hats and headdresses;
2 sets of paired hats

Curator

Stacey W. Miller

Organized by

Jointly organized by Stacey W. Miller
and International Arts & Artists

Requirements

Moderate security;
approximately 1600 square feet

Participation Fee

\$15,000

Shipping

Exhibitors pay outgoing shipping
costs within the contiguous U.S.

Booking Period

8 weeks

Tour

September 2019–October 2022

Educational Materials

Educational Resource Packet

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