
Marcia G. Anderson. *A Bag Worth a Pony: The Art of the Ojibwe Bandolier Bag*. St Paul, MN: The Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2017. pp.265. ISBN: 9781681340296.

<http://www.mnhs.org/mnhspress/books/bag-worth-pony>

Boozhoo anang onimiwin mukwa nindodem lac des mille lacs first nation nindoonji.

A few months ago I was approached by the editors of *Transmotion* to provide a review of Marcia G. Anderson's recent book about bandolier bags. As an Anishinabekwe (Ojibwe) artist and visual anthropologist committed to both the practice and study of Ojibwe material visual and material culture, I welcomed the opportunity. Yet looking at my own unfinished bandolier bag I started about six years ago for my husband, I also felt somewhat guilty, aware that of the many large-scale beadwork projects planned or started by artists, all too many end up in the category of "started but never finished", a point Anderson aptly makes as well (16). Nonetheless, after cracking the book open for the first time, I knew I was in for something special. I smiled as the first image to welcome me happened to be a photograph of Delina White's son in full regalia proudly dancing her beadwork, including a bandolier bag. As an Ojibwe matriarch Delina has and will continue to be a great family friend and a personal mentor for everything that I hope to achieve with the beadwork that I make for my family. Thus, this was indeed a good signal of what was to come in the subsequent pages, which invite the reader to become part of Anderson's "three-decades-long love affair" (3) with gashkibidaaganag (beaded bandolier bags).

Gashkibidaaganag are perhaps one of the largest and most labor-intensive beaded items created and worn by Ojibwe people. Anderson introduces these bags as cultural icons, embodying specific values and attributes important to Ojibwe including status, respect, gratitude, and leadership. The reference to these bags as *worth a pony* is a nod to their role as a form of currency used in exchanges with other tribes for a pony in the 1870s and 1880s. While the exact origin of the bag is unclear, Anderson reminds the reader that it cannot be interpreted apart from earlier forms of bags and pouches created by Ojibwe for both daily life and special occasions—bags often adorned with various materials including glass beads, shells and porcupine quills. Anderson emphasizes that material culture grows and changes along with people and gashkibidaaganag must not be taken up as static objects but as dynamic and emergent entities continuously affected by changes both inside and outside their communities of origin. Referencing an origin hypothesis common to both ethnographers and Ojibwe community experts, Anderson identifies that the most influential "change" leading to prevalence of the bags was that of colonial war, as she links gashkibidaaganag to "military ammunition pouches worn by the European and American military" (21).

Anderson locates herself personally in relation to gashkibidaaganag as a collections curator with the Minnesota Historical Society (MHS) during the 1980s. Over the course of 35 years, Anderson develops this relationship by committing her work to the stories of over 100 bandoliers within the MHS collection. Her efforts focus on weaving together information gleaned primarily from archives, museums, and ethnographic texts with Ojibwe histories and testimonies from present day Ojibwe bead artists, knowledge keepers and tribal effort governments. Her work culminates into a concerted and careful presentation of their cultural significance during the past two centuries.

Part one of the book presents a detailed history of the bags, addressing their design, structure, motif, material composition, and the various ways that archival records and photographs influence their history. On each page Anderson provides strikingly clear images of gashkibidaaganang, including very detailed close-up shots when possible. She includes historical photographs of Ojibwe men and women both donning and making the bags in a way that assists the reader in contextualizing them within Ojibwe community life. This section also provides detailed sketches and descriptions of how the bags are constructed. Anderson's aim in this section is to stitch together an introductory history of the bags and her thoughtful composition of the photographs, sketches and written text, is not simply a "packaging up" of historical information in order to preserve gashkidibaaganang history; rather, it is a carefully constructed blueprint aimed at ensuring future generations are engaged and encouraged to connect to this history in a meaningful way. Anderson uses her position as a curator and writer to craft something that helps make these bags accessible to a more public audience, including other Ojibwe beadwork artists working to reclaim and revive their material cultural practices.

Early on in the book Anderson emphasizes in several places that despite the fact that Ojibwe women were most often the creative forces behind the design and production of gashkidibaaganang, their pivotal roles and accomplishments often remain obscure or are completely ignored. This points to the androcentric and patriarchal nature of colonial ethnographic texts and their interpretation. Anderson commits her work to addressing this absence/erasure through privileging the stories and perspectives of both historical and present-day Ojibwe women. This work goes beyond identifying the names of women pictured in photographs or connecting specific bags to their respective maker throughout the book when possible. Anderson dedicates the second part of the book to privileging the voices and experiences of Ojibwe women beadwork artists throughout seven different Ojibwe communities in Minnesota.

In part two, Anderson takes the reader on a journey to several Ojibwe communities throughout Minnesota, discussing specific gashkidibaaganang and their makers and wearers from specific places. She introduces the reader to the stories of several Ojibwe women beadwork artists, illuminating their dedication, resilience, creativity, strength, and intelligence. The book privileges the experiences and voices of women who have and continue to accept the responsibility of making the bags out of love and pride for their families and communities. Anderson situates this important work within the context of ongoing colonial violence aimed at severing Ojibwe family and kinship ties and demonstrates how significant gashkidibaaganang have been to reclaiming and continuing significant family histories and cultural teachings. Moreover, through the inclusion of direct testimonies, these artists are able to convey their own unique perspectives and stories, explaining how important these bags have been to their own wellbeing, the transmission of intergenerational knowledge and ongoing camaraderie among Ojibwe women within communities.

It should be noted that their testimonies often work to dispel colonial myths attached to Ojibwe beadwork practice. For example, third generation bag maker Marcie McIntire of Grand Portage addresses the myth that Ojibwe floral designs were simply a "mimicking" or replication of European floral design and aesthetic:

It never dawned on me that my designs could be associated with the colonizers... Whether Anishinaabe [Ojibwe] beadworkers were using geometric or floral designs, they were depicting the flora in the world around them. (123)

By the end of the book, what may have started as a curator's love affair with the beauty and magnificence of gashkidibaaganan, over the course of 35 years of work, has been transformed into what I see as a love affair with the brilliance, creativity and tenacity of their makers—specifically with Ojibwe woman. In her writing, Anderson illustrates how as a distinct visual/material object and art practice, each gashkidibaagan may mediate different experiences and generate different kinds of knowledges, all of which are significant to Ojibwe life. This book is a commitment to moving beyond a surface level reading of the bags to bringing forward the stories embodied within every bead stitch—voices that link generations of proud Ojibwe. As a beadwork artist, this book inspired me to pick up my own in-progress gashkidibaagan and honour the teachings of my ancestors and peers. And so I say miigwetch (thank you) to Marcia for this gift.

Celeste Pedri-Spade, Laurentian University