

Nina Sanders

Above all, and before we begin, it is my responsibility to thank the Apsáalooke people who came before us and acknowledge the work they did and continue to do. It is because of their hard work, prayers, and agency that *Apsáalooke Women and Warriors* exists. Aho.

This exhibition and publication have been in the making for many generations, as much of our knowledge and creativity is transmitted through art, objects, and oral history. With these gifts we created an exhibition and publication that properly articulate the culture and life force of the Apsáalooke people. In particular, I believe that this book will continue to transmit the ideas, words, and art of the Apsáalooke across oceans and into future generations.

All of the work presented was woven together to unite multiple views and beliefs—providing the reader with an inclusive collective of intellectual and aesthetic expressions of Apsáalooke culture. In curating *Apsáalooke Women and Warriors*, I've chosen to adhere to and emphasize foundational belief systems and practices that consider the Apsáalooke diaspora and the cultural differences that result from movement. There are many ways to identify as an Apsáalooke, but we all come from the same source.

I begin this journey by telling of the Apsáalooke people's emergence. Knowing where we come from will give the reader a better understanding of who we are. There are many iterations of the Apsáalooke creation story; this version follows the one Chief Medicine Crow would recite at Tobacco Society ceremonies. (In an effort to emphasize the unifying concepts and lessons that resonate throughout Apsáalooke culture, I've left out certain details.)

Long ago, before there were people, water covered all things, only lichiiikbaaliia/First Maker was present.

Deep down under the water lichiiikbaaliia sensed something extraordinary that wanted to come up to the surface.

lichiiikbaaliia called four ducks and asked them to go to the bottom and bring up the thing that wished to become.

One by one the ducks went down. The first, a red-headed mallard, did not return. The second duck, a pinto, failed to rise to the top as well. Sadly, the third, a blue-feathered duck, did not succeed at his task. lichiiikbaaliia was saddened, but did not give up. Finally, the last and smallest duck, the Hell Diver, went down. First Maker waited for a very long time until the little duck finally surfaced, breathless and weakened but with earth in her webbed feet.

First Maker picked up the duck and thanked her, then took the clay from her webbed feet and began to spread it in every direction, starting from the east. From this same earth lichiiikbaaliia created man and woman equally and at the same time. The First People were Awaagaabiilixpaaka.

After the First People were complete, lichiiikbaaliia gave them the gift of language and song. They were told that words are sacred and can be used to make wishes both good and bad, and to always be wise about what one says.

lichiiikbaaliia showed the First People all of creation and told them many things about the beings of the earth, and how they'd come to be. Among these beings were the rocks, Old Man Coyote, and Red Woman. lichiiikbaaliia told the First People that these sacred beings were powerful and sacred and should be respected.

As lichikbaaliia prepared the First People for their life on earth, a new presence arrived—the Star People. The First People witnessed two stars blaze across the sky, rest upon the land, then transform into two small tobacco plants blossoming with dazzling bright white flowers. This sacred plant is lhchihchia.

First Maker told the people that the star beings came to earth to help and protect them, and said they would live in the form of the extraordinary flowering tobacco plant lhchihchia. The First People were told to care for lhchihchia: if they planted it and safeguarded it forever, it would always protect them and ensure they would be happy and successful.

lichikbaaliia instructed the people to live in a way that is considerate of all living things, and told them it was their responsibility to care for earth and her creatures, and to honor the many gifts they were given. This way of being is Immachiikittua.

The people vowed they would honor lhchihchia, practice Immachiikittua, and respect all of the gifts lichikbaaliia provided them. With this they set out on their journey.

Multiple generations of the First People journeyed before they found their home in and around the Bighorn Mountains in Montana and Wyoming, where lhchihchia, the Sacred Tobacco plant, grows. It's here that the people became Apsáalooke, flourished as human beings, and produced a brave and vibrant culture—part of which you will explore in this book.

This publication was created in the spirit of Immachiikittua. Clan members gathered, sweat lodges were erected, and people were fed and given prayer so that *Apsáalooke Women and Warriors* would be a positive experience for everyone involved. Our shared investment brought more than twenty Apsáalooke people to the Field Museum and the University of Chicago, and Apsáalooke hosts welcomed thirteen partners from the Field Museum and the University of Chicago at the annual Crow Fair celebration. Together we worked to honor the cultural legacy of the Apsáalooke people, and reimagine the work—and future—of cultural institutions with a colonial heritage. I am proud

to say that we labored together creatively—over shared meals, through the exchange of gifts, and, most importantly, with mutual respect. I believe we must be unified in our pursuit of equity and equality for all indigenous people previously refused a voice in Western institutions of culture and thought. The work of representing all communities is strengthened by forward-thinking people, and by good people who use their privilege and space to support those who are marginalized. Our ultimate goal is to deliver our own narratives, write our own scholarship, and educate the world about our cultures, worldviews, and experiences.