

Codsiogo



By

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Eastern Shoshone artist Codsiogo (Cod si-ogo/Cad-zei-go in the 1900 Wind River Agency census, but also known as Cadzi Cody, Katsakodi, Charlie Katsakodi) was born about 1866. His artwork was transitional because he adapted traditional materials and art forms familiar from prehistoric petroglyphs, pictographs and decorated leather goods, and modified these to the needs of the early reservation period which served as a bridge to modern Native American art.

As a youth during the 1870s, Codsiogo certainly learned the skills of a hunter and warrior, and probably was expected to provide for and protect his family after reaching adulthood. But he also learned how to produce artistic and material goods for which white people would pay. Chief Washakie and his sons were renowned hide-painters and, like Codsiogo, produced their works for sale to collectors. Plains tribes had long histories of decorating leather goods with paint, beads, and quills. The styles were very ancient: for example, the images painted on Washakie's tepee in the accompanying 1870 photo are similar to prehistoric rock art figures and symbols.

Washakie's Camp. (W.H. Jackson 1870 glass plate, negative #1669, National Archives)



Shoshone Wolf Dance. (Riverton Museum)

According to Joseph D. Horse Capture, painted hides were both cultural and economic survival statements. All of Codsiogo's hides were produced during the turn-of-the-century Wind River Reservation Period, with the earliest hides depicting the tasayuge or Wolf Dance (War Dance) with a U.S. Flag as the center piece of the picture. Horse Capture says the Shoshone Wolf Dance evolved into the Grass Dance with men dancers changing from having one or two feathers in their hair to war bonnets with long streamers and feather bustles. Stylized Sun Dance hides with accompanying buffalo hunts quickly replaced earlier war dance paintings. The moderate theme was intended to attract sales from white buyers visiting the Wind River Indian Reservation to watch the Sun Dance. The flag pole of the Wolf Dance was replaced by the lodge and tree of the Sun Dance. Codsiogo's imagery quickly evolved responding to consumer demand—or perhaps to avoid using spiritually powerful icons for something so crass as public sale.

In 1999, Sotheby's Auction House advertized what appears to be one of the earliest-known Codsiogo hide paintings. This piece shows a Wolf Dance and probably dates to the 1880s or early 1890s and appears to be a combination of stenciling and free-hand outlining. The colors are rather drab compared



Top: Cadzi Cody hide painting offered for sale by Sotheby's Auction House.
Bottom: Detail of Sotheby hide.



Incised horseman petroglyph from Fremont County. (James J. Stewart, Lander, Wyoming)

to paintings produced five or ten years later, but this may be from ultraviolet fading or the type of paints used. The horse in this piece is more sophisticated than one of the earliest Shoshone depictions of the horse seen above. This petroglyph, produced perhaps a century earlier, demonstrates initial Plains Indian confusion about horses: were they elk? Dogs? Or something else? Plains Indian art underwent a 'renaissance' during the second half of the 1800s and Codsigo's representations of horses and human figures were more realistic than older, archaeological images.

By the mid-1890s, Shoshone artists, including Codsigo, used a combination of stenciling and freehand art to

create their dancers, bison, and horses on elk hides. The stenciling was to expedite the process and maintain quality. The simple earth and natural vegetable colors (e.g., charcoal, red ochre, and chalk) used in earlier hides were replaced by brighter commercial paints and dyes obtained through white traders. The once hand-tanned buffalo hides were replaced by commercially tanned deer, elk, or even cow hides.

In the Codsigo painting on the 2011 Wyoming Archaeology Month poster, the dancers, hunters, buffalo, and horse figures are well defined and the polychrome colors are clear and brilliant red, green, blue, orange, brown, and black. This Sun Dance/buffalo hunt hide depicts eight dancers around a Sun Dance tree adorned with a buffalo head and colored streamers. This hide shows only a buffalo head on the Sun Dance tree; other hides also show an eagle. There are five drummer/singers in the mid-lower right of the hide below most of the dancers. There are 22 hunters (some have

Cadzi Cody hide painted after 1900. (Fremont County Pioneer Museum)



dismounted and begun to butcher their prey), and 25 buffalo (four being skinned).

This painting probably pre-dates 1900, when the great Chief Washakie died. Shoshone hide paintings produced after 1900 typically show a long war bonnet hanging by itself on the Sun Dance tree. According to one traditional account, the bonnet represents the deceased Washakie's war bonnet being presented at the Sun Dance as his "presence."

This was an era of terrible poverty and starvation on the Wind River Reservation. Codsigo was fortunate to have a desired skill that could keep both long-cherished cultural traditions and his family alive. Codsigo died in 1910 or 1912 of unknown causes. Over twenty of his paintings survive in museums and private collections around the country.

For information about Wyoming
Archaeology Awareness Month activities:
wyoshpo.state.wy.us/aamonth

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Painted History



The Art of
Cadzi Cody