



A Measure of the Earth: The Cole-Ware Collection of American Baskets

Nicholas R. Bell

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A Measure of the Earth provides an unparalleled window into an overlooked corner of recent American history: the traditional basketry revival of the past fifty years. Steve Cole and Martha Ware amassed a remarkable collection using the most stringent guidelines: baskets made from undyed domestic materials that have been harvested by the maker. An essay by Nicholas Bell details the long-standing use of traditional fibers such as black ash and white oak, willow and sweetgrass, and the perseverance of a select few to claim these elements--the land itself--for the enrichment of daily life. As they trek through woods, fields, farm, and shore in the quest for the right ingredients for a basket, these men and women cultivate an enviable knowledge of the land. Each basket crafted from this knowledge provides not only evidence of this connection to place, but also a measure of the earth.

Drawing on conversations with the basketmakers from across the country and reproducing many of their documentary photographs, Bell offers an intimate glimpse of their lifeways, motivations, and hopes. Lavish illustrations of every basket convey the humble, tactile beauty of these functional vessels.

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