

Arrow belt

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L'Assomption" style arrow belt with lightning bolt pattern made of 12 corridors. The belt is made of red, white, blue, yellow and green wool, the colors probably derived from natural and synthetic dyes. The belt has a large hole and a few tears.

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Date 1950 an

Materials fiber, wool

Technique braided

Historical context

Arrow belts, created by French Canadians in the 2nd half of the 18th century, became a cultural symbol in Quebec. The Assomption model was gradually established in the early 19th century, as a result of the perfecting of the fléchée technique. Between 1830 and 1880, this standard was made by craftswomen for the fur-trading companies, so that they could exchange them with the native nations.

Although artisanal belt-making declined after 1880, notably with the decline of the fur trade, some dart makers continued to make the fléché. This belt is the result of either a commission or a personal creation. The craftswoman used an unusual color, orange-yellow. Not corresponding to Assomption color standards, it is most likely a synthetic dye.

Synthetic dyes, which gradually replaced natural dyes in the early 20th century, are prized for their resistance and the diversity of their shades. The latter can, however, be garish, like the orange-yellow shown here. In the early 20th century, arrow belts became essentially folkloric.

Initiatives to preserve and promote them were gradually launched by folklore researchers and a few dart makers.

Arrow belts reflect a multicultural identity. Although difficult to date, they provide us with information on the cultural history of several territories and the socio-economic relationships that bind them together.

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Photo by Louis-Etienne Dore