Walking This Good Way of Life Together is an ornamental horse collar, or martingale, that pushes the boundaries of traditional Northern Plains art. Created by members of the Growing Thunder Collective, the work won Best of Class in the competitive Beadwork and Quillwork category at the 100th Annual Santa Fe Indian Market. During the award ceremony, artist Juanita Growing Thunder Fogarty (Sisituwaŋ/Wahpetuwaŋ/Hohe, born 1969) shared, “when I was working on this, I was praying for our future generations to find good partnerships in life and to walk this good way in life together.” To ensure the continuation of cultural traditions, the artist works across generations and completed Walking This Good Way of Life Together with the assistance of her daughter, Camryn Growing Thunder (Sisituwan/Wahpetuwan/Hohe/Kiowa/Comanche, born 2002).

The complex layering and interplay of textures and colors exemplify the artists’ extensive knowledge of natural and trade materials used by Native women on the Northern Plains for centuries. Historically, animal furs, bells, silks, and wools were luxury items reserved for regalia and special-occasion horse gear. Since their introduction to the Great Plains in the eighteenth century, horses have been honored with quilled and beaded masks, martingales, pad saddles, cruppers, hoof ornaments, and blankets. Bold in design and festooned with long hide fringe and silk streamers, Walking This Good Way of Life Together is made for motion. Brass and glass beads would sparkle in the sunlight, and bells and tin cones would jingle with the horse’s trot.

Growing Thunder’s designs develop through dreams and with the guidance of her ancestors. The pouch’s central motif represents the purple clustered blooms of wahpé waštémna (sweet leaf), also known as wild bergamot. Found in the Great Plains, the medicinal plant has antimicrobial properties and is used to treat topical and respiratory infections. A sachet of this sweet and minty aromatic plant included inside the pouch is meant to perfume and protect the horse.

Plateau Region, Rawhide Cylinder
For centuries, men and women on the Great Plains have made containers of buffalo, deer, and other rawhides to store food and personal belongings. French traders called these durable containers parfleche, which translates to “against the arrow.” Rawhide containers served a practical purpose, yet they were also beautified with bold, geometric painted designs that were unique to each maker and were meant to be seen from afar. Though we do not know the name of the person who made this cylindrical container from buffalo hide, their mastery of the rawhide painting tradition was surely recognized within their community. The fine linework of the painted designs makes it an exceptional work of mid-nineteenth-century Native American painting.

The cylindrical container likely came from the Plateau region, a vast area that extends from the Rocky Mountains in the east to the Cascades in the west and encompasses the Fraser and Columbia River valleys that extend north into British Columbia. As is common in Plateau rawhide cases, light green and ochre pigments native to the region frame the central diamond design made of brighter commercial pigments introduced through trade. Plateau communities adopted the practice of making buffalo rawhide containers in the early eighteenth century when horses were first introduced to the region. The usage of buffalo rawhide as well as the mix of natural and trade pigments suggests that this container was made on the cusp of the reservation era, a period of dramatic transition for Native Americans. With the near extinction of the buffalo in the 1870s, containers made using deer or elk hide and painted with saturated blue, yellow, and red trade pigments eventually replaced those of buffalo hide and natural pigments. As part of Joslyn’s Native American art collection, this exceptional work adds depth to our understanding of transformations in Native American painting and the artistic practices shared by many tribes across North America.

Juanita Growing Thunder Fogarty and Camryn Growing Thunder, Walking This Good Way of Life Together.

Plateau Region, Rawhide Cylinder, c. 1875, bison hide and natural and commercial pigments, 20 1/2 x 36 x 5 in., Museum purchase with funds from the Durham Center for Western Studies Art Endowment Fund, 2022.12.