

# POINTSWEST

JOURNAL OF THE BUFFALO BILL HISTORICAL CENTER ■ CODY, WY ■ SUMMER 2000





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### POINTS WEST

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Cover: Crow Shield with Cover, Northern Plains, ca. 1860. Deer hide, rawhide, pigments, glass beads, wool cloth, flicker feather. Diameter, 21 1/2 in. Chandler-Pohrt Collection. Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Edson W. Spencer.

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The Buffalo Bill Historical Center is a private, non-profit educational institution dedicated to preserving and interpreting the cultural history of the American West. Founded in 1917, the Historical Center is home to the Buffalo Bill Museum, Cody Firearms Museum, Plains Indian Museum, Whitney Gallery of Western Art and McCracken Research Library.

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# CALENDAR

## OF UPCOMING EVENTS

### JUNE LAROM SUMMER INSTITUTE IN WESTERN AMERICAN STUDIES

- 5-16 Session I—*Managing Wildness in the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem*—Charles Preston  
*Women, Mobility, and the American West*—  
 Virginia Scharff
- 19-30 Session II—*Arts & Traditions of the Lakota and Other Northern Plains Tribes*—Arthur Amiotte  
*Art in the Age of Western Expansionism*—Ron Tyler
- 8 Twilight Talk—Virginia Scharff, 7 p.m.  
 Coe Auditorium
- 15 Twilight Talk—Charles R. Preston, 7 p.m.  
 Coe Auditorium

### 17 PLAINS INDIAN MUSEUM REOPENS Ceremonial Opening—10 a.m.

### 17-18 19TH ANNUAL PLAINS INDIAN MUSEUM POWWOW

- 22 Twilight Talk—Ron Tyler, 7 p.m. Coe Auditorium

### 23 EXHIBITION: John James Audubon in the West: The Last Expedition: Mammals of North America opens.

- 24 "John James Audubon in the West—  
*Exploring for the Quadrupeds*"—  
 Robert McCracken Peck, 7 p.m.  
 Coe Auditorium

- 29 Twilight Talk—Arthur Amiotte,  
 7 p.m. Coe Auditorium

### JULY

- 2 EXHIBITION: John James Audubon in the West: The Last Expedition: Mammals of North America Patrons Celebration

### 15-16 18TH ANNUAL FRONTIER FESTIVAL

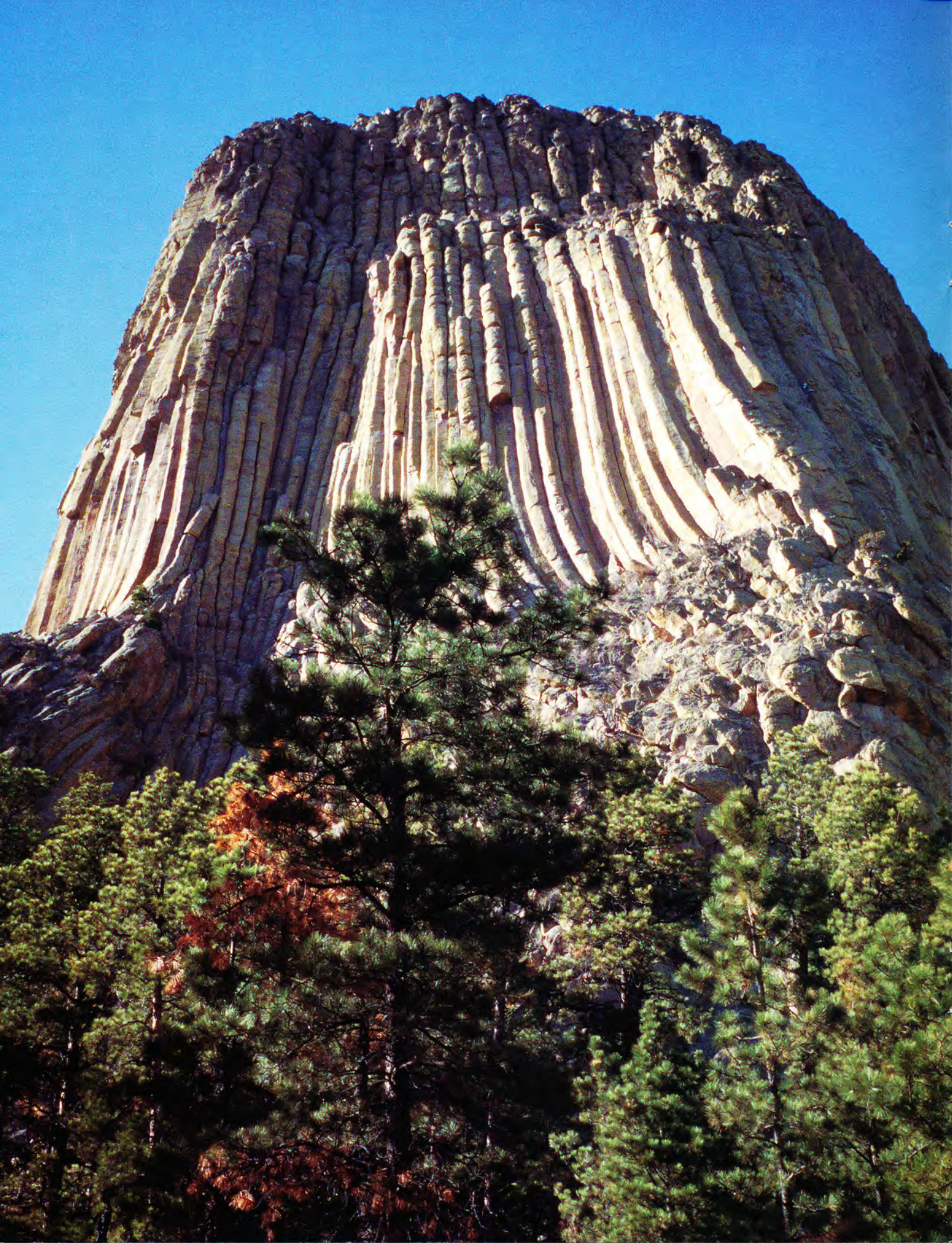
### AUG

- 4-6 BUFFALO BILL CELEBRITY SHOOTOUT—Cody Shooting Complex



Neil Parsons (b. 1938), *A Grandmother Lodge*, c. 1987. Collage, fabric, crayon, tempera on paper, 17<sup>15</sup>/<sub>16</sub> x 17<sup>15</sup>/<sub>16</sub> in. William E. Weiss Purchase Fund, 1987, Plains Indian Invitational Art Exhibit. (See related article, p. 16).







# SACRED LANDS

EMMA I. HANSEN  
CURATOR, PLAINS INDIAN MUSEUM

*East of my grandmother's house the sun rises out of the plain. Once in his life a man ought to concentrate his mind upon the remembered earth, I believe. He ought to give himself up to a particular landscape in his experience, to look at it from as many angles as he can, to wonder about it, to dwell upon it. He ought to imagine that he touches it with his hands at every season and listen to the sounds that are made upon it. He ought to imagine the creatures there and all the faintest motions of the wind. He ought to recollect the glare of noon and all the colors of the dawn and dusk.*<sup>1</sup>

In this passage, renowned Kiowa author N. Scott Momaday provides a glimpse of the strong aesthetic and spiritual connections that have tied Native people to their traditional homelands from generation to generation. Within the landscape of the Great Plains, Native people venerate certain places as inherently sacred sites from which cultural knowledge, beliefs, and traditions originated. Other locations where significant events occurred are sanctified as important elements of tribal histories and patrimonies. Such sacred lands have continuing and renewed importance to Native people of the Plains.

In the late 19th century as tribes were confined to reservations, missionaries and government agents worked together to banish traditional religious practices. In 1880, the Sun Dance was banned among the Plains tribes with threats of arrest of participants, followed by the prohibition of most other forms of Native spiritual traditions. Although many rituals were discontinued, Native traditionalists tried to hold on to their spiritual practices by conducting ceremonies in secret or changing their ceremonial calendar to conform to national and Christian holidays. Small groups of Native people sometimes were able to travel to isolated sacred sites to renew their traditions without official notice.

In 1934 under the Indian Reorganization Act, Indian people were allowed religious freedom and ceremonies once again openly took place under the direction of elders who remembered old tribal ways. Since the 1960s, Native spirituality and ceremonies experienced an incredible renewal as urban Indians returned to their homelands to find the vital links that tie them to their tribal past and people living on reservations found new faith in traditional beliefs.

Left: Bear Lodge (Devil's Tower), Photograph by Emma Hansen, 2000.



Under the American Indian Religious Freedom Act of 1978, Congress recognized its obligation "to protect and preserve for American Indians their inherent right of freedom to believe, express, and exercise their traditional religions." This act, however, has failed to clarify the religious use of sacred sites on public lands as Plains tribal members have again found a spiritual foundation in the ceremonies described by Vine Deloria, Jr.:

*From time immemorial, Indian tribal Holy Men have gone into the high places, lakes, and isolated sanctuaries to pray, receive guidance from the Spirits, and train younger people in the ceremonies that constitute the spiritual life of the tribal community. In these ceremonies, medicine men represented the whole web of cosmic life in the continuing search for balance and harmony.*<sup>2</sup>



Harney Peak, South Dakota, 1995. Courtesy of South Dakota Department of Tourism.

Throughout the Plains, carved or painted images on rock, known as petroglyphs and pictographs, are located near rivers and streams, along cliff facings, and in caves. Consisting of abstract symbols and images of buffalo, elk, deer, bear, mountain sheep, eagles, humans, and powerful spiritual beings with horns or wings, these rock images document the ancient residence of Native people on the Plains. In the Wind River Mountains of Wyoming, drawings of horned figures and other spiritual beings are found on rock outcroppings and along cliffs that can be reached only

by climbing narrow ledges. Some of the drawings in these sites are attributed to the work of spiritual beings. The petroglyphs have continuing sacred importance to the Shoshone and other Native people of Wyoming, who respect and seek to preserve such sites.

Another ancient site in Wyoming, the Medicine Wheel, has been the subject of much research and speculation concerning its origins while remaining an important focus of Native spiritual life. According to the late Northern Cheyenne elder William Tallbull:

*To the Indigenous Peoples of North America, the archaeological sites on North American soil are not "archaeological" sites. They are sites where our relatives lived and carried out their lives. Sacred sites such as the Medicine Wheel are no different. To Native Americans they are living cultural sites from which help comes when "The People" needed or need help. They were/are places where tribal peoples went in times of famine and sickness, in periods of long drought when*



animals would leave, or in more current times when tribes are being torn apart by politics, alcohol, or other abuses.<sup>3</sup>

The Medicine Wheel is built on a peak of the Big Horn Mountains at an elevation of 9,640 feet and consists of a stone circle about 90 feet in diameter with 28 spokes radiating from a central stone cairn with five smaller stone cairns along the periphery. For the Crow, Cheyenne, Sioux, Arapaho, Shoshone and other Northern Plains people, the Medicine Wheel is a holy place, a site of vision quests and peace talks where offerings of thanks are given and important ceremonies continue to be conducted.

Bear Lodge, known to non-Indians as Devil's Tower, figures prominently in ancient Plains oral traditions. According to an Arikara story, a bear chased seven girls who were playing in the woods. The girls took refuge on a rock that grew into the sky beyond the reach of the bear. As the bear clawed the rock trying to reach the girls it left deep furrows. The girls themselves became the cluster of seven stars known as the Pleiades. Versions of this story are found among the Lakota, Blackfeet, Crow, Arapaho, and other Plains tribes. Bear Lodge is a sacred site for many traditionalists, who have traveled there for Sun Dances, vision quests, sweat lodge rituals, and to leave prayer bundles and offerings.

The Black Hills are the sacred lands of the Lakota, Dakota, Cheyenne and other Plains peoples. Lakota spiritual leader Pete Catches described the Black Hills in this way:

*To the Indian spiritual way of life, the Black Hills is the center of the Lakota people. There, ages ago, before Columbus traveled over the sea, seven spirits came to the Black Hills. They selected, that area, the beginning of sacredness to the Lakota people. Each spirit brought a gift to the Lakota people . . . Our people that have passed on, their spirits are contained in the Black Hills. This is why it is the center of the universe, and this is why it is sacred to the Oglala Sioux. In this life and the life hereafter, the two are together.*<sup>4</sup>

Within the Black Hills are many sacred places including Bear Butte. Like other sacred mountains and high holy places, Native people visit Bear Butte for peace and solitude to induce spiritual reflections through vision quests. For the Cheyenne, Bear

THROUGHOUT THE  
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ROCK, KOWN AS  
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PICTOGRAPHS, ARE  
LOCATED NEAR RIVERS  
AND STREAMS, ALONG  
CLIFF FACINGS,  
AND IN CAVES.



Wyoming petroglyphs. Photograph by Michael Bies.





Top: Medicine Wheel,  
WY. State Preservation  
Office.



Below: Bear Butte, Black  
Hills, South Dakota,  
1988. Courtesy of South  
Dakota Department of  
Tourism.

Butte is the source of the four sacred arrows brought to the people by the prophet Sweet Medicine. For the Lakota, Bear Butte is the site where the original instructions of life were given to the people. The highest point in the Black Hills and one of the most sacred to the Lakota is Harney Peak. Here, the holy man Black Elk had his famous vision and referred to the mountain as the "center of the world."

The Sweetgrass Hills of northern Montana also is a place for fasting and vision quests. Women continue to go into the hills to gather roots and plants for food and medicines. According to Blackfeet tribal member Curly Bear Wagner, "Our people camped outside of the hills because of the sacredness of the land. Women would go in there and gather roots . . . or they fast or hunt and they gather sweet pine or sweetgrass and they come out. In that way, the spirits are connecting with our people in there."

For the Native people of the Great Plains, the last half of the 19th century was marked by conflicts and losses of traditional ways of life—the buffalo, lands, and freedom. They remember and memorialize the struggles of their ancestors at Sand Creek, Washita, and Wounded Knee, places now sanctified because of those sacrifices.

According to Vine Deloria, Jr., "Every society needs these kinds of sacred places because they help to instill a sense of social cohesion in the people and remind them of the passage of generations that have brought them to the present. A society that cannot remember and honor its past is in peril of losing its soul."<sup>5</sup>

Native people seek to respect and preserve such sacred places located throughout the Northern Plains. In the past, such sites were naturally protected because of their isolation. In recent years, however, commercial enterprises, recreation, and tourism have moved into even the most isolated areas of the Plains. Compromises that allow the sacred and secular use of the lands are being worked out in legal and governmental arenas. Spiritual leaders such as William Tallbull have asked for public understanding of the significance of sacred places: "If you go to see a Sacred Site, remember you are walking on 'holy ground,' and we ask that you respect our culture and traditions. If you come to a site that is being used for a religious purpose, we hope you will understand."<sup>6</sup> ■

<sup>1</sup> N. Scott Momaday, *The Way to Rainy Mountain* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press), 1969, p. 83.

<sup>2</sup> Vine Deloria, Jr. "Sacred Lands," *Winds of Change* 8(4), 1991, p. 31.

<sup>3</sup> Quoted in David Hurst Thomas, *Exploring Ancient Native America: An Archaeological Guide* (New York: Macmillan), 1994, p. 238.

<sup>4</sup> Quoted in Mario Gonzalez, "The Black Hills: The Sacred Land of the Lakota and Tsistsistas", *Cultural Survival Quarterly*, Winter, 1996, p. 67.

<sup>5</sup> Deloria, *God Is Red*, p. 272.

<sup>6</sup> Thomas, *Exploring Ancient Native America*, p. 238.





Eugene Ridgely Sr. (Northern Arapaho), *Sand Creek Massacre*, 1994. Acrylic on buffalo hide. Loan from Eugene Ridgely Sr.



# *We cared for our corn*

## *The Industrious Women of the*





# in those days . . .

## Upper Missouri River Tribes

ANNE MARIE SHRIVER  
PLAINS INDIAN MUSEUM STAFF

*Upon each side were pleasant cultivated spots, some of which stretched up the rising ground on out left, whilst on our right they ran nearly to the Missouri. In those fields were many women and children, at work, who all appeared industrious.<sup>1</sup>*

*Alexander Henry the Younger, 1806  
English fur trader visiting the Upper Missouri River*

The women of the historic Mandan and Hidatsa tribes of the Upper Missouri River valley were indeed industrious. They worked hard in the fields and in their homes, keeping in the background and busily going about their daily tasks. Because the Indian men were wonderfully dressed for the meetings and trade with the Europeans and Americans, it would be hard for the visitors not to be in awe of the men, and to relegate the women to the typical role of powerless drudges and workhorse.

The Hidatsa and Mandan were closely allied and lived in semi-permanent, fortified earth lodge villages along the Heart and Knife Rivers, tributaries of the Missouri. Their vast gardens on the river terraces amazed the Euro-American visitors who traveled down the Missouri trying to become established in the thriving trade network or to winter-over in the villages. Unlike the nomadic tribes who came to rely heavily on the bison and the men who hunted them as their economic mainstay, corn and other vegetables were central to the economies of the village tribes. It was the women who owned the gardens, working with their sisters and daughters with their families in earth lodges, which they had also constructed.

Village women did not have an easy life, as no woman did before electricity. The European men's perceptions of their powerlessness makes the village women, voiceless in the historical record, although they were powerful in the roles they play in their own cultures. Through the continuity of traditions, the women of the Hidatsa, Arikara and Mandan tribes of the Upper Missouri River passed down their personal histories which were deeply intertwined with those of their tribes and clans, through ritual, story-telling, and the hands-on learning of daily tasks.

In the first years of the twentieth century—as result of ethnologist Gilbert Wilson's work with a Hidatsa woman named Buffalo Bird Woman (Maxidiwiac)—

Left: Sioux Woman, Nuxbaaga (Hidatsa), demonstrating hoeing squash with a bone hoe. Fort Berthold Reservation, North Dakota. Gilbert Wilson, 1912. Minnesota Historical Society.



a much clearer picture of village life from the woman's point of view emerged. Buffalo Bird Woman experienced the transitions of her people from life in an earth lodge village to life on a reservation.

Buffalo Bird Woman was born on the Knife River in the Five Villages in the Upper Missouri valley where the Mandan and Hidatsa came together to live. The Mandan lived in two of the villages, the Hidatsa in three. This is where George Catlin first saw them in 1832, eight years before the birth of Buffalo Bird Woman. When speaking to Gilbert Wilson in 1914 she said, "My people had had the smallpox . . . so they speak of the smallpox year. My birth was three years after the smallpox year, I was born in an earth lodge."<sup>2</sup> In the one horrific year of 1837-38, the



Scarecrow in Nuxbaaga (Hidatsa) cornfield. Fort Berthold Reservation, North Dakota. Gilbert Wilson, 1918. Minnesota Historical Society.





Hidatsa were reduced to about "500 persons" and the Mandan to no more than 150. The trade network had brought a rich cultural and economic prosperity to the village tribes, but it was also the trading contacts and the close quarters of the permanent villages, that made the tribes more vulnerable to the devastating sweeps of smallpox. Buffalo Bird Woman tells how in 1845, "When I was four years, my tribe and the Mandans came to Like-a-Fishhook bend. This was seven years after the smallpox year." The new village "was inhabited in the summer time, and was in prairie country. Our fall and winter home was in the winter village which we built down in the woods along the Missouri."<sup>3</sup> The Arikara joined the Mandan and Hidatsa in 1862.

By passing on her knowledge of the old ways of village tribes, Buffalo Bird Woman has both preserved knowledge and taught new generations about the farming traditions of her grandmothers. She tells how in the variable and often extreme environmental conditions of the Northern Plains, the women produced enough corn and vegetables to feed their own, as well as a substantial surplus to

George Catlin (1796-1872), *Minatarree Village, Minatarree—Seven miles above the Mandan on the bank of the Knife River*, ca. 1855-1870. Oil on paper on bristol board, 2 1/4 x 27 in. Gift of Paul Mellon.



*The women worked in the gardens, kept the earth lodges and protective moats in repair, and did the majority of the labor that was necessary to maintain the comfortable lifestyle of the villages.*

offer as trade goods. The Hidatsa and Mandan had several varieties of flint, flour and sweet corn, and prior to the smallpox epidemics of 1782 and 1837, there were undoubtedly many more varieties, each family having their favorites. The family diet was a combination of food grown in the extensive gardens, and from the bison, elk, antelope and fish of the prairies and rivers. The corn harvest was supplemented by beans, squash and sunflowers. As it is for gardeners today, the size and quality of the harvest would vary from year to year. Native gardeners had to contend with hail, high winds, grasshoppers, early and late frosts, droughts and animals. They also had to deal with raiding enemy tribes, and concealed their produce in underground cache pits.

Before the Euro-American trade brought iron tools to the village tribes, the rich soil of the river bottoms was worked with digging sticks (a substantial, pointed stick about four feet long), buffalo shoulder blade hoes, and rakes made from deer antlers. The digging stick was the most important tool in the garden. It was used to expand the garden borders each spring, till the soil, dig wild turnips, make postholes, and when necessary could be used as a weapon. Even after moving to Like-a-Fishhook Village (around 1845) a few older women, like Buffalo Bird Woman's grandmother, Turtle, still preferred to use traditional tools, which were a curiosity to the children. "She always kept [the hoe] back under her bed.

Sometimes we children would take it out, out of curiosity, and want to take it to the garden and try to use it. She would say 'Leave that alone; put it back! I fear you will break it.'"<sup>4</sup>

Before the planting began, the plot had to be cleared, and the piles of the dried vegetation were burned. Some trees were cut and used in the building of earth lodges or fortification of the village, although a few trees remained as shade for the corn watching stage. As she grew up, Buffalo Bird Woman learned not only how to cultivate the corn, but also how to care for it. One of the duties of young girls was to watch the corn, as Buffalo Woman describes:

*A platform was often built in a garden where girls and young women came to sit and sing as they watched that crows and other thieves did not destroy the ripening crop. We cared for our corn in those days as we would care for a child; for we Indian people loved our gardens, just as a mother loves her children, and we thought our growing corn liked to hear us sing.*<sup>5</sup>

An incredible amount of hard work was involved in the preparation, planting, cultivating, and harvesting of the food from the garden. But life in the village was not only hard work, there was always time for fun, socializing and courting. At the late summer harvest time, the family would have a husking feast. The garden owner would pile the corn into the center of the field. The next morning a crier from one of the men's societies would announce for all members to "go husking". The young men would gather together, and sing as they passed through the gardens



to a particular pile. The young women were dressed in their best, as they waited for their young man to pass by. After the day's work, the family gave a feast of meat and corn.

Women's work played a crucial role in the village tribes' economics. The women owned the products of their labors. Those who farmed, dressed skins, built houses, and produced clothing made themselves and their families rich. Because men did not engage in these types of activities, they needed industrious wives to be considered affluent. The women produced the clothing to be worn, as well as the food and gifts to be distributed at the men's ceremonies. The profit the tribes realized from the trading of corn created the economic surplus that allowed the tribes to hold their ceremonies. Consequently, a hard-working woman was a source of wealth and prestige.

The voice of Buffalo Bird Woman, as recorded by Gilbert Wilson, brings to life the villages of the Hidatsa people—men, women and children.

*I am an old woman now. The buffaloes and black-tail deer are gone, and our Indian ways are almost gone. Sometimes I find it hard to believe I ever lived them. Sometimes at evening I sit, looking out on the big Missouri. The sun sets, and dusk steals over the water. In the shadows I seem again to see our Indian village, with smoke curling upward from the earth lodges; and in the river's roar I hear the yells of the warriors, the laughter of little children as of old. ■*

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<sup>1</sup> Wood, R. & Thiessen, T., (1985). *Early Fur Trade on the Northern Plains: Canadian Traders among the Mandan and Hidatsa Indians, 1738-1818*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press.

<sup>2</sup> Wilson, G. (1917). *Agriculture of the Hidatsa Indians: An Indian Interpretation*. Bulletin of the University of Minnesota.

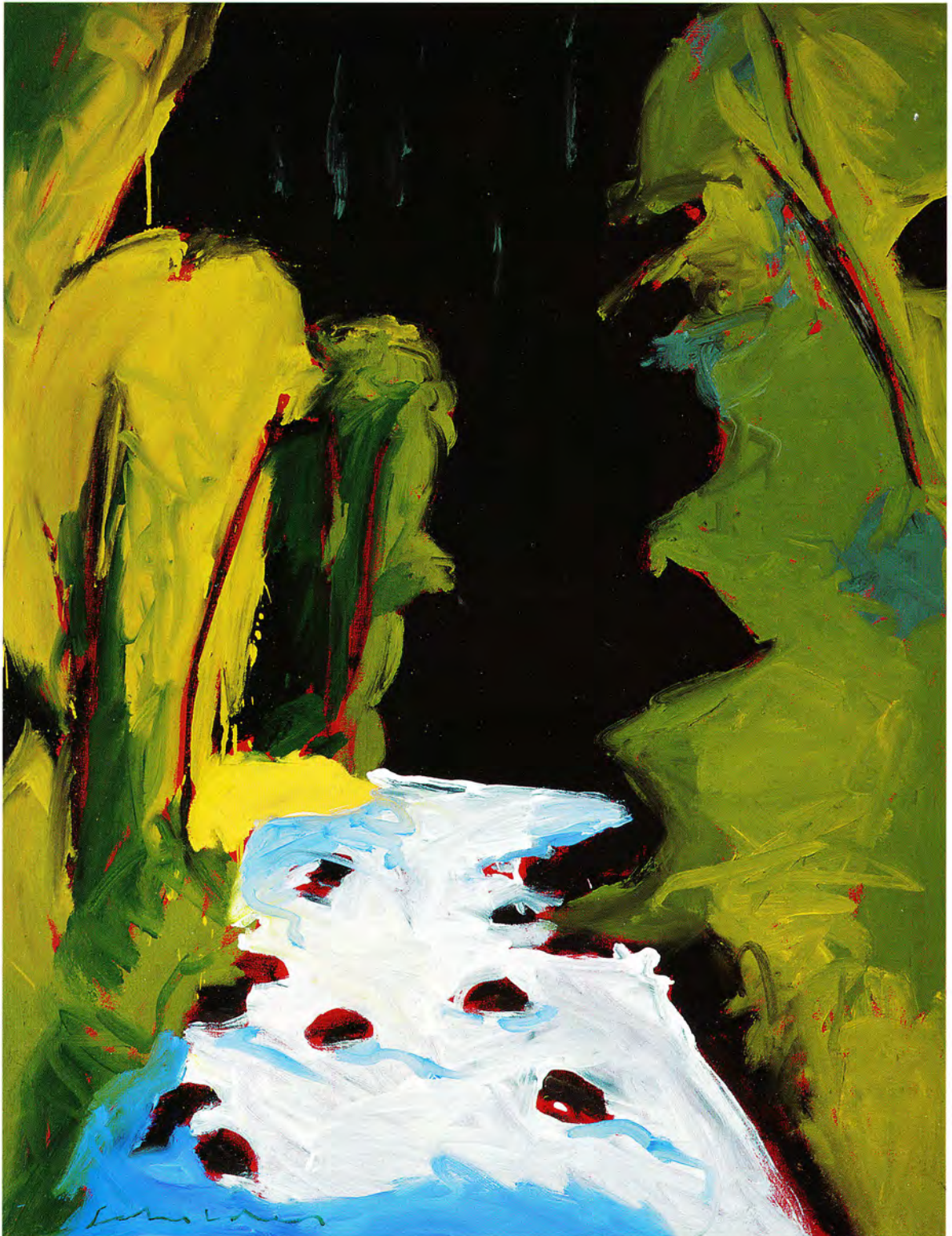
<sup>3</sup> Gilman, C. & Schneider, M.J., (1987). *The Way to Independence: Memories of a Hidatsa Family, 1840-1920*. St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press.

<sup>4</sup> Gilman, C. & Schneider, M.J., (1987). *The Way to Independence: Memories of a Hidatsa Family, 1840-1920*. St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press.

<sup>5</sup> Wilson, G. (1917). *Agriculture of the Hidatsa Indians: An Indian Interpretation*. Bulletin of the University of Minnesota



# *Multiple Influences:*





# Compelling Issues Contemporary Indian Art

SARAH E. BOEHME

THE JOHN S. BUGAS CURATOR

WHITNEY GALLERY OF WESTERN ART

Paintings, sculpture and prints by contemporary Native American artists present some of the most interesting and challenging work being created in the West today. Artists who are Indian often delve into their tribal traditions and yet also find inspiration in artistic movements and styles of the Euro-American culture. Indian artists often incorporate content concerning political, economic, and social issues that confront Native peoples into their art, giving depth and meaning to their productions.

The contemporary scene has been influenced by major changes in Indian art in the twentieth century. In the early decades of the century, several groups of Indian artists developed an approach to painting that used a flat, decorative style to portray scenes of Indian life or aspects of nature. From the Plains tribes came the Kiowa Five and also Lois Smoky in Oklahoma, and from the Southwest developed the similar Studio style of the Santa Fe Indian School. These artists, and the others who were influenced by them, produced paintings for use as visual decoration outside their immediate tribal sphere. Encouraged and instructed by non-native teachers, they found new audiences for their work.

*Mandan Mother and Child* by Blackbear Bosin (1921-1980) provides an example of this twentieth century movement that is now often called "traditional Indian painting." Bosin portrays the scene of a mother and child at play with simplified flat shapes, enhanced by lively decorative lines such as the patterning of the mother's hair and the reeds of the cattails. He portrays the sky and clouds as layers of modulated tones, like pieces of torn paper. Of Comanche-Kiowa heritage, Bosin was self-taught, but was inspired by mural paintings of the Kiowa Five artists. He researched Indian history for his paintings, drawing upon not only his own tribes' histories but upon others as well. He became especially interested in the Mandan Indians, who had been nearly exterminated by the smallpox epidemic in the 1830s,



Above: Blackbear Bosin (1921-1980), *Mandan Mother and Child*, ca. 1963. Gouache on illustration board, 29 x 40 in. Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Robert Wallick in memory of Wallace C. Ford.

Opposite page:  
Fritz Scholder, (b. 1937), *Aspen Summer*, 1977.  
Oil on canvas, 40 1/4 x 30 1/8 in. Gift of Jack and Carol O'Grady.



and he depicted them in a number of paintings such as this one, which includes representations of the Mandan earth lodges at the edge of the horizon.

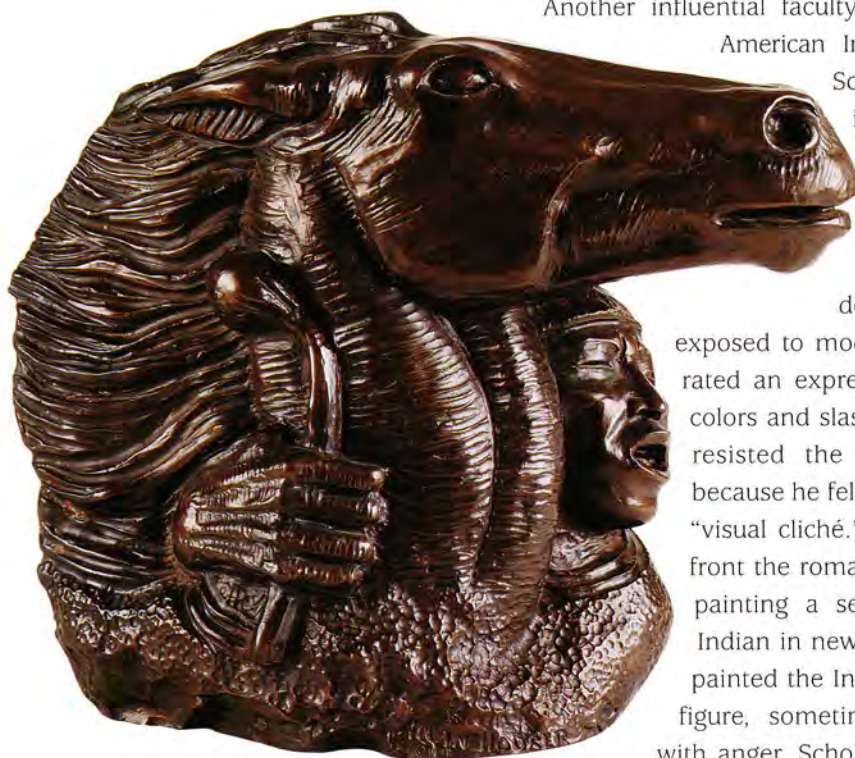
Allan Houser (1914-1994), who studied at the Studio of the Santa Fe Indian School, began as a painter working in the style of traditional Indian painting. He discovered his affinity for three-dimensional work and became one of the most influential Indian sculptors of the century. A Chiricahua Apache, Houser (or, Haozous, the original form of his name) drew on traditional Indian subject matter, but portrayed his heritage in an abstracted style that has the clarity and directness of the best of modernism. He worked directly in carving, responding to the beauty of stone, and also in modeling for cast bronze. *Drama on the Plains*, his depiction of the harmony of rider and horse, exists both as an alabaster and as a bronze. Houser had profound influence on the next generation of Indian artists, especially from his role as a faculty member of the Institute of American Indian Arts in Santa Fe from 1962-1973.

The Institute of American Indian Arts, founded in Santa Fe in 1962, represented a new direction in the education of Indian artists. Prior education often was strongly influenced by non-native ideas of what Indian art should be. The Institute instead emphasized efforts of Native artists to determine their own direction.

Another influential faculty member of the Institute of American Indian Arts was painter Fritz

Scholder (b. 1937). The paintings of Scholder, who is from Luiseno heritage, herald the strong entrance of a modernist vocabulary. Scholder's style developed from academic study in which he was

exposed to modernist views and he incorporated an expressionist approach, using bold colors and slashing brushstrokes. He at first resisted the idea of portraying Indians because he felt that the Indian had become a "visual cliché." He then determined to confront the romanticized view of the Indian by painting a series that would look at the Indian in new ways. Over the next years he painted the Indian, often as a contemporary figure, sometimes with humor, sometimes with anger. Scholder has also made a point of continuing to paint non-Native subjects, such as his representations of mystery women, Egyptian themes, and landscapes, providing a



Allan C. Houser (1915-1994), *Drama on the Plains*, 1978, bronze, H. 13<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> in.





Fritz Scholder (b. 1937), *Indian with Tomahawk*, 1970. Oil on canvas, 58 $\frac{1}{4}$  x 58 $\frac{1}{4}$  in. William E. Weiss Contemporary Art Fund.



*Indian artists  
who use  
twentieth  
century styles  
or materials  
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with Native  
approaches  
bring new  
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to their art.*

reminder that the artist who is Indian need not be confined only to Indian subjects. Scholder's *Aspen Summer* is painted with his signature style of active brushwork and rich, but often dark, coloration.

Indian artists who use twentieth century styles or materials in conjunction with Native approaches bring new sensibilities to their art. Arthur Amiotte, (b. 1942) uses the technique of collage, adding bits of paper to his compositions, a method originated by early twentieth century modernist painters in France. He adopts this method as one of the ways he explores the changing worldviews of his people, the Lakota, around the turn of the century, as in *The Visit* (p. 25). Amiotte sets the collage elements within a pictorial plane that also draws upon the historic Plains Indian ledger style of representing the figure and providing a narrative history, thus creating a work that comments upon history from the contemporary vantage point.

A Blackfeet artist, Neil Parsons (b. 1938) also uses the collage method, in works such as *A Grandmother Lodge* (p. 3). His creations, which use fabric and paper, appear abstract and almost completely non-representational. Yet his titles often suggest a content influenced by his tribal history and his works remind the viewer of the long tradition of abstract designs in traditional Native arts.

The economic, political and social histories of Indian peoples have influenced the subjects of many contemporary artists. Five Indian artists contributed prints to the Indian Self-Rule portfolio, a project that commemorated the fifty-year anniversary of the Indian Reorganization Act of 1934. Artist Jaune Quick-To-See Smith (b. 1940), who is from Flathead, Cree and Shoshone ancestry and who often addresses social issues in her art, made the lithograph *Five Buffalo*. According to the portfolio's Colophon (notation about production) her print "represents Indian attempts to achieve self-rule during the past five decades. The colors are also evocative and symbolic, with yellow representing tanned hide, red for ochre or 'Indian red,' black for smoke or charcoal from fire, while blue is used effectively in the 'stars and stripes.'"

The multiplicity of influences and the compelling sense of issues to be addressed in art are some of the factors that have strengthened the contributions of contemporary artists who are Indian. This brief look has only touched on a few artists as examples and has included works that are in the collections of the Buffalo Bill Historical Center. It points to the need for additional study and additional collecting activity as the Center continues to assess the contributions of contemporary artists. ■





24/50 Indian Gift Series  
 Jaune Quick-To-See Smith (b. 1940), *Five Buffalo*, 1983, lithograph on paper, 28 x 20 in. Gift of Mrs. Damaris D. W. Ethridge.





A HEAVY LOAD - SIOUX

Edward S. Curtis, Sioux Woman



# THE OUTSIDE LOOKING IN PHOTOGRAPHS OF NATIVE AMERICA

BECKY MENLOVE

CURATORIAL ASSISTANT, PLAINS INDIAN MUSEUM

Printed on postcards, in the pages of countless coffee-table books, and on the high-gloss paper of calendars for the new year, historic photographs that have come to represent Native America are regularly bought and sold. Such popular reproductions occupy a prominent place in the imaginations of the dominant culture, and represent only a small sampling of the vast photographic record of North American Indians made during the late 1800s and early 1900s. Comanche essayist Paul Chaat Smith suggests, "There should have been a special camera invented to shoot Indians . . . given the tremendous influence photography has had on us. If one machine (the Colt .44 repeating revolver) nearly wiped us out . . . another gave us immortality. From the first days of still photography, anthropologists and artists found us a subject of endless fascination."<sup>1</sup>

This fascination is manifested in a photographic record that has become contested terrain—images that can at once offer up visual connections to an Indian past or reinforce mythologies that define and compartmentalize Indian people. Photographs in which the subjects are not identified, photographs that omit or distort context, are photographs that can erase history and perpetuate stereotypes. Such imagery evokes contradictory assumptions about Indians of the past, and in turn influences perceptions of Indians in the present. Scholar Lee Clark Mitchell writes of 19th century Natives as subject:

*Were they noble savages or bloodthirsty demons, confirmed pagans or redeemable souls, displaced nomads or an abiding symbol of the American landscape itself? The nineteenth century certainly could not decide, and given the collective cultural confusion, it is understandable why so many photographers failed to transcend stereotypes, even when the stereotypes were clearly belied by the subjects standing right before them.*<sup>2</sup>

For although Native people have diverse cultures, histories, languages, economies, and worldviews, myriad photographs intended to record their lives have served, and in many

“THE VISUAL RECORD OF  
INDIAN PEOPLE IS MAINLY  
ONE OF THE OUTSIDE  
LOOKING IN.”



Edward S. Curtis, *Winter—Apsaroke*





Marie Willow teaches a group of girls how to string beads at the 1988 Arapaho Language and Culture camp sponsored by the Northern Arapaho Tribe and the Wyoming Council for the Humanities. Marie has been a teacher of Arapaho language and culture for over 16 years. She was born May 2, 1939 in the St. Stephens area. Her Arapaho name is Neehii3ei'tou' or *Hits in the Middle*. Sara Wiles, 1988.

lovely to look at—a woman at work, a peaceful winter scene—it presents a type, a popular perception of Indian women in the 19th century: locked in time, she seems saddled with drudgery.

In his monumental attempt to record all the Indians of North America, Curtis's work includes many such "types"—"Winter-Apsaroke" (p. 23) is nearly identical to "Sioux Woman"—there is no distinction between the women pictured in these two scenes of winter work. While many of Curtis's images depict and name well-known individuals such as Red Cloud and Chief Joseph, as many are images of people posed as cultural artifacts. Such stereotypes are perpetuated when these powerfully evocative photographs are reproduced for mass consumption. Artist and photographer Jolene Rickard writes:

*The conceptual space of North American indigenous peoples is time trapped ... it is no wonder that the mention of Native American, indigenous, aboriginal, or American Indian conjures up "Dances With Wolves" nostalgia. The visual record of Indian people is mainly one of the outside looking in.<sup>3</sup>*

Visually and figuratively shrouded in a nostalgic fog, familiar photographs by Curtis and others often ignore Native memory while replacing it with constructed Western myths. For popular audiences, romantic images of "the Age of the Golden Tipi"<sup>4</sup> become an overarching abstraction, a non-Indian vision of Indianness.

Sara Wiles, a contemporary photographer and anthropologist, suggests that such difficulties in interpreting historic images of Indians arise because the majority of such photographs lack context. By depicting reenacted events and staged moments, 19th century photographers sought to capture a past that they believed was quickly fading, but the result was often photography that was culturally out of sync. In her own work, Wiles has made hundreds of photographs of Northern Arapaho. She makes context

cases continue to serve, to sentimentalize, romanticize, and stereotype the Indian of a passing era.

Consider "Sioux Woman," a photograph by Edward S. Curtis (p.22). Burdened with a large bundle of firewood strapped to her back, a blanketed woman walks through the snow, her back bent from the weight of her work. In warm sepia tones, the snowy landscape is hazy and undefined. The subject's face is obscured as she gazes downward, her identity no less clear from the clothes she wears or the task in which she is engaged. While the photograph is



central to the image and its meaning. In Wiles's series, *Ni'iihi'* (In a good way): *Photographs of Wind River Arapaho*, her subjects are depicted as people—individuals with individual lives. She does all she can to make the pictures personal and always includes a detailed caption and her subjects' names ("Names are so important," she says). Wiles tries "to make everything real" in her photographs, knowing that what she brings to the meaning of the image is her perception of the way Arapaho look at things.

The person behind the camera invariably brings his or her experience and worldview to the task, as does the viewer. During the approximately one hundred years that non-Indian audiences have viewed 19th century images of Native America, they have continued to reinvent what they see.

Likewise, Native audiences bring Native perspectives to their interpretation of historic photographic images. Complex insider knowledge, memory, and oral histories from within their cultures make it possible to interpret and use historic imagery for their own ends. Julie Lakota, archivist at Oglala Lakota College has found that historic photographs can add important information to historical and genealogical research. Writing about an historic photograph she encountered at the National Museum of Natural History, she notes, "... it helps tell a much larger story, and offers a vital connection to the past ... Family history can be told from the many collections of historical photographs in the museums, the Oglala Lakota College Archives or old photographs at your grandmother's home."<sup>5</sup>

Sara Wiles agrees that for Indian people, historic photographs can be useful. She has observed that "these days, old photographs get recontextualized on reservations-brought back into the culture and used in new ways... Native Americans find a lot to like about those old pictures."<sup>6</sup> Indeed, historic photographs housed in archival collections often provide a visual link to relatives of earlier generations.

Lakota artist Arthur Amiotte takes this a step further, finding family history and cultural memories in historic photographs of his relatives, images that he interprets and recontextualizes in his artwork. Through the years, Amiotte has collected many photographs of his great-grandfather, Standing Bear, who was also an artist. Standing Bear's travels abroad, his trip to Connecticut as part of a Lakota delegation, and his time at the home he built at Pine Ridge have all been captured in photographs. Amiotte incorporates these images in his collage work in compelling ways, including both photographic reproductions and his own interpretations of them.



Arthur Amiotte (b. 1942),  
*The Visit*, 1995. Acrylic  
and collage, 19<sup>3</sup>/<sub>8</sub> x 23<sup>3</sup>/<sub>8</sub>  
in. Gift of Mrs. Cornelius  
Vanderbilt Whitney.



Many contemporary photographers continue to search for the romantic ideal of Indianness they have seen in historic pictures. This search for the “real Indian” in the 21st century is inevitably disappointing, since “real Indians” are real people living individual lives. Paul Chaat Smith asserts:

*The country can't make up its mind. One decade we're invisible, another dangerous. Obsolete and quaint, a rather boring people suitable for school kids and family vacations, then suddenly we're cool and mysterious. Once considered so primitive that our status as fully human was a subject of scientific debate, some now regard us as keepers of planetary secrets and the only salvation for a world bent on destroying itself. Heck, we're just plain folks, but no one wants to hear that.*<sup>7</sup>

In recent years, greater numbers of Indian artists have “picked up the camera” to begin telling their own stories. Assiniboine photographer, Ken Blackbird brings both his cultural perspectives and a photojournalist's sensibilities to his photography. He works to capture the vitality of Indian life. Unlike the romantic figures he has seen in historic photographs, he makes images of “life as it should be—the people still holding powwows and ceremonies, and knowing that they always will.” Blackbird notes that his work is part of a continuum—instead of telling stories on painted hides, he captures history with a camera. When he goes home to the reservation to photograph, he enjoys meeting people, spending time with them, recording these moments on film. Blackbird finds that to take good pictures, pictures that honor his subjects, it is important to follow cultural protocol, even as a tribal member. This can be a slow process, but the time spent brings opportunities to visit and to learn, and often brings the unexpected to the photographs.

In 1993, after several days photographing Victoria Has The Eagle, a woman of advanced age whom Blackbird admired, a cousin dropped by with his little baby in tow. On his way to a blessing for the swaddled child, the cousin had stopped to visit his grandmother, Victoria Has The Eagle. The resulting photographs of Has The Eagle and her great grandchild are some of Blackbird's favorite images. He says, “the interaction between an elder and a child represents the future . . . this is real life. . . . I'm not catching souls, I'm catching moments of light.”<sup>8</sup>

While Blackbird works as a documentary photographer for the *Billings Gazette*—he is one of



Victoria Has The Eagle and great-grandchild. Ken Blackbird, 1993.

only about five Indian photojournalists in the country—he crosses over to wildlife and art photography on his own time. He is bound by the landscape he lives in and gets out to photograph whenever he can. “I'm always chasing buffalo and grizzly bears,” he notes. “I look for life and death struggles.” In this symbolic work, Blackbird is “just buffalo hunting . . . the kill is the photo.”

Camera work among Indian artists brings with it particular challenges, just as the interpretation of historic imagery does. As Smith notes, “Each of us [Native Americans] has a complex relationship with photography, and each knows it. That relationship is one of





Buffalo, Ken Blackbird, 1996.

culture, of history, of politics.”<sup>9</sup> Blackbird suggests that “people like seeing what other people see—seeing through someone else’s eyes.” If we eschew stereotypes, look closely, and listen to Native perspectives, non-Indian audiences may learn a great deal from the historic photographic record. As this record begins to include more images made by Native photographers, new narratives will emerge, through Native eyes. ■

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<sup>1</sup> Paul Chaat Smith, “Ghost in the Machine,” *Aperture* (#139, Summer, 1995) 7.

<sup>2</sup> Lee Clark Mitchell. *The Photograph and the American Indian*. (Princeton, New Jersey, Princeton University Press, 1994) xiii.

<sup>3</sup> Jolene Rickard. “Frozen in White Light.” *Watchful Eyes: Native Women Artists* (Phoenix: Heard Museum, 1994) 15.

<sup>4</sup> Rayna Green *Partial Recall*. (New York: The New Press, 1992) 59.

<sup>5</sup> Julie Lakota. “Putting Names to Faces: The Oglala Lakota College Archives is a Family Photo Album for the Tribe.” *Tribal College Journal* (Spring, 1995) 36.

<sup>6</sup> Sara Wiles. Personal interview, March 31, 2000.

<sup>7</sup> Smith, “Ghost in the Machine,” 7.

<sup>8</sup> Ken Blackbird. Personal interview, April 6, 2000.

<sup>9</sup> Ken Blackbird. Personal interview, April 6, 2000.



# RECORDING THE

REBECCA WEST

CURATORIAL ASSISTANT, PLAINS INDIAN MUSEUM

**F**rances Densmore is known in the field of anthropology as a dedicated ethnomusicologist who recorded and preserved over three thousand Indian songs from 1905 to 1940. An accomplished pianist, Densmore had formal schooling in music, and was drawn to the field of ethnomusicology after reading reports by fellow anthropologist Alice Fletcher. Early, independent research ventures were amongst the Sioux near Red Wing, Minnesota and the Chippewa of the White Earth Reservation. By 1907 Densmore would embark on numerous research projects funded by the Bureau of American Ethnology, the Historical Society of North Dakota, and later, the Smithsonian. Densmore ultimately worked with tribes from all regions of the United States from the Southwest, to British Columbia, and Florida. Densmore described her life's work as recording "the spiritual life of a race." She came to realize that Indian music is fundamental to Indian culture, profoundly intertwined with religion, spirituality, and daily life. By studying the music of these cultures, she aided the preservation and continuation of disappearing cultural traditions.

When we hear music that is not from our own culture, it can seem foreign, and unnatural. An anthropological explanation notes, "In music, as well as in art, our

Good Earth Woman  
Susan Windgrow  
(Makawastewin) with  
Frances Densmore  
ca. 1930. Minnesota  
Historical Society.





# SPIRIT OF A CULTURE

culture largely determines what we consider acceptable variations, what we say has 'meaning' to us. Even a trained musicologist, listening for the first time to music of a different culture, will not be able to hear the subtleties of tone and rhythm that members of the culture hear with ease." Densmore had additional challenges as she had visited tribes in remote locations, often living with them for days or weeks at a time. Much of the translating had to be done through an interpreter. Her recording equipment was unwieldy, but essential. Indians had no written form of music; songs were passed through individuals and generations. Initially she used an Edison Home Phonograph, and later a graphophone and a dictaphone.

Frances Densmore's research consisted of three main phases: Recording the songs and collecting related artifacts and information from Indian subjects; transcribing the songs into musical notes; and, analyzing and publishing findings. Densmore realized the importance of collecting musical instruments, associated artifacts, and even plants and herbs as a method of interpreting songs in their cultural context, especially in the case of ceremonial or healing songs. She concluded that musical instruments used by North American Indian tribes vary greatly, as does their music. One exception—the gourd rattle—was widely used. Densmore collected hide drums from the Sioux, plank or box drums from Northwest Makah, flutes from the Winnebago of the Great Lakes regions, and various types of whistles and rattles. Although instruments were collected as meaningful artifacts, Densmore did not overemphasize the role of instruments in comparison to music made by the Indian voice, "Instrumental music is used only as an accompaniment to singing among the Indians, except that the young men sometimes play a flute in the evenings and a whistle may be blown in ceremonies or in the treatment of the sick." In Densmore's estimation, the human voice was the most significant "instrument."

While Densmore's research among Indian tribes was scientifically based, she managed to grasp the elusive concept of spirituality while studying healing songs, dream or personal songs, and warrior's songs. Her refusal to record the most sacred of songs illustrated her understanding and respect for Indian beliefs.



Frances Densmore with Lakota (Sioux), ca. 1900. Minnesota Historical Society.



My horse be swift in flight  
 Even like a bird;  
 My horse be swift in flight,  
 Bear me now in safety  
 Far from the enemy's arrows,  
 And you shall be rewarded  
 With streamers and ribbons red.

—A Warrior to His Horse  
 (Lakota), from "Poems from  
 Sioux and Chippewa Songs," 1917.

Densmore was able to separate common misinterpretations of Indian songs, as a form of entertainment, from their spiritual and ceremonial nature:

*... the terms 'superstition' and 'witchcraft' as well as words of highest spiritual import, were attached to Indian customs. These terms became permanent and, to a large extent, have influenced the White Man's opinion of the Indian. Similarly the terms 'music' and 'singing' were applied to Indian performances. These did not please the White man, and there is still a reluctance to regard music as an important phase of Indian culture worthy of our consideration.*

In her article "The Belief of the Indian in a Connection Between Song and the Supernatural," Densmore articulately interpreted the Indian concepts of spirits and dreams in relation to songs. While songs in many cultures are written to or for a deity, Indian songs are received from spirits through dreams, or visions. When a song is transferred in this manner, it becomes the recipient's possession, or "personal song." A moving example is a personal song recorded by Densmore while she was working with the Pawnee. As a boy, a warrior named Eagle was frightened of thunder. The thunder spoke to him in a dream and told him not to be afraid. The warrior remembered the thunder's song, which became his own:

*Beloved it is good.  
 He, the thunder, is saying quietly.  
 It is good.*

As a grown man, Eagle would sing this song whenever he went to war as a source of courage and inspiration.

Densmore discovered the existence of a hierarchy of songs in the tribes she studied. Songs associated with men's roles, such as warrior's songs, or healing songs, were considered more significant than, for example, a lullaby or a woman's lamenting song. Densmore did not trivialize the cultural significance of any song, and recognized each song as being part of a cultural tradition. However, she also appreciated a more romantic quality she called "the poetry of song." The following Chippewa lullaby, Densmore noted, would have been sung in a low, soothing voice, using the syllables "way, way, way" in a mesmerizing rhythm.



Absaroke (Crow) War Dancers, Montana. Richard Throssel, 1905-11. American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming.



*Little baby, sleep,  
Mother swings your hammock low;  
Little birds are asleep in their nest.*

*Way, way, way, way, way,  
Way, way, way, way, way, way, way,  
Little baby with nothing to fear.*

Lullabies and love songs did not have the spiritual impact or gravity of healing, warrior society, or other ceremonial songs, but were valued for their soothing qualities and as a form of expression. Such songs are also significant in outlining men's and women's responsibilities in Indian cultures.

To analyze all of Densmore's data is a daunting task. For each song that was recorded and transcribed, Densmore produced a detailed chart of rhythm, tone, pitch, tempo and melody. She was able to formulate common characteristics for Indian music as a whole: songs usually begin with high notes and end in a low note; rhythm is more prominent than melody; and, music is based on vocal capabilities rather than on notes produced from a musical instrument. While songs were a valued part of cultural traditions, passed from one generation to the next, they were in danger of being lost: "... songs are rapidly passing away and are now a matter of tradition, which adds to the importance of preserving the old songs that have been handed down to the present generation, with the story of their origin." Frances Densmore's research has ensured, for future generations of Indian tribes, that traditional songs continue to be links to the past as well as celebrations of a vital present. ■



Hand Drum,  
Chahiksichahiks  
(Pawnee),  
Oklahoma, 1885.  
Wood, rawhide,  
blue, black and red  
pigments.  
Diameter 12<sup>5</sup>/<sub>8</sub> in.  
Buffalo Bill  
Historical Center,  
Chandler- Pohrt  
Collection.

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# *Vanessa Jennings*

Since early childhood, Vanessa Jennings has been steeped in the culture of her Kiowa/Pima elders, learning various aspects of traditional Kiowa ways. In 1989, Vanessa was named a National Treasure and received the National Heritage Fellowship Award from the National Endowment for the Arts. In Vanessa's words, "with the passing of the seasons we lose more elders and their knowledge. It is my desire to teach our material culture and the reasons an article is done in a certain way. By doing this we honor our elders and maintain our culture."

Vanessa is known throughout the world for her beadwork in dresses and leggings. Here, her craft is applied in a beautiful cradleboard. The beadwork designs incorporate symbols from the owner's tribal heritage and often show a mixture of cultures for a descendent of different tribes.

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