



**СНЫ
ОСЬМИНОГА:
200 графических работ
современных
североамериканских
индейцев**

Каталог выставки
в Екатеринбургском музее
изобразительных искусств

29 июня - 26 августа, 2012

При поддержке
Генерального консульства
США в Екатеринбурге

При содействии
Института искусства
североамериканских
индейцев (Санта-Фе,
штат Нью-Мексико)



Catalogue of exhibition
In Yekaterinburg Museum
of Fine Arts

June 29th - August 26th, 2012

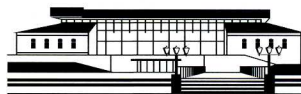
With the support of
United States Consulate in
Yekaterinburg

With the cooperation of
Institute of American Indian
Arts (Santa Fe, New Mexico)

**ОСТОПУС
DREAMS:**

**200 Works on Paper
by Contemporary
Native American
Artists**

IAIA
INSTITUTE of
AMERICAN INDIAN ARTS



ЕКАТЕРИНБУРГСКИЙ МУЗЕЙ
ИЗОБРАЗИТЕЛЬНЫХ ИСКУССТВ



артефакт

Екатеринбург
Yekaterinburg
2012

Contemporary Native American art is an ever-expanding field whose works are comprised of a wide variety of mediums, techniques, and subject matter that are best understood within specific cultural contexts. Within the United States alone, there are over four hundred federally recognized tribes with distinct languages, traditions, and philosophical worldviews that often shape an individual artist's vision, goals, and achievements. The present exhibition of art on paper at the Yekaterinburg Museum of Fine Art will exemplify a crossroads for the forty artists to engage in a dialogue about cultural survivance¹, indigenous self-determination, and the creative impulse. The diversity of works on display will also highlight some fundamental issues such as the importance of maintaining a connection to one's original "homeland" or community, coupled with a commitment to the memories, history and traditions that ultimately define a Native American artist's identity in the contemporary world.

When engaging the history of Native American art as a general viewer, it is imperative to become cognizant of the impact that Western practices of art and collecting have had on the reception and understanding of Native artistic practices since the early nineteenth-century. In particular, scholar and curator Joseph Traugott states, "scholars who view Native American art from a Euro-American perspective unwittingly tend to employ the 'salvage paradigm' as an underlying cultural vision"². This vision is best understood as an ideological construct whose underlying conceptions of history and authenticity reflect a desire to rescue something 'authentic' out of destructive historical changes.³ In fact, the most well known photographic evidence of this process exists within the oeuvre of Edward Curtis' most popular publication, that is, his forty-volume edition of photographs and writings titled *The North American Indian, Being a Series of Volumes Picturing and Describing the Indians of United States and Alaska*, completed between the years 1907-30 and published with active support and marketing from then U.S. President Theodore Roosevelt and banking magnate John Pierpont Morgan⁴.

For the opening photograph of his first volume, Curtis employed a pictorialist photographic style characterized by a softened focus to convey the impression of an entire race passively fading away, or vanishing, into the hazy distance⁵. Indeed, the American social and political landscape, at that time, was fully engaged with assimilationist policies centered on dismantling tribal lands, encouraging farming by individuals rather than collectives, and teaching Anglo-American domestic, carpentry, economic, and language skills in government-sponsored schools⁶. However, despite the over five hundred years of colonial aggression suffered on this continent, Native American life has continued and the present artists exhibiting their works on paper will each tell a different story highlighting the diversity of experiences shaping contemporary Indian life in the United States.

When describing her lithograph titled *Celebrate 40,000 Years of American Art* (1997), Jaune Quick-to-See Smith (Confederated Salish Kootenai Nation) states that she chose the rabbit as an art icon because it appears the world over in petroglyphs, children's books, and, more importantly, as the trickster figure in Native oral traditional stories. The combining of traditional Native American references with popular contemporary imagery and modern Euro-American modes of representation allows Quick-to-See Smith to confront different issues in her work and is also reflective of her mixed media approach to painting. In *Celebrate 40,000 Years of American Art*, Quick-to-See Smith points out the relatively young age of America as a nation compared to the indigenous populations that occupied this land by stating: "[...] it's never taken into consideration that some of the world's greatest cultures and cities were here in the Americas for thousands of years - and are still here. This etching is my succinct comment on colonial thinking⁷". In fact, the rabbit petroglyph was itself a very early form of art found in North America that predates the history of art in Western culture.

The importance of historical tribal memories and events often finds expression in contemporary Native art works. According to printmaker Melanie Yazzie (Navajo/Diné Nation), the creative act is "culturally based in [her] heritage of being a Diné person"⁸. The central tenet of Navajo philosophy that carries her art practice is based in "the thought and belief that we must create beauty and harmony from within ourselves, from above, below, in front, behind and from our core"⁹. This is why a main feature of Yazzie's work is based on her family and community life, especially her grandmothers who were both traditional Diné weavers, as can be seen in *Diné Women Herding Sheep* (2012) or *Summer Thoughts* (2012). In the prints *Travel to Fairbanks* (2012) and *Navajo/Diné Travels to Paris* (2012), one can see Yazzie's interest in connecting with other communities and her role as an educator empowered with the gift of storytelling and a renewed focus on sharing the positive aspects of life with those willing to listen.

CROSSING BOUNDARIES: NATIVE AMERICA AND THE CONTEMPORARY ART WORLD

By Shanna
Ketchum-
Heap of Birds
(Navajo/Diné Nation)

¹ According to Velie, the term survivance "connotes survival with an attitude, implying activity rather than passivity, using aggressive means not only to stay alive but to flourish. Contemporary Indians achieve survivance through reinventing who they are, finding new identities through telling traditional stories, and inventing new ones." (Alan Velie, "The War Cry of the Trickster: The Concept of Survivance in Gerald Vizenor's *Bear Island: The War at Sugar Point*," in *Survivance: Narratives of Native Presence*, ed. Gerald Vizenor (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2008) 147.)

² Joseph Traugott, "Native American Artists and the Postmodern Cultural Divide," *Art Journal* 51:3 (Fall 1992):37.

³ James Clifford, "The Others: Beyond the 'Salvage' Paradigm," *The Third Text Reader: On Art, Culture, and Theory*, eds. Araeen, Cubbitt, Sardar (New York: Continuum, 2002) 160.

⁴ Shannon Egan, "Yet in a Primitive Condition' Edward S. Curtis's *North American Indian*," *American Art* 20:3 (Fall 2006): 62.

⁵ *Ibid.*: 59.

⁶ *Ibid.*: 66.

⁷ Jaune Quick-to-See Smith, "Celebrate 40,000 Years of American Art," *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies*, 23:2 (2002): 154.

⁸ Melanie Yazzie, "Artist Statement," Email to the author, 24 April 2012.

⁹ *Ibid.*

The creative impulse is an important element in the work of Rande Cook (Kwakwaka'wakw Nation) who was born on Vancouver Island at Alert Bay, British Columbia. Even though Cook is versatile in his approach to making art work in diverse media such as wood, jewelry, glass, and textiles, he describes the works on paper as a return to "that raw feeling - where it all began"¹⁰. Cook is referring to starting his career with drawing at a young age and filling sketchbooks with all types of images and designs, constantly pushing himself to explore and evolve within a limited space that yielded a great amount of freedom. Cook's professional career took root when he apprenticed with master wood carver John Livingston for six years but he also credits other family influences like his grandfather who impressed upon him old teachings that emphasize positive energy and a connectedness to all things in the world. The subject matter in Cook's work are made of the essential elements tied to his heritage such as the myths, legends, and metaphors that he has made accessible to his viewers by focusing on specific animals like the salmon, killer whale, or thunderbird¹¹. These animals are specific to the First Nations in Canada as their importance is tied directly to the lands, water, and people. Cook hosted his first potlatch a few years ago and also makes sacred items for private use within his homeland. However, in his works on paper, one can see this artist striving for a purpose, pushing and exploring to evolve his art as a reflection of life, love, relationships, and "giving back" to make a positive change.

America Meredith (Cherokee Nation/Swedish) is a painter whose tribal background figures prominently in her work as subject matter or visual/textual imagery. Several pieces in this exhibition are inspired by Cherokee folk stories like Walela Jola Ganaeha which tells how hummingbird stole the powerful medicine, tobacco, from its guards, the geese, and shared it with humans¹². Other pieces like Tsiqalili (Chickadee) and Stomp Dance are linoleum block prints that are defined by the bold, crisp lines made with a sharp blade that Meredith feels inspires a sense of motion to each piece. In Rattlesnake Gorget and Tommy Threepersons Holster, Meredith employed fumage, an elemental technique that creates an image from fire, light, and carbon to portray a pre-contact Cherokee symbol of a cultural hero and to highlight a gun holster developed by a Cherokee person¹³. Perhaps what is most indicative of Meredith's work is the piece Ssiquoya Dagoliesgr Unvquolada (Sequoyah's Reading Rainbow) because the artist has become a prominent spokesperson for the native language spoken by the Cherokee tribe as it struggles to survive within the current generation. It was Sequoyah who invented the Cherokee writing system even though he was illiterate and using the fumage technique made sense to the artist because "we use smoke to carry our prayers to the heavens, and smoke is the perfect allegory for ideas and inventions"¹⁴. To Meredith, these works on paper were liberating experiences because process is intricately tied to the mediums and techniques executed.

Navajo artist and poet Monty Little is a student at the Institute of American Indian Arts in Santa Fe, New Mexico. In *Amorphous* (2011-12), Little has created ten pieces of work (gouache/acrylic on illustration board) to be shown in five pairs to document the growth or blooming of a flower from beginning to end¹⁵. He describes the creation of the work as very labor intensive because of the amount of paper and paint that was measured and utilized to frame each experience as it signaled the process of transformation. In *Diaspora 1* (2012), Little again primarily works with abstracted shapes juxtaposed on each other to create an unsettling background to the red foreground figure reminiscent of an Indian dancer wearing feathered regalia. Little describes the red-shaped figure as a "metaphor for a person (of color) [feeling] diasporic in their own country"¹⁶. Even though Little was visually representing his own feelings about being away at school hundreds of miles from his homeland and community, the metaphor is translatable to the geopolitical landscape of the United States today as a critical site for a broad spectrum of minority and migrant populations that experience forms of longing, memory, and (dis)identification with their host country. In an insightful essay titled "Diasporas," James Clifford explores the use of the term and its applicability to tribal or "Fourth World" cultures that assert sovereignty and "first nationhood" while stressing continuity of habitation, aboriginality, and a natural connection to the land¹⁷.

In trying to account for the extensive use of the term "diaspora" which is invoked by displaced peoples who feel a connection with a prior home, Clifford maintains that a sense of connection to that prior place "must be strong enough to resist erasure through the normalizing processes of forgetting, assimilating, and distancing"¹⁸. In the work of Edgar Heap of Birds (Cheyenne/Arapaho Nation), the content and subject matter of the *Dead Indian Stories* (2011-12) and *American Leagues* (1995-6) offers a contrasting moment to educate the

¹⁰ Rande Cook, *Telephone Interview with author*, 23 April 2012.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² America Meredith, "Artist Statement," *Email to the author*, 26 April 2012.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ Monty Little, *Telephone interview with author*, 22 April 2012.

¹⁶ Monty Little, "Artist Statement," *Email to author*, 22 April 2012.

¹⁷ James Clifford, "Diasporas," *Cultural Anthropology* 9:3 (August 1994): 308-310.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

public about the negative experiences that diasporan consciousness affords to communities kept in subordinate positions by established structures of racial exclusion. In one print, white text reads “FIND PEOPLE KILL PEOPLE WASHITA RIVER” on a red-colored background to highlight the massacre of children, women and elders of the Cheyenne tribe on November 27, 1868 when Custer and the Seventh U.S Cavalry charged into a sleeping village. Heap of Birds believes that this crucial moment in his tribal nation’s history marks the point when leadership was lost and why contemporary problems like drug abuse, violence, and other kinds of dysfunction plague reservation life in the United States¹⁹. With American Leagues (1995-6), Heap of Birds first made this image as a billboard for the Cleveland Art Museum who censored it and eventually revoked their decision when anonymous donors wanted to make more billboards to show their solidarity with the artist and the American Indian Movement²⁰. The phrase “Smile for Racism” refers to the Cleveland baseball team’s commodification of Indian culture and symbolism for financial gain. Other prints that Heap of Birds will exhibit deal with sensuality or satisfaction as extensions of his own personal feelings, existence, and memory as an individual. He states, “I hope when Russians view this work that they will see a politically outspoken voice defending Native lives but also a personal reflection of just another individual. We need both [represented] today in Native America”²¹.

Through this brief look at a few of the artists involved in the exhibit, one can easily get a sense of the diversity in experiences that coexist within the current field of contemporary Native American art. Alan Velie’s definition of the term survivance is useful in explaining the contemporary Indian’s will to create by “reinventing who they are, finding new identities through telling traditional stories, and inventing new ones²². Since all tribes and tribal members form distinctive groups in the Americas, the level of aggressive means to stay alive and flourish will vary. Clifford was well aware of the specificities of tribal diasporas who are now forced to survive “frequently in artificially reduced and displaced conditions, with segments of their populations living in cities away from the land, temporarily or even permanently”²³. Like all other diasporas with claims against an oppressive national hegemony, tribal cultures can speak of the diverse array of changing conditions of mass communication, globalization, and post- and neocolonialism that have had a detrimental effect on their ability to remain rooted to their homelands at all times. However, Clifford was keen to point out that “tribal cultures are not diasporas; their sense of rootedness in the land is precisely what diasporic peoples have lost”²⁴. That is to say that Native American peoples deeply belong to a place because of continuous occupancy over an extended period of time; they are the hosts and their histories, traditions, and memories will never vanish into a hazy distance.

¹⁰ Rande Cook, Telephone Interview with author, 23 April 2012.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² America Meredith, “Artist Statement,” Email to the author, 26 April 2012.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Monty Little, Telephone interview with author, 22 April 2012.

¹⁶ Monty Little, “Artist Statement,” Email to author, 22 April 2012.

¹⁷ James Clifford, “Diasporas,” *Cultural Anthropology* 9:3 (August 1994): 308-310.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Edgar Heap of Birds, Personal interview with author, 26 April 2012.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

²² See footnote #1.

²³ Clifford, *op cit*: 310.

²⁴ Ibid.

