

INTRODUCTION

This special issue on Native art is not intended as an introduction to the field for the general reader, nor is it organized by art historical period or cultural region as is often the case for books produced in this discipline. The history and development of Native art is rich and complex, and the resources for its study are rarely definitive or introductory. Authors were not asked to focus on a particular topic in Native art as the discipline is still young and its history is fraught with biases of all kinds. What this volume does appear to offer the reader is a sense of the structure emerging in this discipline, a structure with which art historians have been grappling for some time. While each of the papers offers a wealth of new information on particular artists, styles, iconography, history and interpretation, the volume also makes a collective statement about the positive and hopeful directions in which the discipline is moving.

THE PAPERS

What is 'Huron Art?': Native American Art and the New Art History,
by Ruth B. Phillips

This critical first essay reviews the basic elements and methods of the new art history with specific reference to Native American art. Native art historians have often been isolated from the formal methodological debates carried on in the fine arts mainstream discipline. The new art history discusses the need for a multivocal and interdisciplinary discourse in which artists and art historians both within and external to, the subject culture, would have representative voices, thus allowing readers and scholars both an emic and an etic perspective for the critique of artworks. Both Native people and the new art historians are calling for the dismantling of European cultural, intellectual and political hegemony, a decolonizing of knowledge, and a movement towards a less derivative view of Native American art and culture. As the old art history grew in specialization of stylistic and iconological analysis, meaning also became isolated and narrow. The other extreme of this is that the intellectual meaning-mongers left out any sense of function, aesthetics, and practicality in their discussions and exhibitions, thus blinding one to the cohesiveness of small scale societies. "Visual artistic expression in such cultures assumes burdens of meaning not required of an In societies possessing written language. As a result these art forms may not be capable of satisfactory analysis by means of a model which detaches style from content" (p. 4). The paper goes on to examine what have been basic art histori-

cal resources, such as oral texts frozen in time and space, attitudes about hierarchical categories of art, new art history methodologies, the acculturation of artists, the problems of periodization of art history, and the question of representation vs. art.

While Phillips' paper uses Huron art and the works of contemporary Native artists to illustrate her pointed discussion, it also provides a framework for examining the methodologies and approaches taken by the other authors represented in this special issue. Readers will discover the complexity of carrying out any one of these methods in regard to the arts of some small scale societies.

Continuity of Form and Function in the Art of the Eastern Woodlands,
by Amelia M. Trevelyan

Trevelyan traces variations of style within a consistent framework of subject matter and meaning through prehistory to contemporary living artists. The tenacity of Woodland people in continuing to express their beliefs and visions so consistently points back to Phillips' paper and the relevant questions which the old art history does not expect historians to ask about Native American art styles, because it presumes a linear progression and a hierarchical order which has not been a part of the Aboriginal North American past or present.

Tenuous Lines of Descent: Indian Arts and Crafts of the Reservation Period,
by Gerald R. McMaster

The colonization of art historical knowledge and methods may appear minor after reading McMaster's political colonization of Canadian Native arts. The telling archival photos of the Native artist's place, not in fine arts museums or galleries, but in agricultural fairs and tourist centres across Canada had, at worst, devastating effects on the quality of artworks produced in an effort to create efficient and sufficient quantities of work to satisfy the curio trade. The Canadian taste was one carefully orchestrated by the Government of Canada.

Totem Poles and the Indian New Deal, by Aldona Jonaitis

The United States government is no less suspect in its control and orchestration of bad taste through the destruction of a fine original sculptural form and the revival of bad Aboriginal totem pole art in Alaska, but at least this happened under the guise of a sympathetic policy. Both McMaster's and Jonaitis' papers are important for the political contexts which they ex-

pose as impositions upon the early "modern" period of Native art and the effects which these policies had on form, techniques, style, meaning, and function.

Will the "Real" False Face Please Stand Up?, by Joanne Danford

Photographs of visual cultural expressions, such as of masks, form part of the most used art historical resources for classification and interpretation of artworks. They have often been presented in old art history categories derived from such natural history techniques as classifications for butterflies. In addition, the information collected from oral traditions at the time the masks were collected and photographed has also been frozen in time and placed in texts. Danford examines the distortion of these artworks as they are forced through the old strainers of art historical method and the recontextualizing of the original expression.

Looking for Bella Bella: The R. W. Large Collection and Heiltsuk Art History,
by Martha Black

Ruth Phillips referred to Joan Vastokas' (1986-87) review of the procedural difficulties in creating for Native art the same kinds of understandings of stylistic development which allow the interpretation of meaning already achieved for historical forms of Western art. Historians of Native art have not completed the inventories of artworks to establish accurate chronological sequences with which they could identify individual artists. In Martha Black's paper we are presented now with the problems of such an inventory. Work on the Heiltsuk has been clouded by a scarcity of information and hampered by hierarchical and purist attitudes about authenticity. Considered tainted through acculturation by the earliest anthropologists in our discipline, thorough examination of the Heiltsuk had long been eschewed in favor of the search for the elusive pure Native expression. We were unable to look at the Heiltsuk as artists making a critique of culture who themselves were undergoing a radical transformation. Thus we were incapable of acknowledging their artists as the prime conveyors of their own history.

Inuit Women and Graphic Arts: Female Creativity and its Cultural Context,
by Janet Catherine Berio

Contributing to the breakdown of the old art history hierarchical order of what artworks, and by which class distinction, whose art work will be examined, is Berio's excellent review of the genius and success of Inuit women in the graphic arts. To the generally knowledgeable historian this essay may

not offer information about these women that has not already been known as it draws from original, primary resources to make an assessment that should be obvious, but which has never in fact been noted. The phenomenal success of Inuit women in a fine arts medium sets them apart from most other women of fourth world societies. It discusses the possible reasons for this success and the cultural ramifications it has for the further development of Inuit art. The old art history connoisseurship of fine arts media should have recognized their genius long ago, but perhaps the old art history is not yet transformed. The paper clearly points to one of the disciplines most affecting the way we will view the arts in years to come, Womens' Studies.

From the "Dreamtime" to the Present: The Changing Role of Aboriginal Rock Paintings in Western Arnhem Land, Australia, by Paul S.C. Tacon

Tacon's essay starts with a stylistic and iconographic classification of Western Arnhem Land rock painting combining both the European literature and interpretation of singular art styles as told to him by contemporary Aboriginals. While the Aboriginal and European hierarchical orders of the paintings tend to overlap, Tacon does not end the essay with a confirmation of the ability of Europeans or Westerners to define importance or order. The essay goes on to take the reader through Aboriginal prehistory, climate and geography and the Aboriginal relationship to this constant, dynamic, evolution of the earth's history and their history. Tacon confirms the living dynamics of the paintings, both through stylistic and iconographic changes and the actual physical changes which occur in the paintings due to changes in natural history such as seasonal and climatic variations. The continuing exchange and confirmation which the paintings play in narrating practical information, as well as symbolizing myth, ritual and world view, begins to explain the nature of the qualities of the painting themselves, even when some are repainted. It is clear that any attempt to isolate and define the paintings in a closed prehistorical, or even contemporary context would be a great distortion of the art and culture, that all of these periods linked together are vital for the understanding of the Aboriginal past and present, their art and environment.

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