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## **The Native American Fine Art Movement: A Resource Guide**

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HEARD MUSEUM

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Development of this resource guide was funded by the Nathan Cummings Foundation. This resource guide focuses on painting and sculpture produced by Native Americans in the continental United States since 1900. The emphasis on artists from the Southwest and Oklahoma is an indication of the importance of those regions to the on-going development of Native American art in this century and the reality of academic study.

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### **A Note to Educators**

#### **What is the *Native American Fine Art Movement Resource Guide*?**

The Resource Guide is an introduction to a unique aspect of American art in the 20th century: painting and sculpture produced by individuals of American Indian descent.

It is an overview of the emergence of new art forms from people with deep-rooted creative traditions. The Native American Fine Art Movement documents creative change and adaptation as individuals gained access to different media, experienced a changing society and numerous social pressures.

It is an opportunity to look at artistic work in changing cultural contexts.

It affords insight into the first-person experiences and perspectives of Native Americans as they have observed and reacted to the economic, social, political and environmental situations confronting them in this century.

It is social studies, art history and communications walking hand-in-hand-in hand.

#### **What does the Resource Guide include?**

There are several components: The body of the Guide is text. Illustrations of selected artworks are provided, and can be downloaded from the Internet. Higher quality reproductions of the images can be obtained in slide form from The Heard Museum. Review questions on text content are provided, as is a brief glossary of general art history terms and an annotated reading list. A timeline of Native American history provides an overview of significant national and regional events which have helped to shape the fine arts movement.

Additional resources have been designed to facilitate instruction. Key Points summarizes the art-history specific content in the text, and can be used with timeline information to quickly track the emerging fine arts movement through this century. Looking at Artworks offers direction and commentary to support the representative images and/or slide set. This section, like a slide narrative, would be especially useful to an instructor whose computer capabilities included a projector to enlarge the images for classroom viewing and discussion. The Discussion questions and activities section provides ideas for group exploration, studio experience, and student research.

#### **Who is the Guide intended for?**

Anyone interested in contemporary Native American life will find this Guide of value. It is especially intended for educators: not only arts instructors, but social studies, history, anthropology, and multi-cultural educators as well.

Elementary educators may find it most valuable as a way to help their students understand that Native Americans are not only people of the past. James Luna's *"Take a Picture with a Real Indian"* may facilitate such a discussion. The documentary qualities in the genre works can help students get a "first person perspective" of aspects of Indian culture. A studio activity like creating ledger drawings should transfer easily into the primary or intermediate classroom. Elementary children may also be able to identify with some of the environmental issues that concern contemporary Native American artists, and use the ideas presented by Haozous or Quick-to-See Smith as a starting point for their own artwork.

Secondary school, college or university instructors should find the Guide a unique means to interweave social studies and arts. The history and cultures of Native American people are inseparable from their artistic expression: visual, musical, dance and literature. The guide offers a window on American social history and invites non-rancorous examination of native experiences. The Discussion and Activities section is particular targeted at teachers of older students. The museum invites your feedback or further suggestions to be shared on-line with others.

### **A Tip**

*The Native American Fine Arts Resource Guide* is based on the exhibition *Shared Visions: Twentieth Century Native American Painters and Sculptors in the United States*. An illustrated catalogue, published in conjunction with the exhibit, has been reprinted by The New Press and is distributed by W.W. Norton & Company, New York. For further examples of individual artists' work and characteristic works from the different time periods, the catalogue provides an excellent resource. It also contains an extensive bibliography. For reference purposes, search for: Archuleta, Margaret and Rennard Strickland. (1993), *Shared Visions: Native American Painters and Sculptors in the Twentieth Century*, New York: New Press.

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### **Introduction**

This resource guide focuses on painting and sculpture produced by Native Americans in the continental United States since 1900. It is based on the exhibition *Shared Visions: Native American Painters and Sculptors in the Twentieth Century*, organized by the Heard Museum in Phoenix, Arizona. The 19 artists whose work is discussed in detail represent only a fraction of the more than 250 Native tribal groups located in the continental United States. The emphasis on artists from the Southwest and Oklahoma is an indication of the importance of those regions to the on-going development of Native American art in this century and the reality of academic study.

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### **What are the Chief Characteristics of 20th Century Native American Art?**

For centuries Native Americans have produced a vast array of cultural materials. The function and style of these objects varies considerably from tribe to tribe. The magnificent, carved and painted totem poles from the Northwest Coast, the pottery of the Southwest, and beadwork from the Plains have become well known. Anthropology has been responsible for documenting Native cultures from these cultural/geographical regions identified as the Northeast, the Woodlands, the Southeast, the Plains, the Southwest and the Northwest Coast.

Prior to 1900, a separate category known as "art" did not exist in Native American cultures. Cultural materials, like those mentioned above, were incorporated into daily life. They may have had an everyday use or a ceremonial purpose. They were also valued for their aesthetic character.

Since 1850, Native groups in the United States have undergone tremendous change. After the Civil War, the U.S. government forced Native Americans to live on reservations (frequently located far from their ancestral homelands) and to adopt Euro-American lifeways. Until the 1930s, the government encouraged the total suppression of Native traditions and religions. After an abrupt break from this policy in the 1930s and 1940s with the Indian New Deal, the government adopted new policies aimed at speeding up the process of Indian assimilation into mainstream culture. Some of these policies included closing reservations and relocating Indians from reservations to urban areas. The 1960s brought new awareness to Americans about Indian people. The Civil Rights and ethnic pride movements rekindled an interest in American Indian cultures, religions and arts. The promotion and development of Native American painting and sculpture reached a new high.

As a result of Euro-American intervention in Native American culture, Indian artists began to incorporate non-Native materials and visual languages into their art. In the past century and a half, Native American cultural production has expanded beyond the useful and ceremonial objects which are still made to include painting on paper and canvas, sculpture without a useful purpose, and more recently conceptual, performance art, multimedia installations and computer generated/aided art. The first half of the 20th century was dominated by depictions of ceremonial dances and genre scenes painted in a linear, decorative style. The second half has seen the continuation of these subjects plus issues of social, political and cultural importance being expressed in a multitude of modern and post-modern styles such as, abstraction, Neo-Expressionism, Pop Art and Art Deco. Throughout the century, Native Americans have also produced paintings based on actual or imagined events in their lives in the style of European realism.

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### **What is the Role of Tradition in 20th Century Native American Art?**

When Native American artists adopt European artistic traditions, some Native people and many non-Native people assume that they abandon Native traditions of artmaking. Yet this is rarely the case. Twentieth century Native American painting, sculpture, even multimedia installations, are as informed by Indian ways of knowing and seeing the world as are pots,



















































































































