10-2003

Holponiyochi: Contemporary Native American Sculpture

Wright State University Art Galleries

Follow this and additional works at: https://corescholar.libraries.wright.edu/restein_catalogs

Part of the Art and Design Commons, Art Practice Commons, and the Fine Arts Commons

Repository Citation

This Catalog is brought to you for free and open access by the Robert and Elaine Stein Galleries at CORE Scholar. It has been accepted for inclusion in Exhibition and Program Catalogs by an authorized administrator of CORE Scholar. For more information, please contact library-corescholar@wright.edu.
HOLPONIYOCHE
Contemporary Native American Sculpture

WRIGHT STATE UNIVERSITY
Charlene Teters, *Home of the Brave* (Installation view); multimedia art installation

**HOLPONIYOCHI**—Choctaw, meaning “to cause to see”

Charlene Teters (Spokane) asserts that the Native American struggle today is with the popular media. The limiting and often degrading representations of American Indians that pervade such forms of popular culture as movies, television, and sports subsume the rich and varied indigenous cultures of North America under a single, one-dimensional stereotype. Teters contends that, if one is to combat this constraining influence, he or she must meet it head on. The artists represented in “HOLPONIYOCHI: Contemporary Native American Sculpture” do just that.

The nine artists participating in this exhibition share a concern with how practices of visual representation work to construct individual
and collective identity. They examine and then reformulate familiar codes of visual culture, turning established conventions of visual representation against themselves. In highly sophisticated and nuanced critical commentary, they explore how both individual and group identities are shaped in and by one’s cultural environment. At the same time, they recognize that limiting understanding can be an equally powerful influence in the shaping of one’s sense of self and community.

**Edgar Heap of Birds** (Cheyenne/Arapaho) shares with Teters an interest in exploring how popular culture shapes *individual* identity. He finds it equally important to examine how a shared

*Photo courtesy of the artist*
understanding of cultural codes functions as the foundation of collective identity. Heap of Birds often employs the strategy of withholding translation, of making the non-native viewer work to struggle to ascertain meaning. Heap of Birds' site-specific works incorporate un-translated bits of text from the cultures indigenous to their locations. He turns the tables on customary relations of power, employing the verbal and visual rhetoric of advertising against itself by situating text-based works in settings that are incongruous with the
dominant culture's understanding of those settings. While the significance of these textual references may often seem obscure to the general viewer, to those constituting the indigenous population of the particular setting they are rich with cultural and historical references. Heap of Birds illuminates how languages—both visual and verbal—function to secure positions of power for those who speak and understand them. At the same time, he demonstrates how such shared codes work to exclude and disempower those who lie outside the interpretive communities those particular languages address.
Like Heap of Birds, **Duane Slick** (Winnebago) produces works that resist easy translation. Many of his pieces allude to television and other forms of mass media. However, while the references he employs may be highly familiar to the common viewer, they are combined with cultural references that are more fully appreciated only by a much more circumscribed group. Members of the native cultures from which Slick’s images derive are thus placed in privileged positions as viewers.

Slick also makes frequent use of indigenous storytelling traditions, juxtaposing such traditional forms of one-on-one cultural transmission with more mediated modern ones. His series of transparent books, including recent work dealing with customs of self-fashioning and self-adornment among indigenous men, mix such traditional and contemporary forms of communication.
Bob Haozous (Apache) employs the codes of advertising as critique. Perhaps the best known of his works, Cultural Crossroads, combines forms heavily reminiscent of the hieroglyphics of America’s pre-contact indigenous cultures with the ubiquitous modern visual advertising device of the billboard. The result is a trenchant critique of current debates on immigration and transcultural identity.

Jacquie Stevens (Winnebago/Ho-Chunk), David Bradley (Chippewa/Lakota), and Kelvin Yazzie (Navaho/Dine) combine established art and craft conventions in new and

David Bradley, American Spirit; painted paper on plywood construction; 66" x 30" x 14"
unexpected ways. Stevens joins the cultural and artistic conventions of basketry with ceramics, keeping the traditions of her Winnebago ancestors alive in new forms. Bradley combines folk art traditions with imagery from works comprising the Western canon of fine art, replacing the subjects of well-known artworks with figures and settings evoking contemporary Southwest and American Indian cultures. In one of his works, Whistler's mother is transported to a southwestern Santa Fe style interior, and in another *American Gothic*’s dour Midwestern farm couple is replaced by a young Native American couple in semi-traditional dress. Yazzie draws on Western painting and printmaking
traditions. While his works stylistically and compositionally reference the works of Edvard Munch and Vincent Van Gogh, he populates his landscapes with fancy dancers and Navajo sheep.

**Truman Lowe** (Winnebago/Ho-Chunk) also draws on the Western traditions of fine art. However, his canonical sources are more contemporary. His elegant structures reference North America’s native cultures in form and technique of construction while, at the same time, they evoke a modernist, minimalist sensibility.

**Marcus Amerman** (Choctaw) critiques Euro-American conventions of representation in exquisitely crafted beadwork portraits that replicate well-known photographs and paintings of Native Americans. He also manipulates more contemporary icons of American Indian culture. The culture of gambling is critiqued in *Casino Blanket*, a roulette table cover transformed into a wearing blanket through the addition of decorative beadwork.

*Truman Lowe, Wa-Du-Sheh, (bundle); wood, paper, leather; 24" x 18" x 3"*

*Photo courtesy of the artist*
The range of issues addressed by the artists presented in “Holponiyochi” is wide. However, while they clearly demonstrate a multiplicity of approaches to exploration of contemporary American Indian cultures, these artists share an important central concern. They are all committed to exploration of the ways in which practices of visual representation work to construct meaning and shape identity. If, as Teters asserts, the mass media constitutes the site of struggle for the native peoples of today, these artists are at the forefront.

Jennifer McLerran (Cherokee), Curator, Kennedy Museum of Art
Ohio University
Wright State University Art Galleries
Programs for Sunday, September 14, 2003

Panel discussions in Room M252 Creative Arts Center
Panels will include all of the artists; moderated by Jennifer McLerran

1:00–1:45 p.m. Panel discussion (Part I)
15 minute intermission
2:00–2:45 p.m. Special presentation and talk by Edgar Heap of Birds
15 minute intermission
3:00–3:45 p.m. Panel discussion (Part II)

Opening reception in the University Art Galleries,
Creative Arts Center

4:00–6:00 p.m. Reception featuring the Southern Singers
Pow Wow drum group

All events are free and open to the public

Acknowledgments

This exhibition is dedicated in the loving memory of Sueanne Kay Boyd Speece & Ed Star, Jr.

For all of your encouragement and support, I would like to thank:
The participating artists
Cathy & Hunter Star Day
Fern Seton & Family
Southern Singers
Alicia Pagan & Ray Two Crows Wallen
Harry & Jeanne Thomas
Tom Patin
Chuck Hitner
Ted Pope
Will Bonner
Roland Salinas & Family
James Door & Family
Danny & Chuck Anderson & Family
Clinton Young Bear & Larry Roman Nose
Tami Dowler & Family
David & Kitty Sweet

Art Shone
Jennifer McLerran
Barbara Siwecki, University Galleries Coordinator and her staff
Thomas Macaulay, WSU Professor of Art and Co-curator

On behalf of the Wright State University Art Galleries, I would like to thank the organizations who funded the exhibition, related programming, and this publication:

WSU College of Liberal Arts
WSU Diversity Lecture Series
WSU Research Council, Research Initiation Grant Program
The WSU Asian/Hispanic/Native American Center
Friends of the WSU Art Galleries
The Ohio Arts Council
—Noel Day (Choctaw/Creek/Cherokee/Irish), Guest Curator