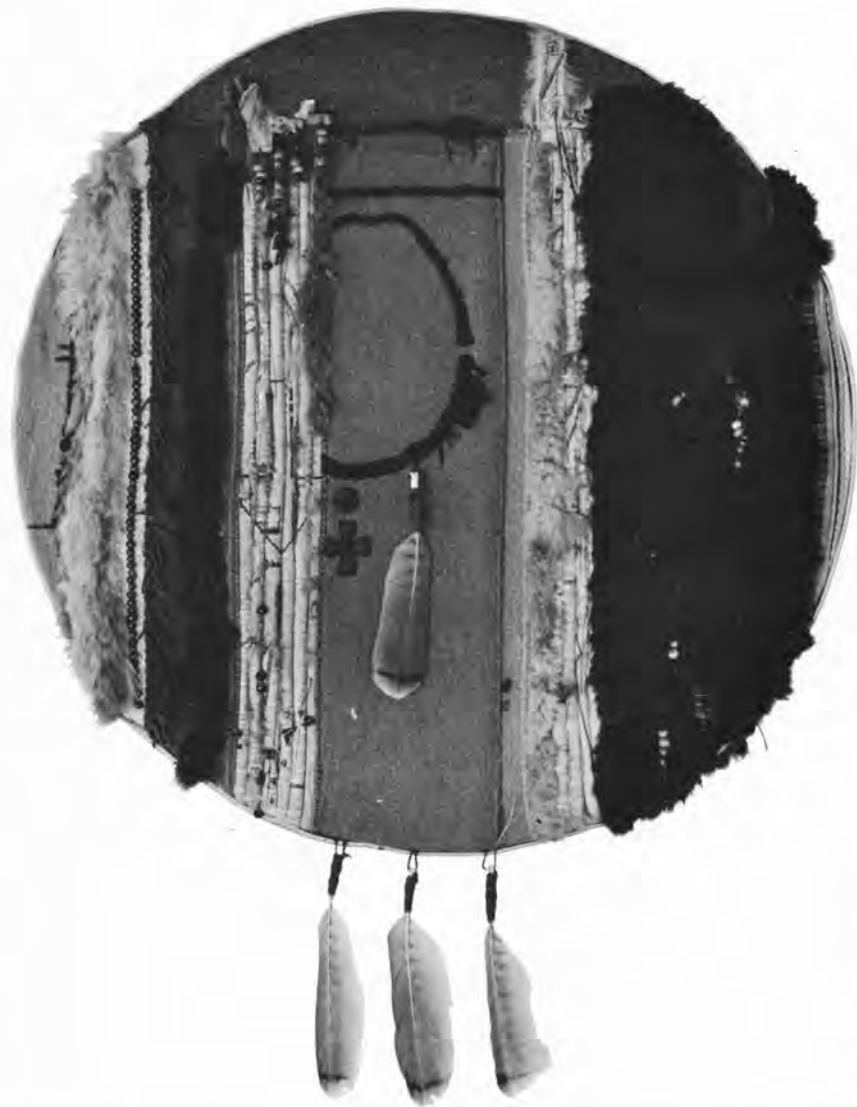


"I believe that there is a new Indian Art emerging. It will take many forms and will be vital. A merging of traditional subject matter with the contemporary idiom will give us a truer statement of the Indian."

Fritz Scholder

(Quoted from *Artists of Santa Fe*)



THE AMERICAN INDIANS, descendants of the original inhabitants of the continent which houses the most scientifically advanced industrial nation on earth, are in a peculiar position today as a quasi-mystical source of inspiration for the arts. The history of the Indian's contact with the polyglot Europeans which invaded his lands and usurped his culture has ever been one of violent misunderstandings and the forced imposition of a way of life by one people upon another.

Wherever European civilization encountered an entrenched aboriginal culture in a desirable land area, a conflict was inevitable. Whether in Africa, New Zealand, Australia, Mexico or the United States of America, the pattern was essentially the same. First, the land had to be wrested from the "savages" so that progress and civilization might be served. The art forms of the "savages" were treated as curiosities to be sent "home" or to be used to decorate barren habitations in the new land, but were certainly not considered to have any relation to the great art forms of the "civilized" world.

After a period of adjustment, and especially when any danger from the original inhabitants had passed, a reappraisal of their art forms took place, and in some cases reaction to the original judgement resulted in the over-compensation of super-adulation which was as false as the original neglect.

The American Indian has been an intrinsic part of American art, both as an art producer and as the subject for art forms produced by Americans working in the European tradition. Paintings and sculptures of Indians by non-Indians parallel the general attitude of the nation toward this ever intriguing enclave in the culture. Early illustrations of the savage, who had to be punished for his depredations, gave way to factual and extremely literal representations which satisfied a growing "scientific" curiosity about the Indian way of life. Finally, a bucolic look at the "noble savage," often characterized as the "Waters of the Minnetonka" school, salvaged the national conscience and filled the need for a glamorized and romantic aboriginal American.

The first art objects of the American Indian were created as part of an unselfconscious everyday life. Clothing, habitations, and ceremonial items were created to take care of life needs of the people. These

SIGNS FOR THE PATH OF THE DEER, woven construction by Mike Selig. (J.L.B. Goodwin collection)

THE NEW INDIAN ART

by
Robert A. Ewing
Curator-in-Charge
Fine Arts Division



Museum of New Mexico collection



Museum of New Mexico collection

ROMANTIC, sentimental view of the Indian is typified by Warren E. Rollins' Grief, (left) painted circa 1917. Joseph Scharp's Taos Indian Portrait, also circa 1917, is more analytic, factual. It is by a trained anthropologist with considerable skill as a painter.

objects, taken out of their natural environments and placed in museums and collections, created a market for "Indian" artifacts which were made for their beauty without reference to their former function (the present day maker of pottery in the Indian Pueblo cooks with pans mass produced for the American economy, but creates and sells pots to be utilized as decorative objects).

The Indian as a painter presents a more complex problem. Historically, Indian painting flourished as decoration for ceremonial structures such as kivas; as picture writing; as decoration for such habitations as the plains tipi; as pictographs, or petroglyphs. In the early part of this century Indian painting, encouraged by anthropologists and painters of European orientation, became an important part of the American art scene. In the valley of the Rio Grande, where the Pueblo Indians had managed to preserve a great deal of their ceremonial life, and where two important art colonies—Taos and Santa Fe—were located, this Indian painting achieved a sort of Golden Age.

The highly designed, flat tempera paintings which became accepted as most representative of American Indian art were original and exciting, and in their design and content were the obvious continuation of a great art heritage. Painters such as Awa Tsireh had the power to move the observer deeply with the simplified complexity of Indian dances painted with deep feeling and sensitivity.

Well meaning teachers guided young Indian artists into what had become the "official" style without regard to their natural tendencies and abilities. As a result, a group of American artists was as restricted in choice of style and technique as if it had existed in a totalitarian society. If a young Indian artist wished to exhibit and sell his work, he soon learned to adopt the popular "Indian" style. The tragedy was that these were the years when American art had entered the extraordinarily free contemporary movement which was to focus attention for the first time on the United States as the leader in world art.

Despite the best of intentions, a patronizing attitude toward Indian art could not be avoided. Indian



Museum of New Mexico collection

AWA TSIREH (Alfonso Roybal) of San Ildefonso was a highly original artist who worked in the flat tempera style of Indian painters of the twentieth century. His Thunder Dance is a fine example.

SCHOLDER'S Indian and Rhinoceros was in the 1968 exhibit "Three from Santa Fe" at the Center for Arts of Indian America in Washington, D.C., with works by McGrath and Loloma. Scholder is pictured with his huge "Pop Indian" work, conversing with Mrs. Stuart Udall.



paintings were charming and childlike, and the Indian artist was not expected to challenge the intellect. He was simply to delight the viewer. It must not be forgotten that many of the early painters in this style produced beautifully imaginative works of art which rank with the best art production of any age. But inevitably, much of Indian art fell into a static repetition of the accepted, and easily recognized, style.

World War II probably stands as the most important causal force for the disruption and reorganization of American culture in the history of this nation. Indian painting was certainly never to be the same again after young Indian creators had an opportunity to travel out into the larger world, and when the incredibly accelerated communications industry brought the world into every Indian home. (Recently a woman at the Santo Domingo Pueblo was observed grinding corn on the floor with *mano* and *metate*—as her most remote ancestors had done—in front of the ever-present television set.)

In the cultural chaos of the post war years a few young artists of American Indian ancestry began to

work with the idioms and materials of contemporary art. One of the most gifted of these young creators was Lloyd Kiva New, who was involved in the famous "Rockefeller Project" which provided the impetus for the establishment of the Institute of American Indian Arts in Santa Fe by the Bureau of Indian Affairs.

The Rockefeller Project was an experimental probe of the thesis that Indian sources and traditions could be combined with contemporary idioms and techniques. The project was held at the University of Arizona at Tucson during the summers of 1961 and 1962 and consisted of a series of lectures, seminars and workshops with studios provided for the actual production of works of art.

New, presently superintendent of the IAIA, headed the project. A number of talented Indians attended the seminars and participated in such experiments as going out to the Navajo Reservation to sketch from life and returning to the studio environment to develop these sketches into designs for fabric, jewelry, pottery and painting.

The Institute of American Indian Arts was a direct

WITH ANDY Warhol, Scholder sets up a rhythm, repeating forms, silhouettes of familiar objects—moccasins—in Moccasin Pattern. Insane Indian, from a "monster Indian" series, is related to England's Francis Bacon.





IN CERAMIC
Essence of
a Goat Clan
Otellie Loloma
combines
traditional
form with
contemporary
techniques.



LOLOMA'S
Bird Girl
textures are
thumb prints
used by Pueblo
Indian potters
for centuries
on surfaces
of utility
ware pots.

THE ARTIST
working
on her most
recent ceramic
sculpture in
Bird Girl
series (right)

outgrowth of this project. A unique government institution, the Institute has brought together a staff of dedicated instructors to work with an extremely heterogeneous group of creative young people who share only the common bond of being American Indians. All of the students at the IAIA make a thorough study of the rich and enormously varied traditions of Indian America. World art history is studied, and the students participate in a wide variety of creative experiences utilizing the skills of teachers who work in the full range of contemporary media. For many, it is an obvious step to combine the Indian heritage with the techniques of contemporary art. But each student is treated as an individual, and at the Institute there is no uniform approach to the creative act.

In the postwar period, a number of non-Indian artists looking for meaning in their lives and work simultaneously discovered the American Indian as an inspirational force. Today, in the argot of the time, "Indians are IN." A rash of psychedelic posters, articles in national magazines—even women's fashions—exploit the Indian as a source of inspiration. The sometimes absurdity of cross-cultural influences was demonstrated in a presentation by a group called *America Needs Indians*, in which slides of an Indian family posed in front of their suburban home in middle class American dress were juxtaposed with those of a non-Indian family posed before their tipi in buckskins with their baby in a cradle board. We have come full circle.

The exciting fact is that from this confusion of inter-relationships a new and unique American art form is emerging. Perhaps the most significant fact about the New Indian Art is that there is no longer a clear line of demarcation between the work done by Indians and non-Indians.

Recently the Museum of New Mexico had an ex-



James DeKorne photo

SCHOLDER'S

The Faculty
of the Institute
of American
Indian Arts
at 4:15 P.M.
was done from
a photograph.
Self-portrait is
second from left.



Museum of New Mexico collection



FOLLOWING
a winter animal
dance at a Pueblo,
James McGrath
painted
Altar for
Winter Songs,
added a gourd,
real feathers,
protruding vigas,
to painted animal
tracks in snow.

James DeKorne photo

hibition called *The Changing Image of the Indian* in which the history of non-Indians painting Indians was traced. An earlier exhibit called *The Rain Cloud Callers* showed Indian-created material from an aesthetic rather than an ethnological point of view. Both exhibits contained recently produced material which could easily have been interchanged between the two shows.

It would be impossible to name all of the artists working in this idiom, but mention of some specific artists in the Santa Fe area who are involved in the New Indian Art may help to define this new "school" of American expression.

Several of these artists are of Indian ancestry. One of the most important is Fritz Scholder, who is part Mission Indian and who participated in the Rockefeller Project before becoming a painting instructor at the IAIA. Scholder's boldly painted canvases have been called "Pop Indian," and indeed they are part of the "Pop" and "Camp" aspects of American contemporary art. Deriving subject matter from old photographs of Indians as well as from Indian-made objects, Scholder builds simple images in smashing colors.

Neil Parsons, a Blackfoot Indian, was an instructor at the Institute before accepting a teaching position in Colorado. His lyric abstractions, both soft and hard edge, are deeply Indian in feeling although very much a part of this time.

Otellie Loloma, a Hopi, draws from her rich heritage for both paintings and ceramic sculpture which reflect rather than reproduce the deeply felt ceremonial life in which she is very much involved. As an IAIA instructor, she serves as both an inspiration to the students in their creative life and as an example to them as an Indian who has become a very successful American artist.

Several non-Indians who are working in the context of the New Indian Art should also be mentioned. James McGrath, currently the arts director of the IAIA, derives a great deal of the inspiration for his work from his study of and love for the American Indian heritage. McGrath's work is largely abstract, utilizing materials such as leather, feathers and potsherds to evoke the essential Indian quality which was totally missed by the romantic painters of an earlier age. His work is poetic and sensitive, and would be, whether or not he was utilizing his close attachment to the American Indian.

Tom Dickerson is a non-Indian who grew up in Santa Fe and Wichita and whose life has been involved with the American Indian. As a boy he went far beyond the usual passing interest in Indians to develop a thorough knowledge of the language, music and arts of several American Indian tribes. In his paintings, which often include ceramic areas built and fired in the Indian manner, the main motive force is his abiding interest in all things Indian. This provides a strength and coherence which marry with his use of contemporary methods to produce a unique art form.



DICKERSON'S Symbol in Three Aspects combines ceramic circles inset in canvas. Maize, bird, tree motifs relate to Indian sources.



SHAPED canvases in Dickerson's work intensify patterns and designs inspired by impressions from Indian life. His designs frequently are minimal in their means of expression

James DeKorne photo



Robert A. Ewing photo

SELIG'S constructions combine textured weaving with fur, feathers, bone—materials often used by Indians. His works embody many qualities of modern painting and mixed media constructions.

CIRCULAR painting Shield to a Wood Duck by McGrath is on canvas stretched over a wagon wheel with duck skin. Designs suggest rather than mimic Indian symbols often painted on war shields.



Weaver Mike Selig is currently on a Wurlitzer Foundation Grant in Taos developing his constructions which very frequently tap original Indian sources. Selig uses woven areas in combination with fur, feathers, leather, bone, beads and, in fact, all of the objects used by the Indians for decoration. His constructions are abstract in form, and derive from the feelings engendered in him as a spectator of the Indian ceremonials and way of life.

The New Indian Art is also national and hemispheric in scope—not just flourishing in the Southwest.

In the Hemisphere, the tradition of the Indian painter's working in a traditional manner and that of the non-Indian's deriving inspiration from the Indian past have been especially strong in México. One of the important painters represented at the 1967 Venice Biennale was Claudio Juárez, a Peruvian Indian.

Nationally some of the important Indians working in the style are Yeffe Kimball, an Osage, who is a successful abstract painter in New York; George Morrison at the Rhode Island School of design; Roger Tsabetsaye, chairman of the new Zuñi Guild; Madison Coombs in Washington, D. C.; Joan Hill in Oklahoma; and Lonny Reyes and John Hoover, both of Washington State.

Non-Indians working nationally in the idiom include such well known artists as Barbara Hoover (John Hoover's wife) and Phil McCracken, both working in Washington State.

There is an excitement in participating in the early years of a new and vigorous movement of art which can be shared by anyone living today in the American Southwest. An appreciation of the New Indian Art requires something of the viewer. It is no longer sufficient to identify symbols or play a "What is it?" guessing game. A surprisingly large number of persons still will not look at those works of art which do not conform to a pre-judgment which they have made about what painting ought to be. In the New Indian Art, there is the wonder of discovering new uses for age old materials and the pure delight of the new born out of the heritage of the past.

Occasionally there is a flash of antagonism from an Indian questioning the validity of the non-Indian borrowing from his culture, or an Indian painter may be caustically labelled a "professional Indian" by fellow artists who feel that he is unfairly trading on his Indian status. But art is free, and in the United States in the 1960s it is possible and valid to work from any source which helps the creator to "do his own thing."

Whether the New Indian Art will be recognized as an important movement on the contemporary American scene depends, in large part, on the creative lives of the artists working in this style. Some of them will undoubtedly move into other fields of inspiration even as other artists will be attracted by the style. But at least the movement was born and exists as a very healthy and compelling infant.