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1986

**Review of *Native Faces: Indian Cultures in American Art* by  
Patricia Trenton and Patrick Houlihan**

Patricia Trenton

Patrick Houlihan

Marsha V. Gallagher  
*Joslyn Art Museum*

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Trenton, Patricia; Houlihan, Patrick; and Gallagher, Marsha V., "Review of *Native Faces: Indian Cultures in American Art* by Patricia Trenton and Patrick Houlihan" (1986). *Great Plains Quarterly*. 898.

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*Native Faces: Indian Cultures in American Art.*

By Patricia Trenton and Patrick Houlihan.  
Los Angeles: LAACO Incorporated and  
the Southwest Museum, 1984. Photo-  
graphs, maps, notes, collections and exhibi-  
tions. xiii + 117 pp. Paper \$15.95.

*Native Faces* is the catalogue to an exhibi-  
tion of the same name presented at the  
Southwest Museum in Los Angeles in 1984  
and at Omaha's Joslyn Art Museum in 1985.  
The show featured late nineteenth and early  
twentieth century paintings of California,  
Southwest, and Plains Indian subjects by well-  
known artists such as Joseph Sharp, Ernest  
Blumenschein and E. Irving Couse. The  
paintings were shown with related Indian  
artifacts and historic photographs. The cata-  
logue focuses on sixteen of the paintings and  
their related material, with commentary on  
each by Patricia Trenton, an art historian, and  
Patrick Houlihan, an anthropologist.

In their preface the authors urge a multidimensional viewpoint in the examination of art depicting the Indian and his culture, stating that such works "are often valuable research documents for both historians and anthropologists." They further state that "the paintings in this exhibition embody a wide spectrum of valuable information, from detailed ethnographic observations to the subtle emotional reactions of the artist and his Indian models."

The works illustrated in the catalogue were not created to serve as primary research documents in the study of Indian cultures. Details are often sketchy, so that Houlihan's commentary on the pictures frequently and necessarily employs phrases like "it is difficult to tell" or "probably depicts." In addition, the paintings are often, as Houlihan notes in referring to William Leigh's *Pool at Oraibi*, wonderful combinations of fact and fiction. To varying degrees this is true of a large proportion of what is called "Western Art."

Nonetheless, such pictures can be, as the authors contend, useful documents. They certainly convey the attitudes and conceptions of the artists and often of their audiences. Moreover, an understanding of an artist's style and predilections can allow the interpretation of pictures as records. Trenton's analyses include biographical data, quotations from the artists, descriptions of their studio props and, in some instances, photographs from which they may have worked. The information on objects and customs provided by Houlihan makes one examine each picture more closely and adds greatly to its appreciation. *Native Faces* is a fruitful collaboration and a beautifully presented book.

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