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Review of *The Indian Craze: Primitivism, Modernism, and Transculturation in American Art, 1890-1915* by Elizabeth Hutchinson

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The Indian Craze: Primitivism, Modernism, and Transculturation in American Art, 1890–1915. By Elizabeth Hutchinson. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009. xv + 277 pp. Color plates, figures, notes, bibliography, index. \$89.95 cloth, \$24.95 paper.

Elizabeth Hutchinson's *The Indian Craze* examines the trend that was not merely "fad or fancy" but "a significant artistic phenomenon with lasting effects on both American art history and U.S. Indian policy." Although the origin of Native American art as art is commonly associated with the Santa Fe movement of the 1920s and 1930s, Hutchinson declares that "this cross-cultural conversation," fueled by progressive primitivism, began at least two decades earlier.

Enhanced by historical images and informed by Janet C. Berlo's anthology, *The Early Years of Native American Art History* (1992), *The Indian Craze* revives a politically charged and artistically productive era, while challenging the binarism

modern/antimodern art. Hutchinson begins by methodically “unpacking the Indian corner,” explaining that it was not only Indian traders who facilitated “the craze,” but department stores that sold Indian-made and Indian-inspired products to middle-class Americans. The following four chapters focus on “artists, educators, and critics” who found inspiration in Native American art forms and solace in progressive primitivism.

Hutchinson is careful to note that Native people also *chose* to enter the dialogue, whether through participation in world fairs or “Native Industries.” This remarkable book’s strongest appeal, however, may be in detailing how the craze was spread by Euro-American professionals aiming for social uplift, such as reformer Sybil Carter, Superintendent of Indian Schools Estelle Reed, painter Elbridge Ayer Burbank, and photographer Gertrude Käsebier.

A welcome addition to recent works like *Trading Gazes* (Susan Bernardin, Lisa MacFarlane, and Nicole Tonkovich, 2003) and *Rookwood and the American Indian* (Anita J. Ellis and Susan Labry Meyn, 2007), the book’s centerpiece offers Hutchinson’s marvelous, close reading of Käsebier’s “Some Indian Portraits.” Hutchinson builds on L. G. Moses’s *Wild West Shows and the Images of American Indians* (1996) to construct a compelling feminist critique culminating in Käsebier’s *colonial desire* for her subject(s). The only exposition missing is why Käsebier rendered Gertrude S. Bonnin (Zitkala Ša) as cartoonishly flat skulled when her other portraits of Bonnin, albeit primitivist fantasies, are breathtakingly beautiful.

The last chapter on Angel De Cora’s cultural politics picks up where the scholarship of Sarah McAnulty Quilter, including “Angel DeCora: American Indian Artist and Educator” (*Nebraska History*, 1976), left off. Where Quilter perceived a “tension” in De Cora’s artwork between her Indian roots and her Euro-American art training, Hutchinson applies postcolonial theory to address the disparity. Exploring De Cora’s Métis heritage and particular tribal ancestry would have enhanced (or challenged) Hutchinson’s interpretive

frames of hybridity, transculturation, and the “contact zone.” However, the author’s introduction invites us to “investigate the complex relationship *among* diverse communities” and acknowledges limitations in the postcolonial theory that grounded her earlier work.

As Hutchinson effortlessly engages with the discourse on modernity, she also mindfully reveals that Native American art in all its forms is not a subclass of America’s art history, but is, in fact, part of its continuum, which early and substantially contributed to the “conversation” about what counts as American art.

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