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The Indian's White Man

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The Indian's White Man

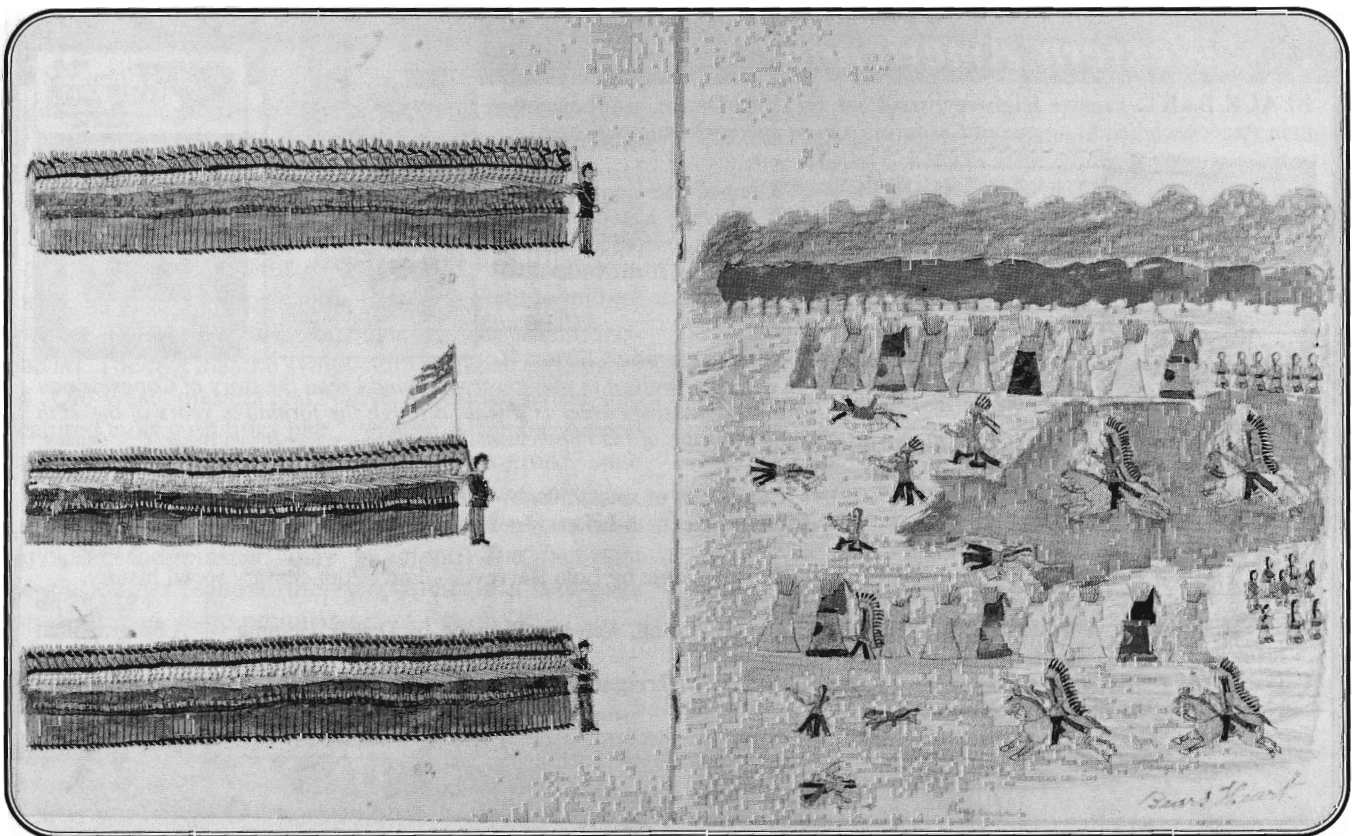
William Anthes

U.S. culture and politics both operate by the mythos of the cowboy taming the wilderness — the pioneer family, whose innocent courage proves victorious over savageness. . . . You all paint and politic wearing cowboy boots. — Jimmie Durham¹

A striking pencil-and-watercolor drawing by the Cheyenne artist Bear's Heart (1851-1882) depicts three columns of U.S. cavalrymen confronting a traditional Plains village. Titled *U.S. Cavalry Advancing on a Cheyenne Village*, Bear's Heart's drawing represents the advancing columns of soldiers as masses of repeated, abstract, blue and gray shapes. Each soldier has dismounted and stands in front of his horse, shoulder to shoulder and rifle at the ready. The soldiers are not individuals, but numbers in a sequence of identical units; the quantity of troops in each column is indicated below in pencil. Indeed, this is a menacing image of abstract power. The troops mechanically advance across the page from left to right as identical units in a seemingly endless pattern, reminiscent in their anonym-

ity and mechanical brute force of the faceless Napoleonic troops that mow down a motley assortment of Spanish insurgents in Francisco Goya's *Third of May 1808*. Bear's Heart has created a powerful image of whiteness as perceived by Native Americans in the midst of the Plains Wars that persisted from the 1860s to the climactic massacre of more than 300 of Big Foot's band of Sioux at Wounded Knee that closed the era in 1890.

Moreover, the difference between the white and Indian place in the world — the very relationship to space and topography — is emphasized by the arrangement of figures on the leaves of the book in which Bear's Heart has made his drawing. The white soldiers are silhouetted against the blank surface of the page. Represented by Bear's Heart as figures without a landscape, the whites appear as people without place.² They face the Cheyenne village across the break between the right and left leaves of the book. On the facing page, Bear's Heart has depicted an encampment of 18 tepees in a carefully rendered, grassy landscape. In contrast to the mechanized



Bear's Heart, *U.S. Cavalry Advancing on a Cheyenne Village*, ca. 1875, ledger drawing.

Massachusetts Historical Society image number 2108, Boston

and anonymous image of U.S. military might, Bear's Heart has clearly individuated the Cheyenne warriors, women, and children through careful attention to details of pose and costume and placed each figure in physical relation to the landscape. A number of Indian warriors on foot and on horseback charge toward the oncoming troops to defend their camp with bows and arrows and rifles. Several warriors have already fallen. At the far right, Cheyenne women and children exit the page.³ Contemporary Cheyenne-Arapaho artist Edgar Heap of Birds describes Bear's Heart's drawing as a depiction of "the harsh linear mentality of the white aggressor as it was imposed onto the circular Cheyenne world."⁴

The drawing by Bear's Heart is a powerful Native document that contradicts the predominant mythos of the white experience of the frontier in American art and popular culture. As Erika Doss notes, generations of white Western painters and sculptors have perpetuated a romantic narrative of the frontier experience defined as heroic, masculine, and solitary [see article this volume]. As eulogized in historian Frederick Jackson Turner's address, "The Significance of the Frontier in American History," delivered at the World's Columbian Exposition, Chicago, 1893, the frontier experience was the very cauldron in which American identity was forged. Accordingly, American art and popular culture depict the frontier experience as the adventures of a larger-than-life cast of heroic white cowboys, trappers, and pioneers, who advance across an unspoiled landscape in pursuit of their birthright. Artists from William Ranney, Charles Deas, Arthur Fitzwilliam Tait, James Earl Fraser, Frederic Remington, and Charles Russell to the contemporary association of Cowboy Artists of America maintain this romantic vision, which is challenged implicitly by Bear's Heart's rendering of the frontier experience in terms of unrelenting military aggression.

The drawing by Bear's Heart is just one in a set contained in a single ledger book produced by the 72 Indian military leaders incarcerated at a military prison at Fort Marion in St. Augustine, Florida, from 1875 to 1878 under the command of Richard Henry Pratt.⁵ At Fort Marion, Plains warrior artists produced drawings for white audiences as part of Pratt's educational program, which included vocational training and interaction with the non-Indian population of St. Augustine.⁶ Bear's Heart and at least six other Cheyenne warriors filled this particular ledger with drawings in pencil and watercolor. The style of their drawings recalls the flat, pictographic style of Plains narrative art on Buffalo hides traditionally practiced by men. They painted hides with a range of personal symbols and pictographic images representing war exploits, hunting scenes, and autobiographical episodes, as well as "winter counts," or important events of a given year, decade, or longer period.⁷

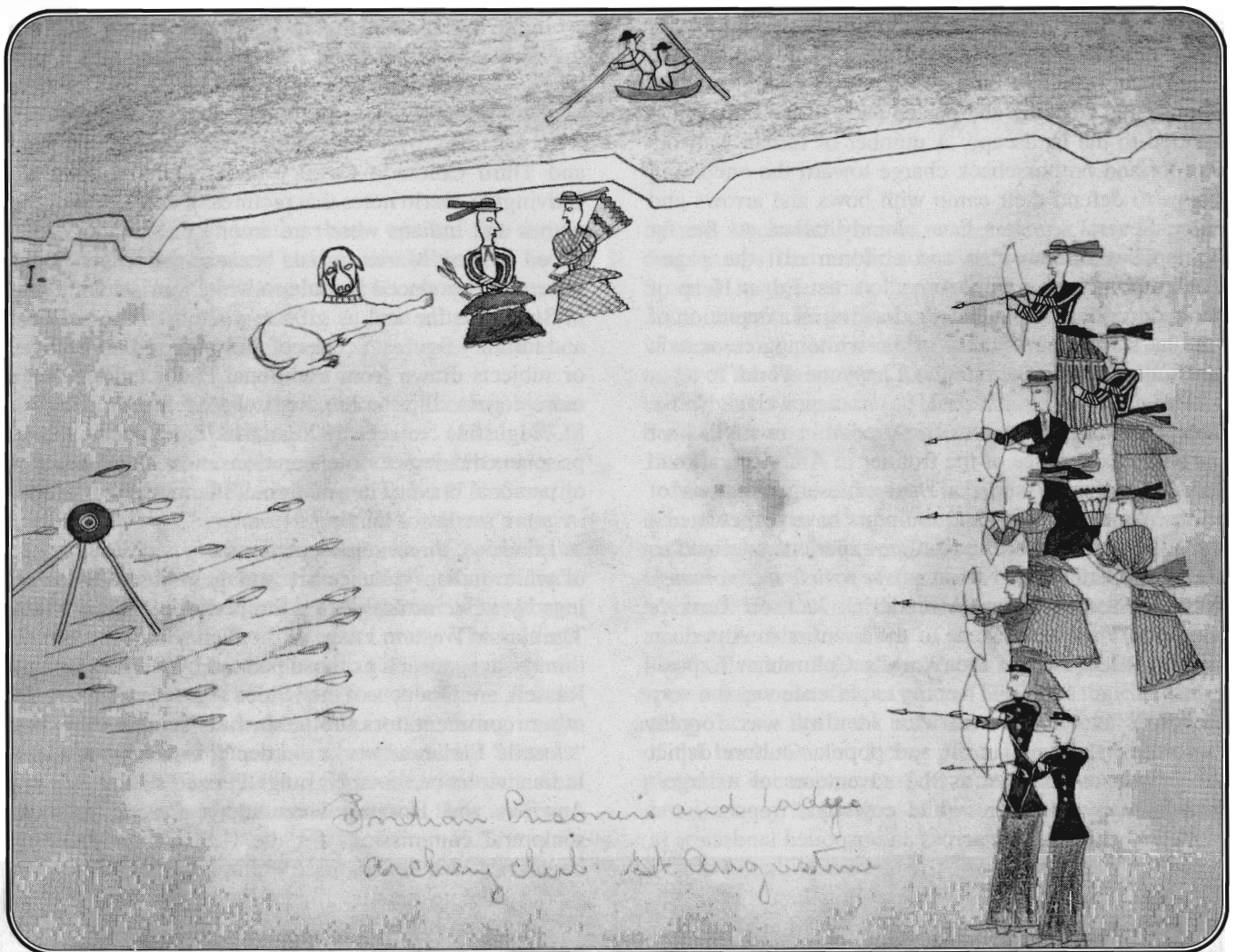
Although the conflict depicted has been generalized and abstracted, Janet Catherine Berlo has suggested that this Bear's Heart may have portrayed a particular chap-

ter in the Indian Wars that rocked the Northern Plains in the late 19th century. Bear's Heart's drawing may depict the Sand Creek Massacre of November 29, 1864, where as many as 600 Cheyenne men, women, and children were killed by over 700 white cavalymen of the First and Third Colorado Cavalry under Colonel John M. Chivington. Berlo notes that pictures of conflict between whites and Indians were rare among the drawings produced by Fort Marion artists because the ledger books were often produced for sale to white tourists wintering in St. Augustine and as gifts to visiting white political and military figures. Scenes of daily life at Fort Marion, or subjects drawn from traditional Plains culture, were more common in the hundreds of sketches produced at St. Augustine between 1875 and 1878. When the Indian prisoners did depict violence, it was most often in scenes of personal bravery in traditional, intertribal warfare, or in genre scenes of hunting.⁸

Likewise, direct representations of specific instances of white-Indian violence are strangely absent in paintings by white artists during the period of Indian Wars. The classic Western image of the Plains Indian as bloodthirsty savage, such as those painted by Remington and Russell, are products of the Gilded Age, after Turner and other commentators noticed that the frontier had "closed." Earlier artworks did depict instances of white-Indian violence, notably Luigi Persico's *Discovery of America* and Horatio Greenough's *Rescue* — both sculptural commissions for the U.S. Capitol building begun in 1836.⁹ But as these examples demonstrate, artworks of white-Indian violence in the 19th century were highly mythologized, depicted in allegorical terms of individual confrontation and struggle, and framed as figures for larger historical inevitabilities such as Manifest Destiny and the presumed passing of Native peoples from the Western landscape.

Although Bear's Heart's drawings were produced for white audiences at Fort Marion, they also function as what James C. Scott describes as a "hidden transcript," or a "critique of power spoken behind the back of the dominant."¹⁰ Joyce M. Szabo has argued that artworks by Fort Marion artists "may have allowed the exiled prisoners to maintain their sense of identity as Plains men while providing a simple way in which to please the captors who controlled their lives."¹¹ Berlo describes Plains ledger drawings as poignant "portraits of dispossession." These drawings, she suggests, form a counter-tradition of Native self-representation and a critical image of whiteness: "Such visual images speak cogently to the painful disruptions that Euro-Americans have thrust upon indigenous peoples." As witnesses to colonialism, and as resistance,

[t]heir art provides an alternative to the official epistemology in which meaning is constructed by our representations of native peoples and our arrangements of their artifacts in our museums.¹²



Making Medicine, *Indian Prisoners and Ladies Archery Club*, 1875-1877, ledger drawing.

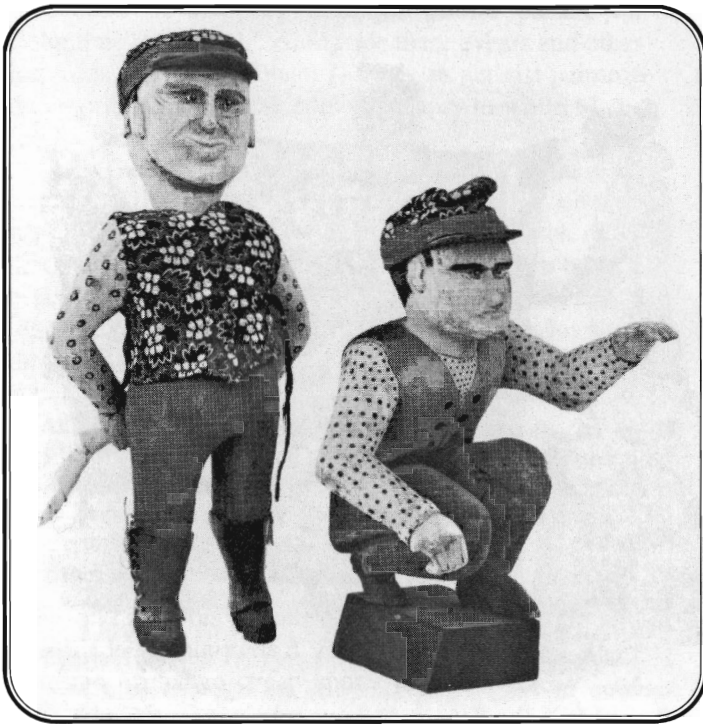
National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution photo number 55,055, Washington, D.C.

The importance of Native counter-memory is noted also by Cherokee artist Jimmie Durham, who writes,

Our history is . . . too closely tied to yours for the past three-hundred and fifty years. It has become strange, untenable, unbearable and, in unbearable ways, untrue. Our history has become lies within your history.¹³

Making Medicine, an officer of the Southern Cheyenne Bowstring Soldier Society, was arrested in 1875 as a leader in the Indian resistance and incarcerated along with Bear's Heart and 70 other Plains warrior-artists under Pratt's watch at Fort Marion. Making Medicine's earliest drawings document Plains life in scenes of hunting and warfare, with a fine sense of attention to significant details that is particular to traditional Plains narrative art. In later drawings, Making Medicine turned to sensitive renderings of daily life at Fort Marion. *Indian Prisoners and Ladies Archery Club* presents an

archery lesson, taught by Indian prisoners to an eager class of Victorian ladies. As in traditional Plains art, attention to details such as dress and personal style is paramount. Two ladies in patterned Victorian dresses and hats fan themselves and enjoy the company of an enormous Great Dane or Bull Mastiff. Below, six ladies in similar dresses are instructed by two Indian prisoners who look like the Indian subjects of the well-known "before and after" photographs of Indian boarding school students. Their hair has been cut short and covered with military caps, and they wear blue wool military uniforms.¹⁴ Ironically, the six Florida ladies are "playing Indian."¹⁵ They are taking archery lessons from Indian instructors and no doubt enjoying an Indian holiday. Perhaps they will leave Fort Marion with an armful of drawings depicting traditional Indian life. Making Medicine has shrewdly noted the white desire for Indian identities, even as Plains identity and cultural distinctiveness has been erased through the imposition of a strict, military dress code implemented by Pratt in his



Anonymous Hopi carvings, ca. late 19th century. Heard Museum, Phoenix, AZ

efforts to guide his charges along the path toward assimilation.

From the Southwest, an unusual pair of carved figurines representing white railroad workers was probably carved in the late 19th century by an anonymous Hopi artist for a specifically Native audience. Information is lacking as to maker or motivation for these artworks. However, the cultural changes set in motion by the arrival of the railroad to the American Southwest in the 1880s is here registered by the anonymous artist. Western scenes by contemporary white artists image the lone frontiersman and the pioneer as the embodiment of the individualist frontier experience. But these are not free agents; they are agents of industrialism, whose arrival signaled the transformation of the landscape into a fungible grid for economic development. William Truettner has argued that Westward expansion was related not so much to the “individual” celebrated in American frontier mythology, but to “the developing political economy of the Metropolis.” White art and popular culture, produced for a largely urban, Eastern audience, embodied the “values of the metropolis.” The production of Western artworks by Remington, Russell, and their cohorts, “was occurring from a point far behind the frontier and in association with those who stood to gain most from the westward movement,” yet masked this economic dimension.¹⁶

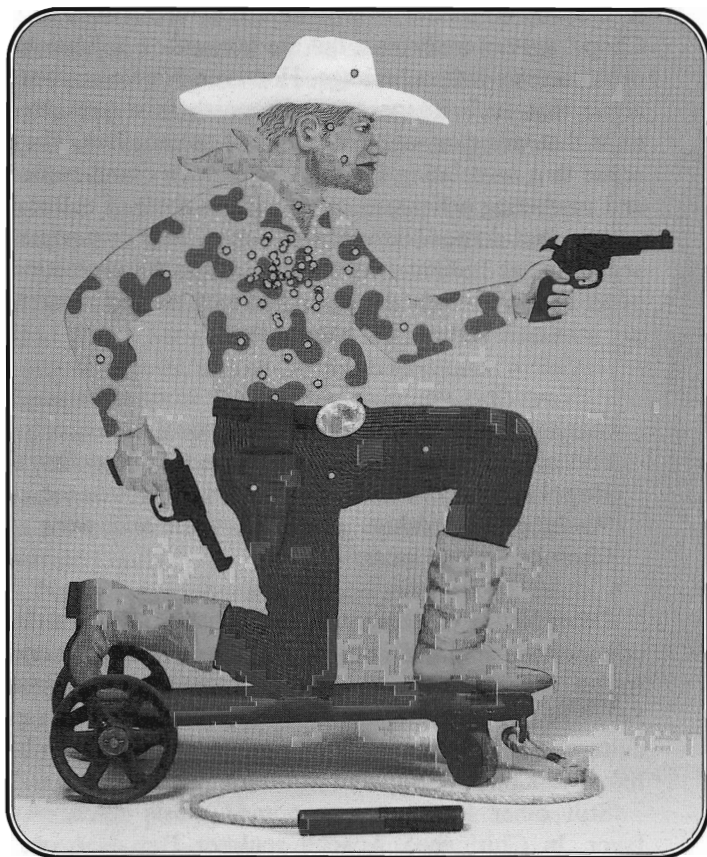
The figures are now in the collections of the Fred Harvey Company in the Heard Museum in Phoenix, Arizona. Indeed, the history of the Fred Harvey Company in the Southwest is closely tied to the expansion of tour-

ism and the Santa Fe Railroad, and the development of the Southwest as a destination for tourists.¹⁷ The figures were collected by H. R. Voth, a Russian immigrant, amateur ethnologist, and Mennonite missionary at Hopi Third Mesa from 1893 to 1902, who later served as a consultant on Fred Harvey Company designs for the “Hopi House” hotels at the Grand Canyon and in Albuquerque, New Mexico.

The railroad men bear some resemblance in size (they are 13 inches tall) and material (carved and painted cottonwood) to figures traditionally carved by Hopi artists to teach children about the kachinas — supernatural forces — who embody natural forces, plants, and animals, as well as ancestral spirits. However, these are secular figures; they do not represent any known kachina. The carver has meticulously noted the details of costume — caps, spats, and vests of patterned cloth — that serve to differentiate railroad workers from Hopi men. As such, they have an ethnological quality that conveys the wonder that these whites may have held for the anonymous Hopi artist who carved them. Their fully articulated, “action figure” poses are unusual for their early date, as in the realism of the figures and the focus on a non-traditional subject. In the late 19th century, there was little in the way of a commercial market for Hopi kachina carvings. Likely, they were carved for a Hopi audience for whom they held value primarily as curiosities. To be sure, it is hard to imagine that a white tourist traveling to Hopi Third Mesa would buy images of white workers. Indeed, Indians made for more appealing subjects than immigrant wage laborers.

By the early years of the 20th century, white Americans had become fascinated with what they believed to be the purity and simplicity of Native cultures. A burgeoning interest in Native art and culture grew symbiotically with the new tourist industry. White urban audiences viewed Native American arts in such venues as the 1915 Panama-Pacific Exposition in San Francisco, in a special exhibition organized by archaeologist Edgar Hewett in collaboration with the Santa Fe Railroad. Indian art was also displayed at the first showing of Native artists in New York, organized in 1920 at the Waldorf Astoria by the Ash Can School painter, John Sloan. In 1922, the first Southwest Indian Fair (precursor to today’s Indian Market) was held in Santa Fe, New Mexico. To promote regional tourism, the Fred Harvey Company launched its famous “Indian Detours” in 1926, which transported visitors by bus and private car to formerly remote pueblos to view dances and purchase crafts. The tourist industry billed the Southwest as a primitive “Land of Enchantment” and traded on the exotic appeal Indian cultures held for whites.

An untitled 1937-1938 painting by Gerald Nailor, a Navajo artist and graduate of the Santa Fe Indian School, makes a wry commentary on the developing



Bob Haozous, *Apache Pull-Toy*, 1988, painted steel.
Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth College, Hanover, NH

and slaughtering the sacred cow[boy] of Manifest Destiny. Haozous' cowboy is a steel cutout, appropriately one-dimensional, and riddled with bullet holes like so many signs on a rural highway. What's more, Haozous' art recalls the pan-Indian Ghost Dance movement of the late 19th century, which prophesied the disappearance of whites and the restoration of Native lands to Indian peoples.

Haozous' sculptural détournement of a familiar icon is an example of what Allan J. Ryan describes as a tradition of "tricksterism" in Indian culture, or, "serious play, the ultimate goal of which is a radical shift in viewer perspective and even political positioning by imagining alternative viewpoints."²⁴ Ryan writes that tricksterism has its roots in Native clowning traditions, in which, as anthropologist Barbara Babcock describes,

Comedy may be a spiritual shock therapy which breaks up the patterns of rationality that hold us in bondage and in which the given and established order of things is deformed, reformed and reformulated; a playful speculation on what was, is, or might be; a remark on the indignity of any closed system.²⁵

Indeed, Haozous has explained as his goal in the *Vanishing White Man* series that the culture of white-

ness, as defined by an ideology of progress and spatial expansion, is in danger of environmental and cultural devastation. He explains:

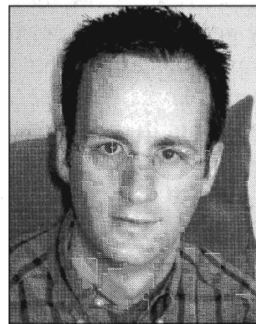
The *Vanishing White Man* series comes from years and years of thinking about how we Americans have become the major polluter of the world, while three-quarters, or more like nine-tenths, of the world, are living in sub-standard conditions. It's something that has to end. That's directly involved in my statement in *The Vanishing White Man*. And in the white man portrait, I intentionally put in Black, Hispanic, Oriental and then Native American people to show that it's really not racial. It's a philosophical issue that comes directly from Western Europe, directly from this progression from earth-related concepts to man-related concepts, and we're destroying everything around us because we refuse to alter or give up our conveniences. The whole series is about the white man, and I include myself because I'm a polluter, too, vanishing from a situation that we've created. I mean, we've destroyed things so bad that we're going to cause our own deaths. We're going to make ourselves vanish from the scene.²⁶

Contemporary artworks by Jaune Quick-to-See Smith and Bob Haozous continue to represent "The Indian's White Man" that dates to the earliest images of non-Natives produced by Native artists. Whether making artworks for Indian or white audiences, Native artists have functioned as critical historians, actively countering the white mythos of the frontier with images that are striking for their insights into the culture of American Manifest Destiny. While white Western artists have concentrated on images of, as Jimmie Durham writes, "the cowboy taming the wilderness — the pioneer family, whose innocent courage proves victorious over savageness," Indian artists have focused their gaze on military and industrial expansionism, tourism and commercialism, relationships to place and environment, and the very myth of the frontier, which is at the heart of American identity.

NOTES

1. Jimmie Durham, "The Ground Has Been Covered," *A Certain Lack of Coherence: Writings on Art and Cultural Politics*, Jean Fisher, ed. (London: Kala Press, 1993), 139.
2. For an interesting discussion of Native notions of "place" as contrasted with European-American notions of time and progress in the 19th century, see Scott L. Pratt's reading of Sauk leader Black Hawk's 1835 autobiography: Pratt, "The Given Land: Black Hawk's Conception of Place," *Philosophy and Geography*, 4, 1 (Feb. 2001); and Black Hawk, *Black Hawk: An Autobiography*, Donald Jackson, ed. (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1990).
3. Janet Catherine Berlo, ed., *Plains Indian Drawings, 1865-1935: Pages from a Visual History* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., Publishers, 1996), 67, 115.

4. Edgar Heap-of-Birds, "Of Circularity and Linearity in the Work of Bear's Heart," Berlo, *Plains Indian Drawings*, 66.
5. Berlo, *ibid.* See also Joyce M. Szabo, *Howling Wolf and the History of Ledger Art* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1994), for a discussion of a single artist, Southern Cheyenne warrior Howling Wolf.
6. Pratt is also well known for his second career as the founder of the Carlisle Indian Industrial School in Carlisle, Pennsylvania. See Francis Paul Prucha, *The Great Father: The United States Government and the American Indians* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1984), 694-700.
7. Janet C. Berlo and Ruth B. Phillips, *Native North American Art* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 199-222.
8. Berlo, *Plains Indian Drawings*, 115.
9. Vivian Green Fryd, "Two Sculptures for the Capitol: Horatio Greenough's *Rescue* and Luigi Persico's *Discovery of America*," *American Art Journal*, 19, 2 (1987): 16-39.
10. James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1990), xii. Scott's book presents an influential and interesting analysis of the various forms of "resistance" employed by colonized peoples.
11. Joyce M. Szabo, "Howling Wolf: A Plains Artist in Transition," *Art Journal*, 44, 4 (Winter 1984): 370.
12. Janet Catherine Berlo, "Portraits of Dispossession in Plains Indian and Inuit Graphic Arts," *Art Journal*, 49, 4 (Summer 1990): 133.
13. Jimmie Durham, "A Certain Lack of Coherence," *A Certain Lack of Coherence: Writings on Art and Cultural Politics*, Jean Fisher, ed. (London: Kala Press, 1993), 143.
14. Under Pratt, Indian prisoners served as guards at Fort Marion. Making Medicine served as first sergeant of the Company of Indian Guards. After leaving Fort Marion in 1878, Making Medicine was baptized as David Pendleton and worked for Pratt as a recruiter of Indian students for the Carlisle Indian Industrial School. Making Medicine returned to Oklahoma in 1881, where he served as an Episcopal deacon for 50 years and was memorialized in the Episcopal Calendar of Saints. Berlo, *Plains Indian Drawings*, 134-137.
15. The mimicry of Indian art and identities has been central to the formation of a unique American culture. See Philip J. Deloria, *Playing Indian* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1998); and William L. Anthes, Jr., *Indian Style: Primitivism, Nationalism, and Cultural Sovereignty in Twentieth Century American Art* (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Minnesota, 2000).
16. William H. Truettner, "Ideology and Image: Justifying Westward Expansion," in Truettner, et. al., *The West As America: Reinterpreting Images of the Frontier, 1820-1920* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution, 1991), 39.
17. See Marta Weigle and Barbara Babcock, eds., *The Great Southwest of the Fred Harvey Company and the Santa Fe Railway* (Phoenix, AZ: Heard Museum, 1996); and Kathleen L. Howard and Diana F. Purdue, *Inventing the Southwest: The Fred Harvey Company and Native American Art* (Flagstaff, AZ: Northland Publishing Company, 1996).
18. W. Jackson Rushing, III, "Modern by Tradition: The 'Studio Style' of Native American Painting," in W. Jackson Rushing, III, and Bruce Bernstein, *Modern by Tradition: Native American Painting in the Studio Style* (Santa Fe: Museum of New Mexico Press, 1995), 54.
19. For studies of the emergence of the classic Santa Fe style, see J. J. Brody, *Indian Painters and White Patrons* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1971); J. J. Brody, *Pueblo Indian Painting: Tradition and Modernism in New Mexico, 1900-1930* (Santa Fe, NM: School of American Research Press, 1997); and Rushing and Bernstein, *Modern by Tradition*. To be sure, Dunn's reputation is somewhat tarnished by her positioning of herself — a non-Indian — as the ultimate arbiter of tradition, quality, and authenticity. However, Dunn and her generation of educators and reformers were instrumental in breaking away from 19th-century cultural evolutionists who believed that Indians were a vanishing race. Cultural efforts were also closely linked to important reversals of federal Indian policy. Defense of Indian cultural and religious practices and land-claims cases by artists and intellectuals in the 1920s culminated in the 1928 report, "The Problem of Indian Administration" authored by Lewis Meriam, and the Indian Reorganization Act of 1934, the centerpiece of liberal Commissioner of Indian Affairs John Collier's Indian New Deal. See Lawrence C. Kelly, *The Assault on Assimilation: John Collier and the Origins of Indian Policy Reform* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1983).
20. The year 1992 also saw an efflorescence of Native American exhibitions staged as counter-demonstrations to official quincennial celebrations. Indian culture symbolically claimed space in mainstream museums and alternative galleries. Quick-to-See Smith organized a traveling exhibition entitled "The Submuloc Show/Columbus Wohl." The Heard Museum in Phoenix mounted "Shared Visions: Native American Painters and Sculptors in the 20th Century." The Denver Art Museum staged "Into the Forefront: American Indian Art in the 20th Century." "Our Land/Our Selves: American Indian Contemporary Artists," was organized at the State University of New York, Binghamton. And "Land, Spirit, Power: First Nations at the National Gallery of Canada" was organized in Ottawa.
21. Jo Anna Isaak, *Feminism and Contemporary Art: The Revolutionary Power of Women's Laughter* (London: Routledge, 1996), 177.
22. Jimmie Durham, "The Ground Has Been Covered," 140.
23. Fritz Scholder, "Indian Kitsch," *American Indian Art Magazine*, 4, 2 (Spring 1979): 64-69. An expanded version of Scholder's photo-essay was exhibited at the Heard Museum in Phoenix, Arizona, in 1979.
24. Allan J. Ryan, *The Trickster Shift: Humor and Irony in Contemporary Native Art* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1999), 5. Ryan takes this concept from Native artist Carl Beam and Ojibwa author Gerald Vizenor. See Vizenor, "Trickster Discourse," in Vizenor, ed., *Narrative Chance: Postmodern Discourse on Native American Literatures* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1989).
25. Barbara Babcock, "Arrange Me into Disorder: Fragments and Reflections on Ritual Clowning," in John J. MacAloon, ed., *Rite, Drama, Festival, Spectacle: Rehearsals Toward a Theory of Cultural Performance* (Philadelphia, PA: Institute for the Study of Human Issues, 1984), 103; quoted in Ryan, *The Trickster Shift*, 11.
26. Bob Haozous, interviewed by Larry Abbott (1994-1997), *A Time of Visions: Interviews by Larry Abbott*, http://www.britesites.com/native_artist_interviews/.



Bill Anthes holds a master's degree in American art history from the University of Colorado and a doctorate in American Studies from the University of Minnesota. He has taught at the University of Colorado, Metropolitan State College of Denver, the University of Minnesota, and Rhode Island College. He is currently assistant professor of

art history at the University of Memphis. He is writing a book entitled *Native Moderns: Primitivism, Nationalism, and Cultural Sovereignty in 20th Century American Art*, which examines the cultural interchange between Native and non-Native artists in the 20th century, and the centrality of concepts of tradition, authenticity, and identity in Native American art history and modern America.