

## Indian Aesthetics: Art and Expressive Culture (Chapter Seven, Kidwell, Velie)

“There is no word for art in our language” What does this mean? Beyond the familiar phrase?

- The intent is to deny that anything is done simply to be beautiful. The truth of the statement may be taken to mean that producing beautiful objects or performing in beautiful ways is a marker of cultural identity that is still important to Native people.
- How can this concept be applied to our class themes?  
*Wisdom Sit in Places, Circle of Life, All My Relations, Coyote the Trickster, Cultural and Personal Loss, Survival Between Two Worlds, Resilience*

### American Indian Art (Painting):

Rennard Strickland, a Cherokee law professor and art critic, argues that Indian painters do have a distinctive aesthetic: “While Indian art has multiple artists and there are multiple intentions, the Indian cultural worldview is the essence of Native American painting, whether the style is traditionalism or individualism. All speak to an Indian experience in an Indian idiom.

*Idiom n. 1. An expression having a meaning that cannot be understood from the individual meanings of its elements, as in hand over fist. 2. The specific grammatical, syntactic, and structural character of a given language. 3. Regional speech or dialect.*

What does Strickland mean by styles representing “traditionalism or individualism?”

- Traditionalism is considered by the lack of detailed depiction of landscape: “the absence of background in ‘traditional Indian painting’ was a product of what quickly became the ‘standards’ for Native painting.” --Strickland
- Resistance to the pressure of white mentors. “The image of Native art has historically been that of an abstracted image filled with intense conceptual narrative . . . Native visual art is just part of a breathing

system and networks with other components in the tribal culture.” – Edgar Heap of Birds

- Traditional painters intended their works for tribal audiences, who understood the context of their images.

### **History:**

- Rock paintings and petroglyphs
- Paintings on animal hides (Hide paintings)
- Ledger art, ledger painting, later became inspiration for early 20<sup>th</sup> century
- easel art

### **Schools of Art, Artistic Influences:**

- Kiowa artist Silverhorn (1880-1900) known for his ledger art
- Stephen Mopope (Silverhorn’s nephew), one of the Kiowa Five who established a style which combined techniques of ledger art with the Art Deco style. See figure 7.3. Also referred to as the ‘Waters of Minnetonka school’ and ‘Bambi Art.’
- Jerome Tiger known as from the ‘Oklahoma School,’ see figure 7.5, thought to represent the best of traditional Indian painting.
- The ‘Studio School,’ steered by Dorothy Dunn in Santa Fe, NM. The traditional style artwork from the Southwest as opposed to the Plains style is known by its emphasis on design and less on narrative content.
- Oscar Howe (Sioux, 1918-1983); student of Santa Fe Studio, widely known and collected, work is characterized by Cubism
- Fritz Scholder (Luseino, a California Mission tribe, 1937-), noted as revolutionizing Indian painting and was of the generation known as the Native artistic renaissance.
- Institute of American Indian Arts (IAIA), opened in Santa Fe in 1962. Combined modernist painting styles of Pollock, deKooning, introduced Pop Art sensibility. Art coming out of IAIA debunked stereotypes of Indian art, sought to inform audiences that Indians are living in the present, not antiquities of the past, but a vitally alive and adapting people. For instance, Scholder intended his paintings to disabuse the notion that Indians are still living in the nineteenth century, wearing feathers and hunting buffalo. Scholder and

contemporary artists such as T.C. Cannon attack the romantic nostalgia by depicting Indians wearing sunglasses, wearing or holding a flag.

### **Indian Aesthetics:**

- Similar to Indian literature in that it considers the same topics: relationship to land, connection to tribal traditions, relationship to nature and animals, and cyclical nature of time.
- Tribal traditions are central to Indian painting, depicting ceremonies or rituals. Paintings of dances are particularly common.
- Reinvention or reinterpretations of petroglyphs and hide paintings. Figures from traditional narratives are common.
- The Indian relationship to nature and animals, in particular, deer and buffalo.
- The cyclical nature of time; very subtle but effectively suggested. Time is related to seasonal activities, temporal patterns, like planting and harvesting. Reinvention of hide paintings suggest that times gone by are manifest in the present.
- Post-modernist art was replaced by 'post-studio art' which is characterized as freeing itself of the constraints of traditional subjects, materials and techniques. Highly conceptual, 'post-studio art' ranges from using video art, installations in public places.

**Key Concepts:** Traditional styles, modern, post-modern.  
Contemporary Native art is highly conceptual, highly ironic or humorous, and often times very political.

Question: Do you think it is necessary to have a wide knowledge of Native history and contemporary Native issues in order to appreciate Native art? Or any art for that matter? Why or why not?