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AMERICAN INDIAN PAINTERS OF OKLAHOMA:

ARTISTIC NEGOTIATION IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

A THESIS APPROVED FOR THE

DEPARTMENT OF ANTHROPOLOGY

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SECTION 1:

American Indian Art as Commodity

Chapter 1:

An Introduction to the Theory and History of American Indian Art as Commodity

> *"*Native art in a whole variety of forms has never been more vibrant. Artists are actually the culture bearers for all of Native America. So art and the creation of objects and the stories told through art will continue to be central in the story of Native America." – *W. Richard West Jr., in Tom Brokaw's NBC Nightly News Report on National Museum of the American Indian grand opening. (Brokaw Sept. 21, 2004)*

The recent opening of the newest branch of the Smithsonian Institution, the National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI) in Washington D.C., has drawn attention once again to the continuing presence of American Indians and their art within American society. W. Richard West Jr., a member of the Southern Cheyenne Tribe (OK) and director of the new museum, has pointed out in his many public interviews surrounding the opening that the museum attempts "to put native peoples themselves, in their first-person voices, at the table of conversation" (Richard Sept. 19, 2004). While controversial in its emic[1] approach towards Native peoples of North and South America, the museum seeks to combat stereotypes of American Indians by providing the Native's perspective of their own culture and society, using both modern art and ancient artifacts to exemplify historical and contemporary issues within American Indian societies (Achenbach Sept. 19, 2004; Gopnik Sept. 19, 2004; Kennicott Sept. 19, 2004; Richard

[1] An 'emic' anthropological approach favors indigenous explanations of ideology and behavior and native definitions of culture. Emic approaches are akin to the insider's perspective of culture. In contrast, the 'etic' anthropological approach uses criteria from an outsider's cultural perspective to define universal trends in culture. (Barnard 1996)

Sept. 19, 2004). As West elaborated, "visitors will leave this museum experience knowing that Indians are not part of history. We are still here making vital contributions to contemporary American culture and art" (Smithsonian 2004).

With the recent resurgence of interest in American Indian arts generated by the opening of the NMAI, it is appropriate at this time that art historians and anthropologists, should endeavor to investigate the influences of culture, society and history on modern Native art. My interest in this subject matter was piqued with an excursion into the collections of the Sam Noble Oklahoma Museum of Natural History (SNOMNH). In the recesses of the museum lay a small space housing the somewhat-forgotten and neglected collections of Classical Grecian and Roman art and American Indian easel paintings. Compared to the larger collections of dinosaur bones, zoological specimens, and traditional ethnographic objects (such as baskets, pottery and arrow heads) these two collections were slightly too artistic in nature to be a primary focus in the State of Oklahoma's natural history museum according to the institution's primary mission statement. Materials from the Classical collection received notice mostly from other institutions and found their way into the public eye in the form of exhibit loans. In contrast, the American Indian art collection had received little attention from museum patrons or researchers, with the exception of an initial exhibition from December 1993 to March of 1994, marking the acquisition of numerous paintings from collector Fred Brown. Due to this neglect, very little catalog information was recorded and available for a majority of the painting collection.

On a suggestion from a museum employee, I decided to re-catalog this ignored collection for the express purpose of it being a final project for my masters in

anthropology. Yet the more I worked with the material, the more I felt that merely re-cataloguing the collection was not enough. Instead, I became increasingly fascinated by how specific paintings reflected changes in American Indian culture, society and economic systems. Ultimately, the art and the artists who made these paintings deserved more attention and study at a deeper and broader level than the confines of a simple catalog could allow. In essence, the "first-person" voices of these artists needed to be heard in order to understand the nuances and interplay of culture and art, society and economy with individual artists. Thus, I embarked on a broader research project on American Indian art.

Using American Indian artists represented in the collections at SNOMNH as case studies, I decided to focus on three research questions. First, how does the market for American Indian art drive or resist changes in painting style and imagery? In order to answer this, I posed two other questions: how do individual artists respond to the demands of this art market and how do they negotiate their artistic creativity in response to fluctuations in the market? The first problem that I encountered was the size and range of the collection. While small in comparison to Sam Noble's other collections, the Native art collection has approximately 400 pieces of art occupying 903 square footage of storage space. In sorting through the art, I found that, although the collection represents over 150 different artists from a broad range of tribal affiliations from across a vast regional expanse covering both the United States and Southern Canada, the majority of the paintings emanated from two cultural regions, the Southwest and Oklahoma. Of the approximately 400 pieces of art, about 180 pieces were created by 80 different Native artists from Oklahoma.

Among the Oklahoma artists there was a further division between individuals descendant from Plains Tribes (Kiowa, Apache, Comanche, Wichita, Caddo etc.) versus Eastern Tribes (Cherokee, Seminole, Choctaw, Chickasaw, Creek, Sauk and Fox, Pottawatomie etc.). I decided the best approach would be to limit the artists studied to a cross section of Native artists from Oklahoma, many with mixed tribal affiliation but all having Muscogee/Creek heritage.[2] I chose five Creek artists represented in the collection, all of which created art during the 20th century, with two artists continuing to create art into the 21st century. A few of the artists represented in the collection had, over the years, passed away. For these deceased artists, my research focused on examination of the art and documentary research about the artist in order to reconstruct how market demand influenced style and imagery in the art. In contrast to that process, much of the information about the living artists is taken directly from interviews with the artists and collected through the winter of 2004 and spring of 2005. These interviews provide a more direct, "native view" of the role that the market played in the artistic creative process.

My approach to this research has been to combine political-economic analysis and field methods found in anthropology with methods of interpretation/deconstruction of artistic forms found in the discipline of art history. The two main related avenues of thought that exist within this project are 1) that American Indian artistic forms changed dramatically with European contact due to the incorporation of new mediums, forms and styles by native artisans and that 2) some of these changes in American Indian art have

[2] In this paper I am referring to artists of Muscogee/Creek descent who are/were affiliated with the Muscogee Creek Nation of Oklahoma, as opposed to other branches of Creek Indians located in Florida, Georgia and Alabama.

been influenced by the introduction of a new market-driven capitalist economy. In order to understand how the market for American Indian art influences Native American painting styles and imagery and how individual artists negotiate their artistic creativity in response to market demands, I must first provide some theoretical and historical background.

Theoretical Background

A market for American Indian art has existed in Oklahoma for over a century. However, there have been no definitive anthropological studies completed on the emergence of this market and its impact on Native forms of art. Only art historians and art critics have recognized artistic works created by American Indians from Oklahoma on a consistent basis. In contrast to other American Indian cultural areas, such as the Southwest, vast amounts of anthropological literature has been written, documenting the creation of new artistic styles, new marketing techniques, and the impact of tourism and trade on artistic processes. From these studies, a central tenet emerges: American Indian artists as producers of artistic commodities have direct control over the products that they create and these products often reflect their cultural heritage. However, the types and styles of products they can sell in the open market are limited by the demands of a primarily non-native consumer base that desires prototypical, sometimes stereotypical, images of an idealized Native culture. Therefore, Native artists must negotiate their artistic enterprises to balance both their own creativity and obligations to their cultural heritage with the profit potential of their art sales.

Within this larger theoretical tenet are several interconnected theoretical sub-categories taken primarily from the discipline of anthropology: the process of

transforming art into commodity (commoditization), the emergence of art market systems or movement of art in an economic structure, the politics surrounding the exchange of artistic goods, and the interaction between individual artists as agents and the hegemonic structure of western non-Native society and economy. These themes are crucial to understanding the emergence of a market for American Indian painting in Oklahoma during the twentieth century.

Commodification of Art

Objects of material culture have been viewed from multiple standpoints- as artifacts, as art, and as commodities (Phillips and Steiner 1999). Traditionally, anthropologists have looked at objects as artifacts, where the object is examined as an indicator of cultural phenomenon and social patterning. This examination usually involves discovering the cultural or social use of the item. Art historians, on the other hand, have viewed cultural objects as art, where the object is examined primarily for its aesthetic qualities, regardless of whether or not the object was intended for use. Recently however, objects of material culture have been viewed as commodities, or an object of an ascribed economic value (social, cultural or monetary) which circulates or is exchanged within various social, cultural and economic networks (Appadurai 1986). Under this definition, both art and artifact can be viewed as commodities.

Art is a complex and dynamic commodity that has been exchanged between people, including American Indians, for millennia (Silver 1979). While the creation and exchange of artistic objects has remained an integral part of American Indian pre-capitalist (pre-contact) and capitalist (post-contact) economies, the type of products

created, the mediums used and culturally derived aesthetic systems dramatically changed with European contact. During the last 150 years, new art forms, such as paintings on canvas, have emerged within American Indian communities. These art forms have primarily been created as marketable commodities for circulation in a new Euro-centric capitalist economy.

One particular case study by Aaron Glass reviews the commodification[3] of Northwest Coast American Indian art over the past two centuries (Glass 2002). In this article, Glass reviews three heuristic periods that he tentatively labels colonial (1850-1950), modernist (1950-1980) and postmodernist (1980-2000). While the dates attached to these periods are specific to the Northwest Coast, the commodification process that Glass discusses can be generally applied to other areas of American Indian art. As Glass states:

> The "colonial" period was characterized by the treatment of First Nations objects as a resource amenable to appropriation and revaluation: as a financial and cultural resource (for Native communities accommodating to and resisting assimilation); as a commercial resource (for the growing tourist economy); as a moral resource (for missionaries to remove and then display as a symbol of successful conversion); as a scientific resource (for ethnographers to study non-Western cultures); as an artistic resource (for non-Native artists seeking inspiration); as a political resource (to define national identities) (Pp. 96).

Under Glass's view, Native objects were set into a new structural sphere through contact between Europeans and Euro-Americans with Native peoples. No longer was a basket simply a basket made for and used by the culture that created it. Now, it became a

[3] Commodification is defined as the process by which a good becomes a commodity through exchange for money or for another good (Appadurai 1986).

representation of 'the exotic other' to a dominant non-Native audience, exploited and decontextualized.

In contrast to the colonial period, the modernist period was characterized by adoption of new aesthetic systems and the "coordination of object production and consumption… and market expansion" in an institutionalized setting, such as the museum or art gallery (Pp. 102). The process of creating artistic objects was intensified as art became synonymous with commodity and individual economic success in a new capitalist economy. The commoditization of art required a change in the way in which art was manufactured (from single, expensive original paintings to inexpensive multiple printings) and a change in the aesthetic devices used (from aesthetic systems reflecting outside influences to revitalization of 'traditional' designs found in museum pieces). During this period, individual native artists sought to gain control over the artistic forms they created, however struggled to maintain their cultural and artistic integrity within the confines of the capitalist economic structure.

Glass characterizes the last period, the postmodern period, as being pluralistic. During the postmodern period, Glass points out that, "Native artists are breaking away from past institutionalization while negotiating their personal and cultural identities in the complex and often contradictory intersections of self, global markets, public expectations, and community responsibilities" (Pp. 103). Pluralism is reflected in the expansion of artistic forms and styles and the "increased visibility, marketability and collectibility of Native art" (Pp. 104). Thus, the process of commoditization in the postmodern period expands to include a vast array of objects with various aesthetic

sensibilities and economic and social values circulating in an increasingly larger market system.

Markets

The market is loosely defined as the exchange of goods between people or groups of people in trade networks. Markets for American Indian objects have been classified in several different ways. However, these various types of markets cannot be adequately discussed without first, briefly delving into Marxism.

In Marxist thought, there is a fundamental difference between pre-capitalist[4] market forms and the capitalist market. In pre-capitalist economic systems, the artisan had direct control over the good that he or she was producing, including the manufacture and sale of the commodity. Exchange of goods usually occurred in the form of *barter* under pre-capitalist systems, where one artisan exchanged his/her product, i.e. commodity, directly with another person for their product. The quantity and quality of the products exchanged were based on the inherent value of the product determined by how much labor it took to create the product.[5] In contrast, under the capitalist system, people exchanged their products for a special kind of commodity, money. According to Marx, the introduction of money fundamentally changes the way that labor is viewed. The artisan is no longer able to exchange their goods directly in the market, but instead

[4] In many American-Indian groups there was resistance to the capitalist economic system introduced with colonialism. Therefore, it is important to not that some pre-capitalist types of trade, such as barter, were still used in American Indian communities after the introduction of capitalism.

[5] I am referring here to Marx's Law of Value, which states that the common value between all goods is the amount of labor needed for the creation of said goods (Tucker 1978:305).

exchanges his labor for money. Under this system, the social connections between people in trade networks become obscured because the buyer is unable to realize how much labor went into the product they are purchasing. The worker is forced to sell his labor rather than a product and therefore becomes alienated from his/her product (Tucker 1978).

When codifying markets for American Indian art, it is important to note whether commodities are exchanged through pre-capitalist market systems, such as barter networks, or through capitalist markets where goods are exchanged for money, because the type of market system used has a direct correlation to the type of consumer. For example, Nancy Parezo (1990) outlines the dichotomy between internal and external markets for American Indian art. Internal markets are delineated by the exchange of artistic works between individuals of a Native group usually in a barter system (Parezo 1990). The consumers of these bartered products are all within the same cultural or social network and therefore the exchange of goods helps to reinforce connections between individuals. As Parezo points out, the exchange and "distribution of art solidifies and symbolizes social and religious relations within the society" (Parezo 1990:567). Not only do internal markets refer to intra-tribal exchange, but could also extend to exchange between American Indian tribal groupings, usually with similar cultural values. Some examples of American Indian internal markets that Parezo mentions are the exchange of pottery between Pueblos of the Southwest (Hays-Gilpin 1996) and the circulation of beadwork patterns between tribal members in Plains societies (Greene 2001).

In contrast to internal markets, external markets are those markets where "art is sold and intended to be used by individuals from societies and cultures other than the artist's" (Parezo 1990:568). External markets can be characterized by exchange between Native groups having distinctly different cultures or characterized by exchange between Native and Non-Native groups. An example of the first type is seen in the trade of blankets the Navajo and other Native tribes, such as Pueblos groups or the Plains Apache (Webster 1996). These tribes had divergent cultural backgrounds from the Navajo, and thus, would be considered an external market for trade. While Parezo's definitions of internal and external market rely mainly upon examples from non-capitalist Native economies, it is important to note that the external market can also refer to a capitalist market, especially with external markets that involve exchanges between Native people and Euro-Americans. In these capitalist markets, money is exchanged for artistic goods so that the art object becomes correlated with it monetary value and not the amount of labor that went into making the product.

While Parezo distinguishes between internal and external markets, James Clifford classifies art markets according to a relative economic value established by the social contexts in which the objects are placed (Clifford 1988). The value-laden classification of markets that Clifford outlines fits neatly within Parezo's definition of external markets. Using Marxist thought to deconstruct Clifford's art-culture system, high art is associated with direct control of the product by the artisan, authenticity, originality, singularity, quality and rarity, and has the highest value. This market is highly specialized due to the fact that it is primarily a commodity of luxury rather than of necessity (Appadurai 1986). The lowest valued art is tourist art, which is mass-produced, industrialized,

commercialized, lacking authenticity and where the laborer is alienated from the product. Tourist art is sold in the souvenir market, where the object is valued not for its monetary worth, but for its commemorative value.[6] Middle value art falls into a third market, characterized by artistic features that are culturally and socially determined; collective and traditional. The middle value market includes art forms such as crafts, folk arts, and antiques, where artisans have only some control over the creation and sale of their products as they respond to the demands and desires of their consumers.

These categories of markets are exemplified through special events where art is sold, such as museum and art gallery shows, art competitions, and art festivals. Each event is likely to attract a different caliber and rank of Native artist (DeLind 1987). For example, institutional settings like the museum and art gallery shows will more likely promote high-end artistic works with well-known and well-established individual Native artists, such as the recent NMAI exhibit of American Indian sculptors Allan Houser and George Morrison. Artists in this category have been characterized as having a high level of exposure to mainstream Euro-American culture and art through enrollment in Western art education programs (Glister 1996). Art competitions will most likely draw up-and-coming, lesser-known artists who are searching for recognition and advertisement. Artists entering these competitions come from a range of educational backgrounds, but often those that succeed at the competitions and gain recognition for their works within high-art markets are those artists who have had formalized art education (Glister 1996).

In contrast, art festivals will have a range of both known and unknown artists who are interested in sales of their artistic commodity (DeLind 1987). American Indian art

[6] See the next section for further elaboration of this point.

festivals such as the Santa Fe Art Market in New Mexico and Red Earth Festival in Oklahoma City draw artists who have a variety of educational backgrounds and artistic training. These markets also display diverse types of goods ranging from high-art to tourist art and provide opportunities for artists to sell their art directly to consumers. The similarity between the majority of the products sold at these festivals, however, reflect the fact that many of the artisans are producing and reproducing objects that are of high demand by consumers rather than creating objects that are unique, original or singular in nature (DeLind 1987).

The Politics of Exchange: Value and Economy

Exchange of artistic objects cannot occur without the establishment of an object's value. There are multiple types of value that can be embedded within an object, including Marxian defined use-values and exchange-values. Use-values, in Marxist theory, are defined as "the practical value of something," measuring the utilitarian purpose of an object (Barnard and Spencer 2002). In this definition, use-values are inextricably linked to the item itself and have "no existence apart from that commodity" (Tucker 1978303). Exchange-values, in contrast, refers to "the value of something as defined by what it can be exchanged for" (Barnard and Spencer 2002). Thus, at first glance, the exchange-value of an object appears relative in comparison to another object. But, as Marx pointed out, there must be a common point of comparison between objects, which lies in the amount of labor vested into its creation. Therefore, the exchange-value of an object is dependent upon the amount of labor that went into making that product, so

that two hours of labor making a pot is equal to two hours of making a piece of cloth (Tucker 1978305).[7]

However, the definitions set forth by Marx leave many people interested in the production of artistic objects feeling cold. How can one equate a small, quickly-drawn sketch made by the master artist Da Vinci with a drawing made by a child in elementary school? While the drawings may have taken the same amount of labor time, there is a definite distinction between the skill levels between the two artists. Thus, it becomes obvious that there is more to determining value than the utility of the item or the amount of labor vested in its creation. In the seminal work *The Social Life of Things* (1986), Arjun Appadurai argued that value "is never an inherent property of objects, but is a judgment made about them by subjects" (Appadurai 1986). As Appadurai aptly pointed out, value is assigned to an object based on the 'political' factors that surround that object, which are grounded in the social and cultural networks in which the objects are exchanged. Under this argument, a child's drawing could potentially be deemed as more valuable in a culture that believed children's art to be sacred or had never heard of Da Vinci.

Besides the political factors surrounding the determination of the value of an object, value is also determined by the ease or difficulty with which objects move through spaces, time and cultural networks. As economist Georg Simmel pointed out, "objects are not difficult to acquire because they are valuable, 'but we call those objects valuable that resist our desire to possess them'" (Simmel as quoted in Appadurai 1986:3). Thus, the primary factor underlying value is the desirability of the object within a specific

[7] See the previous section on *Markets* for a discussion on Marx.

cultural network, or, in economic terms, its demand. The higher the demand for the object, the higher its value will be. For example, objects from colonized American Indian tribes that were transported to Europe during the initial contact period in the 18th century were considered highly valuable because these items were so rare in Europe and had come such a great distance. Similarly, for those European and Euro-American settlers in the Americas, goods from England and continental Europe were considered highly valuable for the same reasons. Thus, movement of goods also affects their value.

The movement of goods between cultural groups and across space or time occurs within the realm of the market and its various types.[8] The value of an object and market type are inextricably linked, so that the type of market that an object is placed in influences the value of an object. Likewise, the estimated value of an object determines in which market the object will be circulated. For example, internal markets exchange objects with culturally defined use values that do not necessarily equate to a monetary exchange value (Tinsdale 1996b). The decorated yellow-ware pottery of the Hopi tribe in the Southwest illustrate several forms of culturally defined use-values. First, yellow-ware pottery was used for cooking and storage and therefore had value as a tool for preparing and serving meals. Second, this type of pottery was also used in gift-giving and therefore had social value as a form of reciprocity. Third, decorated yellow-ware was also used in rituals, and thus had a spiritual value (Hays-Gilpin 1996). In the internal market, Hopi pottery had little monetary value, but had a large use value.

In contrast to internal markets, external markets focus on the exchange value of an object. The exchange value of an artistic object is determined by factors such as quality

[8] See the previous section on *Markets* for a typology.

of workmanship, rarity of form and stylistic expression, and authenticity to cultural traditions as well as qualities of uniqueness or exoticness (Clifford 1988; Silver 1979). Uniqueness (what Clifford 1988 notes as singularity) is perhaps the most potent quality in determining the exchange value of an object in external markets. With contact between different cultural groups, objects have been collected, traded and commoditized as examples of unique and exotic curiosities (Silver 1979). In these examples, it is primarily the culture of the buyer that determines the value of a piece based on these qualities. The commoditization of American Indian art is only one example of "the transformation of global cultural diversity into marketable products" (Parezo 1996). Unique and exotic qualities of these cultural objects often make them more desirable within the market. As the economist Georg Simmel points out, objects are difficult to acquire not because they are valuable, "but we call those objects valuable that resist our desire to possess them" (Appadurai 1986). High art most exemplifies this idea since each piece of art is unique and the quantity of the products produced are dependent upon the life expanse and productivity of the artist.

On the opposite end of the scale are low monetary value objects. Objects with low value are common, easily reproducible art forms that have been produced in higher quantities in industrialized settings, such as souvenirs for tourists. These objects symbolize, but are not necessarily authentic representations of, the cultural 'other' (Clifford 1988). Profit from the sale of souvenirs is based on high levels of sales of inexpensive goods to a broad range of consumers. Despite low monetary value, souvenirs are ascribed with experiential value (Parezo 1990; Tinsdale 1996a). As Parezo (1990) elaborates, "souvenirs are mementos of journeys taken, of trips to strange lands, of

places other than home and the everyday, remembrances of happy or remarkable events" (Parezo 1990572). Thus, in places like the Hopi pueblo, kachina dolls, carved wooden images of the Hopi deities, are sold as mementos to tourists who have visited the tribe.

Because souvenirs are so easily produced, the market is often flooded with them. Creating experiential value is thus an important marketing strategy used to increase the sale (and thus the profitability) of souvenirs. As Mark Bahti (1996) explains, myths and legends are often used in the art market to increase the personal, experiential value of souvenirs. Myths are used both by sellers and creators of souvenirs to increase experiential value, placing the object within a constructed cultural context and enhancing the meaning of the piece for potential buyers. For example, Bahti points out that Southwestern souvenir objects, like mugs, pottery and tea towels, with images of the mythic figure of Kokopelli, who is connected to tales of sexual exploits, sell at a higher rate than objects without mythic images (Bahti 1996). Thus, creating experiential value is an important part of increasing the profitability of inexpensive, mass-produced artistic commodities.

Agency and Structure

American Indian art as commodity exists within the overarching structural systems of culture, society, and economy. In addition to determining the value of artistic objects, these structural systems play a large role in determining the form and style of artistic objects. Shelby Tinsdale states, "the interaction among Europeans, Euro-Americans, and indigenous peoples, coupled with the introduction of a cash economy, has influenced what art is produced, why it is produced, and how it is distributed, both

within and outside the societies involved" (Tinsdale 1996b). For example, the demand for easily transportable artistic goods with the introduction of tourism in the Southwest led potters to decrease the size of their ceramic pieces (Tinsdale 1996a). Likewise, Hopi potters modified manufacturing techniques, firing pots as a high temperature to make them more durable for transportation so that these wares could be traded with other Native communities (Hays-Gilpin 1996).

When discussing variation in artistic form and style it is important to note the distribution of power and the roles that all people play within the structural system of the American Indian art market. In her essay on style variation in Navajo weaving, Laurie Webster explores "the roles that weavers, buyers, culture brokers (patrons, anthropologists, curators), and economic middlemen (traders, dealers, government officials) have played in [the weaving] revival process"(Webster 1996). Webster outlines three major movements within the process of reviving Navajo weaving. First, non-Native reservation traders attempted to sell Navajo weaving by promoting these goods as functional items for modern Euro-American households in curio shops and mail order catalogues. Rugs were produced in many different styles, including classical Navajo patterns in new commercial-dye colors as well as patterns borrowed from Oriental rugs. As Webster points out, artworks produced in this manner were "largely unsuccessful because they failed to meet the demands of the average consumer, who favored inexpensive novelty items over more expensive reproductions" (Webster 1996). During the second phase of the revival process, museums, art patrons, and anthropologists promoted Navajo weavings in classical patterns, marketing reproductions to an affluent consumer audience. While sales increased due to targeted audiences, Euro-American

cultural brokers remained the dominant controlling interest in the exchange of goods. The last phase Webster outlines is the current collaborative partnerships between Native artists and specific retailers and traders in which weavings are produced for a specialized consumer market. In this phase, artists obtain greater control of the artistic and exchange processes, demonstrating and increasing their amount of agency within the larger structural system (Webster 1996).

The role of the artist within these structural systems is perhaps the most important role of all. As pointed out by Ruth Phillips and Christopher Steiner, "the makers of objects have frequently manipulated commodity production in order to serve economic needs as well as new demands for self-representation and self-identification made urgent by the establishment of colonial hegemonies" (Phillips and Steiner 1999). For example, some innovative artists, such as the Martinez family of San Ildefonso Pueblo in New Mexico, revitalized traditional black-on-black pottery and proved that the style could become a popular commodity with non-Native consumers. This, in turn, influenced other artists to produce similar styles of pottery (Berlo and Phillips 1998). As Southwestern pottery became increasingly desired by tourists, many artists compromised the shape and quality of their pottery in order to save time, calculating how much money tourists would spend for their souvenir-style products (Meyn 2001).

Many American Indian artists, particularly easel painters, have chosen to work within styles that are reminiscent of past art forms in order to preserve these traditions. Yet, these artists have also incorporated their own ideas and innovations into the art to give it vitality and life, continuing to develop and change their art just as their culture continues to develop and change over time. In the next section, I will provide a brief

history of the development and change in American Indian painting, discussing the emergence of an external market for American Indian painting in Oklahoma and the purpose of these paintings as seen by the artists and culture brokers.

Historical Background of American Indian Painting

Forms of painting have existed within American Indian groups for thousands of years. American Indian painting prior to European contact was accomplished on multiple background mediums, such as rock and hide. In the years following European contact, American Indian art forms changed dramatically with the influx of new goods and mediums available to Native artisans through trade and the appropriation of new imagery from both Euro-Americans and other tribes. The roots of today's modern American Indian easel paintings can be traced both to influences from contact with Euro-Americans as well as older, pre-contact artistic styles and culturally specific aesthetic ideals.

This section reviews the transition from pre-contact forms of American Indian painting to modern easel painting including the transformation of paintings into a marketable commodity. Painting as an artistic medium has been found across many American Indian cultural regions. However the cultural region most influential to the development of American Indian painting in Oklahoma is the Plains. American Indian tribes from the Plains often painted on flat surfaces, like buffalo hides, an art form that was easily transferred to easels during the early twentieth century. Other tribal groups removed to Oklahoma, like the Creek tribe, were inspired by this art form and thus incorporated easel painting into their artistic repertoire. Some of the earliest twentieth century American Indian painters, such as Acee Blue Eagle (Chapter 2), were profoundly influenced by Plains painting styles found in Oklahoma.

Pre-contact Painting among American Indians of the Plains

Few examples of pre-contact painting have been discovered during archaeological excavations on the Plains. The lack of evidence for forms of painting similar to those found in other American Indian cultural regions, such as that of the Southwest, has led some scholars to proclaim that no painting existed in Plains culture prior to contact (Brody 1971). However, evidence of Plains painting prior to contact is found in pictographic rock art. Despite the relatively infrequent occurrence of this form of painting, the presence of rock art suggests that other forms of painting did exist prior to European contact but have been lost to natural processes. Pictographs were painted on rock walls and in caves using both mineral and vegetable pigments ranging in color from black and white to red and yellow (Dockstader 1973; Kooistra-Manning 2001). Rock art was mostly figurative and portrayed many different images including scenes of daily life such as hunting of buffalo and deer, warfare between Native groups, as well as powerful spiritual images (Moore 2003). Figures were drawn flatly, using simple lines or blocks of color. While subject matter and level of complexity in draftsmanship varies according to site, the drawing conventions seen in rock art remained remarkably unchanged throughout the 5000+ years of its existence in Plains Indian culture and continued to influence painted art throughout the 19th century (Robbins 2001).

Contact with Europeans

While many American Indian groups did not have face-to-face contact with Europeans until the late 18th century, the impact of European arrival was felt far and wide

at a very early point during the contact period (Wolf 1982). The introduction of new diseases, new trade networks and the horse led to major changes in American Indian culture and artistic forms (Berlo and Phillips 1998; Wolf 1982). Possibly the greatest impact of European contact was felt by cultural groups in the Plains. Prior to face-to-face contact with Europeans, the introduction of the horse to the North American continent greatly impacted the daily life of Plains by allowing them to travel greater distances and hunt buffalo more efficiently (Ewers 1979). The buffalo was the primary source of clothing, shelter and food in the Plains and the majority of art forms were accomplished on its hides (Berlo and Phillips 1998). Plains women created hide storage boxes called parfleches, which were often decorated with geometric designs (Berlo and Phillips 1998). Painted designs did not change the functionality of the objects, but added to their aesthetic beauty. Plains men painted on hides also, but drew figurative accounts documenting daily life, war exploits and spiritual events (Ewers 1983). One example of these figurative paintings are winter counts, a type of 'pictorial calendar' used to record important or memorable occurrences that had happened during the year (Greene 2001). The figurative designs seen on winter counts and other hide paintings created by Plains men demonstrate striking similarities to images found in pre-contact rock art suggesting a continuity of culturally specific artistic conventions.

While many of the conventions of Plains artistry stayed the same with the introduction of the horse, actual contact with Europeans brought in new art forms, mediums and imagery. A popular form of art that developed among Plains Indians was that of ledger art. Ledger art has been defined as drawings and paintings done in various mediums including crayon, ink, pencil and watercolor accomplished on various types of

paper, such as notebook or drawing paper and cardboard, but often in bound volumes such as account ledgers (Greene 2001). Plains ledger artists were usually warriors, but more importantly were always male, as only male artists were allowed to create figurative paintings and drawings. Mediums such as those used by ledger artists became increasingly easy to obtain through trade while the traditional background medium for painting, animal hide, became increasingly rare due to the near extinction of the buffalo (Brody 1971). Some of the earliest known paintings and drawings of these types date to the 1830s during Euro-American exploration of the west (Ewers 1979; Robbins 2001). During the early part of the 19th century, European painters like Karl Bodmer and George Catlin followed Louis and Clark's route and began painting many of the Indian people that they encountered. The painting style of these Europeans intrigued many Native people. As Janet Catherine Berlo (1996) relates,

> From 1846 to 1852 a Swiss artist named Rudolf Kurz lived among the Indians of the Upper Missouri River. In his diary he recorded the keen interest with which male artists of the Mandan, Lakota and other tribes scrutinized his paintings. Yet in some cases, Kurz wrote, the indigenous artist was more interested in presenting his own work. 'While I was sketching this afternoon the Sioux visited me. He brought two interesting drawings. He was not satisfied with my work; he could do better. Forthwith I supplied him with drawing paper' (1996).

By supplying the Sioux man with drawing paper, Kurz discovered that specific features were emphasized in Plains drawings. Kurz continued, saying,

> In drawing the figure of a man they stress not his form but something distinctive in his dress that indicates his rank; hence they represent the human form with far less accuracy than they draw animals. Among the Indians, their manner of representing the form of man has remained so much the same for thousands of years that they look upon their

> accepted form as historically sacrosanct, much as we regard drawings in heraldry (Kurz as quoted in Berlo 1996).

While the basic shape and style of figures may not have changed over time, the addition of clothing details demonstrates a marked change in Plains drawing and painting. Prior to contact, very little detail was emphasized in rock art or hide painting (Berlo 1996). Early ledger art represents a continuation of earlier styles seen in rock art and hide painting (Robbins 2001).

As contact between Euro-American and Native peoples increased over the 19th century, scenes depicted in ledger art became increasingly detailed and complex (Berlo 1996). While earlier Plains paintings had documented important historical and spiritual events, ledger art became especially important in American Indian culture as a method of documenting personal biographies during a time of great cultural change (Brody 1971; Ewers 1983; Szabo 2001). Plains artists created 'pictorial autobiographies' that documented all aspects of American Indian life (Berlo 1996; Berlo and Phillips 1998). For example, a Hidatsa warrior by the name of Poor Wolf drew pictures of wars between his tribe and the Sioux. Poor Wolf's drawings document important moments in his warrior life, including scalpings and victory dances (Ewers 1983). Other ledger artists documented daily life in Indian encampments. Watercolor paintings done by a Cheyenne named Squint Eyes (Tichkematse) show family chores such as drying meat and taking care of children, as well as hunting and fishing excursions. Arguably the most important ledger art pieces are those that document the Indian wars and subsequent removal of American Indians from their homelands to reservations. Drawing books made by American Indians removed to the Darlington Indian Agency in Oklahoma document the

removal of Plains warriors to reservations and subsequent assimilation efforts by Indian Agents.

Beginnings of Modern American Indian Paintings

Perhaps the main difference between early post-contact and contemporary two-dimensional American Indian painting is the association between art and economy (Brody 1971). The removal and allotment period changed the essential nature of American Indian economy by decreasing American Indian traditional subsistence resources, such as land, and forcing Native peoples to become more and more dependent on a cash economy (Brody 1971). The sale of art, including paintings and drawings like ledger art, was one way that American Indian people could effectively enter this new cash economy. While some Native individuals entered the art market freely, others were forced to sell their wares (Berlo 1996; Greene 2001). As Berlo elaborates,

> Capt. Richard H. Pratt, who had served since 1869 as a military officer on the Southern Plains, was the jailer for some six-dozen Cheyenne, Kiowa, Arapaho, and other prisoners who had been rounded up accused of various crimes against white settlers and soldiers, and transported to St. Augustine, Florida, in the spring of 1875. They would spend the next three years as prisoners of war in a seventeenth-century Spanish stone fort, then called Fort Marion. As part of an experimental penal reform…Pratt insisted that the prisoners be taught reading and writing, be given religious instruction, and be assigned to manual labor. They earned money and privileges by making items to sell to tourists, such as bows and arrows, fans and pottery jars painted with scenes of Indian life, and, most notably, small drawing books filled with vivid autobiographical pictures (1996:14).

Collectively, the Native men held at Fort Marion sold hundreds of art pieces and opened a major market for American Indian drawings and paintings (Greene 2001).

Pictorial art, like that of the Fort Marion prisoners, continued to be produced as a marketable form of art until 1900 (Greene 2001). Between 1900 and the late 1920s very little pictorial art was produced. As JoAllyn Archambault outlines, "federal education policy in Indian schools mandated that Indians be trained to support themselves in the national economy and to assimilate into the Euro-American population. The preservation of traditional art forms was not encouraged unless their sale could provide a cash income, thus promoting self-sufficiency, and in no case would formal instruction be given" (Archambault 2001). Because art could not be taught within the confines of these federal programs, there was a steady decline in the amount of arts produced and sold in the Plains.

The Emergence of a Market for Oklahoma Indian Painting

It was not until the late 1920s that a revival of Plains painting began in Oklahoma (Greene 2001). This resurgence of Plains paintings was congruent with trends occurring with the revitalization of Indian arts and crafts nationally. In the early part of the twentieth century, there was a change in the way that the government considered Indian people. Traditionally, federal programs had promoted the cultural and biological annihilation of American Indians through assimilation into Euro-American culture (Meyn 2001). This assimilation was carried out through programs similar to Captain Richard Pratt's, like mandatory boarding school educations where American Indians were taught how read, write and provide labor services and discouraged from creating traditional arts or crafts. However, in the 1920s federal Indian programs, under the mandates of Bureau of Indian Affairs commissioners Charles Rhoads and John Collier, reversed this decision

and began including art classes in their school curriculums (Archambault 2001). Instead, American Indians were encouraged by anthropologists, entrepreneurs, artists and other philanthropic individuals to continue to create their art forms as a way of maintaining their cultural heritage while simultaneously entering into the capitalist economy.

In Oklahoma, several figures participated in the revitalization of Native arts, Susie Peters, Oscar Jacobson and Alice Marriott. In 1917, Peters, a field matron with the Indian Service started an art club near Anadarko. Peters encouraged students of the art club to paint and "as her students grew older and their skills progressed, she collaborated with Oscar Jacobson and Edith Mahier of the Art Department at the University of Oklahoma on a project that would allow her students to enroll" (Meyn 2001). Peters and Jacobson both worked to encourage their Native students to paint in ways that were traditional. However, both Peters and Jacobson often took their cues as to what was appropriate in Native painting from other regions such as the Southwest (Meyn 2001; Wyckoff 1996).

In 1928, five Kiowa students, Spencer Asah, Monroe Tsatoke, Stephen Mopope, Jack Hokeah, and Lois Smokey started art classes at the university. The young artists shared a house in Norman, rented by Smokey's parents, and attended classes together. While the young men got along well together, there was much conflict between the men and Lois Smokey. Smokey was not accepted by the men because she was breaking culturally ascribed traditions for females by painting figural forms (Broder 2000; Wyckoff 1996). After only a year at the university, she returned home and began working in the more culturally acceptable art form of beading. Her student slot at the university was then filled by James Auchiah (Broder 2000). During their education at

OU, the male Kiowa artists were encouraged by Jacobson to paint in "the traditions of their forefathers," staying true to the flat, figural forms common to Plains pictorial paintings (Wyckoff 1996). As their patron, Jacobson also encouraged these young artists to paint works that could be sold and promoted their works by enrolling them in numerous exhibitions in the United States and in Europe. Jacobson taught them how to sell their works by promoting their own image. The painting style that the five Kiowa men developed during their interactions with Jacobson laid the foundation for Oklahoma Indian painting as a marketable form of commodity (Archambault 2001).

While Jacobson was working with Native artists in a university setting and Peters was establishing art clubs in Plains communities, Alice Marriott was working to promote American Indian arts and crafts as commodities. Marriot, the first woman to ever receive a degree in anthropology in the United States, worked for the Indian Arts and Crafts Board (IACB) during the late 1930s establishing artists guilds among Oklahoma Indian communities (Meyn 2001). While Marriott worked with many different tribal groups including both Plains and Woodlands tribes, she primarily worked with individuals who created usable art forms, such as baskets, blankets, and pottery because these art forms were more easily marketable to non-Native consumers. However, Marriott's work with the IACB helped to draw attention to all forms of Indian artistry, including painting, which strengthened this emergent market.

Outside of Oklahoma, another important national event was taking place. In 1931, the Exposition of Indian Tribal Arts in New York, which promoted American Indian art as a form of distinctly American art, opened a broad national market for Native arts and crafts. The Exhibition of Indian Tribal Arts was organized by a non-Native

group headed by Reneé D'Harancourt and expressed that their goals were to display Indian objects as art- not ethnology, awaken the public appreciation of American Indian art, encourage Indian artists to develop their art forms and create a viable, enlarged art market for Indian art (Rushing 1995). By marketing American Indian art in such a way, the exhibition ensured that Native paintings could be sold as high art forms akin to those of European artists and established an elite social base for these sales.

The Appropriation of New Art Forms: Muscogee Painters

Painting has a long history amongst American Indians of the Plains. Despite the removal of Plains groups from their traditional homelands, this art form remained relatively stable iconographically for thousands of years. The revitalization of these traditional art forms has also been encouraged through venues like the University of Oklahoma and exhibitions like that in New York.

However, the art forms of other tribes that were removed from their homelands to Oklahoma Indian Territory, like the Muscogee Creek tribe, have changed dramatically (McNickle 1979). Prior to their removal, the Muscogee Creeks inhabited lands in what is today, Northern Florida, Georgia, South and North Carolina. Like other tribes of the Southeast, their material culture included pottery, works in stone and wood, and items of bodily adornment such as clothing and jewelry (Sturtevant 1979). While paints as a medium did exist in Southeastern tribal culture prior to European contact, paints were used primarily for bodily adornment rather than for pictographic painting (Swanton 1946).

With the removal of the Creeks to Oklahoma, tribal arts have shifted incorporating art forms, motifs and imagery seen in works by other American Indian groups. Both Euro-American art and the Plains tribes have influenced Creek arts. Painting was one such art form that blossomed among the Muscogee Creek during the first half of the twentieth century. Acee Blue Eagle, a painter of Creek and Pawnee descent, was the first Creek and first American Indian artist to successfully create paintings for sale in a market for American Indian art, profoundly influencing other American Indian artists in Oklahoma. Blue Eagle's mixed heritage allowed him to bridge the gap between Plains art forms and Muscogee art forms, inspiring a new generation of Creek painters to emerge after him.

In the next few chapters, I will review the lives of five Creek artists, their art and their struggles to market themselves and their work. The next chapter reviews the life of Blue Eagle and the emergence of painting as an art form in the Creek community. I focus particularly on how Blue Eagle was influenced by Plains artists, his relationship with Oscar Jacobson and the University of Oklahoma, and then his role as a mentor for other young artists of Creek descent. Chapters three and four discuss two of Blue Eagle's protégées, Solomon McCombs and Fred Beaver. Both artists were related to Blue Eagle and mentored by him throughout their art careers, however each artist developed their own strategies for marketing their art. In the fifth chapter, I review the life and art of Joan Hill, a contemporary artist who has worked with many major artists over her lifetime, including Blue Eagle, McCombs and Beaver. Hill has been acclaimed as one of the most successful artists of our times as she has been awarded with numerous prizes and honors. The final artist that I will discuss is another contemporary artist, Enoch

Kelly Haney. Haney's approach to art and marketing is distinctly different from that of his compatriots, offering a unique point of view on the commoditization of art. In the last chapter, I will synthesize some of the overarching themes that arise from the examination of these artists' lives and marketing techniques. I hope that, by reviewing these artists, their lives and stylistic changes in their art, I can derive some information about changes in the market for American Indian art and how artists negotiate their creativity within this framework.

SECTION 2:

Blue Eagle, McCombs and Beaver:

Three Early Creek Painters

During the first half of the twentieth century, three American Indian artists of Muscogee/Creek descent stood out as premier easel painters; Acee Blue Eagle, Solomon McCombs and Fred Beaver. Blue Eagle was the first Muscogee/Creek, and arguably the first American Indian painter, to not only survive but also successfully thrive as a full time professional artist. Much of Blue Eagle's success depended upon his extraordinary ability to market himself and his art to a non-native audience. Solomon McCombs and Fred Beaver were both mentored by Blue Eagle, and thus were highly influenced by Blue Eagle's painting style and views on American Indian art. While Beaver and McCombs' artistic styles were quite similar to Blue Eagle's, their individual approaches to the market for American Indian easel painting were quite different. The following chapters will examine the lives of these three artists, their art, and their marketing strategies.

Chapter 2:

Acee Blue Eagle

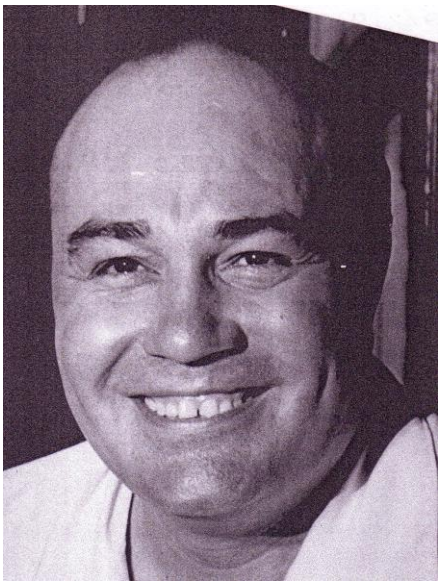

Figure 1: Acee Blue Eagle, ca. 1950
Courtesy of the Philbrook Museum of Art Archives

Acee Blue Eagle was arguably one of the most notable and prolific Native American artists of the 20th Century. Known for his overwhelming personality as well as his artistic abilities, Blue Eagle produced thousands of paintings over his lifetime. While creating his art, Blue Eagle also encouraged other American Indian artists to pursue their own artistic talents. He ultimately wound up being emulated by some of the most prominent American Indian artists of the twentieth century because of this. But, despite the large role that Blue Eagle played in developing the field of American Indian easel painting, his biographical history has remained a mystery. Much of this mystery is due to the fact the Blue Eagle constantly changed his image and identity as a method of

marketing himself and his art. Through constant reinvention of his identity and multiple changes in the style and imagery portrayed in his art, Blue Eagle became one of the most successful and prominent American Indian Artists of the twentieth century. In this chapter, I have attempted to reconstruct Blue Eagle's biography. By investigating Blue Eagle's biographical history coupled with in-depth analysis of several of his paintings, I hope to uncover several of his strategies for marketing his art.

Blue Eagle's Childhood

Much of Blue Eagle's early life is known only from newspaper interviews and promotional announcements that he did later on in his life, after becoming a famous artist. In these interviews and announcements, Blue Eagle was conscious that he was promoting not only his art but also his own image and identity. Thus, Blue Eagle often constructed stories about himself, emphasizing certain aspects of his life and minimizing others.

Some of the best examples of Blue Eagle's process of reconstructing his identity are stories he told about his family, his tribal affiliation, and his birth. Biographies of Blue Eagle that include information about his childhood often contain a standard outline of Blue Eagle's early life. However, many of the details of his life vary dramatically between documents. Blue Eagle was born as Alex C. McIntosh and his Indian name was Che Bon Ah Bu La, which translates as Laughing Boy in the Muscogee language. Blue Eagle's great-great grandfather was Roley McIntosh, a part-Scotch Muscogee/Creek

chief who led people out of Alabama on the Trail of Tears (Lefebvre 1961).[9] His father, Solomon McIntosh, a descendant from Roley's line gave Alex his mixed Muscogee/ Scotch heritage. Blue Eagle's mother, Mattie Odom McIntosh was also of mixed blood, being Muscogee, Choctaw, French and English (DRC Silberman 127/04). Additionally, Blue Eagle often claimed that Mattie McIntosh was also of Pawnee decent although it is unclear whether statement is accurate. As fellow artists Woodrow Wilson Crumbo stated in an interview, Blue Eagle often liked to tell people that he was of Pawnee decent in order to legitimate his use of Plains styles feathered headdresses during performances, even though he had no Pawnee ancestry (DRC Silberman 127/04).

Like his tribal affiliation, Blue Eagle also liked to align himself with different tribes through his birthplace. For example, in 1960 the *Chronicles of Oklahoma* reported that Blue Eagle was born in Anadarko, Oklahoma. Several months later, the magazine received a reply from a close friend of Blue Eagle's, Marcel Lefebvre. According to Lefebvre (1961), Blue Eagle was born in the small village of Hitchita, Oklahoma on the 'Old' Muscogee (Creek) Nation Reserve, not in Anadarko.[10] The implication from Lefebvre's letter was that Blue Eagle often tried to align himself with Plains tribes by stating that he was born near or in Anadarko. Other reports support the assertion that Blue Eagle tried to align himself with Plains tribes by stating that Blue Eagle's birthplace

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[9] Blue Eagle was also related to Chief William McIntosh, who mistakenly signed a treaty ceding Creek lands in Georgia and Alabama to the United States Government.

[10] The Old Creek reserve consisted of lands in the eastern central portion of Oklahoma, encompassing cities such as Eufaula, Muskogee, Tulsa and Okmulgee (home to the current headquarters of the Creek Tribe). The village of Hitchita is located southeast of Okmulgee on the north side of Eufaula Lake in the eastern central part of the state of Oklahoma. In contrast, the city of Anadarko, Oklahoma is located in the southwestern part of the state, approximately 160 miles away.

was located within the Wichita reservation (American Indian Exposition 1958).[11] However, in an article appearing in *University of Oklahoma Magazine* at the beginning of his career as an artist, Blue Eagle reported that he was born in Muskogee, Oklahoma (Garrett 1932). This early statement about birthplace conflicts with Blue Eagle's later reports, suggesting that later on in his career he was more apt to reconstruct his identity.

One reason, perhaps, for Blue Eagle's reinvention of his tribal identity was based on how American Indians were viewed by Euro-Americans. During the first half of the 1900s, literature, film, and the media in the United States had built up a stereotyped ideal of the American Indian based primarily on images of Plains peoples. The so-called 'civilized' tribes of the Southeastern United States, such as the Muscogee, who had been forcibly removed to Oklahoma, were strikingly different from Plains stereotypes and did not fit with this romanticized ideal. Therefore, consumers of Native culture found American Indians from Eastern tribes to be 'not Indian enough'. By stating that he was of Pawnee decent or born among Plains people, Blue Eagle was able to associate himself with the popular stereotype and was later able to capitalize from this assumed identity.

A secondary reason for Blue Eagle's reinvention of his identity can be based in the loss of his family and his movement through the boarding school system. Tragedy plagued young boy's life, beginning with the death of his twin brother four days after birth. His mother and his father both died before Blue Eagle reached the age of five (American Indian Exposition 1958; Lefebvre 1960; Savage February 27, 1972). He was raised primarily by his grandparents until their subsequent deaths prior to Blue Eagle's

[11] The Wichita reservation was located to the northwest of Anadarko, between the Canadian and Washita Rivers, on the opposite side of the state from the Old Creek Reserve.

twelfth birthday (American Indian Exposition 1958; Deskins 1940; Stephenson September 27, 1940).[12]

After the deaths of Blue Eagle's grandparents it is unclear what happened to the young boy. Accounts of this time vary dramatically between the available biographical sketches. Archival documents located at the Philbrook Museum of Art in Tulsa state that W. R. Thompson of Henryetta, Oklahoma was appointed as Blue Eagle's guardian. A contradictory report in *The Bacone Indian* (1931) states that Blue Eagle spent most of his life living with an aunt outside Muskogee. Yet other archival information states that Alex was taken away from his home by the boarding school agents at the age of eight (WHC Jacobson J-13/47, American Indian Exposition 1958). What is clear, however, is that the loss of his family had a direct impact upon Blue Eagle's ability to learn and experience his tribal identity through his family. Furthermore, the American Indian boarding school system was known for attempting to strip Native children of their cultural identity and assimilate them into Euro-American culture. Thus, Blue Eagle's later attempts to associate himself with various American Indian cultures may have stemmed from a need to belong.

The Education of Blue Eagle

By his early teens he was well ensconced within the Oklahoma Indian boarding school system. He bounced around from school to school, attending at least four Indian schools inside and outside the state, including Nuyaka Mission Boarding School (west of Okmulgee, Oklahoma), Euchee Mission Boarding School (in Sapulpa, Oklahoma),

[12] It is unclear whether Blue Eagle's maternal or paternal grandparents are referred to here.

Haskell Indian Schooll (in Lawrence, Kansas) and finally Chilocco Indian School (outside Ponca City, Oklahoma). In his later years, Blue Eagle would comment on the importance of having learned the 'white man's ways' in addition to the ways of his ancestors (American Indian Exposition 1958).

During these formative years, many of Blue Eagle's characteristic personality traits emerged. First, he began by modifying his identity through changing his name. His first attempt at a name change was from Alex C. McIntosh to Antonio Cortez McIntosh, cited in Lefebvre (1961) as being his "Spanish phase." Later, Alex C. McIntosh shortened his name to A. C. McIntosh, which quickly mutated into Acee. The final name transformation occurred when Acee switched from the McIntosh surname to his Muscogee/Creek paternal grandfather's name of Blue Eagle. Blue Eagle's experimentation with his name demonstrates his early reinvention of and creativity with his identity and persona as an artist.

While Blue Eagle was experimenting with his name, he was also acquiring his love for performing and creating art. Blue Eagle commonly related stories about his early interest in drawing and about how he spent his youth "tracing Indian symbols in the sandy hills near Anadarko" (PMA Blue Eagle). However, it was at Chilocco that Blue Eagle began to blossom into an artist and a performer.[13] During this time, Blue Eagle enjoyed the social aspects of school and became the drum major for the school band,

[13] Much of the recorded information about Blue Eagle's years spent at Chilocco consists of anecdotal tales told by Blue Eagle's friends or himself. Valuable information about Blue Eagle's years at Chilocco may be available through archived school records.



Figure 2: Chilocco Indian School Seal, 1930
From Lomawaima (1994)
Designed by students 'A. C. McIntosh,' Harry Bedoka and William Bedoka

performing in full Indian regalia.[14] Blue Eagle's talent for performing was instantly apparent and his friends often recalled that his dancing at school events was impressive and quite memorable (Lefebvre 1961). While Blue Eagle enjoyed his performances, he seemed much less interested in Chilocco's vocational courses. Chilocco offered only a few training courses for young Indian boys in areas like butchering, construction and repair, plumbing and power plant maintenance, general mechanics, masonry, and electrical wiring; courses which were designed to provide boys with basic skills so that they could get a job in mainstream society upon their graduation from the school (Lomawaima 1994). Blue Eagle tried many of these courses but found them all

[14] Regalia often have stylistic differences that demarcate tribal identity. The records discussing Blue Eagle's dances while at Chilocco do not indicate which type of regalia he wore or with which tribe his regalia was associated.

uninteresting until he entered the paint shop (Lefebvre 1961). In Chilocco's paint shop, he began to learn about art as he taught himself to mix paints and contrast colors and lines (Lefebvre 1961). Without ever taking an art class, Blue Eagle completed most of his early experiments with painting for himself and for his friends (Garrett 1932). One important piece was his design for the school's official seal (Figure 2) (Lefebvre 1961, Lomawaima 1994). There are no records indicating that Blue Eagle offered these early works for sale.

After graduating from Chilocco in 1928, he continued his education at Bacone Indian College outside Muskogee, Oklahoma (Snodgrass-King 1968). Missionaries founded Bacone College in 1880 in order to provide American Indians with a Christian education (Blalock Jones 1996). After earning an athletic scholarship (Deskins 1940), Blue Eagle studied at Bacone from 1928-1930, working on and off part time for *The Bacone Indian* (the school newspaper) as art director and then a staff cartoonist through 1931. During Blue Eagle's time at Bacone, he was invited to participate in a trip to Europe as a representative for the Oklahoma Boy Scouts in 1929 (Snodgrass-King 1968). He later joined the Keith Orpheum Vaudeville circuit in 1930 as a chalk artist and performer (PMA Blue Eagle). While Blue Eagle traveled and performed, he continued to work on his paintings. Friends traveling the vaudeville circuit with Blue Eagle were impressed by his work and offered to purchase some of his pieces (SNOMNH Blue Eagle). Some of the pieces he created were passed on to members of the Chicago Women's club who then arranged an exhibit for the aspiring painter (PMA Blue Eagle). A second exhibit was arranged by Fred Leighton's Indian Trading Post, also in Chicago (PMA Blue Eagle).

The most important event that occurred while at Bacone was Blue Eagle's introduction to Oscar B. Jacobson. Jacobson was the director of the Art Department at the University of Oklahoma (OU) and had a knack for discovering upcoming Indian artists. Jacobson had already helped several Kiowa artists gain recognition in Oklahoma by enrolling them in special classes at OU and promoting their work throughout Oklahoma, the greater United States, and even Europe.[15] Seeing some of Blue Eagle's artwork, Jacobson invited him to attend a specialized degree program at OU (Stephenson September 27, 1940). Jacobson's previous American Indian students, had not been enrolled in a degree-earning program. Instead, their enrollment constituted a special program which kept the Kiowa students separated from the general student body through different classes and housing. However, Jacobson offered Blue Eagle a distinctly different regimen, where he was allowed to enroll in a Bachelors degree program in Fine Arts. Blue Eagle accepted Jacobson's invitation and began his degree program in 1931.

The Rise of an Artist

The relationship that developed between Jacobson and Blue Eagle had a profound effect upon the artist and his art. Jacobson encouraged him to adhere to 'traditional Indian' forms of painting and drawing based on the flattened imagery seen in Plains Indian hide art and ledger art, encouraging Blue Eagle to capitalize on his Pawnee heritage. Thus Blue Eagle enrolled in classes such as Watercolor Painting, History of Design and Drawing from the Antique (DRC Silberman 128/012). Jacobson notably did not encourage Blue Eagle to learn about modern art or painting styles, preferring instead

[15] See Chapter 1, *The Emergence of a Market for Oklahoma Indian Paintings* for more information on Jacobson and the Kiowa Artists.

to let him find his own style (SNOMNH Blue Eagle). Instead of exposing Blue Eagle to Western artistic styles, Jacobson exposed Blue Eagle to the art accomplished by his previous Kiowa students and arranged exchange programs with Native artists from the Southwest who were painting at the Studio School in Santa Fe (Heard Museum 2000). In a 1940 article about Blue Eagle, Jacobson is attributed with saying "Of course I can't teach you the art… The knowledge of the Indian spiritualism and religious symbols is yours, the heritage from your forefathers. But I will help you to concentrate all your efforts in becoming a great artist" (Stephenson September 27, 1940). Despite Jacobson's reluctance to have Blue Eagle study European art, Blue Eagle delved into his first formal art classes. Blue Eagle took History of Ancient and Classical Art and History of Art of Northern Europe, demonstrating Blue Eagle's independent and slightly stubborn nature (DRC Silberman 128/012). His goal in studying European art was to gain a solid foundation in all artistic methods and "finish his education in 'the white man's' school before beginning seriously on his life work in the Indian art field" (Garrett 1932).

Due to his contact and exposure to contemporaneous Kiowa art, Blue Eagle at first modeled much of his painting in a style that is strikingly similar to the Kiowa Artists (Garrett 1932). *Art World Magazine* (quoted in Garrett 1932) reviewed some of Blue Eagle's works exhibited at Fred Leighton's Gallery (1931) in Chicago pointing out:

> Blue Eagle is doing work much in the view of the Kiowa artists in Oklahoma, but he manages to maintain his own individuality in representing his people in their various moods and garments. There is an unusual delicacy in the execution of his figures and in the harmony of his vivid color combinations.

Both the Kiowa works and Blue Eagle's work were accomplished in the Flat-style method of painting. Flat-style painting first emerged in Oklahoma in the 1920s. The



Figure 3: ***Wa-sha-she*** **(*Osage*), no date**
By Acee Blue Eagle
Tempera on Paper
Gilcrease Museum, 0227.444

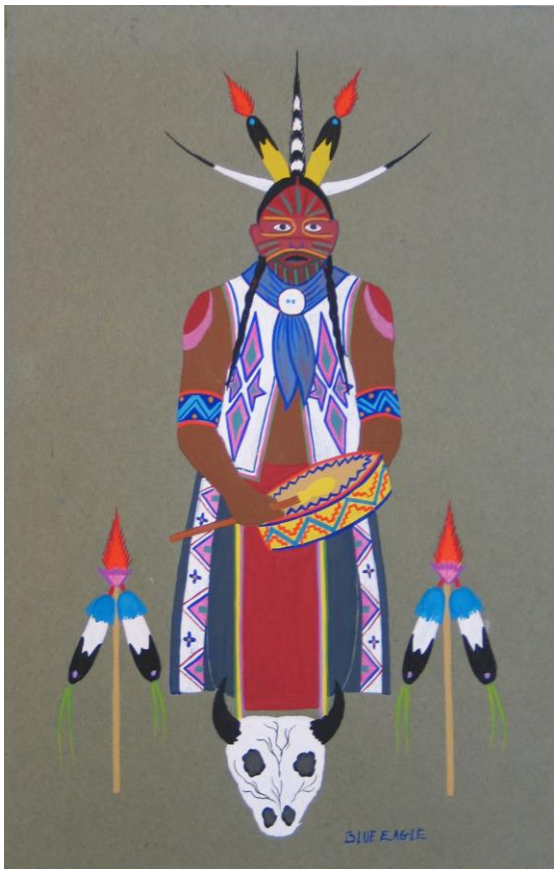


Figure 4: ***Medicine Man and Altar*****, no date**
By Acee Blue Eagle
Tempera on Paper
Gilcrease Museum, 0227.424

first artists in Oklahoma to paint in the Flat-style were the Kiowa artists. Blue Eagle easily adopted this style and made it his own.

While Flat-style painting occurs within numerous American Indian communities and has many variants, there are distinguishing characteristics. As Kevin Smith (2003) has outlined, the characteristics for Flat-style include 1) figural images presented with no modeling or shading to provide depth, 2) lack of perspective with no foreground or background present and 3) subject matter that depicts native life in an idealized and stylized manner (Smith 2003).



Figure 5: *Dancer #1*, no date, Jacobson Collection
By Acee Blue Eagle
Tempera on Paper
Gilcrease Museum, 0227.436



Figure 6: *Kiowa Eagle Dancer*, 1929
By Stephen Mopope
Watercolor
Sam Noble Oklahoma Museum of Natural History, 0338v

Blue Eagle's works are completed in Flat-style, demonstrating stylized, figural images. His earliest works were completed in the same style as that used by the Kiowa Artists and could be easily confused with their works (Figures 5 and 6). As he advanced his education, however, Blue Eagle's works showed some distinct differences from other earlier flat-style art works and artists which were noted in art critiques such as *Art World Magazine*. One of Blue Eagle's works located at the Gilcrease Museum (in Tulsa, Oklahoma) illustrates this point. *Dancer #1* (Figure 5) is completed in same flat-style painting as outlined above. Yet, when compared to a piece done by Stephen Mopope (Figure 6), striking differences emerge. While both artists use the same color blocking technique and outline these color blocks to differentiate each element of the figure (for

example, lines separate the arm from the torso and the leg in the foreground from that in the back), Blue Eagle's line is much thinner and more controlled than Mopope's. Details seen in the headdress, the sense of texture on the hair ties and the thinness on the shawl fringe point to Blue Eagle's superior control of his brush strokes. Another distinguishing feature can be found in the differences between Mopope's and Blue Eagle's depiction of feathers. Mopope's feathers are painted using only two colors (black and white) for the main portion of the feather. Blue Eagle's, in contrast, use four colors, lighter shades of black and white on one half of the feather and darker shades on the other half. This shading suggests curvature to the feather along its axis and a sense of dimensionality that is not present in Mopope's work.

The details that Blue Eagle incorporated into his works, such as those seen in *Dancer #1*, became an integral part of his signature style (Deskin 1940:9). It was this style, his ability as an artist, and his connections to Jacobson that allowed Blue Eagle to burst onto the art market in the early 1930s despite the economic hardships encountered during to the Great Depression. While Blue Eagle was in school, Jacobson pushed him to market himself and his work by submitting paintings for exhibitions around the globe. One of the notable exhibitions that Blue Eagle's work was chosen for was the Exposition of Indian Tribal Arts (1931), one of the largest exhibitions of Native American artwork (National Anthropological Archives 2004). The Exposition of Indian Tribal Arts provided "the first large-scale exposure for the new Indian painting" and toured both the US and Europe (Berlo and Phillips 1998). Blue Eagle's paintings toured with this exhibition from 1931-1933. During 1932, Blue Eagle submitted works to another exhibition, the International Art Exhibition of Sport Subjects in Los Angeles, which



Figure 7: Acee Blue Eagle at Rotary Club Meeting, ca. 1933
By Anonymous Photographer
Black and White Photograph
Sam Noble Oklahoma Museum of Natural History, 0008

coincided with the summer Olympic games (National Anthropological Archives 2004). These early exhibitions gave him the exposure that he needed in order to gain recognition from the art community.

After Blue Eagle received his B.F.A. from the University of Oklahoma (OU) in 1933, his relationship with his mentor continued and Jacobson helped him secure work as an artist. As Lydia Wyckoff points out (1996:35), perhaps the most important thing that "[Blue Eagle] learned from Jacobson was the marketing of 'Indianness'." He often dressed in Plains regalia complete with feathered bonnet when presenting his art to non-

native audiences (Figure 7). By 'dressing the part,' Blue Eagle marketed both his art and himself as a commodity and his American Indian heritage became a spectacle for those interested in the romance and mystique of the cultural 'other'. Through combining art sales with singing, dancing and drumming performances, Blue Eagle found that he could increase the sales of his art by providing a memorable experience, or as Bahti (1996) describes, experiential value for the consumer. Blue Eagle's Euro-American patrons were much more willing to purchase his art as a souvenir after they had seen him perform, marking the day that they met the flamboyant artist or saw a 'real Indian.' In the minds of the consumer, having these experiences to link with the paintings they bought increased the value and also the desirability of the art. Similarly, Blue Eagle also linked himself to his art by wearing clothing and costumes that matched the cultural content of his early art works, the majority of which depicted Plains cultures. Therefore, the consumer could point directly to a painting of a man in a headdress and definitively state that they had met an Indian that looked exactly the same as that depicted in their painting. By combining his performances with selling art, Blue Eagle became a pioneer in the commodification of American Indian easel painting.

Under Jacobson's direction, Blue Eagle also increased his market by entering numerous exhibitions, providing guest lectures on American Indian art and executing public and private commissions. In 1934, Blue Eagle traveled extensively for the purposes of exhibiting and creating commissioned works. He completed yet another exhibition at the Young Galleries in Chicago (National Anthropological Archives 2004). After returning to Oklahoma, Blue Eagle met with Jacobson again to work as a muralist. Jacobson served on the Board of Directors for the Oklahoma Public Works of Art

Program (PWAP), which was created as a work program during the Great Depression (Meeks 1941).[16] Blue Eagle's ability to obtain work under this program is especially notable since jobs for artists were few and far between during this time. Several Native American artists taught by Jacobson were able to secure jobs painting murals.[17] Blue Eagle secured several mural jobs under PWAP including work at Oklahoma College for Women in Chickasha (now the University of Science and Arts of Oklahoma) (Figure 8), Central State Teacher's College in Edmond (now the University of Central Oklahoma), and Northeastern State Teacher's College in Tahlequah (now Northeastern State University) (Meeks 1941). While working on these public works, Blue Eagle also received a few commissions from private sources. One of these commissions was a large canvas depicting a hunting scene that was presented to the U.S.S. Oklahoma (later sunk in Pearl Harbor) (Meeks 1941). These works were all completed in the same style of painting Blue Eagle developed while at OU.

Despite the numerous exhibitions and murals, Blue Eagle found it hard to become recognized as an artist in the United States and particularly in Oklahoma (Stephenson September 27, 1940). American Indian painting styles did not fit into the mold of Euro-American aesthetics, differing greatly from established norms because of the flat portrayal of figures and lack of perspective. Similarly, prejudice against American Indian people and their art still ran rampant among the United States' population, especially in more rural areas like Oklahoma. Therefore, in 1935 Jacobson arranged, as he had for his previous Indian students, for Blue Eagle to travel to Europe and exhibit his works there

[16] The Public Works of Art Program lasted from 1933 to 1934.
[17] Artists who secured work under the Public Works of Art Program that had also worked under Jacobson include Stephen Mopope, Monroe TsaToke, and Spencer Asah.



Figure 8: Mural, 1934
By Acee Blue Eagle
Oil on Concrete
Gymnasium, Oklahoma College for Women
Chickasha, OK



(Heard Museum 2000). In addition to exhibiting, Blue Eagle also lectured on Indian art at Oxford University and participated in a program offered by the International Federation of Education (National Anthropological Archives 2004). Jacobson designed the exhibitions and lectures in Europe as a way of increasing Blue Eagle's potential market. During the 1930s, Europeans became increasingly interested in so-called 'primitive cultures,' or cultures that were seemingly less complex and less advanced industrially (Rhodes 1994). The ravages of World War I had made many Europeans skeptical of the benefits of modern industrialization (Witt, et al. 1993437). Artists in the European community codified this skepticism by turning to objects and imagery borrowed from African, Latin American and American Indian cultures for inspiration. This attention to these seemingly 'exotic' cultures, made European art collectors increasingly interested in works by Native artists, and thus Blue Eagle's art proved to be a popular commodity among them. According to a later newspaper article, Blue Eagle received more fame and acknowledgement as an artist within the European community than he did in his home state of Oklahoma (SNOMNH Blue Eagle).

Development of the Bacone Style

Acknowledged by the European art community as a superior American Indian painter, Blue Eagle returned to Oklahoma to find that his notoriety as an artist had increased. While his fame had not reached a level on par to European or Euro-American artists, Blue Eagle was fast becoming a local celebrity in the Oklahoma art community. In the fall of 1935, Blue Eagle was invited to establish an art department at his alma mater, Bacone College. The art department grew rapidly and drew in many students. The first students to enroll in Bacone's art program under Blue Eagle included Solomon

McCombs, Willard Stone, Chief Terry Saul, and Dick West, students who later became successful artists in their own right (Denton July 13, 1978; Wyckoff 1996).

Bacone, like other American Indian boarding schools, accepted Indian students from across the state of Oklahoma, attracting American Indian children from different tribal backgrounds. Often, the mix of students in these institutional settings acted as a "crucible for the development of Pan-Indianism, with its Plains orientation" (Greene 2001). The art department at Bacone was not immune to Pan-Indianism and courses often incorporated a mix of aesthetics from multiple tribal origins. Students were required to first enroll in a course that taught American Indian designs, basic design patterns and styles from various tribes, including those of the Plains (PMA Solomon McCombs). After taking the design class, students were allowed to enroll in other courses, most notably Blue Eagle's painting class.

Blue Eagle's initial teaching at Bacone centered around the style he learned while at OU, based on the works of the Kiowa Artists (Blalock Jones 1996). However, Blue Eagle encouraged his students to follow their instincts in the studio and provided them with a safe haven to experiment with their art (Wyckoff 1996:36-37). Blue Eagle's students often attributed him with pushing them to explore various mediums and research cultural phenomenon that could be portrayed in art. Blue Eagle did his own experimentation while at Bacone, trying out different mediums such as woodblock, linoleum and silkscreen printing. Blue Eagle's experiments allowed him to find new mediums in which he could create art for the market and produce new art at a rapid pace (SNOMNH Blue Eagle).



Figure 9: *Pawnee Dancer*, 1936
By Acee Blue Eagle
Silkscreen with hand applied paint
Sam Noble Oklahoma Museum of Natural History, 0048

Pawnee Dancer (Figure 9) is one example of the silkscreen prints Blue Eagle created while at Bacone. In this particular piece, Blue Eagle has touched up some of the edges of the silkscreen image with paint in order to give the dancer's dress more detail. The layers of paint and the contrast between the lighter colors of the bustle against the darker skin color give a slight depth to the figure, pushing the bustle away from the

figure.[18] Characteristic of this time period, Blue Eagle also balances contrasting colors throughout the piece, placing blue near red or yellow. Colors are also used in particular places to balance one another. For example, the color of the red anklets are mirrored in the headdress and the blue color of the leg cuffs are repeated in the arm cuffs. While it is evident that some of the modeling and shading (as seen in the feathers of Figure 5) are not apparent in this silkscreen, Blue Eagle's balanced and repetitive use of color creates a distinctly different form of composition.

Besides balancing colors, Blue Eagle also creates repetition and balance through the dancer's pose. The dancer faces away from the viewer with his face in a three-quarter turn. The position of the dancer is awkward, with arms and one foot raised. However, Blue Eagle creates balance by mirroring the angular position of the arms with contrasting angles in the legs, giving the viewer a sense of rhythm by repeating the angles. He creates the feeling of movement through the uplifted leg and angles of the head and arms. It is as if the dancer will take another step forward, away from the viewer. Compositional details such as those seen in *Pawnee Dancer*, his continued use of detail and "the refinement associated with Blue Eagle's adaptation of the Kiowa style was to become known soon as the 'Bacone' or traditional Oklahoma Style" (Wyckoff 1996:37-8). Many of Blue Eagle's students emulated this style and continued to copy it throughout much of the twentieth century.

In contrast to the emerging Bacone Style, Blue Eagle's other artistic experiments differed greatly in color, design, content, and purpose. Blue Eagle had a particularly keen

[18] Bustles are large, circular groupings of feathers which are tied to dancer's backs. Bustles are primarily worn by Plains dancers and Pan-Indian Powwow dancers.



Figure 10: *Laughing Bear*, ca. 1938
By Acee Blue Eagle
Print
Sam Noble Oklahoma Museum of Natural History, 0046

ability in business, and realized that he could make more money through the release of mass-printings of his more popular works than selling individual pieces of art at performance venues (SNOMNH Archives). *Laughing Bear* (Figure 10) is a print (later offstrike) made from a linoleum block created by Blue Eagle in 1938. This piece contrasts dramatically with his other works in two ways; 1) the use of a ground-line and 2) the use of a single color. First, this is one of the few, if not only, art pieces created by Blue Eagle that places the figure on a receding plane. This plane is created by the use of negative line (the white areas devoid of ink) and positive line and shape, where the ink creates a sense of mass. The contrast between these positive and negative lines creates the sense that the earthen plane recedes into the clouds. Second, in Blue Eagle's other works, multiple colors of paint (positive mediums applied to the paper) are used to create figures and compositional details. The background paper in these works is left blank,

having a negative application of any medium. However, in this piece Blue Eagle uses the positive medium of ink to define the background and the large blocks of color. Details are defined by the lack of ink being present, creating a negative space. In this work, the positive and negative are reversed, so that the background is defined by ink and foreground containing the clouds and figures are defined by the absence of ink. This use of positive and negative image creates a beautiful, balanced contrast between the white clouds and the black figure and background. Once again, Blue Eagle's style is defined by his ability to create a harmonious composition with rhythmic, repeated shapes and angles, as seen in the corresponding angles of the clouds and the posed figure.

Life After Bacone

During his time spent at Bacone, Blue Eagle was married and divorced, participated in several exhibitions, including exhibitions in Washington D. C. (1936) and Dallas, Texas, (1937) and produced many commissioned works of art.[19] By this time, Blue Eagle was famous in many art circles for both his abilities as an artist and a performer and had reportedly developed an ego to match his increasing fame. After three years of teaching art and experimenting with different printing mediums, Blue Eagle decided to leave Bacone and pursue his art full time. Blue Eagle went back to painting murals. While the Public Works of Art Program (PWAP) had ended in 1934, public art was still being commissioned by the federal government under New Deal programs such as the Works Progress Administration (WPA) (Park and Markowitz 1984). Under the

[19] In 1937, Blue Eagle had a brief marriage to a Creek woman named Loretta Kendrick. Little information exists about his relationship with her.



Figure 11: *Seminole Indian Village Scene*, 1939 (Photo taken in 2004)
By Acee Blue Eagle
Oil?
Seminole Post Office, Seminole OK

WPA, commissions for art works were controlled by individual government agencies such as the Section of Painting and Sculpture under the Treasury Department (Park and Markowitz 1984, Meeks 1941). Murals sponsored by the Treasury Department were located in post offices rather than other federal buildings such as courthouses or colleges, as seen during the PWAP (Meeks 1941). Blue Eagle created two murals under the Treasury's Section of Painting and Sculpture, one in 1939, located in the Seminole, Oklahoma post office (Figure 11), and the other during 1942, located in the post office in

Figure 12: Photo of SeminolePost Office Mural, ca. 1940/1941
Photo taken by Section of Fine Arts, Works Progress Administration



Coalgate, Oklahoma (Figure 13). It is important to note that the Seminole mural was later restored twice, first by Blue Eagle and again by Fred Beaver. The ground lines that are present in the modern image of the mural (Figure 11) were added in 1953 during the restoration (Figure 12), when Blue Eagle also fixed a few cracks in the wall and added a warmer background color (NAA Blue Eagle/18).

Despite the ground color being added at a later date, the mural demonstrates several variations within Blue Eagle's characteristic style, particularly in the method in which he portrays depth. First, while Blue Eagle's attention to detail and texture remain consistent with that of his earlier works, as seen in the details of the patchwork and the texture of the thatching on the arbors, he adds slightly more shading and blending of colors and lines to increase the sense of curvature or depth of objects. For example, the posts of the *chickee* (the open platform house typical of the Florida Seminoles) are painted using three shades of brown, the darkest brown as the outside edge, and the lightest brown placed in the middle. This creates a sense that the pole is rounded rather than two-dimensional, giving a definite sense of depth to the image. Previous examples of Blue Eagle's works demonstrate this type of outlined, tonal shading. Over time, each successive work demonstrates that Blue Eagle uses these dark outlines increasingly.

Second, Blue Eagle suggests depth by making the figures in the foreground larger and the figures in the background smaller. In other works, Blue Eagle's figures remained the same size despite their placement on the canvas. The figures and the right side of the murals are larger than the figures on the left, suggesting that the chickee and people on the right are closer to the viewer while the other figures and structures are slightly father



Figure 13: *Woman Making Pishafa,* 1942
By Acee Blue Eagle
Acrylic?
Post Office Building, Coalgate, Oklahoma

away. Blue Eagle also denotes depth by overlapping images, placing the chickee's support poles in front of the objects or figures that are supposed to be underneath it.

The third variation in Blue Eagle's style is found in both the Seminole and Coalgate murals (Figure 13). These murals were distinctly different from Blue Eagle's previous works because of their depiction of Indian life in context. Previously, Blue Eagle had maintained the Kiowa style of presenting figures, painting men or women in their native dress, with no ground lines, housing structures, or foliage. The Kiowa style was noted by the use of "drama, movement, monumentality and brilliant color" (Heard Museum 2000). Figures were stripped of their surrounding context in order to place focus directly on the figure and the representation of Plains style dance and dress (Heard Museum 2000). Kiowa style painters often depicted warriors, rituals, dance, flutists, drummers and figures in profile, figures that also represented friends of the artists or the artists themselves. Blue Eagle's early works mirrored the Kiowa painters by depicting single American Indian figures stripped of contextual background.

However, after Blue Eagle left Bacone, he began to paint genre scenes that were similar to those created by American Indian painters from the Southwest. Genre paintings had begun in the Southwest, arising out of interactions between Native people, Euro-American artists and anthropologists. Anthropologist would commission Native people to capture images of their life and these Native people emulated the style of Euro-American artists (Wyckoff 1996). As time passed, genre painting became increasingly popular among many Native peoples, especially those from the Southwest, because of the art's ability capture and document the ceremonial life and daily life of Indian peoples. Documentation of Native life and ceremonies was becoming increasingly important to many artists since there was a general belief that the culture of American Indian people was fading away due to the assimilation policies established by the United States government. As pointed out by the Heard Museum (2000) "for Native Americans, narrative genre paintings (even those commissioned by white patrons) were an important means of self-definition. Narrative painting allowed Native Americans to represent the reality of their lives to themselves, to each other and to the non-Native world." Blue Eagle saw genre painting as a way to capture a lifestyle that he believed was being threatened. He contacted tribal elders and interviewed them about specific rituals and ceremonies so that he could paint them in the most accurate way possible (SNOMNH Blue Eagle, PMA Blue Eagle). Blue Eagle also researched and studied objects in museums, making sketches and notes, which he later included in his genre paintings (SNOMNH Blue Eagle). One example of this was the Seminole mural (Figure 11), which Blue Eagle created after visiting with the Florida Seminoles and documenting their lives through interviews with elders.

Blue Eagle also used the same care and attention to detail when he depicted his own cultural background. The mural at Coalgate (Figure 13) represents a typical Southeastern tribal scene that could have been drawn from Blue Eagle's childhood memories growing up on the Muscogee/Creek reserve. The scene includes an arbor, which is a central structure used for summer ceremonies by many tribes from the Southeastern region, including the Muscogee/Creek, the Cherokee, the Choctaw, and the Chickasaw. Within both the Seminole and Coalgate murals, Blue Eagle included ethnographic details, seen in the clothing and the inclusion of cultural objects like the mortar and pestles and winnowing basket. These details demarcate tribal identity and continue to be obvious to those knowledgeable of Southeastern Indian tribes. While the material culture represented in the Coalgate mural remains similar between these tribes, this mural was probably intended to represent a scene from Chickasaw life since the mural is located within the Chickasaw Nation's tribal jurisdiction.

While Blue Eagle created these larger detailed genre murals, he also worked on smaller paintings continuing to explore symbolism, shading, depth, and genre. However, in contrast to the murals, Blue Eagle's smaller works often depicted more generic scenes created from an imagined Pan-Indian ideal. *Antelope Hunt* (Figure 14) is an example of Blue Eagle's market-friendly style. In this painting, Blue Eagle combines recognizable, stereotyped American Indian imagery from the Southwest and the Plains. He includes Southwestern images of the sun and the swallowtail bird, which is a reminder of the influence that Jacobson had on Blue Eagle, since the early trips that Blue Eagle took to meet other Native artists were at the behest of Jacobson. The hunter is generic in nature, wearing a breechcloth and using a bow and arrow, which was common to many Plains



Figure 14: *Antelope Hunt*, 1941
By Acee Blue Eagle
Tempera
Sam Noble Oklahoma Museum of Natural History, 0042

groups. In this painting, Blue Eagle does not include a ground-line or gradations of size of objects denoting depth. However, he does place objects in front of one another to give the view a sense of foreground, middleground and background, similar in style to his murals. The increased number of tones used in the edges of the color blocks for shading and a sense of curvature are like those seen in Blue Eagle's previous works. The rider remains two-dimensional in comparison to the modeling of hues in the horse. Blue Eagle's control of the brush in creating these lines remains impeccable.

Going to War

After several years of painting, Blue Eagle's life took a dramatic turn. The bombing of Pearl Harbor and the United States' involvement in World War II took center stage in national news. Blue Eagle felt personally touched by the war since the mural he had created for the U.S.S. Oklahoma had been destroyed when the ship sank in Pearl

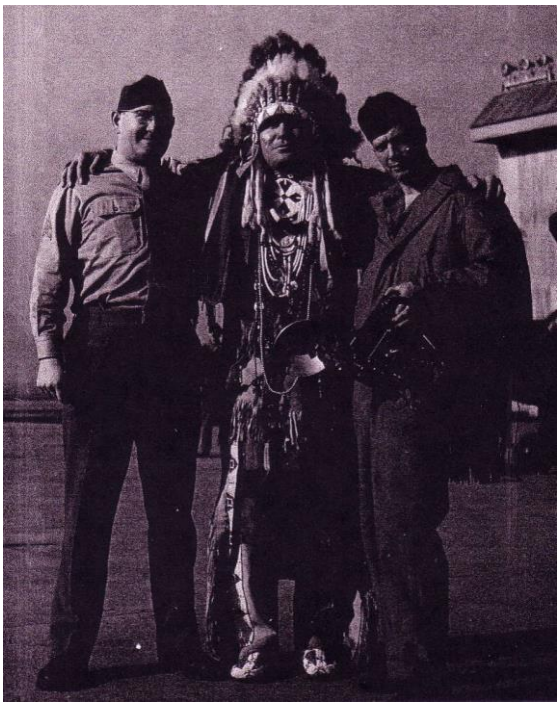



Figure 15: Photos from Blue Eagle's time at Camp Geiger, ca. 1944
National Anthropological Archives, Blue Eagle/46

Harbor. In 1943, Blue Eagle joined the Army Air Corps (predecessor to the Air Force) as a camouflage artist (Campbell 1980) and was one of five artists summoned to "do illustrative work on a safety program designed to help combat training accidents" (Caldwell July 8, 1946). Over the three years and nine months that Blue Eagle served in the Military (GM Blue Eagle/4), he had two accidents in B-17s (Treanor April 13, 1958), was stationed at eighteen different posts, and left murals at each (Anonymous 1960).[20] The last seven months of his Army service were spent recovering in a hospital from an injury most likely sustained in one of his plane crashes. As he reported to friends, the injuries he sustained left him in much pain and suffering from a nervous breakdown (GM Blue Eagle/4).

Blue Eagle was discharged from the Army in 1946 and immediately married Devi

[20] It is unclear what kind of accidents Blue Eagle experienced while in the B-17s.



Figure 16: *Balinese Woman Standing on Beach*, ca. 1946
By Acee Blue Eagle
Watercolor and Pencil?
National Anthropological Archives, 08762500

Dja, a Balinese dancer whom he had met several years earlier during a trip to New York (Treanor April 13, 1958). In letters to friends, Blue Eagle related his infatuation with Dja and her abilities as a dancer (GM Blue Eagle/5). His love for her led him to learn Balinese dancing and language and to produce Balinese-inspired art works with her as his model (Figure 16) (Treanor April 13, 1958). After spending so much time in the hospital, Blue Eagle was eager to resume painting and continue touring the country. While Blue Eagle was often able to travel with Dja, her touring engagements for dance and his for painting often forced them to be apart from one another. Distance coupled with both

Blue Eagle's and Dja's immense egos ultimately led to the dissolution of their marriage in the late 1940s.

While still married to Dja, Blue Eagle's first travels after being discharged led him to Santa Fe, NM (Caldwell July 8, 1946). Blue Eagle produced several paintings which he submitted to the First Annual Exhibition of American Indian Painting at the Philbrook Museum of Art in Tulsa, Oklahoma (Caldwell July 8, 1946). The Annual Exhibitions of American Indian Painting, nicknamed the Philbrook Indian Annuals, were yearly competitions in which Native artists from four regional categories, Woodlands, Southwest, Plains, Alaska and Canada, submitted their works. The Philbrook Annuals later became inextricably linked with the promotion of Indian art and artists, and subsequently became a premier showing for developing Indian artists. Blue Eagle submitted his paintings under the Woodlands category since he was of Muscogee/Creek decent.

The paintings he produced for the exhibition were similar in style to works produced before Blue Eagle joined the Army Air Corps, containing the same attention to detail and use of shading as seen in his earlier works. However, the paintings Blue Eagle produced for the Philbrook Annual differed slightly from his earlier works in two ways: first, the central figure of the painting was a woman, and second, the figures were presented with rose-colored circles on their cheeks. An example of these changes can be seen in one of the works Blue Eagle submitted for the competition, *Creek Mother and Child* (Figure 17). Prior to his relationship with Dja, Blue Eagle's paintings had primarily portrayed men or family groups. Once he became involved in this relationship, however, Blue Eagle increased the amount of paintings dedicated to Indian women.



Figure 17: *Creek Mother and Child*, ca. 1946
By Acee Blue Eagle
Watercolor
Philbrook Museum of Art, 1946.22

In a newspaper article appearing prior to the exhibition, Blue Eagle pointed out that he wished to draw attention to the role that the Indian woman played in tribal life (Caldwell July 8, 1946). His piece, *Creek Mother and Child*, is a primary example of this, depicting an Indian woman surrounded by her two children.

Besides drawing attention to Indian women, Blue Eagle also included new details about American Indian's lives in his painting. One particular detail was the rose-colored cheek dots, which Blue Eagle placed on his figures faces. This stylistic device is evocative of basic face paint design seen among women of Woodlands tribes in Oklahoma, placing the reference to a Southeast Indian family (Howard 1981). Yet, other images in the painting reflect a notable influence from Southwest Indian imagery. As

before, Blue Eagle included iconographic images borrowed from the Southwest, such as the swallowtail birds and the stylized bushes that frame his paintings (see Figures 13, 14, 17). While swallowtail birds would not have found in the original Southeastern homelands of the Creek tribe, these birds are commonly found in Oklahoma as well as the Southwest, suggesting that Blue Eagle is portraying the woman as being from Oklahoma. However, other details of the piece suggest that the scene does not represent a Woodland family. The woman is wearing a skirt that is particularly reminiscent of the broomstick skirts worn by Navajo women. She is also wearing a hairstyle that is suggestive of a Navajo woman. While this piece includes much detail about the dress and custom of Southeastern and Southwestern Native peoples, it would be unclear which culture area Blue Eagle intended to focus on without the presence of his descriptive title. Therefore, it seems that the artist's intention was to place emphasis on the universally important role of women as the bearers of children, regardless of tribal affiliation.

Experiments in Style

Blue Eagle submitted several pieces focusing on the role of Indian women and one of his pieces won first place in the Woodlands Division at the Annual. After receiving this award, Blue Eagle was offered and accepted the position as the art director of Oklahoma State University's Technical Training School in Muskogee, a position he held until his death. He continued to work on his paintings and also enrolled in art classes to explore new mediums such as carving, jewelry, and leatherwork (PMA Blue Eagle). Blue Eagle continued to paint and experiment with his artistic talents. During the later 1940s through 1950s, Blue Eagle broke away from some of his characteristic styles. While he continued to produce familiar works for his existing art market, Blue



Figure 18: *Creek Women Cooking Fish*, ca. 1950
By Acee Blue Eagle
Watercolor on Board
Philbrook Museum, 1950.10

Eagle also began experimenting with broader lines, more caricature-like figures and pictographic images. Rather than the elaborate attention to detail of costumes, Blue Eagle experimented with bold contrasting colors and composed of geometric shapes with distinct outlines.

The earliest painting that exemplifies Blue Eagle's new artistic trend is the work *Creek Women Cooking Fish* (Figure 18). The broad brush-strokes and thick lines, used to delineate the edges of color areas on the figures, are distinct from his earlier works, which use thin lines and multiple shades. This artistic device implies that the figures are slightly more stylized than in earlier paintings. The stylization seen in the figures is also present in the other elements of the painting, with less detail painted in the fish. In contrast to a decrease in lines seen in the stylization of the figures, there is an increased

sense of curvature and roundedness of the logs and table supports due to multiple lines in shades of brown with color gradation from light to dark. While these changes in his style are significant, some of Blue Eagle's characteristic style elements remain. For example, Blue Eagle develops depth by decreasing the size of figures and adding a ground color, which is similar to other works such as his *Seminole Mural* (Figure 11). He includes a repetitive rhythm and balance of color as seen in *Pawnee Dancer* (Figure 9), where the colors on the bottoms of the women's skirt are mirrored in their shirts, scarves and necklaces. Blue Eagle's genius of composition also appears in this painting, as all of the figures are arranged in on oval shape and are framed by tufts of grass at the bottom and branches emerging into the pictorial plane at the top. As in his previous works, Blue Eagle chose to depict a genre scene focusing on the role of women in American Indian culture, not only paying homage to women but also recording the daily activities of Indian people.

Throughout the 1950s, Blue Eagle continued to document American Indian life and culture. He accomplished this by painting cultural objects that were commonly found in museums, such as baskets, and document their usage by placing them in context, as seen in Figure 18. His goal in documenting Native life was not only to preserve cultural elements that he feared were being lost, but also to promote an image of Native people that differed from that seen in Hollywood westerns. Hollywood tended to lump all Indian people together according to stereotypes of the cultural other, often depicting American Indian people as savage warriors who raided villages and needed to be civilized. These movies almost always focused on Plains Indians and depicted people wearing feathered war bonnets regardless of tribal affiliation. Paradoxically, Blue Eagle's

self-promotion tactics often reinforced these stereotypes when he wore Plains regalia during his art presentations. However, Blue Eagle's main goal was to combat the negative stereotypes of American Indian people. However, he felt that he was not reaching a broad enough audience through his painting. Blue Eagle sought out a new medium for communicating his ideas; television.

In 1954, Blue Eagle started his own television show devoted to teaching kids in Oklahoma about Native American culture. During each episode, Blue Eagle taught his audience different words from the Creek and Cherokee languages, demonstrated Native arts and crafts, and also explained the various meanings of traditional symbolism (Anonymous 1955). He presented his show dressed in full headdress and in front of a tipi constructed in his sound stage. Once again, Blue Eagle presented a generalized conglomerate image of Native cultures by mixing Woodland language with Plains-style costumes and scenes. As reported in 1955, "Blue Eagle hopes… to dispel from the minds of today's youngsters that Hollywood-created impression that the Indian of yesterday was a villain bent on violence against the whites" and will "carry on and exploit the romantic tribal traditions he cherishes" (Anonymous 1955). His goal in creating this show and in painting genre scenes was to combat negative stereotypes of Native peoples and promote a positive image of the American Indian for young Oklahomans.

However, in his quest to promote a positive image, Blue Eagle created a new generalized stereotype of American Indian culture. Rather than dressing in clothing that was commonly worn by Creek people and sitting in front of a Southeastern arbor, Blue Eagle chose to wear Plains clothing and sit in front of a tipi, suggesting that there were no cultural differences between Native people from different tribes. Similarly, he also

reinforced stereotypical romantic imagery, denying that there were any problems associated with the inequality of American Indian people in American society. Blue Eagle profited from this positive image of American Indian by creating interest in a disappearing exotic other, and thus also created interest in the representation of this exotic other depicted in his art. If Blue Eagle had chosen to focus on the negative aspects of American Indian life, such as the hardships associated with social and economic inequality, it is much more likely that Blue Eagle would have encountered resistance to his art and most likely would have been unable to survive as an artist.

After Blue Eagle's show ended in 1955, he continued to paint and explore images of Native people in his art. The stylistic changes he had been experimenting with prior to the TV show were revisited, this time in a different manner. Rather than using the broad brush strokes seen in *Creek Women Cooking Fish*, a later piece, *Old Time Indian Art* (Figure 19), demonstrates Blue Eagle's sense of whimsy and use of more caricature-like figures, returning once again to more popular imagery. Breaking away from the documentary nature of works like *Creek Women Cooking Fish*, Blue Eagle returned to market friendly images, as seen in earlier examples like *Antelope Hunt* (Figure 14). In *Old Time Indian Art*, Blue Eagle combines images from multiple regions, once again creating the new positive stereotype he had developed for his TV show. The painting depicts a Plains man teaching Indian children how to paint on hide. As before, Blue Eagle uses symbolic images borrowed from the Southwest, as seen in the sun, the grass, and the wave of birds floating across the skyline. He also colors the cheeks of the figures in large rose-colored circles, returning to the Woodlands stylistic device seen in *Creek Mother and Child* (Figure 17). By combining these three regional styles, Blue Eagle



Figure 19: *Old Time Indian Art,* 1957
By Acee Blue Eagle
Watercolor
National Anthropological Archives, 08759400

created a conglomerate American Indian stereotype. The use of bright colors and caricature-like bushes also give the painting a sense of levity suggesting Blue Eagle may have been responding to market forces.

Another work created in 1957 was *Buffalo Hunt* (Figure 20), in which Blue Eagle emulated ledger art and hide art created by his Plains predecessors. The pictographic images Blue Eagle uses as background in *Old Time Indian Art* are extracted and used by themselves. He paints name glyphs above the head of the figures, representing himself on the left and Green Morning Star on the right (GM Blue Eagle).[21] Symbolism is again used to denote the heart line of the buffalo. As seen in previous works, Blue Eagle uses

[21] Name glyphs were often used in Plains ledger art to visually portray the name of a person or group in the drawing. A thin, wavy line connects the name glyph to the person or group which it represents.



Figure 20: *Buffalo Hunt*, 1957
By Acee Blue Eagle
Watercolor on Paper
Gilcrease Museum, 0227.578

thin lines to outline the color fields. He also presents the figures in a highly stylized manner that is distinctly more angular and geometric than figures found in his earlier works. There is a lack of detail and an understated simplicity of form that distinguishes this type of pictographic portrayal from his previous core Bacone flat-style. Blue Eagle also creates rhythm by repeating the same horse and figure as well as posing the horses and buffalo in the same leaping gait. His return to this pictographic style, known as neo-ledger art, could imply that Blue Eagle wanted to return to a simpler and less complex way of life and attempt to preserve or revitalize what he considered to be traditional forms of art. Simultaneously, the emergence of this imagery in Blue Eagle's art could also signify his wish to find a new marketable type of imagery in the field of American Indian art. Neo-ledger art eventually did become a marketable commodity during the 1970s and later when many other American Indian artists (Plains and Southeastern) attempted to copy Blue Eagle's idea.

The Death of a Star

After he had created what he proclaimed to be thousands of paintings, performed on stage and screen, traveled the world, developed two art departments at Oklahoma colleges and established a recognizable and marketable style of Indian art, Acee Blue Eagle passed away in 1959 from a liver ailment. Many of his projects, such as two unpublished books, were left uncompleted, to be published posthumously by his friends (Blue Eagle 1959; Blue Eagle 1971). Despite his fame and ability to market himself and his art, he died nearly penniless in a military hospital, spending the majority of his income on his predilection for women and alcohol.

Over his lifetime, Blue Eagle had not only developed his own unique style of painting but also developed several strategies with which to market his art. While a young and emergent artist, Blue Eagle used his Plains identity and vaudeville showmanship to market his art to Euro-American consumers, giving them the experiential value that would increase the value of the art to the consumer. Blue Eagle continued to use performances throughout his life to market his art, as seen through the television show, but also developed other marketing strategies as well. He often changed the images portrayed in his art depending upon his audience and his market. For large commissioned pieces, Blue Eagle often painted ethnographic genre scenes, specific to the native group in the surrounding area (as seen with the post office murals). For smaller works sold to Euro-American patrons, Blue Eagle created generic art works depicting conglomerate, positive stereotypes of American Indians. By changing the imagery portrayed in his art, Blue Eagle was able to more successfully market his art.

While Blue Eagle greatly impacted the field of American Indian easel painting by increasing Euro-American awareness of the art form, perhaps the most important role that he played was in influencing other American Indian artists. By starting the art department at Bacone, Blue Eagle inspired many other American Indian artists to create paintings and continue to document Native life and culture through the medium of paint. Artists under Blue Eagle's tutelage, like Solomon McCombs, who will be discussed in the following chapter, often emulated his painting style, choosing to paint in Flat-style and within the various American Indian easel-painting norms that had been established with the help of Blue Eagle, Jacobson and Bacone. However, McCombs and other artists often pursued different marketing strategies than those of their mentor, Blue Eagle. The next chapter reviews the life, art and marketing techniques of Solomon McCombs.

Chapter 3:

Solomon McCombs



Figure 21: Solomon McCombs, 1954
Courtesy of the National Anthropological Archives

In contrast to the massive amounts of biographical information (and misinformation) published about Muscogee/Creek artist Acee Blue Eagle, little is known about Blue Eagle's cousin, artist Solomon McCombs. Little published information exists regarding McCombs' youth, his education, or his development as an artist prior to the 1950s. While McCombs produced many pieces of art over his lifetime, relatively little attention has been paid to his artistic abilities or the various influences on his works. This chapter attempts to reconstruct a tentative framework of McCombs' biographical history and places selected pieces of his art into a chronological sequence. By framing McCombs' works within this timeline, I hope to illustrate the incredible impact that Blue Eagle had on McCombs and early twentieth century American Indian easel painting in

Oklahoma while simultaneously illuminating how McCombs responded to market pressures.

A Youthful Beginning

Solomon McCombs was born in the Creek Tribe's jurisdictional area in 1913 on his family farm west of Eufaula, Oklahoma. His father, James McCombs, a rancher, was a reverend at the Tuskegee Indian Baptist Church, and his mother, Ella McIntosh McCombs, was a relative of Solomon McIntosh, Acee Blue Eagle's father (GM 4027.8600).[22] From the scant records, it appears that McCombs had a relatively normal youth, attending a local elementary school and spending time on the family farm. From an early age, McCombs was interested in art and often drew or painted the animals present on the farm (Jones June 17, 1963). However, tragedy stuck the family in 1928 when McCombs father suddenly passed away. Although young, McCombs and his six siblings banded together in order to help operate the family ranch. Relatives stepped in over their concerns about the children not attending school and ultimately sent them away to government boarding schools (GM 4027.8600 & 4027.8609).

In 1930, McCombs started sixth grade at the Bacone School (FCTM, Solomon McCombs).[23] It was during his time at Bacone that McCombs first gained recognition for his artistic talents. Classmates and the mix of tribal backgrounds present at Bacone often inspired McCombs to paint scenes of tribal life as told to him by his peers (NAA

[22] Ella McIntosh McCombs (1888-1977) was also known as Ellen or Keesaya (GM 4027.8602).

[23] Bacone College (also known as Bacone School) the Muscogee boarding school mentioned in Chapter 2, offered primary, secondary and tertiary levels of educations for American Indian students. Tertiary education was limited to the equivalent of a junior college, covering basic college level classes only.



Figure 22: ***Kiowa Eagle Dancer #3*****, ca. 1933**
By Solomon McCombs
Tempera on Board
Five Civilized Tribes Museum, 1985.02.01

Solomon McCombs/Box 5, FCTM Solomon McCombs). One of McCombs' earliest works, *Kiowa Eagle Dancer #3*, demonstrates his interest in depicting other Native tribal customs. More important to note, however, is the striking similarity between this piece and works completed by other artists during the late 1920s and early 1930s. The singular dancer painted in flat-style was a motif common to the early Kiowa painters and other painters, like Blue Eagle, who were influenced by the Kiowas. Prior to his enrollment in any art classes, McCombs demonstrated the ability to mimic other Indian artists of the era with astonishing precision.

In 1935, McCombs became one of the first students to enroll in classes under Bacone's new art department. McCombs first took the Indian designs class taught by

Ataloa McLendon, followed by the American Indian painting class taught by Acee Blue Eagle (PMA Solomon McCombs).[24] In Blue Eagle's class, McCombs learned how to paint in 'traditional' flat-style, what would later come to be known as 'Bacone' flat-style. Blue Eagle often stressed the importance of learning about Native culture and documenting it through painting, a task that was most easily accomplished through the use of flat-style (Denton July 13, 1978). While Blue Eagle encouraged his students to experiment with their style, the majority of those artists emerging from Bacone under his tutelage, including McCombs, continued to use flat-style as their preferred painting method primarily because of the belief that they were preserving their cultural heritage through the use of this particular style. McCombs honed his skills as an artist and perfected his knowledge of Bacone flat-style in these art classes. Upon graduation from Bacone's high school in 1937, McCombs' class selected one of his paintings, entitled *Buffalo Hunt*, as their class gift to the school, a demonstration of his skills as an artist at this young age (Wadley 1966).

After graduation from high school, McCombs stayed on at Bacone for a brief period, enrolling in one semester of junior college. However, McCombs was tempted to try his luck at being a full time artist (Denton July 13, 1978; Etter 1966). In later interviews, McCombs recounted how, at Bacone, Blue Eagle pushed him to 'go all the way' as an artist and dedicate himself to his art (Fox March 1, 1974). Survival as an artist during the late 1930s, when McCombs was starting out, was difficult due to the economic repercussions of the Great Depression. Little is known of McCombs during

[24] Ataloa McLendon (Chickasaw) was an integral part of Bacone's art department, according to Ruthe Blalock Jones (1995), raising funds for the new department and the building in which it would be housed.

this time period, although McCombs later stated that he sold art for whatever he could get, sometimes selling pieces for as little as fifty cents (Denton July 13, 1978).

During the difficult years of the Depression, McCombs participated in a few art exhibitions, such as the Oklahoma Indian Painting exhibition in Tulsa, and also supported himself through commissioned work for agencies such as the Works Progress Administration (NAA Solomon McCombs/1). In June of 1941, McCombs submitted a sketch to Edward Rowan of the Section of Fine Arts for a proposed mural at the post office in Marietta, Oklahoma.[25] According to a note of receipt, the rough sketch portrayed a group of Native Americans processing corn (NAA Solomon McCombs/1). After several months, McCombs received a reply from Rowan commenting on his sketch. Rowan wrote:

> The cartoon has been reviewed by the members of the section and with a few suggestions for minor changes is approved. The decorative masses of plants crossing the front of the canvas are in our estimation contradictory to the somewhat realistic approach of the corn in the baskets and other elements introduced into the composition. Our suggestion would be for you to remove these artificial plants and to introduce in their place some local plants with which you are familiar and which would take their place in the scene. It might be well for you to check the scale of the children in relation to the adults and also the thin arms of the woman at the table.

McCombs acknowledged the note and began working on the mural.

In 1942, McCombs completed the mural *Chickasaw Family Making Sofkey* (Figure 23). This work demonstrates the large role that both the Bacone Art Department

[25] The Section of Fine Arts was a division of the Federal Works Agency (a.k.a. Works Progress Administration), which oversaw the placement and creation of fine art in federal public buildings.



Figure 23: ***Chickasaw Indian Family Making Sofkey,*** **1942**
By Solomon McCombs
Acrylic?
Marietta Post Office in Marietta, Oklahoma

and Blue Eagle had on determining McCombs' style. Much like the murals that Blue Eagle painted during the 1940s, McCombs painted this mural using the flat-style technique he developed while at Bacone. McCombs follows the strict color block rules of the flat-style, laying down outlines of figures in pencil and filing in the shaped blocks with single tones. He then lays a dark outline color over the edges of the color blocks to further delineate them from the background. This color blocking technique, typical of flat-style makes the objects represented appear to hang in space above the background.

In addition to the use of flat-style to portray his subject, McCombs also displays borrowed stylistic devices from the Southwest. This borrowing could be attributed to influences from Bacone's Pan-Indian student body or be more directly attributed to the influence of Blue Eagle's own style and painterly devices. Blue Eagle often framed his own compositions with stylistic devices borrowed from the Southwest (see Figure 13, *Women Making Pishafa* on page 59). The most prominent example of Blue Eagle's influence on McCombs is the use of the Southwestern sun masks placed in the corners of

the mural and used to frame the central subject matter (for an example of Blue Eagle's use of the sun-mask see Figure14, *Antelope Hunt* on page 62). Unlike Blue Eagle, McCombs did not travel to the Southwest for artistic inspiration. Thus stylistic devices like the sun masks would not have immerged in McCombs' works without the influence of Blue Eagle or Bacone.

Career Oriented

During the early 1940s, it appears that McCombs' career as an artist took a different turn. Instead of painting full time and selling his works for limited amounts of money, McCombs decided to use his artistic talents in the work force. Despite his desire to work, McCombs had much difficulty in securing a job due to the ongoing economic depression and the US's entrance into World War II. Between 1942 and 1946, McCombs wrote to and received dozens of letters from various vocational counselors in Oklahoma seeking employment opportunities. Ultimately, McCombs was able to secure several short-term government contracts under the Bureau of Reclamation as an engineering draftsman. However, none of the jobs lasted very long, causing McCombs to move frequently and search constantly for other placements. At various points during the early 1940s, he was stationed at Clovis Air Base in New Mexico, and Tinker Air Base in Oklahoma City and eventually wound up in McCook, Nebraska by 1947. While his work for the Bureau of Reclamation required him to change posts often, the job allowed some stability in rank and pay and even allowed McCombs to negotiate increases in his salary over several years (NAA Solomon McCombs/1).

While McCombs chose to enter the workforce primarily as a way to stabilize his income (and feed himself), he did not altogether stop painting. Instead, painting became

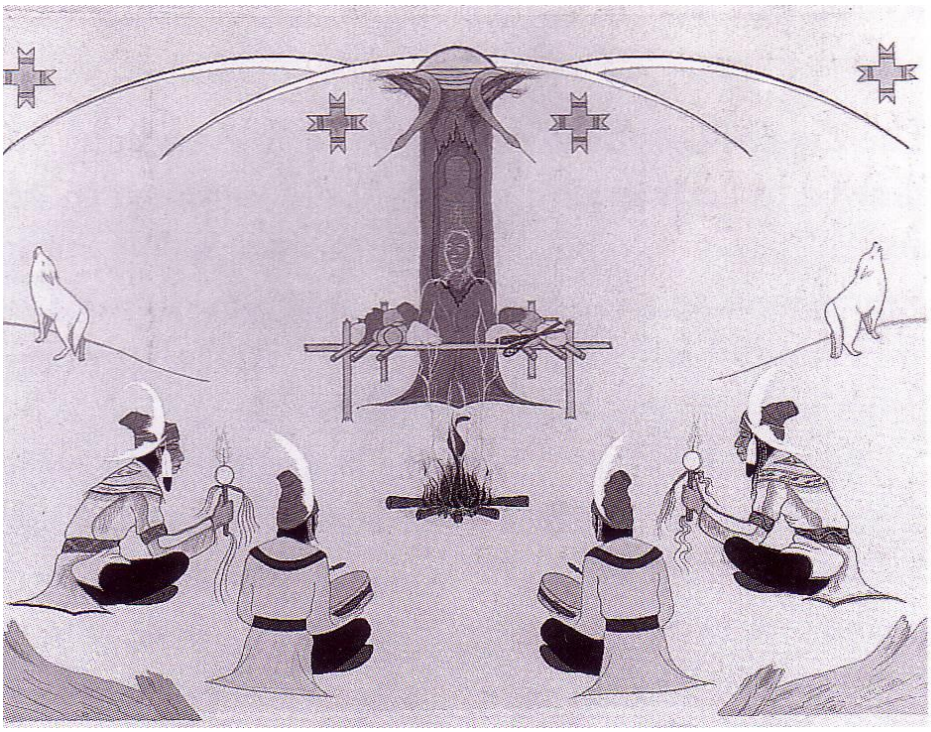


Figure 24: *Creek Indian Burial*, ca. 1948
Solomon McCombs
Watercolor on Board
Philbrook Museum of Art, 1948.17

a hobby and was accomplished in McCombs' spare time. Even though he did not devote his full attention to painting, McCombs was still able to participate in several painting competitions including the first Indian Annual held at the Philbrook Museum of Art in Tulsa in 1946 (Snodgrass-King 1995). McCombs did not win in the Woodlands category (Blue Eagle won this division the first year), but he was encouraged to enter again the following years.

In the 1948 annual, McCombs submitted his painting *Creek Indian Burial* (Figure 24) via mail from Nebraska and won the Woodlands Division second purchase prize of $100 (Wyckoff 1996). *Creek Indian Burial* demonstrates McCombs' mastery of flat-style and attention to draftsmanship. As before, McCombs draws on the traditional flat-style he learned at Bacone. However, McCombs develops his method further by

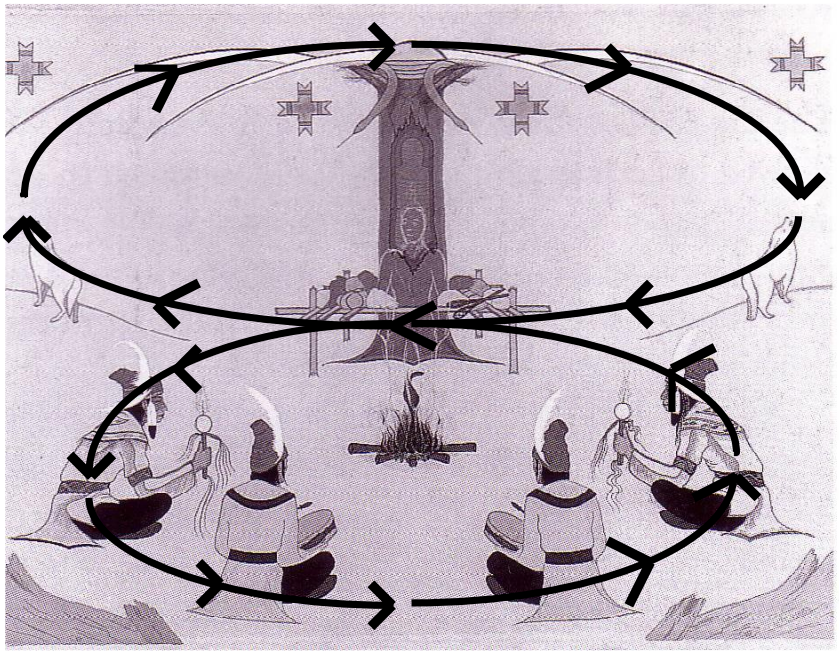


Figure 25: Schematic of Compositional Flow of *Creek Indian Burial*

adjusting for the lack of depth found in flat-style by suggesting a receding plain through the reduction of size in the figures. Similar to his mentor and cousin Blue Eagle, McCombs suggests depth by making figures in the lower half of the painting larger and figures in the upper half smaller.

Besides showing McCombs' proficiency in flat-style, *Creek Indian Burial* also demonstrates his skills as a draftsman. The composition flows in a basic figure-eight pattern. Starting at the top-center, the curving lines, representing heaven, extend downward and outwards, leading the eye towards the edge of the page where one of a pair of howling wolves is set. The curve of the wolf's back and the ground lines drawn beneath them carry the eye towards the center funeral pyre. Once at the pyre, the eyes are drawn across the pyre by a horizontal piece and then again drawn downwards at a diagonal angle towards the edge of the circle of mourning men. The eye flows around the circle of men and once again returns to the pyre. The eyes complete the circuit by

flowing across the pyre towards the second wolf and towards heaven again, completing the figure-eight pattern of the composition. The central focus of the composition is also reinforced by the framing devices of the curvilinear forms representing heaven and the wooden logs located at the bottom corners of the painting, thus emphasizing McCombs' superior abilities as a draftsman.

Learning How to be a Salesman

After being recognized for his work *Creek Indian Burial,* McCombs became increasingly interested in selling his works and sought a venue in Oklahoma in which to sell them. The award from the competition brought McCombs and his work added notoriety and desirability within the field of Indian painting, potentially increasing his ability to sell an increased numbers of art works and increase the overall profit from sales of his art. In May of 1948, McCombs contacted the Philbrook to inquire about whether they could sell some of his art works. The Philbrook declined to sell his work, citing a conflict of interest with their mission as a museum, which stated that they were to collect the art of American Indians and support these artists and art forms by providing educational exhibits and forums on American Indian art. Instead, they referred him to a nearby Tulsa art dealer, Wolf Robe Hunt.

Wolf Robe Hunt (Acoma), an artist in his own right, was the owner and manager of Arrowood Trading Post, a small gallery in Catoosa, Oklahoma that specialized in American Indian art.[26] Hunt's gallery often provided emerging Native American artists

[26] Wolf Robe Hunt (1905-1977)(a.k.a. Wayne Wolf Robe Hunt) had many artistic talents including painting, illustration and silverwork.

a place to sell their art and served as a gathering place for local artists and their fans.[27] Hearing from the Philbrook that McCombs was interested in selling his art, Hunt contacted McCombs in Nebraska. In a letter dated May 18, 1948, Hunt offered to sell McCombs' paintings at the trading post for a 'modest' commission fee of 25% to cover the costs of display, shipping, insurance, matting and framing.[28] After several communications between the two men, McCombs proceeded to make plans with Hunt to send pieces for him to sell at the Intertribal Ceremonial Art Competition in Gallup, New Mexico later that year (NAA Solomon McCombs/1).

Selling art through a dealer brought a flood of demand for McCombs' work. On some occasions, McCombs full-time job interfered with his ability to produce paintings for the market or for competitions (NAA Solomon McCombs/1). It seems that McCombs knew, however, that it would be difficult to support himself on his paintings alone and thus continued to work as a draftsman for the Bureau of Reclamation. Working for the Bureau did allow some flexibility in post, and in 1949 McCombs moved back to Tulsa, making it easier for him to have contact with his dealer. Despite the difficulties in finding time to produce art, McCombs entered more competitions and won several awards including placements at the 1949 and 1950 Philbrook Indian Annual and the Intertribal Ceremonial Art Competition in Gallup and honorable mentions at the Joslyn Museum of Art's competition.

[27] Among some of the artists to frequent Hunt's establishment were, Acee Blue Eagle, Archie Blackowl, and Joan Hill.
[28] In comparison, a gallery in Wisconsin had asked for a 33.3% commission fee.

Making American Indian Art Accessible

In 1950, after many years of hard work for the Bureau of Reclamation, McCombs received notice that a position was becoming available with the General Services Administration. The new job came with an increase in pay and responsibilities, however also came with a mandatory move to Washington DC. It is unclear what McCombs' job was under the General Services Administration although he reportedly continued to combine his artistic ability with his work through design and illustration (NAA Solomon McCombs/1).

McCombs also continued to pursue his art in his free time. Upon his arrival in D.C., McCombs was quick to submit his works to the Corcoran Gallery, which was holding an exhibition on new local talent. Much as he had done while living in Nebraska, McCombs continued to create works of art and ship them to his dealer, Wolf Robe Hunt. He also continued to send his work to various art competitions, such as those at the Denver Museum of Art and the Joslyn Museum of Art (NAA Solomon McCombs/1).

While McCombs' work was well received at the new venues, as evidenced by numerous awards and honorable mentions, he found resistance to his works at competitions where he was already a well-established name, such as at the Indian Annuals at the Philbrook museum of Art. After five successful years, the Indian Annuals were undergoing a change. Prior to 1951, the Annuals had been primarily judged according to the canons of flat-style as seen in New Mexico with the Santa Fe School and in Oklahoma with the Bacone School. At the Philbrook, flat-style was defined as works that had no shading and used a color-blocking technique where each shade was separated by a line. Works could not have backgrounds nor atmospheric affects and works that did

incorporate these features were rejected from competition (Joan Hill 2004). Philbrook director, Bernard Frazier, began to question the myopic attention to flat-style in aversion to all other emergent styles. Frazier felt that flat-style represented a 'primitive art form,' which was ultimately receiving more attention from the art community and being used by the majority of artists because of the rules of the competition. By disposing with those categories dictating that flat-style be used, Frazier felt that more artists would feel free to move beyond the confines of 'primitive' flat-style towards other modern styles. In 1996, Lydia Wyckoff reported Frazier's comments on the fifth Indian Annual. He stated:

> The position of the Indian artist in this contemporary world is unique; holding shares, as he does, in both the modern world and the ancient way off his ancestors… Philbrook Art Center signifies its belief that their native expression now deserves this close attention of us all. We do not seek to unduly extend a primitive art form into the modern world, but rather the privilege of assisting toward integrity and dignity during the difficult transition period. In this manner we honor the art of a noble people and salute the contribution they will surely make to the broader stream of American Painting (Wyckoff 1996:41).

In 1951, Robert Church took over as director of the Philbrook and posed a new direction for the Indian Annuals based on Frazier's vision. In addition to the four categories based on the culture area the artist hailed from (Woodlands, Plains, Southwest, and Alaska/Canada), a fifth category would allow for artists to submit paintings of an experimental style.

While some of the artists participating in the Annuals were pleased by this change, the suggested movement away from the 'traditional' flat-style upset others. In 1953, a flurry of letters went back and forth between McCombs and Blue Eagle discussing the upcoming Indian Annual at the Philbrook. The previous year, McCombs

and several other well established Indian artists had submitted various works completed in flat-style to the Annual but were denied awards or recognition from the judges. In a letter dated May 2, 1953, Blue Eagle commented that perhaps the previous panel of judges had been unknowledgeable about the traditions behind flat-style Indian painting. Both Blue Eagle and McCombs were upset by the judges choices because the pieces did not follow the previously established guidelines. McCombs in particular felt affronted by this movement away from flat-style for several reasons. First, he felt that this particular style was a part of American Indian artistic heritage, representing a link to the past. Second, McCombs also felt that flat-style was the best style to document American Indian culture that was under assault from assimilation practices. While both Blue Eagle and McCombs were unhappy with the Philbrook's decision to move away from flat-style, Blue Eagle encouraged McCombs to continue submitting works to the competitions, sending a variety of paintings to increase his chance for an award and his potential consumer market (NAA Solomon McCombs/1). Per Blue Eagle's suggestion, McCombs continued to submit works to the competition, however, he completed them in his characteristic flat-style, resisting change. Because McCombs knew that the focus of the Annuals were moving away from flat-style, he increasingly relied upon other venues, such as exhibits at the Collectors Corner in D.C., to promote his art (PMA Solomon McCombs).

Local venues, like the Corcoran Gallery and the Collectors Corner, exposed McCombs' work to new audiences and opened up new and interesting opportunities for him. McCombs began to sell his work faster and found it increasingly difficult to find the time to paint as many pieces as were requested by patrons, dealers and art

competitions. During the mid-1950s, McCombs learned how to silkscreen in order to make it easier for him to meet the demands of those requesting paintings (NAA Solomon McCombs/1). By the late 1950s, he had successfully mastered the process of silkscreening and was selling these pieces to supplement his income and satisfy his patrons.

In 1954, McCombs was approached by the State Department and asked to serve as an 'Art Ambassador,' a position which led to him later securing a full time job in the State Department. As an art ambassador, McCombs traveled abroad through parts of Africa, Asia and the Middle East representing not only the United Sates, but also serving as a representative of Native American culture and art. In the fall of 1954, McCombs left D.C. and flew to Syria for his first in a series of lectures on Native art and culture. Over the next four months, McCombs "traveled more than 35,000 miles and visited 10 countries," making approximately thirty lectures and participating in several radio broadcasts (NAA Blue Eagle/Box 29). At each lecture, using 20 of his own works as examples, McCombs discussed flat-style painting, the incorporation of Native symbolism and history in painting, and displayed several items of traditional clothing. The various encounters with lecture patrons had a profound affect upon McCombs, as evidenced in a later report to the State Department. McCombs wrote:

> Like other travelers before me, I found that the ideas of people living in other countries about America are based on the American movies they have seen… They take the pictures seriously whether the picture be based on an authentic story of whether it be one of the "shoot'em up" westerns… I learned that most of the people had developed a strong and sympathetic feeling toward American Indians, probably based on the universal feeling of pity for the under dog fighting an overwhelming force. They seem to

> have a feeling of kinship, perhaps from a sense of foreboding that a similar fate may be in store for them.

The similarities between the repression of minority groups in Africa and the Middle East and the oppression of American Indian cultures in the United States struck a chord with McCombs. He continued:

> Many of the artists were very interested in the technique that I employ and in the materials I use. Many inquired as to whether there are any books, of a reference nature, written about Indian art. In many of the countries there seems to be a movement to revive their own native art which parallels the movement in this country to revive American Indian arts and crafts.

From this statement, it is evident that McCombs' felt an affinity with the local artisans and their struggles to reclaim an artistic heritage. McCombs had helped to popularize and revive the 'traditional' flat-style art found among American Indian painters during the first half of the 20th century. Similarly, he also used his art to record and portray elements of native culture that he feared were being lost. The artists that McCombs met while serving as an art ambassador were also challenged with restoring older art forms to popularity. McCombs' effort to revitalize American Indian painting had been, it seemed, a double-edged sword. While flat-style painting had become more and more popular and the number of Native painters had increased dramatically over the last few decades, there had also been a movement away from 'traditional' flat-style towards newer experimental styles, as evidenced by the proceedings at the Philbrook Annuals. Thus, McCombs felt compelled to continue promoting flat-style as the style that was most effective at preserving Native traditions and culture, an idea which was primarily based on Blue Eagle's teachings.

In 1957, despite changes in the competition rules, McCombs won a purchase



Figure 26: *Creek Indian Social Ball Game*, ca. 1957
By Solomon McCombs
Watercolor
Philbrook Museum of Art, 1957.7

award from the Philbrook for his piece entitled *Creek Indian Social Ball Game* (Figure 26). This piece once again demonstrates McCombs' signature use of flat-style as well as his attention to detail. McCombs uses flat-style to document how stickball is played in a Creek community. From this composition, one can derive that men are allowed to use stickball rackets, while women are only allowed to use their hands. Similarly, McCombs also demonstrates what types of clothing styles and bodily adornment could be seen at a stickball match. However, this piece differs slightly from some of McCombs' earlier works due to the inclusion of a ground plane. Here, the men and women do not simply hang in space above an imaginary ground. Instead, their feet are placed on a sandy colored ground with tufts of grass. McCombs again decreases the size of some of the

figures in order to suggest which men and women are further away from the viewer. Unlike some of McCombs' previous pieces, he does not include any framing devices in the corners of the piece, nor does he include any details connoting sky. Instead the upper half of the composition is left blank, with only the stickball pole rising above the figures. While his attention to detail has increased dramatically in this piece compared to his earlier works, McCombs' use of space has changed dramatically. McCombs continues to use his skills as a draftsman to draw the eye across the horizontal plane, up along the pole with the upraised arms of the central figures, down again on the opposite side and across. It seems that McCombs felt comfortable at this point in not using the painterly devices that he previously inserted into his painting, leaving the piece untainted by non-Creek imagery.

The Passing of an Icon

Following his success at the 1957 Indian Annual, McCombs' art and style began to change. Several events during the late 1950s and early 1960s can be linked to this shift. First, in 1959, McCombs's long time mentor, friend and cousin, Acee Blue Eagle, passed away. Blue Eagle had obviously had a great impact upon McCombs' art and style and the death of such an icon had a large impact on the Indian art community.

Second, McCombs met Margarita Sauer, an artists living in the D.C. area. The daughter of a US diplomat and mother of Colombian origin, Sauer was a painter as well but preferred to paint abstracts in oil. Sauer was formally trained at the Corcoran Art School and also studied in Paris (PMA Solomon McCombs). In 1961 McCombs and Sauer were married at Bacone Baptist Church in Oklahoma. McCombs' mother and two

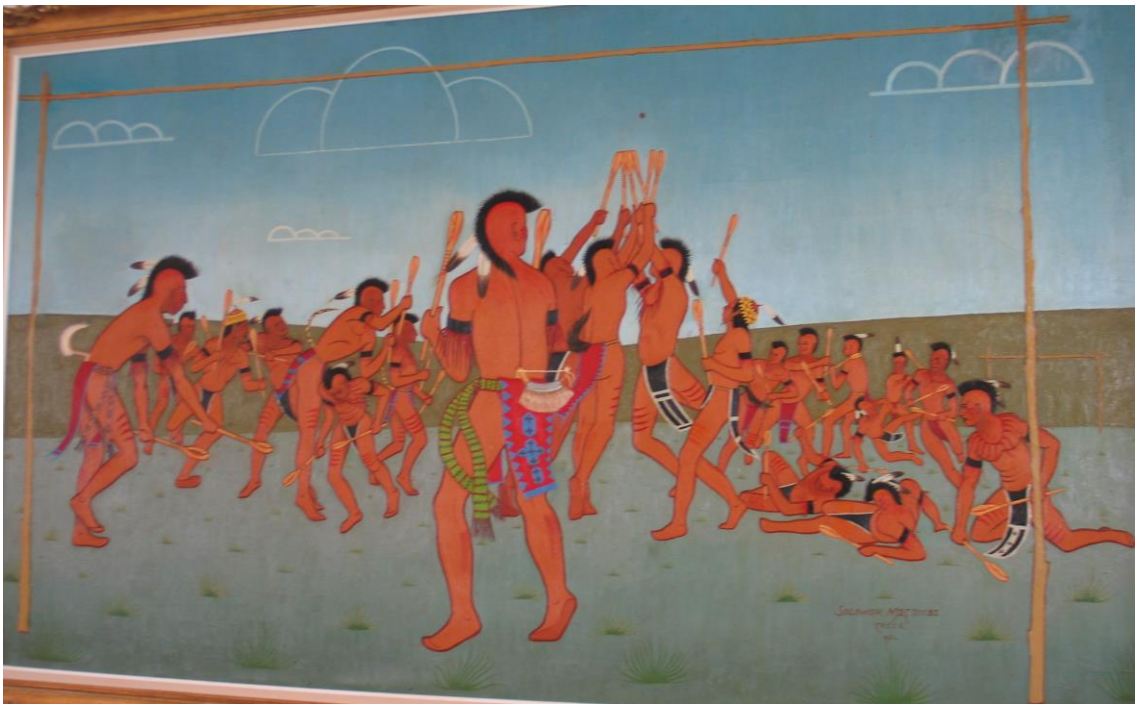


Figure 27: *Stickball Game*, 1962
By Solomon McCombs
Oil on Canvas
Creek Council House Museum, 1982.105.01

of his brothers served as witnesses to the occasion (Revell Nov. 15, 1961). After the wedding, McCombs and Sauer returned to D.C. to work and continue to produce their art.

In 1962, McCombs created *Stickball Game* (Figure 27), a large oil painting. This piece reflects the change in McCombs' style after his marriage to Margarita and after Blue Eagle's death. While McCombs continues to use the same flat-style devices of color blocking and outlining his figures, he inserts background coloration suggesting a receding plane and horizon line. Like his earlier work *Creek Indian Social Ball Game* (Figure 26), McCombs places tufts of grass throughout the foreground. However, in contrast to that earlier work, he fills in between the tufts with additional color to suggest complete coverage of the ground. As the grass recedes into the background it runs into a brown area, a hillside landscape denoting the horizon. McCombs also colors in the sky,

changing the depth of pigmentation from horizon to heaven, simulating color changes seen in nature. McCombs reinforces his new attempt at perspective by once again making the figures in the forefront larger in scale than those that are in the background. The framing devices McCombs relied upon during the 30s and 40s make a return appearance in this work as demonstrated by the presence of the southwestern style clouds and the outlining element of the stickball goal. It is unclear whether McCombs' attempt at perspective through the inclusion of background color is the result of experimentations with his style or a result of the medium he chose to use for this particular piece. What is clear, however, is that McCombs' break away from the elements of flat-style was for his own personal reasons rather than due to pressures from the market. McCombs was financially secure and had been resistant to change his style in the past when the Philbrook Annuals had adjusted their focus away from flat-style. Therefore, McCombs' movement away from flat-style and increasing experimentation was most likely due to personal factors, such as his involvement with his artist wife, Margarita.

By 1964, McCombs had expanded his efforts to experiment with perspective and created *Giants in Woodland* (Figure 28). This piece demonstrates McCombs' mastery at combining flat-style techniques with elements of landscape and accidental light to recreate a powerful Creek legend.[29] In this piece, McCombs once again completely covers the surface of the paper with paint. McCombs uses a dark brown color to indicate the receding horizon of the forest that lies beyond sight and a medium purple tone to indicate the night sky. In the foreground, McCombs uses a medium green color to denote

[29] Accidental light is a term used in painting which refers to any source of light which is not sunlight, i.e. moonlight or candlelight.



Figure 28: *Giants in Woodland*, 1964
By Solomon McCombs
Tempera on Board
Five Civilized Tribes Museum 1966.03.01

the forest floor with darker green lines falling across it to denote shadows from the trees. For the first time in his painting career, McCombs composes a scene that contains light emanating from a singular, unseen source creating shadow and depth. The colors used by McCombs coupled with the shadows of the forest create an ominous setting for the legend, which depicts a man being attacked by two large figures. McCombs paints these large figures using a translucent wash, suggesting that they are of an ethereal, spiritual world rather than of earth. Through his experimentation with perspective and light, McCombs was able to create a painting that embodied the emotion of the legend, rather than simply recording it, a feat which he most likely accomplished due to the influences of his wife.

Career Recognition

In 1965, McCombs was honored with the Waite Phillips Special Indian Artist Award from the Philbrook Museum of Art for his accomplishments as an artist. McCombs had entered every Indian Annual competition held at the Philbrook since its inception in 1946. McCombs also received honors from several other museums and American Indian organizations in the late 1960s, including receiving the shield award from the American Indian and Eskimo Cultural Foundation for his "outstanding contribution to American Indian art" (PMA Solomon McCombs).

After 30 years of government service, numerous awards and recognitions and countless hours of work promoting various American Indian causes, McCombs retired to Tulsa in 1974. Retrospective exhibits were held to say farewell to McCombs in D.C. and to welcome him back in Tulsa. At home in Oklahoma, McCombs was able to devote his full attention once again to his art. However, years of working in public service jobs had left McCombs with a desire to serve his own tribe. Thus, in the late 1970s, McCombs decided to enter tribal politics and eventually was elected as vice-chief of the Creek Tribe in 1980.

While McCombs was working on his new political career he also produced a variety of new art pieces for local Indian museums like the Creek Council House in Okmulgee, Oklahoma and the Five Civilized Tribes Museum in Muskogee, Oklahoma. McCombs' later works demonstrate a range of subject matter and reflect upon the changes seen in his style from the 1930s to the 1960s. In 1978 McCombs again returned to the Kiowa style of portraying a single dancer, a subject matter that was popular in the Oklahoma Indian Art market. While similar to his earliest work *Kiowa Eagle Dancer #3*

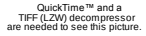


Figure 29: *Eagle Dancer*, 1978,
By Solomon McCombs
Tempera
Sam Noble Oklahoma Museum of Natural History, 0130

(Figure 21), his 1978 painting *Eagle Dancer* (Figure 29) demonstrated McCombs' perfection of flat-style and his ability to capture the movement of the dancer.

McCombs also paid his respect to the late Blue Eagle by painting *Homage to Blue Eagle* (Figure 30) in 1978. In this piece, McCombs copies imagery commonly seen in Blue Eagle's works. He depicts a man on horseback hunting buffalo, a theme which occurs in several of Blue Eagle's more famous works. *Homage to Blue Eagle* also pays strict attention to Blue Eagle's use of Southwestern stylistic devices including swallowtail birds and curve-linear clouds. McCombs also mimics Blue Eagle's draftsmanship by framing the central figures with these stylistic devices.

Despite these reversions to earlier forms of flat-style, McCombs also continued to paint works that displayed landscape and hints at perspective. One of McCombs' last



Figure 30: *Homage to Blue Eagle*, 1978
By Solomon McCombs
Casein
Creek Council House Museum, T2001.502.18

pieces prior to his death was *Old Creek Indian Medicine Practice* (Figure 31), portraying two medicine men healing a woman. In this piece, McCombs does not cover the entire surface with paint, unlike the paintings he created during the 1960s. Instead, he reverts back to his original form of flat-style, but also carries along some of the landscape features that he used in his previous works. McCombs scatters a couple of trees, some scrub grass and a few bushes across the field. He also inserts into the background some angular geometric lines representing a mountain range in the distance. Unlike his works completed in the 1960s, the landscape elements seem slightly out of proportion with the scene. Two children stand in the background, collecting plants for the medicine ceremony. Their size seems overwhelming in comparison to the mountain range behind them. In this piece, McCombs' use of landscape seems more decorative in comparison to the landscape seen in *Giants in Woodland* (Figure 28), where the landscape enhanced the



Figure 31: *Old Creek Medicine Practices*, 1980
By Solomon McCombs
Tempera
Creek Council House Museum, T2001.502.17

story by creating shadow. McCombs' once again returns to his primary focus of documenting Native customs and beliefs.

Going His Own Way

Over the 40 plus years that McCombs painted, he never strayed very far from his original characteristic painting style, that of Bacone flat-style. While works produced in the 1960s did demonstrate experimentation with landscape and perspective, he continued to portray figures using flat-style. Prior to his death from a stroke during surgery for cancer in 1980 (PMA Solomon McCombs), McCombs was interviewed by a local Oklahoma newspaper and asked about his decision to paint in this style (Denton July 13, 1978). As Jon Denton (July 13, 1978) reported:

> There are many who sneer at old style Indian art, admits Solomon McCombs. Its flat perspective and muted colors seem to lack the élan of younger Indian painters. Besides, they tell him, the modern styles sell better. '"I tell them they can go their way, I will go mine. I'll make money,"… History runs in cycles, he allows. At the moment, the cycle is swinging away from Indian traditional. "I would almost bet ten, maybe 15 years from now, all these young people will be painting traditional," says McCombs. "I think people will get tired of buying this other work." Sometimes called the dean of traditional Indian art, McCombs will win either way. If no one paints or buys any more traditional art, his work will be more valuable. But if the style sweeps back into popularity, he will be pronounced a forerunner.

McCombs was never overly concerned about the popularity of his paintings or his style. Because McCombs was able to support himself working for the government, he rarely changed his style or imagery according to the demands of the market. Instead McCombs' variation is style and experimentation seemed to be motivated by personal factors rather than by the market. This reluctance to change with the field hurt him in competitions where current trends were reflected, like the Indian Annual at Philbrook. However, McCombs found that while judges for the Philbrook's competition did not appreciate his attachment to traditional style, other venues found his works to be of great interest to them because of their superb quality and their reflection of American Indian culture.

Ultimately, it seems McCombs' had great success as an artist despite his unwillingness to compromise his style. At the very beginning of his career as an artist McCombs sold works for as little as fifty cents. But by the time he reached the pinnacle of his career, his works were selling for thousands of dollars. McCombs' ability to sell his art for these prices is not only a reflection of his talent as an artist. The dramatic increase in the prices of McCombs art also demonstrated his abilities to consistently

market his art even during times of great economic hardship and during times when his style was not popular. Other artists working in flat-style, such as Fred Beaver, found it difficult to resist the forces of the market and ultimately wound up surrendering to demand in order to survive. In the next chapter, I will discuss the life of Fred Beaver and his responses to changes within the market for American Indian art.

Chapter 4:

Fred Beaver



Figure 32: Fred Beaver, ca. 1960
Courtesy of the Philbrook Museum of Art

Contemporaneous to Solomon McCombs and Acee Blue Eagle was Muscogee/Creek painter Fred Beaver. Unlike McCombs and Blue Eagle, Beaver was primarily a self-taught artist, having never taken an art class nor enrolled in artist workshops. He also began his artistic career much later in his life in comparison to Blue Eagle and McCombs, after serving in the military during World War II. Like McCombs, however, little information has been published about Fred Beaver and his personal history as an artist. While McCombs left his private documents to the National Anthropological Archives, it seems that the majority of Beaver's records have been lost over time. What remains are a few published newspaper accounts, museum archival records, and several unpublished interviews with the artist by Arthur Silberman, a collector who had a great interest in American Indian art. Therefore, my goal in this

chapter is to assemble what little information there is about Beaver and construct an outline of his life. Through discussing his life and the pursuit of his art, I hope to juxtapose his art and market strategy with those of Blue Eagle and McCombs.

A Muscogee Upbringing

Fred Beaver was born in Eufaula, Oklahoma, on July 2, 1911 to traditional full-blood Creek parents. He grew up on the family's allotment, living in a log cabin on a parcel of farmland. Beaver's father was a farmer and had only attended school through the third grade, relying primarily on the farm's products to provision and support the family (Martindale April 15, 1968). Beaver enjoyed art from an early age, drawing pieces created from his imagination while classmates copied pictures out of books. However, Beaver was not encouraged to pursue his art. At home, his parents paid little attention to Beaver's artistic pursuits. As Beaver later stated in an interview with Arthur Silberman, large full-blooded Creek families like Beaver's often had an extraordinary amount of talent in general. Thus, his parents were only concerned when a child got into mischief (DRC Silberman 129/04). The family only spoke their Native language at home, thus Beaver's first language was Muscogee (PMA Beaver, DRC Silberman 129/04). Beaver did not learn to speak English until his entry into the Eufaula public school system.

Upon entering elementary school, Beaver socialized with many other Creek children from the area. It was in school that Beaver first met his long-time friend and fellow artist Solomon McCombs (Thomas Gilcrease Institute of American History and Art 1981). Both children enjoyed drawing, yet they were discouraged by teachers from being creative. Beaver later stated that, despite creating original drawings from his surroundings, the teachers instead pushed him to be like everyone else and to copy from

text books (DRC Silberman 129/04). Despite this, Beaver continued to draw his own unique creations.

In 1926, when Beaver was entering the 8th grade, he was accepted to Chilocco High School outside Ponca City, Oklahoma. While at Chilocco, Beaver pursued his other interests, football and basketball. Even though Beaver was accepted to Chilocco for four years, he only stayed for one. His time at Chilocco, while short, was crucial to his later development as an artist, because here he first met his future mentor and close friend, Acee Blue Eagle. Beaver did not like the militaristic approach to education at Chilocco and opted to return to public high school in Eufaula (Highwater 1976). By the time Beaver started attending high school at Eufaula, both of his parents had passed away (PMA Beaver, DRC Silberman 129/04). His large family had decreased in size dramatically so that only Beaver and his younger sister were left. Several of Beaver's siblings had passed away during childhood or as young adults. Beaver's father passed away from diabetes in the early 1920s and was followed shortly by Beaver's mother who passed away from pneumonia (DRC Silberman 129/04). Yet despite dwindling family support, Beaver continued his education, ultimately graduating from Eufaula High School in 1931 (PMA Beaver).

After graduating from high school, Beaver bounced around between schools, attending Bacone College, The University of Kansas (a public University open to all students) and finally settling at Haskell Institute in Lawrence, Kansas (a private all-American Indian college). Throughout his education, Beaver never enrolled in any art classes. Instead, Beaver pursued his other interests, athletics and music. He loved football and played for his high school team, Bacone's team and for Haskell. He also

loved singing and participated in both school and church choirs. However, Beaver could not pursue any of these interests because of the economic repercussions of the Great Depression. He knew that supporting himself by pursuing his art forms would be extremely difficult at that time, and as he later reported, he 'did not want to starve' (FCTM Beaver). Beaver decided instead to be practical and thus pursued his degree in business administration (PMA Beaver).

In 1935, Beaver graduated from Haskell and immediately started working for the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA). His fluency in his native language afforded him the opportunity to work as a translator near his hometown in Oklahoma. At home, Beaver pursued all of his various hobbies, including music and drawing. Within Beaver's first year of working for the BIA, he met and married one of Blue Eagle's cousins.[30] Blue Eagle often came over to visit the young couple. In a later interview, Beaver recounted, "One day, he happened to notice that I had some pencil drawings that I'd done and he asked me why I didn't try painting them. Well I told him I don't have the time. And that was that" (Highwater 1976). Instead, Beaver spent the majority of his time pursuing his work for BIA and leaving his art as his hobby.

Love and War

By 1941, Beaver and Blue Eagle's cousin had gone their separate ways. Beaver found a new love interest in Juanita Brown (Cherokee), a potter and artist in her own right (PMA Beaver). Beaver and Brown met just prior to the bombing of Pearl Harbor

[30] The name of Beaver's first wife has not been recorded. In a 1975 interview with Arthur Silberman, Beaver mentioned that her first name was Frances, but neither her last name nor her relationship to Blue Eagle were established.

and the United States' entrance into World War II. Six months after the bombing, Beaver was drafted into the Army Air Corps, and the couple was pulled apart (DRC Silberman 085/06). Once conscripted into the military, Beaver spent his first six months of service going to two different technical schools where he learned how to maintain several different types of aircraft. After transfering to the European theater, Beaver served in North Africa, Sicily, Sardinia, Corsica and Naples, Italy (FCTM Beaver). However, while overseas, Beaver encountered extreme prejudice from his fellow countrymen because of his American Indian heritage. Beaver was extremely discouraged by the ungracious treatment he received (DRC Silberman 129/04). While fighting the war and the prejudices of his fellow soldiers, Beaver found solace in letters from Juanita and in his hobbies, especially his music. Beaver took singing lessons in Italy, taking the equivalent of two years of college credit, and also joined the Air Corps Chorale. Finally, after nearly three years of service, the war ended in 1945 and Beaver was honorably discharged (PMA Beaver).

Becoming an Artist

After his discharge from the Army Air Corps, Beaver immediately returned home, married his sweetheart Juanita, and subsequently returned to his position with the BIA. He also looked up his old friends including Solomon McCombs and Blue Eagle. Blue Eagle once again encouraged Beaver to try painting. Beaver later recalled in an interview with Jamake Highwater:

> He gave me three sketches that he had done and he said: "Paint these and see how you do at it." So I did. With watercolors, y'know. And I showed it to him. "You ought to take it up," he says. "Well," I told him, "I don't know." I'd been thinking about painting landscapes and things like

> that with watercolors… When I came back I used to see these girls in Esquire magazine… the pinup girls, y'know. And I thought about it and said to myself: now I should do an Indian girl like that. So I did several paintings of these pinup Indian girls, and when I heard that the Philbrook Art Center was announcing its first Indian art competition I sent my pinups to them. After all, I didn't have the slightest idea what they meant by Indian painting. The Philbrook had just started that year, 1946, and nobody at that point really knew what it was all about. Anyway, they sent them back [he laughs] and said that that wasn't exactly what they had in mind.
>
> That was my first experience as a painter. And that was my first contribution to the Philbrook show in its first year! [He smiles] By the next year, I knew a lot more about painting and art exhibits. I submitted one little painting on a Seminole subject. Sure enough they accepted it and ended up giving me honorable mention. That encouraged me quite a bit.
>
> So the next year I submitted one Seminole and two Creek paintings, and by golly I got third prize for one of them! Well, as far as I was concerned that made me a painter. After that I managed to win first prize for the next five years! (Highwater 1976).

While Beaver had officially started his career as a painter by entering the Philbrook's competitions, he continued to rely upon his job as a translator for the BIA as his primary source of income.

Like other artists who submitted their works to the Philbrook's Indian Annuals in the mid-1940s, Beaver's works were painted using the flat-style. However, Beaver's paintings were distinctive from other American Indian artists of the time for two reasons. First, they were unique because of their portrayal of Seminole subject matter. Beaver was the first American Indian artist to consistently portray members of the Seminole tribe and place them within their native Florida scenery. There were several reasons why Beaver chose to paint the Seminoles. Beaver was attracted to the bright colors seen in

Seminole patchwork clothing and wanted his works to contain this vibrancy (DRC Silberman 129/04). He also wanted to portray imagery that was relatively unique within the American Indian art market, using subject matters that would stand out in contrast to the works around it. The Seminole Tribe had a similar history and structure to Beaver's own Creek culture. Thus he felt comfortable painting this tribe and its culture.

Second, Beaver included complex backgrounds in his works. Primarily self-taught, Beaver broke from the tradition of outlining every gradation in color with black. Instead, Beaver's style was a conglomerate of the various painting genres he had observed. Beaver's favorite artists were painters such as Norman Rockwell, who placed their figures within a complex background setting (National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum 2005). He often combined landscapes inspired by Euro-American perspective paintings with large areas of flat color, creating a two-dimensional effect common in Oklahoma Flat-style works. Beaver would first create a sketch of what he wanted to portray, making sure that he could get the correct sizing for his figures within the landscape. As a 2005 exhibit panel about the artist noted,

> Beaver's normal routine was to draw rough sketches of subjects that interested him. For very small works, the designs were then drawn directly onto his painting surface. For larger works, the initial drawings were enlarged into full sized cartoons using graph paper. The enlarged images were then traced onto illustration board using light-colored (white and orange) carbon paper. This provided a faint outline for the application of pigment (National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum 2005).

He would then create a painting based on the sketch, adding details at specific areas. Beaver often used his sketches over again but made minor changes to the composition in

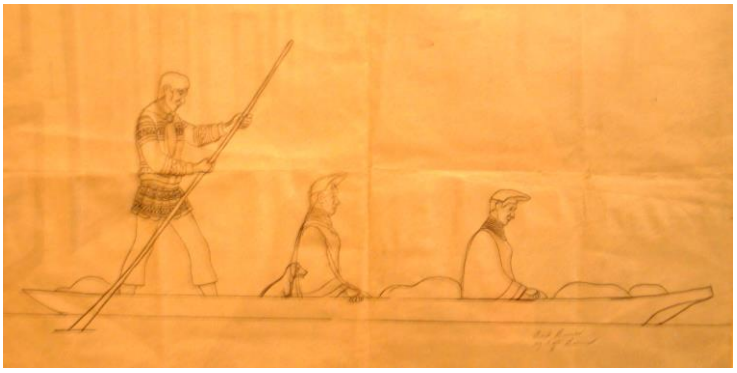


Figure 33: Preliminary Sketch for Seminoles in Canoe Composition (double sided), ca. 1970
By Fred Beaver
Pencil on Paper
National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum, 1997.07.0-87



Figure 34: *Seminoles in Canoe*, 1970
By Fred Beaver
Gouache
National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum, 1996.27.073

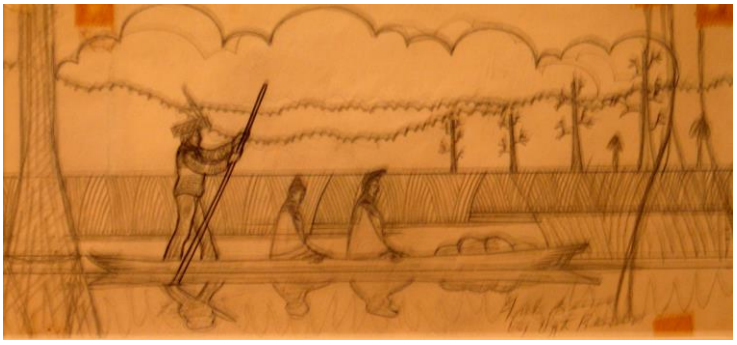


Figure 35: Preliminary Sketch for Seminoles in Canoe Compositions (double sided), no date
By Fred Beaver
Pencil on Paper
Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum, 1996.27.1383



Figure 36: *Returning Home in the Everglades*, 1970
By Fred Beaver
Gouache
Sam Noble Oklahoma Museum of Natural History, 0023

order to make each work an original piece of art (See Figures 33-36 for examples of this).

One of Beaver's earliest works, *Alligator Hunt* (Figure 37), illustrates his combination of Oklahoma Flat-style with landscape and perspective. *Alligator Hunt* depicts three Seminole men hunting alligators in the swamps of southern Florida. One man has caught an alligator on a grassy mound and another man is helping the first secure the animal's mouth. The third figure is approaching in a dugout canoe, coming to help his fellow hunters return to the chickee in the background with their catch. Beaver's lack of artistic training is evident in his combination of styles, his somewhat immature treatment of the alligator's limbs and in his slightly disproportionate figures.

The colors are bright and slightly unrealistic in their tones, with purple hues in the water and trees. Across the bottom of the painting, Beaver paints a roughly outlined

Figure 37: *Alligator Hunt*, 1948
By Fred Beaver
Watercolor on Board
Philbrook Museum of Art, 1948.27.5



sandy-pink color, curving the outer edges slightly upwards in order to frame the scene he has created. The slight curve balances the opposing curves of the grassy hummock in the center of the composition, along with the rising curves of the shrubbery in the background. The composition also has a rhythm created by Beaver's repetition of items in sets of three: three figures, three purple trees in the foreground and three palm trees in the background. In this work, Beaver fills in the entire composition with color variations. Beaver was the first of all the Oklahoma Flat-style artists to completely fill the compositional field with color. While both Blue Eagle and McCombs added background similar to this to their works, they did not begin to do this until the mid 1950s, well after Beaver had established a trend.

Beaver's innovations catapulted him forward into the world of American Indian painting. Beaver's success however was tempered somewhat by his insecurities about his lack of art education. In the early stages of his career, Beaver contacted long-time American Indian painting advocate, Oscar B. Jacobson, at the University of Oklahoma (OU). Beaver was interested in taking some art classes in order to improve his art forms. Beaver had taken an art achievement test, where he drew a piece of art and had it evaluated by an art teacher through the mail. The grade Beaver had received via the courses was high, and thus encouraged he decided that he would like to pursue a more formal art education. However, when he contacted Jacobson at OU, Jacobson told him that he was doing well on his own and should continue to pursue his art without enrolling in formal classes (National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum 2005).

Making a Statement

During the late 1940s and most of the 1950s, Beaver painted during his spare time and entered his art in local Oklahoma competitions. Beaver was obligated to stay close to home due to his job with the BIA and therefore generally did not enter competitions in other states. His work with the BIA increasingly challenged Beaver. First, Beaver was forced to balance his time between his job and his love of art. He and his wife, Juanita, became self-proclaimed 'night owls' and would spend nights working on their art together (DRC Silberman 128/06). While Beaver worked in his home studio painting pieces that were to be sent off to competitions and dealers, his wife would often be near, working late on her own artistic and creative projects (PMA Beaver).

Beaver's second challenge was facing the daily hardships of American Indian life that were rooted in cultural conflict with the dominant Euro-American population. Repeatedly, Beaver found that many of the prejudices about American Indian people, prejudices that he had personally encountered while in the military, were based on a lack of understanding of American Indian culture. Thus, Beaver made it his goal to foster an understanding of American Indian people through the accurate portrayal of Native culture in his art works. As Beaver often told reporters,

> I wanted to change the non-Indian's image of my people, and I wanted to help my own people understand themselves, especially the young. So I sketched and painted the scenes from my own childhood and the rememberings of tales and legends told to me by my parents, and by my grandparents. In this small way I can give all races a part of the true history of the Indian and I can give my own people an authentic record of the traditions and legends of their forefathers (PMA Beaver).

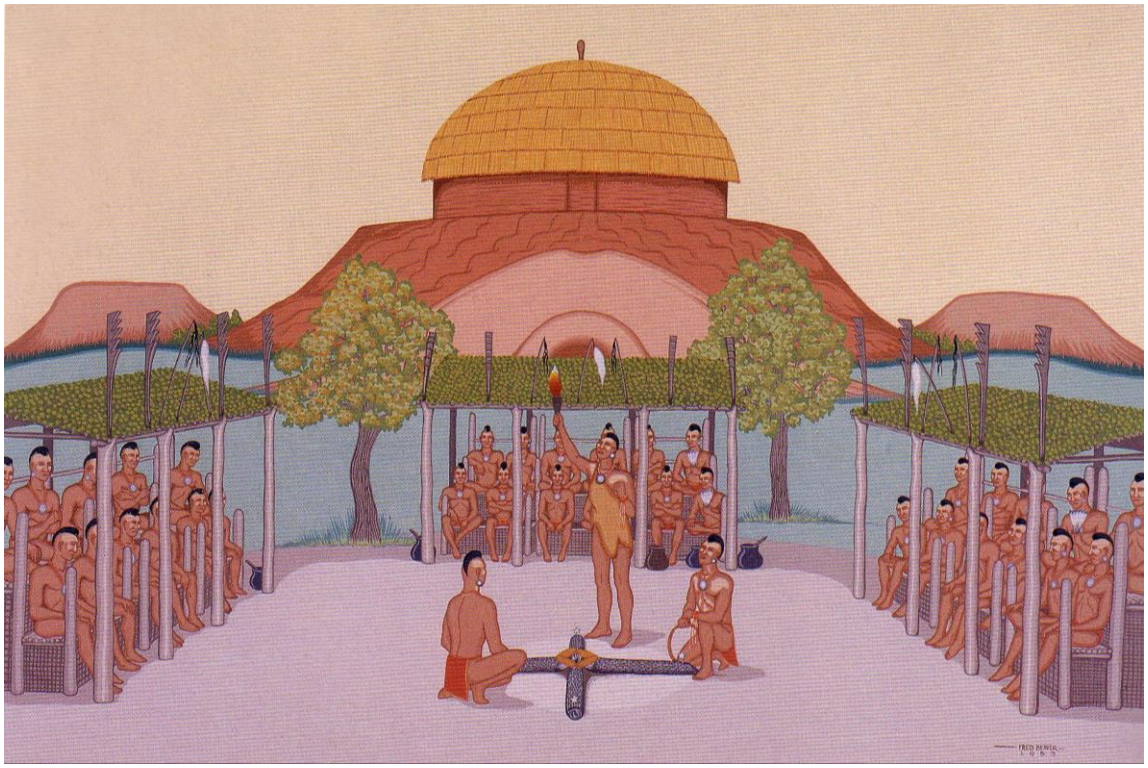


Figure 38: *Creek Baskita Ceremony*, 1953
By Fred Beaver
Watercolor
Philbrook Museum of Art, 1957.8

Thus, Beaver mainly painted the cultures that he knew- his own Creek culture and their close relatives, the Seminoles, which were constructed or reconstructed from memories of his childhood as well as informed imaginings created from the stories told to him by tribal elders.

One of Beaver's more famous works demonstrates his desire to capture and record Creek cultural history and document it for younger generations of Creeks and for non-native cultures. *Creek Baskita* (Green Corn) *Ceremony* portrays the mid-summer ceremony when all the household fires in a village are relit from a central ceremonial fire (Innes 2004). In this work, Beaver has portrayed the ceremony as he has imagined it would have appeared in pre-contact Creek society by including temple mounds in the background. Beaver captures the beginning of the ceremony when the central fire is

being lit from the sacred flame. This ceremony is a time of thanksgiving and marks the time of year when the first fruits are eaten and the upcoming harvests are celebrated. Three arbors are placed around the central ceremonial fire, aligned along three of the four cardinal directions. A fourth arbor would be included in the ceremony, from which Beaver has framed the painting's view. The dancing area is enclosed by these four arbors. Under each of the arbors in view, men from the village are gathered, waiting for the ceremony to begin. Beaver's figures appear less stiff and more fluid that those in his earlier work *Alligator Hunt* (Figure 37), demonstrating his increasing skill as an artist. Similarly, Beaver has toned down the bold colors used in his Seminole works, using a more natural color palette to design the scene. He carefully balances the composition by repeating elements in the background, laying out three temple mounds to mirror the three brush arbors and two trees flanking either side of the middle arbor and middle temple mound. This symmetry leads the viewer's eyes around the ceremony, focusing on the central purpose of relighting the ceremonial fire.

Beaver painted images like *Creek Baskita Ceremony* not only to preserve his own cultural heritage, but also because very few other American Indian artists were painting either the Creek or Seminole cultures at that time. Aside from Solomon McCombs (along with a few scattered works by Acee Blue Eagle), most other American Indian artists were primarily painting images of Plains Indians, because as Acee Blue Eagle discovered, these images were more popular in the market. However, this Plains imagery was popularized because of images seen in Hollywood Western movies. Beaver used his Creek and Seminole imagery to point out that not all Native peoples, including those living in Oklahoma, were culturally alike. His attention to Seminole subject matter

highlighted the cultural differences between Eastern Tribes and Plains Tribes by portraying bright patchwork clothing instead of buckskins, thatched chickees rather than teepees, and hunting of alligators instead of buffalo. While Beaver did not always portray all of the details completely accurately, as seen in the presence of Mohawk hairstyles which were unknown in Creek culture, his attention to the cultural diversity of American Indian people put Beaver and his art well ahead of his time.

While Beaver's use of unique subjects brought him attention within the American Indian art world (especially in competitions), he sometimes found that his works did not sell as rapidly as other artists who were portraying Plains imagery. Beaver later recounted that Blue Eagle encouraged him to branch out from his Creek and Seminole subjects. Blue Eagle told Beaver to do more Plains images because they sold better and 'everybody else was doing them.' However, Beaver declined by pointing out that that was exactly why he did not want to portray Plains imagery (DRC Silberman 129/04). Beaver's dedication to portraying Seminole subject matter often led others to believe that he was of Seminole decent rather than Creek (PMA Beaver). However, despite this confusion, Beaver continued on his own path, creating his distinctive paintings.

A New Career

In 1960, after over twenty years of service to the BIA, Beaver decided to retire from his position as a translator and pursue his art full time. Initially, Beaver encountered some economic difficulties because of the loss of a steady the income from his job. However, he kept at his art and after several years managed to support himself and his wife solely from his art sales. Beaver created approximately 300 to 400 pieces of art per year, selling them at every art competition and market venue he could find (PMA

Beaver). Before Beaver quit his job, he only found the time to go to local art events and competitions. Now, however, Beaver was free to travel to many events around the United States (PMA Beaver). Beaver did confine himself simply to those competitions marked only for American Indian artists, but also entered broader competitions for American painters (DRC Silberman 129/04). Beaver's increased presence in the art world brought him to a new height of recognition within the art world, as evidenced by his being awarded the first Waite Phillips Trophy for Outstanding American Indian Artist from the Philbrook Museum of Art in 1963 (PMA Beaver).

Because of the economic difficulties Beaver faced during the first half of the 1960s, he found it necessary to branch out from his paintings into more commercial ventures. First, Beaver heeded the advice of the recently deceased Acee Blue Eagle and began to portray Native imagery other than that of the Creek and Seminole Tribes.[31] Beaver began by creating small paintings depicting single figures (Figures 39 and 40). Beaver painted Native figures representing Tribes from the Plains as well as the Southwest. Some figures were placed within Beaver's famous backgrounds, surrounded by the landscapes appropriate for the geographical region the Tribe inhabited. However, the majority of these commercialized figurative paintings were left devoid of any background. The majority of Beaver's works illustrating Plains figures often contained only a few stylized bushes in foreground of the piece. In these works, the figure and the figure's action were the primary focus of the piece. This contrasted with Beaver's earlier works where figures were placed in the context of their associated natural environment. This style harkened back to the earlier images created by the Kiowa artists in the 1920s

[31] Blue Eagle passed away in 1959, just prior to Beaver leaving his job with the BIA.



Figure 39: *Shield and Spear Dancer*, 1967
By Fred Beaver
Gouache on Paper
Sam Noble Oklahoma Museum of Natural History, 0024



Figure 40: *Pueblo Buffalo Dancer*, 1962
By Fred Beaver
Tempera, Painted Note Card
Five Civilized Tribes Museum, 1991.08.07

and 1930s. As the Kiowa artists and Blue Eagle had repeatedly proven, these types of images were very popular among collectors of American Indian art and would sell out rapidly. Thus, Beaver decided to create art that portray Plains and Southwestern figures and imagery in order to improve his profit margin.

Besides portraying Plains imagery, the second thing that Beaver did to increase his sales was to create usable art in the form of hand painted note cards (Figure 40). These note cards were small pieces of art depicting various American Indian figures. Like the figurative works, these cards would show single figures with limited background, as simple forms were easier to produce in mass quantities. Beaver sold these works at a lower price than his paintings so that he could market his art to a broader

range of consumers; those that were connoisseurs of American Indian art and willing to pay higher prices, and those that had a more casual interest and were only able to pay a small amount of money for the artwork.

Restoring Traditions

While Beaver's commercial ventures took off, he also sought out income in other areas, primarily in the area of repair and restoration of Works Progress Administration (WPA) era murals. Although, he had never created a mural nor restored one, Beaver responded to a call from Oklahoma's Postmaster E. L. Garrett's advertisement that sought someone to clean several post office murals located around the state. Beaver had known many of the artists who created the WPA murals and felt sure that he would be able to copy their style without too much trouble. He first sent in an application to Garrett for the repair of the mural at the post office in Coalgate, Oklahoma, complete by Acee Blue Eagle. The application listed how he would clean the mural, what paints he would use to repair damaged areas and how much he would charge for the restoration. His application was approved and Beaver set to work repairing the mural in 1965 (Figure 41) (George Hill January 23, 1966). After the successful restoration of the mural, Beaver was contacted about several other murals that were in need of repair. All in all, Beaver restored at least two WPA murals, both by Blue Eagle, and submitted bids to restore at least two others located in Anadarko and Tahlequah (DRC Silberman 129/08).[32]

[32] Beaver restored Blue Eagle's murals located at the Coalgate post office and the Seminole post office. Blue Eagle had previously repaired the mural at Seminole in 1942, however the mural was again in need of repair twenty years later. In contrast, the mural at Coalgate was only repaired at the time that the post office was undergoing renovation in 1965.

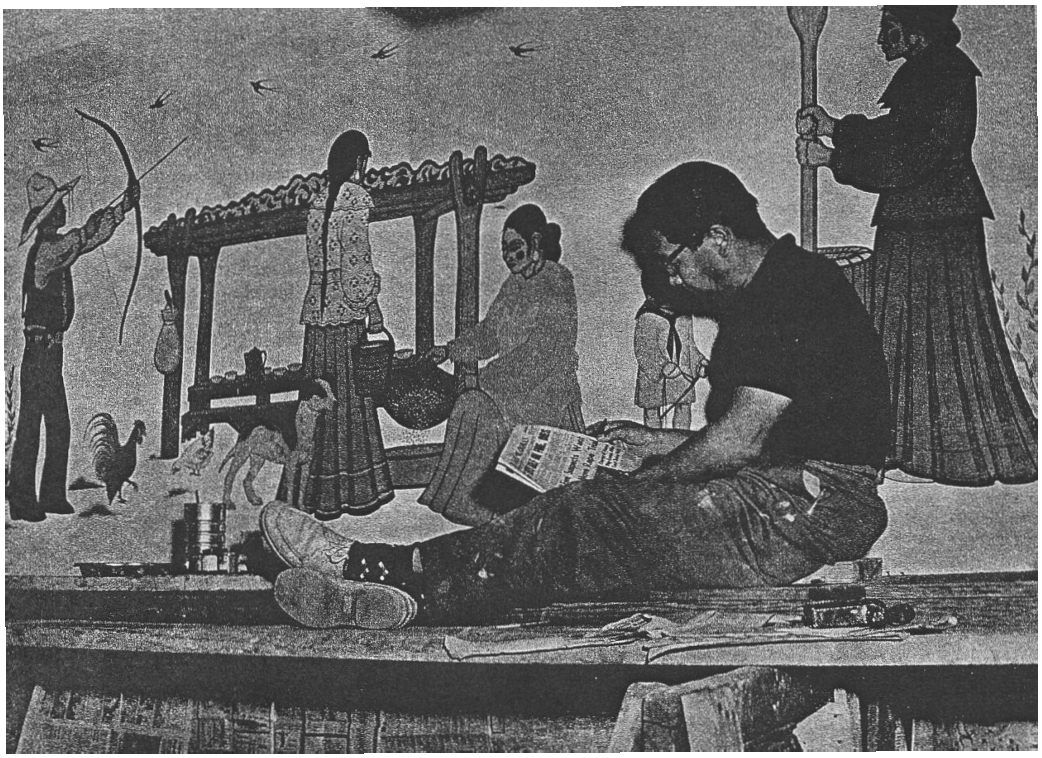


Figure 41: Fred Beaver repairing Blue Eagle's mural at the Coalgate Post Office, 1965
Courtesy of the Philbrook Museum of Art

In addition to restoring murals and making commercial art, Beaver continued to create larger works showing Southeastern Indian images. Because of his dedication to portraying his Creek heritage, Beaver often worked closely with his long-time friend and fellow artist McCombs, who similarly wanted to document Creek culture through art, preserving it for future generations. Beaver and McCombs often submitted their works to the same art competitions and would sometimes comment on each other's works. The two artists were distinct from one another, demonstrating opposite ends of the spectrum for variation within the Oklahoma flat-style. While McCombs adhered rather strictly to his preferred Bacone flat-style, which did not include background, Beaver, in contrast, would fill the entire field with background and color, relying on inspiration from non-native artists (NAA Solomon McCombs/1, DRC Silberman 126/08). Despite the differences between their individual interpretations of the flat-style, both artists were

strong proponents of Oklahoma flat-style (DRC Silberman 127/07, PMA Beaver). Like McCombs, Beaver did not like the movement away from traditional flat-style within the American Indian art establishment. However, unlike McCombs, Beaver was directly affected by this market change because it became increasingly difficult to sell his traditional pieces in a market that was demanding new visionary styles. Instead of experimenting with the new styles that were being developed, Beaver chose to stay with his signature style but delved further into more commercial applications of pieces he created.

An example of one of these commercial works is *Honeymooners on the Plains* (Figure 42). This piece depicts a Native American couple standing on a hill overlooking a teepee and a tethered horse in the distance. The work is completed in a somber palette consisting of grey tones with small hints of peach and pink seen in the details of the clothing and in the setting sun in the background. While the subject matter is distinctly Plains, the environment portrayed in the painting is more suggestive of the Southwest with small amounts of scrub brush and mesas and buttes in the distance. The imagery is more suggestive of the prototypical ideal of what Plains Indians would have appeared like as seen through Hollywood westerns, many of which were filmed in the Southwest using areas like Monument Valley as backdrops. Similarly, while the background is more commercialized, so is the subject of the painting. The title suggests that the male figure is presenting his teepee to his new bride, emphasized by the outstretched arm pointing in the direction of the encampment. However, this account of Plains life is more reflective of how Euro-Americans ascribed their own cultural values onto American Indian cultures, where the male figure is the provider. This commercial imagery is also



Figure 42: *Honeymooners on the Plains*, 1975
By Fred Beaver
Tempera
Sam Noble Oklahoma Museum of Natural History, 0022

combined with a variation of Beaver painting style. While Beaver portrayed his Seminole and Creek works with using great detail in the environmental setting, in this work Beaver seems to simplify the setting so that it appears more like a cartoon. This approach gives the piece a more stereotypical appearance than his other works, once again emphasizing the commercial nature of the work.

Even though Beaver created many commercial works like *Honeymooners on the Plains*, he later stated in an interview with Arthur Silberman that he was not happy about creating such works. His choice of painting these commercial images had been strongly affected by his need to support himself and his wife, Juanita. Had not been for Beaver's need for money, he most likely would have not created Plains or Southwestern images,

but instead continued to portray his favorite subject matter, the Creek and Seminole Tribes.

Growing Old Together

In 1976, Beaver's longtime love and companion, his wife Juanita, passed away. A year later, Beaver met a new love interest, a woman by the first name Vyta. The couple had a whirlwind romance followed by marriage. Beaver found joy in this new companionship and continued on with his art. The aging Beaver continued on with life, working on his art late at night, singing in his church choir on Sundays, driving to various art shows and competitions, and visiting with his fellow artist friends. His friendship with Solomon McCombs remained solid and the pair was often seen together at art events and competitions. As they had grown up together, so they had competed together in everything from school, to sports, to art. Thus it was not so unexpected when both artists passed away within months of each other. On August 18, 1980, Fred Beaver passed away from a heart attack, three month prior to McCombs passing on November 18, 1980 (Lester 1995; Travis August 20, 1980).

While Beaver began painting merely as a hobby and a distraction from the harsh reality of life, he was able to turn his passion for art into a lifelong career. Although he was not able to support himself solely on painting images of the Creek and Seminole tribe, he was able to produce hundreds of works each year and subsidize his income with the occasional commercial venture. During the 1970s, Beaver kept a ledger of pieces that he had made, where he had sold them, and for how much he had sold them. The lowest amount Beaver received at this time was $35 for a small 5 inch by 8 inch work. His

larger pieces sold for over $600, with the average piece selling for around $250 (PMA Beaver).

Beaver often sold out at art shows. Yet, he was later critiqued by fellow artists as having under-priced his art (Haney 2005). Even as Beaver, who by this point in time was a very well established artist, was selling his works for an average of $250, other lesser-known artists were often making twice that amount. It is unclear whether Beaver simply thought that these prices were fair based on the work that he put into them, whether he undervalued his own work because of his lack of formal art education, or whether the value of his art decreased over time because paintings completed in flat-style became less popular in the market after the 1960s. Despite this, Beaver's talent is evident, not only in his superb depictions of a particular area of American Indian life, but also in his ability to enter the art world without any formal training. Because of this fact, Beaver will remain one of the foremost self-taught Native artists of the twentieth century.

SECTION 3:
Hill and Haney:
Modern Creek Paintings

Acee Blue Eagle, Solomon McCombs, and Fred Beaver were three of the foremost American Indian easel painters from the late 1920s through the late 1970s. All three artists made a point of encouraging younger generations of American Indian painters, advising artists in both the process of painting as well as the strategies of marketing art. Joan Hill and Enoch 'Kelly' Haney are two Creek artists who were mentored by these three artistic leaders.

In many ways, Hill and Haney are quite different from their artistic predecessors, choosing to paint in different styles of art that are reflective of the modern world around them. Hill paints in a variety of different styles ranging from the traditional flat-style to non-objective abstracts. Haney began by working in traditional flat-style but soon changed over to realism and has recently switched to sculpture. But perhaps the most important distinction between these two contemporary artists and their predecessors is their individual approaches to marketing their art. The next two chapters will examine the lives of Hill and Haney and expound upon their own unique strategies for marketing art in the present economy.

Chapter 5:

Joan Hill



Figure 43: Joan Hill
Courtesy of the Artist

Described as "one of the Nation's foremost Native American artists" (Southern Plains Indian Museum and Crafts Center 1993), Joan Hill is an extraordinarily talented painter who works in multiple genres. Hill, who has been creating art professionally since the late 1950s, paints in styles ranging from traditional flat-style, to expressionism, to abstract-expressionism, to non-representational images. Depending on her current interests, the influences surrounding her and the demands of patrons, Hill matches each of these styles to appropriate subject matter, the majority of which depict American Indian imagery. While controversial at times, her ability to switch between these genres has allowed her access to a greater market for her works. In this chapter, I discuss Hill's development as an artist and her participation in the Oklahoma American Indian art

market. Using information from published and archival sources, as well as personal interviews, I have constructed a brief outline of Hill's professional biography. Because her awards and achievement, which include the Philbrook Museum of Art's Waite Phillips Trophy and the Five Civilized Tribes Master Artist Award, are too numerous to discuss individually, I have chosen to focus on the high points of her career and those things or people who have most influenced her work. Following this outline, I will then elucidate her many styles and genres in a brief and selective catalog of her works. By discussing Hill's life and her various works, I hope to illuminate both her artistic and marketing achievements.

The Artist

On a crisp winter day in December 2004, I had the opportunity to meet with Hill at her home studio for a long talk about her life, her art and the marketing of American Indian art. Prior to my visit with Hill, I had collected as much information as I could about the artist. Due to her talent as an artist and her hospitable, gregarious character, Hill is perhaps one of the most interviewed American Indian artists of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. In looking through the various interviews and publications, I was struck by how consistent Hill's statements were about her life and her work. She is very forthcoming about her career and her ancestry, but remains cautious and private about certain aspects of her personal life (like her age). My subsequent talk with her yielded the same results as her previous interviews, confirming that there have been three main influences in her life: her family, her teachers, and her travels.

Hill has lived the majority of her life in the town where she was born and raised: Muskogee, Oklahoma. Like many other artists, she is quick to point out that she has

always been interested in art and started painting at a very young age. Hill states, "from my childhood, the first thing I think of is that I used to draw on the walls. As far back as I can remember, I drew on the walls. And so in self-defense my parents bought me paper, crayons, and paints" (Joan Hill 2004). Hill's parents were extraordinarily supportive of her art and her talents from a very early age, sending her to art classes at the Philbrook when she was in school (Wyckoff 1996). Hill continued to be interested in art throughout her elementary and secondary school education in Muskogee, but was not encouraged by her teachers to attempt art as a profession. Instead, Hill states that one particular teacher at Muskogee Central High School pushed her to be an art teacher because "nobody can make a living as an artist" (Joan Hill 2004).

After graduating from high school in 1948, Hill attended the local Junior college in Muskogee where she received an Associate of Arts degree in 1950. She then continued her college education at Northeastern State College in Tahlequah, Oklahoma (PMA Hill). At Northeastern, Hill was again encouraged to "be practical" and go into art education rather than becoming a full time artist. Thus, her class load consisted primarily of art history and included very few hands-on, creative art classes. Hill was mildly disappointed because she felt that she could not really be creative or express herself in these classes. Despite this, she listened to her professors and graduated with a Bachelors degree in Art Education in 1952. Her degree led her to teaching at Roosevelt Junior High School in Tulsa. However, after four years of teaching, Hill felt restless. She yearned to create her own art and decided to resign from her position in order to pursue her creative passions full-time (Joan Hill 2004).

Upon leaving her job in Tulsa, Hill returned to her parent's home in Muskogee. Her parents provided Hill with both economic and emotional support and fully encouraged her to pursue her art. Her father often helped her in her artistic endeavors by making her frames and stretching canvases as well as packaging and crating works for shipping. Hill also received assistance from her brother, Williams Cheasquah Hill, in matters of sales and contracts with galleries (Joan Hill 2004; Watson 1993).

With her parents' support, Hill began attending any and every art class she could find, both locally and in other cities. The first art classes she officially attended were those sponsored by the local Muskogee Art Guild, where she studied under various artists like John Kennedy, Jack Vallee, and Ruth White (Sac and Fox). These artists primarily taught Euro-American genres of painting, like still life, figure painting and abstract painting. For example, in these classes Hill often created studies prior to painting a large work, making small sketches to later unify into one piece. With figure drawing, Hill recounted a story that was typical of all students enrolled in a Euro-American based art curriculum:

> They'd tell you you'd have one minute. A model would take a pose, and you had to draw it in one minute. Boy, you'd be surprised how much you can actually get down in a minute. And then that forces you, you know, not to just whittle, or knit-pick around on it, you know, you just get it down, and make sure you get your lines drawn. And that was fun. I enjoyed that. Then I'd usually finish them afterwards, you know, once I brought them home, and then finish them (Joan Hill 2004).

While the classes that Hill took used teaching methods that were standard to many Euro-American art institutions, nude figure drawing was quite uncommon in American Indian art (Broder 2000). Thus, from these Art Guild classes Hill learned how to draw and paint

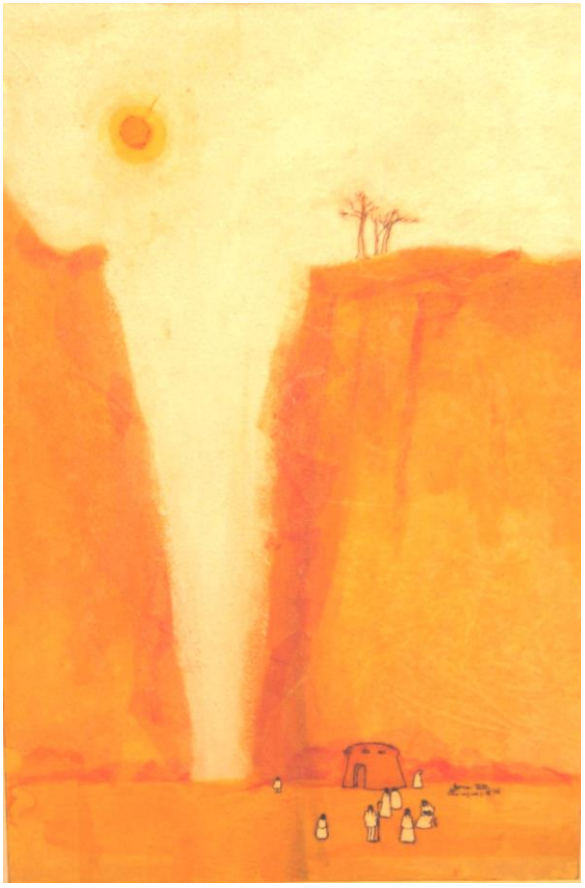
nudes, a controversial subject in American Indian art, which she would later return to during the late 1960s and 1970s.

Hill attended these various art classes throughout the late 1950s through the mid-1960s, learning how to manipulate different media to suit her artistic works. As Hill points out, one of her largest challenges was mastering the art of watercolor. Watercolor was one of the most popular media used in American Indian painting. The majority of flat-style works were completed using water-based paints such as gouache and tempera. In American Indian painting, these water-based paints are used thickly to form solid blocks of colors. In contrast, Euro-American artists use thinly diluted watercolors and water-based paint to blend colors together seamlessly. Unlike other media, watercolor painting for Hill was a challenge because she had difficultly in controlling how the colors would bleed together, creating new and unforeseen gradations in tones and shade. Hill states,

> When I first starting taking watercolor, it was at Thompson's School Supply up here, and this was after…when I was at Bacone too, I was taking lessons everywhere that I could get them. And anyway she had us do transfer watercolor, and you had to do trees, and you learned to do portraits and stuff. And I was never real good in doing portraits in watercolor. I was better at pastels, and oils, and pencils and stuff.
>
> Well anyway, when I had my show over there… I went over there, and the show was hung, I was just floored. I could remember the painting but I had never signed it, and it had been ones that I threw way in the wastebasket. Somebody fished out, and they sold it… The worse painting I've ever seen just about. It's an awful muddy looking watercolor. And see and mud is a crime when you are doing watercolor. That's what it was, and I said, well it came back to haunt me. (Joan Hill 2004).

Despite her difficulties in mastering the media of watercolor, Hill found some of her happiest moments playing with the media and experimenting with the results. While Hill worked with traditional media such as oil paints and watercolors, she also combined non-traditional materials, like coffee grounds, with crayons and turpentine for colors that would bleed together to imitate the effects of watercolors. Besides mixing media so that it would bleed together, Hill also experimented with layering media to create new and interesting effects. For example, she layered different types of thin colored paper and put glue over them to allow for a transparent look. She then covered these works with fracture sand and polyurethane to simulate stained glass (See *Canyon Morning*, Figure

Figure 44: *Canyon Morning*, 1978
By Joan Hill
Tissue Paper, Fracture Sand and Polyurethane
Artist's Private Collection



44). Experimental works such as these often reflected her predominant Euro-American training, often depicting style genres such as expressionism, realism and non-objective abstracts. Thus, Hill began her career working within a somewhat traditional Euro-American mode with styles and genres that reflected the dominant cultural milieu.

Then in 1958, Hill reached a turning point in her art education when she enrolled in art classes at local Bacone College under Dick West.[33] West was a former student of Acee Blue Eagle and had gained his Bachelors degree in Fine Arts from the University of Oklahoma under Dr. Oscar Jacobson. The third director of Bacone's art department, West's style combined the flat-style he had learned from Blue Eagle with elements taken from his Euro-American artistic training to create colorful, monumental works that paid careful attention to detail and anatomy (Blalock Jones 1996). West pushed all of his students to paint American Indian subjects and emphasized the "importance of accuracy and authenticity of detail" (Blalock Jones 1996). Prior to studying at Bacone, Hill painted in muted colors and had primarily worked in Euro-American styles and genres. Under West's tutelage, however, Hill branched out and began to portray American Indian subject matters.

> He told me that I was afraid of color. He said, you've got these little namby-pamby colors. Well he'd always tell you things real straight. When I first started out I would do little pale, pale…I mean, nothing was very definite. It was just a real pale looking colors. And he said, you're afraid of color. Get in there, and put some color in there, he said, work and put some real rich things in there. And [one person] I know he was doing some moccasins and he said, he told one person you've got the plainest moccasins on a

[33] For a complete discussion of Dick West and his influence on Bacone style and Oklahoma American Indian painting, see Ruthe Blalock Jones (1996) "Bacone College and the Philbrook Indian Annuals."

> woman Indian. They had do to it over, because see, he wanted it to be just correct. So like I said, he was a wonderful teacher (Joan Hill 2004).

With the encouragement of West, Hill began to use her signature bright and vibrant color palette as well as paint subject matters that were closely linked to her own American Indian heritage (PMA Hill).

At first, Hill claims that she felt mildly uncomfortable creating art with Indian subject matters. This was due to the fact that Hill "didn't grow up in an Indian tribal setting" (Joan Hill 2004). As art historian Mary Jo Watson points out, "As is typical of members of the Five Civilized Tribes, Joan's upbringing occurred after considerable assimilation had taken place in her family. Her prestigious families had long adapted to the educational and religious standards of Euro-American society" (Watson 1993). During the turn of the twentieth century, Hill's paternal grandfather George Washington Hill, influenced by Euro-American settlers, converted from Indian beliefs to Christianity, ultimately becoming a minister in the Methodist church (Joan Hill 2004; Watson 1993). While Hill's father, William McKinley Hill, was initially raised in a traditional Indian manner and participated in many of the dances, these traditions were viewed as pagan after George Hill's conversion. As Hill states:

> When Grandpa Hill decided it was pagan, then, of course, they all obeyed him. The children and everybody obeyed him… They just quit going to them…
>
> I grew up like everybody else, but like I said, I knew about it [the Indian traditional life], we had a lot of books about it, and the family all talked about it, but we didn't go in for any of the ceremonies and things (Joan Hill 2004).

Despite not being raised in an Indian tribal setting, Hill was encourage by West to research her heritage and paint scenes from what she 'knew,' making sure that she stuck to portraying her own tribe (Joan Hill 2004).

In order to learn more about her Indian heritage and paint it accurately, Hill turned to her family for help.

> When I told daddy that I wanted to take Indian painting and you know, wanted to do these things, he was so happy. My father was just as happy as he could be. So then, he took mother and I, and we would go to all the Stomp Dance grounds… and I would talk and photograph them (Joan Hill 2004).

However, since neither Hill nor her family had attended any of the Indian gatherings in quite a while, they encountered suspicion when they attended some of the dances. As Hill recounts:

> When we went to that one in Tulsa that was the strangest thing. My mother, she was 3/16ths Creek and Cherokee, but she was very, very fair… had hazel eyes and auburn hair, but she had high cheek bones, so you know, you would always know she was an Indian… Daddy really showed his Indian blood.
>
> … When we got there- at the Stomp Dance grounds- because then they were way out in the boondocks, you know, where you had to hunt for them… so I got out with an idea, and I walked over to their leader and asked him if I could photograph the dancing – they were doing the Buffalo Dance, and the Ribbon Dance, and a lot of other ceremonies, and taking of the light drink and everything. And so, he was not hostile, but he was not real warm either. And so he said, 'Well I don't know,' he said, 'We don't usually open it to outsiders.' I said, 'I'm not an outsider.' I said, my mother is a member of the Creek Nation, and so is my father. And he said, 'What's your father's name?' And I said, 'William McKinley Hill.' And I said, 'He's sitting over there in the car in the shade.' And he said, 'Mac? Is that Mac?' He walked over there, and he had known daddy

> when he was a boy. They had known each other a long time (Joan Hill 2004).

Because Hill and her family had not participated in these ceremonies, she was unknown to many of the traditionalists in the Creek community. In this instance, the leader of the stomp dance had assumed that Hill, because she was unfamiliar to him and because she had a fair complexion similar to her mother's, was either not Creek or was not American Indian. The leader showed resistance to Hill requests for photographs at first because he assumed that as an 'outsider' she would use the photos inappropriately. However, when Hill proved her Creek ancestry, she was welcomed by the community and allowed to photograph the sacred ceremonies. From the photographs that she was able to collect at this particular dance and at others that she attended, Hill was then able to create several paintings depicting Creek culture (See *Creek White Feather Dance* Figure 45).

Once Hill began to paint American Indian subject matter, all of her pieces then began to reflect her heritage and her pride in it. While her ability as a painter was dramatically improving, Hill had yet to gain exposure in the art world. Thus, West pushed her to enter her works in art competitions such as those held at the Philbrook Museum of Art. Hill entered her first art competition in 1959, submitting a painting to the Indian Annuals held at the Philbrook. The 1959 Indian Annual marked an important turning point in Hill's career. It was at the Annual that Hill sold her first painting. An anonymous buyer purchased the work for $100, a large amount of money for a painting in the late 1950s. Hill also met many other American Indian artists, like Acee Blue Eagle, Solomon McCombs, Willard Stone (Cherokee sculptor), and was encouraged to continue painting (Joan Hill 2004).

After this event, Hill felt more secure about her abilities as an artist and forayed into her first commercial venture creating book illustrations for a local organization. These paintings were small in size measuring only 8.5 by 11 inches, and she sold each of them for $5 a piece. Thus encouraged, Hill began to enter more and more competitions and to place her works for sale at local galleries. Upon winning a few competitions, such as being awarded the Professional Prize from the Museum of New Mexico, Hill's paintings began to sell at a rapid pace and she began to gain notoriety within the American Indian art world (Joan Hill 2004).

The 1960s found Hill entering her works in numerous competitions and art exhibitions all over the country. Her relationships with the artists she met through competitions afforded her new contacts in the art world. During this time Hill was one of three female American Indians from Oklahoma who were creating paintings, the other two being Valjean McCarty Hessing (Choctaw) and Ruthe Blalock Jones (Delaware/Shawnee/ Peoria). Established male American Indian painters like Solomon McCombs would often invite Hill to exhibit with them. As Hill states,

> I had an unfair advantage I guess you'd call it, because Solomon and the others would say, "We need a woman artist to be represented." So they would invite me to exhibit with them. So, I exhibited all over the country with their group, see, with Solomon and everybody like that (Joan Hill 2004).

The exposure that she gained by exhibiting with these artists, gave Hill an added boost in art sales.

Hill's notoriety often allowed her to sell out at shows and competitions, proving that her works were in great demand. Thus Hill developed her creative process where she would often stay up late into the night and early hours of the morning painting, working

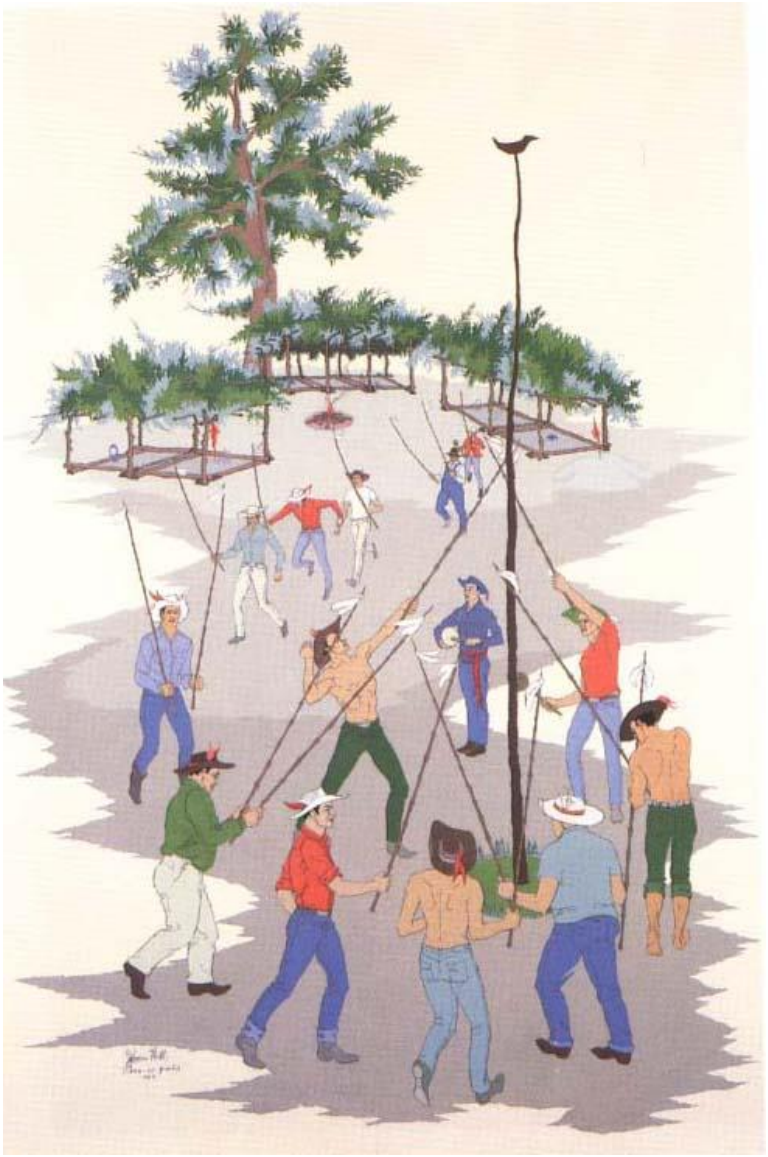


Figure 45: *Creek White Feather Dance*, 1962
By Joan Hill
Watercolor on Paper
Heard Museum

on single pieces for days at a time. On several occasions, Hill stayed up late to finish projects for competition deadlines and then retired for rest and recuperation (Hart March 10, 1975).[34] These late work nights sometimes led to happy accidents, as was the case

[34] Ruthe Blalock Jones (1996) has recounted how many painters worked up until the moment of the Philbrook competition deadline, sometimes bringing their completed works in while still wet.

with *Creek White Feather Dance* (Figure 45). This painting was originally intended to not have ground color. As Hill recollects,

> Do you know I painted 24 hours straight on that… before the deadline, I gave it Philbrook. As a matter of fact, Jeanne[35] took it…they had already closed at five o'clock, and she let me bring it to her house, and she took it over the next day to the thing. But I dropped the brush - my fingers were numb from holding the brush - and my fingers just let it go, and it just dropped out and it rolled across it. And I thought oh, it's ruined, it's ruined. And then I covered it up with the paint - the background paint there.

Despite this addition of background coloration, Hill's work was accepted for the competition and eventually sold to an independent collector.

In 1962, Hill had her first solo exhibition at the place where she first entered the art scene, the Philbrook Museum of Art. The twenty works that were exhibited reflected Hill's broad range of painting styles and genres. The prices on these works ranged from $5 to $100 and also ranged in size from small (8 x 11 inches) to large (24 x 36 inches). By this point in time, Hill had developed many of the styles that she would later be known for. She displayed works in the Bacone flat-style, as inspired by West's stringent tutelage and her colleagues in the field, like McCombs. Besides her flat-style works, Hill also selected abstracts and expressionistic works that captured her Euro-American training from artists in the Art Guild.

Her ability to produce this wide variety of painting genres added to Hill's prominence as an artist and brought her many opportunities such as various teaching jobs and the opportunity to travel with artist programs. Hill turned down all the teaching jobs,

[35] Jeanne Snodgrass was a curator of American Indian Art at the Philbrook during the 1960s through the 1980s. She also helped assemble art displays for the competitions and log entries.

preferring to pursue her art instead (Watson 1993). However, she did take the opportunity to travel by herself and with the T. T. Hewitt artist exchange program during the 1960s and 1970s (PMA Hill). By herself, Hill toured the Southwestern United States. Under the T. T. Hewitt program, Hill visited 27 foreign countries, including Spain, Portugal, France, England, Greece, Russia and China. The art that Hill created while on these trips often reflected her surroundings. In the Southwest, Hill often created works that reflected other American Indian cultures since she felt a sense of connection and shared history with them (See Figure 44, *Canyon Morning*, and Figure 50, *Evening At the Pueblo*). However, the works she created while abroad demonstrated a marked change of

Figure 46: *Two Figures Entering a Cathedral*, 1966
By Joan Hill
Mixed Media on Paper
Adobe Gallery Online



subject matter from her frequent portrayal of American Indian imagery (See Figure 46, *Two Figures Entering a Cathedral*). As Hill states,

> I've got a lot of travel paintings. People gradually talked me out of my travel paintings, and I don't get to keep very many of them, and they're fun to do. Because everywhere I went I had my travels documented. I did one in Russia of the beautiful churches there at the Kremlin. And you know the musician plays…there's a little town that was outside of Moscow, and it was just all churches. Everywhere there was these gorgeous churches and everything. So we painted the whole afternoon there (Joan Hill 2004).

Because Hill was not painting American Indian subjects, her travel paintings are mostly completed in a Euro-American painting style. Hill relied much more heavily on expressionism in these works than in her American Indian paintings, which were mostly done in flat-style. The paintings Hill created while traveling also differed from her previous works because she primarily created them for herself rather than for the market. While she eventually wound up giving her travel paintings away to people or selling them to some of her long-time patrons, Hill still recollected that the time she spent painting these works were some of her most enjoyable moments because of the memories and experiences of travels associated with each piece.

After several decades spent studying art, producing pieces for competition after competition, winning over 150 awards and honors, and traveling extensively with her art, Hill was well established in the American Indian art world by the 1980s. However, Hill's attention was drawn away from her art and travels. As Watson reports, "when her parents became ill during the 1980s, her devotion to them overshadowed her career and she gave them her constant care. During that decade she did not paint and did not resume her career until 1989, after their deaths" (Watson 1993). Although Hill resumed painting,

she did not resume her travels. By the 1990s, Hill grew increasingly concerned about the care and maintenance of her family's property. The homestead where Hill continues to live is located on a section of her great-grandmother's original allotment. The site, which includes a family cemetery, a pre-Columbian temple mound and remnants of the historic site, Fort Davis, is prone to looters and mischievous individuals. The protection of her property became even more of a priority after a developer mistakenly destroyed a century-old fence. Thus, Hill decided in the early nineties to remain close to home, but has continued to produce the works for which she is so famous.

The Art

The three genres that Hill is most famous for are Bacone Flat-style, expressionism and abstract expressionism. She has used all of these genres consistently throughout her career, rather than limiting herself to one particular style for a definitive period of time. In this section, I will illustrate each style with representative examples taken from both her early works as well as some of her more recent paintings.

The genre that most obviously exemplifies Hill's American Indian heritage and her relationship with Dick West is Bacone Flat-style, which document dances, ceremonies and myths present in the Creek and Cherokee cultures. One of Hill's later works, *Harvest Celebration of the First Fruits* (Figure 47), depicts a scene from the Feast of the First Harvest, a spring ceremony where the sacred fire is rekindled (Joan Hill 2004). In this scene, Hill uses the color blocking technique common to Flat-style, where blocks of color are outlined in black. According to the cannons of Flat-style as exemplified in competitions such as the Philbrook Annuals, each color graduation had to be distinctly separated from other colors. In *Harvest Celebration of the First Fruits*, Hill



Figure 47: *Harvest Celebration of the First Fruits*, 2004
By Joan Hill
Tempera
Artist's Private Collection

uses this technique to give texture to the turtle shell rattle and the baskets on the ground. On the shell rattle, the black lines outline the curves and crevices of the turtle shell, where the bony plates have fused together. Likewise, the black lines on the basket emphasize the pattern created by the weaver. Similarly, Hill also creates texture on the figure's leggings by painting darker lines where the fabric has wrinkled.

While this piece demonstrates some of the ideals of Flat-style it also breaks away from some of the earlier cannons. For example, the sky is painted a bright blue. During

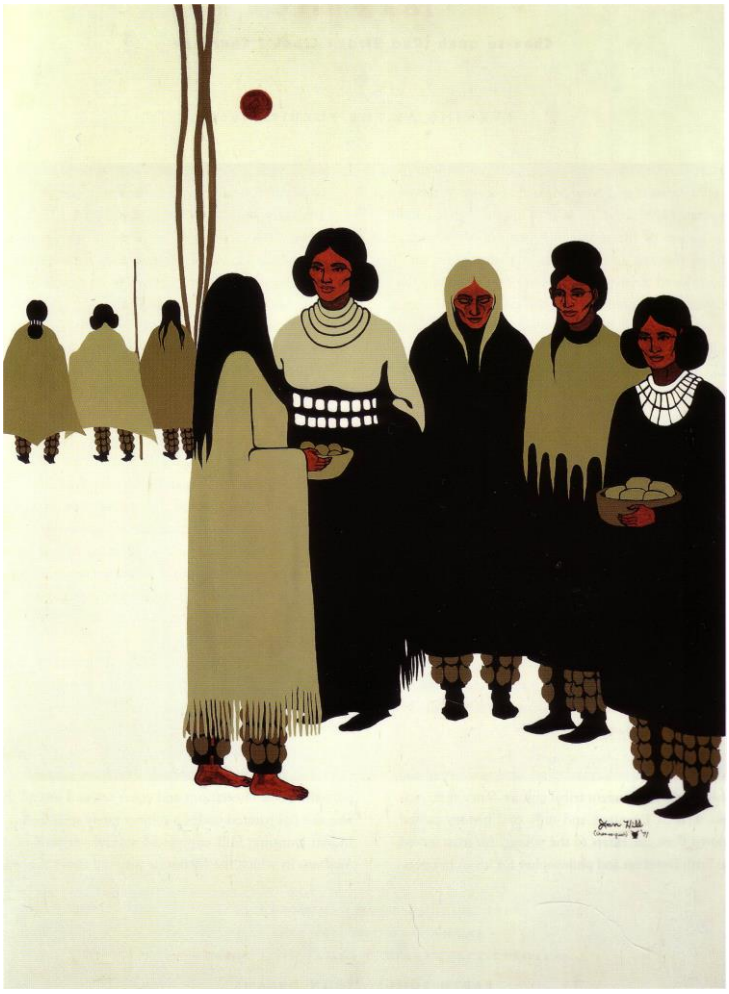
the early years of Flat-style, one of the cannons was that no background should be depicted (Joan Hill 2004). However, in this piece Hill chooses to include sky, a temple mound and a tree. The tree acts as a framing device for the scene and also is an important element in the overall composition of the work. The composition consists of a twisting extended figure eight, beginning at the smoke swirling upwards at the top of the frame. Following the smoke downwards, the eye flows around the left side of the figure, across the top of the fire circle and to the right where the first offering, the shell rattle, lies. The eye continues around the fire, following the offerings and across again to the right side of the figure. The composition then flows up along the sashes and across the figure's arms to the trunk of the tree. The horizontal branches of the tree also compress the scene, thus focusing the eye on the central figure and the harvest offerings. Hill's break away from the cannons of Flat-style through the inclusion of background thus does not detract from the subject matter, but instead enhances the overall composition.

Another piece by Hill that was completed in Flat-style is *Creek White Feather Dance* (Figure 45). Like *Harvest Celebration of the First Fruits*, this piece also breaks the cannons of Flat-style by including background coloration. While Hill's inclusion of the background color was due to a last minute happy accident, the overall composition is not detracted from by its inclusion. In fact, the variations in ground color seem to emphasize the receding plane that Hill achieves through the reduction in size of the figures. While the inclusion of the background color seems to break the traditional cannons of flat-style, its presence in the piece speaks to larger transitional trends occurring in Oklahoma Flat-style during the 1960s. Changes in the rules at the Philbrook annuals sparked many artists to pull away from the traditional cannons and experiment

with their works. Works like Hill's *Creek White Feather Dance*, or McCombs' *Giants in Woodland* (Figure 28 in Chapter 3) exemplify the experimentation with flat-style.

While Hill's *Harvest Celebration of the First Fruits* and *Creek White Feather Dance* demonstrate experimentation with the cannons of flat-style, other works like *Morning of the Council* (Figure 48) represent a transitional style. In this piece, Hill takes elements from the cannons of flat-style and pushes them to their extreme forms. Hill uses the color blocking technique of flat-style, which employs no shading or mottling of color, but does not include a black outline around each color. Instead, she opts to use two

Figure 48: *Morning of the Council*, 1971
By Joan Hill
Oil on Canvas
Heard Museum



opposing color values, black and taupe, as her primary differentiation between clothing pieces. This blocking effect gives the impression that the piece is actually a collage with layered paper, rather than a painting. Hill does employ outlining and shading in the heads, hands and feet of the figures. Here she both accepts the cannons of Flat-styles by using a black outline, but also breaks away from the cannons by including some mottled shading on the faces and feet of the figures. Thus, the piece exemplifies the differences between Hill's more traditional flat-style and her transitional painting.

In contrast to Hill's transitional and Flat-style paintings, her expressionistic paintings do not display clear delineations between colors. Instead, her expressionistic works blend multiple shades of color. In these works, Hill demonstrates her masterful skills at combining a customarily Euro-American genre with American Indian subject matter. *Dying Warrior* (Figure 49) is one such example of Hill's expressionistic works. The painting consists of a mostly nude male figure stretched out across the ground. The figure is drawn in charcoal with multiple short, quick strokes. Over the top of the figure, Hill has thrown watercolor and varnish, making the colors bleed into one another. The tones and placement of the rust red color coupled with the position of the figure suggest that the man has been injured in some grievous way. The harsh lines of the charcoal and the horizontal slashes of color evoke drama and emotion from the viewer, a key element of expressionist paintings. Although the figure portrayed could be representative any ethnicity, Hill has specifically chosen to title the piece as *Dying Warrior*, which identifies this particular figure as American Indian. The title and the subject matter combined suggest multiple interpretations of this piece. First, the image of the wounded warrior embodies the emotional struggle that surrounds armed conflict and the human sacrifice

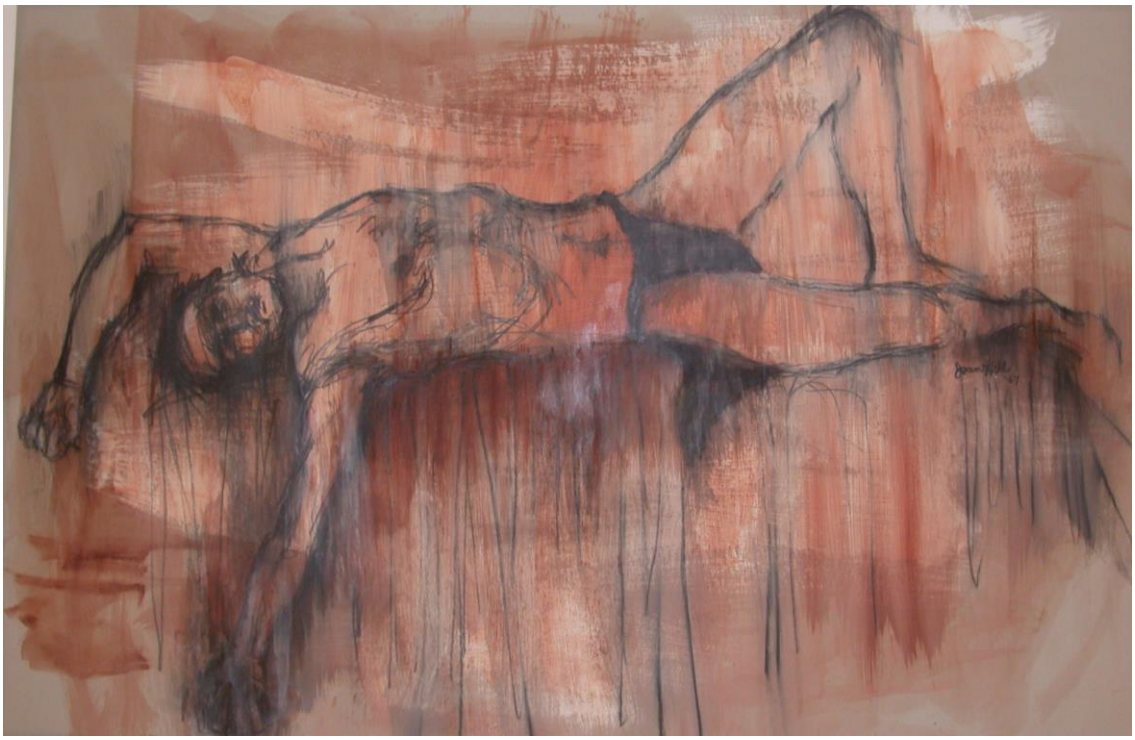


Figure 49: *Dying Warrior*, 1967
By Joan Hill
Watercolor, Charcoal, Conte Crayon on Seriograph Paper
Sam Noble Oklahoma Museum Natural History, 0092

involved in war. Second, the death of the warrior could also be interpreted as the death of American Indian culture, or the mortal wounds that tribal culture received under the United States assimilation policies. No matter the interpretation, the subject matter is distinct among the majority of Native American painting and imagery due to the inclusion of a nude subject. Nude figures are rarely seen in American Indian paintings. Those Native artists who chose to include nudes in their works have had extensive training in Euro-American art genres, like Hill and Chiricahua Apache sculptor, Allan Houser (Rushing 2004). Thus, the coupling of this unique subject matter with the use of the expressionist genre signifies Hill's superb ability to fuse Euro-American styles with Native subject matter in an unique and evocative manner.

Another expressionist work by Hill is *Evening at the Pueblo* (Figure 50). In this



Figure 50: ***Evening at the Pueblo*****, 1967**
By Joan Hill
Oil on Canvas
Private Collection

piece, Hill portrays Taos Pueblo and its Native inhabitants. In this scene, Hill uses deep oranges and yellows to evoke the rich earth tones seen during sunset in the Southwest. Men and women of the village go about completing their daily tasks and readying themselves for the night to come. While the colors remain within the family of earth tones, there are a few pops of turquoise in the form of individual articles of clothing, giving the piece a sense of whimsy. Hill emphasizes the height of the pueblos by pulling her brush through the color gradations along a vertical axis. While the painting draws upon imagery from a real place and time, Hill's choices of color and her emphasis of the vertical plane through brush strokes locate this work in the expressionist genre. This

scene was painted during one of Hill's various painting excursions to the Southwest, documenting the emotions and impact of her travels.

Like Hill's transitional flat-style, which combined elements of flat-style with a Euro-American collage-like appearance, Hill has another style that combines elements from these two painting genres. An example of this is seen in *Pecan Picking Time* (Figure 51), where Hill provides an expressionistic background with flat-style elements. Hill paints the background using watercolors, letting the colors bleed together as she would in her expressionistic works. After the background is dry, she paints trees and figures using opaque gouache. Her placement of the trees highlights elements of the background where colors have blended together. The figures are also strategically

Figure 51: *Pecan Picking Time*, 1991
By Joan Hill
Watercolor and Gouache on Paper
Private Collection



placed in an area that has little variation or gradation in the background color, thus further highlighting the figures against their plain surrounding. The combination of the expressionistic background coupled with the flat-style figures gives the sense that this is a scene from a bygone era, a mythic time of place, an idealized remembrance. In fact, many of Hill's works that portray a myth are completed using this style. Thus, by combining these two genres of painting, Hill is able to create a new venue for portraying her Creek ancestry.

While the majority of Hill's work does portray her Native heritage, a few of her works could be viewed as belonging to anyone's heritage. In her more modernist abstract pieces, Hill's works follow the trends of other Euro-American artists, where meaning is in the eye of the beholder. For example, one collector visited Hill in her studio to survey and purchase some pieces. Upon looking around, the collector came across one piece off to the side.

> I kept one canvas so I can clean off my palette. I didn't want to waste the paint when I wanted to change paint to paint a different painting, you'd have to get rid of the old paint that was on it. But anyway I cut clean off - I had a piece of masonite this time, and then off I would take off…every time I'd clean the palette off, I'd, you know, put around and kind of arrange it like in an abstract pleasing pattern. And then later, I close it together, and then later she came in, and I told her that I didn't haven't any paintings that I had finished, and she said, what's wrong with that one. And I said, well that's not really painting, I said, I was just sort of cleaning my palette off, and she said, I want it. And I said well okay, and I gave it to her. Well it was kind of nice abstract, as far as that goes - non-objective is what I guess they call it instead of abstract. And so, I called it *Indian Constellation*, and it's in some government building somewhere.

A similar work *Horse of Another Color* (Figure 52), demonstrates Hill's innate ability at

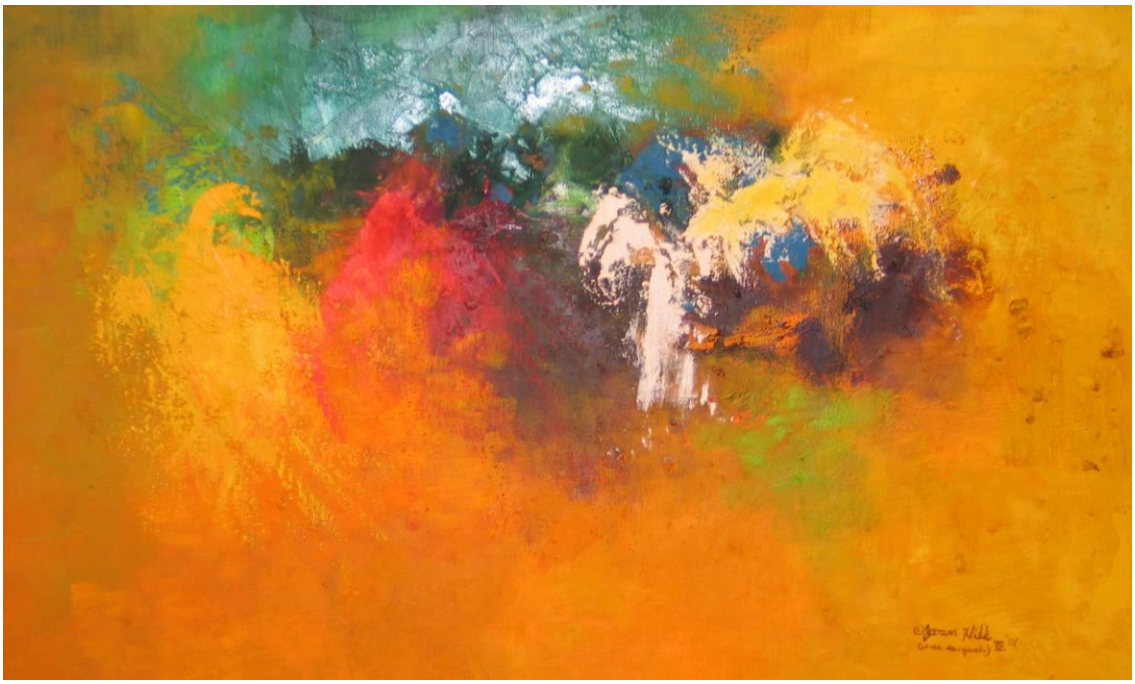


Figure 52: *Horse of Another Color*, ca. 1970s
By Joan Hill
Acrylic on Masonite
Artist's Private Collection

creating abstracts, even if they start out as simply discarded paint. In this piece Hill has started by piling up used paint in the center and the top of the field. Gradually the masonite became filled in and a resemblance of horses emerged. At that point, Hill began to work on the piece and add to it as she would any other piece of artwork. Much like *Indian Constellation* (not pictured), Hill's titling of the piece is the only information that betrays the origin of the piece as being from a Native American painter. These abstract are indicative of Hill's Euro-American training and reflect modern trends within the larger American art world.

The Market

Hill's ability to paint multiple genres has brought her much attention within the American Indian art community. Her success has allowed her to increase the prices of

her works greatly over the years from an average price of $100 to $3000 a piece. Increases in the prices of her art works not only reflect general monetary inflation, but also reflect Hill's increasing notoriety as an artist and her innate ability to create original and distinct pieces of art.

As Hill pointed out in my interview with her, she becomes bored with repetition and creating the same piece of art over and over again. Thus, she changes between genres often and works on many different pieces at the same time, working on whatever strikes her fancy at the moment. Her mentor, West, reinforced the idea that she should approach art with new and fresh ideas. West pointed out that many artists cannibalized one another, so that the majority of entries at art competitions mimicked previous award winners. He encouraged her to find her own path and do art that was distinctly her own (Joan Hill 2004). Thus, Hill's method for creating art includes much experimentation. Hill's transitional works, like *Morning of the Council* (Figure 48), and her ethereal, mythic watercolor paintings, like *Pecan Picking Time* (Figure 51), are unique because they combine both American Indian imagery and style with Euro-American genres, thus making them more desirable because of their combined beauty and originality.

Despite her abilities as an artist, Hill states that she has found it increasingly difficult to sell her works of art within Oklahoma. While the market for American Indian art in Oklahoma was strong during the 1960s, reinforced by major art competitions like those held at the Philbrook, she points out that the market has since all but died out. Hill has mostly relied on dealers located in others states, particularly dealers in the Southwest, to sell her art. She no longer enters competitions or major annual market events, like the

Red Earth competition in Oklahoma City or the Art Market in Santa Fe, because she feels it is necessary for her to stay and protect her ancestral home.

However, in spite of these set backs, Hill has attempted to branch out and market to individuals who are not acquainted with American Indian art. Many of the art dealers who specialize in American Indian art have made the leap to selling art online. Through this medium, Hill and other contemporary American Indian artists, like Enoch Kelly Haney in the following chapter, are reaching out to a new audience and potential market. Pieces of her work have even been sold via E-Bay, an online auction house providing potential new art consumers access to Hill's art. Hill hopes that this new marketing venture will allow for her to continue selling her works, regardless of the lack of a market in her home state of Oklahoma. Despite it all, Hill will continue to produce her art, creating original and unique works in various styles and genres that honor her culture heritage and act as an outlet for her insatiable creativity.

Chapter 6:

Enoch Kelly Haney



Figure 53: Enoch Kelly Haney, ca. 2004
Courtesy of the Artist

Many people within the state of Oklahoma would probably recognize the name Enoch Kelly Haney for his political career as a Senator in the Oklahoma State Legislature. However, Haney has also successfully pursued a lifelong career creating masterful works of art both on canvas and in bronze. In both of these disparate endeavors, Haney's skills at marketing have allowed him to further his political and artistic careers and given him many incredible opportunities and experiences. In this chapter, I describe the life and art of Enoch Kelly Haney and how his marketing abilities have allowed him to stay at the forefront of American Indian art. While Haney's artistic and political careers have often been the subjects of local newspaper articles, little information has been reported on Haney's biography and the tremendous impact it has

had on his art. Thus, I set out to uncover some of Haney's personal history and the role that it played in his artistic career. Biographical information was graciously afforded to me by the artist through several conversations. Through combining my own interviews with the published accounts of Haney's work, I hope to illuminate his exceptional marketing abilities and their impact on his artistic career.

The Artist

Enoch Louis Haney, nicknamed Kelly, was born on November 12, 1940 on his family's homestead in the town of Little in rural Seminole County, Oklahoma (Bovee Jan 15, 1984). Haney's mother, Hattie Louise Harjo Haney (Miccosukee), was his primary caregiver, raising him and his four siblings on the family farm (FCTM Haney). Haney's father, William Woodrow Haney (Creek/Seminole), was a famous flute maker and jewelry maker as well as a minister in the United Methodist Church and spoke his native Creek language.

The early 1940s in Oklahoma were difficult years for the Haney family. The Dust Bowl drought and the Great Depression of the 1930s had left many Oklahoma farmers struggling to survive. Like many other families in Little, the Haney family was poor and had to work hard in order to keep food on the table. Haney helped his family raise watermelons and developed his entrepreneurial skills early by selling the fruit at local baseball games (Haney 2005). Living in a rural area, the family had to do without the modern conveniences of electricity, indoor plumbing and running water (Haney 2004). Despite these hardships however, young Kelly Haney spent many of his early years on the farm releasing his creative energy by creating small sculptures from the local red clay and drawing his local surroundings. Haney's mother recognized his talent at an early age

and tried to foster it by encouraging him to create small pieces whenever he had free time. Similarly, Haney's father also encouraged his son to pursue his art since he was an artist himself (Haney 2005).

While Haney's artistic talents were developing, so were his entrepreneurial skills. Early on in Haney's life, his family would sell some of their extra farm produce to local townspeople. Haney's first entrepreneurial exploits were selling pieces of watermelons at the local baseball games on hot days. Although he only sold the pieces for a few cents, this marked the beginning of Haney's development of his marketing skills (Haney 2005).

By the time Haney was nine years old the family was forced move to the city of Shawnee, in order to improve their economic situation. There, Haney's mother took on a job as a nurse's aide and his father continued his occupation as a minister and flute maker. They bought a small one-bedroom house and often had members of their extended family visiting or staying with them (Haney 2005). As Haney stated in a later interview, " I remember six family members living in one room, so I know poor" (Haney 2004). While his mother worked, Haney attended elementary school. At first, he found the transition into the school system difficult due to a slight language barrier. This was due to the fact that Haney's parents, while able to understand and converse in English, did not use grammatically correct speech patterns. Therefore, when Haney entered school, he often talked in a colloquial or 'broken' English, which his teachers often tried to correct (Haney 2005).

Despite these language problems, Haney's artistic abilities were instantly recognized and encouraged by his teachers and peers. While in elementary school, Haney created works of art based on the things he was learning in the classroom. Thus,

his first sculpture was a miniature bust of Abraham Lincoln (Haney 2005). By the time Haney got to junior high school, he had expanded his artistic repertoire to include a few pieces portraying Indian subject matter. While Haney was creating Indian imagery based on the cultural heritage he saw around him, he continued to create sketches such as hillbillies, purely for the amusement of his fellow classmates, gaining small amounts of money on the side for his efforts (Bovee Jan 15, 1984). His budding notoriety as a junior artist brought him once again to the attention of his teachers who bestowed Haney's first award upon him, the Outstanding Artist Award from Shawnee Junior High in 1954.

In 1955, Haney moved on in his schooling and attended Shawnee High School. It was here at high school that Haney encountered a special teacher who would start him on his artistic journey to create art. As Haney stated in an interview,

> I had a wonderful teacher, Mrs. Brown, in my sophomore year at Shawnee High School, who rather than asking me to write a book report, asked me to draw it. It forced me to go to the library and study several more books to be able to do that one sketch. I had to study clothing, architecture, and the topography of the land so I could get that book report right. I still use that same system today when I create art. She really made a difference in my life. She took the talent that I had and helped me to expand on it (Haney 2004).

Unfortunately, Haney was not able to continue working with this particular teacher as his family once again relocated out of Shawnee after his sophomore year back to Seminole, Oklahoma. However, he took the lessons he had learned from her and continued to use them throughout the remainder of high school and beyond. Haney transferred to Prairie Valley High School and eventually graduated from there in 1959.

After graduating from high school, Haney knew that he wanted to continue to pursue his art. He knew that he was talented based on the recognition that he had already

received from his family, teachers and classmates. However, he also knew that his talent needed to be honed and a formalized education in art would be the key to his success (FCTM Haney). Thus Haney decided to enter Bacone College in 1960. By the early 1960s, Bacone's art department had become the primary school for Oklahoma's aspiring Indian artists. At Bacone, Haney studied in the art department under the instruction of Dick West. It was under West's tutelage that Haney truly delved into the representation of American Indian culture in his paintings. While Haney had previously created a few works depicting Native peoples, the majority of his art had referenced Western images. West pushed Haney, as he had his other students, to shift his focus more to the portrayal of American Indians (Haney 2005). It was at this time that Haney first began to realize and feel that painting was an important medium for documenting and preserving the cultural heritage of American Indian people (Roberts 1980). As Haney later stated,

> I paint Indian subject matter for two reasons. First, the native [sic] American experience is my experience. Artists usually paint what they know best. Second, I have a profound respect for the old ways and for the ability of Indian peoples to sustain themselves under really incredible pressures. I want others, not just Indians, to understand the road that Indians have followed to get where they are, and to sense the powerful faith which has sustained most of them (Roberts 1980).

In order to portray his new native subject matter accurately, Haney combined the research methods he had developed while a student at Shawnee High School with new painting styles, such as the traditional (Bacone) Flat-style art, which he was learning from West. Haney always made a point of researching his subject carefully prior to portraying them in his art. This often required him to make trips to visit various tribes and Native communities in order to accurately capture the details that he wanted to reference in his

paintings. Haney's method of research was highly encouraged by West, who had promoted this type of knowledge of subject matter to all of his students.

Haney graduated from Bacone with an Associates degree in 1962. Immediately after graduation, he attended the University of Arizona Summer Program in Art on a Rockefeller Foundation Scholarship. Over the next few months, Haney expanded his painting style and technique, learning how to paint contemporary non-objective works such as abstract. The program placed emphasis on color, movement and design, elements that would become important to Haney's future works. Besides painting, Haney also broadened his artistic repertoire by learning jewelry-making, working primarily in silvery and with semi-precious stones and following in the footsteps of his father.

Upon his return to Oklahoma, Haney attended Oklahoma City University from which he eventually received a dual Bachelors degree in Fine Arts and Religion in 1965. Haney's degree in art was a natural continuance of his earlier artistic endeavors while his degree in Religion was based primarily on his family's involvement in the United Methodist Church. Haney first followed in his father's footsteps by taking on a job as a minister. However, his ministerial duties only gave him a very small income. At that time Haney had a wife and three children to support and was finding it increasingly difficult to do so on the limited salary of a minister. Thus, he secured several part time jobs over the years including a second job working in downtown Oklahoma City for J. C. Penney's over the Christmas holidays. Haney later recounted,

> I was there just for two weeks for the Christmas holiday and during that time the display manager quit. I was just a farm boy, but I filled [in and] helped out as I could. One day the assistant manager, Mr. Howell, walked in and asked me if I would like to be display manager. I was scared to death, but I said yes, sir, I would. I learned to do

> all kinds of things at that job. I learned to fabricate all kinds of items for those displays (Haney 2004).

Haney was in charge of installing the mannequins in their display windows and changing the designs with each season. The goal of Haney's position was to create a visually appealing image that would attract buyers into the store. Over the next few years, Haney worked hard creating numerous displays and painting store windows with ever changing holiday decorations. His work was successful and Haney moved on to produce displays for other stores including Sears and Montgomery Ward.

Haney's hard work and dedication to his job opened many new doors for him. In the mid-1960s, a local Oklahoma packaging company approached Haney with a job offer. They wanted him to work as their art director and create package designs for new products. Haney was interested in a new challenge and a steady salary so he decided to give it a try and thus created his first pieces of commercial art (Haney 2005).

Haney continued to support himself throughout the late 1960s with odd jobs that combined his budding entrepreneurial talent with his innate artistic ability. Haney pursued various branches of these more commercialized art forms, including designing packaging, displays, signs and working for an engineering firm as their art director. While Haney worked during the day in these commercial art positions to support himself and his family, he continued to work on his painting at night. In this way, he started to produce works of art and sell them through several well-established, local art galleries in Shawnee, painting mostly in his spare time. In order to expedite the creative process, Haney often painted what he has termed "multiples," paintings that were similar to one another in background and composition, but had varying details and smaller elements. For example, Haney would purchase a large sheet of watercolor board. While Haney was

at work or working on another piece of art, he would have his wife prime the board with a color wash made of tempera paint. Once the board was dry, he would cut it into smaller pieces and his wife would sketch in outlines of simple scenes, such as a man on horseback. In assembly line fashion, Haney would then complete the painting by filling in the outlines with paint and adding in scenery details or landscaping. These paintings, while similar to one another, had unique characteristics displayed either in the details of the figure or in the background scenery. On average, each set took approximately one hour to complete and Haney sold each piece for around $25. The benefit to creating these serial pieces was that Haney could complete them rapidly, increasing the amount of art he could sell and increasing his presence within the art market (Haney 2005).

In 1969, Haney trained in urban economic development at the Progress Economic Development Institute in Philadelphia. During the six months he spent in Philadelphia, Haney took formal classes where he learned all the intricacies of the business world and found that he excelled at business development and marketing, graduating from the program at the top of his class. Following his graduation from this program, Haney decided to get his masters degree in education at Oklahoma City University. At the time, Haney thought that he would like to share his knowledge with other young artists and that a degree in education would help him to achieve this goal. However, the degree program was not what he had anticipated. Instead, Haney found himself being increasingly drawn to the world of business and began taking a few classes from Oklahoma Central State University at the same time that he was pursuing his Masters in Education. Finally, Haney decided that he was more interested in business than in education and thus left the masters program at Oklahoma City University. Haney, however, did not leave the

education field entirely, deciding instead to refocus and offer a business class at the college geared towards fellow artists. The class taught them basic principles of business and marketing from the point of view of a professional artist, showing these new and upcoming artists how to market their art to a specific, targeted clientele.

As the years went by, Haney's goals and interests became increasingly varied and complex to manage. Therefore, during the late 1960s Haney laid out a plan for his life to help him organize the goals he wanted to achieve and place them in a timeline stating what age he would achieve them by. In this plan, Haney included plans to expand his artistic career by learning how to use different artistic processes, like sculpture, as well as plans to expand his business career by opening a gallery in which to sell his art. In an effort to promote this purpose and make his art more marketable, Haney decided to increase the number of competitions that he was entering. While he had been producing art throughout the 1960s and had entered various competitions prior to this, it was not until the late 1960s and early 1970s that Haney began to consistently enter art competitions and receive recognition for his work within the art establishment. In 1972, Haney entered the Philbrook Museum of Art's Indian Annual and received first place in the Woodlands division. Two years later in 1974, Haney won the Grand Award at the Five Civilized Tribes Museum art competition. Following his win at this competition, the museum honored him with the Master Artist award in 1975. These awards led to numerous invitations to exhibit his works at various art venues around the state of Oklahoma and several invitations to tour in other states as well as other countries. As Haney's popularity increased, he found it necessary to change his name and signature on his paintings. Prior to the late 1978, Haney had signed his works with Enoch L. Haney

base on his given middle name of Louis. However, many people knew him by his nickname Kelly and thus were confused by this signature. Thus, he changed his name legally to Enoch Kelly Haney and signed all his new works as Enoch K. Haney. Despite changing his name, the recognition he received from his competition awards helped Haney achieve many of the goals he had outlined for himself in his plan.

While Haney's life plan focused primarily on the development of his artistic career, he did not limit himself solely to this occupation. Haney was also interested in giving back to his community through public service and had decided to enter into the political arena. Haney served on the Seminole tribal council, bringing them his business expertise, and, upon enjoying the experience, decided to expand his political career by running for a position in the State legislature. In 1980, he was elected to Oklahoma's House of Representatives, being the only full-blooded American Indian to serve in the State legislature. During this time, Haney was able to use the combined incomes from his political post with the profits from his gallery to support himself and his growing family. In the State House of Representatives, Haney served the majority of three terms before deciding to run for the State Senate in 1986. Haney won this election and served four consecutive terms in office from 1986 through 2002. Among the highlights of his political career, Haney was "the chief architect of legislation designed to develop and implement educational programs for students at risk and he provided legislative leadership in the development of the world class Native American Cultural Center in Oklahoma City" (Haney 2004).

During his numerous years in the state legislature, Haney continued to create paintings and sell his works through galleries around the state (Haney 2004). Although

his political career lasted longer than Haney had initially anticipated according to his master plan, he was able to achieve the majority, if not all of the goals that he had laid out for himself. As he had previously laid out, Haney began to focus his artistic attention on sculpture in the early 1990s. While Haney had dabbled in sculpture prior to this time, he now devoted much of his free time to this pursuit. He started this new avenue with woodcarving but did not like the subtractive style of sculpting and quickly found that it was very difficult to make a profit from this style of art. Likewise, he tried stone carving once, but decided that the medium did not suit his tastes. Instead, Haney found his niche in sculpting works in bronze using the lost wax method to create his casts. For the past ten years, Haney has worked primarily in this medium while pursuing his political career and exploring new interests such as film and television.

The Art

Over his lifetime, Enoch Kelly Haney has pursued multiple types of art, ranging from fine arts to commercial art and from painting to sculpture. The majority of Haney's works, however categorized, can be correlated to certain periods of his life. Haney's Traditional Flat-style works were primarily accomplished during and immediately after his time at Bacone. Like other artists working in Flat-style, Haney used this imagery to record details of American Indian culture. The second and most enduring period is characterized by Haney's use of realistic and surrealistic imagery to recreate scenes from tribal legends and oral histories with added emotional content. It is these works that brought Haney much attention within the Oklahoma American Indian art market during the 1970s and 1980s. The most recent period, overlapping with his second painting period, is Haney's sculpture period, in which he has primarily been working since the

1996. While a recent development in his artistic career, Haney's sculptures have catapulted him into the media spotlight in the last few years and have solidified him as one of the state's foremost artists.

An example of Haney's first period is seen in the work *Dancer* (Figure 54. *Dancer* depicts a single Indian male Straight Dancer who seems to be frozen in mid-step, as the edges of his beaded sash and arm cuffs are swishing out to his sides. The details of the figures dress, including the beadwork, the feathered roach in the figure's hair and the feather fan in the man's hand, suggest a Woodlands dancer or perhaps a Plains powwow

Figure 54: *Dancer*, no date (pre-1978)
By Enoch Kelly Haney
Tempera on Board
National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum, 2000.37.026



dancer. This image has many of the hallmarks of the Bacone Flat-style containing blocks of color outlined in a contrasting color. The dancer's shirt is painted using a single shade of red with black lines indicating folds in the material. Likewise, the dancer's pants are painted in a flat black color with a lighter gray to indicate wrinkles around the knee joints. This image harkens back to the earlier Kiowa works and to previous early Bacone artists like Blue Eagle and McCombs. The painting contains a single, solitary figure placed on a canvas devoid of scenery. The only reference to any background is the ground line represented by a small patch of grass under the dancer's feet.

Despite Haney's attention to this technique, one can distinctly tell that his work was created years after the heyday of Blue Eagle and his compatriots. When compared to one of Blue Eagle's later works, it is apparent the Haney's painting has much more detail than that of Blue Eagle (see Figure 55). Simultaneously, Haney also includes small areas

Figure 55: *Untitled*, no date
By Acee Blue Eagle
Tempera on Board
Gilcrease Museum, 0227.443



of subtle shading, as seen in the sheen on the jingle bells and the fine wisps of their tassels. In contrast, Blue Eagle's work employs simplification of certain elements, such as the figure's hands, which do not show separation between the fingers, and the beading on the moccasins characterized by a thin green line. While Haney has accomplished an impressive interpretation of style used by Blue Eagle and the Kiowa artists, Haney later claimed that he did not enjoy painting in this style (Haney 2005). Instead, he felt that it was 'boring' because it did not portray emotion. He preferred to paint in other styles and mediums that allowed for more expression. His use of Flat-style was predominantly because he knew that it would sell in the American Indian art market. Once established within this context however, Haney felt that he could branch out into other modes of painting and gradually transitioned into his second artistic period (Haney 2005).

In Haney's second artistic period, many of his paintings are completed in a realistic style with some pieces containing surrealistic elements, according to the artist. The realistic elements in these works are brought in first, to tell a story or make a specific point and second, to evoke emotion from the viewer. In contrast, Haney's addition of surrealistic elements locates some of his works within the specific genre of myth. Two pieces, *No More Tears* (Figure 56) and *The Inner Spirit* (Figure 57), demonstrate the marked differences between Haney's two types of realistic paintings. First, *No More Tears* portrays an American Indian woman with a baby bundled on her back surrounded by wind-blown snow. This scene depicts a single, imagined moment of the oral history of Southeastern tribes. In the late 1800s, the U.S. government began its campaign of removing Indian people from their lands and relocating them to what was then Oklahoma Territory. Members from Southeastern tribes were forced to walk out of their homelands

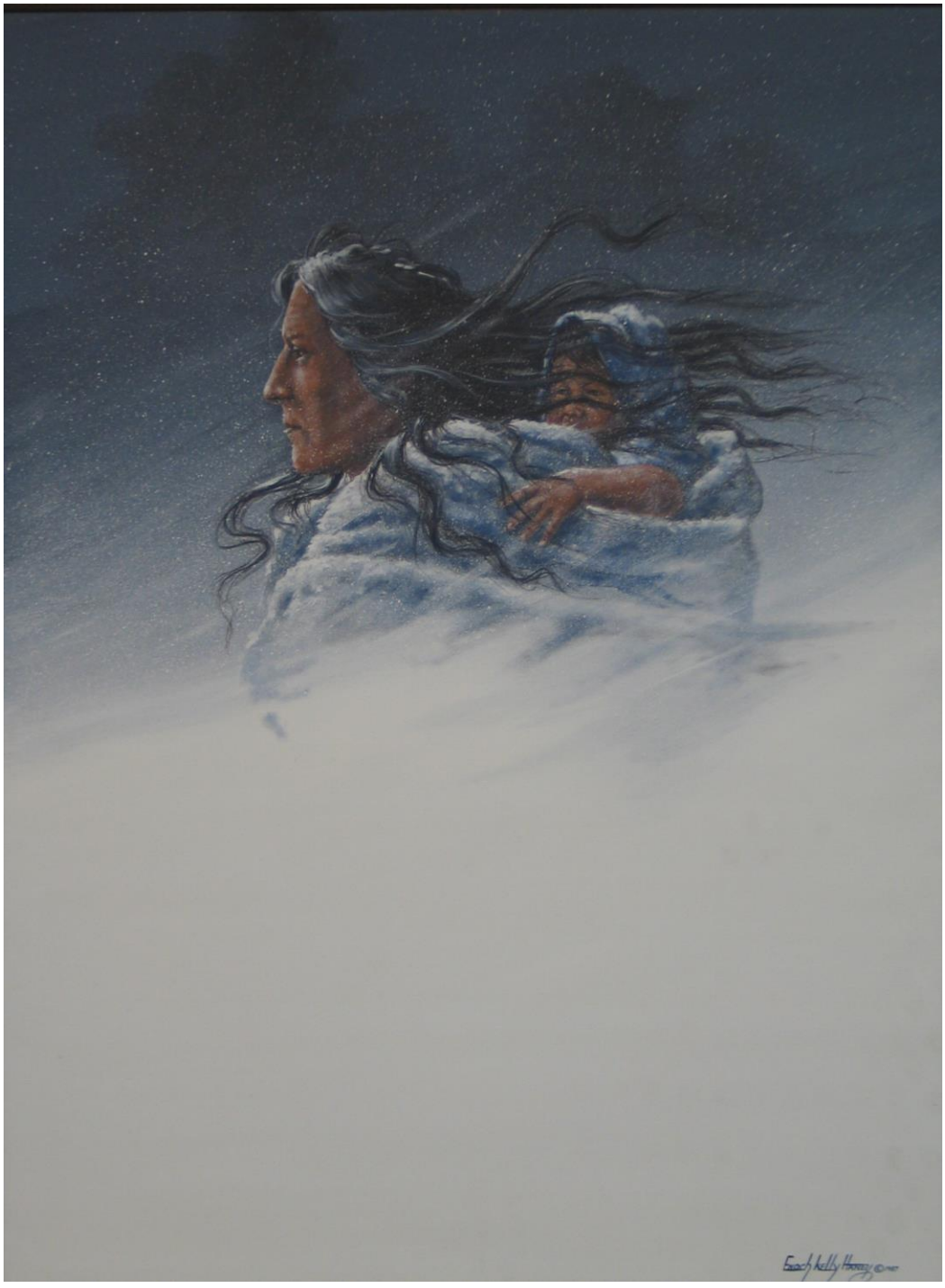


Figure 56: *No More Tears*, 1987
By Enoch Kelly Haney
Acrylic on Canvas
Gilcrease Museum, 0127.2494

and traverse across country to get to Oklahoma over the period of several years. The trek was difficult, crossing mountains and rivers, through the heat of summer and the freezing temperatures of winter. During the winter months, people were forced to continue despite the frigid temperatures and snow storms. As many Southeastern tribes recount in their oral histories, thousands of Native people lost their lives in this journey, especially battling the extremes of winter. Thus, the removal has been named the Trail of Tears. *No More Tears* depicts one image of what this trek would have been like for these travelers. Haney's addition of the snow, which obscures the woman's lower body from view, gives the piece an ethereal quality, as if she is emerging from another world. Rather than simply recording the Trail of Tears, Haney captures the emotion of the journey in the eyes of the female figure. The woman does not weep for her situation, but instead looks stolid and determined to continue on in spite of it. The emotion captured by this piece is the hallmark of Haney's artistic ability.

In contrast to *No More Tears*, Haney's legend painting, *The Inner Spirit*, is completed in realistic genre with surrealistic imagery. In *The Inner Spirit*, Haney depicts a nighttime scene with an American Indian man wearing a brown loincloth and red face paint kneeling by a fire. Wisps of smoke from the fire float upwards forming into a larger replica of the man in spirit form. However, this spirit is different; the man's arms are being changed into wings and his feet are loosing their definition. Finally, at the top of the composition, the spirit has completely transformed into the owl. Like the man on the ground and the transforming spirit figure, the owl has a red mask across its eyes. The gorget necklace around the figure's neck is modified into the striping on the bird's breast. Subtle background images of large trees with thin wisps of foliage dangling off their



Figure 57: ***The Inner Spirit*****, 1976**
By Enoch Kelly Haney
Casein on Canvas
Gilcrease Museum, 0127.2298

limbs suggest that this scene takes place in the swamps of Florida amidst the mangrove tree and Spanish moss. Once placed within this context, the viewer can derive that the legend depicted originated from the Seminole Tribe and describes special individuals who can transform themselves into owls.

Haney created several works depicting similar Seminole legends throughout the late 1970s and early 1980s. All of the works were completed using realistic elements seen in details such as those of the figure's dress or of the bird's feathers. However, other portions of the painting portray what Haney has called surrealistic elements, such as the ethereal spirit rising and transforming from human form into animal form. Haney claims his inspiration for these transforming elements came from other artists working in Surrealism, like Salvador Dali, whose works often depicted figures which were composed of other smaller realistic elements. Haney's use of surrealistic elements in his painting emphasize the other-worldliness of the piece. Haney uses the elements to highlight the fact that his work is illustrating a legend rather than portraying an image from history.

While Haney's main goal in painting has been to both document American Indian culture and evoke emotions, his recent work in sculpture has been primarily about capturing the essence of what it means to be human through sculptural portraits of American Indian people. These portraits usually do not depict any one individual, but are compilations of people that Haney knows. Each portrait is unique and conveys an express message to the viewer. For example, Haney's sculpture *Universal Man* (located at the Five Civilized Tribes Museum) was described by the artist as making a statement about how humans tend to prejudge other people based on first impressions. The

sculpture pointed to the fact that in order to understand "the true essence of another human being one must be willing to spend time and sincere effort to know that person" (FCTM Haney).

Although primarily self-taught in this medium, over the last decade Haney has managed to master the process of sculpting through works like *Universal Man*. However, Haney's superior ability at creating sculpture was brought to the forefront in 2002 when his 17-foot sculpture, *The Guardian*, crowned the Oklahoma State Capital's newly constructed dome (Hoberock June 6, 2002). Two years prior in 2000, a call went out to local artists to submit maquettes for a proposed sculpture on top of the dome. As Haney stated in a later interview

> The first thing I did was contact the Ethics Commission to see if there was anything that would prohibit me as a legislator from participating. Their position was that the sculpture was being done with private funds and that would not be a problem. I submitted my portfolio and was one of six out of 20 artists selected to submit a maquette, or a model, for consideration. They wanted it simple and bold, a Native American male from a generic tribe (Haney 2004).

After several months of work, Haney produced *The Guardian*. The small maquette was a created using a wire skeleton, upon which Haney built up the clay. He was challenged by the request to come up with a 'generic' American Indian figure but finally combined features taken from several of his children and friends of the family. Haney also included his family in much of the creative process, having his children create the feathers for the shield by building clay on pieces of straightened paper clips. The final finished piece depicted an American Indian male holding a shield and lance positioned so that his body was facing south and his head was turned towards the east. Haney imbued several symbols into the piece, the first being a circle divided into fourths on the shield to



Figure 58: *The Guardian* maquette, 2000
By Enoch Kelly Haney
Clay model
Courtesy of the Artist

represent "the four seasons, the four directions, even the four cycles of life." The second symbol was the figure's lance tip speared through the bottom of his clothing to represent standing one's ground, a metaphor which symbolized both Oklahoman's tenacity to face challenges like the Dust Bowl and the 1995 bombing of the Federal Building in Oklahoma City as well as the enduring culture and spirit of American Indian peoples. As Haney later stated "There are no words to describe how I feel about the honor of having

been able to create this piece…. I hope my children and those who participated in the creation of it will remember what they were a part of" (Haney 2004).

The Market

If Haney was not already included in the annals of famous American Indian artists, the completion of *The Guardian* has definitively catapulted him into a place of honor within the art market as well as in Oklahoma's state history. While Haney's artistic ability cannot be disputed, the success he has found throughout his life has been helped tremendously by his superlative ability at marketing and his keen business sense. He has achieved much success because of this ability, making a name for himself in the art world as well as the political arena. Haney's beginning in commercial art and subsequent education in business taught him the key links between marketing and sales. As Haney discovered early on in his career, he could create multiple pieces of original art work in the form of serials and sell them for a better price than that of prints. Similarly, Haney also targeted his sales by using specific, recognized art galleries in Oklahoma that sold American Indian art and had an established clientele until he became more recognized within the field. Once established, Haney was able to create his own gallery, selling other artists works as well as his own and marketing his art directly to his patrons without paying the commission fees to other galleries. Today Haney continues to market his art directly to consumers through the internet, providing customers with a range of goods to purchase.

While the prices for Haney's work have varied dramatically over his lifetime, they have steadily increased over time, coinciding with his increasing popularity as an artist. Haney sold small sketches in his childhood for around 25 cents, but now small

sketches by the artist sell in the open market for a few hundred dollars. His larger, more complex paintings, such as *No More Tears* have fetched prices as high as $12,000, prices which are comparable to those seen in non-Native art markets. His most recent foray into sculpture offers the most promising source of income, however, due to the high prices associated with the bronze sculpture market, the ability to create multiple copies of an image from the same mold, and the popularity of *The Guardian* as a piece of Oklahoma state history.

With the creation and completion of *The Guardian*, his most recent major artistic accomplishment, Haney is again looking towards the future and trying to accomplish those goals he set out for himself as a young man. Haney has vowed to continue both his artistic and political careers in the future, creating more art and working for his tribal government, but has also vowed to expand his horizons by entering into new mediums like film and television to continue to educate people about American Indian history and art. Whatever goals lie in the future for Haney, however, it is clear that he will continue to be successful due to his extraordinary abilities in business and art.

SECTION 4:

Artistic Negotiation in the Twentieth Century Art Market

Chapter 7:

Artistic Integrity and Negotiation in the American Indian Art Market

> Integrity is what a culture uses to achieve balance as it embraces its past while incorporating new materials and ideas. Artists shape new ideas into existing patterns and make new patterns from old ideas, keeping art fresh and alive through the tension between the known and unknown. Integrity was crucial to the fusing of old with new in the transformation of Native cultural traditions in the twentieth century, when Indian people were often the subject of tourism and were sentimentalized by non-Indians. (Bernstein and McMaster 2005)

As W. Richard West Jr. has so aptly stated, "Art and the creation of objects and the stories told through art will continue to be central in the story of Native America" (Brokaw Sept. 21, 2004). However, the relationship between artist and art market is crucial to our understanding of the impact that art and artists have had in relaying the story of American Indian people. Contact between American Indians and Euro-Americans dramatically changed not only the production methods, styles and media used in creating art, but also changed the fundamental purpose of art so that it is now primarily viewed as economic resource within a capitalist economic system. Because the purpose of art changed, Native artists who participate in the capitalist external market have had to strike a balance between creating art that is accepted by non-Native consumers with the artist's culturally ascribed artistic heritage and integrity.

Thus, I must return to the central tenet of this study: how has the market for American Indian art driven or resisted changes in style and imagery? In order to answer

this question, I have examined how individual artists have responded to the demands of the art market and how they have negotiated their artistic creativity in response to fluctuations in the market. Over the past few chapters I have examined the lives and art of five Creek painters living and working in Oklahoma during the twentieth century. In this final chapter, I will return to the theoretical framework that I posited in the first chapter and, using examples pulled from the five artist case studies, I will demonstrate how these artists responded to the demands and fluctuations within the art market. Each artist had a unique strategy for balancing their creativity with the demands of consumers and with their own basic need for economic survival. These strategies reflect both the individual artist's personality and style choices as well as the time period they worked in. Through discussing these strategies, I hope to elucidate how the market has played a role in the development of American Indian easel painting during the twentieth century.

Commodification of Art

Glass (2002) divided the commoditization of American Indian art into three heuristic periods: colonial, modernist, and post-modern. During the colonial period, Native objects became representations of 'the exotic other' and an imagined culture that was less-complex and needed to be protected from extinction. Simultaneously, during the colonial period Native objects also represented a financial resource for American Indian communities who were entering into the capitalist economy. Following the colonial period, the modernist period was characterized by the revitalization of 'traditional' designs in institutional settings such as museums. In contrast, the post-modern period is characterized by pluralism where artists are able to negotiate their needs

and wishes with those of the market. These periods can be roughly applied to the development of American Indian easel painting as an art form in Oklahoma.

The colonial period Glass outlines is synonymous with the emergence of easel painting as an artistic commodity among American Indian groups in Oklahoma. This period featured such artists as the Kiowa Five and Acee Blue Eagle, who were the first American Indian easel painters to emerge in Oklahoma and were under the tutelage of mentor Oscar B. Jacobson. Jacobson was one of the key people that helped establish American Indian easel painting as an artistic commodity in Oklahoma. Jacobson knew that consumers who were interested in purchasing art made by American Indians were primarily non-Native and were attracted to the art because of the mystique surrounding an exotic, supposedly dying, culture that was unknown to them. He also knew that easel paintings could easily be transformed into a commodity that would offer individual Native artists economic prosperity. Jacobson often acted paternalistically by organizing exhibitions for his Native students and arranging jobs for them with organizations such as the Works Progress Administration (Stephenson September 27, 1940). Thus, Jacobson is directly correlated with the colonial period of commoditization in American Indian easel painting.

No other easel painter in Oklahoma epitomizes the colonial period more than Acee Blue Eagle. Being a young artist, Blue Eagle allowed Jacobson to act on his behalf, signing him up for exhibitions and arranging his mural commissions. Blue Eagle also heeded Jacobson's advice and made himself a commodity as well as his art. Blue Eagle often sold his art during his lectures and his performances. At these lectures and performances, Blue Eagle preyed on the intrigue surrounding American Indian culture, as

Jacobson had taught him. Flyers from his lectures promoted the events as "Educational! Historic! Romantic!" and stated that Blue Eagle emanated from a "peculiar culture" (SNOMNH Blue Eagle). From these initial marketing endeavors, Blue Eagle was able to establish himself fairly rapidly as a premier American Indian easel painter.

With Blue Eagle's rise in popularity as an artist also came Blue Eagle's financial freedom and release from the paternalistic relationship he had with Jacobson. Blue Eagle's movement away from the paternal relationship towards a relationship of equals with Jacobson marked his movement into the second period, the modernist period. During this period, considered by some to be the renaissance of traditional American Indian painting in Oklahoma, Blue Eagle and his fellow artists, Solomon McCombs and Fred Beaver, sought to promote 'traditional' flat-style painting as the best way to preserve and document the lifestyles of American Indian people (DRC Silberman 129/04, NAA Solomon McCombs/Box 3). This style of art was marketed as 'traditional' American Indian painting at for two reasons. First, the style lacked perspective and a receding plane, principles that predated the introduction of Euro-American art to North America. Second, these flat-style paintings often referenced pre-contact Native objects found in museums, portraying these items in order to capture American Indian customs and rituals as they were imagined to be prior to their alteration with Euro-American contact (Smith 2003).

The traditional flat-style was not only promoted by Native artists like Blue Eagle, McCombs, and Beaver, but was also endorsed by venues like the Indian Annuals at the Philbrook Museum of Art as being the only 'pure' American Indian type of painting (Wyckoff 1996). These events were created in order to help Native artists market their

art and broaden the potential market for American Indian art by increasing interest in this particular art form. However, the requirement for Native artists to stay within the flat-style genre caused several side effects. First, while the market size for American Indian painting was enlarged due to an increased awareness of the art form, the type of art that could be sold and was accepted within the marketplace was limited by the confines of what was considered traditional. Second, artists were able to increase their individual economic success within the marketplace by entering into these competitions. However, they struggled to maintain their artistic integrity because they had to subscribe to a particular type of painting style demanded by institutional venues, like museums, as well as consumers. Thus, artists like Fred Beaver, were sometimes forced to compromise their artistic integrity and create paintings portraying Plains stereotypes in order to survive economically (DRC Silberman 129/04).

These compromises made many Native artists feel uncomfortable with the aesthetic confines of art competitions. Likewise, in the late 1950s, the director of the Philbrook Museum of Art began to realize that the strict adherence to the canons of flat-style was creating stagnation within the creative process and development of Indian art. Therefore, the Philbrook modified the rules of the competition to include an experimental category (Wyckoff 1996). This change coupled with the movement away from flat-style by many American Indian painters, such as Joan Hill and Enoch Kelly Haney, signaled the beginning of the third era, the postmodern period. In this contemporary period, artists have been able to expand upon their personal definitions of Indian art and better negotiate their personal identities as Indian artists. Hill has demonstrated the Native artists can create art in a broad range of styles and genres, recombining and reconfiguring older

imagery based in American Indian history within contemporary, abstract forms. Haney, on the other hand, has shown that American Indian artists are not limited to the media of paint and can produce monumental works in bronze. Even Haney and Hill's artistic predecessors, Blue Eagle, McCombs and Beaver, demonstrated a predilection for experimentation with media and style, although these trials did not occur until late in each artist's respective careers with the onset of the postmodern period.

Besides increasing control over artistic integrity and breaking away from the traditional form of flat-style, the postmodern period has also been characterized by new marketing schemes. As Haney and Hill have both demonstrated, they have broken away from the institutional setting of the museum as art broker, and moved towards marketing their art by themselves through independent dealers and through the internet. This independence has allowed them to market their art to a broader sector of the population, locally, nationally and internationally, and also allows for direct relationships to develop between artist and consumer. Thus, the postmodern period for American Indian artists is reflective of increasing control over production and marketing of art.

Markets

While American Indian art and objects occupy many different classifications of markets, American Indian easel painting has been customarily located in an external market, with non-Native consumers exchanging money for the art. However, this classification has two exceptions that should be noted. First, the exchange of easel paintings occurred not only between artist and consumer or patron, but also between Native artists. For example, Hill stated that she would sometimes trade her small

paintings with other artists, like Willard Stone, a Cherokee woodcarver (Joan Hill 2004). These trades occurred without the exchange of money in an informal internal market between Native artists. The purpose of these trades is to strengthen the relationships between individual artists as well as provide an exchange of artistic ideas.

Second, many of the paintings created by artists working in flat-style, like Blue Eagle, McCombs and Beaver, featured culturally specific nuances that would only be understood by those viewers that had an extensive knowledge of American Indian culture and history. This, coupled with the artists' statements about documenting Native culture and history for younger generations of American Indians, suggests that these paintings were created not for an external market consisting of non-Native people, but were instead created for an internal market and primarily Native audience. The detailed murals by McCombs (Figure 23) and Blue Eagle (Figure 11) were created specifically for the Native people, demonstrating features distinctive to those American Indian cultures living in the towns of Marietta and Seminole, Oklahoma. However, other works containing culturally specific details created by these artists were sold to non-Native consumers. It seems that Blue Eagle, McCombs and Beaver were unable to sell their art to the Native consumers the art had been intended for and thus had to rely on non-Native patrons in the external market for monetary support.

Beyond the distinction between internal and external markets for American Indian art is the classification of markets based on economic value. This classification is divided into three categories; low, middle and high value art. Each of the five artists discussed in this study attempted to create a broad range of art that would fall into at least two of these categories. In the first category, low value art, the artists created small,

inexpensive reproductions of their more popular works of art. For example, during the first half of the twentieth century, Blue Eagle, McCombs and Beaver created low value tourist art in the form of printed greeting cards and small hand-painted note cards (see Figure 40 for an example) depicting single American Indian figures. In the later half of the twentieth century, Hill and Haney similarly created low value art through the use of print media, where popular works were converted into posters and calendars. These cards, posters and calendars sold for minimal amounts of money, but sold in massive quantities, increasing both the income and exposure of the artists.

While the definition of low value art is fairly easy to delineate, the distinction between middle value art and high value art is more difficult to determine. Under Clifford's (1988) definition, high value art is characterized by quality of workmanship, singularity and originality, authenticity and rarity. In contrast, middle value art is characterized by culturally determined artistic features and includes art forms such as folk art. Each artist discussed in this study is notable because of the quality of their workmanship and their superb ability in easel painting; therefore, their work qualifies under the high value art category. Beyond this qualification, however, the ability to classify each artist's work as high value art becomes increasingly difficult. For example, Fred Beaver created many works that portrayed Seminole men riding in a canoe in the swamps of Florida (Figures 33-36). Beaver was the first American Indian painter to portray this subject matter, making the subject of his art unique and original, qualities of high value art. Yet, the serial nature of the works and the repetition in subject matter makes the pieces' singularity and rarity problematic, despite the fact that each painting contains small details not found in other works.

So the question remains, do Beaver's or other American Indian artists' paintings fall into the high value art market or in the middle value art market? The answer is determined by examining the style and ranges of styles present in the market. The prevalence of flat-style among artists like Blue Eagle, McCombs and Beaver during the first half of the twentieth century suggests that American Indian easel painting falls into the middle value art market because the style and images portrayed were culturally determined and the art was linked to collective and traditional features. Flat-style became synonymous with American Indian painting so that it became the art of this particular people, or folk art. This notion was reinforced through institutional settings like the Philbrook's Indian Annual competition and exhibits like that of the Exposition of Indian Tribal Arts in New York, where flat style was the only art approved for exhibition.

However, during the late 1950s with the transition to the post-modern period, American Indian artists like Hill and Haney, began to move away from the restrictions of flat-style and out of the confines of middle-value art. By broadening their artistic styles and moving into other genres of painting, like non-objective abstracts and realism, Hill and Haney were able to place their art in the high value market category. For instance, Haney's bronze works represent a unique media within the realm of American Indian art and pieces, like *The Guardian* (Figure 56), sell for upwards of $10,000 depending on the size of the work. Similarly, Hill has been able to create a distinct style in the form of her expressionist travel paintings, allowing her to place her art in the high value market. The range of styles represented by Hill's and Haney's works firmly places these artists in the high value market in contrast to their artistic predecessors and demonstrates the

delineation between the modern and postmodern periods in the commoditization of American Indian easel painting.

While it is unclear what the next new and highly desired art style will be, it is clear that the market for American Indian art in Oklahoma is steadily decreasing. As Hill and Haney both stated, it is becoming increasingly difficult, if not impossible, to sell American Indian easel paintings in Oklahoma. Both of these artists have turned to the virtual marketplace of the internet because they have better control over the sales of their works, have less overhead costs exhibiting in cyberspace rather than the traditional fees and commissions associated with galleries, and can reach a wider commercial audience. With the emergence of the internet market for American Indian art, new questions are being raised about how this global market will affect both established and emergent artists and the acceptance of their work within the art world.

Politics of Exchange: Assigning Value to Art

As Appadurai (1986) pointed out, value is not an inherent property of a piece of art but is instead assigned to that object based on certain characteristics agreed upon by society. These characteristics have been defined and categorized in many different manners, including Clifford's (1988) art-culture system discussed above. In purely economic terms, value is the result of demand for an object. To review economist Georg Simmel's statement " we call those objects valuable that resist our desire to possess them" (Simmel as quoted in Appadurai 1986:3). Thus, in Clifford's system the rarity and singularity of an object makes it more valuable precisely because not everyone can possess it.

While this economic principle does contribute to a basic understanding of the politics of exchange within the market for American Indian art, the assignation of value in this market is much more complex. Artists employ many different strategies in order to increase the value of their art. One such strategy is to try and increase the popularity of the artist and his or her acceptance within the market. All beginning artists struggle with establishing themselves within the market, encountering difficulties in exhibiting or advertising their art to prospective clients. Thus, the majority of emergent artists will enter art competitions as a way of initially gaining exposure in the consumer arena. Competitions can provide artists with recognition from the art establishment as well as provide them with publicity, a key factor in the marketing of art. All five artists discussed in this study began their careers in art by entering art competitions, specifically the Philbrook Indian Annuals. The rewards the artists received at these competitions allowed them to be accepted within the art world and become established as professional artists. For example, Haney started to sell his work to friends and relatives at a very young age and for very small prices. However, once he began receiving awards and honorable mentions at competitions, the demand for his art increased and he was able to raise the prices of his artwork. The more awards Haney received, the more his popularity and demand for his work increased, and thus, the value of his work also increased.

Another strategy artists' use to increase value is to associate the art with a historically meaningful occurrence. Blue Eagle, McCombs, and Beaver used their art to document American Indian cultures that were feared to be fading away. By accurately recounting the daily life and habits of American Indian people, these artists made their works valuable cultural records for future generations of American Indian people and for

academics like anthropologists and art historians. Similarly, Haney associated his bronze work, *The Guardian* (Figure 56), with the addition of a dome to the Oklahoma State Capital building in 2002 (Hoberock June 6, 2002). By allowing his work to crown the dome, Haney has tied his statue and his reputation to the history and art history of the state of Oklahoma, increasing the value of all of his current and future work through this association.

Besides associating art with historic occurrences, artists also try to associate meaningful experiences with their art in order to increase its potential value (Bahti 1996). No other artist was more adept at imbuing experiential value into his works than Blue Eagle. Blue Eagle's performances became a spectacle for those interested in the romance and mystique of the cultural 'other'. His patrons were much more willing to purchase his art as a souvenir after they had seen him perform, marking the day that they met the flamboyant artist or saw a 'real Indian.' In the minds of the consumer, having these experiences to link with the paintings they bought increased the value and also the desirability of the art. By combining his performances with selling art, Blue Eagle was able to manipulate the process of value assignation and exchange to his advantage.

Agency and Structure

As Blue Eagle's manipulation of value has demonstrated, artists have had some ability to exercise control (or agency) over the marketing and valuation of their art. However, American Indian art and artists continue to exist within the overarching structural systems of culture, society, and economy. In addition to helping determine the value of artistic objects, these structural systems play a large role in determining the form

and style of artistic objects through the mechanism of demand. As David Bayles and Ted Orland illustrate in their book *Art and Fear*:

> At any given moment, the world offers vastly more support to work it already understands- namely art that's already been around for a generation or a century. Expressions of truly new ideas often fail to qualify as even bad art- they're simply viewed as no art at all… For the artist, the dilemma seems obvious: risk rejection by exploring new worlds, or court acceptance by following well-explored paths. Needless to say, the latter strategy is the overwhelming drug of choice where acceptance is the primary goal. Make work that *looks like* art, and acceptance is automatic. (Bayles and Orland 1993)

In the commercial world of a capitalist economy, artists must be accepted in the art world in order to survive. If consumers do not desire or accept a particular art style, then artists must develop a survival strategy. Artists can either submit to making art that is desired within the marketplace, negotiating their artistic integrity by following those "well explored paths," or they can resign themselves to creating art with the possibility that they may not reap any monetary benefits from its creation.

In the context of this study, each artist discussed was able to develop a strategy that helped him or her negotiate the demands of the market. These strategies are not only a reflection of the individual artist's personality but also speak to the time period during which the artist worked. For example, Blue Eagle was one of the earliest easel painters to enter the American Indian art market. Blue Eagle's inclination for painting in flat-style was a response to the colonial structure that existed in the early stages of the market for American Indian art. Non-native authorities in the art establishment, like Jacobson, had defined flat-style as being the authentic American Indian form of painting. Anything other than flat-style was seen as being tainted by non-Native art movements. Influenced

by Jacobson's tutelage, Blue Eagle believed and stated repeatedly that this style was the only true form of American Indian painting remaining in Oklahoma and thus his job as a painter was to continue this tradition. Even after Blue Eagle was able to establish himself in the art market and act independently of Jacobson, he continued to paint only in flat style. It is unclear whether Blue Eagle continued to work in flat-style simply because he felt obligated to continue this art form or because prior to the late 1950 flat-style was the only form of American Indian easel painting accepted within the marketplace. What is clear, however, is that Blue Eagle was greatly aware of the demands of the market. This is demonstrated by the fact that he gave advice to his fellow artist Fred Beaver on how to change his style in accordance with market trends in order to gain income (DRC Silberman 129/04). Thus, it seems that Blue Eagle adapted to the structural confines of market trends rather than resisting them.

In contrast to Blue Eagle, McCombs did not adapt to fluctuations within the market for American Indian art. Like Blue Eagle, McCombs primarily created works using flat-style. However, during the late 1950s when flat-style became less popular in the market, as demonstrated by the Philbrook's inclusion of an experimental category in the Indian Annuals, McCombs resisted changing his style to accommodate to the market. Instead, McCombs sought out new art venues that would continue to show and sell his flat-style works (NAA Solomon McCombs/Box 1). McCombs was able to resist these changes in the market because art was not his primary source of income. Being employed by government agencies gave him the economic support that he needed during times when his art was less desirable within the market. For McCombs, changes in style came only because of personal reasons, like the experimentation seen in his art after his

marriage to Margarita Sauer. Consequently, McCombs' biography is characterized by the struggle to assert independence from the structural confines of the market.

While McCombs was able to assert his independence from the demands of the market, Beaver found it increasingly difficult to maintain his artistic integrity while surviving economically. Beaver was a full time artist painting primarily in flat-style and relied only on the sales of his art for economic support. Therefore, Beaver's income fluctuated with the demands of the market. When the demand for flat-style declined in the late 1950s, Beaver's income decreased and he found it increasingly difficult to support himself and his family. Thus, heeding to the advice of fellow artist Blue Eagle, Beaver created art that was more commercial in nature and corresponded to the demands of consumers for inexpensive souvenirs representing stereotypes of American Indian culture. Beaver resented compromising his artistic integrity in this manner, especially since he had worked in flat-style not only to preserve American Indian cultural heritage but also to combat the stereotypes he had encountered while in the Army. Nevertheless, Beaver found that he was unable to resist the demands of the market without having a secondary form of income (DRC Silberman 129/04).

Blue Eagle, McCombs and Beaver developed their individual strategies for negotiating and navigating the structural confines of the American Indian art market based on the demands for flat-style works during the colonial and modern periods. American Indian artists, like Hill and Haney, who operate in the pluralistic post-modern period, however, have had greater opportunities to successfully negotiate their artistic integrity within the marketplace. For example, Hill's method of negotiating the market can be equated to a shotgun approach. She creates numerous pieces of art in a wide range

of styles and genres in order to have at least a few pieces of art be accepted by the targeted consumers of American Indian art. While Hill's main objective in creating this wide variety of art is to satisfy her own creative needs, it is clear that this approach allows her to have a much wider consumer audience for her works, increasing her potential profit and her ability to successfully negotiate the structural confines of the art market (Joan Hill 2004).

Haney, on the other hand, approaches the market through the eyes of a seasoned businessman. He researches the potential of his creations thoroughly before ever starting a project and then creates art that targets a specific consumer audience. Because of this approach, many of Haney's works tend to be monumental in size and price, such as his large canvases like *No More Tears*. Haney is able to devote a sizeable amount of time to researching these projects and targeting his consumer audience because he has been able to support himself with other business ventures, like his careers in politics and teaching. While on the surface Haney seems to be less productive than his artistic cohorts because of the time he has devoted to his other careers, many of the works that he has produced have comparatively fetched some of the higher prices in the market, ranging from $10,000 to $30,000 and up. His creations have also set new trends within the field of American Indian art, with a renewed interest and attention being paid to bronze sculpture due to Haney's production of *The Guardian*. Haney's success as a businessman has demonstrated that American Indian artists are becoming increasingly capable of manipulating the markets to suit their own desires, pushing the art market structure to accept new trends and styles (Haney 2005).

The Future of American Indian Art

In the current post-modern period, contemporary Native artists, like Hill and Haney, are left to ponder the future direction of the market for American Indian easel painting. While the American Indian art market drove artists in the first half of the twentieth century to produce primarily in flat-style, the decrease in the market's demand for this style art during the late 1950s and 1960s led artists to develop other styles and art genres. Because of this change in the market, there are few artists remaining who continue to create flat-style art. It remains to be seen whether the pendulum of demand will swing back to make this style desirable again within the marketplace. If eventually demand for flat-style does increase, it is most likely that the art of deceased artists, like Blue Eagle, McCombs and Beaver, will again become hot commodities both as antiquities and as representations of a classic style in American Indian easel painting. Other artists operating in more modern styles, like Hill's non-objective abstracts or Haney's realistic paintings, may decrease in demand and value should the market swing back towards flat-style art. However, it is a safe assumption that both Hill and Haney will find a new niche within the marketplace by either responding to the market through returning to their artistic roots and producing more flat-style or seeking an alternative market for their current artistic style through the medium of the internet.

This study has demonstrated that American Indian easel painting has proven to be a commodity that is ever-changing and developing. The artists discussed in this study have confirmed that there are a range of strategies artists employ to negotiate their creativity with the demands and fluctuations of the market in order to maintain their artistic integrity and cultural identity. These strategies have developed over time from

strategies of accommodation in the first half of the twentieth century to an increasing resistance to and manipulation of the market's demands by American Indian artists in the late 1900s and early twenty-first century. In the current post-modern era, Native-artists are developing an increasing influence within the market and are better able to relay the continuing presence of Native people and their arts within American society. Thus, modern art venues, like the National Museum of the American Indian, reflect the past, present and future progression of American Indian art and the market in which it circulates.

Archival Sources

This work was compiled using multiple archival sources. While a few of the archives focused solely on personal correspondence or items collected by the artists, several archives contained previously published information. When at all possible, I have cited the published information using the standard bibliographic citation. Miscellaneous materials such as correspondence, gallery brochures, and unidentified clippings are cited using the archival abbreviations listed below.

CCHM-	Creek Council House Museum, Okmulgee OK
DRC-	Dickinson Research Center, National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum, Oklahoma City OK
FCTM-	Five Civilized Tribes Museum, Muscogee OK
GM-	Gilcrease Museum, Tulsa OK
NAA-	National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution, Suitland MD
PMA-	Philbrook Museum of Art, Tulsa OK
SNOMNH-	Sam Noble Oklahoma Museum of Natural History, Norman OK
WHC-	Western History Collection, University of Oklahoma, Norman

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