

kitchen) all contribute to an ominous vision of an unsustainable life. The sense of entrapment is clear and powerful. As Pratt says, "As the breast-like mound began to rise, its cells, like cancer cells, started to multiply at an ever-increasing rate. Suddenly it was out of control."

Other artists deal with issues of self-image and self-esteem, both of which take serious blows from the ravages of cancer. Susan Schelle's work consists of twelve ceramic plates decorated with singular articles of women's clothing, the wrappings and entrapments of a "beauty" oriented society. Dawn MacNutt's metal sculpture catches in stasis the motion of a woman caught in a breeze, one part of her chest ripped open into a gaping hole. As the sculpture is fine mesh metal, the body is transparent, the face blank. We see right through her.

The small exhibition catalogue that accompanies the show is a touching legacy to the women who did not survive, as well as a dose of hope for those who currently live with cancer. In it the reader will find photos of survivors, telling their stories between the images of the works in the exhibitions. Their smiling faces look out at us from happier times. They tell the tales of condescending doctors, of self-healing, of the commitment of families and friends, and of remission and relapse. As survivor Alison Bailes says, "I endured the radiation. For weeks, I couldn't sit, stand, or walk. The pain was so bad, I lived on Tylenol, but I survived. I didn't raise my kids all those years to make them orphans." As a survivor, husband Mack Kohout's poignant statement bears witness to the fact that the people left behind have a heavy burden to carry. The words of the survivors say more than any art object can in underlining the pain of these women and the people who are left behind.

The value of artworks and written accounts such as these is immeasurable. They are invaluable for their insight and candour and for their handling of the issues. How are the subjects presented? What is the curatorial force behind the idea? The institutions that have embraced "social issue" exhibitions should be applauded, as arguments to the contrary are, at best, limited by elitism and, at worst, ignorant of the history of art that has transpired over the past centuries. Documenting life and death around us is common subject matter for the artist. Let us not brush off lightly works steeped in subjectivity in order to laud more "theoretical" forms of contemporary art. Although this is not a glamorous or highly-polished exhibition, the value and meaning of the works is not lost on the audience.

Walking through the exhibition and reading the catalogue moved me, as I witnessed an empathetic and public acknowledgement of a previously closeted women's disease whose effects are felt by everyone.

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Reclaiming History: Ledger Drawings by the Assiniboine Artist Hoṅgeeyeesa. GLENBOW MUSEUM. Mounted at the Mackenzie Art Gallery, Regina. 3 March - 30 April 1995. 95 p. catalogue.

The Glenbow Museum's exhibition *Reclaiming History* is a fine example of how fruitful co-operation between Native and non-Native peoples can be. The forty-four drawings by the Assiniboine artist Hoṅgeeyeesa of the Carry the Kettle First Nation

in Saskatchewan were the subject of a combined investigation into provenance and authenticity by the Calgary museum and members of the Carry the Kettle community. In addition, there is much to be learned about both Native history and the history of Native-newcomer relations from this fascinating example of what is known as ledger art.

Ledger art gets its appellation from the fact the drawings were executed by Aboriginal artists in the lined account books and ledgers of Indian agents and other prominent figures from the non-Native society. For Plains artists who traditionally worked on the large "canvases" that bison hides provided, the collapse of the buffalo economy by the 1880s deprived them of their favourite medium. Since the communities of which the artists were a significant part were moving onto reserves and coming under the tutelage of Indian Affairs officials, it is hardly surprising that the unused pages in the ledgers in the agency office became an alternative surface on which to record their observations of the changing world about them. Dr. O.C. Edwards, a Department of Indian Affairs physician, collected a number of such drawings, some apparently executed on commission from the doctor, and his grandson made them available to the Glenbow in 1985.

Discovering the identity of the artist and circulating the drawings became a bicultural project for the museum's staff. The curator of the exhibition, Valerie Robertson, followed a paper trail laid down by Glenbow historian Hugh Dempsey until it brought her to the Assiniboine community on Carry the Kettle reserve, east of Regina. Combining archival research into annuity pay lists and a residential school pupil registry with oral history inquiries among the Carry the Kettle people, Robertson came to the conclusion that the forty-four drawings were the work of Hoŋgeeēeesa. Hoŋgeeēeesa, a prominent figure who occupied the civil office of caller, was well remembered for one particular application of his artistic skill. His sketch of a thief who had robbed a local store enabled the police to arrest the culprit. Robertson and the Glenbow also called upon the historical skills of Charlotte Nahbixie--a Carry the Kettle woman who was studying at the Saskatchewan Indian Federated College--to write an introductory essay on "The Assiniboine" that adds greatly to the excellence of the catalogue that accompanies the exhibition (pp. 17-25). Finally, the Glenbow arranged with the district tribal council in which Carry the Kettle was located to hold the formal opening at the New Dawn Valley Centre in Fort Qu'Appelle, Saskatchewan, on 13 September 1993. The ceremony, which was part of the annual Treaty Four Gathering at Fort Qu'Appelle, was accompanied by Aboriginal rituals such as a Pipe Ceremony and a community feast. Since the opening, the exhibition has hung at the Glenbow in Calgary, the McMichael Gallery in Kleinburg, Ontario, the McCord Museum in Montreal, and the Mackenzie Art Gallery in Regina. It will conclude its journey with appearances at Saskatoon's Mendel Art Gallery in the autumn of 1995 and at the Museum of Anthropology in Vancouver in early 1996.

The items in the exhibition continue this practice of combining Native tradition and the influence of contact with Euro-Canadians in a manner that appeals to both the historical and aesthetic senses. The interpretive captions are provided in English, French, and Assiniboine. The drawings, twenty-three of which are from 1885 and twenty-one from 1897, have been organized in seven themes. Four images on "The Buffalo" are followed by a larger number on "The Hunt," before giving way to

groupings on “Battle,” “Parading,” and “Ceremony and Dance.” The final two topics are “Domestic Life” and “Historic Events.” One manifestation of traditional Aboriginal artistry is the fact that the drawings executed in 1885 strongly resemble aspects of traditional pictographic art. The depiction of horses and buffalo in the 1885 images seems strangely unrealistic to a modern observer--especially when contrasted with the much more lifelike renderings in the 1897 images--until comparison is made with examples of horse renderings in pictographic art (see, for example, the reproduction of sandstone cliff carving in Alan D. McMillan, *Native Peoples and Cultures of Canada* [Vancouver/Toronto, 1988], p. 125).

Other instances of cultural continuity include the 1885 depiction of rituals such as “charging the dog head,” in which pipes are being ceremonially smoked while the dancers charge. In another image, Native warriors are as likely to brandish a bow and arrow, a club or a musket, and some of the muskets are used as clubs rather than firearms. Cultural adaptation--or at least curiosity--comes through in any of the numerous drawings in the groupings on “Domestic Life” and “Historic Events.” Particularly impressive is an untitled drawing that depicts four women and one man who are garbed for the ceremonial round dance. (This image also reveals how much Hoñgeeyeesa’s drafting ability had developed, for the faces on all five are lifelike and gripping.) Since this drawing was apparently done around 1897, it might also illustrate Assiniboine defiance of the 1895 legislation that outlawed any Plains dancing that involved self-mutilation or giveaways.

It is in the interpretation of images of post-treaty life that the curators get into some difficulty. Image number 34 is said to be “a steamer going down the Mississippi or down the Milk River in Montana.” However, the vessel clearly flies a flag that cannot be a Stars and Stripes; the pennant is strongly suggestive of the rendering of a flag in image number 35, which concerns a fort or barracks in Canadian territory. Adding to the perplexity caused by the curator’s attribution in number 34 is the fact that the exhibition and catalogue both reproduce a drawing of the steamer *Northcote* during the 1885 rebellion that strikingly resembles the vessel in number 34. (Both number 34 and number 35 are dated ca. 1885.) Another dubious attribution or explanation accompanies image number 37 which is said to be “a registry by the Indian Agent.” What the image clearly shows is the paying of annuities under Treaty Four. In addition, the curators have suggested that the uniformed Natives in number 44 “could be police training Indian troops or Cavalry training in the U.S.A.” The figures are almost certainly Native guides or scouts in the US army, such as Hoñgeeyeesa could have seen during a documented sojourn south of the international border.

It is not just images of post-treaty life that might have been subject to faulty interpretation. It is hard to credit the explanation for one image, which supposedly depicts “men chopping down a centre-pole for a Sundance lodge.” The “tree” portrayed is a sapling, nothing like what would have been required for the centre pole of a dance lodge. Moreover, the felling of the centre pole was usually attended by more ceremony and a larger audience than is portrayed in the image. Nor is it absolutely certain that the formal setting in another image is “some sort of game” or one of “the most sacred games.” It looks, rather, like some other kind of sacred ceremony. Since Glenbow’s curator relied heavily upon Assiniboine informants to interpret many of the pictures, it is hardly fair to dismiss or severely criticize the explanations. However,

informed viewers will probably experience some doubt about a few of the interpretive panels that accompany the drawings.

The most unsettling feature of the exhibition of ledger drawings, at least as it was hung in Regina's Mackenzie Art Gallery in the spring of 1995, concerned the themes that were arbitrarily imposed on the collection and the ordering of some of the images. After the first seventeen images, which are grouped under "The Buffalo" and "The Hunt" headings, the arrangement becomes less unified and coherent. The sections on "Battle" and "Parading" seem a bit artificial. Why is the image of a war party not in one of these sections, rather than being included in the "Ceremony and Dance" portion? Why was the steamer physically placed in the midst of the "Ceremony and Dance" grouping? The "Domestic Life" images are few, but the one that depicts three amorous couples is a splendid example of whimsical humour. The image of a man pulling killed game home on a buffalo skin should have been included in the "Domestic Life" or "The Hunt" sections, rather than in "Historic Events," where it stands out like a sore thumb. In general the "Historic Events" subset is a hodgepodge of images that are unified only by the fact that most of them deal with post-treaty, on-reserve scenes.

Some specific arrangements that were made in the Regina showing were disconcerting, others useful. Some of the images that appear in the catalogue were not hung in the Mackenzie Gallery. In Regina the gallery switched the captions for images number 35 and number 44. One addition to the drawings that should be noted positively is a group of artifacts that the Glenbow assembled in Alberta and Saskatchewan to accompany the exhibition. These are a backrest, pipe bag, belt, beaded cape, and decorative broach. The physical presence of these items contributes greatly to a viewer's enjoyment of the drawings. It is wonderful to be able to turn from Hoŋgeeŷeesa's depiction of a domestic scene inside a lodge, which includes a backrest, to view a real one that the Saskatchewan Museum of Natural History obtained from two members of the Carry the Kettle First Nation around 1950. These items both complement and amplify the spare, restrained renderings of the Assiniboine artist that hang nearby.

Reclaiming History is a laudable example of cooperation between professional museologists and Aboriginal people, one that provides many clues about Native-newcomer relations. Identifying the original artist and interpreting the contents of his drawings were only possible because residents of the Carry the Kettle reserve assisted Valerie Robertson and other Glenbow staff. As the Glenbow's Executive Director points out in his Foreword to the catalogue, the way in which his museum assembled this exhibition answered the call for "meaningful collaboration" between museums and Native peoples that was issued in a report of the joint committee of the Assembly of First Nations and the Canadian Museums Association. This exhibition provides a powerful example of how fruitful such "meaningful collaboration" can be. Everyone interested in documenting the past and culture of Aboriginal peoples should hope that there will be many imitators of this impressive experiment in *Reclaiming History*.

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