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Cover: Fritz Scholder, *Four Indian Riders*, 1967. Oil on canvas, 182.9 cm. Collection of Mr. and Mrs. William Metcalf.

Back cover: Fritz Scholder, *New Mexico No. 1*, 1964. Oil on canvas, 152.4 x 152.4 cm. Collection of the Estate of Fritz Scholder.

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# Scholder's Figurati

LOWERY STOKES SIMS

Fritz Scholder once observed, "Artistic freedom is color-blind."<sup>1</sup> He would discover that the world was not. Given the political and social context in which he emerged in the United States at mid twentieth century, he, his art, and his career would be inevitably defined by his Native American heritage.

This was the consequence of how the art world came to grapple with issues of diversity, inclusion, and identity as black and Native Americans and Latinos in particular escalated their demands for social, economic, political, and cultural enfranchisement. In the process, the long-standing dominance of exclusively Eurocentric values in the visual arts would be challenged and the character of the postmodern landscape in the art world as of the 1980s would be determined.

Scholder considered himself to be at once Indian and not Indian. As Paul Chaat Smith noted, he recognized the paradoxical aspects of his life.<sup>2</sup> But how did his work demonstrate that paradox? It was demonstrated by the fact he was as adept in creating an abstracted landscape as he was in painting an image of a Native American; in rendering a floral still life or a female figure charged with erotic or occult energy as in capturing the psychological condition of Native Americans. It is also demonstrated by the fact that even after he professionally acknowledged his Native heritage, he would continue to emphasize his German heritage and somewhat disingenuously declare that he was not Indian. Scholder continually thrust the "paradox" of his life situation into the critique of his work by the art world. By differentiating between his heritage and his experience/upbringing, he referenced the ubiquitous conundrum of "nature versus nurture." Does one's environment or one's biology determine the direction and condition of one's life?

The particular character of Scholder's work reflected the fact that he belonged to a generation of American artists who bridged the abstract expressionist movement of the 1950s and the pop art/minimalist/color field movements of the 1960s. Painterly figuration provided a means by which they could mediate culture, identity, and art. Their work also problematized the usual presentation of modernism as a linear, cumulative (reductive) progression, and demonstrated how the canonical story of modernism was actually a complex interaction and coincidence of different tendencies. Two strains of that painterly figuration emerged from abstract expressionism in the United States in the mid to late 1950s and early 1960s. On the East Coast, this impulse in the work of a younger generation of artists that included Larry Rivers, Alfred Leslie, and Alex Katz paralleled the anachronistic figural elements that reemerged in the early 1950s in the work of the main figures of the abstract expressionist movement, particularly Willem



Andy Warhol (American, 1928–1987), *Dick Tracy*, 1960. Casein and crayon on canvas, 121.9 x 86 cm. © 2010 The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts/ARS, NY.

Larry Rivers (American, 1923–2002), *Dutch Masters and Cigars*, 1982. Lithograph, 70.2 x 100.3 cm. Collection of the Samuel Dorsky Museum of Art, State University of New York–New Paltz. Gift of the Dorsky Gallery Curatorial Programs, 2002.031.005. Art © Estate of Larry Rivers/Licensed by VAGA, New York, NY.



de Kooning and Jackson Pollock. Rivers, Leslie, and Katz could also find a comparable purpose in the work of Fairfield Porter and Elaine de Kooning, who had persisted in representational genres, bringing their own combination of impressionistic color and brushwork to their figuration.

Scholder matured artistically on the West Coast in the 1950s where artists—especially those based in the San Francisco Bay area—established an artistic direction distinct from that of New York City. Although Clyfford Still and Mark Rothko—key figures in the New York School—taught at the San Francisco Art Institute (then the California School of Fine Arts) in the 1940s, by the mid 1950s, as Peter Plagens writes, artists in the area gravitated to figuration, “frustrated” as they were “by endless encounters with ‘nothingness’ and ‘spontaneity’” in the abstract expressionist genre.<sup>3</sup> David Park, Richard Diebenkorn, and Nathan Oliveira in particular would find themselves involved in how to “discover a language that dealt with the figure and also recognizing the contemporary concerns about Abstract Expressionism.”<sup>4</sup> This figural impulse—dubbed Bay Area figuration—was characterized by the use of “direct, thick, viscous impasto swatches to build...standing and seated figures” that were “radically generalized” in “a few short, rough, curling...strokes.”<sup>5</sup> This gestural and textural technique would persist even in the first intimations of pop art—as seen in Andy Warhol’s early reworking and appropriation of canonical renderings of popular comic icons (such as Dick Tracy)—there is a brushy, tentative paint surface and open-ended figure/background relationship. With its new subject matter that was informed by popular media and consumerist aesthetics, pop art would be one of the major influences on the generation of artists and students who gathered at the Institute of American Indian Arts in the early 1960s, committed to the conceptualization of a new Indian art. It was in that context that Scholder found his own signature style.

It is clear that Scholder’s “paradoxical” life situation allowed him to start out in the art world with few if any cultural inflections placed upon his work and the perception of him as an artist. His talent, obvious from childhood, was recognized in high school as he was “voted Best Boy Artist and President of the Art Camp”<sup>6</sup> when he attended the Midwestern Music and Art Camp at the University of Kansas in 1955. At his high school in Pierre, South Dakota, the art teacher was Yanktonai Sioux artist Oscar Howe. Scholder always identified Howe as an important early influence. After graduation from Ashland High School in Wisconsin (after his family had moved from Pierre), he spent his first year in college at Wisconsin State College-Superior (now University of Wisconsin-Superior), studying with, among others, Arthur Kruk, who singled him out as an outstanding student. In 1957, Scholder moved with his family to Sacramento, California, where he enrolled at Sacramento City College (1957–59).

One of Scholder’s instructors at Sacramento City College was Wayne Thiebaud, who would emerge as a key figure in West Coast figuration. While this artist and this movement have always been cited as key and formative influences on Scholder, it should be noted that Sacramento was outside the epicenter of the Bay Area figuration movement—San Francisco—and the chronology of Thiebaud’s own career reveals that he himself had only a passing acquaintance with the San Francisco artists until well into the 1960s. But the influence of Bay Area figuration would have been pervasive, and interested artists could have kept abreast of developments in the Bay Area through exhibitions such as the 1957 exhibition organized at the Oakland Museum of Art, *Contemporary Bay Area Figurative Painting*, which codified this regional movement. In any case, Thiebaud’s work in the 1950s did reflect the abstracted figural tendencies in Californian art at that time, as seen in *Ribbon Store* of 1957 where a window display of an accessories shop emerges from what seems to be an explosion of thickly applied, uniform brushstrokes of fully saturated color.<sup>7</sup>

Wayne Thiebaud (American, b. 1920), *Ribbon Store*, 1957. Oil on canvas, 71.1 x 78.7 cm. Thiebaud Family Collection. Art © Wayne Thiebaud/Licensed by VAGA, New York, NY.

Tarmo Pasto (American, 1906–1986), *Lauttasaare by Moonlight*, 1955. Oil on canvas, 55.9 x 81.3 cm. Collection of the Midjo-Pasto Gallery.



Scholder's Sacramento years were particularly successful. He had his first one-man exhibitions at Sacramento City College and at the Crocker Art Museum. He was among the eighteen artists—including Thiebaud, Mel Ramos, Greg Kondos, and Peter Vandenberg—who inaugurated the city's first Artists' Collaborative Gallery in 1958.<sup>8</sup> It was undoubtedly modeled on the now-legendary Hansa and Green galleries in New York City that Thiebaud would have visited during his 1956–57 sabbatical year in New York. Scholder earned his Associate of Arts degree from Sacramento City College and then transferred to Sacramento State College to complete his Bachelor of Arts. There he studied with Raymond Witt and Tarmo Pasto.<sup>9</sup> Scholder found in Witt another practitioner of a gestural abstracted figural style, and in Tarmo Pasto, a type of flat, fluid



approach to form rendered in colors that are reminiscent of the light and color of the West and Southwest, alternating between the subtle and the dramatic.<sup>10</sup> Upon graduating from college, however, Scholder found his own artistic statement in large-scale canvases of black imagery that existed in that liminal space between abstraction and figuration. Works from the late 1950s and early '60s also show fragmented, crystalline, cubistic structures as seen in *Bottles on Land* (1957–58); painterly figuration in *The Meeting* (p. 59); and stratified, textural landscapes such as *Land Barriers* (above) that exposed process in the cultivation of drips and runs of paint, and bristled, stippled dubs of pigment. This genre would occupy Scholder through the early 1960s.

As noted by Leslie Wasserberger, in a 1982 monograph Scholder enumerated his “favorite artists” and the aspects of their work that particularly attracted him: “Goya (the aquatints), Von Stuck (the imagery), Matisse (early works), Monet (Giverny years), Bonnard (the color), Picasso (Barcelona years), Munch (the intensity), and O’Keeffe (the person<sup>11</sup>).”<sup>12</sup> Among the contemporary artists he mentions are Bay Area artists Diebenkorn, Thiebaud, and Oliveira, and he singles out the Norwegian painter Edvard Munch and the British painter Francis Bacon.<sup>13</sup> Despite this rich menu of stylistic influences, however, it is impossible to ignore the societal forces that swept Scholder up into the arena of what was then known as Native American art in the 1960s, and how the Institute of American Indian Arts (IAIA)—where Scholder joined the faculty in 1964, two years after it first opened its doors—attempted to change this art. As Richard Hill describes in his essay in this volume, official policy—whether governmental or art world—presented specific challenges to a new generation of Native Americans in the arts who were determined to forge their own paths in the world and the world of art.

Fritz Scholder, *Land Barriers*, 1960. Oil on board, 88.3 x 111.8 cm. Collection unknown.

Fritz Scholder, *Life Image*, 1963.  
Oil on canvas, 168.9 x 212.1 cm.  
Collection of the Arizona State  
University Art Museum. Gift of  
Mr. Kelley Rollings.

Fritz Scholder, *After the Rain*,  
1962. Oil on canvas, 77.5 x 52 cm.  
Collection unknown.



The pedagogical approach at the IAIA was as much a “cultural experiment” as that developed in the early 1930s by Dorothy Dunn at the Painting Studio at the Santa Fe Indian School. A generic Indian style emerged from this program that featured “traditional ceremonial and community-based scenes” of Native life, primarily rendered in tempera paint in a “flat, decorative, linear style.”<sup>14</sup> It reflected more an outsider’s idea of what Indian painting would look like for “there was little precedent for Indian painting produced for its own sake, as a fine art, and apart from ceremonial and social purposes.”<sup>15</sup> The groundwork in developing a modern Native American style was laid by Allan Houser (Warm Springs Chiricahua Apache, 1914–1994), Oscar Howe (Yanktonai Sioux, 1915–1983), and George Morrison (Grand Portage Band of Chippewa, 1919–2000) in the 1930s through the 1960s. Although these artists were a generation older than Scholder, they correlated, interfaced, and coincided with his development and career in many ways.

As previously noted, Scholder’s encounter with Howe occurred when he was a high school student in Pierre, South Dakota, in the 1950s. Howe participated in the Painting Studio at the Santa Fe Indian School and had an opportunity to go to Europe in the 1940s. By the 1950s, he had developed an abstracted style that might be characterized as “cubistic,” marked by bright color, dynamic motion, and pristine line, which he described



Allan Houser (Warm Springs Chiricahua Apache, 1914–1994), *Reverie*, 1981. Bronze, 63.5 x 58.4 x 33 cm. Collection of the National Museum of the American Indian, Smithsonian Institution, 25/7238.



Oscar Howe (Yanktonai Sioux, 1915–1983), *Indian Mother and Child*, 1972. Casein on paper, 62.2 x 48.9 cm. Collection of the Center for Western Studies, Augustana College, Sioux Falls, South Dakota.



George Morrison (Grand Portage Band of Chippewa, 1919–2000), *Triform*, 1964. Oil on canvas, 142.2 x 179.1 cm. Collection of Dr. Constantine and Aka Pereyma.



as derived from Sioux culture and philosophy.<sup>16</sup> Morrison settled in New York City to study and work at the Art Students League in the mid 1940s during the seminal years of abstract expressionism. By the late 1950s, he had fully developed his own abstract expressionist style, becoming the first Native American artist to be recognized in that context.<sup>17</sup> Morrison's application of paint "directly from the tube using a brush or palette knife" was in the spontaneous method associated with the abstract expressionist movement.<sup>18</sup> This was the very same moment that Scholder was creating his aforementioned landscape paintings in Sacramento. Scholder would encounter Allan Houser when they both served on the faculty of the IAIA. As Houser emerged from Indian boarding schools and the Santa Fe Indian School Studio in the mid 1930s, he eventually found a formal vocabulary that revealed the synthesis of traditional cultures of the Americas, the Pacific, and Africa by modernist sculptors.<sup>19</sup>

As Richard Hill and Leslie Wasserberger note in their essays in this volume, Houser, Scholder, and fellow faculty members and the students who gathered at the IAIA in the early 1960s were united by the singular purpose to forge new forms of expression in the visual arts. The impetus for their efforts came out of the Southwest Indian Art Project in which Scholder had participated in 1961. This was the moment in which Scholder began the transition that took him from California to the Southwest, and to an acknowledgment of his Indian heritage.<sup>20</sup> After winning first prize at the *Tenth Southwestern Painters Festival Show* at the Tucson Art Center in 1960, he received a full scholarship to participate in the Rockefeller Foundation–sponsored Southwest Indian Art Project at the University of Arizona in 1961.<sup>21</sup> He taught at the project the following summer and that same year, 1962, moved to Tucson to study for his master's degree at the University of Arizona. After he received his degree in 1964, he was hired at the IAIA to teach "advanced painting and contemporary art history."<sup>22</sup>

Scholder himself does not provide details about the transitions in his work at this time. When he arrived at the IAIA, he was still painting his abstracted landscapes, such as *Bands of Land* (p. 85) and *Land Seed* (1963). That work had served him well, not



Fritz Scholder on Utah mesa,  
ca. 1970s.



Fritz Scholder, *The Paradox*, 1961. Oil on canvas, 179.1 x 154 cm. The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston. Gift of the Ford Foundation.

Fritz Scholder, *Bands of Land (Land Bands)*, 1961. Oil on canvas, 129.5 x 121.9 cm. Collection of the Estate of Fritz Scholder.

Fritz Scholder, *New Mexico No. 1*, 1964. Oil on canvas, 152.4 x 152.4 cm. Collection of the Estate of Fritz Scholder.





Fritz Scholder, *Super Pueblo*, 1968. Acrylic on canvas, 185.4 x 210.8 cm.  
Collection of the Bureau of Indian Affairs Museum Program.



Fritz Scholder, *Four Indian Riders*, 1967. Oil on canvas, 152.4 x 182.9 cm.  
Collection of Mr. and Mrs. William Metcalf.

only garnering the prize at the aforementioned *Southwestern Painters Festival Show* in 1960, but also a John Hay Whitney Opportunity Fellowship and the Ford Foundation Purchase Prize at the Houston Museum of Fine Arts in 1962. He also won first prize in national painting at the 1963 *West Virginia Centennial Exhibition* organized by the Huntington Art Museum, which was juried by noted New York curator and museum director James Johnson Sweeney.

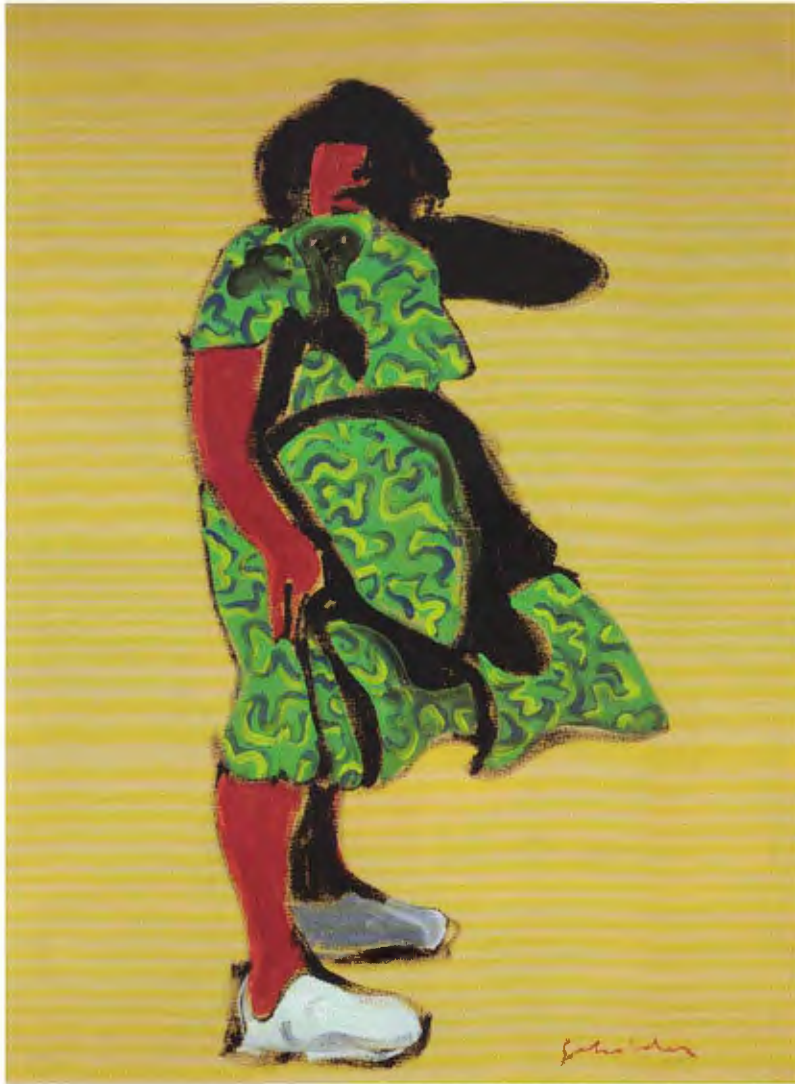
By 1964, Scholder's landscapes become more minimal in character, featuring stripes,<sup>23</sup> which George Burdeau—one of the early students at the IAIA—likens to “Chimayo rugs,”<sup>24</sup> and Robert Ewing describes as “evok[ing] the stratification of the land.” Ewing continues: “The colors were vibrant, the technique innovative. Splatters of color, or of turpentine, softened the divisions and produced glowing passages of pure paint.”<sup>25</sup>

Scholder's transition from stripes to Indian subject matter might be glimpsed in a painting in the IAIA collection that shows “a red stripe filling two-thirds of the canvas and an eighteen-inch Indian in the field of the stripe.”<sup>26</sup> In the meanwhile, a series of butterfly paintings appear circa 1966 that allow him to mediate the relationship between the background and the foreground with figural elements that are indeterminate and interchangeable.

When Scholder finally painted *Indian No. 1* in 1967 (pp. 36 and 43), it was a dramatic reversal of his strongly held—and vehemently asserted—conviction that Native artists should not pursue Native images in their art. Hill and Wasserberger document how the story of Scholder's transition to Indian subject matter is cast in controversy.<sup>27</sup> By his own admission, Scholder watched as IAIA students, in particular T. C. Cannon (Caddo/Kiowa), Bill Soza Warsoldier (Cahuilla/Apache), and Alfred Young Man (Cree), created inventive painted figural depictions of Native Americans. They were inspired by the information about new art movements that was made available through the personal experience of professors such as Scholder, publications, films, television, etc., and drew freely on historical photographs of Native Americans, which Hill notes were provided by the Smithsonian Institution for their reference.

Given this ambiance of interchange, fermentation, and experimentation at the IAIA, it is no surprise that an innovative manner of depicting Native Americans would emerge. Andy Warhol's portraits, with their basis in photography, in particular demonstrated the possibilities of a new incarnation of the historical photographs. Wasserberger details the common elements in the work of Cannon, Warsoldier, Young Man, and Scholder: referencing historical and contemporary photographs; the use of a non-perspectival system; flattened surfaces; lively color; and the introduction of words, lettering, collaged elements, and so on. Many of these elements could be seen in Scholder's landscape and butterfly paintings, and, in the long run, it was his exceptional skill and experience with paint, and familiarity with the protocol and workings of the art market, that allowed him to take the Indian theme that emerged from the IAIA and create a body of work of great painterly interest as well as anecdotal appeal.

Through the 1970s, Scholder's Native Americans are imposing presences, in direct, yet defiant confrontations with the viewer. They stand as powerful indictments of a ravaged history, of habitual neglect by policy and exploitation that provide a striking contrast with the aspirations for the art movement that engendered their creation. Although Scholder continues to evoke his association with Wayne Thiebaud when talking about his art, these depictions are a far cry from Thiebaud's signature painterly, pop images, although the two artists clearly share a love of paint texture. In addition to Bacon's work (which Scholder saw during a visit to London in 1969), we can see relationships to the work of Nathan Oliveira and Edvard Munch in terms of how he defines the physical character of the figures by means of the application of paint on the canvas. If Bacon's brutal, blurring distortion of the physiognomy is captured in the face of



Fritz Scholder, *Drunk Indian No. 2*, 1972. Acrylic on canvas, 101.6 x 76.2 cm. Collection of the Estate of Fritz Scholder.

Nathan Oliveira (American, b. 1928), *Seated Figure with Pink Background*, 1960. Oil on canvas, 208.3 x 157.5 cm. Collection of Anonymous.



Scholder's *Indian with Beer Can* (pp. 31 and 46), the particular flourish of the form that simulates hair/shadow unfurling off the figure of the woman in Oliveira's *Seated Figure with Pink Background* (above right) is comparable to that emerging from the woman in Scholder's *Drunk Indian No. 2* (above left) or the figure in *Portrait of a Massacred Indian* (p. 91), both of 1972, or the mangled form—barely human—in *Massacre at Wounded Knee No. 1* of 1970 (p. 91). Where this flourish in the Oliveira recalls astral projections of body/soul/shadow elements, in these three paintings by Scholder it describes a literal as well as existential state of torment and death that justifies comparisons with the Norwegian symbolist painter Edvard Munch. And while Oliveira tends to obscure the race or skin color of the individual, Scholder provides enough of an identifying element—whether through hairstyle, clothing, or simply the title—to declare the figure's Native American identity.

This exploration of painterly figural conventions—with psychological and emotional content expressed through form and color, and technique and process—had its origins in various expressionist tendencies in modern art at the beginning of the twentieth century. But in the post-World War II era, those conventions reflected a vogue for primitivism with its conventions of “exoticism,” that implied “an admiration of...the uninhibited, dynamic and free character of non-Western cultures.” This was perceived as an antidote to “the modern [i.e., Western] world’s self-control, discipline and shame,”<sup>28</sup> and expressions of a more psychic primitivism resounded in the post-war landscape of Europe. In that context, Scholder’s connection to the work of Bacon



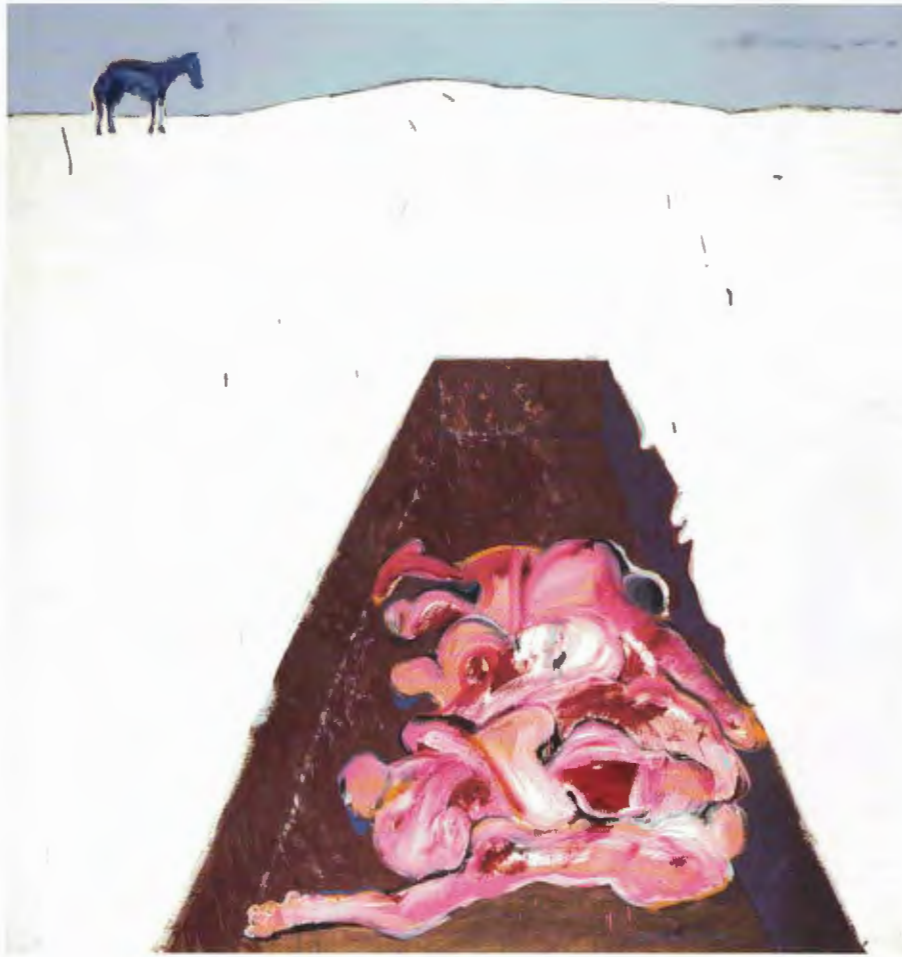
Fritz Scholder, *Portrait of a Massacred Indian*, 1972. Oil on canvas, 182.9 x 132.1 cm. Collection of Deane and Susan Penn.



Fritz Scholder, *Massacre at Wounded Knee No. 1*, 1970. Oil on canvas, 177.8 x 147.3 cm. Collection of the Estate of Fritz Scholder.



Fritz Scholder, *Dying Indian*, 1969. Acrylic on canvas, 68.6 x 101.6 cm. Collection of Romona Scholder.



Fritz Scholder, *After the Massacre*, 1972. Oil on canvas, 180.3 x 172.7 cm. Collection of Romona Scholder.



Fritz Scholder, *Dead Indians in a Wagon*, 1970. Oil on canvas, 106.7 x 106.7 cm. Private collection.





Fritz Scholder, *Indian in Car*, 1969. Oil on canvas, 76.2 x 101.6 cm. Collection of Stéphane Janssen.

Fritz Scholder, *Massacred Indian No. 4*, 1979. Watercolor and oil on paper, 76.2 x 55.2 cm. Courtesy of the Picker Art Gallery, Colgate University, 1992.90.

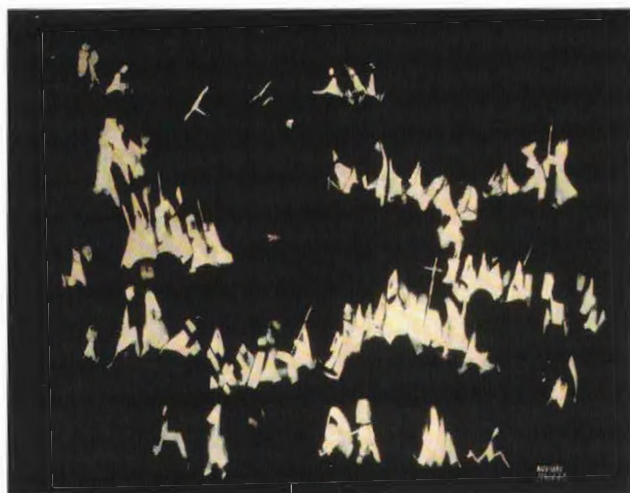


Fritz Scholder, study for *Indian in Car*, 1969. Ink on paper, 24.1 x 18.4 cm. Collection of Romona Scholder.





Hale Woodruff (American, 1900–1980), *Africa and the Bull*, n.d. Oil on canvas, 112.4 x 134 cm. Collection of The Studio Museum in Harlem. Gift of E. Thomas Williams and Audlyn Higgins Williams, New York.



Norman Lewis (American, 1909–1979), *America the Beautiful*, 1960. Oil on canvas, 127 x 162.6 cm. Private collection.

brings the primitivist dialogue between the “West and the rest” full circle. He obviously recognized in the work of the British artist a stylistic as well as psychological means to express not only issues of identity and culture but also the psychic pain and disorientation of the Native American as opposed to a more polemical and dogmatic approach. That disorientation is replete in every stroke, swirl, and accumulation of pigment on his canvases.

Scholder and the IAIA students were not alone in their explorations of contemporary figural idioms in conjunction with cultural content and issues of identity. The African American artists Hale Woodruff (1900–1980) and Norman Lewis (1909–1979) also adapted the gestural language of abstract expressionism to construct compositions that incorporated hieroglyphs and symbolic glyphs that referenced black cultural elements. Contemporaries of Oscar Howe, Allan Houser, and George Morrison, these two artists emerged as pioneers of modernism in the African American community and posited as unique a contribution to the character of modernism as the Native American artists. Woodruff’s work featured elements inspired by Egyptian and sub-Saharan African art. In one painting, those signs even became as specific as the head of the Great Sphinx (which also appears on the opening page of Scholder’s website, referencing his 1974 visit to Egypt). Lewis invented a figural style of glyphic elements, which in the 1960s were featured in several searing compositions dealing with racism and the civil rights movement.<sup>29</sup> The ability of these artists to modify the tropes

of abstract expressionism—gesture, stroke, spontaneity, process, texture—and allow figurative elements to appear indicates the emergence of what Kobena Mercer would describe as “discrepant abstraction” where “difference” and “cultural referents” modify the canonical nuances of modernist abstraction.<sup>30</sup>

While Woodruff and Lewis maintained a primarily abstract quality to their work, another African American artist, Bob Thompson (1937–1966), developed a painterly figural style through his encounter with the work of Jan Muller (1922–1958) when he visited the art colony in Provincetown, Massachusetts, in the summer of 1959. Among the friendships he made at this time was one with Larry Rivers, who was just beginning to exhibit his figural work with its painterly qualities that often featured witty and provocative reworkings of European masterpieces. Thompson followed a similar strategy of appropriation, to which he married personal symbols—such as the anonymous hatted man—in his compositions, where figures and forms were defined by fluid outlines and textural surfaces. His use of non-referential multicolors for his figures not only provided a means by which to approach the compositions abstractly—i.e., as color areas defining the whole—but also to “play on the word ‘color’” while rejecting “racial coding.”<sup>31</sup> Thompson’s work, in particular, provides a comparison with which to consider Scholder’s own signature style, both in terms of technique and approach, and existential implications, as well as reliance on existing imagery as a source for his work.

Another West Coast artist, San Francisco-based Robert Colescott (b. 1925)—who finished graduate school and initiated his artistic career in the midst of Bay Area figura-

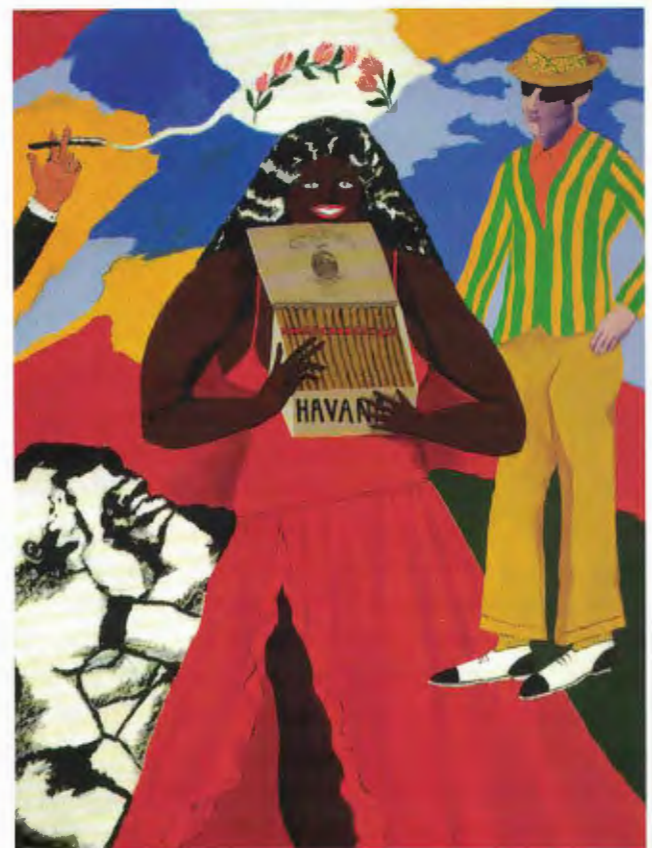
tion in the 1950s—was experiencing his own cultural epiphanies in Egypt (1964–67) and France (1967–70) as Scholder was finding his style and subject matter. Colecott's work at that time showed an abstracted figuration rendered in increasingly bright colors. By the 1970s, the shapes coalesced into more recognizable forms as seen in *Havana Corona* (below right). Colecott would progress through the 1970s into a tighter style that referenced counterculture comic art (especially strong in San Francisco where he was working<sup>32</sup>) and popular culture and media as he engaged ethnic, racial, and gender subjects. Colecott's art became a potent manifestation of his own ambivalent, even defensive, attitude toward the societal and political issues he had to contend with as a black male in American society.

Whereas Colecott would continue to push the boundaries of good taste, propriety, and political correctness to its limits through the 1970s, and indicate the path of what John Russell called the “bad manners” of postmodernism, Scholder's subjects exude an expressionistic existential angst that is very much part of the postwar zeitgeist of the 1950s and '60s. Despite the fact that he became irrevocably associated with Indian subject matter, he persistently sought to tread lightly with regard to the implications of that ethnic association. In that he is closer in spirit to Bob Thompson, who obscured any political or social commentary in his provocative use of non-referential coloring for his figures. One Scholder work of 1970, *White Girl with Cherokee Pendant* (above right), in particular does approximate Colecott's own sardonic view of white privilege, thoughtless cultural appropriation, and blatant exhibitionism, and *Indian in Gallup* of the same year displays skeletal features that contrast disconcertingly with his casual gait and posture.

Scholder's own attitude toward his subject matter seems to be a complicated mixture of ambivalence, pride, recuperation, and, finally, ennui. While originally positioned by him as a counter to kitschy, romantic images of Indians by outsiders seeking to stereotype them within controllable notions of the “other” in postcolonial discourse, his purported “realism” would have functioned in an anomalous way with how Native Americans would have preferred to depict themselves. Photography in particular was an especially accessible and effective way for Native Americans to make images of themselves. As Leslie Wasserberger expertly chronicles in her essay, historical photographs of Native Americans by non-Natives were an important source for the students at the IAIA and Scholder as he began to paint Indian subject matter.



Fritz Scholder, *White Girl with Cherokee Pendant*, 1970. Oil on canvas, 147.3 x 114.3 cm. Collection of Romona Scholder.



Robert Colecott (American, b. 1925), *Havana Corona*, 1970. Acrylic on canvas, 199.4 x 149.9 cm. Collection of the Brooklyn Museum. Gift of Brooke and Carolyn Alexander, 1991.270. © Robert Colecott.



Horace Poolaw (Kiowa, 1906–1984), *Group on horseback*, ca. 1928. Pawnee Bill's Wild West Show, Pawnee, Oklahoma. Black-and-white photograph. P26505.



Edgar Heap of Birds (Cheyenne, b. 1954). *Native Hosts*, 1988. Installation of 12 aluminum signs in City Hall Park in New York City that conceptually reclaimed Native land and alerted non-Native visitors and residents of their rightful hosts.



Richard Ray Whitman (Euclidean/Muscogee Nation, b. 1949), *Street Chlef #1*, 1985. Black-and-white photograph, 25.4 x 33 cm. Collection of the artist.

*"I was a student at the Institute of American Indian Arts from 1968–70 and studied drawing and art history in Fritz Scholder's classes," Whitman recalls. "Showing us slides of contemporary artwork, Fritz introduced us to new possibilities in composition, using color, texture, collage, text, and subject matter.*

*In March 2005, a friend called from Santa Fe to tell me about the memorial for Fritz Scholder she'd just attended at IAIA, and it was good to hear the names of many of my old friends, teachers, and colleagues who'd spoken. In his eulogy, James McGrath, a founding faculty member of IAIA, said, 'T. C. Cannon, Billy Soza [Warsoldier], and Richard Whitman already had their voices when they came to IAIA, but, oh, did Fritz make them stronger.'*"



James Luna (Luiseño, b. 1950) performed *The Artifact Piece*, a groundbreaking work he created in 1987, at the Studio Museum in Harlem in 1990 as part of *The Decade Show: Frameworks of Identity in the 1980s*.



Kay WalkingStick (Cherokee, b. 1935), *Where Are the Generations?*, 1991. Oil on canvas (right side) and acrylic and wax with copper on canvas (left side), 71.1 x 143.5 cm. Collection of Mr. and Mrs. James B. Straw. © Kay WalkingStick.



Jaune Quick-to-See Smith (Enrolled Flathead Salish, Member of the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Nation of Montana, b. 1940), *Trade (Gifts for Trading Land with White People)*, 1992. Oil and mixed media on canvas, 152.4 x 431.8 cm. Collection of the Chrysler Museum of Art. © Jaune Quick-to-See Smith.

The irony of their using images that strained the limits of authenticity and were often composed in the studio has not been lost on Wasserberger. Paul Chaat Smith has observed that, nonetheless, these photographs were an important reference for Native Americans, especially for a generation whose connection with their past had been severely compromised during the period of assimilation foisted on Native populations through government policies.<sup>33</sup> Scholder's non-apologetic depictions can be seen alongside the work of Native photographers working in the 1920s and '30s such as Horace Poolaw (Kiowa, 1906–1984), and found parallels in the work of Scholder's younger contemporaries Richard W. Hill, Sr. (Tuscarora, b. 1950) and Richard Ray Whitman (Euchee/Muscogee Nation, b. 1949) in the 1970s and '80s.<sup>34</sup> These photographers also sought to deconstruct for the rest of us our romantic illusions and at the same time illuminate the actuality of Native existence in the modern world.

In 1982, Scholder decided to establish a more ongoing presence in New York City. Although he had been exhibiting in the city with different galleries through the 1970s, this was the moment when he evidently hoped to move past his Indian imagery. When Scholder decided to engage the New York art world in the 1980s, it was the era of postmodern identity politics, and his work would have been seen alongside that of a number of Native artists who were achieving recognition within that art world. The work of artists such as Edgar Heap of Birds (Cheyenne, b. 1954), Jimmie Durham (b. 1940), and James Luna (Luiseño, b. 1950) demonstrates how Native artists were now engaging media such as installation and performance art. On the other hand, two artists who were close in age to Scholder—Kay WalkingStick (Cherokee, b. 1935) and Jaune Quick-to-See Smith (Flathead Salish/member of the Confederated Salish and

Kootenai Nation of Montana, b. 1940)—created alternative approaches to Native figuration that mediate issues of identity, mixed ancestry, and style that were more in step with the sensibility of the 1980s than Scholder's abstracted figural style. Paradoxically, at the very moment Scholder wanted to move past associations with his Native heritage, these and other Native artists were embracing theirs in step with the proliferation of identity-based art in the postmodern context.

Like Scholder, WalkingStick was raised outside the culture of her Native American father. As she notes, however, her mother encouraged her to be proud of her Indian heritage.<sup>35</sup> She emerged in the New York art world in the early 1970s in the context of minimalism, which she inflected with feminist content, creating flat, unmodulated, de-culturalized female shapes arranged as inter-fitting elements on the canvas. These images, as she noted, transcended issues of race or nationality to express "our shared humanity."<sup>36</sup> Her subsequent reckoning with her Native heritage produced schematic elements that imbued her minimal compositions with cultural allusions: the outline of a tipi, an apron, arcs (bows), and assertive slashes. In the 1980s, landscape vignettes of rocks, crevices, waterfalls, and mountains formed diptychs with symbols such as ovals, lozenges, circles, and crosses that can be seen as referencing concepts such as the four directions. With the death of her husband in 1989, she created a diptych with a self-portrait and, as she notes, began to realize that the landscape elements in her work were surrogates for her own body. An Italian sojourn in the later 1990s produced the reintroduction of female forms in "display" poses or as dancing silhouettes superimposed over the landscape elements of the diptychs.

During the 1950s, Jaune Quick-to-See Smith worked and raised her children while attending college at night.<sup>37</sup> In graduate school at the University of New Mexico in the mid 1970s, she evoked the look and texture of treated buffalo hides (her *Ronan Robe* series) by cutting canvases into eccentric shapes, applying beeswax and paint to the surfaces, and smoking them over fire. About the same time, an encounter in New York with the work of the Parisian-born Venezuelan artist Marisol, associated with the pop art group, resulted in mixed-media figural sculptures of women, which she created along with drawings and collages from photographs of Native women artists. By the mid 1980s, Smith began paintings and drawings of larger animals and figures that moved "between pictograms and...more realistic outlined shapes, all incorporated into an abstract landscape." The marks referred to watering holes, insects, tracks of birds, arrows, and various decorative lines that encapsulated her sense of movement across the landscape. Her evolving figural style was reminiscent of schematic renderings in ancient Native cave paintings or ledger drawings and the beading traditions of her own Plains heritage. Her incorporation of collage, newsprint, labels from various forms of produce, and renderings of commercial line drawings in her work point to a "pop art" sensibility comparable to that of the new Native style that emerged at the IAIA in the early to mid 1960s. The strong charcoal outlines of horses, bison, women's dresses, men's vests, and canoes that often are the focus of these compositions are all "iconographic" elements that can be found in the beaded flat bags made on her reservation. They became powerful vehicles for Smith's wry commentary on stereotypes and archetypes.

By contrast, then, Scholder's work would have seemed out of date in the context of this postmodern infatuation with the media and recuperations of cultural elements. His existential approach seemed more in step with the 1950s and '60s and his abstract expressionist roots. His New York engagement did not have the impact he hoped, and his last exhibition there was in 1991 with Alexander Gallery. *Fritz Scholder: Indian/Not Indian* now provides an opportunity to reevaluate his legacy, however disputed and various it might be. It is clear that he not only revolutionized the possibilities of self-depiction and presentation of Native Americans out in the world but also indicated the



potential arc and expanse of a career in the arts for Native Americans. His work demonstrated the power of the culturalized figure to not only convey but also encapsulate the existential condition of that culturalized situation. By deliberately deconstructing the romanticized or kitsch stereotypes of Native Americans, he paradoxically humanized them and made them more “real” than they had ever been in the prolific encyclopedia of Native images.

As he deconstructed habitual and official notions of Native American art, Scholder also anticipated what has coalesced into the postmodern moment where the past continues to be the source of contemporary critique, but where the reins of the conversations around culture, race, and identity have now been seized by artists embedded in those communities once plundered in the modernist enterprise. Not only returning the

favor, they have reclaimed their images, materials, and ritual and symbolic content to present powerful new expressions of contemporary Native American, Latino, African American, Asian American, and diasporic experiences. While his personal predilections and his generational orientation did not allow for a more consciously political agenda for his art, the impact of Scholder's work was nonetheless palpable and enduring. He also asserted the right for that community of artists of color to be recognized for work that spoke to their individual predilections.

## Notes

- 1 Fritz Scholder, *Scholder/Indians*, Introduction by Adelyn D. Breeskin, Commentary by Rudy H. Turk (Flagstaff, AZ: Northland Press, 1972), 34.
- 2 See Paul Chaat Smith's essay in this volume for a discussion of the paradoxes that framed Scholder's life.
- 3 Peter Plagens, *Sunshine Muse: Contemporary Art on the West Coast* (New York: Praeger, 1974), 41.
- 4 Nathan Oliveira, quoted in Caroline Jones, *Bay Area Figurative Art: 1950–1965*, exh. cat. (Berkeley and London: University of California Press, 1989), 102.
- 5 Plagens, *Sunshine Muse*, 59.
- 6 See [http://www.scholder.com/scholder\\_bio.html](http://www.scholder.com/scholder_bio.html). All information that follows in this paragraph has been taken from the Scholder website.
- 7 Karen Tsujimoto relates this morphological character in Thiebaud's work to the paintings of I Macchiaioli, an Italian school that flourished between 1853 and 1862. See Karen Tsujimoto, *Wayne Thiebaud*, exh. cat. (San Francisco: San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, in association with University of Washington Press, 1985), 30.
- 8 The Artists' Collaborative Gallery opened in Sacramento on April 18, 1958. See John Oglesby, "Cooperative Gallery Has Stimulating First Show," *Sacramento Bee* (May 3, 1958).
- 9 By coincidence, Pasto, who had a joint appointment in the psychology and art departments at Sacramento State, became an advocate for the well-known self-taught artist Martin Ramirez. See <http://www.phylliskindgallery.com/self-taught/artbrut/mr/>.
- 10 See <http://www.midjo-pasto-gallery.com>.
- 11 In an interview posted on the website of the Academy of Achievement, dated June 29, 1996, conducted in Sun Valley, Idaho, Scholder recounts his meeting Georgia O'Keeffe in Abiquiu, and recalls how he spent many afternoons with her. While he doesn't indicate the date of this meeting, he contextualizes by noting this happened when he was "a young painter" who had "just come to New Mexico," which would indicate that this was in 1964. See <http://www.achievement.org/autodoc/page/sch1int-1>.
- 12 Fritz Scholder, "Introduction," in *Fritz Scholder*, texts by Joshua C. Taylor, William Peterson, R. Andrew Maass, Rudy H. Turk (New York: Rizzoli, 1982), 24.
- 13 Ibid.
- 14 Truman T. Lowe, ed., *Native Modernism: The Art of George Morrison and Allan Houser* (Seattle: University of Washington Press in association with the National Museum of the American Indian, 2004), 13. One of the websites where one can find information on Oscar Howe notes that this style was also known as the "Disney" style because its flat, decorative stylizations resembled the cartoon imagery then being developed by Walt Disney and company.
- 15 Barbara H. Perlman, *Allan Houser* (Boston: David R. Godine, 1987), quoted in Lowe, *Native Modernism*, 14.
- 16 Howe has described his work as "my version of Indian traditions to make it individualistic in my own way, but every part comes from Indian and now white culture.... The basic design is Tohokmu (spider web). From an all-Indian background I developed my own style." See <http://www.usd.edu/whover/oscarhowe.html>.
- 17 Lowe, *Native Modernism*, 15.
- 18 Ibid., 21.
- 19 Like his contemporary the African American sculptor Elizabeth Catlett (b. 1915), Houser's "cultural modernism" derived from a global Native sensibility, as hers did from African and pre-Columbian art, and flew in the face of outside perceptions of what Native or African American art should be. As the Santa Fe School presumed, so the Harmon Foundation presumed to dictate what was appropriate art to be made by African American artists. Such prescriptions frequently centered on whether a figural or abstract style was more appropriate to the social, political, and, of course, economic needs of the black community. See Elsa Fine Honig, *Afro-American Artists: A Search for Identity* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1973).
- 20 "Chronology," in *Fritz Scholder*, 277.
- 21 According to Paul Chaat Smith, Scholder came to the attention of the Rockefeller project because his father had placed him on the Luiseño tribal rolls. Lowery Stokes Sims telephone conversation with Paul Chaat Smith, March 12, 2007.



- 22 Paul Karlstrom, interview with Fritz Scholder, 1995, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.
- 23 Eda Gordon, summary of interview with IAIA archivist Chuck Dailey, October 24, 2006, Santa Fe, NM, submitted to Paul Chaat Smith on November 1, 2006; summary of interview with former IAIA student Linda Lomahaftewa, January 2, 2007, Santa Fe, NM.
- 24 Eda Gordon, summary of interview with former IAIA student George Burdeau, December 16, 2006, Santa Fe, NM.
- 25 Adelyn D. Breeskin, *Two American Painters: Fritz Scholder and T. C. Cannon*, exh. cat. (Washington D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press for the National Collection of Fine Arts, 1972), 13.
- 26 Eda Gordon, summary of interview with Chuck Dailey.
- 27 Leslie Wasserberger, "The Demystification of Fritz Scholder," Master's thesis, San Francisco State University, 1987, 17–51; Richard W. Hill, Sr., "The Institute of American Indian Arts: Pride or Prejudice," unpublished manuscript, 1991 (revised 1999), n.p. These manuscripts have formed the basis of their essays in this volume.
- 28 Sieglinde Lemke, *Primitivist Modernism: Black Culture and the Origins of Transatlantic Modernism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 25.
- 29 Both Lewis and Woodruff were contemporaries of the abstract expressionists, and both worked to make the transition from the more cloistered contexts (Atlanta and Harlem, respectively) within which they matured to establish their relationship to the mainstream art world. Lewis exhibited with the Willard Gallery and participated in the famed closed session at Studio 35 (April 21–23, 1950) that marked the definition of abstract expressionism as a movement. Woodruff, then a professor of art at New York University, maintained the ongoing discussions and workshops initiated by the Studio 35 group.
- 30 Kobena Mercer, "Introduction," in Kobena Mercer, ed., *Discrepant Abstraction*, with contributions by David Craven, Stanley K. Abe, David Clarke, Iftikhar Dadi, Mark A. Cheetham, Angeline Morrison, Kellie Jones, and Nathaniel Mackey (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press; London: inIVA, 2006), 6–27.
- 31 Thelma Golden, *Bob Thompson*, exh. cat., with essay by Judith Wilson and commentaries by Shamim Momin (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art in association with University of California Press, 1998), 22.
- 32 Plagens, *Sunshine Muse*, 94.
- 33 Lowery Stokes Sims telephone conversation with Paul Chaat Smith, March 12, 2007.
- 34 See Lucy R. Lippard, ed., *Partial Recall: Photographs of Native North Americans* (New York: New Press, 1992).
- 35 Kay WalkingStick, email to Lowery Stokes Sims, July 18, 2007. Also see Margaret Archuleta, "Kay WalkingStick (Cherokee)," in *Pathbreakers: The Eiteljorg Fellowship for Native American Fine Art, 2003*, exh. cat., Introduction by Lucy R. Lippard (Indianapolis: Eiteljorg Museum of American Indians and Western Art in association with University of Washington Press, 2003), 13–29.
- 36 WalkingStick, email.
- 37 Jaune Quick-to-See Smith, telephone conversation with Lowery Stokes Sims, April 21, 2007, and email of July 17, 2007, to Sims. All information on Smith's formative years that follows, unless otherwise indicated, is based on this conversation and email.