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## Review of *Native Moderns: American Indian Painting, 1940-1960*.

By Bill Anthes

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*Native Moderns: American Indian Painting, 1940-1960.* By Bill Anthes. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006. xxx + 235 pp. Illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. \$84.95 cloth, \$23.95 paper.

Arguing that Native artists developed a unique modernism between 1940 and 1960 as a response to cross-cultural encounters requiring both accommodation and resistance, Bill Anthes explores how differing styles of abstraction and growing artistic freedom coexisted with Native identity. During the 1920s and 1930s, a style of flat application of color, firmly outlined forms, and readily recognizable nostalgic Native images developed in Oklahoma and Santa Fe. Dominating Indian art for decades, this style became “traditional” Indian painting with its tenants upheld by institutions like the Philbrook Museum in Tulsa where annual Indian painting competitions began in 1946. Between 1940 and 1960 artists broke from these restraints in various ways that have not been examined in detail elsewhere.

Anthes begins with Pueblo artists José Lente and Jimmy Byrnes who worked with anthropologists Elsie Clews Parsons and Byron Harvey, providing views of Pueblo life. He sees both artists as culture brokers struggling to become modern. Decisions to provide outsiders with insider information were costly, probably more so for Lente who lived at Isleta than for Byrnes in Albuquerque.

Distance is a theme that Anthes carries into his discussion of Ojibwe painters Patrick DesJarlait and George Morrison. DesJarlait worked close to his home at Red Lake, Minnesota, but in a style reminiscent of the monumentality of the Mexican muralist Diego Rivera. DesJarlait's images have no known antecedents in Native painting. Their formal characteristics and jewel-like colors are different, and their subjects are generally contemporary Native people engaged in simple daily activities. Although rejected from the first Philbrook Annual, his work was purchased by the museum for its collection.

By comparison, Morrison did not explore his Native heritage until late in his career. He was a professionally educated artist who exhibited with the Abstract Expressionists in New York and vacationed in Provincetown, Massachusetts, with the artists' colony there. Early influences were the major movements of the first half of the twentieth century, including Surrealism. Ultimately, he returned home to Minnesota and began rendering the landscape there as he had in Provincetown.

Most of the artists mentioned in *Native Moderns* faced criticism that their art was not "Indian," but Yeffe Kimball illustrates an alternate problem. Anthes discovered that Kimball "invented" her Osage identity in the 1940s, entering work in the first Philbrook and subsequent annuals where she received multiple awards. He carries this theme into contemporary times, citing additional successful artists claiming Indian heritage. This discussion aligns with Anthes's examination of other modernists who sought the "primitive universal" in Native art but did not represent themselves as Indian.

Finally, the author focuses on Oscar Howe, a Yanktonai Sioux, and Dick West, a Southern Cheyenne, each of whom held an MFA from the University of Oklahoma. Both painted in the Santa Fe-Oklahoma style but also developed more daring compositions suggestive of Cubism. It was through the creativity and advocacy of artists like Howe and West that the definitions of Native art expanded. By the 1962 formation of

the Institute of American Indian Arts in Santa Fe, Native modernism had come into being on its own terms, not those imposed by others.

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