

University of Nebraska - Lincoln

DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln

Great Plains Quarterly

Great Plains Studies, Center for

Fall 1983

Review of *Magic Images: Contemporary Native American Art* By Edwin L. Wade and Rennard Strickland

Mary Jane Schneider
University of North Dakota

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/greatplainsquarterly>



Part of the [Other International and Area Studies Commons](#)

Schneider, Mary Jane, "Review of *Magic Images: Contemporary Native American Art* By Edwin L. Wade and Rennard Strickland" (1983). *Great Plains Quarterly*. 1690.
<https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/greatplainsquarterly/1690>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Great Plains Studies, Center for at DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln. It has been accepted for inclusion in Great Plains Quarterly by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln.

techniques. *Magic Images: Contemporary Native American Art* reflects this diversity of interest in its text and photographs.

The introduction defines four categories of contemporary Indian art: historic expressionism, traditionalism, modernism, and individualism, and relates Indian art to the broader issues of Indian identity and aesthetic criticism. The definition of styles and the inclusion of specific artists within each style are sure to be debated by artists and historians, but by identifying schools of Indian art that transcend ethnic boundaries and the issue of "Indian" art, the authors have taken a step toward developing an art history of Native American art.

In the second chapter the history of modern painting and other forms of Indian art is presented as a discussion of the relationship between artist and consumer. White patrons of the arts have long had control over the works produced by Indian artists, since the act of choosing to purchase or to exhibit one style instead of another may force an artist to work in a style that is commercially successful rather than representative of the artist's real talents or interests. Contemporary Indian artists are struggling against this kind of stereotyping and the reader is challenged to become more open to the great variety of Indian art and to be more supportive of innovation and change.

The major portion of the book is given to the presentation of the works of thirty-seven artists. Color plates and black-and-white photographs amply demonstrate the variety of talents and styles of modern Native American artists, although scholars will find the artists represented to be well known to them. The works show romantic imagery, historical events, social commentary, satire, and humor that help to dispel the old myths and stereotypes that surround Indian identity. All too often these myths are the subject of the work. A brief discussion of the artist accompanies the photographs. Sometimes the artist's own words describe the work and provide a brief glimpse into the artist's way of seeing his or her work.

The final chapter is a bibliographic essay for those who want to learn more about Indian

Magic Images: Contemporary Native American Art. By Edwin L. Wade and Rennard Strickland. Norman: Philbrook Art Center and University of Oklahoma Press, 1982. Illustrations, photographs, notes, index. ix + 128 pp. \$12.95.

One of the attractions of American Indian art is that it offers something of interest to practically everyone. For the romantic there are paintings that depict past tribal life-ways. For the realist there are contemporary paintings that present current social issues and depict Indians as citizens of a complex society. For collectors there are avant-garde pieces of individual vision that will influence the direction of American Indian art. For scholars, there is the opportunity to study, evaluate, and debate the origins and relative merits of styles and

art. Although the essay is directed primarily at painting and sculpture, the author also includes general references on North American Indians and more traditional art forms such as pottery, basketry, and jewelry. This essay also provides a history of Indian art, which will introduce the novice to the topic before approaching the more detailed reading.

This book is a welcome contribution to the growing number of books dealing with Indian art. Catalogs from recent exhibitions of modern Indian art have focused entirely on the visual in their attempt to make the public more aware of recent trends in painting and sculpture, while books like Jamake Highwater's *The Sweetgrass Lives On* may overwhelm the person who isn't sure what art is all about. The text of this volume will help people to understand why they should learn more and then provides them with the resources to continue the learning process. Connoisseurs of contemporary Indian art will find no "new" artists and will wonder about the ones that are not included, but they will appreciate the opportunity to ponder the categories suggested by the authors.

MARY JANE SCHNEIDER
Indian Studies Department
University of North Dakota