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Review of *Native Faces: Indian Cultures in American Art* by Patricia Trenton and Patrick Houlihan

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In their preface the authors urge a multidimensional viewpoint in the examination of art depicting the Indian and his culture, stating that such works "are often valuable research documents for both historians and anthropologists." They further state that "the paintings in this exhibition embody a wide spectrum of valuable information, from detailed ethnographic observations to the subtle emotional reactions of the artist and his Indian models."

The works illustrated in the catalogue were not created to serve as primary research documents in the study of Indian cultures. Details are often sketchy, so that Houlihan’s commentary on the pictures frequently and necessarily employs phrases like “it is difficult to tell” or “probably depicts.” In addition, the paintings are often, as Houlihan notes in referring to William Leigh’s Pool at Oraibi, wonderful combinations of fact and fiction. To varying degrees this is true of a large proportion of what is called “Western Art.”

Nonetheless, such pictures can be, as the authors contend, useful documents. They certainly convey the attitudes and conceptions of the artists and often of their audiences. Moreover, an understanding of an artist’s style and predilections can allow the interpretation of pictures as records. Trenton’s analyses include biographical data, quotations from the artists, descriptions of their studio props and, in some instances, photographs from which they may have worked. The information on objects and customs provided by Houlihan makes one examine each picture more closely and adds greatly to its appreciation. Native Faces is a fruitful collaboration and a beautifully presented book.

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