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Review of *Visions of the People: A Pictorial History of Plains Indian Life* by Evan M. Maurer

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Visions of the People: A Pictorial History of Plains Indian Life. Evan M. Maurer. Minneapolis: The Minneapolis Institute of Arts, 1992. Maps, photos, illustrations, and references. 298 pp. \$35.00 paper.

The Minneapolis Institute of Art opened an exhibit in the fall of 1992 titled *Visions of the People: A Pictorial History of Plains Indian Life* "to honor the evolving Plains tradition by constructing a general overview of their representational arts in all media and time periods" (pp. 6–7). To achieve that goal, the curators assembled works produced by as many "known artists" as possible to end both the namelessness and facelessness which frequently accompanies older pieces of tribal art. An exhibit catalogue, which included five essays, was published to accompany the exhibit.

Evan M. Maurer's essay "Visions of the People" retraces the vast expanse and history of plains art. Maurer ties "The Petroglyph Tradition," "Great Lakes and Southeastern Influences," "The Scholarly Record," "Images of Ceremonial Art," "The Biographical Art Tradition," and "The Modern Traditions of Plains Art" into a partial, introductory story. Questions emerge from this synthesis as Maurer employs imagery from outside the Great Plains to illustrate Plains tradition creating a definition problem.

The last four essays cover narrower subjects. Louise Lincoln in "The Social Construction of Plains Art, 1875-1915," stresses that plains artisans symbolically conveyed their reservation experiences and new relationships with whites through art. Lincoln underscores the importance of understanding the cultural context of the art instead of placing the image in the culture of fine art. Though the importance of placing tribal art in cultural context cannot be understated, Lincoln's accent on art being produced for outsiders slights representational and non-representational images that were made during this period solely for tribal purposes such as peyote feather fans which illustrate the evolving tradition of plains art.

In the following essay, "The Warbonnet: A Symbol of Home," George Horse Capture recounts his discovery of the "sunburst motif" as the source of inspiration for contemporary plains star quilt patterns. He asserts that an early nineteenth century "sunburst motif" which represented a warbonnet is the representational image that is seen today as the "sunburst motif" found in star quilts today. It is doubtful that one limited image found on old hide painting, cloistered in a European museum for a century, was the inspiration for the irregular diffusion of the star quilt among plains cultures, given the fact that warbonnets were widely distributed among plains cultures.

In a companion piece, David W. Penney, "The Horse as Symbol: Equine Representations in Plains Pictographic Art," focuses on representational images of horses. He skillfully argues that plains artisans produced different horse images to reflect new cultural concerns. While in the last essay, "Sacrifice Transformed into Victory: Standing Bear Portrays Sitting Bull's Sun Dance and the Final Summer of Lakota Freedom," Peter J. Powell moves away from Lakota imagery and instead examines Standing Bear's life as an artist.

The remaining pages illustrate images from the exhibition. Explanations and descriptions accompany each impression. Though informative, several perpetuate "Indian metaphors" limiting their usefulness. For example, the Caddoan sun was not a universal regenerative symbol of all plains cultures; to the Pawnee, regeneration came from *Tirawahat*. Other images

reflect the ongoing definition question as non-plains Ute and Iroquois images were included in the exhibit. And on page 171, the description title was mislabeled as an Arapahoe ghost dance dress when in fact the caption described a Pawnee ghost dance dress. The latter was a grave error given the fact that exhibit catalogues are important research tools.

Taken as a whole, the essays and exhibit catalogue provides an important visual insight into plains art traditions. No other medium can push us to understand culturally different worlds and the reasons why those artisans made art than the art itself. Thank you Minneapolis Institute of Art. **Richmond L. Clow**, *Native American Studies Program, University of Montana*.