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GILCREASE

J O U R N A L



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James Auchiah

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GILCREASE JOURNAL

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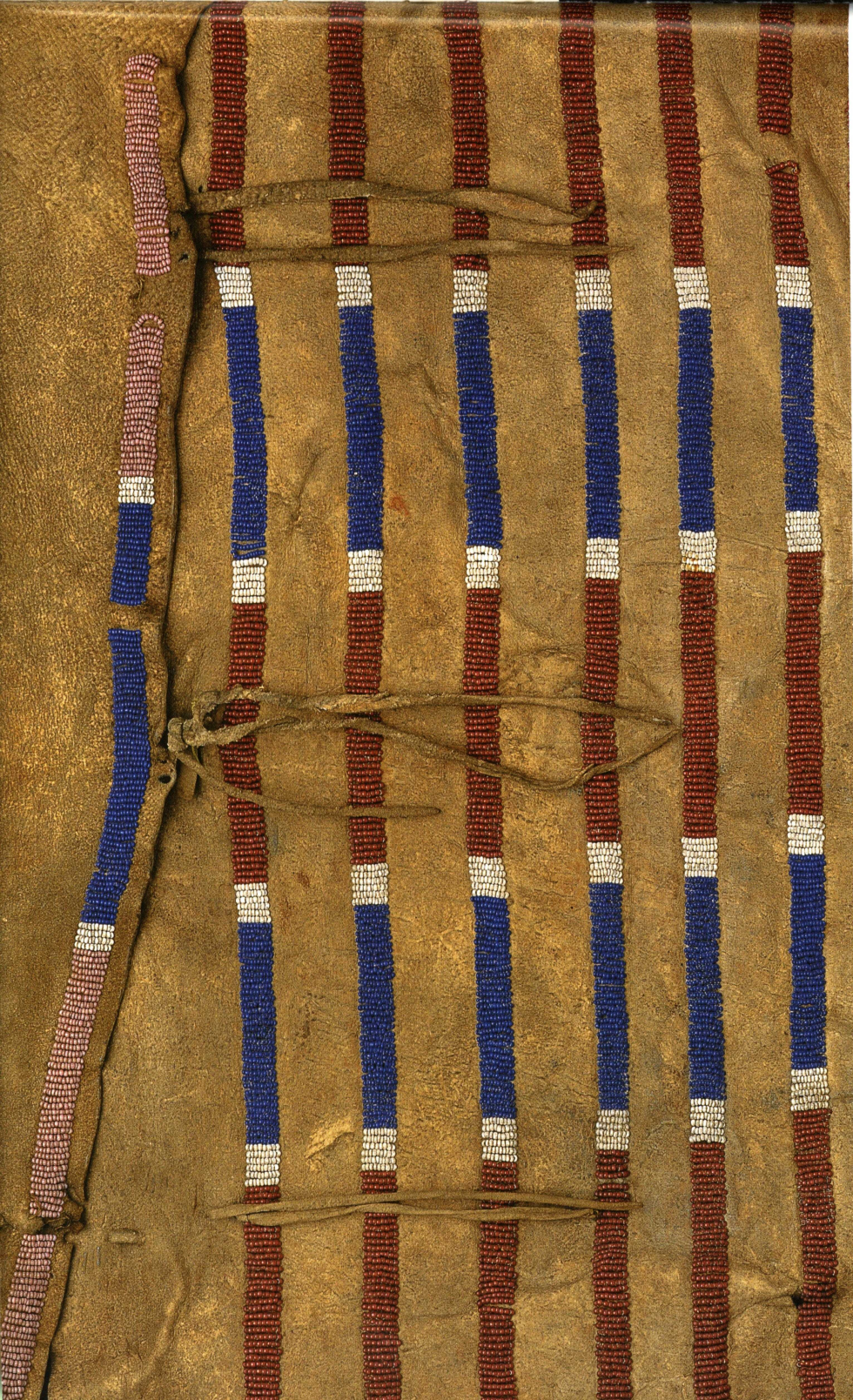
Flatstyle unified Native American painting in

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the twentieth century. Its distinctive look was rooted in old traditions but reflected both new media and new cultural realities.

FLATSTYLE

KEVIN W. SMITH



BEADING

LAKOTA STYLE

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DANIEL C. SWAN

The introduction of glass beads into the western hemisphere was one of the more subtle events of the colonial experience, but one of great significance and endurance. The uses to which Native Americans have put the humble glass bead are extraordinary in both scope and scale. Within this technical and stylistic milieu the Lakota people forged a clear identity as premiere bead workers, recognized for the quality, quantity, and massive scale of their beaded works. Gilcrease Museum collections provide an excellent opportunity to examine the history of Lakota beadwork and its stylistic evolution.

In the engraved shell gorgets, pendants, ear ornaments, and cups made by ancient Mississippians of the Eastern Woodlands, style told the story of a culture's worldview.

THE WORLD IN

A SEASHELL

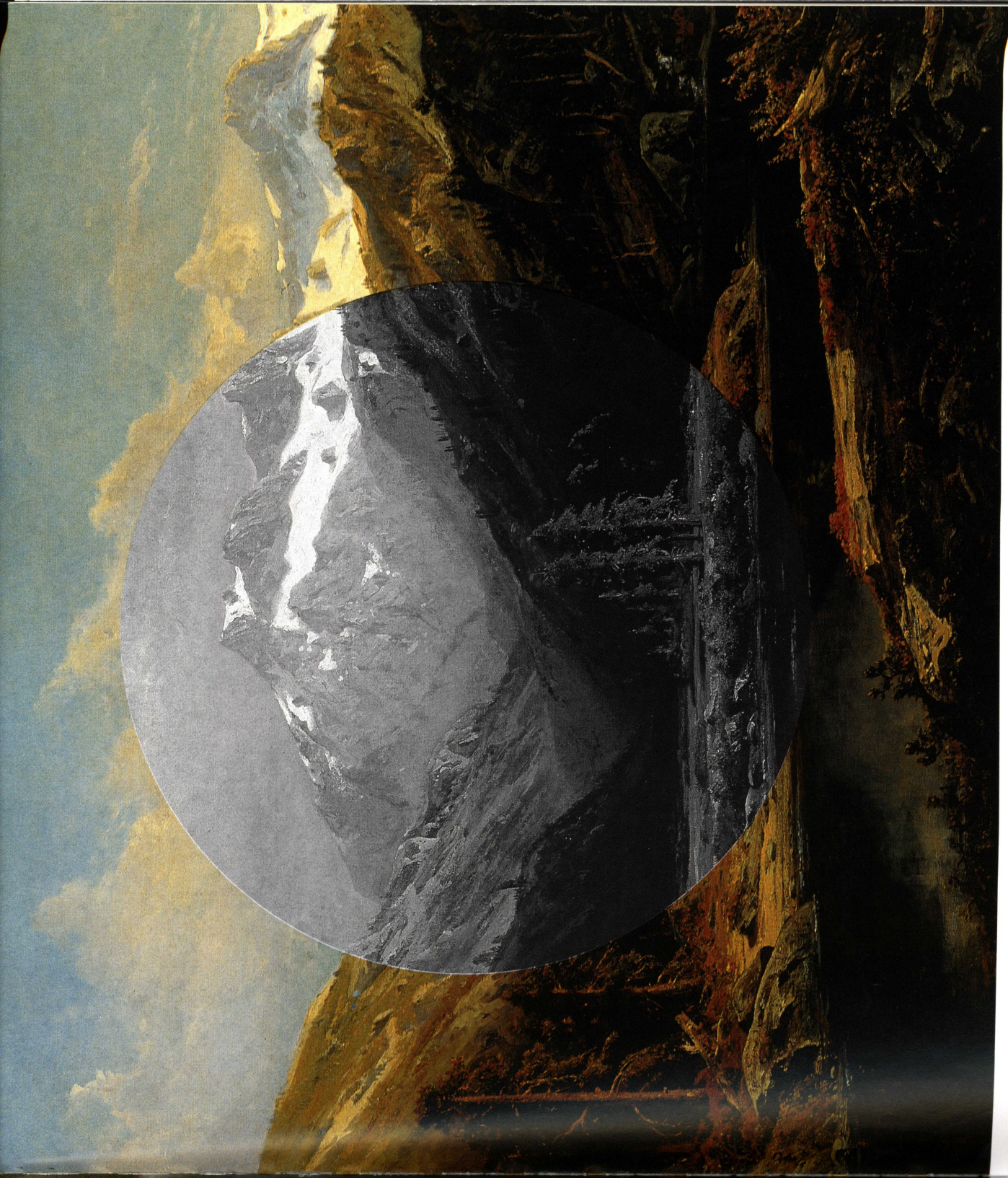
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AUDREY BAKER





Stylistic analysis—comparing and contrasting two works of art—teaches how to really look at paintings, to break them down into their constituent parts, and to make judgments or assumptions about them. It can be an



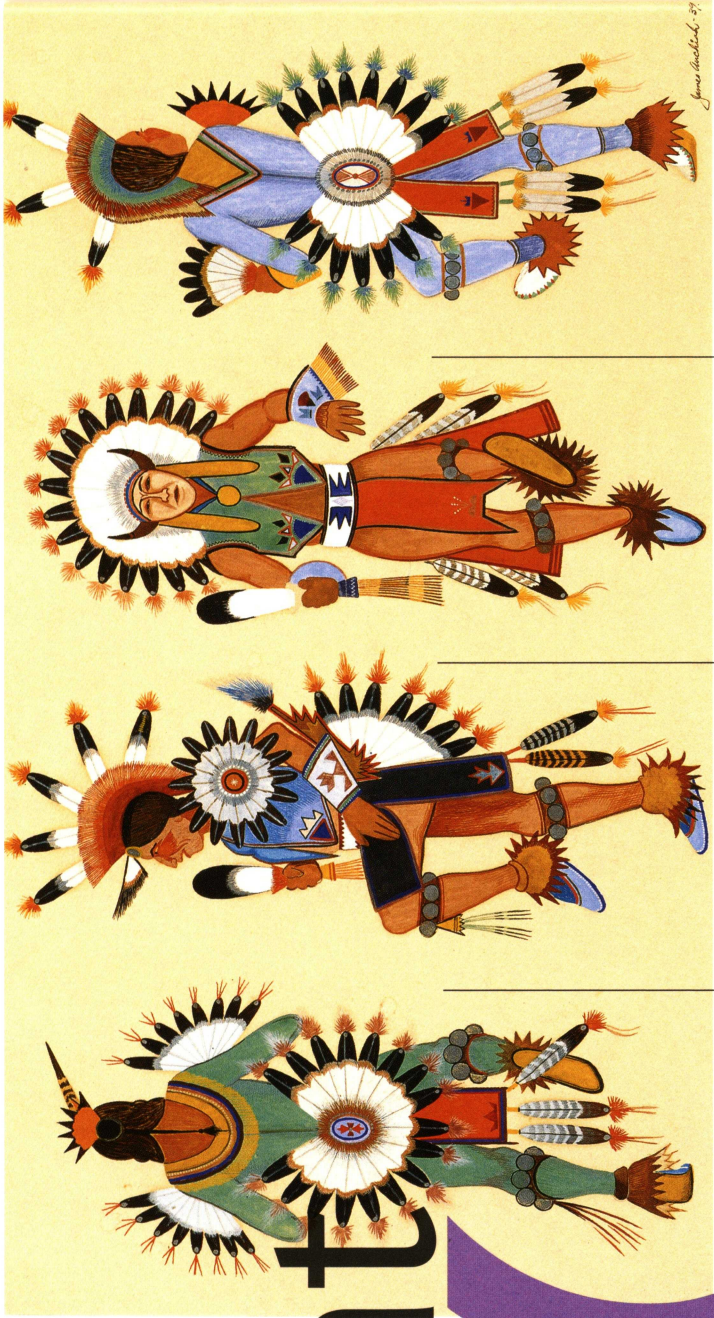
opportunity for the observer to go beyond basic reflections such as "look at how this painter made his trees" or "I wonder how that painter made the water look so real?"

TWO VIEWS OF
THE SIERRA
NEVADAS

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ANNE MORAND

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KEVIN W. SMITH

During the early twentieth century, Native American artists produced a new style of painting. It featured tribal cultures as subject matter, lacked Western academic techniques, and was consequently referred to as “traditional” Indian painting. Non-Indian educators, collectors, and curators played an active role in the style’s development.

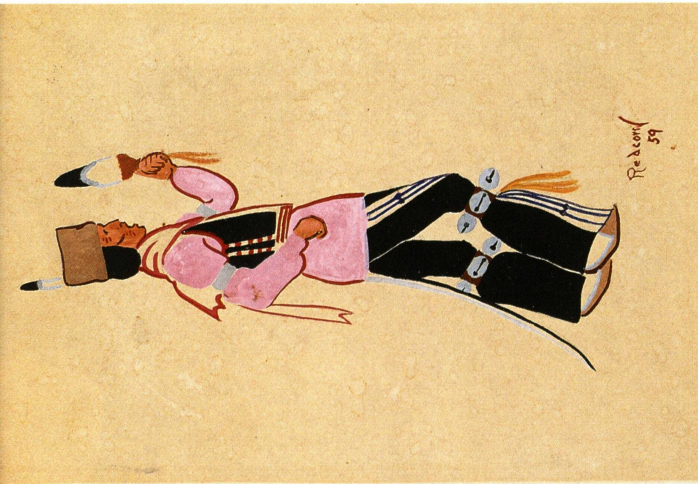
Traditional paintings were produced chiefly with water-based pigments on paper, materials relatively new to American Indian artists, and were characterized by simple, decorative, and narrative compositions. The style grew rapidly in popularity, developing concurrently in Oklahoma and New Mexico during the first half of the twentieth century. By the middle of the century, it was the only modern style of painting accepted as authentically “Indian” by collectors, dealers, and curators. Traditional Indian painting has also been called Studio style and Flatstyle, depending upon the artist’s location or the preference of various collectors or institutions. The name Flatstyle will be used here, as it is the most descriptive and inclusive of the three.

Four Dance Figures
James Auchiah
Tempera on paper
GM 0227.24

For a form that may seem somewhat limited in its stylistic parameters, Flatstyle painting shows a remarkable degree of variation, as is clear in the variety of the illustrations provided here. Yet despite regional and individual variations, all Flatstyle paintings share some important distinguishing characteristics. First, figural images are presented flatly—that is, with no shading or artistic modeling to give the illusion of depth. This is accomplished by using strong outlines to indicate figures and other images. The interior spaces created by the outlines are filled with solid colors that show little or no gradation of hue or value. Jim Red Corn’s *Dancer Wearing Turban* is a good example of these traits.

Second, paintings de-emphasize or eliminate altogether contextual elements. In other words, they often have neither background nor foreground. Or, as is commonly the case, a subtle indication of setting may be expressed through a minimum of objects, as in Acee Blue Eagle’s *Blue Deer*. Objects like the curved lines making a half halo around the deer could suggest a tree or bush but they appear almost abstract, or at least very stylized, when compared with the explicit rendering of vegetation in a western wildlife painting concerned with the illusion of reality. Like the main subjects themselves, objects in the foreground or background are essentially symbolic.

Third, lack of concern with setting is often accompanied by lack of concern with point perspective. Flatstyle paintings rarely have a “vanishing point” as in academic European painting, and objects meant to be seen as at a distance are not always painted behind or smaller than



Dancer Wearing Turban

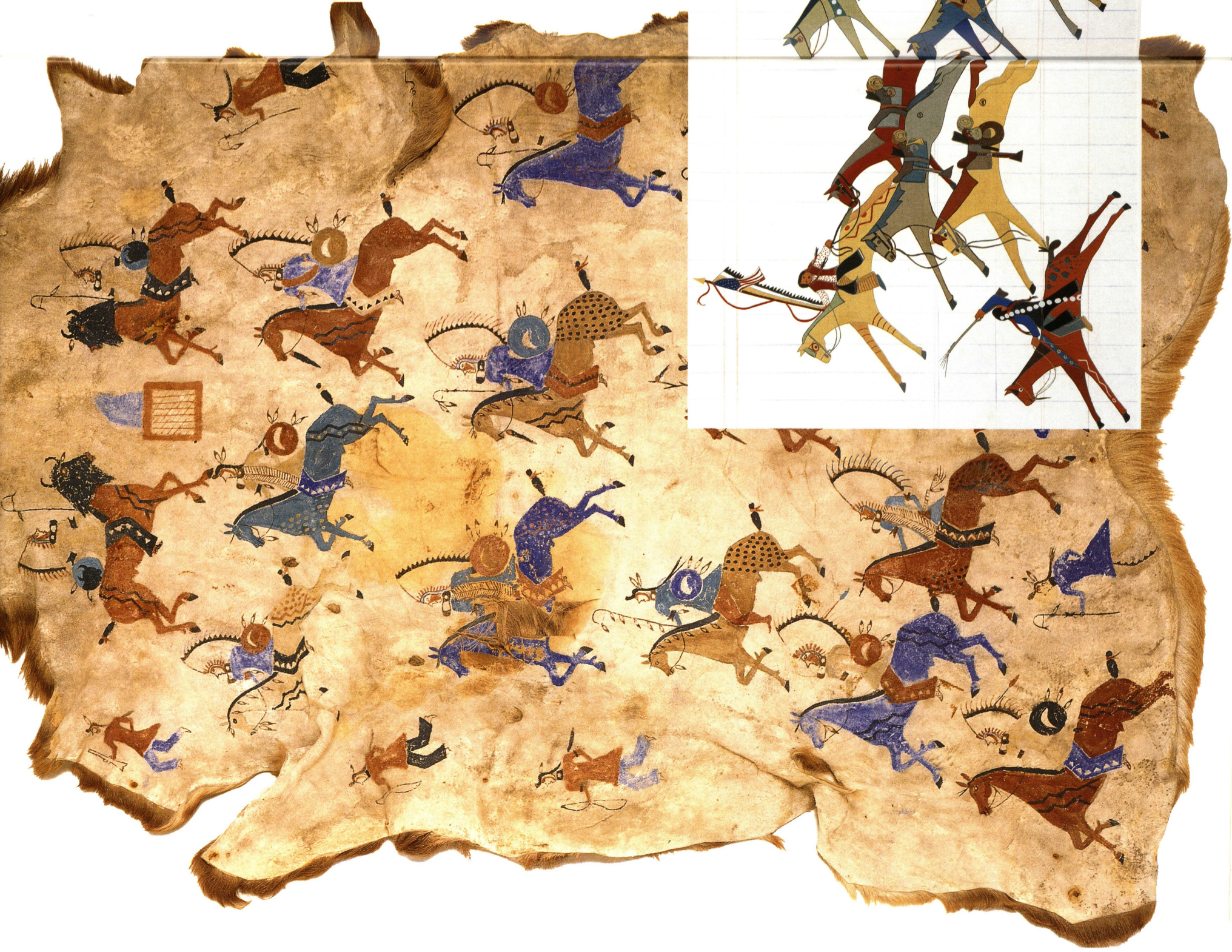
Jim Red Corn
Gouache on paper
GM 0227.1938

Blue Deer

Acee Blue Eagle
Tempera on illustration board
GM 0227.421



Elk Hide Painting
Unknown artist
Pigment on hide
GM 8926.140



Ledger Painting
Virginia Stroud
Tempera on paper
GM 0227.1804

Feather Dancer
Monroe Tsatoke
Tempera on paper
GM 0227.512



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objects meant to be seen as closer to the viewer. As an alternative, artists may present figures "floating" near each other. This device is employed in earlier forms of two-dimensional Native art, for example in painted Plains elk hides. This method of depiction continued in the nineteenth century as artists moved from hides to muslin or paper. Virginia Stroud's contemporary *Ledger Painting* recalls the technique as well as the drawing style used in nineteenth-century Indian drawings made on ledger paper torn from accounting books.

Subject matter in Flatstyle painting varies according to time period, region, and particular artists and schools. Nevertheless, some common themes emerge. One is the human figure, usually dressed for ceremony or in traditional attire. Such figures usually, but not always, are presented with clothing and ceremonial items that accurately associate them with a specific tribe or group. Monroe Tsatoke's *Feather Dancer* shows a figure in dance regalia commonly seen in photographs made at early twentieth-century pow-wows. Some artistic license is taken in the choice of color. A related subject is a group of figures engaged in ceremony as seen in *Corn Dance* by Romando Vigil. In paintings of both single and group subjects, figures are often posed as if participating in a dance or other ceremony.

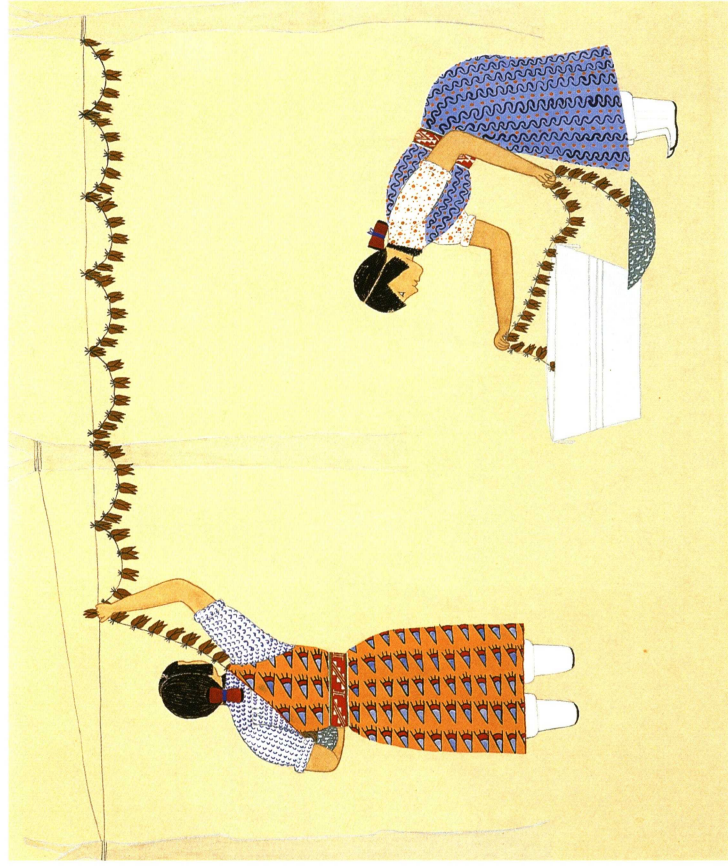




Corn Dance
Romando Vigil
Watercolor on paper
GM 0231.328

The genre scene, or depiction of daily life, is another popular subject. These paintings may show less formal ritual activities, as do Solomon McComb's *Preparation for the Ribbon Dance* and Acee Blue Eagle's *Medicine for Children*. Genre paintings also include depictions of hunting, farming, and other common activities of individuals or community groups. *Drying Green Chilis* by Lorencita Atencio is an early genre Flatstyle painting from the Southwest.

Line contour filled with flat color, lack of one-point perspective, abstract indication of surroundings, floating figures, presentation of individuals or groups performing ceremonies, genre pictures depicting Native cultural life and pursuits—these are all definitive Flatstyle characteristics. But Flatstyle artists do not always follow them to the letter. Works often display a hint of perspective, a touch of modeling, or a relatively comprehensive setting. Compare the realistic and detailed fur on the tall dance figures in Jose Rey Toledo's *Feather Dance* to the flat elements in the painting such as the outlined legs of the dancers in front.



Drying Green Chilis
Lorencita Atencio
Tempera on paper
GM 0237.181

Preparation for the Ribbon Dance
Solomon McCombs
Casein on paper
GM 0227.1674

In paintings of both single and group subjects, figures are often posed as if participating in a dance or other ceremony. The genre scene, or depiction of daily life, is another popular subject.



Feather Dance
Jose Rey Toledo
Watercolor on paper
GM 0237.409

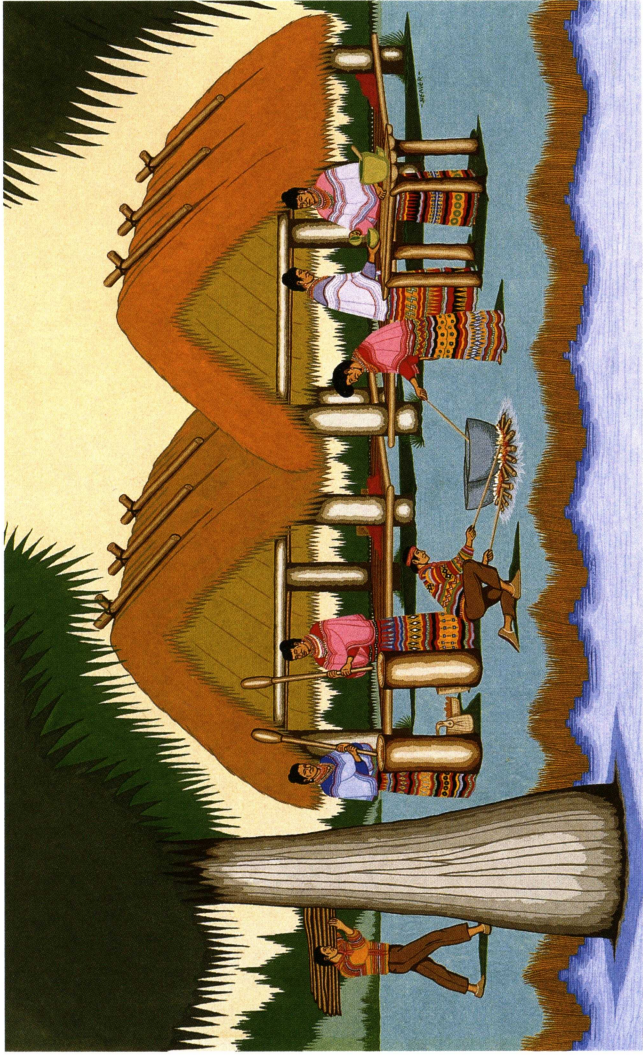
Three Antelope
Jose Rey Toledo
Tempera on paper
GM 0237.295

Compare the realistic and detailed fur on the tall dance figures in Jose Rey Toledo's *Feather Dance* to the flat elements in the painting such as the outlined legs of the dancers in front.



Three Antelope
Jose Rey Toledo
Tempera on paper
GM 0237.295

Such deviations appear in many Flatstyle paintings though they are not within the definition of the style. The consistently stylized and flat treatment of flora and fauna in Toledo's *Three Antelope* is more strictly Flatstyle. Fred Beaver's *Seminoles Making Sofkey* contains quite a bit of contextual background and foreground and perspective for Flatstyle. A small degree of modeling is evident on figures in James Auchiah's *Four Dance Figures*. There is so much modeling in *Bean Dance* by Waldo Mootzka that the painting can hardly be called traditional Flatstyle, even though there is no background or foreground, and the painting has a typical Flatstyle subject. Finally, a successful attempt to show distance through perspective is seen in *Trail of Tears* by Jerome Tiger.

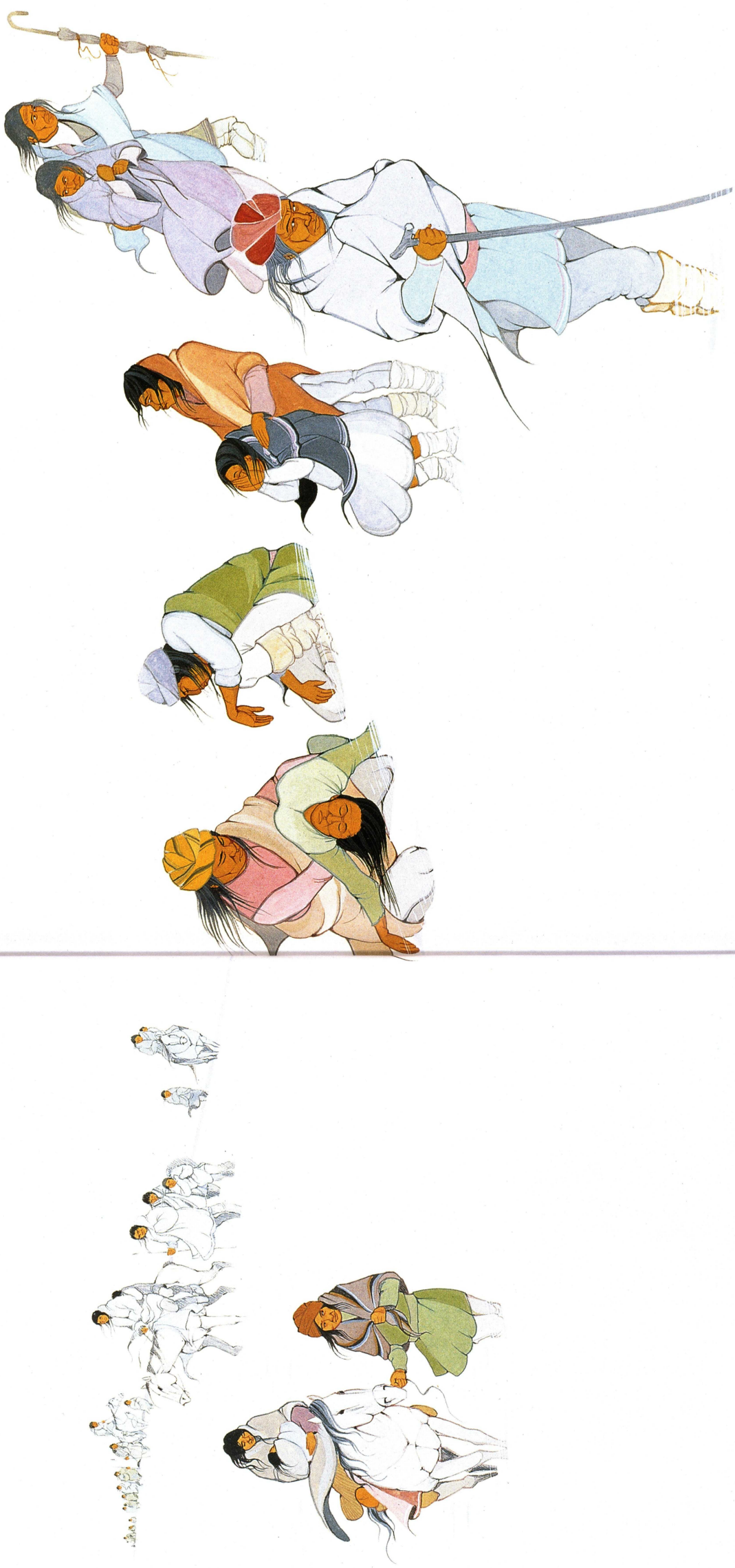


Seminoles Making Sofkey
Fred Beaver
Tempera on paper
GM 0227.531



Bean Dance
Waldo Mootzka
Tempera on paper
GM 0237.196

Trail of Tears
 Jerome Tiger
 Tempera on paper
 GM 0227.1961



Tiger 1961

Trail of Tears ...

Prior to European contact, Pueblo peoples of the Southwest painted on a variety of surfaces. In the ceremonial Kivas, large sacred murals covered the interior walls. Ceremonial items carved of wood were adorned with abstract images representing celestial bodies and spiritual entities. Decoration of pottery was widespread.

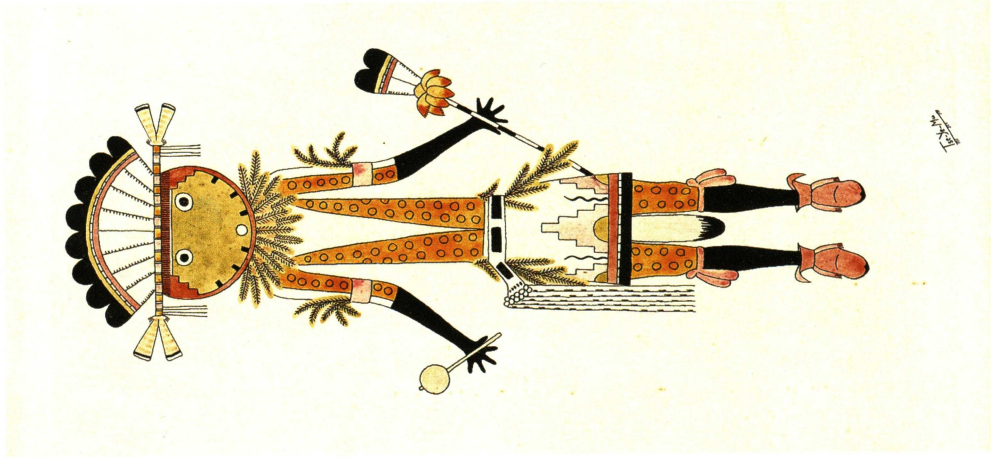
So perhaps it is not surprising that, according to scholars, the first true movement in modern Indian painting occurred in the Southwest. "The earliest documented pueblo paintings on paper were made in 1900 at Hopi, the most isolated of the pueblos, located several hundred miles west of Santa Fe. In that year, anthropologist Jesse Walter Fewkes of the Smithsonian Institution commissioned four Hopi men to make paintings of the Hopi spirits called *kachinas*."¹

The practice of using tribal motifs from older arts in the composition of new ones was encouraged in the early twentieth century by anthropologists attempting to document Pueblo culture. The practice was not new to the Pueblo people, however. Compare the modern *Corn Harvest* by Romando Vigil to the earlier Hopi dish made by an unknown artist, both with a traditional dancer motif.

Because of the enthusiastic encouragement of anthropologists, San Ildefonso Pueblo became a particularly important center for Native painting, giving rise to what became known as the San Ildefonso Watercolor Movement. Romando Vigil was a San Ildefonso artist, as was Julian Martinez. Martinez provided the designs for many of the works of his wife, the potter Maria Martinez. Julian researched traditional motifs and kept them in a notebook that he added to over time. By the 1920s he had visited public museums and other Pueblos and filled his sketchbooks with prehistoric, historic, and contemporary designs, providing the foundation for the invention of his own compositions. His painted designs on the surface of the clay provided the matte images on the famed Martinez "black on black" pottery. His painting activities also included works on paper such as *Pottery Design*.



Corn Harvest
Romando Vigil
Watercolor on paper
GM 0237.544



Pottery Design
Julian Martinez
Ink and watercolor on paper
GM 0236.257

The practice of using tribal motifs from older arts in the composition of new ones was encouraged in the early twentieth century by anthropologists attempting to document Pueblo culture. The practice was not new to the Pueblo people, however. Compare the modern *Corn Harvest* by Romando Vigil to the earlier Hopi dish made by an unknown artist, both with a *Kachina* motif.



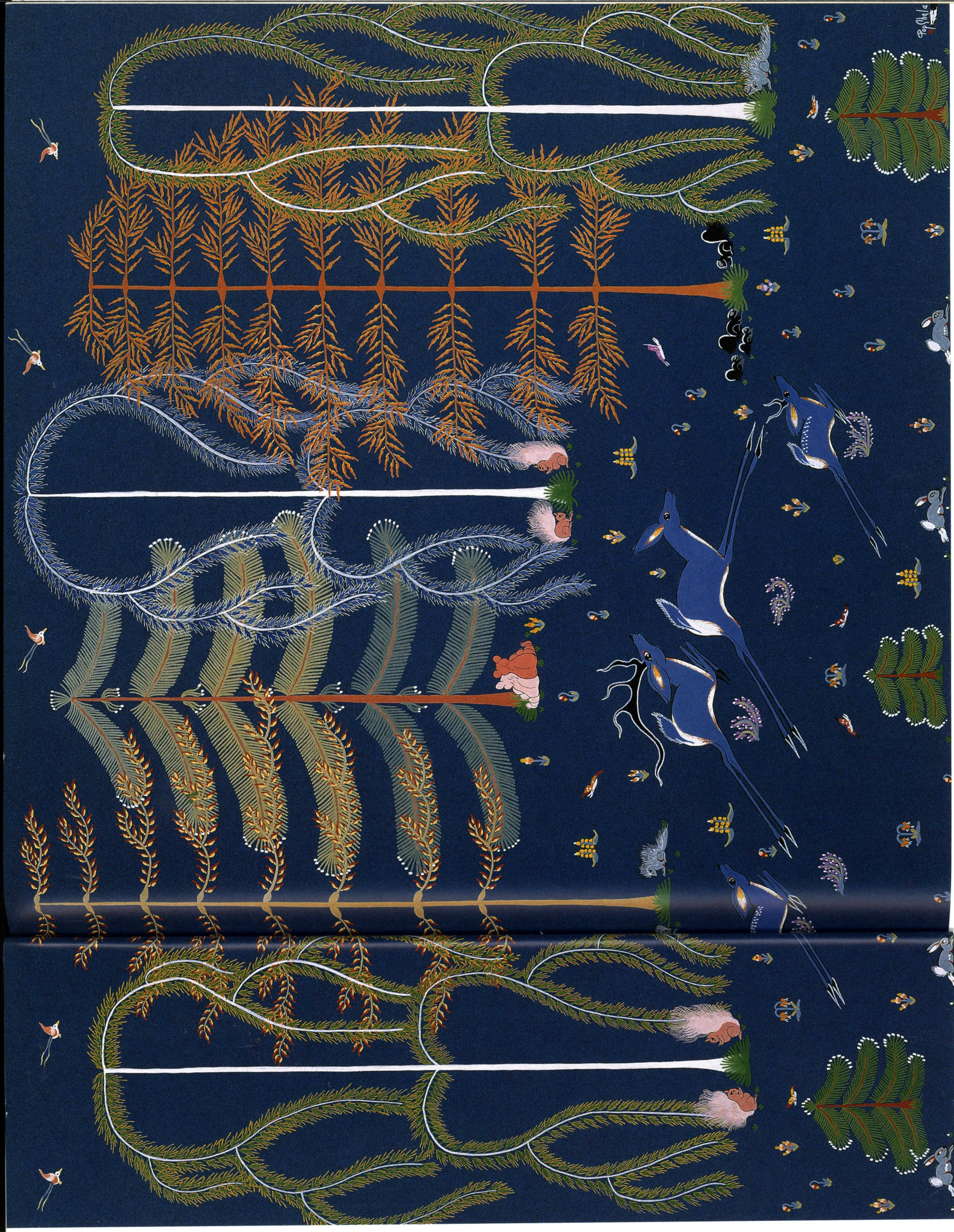
Dish
Hopi, ca. 1920
Clay, natural pigments
GM 54.4408

The San Ildefonso Watercolor Movement spread to the other Pueblos and became known as the Southwest Watercolor Movement. Some of the educators at the Pueblos encouraged students to paint even during the 1920s when the government still sought to repress tribal expressions. Painting classes were not officially approved in government schools until the early 1930s. In 1932 the United States Bureau of Indian Affairs established the “Studio” at the Santa Fe Indian School.² The founding of the Studio School, directed by Dorothy Dunn, was the most important event in the early development of Southwestern Native American painting and even impacted the evolution of modern Native American painting beyond the region. At Dorothy Dunn’s Studio, Flatstyle became institutionalized and codified. “Through the Santa Fe Studio, Miss Dunn became the single most influential individual for an entire generation of Indian painters. The Studio became the model for art departments at other Indian Schools, and no significant changes in method or philosophy occurred until thirty years after she had begun her work.”³

According to Dunn, female students were to paint scenes of home life, such as the harvest tableau *Drying Green Chilis* by Dunn’s student Lorencita Atencio. Boys were to paint ceremonial dances, hunting scenes, racing horses, and leaping deer. Both boys and girls were to employ a stylized manner of depiction that was flat and lacked European devices such as modeling or perspective. For Dunn, “The Indian painter poses no models, follows no color theory, gauges no true perspective...By omitting nonessentials, he produces abstract symbols for plants, animals, earth and sky. Yet he acutely senses life and movement and can convey mood or intense action with a few lines. The typical Indian painting is, therefore, imaginative, symbolic, two-dimensional.”⁴ To truly appreciate paintings from this period, it is important to keep in mind the profound influence of patrons and teachers such as Dunn. The need to please the tastes of non-Indians led to highly decorative works within the approved “traditional” style of painting.⁵

Pop Chalee was one of the most successful artists to study painting in Dunn’s Studio classes at the Santa Fe Indian School. She painted several works like *Forest Scene* during her career. Foliage is represented in a spare, symbolic manner. In some instances, her animals are inspired by those painted on traditional Southwest ceramics. Pop Chalee was of European, East Indian, and American Indian ancestry, and she frequently drew aesthetic comparisons between cultures in relation to painting styles. She pointed out, for example, that the flattened figures painted by ancient Egyptians symbolized their natural environment, and she felt that Native American Flatstyle watercolor painting, similar in form, had similar meanings.

The artist whose work best exemplifies the Studio Style was Harrison Begay. Begay entered the Santa Fe Indian School in 1934, and his painting style took shape at Dunn’s Studio. Like other Flatstyle works, his compositions have little or no background, no point perspective or modeling, and feature solid areas of color contained within contour lines. Peaceful settings surround Begay’s Navajo women, often seen spinning and weaving. Foliage frames the composition in *Navajo Woman Spinning*, implying a natural outdoor setting. Begay’s paintings are pleasing and

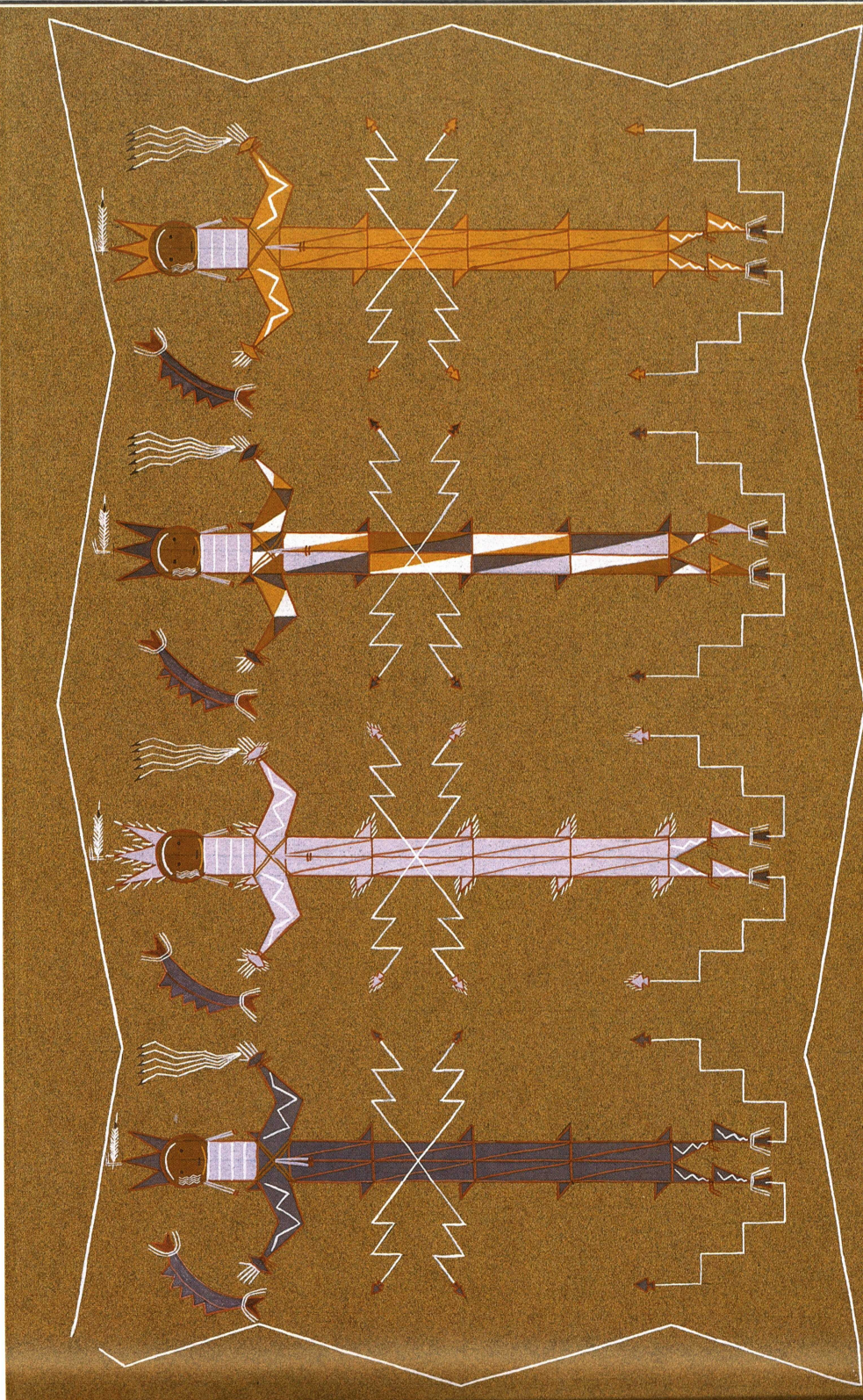


Forest Scene
Pop Chalee
Tempera on paper
GM 0237.527



Navajo Woman Spinning
Harrison Begay
Tempera on paper
GM 0237.160

highly decorative, yet they also often contain accurate information about Navajo life. Begay studied the material culture of Navajo tribal ceremonies and daily life to provide a foundation for his art. He was particularly interested in gathering images from Navajo weavings and drypaintings. This is illustrated in his *Sandpainting Design: The Destroyers of Evil*.



*Sandpainting Design:
The Destroyers of Evil*
Harrison Begay
Tempera on paper
GM 0237.158

The new Native American painting movements of the Southwest developed concurrently with the Flatstyle painting tradition in Oklahoma. Young Kiowa students were creating the "Kiowa style" of painting during the same decades that Flatstyle was developing in the Southwest. These students created a style that would provide the foundation for Oklahoma Flatstyle and would influence generations of Oklahoma Indian painters. The group included Lois Smokey, James Auchiah, Spencer Asah, Monroe Tsatoke, Jack Hokeah, and Stephen Mopope. Originally called the Kiowa Five, the group was sometimes thought to exclude either James Auchiah or Lois Smokey, the former a latecomer and the latter retiring early from painting. The Kiowa style is exemplified by Spencer Asah's *Eagle Dancer* and Stephen Mopope's *Mother and Papoose*. Compared to works in Southwest Flatstyle, both show less emphasis on heavy contour lines and more on color fields. Both also employ colors that are more saturated and hues that are bolder. *Eagle Dancer* shows more action than do most early Southwest paintings. Oklahoma Flatstyle would become known for more drama and action as later artists built upon the Kiowa style. Monroe Tsatoke has often been acknowledged as the most accomplished of the group. His ability to imbue a more sedate composition with subtle power and energy is exhibited in *Seated Man*.

*Mother and
Papoose*
Stephen Mopope
Tempera on
paper
GM 0227.200



Seated Man
Monroe Tsatoke
Tempera on paper
GM 0227.449

Eagle Dancer
Spencer Asah
Tempera on paper
GM 0227.33



The Kiowa movement began "in 1914, when Sister Olivia Taylor, a Choctaw, taught Hokeah, Asah, and Mopope at St. Patrick's Mission School in Anadarko, Oklahoma."⁶ In 1916 Susan Peters, a field matron for the Kiowa Agency, began holding art classes for the Kiowa students. "She bought paper and paints herself and provided an atmosphere where the 'Oklahoma art expression, true and fresh' could thrive."⁷ The works of the Kiowa Five grew out of their traditional artistic heritage as well as their own experience as dancers. Many of the artists' paintings depict individual figures posed in a dance position. The Kiowa Five synthesized their own historical and artistic traditions with a modern, flat, decorative style. Peters convinced Oscar Jacobsen, director of the art department at the University of Oklahoma, to allow the Kiowas to study at the university. Jacobsen also sponsored trips that allowed the Kiowa artists to visit Native American artists of the Southwest. Such encounters allowed artists from both regions to learn from one another as the flat Native American style of painting developed.

In 1935, Creek-Pawnee artist Acee Blue Eagle became the founding director of the art department at Bacone College in Muskogee, Oklahoma. This was three years after the Studio School was established by Dorothy Dunn in Santa Fe. Bacone would become the center for the development of Native American painting in Oklahoma following the Kiowa period. Early Bacone artists like Blue Eagle and Woody Crumbo were deeply influenced by the Kiowas and were also aware of the Flatstyle painting occurring in the Southwest. Blue Eagle often incorporated Southwest designs into his paintings. His *Medicine For Children*, for example, depicts a Southeastern tribal tradition, yet the sun design is of Southwest origin. During the concurrent development of Flatstyle painting, such pan-Indian characteristics became common. Crumbo's *Eagle Dancer* shows Kiowa influence in the action of the dancer and the solid bold color areas. Kiowa influence is seen in the attitude of the figures in *Singers for the Dance* and in the color application. Both paintings are completely devoid of settings, a characteristic of most

Eagle Dancer
Woody Crumbo
Tempera on paper
GM 0227.593



Medicine for Children
Acee Blue Eagle
Watercolor on paper
GM 0227.457



Crumbo ~ 1945



Singers for the Dance
Woody Crumbo
Oil on Canvas
GM 0127.2096

paintings in the Kiowa style. Blue Eagle and Crumbo were both influential artists, and both directed the Bacone art department during the height of Flatstyle's popularity.

Another institution that encouraged Native American Flatstyle painters was the Philbrook Art Center in Tulsa, Oklahoma, (now Philbrook Museum of Art). From 1946 to 1979 Philbrook held the American Indian Annual, a juried exhibition of Native American paintings that became the premiere venue for Flatstyle painting. In fact, according to the exhibition's rules nothing but Flatstyle work was allowed in. As a result, Philbrook shows became "a conservative force in the development of twentieth-century Native art because they imposed a prescribed set of stylistic and iconographic criteria for what was admissible as 'Indian Painting.'"⁸

The market at the time favored stereotypical scenes, particularly of Plains warriors in feathered bonnets. Some Native American art educators attempted to counter the movement towards stereotypical images. Cheyenne artist and Bacone educator Dick West encouraged students to paint only what they knew, only their own tribal traditions. His student Ruthe Blalock Jones took the lesson to heart and continued the same message to her students. For West and Jones, participation in one's own tribal culture and accurate information gleaned from research are critical. But for many artists, the pressure to conform was great. Some work devolved, as one Native American art historian put it, into "treatments of burial and spirit ascension and confused ceremonials and historic reenactments in which tribal cultures are transposed with Kiowa graves being driven from Florida everglades on Comanche ponies carrying Sioux shields."⁹

Not all successful Native American painters devoted themselves to the popular Flatstyle, even during its heyday. One famous and influential painter who deviated from the accepted style was Jerome Tiger. During the early part of his career, Tiger was encouraged by collectors to paint Flatstyle. His innovative delicate line, subtle composition, and soft palette eventually led to an entirely new style in Native American painting, often called the Tiger Style. In 1962 Tiger studied at the Cooper School of Art in Cleveland, Ohio, where he excelled in academic studio techniques. His academic training and excellent draftsmanship allowed him to explore the experience of the individual in a way rarely seen in Flatstyle painting. He eventually incorporated academic modeling and perspective into his works.

Currently only one highly successful professional artist remains true to the Flatstyle tradition. Ruthe Blalock Jones directs the art department at Bacone College and is an internationally known artist who has garnered numerous awards, fellowships, and honors. *Medicine Woman* is one example of Jones's sophisticated development of Flatstyle painting.

Although Native American Flatstyle does not employ European techniques to create illusion, the piece is nevertheless remarkably convincing. This can be attributed to the artist's knowing the subject through personal experience. Such familiarity results in realistic compositions and details. Jones is also successful with a personal acrylic painting style she has developed over the years. Yet even her experimentation has a foundation in Flatstyle art.

Flatstyle has been abandoned by most Native American artists over the last few decades. By the end of the 1950s, there was a reaction against the restrictions inherent in the definition of "authentic" Indian painting. Some new painters began to directly challenge the market's imposed standards. Many began to proclaim an autonomous right to identify for themselves what constituted American Indian painting. In the most famous example, Sioux painter Oscar Howe criticized the Philbrook's limited definition of Indian painting.¹⁰ Howe's 1958 letter to the museum has been characterized as a modern American Indian artist's declaration of independence.

Flatstyle has been abandoned by most Native American artists over the last few decades. By the end of the 1950s, there was a reaction against the restrictions inherent in the definition of "authentic" Indian painting. Some new painters began to directly challenge the market's imposed standards.

Aggressive reaction increased against non-Indian control of Native American art. This reaction was institutionalized in 1962 when the Institute of American Indian Arts (IAIA) was established on the former site of Dorothy Dunn's Studio. The new generation of IALA artists often dismissed the painting of previous decades and placed alternative views of Native American art and culture at the center of their efforts. By the end of the 1970s, Flatstyle diminished. Yet, despite the innovation and influence of Native American artists from the 1960s to the present, there has yet to emerge a movement in Native American art as unified as Flatstyle. No contemporary group or individual has produced a style so overwhelmingly accepted by Native artists and the artistic community as was the Flatstyle movement of the twentieth century.

N O T E S

- 1 Brody 1977:37
- 2 King 1985:27
- 3 Brody 1971:128
- 4 Dunn 1955:349
- 5 Brody 1971:134
- 6 Berlo and Phillips 1998:216
- 7 Callandar and Fawcett 1982:13
- 8 Berlo and Phillips 1998:220
- 9 Strickland 1980:22
- 10 Strickland 1997:73

B I B L I O G R A P H Y

- Janet C. Berlo and Ruth B. Phillips
1998 *Native North American Art* (New York: Oxford University Press).
- J. J. Brody
1971 *Indian Painters and White Patrons* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press).
1977 *Pueblo Indian Painting: Tradition and Modernism in New Mexico, 1900-1930* (Santa Fe: School of American Research).
- Lee A. Callandar and David M. Fawcett
1982 *Native American Painting: Selections from the Museum of the American Indian* (New York: Museum of the American Indian).
- Dorothy Dunn
1955 "America's First Painters," *The National Geographic Magazine* 3:349-377.
- Jeanne King
1985 "In the Name of Progress, is History Being Repeated?" *American Indian Art Magazine*, vol. 10, no. 2. 26-35.
- Rennard Strickland
1980 "The Changing World of Indian Painting," *Native American Art at the Philbrook* (Tulsa: Philbrook Art Center).
- 1997 *Tonto's Revenge: Reflections on American Indian Culture and Policy* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press).



Medicine Woman
Ruthe Blalock Jones
Goauche on board
GM 0227.1942

Beading Lakota Style

DANIEL C. SWAN

A BRIEF HISTORY OF SEED BEADS

GLASS NECKLACE BEADS were one of the first European items to be introduced into the indigenous cultures of the western hemisphere. From Spanish entrance into the Caribbean in the late fifteenth century to the Lewis and Clark expedition of 1804, glass beads were one of the most coveted and highly valued commodities of European and American colonialism.¹ Seed beads contrast to larger trade beads in that they are, as single objects, fairly insignificant, possessing little inherent monetary value or cultural significance. Seed beads are just what their name implies, small glass beads resembling seeds in size and shape. Technically they are defined as being between a half and one millimeter in length. A gauge system has also been applied to standardize the sizing of seed beads on a scale of 10/0 to 20/0. Gauge size is based on the approximate number of beads whose combined length measures an inch—therefore, the larger the gauge, the smaller the bead.²

The motivation to create a large number of uniform and varied colored beads of small dimension can only be explained in terms of the potential they afforded as a new medium for artistic expression. The story of the seed bead begins in Egypt, where glazed ceramic disks, called *faience* beads, were produced in the millions. The technique used to make them dates to 4,000 BCE and originated in either Mesopotamia or Egypt. It represented the first successful attempt to emulate the appearance of precious stone beads inexpensively and with relative ease.



Seed beads, top to bottom:
14/0 French transparent
cut beads, 12/0 Italian
transparent cut beads, 12/0
French metallic finish
beads, 13/0 Czech opaque
cut beads.



Child's dress
Lakota (Sioux), South
Dakota, ca. 1890
Native tanned hide,
glass beads, porcupine
quills, seeds
GM 84.1795

These forerunners to glass beads were used by Egyptian artists to create elaborate funerary coverings constructed in a net beadwork technique that has appeared in the indigenous arts of Africa and North America following the introduction of glass seed beads. This primary usage led to the name “mummy beads” for the *faience* beads that were used to create some of the first documented beadwork in the world. First produced in the blue and green of lapis and turquoise, *faience* beads became more plentiful and their color palette expanded in the New Kingdom period. The technique of net working was used to create realistic representations of plants and other natural elements in decorative collars.³

The story of glass seed beads is tied to the history of the glass industry in Europe, where Venetian glass makers established themselves as the premiere masters of their craft in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. These early artisans were motivated by the desire to recreate the glass bead achievements of their Egyptians and Roman predecessors. The Venetian glass industry developed a number of sophisticated techniques to ultimately produce over 100,000 different bead designs in large quantities. The industrial revolution brought machinery to bear on efforts to create ever more perfect beads at lower cost. In the early 1800s the quest led to a “micro-bead” of less than one millimeter in length, but the small size of its hole prevented it from finding market use and it was soon discontinued.⁴

The first small diameter glass beads in North America were probably the blue colored “pony beads” introduced by the French in the Great Lakes region in 1675.⁵ By the 1840s seed beads of smaller size and larger color range were available through manufacturing innovations developed in Venice and Bohemia. Seed beads were used by Native Americans to create beautiful works of art using a number of specific methods and techniques that are based on the principles of either sewing or weaving. The beadwork discussed in this article was created through a sewn technique referred to as “lane” stitch, a style that the Lakota people would master and come to dominate in the nineteenth century.⁶

THE LAKOTA PEOPLE

The Lakota are members of the Siouan language family, and, together with their Nakota and Dakota cousins, comprise the people that are popularly referred to as the Sioux.⁷ When the Sioux were first encountered by Europeans in the mid seventeenth century, they ranged over a territory that stretched from the Mille Lacs region of Minnesota west to the Missouri River. The displacement of Chippewa and Huron bands into the western Great Lakers region brought the Sioux into periodic warfare with the Chippewa that was largely fueled by unequal access to European trade goods. Regular access to firearms and horses ultimately caused the Sioux to move further west, where they evolved into the archetype for Plains Indian societies.



Dress (detail)
Blackfeet, Montana, ca. 1870
Native tanned leather, glass beads, feathers, metal cones
GM 84.1806
The decorative beadwork on this dress includes the larger pony beads at the neck opening and smaller seed beads across the bodice.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, the Lakota controlled a territory that stretched from southwestern Minnesota to the Rocky Mountains and from Southern Canada into modern-day Iowa, Nebraska, and Wyoming. The western Lakota, called the Teton, was a large group comprised of seven localized bands residing along the Missouri River but venturing across the plains through Colorado to the Rocky Mountains.⁸ The Teton were fully mounted by the end of the eighteenth century and were hunting west of the Missouri.⁹

Today the Lakota primarily reside on numerous reservations in South Dakota, each governed by a sovereign local government that works to improve economic and social conditions for their members. The Lakota people continue to perpetuate many elements of their culture and religion, including their native language and traditional arts.

LAKOTA DECORATIVE ARTS

Prior to the arrival of European manufactured goods, the Lakota relied upon animal hides as their primary material for shelter, clothing, blankets, moccasins, bags, containers, shields, and other utilitarian and ceremonial objects. Considerable effort and skill were required to transform animal skins into tanned leather. Among the Lakota this lengthy and physically demanding process involved nine distinct steps to create an astonishingly soft and thick hide.¹⁰ Hides were further refined through a smoking process that rendered them water repellent and more durable. Smoked hides were used for daily wear clothing, tipi covers, and other utilitarian objects. Finely finished hides with a natural white appearance were reserved for ceremonial garments and sacred objects.

Hide was sewn into garments and other objects with an awl and sinew thread. Fashioned from a sharpened piece of bone or antler, the awl was an integral component in a woman's tool kit, often stored in a decorated case that hung from her belt. Sinew is a strong and durable thread obtained from the bundle of tendon that runs along each side of the spine of large animals. Every attempt is made to remove the tendon in long strips to provide the longest strands of thread. The tendon is scraped to clean it and then soaked to leach away the natural gelatin that surrounds the fibers. When properly prepared, sinew strands separate easily and can be further divided to create fine, uniform pieces of thread.¹¹



Dried and
processed sinew.
GM 8716.1-2

Lakota (Sioux)
South Dakota, ca. 1880
Native tanned leather,
quills, glass, hair, cloth,
pigment.
GM 84.1818





Storage bag
Northern Plains,
ca. 1870
Native tanned leather,
glass beads, metal
cones, horse hair
GM 84.587

Although constructed in a later time period, the beaded decoration on this bag is representative of early seed bead designs used throughout the Plains region. Storage bags like this one, often referred to as "tipi bags" and "possible bags," were important items among the nomadic tribes of the Plains area. These bags were often created in pairs and used to store food, clothing, and other materials.



Dance Ornament
Lakota (Sioux), South Dakota,
ca. 1900
Otter, rawhide, quills, feathers,
pigment
GM 84.97

Otter "breast plates" of this style were a common accoutrement of male Grass Dancers in the early twentieth century. Worn over the shoulders, the

quillwork decoration, feather fluffs and commercial mirrors would create an amazing effect when combined with the movement of the dancer. This piece provides a great example of the use of quilled strips of alternating color bars that are grouped to create geometric design elements.



Bag
Lakota (Sioux) South Dakota,
ca. 1880
Commercial and native
tanned leather, glass beads,
brass beads, otter fur
GM 84.674

Clothing, lodges, and utilitarian and religious objects were decorated by painting, embellishment with natural and handmade beads, and various quillwork techniques. The Lakota observed a sexual division of artistic labor, common to many Native American communities on the Plains, in which men generally painted in a realistic style on tipis and garments to record historic and mythical events, while women tended to paint geometric, abstract designs on utilitarian objects. The Lakota almost certainly were exposed to porcupine quill embroidery during their residence in the western Great Lakes region in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Quillwork is central to the history of Lakota beadwork, providing both technical and stylistic lead for the later art form. Like many tribal groups, the Lakota continued to value quillwork long after their western migration took them outside the natural range of the North American porcupine. Continued use of porcupine quills in great quantities in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries provides proof of their value as an important trade object.¹²

Lakota women were adept quill workers, using a number of techniques to transform the sharp pointed quills of the porcupine into decorative treatment for clothing, domestic items and ceremonial objects. Numerous methods were developed by Native Americans to attach quills to garments and objects by sewing them into place. Porcupine quills were cleaned and dyed into an amazing range of colors using vegetal pigments. Among the Lakota the most important technique of quillwork embroidery involved the use of two parallel lines of running stitch in which the thread only pierced the surface of the finely tanned leather. The softened quill was passed under the stitch, bent back over itself, and then passed through the corresponding stitch on the opposite side of the lane. The embroiderer both sews and quills at once, with the lanes of sewing kept ahead of the quillwork. When a panel of stitched quillwork is complete, the stitching is totally concealed. Only time reveals the delicate and even stitchwork in pieces, like the blanket strip below, which are worn from use and age.

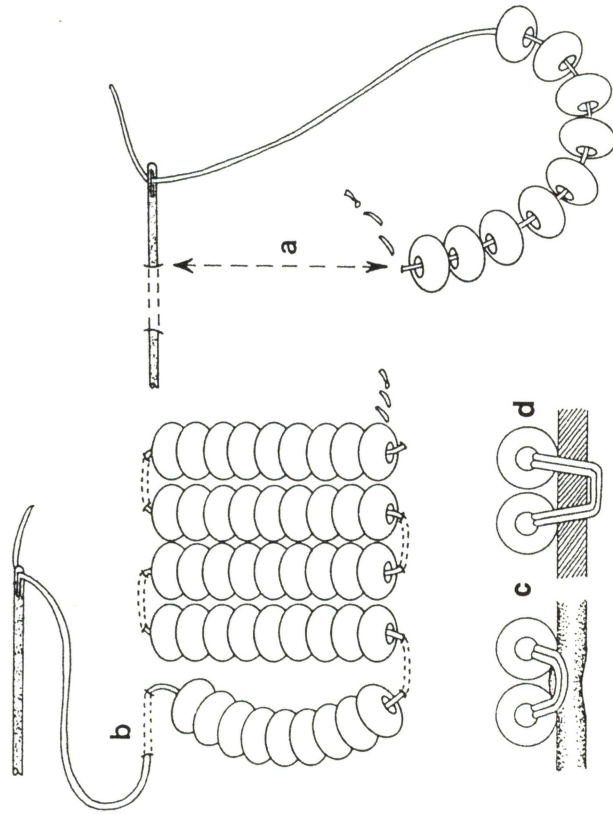
Porcupine quills were also used to wrap thin strips of rawhide of varying colors to create bar designs. Multiple strips could be combined to create design elements. The Teton employed a variety of plaiting techniques to create fine strands of quillwork that were then wrapped around pipe stems, feathers, bunches of hair, and fringes. The repertoire of design elements at the foundation of Lakota quillwork in the eighteenth century included colored bars, stepped triangles, outlined blocks, checkered patterns, and cross designs.

Blanket strip (detail)
Lakota (Sioux) South
Dakota, ca. 1870
Native tanned leather
quills, pigment
GM 84.1860



In the first decades of the nineteenth century, the Lakota people came into increasing contact with small glass beads as a popular trade commodity. The first of these were the so-called pony beads, available only in white or pale blue, which were generally used to create single bands of beadwork in alternating colors. Early examples incorporate both pony beadwork and quillwork, with the scarcer beads used to create single lanes to outline sections of quill work.¹³ At the end of the pony bead era, smaller quantities of light and dark red, dark blue, and caramel colored beads were introduced. The core inventory of design elements from Lakota quillwork transferred easily to the medium of beadwork, with rows of seed beads replacing the flattened and sewn quills.

This early beadwork was executed using the tools and techniques of sewn quillwork with an awl used to pierce the leather base without going all the way through and a piece of sinew passed through the hole. Beads were strung on the sinew and another stitch was executed to secure the row of beads at both ends. Parallel rows of beads were sewn in place to create a lane of beadwork that was usually oriented along the horizontal axis of an object. Early design patterns included lanes in single and alternating color. As the supply of pony beads increased, multiple lanes of bar designs were executed next to one another to create box and cross patterns. Additional design elements that translated from quillwork to beadwork include stepped triangles and checker patterns. The style of this early beadwork enjoyed a wide distribution throughout the plains, plateau, and prairie regions. This beadwork technique was referred to as “lazy stitch” because a skilled bead worker could cover extremely large areas with lane stitch beadwork in a relatively short amount of time. This convenience only stimulated Lakota bead workers to elevate the quantity and scale of their works.



The lane stitch technique:

- a The first stitch is placed exactly opposite the spot from which the thread emerges.
- b The row of beads is anchored.
- c On buckskin, the needle just catches the surface of the leather.
- d On cloth, rawhide, or harness leather, the thread completely penetrates the material and is pulled back through.

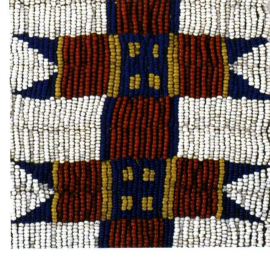
From *Native American Beadwork*, by Georg J. Barth. Shown courtesy of R. Schneider Publishing, Stevens Point, Wisconsin.

After 1840 smaller Venetian glass beads, the original seed beads, became increasingly available, and their use was well established among the Lakota during the 1850s. The opaque beads were hand finished and therefore somewhat irregular in size and shape. These inconsistencies were overcome by adjusting the number of beads in a row up or down to provide adequate coverage. The number of beads in each row ranged from six to ten, and Lakota lane stitch beadwork began to incorporate a slight roll in each row of beads, achieved by crowding the number of beads in each row. The earliest seed bead designs again accessed the core inventory of elements found in quillwork: solid and alternating bands, triangles, crosses, and rectangles. Similar patterns and designs could be found throughout the Plains region during the initial seed bead period. In the 1850s Lakota beadwork began to incorporate a wider set of design elements and motifs. Bead workers drew inspiration from the inventory of geometric designs women used to paint the parfleche, a rigid container of rawhide that housed a wide range of objects and was an indispensable tool for equestrian nomads. New design elements that appeared during this period include the tall isosceles triangle, the “K” shape, and circles.¹⁴

Lakota beadwork assumed a definable style during the middle seed bead period, in the 1860s and 1870s. Major design elements tended to be outlined in a contrasting color, and the design elements were large in scale and bold in presentation. In larger panels of solid beadwork, Lakota women also used a strong central design unit that was situated on a background in a single color, most often white, but sometimes pale blue. Red and dark blue began to dominate in Lakota work during this period with green and yellow used as accent colors.

In the late 1860s the Lakota came into increasing contact and interaction with non-Indian settlers, gaining exposure to elements of Anglo design through the fashion, home furnishings, and accessories of the larger American society of the day. It has been suggested that the patterns of imported area rugs and carpets may have had an important impact on certain design elements that arose in Lakota beadwork in the 1860s and 1870s.¹⁵

Details, top to bottom:
GM 84.584; 84.611;
and 84.467.



Storage bag
Lakota (Sioux), South
Dakota, ca. 1880
Native tanned leather,
glass beads, metal
cones, horse hair,
pigment
GM 84.2388



The period of 1870 to 1880 saw continued evolution of style and design in Lakota beadwork—further distinguishing it from that of other Plains tribes, including the Cheyenne, Arapaho, and Crow. Palettes became increasingly varied and individual elements more complex and detailed. Basic motifs were combined in new ways to form novel compositional units that in turn were often arranged into repetitive patterns. Older design elements were retained and single and multiple row patterns were used as edge treatments on pipe bags, storage bags, and clothing. It was during this period that Lakota bead workers began to tie their design units together with thin lines that often incorporate right angle turns and small, triangular “flags” and forks at their terminal ends. The pattern was one of a lighter presentation with the boldness of older design elements further softened by a reduction in their size and the use of softer color transitions. The overall impression of Lakota beadwork from this period was one of more subtle presentation of more complex compositions.¹⁶



Storage bag
Lakota (Sioux), South
Dakota, ca. 1880
Native tanned leather, glass
beads, metal cones, horse
hair, pigment
GM 84.2388



Storage bag
Lakota (Sioux), South
Dakota, ca. 1880
Native tanned leather,
glass beads, metal
cones, horsehair,
pigment
GM 84.611



Storage bag
Lakota (Sioux), South Dakota, ca. 1880
Native tanned leather, glass beads, metal
cones, horsehair, pigment
GM 84.584



Bag
Lakota (Sioux), South
Dakota, ca. 1880-90
Native tanned leather,
glass beads
GM 84.1268



Woman's leggings
Lakota (Sioux), South
Dakota, ca. 1870-80
Native tanned leather,
glass beads
GM 84.467

Lakota women wore a pair of "half" leggings that were tied under the knee and extended to the tops of their moccasins. The beadwork on these leggings is typical of Lakota design elements at the beginning of the middle seed bead period.

In the last quarter of the nineteenth century the Lakota had access to a much larger supply of more uniform seed beads in a wide range of opaque and transparent colors. This marked a move toward larger panels of beadwork and complete decoration of parts of entire pieces of clothing, bags, tipis, toys, and other objects. It was also during the late seed bead period that preferences and trends in the beadwork produced among the individual bands of the Lakota began to coalesce into distinct geographic styles.

Lakota beadwork reached new heights in the last decade of the 1800s when an incredible amount of work was produced for local communities and a growing market of non-Indians. This intercultural commerce in beadwork began with the army officers, government officials, missionaries, and traders who interacted with the Lakota on a regular basis. At the end of the nineteenth century the market would expand to include urban dwellers in the eastern United States, inspired by the Wild West shows, fairs and international expositions that brought "Native culture" to the attention of a broader public. During this period Lakota women also incorporated western tailoring into fully beaded garments, and they beaded completely foreign objects, including high-heeled shoes, hats, purses, and doctor's bags. The volume of beaded objects created around the turn of the twentieth century should not be underestimated; many items viewers enjoy in museum collections stem from this prolific period of production. Intertribal movements of the late nineteenth century, including the Ghost Dance, Peyotism, and the Grass Dance, brought new inspiration and motivation to Lakota beadwork. Pipe bags were created in large numbers for distribution as gifts to visitors and guests at Lakota dances and celebrations.

It was also around the beginning of the twentieth century that Lakota women broke with convention and began to incorporate realistic depictions of people and animals into their beadwork panels. Common figures included horses, elk, turtles, eagles, soldiers, and mounted warriors in full feather bonnets. These beaded figures incorporate considerable detail with respect to the adornment of both individuals and horses. In figurative work the direction of the beaded lanes was often altered to conform to the outline of the major design elements, providing a stronger line and bolder form.

In the early twentieth century the Lakota people were completely reduced to a reservation economy, and the acculturation programs of the federal government did little to ease the economic and social hardships of the period. In addition, the market for their beaded work was severely diminished as non-Indian interest in native cultures waned into a passing fancy. Within this situation, Lakota women continued to teach their beadwork techniques and styles to a new generation and Lakota beadwork was produced on a small, local scale.

As the conditions of the Lakota people have improved, so have the opportunities and rationales for the production of lane stitch beadwork. Today the Lakota people continue to produce exquisitely beaded and quilled objects for use in their respective communities and for sale to tourists and collectors. Items created for use in the community focus on the elaborate outfits worn by Powwow dancers and ritual objects and

Pipe bag
Lakota (Sioux), South Dakota,
ca. 1900-1910
Native tanned leather, glass
beads, porcupine quills,
pigment
GM 84.825



Purse
Lakota (Sioux), South
Dakota, ca. 1890-1900
Commercial bag with
metal hardware, glass
beads
GM 84.2161



Vest (front and
back).
Lakota (Sioux),
South Dakota,
ca. 1900
Native tanned
leather, glass beads,
cloth
GM 84.1791



Pipe bag
Lakota (Sioux),
South Dakota,
ca. 1900
Native tanned
leather, glass beads,
porcupine quills,
metal cones, horse
hair, pigment
GM 84.494



accessories. Traditional design elements and the Lakota style of their composition have been retained to a considerable degree as contemporary bead workers access the broad range of bead types and colors available today. Over its 160-year history, Lakota beadwork has developed one of the most distinctive American Indian styles of transforming the humble seed bead into magnificent works of beauty and tradition.

NOTES

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2 Dubin 1987:105; Barth 1993:17.

3 Dubin 1987:42-43.

4 The scale of this production and commerce attained astronomical dimensions. In 1764, twenty-two Venetian factories were producing, on average, 44,000 pounds of beads per week. In the 1880s the annual amount of beads imported from Venice to the United States is estimated at 6 million pounds of beads per year. Dubin 1987:111.

5 The gauge measurement for pony beads ranges from 6/0 to 9/0. Dubin 1987:274.

6 (Dubin 1987:275) Hail 1980: See Barth 1993 for a full discussion of the core techniques found in Native American beadwork.

7 The reader is referred to DeMallie 2001a for introduction to the linguistic and cultural histories of the Sioux people.

8 See DeMallie 2001b for discussion of Teton history and culture.

9 DeMallie 2001a:719-22, 731.

10 Belitz 1973:4.

11 Lyford 1984:38.

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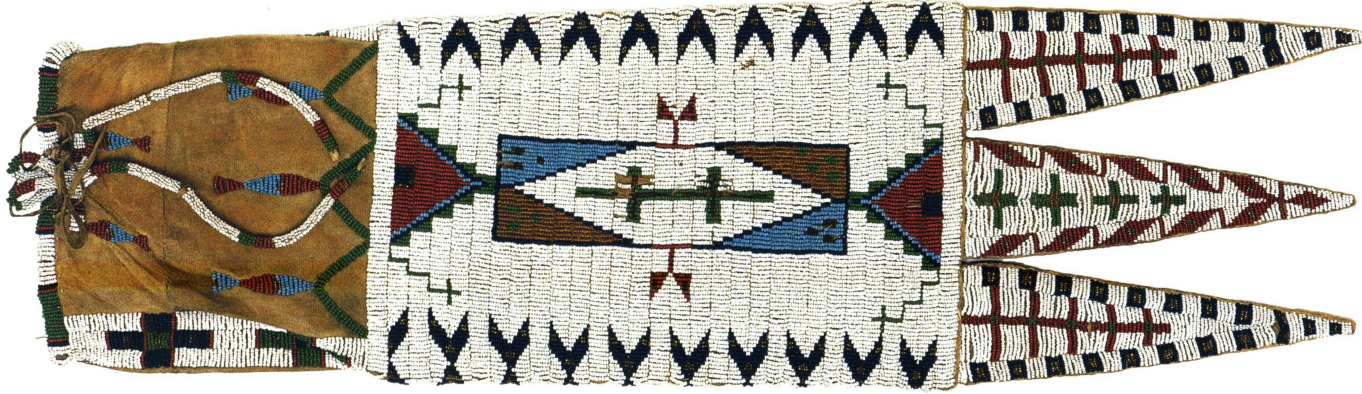
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Placing three triangular tabs at the bottom of a pipe bag was a common treatment among the Oglala band of the Lakota. It contrasts with the more usual quillwork and leather fringe found at the bottoms of most Lakota pipe bags.



Pipe bag
Lakota (Sioux), South Dakota, ca. 1870-80
Native tanned leather, glass beads
GM 84.480

The World in a Seashell

STYLE AND SYMBOLISM IN PRE-CONTACT SHELL ADORNMENT

AUDREY BAKER

In the Mississippian Period (AD 700 to 1500), centralized agricultural groups throughout the eastern and southeastern Woodlands developed socially and politically complex societies. People living together in such societies tend to evolve ways to communicate their status, affiliations, and beliefs; in post-industrial times we may use political buttons, necklaces with the Christian sign of the cross, or Rolex watches. Mississippians used elaborately engraved seashells.

Incised engraving adorned gorgets, pendants, ear ornaments, and marine shell cups, most commonly made from the marine shell species *Busycon perversum*. Many symbols inscribed on these objects drew on overarching designs and motifs common to people living across the broad region, although their style of execution varied from area to area. Others would have been most meaningful to locals.

In the same way that contemporary American indicators of position and philosophy say something about worldview, Mississippian engraved shell objects, whether indicating status or used within religious rituals, said something about the Mississippian view of things. Mississippians lived in a world they perceived as composed of three spheres or realms.

The "upper world," largely represented in mediums other than shell, was characterized by order, stability, and harmony. Birds, falcons, and bird-men inhabited this supernatural world. Other motifs associated with the upper world are rayed circles, feathers, feathered-scrolls, and forked eyes.

"This world" was the world in which humans dwelled and was characterized by a mixture of order and chaos. This world was seen as the sphere in which the upper world and the underworld merged and where a balance between the two worlds was attempted. The symbols for "this world" are connected to the display of political status through the adornment of ritual paraphernalia. Common motifs in

designs representing "this world" are the looped square, cross and circle, and bi-lobed arrow motifs.

The "underworld" was filled with chaos and inhabited by serpents, serpent monsters, and monstrous beings. Attributed to the underworld were the often chaotic, natural forces of lightning, thunder, and rain. The underworld, with its strong connection to the rain, a life source for agricultural societies, was also the source of fertility. The serpent motifs from the underworld are thus symbols of fertility.

These four objects from the Gilcrease collection may appear as simply and mutely beautiful to the unschooled contemporary eye, but to the people who made and used them, their style and presentation communicated a world of meaning.



CITICO GORGET

Lee County, Mississippi
AD 1450 - 1750, Protohistoric
Marine Shell. Gilcrease 9025.456

Representing a version of the rattlesnake theme, the Citico style gorget is a local development of the Appalachian region. The coiled rattlesnake can be depicted with variances in the design elements that decorate the snake's body, the plumage by the snake's head, the position of the snake's mouth and the amount of excised shell. The rattlesnake or serpent theme is associated with the underworld and Mississippian fertility ritual. The Citico style gorget was a marker of age status.



SCALLOPED TRISKELE GORGET

Tennessee
AD 1350 - 1500, Late Mississippian and Protohistoric
Marine Shell. Gilcrease 9025.235

The scalloped triskele gorget is composed of a circular gorget with a scalloped rim, a middle circular ring filled with dots and dot-centered circles, and a center circle with a clockwise or counterclockwise spiral at the center. Another regionally developed representative of the underworld, the scalloped triskele style is believed to represent a stylized rattlesnake, considered the "chief" of snakes. Within social contexts, this gorget was worn by females and infants in the Appalachian region—revealing its possible use in fertility ritual.

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FACE MASK GORGET

Hazel Place, Poinsett County, Arkansas
AD 1350 - 1700, Late Mississippian and Protohistoric
Whelk Shell. Gilcrease 9025.245

Face mask gorgets are commonly cut from the outer whorl of a whelk shell to replicate the form of a face. This one has a protruding circle for a mouth, incised lines around the edge of the gorget representing hair, and the forked eye motif, represented by incised circles around the perforations with a series of "lighting bolt" lines descending from them. The face mask theme generally represents "this world" within the Mississippian worldview; however, the presence of the forked eye motif also connects it to the upper world. Face masks, used by pre-contact societies throughout the Woodlands, were typically part of a mortuary ritual in which the mask was placed over the face at burial.

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CIRCLE AND CROSS GORGET

Christian County, Kentucky
AD 1000 - 1350, Middle Mississippian
Marine Shell. Gilcrease 9025.454

The circle and cross theme, a variant of the sun-circle theme, is comprised of at least one cross—believed to represent the four directions—encircled by a border of incised circles representing the center. Another interpretation, based on ethnographic data from the Natchez, Caddo, Creek, and Yuchi, views this theme as a symbol of a sacred fire ceremony in which the cross is a representation of the position of four logs as they are moved toward the center of a fire. A symbol of the elite, the circle and cross theme is a widespread "this world" theme.

Two Views of the Sierra Nevadas

ANNE MORAND

IN MID NINETEENTH-CENTURY AMERICA, interest in commerce and settlement in the western regions of the country was frequently encouraged by paintings of the beautiful and little known scenery of the Rocky Mountains, particularly the Sierra Nevada range. Beginning in the 1860s and 1870s, various painters chose the western landscape as subject matter, especially Albert Bierstadt, Thomas Moran, Thomas Hill, Worthington Whittredge, and William Keith. The so-called “discovery” of the West that was well known by native peoples, began in earnest by Euro-Americans in the nineteenth century with the Lewis and Clark Expedition. Some of the later expeditions were fortunate enough to include artists and photographers whose work influenced the way eastern audiences perceived the West. Their work also encouraged other

artists to undertake arduous travel in order to capitalize on the popularity of western landscape painting.

Albert Bierstadt (1830-1902) and William Keith (1839-1911) were just two of the artists who established successful careers based on their experience in the West. Art historians and critics tend to idealize the artists about whom they are writing, each becoming the most successful, most renowned, most critically acclaimed. In truth, many artists, sometimes simultaneously or at least in the same period, enjoyed success and accolades from the critics and the public. For example, Bierstadt and Keith were both at times referred to as the best painter of California. It may be instructive, then, to undertake an in-depth examination—what art historians call a stylistic analysis—of two paintings of the Sierra Nevada region, one by Bierstadt and the other by Keith.



ALBERT BIERSTADT'S *SIERRA NEVADA MORNING* AND



WILLIAM KEITH'S *SIERRA NEVADA MOUNTAINS*

Traditionally, stylistic analysis, also called "compare and contrast," is an exercise used to learn to really look at paintings, to break them down into their constituent parts, and to make judgments or assumptions about them. Mostly based on information about the artists' backgrounds, training, and influences, the exercise also includes the analyst's reaction to the works themselves. The exercise can be an opportunity for the observer to distinguish differences and similarities between paintings beyond basic reflections such as "look at how this painter made his trees" or "I wonder how that painter made the water look so real?"

To be of benefit, the exercise involves some precision in expressing impressions and ideas about a work of art, and the analyst should be able to support opinions with objective observations that can be checked by others. It is also critical to be able to tell the difference between actual observation and personal reactions and associations. (For example, if a dog bit you when you were young, you may never be able to look at a painting of a dog and appreciate it on a personal level. However, you might steel yourself to look beyond an initial distaste and consider other aspects.) So let's begin by considering the similarities and differences in the two artists' backgrounds and training.

BACKGROUND, TRAINING, AND CAREER

Albert Bierstadt and William Keith, both immigrants to the United States, shared other similarities in their lives and careers. Each artist studied in Germany before returning to travel in California, where the mountain scenery influenced their choice of artistic subject matter. Bierstadt and Keith attained critical and popular acceptance of their western paintings, and, strangely, each experienced a devastating accidental loss of their work. Bierstadt's in 1882 when his Hudson River home burned, destroying many of his paintings, and Keith's in 1906 as a result of the San Francisco earthquake.

Bierstadt, born in Germany in 1830, was brought to New Bedford, Massachusetts, at the age of two. Details are sketchy about his earliest art training, but by the 1850s he was beginning to support himself by painting. Encouraged by sales and positive response to early, untutored attempts at painting, Bierstadt went to Dusseldorf in 1853, at the age of twenty-two. He

studied informally the work of Carl Friedrich Lessing and Andreas Achenbach, whose paintings were typical of the heroic German style with elaborate compositions, detailed, and highly finished surfaces. Important for his future work, Bierstadt learned through them the techniques, effects, and stylistic conventions of the Dusseldorf style.

Additionally, Bierstadt spent time with American artists Worthington Whittredge and Emanuel Leutze, who were in Dusseldorf when he arrived. He traveled through regions of Germany, Switzerland, and northern Italy with Whittredge and also with artist-friends Sanford Robinson Gifford and William Stanley Haseltine, who would all establish successful careers in America. Bierstadt's great fondness for mountain scenery prompted him to paint in the White Mountains of New Hampshire for several summers after his return to New Bedford in 1857. The next year he began exhibiting work painted in Europe and America at the National Academy of Design.

William Keith, born in Scotland in 1838, arrived in New York with his family in 1851. Apprenticed to a wood engraver for his earliest art instruction, Keith was already a professional and successful artist when he traveled to Dusseldorf in 1868. After moving to San Francisco in 1858, he worked as an engraver and illustrator before abandoning commercial work to paint full time. He sold watercolors in 1866, moving to oils by 1868 to complete a commission for scenes along the Columbia River for the Oregon Navigation & Railroad Company. With money from the commission, Keith traveled to Germany and France, after a brief visit back East. At the age of thirty, he was interested less in formal study than in looking at the art available to him in museums and galleries, in talking to artists, and in private study, which he pursued with academic painter Albert Flamm. After his brief stay in Dusseldorf, Keith went to Paris, where he was impressed with what was then the most modern French painting, the Barbizon school. Where the German tradition emphasized complex and elaborately developed studio compositions, the Barbizon painters advocated painting out-of-doors, directly from nature.

Before returning to San Francisco, Keith spent the winter of 1871-72 in Boston. This reinforced his interest in the Barbizon, which was very popular in the city at that time. Sharing a studio in Boston with

painter William Hahn, Keith exhibited, in Boston and New York, some of the paintings completed after his return from Europe. Critical response was positive, especially at the National Academy of Design.

Bierstadt and Keith experienced epiphanies that directed the courses of their careers. Bierstadt accompanied the 1859 expedition to the Rocky Mountains led by Colonel Frederick W. Lander. Upon his return with sketches of the incredible scenery he had encountered, Bierstadt moved to New York and set up his studio on Tenth Street to paint large, romantic interpretations of the western landscape.

Bierstadt exhibited his western paintings for the first time in 1860 to stunned audiences, who, with the critics, compared the experience of viewing his grand panoramas to a religious one. More beautiful than accurate, the scenes were nonetheless spectacularly popular with an eastern audience that had never beheld the West. On the power of these first pictures, Bierstadt was elected to full membership in the National Academy of Design that year. A second trip to California in 1863 resulted in the first known painting of Yosemite, which he created while living in San Francisco.

Although not as taxing as Bierstadt's and occurring more than ten years later, Keith's epiphany was as important. On his return to San Francisco from Boston in 1872, Keith met fellow Scot and contemporary John Muir, with whom he developed a close, forty-year friendship. Muir, one of America's most influential naturalists and conservationists and founder of the Sierra Club, took Keith camping, introducing him to the splendors of the Sierra Nevada Mountains and other regions of the Pacific Northwest.

Keith's paintings changed from detailed, precise, even fussy work that was a legacy of wood engraving and illustration, to a looser, sketchier style born of exposure to the Barbizons and his time with Muir in the landscape. Muir's interest in topography influenced the way Keith looked at nature, and his own statement that he preferred to "study altogether by Nature" is reflected in his accuracy in this area. These new paintings, some of which were as large as six by ten feet, also reveal that he was aware of the popularity of the large-scale work of Bierstadt, Thomas Hill, Thomas Moran, and Frederic Church. From his first exhibition of paintings of the western panorama, Keith received consistent praise from

critics. They admired his compositions and the spatial relationships he portrayed so effectively through color and brushwork.

Bierstadt's work remained true to the Germanic tradition, tempered by the Hudson River School's advocacy of native subject matter and devotion to the sublime. Keith's work was a successful mélange that also acknowledged Hudson River influences moderated by the intimacy of the Barbizon style, which was more immediate and extemporary than the more academic approach.

Bierstadt's early success guaranteed financial stability, and he returned to New York in 1863. Two years later he built an enormous home and studio overlooking the Hudson River, although he continued to do most of his work in the Tenth Street studio. As many with wealth did, he made the Great Tour of Europe in 1867, also exhibiting his work at the Royal Academy in London. After spending a two-year period in California, where he spent time exploring the Rocky Mountain scenery, Bierstadt returned to New York in 1873. Keith, by contrast, made his home in San Francisco, with only brief periods of travel.

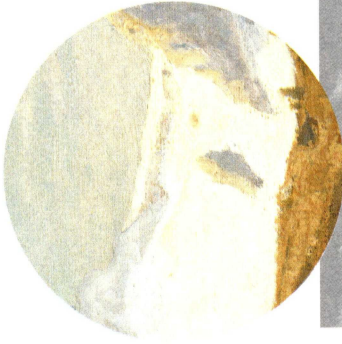
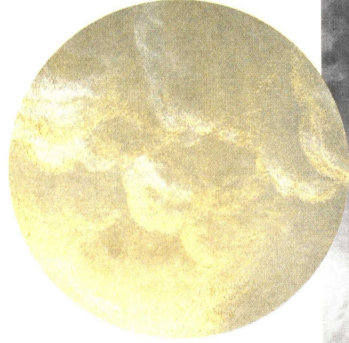
By the 1870s both artists were well established. While Bierstadt's career definitely was at its highest point prior to 1870, he continued a comfortable career until his death in 1902. More evenly successful throughout his career, Keith responded to market changes, which reflected the shifting interests of patrons and collectors.

EXAMINATION OF PAINTINGS

Bierstadt's *Sierra Nevada Morning* was painted about 1870 and Keith's *Sierra Nevada Mountains* six years later. Both are large, panoramic, horizontal oils on canvas. Bierstadt's is larger at fifty-six by eighty-four inches; Keith's is forty-one by seventy-three inches. From the titles we can see that both paintings are landscapes of the same general area, and from observation we see that though they are very different stylistically, they contain the same major elements: mountains, water, trees, clouds. We see the traditional three landscape spaces: foreground, middle ground, and background (even a fourth space, if you count the sky) that are observed in nature. The foregrounds contain deadfall, brush, and rocks in greater number in the

work by Keith, who understandably did not feel the need to “clean up” his setting as much as Bierstadt did. Water and trees populate the middle grounds, although Bierstadt has included animals at the water’s edge. The

backgrounds reveal overlapping rocky mountainsides, Keith’s with snow in the higher elevation, and Bierstadt’s mostly obscured by clouds. Clouds in Keith’s painting are high and allow a view of the blue sky.

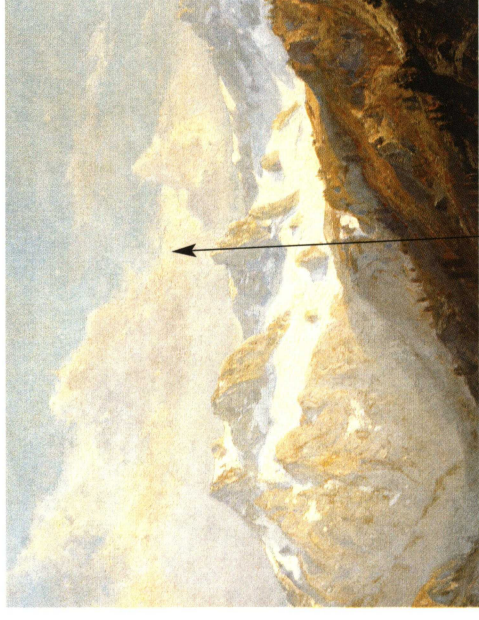
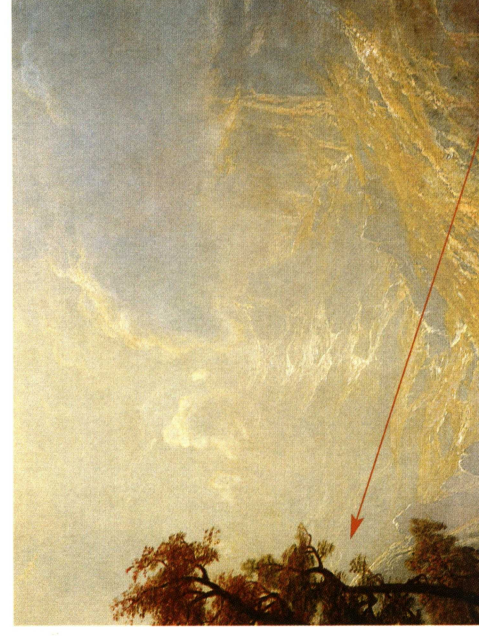
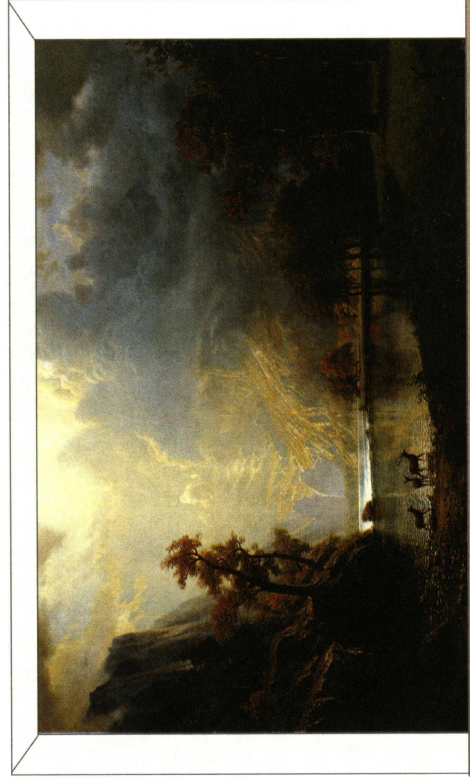


THE BACKGROUNDS REVEAL OVERLAPPING ROCKY MOUNTAINSIDES, KEITH’S WITH SNOW IN THE HIGHER ELEVATION, AND BIERSTADT’S MOSTLY OBSCURED BY CLOUDS. CLOUDS IN KEITH’S PAINTING ARE HIGH AND ALLOW A VIEW OF THE BLUE SKY.



In compositions that are relatively similar, diagonal lines lead the eye from the sides to a point left of center, to a bright spot of water in Bierstadt’s painting. But the eye is led to nothing specific in Keith’s, demonstrating the different approach he took, one that relied less on constructing an imaginary landscape out of real components and more on close observation and depiction of an actual scene. This is further confirmed by the contrast between Bierstadt’s very precise placement and tight arrangement of the elements with Keith’s more loosely, seemingly random layout. Another aspect that furthers the feeling of a real space in Keith’s composition is a sense of what lies beyond the picture plane, the implication of a larger space beyond. Bierstadt’s composition, which has been compared to a stage setting, is enclosed and contained, on the sides, as well as at the top, with the veil of clouds.

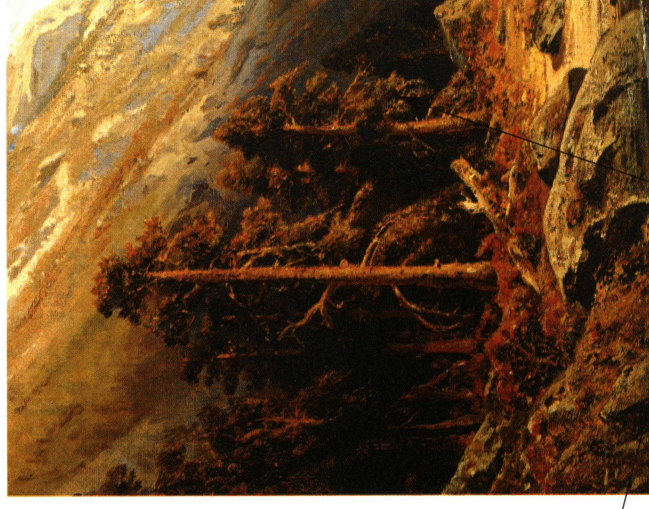
A PROSCENIUM STAGE IS ONE THAT IS ENCLOSED BY A PICTURE FRAME OPENING THROUGH WHICH THE SCENERY AND ACTION ARE VIEWED



The artists exploited the concept of aerial perspective to impose the perception of recession into deep space on the flat surface of the canvas. Aerial perspective relies on color to make elements of the landscape appear close or far, mimicking human vision which sees nearer objects in focus and in warmer, more distinct color. As objects are farther away from the eye, they appear cooler in color, less precise in line and detail. Color is an important aspect of American landscape painting in the later nineteenth century, and Bierstadt and Keith understood that it unifies parts of

AERIAL PERSPECTIVE RELIES ON COLOR TO MAKE ELEMENTS OF THE LANDSCAPE APPEAR CLOSE OR FAR.

the composition and can be used to evoke a response. While both artists employed rich, naturalistic color, Bierstadt’s harmonious tones are welcoming, almost sweet. Keith, on the other hand, creates an austere, inhospitable world with harsher hues. We might want to live in Bierstadt’s world, but we might not even want to visit Keith’s.



BIERSTADT’S HARMONIOUS TONES ARE WELCOMING, ALMOST SWEET. KEITH, ON THE OTHER HAND, CREATES AN AUSTERE, INHOSPITABLE WORLD WITH HARSHER HUES.

Suggestion of light and shadow in paintings can define and give dimension to forms, and, especially in the case of Bierstadt's work, heighten the expressive effect. It is in the area of technique that Bierstadt and Keith diverge most dramatically. Bierstadt's ambitious panorama with its sublime light is meticulously painted, with countless details, on a flawless, glassy surface. Even magnification reveals only a suggestion of brushwork in the leaves of the trees and the mossy rocks. The water,

its surface placid and mirror-like on the right, appears ruffled by a light breeze and sparkles with sunlight in the center area. Farther away, the water becomes a sheet of silver, parts of which are polished and reflect the trees on the far shore.

By the time *Sierra Nevada Mountains* was painted, Keith had rejected for the most part the slick, precise brushwork that characterized Bierstadt's paintings. Keith builds his painting, contrasting substantial, robust

BIERSTADT'S PANORAMA ... IS METICULOUSLY
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A SUGGESTION OF BRUSHWORK IN THE LEAVES
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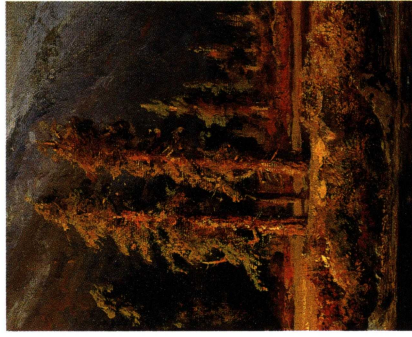
KEITH BUILDS HIS PAINTING, CONTRASTING
SUBSTANTIAL, ROBUST STROKES THAT
CONTAIN MUCH AND VARIED PIGMENT IN THE
NEARER VIEW,



strokes that contain much and varied pigment in the nearer view, with more sheer, blended paint that defines the distant peaks, clouds, and sky. His water, a serene mountain stream, is one of the few passages that retains polished brushwork and slick paint application, which is appropriate to its true nature.

Rocks and trees are rendered in the coarser

brushwork that again is consistent to their character. However, there are beautiful textural differences in Keith's brushwork between trees and rocks: rough, peeling bark on live trees as well as deadfall and bristly foliage contrast with the hard edged and hard surfaced rocks and boulders. Lichens soften some of the surface of the boulder on the far right.



ROCKS AND TREES ARE RENDERED IN THE COARSER
BRUSHWORK THAT AGAIN IS CONSISTENT TO THEIR
CHARACTER. HOWEVER, THERE ARE BEAUTIFUL
TEXTURAL DIFFERENCES IN KEITH'S BRUSHWORK
BETWEEN TREES AND ROCKS

Iconography—the intended meaning of a subject—can be present even in the most naturalistic paintings. If we consider iconography also as an artist's interpretation of the subject, it can be instructive to ask why the artist chose the subject in the first place, what aspects of the subject are emphasized, and what emotional response is elicited. Both Bierstadt and Keith, as did many, saw in the West the concept of a new Eden, pristine, untouched, unsullied by the hand of man. Differences in how each chose to reveal this comes from the disparities in their backgrounds and training. Bierstadt, in the nineteenth-century romantic convention, sought to improve upon nature, combining existing elements—such as the peak of El Capitan in Yosemite on the left of the composition—from different sites into a nonexistent but spectacularly beautiful place.

In fairness to Bierstadt, he was not trying to deceive but to distill the entire experience of the Sierra Nevada range into one, perfect vista, which was appreciated by his eastern audience that was unlikely to ever visit the West.

Turning away from the idealized nature, Keith, influenced by Muir's teachings that nature is perfect as it is, probably painted a real place with all its flaws and beauty intact. Not to say that Keith did not modify nature for the sake of composition, but he did so in a much more subtle fashion. Another aspect of Keith's concept of the western wilderness was its inaccessibility to the masses and the need to keep it that way, again determined by Muir's philosophy. Iconographically, Keith placed a barrier of deadfall and rock that barricades the way into the scene.

KEITH, INFLUENCED BY MUIR'S
TEACHINGS THAT NATURE IS
PERFECT AS IT IS, PROBABLY
PAINTED A REAL PLACE WITH
ALL ITS FLAWS AND BEAUTY
INTACT



Bierstadt, by contrast, painted a grassy copse, smooth, inviting, and dotted with little wildflowers—a perfect picnic ground!

His deadfall, a lone tree trunk, would deter none but the most timid.

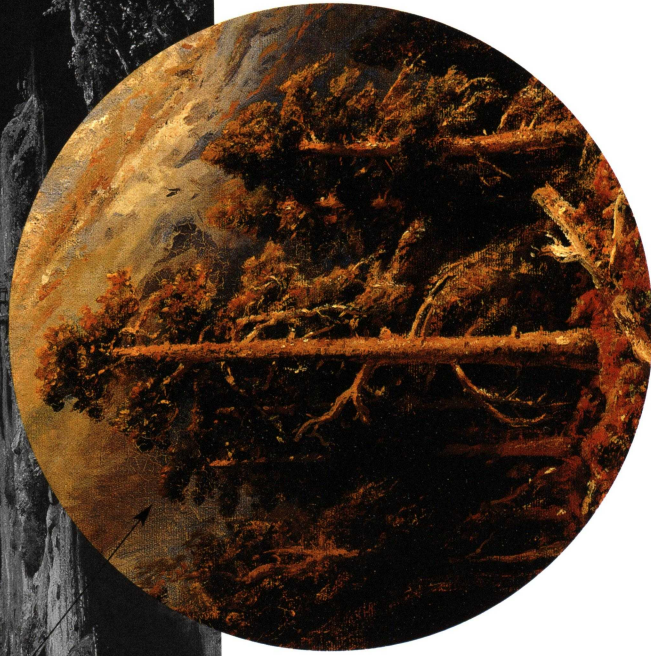
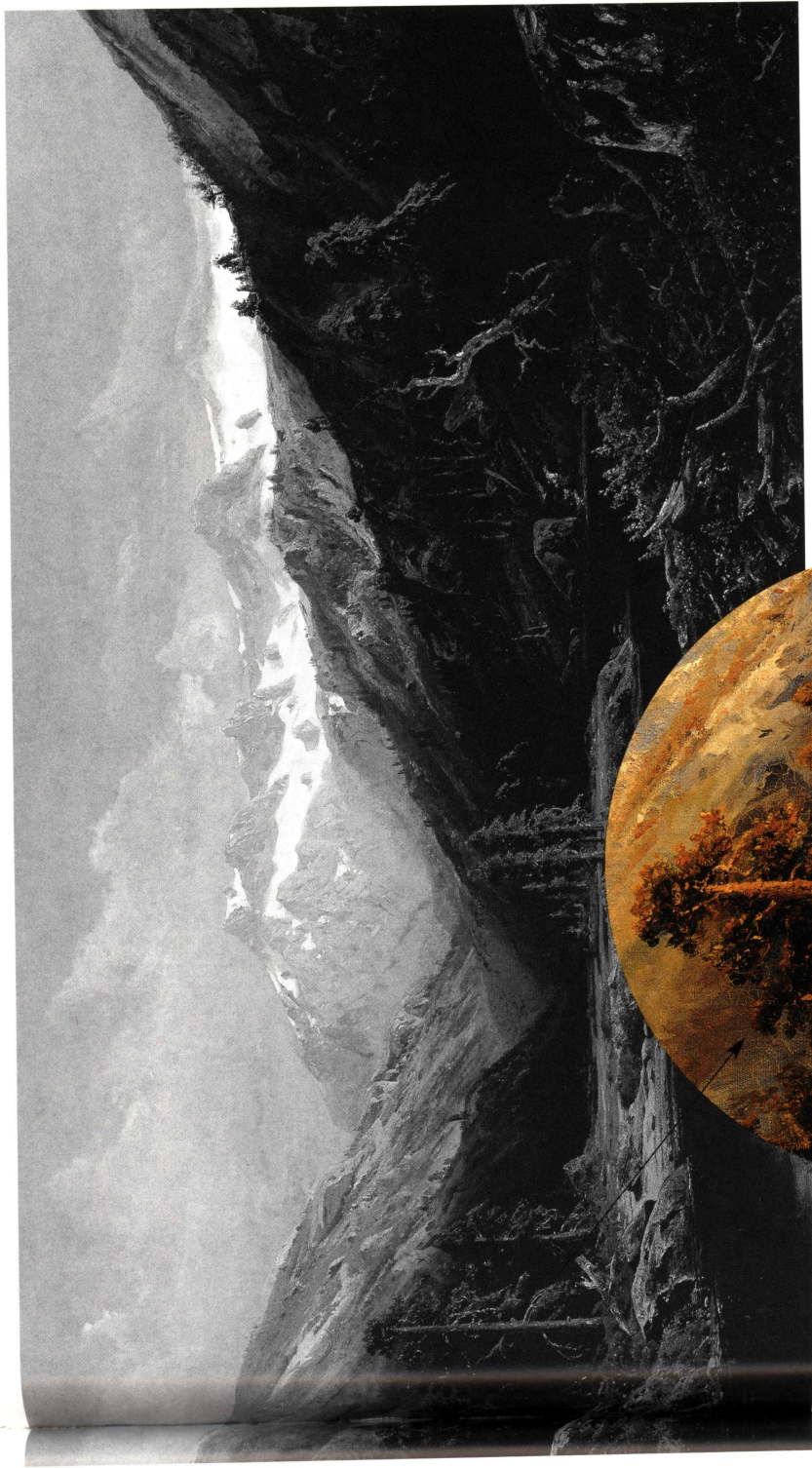
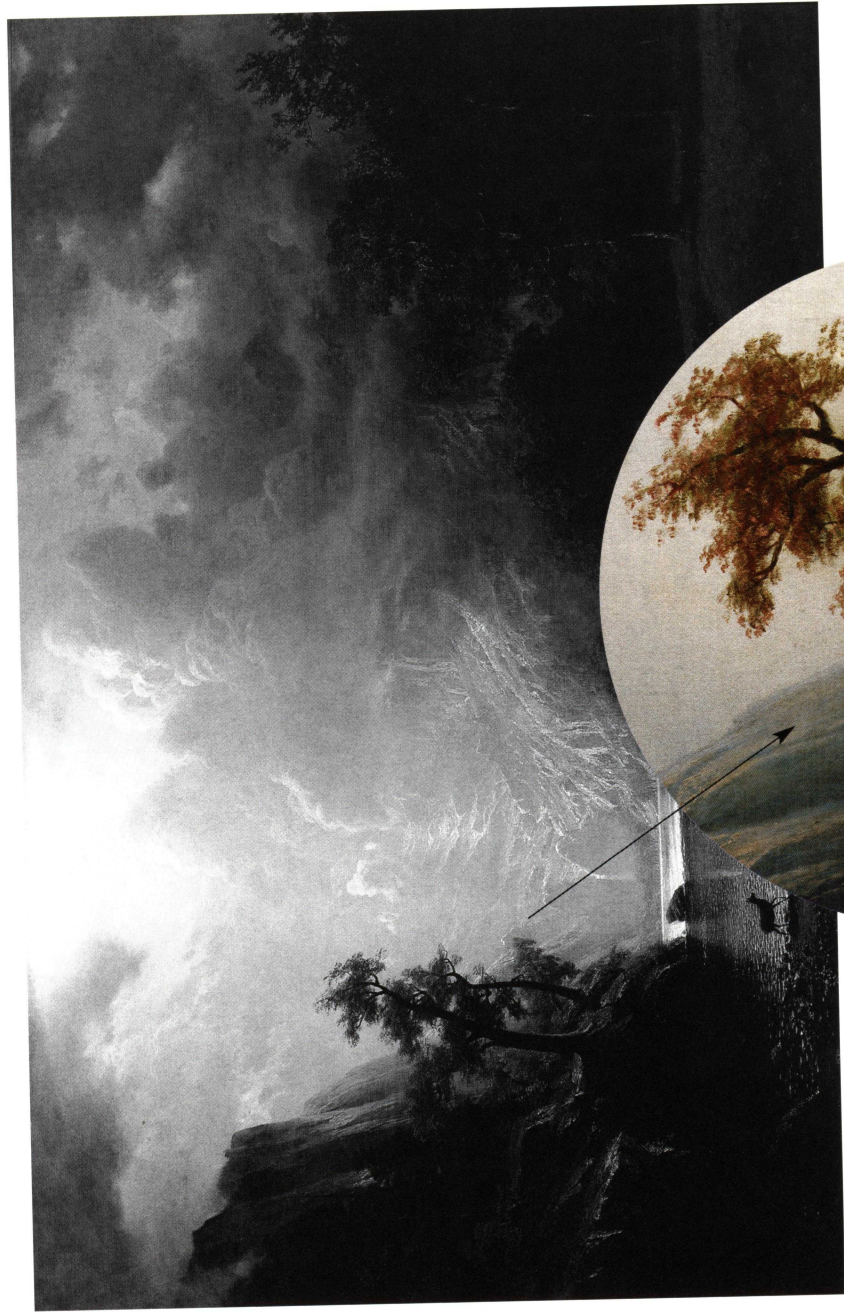


BIERSTADT ... SOUGHT TO
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PLACE.

gallery visitor. It was not uncommon for viewers of large, panoramic paintings to use hollow tubes to experience various portions of a canvas, almost as if using a spyglass out in nature.

Examination and analysis of the two paintings by Bierstadt and Keith have revealed not only the similarities and differences, but also the abilities of these consummate nineteenth-century American artists. In their very different approaches to painting the same region—Bierstadt's more formal and ordered, and Keith's structured, but more immediate—the artists treated their work with such attention to the parts as well as the whole that all the separate passages become compositions in their own right. What has been done here in print and illustration emulates what might have been the visual experience of the nineteenth-century

IT WAS NOT UNCOMMON FOR VIEWERS OF LARGE, PANORAMIC PAINTINGS TO USE HOLLOW TUBES TO EXPERIENCE VARIOUS PORTIONS OF A CANVAS, ALMOST AS IF USING A SPYGLASS OUT IN NATURE.



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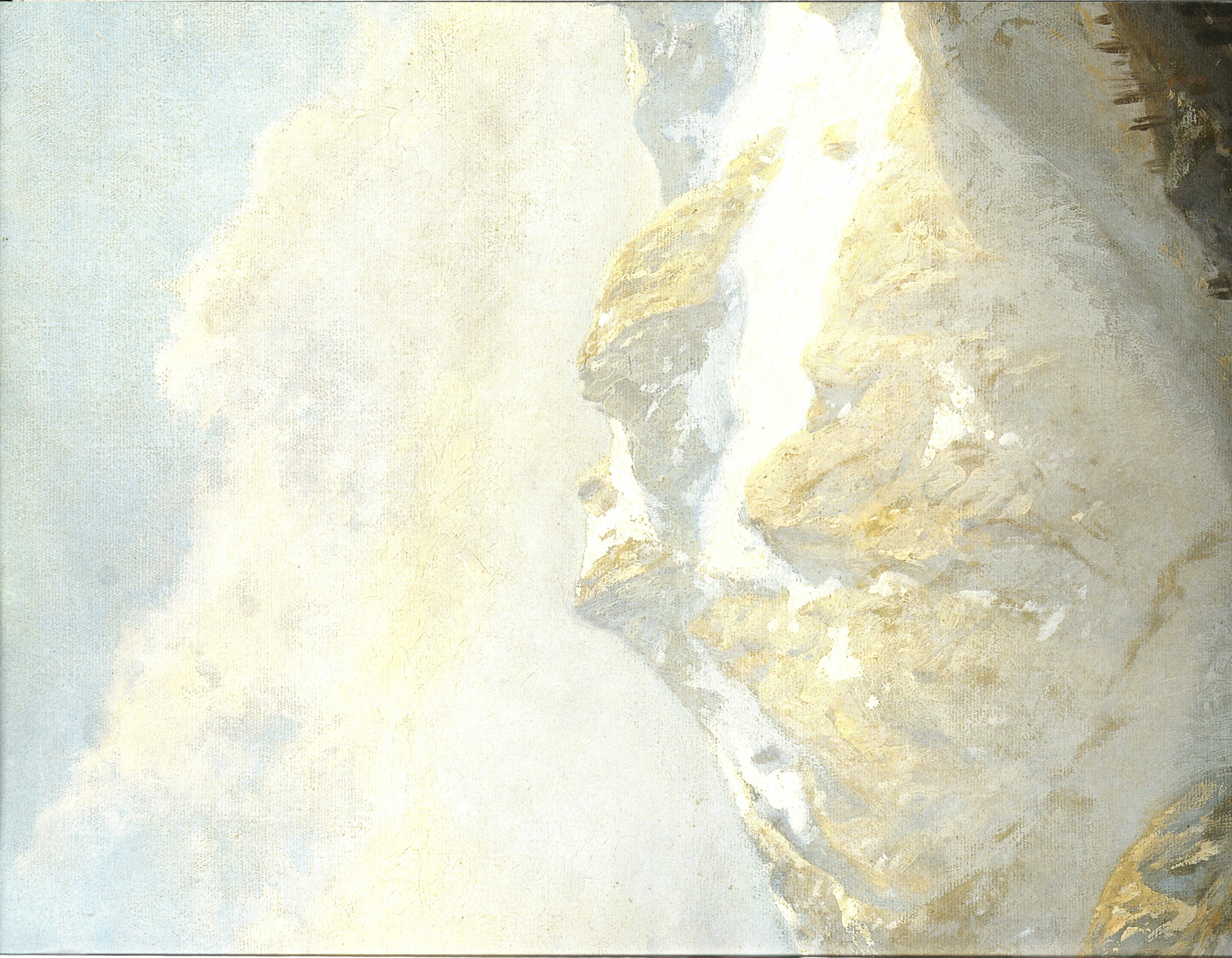
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