



THE NATIVE AMERICAN EXPERIENCE





FOUR ARTISTS INTERPRET THE NATIVE AMERICAN EXPERIENCE

IVI EDGAR HEAP OF BI

RICHARD RAY (WHITMAN)

BRUCE GALLERY EDINBORO UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA DECEMBER 8 THROUGH | ANUARY 29, 1994

ERIE ART MUSEUM DECEMBER II THROUGH | ANUARY 30, 1994

CURATOR: KATHE KOWALSKI

CURATOR'S

STATEMENT

This opportunity to view Native art will be different than any you've experienced. This is not art for tourist consumption. This is not art romanticizing the past before the Native Holocaust. This is art by contemporary Native artists about their life experiences, their people's experiences, and their views of their own history. It has not been altered to satisfy anyone's pre-conceived ideas. It may seem harsh and painful. It will always reflect reality.

In this exhibition you will see balance—two male and two female artists. From a Native perspective a balance of male and female, and the number four, are deeply meaningful. Every aspect of the show has had this same careful thought process supporting it.

I wish to thank Hachivi Edgar Heap of Birds for his support and help throughout the planning stages. I also wish to thank Rebecca Belmore, Hulleah Tsinhnahjinnie and Richard Ray (Whitman) for joining us in this exhibition and for cooperatively tolerating the many changes it has undergone. Thanks to John Vanco and Bill Cox for lending their museum's and gallery's resources. Thank you John for challenging me to begin this project three years ago. Thanks to Shelle Lichtenwalter Barron for the poster and catalog design, Emily Green for the video expertise, and John Snow for his help with the educational component of the show. And thanks to the Student Government Association, the Pennsylvania Council on the Arts, Project Enhance, Bruce Gallery of Edinboro University and the Erie Art Museum for making this project financially feasible.

Kathe Kowalski

Edinboro University

DIRECTOR'S
STATEMENT

This is the second time that the Bruce Gallery of Edinboro University and the Erie Art Museum have worked together to present an unusually important art exhibition. The first instance of collaboration was the *Chicago Works: Art From the Windy City* show in the Spring of 1989, curated by Joyce Fernandes, the Director of Exhibitions and Events at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. Like that exhibition, *STAND!* has been partly funded by the Pennsylvania Council on the Arts.

STAND! showcases the art of four prominent Native American artists. Rebecca Belmore is a performance and installation artist from the Thunder Bay area of northern Ontario. Her art is created out of her sense of heritage and history. Dreams, stories, symbols and memories combine to provide a complex, moving experience for viewers of her performances and installations.

Hachivi Edgar Heap of Birds lives in Oklahoma in the Cheyenne and Arapaho nations. In his public work he concerns himself with politics and history. His typeset messages written for publication deal with global issues. A third level of expression are his *Wall Lyrics*—pastel drawings with words which operate in a more personal and poetic way. In his abstract paintings the content is even more directly personal with meanings related, as he states, to the land—to the place where he lives.

Hulleah Tsinhnahjinnie is a curator and creator of contemporary Native American art and runs a Native American studio at the California College of Arts and Crafts in Oakland, California. From that institution she holds a BFA in painting with a minor in photography. Today she is particularly well-known for her photocollages. A major focal point in her work is that of identity. She is especially concerned with the imposition of an identity classification by federal law on Native Americans—"The Indian Arts and Crafts Act of 1990." Such a law she presents as evidence of continuing political violence against Native Americans and Native American sovereignty. Her work stands in opposition to a paternalistic posture toward Native Americans.

Identity is also of major importance to Oklahoma artist Richard Ray (Whitman). Rejecting outsider views, he seeks to illuminate the often harsh realities of contemporary Native American life. What is presented is in opposition to the distorted imagery of the Hollywood movie and the mass media. (Whitman)'s art is used to "begin to reclaim our image, participate in creating our own image again."

These then are the artists involved with contemporary cultural questions and tensions. This is not "art for art's sake." The importance of this exhibition goes beyond the isolated art object itself.

Dr. William Cox

Director, Bruce Gallery, Edinboro University

DIRECTOR'S

STATEMENT

"Monkey Business", a wacky comedy starring Cary Grant and Marilyn Monroe, ran the other night on local public television. As a longtime Cary Grant fan, (even prior to the revelations attendant to his divorce from Dyan Cannon), I'd naturally seen the film years ago, but this time I brought to it a different level of consciousness. Grant, as a bumbling, likeable scientist under the influence of an experimental concoction, joins forces with a mob of neighborhood children dressed as "wild Indians". Together they capture an attorney, "scalp" him (he ends up with a Mohawk haircut), tie him up and pretend to burn him at the stake. Pretty funny stuff.

A lot has been written about the basic inaccuracies of these common stereotypes of Native Americans, but they remain pervasive in our popular culture. Even if we were able to throw away all the Cary Grant movies and all the cowboy & Indian films, television programs and pulp novels, the myths would not disappear. For most Americans, "Indians" are a part of the larger fiction of the Wild West, a fiction which has been a part of our culture since at least the early 19th century. During the period following the Civil War, when the newsmagazines were filled with reports of the "Indian Wars" and promises of rich farmland and mineral wealth in the western territories, the earlier stereotype of the Native American as a noble savage gave way to that of the Comanche, an immoral thief and brutal killer. Land speculators, transportation companies, mining interests, and other economic powers joined together to identify the Native as the enemy of civilization and civilized people.

By the early years of this century, the native peoples had been so completely brutalized by government and society that photographer/anthropologist Edward S. Curtis was able to identify them as "vanishing Americans". The popular conception of bloodthirsty savages gave way to a more romantic conception. "The End of the Trail", a popular print of the period depicting a lone warrior on his horse, hung in thousands of parlors all over the country. Indians were something from the historical past, living on only in place names and popular culture.

In reality, of course, the people did not vanish, even though they became invisible to much of society. They lived on in out-of-the-way places, both geographically and economically, victims of a paradox of cliches: "Out of

sight, out of mind;" and "Absence makes the heart grow fonder." Despite the gritty reality of their poverty, Native Americans could not command attention as living beings, becoming instead symbols of something they never were.

The American Indian Movement and the flurry of activism and repression which characterized the 1960s and 70s have inspired a generation of Native American artists whose works speak to the realities of life as a Native today. We are proud to be able to present the work of four of the best of those artists. The works of Rebecca Belmore, Hachivi Edgar Heap of Birds, Richard Ray (Whitman) and Hulleah Tsinhnahjinnie, while firmly grounded in the forms and techniques of late 20th century art, address issues and utilize symbols peculiar to the Native American experience. It is strong art which speaks to the rest of us in a familiar language, and even when the particulars are not a part of our experience, their message is universally relevant. I am grateful to them for sharing their work with this community.

I am also grateful to my colleagues, Kathe Kowalski and Bill Cox, for their enthusiam and commitment in seeing this project through, and to Emily Green, John Snow, Shelle Barron and Kim Krynock for their invaluable contributions of professional talents, time and hard work — they made it happen.

John Vanco

Director, Erie Art Museum

I have with me the influence of my Cocum (grandmother) and my mother.

REBECCA

BELMORE

I can see their hands at work. Hands swimming through water, moving earth and feeling sky: warm hands.

I can see their hands touching hide, cloth and bead, creating colour beauty: work hands.

I look at my hands and I am aware of their hands. That is how I wish to work.

May '89

When I began, it was the hands then words.

My words questioned the lack of words.

The words

began to question the hands.

The hands silenced the words.

The making with my hands

is

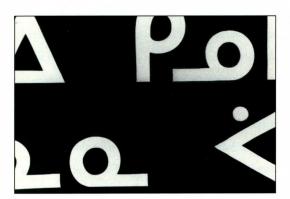
my language.

October '93

Rebecca Belmore
Shifting the North Line, 1993
Mixed media installation performance









Shifting the North Line: 16 Pictures

A series of tightly-performed images blurred together to explore the experience of living as a real and imaginary Indian woman.

I will bring with me 16 photographs. They were taken in Sioux Lookout, Ontario. These images will map a performance in Erie, Pennsylvania and will be installed as a documentation of my visit.

I have recently moved to Sioux Lookout, which is within the territory of the Anishinabe. I am a non-speaker of our language. Having moved to this area where the language is strong, I am increasing the clarity of my own voice. This new work speaks from this place.

Belmore is a multi-media artist whose main focus is installation and performance art. Belmore is Anishinabe and currently resides in Sioux Lookout, Ontario.

Photographs: Michael Beynon

HACHIVI
EDGAR
HEAP

BIRDS

My art has four levels. The first, which more people know, is the public one. These works deal with politics and history, and arise from my understanding history. But they're also about how very few people want to deal with the subject of a Native historical reality. These issues are ignored. I'm doing a public piece relating to the First Nation tribes in British Columbia, and I won't do Cheyenne art up there, because that wouldn't be right. You should let them talk, or you should talk, and have them help you talk, about what they have there. So that's the first level: to respond to what's around you, where you go. Although I don't like to speak for another tribe, or handle their issues, often no one asks them to talk. The art world looks for the prominent artist, so I end up doing the work because that door needs to be opened.

And then there's a second level, a whole other series of typeset messages, things I write for publication, statements, etc., some of which deal with global issues that strike me, like the rain forest and its link to the Third World debt via Wall Street.

The third level is the drawings with the words on them—pastels called Wall Lyrics. (Different from the typeset pieces, because the typeset things are almost like public pieces, since the type font is very, very neutral. My hand isn't in these letters at all, which creates a more matter-of-fact message.) In these drawings, made with music playing while I make them, I put gesture in and all this color. The drawings vary from being personal to being about my own tribe to being about my family. They reveal something about myself, my values and my sexuality, although this is somewhat camouflaged between all the poetry. I'm always looking to understand something in myself.

The final step, maybe the most important one, is the paintings. They're the most direct and personal. They're not interpretive; they just happen on the canvas. On another level, they deal more with this place where I live, this land, even without the people. Just the land. They are so personal that they almost go back to the ceremonial. The image I'm making is like what I've learned in other parts of life: important things are actually like symbols; they can be all-encompassing, like fire, or smoke, or water. Yet they are a reality you can see before you on the ground in the tipi. I feel my paintings are more like that. I can call them abstract, but an old lady who came here once called them spirits, when she saw them.

Describing my work in four different ways makes it an elusive target. Often it's hard for critics to understand how my descriptions fit into Native American art or mainstream American art. My work tends to make you ask questions: what is this? what are we doing? what is history? what is my perception of a Native American person? what's America?

I feel marginalized in modern art. I don't feel marginalized among the ceremonial chiefs. I think a lot of modern installation art shows the audience

how you make a model for the world, how you cope. I've always thought, in the traditional sense, that's the province for renewal ceremonies; that's not what you bring to the gallery. But I think about: how would you actually conjure up your own definition, your own contribution to that?

My leverage is having my tradition-tribe basis to believe, having that place to go to, and then being able to spin off. A person in California thought it was incredible that I was doing all these projects there and that I seemed to be so at home. "You're not in Oklahoma! You're in the Bay area!" Consider all that's behind me: I'm not by myself when I'm away... although I feel lonely. No matter who you are, know where you come from; embrace the history in some way. It will back you, give you somewhere to speak from, and if you're an artist, it can keep your work from being just a lot of show. Many museums will let that pass. They want the product; they're not that concerned about how authentic your inspiration is.

To me, the really crucial issue now—for people of color particularly—is not to trade off our tribal or earth-bound values that white people can profit by, or that are needed for something society's lost. A lot of our work is getting attention because of those issues. To me, that's just another need of white America. There have always been needs of people in this land... they need the earth, the water, farms, railroads, gold and uranium. It's a kind of robbery. In the Cheyenne traditional sense, you would never come somewhere empty-handed. If you go somewhere, see somebody, ask for something, you always bring tobacco, or bread, or a basket of groceries; it's all an exchange. We could talk about, say, land claims, business rights, welfare systems, hospitals—these kinds of apparatus that tribes would need in exchange for their awareness of the earth, or their moral condition with life. But that kind of exchange doesn't happen.

So I look at the frontier really being about individuals. How can we get to know individuals of color as fully as individuals as we know Robert Rauschenberg or David Salle or Julian Schnabel? Will individuals of color always be seen as a group we need to extract something from?

Excerpted from an edited interview in

Border Issues: Negotiations and Identity, Center for Research in Contemporary Art,

The University of Texas at Arlington, 1991.

STAND

SCY SATD YOU GUTTA BE COMPLETE

THERES IN DEAL

CHANEZ WITH HUNGER FUUGHT

THE HIDDER AGENDA

IT'S WHAT RODNEY KING KEPT

TRY IN TU DO

A WHITE GUY IN MUNTANA

TOUK A LAST ONE

7/18

Above: Stand!

Hachivi Edgar Heap of Birds

Marker on rag paper

Right: Public Enemy Care for Youth

Hachivi Edgar Heap of Birds Screenprint, three sheets

THE BRUTALITY WHICH IS AMERICA

RAISES MAD DOGS ENEMY * HACHIVI EDGAR HEAP OF BIRDS 1989



Hachivi Edgar Heap of Birds

Works in the Exhibition

Who Owns History?, series, 1992 Metal Signs each 18" x 24"

Who Owns History? site photos, 1992 Type C color prints each 16" x 20"

Public Enemy Care for Youth, 1993 Screenprint three sheets, each sheet 36" x 40"

Neuf Series, 1993 Four acrylic on canvas paintings each 56" x 72"

Standing Before You, 1991-92 Installation, fifteen drawings, pastels on rag paper, each drawing 22" x 30", Installation 90" w x 110" h

Pretty in the Face, 1991-92 Installation, fifteen drawings, pastels on rag paper each drawing 22" x 30", Installation 90" w x 110" h

Wall Lyric — Working Drawings, 1992-93 Installation, twenty drawings, marker on rag paper, each drawing 18" x 24", Installation 120" w x 72" h

STAND!, 1993 Word drawing, marker on rag paper 9" x 12" H U L L E A H
T S I N H N A H

As we prepare to enter the year 2000, we carry the dreams of our elders, dreams of a day when historical truth, religious freedom and First Nation sovereignty are honored. Those who have taken on the responsibility to communicate and translate these dreams are the First Nation artists, voices from many of the First Nations of this land called America. Native photographers, painters, sculptors, musicians, writers, video artists, are all message carriers, translators and visionaries of Native thought.

On November 29, 1990, President Bush signed into law P.L. 101-644, "The Indian Arts & Crafts Act of 1990." With his signature Native visionaries were presented with a divide and conquer strategy. P.L. 101-644 requires Native artists to prove their Native heritage. Though the regulations of enforcement have yet to be handed down, the finger pointing of racial purity began.

Upon first hearing about P.L. 101-644, my immediate reaction was suspicion, suspicion of "good intentions," of the government's ability to enforce such a law, of the individuals who claim to know what is "best" for my status as a Native woman artist. In response I began creating 30" x 40" photocollages questioning "good intentions." The photocollages combine graphics, text and census numbers referring to Native history and to my beliefs as an individual.

I find it impossible to accept P.L. 101-644. The complexities of Native identity cannot be simplified. Personal and community histories of survival are far from simple.

I respect Natives who did not accept the Dawes Act of 1887, those who refused enrollment. I recognize the survival tactics of those who became invisible to survive. I have made a decision to remain faithful to those "renegade savages" who hid in the everglades, the desert ravines, the redwood forest. I am aware of tribes declared extinct but who still exist, of closed tribal enrollments, and the complications of adoption. Native history is not simple. As survivors we should not be eager to simplify Native identity. The "good intentions" behind this law fail to recognize the complexities and the frightening implications of standardizing Native identity.

A bit paranoid? Let me confirm your thoughts. I was raised to be suspicious of laws made for Native people, as my parents were raised and the family before them. I am inherently suspicious, especially if there is a blanket law for all Native nations. To me it is a blanket law full of smallpox.

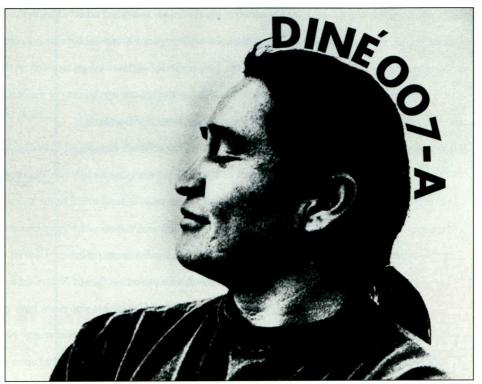
My concerns are that of an individual raised to respect community values, Native philosophy and complex histories. I become concerned when a law regulates identity. I am reminded of the numbers tattooed on the arms of the Jewish people; I am reminded of the vicious witch hunts of the McCarthy period; I am reminded of the ethnic cleansing of Bosnia.

Whose definition of 'Indian' must be satisfied and where will it end?
Will Native women be responsible for bearing racially pure children who are to become artists? Will tribal sperm banks be established in the name of purity?
Will DNA testing be utilized to determine if you are Native enough? Patenting of tribal identity? Family trees in the European tradition? How far will it go?

And for what reason? To provide authentic Native art to the uninformed consumers of Native art? Consumers who never have to educate themselves about the history and cultural content of Native art? Native art then becomes a convenient authentic commodity presented upon a silver platter. It was with myopic vision that P.L. 101-644 came to be, self-anointed cultural gatekeepers compromising for financial gain, an acceptance of colonial values in the name of all Native nations.

Would I Have Been a Member of the Nighthawk, Snake Society or Would I Have Been a Half Breed Leading the Whites to the Full Bloods? This photocollage, from the "Creative Native" series, refers to the Cherokee Nighthawk and Creek Snake Societies whose members resisted the Dawes Commission's allocation of land allotments and census numbers. Eufala Harjo (fullblood Creek and leader of the Four Mothers Society, a collective of Creek, Cherokee, Choctaw and Chickasaw) recounted in 1906; "After our country was divided they would send the half-breeds around, the half-breed Indians would go out and hunt for the names of the full-blood Indians without their consent, and they would take the names down and go present them before the Dawes Commission…"

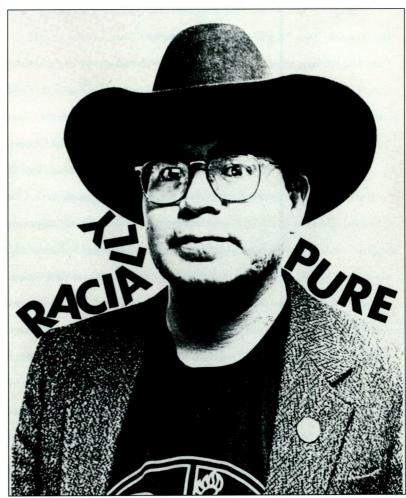
I will continue to question those who have decided what is "best" for me. I will continue my photocollage series, but not because I approve of fabricated Native heritage. My thoughts are that if we want Native sovereignty, we do not ask the oppressor for regulation. As Native people we have a responsibility to protect and carry the dreams of our elders and ancestors: we must protect our artists, our thinkers, our culture.



© HULLEAH J. TSINHNAHJINNIE

Above:
Diné 007-A
(Norman Brown,
videographer)
Photocollage

Right:
<u>Racially Pure</u>
(Ed Singer, painter)
Photocollage



© HULLEAH J. TSINHNAHJINNIE

Hulleah Tsinhnahjinnie

Works in the Exhibition

Canadian Native 354, 1993

Photocollage

40" x 30"

Tuscarora Artist Sez....No!, 1993

Photocollage

40" x 30"

Native Curator #5, 1993

Photocollage

40" x 30"

Diné 007-A, 1993

Photocollage

30" x 40"

Racially Pure, 1993

Photocollage

40" x 30"

Indian Problem, 1993

Photocollage

40" x 30"

Comanche, 1993

Photocollage

40" x 30"

California Native Species, 1993

Photocollage

30" x 40"

Real Live Native Artist, 1993

Photocollage

30" x 40"

Native Painter No. 798003, 1993

Photocollage

30" x 40"

Native Photographer, 1993

Photocollage

40" x 30"

Aleut Asks Why?, 1993

Photocollage

40" x 30"

100% Native, 1993

Photocollage

40" x 30"

California Native, 1993

Photocollage

30" x 40"

Native Print Maker No..., 1993

Photocollage

40" x 30"

Would I Have Been a Member of the Nighthawk,

Snake Society or Would I Have Been a Half Breed

Leading the Whites to the Full Bloods?, 1990

Photocollage triptych

Three photos, each 40" x 30"

430-311-147-037-21-3677, 1993

Photocollage

40" x 30"

RICHARD RAY (WHITMAN) No aspect of the American West has captured the popular imagination more than the Indian with warbonnet astride his painted pony, sweeping across the plains in pursuit of the buffalo, cavalry, adventure. This society continues to foster that romantic image largely in part due to little or no contact with Indians except through television, motion picture, in the Hollywood image, and therefore the stereotypes refuse to die: the noble savage, stoic and mystic, child of nature, in harmony with creation, broken English. Even the encounters of Indians viewed in parades, pow-wows, token political hand-shakes, etc. only to serve to perpetuate the myths, the stereotypes.

Seldom is there a candid, sensitive portrayal of Native life in the contemporary life of urban settings, on reservations or Indian lands as it really exists.

The contemporary Indian in the isolation of city canyons and rural reservations is avoided. The boredom, pain, frustration, poverty of the reality-counter-balance of our lives is harsh, unattractive and unremarkable.

During the time of Edward Curtis, most Americans wanted to believe in the concept of the vanishing First Americans, and in a sense we did vanish. We were displaced onto reservations in Indian Territory. We were out of sight and out of mind until our lands, which were "given" to us because they were perceived by whites as worthless, re-emerged as land with valuable resources of gold, oil, gas, uranium, etc. We were once again in the way of "progress" and displaced again. The United States is built on displacement.

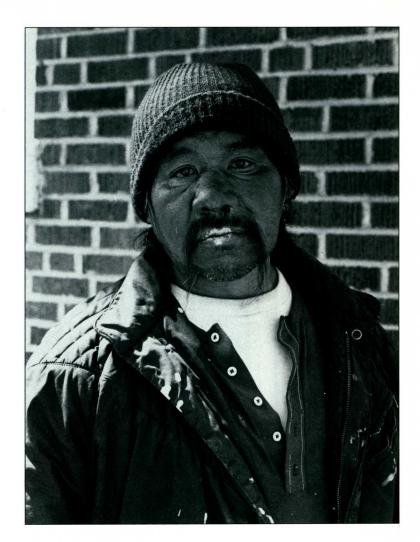
We live in a media-centered society where those who have the influence and power, those who create the images, are white males. We have been externally defined by these white males since we began to share this continent



Aluminum Gleaner
Richard Ray (Whitman)
Gelatin Silver Print

with them. Even the concepts of the words "Indian", "chief", "squaw", were not a part of our language. From the first encounters until today's "Hollywood image" our identity has been stolen and an illusion created.

For the most part images of the Indian available today are still those of the dominant society. We have been approached, defined, interpreted, misinterpreted, mistranslated, visually, literally by missionaries, anthropologists, social scientists, tourists, film-makers, artists, authors, photographers, even friends of the Indians. It is only recently that we Indians have taken the responsibility to push for access to the mass media of film, TV, video, and print. It is a field still very closed to our people. We must begin to reclaim our image, participate in creating our own image again.



Homeland Warrior
Richard Ray (Whitman)
Gelatin Silver Print

Richard Ray (Whitman)

Works in the Exhibition

Culture Guides, 1992 Phototransfer on Rives paper 22" x 30"

Culture Guides (Letter to Self), 1992 Phototransfer on Rives paper 22" x 30"

"Do Indian Artists Go to Santa Fe When they Die?", 1989 Color lithograph on Arches paper 22" x 32" Homage: Sweetgrass, Cedar, Sage, Tobacco, 1987 Mixed media box construction: photographs, text, acrylic 26" x 34"

Relocation-Assimilation, 1987

Mixed media box construction: photographs, text, acrylic

26" x 34"

Man Form Indian Self, 1986 Mixed media box construction: photographs, text, acrylic 26" x 34" Sitting Bull's History Lesson #4, 1985
Mixed media box construction: photographs, text, acrylic
26" x 34"

Alter-Native History, 1992 Computer-generated imagery phototransfer on Rives paper 221/2" x 30"

Wounded Knee — Remembering the Future, 1993 Computer-generated imagery monotone on paper 48" x 36"

The Absence of Our Presence, 1993 Computer-generated imagery monotone on paper 48" x 36"

We Are the Evidence of the Western Hemisphere, 1993 Computer-generated imagery monotone on paper 48" x 36"

Street Chiefs Series, 1973 - 1992

Anthropological Tourism Gelatin silver print 8" x 10"

Homeland Warrior, 1992 Gelatin silver print 8" x 10"

Alley Allies, 1986 Gelatin silver print 8" x 10" Street Chief #1, 1984 Gelatin silver print 8" x 10"

Plasma Warriors, 1984 Gelatin silver print 8" x 10"

Aluminum Gleaner, 1985 Gelatin silver print 8" x 10"

Street Chief #3
Gelatin silver print
8" x 10"

Plasma Warrior Gelatin Silver Print 8" x 10"

Great (Ronald Reagan)
Commodity Give Away
Gelatin Silver Print
8" x 10"

Buy Oklahoma, 1986 Gelatin Silver Print 8" x 10"

A C K N O W L E D G M E N T S

Curator of the Exhibition:

Kathe Kowalski

Director, Bruce Gallery:

Dr. William Cox

Director, Erie Art Museum:

John Vanco

Catalogue Design:

Shelle Lichtenwalter Barron

Educational Video:

Emily Green

Educational Study Guide:

John Snow

Editor and Publicist:

Kim Krynock

Catering of the Opening Reception (Bruce Gallery):

Mrs. Carole A. Werder

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Front Cover: Street Chief #1

Richard Ray (Whitman)

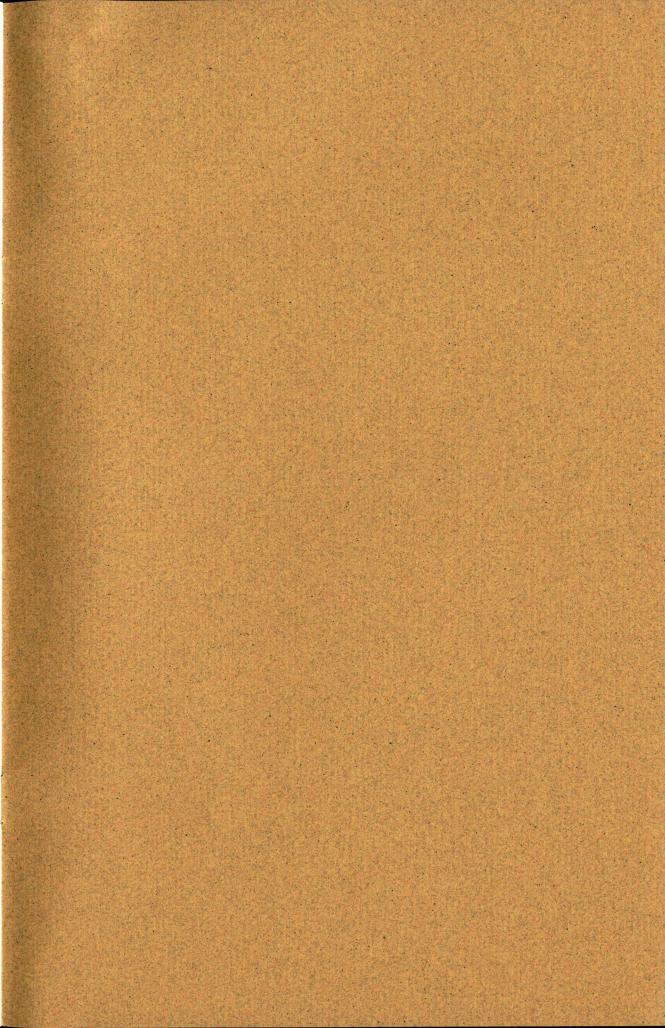
Back Cover: Shifting the North Line

Rebecca Belmore

(Photographs: Michael Beynon)

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BRUCE GALLERY