

Barbara Sandler And Jeff Way Present American Indian Portraits At Zeus-Trabia

BY MIRIAM HERNANDEZ

"**M**aybe I was an Indian in another life."

Had someone made this statement in the halcyon days of long hair, beads, and peace signs, it would probably have been accepted solemnly, or even enthusiastically, as a possibility.

Today it may elicit guffaws, or at best, raised eyebrows. But that statement was made unselfconsciously and with conviction separately by two artists who have never met, one New York born, the other from the Midwest, who work in different styles but share the same subject matter, when they were asked why they paint portraits of Native Americans.

Barbara Sandler and Jeff Way are currently showing their work at Zeus-Trabia Gallery, 437 East 9th St.

The subject has been, for these two artists, an obsession since childhood. And in the '60s and '70s, when it was *de rigueur* to make a trip across America, each artist visited reservations. The attraction has since resurfaced and been probed at various stages in their adult lives as artists.

Like some of us who watched Westerns on television, in the '50s and '60s, they periodically resubmit to their attraction to, and identification with, not the cowboys but the Indians. These two artists remind us that even before we became politicized, our heroes were Pahoo and not Yancy Derringer; Cochise, and even Tonto, not the Lone Ranger. These characters were the ones to whom our eyes riveted when they appeared (and it was never long enough) on the screen. Their clothes were more interesting, their presence more commanding with its cool and control; they were wiser and more courageous than the whites. And we became envious of their knowledge of nature, their ability to imitate animals and to be in touch with the earth.

Both Jeff Way and Barbara Sandler, as children, felt a reverence for Native Americans. As adults they have each pursued that admiration to the point of making hundreds of variations on the subject. The faces, the garb, accoutrements, headdresses, and facial markings enchant them into painting endless representations of people who might be forgotten, whose culture has been attacked, plundered, coerced into assimilation, but whose image and identity remain intact in our memories and fantasies of them.

Barbara Sandler and Jeff Way have used the photographs and paintings by artists of the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries such as Curtis and Catlin. Their work chronicled the history of this country, recorded the lives of the real us, as Sandler likes to point out, of the original people here. The old works preserve their existence before the onslaught of the Twentieth Century and



Jeff Way, "Billyoit," oil on canvas, 54"x40". Courtesy Zeus-Trabia.