

its near success at mowing down the quiet, being-one-with-the-land ways.

It is those works that have most influenced Barbara Sandler and Jeff Way in their attempt to recover the authenticity of tribal Americans. Each artist begins with an existing image and, in the case of Sandler, paints the image larger, in tones and hues that recall aged photographs. Hers are straightforward depictions, employing a very finished style. They are grave portraits, the dignified sitters quite often in profile, or turned away at three-quarter angles.

Even when facing forward, their eyes do not lock the viewers'. There is, as Sandler intends, no confrontation. Instead, we become entangled in their costumes, markings, feathers, hair. These portraits are not to be read as political works, but more as historical renderings of a bygone era. Always, the goal of this artist is to remind us of a specific presence. The respect for the subject is conveyed in the exact, realistic depiction of features. It is when depicting beads, cloth, decorations, that the artist has a looser touch. The brush strokes look faster, less confined; the colors are brighter, as when old photos have been tinted. Body paint becomes strokes of bright, relaxed brushwork decorating the human form. These are larger than life-size oil on paper paintings which have been tacked onto stretched linen, the deckled edges of paper suggestive of tanned hides.

Jeff Way's bright colors force their way into our eyes. His interest, too, is in marking the existence of Native Americans. Way grew up in Ohio, where there were plenty of Indian names in the geography to remind everyone who, indeed, had been their first. And he lived in an area where a child such as himself could hold in his hand, in the form of found arrowheads, the proof.

By combining characteristics, clothing, names, and tribes on an invented portrait, Jeff paints paradigms. The colors and disjointed forms inflict the emotional impact of displacement and dislocation, a reference to what Native Americans have suffered. There is emphasis also on linear patterns which are repeated, exaggerated, and turn into visual symbols. Jeff Way has also done performances crating the personal rituals inspired by Native American cultures. Sometimes he has used research but sometimes, as he admits, he has worked under the influence of the collective unconscious.

Both Way and Sandler believe in the wisdom of the people they present to us. They both feel a kinship with their subject matter which is not only nostalgic, but has spiritual roots as well. And, as artists, as descendants of cultural shamans, they attempt to transform the spiritual into paintings in order to commend to our consciousness those we should not forget.



Jeff Way, "Tribal Head," mixed media on canvas, 16" h x 17" w. Courtesy Zeus-Trabia.



Jeff Way, "Yo-Ho Bowlegs," oil on canvas, 54"x40". Courtesy Zeus-Trabia.

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