

# Loyalties

## Artist brings dual tradition to landscapes in motion

By Ed Montini  
Republic Staff

The monographs were stacked neatly between large sheets of tissue and carried for protection in a portfolio made of two large pieces of cardboard hinged together with surgical tape.

Jaune Quick-to-See Smith set the package on the floor, opened it like a book, and began spreading out the rough-edged rectangles of paper filled with her art.

She squatted down in front of them, looked over their bars of color — mostly pastel, their wide swashes of paint, their lineal, pictographic figures of horses and buffalo and people and tepees.

When she spoke of her art, in a voice whose normal tone is barely above a whisper, she moved her hands over the pictures like someone warming her hands on a fire.

"In the first grade I could draw. That was how I got attention. I remember I did a drawing of children dancing in a circle around Mount Rainier. The figures had that look," she said.

"Actually, they sort of looked like the ones I draw today."

"Anyway, the teacher liked the drawing so much that she told me she was going to hang it in the hallway."

It was near Valentine's Day, and the children in Ms. Smith's first-grade class were cutting out paper hearts. She liked the shape of hearts and the bright red color in them. She liked them so much she took out the drawing of the children dancing in a ring around Mount Rainier and painted a ring of red hearts around the mountain as well.

"The teacher hated it," she said. "She told me I ruined the painting. It was the first piece of abstract art I did, and she embarrassed me in front of the whole class for it."

These days, people are more accepting of her work.

Last year, Ms. Smith had a two-month show at the Heard Museum, and this month the Albuquerque, N.M.-based artist has an exhibit at the Marilyn Butler Fine Art Gallery in Scottsdale.

She has had similar exhibitions throughout the country and in Europe.

The current show is called the "Camus Series" (Camus is a staple of food on the Flathead Reservation in northwestern Montana, where the artist grew up).

The paintings, drawings and monotypes in the show are landscapes — "aerial maps," she says of them — where the elements all have gone askew. There is constant movement in landscapes, Ms. Smith said. In order to bring that across in her work she allows the parts of the landscape to move among themselves.

It is a style carefully chosen by the artist, and one ardently explained.

"Once an artist has been trained, they can carry off a realistic drawing," she said. "But once you learn those skills, the ideal — at least for me — is to be able to turn it into some unique expression, something that can be recognized as coming from within you."

Ms. Smith carries within her small frame a background of French-Cree and Shoshone. Her father was a horse trader, a man who could not read or write, but he was a powerful influence on his daughter.

She is a person of strong loyalties — to her Indian heritage, to her womanhood, to her artistic experience. At the same time, she is vehement in her rejection of anyone who might string the three together under the label "Indian woman artist."

"What does that mean, after all?" she said. "I know what an artist is. I can find that in a dictionary or an encyclopedia. But an 'Indian woman artist,' what is that? Not me."

"I am an artist, in that my work must stand on its own merits. I draw from that inner being of myself that identifies with being Indian and being a woman. Other artists draw from their own unique experiences."

Socially, Ms. Smith has grown up and come to live between two worlds, like others who have moved "off the rez."

"I sometimes feel like I can serve as a bridge between the different worlds," she said. "I feel it is important for Indians to gain more recognition. People need heroes. At the same time, your work has to be accepted by society as a whole before that will happen."

And that means a continued development of that "unique expression" the artist said she is constantly seeking, something explained in part of a poem she once wrote:

Watch me move my hands  
They are moving  
They are moving  
It is moving  
It is moving  
Watch me move my soul  
It is moving  
It is moving  
Watch me make my art  
All is moving  
All is moving



Artist Jaune Quick-to-See Smith.

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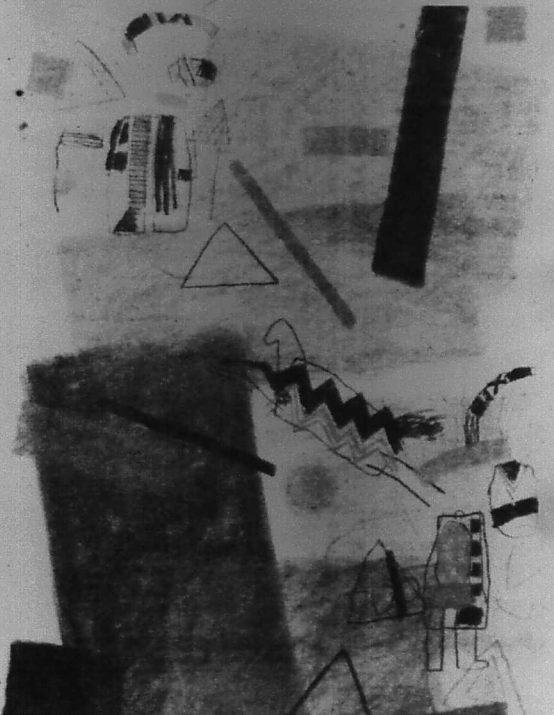
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The painting Camus Series No. 11 was done by Jaune Quick-to-See Smith.

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