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**National Museum of the American Indian Presents
Major Retrospective of Fritz Scholder's Art**

—The museum presents concurrent exhibitions at its Washington and New York City locations—

This fall, the Smithsonian's National Museum of the American Indian mounts a career retrospective of works by one of the most transformative American artists of the last half century, Fritz Scholder (1937–2005), marshaling new scholarship and broadening perspectives to assess the artist's significance.

In a National Museum of the American Indian first, two "Fritz Scholder: Indian/Not Indian" exhibitions open Nov. 1 at the museum's Washington and New York City locations. The National Mall museum will present a broad overview of Scholder's works, including many of the revolutionary paintings of Native Americans for which the artist is best known. The exhibition at the George Gustav Heye Center in Lower Manhattan will focus on works created during a period in the 1980s when Scholder lived and worked in a nearby loft. The exhibitions remain on view through May 17, 2009, in New York and Aug. 16, 2009, in Washington.

"Fritz Scholder was an enormously important and complex figure in 20th-century American art and culture, yet he has never been the subject of an in-depth, comprehensive study of this magnitude," said Kevin Gover (Pawnee/Comanche), director of the museum. "Given the National Museum of the American Indian's ongoing commitment to contemporary art, it is appropriate that such a well-timed reappraisal begin here."

"Although one-quarter Luiseño (a California mission tribe), Scholder always insisted he was not American Indian any more than he was German or French, yet he became the most successful and highly regarded painter of Native Americans in U.S. history—a fact that raises the question of what 'Indian art' actually is," said Truman Lowe (Ho-Chunk), curator of contemporary art at the museum. Lowe organized the exhibition with associate curator Paul Chaat Smith (Comanche).

"With this major loan exhibition, which includes many rarely seen paintings from private collections, we hope to lay the groundwork for new ways of thinking about Scholder's place in art history," said Smith. "And not just in Native American art, but in the global experiment that began with abstract expressionism and led to painterly figuration and pop art."

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A comprehensive 200-page book, edited by Lowery Stokes Sims, curator at the Museum of Arts & Design in New York, and including contributions by Sims, Lowe, Smith and other scholars, accompanies the exhibition.

More than 130 paintings, prints, drawings and bronze sculptures will be drawn from 40 public and private collections for the exhibition. The early works date back to the late 1950s, when Scholder studied with American pop painter Wayne Thiebaud at Sacramento City College in California, and the mid 1960s, when he began to be influenced by experiments with fantastically colored and entirely unromantic portraits of Native Americans created by his own students at the Institute of American Indian Arts in Santa Fe, N.M. The exhibition presents works through 2004—the year before Scholder’s death. Among the works from the final chapter of the artist’s life is “Self Portrait with Grey Cat” (2003), the last of many self-portraits and an unflinching reckoning with aging and infirmity.

Exhibition Highlights

In addition to paintings, prints and sculpture from the Indian series, “Fritz Scholder: Indian/Not Indian” assembles color-drenched landscapes, dream-like evocations of shamanism and the occult, erotic portrayals of powerful women and bravura renderings of flowers, butterflies and other natural forms. A number of the featured paintings are the first created in a series and thus, especially useful guideposts to the artist’s intentions. These paintings include “New Mexico No. 1” (1964), “Indian No. 1” (1967), “Massacre at Wounded Knee No. 1” (1970) and “Monster Love No. 1” (1983).

“Indian with Beer Can” (1969), on public view for the first time in more than 20 years, lies at the heart of this textured career overview. The now iconic painting shocked both the Native American and mainstream art worlds when first exhibited nearly 40 year ago. It still reverberates today: a portrait of a man in a wide-brimmed, black cowboy hat, slouched at a bar with a can of beer at his elbow, his mask-like face baring pointed, feral teeth.

Some Scholder paintings are heroic, if unconventionally so, such as a portrait of an American Indian in feathered headdress rendered in colors almost certainly influenced by early 20th-century expressionism. (Scholder cited Francisco Goya, Edvard Munch and Francis Bacon among his other influences.) Other works suggest seething irony, including a painting from 1970 of an Indian man bearing aloft an American flag.

Fritz Scholder

The son of a Bureau of Indian Affairs administrator who grew up in the Northern Plains, Scholder did not “grow up Indian.” Although he lived on the campuses of Indian schools where his father worked, he attended public schools. (Scholder once said that his father, who was half Luiseño, “was the product of the old Indian schools—he was ashamed of being an Indian.”) One of his high school teachers was the

artist Oscar Howe (Yanktonai Sioux), who had absorbed the vanguard painting of his time in trips to Europe and was painting in a Cubist style.

A gifted abstract painter, Scholder won numerous awards following his graduation from Sacramento City College in 1958. He had been the subject of two one-man shows by the time he received his master's degree from the University of Arizona in 1964.

Upon graduation, he won a coveted position at the Institute of American Indian Arts in Santa Fe, N.M., where he taught painting and contemporary art history for five years. The artist initially counseled his Native American students to avoid ghettoizing themselves by painting so-called "Indian art."

As documented in the book, for many of his Indian portraits, Scholder began by selecting a subject from among the caches of vintage photographs of Native Americans in traditional dress that were available to him, including some supplied to the Institute of American Indian Arts for general use by the Smithsonian Institution. Little in the dignified, sepia-toned images could have forecast Scholder's incongruously proportioned Indians or the unexpectedly orange portrait of a buffalo dancer, blankly holding a cone of pink ice cream in place of a ceremonial rattle.

In 1980, Scholder announced that he would no longer paint Indians. Although he occasionally returned to the subject, "Indian/Not Indian" reflects his post-1980s experiments with other themes. The latter part of his career is represented by his "mystery women," who are depicted as mythic figures in various settings. From the 1990s until his death, crucifixions and embracing couples also populate Scholder's paintings.

About the Museum

The Smithsonian's National Museum of the American Indian has been exhibiting modern and contemporary Native art since the opening of the George Gustav Heye Center in Lower Manhattan in 1994. Its Contemporary Arts Initiative also has showcased the work of Native American artists in its main museum in Washington.

Established in 1989, through an Act of Congress, the National Museum of the American Indian is an institution of living cultures dedicated to advancing knowledge and understanding of the life, languages, literature, history and arts of the Native peoples of the Western Hemisphere. The museum includes its flagship museum on the National Mall; the George Gustav Heye Center; and the Cultural Resources Center, a research and collections facility in Suitland, Md. The museum's web site is www.AmericanIndian.si.edu.

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