

FRITZ SCHOLDER

indian not indian

washington, dc exhibition

NATIONAL MUSEUM OF THE AMERICAN INDIAN



Scholder painting *Television Indian* (1974) in Scottsdale, Arizona, during filming for a documentary about the artist that aired nationally on PBS in 1975. Photo by Don Cirillo, courtesy PBS and KAET TV, Phoenix, coordinated by the Roswell Museum and Art Center from its Fritz Scholder Special Collection.

Indian with Beer Can, 1969. Oil on canvas. Collection of Ralph and Ricky Lauren.

Monster Indian, 1968. Oil on canvas. Collection of Loren and Anne Kieve.



What Is Indian Art?

In the 1950s, much American Indian painting reflected popular clichés about Native Americans, romanticizing Native life and the natural world. For most people, this kind of work defined so-called Indian art. During the following two decades, a group of Native artists at the fledgling Institute of American Indian Arts (IAIA) in Santa Fe, New Mexico, began to depict contemporary Native people in ways that challenged mainstream ideas. At the center of this cultural movement was Fritz Scholder (1937–2005), who would become the 20th century’s most influential, successful, and controversial painter of Indians.

Born in Breckenridge, Minnesota, Scholder spent his early years on the Northern Plains. His father, half-German and half-Luiseño (a tribe of California Mission Indians), worked for the Bureau of Indian Affairs, but he and his family lived off-reservation, and Scholder later recalled that he grew up in a house that contained no Indian objects. In 1957, the family moved to Sacramento, California, where Scholder, who had known from an early age that he wanted to be a painter, studied with pop artist Wayne Thiebaud. In 1964, he received his MFA from the University of Arizona and was soon invited to teach at the IAIA.

Breaking Taboos

Scholder’s dark, energetic, and unsettling paintings of Native people combined realism and historical images with abstract expressionism and pop art. In such haunting works as *Indian with Beer Can*, *Monster Indian*, and *Massacre at Wounded Knee*, Scholder addressed head-on uncomfortable truths about the lives of contemporary Indians. Alcoholism, poverty, historical and contemporary injustice—Scholder’s images presented the issues in a bold, direct style that offered no easy solutions. *Indian with Beer Can* sparked an especially outraged reaction from both Native and non-Native viewers. Scholder’s paintings



Monster Love No. 1, 1986. Acrylic on canvas. Collection of Mitzi and Steve Schoninger.

Painted Man No. 3, 1992. Bronze and oil. Collection of the Estate of Fritz Scholder.



of Indians wrapped in the U.S. flag also became iconic. The images reflected the charged associations the flag had taken on during an era of antiwar protests and an irony-laced response to two centuries of damaging government policies.

New Beginnings

Indians had become Scholder’s signature subject, and his paintings of Indians—a total of three hundred works created between 1967 and 1972 alone—would make him famous. But he resisted being categorized as an Indian, or as an Indian artist. This made him a controversial figure for many other Native artists, who felt that he was denying the source of his own commercial success.

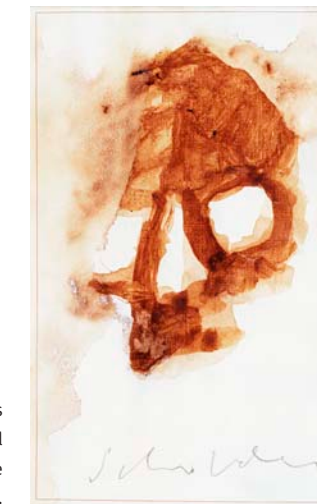
During the following decades, even as he sought to take his place in the global art scene, Scholder’s work became increasingly introspective and spiritual. The enigmatic, sometimes semi-human figures in his *American Portrait* and *Painted Man* series expressed solitude and transition. Increasingly, he incorporated images from shamanism and the occult, world mythology, and his own dark visions of personal relationships in paintings such as *Monster Love No. 1* and *Human in Nature No. 7*.

“One must believe in everything because we know so little.”

—Fritz Scholder

Millennium

In the 1990s, Scholder returned to Indian subjects, taking a more analytical approach. But in interviews, he continued to disassociate himself from Indian art. With his health failing in the last decade of his life, Scholder reduced his output. Especially in his series of skull paintings and prints, he expressed his preoccupation with mortality and the afterlife. In directly addressing his decaying body and in using symbols of death, he displayed the strength and fearlessness that had been hallmarks of his work throughout his life.



Blood Skull No. 1, 2001. Artist’s blood and Diet Coke® on motel note paper. Collection of the Estate of Fritz Scholder.



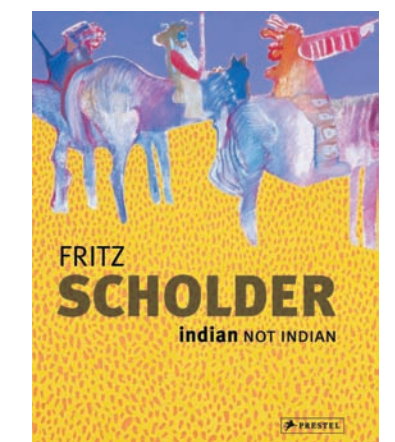
Human in Nature No. 7, 1990. Acrylic on canvas. Collection of the Estate of Fritz Scholder.

Indian in Car, 1969. Oil on canvas. Collection of Stéphane Janssen.



Published by the National Museum of the American Indian in association with Prestel Publishing, the book *Fritz Scholder: Indian/Not Indian*, edited by Lowery Stokes Sims with Truman T. Lowe (Ho-Chunk) and Paul Chaat Smith (Comanche), is available in NMAI’s stores and online at www.AmericanIndian.si.edu/bookshop.

COVER: *Four Indian Riders* (detail), 1967. Oil on canvas. Collection of Mr. and Mrs. William Metcalf.



Fritz Scholder: Indian/Not Indian, curated by Truman T. Lowe (Ho-Chunk) and Paul Chaat Smith (Comanche), is on view in the W. Richard West, Jr. Contemporary Arts Gallery on the Third Level at the National Museum of the American Indian in Washington, D.C., through August 16, 2009. Included in the exhibition is a nine-minute, continuous-loop video that further illuminates the artist’s life and work.

Opening simultaneously at the National Museum of the American Indian’s locations in New York and Washington, D.C., the two parts of this exhibition each focus on different aspects of Fritz Scholder’s work. The exhibition in Washington, D.C., presents an overview of the artist’s career, including his celebrated Indian paintings. The exhibition in New York presents the work Scholder created in the 1980s, when he moved away from the Southwest and from Indian imagery. For more information about the New York exhibition, please see the reverse side of this brochure or visit www.AmericanIndian.si.edu/exhibitions/scholder.

For public programs, please check the NMAI calendar of events at www.AmericanIndian.si.edu

National Museum of the American Indian
4th Street and Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20013
Phone: 202-633-1000

Hours: 10 a.m.–5:30 p.m. daily, closed December 25. Admission: free. The museum is fully accessible.

The Mitsitam Native Foods Cafe on the First Level is open from 10 a.m. to 5:30 p.m., with a full menu served between 11 a.m. and 3 p.m. The museum has two stores, the Chesapeake Store on the First Level and the Roanoke Store on the Second Level. Hours: 10 a.m.–5:30 p.m. daily.

To become an NMAI member, call 1-800-242-NMAI (6624) or click on Membership and Giving on our website: www.AmericanIndian.si.edu.

© 2008 Smithsonian Institution

All artworks © Estate of Fritz Scholder.