

Jaune Quick-to-See Smith

Jaune Quick-to-See Smith spent her childhood with her father, Arthur Smith, a trader, horseman and descendant of the Flathead, Metis, and Shoshone tribes Smith identifies herself with. Smith lived in as many as fifty different homes both on and off Native American Reservations in her childhood. She sees herself as a member of the Flathead tribe who developed early trade routes in the Northwest.

As an activist, Smith participates in the Native American tradition of "give back" which includes returning labor, goods, and spirit to her community. **Native American images and issues are re-appropriated by Smith from mainstream culture.** She is committed to public art projects that affirm Native peoples and their values, she curates touring shows of Native American artworks, and she executes projects related to art and education on the Flathead Reservation in Montana.

About the Artwork

The Tongass is the last remaining natural rain forest in Alaska. It provides a wildlife refuge for plants and animals, including a calving ground for migrating caribou. Attempts to introduce logging to the region bring to mind a history of fears associated with the displacement of native life forms.

In *Tongass Trade Canoe*, Smith draws upon Native American traditions of humor and irony. She uses Pop Art strategies to direct our attention to stereotypical images.

Her respect for nomadic sensibilities is reflected in the caribou that move across the surface of the painting. Also included in the painting are newspaper clippings of a chart of oil reserve rights, political, industrial, and environmentalist positions, a poem (right), a child's



Jaune Quick-to-See Smith. Courtesy of the Steinbaum Krauss Gallery, NYC.

nursery rhyme, and advertising slogans. All of these elements attest to a wide range of beliefs about the rain forest. **The Tongass is never pictured but alluded to through words, associated images, and the deep wet painting techniques.**

Perched above the canvas is a shelf made of unfinished plywood, a product of the timber industry. On it are brightly colored plastic laundry baskets, products of the oil industry, that remind us of Native American traditional baskets used in trade. They also remind us that consumer culture affects all of us regardless of color or ethnicity.

The great sea
Has sent me adrift
It moves me
As the weed in the great river
Earth and the great weather
Move me
Have carried me away
And move my inward parts
with joy

—Uvavnuk, Innuvit

GIVE BACK

The collage reference to the children's rhyme "Rain Rain Go Away..." becomes a quirky mantra for viewers as they contemplate the possible loss of native lands.

The Symbolic Canoe

The mythological "trickster" figure is common in Native American art. Smith-as-trickster directs our attention to stereotype images, such as the canoe, that the mainstream culture uses to identify Native Americans. The transparent canoe, painted as an outline through, upon, and within references to the Tongass and trade, hovers like a ghost upon the surface of this artwork.

The canoe was a means by which Native Americans and others engaged in trade practices that were closely linked with the earth. Smith questions what has been traded. "Trade" carries with it associations of bartering in which fairness is a matter of negotiation, knowledge, and power. The canoe connects concretely to Smith's life as the means through which she moves down the Flathead river and to the outline forms found in ancestral cave paintings. It also connects to stereotypes used to make reference to and keep Native Americans on a symbolic reservation.

Smith's sensibilities are grounded in a philosophy that considers the earth as the source of our lives. It is an organic philosophy which stresses continuity rather than transcendence and detachment. Smith states, "I think of my work as an inhabited landscape, never static or empty. Euro-Americans see broad expanses of land as vast and empty spaces. Indian people see all land as a living entity. The wind ruffles; ants crawl; a rabbit burrows. I've been working with that idea for probably twenty years now."



The Great Sea
Has sent me adrift
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As the weed in a great river
Earth and the great weather
Move me
Have carried me away
And move my inward parts with love
--Ivavuk, Innuit

THE BAY: State threaten

PRINCIPLE BY OWNERSHIP

COMPANY	OIL RESERVE, BARREL	DATE
BP Exploration (Alaska)	22.26	12/24
Exxon	11.75	12/21
Shell	11.75	12/21
Arctic Slope Regional	1.25	12/21
Chesapeake	1.25	12/21
Transoceanic Exploration & Production	1.25	12/21
Alaska West	1.25	12/21
Alaska East	1.25	12/21
Alaska North	1.25	12/21
Alaska South	1.25	12/21
Alaska West & Exploration	1.25	12/21

**GOP looks too
at environment**

**AMASS POWER.
DESTROY YOUR ENEMIES.
MAKE MILLIONS DOING IT.
YES, IT'S THE BOSS ALL OVER AGAIN.**

Thanks
for putting us
on top of the world
**HAVE YOU LOST YOUR
SENSE OF DIRECTION?**
NORTHERN
COMBUSTION

...with
...other
...
About 9,500 to 10,000 years ago, the first trees appeared in Southcentral Alaska. After he loves they were balsam poplar, a tree often called now returned to the landscape.
About 9,100 years ago white and black spruce trees made it to Southcentral. They sold the winged seeds of both tree species probably blew from the west.



BARREN GROUND CARIBOU



ROUND CARIBOU

**PROTECT
ENDANGERED LOG**

**CHIPS
AHOY**

**CLEAR CUT
CHOICE**



© Jaune Quick-to-See Smith, (b. 1940) Tongass Trade Canoe, 1996. Acrylic and collage on canvas, mixed media, 60 x 150" (152 x 381 cm), 3 panels. Photo by Brent Wahl. Courtesy Steinbaum Krauss Gallery, NYC.

Environmental Identity

Connection and continuity with the land is embedded in people's cultures. For Smith it is our identity as cultural selves which guide our explorations and investigations, including those about the land from which people emerge. It is as cultural forms that artworks have meaning and it is in relation to our cultural selves that artworks can be used as guides for contemplating the future.

Smith's values define an aesthetic which minimizes distinctions between fine art and traditional arts. Native American languages traditionally lack a term for art which distinguishes aesthetic objects from other artifacts. **Smith is more interested in how images are used, traded, valued, and thought about.** Her work regularly appropriates influences from traditional and contemporary sources.

Resources

Anreus, A. *Subversions and Affirmations: Jaune Quick-to-See*

Smith: A Survey. Jersey City:

Jersey City Museum, 1996.

Herzog, Melanie. "Building Bridges Across Cultures: Jaune Quick-to-See Smith." *SchoolArts* 92: 31-35 (October 1992).

Serwer, Jacquelyn. *American Kaleidoscope: Themes and Perspectives in Recent Art*. Washington: National Museum of American Art, 1996.

Stewart, Marilyn. "Jaune Quick-to-See Smith: Emphasizing the Connection Between Things." *SchoolArts* 95: 23-26 (May/June 1996).

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Teaching and Learning

Elementary

Ask students to view *Tongass Trade Canoe* thinking of not only what is shown but how it is shown. Have your students choose a natural area such as a park that they would like to preserve. As part of a science unit, consider the area as a natural habitat for plants, animals, and insects. Also, consider human activity that occurs in the area. Have children write stories or poems about this shared space. Construct a collage about this shared space using three layers of media: 1. crayon drawings of natural features combined with words from the creative writing 2. watercolor or thin tempera paint to create a mood or feeling for the place and 3. cut paper shapes or magazine cut-outs of human activity.

Middle

Work with a history or social studies teacher to develop a project related to an ethnic community that the class is studying. Have students choose an issue that links the people they are studying with their contemporary descendants, as Smith does with

the Tongass. Consider contemporary equivalents to their traditional tools. Consider contemporary events occurring on those people's traditional homelands. Have each group incorporate a transparent ghost image or outline of a traditional artifact, (like the canoe), a three-dimensional contemporary equivalent of a traditional form, (like the baskets), and collaged images and quotes related to the issue in their own artwork.

Secondary

Have students consider an environmentally threatened place of importance to their ancestors (e.g. Tongass or a steel mill). Have students research their site. Have them brainstorm and choose powerful verbal and visual metaphors, such as Smith's use of "trade," caribou, canoe, and baskets, that relate to their site and their ancestry. Have them consider unique ways to layer their verbal and visual metaphors which will metaphorically give back their concerns to their ancestors. Let Smith's work influence but not dictate aesthetic and symbolic choices.

Thoughts on Tongass Trade Canoe

by Anna Stofko, Museum Volunteer

Anna Stofko was interviewed by John Howell White when they met at an exhibition of Jaune Quick-to-See Smith's Tongass Trade Canoe at the Zoellner Art Center at Lehigh University. This was her first show as a volunteer.

"This is like reading a book. You can tell she [Jaune Quick-to-See Smith] is an activist. She makes you think about saving as a way of thinking about the future. She wants you to save this beautiful land of ours. Who thought about saving the land when we were growing up?...As I learn more I think it's amazing that Native Americans were the first environmentalists. You can tell she is a political activist—I look to the baskets and think of them as symbols of where we are today. We know Indians for their fine basket weaving. It seems as if plastics have truly invaded our world. Plastics did away with jobs for Native Americans and jobs for us in the steel industry. How much of the car you drive is now plastic? It's even in your furniture.

I can just look at her art and reminisce the history of our country. The visual context is important but it is her philosophy that makes me want to learn more. It's the protection of the environment and the land...It is the story of the land. So she points to the landscape with images like the canoe, which tie us to the land. What a good mind she must have. She must be a beautiful person too. This work touches my soul."