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Exhibited Indians: Eye and Irony in the Art of David Bradley

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ABSTRACT

Like all strong visual artists the Native American painter David Bradley has been nothing if not his own stylist, his work a genuine force of invention. Whether rich muralist-narrative pieces given over satirizing the ideology of Manifest Destiny or the commercialization of the "Indian" in film and media, there can be no missing the assured irony, the tease both serious and less than serious. That derives from Bradley's fierce commitment to issues of Native redress across a span of politics, art, sovereignty, and image. It also reflects his White Earth Earth/Chippewa origins in Minnesota and Peace Core years in indigenous Guatemala, not to mention his take on what it means to live as a contemporary Native American. The essay explores vivid muralist pieces like "Pow-Wow Princess in the Process of Acculturation,""Pictures at an Exhibition, "How the West Was Lost," or "Route 66 Postcard." This Insistence upon Bradley's unique styling is also to recognize inter-creative visual traces -- be it Diego Rivera or Fritz Scholder, Fernando Botero or Andy Warhol. The essay argues for Bradley's rare command, the wit of his eye and vision.

Keywords: *Native American, Irony, Image, Humor, Collage, Style, Visual*

I do use repeatedly certain symbols which you could call popular cultural iconography like the "American Gothic," "Mona Lisa," "Whistler's Mother"…as archetypal images anyone can relate to. Then you take it from that point of view into the new and unfamiliar and you involve it in humorous or more complicated situations. I juxtapose things and just fit all these symbols, archetypal things, clichés in amongst my own creations.

David Bradley "Interview," with Dorothee Peiper-Riegraf, March 1989[1]

David Bradley is a painter who transforms ordinary scenes and images by irony. Gerald Vizenor, *Literary Chance: Essays on Native American Survivance* (2007)[2]

Across a formidable roster, canvas and print, acrylics and lithograph, sculptures in bronze, marble and African wonder stone, David Bradley's creative work continues to earn recognition for its crafted ingenuity. America and the west, players and history, are put under savvy ironic eye and in no greater respect than transformation of the tribes into cartoon or postcard "Indians." Yet the teasing iconography, the pop-culture insignia and invention, has also often flattered to deceive. For Bradley's narratives, as he likes to call them, find their underwriting in a fierce commitment to issues of Native redress.

That embraces his refusal of thinking Indians statically fixed in history, sovereignty, land and language rights, and insistence upon Native reality – and continuance -- beyond the Hollywood Indian and each variety of media stereotype. Art and politics notably came together in helping get passed the Indian Arts and Craft Act (1990) with its stance against fraudulent, and for sure highly profitable, museum and gallery traffic in so-called "Indian" work. Commodification, and the accompanying hype and corruption, he has long felt moved to excoriate. To this end, likewise, he co-founded the Native American Artists Association and took part in the planning of the Smithsonian's National Museum of the American Indian.

Amid which his steadily gathering reputation, and impact, has found its outlet in a chain of key galleries. These include the Elaine Horwitch Gallery in Scottsdale and Santa Fe, the Judith Stern Gallery in Minneapolis, the Heard Museum of Native Cultures and Art in Phoenix with a branch in Scottsdale, and the Plains Art Museum which staged his first "Restless Indian" exhibition in 1991. In Santa Fe, his longtime base, he has exhibited at the Museum of Indian Art and Culture, the Wheelwright Museum of

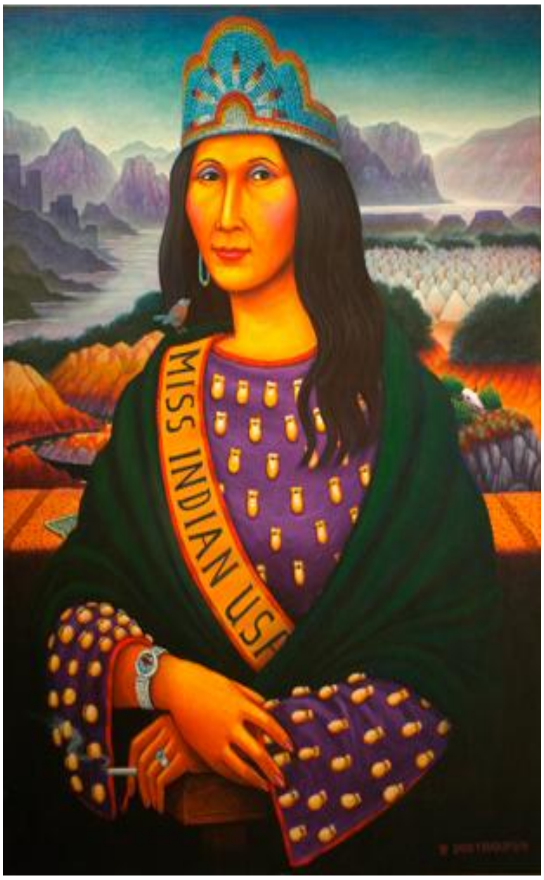
Indian Art, and latterly the Blue Rain Gallery. Holdings in the Smithsonian through to collections outside America, from Peru to France, confirm the status. Names like Fritz Scholder, T.C. Cannon have long been at the forefront in the making of modern Native art. But Bradley has not only been as popular, he invites quite equal recognition of virtuosity, a rare command of draftsmanship.

His own history in all these respects gives necessary bearings: the Anishinaabe/Chippewa mixed-blood heritage, fostering in Minneapolis, and Leech lake and North Woods residence at the edge of the White Earth reservation; the two years (1975-77) spent in the Peace Corps among the Maya of Guatemala, along with Haiti and Costa Rica, and where he took inspiration from folk-vernacular visual traditions; and graduation from the Institute of American Arts in 1979 in Santa Fe (where he was also Artist and Professor in 1991-93) having also studied at the College of Saint Thomas in Minnesota and the University of Arizona at Tucson. His residence in the southwest has brought him especially close to Navajo, Pueblo and other tribal cultures. If Bradley, as Gerald Vizenor alleges, indeed makes Natives "active players in their own history" it has drawn upon close-to-hand experience.

As to his artwork the saving play of irony has been all, or almost all. His creations work at different kinds of pitch, genial, oblique, sober, highly individual and certainly bold, yet with nary a misstep into solemnity or sermon. To be sure that takes its place within his assured graphics, the skills of drawing and high intensity color use. So unique an array of visual ingenuity, moreover, dare one say fun, and as much as it is uniquely angled to counter cliché, has not been without its influences. Traces span the Native spectrum of Oscar Howe, Fritz Scholder, George Morrison, T.C. Cannon and Kevin Red Star. International names like Douanier Rousseau, Diego Rivera, George Grosz, Francis Bacon, Réné Magritte, Frida Kahlo, L.S. Lowry, Fernando Botero and Andy Warhol discernibly have helped shape his graphics. Which is not to doubt, amid the footfalls, a creative signature as has been the case with the White Earth novelist Gerald Vizenor's authorship always recognizably his own.

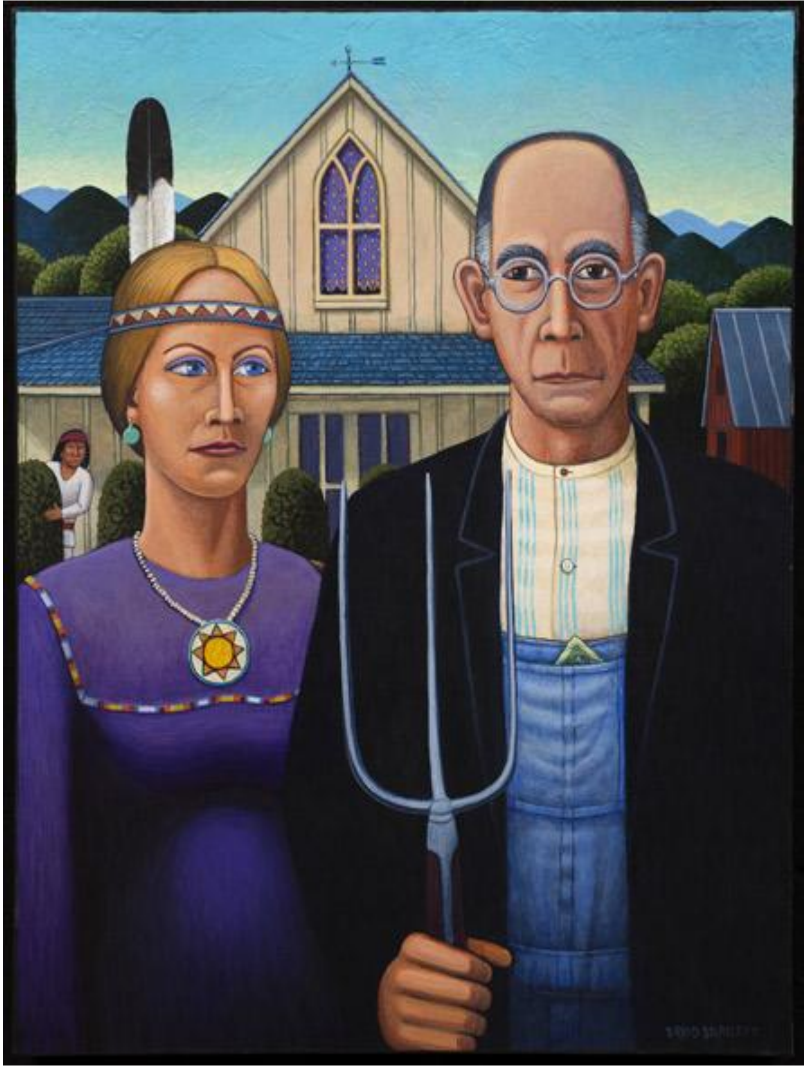
Seeming paradox as may be the roster also includes Georgia O´Keefe, whose flourish if not always her borrowings of subject, he has not doubted. It did not, however, inhibit satiric aim as in "Georgia O'Keefe and Alfred Stieglitz meet Tonto and the Lone Ranger." The pair are depicted as having just bought mementos at the Clayton Moore/Jay Silverheels B&B store (The Silver Bullet) with Stieglitz looking eye-rollingly embarrassed. An "End of the Trail" image on the spire, James Earle Fraser's the mournful warrior and horse sculpture first created in 1915 and which gave further idiom to notions of the Vanishing American and the closing of the frontier, gives the irony its yet further twist. It comes over, along with the rest of the composition, as typical.

Da Vinci's La Gioconda becomes Miss Indian USA under the title "Pow-Wow Princess in the Process of Acculturation." A rare visual wit presides. Ironies press close. Even those familiar with his work only at a distance might say vintage David Bradley.



The accouterments include beauty queen sash, beaded crown depicting eagle feathers, and a wrist watch bearing yet another "End of the Trail" image. Tribal tobacco transposes from ceremony to burning cigarette. The woman sports a Navajo art-market turquoise ring, painted nails, and a dress with deer or elk teeth design. Commercial modernity bows in with a dollar bill, a frequent Bradley motif, protruding from behind her right elbow. An asphalt highway plays against teepees taken from a historic 1863 photograph of imprisoned Santee Sioux. Yet, beyond the acculturation, a small bluebird on her shoulder reminds of a traditional spirit presence or guardian. A classic European icon is wryly appropriated to highlight commercialization of Native America -- and with no small virtuoso flourish.

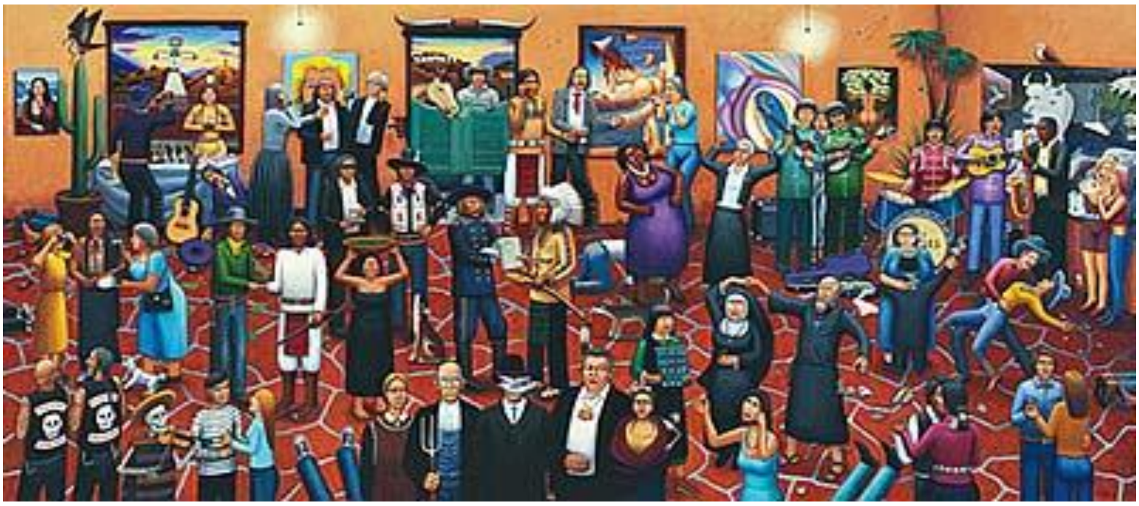
Grant Wood's seminal "American Gothic" of 1930, in shared spirit, is given refashioning as "The Farmer's Daughter."



The daughter, blue-eyed, blond, demure, now comes re-dressed in headband, feather, sun star necklace, and braided purple:. Indian chic as it were. The father has yet another dollar bill in his overalls pocket, profit from land once under Native auspices. Both are looked upon by a Native figure in the background. This is a portrait citing itself, the art equivalent of a palimpsest. The one image "writes" over the other, a trick facsimile.

Elsewhere a Geronimo and spouse piece, one in a series of Native Gothic dual portraits, substitutes teepee for the Iowa farmhouse, rifle for pitchfork. Georgia O'Keefe, in several portraits, is given the once-over as Whistler's Mother, a less than reverent slap at the Wisconsin-born artist's selective appropriation of New Mexico's Native heritages. And in a self-portrait David Bradley sees himself as though in a nesting doll or matryoshka sequence, a recent head with goatee, the second a younger self, and the third a skull. The comic mordancy is not to be missed.

"Pictures at an Exhibition" offers a further working point of departure, with due note of the footfall of Mussorgsky's 10-part musical suite composed in 1874 and itself dedicated to the work of the Russian painter Viktor Hartmann. This ensemble piece can be said to act as a species of *omnium gatherum* for Bradley's work, his take on the spacious "room" of western history.



For sure the picture points up the multiethnic fashioning of the west but in terms of figurative cartoon, costumed tableau. It also embodies Bradley's symptomatic use of perspective, the carefully juxtaposed figures, the groupings, his settings of doorway, wall, floor, interior and exterior.

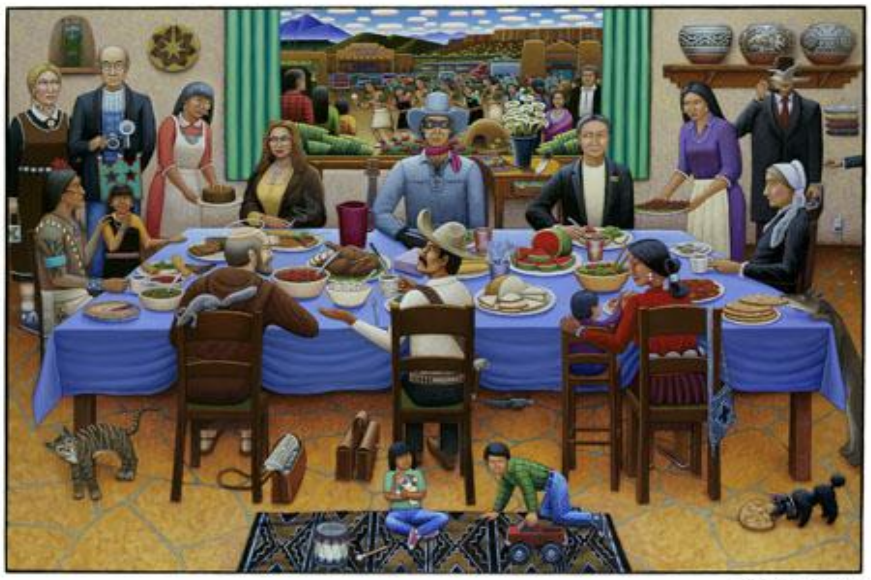
In centre focus Sitting Bull and Custer look to be exchanging a peace treaty. Alongside Native warrior and rancher shake hands. To the right couples dance, a Spanish mission friar with a nun and a country, a cowboy-hatted western pair, and two couples Native and white. Cowboy and rock violinists play to the rear of the image. Front centre a cattleman and his likely Native bride stand together alongside another Grant Wood pair and a Magritte figure. Left corner a Hell's Angels biker duo display their skull leather vests. A cowboy and his horse at the rear peer over the saloon swing-door entrance. Centre left two women tourists camera-click a manikin-like Indian. Cactus plants, longhorn antlers, a vulture, ten gallon hats, guitars, a *Día de Los Muertos* skeleton figure with violin, coyotes, even pairs of legs as if from a shoot-out, take their place. Bradley's earlier pictures reflexively hang on the walls, none other than "Pow-Wow Princess" and "Farmer and Daughter." Other sightings are of Da Vinci, Kahlo, Lautrec, and Picasso. The assemblage configures upon a red floor or map, sun-cracked desert as it were. In this West history has segued into spectacle, the camera reel or shot, and tourism.

From the outset Bradley set himself the pledge of unsettling, and complicating, the usual narratives of the west: manifest destiny, frontier, cowboy and Indian, cavalry and war-party, gun mythologies, Cody circus legacy, movies, comic book and other popular culture, gift shop paraphernalia, and never least Wounded Knee as endgame. The effect is of several kinds. It can call up the dada of Kurt Schwitters and Marcel Duchamp or the modernist photomontage of Richard Hamilton, be it his "Just what is it that makes today's home so different, so appealing?" (1956) or Beatles White Album cover (1968). There can be a resemblance to *Boterismo* (the doll-like image in his lithograph "Homage to Botero" duly applies). Collage, long a preferred Bradley métier, comes fully into the reckoning.

In all these domains he perfectly acknowledges his own trickster affinities, the sleights of satiric provocation. In a recent interview with the French anthropologist, Joelle Rostowski, he usefully supplies the following gloss:

> Among the Anishinaabe, our cultural trickster is Naanabozho. In my early career I have molded a ceramic representation of Naanabozho, a figure with a small head, very thickly bound braids, big hands, and huge moccasins. This was my interpretation of our tribal trickster.
>
> My paintings have been described as narrative art because, when I paint, I tell a story. Like trickster stories, my works are imbued with fantasies and incongruities. Maybe I am a trickster.[3]

That "maybe" itself may be thought to veer close to trickster-speak. Bradley leaves little doubt of "fantasies and incongruities," each resolutely calculated to challenge de-historicization. He also leaves little doubt of his style's visual command. The present account takes up three kinds of format in his work, allowing that they frequently run close to, even into, each other: the ensemble portraiture, the single figure piece, and a selection of his collages. The composite tableau along the lines of "Pictures from an Exhibition" has long been a Bradley forte. A deliberate geometry holds, bodies and faces, gesture and gaze, positioned as though not only in spatial latitude and longitude but also timeline."Pueblo Feast Day," with its beautifully sly take on the Last Supper gives a notable instance, not Jesus and the twelve disciples but rather a kind of frontier or western *seder* under pop-culture auspices. The detail is meticulous, as full and scrupulously etched as it is color-vivid, notably the striking blue table cloth and ochre hued floor again in crack design.



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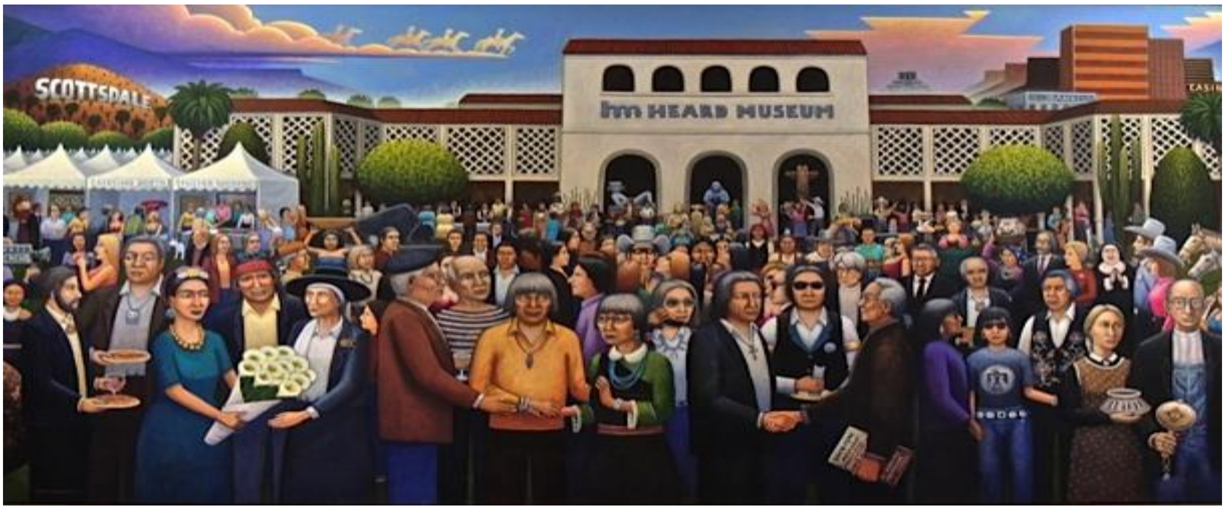
A Mona Lisa pow-wow princess, The Lone Ranger and their dining companion face off across the dining table from a Franciscan with a squirrel on his back, a Mexican in bandoleer and with gun in holster, and a Native mother with arm protectively round her offspring and embroidered arm bag hanging from her chair. At opposite table-ends sit a severe-looking O´Keefe and a warrior in costume and turquoise bracelet. A cat rubs its back on the table leg, a French poodle gnaws at fallen food, and a coyote on rear legs steals from a plate. This is a table with attitude, diners as it were in and upon history.

As though to frame the company stands one more Grant Wood pair, he with camera, she blond-haired and in sneakers, and an appropriately surreal Magritte male figure on the phone, in a trilby, and with a dove obscuring his face. Corn, salsa, watermelon, turkey, beans, salad, and various greens lie upon the table, serving spoons at hand. A vase and flowers, likely a Diego Rivera allusion, stands in the window.Two tribal women act as maids, the one bearing a meat platter, the other dessert cake. Native pots adorn the shelves, a pueblo stove is available. On a Navaho rug in the foreground, alongside a drum and stick, a girl child hugs her doll while a boy plays with his mini-monster truck. A guitar props up a wall which also contains the usual electric socket and plug. A small table bears a magazine, cash, desert flowers in a pot, and a sole feather. An un-bodied arm stretches into the picture from the right and a boot juts out from under the table.

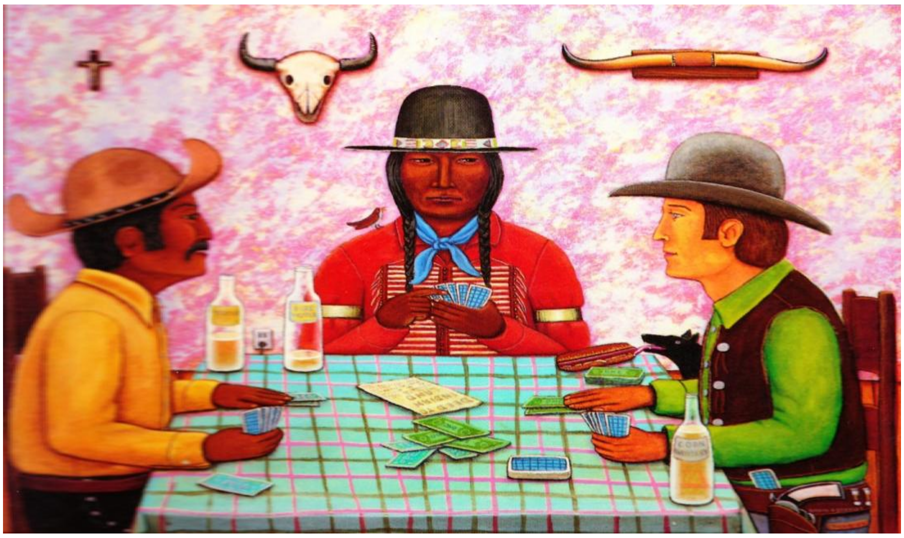
The back projection, as seen through a window, is of an inhabited pueblo, tribal dancers engaged in a spirit dance, white westerner with bolo, adobe buildings, parked cars, and mountain range before a distant cloud-pocked sky.

The inter-layering again yields every dividend, history made subject to Bradley's ironic pictorial code. Components can look discrete yet in fact are subtly conjoined, a coalescence as much as collision -- Native and Settler, Gringo and Mexicano, horse-rider and pick-up truck, basket weaving and electricity, inter-marriage and mixed offspring, even one kind of foodway with another. There can be little doubt of resistance to binaries, simple either-or notions of cultural formation. The several versions of the painting, moreover, clearly signify an impatience with Winning of the West or like formula, shrewd, not to say highly skilled, figuration on Bradley's part of the multiple ironies within an always ongoing frontier. It has been common observance that over the past few decades Indian art has become big business, a point inevitably far from lost on Bradley. Indeed he has not been above a certain self-irony at having been part of the boom. "The Tradition Lives On" offers an ensemble wholly to the point. Ostensibly part of the 50-year celebration of the Heard Museum Guild's Indian Fair and Market, the imagined line-up gathers moderns and contemporaries. Native and other artists s stand horizontally one next to the other but the implication is also of time, a vertical chronology.



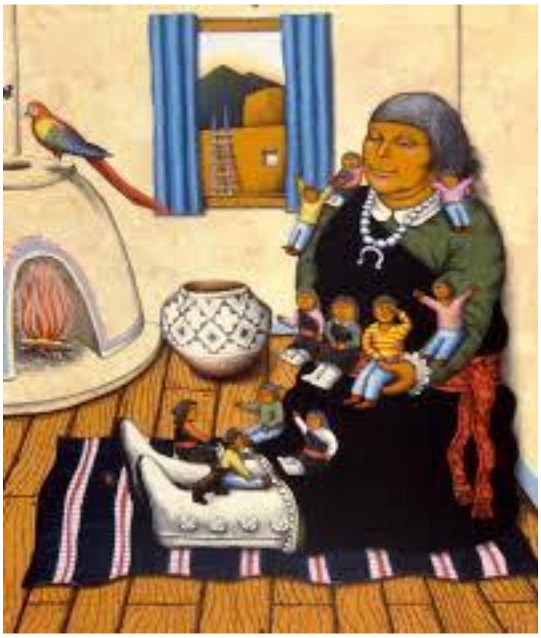
Notables like Fritz Scholder and T.C. Cannon assume centre place. A nice whimsy enters. Frida Kahlo offers flowers to O'Keefe. Picasso wears his trademark matelot stripes. A bulky Rivera peers out. Almost inevitably the Lone Ranger and Tonto make their appearance. A seeming Roy Rogers, Dale and Trigger group together. A nun is to be seen in prayerful pose. The Grant Wood pair, this time holding Native pots and acquisitions, stand impassively to the right of the picture. One could be forgiven for thinking this almost a visual fiction of fact, Bradley's highly purposive art-historical Native playfield. The impact, in kind with, say, "Indian Market Party" as an ensemble of exhibiter, dealer, buyer and viewer based on a gathering at the Horwitch Gallery, is one of group and meta-group, a thread of actual and figurative players in the "picturing" of the Native west.[4]

"How the West Was Lost," if a smaller grouping, shows quite the shared virtuosity. Its three card players, respectively Native, Cowboy, and Mexican/Chicano, at first glance look not only stylized but almost inert. A closer eye, however, indicates larger stakes are involved than a few dollars more – rather the trade-off of liberty, territory, culture, the one as against the other version of western history. As so often in Bradley's work images seam into the larger composite, its proportioning one of ironic alignment and comparison.



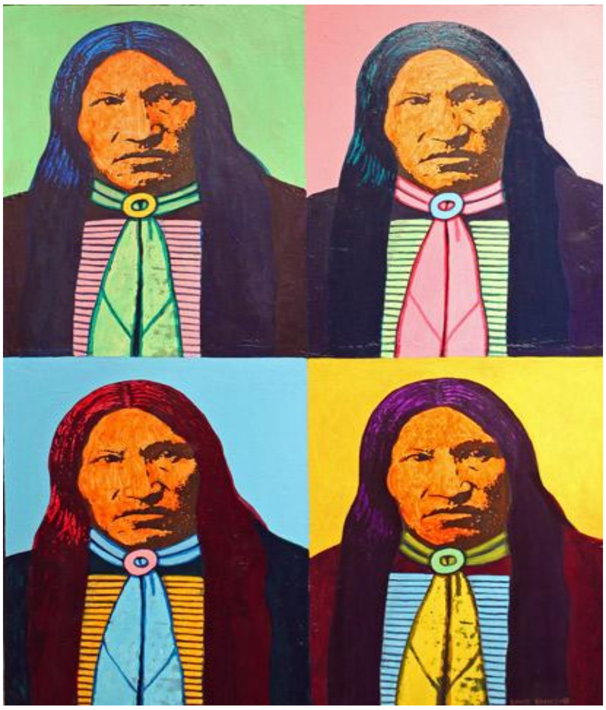
The back wall displays a cross, a buffalo skull, and a steer's horns, yet also (and once again) a small, almost unnoticeable light socket and plug. The men may assume iconic appearance, whether the Indian hat, stetson and sombrero, or the braids, weskit, and mustachio. But they also embody real enough history. The Indian, despite a spirit bird on his shoulder, is wagering tribal land deeds; the cowboy has a spare card tucked into his gun-belt; and the Mexican can readily be imagined to remember the Mexican American War of 1846-8 and Guadalupe-Hidalgo Treaty loss of land in the wake of the Alamo. Each, hands in view or not, is playing a tactically concealed deck. Corn whiskey and tequila stand upon the table, the southwest as implicitly intoxicated history, a firewater pageant. Who loses? Likely all, white ascendancy notwithstanding. On the picture's terms, and whomever the winners and losers, the game goes on being played.

"Storyteller" turns upon a single maternal figure, possibly a spiderwoman in kind with, say, Aunt Susie, Great Grandma A'mooh and Yellow Woman in Leslie Marmon Silko's Laguna narrative of the same name. [5]



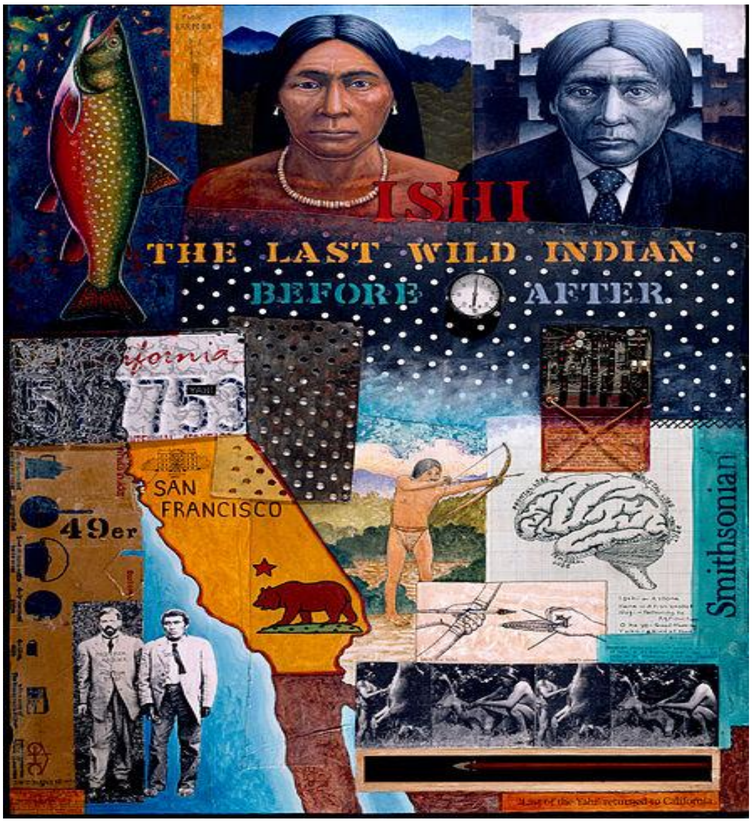
The mother exudes a protective wrap for the eleven diminutive children variously at play over her ample body, wholly matriarchal indeed but also story-keeper as much as story-teller for her listener-progeny. Bradley brings into play a round of indicative tribal markers, the woven Indian rug, patterned ceramic jar, multi-color parrot fixed on an ear of corn, lit hearth fire, and window opening upon a further pueblo home and ladder and they in turn set against mountains. Each helps particularize an indigenous southwest homestead both of, and in itself, story. The portrait steers deftly, representational yet iconographic, another of Bradley's narrative pieces with the one mother storyteller so conceived as to personify Native storytellers all.

Other "single" compositions call upon a shared density of implication. One can alight to good purpose upon "Kicking Bear," a single profile given in four prismatic color blocks and long familiar through Smithsonian and other reproductions.



The Warhol-inflected design offers appropriate tribute to the multifaceted Minneconjou Lakota Sioux leader of Pine Ridge, warrior in the 1876 Battle of the Little Big Horn, and the considerable artist who himself painted the encounter as "The Battle of the Greasy Grass." Kicking Bear, if reluctantly, would also briefly take part in the Cody Circus of the 1890s, evidently well enough aware of the irony of Indian playing Indian before a paying non-Indian audience. The face, strong in feature and gaze of eye, remains the same yet inflected by each shifting coloration of kerchief, eagle breastplate , toggle, and flesh tint. The portrait speaks precisely to Kicking Bear's multiplicity, the shortfall in seeking to fix him in any single transparency. It invites comparison with pieces like "Hopi Maiden," another one visage offered as a quartet, or "Two Worlds," a Native split, or alternatively joining, of tribesman and businessman, horse and car, teepee and house, plain and road. Something akin again holds for the subtly differentiated "Pueblo Sisters" and interfolding "Half Breed."

"Ishi The Last Wild Indian," given over to a Native presence equally full of complexity, and of necessary historical context, blends portrait into collage. Bradley lowers a customary ironic eye upon any version of Ishi (1860-1916) as simply abject Stone Age remnant, anachronistic Crusoe.

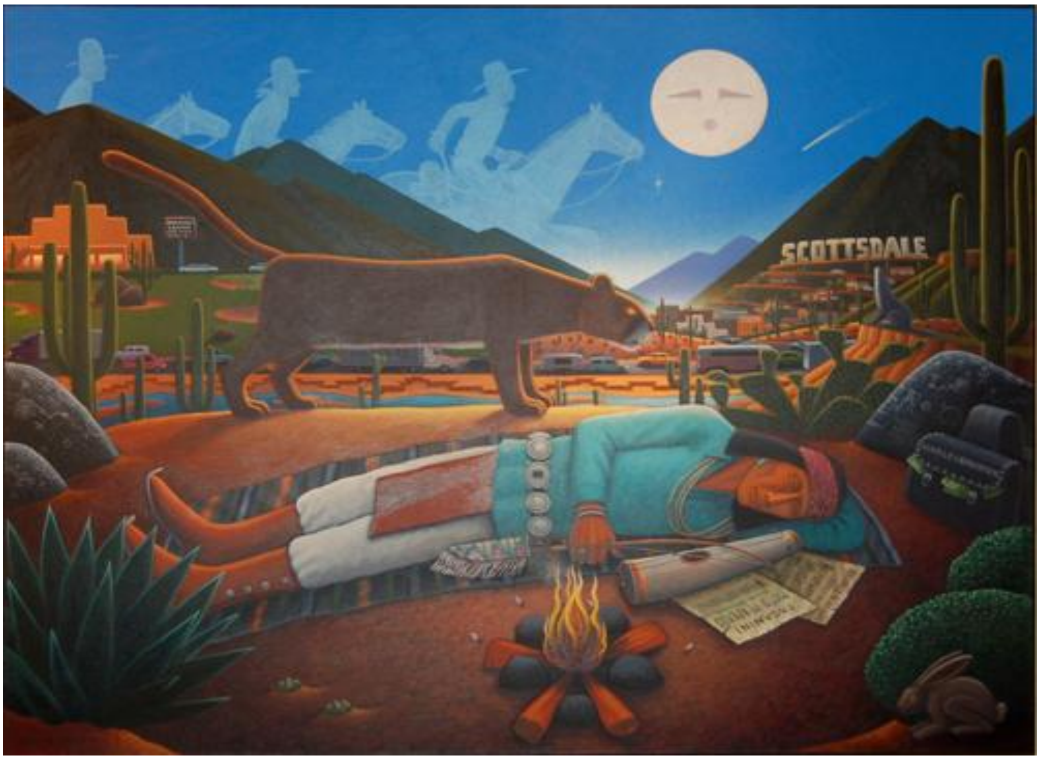


The outlines of the biography embed within the composition. They point to Ishi's Yani lineage and "discovery" in 1911 by miners and then "capture" by Sheriff Webber in California's northerly Tehama County; subsequent adoption by the anthropologist Alfred Kroeber and residence as maker of arrowheads and other artifacts for San Francisco's Museum of anthropology; and death of the TB previously unknown to his people and the surgical removal of his brain for supposed scientific purposes. It was quite a story, "last of his tribe" media headlines.[6]

Bradley, however, cannily subverts, and complicates, all of this formula account. It would be apt to start with the top right hand corner's contrast of Ishi's two faces. The one image has a figure in evident good health, alert, in natural bone or shell choker and ear ring, and situated against hillside and forest. This is the harpooner of fish, bow and arrow hunter-skinner of deer, spear wielder, and the un-wasteful expert survivor. The other conveys a figure in decline, grey, worn, bedecked in modern collar and tie and set against a cityscape of high-rise and smoke. Which better conveys the tribesman who was Ishi? What price his unsought entrance into modernity?

Further scroll of the collage yields matching contrarieties. California becomes the triumphalist bear flag state despite the demise of its grizzlie population. The 1849 Gold Rush is recalled in less than glamorous miner lamps and pots. A state car license plate summons contemporary highway and speed. The clock's 6pm divides day and evening, its machine-age division of time wholly contrastive with Ishi's measure of sunlight and dark. Ishi stands seemingly next to, but actually separate from, Alfred Kroeber, two worlds and their cultural timelines personified. Ishi's brain, once indeed stored in the Smithsonian, is imaged in annotated lobe and cerebral fold, the upshot of grim anthropology, predatory museumization. It would be far from remiss to think a knowing reflexivity operates on Bradley's part, his own collage rendered as ironic refraction of that which for long has enclosed Ishi and indeed most of Native America at large.

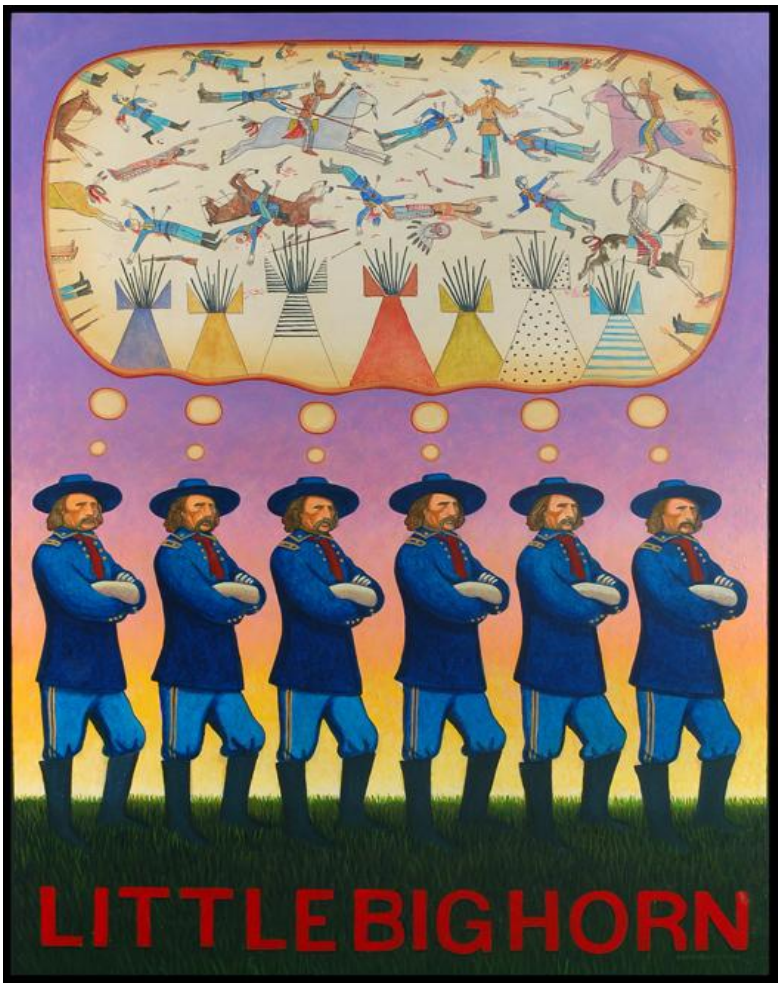
If from the outset collage has been at the heart of Bradley's working practices then "The Sleeping Indian" understandably serves as something of a touchstone. It avails itself of most of Bradley's best graphic tactics.



Both the several pictorial versions, and the bronze cast version, by evident design shadow Henri Rousseau's quasi-surreal "The Sleeping Gypsy" with its African woman traveler, benign lion, mandolin, water jug and crook. It also shares title with a peak in Jackson Hole, Wyoming, one-time Shoshone country. Bradley himself has observed that "While the Indian is sleeping, his homeland is being turned into a huge tourist attraction -- Hollywood on the Rio Grande."[7]

Any number of indicative components come into play. This desert southwest may have its cactus uprights, agave plants, sand, hills, mesa, and nearby Paradise Valley. But it also has its Scottsdale (city slogan "The West's Most Western Town"), SUVs, casinos, and reputation as a leading party hang-out. The mountain lion plays guardian, a rabbit hovers, bushes spout, and ghost riders again ride across a sky under the face of the moon. In another version of the painting a mechanical earth-digger stands close by, un-owned Native land literally being shifted into settler proprietorship. The sleeper, on woven rug and in tribal garb, might be a figure caught between the musical score of Paganini's *Moto Perpetuo* and Ervin T. Rouse's *Orange Blossom Special*, the latter a bluegrass fiddle classic and named for the train. He has become an indigenous Rip Van Winkle either oblivious to, or even dreaming of, a world that has become actual while also himself transposed from actuality into dream for others. Bradley typically shifts the kaleidoscope several ways at once.

"Little Big Horn," titled "Little Big Horn Premonition" in the Blue Rain catalogue, albeit explicitly summoning the frontier's most seminal battle does not lack for shared obliqueness.

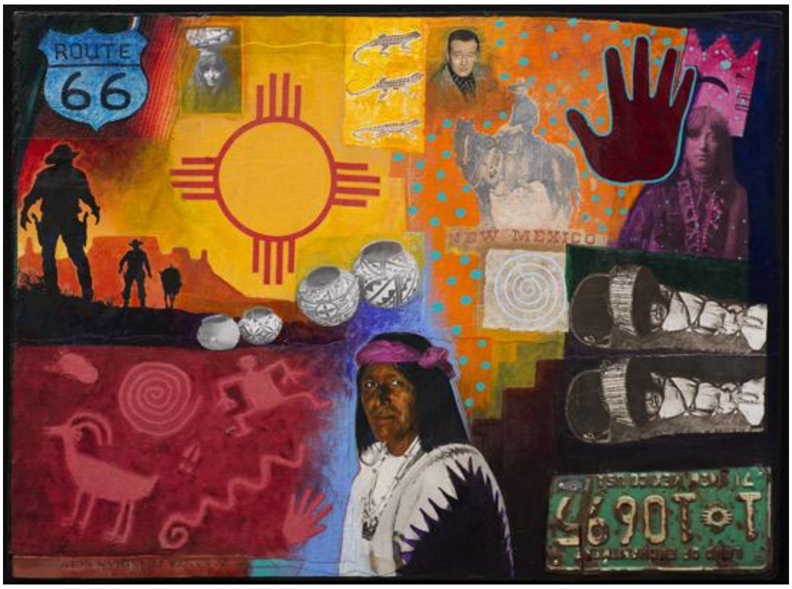


Custer, six times over, arms resolutely folded as if to give added emphasis to his outward show of confidence, turns in mind to possible reverse, the assumed unimaginable defeat of the 7th Cavalry. How could this alliance of Lakota, Cheyenne and Arapaho resist so predestined a military conquest? Could George Armstrong Custer, resplendently uniformed in cavalry blue, boots, riding gloves, moustache and full mane, ever have imagined himself the last man standing as viewed through the teepee sightline?

The battlefield itself resembles that of war hide or ledger and pictograph drawings by Sioux artists who were also Little Big Horn veterans like One Bull, Red Horse, and indeed Kicking Bear, that de-triumphalize, or more to the point disallow the conflict as Custer's Last Stand. Bradley shows a fitting touch in puncturing not only the arrogance of Custer himself, a slightly manikin-like figure in buckskin and wielding his guns, but the notion of "The Indian Wars" as necessary tribal clearance, not to say misnomer, before settler occupation and the vaunted march of civilization. The use of the map as thought bubble adds its own imaginative irony, a touch of the modern comic strip to blend into tribal pictorialization.

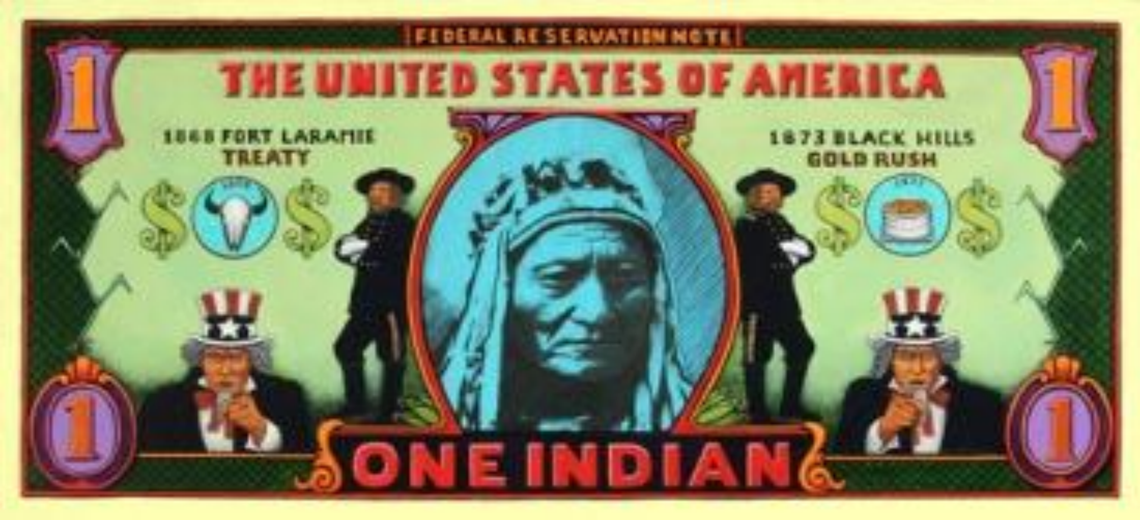
Pieces comparable in kind are frequent. Bradley's "American Horse" again uses an image-serial of Custer but set against a Chief Joseph profile, Jasper Johns-style stars and stripes, Plains horse-rider, and just in view, another US dollar. "Ghost Dance Revelations" offers vertical layerings of teepee, blood drips, and historic tribal photographs –the record one of defeats for sure but also revivalism and continuity. "Border Lands" juxtaposes Geronimo as celebrated Chiricahua/Bedonkohe Apache, a tribal woman, and full-hat Mexican within a configuration of El Paso, other place-names, and the inverted lettering of NO FBI and NO INS (Immigration and Naturalization Service). The upshot is to locate Lone Star Texas, indeed the southwest at large, within cultural mix, a power of *mestizaje* far more spatially and demographically nuanced than the demarcation of mere national border or state line. Bradley offers good reason to think he has in mind the one collage for another, the making of his own artwork for the making of the southwest.

"Route 66 Postcard" turns upon similar iconic reference and again in the form of interactive tableau.



The alignments nudge, or perhaps more aptly negotiate with, each other. A centre-placed Native presence throws John Wayne into relief. Pictograph, hand print and the New Mexico state emblem encode different southwest histories. Tribal cradleboards with their child sleepers are positioned above an upside-down New Mexico car license plate. The Monument Valley skyline highlights a John Ford-like western shoot-out. Intricately decorated Native pots accompany three desert salamanders. A western cowboy at rest upon his horse contrasts with a bowl-carrying Native woman. These interactions once more take on added effect in Bradley’s use of sharply contrastive color, the one bloc highlighting the other.

“Treaty Dollar” carries the perhaps more evident ironic charge, Native America so to speak historically cashed in or sold short, yet despite all, still its own viable currency.



Sitting Bull assumes centre-place, the collage’s presiding spirit and one dollar bill replacement for George Washington. Custer again makes his arms-folded entrance, but almost as prop, an ornamental double. Uncle Sam, top hat, goatee, determined frown, and long the personification of Yankee Doodle Dandyism, appears in reverse mirror image. His finger points outward in due belligerence (actually a military recruitment image). The two calendar dates and the history they mark both bespeak “narratives” utterly the reverse of frontier glory. Little surprise that Bradley encloses each with dollar signs. The 1868 Fort Laramie Treaty, ostensibly was to ensure Sioux land rights and sovereignty in the Black Hills. But its formal revocation in 1877 after inroads by Gold Rush prospectors and other settlers was blatant finagling, quite infamous political calumny. The collage coordinates these events, even so, with a light touch, “money talks” made over into talking picture.

Bradley has developed a considerable repertoire in this kind of succinct, almost diagrammatic composition. “Land O Fakes,” another dollar simulation under the phrases “Federal Reservation Note” and “museum currency,” takes its shot at art gallery manipulated images of Indians. One of them dangles on puppet strings opposite a hanging non-Indian artist. In the background a Columbus or other designated discovery galleon sails into the bay. The kneeling Indian woman (if indeed “Indian”) holds dollars and feather in one hand, a smiling princess mask in the other; wears a US flag blouse above her buckskin skirt; and instead of a living face is seen only as a death’s head skull. Once again Bradley has the debasing of historical currency in his sights, faux over actual Native population. The piece takes its place in what he calls his flashcards, tourist and consumer pastiche to include “Land O Lakes” with its butter advertisement and “Land of Bucks” with its heritage-for-sale implication.

Companion pieces include “Indian Country Today” as a pueblo surrounded by parked cars, fast food outlets, highways and the railroad – with Natives doing tourist dances against a backdrop Mayan pyramid and Wyoming’s Devil Tower. Sacred site yields to travel brochure fodder. “Super Santa Fe Chief” pits Iron Horse against Indian Horse, the train’s smoke a plume of skulls as Santa Fe shades into gallery and Big Mac country. These, like the work mounted in his further “Restless Native” exhibition at the Ancient Traders Galley in Minnesota in May 2004, again draw attention to the unstinting invention of his work.

Whether group picturing, single profile, or any of his abundant collages – later ones embrace the Clintons and Brad Pitt – he has kept his eye sharply focused upon the interplay of Native America and a so-called cultural mainstream: the footfalls of savagism, stereotype and its un-favors, Hollywood and TV, victim politics, historical amnesia, and Indian chic and fakery. It bears repetition how much he has avoided solemnity. The play within his work stays light, deft. The satire earns its keep as un-dogmatic. The vibrancies of coloration and mix of historic reference with everyday modernities of car, wrist watch, socket, newspaper or phone attract even as they modulate the subject at hand. He invites, and merits, every hurrah.

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