# The Indian Space Painters

## Native American Sources for American Abstract Art

Cover: Peter Busa. *Children's Hour*, c. 1948.
Oil on canvas, 72" x 52"
Collection Christopher Busa

# The Indian Space Painters

## Native American Sources for American Abstract Art

**Curated by Sandra Kraskin and Barbara Hollister**

November 8 to December 17, 1991

The Sidney Mishkin Gallery
Baruch College • The City University of New York
135 East 22 Street, New York, New York 10010

## LENDERS TO THE EXHIBITION

Will Barnet
Robert Barrell
Gertrude Barrer
Peter Blum
Christopher Busa
Lisa Collier Cool
Helen DeMott
Terry Dintenfass Gallery, New York
Amy and Elliot Lawrence
The Metropolitan Museum of Art
Jeffrey Meyers
Walter Miles
Stephen H. Rogers
Aurora Russell
Kristina Schlesinger
Snyder Fine Art, New York
Tricon, Somerset, New Jersey
Valspar Corporation, Minneapolis
Mariann Wells
The Whitney Museum of American Art

This exhibition and publication are supported in part by grants from the National Endowment for the Arts, a federal agency; The Richard A. Florsheim Art Fund; Valspar Corporation, Minneapolis; and The Baruch College Fund.

Editor: Jonathan Goodman
Designer: Hilda Shen

© 1991 Baruch College Gallery, New York

Title page: Howard Daum
*Crucifixion*, 1946
Oil on canvas, 29" x 21"
Courtesy Snyder Fine Art



## CONTENTS

**Preface and Acknowledgments** 5

**The Indian Space Painters: Native American Sources for American Abstract Art** 7
Sandra Kraskin

**Northwest Coast Indian Art** 27
Allen Wardwell

**Indian Space: History and Iconography** 31
Barbara Hollister

***Iconograph* Magazine** 35
Ann Gibson

**Catalog of the Exhibition** 38

*The Indian Space Painters*

**Will Barnet**

**Robert Barrell**

**Gertrude Barrer**

**Peter Busa**

**Howard Daum**

**Helen DeMott**

**Ruth Lewin**

**Steve Wheeler**



## PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

In 1967 I learned about Indian Space from Professor Peter Busa at the University of Minnesota. Busa, an Indian Space painter in the late 1930s and 1940s, demonstrated this concept of space in class by drawing an object in five different styles – in the style of Impressionism, Cézanne's Post-Impressionism, Analytic Cubism, Synthetic Cubism, and Indian Space. His sketches dramatically illustrated the gradual flattening of the picture plane by modern artists between 1870 and 1946.

This exhibition at Baruch College Gallery reassembles the work of the Indian Space painters for the first time since 1946. It includes the artists who first recognized and used Indian Space as a source in their work in the late 1930s – Steve Wheeler, Robert Barrell, and Peter Busa – as well as those who were most active in the group and the publication of *Iconograph* magazine in the late 1940s. We regret that Oscar Collier, who was the associate editor of *Iconograph* but later gave up painting to work in publishing, no longer has work from the 1940s to include in this exhibition.

Although some Indian Space artists went on to develop significant careers, the group as a whole was overshadowed by the success of Abstract Expressionism in the years after World War II. However, as scholars revise the history of the 1930s and 1940s to present a more inclusive view, the contribution of the Indian Space group is finally being recognized. I would like to thank the artists for their cooperation in helping Baruch College Gallery document their work. I am pleased that most – Will Barnet, Robert Barrell, Gertrude Barrer, Helen DeMott, and Steve Wheeler – are alive to celebrate the recognition of their contribution to the development of American abstract art.

Professor Ann Gibson was the first to document the contribution of the Indian Space artists in her article "Painting Outside the Paradigm: Indian Space" (*Arts Magazine*, February 1983). Dr. Gibson has generously allowed her essay "*Iconograph* Magazine" to be reprinted in our catalog. Allen Wardwell, who also contributed an essay to the catalog, has kindly provided information on Northwest Coast Indian art. His expertise has been essential to this exhibition. Baruch College Gallery is also grateful for the participation of Barbara Hollister, who helped to curate the exhibition and wrote the essay "Indian Space: History and Iconography."

I would like to thank the many museum, corporate, and private lenders whose cooperation has been necessary to the success of this exhibition. I also wish to express my appreciation for the support from the National Endowment for the Arts, the Richard A. Florsheim Art Fund, Valspar Corporation (Minneapolis), and the Baruch College Fund, whose help made this exhibition and its catalog possible.

Credit should be given to Charles Seliger, Steve Schlesinger, Lawrence Campbell, Leon Kotkovsky, and Carl Ashby, who provided information; and to Melissa Card, who helped prepare the catalog.

Sandra Kraskin
Director
Baruch College Gallery

Mantle with Killer Whale Design (Chilkat blanket)
Alaska, Tlingit, 1870
Dyed mountain goat wool with cedar bark fibers, Width 67"
Collection Jeffrey Meyers

# The Indian Space Painters:
## Native American Sources for American Abstract Art

*by Sandra Kraskin*

### Beginnings: The 1930s and Early 1940s

In the 1930s, the most avant-garde American artists were learning the lessons of the European modernists. Many of these artists had been too young to have seen the "International Exhibition of Modern Art" (better known as the Armory Show) in New York in 1913. But in 1926, at the Brooklyn Museum, the Société Anonyme sponsored an international exhibition that gave young painters the chance to study the work of Picasso, Miró, and other modernists. A year later, Albert E. Gallatin opened his Gallery of Living Art in a New York University building on Washington Square, where he acquired and showed many examples of Cubism, including Picasso's *Three Musicians*. Curiously, Gallatin's collection of European and American modernists also contained a traditional wall painting by John Wallace, a Northwest Coast Indian from the Haida tribe.[1] Gallatin's interest in this work called attention to Northwest Coast Indian art and placed it within the context of modern art. The Gallery of Living Art became a study center for the young artists who lived nearby and for Hans Hofmann's students, who attended his school in Greenwich Village.

In 1936, when Gallatin purchased Picasso's *Three Musicians*, Steve Wheeler, Robert Barrell, and Peter Busa were learning about modernism from Hofmann and frequenting Gallatin's downtown museum. Challenged by Picasso and inspired by Native American art, these artists sought to eliminate the distinction between "background" and "figure" in their paintings. The result of their efforts was the development of a totally flat configuration, later called Indian Space.[2] By 1946, when Howard Daum gave the movement this name, several younger artists had adopted these principles, organized the exhibition "8 and a Totem Pole," and published the first issue of *Iconograph* magazine.[3]

In addition to the examples of modernism provided by Gallatin, the first Indian Space painters had the opportunity to study the work of European artists in the Museum of Modern Art, which had opened in 1929. As early as 1936, visitors could study the paintings of Picasso and Miró in such exhibitions as "Cubism and Abstract Art" and "Fantastic Art, Dada, Surrealism." Then, in 1939, Alfred H. Barr, Jr., the museum's director, organized a Picasso retrospective: "Picasso: Forty Years of His Art." And soon after, in 1941, the museum devoted an exhibition to American Indian works entitled "Indian Art of the United States." These two shows would engage many young artists and provide sources that played a major role in the development of Indian Space.

In general, the critics of the 1930s were hostile to the work of abstract artists, seeing in their efforts either decoration or close imitation of the Europeans. In response to the critics, the American Abstract Artists (AAA) group was formed in 1936 to exhibit, promote, and defend abstract art. The organization's efforts focused the debate on abstraction's merits, which was to last through the decade. The camaraderie fostered by the AAA and the projects sponsored by the Works Progress Administration/Federal Art Project (WPA/FAP) provided an opportunity for ongoing dialogue among American artists, enabling them to absorb and to transform many European influences. The result was a new abstract syntax that could be considered the first phase of the New York School.[4]

Yet even within the AAA controversy existed. Not everyone advocated pure abstraction. Some artists argued that abstract form should be developed from nature. A number of Hans Hofmann's students, who had been instrumental in founding the AAA, were convinced that abstraction was an elaboration of natural form. Other students of Hofmann, while not belonging to the AAA, agreed that nature was the origin of abstract form. They (the latter group) included several of the painters shown in this exhibition: Steve Wheeler, Robert Barrell, and Peter Busa.

For this generation of artists, Picasso's influence was paramount. His Cubist works had restructured pictorial space but had not completely removed the distinction between the figure and its background. Attempting to equal or surpass Picasso's achievements, a group of young American artists encoun-

tered the tribal art of the Northwest Coast and found in it a model for a completely two-dimensional representation of space. Moreover, Picasso's interest in African sculpture introduced these artists to sources of imagery that lay outside the claim of traditional Western art. New York offered easy access to the art of the indigenous cultures of North and South America; important collections could be seen at the American Museum of Natural History, the Brooklyn Museum, and, uptown, at the Museum of the American Indian (the Heye Foundation).

What is striking is how early the art of the Americas was recognized and shown. In 1933, the Museum of Modern Art held the exhibition "American Sources of Modern Art," which saw in the early civilizations of the Americas a profound source of imagery for modern American art. As Holger Cahill pointed out in his catalog essay, "Modern art, like everything else in modern American culture, has a complex heritage. Among the diverse sources upon which it has drawn is the art of the ancient civilizations of America."[5] Cahill's show juxtaposed works from the ancient cultures of Mexico, Central America, and South America with paintings by such contemporary artists as Max Weber, William Zorach, Diego Rivera, and David Alfaro Siqueiros.

Examples of Peruvian art, similar to the textiles and pottery exhibited in Cahill's show, would influence several of the artists in this exhibition. Peter Busa, who had seen "American Sources," made good use of the catalog's extensive bibliography and purchased a Metropolitan Museum of Art publication on Peruvian weaving, *Peruvian Textiles, Examples of the Pre-Incaic Period*.[6] His own work would feature geometric forms closely aligned to Peruvian textile patterns as well as influences from Northwest Coast Indian art. Steve Wheeler learned about Peruvian art in 1937 from a friend whose father was an anthropologist,[7] and Will Barnet owned several publications on the subject as well.[8] Yet these outbursts of received influence were not to culminate in what one might call a movement until more than a decade later.

It was only in the spring of 1946 that Robert Barrell and Peter Busa joined with a group of younger artists to exhibit paintings based on the concept they called Indian Space. Kenneth Lawrence Beaudoin, a poet-painter, had opened Gallery Neuf on 79th Street in Manhattan. In April–May 1946, he presented an exhibition, entitled "Semeiology," or "8 and a Totem Pole," which included eight artists: Robert Barrell, Gertrude Barrer, Peter Busa, Oscar Collier, Howard Daum, Ruth Lewin, Lillian Orloff, and Robert Smith. Beaudoin also showed a small Haida housepole—the symbol of overarching influence in the work exhibited by this group. Beaudoin himself was quick to underscore the connection: "Between pre-Columbian Peru; between the Alaska . . . of 1832, there is an uncharted continent of experience across which even dreams have hesitated. Between the Haida totem and its creator; between the Chrysler building and its creator there is an uncrossed ocean of difference and a bond . . . ."[9] This new vocabulary liberated artists from European modernism and tied them more closely to their American roots, an appealing possibility in a period of postwar nationalism.

## Indian Space Painters

### Steve Wheeler

The painter Steve Wheeler did not participate in the Gallery Neuf exhibition. Moreover, he did not consider himself an affiliate of the group of painters who were showing in the exhibition. Yet Wheeler, by virtue of both his person and his work, acted as a catalyst in the development of interest in Northwest Coast Indian art. When the critic Clement Greenberg, best known for his advocacy of Abstract Expressionism, addressed the work of the Gallery Neuf painters, he referred to Wheeler's painting as the starting point: "The Gallery Neuf is the center of a tendency quite different . . . . This tendency, first made known by Steve Wheeler, takes its point of departure from Northwestern Indian art—more specifically that of the Haidas."[10]

Wheeler, like the other artists, had taken an interest in "primitive" art via his study of the modern masters, particularly Picasso and Paul Klee. He had taken classes at both the Art Students League (1932–36) and with Hans Hofmann (1936–38). His time as a student of Hofmann's predisposed him to the idea that the picture plane was two-dimensional and, perhaps more important, that a painting's structure was parallel to, rather than imitative of, the forms and structure of nature itself.

After his student days, Wheeler took a long walk through the history of modern art, moving in and then out of Impressionism, Post-Impressionism, and Cubism. His forays led him to the primacy of line in his compositions, which along with a thematic whimsicality was to prove his art's signature. The art of Paul Klee influenced him strongly, and like Klee, Wheeler saw abstraction as a means toward a statement rather than as an end in itself. Wheeler wrote in 1947, "Although respecting the contribution of abstractionism to the art of painting, I do not share its basic point of view. It is impossible for me to see things simply in terms of plane, rhythm, negative and positive space, tensions, etc., etc. Perhaps that is why I feel the movement of form in a different way . . . . My forms are a representation of things in the process of generation, corruption, and alteration. In this they are guided by my passions."[11]

This kind of painting, then, was not unaligned with the emotional intensities and symbolism of other young artists like Jackson Pollock, who would later become Abstract Expressionists. But the sources of inspiration were used differently. The work of Wheeler and other Indian Space painters paralleled both the substance and form of the art from indigenous American cultures, so that their interest in abstraction tended to intensify the two-dimensional space of their art.

Wheeler's painting, *Laughing Boy Rolling*, recalls the great moderns, and yet the individual and collective eyes of the work also look back, literally and metaphorically, on the eyes of a Chilkat ceremonial blanket from the Northwest coast. Much of Wheeler's imagery—his outstretched tongues, devouring mouths, and body orifices, as well as his emphasis on the "process of generation"—can be viewed in the context of Northwest Coast iconographical motifs and metamorphosis. The two-dimensional representations of nature developed in Northwest Coast Indian art and the art of ancient Mexico and Peru would also explain the flattened picture plane of the painting(s). With this new use of space, Wheeler extended the innovations of Picasso.

### Robert Barrell

Robert Barrell recalls that in the early 1940s, he and Steve Wheeler worked closely together, much like Braque and Picasso.[12] They were frequent visitors to the American Museum of Natural History, where Barrell worked on a WPA project at the Hayden Planetarium in 1940, and they spent time observing the totems of the Northwest Coast in the American Indian Hall. Like Wheeler, Barrell studied at the Art Students League (1934–38) and attended the classes of Hans Hofmann, although he did not officially enroll. As early as 1940, his work showed Native American influence: *The Hunters*, a scale model he did as a WPA/FAP mural proposal, was aboriginal in both its theme and its flat, schematic images. This small sketch represents one of Barrell's earliest attempts to transform Cubist structure into something new.

Barrell studied Native American art extensively. He read the work of noted anthropologists such as Franz Boas and John Swanton, and like several of the other artists in the group (Busa, Barnet, and Wheeler), he bought copies of the *Annual Report* published by the Bureau of American Ethnology.[13] His acquisitions of Native American art seem to have influenced both the colors and forms he used. For example, in 1941 Barrell produced a series of tempera paintings, including *The Meeting* and *Seated Woman*, which were completely given to two-dimensional space. And he described his use of color in a work like *The Meeting*, with its intense purple, orange and chartreuse, as a direct attempt to capture the iridescence of Native American beadwork.[14] He even carved a small totem pole, *Bird Feeding Young*.

As time went on, Barrell's interest deepened. He adapted what he called the classic line used by Northwest Coast Indian artists to construct his forms and outline his images.[15] In a 1942 painting, *The Hunter*, the complex imagery is defined by sinuous lines, and the shapes reject the illusion of three-dimensional depth. The flattened forms owe a great deal to a design sense in which forms are articulated within, rather than elaborated upon, each other. Such an emphasis sees art as surface, as two-dimensional. Moreover, the colors—black, red, and blue—characterize what are called the primary, secondary, and tertiary formlines of Northwest Coast art. This Native American influence was to last another half-dozen years, until 1948, when Barrell, claiming that his work was becoming too abstract, "gave up Indian Space to reclaim the image."[16]

### Peter Busa

Peter Busa met Steve Wheeler, Robert Barrell, and

Will Barnet at the Art Students League, where he studied from 1933 to 1936. Like Wheeler, Busa left the League to enroll in Hans Hofmann's school. During visits to Gallatin's Gallery of Living Art with Hofmann and his other students, Busa was impressed by Picasso's painting, *The Three Musicians* (1921). He noted that in the late 1930s, "I tried to more or less re-do the inventions of Picasso in terms of my interest in primitive art."[17] In 1938–39, Busa frequented the American Museum of Natural History with Wheeler and Barrell. Their visits preceded by some time the general public's appreciation of Native American art, the works they studied were often hidden away or covered with dust. As Peter Busa recalled, "Many of the objects that were considered just curios are now . . . thought of on the same levels as examples of Western culture."[18]

In addition to the imagery of Native American cultures, Busa's art also exemplified other influences, other friendships. His association with Arshile Gorky played a major role in his early development. Gorky was instrumental in showing Busa the potential of an art not bound to the large categories of Western painting, claiming, for example, a commercial store sign to be "the most authentic work of art in New York City."[19] Gorky also introduced Busa to Stuart Davis, whose work further encouraged Busa to emphasize a two-dimensional approach to painting.

Balancing the influence of these outstanding modernists was the influence on Busa of writers on "primitive" art. "Primitive Art and Picasso," written by Gorky's friend, the Russian emigré artist and writer John Graham, had an impact, as did the monograph *Primitivism in Modern Art*, written by the art historian Robert Goldwater. (The book was first published in 1938.) But it was Franz Boas's book, *Primitive Art*, which most strongly suggested the importance of "primitive" forms to Peter Busa. An anthropologist, Boas looked closely at the formal elements and symbolism of the art of the Northwest Coast, and Busa read the book carefully in the late 1930s.[20] Undoubtedly it was important to fellow artists Steve Wheeler and Robert Barrell as well. In *Primitive Art*, Boas discussed the art of many early cultures, presenting a model for artists like Busa to consider these cultures collectively. Comparing objects from several cultures, Boas's first chapter included reproductions of a Northwest Coast painted box, a Zuni jar, a New Guinea house, and several Peruvian textiles.[21]

In 1940, Peter Busa sketched out *Children's Game*, a proposal for a WPA/FAP project; it was a mural to be placed in the children's ward of the Hospital for Chronic Diseases in New York. This painting portrayed two figures, which had been flattened and transformed into symbolic representations of children. His sources can be found in the images of Peruvian textiles and Northwest Coast art that he studied in Boas's *Primitive Art*. These flat, symbolic images reflect the unity of design and meaning as well as the elimination of background space that so strikingly occurs in the Native American art of the Northwest coast of North America and in Peru. Although the mural was never executed—the hospital's doctors thought Busa's distortions made the children appear mentally handicapped—Busa had successfully transformed disparate influences into a unified work of art.

In 1941, during the last stage of the WPA/FAP, Busa joined Jackson Pollock, William Baziotes, Gerome Kamrowski, and Robert Motherwell to experiment with Surrealist automatism, becoming one of the first American artists to work with this technique. The force of a continuing line dominated Busa's exhibition at Peggy Guggenheim's gallery, Art of This Century, in 1946. The flowing lines of *Original Sin*, reproduced in the exhibition's catalog, characterize Busa's automatic approach and dramatically represent Adam and Eve with the serpent.

Busa later described his painting during this period as ". . . an unholy alliance between my formalistic beginnings and this free approach."[22] However, the two methods were reconciled in his work. Busa's automatic line paralleled his perception of the formline used by the Northwest Coast Indians, and his focus on myth and Surrealist transformation was also consistent with his understanding of Northwest Coast art.

By 1948, in *Children's Hour*, Busa had rejected automatism and returned to more simplified graphic forms. His large, running figure with a cat occupies the entire canvas, leaving no room for background space. Busa uses Indian Space in conjunction with several motifs—the slit eye and mouth, the rectangular nose, and the pronged fingers—adapted from Peruvian textile designs. The head of this giant figure also recalls the chiseled features of Picasso's neoclassic compositions from the early twenties; and the bold forms within a narrow format, the totems of the Northwest Coast.



### Will Barnet

Best known for his later, highly graphic paintings composed of simple forms, Will Barnet was nevertheless strongly influenced by Native American sources in his paintings of the late 1940s and 1950s. He had been friends with Peter Busa since their days at the Art Students League in the early 1930s, but he was not part of the group exhibit at Gallery Neuf in 1946 (overt signs of Northwest Coast influence were to come later).

In the early 1940s, Barnet had other influences to work through, in particular that of Matisse, and it was not until 1947, when he painted *Strange Bird* (Bird Chasing Cat), that he incorporated the principles of Indian Space. This painting, shown at the Bertha Schaefer Gallery in the following year, exemplifies these artists' interest in Native American art for form and image making rather than for thematic and cultural reasons. Barnet, like other painters, believed that the use of Indian Space enabled the contemporary artist to take the ". . . next step past Cubism."[23]

Barnet also played an important role as an advocate of Indian Space at the Art Students League, where he taught from 1936 until the late 1970s. He took his students to the American Museum of Natural History and the Museum of the American Indian, pointing out to them how the Northwest Coast Indians "split objects and flattened them out."[24]

In *Self-Portrait*, a work painted in 1953,[25] Barnet dramatically combined the structure of Synthetic Cubism with Native American space. In his shorthand for the figure, a rectangle outlined in red represents the head of the artist. He combined a bottom-up question mark inside the rectangle (a symbol of his yet unknown development) and a Cubist pipe complete with simultaneous top view and profile; the space of the painting, however, was Native American. Barnet had eliminated the distinction between figure and ground, and some of the patterning of the painting reveals his conscious use of Native American motifs.

Barnet's *Fourth of July* (1954), presents an even clearer integration of structure and symbol; three figures stand vertically in a field of positive space. A band of red moves through the image, tying the three figures into one continuous configuration. Using triangles to indicate the figures' vertebrae, Barnet also incorporated the X-ray imagery used by the Northwest Coast Indians to symbolize regeneration. Barnet continued to work with flat, simplified shapes throughout the 1950s. Although his later work became more representational, he maintained an allegiance to two-dimensional space.

## New Faces

The shared friendship of Steve Wheeler, Robert Barrell, and Peter Busa enabled them to develop a pictorial language based on Native American sources. Their paintings of the late 1930s and early 1940s carried Cubism's flat pictorial plane one step further. Yet their grouping was informal, intuitive—they never considered themselves in any way a formal alliance. But then a younger group of artists did come together, galvanized by their common exhibition, "8 and a Totem Pole," at the Gallery Neuf in 1946 and the publishing of the magazine *Iconograph*, which set forth their aesthetic notions. These artists (Howard Daum, Gertrude Barrer, Ruth Lewin, and Helen DeMott) were not a discrete entity from the older painters—both Robert Barrell and Peter Busa exhibited in the "8 and a Totem Pole" show—their friendship also seems to have been closely focused on an aesthetic agreement concerning the meaning of Indian Space.

### Howard Daum

Howard Daum was an immigrant to Canada from Poland in 1930. After some art study in Canada, he arrived in New York in 1938, where he studied with Vaclav Vytlacil and Will Barnet at the Art Students League in the early 1940s. He too was a student of Hans Hofmann (in 1944–45), and like the others, he was preoccupied with the elimination of background space, which he felt the Cubists had not fully rejected.

Picasso's influence is evident in Daum's work. *Crucifixion* (1946) is based on Picasso's painting *The Dance* (1925), which Daum admired. Daum transformed the spirited movement in Picasso's painting of three dancing figures into religious frenzy in his own. With raised arms and crossed legs, the

figure of Christ in *Crucifixion* repeats the position of the central figure of *The Dance*. Picasso's three figures move within a shallow space defined by a ground plane, and the decorative elements of the room clearly fill the space behind the dancers. In contrast, Daum's three figures occupy a space without background and without any indication of a ground plane. Daum also incorporated the X-ray image to indicate the internal structure of his figures.

Native American sources enabled Daum to move beyond Picasso by freeing his painting of any illusion of depth. In a work like *Untitled (#264)* c. 1946, Daum's flowing black line, used to unify the composition, suggests the formline seen in the art of the Northwest Coast. In this painting, the mazelike line functions simultaneously as line and form, obliterating the distinction between object and background. As Daum explained, "The allover basis of this style deals with *negative* shapes and *positive* shapes as one."[7]

This is not to say that Daum or the other artists were pursuing a specifically Northwest Coast Indian aesthetic. In Daum's case, his teacher and friend Vaclav Vytlacil encouraged his use of more highly abstract form. The tension between Daum's regard for Indian Space and his sophisticated training in the school of abstraction presaged a move toward symbolism in the work of these painters as a whole.

### Gertrude Barrer

The art of Gertrude Barrer, while abstract, derives from actual forms found in nature; she has recently asserted that "everything I have painted I have either sensed or seen."[27] Barrer, too, found that the possibilities of Indian Space provided an alternative to the structure of Cubism. A student of both music and art, Barrer enrolled at the Art Students League, where she took classes with Will Barnet. Her husband, Oscar Collier, was another participant in the Indian Space group, and they both exhibited in "8 and a Totem Pole" at Gallery Neuf and worked on the magazine *Iconograph*. However, Collier later became totally involved with publishing and stopped painting.

A year after the "8 and a Totem Pole" show, Barrer was given a one-person exhibition at the Gallery Neuf. Reviewing the exhibition in *The Nation*, Clement Greenberg both praised her art and noted its Native American influence: "Gertrude Barrer is one of the most promising painters in the country. . . . [She] succeeds in assimilating Klee and Haida art to her own personality. In Miss Barrer's hands Klee's influence serves admirably to expand the absolutely flat and formal patterns of Northwest Indian art and render them permeable to contemporary feeling."[28] Yet again the modern vision is defined through juxtaposition and melding—Barrer's art works because it successfully handles the old and the new.

In his review, Greenberg was referring to paintings like *Untitled I* and *Untitled II*, both painted in 1946. The former's structure depends on a continuous, encompassing line analogous to the Northwest Coast formline. Both make use of a square format, and both employ transparent washes of color to unify and lighten the composition. *Untitled II*, less tightly structured, uses less prominent, lighter connecting lines. The washes of color break up the surface of the painting, suggesting waves, while at the center a horizontal female figure with the head of a fish swims through the marine forms.

The imagery for Barrer's painting *Intruder in the City* (1946) was inspired by a "night vision."[29] This use of a dream state at once recalls the automatic art of the Surrealists and the dream designs of the North American Indians, who believed that the new patterns appeared to their creator in a dream.[30] Despite her affinity with the art of the Northwest Coast, Barrer was moving toward a more expressive intensity of movement and painterly surface. By 1949, her painting *Apocalypse: War and the Machine* seems more closely related to Abstract Expressionism.

### Ruth Lewin

Ruth Lewin, another participant in the "8 and a Totem Pole" show, studied printmaking at the Art Students League with Will Barnet in the early 1940s. In 1948 she married the artist Charles Seliger, whom she had met at the Gallery Neuf. But Beaudoin's closing of Gallery Neuf, along with the end of the publication of *Iconograph*, resulted in the group's drifting apart. Lewin herself stopped painting until the last year of her life, 1974–75, when she completed 25 small acrylic works of city rooftops. Painted from photographs, these paintings were worked in a totally different style.

Will Barnet, *Fourth of July*, 1954. Oil on canvas, 52" x 38". Courtesy Terry Dintenfass Gallery.

Lewin was primarily a printmaker, but she exhibited three paintings in "8 and a Totem Pole." Her art possesses a strong formal instinct as well as the two-dimensional use of space. As monitor of Will Barnet's classes at the Art Students League, she absorbed his lessons on the principles of Cubism in addition to his enthusiasm for the tribal art of the Northwest coast.

The bold, decorative patterns and reflected female figure in Lewin's *Conversation* derive from Picasso's *Girl Before a Mirror* (1932). In her print, Lewin did not completely establish an allover configuration; the figure and its reflection remain distinct from the patterned wall, and the cup on the floor indicates the shallow space characteristic of Synthetic Cubism.

In a woodcut like *Double Portrait*, however, the artist relied on Indian Space as overall structure, defining a light-and-dark figure by means of a continuous linear pattern. The head of the female figure is echoed by another female head, whose eyes, nose, and mouth are transformed out of the breast and stomach of the first. Such a metamorphosis commonly occurs in the art of the Northwest Coast Indians, in which faces often appear in the bellies of forms. It is an illustration of the theme of incorporation commonly seen in such art.

The organic forms of Lewin's tempera work *Untitled* (c. 1945) also depict two female figures. In this painting—perhaps because of its medium—the forms are loosely constructed. The incorporating lines flow freely, creating a more expressionistic surface. Complex patterns seem to constantly shift the emphasis from one reading of the forms to another. Stark black-and-white contrast is accented with gold, adding elegance to this intricate composition.

### Helen DeMott

Helen DeMott was not an exhibitor in "8 and a Totem Pole"; however, her 1946 painting, *The Beach*, was reproduced in the first issue of *Iconograph*. Around the same time, the artist encountered the concept of Indian Space in discussions with Gertrude Barrer and Oscar Collier.[31] DeMott had been a student at the Art Students League beginning in 1941, and as an active member she became assistant editor of the school's journal, *The League*. There she edited an issue containing a piece on Robert Barrell by Oscar Collier and a discussion of the importance of the art of early cultures on modern painting by Cameron Booth. (Both pieces appeared in *The League* winter issue of 1944–45.) Booth, who taught at the League, emphasized the potential of the American Museum of Natural History: "At the New York Museum of Natural History are four floors containing stimulating art . . . , largely the work of primitive people. The forms have vitality, simplification without loss of character, and unerring truth to materials. Ideas and emotions are expressed through abstract and representational terms."[32] Again and again, the art of primary cultures was seen as an instinctive guideline for the formal development of abstract art.

As important as the tribal art of the Northwest coast was, the influence of early Central and South American cultures also played a part in these artists' aesthetic. Many of them used cat (puma), bird, and fish images in their work; these images dominate ancient Peruvian art. Peter Busa's attraction to this art has been described, and DeMott shared this interest. Her 1946 drawing, *Drawing #12*, includes a range of symbols found on Peruvian pottery and textiles, which could be seen in the South American Hall of the Museum of Natural History. Interest in the museum's collections was high, for the Museum of Natural History encouraged artists and other students of design to view their examples of prehistoric Peruvian art: as early as 1929, some 300 students and artists were visiting these collections each month. The museum also published *Peruvian Art: A Help for Students of Design*, a guide specifically intended for artists and students.[33]

In *The Beach* (1946), DeMott's symbols are less specific. But as with the work of the other artists, lines move through the painting to structure and unify the flattened space. At the same time, the painter created a personal vocabulary of pictographs inspired by the designs of the tribes of the Great Plains. Paintings like *The Fleet's In* (1949), contain horizontal expanses peopled by pictographic forms. DeMott has continued to paint the sea; in her later work, she developed a geometric configuration to represent water-wave motion.

### Conclusions

DeMott has said that in the 1940s she considered the possibilities of Indian Space painting both "liberating and connecting."[34] This new vocabulary provided artists with a path away from the powerful, but European, art of the great modernists. Most of the artists in this exhibition—Steve Wheeler, Robert Barrell, Peter Busa, Will Barnet, Howard Daum, and Ruth Lewin—were heavily influenced by Picasso; their new aesthetic, the notion of Indian Space, was an attempt to challenge Picasso's art with painting derived from indigenous American sources. The artists, primarily the older group who studied at the Art Students League in the 1930s, were attempting to equal or even surpass Picasso's Cubism by developing a new pictorial space. This new perception of space was inspired by Native American art from both Americas.

For Indian Space painters, the tribal art of the Northwest Coast became their major focus. The flattening of the picture plane, fusing positive and negative space, along with the use of symbol, myth, and the process of metamorphosis, became the visual signature of the artists. Their concept of space was both adjacent to, and part of, the larger painting movement that would become Abstract Expressionism. Indeed, their focus is being found to have occupied a more central position than previously acknowledged—the art of Jackson Pollock and other Abstract Expressionists is now considered to be influenced by Native American configuration.

As early as 1939, when Robert Coates reviewed the AAA annual exhibition for the *New Yorker*, he noted that the artists in this group had tried to eliminate references to nature in favor of more geometric forms. Coates was prescient in his response to this European-derived painting, writing, "It seems to me to be a move in the wrong direction; indeed, it is precisely in the development of symbols, and the exploration of their capacity to express emotion, that the true field of abstract painting lies. . . . I can't help feeling that the American abstractionists need, above everything else, to develop some such set of symbols equally native in atmosphere, to serve as a point of departure for their work."[35] These comments pointed out the path the Indian Space painters were to take, both as technique and metaphysic.

The Indian Space artists, then, were attempting to work out an indigenous American aesthetic just prior to and then concomitant with Abstract Expressionism. They served to bridge the gap between the purely abstract bent of the AAA and the later, more emotional style of Abstract Expressionism. Their interests pointed to the eventual assimilation of the principles of the European masters within the context of the American-derived Indian Space. Yet their art is not so much a by-way as a part of the main avenue that led to the great American painting of the late 1940s and 1950s.

### *Notes*

1. A. E. Gallatin Collection, "*Museum of Living Art*" (Philadelphia: Philadelphia Museum of Art, 1954), 54, 144.
2. See Ann Gibson's pioneering article, which documented this group: Ann Gibson, "Painting Outside the Paradigm: Indian Space," *Arts Magazine* 57 (February 1983): 82–104.
3. Several members of the group agree Howard Daum provided the name "Indian Space" in 1940.
4. Susan C. Larsen, *The American Abstract Artists Group: A History and Evaluation of Its Impact Upon American Art* (Ann Arbor: University Microfilms, 1973), 429–35.
5. Holger Cahill, "American Sources of Modern Art," *American Sources of Modern Art* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1933; New York: The Museum of Modern Art, Arno Press, 1969), 7.
6. Peter Busa, conversation with the author, Southampton, New York, Summer 1978. This book was still in his collection in 1978.
7. Steve Wheeler, interview with Ann Gibson, New York City, 11 March 1981.
8. Will Barnet, conversation with the author, New York City, 6 September 1991.
9. Kenneth Lawrence Beaudoin, "Eight and a Totempole," exhibition announcement (New York: Gallery Neuf, April 14–May 8, 1946). From the papers of Peter Busa.
10. Clement Greenberg, "Review of Exhibitions of the Jane Street Group and Rufino Tamayo," in John O'Brien, ed., *Clement Greenberg: The Collected Essays and Criticism*, Vol. 2 (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1986), 132. (Originally appeared in *The Nation*, March 8, 1947.)
11. Steve Wheeler, "A Close-Up of 'Hello Soviet,'" *The League* (Winter 1947): 14–15.
12. Robert Barrell, interview with the author, New York City, 10 June 1991.
13. Ibid.
14. Ibid.
15. The classic list, or formline, is defined in this catalogue in Allen Wardwell's essay, "Northwest Coast Indian Art."
16. Robert Barrell, interview with the author, 10 June 1991.
17. Peter Busa, interview with Dorothy Seckler, Provincetown, Massachusetts, 5 September 1965, p. 16. Unedited transcript of interview for the Archives of American Art.
18. Ibid., 14.
19. Ibid., 3.
20. Peter Busa, conversation with the author, Minneapolis, Minnesota, 1970. Busa continued to study Boas's *Primitive Art* in the 1970s.
21. Franz Boas, *Primitive Art* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1928; New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1955), 18, 19, 38 and Plate III.
22. Busa, interview with Dorothy Seckler, p. 11.
23. Will Barnet, interview with the author, New York City, 8 April 1991.
24. Ibid.
25. This work was exhibited and dated 1953 in the exhibition catalog "Selected Works of Will Barnet, 15 Years," 29 September to 18 October 1958, Oscar Kramer Gallery, New York. Frick Artists File, New York Public Library, NFB116.
26. Howard Daum papers, undated, Daum estate.
27. Gertrude Barrer, interview with the author, Roxbury, Connecticut, 25 June 1991.
28. Clement Greenberg, "Review of Exhibitions of the Jane Street Group

[illegible] Ralph [illegible] 1[illegible]
[illegible] 1991
[illegible] Jun[illegible]
[illegible] 4

[illegible] Mead, [illegible] 4 *He*[illegible] Lincoln Square, No. 46, Fifth Ave. (New York: The American Museum of Natural History, December 1929), 3
[illegible] DeMott, [illegible] the author, 20 J[illegible] 1991
[illegible] Robert Coates, "The Art Gallery: Abstract[illegible] and What Abo[illegible] Them?" *New Yorker* (March [illegible]939) [illegible]

[illegible] (Hero), 1942. Watercolor and ink on paper, 13" x 11". Private Collection

Steve Wheeler, *Laughing Boy Rolling*, 1946. Oil on canvas, 36" x 45". Collection The Whitney Museum of American Art

Robert Barrell *The Hunter*, 1942, Oil on board 15⅛" × 19⅜". Collection Walter Miles

Peter Busa *Children's Game* (WPA Mural Sketch), 1940, Casein 20" × 25". Collection Christopher Busa

Courtesy Terry Dintenfass Gallery

Howard Daum. *Untitled (#264)*, c. 1946. Oil on canvas, 24" x 20". Courtesy Snyder Fine Art

1946. O on 15 14 Coll on of the Artist and Aurora Russell

Ruth Lew 1945 Tempera on ge so panel 16 12 Pri ate Collection

Helen DeMott, *The Beach*, 1946. Tempera on paper, 11" × 14". Collection of the Artist

Gertrude Barrer, *Untitled II*, 1946. Oil on canvas, 9" × 9". Collection of the Artist and Aurora Russell

Ruth Lewin, *Double Portrait*, 1943. Woodcut, 9⅛" x 7½". Private Collection.

Opposite page: Pair of Paddles, Alaska, Tlingit, Late 19th-early 20th century. Wood and paint, Length 37". Collection The Metropolitan Museum of Art, The Michael C. Rockefeller Memorial Collection. Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Robert W. Campbell, 1968.



## Northwest Coast Indian Art

*by Allen Wardwell*

Northwest Coast Indian art is one of the most distinctive expressions among the arts of indigenous peoples. Once known, it cannot be confused with any other style, and its strong graphic and sculptural qualities have intrigued artists, art historians, and anthropologists since their discovery by the outside world at the turn of the century.

The bold sculptures, relief carvings, and paintings were made for the social and spiritual ceremonies that were essential to the lives of the Native Americans who inhabited the coastal lands between Vancouver Island and the Alaskan panhandle on the west coast of North America. Here the sea and the land are rich in natural resources, and the people developed ingenious methods of fishing, hunting, weaving, and woodcarving to take full advantage of all the environment had to offer. Halibut and salmon, which could be caught and preserved with relative ease, are abundant, thus assuring adequate supplies of food throughout the year. Sea and land mammals and the forests themselves provided the raw materials for clothing, house construction, and art. The cultures that evolved here are known to have achieved the highest level of civilization among peoples who did not have the advantage of agriculture. Because the demands of survival were not particularly rigorous, there was considerable time available for the development of elaborate ceremonies and the manufacture of the rich paraphernalia that accompanied them.

The best-known examples of Northwest Coast art, of which the totem pole is one, are those that were made for display at feasts known as potlatches. These ceremonial festivals were given to enhance the status and add to the prerogatives of a chief and his family. Potlatches were held in the winter and lasted for several days. They might celebrate the coming of age of a chief's son, announce the acquisition of a new title, or repay another family for a feast previously held. Any potlatch included long speeches, chants, and the reenactment of myths relating to the host family's origin and its relationship to its clan totems. Dancing, singing, the giving of gifts, and the consumption of vast amounts of food were also important elements of these ceremonies.

Masks, headdresses, costumes, rattles, drums, and other objects were used for the performances. As they sat in the center of the large houses in which they were held, guests were surrounded by objects bearing the totemic symbols belonging to the host, so that they were constantly reminded of his wealth and greatness. Painted and relief-carved storage boxes, sculptured house posts, painted screens separating the chief's living quarters from the rest of the house, spoons, ladles, and other eating implements, and feast and oil dishes all bore representations of human and animal imagery symbolizing the clan totems. The wealthiest families could also erect totem poles in front of their houses, each of which symbolized important events in their histories, which related them to animal beings. Those in attendance were given gifts by their hosts but knew they were under an obligation to give even better things at feasts that were at least as elaborate. If they could not, they would suffer great loss of status.

In contrast to this art made for the display of fam-

ily crests, other forms were created for use by shamans in their seances when they sought to bring the aid of supernatural forces to the community. The shamans brought about the curing of illnesses, the defeat of enemies, the annual run of salmon, success in hunting, and other such essential events that could not be controlled by rational action. The animal and human forms that appear in this art represent the spirit helpers with whom the shaman had formed an alliance during his vigils in the wilderness. Masks, maskettes, rattles, ivory and bone amulets, clothing, wands, and dolls were displayed at shamanic performances to give tangible form to the spirits and supernatural powers that were being called upon. This type of art was especially important among the northern groups, that is, the Tsimshian, the Haida, and the Tlingit. Further to the south, shamans relied on their songs, chants, and the elements of their performances themselves rather than on objects.

In the south, among the Kwakiutl of Vancouver Island, a great amount of art was created for the Hamatsa Society, which served to initiate young men into adulthood. Previous to the ceremony, the initiates were kept in seclusion in the forest. There they encountered a powerful cannibal spirit who transformed them into wild, flesh-eating creatures. Upon their capture and return to the village, they were subject to ritual taming and purification. A series of costumed dances were held, which reenacted family stories and the ways in which family ancestors had descended from mythical beings. Huge bird masks decorated with dyed cedar bark strips representing monsters in the entourage of the cannibal spirit were worn in performances showing the taming of the novices. Other masks with mechanical parts that opened to reveal different faces within, those representing humans and animals. Headdresses, batons, rattles, feast dishes, and utensils were also made for the Hamatsa and other related ceremonies.

Given the dramatic contexts in which Northwest Coast art appears, it is, as would be expected, a bold and dynamic expression. There is a close relationship between two-dimensional design and sculptural form in this art. This affinity is brought about by the most pervasive feature of the style: the formline, so named and defined by Bill Holm in his now classic study, *Northwest Coast Indian Art: An Analysis of Form*. He describes it as

> . . . the characteristic swelling and diminishing linelike figure delineating design units. These formlines merge and divide to make a continuous flowing grid over the whole decorated area, establishing the principal forms of the design. . . . [They] rarely retain . . . the same width for any distance. Generally they swell in the center of a given design unit and diminish at the ends. The width of a formline usually changes with a major change of direction. . . . [They] are essentially curvilinear. The curves are gentle and sweeping, breaking suddenly into sharper semiangular curves and, immediately upon completing the necessary direction change . . . , straightening into a gentle curve again.

The formline is the element that gives such a fluid quality to all Northwest Coast art, whether in the form of three-dimensional sculpture, relief carving, painting, or weaving. Separate motifs representing such anatomic features as eyes, feet, claws, feathers, and tails of different animals are also important components.

In sculpture, the formline plays an important organizing role, but the placement of the various elements of design is not as standardized as is found in two-dimensional works. Between 1918 and 1936, three German scholars, Herman Haeberlin, Franz Boas, and Leonhard Adam, described the basic characteristics of Northwest Coast sculpture. They listed the following eight components:

- Stylization rather than realism.
- Schematic characterization through the exaggeration of certain anatomic features.
- Splitting of forms to cover the entire surface of an object.
- The dislocation of split details to other parts of the decorated surface.
- The representation of one creature in frontal view through the use of two confronting profiles.
- Symmetry, with some exceptions.
- The reduction of elements of monumental art to objects of small scale.
- The illogical transformation of details into new representations.

The second of these elements is especially noteworthy in the way it demonstrates close observation of nature and the depiction of animal forms in a fashion that approaches caricature. For example, a bear is represented with a broad face, nose, and lips, prominent teeth, and sharp claws. Species of birds such as the raven, hawk, eagle, and oystercatcher can be distinguished by the shape of their beaks. Beavers are shown with prominent incisors and broad, flat tails. Once such distinguishing features are known, many of the animals in Northwest Coast art can be readily identified.

However, not all examples of Northwest Coast art can be so easily interpreted. Some represent spirits encountered by shamans in their dreams and visions; others are supernatural monsters without counterparts in the natural world. In addition, as suggested by some of the principles set forth above, the art can be extremely stylized, with elements of design rearranged and dislocated in unnatural and illogical juxtapositions. In many cases more than one animal is represented in a single work. This is particularly true of much two-dimensional Northwest Coast art such as is found on the sides of boxes, on canoe prows, housefronts, and textiles.

Obviously, the rich system of art and iconography found on the Northwest Coast must have required a long period of development. Because it is made of wood, little has survived from prehistoric times. Some spectacular finds of ephemeral materials have nonetheless been made at certain wet sites, particularly Ozette on the Olympic Peninsula in Washington State. They show that the rudiments of this style were well established by at least the end of the fifteenth century. In addition, some artifacts of bone, ivory, and antler dating from the first millenium A.D. show formal relationships to expressions from the historic period. Objects thought to be associated with the practice of shamanism date from the same time, and shamanic symbolism can be found in many of the figures that appear in ancient petroglyphs that were carved all along the coast.

Regarding possible prototypes for this expression, there are many interesting parallels to be found in Asian art. Scholars have long been intrigued by similarities between Northwest Coast two-dimensional and relief designs and those that appear on the bronze vessels of Shang and Zhou Dynasty China, which were made between the 16th and 5th centuries B.C. Split imagery, the reduction of human and animal forms to their basic elements, the rearranging of them to fill design areas, and the use of a fluid, sinuous line (though not a formline) are all characteristic of Shang and Zhou decoration. Other stylistic connections to Asia have been made with the Sino-Siberian animal style of northern China and Northwest Coast animal imagery, and certain Siberian expressions, particularly those of the Amur, share a curvilinearity in their designs with those of the Coast. These strong affinities to Asian art styles could have been brought about through direct contact between populations on both sides of the Pacific in as yet unknown ways and times.

Whatever the antiquity and sources of this art, the coming of the outside world to the Northwest Coast in the late 18th century provided a brief stimulus to its creation. Availability of iron and exotic pigments increased the efficiency of both carvers and painters, and the trade of animal skins added sources of new wealth to families that were already rich. A century later, however, the native societies were in decline. The people had fallen victim to smallpox, tuberculosis, and alcoholism, and their cultures were subject to the laws and newly introduced religions of the white man. The potlatch was outlawed in Canada, and, along most parts of the coast, little ceremonial art of any kind was made. The principles of this art and design were gradually being forgotten, and the expression was threatened with extinction.

Fortunately, however, during the 1950s, the potlatch was legalized, and corresponding signs of a renaissance began to appear in the art. A handful of contemporary artists had begun to create new works by copying designs from early publications, from the jewelry still owned by native families, and from objects on display in museums. With the publication of Holm's *Analysis of Form* in 1965, a handbook describing the rules and standards of the art became available. It has been used by artists all along the coast as a basic reference for their creations since that time. Numerous recent exhibitions of traditional and contemporary Northwest Coast art and their attendant publications have provided additional sources of design, and several schools have been established to teach the carving techniques and formal components of the art.

These age-old canons of Northwest Coast art have thus been revived in new creations. The best examples are now being collected privately and by museums. Clearly this style was simply too vibrant, too bold, and too dramatic to die a slow and quiet death. Whether the art we now see has been made for traditional purposes or as a part of this heartening renewal, it will continue to inspire all those who experience it, as it did the artists who are the subject of this exhibition.

Wolf Visor Mask
Southern Alaska, Tlingit
c. 1825–1850
Wood, animal hide, abalone, red and black pigment,
6½" x 6" x 13½"
Private Collection

Oil Dish
Queen Charlotte Islands,
British Columbia, Haida
c. 1800-1825
Wood and shell, 6⅛" x 9⅛" x 11½"
Private Collection



## Indian Space: History and Iconography

*by Barbara Hollister*

### History

The decade surrounding World War II was a watershed in American art. During these years, the formative years of Abstract Expressionism, a group of artists known as the Indian Space Group participated in an intensive search to extend the language of form, sharing an aim of many others to find a human dimension within the language of abstraction.

Due to a dearth of artistic activity in Europe and a gradually increasing influx of many refugee artists, such as the Surrealists in 1940, the art world's center of gravity began to shift to New York, bringing with it a sudden confluence of new ideas that had a dramatic impact on a generation of developing artists. Many of these artists continued a dialogue, started by earlier 20th-century modernists, with art forms of primitive and archaic cultures. The Surrealists, for example, brought an interest in and knowledge of Native American art, and several important ethnological exhibitions of the art of Oceania and the Northwest Coast Indian held in the 1940s made this work accessible to the American public. Many American artists, looking to American roots for sources of inspiration, had already discovered in the art of Native Americans a powerful influence and counterbalance to European culture. The Indian Space artists found in Northwest Coast ideographic art the basis of a pictorial language in which image, symbol, and myth coalesced, functioning simultaneously as art form, historical narrative, and religious icon. They were thus engaged in one of the seminal issues of early abstraction: the merging of language and image.

It was Howard Daum, one of the younger artists of the group, who coined the term "Indian Space." This was to prove a controversial label; other adherents of the movement preferred the term "Semeiology" (referring to its exploration of the language of symbols). The history of the movement, which lasted from the late 1930s through the late 1940s, can be divided into two phases, each associated with a different set of artists. The first formulated the ideas, while the second disseminated them through *Iconograph*, one of the first artist-run periodicals. Members of both groups participated in a significant 1946 exhibition, "8 and a Totem Pole."

The Art Students League, with which all these artists were associated, provided a cosmopolitan and democratic atmosphere, in which old guard, avant-garde, and European emigré artists mingled and argued, notably in the League cafeteria, which took on the ambiance of a Paris café. The principles of Native American art were widely discussed there, and it was in this fertile intellectual environment that the Indian Space movement had its origins.

Steve Wheeler, Peter Busa, Robert Barrell, and Will Barnet were students at the League in the mid 1930s. Although they shared an emphasis on formal approaches, their respective contributions to the movement differed. Wheeler developed the main principles. Busa had close ties with the Surrealists (in 1946 he was shown by Peggy Guggenheim, who exhibited the Surrealists). Barrell immersed himself in Native American Indian culture and art. He collected all the volumes of the Smithsonian's *Annual Report of the Bureau of American Ethnology*, an important source publication for other Indian Space artists. Will Barnet, a prominent teacher at the League from 1936 through the 1970s, was a major proponent of Native American art, and his classes were to influence many nascent artists, among them Howard Daum, Gertrude Barrer, Ruth Lewin, and Oscar Collier of the later *Iconograph* group. Barnet brought his students to see exhibitions of Native American art at the Museum of Natural History (the Heye Foundation). Starting in the late 1940s, his own work would assimilate these artistic principles as well, emphasizing spatial relationships that were all-positive.

After Wheeler, Busa and Barrell left the League in the late 1930s, they remained close friends, attending Hans Hofmann's school on 8th Street, working on the Works Project Administration, and going to art exhibitions together. In an accelerated search for a new direction in their work, they absorbed the influences of Klee, biomorphism through Miró, and other modernist traditions; by 1940, their paintings were emphasizing flatness and allover design. They were developing a new concept of space

in which the distinction between foreground and background was eliminated, creating all-positive space. Although these were features of Northwest Coast Indian as well as Peruvian and Oceanic art, Wheeler emphasized that they were universal ideas that he only later saw confirmed in primitive art forms. He never exhibited with the Indian Space Group or considered himself part of it. Even so, art critic Clement Greenberg wrote in *The Nation* in 1947 that "this tendency [which] takes its point of departure from Northwestern Indian art [was] first made known by Steve Wheeler."[1]

Howard Daum formed a bridge between the artists of the first group and those of the second, who studied at the Art Students League in the 1940s. He generously shared his ideas with the younger artists Barrer, Collier, Lewin, and Helen DeMott and introduced Barrer and Collier to Robert Barrell. Collier studied for a time with Barrell at his 14th Street studio. In the spring of 1946 Barrer and Collier, together with their writer friend Kenneth Beaudoin, started *Iconograph*. Focusing on issues of language and symbol, as well as North American Indian culture, the magazine served as a forum for new ideas in the arts. With Beaudoin as editor, Collier as associate editor, and Barrer as art editor, five issues and two supplements were published, the last appearing in the fall of 1947. A subsequent issue was published by Collier alone.

**Iconographic Sources**

Barnett Newman described the ideographic image made by the Northwest Coast Indians as a "shape [that] was a living thing, a vehicle for an abstract thought-complex."[2] The artists of the Indian Space Group saw in these inventive two-dimensional symbolic forms, which predated written language, a way of rediscovering modes of thinking and perceiving long lost to Western culture.

The Northwest Coast Indians emphasized the essential unity of all things, seen and unseen. Through their intense awareness of animals, believed to embody the magical sources of nature, they selected their most characteristic movements and habits, distilling them into symbolic representations that conveyed their very essence. In this way the Indians affirmed their identity with the physical and spiritual world.

Similarly, the Indian Space artists found within the symbol a means of conveying the essential reality underlying the world of appearance. Often they used their immediate surroundings as the starting point for their work, as Howard Daum does in many paintings of the urban landscape of Union Square. According to Helen DeMott, "The landscape is tied to our identity. A recognition of place and the innate desire to record its physical existence is a way of affirming our own. [It] ties us to locale and ultimately to history and myth."[3]

Peter Busa
*Wall Construction*, 1942
Painted wood, cloth and teacups 94⅛" x 27¾" x 6"
Private Collection

The Indian Space artists saw in the metamorphic power of tribal art a way of fusing the formalism of Cubism with the inner vision of Surrealism. An important feature of the art of the Northwest Coast is "the mixing in one space of two or more images that must be seen from different vantage points." Indian art "serves as a means for expressing . . . connections between people and animals." For example, "a shaman appears as a polar bear . . . or a woman turns into a walrus."[4] The theme of metamorphosis is central to Northwest Coast culture.

Many of the Indian Space artists adapted some of these pictorial methods, transforming personal themes into an iconography that expressed a vision of the modern world's ambiguities and complexities. By condensing an object to its essential and permanent features, and by separating and rearranging them in a process described by anthropologist Franz Boas,[5] they arrived at a new order and meaning.

The artists constructed elaborate constellations of forms within forms in which positive and negative space (foreground and background) are of equal importance, creating kaleidoscopically interchangeable images. Just as their compositions have no single point of focus, so the content conveys multiple and ambiguous meanings. Wheeler and Barrell, for example, distort and fragment forms so that there are scarcely any recognizable points of reference. There are, however, narrative elements in their paintings, although much of the interpretation is left to the viewer. Barrell often uses literary themes, such as Don Quixote, or scenarios from daily life. Wheeler incorporates recurrent motifs, such as grimacing masklike images and other comic and grotesque features, transforming themes of popular culture into a "record of life as a whole."[6] For both artists, component parts come together into a multitude of visual puns.

Busa and Barnet have a more classical vision, as seen in Busa's totemic *Children's Hour*, and Barnet's *Fourth of July*, in both of which the images have been reduced to their most essential structures and rearranged and merged to create a larger, ideographic whole. Barnet's painting depicts the abstracted, emblematic forms of his three children, represented by such elements as their vertebrae.

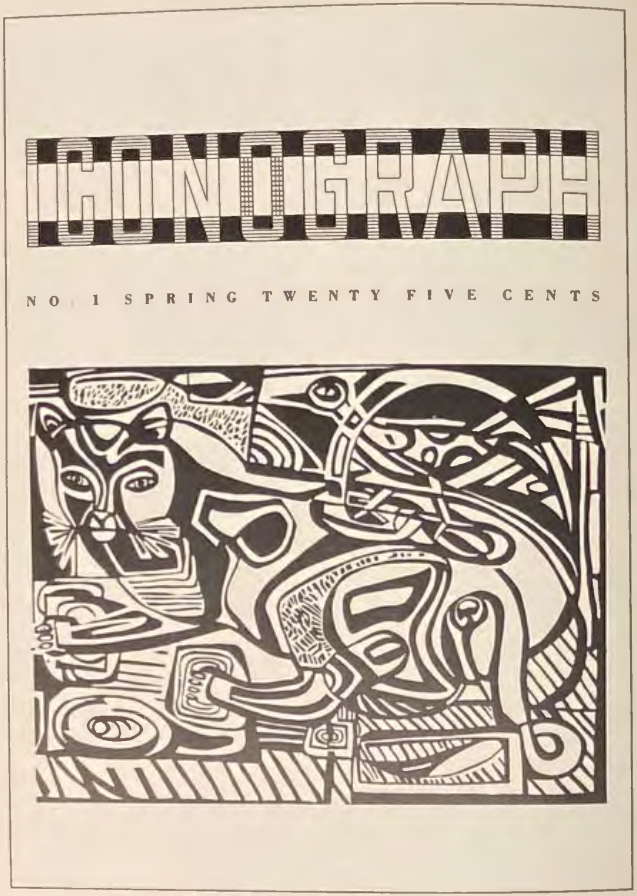
Although they lack the common belief system of tribal cultures, some of the artists have created their own pictorial cosmologies. Daum, though a rigorous formalist, reaches beyond pure abstraction: his pulsating distillations of rhythm, structure, and the "diamond light"[7] of New York reflect a larger universal and mystical vision. Gertrude Barrer's biomorphic landscapes are uncharted territories in which inner states of mind are transformed into intimate yet epic "universes of structure."[8]

Several Indian Space artists used automatism—moving the brush without conscious will—to charge "the known with the new life through . . . metamorphosis."[9] In 1941 Busa was among the first American painters to experiment with this technique, employed also by both Daum and DeMott, who terms it the "self-propelling line."[10] Although Wheeler does not describe automatism, for him too the line is of primary importance; it is "continually creating itself" and has the "immediacy of consciousness."[11]

The art of the Indian Space movement encompassed many important points of departure for the development of a new pictorial language. Ultimately this language was assimilated and then eclipsed by the ascending movement of Abstract Expressionism. During the pivotal period when American art was finding its voice, the Indian Space painters created a new iconography by transforming the familiar identity of things into a complex, multileveled vision—at once idiosyncratic and universal, of the moment and timeless.

*Notes*

1. Clement Greenberg, "Review of Exhibitions of the Jane Street Group and Rufino Tamayo." In John O'Brien, ed., *Clement Greenberg: The Collected Essays and Criticism*, Vol. 2 (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1986), 132.
2. Barnett Newman, in *The Ethnographic Picture* (New York: Betty Parsons Gallery, 1947), 2–3; quoted in *New York School: The First Generation*, ed. Maurice Tuchman (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1965), 22.
3. Helen DeMott, lecture at Art Students League, 15 April 1991.
4. S. A. Arutiunov and William W. Fitzhugh, "Prehistory of Siberia and the Bering Sea." In William W. Fitzhugh and Aaron Crowell, eds., *Crossroads of Continents: Cultures of Siberia and Alaska* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution, 1988), 327. This article refers to Eskimo culture; however, Alan Wardwell notes that there are parallels in the way the Northwest Coast Indians look at their relationship with the animal world.
5. Franz Boas, *Primitive Art* (New York: Dover, 1955).
6. Adam Gates, "Face to Face," in Steve Wheeler, *Hello Steve* (New York: Press Eight, 1947), n. p., 2nd page.
7. Howard Daum, personal notebooks, n. p.
8. Gertrude Barrer, interview with the author, Spring 1991.
9. Edward Rensuf, "On Certain Functions of Modern Painting," *Dyn* 2 (July/August 1942): 22. Quoted in Stephen Polcari, *Abstract Expressionism and the Modern Experience* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 24.
10. DeMott, op. cit.
11. Gates, 3rd page.




*Iconograph* Magazine with *Cat and Bird*, 1946 Woodcut by Howard Daum

## *Iconograph* Magazine

*by Ann Eden Gibson*

Some of the Indian Space artists joined forces in 1946 with the poet and sometimes-artist Kenneth Beaudoin to produce a magazine that would use Native American art as a springboard for contemporary art. Influenced by the descriptive linguistics that Franz Boas had used to approach the art and culture of Northwest Coast peoples in his important book, *Primitive Art*, they named their magazine *Iconograph*. The first issue contained an advertisement for an exhibition at Gallery Neuf, entitled "8 and a Totem Pole," that featured the work of some of the artists Beaudoin mentioned in an article, "This Is the Spring of 1946": Oscar Collier, Peter Busa, Robert Barrell, and Gertrude Barrer.[1]

There were various influences operating in New York's artistic circles to spur an interest among artists in the art of the Northwest Coast Indians. Perhaps most important was the immensely popular exhibition "Indian Art of the United States" at the Museum of Modern Art in 1941. The enthusiasm of Surrealist emigrés such as André Breton, Max Ernst, and Yves Tanguy for Kwakiutl and Haida artifacts played a part in the growing prominence of Northwest Coast art as an inspirational force, as did the great collections at the Brooklyn Museum and the Museum of Natural History (the Heye Foundation). Young American artists, already primed by European and American admiration for the formal sophistication of African and Oceanic art, now experienced a nationalistic desire to use as source material art indigenous to the Americas.[2]

There were some factors besides these, however, in the personal histories of Beaudoin and Collier that are also responsible for the remarkably homogeneous flavor of the art in *Iconograph*. Both artists were predisposed to appreciate the art of "primitive" cultures, though perhaps for different reasons. With the possible exception of Adolph Gottlieb, Beaudoin claimed Barnett Newman as his favorite artist.[3] By 1946 Gottlieb and Newman had been on the record for several years as enthusiastic promoters of what they saw as the parallels between primitive and modern art. Beaudoin recorded in *Iconograph* his fascination in 1931 with "primitive cosmology, primitive metaphysics," indicating an early enjoyment of the sense of the mysterious and primordial which was shared by so many Surrealists, including those whose work would be available in publications in New York, such as Wolfgang Paalen and Wifredo Lam, as well as by anthropologists like Claude Lévi-Strauss.[4] Collier's interest was more visual and immediate. He came to *Iconograph* remembering vividly the Pueblo pottery and Navajo blanket designs he had seen in Taos, New Mexico, in 1945. For Collier, Beaudoin wrote, Indian art possessed "a method of pictorial articulation more satisfying to himself than any he had used before."[5]

Gertrude Barrer and Oscar Collier's interest in Indian art was focused on the Northwest Coast at the time they studied at the Art Students League. This was the result of an enthusiastic introduction by fellow student Howard Daum to Robert Barrell, a painter who had been part of the Works Progress Administration at the Hayden Planetarium and had used his time there to make frequent forays to the adjoining Museum of Natural History. Collier and Barrer both studied briefly with Will Barnet at the Art Students League, as did some of the other contributors to *Iconograph*, including Ruth Lewin and Carl Ashby.[6] Barnet recalls many field trips with classes of the Art Students League to see the Northwest Coast art in the Museum of Natural History. They called what they were doing "Indian Space," he remembers, "a term coined by Howard Daum."[7] Barnet told his classes that there is

> a strength in the decisive way they [Northwest Coast Indians] arranged objects—so that there is not only a dynamic movement but a tremendous balance between forces—a sort of an equilibrium. It was a two-dimensional space—they had no negatives—they had all positives. That was what interested me. When the design was strong, I wanted to know what the motivation was. The power, the geometry in a form, tells you about the strength of the society. When the forms get weak, the society is decaying.[8]

Other artists, too, remembered making pilgrimages to these museums in search of inspiration. Sculptor Ruben Kadish recalled that during the thirties, he, Pollock, and Philip Guston, all of whom were from the West Coast, would often make trips

Reprinted with changes from *Issues in Abstract Expressionism: The Artist-Run Periodicals* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1990), 19–23, by permission from the author.

to the Museum of the American Indian "There's no question that there was a very great interest in more than looking at the things as ethnographic," he recalled He was sure that Clyfford Still, also from the West Coast, was aware from childhood of Northwest Coast art, although he is equally sure that Still intended his art to be "without a recognized source without precedent "[10] Peter Busa, whose work had been shown in "8 and a Totem Pole" and was reproduced in *Iconograph*, also remembered being very interested in Northwest Coast art but recalled that his introduction to it was through Franz Boas's *Primitive Art* [11] The origin of *Iconograph's* predilection for art inspired by that of cultures of the Northwest Coast Indians thus had many facets As Collier said, "It was in the air "[12] But it is certain that Barnet, Barrell, Busa, Daum, and Wheeler, who were all at the Art Students League at the same time in the thirties, had a strong influence on that bias [13]

The *Iconograph* group did not isolate itself from the rest of the New York art community Besides its connections with the Art Students League, *Iconograph's* staff and contributors were familiar with the collector Peggy Guggenheim and a number of artists associated with her gallery, Art of This Century Between 1943 and 1946 Guggenheim gave first one-man shows there to Pollock (1943), Hofmann (1944), Motherwell (1944), and Rothko (1945) [14] Beaudoin met her through Peter Busa, whose solo exhibition in March 1946 at Guggenheim's Art of This Century Gallery was advertised in *Iconograph* Guggenheim was attracted to Beaudoin, whose droll, cynical wit enlivened his gallery, which often became a salon after closing hours [15] Barrer recalls that Guggenheim came to the "8 and a Totem Pole" show and liked it so well that she persuaded the Museum of Modern Art's director, Alfred Barr, to see it [16]

By its fourth issue, *Iconograph* carried an ad for the Betty Parsons Gallery, whose tone and decor Collier preferred to the Art of This Century, and whose artists, he felt, were some of the most promising at that time [17] The stylistic similarity among the artists in *Iconograph* was at its most concentrated in the first issue Thereafter, this "Indian" appearance thinned out By the fifth and last issue (Fall 1947), which featured the work of Perle Fine and Mark Rothko, Henri Michaux, Gertrude Stein, and Ezra Pound, it had moved away from ethnography towards a somewhat more recognizably mainstream modernism (in the outlook of the magazine, if not in the work of all of *Iconograph's* artists)

In the early issues of *Iconograph* the predominating modes of art were either Northwest Coast-derived or a simplified, somewhat abstracted but painterly realism Later, a preponderance of works were composed of abstract but painterly organic forms These paintings and sculptures, like David Hare's *Red Knight*, Gertrude Barrer's *The Hunter*, and Jackson Pollock's *Search for a Symbol*, could be labeled as Abstract Surrealism or, in view of later developments in the case of Pollock, at least, Early Abstract Expressionism [18] The work of Gertrude Barrer, although she has not been included by scholars in their lists of either of these groups, epitomizes in many ways the qualities one might expect from an alert, impressionable artist exposed to the ideas represented in *Iconograph* In her work published in *Iconograph* 1, such as *The Somber Photographer*, Barrer employed flat shapes with sharp edges whose automatist antecedents in the work of Miró and Klee were tempered by her allegiance to Northwest Coast art The dialectic determined her refusal to permit the shapes in her paintings to overlap one another as they might have done if automatism alone had determined their form Her work at this point thus demonstrated a taut maintenance of an "all-positive" valence, in which neither positive nor negative shapes dominate the composition, but in which an atmospherically toned background forecasts the more painterly, exploratory characteristics of her *Illuminato*, painted a year later [19]

In respect to its watery atmosphere, its amorphous biomorphic forms, and its retention of hints of a geometric or gridlike substructure, Barrer's work in 1946 is similar in approach to Mark Rothko's at that time [20] The formal similarity in their work may have been rooted in a similarity of purpose "For art to me is an anecdote of the spirit," Rothko was to state, "and the only means of making concrete the purpose of its varied quickness and stillness "[21] Barrer recalls, "I spent a long time trying to understand how to paint tenuous subjects—the wind, emotions The problem was to get inside the underlying forces "[22]

The final issue of *Iconograph*, Winter 1947 (retitled *The New Iconograph* and now run by Collier without Barrer and Beaudoin), contained a special feature on Mark Rothko It followed by months the first issue of *The Tiger's Eye*, which also had a section on Rothko and should be considered—like *The Tiger's Eye*—as a document of concepts and artists important to the development of Abstract Expressionism It differs, however, from *The Tiger's Eye*, whose parallels to Abstract Expressionist thinking are often ones of content, not structure *Iconograph's* most significant affinity with Abstract Expressionism is its championing of the structure of iconic art—art that embodies that to which it refers—and its conviction of the identity of process and meaning These values appeared in *Iconograph* entwined with its focus on youth in the persons of an avant-garde composed of young artists inspired by the Northwest Indians It presented arguments favoring the artwork as an arena of struggle and experience, emphasizing at the same time that art produced in this way would develop a flat, allover pattern—two of the characteristics by which Abstract Expressionism has been identified

## *Notes*

1 Charles Seliger (a painter who showed at Peggy Guggenheim's Art of This Century Gallery and who later married Ruth Lewin, a contributor to *Iconograph* who attended the Art Students League and was one of Beaudoin's Gallery Neuf artists) remembers the magazine as one whose direction was determined by an interest in Northwest Coast Indian art. Painter Will Barnet, an instructor at the Art Students League at the time *Iconograph* contributors Barrer and Collier, Howard Daum, and Carl Ashby were students there, characterized *Iconograph* as a magazine whose direction was roughly parallel to his Although Barnet's work was more figurative and expressionistic at the time than that of many *Iconograph* contributors, he recalls that the artists whose work was reproduced in *Iconograph* were all, as he was, interested in Northwest Coast Indian art Seliger, interview, 18 December 1981; Will Barnet, interview with the author, 18 February 1982

2 This is a subject about which much continues to be written See Kirk Varnedoe, "Abstract Expressionism," 615-59 in *"Primitivism" in 20th Century Art*, vol 2, ed William Rubin (New York Museum of Modern Art, 1984); W Jackson Rushing, "Ritual and Myth Native American Culture and Abstract Expressionism," in *The Spiritual in Art Abstract Painting, 1890-1985*, ed Maurice Tuchman (New York and Los Angeles Abbeville Press and the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1986) 273-95, and his "The Impact of Nietzsche and Northwest Coast Indian Art on Barnett Newman's Idea of Redemption in the Abstract Sublime," *Art Journal* 47 (Fall 1988) 187-95, and Michael Leja, *Art for Modern Man* (New Haven Yale University Press, forthcoming)

3 David Lashak (editor of *Critique*), letter to the author, 23 January 1982

4 Kenneth Beaudoin, "An Autobiographical Note Kenneth Lawrence Beaudoin, New Orleans, 1942," *Iconograph* 3 (Fall 1946) 13 Wifredo Lam's work was reproduced in *Instead*, Paalen's work appeared in the magazine he edited, *Dyn*, published in Mexico but available in New York In 1943 Lévi-Strauss had published in English "The Art of the Northwest Coast at the American Museum of Natural History" in the *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*

5 Kenneth Beaudoin, "Oscar Collier A Study in Pictorial Metaphor," *Iconograph* 3 (Fall 1946) 18

6 Collier remembered that his first acquaintance with a Northwest Coast Indian-derived style came with his meeting Robert Barrell in 1945 Howard Daum told Collier that Barrell "really had it." Collier recalled being so impressed with Barrell, who was painting in a style derived from Northwest Coast Indians, that he contracted them to take lessons from him. To the best of his understanding, recalls Collier, Barrell owed his ideas about the use of Northwest Coast art to painter Steve Wheeler, whose observation of Klee helped him to see how much was to be gained from a close study of primitive art (Collier, interview, 8 December 1981) Collier gives Barrell the credit for *Iconograph's* focus on Northwest Coast Indian inspiration (Collier, interview, 21 June 1982). Collier's own statement that Barrell was influenced by Wheeler, however, mitigates Barrell's intense exposure to Northwest Coast art in 1939 and 1940 at the Museum of Natural History. It also runs counter to Wheeler's insistence that he was not influenced by Northwest Coast art at all. Wheeler claims that he noticed a similarity between the art of that culture and his own only after his work assumed its mature form, citing the similarity as an example of a bond between the ages. (Steve Wheeler, interview with the author, 11 March 1982.)

7 Will Barnet had admired Northwest Coast art since his frequent childhood exposures to it at The Peabody Museum in Salem, Massachusetts. Will Barnet, interview with the author, 23 February 1982

8 Daum later regretted coining the term, because it reductively implied that "Indian" art was the sole reference for their efforts. "We were influenced by many sources. Miró, for instance, was influenced by Indian petroglyphs—these are in the twelfth volume of the Bureau of Ethnology's *Annual Report* (which Daum owned). "We dealt with automatism, too," he remembered, as well as with American Indian art and the art of the South Seas. "We were working not just with structure but also with design. Cézanne was our model for structure, Van Gogh for design. Picasso used both." Howard Daum, telephone interview with the author, 7 October 1988.

9 Barnet, interview, 18 February 1982. Barnet taught at the Art Students League from 1936-78.

10 Ruben Kadish, interview with the author, 21 January 1982; letter to the author, August 1988

11 Peter Busa, telephone interview with the author, 3 March 1982.

12 Collier, interview, 8 December 1981

13 For more on "Indian Space" see the author's "Painting Outside the Paradigm Indian Space," *Arts* 57 (February 1983) 98-102. Robert Barrell, interview with the author, 16 June 1982.

14 Melvin Lader, "Peggy Guggenheim's Art of This Century and the Surrealist Milieu in America 1942-1947" (Ph D diss., University of Delaware, 1981)

15 Collier, interview, 8 December 1981

16 Barr, Barrer recalled, liked her own work well enough to ask her to exhibit it at the Museum of Modern Art However, his assistant Dorothy Miller vetoed his suggestion. Barrer, interview, 2 April 1982.

17 Collier, telephone interview, 21 June 1982. Betty Parsons took over from Peggy Guggenheim a number of her artists, including Pollock, Rothko, and Still, when Guggenheim went to Venice to live in 1947 Dore Ashton, *The New York School* (New York: Viking Books, 1972), 170

18 Writers have struggled from the start to find an appropriate description for this work Five of the painters whose first inclusion in *Iconograph* occurs in the fourth issue (Kamrowski, Pollock, Rothko, Hayter, and Hare) are classified as "American Surrealist Painters" in Sidney Janis's *Abstract and Surrealist Art in America*, published in 1944 (New York Reynal and Hitchcock). David Hare remembers that Janis would ask the artists he knew about how they would characterize their work; the categories employed in *Abstract and Surrealist Art in America* are the result of these collected observations (David Hare, interview with the author, New York, 18 January 1982). By 1950, Andrew Carnduff Ritchie, in *Abstract Painting and Sculpture in America* (New York Museum of Modern Art, 1951) characterized nearly the same group as "Expressionist Biomorphic," with, however, the inclusion of Charles Seliger, who also made his first appearance in the fourth issue of *Iconograph*, and Theodoros Stamos, who was included in *Iconograph* 1.

19 Reproduced in *Iconograph* 4 (Winter 1946): 28.

20 Rothko's *Gethsemane* (1946) (not the same painting as the one reproduced with that title in Diane Waldman, *Mark Rothko* [New York Solomon R Guggenheim Museum, 1978], 63) was reproduced in the same issue of *Iconograph* as Barrer's *Illuminato*.

21 Mark Rothko, "Personal Statement" in *A Painting Prophecy—1950* (Washington, D C David Porter Gallery, 1945), n p

22 Barrer, telephone interview, 20 December 1981

## CATALOG OF THE EXHIBITION

*The Indian Space Painters*

### Will Barnet

*Strange Bird*
(Bird Chasing Cat), 1947
Oil on canvas, 14" x 18"
Collection Mariann Wells

*Self-Portrait*, 1953
Oil on burlap, 45" x 38"
Courtesy Terry Dintenfass Gallery

*Fourth of July*, 1954
Oil on canvas, 52" x 38"
Courtesy Terry Dintenfass Gallery

*Male and Female*, 1954
Oil on canvas, 40" x 32"
Collection The Whitney Museum of American Art, Gift of an anonymous donor through the Federation of Modern Painters and Sculptors

*Study for Big Gray*, c. 1958
Watercolor on paper, 7" x 5"
Courtesy Terry Dintenfass Gallery

*Multiple Image*, c. 1959
Watercolor on paper, 7½" x 5"
Courtesy Terry Dintenfass Gallery

*Landscape*, n.d.
Watercolor on paper, 8¼" x 11½"
Courtesy Terry Dintenfass Gallery

### Robert Barrell

*The Hunters*, 1940
Scale model for WPA mural
Tempera on gesso board, 5" x 3"
Collection of the Artist

*The Meeting*, 1941
Tempera on paper, 11½" x 9"
Collection of the Artist

*Seated Woman*, 1941
Tempera on paper, 11½" x 9"
Collection of the Artist

*Mask*, c. 1941
Tempera on paper, 11¾" x 9"
Collection of the Artist

*The Hunter*, 1942
Oil on board, 15⅜" x 19⅜"
Collection Walter Miles

*Birds of a Feather*
(Wooden Bowl), 1942
Painted wood, 5⅛" diameter
Collection Walter Miles

*Bird Feeding Young*
(Totem Pole), c. 1942
Wood, 12" x 1¾" x ¾"
Collection Walter Miles

*Cat and Bird*, 1942
Oil on gesso board, 13" x 20"
Collection Will Barnet

*Don Quixote*, 1943
Tempera on paper, 12" x 9"
Collection of the Artist

*Untitled*, 1943
Oil on canvas, 24" x 30"
Collection Gertrude Barrer and Aurora Russell

*Untitled*, 1943
Oil on canvas, 17" x 14"
Collection Gertrude Barrer and Aurora Russell

*The Whirlwind of Romance*, 1945
Tempera on paper, 13" x 20"
Collection Lisa Collier Cool

*Snake and Plane*, 1947
Oil on canvas, 39" x 28½"
Collection Walter Miles

### Gertrude Barrer

*Untitled I*, 1946
Oil on canvas, 15" x 14¼"
Collection of the Artist and Aurora Russell

*Untitled II*, 1946
Oil on canvas, 9" x 9"
Collection of the Artist and Aurora Russell

*Intruder in the City*, 1946
Oil on canvas, 45" x 50"
Collection of the Artist and Aurora Russell

*The Invisible Forms that Populate Our Wish*, 1947
Ink on paper, 11" x 12½"
Collection of the Artist and Aurora Russell



*Landscape in Movement and Space*, 1948
Pen and ink on paper, 10½" x 14½"
Collection of the Artist and Aurora Russell

*Landscape II*, 1949
Watercolor and ink on paper, 11" x 15"
Collection of the Artist and Aurora Russell

*Apocalypse, War and the Machine*, 1949
Oil on canvas, 40" x 44"
Collection of the Artist and Aurora Russell

### Peter Busa

*Children's Game*
(WPA Mural Sketch), 1940
Casein, 20" x 25"
Collection Christopher Busa

*Wall Construction*, 1942
Painted wood, cloth, and teacups, 94¼" x 27¾" x 6"
Private collection

*Totem*, 1942
Oil on masonite, 43⅜" x 11⅜"
Private collection

*Original Sin*, 1946
Oil on canvas, 22" x 30"
Collection Christopher Busa

*Untitled*, c. 1946
Oil on canvas, 25" x 30"
Collection Christopher Busa

*Children's Hour*, c. 1948
Oil on canvas, 72" x 52"
Collection Christopher Busa

*Untitled*
(Reclining Figure), c. 1953
Ink on paper, 20" x 25"
Collection Christopher Busa

### Howard Daum

*The Couple*, 1946
Oil on canvas, 40" x 24"
Courtesy Snyder Fine Art

*Crucifixion*, 1946
Oil on canvas, 29" x 21"
Courtesy Snyder Fine Art

*Untitled (#264)*, c. 1946
Oil on canvas, 24" x 20"
Courtesy Snyder Fine Art

*Untitled (#301)*, c. 1946
Oil on canvas, 18" x 17"
Courtesy Snyder Fine Art

*Provincetown*, 1947
Watercolor and ink on paper, 12" x 15⅜"
Courtesy Snyder Fine Art

*Untitled*, 1947
Etching, 19¾" x 22"
Courtesy Snyder Fine Art

*Labyrinth*, 1950
Oil on canvas, 48" x 48"
Collection Tricon

### Helen DeMott

*The Beach*, 1946
Tempera on paper, 11⅜" x 14"
Collection of the Artist

*Black Night (Seneca)*, 1946
Tempera on paper, 11" x 14"
Collection of the Artist

*Drawing #12*, 1946
Tempera on paper, 14" x 16½"
Collection of the Artist

*Red Composition*, 1947
Oil on canvas, 16" x 12"
Collection of the Artist

*La Mer*, 1948
Egg tempera on canvas, 24" x 20"
Collection of the Artist

*Full Fathom 5*, 1949
Oil on wood, 13½" x 18"
Collection of the Artist

*The Fleet's In*, 1949
Oil on wood, 13½" x 17"
Collection of the Artist

### Ruth Lewin

*Double Portrait*, 1943
Woodcut, 9½" x 7½"
Private Collection

*Conversation*, c. 1944
Woodcut, 12" x 9"
Private Collection

*Untitled*, c. 1945
Tempera on gesso panel, 16" x 12"
Private Collection

## Steve Wheeler

*Dancing Figure*, 1941
Oil on canvas, 16¼" x 12"
Collection Kristina Schlesinger

*Untitled* (Head), 1942
Watercolor and ink on paper, 13" x 11"
Private Collection

*The Halogens II*, c. 1944
Oil on canvas, 20" x 24"
Collection Will Barnet

*Laughing Boy Rolling*, 1946
Oil on canvas, 36" x 45"
Collection The Whitney Museum of American Art

*Nude*, 1955
Oil on canvas, 13" x 11"
Collection Peter Blum

*Nude*, n.d.
Ink and watercolor on paper, 13" x 10"
Private Collection

## Northwest Coast Indian Art

Wolf Visor Mask
Southern Alaska, Tlingit
c. 1825–1850
Wood, animal hide, abalone, red and black pigment,
6½" x 6" x 13½"
Private Collection

Oil Dish
Queen Charlotte Islands,
British Columbia, Haida
c. 1800–1825
Wood and shell, 6¼" x 9⅛" x 11½"
Private Collection

Mask
British Columbia, Haida
Late 19th-early 20th century
Wood and paint, height 10"
Collection The Metropolitan Museum of Art,
The Michael C. Rockefeller Memorial Collection,
Purchase, Nelson A. Rockefeller Gift, 1967

Pair of Paddles
Alaska, Tlingit
Late 19th-early 20th century
Wood and paint, length 37"
Collection The Metropolitan Museum of Art,
The Michael C. Rockefeller Memorial Collection,
Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Robert W. Campbell, 1968

Mask
British Columbia, Kwakiutl
Late 19th-early 20th century
Wood and paint, height 13"
Collection The Metropolitan Museum of Art,
The Michael C. Rockefeller Memorial Collection,
Bequest of Nelson A. Rockefeller, 1979

Mantle with Killer Whale Design
(Chilkat blanket)
Alaska, Tlingit, 1870
Dyed mountain goat wool with cedar bark fibers,
width 67"
Collection Jeffrey Meyers

Totem Pole Fragment of a Frog
Designed by David Hunt and carved by Charlie James
Fort Rupert, Vancouver, British Columbia, Kwakiutl
20th century
Wood, height 45"
Collection Jeffrey Meyers

Rattle in the Form of a Bird
Northwest Coast, Tlingit
19th Century
Wood, 7" x 14" x 5"
Collection Amy and Elliot Lawrence

*Dimensions are in inches, in order of height, width, and depth.*



**Photography Credits**
Zindman/Fremont, New York
The Whitney Museum of American Art, New York
The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York
James Zimmerman, Provincetown, Massachusetts

The Sidney Mishkin Gallery
Baruch College • The City University of New York
135 East 22 Street, New York, New York 10010