

# SEEING AMERICA: Jaune Quick-to-See Smith's *Famous Names*, 1998

In *Famous Names*, references to the artist's Native American and European heritage are combined and transformed into a powerful statement of contemporary identity.

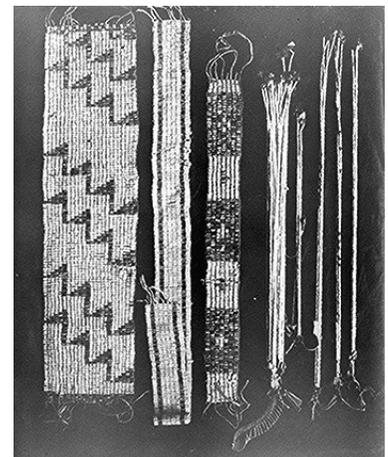


Jaune Quick-to-See Smith (b. 1940)  
*Famous Names*, 1998  
Oil, acrylic, collaged photographs and mixed media on canvas  
Gift of Thomas and Marion Hawks, by exchange, 98.39  
Collection of the Memorial Art Gallery of the University of Rochester  
By permission of the artist

## The Art

*Famous Names* is a large composition (80 x 50 inches) of oil and acrylic paint, collaged photographs, and other mixed media on canvas. What at first seems a simple form—the outline of a woman's dress—becomes increasingly complex and compelling the more we regard it. Names, old photos, iconic images are glued, stencilled, and painted onto the canvas in dizzying variety. An overlay of brown-red acrylic smears the center. The result, although not easy to decipher, draws the viewer in to contemplate the meaning of the welter of elements, both visual and verbal.

The dress is a cut-wing buckskin, of a type still worn in ceremonial gatherings. The bodice in this case is decorated with three collaged chrysanthemums that evoke traditional native beadwork designs, reminding the viewer of the role that women play in sustaining Native American kinships and cultural bonds. But the stylized flowers also suggest European printed fabric, one of several instances in the painting of Western form applied to Native tradition. This mixture of motifs and iconography throughout this work suggests the paradoxes of Indian life in the United States. How does one maintain the indigenous, spiritual connections to the land and community while at the same time living in the Euro-American society? Is it possible to benefit from the experience of living in two worlds?



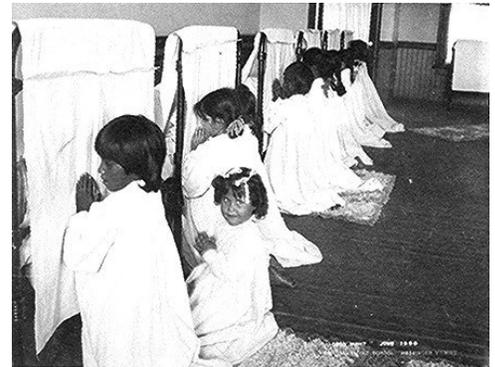
String and belt wampum, ca. 1890  
National Archives and Records Administration  
American Indian Select List Number 16

That this experience has not been peaceful or easy for Native Americans is one clear message of Jaune Quick-to-See Smith's construction. The earth-toned paint, applied like a stain, drips through and down the canvas. It is the color of the artist's beloved Southwest, but also suggests blood dripping from and onto the dress and photographs.

The photographs, too, are unsettling. There are nineteenth-century photographs of Native Americans dressed according to their own traditions juxtaposed with those dressed as Euro-Americans. Close to the center of the artwork is an image of a Native American mother and child represented with halos, no doubt a reflection of the influence of Christian missionaries hoping to inspire a connection with the Madonna and Jesus. In the lower right is a photograph from the interior of a church of an altar with a triptych flanked by angels. What are we to make of this layering of cultural images and symbols? In one sense it certainly suggests how deeply Anglo-European culture has penetrated the Native American identity. But isn't there another sense in which the artist is attempting to transform the sometime shameful residues of the past into something new and powerful in itself?

Take the "famous" names, grouped and stenciled in various fonts: some are familiar, some mysterious, and others seemingly satirical or mocking. Some are historical, others contemporary, but they all derive originally from the attempt on the part of officials, whether from the army or the Church or the government, to give in English the meanings found in Native American languages. Addressing her attitude towards these names, Smith explains, "My 'Famous Names' dress," she says, "proves that we still retain many of our original names, either because they've lasted or because our families took them back (as in my case)" (*Seeing America*, 288).

By reappropriating the famous names in this work Smith is reclaiming ownership of them and prompting us—the viewer—to reconsider old relationships and reassemble them into a new whole.



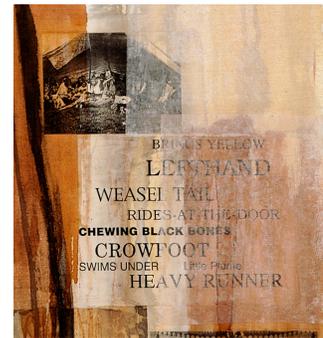
Messinger

*Little girls praying beside their beds, Phoenix Indian School,*

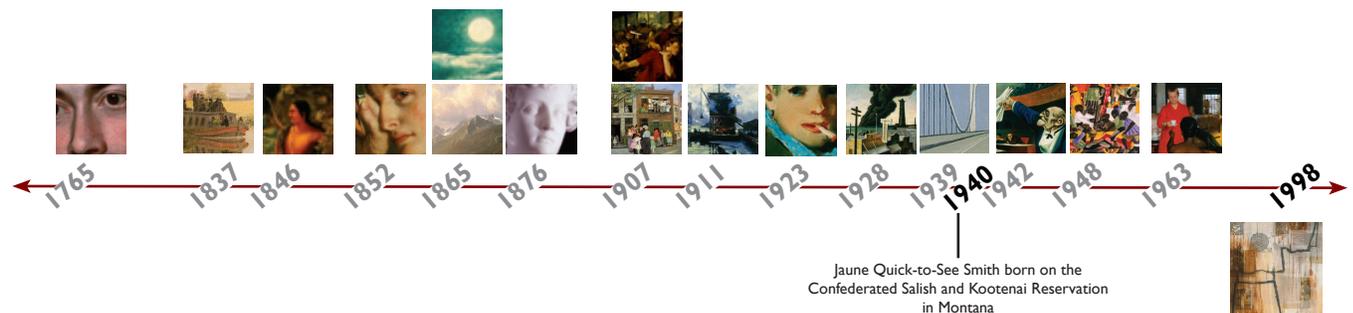
*Arizona, 1900*

National Archives and Records Administration

American Indian Select List Number 162



## The Artist



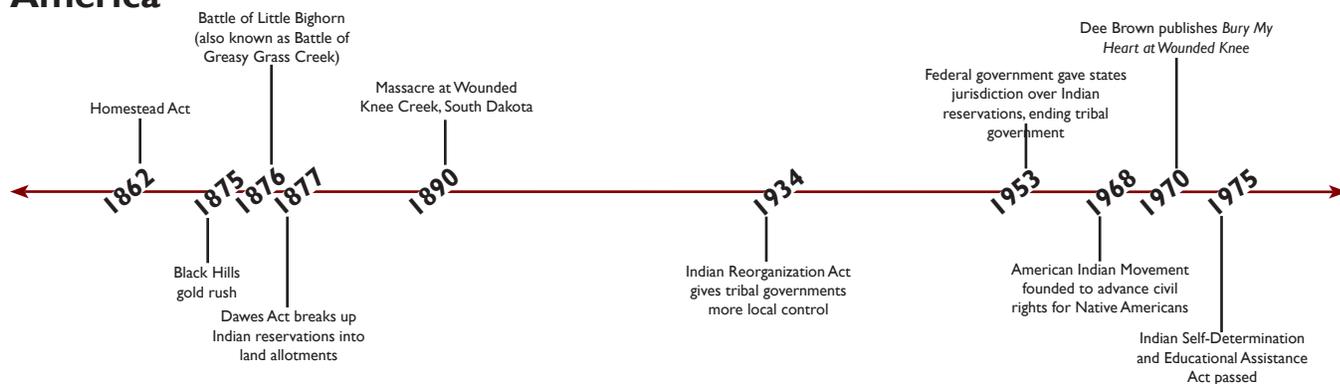
Jaune Quick-to-See Smith is of a descendent of three Native American grandparents and one French grandparent. She is a social activist and outspoken advocate for Native American spiritual values that she sees as a powerful antidote to the excesses of modern consumerism and materialism. Born in 1940 on the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Reservation in Montana, she spent much of her childhood in the company of her Native American father, who was a sometime cowboy, horse trainer, and trader, but also a painter.

She realized early in her life that she wanted to be an artist, but economic restrictions and familial responsibilities forced her to delay pursuit of her career until later in her life.

In 1976, as a single mother with two children, she earned a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree from Framingham (Massachusetts) State College and, in 1980, a Master of Fine Arts from the University of New Mexico. She now resides in Corrales, New Mexico, but has traveled around the world speaking and lecturing. Her art is in the collection of such museums as the Museum of Modern Art and the Whitney Museum of American Art. She holds three honorary doctorates and has been the recipient of several prestigious awards.

In addition to her Native American sensibilities, exemplified by images of horses, buffalo, turtles, and other evocations of the “natural world,” Quick-to-See Smith has been inspired by the abstract work of modernist European and American artists, including Picasso, Kandinsky, Klee, Rauschenberg, Johns, and Warhol.

## America



The Plains Indians, Jaune Quick-to-See Smith’s ancestors, based their living on a cycle dependent primarily on migratory buffalo herds. Food, clothing, shelter, tools, fuel all were provided by buffalo, and communal hunts involved a level of cooperation among the people fostered by kinship rules and spiritual understandings passed from one generation to the next by a rich oral tradition. Ownership of territory, defined by maps and contracts and fences, was an established European tradition, but irrelevant to Native American culture.

However, as the open land of the plains and good hunting lands of the mountains grew scarcer, the struggle for dominance became increasingly intense. In resisting the encroachments of pioneers and settlers, the Native Americans had the advantage of knowing the land better and could mount surprise attacks. But the economic advantages of highly organized political institutions, settled agriculture and herding, industrial inventions, and manufacture tipped the scale in the Anglo-Americans’ favor. Native Americans—such as the Salish Indians of Idaho and Montana, who had encountered Lewis and Clark in the 1840s and, in many cases, converted to Christianity—signed treaties with the United States Government in which they gave up most of their lands and moved to reservations like the Flathead.



C. M. Bell

Flathead delegation of six and an interpreter, 1884  
National Archives and Records Administration  
American Indian Select List Number 46

Annuities and other “compensations” were promised, particularly educational opportunities, but these promises raised problems. The American government demanded that Native Americans assimilate into the dominant Anglo culture, but neither group was fully prepared to accept or allow this. Intense and widespread discrimination against Indians characterized the relationship. In response, the Native Americans clung to their cultural and spiritual traditions for solace and survival.

Despite a century of promises, studies in the 1960s and 1970s showed that malnutrition, unemployment, alcoholism, infant mortality, crime and shortened life expectancy among Native Americans were worse than for any other ethnic group in the United States.<sup>1</sup> Native Americans began to organize to assert **Red Power** to obtain greater justice in the state and federal Courts. Such social and political activism resulted in some financial compensation to tribes, and in the recovery of some lands which had been seized in violation of treaties.

In the late twentieth century, the environmental movement in the United States has recognized and publicized the Native American worldview that stresses the link between humans, the land, and all living creatures. Artists and poets increasingly find inspiration in Native Americans’ spirituality.

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<sup>1</sup>Rural Research Focus: Minorities in Rural America, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 7 August 2007. <http://ruralhealth.hrsa.gov/pub/MinoritiesinRuralAm.htm>

See also G. Peter Jemison, “Jaune Quick-to-See Smith: Famous Names (1998),” in Marjorie B. Searl, ed., *Seeing America: Painting and Sculpture from the Collection of the Memorial Art Gallery of the University of Rochester* (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2006), 286–89.



J. N. Choate

*Group of Omaa boys in cadet uniforms, Carlisle Indian School, Pennsylvania, ca. 1880*

National Archives and Records Administration  
American Indian Select List Number 153

### Glossary

**Red Power:** Phrase referring to the increased sense of pan-Indian identity, as shown through the American Indian Movement of 1968.

## Classroom Activities: Seeing America Through Artists' Eyes

### Observing Detail

What clues in the painting tell you about this artist and the meaning of this artwork?

How does knowing the title, *Famous Names*, shape the meaning in this painting?

What questions would you like to ask the artist?



### Comparing and Contrasting

Compare *Famous Names* with *The Red Mean: Self Portrait*, also painted by Jaune Quick-to-See Smith. What references to Native American culture can you identify in the two paintings? What references to Euro-American culture has the artist included? How are these two artworks similar and how are they different? What issues or themes does the artist address in these two works?



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*Famous Names*, 1998

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Jaune Quick-to-See Smith (b. 1940)

*The Red Mean: Self Portrait*, 1992

Mixed Media

Smith College

By permission of the artist

## Exploring the Context

Artists are keen observers and commentators on the world in which they live. Use *The Artist and America* timelines to consider the effect of American history and art history as reflected in their artwork. In what ways did the artist capture or reflect the events, mood and/or values of his/her America? In what ways did the artist continue or transform the American art traditions he/she would have seen?

## Finding and Analyzing Point of View

The Native American has been a popular subject for American artists. Compare the work of Jaune Quick-to-See Smith with Frederic Remington's *The Cheyenne* (1901), and DeWitt Clinton Boutelle's *The Indian Hunter* (1846). What story does each work of art tell? How does each artist use color, line, composition and space to tell a story? What similarities and what differences do you find in the artists' points of view? Compare the conditions for Native Americans in the United States in 1846, 1901 and 1998. What cultural and political changes help to explain the differences in the three works of art? What issues have remained?



DeWitt Clinton Boutelle (1820 – 1884)

*The Indian Hunter*, 1846

Oil on canvas

Marion Stratton Gould Fund, 84.47

Collection of the Memorial Art Gallery of the University of Rochester



Frederic Remington (1861 – 1909)

*The Cheyenne*, 1901

Bronze

Bequest of Mrs. Merritt Cleveland, 2003.104

Collection of the Memorial Art Gallery of the University of Rochester



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*Famous Names*, 1998

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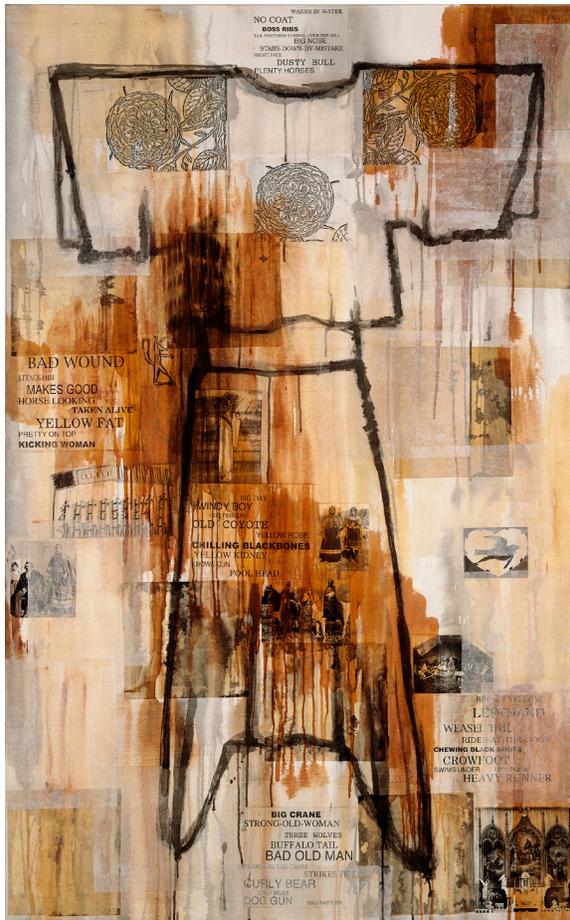
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## Identifying Information/Drawing Conclusions

Jaune Quick-to-See Smith raises questions of language and its many meanings to different audiences. Look closely to identify words, animals, clothing, and shapes the artist has incorporated into *Famous Names* and *Horse Sense*. Research the symbolic meaning of these objects to Native Americans. How has Quick-to-See Smith used these words and objects as metaphors and other symbolic language?



Jaune Quick-to-See Smith (b. 1940)

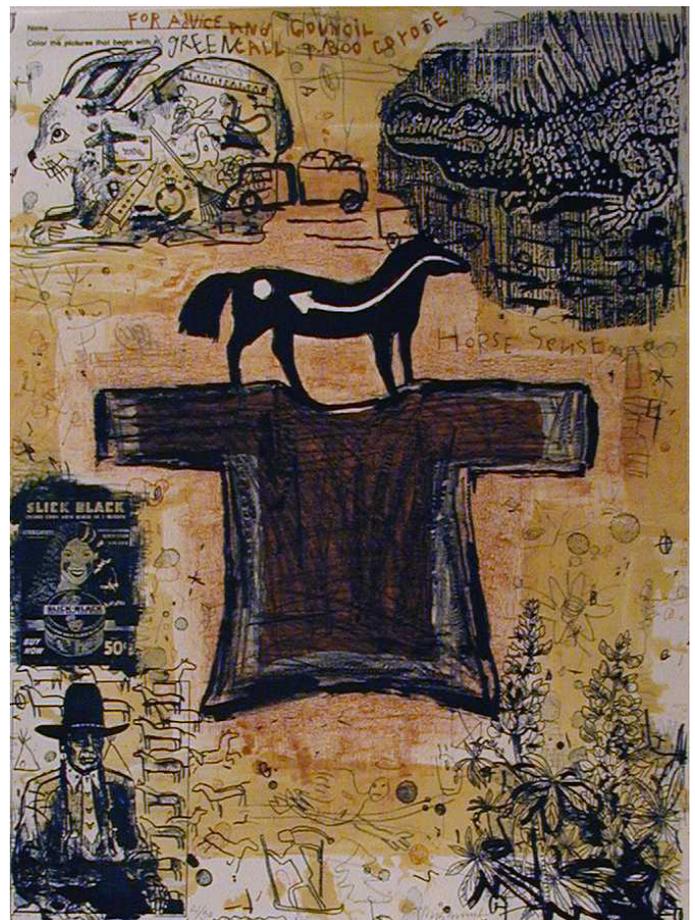
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Jaune Quick-to-See Smith (b. 1940)

*Horse Sense*, 1994

Lithograph

Thomas and Marion Hawks Fund, 94.46

Collection of the Memorial Art Gallery of the University of Rochester

By permission of the artist

## Finding and Analyzing Point of View

Jaune Quick-to-See Smith has written, "It should be noted that *Famous Names (Dress)* is about my community, Native America, having famous names in our own culture that are as important to us as those famous names in the mainstream community such as famous athletes, writers, artists, politicians or other noted people in the news. The American Indian names on this dress portray that we have our role models and heroes in our communities too."<sup>2</sup> Compare *Famous Names* with other works by the artist. How does Quick-to-See Smith use both visual and verbal imagery to raise important issues. Discuss some of the issues she addresses in her artworks.

<sup>2</sup>Letter from the artist to the Memorial Art Gallery, 9 October 2009.



Jaune Quick-to-See Smith (b. 1940)  
*I See Red (snowman)*, 1992  
 Mixed media and oil on canvas  
 Artist's collection  
 By permission of the artist



Jaune Quick-to-See Smith (b. 1940)  
*War Shirt*, 1992  
 Oil and mixed media collage on canvas diptych  
 Montclair Art Museum  
 Museum purchase; funds provided by Tamar and Emil Weiss and prior gifts of Roland B. Swart,  
 1993.27A-B  
 By permission of the artist



Jaune Quick-to-See Smith (b. 1940)  
*I See Red, Chief Sleepy Eye War Shirt*, 1992  
 Mixed media on paper  
 Jersey City Museum  
 Museum purchase  
 By permission of the artist



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## Exploring the Context

Quick-to See Smith writes of the photo installation, *Guess Who is American Indian?*:

*Neal [her son, a printmaker and professor in New Mexico] and I created this photo piece in response to the passage of time and intermarriage since Lewis and Clark's journey. It should be pointed out that even though their journey was titled the Corps of Discovery, they did not discover anything that American Indians had not already discovered and they also needed American Indians to lead them...This work is about Xenophobia in our society and how people mistakenly think they can identify certain races of people. This interactive piece proves that idea is wrong and demonstrates that what you think you know, you don't really know. This piece was especially pertinent in this decade after 9/11, because there was much racism toward people of Middle Eastern ethnicity. The basic point that we were making in this piece is that everyone should be treated with respect.*<sup>3</sup>

How have Jaune Quick-to-See Smith and Neal Ambrose Smith communicated their ideas in this installation? How is this photo installation inter-active? Why do the artists give no “answers” to their question, *Guess Who is American Indian?*

<sup>3</sup>Letter from the artist to the Memorial Art Gallery, 9 October 2009.



Jaune Quick-To-See-Smith and Neal Ambrose Smith

*Guess Who is American Indian?*

Photo installation, 2002, 20" x 16" each

Artist's Collection

We wish to thank Jaune Quick-to-See Smith for generously sharing her thoughts and her artwork in support of this project.

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**Jaune Quick-to-See Smith**  
**Famous Names, 1998**

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