HACHIVI EDGAR HEAP OF BIRDS

CLAIM YOUR COLOR

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Lawrence, Kansas
September 30 – October 19, 1989

Walker Art Center
Minneapolis, Minnesota
March 4 – May 6, 1990

Exit Art
New York, New York
September 8 – October 6, 1990

San Jose Museum of Art,
San Jose, California
October 15 – December 3, 1990

Curator Jeanette Ingberman

Texts by
Papo Colo
Jean Fisher
Lowery Stokes Sims
Hachivi Edgar Heap of Birds

EXIT ART
NEW YORK
THE BIRDS ARE SINGING LOUD
by Papo Colo

America is as big as its lies, as thick as its troubles and as strong as its truths. It all began with the discovery, which is better described as a finding. Amerigo Vespucci initiated this custom from Europe, giving a name to a place to which he went after the fact and never found. So appropriation began with the naming of a part of this earth, a continent, though very real for its inhabitants, did not exist for Europe. This is also applied to the name “Indians” which the real finder, Christopher Columbus, named his ‘discovery’ because he thought he found a passage to India, all this in the tiny island that he named San Salvador in the Caribbean. Appropriation is then the ability to dispossess. American geography is the mutilation of its original peoples and appropriation is its justification.

There are many reasons for the lack of acknowledgement of the originality and creativity of suspicious citizens of this country that are not from Eurocentric backgrounds. Now at the end of the 20th century the structure power of the ‘American culture’ is bending towards a more openness of criteria, meaning intellectual growth or the discovery of the otherness, a reflection of the self in the exotic discourse of being different and victimized.

Our purpose in EXIT ART is to clear the smog of cultural misunderstanding and achieve a new recognizable signal in the redefinition of cultures of the one and many Americas in which we have to dialogue and undeniably coexist. Hachivi Edgar Heap of Birds, artist, bends his double edged knife to his discourse. He appropriates the language of his namers and uses reverse appropriation to let us know of historical territorial concepts. His poetry is extended to his paintings which are color extensions of territories in dispute. As cartography shows demarcations of original nations that once were or are disappearing, his paintings are areas of survival, the edge of color of imaginary areas where original inhabitants, ‘Indians’, lived centuries without being disturbed and are now fighting for a fair co-existence. His words translate into a language of justice and of territorial forms transported into paintings. His message is a fact of American History that has been hidden from our American Conscience.
CLAIM YOUR COLOR

When the summer came, the day for renewal drew near. The day which would begin a close view of the Earth, its history and its future. a time when personal pleasures and business would be halted, a time when the tribe united and spoke of the importance in celebrating the wholeness of a people. Sacred objects—tools of power and beauty—would be worshipped and renewed. These ways fixed our people and continually heal our lives. For two weeks, from that month in June, we offer ourselves to a new beginning. This passage is marked without a date or year. We are of course in the present day so-called Oklahoma. But within our world—which shall be renewed in summer again and again—it is not Oklahoma, it is not 1990. Of which year and of which city, county and nation do I speak? It is an earth-bound thought of a starlit circle. Homage is paid not only to the events often noticed upon the surface of these lands upon which we walk but also to the inner earth and the winds and above, where I believe our spirits truly venture. We could describe this place as Tsistsistas specific, but I don’t think the Old Man taught us to make these offerings just for ourselves.

As we look through the tipi door, the fire is not strongly evident, although the one-hundred degree heat of the afternoon sun could confuse the issue. Breaking this wood one piece after another, then stacking it until it is called for, the circle inside has a quiet manner. Not every tribal member is needed inside. Not every person has the knowledge and training to make his or her presence of some true use.

The Old Man sits near the back of the tipi, an important place. For years I looked on, patiently watching from a distance. The circle I have known from my early childhood years. I recall falling asleep upon the hard national guard armory floor with the drum resounding and dancers with bells circling past. The loud heartbeat of an urban inter-tribal nation stepped off into my dreams. So the circle was there forever reiterated each day. But this fire flickering, as seen through the tipi door flap, it offers a challenge to understand. The circle, once a symbol brushed up against every day, now is posed as an invitation to engage this power. As with many ways of native knowledge, there is a physical cost involved, a commitment in wanting to know. This particular circle, not being a social one, signals that there is a challenge in learning by the added heat of these four days.

The wood was being used quickly. I rested, waiting to serve those within the lodge. As the day began to draw to a close, my uncle called for men to enter the circle and gather this blessing. The smoke within showed me that particular season in which we sat; the smell of the dry burning river wood always tells. My first visit there was a peaceful afternoon. Men were seated in the round with grave important duties that I have since begun to know. I watched hundreds of years of knowledge working hard for our renewal. The heat that day, being so intense outside in the open air, was magnified within from the hoist (fire) climbing brightly from the center of the circle. This all-important flame, which would be used for many days and moved from site to site, was seen almost as the original fire. The power that lighted the pipe, burned the sweet grass, cooked the offerings, brought one warmth in the coldest days and, if not respected, brought injury.

Many powers were present that day. Ways for young people to wonder about and someday find as their own. The Old Man sat calmly near the heat, relying on his deeds and knowledge to bring the coolness. His braids were long as they hung down over each side of his chest. As always he carried out the sacred mission with his unforgettable peace.

Decades and decades are the sacrifice ahead to know such things, as on recounts one’s own name. For us, the younger element in this continuum, the Old Man’s wisdom must be taken in with respect and guarded. These ways are to be brought forth for future warm June days and offered to nourish the renewal of our endless generations.

Hachivi Edgar Heap of Birds, 1990
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>HARD INDIAN</th>
<th>ALL THE ROCKS</th>
<th>MEDICINE WAYS</th>
<th>SWEAT SAGE</th>
<th>RUNNING UNDER THE SUN</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>DEEDS NOT DEMANDS</td>
<td>SPIRIT OUR SPHERE</td>
<td>PLEDGE VOW FAST</td>
<td>SMOKE ROCK PLANET</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GIVE EVERYTHING</td>
<td>CAN'T CANCEL PRIVATE POWER</td>
<td>TRIBE UPON BACK</td>
<td>COOK SKY</td>
<td>FOUR SONGS</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
WORDS INTO VISION: THE ART OF HACHIVI EDGAR HEAP OF BIRDS
by Lowery Stokes Sims

Is it true about words?
Secrets are made
and broken,

by words

Friends are made
and lost,

by words...

Nations rise against, and for each other
Because of words...

Men are condemned
By one man’s choice
of words

Can’t it be said
Words have power
over life and death?

There is a war raging within cultural circles in the United States. There are no body counts, but it is a battle that has several camps stockpiling their intellectual ammunition. The war is over the control of nomenclature. It focuses on the definition of what is “American”, and who is “American”. That the articulation of “American” in the arts and letters would still be a matter of contention, even as we enter the last decade of the 20th Century, should not come as a surprise. As a nation we juggle the varying concerns of individuals of European, African, Asian, Latin and Native American descent. While the first group has dominated the political, social, economic, and cultural establishment in this country during the last 200 years, African, Asian, Latin and Native communities have mounted a challenge to their exclusive control during the last 20 years. What is at stake is whether American culture would be pursued within a “pluralist” (or “multicultural”) approach or an “Americanist” one.\(^2\)

Pluralism describes a situation where the values and creative expression of disparate racial, religious and gender groups would contribute to the definition of culture in this society on an equal basis. Americanists, on the other hand, insist there is but a single criteria for our notions of “truth”, “beauty” and the “classical”, and that is European culture. Advocates of the Americanist canon are currently lobbying for the return to the “classics”, effectively eradicating material related to African, Asian, Latin, and Native Americans, women, gays and other heterogeneous elements in this society that has been introduced into the curricula of universities, the programming of cultural institutions, and the indices of anthologies on American cultures during the last two decades. All of the aforementioned groups have a special interest in the outcome of this debate, which would have widespread implications in terms of public funding policies, educational and cultural programming. For Native Americans, however, this issue particularly highlights the fact that their primacy in the formation of an American culture is still denied. It is such historical and emotional issues as these that have fueled the artistic mission of Hachivi Edgar Heap of Birds.

"It is a racist-imperial nation that takes upon itself the outrageous privilege to determine who shall be considered Native in a land where the national lawmakers are immigrants."\(^3\)

Denial of an individual’s existence can be achieved in many ways—simply ignoring their presence, eradicating their presence, or simply reclassifying how they are named. The first step in the attempted
MILK
THE
OFFERING
MIRROR
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SEX
AS
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LIZARD
BRAIN
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SUBMIT
LICK
MELT
SEX
LIFE'S
PITCH
annihilation of Native American identity was the coining of the term that came to be commonly used to designate the inhabitants of these continents: "Indian". This misnomer is a bad joke of history, the result of the geographical ignorance of 15th century Europe. This one word not only misrepresented the nationality of the Native Americans, but also obscured any sense of their diversity, their existence as individual peoples. Hachivi Edgar Heap of Birds comments on this anonymous stereotyping of Native Americans in his 1987 installation Heh No Wah Naun Stun He Dun or What Makes a Man.

In a series of hand-drawn words on panels, mounted in combination with abstract landscape paintings, Heap of Birds examines aspects of his life as a Native American man in society: father, artist, activist, headsmen in the Cheyenne Elk Warrior Society. He also alludes to more civic issues, such as the contrast between Native American respect for the land and the destructive quest for resources pursued by our capitalistic economy. Words such as "rage", "pain", "love", "trust", "sex" are evoked in a demand that the artist and all Native Americans be looked upon as fully capable, functioning human beings, not just wooden stereotypes. "I wish to express a truthful modern sexual reality, which is also the basis of Native stereotypes. Many Native artist's work appears without reference to sex, as though such interest would spoil the purity of America's 'noble savage'. To open Native artistic endeavors to the issue of sexual energy will cause the public recognition that Native Americans are individuals".

Heap of Birds takes on American society and American culture with the weapons of its own choosing: words, advertising billboards and posters, the digital sign. He uses dye-cut letters or typeset letters that mimic the slick, polished look of Madison Avenue. His messages are esloganistic as the ad pitch. They immediately command our attention. The format and cadence is familiar: they spell out terse, pungent commentaries on issues related to the status of Native Americans. WESTERN / LIVING [written backwards] / HEMISPHERE / WASHITA RIVER / NOV 27, 1868 / DEATH / FROM THE / TOP / FORGET / FORGOT / SLEEPING / CHILDREN / RUNNING / CHILDREN / MURDERED / IN THE / WATER / FIND MY PEOPLE / KILL / MY PEOPLE / PROUD / BRAVE / BRUTALITY / DOMINATE [backwards] / RELOCATE [backwards] / DESTROY [backwards] / MOVING [backwards] / AGAINST [backwards] / EARTH [backwards]. The visual organization of this work demonstrates the artist's compositional approach. Punctuations are achieved by writing certain words backwards, even upside-down. "...[This]...use of mirrored English words...disrupts legibility, forcing us to relinquish our mastery over language and read it "otherwise"." Different colored letters are used—black, white, pink, gold, red, rose—and Heap of Birds exploits their familiar emotional associations. Red letters are used for the passage: SLEEPING / CHILDREN / RUNNING / CHILDREN / MURDERED / IN THE / WATER; black is used for: WASHITA RIVER / NOV 27, 1868 / DEATH / FROM THE / TOP / FORGET / FORGOT. Specific colors are also used to indicate the emotional and psychological differences between the native peoples and their enemies and the words that refer to these distinctions. "Dominant" and "destroy", associated with the enemies, are lettered in black, while "earth" and "moving" as native associations are done up in red.

Heap of Birds has also posed another challenge to American society by reclaiming the original Native words to designate things, places, people. We are again at a disadvantage. Languages such as Cheyenne, Sioux, Arapaho, etc.—routinely left out of educational curricula—offer few linguistic similarities to English as one may experience with French, German, Italian or Spanish. Heap of Birds really begins to engage our consciousness in this play for linguistic control, because "...language...is...the vehicle through which the history and culture of his people were disavowed, and redefined by...generations of [Horace] Greeley's, who had power over political and public opinion." One's identity is reclaimed as "Indian" is changed to "Native American", then specifically to "Cheyenne", and finally in the Cheyenne language "Tsitsistas", and "Edgar" returns to "Hachivi". Telling Many Maq Pies, Telling Black Wolf, Telling Hachivi, a large-scaled print work executed at the Brandywine Print Workshop in Philadelphia, reminds us of the exploitation of Native peoples by American
society for "THEIR NAMES / MASCOTS / MACHINES / CITIES / PRODUCTS / BUILDINGS."

This attitude exposes the insidiousness of our consumer society which appropriates what it wants from various cultural communities, exploits them for personal and financial gain, eventually subsuming any recognition of the source of that creativity—be it in music, fashion, art, etc. The progenitors are seen as disposable as the faddish interest of the moment.

"We are the indigenous hosts of this continent. Our way is to honor all beings who have chosen to share this earth."³

In his installation Native Hosts, which was first presented in 1988 at City Hall Park in Manhattan, Heap of Birds dealt with the displacement of Native Americans. Deep in the skyscraper canyons of lower Manhattan (which the artist likes to correlate with natural geological structures), in a clearing in front of the seat of city government, Heap of Birds reminded his public that Native peoples were there first. Individual signs read, "New York today your Host is Shinnecock", and then variously Seneca, Tuscarora, Mohawk, Weroape and Manhattan. This installation was replete with irony given the additional consideration of the current incompatible relationship between real estate interests and the artistic community in that city.

Heap of Birds found a similar platform during the 1989 centenary celebration of the state of Oklahoma. The festivities restaged the free-for-all grab of land by the so-called "sooners", white settlers from all over the United States. Heap of Birds reminded his audience that Native Americans lost the right to their land even as white Americans claimed their right to the same land in a billboard advertisement that read: SOONERS [written backwards] / RUN OVER / INDIAN NATIONS / APARTHEID OKLAHOMA. Heap of Birds frequently extends the parameters of this dialogue to acknowledge correlations between the situations of Native Americans and other peoples engaged in struggles for cultural hegemony: Irish Catholics in Northern Ireland (English Policy—Native Policy, 1988, Derry, Northern Ireland), and black South Africans (Oh Those African Homelands!, 1987, Hunter College, New York). As the artist has observed: "It's easy to pay attention to South Africa, but when it comes to disputes here no one seems to care... Americans should deal with our own injustices."⁹

Heap of Birds' involvement with word messages complements similar interests on the part of his contemporaries such as Jenny Holzer and Barbara Kruger. These artists remind us of the propagandizing potential of words as visual elements. They revive the political agenda of the Berlin Dadaists, adapting the communication modes of contemporary society to create uncomfortable, confrontational messages that blatantly critique, even undermine the pretensions of that same society. Heap of Birds' approach is distinctive because his agenda is focused on countering the oppression of individual voices within a multicultural America. A work-in-progress, to be entitled Blood Beat, comes out of an expanded comprehension of the rhythmic character of his written words. The visual components of his work—the specific alignment of the words on a wall, a sheet of paper or a billboard, the spacing between the words, the assignment of line space—suggest a pattern (i.e. music) that would result as the words were spoken. His thought is that this recitative in concert with musical accompaniments could reach an all-encompassing, resonating sound. It would be the equivalent of the "Om" chant or the "Nam-myoho-renge-kyo" of Buddhism. If the potential exists to effect change, or at least to accomplish a feeling of personal reinforcement within the group can be achieved—as is averred by the practitioners of these ancient and universal techniques—then Heap of Birds' lyrics may serve as a source of rejuvenation and empowerment to a group of people long silenced in this society. In more recent works, Heap of Birds has replaced commercial typography with the intimacy of hand-drawn letters. Now the movement of the hands the gesture of the colored pencil is like a rhythm, a pulse, visually conveyed through the feverish swirling of Heap of Birds' hand, that permeates nature, and therefore life.

Although the language installations are the better-known aspects of Heap of Birds' oeuvre, the artist's paintings are another expression of his sense of homeland. They are not, however,
unrelated to the word pieces. According to Heap of Birds, the paintings form the "psychological backdrop for the 'wall lyrics'." While these "lyrics" are caught up in issues of the moment, the paintings emanate from a more reflective, nostalgic place in the artist's psyche. He writes: "[During] my travels to Europe in 1976 I was drawn by a very strong sense of homeland to the Cheyenne / Arapaho post-reservations lands of Oklahoma. Images from the Oklahoma landscape are influences to my 'Neuf Series' (Neuf means four times in the Cheyenne language. Also refers to the fact that you must do something four times as an offering). Events such as water rushing after a storm, cutting the red rock, giving new form to the red earth; add a natural energy to my painting while connecting my work with a visible reality. In the 'Neuf Series' varied shapes and colors present an image of forms in action. These forms overlap and collide reflecting the constructive and destructive rhythms of daily life."

The earliest paintings were executed in geometric style, typical of a young art student emulating the prevailing patternistic abstraction of the early 1970s. Around the mid-1970s Heap of Birds began to introduce designs from traditional beadwork done by Cheyenne women—specifically in this case his grandmother—into this modernist format. Subsequent works began to inscribe messages into increasingly more painterly surfaces, and for a while he worked with words and paint "in order to see which one would win". Gradually the words came to dominate the paintings, and eventually to be separated from the act of painting. The paintings now are abstract compositions in which irregular "splashes" of salmon, forest green, russet, yellow ochre, sky blue, beiges and black interlock, creating an "all-over" surface that suggests the multiple pulsating energies of nature.

Since the era of the Hudson River School during the last century, the peculiar "Americanness" of American art has been identified with the genre of landscape painting. When the same Horace Greeley, mentioned earlier in this essay, urged: "Go West Young Man!" he was promoting not only a metaphysical sense of adventure, but also the territorial aspirations of the Euro-American society. The sumptuous renderings of the breathtaking landscape of this country by artists such as Frederick Church and Albert Bierstadt provided a more than subliminal reinforcement of such goals. The landscape again reappeared as a particularly American expression during the mid-1940s when America was seen once again as the new frontier, having been spared the devastation experienced by Europe during the Second World War. The interest in Native American myths and totemic imagery on the part of the Abstract Expressionists group combined with the abstraction that had been perfected in Europe before the war to create a new type of art that was "American". Heap of Birds appropriates the American associations of landscape painting, and uses it to address the issue of territorial imperative that has been a constant theme in the protracted drama of the Native American condition within the United States.

The center of Heap of Birds' universe is his family's Home Place on the Cheyenne Arapaho Reservation. If one has the opportunity to visit the artist he will probably take you for a hike and climb down into the secluded gully where he first began to do his landscape work. The first painting was extremely modest in size—no more than about 8 X 10 inches. Subsequent compositions were about 3 by 4 feet, and the most recent paintings attain 5 by 6 feet. His rugged shapes invite comparison with the work of Clyfford Still. Still's interlocking shapes in the 1940s compressed pictorial space to the surface and offered a kind of aerial topography that reminded us of the grandeur of the western landscape. On a monumental scale Still's surfaces evoked the geological strata of dizzying precipices and walls of rock that heartened to 18th century notions of the "sublime".

Heap of Birds' vision is more intimate in focus. Down within the canyon, the horizon line is a useless point of reference, and the space tends to shelter and protect one rather than overwhelm one. The areas of color connect like the random interplays of natural colorations, and representing individual energies of different animal, bird, insect and plant life and spirits that combine in this visual collision—as he calls it—to present the unity of man and his environment. It is with this kind of unity that the artist has pursued both his language installations and the painting from which they have emerged, considering neither more important than the other, but both as crucial components for the expression of his integral self.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LOVE EARTH</th>
<th>PUSH YOUR LUCK</th>
<th>ENTER OAK POOLS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ENTER LOVE FLAMES</td>
<td>KNOW ROUND SHADOW</td>
<td>NATIVE IS PAIN</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IN LIMBO ALONE</td>
<td>FIXING THE NEED</td>
<td>STATE OF RAGE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PISS UPON RED EARTH</td>
<td>ASK NOTHING SHE</td>
<td>BOY INTENSE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WISH TO TRUST</td>
<td>NO TIME JUST SEASONS</td>
<td>KNOWING DOING</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
"At this time I feel compelled to articulate ideas concerning the subject of Native man in America. I wish to deal with the personal politics of manhood. In doing so I seek to deepen and broaden the definition of contemporary Native American man."  

It is clear from the sides that have already been drawn that the decade of the 90s may witness the definitive resolution of the complexities of the "American" identity, specifically as it pertains to culture. Hachivi Edgar Heap of Birds has already introduced quite a few jobs of his own into the intellectual parrying. To be sure the ambition to modify linguistic habits that are deeply encoded in our collective psyche is no mean task. But artists such as Hachivi Edgar Heap of Birds have realized that there is little choice in the matter for them, so crucial is this task to the psychic and emotional survival of their communities. Jean Fisher as noted "For Heap of Birds, his responsibility as an artist to rebuild the strength and self-confidence of native peoples is also his responsibility as a human being to ensure the health and survival of the natural world".  

This is certainly the crucial mission for all people of conscience during the next decade.

Notes


7. Ibid.

8. See note number 3.


12. See note number 4.

13. See note number 11.


15. See note number 4.

SOONERS RUN OVER INDIAN NATIONS APARTHEID OKLAHOMA

1989 marks the centennial of white domination over the Native nations which survive in the land now called Oklahoma.

The non-Indian citizens of Oklahoma commemorate the land-run by celebrating the beginning of the seizure of over 30 Indian reservations in 1889, from what was once mandated by the U.S. congress as Indian Territory.

From this celebration, now promoted as the birth of the white state, we can truly understand the festivities as a blatantly offensive act on the part of the so-called “Sooners” and their insensitive pioneer spirit.

The “Sooners“ sought to seize for themselves, 100 years ago, Native lands, thus destroying societies and Nations which were forced to Indian territory as refugees. Then to recall those grave days in the form of a statewide joyous observance, i.e. picnics, parades, carnivals and playground programs for school-age students, is a disgrace.

These exercises in racism and cover-ups of true “American” history must be answered. On April 14, 1989 as the “Sooners” celebrated and paraded, over 250 Native supporters countered the invasion celebration by marching in protest through the high-rise buildings of downtown Oklahoma City carrying their grievances to the steps of the state capitol. In support of the march to the capitol, five billboards titled “Apartheid Oklahoma” were deployed in Norman and Oklahoma City, Oklahoma Indian Territory.

Hachivi Edgar Heap of Birds, 1989
Cheyenne and Arapaho Nation
NEW YORK TODAY YOUR HOST IS SHINNECOCK

Downtown New York's City Hall Park is a relatively quiet oasis surrounded by the neo-classical facades of the halls of justice. Over the past few months this park has been occupied by six enameled signs by Edgar Heap of Birds; collectively titled Native Hosts, they are dedicated to the peoples whose land is currently known as New York State. One sign - NEW YORK [backwards] / TODAY YOUR HOST IS MOHAWK - is close by a monument to Horace Greeley, the founder of the New York Tribune, and recalled here for his sadistic observations on Indians during the mid-1850s.

Heap of Birds' signs are situated on the perimeter of the park, facing onto the street. They occupy a strategic site on the boundary between 'culture' and 'nature' (or, rather, what stands for these terms in New York City). They form both a real and an imaginary territory into which the New York office worker or homeless person is cordially invited: a reminder of the sustenance freely given by the Wampanoags to the first English settlers. Like most of the artist's work of the past decade, Native Hosts lays bare the problems of language: the vehicle through which the history and culture of his people were disavowed and redefined by the rhetoric of generations of Greeleys, who had power over political and public opinion, but whose vision was too limited to recognize what could not be thought by Western patriarchal structures. If the law dispossessed the people of their homelands, language continues to disinherit the Native American from the right to speak in her or his own name. Language most clearly demonstrates the unbridgeable distance that exists between Anglo and Indian perceptions of the world. Heap of Birds astutely discloses this dichotomy in language installations that make problematic the act of reading; his use of mirrored English words as in Possible Lives, 1984. (UN / LIKE / FOLKLORIC [bkwdsl] / DISTRATION [bkwdsl] / POSSIBLE LIVES) disrupts legibility, forcing us to relinquish our mastery over language and to read it 'otherwise'. His juxtapositions of English language and Indian names, particularly when they appear to be familiar, like "Manhattan" which was the name of a local people), forces a confrontation between what are essentially mutually unintelligible words.

Jean Fisher
IMPERIAL CANADA DOESN'T MAKE INDIANS
NATIVE PEOPLE RECOGNIZE THEMSELVES

"Imperial Canada" was presented at the Banff Center, Alberta, Canada. The work was commissioned as part of an alternative exhibition organized to support the Lubicon Cree tribe. The exhibition, titled Revisions, supported the boycott against the Glenbow Museum which had assembled a $2.6 million exhibit of Native artifacts for viewing by visitors of the 1988 Winter Olympics. The Lubicon Cree tribe stated that sponsors of the Olympic Exhibit "The Spirit Sings" are among those responsible for decimating its culture.

This billboard piece concerned itself also with another raging issue affecting the Native Canadian populations. Indians were protesting a Canadian government policy not to recognize as Indians any Indian women who marry white men and also their children. Making this policy even more bizarre was the provision that Indian men marrying white women would retain their Indian status.

A headsmen in the Cheyenne Elk Warrior Society, Heap of Birds made this artist's statement in conjunction with his billboard text: "It is a racist-imperial nation that takes upon itself the outrageous privilege to determine who shall be considered Native in a land where the national lawmakers are immigrants. Native women in Canada are Native and so are their children; they always have been; they forever shall be."

"A white Canadian law cannot make Indians nor can a white law un-make Indians. Through these tactics of law, the white man seeks to extinguish the numbers of tribal people on paper; thus 'legally' gaining the upper hand over the Native populations of Canada in order to cheat the tribal Nations out of land claims that are truthfully theirs."

"We are the indigenous hosts of this continent. Our way is to honor all beings who have chosen to share this earth."

Hachivi Edgar Heap of Birds, 1988
OH! THOSE SOUTH AFRICAN HOMELANDS YOU IMPOSE U.S. INDIAN RESERVATIONS

"Insurgent Messages for America"

As in today's South Africa, the United States of America jointly dominated their Native hosts by establishing reserves and relocating the indigenous people for the profits and pleasures of the dominant white culture.

Through this tragic relocation, Indian territory was created in 1866. Later these lands were to be taken away once more by broken treaties, then to become present day Oklahoma. This Indian territory was once a new homeland for tribal peoples from throughout the United States of America. Tribes that were relocated to reserves in Indian territory include Cheyenne and Arapaho, Cherokee, Wichita, Caddo, Kiowa, Comanche, Chickasaw, Choctaw, Creek, Osage, Pecos, Quapaw, Modoc, Ottawa, Shawnee, Wyandotte, Seneca, Tonkawa, Poca, Oto and Missouri, Pawnee, Kaw, Iowa, Sac and Fox, Kickapoo, Pottawatomie, and Seminole. These peoples were forced onto Oklahoma Indian territory from as far away as Florida and New York.

Life in the territory was very grave and the tribes were restricted to the new reserves which were often mere fractions of their original Native homelands.

During the 1870's a reservation rebellion began against the government of the United States in Indian territory. This native insurgency was led by the warrior society members of the Tsistsistas or Cheyenne tribe of Western Oklahoma. Raids were made in Kansas and Oklahoma Territory to recover the traditional tribal hunting grounds that warrior societies used to provide for their families. To venture beyond the imaginary boundaries of the white man's reserve was unlawful.

In 1874 seventy-three defiant warriors and chiefs from the southern plains were arrested by U.S. troops. They were exiled in prison to Fort Marion, St. Augustine, Florida. These seventy-two men and one woman were taken from their families without a trial and charged with the vague term of "ringleaders". While suffering through the sad prison life many of the warriors created artworks by drawing. The colorful drawings became the messages that the warriors could relay about their captivity, the damaging interaction with the white man and their memories of a tribal life back on the southern plains of America.

Today strong artworks with the warrior spirit, such as these from Fort Marion, remain as a method of a more modern warfare. These imprisoned artist/warriors began to use contemporary forms to communicate to the white public, as a way of defending Native peoples. Older modes of physically violent warfare were left behind in order to articulate the public message, thus insuring more survivability for the warrior and his family while voicing opposition to white domination.

In 1986 we are proud to find Native artists, whose families may once have been restricted to reserves in Oklahoma or elsewhere in America, stepping forth to comment as modern warriors. The issues that were raised by the Fort Marion prisoners - social captivity, Native interaction with the white man, and ideals and values from one's tribal perception - are on the edge of the battle to inform and re-educate the white man about his Native host.

It is clear that Native peoples have chosen art as their cultural tool and weapon. We now find Native survival once more depending upon the presentation of Native artistic viewpoints to the American non-Native public. These viewpoints articulate a broad Native reality which is so important to vanquish the racist and romantic image of Indians that is so prevalent across the United States. Before any truly sweeping social justice for Natives in America can be forthcoming, a stunning reality must be projected of the true existence of Native Americans.

The artist-operated associations across America must take up the very important challenges that shall bring the day nearer when Native reality will be sounded.

Firstly, one must always be familiar with the Native tribal communities which are hosting the city in which one lives. Numerous treaties throughout each inch of America have been broken to allow the privilege of American cities and towns to exist.

Secondly, because traditional mainstream American arts institutions have chosen to support the system which dominates the Native peoples to this day, to champion Native artistic statements must be on the agenda of the artist-operated associations in America.

Hachivi Edgar Heap of Birds, 1986