

North Dakota Museum of Art

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The North Dakota Museum of Art is featuring the work of American Indian artist Jaune Quick-to-see Smith in the current exhibition “Language: Concrete and Abstract.”

On exhibition are various drawings and prints that defined the artist’s earliest mature work: drawings, prints, and paintings that grew out of native peoples tradition of picture writing. Living in the Southwest, she was surrounded by examples of petroglyphs, that is, images incised in rock that were an important form of pre-writing. These symbols were used in communication from approximately 10,000 BCA to modern times. She also explored the world of pictographs or images drawn or painted on a rock face and their later expression in ledger drawings and winter counts. A handful of artists began to convert the historic picture writing traditions into contemporary art. Jaune Quick-to-See Smith, along with Randy House, was a driving force among them.

After a time, this artist who relies entirely on visual symbols to tell complex stories began to integrate traditional native imagery with contemporary symbols. A drawing might contain both tipi and truck, house and coyote story, Appaloosa and geometric symbol, mountain range and airplane. Gradually, the work began to look less and less like traditional pictographs as ideas from the Western painting tradition crept in. This included the abstract expressionist’s loose handling of paint. This amalgamation is fully apparent in the painting *Adobe Rose*, now in the Museum’s permanent collection—a gift from the New York based, American Academy of Arts and Letters.

The artist was born at St. Ignatius Jesuit Mission on the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Reservation in Montana. She is an enrolled member of the Flathead Nation. She is also descended from the French, Cree, and Shoshone. Jaune, however, was abandoned by her mother at age two, moved in with her itinerant father, and ended up in foster homes. Although she looked Indian, she was raised outside the Indian culture.

While working endless low-paying jobs to support herself and her children, Juane managed to take occasional college courses, and often they were in art departments. Early on, she fell in love with drawing and painting, which worked its way into her dreams for the future. Jaune was in her thirties when she added her great grandmother’s name, Quick-to-See to her own and earned her BA in art education from Framingham State College in Massachusetts (1976) and her MA in art from the University of New Mexico in (1980). She married a supportive husband and began to make pilgrimages back to her home reservation. Finally she became a fulltime artist.

The North Dakota Museum of Art is building a significant collection of contemporary art that contains collections within the larger collection. Among them, and given the institution’s birth and development inside the University of North Dakota coupled with its deep commitment to the humanities, the Museum is forming a sub-collection of art based in poetry, prose, and the written word. The Museum is also collecting work by Native American artists. Quick-to-See Smith’s work falls into both collections in that traditional pictographic writing was one the earliest forms of communication.

The North Dakota Museum of Art is located at 261 Centennial Drive, Grand Forks. Museum hours are weekdays from 9 am to 5 pm and weekends from 1 pm to 5 pm. The Museum shop is open during Museum hours and the Museum Café is open for lunch from 11 am to 3 pm. Admission is free. Suggested donation: \$5 for Adults, Change from Children.