

THE ELDERS TELL US the earth is mysterious and sacred. In the stories of creation, the earth was created through the efforts of animals like the turtle and the eel. Because life is dynamic and ever changing, some stories recount how the world has been changed three times. The first world was destroyed by fire, the second by a big wind, and the third by a flood. We are now in the fourth world; it will also be changed. It is we who have destroyed the purity of water, cut down the trees that are the lungs of the earth; it is we who have drained the aquifers that stored water for a million years—without water there is no life. We are nearing the end of the fourth world.

To begin this way is to give some idea of the power of knowledge, revealed to medicine people and traditionalists. These old ones paid close attention to the earth and to nature. It is the thoughts, teachings, dreams, and prophecies from generations before us that help define and give direction to our actions and extend the meaning of life and symbols used in art. My first awareness of a traditional ceremony was to see how the burning of blessed feathers along with prayers helped release my father's "shadow-spirit" so he could move into the world of those who had died. I was five years old. I learned then that physical death relates to the physical world, but the spiritual entity never dies and is eternal.

Introduction

The Continuity of Change: The Fifth World



When I was young we lived close to water. The river was constantly moving and changing. I was always fascinated with the movement of shadows, of light and darkness on the leaves and branches of bushes and trees. I was captivated by the sounds of rivers and the moving, sparkly reflections of lights running across the water. The natural beauty of mountains, rivers, snakes, birds, people, and death shaped my visions as an artist. The beauty of nature and our dependency on it for food and sanctuary help us to appreciate the insect people, water people, and plant people. We can understand that all living things are part of nature's order.

The elders taught us about the use of plants, the beauty and meaning of sacred places, and the location of springs, sacred caves, and special rocks that brought the natural world to life. This information passed from one generation to the next in stories—or sometimes when one was physically taken to these sites, an experience that allowed each generation to be present and to know their actual location in one's own time. It is the artist, the storyteller, and the interpreter of song that helps us to hear or glimpse these emotional inner realities. It is the artist who can objectify these things and create the image of the spider, coyote, otter, or a spirit being like wuk'wuk. Einstein said that knowledge is important but limited, while imagination encompasses both the visible and the invisible realities of this world.

In 1944 my sister and I were taken away from family, and we subsequently grew up in the federal Indian boarding schools at Stewart, Nevada, and

Chemawa, Oregon. At Chemawa, I worked in the print shop, learning how to set type and help in the printing of brochures. I fell in love with the smell of ink and the work of the design and layout of the printed page. Then in 1951 my sister, brother, and I were all put into the foster home system, and we began attending public schools. When I graduated from Yreka High School in 1956, I searched for and found some relatives who told me about my family; before this we were never told whether any member of our family was alive or dead. I also found elders who shared so much of our beautiful traditional culture with me.

Elders have been very important in my life as teachers. Wallace Burrows, born in 1887, was willing to share stories, teach songs, and explain the meaning of the different dances. Albert Thomas, the son of a healer, used humor to help us understand how laughter can be a good way to learn. Albert was the person who took me to Grindstone, where the old dances were still being done. He was a Nomlaki Wintun, and it was from him I learned the importance of the Hesi ceremony. Frank Joseph helped me understand something about the Mountain Maidu Bear Ceremony. The artist Frank Day organized the Maidu Dancers and Traditionalists and took some of us to the area where there were remnants of ancient animals that had been crystalized into huge rocks. Florence Jones helped keep the sacred springs on Mount Shasta alive; she kept the language alive and was also a healer, and she helped develop and train a new leader for the Winnemem Wintu people. Mabel McKay blessed the

Maidu dancers as they began; she helped to heal and to teach the proper way to make baskets, and she would also visit schools. Everything was done in a natural way, without official labels or titles.

Many of the artists in this publication have been friends, acquaintances, and people I have admired over the years. For example, Harry Fonseca was a student of mine. He had served in the navy and had some idea of what he wanted to do with his life, but after he had the experience of traditional dance with the Maidu Dancers and Traditionalists, where he saw the Coyote Dance, he knew his culture was alive and well. Fonseca's uncle, Henry Azbill (Maidu/Hawaiian), rounded out his worldview of traditional culture. Craig Bates, who was taught by Azbill, was also important in sharing specific information about Maidu dances and the making of regalia. Brian D. Tripp is a poet, ceremonial singer, and dancer as well as an artist. "B.D.T." gathers his materials—including rocks from the rivers, shells from the oceans, and wood from the forests around him—to make his mixed-media constructions. The beauty of ceremonies and the movement of song and dance inform his work; his prayers keep the world alive.

Rick Bartow, like Tripp and Fonseca, served in the military. He used his talent as a musician, singer, and highly dedicated artist to enlighten us, showing that truth is not always pretty or calm. But there is still beauty there, and it can heal: "heal thyself" is what tradition teaches. Leatrice Mikkelsen was the curator of the art gallery at the American Indian Historical Society in San Francisco,

founded in 1964. When she was young, she attended school with some of the children incarcerated at the Japanese internment camp at Poston, Arizona. Her art reflected her Diné respect for the earth and the stories of insects and the beauty of plants and flowers, but she was also inspired by the art she saw in the camp—how the internees used to make sculpture and create pins from found materials in the desert. I remember admiring a small bird pin she had received as a gift from one of the women in the camp.

Art can be healing. It is a way to actualize a specific thing. I think of all kinds of happenings and events when I work. This understanding of the imaginary world is what we manifest in art. It introduces another level where meaning and healing happens: it brings things into the realm of possibilities.

Just as with the innocence of a child, old age tempers the understanding of life. Newborns and elders share the truths of living the beginning and the transformation, the completion of a cycle. This catalogue contains the works of many artists. In its essays and its diversity of mediums and styles, you may find the powerful quality of art that reflects both the traditions of our ancestors and the changes of these new and contemporary times.