

*Green Shamans*

I have no native state but my visionary portrayals in art, no native nation but a sensual, totemic landscape of memories, and the unreserved resistance to dominance and nostalgia. So, my sense of nation and the natural world is imagic, a circle of visionary creatures forever in magical flight over the White Earth Nation.

The legislative council banished me from the reservation, as you know, because of my totemic shrouds, music, masturbation, and mainly because of my ironic series of casino paintings. I was exiled from my home and studio in spite of the specific article in the new constitution that clearly prohibits banishment. This, a charter irony, was a political contravention, more than censure of an artistic composition, as you know, my friend, because you were

the principal writer of the article in the constitution that prevented banishment.

The President of the White Earth Nation petitioned against banishment and tried to protect my constitutional rights. Yes, you are absolutely right the council has never been more determined to remove anyone from the reservation. First they tried to amend the constitution to allow banishment, and when that failed they passed an obscure ordinance about the abuse of native traditions and the misrepresentations of cultural property, the abuse of dead birds and animals, and persuaded the chief judge to rule on my banishment. Naturally, the judge ruled in favor of banishment because she was not pleased to resemble one of the fleshy narrative figures at a girly slot machine in my cosmoprimitive casino series.

The formal declaration of banishment was delivered late that afternoon by the county sheriff. I was ordered to remove myself from the reservation in three days, including my personal property. The legislative council impounded my house, studio on the mound, and other property. Then the tradition fascists and executioners arrived late that night.

Moses was murdered and dismembered by someone with a primeval hatred, someone who detested animals, the sound of my music, my shrouds, my casino art, and the women who lived with me. Moses was a Maine Coon crossblood cat with huge white whiskers. He watched me work in my studio for seventeen years. Moses was my closest

companion, and he was murdered because of my art, the very art that he so dutifully watched me paint.

The tradition fascists hated me, they detested my totemic grave houses, my creatures of the shroud, and they terminated my devoted cat as surely as the federal agents would have terminated me in the early years of the reservation. You know, the executioners, otherwise the tradition fascists, should be wary of my revenant creatures.

Does anyone ever experience a native state, a secure place of stories, solace, and sentiments that never torment the heart and memories? Yes, of course, my friend, you create marvelous literary scenes and stories of the reservation, and yet your characters are always in flight from the mundane notions of reality. You write stories not to escape, but to evade the tiresome politics of native victimry.

I create traces of totemic creatures, paint visionary characters in magical flight, native scenes in the bright colors of survivance, and you create the same scenes by the tease of words and irony. We both have a place in the sun by art and literature, and a place name, but our situations, as artists of irony, are always uncertain with the tradition fascists of the White Earth Nation.

I create green shamans and creatures in flight, a totemic tease and trace of my own want and crucial dread of absence. You know about this; my narrative figures are in flight over the wasted mansions of a casino homeland reservation. My artistic stories create a sense of presence in earthly flight, an imagic place. Beaulieu is my native

country, the township of my family surname, the place of my family experiences, and now the remains of my house and studio. Beaulieu is the place of the visual stories of my art, the shrouds of animals, birds, and visionary figures.

Marc Chagall creates visionary scenes over his hometown, Vitebsk, in Russia, on the Pale of Settlement. Beaulieu is my Vitebsk, a settlement on the Pale of the White Earth Nation.

The stories of native art and literature must be ironic, a practice that braves the contrived promotions of reality, and the simulations of tradition and culture, culture, culture. How else could casinos become cultural realities? Rightly you query my use of that facile word, culture. I should be more specific about the use of popular, cosmopolitan, and aristocratic cultures, but for now my use of the word culture is even more particular. I mean a reservation culture, a culture of reservations, that reservoir and uncommon association of colonial, foisted, bribable, simulated, countered, postponed, and ironic good stories, taste, and company.

You, my friend, are truly a literary artist, the master of ironic reservation stories about casinos, a native railroad dental clinic, and mongrel driving schools. Your stories and novels create the same visionary scenes with a political and aesthetic tease of reality.

I portrayed, in thick surges of paint, reservation politicians as animals—blue badgers, orange wolverines, crimson porcupines, common opossums, and nasty purple martins. Their huge faces are lost in flight, wry faces on a box

kite over a wasted landscape, tree stumps, seething with bright, wild hues, and, always, as you know, a signature, single Moccasin Flower showy and mature, even in ruins of wilted fern. The intensity of the images is doubly ironic, a sense of resistance and survivance, not nihilism, or, as you would write, never tragic victimry.

The Moccasin Flower, or Showy Lady's Slipper, a tender native white, pink, and rouge orchid that blooms best in the shadows of moist ferns, and a highly evolved signature flower in most of my paintings. Moccasin Flowers are displayed in every one of my portrayals, either noticeably on a landscape, or in some scenes a discrete presence, a miniature bloom and reflection in the eye, on water, but always a trace of the flower.

My second painterly signature is the image of a wave, a crest of water either on land or in the clouds. One of my portrayals in the *Casino Walkers* series, for instance, reveals a mighty crest of a wave reflected in a wide mirror over the Claude Rains Bar at the Oshki Casablanca Casino. The wave carried a walleye pike on the crest. At times the waves are perceived in the actual brush strokes and rush of blue waves of color, and sometimes the waves bear fish, faces, and other creatures of nature.

Hokusai, the nineteenth-century woodblock artist, created the series *Thirty-Six Views of Mount Fuji*, and the first woodblock print in that series, *The Great Wave*, inspired me to become an artist, and that was almost sixty years ago. Many other artists inspired me, as you know, but one

of the first was Hokusai. I was in the military at the time in Japan. The wave, always a wave, is a mighty signature in my portrayals and creature scenes, but not, of course, on the shrouds. The wave is a signature of natural force, always present, an *okinami*, or a wave created by the wind over the ocean.

Marc Chagall said he wanted “an art of the earth not merely an art of the head.” My first artistic portrayals and images were of the earth, the creatures of the tormented earth, not of the head, never the romance or realism of the head that would construct casinos.

Moccasin Flowers and waves are my signatures.

I created shrouds of dead animals and birds that were shot, ravaged, and ruined on the reservation. There are no signatures, obviously, on the creature shrouds. Many humane strangers delivered dead creatures, reverently wrapped in newspaper, to my studio at night. Others, the tradition fascists, heaved the bodies of birds and animals at my studio. Moses and the women of the creature arts learned not to be worried about the heavy crash and haunting thunder of dead birds and animals on the studio windows overnight.

I built suitable native burial houses near the studio window and covered the broken bodies of the creatures with thick linen cloth. Faint traces of natural motion and bird flight appeared on the cloth months later. My shrouds, as you know, were first displayed at Hello Dolly’s, a notorious native bar right around the corner from the Band Box Diner on Chicago Avenue, right here in Minneapolis. Yes, we were both heavy drinkers there more than forty years ago.

Hello Dolly's gave me a start as an artist, and, as you know, once the bar closed it would have been a natural place for me to open a gallery, but the bar was razed for a public housing project. The Band Box Diner is the only evidence of memory that remains of the neighborhood.

I never studied art, but for a month one summer in a special native program, and never graduated from any school, not even the federal school on the reservation. No one recognized me as an artist at the time, so an infamous bar was a critical public place to display my shrouds on the urban reservation. Seven of my totemic creature shrouds were bought right over the counter at the bar by Father Beeg Fedders, a priest and dubious collector of native arts from Germany. Since then my paintings have become widely known and my series, *Totemic Shrouds*, has been shown at several galleries and included in many museum exhibitions.

My shroud of a bald eagle, however, has never been shown in public. Only my closest friends have seen that incredible image, a trace of natural flight. Moses protected that grave house more than any other, and every morning, once the linen trace was secure, mounted and encased, he paused almost every day to examine the solemn shroud of the bald eagle.

One art critic declared that my series *Totemic Shrouds* was the *Sudarium of White Earth* and reviewed the images of the shrouds as native traditions, but the proclaimed tradition was practiced only in my creature arts. I never commented on the *Totemic Shrouds*, never contributed to

the simulations of tradition, and yet the chief judge on the reservation accused me of defilement of sacred totemic traditions. The political criticism and banishment have only contributed to my reputation as a notable native artist.

Curators reveal that my shrouds, mainly the weasels, badgers, wolverines, bobcats, and skunks, haunt their museums, and some gallery owners are worried about the security of their many wealthy customers. One serious museum patron was troubled that the shrouds might haunt those who inherited their wealth from timber cut on the reservations. The shrouds of predatory birds and animals, however, seem to cause the most unease in the city.

I continue to create burial houses for sacrificed and crucified birds and animals, cover the remains with linen, and then wait for a magical image, a trace of flight and motion on the shroud. The burial sites are enclosed in thick plastic to discourage rodents and carrion crows. Now, in the city, as you know, my burial houses are encroached more by humans out of curiosity. Motivated, no doubt, by the idea of buried native treasure, or even the skull of a miniature warrior.

The Galerie Orenda in Paris presented several of my shrouds, creature scenes, nudes, and animal paintings along with the poetic abstract figures, inspired forms, and visionary landscapes by Pierre Cayol. The international gallery is new and very popular among artists, writers, and scholars because the owners present natives with artists from France. I wondered at the time if my shrouds, a commemoration of creature consciousness, actually haunted the most seri-



ous monotheists, those who could never conceive of that native union of creatures and humans. The Galerie Orenda has also displayed totemic paintings and drawings by the novelist N. Scott Momaday.

A Parisian artist, a patron at the gallery, for instance, told me that one shroud, the ethereal trace of a great sand-hill crane, my very own totemic association, was secretly secured at an auction by a priest at a Catholic Church in Avignon, France.

Marc Chagall should hear that story.

Pierre Cayol has become a close friend. We are painters and share a similar appreciation of abstract and figural art, as you know, and we also share the experience of national military service as members of a tank crew. Pierre told me stories about the French Resistance during the war, and then he escorted me to the last rural safe house of the resistance honoree Jean Moulin near Eygalières in Provence. Charles de Gaulle invited him to unite the resistance groups in that area. He parachuted into the nearby Chaîne des Alpilles. Moulin was betrayed, captured, tortured by the Gestapo, and then beaten to death by the notorious Klaus Barbie.

Pierre, later that day, introduced me to Mont Sainte-Victoire, a spectacular view of that glorious mountain near Aix-en-Provence, celebrated in paintings by Paul Cézanne.

Mont Sainte-Victoire inspired me, as it has many, many artists, to create my own scene—a green shaman and several animals in flight, bright and bold colors, over the mountain. The Band Box Diner, pinched narrow on

one side, abstract, uneven corners, towing a cubist historic plaque, and with many huge native faces in various colors at the windows, was tilted over the steep slant at the south side of the mountain. I first presented my painting, *Native Band Box Diner Over Mont Sainte-Victoire*, at the studio of the *Trickster Genre Shifts* in Santa Fe, New Mexico.

The Band Box Diner has almost become a reservation because more natives have eaten here than at any restaurant in the world. Some of my relatives and many friends dined here more than seventy years ago. This reservation diner, as you know, has never served commodity foods. Many Somali emigrants have settled in the Elliot Park neighborhood in the past decade. Halal butchers and bankers have replaced the notorious bars and liquor stores.

*Native Band Box Diner Over Mont Sainte-Victoire* was my first image of the diner. Since then two of my recent canvases portray stout baroque figures crowded together, entwined by fleshy arms and legs, nude, tattooed, eating and playing cards in narrow booths, and some figures are perched on stools at the counter. The entire restaurant is bulging with native eaters. Some of the other figures, shamans and city priests, are in magical flight over the *Cathedral of the Band Box Diner*.

The Band Box Diner is a steady, homey native eatery, truly a contradiction of our experiences, and an ironic reservation. The building is prefabricated, as you know, one of about fifteen constructed only in Minneapolis. This is the last one standing, a famous greasy spoon that has been designated a Historic Structure by the Minneapolis Heritage

Preservation Commission. The plaque, just outside the door, declares that the Band Box Diner was built in 1939.

Yes, my friend, you have published many stories about these contradictions, the pose of historic protection of a manufactured eatery over the elusive memories of natives, exiled natives from reservations, who have eaten here in the past seventy years.

The Band Box Diner is a secure reservation of exiles.

My early artistic practices, as you know, were inspired by the images on native birch bark scrolls, mainly those associated with dream songs, and the rock art paintings of the ancient Anishinaabe. These abstract figures, creatures, totemic symbols, and imagic emblems are afloat on the face of huge bare rocks in the border lakes area, and in flight on ceremonial birch bark scrolls. The moose and some other creatures are direct totemic portrayals, but many of the images are visionary. Clearly some of the abstract images are shamanic, the creation of a native vision, or, as Carl Jung noted, “visionary rumors” of astral aliens that might have visited the Anishinaabe.

These native images and “visionary rumors” were the sources of my early artistic experience. I discovered similar magical images and visionary stories in the avian traces of totemic creatures on my shrouds. There, by the ancient stories of motion and flight, are the traces of our native liberty. Nothing in the world could have been more significant to me at the time. The images on the shrouds were created by the spirit of a way of life and by the visionary passion of native stories.

You, my dear friend, understand more than anyone the native sense of presence, and you write about visions and survivance in your stories. The tradition fascists, however, have lost that sense of presence and visionary power. They have no capacity for irony or the tease of a trickster story. They must track the obvious, dubious causes, and measure their native reality by the beat of a drum.

Native ledger art, Marc Chagall, Fernando Botero, George Morrison, and Otto Dix inspired my artistic styles and practices more than any other artists. I was never a student of art history, as you know, so my associations are with the actual artists rather than schools and teachers. I teased colors with wide brushes, one to another on boards and used canvas, and wasted too much paint in the process. I learned the most about color and the texture of paint in the autobiographies and stories by artists, and always remember the observation that no artist can create as many hues as nature. The mighty hues of a sunset are never the same, and no artist could rightly represent the motion, sweep, and sudden turns of colors on the horizon. These common perceptions of color, shape, and motion, are the primary consciousness of cosmoprimitive artists, and native painters in the Red Rider Circle, or Cavalier Rouge.

George Morrison, the abstract expressionist, may have come closer than any artist to showing the fusion of colors of the horizon at sunrise. The deep layers of color on the horizon lines of his paintings shimmer in natural light. He watched the sunrise from his studio on the shore of Lake Superior near Grand Portage. Morrison inspired me by his

great, masterly abstracts, and the brush of rich, bold colors. He earned international distinction as a painter long before he was accepted as a native artist.

I have never pretended to be a ledger artist, never used colored pencils or crayons on account paper, but the visionary styles of red, blue, and green horses, and those bright parasols, inspired me to paint animals in bold colors, and in magical flight over a landscape. The vision of avian humans and animals is a distinctive native artistic perception, the trace of an innate totemic association with other creatures. Yes, some native artists are closer to that avian sensation than others, a primeval visionary association with the natural instincts of flight; and most birds are apparently not distracted by flying horses, blue beaver, and green bobcats on the wing.

Marc Chagall has never been censured for violating the air space of bald eagles or sandhill cranes, or denounced for the trace of painterly flight of animals and rabbis. Chagall, his dreamy abstract creation of characters in flight, was an inspiration to me, along with the colors of floating horses in native ledger art. We were banished by the secular and tradition fascists from Vitebsk and White Earth, the Pale of Settlements.

Making Medicine created a handsome green spotted horse, and a red horse, with ordinary colored pencils. The Cheyenne visionary artist was a political prisoner, as you know, at Fort Marion in Florida. Luckily his visionary images were not imprisoned, or he might not have painted colored horses in flight. I am convinced that most

art historians and collectors are determined to secure native traditions by the mere representation of horses on robes and ledgers; but they overlook the visionary colors and flight of horses, and they neglect the obvious, that many ledger scenes are communal, a narrative style of native visionary memories.

Yet, many of these same experts would celebrate the genius of colored horses painted by Franz Marc, the German expressionist and member of Der Blaue Reiter, The Blue Rider circle of painters. Franz Marc, so great a painter, died a soldier at Verdun. Marc Chagall inspired me more than any other painter by his dreamy, bold colors, and flying figures. You see, when tutored or cultured artists create colored creatures in flight, the scenes are considered inspirations of primitivism, a certain value of artistic style; but when a native visionary artist creates creatures in bold colors on paper, canvas, birch bark, and on rocks, the images are pronounced primitive. The secondary entrée to the primitive as a painter is apparently more significant to art historians and some curators than cosmoprimitive primary native visionary artists.

So, what are your thoughts? How would the art experts corner my shrouds and avian creatures? My creative images are native stories, but not always a narrative. David Bradley is a perceptive, generous, ironic narrative artist, and he was inspired by the bold colors of natural artists in Haiti and the Dominican Republic. I am truly moved by his bold colors and innovative baroque, ironic communal scenes, and so the inspiration continues from one artist to another.

Yes, we agree, an original critical theory is necessary to perceive native visionary and narrative art, a theory that must forever sideline the romance of the primitive as a representation of native reality. Clearly that idea alone could be the start of a new art theory, Native Visionary Cosmopolitan Primitivism, or Cosmoprimitivism.

Some of the salon artists in Paris, London, and Germany were roused by primitivism, and their art has been ennobled by historians, collectors, curators, and sold at pricey galleries. The perception and sway of native visionary artistic practices have reached around the world and return at this moment to our very conversation in the Band Box Diner.

Today, we are the new cosmoprimitive artists.

So, my friend, we should order our lunch. This is almost the same menu we looked at day after day some forty years ago. Only the prices have changed, although the Baby Burger and Veggie Burger are obviously new to the menu. The counters are now red, but black and white were the colors in our day. Yes, the waitress is clearly the most radical contrast, abstract floral tattoos on her arms, a thick black braid, and on her neck a Gothic Star of David. Forty years ago we were served by Madeline, a rather tough minded motherly waitress who always wore a clean starched apron. She could have been a woman of the creature arts.

Meat loaf, was that on the menu forty years ago?

You kindly invited me to lunch last month at the Mayagi Ashandiwin Casino Restaurant at Leech Lake, a

truly memorable meal, my friend, and, in my way, a greasy hamburger at the Band Box Diner is an ironic return, only matched this afternoon by the unforgettable stories we have shared in this place.

The Mayagi Ashandiwin was the start of our interview, and this is the appropriate place to continue the stories about my experiences as an artist. I have never given anyone permission to write about me, but that has not inhibited curious graduate students and the art critics. The obvious difference is that we have known each other for more than seventy years. I remember, our parents first left the reservation about the same time, we are the same age and we lived in similar places, and now you are a respected writer, rather a literary artist.

I was surprised, as you know, but could not resist your invitation to interview me for a biography. You already understand my shrouds and visionary art, and the critical responses to my work. So, your book should give me some protection and counter the vicious actions of the tradition fascists and casino politicians.

My great uncle was very worried about you, especially when your father was murdered, and that was not far from here. Clement and my father would have eaten here, it would have been the right place for them, but it was not built until a few years after the death of your father and uncle. By then your family had returned to the reservation for a few years. Yes, only two years. Now we carry on the stories of our families at the Band Box Diner.



Clement always wore a fedora, and you look just like your father, even if you are almost fifty years older than he was when he was murdered. That was a horrible experience, your father and uncle murdered at about the same time, and the crimes have never been solved. I know, your grandmother tried to build a new life in the city, but she could not bear to lose another son. I lost my best friend when she took you back to the reservation. How ironic, the reservation was safer then than the city. My parents told me later about the fear and sorrow of our families. They were worried about my uncles and other natives who had been active in labor unions with your father at the time.

Yes, you are right, the Minneapolis Truckers Strike was organized in the same year that we were born, 1934. I read that the brutality against strikers continued despite the resolution with company owners. Gangsters were hired to menace union activists and communist supporters for several years after the strike. Your father and uncle were probably murdered because they were active in the union and truckers strike.

Isadore Blumenfeld was the most notorious mobster at the time in Minneapolis. Kid Cann, as he was known on the streets, ordered the murder of a newspaper reporter who dared to write about him and the political corruption in Minneapolis. Kid Cann was a Jew born in Romania. This emigrant likely ordered the murder of your father and chased your fearful family back to the reservation. That was a time of extreme emigrant irony. I read that he survived extreme prejudice and yet he became a gangster hired by

companies in the city to threaten and murder natives, unionists, socialists, and communists. Kid Cann menaced any association with unions or communism.

Really, he actually ate here, in this Band Box Diner? Kid Cann might have eaten a greasy hamburger at this very table, and surely he must have threatened the owner to play poker with his friends in the back room.

Heavy ketchup is necessary to dilute the grease, as you know, and it always tastes better covered with a sweet sauce. This once was truly a reservation restaurant. Look around, the assortment of people who eat here, once natives and gangsters, now police, brokers, artists, poets, journalists, real estate agents, and body workers. This has always been an unusual and memorable place.

Yes, you are right, the Curtis Apartments were right next to the old Curtis Hotel, and we lived next door to each other for about two years in those ratty, cold apartments. My parents knew the building was about to be razed, but the owner allowed natives to live there month by month. The rent must have been very low. I remember that someone had already removed some of the bricks from the building and stacked them in front of our apartments. My mother took several pictures of you with your father in front of that huge stack of bricks. I know, we were only two or three at the time, and the bricks were heavy. My father laughed as he watched us build a brick wall near the street. We carried one brick at a time from the building to the sidewalk. We must have been very serious about the job. The wall was only a stack of four or five bricks above the

sidewalk. My father was a union member, so our early labor, even as play, was a source of pride. My native memories, like yours, are communal, not separate traces of the past. I know, we were about two years old, and now we share these memories and stories of our families.

So, here we are together again after more than seventy years, a native literary artist and a native painter. Who could have predicted that we would become prominent native artists as our families left the reservation during the Great Depression? Your grandmother could not have imagined that you would become a distinguished author, and the principal writer of the new Constitution of the White Earth Nation. My grandmother could not have imagined my international reputation as a painter, but she might have imagined me as the first native banished from the White Earth Nation. How easy and ordinary it would be to turn our stories into victimry. A much more popular sentiment, of course, but instead you have given natives the new stories of survivance.

Those popular culture victimry stories are predacious and nasty. Even so, some art critics are determined to review my every artistic gesture as victimry. Yes, you always make a very clear distinction between stories of absence and presence, otherwise victimry and survivance. There, you tease my rage when some critics turn my shrouds into the stories of separation on the reservation and tragic victimry.

The hearty tease of resurrections, and the rise of my revenant creatures of the shrouds, is my secret ironic pleasure. Yet, even my obvious tease of miraculous occurrences is reduced in some critical art reviews as native victimry.

I am determined to create artistic images and scenes and ironic narratives of survivance about the aesthetic presence and resurrection of creatures. I perceive this as a natural tease of monotheism, and the notions of separate creations, polygenesis. That notion of a singular resurrection, that creatures on my shrouds might return, allows me to ridicule the arrogance of monotheism. The traces of creatures on my shrouds are the evidence of resurrection and a revenant presence. There are no native stories, liturgies or monotheistic expectancies of a future creature savior among the beaver, bear, sandhill crane, and bald eagle.

Please, notice that withered elderly woman at the counter, she wears black clothes, a shadow of consent, and she reminds me of the characters in paintings by Otto Dix. The dark, deep dents and furrows on her face, a survivor of the extremes of some war. The sudden glance of her black eyes leaves a trace of melancholy. Only the slow motion of her delicate, dirty hands, and the sensuous turn of her bony fingers, reveals the memory of ancient grace and crystal company.

You see, my friend, these are the images that haunted and inspired me in some of the war art and portraits by Otto Dix. He was an art student and portrait painter, and volunteered to serve in the German Army at the start of the First World War. Dix fought at the Somme, was wounded, and decorated with an Iron Cross. He was transformed, obviously, by the barbarity of trench warfare. His early war paintings, a new realism in art, revealed the extreme horror