Book Reviews
Compte rendus de livres

ARNI BROWNSTONE, *War Paint: Blackfoot and Sarcee Painted Buffalo Robes in the Royal Ontario Museum.* Toronto, Royal Ontario Museum, 1993, 128 pp., 38 colour, 18 black-and-white illus., $24.95 (paper).

Plains Indian painted buffalo robes often depict the military exploits of an accomplished warrior, and their pictographs can serve as visual records of Native American history and culture. This text, although short, is a very thorough and succinct analysis of five painted buffalo robes, which were commissioned by the artist Edmund Morris, in the collection of the Royal Ontario Museum. Eight veteran warriors depicted biographical scenes on the robes. They were Running Wolf, Big Swan, Bull Plume, Leans Over Butchering, Running Rabbit, Wolf Carrier, Bull Head and Calf Child. Four of the robes are Blackfoot, and one is Sarcee. Painted between 1908 and 1910, the robes reflect social changes that occurred during the life span of the artists, a transitional period which included settlement on reserves. Brownstone divides his analysis into two parts: discussions of the historical context of the robes, including the traditional role of buffalo robes in Blackfoot culture, traditional Blackfoot pictography and the collection history of the Morris robes, and detailed descriptions of each robe accompanied by a photograph, a schematic drawing in colour, and drawings of specific sections of the robes, as well as biographical notes on each artist. The book also includes an appendix of additional examples of Blackfoot pictography in other major collections that serve as comparative examples of Blackfoot painting.

The robes are accompanied by written accounts of the native American artists' interpretations of each pictographic event. They are also well documented through Morris' photographs, travel diaries and correspondence, which is part of the Edmund Morris Collection of the Provincial Archives of Manitoba, Winnipeg. The text includes photographs of the artists and work in progress that provide a rare opportunity to study the individual artist behind the creation of painted buffalo robes. Brownstone's analysis is representative of recent attempts among historians of Native North American art to identify specific artists. His work contributes to an expanding awareness of the importance of the artist's biography to Plains Indian Art History.

The recent exhibition catalogue, *Visions of the People*, includes analyses of several Plains Indian buffalo robes through a methodological approach similar to that which Brownstone uses.[1] Detailed information concerning the artists' biography is provided. Brownstone lists the written transcriptions of each pictograph on the robes. The transcriptions are numbered to match an accompanying illustration of the pictograph. These useful and methodical descriptions resemble pictographic interpretations by art historians working with Plains ledger art. For example, Gloria A. Young similarly applies a numbering system and diagrams to interpret ledger drawings.[2] Through their common methodology, both Young and Brownstone are able to render complex imagery more comprehensible while offering the reader much historical detail.

In addition to illuminating the lives of the individual artists, Brownstone describes the intentions and biases of the collector Morris. He reveals the advantages of studying a specific collection that can illustrate aspects of the history of collecting and of non-Native perceptions of Blackfoot culture. As patron, Morris' impact upon the creation of the pictographs, such as his request for the use of hide robes rather than the ledger paper commonly used at the time, reflects the collector's romantic sentiment for the traditional Blackfoot nomadic life. Since Morris' father was the principal government negotiator of Indian treaties in the Canadian prairies, Morris had made important connections with both Native leaders and Indian agents that affected his role as collector. A brief biography of Morris provides insight into the distinct character of his collection.

Brownstone's description of pictographic style helps to distinguish Blackfoot painting as a distinct tribal tradition. For example, the common appearance of object tabulations in Blackfoot pictography may reflect a greater emphasis by the Blackfoot on the capture of weapons and other objects than by other Plains tribes. Specific visual characteristics of Blackfoot painting are noted as well. Stylistic analyses of the Morris robes are compared with other examples of Blackfoot pictography included in the text's appendix. These other examples date both before and after settlement on reserves and allow for an understanding of both stylistic continuity and change. Following Brownstone's example, more studies addressing the differences evident among tribal styles of Plains painting are needed.

Brownstone covers the general attributes of Plains painting which he describes as a distinct visual system. Unlike nineteenth-century European artists, the Plains Indian painter tended to use multiple vantage points, transparency of figures, and a predominantly two-dimensional pictorial space. Brownstone contrasts the Blackfoot and European visual systems, revealing fundamental differences in representation. This discussion may be most helpful for the reader who is unfamiliar with the basic principles of Plains Indian painting. However, it also serves to reinforce Brownstone's subsequent conclusions regarding changes in

Blackfoot painting towards a more detailed pictorial style by the beginning of the twentieth century.

Brownstone includes an intriguing point that Blackfoot artists may have adopted a visual system similar to the European in response to the changing needs of the viewing audience or patron. Painting created for use by the Blackfoot was intended to be accompanied through mime and oral tradition at specific ceremonial and social occasions. A European viewer, however, would have required more detailed imagery and narrative. The Morris robes incorporate both approaches to representation. Brownstone suggests that perhaps a more conservative Blackfoot visual system was used to please Morris and his interest in traditional Plains Indian cultures. On the other hand, the pictographic style applying a European approach to representation may have been an attempt to appease the government, who rewarded Blackfoot individuals conforming to European values. Brownstone concludes, "The combination of the two incongruous visual systems in Blackfoot pictorial art of the early 1900s may thus serve as a metaphor for the profound and unsettling changes to which the culture was forced to adjust" (p. 35).

Arni Brownstone's *War Paint* includes the first published photographs and translations of the five Morris robes, as well as copious tracings made of the detailed pictographs. Brownstone's methodical research covers important areas of exploration, such as individual artist biographies, that hopefully will inspire future studies. In addition to thoroughly describing the historical context, collection history and painted imagery of the Blackfoot and Sarcee buffalo robes in the Morris collection, Brownstone offers thoughtful suggestions regarding the possible intentions of the artists and their adoption of transitional styles of pictography. It is an important contribution to Plains Indian art history.

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1 Evan M. Maurer, ed., *Visions of a People: A Pictorial History of Plains Indian Life*, exhibition catalogue, Minneapolis Institute of Arts (Minneapolis, 1992).

2 Gloria A. Young, "Aesthetic Archives: The Visual Language of Plains Ledger Art," in *The Art of the North American Indians: Native Traditions in Evolution*, ed. E.L. Wade (Tulsa, 1986).

MARCIA KUPFER, *Romanesque Wall Painting in Central France: The Politics of Narrative.* New Haven, Yale University Press, 1993, 262 pp., 16 colour plates, 230 black-and-white illus.

Although it was one of the most public fields for pictorial narrative between the eleventh and thirteenth centuries, Romanesque wall painting has rarely been explored as a medium for contemporary theological and political thought. A firm foundation was laid by Otto Demus in his *Romanesque Mural Painting* (London, 1970; German edn, Munich, 1968). Superseding conventional stylistic surveys, Demus provided the first overview of the structure and meaning of Romanesque church decoration, together with a catalogue detailing iconographic programmes. However, even in the French heartland of Romanesque studies, where monographs on sculptural programmes are legion, few writers have devoted attention to the meaning of individual ensembles of monumental painting. This relative neglect is partly due to the ephemeral nature of the medium: Demus estimates that 98 to 99 percent of the original production has perished, and most remaining ensembles are extremely fragmentary. Furthermore, what survives is concentrated in provincial parish churches, far from the major abbeys and city churches believed to be the centres of artistic production. Marcia Kupfer's penetrating study of rural churches in the diocese of Bourges is therefore a welcome addition

to the literature on Romanesque painting, both because it expands the canon and because it poses new questions about the meaning of monumental narrative programmes.

Dr. Kupfer's primary thesis is that wall painting helped define the place of the local parish community within the scheme of universal sacred history (1-2, 16). She moves away from conventional iconographical analysis with its emphasis on "sources" to consider overall patterns of narrative programme, underlying intentions of patrons and reception within the contemporary community. By analysing the internal structure and disposition of these pictorial narratives, she successfully reveals the theological and ideological designs of ecclesiastical patrons which constitute for her the "politics of narrative."

As the author herself admits, her methodology is a hybrid of traditional and progressive approaches (8). Like Demus, she establishes a concrete basis for her broader synthesis in a corpus of nineteen churches, including previously unpublished material (Appendix, 151-98). Here, data essential for establishing the dating and social context of each monument are provided, including patronage, historical sources, architectural history, iconography, style and painting techniques. The corpus is amply illustrated with site and building plans, schematic diagrams for more complete iconographic programmes, drawings of damaged scenes, clear general views, and details in black-and-white and colour.