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FA 301
Holloman
Subject: Harry Fonseca

Harry Fonseca

Harry Fonseca is an artist whose work is easy to appreciate. His work is strong enough to be enjoyed by a mainstream audience but also above any reasonable claim of having sold out by people from the smaller Indian-art audience. It's good at a glance but doesn't disappoint when looked at with an eye for technique and creativity. Although this paper will relate more to him as an American Indian artist rather than just an artist, it should be noted that the latter is more important.

American Indian is a caveat, one that just means who and what a person is. Ever since the Indian Arts and Crafts act, American Indian identity attached to art, like the paper on top of a bottle of Chianti, signifies authenticity. This act came as a reaction to the many cases of false self-identification of Indianness used to sell arts and crafts. An individual's identity does not determine the quality of their art, but it can give the consumer a sense of where the artist is coming from. But many Nisenan, as with many other Indians, did not and could not be recognised by the government because of certain policies that limit tribal identity. It is unclear (at least by my research) if Fonseca was formally recognised by the U.S. government. But for many people, this would not be any cause for concern since Indianness is not determined by them.

With Fonseca's use of traditional characters and elements, anyone can see why he would proudly identify as Indian. These cultural elements are key to expressing his inner self, and they come from his ancestry as well as his interests. Only in such cases where it relates an artist's identity and the art itself does a creator-expressed validation of the source of one's artistry really become so worth expressing. And Fonseca's art is the real deal.

Coming from an Indian who uses Indian material, there is a certain amount of cultural focus in his work. He focuses less on stereotypical 'Indian' objects and symbols, instead drawing attention to certain important elements of the spiritual beliefs of his people and their History (Abbott). The Maidu people have had a very interesting and difficult time in the last few hundred years. As with Fonseca, the Maidu people inhabited areas of northern California in and around Sacramento (Auburnrancheria.com).

When the Spanish came through with their Encomienda system, they were indoctrinated by force into Christianity and labor for the crown with many rapes and dismemberings occurring. Later during the California Gold Rush, the actions of Johann 'John' Sutter created a small American 'kingdom' of his own with himself as the king and several tribes acting as his subjects. To be subjected to Sutter generally meant to be his slave, and he has been accused of being a serial rapist and torturer who killed any and all who resisted (Hackell). Not only Maidu but also Hawaiians were used by Sutter, and Fonseca happens to be descended from both (Abbott).

In time, various Maidu tribes/bands gained recognition by their own efforts and had to fight to keep and reacquire their tribal rights from the government after allotment and termination policy. The Maidu tribe occupied California but also stretched into areas of the Great Basin and so retained characteristics of tribes from both of these areas (Auburnrancheria.com).

Fonseca blends aspects of traditional techniques and symbols with a more modern style. This is not uncommon for many American Indian artists (Berlo), and his work is highly

regarded in this sense. He takes the history and symbols of the Maidu as well as the simpler characters found on glyphs and combines them with expressionism and other schools of contemporary arts in varying degrees of fusion. The History of his tribe and can be viewed from a more impressive angle in his art. It is all very emotional work.

Coyote is a universal figure in many Indian spiritual and religious structures. He is a trickster, a character that does not necessarily embody good or evil, instead being more of a force of the irony that is the natural world (Beaverhead). He is not all knowing but he experiences most that there is to experience and is instrumental in the creation of new experiences. His curiosity and drive for new experiences leads him to change colour, shape and form (Erdoes). He is like this in Fonseca's work as well, sometimes being wrapped in Indians paints, sometimes dancing with modern Indians and his counterpart Rose, or even just skating around.

He tricks the viewer with his unique appearance and strange choices of occupation while subconsciously connecting traditional with contemporary. It would certainly be Coyote who brought Indians into the modern world to live alongside and become one with so many other kinds of people. A focus on Rose makes the art especially unique by not having it simply be about the male character. Regardless of the nationality, so many European-influenced artists look to the female models and characters to add beauty and the male characters to tell the story. Coyote and Rose as partners creates a bond between the two, representing both male and female Indians and the spirit of the trickster arriving in modern environments.

Fonseca was inspired greatly by the famous Cosco Rock Art Petroglyphs. These glyphs represent some of the earlier masculine arts of American Indians and would have originated with Indians from the same area as Fonseca's tribal affiliations (National Park Service). He has an entire series that is reminiscent of these glyphs with numerous kinds of supernatural and natural actors engaged in bold colours highlighted by their derivative white lines. Many of the characters look almost alive though they lack fine detail.

He also has several pieces that reference the California Gold Rush. These works are often more abstract, containing more visceral and unclear shapes rather than the vibrant characters of his other work. This works well with the concept because this would have been a very confused and unfortunate time for affected Indians due to the brutality of the overseers and the harsh overall conditions (Hyer). Many of his pieces exist within a world that is a continuum, so there is an overlap of concepts. He may have references to the blood and gold by using red and gold in an abstract style, but then he may also reference in the same piece other historical events like the Spanish occupation.

Although media opportunities may not be as omni-present as for many other nationalities and ethnicities, there are still a large number of places and organisations for Indian artists. The tribes themselves found a large number of charitable groups interested in the revival and furthering of Indian art and artists (Kohler). For example, the Native American Journalist's Association may work in concert with a creative outlet such as First Nations Experience to promote and distribute content around the entire world. And certain areas have larger support networks and Indian populations where there are 'artist communities' to be found.

Fonseca often had art exhibits, both solo and grouped, in California, New Mexico and Arizona (Fonseca Studios). These are hotbeds for American Indian cultural arts and crafts, so they're locations where there would be a lot of interested fans. Many pop-up festivals as well as permanent stores cater to such markets, and there are a number of small studios/stores. These were the centres for a revival in such art-forms supported by many different kinds of interested parties, many who desired to create a profitable market.

Harry Fonseca passed away in 2006, but his work will live on as his legacy. The sins of the invaders and their foolish decisions to value gold over life is well-represented. Coyote and Rose have likewise entered a new era, with Indians being any and everywhere Americans are found. In fact, they are Americans now, and rather than the image of Iron Eyes Cody half-naked and crying his white eyes out at the sight of some trash on a beach, this is a more accurate representation of American Indians. Like the trickster, the American Indians all went away only to be replaced by American Indians. The trickster and his power still lives on in the hearts of Native men, and Rose has taken over the role of the 'squaw'. And like the trickster himself, Fonseca taught a lot of people some interesting lessons through his actions.

Annotated Bibliography

Abbott, Larry. *Harry Fonseca: Maidu*. Interview. Accessed via WWW 2/23/2017

-In this interview, Harry Fonseca recounts his art and past.

Auburnrancheria.com Accessed via WWW 4/15/2017

American Outrage. Gage. 2008.

-This is a film that addresses the Shoshone's issues with the U.S. government and encroachment. Among the focuses of Fonseca's work is the California gold rush, and this film provides background into Indian struggles with encroachment for gold.

Beaverhead, Pete; Sandoval, Tony; Pierre, Eneas; Alameda, Addison; Woodcock, Andy; Confederated Salish & Kootenai Tribes of the Flathead Reservation, Montana. Salish (Flathead) Cultural Committee.; Pacific Northwest Indian Reading and Language Development Program.; National Institute of Education (U.S.). Educational Equity Group. *Coyote Gets Lovesick*. Washington, D.C. : National Institute of Education, 1981

-This collection of stories focuses on Coyote, the trickster. It, along with Rose (the female counterpart to Coyote) is a focus of much of Fonseca's art.

Berlo, J.C., and Philips, R.B., *Native North American Art*. Oxford University Press: New York, 2015.

- This textbook will provide with an overview of art in the Southwest in general. It also has many references and cited works that can lead to some additional learning opportunities.

Campbell, Grant. *The Rock Paintings of the Chumash*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1965.

-This source provides background of some of the earlier and enduring paintings of Indian Artists from the central California region.

Erdoes, Richard; Ortiz, Alfonso. *American Indian Myths and Legends*. Pantheon: New York, 1984.

-This book is a collection of various kinds of traditional American Indian stories. It includes one Maidu myth under its *Tales of Love and Lust* section. It also contains various coyote myths.

Fonseca Studio. Harry Fonseca. 2008. Accessed via WWW on 2/23/2017
www.harryfonseca.com

-This is artist Harry Fonseca's professional website. It contains biographies, bibliographies, news, and examples of his work. In other words, it's the prime location for all things Fonseca. He is Maidu, and also completed works for the Miwok.

Hackel, Steven. *Children of Coyote: Missionaries of Saint Francis Indian-Spanish Relations in Colonial California, 1769-1850*. Chapel Hill : The University of North Carolina Press, 2012

This book outlines the interactions of American Indians with Spanish religion (Christianity) at a time when the Spanish were very much still major players in 'the New World'. Additionally, it highlights resistance, focusing on the coyote, a central character in a series by Fonseca.

Hiestand, Vicki. Telephone Interview. To Be Conducted Mar. 2017

-Vicki Hiestand has worked for the UAIC Miwok for a number of years and can give insight into the Maidu culture to which Fonseca belonged as the tribes are closely related (some Miwok *are* Maidu, at least federally, because Maidu traditionally relates more to language) and are both in the Sierra Nevadas. She is an American Indian Educator for the tribe and privately, and a Public Speaker.

Hyer, Joel; Trafzer, Clifford. *Exterminate Them! Written Accounts of the Murder, Rape, and Enslavement of Native Americans during the California Gold Rush*. East Lansing: Michigan University Press, 1999

-This book documents the destructive and brutal practices of encroachment by gold-hungry settlers (a subject of focus for Indian artist Fonseca) through newspaper articles and analysis.

Kohler, Jack. Email Interview. To Be Conducted Mar. 2017

-Jack Kohler is the head of the media department at the UAIC Miwok Indian school. He is also the host of the radio/tv show *On Native Ground*, and has been involved in multiple award-winning American Indian artistic projects. He can provide information on contemporary American Indian artistry in general and among the local tribes.

Lewis, Orrin; Redish, Laura. Maidu Indian Legends. Native Languages of the Americas website: 2009 Accessed via WWW 2/23/2017 <http://www.native-languages.org/maidu-legends.htm>

-This site contains a number of Maidu legends as well as overviews of California Indians and their cultures.

National Park Service. Coso Rock Art. 3/16/2016. Accessed via WWW on 2/23/2017
<https://www.nps.gov/archeology/rockArt/index.htm>

-This website provides an overview of the Coso Rock Art location, famous for its petroglyphs. Harry Fonseca cites the site as an influence