

ART NEW ENGLAND

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JAUNE QUICK-TO-SEE SMITH:
POET IN PAINT

Like the issues with which she contends in her work, the Native American artist Jaune Quick-to-See Smith as well as her paintings and collages are less known than they should be—and too important to be ignored. Smith has been creating art since the 1970s, and this exhibition, curated by Judy Collischan, associate director for curatorial affairs for the Neuberger, is an important step in giving her the long-overdue recognition she deserves.

The sixteen recent works in the exhibition are representative of Smith's oeuvre. Combining painted images of Native American clothing, dwellings, and symbols of nature with printed texts and cartoon images, Smith creates evocative visual arguments regarding the treatment

of her people. But greater than the political implication is Smith's fierce insistence on the identity of Native American culture. Her work is a bid for recognition and dignity. It is serious, and it is very strong.

The works are clear in their intent and ingenious in their conception. *Flathead Vest* floats a simple painted outline of a vest over a meshwork of textured color fields, printed images, and texts, which include a label from a can of Redman Brand Pears, a headline that reads "Drums, Sweat & Tears," a generational chart of the degrees of impurities between "Purebred red" and "Purebred white," and a partially obscured image of Mickey Mouse. The suggestions unmistakably concern the oppression of Native American peoples. *Tribal Map* is an enormously clever and justified reflection on contemporary art. As Jasper Johns had done several times, Smith paints a map of the United States, but in her version, Johns's state names are replaced by the names of tribes that occupied the marked locations.

It is a pertinent observation and a well-deserved reprimand. In the face of a postmodern body of art theory, which contends that culture is nothing more than a set of essentially meaningless signs, Smith makes a forceful argument: Culture is real, it intrinsically means something, and sometimes, it can cause great harm.

—Mark Daniel Cohen



At the Neuberger Museum of Art/Purchase: Jaune Quick-to-See Smith—*Not Out of the Woods*, acrylic collage and photography on canvas, 2000.