

# COVER / 'MIXING IT UP'

## Crossing cultures in visual art

By REED GLENN  
Camera Visual Arts Critic



### CONFLICTING STEREOTYPES:

This large mixed-media wall piece was created by Yong Soon Min, a young Korean-American conceptual artist. Its message is the struggle in her own ethnic group to reconcile its contradictory image as both a "model minority" and the "yellow peril." Min uses abstract forms, ideas, images and words — some of which read, "Half the World Knows Not How the Other Lives."

Jackson Pollock watched a Navajo medicine man drizzling colored grains onto a sand painting, guided by religious ceremony. Pollock got the idea to work the same way and stood over his canvases, dripping and splattering paint, guided by his emotions. Pollock's "action painting" and abstract expressionism was a major evolutionary step in contemporary art.

Barnett Newman bisected his nearly empty painted canvases with a simple strip of color. Newman was a great collector of Northwest coastal Indian art. The strip down the center came from the bilateral dissection common in this Native American art style. Newman's influence on the new American and European abstraction earlier in this century was considerable.

"Our Bill of Rights has in it things taken from the Iroquois Confederacy (a council of five Indian nations)," says Jaune Quick-To-See Smith, one of four nationally known artists participating in "Mixing It Up," a seminar on such cultural crossings today and Saturday at the University of Colorado.

Besides raising our consciousness beyond a narrow ethnocentrism, understanding other cultures — and their connection with our own — broadens our larger social and political experience as well as our everyday personal life. How do other people deal with similar things in their lives? Art is a good starting point for this cross-cultural understanding, because by its very nature it is supposed to transcend cultural boundaries. This seminar presents an extremely rare opportunity — especially for white, upper-middle-class Boulder — to meet, listen to and view the work of exceptional minority artists and understand their cultures and connections with mainstream America.

The three women leading the seminar in addition to Quick-To-See Smith are Chicana, Afro-American and Korean-American. Quick-To-See Smith is a Salish, French Cree and Shoshone Indian, originally from Montana, who currently lives in New Mexico. An award-winning artist, she has been called "the Native American Treasure of New Mexico." "Our government is different

from anything in Europe, including our congress and the presidential cabinet and the kind of representation people have," says Quick-To-See Smith, attributing the difference in part to the Iroquois Confederacy. "Our history books don't give us that kind of information. There's nothing (in art history texts) about how the architecture in this country related to Indian influence or how our Art Deco differs from Viennese Art Deco because of the Indian influence.

"I was trained in the East with Bauhaus training by professors from Harvard and Columbia. I have a master's degree in art and take things from all the worlds that I travel across. And I look for commonalities between primitive art and Native American art in this country as well as in artists such as Dubuffet and Picasso, who also looked at primitive art. I look for symbiotic things in both worlds I've traveled across and meld those things together." She works in pastels and oils to create semi-abstract landscapes with animals and people.

A spokesperson for the Bernice Steinbaum Gallery in New York, which shows her work, says that Quick-To-See Smith "combines passages of art history, using the vocabulary of German expressionists. She integrates both cultures and makes a clear point of it that these symbols are universal and not endemic to Native American culture."

Quick-To-See Smith has been the subject of three television documentaries, two for PBS and one in West Germany and is a National Endowment for the Arts juror for regional fellowships. The U.S. Information Agency sent her to Poland as a visiting artist.

"Quick-To-See" means insight," she says of the name taken from her grandmother's name. "It has nothing to do with art." Her own quickness-to-see has led her into the Native American, women's and environmental movements. She is involved in saving the petroglyphs from destruction by developers in the Albuquerque area where she lives, and is associated with the Salish Kootenai College, on her Montana reservation — the Confederated Kootenai and Salish tribes of Flathead Lake.

Seminar artist Amalia Mesa-Bains is a Chicana "altar-maker" and installation artist from San Francisco, also an educator with a Ph.D. in psychology. Beverly Buchanan is an Afro-American public sculptor and Guggenheim Fellow from Athens, Ga., who uses architecture as a cultural and economic metaphor. Yon Soon Min is a Korean-American conceptual and installation artist from New York City. She works with the Asian American Arts Center there and combines avant-garde formalism and socio-political messages.

The seminar was organized by Lucy Lippard, nationally

known author and adjunct professor in the CU Fine Arts Department, who writes:

"Learning to perceive across cultures makes us look more closely at our environment. This symposium signals a rejection of the melting-down pot in which all successful artists must be incorporated into the dominant culture. In its place is the 'salad'; its ingredients are fresher; its colors are more varied; its taste is often unfamiliar; and it is healthier for a university, and a nation, that is very slowly coming to terms with changing times and changing demographics."

"Mixing It Up," A two-day symposium on crossing cultures, begins today in the Sibell Wolle Fine Arts Building of the University of Colorado, Boulder. Informal gatherings with the artists and groups or individuals begin this afternoon. Tonight at 7:30 p.m. is a panel and slide show on aesthetics, education and cultural activism in room N-141. On Saturday from 10 a.m. to noon each artist will show and discuss her own art and community work in a workshop format; rooms in Sibell Wolle to be posted at entrance. All events are free and open to the public. For information call 492-6504.



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