

Native American Ledger Drawings from the Hood Museum of Art: The Mark Lansburgh Collection

HOOD
MUSEUM OF ART
www.hoodmuseum.dartmouth.edu

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**For Immediate Release
September 2010**

Images of Nineteenth-Century Native American Life: The Mark Lansburgh Collection of Ledger Drawings at the Hood Museum of Art



The Hood Museum of Art is pleased to announce the exhibition *Native American Ledger Drawings from the Hood Museum of Art: The Mark Lansburgh Collection*, on view from October 2 through December 19, 2010. The acquisition in 2007 of the collection of Mark Lansburgh, Dartmouth Class of 1949, made the Hood one of the largest repositories of ledger drawings in an art museum in the country, and it will host major scholars from around the country this autumn in conjunction with a Leslie Center for the Humanities Institute entitled *Multiple Narratives in Plains Ledger Art: The Mark Lansburgh Collection*.

During the latter part of the nineteenth century, Plains Indian men meticulously recorded their battle and hunting exploits, courting scenes, and other cultural events, and these images provide an important insight into the world of the Native warrior-artist. Commonly known as “ledger drawings,” these artworks were created on lined and unlined paper that was originally bound into either sketchbooks or account books. Mostly executed in pencil, they were created in a graphically bold style that shows little or no background scenery but plenty of detail. They serve as a moving testament to the artistic creativity of Plains Indian artists.

This style of figurative visual narrative derived from the inscription of heraldic images of war and hunting onto rock, buffalo hides, and tipis to memorialize the accomplishments of the male warrior-artists and to designate their positions within the tribe. As increased contact with Euro-Americans from the 1850s through the 1870s led to the transformation of life on the Great Plains, these men turned to drawing on balance sheets in ledger books that they obtained from white settlers, traders, and the military. Recognizing that ledger books were used to record important information, the Native artists appropriated them to chronicle heroic deeds, battles between Natives and non-Natives, and nostalgic scenes of pre-reservation life. During the reservation era, these drawings served as both personal narratives and as stories in images of the transitions brought on by captivity, life on the reservation, and the subjugation of Native cultures. These drawings depict the struggle for cultural survival as the Natives adapted to an imposed non-Native lifestyle while attempting to preserve their history, resist white authority and domination, and negotiate tribal and individual identities.

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This exhibition is guest curated by Joe Horse Capture, Associate Curator of Native American Art at the Minneapolis Institute of Arts. It is divided into several themes, including hunting, battle, ceremony, and daily life. Derived from a tradition of drawing and carving on stone and animal hides, ledger drawings are mnemonic devices that were meant to be accompanied by a narrative from the owner. Unfortunately, nearly all of the original narratives are gone. Scholars who have specialized in this field have learned to “read” this fascinating visual language, however, so many of these stories created over a century ago can be retold.

The opening event for *Native American Ledger Drawings from the Hood Museum of Art: The Mark Lansburgh Collection* will be held on Friday, October 1, at 5:30 pm, in the Arthur M. Loew Auditorium. A panel discussion moderated by Colin Colloway, The John Kimball Jr. 1943 Professor of History, Dartmouth College, will include Joyce M. Szabo, Professor of Art, University of New Mexico, Seminar Director, William H. Morton Distinguished Fellow; Janet Berlo, Professor of Art History and Visual and Cultural Studies, University of Rochester; and Joe Horse Capture, guest curator of the exhibition.

Companion Exhibition

Incorporating a wide variety of perspectives, materials, techniques, and aesthetic choices, contemporary artists employ the visual narrative of traditional ledger drawings as a means of exploring their cultural heritage and issues of present-day Native experience. The Hood Museum of Art is proud to draw upon its collections, including several significant recent acquisitions, to present the powerful work of these Native artists in an exhibition titled *Contemporary Native American Ledger Art: Drawing on Tradition*, on view August 14, 2010, through January 16, 2011.

These works often critique the contested histories of Native America and constitute vehicles through which Native identity can be explored, constructed, and expressed. Over the past two decades, a number of women artists have also become active in the field of ledger art, joining their male peers in celebrating the cultural perseverance and survival of this art form. Some contemporary ledger artists use historical photographs and documents as a means of reassessing and reclaiming their family and tribal histories. Others use ironic humor, fused with the unexpected, to compel the viewer to confront cultural stereotypes.

About the Hood

The Hood Museum of Art is dedicated to teaching and promoting visual literacy for all of its visitors. This dynamic educational and cultural facility houses one of the oldest and largest college collections in the country, with more than 65,000 objects acquired since 1772. Among its most important works are six Assyrian stone reliefs that date from around 900 BCE. The collection also presents art from other ancient cultures, the Americas, Europe, Africa, Papua

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New Guinea, and many more regions of the world. The Hood seeks to inspire and educate through direct engagement with works of art and offers access to the rich diversity of its collections through ongoing highlights displays, special exhibitions, an online collections database, and a wide array of programs and events.

Image Caption

Short Bull (Tatanka Ptecela), Lakota (Sioux), about 1845–1915, untitled, page number 21 from the *Short Bull Book*, about 1885–90, watercolor, graphite, ink, colored pencil on wove blue lined notebook paper. Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth College: Mark Lansburgh Ledger Drawing Collection: Gift of Ann H. and Harte C. Crow; 2005.28