The New York Times

ART IN REVIEW

Brad Kahlhamer: ‘A Fist Full of Feathers’

Thyssen-Bornemisza Art Contemporary, Vienna; Courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York.

Some of the handmade figures included in “Bowery Nation,” a room-size installation that is part of Brad Kahlhamer’s show “A Fist Full of Feathers,” at the Jack Shainman Gallery.

By HOLLAND COTTER

Published: November 14, 2013

Jack Shainman Gallery
524 West 24th Street, Chelsea
Through Saturday

The four new paintings in Brad Kahlhamer’s show, his first local solo since 2006, spin out *references* to contemporary Native American and postpunk urban culture in figures drawn in filament-fine-ballpoint lines, in graffiti-like phrases and in spray-painted stains that look like

Cotter, Holland. “Brad Kahlhamer: ‘A Fist Full of Feathers’” (Jack Shainman Gallery exhibition review). *The New York Times*, 14 November 2013: C27, illustrated.

scorch marks. Basics of Mr. Kahlhamer's personal history are embedded here: a Native American born in Tucson, he was adopted by a German-American family as an infant and has lived in New York City, near the Bowery, for decades.

The major work, though, is the room-size installation called "Bowery Nation," an assemblage that incorporates 100 handmade, roughly foot-high figures that the artist has been working on since 1985. Composed primarily of street finds — scraps of fabric and wood, coat hanger wire, pigeon feathers — along with taxidermy pieces, the figures are roughly modeled on Hopi and Zuni katsina dolls, cult objects that embody forceful spirits and are used to convey moral lessons to children.

After keeping the figures to himself for years, Mr. Kahlhamer recently began exhibiting them as a group on a platform put together from studio furniture: a work table, stepladder, sawhorses. The result was meant to suggest a flatbed float of the kind that appears, carrying costumed performers, in powwow parades, though the effect isn't exactly celebratory. The float is decorated not with Native American "traditional" designs, but with the repeated logo of the Lakota Thrift Mart. Two dozen figures of scrawny, predatory birds hang from wires overhead.

And the sculptures themselves convey mixed messages. No two alike, together they're as vivaciously inventive as Calder's "Circus." But they're also morbid, death-haunted, a circus risen from the grave.

A version of this review appears in print on November 15, 2013, on page C27 of the New York edition with the headline: BRAD KAHLHAMER: 'A Fist Full of Feathers'.

Cotter, Holland. "Brad Kahlhamer: 'A Fist Full of Feathers'" (Jack Shainman Gallery exhibition review). *The New York Times*, 14 November 2013: C27, illustrated.

Art in America INTERNATIONAL REVIEW
April 2014

Brad Kahlhamer

at Jack Shainman Gallery,
through Apr. 26
513 W. 20th St.

In "Fort Gotham Girls + Boys Club," Brad Kahlhamer explores his Native American heritage in some of the most evocative paintings, sculptures and works on paper he has produced to date. His unusual approach combines elements of graffiti and other pop-culture references with familiar Native American imagery. One wall is covered with drawings and watercolors, including a number of portraits that convey a psychological intensity. In *Super Catcher*, a large ceiling-hung sculpture 10 feet in diameter, Kahlhamer uses the dream catcher motif, transforming it into an elaborate circular mesh construction. One of the best works is an imaginative series of objects inspired by Hopi Katsina dolls.

BROOKLYN MAGAZINE

Talking with Brad Kahlhamer, Contributor to the Wythe Hotel's Permanent Collections

BY LAURA ITZKOWITZ
5.16.16. 1:05pm

Originally from Arizona, Brad Kahlhamer is known for his vibrant, frenetic paintings incorporating influences like his native American roots and '80s punk culture, as well as sculptures and installations. His work has been shown at museums and galleries across the U.S. and beyond, and his *Supercatcher* installation will be featured at the new SF MoMA when it reopens this spring. He lives in Manhattan and maintains a studio in Bushwick.

How many of your sketchbooks are in the Wythe Hotel?
They acquired one book so there's probably about 20 sketches, 22, 24 spread to spread, and they hung selected spreads in the penthouse, which is kind of cool because the idea is sort of to record Brooklyn's creative class.

And you had just been working on that book for a period of time. It wasn't commissioned, was it?

No, I don't really do commissioned work. I'm represented by Jack Shainman Gallery in Chelsea and I pretty much do what I do and the gallery takes it. I do museum shows. I think Kimia met me through Deitch Projects, I think she worked there for a while and I believe we met around then, and you know, I've seen her around. I didn't realize she was at the Wythe. But when she came out here, she was interested in the sketchbooks specifically because I was drawing local Brooklyn. I had this idea that it was gonna be like Weimar Germany or something—you know, artists always project these crazy ideas. So it's really an update of the old *flâneur* tradition, you know the French *flâneur*, walking around observing.

Do you draw upon those when you're thinking about your paintings?

Not specifically. I'm sort of reworking the portrait as an idea of contemporary native art colliding with whether it's '80s Bowery punk culture or contemporary Bushwick. The sketchbooks are more just notes really, but probably coming into this next year, I will be conceptualizing paintings and sketchbooks, so maybe I can work it out. But it's just one of the things, like I used to play a lot of guitar, so it's just like that, just nervous creative energy. But now through venues like Kimia's project and Instagram where I'm posting selected things fairly regularly that all comes out of—this is probably the 26th or 27th book—and at some point I could probably see a show.

How long have you been here in Brooklyn?

This studio will be five years in August. Right now it's not cheap, but it's a good base. Before that, actually I had a great studio on Wythe, about eight blocks up from the hotel. When I was there, that was just a storage facility. I did a number of great paintings. I've been on and off in Brooklyn. Now I seem to be more entrenched here, but I still live in Manhattan.

What was it like then being over there?

It was great. I mean Williamsburg was in one of its earlier phases and you still had a lot of vintage clothing stores, the music venues were still alive then, big studios, more artists, the parties were great. Jeffrey had a warehouse about three, four blocks away so he hosted events at Deitch Projects. PS1 was less formalized. It was really fun. The waterfront was undeveloped. There were no bike lanes, no bike helmets. Zebulon was across the street, so that was a great venue to hang out at. It seemed more local.

So tell me about your path. Did you study art history, studio art?
Well, I've always been super curious and always a direct, impulsive person. I grew up in Tucson, Arizona in the desert, so I had a lot of freedom for wanderings or yonderings as I sometimes call them, and just instilled this kind of do it over and do it again kind of practice, so if I do one painting or one sketch, I just have to do dozens, like the sketchbook. And I've always been sketching. But I was born and raised in Tucson Arizona, then went to Wisconsin at 14. Typical kid life. Went to Oshkosh University, BFA, never went beyond that. I was in a band, so we'd go out on the road.

New York City in '82 and then I got a job at Tops Chewing Gum, working with Arty Spiegel. And through him got interested in their purpose and sense of mission. At that time New York was crazy interesting, punk. Then through the '90s, I started working with Jeffrey Deitch in '97, '98 and that was the first bigger stage in the art world. And now I'm with Jack Shainman, but not so academic, just kind of hands-on doing it experience. And I just got named the new Diebenkorn fellow for 2016, so I'll be teaching out at the San Francisco Art Institute. I'm doing a residency at the Headlands in Marin County, which is super cool. It's an old army barracks. It's quite a well-known art residency.

What was it like when you first moved here?
It was rugged. I mean, the Lower East Side was amazing. Huge rooftop parties. Pre-AIDS. It was '82. Madonna. My band played at Danceteria, which was a crazy experience. Ed Maxey, who's Robert Mapplethorp's brother, took me to one of the original balls, the kind of Paris is Burning thing up in Harlem—that was crazy. Just a lot of energy. At that time, we were all probably outsiders in our towns and cities outside of New York and we came here, all sort of crazy creative types amassing on the Lower East Side, and now you don't really have that.

Well, now it's here, right?
Well it's here, but you know, I think because of the internet more people are staying outside of New York City. It's gotten very expensive. At that time, you could come here and make something with not tons of money, so you had probably a wider variety of creative class coming in. It was great. I mean, it was CBGB. Everybody was in black leather. Everybody was dancing at the club over on Avenue A.

Check out Brad's website and follow him on Instagram @bradkahlhamer.

Photos by Maggie Shannon.

THE BROOKLYN RAIL
CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES ON ARTS, POLITICS, AND CULTURE

ArtSeen

Subterranean Sculptural Blues

July 11th, 2016

by Samuel Feldblum

Island States

TOPS GALLERY | APRIL 23 – JUNE 11, 2016

In Memphis, a sun-baked blues town where history oozes from ramshackle brick façades, the musician's studio often trumps the painter's. Perhaps it's fitting, then, that downtown Tops Gallery is underground, in a basement behind a working stained glass factory. From April 23 – June 11, Tops exhibited *Island States*, a group show featuring the sculpture of twelve artists. Many have Memphian ties, including the curator, Memphis-born and New York-based, Corinne Jones. The curatorial statement sets up the show as a meditation on individuality via standing up and standing for; ultimately, though, the pieces point toward a more relational vision of the self, of islands amid archipelagos.

Jones also contributed the first piece in the show, *Res Nullius sundial II* (2016), a sundial on the sidewalk outside the gallery. A black boomerang indicating six o'clock is painted beside a white circle, which the viewer is to stand within in order to become the gnomon, casting the shadow that tells the time. I arrived, like a gunslinger, at high noon. It was both a welcome engagement with the surrounding environment—the sun in Memphis is a formidable companion—and an upfront reminder that the individual is shaped by circumstances; one's representation in the piece depends on the time of encounter.

Installation view: *Island States*, TOPS Gallery, April 23 – June 11, 2016. Courtesy Tops Gallery, Memphis, TN.

Downstairs, Memphis native Derek Fordjour offers *Topdog* (2016), the most striking work in the show: six clay-and-coal busts stand atop one another, alternating between right-side-up and inverted. Clad in old football helmets, the heads suggest a particular strain of masculine self-definition, predicated on conquering and competition, while also positing that such an identity is a house of cards, turtles all the way down. We see how easy it would be to flip the tower. The sculpture channels a totemic magnetism in its simple power—coal set atop a solid tree stump. Beside it is Terri Phillips's *Soul Blueprint* (2016), a round wooden pedestal with nine colored glass chunks contoured to look like crystals. In a time in which our choices of what to consume define us, these ersatz stones remind us of the poverty of that process. Squint, and we become just so many mantelpieces.

Brad Kahlhamer's *Next Level Figure 12* (2014), a multimedia bird emerging from a central woodblock head, was more traditional in its depiction of individuality: figure atop stand. In LaKela Brown's *Ground Beneath My Feet* (2016), two lower legs are cast in plaster and covered in black glitter, reflecting the sparkle of Fordjour's nearby coal. Scrolled paper pokes out where the tibiae and fibulae would emerge, giving a lopped-off feel and suggesting the violence that shapes many communities. Renee Delosh's *Tropical Staycation* (2016) and Josef Bull's *Sustainable Earth (by Staples)* (2016) reconstruct a stalked plant and a head-like monument in kitschy materials. Atop Bull's sculpture sits a shining piece of Arctic mud. As our natural bounties wane, our dreams become more plastic. As Delosh and Bull suggest, so do we.

Derek Fordjour, *Topdog*, 2016. Clay, coal, steel, wood. 84 × 16 × 16 inches. Courtesy Tops Gallery.

Abutting the industrial miscellanea at the entrance, we encounter Jim Buchman's *Zoe* (2016). A white inch-thick layer of polyethylene flutters around a steel pole holding it upright, bringing to mind an abstracted *Winged Victory of Samothrace*. The marble-like appearance of the work and its industrial core echo the process of rechristening industrial ruins as art spaces, à la Tops and seemingly everywhere else. An offset room—less post-industrial than just industrial, full as it is of working HVAC pipes and valves—is dark, lit by the aura of Robbie McDonald's *Strange Loop* (2016). In it, twin wires threaded through baseball-bat pillars connect to purplish tubes of excited noble gases, twisting like arteries. The title—presumably a reference to Douglas Hofstadter's *Gödel, Escher, Bach*—suggests that meaning comes from mapping empirical observations about the world onto meaningless sets of symbols. To a cynic, the piece might aptly describe love (and could double as an ironic take on art criticism). But strange though the connection may be, the tubes loop together, and, in linking, glow.

At the center of the exhibition, Anne Eastman's *États* (2016), slightly bent polygonal mirrors hang from a hexagrammatic wooden frame. The mirrors twist slowly to and fro, the other sculptures entering and exiting their frames, sometimes recursively repeating themselves into a distant infinity as the mirrors catch one another just so. Alongside *Strange Loop* and *Topdog*, it casts individuality as intimately related to others. Here, then, is the capstone vision of autonomy in the show. Standing up, standing for, cannot possibly happen in isolation; we are in fact reflecting one another, borrowing and learning from others—who themselves do the same—in order to become who we are. Nobody's state is in fact an island.

The New York Times | http://nyti.ms/1C9rgjP

ART & DESIGN

Review: 'The Plains Indians,' America's Early Artists, at the Met

By **HOLLAND COTTER** MARCH 12, 2015

Some of the earliest surviving art by native North Americans left America long ago. Soldiers, traders and priests, with magpie eyes for brilliance, bundled it up and shipped it across the sea to Europe. Painted robes, embroidered slippers and feathered headdresses tinkling with chimes found their way into cupboards in 18th-century London and Paris, and lay there half-forgotten. Now, in "The Plains Indians: Artists of Earth and Sky" at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, some of those wondrous things have come home.

Of the about 130 pieces in the show, on loan from more than 50 international collections, those sent by the Musée du Quai Branly in Paris are exceptional: a drawing, on animal hide, of a half-abstract bird with prismatic wings; a raven-plume bonnet with feathers swept back as if hit by wind; and a bead-encrusted shoulder bag with a double-crescent design. They are all part of an exhibition that has to be one of the most completely beautiful sights in New York right now: But what would Europeans have thought when they first unpacked these objects in Paris centuries ago?

They might have noticed that the crescent emblems stitched on the beaded bag looked vaguely familiar. But from where? Moorish Spain. And the beads? They were glass, probably Venetian. Even a viewer who found the plumed bonnet outlandish might have admired the skill that had gone into weaving its headband from porcupine quills. And surely to 18th-century eyes, as to ours, the drawing of the great bird had a undeniable majesty and a sophistication that spoke of a deep history.

That history long predated the arrival of Europeans, as is demonstrated by the precious archaeological remains that open the show. The oldest is a carved stone pipe in the form of man with a double-bun hairdo and wearing a feather bustle, a feature of ritual attire to this day. The small sculpture may date to the first century B.C. and was found in a burial mound in what is now Ohio.

Its relatively heavy material suggests that the people who made it had settled lives. And its function is evidence of traditions sustained over time. For the first Americans, for as far back as we know, the sharing of a tobacco pipe was a ceremonial way to strengthen friendships and cement alliances. It was a gesture of intimacy and trust, like a mingling of blood, an exchange of breath. For this reason, pipes became as elaborately made and richly decorated as liturgical vessels in European churches.

With the arrival of Europeans on the Plains, life began to change. Spanish soldiers and ranchers, coming north from Mexico in the 16th century, introduced horses, which Indians quickly adopted, mastered and bred. Horses dramatically extended the range and efficiency of the buffalo hunt, a primary source of food and of hides for clothing and shelter. Plains people became increasingly mobile, moving seasonally with the herds and carrying their lives with them. Portability became a requisite, and never has the genre of art-you-can-wear been more inventively explored.

Painted robes, covered with figures and symbols and accessorized with leggings and gloves, became storyboards of oral history and epic adventure. One monumental example from the Branly collection, fittingly known as the Grand Robe, depicts, in more than a dozen episodes and with a cast of some 60 figures, the Homeric exploits of two Lakota warriors. There are debates over the gender of the artists of certain robes. But in general, paintings and drawings were done by men, and tanning, sewing and beadwork by women. And outstanding examples of beadwork, positioned throughout the show, glow with a kind of self-generated light.

An early-19th-century man’s shirt from the Upper Missouri River region, on loan from a museum in Bern, Switzerland, is sewn with just a few glass beads, like a sprinkling of fresh rain. A Central Plains woman’s dress, from

around 1855, has more: rivers of blue beads flow from both shoulders. Elsewhere, that flow becomes a flood, completely drenching a rare fully beaded and fringed dress from around 1900, and washing over moccasins, gloves, tobacco bags, cradleboards, and masks for horses that turn horses into supernatural beings.

It's a cliché to say that Native Americans were particularly in tune with nature. But everything in the show, organized by the Branly in partnership with the Met and the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art in Kansas City, Mo., backs up this idea. You're not in a humanist world where man is central, the crown of creation. You're in a creaturist universe, where humans are just one more beast, and the most aggressive of all.

Images of animals, alive and dead, are ever-present. Most objects in the show are made from, or incorporate, parts of them. One extraordinarily elaborate early-19th-century pipe stem from the Eastern Plains or Western Great Lakes is the equivalent of a zoological reliquary, ornamented with matter from the bodies of sacred beings: horsehair, deer hair, porcupine quills, wood duck feathers and the scalp of an ivory-billed woodpecker, a bird now terminally endangered and possibly extinct.

At the same time, no culture produced more vivacious and emotionally empathetic depictions of animals, who were regarded as having sensitivities and knowledge beyond a human's range. Sometime around 1850, an Arikara artist in North Dakota had a vision of his guardian spirit in the form of a buffalo, and for protection he painted its portrait on his shield. It's in the show and the buffalo's direct, candid gaze is unshakable and unforgettable.

So is an image, carved in wood some 30 or 40 years later by a Hunkpapa Lakota artist of a horse apparently dying in battle. Now in the collection of the South Dakota State Historical Association, the figure was conceived as a tribute to a beloved animal killed under fire. Streaked with blood-red and stretched out as if strained beyond endurance, it has the pathos of a crucified Christ. In a history of great sculpture, past and present, from the North American continent, it has a place in the highest pantheon.

By around 1880, when this piece was carved, mourning was becoming a

way of life on the Great Plains and its native populations needed whatever protection they could find. The United States government, with the Army and frontier settlers as its enforcer, stripped Native Americans of their land and contributed to all but wiping out the natural resources that sustained them. Reduced to the status of hostile aliens, American Indians battled one another over whatever scraps were left.

There are few saints in any history, and even fewer in a history of warrior culture, which is what American history, Native and otherwise, is built on.

At the same time, martyrdom exists, and the fate of native populations in the United States in the late 19th and early 20th centuries is just that. It remains a nation's self-inflicted and unhealing wound. And to some extent, the show can't help but be a memorial to it.

In the 1880s, a millennial spiritual movement arose among Plains Indians, expressed in a ceremony called the Ghost Dance. In a fit of hopeful miraculous thinking, its adherents envisioned the return of a precontact lost world, where the buffalo would be plentiful, the beloved dead restored to life, and the Plains would be American Indian lands again.

Material associated with the Ghost Dance comes toward the end of the exhibition: a woman's dance dress, flame red, and painted with avian spirits — magpies, eagles, crows — and a shield with an image of a thunderbird divebombing from the heavens. More personal is a little dream-drawing owned by the Fenimore Art Museum in Cooperstown, N.Y. Done in pencil and ink on lined ledger-book paper, it depicts an avenging horned deity on a half-eagle, half-bison mount that could come straight from Revelations. It was drawn by the artist named Black Hawk, a traditional medicine man who may have died with other Ghost Dance followers at Wounded Knee. The exhibition's curator, Gaylord Torrence of the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, assisted in New York by Judith Ostrowitz, could have ended the show there, on a tragic vanishing-people note. But wisely, and realistically, they did not. Instead, they bring the story into the present with work by inspired artists who carry Plains traditions into the 21st century.

There are classic pieces here by painters from the early- and mid-20th

century, like Dick West, Francis Blackbear Bosin and artists known as the Kiowa Six, who depicted native life and religions — including the Native American Church and its peyote cult — in an illustrative mode that became the accepted "Indian" mode for a generation. Native art has since broken up into many styles and media, while resolutely monitoring the pulse of tradition.

The photographer Wendy Red Star spoofs the view of the Indian being particularly attuned to nature; in contrast, T. C. Cannon (1946-1978), in a painting of his grandmother as a kind of sky-walker, pregnant with his father, affirms that view. Some artists are politically very direct. In a painting, Arthur Amiotte, who has a terse, moving essay in the catalog, revisits Wounded Knee, where distant members of his family died. Others are what might be called spiritual activists. Through film images and sonorous chants — you can hear them as pure as a Gregorian chant in the distance as you enter the show — Dana Claxton evokes meditative rituals still very much alive today.

Clothing remains the great statement-maker and storyteller it has always been. The young California artist Jamie Okuma transforms store-bought shoes into killer-heel sculptures glinting with 24-karat gold beads. Rhonda Holy Bear stitches, in minute detail, doll-size versions of the hide-painted narratives from the past. And Bently Spang, a Northern Cheyenne from Montana, has made a protective "war shirt" that is really a peace shirt, stitched together entirely from family snapshots taken at home. We all wear our histories on us, whether we know it or not. Mr. Spang knows it, and loves it, and makes it art.

Correction: March 12, 2015

An earlier version of this review referred incorrectly to the curation of the exhibition. Gaylord Torrence of the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art is the curator, and Judith Ostrowitz of the Met is the organizer of the exhibition in New York. It is not the case that they are both curators of the show.

"The Plains Indians: Artists of Earth and Sky" continues through May 10 at the Metropolitan Museum of Art; 212-535-7710, metmuseum.org.

A version of this review appears in print on March 13, 2015, on page C19 of the New York edition with the headline: America's Earliest Artists.

HUFFPOST NEW YORK

Native American Folk Art Meets Punk In One Artist's Search For Identity

Katsina dolls, dream catchers and graffiti, oh my.

Priscilla Frank
Arts Writer, The Huffington Post

Posted: 09/08/2015 09:12 AM EDT

NEXT LEVEL FIGURE 11, 2014 WOOD, WIRE, ROPE, CLOTH, BELLS, ACRYLIC AND SPRAY PAINT SCULPTURE: 13 1/4 X 15 X 3 1/2 INCHES INSTALLED ON METAL STAND: 58 1/2 X 15 X 5 INCHES INVENTORY #BRK14.002 ©BRAD KAHLHAMER. COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND JACK SHAINMAN GALLERY, NEW YORK.

Traditionally, katsina dolls, essential to Hopi and Zuni Native American traditions, serve as messengers between the earthly and spiritual realms, often imparting moral lessons to young children. Representing the spirits of deities, animals, natural growths and deceased ancestors, the dolls are often made from cottonwood root, featuring crescent-shaped mouths, beaks or snouts, as well as bird wings, feathers, and animal horns.

Artist Brad Kahlhamer riffs of the katsina tradition with his wiry assemblage sculptures, weaving the spirit of Native American folk art through the impetuousness of abstract expressionism and the rebellious fever of New York punk. The raggedy talismans, made from canvas and nails and shirts and hair, resemble the abject cousins of the traditional totems, not so much imparting moral lessons but busking through gritty New York streets imparting frenzied and sometimes wildly intuitive tidbits.

Kahlhamer is Native American. However, he was adopted by a German-American family in infancy and does not know his biological parents nor his tribal affiliation. As such, his art is pumped with a certain ravenous hunger, with multiple influences both cultural and personal surgically attached at a quick pace.

NEXT LEVEL FIGURE 12, 2014 WOOD, WIRE, ROPE, FEATHERS, CLOTH, BELLS, LEATHER, ACRYLIC AND SPRAY PAINT SCULPTURE: 17 X 13 X 6 1/2 INCHES INSTALLED ON METAL STAND: 48 1/2 X 13 X 6 1/2 INCHES INVENTORY Â©BRAD KAHLHAMER. COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND JACK SHAINMAN GALLERY, NEW YORK.

"I grew up in Tucson and at 14 moved with the family outside a small Wisconsin town," Kahlhamer explained to The Huffington Post Arts. "I had tremendous freedom as a kid. Lots of desert adventures -- a childhood filled with only-come-home-when-hungry treks and nature encounters in the Sonoran Desert. I think that instilled me with some nomadic impulses. The Midwest was about personal growth, developing my curiosities and early encounters with the 'other.'"

In 1982, Kahlhamer moved to New York City, specifically the Lower East Side in the midst of its cultural rebirth. "I witnessed Glenn Branca's apocalyptic guitar symphony. I was also playing in a band -- I recall one gig at Danceteria that was on the same bill as the Cro-mags' beer-can-throwing crowd. At the time, I worked at Topps chewing gum as an art director and met some of the underground cartoon heavies. Art Spiegelman brought in the first copy of Raw, and he showed the first chapters of Maus. I was attracted to the whole movement's sense of mission."

The raucous pace of 1980s New York is tangible in Kahlhamer's sculptural works -- part subway graffiti, part performative nightlife, part post-punk DIY. And a hefty dose of that New York transplant angst, opting to search for a home and an identity somewhere between the future and the past. A whimsical darkness runs throughout. Holland Cotter described the vision as "morbid, death-haunted, a circus risen from the grave."

"Native American history has long been central to my 'yonderings,'" Kahlhamer continued. "By that I mean the treks and explorations I take through urban street culture, music, cinema, Native American art and the American West. The Arizona landscape of my childhood was so powerful to me, as were the tribal objects that originated there."

BOWERY NATION (INSTALLED AT A FISTFUL OF FEATHERS, JACK SHAINMAN GALLERY, OCTOBER 18 NOVEMBER 16, 2013), 1985-2012 BOWERY NATION: CONSTRUCTION MADE WITH WOOD, WIRE, RUBBER, FEATHERS, OIL PAINT, ACRYLIC PAINT, SPRAY PAINT, CLOTH, STRING, ROPE, HAIR, LEATHER, METAL, PENCIL, BONE, CLAY, AND SAGE APPROXIMATELY 10 X 24 X 4 FEET INSTALLED BRAD KAHLHAMER. COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND JACK SHAINMAN GALLERY, NEW YORK.

Specifically, Kahlhamer was inspired by the Barry Goldwater collection of katsina dolls at the Heard Museum, which he first visited in the 1970s. "I've always marveled at the collection's power and the interconnectedness of its cosmology. It's an entire universe." The artist's "Bowery Nation," featuring over 100 figures, is an ode to this obsession, as is his newest sculptural series, "Super Catcher," which shifts from katsina dolls to dream catchers.

Aside from crafting sculptures, Kahlhamer also plays guitar, a practice he sees as a natural extension of his visual work. "The sounds I play are like the forms in my work -- skeletal, jangly, wirey," he said. "I prefer the raw and immediate. A music video I made, 'Dark Hair,' has lyrics that have ended up in paintings.

"There's a perpetual sonic loop between the painting studio and my musical interests. This translates to writing, too. I recently wrote an essay on the painter Fritz Scholder for the Denver Art Museum, and approached the text with a songwriter's attitude. I always travel with a sketchbook so I can jam out visually in the same way I would with a guitar. The sketches then live on as entries on my Instagram, which I keep as visual diary. It's all a lyrical loop."

There is a loop-like feel to Kahlhamer's entire handmade practice as well; perhaps, that is, if loops could be jagged. Authentic obsessions, whether artistic influences or personal quests, drive the time-travelling sculptures with ferocious intensity. Traditional Native American folk art is stitched together with a hint of Paul Klee's diminutive monsters, a whiff of Jean-Michel Basquiat's calligraffiti, some of Alexander Calder's delicate mobiles, a bit of Robert Rauschenberg's scrap storytelling. It's a search for identity that doesn't just look backwards, but forwards, sideways, inside, and upside down as well.

NEXT LEVEL FIGURE 15, 2014 WOOD, WIRE, BELLS, LEATHER, ACRYLIC AND SPRAY PAINT SCULPTURE: 21 X 8 1/4 X 8 1/2 INCHES INSTALLED ON METAL STAND:53 1/2 X 8 1/4 X 8 1/2 INCHES INVENTORY #BRK14.007 Â©BRAD KAHLHAMER. COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND JACK SHAINMAN GALLERY, NEW YORK.

WALL STREET JOURNAL

NY CULTURE

Art Works by Katie Armstrong, Joanne Greenbaum and Brad Kahlhamer

Fine Art: Our Roundup of Notable Area Gallery Shows

By PETER PLAGENS
April 11, 2014 8:46 p.m.

Brad Kahlhamer: Fort Gotham Girls + Boys Club

Jack Shainman
513 W. 20th St., (212) 645-1701
Through Apr. 26

Brad Kahlhamer (b. 1956) has lived quite a life. He's an American Indian from Tucson, Ariz., who was adopted by a German-American family and has lived much of his life here on the Lower East Side. A musician who played at the legendary CBGB club, he's also an artist—formerly in the stable of the equally legendary Deitch Projects gallery—whose efforts range through painting, drawing, sculpture, installation and performance.

Mr. Kahlhamer's deftly expressionist art understandably comprises a plethora of subjects, from Indian imagery (including decorative motifs lifted from totems), to the vagaries of gritty New York, to the intersection of American consumer culture and Indian life, e.g., Lakota Thrift Store (there's one in North Eagle Butte, S.D.). His work also employs just about every stylistic device under the contemporary sun: graffiti skeins, delicate ink lines, paint stains, wire arabesques and found objects. Unsurprisingly, Mr. Kahlhamer's art is remindful-in-combination of any number of other artists, including Francis Bacon, Marlene Dumas and Ralph Steadman.

This is a daunting, almost manic exhibition that, for all its appearance of reckless passion, looks like it wants to say more, to have more of a political point of view, than it actually does. In short, it's social comment without quite enough comment.

Plagens, Peter. “Art Works by Katie Armstrong, Joanne Greebaum and Brad Kahlhamer” (Jack Shainman Gallery exhibition review). *The Wall Street Journal*, 11 April 2014. Online.
<http://online.wsj.com/news/articles/SB10001424052702303603904579493523021033400?KEYWORDS=brad+kahlhamer&mg=reno64-wsj>.

Kahlhamer

Brad Kahlhamer: Bowery Nation

July 15, 2012, to February 24, 2013

The Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum

Brad Kahlhamer

Bowery Nation (detail), 1985-2012

In the late 1970s, Brad Kahlhamer visited the Heard Museum in Phoenix. The Heard's mission is Native American arts and culture, and Kahlhamer was drawn there because of a growing interest in his Native blood and a resultant fascination with indigenous American art, particularly from the Southwest. His memories of the visit, however, are primarily not of cultural awakening, but are rather based in a profoundly aesthetic experience. Kahlhamer, who was then in his mid twenties, encountered the Heard's extraordinary collection of Hopi katsina dolls,[1] the majority of which were donated to the museum by Barry Goldwater, former Arizona Senator and Republican Presidential candidate. Kahlhamer's life-altering experience with the katsina collection did not so much involve the unique character of each doll, but instead revolved around the overwhelming presence of hundreds of dolls as a group: the cumulative power of the wildly inventive—and often bizarre—Hopi cosmology.

Katsinas are masked and costumed figures that personify supernatural beings that live in the sacred landscape surrounding the Hopi's ancestral land in northeastern Arizona. There are hundreds of katsinas in the Hopi pantheon, and specific katsinas are tied into seasonal rituals that occur in an eight-month period from December through July. Small, effigy-like versions of katsinas are crafted by Hopi artists to be given as gifts, particularly to young girls, to act as teaching tools to explain the complex Hopi belief system. These katsina "dolls" began to be collected by non-native people in the late nineteenth century, and they are still produced by the Hopi for both religious and commercial purposes.

Kahlhamer started making small, figurative sculptures reflecting his interest in katsinas during a series of fishing trips to the Hudson River Valley in 1985. The artist began cobbling together the works out of detritus such as wire, fabric, and bicycle tire inner tubes that he found in a local basement workshop. His initial impulse was spontaneous and organic: the sculptures were provisional and experimental, with no grand scheme or plan as to their eventual future. There was no attempt to actually replicate specific katsinas, with the nature of the sculptures more reflective of the artist's hybrid artistic sensibility than Hopi belief or aesthetics. As the group expanded over the ensuing years, Kahlhamer shied away from exhibiting them publically and began to regard them as "companions," strange studio mates that complemented the extensive collection of taxidermy and other objects that informed his practice as a painter. After a move in 1990 to the Lower East Side Bowery neighborhood that has been his home ever since, Kahlhamer's alternative "tribe" slowly grew to its current one hundred figures, with about two dozen additional bird-like companions. The decision to assemble them as a group and finally pursue their exhibition was partially governed by the series having reached the century mark, but also by the fact that, just like Kahlhamer's experience at the Heard three decades earlier, the power of the individual "dolls" is amplified by their gathering. Kahlhamer's personal mythology has been made manifest through the truism of strength in numbers.

A consistent thread in Kahlhamer's work is identity, or rather the juggling of a tripartite identity: his Native-American background,[2] his formative years being raised in a middle-class, German-American family (he was adopted as an infant), and his adulthood in New York's burgeoning art world of the 1980s and early 90s.

Kahlhamer's aesthetic is also hybrid, a combination of his early influences from the world of comics and cartoons,[3] high-art Expressionism, the attitude and style found in punk and the more rough-and-tumble side of country music, and the very American DIY lifestyle of the garage and basement tinkerer. Because he lives in New York City, one is tempted to label the artist an "urban Indian," but Kahlhamer's connection to Native culture has always been somewhat second hand due to his being raised by adoptive parents. As an adult he has spent significant time with Native people (particularly in the West), but in the present day Indian culture is defined as much by things such as basketball (Kahlhamer is an avid player) and skateboarding as it is by traditional Native spiritual belief. Kahlhamer eschews the stereotypical role of Indian as spiritual being, attuned to and more a part of nature, but his art consistently exhibits a spiritual longing and is frequently touched by the animism found in traditional cultures. Firmly grounded in modern existential angst, Kahlhamer's homesickness is as much American as American Indian, reflecting the restlessness (and rootlessness) that has characterized much of American identity.

Kahlhamer has spoken of *Bowery Nation* as an "alternative tribe" and the fact that the majority of the work's individual elements were born on New York's Lower East Side (the part of city with the most extensive history of immigration) makes a certain kind of sense. *Bowery Nation* can be looked on as a small, but tightly-knit


AKOTA
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ethnic group or clan, owing its spirit to the zeitgeist of New York City as much as to the influence of the inventive vitality of Hopi woodcarvers. The Lower East Side, well before the construction of the New Museum and the recent explosion of galleries, was a focus for New York's alternative communities,[4] from Walt Whitman in the nineteenth century to Bela Bartok, Mark Rothko, William Burroughs, Andy Warhol, the Hell's Angels (their headquarters is still on East Third Street), Kate Millett, and Eva Hesse in the twentieth; both the artist and the characters in *Bowery Nation* fit comfortably into this tradition. The individual figures in *Bowery Nation* share a certain affinity with the personages pictured in the New York street drawings of Saul Steinberg, another artist who was an immigrant to the city. Steinberg's street characters reflect the polyglot nature of New York, and like the figures in *Bowery Nation*, their style is based on an amalgam of influences, including cartoons, Cubism, and folk art.

Kahlhamer's work has always had an outsider flavor, and this quality is particularly apparent in *Bowery Nation* due to the extensive use of non-art materials. Some of the things that comprise the individual sculptures include (in no particular order) rope, coat hanger wire, rubber inner tubes, leather (primarily from a shoemaker on Lafayette Street), found wood, nails, the artist's own hair, thumbtacks, oil paint, spray paint, sage, discarded clothing, buffalo hair, bells, and red broadcloth (from a Native trading post in Rapid City, South Dakota). Feathers are used extensively (Kahlhamer has stated that "it's tough for me to walk by a feather"), with their origins including the pigeons of New York, pricey tackle shops, as well as those found by the artist on his western treks. The folk aesthetic in Kahlhamer's sculpture, particularly its graphic and material quality, owes a debt to one of the artist's other obsessions, handmade fishing lures from the 1940s and 50s. Kahlhamer has an extensive collection of lures from this period (a time before mass production took over the fishing paraphernalia industry) and their inventive use of form, their material palette (besides feathers, animal hair was used extensively), and their lively, cartoon-like painting deeply inform the visual vocabulary of the artist's work.

Contemporary pow-wows are events where Native people (often from different tribal groups) gather for intense dancing, drumming, and singing competitions that last from one day to as much as a week. The pow-wow performers dress in elaborate outfits that reflect their tribal identity and history, and most pow-wows include "Fancy Dancers" who wear vivid costumes that features bright colors and a range of traditional materials like feather bustles, beads, bells, and sheep hair in addition to modern materials such as plastic and synthetic fur. Kahlhamer has frequently attended the larger pow-wows, including the Crow Fair that occurs annually near Billings, Montana, and North American Indian Days held adjacent to the Blackfoot Reservation in Browning, Montana. These festive events incorporate parades with floats (often made from hay wagons or flatbed trucks) and include contingents of military personnel and veterans, tribal officials, and tribal members dressed in pow-wow regalia, war bonnets, reservation hats, and extravagant beadwork. The form taken by the pow-wow float—a repurposed vehicle crowded with costumed figures—provided Kahlhamer with the inspiration for the mass display of his growing tribe of small sculptures. A table-like platform was constructed out of repurposed studio furniture, including saw horses, an old painting table, a step

ladder, plywood, and wooden benches, its surface covered with raw canvas that Kahlhamer has hand-stenciled with his *Bowery Nation* logo: a skull dressed up in a feathered war bonnet. The edge of the platform has been draped in color copies of the shopping bag supplied by the "Lakota Thrifty Mart" in Eagle Butte, South Dakota, a convenience store owned and operated by the Cheyenne River Sioux tribe. The *Bowery Nation* logo and the Thrifty Mart logo slyly acknowledge both the worlds of artistic authorship and corporate sponsorship, dragging the work's overall ethnological associations into our present environment of consumer culture.

Besides the Native American and folk sculptural associations, *Bowery Nation's* lineage includes Modernism's incorporation of bricolage, a French term that refers to the technique of making creative and resourceful use of whatever materials are at hand (regardless of their usual purpose). One of the best-known Modernist works to use bricolage is Alexander Calder's *Circus* (1926–31),[5] a miniature circus ring that incorporates seventy small figurative sculptures and over one hundred accessories such as flags, nets, and trapeze equipment, handmade by Calder out of materials like wire, cork, and fabric. Calder's *Circus*, however, was made for the sophisticated entertainment of both adults and children, while Kahlhamer's bricolaged tribe, as playful as it is, has darker overtones. These beings don't seem to inhabit the peaceful, high desert mesas of the Hopi, but rather the arid

Bowery Nation (detail), 1985-2012

apocalyptic landscape of *Mad Max*, where bricolage is used as a survival tool rather than a pastime.

In the collection of the Smithsonian Institution in Washington is a remarkable katsina made in the 1930s: its head is unmistakably that of Mickey Mouse. Even eighty years ago the larger world culture was infiltrating and mutating Hopi tradition. Similarly, Kahlhamer's *Nation* is standing between two worlds: that of the past and that of the future. The cloud of birds that Kahlhamer made to accompany his rag-tag tribe is not comprised of innocent, twittering songbirds, but rather spirits attending an act of creation and evolution.

Richard Klein, exhibitions director

Bowery Nation is accompanied by a wall work made by the artist that narrates the cosmology of his alternative tribe, as well as by the *Bowery Nation* lounge with reading materials relating to Kahlhamer's work, katsinas, Native American culture, and New York's Lower East Side.

1 *Katsina* is now preferred over the more popular transliteration *katchina* as the Hopi spoken language has no *ch* sound.

2 Kahlhamer was born in 1956 in Tucson, Arizona, and is uncertain of his tribal ancestry. His family lived in Tucson until Kahlhamer was eleven, when they moved to Mayville, Wisconsin.

3 From 1983 to 1993, Kahlhamer worked as Design Director for Topps, the company that produced Bazooka Bubble Gum, baseball cards, and "Garbage Pail Kids," the comic trading card parody of the then-popular Cabbage Patch Kids dolls.

4 The New Museum has compiled a historical timeline of artistic culture on New York's Lower East Side. Entitled *Bowery Artist Tribute*, it can be accessed at http://mediaspace.newmuseum.org/boweryartiststribute

5 Calder's *Circus* is in the collection of the Whitney Museum of American Art and for many years was on extended exhibition in the museum's lobby.

Works in the Exhibition

All dimensions h x w x d in inches unless otherwise noted

Bowery Nation, 1985–2012
Construction made with wood, wire, rubber, feathers, oil paint, acrylic paint, spray paint, cloth, string, rope, hair, leather, metal, pencil, bone, clay, sage
Installation dimensions variable

Bowery Nation Studio Couch, 2012
Couch with spray paint stenciled pillows and cover
32 x 82 x 40

Bowery Nation Wall Work, 2012
Mixed media on unstretched canvas
101 x 134 1/2

All works courtesy of the artist
Photography: Gregory Goode

look. look again.

The Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum

258 Main Street, Ridgefield, CT 06877
Tel 203.438.4519, Fax 203.438.0198, aldrichart.org

The Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum advances creative thinking by connecting today's artists with individuals and communities in unexpected and stimulating ways.

Brad Kahlhamer: Bowery Nation is part of *united states*, a semester of solo exhibitions and artist's projects that approach both the nature of the United States as a country and "united states" as the notion of uniting separate forms, entities, or conditions of being. Timed to coincide with the 2012 American election season, *united states* also includes solo exhibitions by Pedro Barbeito, Jonathan Brand, Brody Condon, Brian Knep, Erik Parker, and Hank Willis Thomas, and projects by Jane Benson, Alison Crocetta, Celeste Fichter, Erika Harrsch, Nina Katchadourian, Matthew Northridge, Risa Puno, John Stoney, Sui Jianguo, Frances Trombly, Rosemary Williams, and Jenny Yurshansky.

Bowery Nation (in progress studio view 2011), 1985-2012

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The O'Grady Foundation

BROOKLYN MAGAZINE

Talking with Brad Kahlhamer, Contributor to the Wythe Hotel's Permanent Collections

BY LAURA ITZKOWITZ
5.16.16. 1:05pm

Originally from Arizona, Brad Kahlhamer is known for his vibrant, frenetic paintings incorporating influences like his native American roots and '80s punk culture, as well as sculptures and installations. His work has been shown at museums and galleries across the U.S. and beyond, and his *Supercatcher* installation will be featured at the new SF MoMA when it reopens this spring. He lives in Manhattan and maintains a studio in Bushwick.

How many of your sketchbooks are in the Wythe Hotel?
They acquired one book so there's probably about 20 sketches, 22, 24 spread to spread, and they hung selected spreads in the penthouse, which is kind of cool because the idea is sort of to record Brooklyn's creative class.

And you had just been working on that book for a period of time. It wasn't commissioned, was it?

No, I don't really do commissioned work. I'm represented by Jack Shainman Gallery in Chelsea and I pretty much do what I do and the gallery takes it. I do museum shows. I think Kimia met me through Deitch Projects, I think she worked there for a while and I believe we met around then, and you know, I've seen her around. I didn't realize she was at the Wythe. But when she came out here, she was interested in the sketchbooks specifically because I was drawing local Brooklyn. I had this idea that it was gonna be like Weimar Germany or something—you know, artists always project these crazy ideas. So it's really an update of the old *flâneur* tradition, you know the French *flâneur*, walking around observing.

Do you draw upon those when you're thinking about your paintings?

Not specifically. I'm sort of reworking the portrait as an idea of contemporary native art colliding with whether it's '80s Bowery punk culture or contemporary Bushwick. The sketchbooks are more just notes really, but probably coming into this next year, I will be conceptualizing paintings and sketchbooks, so maybe I can work it out. But it's just one of the things, like I used to play a lot of guitar, so it's just like that, just nervous creative energy. But now through venues like Kimia's project and Instagram where I'm posting selected things fairly regularly that all comes out of—this is probably the 26th or 27th book—and at some point I could probably see a show.

How long have you been here in Brooklyn?

This studio will be five years in August. Right now it's not cheap, but it's a good base. Before that, actually I had a great studio on Wythe, about eight blocks up from the hotel. When I was there, that was just a storage facility. I did a number of great paintings. I've been on and off in Brooklyn. Now I seem to be more entrenched here, but I still live in Manhattan.

What was it like then being over there?

It was great. I mean Williamsburg was in one of its earlier phases and you still had a lot of vintage clothing stores, the music venues were still alive then, big studios, more artists, the parties were great. Jeffrey had a warehouse about three, four blocks away so he hosted events at Deitch Projects. PS1 was less formalized. It was really fun. The waterfront was undeveloped. There were no bike lanes, no bike helmets. Zebulon was across the street, so that was a great venue to hang out at. It seemed more local.

So tell me about your path. Did you study art history, studio art?
Well, I've always been super curious and always a direct, impulsive person. I grew up in Tucson, Arizona in the desert, so I had a lot of freedom for wanderings or yonderings as I sometimes call them, and just instilled this kind of do it over and do it again kind of practice, so if I do one painting or one sketch, I just have to do dozens, like the sketchbook. And I've always been sketching. But I was born and raised in Tucson Arizona, then went to Wisconsin at 14. Typical kid life. Went to Oshkosh University, BFA, never went beyond that. I was in a band, so we'd go out on the road.

New York City in '82 and then I got a job at Tops Chewing Gum, working with Arty Spiegel. And through him got interested in their purpose and sense of mission. At that time New York was crazy interesting, punk. Then through the '90s, I started working with Jeffrey Deitch in '97, '98 and that was the first bigger stage in the art world. And now I'm with Jack Shainman, but not so academic, just kind of hands-on doing it experience. And I just got named the new Diebenkorn fellow for 2016, so I'll be teaching out at the San Francisco Art Institute. I'm doing a residency at the Headlands in Marin County, which is super cool. It's an old army barracks. It's quite a well-known art residency.

What was it like when you first moved here?
It was rugged. I mean, the Lower East Side was amazing. Huge rooftop parties. Pre-AIDS. It was '82. Madonna. My band played at Danceteria, which was a crazy experience. Ed Maxey, who's Robert Mapplethorp's brother, took me to one of the original balls, the kind of Paris is Burning thing up in Harlem—that was crazy. Just a lot of energy. At that time, we were all probably outsiders in our towns and cities outside of New York and we came here, all sort of crazy creative types amassing on the Lower East Side, and now you don't really have that.

Well, now it's here, right?
Well it's here, but you know, I think because of the internet more people are staying outside of New York City. It's gotten very expensive. At that time, you could come here and make something with not tons of money, so you had probably a wider variety of creative class coming in. It was great. I mean, it was CBGB. Everybody was in black leather. Everybody was dancing at the club over on Avenue A.

Check out Brad's website and follow him on Instagram @bradkahlhamer.

Photos by Maggie Shannon.

artdaily.org

Brad Kahlhamer: Bowery Nation on view at the Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum

Brad Kahlhamer, Bowery Nation (Detail), 1985–2012. Photography: George Goode.

By: Richard Klein
September 2013

RIDGEFIELD, CT.- In the late 1970s, Brad Kahlhamer visited the Heard Museum in Phoenix. The Heard's mission is Native American arts and culture, and Kahlhamer was drawn there because of a growing interest in his Native blood and a resultant fascination with indigenous American art, particularly from the Southwest.

His memories of the visit, however, are primarily not of cultural awakening, but are rather based in a profoundly aesthetic experience. Kahlhamer, who was then in his mid twenties, encountered the Heard's extraordinary collection of Hopi katsina dolls, the majority of which were donated to the museum by Barry Goldwater, former Arizona Senator and Republican Presidential candidate. Kahlhamer's life-altering experience with the katsina collection did not so much involve the unique character of each doll, but instead revolved around the overwhelming presence of hundreds of dolls as a group: the cumulative power of the wildly inventive—and often bizarre—Hopi cosmology.

Katsinas are masked and costumed figures that personify supernatural beings that live in the sacred landscape surrounding the Hopi's ancestral land in northeastern Arizona. There are hundreds of katsinas in the Hopi pantheon, and specific katsinas are tied into seasonal rituals that occur in an eight-month period from December through July. Small, effigy-like versions of katsinas are crafted by Hopi artists to be given as gifts, particularly to young girls, to act as teaching tools to explain the complex Hopi belief system. These katsina "dolls" began to be collected by nonnative people in the late nineteenth century, and they are still produced by the Hopi for both religiousand commercial purposes.

Kahlhamer started making small, figurative sculptures reflecting his interest in katsinas during a series of fishing trips to the Hudson River Valley in 1985. The artist began cobbling together the works out of detritus such as wire, fabric, and bicycle tire inner tubes that he found in a local basement workshop. His initial impulse was spontaneous and organic: the sculptures were provisional and experimental, with no grand scheme or plan as to their eventual future. There was no attempt to actually replicate specific katsinas, with the nature of the sculptures more reflective of the artist's hybrid artistic sensibility than Hopi belief or aesthetics. As the group expanded over the ensuing years, Kahlhamer shied away from exhibiting them publically and began to regard them as "companions," strange studio mates that complemented the extensive collection of taxidermy and other objects that informed his practice as a painter. After a move in 1990 to the Lower East Side Bowery neighborhood that has been his home ever since, Kahlhamer's alternative "tribe" slowly grew to its current one hundred figures, with about two dozen additional bird-like companions. The decision to assemble them as a group and finally pursue their exhibition was partially governed by the series having reached the century mark, but also by the fact that, just like Kahlhamer's experience at the Heard three decades earlier, the power of the individual "dolls" is amplified by their gathering. Kahlhamer's personal mythology has been made manifest through the truism of strength in numbers.

A consistent thread in Kahlhamer's work is identity, or rather the juggling of a tripartite identity: his Native-American background, his formative years being raised in a middle-class, German-American family (he was adopted as an infant), and his adulthood in New York's burgeoning art world of the 1980s and early 90s.

Kahlhamer's aesthetic is also hybrid, a combination of his early influences from the world of comics and cartoons, high-art Expressionism, the attitude and style found in punk and the more rough-and-tumble side of country music, and the very American DIY lifestyle of the garage and basement tinkerer. Because he lives in New York City, one is tempted to label the artist an "urban Indian," but Kahlhamer's connection to Native culture has always been somewhat second hand due to his being raised by adoptive parents. As an adult he has spent significant time with Native people (particularly in the West), but in the present day Indian culture is defined as much by things such as basketball (Kahlhamer is an avid player) and skateboarding as it is by traditional Native spiritual belief. Kahlhamer eschews the stereotypical role of Indian as spiritual being, attuned to and more a part of nature, but his art consistently exhibits a spiritual longing and is frequently touched by the animism found in traditional cultures. Firmly grounded in modern existential angst, Kahlhamer's homesickness is as much American as American

Klein, Richard. "Brad Kahlhamer: Bowery Nation on view at the Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum." *Artdaily*, 8 October 2013. Online. <http://artdaily.com/index.asp?int_sec=11&int_new=56551#.UlQlIlashcb>.

Indian, reflecting the restlessness (and rootlessness) that has characterized much of American identity.

Kahlhamer has spoken of Bowery Nation as an “alternative tribe” and the fact that the majority of the work’s individual elements were born on New York’s Lower East Side (the part of city with the most extensive history of immigration) makes a certain kind of sense. Bowery Nation can be looked on as a small, but tightly-knit ethnic group or clan, owing its spirit to the zeitgeist of New York City as much as to the influence of the inventive vitality of Hopi woodcarvers. The Lower East Side, well before the construction of the New Museum and the recent explosion of galleries, was a focus for New York’s alternative communities, from Walt Whitman in the nineteenth century to Bela Bartok, Mark Rothko, William Burroughs, Andy Warhol, the Hell’s Angels (their headquarters is still on East Third Street), Kate Millett, and Eva Hesse in the twentieth; both the artist and the characters in Bowery Nation fit comfortably into this tradition. The individual figures in Bowery Nation share a certain affinity with the personages pictured in the New York street drawings of Saul Steinberg, another artist who was an immigrant to the city. Steinberg’s street characters reflect the polyglot nature of New York, and like the figures in Bowery Nation, their style is based on an amalgam of influences, including cartoons, Cubism, and folk art.

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VOGUE

CULTURE

MUSIC

Six Degrees of Jay-Z: Meet the Artists Who Showed Up for the "Picasso Baby" Showdown

by Mark Guiducci and Thessaly La Force | photographed by Mimi Ritzen Crawford | July 12, 2013

Brad Kahlhamer, Artist

What did you give Jay-Z when you were out there?
Love, all love.

What's one word you'd use to describe him?
Gold. Gold.

Why do you think he wanted you here?
Connections, friends, family, summer.

Photographed by Mimi Ritzen Crawford

On Wednesday, the Pace gallery on Twenty-fifth Street was empty of art. Instead, the room contained just a low white rope, cordoning off a simple wooden bench and a white square stage. The set-up was an homage to **Marina Abramović**'s MoMA retrospective "The Artist is Present," in preparation for the filming of **Jay-Z**'s new music video, "Picasso Baby." (The upcoming single is from his latest album *Magna Carta Holy Grail*.) Directed by **Mark Romanek,** the final video will be edited from the six hours Jay-Z spent that day performing "Picasso Baby" over and over again in the white gallery space. And the crowd was not just any crowd, but an assemblage of hundreds of artists, actors, writers, designers, producers, and directors (along with their assistants, publicists, and children). Some were old friends of Jay-Z, such as **Lyor Cohen** and **Rosie Perez.** Others were artists whose work he and his wife**Beyoncé** collect, like **Laurie Simmons, Aaron Young**, and **Marilyn Minter.** Above is a collection of portraits featuring the kaleidoscopic universe of people that orbit around a talent like Jay-Z's.

Guiducci, Mark and Thessaly La Force. "Six Degrees of Jay-Z." *Vogue*, 12 July 2013. Online. <http://www.vogue.com/culture/article/six-degrees-of-jay-z-meet-the-artists-who-showed-up-for-the-picasso-baby-showdown/#1>

Bates

Museum of Art

Brad Kahlhamer and Kelsey Barrett: “Yondering”

Posted by: Nicholas O'Brien on January 23, 2012

When

Friday, October 7, 2011 @ 7:30 pm - 9:30 pm

Friday, October 7 at 7:30 p.m. at the Olin Arts Center Concert Hall

Brad Kahlhamer and Kelsey Barrett’s performance work has been described as path-minding stories, spirit meandering, signseeker-walkabouts that combine voice, guitar, drums, and sound. Their performances include pointed stage visuals, sound effects supporting grass-fed stories and desert tales gathered from personal experience, with occasional music vignettes hawk-circling the rising narrative smoke…at times with a few shreds of the words of Diné (Navajo) poet Sherwin Bitsui poetry woven in…

Kahlhamer and Barrett recently performed “Yondering” at The Stone in the East Village, a New York space dedicated to the experimental and avant-garde, as part of Laurie Anderson and Lou Reed’s month of curated performances.

Brad Kahlhamer has been long active in the lower Manhattan music scene, and has played at CBGB’s, Zebulon, SouthPaw, and many other NYC/Brooklyn venues. He was commissioned by the Smithsonian National Museum of the American Indian to write a score for the silent film *Red Skins*, 1929, which he performed as National Braid (Kahlhamer and violinist Laura Ortman) at film festivals in the US and Europe. For more: http://www.bradkahlhamer.net/

Kelsey Barrett resides between the music and fashion community of NYC and Esalen Institute in Big Sur California. Drawing inspiration, breath, and prayer from the dependent co-arising of industrial city playgrounds and nature based communion. Kelsey has been preforming and recording since 2006 providing chilling vocals for world-psych band EFFI BRIEST. She cut her teeth touring the vast lands of America, Europe and British Isles, and slews of festivals. At present Kelsey engages with song-birthing in ritual sound healing ceremonies.

Kahlhamer’s work is featured in the current *Tale Spinning* exhibition at the Bates College Museum of Art through Dec. 17. His visual art fuses expressionist painting with the visionary tradition of Native American art, comics and urban street culture to create narrative work that blurs the line between autobiography and invention. He has exhibited extensively internationally, and was represented by the fabled Deitch Projects in New York from 2001 until Jeffrey Deitch closed his doors to direct the LA Museum of Contemporary Art in 2010. Kahlhamer is based in New York.

O’Brien, Nicholas. “Brad Kahlhamer and Kelsey Barrett: Yondering.” *Bates.edu*, 7 October 2011. Online.
<http://www.bates.edu/museum/events/5780/>

FLAVORWIRE

Flavorwire's Top 10 Picks from Art Basel Miami Beach

By Paul Laster on December 10, 2012

Brad Kahlhamer, Bowery Bird Roost (detail,) 2012. Mixed media.

Laster, Paul. "Flavorwire's Top 10 Picks from Art Basel Miami Beach." *Flavorwire*, 10 December 2012. Online.
<http://flavorwire.com/354452/top-ten-picks-from-art-basel-miami-beach/9>

Wednesday, March 2nd, 2011

Gazetteer

by **THE EDITORS**

Gazetteer of Art Fairs in New York City, March 2011

[opening hours are public hours only; for VIP arrangements, please see respective websites for each fair]

Brad Kahlhamer, Topps Platinum Dream Catcher #1, 2011. Collage and mixed media on paper. 60 1/2 inches. © Brad Kahlhamer. Courtesy Gladstone Gallery, Armory Show 2011 / Pier 94

OTHER ARTICLES IN "ARMORY WEEK 2011"

Armory and Leggery: Glamor and Style at the 2011 Fairs

Salon Zürcher: Showcasing the Indie Dealer Spirit

MORE ARTICLES BY THE EDITORS

Armory and Leggery: Glamor and Style at the 2011 Fairs

Salon Zürcher: Showcasing the Indie Dealer Spirit

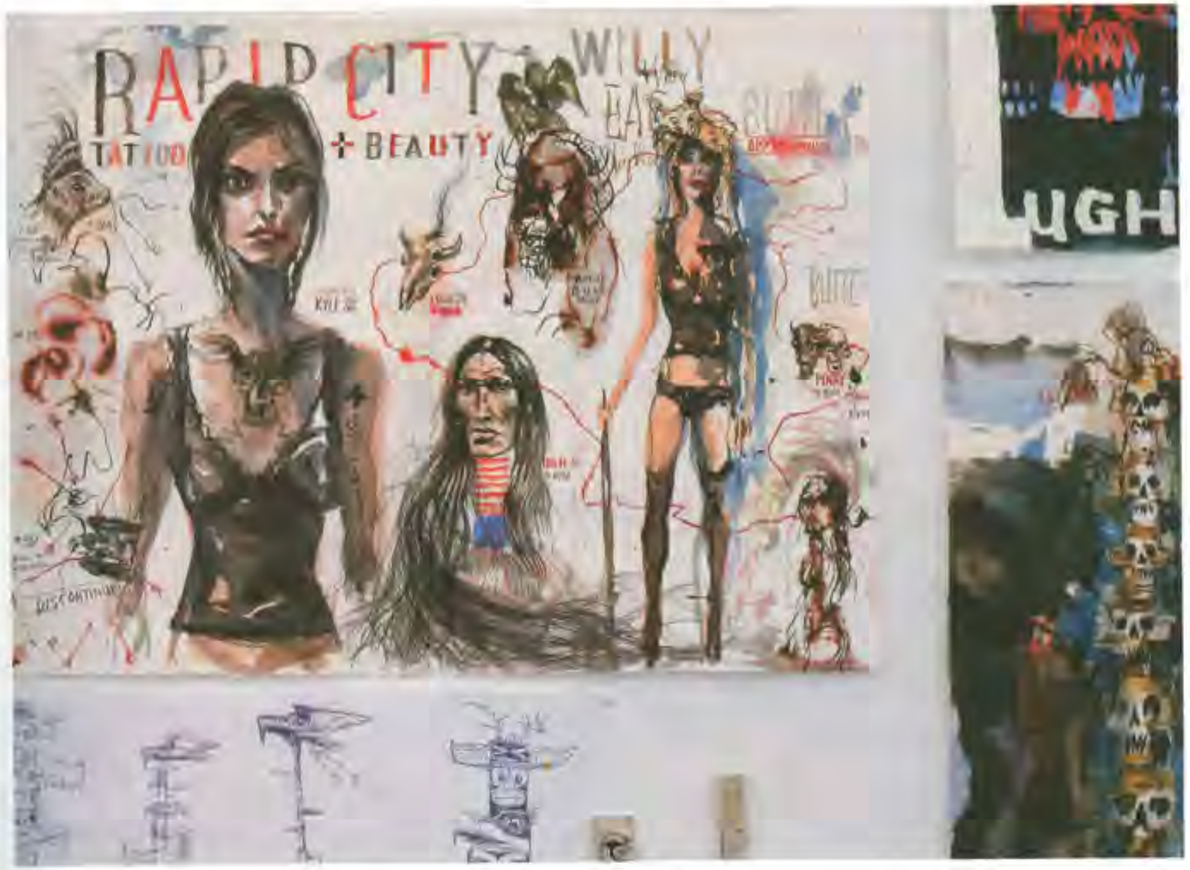
YONDERING
THROUGH
THE SOCIAL
LANDSCAPE
OF AMERICA.

RAPID CITY

BRAD KAHLHAMER's journey is a physical ongoing pilgrimage. Born of Native descent, Kahlhamer was adopted by German-American parents and eventually moved from his birthplace Tucson, Arizona to Wisconsin and from there to New York in 1982. Drawing and painting out these schisms between lived experience and a learned knowledge of a past unknown describes Kahlhamer's search for a utopia or an alternative world where both the desired and the real can sit in permanent dialogue. This "Third Place" as Kahlhamer terms it, becomes an almost spiritual location where the illusory and actuality can reconcile amongst a vibrant and chaotic amalgamation of visual imagery, both remembered and imagined.

Rapid City evolves like a storyboard to Kahlhamer's ever growing filmic visualisations of his environment. Several characters and motifs persist, returning again and again in different guises, walking the eye to the next encounter as it begins to play out in a neighbouring image. Bright mixes of watercolours and graphic inks colour the drawings while thread-like black lines creep from drawing to drawing, intertwining themselves between each figure and from one image to another. These lines are reminiscent of the delicate renderings of everyday life and depictions of battle drawn within the Plains Ledger books found in Northern America. A vivid key to the visual storytelling of Native Americans are held within these books, forming the earliest chapter in the history of America's graphic narration.

This looking to the past also pushes forward within Kahlhamer's constructed figures that sit sentry-like alongside his paintings and drawings. The artist terms these as Spiritual Advisors and as they guard and survey the spaces in which they sit, they are also a reminder of the physical and spiritual journeys within Kahlhamer's world.



One such object is a 10ft totem pole. Originally shown in early 2008 at Modern Art, London the sculpture titled Waqui Totem USA, has since been transcribed from its original cardboard and pins into an exact cast in bronze. As it sits now in the Museum of Contemporary Art in Denver, this monument contains within the process of its own making a kind of song-writing shorthand that describes the movement through the temporal to the permanent.

Kahlhamer fuses such psychic and cultural influences alongside his interests in contemporary comic books and pop and urban cultures but chooses not to delineate differing importance, seeing them instead as part of a continuing and developing shared landscape of memories. Kahlhamer is also an accomplished musician, regularly playing with others as well as performing and writing his own songs. This greater and far-reaching sense of time - its ebb and flow - inherent within Kahlhamer's own understanding of his surroundings, plays out in the lyrical and epic feel of the scenes he begins to set before us.

Ilsa Colsell

Hrad Kahlhamer: Page 32 *Waqui Totem USA (Urban Class Mark V)* 2008, bronze. *Untitled (Spiritual Advisors)* 2007, mixed media
Both: Courtesy of the artist and Stuart Shave/Modern Art, London.
Page 33 Both images: *Untitled (Prairie Girls)*, 2007, mixed media. Detail view of installation at MCA DENVER.
Courtesy of Thyssen-Bornemisza Art Contemporary. Image courtesy of MCA DENVER and Stuart Shave/Modern Art, London.

Opposite page: *Waqui Totem USA (Urban Class Mark V)*, 2008, bronze. *Totem Sticks*, detail, view of installation at MCA DENVER.
Courtesy of Vicki and Kent Logan. This page: *Untitled (Rapid City)*, 2007, mixed media. View of installation at MCA DENVER.
Courtesy of Thyssen-Bornemisza Art Contemporary. Both images: courtesy of MCA DENVER and Stuart Shave/Modern Art, London.
Special thanks to Kent Logan, Francesca von Habsburg of T-B A21, Vienna, Deitch Projects, NY, Modern Art.

BEAUTIFUL/ DECAY

Deitch projects

Work In Progress, Jeremy Scott, Scissor Sisters, Jeffrey Deitch, Noritoshi Hirakawa, Os Gemeos, Barry McGee, Brad Kahlhamer, Fischerspooner, aNYthing

ISSUE: 0 US $5.95 CAN $8.50

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Brad Kahlhamer

Brad Kahlhamer's biography plays a central role in his work. He is Native-American but was adopted by a German-American family. Growing up without a connection to his heritage, he went on to earn a BFA at the University of Wisconsin Osh-Kosh, played in a rock band, and worked as a graphic designer for Topps Chewing Gum. Motivated by his lack of experience and knowledge of his tribal culture, he has used painting to explore a history that is mysterious not only to him but to most Americans. Like Kara Walker, Kahlhamer is connected by birth to subject matter and a narrative where the line between truth and fiction, history and fantasy, is forever blurred.

By trying to know his past Kahlhamer has changed his view of the present. He has used this view to make truly vibrant expressionistic paintings. Ironically, the early separation from his native culture has been creatively advantageous. Because of his decision to explore his personal history as a free-form intuitive exercise, Kahlhamer has received both praise and criticism for his use of Native-American iconography. Some of the controversy might be construed as art world backlash against his New York gallery, Deitch Projects. By showing with an art world powerhouse where over-the-top performances and installations and Art Star are only the tip of the iceberg, it is no surprise that the politically correct get uneasy when Kahlhamer's paintings hang in the gallery. Kahlhamer, now painting for over 25 years, is widely recognized for his work and has had exhibitions across the US and Europe. It seems that controversy or not, and whether you like it or not, Kahlhamer's paintings speak for themselves.

Every artist has a different story when you ask them how they became an artist. When did you figure out you could paint?

I started young and success came quickly. I took first place in the eleven-year-old division in a Tucson, Arizona contest. My parents needed to see that.

You were smart to submit your work in a contest early on. This experience must have helped your parents see the possibility for success in art. Most parents are nervous when their child tells them they want to be an artist and won't support making art a career. When did you begin showing and gaining notoriety for your work?

The first-place picture mentioned above was custom framed by my Dad who is a carpenter. I remember that as my first recognition of my abilities and as an experience that extended the joy of just making into something more. Notoriety came later when during a self-styled residency a few years ago at their fifety-five-plus retirement community, my parents expressed concern over my evolving iconography. They were uneasy, shocked over my subject matter.

It is interesting that you cite this early exhibition in Tucson and your parents' concern as marking the beginning of your success. I was thinking of notoriety in terms of the art world. How did you meet Jeffrey Deitch?

He called once or twice. I thought it was an English gallery with an eye for trends but a few trusted souls said 'Are you nuts? Do it!' Anyway, he came walking through the door. ...I knew in ten seconds it was the right thing to do. Jeffery is an unusual combination of dealer, businessman, and aesthete. Once in Paris at a Picasso sculpture retrospective he explained the provenance of nearly every piece from the dust bunnies to large works, and does it twenty-four/seven! He's infinite! Over time, I've come to think of him more as a performance artist.

If Jeffrey Deitch is a performance artist then his artists are his collaborators. It puts a spin on the idea of a gallery. Over the past ten years, Deitch has become an art world

machine or monster (depending on who you ask). It is a place to see and be seen with lines that can stretch several blocks to get into its openings. The gallery website has the usual links to artist biographies and work, but, like *Index Magazine*, it also documents its parties and serves as a who's who site for the art world.

The "machine" is a necessary component when breaking visions to the public. By "breaking," I mean presenting or releasing a new vision. I've noticed most of the Deitch artists seem to have a natural instinct for this.

How do you think your personal journey to understand your ancestral roots has been affected by the image-conscious scene cultivated at Deitch?

As far as myself is concerned, I don't feel really feel I am trying to establish roots. I'm expanding beyond that. I'm thinking of the Vegas guy, Wayne Newton; you hear he's native but it's not a central feature. He just "gets on with the show."

You often travel out West and keep notebooks of drawings and notes about your experiences that you later use in paintings. Your paintings combine these impressions with your urban experience to create what has been described as an "imaginary zone between past and present." I wonder if you would have set out on this journey if you had not started painting.

The art is a mediator, or a buffer, maybe without that I would have "Oprahed" this much sooner, wrote a book, something that was faster. You call it a journey, and that's exactly what it is, with all the wrong turns, disasters, and discoveries. . .It's never occurred to me that I would be anything other than an artist.

How has your relationship to the American West changed over the years?

Going west the last ten years has been eye opening spiritually. It puts psychic distance on my thoughts; I don't "know" as much out there. . . My latest Los Angeles and Northwest trip made me appreciate convertibles and fog and orcas and over-performing seals.

That sounds like a trip through one of your paintings. How do you find a balance between the two worlds?

It seems there are more than two worlds, like the hemispheres line broken into chaotic verticals. I just try to maintain rims.

BRAD KAHLHAMER
DEITCH PROJECTS

Entering Brad Kahlhamer's exhibition "Friendly Frontier" was a bit like stopping off at a roadside attraction on Route 66. The viewer was immediately confronted by a wall-based installation of small kachina figures wrought from pieces of wood, nails, and old clothing, with ropy hair fashioned from unraveled twine. In a nearby corner was a stuffed javelina, its tiny but fearsome jaws parted, captured mid-prance in a diorama-like replica of its native desert landscape, which came complete with sand, cacti, and birds overhead. Handmade from feathers and scraps of fabric and hung from highly visible pieces of wire, these birds undercut the quasi-scientific presentation of the wilderness tableau and made clear the focus of the show: the axis of the "natural" and the artificial.

Much of what was included (large abstracted landscape paintings and smaller unframed ones, drawings, and various installation elements, including a wall-mounted buffalo head) took inspiration from a trip Kahlhamer recently took to Montana and the Dakotas. Exploring the American landscape and the history and mythology of the frontier is a way for the artist, who was adopted by German-American parents as an infant, to uncover his own Native American roots. His paintings open up what he calls a "third space," beyond his known upbringing into what is unknown but nonetheless deeply felt (his American Indian ancestry). Schematized landscapes are dotted with buffalo (some dead), canoes, pine trees, and tepees. But these "natural" elements, drawn over washy, abstracted grounds, are juxtaposed with everything from half-human, half-animal figures to electric guitars, dissolving happy faces, and the artist's contorted likeness, which recurs, along with comic book–style characters named "Missy," "Ugh Jr.," and "Bear," from work to work. The influence visible here of Emil Nolde's cabalistic expressionism—similarly based on a personalized, primeval mythology—is infused with Kahlhamer's own brand of mysticism: According to the artist, yellow (as in the happy faces) signifies understanding, black is used to indicate the East, etc. Several paintings maintain some grounding in reality through written words that record natural conditions, such as "11:59 P.M. STARRY SKIES" or "WINDY + COLD," while others feature phrases—such as "LOSER + CLARK"—that function as comic relief from the symbolic weight of Kahlhamer's identity search.

The oppositions—nature/artifice, individual/culture—that drive Kahlhamer's work are also manifest at the level of its reception. On the one hand, his enterprise is imbued with outsider cachet (think Jimmie Durham meets Jean-Michel Basquiat). On the other, the presumed sincerity of this position is somewhat at odds with the fact that the work—and by extension, the artist himself—seemed quite at home on the pages of recent issues of *Interview* and *Harper's Bazaar*. Of course, the collision of art and politics with fashion no longer constitutes a major disturbance. Kahlhamer's work has a definite edge, but its alterity is smoothed over and codified; the intimations that his practice will disrupt the borders of criticality, or of fashion, remain disappointingly unrealized.

—*Meghan Dailey*

Brad Kahlhamer, *Starry Skies 11:59 pm*, 1999

VOGUE ITALIA

VOGUE N. 648 - EDIZIONI CONDÉ NAST - AGOSTO 2004 - SPED. ABB. POST. - 45% - ART. 2 COMMA 20/B LEGGE 662/96 - CMP VR - € 5,00

Mariuccia Casadio

on

BRAD KAHLHAMER's

SKULL
PROJECT

NORTH OF NEBRASKA LIVES A BEAUTIFUL RED HAIRED & PERKY GIRL SHE TOOK LAST PLACE IN A SHOOTING CONTEST BUT, THAT WAS LAST YEAR. THIS YEAR, SHE CAME SECOND PLACE SHOTGUN, AND GETTING BETTER SOMETIMES SHE HEAR HER SHOTS IN THE WIND + ITS HER CLOUDS + HER CAST SHADOWS ONTO THE BODIES

Tex Hawk Grew up Strange, under his Head, his old Hawk head + mind, like An Adolescent Body with its tiny Beating Hawk Heart. One Eye is clear, way too clear, too clear to look through EVEN... that task is only for Real live Hawks sitting in Real live Trees.

Mókus left early one morning to go Hunting, while sitting under a tree she fell Asleep. Her Dream was not About Sights but about Smells. She dreamsmelled a stuffed Buffalo, a Skull without Hair, a stuffed baby Squirrel, a wet piece of underwear + a small plastic Skull on a tiny Buffalo Body.

Pubblicati in esclusiva da "Vogue" Italia, i disegni a punta secca di questo "Skull project" compongono una galleria inedita di caratteri, di cui l'artista fornisce anche nomi e notizie sulla personalità nelle diverse didascalie narrative. Si tratta, del resto, di personaggi che perfettamente rispecchiano il mondo di Brad Kahlhamer, uno scenario di frontiera rivisitato e personalizzato con gusto contemporaneo. Recentemente in Italia con una nuova mostra personale nello spazio milanese di Francesca Kaufmann, l'artista di origine Lakota, nato a Tucson, Arizona, ma cresciuto nel Midwest come figlio adottivo di una famiglia tedesco-americana, ha scelto peraltro di traslare nell'opera il suo inusuale stratificato imprinting, rendendolo una risorsa creativa, l'ispirazione di uno stile fondato su personalissimi giochi associativi, metaforiche interazioni di esperienze esistenziali e input culturali di varia epoca e origine. Inconfondibilmente narrativo e stratificato, affollato di un repertorio in progress di personaggi fantastici e simboli, il suo fare arte si trasforma dunque in una singolare ricerca d'identità, è un modo di evocare e investigare le proprie radici, facendo collimare sogni e vissuto, identificandosi con ipotetici, assurdi alter ego umani o animali, soggetti posti al centro delle sue rappresentazioni e dotati d'intriganti fisionomie, di prerogative fascinosamente descritte e particolareggiate. Come delle arene "rituali", le opere di Kahlhamer appaiono perlopiù a impianto circolare, centrifugano motivi narrativi e informazioni visive di vario stile e dimensione, mescolando insieme cultura dei nativi americani e degli Usa di oggi. Segni e forme, significati e simboli, parole e colori si susseguono e concatenano riecheggiando l'assetto classico di cerimonie, preghiere e danze propiziatorie nelle culture tribali. E visualizzando così una gerarchica rotazione d'informazioni, notizie satellite riferibili all'identità di personaggi "centrali", secondarie figure umane o razze animali con tratti somatici da comics o cartoon e battezzati con nomi fantastici. È così che Cherokee Princess o Ugh Jr., Missy o Mòkus Mòkus Little Squirrel si trasformano in icone quasi "familiari", in protagonisti e abitanti di una "friendly frontier" da serial tv, in personaggi di un'interminabile saga narrativa surreale e incongrua, e fatta di parole indifferentemente tratte dai weather broadcast o dalle news televisive, che suonano profonde e insieme demenziali. Effetti di allegoria, parodia e nonsense proliferano infatti realizzando abili cut up e liaison iconografiche tra Far West "classico" e miti culturali di oggi, creando associazioni di realtà e fantasia, di memoria e attualità. Fra ironie e paradossi, tradizione e invenzione, Kahlhamer ricerca effetti voluttamente ingenui e sgrammaticati, cortocircuiti di segni tribali e pop, valori etnici e middle class, mode arcaiche e à la page, ipotizzando e articolando così la sua identità infralinguistica e transculturale di "Almost American". Alla perenne ricerca di esperienze e consuetudini che gli consentano di riconnettersi con le proprie radici, l'artista ha compiuto e continua a compiere viaggi nelle aree a sud-ovest degli Stati Uniti, visitando le località anticamente consacrate ai riti funerari e alla sepoltura, permanendo lunghi periodi nelle riserve del Sud Dakota e partecipando segretamente alle cerimonie religiose del Sun Dance. Arricchisce così la sua elaborazione di morfologie e tipologie, che appaiono diversamente memori di feticci sacri, maschere sciamaniche, totem o kachina dolls, senza tuttavia perdere una "primitiva" capacità di astrazione, nonché un gusto peculiarmente e "volutamente ingenuo" per la sintesi, che hanno generato parallelismi critici fra la sua arte a quella di grandi protagonisti Usa come De Kooning o Basquiat. Fra patrimonio spirituale e cultura materialista, testimonianze originali e gadget turistici, eredità autoctone e speculazioni kitsch, storia dell'arte e attualità dei mass media. Kahlhamer sembra insomma prediligere l'effetto estemporaneo di associazioni casuali e incongrue, la possibilità di trasformare il caos in una cifra stilistica. Spiega, a proposito: «Si tratta di un patrimonio spirituale che non mi appartiene al punto da poterlo riprodurre in modo letterale, anche se innegabilmente molte sue implicazioni informano il lavoro. Le adotto ipotizzando una personale tribù di riferimento. Pertanto, la struttura dei miei dipinti è caotica come caotico è il rapporto che mi lega a quelle origini». L'immaginario di Brad Kahlhamer trascende insomma ogni genere di limite: esattamente come un pensiero manoscritto scorre e si articola sul filo di personali opinioni o sensazioni, rispecchiando l'assoluta libertà di movimento dell'artista, il carattere contingente e mutevole di gusti, esperienze, preferenze o passioni. E generando iconografie o simbologie che, come i teschi e gli scheletri di queste pagine, diventano trademark inconfondibili e ricorrenti del lavoro. Particolarmente intensa e prolifica, la più recente produzione dell'artista nasce peraltro dopo un deciso e felice ritorno al visuale, come frutto di una rinnovata concentrazione artistica dopo scelte di sconfinamento in ambito musicale e un lungo periodo dedicato quasi esclusivamente a concerti e produzioni discografiche con la band country rock di sua formazione, National Braid. Prima d'incontrare Jeffrey Deitch, l'art dealer newyorkese responsabile dei suoi esordi artistici e del suo successo su scala internazionale alla fine degli anni Novanta, Brad Kahlhamer, che si è laureato nel 1980 all'Università del Wisconsin Oshkosh, è stato del resto road musician, nonché packaging designer per la Topps Chewing Gum. Le due esperienze, insieme con l'incontro e l'amicizia di Art Spiegelman, uno dei più celebri autori di fumetti prodotti dalla cultura underground anni Ottanta, sono state evidentemente d'importanza e d'influenza fondamentale per la sua formazione creativa, generando un tipo d'artista sui generis, che ancora oggi vediamo spaziare fra professionalità e dilettantismo, establishment e avanguardia, involontari omaggi all'arte tedesca di Dürer o di Otto Dix e trasversali riferimenti a quella Usa dei graffiti, dei comic strip, della Pop Art e dell'Abstract Expressionism. Dominato da eroine al femminile, da aggressive squaw con lunghe treccie e ultrasexy prairie girl in minigonna, armate di fucile e a capo di un'amichevole, quanto fedele gang di scoiattoli e castori, bufali e cinghiali, aquile e bisonti, il suo immaginario include anche teschi e scheletri. Il loro allure gotico improntà anche i nuovi lavori su carta o su tela, nonché le tavole a punta secca di questo "Skull project", spostando in atmosfere da classica prateria la qualità dark & decadent di iconografie in auge fra visual art e street style, simboli eloquenti di un tempo paradossalmente dibattuto fra paura della vecchiaia e culto della morte, missioni militari e auspici di pace. Artwork courtesy of the artist, Columbia University & Deitch Projects, New York, Francesca Kaufmann, Milano.

BRAD KAHLHAMER TEXT NICHOLAS VERBER PHOTOGRAPHY JAY HANNA

natural phenomenon

Best known for his two-dimensional work, Brad Kahlhamer paints loosely choreographed compositions that bring together his interest in the American landscape and his empathy with pop and urban culture. Born in 1956 in Tucson, Arizona and of Native American descent, he was adopted and raised by German Americans. After a 10 year stint as a roadie, Kahlhamer ended up in New York, where he took on the role of a graphic designer before following his own visual path.

Pop-inflected motifs punctuate Kahlhamer's work, where smiley faces take on braided guises and speaker stacks mingle with mountain scenes, while his canvases seem reminiscent of Jean Michel Basquiat and Cy Twombly in their free-flowing form. The natural world is further animated in a series of birds that Kahlhamer creates from used materials such as coat hangers, hair and old clothes. These birds travel around with the artist from show to show, as Kahlhamer suggests, "a bit like a migration".

Alongside Kahlhamer's visual work is his music. Describing the sound as "left-handed country with a narrative", Kahlhamer sees this as an extension of the static work and likens it to an "urban field recording". His band, National Braid, is comprised of himself on vocals and Lucy Ortman on violin. Their self-titled debut album will be the soundtrack to the forthcoming show together with the aforementioned "birds" and new paintings.

Brad Kahlhamer is showing at Modern Art Inc from January 17 to February 23.

Dazed and Confused
February 2003

Pasatiempo

The New Mexican's
Weekly Magazine of Arts,
Entertainment & Culture
Aug. 16 - 22, 2002

Brad Kahlhamer's loaded paintbrush

DETAILS

- Brad Kahlhamer, paintings
- Through Oct. 24
- James Kelly Contemporary, 1601 Paseo de Peralta
- 989-1601

By Paul Weideman | The New Mexican

Brad Kahlhamer's loaded paintbrush

Brad Kahlhamer, an artist with Indian roots he has not been able to identify, creates vibrant and chaotic works from a psychic center he terms the "third place."

The first place is his Native American ethnicity, and the second is his life as an adopted child who grew up with a German-American family in Arizona, later moving with them to Wisconsin. In the artist's e-mail message, he commented on his adoption. "I had a very positive upbringing, but of course the unknown figures heavily in my work."

Mitch Epstein

Kahlhamer was born in Tucson in 1956 and spent his formative years there. He earned a bachelor of fine arts degree at the University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh and spent 10 years as a road musician in the Midwest before moving to New York in 1982.

While working in advertising art and design for Topps Chewing Gum Company, he consorted with the underground cartoonists of the day where he said he learned that not all cartoons are simple or funny. Although Arizona painter Ted De Grazia (whose art Kahlhamer described as "upbeat, expressionist images of Southwest scenes with Christian overtones") was Kahlhamer's earliest influence in visual art, the impact of his association with the cartoonists shows in all his work.

He populates his oil paintings and watercolor-and-ink drawings with jumbled tableaux of skulls and happy faces, cactuses and buffalo, blood and clouds and spastic-looking squirrels and javelinas and weasels. Repeating themes include piles of speakers and Indian braids.

He connects various elements in his scenes with thin black lines, the threads of undecipherable relationships, which also relate to another influence, Plain Indian ledger drawings.

In an e-mail addendum to our interview he wrote, "The connecting lines in my work represent psychic power connecting various glyph characters. They also act much like map boundaries or trailheads, trails and markers. I also think of Plains ledger drawings as the original American cartoon chronicling a dark history."

Kahlhamer likes the way Margaret Archuleta, curator of fine art at Heard Museum, Phoenix, explained him in her 1999 essay for his *Friendly Frontier* exhibition:

"He is the missing link to the full understanding of what it means to be an Indian person today. He represents a segment of the modern Indian experience that is taboo, an experience that is not fully recognized or acknowledged within the Indian world as a valid Indian experience.

"He represents hundreds of the disenfranchised who through no fault of their own have been separated from their culture," Archuleta wrote. "As a result, Kahlhamer has been forced to create his own definitions of himself and his own cultural context."

Almost American, the Kahlhamer show now on exhibit at James Kelly Contemporary, includes ink/watercolor drawings up to 4 feet by 8 feet and oil paintings up to 7 feet by 10 feet.

Pasatiempo: You've shown your work under the title *Almost American* since last year, but the exhibition in Santa Fe includes brand-new work too.

Kahlhamer: I had a drawing binge in Mesa, Ariz., in the retirement community there. My parents are snowbirds and I took over their trailer for two months and filled it with 20-odd drawings, the best of which are in this show.

There are also four new paintings, three of which are on the way to Santa Fe (July 22) and the paint is still wet on the fourth. One canvas I've been working on for years, *Sacajawea Neat Beaver Head Rock*, is heavy (with layered paint). It has a real history.

Pasa: Your drawings and paintings are about

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Opposite page, top, *Grace, Power, Majesty*, 2002, ink and watercolor on paper, 44 1/2 x 92 inches

This page, above, *East of Mesa East With 4 Eagles*, 2002, ink and watercolor on paper, 62 x 44 1/2 inches; top left, *Baby Eagle USA*, 2002, oil on canvas, 64 x 84 inches;

Brad Kahlhamer, continued from Page 75

relationships and history, but it all looks like present tense to me.

Kahlhamer: I like them to have a sense of urgency, as a contemporary person living in real time. Some of the paintings' graphic sources are from history brought into the present, and that's what artists do: We represent our time. That is our job.

Pasa: Underground comics were one of your influences.

Kahlhamer: I think they always rebelled against the mores of the day. It's like the "parental discretion" thing in music. They were always in an oppositional aspect to that, and in that respect some aspects of my work fill that, but I actually think my work is kind of conservative. It's just my story.

Pasa: You talked about the notion of frontier and of people's fear of the unknown in the Margaret Archuleta piece in the *Friendly Frontier* catalog. What did you mean with the title of that exhibition?

Kahlhamer: That was my first show with Jeffrey Deitch in New York, late in 1999. It's kind of a theme-park title for something that could be a fearful experience. It's like a theme park gone wrong.

Pasa: Your work is quite chaotic, but you sound very quiet and reasonable.

Kahlhamer: Well, I think I'm totally in control of what I'm doing, but I do get visceral reactions to my art.

I want to communicate and these are my stories. It's hard to articulate that. I think I'm doing what I want. When I was 5 years old and picked up a brush or pencil, it wasn't like it was a decision like white or rye. Then as you get older, you realize there are these avenues of exposure. First you just hope somebody else looks at it. First it's your parents. I made the decision to come to New York to take my vision further. I think I'm very driven to paint and draw and play music and make sculptures.

Pasa: You're a musician too?

Kahlhamer: Yeah. I used to do road-band stuff. I play with another guy here in New York; we just did a reunion tour in a local bar. In a couple of hours I have an appointment with a CD cover designer for a program of stuff I've written over the last two years. *National Braid*, which is currently being manufactured, features seven new tracks and parallels the new work in that both contain darker subject matter. It's singing and playing guitars, and I have a violin player who is a member of the White Mountain Apache Tribe. At a recent gig, a perceptive artist said, "You sing exactly like you draw." I hope I'll have CDs when I am in Santa Fe.

Pasa: Do your art and music convey similar feelings?

Kahlhamer: I used to actually transfer some song lyrics to paintings, but now I'd say the relationship isn't so literal. The songs are dark, and I hear from people that the new body of work is darker.

Pasa: Your paintings remind me of automatic writing. Do you work in a reverie?

Kahlhamer: That's a kind of a romantic notion of what happens. For me, the best it gets working on a painting — on the best days, I lose track of time and a certain rhythm is established that allows me to create in a free way. It's art as a sublime sense of freedom, but it's very difficult to get into that place.

Pasa: So both intuition and intellect are important?

Kahlhamer: I'd say it's mostly intuitive. The intellect would be the discipline of trying to construct a story or an important point within a particular piece.

Pasa: What about those bizarre squirrels?

Kahlhamer: They're part of my taxidermy collection I used as models. I shot and stuffed a pheasant once, but all this is stuff I found in secondhand stores.

I also make birds out of wood and my old clothes and bicycle inner tubes and stuff. I'll have about 40 birds at the Santa Fe show. I'm just finishing them today.

Pasa: You don' t know your tribal affiliation, but your art is filled with Indian-based imagery.

Kahlhamer: I feel close to the Plains Indians, the Northern Cheyenne and Lakota. It seems that when I go there, there's more of a visual connection than I have in other places. I've taken repeated trips to Indian lands. The last two years I went to the Sun Dance on the Cheyenne River Reservation. The piles of speakers you see in my work were kind of

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Above, *East of Mesa East a 55 Plus Community*, 2002, ink and watercolor on paper, 44 1/2 x 92 inches

Top, *Twilight USA*, 2002, oil on canvas, 60 x 72 inches

The World's Leading Art Magazine Vol. XXXIV n°219 July-September 2001 US $7 International

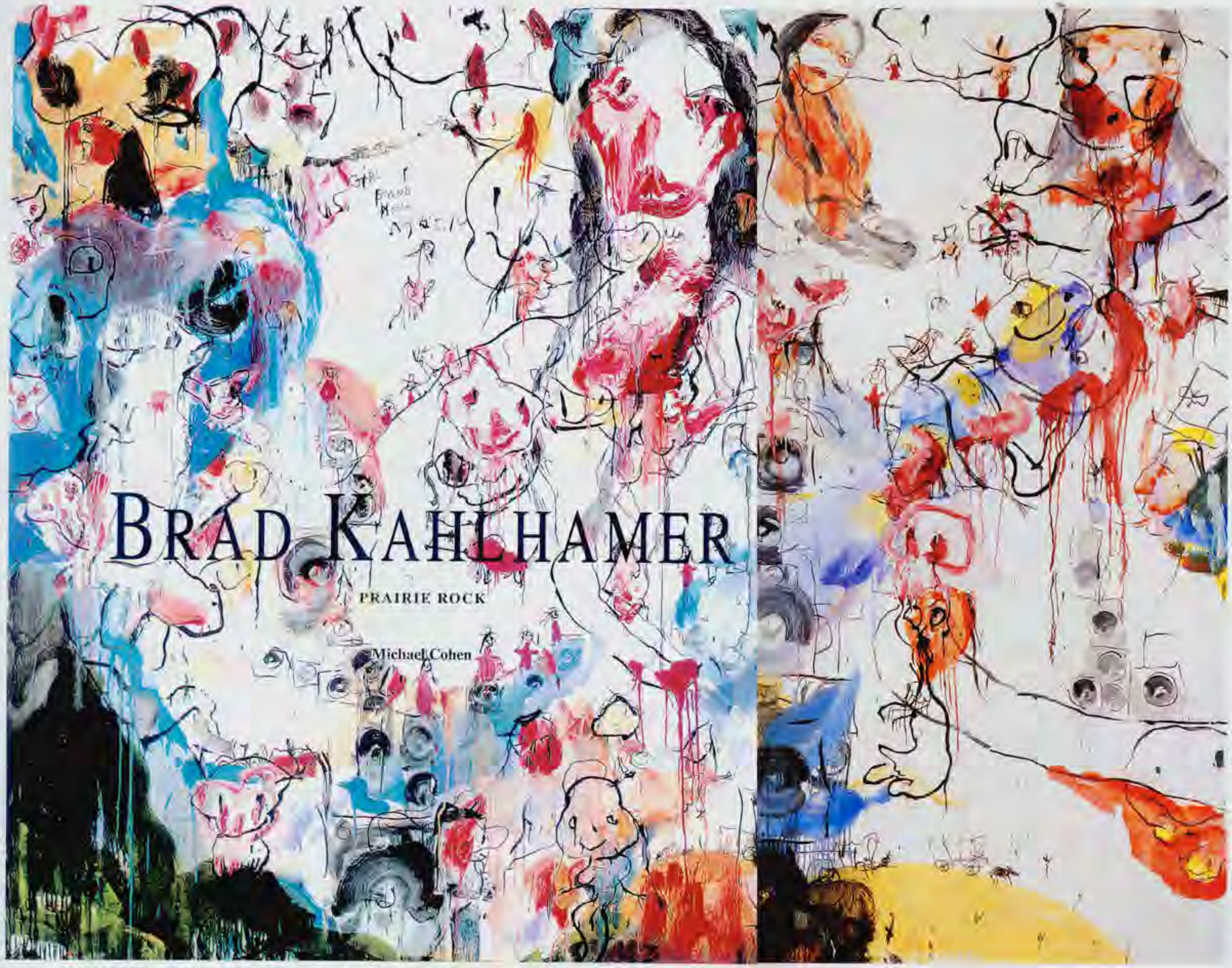
Flash Art

Brad Kahlhamer
"Big Eagle"
Oil on canvas

BRAD KAHLHAMER

PRAIRIE ROCK

Michael Cohen



US Girl Band Near Their Moon, 2000. Oil on canvas, 7 x 10 feet. Courtesy Deitch Projects, New York.

EXPLODING AND IMPLODING the myths of the American Old West, Brad Kahlhamer has recently emerged into the front ranks of contemporary New York painters. His jagged cartoon lines and swirls of earth-colored pigment reconfigure painting as an open-system able to encompass multi-ethnic and street cultures from Native American iconography to Zap comix. In an era poised between capitulation and diversity, Kahlhamer has left the recycling of previous abstract styles behind him. Instead he rummages through the dust-bin of history to organize jagged intellectual rushes which encourage viewers to reconnect with social roots and identity.

Michael Cohen: *Your paintings propose a meeting point between what have been two relatively distinct ideological positions in art — multi-culturalism and abstract painting. How does that relate to your idea of initiating an imaginary "third place" through your art?*
Brad Kahlhamer: The third place happens in my painting through a combination of the imagined and real. Imagined, as if I'd been brought up by my birth parents, and real in its representation of my life as it now is. As far as the ideological junctures you mention, I see multi-culturalism as involvement with a specific community, while abstract painting maps the self. Abstraction is a form of cartooning with its own signatures and readings, but in the end is perceived as personal. I'm profiling myself, but am interested in the history of those caricatures as well. Basically, I'm making landscapes that I can live in, within that history.

MC: *The scratchy, mutable line you use in your calligraphic strokes seems reminiscent of some of the underground cartoonists like Kaz you once worked with as an art director. Have their raw approaches influenced your own?*
BK: My graphic styles have been influenced by many sources: comic artist Gary Panter's sketch books, "Maus" author Art Spiegelman's politics, Henry Darger's episodes, along with the Drawing Center's 1996 Plains Indian drawing show.

MC: *The various characters who keep reappearing in your paintings bring to mind those from comic strips as well. How did you create characters like Ugh, Jr.?*
BK: Ugh, Jr. was a name I took from a guy nicknamed Ugh who was a Native guy passing through. Small town locals wanted to know if I was his brother. Around the same time I was involved in a bar fight with a Wisconsin Oneida guy (domestic problems) who became part of the character too. It was stupid — as the crook in my nose keeps reminding me — but also an influence. Essentially, real events and people make up my characters. My work combines chronicle, myth, and fantasy.

MC: *Your studio is filled with a collection of ghastly totemic figures, and these elements appear frequently in your work. Are you deliberately referencing elements of shamanism?*

BK: I am interested in ideas of belief. Spirituality could imply organized religion, vortexes, or robed dwarfs. This year I was able to visit Jerusalem, a sundance in Green Grass, South Dakota, and Vegas. All these places can offer relief or they can provoke. I'm interested in how religious ideas are transplanted into a modern world they don't work in — a spiritual version of the Beverly Hillbillies. Right now I'm really just beginning to take the steps towards a fuller understanding of shamanism, a primitive term if I ever heard one.

MC: *I agree that spirituality can be too easily tied to primitivism, or linked up with fascism for that matter. But on the other hand a pluralistic era allows artists to select from whatever texts are useful to reinvestigate constructions of the past, whether they're progressive or conservative, to sort out the forces operating there. Rainer Fassbinder's films and Klaus Theweleit's writings have approached this dynamic from European perspectives, and it seems that your work also probes some sort of buried wound that lies at the heart of Native and Anglo-American cultures.*

BK: There is a national disconnection regarding Anglo and Native culture. Black issues and the European Holocaust are routinely and extensively dealt with on an institutional level. When Native issues are visited, on the other hand, they often tend to examine notions of vanished nobility and then are epilogued as a kind of national heritage or legacy. I don't set out to be a political artist; it enters my work as it develops. The painting *Loser and Clark* stands as the most political to date. Some of my drawings deal with other Western historical sites, but politics are only part of my story.

MC: *There's a lot of discussion of globalization in contemporary art, do you think the painting scene in New York reflects that diversity?*

BK: I came to New York to be part of a larger discussion. It's only recently that the dialogue became global. Global sounds better because it's bigger and sometimes you want your bureau not to be big but global-sized. New York was probably always diverse as a destination. No one can say the art world leads in terms of diversity. In the world of entertainment, much greater strides have been made in music, movies etc. The higher you go in the New York art world the more the mirror reflects not diversity but sameness. The current fascination with sex and celebrity is fun and I enjoy aspects of it but it is also what the mirror wants to see — these are interests that reflect entrenchment and not change.

MC: *Edward S. Curtis' photographic portraits of Indians have a perverse relation to your caricatures and landscapes. Do you see your work as creating a play within those archetypal portraits of Indian identity?*

BK: Curtis' photos depicted a fantasy of pre-contact purity which is starting to be seen as an enduring taxidermy of its subjects. My depictions of the West are not as silent or perfect, because I'm mapping bands of accidental cultures, communities of adoptees — looking for but never finding the center.

Baby Millenial Javelina, 1999. 22 1/2 x 29 inches. Watercolor and ink on paper. Opposite: **Sacagena = Friends USA**, 2000. Oil on canvas, 40 x 31 inches.

MC: *The fragmented representations in your paintings seem to reflect a heritage which is dispersed, almost random, in opposition to the timeless formalism of classical portraiture. What painters have inspired that liquid, chaotic style you use?*

BK: My first inspiration was the smell of paint. Those paint by number oil pots I remember as a kid. Later on it was the metallic spray cans used for model making. Ted de Grazia was the first artist I became aware of. He was a local Tucson, Arizona artist who made upbeat expressionistic genre scenes of Natives which he sold to Hallmark cards. These images also had Christian overtones. School introduced me to ab-ex painters, German Expressionist printmakers, and alternative music. Most recently I have walked around a retirement community in Mesa, Arizona and admired the landscape dominated themes of "Snowbird Art." These are decorative and heartfelt scenes on mailboxes and trailer sides. It's a strange tension of northern optimism juxtaposed with harsh desert reality.

The chaos you mention translates as collisions of paint. Most of my cultural influences (movies, music, TV) dwell in chaos. One of my favorite movies, *Natural Born Killers*, features the senseless, chaotic violence that is so inherently American, and I'm always happy when people think the same of my work.

MC: *There's definitely a sonic sweep to your painting and I know you toured as a musician for several years. How does music intersect with your work?*

BK: I love to play guitar and made my living at it for a while. Lately, the art world has gotten as exciting as the road antics were for me then. What excites me is music and art that make you travel someplace. I like my work to feel like a soundscape with melody on top and discordant energy below, like P.J. Harvey's new album.

MC: *Which other musicians have you been influenced by?*

BK: Lately, I've been listening to the poetry and storytelling of rap, as I'm interested in telling more stories with my work. I play different music just to get my blood up, to get the feel for my paintings right. There's also this new band from Tucson who have a hybrid scene called Calexico, and these two native drum groups Stony Pack and Star Blanket who do wild harmonic singing. But sometimes I prefer total silence.

MC: *Why silence?*

BK: I draw more in silence and get more paint on in noise. Silence brings anticipation. ■

Michael Cohen is a critic and curator based in New York.

Brad Kahlhamer was born in Tucson, Arizona, in 1956. He lives and works in New York.

Selected solo shows: 2001 Deitch Projects, New York; Aspen Museum, Aspen, CO; 2000 Madison Art Center, Madison, WI; Modern Art Inc., London; Francesco Kaufmann, Milan; 1999 Deitch Projects, New York; 1998 Bronwyn Keenan, New York; 1996 Bronwyn Keenan, New York.

Selected group shows: 2001 "Spiritual America," Asdellio Fine Arts, New York; Tirana Biennale, National Gallery, Tirana; 2000 "Local," Ikon, Birmingham (England); "Greater New York," P.S.1, New York; "Tadpoles," Neuberger Museum of Art, Purchase, New York; "IDY2K: Identity in the Millennium," Castle Gallery, The College of New Rochelle, New York; 1999 Patrick Gallery, New York; 1998 "PSTK," Bronwyn Keenan, New York; "Wall Paper," Nicholas Davies, New York; 1997 "Structures," John Berggruen, San Francisco; "Stepping Up," Andrew Mummery, London; "Black & White," Neuberger Museum of Art, Collection, Purchase, NY; 1996 "Red River Crossing: Ten Contemporary Native American Artists Respond to Peter Rindisbacher (1806-1834)," The Snow Institute, New York; "Scratch," Thread Waxing Space, New York; 1995 "Way Cool print Portfolio," Exit Art, New York; Boone Post Gallery, New York.

BRAD KAHLHAMER
Millennial Ground Squirrel, 1999-2000, watercolor and ink on paper, 22" x 29½"

with the idea of creating windows in buildings based on similar camouflaging movements. The sculpture had an elusive quality that made it unclear whether one was seeing the beast, or a pastoral scene in which the beast was hiding.

According to Lynn, the striations, linear segments, and many panels that formed *The Predator*'s "body" were the architectural elements that kept the piece from being solely sculpture. But feats of pure architecture were not to be found here: with its many panels, the piece was not a marvel in construction. There was little beauty in the joinery of the plastic ties that held the structure together. But Lynn's strategy of allowing the light, plastic surface to maintain its own weight without an internal armature was sheer architectural principle at work.

The Predator was an exciting, theatrical installation. Theoretically, it inspired viewers to explore our place in nature, but it also stimulated questions as to whether technology is natural because it is man-made, or unnatural because it conquers nature. Lynn and Marcaccio have created a digitally engineered monster from synthetic materials, that asks whether humans are being swallowed up by technology.

Sarah Buehrle is a Web-site news editor and freelance writer from Cincinnati.

WISCONSIN

BRAD KAHLHAMER

MADISON ART CENTER
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Brad Kahlhamer locates his art production in what he calls a "third place," the "first place" being his Native American ethnicity, and the "second place" his life as an adopted child growing up with a German-American family in Oshkosh, Wisconsin. Accordingly, the "third place" is a fantastic synthesis of the first two, no more or less real than the pigment of Kahlhamer's skin or his University of Wisconsin education. Does all of this sound too familiar—another exhausting body of identity-based work embraced by the art apparatus because it is simply the product of an "other"? The answer is "yes" but with one very important difference: Kahlhamer can paint and draw masterfully. However, his sculptural works are neither ironic nor romantic enough to transcend their "Indian" art aesthetic.

The show's curator Sara Krajewski writes that "Kahlhamer slips between genres easily, from painting to storytelling to pop music, finding the most powerful combinative language to express his stories of transformation." But his paintings in this show titled "Almost American" are successful because many of these stories are universal. The paintings' abstract, gestural compositional psychology bows to the dynamics of existential thought. There is an all-over energy and momentum of marks, images, words, and stains that affirm Kahlhamer's existence as fundamentally human. His brisk, direct process of laying down paint conveys a life-drive, a passion that is first felt, then read. Issues of truth and knowledge are more than subtexts to canvases such as *Cloudy Boy Monument*, in which a mountain of stereo speakers pierces a delusory atmosphere of animal contours and heavy blue clouds.

Cliché imagery of American Indians is woven throughout Kahlhamer's gestural landscapes. Red faces framed with stereotypical braids, and ubiquitous yellow smiley faces haunt Kahlhamer's large, psychologically charged "third place." By employing an unabridged vocabulary of iconography, Kahlhamer reveals a willingness to be self-effacing and funny. These traits also open up his work to broader human empathy, sentiments accessible beyond the Native American experience.

Humor and the artist's deft ability to sling a loaded paintbrush make his suite of new works on paper as compelling as any Raymond Pettibon graphic. They are satirical and misleadingly cute yet always wildly imaginative even within the tradition of storytelling and anthropomorphism. Drawings like *Millennial Ground Squirrel* and *Millennial Weasel + Sacagawea* are at once wickedly funny and profound. In addition to their cartoon directness, they celebrate a complex relationship between pictorial space and iconographic flatness, text and contour, history and fiction.

I would like to think Kahlhamer has the attention of the art world because he has reinvigorated expressionistic painting. But until this industry stops elevating artists because of their previous lack of inclusion, really good artists will work in a shadow of doubt.

Michelle Grabner is an artist and writer living in Oak Park, Illinois.

MATTS LEIDERSTAM

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With echoes of Rene Magritte's paintings of paintings, each of the seven photographs in Matts Liederstam's show has the image of a painting in it. In the first grouping, three photographs hang side by side. The middle image shows a painting mounted on an easel that sits on a mountain pathway. The painting in the photograph depicts an exploding volcano with a river of lava and small figures of onlookers below it. The tone and technique of the painting remind

Building the Story of a Life Lived Between Worlds

By ANN WILSON LLOYD

THE New York-based artist Brad Kahlhamer paints from life — his own, and a life that might have been.

An American Indian, Mr. Kahlhamer was adopted at birth by Caucasian parents and raised, quite happily, he says, mostly in the Midwest. Since official links to his tribal heritage were lost, his explorations of native culture have been conducted as neither insider nor outsider. He sees this nebulous state as a third existence melding history, fantasy and personal revelation. It flavors the edgy country-rock music he writes and performs, but comes through most overtly in his paintings.

A traveling show of Mr. Kahlhamer's recent work will run from June 1 through July 22 at the Aspen Art Museum in Colorado; it originated last winter at the Madison Art Center in Wisconsin. His latest paintings are on view at Deitch Projects in SoHo until June 30.

Like the works in the touring show, these new pieces are still cheerfully messy, though segments of washy landscape emerge from the chaos. Colliding patches of expressionistic abstraction and scrawling cartoonlike drawings are strewn around like graffiti. The cartoon figures often have skulls or smiley faces for heads, or take the form of raw-boned maidens or wildlife like eagles and wild pigs. Images of stacks of dark speaker boxes that refer to Mr. Kahlhamer's musicmaking appear less frequently and are less towering here than in other shows.

Mr. Kahlhamer, 45, came to fine art through a side door and somewhat late in life (his first solo show was in 1994). Before taking up painting, he spent 10 years as a road musician, then 10 years as a graphic artist at Topps Chewing Gum in New York, where he became a design director. At Topps, his cartoon style evolved through contact with contemporaries like Art Spiegelman; other influences range from kitschy western tourist art to Plains Indians' ledger drawings and the outsider artist Henry Darger; more recently, ersatz desert landscapes painted on Sunbelt campers and mailboxes have figured in.

Ann Wilson Lloyd's most recent article for Arts & Leisure was about the artist Hiroshi Sugimoto.

Chester Higgins Jr./The New York Times

The painter and musician Brad Kahlhamer in his Brooklyn studio, before his painting "Immature Eagle USA."

Mr. Kahlhamer does not aim for parody or critique, per se, and cultural politics is just one factor. His parallel lives, like train tracks, create a middle space where connectedness and yearning mingle, often in absurd ways. It's here that the story unfolds. "I'm interested now in building a more complete narrative, as much as I can, given my background," he says. "My past can't change, but the chapters I'm adding pressure all this up."

An antidote for this disjointed narrative may lie in Mr. Kahlhamer's recent interest in what he calls "ideas of belief." He often makes small, crudely fashioned figurative objects, reminiscent of animal totems or kachina dolls, that have been linked to shamanism in exhibition essays. Recent travels have taken him to Jerusalem and to Indian burial grounds in the Southwest of the United States. On a South Dakota reservation last summer, he attended a sun dance, a semi-private religious ceremony that Mr. Kahlhamer says was once banned by the United States government. None of this is overtly present in his paintings. "It's spiritual property that's not mine to quote, but aspects of these experiences inform my work," he says. "I'm taking these issues and imagining my own personal community. The paintings are very chaotic because my sense of myself in this community is very chaotic."

Predictably, perhaps, the chaos is also linked with Abstract Expressionism. "Brad is appropriating an almost quintessential American style," says Dean Sobel, director of the Aspen Art Museum. "He's not using it for the same reasons Pollock did, or Rothko or Twombley did later, but combining it with images of another culture."

Brad Kahlhamer, an American Indian raised by Caucasians, seeks through his art and music to define a middle space for himself.

Mr. Kahlhamer points out that his scruffy brand of abstraction could also be seen as cartooning. "I see late de Kooning, for example, as a kind of cartooning," he says. "But I also like the sumptuousness of paint, and ultimately, abstraction is perceived as personal, as mapping the self."

Beyond abstraction and imagery are subtle formal factors like circular compositions and meandering, interconnecting lines. "There is a hierarchy here that is clear to me but may not make sense to the viewer," he explains. "My favorite movie is 'Natural Born Killers.' It's a bit ugly, but uncontrolled chaos is so interesting. Chaos may be something that plays out over the entire experience of life — stretched-out violence.

"Maybe the paintings don't convey that. It's really hard to wrap up all these important messages, and then deal with yourself and not come across as a victim. I prefer to be positive about the whole Native American thing, and not define myself by tragedy. You can't do that as an artist, you have to be sort of absurdly positive." □

THE NEW YORK TIMES, FRIDAY, OCTOBER 28, 1988

ART IN REVIEW

Brad Kahlhamer

Deitch Projects
76 Grand Street
SoHo
Through Nov. 6

Brad Kahlhamer's show, "Friendly Frontier," has an explosive feel, as if it were run extended. Impulsive gallery-filling gesture, with no revisions or second thoughts. Paintings and sculptures seem to feed off one another, and the results, voluble and messy, are all of a piece.

There is a basic narrative in play, largely autobiographical. Its content centers on Mr. Kahlhamer's restless probing of his American Indian heritage. (Born in 1956, he grew up as an adopted child in Arizona and Wisconsin, and doesn't know his biological parents or his tribal affiliation.) Its rhythms reflect his episodic career as a road band musician, a professional illustrator and an artist.

All of these variables are tossed together in the show. The gallery entrance is lined with dozens of small assemblages that Mr. Kahlhamer has fashioned over the past decade or so from studio refuse (bits of trimmed canvas, nails) and personal scraps (cut-up shirts, hanks of hair). They vaguely suggest Kachina figures, fishing lures or birds, but are basically packets of privately meaningful materials compressed into talismanic units.

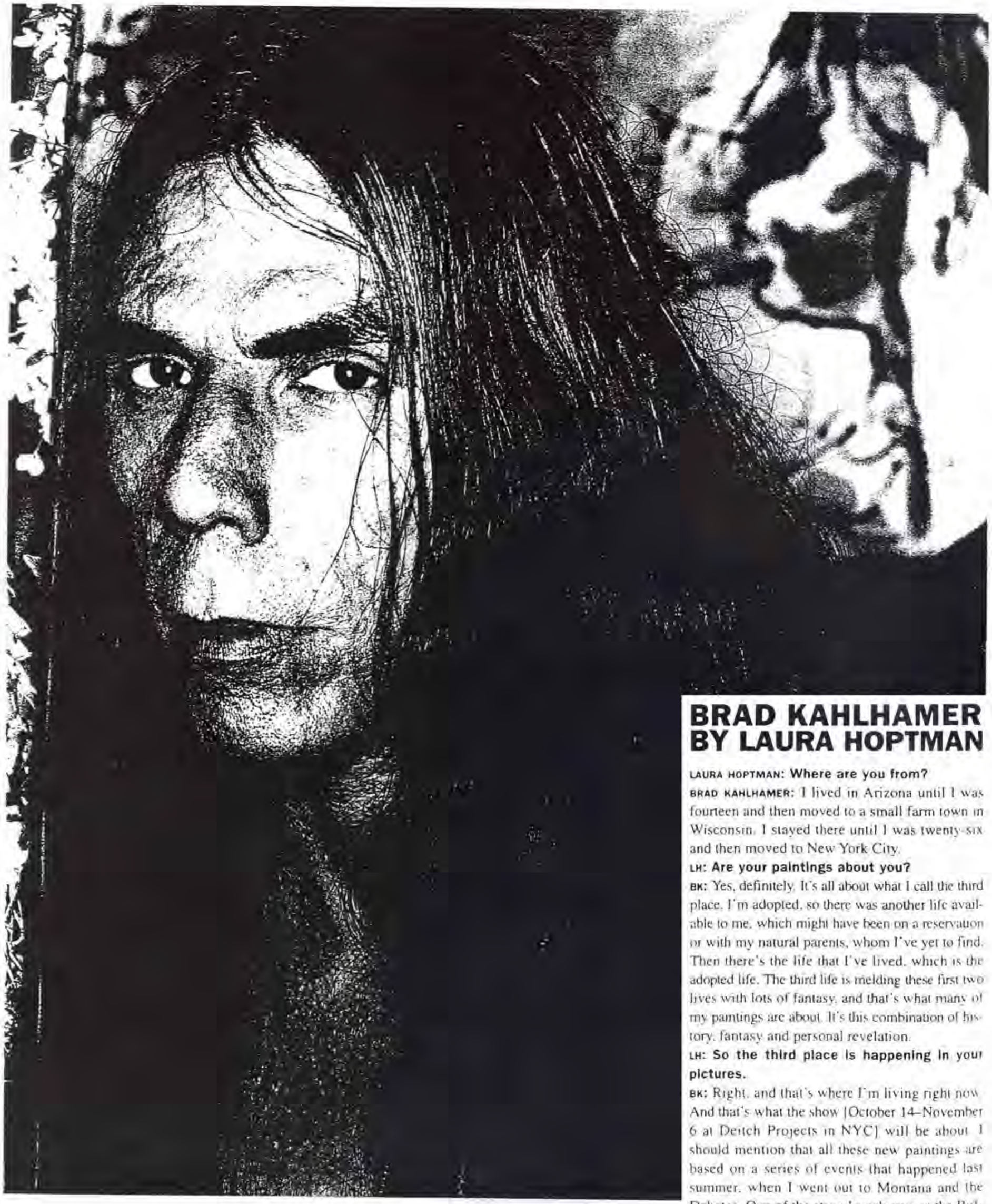
The oils and watercolors similarly join images and words. Paint goes on in brushy, sinewy networks against a white ground. (Mr. Kahlhamer's admiration for Abstract Expressionism is evident.) Scattered across the surface is a swirl of forms: animals, figures in canoes, wobbly Happy Faces, skyscraper-like stacks of music amplifiers, scrawled phrases, portraits and self-portraits, all floating through abstract landscapes of green hills and blue skies.

The results have the ungrounded feel of Plains Indian ledger book drawings, with a charge of psychic irritation and urgency that those drawings keep suppressed. But then, Mr. Kahlhamer is not operating within a Native American art tradition. (To see contemporary art that is, one can visit the retrospective of the late Jim Schoppert at the National Museum of the American Indian downtown.) And the very fact that he is not working within that tradition may account for some of the tension of his work.

How, he seems to ask, can one talk through art about having an identity without using the coded visual language and symbols that the culture at large associates with, has even assigned to, that identity? It is a question facing many young American artists — black, Latino, Asian, American Indian — at present, as the say-it-loud identity politics of the 1980's settles in for the long, introspective and in some ways more difficult haul.

Mr. Kahlhamer's inchoate-looking work seems an appropriately searching response to these developments. It is as if he were coming to grips with feelings and sorting out options as we watch. The results aren't neat; they couldn't be. But they are compelling.

HOLLAND COTTER



BRAD KAHLHAMER BY LAURA HOPTMAN

LAURA HOPTMAN: Where are you from?

BRAD KAHLHAMER: I lived in Arizona until I was fourteen and then moved to a small farm town in Wisconsin. I stayed there until I was twenty-six and then moved to New York City.

LH: Are your paintings about you?

BK: Yes, definitely. It's all about what I call the third place. I'm adopted, so there was another life available to me, which might have been on a reservation or with my natural parents, whom I've yet to find. Then there's the life that I've lived, which is the adopted life. The third life is melding these first two lives with lots of fantasy, and that's what many of my paintings are about. It's this combination of history, fantasy and personal revelation.

LH: So the third place is happening in your pictures.

BK: Right, and that's where I'm living right now. And that's what the show [October 14–November 6 at Deitch Projects in NYC] will be about. I should mention that all these new paintings are based on a series of events that happened last summer, when I went out to Montana and the Dakotas. One of the stops I made was at the Buffalo Bill Historical Center in Cody, Wyoming, which is sort of the right-wing Whitney of the West. And there was the studio of Frederic Remington in this museum. I loved looking at these artifacts and blankets and all this stuff. For this show in addition to the paintings I'm going to recreate my studio in a small gallery, based on Remington's studio. I thought that I could present my version, or maybe another take on this concept.

LH: You'll create your world like you did in your last show, have your CD playing? [Kahlhamer is a musician and released a CD, *KTNN*.] When did you start learning about Native American culture?

BK: My father was a construction worker and he would take me out on his job and I looked so much different from him and from all of the other kids. He hired this Navajo guy. His name was Joe. We were building cabins up in the White Mountain Apache Reservation, and he would tell me stories at night, and that's really the first time where I felt a very deep and powerful connection through his stories. They were great stories, and I'm sure that's how, to this day, I'm still conjuring up these images.

LH: What are you trying to get at in the paintings?

BK: I think it's about the real power of this country. One of the experiences I had [traveling] was visiting this spiritual site and feeling this amazing power. And once you feel that, you know that it can only come from below or from above or however you want to look at it. And then you go ahead and you try and describe it. And that becomes your sole drive, to make this known. And that's also what these paintings are about. I mean, sure there's the story and there's access through color and characters and comic language, but it's really about power and ecstasy.

Sometimes I imagine myself almost a conduit, somebody who's here in the East and looking West and looking at the rest of the new frontier, because I think that's where the new energy of this country is going to come from. The East just seems to be layer and layer of information and everybody's bored by this sort of meaningless existence. [What I want to convey is] more of a feel, it's more of a weirdness that you would feel as you're driving late at night and the car just happens to be heading west, whether you're in Illinois or Montana or even Connecticut. You look into your windshield and you don't see the road, but feel something else, and that's what this is about. I think I'm trying to become like a storyteller.

LH: You do tell big stories, come to think about it, and many times I've listened to you tell stories.

BK: And fallen asleep.

LH: And fallen asleep. ■