Fritz Scholder | Recent Work
Fritz Scholder | Recent Work
Copyright © 2002, all rights reserved, the University of Oklahoma, School of Art, 520 Parrington Oval, Room 202, Norman, Oklahoma 73019-0560 PHONE: 405.325.2691, FAX: 405.325.1668

The University of Oklahoma is an equal opportunity institution. Accommodations on the basis of disability are available by contacting the School of Art at 405.325.2691

Front Cover: *Self-Portrait at 28*; oil on linen; 13 x 15"; 1965

Back Cover: *Millennium #12*; oil on canvas; 80 x 68"; 1997
Fritz Scholder—Distinguished Artist in Residence in the School of Art, at the University of Oklahoma, April 30 - May 10, 2002 and Keynote Speaker at the College of Fine Arts Commencement May 11. Mr. Scholder’s exhibition, Recent Work runs from May 3 - September 8, 2002 at the Fred Jones Jr. Museum of Art. The exhibition includes a selection of paintings, prints, sculptures and collages in addition to several limited edition artist’s books. Mr. Scholder’s visit and exhibition have been made possible with the enthusiastic and generous support of President David L. Boren and his wife Molly, Mr. and Mrs. Jerome Westheimer and Ms. Joanna Champlin. The School of Art is truly blessed by their on-going support and deeply appreciates it. We would also like to thank Dr. Marvin Lamb, Dean of the College of Fine Arts for his assistance and encouragement.
Orchid on Black; acrylic on paper; 11 x 7"; 2002.
FRITZ SCHOLDER—Painter, sculptor, and printmaker of international prominence, was born on October 6, 1937, in Breckenridge, Minnesota. During his high school years he studied under the noted Sioux painter, Oscar Howe. Scholder received a BA Degree from California State University, Sacramento where he had the opportunity to study with Wayne Thiebauld; and a MFA Degree from the University of Arizona. In addition to his prolific output as an artist, Mr. Scholder taught painting at the Institute of American Indian Arts in Santa Fe from 1964-1969. He has been an artist in residence at Dartmouth College, as well as guest artist at the Vermont School, Oklahoma Arts Institute, Idyllwild Art Institute, Santa Fe Art Institute, Taos School of Art and the American University, in Washington, D.C. His works have been exhibited in Japan, China, France and Germany and at the Hermitage Museum in St. Petersburg. Scholder’s art work is represented in many public collections including the Museum of Modern Art, New York; Bibliotheque Nationale, Paris; Los Angeles County Museum; Walker Art Center, Minneapolis; San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian; and the Milwaukee Art Museum. It is also included in many private and university collections including the Fred Jones Jr. Museum of Art at the University of Oklahoma.
Numerous awards in the last forty years include fellowships from the Whitney Foundation, the Rockefeller Foundation, the Ford Foundation, the American Academy of Arts and Letters Award in Painting, and awards from the Salon d'Automne in Paris and Intergrafiks in Berlin. In 1991, Scholder received the Norsk Hostfest Humanitarian Award and in 1996 he received the Visionary Award from the Institute of American Indian Arts. Scholder is a past honoree and present board member of the American Academy of Achievement. Earlier this year he was recognized by the Governor of Arizona, receiving the annual Artist Award for his achievements. He has received Honorary Doctorates of Fine Arts Degrees from Ripon College, Wisconsin; Concordia College, Minnesota; University of Arizona, Tucson; the College of Santa Fe, New Mexico; and the University of Wisconsin, Superior. The subject of eleven books and three PBS documentaries, Scholder is listed in *Who's Who in America*, *Who's Who in the World*, *Who's Who in 20th Century America*, *100 Years of Unforgettable Achievement* and *Who's Who in the 21st Century*. Fritz Scholder lives in Scottsdale, Arizona.
Singing Iris; acrylic on canvas; 52 x 93"; 2002
Many will immediately associate Fritz Scholder with his famous Indian Series of more than 300 truly revolutionary paintings presenting Native Americans in an un-stereotypical light and forever changing the concept of "Indian Artist". In the following words, Scholder describes how he began that series: "Upon my arrival in Santa Fe in 1964, I vowed that I would not paint the Indian. The non-Indian had painted the subject as a noble savage and the Indian painter had been caught in a tourist-pleasing cliché."

"I retracted my vow of 1964 for several reasons, one of those being a teacher's frustration upon seeing a student with a good idea fall short of the solution. After class the immature struggles with paint and concept haunted me. One winter evening early in 1967 I decided to paint an Indian."

Iconoclastic as these works were to traditional ideas of Indians, they were immediately recognized for their insights and powerful commentary on the publicly held stereotypes of Native Americans and propelled Scholder into a position of prominence as an artist. While the Fred Jones Museum has several outstanding examples of Scholder’s Indian Series in its permanent collection, the current exhibition of recent works contains none. However, as the exhibition vividly demonstrates, Scholder is much more than an Indian Artist, he is a very profound,
Three Roses Celebrating; acrylic on canvas; 84 x 144"; 2002
complex and masterful artist whose interests are encyclopedic. He is a seeker, a collector, a seer, and his richly inventive, prodigious outpouring of work is a testimony to the endlessly imaginative and inquisitive mind of the artist. Before beginning a series, Scholder immerses himself in the subject matter by reading, researching, investigating and thinking. The recent works are alternately ironic, happy, elliptical, poetic, sardonic, sly, seductive, brutal and inventive. Master and magician, conjurer and creator, Scholder is endlessly surprising, always inventive and many of his images have become uniquely iconic within American culture. Never one to shy away from new subjects or concepts, Scholder outlines his philosophy of painting as follows: “It is the concept and the approach that is of value. With every painting you learn. You have to keep open, and it’s not easy walking the tightrope between discipline and accident.”

First and foremost a painter who clearly loves his medium, Scholder has at times been compared to Francis Bacon for his distortions, explosive brushwork and vivid, even shocking colors. And yet some of other his images, such as those hauntingly poetic ones; *End Time Land, Millennium #12, Eagle Fetish or Forgotten Alter #2*, offer another, more reflective and wistful side of the artist. While his forceful style betrays his expressionistic origins, the artist says this about
himself: “An expressionist is one who celebrates paint. Paint drips. It smears. It’s not because I’m trying to fool anyone into thinking this is a three-dimensional object on a two-dimensional surface.” Forming the core of the exhibition are the large Three Roses Celebrating and Singing Iris paintings where Scholder’s painterly virtuosity infuses the natural forms of the flowers with the expressive quality of paint, transforming them into breathtakingly large, ethereal objects virtually glowing with vitality and beauty. Expressionistically painted, there are also three paintings of heads included in this exhibition that are extraordinarily forceful images and dramatic representations of their titles, Heaven, Hell and Purgatory. Scholder’s work, while compositionally straightforward, is frequently filled with subtle layers of complexity not so readily apparent. It is easy to see these works as symbolic representations, but perhaps we should also understand them as portraits of the various personalities of the artist! At another time and in reference to another work, Mr. Scholder said: “It’s ...another painting of me. Most of the figures are. I paint myself in many guises. It’s all unconscious. I don’t think about it until years later.” So, perhaps these words are still true and in these paintings the artist presents a vision of three sides of his personality! The artist also knows how to look at the world in fresh, almost innocent ways and
Heaven; acrylic/oil on canvas; 80 x 68”; 1996
Purgatory; acrylic/oil/collage on canvas; 80 x 68"; 1996
Hell; acrylic/oil on canvas; 80 x 68"; 1996
viewers should take care that they not overlook some of the small gems that are in the exhibition. Works such as Fish #1, Bird, and Two Cats reveal him as a keen observer and painter of mundane moments or objects that, because of the painter’s vision and skill are imbued with significance even as they reflect disarmingly unpretentious simplicity. The artist’s words on the world and on his place in it: “I alone awake. She sleeps by my side. I cannot rest from the unknown portrait of paradox which is myself. There are many futures with the coming of change, Nicene creed eliminated magic, but magic never dies. Every human tribe, every nation and race of people, have had their shamans of black and white magic. All philosophers of old believed in the reality of magic. Music will magically cure a sick person. The magic circle will protect me.” ¶“Outside the story, the animus, anima and animal will witness the end of history. Death lurks at the fringes of a good party.” ¶“I am part of all that I have met. I venerate the relics of blood. The Gates of the North will be opened at the end of the world. What is it that will last. Will death be anew beginning?”
Fish #1; acrylic on canvas; 12 x 16"; 2000
Two Cats; acrylic on canvas; 12 x 16"; 2000
End Time Land #2; acrylic on canvas; 48 x 80”; 1998
OTHER SIDES, OTHER DIMENSIONS—Scholder is a wonderful example of the artist as a multi-faceted, multi-dimensional and multi-talented individual. He is a very cultured, sophisticated and erudite individual who has extraordinarily wide ranging interests. In addition, he is a traveler and a collector. Travel to Egypt where he participated in extensive archeological work influenced him profoundly, and the influence has been reflected in previous exhibitions. His collecting has focused on subjects that some might term macabre, as they include skulls, an Egyptian sarcophagus as well as several mummies. While the connection between his collecting and his art is not extensively reflected in this exhibition, it has been in previous shows. Included in this exhibit are several of the artist's limited edition books and one of the books, Thoughts at Night, reflects his collecting interests as do the paintings, Blood Skull and End Time Land. Scholder has a special affinity for books. Widely read and learned in many things, the artist has frequently commented on his long relationship with books and the special role they have always had in his life. That interest has long been a part of his creative oeuvre and this exhibit contains exquisite examples of his creations. "I regard the book as a supreme concept of bringing together esoteric knowledge printed with beau-
Thoughts at Night; artist’s book, edition 100; 7 x 5.5 x .25”; 2000
Blood Scull: Painting (artists blood) on motel paper; 5.25 x 3.25"; 2001
Yellow Horizontal Flower, acrylic on paper; 11 x 7"; 2002
tiful types, on fine papers, adorned with gold and paint, bound to be treasured. Books have always been constant and true friends of mine. Antiquarian books have a special feel and smell, especially incunables. From these old books, I have found there are still books to be made. Several years ago I bought an old letter press with a good amount of Baskerville types. I now print my own books.” He also writes poetry that reflects many of the reoccurring themes running through his visual work.

Spasms of dog dreams
Remind me life is short
Death is long

We never asked for this
I hang on with teeth of bone
The dog by my side is blessed
Alive, unaware of
Black corners in the hall
I double up and snarl while he sleeps
Dreams are riddles of out waking time
The dog knows
His bark in space will someday tell us what we knew
Long before the sands of Egypt he talked to us
In all his work, the artist challenges the viewer (or reader) by offering pungent observations and irreverent insights as well as posing profound questions about humankind, our nature, history and future. Who are we? Where have we been? Where do we go? What will last? What will change? What shall remain?

Frames with black corners surround dark glass
Through which the mysteries can be seen on the stairway to the hall
I forgot to lick the dust on the surface
Remembering yesterday today and ignoring tomorrow
I try to open eyes lashed by lies
Maps of the quest are under the bed
Only the dog smells the flame behind smoke
Ra knew
Lilith knew
Woden knew
God and Dog Know⁹
Shaman #6; photograph, edition of 15; 16 x 20"; 2002
Finally, it seems most appropriate to end these all too brief notes on Scholder by using the artist’s own words: “I consider myself a natural optimist, which might be surprising, because I like the dark side of things. That’s simply because of intellectual curiosity. I celebrate each day. I truly wake up happy every morning.”

With the first codex
The writing of conjurations,
Recipes, curses, incantations,
And screeds, stained the
Human consciousness with it’s own blood.

Later, proclamations were
Chiseled on the pages of
Grimoires, known to few.

Eat the ink and absorb the message.”

Fritz Scholder is a uniquely gifted individual and we are honored that he is willing to share his many gifts and multifaceted talents with us.
| Weather #1: acrylic on canvas; 60 x 48"; 2001
NOTES:
2iBID.
4iBID.
5iBID.
7iBID.
9iBID.
10Brockman, The Joy of Life in Death's Shadow.

CREDITS:
Text: Dr. Andrew Phelan
Design: Eric H. Anderson
Printing: OU Printing Services

A special note of thanks to Dr. Eric Lee Director of the Fred Jones Jr. Museum of Art and his outstanding staff for all their assistance in making possible this exhibition. Without their enthusiasm and cooperation this exhibition would not have been possible. Also, a very special thank you to Ms. Jennifer Gourley, Administrative Assistant in the School of Art for all her cheerful and able assistance in a number of ways.