

***Women and Ledger Art: Four Contemporary Native American Artists.* Richard Pearce. Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2013. 101 pp.\***

Reviewed by Jenny Tone-Pah-Hote

*Women and Ledger Art* examines the works and lives of Sharron Ahtone Harjo (Kiowa), Linda Haukaas (Sicangu Lakota), Delores Corcoran Purdy (Caddo), and Colleen Cutschall (Oglala Lakota) who create ledger art across different mediums. Combining the frames of autoethnography and transculturation, Pearce and the artists analyze their painting, drawing, sculpture, and offer their perspectives on the art (3). This collaboration emphasizes the “extraordinary accomplishments” of the artists while contextualizing their art and allowing them to tell their own stories about their communities (11). Each chapter discusses the artist’s biography and includes a collaborative interpretation of key works. The book contributes to the literature on American Indian art through its subject and collaborative frame.

The book re-orient the scholarship on ledger drawing by focusing on the lives and works of women who draw in this style and highlight women as vital actors in Plains nations. The first chapter investigates Sharron Ahtone Harjo’s art, which serves to “preserve historical tribal events, sacred traditions, and the Ahtone family history” (14). The second analyzes drawings by Linda Haukaas, whose pieces focus on gender, the contemporary art market, and Lakota history (51). She creates visual narratives of her nation’s history from her perspective as a Lakota woman. Her ledger art serves to “remind us of the Lakota people’s struggle against Euro-American colonization” (51). Delores Purdy Corcoran’s pencil and ink drawings underscore the critical role of Caddo women and connect Caddo people to ledger drawing as an art form (73). Corcoran’s drawings are striking in their use of humor, which resonated throughout many of her pieces featured in this book. Finally, Pearce focuses on Cutschall’s paintings of representational beadwork and the sculpture that she made for the Little Bighorn Battlefield. This initially contentious sculpture included a woman, who “embodies the humanity and the whole of the tribes” (82). Her sculpture also provides space for Native people to honor past warriors (85).

There are a couple of chapters that highlight the important work this book does. Pearce and Cutschall’s examination of *Spirit Warriors* and the controversy surrounding it does a great job of illustrating how contested and complex gender, representation, and memory remain. Pearce’s chapter on Linda Haukaas shows how she, as a current artist, employs ledger art “to perform the traditional female role of nurturing the Lakota lifeline” (35). This particular chapter illustrates the overarching argument well. Both of these examples demonstrate how the artists engage with ledger art and its history in nuanced and innovative ways.

*Women and Ledger Art* tackles a compelling subject, but there were a few missed opportunities that would have allowed it to speak to a broader audience. Also, some readers may occasionally chafe the category of “Plains Indian,” which at times glosses the distinctions among the Kiowa, Lakota, and Caddo nations. Caddo people possess a history that the introduction could explore

---

\* This editorially reviewed contribution was accepted for publication in *Museum Anthropology Review* on June 16, 2015. The work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License. To view a copy of this license, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>

more because it is distinct in many respects from the others described. Readers do not get a full sense of the uniqueness of Caddo people until Pearce examines Purdy's work in more detail. Though ledger drawing is a historic art form, it has a long history as a commodity that is not fully addressed, although most of the artists discuss the market. Linda Haukaas and Delores Purdy Corcoran each produced pieces inspired by the market. Writing more and critically about this subject would help answer questions this book raises. Why do artists continue to connect with ledger drawing as an art form? What opportunities and limitations does the form provide for contemporary artists? At times, I thought Pearce could situate these artists more in conversation with the literature on ledger drawing. How is the purpose of the artists work similar to and different from their historic predecessors? Pearce and his interlocutors offer a rich picture of their lives, and he could more fully analyze and situate the artists' perspectives on significant issues in the interdisciplinary fields of American Indian art and American Indian studies. For instance, one of the artists mentions blood quantum a couple of times, which could be explored and explained within the context of the literature on American Indian identity that would have been useful for more general readers. Further exploration of these areas could have allowed this book to speak to a broader audience. However, anyone interested in the book's central areas—women and gender, ledger drawing, and contemporary Plains art—will want to read this book. It opens a conversation about gender and artistic change that is important in the field of American Indian art.

*Jenny Tone-Pah-Hote is an Assistant Professor in the Department of American Studies at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill. She is currently working on a book manuscript entitled Envisioning Nationhood: Kiowa Expressive Culture, 1875-1940, which examines Kiowa expressive culture, including painting and drawing, through the lens of nationhood. She has also written an article examining intercultural interactions in 19th century Southern Plains ledger drawing.*

<http://dx.doi.org/10.14434/mar.v9i1-2.19518>