Elizabeth Hutchinson (Assistant Professor of North American Art at Barnard College) wrote The Indian Craze as an exploration of the trends in collecting Native American art and artifacts at the turn of the twentieth century. Each of the five chapters takes a different perspective on the relationship between American art and culture and the evolution and context of Native American art and culture during the same period.

Hutchinson first examines “Indian corners” which were a variant on the period’s “cozy corners” arranged as escapes from the stresses and artificiality of increased American industrialism and urbanization. Indian artifacts evoked a simpler and more “authentic” time. Additionally, the collection and arrangement of these objects influenced the aesthetics of the period, such as the emerging Arts & Crafts movement promoted by William Morris and John Ruskin.

The author next explores the curriculum at Indian schools during this time and the ideology of educators who encouraged education in Native arts as a way to promote traditional values as well as commercial potential. Such “industries curriculum” was an intrinsic component of the integration of Native communities into modern American society and was seen as a way to legitimize and spread the influence of Indian arts and crafts.

Emerging visibility of the Native arts naturally resulted in the increased celebrity of Native artists. This art came to be seen as a legitimate aesthetic, and its formal qualities (along with the primitivism sought in other cultures) became an intrinsic form of the American modernist movement. Native arts were seen as models for the combining of fine and applied arts so important to the modernist aesthetic.

Hutchinson also investigates photographer Gertrude Käsebier who was captivated with Indian culture, arts, and crafts. Hutchinson examines Käsebier’s portraits of the Sioux members of Buffalo Bill’s Wild West Show by exploring the power relationship and sexual dynamics between subject and artist. Another artist who benefitted from increased interest in Native American imagery was Angel DeCora, a Winnebago artist. Hutchinson examines the combining of gender receptivity in early modernism with the issues of Native aesthetics and culture. DeCora was educated in the tradition of the Indian Schools, and as a result her works display a complicated mixture of European American and Native ideas. While her media representation was that of a wild savage in the style of Buffalo Bill’s Wild West Show performers, she was influenced as well by her white mentors and artistic peers.

Hutchinson’s framework of cultural contextualization makes this a dynamic look at a compelling (and under-researched) topic. Illustrated with both black and white and color plates, this book is recommended for academic and non-academic audiences interested in the topics of American art, Native art, education, racial politics, or American history. It is a book that will spark curiosity and serve as the basis for future scholarship.

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