

*Art of the Red Earth People: The Mesquakie of Iowa*, by Gaylord Torrence and Robert Hobbs. Iowa City: University of Iowa Museum of Art, 1989; distributed by University of Washington Press. x, 144 pp. Illustrations, 33 color plates, exhibition checklist, notes, bibliography. \$50.00 cloth, \$24.95 paper.

REVIEWED BY HELEN H. SCHUSTER, EMERITA, IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY

*Art of the Red Earth People* offers the first comprehensive and detailed coverage of the distinctive aesthetic traditions of the Mesquakie Indians of Iowa. It is a catalog prepared to accompany an outstanding exhibition of the same title at the University of Iowa Museum of Art. Although the catalog was not available until some five months after the exhibition closed, it stands alone as a much needed, significant presentation and discussion of the artistic works of the "Red Earth People," as the Mesquakie (or Fox) Indians refer to themselves. The authors are two distinguished scholars and art historians who collaborated as guest curators for the exhibition.

The book provides detailed descriptions of the styles and techniques of Mesquakie art, illustrated by the many diverse objects chosen for the exhibition because of their representativeness and superb quality. The essays also include discussions of the historic background of the Mesquakie and the unique symbolic concepts and meanings conveyed by the expressive motifs. The authors give full recognition to the many historic influences from neighboring tribes as well as to European-American artistic forms, materials, and techniques that contributed to the development of what is recognized today as Mesquakie art. What is perhaps most significant, though, is the tenacity and integrity that the Mesquakie were able to maintain in their aesthetic expressions as they developed and changed during the turbulent historic periods from the eighteenth through the early twentieth centuries.

The essay by Torrence, "Art of the Mesquakie," first presents an overview of the general characteristics of Mesquakie society and its cultural institutions. Then he describes the effects of the early historic or postcontact period on the location and movements of Mesquakie villages until the establishment of their permanent settlement along the Iowa River west of Tama where they reside today. Torrence also discusses in detail how the artistic tradition related to "religious concepts and ritual practices" such as dance, song, myth, and ritual (5).

Torrence also includes a detailed discussion of various classes of art objects according to functions, techniques, materials used, size, colors and dyes, and continuity or change in design. These include objects such as rush mats, finger woven bags, yarn sashes, medicine

bundles (otter skin bags and bandolier charm bags), various costumes and adornments (breech cloths, leggings, moccasins, blankets, robes, shawls, hair binders, skirts, blouses, fans, bear claw necklaces, and headdresses), sculpture, utensils, tools, wooden heddles, flutes, and other objects made from stone, antler, bone, and wood. Most important was wood, for "to the Mesquakie, wood is sacred" (21). Traditional arts carved in wood included sacred feast bowls and spoons, cradle boards, feather boxes, pipe stems, effigy figures, and painted wooden grave posts. Decorative techniques included porcupine quill embroidery, which was replaced by glass trade beads in the nineteenth century, ribbon appliqué, and featherwork.

The value of Torrence's essay is enhanced by his personal interviews with Mesquakie people themselves, in particular those who have become repositories of knowledge about traditional Mesquakie ways of life and the spiritual significance of their handsomely created works of visual art. To his credit, though, he carefully excluded sacred knowledge that the Mesquakie deem inappropriate for public discussion.

The second essay is by Robert Hobbs, "Constancy, Change, and Cultural Interaction in Mesquakie Art." Hobbs examines further the history of intertribal and Indian-white relations during the early contact period. He also presents other significant historic events in detail, including the 1842 treaty in which the Mesquakie ceded about ten million acres of land in Iowa, their removal along with the Sauk to reservations in Kansas, their momentous decision in 1857 to purchase eighty acres of land in Iowa for one thousand dollars and some ponies, and the legalization of their presence in Iowa with the support of Governor James W. Grimes.

Hobbs also focuses on new concepts, materials, and artistic forms. He argues that by the latter half of the eighteenth century, much of the material culture of the western Great Lakes Indians had been discarded in favor of introduced cloth, clothing, metal utensils, and tools. He maintains that Mesquakie art is a composite, "an amalgam of many different traditions and ideas" (50). Among the forms borrowed from European-Americans, he lists curvilinear patterns, complex geometric designs, new colors, and the use of a "rich variety of colored beads" (38). Although Torrence maintains that the development of curvilinear beadwork was due to influences from southeastern, Delaware, and Algonquian Indian contacts, Hobbs suggests that it "derives from the influence of European folk art and mainstream American culture" (41). Mesquakie clothing, too, is said to represent "eclectic mixtures of European folk costumes . . . Victorian outfits . . . [and] their own Native American penchant for elaborately decorated

garments" (43). With the rise in popularity of Pan-Indianism, powwows, and the Plains warrior image at the beginning of the twentieth century, the Mesquakie responded by adopting Plains-style moccasins, beaded vests, and other articles.

Hobbs goes to great length to point to these links to European-American and other Indian decorated forms and designs, but he also maintains that the Mesquakie still "asserted their own cultural stature," remaining "traditional and innovative at the same time" (44-45). Thus, while their developing aesthetic expressions may have comprised new, selectively borrowed artistic forms and designs as well as their own cultural tradition, these synthesized artistic expressions have managed to remain distinctively Mesquakie.

Unlike most exhibition catalogs of tribal arts, this one gives present aesthetic expressions equal consideration with past "traditional" forms. This is testimony to the vitality and creative skills of the Mesquakie today. Mesquakie artists continue "to reaffirm tribal identity," and the "Mesquakie artistic tradition . . . continues to offer a precious means of cultural expression" (27).

An exhibition checklist describes all of the 188 objects included in the exhibition according to date, size, materials, collection information, and location. Eighty-one of these objects are illustrated in thirty-three color plates and sixty-six black-and-white photographs, all of superb quality. A selected bibliography concludes the catalog, but a greater wealth of information on basic references is included in the extensive endnotes to Torrence's essay.

*Forlorn Hope of Freedom: The Liberty Party in the Old Northwest, 1838-1848*, by Vernon L. Volpe. Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 1990. xxii, 236 pp. Tables, notes, bibliography, index. \$24.00 cloth.

REVIEWED BY MORTON M. ROSENBERG, BALL STATE UNIVERSITY

Vernon L. Volpe has reexamined the origins, developments, and decline of the Liberty party in the Old Northwest. Based on prodigious research and buttressed by meticulously detailed endnotes, Professor Volpe's brief study, which first appeared as a dissertation, seeks to correct earlier misconceptions and errors about the Liberty party as promulgated by earlier as well as contemporary scholars. Statistical analyses and supporting tables further attempt to sustain the author's assertions.

According to the author, previous studies of the Liberty party have not properly focused on nor correctly analyzed the religious basis for the Liberty party. Liberty adherents, Volpe asserts, were first

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