

*Rance Hood: Mystic Painter*¹

By James J. Hester² and Rance Hood³

Reviewed by L. Charles Pettit⁴

Please note that in reading and reviewing this book, I approached it as a Native American raised as a non-Indian. I am belatedly discovering my American Indian cultural heritage through genealogy and other sources.

The layout of the book's seven chapters is organizationally smooth. While reading from the foreword on throughout the book, I felt as though I was being spoken to by a single voice even though there are four different authors involving different sections. James J. Hester is mainly responsible for the whole book. However, the foreword is by John J. Rohner. The preface is by James J. Hester. There is a personal statement by Rance Hood, and the introduction is by Joan Frederick. Seven chapters constitute the body of the book. Many color plates brilliantly depict Hood's paintings and sculptures. The latter part of the book provides a career resume of the artist, including entries on paintings owned by museums, commissions, gallery exhibits, and awards. The authors, including the artist, complement one another very well as they honor Rance Hood's work and place it in a larger context involving aspects of other Native American art and tribal cultures. It is worth noting that Rance Hood's style includes both traditional and abstract approaches. According to art critic Gary Lantz, quoted in the book, Rance Hood himself says that " 'abstract art has been a part of Indian culture from the time medicine men translated personal visions into shield paintings to serve as protection and power for that individual'" (p. 49).

John Rohner provides an overview in the foreword about how various indigenous peoples in this country have been mistreated under such dubious mentalities of education as "Kill the Indian to save the man." For example, practices of the dominant society historically have been forced on Indian students, as at the Indian boarding schools in Phoenix, Arizona, and Carlisle, Pennsylvania. Rohner shares how he and Rance Hood initially met in Boulder, Colorado,

at an art show, which I think adds a nice personal touch to storytelling.

The story is relayed of how two Pueblo women were banned from dancing in tribal ceremonies when it was so much a part of their tribal culture. There are of course many other examples. Sad but true! The similarities are uncanny regarding the treatment by nuns of a Lakota medicine man in the mid-west and that rendered to Indian students at the Carlisle Institute in the east where there were prohibitions against students wearing their hair in traditional ways and speaking in their native tongues. I particularly appreciated the compare-and-contrast method of imparting events of historical and cultural significance in the foreword. We should all be thankful that John Rohner "prodged" James Hester into preparing this long overdue book about Rance Hood and his art.

The chapter titles reveal the book's historical, cultural, and artistic scope – Chapter One: The Beginning; Chapter Two: Native American Painting in Oklahoma; Chapter Three: Warriors on Horseback; Chapter Four: The Peyote Road; Chapter Five: Hood's Individual Style; Chapter Six: I Am Comanche; Chapter Seven: In the Eye of the Beholder. Prior to reading this book, I was fairly uninformed about the work of Rance Hood and the details of the Sacred Peyote Ceremony. I certainly gleaned much from reading James Hester's description of the ceremony and its influence on Rance Hood. Previously, I thought that the details were secretive and only known to participants. I was a little uncomfortable about reading about the details of the Peyote ceremony. That was until I got to the part where Hester explains that he feels that it is necessary to better interpret and appreciate the work in Native American art of Rance Hood by showing the background and inspiration of it all. Hester's justification put my mind and spirit at ease.

I agree with Joan Frederick that Rance Hood can compete and hold his own with the "Big Boys" as she says in the introduction. One of the

established Indian artists she mentions is Allan Hauser (also known as *Haozous*). I had the privilege of meeting and getting to know him during the last five years of his life. A Chiricahua Apache (1914-1994), he was an *Uncle* through marriage to one of my *Brothers-In-Law*, and he considered us part of his extended family. I think that Rance Hood and Allan Hauser share some of the same values about American Indian art. It is interesting to note that Rance Hood received some instruction in art from Allan Houser (p. 54). Their work honors not only traditional American Indian lifeways, but also the manifestation of such lifeways as an integral part of the social identity of modern American Indians who incorporate the past into the present for the future. The reader may wish to compare the Rance Hood book under review here with one about Allan Hauser by W. Jackson Rushing III (2004).

What is important is that individuals like Rance Hood and Allan Houser have followed their own sources of inspiration and understanding to be the culture-bearing artists they became. As Henry David Thoreau (1817-1862) states, "If a man does not keep pace with his companions, perhaps it is because he hears a different drummer. Let him step to the music which he hears, however measured or far away" (Thoreau 1960: 216). Because of extraordinary artistic ability, it would seem that Rance Hood, like the late Allan Houser, steps to the beat of a different drummer, for which we all should be grateful.

The book would be a welcome addition to any personal library on American Indian art, history, and culture in particular and American art in general. Thanks to all who had a part in putting this book together to see it in print. Beautifully produced, it is a book of which to be proud. The price set for this book is a fair one given its many plates in full color.

In my quest for knowledge through genealogical and other research on a Native American ancestry that was hidden from me most of my life, this book most definitely contributes to my growing knowledge base of tribal cultures. It broadens my appreciation by introducing me to Rance Hood as a most gifted and expressive contemporary Native American artist. I consider it an honor to be a reviewer, and I highly recom-

mend it to anyone interested in Native American art and the ongoing culture it represents of the first peoples of North America. The end product is well worth reading and savoring. ○

Notes

1. Albuquerque, New Mexico: University of New Mexico Press, 2006. 176 pages, foreword by John R. Rohner, preface by James J. Hester, artist's personal statement by Rance hood, acknowledgements, introduction by Joan Frederick, seven chapters, color plates, catalog of the artist's selected works, two appendices, bibliography. Cloth, \$39.95 U.S.

2. James J. Hester's Ph.D. in anthropology is from the University of Arizona. He is a professor emeritus, Department of Anthropology, Campus Box 233, University of Colorado at Boulder, Boulder, Colorado 80309-0233 USA. By telephone, he may be reached at 303-492-7419 or at 303-939-9095. By e-mail, james.hester@colorado.edu is his address.

3. Rance Hood is a Comanche artist whose studio is in Denison, Texas. He may be reached at Post Office Box 72, Denison, Texas (TX) 75021-0072 USA, at 903-463-6020, or at **Rance@RanceHoodStudio.com**.

4. L. Charles Pettit is a support services specialist at the Denver Service Center / Intermountain Regional Office, National Park Service, U. S. Department of the Interior, 12795 West Alameda Parkway, Post Office Box 25287, Denver, Colorado (CO) 80225-0287 USA. His e-mail address is charlie_pettit@nps.gov and the telephone number there is 303-969-2719. His B.S. degree is in business administration from Columbia College, Aurora Campus, Denver, Colorado, USA.

References Cited

- Rushing III, W. Jackson
2004 *Allan Houser: An American Master (Chiricahua Apache, 1914-1994)*. New York: Harry N. Abrams, Publisher.
- Thoreau, Henry David
1960 *Walden or Life in the Woods*. New York: New American Library. First published in 1854.

*Rance Hood: Mystic Painter*¹

By James J. Hester² and Rance Hood³

Reviewed by Edward M. Chamberlin⁴

Color! Artist Rance Hood's paintings are filled with color! The book, *Rance Hood, Mystic Painter* is filled with the colors of his life, his dreams, his enjoyment of painting and his faith in the Native American Church. The illustrations are produced spectacularly, capturing the intricate beadwork, feathers, ribbons, multi-colored shields of the people and the colors of the painted ponies. *Mystic Painter* successfully illustrates Mr. Hood's colorful life.

Organized chronologically, the book presents Comanche Indian Rance Hood's work from childhood to adult taking side steps to expand on his personal interests and inspirations. Many of his paintings are used to illustrate points being made throughout the story. The author, James Hester, did an excellent job telling this story in a readable manner for all to enjoy.

The paintings are reproduced vibrantly. Rich colors jump from the pages and the pure whites add exciting energy to every piece. I wish all 221 illustrations could have been printed full page. The stories told in these works are often found in the details. We are fortunate that the book includes nearly a complete set of his work by including 148 thumbnail images. My favorite pieces include, "Owl Medicine," "Government Abandonment," and "Winter Song." Each of these compositions offer mesmerizing stories, are profound in their purpose, and powerful in their presentation.

Collectors of Native American wall art will find *Mystic Painter* enticing, teaching them how Indian artists gain their inspiration, how they see the world, and what matters most to them. The reader will find in the appendix a detailed timeline of the history of Native American painters in Oklahoma. Collectors of Hood's art will embrace the book for its comprehensive approach to his story. It thoroughly covers his life and offers 195 of his paintings, 14 of his sketches, and 12 of his sculptures for study. Anyone interested in the Native American Church will discover the book to be an enriching

way to learn about this complex and often misunderstood religion. Hood's stories, open the teepee door for all to enter.

This artist's biography gave me an introduction to the Native American Church. Rance's boyhood experiences following the Peyote Road is brilliantly remembered and shared. The memory allows us to enter a Native American Church ceremony and see what he sees. The use of peyote in the ceremony helps the follower reach a state of connection with the world. Rance says, "When you use peyote, everything is clear: All the colors are strong, and when you look at the earth, every particle of sand, every blade of grass is distinct" (p. 27). Re-visiting his paintings after listening to his remembrance, you discover the sacred paraphernalia included in his paintings; the staff, fan, and drum. And then you understand the emotional and spiritual significance of his paintings.

At 67, Mr. Hood's story is long overdue. The Native American art world was recognized and encouraged to grow and bloom during Hood's life. *Rance Hood, Mystic Painter* is a beautiful book that enriches our world with strong colorful paintings and respectfully takes us into the realm of the Peyote Road. ○

Notes

1. Albuquerque, New Mexico: University of New Mexico Press, 2006. 176 pages, foreword by John R. Rohner, preface by James J. Hester, artist's personal statement by Rance hood, acknowledgements, introduction by Joan Frederick, seven chapters, color plates, catalog of the artist's selected works, two appendices, bibliography. Cloth, \$39.95 U.S.

2. James J. Hester's Ph.D. in anthropology is from the University of Arizona. He is a professor emeritus, Department of Anthropology, Campus Box 233, University of Colorado at Boulder, Boulder, Colorado 80309-0233 USA. By telephone, he may be reached at 303-492-7419 or at 303-939-9095.

By e-mail, **james.hester@colorado.edu** is his address.

3. Rance Hood is a Comanche artist whose studio is in Denison, Texas. He may be reached at Post Office Box 72, Denison, Texas (TX) 75021-0072 USA, at 903-463-6020, or at **Rance@RanceHoodStudio.com**.

4. Edward M. Chamberlin is the museum curator at Hubbell Trading Post National Historic Site, Post Office Box 150, Ganado, Arizona (AZ)

86505-0150 USA. His e-mail address is **e_chamberlin@nps.gov** and the telephone number there is 928-755-3475. His B. S. degree is from Northern Michigan University with additional studies in anthropology from the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, and Dine College, Navajo Nation. His knowledge of Native American Art has been obtained over the past 27 years while living and working in Arizona and New Mexico.

*Rance Hood: Mystic Painter*¹

By James J. Hester² and Rance Hood³

Counterpointed by By James J. Hester

It has been an honor to have had the opportunity to write the story of Rance Hood's life and to attempt to explain the origins of his art. Further, it is a privilege to receive the kind remarks of the two reviewers, Charles Pettit and Edward Chamberlin. From their comments it is apparent that we – John Rohner, Joan Frederick, Luther Wilson, Rance and I – have achieved our goal of making Rance's art understandable to the general reader. I am grateful to them for their inspiration and their contributions.

I would like to explain how I conducted the research on Rance's work as this is not fully explained in the text. My initial research was in the library of the Heard Museum in Phoenix, Arizona, which maintains clipping files on Native American artists that include newspaper articles, magazine articles, gallery flyers, and exhibit catalogs. From that initial research, I was able to reconstruct a history of Rance's life and work. Rance did not have such a record so the Heard information was critical. With that outline available, I then contacted other museums by e-mail for additional information. Without exception, the curators at those museums responded promptly; either providing more data or stating that they had nothing in their files.

One major positive response was from the National Cowboy Hall of Fame and Western Heritage Center in Oklahoma City, so I went there to copy their file on Rance. On the same trip my wife, Adrienne, and I visited Rance in his studio in Denison, Texas. There I interviewed Rance while Adrienne took photos. After that, we visited the Comanche Tribal Visitor Center in Lawton, Oklahoma, where more of his work was on exhibit. In subsequent years I interviewed Rance in Santa Fe at the annual Indian Market where his work was on exhibit in Jeff Tabor's gallery.

In writing about Rance's work, it was necessary to place it in broader contexts of (1) the history of Native American painting in Oklahoma and (2) the adaptation and acculturation

of Native Americans exposed to European American culture. The latter has been discussed by the reviewers among a number of topics such as differing world views, subjugation, discrimination, and finally revitalization.

Given the history of those constraints over several generations it is remarkable that so much of Comanche traditions has been preserved for Rance to draw upon. In large part that is due to his having been raised by his grandparents. Even with that advantage, there is still a deep gulf between the European American and Native American world views. That is the reason that I included the chapter on the Peyote Road. The average general reader knows little or nothing about the Peyote religion. So it was necessary to describe it first before discussing its importance in Rance's art.

Today after passage of the Native American Religious Freedom Act of 1990 (NAGPRA), Native Americans are free to practice their religion and to discover their cultural roots. They can again perform ceremonies previously banned such as the potlatch and the sun dance. Unfortunately, due to generations of suppression, much has been lost. That is one reason why Rance's work is so important. It gives us a window into the past. At the same time, Rance's vision is what we have in lieu of history. So in the future, Rance's vision of Comanche traditions will become the history we remember. ○

Notes

1. Albuquerque, New Mexico: University of New Mexico Press, 2006. 176 pages, foreword by John R. Rohner, preface by James J. Hester, artist's personal statement by Rance hood, acknowledgements, introduction by Joan Frederick, seven chapters, color plates, catalog of the artist's selected works, two appendices, bibliography. Cloth, \$39.95 U.S.

2. James J. Hester's Ph.D. in anthropology is from the University of Arizona. He is a professor emer-

itus, Department of Anthropology, Campus Box 233, University of Colorado at Boulder, Boulder, Colorado 80309-0233 USA. By telephone, he may be reached at 303-492-7419 or at 303-939-9095. By e-mail, james.hester@colorado.edu is his address.

3. Rance Hood is a Comanche artist whose studio is in Denison, Texas. He may be reached at Post Office Box 72, Denison, Texas (TX) 75021-0072 USA, at 903-463-6020, or at **Rance@RanceHoodStudio.com**.