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**Changing Woman: The Life and Art of Helen Hardin.** By Jay Scott. Flagstaff: Northland Press, 1989. 165 pages. \$35.00 cloth.

This is a fine book that nicely balances biography and art criticism. Helen Hardin was a New Mexican artist from Santa Clara Pueblo who lived most of her life in Albuquerque and Santa Fe. A locally famous daughter of an even more famous artist mother, Pablita Velarde, Hardin was a talented, accomplished, beautiful, tough, and troubled person who died of breast cancer on 9 June 1984, barely a month into her forty-first year. Her life and her death both have elements of tragedy, courage, and drama, with almost mythic overtones. Her story is also thoroughly contemporary.

As well as showing Hardin to be an intensely individual person, Jay Scott uses her as a vehicle for addressing many issues that trouble our times. These range from the profoundly tragic one of breast cancer, to the no less profound though certainly problematic issues of alienation, broken families, physical abuse, and quality and equality in the education of Indian and other minority people. In these contexts, it may be pertinent that Scott is a male, Anglo-American journalist who grew up in Albuquerque but now lives in Toronto.

Scott and Helen Hardin were of the same generation and the same community, although they seem not to have known each other until only a few years before Hardin's death. Both grew up in the sixties, with shared values and experiences that are unique to their generation. Similarly, they shared an Albuquerque orientation (I do also, to some degree) about art in New Mexico. This means they regarded that city as a sort of blue-collar, regional intellectual center where real people can do real art, as opposed to Santa Fe and Taos, where unreal dealers market art and artists, as though they were some precious kind of canned chili, to plastic Texans and Californians. These shared experiences and prejudices give Scott special insights that balance, to some degree, his Anglo maleness. He understands why Hardin did so poorly and learned so little about art (or much of anything else) in college, why her Santa Fe years were uncomfortable, and why her work, if it was to rise above decorative, abstract cliché, could do so only in Albuquerque.

He begins with a not-very-flattering profile of Pablita Velarde, establishing the personal, social, and intellectual background of

her life and work as the essential matrix within which Hardin's story unfolds. Rivalry between mother and daughter then becomes the tragic theme, the Electra story replayed in surprising detail to include the daughter's love for a father whom the mother hates.

Other threads—interracial marriages, the social discomfits of both urban and reservation life, Helen as an abused child and (in the end) a happily married woman, ideological angst about Catholicism and the traditional religion of Santa Clara, the awful reality of cancer and the knowledge of impending death—all play out within the Freudian storyline. Hardin's art is woven through these struggles, as much a metaphor as an expression of personality or experience. The reader might wonder, at first, if the story would have been told had Hardin not been an artist of repute, but, in the telling, her art becomes almost incidental to her life.

Because Hardin's story is set within a mythic framework that some believe to be archetypal and universal, Scott's book may well be unique within the limited genre of Indian artist biographies. In my view, the effort alone makes the work worthwhile, for although I may question the validity of archetypes and universals, Electra makes one hell of a plot. But this is much more than a good try. Scott tells his story with a conviction that puts the art and his critical comments about it in a setting that humanizes art history and art criticism. He seems to be telling us that pictures may not be as important as the people who make them. Consequently, he interprets Hardin's artistic successes and failures in warm, human as well as objectively historical terms.

Many biographies of Indian artists are puff pieces that trivialize the art, depersonalize the artist, and perhaps disgrace the author. Only two that are at all comparable to Scott's book come to mind: *Fred Kabotie: Hopi Indian Artist* (Fred Kabotie and Bill Belknap, 1977) and *Carl Gorman's World* (Henry and Georgia Greenberg, 1984), and for all their merit and honesty, neither deals with the art in so insightful, human, and useful a way.

I have some complaints. While I do not believe that Scott deliberately avoided the issue, I think he missed an opportunity by not discussing Hardin's weak formal art and art history training as a limiting factor of her career. I agree with him that her late work is by far her best, but I cannot dismiss my sense that her ignorance of alternative means and methods of making art inhibited her to the very end. Early on, she was denied (and she

denied herself) the benefits of professional art training. When she did mature as an artist, it was too late; there was no time left to learn the things she needed to know to be released from her Indian School past. In her case, Indianness may not have been the key issue, but the problem is so endemic among Indian artists as to make the point worth pursuing.

I have technical criticisms that may be more the fault of the publisher than the author. The book lacks an index, which is unfortunate for a volume that is bound to be used as a reference for years to come. More irritating by far, the illustrations are unnumbered, there is no listing or index of them, and they are not cross-referenced in the text. Since Scott's analyses often refer to particular pictures, the reader must interrupt the flow of words and thoughts to search backward and forward for an illustration that may or may not be in the book. On the positive side, the reproductions are very nice indeed.

Scott tells us that Helen Hardin saw and edited a late draft of this manuscript shortly before she died; thus this is, in a sense, an "authorized" biography. So both Scott and Hardin are to be credited for the journalistic objectivity and painful honesty of the work. It could so easily have become a soap opera, a sanitized panegyric, or a phony yawner, but it is none of those. Scott writes as an art critic about Hardin's pictures and seems to pull no punches; Hardin accepts Scott's right to express opinions and offer analyses that she may or may not agree with. Both benefit from a transaction that gives each credibility.

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**Mean Spirit.** By Linda Hogan. New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1990. 371 pages. \$19.95 cloth.

"[H]elp us, oh God, we're rich." This line from James Welch's poem, *Harlem, Montana: Just Off the Reservation*, captures the tone of Linda Hogan's fine book, *Mean Spirit*. The book is a work of fiction based on historical events that took place around Watona, Indian Territory, Oklahoma, in the 1920s. The Native American characters are not long off the Trail of Tears that brought them