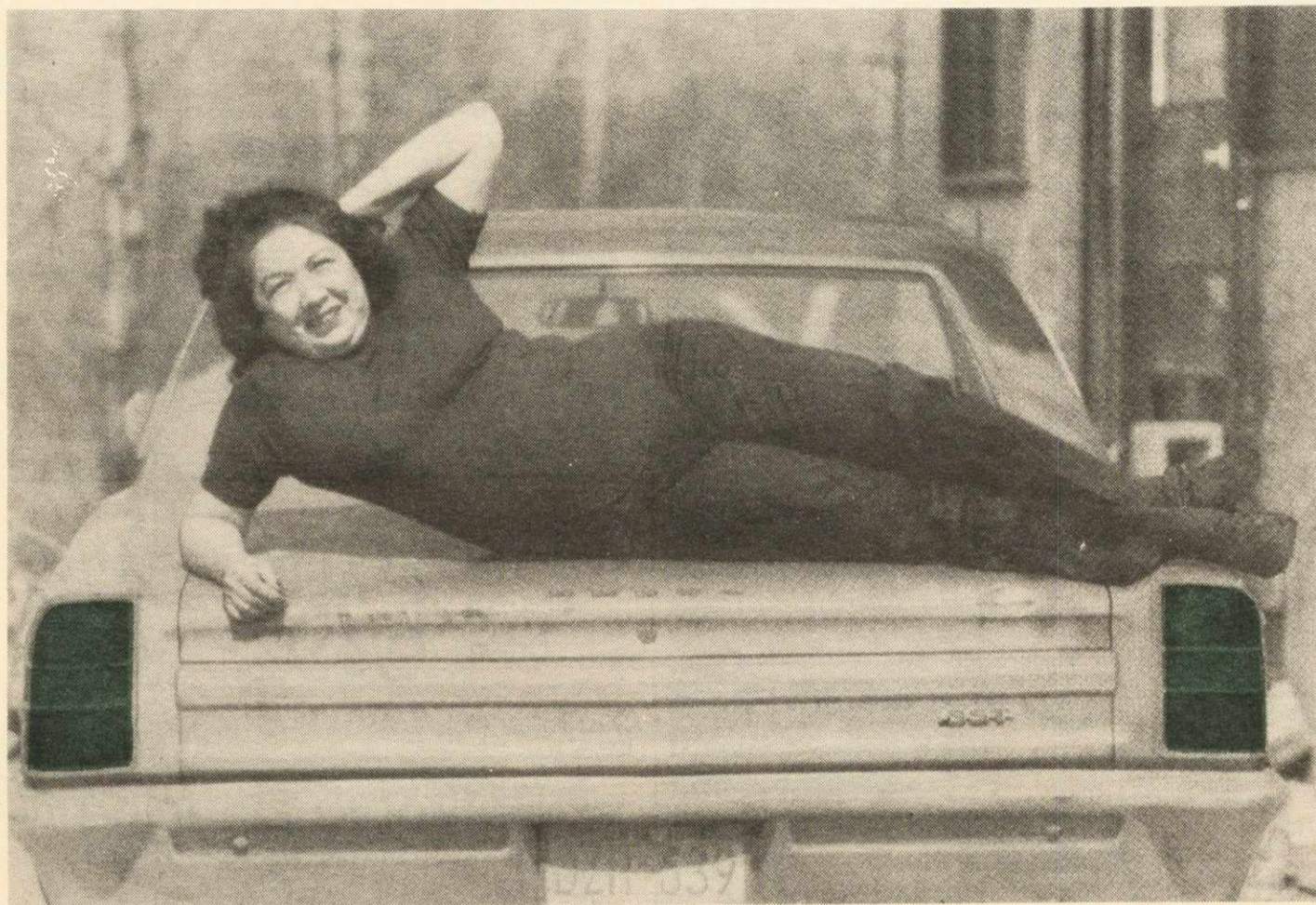


# CHANGERS

## A SPIRITUAL RENAISSANCE



the dominant society has imposed many of its biases. Man and woman have become dichotomized and separated into two different beings. Man, in the dominant society, is powerful. And the dominant society asked the Native man to be powerful as well.

Trying to adapt to the dominant society, the Native woman maintained her role as mother and teacher. Trying to adapt to the dominant society, the Native man was no longer hunter, warrior or shaman. The dominant society took away what had defined the Native man, and asked him to fulfil entirely new tasks, from which the Native man could only look to his non-Native counterparts. In effect, the Native woman has been closer to her traditional being, closer to her spiritual past, than the non-Native man, who was always had to struggle to maintain both sides of his being.

*Changers*, then, reflects these struggles in Native society. We see the struggle of gender power in Ruth Cuthand's "Guard Your Feminine Wiles," a stark yellow war shirt, ripped and torn with blood stains. We see the struggle with religion and dominant culture in Joane Cardinal-Schubert's "Preservation of a Species - The Warshirt Series," a group of warshirts raging against an oppression. We see the struggle with education in Jane Ash Poitras' "Repatriated Blackboard," a mixed media mural which tells us there is more to our history lessons than we've been told.

*Changers* is also careful not to fill the room with anger. Shelly Niro's "Rebel" gives us a glimpse of Native humour and Glenna Matoush's etchings carefully accentuate maternal Native spirituality.

I am not an artist, nor am I an art critic. A lot of *Changers* I found weird, part of an artsy fringe. I am, however, an Indian. After a quick glance, I gave this art more study, and tried to imagine each artist - where they were coming from. I realized that this is a very important show: to Native people, who are reclaiming their spirituality; to native women, who leads this spiritual renaissance; and to non-Native people, who perhaps don't know about Native people as we wish they did.

*Changers: A Spiritual Renaissance* shows at the Dalhousie Art gallery in the Rebecca Cohn from September 22 to October 27. An accompanying film series on Native women will be shown every Wednesday evening. Admission is free.

### BY DUNCAN MCCUE

THERE IS NO NEED to talk about the anger in Indian country. You saw that at Oka, you saw that in Elijah, you see it every day in the newspapers. I don't need to tell you about the Indian's anger.

**ART**  
*Changers: A Spiritual Renaissance*  
Dalhousie Art Gallery  
Until October 27

But have you really seen our anger? Not in the newspapers. Real, straightforward - bang. Or have you seen our humour? Barbara Frum doesn't seem to have time for that. Or have you seen our spirituality? Not just the red man's bond to the earth, but our spirits.

*Changers: A Spiritual Renaissance* may give you a chance. Recently opened at the Dalhousie Art Gallery in the Cohn, this show of contemporary Native women's art might just give you a glimpse about what Native women are feeling, where they have come from and where they are going. Given a chance, *Changers* may just change the way you think about the Native people.

*Changers* is a unique exhibition,

in that it is the first time in contemporary Canadian art history that the work of aboriginal women artists has been gathered and displayed.

Curated by Maliseet artist Shirley Bear, the show has been given a distinctly feminist twinge, something which distinguishes it in both the Native and non-Native worlds.

Feminism, as most understand it, seems to send shivers down the spines of many. Conjuring up images of frantic Mary Daly's, feminism elicits a cold response from many people, Native and non-Native. *Changers* is asserting that for native people, it was not always this way.

In traditional Native culture, the woman was respected and given equal status to the man. As mother and giver of life, the woman was seen as the centre of the life circle. Her role as an equal was reflected in traditional spirituality - the "Great Spirit" is asexual. In Native languages - many of which do not have separate words for "he" and "she"; in the balance of powers - many tribes are matriarchal and matrilineal.

In contemporary Native culture,

I looked back to what I had learned in school, and found only questions:

- Where was my culture?
- Where was my language?
- Where was my religion?
- Where was my mythology?
- Where was my heritage?
- Where was my identity?

Jane Ash Poitras

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