

Artist Teresa Marshall *ReSearches* Native Identity

by Jethelo E. Cabilete

Native art combines creative beauty with powerful symbolism to produce an evocative piece that can speak volumes without uttering a word. Beginning January 9 to February 13, 1994, Gallery Connexion presents a striking and thought-provoking exhibit by well-known artist Teresa Marshall, entitled *ReSearch*.

Teresa Marshall is a Nova Scotian Mi'kmaq artist, playwright, writer and cultural researcher. Raised on an Indian and Military reservation, her works span the critical and creative exploration of the duality of her Canadian identity. A graduate from the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, her works can be found in such exhibitions as, The Department of Indian Affairs at the Pitt International Gallery in Vancouver, Pe'l Atukwey at the Art Gallery of Nova Scotia in Halifax and Land, Spirit, Power at the National Gallery of Canada in Ottawa. Her prose writings have been published in *Kelusultiek*, an anthology of East Coast Native women writers and Na-Me-Res, Native Voices, while the production of her first play, *Sticks and Bones*, was performed at the To-

ronto Playwrights' Festival.

Teresa Marshall's latest exhibit, titled *ReSearch*, is based on her exploration of herself as an artist and her identity as a Native Canadian. The works comprise a look at her art through the years, exploring her heritage and culture through the media of artistic expression. The exhibition is set in two rooms at Gallery Connexion, with a major piece set up in one room by itself. This piece, which is a huge representation of a Monopoly board, is a powerful message of the plight of Native Canadians and the history of what is still being done today. The board itself contains different names for the traditional settings, calling to mind different Native events from history and the present. Names such as Oka (a protest), Kahnasatake (police action against Natives), Wounded Knee (a historic battle) and Not Just Visiting (Native over-representation in prisons) are just some of



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the symbols that conjure strong emotions in the viewer. The various playing pieces; the tanks, soldiers, crosses and upside-down Canadian flags (signalling distress) also add to the symbolism. The cards, made from woollen blankets, contain messages of Native repression and subjugation, for example: You Inherit Smallpox, Justice Denied-Go to Jail, Land Appropriation-Go Back to Where You Came From and so on. The ribbons on the playing "cards" symbolise the four "races" that live on the Earth, as well as the four cardinal points of North, East, South and West.

The other room houses art that spans past and present works that are just as powerful as the Monopoly piece. The work entitled, "Mother May I" (1991), depicts the Creation myth of the Mi'kmaq People. This is a beautiful piece and is a nice rendition of an ancient tale. "Teacher" (1989) seems to indicate the Native People's sharing and teaching of their cul-

ture and heritage through tribal storytelling and cultural events. The painting, "How the West was Won" (1991), depicts the plight of the Natives when the Europeans settled North America; "Eden" (what Native life used to be), "Confinement" (physical, mental and cultural imprisonment), "Alter" (conformity to the "greater" society) and "Prayer" (a hope for a better future). Finally, a sculpture, "Turtle's World" is another telling of the Creation myth from the Native point of view. The other pieces were just as powerful and interesting.

On January 23, 1994, from 2 p.m. - 4 p.m., Gallery Connexion, in conjunction with the Native Studies Program of Saint Thomas University, is holding a reception with the artist, Teresa Marshall. This will be held at the NB College of Craft and Design Theatre. Gallery Connexion is located behind the Justice Building on Queen Street, and they are open Tuesdays - Fridays 12:00-4:00 and Sundays 2:00-4:00. Many thanks to Rosalyn Rosenfeld for helping with some of the explanations for some of the pieces.

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