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**When My Vision  
Is Cohesive, I Draw:  
Banakonda Kennedy-Kish (Bambi)**

## Georgia Watterson

*Bambi est une femme indigène qui explore son héritage à travers son art.*

*'Once I have put an experience in a picture on a page, I have accepted it. The pain of Sarain's death is an important example. There is sorrow in the picture I drew after he died but it is not at all a sad picture. It is in the Indian tradition of picture. It says, I have spoken. I have said what there is to say. There is no more to be said. Now, take it away and climb among the lines and find out what it means to you.'*

Bambi first encountered Sarain Stump, a Native poet and artist, ten years ago. He agreed to illustrate a book of her poems. However, after seeing a card she designed for him, he insisted she do her own drawings. That was the start of her serious drawing, which continues to be influenced by him.

She writes and draws, but for different needs. Her writing comes from the need to bring something out so she can see and work with it. *'It is disintegrated, searching, trying to pull up all the kinds of roots at one time.'*

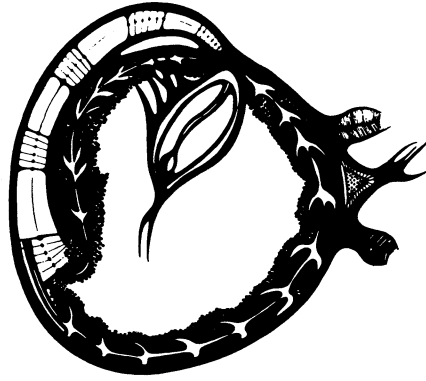


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Bambi is eloquent about her writing. Her drawing, on the other hand, has clarity, simplicity and oneness. It is so much a part of her psyche that she resents having to put words to it. Bambi is more clear when she draws; she can focus finely. A drawing comes to her whole.

*'When my vision is cohesive, I draw.'*

It takes Bambi a long time to resolve an experience into a picture. She is finally doing a series on birth eight years after her daughter was born.



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*'The birth experience is one of the most powerful of human experiences. I wanted to catch that experience in imagery. People became impatient when I talked about it. They told me it was inappropriate. I know that it is private. It was not that I wanted to give birth in front of people. I wanted to communicate what it meant to me.'*

I understand why people might have wanted to avoid her talk about birth. Bambi's conversation is often confronting and always intense. If I want to escape the issue she is exploring, she has only recently learned to allow me any room to manoeuvre. She has no small talk. She is bored with triviality, offended by superficiality and outraged by evasion.

Her drawing clearly reflects the Native tradition. In a sketching group, she was asked: *'Why do you draw Indian?'* The question startled and angered her. It suggested her style was a ploy.

*'Why do you draw white?'* she retorted. But she took the question home, with the realization that she thinks and sees in different symbols from those around her. Her Native style surprises and fascinates Bambi:

*'I never did that purposefully. Seeing it made me realize that my background is really the framework of my existence. My goals, my dreams, my own symbols, my belief system, my means of self realization are all part of that framework. I had somehow camouflaged that for myself to escape the duality of my inheritance. I have learned that I need to recognize that framework and exhaust the possibilities for me within it before I can stretch beyond it.'*

Bambi's work is a struggle to get in touch with all humanity. She experiments constantly with her

inheritance, playing with the duality of her background, incorporating what she calls her Indian sense and her 'white' sense. She feels she has inherited two belief systems and two life-styles. She now wants to recognize and work with both of them.

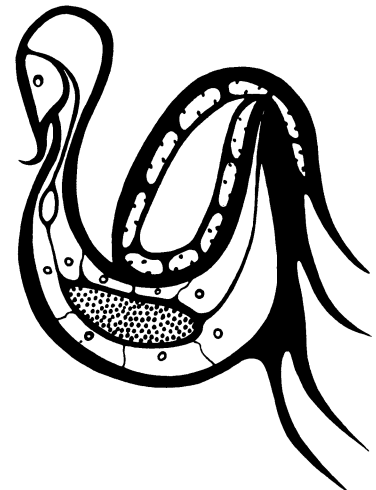
*'My health depends on creating a balance between them. My search for a holistic experience as a human being can only come from accepting all of my inheritance.'*

She sees white culture as technologically and materialistically sophisticated and Native culture as rich in spiritual and other-worldly abilities.

*'Whites draw the outside. Natives draw the inside. Whites are too much involved in outer realities. Natives are too much involved in inner realities. I have inherited two age-old abilities. I have a unique opportunity to put them together, to become holistic.'*

Bambi has an impressive ability to use her intuitive and technical skills at the same time, an ability not often seen so evenly developed in one person. It is startling to watch her use those talents as a Native Family Social Worker for the Catholic Children's Aid.

This work, she says, is her way of paying dues for surviving. Working at the Agency enhances her creativity, by confronting her with things that matter to her. The survival of her people is integrally related to her own survival. She doesn't want the old ways to die; she wants them to be recorded and passed down.



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While revering the old ways, she believes in the analytical therapeutic process. She uses both to pursue her strong personal goal, a goal for herself and her culture. To achieve wholeness, to develop on all levels.

*'We will only survive as a people by finding a way to bring what is valuable in one heritage and place it on the landscape of our present. We now live in a world of many different cultures and belief systems. It is essential for Native people to realize their potential to be who they are and to carry forward their traditions in a contemporary sense, placing them and learning to live on a landscape with many other cultures and belief systems.'*

Bambi is however, not satisfied with what she has understood so far about her dual inheritance.

*'I am nowhere near to facing just how profound an effect my spiritual inheritance has on my way of seeing the world. There is a belief system deeply rooted in me that I have not yet fully accepted. I have a powerful resistance to it because of my white part.'*

She was confronted again with her spiritual legacy in the birth of her daughter. Bambi experienced Shona as other-worldly. Each month, and then each year has brought Shona more fully into the world. Now, at eight, Shona only sometimes startles her mother with reports of dreams which seem to trail from another world.

Bambi has inherited two opposing inclinations, to resign herself to destiny or to shape it herself. Somehow, in those extremes, she finds a balance. She strives consciously to express the full extent of her human possibilities and to respond to that fullness in others.

Art and Photos by Banakonda

1 *Untitled*

2 *Rooster*

3 *Snow Bird*

4 *Untitled*

5 *Moon Dreams*

6 *The Unfolding*