VISIONS OF THE DANCE
IMAGES OF CALIFORNIA INDIAN TRADITION

Historical Photographs selected by Craig D. Bates
Contemporary works by Harry Fonseca and Frank La Pena

Organized by the Cultural Services Division, City of Long Beach,
in conjunction with The American Indian Studies Department,
California State University, Long Beach.

The Long Beach Gallery
January 8 – February 1, 1982

Guest Curators
Craig Cree Stone
April Skinas

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We wish to first of all thank those who have graciously lent works to the exhibition, particularly our artists, Harry Fonseca and Frank La Pena, and the National Park Service, Yosemite Park Collections. In addition, we thank Craig Bates, Assistant Curator of the Yosemite Collections, for his excellent selection of historic photographs included in the exhibition as well as for sharing his extensive knowledge and understanding of California Indian Traditional Dance.

With sincere appreciation, we acknowledge the undaunted efforts of our curators, Craig Stone and April Skinas, who conceived the idea for the exhibition and brought both it and the catalogue to realization.

We express special gratitude to California State University, Long Beach, AILOTT, the Associated Students, Native American Student Council and the Department of American Indian Studies for their generous and indispensible sponsorship of the exhibition, catalogue and special events.

Shelley Hellen, Manager
Long Beach Gallery

12. Chico Maidu dancers, c. 1920. Rear, left to right, George Nye, Issaic Conway, Jody Conway, Herb Young. Front, left to right, Billy Conway, Dewey Conway. Note flicker quill bands, hairnets, feather hairpins, and feather capes. This photograph was taken in conjunction with a series of public performances. The regalia of the two seated men is considerably altered from older forms; the flicker quill bands are worn reversed and expose the eyes of two of the dancers. This was apparently done so that the dance could be given in a "show" atmosphere. Courtesy Dorothy J. Hill.

6. Star Dancer, 1981. 25 × 19″

POWER AND BEAUTY: DANCING AMONG THE INDIAN PEOPLE OF CENTRAL CALIFORNIA

At the time of European contact in the late 18th century, Central California was one of the most densely populated and linguistically diverse areas of North America. Today we refer to the Maidu, Miwok and Wintun peoples as if they were nations unto themselves, but in reality they were innumerable small tribelets speaking different languages, with these languages further divided into dialects. Life was rich, and there were plentiful food sources of plants and animals from which to choose. The climate was mild and clothing sparse; the men wore buckskin breech-cloths, and women wore two piece aprons of buckskin or other materials. Houses varied from those of bark slabs in the mountainous regions to the earth covered semi-subterranean homes of the more affluent valley dwellers.

From these earth covered homes sprang larger structures, sometimes sixty feet in diameter, that became the center for village ceremonial and ritual activities **(Cat. No. 11)**. Known as the Roundhouse or Dancehouse, its roof was supported by large upright beams and thatched with layers of brush, grass and/or other materials before being finally covered with a thick layer of earth. These structures became home for what is termed the "Kuksu Cult" of Central California. The Kuksu Cult is characterized by the existence of a male secret society, sometimes assisted by a similar female secret society, that performed a variety of dances in the winter ceremonial season to insure the well-being of the group. These ceremonial dances were extremely complex and used an array of regalia which in and of itself was potentially dangerous.

While the "Kuksu Cult" was never a unified, inter-tribal organization, each of the major villages at one time had a secret society and often shared their dances with neighboring groups. Young boys were initiated into the society, often being confined in the ceremonial house, and were taught the rules and practices, the dances and songs of their people. Dancing was not something to be taken lightly; entering into the secret society and taking part in the dance was indeed a serious undertaking. In many of the dances the participants took the parts of certain spirits, or recreated events from the legendary past, in either case bringing forth a manifestation of power. This power, needed to insure a good life for one's people, was not inherently evil but was of such magnitude that, if not properly handled, it could cause ill fortune to befall members of the group. Today, many people tell not only of such occurrences in the past, but convincingly describe the cause and effect relationship between certain individuals' peculiarly constant bad luck and their disregard for dancing rules.

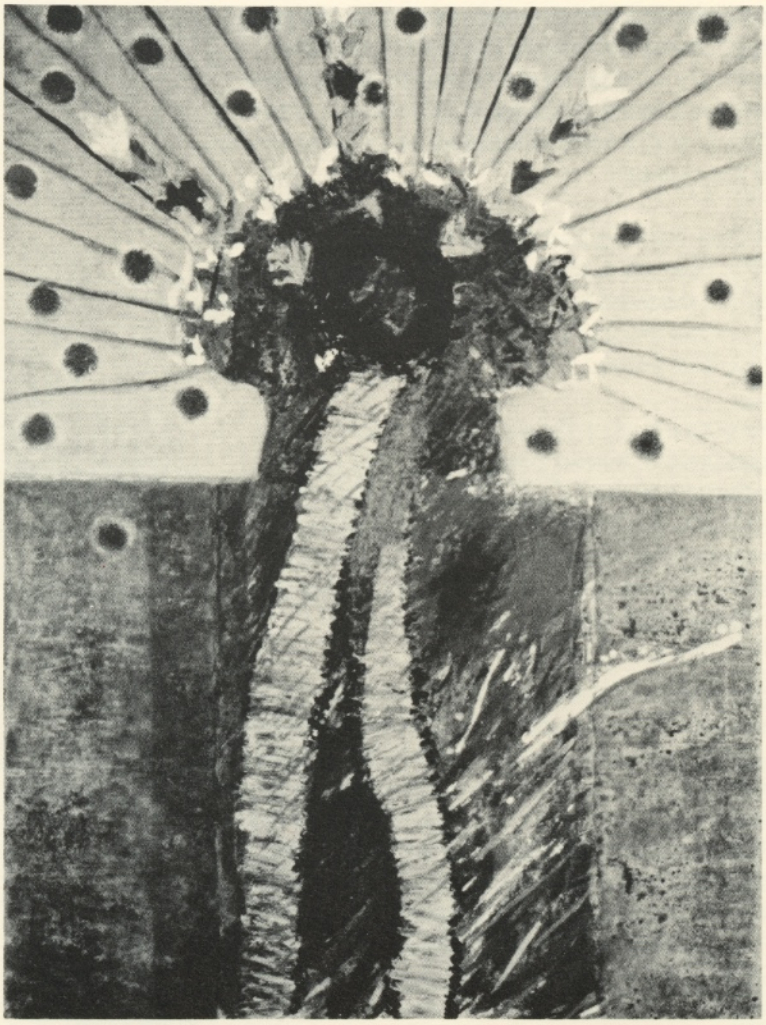
Many times charms were used or other precautions taken to insure the safety of the dancers. Charms, made of specific roots or certain feathers, were worn in dances deemed "very powerful," while in other dances Northern Miwok people would bathe themselves in a boiled tea-like mixture of **kitchinu** and water. Certain prayers or specific songs were recited prior to and sometimes during the donning of dance regalia. After removing the regalia a dancer was required to bathe and remove his paint before associating with common people, lest the residual power upon him cause illness to strike someone.

The regalia used in the dances consisted of an often bewildering array of feathered headpieces, cloaks, capes, hairpins, belts, necklaces and other items. Regalia varied in different dances and, while certain items were used in many kinds of dances, other items were reserved for certain specific dances. There was some similarity between the regalia used in different groups, although certain items were unique to one group or another, and other items, while appearing similar, exhibited subtle differences that denoted their origin.

Flicker quill headbands, made of the scraped feather shafts of the red-shafted or common flicker, were widespread. The Maidu and neighboring Patwin alternated four or five wingfeathers with one tail feather, creating a distinctive pattern **(Cat. No. 12)**, contrasting with a solid border of alternating tail feathers used by the Northern Miwok. Some Miwok and other groups often made a straight-edged band, with the tail feathers arranged at intervals, projecting beyond the border.

Feather capes, worn most often on the backs of male dancers, were made of feathers attached to a net foundation. Each quill was cut at a bevel on the butt end, then folded over the net and thrust back into itself, providing a secure attachment. A long, enveloping cloak that hid the entire body of the dancer was worn by the Patwin and Maidu **Moki**, and the Miwok **Kuksuyu** was made in the same fashion. This cape and the part of the spirit it represents was considered so powerful that few people accepted the position when it was offered to them. A person must have been wise and generous in order not to be swayed by the intensity of power **(Cat. No. 15)**.

Elaborate belts were woven of native milkweed or hemp fiber cordage into which were incorporated the small scalp feathers of the mallard duck and acorn woodpecker **(Cat. No. 15)**. Sometimes six feet in length, these were often further embellished with small shell disc beads. Large headpieces of willow rods, ornamented with white feathers and thrust into a tule foundation, were worn by dancers in the Hesi ceremony, one of the most important of the Patwin/Valley Maidu dances. Made of natural materials, the regalia reflected the good things that had been provided to the people by the creator and showed respect for the life the people lived. The dances and the regalia thus symbolize the inseparable link between the people and the spirits, further establishing that the real and supernatural worlds are one.



2. Flower Dance Spirit, 1981. 40 × 30″

In the late 19th century the teachings of the Ghost Dance swept through California and altered the religious beliefs of the Patwin, Pomo and other groups, stressing the afterlife and the supreme being as well as the disappearance of Whites. Local "dreamers" became religious leaders and had revelations about how to hold dances, which usually incorporated aspects of older rituals with new ideas revealed in their dreams. Thus continued the old pattern of dances and related ritual activity that differed from village to village and religious leader to religious leader. What was right for one person in one hamlet may have been very much the opposite of what was correct for another in a neighboring village. Thus, beliefs were further altered or changed.

By this time people from neighboring tribal groups often practiced ceremonial dances with each other. The Northern Miwok near Ione held dances with the Southern Maidu of Auburn in the early years of this century. Likewise, the Maidu at Chico often held their dances with the Patwin at Colusa and Cortina, as well as the Salt Pomo at Stonyford and the Nomlaki at Grindstone. This pattern was well established by the late 19th century and continued until the abandonment of the dance society at Chico in the early 20th century. Today, people from the rancherias of Colusa, Grindstone, Stonyford and Upper Lake often hold their dances with one another.

After the turn of the century many pageants, fairs and other events in California needed suitable "Indians" to add color to the festivities. Most Californian Indian regalia did not fit the stereotyped image of what Indians should look like, so in some localities people responded by creating regalia for such occasions. Some of the

costumes and dances were of older types, while others were created for the occasion. Plains Indian beadwork mixed with items traditionally Californian and with clothing made in a new "Indian style" were used to create the proper atmosphere **(Cat. No. 18)**. Although many of these were made and used in such events, it seems as though objects like Sioux war bonnets and beaded moccasins never entered into the traditional ceremonial dances of the people.

Over the years, after contact with Anglos, dancing came to an end in many localities. The older ways of life were replaced by new ways, and former villages were abandoned. Dances were discouraged by the missionary efforts of some because of their "pagan" character. The genocide of certain groups, coupled with disease and dispersement in some cases, dealt the final blows.

Although dancing disappeared in many localities, it has survived in others. At the Miwok rancheria near Tuolumne dances were revived around World War I and continued until the older folks there died in the 1940's, just prior to the collapse of the ceremonial roundhouse. In the last decade one family from the rancheria has traveled to Ione to learn dances from a Northern Miwok group that gives public performances, while a few others have more recently learned dances from a man who was a dancer in his youth and whose father was a well-known dancer.

While the dances may have not been performed in some localities such as Chico's village of Mechoopda, the memories of those dances often remain strong among the elders. Much of **Harry Fonseca's** work draws upon the Chico Maidu dances which his uncle, the late Henry Azbill, remembered so vividly. Henry Azbill was from the village at Chico and saw many of the dances held there in the late 1890's until the destruction of the dancehouse in 1906, as well as the dances of the neighboring Patwin, Nomlaki and Pomo during that period and subsequent years. Many of Henry's memories were transformed into a visible image through Fonseca's artistry. Fonseca's involvement with contemporary Maidu dances is also reflected in his work. Yet he does not dwell completely upon the traditional past, for while his Coyote images evoke the ancient stories of the trickster, Fonseca has shown that the Coyote still lives with us today. Thus is born the Coyote in tennis shoes and Levis.

Frank La Pena's art reflects not only his own rich Wintu heritage, but also that of other native groups of Central California. La Pena's participation in the traditional dances of Central California is evident in much of his work, which is often representative of the manifestation of supernatural power that surrounds us. He works in a variety of media including photography, charcoal, pencil, watercolor, acrylics and monoprints; he is a prolific poet as well. His work bespeaks not only tales of the past but perhaps more so the traditional life which he sees taking place today.

The works of these Native Californian artists, coupled with the historic images presented here, gives one a sense of the ceremonial dances of the Indian people of Central California. It is a rich, vibrant way of life which, although subjected to increasing pressures from a new way of life since the last century, is still very much alive today.

Craig D. Bates
Yosemite Valley
Yosemite National Park,
California

All works lent by the artists except **Big Head Series #4.**
All dimensions are in inches, heighth preceeding width.
Asterisk denotes illustration in the catalogue.

EXHIBITION CATALOGUE

Frank La Pena

1. **Big Head Series #4**
   Monoprint
   1980
   12 5/8 × 9 5/8
   Lent by Dorothea Theodoratus

*2. **Flower Dance Spirit**
   Acrylic
   Summer 1981
   40 × 30

3. **Spirit #5**
   Acrylic
   1981
   40 × 30

4. **Dance Spirit**
   Acrylic
   1981
   36 × 48

Harry Fonseca

5. **Rose and the Res Sisters**
   Lithograph 30/75
   1981
   30 × 22

*6. **Star Dancer**
   Lithograph 14/48
   1981
   25 × 19

7. **When Coyote Leaves the Res.**
   Serigraph 45/150
   1979
   14 × 24

8. **Coyote Woman**
   Serigraph 82/150
   1979
   14 × 24

9. **A Gift From California**
   Serigraph 61/75
   1980
   22 1/2 × 30 1/2

10. **Deer Dancers**
    Serigraph 45/60
    1981
    22 3/4 × 30 1/2

Historical Photographs

11. **Ceremonial dancehouse,**
    Northwestern Maidu,
    Mechoopda Village,
    Chico, c. 1900.
    Courtesy Dorothy J. Hill.

*12. **Chico Maidu dancers,** c. 1920.
    Courtesy Dorothy J. Hill.

13. **Pedro O'Conner and his wife Lily,**
    Northern Miwok, c. 1920.
    Courtesy Jennifer Bates.

14. **Chris "Chief Lemee" Brown,**
    Southern Miwok, c. 1930.
    National Park Service photograph
    by R. H. Anderson.

15. **Hesi ceremony,**
    Stonyford Rancheria, c. 1914-1917.
    Courtesy Craig D. Bates.

16. **The burning of the digger,**
    1920's, Ione.
    Courtesy Dorothy Stanley.

17. **Indian Field Days,**
    Yosemite Valley, 1926.
    Courtesy National Park Service,
    Yosemite Collections.

18. **Chris Brown,**
    Southern Miwok, July, 1950.
    Courtesy National Park Service,
    Yosemite Collections.

19. **Central Sierra Miwok dancers,**
    Sonora, 1856 or 1865.
    Courtesy National Park Service,
    Yosemite Collections.

20. **Northern Miwok dancers emerging from an earth covered dancehouse,**
    Ione, c. 1920.
    Courtesy private collection.

21. **Francisco Georgerly,**
    Southern Miwok, 1903.
    Courtesy National Park Service,
    Yosemite Collections.

22. **Chico Maidu dancers,**
    c. 1920.
    Courtesy private collection.

23. **Headdresses of California Indians,**
    Mission San Francisco, 1818.
    Courtesy Smithsonian Institute,
    negative number 284-G-8.

24. **Unidentified couple,**
    Maidu (?), c. 1900.
    Courtesy Smithsonian Institute,
    negative number 81-2124.

25. **Mike Jefferson in Coyote dance regalia,**
    Grindstone Rancheria,
    May 1923.
    Courtesy Bancroft Library,
    C. Hart Merriam collection.

26. **Indian Field Days,**
    Yosemite Valley, 1929.
    Courtesy National Park Service,
    Yosemite Collections.

Photography of contemporary works by Richard Sears and April Skinas.
Reproductions of historical photographs made especially for the
exhibition by Michael Dixon, Yosemite Park staff photographer.

Catalogue designed and edited by Maudette W. Ball.
All type set in Helvetica by Queen Beach Printers, Long Beach.
Printed by Queen Beach Printers in an edition of 500.

CALIFORNIA'S INDIAN ARTISTS
Volume III, number 3, 1982.

A series of documentary publications by the American Indian Studies Department
and the Native American Student Council at California State University, Long Beach.

Published in conjunction with an exhibition of historical photography and
contemporary Indian art at The Long Beach Gallery, City of Long Beach Cultural
Services Division. Additional copies of any American Indian Studies publication may
be obtained by writing California State University, Long Beach, American Indian
Studies Department, 1250 Bellflower Blvd., Long Beach, California 90840.