

Francis J. Yellow, (Francis Yellow)  
The artist also uses his Itazipco Lakota name:  
Wanbli Koyake (Carries the Eagle)



Anthropology: We're Not Your Indians Anymore, 97.114 a-c

**DATE:**

1995

**MEDIUM:**

Mixed media (Pen, ink, tempera) on Peabody Museum Culture Term Authority List (c)

**DIMENSIONS:**

9 1/2 x 11 in. (24.13 x 27.94 cm) (sheet, each) 9 1/2 x 33 in. (24.13 x 83...

**CREATION PLACE:**

North America, United States, Great Plains region

**CREDIT LINE:**

The Ethel Morrison Van Derlip Fund

**IMAGE COPYRIGHT:**

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**ACCESSION NUMBER:**

97.114a-c

**LOCATION:**

G261a

Francis Yellow applied the traditional Plains pictographic style to create this piece. Like this work, many historical painted animal hides were depicted with the action moving from right to left. The artist uses a name glyph to identify each rider's traditional name instead of using the assigned English name. Yellow depicts mounted Native people in traditional outfits running people down. These people represent academics, teachers, and scientist who hold books that relate to their study of Native American people. As the horses overtake those on foot, they yell non-traditional names of Native tribes. While visiting the Peabody Museum, a museum known for its large ethnographic collection, Francis Yellow requested a copy of their cultural term list. This list corresponds the inappropriate name for Native American tribes with the names that the tribes call themselves.

Biography

Born in Pierre, South Dakota in 1954, Itazipco Lakota member, currently resides in Bonduel, Wisconsin.

Graduated from Black Hills State University, Spearfish, SD, served as a Marine in Vietnam, earned an MFA from University of Wisconsin, Madison.

Recipient of Crazy Horse Scholarship and Thunderbird Foundation Scholarship.

Collaborated with Marilyn Lindstorm and student artists on school and community murals in Minneapolis public schools.

Primarily works in sculpture, but also painting. Works are found in museums across the U.S.

MIA has three of Yellow's works: *Anthropology*, *Hunta-Po*, and *They Say Minnesota Nice*. See pictures below.

Artist in Residence at NACDI, Native American Community Development Institute.

Showing currently (1/20-2/24, 2012) in the All My Relations Gallery, 1414 E. Franklin, and Bockley Gallery, both in Minneapolis.

### Artist's Statement

Yellow states that his art will express the humanity of the Lakota People through a metaphoric portrayal of the contemporary Lakota experience. His art is 'first for the Lakota People, but that all people are naturally drawn to any full and free human expression.' He continues, "Lakota isn't about race, ethnicity, or culture, but an everyday way of being in Life. It is said, 'We do everything through dreams.' As our ancestors said, today's Friendly People still say "*Lako Wicohan kiu tehila ca iytiyawakiyelo*" or 'I love the Friendly Lifeways, so I have a hard time.' The Friendly Life is how I live my life, it is how I make things, a voice, my lifestory, a poem, sculpture, ledger art, public art-relations. (Bockley Gallery, Mpls, 8/23/11)

### Ledger Art

**Definition:** Ledger art is a term for Plains Indian narrative drawing or painting on paper or cloth. It flourished from about the 1860s-1920s, at the time of the Indian Wars and reservation era. The motifs predate this time and are found on traditional hide paintings and ancient petroglyphs.

Two good sources available in the MIA library are:

**Berlo, Janet Catherine. Plains Indian Drawings 1865-1935: Pages From a Visual History. The American Federation of Arts and The Drawing Center, 1996. Please page 70 for a poem by Francis Yellow about Cetan Sapa Tatehila (Black Hawk's Love), Lakota artist of the 1880s.**

**Szabo, Joyce M. Howling Wolf and the History of Ledger Art. University of New Mexico Press, 1994.**

There are three distinguishable phases in ledger art: before the reservation era when drawings were done on hides and tipis, during prison where new tools were made available, and the reservation era when life changed for Native Americans. The Cheyenne artist, Howling Wolf

(1849-1927), is one of the most important ledger artists as he worked during all three periods. During his imprisonment at Fort Marion, Florida from 1875-1878, Howling Wolf created many drawings where he experimented with ways of showing space, line, pattern, and color. (The ledger that was on view in the Thaw Collection last year was drawn in 1880-81 by Black Hawk, the same Lakota artist that Francis Yellow honors in his poem. (see Berlo p. 70) Currently on view at the MIA in G 261, is a ledger art notebook, *Sketchbook*, 2008.14.1 from 1876 by Kobo, a Kiowa Indian who was also imprisoned at Fort Marion. Pages from ledger books were sold separately to tourists and collectors. Complete books are rare and highly valued for their detailed record of Native life.

Characteristics of ledger art include: 1) paper sized 11-13 inches x 7-8 inches, originally accounting ledger paper, but not limited to that, almost any paper was used; 2) bone or stick drawing implements and organic colors gave way to colored pencils, crayons, and later, water color paint; most common colors are red, yellow, blue with green less common; colors show little variation in intensity and no blending; 3) simple figures from the styles of petroglyph (rock art) and hide and tipi painting; 4) shapes are outlined, then colored; 5) action moves from right to left as it traditionally would on a painted hide; 6) composition is usually horizontal; 7) human figures are shown with profile heads and frontal bodies; 7) costume is emphasized because it carries complex social messages like rank, tribal affiliation; 8) facial features not emphasized and placement of figures carries understood messages of time and action; 9) content /subjects are predominantly scenes from men's life and the warrior tradition, although there are some drawings of village life with children and women; 10) usually drawn by men as they were the traditional painters of hides. (Women traditionally worked with beads and quills.)

The impact of the reservation era on Native men (and much of Native art) cannot be underestimated. In the forced assimilation following the Indian Wars of the 1870s, Plains men went from being the active defenders, protectors and providers to living a sedentary life on the reservation. Robert Utley, quoted in Szabo describes it this way:

*When the hostile Sioux came to the reservation, they doubtless understood that the life of the future would differ from that of the past... During the following decade, the white man cut the very heart out of the only life they knew...they surrendered a large group of customs on which the old life had focused. Warfare was an activity no longer possible. Planning and conducting raids, performing attendant rituals, celebrating success, and mourning failure had once consumed much of the time, interest, and ambition of the Tetons [Sioux]. Now, except when men gathered to reminisce, it consumed none. The principal means of attaining prestige, wealth, and high rank vanished the moment they arrived at the agency. (Szabo, p24-25)*

The highly detailed renderings in ledger art serve as a ethnological memory of Native life as lived before contact with settlers. Ledger art provides a powerful link from the past, through a time of cataclysmic change, to contemporary artists. "Ledger art performed, and still performs, an important role in providing a visual record of a culture and a way of life. "(Szabo, p. 43)

### Anthropology: We're Not Your Indians Anymore

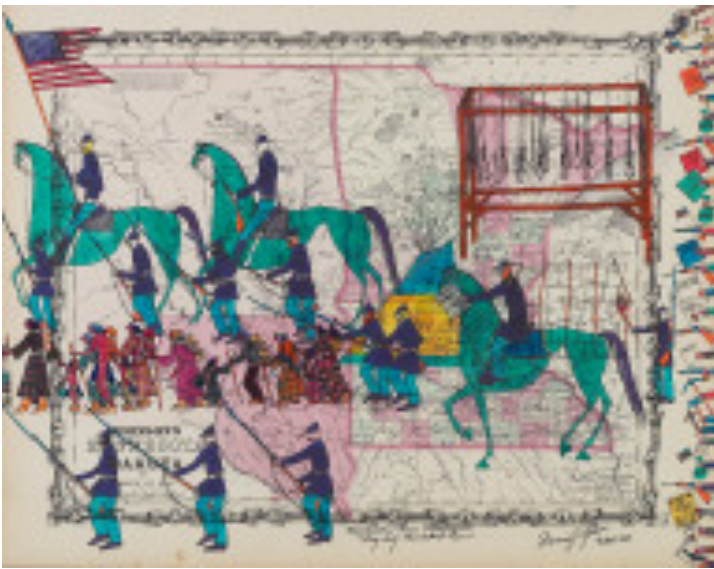
- \* Three pages of 'old time' computer printer paper printed from the Peabody Museum's cultural list of Native names.
- \* Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology is located at Harvard University. It was established in 1866 and today houses over six million objects.
- \* Eighteen horses and riders, each unique. Note that some of the horses are exactly the same shape, but their color is different. Young viewers will enjoy finding "two the same" or "two not exactly the same".
- \* The eighteen people that the riders are chasing hold books used in academia that have stereotyped or inaccurately characterized Native people, i.e. Eugenics, Bering Strait Theory, Ethnic History.
- \*The action moves right to left across the cultural list. Yellow also uses this juxtaposition of 'thought provoking' paper and ledger figures in *They Say Minnesota Nice* where the U.S. Calvary figures painted in the ledger style move across an old map. It makes effective commentary.

### Possible Tour Questions

This artwork works on a number of levels, just adjust the questions accordingly. A magnifying glass is helpful, too!

1. Take a look at this painting. What is going on?
2. Looking again at the painting, what kinds of writing and/or words do you see?
3. More looking, count the horses and people. Then figure out how many are the same and how many are different. Look at the horses, the riders, and the people who are running.
4. What type of paper has the artist used to paint his picture?
5. How has the artist made the horses, riders, and people stand out? (Outlining)
6. For young viewers, what objects did you see in the Native American gallery that have similar shapes? What activities do you do in your family or have you learned from your family that are like your grandparents, but just a little bit different?
7. Francis Yellow's choice of ledger art honors his ancestors and the tremendous changes they experienced. His choice of paper evokes social commentary. What other works at the MIA show the influence of traditional Native art or evoke social commentary? (Note the works next to *Anthropology*, *Akicita Waste--Good Soldier*; 91.96 and *What is an American?* 2011.53.3, Whiteman's *Untitled* (not on view). How do other artists choose a certain media to enhance the message in their work? (*Panda*, *Swoon*, and others.)

Sue Hamburge, January 2012



They Say Minnesota Nice  
"Minnesota Nice Oyakepelo"  
1995 #96.5

Acrylic on paper, not on view.



Get out of the Way  
"Hanta-Po" # 99.208

Bronze, on view in G261.