

A photograph of Earl Biss in profile, focused on painting a portrait of a Native American man. The background of the painting is a vibrant, warm mix of reds, oranges, and yellows. Biss is wearing a dark shirt and a necklace.

Earl Biss (1947-1998)

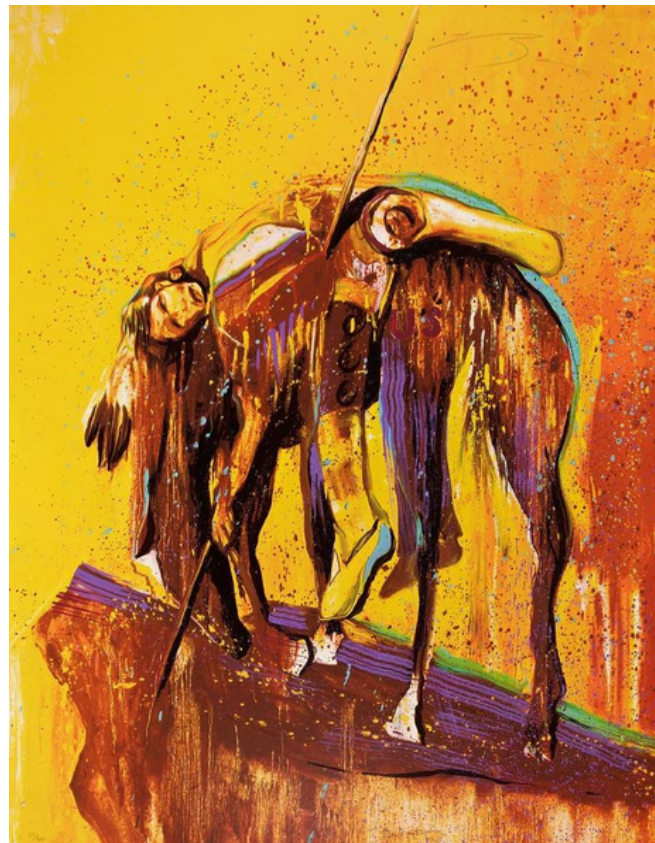
EARL BISS was a profound contributor to the explosion of Southwestern Art in the last half of the 20th century, and particularly to the rise of contemporary Native American Art. His compelling portraits of Plains Indian horsemen, his phenomenal grasp of the medium of oil painting, and above all the sheer exuberance of his palette and brushwork earned him a place in the history books of modern art. He was, according to one Southwest critic and collector, 'The greatest colorist of the 20th century.'

"THE MONET OF THE 20TH CENTURY" - THE ASPEN TIMES

Biss lived between worlds. He balanced the divide between Native American ways and the dominant society of European influence. His brush traced that very thin line between the spiritual and physical worlds - an edge that can only be seen with the heart.

CROW NATION

An enrolled member of the Crow Nation - the Apsáalooke - Earl Biss was born in Renton, Washington and raised by his grandmother on the Crow Reservation in southern Montana in the early years of his life. As he grew older, he lived with his father on the Yakima Reservation in Washington, and would return to the Crow Reservation in summers. He was given the Crow Indian name Spotted Horse, Iichíile Xáxxish, early in his art career because he was animated and colorful. Later in life he earned the name The Spirit Who Walks Among His People, Iláaxe Baahéeleen Díilish. This was due to his presence being felt among his Crow family and friends even when he was gone, and his incessant honoring of Apsáalooke culture in his art. He found inspiration for his works in tribal legends and histories learned from the elders, and in the sweeping landscapes of the Rocky Mountains and Great Plains



EARL BISS BIOGRAPHY

Biss was a central figure in the "miracle generation" of students at the Institute of American Indian Arts (IAIA) in Santa Fe in the 1960s. When Earl and his fellow students – which included Kevin Red Star, T.C. Cannon and Doug Hyde – arrived at IAIA, western art was focused on cowboys and landscapes, while Native art was stylized, linear and depictive. That perspective was too narrow for Biss, who studied painting with Fritz Scholder, sculpture with Allan Houser, jewelry and design with Charles Loloma, and architecture with Paolo Soleri. Inspired by these teachers, as well as fauvism, impressionism, expressionism, and other modernist movements, Biss pushed himself and his friends to create an entirely new genre that we know today as *Contemporary Southwestern Art*. "Earl was the catalyst," Red Star said.

Biss went on to the San Francisco Art Institute on a full scholarship, then moved to Paris where he haunted museums and studied printmaking with S. W. Hayter. Returning to Santa Fe, he rented studio space with several of his fellow artists who continually challenged each other to further develop their unique styles.

Biss often painted in bursts of 48 to 72 hours or more, eating little and sometimes working to collapse. He created thousands of paintings and drawings in his lifetime, many of which sold so fast their whereabouts are unknown. He remained at the top of his field for thirty years. Even as his career skyrocketed, Earl admittedly struggled with alcohol and other substances, and went through multiple relationships and marriages. While attempting to balance Native ways in a white man's world, his love for art superseded any of life's challenges. His mastery with oils evolved over time with colors becoming richer and with unparalleled depth as he pushed the edge of what is possible in wet-in-wet technique. Expressionist - yet always giving enough imagery to ground the viewer - Earl Biss was ever the explorer. He continued to stretch of the boundaries of the genre of Contemporary Southwest Art up until his last day on this Earth.

Weakened both by his lifestyle and a childhood bout with rheumatic fever that damaged his heart, Earl Biss died of a stroke in his Santa Fe studio in 1998. His works in the Contemporary Southwestern Art style are now collected worldwide.



EARL BISS MOVIE | ABOUT THE FILM:

“Earl Biss, The Spirit Who Walks Among His People” is a documentary that sheds light on this ground breaking, dynamic, mystical, and controversial Crow artist. Earl Biss (1947 – 1998) was a profound contributor to the explosion of Southwestern Art in the last half of the 20th century, and particularly to the rise of Contemporary Native American Art. His compelling portraits of Plains Indian horsemen, his phenomenal grasp of the medium of oil painting, and the sheer exuberance of his palette and brushwork earned him a place in the history books of modern art. He was, according to one Southwest Art critic and collector, “The greatest colorist of the 20th century.”



The film showcases masterful art while giving deep insight into the man that created it. Archival footage of Biss speaking and painting, and interviews with tribal members, friends, art dealers, and patrons paint an unforgettable story – a joyous, dynamic, tumultuous journey to success in the art world. Archival footage of Biss speaking and painting, and interviews with tribal members, friends, art dealers, and patrons paint an unforgettable story – a joyous, dynamic, tumultuous journey to success in the art world.





NOTABLE PUBLIC & MUSEUM COLLECTIONS

- Denver Museum of Fine Art
- Museum of the Plains Indians
- Wheelright Museum
- Language conservancy
- Scottsdale Center for the Arts
- Museum of New Mexico
- Singleton Biss Museum
- The James Museum
- Whitney Museum of Western Art
- The White House
- Institute of American Indian Art
- The Gilcrease Museum
- American History of Art
- Smithsonian Institute Permanent Collection

NOTABLE PRIVATE COLLECTORS

- Ringo Star
- Tom & Mary James
- Paul & Bonnie Zuger
- Wayne Yakes
- Michael Douglas
- Nancy Pfister
- Tia Collection

THE WHITE HOUSE, UNDER THE RONALD REGAN ADMINISTRATION



President
Ronald Reagan

Earl Biss