



art

SACRED SIGHTS

CONTRASTING IMAGES OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLE STAR IN *CHROMATIC VISIONS*, REPORTS **TRACEY CLEMENT.**

DON'T be fooled by the title: *Chromatic Visions* isn't a particularly colourful show. But it is captivating. This group show is an odd mix of historical photographs of Native Americans, contemporary photos by indigenous artists Tracey Moffatt and Fiona Foley and colour field paintings by Australian modernist John Nixon.

It is dominated by Edward Sheriff Curtis's sepia-toned portraits of Native Americans. Shot between 1900 and 1930, these photos were taken when the West was well and truly won and native tribal culture was still intact, but only just.

Curtis's romanticised images present classic noble savages straight out of central casting. He

captured their strong features in profile.

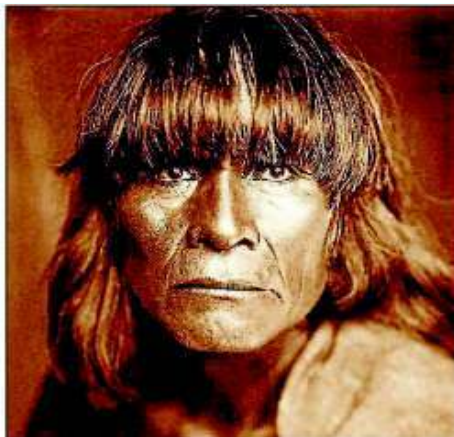
Curtis's photos are stunning but in hindsight there is something disturbing about a white man documenting indigenous subjects as if specimens. His beautiful photos mimic a collection of butterflies pinned to a board.

Curtis's intentions may have been good but his attempts to capture a "vanishing race" reek of paternalistic, ultimately destructive, policies that had echoes in Australia.

If *Chromatic Visions* is a conversation, then Foley and Moffatt get the chance to respond to the whole "dying race" thing. Moffatt counters all those Native Americans with photos of a blackfella cowboy and both women take charge in a series of confident self-portraits.

CHROMATIC VISIONS

SCA Gallery, Sydney College of the Arts, Balmain Road (enter at Cecily Street), Rozelle, 93511008. **Tue-Sat**, until Thursday.



Visionary ... (from left) *Vash Gon* and *Hopi Man* by Edward Sheriff Curtis; *Beauties in Mulberry* by Tracey Moffatt.