Between 1778 and 1781, the Revolutionary War in the North centered around British-occupied New York City. But following the Battle of Monmouth in June 1778, few decisive battles occurred in this region. The towns and farm fields around New York became a “no-man’s-land” and the site of a civil war. Revolutionaries and Loyalists fought each other for control. British, Hessian, and Continental troops foraged for supplies. The war also raged on Native American lands and in backcountry settlements, destroying native communities and pitting neighbor against neighbor. It appeared as if the Revolutionary War would never end.

How can we go about imagining these years? How does Don Troiani capture the harsh reality of this conflict? Eyewitness images of the Revolutionary War are rare. Those that do survive offer glimpses into the opinions and perspectives of the people who saw the war first-hand. For example, Troiani studied a Hessian officer’s 1778 description and sketch of a Native American soldier as part of his research for his painting of the Battle of Kingsbridge, also called the Stockbridge Indian Massacre. The Stockbridge Indians were allies of the Revolutionary cause and a multiethnic group of Native Americans, who included Mahican, Housatonic, and Wappinger peoples. When Hessian Jäger Captain Johann Ewald saw the blood-stained battlefield at Kingsbridge, New York, in 1778, he took note of the clothing worn by the dead and wounded Stockbridge fighters. In his journal he wrote, “Their costume was a shirt of coarse linen down to the knees, long trousers also of linen down to the feet, on which they wore shoes of deerskin, and the head was covered with a hat made of [straw].” They also carried bows, arrows, and muskets and had pierced ears and noses. Ewald's sketch is the only known image of a Stockbridge soldier from the war. Inspired by this unusual eyewitness description and image, Troiani translated these historical sources into a modern painting. Doing so brings attention to some of the surprising vibrancy and diversity of the Revolutionary War.