

American Indian Curatorial Practice 2008 – State of the Field
University of Wisconsin-Madison Department of Art History and the American
Indian Studies Program with funding from the Ford Foundation

Press Release

Public lecture:

“Visiting: A Conversation on Curatorial Practice and Native North American Art”
with independent curator Ryan Rice and Institute of American Indian Arts
Museum director Patsy Phillips

Museum director Patsy Phillips interviews curator Ryan Rice regarding the use of
indigenous curatorial strategies in settings as diverse as the Venice Biennale,
independent galleries in Canada, international festivals and national museums.

September 25, 2008, 6:00 PM to 8:00 PM

L140 Conrad A. Elvehjem Building, 800 University Avenue

Brief synopsis:

The American Indian Curatorial Practice (AICP) lecture and symposium hosted
by the University of Wisconsin-Madison’s Department of Art History and the
American Indian Studies Program will explore the tension between the dynamic
and emerging field of indigenous arts and the lagging reception of this practice by
the American academy. Ten nationally prominent American Indian curators,
artists and intellectuals are being brought to campus solely for this event which is
sponsored by the Ford Foundation’s “Advancing the Dialogue on Native
American Arts in Society” initiative. The project is led by UW Assistant Professor
of Art History Nancy Marie Mithlo and Truman Lowe, Professor of Art. Graduate
student Danielle Majors serves as the Project Assistant.

Contemporary American Indian arts are doubly challenged – both by erroneous
assumptions of the work as inauthentic, and by a dismissal of indigenous
curatorial methods (such as mentorship and collaboration) in professional
settings where individualism and authorship are highly valued. While a more
pluralistic understanding of arts and culture is now largely acknowledged in
mainstream educational and museum settings, varying curatorial standards
informed by diverse cultural values are often neglected. The AICP project hopes
to build the capacity for new as well as ongoing collaborations to promote the
development of an established field of indigenous art theory and practice. UW
Madison is ideally situated to serve as a site for these discussions due to its high
number of American Indian arts faculty, central geographic location and
demonstrated commitment to the advancement of American Indian
intellectualism.

Project background:

The UW-based “American Indian Curatorial Practice 2008” project is one of only nine programs selected from around the country as a component of the Ford Foundation’s initiative “Advancing the Dialogue on Native American Arts in Society.” Other related projects are based at UCLA, Cornell University, the Smithsonian Institution and the University of California-Davis. The collective aim of all national projects is to enable Native American artists and arts scholars to be a creative and intellectual force for the nation as a whole. An indigenous theory of sovereignty is forwarded in which Native American artists and scholars in the arts serve as a catalyst for the development of new artistic relationships, productions and collaborations.

Speaker Bios:

Independent curator Ryan Rice, a Mohawk of Kahnawake, Quebec, has worked for the past 13 years within the museum/art gallery milieu as an educator, intern, technician, and curator at the Iroquois Indian Museum, Canadian Museum of Civilization, Indian Art Centre (DIAND), Carleton University Art Gallery and the Walter Phillips Gallery. Rice is a co-founder of Nation To Nation, a First Nations artist collective and co-founder and chair of the Aboriginal Curatorial Collective, a national collective of Aboriginal curators from across North America. He has received a Master of Arts degree in Curatorial Studies from the Center for Curatorial Studies, Bard College, New York and graduated from Concordia University with a Bachelor of Fine Arts. In 2008, Rice will tour his exhibitions ANTHEM: Perspectives on Home and Native Land and Oh So Iroquois, and will be opening new exhibitions in Lethbridge, Toronto and Montreal including the show HOW: Engagements with the "Hollywood Indian."

Patsy Phillips was recently selected as Director of the Institute of American Indian Arts Museum, the only museum in the United States solely devoted to exhibiting contemporary American Indian art forms. A member of the Cherokee Nation, she spent more than eight years heading up the Smithsonian National Museum of the American Indian's contemporary art initiative. Before working for the National Museum of the American Indian, she was both Interim Executive Director and Program Development Director at Atlatl, Inc, a national service organization for Native American arts in Phoenix, AZ. Phillips graduated in December 2007 with a Master of Arts degree in nonfiction writing from Johns Hopkins University and also holds a graduate certificate in museum administration from Harvard University.

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