

work are made from tinfoil that is meant to serve as a substitute for platinum.

Two artists reflect the strong presence of hip-hop in Asia. Through computer imaging, the artistic collective Enlightenment produced *Mineta* (2001), a portrait of a Japanese youth with an afro, mustache, goatee, and a football jersey posed in a hip-hop stance. By including this image, *Mineta* draws stylistic parallels between African American and Japanese youth styles, thus representing hip-hop's breadth. Further representing the presence of Asians in hip-hop culture is Hisashi Tenmyouya's work, *Japanese Graffiti (Kanji Wildstyle)* (2000).⁶ Tenmyouya's work features a combination of traditional Japanese characters alongside his own Japanese wildstyle graffiti lettering. A Japanese warrior placed in the middle of the work further localizes the image to Tenmyouya's home. Rather than mimicking U.S. wildstyle writing, the artist visibly attempts to create his own writing style and urges other Japanese writers to do the same.

Renee Green addresses the production and dissemination of knowledge in her piece *Import/Export Funk Office* (1992–93). In an office-sized enclosed space, works of popular fiction (newspapers and video footage) that are associated with black culture, and hip-hop culture more specifically, are neatly placed on a series of multileveled metal shelves that form a rectangular structure. The work contrasts the order and routinization of the office environment with the fluid nature of hip-hop's creation and practice. Green calls into question the attempt to compartmentalize hip-hop culture into a fixed locale. In a sense, *Import/Export Funk Office* also serves as a critique of the role and methods of museums in storing objects.

With the noticeable lack of graffiti artists in the show, *One Planet under a Groove* raises the issue of who and what represents hip-hop culture. How does one organize a hip-hop-related art exhibit without the presence of graffiti artists? The answer is to feature artists who incorporate aspects of hip-hop culture into their work. One wonders what a show with a similar theme would resemble if solely graffiti artists were commissioned to reinterpret hip-hop culture from the "inside." This would allow a self-critique of hip-hop, which would address a different set of issues in relation to the perception and critique of hip-hop culture. Although this was not the primary aim of *One Planet under a Groove*, this would have provided an interesting comparative reference point.

The issue of representation is central to both museums and hip-hop culture. The two exhibits, *One Planet under a Groove: Hip-Hop and Contemporary Art* and *Hip-Hop: The Culture, the Sound, the Science* attempt to unlock various aspects of the hip-hop conundrum. Academic and popular treatments of hip-hop culture have attempted to come to terms with hip-hop's various incarnations, ranging from informal art practice to popular culture juggernaut. The different ways in which both exhibits approach the presentation of hip-hop culture speaks to the diverse interpretations of the culture. Viewed as *interpretations* of hip-hop culture, the two exhibits can serve as a useful starting point for some to un-

derstand what hip-hop culture is and, perhaps even more importantly, what it is not.

NOTES

1. Perkins 1996, Rose 1994, Toop 1984, Nelson and Gonzales 1991, and Hager 1984 provide useful discussions of hip-hop culture's elements.
2. A mixer is a device that allows a deejay to manipulate the volume and source of a record being played.
3. Scratching is a hip-hop deejay technique that involves moving a record back and forth on a single groove in order to produce a sound.
4. *Flossing*, or *to floss*, is a term used in hip-hop that means to publicly celebrate conspicuous consumption.
5. Fronts are pieces of gold, silver, or platinum that fit over a person's teeth.
6. Created in the United States, "wildstyle" is a complex graffiti style of writing that uses interlocking letters.

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Staging the Indian: The Politics of Representation. The Tang Teaching Museum and Art Gallery at Skidmore College. February 2, 2002–June 2, 2002.

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I was recently asked by a well-established museum if I would be interested in curating a Native American arts show that a team of professional consultants had tentatively titled *From This Earth*. The exhibit was to be broadly representative (including 20 to 30 artists), travel to smaller communities, and be illustrative of contemporary artists engaged in traditional mediums or themes. I was compelled to tell the organizer that the proposed exhibit had already been done—staged 25 years earlier, with exactly the same title, theme, and focus.

Scenarios like this are depressing for those invested in Native arts. Why? Because duplication of cultural arts efforts is indicative of a broader social amnesia, a type of malaise that is part indifference, part ignorance, and in a greater sense representative of an unrecognized cultural disenfranchisement; some would even argue an extension of cultural genocide. Unlike the Gabriel García Márquez novel, *One*

Hundred Years of Solitude (1970), in which an entire town is struck with a collective amnesia and quickly rushes to label all objects lest they forget their names or even their purpose, the forgetfulness surrounding Native arts presentations appears to garner no despair or even regret. The resulting cyclical, repetitive exhibit structures hinder our collective understanding of why Native American arts occupy such a central place in defining key communal values and challenges to sovereignty.

The exhibit *Staging the Indian: The Politics of Representation* at the Tang Teaching Museum and Art Gallery at Skidmore College succumbs to our collective amnesia while making valuable contributions to its demise. By being self-reflective of exhibit practices, the Tang's endeavor is an important contribution to Native American representation, for signposts of cultural legitimacy are established that did not previously exist. This is not exactly the García Márquez strategy for salvation by mass utilization of memory aids, but more of a great city map with a large "you are here" arrow drawn brightly in red. The visitor sees and understands their location in space, but the work of finding a desired destination depends entirely on your own ability to traverse the distance.

Staging the Indian contrasts the historic works of photographer Edward S. Curtis with new artwork by six contemporary Native American artists: Marcus Amerman, Judith Lowry, James Luna, Shelley Niro, Nora Naranjo-Morse, and Bently Spang. The exhibit is the result of efforts by cocurators Jill Sweet, Professor of Anthropology at Skidmore College, and Ian Berry, Curator of the Tang Teaching Museum. In addition, Skidmore students in the honors section of Anthropology 242, "North American Indians," assisted in conceptualizing the installation and contributed text from their class papers in the form of wall labels and catalogue entries. The purpose of the exhibit is both to problematize Curtis's body of work (primarily by examining what Sweet defines as its ever changing interpretation by various constituents) and to counter Curtis's vision of a "vanishing race" with inclusion of the contemporary Native arts. In sum, the show asks how Native Americans have been represented by others and how they see themselves. An essential component of the exhibit process was the use of Curtis's images as the starting point for Native American self-representation with artists proposing new or recent projects to "stand in relation" (Berry 2002:44) to the Curtis collection.

The juxtaposition of historic works to new pieces by living artists has become a staple of museum exhibits dealing with Native American material. Recent examples include: *Gifts of the Spirit: Works by Nineteenth Century and Contemporary Native American Artists* at the Peabody Essex Museum in 1996–97, *Memory and Imagination: The Legacy of Maidu Indian Artist Frank Day* at the Oakland Museum of California in 1997, *In the Spirit of the Ancestors: The Kappmeyer Collection of Native American Art* at the Erie Art Museum in 1997, *Clay People: Pueblo Indian Figurative Traditions* at the Wheelwright Museum of the American Indian in 1999, *Who Stole the Tee Pee?* Atlatl, Inc., with the National Museum of the American

Indian in 2000, and *IAIA Rocks the Sixties: The Painting Revolution at the Institute of American Indian Arts* at the Institute of American Indian Arts Museum in 2001. In most instances, these examples mirror the intent of the *Gifts of the Spirit* exhibition in that the display of old and new provides viewers with the opportunity "to discover both continuity and change in the artistic vision and expression of Native American art and artists" (Monroe 1996:6). What is often not stated is the probability that by consistently tying contemporary Native American art with historic images and objects, these exhibits serve to reify rather than challenge notions of historic authority.

These examples from the past decade are preceded by a century of Native American arts exhibition practices that are bound into larger contexts of modernism and "primitivism" from typological classification models to contextualized life-size dioramas. Margaret Dubin's recent book, *Native America Collected: The Culture of an Art World* (2001), describes a full range of strategies in organizing and analyzing non-Western material culture—from the culture-area model, to classification by medium and regional styles, to more qualitative categories such as folk art, tourist art, or fine arts. The culmination of these stages in exhibition approaches appears to be collaboration between Natives and non-Natives or complete self-representation by Native Americans. Dubin addresses some of the more problematic concerns of "the new museology" by concluding that tribal self-representation is often used by museums "because it is a safe and easy solution to the contemporary crisis of authority" (2001:97). She further argues that shifting the responsibility of interpretation into Native hands does not guarantee more accurate or counterhegemonic representations for "different words are used to convey the same information" (2001:98). Can an unmediated representation occur within the confines of a traditional museum presentation? Dubin questions if Indians so included are thus "mere tokens of ethnic pluralism" (2001:98).

In contrast to the potential limiting factors of Native collaboration, the work of Sweet and Berry does not appear to have been a relatively safe or easy endeavor. By most accounts, implementation of the exhibit was challenging for all parties. Naranjo-Morse describes her reaction to first examining the Curtis material:

I was torn. I was saddened and acutely aware that I was looking at our culture from a distance. I was angry because it was obvious we were, even then, viewed as a vanishing people. And yet through my gloved hands, my fingers kept outlining the faces of people and places that were so much a part of me, as if tracing these people would bring them back. It was a hard day for me. [Naranjo-Morse 2002:97]

A particularly poignant moment for Berry came in response to the preparators' first including and then excluding tribal affiliations in the exhibit labels. Should the artists be known as tribal artists or simply artists? Berry was concerned that the artists may object to the tribal labeling but reported that Spang resolved the quandary by encouraging the curators to

be "true to your audience," stating simply, "You chose me because I'm Native" (personal communication, May 13, 2002). These undoubtedly uncomfortable moments serve to define a new exhibits era that may perhaps best be termed "postcollaborative" in nature. Although the parameters of the exhibit method are tried and tested (the historic-contemporary juxtaposition), the process of implementation is overt. It is my opinion that only within the context of a strong educational mission can an institution survive such a challenge to its own authority. The Tang Teaching Museum and Art Gallery has this capacity.

Established in October 2000 as what Director Charles Stainback terms "a museum that is driven by ideas and not by our collections or the traditional constraints of connoisseurship" (2000), the Tang Museum's mission is geared toward interdisciplinary approaches and collaborative learning. The medium of art is seen as a means to "awaken the community to the richness and diversity of the human experience" (Tang Teaching Museum 2000). The physical structure of the museum, designed by architect Antoine Predock, mirrors this sense of egalitarianism and openness with its use of raw industrial materials and unobstructed vistas. I was first clued into the classroom-campus nature of the museum by the well-worn volleyball court adjacent to the museum's entrance. Similarly, the overt inclusion of the phrase "Teaching Museum" in the full title of the institution registers a distinctive antielitist orientation.

With its strong emphasis on newer models of interpretation, why did the Tang Museum choose Curtis as the central theme of its first exhibit dealing with Native American issues? Ironically, considering the museum's call for idea-driven, not object-driven, exhibits, the choice was because of the museum's collections. The Lucy Scribner Library at Skidmore College purchased one of the few remaining complete sets of Curtis's portfolios in 1944. Sweet saw the opportunity to make the rare archival collection (one that she used regularly in her classes) available to the public with the new museum's interest in collaborative faculty-student-oriented exhibits. Sweet defines the Native participation in the show as the most recent development in a long history of fluctuating receptions of Curtis's work. Characterizing the Native American assessment as largely one of "gratitude . . . for taking pictures of a past otherwise lost" (Tang Teaching Museum 2002), the exhibit text makes the mistake of essentializing the complex Native American interpretations of Curtis's legacy found in the contemporary works themselves. The contrast could not be more apparent.

Amerman is decidedly direct in his interpretation of Curtis's work (Figures 1 and 2). As an artist who regularly uses historic photos in his pictorial beadwork, Amerman pays tribute to Curtis, not as chronicler of an otherwise lost past but as a fellow romantic who showed us the Indian "Garden of Eden" in a time when Indians "dressed and lived in the height of fashion and design" (Amerman 2002:47). For example, the parallel images of Curtis's *Before the White Man Came—Palm Canyon, 1924*, and Amerman's 2001 *After the White Man Came* playfully illustrate an interpretative strat-

egy that seeks to contradict rather than affirm notions of historic superiority. In each photo, a carefully staged Native woman holds a utilitarian container atop her head (a basket in Curtis, an ice cooler in Amerman), long hair flowing down her bare back as she faces the background. Her half-turned torso suggestively exposes a bare breast outlined against a dramatic landscape. The multitude of interpretative strategies (voyeurism, an innate relationship of women and nature, the averted gaze) holds for both works, suggesting Amerman's intimate relationship with Curtis's material.

Spang's installation, *Boutique of the Damned*, likely offered the greatest challenge to viewers unaccustomed to contemporary Native arts. Inspired by New York City commercial boutiques, Spang installed a disco set, complete with pulsating lights; loud, punctuated music; and an intoxicating film segment. In a similar fashion to James Luna's film and photography in this exhibit, Spang exploits his own body in an updated portrayal of the reservation man—this time in blue face with signage across his torso. His film narrative declares, "The Indian of your wildest dreams is coming." This assessment of overt capitalism and the inherent power exercised in the exchange of trademark goods draws reference to the symbol of the Indian male as one of the most recognized images in the world. In critiquing these eternal Curtisesque icons, Spang creates new images of "the Indian of the Future." The Tang Museum exhibition space served this installation especially well as a suspended walkway entrance gives full exposure to the complicated visual set.

The women of the exhibit deliver a mature, more serene response to the Curtis works. Niro, a filmmaker, photographer, and installation artist exhibited several lush, large-scale photos entitled *The Essential Sensuality of Ceremony* (Figure 3). Five pedestals holding jars of candy, cards, cedar and sage, bells, and neon-colored feathers were placed in front of alternating scenes depicting the five senses. This installation illustrates the instructions of the Peacemaker, who taught the people on how to live well following a period of a great loss of life. The use of dramatic lighting and encompassing dark backgrounds seems to mirror Curtis's photographic style, yet the content of Niro's photography is consistent with the other artists' themes of survival despite great dysfunction and grief. Naranjo-Morse continues her explorations in large-scale clay installations with the monumental piece *Our Symbols*. A multiplicity of appropriated and invented signs encompasses and almost overwhelms the viewer with a suggestive allusion to the power of the earth as a constant resource for creation. Naranjo-Morse's response to the Curtis work is direct and personal; she draws reference to her own relationship to clay and the images of Hopi women and children "whose life centers around mud" (2002:97). Lowry's overscaled graphic paintings in primary hues narrate Native appropriations of non-Native stereotypes, echoing a familiar sense of cross-cultural miscommunications.

Luna fully exploits a cast of Native male characters in the film and photo series *Petroglyphs in Motion*. Flamboyant coyotes, leather men, and carnival entertainers mix with



FIGURE 1. Marcus Amerman, *Watching the Sunset*, 2001. Black and white photograph. Photographs by Gwendolen Cates. (Courtesy of the artist, Santa Fe, NM)

desperate reservation men and diabetics in both playful and self-destructive ways. The work is evocative of a common thread in the contemporary segment of *Staging the Indian*—that of fantasy, reality, and an eternal responsiveness to the erasure of self. The contemporary art section as a whole serves as a form of “witnessing” a century past Curtis’s fascination with our demise. Interesting connections and comparisons are suggested by these current selections that are largely left unexplored. What can the viewer draw from the self-exposure of the male body and the introspective, self-healing themes of the women’s work?

I do not interpret *Staging the Indian* as a forum for contemporary Native artists being allowed to respond to historic representations as much as the artists themselves allowing the Tang Museum and its visitors in on some pretty potent worldviews. After a week of intensive installation work with the artists, Berry (who defines himself as “more of a producer” for the show) concluded, “a week here thinking about Curtis changed us and them [the artists] too” (personal communication, May 13, 2002). Likewise, Sweet is quoted as stating “I expected them [the artists] to take issue with Curtis’s image-making, maybe even express some anger; but what I’m hearing more of is irony and humor” (Tang Teaching Museum 2002). These confessions evidence a willingness to discover new vistas of interpretation that di-



FIGURE 2. Edward S. Curtis, *Watching the Dancers*, 1906. Photograph. (Courtesy of the Special Collections, Lucy Scribner Library, Skidmore College, Saratoga Springs, NY)

verge from the static merry-go-round of established exhibit practices.

The story of how Native Americans have been represented in the past, by themselves or others such as Curtis, is a fairly safe and confined topic. The story of how Native Americans represent themselves today is the story of the century. With the establishment of major Native-run museums (such as the Mashantucket Pequot Museum and Research Center) and national Native-sponsored museums (the National Museum of the American Indian), the dialogue on contemporary self-representation will be heightened. This discussion deserves a higher level of resolution than the historic-comparison exhibits model allows. Returning to Dubin’s earlier challenge, how can cultural institutions engage in sustained inquiry with Native communities without positioning the Native voice as a “mere token of ethnic pluralism”? Two related issues are central to this discussion—anger and freedom.

The U.S. public is highly informed by an undercurrent of fear concerning racial anger. Contemporary Native American arts and cultural endeavors are frequently appraised by reference to an anger quotient. These critiques (never formal critiques, always informal) often register which exhibiting artists expressed anger in their work. Museum staff voice displeasure and concern about inclusion of artists known to be angry, frequently avoiding those with such a characterization. Key to understanding this fear is the question of

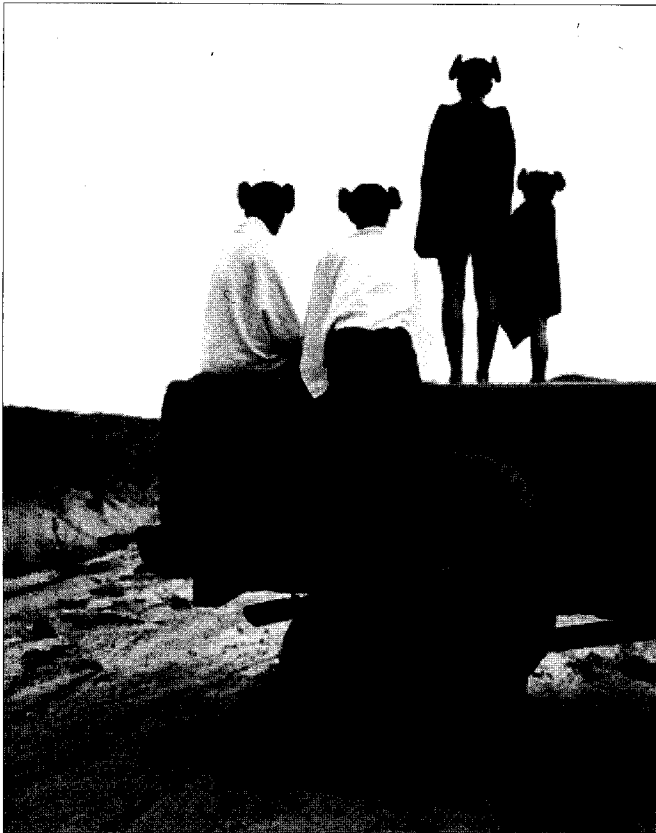


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FIGURE 3. Shelley Niro, *The Essential Sensuality of Ceremony*, 2002. Mixed media installation. (Courtesy of the artist, Brantford, Ontario, Canada)

freedom—what exactly is meant by freedom in Native arts, and why this goal appears to be so elusive? The Tang Museum's *Staging the Indian* addresses this issue briefly in the catalogue with Berry questioning the artists about audience expectations. The idea of freedom also plays a central role in the identification of the artist as Native or simply artist. Key to sorting out the relationship of anger and freedom is the notion that museums have the power and responsibility to alleviate Native American angst by allowing Native artists the freedom to express themselves as individuals. Is it the responsibility of cultural institutions to offer Native artists greater freedom, or could this perception be inherently tied to Western norms that champion individual achievement and fear communal action? Is cultural identification inherently restrictive or is it only in response to ignorance about cultural categories that explicit ethnicity tags are unwelcome? These unresolved issues about individualism, positioned in opposition to communal identification, will continue to hamper the full interpretation of Native arts until they are addressed directly.

By starting from the point of view of an observer to Native culture, *Staging the Indian* utilizes a standard interpretative tool (one that I learned in National Park Service duty as one of "Tilden's Ten"), which is to begin teaching from the audience's experience and perspective. However effective this strategy may be for an uninformed audience, it is unfortunately a counterproductive approach for Native self-representation. Self-representation cannot occur reactively in response to inaccurate 100-year-old portraits. Stated simply, self-representation should proceed from wisdom, not ignorance. The manner in which these highly charged questions of identity and race can be meaningfully addressed in the framework of museum exhibits is a challenge that can justifiably be explored more fully in the context of a teaching museum such as Skidmore's Tang.

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Atom Egoyan's *Steenbeckett—An Installation*. Commissioned and produced by Artangel. Museum of Mankind, London, February 15—March 17, 2002.

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Since the turn of the Millennium the concept of memory has spawned a veritable industry of tortured texts agonizing over the often intangible processes by which we recall the past. Artists and filmmakers have not escaped this fascination. It is rare, however, to find a work that achieves empathy and suggestiveness while at the same time encourages a critical interrogation of the structures through which memory is made manifest. In an installation as resonant for the historian as for the anthropologist, Atom Egoyan's *Steenbeckett* succeeded in embodying the elusive nature of remembering and the fragility of the archive (however constituted) on which this depends.

It is no accident that London's Museum of Mankind, the former home of the British Museum's ethnographic collection, was the chosen venue for Egoyan's reverie. The neo-classical façade, ringed round with the glorious and named "men" of science peering down from niches interspersed with their usual backup team of allegorical females, inevitably lent an air of colonial omnipotence, one that sometimes seemed hopelessly at odds with the best efforts of the ethnographic curatorial teams inside the museum and sometimes disturbingly appropriate. With the move to reintegrate the ethnographic collection into the body of the British Museum, the Museum of Mankind is in a kind of mothball

limbo—somewhere inbetween abandonment and the pleasurable anticipation of renewal. This limbo provided the ambiance through which Egoyan so suggestively evokes the "never never land" of nostalgia.

Entering the museum via a nondescript side entrance, our visit took us through the remnants of the once-imposing entrance hall, past the glassed portals of the now-defunct shop serving in the interim as a makeshift office space. No longer clad in the trappings of a stylish public venue, the bureaucratic and institutional underbelly lay vulnerably exposed. We wandered past the peeling decor and the drab of the invariably "sensible" gray and beige paint so beloved of school and hospital corridors, stained and scuffed by the long-departed crowds of eager museum-goers. Disoriented by the lack of order thwarting our habitual expectations of the museum experience, it felt as though we stumbled unwittingly into the usually secret (and secreted) world of the janitor's cupboard—the cabinet of curiosities that magics order out of chaos in a parallel but unaccredited universe to that conjured out of the curators' taxonomic obsessions.

This sensation of being disconcertingly presented with the inside out of the museum, the "ghost in the machine," was extended at the entrance to Egoyan's installation and is a crucial component in his attempt to realize in material form a kind of metonymic device for the workings of the mnemonic process. Led up a stairwell covered in black felt, an ancient substance long associated with insulation (of both heat and sound), we crossed the threshold between outside and inside and stepped into the dreamtime of Egoyan's construction. Suddenly behind the scenes at the museum, we are in a projection room looking down at a skein of celluloid running in a labyrinthine spider's web to its destination—a distant and consequently tiny Steenbeck editing machine, replacing the anticipated magnified image of the big screen. Instead of the magic of cinema, our attention is drawn to the technologies that created it—the inside out of film (Figure 1).

Moving from the projection room we wander through a cramped corridor, past anonymous office-grey steel cabinets containing old film canisters and dusty labels denoting geographic regions: Africa, Asia, North and South America, and Oceania. A cumbersome spool tape recorder lies abandoned amongst other pieces of now defunct technology reminding us of the logistical improbabilities of earlier fieldwork methods. Another back-stairs space houses reels of film spilled from their spools in a derelict heap—the fruits of hours of ethnographic endeavor. Around the walls are the pages from the instruction manual for the Steenbeck, the "interlock systems ST69 and ST269 for 'Steenbeck' equipment," rendered into a kind of archaic exhibit by the mere fact of its mimeographed instructions.¹ Thus the once-"new" technology has become itself an ethnographic exhibit (Figure 2).

Yet throughout our meandering passage from one behind the scenes location to another, past various unlovely broken-down machines, it is impossible to avoid a pervasive sense of loss and nostalgia for an era when the material traces of the physical acts of recording, storing, and archiving were