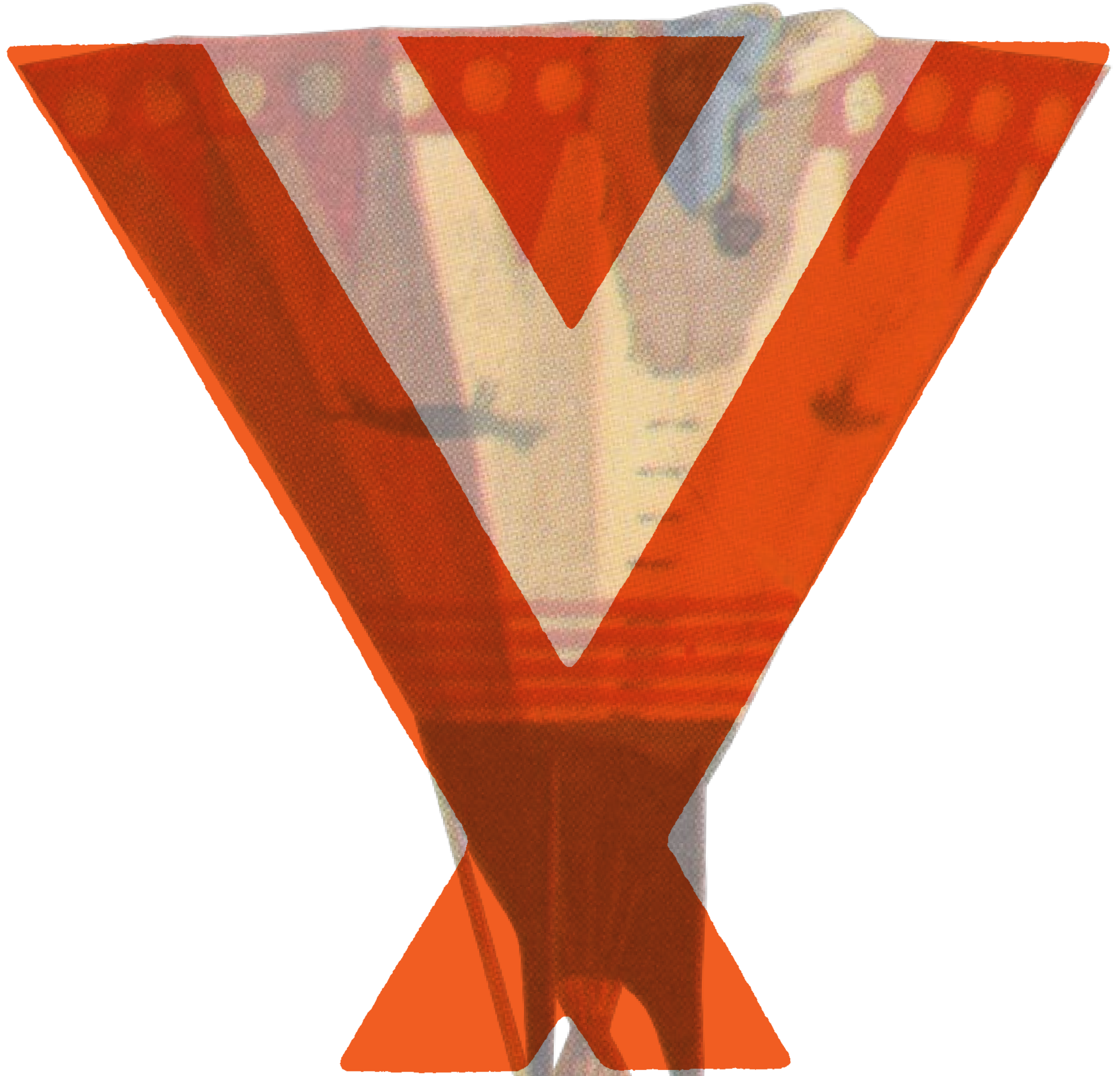

VISITING

CONVERSATIONS ON CURATORIAL PRACTICE
AND NATIVE NORTH AMERICAN ART

The American Indian Curatorial Practice (AICP) symposium was hosted by the University of Wisconsin-Madison Department of Art History September 25-27, 2008 with funding from the Ford Foundation.

Director: UW Assistant Professor of Art History Nancy Marie Mithlo, AICP Project Director and "Visiting" Senior Editor

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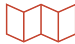

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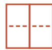

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HOW DO YOU DEFINE CONTEMPORARY?

RICE

I've been thinking a lot about what needs to be done in the curatorial and /or art history field in regards to Native art and that is

TO FIRST, COLLAPSE COLONIAL BORDERS, AND SECOND, TO CREATE A PARALLEL HISTORY

alongside the mainstream. One that begins and ends without boundaries, except those that are created for us. However, I find the divide of traditional and contemporary complicates matters.

PHILLIPS

How do you define contemporary?

Do you look at it chronologically?

RICE

I don't look at the linear. When people say American Indian contemporary art didn't start until 1960, I question that.

I COULD SAY CONTEMPORARY MEANS CONTACT.

If the field of art starts in, say 1960, do they mean that is the first time somebody had an exhibition; an exhibition that was recognized by a curator, written in the context of contemporary art and art history?

I wonder how many people were actually painting in our communities in the 1800s onward, doing watercolor, performance, woodcraft, or other artwork that didn't get recognized because it wasn't in the space of a gallery, deemed authentic (as strictly "Native") or fit within an art historical category/pedigree/genre. Huron artist Zacharie Vincent and the Tuscarora Cusick brothers (David and Dennis) are examples of early recognized artists whose work took on portraiture, landscape, illustration and narratives in a contemporary manner while maintaining aesthetic referencing traditions.

RICE

In 1941, the Museum of Modern Art in New York opened the exhibit "Indian Art Of The United States," as a "contemporary" exhibition and remains something worth revisiting and analyzing. In Canada, they say Carl Beam was the first Native person to be purchased by the National Gallery of Canada. Previous to that artists Robert Markle (Mohawk from Six Nations) and Rita Letendre of Abenaki descent from Quebec were collected by the institution before art history's referential date of 1995, however they didn't self-identify themselves as Native. And at the Indian and Inuit Indian Arts Centre in Ottawa, Ontario, Canada, which is the largest collection of contemporary artwork in Canada; the collected work goes back as early as 1900.

PHILLIPS

I don't think that there's an answer necessarily. There is the argument at the Institute of American Indian arts right now - why aren't we representing the traditional arts, why aren't we teaching that? It becomes blurred, the traditional and the contemporary.

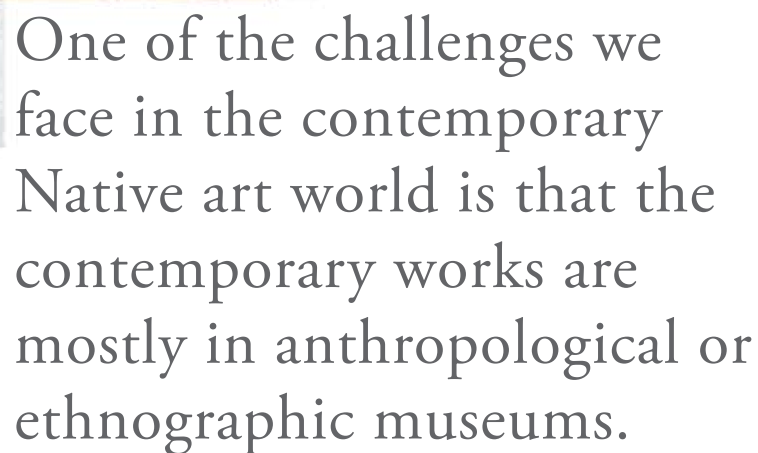
RICE

That's the thing about our histories, there's two – traditional and contemporary and whatever is in-between, which can be totally opposite of each other or in tandem. We (artists and curators) rarely speak or describe our work from western points of view, however

THERE ARE A LOT OF PEOPLE WORKING WITHIN THOSE SPACES AND THEY ARE INFLUENCED FROM BOTH TRADITIONAL AND CONTEMPORARY PERSPECTIVES.

RICE

George Littlechild was part of the 1960s scoop and he was adopted out. The archives became a place for him to find his family, hence who stole his teepee. He went back through the National and many museum and regional archives to do a whole family tree and found his ancestors. He has so many cousins/relatives he's been able to trace through his mother Rachel Littlechild. Photography, being part of our community, made way for Littlechild to explore and reclaim what he lost. His work toys with, as well as celebrates, tradition and contemporary.



One of the challenges we face in the contemporary Native art world is that the contemporary works are mostly in anthropological or ethnographic museums.

Our best work and Native artists are not in The Museum of Modern Art and in our major museums.

RICE

WE CONTINUE TO BE MARGINALIZED AND RELEGATED TO THE PAST. THIS IS HOW WE ARE "REMEMBERED."

This inclusion in ethnographic and anthropological displays is a continuum of the given fields' traditional practice of collecting and displaying the "Other." We are still unrecognized in the mainstream museums of modern art, and experience an incredible absence (in all avenues), especially in the United States. In 1985, Museum of Modern Art opened the exhibit "Primitivism in 20th Century Art: Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern." Work from Native North America (among other places) became a background to western works. The stature of contemporary we received in the 1940s exhibition was diminished.

When you go to New York and you look in New York Magazine, Village Voice or TimeOut's gallery listings; the National Museum of the American Indian is never in there. Why is that? We have no presence in the global arts hub. That's one big problem right there. That can be changed — when you ask people in New York

"Have you ever been to the American Indian Museum?"

Their response is "Where's that?"

PHILLIPS

How do you do that?

RICE

WE NEED TO BECOME VISIBLE, STRATEGICALLY AND DEVELOP OUR OWN SPACE.

We need financial support and investment. We are not financially rich and we are not present professionally in the institution. It's really hard to do and this is one of my reasons for getting into curatorial work. Another question that concerns me is how do we get our own people into the gallery to see our work? One way is to bring it to them, however, most of our communities don't have galleries, we don't have those spaces and we don't have funds to do those projects. We rely upon a gallery/space/institution that is already maintained; because we don't have those spaces, and that is not a priority in our communities.

PHILLIPS

Racism is a bigger issue, who are you creating that artwork for? Are you creating it for your community, or for the bigger community? And those are two completely different communities.

RICE

You asked who the artists are making the art for and that is a big question with a lot of answers which can be relevant or not. Personally, I think about my community when I create, I think about Mohawk people, protocol and the Iroquois confederacy; I think about the big picture, and I also think of how we tell that story to other people as well as our own people.

A LOT OF TIMES THAT STORY IS ABOUT THE PREJUDICES THAT COME FROM MISUNDERSTANDINGS. I LIKE TO TRY TO COUNTER THAT.

Again, most of us (communities) don't have collections and or any mechanism to process a collection, outside of traditional ceremonial caretaking. The Institute of American Indian Arts has the mandate to collect, and some cultural centers regional museums will have small collections, however the vision is lacking because the economic/social/political structures of our communities take precedent, and the worth of art and culture can be overlooked.

We need to remind ourselves that the colonial project and the residential school

legacy dismissed, erased and attacked our core bearings,

leaving us responsible to recuperate/retrieve the interruption of our culture.

VISIBILITY

The 1992 Party Started Something

PHILLIPS

We have a lot of young people here; I'm curious if you will talk about how Canada supports Aboriginal curators.

Canada has now had two indigenous artists in the Canadian Pavilion in Venice at the Venice Biennale, the oldest art venue in the world (Edward Poitras in 1995 curated by Gerald McMaster and Rebecca Belmore in 2005 curated by Jann LM Bailey and Scott Watson), whereas the United States has never had a Native artist in the US pavilion. Can you talk about that?

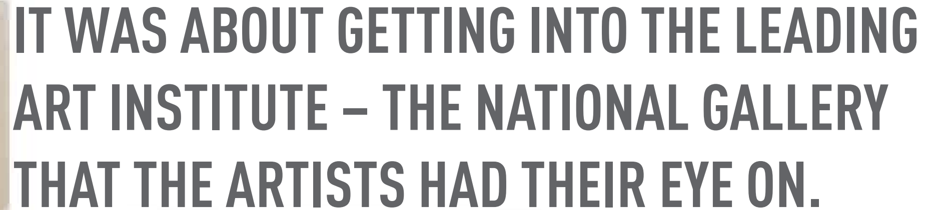
RICE

The visibility/presence factor, support and recognition of good work is a big known part of that. When I went to school in Santa Fe (IAIA), I thought Santa Fe was the greatest place. When you leave Santa Fe or the southwest, you don't see Indians or Indian Art anywhere in the United States unless you really seek it out.

NATIVE ART IN CANADA IS PROGRESSIVE AND NOW TEETERS BETWEEN MAINSTREAM AND MARGINALITY BUT IT STILL NEEDS TO BE SOUGHT OUT.

RICE

The quincentennial celebration was happening, Indians were in vogue, everyone wanted to show Indians in their galleries, there were shows across the United States and Canada. At that point, the level grows quite high, the National Gallery of Canada, and the Museum of Civilization had a show in Canada, as well as shows in the United States. The artists in those shows in Canada got to another level. I can't say that it continued, but it started something. There was a lot of advocacy at the time; there was a group that was called SCANA (Society for Canadian Artists of Native Ancestry) who were very vocal in pushing for exhibitions in major art Institutions and a place in the mainstream. As I stated before, artists were being shown in the anthropological/ethnographic institutes such as The Museum of Civilization but



IT WAS ABOUT GETTING INTO THE LEADING ART INSTITUTE – THE NATIONAL GALLERY THAT THE ARTISTS HAD THEIR EYE ON.

The 1992 "party" started something, and through this rendezvous non-Native curators and collectors began recognizing the work.

RICE

It was also the International Decade of the World's Indigenous Peoples, United Nations, and I think it was taken more seriously (or publicly) in Canada than the United States. Our presence in North America is predicated on where we stand. In the United States, the melting pot factor considers and endorses everyone to be one. This approach fails Native Americans. The reality is a white America and a black America. Canada's multiculturalism approach incorporates the black population and others into a space that doesn't fit the original peoples. First Nations, Métis and Inuit people are recognized somewhat as original founders, which is a whole other alternate history, strategy and politic that is instituted; allowing for granting opportunities and other programs to be established and created.

PHILLIPS

Plus you have the Canadian Council for the Arts that's very supportive. You have your own branch for Aboriginal arts. We have the National Endowment for the Arts that never had its own arm for Native arts.

RICE

Through the lobbying and efforts of these indigenous artists, curators, exhibitions, the Canada Council introduced an Aboriginal program within the arts sector that comes into play around 1995. There are programs for curatorial residency, for collaborative exchanges, traditional arts, music, dance, media, however, there's still no specific grant for contemporary visual artists. Contemporary artists are still competing in the mainstream area, and have been very successful.

DO WE HAVE OUR OWN CURATORIAL PRACTICE?

PHILLIPS

There are pockets of people doing work with Native communities. Were you going to talk about Native curatorial practices? What does that mean; do Natives have their own curatorial practice, or is it westernized?

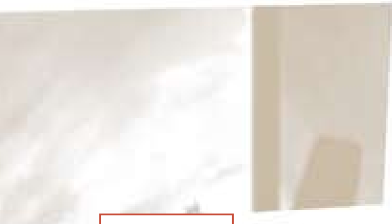
RICE

The whole gallery process is westernized. The idea of exhibiting art is something foreign. Our art was shared with our families, our communities, not in the same way as we do or don't do today. I see Native curators as representing and negotiating another voice, another perspective. The curatorial process is another way

TO BRING FORTH OUR STORY, OUR ISSUES AND OUR CONCERNS AND ASSISTS THE ARTISTS WITH TELLING THEIR STORY, THROUGH THEIR ARTWORK AND EXHIBITIONS.

Native curatorial work hasn't always been represented; an historical example is the "The Spirit Sings" exhibition, which took place twenty-five years ago at the Glenbow Museum in Calgary, Alberta. It was an anthropological product conceived by white curators staged for an international audience which placed Native people in the past, without exhibiting any Native voice/perspective of today.

We need to create and maintain our own spaces.



PHILLIPS

Talk a little bit about the curatorial work that you're in charge of, the collective.

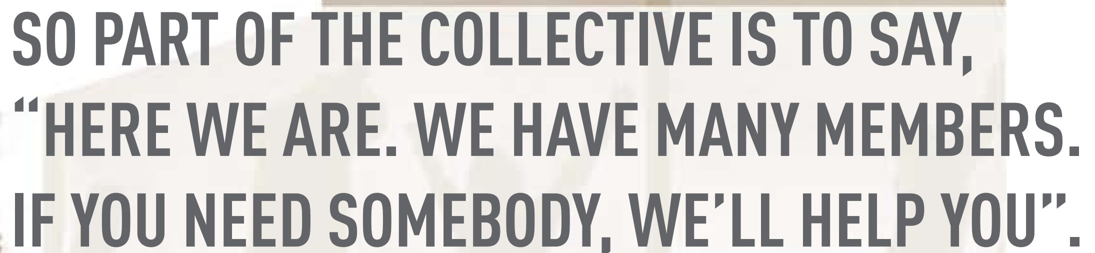
That is a good model for us to look at.

RICE

The Aboriginal Curatorial Collective (ACC). In 2005, I got a call from Barry Ace who I worked with previously at the Indian Arts Center, and he asked "What are you doing?", and I was without work. I just finished an MA degree at Bard (Center for Curatorial Studies and Art in Contemporary Culture, Bard College), and couldn't find anything, like so many other Native colleagues who weren't working or getting any projects. The ACC was created to counter this problem and to build a capacity for Native curators and any Native person working in the arts to have a support and network system that would keep us abreast of opportunities at all levels.

RICE

I used to hear from artists and galleries, etc. that so many times they couldn't find an Aboriginal curator, a writer, etc.,



SO PART OF THE COLLECTIVE IS TO SAY, "HERE WE ARE. WE HAVE MANY MEMBERS. IF YOU NEED SOMEBODY, WE'LL HELP YOU".

Another objective was to get our critical writing seen and published beyond the local, as most of our writings are printed institutionally in brochures and given out at exhibitions. We also compiled an extensive bibliography; we wanted to provide that for students, for research, for art historians, and also for anyone to see what is out there.

We're a volunteer organization. The other goal was networking. We have to talk to each other; to know what each other are doing. There are so many times that you do a show and you don't tell anybody. I don't know if that's something that's in the Native community, because artists do the same thing. We have a list-serve, we send out e-mails almost everyday of things happening, opportunities, projects, talks, so people have a scope of what is going on across the country.

IT'S ALSO ABOUT COLLABORATION,

we realize we don't own the museums, the galleries; we can't just go in those spaces and say, "We want an exhibition." The easier way is to offer collaborative strategies. We've done a number of collaborations and conferences.

THEY DON'T UNDERSTAND NATIVE

PHILLIPS

These issues are endless if you ask me. Why don't we have critiques of shows that we have?

A lot of the discussions that we were having in Washington were that non-Native critics don't understand Native art well enough to write about it.

One of the shows we did at the Venice Biennale was James Luna's "Emendatio", it was a great show, very well attended, and Rebecca Belmore was the same year, 2005, she was in the Canadian pavilion [the exhibit was titled "Fountain."] We were very excited, we were going to have a critique written about these two artists, and in the end, a very good writer just did an interview; he did not even give us a good critique of the work. Even if it's bad, the artists were saying they wanted a critique.

RICE

IT'S LACK OF UNDERSTANDING AND EDUCATION. PEOPLE STILL DON'T GET TO SEE NATIVE ARTWORK IN AN ART HISTORY CLASS.

I have seen several shows that considered themselves a show about the country, and we're forgotten again. I think they are not versed on what we do; where we have to be on top of what they do and on top of western history and we have to know what happened in Rome, Italy, and they don't know what happened in the neighboring town here and wherever artists are working. I don't think people, especially critics, are going to go out of their way, unless it comes to them.

PHILLIPS

We're talking about curatorial practices; we see a lot of collaborative curatorial work in the Native world, whereas in the mainstream, it's really in my experience, usually one curator and maybe an assistant. Canada might be doing it differently, but in the United States…

RICE

It's a matter of scraping up what you can get and supporting each other. You can get that much money, I can get that much money, let's work together. We really don't have a space, there are few curators in any institution across the country and that's one of the things that ACC recognizes. There are still a number of professionals who aren't working. My choice to be independent isn't a choice, I can't get a job. I'm dependent upon the gallery world, and they're dependent on their funders. I can say I'm on Canada Council welfare because I'm dependent on whatever they get because they are dependent as well.

WHAT'S NEEDED IS MORE ACCESSIBLE AND AVAILABLE EXHIBITIONS. FLOOD THE MARKET AS THEY SAY.

It's not a bad thing that we're always lumped up into a group show of thirty people, but, it's nice to see somebody highlighted in their career. Personally, I like to work with a lot of artists and most of my shows are from two to thirty-eight. I find it a lot more challenging to do a solo exhibition.

RICE

Just by working independently over the years and trying to establish, heightening the arts in our own communities, I came to think that a curator's role is really privileged because people don't know what a curator is. My mother doesn't really know what I do. There's no concept of what that person does, even with our artists, people will always say, "Oh they're a painter," but they could be a sculptor, but it's a painter that people understand as art.

THESE CONCEPTS, THESE ROLES, ARE CHALLENGING, BUT ALSO BECOMING MORE INCLUSIVE AS WE CREATE OUR OWN DIALOGUES LIKE THIS, AND TALK ABOUT HOW TO BRIDGE THAT GAP AND HOW PEOPLE GET INVOLVED.

I think that's important for us to think about.

SOURCES

Aboriginal Curatorial Collective
WWW.ABORIGINALCURATORIALCOLLECTIVE.ORG

The Canada Council for the Arts
WWW.CANADACOUNCIL.CA

The Canadian Museum of Civilization
WWW.CIVILIZATION.CA/CMC/HOME/CMC-HOME

Indian and Inuit Indian Arts Centre
WWW.AINC-INAC.GC.CA/ACH/AC/INDEX-ENG.ASP

Institute of American Indian Arts Museum
Santa Fe, New Mexico
WWW.IAIA.EDU/MUSEUM/INDEX.PHP

International Decade of the World's
Indigenous Peoples
1995-2004, United Nations
WWW.UN.ORG/RIGHTS/INDIGENOUS/MEDIAADV.HTML

La Biennale di Venezia
WWW.LABIENNALE.ORG/IT/HOME.HTML

National Endowment for the Arts
WWW.NEA.GOV

National Gallery of Canada
WWW.GALLERY.CA/ENGLISH/INDEX.HTML

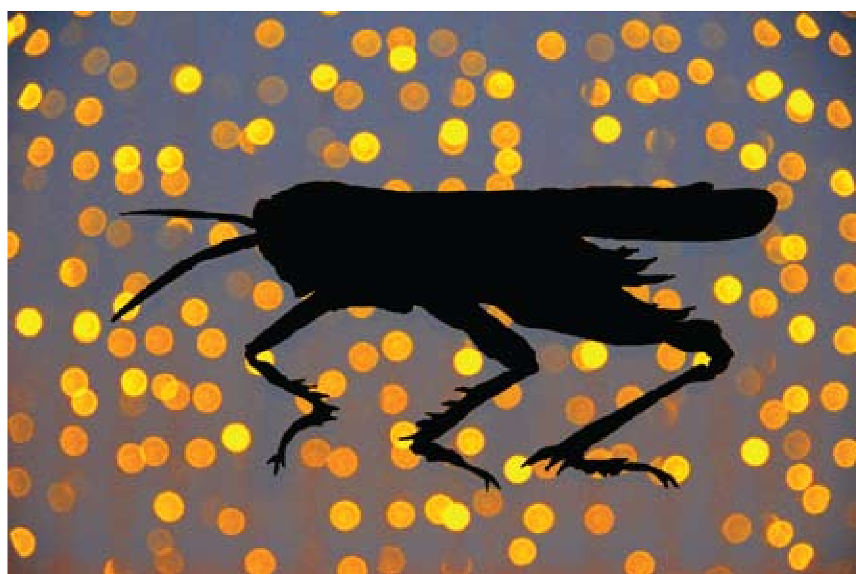
Native American Indigenous
Cinema and Arts
WWW.THENAICA.ORG

Smithsonian National Museum
of the American Indian
WWW.NMAI.SI.EDU

The Spirit Sings
WWW.ABORIGINALCURATORIALCOLLECTIVE.ORG/
FEATURES/IGLOLIORTE2.HTML

FORD FOUNDATION

12 Bon 3/7/02 it is the way of reeds to be hollow, to rejoice and reverberate
with their hollow strength, to let the sunlight of love befall them,
first & make them **more.** the way of reeds must now be my way —
remove the staunch energies of [illegible], the plot of earth dug for
planting, no more a stationary spot to **grow rings each** year like
an elm. The reeds today came [illegible] — See how beautiful it is to
bend in sunlight. how in these difficult moments you will find
emptiness a treasure, the loom of sunlight and reeds an energy of
unusual rejoicing. Here the birds speaking the [illegible] of trees &
flowers, hear the panther moving with his dark power into your
[illegible]. Crouch with **immense** [illegible] with **him** into reeds. You
will learn the power of sunlight **there.** Breathe easy in all
calamities, because such grace is hard to place in a pocket or
on a sleeve, such grace is what we're born for — to believe in,
to laugh about because love is here with you now. So when
do I descend into emptiness & how do I work from its power,
its tools so transparent I could trick myself again? Let go of
irrelevancies and [illegible], let go preoccupations that take your
light and use it for a useless desire. Your roots go deep, grow
into the mantra of each day's fire. Your roots are not the
death grip of your will, but the acceptance of the wind & sun
falling in graceful streams, accept the beams beneath these
words, the way of reeds the only way you love. There were
such blessings before, such [illegible] in the power of your
own heart to call into the sky to surrender [illegible], &
to be guided in the gentle art of [illegible], believe — miracles
in the mind.



Roberta Hill

The Way of Reeds, 2002

Drawing paper, colored pencil and colored marker

9" x 9 7/8"

John Hitchcock

SuperBug: An Installation by Jennifer Angus and John Hitchcock, 2009

An Installation by Jennifer Angus and John Hitchcock at the James Watrous Gallery
of the Wisconsin Academy, Overture Center, Madison, WI
Screenprint and flocking on paper, vinyl stickers, and insects

Size variable

Photo credit: Robert Apholz

Tom Jones

Shades of Blue, 2008
From the series: *I Am An Indian First, and An Artist Second*

Archival digital photography

40″ x 40″

Tom Jones

Cross, 2008
From the series: *I Am An Indian First, and An Artist Second*

Archival digital photography

40″ x 40″

Erica Lord

Oil Drum Totem 1, 2006 (left)
Tire Totem 1, 2006 (center)
Tire Totem 2, 2006 (right)
From the series: *Trash Totems, Fairbanks, Alaska*

Photo documentation of Performance/Ritual

Digital C-Print

Terrance Houle

Untitled, 2008

Graphic design by Mike Pelletier

14.2″ x 10.6″

www.terrancehoule.com

Danielle Majors
Grandma's Yarn, 2009
Copper wire
Size variable

Danielle Majors
Homecoming, 2009
Copper wire
36" x 24"

Dyani Reynolds-White Hawk
Effection, 2008
Mixed media on canvas
72″ x 60″

Dyani Reynolds-White Hawk
ca. 2000, 2008
Acrylic on canvas
30″ x 24″

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

Andrea Brdek
Rainy Mountain, 2008
Digital photograph
16” x 20”

Andrea Brdek
Buffalo Nickel, 2008
Digital photograph
16” x 20”

BENLEE

Scattergories, The Categories Game in Native American Art History: A Commentary©

by Jaune Quick-To-See Smith

In the mainstream art world, museum administrators, historians and writers categorize art movements based on a timeline affected by such things as politics, governments, wars and religion. We're all familiar with cave art, medieval, renaissance and so on. Within that timeline, there is also art that is identified by nation such as Mayan, French, Egyptian, Aztec, or Northern European Renaissance art.

Finally, there are lesser categories which refer to style and the education of an artist and/or function of the art, such as folk art, colonial, minimal, contemporary, modern, high, low, craft and ethnic art. These categories fit within the art of nations previously mentioned. For example, Haitian folk art or Peruvian Moche gives immediate information about the derivation of an artist's work.

But in the study of Native American art, there tends to be considerable confusion about how to define work made by Indians in a Native community or on a reservation or at the boarding schools. If the artist is educated at a tribal college versus a mainstream university, does that make the work more authentic or less? Authentication is an imperial rationalization for increasing or decreasing value.

Terms such as contemporary, traditional or modernist have mixed meanings and are tossed around with abandon depending on each writer's personal notions. Bill Anthes and Edwin Wade each chose different eras to describe modernism. And then there's "tourist art" and the question of whether it has any validity and if so, what is it, the stuff of endless conferences.

Before the Great Invasion, all Native art was an authentic expression of indigenous tradition, made and functioned with recitation, music, poetry, dance and ceremony. There was no word for art in any of our 3,000 languages because art making incorporated the intangible. Definitely the object was not a singular entity.

The object functioned with seamless integration with an expansive role in the cultural lifeway of the tribe. Often the object had function only for a period of time, a half-life, if you will, and then was placed in a deserted location to finish out life, to molder away. Back to earth.

Traditional art was originally not that of the government-imposed boarding schools either, but of the folk, the tribe, the people. A traditional Native person learned at

home from the family, inter-generationally and from the tribe. There is tradition in some of the tribal art-making today, but likely made with trade goods such as beads, paint, dyes or feathers. Even hide tanning has changed. Many hides at home are now tanned using commodity eggs instead of brains.

Truth be known, all art everywhere began in religiosity, celebrating life and seeking answers to the mysteries of the universe. Traditional Native American art functioned in that same way, but here in the Americas, it's the only art that has any continuum from its nature-based origins. No matter how contemporary the art or how many cultural disruptions, there is still a thread that ties all Native art into this continuum. It may not last and it may not be so in another generation, but for now there is truth in saying this.

Stories abound that describe the confusion when historic pieces have been returned to the tribes. Tribal people are fully aware that individual objects are loaded with cultural information, though not always sure what that is. They cannot simply be viewed or admired just as an object. But at this point in time, what does that object convey to the People and no, it's not just the surface quality or the craftsmanship.

For instance, I recall hearing about a tribe in Oklahoma who received a group of small carved-wood figures from the Smithsonian some years ago. After studying them for some time, they decided for multiple reasons, that it was best to bury them, but the foremost reason was that no one could remember the songs that should accompany the figures and without that their usefulness was no longer relevant, no matter their beauty or craftwork. Their value to the tribe was in a cultural construct much larger than simply their beauty.

I have a personal story that involved a traditional piece, a woman's headdress used in a thousands-of –years-old ceremony which I attended with my son and our extended family for many years up on the high line of the Northern Plains. The ceremonies weren't practiced for sixteen years because the headdress was held in the storage of a Canadian museum and without it, the ceremonies couldn't be held. Finally the museum relented and loaned the headdress for a limited number of days. But because the Center Woman received her menstruation period, we couldn't start the ceremonies on time. The museum fined us for the extra time we had to wait. To me, this object is an example of a traditional artwork, it was believed to be made B.W., before whites. It was not only beautiful, it was functional and it had important

cultural relevance.

A side note here is the fact that the plunder and pillage of Native artworks continues today throughout the Americas. During the Great Invasion, Christian churches while saving pagan souls, burned Native artworks in massive bonfires throughout the Americas. Most of the works, housed in the museums of Europe and the Americas, were looted or traded for alcohol and a string of beads. The underground market run by pot hunters and grave diggers is still thriving for an international clientele with a taste for the exotic. This too creates an economic and colonial control over American Indian art.

So can we truly call today's artwork, made for selling in a booth, at Indian market to white collectors—traditional Indian art? I can't sort this out here nor do I want to speak on behalf of other Indian people. But it's worth thinking about.

My Cuban friend, Alejandro Anreus, author of several books, professor at William Paterson University, specialist in the art of Latin America, says that in a conversation with Cuban curator José Gómez Sicre:

"There is no such thing as Latin American art. There is art made by Latin Americans which begins in the nineteenth century. Before this we have pre-Columbian and colonial art."

Dr. Anreus does mention that modernism, which began in the early decades of the twentieth century, continues into postmodernism, believing that historical zones can coexist at the same time. Then he goes on to mention art broken into national categories such as Chicano/a art, Cuban, Dominican and Puerto Rican as well as South American.

Not to be confusing, but many years ago Dr. Andrew Whiteford divided Native American art into regional nations or clusters of nations; Woodlands, Great Lakes, Southwest etc. Dr. Whiteford referred to this work as traditional Indian art even though much of it was impacted and altered by the trappers, traders and U.S. government during the Great Invasion.

Trade goods such as glass beads from Italy, silk appliqué via French traders after Bastille Day, chemical dyes for weavers, changed all traditional art. Boarding schools, springing up everywhere courtesy of the U.S. government and its cultural genocide

program, imposed European forms and patterns in their teachings. But now these are referred to as "traditional art."

These schools taught English and French crewel design; thus the Great Lakes and Woodlands flowery patterned beadwork. Algonquian lace workers at the boarding schools had similar sources. So, from the beginning of contact everything was altered in myriad ways. The function of the object changed, the materials used were different and the cultural relevance was not the same. Perhaps it would it be more truthful to assign colonialism to everything after contact.

The most prominent boarding school after Carlisle, Haskell and Bacone (there were hundreds of others) was the Santa Fe Indian School. In the 1930s, the government hired Dorothy Dunn, who had been in China, to teach a Bambi style of art to Indigenous people believing they were less intelligent than Europeans and incapable of being taught much other than crafts. Thus was born another version of "traditional art."

Again, this is an example of colonial oppression, cultural genocide and an imposed style. To my way of thinking, most of the work entitled traditional art is really Colonial art.

Edward Said insists that misinformation sufficiently repeated can become accepted academic work and I think this is a good example.

Objects made with new contact materials, were and still are, made for use in ceremonies and function in an age old and necessary cultural way. Other works are part of commodification and colonial edicts from traders, collectors, museums and galleries. They have slicked up, industrialized surfaces, high tech designs to fit the taste of these buyers and collectors today. Besides, they photograph well for ads.

A crossover that is likely to confuse is that of the contemporary artist who works in "traditional" materials or process. Marcus Amerman (Choctaw) is an extraordinary beader who beads belt buckles with images of women's eyes taken from advertising—more DaDa than any Native tradition. He beads such things as whole postcards, ads, Curtis photographs etc. Marcus is today's savvy young Indian involved in pluralistic art making.

Joe Feddersen (Okanogan) weaves baskets with computerized designs from parking lot painted lines and glyphs of electrical power poles. Joe has an MFA degree, is a college professor and in no way pretends that he is making traditional art. Quite the opposite, both he and Marcus are making work that is meaningful to today's viewer, very hip, very knowing.

Both Marcus and Joe are contemporary artists, in fact, they are postmodernists. I believe that any American Indian who goes to university and has an advanced degree in art has the same freedom to make their art as any mainstream artist, meaning without the constraints of parents, tribe, or government. So what makes them Indian you ask? The same thing that makes a Dominican a Dominican or a Cuban a Cuban. They identify with their nation and in this case both Marcus and Joe identify themselves by their nations too.

And like a Dominican or a Cuban, they both make their art from their life experience, not a canned colonial recipe imposed on them. Native artists are free to choose something from their tribal area, such as craft or design elements or something intangible such as philosophical ideology, and of course they are as free as mainstream artists to choose and mix ideas from other cultures around the world or from any time line in art history.

Postmodern Indian art conveys irony, humor, cheekiness, a turning around and it also critiques colonial history as well as, contemporary American society and its hypocrisy. It is not homogenous, simple, maybe not designerly and likely not exotic, it is art made by separate individuals. Jimmie Durham knowingly and with irony, will hang feathers off a set of car headlights with antlers attached to recreate the exotic and send a message.

Learning or knowing about this art is the same process as discovering a New York Euro-American artist. One must read the reviews, the critical writing and the monographs. This is the issue that isolates contemporary Native art and keeps it in the dark. There is a scarcity of monographs, critical writing and certainly no encyclopedic cataloging of who these artists are. Their work is a hidden treasure within the mainstream art world.

At this moment in time, we, contemporary Native artists, are still shadows and if brought to light, it's with two hundred years of counterfeit identity from Hollywood movies, written history, literature, tv, ads and pop society.

There might be sixty books or more, currently available and newly written, on African American art and certainly a dozen or more books on Mexican American art, Hispanic, Southwestern Latinos and their art, but to date there is nothing in the way of a compendium or book on contemporary Native art nor have there been any sizeable touring exhibits of American Indian contemporary art like the multiple exhibits of Hispanic/Mexicano/Latino contemporary art touring museums at any given time.

There are also major collections in multiple museums of African American art, African art, Haitian art, Mexican art, Latin American art and so on. But as of this time there is no, none, nada, major collection of contemporary Native art anywhere. Nor are there any private collections of note such as the Peter Norton Collection of African American Art. So yes, we are still in the shadows.

For nearly forty years, I've been organizing, curating and touring small American Indian art exhibits in this country and other countries as well. Twenty to thirty artists has been my standard, only smallish pieces due to lack of funding and generally only a postcard records that it existed at all. Of the thirty plus exhibits (and not all traveled), there are approximately a half dozen or so brochures and small catalogs as reminders of these years of work with scant funding.

I am, and remain, the biggest fan of contemporary and postmodern Indian art. I've lectured about it for nearly forty years. I find it the most interesting, inspirational, dynamic art being made today with humor, pathos and an ever enlightening narrative. I never tire of it, I am always exhilarated and uplifted by it and I love sharing it with audiences who often are stunned by what they've never seen or heard before. Why is this?

Imperialism is still at work here. The so-called Indian art market, the pot hunters, the traders, trading posts, collectors and specialized galleries that buy and sell romance, the exotic, the primitive through the hegemony of economics, the enforcers, have an iron grip. They are "Keepers of the Kulture."

Imperialism's economic grip will loosen and the disenfranchisement of college educated Native artists will change when there are compendiums with interpretive writing, monographs and essays on contemporary Native art. This material will enlighten the arts community, museums, collectors and academia. At this point in time, almost all written material, books, magazines, college history courses,

collections, all concentrate on the craftwork of colonial and neocolonial prescripted work.

Another misleading issue is that all Native art which is not part of craft, is entitled modernism, which is an erroneous, confounding term, forcing contemporary Native artists to be performing behind the times - such as somewhere in the1930s. Yes, we had Native artists who were working at that time, Leon Polk Smith, George Morrison, Patrick Desjarlais, Oscar Howe and others, but not those of us born after 1940. This alienates our contemporary Native art from today's mainstream art and causes writers and critics to be suspicious of its validity or lasting importance. Crafts dominate because of imperial economics.

My belief is that the interpretive writing must come from the community itself, just as the African American community has done. Cultural critics such as Henry Louis Gates, bell hooks, Cornel West and Lowery Sims have opened the doors of credibility in the art world for African Americans. Amalia Mesa Bains, Alejandro Anreas, Gerardo Mosquera and David Craven among others, continually publish interpretive writing for Latino artists.

If this writing comes from within our own Native communities, the ripples will extend outward to the mainstream writers who will advance the dialogue. There is room for traditional art serving tribal purposes, and for crafts too, that are prescribed by colonial institutions or dictated by collectors that serve their economic market. But colonial paradigms must change and make space and provide verification for today's postmodern artists or we stand to lose forty years or more of written history for this whole postmodern group of Native artists. This is a serious loss, as they are passing away and carry this knowledge with them.

There's a dire need for this art to become known. As Dorothee Peiper, German citizen and a rare collector of contemporary Native art has said for twenty plus years, "This art has much to offer the world."

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2

The Americana Indian: American Indians in the American Imagination

by Ned Blackhawk and Brian Baker

NED BLACKHAWK: ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR OF HISTORY, UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN–MADISON
BRIAN BAKER: ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR IN NATIVE AMERICAN & ETHNIC STUDIES, CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, SACRAMENTO

NED BLACKHAWK:

Let's begin this process and exchange. How about I pose a question and then respond with a question towards the end of your response?

As a recent interloper in the field of American Indian art, I've been struck by the consistent and often trenchant critiques leveled by Native artists at our society's continued misconceptions about American Indian and American history more generally. In fact, I've come to feel that contemporary Indian art is a wonderful arena in which to measure the distance between society's perceived understandings of Indian peoples and the actual experiences of Native people. Would you agree with such an observation?

BRIAN BAKER:
Excellent observation and question. Native artists possess a unique opportunity to either memorialize, sensationalize, dramatize, or criticize, even trivialize, American society and American history in general, especially when it comes to the reserved and restricted space allotted to Native Americans on the landscape within the world of the American imagination.

If it were possible to devise a "Native ruler" to measure the distance as a disconnection between American misconceptions about American Indian/American histories relative to the lived Native experiences, I could only hope that Americans would be shocked by, and hopefully become displaced from, their own ignorance. Frequently and in various ways, I inform my non-Native students about the untold ways in which an American imagination shapes their worldviews and understandings when it comes to their perceived notions towards American Indians. In several taken-for-granted ways, whether these images are assimilated from within their homes and by their parents, instilled into their heads through the accepted curriculum instructed within schools and articulated by teachers, or circulated as symbols within the media and other aspects of popular culture, the actual source or space where the misconceptions reside does not really matter because those notions have become infused with American institutions. Because they are both embedded and accepted as intellectual artifacts, the misconceptions serve to validate an imaginary landscape occupied by American Indians in an Americana cultural milieu.

Take Disney's Pocahontas for example, neither "art" nor "history." On some level, this film reflects creativity as it tells us a story, one where Grandmother Willow is an insightful tree who, among other things, as an elder offers advice and wisdom to Pocahontas; is immediately accepting of John Cook when she first meets him; and sings. In this animated form of storytelling, the creators of this fictional world seized artistic liberty in recounting and interpreting a story connected to, while simultaneously disconnected from, American Indian/American histories. The fact that students, who tend to appear as being more open minded and critical in their observations, in many individual cases have an adamant disregard for the film's blatant disconnections is a testament to the pervasiveness of misconceptions. They acknowledge that "Grandmother Willow" is fiction, hence a disconnection to history, as well as other more obvious misconceptions because, after all, it is a

cartoon. However, because they are not familiar with the actual history, where there is a blending of fiction and non-fiction, students have difficulty in understanding or acknowledging the significance of more important and powerful misconceptions, as in the case of the real ages of Pocahontas and John Cook as actual historical figures who did not live happily ever after. As "art" and "history," Disney's fictional account of Pocahontas, while dismissed by my students as a cartoon, has had an effect in shaping their misconceptions about American Indian/American histories.

On an intuitive level, I would say that the distance between the imagined American Indian/American histories and the lived experiences of the American Indians has decreased. How much? Definitely an insufficient decrease, due to the fact that misconceptions continue to permeate American institutions which makes them extremely difficult to change. Because the distance as a disjuncture continues to be immense, the work of Native artists is important because they operate in an arena where powerful and visual statements are made on American Indian/American histories to inform, educate, and facilitate an understanding of Native perspectives that challenge prevailing misconceptions.

In the end, and stated more succinctly, I agree with your observation. Native artists occupy an important and unique space to juxtapose Native understandings and experiences with American misconceptions as intellectual artifacts.

When we think of this arena, there are interrelated issues of authenticity, voice, and even definitions of Native art. Within the discourse of Native art and artists, there are a numerous styles and perspectives, which may reflect ideas about tradition, experience, ancestry or education. Given these conditions, how can non-Native people understand and interpret the work of Native artists?"

NED BLACKHAWK:
These are important observations, and I'm wondering how one would go about developing an effective gauge or measure with which to determine how society's perceptions of Native Americans have changed and/or decreased in their pejorative forms.

Here in Wisconsin, for example, now that the Democratic Party controls the State Legislature, a bill prohibiting Indian mascots in the state's 30 remaining school

districts that use Indian mascots will be passed likely this year. Such efforts, as you know, have occurred throughout the country, most recently within the National Collegiate Athletic Association. While such images are generally of little import to reservation communities themselves, for those of us who live in close proximity to such institutions it can be quite damaging, especially on young Indian children who have to confront these issues at various stages of their social development. I can't seem to determine what kind of measure may be most useful here, but these changing forms of denigration seem to be productive developments.

As for Indian artists and art history, it does seem that many Native artists have been dealing with such concerns for some time and that many of the most sophisticated responses to this "tension" regarding dominant society's limited understandings of Indian experiences have been best explored by Native artists and intellectuals. The late 1960s and early 1970s saw the rise of intellectuals like Vine Deloria, Jr. and artists like Fritz Scholder, while I've always found Sherman Alexie's early work to be quite effective in its critique of representational concerns. "Somewhere in American a television explodes, and here you are again (again) asking me to explain broken glass," is the first line to one of his earliest collections, "Old Shirts, New Skins," while the cover and especially title of "The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven" both invoke such visual and representational concerns. I'm not sure I've seen anyone publish on this subject in his work, but I'll be looking for it and similar works in the future.

BRIAN BAKER:
Yes, I agree with you on issues concerning Indian mascots, as current politics and debates on this topic do reflect an awareness of popular cultural perceptions of Native Americans. The legislative initiative you mentioned on Indian mascots in Wisconsin in public schools is an important measure or indicator of social change, one that follows similar legislation and changes in other states. In recent years, Governor Schwarzenegger, vetoed a similar bill passed by the California State Legislature, stating that any decision for change should be left up to local school districts. Shortly afterward, his platform for re-election articulated a statewide initiative calling for a 25% tax on Indian casinos, a

measure of "fair share" for California Indian tribes and a message communicated daily in the media.

While Indian mascot imagery permeates American culture and institutions, many non-Native people perceive challenges as being trivial and not worthy of political attention, or any attention for that matter. One powerful and visible icon is a generic "Americana Indian head," itself cut off from any specific Native historical and cultural context. This iconic symbol conjures up perceptions and ideas associated with American Indians. For example, one writer, in a defense of the stereotypes embedded within Y-Indian Princess Program, stated "Considering some of the injustices in their past, I think they would have bigger pale faces to scalp than suburban dads in head dresses." At the University of Illinois, officials would go to great lengths to describe how much they "love the Chief" as a symbol of "respect" and "honor," and one political proponent went so far as to reference Chief Illiniwek's dancing at half-time as an "art form." But, after years of conflict and controversy, "Chief Illiniwek" performed his "last dance" in 2007 to the sound of music designed to activate the "Americana Indian" in popular culture.

A number of debates in cities and rural communities over Indian mascots have taken place throughout California. While there has been some change, it has not come easy, especially when met by vocal and widespread resistance, which has been key to maintaining the status quo. In Carpinteria, California, a site of one of the most recent challenges, a Native student, Eli Cordero (Chumash), set off a controversy when he asked the school to do away with the "Indian" iconography while retaining the "Warrior" as an "ethnically neutral" name for the high school. While viewed as trivial and unimportant, this request been met with intense resistance as attempts are made to preserve and memorialize the "Americana Indian" as a phantom figure who inhabits, and who is inhibited by, the American imagination.

Yes, Native intellectuals and artists have been dealing with such disconnections and tensions, as well as just blatant racism, for quite sometime, and each generation has had the opportunity to build on the legacies and successes, or manage to take note of and deal with the shortcomings, of the previous generation. We are fortunate to have a broad spectrum of perspectives articulated

by Native intellectuals, artists, writers, and storytellers to choose from, to integrate or critically analyze, something that will help us negotiate our individual pathways within academy. It is amazing how ideas and perspectives by Native artists and writers can influence our thinking. While there are many voices and perspectives that come to mind, one example for me is a short quote by Ulali from their song "Museum Cases," where "Creation came" is a powerful political and cultural statement being made in this text. I use this song as a creation story, and ask students to think about "what" is being created in this context, and to consider historical and contemporary circumstances that compelled these three Native artists to write and perform this song.

"Museum Cases"

I saw them lying stacked high on shelves, cardboard boxed and labeled, through skeleton mother holds her embedded child.

Uncovered, no blankets. No nothing just how?
I was looking at myself buried alive!

Military donations, government research, science, churches, and museums!

I was looking at myself buried alive!
I am my ancestors, my mothers' stolen grave!
Wipe my face from the right to live on this land!
Creation came!

You still take.
You still take.
You still take.
You still take!
You still take.

You still take.
You still take.
You still take.
You still take.

Sterilized women cannot give birth, strip my womb of mother earth!

Remove my future leaving no trace say, that I am a non-existent race!

I can not claim from where I came.
You hid the truth.
No guilt, no shame.

I can not claim from where I came.
You hid the truth.
No guilt no shame.

Exploitation! Anthropology! Excavation!
You call it state property!
A professional living?

How can money justify the greed to disguise what is truly genocide?

When I claim from where I came, you hid the truth.
No guilt, no shame.

"Museum Cases" (1997) is authored by Pura Fe of Ulali and is used by permission of Corn, Beans and Squash Music in association with Tuscarican Music.

Cover: A Horace Poolaw photograph. Courtesy of The Horace Poolaw Family Photography Collection. ID: 45EP120(OS)

This is What Indigenous Curation Looks Like

by Amy Lonetree

ASSISTANT PROFESSOR OF AMERICAN STUDIES
UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, SANTA CRUZ

One of the most significant recent developments in the museum world is the emergence of tribal museums on reservations across the United States and Canada. These museums reflect the desires of Native Americans to present and preserve their history by establishing cultural institutions for their own communities and for the general public. The development of tribal museums is important given the complex historical relationship between Indigenous people and museums and the role that museums have played in the appropriation and misrepresentation of Native American people and cultures.

Current estimates place the number of tribal museums between 120 and 150, and the Ziibiwing Center for Anishinabe Culture and Lifeways, located on the Saginaw Chippewa Reservation in Michigan, is one of the finest. The Ziibiwing Center embodies a decolonizing museum practice and creates an engaging learning experience for visitors. The community center reflects some of the most current and innovative exhibition strategies, including more thematic rather than object-centered exhibitions; effective use of multi-media, storytelling and the first-person voice throughout; and, most notably, an emphasis on contemporary survival that challenges head-on the "vanishing race" stereotype prevalent in past museum representations of Native Americans.

The tribally authored narratives presented in this museum were developed in consultation and collaboration with Saginaw Chippewa community members, and it shows. The exhibition text is all in the first-person and the oral tradition is privileged throughout the galleries. Equally significant is the Saginaw Chippewas' desire to address the legacies of historical unresolved grief in their community; they bravely speak the hard truths of colonization to promote understanding and healing for tribal members. By emphasizing the oral tradition and by presenting the painful stories of colonization, the community engages in an important act of decolonization and provides a model for other tribal museums to follow.

Anishinabe understanding of history, as reflected in the oral tradition, provides the framework for the Ziibiwing Center visitor to interact with the tribe's unique history and culture. Their 9,000-square foot exhibition space is organized around the "Seven Prophecies /Seven Fires" of the Anishinabe people, an effective and intimate manner of narrating their story. As visitors travel through the exhibition, each of the prophecies is introduced on text panels and spoken via audio first in Anishinabe, followed by an English translation.

The prophecies are the narrative thread that connect the contents of the museum and provide an understanding of tribal philosophies and spirituality. By representing historical events in the context of Anishinabe prophecies instead of rigidly adhering to the framework of United States-Indian relations, the museum deploys an important decolonization strategy. Historical context is provided, but it is placed in a tribally-based epistemological framework that honors oral tradition and Indigenous conceptions of history.

In the "Effects of Colonization" gallery, the exhibits focus on the tragic period in their history that included loss of land, disease, poverty, violence, and forced conversion at the hands of Christian missionaries. The design elements in this section illustrate physically the sense of intense pressure—the space begins to narrow, giving the impression that the world is closing in on the Saginaw Chippewa. The gallery relates a painful story by layering information and including voice-overs and images to provide an auditory and visual break from the emotional stories that visitors are reading. The maps, text panels, images of ancestors, and treaties provide context for this devastating period of the fifth prophecy, which "foretold that the Anishinabek would encounter separation and struggle for many generations.".

The use of audio in this section is extremely effective. In one area, visitors hear voices reading some of the documents featured on nearby text panels. As visitors walk through the space, they hear the words of government officials such as Lewis Cass and John Hudson. Listening to the angry and racist opinions of the colonizers is very difficult, and the exhibit is strategically designed so that no one misses hearing those words. One may choose not to read a text panel, but it is another thing entirely to avoid these words, repeated over and over again overhead as the visitor moves through the space. Hearing expressions of the deep-seated hatred that Cass and others had for the Anishinabe people is a difficult and emotional experience, one that the museum insists visitors confront.

After the hard truths of colonization, the museum provides a space for healing, entitled "Blood Memory." Visitors' engagement with this section begins even before they leave the "Effects of Colonization" area. The sound of a heartbeat and a beautiful song sung by three women from the community pull the visitor forward toward the healing space. The exhibit is an open, inviting, circular area with benches nearby for people to rest and collect their thoughts. The following text panel introduces the concept of Blood Memory to visitors:

Mindjimendamowin

Blood Memory

Blood memory is an inherent connection we have
to our spirituality, ancestors,
and all of Creation.

Blood memory can be described as the emotions we feel when we hear the drum or our language for the first time. The Creator gives these emotions to us at birth. We use these emotions or blood memories to understand our heritage and our connection to our ancestors. Blood memory makes these connections for us.

Today, many Anishinabek use their blood memory to relearn our language. Our beautiful and descriptive language is deeply rooted in the land and our connections to it. As more and more Anishinabek recall their blood memory, our language and our spirituality will be spoken for the next Seven Generations.

That moving message is a reminder that the museum's central audience is tribal members. The "Effects of Colonization" and "Blood Memory" represent powerful methods that a tribal museum can use to assist community members in the truth-telling and healing process. Alongside difficult stories, the Ziibiwing Center provides a place where tribal members can gain strength from understanding and reclaiming their rich cultural inheritance and identity.

As one of the newest tribally owned and operated museums, the Ziibiwing Center exemplifies a decolonizing museum practice through privileging oral tradition, and through speaking of the hard truths of colonization to promote healing. The Center sensitively incorporates aspects of Anishinabe philosophy and spirituality that effectively conveys the uniqueness of the tribe's worldview and knowledge system. What Ziibiwing Center staff members have achieved truly represents a decolonizing museum practice and sets the standard by which future presentations of Native American history and culture should be judged.

This text is excerpted from a previously published exhibition review essay,
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Wretched (excerpts)

by Erica Lord

2008 DOBKIN NATIVE AMERICAN ARTIST FELLOW
SCHOOL OF ADVANCED RESEARCH, SANTA FE

I am an artist, and therefore visual iconography is something I examine. I am from Alaska, a place that throughout history has been a crossroads of cultures, a unique intersection of populations — human, animal, and spiritual. I think it these origins — a lineage that I was born into, and a land I removed from, my cultural limbo and precarious balances — these have molded my identity and fueled my artistic expression.

As I continue to move in this space of translation, I maintain a constant balancing act between what seem to be opposing aspects of my life. I become an emigrant to my home, or more accurately, homes. Through art or ritual, I discover ways to find a root and affirm my position as a shifting self, understanding that in order to survive, identity and culture cannot be static. In order for cultural survival, we must review our visual philosophy, deconstructing the imposed images as well as our own colonized mind. Through this, the multiplicity of self will evolve along with our expanded notions of what is authentic, traditional, or real.

When reading and studying American visual culture, it becomes apparent that there still exists a sort of distancing of "western," or Euro-American people from the Native; an attempt (even if it is unconscious), to keep the Native in the past, easily recognizable, simple, and essentially, separate and different from "us." The racial and cultural stereotypes of what an Indian looks like were constructed by whites, eventually accepted and digested by Natives, and have now been perpetuated for so long that we do not even question if this is who Indians really are. Contemporary images do not show the ethnocentric views as clearly as the old images, but they do continue to separate, exoticize and mark as strange or bizarre, differentiating the Native from the Euro-American. This treatment has the dual effect of dividing the two as people of different levels of civilization or advancement, and denying the identities of contemporary Natives who do not fulfill the traditional stereotypes.

On numerous occasions I have heard people comment on how they just don't understand why they (very pointedly marking them the 'other') live in such poor conditions, why they have such a problem with violence, alcohol, or drugs. In the visual documentation of the ghetto or the reservation, it is no coincidence that the decay of the community is enlarged, that the subject continues to be the depressed, broken, and hopeless faces, that the images elicit overwhelming fear or pity. The continued focus on violence and corrosion helps the oppressor to continue to separate himself from the other, as well as dividing the oppressed community itself. These images aid in identifying these people, the "they", as a different variety of people, one that does not share any humanistic qualities, one that is not equal.

As long as there is a fear of the Native, there simultaneously exists a fascination with their primitivism. In America, it was accepted that the Native was to eventually die

out by law of the conqueror, so in order to preserve the dying past, photography was introduced as an indispensable tool; Wild West shows and circus sideshows became popular. The Natives were tamed and put on display before they met their just and ultimate destiny of vanishing. "A Vanishing Race," was a "picture opera" by Edward Curtis depicting the old time Indian. Curtis almost single-handedly created the image of the noble savage, documenting both the curiosities of the culture and people before they both disappeared. Curtis's photos did not alter the general attitude towards Native people. Natives continued to be feared and seen as savage. Misused or misunderstood, Curtis's photos could be used to support these ideas—these Natives wore animal skins, the women walked around indecently, their faces were brutal and fierce—maybe some were the noble savage, but the images supported the idea that they all possessed an animalistic fever deep within.

To this day, the majority of photographs of Native people are historic, or historically referencing, images. For the viewer, it is easy to conclude that Natives are of the past, a primitive culture, and very clearly not part of modern life. Those that are left are documented in a different manner. It seems that the majority of Native photographs show one of two extremes; either the continuance of the noble savage, or the document of the depression and desperation of the reservation. Narrow opinions of the Native are kept alive; the subtle attempts to place them apart from the settler, or rather, contemporary American, still exist visually through the shooting and editing of Native photographs. An antiquated anthropology of racial science bleeds into our perceptions of the Native, both in our private thoughts and the public portrayal in visual media.

For the Native, the photographs set up a visual precedent that contemporary individuals cannot live up to. Contemporary Natives cannot honestly believe that we are the representations we see: the noble savage, the wise medicine man, the Indian maiden. In addition to these archetypes, we cannot fit the image visually because the photographs continue to portray faces that have not changed in the past two hundred years. In reality, most Natives are mixed blood of some sort. A visual representation of a mixed-blood individual could mean several things: that the threatening idea of miscegenation exists, that the culture is diluting and dying through the "breeding out" of the Native, or simply, these mixed blood images do not exist because they are not as visually interesting—they do not create a story

to believe in. These poses were accepted by Americans as "Indian," but just as quickly accepted by Natives, even if it was an act, in an effort to make money and survive as a people.

In modern times there is even more interracial mixing, as the majority of Natives admit to having non-Native blood of some sort. Despite this admittance of racial mixing, the visual evidence, through contemporary film and photographs, does not reflect the reality. There still continues the practice of editing to perpetuate this rather solid idea of "Indian" — it complies and continues a tradition begun over a hundred years ago. The Indian is still dark-skinned, always has angular features, commonly has long hair and often still wears traditional clothing (i.e. the popularity of powwow photos). The stereotype of Indian is the same as it was generations ago despite the changing reality of Native America.

The government-regulated definition of "Indian" combined with visual reinforcement of what Indian is supposed to look like, creates a nearly unachievable level of Indian-ness and very little room for mixed-race acceptance. The blood-quantum regulations create a questioning of cultural authenticity that is always underlying. The visual example parallels the quantum issue in that it is easier to subscribe to a simple idea of Indian rather than working through the complex reality that exists. The difference exists in the levels of Indian-ness, the United States government initiated a minimum blood quantum of one-quarter to be nationally recognized as Native. Beginning in the 1990s, many tribes began to shed the U.S. government's initial blood quantum approach, so tribal recognition may have a lower quantum requirement or use other methods such as lineal descent.

Unfortunately, to be nationally recognized, one must comply with tribal, state, and national standards, despite their tribal criterion. In regards to image, there is no one model to show an "Indian enough" or one-quarter-Indian-blood-person. Visually, as a result, the visual culture subscribes to an easily defined "full-blood" appearance. This is easy because full-blood appearance has been defined by culturally stereotypical images that originated over a hundred years ago. Does this perpetuated image continue to exist because of a desire within

the Native community to isolate themselves from other races and cultures; or does it exist because Americans (Native and other) have created a nearly impossible definition of Indian-ness, reinforced by the image, and perpetuated by the Native community, visual artists, and scholars?

It appears that the majority of images of the American Native still exist as a distorted view of the people. This continuance of subliminal visual messaging does nothing to end the tension between Natives and non-Natives (or between Natives themselves), instead, it reinforces stereotypes, creating feelings of inequity for the Native, and ultimately further divides the people. To create a simple, palatable, and safe version of Indian is what the directors of the Indian image have been doing for generations. Whether change comes from Natives who hold leadership roles or from our friends and family, it will take an intelligent and conscious analysis of our own colonized minds, understanding and critiquing our own preconceived notions, characters, and stereotypes.

I want to explore the world in which translation is suspended, the space beyond singular identities where worlds collide, merge, or resist. In the context of my individual and cultural framework, I move through different identities, languages, and experiences. Art has become my tool of translation, addressing the merging of blood, culture, gender, memory, and the idea of home. The qualities that define my identity become an overlapping and blurring of lines creating an amalgamation in which the multiplicity becomes indivisible. However, since archetypes are easier to understand, a multifaceted identity is often rejected or narrowed into effortless characterizations. Therefore, it is most often the context of my environment or the company I choose that determine which of my qualities emerge. To sustain a genuine self, art becomes my means, creating a world in which I can shift and become one or all of my multiple visions of self.

Considering the history of "identity art," I want to explore the next wave of cultural examination, an evolution of new ways to demonstrate cultural identity beyond the polar ideas that exist in a solely black/white diaspora. I want to challenge ideas of cultural purity or authenticity as well as discuss ideas of attraction, repulsion, exoticism, and gender or feminist notions. Besides a few individuals, there has been a lack of the indigenous voice in the art world.

Taking into consideration this challenge, I want to raise questions as well as declare convictions; challenge, deconstruct, and influence a new way of thinking about contemporary Native people, our life, and our art. It is time to redefine our representation as Native people. Until recently, it has been mostly cultural outsiders that have dictated images of Native people and when Natives have spoken, it is most often directed towards the cultural tourist. Through art and media, the cultural shapers of this generation, it is time for us to self-determine, to control our representation and image, and to address modernity, development, and discuss the myth of an authentic culture.

Excerpts from this essay included in the forthcoming publication *The Alaska Native Reader: History, Culture, Politics* by Maria Sháa Williams, Duke University Press 2009.

Cover: A Horace Poolaw photograph, image of Bruce Poolaw. Courtesy of The Horace Poolaw Family Photography Collection. ID: 57FBCHN7(OS)

Establishing The Field

Interview Nancy Marie Mithlo and Henry Drewal

Mithlo Is it your impression that the scholarship and curatorial practice of other political/social groupings that were previously marginalized in fine arts have gained a more solid presence than American Indian arts? **Drewal** I'm going to speak about the scholarship and the curatorial practices in my own field which is Africa and African Diaspora art, my impression is (though it is in the context of my not being abreast of the details and latest developments in the field of Native American arts) but I would judge the developments in African and African Diaspora arts to be perhaps further along than those same practices in Native American arts. The serious scholarship and building of critical mass of professors and their students becoming professionals in academe and in the museum world dates to say the late sixties, when Professor Roy Sieber, who was based at Indiana University, began to train a large number of students. Sieber's interest was in objects, he considered himself a connoisseur, so he was interested in connoisseurship. He did do some minimal field work in Africa but it was basically focused on collections and the scholarship of collections and also the exhibition of collections, so many of the students that he trained went into museum/curatorial work. And a good number of those, because of his connection to then the fledgling National Museum of African Art in the Smithsonian, found their positions there. Most of those positions were taken up by Sieber's students, and, although many of those students did fieldwork, the emphasis was more collection-based. The other major mentors in our field at about that same time, that is late 1960s, to early 70s were Professor Douglas Fraser at Columbia University (both collection and field focused) and Professor Robert Farris Thompson at Yale University, who, while trained as an art historian after an earlier commitment and interest in ethnomusicology, was much more field based. It was much more about art in its cultural and historical context where he has over the years and continues to engage in extensive field work. **Mithlo** Can I ask you quickly? **Drewal** Sure. **Mithlo** The difference between the collections based and the field based and you just mentioned the cultural context issue. Is the problematic of the collections based in the manner in which they were collected or that they have just been completely alienated from any other frame of reference? Is it the connoisseurship? **Drewal** That's an excellent question — the issue in our own field has been less about the ethics of how those collections have been formed because those are works that come from far away. **Mithlo** (Laughter) Wow.! **Drewal** And that's the only difference. If those collections had come from our own neighbors within our national borders I think the ethical issues of how they were collected would have been raised much earlier and much more seriously. Those ethical issues of collection are only really still to this day directed toward archaeological material because of the destruction of so many archaeological sites within Africa.

So there has been an effort, but a kind of hit and miss effort to encourage African governments to sign onto international agreements about the protection of national heritage but with very uneven policing, controls and surveillance of that. So illegal archaeological excavations continue to take place and they become more rampant as the prices for these works, these early terra cotta, stone, and metal works, have risen dramatically on the international market, which has fueled the increase in illegal excavations. So this is an important issue, that has not been a priority in our field until recently and only with archaeology material although now some works in other media, that are 19th and 20th century works that are regarded as important documents of cultural heritage in different parts of Africa are now subject to the same kinds of scrutiny or beginning to be subject to the same kinds of scrutiny… **Mithlo** That's fairly recent? **Drewal** Yes, that's recent — I would say within the last ten to fifteen years. **Mithlo** It is the collections-based then because the association is only with the connoisseurs and collectors that it is a problem or is it just that the focus is so narrow that it is very subjective, kind of arbitrary selection that you have to deal with and if you are being more culturally-based that it is a little broader? **Drewal** Well it is a bit broader and I think there are a lot of complex issues about that and I am speaking from my own personal point of view on this matter. The collections-based scholarship is being done by some scholars who have some field experience but to my way of thinking not sufficient, and therefore the works are taken out of their original context of meaning and of significance and of use and are being reinterpreted from a Western, outsider point of view, a non-indigenous point of view and I think that is a loss, a great loss. And what is happening in our field, and I don't know if there is a parallel to this in your own, is that while we encouraged and have encouraged fieldwork in our areas, that field work has become much more difficult in the last say ten to fifteen years because of the dangers of political unrest, of kidnapping, of dangerous situations for fieldwork (and the severe lack of funding for such research) so that the places where students in African art, less so African diaspora, but in African art, have fewer and fewer places where they can engage in serious long-term field research on the more "traditional" forms, forms that are continuations and transformations from the past that go up until the present. So, we've seen a dramatic shift in the field toward contemporary African art. **Mithlo** So that's a good thing for contemporary arts. **Drewal** Well it is a very good thing for contemporary art. And it is also good I think in the sense that the interest in the contemporary situation is not just with artists in Africa but also artists who are themselves in diaspora, who have gone to Europe, to France, to England, to Germany and who are working in those places. But it also means older traditions in Africa are being neglected.

Mithlo I wonder how that would play for contemporary Native arts, because there is such an emphasis on the ethnographic, right? And that's where all the legitimacy is and the validity, and you know the solid standing and the contemporary arts have always been seen as OK, well that maybe is just mimicry or it's not authentic. There has always been this cast of doubt on contemporary arts. I wonder if you take that same analogy, would contemporary Native arts become more legitimized if fieldwork was restricted? Would that be a parallel development? **Drewal** Well, it might be a parallel development. And I think the same issues of mimicry or of copying traditions rather than authenticity, the issues of authenticity are issues that come into the discussions of contemporary African arts. **Mithlo** To delegitimize it? **Drewal** Yes, critiques of it. But I think the originality of lots of contemporary art, of African and African diaspora art is becoming more and more firm, and more firmly established and essentially established through major international exhibitions, through the curatorial venue. Now thinking about academe, that is scholarship and curatorial practice, exhibitions have become a major venue for the dissemination of scholarship because there aren't very many outlets for books or long articles or monographs on African art. There aren't the journals because the field is marginalized. We have essentially one journal that has some validity because it is now juried and it wasn't in the beginning but it is a juried journal. **Mithlo** Which one? **Drewal** That is *African Arts* and it comes out of UCLA. But it has had to make compromises. In order to maintain its high design quality and its emphasis on good illustrations and good design and presentation of the material they've had to rely on advertisements from the same galleries and dealers that we also have some ethical issues with. I don't know what would be a comparable example in your area. **Mithlo** *American Indian Art Magazine*. Hey, I wanted to go back to a point before I miss it and let's keep this publications issue at play, but what struck me is that you were describing the importance of field work for giving a contextual relationship to objects and I was just thinking about with American Indian arts there is still a lot of what I call "anthro-bashing" in the field. If there is anything that is even associated with anthropologists, because of the ethical misuses in the past, the looting, the trade in grave goods and human bodies, because of that, anything smacking of anthropology at all is seen as being negative. So if you say fieldwork, fieldwork itself then is seen as being a negative as well. Although for myself personally when I think about how I do work, in order to return those objects to their producers, then having the skill base that you'd have out of that kind of training — about how to do oral interviews, how to do a longitudinal study over time with the same group of people, and understand the location and have an in-depth knowledge, all of that is anthropology. And I've always thought about that as being not necessarily art historical. In my mind, I think art historical is object-oriented, collections-based. Anthropology is fieldwork-based, contextual. Those two are the classical boundaries. I don't know if you want to comment on that at all. **Drewal** Yes, let me comment on it. I don't think an anthropological approach has the same negative connotations in our field because it's anthropologists who first began to write about and attempt to understand expressive culture which includes the visual arts, but now also the performance arts and ritual. So I think, from my point of view at least, the tools of ethnography or anthropology are important because they give importance to Native testimony, indigenous testimony and regarded it as that. And I think one of the things that we did in our field, in the field of African art history that is field based which is not strictly ethnography and anthropology because it is also art history, is that we gave prominence to the testimony of people within the culture and acknowledged their information. **Mithlo** See, I love this term testimonial, and testimony, I love those terms. Because you really, you don't hear that as much I think, in American Indians arts, you know because it has a legalistic bent, it is a foreign word, but I love the way it sounds. **Drewal** (Laughter) Well, I think it is an important part of any kind of research. Of course we, as outsiders, or in-betweeners, betwixt and between the cultures that we are trying to understand and our own that we live, we're going to present and represent it as something that reaches beyond where we started from (in our understanding) and where we are trying to go. I think our texts are also in-between texts. So I think an ethnographic or an anthropological approach is important, one in which we are no longer "participant-observers" but "observant-participants" — engaged in more experiential ways. And in our field, I think everyone who is a serious scholar in African and African diaspora arts feels that they have had to learn anthropological tools, methods, theories… and maybe, some, to learn them in order to ignore them, perhaps in many cases. **Mithlo** (Laughter.) **Drewal** But the same thing with art history. Because there are certain aspects in the discipline of art history where people feel that they do not need to or want to know anything about the object's history, its maker, its user, its cultural historical context. For them, the object stands alone and can be interpreted alone. There are art historians who still believe that, you see. **Mithlo** See, that blows my mind. Because the more I learn about art history I've told friends, gosh, it is easy, you just have to say what you think! (Laughter) It seems like it is three steps easier, but maybe I'm just reading that wrong, I don't know. **Drewal** Well, there are art historians who operate that way. **Mithlo** If it is your opinion, then it's valid and that's all you have to say! **Drewal** If it's only my opinion, then it's bullshit… it's nonsense… I think it is easy and that's why it is necessary to be avoided. Because nothing is easy. There are no easy answers, there are no simple answers, there are only complex ones. And it depends on how serious you are at going beyond the surface of things to try to get at that complexity. So I would say that we recognize in our field that you have to be part anthropologist, part visual culturalist, part art historian, and historian, you have to be all of those things if you are going to do something and say something serious. **Mithlo** I love that. Can I ask you this point about the publications? **Drewal** Yes. **Mithlo** Because I heard you before and I just wanted to be clear about this, because you were saying that a large part of your field is exhibits driven because of the lack of publications. **Drewal** It's had to be. Yes. **Mithlo** How do you assess that? Is that where the field should go? Looking at a parallel with American Indian arts, I see the same thing. Museum catalogues are really important and part of the tension in the field is that academia often doesn't count those as being valid. Anthropology certainly does not. Yet if that is the engine that drives the theoretical development of your field how do you think about the training? I see all those things as being really tied together. People need to be trained as professionals in academia so they can have some level of authority in the field, yet their advancement is tied to the academic publications that they can produce — books and journal articles — not exhibit catalogues. Has that been a major challenge? **Drewal** Yes, it has been a challenge but I also think it's been an advantage. If one is positioned in a discipline and at the center of a discipline, so say in the discipline of art history, if one is centered in Western, so called Western art history, it is much easier to find venues for strictly academic publications that focus on internal debates within the academy, that is theory, method, points of interpretation and so on. And I think those kinds of publications/conversations can be useful, but they are not as useful from my point of view as something that is geared to a much broader audience, a general audience. And that is the benefit of exhibitions and that is the benefit of writing catalogues. Because catalogues, exhibition catalogues, have to avoid the kind of obfuscation that is prized in some academic publications. And it becomes, in attempting to reach a much broader audience, scholarship that is public scholarship. And it seems to me that is what scholars in this country and elsewhere need to do. I think the academy is rightly criticized as being an ivory tower when it engages in this kind of internal debate, and very esoteric debate that really doesn't seem to have much impact beyond the tower. And I think we, in our field, need to become much more public scholars and I think exhibitions allow that to happen. But doing exhibitions and writing catalogues is a very different set of skills that you have to obtain which you don't necessarily learn in graduate school unless you have had the opportunity of trying to put an exhibition together or work on an exhibition. So, in my own career and in the career of many of my colleagues, we have had to learn that by trial and error, by doing it and just taking on the challenge and seeing what we could do. Y