INDIGENOUS PERSPECTIVES ON CONTEMPORARY NATIVE ART, INDIGENOUS AESTHETICS AND REPRESENTATION

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AND REPRESENTATION

by

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ABSTRACT

In this dissertation I examine and posit Indigenous perspectives on contemporary Native art, Indigenous aesthetics and issues of representation. Contemporary Native art at this moment is best described as an expression of values—personal or communal or cultural—with an attention to material conditions and current issues. I employ Indigenous methodologies and Tribal Critical Race theory as a critical framework to intervene in the dominant discourse on Native art. This research focuses on the narratives and perspectives of eight artists who represent a cross-section of the current state of Native arts production in North America drawing from the local Native arts community in Santa Fe, New Mexico, various urban areas of the United States, and a artist in Vancouver, British Columbia. These artists span three generations of artistic practice that includes display, performance, lecture and education. I utilize the current scholarship on Native arts, curatorial practice and the perspectives of museum professionals from the Institute of American Indian Arts, a federally chartered college and museum.

Utilizing Indigenous perspectives and frameworks is necessary for understanding Native art and Indigenous aesthetics, particularly in public institutions such as museums. Reclaiming the apparatus of an institution like the museum promotes and encourages the recognition of Indigenous ways of knowing, models of representation and the delivery of knowledge pertaining to Native arts and culture. The Native museum becomes a site to re-educate the general public about the complexities of identity and influence, cross-cultural exchanges, and the prevalence of thriving Indigenous living cultures. This is an
area of research that is under-developed and I extend the discourse on Native art theory and representation through Indigenous aesthetics.

Indigenous aesthetics are an expression of a continuum of cultural production and connections to place, language, culture, traditions, values, oral histories and Indigenous knowledge, ancestry and also to future generations. This includes indigenous mapping where the connection to place is tied into worldview, ceremony, language, songs, dance, prayer, family and cultural continuity. Native American art is a spectrum of expression, influences and perspectives represented in forms that embody an expansive range where I utilize the terms essentialism and hybridity. Essentialism employs the concepts of cultural distinctiveness and tribal sovereignty that allows the Native artist to claim and interpret cultural patrimony. Hybridity, in an Indigenous context, resists the limitations of dominant culture projections of Native culture and encourages innovation, adaptation and a response to influences, current conditions and new media.

Native artists use Indigenous aesthetics to respond to colonialism through political/social commentary, addresses stereotype and racism, indicating survivance and enacting cultural sovereignty. When Native artists and intellectuals do this they are re-appropriating or indigenizing ideas, symbols, mascots, the colonial gaze. I discuss re-presentation of Native arts and the ongoing development of Indigenous aesthetics through recent exhibitions, current scholarship, Native curatorial practice and the ethnographic narratives of Native artists. I extend the current discourse on Indigenous aesthetics through the concept of the Indigenization of space that occurs when Native people reclaim a location through cultural signifiers, performance, ceremony, song, dance, or installation conveying the existence and presence of Native peoples. My research illustrates how Native people reclaim cultural, intellectual and physical patrimony through this new discourse by using Native critical theory and methodologies, Indigenous aesthetics and Native art terminology.
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Critical Ethnography

Critical Analysis and Theory

Indigenous Methodology

Research Methods

Ethics/Reflexivity

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Chapter 1 Introduction

This dissertation is an examination of Indigenous perspectives on contemporary Native art, Indigenous aesthetics and issues of representation using Indigenous epistemologically centered methodologies. Contemporary Native art at this moment is best described as an expression of values—personal or communal or cultural—with an attention to material conditions and current issues. This research focuses on the narratives and perspectives of eight artists who represent a cross-section of the current state of Native arts production in North America drawing from the local Native arts community in Santa Fe, New Mexico, various urban areas of the United States, and an artist in Vancouver, British Columbia. I extend the discourse on Indigenous aesthetics using Native forms of representation through specific Native artists, scholarship on Native arts, curatorial practice and the perspectives of museum professionals from the Institute of American Indian Arts, a federally chartered college and museum.

Indigenous aesthetics encompass multiple perspectives, influences, ideologies, cosmologies and connections to place and community that can often reference oral histories, traditions, language and spirituality and signify presence, adaptation and a continuum of cultural production. Indigenous aesthetics support and validate the cultural distinctiveness of Native artists, tribal sovereignty and Indigenous ways of being. This is an area of research that is under-developed and I will extend the discourse on Native art theory and representation.

Historically, the art and material culture from Indigenous cultures has been the source material and inspiration for Euro-American art or the object of collection, consumption and anthropological inquiry (Dubin, 2001; Errington, 1994). Mainstream
perceptions of Native America are disseminated and reinforced through academic disciplines and popular culture misrepresentations. Arts from Africa, Oceania and the Americas are often taught separately from the canon of Western art (Berlo & Wilson, 1993; Mackenzie, 2001; Kampen-O'Riley, 2006). Images prevalent in popular culture reinforce stereotype and racism toward Indigenous peoples perpetuating the myth of a singular vanishing race. These representations of Native art, culture and people are reductive, under-informed, and often occlude an Indigenous voice or suppress Indigenous knowledge. As the perception of culture is important, I will discuss conceptions of culture in relation to Native American representation.

Since European contact, Native American people and cultures have been the object of study, collection, appropriation, surveillance, and federal policy. Anthropological research in the 1800s lead to the creation of a salvage paradigm for Native material culture around the turn of the twentieth century which included collecting and studying Native Americans to preserve and capture the most salient aspects of the original culture before it was influenced, assimilated or extinct (Berlo, 1992; Dubin, 2001). Cultural anthropologists Franz Boas (1928) and Bronislaw Malinowski (1922) developed ethnography as the primary methodological approach to the study of Native art and culture. Their contributions to anthropological and ethnographic research contribute to more nuanced understandings of Indigenous peoples in relation to their histories and cultures. Malinowski (1922) introduced the notion of the intimate knower or inside informant, a person who could become knowledgeable on a subject by “going native.” Geertz’s (1973, 1989) ethnographic approach introduced more nuanced understandings of culture through “thick descriptions.” I find these methodologies, however productive,
problematic as they position the researcher as the authority instead of the originating peoples and the researcher has typically observed and analyzed through a Western, Euro-American or dominant culture lens. In this context, the research benefits the academy and not the communities and subjects of inquiry.

Ethnography has transitioned through several adaptations of functionalism, symbolic interactionism, positivism and post-positivism to its current iteration, critical ethnography. Critical ethnography is a research methodology that decentralizes the authority of the researcher, is dialogic in nature, and is grounded in theory and method (Madison, 2005). Critical ethnography involves the use of theory and method. Tribal Critical Theory (Brayboy, 2005), decolonizing methodologies and Indigenous methodologies (Smith, 1999; Denzin, Lincoln, & Smith, 2008) form the conceptual framework and inform critical ethnographic research methods.

Ethnographic narratives of Native American art and culture are typically written from a Western perspective, for a non-Native audience, and with minimal inclusion of Native scholarship (Sloan & La Farge, 1931, Douglas & D'Harnoncourt, 1941; Brody, 1971, Bernstein & Rushing, 1995; Berlo & Phillips, 1998; Penney, 2004, Leuthold, 1998). The privileging of non-Native scholarship occludes an Indigenous perspective while reifying the positionality of Western discourse and knowledge production. As a Native scholar and member of this marginalized group that is often the subject of ethnographic inquiry, I am acutely aware of the issues prevalent in ethnographic research. These issues concern the appropriation and exploitation of Indigenous cultures and diminishing the legitimacy of Indigenous knowledge. Critical ethnography requires the use of critical theory to identify researcher positionality and to address the needs of the
community or group being researched (Madison, 2005). Critical ethnography therefore is a salient methodological framework to study Native arts and culture representation.

Research Questions

This dissertation began with the overarching question: What is contemporary Native art? In order to clarify the question and focus my research I also asked: What are Indigenous aesthetics and why are they important to the discussion of Native art? How are Indigenous aesthetics utilized in the display and representation of public Native art? Who makes contemporary Native art?

Definitions

As the scholarship on Native art history expands and becomes a more developed academic discipline, the need for more nuanced and informed definitions and descriptives becomes apparent and necessary. While this is not meant to be definitive, I am illustrating issues that stem from the problematics of representation, defining the discourse and the politics of identity while prioritizing Indigenous perspectives (Parezo, 1990, Desai, 2000; Herzog & Stolte, 2012; Mithlo, 2012). Western representations in institutions such as museums and academic disciplines historicizes inaccuracies and dominant culture projections of Native culture based on salvage ethnography or inclusion of Native art as inspiration for Western art. These representations reduce Native material culture to artifact or craft. Commercialism and the commodification of Native culture create both static categories and classification while also politicizing Native art and identity. I will explicate the use of Native or Indigenous within this context as well as my conceptions of Native art and Indigenous aesthetics.
Since the turn of the twentieth century, Native art and artifact were relegated to natural science museums and displayed as the objects of conquest of a vanishing or ancient pre-civilization. This display method, as evidenced in institutions such as the American Museum of Natural History and the Smithsonian, had taken a salvage-ethnography approach to Native arts and culture (Herzog & Stolte, 2012).1 Chickasaw nation scholar Amanda Cobb (2005) stated

Museums offer significant bodies of scholarship and knowledge that cannot be discounted; nevertheless, museological practices are underpinned by Western epistemologies, systems of classification, and ideological assumptions that, when applied to Native Americans, have functioned in exploitative, objectifying, and demeaning ways. By using a historically unquestioned authority to take Native objects and remains and to define who and what Native Americans are, museums have, in many ways, trapped Native Americans behind their glassed-in cases, rendering vital, contemporary Native voices silent, dynamic Native cultures invisible, and abstract concepts of legal and cultural sovereignty difficult to exercise in meaningful ways. (488)

The Smithsonian’s National Museum of the American Indian, while presenting a historiography of Native arts and culture also focuses on the idea of living cultures with the consultation, collaboration and inclusion of Native voices and perspectives (Jacknis, 2006; Lonetree, 2006).2 However, Native art is still categorized and sublimated as

2 Lonetree (2006) described the “complicated and evolving relationship” between Natives and museums in her article Missed Opportunities: Reflections on the NMAI.
ethnographic; that is, Native art is often grouped and displayed apart from the canons of Western, Euro-American art. This is evident today in museums nationally as well as internationally including the Louvre and the Quai Branly. Museums that display Native art using anthropological, ethnographic, and Western art historical models as interpretative lenses work to sublimate Native peoples and cultures into an imagined or romanticized past, creating an absence of authentic Native representations in the present. Within academia and specifically in the disciplines of art history, anthropology and archaeology, Western forms of art, culture and civilization are typically prioritized while the material culture of less developed nations become devalued or are offered as inspiration for the dominant culture’s achievements. A classical example of this is the Primitivism movement in Western Art. The 1984 MoMA exhibition Primitivism in 20th Century Art: Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern illustrates this point succinctly (Rubin, 1984). Herzog and Stolte (2012) argued for “a reconceptualization of art history’s discursive frameworks, canonical narratives, and assumptions about art, artists, and representation.” They also suggest that Native art should be included in the study of American art. While inclusion in Western frameworks would seem to indicate a higher regard for Native art, this inclusion would problematically overlook the distinct characteristics that become visible only when considered within an Indigenous framework.

Native art is often delimited as primarily ethnographic and Native artists continue to struggle for acceptance into mainstream art markets. Much of Native material culture is regarded as artifact, an elevated level of craft, but it is not seen as comparable to Western forms of art. Thus, Native art and subsequently Native culture(s) are reduced to
products. In the Southwest there is a long history of tourism and commodification of culture (Clifford, 1988; Parezo, 1990; Berlo, 1992; Dubin, 2001). The consumption of American Indian material culture created this region’s consumer culture mainly through galleries, trading posts and art markets like the Santa Fe Indian Market that re-inscribe and reinforce primarily the Western imposed representations of Native America. The Santa Fe Indian Market, founded in 1922, is the largest and oldest juried Native art show and market. The show takes place on the streets of the historic Santa Fe Plaza over two days every third weekend of August. The market features approximately twelve hundred juried artists who are enrolled members of federally recognized tribes and gets over 100,000 visitors to the event. The Southwestern Association for Indian Arts (SWAIA) who produces the Santa Fe Indian Market creates standards and guidelines that literally define Native art

There are 10 kinds of art in both traditional and contemporary forms you can buy at the Santa Fe Indian Market: Jewelry, Pottery, Sculpture, Textiles, Paintings, Wooden Carvings (Kachinas), Bead Work, Baskets and Diverse Arts, which encompass a variety of items including drums, bows and arrows, cradle boards, etc., There are literally thousands of handcrafted works of art for sale….SWAIA guarantees that its artists adhere to strict production and material guidelines. (Indian Market 2012 Dates and FAQs, 2012)

SWAIA’s categorizations, contemporary and traditional, are problematic as it fictionalizes a fissure in cultural production instead of allowing for a more nuanced representation of living, continual, thriving cultures. In Changing Hands: Art without Reservation 2, SWAIA executive director Bruce Bernstein (2005) elaborated
Unfortunately, definitions of “traditional” and non-traditional” continue to permeate the Indian art market and the Indian world, originating from both artist and consumer, most flagrantly in the standards and judging of experts who bemuse us with pontifications on the art’s authenticity, age, and aesthetic quality. If we were to read an indigenously authentic history of Indian art history, we would immediately understand that the tradition of all Indian art is change itself, rather than the way the market and museums have promulgated traditional Indian art as unchanged. (179)

Yet, these categories remain entrenched in the current understanding and evaluation of Native arts within the art market. As an academic, Bernstein acknowledged the dynamics in place and that as an administrator the bureaucratic mechanisms for change are slow; however this art market ideology extends into museum and academic representations as well. Metis/Cree filmmaker Loretta Todd (1992) asserted

By reducing our cultural expression to simply the question of modernism or post-modernism, art or anthropology, or whether we are contemporary or traditional, we are placed on the edges of the dominant culture, while the dominant culture determines whether we are allowed to enter its realm of art. (75)

Todd’s critical essay appeared in the 1992 exhibition catalog *Indigena: Contemporary Perspectives in Canadian Art* and resonates today. Evaluating Native art through rubrics which dichotomize art, as in contemporary versus traditional, form static misnomers that force a distinction between an ahistorical, pre-contact nostalgia and current cultural production.
The consumption and commercialism of Native culture historicizes the romanticized projections of Native peoples in popular culture. What occurs is a binary of absence and presence where there is an absence of actual Native people and a presence of a fabricated, fictionalized Euro-American version of Indian (Vizenor 1999, 2000). Using a Westernized lens to describe and codify Native art and culture creates a reified simulation that can be abstracted, decontextualized, and commodified. Collectors typically place higher value on items that reflect and reinforce these simulations. Up until a few years ago, the contemporary work that didn’t have obvious Native cultural or ethnic signifiers, symbols or expected imagery didn’t win as many awards at the major Indian art markets in Phoenix and Santa Fe. These markets have become the standard for what is regarded as quality Indian art. The recognition is still disproportionately higher for work that is traditional, historic or tribal culturally specific. Also, the number of jewelry, pottery, Indian rug and Western frontier painting stores and galleries send a clear message that the simulation still has power and efficacy. Due to the cost, collectability, and perceived rarity of Native art, non-Native stakeholders police issues of identity and authenticity—not for the benefit of the Native artist or tribe represented—but to protect the investment of the purchaser. A central example of this is the Indian Arts and Crafts Act (1990) where Native identity is defined and regulated through Federal policy. Native American is the only ethnic/racial designation that requires a pedigree/blood quantum. This external imposition undermines Native sovereignty and self-determination (Barker, 2003).

3 Indian Arts and Crafts Act (1990) – See Appendix A
Perpetuating the use of the terms Indian, American Indian or Native American, which are an inaccurate, reductive and naturalized system of naming, reifies the notion of distinctly different and culturally diverse peoples existing in a homogenous, monolithic cultural group. When Native American art and culture is displayed and represented in public institutions, such as museums and academia, it is often packaged, presented, and consumed through the lens of the dominant culture, creating an imagined past where American Indian people are static, immutable parts of colonial history and conquest. I use Native or Indigenous interchangeably throughout to refer to peoples connected to land, place, ideology, language, culture, cosmology, and ways of knowing, particularly the domestically dependent nations within the United States. I drop the use of American or Indian to infer a paradigm shift away from colonial referents. Indigenous also refers Native peoples to marginalized, disenfranchised nations globally. I am using a North American context for Native and Indigenous as that is my frame of reference. My Indigenous worldview grounds this understanding through relationships and ties to communities that extend from my home, extended families, and cultures, which form my center, outward in concentric circles to my affiliations with Native people and communities across the continent. I also recognize the need for Native people to self-identify based on their membership to a specific culture, community or sovereign nation. I use tribal names, where applicable, to reference the artists connections to those peoples, histories and nations.

I consider Native art as a spectrum of work ranging from culturally specific art forms and historic reproductions to use of new media and influences where Native signifiers, symbolism and references are not obvious or overt. The focus of this study is
centered on living artists who are using art as a means of communicating their experiences as a Native person today which necessarily means pushing at the well-seated boundaries of what constitutes Native America art. Native people adapt and incorporate new ideas, influences and materials into their lexicon of cultural expression. I refer to this re-conceptualizing and reframing as Indigenizing of materials and space, discursive and physical. Continuity is a key component to this discussion as Native people are currently and have continuously produced art that reflects their cross-cultural influences, experiences and cultural expressions. In this context, traditional is not static but dynamic. I utilize contemporary as a way to reference Native artists as existing in the present and producing art while contextualizing Native people and culture as part of the present, connected to their histories, values, worldviews, and moving forward.

I extend the discourse on Native art theory and representation through Indigenous aesthetics by applying Indigenous definitions of culture and material production through the concepts of relationships, community, problematizing essentialism and hybridity, counterstorytelling, and survivance. Relationships are important as they signify nuanced connections to place, ecologies, tribal histories, oral histories, language, traditions, cosmologies, tribal affiliations and responsibilities to community. In many Indigenous beliefs, creations stories, cosmologies, and worldviews is the understanding that the people come from and have a relationship to the earth. This concept is reaffirmed through language, prayers, songs and spiritual practice. Encoded in our stories, songs and language are mores and values like respect. They impart knowledge, teach us how to live and also describe our relationship to each other and the earth. Indigenous connections to
community extend from family to specific tribal nations to the larger context of Native America, in other words from local to global.

Indigenous aesthetics encompass a continuum of expression, influences and multiple perspectives represented in Native art. I problematize value laden terms like essentialism and hybridity to show how the meanings of these terms become convoluted in an Indigenous context. I am not advocating that essentialism and hybridity replace terms like contemporary or traditional as I think dichotomizing Native art into binaries is not productive or an Indigenous way of thinking about or describing Native art or culture. I am using these terms strategically to demonstrate important Indigenous perspectives on cultural production and identity.

Essentialism refers to how Native people maintain distinct cultural particularity through language, traditions, value systems and ways of knowing. I employ this term to signify tribal sovereignty, rights to cultural patrimony, self-identification and resistance to the notion of Native America as a singular homogenous cultural group. In a Native context, hybridity refers to Native people’s participation in varying memberships of cultural, ethnic, communal, national, and spiritual spheres. For example, a Native person can be a member of a particular sovereign tribal nation, speak their specific language and dialect, participate in tribal cultural and social functions and also be a member of the United States and the Catholic Church.

Native people occupy a liminal space politically due to the dual membership of their particular sovereign nation and the United States and also racially or ethnically due to the cross-cultural negotiations that occur from home environments to participation.
within the dominant culture. I utilize hybridity as a way of examining the liminal space that Native Americans inhabit between the racial and the political and how that liminality corresponds to “colonial anxiety” (Bhabha, 1994; Spivak, 1998, Brayboy, 2005). Colonial anxiety refers to the persistence of Native peoples to resist assimilatory practices, the cross-cultural influence that Natives have contributed to the dominant culture, and the uneasy relationship between the United States and sovereign Native tribal nations. Indigenous conceptions of culture contain a number of cross-cultural negotiations where there are intersections of ideology and performance. This occurs within Native communities during social and ceremonial events but also when Indigenous people interact in mainstream society or away from their home communities. The concept of hybridity in this context allows for Native people to essentialize their identity and cultural distinctiveness while simultaneously participating in multimodal and multivocal environments (Bhabha, 1994; Gunn Allen, 1998; Rangel, 2006).

Hybridity, through a contemporary Native art perspective, refers to the use and purposeful manipulation of media and materials, symbols, iconography and metaphor to express values, current issues and material conditions of Native peoples. This idea of hybridity rejects the presumption that Native art has to look a certain expected way and has to be out of a recognizable list of acceptable and established mediums such as textiles, pottery, silver/turquoise, beads/feathers, etc. Native artists use Indigenous aesthetics to respond to colonialism through political/social commentary, address stereotype and racism, indicating survivance and enacting cultural sovereignty. When Native artists and intellectuals do this they are re-appropriating or indigenizing ideas, symbols, mascots, the colonial gaze.
Counter-storytelling involves being aware of historicizing narratives and producing work, academic or creative, which reclaims cultural and intellectual patrimony through thoughtful and purposeful representations that not only reveal critique, but also counterpoint. Reclaiming negative imagery and introducing social or political commentary is only one aspect of counter-storytelling. Another aspect involves extending Anishinabe author Gerald Vizenor’s (1999, 2000) notion of “survivance,” a combination of survival and resistance. Counter-storytelling, while enacting survivance, engages the persistence and continuity of Native cultures, worldviews, languages, cosmologies and belief systems while reflecting them intellectually, creatively, socially and politically. This form of counter-storytelling is informed by colonizing histories but not dependent on them for inspiration. In addition to challenging preconceived notions and Western constructions of Native America, counter-storytelling is important for affirming Indigenous perspectives on creating art, cultural meaning, knowledge production and understanding the material conditions in the lives of real Native people. Native arts, cultures, histories and knowledge systems have significance apart from colonizing or dominant culture constructs. The artists in this study reflect both aspects of counter-storytelling through their personal narratives and the work they produce.
**Significance**

Writing about Native arts representation from an Indigenous perspective is vital for a number of reasons. Natives are under-represented in the academy, particularly in Native arts discourse. There is very little written about contemporary Native arts, Native art theory or curatorial practice, and most of what is written about Native art is from a western perspective. The majority of research on Native arts and culture to date is primarily written by and for a non-Native audience. The number of books available by Native scholars about Native art and culture is disproportionally low to those written by non-Natives indicating that there is a need for more Native scholarship.

This lack of Native scholarship is especially troubling given the prevalent stereotypical imagery and ideologies projected through popular culture, public institutions and books that omit or obscure the Native voice. These dominant culture representations reify romanticized notions and naturalize racism. This research examines Western forms of representation and uses Western cultural theory to explain the marginalization and silencing that occurs in academia and popular culture. Naming and critiquing Western forms of representation, while useful and important, does not equate to solution. I utilize Tribal Critical Race Theory (TribalCrit) and Indigenous methodologies to form the conceptual framework that informs my research methods for interpreting and analyzing Native art.

Indigenous and decolonizing methodologies are useful in deconstructing dominant ideologies, imperialistic research practices and hegemonic knowledge production. TribalCrit posits that Indigenous concepts of knowledge, culture and power are imperative for producing scholarship, pedagogy and understanding the perspectives,
material conditions and current issues relevant to Indigenous peoples and their communities. Decolonizing and Indigenous methodologies conceptually structure the research methods and also the subsequent analysis and presentation of critical ethnographic research. These methodological and ethical concepts create the possibility for more appropriate and culturally relevant research and begin to redress the legacy of misrepresentation of Native peoples and cultures.

Conducting research with Native Americans requires the use of critical ethnography. Critical ethnography is appropriate to study Native arts and culture representation when conducted through an Indigenous epistemologically centered methodology. This ethnographic project includes community-based and collaborative research and praxis resulting in scholarship that benefits the Native arts community and Native America at large. A community response is necessary for change to occur. Which means participation by both Native and non-Native researchers

Understanding Native art and aesthetics through Native perspectives (epistemologies) is central to producing better scholarship and representation while promoting and acknowledging Indigenous worldviews and knowledge production (Mithlo, 2011, 2012; Farrell Racette, 2011; ahtone, 2009, 2012; Rangel 2006, 2012). My research uncovers Indigenous definitions of culture and material production through the concepts of relationships, community, problematizing essentialism and hybridity, counterstorytelling, survivance and the Indigenization of space.
Chapter 2 Literature Review

Conceptions of culture

The study of art and culture, from Western discourse, reveals the way Euro-American representations marginalizes, abstracts and appropriates Native art and culture. I begin with Western representations and perspectives on Native peoples through academic disciplines and popular culture that create fictionalized, romanticized simulations of the Native North American Indian. Western cultural theorists, Benjamin and Baudrillard, explain how the abstraction, simulacra and appropriation of Native America occur. I use these examples to illustrate how the dominant culture has a long, continual history of misrepresentation and there is a need to address these forms of naturalized racism. Critique alone is not sufficient. I posit that the solution involves not only recognition and acknowledgement of these damaging forms of representation, but the consultation and collaboration with Indigenous artists and scholars directly, including Native informants and epistemologies as primary resources, and the application of Indigenous methodologies. The current literature on North American Indian art and Indigenous aesthetics reveal advancement towards a more nuanced understanding of Native people and culture.

Academic research and popular culture have shown that Native American culture is invented, abstracted and appropriated to signify what the dominant culture needs at the time (Berlo, 1992; Jonaitis, 1992; Clifford, 1988; Deloria, 1998; Vizenor, 1999, 2000; Dubin, 2001; Rangel, 2006). Tourism, patronage and the commodification of Native culture lead to the creation of the native arts movement and establishing the Western
classifications of traditional and contemporary that allowed Native arts to be ethnic but not mainstream (Brody, 1971; Jones, 1992; Jonaitis, 1992; Errington, 1994; Cohodas, 1999). Within art history and mainstream art markets, the delineation between art and artifact is often used as a signature distinction used to distinguish ethnic marginalized groups from White, Euro-American mainstream culture. Much of Native material culture is regarded as artifact, but it is not seen as comparable to Western forms of art. Thus, Native art and subsequently Native culture(s) are reduced to products and also symbols for appropriation. Vizenor (1999, 2000) described how “Indian” is a fabrication, a romanticized simulation whose presence permeates popular culture and creates an absence of actual Native peoples and thriving cultures. Native authors Gerald Vizenor (1999, 2000) and Phillip Deloria (1998) examine the simulation and symbol of “Indian” to discuss what this term signifies and the erasure and eradication of Native culture(s) and identity(s), while simultaneously authenticating Euro-American national identity. There are also trends and advertisements in popular culture depicting non-Natives in stereotypical Indian or Plains style costume—such as feathered headbands, fringed leather and war paint. These are Western projections of Native American culture that are monolithic, static, one-dimensional and offensive that promote stereotype, racism and the denigration of Native peoples.

4 The online blog: nativeappropriations.blogspot.com documents popular culture iterations. The description for the site reads: Native Appropriations is a forum for discussing the use of Indigenous cultures, traditions, languages, and images in popular culture, advertising, and everyday life.
Natives inpopularculture

Generally speaking, when one thinks about Native America a number of popular
culture images and products readily come to mind, such as tipis, bare-chested riders on
horseback wearing feather headdresses, the Lone Ranger and Tonto, Kevin Costner’s
movie, *Dances with Wolves*, Disney’s *Pocahontas*, sports mascots such as the Fighting
Illini, the Chicago Braves, the Washington Redskins, and the Cleveland Indians\(^5\), and of
course, Thanksgiving. Native art, or what some still refer to as Indian art, is commonly
associated with silver and turquoise, dreamcatchers, objects adorned with beads and
feathers, or pottery and textiles, particularly Navajo rugs—crafts and souvenirs—which
have become the defining feature of Native art. These examples exemplify how popular
culture representations commodify, fetishize, and romanticize their abstracted versions of
Native arts and culture, serving the consumers who buy them; thus Indian becomes
something that can be consumed, collected and reinterpreted. These grievous
misrepresentations of Native culture help to illustrate the prevalent misconceptions
disseminated and naturalized to the general public. More specifically, when Native art
and culture is displayed and represented in public institutions, such as museums and
academia, it is often packaged and presented—and consumed—through the lens of the
dominant culture, creating an imagined past where Native peoples are static, immutable
parts of colonial history and conquest.

\(^5\) Blue Corn Comics, a Native online magazine, covers the mascot issue on their “Team
Names and Mascots” page (http://www.bluecorncomics.com/mascots.htm).
Cultural theory and issues of representation

Western cultural theorists, Benjamin (1969) and Baudrillard (1988), explain how the abstraction, simulacra and appropriation of Native America occurs when framed through Euro-American dominant culture perspectives. These mechanisms aid in understanding and naming the power structures, technologies and surveillance imposed on Native peoples while conceptualizing resistance, counter-narrative and alternative discourse (Vizenor, 1999, 2000; Deloria, 1998; Barker, 2003). Walter Benjamin (1969) articulates the methods through which Western representational frameworks replicate art so as to remove art from its originating context and, thereby, alter its significance and value. The power to remove products of material culture from one specific context to another, as with cultural objects in an ethnographic museum exhibit, is an important tool for maintaining Euro-American hegemony while marginalizing Native art from the mainstream. Euro-Americans define Indian art as hand made and then value it for this quality; thus, Indian-made art because it's not mass-produced. Paradoxically, Euro-American popular culture can take a “Native object” and reproduce it through its various machineries and media such as print, digital, and broadcast. This use of technology reduces the nuanced, distinct cultures such as the Haida, Cheyenne, Oneida, or Navajo to a generalized cultural signifier that becomes a symbol; through that process of reduction the symbol comes to signify what Euro-America wants and needs it to signify. I argue that this type of reduction of Native arts/cultures becomes a simulation, silencing and erasing and the originating cultures.

Similarly, Jean Baudrillard’s (1988) characterizations of “simulation and simulacrum” draw on the reduction of art through mechanical reproduction (Benjamin,
Baudrillard (1988) posited that the original is replaced by a replicate or facsimile. The facsimile is a reduction of the original so as to be usable and consumable. Euro-Americans create their version of Indian arts and culture, a simulation of the real and an absence of actual Native arts and cultural expression. In this regard, Baudrillard (1988) and Benjamin (1969) illustrate that the Euro-American simulation of the Indian is consumable, collectable and not dependent on the original for context, authenticity or meaning. Here are a few examples. Katsina dolls and ornamental pottery become synonymous with the Southwest. Indians in headdresses or feather become sports mascots. Hobbyists become Plains culture, specifically Lakota (Sioux), experts and enthusiasts—even to the point of creating social, cultural, and ceremonial events like pow-wows or the sundance without the consultation, inclusion or sanction of Native people. The New Age movement and alternative healing practice have co-opted aspects of Native spiritual belief, ritual and ceremony with little regard for observing traditional, cultural protocols or understanding the intrinsic connections these things have to a system that includes place, a way of being or knowing, language, oral histories and Indigenous cultural knowledge.6

Native creative writers, historians and literary critics have incorporated elements of Western cultural theory in their own work, appropriating and reframing it in order to construct Indigenous conceptual frameworks for the production and study of Native literature (Warrior, 1995; Deloria, 1998; Owens, 1999; Womack, 1999; Vizenor 1999, 2001).

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6 The most visible and documented example is self-help guru and motivational speaker James Ray who was convicted of negligent homicide while conducting his interpretation of a sweat lodge ceremony. http://abcnews.go.com/US/james-ray-found-guilty-negligent-homicide-arizona-sweat/story?id=13908037
2000; Weaver, 2001). I draw on three Native authors to expand on the concepts of simulation, abstraction and appropriation in popular culture representations. Lakota historian Deloria (1998) traces the historiography of Euro-America’s early attempts to assert its national distinctiveness, which was to essentialize an identity and claim to the North American continent through the appropriation of their monochromatic, generic version of (typically Plains) Indian culture and tradition. Deloria (1998) popularized the term “playing Indian” which sounds a lot like Malinowski’s (1922) “going native.” However, playing Indian specifically involves Euro-America performance of Indian as an expression of personal or national identity. The Euro-American dominant culture appropriates the simulation of Native cultural signifiers to validate their own authentic nationalism through various performances such as the Boston Tea Party, Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts of America, team mascots, hobbyist and “Indian clubs” and the New Age movement (Deloria, 1998; Barker, 2003).

Lenape nation scholar Joanne Barker (2003) also examines the need for American “authenticity” as “…preferring a retreat into nostalgia and transcendence from a modern, impersonal society through Indian beliefs that they believed connected them to a more authentic, natural truth” (58). Therefore, I argue, that the Euro-American dominant culture has an ambivalent sense of national identity that is fabricated through the imagining of Euro-Americans as the originating and authentic peoples of the Americas by appropriating, and claiming as their own, interpretations and translations of various Native cultural signifiers. Co-opted in this way, these signifiers are corrupted, becoming distorted simulations of Native peoples from diverse nations and cultures. Barker (2003)
points to the ideological problem inherent in Euro-America’s relationship to Native America when referencing Deloria’s “Playing Indian”:

Indian-made art has made it possible, at least in part, not only to possess and own the Indian but to perform an Indianness that is personally and socially transformative. The contradictions within such practices form the foundation of a U.S. nationalism that has enacted a systematic dispossession and genocide of Indian people. (60)

What is at stake is the ownership or proprietary use of a set of symbols, stereotypes, and misrepresentations aimed at the marginalization and denigration of culturally and linguistically different peoples representing 565 federally recognized tribes, and also the various unaccounted, undocumented, or non-status Indigenous in North America. This narrative is prevalent and most visible in popular culture representations such as children’s toys, advertisements, sports mascots and movies depicting Native people and culture. Extending this concept further, Vizenor (1999) introduces terminology that describes the structuring, naming, codifying, regulating, and surveillance that affects the mobility and agency of Native peoples. Vizenor (1999, 2000) identified an absence/presence paradigm illustrated by the presence of the simulation I have described, what he calls “Indian,” an absence of the “Native”. Vizenor argued that by privileging the Indian simulation, the dominant culture could conveniently ignore and continually displace and dispossess actual Native people with living, thriving cultures. It is necessary to recognize, name and understand these historical representations as they structure and reinforce current mainstream perceptions of Native people and culture.
Native North American Indian Art

A review of the texts on Native art and Indigenous aesthetics illustrate the need for Indigenous critical analysis and representation. The literature on Native American art focuses primarily on historic or culturally based objects and material culture with minimal inclusion or mention of contemporary works and a lack of Indigenous perspectives (Herzog & Stolte, 2012). Cherokee scholar Haworth (2007) elaborated We recognize that Native artists have far too frequently been marginalized or ignored by the mainstream art world of curators, collectors, and critics. Historic objects made by Indians command top dollar at art auctions. And many ‘Indian markets’ give substantial attention to tradition-based textiles, ceramics, basketry, and beadwork made by living Native people. Considerably less attention is paid to contemporary Native ‘gallery’ art—paintings, sculpture, public art, installations, performance art, multimedia art, and conceptually based and site-specific pieces that reflect contemporary techniques and aesthetics or comment on today’s issues.

Two surveys on Native North American Indian art provide historical accounts of Native art and trace the influence of contact on Native art and cultural production (Berlo & Phillips, 1998; Penney, 2004). As surveys, these texts present an overview of Native art through geographic regional grouping. Both texts identify the need for stronger Native recognition and participation in the discourse on Native arts representation.

David Penney’s (2004) North American Indian Art covers Native cultural production from pre-Contact through the assimilatory periods to the near present, around the end of the last century. Penney’s introductory chapter describes modern day Native people and problematizes art, aesthetics and historical and anthropological
representations. The next seven chapters, divided by geographic region, explain the anthropological, ethnological, and historical aspects of Indigenous material culture. Interestingly, there is very little discussion on contemporary or current Native American art until the last chapter. Penney (2004) suggested in his closing statement, “Native Artists…have seized the apparatus of larger cultural discourse, the studio, the university, the gallery the museum…but they are still represented primarily by museums specializing in Native American Art” (212). This limited scope of representation is problematic as Native art is relegated to ethnic, historic or folk art and is not recognized as having the same value and status as Western, dominant culture forms of contemporary art. Penney framed the opening and closing chapters with survivance. I argue that in order for this text to fully enact and embody survivance, Native voices and perspectives have to be a strong component of the analysis throughout the text.

Berlo and Phillips (1998) *Native North American Art*, written prior to Penney’s (2004) survey text apply regional geographic grouping as an organizational method. Herzog and Stolte (2012) observed both texts “consider changes in materials, techniques, and imagery in Native art in response to contact and colonization; themes of continuity, innovation, adaptation, and resistance; and, countering the presumed anonymity and collective orientation of Native artists, the work of individual artists.” Berlo and Phillips (1998) assert that belief, cosmology, spiritual value or significance, symbolic power through personal adornment, and the gendered roles of art make possible ways of understanding the visual culture of Native America. This methodology creates a more nuanced understanding and evaluation of Indigenous art and culture. Herzog and Stolte (2012) stated
Berlo and Phillips problematize the typical non-Native division of Native American history into two periods, pre- and post-European contact, as this division foregrounds the availability of written texts as post-contact historical records in contrast to the archeological materials that generally serve as a primary source of study of pre-contact visual culture. This divide also suggests a period of cultural stasis that denies the dynamics of intercultural contact and exchange that preceded the arrival of Europeans to this continent. (88)

Berlo and Phillips (1998) include works by contemporary Native artists in each section that underscores the concept of continuity applied to Native cultural production and expression. This survey text uses not only historic, ethnological material culture, but also contemporary fine art cultural expressions such as sculpture, installation, mixed media and fashion. Berlo and Phillips (1998) broaden the conceptions of Native art but remain bound through understanding and describing contemporary Native art through the lens of modernity, commoditization and patronage as evidenced in their last chapter. This limitation is most likely attributed to the timeframe of publication. Both Penney (2004) and Berlo and Phillips (1998) privilege the voice of the non-Native author(s) above the narratives of Native scholars, artists, and art critics. I again advocate for the visible inclusion of Indigenous perspectives in texts about Native art.

Herzog and Stolte (2012) cited an example of collaboration with Native artists and scholars in W. Jackson Rushing’s (1999) *Native American Art in the Twentieth Century*, which explores “place, community, spirituality, memory, language, indigenous knowledge, sovereignty, and globalization as they problematize fixed notions of identity and authenticity.” Exhibition catalogs like *Indigena* (McMaster & Martin, 1992) and
Reservation X (McMaster, 1998) prioritize Native perspectives. The exhibitions Changing Hands: Art Without Reservation (McFadden, 2002) and Changing Hands: Art Without Reservation 2, Contemporary Native North American art from the West, Northwest & Pacific (McFadden & Taubman, 2005) and their corresponding catalogs illustrate the breadth of contemporary Native expression while also providing critical analysis through supplemental essays from current Native and non-Native arts professionals. More recently, the Museum of Contemporary Native Arts published Manifestations: New Native Art Criticism (Mithlo, 2011), a landmark publication that features twenty-one Native scholars, critics, curators, and museum professionals writing about Native art including the profiles of sixty Native artists.

The following paragraphs uncover salient aspects of a developing discourse on Native art criticism. In the preface of Manifestations, Navajo scholar and artist Will Wilson (2011) calls for “Native representational sovereignty” that includes the “conveyance of history and culture through story and language, our shared histories of colonization and our long walks to self-determination,” and the “issues of identity” related to membership and Natives being both political and racialized bodies. Native artists and scholars Fadden and Wall (2011) articulate the history and impact of federal policy towards Native people through Native art as visual evidence. One of the defining features of these federal policies was the creation of legislation that defined and determined Indian identity. Fadden and Wall (2011) contended, “The results of these policies are not only part of the analysis of any specific American Indian artist, but also part of the economic, cultural and political environment in which American Indian art is produced and consumed.” Wilson (2011) and Mithlo (2011) agreed that using a political
or colonizing lens is not the only way to interpret or appreciate Native art. However, it is undeniable that federal policies and Euro-American contact have had visible effects and influences on Native art and cultural expression. While policing identity and agency seems to be the primary focus in most arguments, Fadden and Wall (2011) illustrated through their discussion of three prominent Native artists that “policies introduced new media, processes, and purposes for expression,” a tradition that continues today and is evident in the case studies I have selected as well as the artist profiles in Manifestations.

Mithlo (2011) advocated for a deeper understanding of Native art through “the whole context of Native histories, personal life trajectories, and U.S. political policies that shape and inform the work.” Equally important is broadening the lens for evaluating and interpreting Native art production. Sherry Farrell Racette (2011) elaborated on Indigenous aesthetics through what she referred to as “deep continuity” where signs, symbols and the object contain memory, encoded knowledge and evoke an emotional response. Farrell Racette also emphasized the important connections between objects and oral traditions or cultural memory. In this way, objects are containers of power and linkages to our ancestors and Indigenous knowledge. Farrell Racette eluded to a “multi-layered discourse” intrinsic for understanding Indigenous aesthetics, Native art and the practical application of methodology and representation.

As public representation is an integral aspect of communicating ideas about the current state of Native art and culture. Mario Caro (2011) reviewed the last twenty years of “Native practitioners” actively participating in the “production, exhibition and marketing” of Native art. Caro, also acknowledging the impact of federal policy, purposefully initiated his survey from 1990, the year the Native Graves and Repatriation
Act and the Indian Arts and Crafts Act were passed and affected “both Native artists and museum professionals.” Caro noted changes in academic, curatorial and marketing developments attributed to Native practitioners actively participating in developing, critiquing and reinterpreting the discourse. Advancement in Native curatorial practice and development of contemporary art markets created more visibility and opportunities for production and display nationally and internationally. However, Caro warned that inclusion into Native art markets may impede access to mainstream contemporary art markets. Caro (2011) observed that museums such as the Denver Art Museum, the Heard Museum and the Eiteljorg Museum have become more active in their support and display while the Museum of Contemporary Native Arts is “exclusively dedicated to the preservation, exhibition, and scholarly investigation of contemporary Indigenous art.” Indigenous participation in Native arts discourse is imperative for producing curatorial methodologies and understanding the whole context of cultural production and representation.

Herzog and Stolte’s (2012) essay *American Indian Art: Teaching and Learning* evaluated the discourse of American Indian art history through several theoretical approaches emphasizing a necessity for “critical engagement with indigenous methods and knowledge … foregrounded as key course content.” In their analysis, they strategize productive methods for teaching Native art courses through the lens of modernism, world art, as a significant inclusion in North American art, and also within contemporary art discourse. They identify several resources that elucidate Indigenous methodologies and perspectives while encouraging critical pedagogy. Herzog and Stolte (2012) asserted Whether Native or non-Native, as educators we all need to center Native
perspectives in our teaching as we design and instruct courses that look at the
interconnections in Native art among aesthetics, materials, function, meaning,
social relations, and social practices, and the historical circumstances within which
these works of art are produced. (88)

Native scholar, curator and author Nancy Marie Mithlo (2012) problematizes three
strategic approaches to contemporary Native art discourse which include
the rejection of standard fine arts categories of reception (“No word for art in my
language”); (2) the assimilation of these same fine arts categories (“I’m an artist
first and an Indian second,” now expressed as a “post-Indian” sensibility); and (3)
the creation of new categories that reflect Indigenous values of cultural reclamation,
sovereignty, and land-based philosophies (what I term “American Indian
Curatorial Practice”). (112)

Mithlo (2012) explained that the “no word” argument had complicated meanings across
differing contexts and “proved remarkably flexible in meeting varying constituents’
needs, none propelled the development of scholarship, offering as they did confusing and
conflicted meanings for both the buying public and the academic community.” Similarly,
the “artist first, Indian second” or “post-Indian sensibility” proved to be equally
unproductive. The denial of race or attachment to cultural heritage present a false sense
of liberation and encourage the erasure and silencing of the material, socio-economic
conditions of Native peoples (Mithlo, 2012). Indigenous curatorial methodologies or
American Indian Curatorial Practice based on the criteria of “long-term, reciprocal,
mutually-meaningful, and mentorship” inform the exhibition, education, research and
“successfully marketing American Indian arts” (Mithlo, 2011, 2012). American Indian
Curatorial Practice seeks to provide a more relevant engagement with representation, categorization and research that reflect and promote Indigenous perspectives. Another complicated area of development is Indigenous aesthetics.

**Indigenous Aesthetics**

A discussion of Indigenous aesthetics is important as it reveals significance and meaning beyond what Western art and aesthetic discourse has been able to articulate about Native art. The text *Indigenous Aesthetics; Native Art, Media and Identity*, Steven Leuthold (1998) uses a “systems approach” to Indigenous aesthetics and argued that artistic expression is interconnected with worldview and that aesthetic experiences shape collective identity. Leuthold, like Berlo and Phillips (1998), considered Indigenous artistic expression through spirituality, beauty and ethics complicating mainstream Western conceptions of art and aesthetics. Utilizing film and video production, specifically documentaries, provide evidence of cultural representation and agency in areas outside typical fine arts categories but do not reveal a generalizable Indigenous documentary aesthetic. Leuthold (1998) explained the limitations of representation (and identity) through colonial frameworks

…indigenous aesthetics from this framework alone may be too limited: limited temporally to problems of relatively contemporary art—art created during and since the colonial era—and limited analytically to art’s political context and rhetorical goals, perhaps at the expense of religious or spiritual understandings of aesthetic expression. (8)

Yet, throughout the entirety of the book, Leuthold deploys the terms colonialism, post-colonialism and neocolonialism as a means for understanding the Indigenous aesthetic.
Key to understanding Indigenous aesthetics is what Leuthold described as “continuity of expression” relating to “historical, religious, conceptual, generational, tribal, or cosmological.” A “profound sense of place” connecting the “spiritual with the natural” is central to Indigenous aesthetics (Leuthold, 1998). His description of attachment to place is similar to Keith Basso’s (1996) *Wisdom Sits in Places*. I agree with these assessments, but I did not find value in the comparative study to Western aesthetics. This effort to construct a broader context for understanding and developing critical frameworks for Native art and media ultimately is a self-reflexive study of non-Native aesthetic expression in Western cultures (Leuthold, 1998). This methodological approach, like the ones mentioned in Mithlo’s (2012) assessment, are confusing and convoluted, producing conflicted meanings that may hinder rather than aid the advancement of Indigenous perspectives.

Native scholar heather ahtone defines an Indigenous aesthetic by identifying key signifiers that include the relationships between metaphors, symbols, cultural beliefs, knowledge, stories/histories, and personal narratives. Metaphors and symbols connect stories, narratives, and culture inter-generationally so that meaning and significance are preserved and renewed in what Ahtone (2009) expressed as “regeneration and reciprocity.” This notion of regeneration and reciprocity is in keeping with Farrell Racette’s (2011) deep continuity; there are linkages to the past, to ancestors and Indigenous knowledge that are evocative and accessible through objects and symbols. This concept also follows the idea of blood memory, but as Racette (2011) described, an Indigenous reading considers an object to be alive; everything has a spirit or energy.
Ahtone (2012) stressed the importance of Indigenous epistemology as the most appropriate framework for Native arts. This epistemology centers on Indigenous cultural values, beliefs and ways of knowing. Ahtone clarified:

This distinction between “ways of knowing” is important, as it allows that bodies of knowledge reflect the cultural values and beliefs on which they are grounded—there does not exist a universal measure. Thus one cannot imagine an Indigenous aesthetic while using Western cultural standards…The framework needed to analyze an Indigenous aesthetic must come from within the cultures themselves. Each tribal culture has local ideals, values, and beliefs that necessarily require consideration. (74)

Thus, ahtone’s (2012) assertion about Indigenous aesthetics negates Leuthold’s comparative study about collective identity and universalizing organization. Ahtone (2012) explained her development of Indigenous aesthetics: “Through careful consideration of an object’s materiality, the artist’s use of metaphor and symbolism, and the role of cultural reciprocity, it can be placed within a context that will lend a fuller understanding of the object as contemporary art.” According to ahtone, the object’s materiality corresponds to the use of materials and designs reflect ideas about and extend local Indigenous bodies of knowledge. She suggested that consultation with “local tribal artists” provide “valuable resources for information” particularly about the history and continuity in the usage of materials and designs (ahtone, 2012). The artist’s use of metaphor and symbolism indicate a need for understanding semiotics through the cultural lens and positionality of the creator. This supports and acknowledges local Indigenous knowledge and worldview similarly to Farrell Racette’s (2011) “multi-layered
discourse.” What follows in ahtone’s assessment of Indigenous aesthetics is reciprocity, which function with the concepts of gratitude and respect. Reciprocity acknowledges in a very visceral way, the deep continuity that Indigenous people have access to through their connections to place, community, and culture expression. By continuing to use the signs, symbols and metaphors of one’s culture and ontology, an Indigenous artist honors and respects their histories, legacies, perseverance and continuation of their cultures and traditions. On this notion of continuity and accountability, ahtone (2012) stated, “When Indigenous people actively practice, participate, and perpetuate their cultures, this is the most basic form of gratitude to those ancestors who made the effort to carry the culture into the future, into our present.”

Ahtone underscores her concept of an Indigenous aesthetic through a methodology applied to Joe Feddersen’s Parking Lot. This development generates a more thoughtful and productive approach to understanding and recognizing Indigenous aesthetics as a methodological approach. Through my case studies, I expand on Ahtone’s contribution and add an additional component—that of connection to place, language, and the “indigenization of space” as important signifiers. The indigenization of space occurs when Native people reclaim a location through cultural signifiers, performance, ceremony, song, dance, or installation that convey the existence and presence of Native peoples and cultures (Rangel 2006). I discuss this concept further in my analysis section.
CHAPTER 3 Theoretical Framework

A theoretical framework should be an organizational method and intellectual consideration for conducting research and analysis. I initially struggled with finding the appropriate theory to explain and guide my research methods and decided that, like my understanding of Indigenous aesthetics and Native art representation, it required drawing from different theoretical approaches and perspectives. I am not asserting that one theory can encompass all the deliberation and preparation necessary for addressing my research questions, but that they all inform my research methodology. Tribal Critical Race Theory (Brayboy, 2005), decolonizing methodologies and Indigenous methodologies (Smith, 1999; Denzin, Lincoln & Smith, 2008, Kovach, 2009) form the conceptual framework while informing critical ethnographic research methods and ethics protocols necessary for deconstructing dominant ideologies, imperialistic research practices and knowledge production. This theoretical and methodological framework is central to recognizing and validating Indigenous knowledge and perspectives on representation.

Decolonizing and Indigenous methodologies locate misrepresentation inherent in established research practice and challenge scholars, Native and non-Native, to consider, value, and utilize Indigenous ethics, epistemologies, and ontologies (Smith, 1999; Denzin et al., 2008, Kovach, 2009). I begin with decolonizing methodologies as it is useful as a theoretical framework for reconceptualizing research with Native populations and presents the opportunity for reclaiming cultural and intellectual discursive space. Indigenous methodologies focus on prioritizing Indigenous epistemologies and become the foundational methodology for my research. Tribal Critical Race Theory (TribalCrit) also informs my research methodology as it addresses local concerns, material conditions
and relevant current issues for Natives. TribalCrit is situated in resistance theories, such as Critical Race Theory and Latino Critical Race Theory, which address issues of power and inequality and begin to imagine interventions, resistance, and transformation for marginalized groups. TribalCrit is more relevant to Indigenous people as colonization is central for understanding the imbalances of power relating to Native arts representation and knowledge production beyond race, ethnicity, class, or gender normally addressed in critical theory.

**Decolonizing Methodologies**

Maori author Linda Tuhiwai Smith’s *Decolonizing Methodologies* lays the groundwork for research and begins addressing the creation of Indigenous analytical frameworks for presenting Native visual culture. Smith (1999) argues for the use of “decolonizing methodologies” that redress the use of research for cultural colonialism and uncovers the imperialistic power structures that influence and guide the process of research. Smith (1999) outlines a methodology for Indigenous research and re-education that can be productive in working towards reclaiming historical documentation and the dissemination of information. Reclaiming and re-educating are critical for Indigenous peoples to exercise cultural sovereignty and self-determination. Decolonizing methodologies engage with postcolonial discourse while privileging Indigenous agendas for research. These agendas are established through collaboration and consultation with Indigenous communities. While the idea of postcolonial is not applicable to Indigenous nations within the United States, Smith’s methodologies function as a theoretical base for the restructuring of Indigenous culture/knowledge transmission and research. Decolonizing methodologies is the precursor to Indigenous methodologies that support
the validation of Indigenous knowledge production and representation.

**Indigenous methodology**

I employ Indigenous methodologies as a “theory of inquiry;” embedded in this framework are ethics, epistemology, and ontology (Denzin et al., 2008; Kovach, 2005; Kovach, 2009). Approaching research from an ethical perspective in consideration of Indigenous values, traditions, protocols and knowledge systems is a necessary departure from the established research practices of Western art history, anthropology and archeology. Understanding epistemological and ontological differences between the researcher and Indigenous peoples involves reflexivity, questioning the construction and validity of truth and being open to multimodal and multivocal perspectives that may not reflect dominant ideologies. This methodology involves using critical theory and pedagogy as a way to collect, interpret and redistribute Indigenous research. Kovach (2009) identifies three aspects of Indigenous research: the cultural knowledges that guide one’s research choices, methods used in searching, and way to interpret knowledge so as to give it back in a purposeful, helpful and relevant manner. Put simply, these are Indigenous epistemology, ethics and reciprocity. American Indian Curatorial Practice (Mithlo, 2012) and an Indigenous aesthetic methodology (ahtone, 2012) are directly aligned with this definition of an Indigenous methodology. Aspects of Critical Race theory and Tribal Critical Race Theory inform the naming of power structures and strategies for resistance.
Critical Race Theory

In order to understand the relevance of Tribal Critical Race theory, I begin by explaining Critical Race theory, which addresses issues of power and inequality and begins to imagine interventions, resistance, and transformation for marginalized groups, specifically people of color. Critical Race theory is the critical examination of the limitations of “objectivity, meritocracy, colorblindness, race neutrality and ‘equal opportunity’” which includes taking into account race, class, gender and sexual orientation (Delgado Bernal, 2002; Delgado & Stefancic, 2000; Solorzano & Yosso, 2001; Villalpando, 2003). Critical Race Theory requires critiquing social reproduction by intervening, counter-storytelling, analyzing, and challenging oppressive dominant ideologies. Key tenets of Critical Race theory include: the idea that racism is ordinary or normalized, the ascendency of white over color, and that race is a social construct that can be employed and altered by the dominant culture to maintain hegemony (Delgado & Stefancic, 2000). The White/Other binary is useful for locating racism and White privilege that occurs across disciplines, educational and governmental policies, employment practices and the social stigma of racial profiling. Yosso (2006) confirms the persistence of racism while examining Latino/Chicano populations and warns that simply reacting is not useful and actually reifies the problem. Counter-storytelling becomes a productive method of articulating change and mobilizing transformation.

Counter-storytelling recounts the experiences and perspectives of racially and socially marginalized people, raises critical consciousness about social and racial injustice and challenge the premises, myths and accepted histories and narratives privileged by the majority (Delgado & Stefancic, 2000; Yosso, 2006). Counter-
storytelling is more than response and reaction, but rather “a critical reflection of the lived experiences and histories of People of Color” (Yosso, 2006). Counter-storytelling, in a Native context, draws from Critical Race theory to describe how Native artists, museum administrators and intellectuals re-present Native arts and culture by engaging and resisting the dominant discourse and producing work that challenges romanticized notions, stereotypes, and racism (Delgado & Stefancic, 2000; Solorzano & Bernal, 2001; Delgado & Bernal, 2002; Solorzano & Yosso, 2002; Villalpando, 2003, Brayboy, 2005; Yosso, 2006). In addition to challenging preconceived notions and Western constructions of Native America, counter-storytelling can be employed to assert Indigenous perspectives on creating art, cultural meaning, knowledge production and the material circumstances of actual Native people. Counter-storytelling builds on the concept of survivance that signifies moving out of imperialist or colonial conceptions of Native identity and representation to valuing Indigenous knowledge and methodologies (Smith, 1999; Vizenor, 1999, 2000; Brayboy 2005; Denzin et al., 2008).

Naming the issues of race and racism can illuminate the inequities and social injustice that are occurring while inspiring counterhegemonic strategizing and mobilization. Solorzano and Bernal (2001) and Yosso (2006) described examples of this through a Critical Race and Latino Critical Race theoretical framework. They suggested that group affiliation is important for social justice. That is, oppositional behavior and resistance address social justice when they move beyond the individual interest. For members of marginalized groups this includes having a “dual consciousness” which means acting from an awareness of the rules and expectations of the dominant society while also preserving and protecting the values, languages, cultures, and way of life.
intrinsic to their core identity (Du Bois, 1982). While CRT, LatCrit and also Asian Critical Race theory were developed to address social inequities for Blacks/African Americans, Latinos, Asians and minoritized/marginalized people of color in general, these theories fall short of articulating the particular needs of Native peoples. I rely on Tribal Critical Race Theory (TribalCrit) to organize ideas around awareness and resistance in relation to Native arts representation.

**Tribal Critical Race Theory**

Brayboy (2005) asserted that TribalCrit is rooted in other disciplines such as Critical Race Theory, Anthropology, American Indian Literature, American Indian Studies, and Education. There are limitations to Western theoretical frameworks, particularly that they lack the ability to fully “address the issues salient for and to American Indians” (Brayboy 2005). I find this to be true across disciplines and particularly problematic in areas of history, arts and culture. TribalCrit is similar to CRT and LatCrit in that it addresses inequities based on race, gender, sexual orientation, and ethnicity in addition to class, however TribalCrit “emphasizes that colonization is endemic to society,” a distinction that goes beyond a racialized theory of injustice to implicate Euro-American “thought, knowledge, and power structures” present in the dominant society within the United States (Brayboy, 2005). It is colonization, imperialism and consumerism that has material consequences to Native American people and affects them physically, intellectually, economically, politically and spiritually. This goes far beyond the construction of race and the ethnic, gender and sexual orientation biases inherent in CRT to include governmental policies, tribal sovereignties, decimation of sacred lands, language shift/loss and systematic cultural and physical genocide.
TribalCrit, commonly applied to Indigenous education, is a useful theory to understanding the complexities of the issues related to Indigenous knowledge production and Native arts representation.

In Brayboy’s first tenet, “Colonization is endemic to society,” indicated that the dominant society has invested misconceptions of Native America that are “rooted in imperialism, White supremacy, and a desire for material gain” and visible in federal policies directed toward Indigenous peoples. These misconceptions include but are not limited to the tropes of the savage Indian, the vanishing Indian and the pre-modern Indian. Furthermore, Brayboy claims, Native people internalize and perpetuate these misconceptions when they fail to challenge them.

Brayboy’s second tenet (2005) “U.S. policies toward Indigenous peoples are rooted in imperialism, White supremacy, and a desire for material gain,” noted the federal ideologies used for land claims and removal, namely Manifest Destiny, the Norman Yoke and also the Doctrine of Discovery (Williams, 2005), establishing eminent domain of the land, resources (and subsequently the cultures therein) and the erasure of Native America (Deloria, 1998; Vizenor, 1999). Deloria (1998) deconstructed the ways in which White America has historically performed their version of Indian to assume an authentic national identity which included claim to the land and its resources. EuroAmerica systematically removed and erased Native peoples thereby assuming the ascendancy of the land, peoples, resources, cultures and nullifying Indigenous rights, sovereignty, knowledge, traditions, language, and sacred sites.
Brayboy’s (2005) third tenet, “Indigenous peoples occupy a liminal space that accounts for both the political and racialized natures of our identities,” makes an important distinction about the liminality of Native peoples as identities are shaped by multiple statuses of racial and/or legal/political. Native people occupy a liminal space politically due to the dual membership of their particular sovereign nation and the United States and also racially or ethnically due to the cross-cultural negotiations that occur from home environments to participation with the dominant culture. Many Native people maintain distinct cultural particularity through language, traditions, value systems and ways of knowing. Brayboy argued that the dominant perception of Native America is based on race and ignores the complex legal/political identities of Native peoples which is dangerous for Native peoples for whom the U.S. government has a trust responsibility to uphold under treaty rights. This concept of liminality, positioning Native peoples as only racialized bodies, threatens the sovereignty and self-determination of Native nations while reproducing social and economic inequities. Thus, Brayboy’s (2005) fourth tenet, “Indigenous peoples have a desire to obtain and forge tribal sovereignty, tribal autonomy, self-determination, and self-identification,” emphasized the need for recognition of sovereign nation-to-nation relations between Native Nations and the United States government. These points illustrate a significant difference between Indigenous and other minoritized and marginalized groups.

Brayboy’s fifth tenet, “The concepts of culture, knowledge, and power take on new meaning when examined through an Indigenous lens,” identified three forms of tribal/Indigenous knowledge: “cultural knowledge, knowledge of survival, and academic knowledge.” Brayboy (2005) described culture is described as being both “stable” and
dynamic. Native peoples connect culture to relationships of community and place. Therefore, when Indigenous people continuously occupy a place, they form cultural bonds (relationships) that are formalized and reconfirmed throughout the year through language, story, song and ritual. This conception of culture is significant in describing Native culture as being grounded but not immutable. Cultural knowledge is important, as it is what distinguishes an Indigenous individual to a particular tribal nation and community. Knowledge of survival in this context is “the ability and willingness to change, adapt and adjust” to material circumstances, influences, encroachment, and restrictions while persisting as an individual and member of a community (Brayboy, 2005). Combining academic knowledge with the two other forms of knowledge is an example of an Indigenous use of the concept of dual consciousness. Utilizing all three become important in enacting power that is realized through a combination of community and activism (Weaver, 2001). Valuing Indigenous knowledge is also an enactment of sovereignty as it signifies the power to self-define. Brayboy suggested the term “survivance” in relation to the enactment of power as a form of survival and resistance—but this requires adaptation and consciousness. Vizenor (1999, 2000) described the “post-Indian” as a realized and actualized Native person who resists the limitations of the dominant culture and is fully engaged in “survivance” which is in opposition to what he refers to as “tragic victimry.” Post-Indian is deployed in contested and problematic ways thereby losing it’s original referent (Mithlo, 2012), but survivance is a productive way of imagining and enacting power.

Brayboy’s (2005) sixth tenet, “Governmental policies and educational policies toward Indigenous peoples are intimately linked around the problematic goal of
assimilation,” explained how assimilation is the official governmental policy and educational goal for Native Americans. This is a topic of great significance, one that I have attempted to highlight through my analysis of Western cultural theory and the various forms of Indigenous representation by the dominant culture. The goal of assimilation is germane to the discussion of both overt and hidden curriculums used in classrooms that are structured toward the erasure of indigenous values, histories, cultures and languages.

Brayboy’s (2005) seventh tenet, “Tribal philosophies, beliefs, customs, traditions, and visions for the future are central to understanding the lived realities of Indigenous peoples, but they also illustrate the differences and adaptability among individuals and groups,” prioritizes Indigenous forms of knowledge, values the distinctness of Indigenous perspectives and is integrally linked to power and sovereignty through the ability to self-define and self-educate. This tenet recognizes the diversity of Native experience and is helpful in thinking about native people as complex and multi-layered. While Brayboy doesn’t specifically say, this tenet is crucial to understanding an Indigenous aesthetic and methodology.

Brayboy’s (2005) eighth tenet, “Stories are not separate from theory; they make up theory and are, therefore, real and legitimate sources of data and ways of being,” emphasized the significance of oral traditions as valid forms of Indigenous knowledge. In mainstream American society, oral traditions are often devalued because this form of communication has not been historically privileged as have other modes of communication. In Native cultures, oral traditions contain language, metaphor, cultural values, connection to place, cosmologies, histories and other nuanced indicators of
knowledge vital to the continuance of the tribal entity. These are also important factors prevalent and visible in my concept of Indigenous aesthetics.

In Brayboy’s (2005) ninth tenet, “Theory and practice are connected in deep and explicit ways such that scholars must work towards social change” also indicated that TribalCrit involves action and responsibility of connecting theory to practice and making it relevant to Native communities. TribalCrit Theory is an important theoretical framework that supports Indigenous knowledge production and representation. Brayboy issued a directive to Native scholars to use TribalCrit as a framework for “creating structures that will address the real, immediate and future needs of tribal peoples and communities” (Burkhart, 2004, cited in Brayboy 2005). While this theoretical framework was created to address issues within education specifically, TribalCrit has a broader application and is relevant to Native arts and culture representation.

Decolonizing and Indigenous methodologies and also Tribal Critical Race Theory form my theoretical framework that is central to recognizing and validating Indigenous knowledge and perspectives on Native art representation. Decolonizing and Indigenous methodologies confront the legacy of misrepresentation inherent in established research practice and promote the use of Indigenous aesthetics, perspectives, ways of knowing and conducting research that privileges the goals of Native communities. While the concept of “postcolonial” does not apply to Native people in the United States, utilizing “decolonial” as a theoretical paradigm shift on Native arts and culture is relevant and compulsory for change to occur. The idea is not for Indigenous people to move past a point of contact and influence or return to some utopian pre-contact, pre-history romanticized and fictionalized past, but rather to acknowledge the pervasive influence–
mental, physical, emotional and even spiritual—has occurred and move forward
individually and as a community. They only way to do that is through the use and
advancement of Indigenous knowledge, research methods and conceptual frameworks.

Critical Race Theory exposes the relationships of power, race and racism and is
helpful for uncovering social injustices based on racial, ethnic, class gender and even
sexual orientation. CRT questions White privilege and the Othering or marginalization of
people of color. CRT confronts the idea that racism is normalized and names race as a
hegemonic construct. The act of naming, while creating better levels of understanding, is
not substantive enough. CRT and all of its associated theories (LatCrit, AsianCrit, and
also TribalCrit) call for action and resistance through a counter-hegemonic response of
strategizing, mobilizing, counter-storytelling and the development of new and relevant
theoretical frameworks and praxis. Where most Western theory falls short, however, is
meeting the specific needs and addressing issues particular to Native Americans. Tribal
Critical Race Theory is more relevant.

TribalCrit is useful in naming colonization as the overarching ideological
construct that is normalized and endemic to society. Understanding the impact of
colonization as a pervasive ideology within mainstream culture begins to name and
describe the imbalances of power relating to Native knowledge production and
representation across disciplines. Not only is colonization relentless, but it is a
mechanism that works internally and externally. The impact on Native people is different
than other marginalized groups is because of the nation to nation relationship Indigenous
peoples have with the U.S. government. What is also at stake for Native Americans is
claims to cultural patrimony including rights to use of land, social and economic
mobility, distinct cultures, languages, traditions, histories, knowledge, autonomy, self-determination, self-identification and sovereignty. Indigenous concepts of knowledge, culture and power are intrinsic for producing scholarship, pedagogy and understanding the material circumstances in the lives of Native Americans today. Indigenous concepts of knowledge include cultural knowledge, oral histories, survival, adaptation and also academic knowledge. Indigenous definitions of culture can be understood through the concepts of relationships, community, counter-storytelling, and survivance. Survivance ties into Indigenous concepts of power which access and value Indigenous knowledge, claim cultural patrimony, assert tribal sovereignty and the ability to self-define and self-regulate. TribalCrit is an important theoretical framework that intervenes into Western discourse and challenges imperialistic structures of governance, education and consumption.
CHAPTER 4 Methodology

Critical ethnography involves the use of theory and method. Tribal Critical Race Theory (Brayboy, 2005), decolonizing methodologies and Indigenous methodologies (Smith, 1999; Denzin et al., 2008; Kovach, 2009) form my conceptual framework and inform my critical ethnographic research methods and ethics protocols. I also incorporate ahtone’s (2012) Indigenous aesthetics methodology. I explain my research methods, instruments and the selection of Native artists included in this study. I address issues of ethics and reflexivity as they are important considerations of my positionality as a researcher. Critical ethnography is dialogic; therefore I will elaborate on how my methodological approach is both community-based and collaborative. I envision social change through my work as an artist and educator and the scholarship that I produce which is dialogic, collaborative and community-based. My research is guided through my experiences as a participant-observer as well as by the needs and my long-term interaction with Native artists and the Native arts community.

Ethnography

Ethnography is the study of groups of people and cultures in order to understand how members of a cultural group share and construct meaning (Creswell, 2007; Denzin & Lincoln, 2003; Glesne, 2006). Ethnography has transitioned through several adaptations of functionalism, symbolic interactionism, positivism and post-positivism to its current iteration, critical ethnography (Madison, 2005). Each movement sought to illuminate human behavior and social structures through more nuanced inquiry and interpretation. Ethnography involves extended immersion in the field, participant observation, interviewing, and the textual analysis of artifacts and documents.
Ethnographic research historically has been used to study groups that are marginalized and not considered part of the dominant culture. This type of research privileges the perspective of the researcher and therefore the needs of the dominant culture. Classic ethnography is based on objectivism, a complicity with imperialism, monumentalism and timelessness (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). While these tenets are dated and have been criticized and challenged, there are lasting ramifications for representations and perceptions of Native America.

Boas (1928) and Malinowski (1922) developed and popularized participant observation, a signature method of ethnography (Madison, 2005; Creswell 2007). Participant observation allows for the researcher to conduct research while maintaining a participatory role within the community. The idea is to integrate the researcher so that he/she is viewed less as a voyeur and would thereby gain more intimate knowledge of the individual, people, community or group. Arguably, there is always a distance that a researcher would encounter as an outsider and it is questionable that even as an intimate knower that the researcher would gain authentic data.

Critical ethnography requires the use of critical theory to identify researcher positionality and to address the needs of the community or group being researched. Critical ethnography informed by Indigenous methodologies and Indigenous aesthetics therefore is a salient methodological framework to study Native arts and culture representation.
Critical Ethnography

Critical ethnography is grounded in critical analysis, ethics and performance, which is a combination of theory and method (Madison, 2005). Critical ethnography challenges the status quo and addresses issues of power, dominance, and inequality (Creswell, 2007; Madison, 2005; Simon & Dippo, 1986). Additionally, critical ethnography intervenes into hegemonic discourse, provides a possibility for “critique and transformation of the conditions of oppressive and inequitable moral and social regulation” and considers the limitations of its own claims as it is a social practice “constituted and regulated through historical relations of power and existing material conditions” (Simon & Dippo, 1986; Madison, 2005). Lastly, performance involves an interaction of critical theory and praxis that moves ethnographic research out of conceptualizing and critique to solution, taking social action, applied methods and eventually pedagogy. As critical ethnography is dialogic, the researcher works collaboratively with community on issues relevant to its members. Research on Native America involves advancing Indigenous knowledge and perspectives on art, culture and representation.

As Native Americans are a minoritized group underrepresented in the academy, there is a need for more Indigenous research and the development of a critical ethnographic framework is more appropriate for Native arts representation. This grouping however can be somewhat problematic as Native Americans encompass a diversity of peoples, beliefs, and ways of knowing—distinctions which the dominant culture seeks to essentialize by categorizing distinctly different peoples with multitude of experiences into one homogenous group. There are certainly some commonalities shared by this cultural
group. These include survival and persistence despite assimilation, genocide, restrictions on mobility and spiritual practice, and the decimation of sacred lands and ways of being. Also, historically, Native people are community-based and many have maintained aspects of their cultural distinctiveness including language, spiritual practice, ways of knowing, and ecologically-based connections to place (Cajete, 1994). Often, Indigenous knowledge and cultural ways of being are not recognized, or they are marginalized and silenced by the dominant culture. Thinking beyond the Western circumscribed box requires both imagination and the revaluing of Indigenous conceptions of arts and culture.

**Critical Analysis and Theory**

I am applying Tribal Critical Race theory (Brayboy, 2005) and Indigenous methodologies (Denzin et. al., 2008; Kovach, 2009) as the conceptual framework that informs my critical ethnographic research methods for interpreting and analyzing Native art. TribalCrit is primarily used in education as a means to deconstruct dominant ideologies, imperialistic research practices and hegemonic knowledge production. TribalCrit is applicable to issues of representation regarding Native art and culture as this critical framework prioritizes, acknowledges, and validates Indigenous knowledge production and supports cultural and political sovereignty. Brayboy (2005) argues through his fifth and seventh tenets that Indigenous concepts of knowledge, culture and power are imperative for producing scholarship, pedagogy and understanding the perspectives, material conditions and current issues relevant to Indigenous peoples and their communities. I suggest that TribalCrit addresses the inequities of knowledge production within academia relating to specifically to Native arts and culture. Indigenous
methodologies (Denzin et. al., 2008; Kovach, 2009) conceptually structure the research methods.

**Indigenous Methodology**

Kovach’s (2009) basic criteria for Indigenous research include Indigenous epistemology, ethics and reciprocity. In this model, an Indigenous epistemology is the central focus. The researcher prepares by first becoming knowledgeable about cultural protocols and the epistemologies in the particular subject area and also the research participants. The next step involves creating a research design. The criteria in the methodological approach in ahtone’s (2012) analysis of Indigenous aesthetics compliments Kovach’s (2009) model through the steps of creating the design, utilizing ethics, gathering knowledge, making meaning and giving back. Ahtone’s (2012) methodological approach is guided by three characteristics: “careful consideration of an object’s materiality, the artist’s use of metaphor and symbolism, and the role of cultural reciprocity.” These criteria are only relevant if the research is centered in an Indigenous epistemology, which necessarily involves the direct and close consultation of Native artists as primary resources. These key components are fundamental for developing a meaningful research project and creating any possibility for reciprocity. American Indian Curatorial Practice based on the criteria of “long-term, reciprocal, mutually-meaningful, and mentorship” compliment this methodology (Mithlo 2011, 2012). These methodological and ethical concepts are more relevant to the representation of Native peoples and cultures and foster better relations between researcher and informants.
When discussing methodological approaches and analysis, Indigenous scholar Duane Champagne (2007) observed, “The culture, world view, strategies, interests, and
choices of American Indian individuals and nations should be our primary units of analysis.” This focus places emphasis on perspectives, material conditions and current issues relevant to Indigenous peoples and their communities. My research extends into understanding Indigenous definitions of arts, aesthetics, culture and material production through the concepts of relationships, community, problematizing essentialism and hybridity, counter-storytelling, and survivance. Another important consideration are “the choices about decolonization, innovation, change, and reclamation of tradition and culture” made by the “American Indian individual [artist]” (Champagne, 2007). These choices are crucial aspects of exerting cultural sovereignty and claiming the ability to self-define and self-represent. In the figure 3 I outline the additional criteria I use for evaluating Native art. In the next section I elaborate on my research methods, instruments and criteria for the data I collected.

Figure 3. Rangel’s (2012) Criteria for Evaluating Native Art

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Relationships</th>
<th>Connections to place, ecologies, tribal histories, oral histories, language, traditions, cosmologies, tribal affiliations and responsibilities to community</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Community</td>
<td>From family to specific tribal nations to the larger context of Native America, to citizen of United States, local to global Indigeneity, concentric circles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problematizing Essentialism and Hybridity</td>
<td>Distinct cultural particularity; liminality; varying memberships of cultural, ethnic, communal, national, and spiritual spheres; cross-cultural influence; innovation; expressing values, current issues and material conditions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counterstorytelling and Survivance</td>
<td>Persistence and continuity of Native cultures, worldviews, languages, cosmologies and belief systems while reflecting them intellectually, creatively, socially and politically; social critique; reappropriation of imagery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indigenization of Space</td>
<td>Reclaim a site or place through cultural signifiers, performance, ceremony, song, dance, or installation that convey the existence and presence of Native peoples and cultures</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Research Methods

This research involves consultation, collaboration and dialogue with Native artists and professionals within a Native museum and as members of Native art communities to promote social change. In this study, I focus on the ethnographic narratives of eight Native artists to describe and prioritize Indigenous perspectives on contemporary Native Art and Indigenous aesthetics through their work and creative process. I examine Indigenous representations of Native art and culture in the context of the museum. The documents and artifacts I utilized include exhibition catalogs, and photography on contemporary Native art and exhibitions, and texts on Native curatorial practice and Native art criticism. As new media is prevalent and accessible, I include publically accessed information available on the Internet through websites, blogs, and social networking sites. These texts indicate Native presence and contemporary iterations of self-representation, counter-storytelling and cultural expression. My data collection methods include secondary and primary literature reviews, case studies and interviews, and observation/participation.

I conducted interviews with eight Native artists—Charlene Teters (Spokane), Teri Greeves (Kiowa), Dyani Reynolds-White Hawk (Sicangu Lakota), Sarah Sense (Chitimacha), Michael Nicoll Yahgulanaas (Haida), Marcus Amerman (Choctaw), Frank Buffalo Hyde (Onondaga) and Chris Pappan (Kaw, Osage, Lakota) – who are all members of their respective nations. These Native artists contribute to the advancement of Indigenous aesthetics and a broadened definition of what constitutes Native art and cultural expression through the work they produce, the mediums they use and their creative process. The narratives and perspectives of these artists represent a cross-section
of the current state of Native arts production. I draw primarily from Native artists in North America; four of them are part of the local Native arts community in Santa Fe, New Mexico, the other three are situated in various urban areas of the United States (St. Paul, MN, Sacramento, CA, and Chicago, IL), and one artist who is a member of a Canadian First Nation and is currently in Vancouver, British Columbia. These artists span three generations of artistic practice that includes display, performance, lecture and education.

I selected these artists based on the criteria of being living artists, currently producing work, and having a specific Native affiliation and connection to their home communities. I chose four women and four men to neutralize a gender bias. I divided them according to three age groups of producing art—twenty years and above, ten to twenty years and under ten years—to allow experience to contribute to the nuance of these perspectives that range from emerging or early career to established or late career. The interviews were typically between one and two hours and I conducted them over the course of approximately four months either in person or through video conferencing using computers, the Skype application and an internet connection.

I began my interviews by summarizing my research and explaining the interview process, my research protocols, and the consent form. I asked the following questions:

Where do you come from? What is your tribal affiliation? What is your experience with the art making/creative process? Do you have formal training? Do you have experiences or training through your cultural or tribal affiliation? What is your connection to your Native community(s)? What is your
purpose/intention for creating work? Who is your intended audience? Do you consider your work to be contemporary? Can you describe your personal or cultural narratives are in your work? Does your work carry social or political commentary? What are Indigenous aesthetics? Is the production of Native art important?

I designed these questions to allow the individual to express the aspects of their identity and experience that were relevant to their creative process and the selected works. I wanted the artists to also have an opportunity to give details about their knowledge and experience outside of Western academic training as I hypothesized that some had traditional or cultural learning that informed their creative process. It was important for this type of research to acknowledge and name Indigenous knowledge or ways of knowing where possible and reference them. Prior to the interview, I asked each artist to submit four to six images of their work. During the interview I asked each artist to describe each of their works, their process, context and intention. I closed the interview by asking the artist to describe what they thought about the future of Native arts either generally or specifically. After writing my narrative of the interviews, I emailed each artist their particular section to verify quotes and concepts for accuracy. This gave me the opportunity to create dialogue about their work, their process, and the issues presented therein.

Apart from the interviews, I am including a pilot study that I conducted that documented the exhibit Scout’s Honor at the Museum of Contemporary Native Arts, which is part of the Institute of American Indian Arts in Santa Fe, New Mexico (Rangel, 2012). The museum is an integral site to re-educate the general public about the
complexities of identity and influence, cross-cultural exchanges, and the prevalence of thriving Indigenous living cultures. I interviewed six museum professionals to discuss their role at the museum, their understanding about Native arts and the current issues of representation. I asked the following questions:

What is your tribal affiliation? What is your title/role with the museum? How long have you been with the museum? What is your educational background? What prior experience do you have with Native arts? Is there a distinction between contemporary and traditional? What are Indigenous aesthetics? Why is this distinction important? Why is the production of Native art important? What is Native curatorial practice? What sort of programming is in place to educate the general public about Native art? Native cultures? Contemporary Native art? Who is the museum’s target audience? Why? How does the museum reach them? How does new media and technology add new dimensionality to communicating and representing Native arts? What are your projections for Native arts? What’s the next step? What are the big issues for Native arts and culture?

I incorporated their responses into a narrative about the Scout’s Honor exhibition that featured the work of two Canadian First Nations artists, Michael Belmore and Frank Shebagaget (Rangel, 2012). I selected this museum because its focus is contemporary Native art and it is the only museum dedicated to that purpose. This exhibit presents examples of Indigenous aesthetics and also indicates connections between Indigenous people beyond the federal border lines of the United States and Canada.
Ethics/Reflexivity

Considering the groundwork of decolonizing methodologies, I have a sense of my role as a researcher/member of the academy and the examples of previous iterations of ethnographic research (Smith, 1999). I am aware of the mistrust that a researcher engenders when entering a Native community and the power dynamic that is present. Inherent in my positionality is an imbalance of power that has been historically used for social reproduction and the marginalization of Indigenous knowledge and representation. As a member of this marginalized group I am aware of the consequences of repeating this pattern that would completely negate my project. Further, as an informed insider and participant, I have a nuanced understanding of the material conditions, mechanisms, current issues and the desire for change. Moreover, I feel like this work is not only necessary, but long overdue. I find the continual use of stereotype and caricature in popular culture, the omission of Indigenous people in U.S. history, the exclusion of Native art into mainstream fine art, the systematic cultural genocide, the regulation of identity and governance on Indigenous people deplorable and inspiration for the depth of my academic inquiry.

As I have a bias towards promoting contemporary Indigenous arts and knowledge production I have to be careful that I don’t discount, dismiss or marginalize other groups historically pushed to the periphery. As well, I don’t want to exclude non-Native informants and research that works toward supporting and validating Indigenous forms of representation and knowledge production.

In addition to institutional ethics related to academic research, I have employed Indigenous ethics and protocols. Smith (1999) and Denzin, Lincoln, & Smith (2008)
formally introduce these ideas to the academy, but there are expectations, levels of understanding and respect that, as a culturally Native person, guided my research when I approached Native individuals and institutions. While my research primarily focuses on publicly accessed iterations of artistic and cultural expression, I have been mindful of culturally sensitive information and have consulted with the individuals in this study for the appropriate permissions particularly about culturally specific and sensitive information such as cosmology, spirituality or ceremonial practice. Some tribal nations prefer certain ideas, objects, customs or traditions not be shared generally to someone who is not initiated to receive this information. As a respect for and acknowledgment of tribal and cultural sovereignty, I honor and uphold these requests where applicable.

Critical ethnography is dialogic; therefore I will elaborate on how my methodological approach is both community-based and collaborative.

**Community-based and Collaborative research**

My research is, by nature and design, collaborative and community-based as I draw from the experiences and relationships I have forged working in the fields of Native art and education. As a member of the Native arts community, an Indigenous scholar and instructor, I am situated as an observer/participant. I conducted observations at sites such as museum lectures, symposiums, exhibition openings, and artist talks to examine how the institutions produce and display Native arts and culture and educate about Indigenous perspectives. As a Native artist and designer, I have worked collaboratively with Native artists and institutions to improve the visibility and accuracy of actual representations of Native America. For the past twelve years I have worked in various capacities doing advertising, marketing, communications, public relations, creating media and press
releases for Native artists. I worked for the Southwestern Association for Indian Arts, a non-profit Native arts organization, as their marketing director where I oversaw the promotion and publicity for the annual Indian Market in Santa Fe, New Mexico and the development of their website. My professional work gives me the position of an informant/participant in my own research and as an educator I have introduced Indigenous perspectives on Native art that intervene into Western discourse allowing my students to critically examine representation from multiple perspectives and interrogate issues of power, dominance and knowledge production. Over the last eight years, I have taught courses in studio art, new media, art history and Indigenous liberal studies. In my critical courses such as Writing about Art, Art of Africa, Oceania and the Americas and a senior seminar on Indigenous studies I incorporated Indigenous perspectives and critical analysis into my curriculum and pedagogy. Given the nature of my research, which explores contemporary expressions of Native arts and culture, this work has significance to the Indigenous arts community across the United States as I am utilizing Indigenous methodologies to conduct research and developing the discourse on Indigenous aesthetics that is important for understanding the multimodal, multi-vocal narratives of Native Americans. My continuing research fits the definition of collaborative ethnography that Lassiter (2000) stated is “…a moral and ethical undertaking, one that ultimately privileges the discourse between consultant(s) and ethnographer over a disciplinary discourse.” I also see the discourse on Native art changing as new perspectives on Native art theory and curatorial practice are emerging contemporaneously with my research.

The methodological approach for my research also fits the definition of community-based research as “collaboration, validation of multiple sources of knowledge
and methods of discovery and dissemination, and the goals of social change and social
action to achieve social justice” (Strand et al., 2003). Community-based research is an
applicable description as my goals are not for personal gain but to further Native
scholarship, produce culturally relevant pedagogy and contribute to an area that is
underdeveloped. This research is necessarily connected to varying levels of community
and involves consultation, collaboration and dialogue with Native individuals, institutions
and tribal entities for social change.
Chapter 5 Native Artists – profiles and art, the case studies

Native art requires Native interpretation. When discussing Native art and culture, Native voices or informants are often omitted, overshadowed or erased. I went to members of my Native artist community to explore ideas about process, purpose, audience, aesthetics, issues and looking at art through a Native perspective. What follows is a profile of each artist followed by a discussion of aesthetics in relation to making and presenting Native art. I sat down with artists individually and asked them all the same questions about their art and what it meant to them. Here are their responses.

Charlene Teters

My artwork expresses my personal and political views about America's dehumanization of Indian Peoples. My art, lecturing and teaching has centered around achieving a national shift in the perception of native people. All too often we are still seen as objects or as a people trapped in the past tense. We are twenty-first century people, and must be seen as such in order to deal with the serious issues that face us today. Yet, even in the aftermath of a momentous civil rights movement we are invisible under the weight of “mythology.” — Charlene Teters (2012)

Charlene Teters, a member of the Spokane Nation, is an internationally renown Native artist and activist who is also the Chair of Studio Art and a professor at the Institute of American Indian Arts (IAIA). She has a Masters of Fine Art from the University of Illinois and Honorary Doctorate in Fine Art from Mitchell College, New London Connecticut. Teters creates multimedia installations, which also often include a performance element, examine the social presumptions and portrayals of Indian people in popular culture and mainstream media.
Art wasn’t what Charlene initially started school doing, she initially went into sociology with the intention to find ways of addressing social issues for her Native community. After a short stint at college, she decided not to continue that degree track. Several years later following some life changes and a divorce, she decided to return to school and focus on art. She decided to go to IAIA which lead her to gaining an Associated degree in studio art and the confidence to continue on to get her Bachelor’s degree at the College of Santa Fe.

During this time Teters was focused on painting. Char stated that she was doing “traditional painting,” that is, applying paint on canvas with brushes. In talking about her BFA show she described her concept and context as being driven by her experiences with domestic violence. She asserted, “That’s why my marriage failed. I was trying to get away from the violence. The series of work was really about reclaiming my identity as a woman…. It’s about reclaiming identity or sense of self…maintaining some sense of dignity (personal communication, January 31, 2012). She described that there “was a darkness” to her paintings and that they were somber. I noticed that there is gravity to her earlier work that carries over to the type of work that she continues to do today.

While completing her Bachelors of Fine Arts at the College of Santa Fe, she and a couple of her fellow Native artist students were recruited to an Masters of Fine Arts program at the University of Illinois. There she and her cohort encountered very blatant and overt racism most visible in the use of the university mascot Chief Illiniwek. The experiences Teters had at the University of Illinois changed her life and art making as something solidified in her intention. It was these experiences that became the primary focus and information for the work that she decided she wanted to do. Then she began to
move away from making objects and more toward installation and conceptually based work. Five years have past since the ruling that laid Chief Illiniwek to rest, yet there is still an on-going struggle with the university and the music that continues to be played during sports events. It’s the same music that the mascot would dance to while costumed in stereotypical Plains dress, facepaint and making gestures that caricaturized Native dance (Bowean, 2011).

This was an affront to Teters and her cohort who saw this public display as mocking and denigrating Native people. Although there were other Native artists making reactive art that targeted negative stereotype and racism, Teters was now determined to delve into the subject matter that would lead to national and international attention to this issue.

As Teters talked about her process, she stated that her initial motivations were based on skill development and later shifted to a therapeutic process that helped her to develop self-esteem. While in grad school she became angry and driven. As a way of focusing her animosity, Teters asserted, “The art became my weapon. I purposely made things that were confrontational and the purpose was get people to see it, feel it and if they were mad then I thought ‘OK, now you know, you get a glimpse of what it’s like to be me in this environment’ (Charlene Teters, personal communication, January 31, 2012). In describing her MFA show “What We Know About Indians,” Teters stated she decided to create an installation that showed contrasting elements by juxtaposing black

7 From the University of Illinois website: NCAA ruled in 2006 that certain Native American-based college mascots and symbols were “hostile and abusive” to minorities. In February 16, 2007, the chair of the University of Illinois Board of Trustees has retired the tradition of Chief Illiniwek. (http://will.illinois.edu/chief-illiniwek-understanding-the-issues). For more information on this controversial issue and to see the arguments from the supporters of the mascot: www.honorthchiefof.com.
and white paintings of family members with imagery from popular culture in full color. Teters described her audience, the mainstream dominant culture and their view on Native people: “They didn’t see us as full-fledged human beings so that’s why they’re [the family members] in black and white. They didn’t see us as real unless we looked like the stereotype” (ibid). I asked about the barcodes that Teters said was commentary about the “packaging and selling of our identity” (ibid). Commodification of culture is a theme that figures prominently in the production of ethnic art and Native art in particular (hooks, 1992). The effects of patronage, commercialism and Western academic discourse on Native art production is well documented as indicates the power of these factors to determine what is produced for consumption (Brody, 19712; Dubin, 2001; Rangel, 2006).

With her MFA show, Teters began addressing the issue of representation on a local and personal level, but then was
able to bring the issue to national and international attention through her art and founding
the National Coalition on Racism in Sports and Media. She described her intention or
purpose for making art as a means of trying to “humanize the Native experience” by
confronting stereotypical representations. IAIA museum studies faculty and Native
scholar Michelle McGeough (2011) observed that “Teters described herself as a reluctant
activist, yet her multimedia installations, writings and lectures challenge dominant
narratives by exposing how popular culture and negative stereotypes continue to
reinforce the racist notions of manifest destiny still active in the American psyche.”
Teters argues that despite her efforts and the mainstream societal attempts at multicultural
inclusion and political correctness, she observed that the “quality of the debate is still the
same today” (Charlene Teters, personal communication, January 31, 2012).

The primary argument and defense is that the use of these symbols, references and
mascots by the mainstream is in some way honoring Native people. What typically isn’t
discussed is how Native people are not informed, consulted or asked for consent. The
most recent moment being when the clothing and home furnishings retailer Urban
Outfitters began marketing Southwest themed clothing, underwear and flasks as Navajo.
Facing a lawsuit over trademark infringement from the Navajo Nation, Urban Outfitters
removed the items in question (Ng, 2011; Judkis, 2012). Teters makes work that
confronts a mainstream American audience and challenges dominant culture
(mis)representations of Native people, but her work is also for a Native audience. The

8 Navajo file trademark suit against Urban Outfitters, forcing Urban Outfitters to remove
the word ‘Navajo’ from Product Names.
issue that she raises is the normalization of racism and the acceptance of it by both non-
Native and Native audiences.

Since Native art is generally considered as secondary to the canon of art history
and relegated to “primitive” ethnic arts and crafts that serve as inspiration for Western
art, some contemporary Native artists resist being labeled and categorized. I am not
attempting to redefine a label but to give each artist an opportunity to respond to the issue
of labeling. Some artists like George Morrison, preferred being an American modernist
Abstract Expressionist Painter and Sculptor who was also Ojibway from Minnesota.
Initially resistant to being pigeonholed as an ethnic artist who made typical romantic or
expected Native art, Teters was adamant about not making her nationality or ethnicity
the signifier for her identity as an artist. She stated that the work that she creates is
informed by her experience as a Native person and that in that light she embraces the use
of Native artist.

I think of contemporary as being in the present and happening now. The use of
traditional to describe Native art is problematic for many reasons, mainly as it places a
time limit to the type of cultural production and creates a static and immutable perception
of Native art that I want to move away from. I reference traditional as a way to describe
time-honored cultural or historic practices of a particular people. Clearly, Teters work is
not in the realm of reproducing cultural or historical objects that are tribally specific.
That’s not her intention as her work is installation and performance based and she is not
creating consumable, collectable art objects available for purchase at a gallery or at the
various Native art markets around the country.
In describing her work Teters had a great way of entering the conversation and subverting it. She asserted

All of this comes from that place [the historical/cultural] but I don’t feel a need to recreate any of those things. Only in some of the performance pieces I put some of those things in there with the idea that they [the audience] are going to respond a certain way. I sort of predict a possible response…because we are supposed to be behind glass, we are supposed to be preserved. It’s an exhibit come to life. Using perceived and preconceived notions, it’s part of the medium. It’s so predictable in some ways. For me it’s fun and what used to hurt in some ways is sort of funny because I can predict it. (personal communication, January 31, 2012).

Teters was referring to the regalia that she dresses in during the performance part of her installation work. Often a Native person is not publically dressed in “traditional” or “ceremonial” clothing unless they are part of a cultural event like a pow-wow, dance demonstration or performance. I will return to this concept in the discussion of her art.

In the next section I will discuss three installations by Charlene Teters, Obelisk: To the Heroes (1999) that was part of the 3rd Annual Site Santa Fe Biennial, Route 66 Revised: “It was only an Indian” (1999) at 516 Arts in Albuquerque, NM, and Baseball and Playing Indian (2002) in the Natural History Museum in New York City. These works illustrate the type of work Teters creates and incorporates the themes and motivations driving her art.
In 1999, Teters was invited to participate in the 3rd Annual Site Santa Fe Biennial. The theme was “looking for a place” and she asked “what does that mean for Native people?” she deliberated and decided to do something about Santa Fe and that the piece would be constructed using earth. As an introduction to her thought process on the piece, Teters relayed a story:

My grandmother, who was a storyteller, said that we’ve been here so long that we are a greater part of the earth than any other people so that when you open up the earth, even to plant a seed, that you have to do it in a way that is very respectful. It was a very powerful act to open up the earth for any reason. With that in mind, this place, our bodies are part of the earth. (personal communication, January 31, 2012)

Common in many Indigenous beliefs, creations stories, cosmologies, and ontologies is the understanding that the people come from and have a relationship to the earth. This concept is echoed in prayers, songs and spiritual practice. Also notable is the concept of respect relayed in the story. Encoded in our stories, songs and language are mores and values like respect. They impart knowledge, teach us how to live and also describe our relationship to each other and the earth.

Teters found her inspiration and decided to do a piece on the Obelisk in the center of the historic Santa Fe Plaza. In describing the research she did on the obelisk, she stated

It was dedicated in 1868, placed in front of the Palace of the Governors because that was the capital of the territories. On it had the inscription ‘To the heroes who
have fallen in various battles with savage Indians in the Territory of New Mexico’…, the panel that faces the palace has to do with Native people—it was purposely that panel. I am going to deal with that text. (ibid)

She mentioned that the word “savages” was chiseled out of the original obelisk by members or supporters of the American Indian Movement (AIM) on their way to South Dakota during the occupation of Wounded Knee in 1973. She created her version of the obelisk with adobe in similar scale to the original and was able to get permission to have it placed on the grounds in front of the state capital. On the base was the inscription “to the Heroes” and on the east facing side was a metal plaque with the word “savage” placed among the adobe bricks. She decided to make her piece also about community and invited people from her community to come and help erect the monument. She saw this recreation of this obelisk as a sort of “time capsule” like the original and encouraged people to put their mementos into the adobes. As the piece eroded over the time it stood outside, many of the pieces were exposed and Teters commented that someone had spray-painted the word “Indians” under the Savages plaque at one point. In this piece she posed the question: Who gets to say who is the savage and who is the hero? And gave the answer: It depends on who is telling the story.

The piece is layered with meaning. The first was addressing the inscription on the original obelisk that used the phrase “savage Indians” which is the side that faces the Palace and also directly across from where local Native American artisans set out blankets and their arts, crafts and curios on the ground under the portal that runs along the interior side of the Plaza. Interestingly, the vendors who set up across the street, who aren’t Native, can set up with tables and more elaborate displays. Charlene takes the word
savage, which is a loaded and contested word, isolates it to give it emphasis and places it on the street side of her obelisk visible to the public, in front of the capital of New Mexico, as a way of engaging the history of colonial settlement and the way the dominant culture viewed and described Native people. Teters obelisk of earth is, in one sense, a memorial to the indigenous people of the land in New Mexico who once occupied the area which is now the center of Santa Fe and also an ephemeral marking of time through the community participation on the construction of the installation. Teters was able to reclaim both ideological and physical space with this installation.

Teters, Charlene. (1999). Route 66 Revised: “It was only an Indian” – Interior view [Installation]. Albuquerque, NM; 516 Arts. Photo courtesy of Charlene Teters.

Teters, Charlene. (1999). Route 66 Revised: “It was only an Indian” – detail [Installation]. Albuquerque, NM; 516 Arts. Photo courtesy of Charlene Teters.
In this installation, Teters constructed the illusion of a bar along the historic Route 66 at Magnifico Art Space (now 516 Arts) in downtown Albuquerque, New Mexico. She used realism and slickness to invite the viewer to question the space and also the intention. Teters intentionally drew people in with the “pretty” veneer. Upon closer inspection the viewer is surrounded by imagery from popular culture. The walls have the “End of the Trail” Indian motif stenciled like wallpaper. The bar is stocked with Crazy Horse Malt Liquor, Redskins Coca-Cola, and Chief Illiniwek beer. The walls have framed black and white renderings of actual Native people who are surrounded by familiar pop culture images and above them in neon lights are word like Injuns, Squaw, Braves and Savages. She described her intention and referenced the use of mascots and the mainstream popular culture distortions of Native America.

I meant for it to be a really pretty space because to me that’s what they do with these icons and names: Redskin, Braves, Chief– It’s a way to candy coat [the offensive nature of the imagery] and make it high gloss so that you don’t recognize it for what it is. They become almost normalized. These racial slurs become normalized because they’re pretty. (ibid)

Teters explained the reaction she got from Native people “I’m not sure they understood my point of view. [They asked] are you supporting this? Or are you against this. Native people would get really angry because they weren’t sure, but I am ok with it because it becomes part of the dialogue” (ibid). While targeting mainstream culture and Euro-America, she also wanted to bring a Native audience into the conversation to have them both question the use of racist and denigrating imagery that has become normalized and accepted by all parties. Further, Teters reiterated the motif from her MFA Show of
making the stereotypical images in color and the actual Native people in black and white to illustrate how the mainstream doesn’t see or acknowledge Native America. This theme of addressing the invisibility/visibility and absence/presence paradigm is prevalent in contemporary Native art and is likely to continue until Native people are afforded the same human rights as the dominant culture.

Teters mentioned that sometimes there is a performance aspect to her work which often involves her performing in the space. In this installation she makes the viewer part of the performance/installation. The barstools were inviting and she remarked that people would walk in off the street, expect to be served and then slowly come to the realization that her installation was not actually a business. The installation was situated on a main street that has both bars and shops that sell Indian pawn items and Southwestern Indian kitsch, which made the exhibit even more deceivingly convincing despite the words “ART SPACE” above the door. I observed that the use of the bar also carried the subtext of Indians and alcoholism, which is a well-documented problem that also became a prevalent stereotype for Native America.
In 2002, as part of an Artist-in-Residence Program, Charlene Teters produced an art installation piece entitled *Baseball and Playing Indian* in conjunction with the *Baseball as America* exhibition at the American Museum of Natural History in New York City. In this exhibit Teters placed Native themed baseball memorabilia with Indian kitsch toys in a display case that surround, envelop, obscure and overwhelm the imagery of Native people in the background. In addition to the display case, Charlene dressed in her dance regalia and interacted with the public in the museum near her installation but also in other areas. In our discussion, Teters described how a mother quickly grabbed her...

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9 In their *Totems to Turquoise Section* which is on Native American culture, The AMNH has an online “North American Ethnography Collection” that contains a comprehensive collection of 50,000 artifacts and claims “Every Native American cultural region in North America is represented in this artifact collection, making it an irreplaceable national treasure.”
children and pulled them toward her, and then when it registered that Charlene just an
Indian Woman dressed in Indian clothing the woman became embarrassed. Teters
commented on the performance aspect of the exhibition

I sort of predict a possible response like the woman grabbing her children.
Because we are supposed to be behind glass, we are supposed to be preserved. It’s
an exhibit come to life. Using perceived and preconceived notions, it’s part of the
medium. It’s so predictable in some ways. For me it’s fun and what used to hurt in
some ways is sort of funny because I can predict it. It’s also a reflection of the
history of that particular museum that had Native specimens on exhibit – the four
Inuit people who were on exhibit who, when they died, became part of the
exhibit.10 (ibid)

Teters was referencing the type of ethnographic exhibitions that place Native people and
their material culture in glassed cases and dioramas. These waxed representations
characterized Native peoples as part of a distant past and also because they were not
considered full human beings and citizens with basic human rights, they were often the
object of inquiry and collection by anthropologists and archeologists until the end of the
twentieth century.11 Using the medium of pop culture references and perceived and
preconceived notions of Native America gave Teters a forum and starting point, an entry
into a dialogue about re-educating Euro-America and reclaiming discursive space. She
asserted, “It’s always about reclaiming the space. A lot of this work is about reclaiming.

10 The account of the six Inuit from Greenland was documented in Kenn Harper's (2000)
Give Me My Father's Body: The Life of Minik, the New York Eskimo.
11 See the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act.
www.nps.gov/nagpra/
The early work was about reclaiming my identity as a woman and a Native… it’s always a part of the performance… it’s not just art on the safety of white walls. It’s reclaiming a safe space” (ibid). Space has been taken from Native people in so many different ways – physical, ideological, spiritual, emotional. Reclaiming or Indigenizing space is part of my discourse on Indigenous aesthetics. Teters work is a clear example of Indigenizing space, not only when she is physically inhabiting the space in her regalia but also when she leaves her mark through installations that challenge the observer to question what they know and believe to be true about Native people.

When asked about her regalia, Teters elaborated, “They’re family heirlooms. One dates back to 1890. There’s something about wearing them. There’s a power in them” (ibid). I observed that several generations have worn them and by using the regalia Teters was connecting to lineage, legacy, family, community and cultural history. Even though Charlene doesn’t create culturally specific or historic objects for consumption that reference her tribal identity, she is clear about how that identity informs who she is and the type of work she produces.
Michael Nicoll Yahgulanaas

*Indigenous epistemology is fluid, non-linear, and relational. Knowledge is transmitted through stories that shape shift in relation to the wisdom of the storyteller at the time of the telling.* —Margaret Kovach (2009)

Michael Nicoll Yahgulanaas is an artist from the village of Masset in the islands of Haida Gwaii 27 miles off the west coast of British Columbia, Canada. Michael descends from Isabella Yahjanaas and her husband Charles Edenshaw who are his great-great grandparents. Prior to focusing primarily on his art, Michael had a career of three decades of social and political involvement for the Haida nation. Drawing from his formal training in classic Haida design and narratives, exposure to Asian brushwork, and the Japanese form of comicbook called manga, Yahgulanaas invented a new genre of graphic narrative called Haida Manga. He produces works in a variety of mediums including works on paper, canvas, car hoods and recently a 43 meter monumental steel sculpture commissioned by the city of Vancouver. Yahgulanaas has also published several books utilizing his Haida Manga style as a form of narrative style and composition including *A Tale of Two Shamans*, *RED*, *Flight of the Hummingbird*, and most recently *Old Growth: Michael Nicoll Yahgulanaas*. He creates these publications with the interest in making his work and also his message accessible to a larger audience. Yahgulanaas integrates Indigenous narratives along with social and environmental issues through his innovation on the classic Haida formline aesthetic, lexicon and storytelling.

Like Charlene Teters, Yahgulanaas put other obligations in front of his art before deciding to commit to it full-time. While taking positions of leadership and action for his community, the ideas for his work solidified and became the underpinning and context for what he does today. Yahgulanaas described how, in his community of Old Massett,
there is a history of art making and the valuing of the items being made, the reasons for
their creation as well as the persons who made them. This includes not only artists who
worked on canoes, family crest poles, bentwood boxes and jewelry, but also the weavers
and regalia makers know for their cedar, spruce root, Raven’s Tail/ Yelth Koo or
Chilkat/Naaxiin creations. While he didn’t pursue an institutional degree in studio art,
Yahgulanaas was immersed in a creative community. He recalled that his first experience
making art with the intention of making an art piece was in the early Seventies, working
with a team of relatives and friends under the direction of Robert Davidson. Yahgulanaas
stated, “In 1977, when we created the four interior house poles, that was the first time in
living memory that such a house and poles had been built in the traditional style. That
was a powerful social moment for the community” (Michael Nicoll Yahgulanaas,
personal communication, 01.02.2012).

When he referred to traditional, Yahgulanaas described his meaning and
understanding as something that was made that had a Haida specific historic reference
and cultural aesthetic from several hundreds of years of art making. During this early
exposure to community scaled art he also observed and began to question how a style of
traditional work was changed as it moved into an art market for export outside of the
community context. This was the part of his life where Yahgulanaas was dedicated to
reconstructing our government structures and being a part of community effort
that involved physical and political blockades, being challenged by and also
challenging Canadian judiciary and basically fighting for the landscape that
defines who my community is. This very conscious decision that we had to
protect the land became the central focus of my life for decades to follow. (ibid)
Yahgulanaas mentioned that he would often sketch during this time and occasionally submitted his initial cartoons regularly to the local paper. These drawings were for a “small audience, but directed at both Haida and Canadians living on the island” (ibid).

Yahgulanaas talked about struggling with the idea of creating North American style comic book, but came to the realization that his work had to become more than that. While working as a cultural ambassador and guide on Haida Gwaii, a group of Japanese University students introduced him to the potential of both comic based art and the professional achievements of the artists through Japanese manga. While reminiscent of the alternative comic world that once seemed so promising, manga opened him up to thinking of the possibility of doing something totally different than North American comic books. This was the moment of inception for the creation of his Haida Manga style. The following is how Yahgulanaas discussed the clarity he had about this new style and purpose

I started creating my first book in the Haida manga style, which for me is code for hybridity. It simply means living in that intersection, that fertile, rich almost explosively rich area where different comes together- such as when fresh water meets salt water - the delta, the estuaries; that’s where it’s happening. It’s fertile.

I realized that shifting out of the creation of work that is judged by it’s ability to look two to three hundred years old, traditional – shifting away from that to a place where I come from which is a person of this time, speaking English, of mixed ancestry, growing up with a great grandmother whose English was her second language while also being so well loved by my Scottish grandfather. Having being able to see that and listen to conversations with old people, to have
had that generational experience… to be at that interface between Canadian and
Haida, that’s who I am, that’s where my art needed to be. (ibid)

Yahgulanaas makes a distinction about moving away from creating work that is
c consumer or market driven or based strictly on a cultural or historic reference, essentially
reproductions of older, customary designs in materials like wood, argillite or ivory, to
fully embracing his Haida Manga style to guide his work across other mediums. In his
description of hybridity, Yahgulanaas clarified that it is not only an Indigenous cultural
experience that inform his work, but also a reflection of his experience as a person who is
an amalgam of Native and non-Native influences living in a modern world.

While his work is a reimagining and innovation on classic Haida formline
aesthetics and his narratives are often grounded in Haida ideology, ontology and
mythology, Yahgulanaas does not want to be categorized solely as a First Nations or
Native American artist. For him it is too limiting to the way he thinks about his work,
which is intended for audiences looking beyond and between ethnicity. Yahgulanaas was
also opposed to the familiar categorization of traditional versus contemporary. He
elaborated on his position

I am the most traditional artist because I am working in the tradition of
innovation. I am creating artwork that serves the purpose of the living. Tradition
becomes a way of describing an era, a particular point on a timeline or a map. A
Haida clan created the first ever totem pole just outside my home in Delkatla
slough near Massett. No one had ever done that before. No one had ever carved
such a design into a log before. This event was a living, inspired and very
contemporary creative process that has become firmly entrenched, still potent but now known as traditional (ibid)

In this context, Yahgulanaas seemed comfortable with the definition of being a contemporary artist of mixed ancestry, producing work that is a contemporary expression of his cultural experience. His work is distinctly Haida, but Yahgulanaas has allowed for a broader definition of what Haida art and aesthetics could and should look like.

Yahgulanaas commented on the audience he envisioned his work reaching and divided it between fine art and his publications

The reason why I do publications with a strong visual component is because the technique of mass production is populist and the imagery, the literate line is universal, regardless of education, language, cultural experience, geography – All humans almost be definition understand graphic language.

As I thought back to what it was like in the pre-Canadian Haida civilization where imagery was so commonplace, I realized that it is language, a complex form of signs, iconography and communication. If I wanted to produce work that wasn’t about hierarchy and speaking only to an elite, be it the elite of hundreds of years ago or even today, and if I was interested in the spaces between, notions of accessibility, then I had to do publications. If I create one piece of artwork… it has a very limited audience, but a publication has the potential, has the ability to reach a thousand fold more people. It’s about accessibility to all communities – Indigenous and settler. So that we, as Indigenous people, can think of different ways of presenting and seeing ourselves and talking about who we are as well as
for other people to consider the possibility that we are also complex and human.

(ibid)

It is important to distinguish that Yahgulanaas was referencing how Haida imagery and iconography is a lexicon for describing complex systems of family, community, culture particularity, language, oral traditions, place, songs, status and lineage when used intraculturally. Also, like most Indigenous people who live today, Yahgulanaas is a member of multiple communities and does work within a global context so his art and therefore his iconography isn’t necessarily Haida specific. Yahgulanaas draws from that lexicon to relate his worldview to a larger audience which is Haida and non-Haida, Indigenous and non-Indigenous. Yahgulanaas also appeals to Indigenous people to reimagining themselves and move away from static, romanticized representations widely accepted and marketed to the dominant culture.

Yahgulanaas is also very clear about making and marketing his fine art. He stated, “In terms of the fine art, I select galleries that sell very little Indigenous artwork. That they were not marketing a particular image of who I was to an audience that was out there buying a powerful yet formulaic approach” (ibid). Yahgulanaas also posed a question about the dominant culture appropriating art and cultural symbols when he asked

What does it mean when the $20 Canadian bill which has drawings by Bill Reid, a much acclaimed and accomplished artist? It’s quite clear that culture is currency. I don’t want to necessarily be contained within a canvas or a monetary theory that
is that is prescribed, defined and marketed by somebody who may actually be selling other designs” (ibid).

This concept is a source of inspiration and aggravation for many Native artists who are either proactive or reactive to their approach to making art that addresses issues of representation related to commodification of culture. Yahgulanaas is working from an informed perspective of the politics of identity and purposely producing work that pushes against those boundaries.

There is a driving purpose or motivation for the work that he does, Yahgulanaas wants the dominant culture to experience Indigenous peoples in respectful and dignified ways and to provide visibility to the continuing presence, rich intellectual histories and cultural expressions. Yahgulanaas elaborated on the issue:

If people can see us as complex and not the stereotype - If they don’t see us as human beings just like themselves, the same species, the same kind of rich emotional creatures, then it is possible, even likely that we will again witness assaults. Elite societies around the world have been killing and torturing and abusing marginalized and demonized people for years beyond counting. Not seeing us, not seeing the other means we are invisible and a blank façade for others to describe. My work is to welcome people to see other peoples in complex ways. If we see the other, if we love and laugh with the other maybe we will no longer tolerate the pain and suffering of the other (ibid)

Yahgulanaas draws parallels with Native America to the treatment of Jewish people at the beginning of the 20th century. His words are a call to action for Native people as well.
Like the Jewish. Thinking back to the holocaust that they had and the holocaust that we are having. One must respond, inaction is not an option, checking out or just leaving the scene is complicity. Because we live we are engaged. For us here along the west coast we survived three hundred years of genocide and we didn’t do that so we could do the same nasty things to others.. We experienced and we survived so that when we respond to the world we can do so in an emotionally complex way; we can become advocates for a better way ahead for all of us, even those who appear so different that we call them other (ibid)

For Yahgulanaas, this means making work that carries a message or commentary about things that matter and also making work that will be accessible so that the message disseminates to a larger audience. Yahgulanaas has also taken the opportunity to use his position as a public figure to bring deeper awareness to these issues thus doing his part to bring issues affecting Indigenous peoples into greater visibility. There is also a sense of pride and honoring to the legacy and tradition of Haida cultural production and storytelling that carries through his work.

In 2001, Yahgulanaas published A Tale of Two Shamans that he adapted from an old story that comprised of black ink illustrations and facing pages with text. As Yahgulanaas described it, he wanted to tell the story through his own interpretation, “not as an ethnographic translation, not as a Haida speaker would, but I, the child of Haida and Scot, of hybridity, would tell it and own it. Not trying to measure up to any constructed group standards or externally controlled definitions, just doing it in a way that feels honest and deeply personal” (ibid). Yahgulanaas was definitive about not asserting himself as an expert on Haida language or culture, but as a person of mixed ancestry who
was creating his own version based on his understanding. The origin of the story, he recalled,

It was recorded in three different ways, three different villages. The stories had become separated, even at the time that they were recorded which was in the early 1900s, so I knitted them back together again. So there’s primarily a Massett story and a little part from Skidegate and a little part from Kaigani family in South East Alaska…. Once those three pieces came together the individual versions began to really make sense. The reunited story revealed itself as a tidy parable, an examination for how one could be fully responsible for our own actions, and the results of being blind to that choice. (ibid)

With Native storytellers and oral tradition, there is adaptation. His taking the disparate pieces and consolidating them is in keeping with the storytelling tradition of finding the
right elements to retell this story while also creating a new version. In Western history, the victor tells the story, but there are multiple versions of history. The same is true for oral tradition and songs. Over time they change and adapt as languages and cultures change. They change and adapt to fit the present moment, to be relevant to the current audience while keeping the spirit or intention. Yahgulanaas’ interpretation of a Tale of Two Shamans (2001) makes the connection to Haida cultural mores and values while asserting himself as a Storyteller in his own right.

One of the concerns that a Native artist with cultural ties to his/her community faces is how the work will be received or evaluated by the community members, particularly if some sort of cultural patrimony is being offered for public/outside consumption. For the most part, there seems to be a high level of accountability and reflexivity among Native artists who produce work with culturally specific signifiers, symbols or narratives and many purposely chose not to use sacred imagery or culturally sensitive material. There is a belief among many Indigenous people that there are aspects of culture that are meant only for people who are initiated, usually tribal members of the particular nation or extended family members and their community. Thus, these things are produced for internal consumption and not taken out of their intended context. Yahgulanaas reported that the response from his community was “pleasant”, and even encouraging and that they understood that the story was his interpretation and “not something that had to be sanctioned”(ibid). Yahgulanaas gained the courage and resolve to continue producing narrative driven publications and to create stories from his own observations.
An example of that is *Flight of the Hummingbird* (2008), an adaptation of a Quechua parable. Yahgulanaas talked about the power of the image and described the hummingbird as “a symbol for moving into action.” He declared without hesitation “Never mind the consequences, it’s not whether you win or lose. Did you play the game? Did you find a place for yourself to become part of the situation or are you just sitting off to the sidelines wasting oxygen” (ibid).

In the book, Yahgulanaas explained the significance of taking action

In Haida stories it is often the most diminutive creature—a mouse, a frog, or even that curious being that becomes smaller the closer it approaches—that offers the critical gift or the necessary solution. One of our foundational narratives describes a dark time when all the light is stored away in the smallest container and is released only when the greatest hero becomes a small child. The wee creatures don’t seek a lofty status, but their humble contributions, even a single bead of water, allow for heroic events. (Yahgulanaas, 2008, p. 52)
Yahgulanaas successfully related this story to discuss his environmental concerns, sustainability, taking responsibility and moving into action.

*RED: A Haida Manga* began as a five meter long by one meter tall mural that became the pages and spreads for his book. Each page has illustrations and text within the container of Yahgulanaas unique interpretation of Haida formline aesthetics. If each page is removed from the binding and placed back in sequence, the larger image would be visible. Yahgulanaas called the gutters and whitespaces “time/space devices” which are metaphors for the “larger picture” happening around us and the book a matter of perspective or viewpoint from seeing with your eyes, a microscope, binoculars or a telescope (Michael Nicoll Yahgulanaas, personal communication, 01.02.2012). The book

is also a metaphor for questioning. Books are bound, discreetly packaged and marketed. Yahgulanaas encourages the viewer to make a decision to either keep the book intact or to disassemble and recreate their own miniature of the original mural therefore empowering the viewer to take responsibility for how they view the narrative. This is a reflection of a larger theme in his artwork where his message is for people to think for themselves, take responsibility for their thoughts and actions and explore the possibilities of seeing things from more than one perspective.

According to Yahgulanaas, this was a family story that was never written down. He said, “I needed to find a story that wasn’t quaint, that wasn’t about metaphoric ravens, eagles, whales, or even those wooden cigar store statues; that would entice people to see deeper and clearer” (ibid). His stories are contextually very different from mythological, iconographic stories that are detached from everyday life. Red tells a story about morality and the consequences for one’s actions. Yahgulanaas presented this allegory through a family story that isn’t based on romanticized or highly mystical characterizations of Haida or Indigenous peoples, but instead of actual human struggle. Yahgulanaas is
adamant about “getting people to see more than the superficial, stereotypical versions of Indigeneity and the Other” that are prevalent in popular culture and his approach is to present narratives that are grounded in social, economic and material conditions relevant to the human condition while focusing through a hybrid lens (ibid).
Along the same lines or as his books could loosely be described as a series of works on paper, his latest offering is *Old Growth: Michael Nicoll Yahgulanaas*. This book contains more than three decades of art work tracing the history of political negotiations and cultural conflict from his homeland of Haida Gwaii. This retrospective includes studies, experiments, and works previously unpublished or exhibited. Like the other books in his series, this book also serves as commentary on environmental and societal concerns and is accessible to young and old, educated and non-educated.

“Papered Over” is part of Yahgulanaas’ “Rotational Series” where he works on an image up to a point and then rotates the paper or canvas 90 degrees only to turn it again.

Yahgulanaas reflected on his creative process and intention
It’s almost like trying to sculpt on a flat surface, trying to find different perspectives for me to look at it. I refuse the notion that there is a proper up and down. I remove the oppression of a single horizon. That means many things. One of the things it means is speaking to the observer, welcoming the observer to take responsibility for how they see the work. In the rotational series you are welcomed or encouraged to flip the work constantly so you can become part of the process of interpreting the world as opposed to having someone deliver it to us in a…tidy little package with a set of instructions. (ibid)

Scriven & Paul (1987) suggested that critical thinking is the “intellectually disciplined process of actively and skillfully conceptualizing, applying, analyzing, synthesizing, and/or evaluating information gathered from, or generated by, observation, experience, reflection, reasoning, or communication, as a guide to belief and action.” Critical thinking is at the heart of what Yahgulanaas is suggesting through the Rotational Series, which in one instance gives the observer freedom to pick a display orientation, but also serves as a metaphor for a history of political struggles with the Canadian government. Yahgulanaas explained

I am trying to undermine the hierarchy of the authority of the artist in the same way we sought to challenge the authority of the colonial government structure over our landscape. In the work…I try to do it in a gentle way. The rotational series is a way to engage with people understanding that they, like myself, are just too willing to give our responsibility and authority away. The artwork is a great vehicle for a gentle, colorful, creative reaching out as opposed to other less
friendly approaches to problem solving. (Michael Nicoll Yahgulanaas, personal communication, 01.02.2012)

While Yahgulanaas’ drawings are colorful, playful, whimsical and inviting, they provide a great entry point into a deeper and layered discourse on awareness and action. The imagery is non-specific, meaning there are no direct narratives or specific references to Haida crest iconography, however this is a quintessential example of the innovative Haida manga style that is informed by that classic formline aesthetic.

Looking at the formal qualities of the piece, the expanding and collapsing line along with the use of color and the filling of negative spaces create tensions similarly to Haida cultural art forms. This work also references the abstractions and distortions commonly recognized in Modern artists such as Pablo Picasso, Rene Magritte, Wassily Kandinsky and Peter Saul. Arguably, Haida abstraction began hundreds of years before these artists. As a product of hybridity and the mixing of cultures, ethnicities, worldviews and influences, Yahgulanaas’ art is a reflection of all those things while being grounded in a distinctly Haida aesthetic and ideology. It would be a disservice and disrespectful to his family, communities, land or experiences to say otherwise. At the same time, Yahgulanaas is reimagining what Haida art is supposed to look like and is creating room for future generations of Native artists to continue in the “tradition of innovation” (ibid).

Another example of his version of abstraction embued with layers of meaning and subtext are the Coppers from the Hood series, which are part of the larger Rotational series. In 2011, the British Museum commissioned one of the Coppers from the Hood and then immediately sent it off to exhibit in Australia and Dubai as part of their “Treasures
of the World” exhibit. In this series, Yahgulanaas applied gold, silver, or in this case, copper leaf onto a car hood before adding a Haida Manga design. With this series, he incorporates a play on words in the title that references both the description of the materials and also to Haida culture.


Within customary Haida culture, copper shields were valued as a form of wealth and prestige. While this wealth was substantive and material, it was also a reflection of something beyond the corporal, something that was eternal like names, privilege or status that was conferred and validated as part of the potlatch system in Haida culture. Yahgulanaas referred to the transference of wealth through the potlatch system as a “
vehicle to move from one place to another” (ibid). Here again is a play on words and symbolism where copper is wealth, wealth is a vehicle and the metal underneath is from a vehicle. Literal comparisons could also be made to actual coppers that were rectangular, had purposeful creases and designs that were painted on them. This piece is about playing with notions of currency and value as Yahgulanaas has transformed a reclaimed or found object and gave it a new intrinsic value.

Like with *Papered Over*, Yahgulanaas (2010) spoke about the rotational aspect of the piece and makes a distinction about the role of the observer.

The image can be turned upside down or right side up. There is no 'correct' horizon and the shifting horizon line also shifts the narrative. Under the authority of the observer, curator, etc, new meanings and reference points are created. Observer as passive recipient or simply consumer of a product encourages hierarchy and elitism. Undesirable conditions in political, social and economic life lead ultimately to stasis. An engaged Observer that creates new references and determinations must diminish or claim a role as artist as part of the pre-eminent authority. Authority is not exclusive and its expansion does not lead to chaos but rather encourages robustness.

In this work I hope to acknowledge that historically and contemporarily, Haida and by extension, human society may be one of welcoming and respecting a diversity of positions or viewpoints on a single situation, thereby reconsidering the more limited and typically authoritarian view that posits opposition and conflict between the preferred and the dismissed.
Although the imagery has reference points, with hands, eyes, arms, faces, a creature in a
nest, this piece is more of a play of lines and metaphors than a representation of a Haida
mythological or crest symbol. Yahgulanaas stays true to form with references to his
cultural understanding of the world and reflecting on the broader picture and implications
for humanity. This widening of the lens allows for a better understanding that Native art
doesn’t have to be Haida or Indigenous specific, but can draw from those influences and
reflect what is important to the artist, expressing who they are today.

Yahgulanaas, Michael Nicoll. (2011). *Abundance Fenced* - Composite, Horizontal Detail and Vertical

Commissioned by the city of Vancouver, Yahgulanaas translated his Haida
Manga style into a monumental steel public art. This steel sculpture, a stylized fence, but
also reminiscent of carved Haida bracelets, measures 43 meters and was inspired by the record-setting 2010 Fraser River Salmon run (Griffin, 2011). Yahgulanaas described the imagery and intention in the creation of *Abundance Fenced*.

The sculpture depicts two sets of stylized orca whales facing opposite directions with their tail flukes meeting in the centre and their faces rising up to define a metaphorical passageway. The whales pursue cascading salmon down a slope towards the North Shore mountains. The salmon are welded together in a timeless pursuit to represent a system of interdependence essential to all of us.

Again Yahgulanaas is using the title to reference not only the actual piece but also the larger context that he works in. The steel sculpture is a fence along a walkway but also references how the fencing and controlling of waterways affect nature and salmon, in particular. Intrinsic in this reference is the Native peoples who have been affected not only by the containing of waterways and their ability to get a food staple, the salmon, but also through the residential systems and reserve systems that restrict movement both ideologically and physically. Yahgulanaas is adept at using beautiful imagery much in the same way Charlene Teters and many other artists today use imagery to invite people, Native or non-Native, to the conversation. This dialogue that they want to foster is based on making Native people and their lived realities more visible.
Teri Greeves

When I was older and able to understand the stories my mother told us about growing up dirt poor in Oklahoma, I realized that it was my grandmother's beadwork that had fed all of her children and the many grandchildren that she had raised. It was NOT the white education she had received in a Catholic Indian boarding school that had given her a skill to make money…it was not the white education that had given her such an exquisite sense of aesthetic…and it was definitely not the white education that had given her the pride and persistence in her artistic abilities.

In the summer of 1995, I was going through some of the beads I had inherited from my grandmother after she had died. I found a medallion that she had just barely started...obviously Southern Plains style with a white background and rainbow colors. I finished it. I did this piece with my grandmother and in doing so, I believe I finally connected around a long circle back to the beginning of where I came from.
—Teri Greeves (personal communication, November 16, 2011)

Teri Greeves is a distinguished Native artist, an enrolled Kiowa from Oklahoma, and an innovative beadworker. Her work is a notable blend of the beadworking techniques that were practiced when glass beads were first introduced to Native peoples and the use of unconventional objects as her canvas. The techniques Greeves uses link her to generations of Plains beadworkers before her and her innovations pave the way for future Native beadworkers. Unlike customary Kiowa beadwork that is abstract and geometric, Greeves beadwork is pictorial and narrative driven. Through her narratives she explores a range of themes from aspects of Native culture, current or historical events and even Kiowa mythology.

Greeves grew up on the Wind River Reservation in Wyoming on the Shoshone side of the reservation which meant she was influenced by people and culture not of her tribe of origin. This necessarily had an impact on her artwork as well as the time she spent in her mother’s trading post on the reservation. Greeves clarified that her work is narrative driven and about her use of pictorial beadwork.
What I am known for is pictorial work. I like to do narrative work instead of just pictorial as all of my work has a story in it. Traditional kiowa beadwork is abstract and very minimal and I have done it before but it was not a good enough vehicle to tell the narratives I felt compelled to tell. The Shoshone’s I grew up around were well known for doing pictorial beadwork. I am narrative driven and therefore that’s why I do narrative work. (Teri Greeves, personal communication, November 16, 2011)

Greeves became interested and started beading when she was eight years old. She makes a distinction about not being “formally trained” but rather she learned “traditionally,” she stated “no formal training when to comes to art, but definitely traditional learning when it comes to beadwork, but really that’s how all traditional learning is done. It’s done by doing. Kids are interested, so you sit down with them and show them a little bit and keep doing it” (ibid). Her mom’s adopted sister Zeedora Enos, an enrolled Shoshone who was working at the trading post was the first person to give Greeves instruction on beading. Greeves explained,

“I was ‘biting at the bit’ to start learning beading so I asked my mom. She said, “I’m not a beadworker I can’t show you how to do it. Go ask Zee [Zeedora Enos]. So I did. She sat down with me one day at the shop and I made a pair of baby moccasins with a hump [lazy] stitch design on them. They’re really a classic looking moccasins. The negative space is actually the dear footprint, the beadwork is there but it’s the negative space that creates the essence of the piece. (ibid)
Several years she learned how to peyote stitch from Calvin Magpie a well-known Cheyenne peyote stitch fan maker. In her youth, Greeves spent a lot of time working at her mother’s shop and benefited from seeing the artists come in with their work. Greeves said, “They were always generous with their information and giving me advice. Also, my mom taught me a lot as she had a good eye for really good beadwork. She taught me two big lessons: Always use good materials; never use junk. Two, finish the piece. As you turn the object or hold it in your hand – every part of the surface of it has been addressed” (ibid). Greeves also mentioned that her mother taught her about the business of art and while the store contained all the materials she needed to produce her work, her mom instilled the concept of value by selling the materials to her at cost. It was through these experiences that Greeves solidified her understanding of technique, materials, purpose and concept of her chosen medium.

Greeves was fortunate to have a Native cultural experiential learning atmosphere growing up that gave her a good foundation for making objects and creating narrative driven work. What I am describing is Indigenous education within Native communities often includes instruction and mentoring on language, songs, dance, creative expression, morality, ethics, values along with skill based activities with materials, problem solving and conceptual thinking. After several decades of making objects and going through the Western educational system, she described her main motivations for making art at this point in her career are driven by the need to communicate her experiences as a Native person and educating the general public about Native America. She said, “Art for me is about communication between me and an imaginary audience. Part of it is driven by a need to understand one another on a human level but the only way to do it authentically is
to come from my own perspective” (ibid). Greeves uses the allure of the materials on the object, like Converse All-stars, to attract people to looking at the images and consider the underlying narrative. She spoke about the influence of brand recognition and also the power of being able to present her narratives on a recognizable “canvas”

The shoes, converse all-stars, everyone’s owned a pair. As an object, it’s a universal object; everyone recognizes those shoes. Then they’re fully beaded, so they catch people’s attention. It used to bother me that people would approach the shoes smiling and laughing. Then I realized the power of it, people walk up to them with a smile on their face and their heart totally open, and if there is a heavy-duty story on that object, they are open to it. You know, you can catch more flies with honey. (ibid)

Often, it is popular culture that appropriates a symbol of Native American culture and transforms it into an empty signifier that is devoid of reference to actual Native people. This is a clear example of exactly the opposite. Greeves utilizes recognizable objects from the dominant culture like the converse all-stars, high heels or and umbrella appropriates their power as a symbol to relate her narratives and expressions as a Native person. She described that the use of beauty in her work as a vehicle for communication, she explained

My intention has always been to communicate…It’s part of what drives always doing something beautiful, because the heavy subject matter that I am trying to address, if it is aesthetically beautiful to look at, it draws people into it because it’s the beauty that they are drawn to – the craftsmanship or the materials or the
sparkle [of the beads]. Then the more they look at it, then the more they are confronted with the narrative that I have to tell. (ibid)

Greeves makes these objects because of an urgency to communicate and educate people on aspects of Native life and culture that are thriving today. She also reflected on how, as a mother she felt the need to make work that carried Kiowa cultural signifiers and narratives that her children could understand and remember. Greeves made the connection between heroes in popular culture and iconic or heroic figures in Kiowa mythology. She related how she was inspired to begin her Kiowa Half-boys series

I did a whole series about our “half boys,” Kiowa sacred beings. It was driven by the fact that I was watching my kids watching Spiderman, Batman and all the comic book heroes and I realized that we have our own heroes. How do I get [my sons] to recognize them or see them? That got me producing a whole series on the “half boys” and trying to deal with them in a way that would be interesting to a younger audience because they’re the ones that need to hear those stories. That’s our Jesus story, the foundational story for Kiowa worldview. (ibid)

Unknowingly, like any traditional storyteller, Greeves began a process of taking the story and relating it to the present so that is was relevant and also so that the story and it’s cultural significance would past to the next generation, her children. She explained

For me to understand it better by delving into it, to process it and put it into imagery and into narrative. For them, to make an image that hopefully would stick in their little brains so that when I am gone and they are with their kids that
maybe a flash of one of my pieces will blink in their mind and they will have that
to remember those stories and be able to transfer them. (ibid)

Indigenous traditional storytelling and oral tradition often involve creating memorable
imagery, either literally or metaphorically that carries the meaning, symbolism and
underlying cultural knowledge (signifiers, histories, mores, values, cosmologies, spiritual
beliefs, etc.). As a mother, Greeves felt compelled to communicate to a particular and
significant audience, her children. Her work also communicates to a broader audience,
both Native and non-Native, about the presence of living Native people, culture and
whatever her subject matter, it is extremely important or she wouldn’t do it.

Greeves described how important it is to relate the Native experience or perspective on
events like the 2008 election, the war and 1928, the year Native people were granted U.S.
citizenship

Like when Obama was elected, I had to do a piece about this election. I had to
make some sort of commentary about what just happened in the United States. It
was a big deal. I started thinking about it and the only way I could deal with it is
to talk about how Native people got the vote. We all know this story intimately.
We all have family members that served in the war; that were the people that lead
the way. My grandmother was 24 years old before she was considered a citizen
of the United States and I am not the only one. There are lots of us out there that
have really close family members that were not citizens.

So, that’s what I mean. I did a lot of pieces about Iraq, but every one of them I
had to relate through something that I had observed in the Native experience that
processed that moment in history. We are a part of that history, we are not separate from it. (ibid)

Native people have been a part of the national history since contact, but are minimally included in the retelling of historic events. Through her work, Greeves inserts the Native perspective on U.S. national events that have had a profound effect on Native peoples up to the present. She also discussed the adaptation of Native people to the modern world and how Native people are utilizing and Indigenizing technology

Our children have ipods and they listen to music that way, they are not listening to a drum around a fire. We are part of this world, so how do we process the ipod but through Native eyes. You go to any pow-wow, you see a bunch of boys with baggy pants selling CDs that they burned themselves, probably using a MAC music program, with Indian songs that they made. To me that’s like, ok, we will survive. That’s good stuff right there. That’s it. That’s all we can hope for is for the next generation to figure out how to use [technology] – our generation did. My grandma sewed with nylon thread, not sinew, because she had access to nylon thread. Technology is technology. I don’t care what it is whether it is digital or tactile, so long as we are able to use it and process it our survival is going to happen. (ibid)

Greeves noted that Native people today are using technology and the forms of digital audio media that is available to make, learn and disseminate music where in previous generations people would gather and learn within their small communities around a drum in traditional cultural settings. This is not to say definitively that one is replacing the
other, but rather that Native people are accessing these new forms that have become available. In some instances, new materials and tool do replace older materials in some instances such as nylon thread instead of sinew and glass beads instead of porcupine quills. Greeves touched on a familiar discussion about how Native art and cultural production is often separated into the categories of traditional and contemporary. She agreed that Native people adapt and incorporate new ideas, influences and materials into their lexicon of cultural expression. I refer to this re-conceptualizing and reframing as Indigenizing of materials and discursive space. A key component to this discussion is continuity and what I consider a spectrum of cultural expression that varies from culturally specific and historic forms to very abstracted and highly innovative forms that may not immediately indicate the reference point to someone who isn’t familiar with the context or development of Native art.

The type of work that Greeves produces is purposeful and the way that she does it links her to a long line of beadworkers past, present and in the future. She asserted,

“I do beadwork and I try to use traditional technique and materials, but it’s never been based on materials, medium and technique. I am in a long line of beadworkers before and after. I don’t like the words contemporary or traditional. There is a historical spectrum of us. I come from, with the materials and techniques, that line of [beadworkers]. There will be people in front of me that will be doing things that I never thought of, so I am a part of that history. [What I am doing is] contemporary now, but in 100 years it might be traditional. It’s all in the moment you are living. (ibid)
In my discussions with Native artists working across different mediums over the last decade, many agree and hope that these static categories will fade away. The artists in this study are part of living artistic and cultural expression that is distinctly of this time and grounded in their experience as a Native person.

Greeves clarified about producing objects or items that were culturally specific and meant for internal use. These items are normally referred to as traditional or artifacts and often get categorized as craftwork. She stated that she would be limited in the scope of her personal expression if she produced only “traditional objects” and while she still makes them for family and members of her community, these objects are not available for the general public (ibid). I have observed over years of being among different Native communities and artists that there is a separation of internal and external cultural production. Within many communities there are cultural contexts, events and gatherings that are considered private domain and never seen or experienced unless you were initiated or invited. This type of cultural patrimony of a particular nation is generally not considered public domain, although Western anthropologists and ethnographers have gone into communities, recorded and appropriated cultural patrimony and then made it available to the general public. It is the responsibility of the individual, within a Native context, on how and what they disclose. Also, in this context Native artists are not just individuals but also representatives and even ambassadors for their families, communities and sovereign nations. Greeves decided that it was necessary to continue to use the materials and techniques associated with historic Plains style beadwork, but moved away from using cultural or historic objects to express her narratives.
When I asked about the choices she made in using sacred imagery and specifically the Sun Boys narrative she explained

There were parts of the story I left out so there were only highlights of the stories that I put in that I had already seen in print. When I came to the parts of the story that I questioned putting in there, I did it symbolically. Unless you were Kiowa or knew those stories you wouldn’t be able to really read it. Those pieces were all devotional art, the same way a monk would sit and illustrate a bible page. (ibid)

When work is available for public consumption, the opportunity for misunderstanding increases, especially if an artist uses iconography that can reference the sacred or spiritual from someone else’s tradition. Greeves elaborated on her decision to represent the Kiowa form of the Sundance, a ceremony that many Plains nations have adapted and adopted,

It was in recognition that we got the Sundance from the Crow. So it had a Crow figure on one side and a Kiowa figure on the other with a Sundance pole in the center. I just did the forked pole. I was looking at ledger drawings of Kiowa men and their yearly calendars had those marks on them. So I thought I would use their shorthand, the forked tree and those two figures on either side to represent how we got the Sundance. I had to recognize that it was a big thing for us. It was Kiowa history from our origin myth all the way through the contemporary and part of that was the migration from the north to the south. (ibid)

Greeves borrowed from the lexicon and iconography of Kiowa ledger drawings to convey an aspect of Kiowa cultural history that had personal significance and meaning. She also
expressed using discernment and reflexivity with taking her ideas and imagery to her family and community members first before presenting them to a larger audience.

Greeves begins most projects with a story she wants to expand into a piece or series. As narrative starts to develop she works out the imagery into drawings. She discussed her process

I begin to translate that in drawings with figures, symbology, placement, composition. After the drawings I work on color and the construction of the object. Sometimes the narrative starts with the object and sometimes the object comes from the narrative. (ibid)

Greeves work is based from her perspective, a Kiowa beadworker who does pictorial narrative that she became familiar with as a child. She is happy to be recognized as a Native American artist or a Kiowa beadworker because she claimed, “those things are important to me” (ibid). Greeves mentioned that her work is often classified as “diverse arts” and that sometimes “people question where I belong” which is good, in her opinion because ”it forces [the viewer] to question what [they] walk into this situation with” (ibid). The standards for Native art make clear divisions between contemporary and traditional art or objects and these standards often lack the flexibility or the people who are appointed the judges and experts lack the terminology or insight to adequately describe or make allowances for innovation within a medium. ¹² This is part of the larger ongoing conversation about Western perspectives on Native art versus Native perspectives. Historically these standards were created by and for a collector base to

¹² See SWAIA standards – Appendix A.
determine the intrinsic value, validity and rarity of authentic Native art. Through this process Native art that is produced through these markets is coded, delimited, reproduced, and reified as what Native art is expected to conform to. Contrasting, the Native worldview on artistic production has more fluidity and multiplicity as evident in Greeves work and the artists in this study. Also, the artists herein are determined to expand and challenge those boundaries through the work they create and the dialogue they generate in public forums on Native art.

In 1999 Greeves won the Best of Show at the Indian Market in Santa Fe, New Mexico for her beaded buckskin *Indian Parade Umbrella*. Built on an antique umbrella frame, the brain-tanned hide panels depict Native people in a parade procession. Greeves recalled moments from her childhood that inspired the object and narrative

I grew up watching Indian parades. Shoshone Indian Days was held in the field behind my house…And once a year, my family drove up to Crow country in Montana to watch and participate in the largest old style Indian gathering in the nation. Some kids went to Disney World for their vacation; we went to Crow Fair. One of the biggest highlights of Crow Fair is the afternoon parade. Sweating in the sun, (our mom, like so many other fashionable Indian women, always brought an umbrella for shade but we were too cool for that) we saw a parade of well dressed Indians on horses, on foot, in trucks, on convertibles, and in flatbed trailers that lasted at least an hour. (personal communication, March 19, 2012)
Greeves, Teri. (1999). *Indian Parade Umbrella*. [mixed media – beadwork]. 36” x 42” Brain tanned deer hide, 13 and 12 cut beads, glass beads, abalone shell, Bisbee turquoise, cloth, brass studs, nickel studs, Indian head nickels, antique umbrella frame. Santa Fe, NM; private collection. Photo courtesy of Teri Greeves.
Brain tanned deer hide, 13 and 12 cut beads, glass beads, abalone shell, Bisbee turquoise, cloth, brass studs, nickel studs, Indian head nickels, antique umbrella frame. Santa Fe, NM; private collection. Photos courtesy of Teri Greeves.

Greeves places many personal elements into her work. The umbrella is a symbol of her mother and the older Indian women she was around growing up. Many of the characters in her scenes are often based on people she knew and an “expression of pride and cultural wealth” (ibid). Each of the panels has some aspect of the parades scenes she observed, so they also function as a retelling of history, her history of growing up immersed in Native culture. Greeves spoke about her connection to the idea of parades from a Native perspective

The whole idea of Indians parading seemed very natural to me as a young person. It wasn't until later, after a college education did I realize that originally Indians had historically been put on parade. Buffalo Bill and others like him brought the tamed Indians to the big cities of the US to delight the white audiences and quell
their fears about the Wild West. Indian parades were historically, in the white man's hand, a tool of colonialism. They were a contained circus like exposition showing America that not only was the West won, it was now safe to settle; the Indian was so rare, he was nearly extinct.

But this wasn't what I saw growing up. The parades I grew up with were run by Indians, for Indians. Generally the only white face was that of the lone politician who had entered our parade to win our votes. Like so many other things in our lives, Indians seemed to have adopted this tool of colonial America, re-invented it, turning it on its head, using it instead as an expression of pride of ourselves, for ourselves. And perhaps really, parading is only an Anglicized extension of the old rendezvous times when our bands or allied tribes got together in the summer.

(ibid)

From initial observation, the viewer could look at the piece and make connections to pictorial beadwork and ledger drawings. Going past the obvious identifiers to parades and personal references, the piece also questions the notion of an Indian parade from Western context to Native context. Many aspects of Western or the dominant culture seep into the cultures of Indigenous peoples, so much so that it is impossible to separate out the cross-cultural influences. There is no value judgment placed on the influences that are a direct and inevitable result of contact, something that has been happening before there was a United States. This is simply another iteration. As Greeves described, this is a good example of how Native people appropriate something from the dominant culture and indigenize it. This piece celebrates the beauty and pride of Native people who gather to share songs, dance, food, and represent their nations and families through their regalia.
The *Great Lakes: Fully Beaded High Heeled Shoes* (2008) is another iteration of the beaded shoes Greeves is known for. This version though is a pair of elevated, elegant stiletto high-top “tennis” shoes that become the “canvas” for Great Lakes floral designs and Jingle dress dancers. These shoes show the intersections of traditional and modern, high fashion and pow-wow culture and where Native and non-Native merge. These shoes represent the Native women today who are members of their communities and cultures and able to carry their beauty and strength into the current Western society. Greeves combines elements from pow-wow culture with Euro-American high fashion and pays homage to Great Plains floral designs. Greeves explained the significance of the two female figures

The dance that the two female figures are doing is referred to among Native pow-wow circles as the Jingle Dress. This name comes from the type of dress the women wear. Made out of cloth and heavily embellished with cones made from the twisted metal lids of tobacco snuff cans, the dress itself is a testament to the absorption of the material world the dominant culture brought with them and the Native creativity with those new mediums. Though women of many different tribes now do this dance, it is my understanding that it began in the Great Lakes Region among the Ojibwa and Chippewa. These are the people whose ancestral home is now called Lake Shore Drive. And these people still maintain communities in the city that has grown around them. (ibid)

Greeves grew up going to social dances or pow-wow and wearing dance regalia. The regalia that the dancers wear are often produced with the best materials and the finest attention to detail. Each piece is made with intention and skill. Individually, these pieces
are art pieces, but when worn become living culture embodied with movement, rhythm and even sound. These are aspects of Native culture that generally go unseen by the dominant culture, but have continued to evolve and adapt to influences and introduction of new materials. While these shoes are not practical for pow-wow dancing, they are a tribute to the legacy of culture, fashion and high art associated with Native social dance. Greeves elaborated on her decision to produce designs that were not from her home cultures.

On the inside of the shoes, I chose to do my version of traditional Great Lakes floral designs. Being ever mindful of the appropriation of cultures and the ways in which it can dishonor the original meanings behind design aesthetic and the proper ways in which ideas and symbols are passed on, I never thought it was proper that me, a Kiowa, should bead Great Lakes florals though I found them so outrageously beautiful. As fate would have it, I married an Ottawa man from Michigan and now have two beautiful Ottawa/Kiowa sons. In some way, I feel I can bead my personal version of the flowers those Great Lakes ladies did so well. These shoes are my tribute to the beauty and survival of the Anishnaabe Quaa, the Great Lakes Indian Women who have always known the shores of Lake Michigan as home. (ibid)

This is an example of looking at aesthetics and art-making through a Native perspective. There are legacies, histories, families, communities and nations conveyed in certain symbols, designs and even color configurations that are tribally specific. Greeves, having that awareness, takes an ethical approach to her art-making and is conscientious about appropriating imagery from other cultures.
Greeves utilizes an easily recognizable stereotypical representation and a pop art reference to ask “What is art? More pointedly for my purpose, what is Indian art?” (ibid). In this piece titled *NDN art*, Greeves uses her pictorial beadwork technique on brain-tanned deer hide “canvas” to question the established notions of what constitutes Indian or Native American art. Beadwork is normally attributed to an object that is typically worn or used. Greeves appropriates from pop art and specifically Roy Lichtenstein’s *Art* (1962) to illustrate her observations on Native art. She commented on her motivations and choices of imagery.
Roy Lichtenstein addressed a similar question in 1962, perhaps fed up with the stodginess of the American art scene up until that time. So here I sit, 50 years later and culturally (supposedly) miles apart, fed up with the brittle stodginess of the American “Indian” art scene asking myself the same question. And here it is: My Little Chief Stereo Type. I have asked him to answer it for me.

Whether you’re in Japan or Kenya or Afghanistan, draw a simple image of an Indian in a War Bonnet and you’ve got instant recognition of America and Indian-ness. This stereotypical imagery has enormous power: to attract, to objectify, to connect, to degrade, so I chose it as the skeleton of this piece so that I could do to it what Indians (or is that NDN’s?) have been doing for centuries: subvert it and make it mine. (ibid)

Greeves addresses this type of stereotypical imagery in a similar way to Charlene Teters. They both acknowledge and name what it is and then reclaim the imagery to re-present it and create dialogue on the continual use of these symbols and the negative effects it has on Native people. Modern artists like Rothko, Pollock, Rauschenberg, Warhol and Lichtenstein all borrowed from Native art and culture to create masterpieces notable in Western art history while actual Native art does not get the same recognition or legitimacy. Greeves appropriates from Pop art to question the marginalization and ghettoization of Native art.
"War Mother" (2011) is part of a series of large-scale bead “paintings.” In this piece, Greeves uses her pictorial beadwork technique to create a narrative tribute to Native people in the United States armed services and the families affected. She explained the imagery and its symbolism:

We have been sending our young men to battle for generations. Not so long ago, these men were fighting the US cavalry in Texas and Oklahoma territory. Today our young men are a part of the US cavalry in Iraq and Afghanistan. And their grandpas were on the Rhine River in Germany and in the POW camps of Manpo, North Korea and in Binh Long Province in Viet Nam.

And what were their mothers, wives, sisters, aunts and cousins doing for them while they were so far from home? What are they still doing for those Kiowa men and women serving in the deserts of the Middle East? Exactly what they’ve been doing for all those generations before: praying and dancing for their safe return not only in the flesh but in spirit as well.

Wearing a Battle Dress that is unique to Kiowa War Mothers, holding a lance decorated with the colors of Iraq War service, remembering a grandfather who served in Viet Nam in the colors of her drop, painting her leggings with hatch marks indicating action seen, my War Mother prays in a timeless Victory Dance for her man’s safe return to our people. (ibid)

Native men and in the last few decades, Native women, have proudly served the country and government that attempted to exterminate them. Historically and presently, when members of Native families go to war the communities gather to honor the individuals
with songs, dance and prayers to send them off. It is customary at social gatherings like pow-wows to honor the veterans – those that made it back, those that didn’t return home alive and those who haven’t come home yet – with a Veteran’s songs and a Victory dance. This Victory dance and Veteran’s songs are particular to Plains culture tribes who make songs to commemorate past battles, like the Battle of Little Big Horn all the way to Desert Storm and now the war in Iraq.

Greeves uses her particular type of shorthand or symbolism to indicate a Kiowa woman’s perspective on honoring Natives in the service. The blue and red along with the text “War Mother” indicate that the female figure is Kiowa. The lance along with the feathers in the figure’s hair are eagle feathers, which are considered sacred objects that indicate both honor to the family and prayers. The text is green, which typically is associated with women and the earth. The figure has one leg lifted and lance raised depicting the movement of a Victory dance. Greeves uses a visual vernacular that is easily identifiable to people associated or familiar with Plains culture and Kiowa culture in particular. These are examples of an indigenous aesthetic. Her use of scale also subverts the familiar use of beadwork as ornamental or decorative to monumental or memorial.

While Greeves is grounded in customary and time-honored beadwork technique and application, she is also redefining the medium. Her work is made to be read by a Native audience, but she is purposeful in making beautiful imagery that will appeal to greater audiences who will hopefully inquire and recognize that Native people are part of living, thriving cultures. Greeves not only follows the long line of bead and quillworkers before her but also makes her mark as a modern day storyteller and record keeper. Her
work is at once a cultural expression of her time while also an opportunity to confront stereotype and misrepresentation. The innovation and exploration she has made sets an example for future artists in her medium to build on, emulate and take to the next level.
Marcus Amerman

*To define my concept of art is much like defining my concept of God. It is something elusive. It is something that is constantly changing, evolving, and growing. It is a Great Mystery. The act of creating art is a process that consciously embraces this mystery of life.* — Marcus Amerman (2012)

Marcus Amerman is multimedia artist and an enrolled member of the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma. He is known nationally and internationally for his pictorial realism beadwork, but also does painting, sculpture, glass, performance art, fashion design, film, photography, and installation. Amerman was born in Phoenix, Arizona, grew up in the Pacific Northwest then later moved to Santa Fe, New Mexico. He has a Bachelors of Art in Fine Art from Whitman College in Walla Walla, Washington and also took courses at the Institute of American Indian Arts (IAIA) in Santa Fe, NM. Marcus Amerman, Charlene Teters, and Osage painter Norman Akers were recruited to the University of Illinois at Champaign-Urbana for their Masters of Fine Arts program. As described earlier, they all encountered blatant displays of racism. These experiences informed and activated the context for his art making. Heather Igloliorte (2011), an Inuk curator and art historian who wrote an essay on Amerman in *Manifestations: New Native Art Criticism*, stated

Amerman’s subject matter oscillates between mediums, but a thread of social commentary and an inquisitive nature knits together these otherwise diversified artistic practices. The artist has famously espoused, “Art is War,” and discussed the complex relationship of art and divinity in terms of what might be best described as a process of embracing the mysteries of life. These philosophies of resistance and wonder have guided his artistic practices for over two decades. (78)
Amerman’s lexicon of imagery includes re appropriating and reinterpreting Edward S. Curtis photographs and using popular culture icons including Mickey Mouse, Wonder Woman, Barack Obama, Marilyn Monroe, the Lone Ranger and Tonto, and the Green Lantern. Whether in beadwork, a photograph or a performance, Amerman inscribes a Native presence into contemporary American culture.

Amerman was born into a creative family and asserted “There was always a culture of creativity around me (personal communication, February 4, 2012). While growing up he drew inspiration and influence from not only his relatives who were artists but also from his environment, the various places and regions he lived. In Hopi he learned katsina carving, feather work and even silver overlay. Amerman observed that he made a connection to the color palettes of the area which included not only the landscapes and sunsets, but also the symbols and aspects of cultural events as well (ibid). When he was in the Pacific Northwest Amerman encountered Plateau and Great Basin beadwork and also noted the changing color palettes there. He also was drawn to the gradations in peyote stitch beadwork from Oklahoma. These things became his foundation for understanding color and aesthetics. In college, Amerman gained an appreciation for modern art and especially Pop art. He cited Andy Warhol’s bold use of color and iconographic imagery and George Seurat’s pointillism and color theory as influences on his beadwork (ibid).

In 1982 while taking classes at IAIA, he used beadwork to create a portrait of Brook Shields on the back of a motorcycle jacket. With this piece Amerman launched a new genre of pictorial realism in beadwork that would change the use and understanding of beadwork as a medium of Native cultural expression. Amerman successfully crossed
boundaries and definitions by defying the expectations of both the medium and what Native art was supposed to look like. This genre of realistic portraiture continues to influence other beadworkers who have adopted Amerman’s style. While his content often includes pop culture references, Amerman connects to the legacy of beadwork through his application that involves hand-stitching each bead.

Social and cultural commentary underpins Amerman’s creations. Experiencing the blatant and normalized racism at the University of Illinois had a profound effect on Amerman’s psyche. His new resolve was directed toward addressing Western perceptions of Native Americans predicated through the one-dimensional representations, caricatures and stereotypes prevalent in dominant culture. Amerman hopes to change the perception of Native Americans. Specifically, he would like to “see us portrayed in three dimensions” (ibid). Amerman commented on Hollywood representations and the movie Dances with Wolves where he observed “Kevin Costner is painted in full color and dimension; all the Indians were sketches or caricatures” (ibid). Just as the dominant culture appropriates iconic imagery from Native culture, Amerman pulls from the most recognizable imagery from popular culture and reframes it. Using familiar imagery, a vibrant color palette, and often humor, Amerman invites the viewer to question their assumptions about Native people and culture. His work often contains layers of meaning and context where he claims to “hold a mirror to society” (ibid).

Amerman is a multidisciplinary and multifaceted artist who works in several mediums and crosses the boundaries of traditional and contemporary Native art. He is often selected to participate in diverse shows since his work does not fit neatly in prescribed categories. When describing his beadwork however, Amerman asserted
I want my beadwork to belong to the continuum of Indian thought, culture and expression. I teach it so that I insure people do know it and can utilize it. I like the idea of belonging to my culture and my art belonging to that…Part of being recognized is that you represent your culture, it’s part of your responsibility. (ibid)

His work creates dialogue and is informative to a wide audience about the beauty and complexity of Native art.

Amerman, Marcus. (1995). *Man with No Name* [mixed media – beadwork]. 11” x 14” Beads and thread on canvas. Santa Fe, NM. Photo courtesy of Marcus Amerman.
*Man with No Name* (1995) is part of a series of portraits of Native peoples. Some are images of relatives commissioned from family members, while others are prominent chiefs, leaders or otherwise iconic images from archival photographs. Amerman reclaims and reframes these images that were often staged studio shots and often adds contextual backgrounds that have landscapes or cityscapes. An example of this is Amerman’s depiction of *Geronimo* (1995) places the Chirichaua Apache leader in a sunset landscape indicative of the desert. There are silhouettes of saguaro cactus on the horizon line along with two figures who represent the sacred Ga’ an dancers who figure prominently in Apache ontology. The title *Man with No Name* refers to the fact that Amerman did not know the name of the Native man he was depicting. The background is black, but contains faceted or cut beads that create a shimmer. The figure is also surrounded or illuminated by a blue “halo” that is a painterly technique that Amerman uses to enhance the volumetric depth of the image while also used to reference a spiritual or otherworldly quality to the figure. Amerman colorizes these images to begin the

process of humanizing them and giving them dimensionality.

One can find the original version of *Postcard* (2002) in almost any kitsch gift shop in downtown Santa Fe and probably throughout the Southwest.\(^{13}\) In Amerman’s version, he has removed the romanticized imagery within the block lettering of “Indian Country” and replaced it with images encoded with personal meaning. In the letter “I” is Lakota leader Crazy Horse who Amerman admires. The letter “N” contains an image of Amerman dressed in his race car suit. The “D” has two buffalo with a tornado in the background. The buffalo are often a reference to Plains culture and also associated with Native people, and in this case most likely subconsciously linked to Amerman’s Choctaw

\(^{13}\) A search on the internet revealed that the original artwork was also available in postcard size or 16” x 24” poster size in popular websites such as Ebay, Etsy and Amazon.
nation who reside in Oklahoma. The tornado is a powerful and destructive element that, when placed with the buffalo, could reference the imminent destruction, extermination, and annihilation of the buffalo that occurred along with Western expansion. The second letter “I” has an astronaut, John Herrington (Chickasaw) who was the first Native in space. Amerman suggests that Native people are progressive and capable of participating. The letter “A” has the Blue Angels F/A-18 Hornets in formation which Amerman calls a “symbol of transcendence” (personal communication, February 4, 2012). The letter “N” has Amerman’s Osage goddaughter. The letter “C” has a nuclear explosion in the background and a recreation of a photo of Bently Spang (Northern Cheyenne) and Amerman wrapped up as a mummy from Cate’s (2001) book Indian Country. In the letter “O” is a tidal wave borrowed from Japanese print. The letters “U” and “N” are the before and after photographs of Navajo student Tom Torlino who went to the Carlisle Indian school. In the letter “T” is a volcanic eruption and there is lightning in the letter “R.” The last letter “Y” has an image of earth taken from space. The nuclear explosion along with the tidal wave, volcanic eruption and lightning are symbols of power for Amerman. The use of “U” and “N” are intentional in suggesting “something undone” in Tom Torlino; Amerman stated “he was un-Indianized, He doesn’t have a light in his eye. I see that as a metaphor for the civilizing process; it takes the light and the willingness to live” (ibid). Amerman also recreates the coloration, text and dancing Indians in headdresses from the original postcard.

14 Amerman is featured as “Buffalo Man” on the cover and Bently Spang is among the featured artists.
The selection of imagery within the block lettering, according to Amerman, was based on the “strength of the images” and his “personal attachment to them” (ibid). In this version of the postcard, Amerman subverts the heavy handed romanticized depictions of primitive Indians in the original and replaces them with actual Native people and aspects of his personal narrative. This piece calls attention to the disconnect between the lived experiences of Native people and the projections of the dominant culture. Amerman explores concepts of power, destruction, assimilation, connection to ancestry and the presence of Native people in the modern age.

*My Santa Fe* (2007) is reminiscent of *Postcard* (2002) with the block lettering containing images. Amerman uses this piece as a personal reflection of time and place of what he referred to as “people or things I associate with the Southwest” (ibid). In the block lettering of “Santa Fe” from left to right are porn star Tera Patrick as an idealized Indian woman, a cartoon character “Super Chief” from old Santa Fe Railroad advertisements, Georgia O’keefe, a Native silversmith from an old photograph, the
Virgin of Guadalupe, Lakota leader Sitting Bull, and Nez Perce rodeo rider Jackson Sundown. Amerman’s use of Tera Patrick is similar to his depiction of Brooke Shields in this case he uses Patrick to reference ethnic beauty. The Santa Fe Railroad had the “Super Chief” engines and the advertising campaigns included the cartoon figure. Both the use of the name and the cartoon are additional examples of caricaturing and appropriation of Native symbols. Amerman placed Georgia O’Keefe and the Virgin of Guadalupe in his composition to remind the viewer that they are iconically linked to the Southwest as well. The image of the silversmith is suggestive of the prevalent ideas about the tourism of Native culture. Amerman includes Sitting Bull and Jackson Sundown, both symbols of Native heroism and strength, as counterpoints to the other imagery in the lettering.

Below the text is an idealized version of Amerman as his performance persona Buffalo Man holding a mace and shield. Behind Buffalo Man are two figures that Amerman explained are the “devil under the pale moon light” on the left and his muse “dancing in clothes I made” (ibid). The background has both the dynamic sunsets characteristic of the Southwest and the massive storm clouds and lightning displays that roll in during the monsoon season in the summers. This is piece connects Amerman to place through his use of symbols, icons and elements.
Amerman, Marcus. (2001). *A Day at the Beach* [photograph]. Santa Fe, NM. Photo courtesy of Marcus Amerman.

Amerman is familiar with Edward S. Curtis photographs as he often uses them as the source material and “underpainting” for his beadwork. His process involves printing out the images and gluing them to the material to which he applies the beads. In 2000, Amerman was invited to participate in a group exhibit based on an Indigenous response to the Curtis’s photographs and writing.15 Amerman expressed an affinity with Curtis, admired his photographic technique and the quality of the image while also crediting him

15 From the Tang Museum website: For this exhibition, the Tang invited six contemporary North American Indian artists to propose works that would respond to Curtis’s photographs and writings. The exhibition included video, photography, painting, sculpture, performance, and site-specific installation, as well as works from Curtis’s portfolio… *Staging the Indian: the Politics of Representation* brought together a compilation of independent perspectives to inform and critique Curtis’s personal vision.
for the enhanced popularity due to the notoriety of Curtis’s work (Amerman, 2001). In *A Day At The Beach*, Amerman recreates the Curtis photograph of Hopi women grinding corn. This update to the original places three women and a little girl in similar poses and hair styles, but unlike the overly covered women posed to look like they are hard at work in the Curtis photo, they are outside in swimsuits posed in the act of having a picnic. Instead of preparing traditional food, the group is having fast food from Burger King. Amerman described how he felt about doing this series and the Curtis originals, he stated “what’s essentially Indian is still there in all the people who descended from them, it’s just we are in the modern world, it can make it seem like we are not connected but deep down we’re still those people” (personal communication, February 4, 2012). In this statement Amerman positively connects with Curtis’s images and suggests that the essence of who Native people are is present in both photographs. Like anything that Amerman does, there are layers of information to consider. The Curtis image is primitivizing and reinforces the idea that Native people live apart from modernity. Amerman’s photo places Native people in modernity, in recreation rather than at labor and uses elements of contemporary life-modern clothing, Burger King, bottled water, Marlboro cigarettes and a wrapped sage bundle.
Buffalo Man is a character that Amerman uses in his performance art. Through this character Amerman can express many of his socio-political ideas about the world. In an interview Amerman explained his Buffalo Man persona

I feel that the Buffalo Man is a spirit of the Earth and pushes me to speak for the Earth and for balancing man’s relationship with nature. I saw in an archaeology magazine an illustration of a Buffalo Man carved into a pillar in a cave. It was 36,000 years old. My theory is that the Buffalo Man reemerges into society when it has reached a critical crossroads. If that society accepts the Buffalo Man into it, it signifies hope and redemption for the culture. If, on the other hand, he is rejected by society the society is doomed (Fleming, 2010).
Buffalo Man is another part of Native culture that is connected to modernity, technology, and social networking. On his “public figure” page Buffalo Man’s description combines humor and somber stating “Buffalo Man speaks for the Earth, and warns of the consequences of a world out of balance. Besides being a harbinger of doom, Buffalo Man is also a self-help guru, and a professional hand model” (Buffalo Man, 2012). With this persona, Amerman can cover aspects of his creative thought process, cynicism, philosophy, emotional attachments and humor in a vehicle that gives him more expressive freedom than any other medium. On Buffalo Man’s facebook page, which has videos and over one hundred images, Amerman has created a pictorial narrative of Buffalo Man performances and supporting imagery. The use of technology and social media in particular has becomes an important tool for Native people. I will address this in further in my analysis chapter, but this technology has become instrumental in becoming an accessible way to display artwork, share information, network and increase visibility. Amerman, like other Native artists use this technology to create community and disseminate their work to a diverse audience.
Sarah Sense

For decades American popular culture has resurrected the dying American Indian through Hollywood cinema, fashion trends and pop icons. I was raised in California with a strong influence of Hollywood idealism. Cowboy and Indian iconography are deeply rooted in America without recognition of the real history or the consequences of stereotypes. These sweeping generalizations are detrimental to the collective community and to the individual. Mainstream interpretations of what it means to be American Indian are misleading to the masses, which includes contemporary American Indian communities. The objectification affects the individual by leading one to doubt their inherited identity. I am a woman of complex ethnic background. Popular culture has given me false ideas of ethnicity and what it means to be a female. My art explores questions of identity, and the influence that heritage, gender roles, ideologies, family values and the crossing over of cultural and personal experiences has had on my development and understanding of self. —Sarah Sense (2012)

Sarah Sense is a mixed media artist who traces her heritage to European and American Indian decent, including German, English, Cajun French, the Chitimacha Nation in Louisiana, and the Choctaw nation in Oklahoma. Sense holds a Bachelor of Fine Arts in Fine Art from California State University – Chico (CSU, Chico), and a Master of Fine Arts in Fine Art from Parsons School of Design. Although growing up in Northern California thousands of miles away from her tribal communities and homelands, Sense’s work reflects a strong attachment and identification with her Chitimacha heritage. Sense takes two seemingly incongruous mediums, photography and weaving, and combines them to create work that is both visually and conceptually compelling. Using an ancestral Chitimacha basket weaving pattern, Sense weaves photography into new collages of color, texture and dimension. Source material ranges from old Hollywood imagery and mass produced posters to images from her childhood, constructed “cowgirl” and Indian Princess” personas and landscape photography of not only her homelands, but also the lands of Indigenous peoples across the American
continent. Through these woven photo constructions, Sense addresses issues of home, identity, community, Indigeneity, and challenges mainstream conceptions of Native Americans.

During her late teens and more so while working on her undergraduate degree at CSU, Chico, Sense began reconnecting with her Mother’s family and community on the Chitimacha reservation. She described the process as being important, poignant and instrumental in helping her to understand the bits and pieces of Native culture from her childhood. Sense recalled her grandmother’s basket collection, décor in her mother’s house including an “Indian room” containing “trinkets and a collection of what being Native meant to her,” her mother’s love for Hollywood old Western films and her mom dressing she and her sister as cowgirls and Indian princesses (Sarah Sense, personal communication, March 11, 2012). She began to have an awareness that these elements, no matter how personal, were superficial ways to identify with Native culture.

Initially, Sense was attracted to painting and the abstract expressionist movement which continued into graduate studies. At Parsons, Sense struggled with finding the right medium and vehicle for her artistic expression. The inspiration for the weaving process she has developed occurred over time and a series of experiences. Sense spent her summers on the reservation organizing and creating activities and field trips for a summer youth program she initiated with her siblings. She noticed that some of the parents, who were basket weavers, were coming and weaving while their children participated in the youth program. Interested in learning more about her culture and weaving specifically, Sense asked the weavers there to teach her and the kids, but the process was too extensive and inaccessible unless one stayed there and learned over long amounts of time. Sense
described this being an obstacle that hindered her progress. Sense related a story where she got lost in New York and wandered over to Battery Park and ended up in front of the National Museum of the American Indian that happened to have a basket exhibit where she gravitated directly to the Chitimacha baskets (ibid). She explained the following course of events that inspired her current work and process

After researching the history of Chitimacha basket weaving, I was inspired to continue the tradition from my ancestry. In 2004, I asked the chairman of the Chitimacha Tribe of Louisiana for permission to weave our basket patterns using non-traditional material. After he gave me his blessing, I began weaving reservation landscapes. The images evolved as I incorporated Hollywood posters, familial archives, and my personas of “The Cowgirl” and “The Indian Princess.” (ibid)

After exploring personal narratives of identity and subverting the stereotype in a few series of works, Sense moved to larger narratives of global Indigenous, land, community and connections to place. Her current body of work is *Weaving the Americas*, a series of photographs, interviews and cross-cultural exchanges that became large scale weaved pieces, video documentation and a book. Sense elaborated

It’s about going back to lands and being connected to land – where we come from, where we are born out of physically. *Weaving the Americas* is about going into, going through these landscapes, arriving at a community, meeting an artist and learning about their work. I was able to connect to their landscape by going there. (ibid)
She talked about going to different locales by various methods – boat, bus, train, etc and was creating, in her mind, a “map that was lived.” (ibid) Through this project Sense connected to other Indigenous artists in the Americas, to the land and their communities and also did a form of Indigenous mapping. Historically, Indigenous peoples were integrally linked to place through language, culture, song and oral tradition. These ties formed an inextricable link over time and generations. Simply put, Indigenous peoples came to know a place and knowledge became inhabited. Sense began to explore these linkages that Indigenous peoples have maintained over thousands of years.

Initially inspired to explore, uncover and rewrite her identity, Sense has moved to broader strokes in trying to develop projects that build community through the sharing of information. She commented that the information could be “emotional, spiritual or physical things” (ibid). With the *Weaving the Americas* project, Sense created a document that is translated in Spanish and intended to go back to the artists and also bring greater visibility to Indigenous peoples of the Americas. As well, Sense is very committed to preserving aspects of her Native heritage, especially the weaving. Like other Native artists in America, her work serves to stimulate dialogue about mainstream perceptions about Native Americans and remind people of the lived experiences and history of Native people.

Although her work up to this point is focused on the Americas, Sense is communicating to a global audience and beginning the process of connecting to Indigenous worldwide. Empowerment figures significantly in her work, not only for Indigenous artists but also women. Sense hopes that women will find humor in the
personas she embodies in the photographs—some of them are brandishing guns—but she also is projecting what she identifies as a “strong female character” (ibid).

Sense is resistant to categorization and her work does not easily fall into discrete categories. She is definitely creating contemporary work, yet the weaving technique and patterns have a history and legacy of several millennia. Like Indigenous people before her, that she has adapted and innovated on previous iterations while maintaining a certain sense of continuity. In terms of placing Sense within the purview of Native North American art or even ethnic art, it would be only fair to include her in the scope and breadth of Native cultural expression as it honors her Chitimacha and Choctaw heritage. However, because she creates work that crosses boundaries and limitations, calling her a Native artist or a woman artist alone is insufficient. Sense embodies a space of hybridity as a woman of mixed heritage who works in several mediums and exceeds expected perceptions.

The *Young and Impressionable* series (2007) integrates Hollywood and stereotypical iconography and imagery from popular culture with family photos of Sense and her sister. These are photographs that her mom took of them dressed up as cowgirls or Indian Princesses. The two individual photographs that are woven together are actually comprised of several images digitally collaged and manipulated for scale and placement. The mixing and integrating of the imagery allows Sense to express her earliest concepts of being Indian through the lens of stereotype and misrepresentation. In this image the text “Buffalo Bills Wild West Rough Riders,” Indian in a headdress in the lower right, and the shirtless Indian on horseback in the center recall the Western fascination with the frontier and the generalization of all Native peoples to the romanticized version of Plains
culture. The Chitimacha weaving patterns add texture and component of movement that obscure and reveal different parts of each image. The resulting effect is a fracturing and dissolution of each image that reformulate into a complex layered composition that is oddly integrated like an avant-garde musical score.

Sense, Sarah. (2007). *Young and Impressionable Indians* [Woven photographs]. 20” x 25” Photo courtesy of Sarah Sense.
Sterling Indian (2007) is part of the Hollywood series. This series is a blending of photography, digital manipulation, weaving and performance. In this series Sense incorporates a type of performance documentation photographing herself as an Indian princess or cowgirl. Sense stated that she had an Indian grandmother and the other one was from Texas, thus making each a familial reference as well as continuing the narrative on confronting stereotypical representations of Native people (ibid). Photographed as an older “Indian Princess,” Sense uses this imagery to convey the idea that these perceptions not only persist but have become a normalized part of the dominant culture from Hollywood to high fashion. Sense as Indian Princess is on the right and opposite is an iconic image of Lakota leader Sitting Bull by Edward S. Curtis. Sense places her character in color and Sitting bull in black and white to suggest the dichotomy between actual Native people and the Hollywood version. Ironically Sense is an Indian playing Indian, which also references how Native people perpetuate and reinforce stereotype. The weaving in this piece has a uniformity that accentuates the alternating “rabbit’s foot” and “raven’s eye” patterns typical of Chitimacha weaving (ibid). Sense connects to the legacy of Chitimacha weavers by using these patterns even though her piece is not a functional basket.
Sense, Sarah. (2007). *Sterling Indian* [Woven photographs]. 20” x 30” Photo courtesy of Sarah Sense.
The next few of images are from the *Weaving the Americas* (2011) series that Sense stated was “quite literally about weaving the landscapes that represented a community of people” (ibid). Sense traveled throughout South, Central, and North America visiting several cities, countries, and finding Indigenous artists in each locale to interview and document. In her interviews, Sense asked a series of questions about the artists and their work. What resulted was a body of work, a collection of writings, video, audio and interviews, some of which appear in Sense’s book *Weaving the Americas: A Search for Native Art in the Western Hemisphere* (Sense, 2012). As mentioned earlier, the book is translated into Spanish. English and Spanish being the two most dominant languages in the Western hemisphere, this book becomes a vehicle for discourse between the Indigenous peoples of the Americas. Sense incorporates digital laser prints and photo-silkscreen prints in her compositions. The black and white photo-silkscreen prints form the backgrounds for each geographic region with each one being specific to South, Central, and North America.
Helados (2011) gains its title from the central picture that has a group of kids that are in front of an ice cream [helados] truck that was taken in Antigua, Guatemala. Sense described the layers of images

This is during the procession in Antigua close to sunset. The water is in Panama, Cuna Island. The seascape is from Tamarindo, Costa Rica on the Pacific coast. Everything is over a black and white photo silkscreen of the Monte Verde cloud forest that represents Central America. (Sarah Sense, personal communication, March 11, 2012)

Sense mentioned that the photo was taken in front of the church and that she photographed the churches as a way of documenting the widespread influence and presence of Christianity (ibid). One of the aspects of Mayan culture, elaborate sawdust and flower drawings made on the ground called “alfombras” were created for people in processions to walk upon. Sense elaborated on the amalgamation of Mayan and Christian culture and symbology

There were people carrying Jesus over a Mayan alfombra – and that’s very intentional. Over and over again I was reminded that there is this blend of culture and colonization that’s so deeply rooted. It’s been going on for hundreds of years. The images of churches [represent] the people are very religious. We saw it in Central America, in South America and also in the States, like New Mexico. (ibid)

Sense referenced the correlation of Christian religious influence that has spread across the Americas. In New Mexico, the Pueblo Native American cultures have integrated
Christianity in their annual ceremonial events. This piece is Sense’s visual record of the Central American section of the *Weaving the Americas* project that also references the artists interviewed from the accompanying book (Sense, 2012). As with her previous work, the Chitimacha weaving patterns are visible and provide an additional textural layer to the composition. Adding this element unifies the composition and also allows Sense to reference her interaction with the landscapes, cultures and peoples.
the left is from Humahuaca, a small village in Northern Argentina. The central image is a gorge in Patagonia. The image on the right is of two goats fighting directly on the side of the road and the featured photograph in the Argentina section of the book (p 96-97, Sense, 2012). In *Argentina* (2011), Sense manipulates the weaving on both the horizontal and vertical axis to create perspective lines that enhance the dimensionality of the overall composition. The lines and the strategically placed Chitimacha weaving patterns create movement that purposefully enhances the different imagery.

North Central South (2011) brings the Americas together and inherently references all the indigenous peoples Sense interacted with throughout the project. The left image is a view from Sense’s apt in Santiago, Chile. In the center is a sunset from Tamarindo, Costa Rica. Below it is a houseboat on the bayou in Louisiana near the Chitimacha homelands. The image on the right was taken on the walk down from Huayna Picchu, the mountain just above Machu Picchu in Peru. These images are woven over the black and white Costa Rican silkscreen, which is most visible on the lower left. In this piece Sense uses the horizontal lines to add perspective while the Chitimacha weaving patterns form directional lines that create movement toward each of the focal points in the imagery. The staccato horizontal and vertical lines that the weaving patterns dissolve into and out of are reminiscent of Morse code or lines of music. The combination of images and weaving brings together all the elements of the Weaving the Americas (2011) project and references the lands, peoples and cultures Sense experienced first hand through her research and travels for this project. Sense remarked that this was a foundational and life-transforming beginning to further research and development of future projects that connect her and her work to Indigenous peoples and cultures globally (Sarah Sense, personal communication, March 11, 2012).
Frank Buffalo Hyde

“When working on a piece, I tap into the universal mind, the collective unconsciousness of the 21st century. Drawing images from advertisement, movies, television, music and politics. Expressing observation, as well as knowledge through experience. Overlapping imagery to mimic the way the mind holds information: non linear and without separation. I don't need permission to make what I make. Never have...no artist should.”

–Frank Buffalo Hyde (2012)

Frank Buffalo Hyde, is the son of internationally known Native sculptor Doug Hyde and becoming a recognizable artist in his own right. Hyde was born in the Southwest, but traces his heritage to the Nez Perce and Onondaga people. Hyde grew up in central New York, and then returned to New Mexico to study at the Institute of American Indian Arts. He has exhibited in galleries and museums across the United States for over 15 years. Hyde situates himself as a contemporary Native painter who has also taken up the mantle of addressing misrepresentation and stereotype in his work while also providing his critique and commentary on the commodification of Native culture. Hyde uses popular culture references and humor as a way of inviting the viewer into the conversation and subject matter that is still so very compelling and relevant for Native artists to develop content about.

Hyde’s paintings are about contemporary Native life. He decided early on to address “how Native people are influenced just as much by the stories of their grandfathers and their culture as they are by popular culture like CNN or MTV at that time, and these days it’s Facebook, Twitter, and social networking” (Frank Buffalo Hyde, personal communication, January 22, 2012). He began making work that reflected his experience as a modern day Native person, one that is satirical and slightly contemptuous towards the romanticized imagery that has become recognizable as Native art. What
resulted after years of personal development was finding his voice through using established stereotypes, play on word titles and interjecting funny or unexpected things in his paintings. Humor is a reoccurring theme that Native artists have used in their work to address the serious issues that affect Native America such as racism, marginalization, disenfranchisement, and the trauma related to the violence and genocide directed at Native peoples.

Hyde describes his primary audience as being “the general public, White America or popular culture to skew their perceptions of contemporary Native Art” (ibid). He is also interested in reaching a Native audience and in particular young Native artists. Hyde commented

I hope to enable them to realize that they don’t have to make work to the parameters of what the previous market told us what Native art was. If I can push the door open a little wider to let them come through a little easier and make them feel like they don’t have to paint Indians at all, If I have done that, then I think I have done my job. (ibid)

He is working directly with perceived notions of Native art and pushing against the boundaries of market/collector defined expectations of what Native art is supposed to look like. Hyde expressed his frustration with this dynamic, but instead of being bitter and angry he decided to take that subject matter, reclaim it and put his own spin on it. An example of this is when he puts balloons in his “war party” paintings. He explained, “It’s a play on words. I’m on my way to a war party and I am taking balloons”(ibid). Instead of replicating and reifying a romanticized simulation of Native America that frames all
Native Americans as one homogenous Plains culture group, Hyde undermines the familiar and uses humor to entice and invite people to reconsider the imagery that has flooded the market for over a century. What I have found through personal experience and also a common thread in the way artists tackle this serious subject matter is as Hyde suggested that it was better to take a less didactic approach and that subtly, “multiple layers of subtly goes further than the angry Indian routine…People don’t respond well to being preached to” (ibid).

Hyde names some of the pressing issues for Native Americans that collectively we are still struggling with – displacement, trauma, being invisible or considered fully human beings with rights and citizenship or religious freedom. He stated

Even in the perfect scenerio, say we got everything back, we got reparations, we got an official apology… we still have to deal with that trauma from being displaced, our lives threatened, our culture – the attempted genocide and extermination of an entire people.

It’s all a process. It’s generational. The ball started rolling in the 40s and 50s when they were integrating the schools. Most of the controversy was for African Americans, but my uncles were also treated badly for going to the white schools. They were spit on. They were treated as badly, if not worse than African Americans, because we were savages. America doesn’t like the fact that we have

17 In 1928, U.S. grants Native Americans citizenship. In 1978, the Native American Religious Freedom Act allows Native people to openly practice their spirituality with out persecution.
the keys to the land, in their minds. They don’t like the untidy end that this land isn’t theirs and it never will be. That’s one of their contentions with us. (ibid)

Hyde’s work may look light-hearted but he, like the rest of Native America, is grappling with these issues and it necessarily comes out in his art. He is among a generation of Native artists that are a second or third phase of moving away from the static imagery that delimits people’s conceptions of Native America. What this indicates is that the process is long and continual and will take the efforts of artists and scholars to continue to address these issues so that future generations will benefit and heal from the work we are doing now.

As the medium that Hyde works in is painting, his work is necessarily contemporary. The themes that he works with are informed by his experience as a Native person. Like other Native artists, Hyde does not want to conform to a discretely partitioned and white-washed box and be labeled an ethnic artist or just makes work that is only seen by a collector and arts base that is solely Native. Hyde’s work is important as he reclaims and diffuses stereotypical Indian imagery while moving towards expression that places emphasis on the contemporary Native American experience.
This is part of the “Buffalo Field” series that Hyde has been creating for about 15 years. He uses the landscape or buffalo field as “an allegory for North America” and the buffalo as a “witness” (ibid). This iconic character, once hunted to the brink of extinction, appears in many of Hyde’s paintings and is also an important symbol for Native America people who valued the animal. In an ironic twist, Hyde described the buffalo as a “homicide detective, always there, witnessing or observing” (ibid). The buffalo, like other figures in his paintings, appears to be looking back out at the viewer. This is Hyde’s way of turning the gaze back on the observer and asking the viewer “to examine their perceptions of Native Americans and contemporary Native art” (ibid).
The choice of using a barren landscape, to remove any indication or reference to technology creates what he calls a sense of “timelessness” as the moment that he captured could be in the present, “500 years ago or 500 years from now all at the same time” (ibid). Hyde expressed a fascination with the paranormal and UFOs. That explains the large disk shaped object looming above the landscape and the circular spots that are meant to represent sunspots or possibly orbs that cause crop circles. All these elements make up the complexity of ideas that Hyde works out in his compositions. While this painting does not have Native iconography or imagery of Native people, the reference is there through the symbolism of the buffalo and the land. There is an underlying connection to settler colonization and manifest destiny as the mother ship is hovering over seemingly unclaimed land. The South Park character Cartman appears in the lower right corner as a reference to the episode about aliens and anal probes. Including Cartman is part of Hyde’s sardonic humor that underminds the otherwise serious tone of the painting and brings in a popular culture reference. This simple character reference pokes fun at societal fascination with mythologies such as alien abductions and the romanticized versions of Indians.

*You're invited to a War Party* borrows from the familiar iconographic idealized and romanticized versions of Indians hunting on horseback. There are a number of Western artists, such as George Catlin, Frederick Remington, and Charles Russell, who have popularized this genre of painting. Hyde appropriates these images and places them in almost non-descript silhouettes that have enough detail to make the connection. Hyde also replaces these warrior’s horses with Segways, personal two-wheeled electric
vehicles. These anonymous figures have no reference to any tribally specificity other than generalized Plains culture much like how Euro-America homogenizes and reduces all of Native America to an Indian in a feather headdress. The Segway as a stand in for the horse is a play on the adaptation of technology and influence from the Euro-American dominant culture. This is an important concept for Hyde who critiques the perceptions that Native Americans as cast as part of a distant, extinct American past and therefore can not be part of the present. The imagery is beautiful and absurd at the same time, but meant to provoke thought and dialogue.

Recently, Hyde has become a father. Many of the Native artists I have talked to, including Teri Greeves and Charlene Teters, are motivated to produce some body of work that references their reflections of the world as parents. Teters’ response to the mascot issue at the University of Illinois was in part from wanting to protect her children and reaffirm positive imagery of Native people. There isn’t much that is a substantial part of American culture that promotes a positive image of Native America or that confirms that Native people still exist. For Greeves, it was her children becoming fascinated with American comic book superheroes and not recognizing the heroes from their own tribal mythologies and oral histories. *Lego my Ego* (2011) is Hyde grappling with similar issues.

Most children grew up playing cowboys and Indians. As is evident in popular culture and definitely portrayed in Hollywood, the Indians are always the bad guys and always lose. These ideas solidify in children from a young age and it is ingrained in the young psyche that white is right and always the victor. Speaking about the way kids are indoctrinated, Hyde stated, “[White] Kids at a basic level are taught that they are different than us” (ibid). This difference is evident from the curriculum children are taught in school to the iterations of popular culture from Disney cartoons to blockbuster films and toys, of course.

Lego is a popular developmental toy that promotes problem-solving and construction. In 1997, Lego produced a Native themed play set complete with a teepee, totem pole, “Indian chief,” and male and female “braves.” This is one of several Native themed sets, but what I find significant is their descriptions and the mixing of different Native cultures. Totem poles are from northern Pacific coastal and island cultures and
have nothing to do with “western” or Plains cultures. 18 They also have separate “cowboys” sets. Often cowboys and Indian toy sets are combined so that kids can reenact battle scenes. In Lego my Ego (2011), Hyde reimagines a classic Lego children’s battle scene where the Indian wins. In my imagination this is a Native child’s version of Custer’s last stand. The faces are illustrated with smiles similar to actual Lego products, which makes the scene humorous and violent at the same time – much in the same way mascots function.

The pattern in the background is a personal reference as Hyde stated, “It’s a basic argyle, it’s modern, and I wear a lot of that pattern” (ibid). The use of the pattern serves two functions. It creates movement and dimensionality in the painting that is otherwise very flat. The argyle pattern also represents that Native people are familiar and interested in modernity and current fashion trends from American culture. Hyde is placing himself and thus Native America in the present and not part of a mystic, mythological past that Euro-American children play out in their collective imaginations.

I’ll see you there (2009) successfully incorporates many elements of Hyde’s visual symbolism and presents a narrative that is both autobiographical and references his critique of the commodification of Native culture. There are layers of meaning and modern art influences like Jean-Michel Basquiat, Jasper Johns, Robert Rauschenberg, and Fritz Scholder are apparent in this piece. According to Hyde, the colored dots are a composition tool that reference pop art and also are suggestive his interpretation of sugar molecules (personal communication, January 22, 2012). The large black and white figure,  

18 See toysperiod.com: LEGO sets 6763; 6766 Rapid River Village Western Indians Tepee Set.
as Hyde described, is of a “White woman wearing a feather” that he pulled from a 1940s “nudist magazine” (ibid). This figure calls attention to the way Euro-American people appropriate Native culture and “play Indian” (Deloria, 1998). In the center of the composition is Marvel comics super hero Iron Man. As a child, Hyde reimagined this super hero as an Indian because of the red suit and the missiles above and below Iron Man is symbolic of how Hyde felt about the world around him including the Native art


world— “either flying alongside destructive elements or avoiding them” (personal communication, January 22, 2012). Below Iron Man are three figures that are part of his
“war party” series representing the Western representations of Native art. In this context “war party” could also connote the violence directed towards Native people. Hyde uses broad brush strokes and silhouettes as a form of shorthand for these figures as they are easily recognizable and part of the collective American consciousness. The blue lines at the bottom left corner are also shorthand that reference coupons, advertisements, bar codes, and commodification (ibid).

The autobiographical elements in this painting are like diary entries from a particular period in Hyde’s life. The puzzle pieces are a way for Hyde to describe moments of “self-doubt” and “whether or not to conform” as well as questioning how he “fits in” to the Native art discourse (ibid). The three figures in the lower lefthand corner are a stylized version of the MySpace logo which correspond to the three emphatic lines “text me!” on the right side of the canvas. For Hyde, these elements bring attention to the normalized use of social media and texting for communication and courtship. Although highly personal, Hyde is also reflecting on how communication and cultures change over time. Again, Hyde contrasts how Native people are engaged in the present by utilizing the same technology and vernacular as the dominant culture with the outmoded romanticized imagery that persists.
Dyani Reynolds-White Hawk

*My work embraces the dilemmas and contradictions, as well as the joys and blessings of a cross-cultural existence. As a woman of Lakota and European ancestry my life experiences have been a combination of both Western and Indigenous educations causing a continual negotiation of value systems and worldviews. Through the amalgamation of abstract symbols and motifs derivative of both Lakota and Western abstraction my artwork examines, dissects, and patches back together pieces of each in a means to provide an honest representation of self and culture.*

— Dyani Reynolds-White Hawk (2012)

Dyani Reynolds-White Hawk, a Sicangu Lakota artist, grew up in her father’s hometown of Madison, Wisconsin but also maintains ties to the Rosebud reservation in South Dakota where her mother’s family is from. Initially attending Haskell Indian Nations University where she received an Associate degree, Reynolds-White Hawk completed a Bachelor of Fine Arts in Studio Arts from the Institute of American Indian Arts. She continued to graduate school to obtain a Masters of Fine Arts in Studio Art from the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Reynolds-White Hawk utilizes her multicultural background as a woman of Lakota and European ancestry to create powerful and evocative imagery in paintings and mixed media works. She has developed a lexicon of symbols and motifs that draw from both Indigenous, specifically Lakota, and Western forms of abstraction. Through her work Reynolds-White Hawk articulates her life experiences drawing from her participation in both Western and Indigenous forms of education while finding ways to convey the constant negotiations of often contrasting value systems and worldviews.

Prior to college and formal training in the Western model, Reynolds-White Hawk created beadwork and other objects that are part of her Lakota culture. Like Teri Greeves,
Reynolds-White Hawk had cultural experiences and mentoring with her family, friends, elders and members of her Native communities as she was growing up which constitutes years of learning values and aesthetics that becomes part of her art making process. Reynolds-White Hawk is like many displaced Native Americans who for varying circumstances relocated from their tribal home communities and reservations to American urban cities. Native people who are grappling with this dynamic of having concepts of home and family in distinctly different ideological, cultural, and physical places often refer to it as “living in two worlds.” The phrase is limiting and reinforces the familiar Western and Other trope (Said, 1978). It also bolsters the notion that Native or Indigenous people are not part of the modern world or that they suddenly return to a mythicized pre-Contact existence. A more accurate description is code-switching or the cross-cultural negotiations that Native people, including Reynolds-White Hawk, contend with as they participate in the many-faceted aspects of their lives (Heller, 1992). Reynolds-White Hawk described how Native artists often return to this struggle as a source of inspiration for their art, she stated “it is so often at the root of how we go about our everyday lives that it is completely natural that it comes out in our work (personal communication, February 7, 2012). Native artists return to identity as subject matter or make it their primary focus as a means to validate their existence and presence.

Identity is a highly contested and complicated space when it comes to Native Americans. Native Americans are the only ethnic minorities that have to prove their membership or claim to their ethnicity. Native American identity is often placed on a value system regarding the authenticity of both the art object and consequently it’s maker. The intention of the Indian Arts and Crafts Act (1990) was to provide federal
support to protect and support Native identity, copyright and to stop the infringement and mass reproduction of material culture attributed to Native Americans. There is no argument that this is productive especially when corporate retailers like Urban Outfitters appropriate the name of a sovereign nation. This act, however validates the way the dominant culture has control of naming, codifying and defining what and who constitutes Native America.

To complicate matters, there are many Native people who, because of federally regulated membership requirements, do not qualify as citizens of their respective nations regardless if they are connected to or live within their tribal home communities. Children of mixed ancestry, Native and non-Native or Native from different tribal nations, often don’t qualify for the blood quantum requirements for membership to the tribal nation where their parents reside. Children of Native parents who relocated to cities, married non-Natives and then tried to integrate into the larger culture now face the confusion and frustration of not being fully validated in the dominant culture and also disconnected from their homelands and ancestral people. These are just a few of many instances that make the subject of identity a volatile and productive source of expression.

Fortunately for Reynolds-White Hawk, she was able to connect to Native community in the cities where she lived and also by returning to where her Indigenous ancestry originated. She describes her tribal people and homelands as “my center, the heart of my understanding of things and what I return to” (Dyani Reynolds-White Hawk, personal communication, February 7, 2012). Reynolds-White Hawk embraces all aspects of herself, the fact that she is a product of mixed ancestry, that she lives in the city, and that she was raised bi-culturally. Consequently, these things are reflected in her art. She
declared, “All of those experiences make up who I am and how I understand this place and my artwork. For me, it’s about recognizing, accepting, acknowledging and celebrating all my influences, all portions of my education and all portions of myself” (ibid). This inspiration is also her motivation for creating art for public consumption and a mandate to use her opportunities in the public sphere to discuss the pressing issues for Native people today. Reynolds-White Hawk described some of the challenges

It’s very important for me to talk about the history, beauty and contributions of Native art to the greater art world. I feel a responsibility to contribute to that discussion. So our voices are heard and we are not the observed. That it’s not just being defined from the outside in, that we get to define who we are from our own perspectives. There’s still a tremendous gap in understanding and a misunderstanding of what Native arts are, the influences they have had and the contributions that we have made and continue to make…we are still very much overlooked. In academic settings, when discussions arise based on Native issues, or most specifically in this case, Native subject matter in the field of art, it is a rare occasion when non-Native people are able to engage with Native people in enlightening discussions without discomfort. Instead of being able to talk, critique, evaluate, and cross-analyze the subject matter as would normally take place, issues of race, defensiveness, ignorance to the subject matter and/or an unwillingness to see validity in identity-based work clouded the ability for a true academic conversation to take place. These patterns teach Native students that their life experiences do not hold the same significance as the general American or
European experience in the arts. I often felt as though I needed to put my culture in my back pocket when I entered the classroom. (ibid)

Reynolds-White Hawk observed in Western academic settings that discussions about Native history or contemporary issues rarely go beyond “race” or surface level ideas, which is the baseline conversation and usually the stopping point. I have noticed the response to be either the historical/cultural amnesia about Native America or what is referred to as Euro-American “White guilt.” Either response, in my experience, prevents members of the dominant culture, namely White Euro-Americans, to shut down and cut the dialogue off. This is a reflection of the greater part of American society failing to acknowledge, ignoring or otherwise silencing and erasing Native peoples, histories, cultures and knowledge. As an artist and also an academic, Reynolds-White Hawk thinks critically about her positionality within the dominant culture’s understanding of Native America. She is among many Native people including myself that have found aspects of the Western academic experience ostracizing. There is such a disproportionate amount of quality information that uses Indigenous voices as primary sources or includes Native perspectives. This schism often occurs for minoritized students who have very few things that are culturally-relevant reflected and validated by practically every aspect of the dominant culture. What does occur is surface level inclusion equivalent to the “heroes and holidays” multi-cultural approach or the racist type of “honoring” typified by mascots and stereotypical representations. The prevailing issues for Native Americans are visibility and being able to not only self-define, but to have Indigenous knowledge and perspectives given the same consideration as those from the dominant culture.
Reynolds-White Hawk identified that the work she produces is intended for a Native audience, but she is also interested in having her work reach a mainstream arts audience. She commented,

“I want the mainstream to have a better understanding of Native art. Both audiences are important… My values, the things I cherish in aesthetics, spirituality…for Native people to see that realized, the joy of recognition is the most important for me. (ibid)

Reynolds-White Hawk identifies as a Native artist but is clear about not disavowing her mixed ancestry. She cites modern abstractionists such as Sean Scully and Mark Rothko as direct influences. She also draws from Lakota iconography and material culture which contain Indigenous forms of abstraction that existed long before the Western arts movement. Her subject matter and underlying purpose for creating art for public consumption is similar to the other artists in this study. Reynolds-White Hawk develops imagery that is compelling and inviting while forcing an unfamiliar eye to question their assumptions about Native art. For people familiar with Lakota aesthetics and symbolism, there are layers of context that connect her art to oral traditions, spirituality, the landscapes of the Plains, the Black Hills, and cultural expression.
So often Native art and culture is discussed and analyzed from the outside in. Conversely, it is uncommon to consider how Indigenous people view or think about the dominant culture. This painting is a quintessential example of how Reynolds-White Hawk blends Western and Indigenous influences and is able to convey ideas about Indigenous perspectives. She described the overall theme as perspectives or viewpoints,
“about the ways we see the world, the window through which we look” (ibid). In the center of this painting is a large four directions symbol. Within the negative space are clouds receding into a deep blue sky. Reynolds-White Hawk explained

That sky is from a picture I took on the way home from Sundance. It’s a South Dakota sky. It’s that moment after we leave ceremony and are on our way home, off the reservation and back to the city. It’s a really strong moment of transition. Sometimes it’s really sad. Sometimes it feels really amazing too though because you feel fresh and renewed in a way you don’t any other time of the year. It’s always a mix of emotions and it’s really hard to go back into the city after that. It’s very challenging. (ibid)

The four directions symbol combined with the sky connect to both time and place along with cultural and spiritual context. This sky is typical to summertime in South Dakota. Reynolds-White Hawk succinctly conveyed those moments of reflection that occur particularly after life affirming ceremonies such as the Sundance along with the difficulty that Native people experience being separated from their home communities and the land that they feel close ties with.

While the middle is specifically representative of home, Lakota symbolism, spirituality and South Dakota, the corners are used to address how Reynolds-White Hawk utilizes Western and Indigenous references. The corners alternate between painted lines made to resemble lines of quillwork and solid blue color lines. She commented that although “Western art in general has been highly influenced by Native art, it’s not really talked about or delved into” (ibid). Artists like Robert Rauschenberg, Mark Rothko,
Jackson Pollock, and Roy Lichtenstein all have appropriated Native iconography. These artists gained recognition for their contributions to art while the Indigenous originators of these iconographic elements are not held in the same esteem. She argued

They’re never compared or talked about in Western literature. Our arts are something that their masters have looked at and drawn from, but it’s their master’s works that are highlighted. Our works aren’t considered Masters, they are considered craft or something secondary. (ibid)

Regardless, Reynolds-White Hawk acknowledges how Western and Native art factor into her work

Both of those are my understanding of not only art but the world at large.

Combining those gives credit to both. The entire piece is meant to talk about how we see. Each one of us has a story, a background, passions that we carry around with us and it’s those things that determine how we understand the world. So being mixed Lakota and German/Welsh factors in. (ibid)

Reynolds-White Hawk is drawn to Modern art and specifically Modern Abstraction and stripe painting naming Sean Scully as one of her favorite contemporary artists. She elaborated “When I see those types of paintings, they remind me of Native art” (ibid). The alternating blue and white lines are direct reference to stripe painting and abstract expressionism. While the blue lines are painted in solid color fields, the white stripes are rows of horizontal lines with multiple vertical marks resembling quillwork. These same rows are visible in lazy-stich or hump-stitch beadwork. Reynolds-Whitehawk draws comparisons to Native art
When I see works like that I see lazy stitch, quillwork, beadwork. I see the patterning that we have in our traditional works and the power that’s in them. If you have an entirely beaded buckskin dress, for instance, and the symbolism in that dress is more minimal there are large fields of color. What’s so beautiful about lazy-stitch application in particular, what makes it so rhythmic and amazing is the patterning. You have stripe after stripe after stripe after stripe. Then you have all these variations of shading and color in the beads, some of them come out farther. You have all of this play and beauty that creates this illusion of a field of color. So those were the things I was looking at in modernist abstract painting and these things that also happen in traditional [Native] art. (ibid)

She recognizes the beauty of Native art and employs Native, Plains culture and Lakota symbolism and abstraction to create a powerful piece that honors her cross-cultural art making process. This painting, while not overtly addressing stereotype or racism through its imagery, invites dialogue through the use of design elements and the purposeful mark making. The iconography of the four directions and the lines of quillwork signify place, culture and spiritual context directed at a Native audience. The stripes invite a non-Native audience into reading the painting from elements familiar to modern art. Reynolds-White Hawk hopes that each audience will move toward understanding and appreciating how she brings the two references together.

Master’s Study (2011) was produced during her graduate work at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Reynolds-White Hawk recalled how it was customary in fundamental art courses to replicate a masterwork from Western art history. This is nothing out of the ordinary. Most arts programs use the master’s study as an effective teaching tool. When given this assignment, Reynolds-White Hawk came to an important conclusion and decided to look toward Native art. She stated,
I recognize the fact that we have our own Master’s. Abstract painting, color field painting and stripe painting—We have masters in those areas. This is one of the only instances I have worked outside my own tribal influences. I don’t usually go out of Lakota influences as I feel I don’t have ownership over any other tribe’s ‘things’ and I don’t want to misrepresent something that I don’t fully understand. As far as abstraction and color field goes, Navajo textiles are amazing and they have all those things. I saw the power and rhythm and simplicity in them. I saw an image of a second phase Navajo Chief’s Blanket and decided to use it. (ibid)

There are two important points to consider. The first is Navajo textiles are masterful works requiring both technical and aesthetic acuity. Aside from the preparation of the wool, dyes, warp and weft, the weavings display purposeful symmetry and balance. While these qualities could be attributed to Western aesthetics, they are more aptly examples of Navajo philosophies or ways of being based on hozho or beauty and balance. There is tension created between the black and white lines and also between the thin blue lines within the red lines. In the painting there is variation in the color within the lines of color similar to the variation that would occur in the dyes of the weft. Second, Reynolds-White Hawk brings up an important consideration about appropriation. There are no overtly sacred symbols in this Navajo blanket, so she is not committing any cultural taboos. These blankets were valuable within the Navajo culture but were available for internal and external consumption, in other words they were trade items. Also, weaving like silversmithing, was acquired through contact with other cultures. The sheep and wool came through the Spanish and the weaving was a cross-cultural adaptation from the neighboring Pueblo nations. The deep red wool came from imported fabric dyed with
cochineal, which was not native to the southwest. This color could have only appeared through trade, contact and appropriation. Native art is often discussed and valued on its perceived cultural purity and specificity. There is very little information on this type of cross-cultural appropriation or influence that was occurring prior to and after European contact. Reynolds-White Hawk’s interpretation or master’s study of a Navajo textile re-contextualizes the object into a two-dimensional painting, but does not use and reframe specific Navajo cultural or spiritual patrimony. She uses an Indigenous reference to highlight and call attention to questioning what is considered a masterwork. Like the painting Seeing, Master’s Study is intended to create dialogue about Native contributions to Western art.

This mixed media work could be considered as part of the series of Western and Indigenous confluence characterized by the first two pieces. It is another example of hybridity similar to Yahgulanaas’s work. Reynolds-White Hawk combined elements of color field paintings, stripe paintings and quillwork. The references to Sean Scully and Mark Rothko are evident in the composition. The dark grey color field has a gradient from the outside edges in toward the center drawing attention to the blue and white lines. There are lines of porcupine quills that compose the white stripes in the center rectangle. There is variation in the color of the quillwork that from a distance reads as white. Reynolds-White Hawk use of quillwork lines combined with painted lines illustrates how Native abstraction is similar to the Western art equivalent. By bringing both elements into one painting, she is placing value and importance on both. The use of the quillwork is minimal and Reynolds-White Hawk claimed she was “wanting to celebrate and recognize the beauty of quillwork and the power that it has” (ibid). There are no designs or patterns which allow the quills to stand as a reference to the history, legacy, and tradition of using quillwork on an object. Reynolds-White Hawk explained the title

This was early in my realization… that beginning moment of returning to our arts no matter what I was studying in their arts [Western]. Some of the people that I was drawn to like Rothko, I kept finding their intersections with Native art. I would see a Western painting and find out that these artists were influenced by Native art. So it [seeing mainstream art] somehow kept bringing it back to our [Native] arts. That painting was the physical realization of that relationship, thus “Cyclical.” (ibid)
Acknowledging the connection is validating and liberating at the same time. Reynolds-White Hawk additionally reappropriates, reclaims and Indigenizes Western abstract, color field and stripe painting. This painting forces the viewer to consider their assumptions about Native art as it does not have any obvious iconography. Reynolds-White Hawk is moving into a new discursive space for Native arts, one that doesn’t depend on external definitions.

*A Heathen’s Penance* (2010) was part of an exhibition *Soul Sister: Remembering Kateri* (2011) curated by Ryan Rice, Chief Curator at the Museum of Contemporary Native Arts (MoCNA). The exhibition was based on several artists reflecting on Kateri Tekakwitha, the Mohawk and first Native American saint. From the MoCNA website “The exhibition re-imagines Kateri through an Indigenous lens that includes re-contextualizing history and the impact of convergence that shifted religion, tradition and cultural practices across North America.”

Initially, Reynolds-White Hawk questioned being asked to participate based on several factors. She discussed her reservations about taking the project

I know next to nothing about Catholicism and about the same of Mohawk culture. And I have a fairly jaded perspective on Christianity, but I noticed that a lot of Mohawk and Native people who do identify with Catholicism or Christianity, especially there in Santa Fe, in the Southwest they value Kateri; she’s someone important to them. (Dyani Reynolds-Whitehawk, personal communication, February 7, 2012).
In order to find something to connect to Kateri, she studied the saint’s life and history. Reynolds-White Hawk elaborated

I did a lot of research and learned about her life and what that experience was. Her history is very intense. In the 1800s, it was one of those first generations of intense assimilation where Catholic people were coming in and living in Native communities and bringing extreme approaches to converting Native people. It was one of those moments of intense conflict and intense efforts towards converting Native people. I found out she had an extremely intense practice of penance. From what I read, it was obsessive. Her story is much more than that, but I wanted to focus on why she did that [form of penance]. How much guilt did she have to carry to make her think that she had to go through that much in order to gain forgiveness? I was thinking about when cultures come together and you somehow learn that everything that you know, everything that you are, all the people that you are surrounded by are fundamentally wrong, fundamentally evil and this other way that you never knew before is the right way. How much did she feel she had to do to not only gain forgiveness for herself but for her community? She was really young too. She got really sick from an illness and her self-inflicted injuries from her penance practices. (ibid)

The resulting painting has two parts. The middle contains a barren winter landscape and it is bordered on two sides by two columns painted to resemble rows of quillwork. Reynolds-White Hawk described the center receding line that resembles a path as “tally marks that represent her penance practices. All of those individual self-punishments are supposed to lead her down this path of forgiveness or righteousness, acceptance or
enlightenment” (ibid). According to Reynolds-White Hawk the white ground covering and the clouded sky is representative of Kateri’s landscape and references how she walked barefoot in the snow as part of her penance practice (ibid).

The symbol in the sky resembling a cross is intentionally broken. The top part is a four directions symbol in Lakota lexicon, but here Reynolds-White Hawk is combining it with the line below to indicate the possible merging of two different worldviews.

Reynolds-White Hawk reflected on Kateri’s Indigenous perspective on Catholicism:

It would be really interesting to know where the intersections of her understanding of the world through her perspective as a Mohawk woman and how that dictated her understanding of Catholicism. There may have been symbols and practices that were part of her upbringing that had parallels with her understanding of Catholicism. There may have been areas that she felt like she could identify with because she understood them from an Indigenous perspective and not necessarily a Catholic perspective. Was it an amalgamation of Catholic beliefs and her own understanding? There’s language differences, plus her own personal experiences and worldview through the way you have been raised, through the language that you speak. (ibid)

As Christianity and Catholicism spread across Indian country through contact and assimilation many different Indigenous peoples co-opted, adapted or incorporated the religion into their culture. Some Native peoples, like the Pueblo nations in New Mexico embraced Catholicism as a means of survival and preservation of their cultures and languages. Pueblo dances and ceremonials were held on Catholic saint feast days that
corresponded with the appropriate seasonal ancestral ceremonies. The Pueblo people were allowed to conduct their dances and sing their songs provided they first honored the saint and participated in Catholic mass. Today that tradition continues. It is possible that Kateri was reinterpreting Catholicism and incorporating the religion and its penance practices through her Mohawk worldview.

Reynolds-White Hawk also had an important insight about Kateri; through her research she found that Catholic people held the saint in high esteem but questions whether they really understood Kateri from her point of view? According to Reynolds-White Hawk, Kateri is characterized as “an amazing beadworker and quillworker” but that was “associated with a Catholic trait. That she was industrious; she kept herself busy. They wrote about it like it was a Catholic value. They didn’t write about how it is in the fact an Indigenous value” (ibid). The columns of painted quillwork lines pay homage to Kateri as a Native woman who exists in a line of beadworkers and quillworkers all the way back to her ancestors who learned generations prior to European contact and extending to current artists including Dyani Reynolds-White Hawk and Teri Greeves. This type of misinterpretation was common and was meant to overshadow and silence Indigenous ways of being. This is the type of dehumanization and erasure that justified the extermination and eradication of Indigenous cultures, languages and peoples.

Ironically, the Mohawk are part of the Haudenosaunee confederacy, which was used as the model for the United States constitution. There are many forms of assimilatory mechanisms that reduce, eradicate or incorporate Indigenous perspectives or ways of being.
This painting creates context for questioning dominant culture interpretations of Native peoples and their cultures. Additionally, Reynolds-White Hawk began the process by not identifying with her subject matter, but through her research and understanding of her Indigeneity found relevant and correlating aspects of Kateri’s story. Both are products of mixed heritage unions. They are creative women who used beadwork or quillwork in their artistic expression. Reynolds-White Hawk commented that she specifically related to the apparent struggle that Kateri, who was Mohawk and Algonquin, had with her ethnic and cultural blending and how a person of mixed heritage has trouble being accepted in their multiple communities dealt with “similar issues of a cross-cultural existence” (ibid). Although members of different communities and cultural understandings, Reynolds-White Hawk found relevant aspects of Kateri’s story that she could convey while also addressing broader issues on Indigenous perspectives.
Chris Pappan

I am of Osage, Kaw, Cheyenne River Sioux, and mixed European heritage. I don’t listen to the wind, I listen to people’s cell phone conversations. I make paintings to bring awareness that Indians are still here. I prefer to term Indian over Native American, but I use both. I am an American Indian living in the 21st century. —Chris Pappan (2010)

Chris Pappan is another mixed heritage artist who is a member of the Kaw Nation in Oklahoma, but also traces his lineage to the Osage and Lakota. Pappan grew up in Flagstaff, Arizona and later attended the Institute of American Indian Arts on scholarship. He moved to Chicago with the intention of completing his undergraduate degree, but lacked the resources to complete the program. This did not deter Pappan from making art and trying to find his voice. Like many urban Natives, Pappan struggled with understanding his identity and resisted creating work that reinforced the stereotypical and romanticized imagery that was most recognizably called Native American. In order to find relevant subject matter, he turned to reproducing old photographs of people from Plains culture since that was part of his heritage. Instead of merely duplicating the imagery that he knew was often staged, he decided to distort the photographs. This often involved creating digital images of the photographs and manipulating them electronically before recreating them on paper or canvas. He then transposed the transformed images into drawings and paintings on old maps and ledger paper. He was familiar with ledger style art, but found the flat, two-dimensional style limiting. Pappan considers his work a new interpretation of ledger art where he combines themes of distortion and displacement.
In order to find his subject matter, Pappan researches old historic photographs of Native people from books and also on the Internet where information is accessible and plentiful. He finds the old maps and ledger paper in various places like online auctions and at antiques shops. Taking the photographs and also the paper media and putting his mark on them is Pappan’s method of reclaiming the imagery and connecting to it and thus his Native heritage. Describing the theme of displacement, Pappan stated

I started looking at old photographs and thinking about these people’s stories and what lead them up to the point where they had their picture taken and where they went immediately after. I was also researching old maps that showed Indian territories and where Indian peoples have been moved or relocated to and displaced from. I recreate those old maps and juxtapose images of people who are indigenous to those areas on the map to show that they have been uprooted, moved and displaced. It’s a huge narrative that’s historic and it’s one that a lot of Indian people can relate to. (Chris Pappan, personal communication, November 23, 2011)

This is also part of his personal narrative. When discussing the intention for the work he creates, Pappan explained that it was a way to address his issues of identity and displacement. He asserted

A lot of my Native experience has been trying to find my identity – what that means to me. I grew up in Flagstaff, I was totally displaced from my homelands, my family. I grew up with my mom, who’s white, and my stepdad and I would just see my [Native] dad on occasion – but much more so now. My Mom always
told me, “You’re Native American you need to be really proud of that.” But I never knew what it meant. It was only when I went to IAIA and really started hanging out with other Indian Artists that I really started to find my way. It’s still a journey I will be going on for the rest of my life. (ibid)

This self discovery is still unfolding and becomes an integral part of his art making process. Although Pappan is culturally and ethnically diverse, he most strongly identifies as a Native American.

The distortions of the old photographs allow Pappan to reappropriate this imagery and use it as a commentary for how the dominant culture projects it’s perceptions of Native America. Pappan hopes that a Native audience will embrace the imagery while questioning the ways that they condone and reinforce stereotypes (ibid). Like the other artists in this study, Pappan creatively uses his imagery and colorful compositions to invite dialogue about these issues rather than making an overt critique of these circumstances.
This mixed media painting is part of the series called “Displaced Peoples.”

Pappan clarified “These paintings arose from my working on antique ledger paper as a way of making art on a found surface” (ibid). This painting combines layers of information including a map of the Indian territories in the central plains of North America, botanical illustrations and four Sauk and Fox men. Pappan explained that the portraits of these Indigenous men are intentionally rendered to represent “the distorted image we all have of Indians in our minds” (ibid). Pappan acknowledged that Native Americans perpetuate and reinforce the stereotypes projected by the dominant culture.

The map indicates the areas assigned to “Emigrant Indians west of Arkansas and Missouri.” Ironically, emigrant refers to people who move to another country while the Native sovereign nations depicted here were forcibly relocated out of their homelands. The title of the map makes the history and violence innocuous and normalized.

The botanical illustration is of the dogwood plant that is native to the southern plains of central North America. Dogwood is a traditional medicinal plant that had many uses from curing fevers and malaria to creating red dyes and the wood was used for various weaponry. Pappan overlays these drawings to reference how Indigenous people were studied like plants and animals (ibid). Remnants of Native culture including bodies, bones and material culture were often displayed in natural history museums. This type of ethnography was common particularly around the 1800s when this map originated and continued until the turn of the last century when the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (1990) began the process of returning cultural patrimony and ancestral remains back to the originating nations.

Pappan’s narrative, while general, also echoes his personal narrative of being an
emigrant growing up in the United States away from his tribes and homelands. In this statement he connects the elements in his painting to land, sacred space and displacement. There are specific places that are sacred to most Native Americans, and we still fight for the protection, and right to worship in these spiritual spaces. These pieces are also great teaching tools because I portray the Indigenous peoples of that particular mapped area, and oftentimes the viewer isn't aware that these people even existed!

The main idea behind them is that they are a metaphor for the "Native American diaspora". Regardless of the fact that the majority of Indians today retain a (small) land base, so much has been lost of so many tribe's culture (language, art, dance songs, etc.) its as though we are wandering, trying to find a way back (to what?). I then will do portraits of leaders or "spiritual guides" to show them the way, and call them back home. (ibid)

It’s as though Pappan is invoking the ancestors to provide the people the means to survive, renew and revitalize. Pappan like other Native artists use their art as a vehicle for addressing the violence and trauma evident in the lived experiences of Native peoples. Rather than just focusing on the trauma, these artists use this discursive space to reimagine history and tell their stories of triumph and survivance. As Pappan noted, the Displaced Peoples series also provides opportunities to educate those who are less informed about Native Americans.

This pencil drawing on antique ledger paper is part of the “21st Century Ledger drawing series” and homage to Chief Wahshungah, the last Kanza (Kaw) Chief. Pappan expands and redefines the lexicon of ledger drawing/painting by incorporating his version
of hyperrealism, distortions and image manipulations. This is one of the instances where he salvages, recycles and reclaims antique ledger paper. Pappan was compelled by a photograph of the chief and noted that he found the portrait “very striking” and admired the defiant and “punk rock” quality evident in Chief Wahshungah’s pose and the cigar hanging from his mouth (ibid). Pappan also mentioned that, in his research, he discovered that the chief would dress in full regalia as part of his normal and everyday attire (ibid). Each element of the chief’s regalia is carefully and intentionally placed representing the respect and status among his people. Pappan also discussed the use of Indigenous text with the portrait

While I was working on this I was thinking about how the Kaw and Osage are closely related, some say we were once Osage (while others dispute it), but the fact remains that my family are both Kanza and WahZhaZse [Osage]. So in keeping with the idea of the ledger being a document to record transactions or events, I utilized the blank lines to write an Osage prayer that had been translated into the Kanza language. It has been erased as though the language is fading, but it is also strong in other areas because it is coming back, as the people relearn their own language. (ibid)

In this invocation of Chief Wahshungah, Pappan honors the Kaw and Osage connection to his heritage through the use of Indigneous orthography. This is another example of how Pappan utilizes his art to convey contextual information about Native Americans and, in this case, about his own heritage, history and people. Pappan provides the English translation that reveals insights on Kanza/Osage worldview

Grandfather Sun, you obeyed the words of Father God and in that way became a
person, they say. The elders talked to you always, as long as they lived. Today I
am but a pitiful person. Today I speak to you. You, who they say helps us with
things, you who are all knowing, make me brave, and I will do my best. Now,
through your kindness to me, I ask you to help me with this, and also, with these
words, I ask you to make it good for all the men. As you make our minds clear
and hearts good and we go forth, I ask you to bless us. We ask that we live thus,
as Kaws standing with calm hearts. In future days, as you look down upon us,
whatever you wish of us, it will be done. Amen. (ibid)

on antique ledger paper. Santa Fe, NM; private collection. Photo courtesy of Chris Pappan.
This pencil drawing on antique ledger paper is also part of the 21st Century Ledger drawing series. The portrait is what Pappan described as a mirrored image where half of the image is overlaid onto itself and the two sides are interwoven to create a new image which is representative of “two ideas merging into something new” (ibid). Pappan emphasized that the intertwining of the necklace strands created a web and was a symbolic reference to the “connection to the digital age, the worldwide connection we can all share” (ibid). The piece is aptly titled Interface Protocol, which is at once a play on words since the two faces are connected and also a reference to computer programming and technology. In this piece Pappan has an underlying narrative of Native people connecting the past with the present and reconciling their disconnected identities or merging them into new understandings of themselves. The narrative is autobiographical, but one that many Native people can relate. Pappan is also subtly describing his process that involves the use of technology and the Internet while drawing attention to the fact that Native Americans are not stuck in the past but very much a part of the modern and digital world.
This mixed media piece incorporates an antique map of Phoenix, Arizona, painting and photo transfers. *Retelling the Tale* is part of the *Displaced Peoples* series. The subject matter is the Maricopa people who are indigenous to the lands that are now the burgeoning city of Phoenix, and their material culture. There is still a Maricopa presence in Phoenix, but their reservation is surrounded by concrete and asphalt. The photo transfers are of archival photographs of Maricopa baskets. They are placed to suggest movement and are symbolic of Pappan’s theme of displacement.

The large painted basket bears the Maricopa “man in the maze” design. According to Pappan the male figure above the basket is the man in the maze who has materialized off the basket and is “wandering the urban landscape of Phoenix” trying to find his way home (ibid). The blue outline is Pappan’s shorthand for indicating that there
is something spiritual or “otherworldly” about the man (ibid). The figure in the lower right hand corner is a Maricopa girl who, like the man is facing out. Like Frank Buffalo Hyde, Pappan turns the subjects into the observer and the viewer as the observed. Pappan also considers this girl a “spirit or ancestral guide” who is there to watch over the man on his journey (ibid). While this subject matter is not directly from his ancestry, Pappan grew up in Arizona and became more informed about the Indigenous peoples there as he participated in annual art markets, exhibitions and through networking with the relatively small Native arts community. The piece examines the displacement of Native peoples in Arizona while bringing attention to the continuing presence of Indigenous people and cultures in different geographic areas North America.
Chapter 6 Analysis

The artists in this study contribute not only to the legacy and continuing development of Native cultural expression, but also to the larger context of art history. Their work defies and in many instances overcomes the expectations, limitations and perceptions of Native art. These artists move beyond typical Native arts and crafts into mediums such as painting, mixed media, digital image manipulation, photography, sculpture, installation and performance. Innovation figures prominently in the interpretation of content and cultural art forms. Amerman, Greeves and Reynolds-White Hawk manipulate beadwork and quillwork. Yahgulanaas reinterprets the classic Haida formline aesthetic, integrates Japanese manga, and authors a new form of cultural expression. Pappan changes the understanding and use of ledger art. Sense transforms and preserves ancient weaving techniques. These artists produce thought provoking work that is progressive and also part of the expansive spectrum and continuum of Native American artistic expression. The art they generate is narrative driven and conceptual where abstraction, symbolism, memory, emotional response and specific imagery are used as tools for communication to specific and broad audiences. As well, Native cultural references, popular culture, beauty, subtly and humor become vehicles for reaffirming Native identity and addressing contemporary Native socio-cultural issues. Through their work, these artists create dialogue and visibility through reclaiming Native imagery, humanizing the Native experience, counter-narratives, and reframing and re-educating about the breadth and depth of Native arts and cultures.

Native art is created for differing purposes and varying audiences depending on the circumstances or intentions. Some falls in the category of material culture for internal
use. These items are typically considered aspects of cultural patrimony that historically have been collected and hoarded by the dominant culture as trophies and symbols of conquest. It is important to continue to identify and repatriate those items to the originating Indigenous peoples. In contrast, the art in this study is made for public consumption. Encoded in the work are symbols, stories, histories and aspects of culture that are meant for a Native audience to read and understand. It is also made for a larger audience to stimulate dialogue and communicate about the diversity and complexities of Native peoples and their living cultures.

Making this work visible is equally important as repatriation as it serves many purposes. These artists humanize the Native experience by addressing the stereotypes and static representations with counter-narratives that begin the process of re-educating the public on Native histories and lived circumstances. Reclaiming imagery is an act of repatriation and at the same time it is reclaiming discursive space and an act of self-determination and self-identification.

Charlene Teters and Marcus Amerman were instrumental in creating national attention and speaking out about the use of mascots and other damaging imagery in popular culture. Teters uses performance and installation to call attention to the continual use of these images and the damaging effects they have on Native people. This work has spanned over two decades with gradual progress but has created more awareness and intolerance on these issues. Through his beadwork, Amerman reclaims staged archival images of Native Americans and retells their stories in full color. Amerman also takes popular culture mages and *Indianizes* them by capturing them in beadwork. Amerman
reclaims kitsch imagery and reframes the familiar with personal narratives and real histories of Native people.

Artists like Frank Buffalo Hyde and Chris Pappan continue with the same visual vernacular that Teters and Amerman initiated. Hyde takes familiar imagery and subverts the romantic with humor and sarcasm. He also appropriates imagery from popular culture and uses them for his own narratives and commentary about dominant culture representations and perceptions about Native culture. Chris Pappan, like Amerman, draws from archival photographs and uses distortion to reflect the misinformation and misrepresentation that persists.

Indigenous creative expression today or what we refer to as contemporary Native art is based largely on continuity and Indigenous aesthetics. These artists are also doing something important for Native people and intrinsic to Indigenous persistence, they are providing leadership and mentoring for future generations. Their work also focuses on healing and addressing historical trauma.

Continuity is foundational in understanding Native art. The value-laden and binary categories of contemporary and traditional fail to adequately assess and describe the ongoing production and expression of Native arts and culture. As these artists demonstrate, they are connecting to and adding their mark to a continuum and spectrum of cultural expression. While these artists are not necessarily reproducing cultural art forms, some like Greeves, Amerman, Sense, Reynolds-White Hawk and Yahgulanaas build on foundational Indigenous cultural references like beadwork, quillwork, weaving and tribally specific aesthetics. There are Native artists that have dedicated their lives
and occupations to revitalizing or preserving time honored cultural art forms and
techniques. Both are equally important to the vitality of Native culture and intrinsic to
this discourse is that Native art should be defined and evaluated from within using
Indigenous aesthetics and Native art theory.

Leadership and mentoring occurs when artists such as these produce work that
challenges the dominant culture’s perceptions and negative representations. Moreover,
they are creating art that changes what Native art and culture is supposed to be and
influencing future generations of artists and scholars. Many of these artists are instructors
and administrators or become involved in community-based projects and speak publically
about their work. Collectively, they have influenced and will continue to influence
generations of artists.

Their work also focuses on healing and addressing historical trauma. Native
people today are the survivors of a holocaust, cultural and physical genocide and also the
trauma of being displaced, silenced and erased. We are as Charlene Teters described, the
“invisible people” (personal communication, January 31, 2012). In order to move forward
and move past the hurt, Native people first have to recognize, name and then address the
problem. One possible way to explain this is through the Kübler-Ross (2005) model or
*Five Stages of Grief*, which are denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance.
Where most get stuck is the recognizing and naming of the problem or the anger and
bargaining stage. Moving through the grief model means working toward solutions and
action. A fitting idea that Indigenous scholar Gerald Vizenor (1999, 2000) uses
“survivance,” becomes part of the Indigenous academic discourse on dealing with this
trauma. In this context, resistance could be construed as being reactive. What hasn’t been
discussed is moving beyond resistance and mere survival into being and living, addressing issues actively and proactively. Using the context of resistance is great for mobilization and getting people into the anger stage of grief, but there has to be a time when Native people will no longer need this impetus. I believe that there are Native scholars and artists such as these that are making strides toward moving forward with their lives and paving the way for the next iteration of Native expression.

Some of these artists still use familiar romanticized imagery because it is still charged, but in discussion with them there will come a time when those images no longer have power. Charlene Teters installations and performances directly confront stereotype and racism while promoting awareness of contemporary Native issues. Marcus Amerman, Frank Buffalo Hyde and Chris Pappan’s reinterpretations of familiar imagery and Native iconography take a more subtle approach; yet they address similar concerns and messages.

In contrast, artists such as Yahgulanaas, Greeves, Reynolds-White Hawk and Sense have taken progressive approaches to tackling this subject matter. Yahgulanaas has developed an aesthetic, style and narrative that transcend the restrictions of working as a Haida or ethnic artist while still honoring his Indigenous heritage and lineage. Yahgulanaas adapts and reinterprets not only Haida narratives, but also narratives that are in response to global concerns. Greeves and Reynolds-White Hawk adapt, innovate and transform the mediums of beadwork and quillwork. This medium, initially used for personal adornment, becomes a vehicle for narrative work and understanding how Native people use abstraction and symbolism. Sense integrates weaving techniques and patterns from her heritage into mixed media constructions that at once tie her to time honored
traditions and link her to the legacy of her Chitimacha heritage while also expanding the conception of weaving. With each of them, there is an aspect of their art that is directly informed by their specific cultural heritage. While not using overt or confrontational imagery, embedded in their work are elements intended to provoke dialogue and inquiry about Native art and culture.

**Native Art representation in Museums**

Museums present interesting sites for the study of Indigenous aesthetics and problematize the value-laden categorization and representation of Native arts. Specifically, discussing a Native-run museum demonstrates how Indigenous aesthetics can be operationalized in a museum setting. The following is part of a pilot study I conducted in preparation for this study.

When Native art and culture is displayed and represented in public institutions, such as museums, it is often packaged, presented, and consumed through the lens of the dominant culture, creating an imagined past where Native peoples are static, immutable parts of colonial history and conquest. Museums that display Native art using anthropological, ethnographic, and Western art historical models as interpretative lenses sublimate Native peoples and cultures into an imagined or romanticized past, creating an absence of authentic Native representations in the present. The museum, as a public institution and a producer and transmitter of culture and knowledge, is often one such site of sublimation and tokenization. However, the Museum of Contemporary Native Arts, whose mission is the advancement of “discourse, knowledge and understanding of Native art,” takes a different approach via their exhibition and interpretation of Native arts. The
museum is a center within the Institute of American Indian Arts (IAIA), a federally chartered tribal college. As this is a Native-run contemporary art museum, MoCNA’s ideologies and perspectives used to structure the exhibits, programming and outreach promote and encourage the recognition of Indigenous ways of knowing, Indigenous models of representation and the delivery of knowledge pertaining to Native arts and culture. Indigenous ways of knowing include culturally distinct cosmologies, belief systems, values, traditions, and ideologies that are integrally tied to language, community, and place. Indigenous models of representation and the delivery of knowledge pertaining to Native arts and culture prioritize Indigenous ways of knowing over Western forms of representation (Rangel, 2012).

Native arts, using a Western art historical model are categorized into the binaries of contemporary or traditional, appearing to have a temporal fracture in cultural production rather than allowing for a more nuanced representation of a living, continual, thriving culture that spans generations and varied iterations. The Native museum is therefore tasked with a responsibility to cast off these reductive and constrictive binary models and reconceptualize what Native art is and means within a Native context. The Museum of Contemporary Native Arts uses the term contemporary strategically to assert a Native presence utilizing Indigenous perspectives and aesthetics to guide the production and display of contemporary art made by Native artists. Situating Native people within the conceptual framework of contemporary is central to my ongoing research at MoCNA and comparatively at other Native-run institutions. Contemporary, in this context, is employed to distinguish from the historical and ethnographic museums, which focus on and frame Native people and their cultures existing only in a romanticized pre-colonial,
pre-civilization past. While comparative studies of other Native institutions are important, it is outside the scope of this study. I conceptualize contemporary as “still existing today, producing art and contextualizing Native people and culture as part of the present and moving forward” (Rangel, 2012).

**The Museum of Contemporary Native Arts**

In describing the Museum of Contemporary Native Arts, I illustrate the complexities of space that the museum and also Native people metaphorically and physically occupy.

Located in the historic downtown arts district in Santa Fe, New Mexico, where the town’s plaza is situated directly over an ancient Pueblo Indian village, MoCNA’s architecture follows the adobe and wood Pueblo Revival style of the city, reflecting Indigenous and Spanish colonial architectural influences. This style was implemented to create a unified look and increase the city’s aesthetic appeal as a tourist destination. Additionally, MoCNA inhabits a reclaimed federal building that has served historically as a post office and even a Los Alamos National Laboratory site. The physical attributes and the location of the museum are thus layered in contrasting identifications. A contemporary Native arts museum is in a U.S. government building that is near the center of a town that was built over a Pueblo Indian village. Over a few hundred years, Native Americans have symbolically reclaimed a small island of the lands they once occupied freely. (Rangel, 2012)

At nearly twenty years, the MoCNA is a significant center for contemporary Native art production and representation, especially since it is the only museum in the country
solely dedicated to that endeavor. As one of a small number of museums focused on the display and public access to Native art and cultures, this site is of vital importance to understanding Native representation (Rangel, 2012). MoCNA has a collection of more than seven thousand contemporary works of art from more than 120 Native American nations, including paintings, sculpture, photography, drawings, prints, textiles, clothing, baskets, jewelry, pottery, ceramics, beadwork, and a small collection of historic material. The museum has an extensive collection of works by the faculty, students, and alumni of the Institute of American Indian Arts college collected since its inception in 1962. Additionally, the MoCNA, as part of the IAIA, provides opportunities for students and faculty to produce and display work in small temporary exhibitions.

The MoCNA provides contemporary expressions of Native American arts and culture and educates the public about the complexities of influence and cross-cultural exchanges, the prevalence of thriving Indigenous living cultures, and the ever-contested space of “identity.” I discuss the politicized sphere of Native identity through the Indian Arts and Crafts Act of 1990.

This act legally defines who is considered Indian and outlines the consequences for misrepresentation. While the act was theoretically initiated to protect Native artists, it in fact serves as a method of protecting the investments of Native art collectors. Legal definitions of authenticity imposed on Native artists and their implementations threaten an Indigenous reading of what constitutes membership in Indigenous communities (Rangel, 2012).
The MoCNA, which is located geographically where Native art is typically market-driven and often perpetuates an imagined, expected, and romanticized version of Indigenous identity, provides opportunities for the discussion of terms and phrases such as Native, American Indian, Indigenous, contemporary vs traditional, living cultures, and what is considered Indian art. The museum’s staff of trained specialists (the director, chief curator, curator of collections, museum registrar, education coordinator, museum store director, graphic designer, special projects and community relations officer, and security/maintenance supervisor), many of whom are Native American, possess extensive knowledge and background on Native arts, archiving, and curatorial practice. The museum staff serve as ambassadors for Native America. This is yet another aspect of this institution that makes it such an important site for the transmission and representation of Native arts and culture (Rangel, 2012).

**Indigenous Perspectives in a Native Arts Museum**

In order to locate Indigenous perspectives on arts and culture, I begin with popular, mainstream, or dominant culture perceptions and ways of organizing ideas about Native art.

Since the value-laden binaries of Western/Other and contemporary/traditional are so strongly present in both academic discourse and public perception, I am interrogating the subtleties and nuanced engagements of these terms within the culture of a Native museum where these dominant ideologies are either reified or challenged. (Rangel, 2012)
What becomes central to this discussion are the perceptions of Native arts and culture, transmission and reception, Indigenous epistemologies, Indigenous aesthetics, and the (re)conceptualizing and understanding Native arts through Indigenous perspectives.

Perceptions of Native America are difficult to change, particularly when there are investments toward romanticized one-dimensional representations. The Museum of Contemporary Native Arts purpose is educating the public, both Native and mainstream, about the complexities of contemporary Native cultural expression and the uniqueness of the museum. The internal perception among the administration and staff of the museum is that it is a diverse space. Tatiana Lomahhaftewa-Singer, the MoCNA curator of collections, stated,

“The museum is not tribally or regionally based, more of a national museum and contemporary, versus cultural. Other museums usually have the cultural art forms as the main exhibits and contemporary as a small focus, a room off to the side. This museum is the only museum that is dedicated to contemporary Native arts. If we do show cultural art forms, they are integrated into an exhibit and not segregated. (personal communication, October 12, 2009)

Her use of the term “cultural art forms” is a more productive way to imagine Native art beyond the familiar and ostracizing limitations of contemporary and traditional. In Western art history, art is recognized and validated through canonical categories such as baroque, classical, surrealism, and primitivism. The terms contemporary and traditional reflect a Western art historical understanding of Native art. I argued, “When Native art is categorized through this lens, the entire body of Native art becomes a static, immutable
entity, reifying the romanticized notions of a pre-historic, pre-contact, pre-civilization past—all dominant constructions in Western art history discourses” (Rangel, 2012).

I make a distinction about the use of the term cultural art form, it “can be useful in talking about Native art that is based on the reproduction of old or ancient designs, symbols, and iconography and often with materials that are tribally, culturally, regionally, or geographically specific (like clay from a particular place), but which can also include new influences (like the introduction of glass trade beads instead of porcupine quills)” (Rangel, 2012). Lomahhaftewa-Singer also observed “With cultural art forms, ‘traditional’ makes it sound like it is stuck and it can’t grow, and that’s not true… Cultural art forms can include new materials and is a better ways of describing what people refer to as traditional” (personal communication, October 12, 2009). I also commented that “contemporary Native people produce cultural art forms as a way of connecting to and preserving generations of creativity and tradition. This is something to bear in mind when analyzing ceramics, beadwork, parfleche, basketry, or pow-wow regalia; inherent in these forms are stories, songs, genealogies, oral histories and Indigenous aesthetics” (Rangel, 2012).

Contemporary Native art is best described as an expression of values—personal, communal, or cultural—with an attention to material conditions and current issues. The museum director, Patsy Phillips, credits the official conception of the institution (1962) and the earliest collection of works by students and faculty from IAIA as the actual inception of contemporary Native art (Patsy Phillips, personal communication, October 21, 2009). Bradley Pecore, IAIA alumnus and museum educator, provided the following working definition of “contemporary”:
Contemporary Native art is about ‘values and not valuables,’ to quote Mohawk scholar/IAIA instructor Stephen Fadden. The art is essentially reflecting the times and the values of the time. Right now this is contemporary; in a hundred years it will be called something else. This art now is reflecting the value systems of this particular society and culture. This is the visual, the self-expression, communal expression in some cases, that is happening today. (Personal communication, November 11, 2009)

Native art is essential, particularly for Native people because the arts are integral to the expression of our living cultures. As Ryan Rice, Chief Curator, observes, “It’s a continuum of our culture” (personal communication, October 12, 2009), succinctly situating the presence of the arts in Indigenous life: it is who we are and what we do. Tatiana Lomahaftewa-Singer elaborates:

As Native people we have always understood, that when you do something, you have to do it well. One way is in the form of “art”—not just necessarily beauty and function, but it’s a way of manifesting things that we believe in as well. We understand and value that those designs, techniques, and processes are important for carrying on our belief systems, our understandings of who we are. That our ancestors and future generations are going to understand why those things came to be, why those things are there; it’s a way of reaching out to what we can not tangibly see, but that we know exists—art is also a way, an expression of what we think and believe in, what we feel. (personal communication, October 12, 2009)
Connecting art and creativity to personal, communal, and cultural expression is not a new concept; however, one of the biggest challenges facing those working on these issues is finding ways to teach the dominant culture to recognize that Native people have their own ways of interpreting and theorizing about who we are and what we do. Finding ways of communicating the authentic voice and experience of Native peoples, in this instance, through the presentation of arts and culture is a necessary undertaking. I demonstrate through Scout’s Honour, one of MoCNA’s progressive exhibitions, how this can be operationalized.

The following is a description of the exhibition and the two featured artists. Scout’s Honour consists of various elements: rock, cloth, paper/prints, sheets of copper, and wooden objects. The installation uses mixed media with no recognizable cultural art forms (tribal or culturally specific marking, symbols, or materials). The pieces in this exhibit are uncontained and without physical barriers, which will allow people to interact with the artwork as opposed to simply observing Native “artifacts” through glass. The open display approach has been used in previous exhibits in this installation-based museum, distinguishing the MoCNA from other Native arts museums that rely on more traditional presentation methods (e.g., in cases and behind glass) (Rangel, 2012).

Frank Shebageget, a Anishinabe artist from Canada, incorporates the concept of multiples in his installation practice, and Michael Belmore, also an Anishinabe artist from the same region, is concerned with the environment and commodification. Chief Curator Ryan Rice noted that while the two artists originate from different reservations, both came from the same geographic region and through their art were responding to the changes they experienced and documented on a recent visit to their “home,” which
includes lakes, mountains, hunting/fishing areas, childhood residences, roads, rivers, and streams.

In the installation piece *Lodge*, Shebageget uses the de Havilland Beaver airplane to recall the introduction of this aircraft to the skies where he grew up. In a curatorial talk coinciding with the opening of the exhibit, Rice discussed the impact that aircraft like these had on Native lands, noting the pros and cons, such as noise pollution, greater mobility, and more contact with the rest of the world. Rice then displayed a picture of a beaver lodge native to that region, an image that becomes source material for this installation. Beaver plane multiples become a “beaver lodge.” What followed were pictures of the 1692 miniature basswood replicas used in several configurations from previous exhibits. Rice commented that Shebageget was concerned with waste and sustainability in reference to the beaver lodge as a home from one perspective and a pile of sticks from another. Rice also described the exhibit as a “mapping exercise.”

Looking at this work as an exercise of Indigenous mapping, I make important distinctions between Indigenous mapping and colonial mapping.

Colonial mapping is based on resources, propriety, and accumulation while Indigenous mapping forges connections between language, culture, and place.19 Indigenous mapping ties into Indigenous aesthetics through the connections of people to culture, language, and place. Many Native artists, including Shebageget

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19 A great example of this is K. Basso’s (1996) *Wisdom Sits in Places: Landscape and Language among the Western Apache.*
Belmore’s Indigenous mapping is influenced by his fascination with topography, communication, and technology. While showing images of Belmore’s home landscape with its several unmaintained telephone poles, Rice explained that the telephones were no longer used as the area was becoming wireless like the urban areas. Rice also noted that the telephone poles were once great trees that came from the area and were returned “home,” put to use and then left standing but functionless. The work *Snag* ten silhouettes of the telephone poles on small sheets of aluminum was inspired by these abandoned telephone poles. Rice indicates that the use of aluminum was intentional as it is a synthetic material. Belmore’s intent was to contrast the affect of humans on nature and the environment. Another example of Belmore’s mapping is seen in the piece *Ridge*, an installation made with mosquito netting, hooks, and fishing line. The assemblage creates a “topographic map” of the watershed of his homelands. This Indigenous mapping that suggests connections to home, weather, water, sustainability, fishing and protection against insects, namely mosquitoes, which are abundant near water (Rangel, 2012).

*Scout’s Honour* challenges the familiar notions of Native art; it is an exhibit of contemporary art produced by Native artists and conceptualized by a Native curator. I asserted that this installation, unlike ethnohistorical exhibitions about Native art and culture, “challenges the viewer to think conceptually about the work without the comfort of being shown typical cultural art forms or recognizable American Indian iconography”

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20 The works featured are part of the larger exhibit and referenced in the exhibition catalog. See Ryan Rice, *Scout’s Honour: Michael Belmore and Frank Shebageget.*
(Rangel, 2012). The exhibit strategies—installation, conceptual art, and interpretative data—advance the museum’s mission of promoting dialogue and inquiry about Native presence while also becoming visual representations of Indigenous epistemologies.

**Indigenous aesthetics**

Utilizing Indigenous perspectives and frameworks is necessary for understanding Native art and Indigenous aesthetics. Western art historical models are outmoded, perpetuate misrepresentation and promote disrespect and denigration of Native people and their arts, culture and knowledge. Reclaiming the apparatus of an institution like the museum as a vehicle for re-educating the general public about the complexities of identity and influence, cross-cultural exchanges, and the prevalence of thriving Indigenous living cultures. I would like to reiterate that what is called contemporary Native art right now is best described as an expression of values—personal or communal or cultural—with an attention to material conditions and current issues.

The discourse on Indigenous aesthetics is emerging as well as movements toward creating Indigenous curatorial practice. Leuthold's (1998) definitions of Indigenous aesthetics include spirituality, beauty and ethics, broaden conceptions of Native art and aesthetics beyond Western categorizations but occlude Indigenous scholarship and perspectives through self-reflexive comparisons to Western aesthetics. Ahtone (2009) extended the discourse to concepts like the relationships between metaphors, symbols, cultural beliefs, knowledge, stories/histories, and personal narratives. My contribution to the analytical models described includes that of connection to place, language, and the “Indigenization of space” as important signifiers. The Indigenization of space occurs
when Native people reclaim a location through cultural signifiers, performance, ceremony, song, dance, or installation that convey the existence and presence of Native peoples and cultures (Rangel, 2006). In Figure 4, I present my conceptual model for understanding Indigenous aesthetics. I think of all the parts being inter-related and associated. In the center is the community and the artist is a reflection of the community and the vehicle for continuity and a transmitter of all the surrounding aspects. This model is useful for understanding how Indigenous knowledge is collaborative and collective.

This is my visual representation of an Indigenous epistemology. By grounding oneself in this understanding, an Indigenous artist can enact or express counter-storytelling, survivance and the Indigenization of space.
The Indigenization of space can be both physical and discursive. Charlene Teters uses performance and installation to reclaim, transform and Indigenize public spaces like museums, gallery spaces or in front of the New Mexico state capitol to remind the dominant culture of an Indigenous presence. Teters’s work also produces counter-narratives and alternate readings of histories and symbols, references and mascots by the mainstream. Michael Yahgulanaas Indigenizes space through his publications and monumental sculpture. Yahgulanaas reclaims Indigenous discursive space and creates counter-narratives through the retelling and reinterpreting of narratives including Haida oral tradition and disseminating them through accessible media. Teri Greeves uses pictorial beadwork to (re)introduce Native histories on recognizable mainstream material culture like converse all-stars, high hells and an umbrella. Marcus Amerman, Frank Buffalo Hyde and Chris Pappan’s reinterpretations of pop culture imagery and Native iconography reclaim and revalue while making evident that Native people are reflecting and influencing popular culture. Dyani Reynolds-White Hawk illustrates how Native people utilized abstraction and symbolism prior to European influence. These are also examples of counter-storytelling and survivance.

Indigenous aesthetics are an expression of a continuum of cultural production and connections to place, language, culture, traditions, mores, values, oral histories and Indigenous knowledge, ancestry and also to future generations. This includes Indigenous mapping where the connection to place is tied into worldview, ceremony, language, songs, dance, regalia, prayer, family and cultural continuity. Sense weaves traces of herself into landscapes that she experiences and documents first-hand to indicate the expansive networks and trade routes of Indigenous peoples. Through her travels, Sense
gathers evidence of Indigenous peoples and their communities through the landscape weavings she produces. Pappan utilizes old maps to reinscribe Native presence and remind people of the histories of Indigenous peoples connected to place. Pappan’s work is similar to Cheyenne artist Edgar Heap of Birds whose site-specific work often recalls Native histories and presence. Michael Belmore and Frank Shebagaget use of installation as a form of Indigenous mapping ties their work to land, people and culture.

There is a spectrum of cultural expression, influences and multiple perspectives represented in Native American art ranging from essentialism to hybridity. Essentialism employs the concepts of cultural distinctiveness and tribal sovereignty that allows the Native artist to claim and interpret cultural patrimony. Greeves and Reynolds-White Hawk are examples of Native artists utilizing their own tribally specific aesthetics to communicate their work. These women are strongly connected to not only their Native communities, but also to their stories, traditions, cosmologies and ontologies. This necessarily has a bearing on the art they produce. Hybridity, in an Indigenous context, resists the limitations of dominant culture projections of Native culture and encourages innovation, adaptation and a response to influences, current conditions and new media. All the artists in this study are examples of hybridity. They represent who and what Native art is today –multicultural, multi-ethnic, complex, diverse and invested in the continuance of Native cultural expression.

Indigenous aesthetics in relation to Native art can also be a reaction or response to colonialism that often has political or social commentary, and addresses stereotype,

racism and misrepresentation. When Native artists and intellectuals do this they are re-appropriating or indigenizing ideas, symbols, mascots, the colonial gaze and Western styles and genres of artistic expression like pop art and surrealism. I would argue that we already have aspects of “pop art,” surrealism, abstraction, performance art; it is the mainstream that is catching up to us and taking credit. Native people are reclaiming cultural, intellectual and physical patrimony through the work they produce and the scholarship that is developing. This work continues to address a number of complex and value-laden ideas, social-political issues, authenticity, identity and acknowledges the lived experiences and histories of Native people. Additionally, these artists continue the oral tradition into the 21st century through their particular mediums. Images become a visual language that reaffirms identity, belief and continuance.

Native art is more than moving beyond resistance and mere survival. The context of resistance is great for mobilization and is important source material to assert self-determination, self-identification and enact cultural sovereignty. However, Native people were producing creative cultural expression and material culture before European settler colonization and influence. There will come a time when Native people will no longer need to make work that addresses the trauma and obscured histories because of the work that Native artist and scholars are doing now. The next iteration of Native expression that is unfolding now is dynamic and reflects our participation as members of our own communities while connecting to Indigenous people globally and acknowledges our part of greater humanity.
Chapter 7 Conclusion

This study began as an exploration on issues of Native art representation. Through different iterations of cultural theory and literature, the research indicates that evaluating Native art from a Western lens is problematic and does not promote a meaningful or accurate interpretation. Popular culture imagery projects and reinforces persistent damaging ideologies that Native artists have reappropriated and reclaimed to offer a critique and counterpoint or counter-narrative. Native art and culture remain a marginalized area of academia, but there is an increase in Native scholarship and the development of Indigenous-centered disciplines including museum studies, Indigenous studies, Native art history and American Indian curatorial practice.

A more productive methodological approach is the use of an Indigenous centered epistemology that incorporates critical ethnography, ethics and reciprocity. Key criteria for evaluating Native art through an Indigenous centered epistemology include the object’s materiality, metaphor and symbolism, cultural reciprocity, and direct consultation with and utilization of local Indigenous cultural knowledge (ahtone, 2012). As well, Native art can be evaluated through understandings of organizational concepts of relationships, community, problematizing essentialism and hybridity, counterstorytelling, survivance and the Indigenization of space. These are ways to begin making the ideological shift needed for understanding, interpreting and presenting Native art, culture and aesthetics. In Figure 4, I presented a visual interpretation of the basic elements of an Indigenous epistemology. Figures 1-4 become keystone instruments for conducting Indigenous research. These methodologies and understandings of Indigenous aesthetics are not meant to replace the static, binary definitions and categories that are in
place now. The visual conceptualization of Indigenous aesthetics in Figure 4 is a starting point for a deeper and more nuanced understanding of an Indigenous epistemology that I will continue to build on and refine.

At the end of my interviews I asked each of the artists to respond to the following question: Do you feel the production of Native art and culture is important? Charlene Teters stated:

I think it’s a powerful method of reclaiming or feeling comfortable with who you are. I want to see more of us out there. Its about replacing yourself many, many times. The responsibility of leadership is to groom leaders. The way I do it, it’s a privilege to be teaching our own people, Native young people. We have the whole range of what it is to be Native – including non-Natives, descendants, state, federal, people who know they are Native. I want to see us out there meaning I want to see Native people writing books, curating shows, and directing the films. We the invisible people; we haven’t been seen and other people tell our stories. Then they think that we should be thankful; that they make images of us in all the different forms of how they think we are. They create these things and we are supposed to be grateful. I’m here because I want to see our young people creating from this space, this identity. Those are our future leaders. We have to do our jobs to try and make sure we have a lot more healthy people. (And they don’t lose touch) I found a lot of healing and comfort, strength through the process of making these things. It’s all art, but I am not making pieces for people to buy. (personal communication, January 31, 2012)
Teters was at once expressing pride in her cultural heritage and also indicating an important concept of continuity – that of leadership and mentoring. Teters is part of what could be considered the second wave of contemporary Native artists where the first wave would be people like Allan Houser or Pablita Velarde. As someone who is becoming an elder, Teters reflected on her changing role and the notion of grooming or mentoring future Native leaders.

Micheal Nicoll Yahgulanaas had a simple but direct response

Culture, art, economies, government to continue on. Here we are. We are still here.

It’s not to do damage but to do something that honors those tough people who survived. The way we do that is by maintaining our cultural identity. Not to do it is disrespectful and a waste of oxygen.

Yahgulanaas, like Teters, has a long history of being an active part of change and resistance for his communities through various capacities. He is also an educator and has found a vehicle for disseminating information beyond the culture of fine art through his publications. Teri Greeves commented

It’s our voice. That’s our survival mechanism, the actual making of and the interpretation of the world through the material world. It’s really important and it comes at all different levels from ceremonial objects that will only be seen by a handful of people in a tribe to things that are meant for everyone in the world to look at.
I am particularly fond of the temporary nature of my work because everything that I make is organic material. Someday it will rot into the ground. (personal communication, November 16, 2011).

Greeves brought up a few important ideas that kept coming up in the interview. Native artists, like Greeves, are compelled to make things that express and interpret the world around them. Like Greeves stated, some things are meant for internal use and will only get seen and used in particular settings to a limited number of people, while other things will become part of the larger discourse of Native cultural expression that will hopefully reach a broad audience. Preservation of cultural artifacts is grounded in Western ideology. Greeves remarked that some things—physically speaking—were meant to not have permanence. Underlying this concept is that there will always be someone there to recreate a cultural object or produce a new version appropriate to that time and place.

Marcus Amerman’s response to the question was humorous and slightly sardonic

It’s important to me. I have to keep making it. To be in control of what I create and how I live on the earth. I think Indians are the best at creating art. We have a strong aesthetic and come from a people who made their own stuff. I like belonging to that continuum. (personal communication, February 4, 2012)

Amerman has influenced a whole new generation of beadworkers with his style of pictorial beadwork. Like Greeves, he belongs to the continuum of beadworkers before and after him.

Although younger and with less professional art-making experience, Dyani Reynolds-White Hawk’s tone was similar to Greeves, she stated
It’s a fundamental human need to be able to visually express our experiences and who we are. We all have the need to do it… creating intersections, creating dialogue, tying into where you come from, who you are, making a place for your children and future generations, continuity, connections to time honored traditions, reinterpreting them.

The notion of continuity is important in my thought process. Those connections to our traditions and our past are extremely vital, the growth and the change and adaption are just as vital. They are our reality and we need all those moments, we need the direct link and understanding to our traditions, histories and our past – the things that make us tribal people just as much as we need innovation and things that continue to reflect our current existence. All of it is vital to our continuity. (personal communication, February 7, 2012)

Continuity figures heavily in each of the conversations I had with the artists. As well, each were concerned with reaching both a Native audience who were more likely to understand the cultural cues inherent in the work and also a non-Native audience to continue the re-education process about conceptions of Native people and culture. Frank Buffalo Hyde agreed

Definitely, It’s our responsibility to push even farther than the previous artists and lay the groundwork. Like for my daughter, for whatever she wants to do and nobody will think twice about it because we have pushed the perception of what contemporary Native art is. It goes back to us as a people dealing with the trauma of what we have been through. I think collectively we are healing through what
we are doing. Retaining who we are is important, it doesn’t have to be a crutch, it’s a reference point to who we are and where we are going. (personal communication, January 22, 2012)

Both Sarah Sense and Chris Papan also had short but poignant answers to the question. Sense replied in two parts

One, if there is a traditional art form that is being continued, it is important to keep it going, keep it alive…Two, if it is to have any purpose of sharing a story or reguiding any kind of stereotype or misinterpretation of Native people and culture. (personal communication, March 11, 2012)

Chris Pappan answered simply “It’s how I am able to express my identity and relate to a community and my family. It doesn’t get more important than that” (personal communication, November 23, 2011). All of these artists come from different backgrounds, experiences and complexities of identity but they all seemed to converge on the importance of continuity, personal and communal expression, future generations and participating in social change through producing work and creating dialogue about it.

There are many areas of representation and issues to address regarding Native people, art and culture. One of the reoccurring issues is identity and exclusion. In our interview, during her response to the last question, Charlene Teters asserted

We still have people like you who still are facing the same stuff…[referring to me] I’m a grandmother and I have children and grandchildren who are not recognized. I can’t wait for the tribe to recognize them. I recognize them and I will teach them, it’s their birthright. To me, as a grandmother it’s the most
powerful thing that I can be doing is to recognize the next generation. (personal communication, January 31, 2012)

Char talks about how it is also affecting her students and coming up as a topic/issue in her classroom. She tells her students to make art about it. She commented

That somewhere we have agreed to this. Our elders before us agreed to this, but we need to undo this. We need people to do this work, but it’s hard because we are fighting our own people. The power of racism is to cause confusion. That confusion is what we are talking about. We’re playing the game. So how do you stop participating in it? You start to understand the mechanics of it and stop playing the game. My part is to get them to recognize it, name it – plant the seeds. Like I said, it’s a powerful act to open up the earth and plant seeds. Like that Hopi prophecy – the most revolutionary thing is to plant seeds. You hope it takes hold and things turn around. Then we, as a people, become healthy again. (ibid)

Racism is one of the most insidious things that Native people continually face and it is often internalized. As much of the art is informed by our experiences with the dominant culture, it is important to acknowledge that this issue of identity has yet to be resolved. Teters elucidates how she uses her influence as an educator and grandmother to enact change.

Native art and cultural production is vast and diverse. Time-honored cultural art forms are part of a milieu of cultural expression that includes video, dance, comedy, performance, theater, radio, television, film, pow-wow, hip-hop, skateboarding, fashion and social media. With the inception of accessible technology and the dissemination
through the internet, Native people have found new ways to mobilize and share information more quickly.

Native people in the northern hemisphere are connecting to other Indigenous globally through social media such as Facebook, Youtube, Vimeo and personal websites. But artists and scholars are promoting knowledge production and their own forms of representation through artist’s websites, facebook, blog sites, youtube, and vimeo. These electronic forms bridge the distance gaps and create opportunities for personal expression and marketing that are not as easily accessible through the mainstream art venues. These avenues are quickly becoming powerful tools for knowledge production and challenging the status quo through public forums and mobilizing efforts. Online representations are becoming the alternative and sometimes counterpoint to the mainstream art or academic discourse.

I envision the research in this study extending into future and ongoing work which would include expanding the study to more artists and media including cultural/historic art forms and new media. I want to produce and encourage more Native scholarship particularly on Native art, Indigenous aesthetics, Native art criticism, and American Indian Curatorial Practice. As well, I want to advance the recognition and usage of Indigenous methodologies for the study, display and instruction on Native art and culture. This research focused primarily on artists connected to the Southwest and Santa Fe in particular. In future studies I would look at additional areas – reservation and urban – for the ways Native artists and mobilizing on issues of representation. Initial sites would include Vancouver, BC; Minnesota; Phoenix, AZ; and also Tribal Cultural Museums that promote contemporary Native art such as the Red Cloud Indian School Heritage Center.
and museum on the Pine Ridge Reservation, the Alaska Native Heritage Center in Anchorage, Alaska, and Indian Pueblo Cultural Center in Albuquerque, New Mexico. I would also like to expand from local (North American) definitions of Indigenous to thinking critically about global Indigenous which would initially include broader collaboration with the Maori in New Zealand, Aboriginal in Australia, and the First Nations in Canada.
APPENDIX A – The Indian Arts and Crafts Act of 1990

The Indian Arts and Crafts Act of 1990 (P.L. 101-644) is a truth-in-advertising law that prohibits misrepresentation in marketing of Indian arts and crafts products within the United States. It is illegal to offer or display for sale, or sell any art or craft product in a manner that falsely suggests it is Indian produced, an Indian product, or the product of a particular Indian or Indian Tribe or Indian arts and crafts organization, resident within the United States. For a first time violation of the Act, an individual can face civil or criminal penalties up to a $250,000 fine or a 5-year prison term, or both. If a business violates the Act, it can face civil penalties or can be prosecuted and fined up to $1,000,000.

Under the Act, an Indian is defined as a member of any federally or State recognized Indian Tribe, or an individual certified as an Indian artisan by an Indian Tribe.

The law covers all Indian and Indian-style traditional and contemporary arts and crafts produced after 1935. The Act broadly applies to the marketing of arts and crafts by any person in the United States. Some traditional items frequently copied by non-Indians include Indian-style jewelry, pottery, baskets, carved stone fetishes, woven rugs, kachina dolls, and clothing.

All products must be marketed truthfully regarding the Indian heritage and tribal affiliation of the producers, so as not to mislead the consumer. It is illegal to market an art or craft item using the name of a tribe if a member, or certified Indian artisan, of that tribe did not actually create the art or craft item.

For example, products sold using a sign claiming "Indian Jewelry" would be a violation of the Indian Arts and Crafts Act if the jewelry was produced by someone other than a member, or certified Indian artisan, of an Indian tribe. Products advertised as "Hopi Jewelry" would be in violation of the Act if they were produced by someone who is not a member, or certified Indian artisan, of the Hopi tribe.

If you purchase an art or craft product represented to you as Indian-made, and you learn that it is not, first contact the dealer to request a refund. If the dealer does not respond to your request, you can also contact your local Better Business Bureau, Chamber of Commerce, and the local District Attorney's office, as you would with any consumer fraud complaint. Second, contact the Indian Arts and Crafts Board with your written complaint regarding violations of the Act.

Before buying Indian arts or crafts at powwows, annual fairs, juried competitions, and other events, check the event requirements on the authenticity of products being offered for sale. Many events list the requirements in newspaper advertisements, promotional flyers, and printed programs. If the event organizers make no statements on compliance with the Act or on the authenticity of Indian arts and crafts offered by participating vendors, you should obtain written certification from the individual vendors that their Indian arts or craftwork were produced by tribal members or by certified Indian artisans.
SWAIA Indian Market Standards and Judging criteria reflect the traditional standards and styles established by the tribes of the Southwest, specifically those regarding jewelry, pottery, textiles and culture related crafts. In order to maintain equitable Standards, SWAIA strives to be consistent in all media for all artists. SWAIA also recognizes the artistic influences of tribes outside the Southwest, the contemporary art market, and the influence of new materials, techniques, and ideas of living artists. Therefore, the Standards are a continually evolving guide for both artists and consumers, which recognize and encourage both traditional and non-traditional handmade arts. Read the general SWAIA Indian Market Standards, as well as the SWAIA Standards for each classification that you plan to sell at Indian Market.

**SWAIA STANDARDS FOR SELLING WORK AT INDIAN MARKET: ITEMS FOR SALE**

Exhibitors must comply with the New Mexico Indian Arts and Crafts Act for labeling and sales. All items offered for sale must be properly represented. For their own protection, artists should obtain receipts from suppliers which state that raw materials are natural. All artists must follow the Jewelry Standards regarding use of materials. If feathers are used, they must comply with all current laws and regulations of State and Federal agencies. It is recommended to the artist that a receipt or statement identifying materials and techniques used to create the finished product, as well as identifying the maker, be given to the consumer.

Collaborative pieces are allowed provided the artists are current SWAIA approved. Youth artists should follow the Standards established for their Classification. Artists must be present in their booths during Indian Market Weekend. Everything for sale at Indian Market must be produced by the approved artist(s) in the booth, or their children 17 years and under. Only approved Indian Market vendors and their family members are allowed to sell. No mass production of any kind is allowed. SWAIA requires every item for sale at Indian Market to be identified by having a signature, trademark, tag, or label affixed to it.

All artists should be aware of the physical size of their booths (5’x10’ or 10’x10’). Artwork must not project outside their allotted space. This is a very serious safety issue that will be enforced.

**SWAIA RULES FOR ITEMS ENTERED FOR JUDGING AT INDIAN MARKET**

The rules for entering items for judging are more specific and each artist should carefully review the Classification, Definitions and Terms. Because of space limitations in the Judging room, size limits are in effect regarding Paintings, Sculpture, Diverse Arts, and displays. The Rules for Judging will be included in your Artist Packet.

**PROMOTIONAL MATERIALS:**

A. ALLOWED FOR SALE

1. Fiction or poetry must be the work of the artist.
2. Tapes and CDs must be the work of the artist.
B. ALLOWED IN BOOTHS FOR PROMOTIONAL PURPOSES ONLY (not for sale)
1. Books and videos must be of cultural, historical or educational content, pertaining to or by the artist.
2. Magazines or artist’s portfolios featuring artwork may be in the artist’s booth.

C. Not Allowed in Booths or For Sale at Indian Market
1. All photo-mechanically reproduced items, such as note cards, postcards, posters, and jewelry.
2. Commercially produced T-shirts, caps, and non-handmade items.

CLASSIFICATION I
JEWELRY STANDARDS

A. ALLOWABLE
1. Organic and Stone Materials
   a. Shell and natural organic materials, such as bone, wood, and natural stones, such as turquoise, coral, lapis, etc., other natural untreated stones and gemstones, ceramic medallions and/or objects set as stones.
   b. Natural pearls, finished stones and gemstones in cabochon and faceted shapes set in metal settings.
2. Metals: All non-plated metals are allowed and must be clearly identified. For example, iron, silver, brass, gold, etc. Gold must be 14 kt. or higher.
3. Chip inlay in the ratio of no less than 85% stone, 15% adhesive. No powder is allowed, only chips.

B. ALLOWABLE FINDINGS
Allowable findings for the purpose of Indian Market are defined as “an ingredient part of the finished product that adapts the product for wearing or use.” Examples of allowable findings are: jump rings, earring backs, clasps, barrette clips, money clips, hooks and eyes, leather for bolos, concho and buckles. For shell and bead makers only: single bead/cone combination to finish ends of necklaces or earrings.

C. ALLOWABLE WITH DISCLOSURE
1. According to the New Mexico Indian Arts and Sales Act, stabilized turquoise must be disclosed to the consumer.
2. Commercially available coral from temporary strands must be natural and undyed. The use of coral can only be used in combination with a hand-made item or items.
3. Commercially available glass beads can only be used in combination with a handmade item(s).
   a. Multiple strand glass bead necklaces strung in the tribal tradition of the maker are allowed.
4. Cast Jewelry to include sand, cement, wax, and tufa.
   a. Editions are limited to 25 and must be must be signed with the artist’s hallmark and numbered.
   b. Rubber molds are allowed, as long as edition requirements are adhered to.
5. Commercial chain may be used (as a finding) with handcrafted items, but may not be sold individually.
6. Fabricated laminated pattern sheet metals such as mokume-gane can be used but must be disclosed to the consumer.
7. Precious metal clay.

D. NON-ALLOWABLE ITEMS
1. Imported or non-Indian hand-made stone or shell beads and fetishes, excluding coral.
2. Imported and/or color treated nuggets or tumbled chips of any material.
3. Laboratory grown, Plastic or Synthetic block reconstituted or compressed materials, such as coral, lapis, opal, etc.
4. All color-treated (dyed, heated or irradiated) materials, such as blue onyx, blue topaz, irradiated red coral, etc.
5. Items assembled from non-Indian or manufactured components, such as
   a. Machine-made or die-struck components or purchased cast blanks, such as rings, bracelets, bezel cups, leaves, bolo tips, etc.
   b. Silver or other metal beads.
   c. Commercially drilled or pre-strung gemstone, natural pearls or glass beads (See C2/C3) including:
      i. Restrung necklaces.
      ii. “Treasure” necklaces made with commercial “found” objects.
6. Machine made “liquid” silver and gold, or plated materials; gold under 14 kt.

CLASSIFICATION II
POTTERY STANDARDS
A. ALLOWABLE
   1. All handmade traditional and contemporary pottery forms.

B. ALLOWABLE WITH DISCLOSURE
   1. Kiln-fired and/or double-fired pottery.
   2. Pottery made with commercial materials, such as clay, glazes, and temper.
   3. All decorative stone, shell or metal elements (such as turquoise and coral cabochons), and shell, glass or metal beads must be properly identified and comply with the same Standards established for Allowable Materials and Non-allowable Items for Jewelry.

C. NON-ALLOWABLE ITEMS
   1. Slip molds, greenware, non-Indian or commercial pottery

CLASSIFICATION III
PAINTINGS, DRAWINGS, GRAPHICS & PHOTOGRAPHY STANDARDS
A. ALLOWABLE
   1. Hand-pulled prints in a numbered and signed edition of no more than 50. It is recommended that a certificate of authenticity from the printer be provided to the consumer.
   2. For Photography: all works must be signed and numbered in an edition not to exceed 50.

B. NON-ALLOWABLE ITEMS
   1. Any photomechanical reproduction, including note cards, posters, and T-shirts.
   2. Giclee, Iris or other digital photographic reproduction techniques are limited only to photography

CLASSIFICATION IV
PUEBLO WOODEN CARVINGS STANDARDS
A. ALLOWABLE
   1. Carvings must be of the tradition of the carver.
   2. Traditional carvings, Division A, made only with traditional materials.
a. Hopi carvings must be carved from the root of the cottonwood tree.
b. Zuni carvings must be carved from the root and/or limbs of the cottonwood or pine trees.

B. ALLOWABLE WITH DISCLOSURE
1. Traditional carvings, Division A, (Artificial) fixatives can be used to stabilize pigment, but must be disclosed. Termite bored, or aged wood must be non-infectious and must be disclosed. SWAIA reserves the right to examine and refuse.
2. Contemporary carvings, Division B, can be carved from woods other than cottonwood, but wood must be identified.
3. All feathers used must comply with all current laws and regulations of State and Federal agencies.
4. All decorative stone, shell, or metal elements (such as turquoise and coral cabochons), and shell, glass or metal beads must be properly identified and comply with the same Standards established for Allowable Materials and Non-allowable Items for Jewelry.

CLASSIFICATION V
SCULPTURE STANDARDS
A. ALLOWABLE
1. All hand-wrought materials, such as stone, metal, ceramic, paper, cloth, etc.
2. Cast bronze sculpture in numbered editions not to exceed any dimension:
   10 for 6’ and up
   20 for up to 6’ (72’’)
   30 for up to 4.5’ (54’’)
   40 for up to 3’ (36’’)
   50 for up to 1’ (12’’)
  Measurement will apply to greatest dimension of casting and includes bases. All must be signed, numbered and marked by the foundry. It is recommended that a certificate of authenticity be provided to the consumer.
   3. Hand-blown and fabricated glass.
   4. Fabricated fiberglass.

B. ALLOWABLE WITH DISCLOSURE
1. All decorative stone, shell, or metal elements (such as turquoise and coral cabochons) must be properly identified and comply with the same Standards established for Allowable Materials and Non-allowable Items for Jewelry.
2. Decorative stands that are hand-wrought and are an integral element to the original sculpture. Stand must not dominate the work.

C. NON-ALLOWABLE
1. Cast resins.
2. Cast miniature sculpture intended for use as jewelry.
3. Production cast open editions.
4. No commercially manufactured stands or props.

CLASSIFICATION VI
TEXTILES AND BASKETRY STANDARDS
A. ALLOWABLE
1. Weavings may be done on vertical or horizontal looms.
2. Finger weaving, knitting, crochet, sprang and embroidery are acceptable techniques.
3. Baskets should be made of plant materials of the tribal traditions of the artist; yucca, willow, three-lobed sumac, honeysuckle root, cottonwood, redbud, split-ash, devil’s claw, fern, etc. All basket materials must be processed (split, cleaned, dyed) by the artist.

B. ALLOWABLE WITH DISCLOSURE
1. All attached buttons, conchos, beads, leather and tin tinklers must be properly identified and comply with the Jewelry Standards for Allowable and Non-allowable items.
2. All feathers must comply with all Federal and New Mexico regulations.
3. Baskets made of non-plant materials, such as horse hair, yarn, thread, metal, wire, mixed media, raffia and purchased plant materials.

C. NON-ALLOWABLE ITEMS
1. Commercially made items (such as shirts, jackets, purses, etc.)
2. Liquid embroidery, hot-glue or iron-on appliqué.
3. Items made from kits, including baskets.
4. Plastic beads, buttons or other plastic parts.
5. Manufactured or non-Indian made die-struck metal buttons or conchos.
6. Stands or other display items.

CLASSIFICATION VII
DIVERSE ART FORMS STANDARDS

A. ALLOWABLE
1. Purchased glass beads.
2. Commercially processed hides (deer, elk, cow, rabbit, etc.).
3. Handmade items are encouraged, although sewing machine work is acceptable. All sewn items must be designed and sewn by the approved artist.
4. All sewn clothing must be labeled, in editions not to exceed five.

B. ALLOWABLE WITH DISCLOSURE
1. All attached materials, including buttons, collar tabs, beads, leather and tin tinklers must be properly identified and comply with the same Standards as established for Allowable Materials and Non-allowable Items for Jewelry.
2. Allowable findings for Indian Market are defined as “an ingredient part of the finished product that adapts the product for wearing or use.” Examples are functional buttons, hooks, etc.
3. Nickel and/or brass beads or buttons not made by the artist must be disclosed.
4. All decorative stone, shell or metal elements (such as turquoise and coral cabochons), and shell, glass, or metal beads must be properly identified and comply with the Standards established for Allowable Materials and Non-allowable Items for Jewelry.
5. All feathers must comply with all Federal and New Mexico regulations.
6. The use of commercial sewing patterns, such as Folklore, Vogue, Simplicity, etc. must be disclosed.
7. Chip inlay is allowable as long as it complies with Jewelry Standards

C. NON-ALLOWABLE ITEMS.
1. Plastic or synthetic parts of any kind, for example: beads, buttons, hair, hairpipe, polymer clay (e.g. SculpeyTM).
2. Manufactured or non-Indian made or die-struck metal charms, buttons, conchos used for ornamental purposes.
3. Commercially made items such as jackets, shirts and purses.
4. Liquid embroidery kits, hot-glue or iron-on appliqué.

CLASSIFICATION VIII
BEADWORK AND QUILLWORK STANDARDS

A. ALLOWABLE
1. Purchased glass beads.
2. Commercially processed hides.

B. ALLOWABLE WITH DISCLOSURE
1. Nickel and brass beads that are not made by the artist must be disclosed.
2. Commercially produced objects that are transformed into a work of art by the hand application of beadwork or quillwork such as tennis shoes, bottles, etc.
3. All feathers must comply with all Federal and New Mexico regulations.
4. All attached materials, including buttons, collar tabs, beads, leather and tin tinklers must be properly identified and comply with the same Standards as established for Allowable Materials and Non-allowable Items for Jewelry.

C. NON-ALLOWABLE ITEMS
1. Plastic or synthetic parts of any kind.
2. Commercially beaded and manufactured items of any kind.
3. Plastic or synthetic materials of any kind, such as beads, buttons, hair, hairpipe, polymer clay (e.g. Sculpey™).

IMPORTANT: NON-COMPLIANCE WITH SWAIA STANDARDS MAY RESULT IN DISMISSAL FROM THE SANTA FE INDIAN MARKET
Revised Date: November 2004
References


