Amazons, Indian Princesses, and the Artistic Matriarchs of the Southwest: On Classicization and the Construction of Native American Femininity in Museums

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by

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Abstract

This paper explores the Classical influence within the discourses surrounding museum exhibitions that helped to construct colonial representations of gender. I address how Classical receptions and images of Native Americans rendered into Classically influenced discourses have featured in anthropological and later art market structures within museum displays. Constructions of femininity play a significant role here as these representations, especially in the Southwest, serve to gender colonized and Othered subjects with parallels in Classical ideas about foreign others. My analysis is in two parts: I first explore constructions of femininity in museum exhibitions through these insights. I then consider the agency of Native American artists today and how they navigate their own identities and heritages within the broader scope of Classically-influenced Western heritage.
My analysis is comprised of two sections with multiple chapters within them. In order to demonstrate the relationship between Classical frameworks and the construction of femininity in museum discourses, I first address a selection of exhibition case studies, starting with an overview of relevant curatorial decisions at the Denver Art Museum (Section I). In this section I also include an analysis of some of the Denver Art Museum’s approaches to Native American art, as well as an analysis of two national exhibits that are framed in relation to matriarchy discourse. Through a series of three artist case studies, Section II addresses the agency of some contemporary Native American artists in their engagements with these frameworks within museums. Ultimately, my concern in this exploration is to show how the interpretation of art objects in the Southwest were constructed as an American Classical art tradition, authenticated within the space of specific museums using these frameworks. In this representational arena, Southwest traditions are valorized in relation to a sanctioned, authentic, ancient/Primitive cultural heritage that makes tangible the specific features of constructed narratives of American nationalism.
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Perspectives on Gendered Museum Representations of Native Americans

As museums become increasingly concerned with how they interpret their materials, anthropologists and Classicists alike are writing more critical reflections on the influence on one another of their respective fields (e.g., Varto 2018). In this thesis, I synthesize these two concerns to explore the relationship between Classical frameworks within anthropology and art history to consider how these frameworks inform the representation of Native American materials and the ways in which this influence relates to the construction of femininity. I focus my analysis on museum displays and their representations of Native Americans, including exhibit catalogues. While important scholarship has considered the role of Classicism in relation to Primitivism as constructs that arose out of colonial contact between Europeans and Indigenous peoples (Connelly 1995, Thomas 1991), research that considers the impact of Classical frameworks within ethnology, especially of the Southwest, which is another focus of this thesis, are more scarce. To deepen my analysis, I also draw from critical frameworks for considering the museum as an authoritative institution in order to examine the link between Classicism and nationalism. As authoritative institutions, museums have the impact of authenticating particular ideological narratives related to identity and national citizenship, which makes their discourses on museum objects significant for the larger society.

My focus on gender serves to highlight the particular ways that ideologies concerning feminine representations of the colonized Other derive from Classical frameworks in a few key ways. These representations most prominently relate to the concept of a Primitive matriarchy in a constructed American mythology, nineteenth century cultural evolutionary frameworks, and the idea of an authentic primitive art that
played a significant role in the development of the Southwest art market that is related to the museum contexts I address. I begin my research in the nineteenth century ideological discourses where anthropology and Classical Studies were in the process of becoming distinct disciplines. These emerging disciplinary distinctions nonetheless continued to influence each other and, in turn, during this time influenced anthropological exhibitions that became part of displays in institutions such as the U.S. National Museum (later the National Museum of National History) and the Denver Art Museum.

As museums seek to decolonize their spaces, or at least to include different interpretations that add agency, multivocality, and a greater variety of perspectives providing new dimensions to their representations, they face a complicated task in addressing the impact of these continuing cultural constructions. In unpacking the complexity of some of the language used for objects within museum discourses, I highlight how entrenched the ideologies of Classicism, Primitivism, and gender remain in the spaces of museums. Confronting these ideological frameworks can allow museums to consider how they contribute to shaping certain identities through the discursive practices of displaying objects.

My analysis is comprised of two sections with multiple chapters within them. In order to demonstrate the relationship between Classical frameworks and the construction of femininity in museum discourses, I first address a selection of exhibition case studies, starting with an overview of relevant curatorial decisions at the Denver Art Museum (Section I). In this section I also include an analysis of some of the Denver Art Museum’s approaches to Native American art, as well as an analysis of two national exhibits, *Legacy of Generations* and *Woven by Grandmothers*, that are framed in relation to
matriarchy discourse. Through a series of three artist case studies, Section II addresses the agency of some contemporary Native American artists in their engagements with these frameworks within museums. Here I explore how the construction of femininity relates to the construction of identity within museum narratives that reify social values connected to American citizenship. Ultimately, my concern in this exploration is to show how the interpretation of art objects in the Southwest were constructed as an American Classical art tradition, authenticated within the space of specific museums using these frameworks. In this representational arena, Southwest traditions are valorized in relation to a sanctioned, authentic, ancient/Primitive cultural heritage that makes tangible the specific features of constructed narratives of American nationalism. Also significant are the specific ways in which contemporary artists are challenging these representations.

**Theoretical Orientation**

I begin my analysis with a brief discussion of the theoretical frameworks I use to evaluate museum discourses in exploring the cultural assumptions of Classicism and Primitivism that provide a foundation for museum representations, the relationship of these to the construction of an American national identity and the significance of Native American material culture therein, and the construction of femininity and relevant ideologies that result in particular museum narratives. Understanding these ideologies helps to reveal the ways in which the meanings associated with objects in these discourses correlate with particular national heritage narratives that are reproduced in the spaces of museums. I focus on language ideologies overall, and within this focus consider some underlying frameworks in anthropology that museums still to some extent use to
categorize ethnological artifacts within Classical typologizing. I also examine the relationship between these Classically-influenced frameworks and ethnological categorization in the construction of femininity. Overall, this relationship underlies ideologies reproduced by museums in their constructions of social values associated with national citizenship within their overarching narratives.

*Unpacking Frameworks for Mapping Ethnological Objects*

My examination of language ideologies involves exploring the ways in which certain terminologies applied to museum objects construct value as rhetorical tropes. I consider Keane’s (2003) approach to the semiotic analysis of material things inasmuch as indigenous objects have served to objectify concepts or ideological representations in museum contexts. This semiotic approach to materials enables me to emphasize the role of social agency in the objectification of concepts that are related to the objects on display in museums. The museum objects that I examine can be understood as material objectifications of particular ideologies through the language used in describing them. This analysis relates as well to Thomas’ (1991) study of the European approach to indigenous things, in which discursive shifts have occurred related to narrative or classificatory schemes, and where temporal transposition and imposition were also included where Classical frameworks were utilized. I also consider McChesney’s (2012) analysis of artwriting and her discussion of the representational hierarchies within its language. Particular forms of discourse, in which artists themselves rarely participated until recently, construct notions of “pure” artistry that allow for a privileged status based in Western aesthetics. The recent transformation of this discourse through the participation of contemporary artists is also a concern I address here.
My analysis begins with the basic premise of describing the relationship between Classicism and Primitivism. These are terms that derive from Western frameworks in creating categories of art, but I derive my analysis from Connelly’s (1995) model that posits Primitivism as an inversion of Classicism. The discussion on the relationship between Primitive and Civilized (or Classical) relates as well to ideologies within cultural evolution and art market contexts, including those specific to the Indian art market in the Southwest. Of similar relevance is the interplay between antiquity and modernity. Just as Primitivism can be viewed as an inversion of Classicism, modernity is often defined through antiquity and vice versa. I will show how the positionality between modernity and antiquity can be complicated for representations framed within discourses of Classicism and Primitivism, and how some contemporary Native American artists navigate between these realms.

One further means of locating my analysis within theoretical discourses concerns the spatial designations of Southwesternism as it correlates with Orientalism. I draw from Michael Riley’s (1994) definition of Southwesternism as the U.S.’s equivalent to Orientalism (as theorized by Edward Said (1978)): that is, as a space viewed as a distant and exotic Other region, such as that of the Orient in the European past. I also explore the nuances of this relationship of the Southwest as an imagined Orient to the formation of an American national identity through examinations of representations that link the region to Oriental spaces of the Classical past. Inasmuch as these constructed links to an exotic

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1 I explore the art market especially as a process of “Commodifying the Primitive,” following McChesney’s (2003) and Babcock’s (1993) consideration of the roles of gender and desirable (feminine) sexual availability as they relate to the valorization of Indian art market goods.


3 See Babcock (1990); also Auerbach (2008), who explores representations linking the Southwest and Puebloan subjects to the Middle East and Biblical antiquity. See also Malamud (2009), who describes the
place that is Othered in the context of space and time, this context draws a useful comparison between how the display of the Southwest is positioned in a hierarchy relative to the civilizations of Classical antiquity. Southwest archeological objects (and by extension similarly aestheticized ethnographic objects) become entangled in this hierarchy as relics of a distant, Primitive past. While ethnographic objects are my primary focus, I also consider the role of Othering in the representation of Southwest Native arts in narratives of antiquity and heritage, a context where this relegation is also relevant.

Using Babcock’s insights, I also highlight the significance of gender (that is, the feminizing of the desirable exotic) within this Orientalizing process. In the Southwest, the prevalence of Biblical references amidst Classical comparative typologizing likely relates to cultural evolutionary schemes as well. As I explore, the space of the domestic primitive is both Orientalized through association with an ancient East and correlated with a lesser, Pre-Christian civilization. Nonetheless, just as the Near East serves a significant place in the Christian imagination, the Southwest provides a similar space for imagining the roots of a Christian civilization (a new American nation with a God-given manifest destiny). In this space, the Noble Indian Princess becomes a domiciled girl of ancient Palestine or a New Mexican Rebecca, as signified by the prolific image of the Puebloan Olla Maiden (Babcock 1990). In the following discussion, I unpack the

influence of the Southwest on the author of Ben-Hur (Malamud 2009, 133-136). Thus, the language or representational ideology relating the Southwest to Biblical antiquity influenced representations in both directions, where Biblical antiquity was imagined in the landscape of the Southwest U.S. and the Southwest was interpreted through the lens of Biblical antiquity in turn.

4 See Solchaga (2018) on the display of Ancient Egypt relative to Greco-Roman antiquity in European museums. As he demonstrates, an example of interpretative hierarchizing is prevalent in the display of Ancient Egyptian artifacts, which tend to sit in dimmer, more crowded spaces meant to evoke a mysterious atmosphere in comparison to the brightly lit and orderly halls wherein museums display Greek and Roman antiquity. The particular colonial history surrounding the interpretation of Ancient Egyptian artifacts came from the interpretation of Egyptian Antiquity through Greco-Roman antiquity. This means of interpretation established a hierarchical order conveyed through the display of museum objects.
relationship between Classical frameworks and femininity more broadly.

Matriarchy Myth and Constructions of Femininity

Concerning the role of gender within Classical frameworks, much of my analysis centers on the matriarchy myth. This myth manifests in three significant ways relating to the construction of Native American femininity as derived from Classical frameworks. Rayna Green (2010/1974) highlights one development in her article on “The Pocahontas Perplex.” Green traces this perplex to early European contact and representations of Native American women; it involves the complicated narrative of the American Indian woman as she comes to symbolize the conquest and settlement of the North American continent as a mythical maternal figure.5

While these mythic representations identified by Green derived from Classical mythic narratives that preceded the matriarchy myth in early anthropology’s application of cultural evolution to categorize societies, the two ideologies together contribute to later gender ideologies relevant to museum narratives.6 For instance, Cynthia Eller (2011, 2018) outlines in detail the 19th century theories that developed the idea of a primitive, prehistoric matriarchy inspired by Ancient ideas about mythical matriarchies. I do not have the space to fully explore the arguments in Eller’s work, but in summary these theories transferred ideas in antiquity about foreign societies conceived of as barbarous or less civilized matriarchies, repurposing foreign matriarchies to occupy positions in

5 Green’s analysis shows the transition from savage Amazon queen to noble matrona figures in the representation of Native American women, the latter becoming distinctly part of an American mythology through figures like Pocahontas or Sacajawea. Nobility and savagery were defined in terms of mythic women’s relationships with male figures. See also Finley (2011) for a similar analysis on Sacajawea as a maternal symbol of American conquest and McChesney (2003:57-88) for a relevant discussion related to Southwestern Native American art and artists.

6 This typology includes categories ranging from degrees of savagery and barbarism to the pinnacle of civilized Man typified by Western societies (Varto 2018). See Kennedy (2018) for a discussion on how Otis T. Mason adapted such a categorization from Lewis Henry Morgan for developing museum displays.
cultural evolutionary schemes. One prominent theorist of the matriarchy myth was Johann Jakob Bachofen (1992/1926), who imagined societal stages derived from Classical mythology based on ascendant goddess worship that eventually fails and gives way to a more successful patriarchy. John Ferguson McLennan (1865/1970) and Lewis Henry Morgan (1877/1878) would later develop the idea of primitive matriarchy further in the direction of cultural evolution texts seminal to early anthropology, and the role of Classical myth and religion would continually return to invigorate interests in a matriarchy myth of prehistory in anthropology and related discourses.

These two means of imagining Primitive matriarchs contributed to the iconicity of the domestic primitive in the Southwest, among whom certain named artists are prominent. McChesney analyzed representations of Nampeyo, who became iconic of the domesticated primitive in her role as first named pottery Matriarch in the Southwest, as well as the first named Native American artist. Nampeyo's iconic representation transitions the romanticization of Matriarchy from a Classically-derived conception of primitive matriarchies in cultural evolution schemes to a matriarchal line that is valorized/commodified in the Southwest art world to authenticate artist’s reputations.

Ideologies surrounding artistic matriarchies in the Southwest are the third aspect of the matriarchy myth that is formative in constructions of Native American femininity in museum narratives.

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7 See Eller (2011, 2018). Bachofen’s model begins with hetaerism (brutal clan society led by male rulers but with kinship solely through a maternal lineage, due to the clans communally owning women), followed by Demetrian matriarchy (true matriarchy, or the ascendancy of females rebelling against hetaerism’s sexual demands to establish monogamy and mother right), Dionysian matriarchy (characterized by moral decadence), and Amazonism (further societal perversion and regression). Bachofen saw Apollonian patriarchy, the pinnacle of society at the time he of his writing, as emergent from the fallen era of failed matriarchies.

8 Examples range from Frazer’s The Golden Bough to first-wave feminists reviving interest in matriarchal deities as ancestors to humanity (Eller 2018).

9 See McCoy (1985) and McChesney (2003).
I also must briefly delineate anthropological definitions of matriarchy and matrilineality, as these terms are relevant for exploring constructions of femininity in anthropology. McChesney brings up the confusion of matriarchy and anthropological understandings of matriliny, or female descent lines, as well as matrilineality, or the symbolic emphasis which societies place on processes of symbolic regeneration. For the sake of my analysis, here I define these terms along with the confounding identified by McChesney to underscore her critique that the conflation of these terms is a problem in understanding meaning(s) for Hopi pottery.10 Throughout my paper I will be dealing with many instances of these terms being conflated or used interchangeably from historic through present discourse. This confusion of terms is a significant effect of the Matriarchy myth on museum discourses.

Language Ideologies and Museum Narratives

In my exegesis, I also introduce the relationship between heritage, identity, and nationalism in museum narratives. The role nationalism plays in dealing with heritage and identity is central here. Using Duncan’s (1995) model of considering museums as sites for civilizing rituals, or imparting social values for citizens, I consider the ways in which museums construct narratives based on heritage and identity ideologies.11 I draw from Harrison’s (2013) and Kirshenblatt-Gimblett’s (1991, 2007) discussions of heritage as they relate to ideas of modernity and globalization.

These comments return us to the issue of Classicization. Classical typologizing refers to the ways in which museums have historically framed and referenced materials in relation to “Classical” (i.e. relating to Western Civilization’s concern with Greco-
Roman antiquity) models and types. At the same time, Classicization does not specifically denote Greek and Roman antiquity, but instead and more precisely it denotes the process by which Greek and Roman heritage is articulated as foundational to Western civilization. Classicization plays a significant role in national discourses of heritage and the identity formations of citizens.

To illustrate this point, I note a case involving Classical identity and cultural heritage in supporting nationalism. Yannis Hamilakis (1999) considers the issue of the Parthenon/Elgin Marbles, unpacking the ways in which essentialized Greek identity formation lies at the center of both sides (contemporary Greece and the British) debating the issue of restitution. One essentialized identity forms among a diaspora of people seeking political identity within the national community of modern Greece; on the other side, identification occurs among British nationals who feel themselves the rightful inheritors of Classical/global heritage (versus what they perceive as the irresponsible mob of people from contemporary Greece). The latter view of contemporary Greek nationals plays into an Orientalizing (or, perhaps, Balkanizing) view of modern Greeks.  

This Balkanization/Orientalization of contemporary Greeks by the British renders Greek nationals as foreign Primitives, less worthy of inheriting Classical materials. British nationals thus position themselves as proper neocolonial heirs to items of cultural heritage originating in Greece or Greek homelands. Classical materials index value through their association with particular ideals of Western heritage (and thus are iconic as well as symbolic). In this way, intangible forms of heritage, that is the concept of and ideologies associated with a particular identity linked to heritage, can be reified through material symbols that serve as tangible forms of heritage. The creation of essential

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identities links to projects supporting national heritage and its accompanying narratives (that is, intangible forms of heritage which can be reified through material symbols).

Issues within these heritage frameworks relate to those of Native American identity as constructed in the national narratives of colonizing states. I use Weaver’s (2010) approach to Native American identity, wherein she understands representation through a lens of language construction. According to her, identity exists through the construction of difference in relation to others; in the case of Native American identity, Native people receive awareness about themselves and their culture through their colonizing language (English). Through that knowledge, they adopt distorted meanings and some stereotypes. Where (mis)recognition shapes identity, Weaver also argues against linear bicultural models in favor of multi-layered, complex identities. I consider the relationship between this identity formation as navigated by Native and non-Native people in relation to national citizenship and the ways in which museums construct narratives of national identity in relation to objects, or tangible symbols of constructed identity (as cultural heritage).

Beyond tracing the role of language ideologies in Western frameworks, I consider as well the different narrative tropes employed in museums in order to view how museums and artists can subvert, scrutinize, or draw awareness to the issues of representation within museum narratives. This part of my discussion is informed by critical museum work on figurative tropes and devices used in the display of Native American materials such as romanticization and irony (Penney 1995), as well as in relation to considering standard museum devices in exhibitions more generally (Roberts 1997). This discussion returns us to the ways in which museums construct particular

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13 In this regard, I also consider Weaver (2010) for her examination of language and indigenous identity.
narratives in relation to ideologies as civilizing institutions. The structure of museums and the ways in which they construct narratives in their discourse relate to the museum’s authority as an institution. I also show, however, how artists and audiences still bring their own interpretations into these institutional narratives, critically engaging with museum’s frameworks, often in subversive ways, in relation to their own identities.

Overall, I seek to show how the interpretation of art objects in the Southwest was constructed as an American Classical art tradition, authenticated within the space of specific museums using these frameworks. In this representational framework, Southwest traditions are valorized in relation to a sanctioned, authentic, ancient/Primitive cultural heritage that makes tangible the specific features of constructed narratives of American nationalism. In these processes, “matriarchy” is a semiotic trope used rhetorically to construct a particular kind of value. This construction of value arises from the Classicization of Native materials within national narratives as supported by authoritative texts grounded in artwriting discourse.

While “matriarchy” is specific to materials associated with Southwest indigenous groups, especially Puebloans, semiotic analysis of the term also reveals the ways in which value is constructed around gender and discourses surrounding Native art in general. I start my examination of these discourses at the Denver Art Museum where the museum maintains a commitment to displaying Native art as art. This is another relevant semiotic category that I link to Classicization while also considering the role that gender plays in the museum’s efforts to reframe discourses about Native Americans. I then consider ways in which national museums use the trope of matriarchy in exhibits both directly and indirectly, revealing how museums construct authenticity through this
rhetorical trope. In my second section, I examine Rose Simpson’s assertion of a more complex identity as a post-modern indigenous artist who both draws on and challenges the language of matriarchal discourse. I then turn to two other artists who work outside of the scope of matriarchal traditions, but still interact with the framework of Classicization in Native art from gendered perspectives. Julie Buffalohead and Kent Monkman both use stereotypes and gendered experiences to question gender roles through their own personal constructions of femininity. Their challenges to representation in the museum further reveal the ways in which Native art relates to Primitivist traditions even while museums seek to Classicize their works. Examining how they contest accepted representations also reveals how museums work within essentialized identities in order to construct a national narrative of Classical heritage in its display of Native materials. This essentialization of identities adds to the authentication of museum objects as belonging to a national heritage, wherein matriarchy discourse plays a significant role directly and indirectly in the rhetoric of authorizing and legitimizing certain artists and their practices.
Section I: Classicization in Museum Exhibitions and Programming

Chapter 1
Classicism, Primitivism, and Negotiating Regional Contexts within an American National Identity at the Denver Art Museum

I begin with tracing the history of the Denver Art Museum’s representations of gender in terms of its curatorial links to broader trends. The Denver Art Museum (DAM) is a major regional metropolitan-area art museum in the process of renovating its permanent exhibit on Native American art. Given its location in proximity to both the Southwest and broader American West, the Denver Art Museum serves as an important interpreter of the region’s Native art to the American public. To some degree, the institution has worked to foster a focus on agency/subjectivity and the vocality of Native Americans as artists. My concern with gender and language ideology identifies three main areas that have affected discourses of Native American arts. First, I examine cultural evolution frameworks that most prevalently entered into museum display through cultural area mapping. As a semi-local site that specializes in both Southwestern and Plains Indian materials, I consider the relationship between the feminized Puebloan Indians of the Southwest to the masculinized Plains Indians often found in romantic, now stereotypical, depictions of the American West. I consider stereotypes in terms of gender, where particular ideas of virtuous or exotic/sexualized Indian maidens influenced museum representations. Lastly, I assess the role of commodification for the Southwest in particular, where gender was part of authenticating Primitive art through the construction of matriarchal genealogies and artistic legacies. Overall, I consider the materiality of language from a semiotic approach in order to understand how the Denver Art Museum
has responded to these frameworks, both working against and within prevalent ideologies for interpreting Native materials.

The DAM serves as a useful site for starting this consideration of the place of Southwestern Native Americans within larger schemes of the representation of Native Americans through developments tracing from its early curatorial practices to the present. The initiatives of the Denver Art Museum’s American Indian Arts department have long stood out in the department’s attempts to display Native American art beyond its anthropological value. As a regional museum with a national reputation, I also consider the DAM as an authoritative institution serving as an important site for authenticating Native American art within national art narratives.

The museum often cites their commitment to being a leader in the presentation of its Native arts beginning with its second curator, Frederic H. Douglas (Blomberg 2011, Parezo with Blomberg 1997). Through his more than thirty-year career at the Denver Art Museum beginning in 1929, Frederic H. Douglas played a significant role in developing and interpreting the collection there. Douglas also established a national reputation for himself and the museum, working on several prominent projects on the national scene. For instance, he worked with Renée d’Harnoncourt at the Golden Gate World’s Fair in

14 The department’s homepage on the museum’s website explains: “The collection helps illustrate that American Indian art is a vibrant and continuing tradition advanced by individual artists and craftspersons” (Denver Art Museum 2019). The current mission statement states: “The Denver Art Museum is an educational, nonprofit resource that sparks creative thinking and expression through transformative experiences with art. Its holdings reflect the city and region—and provide invaluable ways for the community to learn about cultures from around the world. The mission of the Denver Art Museum is to enrich the lives of present and future generations through the acquisition, presentation, and preservation of works of art, supported by exemplary scholarship and public programs related to both its permanent collections and to temporary exhibitions presented by the museum” (Denver Art Museum 2019).
1939, a later International Expo but one still significant in its narrative of American nationalism.\footnote{See Rydell (1983), who discusses in detail aspects of class and racism in World’s Fair displays up to 1916.}

At such an exhibition, multiple indigenous cultures were displayed to the world under the banner of American nationalist identity. Rebecca Futo Kennedy’s (2018) analysis of Otis T. Mason’s incorporation of Classical ideas into his displays reveals that Classical influences had appeared in early anthropological exhibitions on this scale of international exhibition, where Douglas worked at the outset of his career. Cultural evolutionary ideologies common in early 20th century anthropology routinely adopted Classical frameworks. However, by the time of 1939-1940 International Expo in San Francisco (or Golden Gate World’s Fair), through his contribution to the Indian Court attraction Douglas sought to introduce the public to American Indian culture by highlighting contributions from the indigenous participants as artists, rather than as the relics of salvage anthropology. Douglas strove to increase the appreciation of Native works as art to the American public. Through presentations in various national venues, Douglas “achieved national renown for his pioneering efforts to promote the understanding and appreciation of American Indian art as fine art and not solely artifact” (Blomberg 2011: 45). Where previous Classical frameworks created hierarchies that categorized the display of the American Indian as part of a Primitive past, his approach sought to include American Indians and their art within a modern art canon in the narratives of an American art history.

But to what extent is this approach in modernizing Native American materials a shift from Classical influence? In considering this question, I explore the difference
between anthropological categorization and the place of Primitive art in relation to Classical typologizing, as well as the shift in values that form the basis for such categories. The category of Primitive art is one of continued entanglement with Classical ideals, premised as an inversion of the latter (Connelly 1995). This categorization occurred alongside developments in modern Americans’ experience of identity through Classical ideals and a broader sense of Western identity in relation to Europe. During the time of the Golden Gate Expo, salvage anthropology in early museum collecting became implicated in trends toward commodifying materials and increasing consumerist values. This shift also parallels shifts in Classical ideals in broader American society as exhibition and consumerism became increasingly tied to imperial models of spectacle-oriented consumerism of the exotic Other (Malamud 2009).

The resulting shift in American identity came with a project in modernization that is reflected in the curatorial interests at the DAM. While maintaining narratives of national identity, American Indian materials became further entangled with the promotion of the consumption of Native-made items for a growing middle-class. These materials thus shifted in relevance from relic or curio from the past to an aesthetic commodity desirable for the modern consumer (McChesney 2003, Mullin 1993), both exotic and part of the new American Empire (Rydell 1983). Furthering the role of commodification in valuing Native American materials may not have been Douglas’ intention, but his goal of modernizing American Indian arts implicated these materials in this social world of modern American identity formation, which fostered consumerism as part of a growing American empire.
After the Golden Gate International Expo, Douglas and D’Harnoncourt would continue their work together in another national venue, the Museum of Modern Art in New York. *Indian Arts of the United States* was the catalogue that they prepared for this exhibition, on display in 1941. The United States National Museum and the Royal Ontario Museum of Archaeology sponsored it, and the accompanying catalogue included a foreword from First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt, who recognized and appreciated “the Indian’s past and present achievements” (Roosevelt in Douglas and d’Harnoncourt, 1941, 10). Roosevelt acknowledged Indian heritage as American, “part of the artistic and spiritual wealth of this county,” but also that the “Indian people of today have a contribution to make toward the America of the future” (ibid.). This rhetoric served as part of the exhibition’s overall goal of modernizing Native Americans while also recognizing their artistic heritage within a project of nationalism.

Despite some contributions from the Royal Ontario Museum and recognition from Roosevelt that Indian heritage spans both North and South America, the subject of the exhibition was the Indians of the United States. The accompanying catalogue was split into two parts, Prehistoric and Living Traditions. This split is partially based on disciplinary divides, premising the first category on archeological finds. The latter section of the book, however, constitutes traditions established through categories that are derived from recorded and continuing contact with tribes existing as they were known historically through modernity. Though the authors do concede that their divisions include parts of Mexico and Canada, these groups are mapped out within the United States and traced accordingly (Douglas and d’Harnoncourt 1941).

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16 The authors provide the rationale for this division thus: “In the prehistoric section, incomplete knowledge of cultural background made it preferable to divide this book according to information about styles and techniques gained from the actual specimens” (Douglas and D’Harnoncourt 1941, 99).
Following in the tradition of Otis T. Mason, Douglas and d’Harnoncourt established eight cultural areas based on environment and subsistence activities linked to each environment. Mason had premised his criteria for culture areas on environmental concerns (i.e. people sharing geographical, topographical, climate, or material resources) to define a cultural grouping; later he added linguistic considerations. Although the criteria for these groupings reject racial and even linguistic similarities, the bases for such categories remain entrenched in the idea of environmental determinism, just as Mason had premised his culture areas.\(^{17}\) Douglas and d’Harnoncourt take on a tone of appreciation for most Indians whom they describe according to environmental determinism, to the exclusion of Mason’s focus on the language of savagery and barbarism.

However, cultural evolution’s scales of progress are not entirely absent from this catalogue. For instance, the brief section on “The Apache Mountain People” reveals some of the biases of this culture area framework. In contrasting Apache tribes from their linguistic relatives the Navajo, Douglas and d’Harnoncourt note: “The Navaho, settling near the old established Pueblo villages, adopted many of the accomplishments of Pueblo civilization. But the Apache remained roaming hunters and raiders until the wars were over and even today are known for their look of untamed pride” (Douglas and d’Harnoncourt 1941, 119). In their representation, a moral characteristic -- untamed pride -- becomes entangled with set cultural distinctions relating to the Apache peoples’ life.

\(^{17}\) As Kennedy (2018) shows, late nineteenth-century thought was influenced from Ancient Greek Hippocratic characterizations of foreign people. She notes that theories of environmental determinism were not consistent even among the Ancient Greeks, but three points derived from this Ancient Greek thought were relevant for 19\(^{th}/20\(^{th}\) century cultural evolutionary debates. The first is that environment is a determining factor in moral and cultural characteristics. Second and third are the heritability of acquired characteristics and technological use as a feature to overcome or change deficiencies that are either environmentally determined or hereditary (Kennedy 2018: 157).
ways, which in turn relate to the environment (Douglas and d’Harnoncourt 1941, 119-120).

They also describe the Apache as “hardy, virile people.” This description depends on the categorization of people in terms of gender, with particular moral qualities marked as masculine. This masculinity indexes qualities that Douglas and d’Harnoncourt seek to establish as admirable, perhaps noble, savagery in these people’s adaptation to a harsh environment. This description also provides a stereotypical image of the Apache, in line with the iconic Plains Indian warrior, that excludes women in favor of a romanticized male lifestyle. Adding to their admiration of these masculinized people, they also describe the Apache as “thoroughly at home in their apparently hopelessly inhospitable environment, and capable of great feats of endurance” (Douglas and d’Harnoncourt 1941, 119). Life is rough and “savage” rather than “civilized,” but nonetheless Douglas and d’Harnoncourt challenge these categories to some extent in emphasizing the artistic and technical skills of the Apache people despite their harsh environment. While this reorientation undermines the scale of progress emphasized in Mason’s displays, it still draws from the framework of environmental determinism and related stereotyping.

In another example, they write:

The Indian Tribes of California and Nevada are less advanced than their neighbors in the Southwest or the North. This is not due to a lack of innate ability but to a natural environment that did not demand or favor the development of complex civilizations (Douglas and d’Harnoncourt 1941, 123).

This example shows how the exhibition’s representation of progress veers from a straightforward and linear progression as Mason had depicted. At the same time, their language does not avoid the notion that the path toward civilization involves
advancement. While their representation does not completely undermine the language of past cultural evolutionary models, it does reveal a complex relationship between anthropological categorization and a new recognition of American Indian as part of a “living tradition,” rather than as a relic of the past. Their representation thus signals an important shift in how Native American populations and their arts were to be valued.

*Indian Arts of the United States* sought to establish Native American art as an ever-changing and growing process and practice. Rather than treating contact with Europeans as destructive, the catalogue instead pointed to the ability of many tribes to integrate both elements from other tribes and European groups as an achievement. In this way, the catalogue seeks to challenge the static view of Native Americans as locked into a pristine, bounded past. “Invention of adaptation of new forms does not necessarily mean repudiation of tradition but its source of enrichment” argues the catalogue’s introduction (Douglas and d’Harnoncourt 1941, 10). In this way, Douglas and d’Harnoncourt set the grounds for a “living tradition,” rather than setting tradition in opposition to modernism with their notions of progress into the future.

This discussion leads into the final, brief section, “Indian Art for Modern Living,” which recognized contemporary Indian art as Modern. “Indian Art for Modern Living” argued for a place for Indian art in modern American life, beyond its previously assumed value as mere salvage relic or tourist curio. This section provided some inconsistency in arguing for a pure form of art, “[g]ood Indian work, done without interferences of whites,” rather than that influenced for a curio market. The inconsistency of this

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18 For example, see Douglas and d’Harnoncourt (1941, 115-118) on “The Navaho Shepherds.” In fact, some Indian tribes are lauded specifically in terms of their adoption of cultural elements from others: “All the Athapaskans have a faculty for absorbing new elements into their culture” (Douglas and d’Harnoncourt 1941, 115).
argument fits within the logic of raising Indian art to a different art market standard, while still prescribing that it serve a purpose within a contemporary art market. With the elaboration of an American national identity taking precedence in the wake of World War II, aestheticization became further based around consumerist values built upon marketing to a growing American middle class. Not only did *Indian Arts of the United States* seek to recontextualize Primitive art in a modern setting, but this exhibition also emphasized values associated with a national American consumerism in arguing for the relevance of Indian arts as part of modernity.

In a similar project, Douglas sought to bring this modern view of Indian arts to the public at the Denver Art Museum through his Indian Fashion Shows, which traveled to various venues outside of the region as well. Set alongside his influence at the Museum of Modern Art’s display of Native “primitive art,” through these fashion shows that featured Native American aesthetics as linguistically encoded, Douglas expressed his interest in bringing Indian arts into modernity. This emphasis accompanied increasing popularity for the consumption of Native American items thus rendered as iconic in the broader American public. In this way, salvaged anthropological objects shifted toward categories of Primitive art that eventually became valorized as exotic consumer goods. Even while the Denver Art Museum sought to universalize Native Arts through its program, Indian Fashion Shows continued to valorize Native American culture through a gendered form of spectacle.

These shows also brought gendered representations of Native Americans into the national spotlight. Parezo characterizes Douglas’ Indian Fashion Show as a combination living exhibit and authoritative lecture, part of a museum outreach program. Developed

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19 McChesney (2003, 670-673) describes this trend in “Commodifying the Primitive.”
from Denver Art Museum collections, the program traveled around the U.S. in the 1940s and ‘50s (Parezo 2013). Parezo describes how Douglas’ aim to take on negative stereotypes about Native Americans was a form of stereotype transference, wherein one social group’s characteristics are subject to reassignment to another group (in this case, positive attributes from European women), followed by an assertion that the resulting classification carries greater moral weight. In this case, Douglas challenged the idea of the Wild Savage woman or haggard squaw, instead promoting a Noble Savage woman through common attributes of all Native women (Parezo 2013). As Parezo notes, he featured mostly Euroamerican models, who became mute/living props in Douglas’ project of creating “kinship” among women cross-racially. His featured audience was middle to upper-class Euroamerican women, assuming a benign sense of charity among them that these women would be interested in promoting other women. In his appropriation of American Indian attire to European fashion, he relied upon the language of the European fashion industry throughout his presentation. Parezo further explains that Douglas adopted terminology found in magazines such as *Vogue* and *Harper’s Bazaar*, presuming that his audience would best understand those terms (Parezo 2013, 332). His representation resulted in transferring commodified value from a specialized Indian market to interest in the broader fashion industry. This may not have been Douglas’ intention, but it was a result nonetheless.

Another result of his program was its reification of the Indian Princess imagery in the American consciousness. While striving not to eroticize the models and to show innovation and variation among Native women’s styles, Douglas still started his shows with iconic Plains Indian women’s dress that evoked the Indian Princess for the audience
and models alike (Parezo 2013, 328-331). He compared the style of these buckskin dresses to the elegant, simple wear of a mid-Victorian matron, stressing the virtue of the Indian maiden through this unspoken moralistic comparison. Rayna Green’s (1974) description of the Indian matron, which developed in American mythology from the complex “exotic and sexual yet maternal and contradictorily virginal image of the Indian princess” is relevant here as a point of contrast. While still enmeshed in this contradictory perplex, the symbol of the ever more civilized but still somewhat exotic matron symbolized a universal mother figure for America as a nation. In trying to emphasize stately elegance over exotic sexuality, Douglas’ comparison bordered upon evoking the later Indian matrons steeped in American mythology, which were still perplexing figures of desire and symbols of colonizing assimilation in the American imagination (ibid.).

While the Indian Fashion shows began with these iconic images suggestive of American audience’s images of Pocahantas and Sacajawea, the display ended with a Hopi bride, evoking Southwest America’s later and more exotic Indian Princess, the Hopi maiden, eventually embodied by the artistic matriarch Nampeyo (McChesney 2003, 1-7, 674-677). Douglas tried to contrast his American Indian fashion with European fashion by emphasizing his appreciation of American Indians for their lack of a fashion industry, while nevertheless having taste and appreciation in their attire that was lasting beyond the yearly/seasonal trends of modern industrial fashion (Parezo 201, 337). This depiction reified the Noble Savage maiden as one who was romanticized through her anti-industrial aesthetic, in line with a desirable idealized authentic primitive (McChesney 2003). The reproduced images of iconic Indian maidens emphasized moralistic qualities meant to relate the American Indian to positive moralistic attributes assumed of Euroamerican
women, aligning them universally with stately beauty and taste. However, these representations still linked audiences to extant and distant images of Noble Savage women, if only more matron-like than downtrodden or overtly eroticized.

While Douglas made a point to avoid feathered headdresses, pop culture still held its sway as his programs unintentionally came to influence the European fashion industry. Fifty years later, models recalled in interviews the message of tolerance that he imparted to them (Parezo 2013, 340. This message was coupled with their view that they were playing the part of Indian Princesses within their experience of fantasy and play. Thus, stereotype lift resulted, where Douglas’ message empowered the models to experience their roles as positive ambassadors who embraced and welcomed Indian women through their clothes. In this way and through the persistent interpretations of the American Indian by its Euroamerican audience, stereotype eradication and transfer could not be effected beyond Douglas’ intentions with this program. Confronting stereotypes, as Parezo concludes in her analysis, is not a straightforward process. American Indian groups themselves want to confront generic stereotypes, but they also want to maintain cultural differences rather than assimilate (Parezo 2013). Representing American Indians as modern Americans thus becomes a tricky task for a museum trying to confront negative stereotypes with positive ones and simultaneously seeking to maintain a balance between displaying cultural variation and not estranging Native Americans from the general American public (i.e., Othering or exocitizing them too much via romantic representations).

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20 Stereotype boosts the positive feelings about a stereotype among a group using those stereotypes (Parezo 2013, 340).
Douglas’ projects set some groundwork for the Denver Art Museum’s later attempts in representing Native Americans through their collections. While he worked to represent Native Americans against the grain of the hierarchical ordering of previous frameworks of cultural evolution, he nevertheless found himself still replicating and borrowing from earlier anthropological language in his use of culture areas. His later project of the Indian Fashion Show demonstrated Douglas’ ability to de-emphasize those categories in favor of a more universalizing project that was meant to impart to his audience technological/artistic variation, despite reproducing assumptions about Native Americans being more Primitive. However, in trying to challenge negative stereotypes, Douglas’ project in stereotype transfer was unsuccessful. His work instead reified stereotypes in many ways and also encouraged Euroamerican women to further valorize previously existing representations of American Indian women. The complicated task of dealing with stereotypical imagery is one that the Denver Art Museum continues to confront in its display of Native American arts, as I next explore.

The DAM’s More Recent Narratives: Masterworks and Native American Art

This entanglement also concerns the DAM’s more recent project of framing Native American art as “Masterworks.” To unpack this term, I consider Keane’s approach to the semiotic analysis of material things in as much as indigenous objects have served to objectify specific concepts or ideological representations, especially Western ones. Drawing from Keane (2003), I consider how iconicity is necessarily enmeshed within dynamics of social value and authority. Key to this assessment are the ways in which social value is reproduced and reinforced by the authority of the museum.
(Duncan 1995). In Douglas’ earlier projects, he was working from the position of his authoritative institutional role in order to impart social values that he linked to Native American materials, though his audience filtered their interpretations as much through his interpretation as through other popular sources. In the process, ideas pertaining to femininity and Native American identity became objectified as related to particular terms. Another important set of terms that remain relevant to my Keanian analysis are “art” or “artist,” which I address here as objectified concepts surrounding material objects in museum collections.

The trajectory of intent for the Denver Art Museum has involved shifting the designation of ethnological object thoroughly into the category of “art.” In the European appropriation of indigenous materials, Thomas (1991) argues for changes in the material stability of objects. Pertaining specifically to ethnological materials, he notes that discourses about the practice of collecting and the resulting aggregation of materials have shifted over time in relation to changing ideologies. Thomas’ argument focuses on a long genealogical history that considers frameworks ranging from “curiosity” to eventual appreciation. For instance, Thomas argues that “[a]estheticizing a spear or a club is inevitably a political act that presupposes some denial of former context and of the capacity of indigenous producers to perpetuate their own uses and construction of things” (Thomas 1991, 174). The denial of former context is significant here, and reveals tensions between appreciation and appropriation.

The Denver Art Museum is in a continual process of shifting collection narratives that have constructed changing meanings. This project to make audiences appreciate Native arts as a form of American fine art is one that Douglas set out in his work; more
recent curators are working in this frame as well. However, this canonization of Native arts aligns with an institutional form of appropriation for expressing an imperial state’s vision (Duncan 1995, Thomas 1991). The recognition of Native American art as art also functions to appropriate Native American art within national heritage narratives. “We evaluated our own mission as an art museum—one that has always featured the finest art from around the world, and has always placed American Indian art at the forefront of exhibitions and programs,” writes the late curator Nancy Blomberg in describing the DAM’s new gallery space (Blomberg 2011, 50).

While Douglas’ legacy frequently marks a significant start for placing American Indian art in the American fine art cannon, more recent curatorial decisions reproduce its initiatives to feature Native American works as appreciable fine art representing American aesthetics among global collections. As with European paintings and other works in Classical styles (that is, stemming from European Renaissance-era traditions), the Denver Art Museum uses deliberate language to frame Native American works as high art, for example referring to different weaving styles as “art form[s],” as well as identifying “artistic traditions” and “innovative styles” throughout their current representations (Blomberg 2011). While this discourse stresses diversity in artistic intent, largely to emphasize vital traditions that are ever-evolving, the overarching framework is to consider objects within the narrative of the museum’s function as an art museum.

In early 2011, the Denver Art Museum reopened its galleries for American Indian arts with new labels, regarded as revolutionary for their attribution of individual artists rather than tribes (Dobrzynski 2011). In her New York Times review of the exhibit, Dobrzynski traced the trend of attributing artifacts to particular artists as a movement
going back to the 1960s, when noted scholar Bill Holm devised a vocabulary for
describing form and stylistic characteristics in Northwest Coast art. Dobrzynski noted
that, as art history scholars did for artists in the Renaissance, Holm used the terminology
of “Master” to identify an unnamed artist of particular talent and skill (Dobrzynski
2011). The practice of identifying individual master artists is derived from Western art
historical practice, now applied to Primitive art objects. It is a significant practice of
artwriting in which the aesthetic value of a work (and its maker) are constructed. These
practices began several decades before the Denver Art Museum made this the main goal
of their museum’s static interpretation in their permanent galleries. The intention to
identify artists does not often result in the use of actual names, however: the museum
displayed barely 100 out of 600 pieces with names attached to them in these reopened
galleries, and half of them were contemporary and still living artists (Dobrzynski 2011).
Nevertheless, the Denver Art Museum now places the descriptor “Artist Unknown”
beside the identified culture group of its displayed Native American works to show that
all work displayed, whether or not it is produced by a known maker, has the status of art.

“I want to signal that there are artists on this floor,” the late Nancy Blomberg,
senior curator of Native arts, stressed in her interview for the New York Times review of
the revamped galleries (Dobrzynski 2011). While this labeling practice indexes an
individual identity alongside and beyond the mere attribution of culture area or other
group classification and represents an advance over Douglas’ depictions of Native

21 Examples of the use of this term include the “Saint Cecilia Master” (Renaissance altarpiece creator in Florence’s Uffizi Gallery) and the “Master of the Chicago Settee” (coined by Holm for the maker of a 19th-century Haida chief’s chair at the Field Museum in Chicago). Others followed Holm’s example in designating American Indian artists as “Master.”

22 See Serrell (2014) for more on types of wall labels in exhibits. This DAM’s new labeling convention shows the potential impact of descriptive object labels (also known as “tombstones”), the most straightforward and pointed form of static interpretive texts in an exhibit.
Americans, it nevertheless remains problematic. Where are the artists, if only materialized as labels accompanying the museum’s displayed pieces in its galleries?

Webb Keane’s insights on objectification are illuminating here. The labels objectify a social identity alongside particular social values associated with that identity. Keane’s analysis of objectification describes experience as rendered into secondary qualities that are then bundled into a material object through translation involving semiotic modalities (Keane 2008, 312). Objectification here makes perceptible a social role associated with particular experiences of production that are then shifted toward representation via a particular product while deliberately altering semiotic modalities. From this perspective, a museum object’s definition does not lie solely within its perceptible parts: the object also has agency both through its production and alongside qualitative attributes that the museum labels produce by indexing its producer as a creator of aesthetic pieces. This semiotic ideology, in line with Keane’s analysis of educational experience, produces a tension between experience/agency and the authority of the museum (Keane 2008). Thus, signaling the presence of artists in exhibitions functions primarily within a semiotic modality. The use of the term “artist” makes up the nominalization of a particular agentive experience. The museum labels nominalize and authorize this agentive experience, being an artist, through the discourses it produces starting at the level of this label change.

The emphasis on works created by artists parallels a broader ideological shift away from considering works as “artifacts.” While not a surprising move for an institution whose mission and focus are to present works of art, the significant shift here is the elevation of that art from the status of “primitive” to art that is on the same level as
Classical art within a Western art framework. Thus, this curatorial prerogative seeks to remove the Othering bias on its labels, as can be seen in both the comprehensive sweep of this new goal to include an indication of the individual artist (emphasizing the objects as art rather than artifacts), and in premising this indication on Classical art frameworks. In the use of the term “curatorial prerogatives” I draw on the concept as Michael Ames originally presented it in 1989. Ames examined several institutional classifications that are oppositional to a more holistic curatorial perspective for indigenous people (Ames 1990/2010). Ames’ examination focused on practices in Canadian institutions and First Nations peoples, but his points also have relevance for U.S. institutions in curating indigenous cultures.

Ames later discussed a holistic approach, first identifying how First Peoples’ are often collaborated with as resources, whereas as artists they are subject to curatorial treatment within a Western “transcendental” or “contextualized perspective” (Ames 2000, 78). The transcendental perspective fosters a traditional curatorial prerogative in which fine art transcends society. This curatorial perspective assumes that the curator has an authoritative position that defines art. Their training in Western art history justifies their authority and tends to supersed the authority of the artists themselves. The latter perspective, contextualized, is more “a form of ethnographic relativism, which allows art to be identified separately from other aspects of culture and seen within its cultural and historical context” (ibid.). Another alternative allows indigenous people to be full partners in the collaboration, rather than simply as sources of art or information. Ames’ considerations of the relationship between the museum and the objects it displays via its

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23 Ames also built from this paper in his later work (Ames 2000). First published in 1990, this talk was republished 20 years later (Ames 2010) and remains relevant to this discussion.
entrenched Western-based curatorial and similar structures have relevance to museums in the U.S. and elsewhere as well.

The relevance of Ames’ work to the Denver Art Museum case pertains to the question of authority. It is important to consider with respect to both earlier and more recent curatorial practices at the DAM, in part to assess the way in which the lines of authority have or have not shifted over time. In his curatorial position of an earlier era, Douglas sought the participation of Native Americans as actors in his Indian Fashion Shows. The collaboration was with Native Americans resources for demonstrating the clothing in a modernized context. Perhaps this was a step away from the Othering lens of the standard of displaying objects in cases under glass, but those participating in the shows did not do so as equitable collaborators. In reframing Indian clothing and isolating these items as modern “fashion” and “art,” Douglas’ both created an appreciation for particular forms of cultural dress and recontextualized those outfits as desirable and valuable for the modern American consumer. In the case of fashion, the mainstream effects of this appropriation would primarily enter into a high-fashion world apart from the average middle-class American consumer (Parezo 2010, 340); however, such desirability and valorization could be accessible for the consumption of already commodified goods on the Indian art market, such as pottery or jewelry. In the same way that the Indian Fashion Shows reified the Indian Princess, another indirect and unintentional result was the reification of the Indian art market.

In a shift from Douglas’ paradigm that also reflects changes in the art and museum worlds generally, the DAM’s new exhibit continued to separate artists into geographical areas while it also featured prominent named artists, among them Nampeyo
and members identifying with her family line (MacMillan 2011, Dobrzynski 2011, Blomberg 2011). The rationale for the exhibit continuing to organize around geographical regions was due to people requesting this organization in focus groups, stressing that they learned about Native cultures that way in school and were most comfortable with that (MacMillan 2011). At the same time, curator Nancy Blomberg wanted to stress aesthetics over encyclopedic display (Blomberg 2011). She emphasized particular artists or art forms within each area in the exhibit. As one example, several eye-dazzler textiles, a particular type of Navajo weaving from the late nineteenth century, served to represent Navajo weaving as an aesthetic art form, catching the eyes of viewers. The exhibit presented audiences with introductory questions on a video screen:

What is American Indian art? Does it have to be functional? Does it have to be old? Does it have to be handmade? Do you have to learn it from your grandmother? (Blomberg, Denver Art Museum, 2011).

This interpretation thus provided some opportunity for reflection on the museum’s definition of art, showing examples with each question with which a visitor could respond both, “yes” and “no.” Yet while seemingly open-ended, the museum ultimately frames art within these binaries even while showing a multiplicity of approaches to what defines Native art. To illustrate this paradox, I examine the last question sources of instruction by focusing on the museum’s display of Nampeyo’s pottery surrounded by that of her descendants.

“Does Native art have to be learned from one’s grandmother?” For those who receive authentication within the Southwest Indian art market, that may be the case. This particular recognition is significant to certain artists’ identities, especially in terms of their artistic practice, as well as to their cultural affiliation. It also links certain artists to a
structure of legitimation through their connection to certain master artists. The prominence of matrilines in Southwest art is one that I delve into further in the next chapter, but relevant to my discussion here is the history of naming artists in the Southwest, a tradition that began with Nampeyo and was followed by Maria Martinez and several other pottery “Matriarchs” (Dillingham 1994). As McChesney (2012) discusses it, artwriting legitimizes artistic status and inheritance, specifically in terms of genealogies for artists in Southwest pottery traditions. These constructed matrilines stem from select Master artists such as Nampeyo and impart status to artists across generations. It is worth noting here, too, the application of the language of “master artist” in this context of artistic production that Holm advocated for Northwest Coast arts.

The exhibit in this way reified the status of such matriarchs while reproducing this discourse of artwriting that gives legitimacy to some artists who style themselves after this genealogical ancestor. While the exhibit acknowledged that not all Native art needs this authentication, it also displayed art authenticated through the notion of such tradition. Evocation of these particular names adds value and importance to the names of their descendants, and this common practice of the Indian art market in the Southwest is one that the Denver Art Museum’s labels reproduce. It is thus not a revolutionary new practice for ceramics in the Southwest but instead a continuation of an historical practice (McChesney 2003). The idea of named artistic masters, in this view, has precedence in Southwest art traditions as developed by the Indian art market and accompanying authoritative artwriting on these traditions.

At the same time, the exhibit produced this among other contextual frames from the outset, even while curator Blomberg hoped that the exhibit would serve to create an
aesthetic experience regardless of contextual aids/labels (MacMillan 2011). This museum has the overarching authority in how it renders an assemblage of objects into that aesthetic experience (that is, deciding what counts as aesthetic art to display and how it should be interpreted). The museum perhaps provided a multi-dimensional frame for its artwork, but that frame was still an authoritative structure which the exhibit imposed on what visitors encountered.

This point returns us to the issue of Classicization. As I discuss in more detail in later chapters, museums can authenticate artistic traditions such as those of the Southwest pottery matrilines in order to Classicize those forms of art within its narratives of art history. Classicization is a complex process in the direction of adopting materials as part of a more broadly American art. Where the DAM has previously viewed its projects as bringing Native objects into modernity, Classicization accompanies this discursive shift in recognizing materials as art rather than artifacts. Overall, the Denver Art Museum has used its national reputation and regional representation as a fine art museum of the American West in order to represent Native American art as “art,” with Native American artists as creators of these works. In addition to the clear distinction of the category art from artifact instituted by Douglas, this representation has also involved signification through naming and featuring artists. As my narrative suggests, the shift in representation began with Douglas’ actions which, while maintaining the grouping of people within particular culture typing, challenged the relegation of Native American people to the pre-modern past through the recontextualization of Native primitivity into consumer goods reframed for mainstream middle-class valorization and consumption.
The Denver Art Museum’s naming of artists, or at least their creation of placeholders for names on labels of even utilitarian objects designated as art, further repositions the museum’s collections into an elevated discourse. This elevation in some ways perpetuates the valorization of Native American items as exotic objects desirable for consumption, inasmuch as it seeks to reposition Native American works within a national art historical canon. In it, the American West, consisting most prominently of masculinized Plains Indians art and the Matriarchal traditions of the Southwest, converges with a larger body of Native American works to form a new fine art category meant to rival, or at least to equal, other forms of American fine art. Furthermore, this solidified representation of Native American art within the art history of American art is now projected into the global arena as “among the finest art from around the world.” While highlighting the ways in which the museum’s discourse may have shifted to include more potential categories for its authentication of art, I nevertheless have found that it still works from and reproduces aspects of established artwriting discourse from an earlier era. Perhaps Native art, for instance, is neither constrained as “traditional” nor “contemporary”: it could be either, according the most recent iteration of the DAM Native arts gallery. But the need to provide authoritative contexts within established linguistic conventions still restricts the museum’s curatorial choices. In turn, curatorial choices still define for its audience what visitors consider authentic art.

However, the Denver Art Museum can and does continue to foster more approaches to its interpretations of art beyond the static interpretation of its main galleries. With respect to Native artists, the Denver Art Museum seeks their active participation through residencies and direct participation in the museum’s written
interpretations of their work. A few of the artists that the DAM has featured over approximately the past decade, since making the label change I discuss here, including Rose B. Simpson, Julie Buffalohead, and Kent Monkman, are the focus of my artist case studies in the second section of my thesis. While I discuss their engagements with these discourses in more depth there, I precede it with a more in-depth discussion of museum representations of matriarchy.
Chapter 2
Matriarchy in National Contexts

In this chapter, I examine the ways in which matriarchy discourses are used in recent exhibits featured in national venues, including the National Museum of the American Indian and the National Museum for Women in the Arts. I consider matriarchy as understood in conflation with matrilineal traditions that support the idea of authentic traditions. I consider the ways in which this idea of authentic tradition based around these artistic matriarchies and associated matrilines continues to influence museum representations. These pervasive representations derive from Classical ideas about a Primitive matriarchy and still remain entangled with the iconic Indian Princess.

Most entrenched in the matriarchy myth is the aspect of commodification, wherein gendered objects such as pottery are authorized as valuable commodities. *Legacy of Generations* was an exhibit which specifically categorized Puebloan pottery traditions using the terms “Matriarch” and “Matrilines” as its overarching categories. This exhibit was on view at the National Museum of Women in the Arts from October 9th, 1997 until January 1998 before going to the Heard Museum the following Spring. *Woven by Grandmothers* focused on Navajo weaving of the 19th century, a tradition less entangled with art market matriarchy discourses, but still influenced by these narratives nonetheless. I compare these two exhibits as they were on display at the National Museum of Women in the Arts, then the Heard Museum, at the same time. *Woven by Grandmothers* is also noteworthy as a groundbreaking collaborative effort at that time, curated by the National Museum of the American Indian and on display in New York before joining *Legacy of Generations* at the Washington D.C. and Phoenix venues. I
review these exhibits in terms of how they place emphasis on matriarchal lineages in the Southwest so that I can consider to what extent these museums rely on the construction of artistic matriarchies for authenticating objects as forms of distinctly American art, Classicized for audiences, and what the relationship is between audience and identity within these national narratives.

As previously stated, Duncan (1995) posits that museums are spaces for civilizing rituals, offering up values and beliefs in social, sexual, and political identity. Museums create meaning through the structures of this ritual, and I use Duncan’s premise as a model to further explore how museums produce values about gender and the Other through the use of the matriarchy myth in depictions of Native Southwest art traditions. These particular narratives arose from developments in the Native American art market in the Southwest, but also had significant influence from Classical ideas about feminized Matriarchal Others embedded within culturally established frameworks. The place of this representation at a national museum also brings up questions about identity, multivocality, and agency where the NMAI serves as a place of signification of national identity while also representing Native Americans as colonized subjects within that identity.

The relationship between museums as spaces of civilizing rituals and the creation of a specific American identity involves the adoption of American identity arts as part of a Classical American heritage. Another aspect of the role of Southwest pottery in the art market and its subsequent adoption into museums as a valued commodity reveals tensions in the adoption of cultural heritage items for broader human heritage. I draw here from Kirshenblatt-Gimblett’s (2006) analysis of the effect of world heritage claims
on local cultures. In some ways, world heritage weakens the authority of the (national) state in legislating heritage, through undermining national citizenship; however, this mostly occurs through emphasizing citizenship in a universalizing, global polity. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett cites this as an issue in terms of who benefits from the valorization of cultural heritage, because even as societies become more globalized, colonial power balances often still remain and the dominant part of society exploits world heritage. For my purposes, I look not at how world heritage universalizes heritage as part of global/world heritage, but instead highlight similar relevance in the ways that colonial power nationalizes heritage and similarly controls properties of indigenous heritage through valorization. This national control of heritage relies on both authorizing objects as authentic and primitive as well as creating a Classical designation out of American Primitive art through the civilizing rituals of the museum.

*Legacy of Generations*

First shown at the National Museum of Women in the Arts, *Legacy of Generations* then traveled to the Heard Museum. My analysis of the exhibit, reviewed through examining curator Susan Peterson’s accompanying essay and catalogue, examines the ways in which this exhibit frames Puebloan pottery and what ideologies persist in the language surrounding these objects. In the introduction to her essay, Peterson evokes the language of earlier 19th century salvage anthropology, transposing the idea of the vanishing Indian upon American Indian pottery:

But American Indian pottery is a vanishing art. In today's fast-paced society, where technology and mass production are the predominant themes, it is assumed that all folk traditions everywhere will vanish. This is especially true concerning pottery: in the minds of many potters, the
sacred clay is too hard to prospect, pulverize, and process and not worth
the effort when commercial clays are available…

It is only the strong, uninterrupted traditions that will sustain this
art. Therefore, it is fortunate for all of us that many Indian women who
have chosen clayworking - whether traditional or avant-garde - still want
to live the Indian life in their traditional villages. This ensures that the
legacy of the matriarchs will continue to support the newer visions of
those who follow. It is up to the artists of the new generation to nourish
the old, while in the same breath creating the new and individual.
(Peterson 1997, 21-22)

Here, she characterizes pottery as a “folk tradition,” antithetical to the mass-produced
objects of the modern world. McChesney (2003) describes a similarly constructed appeal
in Nampeyo’s ceramics, wherein the Primitive could be aestheticized through association
with a pre-contact past, both idealized and distanced (from the modern world) as in
Peterson’s essay. Through a representation first staged by photographer Adam Clark
Vroman and later restaged for tourists by the Fred Harvey Company, Nampeyo became
an icon of authentic primitivity within the commodification of the primitive. The latter
staging relied on an “anti-industrial domestic theme” within the line of women first
embodied and personified by Nampeyo as part of the construction of Nampeyo as an
authentic primitive matriarch (McChesney 2003: 686).

Early on, 19th century archeologist who worked for the Bureau of American
Ethnology, Jesse Walter Fewkes, promoted Nampeyo’s interpretation of pottery designs
derived from the Sikyakti ruin east of the Hopi First Mesa that he excavated. With some
reservations about what he considered truly authentic – original pottery at the site –
Fewkes authorized in his writing that there was an “authentic primitive” and an “imitative
or reproduced primitive,” and Nampeyo’s lineage sanctioned authentic reproduction of a
revivalist style (McChesney 2003: 664-668). This authentication from an emerging
scientific field became entangled with emerging capitalist ventures, specifically the
emerging possibilities for tourism and related commercialization in the Southwest, to
forge a new object for tourist consumption.

As Babcock (1993) notes, gender was a significant component of this constructed
authenticity, as a young Pueblo woman could be iconic of desirable and accessible
sexuality with Orientalist qualities, framed as the domesticated primitive. Matriarchy, in
this sense, becomes entangled with the ideas of a sustained anti-industrial (that is,
modern) tradition that is part of the aesthetic of an authentic primitive pottery. Audiences
at first sought this authenticity as a curio, but Nampeyo’s legacy endured beyond the era
of pottery as curio. Transitioning from Indian Maiden iconic of domestic primitivity to
gracefully aged matriarch to an extended line of potters, Nampeyo has come to signify an
authentic art tradition within an art historical canon. While being recognized as a master
artist, this recognition comes with the construction of a matriarchal legacy divorced from
anthropological/natural history paradigms in favor of art historical authority.

McChesney’s problematizes these competing representational interests:

… the confounding of matriarchy with matriliney (the anthropological
understanding of descent through a female line), and more importantly
with matrilineality (the anthropological understanding of the emphasis
these societies place on symbolically regenerative processes), has
profoundly misconstrued the meaning(s) of pottery (McChesney 2003: 80-
81)

This misconstruing remains relevant to my analysis where this confounding
persists in art historical narratives that have legitimized Primitive art, starting with
Nampeyo as the first artistic master in its canon. This confounding is also rooted in
cultural evolution frameworks adopted from outdated anthropological perspectives,
though art history has since distanced itself from the field of anthropology. Peterson does
identify an avant-garde form of pottery alongside traditional work, though this too
maintains links to traditional lifeways and matriarchal legacies. Peterson defines avant-garde potters as women “of rare and innovative ability” who are inspired by “the matriarchs and their descendants” (Peterson 1997, 165). The way in which Peterson defines these criteria as innovative, yet traditional as manifested in her writing comes across as a contradiction, although Peterson maintains these terms as dichotomous:

Some "new generation" women, born with unusual vigor and drive, have chosen to live in two worlds, balancing both Indian and Anglo cultures. Many have gone to college and have learned about the history of world art. Others have left the tribal homes of their youth to reside in cities. The ceramic art practiced by some of these women is executed in non-traditional materials and techniques, drawn from the Anglo ready-made marketplace. Most of these Indian women struggle with dealers and agents in the same way Anglo artists do.

All of the artists featured here, however, have chosen to maintain traditional Indian lifestyles and acknowledge the specific traditional influences that shape their work. They pay tribute to the vision of their elders, and then proceed in their own ways - stretching and experimenting, sometimes breaking barriers to stray far from original ideals. (Peterson 1997, 165)

Peterson defines the avant-garde artists she selected as women who live “Indian lifestyles” and whose work derives from traditional processes in some form or another. This does not sound much different from how Peterson characterizes earlier generations of artists, the descendants of the six identified Matriarchs (Peterson 1997, 165-213). At what point is pottery innovation within the acceptable bounds of tradition, and at what point is the artist too far removed from “Indian life” and immersed in the Anglo world?

Perhaps the issue on hand is that the relation between tradition and the artists’ identities as Indian potters is more complicated than these boundaries which Peterson assumes to be essentialized. In her review of the exhibit, Kruckmeyer (2000:96) observes that “the exhibit itself makes no attempt to explain its own categorization besides bloodlines, certainly a shaky means for division within a traditional artistic community.”
Peterson from the outset defines what she means as traditional in terms of six “master craftswomen” that she identifies as “the foundation of Indian pottery tradition as we know it today” (Peterson 1997, 19). From there, Peterson establishes a second set of artists who are close descendants to these six foundational potters, creating her first two sections “The Matriarchs” and “The Matrilineal Lines.” For her third division, Peterson used the terms “aesthetic contrast,” “non-traditional,” and “innovative” among “The Avant-Garde” set, therein establishing a dichotomy amidst boundaries that Peterson herself blurs. Contrasting aesthetics could be a strong ground for setting the latter group of artists apart, but what Peterson primarily has assembled is a group that does not have direct connections to the foundational matrilines. In this way, though her terminology is confusing, Peterson does establish a distinct set of what is “traditional” -- that is, following the constructed tradition of six authorized matriarchs -- versus being more innovative, or less strongly tied to the Matriarchs. However, she frequently applies both terms to artists in each set because the artistic practices of these potters are more complicated beyond a strict bounding to these essentialized categories and not so much on how the artists themselves experience their identities in relation to Indian practices or the Anglo art world.

Aestheticization lies primarily in authorized categories as reproduced in authoritative texts such as this one. McChesney notes that through these representations that have made her an icon of American primitive art, “Nampeyo remains mute and unable to articulate the meaning and actions of her work” (McChesney 2003, 80). This is not to say that Nampeyo had no control or agency as a potter, but rather that artwriting discourses took precedence over her own vocality in marketing her art to consumers. The
art market itself was a foreign system that ascribed meaning through the “aestheticization and fetishization of a presumed primitive technology” (McChesney 2003, 81). While many aspects of the earlier artwriting discourses remain, I subsequently argue that artists since have engaged with these frameworks, conscious of its language and using it in different ways for their own purposes.

McChesney (2012) shows that artwriting by specific agents in the Indian art world (typically dealers, collectors, and museum personnel but not the artists themselves), or particular forms of discourse in which now even artists themselves participate, constructs notions of “pure” artistry that allows for a privileged status based in Western aesthetics. The Western aesthetics of the art world would otherwise categorize their works as utilitarian (or artifactual), less significant than the artists themselves might regard them, but value has to be reshaped within Western hierarchies in order to afford agency to the artists as not mere producers of plain goods and their works as not simply objects. Purity is a construct, but through language use such as the discourse of artwriting, Native artists can best receive recognition and value alongside their meaningful creations.

Featured artist Nora Noranjo-Morse (one of the avant-garde artists in the Legacy of Generations exhibit) and her relative Tessie Naranjo both critique elsewhere some of the influence of commerce on pottery traditions in their writings. Tessie Naranjo has written to express her concerns about foreign systems’ influences on the traditional Pueblo worldview. These foreign systems include the railroad and automobile tours that brought tourism and commodification into the Pueblo way of life (Naranjo 1996). Naranjo contrasts her traditional worldview in which pottery making is enmeshed with that of the objectifications of art market publications through which Southwest pottery became
aestheticized (McChesney 2003). “Western economics (money) determines, more and more, how pottery is made” (Naranjo 1996:195). Actual tradition among families, or the ways in which pottery is practiced among family members as particular lived experiences, are lost through the production of Anglo-American (i.e. commodified) interpretations of an authentic tradition. This authenticity is articulated through connections to the matrilineal adoption of technique and a few identified matriarchs within artwriting discourses. This interpretation, in other words, packages pottery production as a tradition fit for consumption through authorized aestheticization.

Peterson’s interpretation and the language of this exhibit references matriarchy and matrilinity implicitly as part of emphasizing an aesthetic created from a non-modern tradition. The use of the term “tradition” is closely linked to the idea of an “uninterrupted” matriline linked to the past, a discourse that alienates authentic Indian lifestyles from aspects of modernity in both a temporal sense and in terms of spatial distance. Tensions primarily appear, however, where artwriting emphasizes the distinction between modernity and tradition.

I point here to this essentializing of identity within artwriting as a facet of creating heritage for national narratives. Creating a Classical cultural heritage involves positing essentialized identities within national narratives, or intangible forms of national heritage, which material symbols reify through this Classicization process. The artistic matriarchs of the Southwest, particularly Puebloan potters, identify their pottery with an ancient tradition in that their practice is valorized as an authentic, anti-modern art. When this art then becomes subsumed as part of national heritage, the implicit statement becomes: This authentically antique art tradition is an American Classical heritage. The art is
appreciated as a symbol of aesthetic human cultural heritage rooted in a new locus -- North America rather than Europe -- where it can be incorporated into a different narrative about national identity that has its own unique classical cultural heritage.

Overall, the exhibit depends on the authority of the museum and the civilizing ritual function of the museum space. While the exhibit allows for some exploration of the direct perspectives of the authors whom it features, it relies on pre-established values associated with defining national citizenship in terms of a reified modernity. Modernity sits in contrast with tradition, according to artwriting’s discourse, but authentic tradition can accommodate potters with degrees of aesthetic innovation as avant-garde artists within the narrative of a Primitivist tradition. Modernity embraces Primitive art as a valorized form of authentic primitive aesthetics that is reproduced in the form of classicized tradition within the civilizing space of museum galleries. While the exhibit reifies forms of authenticity, this authorized aestheticization supports national citizenship through museum goers who encounter authentic Southwest pottery as a fine art tradition belonging to a shared modern American identity.

Woven by the Grandmothers

I turn to a critical discussion of the accompanying exhibit, *Woven by the Grandmothers*, on Navajo weaving in the 19th century in order to examine the ways in which the authoritative narratives of museums as civilizing institutions evoke a matriarchy myth beyond pottery artwriting in the Southwest. I consider this exhibit in terms of its impact as a collaborative exhibition, drawing on the comments of participating co-curators and some critical reviewers in order to examine the differences
in intention and reception surrounding discourse in this exhibit. I emphasize the role of objectification and social agency, as elaborated on in Keane (2003) in the creation of these discourses and interactions between these objects and audiences identity.

Beginning in 1989, the National Museum of the American Indian began a collaborative project with community members of the Navajo Nation to display textiles from its collections (Bonar 1996, Heald and Ash-Milby 1998, Hedlund 2017). This collaboration brought to Navajo Nation visitors 24 textiles from the museum’s collections for the eventual development of the 1996 exhibit, *Woven by Grandmothers*. The collaboration made accessible to people from that community who otherwise would not have access to the textiles weavings from the mid 19th century that had been stored away at the George Gustav Heye Museum in New York City, which became the primary collection of the NMAI. The significance of this collaboration highlights the positionality of the NMAI as a national institution and its geographic and cultural distance relative to the communities it serves. The textiles’ return to the reservation and the exhibit’s eventual travel to nationally visible urban locations (New York, Washington D.C.), locations close to and within the Navajo Nation reservation (Window Rock, Phoenix), and even international venues (it toured in various Latin American cities for 14 months), were significant components of the collaboration (Hedlund 2017).

For the purposes of this discussion and following Caro (2006), I consider the National Museum of the American Indian as a hybrid space: an experimental locale that

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24 An intersection between the tangible properties of heritage, including the context of physical space, and less tangible social relations arises where identity formation relates to place, according to Caro (2006). He notes the site specificity of the NMAI, regarding its location at the nation’s capital (Caro 2006: 545). Further, Caro’s essay also examines how museums, including the NMAI and tribal museums, situate visitors in locations in relation to their identities. In the case of a national museum, visitors’ identities are affirmed in terms of being domestic or foreign; at tribal museums, identity is affirmed as Native or non-
is not quite a tribal museum, using groundbreaking and influential methods in its attempts
to give prominence to Native voices, but is nevertheless “mainstream” in its place on the
National Mall among other Smithsonian Institution branches in Washington D.C., thus
maintain links to narratives of national identity. The relevance of this hybridity comes to
the fore primarily where the exhibit was displayed far away from the Navajo reservation.

The textiles were brought to the reservation at first to help address the issue of
access (that is, to allow community members to experience their cultural heritage on
display where they otherwise would not have experienced the dilemma of identity
situated far from home, in one of the East coast venues of the exhibit). While this
collaboration considered the community members foremost as an audience, the ultimate
goal was to reach a broader audience, wherein visitors in both tribal and tribal-adjacent
venues (in Arizona), as well as non-tribal visitors (with the additional dimension of “at
home” and “abroad” with the exhibit’s international scope of travels), relate to these
identity formations in encountering the textiles. Thus, a personal connection to the exhibit
related in part to location-based identities.

Locationality can be implicated in spatial and temporal dimensions as well. The
question of art versus artifact also relates to another set of distinctions where Ames
scrutinized the positioning between past and present.25 Traditionally, Native Americans

Native. The locus of identity thus becomes relational at museums as sites of identity. Identification at a
museum is therefore fluid and unstable, whereas place-bound notions of identity, situated in notions of
home, are fixed and essentialist (Caro 2006: 553). Within this contrast, museums serve as a hybrid space
for reinforcing identities in terms of place.

25 A future orientation supports a narrative of continuity of people and more fully emphasizes the agency of
American Indians. Nason (2000) suggests that an interpretive paradigm which creates multidimensional
exhibitions involving collaboration between curatorial and community views would counter that distancing,
instead emphasizing that “the inherently living nature of Native American heritage and ensuring that
heritage is not relegated to the past or otherwise divorced from today’s community concerns” (Nason 2000:
41). Native identities are undoubtedly tied to a form of the past, but with the narrative so long out of their
have been relegated to a distant, often romanticized past. James D. Nason identifies two prevalent characterizations of exhibition types: the “disassociation” between Native community’s past and present, and the resulting disembodiment of “the reality of a continuing Indian presence” through denial of it in these dissociative representations (Nason 2000, 37). Nason also finds that anonymity is frequent in the characterization of objects, further distancing materials from actual people. These two factors result in a disembodied and unidimensional representation of Indians conveyed through such exhibits.

The effect of bringing these textiles back to the community and connecting them with community members in this way helped in working against the distancing between past and present. The selection of the museum objects came from museum staff, but the interpretation of those objects primarily came from Navajo guest co-curators. These co-curators served as community representatives who sought to interpret the materials for a Navajo audience, in part following observations made by museum staff during the textiles’ initial display at the Navajo Nation reservation.

This exhibit challenged the idea of Navajo textiles as two-dimensional art objects, emphasizing their role as utilitarian, often clothing, items as part of this interpretation. As objects that were part of ancestral Navajo people’s everyday lives, their artistic status is formed more from of an appreciation of past lifeways and surrounding philosophies that give higher significance to the practice of weaving for Navajos in associating the textiles with the people who used them. In the exhibit, this manifested in the form of draping the weavings over 3-D shoulder mounts (Hedlund 2017), which Kruckmeyer describes as own hands, the traditional mode of presenting that past alienates present Native identities from it, while also denying a present reality and future in the process.
“simplified human forms that, arrayed standing, sitting, and reclining, not only give the viewer a sense of the way the weavings would appear ‘in use’ but also contribute to the impression that one is actually in the presence of the grandmothers and their relations” (Kruckmeyer 2000). These mannequin-like display mounts took some of the textiles from the context of two-dimensional flat object mounted on the wall and conveyed the purpose of being worn, for which many of the blankets were originally woven.

At the same time, these mounts were intended to add to the personal in this exhibit by showing blankets in use, while also distinctly not showing human features: these soft-form sculptures did not have heads or limbs. Still, since mannequins have a long history of standing in as mute representations of Others in museums, audience members could recognize these figures as standing in for the concept of “matriarch,” glossed as “grandmother” here in the exhibit. In fact, Navajo sensitivities were considered to avoid making these forms too human, yet visitors such as Kruckmeyer in her review could personify these figures as imagined ancestral grandmothers. The phrase “woven by grandmothers,” meanwhile, contained deep personal meaning to the visitors who were recorded during the textiles’ return to the reservation community, and a more generic idea of ancestral grandmothers could be carried over into the exhibit’s representations, personified by the mounts as a stand-in.

In her essay accompanying this exhibit, Hedlund highlights what matrilineal lineages means through the lens of Navajo audience members (versus those who might conflate matriliny to authentic primitive art and constructed notions of matriarchy). Navajo viewers of these textiles had a few different personal responses, seeing the textiles in terms of the hardships their grandmothers faced in the nineteenth century,
associating the textiles with having an intrinsic power or evoking a sense of nostalgia. Some contemporary weavers found the weavings as inferior or problematic in terms of their greater market value. Reactions were mixed, but the exhibit tended to privilege the more positive emotive reactions of Navajo visitors in its interpretation. Further, Hedlund argued that the exhibit’s emphasis on promoting weaving as a lifeway does not detract from its aesthetic quality. Yet this orientation does reveal how a Navajo view can both valorize weaving in a non-commodified way and acknowledge skill outside of hierarchical categories of fine art. In terms of museum object narratives, tensions persist, as demonstrated by the setup of this exhibit as a unique perspective between categories of art and craft/ethnographic/utilitarian object. Yet the exhibit’s co-curators provided a perspective that shows how an object can be both, even though this still involves the presentation of the textiles in a way that reifies their appreciation as valuable art.

In a later 2006 exhibit through the Museum of Indian Arts and Culture, *Spider-Woman’s Gift*, the interpretation relied heavily on emphasizing Spider Woman as an ancestral matriarch rather than as a “grandmother” (Tisdale 2011). This exhibit furthered the hybrid project of including Native perspectives alongside anthropological ones, wherein the catalogue presented a distinct dichotomy between the two perspectives: “one is deeply personal while the other is clearly academic” (Montoya 2013: 15). While some primacy is granted to the Native perspective, in this approach to multi-vocality it is worthwhile asking whose voice is heard and recognized foremost by the audiences? While this Navajo weaving exhibit had the benefit of community voices connecting with people associated with their community, some of the resulting interpretation nevertheless

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26 Charley and McChesney (2011) also addresses another, similar approach to dichotomizing Native arts in discourse.
remains within the shadow of anthropological and artistic matriarchy myths. As Babcock (1983) identified in the representation of the domestic primitive as embodied by iconic images linking Pueblo femininity and desire, the image of the exotic Indian maiden still persists in the aestheticization authorized by museums and such iconicity supports the idea of authenticity embodied past matriarchs through the imaginations of audience members, as in the case of Kruckmeyer (2000)’s review. Just as in the nineteenth century, the dual perspectives can lend themselves to a similar narrative of Primitive authenticity as authorized by Fewkes (McChesney 2003). Where museum goers can view the Navajo perspective in their terms as a (Primitive) matriarchy myth alongside a more authorized, scientific/anthropological (or modern/civilized) perspective, the Navajo perspective may in fact reinforce the notion of an authentic Primitive art. Where Spider Woman is only a mythic matriarch to a non-Native artist, the combined perspectives could lend themselves to such symbolic objectification occurring. The significance of weaving to the Navajo people, from their viewpoint could be obscured in the dichotomized perspectives wherein one perspective holds more authority in the museum’s role as a civilizing space.

My analysis here is to examine the effects of discourse surrounding these ethnographic items in Southwest Native American traditions and what this discourse means in the context of national settings for display. While the role of women is significant in traditions of pottery and weaving among Pueblo and Navajo people, matriarchal discourse has a significant interpretation and meaning within the context of museums as institutions reifying national identity. In examining Legacy of Generations, I highlight how artwriting reproduced as part of museum representations allow for the valorization of these objects through this discourse, where articulations of matriarchy
support the notion of an authentic Indian identity fit for consumption, collection, and display. Displaying these items as fine art within national spaces for cultural heritage does not undo colonialist appropriations. Rather, this practice becomes a part of continuing to couple art market commoditization with rituals of national citizenship. Collaborative exhibits, such as that of *Woven by Grandmothers* and subsequent collaborative weaving exhibits, work to consider the vocality of artists and their communities. This approach can help community members have more agency in the interpretation of their work, but aspects of previously established narratives persist within museum representations and still require indigenous people to adopt and navigate through the meanings imparted by them. Specifically, ideas about a primitive matriarchy persist in authoritative representations of Southwest artistic traditions where exhibits emphasize the femininity of artists. These authoritative representations draw from discourses which ultimately seek to authenticate primitive art as part of a distinctly American tradition, adopted as a Classicized tradition with antique roots within the space of the museum gallery.
Section II: Artist Interactions with Classical Frameworks

In this section exploring the cases of three contemporary Native American artists, I explore the agency of these artists in their engagements with museum frameworks involving Classicization and gendered representation. Chapter three explores the case of Rose B. Simpson, who both exemplifies the established art world representations of matrilineal and matriarchal traditions in the Southwest and challenges those terms through her own authoritative representations of her work. Chapters four and five focus on two contemporary Native American artists outside of the Southwest art market with its matriarchal traditions. First, I consider Julie Buffalohead in order to understand how her art fits within art discourses between the Classical and Primitive. While outside of the matriarchal discourses of the artwriting on Pueblo potters surrounding artists in the Southwest such as Rose B. Simpson, Julie Buffalohead explores similar aspects of her identity as both a Native artist and a woman. In the next chapter, I discuss the art of Kent Monkman in terms of his gender subversion that explores aspects of his own Queer Native identity, contesting the construction of Native femininity within museum discourses in a way that blatantly toys with Classicism and Primitivism. This discussion is relevant to considering in a broader scope the ways in which Native art is understood in relation to Primitivism and Classicism and the similar roles of gender in these representations even outside of Matriarchy constructs.
Chapter 3
Rose B. Simpson: Matriarchy and Indigenous Femininity as Post-Colonial Primitivism

I turn now to my first artist case study to examine the works of Rose B. Simpson, the daughter of Roxanne Swentzell and a member the prominent line of Naranjo family potters at Santa Clara pueblo. Simpson’s reputation as an artist is forged in part from her connections to the predecessors in her family line. At the same time, Simpson has worked through and against this legacy by contributing her own voice to discussions of her work. I consider the ways in which Simpson addresses Primitivism both through her work and in discourses about her work. While acknowledging her heritage as a Santa Clara potter, Simpson’s mixed-media sculptures engage other aspects of her identity as a modern artist that transcend her recognition as descended from a famous line of potters. In this way, Simpson is an example of what Ruth Phillips (2015) explores as the existence of multiple modernisms, including settler-modernisms and indigenous modernisms. Phillips’ explication of Primitivism in modern art notes that settler-modernisms helped to create the category of Primitive art, partly out of appreciation and identification with the alienating conditions felt in relation to modern existence. Key to my analysis of Simpson is considering the ways in which she reclaims aspects of her heritage from settler-modernisms in forming her post-modern identity. Simpson is post-modern in the way she acknowledges and reflects upon her identity as a contemporary artist with influence from her ancestral heritage.

References to ancestral heritage within indigenous modernisms can be understood as influenced by settler-modernist appropriations as much as they are reclamations of heritage on the part of the indigenous artists. For example, Simpson’s 2017 residency at
Aztec Ruins National Monument can be seen as a reappropriation of this site, if only temporarily, from the narrative of universal heritage. She worked with National Park Service Staff to reinterpret Chacoan artifacts and to study their aesthetics at this world heritage site. Here I examine how Simpson engages with her heritage and also incorporates new elements into her artwork that come from a range of influences outside of her family. I use Simpson’s example to illustrate how a contemporary potter can express her identity by both acknowledging her legacy in relation to matriarchal discourse in artwriting while also expressing individuality and personal experience in a complex engagement with the frameworks of artwriting and its authenticated primitivism.

In this chapter, I explore how Simpson’s artwork, featured in a few recent exhibitions, stresses individual and personal experience in relation to values that connect her to her community. I discuss the framing of her artwork in terms of a matriarchal discourse in a representational tradition that links her and her family members to the Santa Clara potter Rose Naranjo and the ancestral legacy surrounding her as a Puebloan pottery Matriarch, as well as art world discourses outside of the community. For this analysis, I discuss at length a few pieces in her 2018-2019 exhibition, *LIT: The Work of Rose B. Simpson*, at the Wheelwright Museum in Santa Fe, NM. As the introduction to this exhibit explains, “themes of Pueblo identity, maternity, self-portraiture, post-apocalyptic warriors, and graffiti appear throughout the gallery. Simpson’s sculptures disrupt the aesthetic typically associated with Pueblo art to speak to issues beyond her community” (Wheelwright Museum 2018).

In her own words, Simpson expresses this disruption as part of a desire for accessibility in her art, so that it can be “accessible enough that I draw somebody in, and
then I want it to be uncomfortable enough that they suspend disbelief” (Simpson, Wheelwright Museum, 2018). As a post-modern artist disrupting the dichotomies of tradition and modern innovation, Simpson highlights in her work issues of heritage, identity, and the matriarchal discourse that underpins Puebloan ceramic art, while bringing her own personal stake in those discourses to the fore of her artistry. I consider Simpson not only as a currently active descendant of one of the recognized Puebloan pottery matrilines, but also one who engages with this legacy by both drawing from the trope of matrilineal descent and constructing an artistic identity beyond it.

Through catalogues and museum labels, for instance, artwriting constructs an artist’s reputation through her connection to a master artist’s legacy (McChesney 2012); in Simpson’s case, that legacy comprises her mother Roxanne Swentzell and other female relatives in the Naranjo line. Simpson asserts her own authority in this narrative, both alluding to her mother’s legacy while keeping her father’s legacy as a wood and metal sculptor in her biography (or, as on her website, mentioning her daughter but neither parent; see Simpson 2019). In this way, Simpson both draws from and challenges the legitimizing discourses of artwriting as an incorporation of her practice that features acknowledgement of this framework through self-reflection. Simpson brings this self-reflection into the discourse around her artwork, which is post-modern in its approach to matriarchal representations of Pueblo artists and indigenous feminine identity.

The exhibit opens with a pair of self-portrait sculptures sharing a case. In Prayer (2014), Simpson portrays herself wearing a traditional Puebloan woman’s dress, though her tattoos and designs on the dress point to experiences in urban life outside of her Pueblo community (Figure 1). “It’s not what you look like, but the power of your
prayer,” Simpson says of this piece, reconciling what others might see as a tension in her identity with an affirmation of her confidence (Simpson, Wheelwright Museum 2018). Elsewhere, Simpson has written of the strong connection she has with place in her artwork. Leaving her home community for school in Albuquerque, Simpson described how her connection to the northern New Mexican low-rider culture of Española, where she grew up, was important to her socially and artistically. Residing in this urban community adjacent to her Native community of Santa Clara during her young adulthood as a college student, she described her invigorating experience:

…but without the grounding of place, I was spinning without a center. In the spring semester of 2002, I dragged my new Acoma roommate to a Dead Prez concert at the Sunshine, and afterward, as is tradition, we followed the midnight horde to the Frontier for a breakfast burrito. There we met Mike360, a long-haired cholo who walked up to our booth in shell-toe shoes, a flute hanging from a Peruvian-style holster across his chest.

“Heeey … nice turquoise earrings, sister,” he said to me. “What tribe are you?”

“Santa Clara,” I answered, feeling so flashy rocking my Feast Day gear, my Pueblo bling.

“Isn’t that up by Española? The Lowrider Capital of the World?”

I nodded and smiled.

“Órale …” he said. “Heeey … well maybe you can help me out … I have an idea to build a lowrider that runs on biodiesel …”

Through Mike360 I found another family and, with it, passion and direction through community—vivid names on the sides of trains and on billboards, water towers, cinderblock walls, on everything between Taos and Silver City. I’d conjure the face or the sound of the voice behind the spray paint, slap tag, or fat marker and smile, feeling like this was my people’s turf. I’m here. I’m here. I’m here. I’m here. Chanted emblazoned names like Chale. Fueds. Shine. Husle. Muerte. Ceaso. Weso. Ruein. Kwiot. Avol. Grab. Afue. Gaen. WM7. And Rude, may he rest in peace. These souls are puro New Mexico. (Simpson 2018, online source)

In this account, family and community are deeply rooted in place, personal connection, and shared practice, yet these aspects of her post-modern identity do not
strictly or exclusively rely upon blood ties or Pueblo tradition. Simpson expresses a strong sense of place in relation to finding community outside of her Pueblo home. The expression of place defines “puro [pure] New Mexico” through her lived experience of it while also transcending categories that might counter her developing concern for a place-based identity. While Guthrie (2013) describes the tri-racial categories dominant in discourses about Northern New Mexico that are often pervasive in discussing heritage in the Española valley for instance, Simpson instead uses language that blends and challenges such dichotomies. Her “people” are defined in connection to land, but that land is urban, graffitied, shared between her and other members of the low-rider community: a space that is not separated out as Native or Hispanic or White. “Tradition” here is a late night breakfast burrito at the Frontier restaurant in Albuquerque, a hundred miles south of Española, and her “traditional” Feast Day jewelry is “gear” and “bling” in this setting. Her sense of direction, of belonging, is grounded in the communal practice of making graffiti with other members of this urban community. This picture of New Mexico has features of “traditional” categories, but it is realized in urban terms, much like her sculpture, Prayer. Her identity is valid and expressed not so much in a pristine image of a traditional appearance relating to the past that has been codified in museum representations of a specific Other, but as a mixture that incorporates a multi-faceted identity that is neither isolated as “Native” nor “urban.”

Alongside Prayer stands Genesis (2017), where Simpson stands as a protective figure holding her daughter.²⁷ One can feel a connection to her earlier work, Nurturer (2013), although now her sculpture is even more personal, with a more clearly feminine shape and prominently displayed (rather than bundled up) infant figure in her arms. In

²⁷ See fig. 1.
this new work, her role as a mother is emphasized, and her transformation from protected to protector is significant to her personal reflections of self. Simpson uses her sculptures to express the intangible inner lives of individuals as androgynous human forms. The androgyny of many of Simpson’s figures allows her depiction of gender to avoid the problem of sexualization rampant in Primitivist artworks, while perhaps adding a dimension of gender queerness or ambiguity to some of her works.

Another noteworthy reflexive piece, *Self-Portrait (2016)*, portrays the artist while pregnant and as rendered into a hybrid human-car figure (Figure 2). In this work, Simpson imagined her body as a V-8 engine: “After [the birth], I was human again,” Simpson writes of her pregnancy. “It was the building of the baby that felt like my body was out of control, like a ’69 Chevelle going full speed, and my brain was a deflated balloon hanging off the rear bumper” (Simpson, Wheelwright Museum, 2018). The blending of human and machine resembles Donna Harraway’s post-modern cyborg figure (Harraway 1985). This image of the cyborg figure also suggests post-apocalyptic temporality, another theme that features in Simpson’s work. Rather than placing herself in a romantic past, Simpson expresses her present urbanity through a form of Indigenous futuristic art that is solidly grounded in the material realities of the contemporary world.

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28 This theme was central to her trilogy of sculptures on display at the Denver Art Museum’s exhibit, *Sovereign: Independent Voices*, from 2013-2015. In addition to Simpson, that exhibit featured the works of contemporary Native American artists Virgil Ortiz and Kent Monkman (whom I discuss in a later section), who work to “alter perceptions of self and history” (Lukavic 2013, pamphlet introduction). In that exhibit, Simpson’s sculptures *Warrior (2012)*, *Explorer (2013)*, and *Nurturer (2013)* narrate states of personal transformation.

29 For example, Connelly (1995) and Duncan (1995) both bring their attention to Picasso’s *Les Demoiselles d’Avignon* (1907) on this topic. Connelly argues that the “aggressive sexuality of the *Demoiselles* forges an additional link with the grotesque tradition and with characterization with idols” (1995, 107). In her analysis, grotesque sexuality was overlaid with depictions of carnality translated through Judeo-Christian iconography and characteristic of Primitive idols. For Duncan, the painting privileges the male viewer and in drawing from figures in African art “constitutes not an homage to ‘the primitive’ but a means of framing woman as ‘other,’ one whose savage, animalistic, inner self stands opposed to the civilized, reflective male” (1995, 117). In this canonical work, then, sexuality and Primitivism come together to depict a female Other in opposition to rational male order.
Many authors have critiqued exhibits for placing the American Indians in a static past (e.g., Nason 1995, Penney 1995); the Wheelwright exhibit defies that positioning through lack of a static temporality. Aspects of Simpson’s sculptures such as her self-portrait, with the androgynous clay figure beneath the parts of the machine in this case, suggest a form of Primitivist art through idol-like and hybrid figures as described by Connelly (1995). While one characteristic of Primitivism is that modern artists derive inspiration from any number of ethnographic sources (African, Oceanic, Ancient Egyptian) and Simpson’s own sculptures may suggest similar generic ambiguity, her figures are informed with her own particular culture in mind. In the installation, Simpson surrounds her post-apocalyptic figures with her Ancestors series (2016), which is comprised of masks that specifically emphasize her connections to her ancestors (Simpson, Wheelwright Museum, 2018).

Rose Simpson’s work in this exhibit also includes pieces from the Directed series, created during her residency at the Denver Art Museum in 2014. Arranged around the center of the exhibit’s main gallery, Directed features five post-apocalyptic warriors representing the four cardinal directions and a center to represent a significant component of Puebloan cosmology (Figure 3). The warriors are draped with jewelry-like adornments, which the exhibit states “can be viewed as protective armor” (Wheelwright 2018). The adornments are both personal, connecting with the idea of adornment and the self-expression of identity, and give new meaning to traditional tribal adornments in a futuristic setting. The warriors resemble those of Virgil Ortiz’s series, Pueblo Revolt: 1680/2180, in which Ortiz portrays the Pueblo Revolt in a futuristic setting. Indigenous

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30 This approach is in contrast to Primitivists such as Gaugin or Picasso, who copied generally and combined various figures as inspired by artifacts from various cultures (Connelly 1995).
futurism, as embodied in the work of Ortiz and Simpson, reworks the positioning of Native Americans in a static past and places them in an imagined future that includes elements of the past and present. In this way, indigenous subjects exist in a contemporary location that is simultaneously connected to past, present, and a potential future.

Simpson’s *Directed* warriors also relate to another of her pieces in the Wheelwright exhibit. *Directed* encompasses *Baby* (2010-2014), another self-portrait that is also identified with Simpson’s daughter, Cedar, who was born two years after the completion of the sculpture (Figure 4). In the Wheelwright’s installation, the warriors of *Directed* are positioned around *Baby*. The resulting relationship between these works is explained thus:

“Like Rose, who protects her young daughter against the challenges she herself faced as a young person, the warriors defend against stereotypes about indigenous identity. ‘Can we rewind, take away Western culture’s idea of what’s beautiful, what’s acceptable, the stereotypes of what it means to be Native, what it means to be any kind of culture…’” (Simpson, Wheelwright Museum, 2018)

Through the combined museum interpretation and artist statement in the label accompanying *Directed* and *Baby*, these two works combine to engage with indigenous identity and the lived experience of maternity. The way in which *Baby* is both a self-portrait and a representation of her daughter renders the sculpture at once as both a subject of self-representation and an object engaged with her personal subjectivity as a protective maternal figure. The continuity of a maternal line is embodied in the multi-dimensional subjectivity of *Baby*, a figure that simultaneously represents the mother as a daughter and the new mother via her daughter through its dual-representation of Simpson and her daughter.
As an addendum to *LIT*, “Rose’s Cabinet of Curiosities” is a small installation that resides outside of the main gallery. It includes an untitled work by her parents, Roxanne Swentzell and Patrick Simpson, located in the center of this side gallery.\footnote{Simpson’s mother, Roxanne Swentzell, is a Santa Clara sculptor who works in clay and her father, Patrick Simpson, is an artist who works in metal and wood (Wheelwright 2018). The exhibit mentions both and uses this unusual collaborative work between the two artists to highlight their influence on her work. However, Swentzell and Simpson are not otherwise mentioned as working together: Swentzell and Simpson’s collaboration is not noted except in this ancillary exhibit, as a part of their daughter’s biography.}

Known as the “horned c-section” according to Rose Simpson, *Untitled 1983* is a representation of Roxanne Swentzell giving birth to her (Figure 5). Out of a metal-horned clay figure, its belly split open, emerges a bundled baby, a precursor to Rose Simpson’s 2010-2014 infant sculpture self-portrait. The label accompanying her parents’ sculpture emphasizes the significant influence that both of her parents imparted on her. This sculpture of birthing an infant shows the continuity of a maternal line, which is later embodied by Rose Simpson’s own infant sculpture. At the same time, the gleaming metallic contributions of Patrick Simpson in the 1983 sculpture point to the influence of both parents in creating the artist who Rose Simpson would later become. The label quotes Rose, who explains:

‘And so, between the two of them, watching my mother use the chainsaw and fix the truck, and watching my dad be really excited about a project, it made me feel like nothing is impossible. We could do what we wanted regardless of gender.’ In time she would also master sewing, drawing, painting, welding, and automotive design and repair. (Simpson, Wheelwright Museum, 2018)

While she acknowledges the influence of both her parents, Rose Simpson’s matrilineal connections are a prominent part of her legacy and work. In a 2009 exhibition at the Heard Museum, *Mothers & Daughters: Stories In Clay*, Roxanne Swentzell and Rose Simpson were featured among the sets of mothers and daughters from the Naranjo
family at Santa Clara who were included. This exhibit framed the artists’ works explicitly in terms of artistic inheritance through a line of women, but it also included the artists’ own thoughts on these relationships, keeping this representation of lineal descent personal and intimate. The accompanying catalogue included an essay in which Roxanne Swentzell discussed the centrality of her grandmother, Rose Naranjo, to their family for five generations. Swentzell likened her grandmother’s (Simpson’s great-grandmother’s) role to that of a queen bee, with the family separating off into new nuclear families or new hives at the time of the exhibition (Swentzell 2008). Rose Naranjo’s own matrilineal heritage traces back to a common ancestor with Nampeyo, the first artistic matriarch from Hopi and the first named Native American artist, through her adoption by Corn Tassel, a relative of the renowned Hopi-Tewa potter through their common Tewa Corn Clan ancestry (Schaaf 2009, 35-36). The Naranjo matriarch, with almost mytho-historic roots in her own pottery legacy, thus takes precedence as a central figure in the social lives of the pairs of women featured in this exhibit, as recognized in Swentzell’s concluding statements.

Yet, Simpson also draws her influence from both parents and discusses her legacy in a way that transcends a straightforward matriline. When asked about her family’s pottery legacy, Simpson points to a familial tradition going back several centuries, according to archeological records:

‘How long has pottery been in your family?’ she asked. ‘About 700 years,’ I said. ‘Give or take.’ It didn’t seem so long compared to the 13,000-year ancestry of ceramics in, say, Japan. (Simpson 2018, online source)

Thus, while Simpson acknowledges a long family history going back to her ancestral antiquity, she also humbly frames this acknowledgement within the legacy of greater
trajectories of world history. She does not compare her family’s pottery making in terms of Western antiquity, but compares that history with Japanese ceramics (which she studied in art school) in order to downplay her family legacy in giving her skills a cultural pedigree. In making hers a “mere” 700-year family practice, Simpson dismisses the notion that such a history gives her a particular primitive authenticity when she places her practice within a global art historical perspective. In the context of the above acknowledgement, she has to answer why she has chosen to attend graduate school while already having such a “cultural pedigree,” as deemed by the visiting artist she met in a classroom (Simpson 2018). This illustrates some of the paradoxes between Classicism and Primitivism. The visiting artist treated Simpson’s training in ceramics via graduate school as either counter or superfluous to Simpson’s traditional training at home in her Pueblo; however, Simpson chooses to place herself in a larger frame within the art world, beyond claiming recognition through a matriline.

As Peterson (1997) observes, college training is seen as something that more contemporary or “avant-garde” artists pursue in spite of having authentic training outside of the Anglo world. Along those lines, Simpson’s ability to trace her artistic skills to a primitive tradition along a far-reaching matriline becomes a “cultural pedigree” in the art world, and it is this rendering of her genealogy into the discourse of artwriting that truly Classicizes her Puebloan art and gives her a pedigree. Academic art training stands in opposition to authentic primitive art, yet such art nevertheless becomes recognized through artwriting as having authenticity, rendered in the terms of Classicism and cultural valorization (here “pedigree”). In this historical moment, an artist of Simpson’s stature
can draw on both means of establishing her reputation, although she might choose to privilege one source of “authenticity” over another.

Through Simpson’s “Cabinet of Curiosities,” she addresses directly the role of “primitivism” and the meaning of objects in displaying the arts of Native Americans and other indigenous peoples (Figure 6). The introduction to this cabinet section reads:

Every artist, and in fact almost every human, accumulates objects which have or to which they assign special meaning. We all live with family photos, childhood toys, gifts from relatives and friends, and objects we have purchased or found. To Rose, those accumulations in our homes, offices, workshops, and even museums are reminiscent of the spoils of conquest that were displayed in private ‘cabinets’ and in the halls of ethnology in museums of North America and Europe starting at least as early as the sixteenth century. The arts of Native Americans, Africans, Pacific Islanders, Indonesians, Asians, and others were enclosed in casework with little or no information. These exhibitions were often an attempt to convey the ‘primitivism’ of Indigenous peoples living under the oppression of colonialism and to justify colonialism (Wheelwright Museum 2018).

The introductory panel here conveys the direct significance of colonialism in the collection and interpretation of ethnological objects in relation to primitivism. This description of historical cabinets for collecting is underlined, but Simpson also reinterprets the meaning behind collected objects in creating her own cabinets. In re-appropriating them to her own artistic purposes, she brings these objects into a discourse that implicates her personal experience, rather than displaying them as exotic curiosities. In doing so, Simpson acknowledges the discourses and related processes that museums have used in creating the Primitive through objects. Simpson then implicates herself in this process as a way of strategically challenging them. She also forces the viewer to reconsider objects as carrying more personal meaning in this way. The viewer may recognize their own belongings or connect with them in such a way that they consider
their own individual experiences. Through this display, Simpson reclaims the meanings of the objects as her own, giving them interpretative information that conveys her personal meanings while recognizing that objects can have special meaning on an individual level.

This panel references the tradition of primitivism in displaying indigenous art with little information and poor interpretation, as mere objects for ethnological fascination, and how this primitivism impacts many Native Americans in remaining wary of museums for this continued interpretive legacy. In tracing the colonial legacy of European collecting outside of Old World antiquity, wherein curios included some classical relics, Thomas (1991) notes that over time these categories largely encompassed non-Western artifacts and natural specimens. From these expanded categories, narratives and classificatory schemes developed around Europeans’ ambivalent desire to describe, know, and therefore colonize foreign items through containment in their collections. In countering these dominant practices, Rose Simpson’s curation of her own cabinet of curiosity uses objects from her life labeled to convey her own special meanings, demystifying the museum object as impersonal while reclaiming the museum space through her own curation and accompanying interpretations. Following Frances Connelly’s assertion that Primitivism is an inversion of Classicism (Connelly 1995), Simpson’s work reveals the way in which the living artifacts traced to Native American antiquity have become esteemed as Primitive art in the art world. Connections to an ancient ancestry impart value for Primitive art, though Simpson maintains this ancestry as one of personal value related to those of her family’s Puebloan worldviews, not as an objectified category or “tradition” in the Western art world.
Simpson assumes ownership of representations of Pueblo art traditions and asserts herself through actively fusing her artistic legacy with her academic art training and post-modern, contemporary perspective. Pride in her lineage grounds her as a member of a continuing line of women potters at Santa Clara, yet she also remains connected to the art of her Anglo patrilateral influence as well. Her experiences are framed as both a daughter and a mother, as a Native woman, and as a person connected to her family, her home, and her inner self. Home for her is New Mexico, a place ascribed with both the traditions and contemporary presence of the Santa Clara reservation as well as the cultural practices of its urban surroundings. Simpson maintains strong connections to her ancestry from the ancient past while also referencing post-apocalyptic futures. For Simpson, none of these categories is mutually exclusive or contradictory, and together they comprise her identity as a whole.

Artists such as Simpson have reclaimed the aesthetics of Primitivism, identified as based in appropriations among settler-modernists from indigenous arts according to Phillips (2015), and she has reinterpreted those aesthetics to provide an overall reinterpretation of primitive art through her post-colonial worldview. “I will study how my ancestors…did not define a separation between aesthetic awareness and the utilitarian object, from architecture to a vessel for eating,” Simpson stated, ahead of her Chaco residency (Wainright 2017). In Simpson’s view, the modern dichotomy of art and utilitarian object is antithetical to her ancestral aesthetics. At first, this distinction seems to reify antiquity and modernity as antithetical categories, yet Simpson’s emphasis on the role that an ancestrally-formed worldview plays in her art blurs this binary. “We are utilitarian objects in an aesthetic experience,” Simpson states in a video created during
her residency at the Denver Art Museum (Simpson 2014). In part performative, her art is
constituted by the way in which she performs her experience of this utilitarian aesthetic.
Both the materials she works with and living beings such as herself (and her occasional
model) form her post-modern identity embodied by her artwork that combines an
aesthetic sense of an ancient past, contemporary present, and future possibilities.
Simpson’s connection to multiple temporal and locational identities reappropriates
heritage in her own terms about ancestry while complicating straightforward narratives
that associate her artistic practice as either traditional or modern. Her art is hybrid: a
blend of both ancestral and contemporary influences.
Chapter 4
Julie Buffalohead: Art and Native Women’s Agency Outside of the Southwest

I begin this broader consideration of the ways Native art is understood in relation to Primitivism and Classicism and the similar roles of gender in representations outside of matriarchal constructs with an analysis of the artwork of Julie Buffalohead of the Ponca Tribe of Oklahoma. Buffalohead provides an interesting case study for my analysis in comparison to Rose B. Simpson due to her exploration of Native identity, femininity and motherhood, and her use of Primitivist tropes amidst toying with stereotypes and confronting aspects of her intersectional identity through her art. While she works in several media, I focus primarily on her two-dimensional oil paintings and collage work.

Drawing from two of Nancy Mithlo’s (2008) central theses concerning the reproduction of gendered Indian stereotypes, I turn my attention away from exclusively scrutinizing the subjectivities of Native women participating in the Southwest art market toward an approach which features Pan-Indianism as a device for understanding the construction of Native femininity in exhibits. Due to the historical legacy of Native American racial oppression which she describes as creating “a generic group ideology” related to an “inescapable” grouping designation, Mithlo argues for a Pan-Indian perspective that nevertheless enables designations that critique racial bias, historically.

Along these lines, Mithlo advocates the recognition of binaries and alterity in Native American imagery. As part of her thesis on binaries and alterity, she also recognizes the theoretical value of essentialized identities, especially as these identities

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32 See Mithlo (2008, 154-157) for a full discussion of her theoretical aims. These including addressing stereotypes, creativity, Pan-Indianism, realism, and binaries and alterity.
33 Mithlo (2008, 156) argues that the “[t]otal eradication of stereotypes as multtribal referents prevents the political mobilization of counternarratives based on common histories of oppression.”
have the potential for reclamation by Native groups. My discussion of Buffalohead highlights the relevance of examining the construction of Native femininity from this theoretical position on representations of Native identity. Another useful perspective is offered by Hilary N. Weaver (2010), who argues for a constructionist approach to representation (through language), pointing to identity’s existence in relation to others. The relevant difference between these perspectives pertains to the distinctions constructed between Native and non-Native identity. In her discussion, Weaver describes how the term “Indian” reinforces the image of people linked to a romantic historic past. On this basis, Weaver argues against linear, bicultural models, though for the sake of my argument here, I find that Weaver brings up important points of critique. At the same time, I endorse the argument for theorotical value in the exploration of essentialized identity that Mithlo promotes.

I briefly examine Buffalohead’s identity as a Plains Indian woman in contrast to the women artists characterized within the artistic matriline of the Southwest. Buffalohead neither comes from a commodified art market tradition with as much historical depth as is found in the Southwest, nor is her tribe matrilineal. As the daughter of a white mother and Ponca father, her tribe’s patrilineality\(^{34}\) serves as a useful contrast to the stereotypic rhetorical trope of Native American matriarchy prevalent in the artwriting about (or representations of) Southwestern potters in particular. As I discuss in this chapter, her paternal clan identity is a significant feature of her artwork. But first it is important to explore this local means of determining one’s identity in terms of its contrast

\(^{34}\) See Gilley (2010) and Buffalohead’s brother, historian Eric Buffalohead (2004), for discussions on patrilneality among the Ponca.
with the dominant rhetorical trope of matriarchy, along with other aspects of the representation of Native Americans and gender.\textsuperscript{35}

I find three considerations significant in this contrast that are relevant for addressing Buffalohead’s work in the subversion of stereotypes. First, the categorization of Plains Indians as more savage or barbaric (when compared to Southwestern tribes, in particular the Pueblo Indians, who are iconic of the domestic Primitive) relates to particular ideologies in the creation of Classically-derived hierarchies in nineteenth century cultural evolutionary schemes. Second, these ideologies of cultural evolution served to both gender groups of people and in turn relate gender practices to particular representations of the Other. Lastly, these ideologies persist in stereotypical representations that feature the Plains Indian chief as iconic of Native Americans, while relegating Plains Indian women to subaltern or invisible positions through this imagery. This situation presents a paradox in the representation of Native American women, wherein iconicity renders visible what is desirable and exotic to the exclusion of other representations of Native women. Outside of the image of the exotic or domesticated Primitive, ranging from Pocahontas or Sacajawea to Nampeyo, matriarch of one of the best-known Southwest pottery traditions and the first named Indian artist (McCoy 1985), images of Native femininity are passive and subservient figures in the shadow of the “noble savage” Plains Indian chief.\textsuperscript{36}

\textsuperscript{35} Consider, for instance, Fraser’s \textit{End of the Trail}, referenced in both discussions by Silberman (2013: 122) and Monkman (2016), an iconic image of the defeated and romanticized male Indian warrior that is prolific in its Classical imagery. Or, conversely, consider the exotic Indian maiden as captured in Edward Curtis’ \textit{Zuni Pueblo Girl} (1903) and other prevalent images of Zuni olla maidens referenced in Babcock (1993).

\textsuperscript{36} See McChesney (2003, 57-88), for a discussion of Nampeyo’s iconic significance among the shifting gendered representations of Native American women, as well as Green (1974) for Pocahontas and McLaughlin (2003) for Sacajawea.
The categories of “Plains Indian” versus “Southwestern Indian” relate back to categorizations derived from cultural evolutionary ideas. Rebecca Kennedy (2018) highlights the emphasis on environmental determinism, an ancient theory of human diversity prevalent in Hippocratic literature, as significant in the displays of Otis T. Mason at World’s Fairs and at the Smithsonian Institution. These cultural areas prioritized material and region over specific tribal characteristic in exhibit displays (Kennedy 2018). I discuss these groupings for the sake of addressing the present effects of their historical definition and continued use. In dealing with that historicism, however, it is also worth noting the factor of environmental determinism in the creation of these regional categories.\textsuperscript{37} I primarily focus on broader categorizations of Native Americans from this point, but some aspects of these culture groupings are relevant background to the issue of gendered representation to keep in mind.\textsuperscript{38}

In examining her recent solo exhibition \textit{Eyes on: Julie Buffalohead}, displayed within the larger exhibition, \textit{Stampede: Animals in Art} at the Denver Art Museum, I find that Buffalohead’s art uses modern Primitivist style and tropes, particularly those associated with surrealism, as part of her exploration of political and social issues pertaining to her identity as a woman and a member of the Ponca tribe. She uses several animal figures to represent clan identities significant to her tribe, in an admixture with her typical trickster characters and other animals related to Native storytelling. As the DAM

\textsuperscript{37} As Kennedy (2018) also points out, current popular theories continue to be generated along the lines of environmental determinism. See my discussion on Douglas’ and d’Harnoncourt’s (1941) use of culture areas in chapter 1 as well.

\textsuperscript{38} At its core, environmental determinism connects physical, mental, and cultural differences among people to their environments. In the Ancient Greek conception, environmental determinism tended to promote a hierarchy between people (that is, based on how similar or foreign people were to each other). This hierarchy later merged with ideologies of racial progress in the 19\textsuperscript{th} century ideologies of Mason and his contemporaries. Their neo-environmental determinism resulted in a comparative perspective on technology according to “cultural area,” based on climate, geography, and topology (Kennedy 2018).
noted in its label copy, “Her paintings are not literal interpretations of clan teachings; rather they are her own constructs, which allow her to question, critique, and reflect upon humanity and society” (Denver Art Museum 2018). In addition to the occasional tribal symbol, Buffalohead’s use of these anthropomorphic animal characters representing her clan and figures from various Native American folklore traditions creates visual narratives suggestive of the Primitive through the surrealist setting and style of her work. However, Buffalohead works from this style in order to question essentialized Native identity through the venue of an (essentializing) Primitivist scene. Drawing on Mithlo’s recognition of a Pan-Indian approach that allows for the exploration of Native identity while addressing binaries and al terity, I contend that Buffalohead uses various Primitivist tropes to confront stereotypes in the surrealist milieu she constructs in her paintings.

Recent art historical discourse provides a useful context for interpreting this aspect of Buffalohead’s work. In his analysis of several contemporary Native American artists including Buffalohead, art historian Robert B. Silberman (2013) discusses what it means for Native American art to be surrealist, a form of modernist art that works within Primitivism. Following Silberman, I begin with the premise that surrealist Native American art is a contentious category, as non-Native artists derived their surrealism within the Primitivist artistic mode of appropriation. Such an approach relates to Connelly’s assessment Primitivism as an art style that “existed in the mind of the European beholder,” as an idea of the “primitive” that influenced European artists rather than any particular source or set of images (Connelly 1995, 2). Silberman argues that

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39 Following Connelly (1995), Primitivism is an art category that borrows from primitive arts, or those from indigenous/non-European cultures that are positioned as inverse to orderly, civilized Classical art. One aspect central to Connelly’s thesis is that Primitivism is characterized as pre-or irrational, in an inverse relationship to the rationality associated with Classicism.

40 See also Martínez (2015) for more on this contentious discussion about Indian art.
some Native American contemporary art constitutes a re-appropriation of Primitivism, and that Native American surrealism, perhaps in one sense a contradiction, also represents a “complex form of expression, encompassing a multiplicity of tribal identities and artistic approaches.” The case of Julie Buffalohead’s artwork illustrates the significance of that assessment. I draw from Silberman’s approach in describing Buffalohead’s work as Native American surrealist art that serves to reappropriate aspects of European Primitivism to Native ontologies. Following his insights, I find that Buffalohead’s allusions to childhood and play, the theatrical staging of her storytelling scenes, and her use of mystery and masks are particularly significant to her surrealism.\textsuperscript{41}

\textit{Black Snake Memory} (2018) is one particular painting in the \textit{Eyes On: Julie Buffalohead} exhibit that references the artist’s childhood in a playful manner; however, it is simultaneously encompassed by warning messages. In this scene, a bear, an owl, a pair of snakes, and a pair of rabbits sit around a plastic table and chairs. The owl sports a little pink birthday hat that matches the cake on the table. The scene is at first glance playful, but the rabbits leap from the accompanying snakes, which reference the snake clan and taboos its members have against touching snakes (Figure 7). Blurring into the colorful surrealist background of the painting sit two oil wells. This fantasy scene alludes to Buffalohead’s childhood, but the threat of the black snake’s pollution mars any pristine association with a European Primitivist’s nostalgia for childhood innocence. While Buffalohead draws from her memory of visits to her family on the Ponca Tribe reservation in Oklahoma in the summer where she celebrated birthdays as a child, the memory of the nearby oil wells also complicates this otherwise idyllic surrealist scene.

\footnote{Silberman (2013); see also Monkman’s (2016) discussion of surrealist artist Paul Kane’s appropriation of various Indigenous masks. I discuss Monkman and his response to Kane in the following chapter. These art practices also resonate with Ruth Phillips’ discussion of indigenous modernisms (Phillips 2015).}
Not merely nostalgic or Primitivist, *Black Snake Memory* both uses indigenous symbolism to represent danger in the world and serves as a political commentary about the threat of environmental degradation.

This painting shares several key motifs with Buffalohead’s 2010 collage (or mixed media on paper) entitled *Let the Show Begin*, which was featured as the title work of her NMAI exhibition that year. Silberman points to this work as an exemplary use of surrealist art drawing on childlike wonder and terror, comparable to the work of Lewis Carrol who inspired many surrealists through his texts (Silberman 2013, 119-120). *Let the Show Begin* engages with theatrical staging and masks as well, portraying a masked girl and masked coyote playing cards at a table while a beaver, rabbit, and several other animals frolic near the girl’s feet. The rabbit sits in a toy car and in the background a fox puts on a puppet show (Figure 9). This portrayal of child-like innocence draws from Buffalohead’s experiences, especially as a mother. In an interview with journalist Judy Woodward (2013), Buffalohead addressed the significance of depicting this child’s play. Having a daughter of her own, Buffalohead came to appreciate child’s play as a feature of roleplaying. In this painting, Buffalohead represents a masked human girl, a “personal surrogate” as Silberman identifies it, alongside a coyote trickster, both wearing masks and signifying Buffalohead’s preoccupation with masked roleplaying as a feature of Native storytelling (Silberman 2013, 121).

Silberman relates the significance of masks and trickster identities to a Native concern with disguises and doubleness in the creation of identity. The use of trickster figures by Buffalohead allows her to explore aspects of indigenous identity through toying with conventionalized representations. Other indigenous artists have also imagined
themselves as tricksters for the sake of confronting museum representations and exploring Indigenous identity. Julie Buffalohead’s self-representation or depiction of trickster figures in her imagery, alongside the frequent use of masks and disguises, allows her to create a performance of identity in the space of her paintings.

Returning to Buffalohead’s works featured in the recent Denver Art Museum exhibit, another prominent painting on display, *A Little Medicine and Magic*, provides social commentary on feminine identity using her trickster persona, Coyote in a dress (Figure 8). Perhaps more so than elsewhere, Coyote’s dress here references the identity formation of women in respect to how they adorn themselves. In the painting, Coyote gives a non-verbal admonishment to four skunks, precariously stacked on each other to match her height. The skunks seemingly have stolen Coyote’s purse and are playing with the lipstick it contained. While skunks represent a Ponca medicine clan, their role here is to play with Coyote in a scene that questions the role these feminine adornments play in the creation of women’s identities. According to the exhibit text:

Buffalohead says this painting illustrates the battle women face in embracing or resisting characteristics associated with being female. Lipstick, purses, dresses—are these choices, or are they imposed? In the past, Ponca men who accomplished many war deeds could have a young woman of their choice tattooed with star-shaped “honor marks,” which are here drawn in lipstick on the skunks’ bodies. (Denver Art Museum, 2018)

Buffalohead’s approach to addressing markers of femininity largely considers the role of choice and agency within societal norms. She uses symbols particular to her

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42 Ames’ outlining of curatorial prerogatives and aboriginal interpretation details a trickster program entitled “Rattling under Glass” (1988), involving two First Nations’ artists’ interpretive programs developed for school groups on museum visits in Western Canada (Ames 1990/2010). The program featured trickster figures from various other Native American traditions, including Plains Indian and Mayan-Aztec traditions. One of the trickster characters, Coyote, portrayed by Cuna/Rappahannock/Six Nations actress Monique Mojica, was intended by the performer to represent Native culture as a whole, or more specifically, the tangible aspects of culture—materials removed for museum collections. Jaune Quick-to-See Smith is another prominent artist who depicts Coyote as trickster in her work and frequently signs her work with a Coyote logogram (Trevelyan 2000).
culture in order to nuance her critique, but this question of feminine agency and adornment transcends her indigenous cultural concerns. In a way, Buffalohead’s concern with feminine identity has realized Frederic Douglas’ vision for connecting non-Indian women with American Indian culture through mutual associations with clothing (Parezo 2013). However, Buffalohead avoids stereotype transference and instead critiques stereotypical markers of femininity, providing a more nuanced, self-reflexive – and therefore agentive— voice. The concerns of agency in feminine identity are presented not just as a straightforward view on a tradition of cultural oppression, but rather through a depiction that allows the viewer to consider themselves in a complex system of multiple identities.

In this way, Buffalohead even challenges some of the stereotypes of the downtrodden Plains Indian woman, the mute and oppressed “squaw” that proliferates in misrepresentations of Indian women regardless of their particular cultures. Patricia Albers addressed the either pervasive absence or misrepresentation of Indian women in media in her introduction to *The Hidden Half: Studies of Plains Indian Women* (Albers 1983). Influenced by other pervasive mythic representations, the Indian Princess serves as another form of misrepresentation, having little other agency than to mediate between her people and White men (that is, as an agent of colonial desire) (Green 1974). The squaw serves as another side of this misrepresentation, a less attractive objectification for men – voiceless, passive, and often relegated to the status of burden animal (Albers 1983, Weist 1983). If not absent in the prevalent romantic imagery of Plains Indian chiefs, Plains Indian women were often represented as subservient slaves within their societies.
In separate essays, Katherine Weist and Alice Kehoe both examine the biases of nineteenth-century anthropologists in the formation of these pervasive misrepresentations. In order to avoid generalizations, Weist’s aim was only to consider the ways in which nineteenth-century Euroamericans may have misunderstood some of what they observed, recognizing that the status of women would have varied even within cultures (Weist 1983). Kehoe’s argument has even more resonance with my perspective, as she describes Classical influence in anthropology as informing views on Indian women (Kehoe 1983). Victorian thought adopted an oppositional dualism, including in the formation of ideas about the sexes, from Greek thought. This dualism then informed developments in ethnographic comparativism and cultural evolution. These perspectives were also inspired by popular conceptions of the European lower classes as well: “The traditional picture of the Plains Indian woman is really that of an Irish housemaid of the late Victorian era clothed in a buckskin dress,” asserts Kehoe (1983, 70). Comparativism, combined with Victorian mores and ideas about gender and class division, was a strong factor in creating the iconic downtrodden Indian woman.

In an interesting complement to this assessment, DeAngelis (2018) describes an inverse to this representation in the influence of North American ethnography on Classical Studies. In the process of claiming Classical culture as an inheritance of the elite, European peasants including those in contemporary Mediterranean countries were imagined as less worthy inheritors through similar modes of comparativism. In DeAngelis’ view, the creation of the iconic European peasant derived from an elite European conception of Indian savages abroad (DeAngelis 2018). This is the same iconic peasant that Kehoe (1983) argues nineteenth century anthropologists re-clothed as
downtrodden Indian women. Linked through illiteracy and other markers of lower class status, perhaps the two images involved a complex influence upon one another. The iconicity of either downtrodden woman, European or Indian, points to similar systems of ideological representations in creating negative stereotypes.

This genealogical consideration of negative iconicity relates back to the issue that Buffalohead seeks to address in *A Little Medicine and Magic*, and elsewhere in her artwork. Representations of femininity are formed out of complex social understandings about gender within, across, and between cultures. Buffalohead’s identity comes from both her Indian and non-Indian heritage, and the former has a particular burden of misrepresentation that accompanies it. Yet at the same time, she challenges the stereotype of the menial Plains Indian woman by enshrouding her particular cultural marker in a larger question of feminine choice and agency. The dress, purse, and lipstick are the overarching indexes of feminine identity that she toys with in her painting. The tattoo symbol means more to her and people within her culture, adding intricacy to her exploration of identity, but is not meant to reify the suggestion of a particularly oppressed Native femininity as the signs of Western femininity do.

The Honor Mark symbol itself is a playful mystery adorned in lipstick by the skunks, actors in this Primitivist scene. Julie Buffalohead’s artwork, even with some of its darker qualities and subject matter, ultimately presents a space for dreams and play. While she uses some Primitivist imagery such as the subtle, occasional symbol, she does so with a deliberation beyond hieroglyphic appropriation (Connelly 1995, Phillips 2015). Buffalohead does not rely on stereotypical images except in the suggestion of them, often played with by her animal actors as puppets. Notably, one of the few appearances of a
feathered headdress is in her piece, *Christina Fallin on a Stick* (2014). Celebrity Christina Fallin’s cultural appropriation receives some jarring mockery as a squirrel raises her head up on a popsicle stick, presumably a cut-out of a head like that of a paper doll, in this painting (Figure 10). Buffalohead’s work is a combination of playfulness and mocking in works such as this, and is not always sympathetic to women for the sake of common empathy. Her exploration of her identity and agency as a woman also includes attacks on the misrepresentations of people such as herself.

Some of her animals are banded with simple adornments suggestive of traditional clothing, such as the rabbits in *Black Snake Memory*, yet even those animals otherwise do not bear prominent markers of her indigenous identity. They are figures significant to the myths and stories of Buffalohead’s tribe and those of other indigenous North Americans, but they also allow for most audiences to identify with them, including non-Natives. The space of her paintings is one for encountering the symbols of everyday American identity through mythic figures. Foremost in her work her adoption of a surrealist aesthetic from modernism, which Silberman (2013) argues is a defining feature of her art as an indigenous modernist. Her scenes are self-contained reflections that allow the viewer to consider what they see, both in the space of her paintings’ scenery and in the waking world. Through her works, both playful and often subtly disturbing, Buffalohead presents spaces for temporary subversion in which her collection of mischievous animal and trickster figures toy with iconic representations of indigeneity in the exploration of her identity as a Ponca woman.
Chapter 5
Kent Monkman: Other/Queer Femininity and the Subversion of Classicism/Primitivism

In this chapter, I turn to a Native artist far removed from the artwriting trope of matriarchy, but still directly addressing the problems of the authority of the museum, the relationship between Primitivism and Classicism, and exploring identity within the category of Native art. Rather than legitimizing his identity through matrilines, Kent Monkman asserts himself as a trickster-esque drag queen who works to subvert the order of Classicism through its European tradition of fine art painting. In blurring the lines between Primitivism and Classicism, Monkman challenges the authoritative structure of museums and their discourses while rendering that subversion through a queer, feminized persona.

The final artist of my case studies, Kent Monkman, addresses self-representation as a liminal trickster figure and performance art drag queen character, Miss Chief Eagle Testickle. Miss Chief is a character set upon playing with national identity, appropriation of the American Indian in Classical imagery, and ideas about gender through subversive mimesis. She appears throughout Monkman’s work, in paintings, performances, and other forms of 3-D mixed media art. This subversion is part of a project of making visible the historically erased *berdache* or Two Spirits, in response to George Catlin’s paintings. As a direct response to Classicism, Monkman’s art also mocks the romanticization of Native Americans and brings in queer identities, for example the

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43 The *berdache* is a French term for “third gender” people encountered by Europeans in North America, a male who lived as a female, or outside of the binary boundaries of male and female. For further discussion on this and the term “Two Spirit,” see Callender, et. al. (1983) and Jacobs et. al. (1997). George Catlin (1796-1872) was a 19th-century painter who set out to document, collect, and record as much as he could from the many tribes of North America with the intent of preserving what he deemed a race on the brink of extinction (Monkman 2016, Catlin 2000/1926).
Pygmalion myth in his painting "Si je t'aime pren ds garde a toi (Study for "Icon from a New Empire")" (2007), and the clash of Classicism and Primitivism in “The Triumph of Mischief” (2007). I discuss both of these paintings in terms of their simultaneous use of Classical and Primitivist imagery. Monkman’s paintings bring together these artistic tropes in order to toy with how these categories have informed representations of Native Americans in art. I examine his irreverent work as it confronts representations of the American Indian in the American imagination.

In arguing that Monkman formulates his artistic persona within mimetic excess, I discuss his artwork in terms of subversive mimesis. Mimesis comes from the mimetic function of the colonized to copy the colonizer, and Taussig’s (1993, 255) concept of mimetic excess as “a form of human capacity potentiated by post-coloniality [that] provides a welcome opportunity to live subjunctively as neither subject nor object of history but as both, at one and the same time” provides a useful formulation. The factor of subversion perhaps seems redundant or out of place in the view of mimesis as existing in an increasingly complex relationship with alterity. But to make that connection I draw as well from Victor Turner’s (1969) notion of ritual subversion in the context of this mimetic excess when it occurs within the ritual space of the museum. I combine this examination of ritual subversion with Duncan’s (1995) assessment of the art museum as site for civilizing rituals. I examine specifically Monkman’s presence as a liminal figure through the creation of a persona that serves a subversive and mimetic function in the museum as ritual space. For my analysis of these pieces, I draw from an essay by Monkman in his contribution to the Denver Art Museum symposium, *Art in Motion: Native American Explorations of Time, Place, and Thought* (Lukavic 2016), in order to
directly engage with the artist’s approach to gender and the representation of the American Indian in museums. In his essay, Monkman questions the static presentation of North American Indians in art; in his own work he responds by saturating empty frontier landscapes with various figures, creating movement across boundaries of time and gender while exploring representations of Indigenous identity.

In particular, I examine his work *Icons from a New Empire* (2007) as it engages with the roles of artist and artistic object, in which the American Indian is a sculpture brought to life in the studio of a European American frontiersman (Figure 11). The painting merges the Ancient Greco-Roman myth of Pygmalion with that of the European American “romantic and tragic myth of a dying race” surrounding the North American Indian (Monkman 2016: 21). The use of the mythic antecedent emphasizes the subsequent ideology as another form of myth. The Pygmalion figure here works in a museum-like studio, a few artifacts surrounding the artist and his object of desire, the statue coming to life. Amid these artifacts rests the artists’ miniature model for his life-sized work, James Earle Fraser’s *End of the Trail* (1918). According to Monkman, “[t]his sculpture, replicas of which are ubiquitous in the Southwest, is an iconic image that reinforces an obsession by non-natives with a romantic grief for native cultures that have reached the end of the North American Indian, and they fell in love with their romantic and tragic imagery of a dying race” (Monkman 2016, 21).  

Monkman portrays this romantic grief and subsequent infatuation through depicting the two central figures of *Icons for a New Empire* kissing. A Cupid/Raven hybrid looms overhead, aimed at the sculptor who is already in love, perhaps indicating that along with this spell of desire the

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44 Monkman also describes here another painting, *Not the End of the Trail* (2004), which places Miss Chief on a pony in the middle of a landscape painting.
artist’s subject also comes with a subversive trickster-like snare. I start with this piece as it clearly shows Monkman’s interest in the role of desire, which elsewhere he subverts through his drag queen persona.

Monkman often depicts himself via Miss Chief or others in scenes celebrating homosexuality in response to the invisibility of indigenous homosexuality in historical representations. In his essay, Monkman adopts the notion that George Catlin (1796-1872) is his artistic nemesis. Yet he troubles this idea in that he both draws from Catlin’s work, deriving admiration from it, and pokes fun at Catlin’s depictions of Native Americans. Monkman’s response to Catlin in part helped him to produce his own berdache persona. Catlin addresses this in-between position in his paintings and journal writings, but through the lens of colonial “cultural obliteration” Monkman 2016, 14). It is through a position of a liminal gender that Monkman explores the role of colonialism in interpreting native culture, historically.

Catlin’s work is significant to Monkman in that Catlin did portray some berdache individuals, but only to a limited extent. Catlin’s Dance to the Berdache—Saukie (1861/1869) depicts a Sac and Fox Nation dance that he described as morally repugnant. Despite his disgust, Catlin painted the dance; elsewhere his sketches of men he described as “dandies” were more or less erased. Monkman was inspired to research the limited representations of these feminine males, hardly more than traces in historical depictions. In order to counter Catlin’s prejudices and celebrate homosexuality where it was previously rendered invisible, Monkman brought forth Miss Chief, “rampaging through

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45 In this section of the essay, Monkman describes how particular artists, including Catlin, were formative to the romantic construction of the imagery of Native peoples and their landscapes and how their romantic lenses are significant to Monkman and his own work.
46 See Monkman (2016, 23-29) for a full account of Catlin’s art and response to third-gender Native Americans.
North American art history in [his] paintings, performances, and other works” (Monkman 2016: 19). Through Miss Chief, Monkman reverses the gaze of the (male) colonizer while collapsing the boundaries of static time, space, and gender/sexuality.

Art historian David Penney (2000) examines the narratives surrounding the representation of Native Americans in exhibitions in terms of the rhetorical devices that museums employ. Penney examines in more detail the rhetorical strategies common in exhibition narratives that support his view before finally discussing at length the use of the ironic trope in more recent exhibitions. As Penney points out, irony is a figurative trope with potential to be badly misunderstood by an audience; when it does manage to challenge conventional ideologies, the public may not accept those challenges. This is exemplified in the Royal Ontario Museum’s First Peoples Gallery refusing to display Monkman’s satirical parody of a Paul Kane painting, demonstrating as well the limits some museums impose in maintaining their narrative structures (Monkman 2016: 33-37).

Following Penney, indigenous artists are the most privileged in deploying irony in museums, since museums themselves can easily be misunderstood in presenting an ironic view questioning their own civilizing functions. Further, Penney highlights the romance of the Native survival narrative, questioning if there are other ways to structure narratives from the Native perspective that are neither based in irony nor romance. Ultimately

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47 While Penney identifies exhibitions as educative, he also unpacks the function of education through the rhetorical use of language. He argues that teaching “employs rhetoric to convince us of the truth of the content taught and the falsehood of alternative ideas,” whereby museum teaching tends to promote ideas that support the status quo rather than change, or are “situationally congruent” (Penney 2000: 48).

48 Penney’s example, in fact, of misconstrued irony was a 1989 exhibit at the Royal Ontario Museum as well, in which they tried to address the racist history of Victorian-era collecting of African materials, but their display of racist material was viewed as endorsement, not negation, perhaps given the difficulty of the institution itself bearing the name of imperialism (Penney 2000: 56-57). Perhaps later curators had some awareness of this misinterpretation when denying Monkman his display, though the museum still allowed Monkman to retaliate by exclusion with a performance art installation and displaying his painting in the contemporary arts gallery (Monkman 2016: 33-37).
finding he is unqualified to respond to this issue, he instead posits a useful way of thinking about how narrative representations convey or mask certain ideologies through their rhetorical figurations (Penney 2000, 59).

With respect to Monkman, the problems Penney poses also are useful in looking at more entrenched exhibition language while considering shifts in rhetoric, voices, and perspectives in museum exhibitions. He works in the ironic mode in his mimesis of the tragic and romantic tropes common to museum narratives, romantic tropes being those that find admiration for indigenous people through narratives of heroic transcendence.49 This irony works within the space of the museum, counter to its typical messages and rituals that are encoded in the romantic tropes of the past. Mimesis such as that reflected in Monkman’s art functions in the ironic mode to subvert the romance of museum narratives in a way that counteracts the expected rites of the museum. While it represents the artist’s critical stance and ironic distancing from Western cultural conventions, this strategy has the potential to create some mischief for museum goers.50

49 Penney (2000, 8-59) identifies four literary archetypes in depictions of Native Americans: comedy, tragedy, romance, and ironic satire; he mostly associates the former two archetypes with non-Native voices and the latter two with Native voices. For Penney, romance is associated with survival and heroic transcendence and, I would argue, is ever more prevalent in non-Native views of the American Indian. Rather than portraying a dying, tragic race, romance through survival is a more prevalent discourse (perhaps even more so than tragedy where narratives try to leave out the effects of colonialism on culture). Romance is evident, for instance, in Douglas and d’Harnoncourt’s description of the Apache’s resilience as a way of life, mentioned in my first chapter: “But the Apache remained roaming hunters and raiders until the wars were over and even today are known for their look of untamed pride” (Douglas and d’Harnoncourt 1941: 119).

50 As in the case of “Rattling under the Glass,” highlighted by Michael Ames (1990/2010), using ironic tropes does not always appeal to museum audiences. Under the purview of teaching school children about local Native culture, this program provided a critique of the museum itself. However, the approach was not well-received in both its presentation and its message. Complaints about the performance from museum staff, teachers, and even some First Nations members showed that they viewed it as an offensive, “reckless and disrespectful attitude towards the museum environment and the artifacts” (Ames 1990/2010: 169). The performers were working within ironic tropes, counter to romantic depictions of oversimplified Native life restricted to the past. In many ways, Kent Monkman’s work stages his own series of trickster programs similar to that of “Rattling under the Glass.”
Miss Chief Ego Testickle, the name of Monkman’s self-representational trickster persona, is a play on words. A mischief-maker, the latter part of her name refers to the egotistical nature of the men he targets as objectifying artists portraying themselves in fine art. In his emulation of other Western male artists, who often portrayed themselves in the settings of their paintings, Monkman portrays a version of himself as Miss Chief while also incorporating some of the artists that both inspire and provoke him within those same settings. Monkman now portrays himself -- the invisible Indian “dandy” of Catlin’s sketches, the Indian chief privileged in those artists’ portrayals of Native subjects -- but with a gendered twist. Taking on a feminine identity also allows Monkman to subvert male authority and the colonial gaze. She is now the artist as well as the subject of her own art, and among her objects for painting and desire is “the European male” that she studies.\textsuperscript{51}

Several of these individuals come together in the chaotic scene of Monkman’s painting, “The Triumph of Mischief” (2007) (Figure 12). Modernists such as Picasso, along with Catlin and Paul Kane, another 19\textsuperscript{th} century artist who set out to document indigenous ways of life, are among several characters to make appearances in this scene. These artists become the subjects/targets of Monkman’s painting, as Picasso was a canonical Primitivist artist known for his borrowings from ethnographic materials, while Catlin and Kane are specific artists who frequently evoke reactions in Monkman’s paintings.\textsuperscript{52} Monkman reverses the position of these three artists, appropriators of indigenous culture, who are now the focus of an indigenous artist’s work.

\textsuperscript{51} A study exemplified, for instance, in Monkman’s short film, Group of Seven Inches: A Titillating Taxonomy of the European Male (2005).
\textsuperscript{52} See Monkman (2016:25) citing these figures in his artwork.
The pair, Kane and Catlin, wear Indian buckskins, pointing to their romantic double-standard, which Monkman problematizes in his essay. He remarks that Catlin would complain about Native Americans wearing European-style clothing, but Euroamerican men such as Catlin himself when exploring or encountering Native culture could take elements of American Indian dress (Monkman 2016, 25). Meanwhile, Picasso clutches an African-style mask, alluding to the modern artist’s frequent use of tribal-inspired elements from Africa and Oceania in his Primitivist art. The inversion of Classical ideals described by Connelly (1995) is readily apparent in Monkman’s work. Primitivism adopted from what European standards deemed to be closer to the early nature of man, that which was disorderly and closer to nature (versus orderly civilization as stemming from the Classical Greek and Roman cultures). But rather than relegating Primitivism to the dark and grotesque corners of this Classical idyllic scene, Monkman portrays the Primitive in the style of Classical painting in an ideal setting. His Indian braves and frontiersmen mingle with Centaurs, Satyrs, and other Greek figures, erasing any boundaries of time or aesthetic category. The sexual nature of Primitivism is on celebratory display, further confusing the inversion of Classicism through a subversive tableau.

The title of this painting refers to a triumph, but the staged parade following a conquest is a subversion of the colonizing order and its related myth of American conquest of the Western frontier. As the embodiment of mischief, Miss Chief stands toward the center, seemingly confronting Picasso, a representation of modern art’s borrowings from “Primitive art.” Monkman’s triumph is thus not the neat, linear procession of the Western fine art canon, but instead a place for ritual subversion.
Monkman’s liminal role in bringing about this subversion is especially noteworthy. Victor Turner (1969: 94-130) describes liminality as a condition of the ritual process, a concept which Duncan (1995: 11) also draws from in establishing the museum as a ritual space. Duncan sees the art museum as a space in which time is suspended through liminality for the visiting participants, and in this liminal space the art objects are reinscribed within the context of art experience or contemplation (Duncan 1995: 7-20). Monkman inserts himself as a different sort of participant in this ritual, as a liminal figure who seeks to further disrupt the imposed structure of the museum. Monkman’s participation results in what Turner describes as ritual status reversal, which allows for participants to view established hierarchies in the social structure as imposed by ritual (Turner 1969: 176-178).

Still, the ritual of subversion may not be a permanent condition of status reversal. Miss Chief exists in the world of the painting, revealing and challenging meta-narratives under the effects of the colonizing gaze. She does not subvert the power of the colonizing gaze outside of her representations, but does have the power to shift that gaze for the limited space of the artwork’s scene. As a liminal figure, Miss Chief exists to traverse boundaries and the scenes in which she stirs up this categorical trouble, subverting roles in order to question the existence of categories such as Primitive and Classical.

For Monkman, the latter’s relationship to the former is not as clear cut as artists such as Catlin, Kane, or Picasso might have liked to imagine. Some of the tensions between these categories lie in problems with hierarchical schemes that formed within 19th century cultural evolution. Monkman does not provide a straightforward pitting of Primitivism against Classicism. In other words, he does not pose these as antithetical or
antagonistic categories. Rather, drawing from Classical imagery, he uses its styles to challenge 19th century Classical presumptions about cultures past and present. He embraces the “primitivist” elements of Greco-Roman pagan culture in combination with hidden or suppressed homosexuality in North American history. For example, Lewis and Clark are featured in this work since Lewis’s writings suggest an unrequited love for his exploration partner that resulted in his suicide (Monkman 2016: 23). Elsewhere in the scene, a priest is molested in a role-reversing critique of the Catholic Church’s role in colonialism and suppressing homosexuality. Overall, the painting seeks to represent homosexuality across pagan or “primitive” culture as it meets with the North American frontier. Monkman adapts the inverse relationship between Classicism and Primitivism in this frontier setting in order to challenge the canonical representations that these categories more commonly impose.

In a more somber scene, Monkman’s work, Lot’s Wife, features Miss Chief standing in for Monkman’s great-grandmother and a tragic figure from Biblical mythology (Figure 13). This installation piece combines mixed-media sculpture with film and elements of a diorama to create a work that further emphasizes movement instead of static placement in space and time. In referencing a Biblical narrative, the installation works to assess meta-narrative myths central to museum representation and the representation of American Indians in Western art. Monkman (2013, exhibit pamphlet) emphasizes the “sin of memory” in referring to this piece. The sin alludes to the relationship between Sodom and Gomorrah, places destroyed in this Biblical story.

53 This installation was displayed at the Denver Art Museum in an earlier exhibit, Sovereign: Independent Voices, that followed the Art in Motion symposium (2012, essays cited here published 2016). Sovereign ran from September 15, 2013-August 17, 2014. This story in Genesis tells of the wife of Lot who was spared from the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah with her husband, but disobediently looked back and was turned into a pillar of salt (Encyclopedia Britannica, Kupier 2019).
with the frequent correlation to homosexual practices, described as sins, leading to the
cities’ destruction. Beyond this allusion, memory for Monkman relates more broadly to
personal loss. Like Lot’s wife in the Bible, Miss Chief looks out to a lost homeland. This
narrative of loss and the potential dangers of memory or looking back convey the
difficulty in confronting the past for indigenous peoples who were removed from their
land, including Monkman’s great-grandmother. His critique of colonialism here relates to
a broader critique of nationalism throughout his work. In *Lot’s Wife*, forced removal from
one’s homeland is personal. Miss Chief stands in as Monkman’s maternal ancestor who
was subject to this removal.

Monkman’s works toy with these tensions in site-specific identification for Native
peoples. Caro’s (2006) work examining how museums, including the National Museum
of the American Indian and tribal museums, situate visitors in locations that relate to their
identities provides insight on such identification. I consider site-specificity from his
perspective, including its complication for the colonized Native visitor.\(^{54}\) Forced removal,
as referenced in *Lot’s Wife*, recontextualizes the borders of homeland for the North
American Indian. Monkman is both a Cree Indian and a Canadian citizen of European
descent. His North American citizenship places him within the Canadian borders, yet that

\(^{54}\) Mario Caro’s review of the NMAI exhibit *You Are Here*, treats the exhibit and the museum hosting it as
a site of identification (Caro 2006: 545). In the case of a national museum, visitors’ identities are affirmed
in terms of being domestic or foreign; at tribal museums, identity is affirmed as Native or non-Native. This
connection between site-specific identification becomes complicated for the Native visitor in a hybrid
museum space such as NMAI. In such a space, the visitor is both confronted with fixed notions of place or
home-bound identity and the contrasting fluidity and instability of identity through estrangement (such as
physical distance) at this site. In the same essay, Caro discusses reservations as specific sites, as explored in
another exhibition, *Reservation X*, where despite its function as a contradictory place of colonial isolation
(a prison) and a place for preserving their culture from further destruction (a sanctuary), “the locus of the
reservation functions dialectically as formative of Native identity” (Caro 2006: 547). Site-specific
identification for the American Indians, including where this identification is replicated in gallery spaces,
continues to serve as a point of tension for dealing with Native American identity.
nationalistic designation also serves as a challenge to his indigenous identity, since indigenous claims and identification with place are subject to the definitions of that colonizing nation. Myths of North American nationalism appropriate the space of the imaginary empty frontier, an appropriation that Monkman mocks by refilling these scenes with his characters. Those empty landscapes, otherwise populated by the noble braves and frontiersmen whom he also mocks, serve as spaces for the subjugation of the North American (that is Canadian and United States) imaginations within their narratives of national expansion. Myths of manifest destiny prevail, until Monkman reappropriates these scenes for his own narratives.

Returning briefly to the issue of museum narratives, I lastly discuss the multimedia installation in which Monkman inserts himself into dioramas. His mimesis of the diorama serves to collapse the distinctions between ethnographic object and artistic subject while bringing into question the display of Native Americans as either natural history object or image in fine art. In The Collapsing of Time and Space in an Ever Expanding Universe (2011), Monkman goes beyond art history to broader forms of Native American representation in museums, challenging the static view of Native Americans through a dynamic display featuring motion and sound. Miss Chief’s eyes pump the occasional tear while she gazes out a window, and a soundtrack meshes wilderness sounds with a low rumble that could be thunder or the Paris metro. Meanwhile, a ticking grows louder, emphasizing time, or the suspension of time. In the still space of the diorama, Miss Chief’s natural surroundings as aging diva include antique items in her Paris apartment and a record player that includes her own

\[55\] This strategy is comparable to the performance art of James Luna, who displayed himself under glass in Take a Picture with a Real Indian (1992). Hawley (2016) examines Luna’s performance art as a way of reasserting agency as a Native American through fitting a stereotype.
performance, *Dance to Miss Chief*. A couple of taxidermy animals complete the scene (Figure 14).

“How can museums address indigenous cultures as non-static cultures?” Monkman asked in relating how, as a child, he was both fascinated by the frozen beauty of Aboriginal life and disturbed in encountering the life-sized dioramas at the Manitoba Museum where he grew up (Monkman 2016). The museum’s location in Winnipeg, with a high indigenous population largely affected by poverty, was a stark contrast to the lives of native people in the displays, and Monkman immediately considered this museum in addressing the question that he posed. The museum remains a special connection to Monkman’s personal memories and also serves as a home-bound location for him as an urban Indian, even while it presented a complicated image of his heritage in his childhood.

Monkman uses a form of self-representation to place himself in the middle of established museum narratives through his trickster figure/drag queen persona, Miss Chief. These museum narratives include the perpetuation of romantic narratives linked to forms of Classical and Primitive art, distinctions that he collapses in his own paintings. Through his collapsing of boundaries, Monkman also complicates gender and sexuality, celebrating homosexuality while countering the invisibility of queer indigenous identities in art history. He addresses as well the complicated relationality between Native identity and place, while museums seek to address their audiences as sites of identification. Some of this identification requires the affirmation of national boundaries, complicating the site-specific identities of indigenous citizens. Monkman’s positionality as both a displaced Native person and a citizen engaged with museum rituals serves as a starting
point for him to create mischief through his art. While museums largely remain sites for ritual performances of national identity, affirming conventional gender and sexual roles as well as colonial narratives in canonical representations, Monkman’s art within these spaces challenges these dominant narratives and the rituals that produce them through subversive mimesis.
Reassessing Gendered Museum Representations of Native Americans

My goal in this study was to show how the interpretation of objects of Southwest indigenous cultures were constructed as an American Classical art tradition as authenticated within the space of specific museums using these frameworks. In this representational framework, Southwest traditions were and remain valorized in relation to a sanctioned, authentic, ancient/Primitive cultural heritage that makes tangible the specific features of constructed narratives of American nationalism. I first approached this topic through exhibit case studies of the mid-20th century in order to understand key terms used in museum discourse and examine the ways that they serve as semiotic tropes in discourses constructing value for objects.

Through my Denver Art Museum analysis, I traced how the designation of Native materials as “art” (as distinct from artifact or relic), starting with Douglas’ curatorial programs and solidifying under recent changes to the museum’s gallery spaces, served a significant semiotic function in equating Native materials with Western fine art. This function is related to the museum’s role as an authoritative institution that imparts social value in rituals of national citizenship. I considered the significance of stereotypes, including gendered stereotypes, in the museum’s curatorial practices of museum interpretation. From this discussion, I next considered the DAM’s more recent attempts of the early 21st century to display Native arts within the definition of “art” while drawing from the rhetorical trope of “Master” artists. I argue that this particular practice is not new, but rather stems from post-Renaissance fine art traditions more broadly. The result of this effort is to Classicize Native Art within a distinctly American fine art cannon.
In its most recent Native American arts gallery display, The DAM also draws partly from an established discourse around matriarchal representations of Native art, a practice derived from artwriting within an established art historical canon of Native works. This artwriting legitimizes certain artists in their genealogical connections to identified and authorized master artists within Southwest pottery and other gendered traditions. Although the exhibit allows for a multi-dimensional view of Native art, its semiotic practices still participate in processes of Classicization in these significant ways. This practice is significant given the museum’s position as a regional authoritative institution with a national reputation that seeks to feature Native art within a recognized art historical canon.

In representing materials specific to Southwest ethnography, the main concern of my paper, exhibitions still continue to draw on the matriarchy trope of artwriting in their exhibitions. I examined this phenomenon in two recent exhibitions, *Legacy of Generations* and *Woven by Grandmothers*, which both ran in national museums simultaneously in 1997-1998. *Legacy of Generations* was based directly on the tropes of matriarchy, basing its organization around categories identifying particular artists as masters—matriarchs—while encompassing the other artists, in genealogical proximity along matrilines, to those master artists. The justification for featuring each artist in these exhibitions was on the basis of this categorization, which legitimized or authenticated them by these criteria for their inclusion. On the other hand, my analysis of *Woven by Grandmothers* showed how collaborative exhibits can increase the vocality of community members, but even these exhibits still require navigations of previously established narratives, including those around matriarchy, in museum exhibitions. Thus, in their
authoritative representations, museums seek to construct an authentic Primitive art grounded in Classical ideologies as part of a distinctly American tradition through that very authority.

In the following sections, I continued to explore the ways in which Native artists work within these established frameworks in order to shed light on the agentive ways that they can assert their own authority. Three case studies of contemporary artists served as the means to explore these issues. Rose Simpson draws on her legacy as an active descendant of a matriline of famous potters, participating to some extent in these established practices, but she also includes her father’s artistic skill in influencing her. Simpson asserts her own complex identity into the narrative of authentic Primitive art, at the same time reclaiming her heritage as an indigenous modernist who articulates her agency as both a daughter and a mother. She fuses the dichotomies of tradition and innovation and reclaims the aesthetics of her ancestral heritage from the appropriation of settler-modernists and Primitivist discourse.

With Julie Buffalohead and Kent Monkman, I examined more broadly the ways in which Native artists contest the categories of Primitivism and Classicism while using gendered perspectives to insert their agency into museum discourses of Native arts. Both of these artists work through stereotypes in order to confront representations of Native Americans. Working through these stereotypes allows both artists to explore issues of representations through essentialized identities. Considering the ways in which essentialized identities are significant to museums’ constructions of heritage can help unpack how they situate and map visitors’ identities within heritage narratives.
Buffalohead, who works within the medium of surrealism (which Silberman (2013) argues is a form of Native art), is similar to Simpson’s work in that she also reappropriates Primitivist tropes as an indigenous modernist. Unlike Simpson, Buffalohead comes from outside a recognized artistic tradition represented by matrilines, and thus has to assert herself as a Native woman in ways other than those linked to matriarchy discourse. Buffalohead also has to assert herself where representations of women from Plains Indian cultures like her own, the Ponca tribe, are subaltern or invisible, revealing the paradox that such iconic representation both creates visibility for what is desirable and exotic and excludes other representations of Native women. The role of cultural evolution ideologies that contributed to the construction of authentic primitive matriarchies, unpacked in the first section of the thesis, is brought in at this juncture to assess the differences in the representation of Native Americans in the Southwest as compared to the Plains. In this section, I also draw attention to the ways these ideologies contributed to ideas about the Noble Savage (i.e. the Indian Princess) or, conversely, the Wild Savage or Squaw. In turn, these ideologies contributed to stereotypical representations and influenced how Buffalohead challenged those stereotypes while questioning the agency of women in the construction of feminine identity.

Finally, I turned my attention to Kent Monkman who brings a queer perspective to the construction of femininity in his irreverent art. As a drag queen performance artist, Monkman created the *berdache* or Two-Spirit character, Miss Chief Testickle, through which he subverts the categories of Classicism and Primitivism as well as the authority and desiring gaze of the male European colonizer. Monkman challenges an American
national mythology through his subversive approach within the ritual space of the museum. With guidance from Penney (2000) in this analysis, I find that Monkman works within an ironic trope of museum discourse through this subversion. Within this ironical stance and as a post-colonial indigenous artist, he presents this challenge within the museum space itself. Meanwhile, the authoritative structure of the museum remains even while this liminal trickster-esque figure, Miss Chief, allows for the temporary suspension of time, space, and conventional static representations, in order to highlight the structures of art world discourses that undergird conventional representations of Native Americans.

Thus, we return to where I started: with identifying the structures in which the imposition of Classical values or ideals especially influenced gendered frames of creating an authentic Primitive, culminating in the matriarchal discourse authorized in artwriting. I identified three ways in which Classical imposition contributed to the representation of this authentic primitive. Classical mythology informed such iconic representations as the Amazonian savage queens and noble savage Indian maidens within narratives of European contact. Eventually, Classically-inspired cultural evolution ideologies that featured Primitive matriarchies, contributed to the construction of authentic Primitive arts. These Primitive arts were authorized through artwriting that legitimized artists genealogically connected to master artists, identified as matriarchs in the Southwest. While I investigated the relationship of Primitivism to Classicism as opposite but relational categories, I traced the complex ways in which these inform the representation of Native materials on display in museums. When authenticated and authorized through museum discourse, Primitive arts are Classicized. “Matriarchy” is a semiotic trope of this Classicization process that is integral to the museum’s function as a space for civilizing
rituals. At the same time, examining gender and the construction of femininity helps demonstrate the ways in which essentialized identities place objects and visitors within the museum’s narratives of heritage and citizenship.

Museums are instituting important changes in representational approaches based on shifts in perspectives in our increasingly globalized and postcolonial world. In Europe, displays of Classical antiquity are becoming implicated in, if not necessarily responding to, the demands of post-colonial national entities seeking control of certain aspects of their cultural heritage property. While this issue goes beyond the scope of my paper, it bears mention as it has some pertinence for museums today.

As museums come to face problems of how they address their audiences and whose perspective within those audiences should inform these representations, claims for national identities draw from the discourses of world heritage and may be at odds with indigenous perspectives. Beyond claims of whose cultural heritage is at stake, the ideologies shaping narratives within representations also should come under evaluation within museums. In addition, as museums reevaluate how they interpret various cultures, whether Classical or those that have been framed as Primitive, it would be useful to consider how well -- and according to whose criteria and values -- people are represented within their particular cultures. Particular identities may be masked through gendered typologizing, as this exploration of these topics reveals.

Further study is needed to examine more thoroughly the shortfalls in representing women in the past, especially those who cannot have increased vocality on their own, as in the examples of my Native artists’ case studies. I would like to expand more on this study in the future and look as well at non-Anglo sources for Classicization in the
Southwest. Furthermore, other scholars may find this comparative scope useful in considering Classical influence in the colonization of African, Oceanic, and other Native American cultures. The perspective offered here could be useful in other studies of decolonizing museum interpretation.
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Section II Figures:

Fig. 2: Rose B. Simpson, *Self-Portrait* (2016), Wheelwright Museum, *LIT: The Work of Rose B. Simpson*, November 4, 2018-October 6, 2019. (photograph by the author and reproduced here with permission of the artist)
Fig. 3: Rose B. Simpson, *Directed (South)* (2014), Wheelwright Museum, *LIT: The Work of Rose B. Simpson*, November 4, 2018-October 6, 2019. (photograph by the author and reproduced here with permission of the artist)
Fig. 4: Rose B. Simpson, *Baby* (2010-2014), Wheelwright Museum, *LIT: The Work of Rose B. Simpson*, November 4, 2018-October 6, 2019. (photograph by the author and reproduced here with permission of the artist)
Fig. 5: Roxanne Swentzell and Patrick Simpson, *Untitled* (1983), Wheelwright Museum, *LIT: The Work of Rose B. Simpson*, November 4, 2018-October 6, 2019. (photograph by the author and reproduced here with permission of the artist)
Fig. 6: Rose B. Simpson, part of “Rose’s Cabinet of Curiosities” (2018), Wheelwright Museum, *LIT: The Work of Rose B. Simpson*, November 4, 2018-October 6, 2019. (photograph by the author and reproduced here with permission of the artist)
Fig. 9: Julie Buffalohead, *Let the Show Begin* (2010), from the Smithsonian Institution, courtesy Bockley Gallery.
Fig. 10: Julie Buffalohead, *Christina Fallin on a Stick* (2014). Image courtesy Bockley Gallery.
Fig. 11: Kent Monkman, *Se Je T’Aime Prends Garde à toi (Icon for a New Empire)* (2007). Image courtesy of the artist.
Fig. 12: Kent Monkman, *Triumph of Mischief* (2007). Image courtesy of the artist.
Fig. 13: Kent Monkman, *Lot’s Wife* (2012). Image courtesy of the artist.
Fig. 14: Kent Monkman, *The Collapsing of Time and Space in an Ever Expanding Universe* (2011). Image courtesy of the artist.