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Defying Binaries: A Critical Examination of 'Old' Versus 'New' in the Art of Pablita Velarde and Helen Hardin

Jenna Kloeppel

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DEFYING BINARIES:
A CRITICAL EXAMINATION OF “OLD” VERSUS “NEW”
in the art of Pablita Velarde and Helen Hardin

BY

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ABSTRACT
Santa Clara painter Pablita Velarde and her artist daughter, Helen Hardin, are often discussed in both popular and academic literature as being representative, respectively, of two very different artistic traditions. Velarde’s art is commonly viewed as very much a product of her Dorothy Dunn-trained Santa Fe Studio background, and Hardin is seen as an avant-garde, wholly innovative artistic force representative of the generation of Native artists more aligned with the anti-Studio philosophies of the Institute of American Indian Arts, which was developing as Hardin was beginning her career in painting. This thesis will examine the modes of representation that have led to Velarde and Hardin being commonly discussed in terms of stylistic opposition in their artistic production. Examining paintings by Velarde, Hardin, and several other Native artists, undertaking a discussion of artistic methodology, and providing a close reading of available commentary by both women, I will demonstrate that the artistic relationship between Pablita Velarde
and Helen Hardin cannot be accurately portrayed within the constructed binary system so often imposed upon their art by art critics, museum curators, and art historians. While the two women, during their respective lifetimes, did not consciously counter commonly held notions placing them in an artistically opposed placement of “old” versus “new,” “traditional” versus “modern,” their art speaks to a much more subtle interplay of ideas, techniques, and styles.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES........................................................................................................vi

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

From “Tradition” to “Modernity”: Two Generations of Female Pueblo Artists......1

CHAPTER 2

Resisting Tradition: The Social and Artistic Modernity of Pablita Velarde ..........9

CHAPTER 3

Embracing Traditional Icons through Modern Technique: Helen Hardin’s
Emergence as an Innovative Contemporary Painter .............................................26

CHAPTER 4

The Picture of Life........................................................................................................47

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

Beyond Modernity: A Continuing Tradition of Originality...............................56

FIGURES....................................................................................................................66

BIBLIOGRAPHY..........................................................................................................89
LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1.

*National Geographic* Magazine (August 1999), Joe McNally Photography ..........66

Figure 2. Pablita Velarde, *Dressing Young Girl for First Ceremonial Dance*, c. 1939.

Tempera on paper, 35.6 x 31.8 cm. Museum of Indian Arts and Culture,

Laboratory of Anthropology, Santa Fe .........................................................67

Figure 3. Pablita Velarde, *Why the Coyote Brays at the Moon*, from “How and Why Stories,” 1961. Private Collection ..........................................................68

Figure 4. Joe Herrera, *Untitled*, 1951. Watercolor on paper, 22 ¼ x 14 ¾ inches.

Private Collection .......................................................................................69

Figure 5. Joe Herrera, *Creation*, 1953. Casein on Board. Private Collection........70

Figure 6. Pablita Velarde, *How the Skunk Got His Scent*, from “How and Why Stories,” 1961. Private Collection ..........................................................71

Figure 7. Helen Hardin, *Hungry Bugs*, 1960. Casein on Board. Private Collection...72

Figure 8. Pablita Velarde, *Woman Communicating with Full Moon*, 1965. Private

Collection .......................................................................................................73

Figure 9. Oscar Howe, *Victory Dance*, 1954. Watercolor on Paper, 19 ½ x 12 in.

Philbrook Museum of Art, Tulsa, OK ................................................................74


Private Collection ............................................................................................75

Figure 11. Helen Hardin, *White Buffalo Dance*, c. 1968. Casein on Board. Private

Collection .......................................................................................................76
Figure 12. Pablita Velarde, *Buffalo Dancer*, no date. Earth Pigments on panel.

Private Collection..............................................................................................................77

Figure 13. Helen Hardin. *Courtship of Yellow Corn Maiden*, 1970. Acrylic on Panel.

Private Collection..............................................................................................................78

Figure 14. Fritz Scholder, Luiseño. *Santana Kiowa*, 1968. Oil on canvas, 76.2 x 76.2 cm. Private Collection..............................................................................................................79


Figure 16. Helen Hardin, *Mimbres Rabbit Ceremonies* (Detail), 1983. Acrylic on Panel. Private Collection..............................................................................................................81

Figure 17. *Mimbres Rabbit Bowl*, ca. 1000-1250 AD. Black-on-white ceramic.

Smithsonian Museum of Natural History, Department of Anthropology,

Washington DC..................................................................................................................82


Private Collection..............................................................................................................83

Figure 19. Helen Hardin, *One Soul Sings Two Songs*, 1980. Acrylic on Panel, 50 x 50 cm. Private Collection..............................................................................................................84


Chapter 1

Introduction

From “Tradition” to “Modernity”: Two Generations of Female Pueblo Artists

“The project of creating is about transcending the basic survival mode through using a resource or capability which every indigenous community has retained throughout colonization – the ability to create and be creative.”\(^1\)

(Linda Tuhiwai Smith, 1999)

Santa Clara painter Pablita Velarde (1918-2006) and her artist daughter, Helen Hardin (1943-1984), are often discussed in both popular and academic literature as being representative, respectively, of two very different artistic traditions. Velarde’s art is viewed largely as a product of her Dorothy Dunn-trained Santa Fe Studio background. Hardin is often discussed as an avant-garde, wholly innovative artistic force, representative of the generation of Native artists more aligned with the anti-Studios philosophies of the Institute of American Indian Arts,

\(^1\) Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*
which was developing as Hardin was beginning her career in painting. This thesis critically examines the modes of representation that have led to Velarde and Hardin being commonly discussed in terms of stylistic opposition in their artistic production. Analyzing paintings by Velarde, Hardin, and several other Native artists, undertaking a discussion of artistic methodology, and providing a close reading of available commentary by both women, I will demonstrate that the artistic relationship between Pablita Velarde and Helen Hardin cannot be accurately portrayed within the constructed binary system so often imposed upon their art by art critics, museum curators, and art historians. While the two artists, during their respective lifetimes, did not consciously counter publically voiced tendencies to place them in an artistically opposed placement of “old” versus “new,” “traditional” versus “modern,” their art speaks to a much more subtle interplay of ideas, techniques, and styles.

Utilizing formal analysis for discussion and comparison of works by Pablita Velarde and Helen Hardin, I will interpret their respective paintings focusing on stylistic and iconographic elements. Whilst analyzing the formal qualities of these works, I will also place them within the appropriate historical, social, and cultural contexts in order to gain a deeper understanding of the paintings and of the artists themselves. In gaining access to personal histories and social contexts of paintings, I will rely on primary accounts written in recent years detailing the careers and personal experiences of Pablita Velarde and Helen Hardin (most notably, the works

\[ See, \text{ for example, Sue DiMaio, “Helen Hardin,” handout compiled in conjunction with PBS documentary } \textit{Charles Loloma & Helen Hardin}, (KAET: Arizona State University, 1976), \text{ Tony Schmitz, dir.} \]
Pablita Velarde: In Her own Words, by Shelby J. Tisdale, and Helen Hardin, Tsa-sah-see-eh: A Straight Line Curved, by Kate Nelson, both of which were published in 2012). To achieve further insight into the social and familial contexts of the paintings of Velarde and Hardin, I will also remark on personal interviews conducted in April and November 2013 with Helen Hardin’s daughter, Margarete Bagshaw-Tindel.

Though there has been much discussion of Pablita Velarde and Helen Hardin in art historical and historical literature, most works either focus exclusively on biographical elements—such as the two aforementioned works by Nelson and Tisdale—or present an overly romanticized version of an inherent, spiritual artistic connection between Velarde and Hardin, as seen most vividly in the article “A Transcendent Journey Through the Motherline: A Voyage with Helen Hardin, Southwest Artist,” by psychoanalytic scholar Kate T. Donahue. With a breadth of theory-based literature available pertaining to post-colonial and feminist issues, I chose to reference theory that best represented the non-Western female experience in North America in the twentieth century. Framing my discussion of Pablita Velarde and Helen Hardin within commentary from postcolonial feminist scholars Radhika Parameswaran, Linda Tuhiwai Smith, and Margaret Kovach, I distinguish this thesis from other scholarly and popular writing on the two artists by synthesizing the available biographical information with a theoretical approach, grounded in formal and social analysis and utilizing relevant commentary in the fields of post-colonial and feminist theory. Where I found other discussions of the artists to be lacking, I sought to explore more deeply using a variety of methods,
both formally and socially based; the inclusion of a diverse academic methodology differentiates this thesis from previous literature on the subject.

Finally, my discussion of the two artists in terms of a projected binary of “old” versus “new,” and my subsequent arguments made against this overly simplified interpretation of the artists further distinguishes this thesis. Most available literature on Velarde and Hardin conforms, as I will detail using examples throughout the thesis, to an interpretation that, at its core, promotes the idea of the artists as existing in a binary of tradition versus modernism in artistic creation. Undertaking the critical analysis outlined above, I prove this binary to be inept when discussing the work of Pablita Velarde and Helen Hardin.

Scholars have addressed the tendency of western thought processes to understand the world in various constructed binary systems; postcolonial feminist scholar Radhika Parameswaran has articulated this as the push to categorize people, places, objects, and ideas as “first world/third world; white/non-white; man/woman.” In the same vein, Pablita Velarde and Helen Hardin have been commonly conceptualized in the artistic circles of Santa Fe and beyond as existing in a binary system that places the “old model” of Pueblo easel painting—represented by Dorothy Dunn, Velarde, and cohorts at the Santa Fe Indian School—against the “new system,” represented by the likes of Helen Hardin, Joe Herrera, and students at the Institute of American Indian Arts. This binary exists and is embodied within the mother/daughter artistic relationship of Velarde and Hardin, despite such

discrepancies as, for example, Hardin not actually attending IAIA, though she was, after her 1984 death, praised by IAIA Museum Director Chuck Dailey as “one of our early graduates because she was part of the University of Arizona Southwestern Indian Art Project, an art experiment that led to the establishment of the Institute in Santa Fe the following year.”

Dailey makes no reference to the fact that, though Hardin did indeed participate in this early Native American art “experiment,” she was pinpointed in a follow-up report as an example of why “‘political selections’ should be avoided since those few students who had been chosen because of parental importance in the arts were also the ones who proved less successful.”

The desire to break artistic ties with her “traditional” artist mother, expressed by Hardin throughout her artistic career, was echoed and aggrandized in numerous publications that followed her death in 1984. Hardin was eulogized, for example, as “an artist who consciously chose to avoid any comparison to her mother.” In the inevitable casual written comparison with Velarde, however, Hardin was noted for adhering to “less authentic detail than her mother employed in her more traditional work.” Hardin was praised after her premature death as echoing the styles of such modern art icons as Piet Mondrian and Pablo Picasso; as

8 DiMaio, “Helen Hardin,” handout compiled in conjunction with PBS documentary Charles Loloma & Helen Hardin (KAET: Arizona State University, 1976), Tony Schmitz, dir.
stated in one museum catalogue featuring her work, “the family heritage is art, but there tradition ends and the originality of Helen Hardin emerges.”9 In evaluating the social and artistic innovations made by Pablita Velarde, however, it becomes obvious that the family heritage referred to in the above comment may be based in art, but is actually a tradition of originality, passed from mother to daughter. This tradition of originality is expressed in a fierce abandonment of societal expectations, in an adherence to artistic and social independence, and in the creation of art that was shockingly modern, whether modern by the social realities of paintings created by a Pueblo woman supporting her children as a single mother, or by the stylistic innovations employed by Hardin that made artistic novelty out of familiar Pueblo forms.

First Nations scholar Margaret Kovach notes that thinking “in a non-binary way is a challenge when we live in a binary world.”10 Overly simplistic approaches to the lives and work of Velarde and Hardin create binaries of Pueblo/Anglo environments and life experiences; male/female social and cultural roles; and western/non-western artistic influences. Radhika Parameswaran uses the example of a 1999 National Geographic cover photograph (figure 1) to demonstrate an attempt by a major western cultural institution to place a non-western mother-daughter duo into an easily and readily identifiable binary of old and traditional versus new and modern. The provocative photograph features a demurely seated

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10 Margaret Kovach, Indigenous Methodologies: Characteristics, Conversations, and Contexts (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010), 59.
plump older woman dressed in a red sari and dangling necklaces, her hair pulled back modestly from her face. Sitting to her right, a waifish young woman, dressed in a low cut leather body suit, stares out to the audience with a solemnly defiant gaze. Her dark red lips convey a pouty expression akin to that of a fashion model, and, most importantly, her body language radically departs from that of her mother. This thoroughly modern woman owns her body and, accordingly, her sexuality. Her legs sit splayed open, caving slightly inwards at the knee; one hand grasps her right hip while her other hand dangles from the position of her arm being propped upon her mother’s shoulder. Whilst the mother gazes lovingly at her daughter, the daughter acknowledges her mother only through this posed elbow, which seems to communicate her triumph and dominance over all that her mother represents. Used solely as a resting post for one of her daughter’s awkwardly splayed limbs, the mother holds dearly in this image to her role as matronly admirer of her offspring, though her offspring breaks away, through violently overstated visual language, from every aspect of material and visual “tradition” that came before her.

Parameswaran notes of this image:

(Its) most visible colonial/modernist—natural history’s linear, binary, and sharply polarized logic—rendering of the ‘new and hip’ as radically different from the ‘old and outmoded’ is just the most banal of its hegemonic interpretations of globalization, a contrived moment that was preserved for the public gaze when light from the mother-daughter dyad fell onto a photographic surface.11

Moreover, when casually viewing this image, “busy readers can scan quickly to trace a non-Western nation’s passage from tradition to modernity.”12 Whereas no such

11 Parameswaran, “Reading the Visual,” 418.
12 Ibid, 418.
literal dramatic visual representation exists of Velarde and Hardin, their combined oeuvre is often similarly broadly interpreted, as I will demonstrate throughout this thesis, as a visual representation of the passage within non-Western Pueblo culture from “tradition” to “modernity.”
Chapter 2

Resisting Tradition: The Social and Artistic Modernity of Pablita Velarde

“Femaleness is not an essential quality. It is constantly made, and redistributed. One has to be able to see the formation of femaleness in each and every form at a given point...see what it is composed of, what its social correlates are, what its ideological potentials are, what its freedoms may be.”

(Radhika Parameswaran, 2008)

A tradition of originality is grounded in Velarde’s early upbringing at Santa Clara Pueblo. In an outward rejection of familial and Pueblo expectations for young women, Velarde voiced a distaste for the mundane routine of homemaking, preferring her artistic pursuits to the responsibilities of life with her father and stepmother as an older sibling caretaker of younger siblings and half-siblings. She resented the accepted Pueblo artistic hierarchy that assigned certain artistic tasks to women and others to men. According to these commonly held Pueblo values, women made pottery and men painted. This gendered segregation of the arts was

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13 Radhika Parameswaran, “Reading the Visual,” 423.
14 Tisdale, In Her Own Words, 62; 72-73.
especially apparent at the Santa Fe Indian School Studio, where Velarde and her sister Rosita were Dorothy Dunn’s first female painting students in 1932.\(^{15}\) Whilst involved with Dunn’s Studio, during which time she often had to endure the unwanted flirtations and “pats where I didn’t want to be patted” by the many male students,\(^{16}\) Velarde responded positively to Dunn’s teaching to paint what would be happening at that moment at his or her Pueblo. Velarde painted images of daily tasks such as harvesting corn and, perhaps looking to her mentor Tonita Pena (San Ildefonso, 1893-1949), of women in the Pueblo doing distinctively female activities, such as preparing the garments of a young girl about to embark on her first ceremonial dance (see Figure 2). Velarde also embraced animal imagery, which she painted from memory, recalling, for example, a deer that frequently came to the door of her father’s house in Santa Clara.\(^{17}\)

When Velarde graduated from the Santa Fe Indian School in 1936, she was confronted with the disparaging reality that, despite her extensive artistic training with Dunn, the Santa Fe Indian School had nonetheless prepared her essentially for duties as a wife, mother, and, possibly, a secretary.\(^{18}\) In the coming years, Velarde would take on random jobs, from hospital nursing to work as the caretaker of Boy Scout founder Ernest Thompson Seaton’s young child, in order to support herself while she indulged in her passion, painting. Resisting the community and familial push to marry someone within Santa Clara Pueblo, Velarde cited her desire to not

\(^{15}\) Ibid, 44.

\(^{16}\) “Golden Dawn: The Pueblo Paintings of Pablita Velarde,”\emph{ Colores} (New Mexico PBS, 1994).

\(^{17}\) Tisdale, \emph{In Her Own Words}, 49.

\(^{18}\) Ibid, 72.
marry someone with whom she could trace common family relations, as she humorously asserted “I don’t want to marry my own cousin.”19 In 1939, three years after her graduation from the Santa Fe Indian School, Velarde was commissioned to participate in two major public works: murals, at Bandelier National Monument near her home Pueblo of Santa Clara, and at Maisel’s Trading Post in Albuquerque. These commissions brought her the public exposure to pursue more projects and the financial stability to support herself with her artistic endeavors. She subsequently became the first woman from Santa Clara to finance and build her own home on the Pueblo in the early 1940s.20

Velarde’s actions likely seemed brazen to a Pueblo community that was very much based in a patrilineal social and cultural structure, which placed home ownership rights on the male head of the family. In her early twenties and unmarried, Velarde was likely perceived as asserting a modern and flashy sensibility, with her house, in addition to being the first independently financed residence by a woman, the first in the Pueblo to have electricity.21 Within a few years of building her house at Santa Clara, Velarde had moved to Albuquerque for work, and had met the man who would become her husband, Herbert Hardin. In marrying a white man, or, for that matter, any man who was not a member of Santa Clara, Velarde’s future children would be subject to the patrilineal rule that forbade the children of non-Santa Clara fathers to be enrolled in the Pueblo. Velarde would, for the rest of her life, speaking out against this Pueblo law, which she deemed

19 Ibid, 103.
20 Ibid, 96.
21 Ibid, 96.
unfair in its hypocrisy, as children of non-Santa Clara mothers could still enroll, as long as their father was a Santa Clara member. Velarde would later assess the impact that this had on her children as “the tribe giving them a push-away sign.”

Scholars Gaile Canella and Kathryn Maurelito note, “for Native peoples, indigenous means living in reciprocal relations with one’s place of birth.” Very early in her adult life, Pablita Velarde’s “reciprocal relations” with her place of birth, Santa Clara Pueblo, were under a great deal of strain due to her unorthodox social actions. Her connection to Santa Clara had been damaged by her sensationally independent construction of a home on Pueblo lands, her refusal to marry within the Pueblo, and her subsequent move from the Pueblo to Albuquerque.

Velarde provoked distrust and disapproval in the Santa Clara community as a result not only of her independent personal life, but also of her artistic choices. Most notable in her perceived breaches of artistic taboos was Old Father Storyteller, a 1960 children’s book that conveyed stories of Pueblo cosmological myths through text and accompanying artwork. Prior to this publication, these stories had been told orally amongst members of the Pueblo. Recording the stories in writing proved to be problematic for many Pueblo members, and the inherent reality of making the stories available to a non-Pueblo audience also undoubtedly fueled the controversy surrounding this project.

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22 Ibid, 103.
23 Ibid, 104.
Pablita Velarde’s at times problematic relationship with her home Pueblo was, by default, passed down to Helen Hardin, who grew up in the largely Anglo school and social communities of Albuquerque, and, despite her “status” as being half Native, could not enroll in her mother’s Pueblo. For Pablita Velarde and Helen Hardin, “indigenous” likely meant something far more complicated than “living in reciprocal relations” with their respective places of birth. “Indigenous” implicated an attempted navigation of the cultural mores of a Pueblo that seemed at times to push both of them away. This complex navigation of cultural identity compelled both Velarde and Hardin to represent Santa Clara, both in literal physical and in more broad philosophical incantations in their respective art.

One example of this artistic exploration of Pueblo culture is a work completed in conjunction with a 1961 publication entitled How and Why Stories. The painting, entitled Why the Coyote Bays at the Moon (Figure 3), by Pablita Velarde, appears in contrast to her earlier works done in a more straightforward Studio Style. A starkly geometricized coyote stands upon a jagged, angular ground line. The coyote’s firmly rooted legs bend in a sharp angle at the knee, giving way to a rainbow-shaped torso, which curves into angled front paws and an elongated linear neck. The coyote’s face appears in a triangle, its facial features shown in flattened perspective as it throws its head back in a cry to the moon. The only features on the coyote that appear in a softer, more curved form are the creature’s tail, which makes an s-shape with the coyote’s torso and culminates in an ovoid curve at its tip, and the bag that the coyote carries around its neck, which hangs down from the animal in a horn of plenty-shaped elongated form.
The coyote’s surrounding environment is portrayed in a similarly simplistic geometric style, with a large circle of flat pigment framing the coyote and echoing the elongated curving form of its torso. Above this circle of color sits a circular face high in the night sky. This figure represents the moon that has just been created by the disobedient coyote. The moon’s face is conveyed through simplistic crescent-shaped eye slits, and a small circle indicating a mouth. Four lines extend from each side of the moon’s face, one of which connects with the flat background behind the coyote. In the curved space of the night sky, evenly placed stars twinkle against the black background.

The subject matter of this work, a coyote, would have been familiar to Velarde as the kind of “traditional” animal representation that would have been encouraged by Dorothy Dunn at the Santa Fe Indian School. The painting itself, however, bares more formal similarities with work that was being done at the time— the 1950s and 1960s— that was considered at the forefront of avant-garde Native American art, most notably the work of Cochiti artist Joe Herrera. In an untitled work from 1951 (Figure 4), Herrera painted a curving band of geometric design that bares similarities to Velarde’s curving coyote torso. Herrera’s rainbow shape is, at is base, divided into two colors, brown and blue. On top of these bands of color, decorative elements divided into abstracted triangles recall a stylized butterfly. Herrera’s work, like Velarde’s coyote painting ten years later, consists of overarching curves contrasted against more linear, angular, and often triangular elements. Herrera’s Untitled features an abundance of repeated circular or semi-circular forms, with linear elements in the form of outstretched zigzags that enter
the work from the top and bottom and make their way to the off-center focal point of the piece. Velarde’s work recalls these forms, but inverts the hierarchy of shapes to feature more sharply angular elements that are complemented by the occasional well-placed curved line.

*Why the Coyote Bays at the Moon* also bares some similarity to Herrera’s 1953 work *Creation* (Figure 5). In *Creation*, Herrera maintained the same formal balance of curving and sharp geometric lines as seen in *Untitled* to portray an abstracted scene of a spiritual and earthly creation. The work features a cloud of figures and scenes, contained in an asymmetrical form. Beyond this asymmetrical cloud, a black sky is barely visible with one bright four-sided yellow star gleaming in the upper left corner. Most notable for comparison with Velarde’s *Coyote*, a circular abstracted face, divided into three colors and with straight lines across its upper half to signify eyes, looks upon the viewer from the top portion of the work. A zigzag thunderbolt comes down from the top right of the painting and divides this face in half. Dividing the face further, an arm juts out of a figure hovering to the left of the face, grabbing onto the lightning bolt in front of the face. The placement and angle of the face, along with its overall shape, are similar to the moon figure in Velarde’s *Coyote*. A distinctive iconography found in both works, the tilted circular face serves as a possible indication that Velarde was looking outside the confines of her “traditional” artistic background for inspiration. Aside from this one specific icon, aesthetic elements in these two works by Herrera and in *Why the Coyote Brays at the Moon* by Velarde share the more broad formal similarities outlined.
While not suggesting that Velarde was necessarily looking to these specific works by Joe Herrera, it is notable that she was exposed to Herrera’s style and artistic techniques through Helen Hardin, who had, in the summer of 1960, studied under the tutelage of Herrera at the University of Arizona summer workshop for young Native American students. In an interview conducted by Shelby Tisdale for her 2012 biography of the artist, Velarde referenced experimenting with the technique of paint splattering: “Helen went to the University of Arizona, and that year Joe Herrera was out there as an instructor. Then when Helen got back home, she was using that technique. So copycat mama decided to try it.”25 When assessing Velarde’s paintings done in the years following Hardin’s return from the summer art courses, it is possible to draw connections between Velarde and the “new” camp of Native art, as represented by Herrera, that are not only technical, as addressed by Velarde in the above quotation, but that are also stylistic and iconographic, as seen in the comparison of Velarde’s Coyote and Herrera’s Creation and Untitled.

Another painting included in Velarde’s How and Why Stories of 1961, entitled How the Skunk Got His Scent (Figure 6), features a silhouette of a skunk, with three stinkbugs (a larger mother and two smaller offspring) forming a strong diagonal going from the skunk in the lower right side of the work to the upper left side. The stinkbugs are distinctively shaped with two pointed circular parts—a head and a lower abdomen—flanking a circular central abdomen. The bugs’ linear, angular legs propel them upwards to the far reaches of this abstracted landscape. A painting that bares many iconographic and stylistic similarities to Velarde’s Skunk, done by a

25 Pablita Velarde, quoted in Tisdale, In Her Own Words, 173.
young teenage Helen Hardin circa 1960 (Figure 7), is notable as representing what was “likely her first use of spattering following the Tucson Fellowship.”26 The work features three overlapping ceramic vessels: a yellow olla, a black bowl, and a red canteen. The vessels appear roughly spotted, the result of the spattering technique, and they sit against a beige background with no hint of ground line or depth. In the foreground of the work, a line of four small insects walks in a line towards the vessels, each of which contains a source of food or water. Already attacking the vessels to extract their nutrients, three larger stylized insects spearhead the mission of undermining these man-made ceramics in order to feed and water the small army of insects marching forward. Hardin’s insects, most notably the four small figures walking in a diagonal line from the lower left side of the painting towards the centralized ceramics, bear a striking resemblance to Velarde’s How the Skunk Got His Scent insects. Both sets of figures feature elongated torsos, similarly angled legs and antennae, and both groupings walk forward in a linear fashion, leading the viewer’s eye on a strong diagonal upward. While not suggesting that either artist directly appropriated the iconography of the other, such strongly similar figures in the two works indicate that there was some iconographic exchange occurring between Velarde and Hardin in their respective artistic endeavors in the early 1960s.

Around this time, Pablita Velarde found herself placed in a position of justifying her art and the integrity of her artistic training, which had occurred almost thirty years prior in the Santa Fe Indian School Studio of Dorothy Dunn. Velarde and Dunn were provoked into defending the artistic philosophies of the

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Studio at a 1959 conference entitled *Directions in Indian Art* at the University of Arizona in Tucson. The overarching theme of this conference was the evaluation of Native art in regards to the formation of new art practices and methodologies in the training of young Native artists. In evaluating what he considered to be the outdated mode of teaching spearheaded by Dunn, a University of Arizona professor, Robert M. Quinn, asserted: “A call was made for the reestablishment of special schools. The primary example is the Santa Fe school, which I deplore. The Santa Fe School was one in which, in the process of producing an Indian artist, actually taught him a style of painting derived from Persian miniatures. At best this style is an unwarranted eclecticism and at the worst it is a fraud.”\(^{27}\) Quinn went on to say, “There should be no effort to contain the Indian within the traditions of his past. He has to realize that he is an artist first and an Indian second if his art and the tradition it represents are to grow...We should cherish the Indian arts of the past and preserve them physically, but we should leave the past in the museum.”

Confronted with the staunchly voiced opinion of an academic authority figure, Pablita Velarde and Dorothy Dunn likely felt personally attacked as they were being told by a new generation of artistic leadership that their art and artistic philosophies, and perhaps they themselves, belonged in a museum. In his conference presentation, Lloyd Kiva New addressed an additional point of contention when he stated, “Let’s be more concerned with the evolution of artists rather than art products.”\(^{28}\) Neglecting to acknowledge the tangible benefits Dorothy Dunn and her system had provided a generation of Native artists, those in

\(^{27}\) Tisdale, *In Her Own Words*, 164.

\(^{28}\) Lloyd Kiva New, quoted in Tisdale, *In Her Own Words*, 164.
favor of the establishment of the new Institute of American Indian Arts, which would, significantly, be located in the old Santa Fe Indian School, attacked Dunn’s Studio with vigor.29 Ironically, the Institute of American Indian Arts would, itself, be criticized in later times for aggressively promoting commercially based artistic production amongst its young students.30

These attacks would have been especially painful to Pablita Velarde, who, without the training provided by Dunn, would likely have had no formal outlet in her resistance to the largely adhered-to gender norms of Santa Clara Pueblo. Under Dunn’s tutelage, Velarde gained the skills that would later allow her the freedom to support herself and her two children as her marriage ended. Dunn’s training allowed Velarde to pursue easel painting, an overwhelmingly male-dominated field, whereas Santa Clara tradition would have pushed her towards the more acceptable female artistic endeavors of ceramic or textile production.31 The criticisms of Dorothy Dunn voiced so vehemently refused to give her due praise for doing something that was, at the time she did it, shockingly modern. Dunn had provided Native artists—most significantly, a female Native artist—the means to compete in and benefit from an international art market.

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29 The location of the then- newly established Institute of American Indian Arts was viewed by some as an affront to those who felt philosophically and stylistically aligned with the Santa Fe Indian School, as the physical placement of the “new” school of Native American art (IAIA) was on the site of the “old” school of Native American Art (Santa Fe Indian School). In a seeming display of spatial dominance, the location of IAIA signified a perceived triumph of new philosophies and spaces over those that were viewed by some as outdated and old.


31 See Tisdale, In Her Own Words, chapter 1.
Lloyd Kiva New, in his comment that art should now be focused on the development of artists rather than art products, was correct in asserting that the goals of Native American art were shifting along with the times. He failed, however, in not noting that the push for Native art products in the earlier half of the twentieth century had provided the basis for a tradition of independent Native artists that would, in turn, allow future artists to thrive, for example, at IAIA. The institution-based artistic development inherently necessary for Native American art to reach a level of modernity employed by Euro-American artists had to “start” somewhere. It had largely started with Dorothy Dunn at the Santa Fe Indian School. Dunn’s early efforts were, however, the subject of attack not only from university art professors and museum professionals, but also from emerging scholars in the field of Native American art.\(^{32}\)

In his seminal 1971 *Indian Painters and White Patrons*, scholar J. J. Brody assessed Dorothy Dunn’s Studio in a critical tone typical of the previous decade, but his criticism included an assertion that implicated Helen Hardin as much as it did Pablita Velarde. Brody claimed that the legacy of the Studio permeated the artistic experience of the offspring of artists trained at the Santa Fe Indian School. While it seems obvious that this would be the case, as children naturally are influenced in their development by parental involvement in various social and artistic circles, Brody’s reference to the far-reaching artistic influence of the Studio emphasized Studio artists’ desire to please white patrons. Brody asserted that children of Studio-trained artists:

\(^{32}\) Ibid, 215.
...maintain the decorative ideals of the Studio but modify the idiom by supplying an aura of contemporaneity that is acceptable to their patrons. A surprising number of these young painters are, like (Joe) Herrera, the children of painters. Among the most polished of the modifiers are...Helen Hardin, daughter of Pablita Velarde of Santa Clara. None attended the Santa Fe Indian School, but all were involved to some degree with the White art world of that city...Paintings by the parents...are avidly sought by collectors of Indian art, and the artists’ children have thereby been sympathetically received and encouraged.33

For Helen Hardin, who was at the time struggling to assert her own artistic identity as completely independent from that of her mother, this broad assertion must have seemed as though it was undermining her integrity as a young avant-garde artist. For Velarde, this summary of her work and that of her daughter was made, somewhat insensitively, with no feedback or input from her or her daughter. At this point, after more than ten years of encountering academic banter that used Velarde herself and those dear to her as examples representative of some broader artistic or philosophical issue, Velarde was surely wary of being theoretically objectified by individuals who had no direct experience with the themes and people they were analyzing. Velarde commented, "Brody was just prejudiced. He thought he knew more about Indian art than Dorothy did."34

Discussing a meeting of the National League of American Pen Women35 during which Brody was present, Velarde noted that she and Hardin

34 Pablita Velarde, quoted in Tisdale, In Her Own Words, 216.
35 National League of American Pen Women: "An organization of professional women artists, composers, and writers, founded in 1897, dedicated to our mission...as an organization to serve our communities through the arts.” See NLAPW website: http://www.nlapw.org.
gave him heck...We argued with him—especially Helen did most of the talking...We didn’t realize that he was a professor of anthropology or something and he had done a lot more studying than we did, but we were the Indians he was talking about!...He just studied up, read about it from somebody else’s thinking, and put it all together. This is the way I felt.36

Voicing these sentiments, Velarde emphasized that during this era of heated debate in the history of Native American art education, it seemed often to be the opinion of non-Native community outsiders that dictated what was best for Native artists.

The continuing commentary by figures such as Brody, theoretically grounded in expectations regarding patron/artist relationships and the continuing effect of Dunn’s imposed stylistic dictations upon her students, appears moot when viewing some of Velarde’s work undertaken in the mid-to-late 1960s. One such broad, theoretical expectation would be that Velarde would continue to paint in the flattened, two-dimensional decorative style that had proven commercially viable in the past. This is not the case in a striking 1965 painting (figure 8), entitled Communicating with the Full Moon, which showcases Velarde’s developing exploration of a modern aesthetic.

The portrait, which scintillates with vibrant colors geometrically angled in the background, features a lone female figure dressed in a traditional black manta, with accompanying red and green belt and decorative fringe elements. The figure is kneeling on the ground, arms extended with one hand holding what appears to be a feathered object and the other hand extended upward, fingers outstretched, in a gesture that seems to support a cry or sentiment directed to the moon. Her face is upturned; the viewer sees it in profile, with her black hair encircling her cheeks, 

36 Ibid, 216.
highlighted by the yellow light of the full moon. Looking down upon her, the moon appears horned and with a fringe of blue spikes emerging from its top half. The moon itself appears in fragmented geometric triangles of color, ranging from vibrant blues to warmer tones of orange and yellow. The moon’s face is visible through two black slits, in which irises are visible, and a single black slit for a mouth. The moon’s curves are reiterated in a double-lined semi-circle that extends down from the shape, encircling the female figure’s head and shoulders within its curve. Finally, a single line comes down from the lower left side of the moon, breaking into dots as it nears the open hand and mouth of the figure.

This painting— in which the main figure bears striking enough resemblance to Velarde that it can safely be deemed a self-portrait— shows a lone woman engaged in a state of dialogue with the animated figure of the moon. There is a sharing of power, of feeling, or of knowledge occurring between the two of them, as indicated by the linear elements physically connecting the kneeling figure with the moon. The most striking aspect of the portrait, however, is its cubist style. The figure’s manta is broken into blocks of sharply delineated shapes, as indicated by varying shades of black and grey, and her arms, chest, and face appear fractured into the typical cubist representation of various angles and viewpoints being imposed upon each other. Her arms are divided into four varying flat shades of skin tone, with lighter shades reflecting the moonlight falling upon her.

Stylistically reminiscent of earlier work by Oscar Howe (see Figure 9), this self-portrait is significant in demonstrating how Pablita Velarde represented herself at this juncture in her career. Making very deliberate stylistic choices, Velarde
showed that she was a dynamic artist, that she was not bound to any one style or mode of representation. Aligning herself with a modern Native art aesthetic, she provided a visual counterpoint to many of the derogatory sentiments voiced by art professionals and academics regarding her generation of Native artists. Arguably, she also pointed to the hypocrisy of these comments in creating a painting that was as derivative of modern art as Studio style paintings were of “Persian miniatures.”

Most art is derivative of something that came before it, but which art is acceptable from which to derive inspiration very much depends on the fashion and trends of the era. Velarde’s portrait asserted her identity as a modern artist who will indeed derive inspiration from various sources: from modern Native artists, from the Pueblo genre scene painting of her youth, from her own daughter, who was herself asserting an artistic identity at this time, and from her emotional and cultural experiences as a single Santa Clara woman painter.

Scholar Radhika Parameswaran notes,

femalesness is not an essential quality. It is constantly made, and redistributed. One has to be able to see the formation of femaleness in each and every form at a given point...see what it is composed of, what its social correlates are, what its ideological potentials are, what its freedoms may be.37

Pablita Velarde was born into a cultural and social environment that did assert femaleness as an essential quality, or, rather, an essential role. Velarde continually refused to conform to that role in an era when her peers at Santa Clara Pueblo generally felt compelled to uphold the traditional gender constructs of their

37 Parameswaran, “Reading the Visual,” 423.
community. Her unwillingness to conform served as an initial isolating factor in regards to that community. Upon her divorce from her Anglo husband, Pablita Velarde, and, by association, her children, were more concretely viewed as Pueblo outsiders. Velarde framed this attitude of resentment in terms of success, and said, “They (Santa Clara Pueblo members) had such little appreciation for a successful person. Instead of trying to be successful themselves, they’d start talking about them in a negative way.” Velarde felt so persecuted at Santa Clara that she came to believe she had been the target of a curse, which caused her to lose weight and become increasingly anxious.

Velarde’s role as a social outsider in her Pueblo and Helen Hardin’s non-member status speak to a notable resistance from the Pueblo to accept these female figures who so daringly discarded Pueblo gender barriers dictating artistic creation, property ownership, and courtship and marriage norms. The social correlates and ideological potentials of Velarde’s and Hardin’s gender were thus complicated immeasurably by both the era in which they lived and by the fact that they came from a small, socially conservative Pueblo. Their emotional and intellectual responses to the complexities of their relationships to the Pueblo are represented visually in many of their works, and it is these visual responses that form the basis of the familial tradition of originality.

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38 Personal conversation with Margarete Bagshaw-Tindel, November 6, 2013, in which Bagshaw-Tindel stated, “Santa Clara Pueblo has always been a very socially conservative Pueblo, making it difficult for independent women like my grandmother (Velarde) to be accepted, particularly by the men of the pueblo.” Bagshaw-Tindel noted the gender inequalities that have remained problematic at the pueblo, with generations of female artists striving socially and culturally against “men who don’t seem to get it (the artistic success of females from Santa Clara).”

39 Pablita Velarde, quoted in Tisdale, In Her Own Words, 206.
Chapter 3

Embracing Traditional Icons Through Modern Technique: Helen Hardin’s Emergence as an Innovative Contemporary Painter

“Stylistically there is little comparison since Pablita does a ‘then’ Indian thing and Helen does a ‘now’ Indian thing.”40 (Joan Bucklew, 1970)

“The family heritage is art, but there tradition ends and the originality of Helen Hardin emerges.”41

(Nelson Gallery-Atkins Museum exhibition handout, 1978)

An aspiring painter from childhood, Helen Hardin was early to form a troubled relationship with her mother, Pablita Velarde; this relationship stemmed not only from the artistic competition inherent in their situation, but also from a perceived contradiction that Hardin felt existed at the core of her young life. Hardin remarked of her childhood in a 1972 interview with Margaret Connell Szasz, “she

(Velarde) was raising me with an Indian philosophy (reverse psychology), but she was raising me in the city...I was receiving positive from one side and negative at home, and it was hitting me in between.”

Surrounded by Anglo classmates and community members, Hardin’s childhood in Albuquerque was both imbued with nurturing and fraught with scolding by Velarde in what Hardin deemed a distinctively “Indian philosophy,” whilst Hardin herself felt socially and emotionally inclined to the “positive” that she was receiving outside the home. When, in the early 1960s, Hardin became romantically involved with a notoriously troubled young man, Pat Terazas, she fled her problematic relationship with her mother only to turn to one that was more physically and emotionally abusive. Hardin and Terazas’ daughter, Margarete Bagshaw, was born in 1964; Hardin now bore a familial tie to Terazas, which made any future attempts to sever relations with the increasingly unstable man difficult.

Hardin responded to the hardships of her personal relationships by engaging in artistic creation. In the aforementioned 1972 interview with Margaret Connell Szasz, Hardin commented, “every time I have had a desperate situation in my life, painting has always pulled me out of it.”

While Hardin noted that the act of artistic creation itself served generally as a therapeutic expression for her, the subject matter in many of her works can be interpreted as providing insight into some of her specific personal toils. One such painting, *Old Age Brings Visions of Rainbows* (figure 10), was painted in 1980, late in Hardin’s career. It provides a poignant view

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43 Helen Hardin, quoted in Nelson, *Straight Line Curved*, 55.
into a possible artistic exploration of a positive turn to a long-turbulent mother/daughter relationship.

In this highly colorful and geometric work, a seemingly female face peers out from an abstracted blanket. Her face is represented in profile and displays deep creases indicating old age. Her blanket is broken into triangles and trapezoids. The blanket reflects the vibrant colors of the rainbow that encircles her upper body; bright turquoise, red, pink, purple, and muted green and orange stand in stark contrast to the grey hue of the background and the occasional black shape interspersed with the colors of the blanket. Considering Hardin’s deeply held Catholic beliefs, she may have been suggesting the Christian iconography of a halo in the perfectly circular rainbow form that surrounds the figure. Starting with an inner ring of blue, the rainbow changes from purple, to red, to orange, culminating in an outer ring of golden yellow. Beneath the figure, a pattern of interlocking yellow and grey triangles creates a ground line on which the blanketed figure sits. Giving the overall impression of a mountainous shape rising from the earth, the lower third of the blanket resembles the foothills of a mountain, and the shapes that build upon this base become increasingly steep as the blanket culminates in the hooded form from which the figure’s head emerges.

The significance of this work lies not only in its aesthetically engaging design and innovative representation of the human form. The year in which it was painted, 1980, was a hugely important year for both Hardin and Pablita Velarde. Prior to this year, Velarde’s dependence on alcohol, and her subsequent erratic behavior, had become debilitating for her both personally and professionally. Velarde’s weight
dangerously low and her health reflected in a dismal physical appearance, Helen Hardin decided that an intervention was necessary to help her mother emerge from an alcoholic slump and, possibly, to save her life. Through Hardin’s initiative, and with the aid of healthcare professionals, Velarde overcame her alcohol dependence in 1980 and resumed her thriving art career and her personal responsibilities as a mother and grandmother.

No records exist indicating that *Old Age Brings Visions of Rainbows* is Hardin's portrait of her mother, painted in response to Velarde’s triumph over substance abuse. However, the timing of the work, as well as its title and iconographic references, suggests that it may indeed exist as Hardin’s personal visual monument to her mother. If this is the case, it becomes clear that four years prior to Hardin’s death, the troubled mother/daughter relations that served as the basis of their earlier experiences had faded and morphed into feelings of respect and, possibly, gratitude, conveyed artistically from daughter to mother. Recognizing Velarde as a woman now at peace, experiencing visions of rainbows after a storm-filled life, Hardin acknowledged the saintly aspects of old age, of a mother who put love and effort into raising offspring who, Hardin surely realized of herself, was at times a difficult and tiresome daughter to an equally difficult and tiresome mother. While Margaret Bagshaw-Tindel cannot confirm this image as a definitive portrait of her grandmother, she acknowledges this interpretation as an “original, interesting”

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44 See Tisdale, *In Her Own Words*, 234.
reading of the painting; she recalls of this era, “everything in all of our lives became more peaceful when grandmother achieved sobriety.”

Helen Hardin’s use of art as therapy in the early 1980s had origins in her earlier artistic endeavors. Of these, most historically and socially relevant was Hardin’s participation, in 1960, in an aforementioned art camp sponsored by the University of Arizona. This camp would prove to be an early prototype for the system of art training that would continue to develop in the 1960s at the Institute of American Indian Arts in Santa Fe. The camp recruited young American Indian art students, and included faculty members such as Cochiti artist Joe Herrera. Some of the students and faculty involved were children of established Native artists. Though Hardin noted verbally, and visually through her development of new techniques, her respect for the leadership and teaching of Herrera, her overall impressions of the camp were ambivalent at best. She summarized her experience: “they were trying to tell us the traditional Indian art was not the thing that we should be doing and we should be doing something else, but they didn’t really know what we should be doing.”

This commentary provides a reflection that would become indicative of the image of herself and her art that Hardin would struggle to promote throughout her career. Often contradicting herself regarding her opinions of “traditional” and “modern” or “contemporary” Indian art, Hardin seemed to convey an uncertainty about what her art was, how it should be categorized, and how it related to that of her mother. Voicing her wish to be viewed as a wholly contemporary artist (not

45 Interview with Margarete Bagshaw-Tindel, November 6, 2013.
46 Hardin, quoted in Nelson, Straight Line Curved, 42.
even per se as a Native artist, but rather simply as an artist), Hardin also in turn praised “traditional” or “true” Indian art, criticizing Native artists whom she deemed had gone too far from the “traditional” in their painting.47

Hardin appears to have been more critical of contemporary art earlier in her career, for example voicing distaste for the art she was seeing in Columbia during a 1968 show at the United States Embassy in Bogota. This show had developed as a result of Herbert Hardin’s State Department assignment in Columbia, which, in turn, attracted Hardin and daughter Margarete for an extended stay with Hardin’s father and new wife and family. Hardin remarked in a 1968 letter to her mother, written during her time in Columbia, “Everyone here is painting abstract, you know the real ugly kind. So I hope my show hits them real hard.”48 During this early period in Hardin’s career, she appears to have been more aesthetically and philosophically aligned with Pablita Velarde than with her abstract artist peers. Jay Scott notes in his biography Changing Woman: The Life and Art of Helen Hardin: “she (Hardin) had no sympathy for what Kay Larson termed the twentieth century’s ‘rage for disorder,’ and in that sense- as in many others- she was profoundly alienated from the artistic mainstream.”49 Her lack of “sympathy” for the disorder she observed in the “ugly kind” of abstract art she saw in Columbia is evident in a painting displayed at her 1968 Columbia show, entitled White Buffalo Dance (figure 11).

47 See, for example, Nelson, Straight Line Curved, 107.
48 Hardin, quoted in Nelson, Straight Line Curved, 92.
Many visual elements of *White Buffalo Dance* reflect Hardin's voiced distaste for the abstract, aligning it more with Velarde's paintings of the 1950s and 1960s than the art produced by Hardin's young Indian contemporaries at IAIA in Santa Fe. The work features three dancers standing in a symmetrical triangular formation, the two dancers on either side of the central figure portrayed in near-mirror images of each other, with their rattles, bows and arrows, and yellow kilts with water serpents; they have similarly angled faces, each head featuring a horned buffalo skin. Both of these dancing figures stand on an arrow with one foot on the body of the arrow and the other foot raised in a rhythmic dance motion. Triangulated behind the two dancers, a central female figure holds a wooden lightning carving; she wears a manta with white, black, red, and green designs, and she is portrayed in a one-footed stance similar to that of her companions. Behind the female figure, a ghostly buffalo, painted in soft tones of white and gray, stands in profile, much of its head hidden by the ceremonial objects belonging to the dancer standing in front of it. The four figures—those of the three humans and the buffalo—float against a nearly empty background that features only a geometric suggestion of a cloud against a sprayed soft blue sky.

Among the most obvious similarities to many of Velarde's works are the absence of a solid ground line and of conventional perspective, and also the simplified depiction of the human form. Hardin's figures do have depth, but it is very stylized and geometricized, created from accentuated linear shadows that contrast against the softer curves of human skin and fabric. The faces of Hardin's male dancers display sharply squared cheek and jaw structures and linear arm and
leg shadows, whereas the female’s face is softer, lacking the delineated bone structure of her male cohorts. Her arm shadows, however, are similarly geometricized. The buffalo behind the human figures is softly curved, completely lacking the linear aspects of the human figures. Compared with Hardin’s male dancers, Buffalo Dancer (undated, figure 12) by Velarde utilizes similar patterned linear body shadows, skin tone and nearly identical attire and dance positioning. Velarde’s dancer’s face and upper body are, however, notably less geometricized than those in Hardin’s work. Despite the many similarities in these two Buffalo Dance depictions, core differences hint at what became, as her career progressed, Hardin’s unique style, labeled by critics and historians as decidedly contemporary.50

Two years passed between Hardin’s 1968 depiction of the White Buffalo Dance and her much altered depiction of nearly the same scene, entitled Courtship of Yellow Corn Maiden (figure 13). In a telling example of Hardin’s stylistic development in the short years between the late 1960s of her Columbia show and the early 1970s, the later image features three figures arranged in the same triangular man-woman-man positioning as the previous work. The three figures in the 1970 image are, however, highly geometricized in both their physical bodies and their ceremonial attire. Buffalo headdresses are broken into splintered triangles of ruddy colors, while elbows, knees, and faces are reduced to stylized angled elements. The heavenly background of the previous work is replaced by sprayed

earth tones, which fade softly into each other and are punctuated by lighter linear patterning. In this work, Hardin has further developed the vaguely geometricized figures of her earlier Buffalo Dance depiction. Her 1970 Buffalo Dancer figures are fully realized angular dancing forms that lack any of the soft naturalism seen just two years prior in *White Buffalo Dance*. Both of the works featuring Buffalo Dancers, most notably the 1970 version, can be effectively compared to Pablita Velarde’s 1965 self-portrait (figure 8), in which the artist is depicted in much the same geometricized, linear, patterned forms as those present in Hardin’s works of approximately the same time period. Having been painted five years prior to Hardin’s buffalo dancers, and featuring much the same modern aesthetic, Velarde’s self-portrait may have served as a major source of inspiration to Hardin as she embraced elements of cubism in her own painting.

Even though she experimented with a more abstract, modernist aesthetic, Helen Hardin’s feelings towards her modern contemporaries in Native art were best summarized by her highly antagonistic attitude towards Luiseño painter Fritz Scholder. Believing that Scholder was “not Indian enough...and was too reliant on visual gimmick,” Hardin, herself half-Pueblo and admittedly “Anglo socially and Indian in art,” was overwhelmingly critical of Scholder. Hardin summarized her attitude in this 1968 statement, given to a journalist in Columbia during her embassy exhibition: “I believe there is more merit in the conservation of culture. I do not sympathize with the case of Indian painter Fritz Scholder, who after studying art in California becomes an abstract painter, which in my way of seeing is enough

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52 Hardin, quoted in Scott, *Changing Woman*, 17.
away from true Indian art.”53 In addition to her often-critical attitude towards contemporary Native artists, Hardin also voiced distaste for social causes at the forefront of the Native American experience in 1960s and 1970s North America. Disapproving of, for example, the American Indian Movement (AIM), Hardin commented: “Indians feel too sorry for themselves.”54 Perhaps reflecting her own struggles with assessing her place in a Native American social and artistic world, Hardin showcased an ironically judgmental tone in her reactions to what many other Native people viewed as social and cultural progress in a country that had traditionally suppressed such developments.

In addition to “not being Indian enough,” Fritz Scholder created art that embodied the “rage for disorder” noted by Jay Scott, which proved to be antagonistic to Helen Hardin. A painting that resonates with modernist disorder, Fritz Scolder's *Santana Kiowa* (figure 14) indeed reflects much that was antithetical to Hardin’s artistic philosophies. The Kiowa represented in Scholder’s painting stares garishly at the viewer with a grotesquely small head. His bulbous shoulders convey an alarmingly large torso, decorated in shades of red, pink, and blue. His face features flattened shades of blue, off-center eyes, and an overall blocky appearance. His hair hangs partially down his polka-dotted vest in streaks of light and dark blue. His massive form sits against a soft blue background. The figure of *Santana Kiowa* is hurriedly applied to the canvas, consists of loose brush strokes, and, most importantly, is visually jarring. All of these characteristics make this image, and many similar to it, an easy target for Hardin’s criticisms.

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Compared to Scholder’s grotesquely bloated Indian, Hardin’s figures from the 1960s and 1970s appear intricately detailed, highly planned, and painstakingly rendered. Valuing her own mode of painting, she deemed the more hurried, looser qualities of Scholder offensive and, likely, commercially threatening, with Scholder’s controversial works generating much publicity and attention. The artistic differences between herself and Scholder provided Hardin ample material for the basis of her criticisms of her provocative competition in the Native American art world. In their shared distaste for the school of art represented by Scholder, grounded in the philosophies and aesthetics of IAIA, Helen Hardin and Pablita Velarde voiced a common resistance to what they deemed to be inferior Native American art.

Hardin’s attitude towards her avant-garde Native artist contemporaries may have also been colored by her own feelings of displacement in her Pueblo community. Hardin and Velarde both voiced repeatedly their long-held feelings of isolation from Santa Clara Pueblo.55 Hardin specifically stated, as noted previously, that she had, in her social and artistic experiences, compartmentalized the Anglo and Indian aspects of her personality and behavior in order to thrive both in an Anglo social setting and in an Indian art market. Experiencing these social, cultural, and artistic complexities in her personal life, Hardin may have found solace in maintaining a publically voiced critical eye on those artists who were most easily targeted. Scholder, for example, was pinpointed by Hardin for his painterly aesthetic style, which veered too far away from the “traditional” and “true” in Native American art.

55 See, for example, Scott, Changing Woman, 135.
art; Hardin also criticized him for not being “Indian” enough, as a quarter Luiseño Native person. Having warned Scholder that if he were to develop a nosebleed, all of his “Indian blood would be lost,” Hardin perhaps targeted Scholder as an individual who may have been more confident than she in regards to his Native heritage. Notoriously brushing off other criticism of his lack of valid “Indianness,” Scholder may have intimidated an outwardly confident Hardin, who questioned her relationship to Santa Clara throughout her life, as evidenced by the following reflection, offered to biographer Jay Scott: “when my mom would take me to the Pueblo, or when I was living there as a very little girl, I was allowed to look at the dancers but I was never allowed to participate. I was always on the outside looking in.”

Helen Hardin faced isolation within Santa Clara Pueblo partially due to the stigma on her family, brought about by her mother’s relationship with, and failed marriage to, a White man. Carrying the burden of her mother’s blatant rejection of Pueblo social custom, Hardin further distanced herself from the Pueblo through her first relationship with a Hispanic man, Pat Terazas, and her later relationship with, and marriage to, Anglo photographer Cradoc Bagshaw. Hardin’s long-held feeling of being “on the outside looking in” to the Santa Clara community was given a more empirical basis when, in early 1976, she stayed at her mother’s house on the Pueblo

and was told by Pueblo members to close the curtains of the house during a ceremonial because she and her family “were not considered part of the Pueblo ceremonies.” Thus, Hardin’s disparaging comments towards Native artists and movements may have had a deeply personal origin in her own feelings of seclusion from and segregation within her Native community.

As Hardin’s artistic tendencies veered more towards spiritual Kachina imagery (see figure 15) later in her career, she provided Pueblo members with additional reasons to be leery of welcoming her into their community. Portraying faces of Pueblo spiritual beings, Hardin ignored a commonly understood and adhered-to rule that dictated what was appropriate for a Pueblo artist to depict in his or her art. Appropriate subject matter generally did not include imagery of ceremonials or beings from one’s own sacred Pueblo belief system. Non-Pueblo individuals viewing, buying, and selling the art, however, understood Hardin’s spiritually themed depictions as an indication of her inherent artistic talent and connection to a profound Native spiritual plane.

A tendency arose, and continues today, for critics, biographers, and scholars to idealize the method of Hardin’s artistic creation in regards to spiritual Pueblo iconography. Generally, the theory has been promoted that the art itself, and the spiritual imagery present, were an ingrained skill that Hardin could access due to her cultural heritage. For example, a 2001 psychoanalytic exploration of Hardin’s work, undertaken by psychoanalyst Kate T. Donohue, suggests the following: “her personal ancestry became the doorway to images from a more universal source,

59 Nelson, Straight Line Curved, 191.
60 See Scott, Changing Woman, 47.
what Jung called the collective unconscious.”61 Donohue also notes that Hardin signed her works most commonly with her Tewa name, Tsa-san-wee-eh, because, Donahue asserts, “she felt the creative source of her imagery was fueled by the expansive, imagistic, spiritual language and culture of the Tewa world.”62 Donahue neglects consideration of alternate, more commercially based theories as to why Hardin signed her paintings with her Indian name. Perhaps, as was often the case with earlier generations of Pueblo artists,63 Hardin found that her art sold better with a more exotic-sounding Indian name attached to it. Even the most current and well-informed biographical publications examining Hardin’s life and artistic output are occasionally colored with an overly idealized image of the inherently talented, collective conscience-accessing Native artist. Kate Nelson remarks in her 2012 biography, Helen Hardin: A Straight Line Curved: “hours of watching her mother crush rocks into grains of pigments and daub them into two-dimensional shapes transferred into sight reading glyphs of genetic muscle memory.”64

A more empirically accurate approach to Hardin’s spiritually-themed art must acknowledge her meticulous use of study materials in order to re-create ancestral symbols and designs. In a 1968 letter from Hardin to Velarde, written during Hardin’s time in Columbia, the young artist asks her mother to send her “Tom Bahti’s book on Indian arts, sketches on Hohokam figures, and geometric

62 Ibid, 23.
64 Nelson, Straight Line Curved, 1.
designs they used in their pottery.” At this early juncture in her career, Hardin undertook a thorough approach to the research side of her artistic endeavors, studying Hohokam figures and designs in order to pay aesthetic homage to these designs in her paintings.

A 1983 painting resulting from this careful study (detail, figure 16), entitled *Mimbres Rabbit Ceremonies*, bares striking enough resemblance to a popular Mimbres pottery design (see figure 17), done by the Mimbres ca. 1000-1250 C.E., that the level of precision of Hardin’s study of ancestral vessels becomes immediately apparent to the viewer. Utilizing basic shapes and color patterns—which are polychrome in Hardin’s version and contrasting black-on-white in most of the Mimbres pieces—Hardin draws extensively from Mimbres patterns and figures while asserting a distinctive interpretation of them. For example, the body of Hardin’s Mimbres rabbit curves downward, culminating in what seems to be a rattlesnake rattle. Half of the rabbit body appears as a sleek reptile, while the upper half retains a traditionally depicted rabbit. Using common Mimbres forms, but altering them to suit her vision, Hardin demonstrates that her paintings did not spring from an internal cultural source, but rather resulted from thoughtful research. Interestingly, Mimbres and Hohokam figures were also a popular subject for Velarde, as evidenced in *Polychrome and Mimbres Motifs*, a 1973 painting (figure 18) depicting a Mimbres-style rabbit with polychrome designs swirling to create the abstract form of a bird of prey with sharp beak and talons, posed to attack the

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65 Correspondence between Helen Hardin and Pablita Velarde, quoted in Nelson, *Straight Line Curved*, 102.
66 For more on Mimbres culture and pottery, see J.J. Brody, *Mimbres Painted Pottery* (School of American Research: Santa Fe, New Mexico, 1977).
rabbit. Having earlier in her career most commonly painted motifs and contemporary scenes that she would have witnessed at Santa Clara, Velarde may have become more adept at painting historic or research-based works during her time at Bandelier National Monument (1937-1943), during which she painted a series of historical vignettes of the Ancestral Pueblo People of the Bandelier site.

While borrowing, as Pablita Velarde had done throughout her career, from Ancestral Pueblo designs, Helen Hardin also voiced a resistance to partaking in techniques that were not distinctively hers. In a 1974 Public Broadcasting Service documentary, Hardin indicated, “I do not do earth pigment paintings because they are completely my mother’s. I won’t do anything that isn’t completely mine.” 67 Stating more concisely her rationale for not attempting this method, Hardin informed biographer Jay Scott, “I couldn’t stand her earth pigments because they were too slow and there were too many layers.” 68 She went on to acknowledge the similarities, however, in her mother’s earth pigment technique and her own technique of layering acrylic paint: “Now I’m doing the same thing in acrylics.” 69

Helen Hardin may have felt compelled and able to create Kachina imagery because she had largely not been brought up on the Pueblo, with its conservative approach to spiritual iconography in art. One of Hardin’s best-known Kachina images also functions as a self-portrait. Entitled One Soul Sings Two Songs (figure 19), the painting consists of two very different sides of one face merging in the central axis of a circle. Pale greens, blues, and vibrant turquoise dominate the color

67 “Helen Hardin,” American Indian Artist Series (PBS, KAET Television, Arizona State University, 1976).
68 Hardin, quoted in Scott, Changing Woman, 110.
69 Hardin, quoted in Scott, Changing Woman, 110.
palette, interspersed with warm shades of yellow and salmon. The right side of the face stares forward with a single circular, widely opened eye. Pointed fangs grimace in a square box mouth, and dark hair falls where the cheekbone and jawbone would exist on a human face. The overall impression of this side of the face is that of tension and discord. Merged with this seemingly suffering figure is a face that appears to depict serenity. A closed eye and open mouth indicate that there is singing occurring. Whereas both sides of the face may be engaged in vocal expression, the left side of the face conveys, through its curved, soft lines and warm earth tones, a song of peace while its counterpart seemingly sings a song of angst and despair.

Both sides of this face appear in a circular frame, reminiscent of a vanity mirror. Hardin undoubtedly felt, as evidenced verbally by her statements and artistically through this self-portrait, that two distinctive cultural elements existed within her own persona. Perhaps this image was what Hardin imagined to be staring back at her when she peered into a figurative mirror that would penetrate her outer appearance to expose her inner turmoil. In a similar vein as her mother's deeply personal self-portrait, *Woman Communicating with Full Moon* (figure 8), Hardin’s artistic vision of herself exposes a psychological state of balance between chaos and serenity that she likely perceived as a core element of her human experience.

Hardin’s use of Kachina iconography, despite the fact that it was more likely invoked for the purpose of a self-portrait than for providing insight into Pueblo religion, was nonetheless highly taboo within Santa Clara. Pablita Velarde feared
from an early point in her daughter’s artistic use of these icons that Hardin would be punished by divine law. Velarde stated, “I was told not to paint Kachinas by the elders at home when I started painting. They said ‘you can paint anything you want, a koshare is fine— but anything past a koshare we don’t want you to paint.’” When, in 1981, Hardin was diagnosed with breast cancer, Velarde was quick to draw conclusions based on her already established culturally bound fears. After Hardin’s 1984 death, Velarde commented, “Helen may have got cancer because she painted the Kachinas.” Kate T. Donohue echoed this sentiment, observing, “local legend has it that the elders actually said that Helen would die young for violating this taboo.” Further mystifying the life and art of Helen Hardin, “local legends” such as this complicate the manner both in which Hardin is viewed as an art figure and in which her paintings are upheld as uniquely executed pictures indicative of a distinctive young Native artist in the twentieth century.

Observing the varied scholarly, biographical, and commercial perspectives regarding Hardin’s artistic modernity versus traditionalism, her place within the contemporary art scenes of the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, her artistic methodology, and the sources for her inspiration, it is not surprising that individuals have interpreted Hardin and her art through a multitude of theories and philosophies. Hardin herself never seemed to know exactly what image she wanted to project to the communities that so eagerly observed the development of her artistic style and her subsequent success in the Santa Fe-based art market. Early in her career,

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70 Velarde, quoted in Nelson, Straight Line Curved, 47.
71 Velarde, quoted in Scott, Changing Woman, 53.
72 Donahue, Transcendental Journey, 23.
Hardin described her paintings to a journalist as “colorful and geometric,” she had “pulled the designs from the depths of her being—from her ancestral lineage, her memories, and especially the works of her mother.”73 Contrasting with this, and earlier sentiments expressed, Hardin commented in a 1970 New Mexico Magazine article,

some of those who do know my work are constantly comparing it with my mother's. I do my own thing. You cannot compare us. My mother is a ‘traditional’ painter. I feel that Indian art is growing away from traditional painting. Let the traditional painting be done by the artists who originated it and lived it. I am not, and never have been, a traditional Indian.74

Whereas one decade prior, Hardin had criticized Fritz Scholder for not being “traditional” enough in his art, towards the end of her career, Hardin herself sought to establish herself as a distinctly non-traditional Native artist.

While Helen Hardin assumed various conflicting attitudes throughout her career when discussing her artistic relationship to her mother, one must acknowledge that inherent to this commentary is the mother/daughter dynamic that the two experienced in their often-troubled personal relationship. Whereas Hardin harbored embittered feelings due to what she deemed to be an extremely difficult upbringing by Velarde, Velarde struggled with her own resentments, she felt, at being cornered into a stifling role as young mother to her two children.75 Additionally, Velarde, while undoubtedly wishing the best for her daughter, saw Hardin as artistic competition nonetheless, resulting in an “intolerable”

73 Nelson, Straight Line Curved, 134.
74 Hardin, quoted in Nelson, Straight Line Curved, 115.
environment for Hardin at Velarde’s house around the time of her first solo show in 1964.\textsuperscript{76}

These emotional complexities undoubtedly colored both Velarde’s and Hardin’s feelings towards the art that the other was respectively producing. When one examines the art itself, however, focusing on the aesthetic, iconographic, and stylistic properties that each artist utilized, an impression emerges that is untainted by the social realities of that complicated familial dynamic. It is an impression of continual, ever-changing creation, of carefully and meticulously painted figures and designs. When focusing on Velarde’s and Hardin’s art as an overarching familial oeuvre, the dichotomized images of the two women as radically opposing artistic figures is exposed as a socially and culturally constructed oversimplification.

Hardin’s and Velarde’s self-portraits \textit{One Soul Sings Two Songs} and \textit{Woman Communicating with the Moon}, respectively, present women struggling with the social and cultural hardships thrust upon them, and claiming and dominating those hardships to find artistic inspiration in them.

Kate Donohue says of Helen Hardin, “She was a forceful spokesperson for Native American art and women.”\textsuperscript{77} While this may be true in hindsight, Hardin likely would not have appreciated this view during much of her professional career. Becoming, after her death, a spokesperson for various causes that she may have scoffed at during her life, Hardin emerges in the twenty-first century as a heroic Pueblo woman artist, one to provide inspiration for generations of young Pueblo women to come. Plainly stating, during her life, that she did not identify with

\textsuperscript{76} Ibid, 66.
\textsuperscript{77} Donohue, \textit{Transcendental Journey}, 26.
causes, be they Indian causes or Feminist causes, Hardin’s ascendance into this role after death only furthers the complexities that arise when examining how she fit into the artistic, social, and cultural environments that she—and her art—inhabited during her lifetime.
“After her death, I was slow to resume painting. When I was finally able to paint again I painted the picture of life: High Country. I knew I would heal from her death.”

(Pablita Velarde, 2001)

Pablita Velarde continued to paint and, a hobby she had acquired after the death of Helen Hardin, sew fabric dolls, until her 2006 passing. As she stated to author Marcella J. Ruch, her own artistic creation, specifically in the form of her 1984 work High Country (figure 20), indicated to Velarde that she would be able to heal from Hardin’s death. In order to move forward with her own life, she needed to paint “the picture of life.”

In High Country, Velarde portrayed a group of seven deer, ranging in apparent age from very young, seen in the deer on the far left side, half the size of the other deer, to mature and authoritative, as seen with the deer second from left, with his large antlers and oversized facial features. The aforementioned antlered

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78 Pablita Velarde, quoted in Ruch, Marcella J., Pablita Velarde: Painting Her People (Albuquerque: New Mexico Magazine, 2001), 64.
deer is the only outwardly mature male, and he may indeed be the only male present in this grouping. Two deer rest with their legs tucked under their torsos, while one deer on the left leans down in seeming communication with one of the relaxed deer. Finally, to the far right of the painting, a deer scampers into the scene, possibly after running ahead to scout the uncharted territory.

Stylistically, in *High Country*, Velarde utilizes various design elements and techniques that span the many decades of her artistic training and experimentation. Whereas the seven deer display shading and depth, and are in no way representative of the flattened, full profile animals promoted by Dorothy Dunn at the Santa Fe Indian School, Velarde’s bushes in the foreground are reminiscent of those that she would have painted while studying with Dunn. Writhing and twisting upwards, they showcase delicately detailed red and orange leaves, which are highly decorative, geometricized, and intricate. They represent the type of aesthetic that would have, two decades prior, been criticized by some figures prominent in the heated Native art discourses as looking overly derivative of Persian art, with their intricate stylized patterning and emphasis on decorative design elements.\(^79\)

The ground beneath the deer undulates and swells in some areas, and is predominantly covered with green and yellow grass. Grey rocks contrast against the grass, and some areas of grass culminate in decorative red and yellow dots, echoing those present on the leaves of the bushes. The painting is split definitively into a foreground and background by two groupings of aspens that jut out of the far foreground and stand as bold dividers between the space inhabited by the deer and

\(^{79}\) See Robert Quinn’s commentary, quoted in Tisdale, *In Her Own Words*, 164.
the snowy blue and green hues beyond. The aspens are divided into groups of four, standing on the left side, and seven, standing in the middle of the scene. Each aspen displays a starkly white trunk, which tapers close to its top. Soft grey markings dot either side of the trunks, which, though they display identical shapes, are each depicted with a unique width and patterning. At their tops, bright yellow leaves merge, creating the effect of two interconnected, delicately patterned golden clouds.

Behind the groupings of aspens, six mountain peaks rise to the sky, representing the higher ground that will eventually be the resting place for these deer. The mountains are sharply angled, and appear distant and distinctive, compared to the land currently inhabited by the deer. There is an impression of the ground dropping off into a steep valley behind the aspens, of a vast space separating these two landscapes. This is achieved through the distancing of the mountains; perspective indicates that it will take a long trek for these deer to reach high country. Also, the aforementioned cool colors of the mountains provide a drastic juxtaposition to the bright, warm, lively colors of the foreground. In a vaguely suggested middle ground, three evergreen trees jut out between the two groups of aspens.

In a technical juxtaposition to the decorative flora found in the foreground, stylistically aligned with her early painting at the Santa Fe Indian School, Velarde used the modern art technique of paint splattering to achieve the suggestion of a snowy, wintery mountain scape in the background. The splatter technique, which Velarde jokingly referred to as something she had “copycatted” from Hardin, was, as discussed earlier, a technique that Hardin had learned from Joe Herrera at the
University of Arizona art camp for young Native students in 1964. Upon her observation of a young Hardin utilizing this newly acquired method, Velarde incorporated it into her own artistic practice. Perhaps as homage to Hardin, but also undoubtedly due to the aesthetic effect achieved, Velarde chose to feature splatter technique in her “painting of life.”

Examining this work, the viewer inevitably asks, “what, exactly, distinguishes this particular work as ‘the painting of life’?” How is this painting of deer more indicative of profound ideas of mortality than other images of deer painted by Velarde and other Pueblo artists from the 1930s onwards? The answer to that question may be that, through the act of creating this work, Velarde achieved the therapeutic release that was crucial for her own life to continue after the death of her daughter. I believe, however, that there are multiple visual cues present in this work that distinguish it as a work highly representational of the life cycle, death being an unavoidable component to that cycle.

Most broadly, the season in which the scene takes place, late fall/early winter, is the time of the yearly cycle when living things, be they bushes, trees, deer, or humans, will naturally slow down. In the case of the bushes and trees, they may appear to be dormant or lifeless for the coming months. The deer will physically slow down, eating less and conserving energy, and will emerge in the spring to a transformed landscape, one that will, in its spring abundance, provide the sustenance that will allow the deer to continue on their respective journeys through this world. Pueblo people as well undergo shifts at this juncture in the seasons; the

80 Tisdale, In Her Own Words, 173.
summer and fall harvest, with the centrally important and sacred crop of corn at its core, will now be conserved and used carefully throughout the harsh winter months as hunting takes precedence in the cycle of Pueblo sustenance. These two very different modes of life—those represented by broad distinctions of summer and winter—are reflected in the most basic element of Tewa social structure, the Winter and Summer Moieties.\textsuperscript{81} Belonging to a culture in which the yearly cycle is distinguished broadly by the notion of summer, denoting harvest, fertility, and warmth, and winter, emphasizing dormancy and coolness, Velarde provided in \textit{High Country} an aesthetic representation of this crucial time of transition.

The decidedly marked transition from the foreground to the background speaks to two very different spatial realities. The foreground, occupied by the deer, features the warm hues of autumnal transition. The background, with its angular mountain peaks at a higher altitude, appears to have already experienced transition. The blue and green snowy mountains are on the other side of the seasonal change; they are also on the other physical side of the divided landscape. The distant mountains await the deer as they move to higher ground. Tewa Scholar Alfonso Ortiz noted in his significant doctoral study of Tewa social and religious structures and beliefs that, for the Tewa, time and space are not separate notions.\textsuperscript{82} As can be observed with the importance of certain landscape features (specific mesas, mountains) in Tewa spiritual beliefs, worldly and otherworldly spaces coexist in the observable landscape. In a philosophical framework that generally proves difficult

\textsuperscript{82} See: Ortiz, \textit{The Tewa World}. 

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for the non-Pueblo Western mind to grasp, time and space form a continuum where
time is non-linear but may be compartmentalized alongside notions of spatial
understanding.

*High Country* presents the viewer with a visual rendering of worldly and
otherworldly space. The worldly space, colored with warm hues, is occupied by
seven deer, but the group is bound for the space beyond the aspens. The deer will
all eventually pass into the otherworldly space, colored with muted cool tones and
existing under a snowy sheet of winter. The mountains represent death not as it is
classified in the binary of “the opposite of life,” but rather this space represents
death as a continuation of the cycle. The mountains are a different place than the
high desert of the foreground, neither better nor worse than the currently inhabited
space, but the next unavoidable phase of the cycle.

Helen Hardin remarked in a 1976 television documentary that she did not
fear death. She repeated this notion several times, stating that death was part of the
cycle of every living thing, and emphasizing that after her own death, she would be
present on earth through her paintings. Hardin is also present in *High Country*, both
philosophically, as Velarde has painted a representation of the spaces that
constitute the life cycle, and perhaps in a more literal depiction as well. Three deer
in the group appear to be engaged in a particularly poignant moment (see *High
Country* detail, figure 21). The two deer resting on the ground appear to merge into
one body with two opposite facing heads. One of those heads gazes calmly at a deer
to its left, who is leaning in, nearly touching noses with the grounded deer. The
standing deer appears to be in a later stage of life than the two resting deer, as
indicated by facial lines and dark shading differentiating it from the younger deer. The resting deer gazes tenderly at the face leaning towards it. The other resting deer, seemingly physically bonded to the middle animal, looks forward to the oncoming terrain.

These three deer, physically bonded and tenderly engaged with each other, may represent Velarde, Hardin, and Hardin’s daughter, Margarete Bagshaw-Tindel. Without intending to project definitive human identities onto the deer, viewing these centrally depicted deer as possible representations of the three generations of women is a valid assertion considering the social and cultural contexts of this work. Bagshaw-Tindel herself recognizes the work as a more general depiction of family, of the “complete love intertwined with discipline” that was core to Velarde’s perception of family, whether or not that family was, as Bagshaw-Tindel notes, “complete” or “broken.”

In her painting of life, Velarde may have desired one final artistic moment of tenderness with her daughter, so often outwardly lacking in their relationship while Hardin was alive. Through her use of multi-layered styles, techniques, symbols, and aesthetic choices, Velarde created a compelling painted vision of life.

Pablita Velarde’s “painting of life” can be viewed as an artistic response to the death of Helen Hardin, but it can also be seen as the final chapter in the painted dialogue that occurred between Velarde and Hardin in their short time as artistic contemporaries. Through this interpretation, Velarde’s Higher Ground manifests as a response to Hardin’s final piece, Last Dance of the Mimbres (figure 22). This

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83 Interview with Margarete Bagshaw-Tindel, November 6, 2013.
painting was begun in 1984, during what Hardin knew would be her final months of life, as she had accepted that death was near due to an ongoing battle with breast cancer. Hardin died before she completed *Last Dance*, as evidenced in the work by the incomplete red outlining of the Mimbres figure.

*Last Dance* proves to be exceedingly detailed and carefully rendered, with a central humanoid figure encircled by a grey spotted background and layers of finely drafted circular frames. The most central frame consists of solid turquoise, the inner frame features patterns of minute perpendicular lines, reminiscent of pre-Pueblo pottery designs, and the outermost frames alternate between thinly drawn white, green, and black. A thick panel of splattered grey-on-white curves around these inner layers, and, finally, a thin red line separates the circular frames from the black that lies beyond.

The centralized figure has the human features of two arms, hands, legs, and feet, but it also consists of a thick, curving tail. The figure’s torso is boxy, and its head extends from its body in a manner that invokes the impression of looking down upon a reptile. The composite figure indeed appears to be portrayed partially in profile— in arms, legs, tail, and body— and partially from a perspective that hovers above it. A large red circle covers most of the torso, and the arms alternate in bands of white and grey. Nearly every part of the figure is outlined in a thin membrane of red, turquoise, or grey, as if enclosing the physicality of this creature

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within defined boundaries that radiate outwards in the nested layers of circles. Evocative of Mimbres humanoid figures, the creature suspended in the center orb of this painting was intended by Hardin as a final aesthetic statement.

As evidenced by her carefully chosen title, Last Dance of the Mimbres reflects the reality that all living things, whether they be individual organisms such as Hardin, or larger cultural bodies such as the pre-Pueblo Mimbres culture, ebb and flow in a cycle of birth and death, youth and age, strength and weakness. As Hardin’s physical strength waned, she persevered in a desire to continue painting, and Last Dance of the Mimbres is the final result of that powerful drive to create. An absent red outline on the inner curve of the Mimbres figure’s tail reminds the viewer: this drive was present in Helen Hardin until she was physically unable to satisfy it through artistic creation.

Pablita Velarde’s Higher Ground and Helen Hardin’s Last Dance of the Mimbres are artistic embodiments of the philosophies that Hardin voiced, prior her cancer diagnosis, of accepting death as an element of life. These two paintings, when viewed as different interpretations of the same theme, provide viewers a profound insight into the losses, pains, and renewals that Velarde and Hardin experienced during this difficult period of transition. Two paintings, which could so easily be misinterpreted as binary oppositions of life and death, present complexities and nuances that align both works with a definitive creative force, a force that is central to life as it is experienced by humans on earth. Higher Ground and Last Dance of the Mimbres are both, in ways unique to each piece, the picture of life.
Chapter 5

Conclusion

Beyond Modernity: A Continuing Tradition of Originality

Far from being the most natural thing in the world, motherhood is in fact one of the most unnatural. Rather than going on about the universal, bio-cultural innateness of something called a ‘mother-child bond,’ the process of conceiving, bearing and rearing a child should be viewed rather as a dilemma that strikes at the core of human understanding and evokes a heightened, not a diminished, cultural interpretation.\(^\text{86}\)

(Lee Drummond, 1978)

In this commentary, L. Drummond demystifies commonly held notions of motherhood as an innate, natural, and holistic state, and calls for an increasingly culturally sensitive view of motherhood, in which there are no universal truths common to the relationships between mothers and daughters in diverse cultures.

The relationship between Pablita Velarde and Helen Hardin proves to be a particularly insightful example of this principle, as their mother-daughter relationship in no way adhered to the “universal, bio-cultural innateness of...a mother-child bond.” Rather, their relationship was fraught with jealousy, competition, occasional emotional and physical aggression, and, for both women, occasional criticism of the artistic merits of the other. Also inherent to this relationship, however, was a mutual love, protectiveness, and a sharing of artistic techniques and icons. Biographer Kate Nelson states, “beyond the competitiveness, the jealousies, and the turbulences, they were each other’s biggest supporters and loved each other as only a mother and daughter can.”

Margarete Bagshaw-Tindel voices recognition that, whilst being mostly self-taught in terms of her own stylistic evolution, Helen Hardin learned to paint from Pablita Velarde. Bagshaw-Tindel believes that the fiery, competitive relationship between Hardin and Velarde had a purpose: as much as they fought, they also learned artistic methods and techniques from each other, in what Bagshaw-Tindel terms “learning by default.”

Regardless how Velarde and Hardin both attempted, at various junctures in their respective careers, to distance themselves artistically from each other, artistic examples from both women’s oeuvres speak to a relationship of shared artistic expression. As noted earlier, in 1971, Hardin described her art to a reporter as “colorful and geometric...she had pulled the designs from the depths of her being—

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89 Interview with Margarete Bagshaw-Tindel, November 6, 2013.
from her ancestral lineage, her memories, and especially the works of her mother.”

Admitting that in addition to coming from “the depths of her being,” her works were largely inspired by those of her mother, Hardin voiced a rare sentiment that minimized her oft-projected starkly independent artistic persona. Revealing that many factors contributed to her development as an artist, Hardin’s seemingly obvious statement that incorporates memory, ancestral lineage, and empirical observation of her mother indeed stands in contrast to assumptions that “the creative source of her imagery was fueled by the expansive, imagistic, spiritual language and culture of the Tewa world.”

The tendency of art critics and journalists to oversimplify notions of Tewa worldview and cultural practice, as evidenced in the above commentary by Kate Donahue, is negated by the reality of Tewa cultural, social, and artistic practices as being complex, learned behaviors, skills, and attitudes. These behaviors, skills, and attitudes are not passed down through genes; they are not naturally acquired due to a person’s blood quantum. As discussed at length already, the ancestral iconography that Hardin evoked in her works was largely created through a well-planned research methodology that included examining pottery shards, anthropological records, and her mother’s work. Being forced to refrain from dancing in Santa Clara ceremonials, having no moiety affiliation, and being systematically excluded from Pueblo sociocultural events, Hardin would have had to find inspiration for her spirituality-laden paintings largely through a rigorous process of study and observation.

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90 Ibid, 134.
91 Donahue, Transcendent Journey, 23.
The Tewa worldview is explored in depth by Alfonso Ortiz in *The Tewa World: Space, Time, Being, and Becoming in a Pueblo Society*. Reading this work, one overarching theme becomes clear. Though split into two “opposing” moieties, Tewa social structure cannot be broken down into a simple binary of summer versus winter, hot versus cold. Just as spiritual beliefs do not consist of heaven versus hell, life versus death, the core culturally bound structure in the Tewa world, the moiety system, though it appears outwardly to be based on a binary of two opposing forces, is in fact comprised of intricate, nuanced micro-structures that make such attempted categorization moot. Ortiz himself states, “we do not have a neat and consistent system of binary oppositions, even on this (moiety) level.”

Just as a too-easily applied binary opposition fails in explaining the most basic unit of Tewa sociocultural structure, so does it fail in effectively communicating the art and social practices of two Tewa women, Pablita Velarde and Helen Hardin. For Velarde, her antagonized relationship with Santa Clara Pueblo remained problematic throughout her life. Postcolonial psychologist Eduardo Duran notes, “within American popular and expert culture, Indianness is more than an ethnic assignment (like Italian or Irish) and to be a real Indian, one must fit one of the binary oppositions or cease to be.” Despite living within the context of American popular and expert culture, Pablita Velarde neither “fit one of the binary oppositions” nor “ceased to be.” Rather, she responded to this core tension by painting—through the act of painting, through the scenes she portrayed, and through

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92 Ortiz, *Tewa World*, 95.
her emergence as a self-supported artist who, despite the Pueblo’s oft-ambivalent attitude towards her, identified proudly as a Santa Clara painter.

Helen Hardin inherited a social and cultural isolation from Santa Clara Pueblo, which caused her to, at an early age, emotionally divorce the Anglo, Catholic aspects of herself from those that she categorized as “Indian.” Outlining this sentiment, Hardin stated, “When I was a kid, being Catholic and being an Indian had nothing to do with each other— being an Indian and learning all the stories was one thing and being White and Catholic was something else.”94 Hardin also stated, in speaking of her first solo show in 1962, “I can see now that I had decided, way back then, to be Anglo socially and Indian in my art. That has never changed.”95 Vine Deloria reinforces Hardin’s experiences with the historical reflection: “young Indians were sold the notion by anthropologists that Indians live in two worlds…”96 Referencing early twentieth-century relationships between anthropologists and Native artists, Deloria’s assertion of a projected divide between Indian and White worlds was reiterated in Hardin’s own experience as a multi-cultural individual in mid twentieth-century New Mexico.

Hardin responded to the pressure of identifying as White or Indian by compartmentalizing aspects of her life. Raised in the largely White urban environment of northeast Albuquerque, Hardin decided early in her career that she would be Indian primarily through her art. As a Pueblo outsider, her art was the only way she could actively participate in a culture that she had experienced

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94 Nelson, Straight Line Curved, 33.
95 Scott, Changing Woman, 17.
96 Vine Deloria, quoted in Duran, Postcolonial Psychology, 115.
primarily in her early childhood when she had briefly lived with her mother on the Pueblo. Responding artistically to experienced cultural tensions, neither Velarde nor Hardin succumbed to the prevalent attitude throughout much of the twentieth century that one was either White or Indian, and that each ethnic and cultural category existed distinctly of the other. Velarde and Hardin demonstrated, both artistically and socially, that an individual’s culture and/or ethnicity is as much based in how a person chooses to identify him or herself as it is in his or her genetic identity or tribal affiliation. Often, the manners in which people choose to identify themselves are not always easily broken down into categories. This theme, the basis for so much of the art created by Velarde and Hardin, undoubtedly provided inspiration for other marginalized individuals—Pueblo and otherwise—struggling in this period of American history to understand their place in a cultural or ethnic community.  

A 1999 museum-based discussion of Helen Hardin’s work states that her “new technique...became the hallmark of her late style...(using) pigments boldly, sometimes putting on more than 20 layers of paint...Her work will be remembered as bold and groundbreaking.” Hardin’s groundbreaking method of layering paint to achieve a bold pigment tone was in fact something that she may well have learned from her mother, who “paint(ed) each section in flat colors and let the painting dry;
then she repeat(ed) the painting up to seven layers.”

Velarde’s technique for her earth paintings relied on layering the earth pigments to achieve the desired boldness of color. While Helen Hardin’s paintings, created in her short lifetime, indeed showed an astonishing range of creativity and boldness, it is safe to say that some of that creativity, attributed by art critics and commentators to her individual genius, likely sprung from an artistic dialogue with her mother, Pablita Velarde. It is just as likely that Pablita Velarde’s stylistically innovative works of the 1960s were probably inspired by Helen Hardin’s own experimentation and artistic training with modern Native artists. The artistic traditions represented by Velarde and Hardin are not as disparate as they may first appear. Their art cannot be categorized; their paintings defy the labels that are so often imposed upon them.

Forging a path into what had been, for female Pueblo artists, the uncharted territory of easel painting, Pablita Velarde established herself professionally as a self-sufficient artist and single mother. Her art exuded nuanced visual messages about social and cultural roles of Pueblo females, familial relationships, and modes of visual self-reflection. Carrying on the newly established family tradition of artistic production, Helen Hardin boldly asserted her place as an unconventional artistic figure. She looked to her mother’s art, and also to Mimbres iconography, which she considered to be her ancestral artistic heritage, and finally, to her contemporaries and modern art forefathers, both Native and non-Native, for inspiration in her own art.

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Emphasizing a generalized strength of mother/daughter connectivity, Kate Donahue defines the “motherline” as the “biological, historical, and unconscious feminine legacy passed from mother to daughter to granddaughter and to great granddaughter.” Without intending to sensationalize this unconscious connectivity between the female generations of one artistic family, the following is worth considering as a closing thought in the artistic discussion of Helen Hardin and Pablita Velarde. Not only does Helen Hardin’s daughter Margarete Bagshaw-Tindel continue the family legacy today as a successful painter, Bagshaw-Tindel’s 26 year-old daughter Helen Tindel can be observed spending time in the family’s Santa Fe gallery working on her own drawings and paintings (see figure 23). Referencing the stylistic changes that Velarde and Hardin experienced in their careers, Bagshaw-Tindel notes,

Helen (Tindel) is experimenting with landscapes now. She started off doing a very modern style, after having no interest in art while growing up. She has figured out now that it is very soothing...who knows where she will be (stylistically) when she is 45. It is similar to how my mother started out painting in Studio Style, which surprises a lot of people when they first see those works.

Comparing her daughter’s artistic progressions to those of her mother, Bagshaw-Tindel views the four generations of artistic heritage as one continually evolving female familial element. Indeed, something akin to a feminine legacy has undeniably been passed down from mother all the way to great-granddaughter. Velarde, Hardin, Bagshaw, and future generations of women from this Santa Clara

100 Donahue, Transcendental Journey, 20.
101 Interview with Margarete Bagshaw-Tindel, November 6, 2013.
102 Interview with Margarete Bagshaw-Tindel, November 6, 2013.
family have, and will continue to, further the family legacy of artistic independence and innovation. Additionally, looking beyond the scope of the immediate family, the benefits that Hardin and Velarde’s artistic and social achievements have reaped on their broader communities are still felt in those communities today. Bagshaw-Tindel summarizes the lasting importance of her family thus:

Santa Clara Pueblo has benefited a great deal from my mother and grandmother’s actions; they just don’t always say it. Some politicians say that she (Velarde) ‘didn’t do that much for the Pueblo.’ This is a result of jealousy. She brought electricity to the Pueblo, she lived through losing her eyesight at a young age and created art because she had to express something visually. My mother (Hardin) competed in a way that women weren’t doing in those days. She put Fritz (Scholdel) in his place, while at the same time she was mostly self-taught; she didn’t owe anything to any teacher.\(^\text{103}\)

Though they may be benefiting in numerous ways from the artistic and social paths forged by older generation of Santa Clara artists, according to Bagshaw-Tindel, young female artists at Santa Clara still face gender biases and are forced to confront the jealousy of male community members. These women, most notably those from the Naranjo-Morse family (whom Bagshaw-Tindel refers to as “a family of outstanding women”), continue the legacy of Velarde and Hardin’s attitude of strength and perseverance in the face of Santa Clara patrilineal powers.

Pablita Velarde and Helen Hardin have provided a legacy that has bettered the women in their family, and, more broadly, at Santa Clara Pueblo. Their legacy also survives in the newly established *Pablita Velarde Museum of Indian Women in the Arts*. This Santa Fe museum provides female Native artists from North America

\(^{103}\) Interview with Margarete Bagshaw-Tindel, November 6, 2013.
a venue in which they can “learn how to promote themselves...it is not a tribal thing, it is much bigger than that.”104 The scope of Velarde and Hardin’s influence thus extends far beyond their family, their Pueblo, and their local communities; their respective legacies are empowering young Native women on a national level. They have far exceeded the often-asserted attitude that they merely visually represented a passage from Pueblo “tradition” to “modernity.” Their legacy reaches beyond modernity, indicating a continuing tradition of feminine originality and resilience through art.

104 Interview with Margarete Bagshaw-Tindel, November 6, 2013.
Figures

Figure 1. National Geographic Magazine (August 1999). Joe McNally Photography.
Figure 2. Pablita Velarde, *Dressing Young Girl for First Ceremonial Dance*, c. 1939. Tempera on paper, 35.6 x 31.8 cm. Museum of Indian Arts and Culture, Laboratory of Anthropology, Santa Fe.
Figure 3. Pablita Velarde, Why the Coyote Brays at the Moon, from “How and Why Stories,” 1961. Private Collection.
Figure 4. Joe Herrera, *Untitled*, 1951. Watercolor on paper, 22 ¼ x 14 ¾ inches. Private Collection.
Figure 5. Joe Herrera, *Creation*, 1953. Casein on Board. Private Collection.
Figure 7. Helen Hardin, *Hungry Bugs*, 1960. Casein on Board. Private Collection.
Figure 8. Pablita Velarde, *Woman Communicating with Full Moon*, 1965. Private Collection.
Figure 9. Oscar Howe, *Victory Dance*, 1954. Watercolor on Paper, 19 ½ x 12 in. Philbrook Museum of Art, Tulsa, OK.
Figure 11. Helen Hardin, *White Buffalo Dance*, c. 1968. Casein on Board. Private Collection.
Figure 12. Pablita Velarde, *Buffalo Dancer*, no date. Earth Pigments on panel. Private Collection.
Figure 14. Fritz Scholder, Luiseño. *Santana Kiowa*, 1968. Oil on canvas, 76.2 x 76.2 cm. Private Collection.
Figure 17. *Mimbres Rabbit Bowl*, ca. 1000-1250 AD. Black-on-white ceramic. Smithsonian Museum of Natural History, Department of Anthropology, Washington DC.
Figure 19. Helen Hardin, *One Soul Sings Two Songs*, 1980. Acrylic on Panel, 50 x 50 cm. Private Collection.
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