One Hundred Years in the Making: Reinstalling the Indigenous Arts of North America Permanent Collection Galleries at the Denver Art Museum

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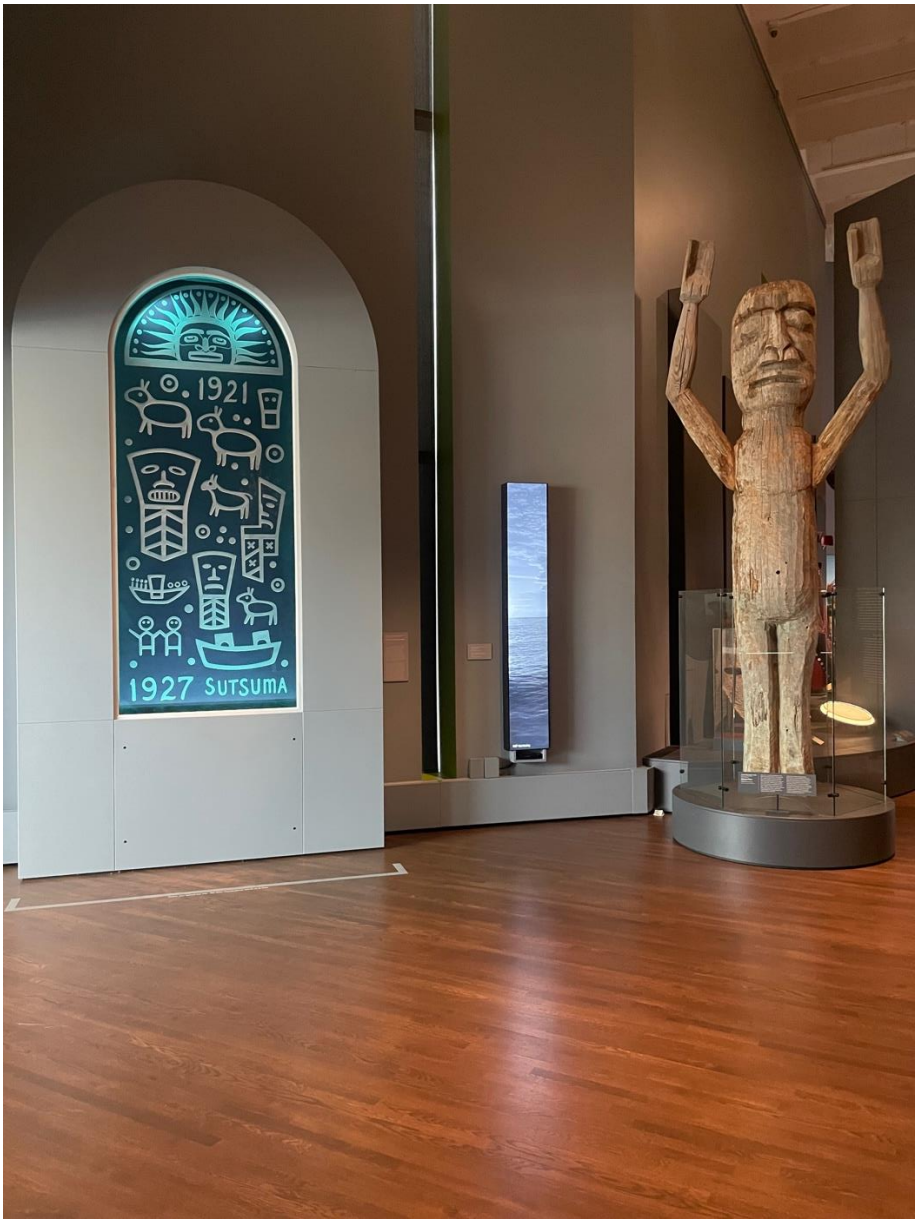

In November 2017 the Denver Art Museum closed the north side of its campus to completely renovate the seven-story building designed by Italian architect Gio Ponti. The 150-million-dollar capital campaign that funded the renovation also funded the reinstallation of the permanent collection galleries housed in what is now called the Lanny and Sharon Martin Building. As part of this, I served as the Andrew W. Mellon postdoctoral curatorial fellow in Indigenous Arts of North America at the Denver Art Museum. Working alongside John Lukavic, Andrew W. Mellon Curator of Native Arts, and Dakota Hoska, Associate Curator of Native Arts, I had the opportunity to participate in the reinstallation of the Indigenous Arts of North America permanent collection galleries. Covering over twenty thousand square feet of gallery space across portions of the second floor and the entire third floor of the Martin Building, the galleries have long been considered a benchmark for innovative approaches to the exhibition and interpretation of Indigenous art and material culture.

The Denver Art Museum is often credited with being the first American art museum to acquire and exhibit Indigenous North American art and material culture for its aesthetic qualities in addition to its perceived cultural value.[1] While Denver was certainly one of the first museums to approach Indigenous art from this perspective, the "honor" of being "the first" is sometimes given to the Brooklyn Museum. According to art historian Evan Maurer, "the first American art museum to present objects from Native American cultures as serious art was the Brooklyn Museum, which, as early as 1910, devoted major areas of its exhibition galleries to the arts of Native America."[2] Previously, displays of Indigenous material culture were the exclusive domain of anthropologists and naturalists who created classificatory schema that transformed their collections into "specimens that could be studied scientifically to reveal information about the technological development, belief systems, and practices of their makers."[3] While the debate about what institution was the first to introduce Indigenous collections into fine art museums may seem trivial, it provides an entry point into ongoing discussions about the coexistence of multiple ways of seeing, being, and knowing; the lingering presence of artistic hierarchies and canons; and the fraught history of non-Native "experts" interpreting Indigenous lifeways and artistic practices.

In this essay, I situate Denver's 2021 reinstallation of the Indigenous Arts of North America permanent collection galleries within these seemingly irresolvable tensions. Viewed in isolation, no museum exhibition—no matter how thorough and thoughtful—can ever provide a complete or comprehensive understanding of its subject(s). As argued by Steven D. Lavine and Ivan Karp over thirty years ago, museum exhibitions are inherently heuristic spaces:

> Decisions are made to emphasize one element and to downplay others, to assert some truths and to ignore others. . . . Exhibitions made today may seem obviously appropriate to some viewers precisely because those viewers share the same attitudes as the exhibition makers, and the exhibitions are cloaked in familiar presentational styles.[4]

Despite this, museum exhibitions can be the focal point of a suite of institution-wide initiatives, programs, relationships, and outreach that present the possibility of changing how visitors engage with history, the perceived distinctions between fine arts and craft, and, most important, our shared humanity. Increasingly, museums are recognizing that this is only possible by decentering its own perspective and authority and instead creating spaces in which people can speak on their own behalf about the historical and lived experiences of the artists, communities, and cultures whose artworks and cultural belongings these institutions steward.

To demonstrate how the project team at the Denver Art Museum approached the reinstallation, I begin with an overview of the role that past curators, beginning with Frederic Huntington Douglas, have played in helping to define the exhibition and interpretation of Indigenous art and material culture on its own terms *and* within the context of global fine art. In doing so, I emphasize that many of the exhibitions curated or cocurated by Denver Art Museum staff have been iterative and deeply engaged with Native art and its "vexed relationship with the canons of American art history."[5] More recently, Denver Art Museum curators Nancy Blomberg, Dakota Hoska (Oglala Lakȟóta), and John Lukavic have developed temporary exhibitions and traveling shows that emphasized the fact that Native artists—past and present—both shape and are shaped by the diverse cultures in which they live and work. In doing so, these curators have attempted to challenge dominant paradigms and hold space for conversations that "honor the joy, love, sacrifice, sorrow, trauma, and

triumph embodied by these works while also acknowledging the history of removal, assimilation, and erasure that museums historically perpetrated while building collections of Indigenous arts."[6] I close this essay with an overview of the reinstallation, beginning with its planning and development and ending with its opening in October 2021. While the gallery spaces are the focal point, they are also conduits that facilitate deeper engagement with the fraught history of the exhibition and interpretation of Indigenous art and cultural belongings in fine arts museums, the seemingly unshakeable artistic canons that continue to inform the taxonomies embedded in collections and curatorial departments, and the relationship between artists and their multidimensional identities.

Frederic H. Douglas and the "Discovery" of Native Aesthetics (1929–56)

Since the inception of the Native Arts department at the Denver Art Museum in 1925 (initially called the Indian Art department), curators at the museum have played a critical role in engaging debates regarding the ethical collecting and exhibition of Indigenous artwork and cultural belongings, oftentimes occupying a central space in shifting perspectives and guiding the nascent field of Native American art history in new directions, however problematic they may seem today.[7] While Frederic Douglas was not the first curator to lead the department, he was responsible for growing the collection and establishing the foundational tenets of the department's emphasis on aesthetic appreciation. The goal, ultimately, was to develop the parameters of Native American art history and to "increase the acceptance of this field nationally."[8] In addition to his contributions to the early years of the Native Arts department, Douglas was instrumental in organizing two major exhibitions of Indigenous North American art and material culture. Along with René d'Harnoncourt, general manager of the Indian Arts and Crafts Board and later director of the Museum of Modern Art, Douglas helped organize the "Indian Court" in the Federal Building at the 1939 Golden Gate International Exposition, which served as a preface to the watershed exhibition *Indian Art of the United States* at the Museum of Modern Art.

The Indian Court, a fifty-thousand-square-foot exhibition, included "an introductory gallery of Indian history, eight galleries of Indian arts, a market for Indian handicrafts, and ample working space for Indian artists and

artisans."[9] One of several exhibition spaces in the federal government's pavilion at the Golden Gate Exposition, the Indian Court was, according to Douglas,

> Devoted to the Indian of today and tomorrow, seen against the background of yesterday. It will present the Indian's traditions and past, since they are indispensable for understanding him. It will also give the living Indian a chance to prove that he is today the keeper of values which, if they were better known, could be an important contribution to our own civilizations and the means of his finding his place in our world.[10]

Organized by both culture area and the ecology or subsistence economy of that area, the exhibit sought to demonstrate, however paternalistically, that Native peoples have both an important place in American society and that a deeper appreciation for Indigenous cultural practices and relationships to the land could offer the hope of salvation for American society.[11] These aspirations resonated with the overall aims of the federal government and its participation in the exposition. In his report to the Golden Gate International Exposition Commission, Commissioner George Creel wrote that "the purpose of federal participation in the Golden Gate International Exposition was to show to the citizenship, as dramatically and interestingly as possible, this new meaning of government; what it is doing and why."[12] Creel highlighted massive urbanization, the elimination of "any close relation between labor and management," and little hope for the promise of a "better life" that had long been the origin myth of American identity as the primary concerns of both the government and its citizens.[13]

In addressing all of these concerns, d'Harnoncourt and Douglas were eager to ensure that the exhibition was "'presented to the public in an easily digestible way'" and emphasized the aesthetic qualities of historical and contemporary Native arts and crafts.[14] After visitors passed through the exhibition's introductory gallery and the subsequent culture areas, they arrived in an open courtyard that contained "a pan-Indian market of contemporary art."[15] As noted by W. Jackson Rushing, the goal of the exhibition was to engender a deeper appreciation of—and market for—Indigenous art and craftwork. This would achieve the goals outlined by Douglas in his lecture to the American Indian Defense Association to create pathways for Native self-sufficiency by educating non-Native consumers about the creative achievements of historical and living Native artists, thereby "replac[ing] the sad image

of 'the noble red man selling postcards on the depot platform' with that of the proud American producer of quality goods."[16] However, these choices, which were deeply connected to federal policies implemented to revitalize Native economies and greater participation in American life, created "a binary construction of traditional and modern that precluded recognition of the forms and practices that did not fall at either pole of this conceptual framework."[17]

Douglas and d'Harnoncourt revised and expanded their ideas in preparation for *Indian Arts of the United States*, the 1941 exhibition held at the Museum of Modern Art in New York. While the exhibition continued the stated goal of creating greater interest in marketing "authentic" Native art, the exhibition catalogue coauthored by Douglas and d'Harnoncourt reemphasized the role that Native culture plays in defining American identity.[18] Touted as the "largest and most representative of its kind," the exhibition contained nearly one thousand works that ranged from projectile points to contemporary commissions by Hopi artists Fred Kabotie, Victor Coochwytewa, and Charles Loloma, purporting to represent twenty thousand years of cultural production.[19] The foreword to the catalogue, written by Eleanor Roosevelt, acknowledges the "cultural debt" to Indigenous peoples of the Americas, and states that "the Indian people of today have a contribution to make toward the America of the future."[20]

While the catalogue echoed the sentiments of the Indian Court, it expanded on notions of aesthetics and the perceived distinction between art and craft, as well as settler society's obsession with progress and technological advancement. In the catalogue's introduction, the authors reflect on the consequences of assimilationist policies and the salvage paradigm, writing that

> there are people who have created for themselves a romantic past that is often far from accurate. They wish to see the living Indian return to an age that has long since passed and they resent any change in his art. . . . To rob a people of tradition is to rob it of inborn strength and identity. To rob a people of opportunity to grow through invention or acquisition of other races is to rob it of its future.[21]

Douglas and d'Harnoncourt argue that the idea of a pure, precontact culture is a popular myth and that Native artists have always been innovative and creative. They cite Diné silversmithing and Plains horse culture as examples of the myriad ways that Native peoples

have incorporated new ideas and practices into ongoing customs and ways of being in the world.[22]

The authors also contend with the notion of aesthetics. In explaining *how* to look at Indigenous art, they write that

> the eye, trained to see only familiar elements of form and color, actually fails to see in a work of foreign origin certain elements that may be of great importance to its maker. . . . Only with knowledge of the background of a work of art are we able to synchronize, in effect, our pattern of associations with those of the culture that produced it and thus see it clearly enough to judge its merit.[23]

While it is both aspirational and presumptuous to assume that knowledge of cultural practices creates pathways to access Native ways of seeing, the assertion that Native art and material culture only appears "primitive" or "grotesque" is rooted in the privileging of settler conventions of seeing and the hierarchies embedded in artistic canons that museums, up until very recently, have upheld and reinforced.[24] Douglas and d'Harnoncourt introduce the idea that canons, or at least ways of looking at art, are not universal but rather mediated by cultural knowledge as well as simultaneously intersecting and divergent ways of understanding our individual and collective place in the world.

After returning from service during World War II, Douglas continued to grow the collection and expand its collecting into Oceanic and African arts. All the while, he also continued to develop his understanding of the relationships between environment, aesthetics, and cultural practices, applying the principles that he and d'Harnoncourt introduced during the prewar era to the collection at the Denver Art Museum. In 1948 he curated the exhibition *The Native Artist and His World*, which was organized by ecosystem and focused on the ways in which artists from diverse cultures "influence other people's ways of looking at life and nature."[25] Again, Douglas centered the artist within cultural ecosystems; however, he took a global approach to organizing the exhibition in an effort to demonstrate that artists working in similar environments around the world shared aesthetic practices informed by the land. "When surroundings are the same," wrote Douglas, "[artists] build similar houses and create the same kind of arts and crafts, because they see the same kind of natural forms and have the same materials at hand."[26] Approaching environmental determinism, Douglas presumed that

there exists some sort of primordial connection between global Indigeneity and the land. Such assumptions ignore other factors that contribute to social organization and cultural practices, while also ignoring the inventive strategies that people have historically used to intervene in their environments. While Douglas—perhaps unwittingly—reinforced binary distinctions between so-called "traditional" and "modern" societies, he did center artists within a nexus of cultural practices and ecosystems that set the foundation for curators and exhibitions that followed at the Denver Art Museum.

The "Hobbyist" and the "Professional": Norman Feder and Richard Conn (1956–94)

After Frederic Douglas's death in 1956, the Native Arts department was briefly led by Richard "Dick" Conn during the first of his two nonconsecutive terms at the museum. He was followed briefly by Royal Hassrick, and then Norman Feder, who served as the curator of Native Arts from 1961 to 1971. After Feder's departure, Conn returned to the museum until his retirement in 1994.[27] In this section, I focus on exhibitions and catalogues produced by Feder and Conn, who arrived at the museum via distinct professional trajectories. Feder, a hobbyist who became a professional, was initially uninterested in questions of art and aesthetics, focusing his early efforts on recreating "traditional Native crafts."[28] However, he became an important contributor to ongoing conversations about Indigenous aesthetics and the role of Indigenous art in fine arts museums. In contrast, Conn received a master's degree from the University of Washington in 1955 and was a career-long museum professional. Conn and Feder represent two different approaches to the study of Indigenous art and material culture, although both contributed to the discipline in ways that informed the project team's approach to the 2021 reinstallation.

Two exhibitions, one at the Denver Art Museum and the other at the Whitney Museum of American Art, demonstrate Feder's trajectory from hobbyist to museum professional. In 1965 Feder organized *American Indian Art Before 1850* at the Denver Art Museum. Like many twentieth-century exhibitions of Native art and material culture, Feder claimed that the show represented an important first for the museum and the field. In the catalogue introduction, he claimed that

> This exhibition of American Indian Art is the first comprehensive presentation, devoted entirely to material of the

> pre-1850 period. . . . Pipes, war clubs, medicine bundles, mirrors, fetishes, bowls and costumes with accessories reveal the Indian's innate ability to utilize native materials in a dynamic fashion.[29]

Echoing some of the foundational work of Douglas and d'Harnoncourt, Feder maintained the connections between the land and artistic practices, as well as the artists' ability to incorporate novel goods and materials into preexisting and ongoing ways of being. "The year 1850," writes Feder, "was chosen as the terminal when the indigenous Indian craftsmen had achieved a perfect integration of native techniques and imported trade goods."[30] Given his background in the hobbyist world, Feder focused detailed attention on the relationship between materials and techniques, using these relationships to provide historical context to objects included in the exhibition and catalogue.[31]

In 1971 Feder guest curated *Two Hundred Years of North American Indian Art* at the Whitney Museum of American Art, which featured 314 objects from private collections and cultural institutions in the United States, Canada, and Europe.[32] Sponsored by Philip Morris (now Altria), the exhibition catalogue included a foreword by the company's president George Weissman. Weissman's foreword, like that of Eleanor Roosevelt's in *Indian Art of the United States*, acknowledges the "debt" owed by the United States to Indigenous peoples, and that

> it has taken the threat of environmental disaster to make twentieth-century Americans acutely aware of our earth, of our animal and plant life, and of the quality of our air and our water. In contrast, the North American Indian has always been an instinctive environmentalist who never separated man from nature.[33]

Two Hundred Years of North American Indian Art was the first exhibition at a major art institution in New York since *Indian Art of the United States*, and it was hugely successful for both the Whitney and Philip Morris.[34]

Although it retained many of the idiosyncratic and paradoxical ideas about the relationship between Native cultures and American identity, the exhibition and accompanying catalogue introduced, however tentatively, the possibility of appreciating Native North American art and material culture on its own terms and with greater specificity than previously imagined by non-Native curators and museum professionals. Feder began his introduction by asking whether or not it is necessary—or even possible—to view an artwork from the perspective of a person

from the community that produced it. Feder claimed that

> While it is certainly true that a Sioux Indian born and brought up on a Sioux reservation will have a different view of Sioux art than a non-Indian. . . . Likewise, the fact that he is a Sioux will not give him special insights into the art of any other tribe. Furthermore, his tastes will be far different from those of his father and grandfather because ideas of beauty vary from time to time and from place to place.[35]

In stressing the limitations of trying to adopt an insider's perspective to appreciate artworks and material culture, Feder demonstrated that there was no unifying or overarching aesthetic sensibility that could encompass all Indigenous creative expressions. Moreover, Feder acknowledged that change over time does not dilute or acculturate Indigenous cultural practices, which change over time.[36] The goals outlined in the catalogue seemed to be successful. *New York Times* art writer Hilton Kramer wrote that visitors "cannot help being aware that the esthetic faculty alone is finally insufficient for apprehending the full power of the objects on view."[37]

After the exhibition at the Whitney, Feder left the museum and was replaced by Dick Conn, who returned after serving as the Curator of Anthropology and History at the Eastern Washington State Historical Society in Spokane, Washington, and later holding positions at the Manitoba Museum of Man and Nature and the Heard Museum in Phoenix. Conn was the first curator at the Denver Art Museum to author a collection highlights of the Native Arts permanent collection, which outlined his approach to the study of Indigenous art. Published in 1979, *Native American Art in the Denver Art Museum* represents the synthesis of the department's work over the preceding five decades, setting the foundation for the department's vision over the coming years. Conn also played an important role in deepening relationships with the Indigenous community in the Front Range, hosting the first Friendship Powwow. Running continuously since 1990, the Friendship Powwow has created further opportunities for the department and the museum to work alongside community partners in the Front Range and beyond.

Organized by culture area—one of the most enduring survivals of early anthropological scholarship on Indigenous North American culture—*Native American Art in the Denver Art Museum* at once upholds many of the intellectual conventions of non-Native experts "explaining" Native culture to

primarily non-Native audiences while at the same time introducing new ways of thinking about the relationship between museums and originating and descendant communities.[38] In the introduction, Conn writes about the "discovery of Native art" and the slow dismantling of artistic canons in fine arts museums since the turn of the twentieth century. "Art museums," according to Conn, "have ventured into collecting and exhibiting objects from native societies of the Americas, Africa, and the Pacific. At last these works have taken their rightful places among those by Giotto and Winslow Homer."[39] While recognizing the increasing visibility of Indigenous art and material culture in fine arts museums marks a significant loosening of rigid artistic canons, the notion that Indigenous artists need fine arts museums to legitimize their work still foregrounds the authority of taste within the walls of settler cultural institutions.[40]

Despite this, Conn's introduction demonstrates that museums were beginning to awaken to the historical and contemporary contributions of Native artists. He concludes his introduction by saying that

> We owe a great debt to the Native Americans for the magnificent works of art they and their ancestors have given the world. Their genius and enterprise have enriched all people to a degree we are just beginning to realize. They have much to show us that is beautiful, but they also have much to teach. Let us approach their works with our eyes upon and our minds ready to learn.[41]

Three years after the publication of *Native American Art in the Denver Art Museum*, Conn organized *Circles of the World: Traditional Art of the Plains Indian*, an exhibition of historical Plains cultural belongings largely drawn from the museum's permanent collection. The exhibition, which traveled to venues in the United States and Europe, used the circle "as the central device of the exhibition because the Plains people considered it an ideal form. Having neither beginning nor end, it reflects the eternal continuity of all life."[42] Conn, choosing to use Native frameworks for organizing the exhibition's sections, affirmed his aspirational statement that museums should approach Native art and material culture "with our eyes upon and our minds ready to learn." Moreover, Conn convened a consulting group of Native and non-Native scholars and community members, which included Dr. Beatrice Medicine, George Horse Capture, Dr. Omer Stewart, and Richard Tallbull.[43] This group "reviewed the exhibition and catalog

to assure its accuracy and its inclusion of the perspective of the Plains Indian people themselves."[44]

From the Artist's Hand to the Here and Now (1994–2021)

Nancy Blomberg joined the curatorial staff at the museum in 1990 and was promoted to department head in 1993. Of her many contributions to the department, her role in growing the Indigenous contemporary art collection, developing temporary exhibitions, and reinstalling the permanent collection galleries in 2011 was foundational to the project team's work in 2018. Many of the stories told in the galleries would not have been possible had Blomberg, later joined by John Lukavic in 2012, not focused tremendous effort in acquiring masterworks by modern and contemporary Indigenous artists. Likewise, her commitment to emphasizing that Native people are artists, not anonymous craftspeople who repeat culturally prescribed designs and motifs, created the building blocks upon which the 2021 reinstallation was founded.

Over the course of three years, the project team for the reinstallation included the following people: John Lukavic, Andrew W. Mellon Curator of Native Arts; Dakota Hoska, Associate Curator of Native Arts; Danielle Stephens, Senior Interpretive Specialist; Curatorial Assistants Julia Strunk and Jennie Trujillo; Project Manager Emily Attwool; exhibition design firm Fricker Studio; and graphic design firm McGinty Co. Artist and videographer Steven Yazzie (Navajo and Laguna Pueblo) shot and edited the majority of the artist videos. Additionally, staff members in the Publications department Laura Caruso, Kati Woock, and Valerie Hellstein copyedited and proofread the exhibition label program for the galleries, as well as the publications *Companion to Northwest Coast and Alaska Native Art* and *Here, Now: Indigenous Arts of North America at the Denver Art Museum*. There were many more staff members in departments across the museum that conserved, prepared, and installed over six hundred artworks for public presentation in the galleries.

Planning for the reinstallation began in September 2018, with an initial focus on the Northwest Coast and Alaska Native gallery, located on the second floor of the Martin Building. While the building was under renovation, the project team had limited access to the collection, which was stored off-site at several locations in the Denver area. In addition to these practical obstacles, the Northwest Coast collection at the Denver Art Museum presented other challenges that required the project team to consider

the following issues: ensuring meaningful community engagement and consultation; working with largely historical collections that privileged the work of male artists; engaging the persistence of the culture area paradigm; and negotiating gaps in the collection. In navigating these issues, the team developed an approach to the galleries that sought to address these concerns. Within the broadly defined culture areas, we organized sections thematically, and each section text was grounded with a quotation from an artist or community member intended to introduce visitors to the ideas explored in that section. Each section also brought together historical and contemporary works from different tribal nations along the Northwest Coast and included works by both male and female artists. Overall, the goal of the gallery was to help visitors understand that, in the words of Danielle Stephens, "artists work within knowledge systems that are rooted in community and place. They make choices that influence—and are influenced by—the cultures in which they live and work. These galleries convey that continuity *and* change are interrelated aesthetic and cultural forces that inform people's worldviews and lifeways."[45]

In January 2019 the project team traveled to Seattle, Victoria, and Vancouver to meet with colleagues and artists. During this trip, we met with Musgamakw Dzawada'enuxw artist Marianne Nicolson to discuss the reinstallation. Nicolson, who was installing an exhibition at the Morris and Helen Belkin Art Gallery at the University of British Columbia, offered deep insight into the collection that radically shifted the team's approach. Nicolson's insights set the foundation for rooting the Denver Art Museum reinstallation in the colonial histories of land theft and the removal of regalia from communities. The Welcome Figure in the museum's collection has long stood near the entrance of the second-floor gallery. The museum knew that it was acquired by Norman Feder from Chief William Scow in 1969 but had little information about it beyond its provenance. Nicolson informed the team that the carved human figure was not a Welcome Figure but a protest figure carved in defiance of the theft of Kwakwaka'wakw land historically used to harvest clover. In 1912 the Royal Commission on Indian Affairs significantly reduced reserve territories for many First Nations and, in response, Kwikwasut'inuxw chief Johnny Scow commissioned the Welcome Figure and "gifted" it to farmers who now occupied annexed

Kwakwaka'wakw land. According to Nicolson, "it is not a gesture of supplication to colonial encroachment but an assertion against it."[46] By placing the Welcome Figure on annexed land, the farmers unknowingly affirmed the Kwakwaka'wakw as its true and rightful stewards.

The recontextualized Welcome Figure sits at the entrance of the gallery and is grouped with a commission by Nicolson and an artist video in which she recounts the story of the Welcome Figure (fig. 1).[47] Nicolson's commission, titled *To Change the Shape of the World*, is a testimonial to the long history

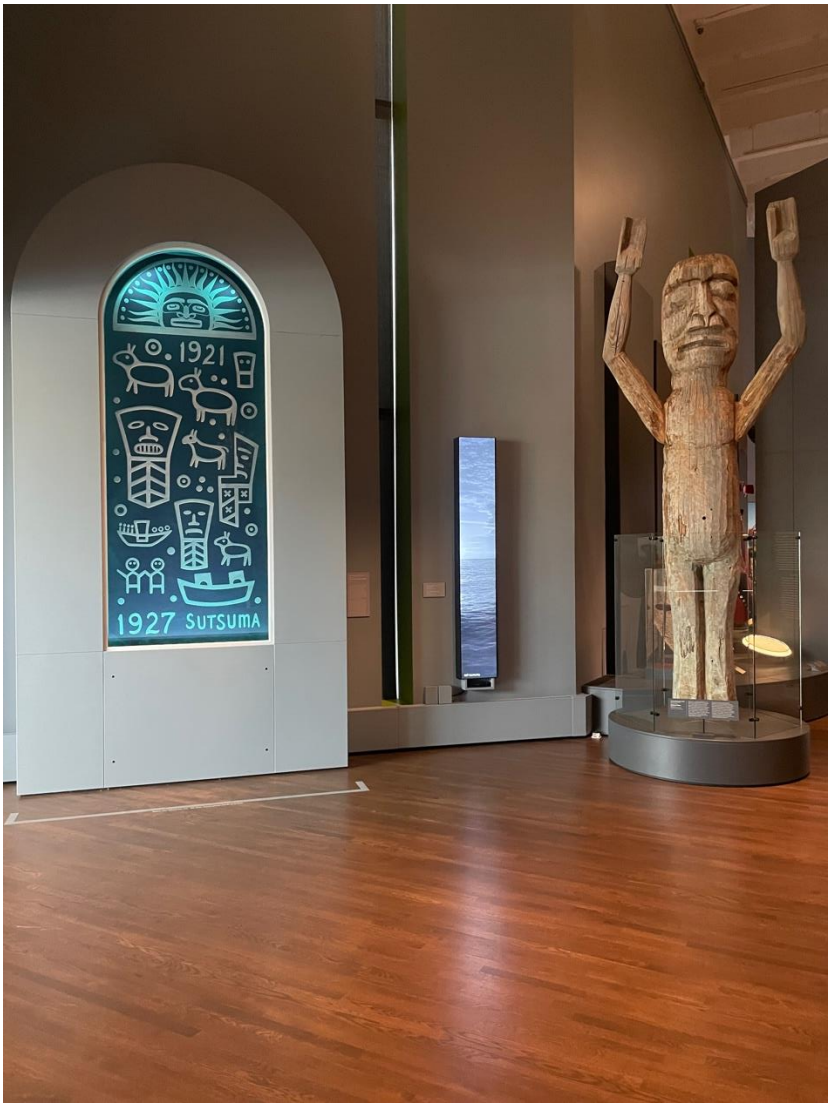

Fig. 1. Installation view, *To Change the Shape of the World*, with Welcome Figure, Northwest Coast and Alaska Native Galleries, Denver Art Museum, Denver, CO. Photo: Christopher Patrello.

of Musgamakw Dzawada'enuxw art as protest. The monumental sand-carved panel was fabricated by Charles Gabriel, who also designed the framing and mounting for the three-hundred-pound glass panel. The images and dates carved into its surface all refer to pictographs painted near Petley Point, a site located northwest of Vancouver, as a protest action. In 1921 Chief Johnny Scow participated in a copper transaction as part of his younger brother George's marriage ceremony, which violated restrictions imposed by the Canadian government.[48] In 1895 the Canadian government had amended the Indian Act to include a ban on all ceremonies and dances:

> Every Indian or other person who engages in, or assists in celebrating or encourages either directly or indirectly another to celebrate, any Indian festival, dance or other ceremony, goods or articles of any sort forms a part, or is a feature, whether such gift of money, goods or articles, takes place before, at, or after the celebration of the same, and every Indian or other person who engages or assists in any celebration or dance of which the wounding or mutilation of the dead or living body of any human being or animal forms a part or is a feature, is guilty of an indictable offence and is liable to imprisonment for a term not exceeding six months and not less than two months.[49]

Johnny and his brothers were prosecuted by Indian Agent William Halliday. A woman named Molly Wilson painted ceremonial coppers and the date at the mouth of the river at Petley Point as an act of defiance and "statement about [Kwakwaka'wakw] land jurisdiction and their law, which is basically symbolized by the coppers."[50] That same year, Halliday prosecuted participants in a potlatch hosted by 'Namgis hereditary chief Dan Cranmer at 'Mimkwamlis. In this sense, the date 1921 in the upper-right corner of *To Change the Shape of the World* takes on additional significance in that it grounds viewers in the historical suppression of the most significant ceremonies for Kwakwaka'wakw peoples, as well as the consequences of this legal suppression by the Canadian government.[51]

The panel is backlit to create the illusion of a window or an additional architectural feature of the museum building itself. Nicolson described this choice as an intervention into the space that opened up the possibility of challenging the dynamics of colonial power upon which the institution and its collection were founded. "Symbolically," she says, "the disruption . . . of the architecture of the window

space is a way to create an aperture or a way of looking that disrupts the colonial infrastructure of the space itself."[52] The placement of this grouping at the entrance to the hall was an intentional choice to encourage visitors to view everything in the gallery through the lenses of removal, forced assimilation, and survivance.

The Native Arts department also commissioned an artwork from Haida artist Michael Nicoll Yahgulanaas's *Coppers from the Hood* series. Like *To Change the Shape of the World*, Yahgulanaas's *DAM Dancing Crane* sits in conversation with historical objects related to the use of ceremonial coppers throughout the Northwest Coast. Serving as the anchor artwork for the section "Expressing Values," *DAM Dancing Crane* provides an entry point into conversations about our shared humanity and responsibility to each other and the land, as well as the tensions between settler narratives about coppers and the role that coppers continue to serve for many Northwest Coast communities. In an artist video directed by Gillian Darling Kovanic for the Denver Art Museum, Yahgulanaas says

> This artwork is not confined to a particular place or time. My inspiration is informed by a historical connection to activities deeply rooted in landscape and place, but it is also deeply rooted in this place today and this time today. This is not a typical time for the species. This is a time for all-hands-on-deck.[53]

Employing his signature "frameline" style—which blends customary Haida design elements with manga-inspired graphic features and calligraphic brushstrokes—Yahgulanaas depicts a crane, which he also refers to as a heron, on a copper-leafed Toyota Tercel car hood.[54] The lacquered surface is highly reflective, allowing visitors to see themselves and their surroundings mirrored on its surface.

The series, *Coppers from the Hood*, reflects on the ways in which both ceremonial coppers and automobiles can signify status. However, Yahgulanaas is quick to caution against conflating the two or only focusing on the relationship between ceremonial coppers and wealth or prestige. In an artist video accompanying the piece, Yahgulanaas says that

> Coppers are similar to automobiles in that they function as symbols of achievement or status. Coppers are still used today. Copper shields are still manufactured and displayed and gifted and convey respect and notions of incorporeal and tangible value. They still function that way. But the fascination of Western

institutions with coppers is rooted in the fascination of the "imaginary Indian."[55]

The placement of *DAM Dancing Crane* within a section focusing specifically on the cultural meaning of ceremonial coppers creates a conversation between Yahuglanaas and the institution, allowing him to challenge the very ways in which the project team chose to interpret coppers and the regalia related to them. *DAM Dancing Crane* is joined by a Kwakwaka'wakw broken copper, a 'Kumukwamł carved by Willie Seaweed, and a copper breaking post in the form of 'Namxiyalagiyu, a halibut-like sea monster (fig. 2). Interpretive text in this section provides context for the use, exchange, and ongoing importance of ceremonial coppers, to which Yahgulanaas provides an important counterpoint and reminder that institutional ways of knowing are often different than those of originating and descendant communities.

The project team continued its commitment to amplifying the voices of artists and community members in other sections of the gallery. "Seeing the Line" explores the ways in which Northwest Coast artists approach questions of design, form, and materials, thereby challenging the perceived rigidity of Northwest Coast design principles by showing artworks that defy and challenge these expectations. The section also provides visitors with the opportunity to learn about the historiography of Northwest Coast art, namely, the ways in which non-Native scholars have talked about Northwest Coast design elements, as well as the ways that artists today are reclaiming that language. In an essay written for *Companion to Northwest Coast and Alaska Native Art*, Haida artist Gwaai Edenshaw describes the work of non-Native scholars, particularly art historian Bill Holm, that contributed to a deeper understanding of Northwest Coast design elements.[56] "What Bill Holm did," writes Edenshaw, "was provide a tool that artists in our field have employed as the principal language that we have used to expand our understanding of the art."[57] Gwaai and his brother Jaalen have been developing Haida-language terms to describe the same formal elements identified by Holm.

Edenshaw's essay formed the basis of the interpretive panel accompanying the "Seeing the Line" section (fig. 3). Using the design painted on the interior of a Tlingit drum depicting an eagle, graphic design firm McGinty created a vinyl panel with a clear Sintra overlay identifying the shapes and terms described by Holm. In the accompanying panel text, the project

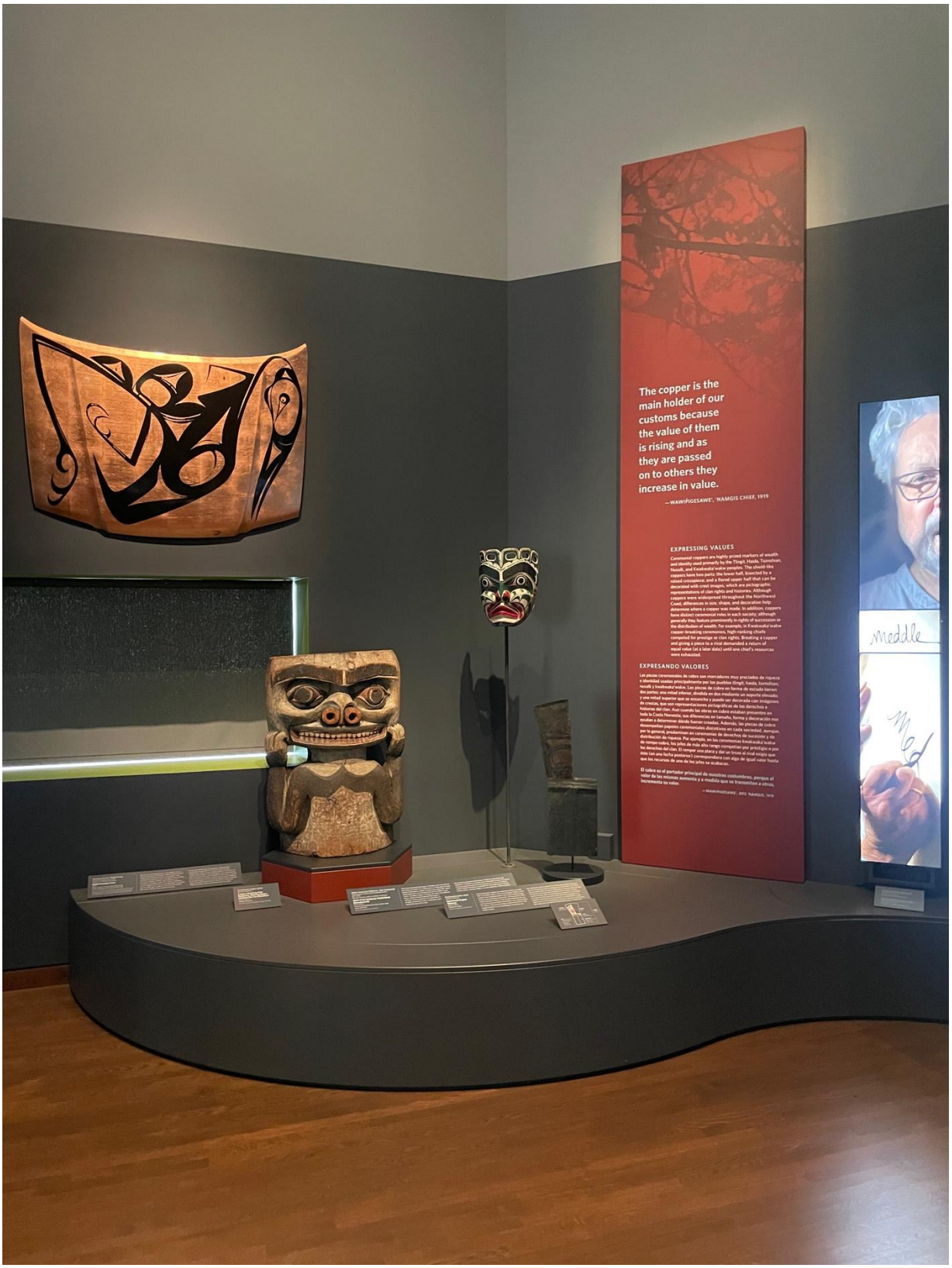

Fig. 2. Installation view, "Expressing Values" grouping, Northwest Coast and Alaska Native Galleries, Denver Art Museum, Denver, CO. Photo: Christopher Patrello.

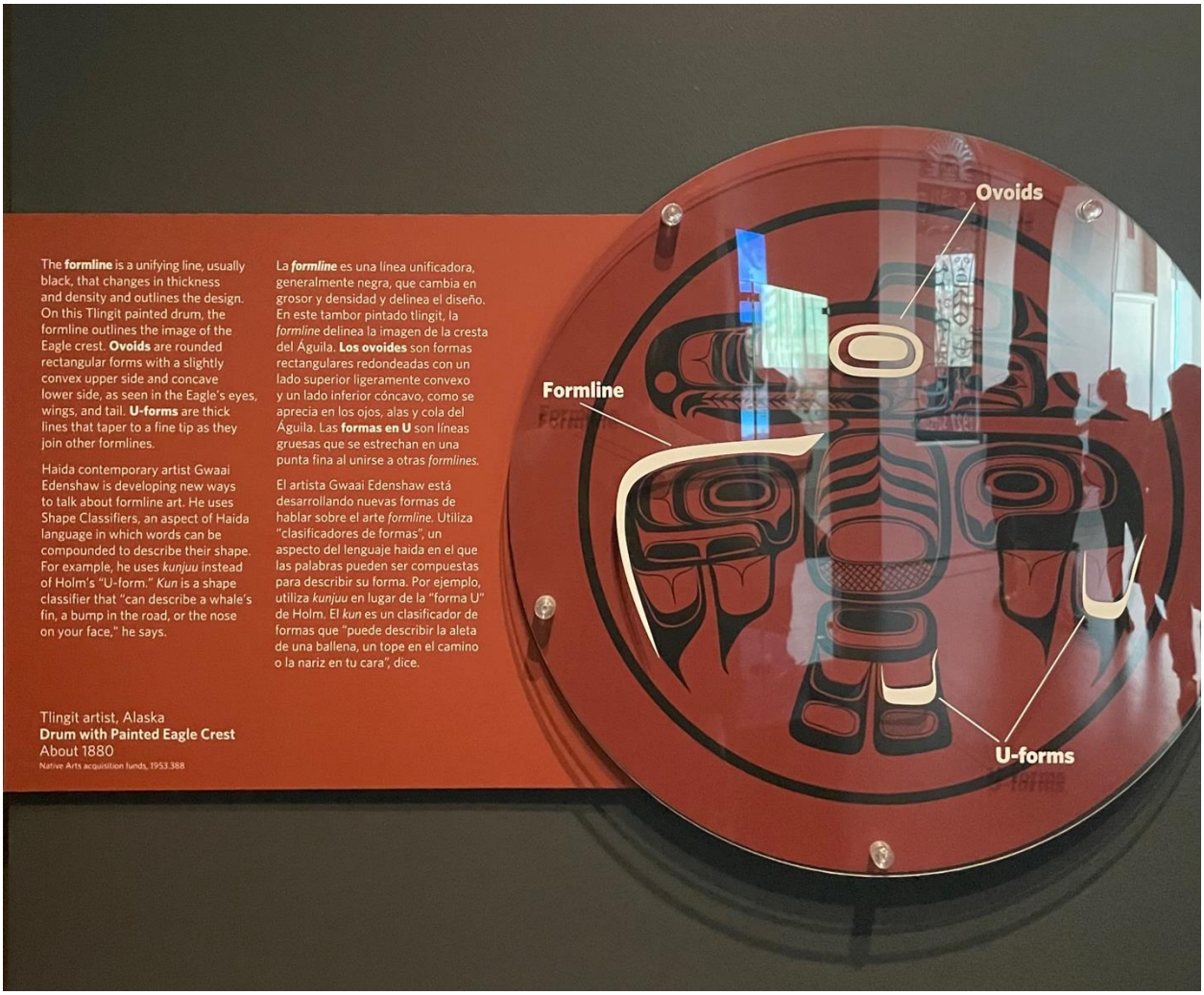

Fig. 3. Interpretive panel for "Seeing the Line" grouping, Northwest Coast and Alaska Native Galleries, Denver Art Museum, Denver, CO. Photo: Christopher Patrello.

team introduced both Holm's concepts and Gwaai and Jaalen's work to redefine them using Xaayda Kil linguistic concepts. "For instance," writes Gwaai, "we use *kunjuu*. . . . As a Shape Classifier, *kun* can describe a whale's fin, a bump in the road, a point of land, or the nose on your face. It describes any object that comes off another body, and so describes an intrinsic property of U form."[58]

The reinstallation of the Northwest Coast and Alaska Native galleries also offered opportunities to partner with community members. In November 2019 the museum reinstalled the Haida house frontal and memorial pole in the Northwest Coast and Alaska Native gallery. The museum collaborated with descendants of Dwight Wallace—the Haida artist who commissioned the memorial pole and carved the house frontal pole

originally from Sukkwan, Alaska—to host a pole raising ceremony and feast to commemorate their reinstallation and honor their family.[59] The project team worked closely with artist and community leader Lee Wallace, his daughter Markel, grandnieces Andrea Cook and Valesha Patterson, and Valesha's son Tristen, which afforded the family and the museum the chance to engage in conversations about stewardship, cultural protocols, and the intergenerational transmission of knowledge.[60]

The Alaska Native section of the gallery is distinguished by a shift in color and design inspired by both the Alaskan tundra and the coastlines from which many of the belongings on view originate (fig. 4). The section is organized into three

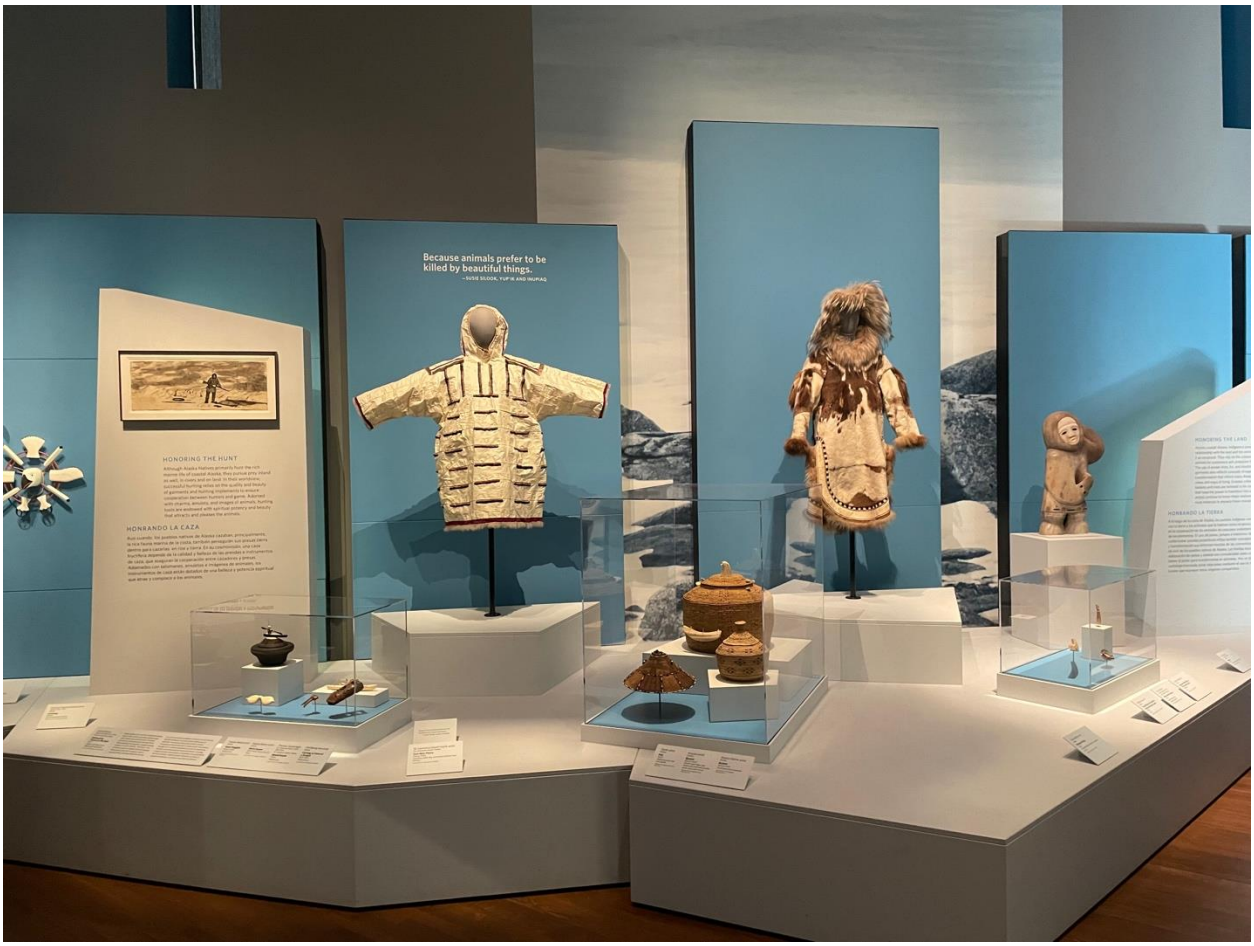

Fig. 4. Installation view of Alaska Native Section, Northwest Coast and Alaska Native Galleries, Denver Art Museum, Denver, CO. Photo: Christopher Patrello.

interrelated groupings that examine the reciprocal relationships between humans and nonhuman beings that animate the cosmos. The first grouping, "Honoring the Land," grounds visitors in the fact that many Alaska Native communities understand that the landscape is animate, and that physical and spiritual sustenance is predicated upon a reciprocal relationship with all beings. "Honoring the Hunt" focuses on the relationship between artists, hunters, and game that offers itself to hunters wearing and using beautifully made garments and hunting equipment. "Honoring all Life" turns to the ceremonies that honor the game that offered itself to hunters in the previous hunting season, while also ensuring future cooperation from game in the following year.

The Alaska Native section also features an artist video with multidisciplinary artist Sonya Kelliher-Combs, who discusses her practice and the relationship between materials and ongoing cultural and spiritual practices. "My relationship to material is very important," she states. "Something that is really beautiful about Alaska Native culture is that every object was designed and incised with beautiful motifs and pattern to strengthen or give power to an object. So, everything was made and was made to last."[61] Kelliher-Combs grounds visitors in the deeply rooted relationship between artists, community, land, and the ongoing environmental consequences of non-Indigenous human behavior on the ecosystems upon which many Alaska Native communities still rely.

She also reminds visitors that not only are Native peoples still here, they are stewards of the land who engage with it as relatives and caretakers. In an interview with the author, Kelliher-Combs elaborated on the consequences of anthropogenic change and extractive industries for Alaska Native communities. When asked to describe the emotional connection she has to materials, she said that she is

> inspired by our ancestors and their relationship to their environment, which is embodied in their use of skin, fur, and membrane in material cultures. The subjects of my work are patterns of history, family, and culture. Personal and cultural symbolism form the imagery. These symbols speak to history, culture, family, and the life of our people. They also speak about abuse, marginalization and the historical and contemporary struggles of Indigenous peoples.[62]

From the outset, the project team committed to a process that amplified the voices of Indigenous artists. The commissions, groupings, and interpretation were guided by

Northwest Coast and Alaska Native ways of being, seeing, and knowing.

Once the project team completed planning the Northwest Coast and Alaska Native galleries, we then turned our attention to the third-floor galleries. The eighteen-thousand-square-foot space comprises two large galleries that are connected by a smaller space that is home to the Native Arts artist-in-residency studio.[63] While the Northwest Coast and Alaska Native galleries used the culture area paradigm as their most basic organizational structure, the third-floor galleries presented the possibility to further develop themes and ideas introduced on the second floor. In developing the visitor experience goals for the Indigenous Arts of North America galleries, the project team—in collaboration with the museum's Indigenous Community Advisory Council—committed to the following goals for both Native and non-Native visitors:

- Recognize the diversity of Native nations living in North America and the variety of materials used in Indigenous arts.
- Appreciate the continuity of creativity and skill evident in Indigenous arts and how they contribute to global artistic conversations.
- Reinterpret history through Indigenous perspectives.
- Think about ideas of perseverance and survival.
- Connect to universal themes around place, knowledge, and community.[64]

Additionally, the project team developed the space so that it could serve as a resource for Native people across North America. This aspiration sought to create a gallery experience that was "accessible, a source of pride, and a catalyst for honest conversations."[65]

To achieve these goals, the project team followed the transhistorical approach established in the Northwest Coast and Alaska Native galleries, but also introduced thematic sections that were not tethered to the culture area paradigm. The thematic gallery focused on identity and history, using modern and contemporary artworks as anchor pieces in conversation with historical artworks and cultural belongings (fig. 5). The hinge space housed a large case focusing on Native American Church art, which led into the artist-in-residence studio. After passing through the hinge, visitors enter the "Home|Land" section. This circular gallery focuses on Cheyenne, Arapaho, and Ute cultural relationships

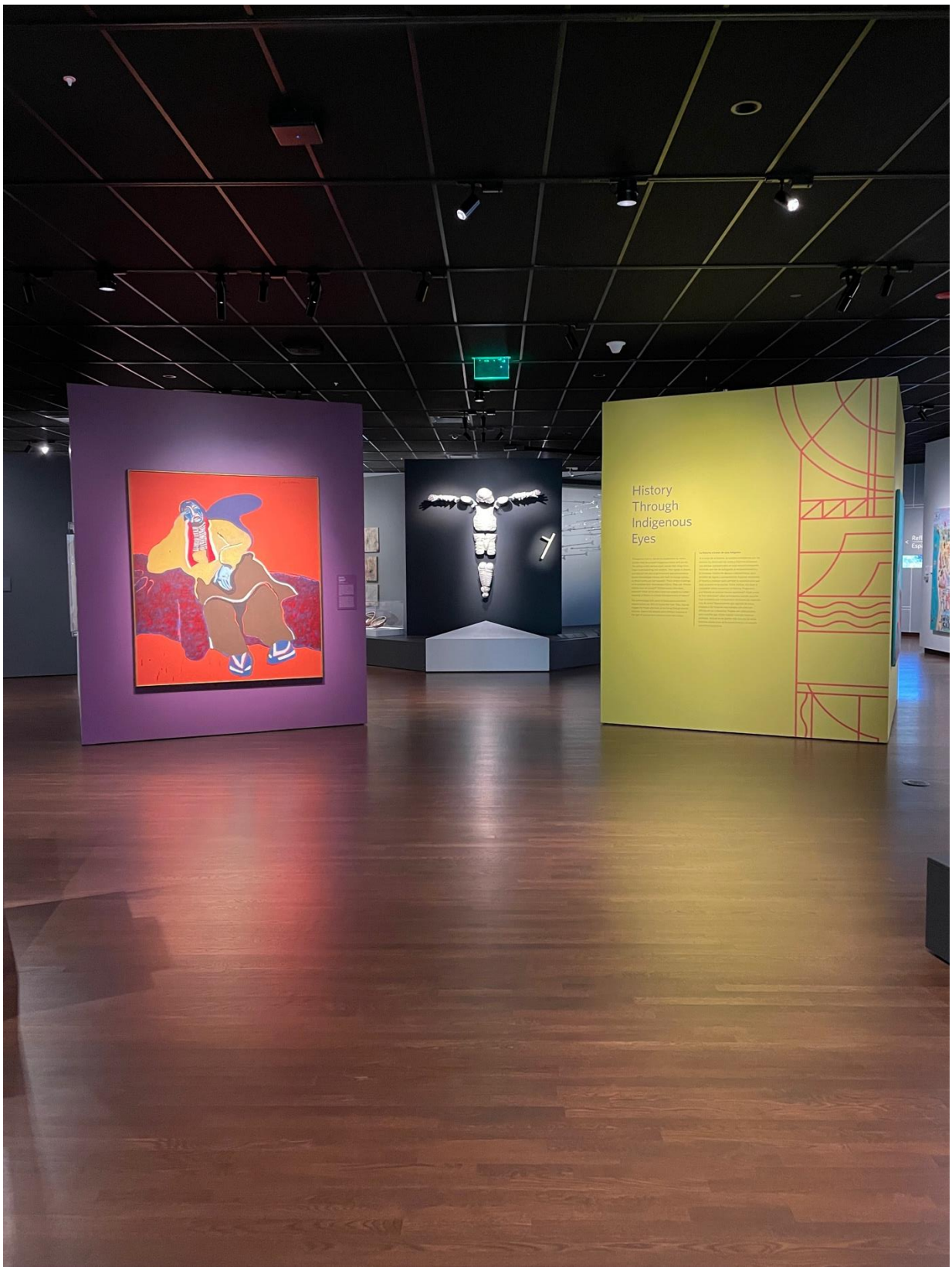

Fig. 5. Installation view thematic gallery in the Indigenous Arts of North America permanent collection galleries. Denver Art Museum, Denver, CO. Photograph: Christopher Patrello.

with what is today known as Colorado. Dakota Hoska led the development of this gallery, and worked with Cheyenne, Arapaho, and Ute community members and tribal leaders who served as advisors and participants in the interpretive videos in the gallery. This gallery transitions into a geographic gallery, which is organized by culture area. Like the Northwest Coast and Alaska Native gallery, every section in this part of the gallery comprises historical and contemporary artworks from diverse tribal communities, as well as works by both male and female artists. Moreover, the interpretation focuses on concepts of confluence and exchange, the forced relocation of Indigenous peoples onto reservations and allotments, and the novel and inventive use of European and American trade goods and motifs by Native artists. The project team also developed a community label program called "Our Voices," which placed labels written by community members throughout the galleries.[66]

When visitors enter the thematically organized gallery from the elevator lobby, they are met by *Mud Woman Rolls On*, a site-specific artwork by Roxanne Swentzell originally commissioned by Blomberg for the 2011 reinstallation of what were then called the American Indian Art galleries. *Mud Woman Rolls On* remained on the third floor during renovation and was housed in a climate-controlled chamber while the building was under construction. In its new placement in the gallery, *Mud Woman Rolls On* is connected to a grouping of pottery and sculpture that honors the artistic legacy of the Naranjo family. All of the artists featured in this grouping are descendants of famed Santa Clara potter Rose (Gia) Naranjo, including Judy (Jody) Folwell, Nora Naranjo Morse, Roxanne Swentzell, Polly Rose Folwell, Susan Folwell, Jody Naranjo, Rose B. Simpson, and Kaa Folwell (see fig. 6).

Mud Woman Rolls On is a monumental Storyteller figure, which is a pottery motif that was first introduced by Cochiti potter Helen Cordero around 1964.[67] Made from unfired mud and fired clay over a plant fiber substructure, *Mud Woman* cradles four nested children, creating both a symbolic and material connection between intergenerational knowledge, human beings, and the earth as mother.[68] Placing *Mud Woman* in the context of an artistic lineage of Santa Clara artists reinforces both Swentzell's intentions and inspirations while also highlighting the connection between dynamic artistic practices, families, and the land. The grouping is also paired

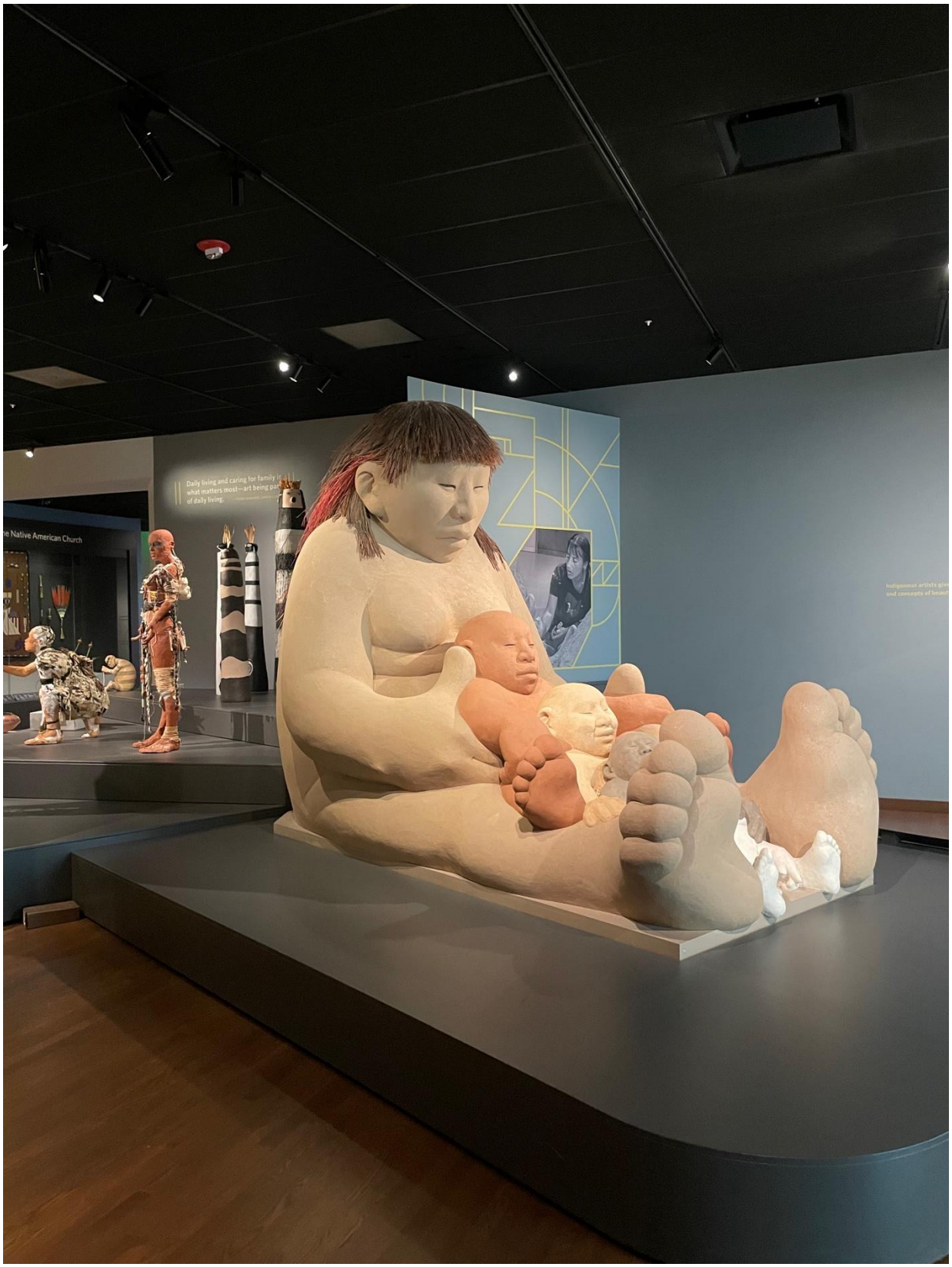

Fig. 6. Installation view, “One Family’s Legacy” grouping, Indigenous Arts of North America permanent collection galleries, Denver Art Museum, Denver, CO. Photo: Christopher Patrello.

with a family tree that shows the connections between artists featured in the grouping, as well as other family members whose work is not on view. Works in this grouping range from customary pottery to conceptually challenging installation art, thereby demonstrating the tremendous range of Native artists and the diverse ways in which similar materials can be used in inventive ways.

Another section in the thematic tower, "History through Indigenous Eyes," reinterprets the history of North America from the perspective of Indigenous artists and community members, with specific focus on social justice issues that acutely impact Native communities. Fritz Scholder's *Massacre in America: Wounded Knee* depicts an open grave set against a snow-covered field. A lone horse stands near the horizon where snow meets sky. A tangled knot of unidentifiable parts and viscera rests in the open grave. Scholder's unflinching account of the Seventh Calvary's massacre of approximately three hundred Mnikȟówožu and Húŋkpapȟa Lakȟóta men, women, and children near Wounded Knee Creek is contextualized by a label written by Oglála Lakȟóta hip hop artist Terrance Jade.

> I feel anger. Elders watching generations of family being ended right before their own eyes. No Mercy. Yet they call us "savages." Nothing is more savage than killing innocent people seeking refuge.
>
> I feel sadness. In this painting I see myself. I see my sons. My nephews. My little brother. My daughter. My nieces. My mother. My grandparents. My aunties. My uncles. I see friends.
>
> I feel a peace of mind and peace of heart. We live on. We are a true nation of warriors.[69]

The painting by Scholder and accompanying text by Jade provoke visitors to confront the historical realities of genocide and forced removal in ways that underscore the ongoing relevance of the past for the present. Jade describes the emotions and sensations of historical trauma in ways that are not academic or moralistic. They are deeply personal. And yet, he also talks about the survivance of Lakȟóta people and lifeways and the pride he feels knowing that Lakȟóta culture is still vibrant and powerful despite the US government's attempts to erase it.

Other works in this space, such as Sonya Kelliher-Combs's *Credible*, which reveals the history of abuse by Catholic clergymen and laypeople in Alaska Native communities, and Kent Monkman's *The*

Scream, a monumental history painting that challenges viewers to confront the trauma of the residential school system in Canada, can be deeply unsettling and painful for visitors. In addition to including contact information for organizations that support survivors of sexual abuse and the residential school system, the project team included a reflection space in the gallery for visitors who need a place to process, reflect, and rest. The minimalist space also features an excerpt from a poem by 2019–22 US Poet Laureate Joy Harjo (see fig. 7).

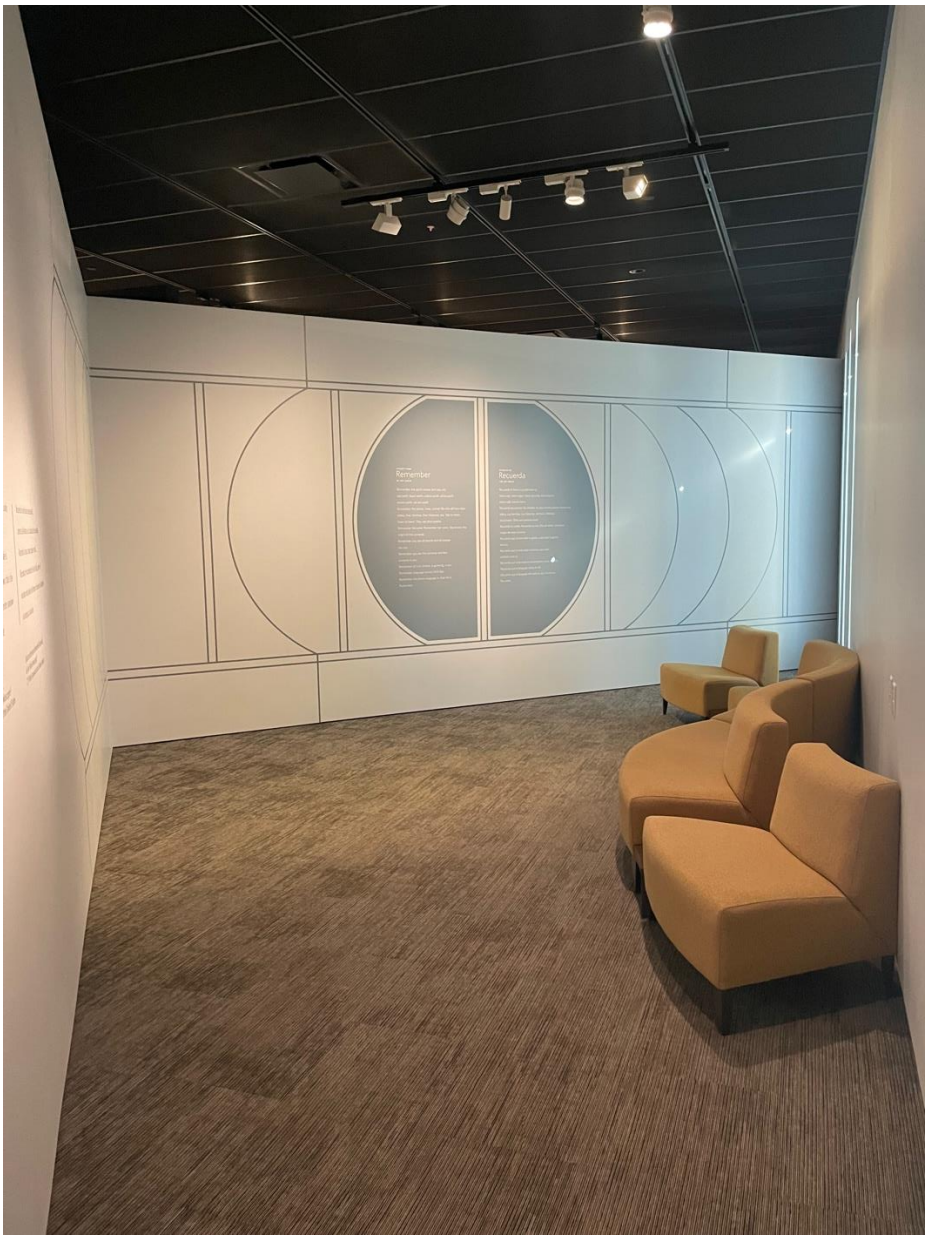

Fig. 7. Reflection Space, Indigenous Arts of North America permanent collection galleries, Denver Art Museum, Denver, CO. Photo: Christopher Patrello.

The "Home|Land" section functions as a gateway between the thematic gallery and the geographic gallery. The project team believed that it was important to ground visitors in the history of what is today known as Colorado by both focusing on Cheyenne, Arapaho, Ute, and Ancestral Puebloan artworks and cultural belongings as well as the perspectives of tribal citizens. Steven Yazzie produced a multichannel video installation featuring Dr. Henrietta Mann (Cheyenne); Jordan Dresser (Northern Arapaho); George Curtis Levi (Southern Cheyenne, Arapaho, Lakȟóta); Angelica Lawson, PhD (Northern Arapaho); Cassandra Atencio (Southern Ute); Helen Munoz (Ute Mountain Ute); Elise Redd (Southern Ute); and Harvey Pratt (Cheyenne, Arapaho). In her interview, Dr. Mann said that

> we are made from the same four basic elements of life: earth, air, fire, and water, which really constitutes everything that lives on this earth of ours. That lives on this earth, that lives in the skies, that constitutes this beautiful whole and one earth in which we live where everything is interdependent. And so I think our art really begins to draw on those kinds of our beliefs, depicted in whatever way that the artist chooses.[70]

Dr. Mann provides poignant reminders of our shared humanity and the role that artists play in mediating relationships between their communities and the basic elements of life derived from the earth. Importantly, we are not necessarily *the same*, but we comprise the same basic building blocks of life, and artists maintain and develop creative practices that express the myriad ways in which communities understand individual and collective identities (see fig. 8).

This testament to artistic creativity and cultural diversity also sets the foundation for the curatorial and interpretive approach found in the geographic gallery. Organized by culture area, the open concept galleries employ a range of colors to distinguish between different sections. Although the culture area paradigm creates seemingly arbitrary barriers between cultures and communities that have exchanged goods, ideas, and beliefs since time immemorial, it "can provide rich historical and geographical context to the artworks from a given culture area . . . [recognizing] that it can also obscure the fluid and porous boundaries between them."[71] For instance, the "Great Basin and Plateau" section focuses on the interchange between Plains and Plateau artists, as well their incorporation of dentalium and other trade items acquired from the west coast of

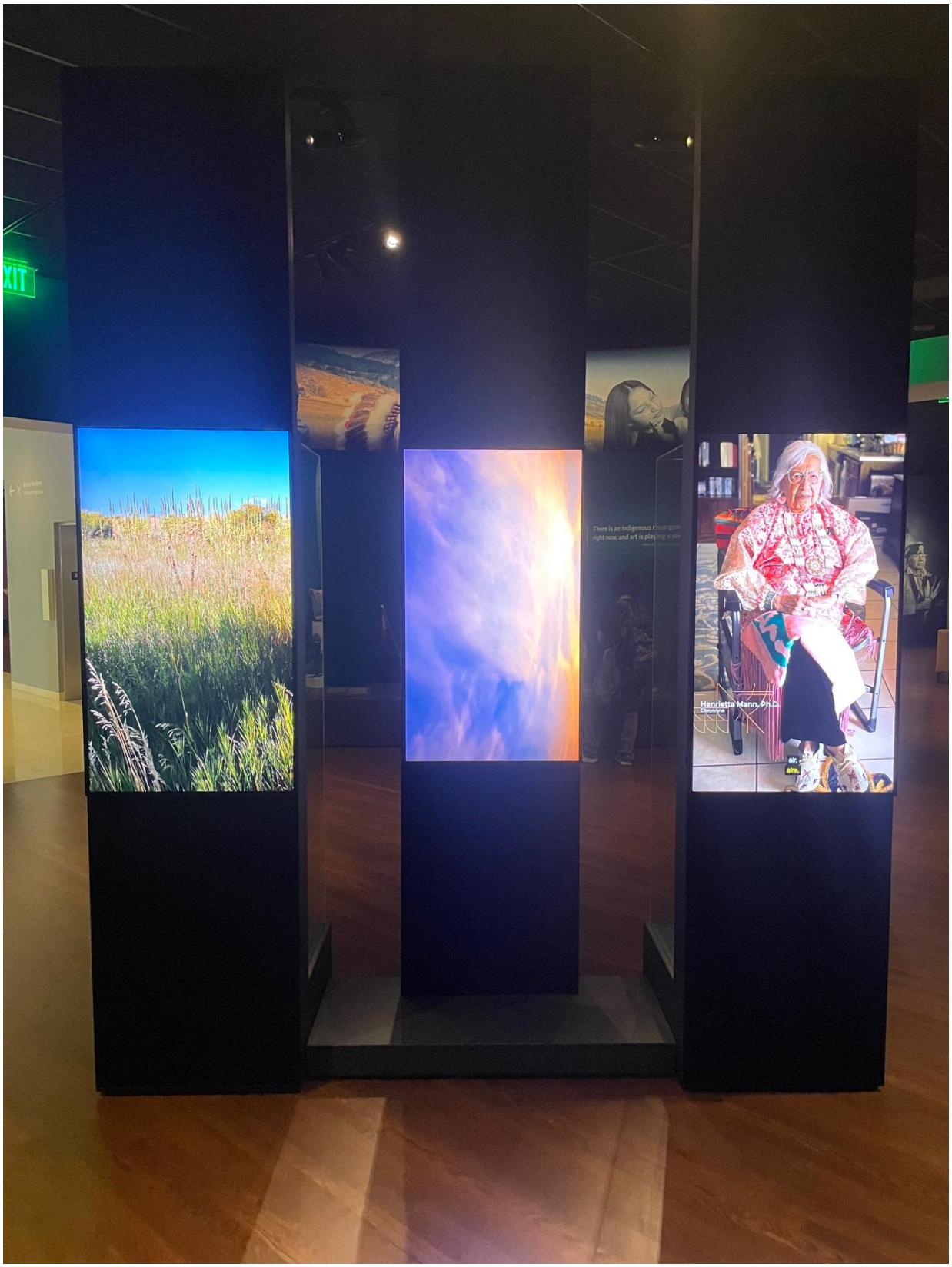

Fig. 8. Installation view, "Home|Land" section, Indigenous Arts of North America permanent collection galleries, Denver Art Museum, Denver, CO. Photo: Christopher Patrello.

North America. Additionally, the section focuses on the use of materials introduced by Anglo-American traders moving westward across the United States and Canada, as well as the ways in which artists adapted to the radical shifts caused by forced relocation onto reservations. For instance, the section highlights painted hides attributed to Codsiogo—also known as Cadzi Cody—a Shoshone artist who painted hides with depictions of buffalo hunts and dances in response to non-Native market demands for Native art and material culture. According to curator Joe Horse Capture, "Codsiogo's work reflected historical Plains life while also including non-confrontational images that would be acceptable to non-Natives."[72]

As visitors exit the gallery and return to the elevator lobby, they are greeted by a statement from the museum's Indigenous Community Advisory Council (fig. 9). The statement reads as follows:

> We ask you to contemplate the many different peoples and nations represented throughout these galleries. What you see on display is only a small portion of the nearly 18,000 Indigenous works from North America stewarded by the Denver Art Museum. Each of these works, while representing an individual artist, object, culture or expression, serves as a reminder of moments in time, stories, ceremonies, thoughts, visions, and the need to create and explore. Indigenous peoples knew no states or countries, but they fully knew their ancestral lands. They were and remain distinct from one another, each having their own sense of place and community. Today's Indigenous artists still embrace the old, but they are not afraid to look at things in enlightening ways.[73]

This address to visitors, whether it is viewed as a welcome or a reminder, fully captures the goals of the project team in programming over twenty thousand square feet of gallery space. Given the size of the collection, the number of Indigenous nations represented therein, and the deep history of the Native Arts department and its role in defining the interpretation of Indigenous art and material culture in fine arts museums, the Denver Art Museum employed a number of strategies. It sought both to build upon this history and challenge itself to develop pathways for greater collaboration with community members and artists.

Moving Forward (2024–)

Although permanent collection galleries often remain static for long periods of time, the galleries at the Denver Art Museum have featured significant changes and rotations over the last three years. While the initial focus of the

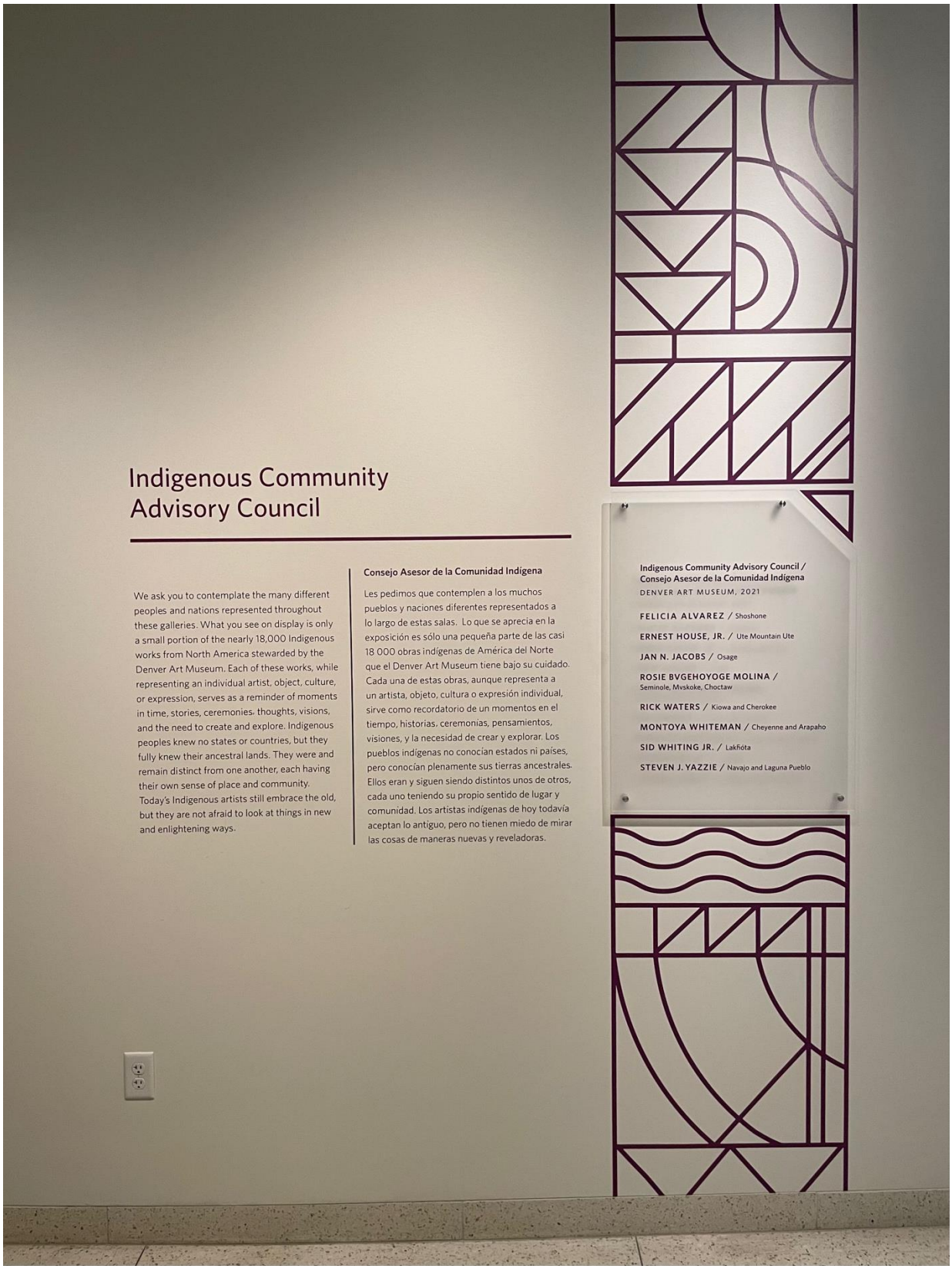

Fig. 9. Installation view, Indigenous Community Advisory Council Statement, Indigenous Arts of North America permanent collection galleries, Denver Art Museum, Denver, CO. Photo: Christopher Patrello.

reinstallation examined the role that artists play in mediating relationships between human beings, their environments, and the more-than-human beings that animate the cosmos, recent rotations have created greater opportunities to partner with members of originating and descendant communities to change how artworks and cultural belongings are exhibited and interpreted therein. More important, these changes have also transformed the museum's collections and conservation practices, thereby illustrating the necessity for deeper, ongoing collaborations with tribal representatives within and beyond the purview of the recent changes to the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act as well as the Duty of Care guidelines outlined in those changes.

In 2021 the museum received a Bank of America Art Conservation grant focused on the museum's collection of Acoma textiles. In addition to technical analysis of the textiles, the collaborative project sought to develop conservation treatments guided by Acoma representatives, as well as a loan of textiles to Acoma Pueblo for exhibition at the Haak'u Museum at Sky City Cultural Center.[74] The project resulted in changes to the museum's collections storage and conservation practices, and also significantly impacted the ways in which such garments are exhibited in the galleries.[75] When the galleries originally opened in 2021, the Acoma textiles were installed alongside Diné weavings, all of which were suspended in front of a black scrim in the "Southwest" section of the geographic gallery. Exhibiting them flat afforded visitors the ability to engage with the motifs and weaving techniques but did not accurately reflect the manner in which the Acoma textiles were—and continue to be—worn by people. According to Hoska, the Acoma representatives had two primary requests. First, they asked that the Acoma textiles be separated from the Diné weavings. Second, they stated that the textiles should be displayed on mannequin forms with complete outfits.[76] While hanging the textiles two-dimensionally emphasizes materials, form, and iconography, it also decontextualizes the garments and disrupts visitors' ability to understand the embodied practices and intimate connections between adornment and the body. While other areas of the Indigenous Arts of North America permanent collection galleries installed garments and regalia on mannequins, this project created opportunities for both direct feedback and responses to that feedback.

Building upon the response to the "Our Voices" labels throughout the galleries, Hoska worked closely with Erlidawn Roy (Meskwaki/ Laguna and Isleta Pueblo) on a rotation examining the history and development of Prairie style, as well as the relationship between Prairie style and the forced relocation of many Native communities to the Southern Plains as part of the 1830 Indian Removal Act. The development of this intertribal visual and material culture is richly expressed in a range of clothing and other objects. "As you look upon this dance regalia," writes Roy, "try to visualize the movement of the ribbon, the prayer of the dance, and the strength of the woman wearing it. As a Meskwaki (Sac and Fox) woman, I am proud to be a part of the resurgence of this once dwindling style of dance, 'Women's appliqué' or 'Old Style Scrub.' Following my grandmother's path, I continue the legacy—emulating dignity, grace, and power in each movement."[77] The "Our Voices" label program continues to develop as wholesale changes are made to the original 2021 installation, and now involve deeper collaboration between participants and curators, which further informs the selection and interpretation of cultural belongings and artworks currently on view rather than simply providing community members an opportunity to share their perspectives on a given belonging or artwork.

As museums across the country reevaluate their permanent collection galleries, it is increasingly necessary to also reevaluate collecting practices, collections management policies and collections access, conservation procedures, exhibition curation, and interpretation. Having participated in the original installation of the Denver Art Museum's Indigenous Arts of North America permanent collection galleries, it is somewhat difficult to situate the project team's work in the larger conversations regarding the ethics and politics of exhibiting Indigenous histories and material culture within the context of global fine art. The reinstallation, like the others that preceded it, will be evaluated retrospectively. Its contributions to the field, its shortcomings, its errors and omissions will be part of that conversation. The challenge for the Denver Art Museum, and any museum, is to respond to those critiques with humility and a desire to change when such critiques from Native communities arise. However, it is worth questioning whether or not substantive change is even possible, given the generally inflexible structure of modern museums. Michel Foucault describes museums as heterotopias, or the

"project of organizing in this way a sort of perpetual and indefinite accumulation of time in an immobile place."[78] As such, museums contribute to a peculiar form of ordering, one in which Enlightenment epistemologies and classificatory schema create a strange engagement with place, time, and history. Often, if not always, the unending accumulation of time and space experienced in a museum does not reflect how people live or how they make sense of their place in the world. What might a fundamental reevaluation of the structure and mission of global fine arts museums look like? Are there more appropriate ways of engaging with human creativity without the need for taxonomies and divisions that separate individual and collective engagement with the world into neatly defined culture areas, time periods, and artistic practices? If so, who would such changes serve?

[1] Richard Conn, *Native American Art in the Denver Art Museum* (Denver: Denver Art Museum, 1979), 16; Christoph Heinrich, "Director's Foreword," in *Here, Now: Indigenous Arts of North America at the Denver Art Museum*, ed. John Lukavic, Dakota Hoska, and Christopher Patrello (Munich: Hirmer, 2022), 15; Christian F. Feest, "Norman Feder and American Indian Art Studies," in *Studies in American Indian Art: A Memorial Tribute to Norman Feder*, ed. Christian F. Feest (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2001), 26; Ira Jacknis, "A New Thing?: The NMAI in Historical and Institutional Perspective," *American Indian Quarterly* 30, no. 3/4 (Summer/Fall 2006), 531. I use "perceived" here to indicate that, historically, such interpretations of cultural value often ignored Indigenous ontologies and ways of understanding the world. Aesthetics, too, were often interpreted through the lens of museum professionals and connoisseurs who privileged their perspectives over and above the ways in which Native peoples understand their own visual languages and their relationship to ongoing cultural practices.

[2] Evan Maurer, "Presenting the American Indian: From Europe to America," in *The Changing Presentation of the American Indian: Museums and Native Cultures*, ed. W. Richard West Jr. (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2000), 23; Andrea L. Ferber, "Collections: Denver Art Museum," *First American Art Magazine* 24 (Fall 2019): 90.

[3] Janet Catherine Berlo and Ruth B. Phillips, *Native North American Art*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 8.

[4] Steven D. Lavine and Ivan Karp, "Introduction: Museums and Multiculturalism," in *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display*, ed. Ivan Karp and Steven D. Lavine (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991), 1.

[5] Janet Catherine Berlo, "The Art of Indigenous Americans and American Art History: A Century of Exhibitions" *Perspective* 2 (2015), https://doi.org/10.4000/perspective.6004.

[6] John Lukavic, Dakota Hoska, and Christopher Patrello, "Introduction," in Lukavic, Hoska, and Patrello, *Here, Now*, 19.

[7] Ibid.

[8] Conn, *Native American Art in the Denver Art Museum*, 16.

[9] Golden Gate International Exposition Commission, *Report of the Commissioner for the United States Golden Gate International Exposition Commission, 1939–1940* (San Francisco, Office of United States Commissioner George Creel: 1941). The eight galleries were "The Eskimo Hunters of the Arctic," "The Fisherman of the Northwest Coast," "The Seed Gatherers of the Far West, "The Buffalo Hunters of the Plains, "The Woodsmen of the Eastern Forests, "The Cornplanters of the Pueblos," "The Navajo Shepherds," and the "Desert Dwellers of the Southwest."

[10] Frederic H. Douglas, Golden Gate Exposition (1939), Native Arts Curatorial Files, Denver Art Museum. Douglas gave a lecture to the American Indian Defense Association in conjunction with the Indian Court. For more information about the AIDA, see John Lukavic and Christopher Patrello, "'On behalf of the family': A Pole Raising Ceremony at the Denver Art Museum," *Museum Anthropology Review* 16, no. 1–2 (Spring/Fall 2022): 115–134, https://doi.org/10.14434/mar.v16i1.31650.

[11] While the long history of appropriating Native identity and stereotyping Native ontologies in the United States is beyond the purview of this paper, this history contributes significantly to ongoing debates about the relationship between Indigenous and American identities. For more information, see Philip J. Deloria, *Playing Indian* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998). Additionally, such an approach fundamentally misappropriates Indigenous worldviews and the depth and nuance of the diverse ways in which Indigenous peoples articulate relationships to the land that are rooted in reciprocity. For instance, Leanne Betasamosake Simpson describes Nishnaabeg pedagogy as a lifelong process from which one does not graduate. Rather, "existence is ultimately dependent upon intimate relationships of reciprocity, humility, honesty and respect with all elements of creation, including plants and animals." See Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, "Land as Pedagogy: Nishnaabeg Intelligence and Rebellious Transformation," *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society* 3, no. 3 (2014): 9. Similarly, artist and curator Wanda Nanibush writes that "The idea that the earth is our first mother and that animals are our kin and can communicate with us through visions, dreams, and signs is central to many Indigenous cultures. . . . These facts were deeply misunderstood and parodied for the sole purpose of justifying the removal of bodies blocking the path to settler colonialism." See Wanda Nanibush, "Notions of Land," *Aperture* 234 (Spring 2019): 74.

[12] Golden Gate International Exposition Commission, *Report of the Commissioner*, 3.

[13] Ibid.

[14] Letter from d'Harnoncourt to Frederick Keppel, quoted in W. Jackson Rushing, "Marketing the Affinity of the Primitive and the Modern: René d'Harnoncourt and 'Indian Art of the United States,'" in *The Early Years of Native American Art History* ed. Janet Catherine Berlo (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1992), 199.

[15] Rushing, "Marketing the Affinity of the Primitive and the Modern," 203.

[16] Ibid., 204.

[17] Jennifer McLerran, *A New Deal for Native Art: Indian Arts and Federal Policy, 1933–1943* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2009), 2. See also Christopher Patrello, "Indigenous Accounts: Local Exchange and Global Circulation on the Northwest Coast" (PhD diss., University of Rochester, 2018), 148–51, http://hdl.handle.net/1802/34157.

[18] Berlo, "The Art of Indigenous Americans and American Art History."

[19] Museum of Modern Art, "Exhibition of Indian Art of the United States Opens at Museum of Modern Art," press release, n.d., https://assets.moma.org/documents/moma_press-release_325212.pdf, accessed December 12, 2023; Lukavic, Hoska, and Patrello, eds. *Here, Now*, 156. D'Harnoncourt and Douglas commissioned Kabotie to recreate murals found in a ceremonial kiva from an Ancestral Puebloan site at Awatovi. They were first exhibited at the Golden Gate Exposition before being included in *Indian Art of the United States*. In 1953, the Indian Arts and Crafts Board donated the murals to the Denver Art Museum.

[20] Frederic H. Douglas and René d'Harnoncourt, *Indian Art of the United States* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1941), 8, https://assets.moma.org/documents/moma_catalogue_2998_300061960.pdf.

[21] Ibid., 10.

[22] Challenging settler notions that Native peoples were vanishing or had already vanished when faced with the unassailable march of progress, Douglas and d'Harnoncourt began to contend with many of the same issues that Indigenous organizers continue to confront today. NDN Collective, a grassroots organizing collective that advocates for intersectional, restorative justice and Indigenous-led policies argues that "most Americans—sadly including politicians and business leaders—know very little about modern Indigenous peoples. When information is shared, stereotypes of abject poverty and substance abuse are often reinforced, clouding policy, legislation and other critical decision-making in places of power." See Nikki A. Pieratos, Sarah S. Manning, and Nick Tilsen, "Land Back: A Meta Narrative to Help Indigenous People Show Up as Movement Leaders," *Leadership* 17, no. 1 (February 2021): 47–61, https://doi.org/10.1177/1742715020976204.

[23] Douglas and d'Harnoncourt, *Indian Art of the United States*, 11.

[24] In the wake of George Floyd's murder and in response to the ongoing cultural reckoning it engendered, museums have made promises to address issues of systemic racism in their collecting practices. In addition to public statements in support of Black lives, many museums have also made public promises to collect artworks by historically marginalized artists in an effort to expand, dismantle, or otherwise transform the artistic canon to be more inclusive of diverse stories and experiences. See Jo Lawson-Tancred, "Two Years Ago, Museums Across the U.S. Promised to Address Diversity and Equity. Here's Exactly What They Have Done So Far," *artnet*, September 5, 2022, https://news.artnet.com/art-world/museum-dei-plans-2022-2161690.

[25] Frederic Douglas, *The Native Artist and His World* (Denver: Denver Art Museum, 1948), 2.

[26] Ibid., 3.

[27] "Department History," Indigenous Arts of North America, Denver Art Museum, last updated April 23, 2024, https://www.denverartmuseum.org/en/collection/indigenous-arts-north-america.

[28] Feest, "Norman Feder and American Indian Art Studies," 26. As noted by Feest, anthropologists in the mid-twentieth century had become disinterested in material culture, and hobbyists filled an important gap in the study of Indigenous material culture by closely studying it for the purposes of reproduction. Today, the ongoing activities of hobbyists in the United States and Europe—particularly Germany—are a source of both frustration and anger for both Native and non-Native curators, museum professionals, and artists.

[29] Norman Feder, "American Indian Art Before 1850," *Denver Art Museum Quarterly* (1965), n.p.

[30] Ibid.

[31] Feest, "Norman Feder and American Indian Art Studies," 28.

[32] Patrello, "Indigenous Accounts," 156.

[33] George Weissman, "Foreword," in *Two Hundred Years of North American Indian Art*, ed. Norman Feder, exh. cat. (New York: Praeger; Whitney Museum of American Art, 1971), xiii. Beginning in 1966, Philip Morris sponsored art exhibitions at several prominent New York institutions, including the Metropolitan Museum of Art, in an effort to improve its image as public perceptions of the dangers of smoking changed. Under increasing pressure from the FCC and the American Cancer Society, the company developed new methods of engaging the public. In his foreword, Weissman also acknowledges that tobacco, and Native cultivation of it, provided the country with its first distinctly American products. For more information see Patrello, "Indigenous Accounts," 153–6.

[34] Sam Hunter, *Art in Business: The Philip Morris Story* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1979), 65–73.

[35] Feder, *Two Hundred Years of North American Indian Art*, 3.

[36] Patrello, "Indigenous Accounts," 157–8; Feest, "Norman Feder and American Indian Art Studies," 28. While Feder does introduce greater nuance for understanding Indigenous art on its own terms, he organized the exhibition and catalogue by culture area, which maintains anthropological and stylistic distinctions that do not reflect the transcontinental trade networks that have connected Native North America since time immemorial.

[37] Hilton Kramer, "Indian Objects Display Rare Beauty," *New York Times*, November 16, 1971.

[38] The culture area paradigm was popularized by American Anthropologist Clark Wissler in the early twentieth century. See Clark Wissler, "The Culture-Area Concept in Social Anthropology," *American Journal of Sociology* 32, no. 6 (May 1927): 881–91.

[39] Conn, *Native American Art in the Denver Art Museum*, 18.

[40] The tension between contextualizing Indigenous North American art on its own terms *and* in terms of its relationship to global fine art may be irresolvable, especially as museums face increased scrutiny for their historical collecting provenance, lack of provenance for early collections of Native art and

material culture, and recent changes to the duty of care guidelines of the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) that require "free, prior consent" for researching or exhibiting NAGPRA-related items. These necessary changes and conversations will hopefully foster increased dialogue and meaningful collaboration between institutions and originating and descendant communities. The Denver Art Museum's process for facilitating these conversations will be discussed later in the essay.

[41] Conn, *Native American Art in the Denver Art Museum*, 26.

[42] Richard Conn, *Circles of the World: Traditional Art of the Plains Indian*, exh. cat. (Denver: Denver Art Museum, 1982), 9.

[43] Conn, *Circles of the World*, 6. Dr. Beatrice Medicine was a Lakȟóta anthropologist and community organizer; George Horse Capture was an A'aninin curator, scholar, and activist who served as Deputy Assistant Director for Cultural Resources at the National Museum of the American Indian, New York, during its early years; Dr. Omer Stewart was a non-Native anthropologist from the University of Colorado, Boulder; and Richard Tallbull Jr. was a Southern Cheyenne community leader and activist who worked with both the Denver Art Museum and Denver Museum of Nature & Science. Other Native people participated as models for the catalogue: Black Horse Foster, Charles Janis, Red Fawn Martin, Jolynne Peters, and Terry Eaglefeather.

[44] Ibid.

[45] Personal correspondence with Danielle Stephens, Senior Interpretive Specialist, Denver Art Museum.

[46] Marianne Nicolson, "A Gift of Resistance," in *Companion to Northwest Coast and Alaska Native Art*, ed. Christopher Patrello (Denver: Denver Art Museum, 2020), 44–45.

[47] Marianne Nicolson, "Story of the Welcome Figure (Pole)," video by Steven Yazzie for the Denver Art Museum, 2020, https://youtu.be/9R3FvI21b64.

[48] Marianne Nicolson, interview with Denver Art Museum staff Dakota Hoska, John Lukavic, Christopher Patrello, Danielle Stephens, and Julia Strunk regarding the commission *To Change the Shape of the World*, May 6, 2020.

[49] Christopher Bracken, *The Potlatch Papers: A Colonial Case History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 118. Bracken quotes directly from the statute itself, which was included in Statutes of Canada, 1895, chapter 35, section 6. A pdf of the text is available through the University of Saskatchewan's Indigenous Studies Portal research tool: http://epe.lac-bac.gc.ca/100/205/301/ic/cdc/aboriginaldocs/stat/pdf/Ia1895.pdf.

[50] Marianne Nicolson, interview with Denver Art Museum Staff, May 6, 2020.

[51] For more information on the Cranmer potlatch and the theft of regalia from its participants, see "The History of the Potlatch Collection," U'mista Cultural Centre, last modified March 29, 2024, https://www.umista.ca/pages/collection-history.

[52] Marianne Nicolson, interview with Denver Art Museum staff, May 6, 2020.

[53] Michael Nicoll Yahgulanaas "Meddle," video by Gillian Darling Kovanic for the Denver Art Museum, 2020, https://youtu.be/iuRzF2AKfT0. This quotation also appears in Lukavic, Hoska, and Patrello, eds. *Here, Now*, 222.

[54] For more information about Yahgulanaas's style and influences, see Christopher Green, "Fluid Frames: The Hybrid Art of Michael Nicoll Yahgulanaas," *ArtNews*, November 2, 2017, https://www.artnews.com/art-in-america/features/fluid-frames-the-hybrid-art-of-michael-nicoll-yahgulanaas-60076/.

[55] Michael Nicoll Yahgulanaas, "Meddle," 2020.

[56] Holm developed the concept of form-line design, which describes and labels the various graphic elements of primarily northern Northwest Coast art. See Bill Holm, *Northwest Coast Indian Art: An Analysis of Form* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1965).

[57] Gwaai Edenshaw, "The Power of Speech," in Patrello, *Companion to Northwest Coast and Alaska Native Art*, 55.

[58] Ibid., 55.

[59] Lukavic and Patrello, "'On behalf of the family,'" 116.

[60] For a more complete recounting of the pole raising ceremony and the ways in which the events intersected with ongoing Haida cultural protocols, please see Lukavic and Patrello, "'On behalf of the family.'"

[61] Sonya Kelliher-Combs, "An Artist of Iñupiaq," video by Steven Yazzie for the Denver Art Museum, 2020, https://youtu.be/_wRFeh7FW3A.

[62] "Skin as Media: An Interview with Sonya Kelliher-Combs" in Patrello, *Companion to Northwest Coast and Alaska Native Art*, 74–75.

[63] The Native Arts artist-in-residency program was put on hiatus during the renovation. For a list of past and current artists-in-residence, see https://www.denverart-museum.org/en/native-arts-artist-residence.

[64] Personal correspondence with Danielle Stephens, Senior Interpretive Specialist, Denver Art Museum.

[65] Ibid. The development of the visitor experience goals was led by Danielle Stephens, Senior Interpretive Specialist, who worked closely with curatorial staff and the Indigenous Advisory Council to ensure that interpretation in the space was thoughtful, collaborative, and responsive to the aspirations and voices of artists and community members who assisted throughout the process. The author is especially indebted to Danielle Stephens for sharing internal documents that provide an overview of the Indigenous Arts of North America Experience Plan.

[66] Gregg Deal (Pyramid Lake Paiute), Markel Wallace (Haida), Terrance Jade (Oglala Lakota), Jeffrey Chapman (White Earth Ojibwe), Jasha Lyons Echo-Hawk (Seminole, Pawnee), Nicole Myers-Lim

(Pomo), Ula Taylor (Eastern Shoshone Tribe, Sheep Eater Mountain Shoshone), Rick Waters (Kiowa, Cherokee), Jan N. Jacobs (Osage), and Steven Yazzie (Navajo, Laguna Pueblo) contributed to the initial run of community labels on the third floor. To view the text for the community labels, see "Indigenous Arts of North America Galleries Community Interpretation," Denver Art Museum, https://www.denverartmuseum.org/en/indigenous-arts-north-america-galleries-community-interpretation.

[67] Gregory Schaaf, *Southern Pueblo Pottery: 2,000 Artist Biographies* (Santa Fe, NM: CIAC Press, 2002), 2, 101.

[68] Roxanne Swentzell, "Artist's Statement," Denver Art Museum, last modified May 1, 2024, https://www.denverartmuseum.org/en/edu/object/mud-woman-rolls.

[69] This text is a condensed version of a longer piece that Terrance wrote for Lukavic, Hoska, and Patrello, eds., *Here, Now*, 60–61.

[70] Henrietta Mann, "Connecting Indigenous Art to Their Homes and the Land," video by Steven Yazzie for the Denver Art Museum, 2021, https://youtu.be/Plia77dIk40.

[71] Lukavic, Hoska, and Patrello, "Introduction," in *Here, Now*, 20.

[72] Joe Horse Capture, "The Art of Codsiogo" in Lukavic, Hoska, and Patrello, eds., *Here, Now,* 196–7.

[73] The statement is signed by the members of the council who served during the reinstallation. They include Felicia Alvarez (Shoshone), Ernest House Jr. (Ute Mountain Ute), Jan N. Jacobs (Osage), Rosie Bvgehoyoge Moline (Seminole, Mvskoke, Choctaw), Rick Waters (Kiowa and Cheyenne), Montoya Whiteman (Cheyenne and Arapaho), Sig Whiting Jr. (Lakȟóta), and Steven J. Yazzie (Navajo and Laguna Pueblo).

[74] Marina Kastan, Dakota Hoska, Allison McCloskey, and Sarah Melching, "Sustaining Acoma Textile Traditions," in *Working Towards a Sustainable Past. ICOM-CC 20th Triennial Conference Preprints, Valencia, 18–22 September 2023*, ed. J. Bridgland (Paris: International Council of Museums, 2023), 1.

[75] Ibid., 5.

[76] Dakota Hoska, personal communication with the author, May 21, 2024; Kastan, Hoska, McClosckey, and Melching, "Sustaining Acoma Textile Traditions," 8.

[77] Erlidawn Roy, "Our Voices" label, Indigenous Arts of North America Permanent Collection Galleries, Denver Art Museum, 2024.

[78] Michel Foucault, "Of Other Spaces," *Diacritics* 16, no. 1 (Spring 1986), 26.