

Introduction: Remaking Spaces for Indigenous Art

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We have inherited a museum world that was founded and fashioned by empire. The earliest cabinets of curiosity, precursors to today's natural history museums, displayed the spoils of European encounters with Indigenous nations from around the world. Early private art collections were crafted by and for the elite; they exhibited wealth as much as they did art. Scholars such as Amy Lonetree, Alan Wallach, Carol Duncan, Dan Hicks, Janet Berlo, John MacKenzie, Ruth B. Phillips, Sally Price, Tony Bennett, and many others have described how museums have aided colonial and capitalist agendas. Museum work has entailed both physical and epistemic forms of violence against Indigenous communities, from the extractive collection of sacred objects and human remains to the promulgation in exhibits of racialized narratives about Indigenous communities. By constructing artistic canons prioritizing Western aesthetic forms, art

museums have reinforced hierarchical ideas about human cultures that have marginalized Indigenous art and artists.

And yet, despite these colonial influences—with legacies that continue to reverberate—the museum world is *more* than a product of empire. It is also the product of creative actors with a range of visions: to create, to pursue knowledge, to foster the imagination, to celebrate beauty and to critique it, to realize self-expression, to reflect, and to experience something out of the ordinary. In this issue of *Venue*, contributors thoughtfully discuss how artists, curators, museum staff, advisory boards, and community members are working together to transform museum spaces that have historically undervalued Native American and Indigenous art and artifacts. This paradigm shift does not entail merely tacking on more works to existing canons or rearranging rooms a bit. Rather, it involves reimagining our conceptions of art,

changing our understanding of the canon, and creating new expectations for museums. The goal is not simply to make space for Indigenous art, but to remake the spaces in which we experience Indigenous art.

The contributors to this volume address a number of pressing questions related to the exhibition of Indigenous art. How can artists—and their communities, histories, lands, relationships, stories, and traditions—guide the utilization of space in museum settings? What kinds of environments does the art itself call for? What happens when we shift our thought and practice about museum architecture and design? How do we repurpose colonial structures of containment to serve Indigenous flourishing? How might rethinking and remaking museum spaces enable community engagement and relationality between art, Native nations, and the broader public? The contributions in this volume identify a range of possibilities for decolonizing and Indigenizing museum spaces.

In their article “Powerful Narratives,” Alaka Wali and Eli Suzukovich describe recent updates to the Field Museum of Chicago’s Native North America Hall. After over five years of planning, *Native Truths: Our Voices, Our Stories* opened in May 2022. The previous exhibit

had been dated, with stereotypical and misleading representations of Native communities. The authors detail early steps to update the exhibit in ways that were more subtle—albeit still meaningful—until a major renovation could be undertaken. They highlight the significance of working with contemporary artists and a predominantly Indigenous advisory committee to reimagine the space. The essay is valuable in highlighting a natural history museum that exhibits contemporary Native art, as well as the heritage that anthropology, art, and natural history museums share with regard to the collection and exhibition of Native objects.

Christopher Patrello’s contribution, “One Hundred Years in the Making,” also offers useful historical context. He traces the process through which non-Native curators began to take Indigenous art more seriously, illustrated by a series of exhibitions by major art museums over the course of the twentieth century. This history reminds readers that there have been efforts over the years to highlight Native arts in public fora—limited as they may have been. The Denver Art Museum has been at the forefront of collecting and exhibiting Native North American art, and Patrello’s contribution is useful in demonstrating how iterative institutional change can

happen over time. He highlights the strategies that the Denver Art Museum has used in the most recent revamping of its Indigenous Arts of North America galleries.

This issue also offers a look into the creation of new spaces for exhibiting art. Jared Katz discusses efforts to design Native American art galleries at the Raclin Murphy Museum of Art at the University of Notre Dame in his essay “Indigenizing a New Museum.” The museum opened to visitors in December 2023. It features a suite of three galleries dedicated to Indigenous art of the Americas, with each dedicated to a geographic region: North American art, Mesoamerican art, and Central and South American art. Katz discusses some of the challenges with trying to decolonize—or rather, Indigenize—a museum space and describes the unique guiding principles that informed the design of each of the galleries. His case study outlines the museum’s overarching goals for the galleries and the concrete ways its team sought to realize them.

In this issue, we also gain a sense of the power of Indigenous artistic practice. Native art does not just offer aesthetic value—it can also heal, critique, tell stories, and contribute to conversations. In “Susan Folwell: Taos Light,” Michelle Lanteri describes the

Taos Light series of painted pottery vessels by artist Susan Folwell (Santa Clara Tewa, b. 1970). Folwell’s work builds on and adapts long-standing pottery traditions from her Tewa-speaking Pueblo community in northern New Mexico. In addition to describing and analyzing Folwell’s work in detail, Lanteri discusses its presentation at two distinct institutions in Taos, New Mexico: the Couse-Sharp Historic Site and the Harwood Museum of Art. This in-depth examination of a unique body of work—one that both engages with and innovates a millennia-old artistic form—demonstrates why and how art itself can inspire exhibition design.

Taken together, these contributions offer a history of collecting practices, discuss multiple types of museums that exhibit Native art, trace the process through which Indigenous art came to be accepted within the umbrella of global fine art, describe a paradigm shift in museum practices that includes new visions for exhibiting Native arts, and detail the work of visionary artists who are creating new forms of cultural expression that draw on the past and gesture to the future. These articles document a range of ways that art museums and exhibitions featuring Indigenous art can reshape visitor experience, including commissioning

work by contemporary artists, disrupting stereotypes, emphasizing the continuance of Native communities, creating community advisory committees comprising Indigenous members, highlighting artists' perspectives, hosting events, emphasizing story, and connecting art with communities, history, and the environment. Decolonization is an ongoing process, and the artists and museums highlighted in this issue offer instructive case studies for those who are engaged in this important work.