# Venue

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## From the President of MAHS:

The publication of the second edition of *Venue*, the Society's online journal, is as exciting for the Midwest Art History Society (MAHS) Board as the appearance of the first. One of the Board's standing goals has been to offer additional publication opportunities to both academic and museum professionals, and the ability to once again support scholarship in the field of art history inspires us and reinvigorates our work.

Shepherding each volume of *Venue* to its completion is a labor of love, and this publication would not exist without the tenacity and talent of the publication's Founding Editor in Chief Dr. Heidi Hornik (Baylor University). Heidi's editorial and production team also consists of Volume Editor Dr. Judy Mann, Senior Editor Dr. Cheryl Snay, Copy Editor Sara Carminati, and VGreen Design. As a single-blind peer-reviewed journal, our thanks also extend to the experts in the discipline who served as reviewers. This project is supported with various resources from the Office of the Provost, College of Arts & Sciences, and the Department of Art & Art History, Baylor University. It is hosted by the Texas Digital Libraries, an Open Journal System, through Baylor University Libraries.

The MAHS Board has always viewed *Venue* as a flexible publication to be shaped by current trends and circumstances. The inaugural edition consisted primarily of individual essays focused on significant works in Midwestern collections. The current volume features articles that offer a detailed look into recent expansions and reinstallations of the Indigenous collections at several Midwestern museums. As in the first issue of the journal, a significant portion of this volume is dedicated to catalogue and exhibition reviews covering all art historical periods.

We are thrilled to provide our membership and the broader art history community with both the career opportunities and deeper art historical knowledge that *Venue* offers. Please stay tuned for the next volume, which may align perfectly with your research interests.

Dr. Amy Morris, President, Midwest Art History Society August 1, 2024

# *Contributors*

**Jared Katz** is the newly appointed Pappalardo Curator of Musical Instruments at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. At the time of writing this article for *Venue*, he served as the Associate Curator of the Americas and Africa and Assistant Professor of the Practice at the Raclin Murphy Museum of Art at the University of Notre Dame. In this role, he worked on the design and installation of the Indigenous Art of the Americas suite of galleries and the African Art galleries, as well as curating an exhibition highlighting the work of LA-based artist Clarissa Tossin titled *All That You Touch, You Change*.

Katz received his PhD from the Department of Anthropology at the University of California, Riverside, where he wrote his dissertation on ancient Maya musical practices. From there, he served as a Postdoctoral Curatorial Fellow and then as a Consulting Curator at the Denver Art Museum, where he assisted with the design of the new Arts of the Ancient Americas galleries. While there, he also curated the exhibition *Rhythm and Ritual: Music of the Ancient Americas* and assisted with the exhibition *ReVisión: Art in the Americas*.

Katz's research explores ancient Mesoamerican music and sound, and he has published and spoken widely on this topic. He developed a technique to 3-D print playable replicas of ancient musical instruments, and this work is included within an installation at the 2024 Whitney Biennial Exhibition by Clarissa Tossin, titled *Mojo'q che b'ixan ri ixkanulab / Antes de que los volcanes canten / Before the Volcanoes Sing*.

**Michelle J. Lanteri, PhD,** museum curator and arts writer, is committed to reciprocal, accountable collaborations through a local-to-global, active-listening approach and a focus on Native American arts and cultures of the Southwest. Lanteri is the museum head curator and head of the curatorial department at the Indian Pueblo Cultural Center in Albuquerque, New Mexico, where she supports artist and community gallery projects and collaborates with her colleagues in collections, archives, digital media, and museum education. She previously curated a series of New Mexico arts exhibitions and led the acquisitions program at the Millicent Rogers Museum as curator of collections and exhibitions, and she has cocurated exhibitions with the Couse-Sharp Historic Site, Institute of American Indian Arts, and the University Art Museum and University Museum at New Mexico State University. Lanteri earned her doctoral degree in Native American art history from the University of Oklahoma with an Andrew

W. Mellon Foundation predoctoral fellowship that supported her dissertation, "Patterns of Renewal: Native Women Artists and the Northern New Mexico Exhibitionary Complex in the Twenty-First Century." Her writing has been featured in *First American Art Magazine*, *Southwest Contemporary*, *Museum Anthropology*, and *El Palacio: The Magazine of the Museum of New Mexico*.

**Christopher Patrello** is the Assistant Curator of Anthropology at the Denver Museum of Nature & Science (DMNS). Previously, he was the Andrew W. Mellon Postdoctoral Curatorial Fellow in Indigenous Arts of North America at the Denver Art Museum, where he cocurated the reinstallation of the Indigenous Arts of North America permanent collection galleries, working closely with museum staff, the Indigenous Advisory Council, and artists and community members from across North America. As a Peter Buck Fellow in the department of anthropology at the National Museum of Natural History, Chris researched early ethnographic collections of Northwest Coast and Alaska Native material culture in support of his dissertation project "Indigenous Accounts: Local Exchange and Global Circulation on the Northwest Coast." Chris's research interests include exchange systems, anthropological theories of value, critical museology, and digital humanities. Currently, Christopher is facilitating several collaborative research projects related to the permanent collection at DMNS, specifically focusing on Southern Plains beadwork and textiles from the Americas. In his personal time, he is an avid baker, and he worked at a bread bakery during his graduate studies at the University of Rochester.

**Dr. Eli Suzukovich** (Little Shell Tribe of Chippewa/Cree) is a faculty member in the Program in Environmental Policy and Culture at Northwestern University and an anthropologist who focuses on cultural resource management, ethnobiology, oral history, and ethnohistory. He is an anthropologist with a focus on cultural resource management, ethnography, religion, oral history, and ethnobiology. Throughout his academic career, his work has included community level research, archival collections research and management, applied ethnography, forensic research, and community-based research. Eli's professional experience has focused on cultural resource management as a contract ethnographer and historic preservation specialist. Within this capacity, he worked with Wyoming and Montana tribal nations and the State of Montana in assessing preservation status and NHPA Sections 106 & 110 surveys. Beginning in 2018, Eli worked on the development and cocuration of the *Native Truths: Our Voices, Our Stories* exhibition hall at the Field Museum, Chicago, as a Research Scientist within the curation team under the Curator of North American

Collections. In this capacity, Eli worked on twelve community-curated exhibits as a staff cocurator between 2018 and 2022. Today, he continues to assist the Field Museum's Exhibitions and Anthropology Departments with the *Native Truths* exhibition hall.

**Dr. Alaka Wali** is curator emerita of North American Anthropology in the Science and Education Division of the Field Museum. She was the founding director of the Center for Cultural Understanding and Change at the Field Museum from 1995 to 2010. During that time, she pioneered the development of participatory social science research and community engagement processes based in museum science. She curated the North American collection, one of the museum's largest regional anthropology holdings. Her research focuses on the relationship between art and the capacity for social resilience. She has authored several books, including *Stress and Resilience: The Social Context of Reproduction in Central Harlem* with Leith Mullings (Kluwer Press, 2002). She has also published monographs and over fifty articles on a wide range of topics, including museum practice, the social context of art making, political ecology, racialized health disparities, and urban anthropology. She curated numerous exhibitions, pioneering cocurated exhibitions with Native American contemporary artists. She led the curation of the *Native Truths: Our Voices, Our Stories* exhibition, which opened in May 2022, and broke new ground for the Field Museum with a deeply collaborative approach that privileges the perspectives of Native American scholars, artists, and community members.

# *Abstracts*

**Indigenizing a New Museum: A Case Study from the Raclin Murphy Museum of Art**

**Jared C. Katz, Raclin Murphy Museum of Art**

To place theory into practice in designing new galleries with an Indigenizing framework, the Raclin Murphy Museum of Art staff sought to center Indigenous voices and world views. This article provides an overview of the newly opened Indigenous Art of the Americas suite of galleries at the Raclin Murphy Museum of Art, located at the University of Notre Dame. It outlines the theoretical tenets that grounded the project, followed by a discussion of the practical implementation of those theoretical tenets. It then offers an overview of the suite of galleries, providing insight into the overarching organizational strategies employed. Specific installations are discussed in greater detail to demonstrate the types of narratives they tell.

**Susan Folwell: Taos Light**

**Michelle J. Lanteri, Indian Pueblo Cultural Center**

Santa Clara Tewa artist Susan Folwell's *Taos Light* series (2016–present) of social commentary vessels in clay continues the legacy of Native women artists' leadership in the Southwest in both pottery making and exhibitions of the medium. As a pattern of renewal, or constant set of practices, centered on Pueblo people, Folwell's vessels portray figurative narratives of cross-cultural dialogue within the region. The intercultural exchanges she depicts express a "kin-space-time constellation," an Indigenous lens of understanding coined by scholar Laura Harjo (Mvskoke), that "operationalizes multiple dimensions," including the spirit world, ancestral practices, cosmology, ceremony, and everyday community life.

In her *Taos Light* series, Folwell comments on the complexity of early twentieth-century intercultural perceptions, specifically the interactions between the Taos Society of Artists (TSA)—a group of Euro-American painters who made portraits of Native Americans between 1915 and 1927—and the Taos Pueblo people who collaborated with them as models. Tethered to the early tourism era, Folwell's vessel forms and imagery create new associations within both the kin-space-time constellation and cross-cultural relationality of Taos that continue today. In this article, I analyze the multi-play, or strategically layered, visual devices that Folwell employs in this series, examining how their

meanings shift in presentations at two venues in Taos, New Mexico—the Couse-Sharp Historic Site and the Harwood Museum of Art. To do so, I employ Tuscarora scholar and artist Jolene Rickard's four-part methodology of analyzing Native art: inspiration, formal analysis, learning through making, and function in Western and Indigenous cultures. To further contextualize Folwell's collaborative leadership, I examine her *Taos Light* vessels and related exhibitions through four foundational lenses: mentorship and education, local and international reach, interdisciplinary forms, and place-specific interactions.

**One Hundred Years in the Making: Reinstalling the Indigenous Arts of North America Permanent Collection Galleries at the Denver Art Museum**
**Christopher Patrello, Denver Museum of Nature & Science**

This article situates the 2021 reinstallation of the Denver Art Museum's Indigenous Arts of North America permanent collection galleries within the historical context of the department's leading role in shaping the trajectory of the exhibition and interpretation of Indigenous North American art and material culture in fine arts museums. Beginning with an overview of the contributions of past curators, including Frederic H. Douglas, Norman Feder, Richard Conn, and Nancy Blomberg, the article focuses on the iterative nature of the Native Arts department's contributions to the field of Native American art history. The article closes with a review of the planning and implementation of the 2021 reinstallation, focusing on the ways in which the project team—in collaboration with artists, community members, and the museum's Indigenous Community Advisory Council—worked to amplify the perspective of Indigenous communities through innovative design, interpretation, and a transhistorical perspective.

**Powerful Narratives: Contemporary Native American Art at the Field Museum**
**Alaka Wali, The Field Museum**
**Eli Suzukovich, Northwestern University and the Field Museum**

Collaboration with contemporary Native American artists is a powerful strategy that natural history museums can use to disrupt colonizer narratives and begin to remedy the harm of historical curatorial practices. This article discusses the use of contemporary Native American art in a new permanent exhibition at the Field Museum, Chicago. The exhibition, titled *Native Truths: Our Voices, Our Stories* opened in May 2022 and includes fifty new works of art commissioned by

or loaned to the Field Museum. The discussion first describes antecedents to creating the exhibition and then examines this representational strategy by considering the work of four artists featured in the exhibition: Karen Ann Hoffman (Oneida), Diego Romero (Cochiti Pueblo), Monica Rickert-Bolter (Potawatomi and Black), and Julie Buffalohead (Ponca).

# Introduction: Remaking Spaces for Indigenous Art

Sarah Dees, PhD
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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.

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# Indigenizing a New Museum: A Case Study from the Raclin Murphy Museum of Art

Jared C. Katz, PhD
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**Introduction**

The Raclin Murphy Museum of Art is the newly constructed art museum located on the University of Notre Dame's campus, which opened to the public on December 1, 2023. For more than forty years, the university's collection of over thirty thousand objects was housed at the Snite Museum of Art, which became inaccessible to the broader South Bend, Indiana, community as Notre Dame's campus grew around it. This new institution aims to become a top university research and teaching museum. Ultimately, the museum will be a 132,000-square-foot facility built in two phases. The first phase of the museum, which is the building that opened in December 2023, is seventy thousand square feet. It includes twenty-three permanent collection galleries and a five-thousand-square-foot temporary exhibition space. The new building is intentionally designed to be a resource for the broader community. Situated on the edge of campus, with easy access to parking, the new museum is far more accessible to the public. Through intentional curatorial design, exhibitions, and programs, we hope to become a regular destination for people throughout the region.

Planning this new state-of-the-art museum provided the opportunity to rethink the presentation of the Indigenous Art of the Americas and African Art collections. In this article, I will discuss the curatorial approach to the Indigenous Art of the Americas suite of galleries in particular. The suite is located on the second level of the museum in the southeast corner of the building and includes three galleries. From the balcony, museum guests enter into the North American Art gallery, transition into the Mesoamerican Art gallery, and conclude in the Central American and South American Art gallery. In this discussion, I will highlight the theoretical tenets that guided the design, address the actual implementation of these theoretical tenets, and conclude by providing an overview of the galleries themselves.

*Theoretical tenets*

To begin, I would like to state that what follows is a brief synopsis that highlights the frameworks that guided this reinstallation and is by no means a comprehensive analysis. Works such as Amy Lonetree's *Decolonizing Museums* offer a far richer discussion.[1]

Several overarching theoretical principles guided the development of these galleries. The first, of course, was the lofty goal of decolonizing museum spaces. As stated

by Brandie Macdonald, "Museums are everlasting monuments that replicate colonial erasure and violence through their exhibitions, educational content, and through their curatorial stewardship, and collecting practices. In thinking about these nuanced paradigms, it is essential we critically interrogate how museums can responsibly move forward while being held accountable for past and current colonial harm without being performative."[2] Museums are inherently colonial institutions that were conceived through the actions of colonization.[3] As such, museums can be sites of extreme pain and trauma for many individuals, including Indigenous people.[4] If we are not careful and extremely intentional in the work we as museum professionals undertake, we can reify and uphold these harmful and traumatic colonial legacies rather than contributing to their dismantling.[5]

The question then becomes, what actionable steps can we take as museum professionals to ensure we are working to dismantle centuries of harmful colonial practices? This daunting question emphasizes the herculean nature of this task. In the work I undertook, for example, I certainly do not think I succeeded in decolonizing the museum. Rather, I tried to make it a more inclusive and welcoming space that relied on a greater diversity of voices.

In the summer of 2023, I attended the Ucross symposium Curating Native American Art, held at the Denver Art Museum. In her opening remarks, heather ahtone (Choctaw/Chickasaw Nation), director of curatorial affairs at the First Americans Museum, spoke of Indigenizing gallery spaces rather than decolonizing them. She explained that focusing on decolonizing is setting ourselves up for failure, because museums, as previously stated, are inherently colonial in nature. Instead, ahtone encouraged the curators in attendance to focus our energy on Indigenizing museums. Stephen Gilchrest spoke to the distinction between decolonizing and Indigenizing as different inflections of curatorial practice: "For me at least, the former [decolonizing] is about undoing something that invariably feels like you are forever playing catch up. Indigenization for me is about doing; manifesting, instantiating, and running our own race on our own terms."[6] Majel Boxer describes Indigenizing as a process that involves maintaining and reinforcing Indigenous epistemology.[7] This is accomplished through curatorial processes that place significance and emphasis on Indigenous voices, values, and world views.[8]

In essence, when striving to Indigenize a gallery space, we are striving toward what Ruth Phillips has termed "the second museum age" in which museums are rooted in "programs of socially responsible research and representation."[9] This work helps make museums more community-relevant and community-oriented spaces.[10] For this to happen, theory and practice need to come together and work hand in hand.

To place theory into practice in designing new galleries with an Indigenizing framework, the Raclin Murphy Museum of Art staff sought to center Indigenous voices and world views. We wanted the most prominent voices in the gallery to be Indigenous artists speaking for themselves, not to problematically force them to serve as a representative for a larger group. We also aimed to use direct quotations from Indigenous artists and scholars in label text whenever possible and to center the texts on Indigenous philosophies and narratives. Two significant commissions were made for this gallery, which we approached with a goal of further Indigenizing the space and collection. For both commissions, no restrictions were placed on the artists. I asked the artists what narratives they would like to contribute to the gallery and how the museum could help facilitate the telling of these narratives. These commissions will be discussed in greater detail later in this essay. I also formed an Indigenous Consultation Committee to ensure that we had a paid group of advisors to run our ideas past as another safeguard to help us avoid inadvertently reifying rather than dismantling colonial practices. The next section describes in more detail the actions that were taken to implement the theory outlined above.

### *Implementation of theoretical tenets*

While the theoretical tenets of Indigenizing and ethical curatorial practice served as the standards I attempted to meet to the best of my ability while undertaking this work, the reality of scheduling and deadlines often forced us to come up short of these ideals. I was hired several years into the planning process and thus was always playing catch-up. Filling the curatorial position that I now hold was delayed by the Covid-19 pandemic and the resulting hiring freeze. I was offered my position in September 2021 and was asked to start working part-time in October. As I was completing previous projects for other institutions, I was unable to relocate to Notre Dame until January 2022. I made three trips to Notre Dame, one per month

between October and January, to spend a few days in person with the collection. Starting in December, I was given three weeks to create the initial checklists, object groupings, and narrative for the African Art Gallery, and in January I was given three weeks to do the same for the North American Art Gallery, then three weeks for the Mesoamerican Art Gallery, and finally three weeks for the Central American and South American Art Gallery. This was the reality of the schedule as it was presented to me in order to meet key deadlines for the physical construction of the building, fabrication of case furniture, and build-out of the galleries. The museum administration wanted to provide me with as much opportunity as possible to weigh in on the actual construction of the galleries, but the process was too far along to give input on the architecture of the building itself. For example, the architecture of the First Americans Museum in Oklahoma incorporates and draws inspiration from Indigenous customs and beliefs. As the physical architecture of the Raclin Murphy had been solidified years before my hire, I was not able to suggest this approach. I needed to work quickly under these intense deadlines while trying to adhere to my theoretical tenets as closely as possible in guiding the rest of the design as ethically as possible.

As I needed to start planning the North American Art Gallery as soon as I arrived on campus, I wanted to understand the role this gallery could and should play at the university. I immediately began working to establish an Indigenous Consultation Committee and at the same time held several conversations with faculty about what role the gallery should play. The resounding feedback I received was that the university needed something that celebrated Indigenous people as modern, vibrant, and still very much present. These conversations played an invaluable role in shaping the gallery.

The creation of the Indigenous Consultation Committee took significantly more time, which was to be expected. The university and museum administrations were both extremely supportive in the founding of this committee; the university's associate vice president for public affairs placed me in contact with Nicole Holloway, the Pokagon Band of Potawatomi's director for the Center of History and Culture. It was important to me that we go through the correct and official channels within the Pokagon Band of Potawatomi in creating this committee. Holloway kindly reached out to several

people she felt would be a good fit for the role.

My goal for the committee was to have one faculty representative, one student representative, and three citizens of the Pokagon Band of Potawatomi serve as the founding members. After almost a year of working with Holloway, we had assembled an initial group that included four members: a faculty member, a student, and two practicing artists from the Pokagon Band. These positions are paid, and the expectations outline that we would meet four times per year for two hours. We met for the first time in March 2023, unfortunately far along in the process of designing the North American Art Gallery. The first session, therefore, focused entirely on didactics and label text, which I had sent to the committee ahead of time. During the meeting, we went through every label in the gallery, exchanging feedback and suggestions. It was a productive session, with invaluable feedback that led to edits on a number of the texts.

Whereas in the past museum employees may not have known where to go for guidance, or would have inadvertently expected unpaid labor and service, we now have a standing group of paid people we can turn to for advice in our ongoing process of Indigenizing the museum. I, or any other museum employee, can bring exhibition plans, label text, rotation schedules, educational content, or programing ideas to the committee. While we could not take advantage of their advising as much as I had hoped or intended on the initial installation, the gallery is designed to be flexible with frequent rotations on which committee members will certainly give input going forward. This standing committee for the museum is one step in the ongoing process of Indigenizing the entire institution. It is a way to ensure Indigenous people's voices and expertise are included in the galleries and to help us avoid inadvertently perpetuating colonial violence. It also ensures that nonfaculty committee members are fairly compensated for their time.

I also undertook writing a land acknowledgement for the museum. It was important to me that the writing and approval process demonstrate our commitment to the words we put forward. I coauthored the acknowledgement with two colleagues, Ashlee Bird (Western Abenaki), PhD, who is an assistant professor in the American Studies department, and Erin Oliver (Miami), JD, who is the assistant vice president for institutional equity. When we were satisfied with the wording after several collaborative working sessions, Oliver

presented the statement to the Miami Nation of Indiana Tribal Council for its approval, which it gave. I sent it to Nicole Holloway, the director of the Center of History and Culture at the Pokagon Band of Potawatomi (as mentioned above), who also approved the text. We then sent the draft to a number of artists and scholars for their feedback. Finally, we submitted the statement to the museum and university administration for their approval, which we received.

The land acknowledgment reads as follows:

> The Raclin Murphy Museum of Art acknowledges our presence on the traditional land of the Potawatomi peoples, the Miami peoples, and many people from other Indigenous nations that now call this land home. As an initial step towards reconciliation and out of a desire for a brighter and more equitable future, the Museum is committed to amplifying Indigenous voices and building conversation and collaboration through the hosting and support of Indigenous artists, art forms, and communities.

In preparing to write this land acknowledgment, I attended several conferences and webinars to hear current perspectives on the subject. There are a number of valuable resources online. The one I found most useful was an event co-hosted by the Native Governance Center and the Lower Phalen Creek Project on Indigenous Peoples' Day 2019.[11] While some scholars, artists, and museum professionals do not like the use of land acknowledgements, feeling they are a hollow gesture, we ultimately decided to write one for several reasons.[12] First, it serves as an educational tool to help museum guests learn whose ancestral land we are currently on, which they may not have known previously. Second, it allows us to publicly voice our commitment to ethical collaboration with Indigenous artists and communities so that the institution can be held accountable for undertaking this meaningful work. The acknowledgement, therefore, is a starting place that marks the beginning of the work rather than the end.

To further our commitment to the Indigenization of our gallery spaces, it was also important that the galleries be polyvocal, so museum guests hear and learn from a diversity of voices. We have done this in a variety of ways. First, each of the contemporary artists highlighted in the galleries wrote a statement about their featured work. We included these statements in the galleries on what we have called "artist labels" (see fig. 1). This label type features a photograph of the artist, the artist's statement about the work, and a

**DANA WARRINGTON**

"Oftentimes in tribal communities across the continent tribal Indian names hold great value as a form of our identity. We believe our higher power uses that specific name to identify us throughout our physical walk on this planet. The name Wapananah translates to Eastern Star or Morning Star. My father carried that name until his Walk on this Earth ended in 2001. . . . In 2017 our brother's second son was born. Our mother was given the honor to name her grandchild. At that time, she felt the urge to revive our father's Indian name and bring it back to the family. That was a beautiful time for my mother and our siblings to honor and remember our father. . . . This sequence of events inspired the creation of this cradleboard. The colors and designs used represent different parts of our tribal identity and beliefs."

Scan the QR code to watch an interview with Dana.

Fig. 1. Example of an artist label in the North American Art Gallery.

QR code that leads to a video interview. A grant from the Terra Foundation for American Art supported the filming of these videos with videographer Angelic (Angie) Rose Hubert of the Research Department at the University of Notre Dame. Each artist decided whether to be interviewed in their studio, on campus, or elsewhere. We have filmed six interviews thus far. The interviews allow the artists to speak directly to museum guests, to introduce themselves and discuss the significance of their work on display, but also to talk about their process, passions, and beliefs. In this way, audiences learn directly from the artists, rather than receiving that information filtered through an institutional voice.

The examples outlined above are some of the ways in which I tried to strategically undertake projects that would help to Indigenize the museum and its gallery at the inception of this new institution. Before the building's opening, we had a standing Indigenous Consultation Committee, a land acknowledgment that outlines our commitment to collaborating with and serving local Indigenous communities, and polyvocal gallery spaces where museum

guests can hear directly from our featured artists. While there is much more that needs to be done, I hope and believe these steps will put the institution on the correct path toward undertaking this deeply important work moving forward.

*Overview of the Gallery Spaces*

The goal of the Indigenous Art of the Americas suite of galleries is to provide museum guests with a more holistic view of the interconnectedness of people. Arbitrary disciplinary boundaries can at times prevent visitors from seeing a broader view of the interaction and exchange of goods and ideas across the Americas over thousands of years. At the same time, the galleries are designed to celebrate and pay respect to individual cultures. As stated previously, the suite of galleries begins in North American Art, transitions into Mesoamerican Art, and ends in Central American and South American Art.

As guests enter the North American Art gallery, the first display case they reach (see fig. 2) is intended to provide an overview of the suite. This case has three pieces on view: a West Mexican Dog with Corn Cob in Mouth Effigy Vessel from 300 BCE–250 CE done in the Colima style, a whistling vessel in the form of a feline from the Andes dating from 1000–1400 CE, and Rick E. Bartow's *Crazy Coyote*, made in 2000. The case, therefore, includes representations of quadrupeds from North America, Mesoamerica, and South America. It aims to show how a similar form is represented in artworks from across the Americas in very different ways. The three are arranged in a procession of sorts, as if moving across the landscape themselves. The label on the case, titled "Borders," invites guests to consider the free movement of people. The text reads as follows:

> In 2013, a site was discovered near Abiquiu, New Mexico, with some of the most conclusive evidence that humans were already settled in North America 37,000 years ago. For the vast majority of those 37,000 years, people freely traveled across the landscape, interacting with different cultures and exchanging goods and ideas. While each culture should be understood and respected on its own terms, to see these intercultural interactions, we must look holistically at the Americas.
>
> This suite of galleries is organized geographically into North American Art, Mesoamerican Art, and Central and South American Art. These galleries should not be seen as distinct spaces. You will flow between them just as people flowed between these regions, bringing what you learned from one region to the next, just as they did. Their ability to

Fig. 2. Case introducing the Indigenous Art of the Americas suite of galleries. Left to right: Unrecorded artist, Whistling Water Bottle (1000–1400 CE); Rick E. Bartow, *Crazy Coyote* (2000); Unrecorded West Mexican artist, Dog with Corn Cob in Mouth Effigy Vessel (300 BCE–250 CE).

move freely across the landscape is the reason that Indigenous communities today do not recognize borders, as borders did not exist for over 99 percent of the time that people have resided here.

In this case, we also included a text that informs visitors about our choice to use the term "Unrecorded artist" when we do not know the name of the individual who created the work. Elizabeth Morton served as visiting curator of African Art in 2017 and began this practice at the institution, and I embraced the terminology for this reinstallation. We use variations of this label in multiple places throughout the Indigenous Art of the Americas suite and the African Art galleries to ensure that visitors will encounter it. The text reads as follows:

Indigenous art has long been collected and displayed without identifying the artists. The identity of these creative and skilled individuals was often only referenced in terms of their tribal affiliation, cultural background, or geographic region of origin. This is due to a variety of reasons; for example, the existence of a violently extractive colonial mentality in which the name of the artist was not important to early collectors and galleries, or in the case of ancient artists, the artist's name was most likely once known to their community, but has since been forgotten. In these galleries, we use the term "**Unrecorded artist**" to restore the individual humanity to Indigenous artists whose names were not written down and cannot be recovered.

## North American Art Gallery

The North American Art Gallery (see fig. 3) accomplishes several primary goals. First, it celebrates Indigenous artists as inherently modern, breaking some people's incorrect view of Indigenous art as static and problematizing the incorrect notion that only particular types of Indigenous art are "authentic" based on a deeply flawed understanding of Indigeneity. A second objective was to provide a polyvocal space where visitors hear from a diversity of voices and the most prominent voices are Indigenous. Third, we sought to help museum visitors understand the long history of different artistic mediums, and how the very act of keeping these artforms and mediums alive through the generations and centuries is one of perseverance and resistance. Finally, our fourth goal was to use this gallery to display and support local artists and communities. To accomplish these goals, the gallery tells these stories through eight subsections and fifty-six works of art.

The North American Art Gallery, titled "Modern and Intersectional," is designed to celebrate contemporary artists. Each grouping in the gallery is centered around a work by a contemporary artist. Historic

Fig. 3. Entrance to the North American Art Gallery.

and other modern examples of artwork completed in the same medium surround the highlighted work. The goal of this display strategy is to help museum guests see how approaches to working within a particular medium have changed in some ways and remained the same in others over time. In this way, guests can see how contemporary artists draw on customary practices and place them in dialogue with their other passions. The subsections within this gallery include displays on textiles, beadwork, quillwork, clothing, baskets, and ceramics. A rotating display highlights works from a particular cultural area. For the opening, this was a grouping dedicated to ancestral Puebloan material highlighting a contemporary work by Margaret Tafoya (Santa Clara Pueblo).

We selected this organizational strategy for the North American Art Gallery due to several key factors. First, as discussed previously, the feedback I had received recommended that the gallery celebrate Indigenous art as modern art. Second, the works within the collection allowed for neither a geographic nor culturally based installation; there would have been too many gaps. I developed this approach because it allows us to

discuss particular mediums in detail and to show how the highlighted artists work within those mediums in their own unique ways. In order to tell this narrative effectively, we commissioned two works of art, one by Jamie Okuma (La Jolla Band of Luiseño Indians) and one by Jason Wesaw (Pokagon Band of Potawatomi). We also acquired a new work by Dana Warrington (Menominee/Prairie Band, Potawatomi) and secured a long-term loan of a piece by Virgil Ortiz (Cochiti Pueblo). Other highlighted artists include Rick Bartow (Mad River Band, Wiyot), Netadi Frank Hamilton (Pokagon Band of Potawatomi), Christine Marie Rapp-Morseau (Pokagon Band of Potawatomi), and Margaret Tafoya. Works by many other prominent contemporary artists appear throughout the gallery as well, including ones by Wendy Red Star (Apsáalooke) and Fritz Scholder (Luiseño).

Each subsection in the gallery includes the same overarching elements to provide a consistent experience for museum guests. The subtopic panel provides a brief history of the medium and emphasizes why it is important. Each subsection has an artist label, as discussed above, with a photograph of the highlighted artist, a quotation from the artist about the work, and a QR code that leads to an interview with the artist. These labels are important in making the gallery a polyvocal space. In addition to the subtopic panels and artist labels, extended texts and lead paragraphs provide visitors with additional insights or context into the different groupings.

I will briefly discuss one of the subsections to provide an example of how we approached the groupings and demonstrate the types of conversations that exist throughout the gallery. The section on beadwork (see fig. 4) serves as the sightline from the balcony into the gallery. This section centers on Jamie Okuma's new commissioned piece, titled *All the Things I Hold Dear*, which was completed in 2023. This elaborately beaded pair of Prada boots is a physical expression of her relationship with her two sons. Both boots have an attached beaded bag: one of these depicts Destoroyah from the Godzilla franchise, the other depicts Bulbasaur from the Pokémon franchise. These two characters were selected by her sons, Destoroyah by her thirteen-year-old and Bulbasaur by her nine-year-old. Hidden underneath these bags are beaded hearts. While we are allowed to discuss the beaded hearts, we are not allowed to display them. This is because the hearts symbolize her relationship with her two sons, and this

Fig. 4. North American Art Gallery subsection on beadwork, with Jamie Okuma's *All the Things I Hold Dear* at center.

connection between mother and child can never be fully seen or understood by anyone outside of that relationship. Around the hearts are raised beaded bands, thirteen bands around one, nine around the other. This is meant to capture the boys' ages at the particular moment the work was undertaken. The bags and the back of the boots are lined with spikes, which Okuma used as a symbol of protection. On the body of the boots themselves are intricately beaded plants. Each plant is connected to a particular moment and story that the artist associates with her children. In the creation of this work, Okuma used a number of antique beads. When discussing the beads, she said, "they're antique, they were hand-pulled beads. And that's another added element to my work. It's like all these hands from hundreds of years ago that helped make this modern piece. There's so much history in the beads alone that is just it's amazing that the people made those beads, not a machine."[13]

Beaded moccasins are displayed on risers on either side of

Okuma's boots, one pair by an unrecorded Lakota artist and the other by an unrecorded Sicangu Lakota artist. This placement was intentional, to drive home another point that Okuma made. I had asked her how she sees her work as bridging customary practices with modern fashion and she stated, "Yeah, I don't know that it's bridging anything. It's just what we've always done. I wasn't the first to bead on, you know, footwear or to embellish clothing. I've seen the most incredible shoes from the 1800s that were beaded in the manner that I'm beading them. So it's just a traditional concept of beading everything that was available to us at the time and putting our stories on them."[14] Including these moccasins in the display intended to tell that story and show how Okuma is continuing a centuries-old practice.

Above *All The Things I Hold Dear* are two beaded "whimsies"—a term that has become somewhat controversial, as some people feel it is dismissive or pejorative to the art form.[15] This style of raised beadwork used by Iroquois artists became popular among tourists in places such as Niagara Falls and Toronto in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.[16] Artists, therefore, drew influence from motifs they knew would be successful in these markets, such as the Victorian-era boot on display in this case. I used this grouping to discuss how Native artists have always been intersectional, drawing on a variety of influences for their beadwork. An extended text reinforces that "whimsies" are another example of how Indigenous artists have always been contemporary to the time in which they work and have never been static.

The grouping on beadwork accomplishes several of the overarching goals for the gallery as outlined above. While it centers on Jamie Okuma's work, it also helps visitors understand that all of the artwork shown was intersectional and modern at the time of its creation. Okuma's voice and words are prominently featured on the artist label, presented front and center in the case, adding to the polyvocality of the space. The grouping presents multiple forms of beadwork from the past 150 years, and the subtopic panel presents a brief history of the medium.

While the display on beadwork does not include a local artist (the fourth goal of the gallery), local artists and scholars are highlighted in multiple places throughout the space. A large quotation appears on the gallery wall from John Low, PhD, JD, a citizen of the Pokagon Band of Potawatomi and an associate professor in the Department of Comparative Studies at the Ohio

State University: "The Potawatomi have never been in stasis; they have always interacted with their neighbors, changing both themselves and others as a result."[17] His words succinctly summarize the main argument put forward throughout the gallery.

Three artists from the Pokagon Band of Potawatomi are highlighted in the gallery: Jason Wesaw, Christine Marie Rapp-Morseau, and Netadi Frank Hamilton. The commissioned work by Jason Wesaw, titled *The Path* (fig. 5), is the highlight piece in our subsection on textiles. When we first approached Wesaw about this commission, he expressed interest in creating a piece that would simultaneously look at the historic relationship between the Pokagon Band of Potawatomi and the University of Notre Dame, highlight things the two communities have in common, and call for a brighter, more collaborative path forward. For this piece, Wesaw alludes to the form of the jingle dress, which is intimately connected with healing.[18] The jingles are made from earth that Wesaw harvested from the lakes on ancestral Potawatomi land that is now Notre Dame's campus. After firing these ceramic jingles, Wesaw dipped them in a gold luster. A golden dome dominates the bottom third of the textile, and the background is a light green. In this piece, Wesaw explores the deep and historic relationship between the Pokagon Band of Potawatomi and the University of Notre Dame in order to facilitate potentially difficult conversations that will ultimately lead to healing. Wesaw helped me to write a statement about the piece that we used in the museum magazine. It reads as follows:

> This visually striking work is rich with color and symbolism, drawing attention to the challenging connection and unique narrative shared amongst these two esteemed groups. His intention with *The Path* is to acknowledge the true depth of this shared history, embracing the individual and collective roles in it while encouraging a united and harmonious course forward for the University and Tribe.[19]

The university's version of the founding of the campus is frequently told. In this commission, we wanted to elevate Wesaw's voice to ensure the Pokagon Band's side of this story held a prominent place on campus for all to see.

The subsection on basketry highlights a work by Christine Marie Rapp-Morseau, another artist from the Pokagon Band of Potawatomi. Rapp-Morseau's basket, titled *Wisgak Gokbenagen (Black Ash Basket)* (fig. 6), is a beautiful example of this art form, which is

Fig. 6. Jason Wesaw (Pokagon Band of Potawatomi, b. 1974). *The Path*, 2023. Hand sewn and hand dyed linen, wool felt, polyester/metallic crepe, clay and temper harvested from land at the University of Notre Dame, glaze, gold lustre, polyester ribbon, and artificial sinew. Raclin Murphy Museum of Art, Lake Family Endowment for the Arts of the Americas, Africa and Oceania, 2023.014.

Fig. 5. Christine Marie Rapp-Morseau (Pokagon Band of Potawatomi, b. 1968). *Wisgak* Gokbenagen (Black Ash Basket), 2018. Black ash and sweetgrass; 7 ¼ × 8 ¼ × 8 $^{1}/_{8}$ in. (18.42 × 20.96 × 20.64 cm). Raclin Murphy Museum of Art, Humana Foundation Endowment, 2019.006. © Christine Marie Rapp-Morseau.

extremely important in the region.[20] Using the wood of black ash trees to make baskets is a centuries-old practice that has been passed down through the generations.[21] The trees appear in some creation stories, and the wood is prized for being strong yet flexible.[22] In her interview, Rapp-Morseau emphasized the amount of time and labor that go into creating these baskets. She described how a group first goes into the woods, usually in watery areas, to find the straightest tree possible. Once the tree is cut down, the bark is then peeled off and saved for baskets. After this, the log is pounded with the back of an axe or a mallet, which makes it easier to pull off strips of the wood. Those strips are then split down further and sorted based on what parts of the basket they will be used for. Next, all the hard imperfections are scraped off with a knife to make the strips smooth. Only then can the artist start making the basket. The subsection on baskets is meant to drive home the amount of labor and skill that goes into each of these works. Rapp-Morseau is committed to passing this art form on to the younger generation. She stated:

> It's important for our youth to remember what we were doing back in the past, you know, and to raise awareness that it's still around. . . . Just to teach our youth what we used to do back in the day and what our grandparents and great grandparents [did], you know. . . . Thank goodness we have the Head Start school on our property, because now maybe they're not thinking about, *Oh, you guys still live in teepees. Oh, you guys still wear moccasins or are you guys*, all this kind of nonsense that they still teach in schools. You know, there's a lot more to us than that. So culture-wise, we'd like to keep that going for our kids.[23]

Black ash has been suffering due to an invasive species of beetle called the black ash borer that has been killing millions of ash trees across eastern North America.[24] This makes it difficult for artists like Rapp-Morseau to find black ash trees in the area to keep this deeply important tradition alive. For these reasons, we seek to honor the art form in the gallery and to call visitors' attention to ongoing conservation efforts.

The final artist I will discuss in this subsection is Netadi Frank Hamilton, who lived from 1876–1939. Hamilton was the great-grandson of Chief Leopold Pokagon and Elizabeth Topinabee, and he served as the *Ankéntagét* (interpreter) for what is now the Pokagon Band of Potawatomi.[25] Our subsection dedicated to fashion and clothing features Hamilton's *Mizhatthwen* (regalia) (see

fig. 7) that he made and wore to the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago (a world fair celebrating the four hundredth anniversary of Christopher Columbus's landing in the Americas). Hamilton accompanied author Simon Pokagon to the exposition in order to hand out Pokagon's book, *The Red Man's Rebuke*, which was printed on birch bark and called out the injustices committed against Indigenous peoples while also reclaiming and reasserting Indigenous space and identity.[26]

This *Mizhatthwen* was passed down from Netadi Frank Hamilton to his son, Paul Hamilton. Paul Hamilton played professional baseball for the St. Louis Browns as a pitcher for one year before stepping down due to an injury.[27] To more effectively tell Paul's story, we also included three of his baseballs in the display. Baseball was clearly important to the family, and the headdress displayed is constructed around a baseball cap with the brim cut off, a fact we

Fig. 7. North American Art Gallery display of Netadi Frank Hamilton's *Mizhatthwen*.

used to celebrate the intersectionality of Paul and Netadi's interests. Paul Hamilton's daughter left this *Mizhatthwen* to the museum. For this subsection, we included a video interview with Kyle Malott (Pokagon Band of Potawatomi), who is the great-great-grandson of Netadi Frank Hamilton and a Potawatomi language specialist and historian. Our records incorrectly stated that an unrecorded artist had made this *Mizhatthwen*. Malott informed us that Hamilton himself had made it, and we have updated our records and are planning to reprint this label to correct this misattribution.

To summarize the goals and conclude the discussion of the North American Art Gallery, we aimed to achieve the first goal—celebrating Indigenous art as inherently modern—by centering the subsections around contemporary artists and by showing how the historic works displayed were innovative and intersectional at the time of their creation. This approach demonstrates that Indigenous art has never been static. To accomplish our second goal—making the galleries more polyvocal spaces—we included a variety of artist statements and interviews throughout the gallery so that museum guests can hear many voices and can learn directly from the artists themselves. We also intend to have frequent in-person engagements, including artist talks and demonstrations, within the gallery. For example, at our opening weekend, organized by our education department, Christine Marie Rapp-Morseau led a basket-making demonstration directly across from the case displaying her artwork. In this way, the thousands of guests who attended our opening weekend were able to engage directly with one of the artists highlighted in the gallery. Multiple times, I observed people watch Rapp-Morseau work, turn to see her photograph prominently displayed next to her piece in the subsection on baskets, and excitedly exclaim, "That's her!" Artist David Martin (Pokagon Band of Potawatomi), who sits on our Indigenous Consultation Committee, also organized a number of dances and talks at our opening weekend. We are committed to continuing such engagements going forward. To reach our third goal—exploring the history, significance, and continuity of these different mediums—we created subsections dedicated to textiles, beadwork, quillwork, fashion and clothing, baskets, and ceramics. Each of these displays presents artwork from various time periods. Our grouping on ceramics, for example, includes both a Hohokam vessel from 600–900 CE and a work by Virgil Ortiz made

in 2004. The subsection label for this display centers on the Cochiti myth about the origins of pottery, emphasizing the thousands of years of continuous creation. Finally, for our fourth goal—to display and support local artists and communities—four of our eight highlighted artists are Potawatomi, three from the Pokagon Band of Potawatomi. Going forward, we intend to continue emphasizing works by local artists and prioritizing engagement with local communities.

## Mesoamerican Art Gallery

The Mesoamerican Art Gallery (see fig. 8) takes a very different approach from the North American Art Gallery. The transition point from North American Art into Mesoamerican Art is a grouping of ceramics from the US Southwest, which are positioned next to the doorway leading to Mesoamerican Art. The label text invites visitors to look deeply at the iconography and motifs from the Southwest and to think about how they relate to the artworks in Mesoamerica. Of course, trade and interaction happened frequently throughout what is now the Southwestern region of the United States and Mexico from an early period, and we discuss these interactions.

Fig. 8. The Mesoamerican Art Gallery.

My primary area of specialty is ancient Mesoamerican cultures and artwork, and this is one of the flagship collections at the Raclin Murphy Museum of Art. In particular, the museum has excellent holdings in artwork from the Formative period (1800 BCE–200 CE). The vast majority of museum visitors may have learned about Maya and Aztec cultures in secondary school but are likely unfamiliar with the wide array of cultures that thrived throughout this region for millennia. As a university museum, we need to consider the various audiences who make use of these spaces. The gallery needs to be usable by undergraduate and graduate students, faculty, staff, and visiting researchers, but also K–12 students, the broader community, and descendant communities.

To accomplish the goal of serving as many diverse audiences as possible, I used a variety of display strategies and designed sixteen subsections, presenting 208 works of art. Previous installations of precontact art have demonstrated that a solely narrative organization is not usually the most successful in reaching the average museum visitor. This is because most people do not know enough about precontact cultures and need an introduction to these peoples and an entry point into the artwork from this area. In this gallery, I relied on chronology. The perimeter of the gallery includes nine subsections presented in a roughly chronological order. These subsections are introductions to different cultural groups including Olmec, Tlatilco, Zapotec, West Mexican, Chupícuaro, Maya, Teotihuacano, Aztec and Mixtec, and Veracruz peoples. The center of the gallery features seven subsections that are narrative groupings. These displays combine artwork from the cultures introduced around the periphery to emphasize broad themes throughout Mesoamerica. Narrative groupings include discussions of ritual feasting, writing, the ballgame, animals in mythology, music, and the feathered serpent. This organizational strategy is meant to facilitate various levels of conversation. For example, a museum guest visiting on their own can learn about the different specific cultural groups on the perimeter and then move to the center to learn about broad themes that connect them, or vice versa. On the other hand, an undergraduate art history class could have a detailed conversation about Olmec iconography, for example, while an elementary school class could be on the other side of the gallery at the same time discussing animals in mythology or the importance of different types of foods.

When entering the gallery, visitors are greeted by two large displays of figurines (see fig. 9). These two cases are built into the front of a large archway that occupies the center of the gallery. This archway has *talud-tablero* architectural elements on either side, paying homage to an iconic architectural style from this region. There are seventy-eight figurines in the two cases alone. This narrative grouping, titled "Peopling the Americas," is designed to introduce visitors to the wide array of peoples and cultures that thrived across this relatively small geographic area over thousands of years. The label reads as follows:

Until recently, it was taught that Christopher Columbus "discovered" the Americas. In these discovery stories, the land was a sparsely populated area, full of opportunity and waiting to be claimed. In reality, Mesoamerica and the Caribbean had been densely settled for over 3,000 years. Many people have heard of the Maya and Aztec, but not many have heard of the other cultural groups that thrived throughout the region. These figurines represent the diversity of peoples who lived robust lives on this land. They raised families, farmed, worshiped gods, recorded historic events, and traded goods. As you explore this gallery, think about these people and their lives—lives that were just as rich and nuanced as our own. The objects you see here might seem static, but centuries ago they were regularly used by these people. These objects, with their dynamic and rich life histories, allow us to celebrate the cultures and people who made and used them.

The figurine wall also serves another function. I wanted to make a grand entranceway to the gallery, and because the majority of the artworks in this collection area are relatively small in scale, doing so involved displaying a significant number of artworks at the same time, creating a monumental whole out of many small pieces. Thus far, visitors have responded very positively to the figurine wall and have been stopping to spend time with it, looking at each of the figures and picking out those that they find most compelling, which was the desired outcome. The snag with this display was how to effectively include the identification labels. Ultimately, we included a QR code on the subsection label, which directs guests to a checklist on our online collection platform, Marble.nd.edu. The checklist informs guests that the figurines are organized from top left to bottom right, and each entry has a thumbnail image, making it relatively straightforward to find the figurine in question. I have seen people

Fig. 9. View of the figurine wall at the entrance of the Mesoamerican Art Gallery.

interact with the QR code, and while more objective analysis and data are needed, from initial engagements it seems like the few people who have used the QR code have been able to find the information they were looking for relatively easily.

A discussion of one of the cultural subsections and two of the narrative subsections can provide additional context into the design intent behind these installations. Each subsection includes a subtopic panel that introduces either the culture or the primary thematic narrative of the display. These subtopic panels also discuss the descendants of these cultures whenever possible, ensuring that descendants who visit the museum and who may or may not speak the languages being discussed feel they are included in the narrative and are not experiencing the violence of erasure, as has happened historically with displays of this type. Simultaneously, this approach helps other guests understand that many of these cultures and languages are still very much present today. Many of the groupings include figurines, with the goal of introducing guests to the people of these cultural areas. This also allows guests to begin to

learn the unique styles of figurines made by different cultures. The majority of the cases include multiple groupings that facilitate deeper and more nuanced discussions of the artwork being presented.

Going clockwise around the gallery, the first case that museum guests encounter focuses on ancient Olmec artwork (see fig. 10). The subtopic panel introduces visitors to Olmec peoples and provides a quick discussion of both the mother culture model and the sister culture model.[28] Other important topics are also addressed in this subsection text, which reads as follows:

Olmec culture (1500–400 BCE) has been referred to by some scholars as the "mother" culture due to its profound influence on the religion, aesthetics, and iconography of later Mesoamerican cultures. Other scholars argue that the Olmecs were one of several important cultures from this time period—an argument known as the "sister" culture model. The mother culture model is based on the fact that many Olmec gods served as foundational models for later deities worshiped throughout Mesoamerica for thousands of years, such as various rain deities and maize gods. The Olmec also developed the first writing system and formed the first known city in Mesoamerica, San Lorenzo, dating before 1500 BCE in what is now the state of Veracruz, near the Gulf of Mexico.

The Olmec were not a homogenous group. No one knows what they called themselves or even if they saw themselves as a connected people. The term "Olmec" is based on the much later Aztec word for the region, Olman, meaning the "place of rubber." The time-depth here is crucial to consider when understanding Mesoamerica and the importance of the Olmec. The Olmec were at their height more than 2,300 years before the Aztec, meaning more time had elapsed between the life of an Olmec person and the life of an Aztec person than between Jesus and us today. Displayed here are several iconic examples of Olmec art, including their characteristic figurines with downturned mouths and flaring upper lips.

Within the case itself, a semicircle of figurines made of ceramic and jade greet the viewer. This display is designed to reference La Venta Offering 4, a cache of figurines found at the site of La Venta, located on the Gulf Coast of Mexico, where they were also arranged in a semicircle.[29] These figures allow us to discuss Olmec style, including the downturned mouths and flaring upper lips that give the figures a "despondent, fierce expression."[30] Above these figurines, mounted to the back of the case, is a grouping of artworks carved from jade and other green stones. The label text discusses the importance of jade in Olmec art, and

Fig. 10. Mesoamerican Art Gallery subsection on Olmec peoples.

subsequently the artwork of many later Mesoamerican cultures. The significance of jade extends down into Central America, and Olmec jade was traded with people in Costa Rica centuries later. On the left side of the case are examples of the flame eyebrow motif found throughout Olmec art.[31] The right side of the case includes several other iconic examples of Olmec art, including a *Yuguito*, a small stone item associated with the rubber ballgame that appears to have been an important component of the Early Formative version of the game.[32] Within this one case, various small groupings allow for multiple conversations about Olmec art and introduce museum guests to a variety of mediums and motifs from this important early culture.

An example of a narrative grouping within the gallery is the case dedicated to ritual feasting and drinking (see fig. 11). As in the approach used in the Olmec case, there are several different groupings within this display. The subtopic panel describes the importance of food and drink, both in ceremonial contexts and

Fig. 11. Mesoamerican Art Gallery subsection on ritual feasting.

everyday life. The left side of the case features a detailed Nayarit-style model house from West Mexico from 100 BCE–300 CE. The model shows three different apartments, each with figures inside performing different roles. This model house will be rotated periodically to show all the apartments. For the museum's opening, however, we chose to have the largest apartment facing outward toward the viewer. In this scene, four people sit on the floor, hands raised to their mouths, sharing a meal. A dog makes aggressive eye contact with one of the figures, tongue hanging from his mouth, a posture dog caretakers are all too familiar with. These scenes provide valuable insight into people's lives. They show the preparation of food, the sharing of meals, and people gathering.[33] What better way to start a discussion of ritual feasting?

The next grouping in this case demonstrates the importance of cacao in Mesoamerica. Cacao has been prepared and consumed by many cultures throughout Mesoamerica since the Early and Middle Formative periods.[34] The first vessel in this group is from the Classic Maya period and shows two monkeys carrying cacao pods. The Maya often depict monkeys as the "bringers" of cacao.[35] This is in part because monkeys would eat cacao seeds, and then travel through the rainforest and excrete them, thus helping cacao to spread. Next to this is another Classic period Maya vessel used to consume cacao. Maya people would use cacao to make a frothy and zesty beverage, which the wealthy would drink out of elaborately decorated cylinder vessels, such as the one on display, at ritual feasts. The central glyphs of this vessel read *u-jaay y-uk'ib'*, meaning "his drinking cup."[36] Stylized cacao beans surround these central glyphs, demonstrating that this vessel was used for cacao.

The final grouping in this case is dedicated to maize. Maize has been a crop of central importance in Mesoamerica since the Formative period.[37] As detailed in the Popul Vuh, a Maya origin story, the creator deities tried to create humans several times, all unsuccessfully. The attempt that finally worked was when these gods shaped humans out of maize, making humans, quite literally, the people of maize.[38] The first vessel in this grouping is an Olmec depiction of the maize god, which allows us to discuss how Olmec deities continue to have significant impact on later Mesoamerican deities, as well as the significance of maize from a very early period. Next to it is a figurine whistle from Classic period Veracruz showing a woman grinding maize with a mano and metate. Above this figurine we included a

miniature metate to discuss how corn was traditionally prepared. The final vessel is a Classic Maya vessel showing *waaj*, a tamale-like dish, which allowed us to discuss the different dishes prepared using maize and masa.[39] This subsection addresses several important foods throughout Mesoamerica, demonstrates how these foods are woven into mythology, and provides examples of how they are prepared and served. The case is intended to provide both museum guests and educators leading tours everything they would need in order to effectively discuss and understand this narrative.

The final narrative grouping I will discuss is dedicated to the feathered serpent and is located at the center of the gallery (see fig. 12). The goals of this grouping are to break the chronologic organization of the gallery and to celebrate a motif that has captured people's imaginations for thousands of years. The feathered serpent as a symbol connects earth and sky; it is the bridging of worlds. It first appeared during the Formative period and remains an important motif today.[40] The bronze sculpture *Quetzalcoatl* (2017) by David Ocelotl Garcia sits on an open-air pedestal. When speaking about *Quetzalcoatl*, Ocelotl Garcia said, "In this contemporary interpretation, I explore the sculptural symbolism as it pertains to Quetzalcoatl, pulling inspiration from a variety of tribal pictographs that include the Maya, Mexihca, and Mixteca."[41] The artist label includes a QR code that leads guests to an interview with Ocelotl Garcia. Paired with this sculpture are three ancient depictions of the feathered serpent from throughout Mesoamerica. On the label rail we included a reproduction of a photograph in Notre Dame's library collection taken during the excavation of the Temple of the Feathered Serpent at the site of Teotihuacan in the early 1900s. The introductory label to this grouping discusses how, as archaeological excavations took place throughout Mexico in the early 1900s, the nation-state began drawing on motifs from these precontact cultures in their contemporary national aesthetic. For example, motifs taken from the Temple of the Feathered Serpent at Teotihuacan were used on the twenty-peso note. This subsection, therefore, demonstrates the longevity of this important mythological figure across multiple periods of time: from thousands of years ago, to the early 1900s, to today.

I am committed to collecting and exhibiting contemporary artwork like *Quetzalcoatl* for several reasons. First, displaying contemporary works by descendant

Fig. 12. Mesoamerican Art Gallery subsection on the feathered serpent, with David Ocelotl Garcia's *Quetzalcoatl* at right.

artists does a lot of heavy lifting by helping museum guests who might be unfamiliar with these cultures to understand why they are so important and to see how they continue to have a profound impact on the identities, beliefs, and practices of many people today. I am committed to exhibiting contemporary artwork in the gallery going forward to create these meaningful discussions of cultural continuity. Second, although we translated texts found on artwork in the gallery whenever possible to allow those words to reach people today, the addition of more contemporary voices is necessary for our ongoing work of Indigenizing gallery spaces through a polyvocal approach.

The Mesoamerican Art Gallery accomplishes multiple goals. First, it introduces museum guests to many different cultures throughout the region while at the same time helping them understand the overarching chronology of said region. Second, it provides seven narrative groupings that help

people better understand how different cultures engaged with various themes, such as music, the ballgame, and the presence of animals in mythology, in similar yet unique ways. Third, by incorporating contemporary artworks and discussing descendant communities and languages in the label text, the gallery seeks to emphasize how these cultures continue to have a profound impact on the identities, beliefs, and practices of many people today. When I discuss my research, one of the most common questions I get is, *Where did the Maya go?* The answer is they did not go anywhere; there are still millions of people who speak Mayan languages living throughout Mesoamerica today. The gallery seeks to educate museum guests about these contemporary peoples to help undo the damage that erasure under colonialism causes.

**Central American and South American Art Gallery**

The final gallery within the Indigenous Art of the Americas suite is dedicated to Central American and South American Art (see fig. 13). This is the first time a museum at the University of Notre Dame has had a gallery dedicated to these cultural areas. Whereas the Mesoamerican Art Gallery relies on

Fig. 13. Entrance to the Central American and South American Art Gallery.

chronologic and narrative groupings, this gallery relies on geographic and narrative groupings. This is largely because the gallery displays artwork made by cultures that thrived over a much larger geographic expanse. This space covers several geographic regions, including Central America (Costa Rica, Nicaragua, and Panama), the Andes, and the Southern Cone. It also features several narrative subsections. The subsection dedicated to waterscapes discusses how cultures that thrived throughout the Caribbean and along the coasts of Columbia and Ecuador used their surrounding large bodies of water (i.e., the Caribbean Sea and the Pacific Ocean) to facilitate travel and trade. In this way, these bodies of water connected rather than divided communities. Another narrative subsection explores the form of the stirrup spout vessel produced by various Andean cultures over thousands of years. At the far end of the gallery, we take advantage of the sixteen-foot ceilings to display a variety of contemporary Andean textiles. This gallery includes six subsections and eighty-nine works of art.

Again, to provide a sense of the types of narratives presented in this gallery, I will describe one of the geographic subsections and one of the thematic subsections. The subsection dedicated to Central America includes three cases. The first case (see fig. 14) displays two figurines and three ceramic vessels to discuss the types of artworks common to this region. One of the figurines is a rattle in the form of an *usékar*, a ritual specialist with powerful magical abilities who is identifiable by the conical hat he wears.[42] *Usékars* are commonly depicted in artwork from this region. The piece has an extended label that reads:

> Identifiable by the conical hat, this is a representation of an *usékar*, one of the most commonly depicted classes of ritual specialists. These powerful individuals were believed to have descended from jaguars and possess magical abilities. According to creation myths, the creator god Sibö sent the *usékars* to protect people from animals and other threats. By entering a trance-like state, ritual specialists could transform into their jaguar forms in order to commune with ancestors and spirits. This figure is also a rattle. Music, and particularly rattles, played an important role in many of the rituals performed.

The next case in this subsection (see fig. 15) provides two narrative groupings. The first discusses the prominence of mace heads in Central American art. Warfare in this area took the form of raids by one community into surrounding

Fig. 14. Central American and South American Art Gallery subsection on Central America, case 1.

communities for a variety of reasons, such as the desire to claim additional territory or gain access to necessary resources.[43] It has been argued that another reason for these raids was more magical in nature: to stop black magic that was being cast on the community by a ritual specialist from a nearby community. As such, *usékars* would lead raids to put an end to the black magic and protect their people.[44]

This case also contains a grouping on the importance of different animals in mythology. The central figure is an opossum named *Bikili'* in the Bribris language—this same name is used for the original opossum spirit and for any opossum, who can then stand in for the original opossum spirit. This is because, to Bribris speakers, the proper name for animals is the name of the original animal's spirit.[45] The Bribris peoples believed that Bikili' was the first healer and the first intermediary between the creator god Sibö and humans.[46] In a different story, the opossum was a funeral singer, and in one version the creator god made Bikili' sing himself back to life after his death. Due to these various roles in mythology, Bikili' acts as interpreter for the people before the *usékars*.[47] The opossum

Fig. 15. Central American and South American Art Gallery subsection on Central America, case 2.

shown in this case is in the Pataky style from the Nicoya region of Nicaragua and dates to between 800 and 1250 CE. The grouping also includes representations of a crocodile and a stingray, both important animals which appear in other myths and are discussed in greater detail in the label text.

The final case in this subsection (see fig. 16) discusses the transition from jade to gold as the primary luxury good in the region. It includes a jade celt, or ceremonial

axe-head, from Mesoamerica; a large jade tube from Costa Rica; four gold pendants from Central America; and three gold nose ornaments from South America. Central America was an area of great exchange, having traded regularly with both Mesoamerica and South America. Up until 400–700 CE, jade was the most highly valued material, and Olmec carved jades traded from Mesoamerica in particular were highly prized possessions. Then, as trade with Mesoamerica began to slow, gold items from South America rose in prominence as the most sought-after goods.[48] This display, therefore, allows us to discuss changing cultural influences in this region over time and the trade networks that existed between Mesoamerica, Central America, and South America.

This subtopic aims to facilitate multiple conversations. The first case introduces audiences to artwork from this region and the

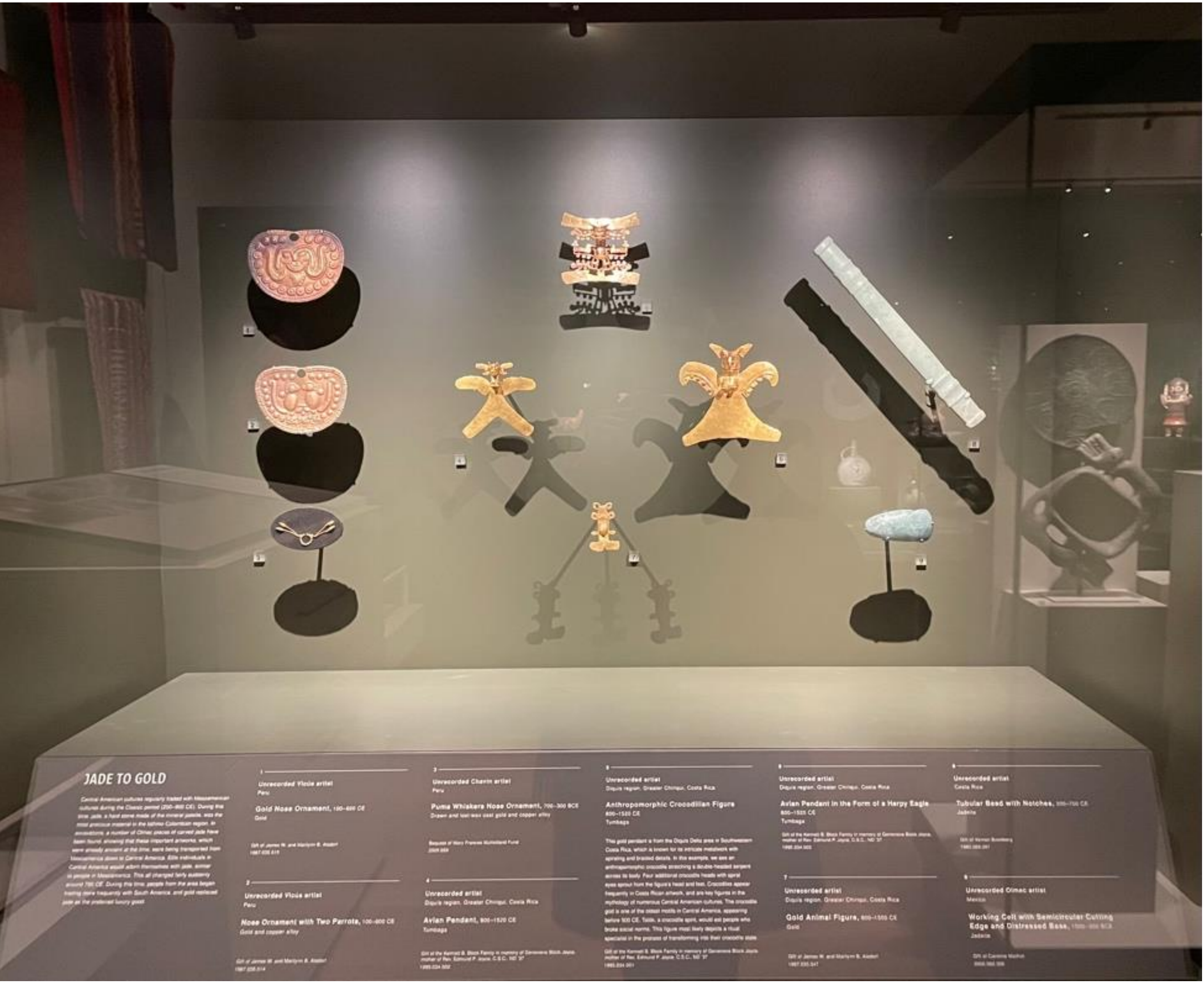


Fig. 16. Central American and South American Art Gallery subsection on Central America, Case 3.

role of ritual specialists in Central American beliefs and social hierarchy. The second case discusses combat in the region, which occurred for a variety of reasons. At the same time, this case shows various myths and origin stories and the roles that animals played within those myths. The third case describes the role of trade with other cultures over vast distances and the impact that trade had on the aesthetics of cultures inhabiting the Central American region. By telling these narratives, we aimed to center the mythologies, stories, and world views of people from this region and to allow visitors to think broadly about the interactions of these cultures with other peoples across the Americas.

An example of the narrative subsections in this gallery is our display on textiles (see fig. 17).[49] This display takes advantage of the full wall space afforded by the sixteen-foot-high ceilings and uses the Arakawa hanging system to suspend the textiles, which allows the weavings to float off the wall for a more dramatic presentation. The initial rotation includes seven contemporary textiles suspended on the wall. Two body forms on platforms in front of the wall display a poncho and an *ahuayo* (woman's mantle), showing guests how the textiles are worn. While displaying the textiles flat allows museum guests to see more of their iconography and patterns, the body forms serve to remind guests that these are worn and lived artworks. This display approach helps visitors understand how textiles are encountered in day-to-day life. A display-grade flat file cabinet sits in front of the textile wall between the two body forms. On top of this flat file appears the subtopic panel for this grouping, the labels, and photographs of artists weaving some of the textiles we have on display and similar textiles. While we do not currently have any video interviews to display in this grouping, we hope to interview a contemporary textile artist to feature in the future.

Each of the three drawers in the flat file contains two ancient textiles. The drawers allow these ancient textiles to be kept in total darkness for the majority of the time. The oldest textile on view is a Paracas fragment from 400–100 BCE. Visitors are encouraged by the label text to open the drawers, view the ancient textiles, and compare them to the contemporary textiles. In informal observations in the space, I have seen people become very excited that they are invited to open the drawers. This moment of discovery for them within the gallery creates a sense of intimacy between the viewer

Fig. 17. Central American and South American Art Gallery subsection on textiles.

and the work. A type of figure depicted on a textile fragment made by an unrecorded Chancay artist from 1000–1476 CE is clearly referenced by one of the contemporary textiles on display above, again showing that these ancient and historic cultures continue to have a profound impact on the identity and practices of people today.

This textile wall is an invaluable addition. There are several hundred contemporary Andean textiles in the museum's collection, the vast majority of which have never been on view. This wall allows us to feature them for the first time and have a sustainable rotation cycle.

While the Central American and South American Art Gallery is the smallest gallery in the Indigenous Art of the Americas suite, it addresses a wide array of cultures and topics. These galleries highlight cultures that are extremely important to understanding movement and interaction throughout the region, such as the peoples of Central America, the Andes, the Southern Cone, Ecuador, Colombia,

and the Caribbean. Our organizational strategy allows visitors both to gain a better understanding of the geography of the region and learn about particular topics through the narrative groupings.

**Conclusion**

In this discussion, I have laid out the theoretical tenets that guided the curatorial decisions behind the design of the Raclin Murphy Museum of Arts's Indigenous Art of the Americas galleries, discussed steps we took to uphold these tenets, and provided an overview of the galleries with detailed descriptions of several subsections to demonstrate the types of narratives they tell. The overarching goal of the installation was to engage in decolonizing practices and Indigenize the gallery spaces. To this end, we established an Indigenous Consultation Committee to ensure we incorporated Indigenous perspectives and expertise and to bring in new ideas as we continue to engage in these practices. The land acknowledgment of this new institution is a public commitment to continued reciprocal and ethical collaboration with Indigenous communities and artists, particularly local communities. The new galleries sought to place Indigenous voices and world views front and center, and this intent drove new commissions for the North American Art Gallery. Relying on a polyvocal approach, we made use of both the artist label format and video interviews to ensure that the most prominent voices in the gallery were Indigenous. As we engage this same approach in the Mesoamerican Art Gallery and the Central and South American Art Gallery, we look forward to conducting more interviews and acquiring new works that allow these spaces to become even more polyvocal in nature.

I initially wrote this article only a week and a half out from the opening of the new Raclin Murphy Museum of Art. A significant amount of labor went into this building and its galleries to get to this point. This is only the beginning of this work for us, not the end. While we did our best to center the galleries around Indigenizing principles, there are certainly places we have fallen short. I look forward to continued collaborations and conversations that will help us to continuously make the galleries more ethical and welcoming spaces for all people.

To conclude, one of the ways that museums can engage in decolonizing practices is to be more transparent in regards to the labor that goes into the galleries and exhibitions. A museum installation of this scale involves the dedication of many individuals, and while

curators often receive recognition for the part they played, I think it is important that everyone who contributed in making that vision a reality receive credit for all of their work. Too often, work within museums goes unacknowledged. Thank you to the members of our Indigenous Consultation Committee, Madalene Big Bear, Ashlee Bird, David Martin, and Katiebelle Thompson, for all of your insight thus far, which has been invaluable to me. Thank you also for your patience with me through the challenges of establishing and structuring a committee. Thank you to the Director of the Pokagon Band's Center of History and Culture, Nicole Holloway, for helping us find artists who were interested in joining this committee. Thank you to all of the artists and scholars we interviewed for your passion and for working with us on this project: Kyle Malott, David Ocelotl Garcia, Jamie Okuma, Virgil Ortiz, Christine Marie Rapp-Morseau, Dana Warrington, and Jason Wesaw. Thank you to Ashlee Bird and Erin Oliver for all of our engaging and collaborative working sessions to craft the museum's first land acknowledgment. Thank you to John Low for allowing us to use your quotation on our gallery wall. Thank you to the entire Raclin Murphy Museum of Art staff for everything you have done over the past few years to bring this new building, and the Indigenous Art of the Americas suite, to fruition. In particular, thank you to the administrative team: our director, Joseph Becherer, and our associate directors, Ann Knoll and Laurene Grunwald, for all of your support. Decolonizing work is extremely challenging, and the administrative team has been committed to engaging in these difficult conversations and processes. They have been strong advocates for this ongoing work. Thank you to Julie Boynton, Senior Director of Interior Architecture at the University of Notre Dame and the best project manager we could ask for. She kept this massive endeavor on track over the past few years. Thank you to my curatorial colleagues, including Cheryl Snay and David Acton, for offering me your advice and guidance, for all of the thought that went into your galleries, and for the upcoming exhibitions you have been designing. Thank you to all of the collections department staff for countless hours of conversations and discussion on gallery design and layout, for the handling, condition reporting, packing, transporting, and unpacking of over a thousand works of art, for responding to all of the crises as they arose, and for the successful tracking and installation of hundreds of labels,

keeping our database up to date with changes, and so much more. From the bottom of my heart, thank you for everything you have done. This includes our registrars, Victoria Perdomo, Rachel Geiogamah, and Brittany Hild; our art preparators, Ramiro Rodriguez and Kyle Thorne; and our art handlers, Matt Bean and Anders Ove. Thank you to our education team, Margaret Dosch, Bridget Hoyt, Sarah Martin, Rachel Mills, and Emily Normand, for making our opening weekend such a huge success. Thank you to our staff photographer, Michael Rippy, for photographing hundreds of works of art over the course of this project. Thank you to Angie Hubert, our videographer from the Research Department at the University of Notre Dame, for going on many trips with me to film the interviews with our featured artists. Thank you to my curatorial research assistant, Kendra Lyimo, for all of the research you undertook that allowed the textile wall to become the beautiful installation it is. Thank you to our fantastic conservators, Laura Kubick and Kathleen Kiefer, for caring for the artworks, stabilizing them, and helping us to honor the intent of the artists. Thank you to the ELY, Inc. mount-making team, including Bruce, John, Jason, Josh, Slim, Lisa, Thomas, and other team members I did not have the opportunity to work as closely with, for making the hundreds of stunning mounts and installing the majority of the artworks on view, thus turning our imagined presentation of the artwork into a reality. A huge thank-you to Bailey Whisler, our exhibition designer, for your passion and creativity. I am so appreciative of your design work and your willingness to collaborate with us as we solidified the design. The galleries are as beautiful as they are because of you. Thank you to our design team, Gallagher and Associates, including Sarah Thompson, Hannah Chiarella, and Taina Quiñones for everything you have done. From working on the design and keeping track of all the minute moving parts of the schedule, down to choosing fonts, you were involved in every step of this process and it has been wonderful getting to work with you. I thank you, also, for your patience with me as I constantly pushed for more time to ensure we were being as thoughtful and reflective as possible in our decision-making. Thank you to Darla Decker and Gretchen Pruett for proofreading all of the label texts. Thank you to the entire Click Netherfield team for designing and installing all of the fantastic cases. Thank you to the Kubik Maltbie team for fabricating all of the exhibition build-out, and in particular

to Turtle and Tanner for overseeing its installation.

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# Susan Folwell: Taos Light

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"It's the movement and it's the fluidity. It's the liquidity of how we get through life. It's a simple concept that the only consistency in the world is change."[1]
—Susan Folwell (Santa Clara Tewa, b. 1970), clay artist, northern New Mexico

Clay offers a constant that accompanies ongoing change for the Tewa-speaking village of Santa Clara Pueblo in northern New Mexico adjacent to the Rio Grande. Susan Folwell refers to the clay as Mother Earth—the provider for all beings.[2] The artist participates in the millennia-old practice of transforming Tewa clay into painted pottery, a matrilineal legacy within the tribe. These vessels convey her reflections on places of home and relations between people during particular time periods. Thus, the Pueblo use of clay to respond to social dynamics since time immemorial gives form to an ongoing "pattern of renewal," or constant set of practices, that centers Pueblo people. The concept of a pattern of renewal, based on the teachings of Folwell's cousin Roxanne Swentzell (Santa Clara Pueblo), refers to repeating patterns found in nature—the constant movement of health, vitality, and continuance—that interconnect all aspects of life.[3] As a pattern of renewal, Folwell's clay vessels often portray figurative narratives of cross-cultural dialogue within the Southwest region.

In Folwell's *Taos Light* series of painted pottery vessels (2016–present), she comments on the complexity of intercultural perceptions of the early twentieth century. She visually references the interactions between the Taos Society of Artists (TSA)—a group of Euro-American painters who made portraits of Native Americans between 1915 and 1927—and the Tiwa-speaking Taos Pueblo people who collaborated with them as models. In working with the medium of clay, Folwell grounds Native women's leadership in pottery making as a pattern of renewal—a constant in this series. A painted dialogue on the intertwined relationships of Taos Pueblo community members and the TSA, the *Taos Light* vessels contribute an illustrative social commentary to consider how the past shapes cross-cultural interactions of the present and future for Pueblo people.

Folwell sets up this dynamic by reimagining the TSA's well-known paintings from her Indigenous perspective on the cultures and locales in focus. Her *Taos Light* series honors and enacts patterns of renewal in the continued epistemologies and ontologies of Pueblo communities through the constants of pottery making and cross-cultural dialogue. These artworks contribute to Pueblo peoples' history of exchange, including intertribal exchange, ongoing since time immemorial, and exchange with people from abroad such as the Spanish and Anglo cultures, who began occupying the region in the

late sixteenth and mid-nineteenth centuries, respectively.

The ongoing history of these intercultural exchanges as reflected in Folwell's *Taos Light* series expresses a "kin-space-time constellation." An Indigenous lens of understanding coined by scholar Laura Harjo (Mvskoke), a kin-space-time constellation "operationalizes multiple dimensions . . . the spirit world, the practices of ancestors, cosmology, ceremony, and the everyday social reproduction of the community."[4] Kin-space-time constellations manifest in the shared and enduring significance of Indigenous places among Indigenous communities in relation.

Harjo writes, "Indigenous futurity places us in a conversation . . . with the unactivated possibilities of our past, present, and future relatives. . . . Futurity is space, place, and temporality produced socially by people, including relatives located in the past, present, and future. It invokes many . . . yet-to-be imagined possibilities."[5] As such, patterns of "kin-space-time envelopes," as continuances of Indigenous practices, make up kin-space-time constellations. A kin-space-time envelope embodies a concept of futurity where past, present, and future generations of Indigenous community members become tethered through creative expressions that remain extant beyond the time period in which they were produced.[6] As Harjo writes, "Through storytelling, art, and the self-publishing of community knowledge . . . cultural workers are creating futurity in the present moment, dreaming of a (re)imagined future where narratives about Indigenous people are more complex and aligned with lived, felt knowledge."[7]

Tethered to the early tourism era of the 1880s to 1910s, Folwell's *Taos Light* series of social commentary vessels in clay carries on the legacy of Native women artists' leadership in the Southwest region in the arenas of pottery making and exhibitions of the medium. Folwell's vessel forms and imagery create new associations within the kin-space-time constellations and kin-space-time envelopes of today in Taos and northern New Mexico. In the discussion that follows, I analyze the multi-play, or strategically layered, visual devices that Folwell employs in her *Taos Light* series. I consider the ways that these meanings shift in the context of the works' presentation at two institutions in Taos, New Mexico—the Couse-Sharp Historic Site and the Harwood Museum of Art. While Folwell grounds her *Taos Light* series in a local focus, its international implications offer a layer of reciprocity that propels its themes

both outward and inward at once.

In the analysis below, I apply Tuscarora scholar and artist Jolene Rickard's four-part methodology for reading Native art through deep considerations of inspiration, formal analysis, learning through making, and function in Western and Indigenous cultures.[8] To contextualize Folwell's collaborative leadership process, I extend Rickard's method to critically situate the artist's *Taos Light* vessels and their associated exhibitions at the intersection of four foundational lenses. These considerations are mentorship and education, local and international reach, interdisciplinary forms, and place-specific interactions.

**Beginnings**

Folwell began the first work in the *Taos Light* series in Taos in 2016, after moving there in 2015 following several years of living in Tucson, Arizona. She drew inspiration from her time spent with the art collections at the Couse-Sharp Historic Site in Taos, where her husband, Davison Packard Koenig, was hired as a consultant and now serves as executive director and curator. Drawing upon the site's pottery collection, Koenig, Folwell, and her mother, potter Jody Folwell, curated *Visionaries in Clay: Pueblo Pottery, Past and Present*. In this exhibition, twelve Pueblo ceramicists paired new or existing works with some of the site's vessels—a historic collection of Southwest Native pottery brought together by E. I. Couse, a founding TSA member, for use in his paintings. As one of the featured artists, Susan Folwell created the site-specific vessel *The Artist* (2016; figs. 1–2). This community-driven exhibition was on view June through October 2016 in the site's Luna Chapel—the first studio in Taos of J. H. Sharp, another TSA founding member. This work marked the beginning of Susan Folwell's *Taos Light* series, an ongoing body of work that marks the longest amount of time the artist has pursued both a particular series and subject matter to date.

Fig. 1. Susan Folwell (Santa Clara Pueblo, b. 1970). *The Artist*, 2016. Santa Clara Pueblo clay, slips, acrylic paint, wood stain, India ink. Private collection. Photo: Michelle Lanteri.

Fig. 2. Susan Folwell. *The Artist* (verso), 2016. Santa Clara Pueblo clay, slips, acrylic paint, wood stain, India ink. Private collection. Photo: Michelle Lanteri.

The *Visionaries in Clay* curatorial statement provides insight on the conditions from which Folwell birthed her *Taos Light* series.

> In the Luna Chapel, the exhibition *Visionaries in Clay: Pueblo Pottery, Past and Present* presents highlights of Native artists, both historic and contemporary, who have helped define our understandings of Native identity and cultural expression through their bold work. The exhibition draws from the strong historic pottery collection of E. I. Couse and from contemporary Native artists in northern New Mexico. The historic potters were visionary for their experimentation in form and designs imbued with symbolic meaning. The contemporary potters are visionary for their continued experimentation that challenges stereotypes of "Indian" and force us to confront our own biases and perceptions.[9]

True to the vision cited here, Folwell created *The Artist*, her first *Taos Light* vessel, as a painted narrative of critical commentary. Her artwork and the exhibition's scope of vision can be understood to have been produced within the northern New Mexico "exhibitionary complex," an industry term that scholar Tony Bennett defines as "a self-monitoring system of looks in which the subject and object positions can be exchanged."[10]

Folwell grew up with artists all around her at Santa Clara Pueblo, and she came from a family of ceramicists. As pottery making was a family affair, she regularly sifted clay—or removed the clay's impurities—and gathered manure for the pottery's outdoor firing in her younger years. The practice of making pottery is a maternal legacy in the family, which Susan's mother, Jody Folwell, learned from her own mother Rose Naranjo. Naranjo had learned pottery from her grandmother, who had become her primary caregiver when she was only three years old upon her mother's passing.[11] Reflecting on the countless memories of gathering with her family to make pottery, Susan Folwell states,

> I was so lucky to be immersed in so much mentorship. It was such a daily part of life with memories of—it's late night, it's summer, it's right before Indian Market, and your grandmother's there, your aunts are there, cousins are all gathered around a table. Some may be polishing pottery, some may still be sanding their pottery. Some may still be trying to get air bubbles out. But you're having a community conversation, and when one person's done with the project they were doing, it's like, okay, now all my five pots are sanded, give me yours. . . . Or if they're done polishing, they're like, here, give me your sanded pots . . . just this really beautiful, interwoven community that can happen. And that still happens quite a bit around clay.[12]

Pottery is a kin-space-time envelope, or continued legacy, in the family: Susan's sister, Polly Rose Folwell; her aunts Tessie Naranjo, Rina Swentzell, Dolly Naranjo-Neikrug, and Nora Naranjo Morse; her cousins Roxanne Swentzell and Jody Naranjo; and her nieces Rose Simpson and Kaa Folwell, all from Santa Clara Pueblo, have worked in clay styles that reflect their own perspectives and connections to the medium and its time-immemorial history.

For more than forty years, Susan Folwell has observed her mother, Jody, making clay vessels in a range of styles. In these experiences, Folwell witnessed, and continues to witness, her mother exploring an interdisciplinary blending of art forms within pottery. These variations extend from sgraffito, or scratched, bird designs on a sienna ground to social commentary narratives in polychrome reflecting her perspectives on national politics and being a Native artist in the Southwest art world. Folwell has witnessed her mother exploring new aesthetics for her vessels over the course of several decades. These explorations include combining an asymmetrical neck and an unpolished lip with a brown-toned surface, or adding a new layer to the familial practices of gathering, processing, and aging clay to build pottery vessels coil by coil.

In the 1970s and 1980s, Jody was one of the first Pueblo ceramicists of her generation to show experimental work in fine art venues, particularly at Gallery 10, a commercial space owned by Lee Cohen in Scottsdale, Arizona.[13] This was a time when most galleries did not take chances on unfamiliar styles of Pueblo pottery, although ironically, San Ildefonso Pueblo artists Maria and Julian Martinez's internationally renowned black-on-black vessels were in demand, despite being an unfamiliar Pueblo pottery style when they emerged during the early tourism period. The matte and burnished black surfaces, a new technique featuring adaptations of Mimbres designs, introduced a different approach to Pueblo pottery in the late 1910s and the early 1920s and has since become a customary style of the family's descendants who make pottery.

In another innovative turn in the late twentieth century, Jody Folwell painted social commentary narratives from her lived experiences on her pottery vessels. While her works were technologically savvy and aesthetically appealing, her social commentary potentially turned some buyers off from collecting her vessels because they confronted the everyday and

sometimes harsh or humorous realities of life from her perspective as a Native female artist. Because of this tension between Jody's style and the Native art market's expected conventions, Cohen's gallery representation allowed Jody to break into the art world, leading to the Heard Museum's purchase of her work in 1979 and a 1985 Best of Show award at the Santa Fe Indian Market.[14] This partnership opened an important avenue for Pueblo potters who want to explore clay vessels' potential for narrative political themes and vivid color palettes of figurative imagery. Jody's trailblazing work in this Pueblo pottery style opened up a broader world of imagery for fellow Pueblo artists to explore, for which numerous Pueblo artists, including Susan, have achieved renown over the years.

Jody's legacy lives on in Susan's vessels, which both convey compelling stories and take chances in their reflections on current epochs. Thus, both women carry forward legacies of leadership in Pueblo arts and exhibition practices. They continue to contribute to the ongoing history of Native women creating new art forms for audiences in both the Southwest region and the northern New Mexico exhibitionary complex.

Fittingly, Susan's first connections to Taos came from her mother. Jody had relocated to Taos Pueblo from Santa Clara Pueblo with her family during middle and high school due to her father's work as a Baptist minister.[15] Jody met Susan's father, Henry Folwell, at the Taos Plaza, when she and her sister, Tessie, were eating ice cream.[16] Henry, an artist from Denver, Colorado, made paintings of the Taos Pueblo community.[17] After earning a degree from the College of Santa Fe in history and political science, Jody returned to Santa Clara Pueblo to raise her children with Henry, who encouraged her to be a full-time artist.[18] Of her father's influence, Susan recalls, "I've always been much more two-dimensional. With my father being a painter, I just felt I had inherited that. . . . I've found a way to actually be a two-dimensional person on a three-dimensional object, which is always a challenge. In many ways, I've come to realize the plain fact that clay's a canvas for me."[19] Her father's history as a painter and mother's work as a clay artist offer a familial backdrop to Susan's retellings of the TSA paintings in her *Taos Light* series.

Folwell studied photography and design at the College for Creative Studies in Detroit, blending aspects of these disciplines with Native clay to arrive at her ceramic vessels painted with poignant narratives. Within this style, she has

produced work shaped by comic books, tattoo imagery, political controversy, and the pottery history of Tewa-speaking Pueblos. Such work includes her *Cry Baby* series, inspired by an encounter with Roy Lichtenstein's painting *Drowning Girl* (1963).[20] In *Love Gun* (2013), Folwell reframed the painting as a tearful self-portrait reflecting the pressures of both working tirelessly to meet exhibition deadlines and reconciling the demands of Native art market expectations for Pueblo pottery with her identity as a female pottery artist from Santa Clara Pueblo.[21] The vessel, a large seed jar, features a square neck and a large painted image of a woman crying while a handgun adorned with roses points at her head—symbols that evoke both a hold-up as well as beauty. Folwell painted the face in comic book colors, while the pottery vessel features Pueblo designs in a palette of earth tones. This pairing speaks to Folwell's struggle to establish her social commentary within the arena of Pueblo pottery—a legacy she carries on from her mother's work in the field.

Other works by Folwell take on the politics of the Southwest art market and tourism through humor. With a canteen body in red, *There Goes the Neighborhood* (2011) ironically bears the imagery from the Fred Harvey Company's advertisements for their "Indian Detours." The composition features a Native woman seated next to a painted pottery vessel and a ladder, looking down at a Harveycar outside of the Pueblo's dwellings. Folwell revised the headline as "Take the Indian-detour Santa Fe in a genuine Harveycar!" Below, the words "There goes the neighborhood" emerge from the woman's unseen mouth as she sits with her back facing the viewer. Complete with the Santa Fe Railway logo and the Harvey thunderbird logo, the vessel demonstrates Folwell's attunement to what she refers to as "a play on play on play."[22] It satirically criticizes the tidal wave of tourism that developed at the turn of the twentieth century, an international marketing vehicle that still supports Native artists, including Folwell herself, today.

Offering more jests as commentary on this phenomenon, Folwell added streaks of white slip to the front and back of the vessel, suggesting vandalization. She replicated a tin Calumet Baking Powder seal on the verso, alluding to the dietary changes that resulted from the influx of industrially made goods from the railroad to the Pueblos. This symbol of the commercialization of Native American

identity also references fry bread, which requires baking powder to make. A staple food in many Native communities in North America, fry bread emerged from forced living on reservations with government annuities. Following in her mother's footsteps, Folwell won a first-place award at the Santa Fe Indian Market for *There Goes the Neighborhood*.[23]

### ***Visionaries in Clay: Pueblo Pottery, Past and Present***

From this prismatic world of inspiration, layered approach, and sharp wit, Folwell's *Taos Light* series emerged in 2016, featuring both experimental form and bright hues. *The Artist* (figs. 1–2 above) depicted artworks from the *Visionaries in Clay* exhibition, including those by her Pueblo contemporaries and from the historic pottery collection, as a kind of mirroring reflection. This water jar with a black square neck reinterprets *An Indian Artist* (ca. 1920), E. I. Couse's sketch of a seated Taos Pueblo man painting a pastoral mural on an adobe wall near pottery vessels that are now part of the Couse-Sharp Historic Site's collection.[24] Reproduced posthumously in the 1938 American Lithographic Company's calendar, Couse's composition offered Folwell both a complicated history and a wealth of content for a "play on play on play."

As identified by Couse's granddaughter Virginia Couse Leavitt, this sketch was adapted into the chromolithograph featured in the calendar by E. Martin Hennings, Couse's fellow TSA member.[25] Because Couse had passed away two years prior, his son, Kibbey, insisted that Hennings create the painting in order to maintain the high level of quality that Couse had become renowned for in his work.[26] In this process, the American Lithographic Company sent a series of revisions to Hennings that included widening the color palette and using a "more rugged-feature type" akin to Couse's figurative style.[27] The final version of the painting used for the chromolithograph plate resulted from the artistry of two sets of hands and several compositional edits from the calendar's committee members. Couse had been involved in this kind of process for some of his paintings-turned-chromolithographs commissioned by the American Lithographic Company and the Santa Fe Railway, both of which featured his works between the mid-1910s and the 1930s.[28]

In addition to becoming a household name through the calendar prints, Couse garnered national and international recognition in exhibitions both at home and abroad. His promotion to a full

academician in the National Academy of Design and training at the Académie Julian in Paris further solidified this status. However, Couse made his paintings from his own gridded photographs, a preparatory practice he hid from the public to uphold an air of the artist's mystique.

Couse was not painting ethnographic imagery, contrary to the interpretation of art critics of his day.[29] Although rendered in a naturalistic style, his paintings reflected his work with models in an ethos of pictorialism.[30] He reimagined the academic genre of history paintings within the context of the Taos Pueblo community and invented mythic and aesthetically pleasing scenes designed to invoke empathy for Native American people. Another irony emerges here when considering Folwell's recontextualization of many of Couse's paintings, which promoted the sale of Pueblo pottery through train travel—the mass transit that drastically changed tribal communities and imposed a cash economy for Native arts onto Pueblo communities.

Folwell's *The Artist* embeds several cross-cultural narratives into a visual storyline. First, her practice of using Native clay as a canvas imbues Santa Clara Pueblo history into the vessel, through its coils and circular base, and establishes the artist as a narrator from a particular place. Second, drawing inspiration from historic ceramics in the site's collection—a San Ildefonso polychrome water jar and one of Hopi-Tewa artist Nampeyo's seed bowls with Sikyatki designs—contributes to a legacy of Native women's leadership in arts and exhibition practices in northern New Mexico. Third, Folwell intersects the past, present, and future by reinterpreting Couse's *An Indian Artist* to feature her contemporaries and their selections from the site's pottery collection. This approach creates layers of new relations between extant artworks, participating artists, and audiences bearing witness to this vessel both in person and virtually. Folwell's process for *The Artist* gives way to a kin-space-time envelope by showing the pattern of renewal in the artworks and people emerging from the same particular place. Folwell's artwork honors the circular patterns of subjects and cross-cultural representation in northern New Mexico: a kin-space-time constellation that has been in existence and evolving for more than a century.

A central tenet of the TSA's painting and exhibition practices was to serve an educational function, specifically "to preserve and promote the native [*sic*] art."[31] In *The Artist*, Folwell's site-specific

tactic twists this principle to emerge from a Santa Clara Pueblo artist's hand as both painting and etching on pottery. Her selections of historic pottery from the Couse-Sharp Historic Site's collection create connections with two leading families in the history of the Tewa-speaking villages' pottery production. The references made are to Nampeyo at the Hopi-Tewa village of Hano, a friend of Couse and his family, and to generations of pottery makers at San Ildefonso Pueblo, the home village of Maria and Julian Martinez. Through his cross-cultural relationships in the region, Couse collected Pueblo pottery for use in his paintings—a concept Folwell reflects back to audiences within her imagery in *The Artist* in the context of the *Visionaries in Clay* exhibition.

A case in point, Folwell features Nampeyo's jar in two places in *The Artist*, in the narrative band next to the Taos Pueblo model and as a band of sgraffito patterns in a lower register. The up-close and distant views of this vessel by Nampeyo represent a multiplicity of perspectives and bridge several related contexts. First, Couse included Nampeyo's vessel in his painting *The Flute Player* (ca. 1903), which depicted a Native man seated and playing the flute while a Native boy, presumably his son, sits listening nearby, adjacent to the disc-shaped jar. Couse had exhibited this painting at the Louisiana Purchase Exposition in St. Louis in 1904, and it was reproduced in the 1933 Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe (ATSF) Railway calendar promoting "Indian detours."[32] These contexts bear significance in terms of multiple representations of Southwest Native cultures through figurative and artistic representations. Adding another layer, the Martinezes had exhibited their art to international audiences at the 1904 exposition, positioning Native pottery as both an accurate representation and an attraction, the latter being a desirable point of interest in the Southwest region.[33]

On the theme of cross-cultural exchange in the *Taos Light* series, Folwell commented, "You are literally interpreting someone else's work that has come before you. . . . It's an interesting circle because, of course, them [the TSA] studying Native people themselves . . . you can kind of feel the circle of them looking at you looking at your people, you're looking at them, you're all just interpreting. Even though it's a hundred years later. It's all still kind of relevant."[34] In the case of *The Artist*, Folwell steps into the position of a cross-temporal interpreter in her visual play of role-swapping in the vessel's painted

narratives and varied design bands.

In the upper and largest band of the work, Folwell depicts a scene of Native community through the group of clay artworks contributed and selected by the Pueblo artists featured in *Visionaries in Clay*. The Taos Pueblo male model holds the most prominent position at the center of this narrative; he is in the process of coiling a round clay vessel. Folwell's reinterpretation of this figure as a pottery artist—a departure from Couse's portrayal of him as a mural painter—emphasizes the central position of clay to Pueblo people, the impetus of the exhibition. Her acknowledgment that the role of Pueblo pottery makers extends across gender throws into question the binary expectations held by many tourists because of a century's worth of marketing Pueblo women as the ceramicists of their villages.

Folwell positioned Diego Romero's *No Pictures Please* (ca. 2015), a bowl made in a brown-and-cream Mimbres-style palette with a checkerboard rim, behind the Taos Pueblo potter, accentuating the role of male potters by example. In his signature style, Romero (Cochiti Pueblo) etched a graphic in the bowl's center. A group of Pueblo women and men dressed in their feast-day regalia poses for a selfie taken by one of the women on a cellular phone camera. An irony arises between Couse's use of photographs for his paintings and the Pueblos' enforcement of a "no photography" rule for tourists visiting on feast days open to the public. The composition reflects multiple layers of staging, both in the Taos Pueblo model's mix-and-match Native apparel from Couse's studio collection and the selfie image taken by Pueblo people on their own terms.

Folwell and Romero's figurative portrayal of Native artists dispels another stereotype—that Pueblo potters of the past and present shy away from naturalistic forms. This point is reinforced both through Folwell's role as a narrative storyteller and Romero's feast-day selfie scene. It also is emphasized by Folwell's representation of a figurative clay sculpture in *Visionaries in Clay* by her niece, Rose Simpson. Simpson's work is a seated figure holding its hands and arms upwards to frame its face that is painted in white (see fig. 2). This sculpture reflects Simpson's interpretations of the constant presence and influence of her Santa Clara Pueblo ancestors, conveying a pattern of renewal inherent to pottery making. This meaning is emphasized by Folwell's curatorial positioning of Simpson's artwork in the *Visionaries in Clay* gallery

with two more figurative sculptures: a self-portrait in a standing pose also created by Simpson and a seated self-portrait made by Simpson's mother, Roxanne Swentzell. The themes of legacy and self-reflection form the central thread of this exhibition through the pairings and the strategic installation.

Building upon matriarchal legacy, Folwell includes two bands of abstract motifs in *The Artist* borrowed from both Nampeyo and the San Ildefonso potters, each occupying its own register and making connections between the past, present, and future of the Tewa-speaking villages and their pottery. In the middle band, Folwell reinterprets Nampeyo's Sikyatki designs from their original red and black palette over a white ground as an etched area of cream and sienna. The brown tone of this band links the piece to her mother Jody's work and their family's renowned sgraffito designs. This matrilineal connection becomes pronounced in the vessel's interior rim. There, Folwell painted a series of orange X forms—a family symbol that Jody has also turned sideways in her work, using it as an oblique reference to the mission church at Santa Clara Pueblo. Just above the vessel's red base, Folwell painted a band of alternating white circles and vertical lines—a visual reference to a pattern borrowed from the San Ildefonso Pueblo water jar.

*The Artist* evokes intersecting patterns of renewal within a site-specific context. The narrative portrayed on the vessel references several facets of cross-cultural relationships, reflected in the borrowed imagery throughout. These include the supportive community upheld by contemporary Pueblo potters as well as the influence and growth of Pueblo pottery through the TSA painters' promotion of Native arts. The continuation of the Tewa-speaking villages' pottery making, upheld by matriarchs like those at Santa Clara and San Ildefonso Pueblos, carries these legacies of cross-cultural exchange into ever-expanding contexts, as exemplified by this first vessel in Folwell's *Taos Light* series. This process embodies generations of Pueblo pottery artists creating kin-space-time envelopes through their work, which make up a kin-space-time constellation, forming a continuum between time immemorial, the recent past, the present moment, and the future ahead for Pueblo communities.

## ***Through the Looking Glass*** **at the Harwood Museum of Art**

From a single vessel made in 2016, Folwell's *Taos Light* series grew into a body of work that fueled her

exhibition *Susan Folwell: Through the Looking Glass*, on view from July 2019 to January 2020 at the Harwood Museum of Art in Taos, New Mexico (see figs. 3–4). As the exhibition's curator, Folwell juxtaposed her vessels with paintings by the TSA in order to call attention to the shared history of Taos as depicted through an exchange of cross-cultural perspectives between the early twentieth century and the early twenty-first century—a kin-space-time envelope

Fig. 3. Installation view of *Susan Folwell: Through the Looking Glass* at the Harwood Museum of Art, Taos, New Mexico. Photo: Michelle Lanteri.

Fig. 4. Installation view of *Susan Folwell: Through the Looking Glass* at the Harwood Museum of Art, Taos, New Mexico. Photo: Michelle Lanteri.

taking the form of an active visual conversation.[35]

This combination of pottery and paintings reveals the ways in which Southwest Native pottery and the TSA paintings created a dialogue during the early tourism period. These art forms worked, and continue to work, in collaboration to promote Native life and arts of the Southwest. As such, this dynamic established a strong platform for Native art sales and representation in northern New Mexico during the early twentieth century that persists today. Reflecting these internal and external stances, the exhibition title refers to Lewis Carroll's 1871 novel *Through the Looking-Glass* (the

sequel to *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*), providing a cross-cultural context from that era that is still familiar to today's audiences. Thus, in a "play on play on play," Folwell steps into two roles simultaneously—those of the author, like Carroll, and the protagonist, like Alice. A quotation from the book offers insights into the orientation of Folwell's exhibition: "Why, it's a Looking-glass book, of course! And if I hold it up to a glass, the words will all go the right way again."[36] Folwell applies this methodology in many aspects in her curation of this exhibition.

One instance of this approach allows Folwell's pottery to bridge the time period of the TSA paintings with the current moment of the exhibition. To this end, the majority of the TSA paintings displayed include portraits, landscapes, and still lifes that do not feature pottery, despite its strong presence in many of Couse and the group's works. Furthermore, Folwell's vessels assume the role held by Native women potters during the early tourism era, thereby building upon their legacy of leadership in artistic and display practices. Folwell's exhibition contributes to the ongoing kin-space-time constellation within both the specific locale and cross-cultural relationality of Taos. Her foregrounding of her vessels places a Native interpretation of Taos's history at the center of a conversation with the TSA paintings to connect the early tourism era with present-day history in the making. As a clay artist from Santa Clara Pueblo, Folwell holds multigenerational connections to Taos, her current home, through her grandmother and parents. Her *Taos Light* series offers a foundation for and homage to her very existence, as well as to the family legacy of her father painting imagery of Taos Pueblo and her mother making pottery with social commentary narratives. These familial traditions merge the legacies of Pueblo clay artists with those of the TSA painters—with Folwell's *Taos Light* series and *Through the Looking Glass* exhibition embodying the next generation.

With this in mind, Folwell's curation also offers viewers an opportunity to consider women's and men's roles as complementary in Pueblo communities. She does this by bringing together representations of women's work and accomplishments, like baking bread and producing pottery, and men's responsibilities and achievements, like serving as religious leaders and engaging in a successful hunt. Both Pueblo women and men worked as models for the TSA to support their families in the new cash economy.

Both women's and men's activities contributed to the continuance of Pueblo communities of the period. Both Folwell's and the TSA's artworks underscore the Pueblo belief that Mother Earth supports all life. In a Pueblo worldview, Mother Earth does this through the movement of the wind and water, the gift of clay that fuels the life cycle of adobe homes, animals and plants of the land and streams, and the energy of the people that becomes clouds upon their passing.[37]

The Harwood Museum of Art, the site of the exhibition, is an adobe building complex in the Pueblo Revival style. It holds significance as the first space in Taos where local artists displayed their work for both local and international audiences, beginning around 1924.[38] These have included emerging and established artists. The Harwood has showcased paintings by members of the TSA, figurative wood carvings by Patrociño Barela, and collections of Hispanic textiles and retablos (devotional paintings on wood panels), as well as Native-made artworks such as pottery.[39] At the time of this writing, the museum's mission reads as follows: "The Harwood Museum of Art celebrates Taos' artistic legacy, cultivates current connections through art, and inspires a creative future."[40] The museum features permanent galleries devoted to the TSA, Taos modernist artists of the mid-twentieth century, Hispanic artists of the region, and contemporary artists from a variety of cultures. It is worth noting that Folwell's exhibition was presented in the TSA area that is named the Dorothy and Jack Brandenburg Gallery after the daughter and son-in-law of TSA member Oscar Berninghaus and his wife, Emelia.[41]

The museum began as the Harwood Foundation in 1923, established by Elizabeth "Lucy" Harwood, whose late husband, Burt Harwood, was a painter of Southwest portraits and scenes but was not granted membership into the TSA. The Pueblo-style complex was formerly the Harwoods' home, which they had renovated to run on its own electrical generator—the first residence in Taos to do so.[42] The foundation served as the town's only library, with Lucy as community librarian, and the educational exchange in this space grounds its history as a place of international dialogue and learning.[43] This coincided with the international reach of the TSA's exhibition circuit, which brought artists and visitors to the area.[44] In 1935 the Harwood Foundation became part of the University of New Mexico, a status it continues to hold today, and it ceased operating

as a library in the early 1980s.[45] The museum, which has been listed on the National Register of Historic Places since 1976, underwent significant renovations and expansions in 1937 and again in 1997.[46]

Shown in local and international exhibitionary complexes from approximately 1915 to 1927, the TSA's paintings presented imagery of Taos Pueblo—the area's original inhabitants—that portrayed them as an artistic people in order to invoke empathy from viewers. Depictions of the people of Taos Pueblo and their dances, arts, music, and adobe dwellings in the TSA paintings and ATSF calendars, which reached both elite and mass audiences, transformed these audiences into visitors who sought out this locale across long distances. The timing of these works holds significance, as 1915 marked nine years since President Theodore Roosevelt seized the Taos Pueblo people's sacred site, Blue Lake, and placed it under the jurisdiction of the United States Forest Service, specifically the Taos Forest Reserve and the Carson National Forest.[47] The area comprised thirty thousand acres, and under federal regulations, the Taos Pueblo community could not freely engage in their religious practices at Blue Lake, with the exception of three days each August with advance notice.[48] In the early twentieth century, the federal government opened the land to ranchers for cattle and sheep grazing by permit as well as for recreational purposes, including fishing and camping.[49] After sixty-four years of federal litigation, President Richard Nixon signed the Harris-Griffin Bill, which returned the stewardship of Blue Lake and the surrounding lands to Taos Pueblo.[50] The Harwood Museum of Art holds the Taos Pueblo community's historical documents of this struggle in an archive that can be accessed only by the Pueblo's permission.

This site-specific history adds a subtext to *Through the Looking Glass*. Folwell draws upon the complexity of the interdependence of the ongoing cross-cultural relations of Taos in her *Taos Light* series. Building upon a pattern of renewal, she prompts viewers in a twenty-first century context to consider the long-term effects of the early tourism era and its contemporary relevance particular to Taos. To do this, she paired more than nine of her *Taos Light* vessels, many on loan from private collectors, with nineteen paintings by the TSA, several of which were on loan from northern New Mexico institutions.[51] These included the Couse-Sharp Historic Site, the Taos Art Museum at Fechin House, and the New Mexico Museum of Art.

The exhibition also included a bronze sculpture by Ed Smida titled *The Goose Hunter* (2016). Smida, an Anglo artist based in northern New Mexico, portrayed in this work a Native man using a walking stick and carrying a bird on his back. The man is in the process of journeying home. Smida's sculpture is based on Couse's painting *The White Goose* (1911). Through a variety of loans and associations, the exhibition emerged from many layers of collaboration and cross-cultural dialogue.

On a backdrop of walls painted green, with pine vigas above and wooden floors below, *Through the Looking Glass* conveyed a more mature moment in Folwell's "play on play on play" strategy in her *Taos Light* body of work, building on its beginnings in *The Artist*. The exhibition hinged on stories of place retold through Folwell's painted narratives on clay vessels. Folwell achieved this retelling through reinterpretation by appropriating and subsequently reworking a group of TSA compositions. She recontextualized these paintings as a visual device through a changed perspective from her position as a Santa Clara Pueblo pottery artist. In this process, she created reflections on a specific moment in time brought together in the Brandenburg Gallery at the Harwood Museum of Art to intermesh a mirror of the past with a mirror from the present.

In *Through the Looking Glass*, Folwell situated the gallery as a stage of mirrors, in which the TSA's Anglo paintings of Pueblo life and her portrayals of Pueblo life on painted clay vessels anchored multiple perspectives. As a female Pueblo artist and the exhibition's curator, Folwell conjoined these cross-cultural narratives to shape the gallery as a space of many mirrors that invited viewers to participate in a carousel of visual negotiation. She also strategically included an artwork that references her Native name and functions as an origin story and self-portrait at once.

This vessel is named *Blue Mountain* (2019; fig. 5). It is a shallow bowl with a dark rim surrounding an adobe-colored interior scene of a bear in a desert landscape. It conveys a culture hero story of a bear leading the Santa Clara Pueblo people to water, offering a continued source of nourishment. Sikyatki-style designs, reminiscent of Nampeyo's work, surround the vignette of the bear. Placed between two of W. Herbert "Buck" Dunton's paintings, *Portrait of John Reyna* (n.d.) at left and *Ginger* (ca. 1932) at right (see fig. 6), *Blue Mountain* situates Folwell as the narrator of the exhibition's series

Fig. 5. Susan Folwell. *Blue Mountain*, 2019. Santa Clara Pueblo clay, slips, acrylic paint, wood stain, India ink. The Harwood Museum of Art, Taos, New Mexico. Courtesy of the artist. Photo: Michelle Lanteri.

of visual exchanges. Reyna, representing a man from Taos Pueblo, and Ginger, portrayed by an Anglo model, suggest the interwoven dialogues between cultures in Taos. This juxtaposition even alludes to Folwell's bicultural heritage and her intercultural marriage. The depth of her "play on play on play" comes through at both personal and community levels while speaking to parallel dynamics taking place on a global stage.

This strategy enacts a gesture of reciprocity, or process of giving and receiving in equal value. As a "play on play on play," Folwell's curation allows her to marry the TSA imagery of Pueblo people and their arts with her retelling of this imagery as a Pueblo female artist and curator. In doing so, she carries on Native women artists' leadership in northern New Mexico. As I discuss below, several pairings reveal the centrality of mentorship and education, local and international reach, interdisciplinary forms, and place-specific interactions as the ongoing manifestations of this

Fig. 6. Installation view of *Susan Folwell: Through the Looking Glass*, showing Susan Folwell's *Blue Mountain* (2019) at center; W. Herbert "Buck" Dunton's *Portrait of John Reyna* (n.d., oil on canvas, collection of the Taos Art Museum at Fechin House) at left; and W. Herbert "Buck" Dunton's *Ginger* (ca. 1932, oil on canvas, collection of the Harwood Museum of Art) at right. Photo: Michelle Lanteri.

feminine legacy rooted in collaboration.

Adding another layer of meaning to its form, Folwell paired *The Artist* (figs. 1–2) with *The Cacique* (1932; fig. 7). At the time of the exhibition, this was the only painting by E. I. Couse in the Harwood Museum of Art's collection. It filled an important role institutionally as a tether between the museum and an artist who was instrumental in promoting Taos to national and international audiences.[52] Folwell's pairing of *The Artist* and *The Cacique* also carries another significance. This is the only TSA painting included in the exhibition that features pottery in its composition, serving as a testament to Native women and their leadership in arts practices in northern New Mexico. By placing vessels adjacent to the cacique who overlooks Taos Pueblo, this painting blends both

Fig. 7. Installation view of *Susan Folwell: Through the Looking Glass*, showing Susan Folwell's *The Artist* (2016) at left and E. I. Couse's *The Cacique* (1932, oil on canvas, collection of the Harwood Museum of Art) at right. Photo: Michelle Lanteri.

female and male presence to create balance in terms of leadership, gender, and responsibilities within the community. Seated on a Pueblo house rooftop, the cacique is the largest and uppermost figure in the painting. His position suggests a connection to his Pueblo ancestors, whose energy embodies the clouds overhead. The work also incorporates another layer of meaning with the return of Blue Lake and its surrounding lands to Taos Pueblo.

As a material provided by Mother Earth, the clay of the vessels shown creates feminine associations between the Pueblo architecture and the adjacent horno, or outdoor clay oven, depicted at left in *The Cacique*. At this hearth, a woman is shown baking bread while another figure and two children stand nearby. Depictions of community sustenance like this provide visual examples of the collaboration that serves as a supportive foundation for the cacique to act as one of Taos Pueblo's primary leaders. Folwell's narrative in *The Artist* carries forward this idea of a foundation as well, with the narrative band showing the clay artworks of her Pueblo contemporaries supported by the pottery vessels of Native female ceramicists of earlier generations, referencing familial and maternal contexts. The large pictorial band of *The Artist* functions similarly to the compositional space of the painting as a window into a constructed world that evokes intergenerational relationships grounding the continuance of the Pueblos. As her own contribution to these relations, Folwell's interdisciplinary practice of using clay as a canvas emerges as a portal between time periods in the northern New Mexico area.

The elements of this painting all allude to themes of local and international reach. The clay vessels suggest the ancestral practice of pottery making at the Pueblos, which began in domestic and trade contexts and then expanded to an art and commerce function during the early tourism period. The Pueblo architecture, providing dwellings and protection for the people, symbolizes the combined support of Mother Earth and the community's women in nurturing these structures. Historically, women plastered the adobe walls, a practice that continues today but now includes men, similar to the way pottery making spans gender while also signifying Native women's legacies and leadership.[53]

The horno builds on this context while illustrating the Pueblo peoples' integration of this Spanish technology of bricks and mortar covered with adobe. Women continue to use this beehive-shaped oven to bake bread for the community, particularly during annual feast days, when the Pueblos open their villages to the public to partake in a meal that usually includes oven bread. Taken together, the pottery, architecture, and horno in *The Cacique* all visually reference Native women's leadership in arts and community building in northern New Mexico. This imagery traveled internationally through photography and paintings that promoted Southwest

tourism in exhibitions, calendars, and publications. The pairing of *The Artist* and *The Cacique* underscores the interdependence of the creative production of pottery making and community leadership, both directly linked to the lands of northern New Mexico.

Another pairing further explores the connections between Native women's mentorship and education, local and international reach, interdisciplinary forms, and place-specific interactions within the northern New Mexico area. Folwell's *Baking Bread* (2018; figs. 8–9) depicts four vignettes of Pueblo women baking bread in hornos. Adjacent to this artwork

Fig. 8. Susan Folwell. *Baking Bread*, 2018. Santa Clara Pueblo clay, acrylic paint, wood stain, India ink. Private collection. Photo: Michelle Lanteri.

Fig. 9. Susan Folwell. *Baking Bread* (detail), 2018. Santa Clara Pueblo clay, acrylic paint, wood stain, India ink. Private collection. Photo: Michelle Lanteri.

*Winter in New Mexico* (ca. 1930; see fig. 10) by Walter Ufer depicts two Pueblo women walking through a mountain pass. Both artworks show women supporting women within Pueblo communities while offering a social commentary on popular imagery marketed as a kind of Southwest mythology to tourists during the early twentieth century. Matthew J. Martinez (Ohkay Owingeh) and Patricia C. Albers have contributed an insightful analysis of these categories of images within the scope of twentieth-century photography. They write:

> The mythical "look" of the Pueblo Southwest was sustained by a narrow range of pictorial subjects and styles, endlessly replicated in the work of different photographers. One apt example is the image of women baking bread in the beehive-shaped ovens the northern Pueblos call a *horno* [Spanish] or *panteh* [Tewa]. Whether pictures of this activity come from Isleta and Cochiti in 1910 or Taos and Tesuque in 1940, they follow nearly identical stylistic conventions. All of them depict their subjects wearing a traditional *manta* [dress] and shawl. Staged or taken from "real life," this sort of stock image represents a classical embodiment of the prelapsarian [a kind of Eden-like] imagining of the Southwest.[54]

Fig. 10. Installation view of *Susan Folwell: Through the Looking Glass*, showing Walter Ufer's *Winter in New Mexico* (ca. 1930, oil on canvas, collection of the Harwood Museum of Art) at left; Susan Folwell's *Baking Bread* (2018) at center, and E. Martin Hennings's *Discussing the Crops* (ca. 1930, oil on board, collection of the Harwood Museum of Art) at right. Photo: Michelle Lanteri.

In her reproduction of an iconic image of Pueblo women baking bread, Folwell shifts the perspective from that of an outsider looking in to one that looks both outward and inward. Through this multiplicity of stances, Folwell's vessel offers a reinterpretation of Ufer's painting, *The Bakers* (1917), a work not on view. This strategy reflects her lived experience and that of her ancestors, emphasizing their collaborative participation in baking bread and making both pottery and staged imagery.

A connection to complementary gender roles is also revealed in a painting by E. Martin Hennings that bookended *Baking Bread* in the exhibition. At the vessel's right, Hennings's *Discussing the Crops* (ca. 1930; see fig. 10) depicts three Pueblo men standing together in a field with clouds overhead and mountains in the background. The painting symbolizes the men's responsibility for a healthy growing season, the prayers they put forth to appeal for this sustenance, and the wheat that the women winnow to make bread.

In reflecting on her *Baking Bread* vessel, Folwell discussed Ufer's painting style as an impetus for this piece portraying Pueblo community life. She stated:

> What I love about the *Baking Bread* piece is I've always thought of Walter Ufer as . . . no matter what his subject is, there always just seems to be this momentum. You can almost feel the wind. His clouds are very specific to his sky, very specific, even though he might be doing a portrait of farmhands. You're still feeling the atmosphere that they're in. I'm really proud of the *Baking Bread* piece because I feel like there's movement . . . you can just kind of feel the momentum. Not only just the women working, but it's just kind of in everything else. I think there's an atmosphere that's around it.[55]

Folwell's pairing of *Baking Bread* with *Winter in New Mexico* creates a relationship of absence, presence, reproduction, and allusion.

*Baking Bread* is a terracotta-color vessel with an oval base depicting five Pueblo women in the process of baking bread at two hornos, with the same scene shown in mirror image on the two wider sides of the vessel (see fig. 8). In the background, Pueblo architecture holds the waistline of the vessel while white clouds mark the shoulder area. The narrower sides each show a pair of women removing baked bread from the horno (see fig. 9). The overall shape of the vessel reads similarly to the beehive form of the oven, save for the four bands of rope-like texture Folwell placed at the vessel's neck. Lighter washes of terracotta brushed in wide strokes in the sky portion of the landscape

give an atmospheric effect. Like all of Folwell's *Taos Light* vessels, *Baking Bread* bears a matte finish.

Folwell reflected on the form of the vessel:

> I also feel like the rope, the shape, the body of the piece is good and solid, but the rope kind of lends to visually understanding that the rope is just spinning around the pot. I think that helps with the movement of it. That [the rope] was not my choice. You know the shape of the piece started to make itself. It was another one of those . . . *What is this? How do I finish it? It's getting interesting.* It's very oval. It's got these shoulders but it doesn't. When you look at the top of the piece, it's very oval. It's almost vaginal in a way . . . *How do I finish that? What is that looking like?* So, I think that's why I ended up just making a long coil . . . my very last coil . . . then just accenting the idea of it still just being a coil and breaking it off into a rope, or a texture like rope.[56]

Folwell's sentiments echo those of her grandmother, Rose Naranjo, who described the importance of being "one with the clay," since "the clay says, 'I want to be this, not what you want me to be.'"[57] Folwell's vessel form evokes associations with an earlier generation of Pueblo women potters. The rope alludes to the way that Native women strung this material through the lugs of large pottery canteens that they made to carry water to their homes at the Pueblos and at the Hopi-Tewa village of Hano. The rope texture, together with the narrative scene of baking bread, attests to Native women's leadership in acts of community care through the use of clay in both hornos and pottery making, as well as in art for sale to foreign visitors since the early tourism era.

In Ufer's *The Bakers*, the composition similarly centers on the women and their work of baking bread, though it focuses more tightly on this scene with a framing that ends on either side of the pair of hornos. In contrast, Folwell's reinterpretation opens the scene to a much larger landscape and roots it locally. Folwell portrays four groups of women baking bread to suggest the passing on of intergenerational knowledge. However, as Ufer's painting was not on view in the exhibition, these associations could only be made from knowledge and research beyond the display. Instead, audiences of *Through the Looking Glass* created new associations between Folwell's version of *Baking Bread* and Ufer's *Winter in New Mexico*. This offered a broader perspective for those familiar with Ufer's oeuvre, as one can draw relationships between his different compositions. In *Winter in New Mexico*, two Pueblo women wearing dresses

and long shawls over their heads walk through a mountain pass, one in front of the other. Here, Ufer offers viewers a large sky that is filled with white folding clouds, providing an upper frame to the rock buttes on the other side of the women. Ufer also placed tracks in the snow ahead of the women, communicating a sense of legacy that these women follow, as their forebears have done and descendants will do.

Across from these artworks, Folwell devoted an entire wall to full-length portraits of Native women of the Southwest region (see fig. 11). This curatorial strategy calls attention to the fact that the TSA also collaborated with female models, although the group's portraits and narrative scenes of Native men are more widely circulated. Here, a group of five artworks visualized the multiple roles of Pueblo women. Two portraits by Folwell and three by Victor Higgins offered audiences an opportunity to consider Pueblo women as both pottery makers and portrait sitters at once. These portraits of Native women, blending representation with abstraction, evoke complex narratives in the collective grouping of Anglo and Pueblo perspectives on their subjects. Two pairings within this display emphasize the centrality of feminine leadership in Southwest Native communities, and the multiple forms it can take.

Higgins's *Sleeping Model* (n.d.) (see fig. 12) portrays a Native woman seated in a chair, wearing a floral-patterned dress in orange and white, a red cape, and white moccasins with matching leggings wrapped around her calves. Her hair is pulled back and gathered at the base of her neck, and her head tilts downward, while her hands rest in her lap. She is surrounded by an adobe-colored wall and ground. Her legs are crossed, and her feet rest on a striped rectangular rug. Near the right edge of the composition, a dark shadow surrounds the red cape, suggesting a light source shining diagonally from the opposite side. Another quotation from Carroll's novel offers insights into both Higgins's depiction of the model and Folwell's retelling of this portrait: "'So I wasn't dreaming, after all,' [Alice] said to herself, 'unless—unless we're all part of the same dream.'"[58]

Higgins's painting focuses its attention on the adobe-colored wall and ground that supports the woman. This allusion to adobe architecture, coupled with her moccasins, floral dress, and hairstyle, identifies her as Pueblo. The painting, like the works of both Folwell and the TSA, conveys the strength

Fig. 11. Installation view of *Susan Folwell: Through the Looking Glass*. Works, from left to right: Victor Higgins, *Sleeping Model* (n.d., oil on canvas, collection of the New Mexico Museum of Art); Susan Folwell, *Sleeping Model* (2018; Santa Clara Pueblo clay, acrylic paint, wood stain, India ink; private collection); Susan Folwell, *Higgins "Open Bowl"* (2017; Santa Clara Pueblo clay, slips, acrylic paint, wood stain, India ink; private collection); Victor Higgins, *Nude Study* (n.d., watercolor on paper, collection of the New Mexico Museum of Art); Victor Higgins, *Indian Nude* (n.d., oil on canvas, collection of the Taos Art Museum at Fechin House). Photo: Michelle Lanteri.

of Native women through the combination of adobe—an embodiment of Mother Earth—and the female model shown at work, even while she is asleep. Folwell's reinterpretation of this narrative portrait transposes the figure from Higgins's ground plane to an abstract skyscape (see figs. 12–13).

On this clay vessel, Folwell illustrates Pueblo worldviews of cyclical life through the filter of Higgins's composition. She replaces the striped rug with a sewer grate, reflecting the changes in technology at the Pueblos. Depicted in the same pose as in the Higgins painting, the female figure suggests a woman of a later time than in the

Fig. 12. Installation view of *Susan Folwell: Through the Looking Glass*, showing Victor Higgins's *Sleeping Model* (n.d.) at left and Susan Folwell's *Sleeping Model* (2018) at right. Photo: Michelle Lanteri.

earlier portrayal, creating an illustrated kin-space-time envelope between the two time periods.

Yet the two figures remain connected through the legacy of Pueblo values, and this connection holds visual form in the billowing clouds. These clouds suggest the presence of Pueblo ancestors and the life cycle of Po-wa-ha, the breath that gives life's expressions.[59] This spiraling movement, as a pattern of renewal, echoes through the coils of Folwell's vessel. In this creative expression, Folwell demonstrates Native women's leadership—a legacy intertwined with Mother Earth, whose clay body offers Pueblo people spaces of dwelling and pottery vessels that support life. At the top of Folwell's vessel, an adobe-colored rim visualizes the foundation that Mother Earth provides to Pueblo people. When considered in tandem, Higgins's painting and

Fig. 13. Susan Folwell. *Sleeping Model*, 2018. Santa Clara Pueblo clay, acrylic paint, wood stain, India ink. Private collection. Photo: Michelle Lanteri.

Folwell's vessel convey the Pueblo worldview that all beings connect without separation and that the sacred locates itself in the every-day.[60]

These themes continue in the section of the wall to the right of this pairing. Here, Victor Higgins's *Nude Study* (n.d.) and his *Indian Nude* (n.d.) create a backdrop for Folwell's *Higgins "Open Bowl"* (2017) (see figs. 11, 14–15). When looking at these three works together, the concept of the sketch

Fig. 14. Installation view of *Susan Folwell: Through the Looking Glass*, showing Susan Folwell's *Higgins "Open Bowl"* (2017) at left and Victor Higgins's *Nude Study* (n.d.) at right. Photo: Michelle Lanteri.

Fig. 15. Susan Folwell. *Higgins "Open Bowl,"* 2017. Santa Clara Pueblo clay, slips, acrylic paint, wood stain, India ink. Private Collection. Photo: Michelle Lanteri.

emerges as a key TSA painting practice, which adhered to European academic standards where preparatory studies served as studio references for final works. Folwell's "play on play on play" resignifies this practice by incorporating Mother Earth, in the form of a clay bowl, who both holds and supports the nude model whose back is to the viewer. Her composition echoes that of Higgins's *Nude Study* in its use of abstracted blankets as a backdrop to the woman while offering new insights into nude portraiture. On this topic, Nancy Marie Mithlo (Chiricahua Apache) writes, "Depictions of nudity in Indigenous creative endeavors do not simply mimic . . . but often work in ways that say something altogether different—sending a message of self-empowerment and resiliency."[61] In a visual demonstration of this concept, Folwell's orientation of her portrait of this Pueblo woman as encompassed by a round clay bowl directly references Tewa

worldviews. Specifically, that beings of the current world live through Po-wa-ha (or breath) in the middle place (or earth), with a clay bowl supporting from below and a wicker basket offering protection from above.[62]

The crackled edge of the cream-colored bowl is one of Folwell's signature stylistic elements, borrowed from her mother, Jody. Adding another layer to her mother's visual legacy, Folwell applied gold acrylic paint along this edge, alluding to various forms of value, including the sun and gold as a precious metal that the settlers of New Spain sought to both find and commodify in New Mexico. Herein lies another moment of Folwell's humor and "play on play on play": as the Spanish did not find gold there, the vessel reveals the greater value of Mother Earth, who offers the Pueblo people the precious value of life itself. The protection suggested by the model's body facing downward into the clay demonstrates the Pueblo understanding that people are both made of Mother Earth and supported by her in the cyclical process of life, taking form through her body and returning to her as clay. This cycle of becoming and returning recalls Pueblo creation stories of their arrival into the current world, or era, by emerging upward through the clay, or Mother Earth's body.[63]

Folwell's curated pairings of her own works with Higgins's reveals that they show many sides of a cross-cultural narrative. As a case in point, Higgins's *Indian Nude* (see fig. 11) offers audiences a frontal view of a female Pueblo model, as a counterpoint to the depiction of a subject from behind in his *Nude Study* and Folwell's *Higgins "Open Bowl."* In *Indian Nude*, the woman appears to be asleep, in a similar seated pose to that of *Sleeping Model*. Folwell's curation of this wall exemplified the exhibition's title, *Through the Looking Glass*, by leading audiences through multiple mirrors and the intersecting perspectives reflected in the works: hers as a Pueblo woman artist and Higgins's as an Anglo man and artist. By presenting viewers with these multiple mirrors, Folwell related the concept of the looking glass to traditions of illusionism in painting. As Yvonne Yiu writes, "The mirror can serve the painter as a tool."[64] In her turning of the mirror, Folwell as curator transforms the looking glass into a prism, refracting light in different directions in order to show both commonalities and cultural intersections at once.

Throughout *Through the Looking Glass*, Mother Earth, as seen in the clay and adobe, supports these acts of looking and cross-cultural

exchange in kin-space-time constellations—or embodiments of cultural continuums—in northern New Mexico. As the provider of clay, she maintains the time-immemorial foundation of the place and the people. In turn, Folwell's cyclical vessels, as kin-space-time envelopes, empower the futurity of Pueblo women through the patterns of renewal of pottery making practices and related exhibitions. Thus, Folwell conveys Native women's leadership in her *Taos Light* series by honoring women's roles in Pueblo communities as creative contributors in balance with the roles of Pueblo men. She bridges her personal history and connections to Taos Pueblo and Santa Clara Pueblo with the experiences of both the TSA and the Pueblo models who collaborated with them. By constructing a direct dialogue between her works and the TSA's, she offered glimpses of relatability to viewers who have become familiar with the TSA paintings over the decades.

In nurturing this tether to Pueblo community members of the early tourism era, Folwell builds upon Native women's leadership in the northern New Mexico exhibitionary complex as a kin-space-time constellation. Her pottery series *Taos Light* and its two related exhibitions, *Visionaries in Clay: Pueblo Pottery, Past and Present* and *Susan Folwell: Through the Looking Glass*, act as kin-space-time envelopes, calling for empathy from audiences. In her roles as an artist, narrator, and curator, Folwell demonstrates the prismatic quality of identity and the open-ended possibilities of holding multiple social positions at once—both of which have long been patterns of renewal among Pueblo women. She does this by strategically layering her "play on play on play" narratives and by anchoring her work in practices of mentorship and education, local and international reach, interdisciplinary forms, and place-specific interactions. To conclude this discussion, I (re)turn to Folwell's reflections upon fluidity in time and place:

> The TSA helped introduce Native culture, Native life. . . . It's a living legacy today . . . all of it has this third eye that kind of swirls around you, and it comes together for a reason that way. . . . Clay is a living thing. . . . It's a platform for what you need to say. It really doesn't have to strictly be beautiful. I think, particularly for Native females, and the world is changing quite a bit. . . . Native people will always be community people, but it's nice that you're seeing a lot more individual voice, and I think that's part of the feminism, part of the power. . . . You're just another fish in that stream, moving forward. . . . The only constant in the

world is change. . . . It's the movement and it's the fluidity. It's the liquidity of how we get through life.[65]

[1] Interview with the author, January 26, 2021.

[2] Ibid. Susan Folwell studied art in a post-graduate course at the Idyllwild Arts Academy in California, and she focused on photography and design at the College for Creative Studies in Detroit. Her work is in many museum collections, including the Fred Jones Jr. Museum of Art at the University of Oklahoma, the Eiteljorg Museum of American Indians and Western Art in Indianapolis, and the Minneapolis Institute of Art in Minnesota.

[3] See Roxanne Swentzell, "Flowering Tree Permaculture Institute—Patterns," Karl Duncan, uploaded October 19, 2010, YouTube video, 14:59, https://youtu.be/NGKQFbK-zd8.

[4] Laura Harjo, *Spiral to the Stars: Mvskoke Tools of Futurity* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2019), 28.

[5] Ibid., 30.

[6] Ibid., 28.

[7] Ibid., 30.

[8] Jolene Rickard, "Artist Essay: Frozen in the White Light," in *Watchful Eyes: Native American Women Artists*, ed. Anne Gully (Phoenix, AZ: The Heard Museum, 1994), 18.

[9] "Exhibitions: Visionaries in Clay: Pueblo Pottery, Past and Present," Couse-Sharp Historic Site, accessed May 17, 2021, https://couse-sharp.org/exhibitions/detail/100005.

[10] Tony Bennett, "The Exhibitionary Complex," *new formations* 4 (Spring 1988): 82.

[11] Tessie Naranjo, "Those Naranjo Women: Daughters of the Earth," in *Hearts of Our People: Native Women Artists*, ed. Jill Ahlberg Yohe and Teri Greeves (Minneapolis: Minneapolis Institute of Art; Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2019), 76.

[12] Interview with the author, January 26, 2021. "Indian Market" references the annual Santa Fe Indian Market that takes place every August, usually in outdoor booths throughout downtown Santa Fe, New Mexico.

[13] Ibid.

[14] Adele Cohen, "Jody Folwell," in *The Art of Clay: Timeless Pottery of the Southwest,* ed. Lee M. Cohen (Santa Fe: Clear Light Publishers, 1993), 75.

[15] Ibid., 74.

[16] "Susan Folwell: Santa Clara Pueblo Potter," Medicine Man Gallery podcast, episode 117, uploaded September 9, 2020, YouTube video, 1:07:29, https://youtu.be/ga-kukEXqx4.

[17] Cohen, "Jody Folwell," 74.

[18] Ibid.

[19] Interview with the author, January 26, 2021.

[20] Beth Duckett, "Peering Through Taos Light," *Images Arizona*, accessed May 17, 2021, https://imagesarizona.com/peering-through-taos-light/.

[21] Patricia Lenihan, "Regarding Patterns: Susan Folwell," *Santa Fe New Mexican,* August 18, 2017, https://www.santafenewmexican.com/pasatiempo/art/regarding-patterns-susan-folwell/article_3decb32d-59d2-52d6-a434-52e08be0b31b.html.

[22] Interview with the author, January 26, 2021.

[23] "Susan Folwell," Folwell.Koenig, accessed May 17, 2021, http://www.folwellkoenig.com/susan.html.

[24] Virginia Couse Leavitt, *Eanger Irving Couse: The Life and Times of an American Artist, 1866–1936* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2019), 274–275, 277.

[25] Ibid., 277.

[26] Ibid.

[27] Ibid.

[28] Ibid., 257, 260.

[29] Ibid., 220.

[30] Ibid. "Pictorialism" refers to staged and edited photography of the late 1800s to the early 1900s that largely focused on themes of myth, archetype, and legend. These images were made using glass plate technologies.

[31] Ibid., 234.

[32] Ibid., 190.

[33] Richard L. Spivey, *The Legacy of Maria Poveka Martinez* (Santa Fe: Museum of New Mexico Press, 2003), 167.

[34] Interview with the author, January 26, 2021.

[35] Michelle J. Lanteri, "Review: *Susan Folwell: Through the Looking Glass*, The Harwood Museum of Art," *First American Art Magazine* 24 (Fall 2019): 77.

[36] Lewis Carroll, *Through the Looking-Glass, And What Alice Found There* (London, 1871; Project Gutenberg, 1991), https://www.gutenberg.org/files/12/12-h/12-h.htm.

[37] Rina Swentzell, "Rina Swentzell: An Understated Sacredness," New Mexico PBS KNME-TV, *¡COLORES!* program, uploaded November 30, 2009, YouTube video, 18:21, https://youtu.be/8zHAi-OKN6Vo.

[38] Leavitt, *Eanger Irving Couse*, 301; The Harwood Foundation, *Harwood Museum Collection Handbook* (Tucson, AZ: City Press, 1997), 6.

[39] The Harwood Foundation, *Harwood Museum Collection Handbook*, 6.

[40] "About," The Harwood Museum of Art, accessed November 16, 2023, https://harwoodmuseum.org/about.

[41] Carole Gregory, "Dorothy Berninghaus Brandenberg," Remarkable Women of Taos, accessed May 17, 2021, http://womenoftaos.org/women/profiles-legends?/item/130/Dorothy-Berninghaus-Brandenburg.

[42] The Harwood Foundation, *Harwood Museum Collection Handbook*, 5.

[43] Ibid., 6.

[44] Leavitt, *Eanger Irving Couse*, 302.

[45] The Harwood Foundation, *Harwood Museum Collection Handbook*, 6–7.

[46] Ibid., 7.

[47] Joe S. Sando, *Pueblo Nations: Eight Centuries of Pueblo Indian History* (Santa Fe, NM: Clear Light Publishers, 1992), 98.

[48] Ibid., 98–100.

[49] Ibid., 98–100.

[50] Ibid., 100–101.

[51] Due to loan constraints, Folwell removed and replaced some of her vessels during the run of the exhibition.

[52] Leavitt, *Eanger Irving Couse*, 334–35.

[53] Orlando Romero and David Larkin, *Adobe: Building and Living with Earth* (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1994), 44; Anita Rodriguez and Katherine Pettus, "The Importance of Vernacular Traditions," *APT Bulletin: The Journal of Preserving Technology* 22, no. 3 (1990): 3.

[54] Matthew J. Martinez and Patricia C. Albers, "Imaging and Imagining Pueblo People in Northern New Mexico Tourism," in *The Framed World: Tourism, Tourists and Photography*, ed. Mike Robinson and David Picard (London: Ashgate, 2009; New York: Routledge, 2016), 45.

[55] Interview with the author, January 26, 2021.

[56] Ibid.

[57] Quoted in Stephen Trimble, *Talking with the Clay: The Art of Pueblo Pottery in the 21st Century*, rev. ed. (Santa Fe, NM: School for Advanced Research, 2007), 15.

[58] Carroll, *Through the Looking-Glass.*

[59] Rina Swentzell, "Rina Swentzell: An Understated Sacredness."

[60] Ibid.

[61] Nancy Marie Mithlo, "The Gaze in Indigenous Art: Depictions of The Body and Nudity," in *Making History: IAIA Museum of Contemporary Native Arts*, ed. Nancy Marie Mithlo (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2020), 42.

[62] J. J. Brody and Rina Swentzell, *To Touch the Past: The Painted Pottery of the Mimbres People* (Minneapolis, MN: Weisman Art Museum; New York: Hudson Hills Press, 1996), 20. The clay, as the lower half of the spherical Tewa world where all beings live, embodies Mother Earth and femininity, while the basket signifies the upper half of the Tewa cosmos and is understood as male.

[63] Rina Swentzell, "Rina Swentzell: An Understated Sacredness."

[64] Yvonne Yiu, "The Mirror and the Painting in Early Renaissance Texts," *Early Science and Medicine* 10, no. 2 (2005): 189.

[65] Interview with the author, January 26, 2021.

# 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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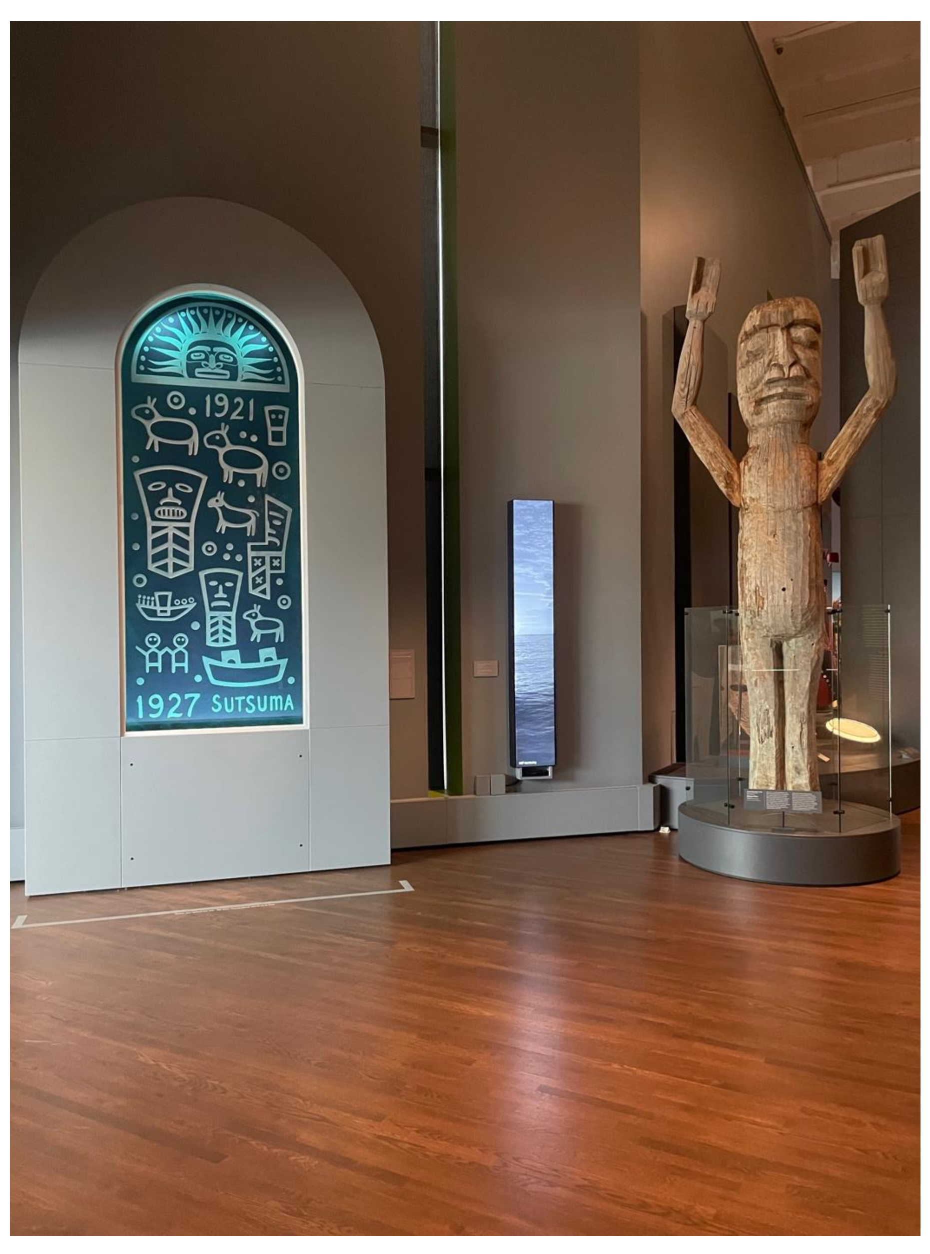

In November 2017 the Denver Art Museum closed the north side of its campus to completely renovate the seven-story building designed by Italian architect Gio Ponti. The 150-million-dollar capital campaign that funded the renovation also funded the reinstallation of the permanent collection galleries housed 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

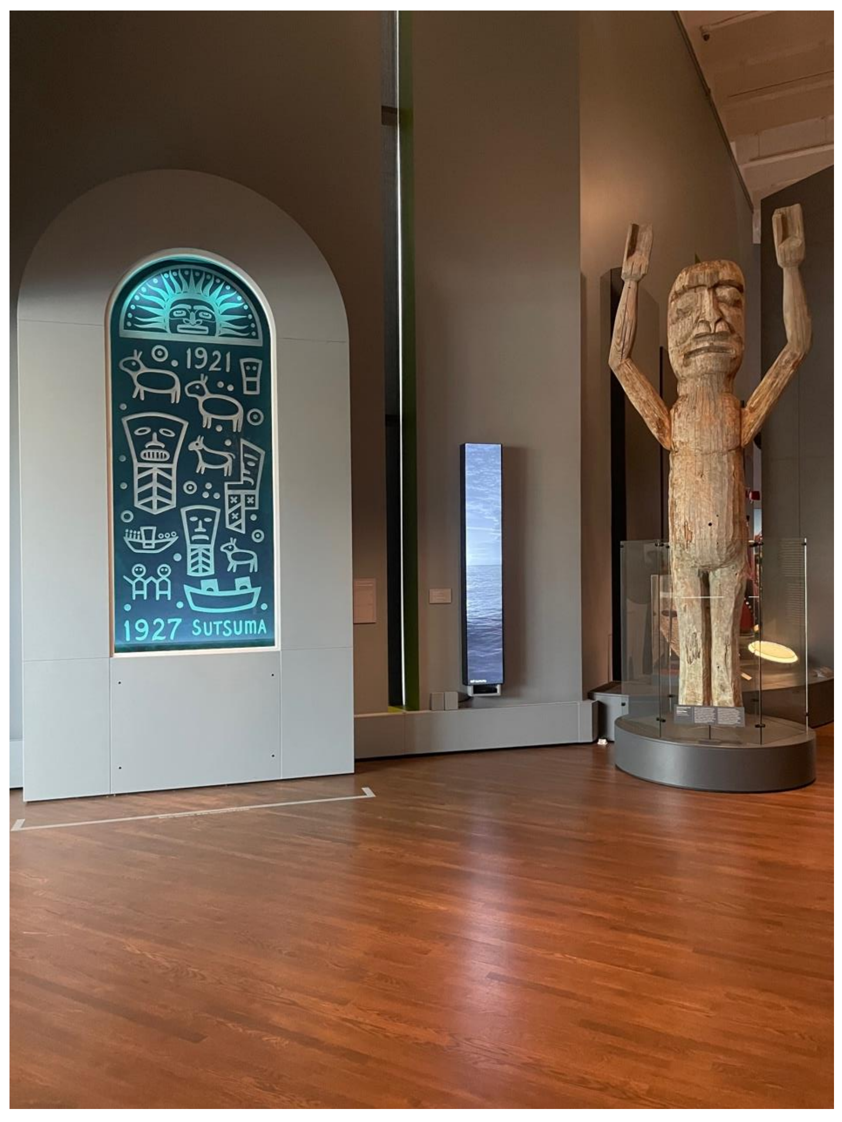


Fig. 1. Installation view, *To Change the Shape of the World*, with Welcome Figure, Northwest Coast and Alaska Native Galleries, Denver Art Museum, Denver, CO. Photo: Christopher Patrello.

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 Kwakwa̱ka̱'wakw broken copper, a 'K̲umuk̲wa̱mł 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 X̲aayda 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.denverart-museum.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 formline 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.denverartmuseum.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.

# Powerful Narratives: Contemporary Native American Art at the Field Museum

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The authors would like to thank the advisory committee for the exhibition, as well as the exhibitions, anthropology collections, and conservation staff who worked with us for over five years to conceive, design, and construct the exhibition. Our heartfelt gratitude as well to all of the Native American community members and contemporary artists who gave generously of their time, expertise, and wisdom to craft the exhibition's stories.

## Introduction

In May 2022 the Field Museum, Chicago, opened the permanent exhibition *Native Truths: Our Voices, Our Stories* (hereafter referred to as *Native Truths*), the culmination of over five years of planning and development. In the course of its preparation, the museum staff experienced the beginning of a paradigm shift in thinking about how to better collaborate with communities whose heritage is represented in our collections. A significant factor contributing to the change was the engagement with contemporary Native American artists. Over fifty new works of art were commissioned, loaned, or, in the case of photographs, reprinted for the exhibition.

We recognized that by including a diversity of artworks we could disrupt our visitors' assumptions about Native American cultural production and practices, allowing them to more deeply appreciate the distinct worldviews and concerns of communities. Furthermore, visitors would be able to recognize individuality and see beyond stereotypes that have so dominated representation. As with all paradigm shifts, the changes influenced by making the exhibition were embedded in longer ongoing processes. In this article, we discuss the antecedents to the creation of the *Native Truths* exhibition in order to provide context for the use of contemporary art in natural history museums with Native American collections. We then discuss more specifically the role of contemporary art in the exhibition, and finally discuss the work of four of the artists displayed in the installation.

## Antecedents and Context

### *Native North American Collections at the Field Museum*

The collection of Native North American material culture has its roots in the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago (World's Fair). The fair was the source of the original Field Museum collection and formed its core.[1] After the museum was established, between 1893 and World War II, curators continued to accumulate material, either leading expeditions themselves or commissioning others to travel to reservations and territories for the collection. In this time period, all of the major museums were racing to collect as much material as possible, with the belief that Native Americans were rapidly "vanishing" as a result of exposure to disease, displacement, and assimilation. As amply documented by historians of museums, collectors were often unscrupulous in their practice, resorting to grave robbing, theft, and coercion to obtain

items.[2] Even when collectors purchased items, they tried to pay a minimum amount. The sellers were experiencing immense hardship during this time as they became confined to reservations or military forts or suffered disease epidemics.[3] Additionally, museum archaeologists conducted numerous excavations at sites throughout North America. Ultimately, the Field Museum curators had built one of the largest collections of Native American cultural items, rivaled only by those of the Smithsonian Institution and the American Museum of Natural History. Currently, the Field Museum collection includes over 70,000 items from postsettler time periods (predominantly the nineteenth and twentieth centuries) and over 250,000 items from archaeological excavations. Although the collections span the entire continent, the majority are from the Southwestern United States, the Northwest Coast, and the Plains.[4]

At the time these items were collected, they were largely categorized as "functional" objects, meant to document the lifeways of their makers. Natural history museums that contained cultural material distinguished themselves from art museums by using their collections to illustrate then prevailing theories of cultural evolution. Curators made analogies with theories of biological evolution and framed the collections of cultural material as scientific evidence of the hierarchy in human evolution. They classified the collections' source communities as "simple" societies characterized by lack of political organization and writing systems that were reliant on kinship to structure economic activity and contrasted these to "civilized" societies of the West.[5] If the aesthetic qualities of cultural material were discussed, it was to designate these objects as handicraft or "primitive art," distinguished from European or Western genres that were housed in art museums.

*Decolonization Efforts*

Native Americans, along with other Indigenous peoples, have long protested the treatment of their cultures in Western museums. Since museums were first established, Native people have attempted interventions that countered the ahistorical narratives, collaborating with anthropologists at the American Museum of Natural History and the Smithsonian to provide richer portraits of Native American life. Examples of these professional Native American anthropologists include George Hunt, who worked with Franz Boas; Francis La Flesche, who collaborated with Alice Fletcher; and Ella Deloria, who was a student of

Franz Boas.[6]

Aware of past neglect of Native American contributions, earlier curators at the Field Museum attempted remedies at times. For example, at the Field Museum in the 1960s, curator and archeologist Donald Collier worked with Native Americans in Chicago to put on a festival of the arts that showcased local artisanship to highlight the vibrancy and continued presence of Native Americans and their art.[7] In the early 1970s Pawnee elders worked with the Field Museum's education and exhibitions staff to install an Earth Lodge in the style of late-nineteenth-century dwellings before the Pawnee were relocated from Nebraska to Oklahoma. They also contributed to the development of training materials used by docents who did regular talks in the Earth Lodge for school groups and visitors. The Field Museum's curator of the Pacific Collections, John Terrell, also undertook extensive collaborative work, especially with the Māori of New Zealand in the 1970s. These efforts at collaboration, however, remained sporadic, and curatorial authority was entrenched.

By the 1990s, however, responding to a wave of critical museology and continued activism from Native American, Indigenous, and non-Western communities, museums began a more concerted effort to be inclusive and collaborative with source communities.[8] The force of the critique of these practices began to take on more urgency with the passage of the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) in 1990, which at the time mandated that museums that receive federal funding survey their collection and notify Tribes of any ancestors' remains, funerary objects, and objects of sacred patrimony that may be eligible for repatriation. The law, however, placed a heavy burden on American Indian, Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian Tribes to prove their claims for repatriation. In late 2023, new regulations were issued with the intent of addressing some of the flaws in the law.[9]

In the thirty years since NAGPRA was enacted, museums and Tribes have entered into relationships—sometimes merely transactional ones, but sometimes something deeper that can lead to improved collaboration and inclusion of Native American perspectives in representation and methodologies for care of the collections.

At the Field Museum, the movement toward decolonizing was occurring at a time of other changes in museum practice, including a new approach to exhibitions and a

rethinking of the museum's mission. Specifically, in the mid-1990s, museum leadership decided to experiment with strategies that would extend beyond changing the representational approaches of exhibitions to directly addressing contemporary concerns. They initiated a more concerted effort to translate the museum's scientific expertise into tangible actions and initiatives for both biodiversity conservation and promotion of cultural understanding—the two broad spheres of the scientific disciplines that traditionally comprise natural history (paleontology, botany, biology, and anthropology). The experiment was located in two ad hoc centers—the Environment and Conservation Program (ECP) and the Center for Cultural Understanding and Change (CCUC). Both were loosely linked to the Science Division of the museum, but they received only minimal operating support and were expected to raise funds for any programmatic activity they initiated.

Alaka Wali (coauthor of this article) joined the museum in late 1994 as the first director of the CCUC and had success raising funds for a series of initiatives to apply the museum's anthropological expertise to issues of concern for Chicago community-based organizations. The CCUC team developed a methodology for participatory action research that used museum-based communication strategies.[10]

The team also started working with neighborhood-based cultural organizations to develop a public program series that highlighted common concerns across cultures and the different responses to these concerns. The organizations worked with the CCUC staff to develop and cohost these public events (these included, for example, programs on the themes "rites of passage," "sports," and "youth socialization"). Each of these was a joint offering of two or three of the organizations, which resulted in interesting pairings. For example, the Chicago Japanese American Historical Society worked with the National Museum of Mexican Art on a program around death rituals, and the Chicagoland Czech-American Community Center and the American Indian Center collaborated on one about musical instruments. Over the ten years that the CCUC administered the program series, the number of participating organizations grew, and so did audiences. Ultimately, we realized that the CCUC could not sustain this programming for the long term, and we worked with our partners to create the Chicago Cultural Alliance, which is now in its

fifteenth year.[11]

At the same time that the CCUC was growing, the Field Museum's direct action efforts for biodiversity conservation also grew under the auspices of Dr. Debra Moskovits, who founded the Environment and Conservation Program. Eventually, the CCUC and ECP joined forces for greater impact, working together in the Andes/Amazon region of South America and in the greater Chicagoland region to integrate efforts to protect biodiversity and improve the quality of life of the regions' residents. Currently, this work is housed in the Keller Science Action Center, which now has an endowment and is a permanent unit within the Field Museum's Science Division with a staff of social scientists, ecologists, and educators.

Taking two ad hoc units to full incorporation within the institutional structure required persistence, creativity, and teamwork. All these qualities stood us in good stead as we approached the creation of the *Native Truths* exhibition.

*Representation*

The former Native North America Hall, which *Native Truths* replaced, was the only cultural exhibition at the Field Museum that had not been renovated since its installation in the 1950s. It retained the approach to representation of that time—displaying Native American lifeways as frozen in a timeless past, with few attempts to contextualize the items on display beyond small labels identifying Tribal names. The cases were loosely organized, and some appeared to be an ad hoc mix of random items from the collections.

In effect, it was symbolic of how museums of natural history treated and represented Native American belongings and lifeways until very recently. The displays reinforced the evolutionary theories that guided curators and focused on depicting what were presumed to be the vanishing cultures of these peoples as they were assimilated into European societies. The exhibitions were organized as static representations of life in either the prehistoric past or as Europeans had encountered them when they colonized North America. It was necessary, therefore, to change those representational practices. The Field Museum had already made significant renovations to the other cultural halls (Africa, the Pacific), so these could provide lessons on how to address the renovation of the Native North America Hall.

It was in the context of Wali's experiences with ongoing change, successful impact on the ground with direct action approaches, and

the continued need to decolonize, that she undertook efforts to change the direction of how the museum represented Native American cultures when she became curator of North American Anthropology in 2010. Her first opportunity was in 2012 with a small gallery space located at the front of the former Native North America Hall, the Webber Gallery. This five-hundred-square-foot space was intended to showcase contemporary Native American life but had largely been curated in the traditional manner with the authoritative voice of the curator, albeit with the inclusion of contemporary artworks at times.

Wali decided to experiment with a new approach: engaging contemporary artists to create installations by selecting objects from the museum's collection to display alongside their own work. The first foray was a collaboration with Chicago-based artist and fashion designer Maria Pinto. While Pinto is not Native American, she represented a pathway to radically changing the way we used collections to tell stories that went beyond mere object-driven approaches. The success of the Maria Pinto exhibition gave Wali the confidence to begin working with Native American contemporary artists, the first of whom was Bunky Echo-Hawk (Pawnee and Yakima). The Field Museum has a large collection of Pawnee cultural material and had repatriated sacred ceremonial bundles; therefore it was appropriate to work with a Tribal Nation with whom we had an existing relationship.

The next iteration of this approach was the installation of a retrospective of works by Rhonda Holy Bear, a Lakota artist who had lived in Chicago for many years as a young adult. Holy Bear is self-taught and makes exquisite soft sculptures that capture in meticulous detail the regalia of Plains Tribes, such as the Lakota and the Crow (Apsáalooke). She had visited the Field Museum many times to study the collections on display in the former Native North America Hall as well as pieces in storage.[12] For her display in the Webber Gallery, she selected a few objects from the collections that had inspired her and placed them with her works loaned by various private collections. Simultaneous to the Holy Bear installation, we invited Chicago-based artist Chris Pappan (Kanza/Osage) to also create an installation (fig. 1). Pappan refers to himself as a "twenty-first-century ledger artist," following in the traditions of Great Plains ledger artists such as Silver Horn.[13] His work was installed as an intervention in the then Native North America Hall. In some instances

Fig. 1. Installation view of *Drawing on Tradition: Kanza Artist Chris Pappan*.
This photo provides a sense of what the old hall looked like and the impact of Pappan's exhibition.
Photo by John Weinstein for the Field Museum.

Pappan's reprinted ledger art, which ranged from geometric designs to portraits, was reprinted on translucent paper that was adhered to the old cases. The result was a powerful transformation of the hall. Pappan's work shone a light on problematic aspects of the hall's previous installation—everything from the egregious way the objects had been mounted, which caused them to sustain damage due to long-term exposure, to the racist overtones that permeated the nature of the displays.

In each of the Webber Gallery exhibitions, we used a similar methodology. The artist was the cocurator, combining pieces from the Field Museum's collection with their own creations and working closely with the exhibition staff to design the installation layout. This approach offered powerful new perspectives on both the relevance of the historical collections and contemporary artists' unique relationships to their artistic heritage, their communities, and their own practice. Representing Native American artists' viewpoints on such themes as identity, artistic

continuities, craft, and harmful museum practices was a radical departure from previous exhibitions. For the curatorial and exhibitions staff, collaborating with contemporary artists marked a positive shift toward changing practices and adopting decolonization methodologies.

To summarize, the approach to the complete renovation of the old hall was informed by the decolonizing methodologies (collaboration and cocuration) that we had used in both establishing the Keller Science Action Center and developing the Webber Gallery installations.[14]

*Applying What We Learned*

In 2018 we began the renovation of the Native North America Hall, starting with the deinstallation process. Given our commitment to collaboration, we knew that the first step in the project was to establish an advisory committee. We extended invitations to eleven Native American museum professionals, Tribal leaders, scholars, and artists (see the appendix for the list of advisory committee members). Some were people who had relationships with the museum's repatriation director, Dr. Helen Robbins; others were brought in by Wali and Chicago-based artist Debra Yepa-Pappan (Jemez Pueblo/Korean), who was the first person hired for the project as the community engagement coordinator. Yepa-Pappan had been volunteering with the Native North America collections for close to two years and had been instrumental in connecting us to contemporary artists, some of whose work we purchased for the collection.

The hall contained over 1,500 items, some contaminated with arsenic, placed on damaged mounts, and bearing outdated labels. It took close to a year and a half to deinstall the items and return them to storage, where they are now properly housed in protective containers.[15] The hall remained open the entire time, as it connects Stanley Field Hall to the Northwest Coast Hall and could not be closed. We took this as an opportunity to provide our visitors a peek at the behind-the-scenes work of caring for the deinstalled objects, including how to treat them for conservation purposes and for making new mounts.

The advisory committee (see fig. 2) met quarterly, engaging in dialogue with the Field Museum team to develop the conceptual structure of the exhibition. During the pandemic shutdown in 2020, the committee continued to meet via Zoom. It took close to two years to settle on the reinstallation's

Fig. 2. Members of the advisory committee are seated in the front row; behind are some of the Field Museum staff who worked on the exhibition. Photo by John Weinstein for the Field Museum.

main messages. The committee worked well together—most had known each other and worked together on other projects. Discussions were lively and intense but never polemical or strident. Field Museum staff listened to counsel from the committee and shared their insights on visitor expectations, museum budget constraints, and the feasibility of executing some of the ideas for exhibition design.

One of the challenges the Field Museum team faced was how to honor the advisory committee's strong consensus that the exhibition should not emphasize the victimization of Native Americans throughout centuries of settler colonialism. The committee asked us to focus instead on illuminating the popular phrase "We are still here" and showcase that Native peoples haven't just survived genocide and oppression, they have thrived and forged new paths while sustaining their cultural practices, knowledge, and sense of identity. Honoring this guidance

meant going against the grain of how exhibitions had been done at the Field Museum since the 1990s, reinforcing visitors' mistaken stereotypes about Native Americans. The former hall had been popular *because* it reinforced those stereotypes—that Native peoples were in the past, that their ways of life had vanished, that they were to be gawked at and pitied. Visitor surveys and conversations with donors showed an expectation that the exhibition would focus on a chronological history of the dispossession and trauma that Native Americans had suffered in the course of European settlement in the Americas. The advisory committee strongly advised against reinforcing stereotypes or attempting a comprehensive history of the encounters between Native Americans and European colonists. Although aspects of these experiences (and countering stereotypes) could be included, they should not drive the storytelling.

Another challenge arose when the committee informed us they could not speak for all Native peoples. They could guide the installation's main messages but not tell the stories that would illustrate those messages. We had to reach out to individuals and communities across North America and tell the diverse stories that characterize Native life today. This led us to a diverse network of storytellers who would share their perspectives. In each instance, the storytellers used the same method employed in the Webber Gallery installations—choosing objects from the Field Museum's historical collections and incorporating contemporary pieces they made themselves or selected from their Tribe. At this point, the curatorial team included two Native American scholars: Dr. Eli Suzukovich (Little Shell Tribe of Chippewa/Cree, coauthor of this article) and Dr. Meranda Roberts (Paiute). Together with Debra Yepa-Pappan, they were instrumental in selecting storytellers. Exhibition department staff assigned to develop content labels also identified some of the storytellers. At the Field Museum, curators are responsible for conceptualizing and guiding content but actual label copy is written by exhibition developers—an eclectic group with diverse educational backgrounds. In the case of this exhibition, the developers and curators met regularly with the storytellers to determine the content and the story they wanted to tell. The storytellers edited and reviewed all label copy, as did the advisory committee. Almost all labels are therefore written in the first-person voice of the storyteller.

Many stories spoke directly to

fundamental concepts that characterize Native American experiences and worldviews, which we came to call "Native Truths." These concepts formed the backbone of the exhibition and were designed to remain a permanent feature of the hall. The advisory committee chose five "Native Truths":

- Our Ancestors connect us to our past, present, and future
- Native people are everywhere
- The land shapes who we are
- We have the right to govern ourselves
- Museum collecting and exhibition practices have deeply harmed Native communities

Each Truth was illustrated with four to six displays by individuals or collectives (see fig. 3).

In addition to the Native Truths displays, the team created immersive displays delving into specific stories that illustrated or amplified the Truths (see fig. 4). These in-depth stories were located in the center of the hall, each set apart in

Fig. 3. Installation view of one of the "Native Truths," "Our Ancestors connect us to the past, present, and future," with four displays, each told by a different storyteller. Karen Ann Hoffman's display is at far right. Photo by John Weinstein for the Field Museum.

Fig. 4. Installation view of rotating gallery "The Pueblo peoples' relationship to Chaco Canyon."
The blue lattice sets off the gallery, which is about 500 square feet.
Photo by John Weinstein for the Field Museum.

their own small gallery space. In contrast to the more permanent Truths displays, these small-gallery stories will change on a regular basis, keeping the content fresh and allowing us to tell more stories. The inaugural rotating stories were:

- Frank Waln's journey home
- The revitalization of California basket making
- The Pueblo peoples' relationship to Chaco Canyon (fig. 4)
- Food sovereignty of the Meskwakie Nation of Tama, Iowa
- The Chicago Urban Native Community Gallery

Each story gallery includes ambient photographs at the top of the display, as well as cases and interactive features around the walls and in the center. Their design, look, and feel (including the case layouts) were determined with the advisory committee and the cocurators.

This is the first time that a permanent exhibition at the Field Museum has had a built-in rotation feature, complete with a dedicated endowment that will enable the continuous display of fresh material. The advisory committee's counsel was instrumental in enabling us to represent the diversity of Native American lifeways, cultural practices, and perspectives on contemporary concerns. The use of multiple storytellers (for the inaugural exhibition, we ultimately engaged over 150 artists, community members, Tribal historic preservation officers, and Tribal authorities from forty Tribes and First Nations in the United States and Canada) also moved us away from the object-centered approach of the older exhibitions toward a people-centered or story-centered approach.

**The Role of Contemporary Art**

As discussed above, engaging with contemporary artists for recent exhibitions was an experimental strategy that attempted to address problematic aspects of representation that are faced by natural history museums in general. Bringing contemporary art into a natural history museum is actually not a new innovation. The Field Museum has a long history of incorporating art—in the form of murals for dioramas, wall hangings, and scientific illustrations—into exhibition displays of the natural world. However, these works were generally considered background for the specimens, and the artists were often not credited on the label copy. In the cultural halls, the displays were replete with cultural items that were considered ethnographic rather than pieces of art. In these instances as well, the names of the makers were not included in the labels and little attempt was made to educate the public about the aesthetic undergirding of the items. Indeed, non-Western art has always had a problematic relationship with museums.[16] Art museums have usually placed non-Western artworks in their own gallery space, lumping all cultures together (for example, the Metropolitan Museum of Art's Michael C. Rockefeller Wing). Native American art historians, such as Nancy Marie Mithlo, have questioned reductionist categories and argued for an Indigenous perspective on what constitutes art.[17] Anthropologists have also been rethinking categories, shifting their focus from comparative studies of non-Western art toward more theoretical explorations of the role of material culture in social life. One influential thinker in this regard was Alfred Gell, who wrote about the ways in which material culture exerts

agency in social relationships, independent of the makers.[18]

In this context, museum staff are continuing critical work that can advance decolonization in representation and privilege Indigenous artists' perspectives. The efforts are facilitated by the increased recognition that Indigenous artists have begun to receive in the last ten years with major shows and invitations to major art events. Jeffrey Gibson (Choctaw/Cherokee), for example, became the first Native artist to have a solo show in the US Pavilion at the Venice Biennale in 2024. *Native Truths: Our Voices, Our Stories* demonstrates how including contemporary art can be part of the process of decolonization.

Changes in museum display practices of Indigenous work and cultural materials have come in part as a result of activism on the part of Indigenous artists and communities themselves, as well as from museums confronting their legacies of exclusionary practices. Just as important as these considerations is the creative force of Indigenous artists who are working in multidisciplinary modes and genres and upending the standard categorization of their art. As we worked on the installation of *Native Truths*, we experienced the power of contemporary Native American art and saw how it could illuminate the messages that the advisory committee wanted to convey in a way that other representational strategies could not. In order to illustrate how this unfolded in the exhibition, we discuss four artists who were included in the exhibition: Karen Ann Hoffman (Oneida), Diego Romero (Cochiti Pueblo), Monica Rickert-Bolter (Potawatomi and Black), and Julie Buffalohead (Ponca).

*Karen Ann Hoffman*

In the exhibition, Karen Ann Hoffman (fig. 5) describes herself in this way:

> I'm Karen Ann Hoffman, a Haudenosaunee (Iroquois) Raised Bead worker from the Oneida Nation of Wisconsin. I'm the student of the late Samuel Thomas and the late Lorna Hill. When I'm sewing, I hear whispers, old beaders from long ago, encouraging me, "Keep this up, do this well." This work stands not for me, but for all those who came before us and all whose faces we have yet to see.[19]

Fig. 5. Karen Ann Hoffman (Oneida).

Hoffman grew up in Oshkosh, Wisconsin, and settled in Stevens Point. She first started learning Haudenosaunee raised beadwork from Samuel Thomas and Lorna Hill, Cayuga artists who traveled to Wisconsin from Ontario in the 1990s to teach. She traveled with them and learned from them for many years. She has gained widespread recognition, including a prestigious National Endowment for the Arts National Heritage Fellowship. Her work is included in the New York State Museum and the Eiteljorg Museum as well as the Field Museum. She also teaches raised beadwork techniques to young people at her home. Her display in *Native Truths* illustrates the Truth "Our Ancestors connect us to our past, present, and future." Three of her works are featured: *SkyWoman* (fig. 6), raised beadwork on an antique wood chair; *Thunderbird Whimsy* (fig. 7), a beaded cushion; and *Great Bear Hunt Mat* (fig. 8), a beaded mat.

Fig. 6. Karen Ann Hoffman (Oneida, b. 1957). *SkyWoman (she/her)*, 2018. Wood, glass beads. Adopted from the artist and living at the Field Museum since 2018, 360821. Photo by Michelle Kuo for the Field Museum.

Fig. 7. Karen Ann Hoffman (Oneida, b. 1957). *Thunderbird Whimsy*, 2011. Cloth, glass beads. Adopted from the artist and living at the Field Museum since 2021, 361601. Photo by Michelle Kuo for the Field Museum.

Fig. 8. Karen Ann Hoffman (Oneida, b. 1957). *Great Bear Hunt Mat (he/him)*, 2009.
Cloth, glass beads. Adopted from the artist and living at the Field Museum since 2021, 36102.
Photo by Michelle Kuo for the Field Museum.

Each of these three pieces are examples of how Hoffman perceives her connection to the past and how she carries forward her message to future generations. As historian and advisory committee member Doug Kiel (Oneida) writes about Hoffman's display:

Both the Seventh Generation Philosophy and Hoffman's art highlight the cyclical nature of time, intergenerational stewardship, and profound respect for the natural world. The Seventh Generation Philosophy emanates from an Indigenous worldview that regards time as cyclical rather than linear. It weaves together past, present, and future generations in an unending continuum. This philosophy steers the governance of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy, rooted in the Great Law of Peace. This law fosters communal stewardship and harmony among the nations. Decisions are made by consensus within the Council, with a focus on the long-term effects on both community and environment.[20]

With *SkyWoman*, Hoffman tells the creation story prevalent among the Haudenosaunee and other Northeast peoples. She states:

> As I was walking through an antique store, I saw this child's rocking chair. There were three panels on it, the perfect platform to tell the story of SkyWoman—how we Haudenosaunee, one of the original peoples of the Eastern Great Lakes, came to be. The chair (she) said, "SkyWoman's story needs to be on me," so she's my way to tell our creation story to people I'll never meet.[21]

Hoffman told the exhibition team that SkyWoman is a living being, and so the label copy offers her pronouns (she/her) and states that she is "adopted from the artist and living with the Field Museum since 2018."

*Thunderbird Whimsy* is in the style of nineteenth-century Haudenosaunee works created for the burgeoning tourist industry around Niagara Falls. Hoffman states about this piece:

> Popularized in the late 1800s, whimsies are small items made for non-Native tourists to buy "on a whim." Scholars and collectors for too long overlooked them. To me, whimsies are powerful. I decorated this larger pincushion whimsy with a stanza from the Haudenosaunee prayer "Thanksgiving Address" (The Words Before All the Other Words), which calls for us to be thankful for the Thunderbirds, who come from the West to clear our minds.[22]

The display label included audio of Hoffman reciting the Thanksgiving Prayer. The *Great Bear Hunt Mat* is an intricate piece that tells another story—one that relates the story of the constellation of the Great Bear (Ursa Major) and how it was hunted into the sky. Hoffman explains in the label copy:

> Once I heard an archaeologist say, "civilization didn't begin until the written word." That struck me as incomplete. Our Native arts, our oral traditions, have passed our worldview from generation to generation for a very long time. So I began to bead our traditions to show there's more than one way to transmit "civilization"—our culture. Great Bear Hunt—a very old tradition written in the Stars—is the first story I beaded.

For Hoffman, as she described in interviews with staff during the process of creating the display, time is experienced as a three-dimensional sphere or orb that allows us to "remember the future and predict the past." Her philosophy of art teaching centers on "learning by hanging around." In other words, one learns the craft as one lives one's life, or as one sits at the kitchen table, conversing, practicing, and observing. She spoke about how elders would insist that one must "wash the dishes before you can lead the ceremony."[23]

In the exhibition, Hoffman's

works sit alongside the pieces she selected from the collection—a mortar and pestle, an intricately carved spoon, a beaded pair of moccasins, and a beaded purse. She chose each of these to illustrate the connections across time to both the artistic traditions and the persistence of foundational beliefs that she continues to address through her art.

*Diego Romero*

Diego Romero is a Cochiti Pueblo artist whose works are included in several major museums, including the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Denver Art Museum, and the Heard Museum. He attended the Institute of American Indian Arts and earned degrees from the Otis College of Art and Design and the University of California, Los Angeles. We commissioned Romero to create a piece for the introduction to the rotating gallery "The Pueblo peoples' relationship to Chaco Canyon." This gallery, which was cocreated by three advisory committee members, features displays that incorporate items from the collection with new works by contemporary artists, photographs, and videos to illuminate the significance of Chaco Canyon as a sacred site that the Pueblos have cared for and protected over the centuries.[24] The site is still used for ceremonies to honor the ancestral peoples who lived there and is cared for by both the Pueblo and Diné/Navajo. It has been threatened by looting and more recently by fracking and oil exploration. In June 2023 Secretary of the Interior Deb Haaland (Laguna Pueblo) issued a ban on drilling and fracking within a ten-mile radius of the site. The exhibition team (including cocurators) discussed the intent of the gallery with Romero, and he created a powerful ceramic piece that depicts Haaland as protector of the site (fig. 9).

In the label, Romero describes *The Crying Indian* this way:

> In this piece I highlight the urgency of environmental issues at Chaco. US Secretary of the Interior Deb Haaland is at the center, recalling 1970s "Crying Indian" antipollution ads. The landscape hangs in fragile balance: Chacoan buildings to her right mirror the fracking station to her left, like the dualities of our Pueblo worldview. I borrow the checkerboard border from Mimbres pottery—it represents corn kernels, a metaphor for the people.

Romero's art draws on the traditions of Cochiti storyteller pottery, bringing to these his own style that plays with the influence of comic book illustrations he was steeped in as a youth growing up in Berkeley, California. At once humorous, tragic, and poignant, this piece

Fig. 9. Diego Romero (Cochiti Pueblo, b. 1964). *The Crying Indian* (exterior and interior), 2021. Ceramic. Commissioned by the Field Museum in 2021, 361786. Photo by Michelle Kuo for the Field Museum.

grounds the gallery in the overlapping themes of resilience, continuity, and significance of place.

*The Crying Indian* sits in conversation with other contemporary art in the gallery, including the works of Al Qöyawayma (Hopi), Les Namingha (Zuni/Tewa/Hopi), Aric Chopito (Zuni), Louie García (Tiwa/Piro Pueblo), and Loren Aragon (Acoma Pueblo). Altogether, the gallery brings to life the sacred place that is Chaco Canyon and why its protection matters. The seamless integration of the contemporary artworks with the collection pieces selected by the collaborating curators creates a powerful story of why place is such a significant concern for Native Americans, a manifestation of the Truth "The land shapes who we are."

*Monica Rickert-Bolter*

Monica Rickert-Bolter, who is Potawatomi and Black, grew up on Potawatomi ancestral lands and currently lives in Chicago, where she is a founding member of the Center for Native Futures, an artists' collective and gallery space. She first became involved with the Field Museum as a volunteer, working with Debra Yepa-Pappan to assist Wali in the curation of the Native North America collection. She is also a journalist who has written about Native American art and current affairs. We commissioned Rickert-Bolter to create three pieces for the exhibition. First, *Mshiké Mnisé (Turtle Island)*

(fig. 10) is a large mural that hangs on the wall in the Northwest Coast and Arctic Peoples hall, leading into the entrance to the *Native Truths* exhibition. The second commission, *The Great Lakes Mural* (fig. 11), consists of three large panels that hang above the "We speak for ourselves" gallery, which is a transition space from the *Native Truths* exhibition into the Northwest Coast Hall. It depicts the story of the Great Lakes Spirits discussing the "human problem." And finally, *Ralph Kerwineo* (fig. 12) is a painting depicting Ralph Kerwineo, an African American and Potawatomi/Cherokee trans man who lived from 1876 to 1932.

Fig. 10. Installation view of *Mshiké Mnisé (Turtle Island)* mural by Monica Rickert-Bolter (Potawatomi and Black). Photo by John Weinstein for the Field Museum.

Fig. 11. Installation view of *The Great Lakes* Mural by Monica Rickert-Bolter (Potawatomi and Black) in the "We speak for ourselves" gallery. Photo by John Weinstein for the Field Museum.

Fig. 12. Monica Rickert-Bolter (Potawatomi and Black). *Ralph Kerwineo*, 2022. Dry pastels on foam board; 81.3 × 81.3 cm (32 ×32 in.). Permanent installation at the Field Museum.

Doug Kiel describes the Turtle Island and Great Lakes murals in this way:

> In "We speak for ourselves," [Rickert-Bolter] unveils a series of murals depicting the Great Lakes Spirits as personifications of the five Great Lakes: Superior, Michigan, Huron, Erie, and Ontario. These murals are rooted in Rickert-Bolter's own original narrative, wherein the Spirits express concerns over the "human problem" and humanity's indifference to their welfare. She weaves elements of Potawatomi culture and cosmology into her murals, employing colors, symbols, and animals to impart deeper meanings. For instance, she depicts the Spirits with varied skin tones to represent the range of Indigenous people. Another mural features a representation of Turtle Island, a term for the continent embraced by numerous Indigenous groups in eastern North America. Serving a dual purpose, Rickert-Bolter's murals not only showcase her artistic prowess but also educate viewers on Indigenous environmental stewardship. Through her art, Monica Rickert-Bolter engages and challenges audiences to forge a connection with the natural world.[25]

The portrait of Ralph Kerwineo juxtaposes images of him as a man and as a woman. Kirwineo lived in Milwaukee and was arrested in 1914 for "disorderly conduct" after his former wife revealed that he was assigned female at birth. Kirwineo's story is told by Rickert-Bolter in the label in collaboration with Two Spirit poet and scholar Kai Minosh Pyle (Métis/Sault Ste. Marie Nishnaabe).

In addition to contributing these commissioned pieces to the Field Museum exhibition, Rickert-Bolter has participated in exhibitions on Afro-Indigenous identities at the Smithsonian's National Museum of the American Indian and curated at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Her work incorporates floral motifs drawn from Anishinaabe traditions and is also influenced by her experiments in dry pastels and digital art. Rickert-Bolter represents a new generation of Native American artists who are exploring the complexities of mixed identity within the context of personal experience. Her work's inclusion in the exhibition also highlights the experience of Indigenous people living in major cities, which has been underrepresented in museums.

*Julie Buffalohead*

Born in 1972, Julie Buffalohead is an enrolled member of the Ponca Tribe of Oklahoma. She received her Bachelor of Fine Arts from Minneapolis College of Art and Design in 1995 and her Master of Fine Arts from Cornell University in 2001. Buffalohead lives and

works in St. Paul, Minnesota. She was awarded a prestigious Contemporary Art Fellowship in 2013 by the Eiteljorg Museum in Indianapolis, Indiana, which showed her work in an acclaimed exhibition that same year. She has subsequently shown works in major exhibitions, including a solo show at the Denver Art Museum that opened in 2018.

Buffalohead's painting (fig. 13), which is untitled, is also in the "We speak for ourselves" transition gallery. We chose to include her work in this space to reflect on the diversity of art forms, the complexities of identity, and the entanglement of cultural and individual experience. The painting depicts Coyote and Loon. In an interview with Field Museum staff about the painting and her work in general, she said:

> In this piece I am tapping into "the animal within" to address the sometimes seemingly impossible nature of daily life. Situated in a stark horizonless picture plane, these two creatures achieve an eerie cooperation. This echoed my postpartum feelings about childbirth while referencing traditional narratives—as a mythic space constructed around the internal world.[26]

Fig. 13. Julie Buffalohead (Ponca, b. 1974). *Untitled*, 2008. Watercolor on canvas. The Field Museum, 359216. Photo: Alaka Wali.

Buffalohead also writes on her website:

> My work has focused thematically upon describing Indian cultural experience through personal metaphor and narrative, drawing from the substance of traditional stories while contextualizing motifs of cultural identity. In pictorial terms, the works tend to evoke animals or anthropomorphism within a horizonless field, who are caught within the human condition, often tragic and comedic. Using an eclectic palette, my painting juxtaposes evolving representations of animal spirit, deer, and coyote forms, and speaks to issues of commercialization of Native culture.[27]

In the interview, she described herself as an introverted child who was drawn to art as a refuge from rough treatment in high school. Her work draws on narrative traditions of the Ponca Nation, but also incorporates her own reflections on her personal experiences. In the case of this painting, she is reflecting on the feeling of loss of self she experienced after the birth of her child. She stated in the interview:

> I had pretty bad postpartum depression after I had my daughter, and I was thinking about a lot of things about depression. . . . As a mom you're sort of expected for this to be the most joyous moment of your life. But there is this side of you that feels like something is missing, that part of yourself is no longer yourself. And I don't often think that women have time to grieve that part.[28]

She also described her perspective on Coyote, the trickster figure found in the narratives of multiple Native Tribes:

> I was exploring a lot of thoughts about how, in Native storytelling, I was very attracted to trickster characters, and one of the main ones is Coyote, and he's one of my favorites. And I think it's because he's a character that does all these things in contradiction. He's gluttonous, and selfish, but at the same time he creates worlds and makes things happen. And I think what they were really trying to say is that is what it means to be a human being. You don't live in these opposites of black and white, but life is very much in the gray. I put him in a lot of my paintings as a sort of self-portrait.[29]

Julie Buffalohead's narrative work encapsulates the essence of what the "We speak for ourselves" gallery represents. It is adjacent to works by Preston Singletary (Tlingit), Jason Wesaw (Potawatomi), Monica Rickert-Bolter (Potawatomi and Black), Storme Webber (Choctaw/Black/Sgupiak descent), and Max Early (Laguna Pueblo), as well as a poetry interactive by various poets writing and speaking in their Native languages. Also included in the gallery is a brief clip from the first season of

*Reservation Dogs*, the first television show to feature exclusively Indigenous directors, writers, and lead cast members. Pieces from the museum collection that the artists selected are also woven into the display. As such, "We speak for ourselves" disrupts the very notion of stereotype and the idea that the museum curator is the only authoritative voice. It provides visitors with an insight into the deeply personal experiences that inform contemporary Native American art today.

## Conclusion

The inclusion of artists throughout the exhibition *Native Truths: Our Voices, Our Stories* at the Field Museum provides visitors insights into the strength of Native American creativity and the diversity of perspectives that characterizes these communities today. Contemporary art is flourishing in Native America and fast gaining visibility within the natural history museum community. Museum curators are recognizing that they must include Native Americans in the representation of their own heritage and contemporary concerns. *Native Truths* demonstrates that collaboration with contemporary artists is a powerful strategy to disrupt colonizer narratives and begin a path forward toward remedy of the harm that historical practices have caused. This is especially true in the case of natural history museums, in which Native American and Indigenous cultural items were collected while Native voice and agency were denied (or included only in limited capacity). When contemporary art is integrated with historical and archaeological materials and stories of Indigenous science, governance, and tradition, visitors simultaneously encounter Native American voices from the past and present, as well as voices that will continue into the future.

**Appendix: Biographies of Advisory Committee Members (2018–22)**

**Tony Chavarria**, Santa Clara Pueblo, is the Curator of Ethnology at the Museum of Indian Arts and Culture/Laboratory of Anthropology in Santa Fe, New Mexico.

**Robert Collins**, PhD, African-Choctaw descent, is Associate Professor of American Indian Studies at San Francisco State University. Using a person-centered ethnographic approach, his research explores American Indian cultural changes and African and Native American interactions in North, Central, and South America.

**Bibiane Courtois**, Innu Nation, was born in Mashteuiatsh, Province de Québec. In 2003, She became the director of the community museum and renewed their permanent exhibit, a living exhibit that showed their traditional ways of life. From 2012 to 2017, she was the coordinator for a research project with the University of Montreal on repatriation.

***Elizabeth Hoover**, PhD, is Associate Professor at University of California, Berkeley, in environmental science and policy management. Formerly, she was Assistant Professor of American Studies at Brown University, where she taught courses on environmental health and justice in Native communities, Indigenous food movements, and community-engaged research.

**Joe Horse Capture**, A'aninin, Vice President of Native Collections and the Ahmanson Curator of Native American History and Culture at the Autry Museum of the American West, has over twenty years of museum experience and has served in a curatorial role at the Minneapolis Institute of Arts and at the National Museum of the American Indian. He is widely published in the field of Native American art and culture.

**Doug Kiel**, Oneida Nation, is Associate Professor in the Department of History and the Alice Kaplan Institute for the Humanities at Northwestern University. He is an affiliate of the Center for Native American and Indigenous Research, with particular interests in the Great Lakes region and twentieth-century Indigenous nation rebuilding.

**Stewart Bruce Koyiyumptewa** is a member of the Hopi Tribe and is from the village of Hotevilla located on Third Mesa and belongs to the grey badger and butterfly clans. He works in the Hopi Tribe's Cultural Preservation Office as an archivist and now as the manager.

**Patty Loew**, PhD, Bad River Band of Lake Superior Ojibwe, is Director Emerita of Native American and Indigenous Research at Northwestern University and a professor in the Medill School of Journalism. She has written extensively about Ojibwe treaty rights, sovereignty, and the role of Native media in communicating Indigenous worldviews.

**Scott Shoemaker,** PhD, Miami Tribe of Oklahoma, is the Program Officer, Native Arts and Cultures at the Margaret A. Cargill Philanthropies. He was formerly the Thomas G. and Susan C. Hoback Curator of Native American Art, History and Culture at the Eiteljorg Museum. He has taught American Studies, American Indian Studies, and Museum Studies courses at the University of Minnesota and Macalester College. He is involved in the study and recovery of the art of Miami ribbonwork and language.

**Blaire Topash-Caldwell**, PhD, is a citizen of the Pokagon Band of Potawatomi Indians and Assistant Professor in the Department of Anthropology at Michigan State University. She was at the University of Massachusetts, Boston from 2021 to 2023. Dr. Topash-Caldwell was also the Public Humanities Fellow at the D'Arcy McNickle Center for American Indian and Indigenous Studies. Her research interests are in Indigenous science fiction and futurisms, traditional ecological knowledge, and digital heritage.

**Brian D. Vallo** served three terms as Governor of Acoma Pueblo. Previously, Governor Vallo was Director of the Indian Arts Research Center at the School for Advanced Research in Santa Fe, New Mexico, and the Founding Director of the Sky City Cultural Center & Haakú Museum in Acoma Pueblo. He is currently on the board and consultant to major museums in the United States.

*At the time that she served on the Advisory Committee (2018–2020), Dr. Hoover claimed descent from Mi'kmaq and Mohawk Nations. In 2023 she apologized for falsely claiming descent and stated that in fact she is not Native American.

[1] Paul Brinkman, "Frederic Ward Putnam, Chicago's Cultural Philanthropists, and the Founding of the Field Museum," *Museum History Journal* 2, no. 1 (July 2013): 73–100, https://doi.org/10.1179/mhj.2009.2.1.73; Warren Haskin, Stephen E. Nash, and Sarah Coleman, "A Chronicle of Field Museum Anthropology," in "Curators, Collections and Contexts: Anthropology at the Field Museum, 1893–2002," ed. Stephen E. Nash and Gary M. Feinman, special issue, *Fieldiana Anthropology*, new series, no. 36 (September 2003): 65–81; Robert W. Rydell, *All the World's a Fair: Visions of Empire at American International Expositions, 1876–1916* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985).

[2] See, for example, Margaret M. Bruchac, *Savage Kin: Indigenous Informants and American Anthropologists* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2018); Douglas Cole, *Captured Heritage: The Scramble for Northwest Coast Artifacts* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1995); and Margareta von Oswald and Jonas Tinius, eds., *Across Anthropology: Troubling Colonial Legacies, Museums, and the Curatorial* (Belgium: Leuven University Press, 2020).

[3] See, for example, Cole, *Captured Heritage*, for an account of experiences with Northwest Coast Nations.

[4] Nash and Feinman, eds. "Curators, Collections and Contexts: Anthropology at the Field Museum, 1893–2002."

[5] Michael M. Ames, *Cannibal Tours and Glass Boxes: The Anthropology of Museums* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1992); Eric Wolf, *Europe and the People Without History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982).

[6] Francis La Flesche, "The Omaha Tribe," *Science* 37, no. 965 (June 1913): 982–83; Ella Deloria, *Speaking of Indians* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1998). Bruchac, *Savage Kin*, chronicles their efforts and discusses the ways in which they were marginalized. See also Ira Jacknis, "No Object without Its Story: Franz Boas, George Hunt, and the Creation of a Native Material Anthropology," in *Disruptive Voices and the Singularity of Histories*, ed. Regna Darnell and Frederic W. Gleach (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2019): 231–52.

[7] Donald Collier, "My Life with Exhibits at the Field Museum, 1941–1976," in Nash and Feinman, "Curators, Collections and Contexts: Anthropology at the Field Museum, 1893–2002."

[8] Ivan Karp and Steven D. Lavine, eds., *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institute Press, 1991); Ivan Karp, Christine Mullen Kreamer, and Steven D. Levine, eds., *Museums and*

*Communities: The Politics of Public Culture* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institute Press, 1992); Christina F. Kreps, *Liberating Culture: Cross-Cultural Perspectives on Museums, Curation, and Heritage Preservation* (London: Routledge, 2003); Sharon Macdonald, *A Companion to Museum Studies* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011).

[9] See Julia Jacobs and Zachary Small, "Leading Museums Remove Native Displays Amid New Federal Rules," *New York Times*, January 26, 2024, https://www.nytimes.com/2024/01/26/arts/design/american-museum-of-natural-history-nagpra.html.

[10] Alaka Wali, "Listening with Passion: A Journey through Engagement and Exchange," in *Mutuality: Anthropology's Changing Terms of Engagement*, ed. Roger Sanjek (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015), 174–90.

[11] Learn more at https://www.chicagoculturalalliance.org/.

[12] Holy Bear was introduced to the museum by her teacher Louis T. Delgado (Oneida) and Father Peter Powell, who had worked closely with the Chicago Native American Community. Father Powell was a scholar of Southern Cheyenne lifeways and cultural practices and was very familiar with the Field Museum collections. The curators provided access to Holy Bear and Father Powell, enabling her to closely study designs and beadwork of the Plains collections.

[13] Ledger art flourished in the nineteenth century when Plains Indians were confined to army forts or reservations and given access to paper and colored pencils and paints. They transferred their narrative drawing methods from hide to this new medium. The ledger art became popular in the art market and also was collected by museums. See Candace S. Greene, *Silver Horn: Master Illustrator of the Kiowas* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2001).

[14] For a review of decolonizing methodologies in museums, see Christina F. Kreps, *Museums and Anthropology in the Age of Engagement* (London: Routledge, 2020); Amy Lonetree, *Decolonizing Museums: Representing Native America in National and Tribal Museums* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012); and Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*, 2nd ed. (London: Zed Books, 2012). See also Alaka Wali and Robert Keith Collins, "Decolonizing Museums: Toward a Paradigm Shift," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 52 (October 2023): 329–45, https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-anthro-052721-040652.

[15] For details, see Michelle Brownlee and Katie Hillson, "Collections Reflections: Continuing Towards Collaborative, Community-Guided Collections Management," in *The Future is Indigenous: Stories from the New Native American Hall at the Field Museum*, ed. Alaka Wali and Tom Skwerski (London: BAR Publishers, forthcoming).

[16] See Nancy Marie Mithlo, "'Red Man's Burden': The Politics of Inclusion in Museum Settings," *American Indian Quarterly* 28, no. 3/4 (Summer–Autumn 2004): 743–63, http://www.jstor.org/stable/4138940.

[17] See Nancy Marie Mithlo, "No Word for Art in Our Language? Old Questions, New Paradigms," *Wicazo Sa Review* 27, no. 1 (Spring 2012): 111–26, https://doi.org/10.5749/wicazosareview.27.1.0111.

[18] Alfred Gell, *Art and Agency: An Anthropological Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).

[19] Label text, *Native Truths: Our Voices, Our Stories*, the Field Museum, Chicago, 2022. The label copy of each display included biographical information about the storyteller written with the help of the exhibition staff.

[20] Douglas Kiel, "In Harmony with the Ancestors: Indigenous Worldviews, Traditions, and Arts Bridge the Past, Present, and Future," in Wali and Skwerski, *The Future is Indigenous*.

[21] Interview with Karen Ann Hoffman, 2018.

[22] Ibid.

[23] Karen Ann Hoffman, interviews with Field Museum staff, 2020–21.

[24] The advisors who curated this gallery were Brian Vallo (Acoma Pueblo), Stewart B. Koyiyumptewa (Hopi), and Antonio Chavarria (Santa Clara Pueblo). They developed the content for the gallery together with Field Museum exhibition staff and curators and selected the artists whose works are featured alongside the Field Museum collections.

[25] Douglas Kiel, "We Speak for Ourselves: Challenging Stereotypes in Native Truths," in Wali and Skwerski, *The Future is Indigenous*.

[26] Interview with Julie Buffalohead, 2021.

[27] "Statement," Julie Buffalohead (artist website), https://www.juliebuffalohead.com/page/0b46da2f/statement.

[28] Interview with Julie Buffalohead, 2021.

[29] Ibid.

# *The Tudors: Art and Majesty in Renaissance England*

Elizabeth Cleland and Adam Eaker, with contributions by
Marjorie E. Wieseman and Sarah Bochicchio
New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2022
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The Tudor monarchs of England only reigned for three generations five centuries ago (1485–1603), but their legacy looms large in historical memory and pop culture. Henry VII, Henry VIII, Edward VI, Mary I, Elizabeth I, and many others of the era are well-known—thanks in large part to the intrigue, myth, and misinformation surrounding the Tudor courts. The divorces, deaths, and executions of Henry VIII's six wives; Henry's break with Catholicism and the formation of a new church; and the sovereignty of not one but two (some say three) female monarchs are just some of the aspects of Tudor court culture that have captured imaginations over time.[1] Their presence in contemporary films, books, music, theater, and social media (Henry VIII even has his own account on X/Twitter) ensure their enduring appeal to a variety of audiences.

Those compelled by the art and material culture of the Tudor courts now have a splendid new scholarly resource: the catalogue for the stunning 2022–2023 exhibition *The Tudors: Art and Majesty in Renaissance England*, hosted by the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Cleveland Museum of Art, and the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco. The exhibition was the first in the United States on Tudor patronage of the arts and the artistic production surrounding their courts. The catalogue plays a critical role in preserving and extending the legacy of this important exhibition, much as the artworks in the exhibition have maintained the dynasty's legacy. The publication's scholarship illuminates the Tudors' status as the first English monarchs to cultivate the arts and

mobilize them to political advantage. Although the dynasty emerged out of the contentious Wars of the Roses with a tenuous claim to the throne, the Tudors were able to harness the power of the arts to project an image of legitimate and stable rulership, effective diplomacy, and courtly splendor on par with Europe's more established royal houses. They did so through an extensive network of artists, craftspeople, agents, dealers, and bankers, and their patronage of artists from Italy, Flanders, Germany, and elsewhere brought continental knowledge and new art-making techniques to the island. However, by the end of the Tudor period, as the catalogue seeks to demonstrate, a uniquely English or insular style had developed, characterized by "esoteric symbolism, decorative surfaces, and a close interplay between the visual arts and literature."[2]

The beautifully illustrated catalogue is divided into four sections: "Inventing a Dynasty," "Courtly Splendor," "Courtly Identity," and "The Tudor Legacy." Each section features essays and annotated catalogue entries by the exhibition's curators Elizabeth Cleland and Adam Eaker, with additional contributions from Marjorie E. Wieseman, Sarah Bochicchio, and Giulia Chiostrini. The catalogue contains over 120 entries on objects from collections in Europe, the United States, and Canada, as well as over 140 additional supporting images. All images are full color, and many are full page, conveying the minute details and sumptuous materiality of an impressive range of objects, including canvas and panel paintings, prints, tapestries, metalwork, armor, clothing, jewels, and decorative works. One of the catalogue's advantages is that it includes objects that were cut from the exhibition due to COVID-19 interruptions. And it encompasses immovable art forms such as architecture, tombs, and large-scale sculpture, offering a wide-ranging view of the Tudor world.

Individual essays offer critical insights into Tudor tastes, their sponsorship of artists and strategic use of artworks, and the afterlives of Tudor objects and aesthetic values. In the section "Inventing a Dynasty," Cleland's essay "England, Europe, and the World: Art as Policy" argues that the Tudors manipulated art to propagate and sustain claims to legitimacy. It also addresses the increasingly international artistic contacts fostered by the Tudor court, albeit international only in the sense of Pan-European. Tudor political machinations are often reflected in their far-reaching artistic and

commercial networks, which facilitated the flow of both art and political brokers to London from places such as Antwerp, Florence, and Seville.

The objects included in this section demonstrate the Tudors' concerted effort to legitimize the dynasty through heraldic symbols such as the Tudor rose, as well as the geographical reach of their patronage. An illustrative example is the *Cope of Henry VII* (1499–1505, cat. 7), a ceremonial cloak. Made from Italian velvet cloth of gold brocaded with silk and gilded silver thread, the cope formed part of an expensive commission for over thirty vestments celebrating Henry VII and incorporating his newly formulated dynastic symbology. Intended for use by priests and deacons at Westminster Abbey, both his successors Henry VIII and Edward VI retained several garments from this commission for their personal collections even after the dissolution of the monasteries, demonstrating the reverence with which they held the set and its importance in communicating continuity of rule.

In the second section, "Courtly Splendor," Cleland's essay "Furnishing the Palace" addresses the material splendor of Tudor palaces and homes. Although many of these structures are no longer extant, surviving drawings, inventories, visitor accounts, and artifacts provide a sense of their original grandeur. Sparkling jewels, glimmering metalwork, gilded leather wall hangings, Turkish carpets, intricate embroidery, and luxury tapestries impressed palace visitors with the dynasty's wealth and connections. Eaker's essay "The Tudor Art of the Gift" demonstrates the critical role of gift-giving at the Tudor court to secure support, obtain knowledge, curry favor, and drive diplomacy. Gift-giving even became a competitive practice as rulers and courtiers sought to devise the most original or distinctive gift. In "Honing the Tudor Aesthetic," Cleland traces the development of a uniquely Tudor visual taste, which combined classical references, an appreciation for the natural world, and the theatricality of Arthurian legend. It is in this essay that the catalogue's claim that Tudor tastes represented a uniquely insular style is most clearly articulated.

The objects in this section speak to the material wealth on display at Tudor residences. Although the original pieces are now lost, Hans Holbein's ornate designs for goldsmiths' works such as mirrors, cups, and weapons give a sense of their mesmerizing opulence. His design for a cup that Henry VIII may have given to Jane Seymour and which was later passed on to

Elizabeth I (cat. 39) was elaborately decorated with antique figures, mermaids, and putti, and further embellished with diamonds, pearls, and enamel. Henry VIII also spent extravagant sums on monumental tapestries and was well-attuned to developing trends in the medium, commissioning sets from leading masters such as Jan van Roome, Pieter Coecke van Aelst, and Raphael. These included sets depicting stories from David and Bathsheba, the Triumph of Hercules, and the Life of St. Paul, biblical and mythological figures with whom Henry sought to associate himself and his reign. Such tapestries manifest the sensorial splendor of his court, their gold and silver wrapped threads glittering in the candlelight and the life-size figures seeming to animate the palace walls.

The third section, "Courtly Identity," contains three essays by Eaker. In "Hans Holbein and the Status of Tudor Painting," Eaker evaluates Holbein's status at Henry's court and the development of his legacy as an "old master" during Elizabeth's reign, when he became a model for a new generation of court artists such as Nicholas Hilliard and Hans Eworth. In "Fashioning the Courtier," Eaker assesses the importance of images, objects, and clothing in constructing identity at the Tudor court—identities that relied heavily on prevailing notions of gender. And in "Icons of Rule," Eaker traces the evolution of Tudor royal portraiture beginning with early portraits from Henry VII's reign, which are restrained and dependent on Flemish precedents, to Henry VIII's and Elizabeth I's full manipulation and mobilization of portraiture in painting, print, and metalwork to convey notions of power, control, and legitimacy.

Objects in the plates of this section tend to portraiture in varied forms, displaying the full gamut of courtly fashions, identities, and political maneuvering. There are, of course, the familiar portraits of Queen Elizabeth, such as the *Ditchley Portrait* (ca. 1592, cat. 119) and *Rainbow Portrait* (ca. 1602, cat. 120), both by Marcus Gheeraerts the Younger, and the famed *Sieve Portrait* (1583, cat. 114) by Quentin Metsys the Younger. Perhaps more intriguing, however, are those somewhat mysterious or enigmatic portraits for which a definitive interpretation still eludes scholars. These include Nicholas Hilliard's 1590–95 miniature portrait of Henry Percy, Ninth Earl of Northumberland (and one of Elizabeth's favorites) reclining in a garden with a spherical object and a feather hanging over his head (cat. 110), the meaning of which is uncertain.

The final section, "The Tudor Legacy," explores the continued interest in Tudor histories and personalities to the present day, as well as the various times at which this legacy was used in support of historical, political, and aesthetic movements. Bochicchio's essay "Iterations of Elizabeth: A Seventeenth-Century Legacy" discusses Elizabeth's posthumous hold on seventeenth-century artists and writers, who played on different facets of her identity—both masculine and feminine, real and imagined. Wieseman's essay "The Tudor Afterlife" surveys instances of Tudor revivalism in the centuries following their reign to better understand how subsequent generations received and utilized the Tudor legacy. These revivals took many forms: Horace Walpole's romanticized vision of Tudor architecture at his mid-eighteenth-century Strawberry Hill villa; nineteenth-century France's fixation on Tudor condemnations, beheadings, and executions as pictured in academic painting; and twentieth-century American industrialists who emulated the Tudor aesthetic at their urban and suburban mansions (some of the finest examples of which are located in the Midwest).

One of the catalogue's best features is the literal treasure trove of artworks from diverse makers and materials that it has brought together and made available. Many of these objects embody overlooked genres, media, and narratives, especially those pertaining to women, such as the manuscript works of Esther Inglis and the outstanding variety of Tudor embroidery. These may not be the objects that the art historical canon has traditionally valued, but here they are held up alongside paintings, sculpture, and architecture. That said, other critical narratives seem underemphasized. Despite the inclusion of some global objects such as Chinese porcelain and references to Tudor contacts farther afield—Sir Francis Drake's circumnavigation of the globe, Eastern contacts made via the Muscovy Company's trade, and Tudor miniatures surfacing at Mughal and Ottoman courts—the catalogue remains largely European in focus. It contains only one image of a non-European: the striking portrait of Moroccan ambassador ʿAbd al-Wahid bin Mas'ood bin Mohammed ʿAnnouri, who spent six months in London negotiating trade relations and alliances with Elizabeth I. Additionally, while the catalogue makes note of Black musicians at court and Black weavers, needle makers, seamen, and other professionals working in and around London, it goes no further in illuminating their stories,

despite sustained scholarly interest in Tudor England's global contacts and ambitions at home and abroad. As early as the mid-1990s, scholars such as Kim Hall pointed to the Black presence in Tudor England (albeit not as present in the visual record) and to racialized discourses of light and dark in early modern English literature and aesthetics.[3] Onyeka Nubia's 2013 study revealed the important role that skilled Black artisans and tradespeople played in Tudor England, and Miranda Kaufmann's 2017 book centers on ten case studies of Africans living in Tudor and Stuart England.[4] Additionally, recent work by Matthew Dimmock sheds light on England's increasingly global contacts and ambitions during Elizabeth's reign—specifically with regard to East Asia.[5] England's rise as an economic, political, and colonial power brought with it a complicated and fraught history, but a history with roots in the Tudor period. While the omission of a global framework for presenting Tudor art and majesty is striking, the catalogue remains an essential scholarly contribution to our understanding of artistic patronage at the Tudor court and English visual culture more broadly during the late Renaissance period.

[1] Lady Jane Grey (1537–1554), also known as the "Nine Days' Queen," was nominated by her cousin King Edward VI as his successor and proclaimed Queen of England on July 10, 1553. However, she soon lost support of the Privy Council, who deposed her after only nine days and proclaimed Mary I the new Queen. Lady Jane Grey was later labeled a usurper, accused of high treason, and executed. There is debate over whether or not she should be considered a reigning queen.

[2] Elizabeth Cleland and Adam Eaker, "Preface: An Insular Art?," in *The Tudors: Art and Majesty in Renaissance England*, exh. cat. (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2022), 17.

[3] Kim Hall, *Things of Darkness: Economies of Race and Gender in Early Modern England* (Ithaca, NY, and London: Cornell University Press, 1995).

[4] See Onyeka Nubia, *Blackamoores: Africans in Tudor England, Their Presence, Status and Origins* (London: Narrative Eye, 2013) and Miranda Kaufmann, *Black Tudors: The Untold Story* (London: Oneworld Publications, 2017).

[5] Matthew Dimmock, *Elizabethan Globalism: England, China and the Rainbow Portrait* (London: Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art, 2019).

# *In Our Hands: Native Photography, 1890 to Now*

Jill Ahlberg Yohe, Jaida Grey Eagle, and Casey Riley
Minneapolis: Minneapolis Institute of Art, 2023
$40 (296 pages) ISBN 978-0-300-27216-1

Reviewed by Katherine Feldkamp
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With the history of Indigenous photography as its primary focus, the catalogue for *In Our Hands: Native Photography, 1890 to Now* by the Minneapolis Institute of Art (MIA) is an insightful and deeply personal journey into image making through a Native American lens. The exhibition itself was initially conceived during the early days of the pandemic as a collaboration between MIA's Associate Curator of Native American Art Jill Ahlberg Yohe, Shakopee Mdewakanton Fellow Jaida Grey Eagle, and Curator of Photography and New Media Casey Riley. The exhibition and subsequent catalogue became a highly inclusive project that successfully demonstrated how to make room for community stakeholders and noncuratorial voices. Ahlberg Yohe, Grey Eagle, and Riley formed an advisory group of fourteen Native artists and writers who ultimately helped to produce an exhibition and publication that are arguably by and for Indigenous people. Overall, the book is focused on Native North American photographic production and histories while also being grounded in Indigenous methodologies that incorporate consensus, relationship building, mutual respect, and reciprocity. The artists included in the catalogue are wide-ranging, from respected senior makers to up-and-coming individuals. Crucially, the authors note that they consciously decided not to include the work of any non-Native photographers in the publication, even as comparative images, so as to keep the conversation centered on Indigenous experiences and perspectives. By excluding non-Native artists, and the Western canon by extension, the publication establishes an autonomous Indigenous tradition of photography with a

rich and complex history that stands on its own.

Broken into three sections, the catalogue presents essays and interviews from a range of artists and scholars. Extensive biographies of all the photographers, writers, and curatorial council members evince the wide range of expertise that shaped both the exhibition and book. Full-page color reproductions of the artworks punctuate the various sections while providing moments of visual reflection. Within the essays themselves, nearly all the writers—whether photographers or scholars—resist the traditional genre-defining, hierarchical, time-period-bound approach when discussing either their own work or other works in the show. Instead, the approach taken by almost all the essayists is far more fluid and emphasizes the personal over the aesthetic. Together, this makes for a collection of moving stories and reminds the reader that the subjects represented in these photographs are real people, not merely objects for aesthetic consideration.

A number of themes recur throughout all of the essays. Of particular note, a majority of the authors reflect on the ways in which photography originally aided colonial expansion and extortion and harmed Native Americans by presenting them as an exotic other or as a vanishing race. The corrective to this has largely been the personal photographic archives created by and for Native people that help to fill in the gaps in the official state-sanctioned record. Mique'l Icesis Dangeli's essay "B. A. Haldane: Inspiring Resurgence through Images of Resistance" perhaps expresses this best by using Haldane's photography career as a case study for Native resilience and communal connections. Wider commentary on women as culture bearers and community champions is also a consistent touchstone, as in Veronica Passalacqua's "Rematriating Photography" and in the interview between Rhéanne Chartrand and Casey Riley, "Researching the Legacy of the Native Indian/Inuit Photographers' Association (NIIPA)." Additionally, many of the personal essays contemplate the lived experience of being an Indigenous photographer and existing within two worlds. These themes are particularly strong and insightful in Amy Lonetree's "'Indigenous Storywork' and Native American Photography" and in Rosalie Favell's "An Enduring Passion."

While many of the photographs speak for themselves, the inclusion of more formal aesthetic interpretations for some of the images would help to guide readers

unfamiliar with Native photography, as well as to ground the deeply personal narratives many of the artists and scholars share in the publication. Additionally, a clearer organization for the various essays would have aided the narrative thread of the catalogue. Overall, *In Our Hands: Native Photography, 1890 to Now* presents a powerful and deeply moving body of work from Indigenous makers. While this catalogue will primarily appeal to those working in art history, scholars of American studies as well as Native American and Indigenous studies will also appreciate this work. The compelling stories and visuals shared in this publication proudly assert the strength of this field and demonstrate the power of photography to capture and celebrate the resilience and pride of Native people when they wield the camera with their own hands.

# *Quanta of Space: The Bosom Sculpture of Ibram Lassaw*

Edited by Andrew Wallace
Davenport, IA: Figge Art Museum; Zurich, Switzerland: Scheidegger & Spiess, 2023
$39 (144 pages) ISBN 978-3-85881-890-4

Reviewed by June Scalia
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Last week, I surveyed a group of colleagues to see how many of them, at that moment, were wearing a piece of jewelry: every single person raised a hand. This (admittedly unscientific) data set speaks to the broad appeal of the catalogue under review, *Quanta of Space: The Bosom Sculpture of Ibram Lassaw*, and the exhibition of the same title organized by the Figge Art Museum in fall 2023. The catalogue brings together for the first time artifacts of abstract sculptor Ibram Lassaw's considerable jewelry production and juxtaposes these miniature works with his larger, though no less ethereal, constructions in a variety of metal alloys. This book does not mount a full-scale defense of jewelry's position within the hierarchy of the "fine arts." Rather, it emphasizes the visual resonances between Lassaw's two bodies of work, and in doing so, highlights the pioneering sculptor's innovative approach to material and form.

Thoughtfully crafted and aimed at both the casual museum visitor and the initiated enthusiast of abstract sculpture, the catalogue's four full-length essays mix references to popular culture and in-depth scholarly analysis to delightful effect. Notes on *Star Trek*, automobiles, and snowflakes are intermingled with detailed biographical accounts and shrewd formal analyses. An Instagram post demonstrating an at-home science experiment, for instance, is mentioned by Andrew Wallace in his introductory essay "Yesterday's Tomorrow" to illustrate the cosmological and molecular aspects of space resonant in Lassaw's work.

Rather than detract from the volume's intellectual rigor, the pop-culture parallels provide useful entry points into the often-elusive world of abstract art. Jewelry is, after all, something many of us encounter on a daily basis, so it is only appropriate that the exhibition's organizers and the catalogue authors would situate it within a common vernacular. Thus, the catalogue largely does what executive director Michelle Hargrave says the Figge continually aspires to do: bring art and people together.

A brief word on the title: essays by art historian Nancy G. Heller and the artist's daughter, Denise Lassaw, both mention Lassaw's tendency to refer to his jewelry as "bosom sculptures." Was he trying to avoid the word "jewelry" and, by extension, associations with craft and the decorative arts? Has the Figge perhaps done the same thing? Maybe the museum regarded the cheeky phrase as suitably surprising and effectively suggestive. Or, in a more generous reading, perhaps the organizers saw in the word *bosom* a gesture toward a nurturing, nonsexual form of intimacy, the kind of comfort that comes with being in close physical proximity to someone's heart. Either way, it is a slightly odd and clunky, albeit memorable, title. Admittedly, "wearable sculptures," another term used by Lassaw, doesn't quite pack the same punch.

The first part of the title also raises interesting questions. The artist's enduring interest in astronomy, mathematics, physics, and the transcendental aspect of space embodied in Zen Buddhism attests to the significance of the title's opening phrase. Space, with its myriad connotations, was essential to the way Lassaw both conceptualized and constructed his sculptures. As the catalogue demonstrates, the jewelry conforms to the same basic principles of his larger works: irregular metallic lines woven together to form webs of open-form cells. The energetic configurations, which recall crystalline structures, nebular formations, and bacterial growths were achieved through the artist's experimental use of the oxyacetylene welding torch, which he purchased after his first major sale in 1950. The tool enabled a procedural immediacy that permitted Lassaw an increasing degree of improvisation. Working without maquettes or templates, the artist fused various metal alloys into quivering grids that visually belie their structural integrity.

Heller traces the periods before and after this transformative purchase in her essay, "Shapes Made of Air: The Life and Sculpture of

Ibram Lassaw." Born in Alexandria, Egypt, to Russian Orthodox Jews in 1913, Lassaw moved with his family to New York City in 1921, settling first in Manhattan and later in Brooklyn. Heller, whose essay benefits from interviews she conducted with the artist between 1979 and 1981 while writing her PhD dissertation on Lassaw, describes an insatiably curious child, nurtured in a multilingual environment that encouraged his interest in art from a young age. As a teenager, Lassaw exhibited his work through the Clay Club (now the SculptureCenter), a communal workspace founded by Dorothea Denslow, a graduate of the Art Students League and Lassaw's only formal teacher. (It is worth noting that both Heller and Denise Lassaw mention Denslow's influence, and I'd venture to say that her role in fostering a generation of young artists in New York City may deserve an exhibition in its own right.) These early, largely figurative sculptures owe their inspiration to works by Henri Matisse and Alexander Archipenko. Heller notes that the teenage Lassaw encountered the work of both artists in the pages of the French-language journal *Cahiers d'Art*.

The second half of Heller's essay turns toward the 1950s, when Lassaw began to experiment with oxyacetylene welding. The technique was not unique to Lassaw; several contemporary sculptors, such as Herbert Ferber, Theodore Roszak, and David Smith, similarly explored the emancipatory potential of welded steel. What distinguished Lassaw's work was his idiosyncratic integration of color. Defying the popular Greenbergian mandate of medium specificity, particularly in terms of its insistence on monochromatic form in sculpture, Lassaw incorporated multiple metallic patinas within a single work. In the jewelry, the variegated alloys were further enhanced by semiprecious stones, patterned beads, and seashells. It was Lassaw's wife, Ernestine, who in 1951 first thought to hang a small scrap of the sculptor's experimentations with color around her neck; and the industrious Manhattan gallery owner Samuel M. Kootz recognized their wider aesthetic and ornamental appeal. The pocket-sized pieces, whose sales provided a degree of financial stability, soon became an integral part of Lassaw's sculptural output.

In "Bosom Sculptures: A Family History," Denise Lassaw recapitulates many of the same biographical details of her father's life, including her mother's role in the conception of the so-called bosom sculptures on that fateful day in 1951. The value of Denise Lassaw's

contribution is in the memories she shares, recollections that make the work come alive, stories that treat the pieces of jewelry as savory accoutrements of everyday life. In one particularly delightful anecdote, she recalls a large, subtly asymmetrical bronze necklace dotted with semiprecious stones that she received from her father on her sixteenth birthday (plate 68). As a young woman, she wore the necklace in the halls of her high school, to openings at the Whitney and MoMA, when hitchhiking across the United States, and while floating nude down the San Lorenzo River in California. The last is a vivid recollection that perfectly captures the joyful freedom of youth and the aesthetic reality of a fully lived life.

The final essay, "Modernist Sculpture/Modernist Jewelry" by Marin R. Sullivan, most directly addresses the traditional disciplinary divisions between the two mediums. The text, which adds to Sullivan's growing body of scholarship on the often-overlooked artistic contributions of postwar abstract sculptors such as Henry Bertoia, Richard Hunt, and Harold Cousins, situates Lassaw's work within the broader arena of midcentury studio jewelry, that is, artfully handcrafted wearables that were relegated to the domain of design. The maneuver not only tacitly endorses jewelry's estimable position within the canon of visual culture; comparisons to pieces by studio jewelers Art Smith and Margaret De Patta also enhance an understanding of Lassaw's cosmic compositions and reveal parallel formal and conceptual spatial concerns which Sullivan describes as unique to the historical moment. As such, Sullivan reengages the narrative first introduced by Wallace, in which a discussion of the period's technological advancements and scientific innovations highlights an ethos of intergalactic fascination—literal and metaphysical—manifest in both popular and artistic artifacts of the time.

Sullivan also notes the practical reasons artists like Lassaw made jewelry: it is, generally speaking, less expensive to produce. It requires less time, less space, and less physical labor, and is consequentially easier to move, easier to store, and, as exemplified by Sam Kootz, often easier to sell. Denise Lassaw writes of the economic stability her father's jewelry provided in her own essay. Beyond monetary concerns, however, Sullivan frames jewelry as an exploratory and experimental medium, one which allowed artists to translate certain formal ideas across scale while utilizing the body as a living pedestal. Hung around a person's

neck, Lassaw's unique compositions become suspended constellations, small material reifications of a universal, macrocosmic ideal. For Lassaw, who never editioned any of his jewelry designs, the medium provided a creative outlet that far outweighed its economic potential.

Ibram Lassaw was an extremely fecund producer of wearable works, creating by some estimates 1,500 pieces, a quantity that supersedes even that of Alexander Calder, the best-known artist-jeweler of the twentieth century. The catalogue concludes with forty-eight plates featuring work created by Lassaw between 1938 and 1996. Most of these images present isolated close-ups of intricate pendants, though the spread is punctuated by examples of the artist's larger sculptures, an arrangement that accentuates the visual parallels across the two mediums. If this catalogue has a weakness, it is this: Where are all the bodies? Other than a group portrait of Ibram, Denise, and Ernestine Lassaw at the beginning of Heller's essay, there is not a single photograph that depicts these objects being worn. This strikes me as a missed opportunity to demonstrate how these unique works may have been enhanced by their relationship to the human body. Nonetheless, *Quanta of Space* is an admirable catalogue that benefits from the inclusion of intimate details provided by people who were close to the artist as well as insightful contributions by art historians with a deep knowledge of postwar abstraction.

# *Scott Hocking: Detroit Stories*

Edited by Andrew Satake Blauvelt
Bloomfield Hills, MI: Cranbrook Art Museum, 2022
$65 (344 pages) ISBN 978-1-7333824-4-1

Reviewed by Matthew Ryan Smith
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The first museum retrospective exhibition of artist Scott Hocking's work, *Detroit Stories*, launched at the Cranbrook Art Museum in November 2022. Hocking emerged as a prolific chronicler of Detroit during the early 2000s, having documented the city's enormous vacancies and scrapping subculture through photography and ephemera. Today, he is one of Detroit's most important multidisciplinary artists and is internationally recognized for his site-specific installations that scrutinize local histories, industrial capitalism, and the process of entropy. The catalogue accompanying his retrospective, *Scott Hocking: Detroit Stories*, combines Hocking's new and previously published writing, academic essays by Andrew Satake Blauvelt and Michael Stone-Richards, artist interviews, photographs, historical illustrations, and didactic text. The book's table of contents appears on page thirty-nine, its chapters do not include corresponding numbers, there is no index, and Hocking's artistic practice is not presented chronologically, all of which imply that the overarching structure is intentionally experimental. As such, *Detroit Stories* stands as one of the rare catalogues that is seriously inventive and idiosyncratic, much like the artist himself.

*Detroit Stories* opens, somewhat unexpectedly, with "Description of the River of Detroit" by Antoine de la Mothe Cadillac, one of France's earliest explorers to the region during the early colonial period. "It is only the opponents of the truth who are enemies of this settlement," he says, "so essential to the increase of glory of the King, to the spread of religion, and to the destruction of the throne of Baal" (2). His words provide an Edenic picture of "d'etroit" ("détroit" is

French for "strait") as he witnessed it in 1701, temperate and complete with flora and fauna, all standing in marked contrast to the Detroit of today. This description is followed by a second prologue written by Hocking himself titled "A Nice Spot along the Water" (2009), which not only elucidates the long-standing Indigenous presence in Detroit but also the city's collective hope for future renaissance. Hocking's moving homage to his home produces fertile ground to narrate the multifaceted history of the region and its decades of deindustrialization, but it also provides a strong contrast to the idyllic vistas described by de la Mothe.

The autobiographical "Detroit Nights" (2018) is arguably Hocking's most compelling and gritty script in the catalogue. Here, he maps his early life growing up in a working-class Detroit neighborhood, throwing rocks with a slingshot, playing with his friends in a local cemetery, and listening to freight trains pass in the night. The latter stuck with him, as it does with the reader: "Driving that train, going wherever, cutting through cities, towns, prairies, states. I imagined it as freedom. Traveling. Exploring. Escaping" (22). It's a telling anecdote because it binds Hocking's artistic practice to a category of nomadism since, like the train, he too meanders through space and time, loading and placing various materials in one location only to do so again somewhere else indefinitely.

The text also outlines his maneuvers through the forsaken Studebaker and Fisher Body Plant 21 factories during the late 1990s, well before urban exploration was decreed a fashionable social activity. What resonates most is the artist's meditative practice of walking the streets and rail lines at night, usually on his way home from scavenging for materials, taking long-exposure photographs, or fabricating clandestine installations. "Viewing the city on foot, from the railroad tracks, provided a unique, solitary perspective and directly connected me to the lingering industrial past," he says. "Walking in general allowed me to observe minute details of the city, the things you miss while driving" (25). The irony of walking the Motor City is palpable, yet these lines offer evidence of his singular approach to art making—one that entangles anthropology, archaeology, economics, geography, sociology, and more—making his practice refreshingly difficult to discursively categorize and contain. At its most elemental level, Hocking's unrestrained independence and ease of movement reflect

a boundless freedom that few major cities in the United States but Detroit could allow or facilitate.

There are numerous photographs and installation images of Hocking's body of work featured in *Detroit Stories*, and these are often supported by paragraph-length didactic texts. For example, images from the series *Scrappers* (1999–2004), *Ziggurat and FB21* (2007–2009), and *The Mound Project* (2007–present) are accompanied by lengthy paragraphs of explanatory text written by the artist that illustrate the historical significance and lasting impact of each project. Regrettably, though, several of the color images, printed on matte Munken Print White paper, appear foggy, which a higher-gloss paper may have alleviated. Moreover, the didactic texts supporting the images occasionally repeat information included elsewhere. The repetition, combined with the artist interviews, critical essays, and articles, makes for a text-heavy catalogue. Nonetheless, the catalogue emphatically shifts away from being typical and moves toward something different and original. Conversely, as an academic research document, the vast amount of information available is immensely beneficial, and the book unequivocally stands as the most important publication on Hocking to date.

Andrew Satake Blauvelt's essay "When is Art?: Unearthing the Archive" is a fascinating and forthright survey of Hocking's major projects including *Found Slides* (1999–2004) and *RELICS* (2001–2016) that also examinines the artist's media "of time, history, and memory" (59). Blauvelt persuasively summarizes Hocking's work in relation to the readymade, the archive, and—perhaps most poignant—archaeology. "For more than twenty years," he says, "Hocking has been busy digging—unearthing the remains of a city—and narrating stories about a place of historical traumas and triumphs, resurrections and deliverances, forsaken by so many and yet unforgotten: Detroit" (55). By considering the artist's work as the study of human presence and the places and materials it leaves behind, Blauvelt lends further context to Hocking's unorthodox methods and procedures, which drift seamlessly from visual art to archaeology to creative nonfiction and back again.

The second essay in the catalogue, Michael Stone-Richards's "Retreating/Retracing Space: Scott Hocking's Diagrams of Visibility," sketches the linkages between Hocking's work, neo-Constructivism, post-Surrealism, ruin, and analogical impulses. It aims to situate

Hocking's practice within capitalism's opposing faculties to both enfranchize people and places and altogether corrupt them. Drawing connections between Andrei Tarkovsky's *Stalker* (1982), T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* (1922), and the Mesopotamian flood myth (1700 BCE), Stone-Richard's affirmational text is wonderfully ambitious and dotted with memorable lines that get to the marrow of Hocking's complexity. For instance, "This is where a surrealist-inflected critical practice of ruins, spectrality and, in places of castles—*la question des chateaux*—the *question of factories*, becomes decisive in comprehending Hocking's practice, for it is only too clear that in his practice the factory becomes the figure of the intersecting forces and problems of ruination and social stratigraphy" (196). However, because it is so dense and analytical, and coupled with nearly fifty citations, the essay feels adrift in an exhibition catalogue but would be welcome in an edited collection.

Hocking's on-site interviews with Cranbrook Art Museum curator Laura Mott, titled "Trespassing into the Sublime: Site-Specific Interviews with Scott Hocking," records their gripping and frequently hilarious conversations while swashbuckling through abandoned buildings and crumbling factories. Several of these outings revisit the locations of Hocking's previously installed works, including *Garden of the Gods* (2009–2011), and technically speaking constitute trespassing. While this fact might be controversial, it also serves to electrify the dialogue, especially when there is the very real danger of falling through the concrete floor or having the ceiling fall on your head. "All the doors are welded shut to prevent people from doing what we are doing; we have to break in through here," Hocking says. "Since the doors are welded shut, we are going to have to snake around stairwells based on what's been pried open." Mott replies, "Oh my God. . . . Scott, this is scary," to which he says, "Well, now you get a taste of what this is like" (137). In this drama, Mott enters the treacherous environments that Hocking is perhaps most comfortable in, those which he has become internationally recognized for, and the results are entirely consuming.

These candid interviews are integral to understanding the thorny processes and background finagling involved in creating major installations in government-regulated or privately owned buildings. More specifically, the account of the formation of *Bone*

*Black* (2019) is noteworthy because Hocking breaks down the bureaucratic red tape that can hinder production while outlining the logistical issues he regularly contends with. While there is some banter, Hocking's and Mott's informal yet detailed observations in regards to the project's historical references and conceptualization far exceed the more formal didactic text for the project. This begs the question whether or not it is more apt to include casual, unofficial discussions to describe an artwork over the traditional didactic message.

*Detroit Stories* is recommended for specialists and nonspecialists interested in the material and cultural history of Detroit, particularly in the areas of documentary photography, readymades, and installation art practices. This is not to say that it should be confined to a Detroit-centric readership, for it touches upon numerous subjects intersecting with commercial waste, ethnography, industrial decay, late-stage capitalism, urban renewal, and more. Though Hocking has been the subject of earlier publications, this impressive catalogue now serves as the largest and strongest repository of critical essays, artist interviews, autobiographical articles, and installation photographs on Hocking's prolific oeuvre. To this end, it appears to bend the genres of the exhibition catalogue, edited collection, and catalogue raisonné, proposing a model for a nontraditional and stirringly experimental publication for institutional galleries and museums.

# *In the Shadow of Dictatorship: Creating the Museum of Spanish Abstract Art*

Meadows Museum at Southern Methodist University
Curated by Amanda W. Dotseth and Clarisse Fava-Piz
February 26–July 30, 2023

Reviewed by Susan J. Baker
Professor of Art History
University of Houston-Downtown

Abstract Spanish art on loan from Cuenca, Spain, filled rooms that wrapped around the permanent collection of the Meadows Museum at Southern Methodist University in Dallas, Texas, like youthful arms around an old man. The Meadows Museum is home to the prized Spanish Renaissance and Baroque art collection of its founder, Algur H. Meadows, which he began to acquire (along with petroleum interests) in the mid-1950s. When the Museo de Arte Abstracto Español in Cuenca decided to renovate its galleries, it agreed to loan its artwork for traveling international exhibitions. Given the Meadows's Iberian genetics, providing temporary housing for this collection was like inviting a close relative to stay.

A catalogue accompanying the exhibition was developed and published by the Meadows Museum.[1] An essay by Manuel Fontán del Junco relates how abstract art was freely produced in Spain during the Franco dictatorship and strategically promoted abroad by the regime as evidence of its cultural erudition. However, this kind of avant-garde art was not actively championed in Spain itself. Ordinary Spaniards remained largely unaware of modernist trends in art.[2] So when the Filipino-born artist Fernando Zóbel moved to Spain in 1958 (after graduating from Harvard and completing a residency at the Rhode Island School of Design), he decided to establish a museum that could generate awareness of abstract art within the country. A fellow artist suggested he locate it in an unlikely group of fifteenth-century buildings in rural Cuenca, known as the Hanging Houses because of their seemingly precarious location on

cliffs, and the museum opened there in 1966.[3] The juxtaposition of abstract paintings and Renaissance architecture has been described as a perfect blending, so it is not surprising that this same sense of seamless companionship of new and old was generated by this current exhibition and the Meadows permanent collection.

The exhibition included a wide sampling of Spanish abstract art placed in six rooms whose composite floor plan formed a large U shape, which enfolded the space housing the Meadows's notable permanent collection. In each room, ample wall space surrounded every object, allowing individual works in the exhibition to breathe visually. Often an entire wall was given over to a single work. The objects included paintings, mixed-media pieces, and sculpture, both in metal and wood, that date from roughly the mid-1950s until 1980, with most work created during the 1960s. Given when they were made, it is not surprising that the works reflected artistic movements akin to Abstract Expressionism, Minimalism, Hard-Edge painting, and Op Art. Compared to American painting from that time, the works were mostly smaller in scale, in keeping with the size of traditional easels rather than the proportions of a mural. In this sense they possessed a European air. What was perhaps most striking was the palette of the artworks: rich browns and deep blacks, reds, and golds dominated. Occasionally, bright colors like daisy yellow, pastel pink, or ocean blue popped out, but overall the works' palette was subdued, quietly luminous, with calculatingly textured surfaces. One dared to recognize in the work the lighting of a Velázquez or Zurbarán, something perceptibly Spanish, as well as a Hispanic love of capturing surface detail.

The first room offered an introduction to the origins of the museum in Cuenca and supplied a brief history of several artists' cooperatives, such as Dau al Set (Seventh Side of the Die), which included the Catalan artist Antoni Tàpies, as well as the groups El Paso and Equipo 57, all of which helped abstract art in Spain retain a presence under the dictatorship. Honorary placement in the exhibition was given to two works by Tàpies in recognition of his significant role in advocating modern art in Spain. The first, *Brown and Ocher* (1959), was hung immediately to the right as one entered the exhibition. *Large X* (1962), was placed in the adjacent room so it could be seen through a doorway as one stood in front of the first Tàpies. Both are richly textured mixed-media objects comprising

aluminum powders and gold pigments bonded with polyvinyl on canvas. Tàpies used his characteristic X symbol in both. While the mark forms the loose compositional structure of the second painting, in the first it is a minor element set at the top left alongside a colossal stretch of gold in the shape of an abstracted battle tank that dominates the composition.

The second gallery, slightly larger and more rectangular than the first, emphasized the abstract Spanish artists' use of concrete materials. Roughened scrap metal, burlap, and wood were collaged onto gleaming painted surfaces that avoided verism or symbolic associations. The palette in this gallery was decidedly gloomy, dominated by blacks and browns. The trend toward tortured materials was explained as a response to trauma brought on by the Spanish Civil War and World War II.[4] Many of the pieces—without being literal—recall landscapes, potentially battlegrounds, in their compositional designs arranged along horizontal fields. This is the case with Gerardo Rueda's *Athos* (1960), a reference to the Greek monastery at Mount Athos. The work comprises gray cliff forms or short skyscrapers devoid of surface detail that appear as if through smoke. Lucio Muñoz's *Green and Black Structure* (1961), made from charcoal-colored wood and black oil, suggests an embattled hilltop village, its recent burning evident. Other works had impasto that had been scraped or stabbed. In *Metamorphosis (November)* (1962), Manuel Rivera used wire and gauze to form flame-like plant shapes that disintegrate in front of a hot copper ground. Modest Cuixart's *Large Baroque* (1959), depicts a bulbous shape that seems to bleed beneath a scratched overlay of metallic paint suggestive of barbed wire. This room also contained a sculpture by Pablo Serrano, *Cave for Mankind* (1962), a cast bronze over a foot high, which expresses fragmentation and disfigurement. The piece bears irregular shapes like horizontal stalagmites. In each work in this room, the material eschewed symbolic signification and instead directly conveyed its intended emotion through its substance. While associations might be made, ultimately it was the materials themselves that generated pure expression.

Due to its brighter colors of yellow, red, and cerulean blue, the third and largest room offered relief from the second's horrors. The works recalled New York–based Abstract Expressionism. For example, José Guerrero's *Somber Red* (1964), and Luis Feito's *Number 460-A* (1963), contain jagged edges and a reddish palette like that

found in a Clyfford Still or the confusion of figure/ground of Robert Motherwell's broad strokes of black. Miguel Ángel Campano's *Unititled (The Bridge II)* (1979), shows traces of an arbitrary reshuffling of compositional elements, with an enticing yellow palette, like something found in the work of Willem de Kooning. Campano's composition was unusually large in scale in comparison to the rest of the works in the exhibition, more in keeping with its American counterparts. One artist in this room, José Guerrero, lived in New York in the 1950s, which, according to the exhibition catalogue, transformed his technique.[5] His *Blue Intervals* (1971), with its repeated black ovals atop long blue rectangles, conjures the image of monks walking in procession to prayer. One work in this room by Antonio Saura continued the Spanish character of the two previous rooms. *Brigitte Bardot* (1959), contains mangled forms in black and white slashes of paint that are reminiscent of figures in Pablo Picasso's *Guernica*.

The next room was smaller and separated by a temporary wall, offering a bit of an interlude with walls painted black and only the objects illuminated. The intense spotlighting caused these color-rich paintings to glow. Works here included those by Antonio Lorenzo, Manuel Rivera, and Gustavo Torner. According to the wall text, this room replicated a similar space, the Sala Negra, created by Zóbel in his Cuenca museum, to offer an area for contemplation.[6] That idea, however, rang a little insincere and forced. The slightly baroque staging of these works seemed unnecessary, although it continued to make one think of Velázquez's dramatic use of light.

The last two rooms outlined the direction of later abstraction in Spain, which, influenced by Equipo 57, was characterized by strong geometry and mechanized designs. In some ways, this room possessed a more authentic spiritual quality than that of the Sala Negra. According to the didactics, a Madrid computer lab, the Centro de Cálculo, became a center for highly rational and objective art making long after Equipo 57 disbanded.[7] But a sense of the spiritual was not absent in these works. The exhibition presented a tranquil and beautiful work by José Luis Alexanco, *Used Curves* (1977), a piece made with acrylic, graphite, and what must have been a very thin felt-tip pen. The composition was built on a beige grid formed using gentle straight double black lines. Irregular circular smudges within each grid square are surrounded by more loosely drawn squares at

angles to the base grid. Alexanco's touch is delicate, and although systematic, each mark retains individual character and possesses a contemplative quality. Also formed on a grid, Jordi Teixidor's *Yellow Bands I* (1978), recalls the soft work of Agnes Martin, as well as her faint pastel palette. Néstor Basterretxea's *Progression* (1959), is a bas-relief in slate. Its surface is like that of an extensively used and erased chalkboard, reminiscent of a Cy Twombly but on a smaller scale. Placed next to it was a 1975 untitled work by Elena Asins that possesses similar Twombly-like properties. In the center of this room at eye level, a welded and painted iron-rod sculpture by Eusebio Sempere (1966) was placed. Light flowed through its patterned forms as it interacted in visually dynamic ways with the Teixidor painting behind it. The play with light throughout this room was not unlike that of a modern chapel, evoking divinity despite any emphasis on rationality.

In the last gallery, the space appeared as a variation on the room where the exhibition began, with colors once again muted and compositions fluid and less geometric. One piece that stood out was by Sarah Grilo, who came to Spain from Argentina via New York City. Her painting *Announcement* (1971), recalls graffiti scrawled on a worn subway wall, filled with random tagging and decayed printed letters and numbers, with an overall palette and sensibility that once again recalls the work of Cy Twombly. The exhibition finished much like it began, with an atmospheric painting by Eva Lootz, called *Black Painting* (1974). It hearkened back visually to the earlier work by Tàpies in the first gallery, its wide area of color forming a broad oval, this time at the bottom of the work, as if it were Tàpies's *Brown and Ocher* turned upside down.

By this final room, the complete range of abstract exploration in postwar Spain had been presented. At the end of the exhibition loop, one could enter the Meadows's Renaissance and Baroque galleries. Yet there was no jarring change of mood or aesthetic as one stepped into the collection of earlier art objects, largely because of a continued Spanish sensibility conveyed through color and texture throughout the Cuenca exhibition.

[1] *In the Shadow of Dictatorship: Creating the Museum of Spanish Abstract Art*, ed. Clarisse Fava-Piz and Amanda W. Dotseth, exh. cat. (Dallas: Meadows Museum, Southern Methodist University, 2023).

[2] Manuel Fontán del Junco, "'It seems the same as ever, but it is the never before seen': Creating a Museum in Franco's Spain," in Fava-Pitz and Dotseth, *In the Shadow of Dictatorship*, 16.

[3] Fontán del Junco, 17.

[4] Wall text, *In the Shadow of Dictatorship: Creating the Museum of Spanish Abstract Art*, organized by and presented at Meadows Museum, Dallas, TX, February 26–July 30, 2023.

[5] Clarisse Fava-Piz, Miranda Saylor, and Olivia Turner, "Catalogue," in Fava-Pitz and Dotseth, *In the Shadow of Dictatorship*, 114.

[6] Wall text, *In the Shadow of Dictatorship*.

[7] Wall text, *In the Shadow of Dictatorship*.

# ***Bobby Marines: Resurrection***

NE Sculpture | Gallery Factory
Curated by Bobby Marines
December 1, 2022–February 4, 2023

Reviewed by Olivia Comstock
PhD Student, Art History
University of Minnesota

At NE Sculpture | Gallery Factory in Minneapolis, the Minnesota-based and Texas-born artist Bobby Marines exhibited eight works created during his two-month studio residency at the gallery from December 1, 2022 to February 4, 2023. Marines acted as both artist and curator for the show. The title *Resurrection* refers to a process of rebirth in his own life and in the lives of his friends and family. Marines is originally from Robstown, Texas, a small town with a population of ten thousand that has been called the "most dangerous" city by the FBI and the "worst city in Texas" by *USA Today*.[1]

Place is important for Marines. His pieces trace different stages of his life chronologically, from *The Wander Years* of his early childhood in Texas, to *The Resurrection of Things that Never Died*, which refers to Marines's rediscovery of his interest in art making and community building after he moved to Minnesota. He simultaneously reflected on the influence of Robstown's environment on himself and fellow residents and critiqued the systems that created a place like Robstown, with its poverty, gang culture, and drug epidemics.[2] Other pieces in the show reflect more broadly on Marines's experience as a Chicano man and on the lives of his friends and family. Ultimately, *Resurrection* raises questions regarding what systems produce negative experiences and dangerous places, as well as what it takes to overcome those conditions.

Though some visitors expecting traditional smooth marble sculptures may have felt uneasy faced with Marines's ordinary materials like pencil on paper and cardboard, Marines intentionally employed these both out of necessity and as

part of the lineage of *rasquachismo* aesthetics, defined by Tomás Ybarra-Frausto as a sensibility or taste of the underdog.[3] Marines used found materials like cardboard, discarded reflective insulation, the back sides of previously used canvases, and accessible marking instruments like pencil and pen. For example, his installation *Pleasantville and the Abyss* faced the entrance into the gallery and was entirely filled with the reverse sides of large cotton canvases. Because the canvases were simply pinned on the wall next to each other, the viewer could glimpse the dark painted edges curling around from the front. The front of the white canvases were filled with pencil sketches depicting a montage of cityscapes, signs, lettering, graveyards, and people.

Marines's *rasquachismo* aesthetic was effective because it was true to his experience as an artist putting together his own show with limited institutional support, and therefore limited money for expensive supplies. His attention toward reuse also critiqued both the aesthetic values of the polished art world and the effects of race, class, and the criminal justice system on Marines's own life and those of the people he knows. *The Wander Years*, an installation representing Marines's early life, conveys this institutional critique especially well. As viewers entered the gallery, the first wall to their left was filled with smaller and more colorful portraits of individuals, families, and objects. Several of the pieces had symbols, like green money signs or guns, that signaled the poverty and violence of Robstown and critiqued their impact on the families that live there. The depicted figures' faces were mostly void of any definition or expression, appearing simply as blank planes. A few had ovals of tinfoil placed where the facial features would normally appear. The blank and reflective faces evoked a sense of shared experience, suggesting they could have been anyone. Marines extrapolated his own experience to speak to the larger reality of other Chicanos/as and residents of towns like Robstown throughout the United States. Starting from a personal place, Marines speaks to universal themes about systemic violence, its detrimental effects, and the difficult intentional and transformational work one must undergo to counteract it.

However, Marines did not stop at systemic critique. Instead, he also visualized his own process of transformation through his piece *The Resurrection of Things that Never Died*. If the early and middle eras of his life, depicted in the aforementioned works *Wander*

*Years* and *Pleasantville*, were defined in part by the negative effects of systemic violence, then *The Resurrection of Things that Never Died* and the show's title, *Resurrection*, were about his process of the personal rediscovery of self. By reusing materials, such as the dispersive reflective metal house insulation panels cut and layered to form an archway around the central figure drawn in pencil, presumably Marines, he referenced elements of the previous two pieces. His *rasquachismo* aesthetic of reviving materials acted as a visual representation of his personal revival of self through returning to art making as well as the revival of his community through his return to Robstown and the founding of Robstown Arts Committee and Robé Art Blitz. References to Robstown Arts Committee and Robé Art Blitz were penciled on the dark background surrounding the central figure of Marines.

Off in a small room in the back of the gallery was an altar surrounded by three pieces: *Blessed*, *Virgin and Child*, and *La Virgen de San Juan (The Story of Genevieve)*. There, Marines reimagined his cousin as the Virgin of San Juan. Instead of placing the name of a possessive ex-boyfriend on her neck, Marines wrote "Juan," proclaiming her a saint adorned with the self-assertion of her own name rather than the controlling power of the men in her life. Through this piece, Marines asserted that even if those around him had been harmed by the same systems that harmed him, they too could return to the creative parts of childhood as a source of inspiration for self-transformation. Even if Marines's cousin had not yet undertaken this journey, Marines was visualizing the first step for her to take, inviting her to join him in the self-creation of art making and community building. In this way too Marines spoke to a broader audience who had been affected by poverty, racism, and violence, conveying that they are never too forgone to transform themselves and can use easily found materials and creative pursuits to do so. Viewers needed to put aside any expectation of a glossy art-world aesthetic to understand the creative reuse and critique of a *rasquachismo* sensibility when entering into Marines's biographical world.

[1] "Resurrection," NE Sculpture, last modified November 30, 2023, https://ne-sculpture.org/resurrection.

[2] "Resurrection," NE Sculpture.

[3] Tomás Ybarra-Frausto, "Rasquachismo: A Chicano Sensibility," in *Chicano Art: Resistance and Affirmation, 1965–1985*, ed. Richard Griswold del Castillo, Teresa McKenna, and Yvonne Yarbro-Bejarano, exh. cat. (Los Angeles: Wight Art Gallery, 1991), 155–62.

# *Work and Leisure in Mid-Century Missouri: The Scruggs-Vandervoort-Barney Heart of the Nation Collection*

Museum of Art and Archaeology, University of Missouri and the Montminy Gallery, Boone County History and Culture Center
Curated by Kristin Schwain, Lorinda Bradley, and Mary Karcher
March 17–May 13, 2023

Reviewed by Audrey Florey
PhD Candidate, Visual Studies
University of Missouri-Columbia

For the first time in seventy years, paintings from the Missouri: Heart of the Nation collection were presented to the public as an art collection in the Montminy Gallery's 2023 exhibition *Work and Leisure in Mid-Century Missouri: The Scruggs-Vandervoort-Barney Heart of the Nation Collection*.[1] In 1946 Reeves Lewenthal of the Associated American Artists initiated a commission on behalf of the St. Louis–based department store Scruggs, Vandervoort & Barney. Fourteen artists were tasked with depicting the people and places of Missouri, and Missouri: Heart of the Nation is the result. The goal of this initiative was to put fine art in the hands of the American people. As such, the ninety-eight figurative drawings and paintings of rural landscapes, urban industries, and tourist attractions were used as decor in the Scruggs, Vandervoort & Barney storefront and mass-produced as fine art prints. However, as the exhibition successfully demonstrated, the Missouri: Heart of the Nation collection did not serve the entire Missouri public and was intended for a specific audience, one that was white and middle- to upper-class.

At first glance, paintings in *Work and Leisure in Mid-Century Missouri* evoked nostalgia. Viewers found themselves immersed in a warm sunny day in Nicolai Cikovsky's *Missouri Botanical Garden, St. Louis* (1946) or driving down Missouri's winding country roads where they would encounter quarries like those in Ernest Fiene's *Lead and Zinc Mining, Joplin*

(1947). But this quaint reminiscence was brought to a crashing halt as viewers were asked to reflect on the social and racial tensions in mid-twentieth-century Missouri brought out in the wall text, a key factor in the exhibition's success.

It was evident that the show's organizers faced various challenges in presenting a sizeable academic collection in a contemporary gallery space. Missouri: Heart of the Nation is part of the permanent collection of the Museum of Art and Archaeology (MAA) at the University of Missouri (MU) in Columbia, but the museum has remained closed since July 2022 as it undergoes renovations. In a desire to bring part of the MAA's collection to the public during this time, the museum collaborated with the Montminy Gallery, a contemporary art gallery situated within the Boone County History and Culture Center. As a smaller contemporary art space, the Montminy Gallery demanded an effective curatorial strategy, which the exhibition's curators accomplished by placing a small portion of the collection's paintings in conversation with each other. Of the thirty paintings in the collection's ninety-plus works, roughly twenty oil paintings were chosen for this exhibition. Those paintings were then organized into five sections or themes: "Missouri: Heart of the Nation," "Postwar Missouri Life," "Scruggs, Vandervoort & Barney," "The Artists," and "The Associated American Artists." Each section included three to eight paintings, respectively divided among five of the gallery's six walls. On the sixth wall, a short film was projected about Missouri: Heart of the Nation's history, describing the collection's transition from MU's administrative building to the MAA in 2014.

Arranging the paintings in five sections allowed the curators to maximize the gallery space; it also influenced other curatorial decisions, including the exhibition's didactic materials. The show did not use extended labels, which often accompany artworks in museum exhibitions, and instead relied exclusively on thematic text panels positioned at the beginning of each section. Each of the exhibition's five text panels explained the Missouri: Heart of the Nation collection's inception, production, display, dissemination, and reception, as well as the works' subjects. Eliminating a conventional museum interpretation strategy—the extended label—may seem unorthodox for a collection with deep historical roots. However, this curatorial choice contributed to the show's efficacy. Viewers were introduced to the collection's

sociocultural context first, and then were invited to contemplate the artworks' subtle implications, unencumbered by additional label text.

At times, the curators' statements directed the audience toward a particular interpretation. In the exhibition section "Postwar Missouri Life," four paintings depicting scenes ranging from a rural farm to urban industries and city leisure suggested an idyllic rural Missouri. The exhibition text addressed the racial and gendered undertones evident in these works. Lawrence Beall Smith's *Canning and Button Art, State Fair, Sedalia* (1946), for example, portrays a white woman shopping for canned goods. The wall text described how women were essential figures in Missouri's workforce but were consistently depicted as consumers instead of active contributors.

While "Postwar Missouri Life" drew attention to specific social biases, other section texts allowed individuals to draw their own conclusions. The "Scruggs, Vandervoort & Barney" section focused on the relationship between department stores and fine art in the mid-twentieth century. It explained how department stores frequently used fine art's high status to elevate their own prestige. Using the arts as an arbiter of taste appealed to Scruggs, Vandervoort & Barney's predominately white middle- to upper-class audience but dismissed those who did not fit this identity, particularly Black Americans, who constituted a large portion of St. Louis's population at this time. The exhibition emphasized this point by showing another work by Smith, *Note from St. Louis* (1947). Smith's painting juxtaposes working-class America with upper-class America: a young Black child is shown holding a shoe-shining kit and standing before an ornate public fountain sculpture. The dichotomy was not lost on viewers encountering the work in 2023, and one wonders what viewers of the mid-twentieth century would have thought. While they can idly enjoy the painting's portrayal of the young child, he can only take a brief moment from his work obligations to appreciate the fountain's beauty. Since works such as this one from Missouri: Heart of the Nation appeared in leisure spaces (e.g., the Scruggs, Vandervoort & Barney department store) for predominately white Americans, Black Americans like the young boy pictured in Smith's painting did not often have the economic means or social privilege to access these places.

As a whole, the exhibition demonstrated the intricacies and complexities of Missouri's political, social, and cultural landscape, but

it also celebrated the regional Midwest art style of the 1940s. The artists commissioned by Scruggs, Vandervoort & Barney made up the largest wall of the exhibition. Most of these artists experienced the social power and effects of Depression-era public art sponsored by federal programs such as the Works Progress Administration and Federal Art Program in the 1930s and 40s. The exhibition holistically showcased the different aesthetic modes—Realism, Regionalism, Modernism, and Social Realism—that the artists embraced. Missouri artist Frederick Emanuel Shane exemplified the Regionalist style in *The Old Cemetery (Ste. Genevieve)* (1946) while others, including Frederick E. Conway, highlighted more Modern qualities like divided planes and bright colors in *Grand and Olive—St. Louis* (1946).

Perhaps most important, *Work and Leisure in Mid-Century Missouri* effectively met the Missouri: Heart of the Nation collection's original goal by making the works accessible to the public. The Boone County History and Culture Center, where the Montminy Gallery resides, is located on a main thoroughfare in Missouri and is accessible to a larger public who may not venture into downtown Columbia, where University of Missouri and its museum are located, or into traditional museum spaces. Furthermore, as a collaborative effort between the MAA and a public gallery space, the exhibition drew upon its local constituents; it recruited MU professors, graduate students, and professors emeriti, as well as MAA preparators and regional gallerists to design, curate, and execute the show. Collaborations like these are what make art collections more accessible to the general public and facilitate a larger reception for art. *Work and Leisure in Mid-Century Missouri* is only one of the many exhibitions mounted by the Montminy Gallery that have succeeded in both content and spirit.

[1] Prior to the Missouri: Heart of the Nation collection's 2014 move to the University of Missouri's Museum of Art and Archaeology, a portion of the works were on view in private offices and hallways throughout Jesse Hall, the University of Missouri's administrative building.

# *Miniature Costumes and Quilts: Geeta Khandelwal's Labor of Love*

International Quilt Museum, University of Nebraska, Lincoln
Curated by Marin Hanson
March 31–October 14, 2023

Reviewed by Emily Mayagoitia
Art Historian
Wichita State University

Walking into the exhibition *Miniature Costumes and Quilts: Geeta Khandelwal's Labor of Love* at the International Quilt Museum (IQM) on the University of Nebraska-Lincoln's East Campus was like stepping into a tiny, exquisitely embellished world where the rich tapestry of Indian history and culture unfolded in miniature form. Geeta Khandelwal, a globally recognized quiltmaker from Mumbai, crafted a mesmerizing collection of over fifty miniature costumes that paid homage to the opulent attire worn by the ancient maharajas (kings) of northern India between the 1750s and the 1950s. The International Quilt Museum, located at the heart of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln's East Campus, is renowned for housing the largest publicly held quilt collection in the world. As diversity and inclusion are central to the university's and the IQM's mission, all visitors are encouraged to experience works that represent quilts and quilt-making traditions from around the world and throughout history. With objects from more than sixty-five countries and dating from the 1600s to today, the IQM served as a fitting stage for an exhibition that artfully celebrated the multifaceted richness of Indian culture.

The exhibition showcased Khandelwal's meticulous re-creation of traditional royal garments, reduced to approximately six inches tall, or one-eighth of their original size. While traveling through many of India's diverse regions, she was able to collect local textiles, which she used in the construction of her miniature garments created over the course of three years. The level of detail in

each miniature robe was impressive, capturing the grandeur and intricacy of the original garments worn by the maharajas. From vibrant silks to elaborate embroidery, Khandelwal's dedication to authenticity was evident in every stitch. Each miniature costume was a testament to her deep understanding of the historical and cultural attributes that shaped India over the centuries. Beyond the royal realm, the exhibition offered a glimpse into various facets of Indian life.

A standout feature of the exhibition involved the presentation of Khandelwal's miniature garments alongside doll quilts from her private collection. Each miniature quilt was paired with an Indian garment or quilt sourced from the International Quilt Museum's collection, illustrating the rich spectrum of the country's cultural heritage. The incorporation of full-sized pieces from the IQM permanent collection alongside their miniature counterparts introduced textiles originating from marginalized Indian communities, emphasizing the diversity within India's cultural tapestry. Each pairing created a harmonious dialogue between the miniature pieces and full-size works, making the interconnectedness of India's textile traditions evident throughout the entire show.

Khandelwal's "labor of love" extended beyond the aesthetic appeal of her creations. It was a celebration of Indian craftsmanship and a journey through time that encapsulated the essence of a bygone era. The exhibition showcased her exceptional sewing skills while also inviting visitors to explore both the complex details of Indian history and the evolution of its textile artistry. Each miniature costume thus became a window into a different facet of Indian society and offered insights into the historical and cultural features that have shaped the nation over the centuries. This exhibition was not only one of artistic mastery but also a powerful educational platform that brought the rich mastery of Indian workmanship to the heart of Midwest America in a manner that was both accessible and visually captivating.

The thoughtful curation and arrangement of the exhibit contributed to its overall success. The open exhibition space complemented the sumptuous beauty of Khandelwal's creations by providing a neutral setting that allowed the vibrant colors and detailed patterns of the miniature costumes and quilts to shine. The space served as a carefully considered canvas that not only mitigated visual overstimulation but also ensured ease of access for all visitors,

accommodating diverse needs. First and foremost, the open layout of the exhibition space provided visitors with ample room to move freely and explore at their own pace. This deliberate design choice prevented the feeling of overcrowding, minimized the risk of visual overload, and allowed visitors to focus their attention on each minute detail of the miniature costumes and quilts without feeling overwhelmed by a chaotic environment.

Additionally, wide pathways and clear sightlines ensured unobstructed movement throughout the exhibit, accommodating individuals using mobility aids such as wheelchairs or walkers. Moreover, the absence of large physical barriers within the space promoted inclusivity and allowed all visitors to engage with the objects equitably, regardless of their physical abilities. The open exhibition space enabled flexible viewing perspectives, catering to the diverse preferences and needs of visitors. Those who preferred to take in the entire exhibit at once could do so from a central vantage point, while others could choose to approach individual displays more closely to examine the embroidery and quilting in detail. This versatility in viewing options empowered visitors to tailor their experiences to their own interests and comfort levels, contributing to more enriching and personalized visits.

Consistent lighting levels across the exhibition space eliminated any unevenness or dark spots and guaranteed that every visitor could clearly see the fine details of each piece from any vantage point. The lighting worked to illuminate the overall elegant features of the miniatures, quilts, and full-size mounted garments, allowing visitors to appreciate the craftsmanship up close. Moreover, specialized spotlighting was employed to accentuate specific areas of interest within the exhibit, such as ornate appliqué and meticulously constructed seams. By selectively illuminating these details, the lighting design allowed visitors to marvel at the talent inherent in Khandelwal's own creations and the works from IQM's permanent collection.

The informative text, presented both on the wall and in panels, provided context and made the exhibition approachable to textile enthusiasts as well as experts on Indian culture. Specifically, the object labels themselves stood out as beacons of guidance amid the displays of ornate miniature garments and quilts. Strategically colored in bright yellow, they served as vital signposts, effortlessly drawing the visitor's attention without overshadowing the exquisite artistry of

the showcased pieces. These labels emerged as subtle yet effective tools for conveying essential information regarding each object. Their vibrant hue contrasted with the surrounding pieces, ensuring they remained noticeable without creating visual clutter. They were carefully positioned alongside the garments and quilts, providing helpful insights into the historical significance, regional influences, and key details of each work of art. By seamlessly integrating with the displays, the labels became continuous extensions of the storytelling process, enriching the visitor's journey through the diverse landscapes of Indian culture and history.

*Miniature Costumes and Quilts: Geeta Khandelwal's Labor of Love* was a testament to the power of art transcending time and space. By juxtaposing the delicate miniatures against the full-sized quilts, the exhibition provided a visually striking contrast that drew the viewer's attention and invited them to explore the nuances of both art forms. Showcasing both Indian miniature costumes and quilts side by side underlined the universality of textile traditions and underscored the interconnectedness of global artistic expression. As the visitor explored the space, it became apparent that all were welcome at the International Quilt Museum, where diversity and inclusion enrich the community of learning, discovery, and outreach. Geeta Khandelwal's dedication to her craft, coupled with the show's meticulous attention to detail, resulted in an enchanting exhibition that invited all who visited to embark on a captivating journey through India's rich cultural and historical tapestry. It is this "labor of love" that resonates with the essence of the textile world, leaving a lasting impression on all who had the privilege to experience it.

# *Magic Wilderness: Dreamscapes of the Forest*

Museum of Wisconsin Art, West Bend, Wisconsin
Curated by Anwar Floyd-Pruitt, Graeme Reid, and Ally Wilber
October 22, 2022–January 15, 2023

Reviewed by Tamera Lenz Muente
Curator
Taft Museum of Art, Cincinnati, Ohio

"There are some who can live without wild things, and some who cannot." So begins *A Sand County Almanac*, Aldo Leopold's groundbreaking 1949 memoir of his efforts to restore his family's land near Baraboo, Wisconsin. The sixteen artists featured in *Magic Wilderness: Dreamscapes of the Forest* certainly fall into Leopold's latter camp: it is obvious they cannot live without wild things, and their evocative works in this exhibition make the argument that none of us should.[1]

The Museum of Wisconsin Art's mission is to present the work of Wisconsin artists, past and present. Although born and raised in Wisconsin, I finally made my first visit to the museum during the winter of 2022. I was immediately taken by the connections between art and nature throughout not only the current exhibition, *Magic Wilderness*, but also the entire facility and its permanent collection. This is likely a natural outgrowth of the museum's locale. The city of West Bend sits within the Kettle Moraine region of southeastern Wisconsin, where remnants of the Ice Age are still visible in kettle lakes, rolling hills, and ridges that mark the landscape once covered by glaciers. Further north, boulder-strewn rivers roll through dense evergreen forests that reach to the shores of Lake Superior. Even Milwaukee, the state's largest city, a forty-five-minute drive south of West Bend, is dominated by the massive presence of Lake Michigan, its size and scale akin to an inland ocean. One is never far from the powerful presence of nature in Wisconsin.

To enter the museum—a white contemporary building designed by Jim Shields that opened in 2013—I walked a path that winds through a grove of more than seven hundred aspen trees, their white

branches bare against the clear blue winter sky. Inside the building's airy, glass-walled atrium, I experienced the first work in *Magic Wilderness*: Brooke Thiele's short film *The Deer Queen* (2017), which set the tone for the exhibition.[2] Near the misty shores of a Northwoods lake, a woman emerges from the belly of a whitetail deer carcass. A towering female figure wearing an antler headdress, buckskin, and a flowing skirt of camouflage fabric walks through meadows and forest. The otherworldly cackles of sandhill cranes—personified by another statuesque figure with wings—punctuate the sounds of falling trees and rifle shots. The archetypal imagery in the film tapped into my childhood memories of northern Wisconsin: swimming and fishing in tree-rimmed lakes, walking through shadowy forests, and learning to fire a rifle from my uncle, an avid deer hunter. Thiele creates a shamanistic atmosphere that carries the film to its conclusion, in which the wildness of the self collides with that of the landscape.

On the entrance wall of the second-floor exhibition gallery, Aldo Leopold's thoughts about beauty in nature and art provided a framework for the exhibition: "Our ability to perceive quality in nature begins, as in art, with the pretty. It expands through successive stages of the beautiful to values as yet uncaptured by language." Leopold's statement suggests that visual art, along with other modes that appeal to the senses, has the ability to elicit deeper responses to nature that are impossible to describe in words. In *Magic Wilderness*, the museum created an installation that encouraged visitors to experience art—and in turn, nature—through their senses.

Jacob Bautista's *A Forest Follows* (2021–22) led the visitor through the exhibition.[3] The piece consisted of tree trunks formed from handmade flax paper that rose from the floor at varied angles, turning the space itself into a forest. A soundscape by Ben Binversie (2022) filled the gallery with birdsong, footsteps, and the wind rustling through leaves. In his sculpture *Bird* (2022), Kevin Giese created a minimalist marsh with invasive phragmite grass that soared from floor to ceiling.[4] The title could be interpreted as ironic: phragmites spread rapidly, destroying the wetland biodiversity essential to native and migrating birds. Likewise, pieces by Andrew Khitsun and Maureen Fritchen explored Wisconsin flora. Khitsun's close-up photographs of fungi and lichens (2022) presented an otherworldly landscape with stunning colors and textures that served as both

abstract compositions and scientific catalogs. Fritchen's sculptures (2020–21), made of polyethylene foam and expired medical containers, echoed the forms of Khitsun's photographs in three dimensions while commenting on the threat to the environment of single-use plastics.[5]

Anchoring the exhibition visually and historically were large paintings by John Colt and Tom Uttech, both former painting professors at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, my alma mater. Of his interest in nature's microcosms, Colt said, "I've never been interested in the panoramic scene as much as I have the little areas—the realms of experience, nature close-up."[6] His Marquette mural (1958), commissioned for Marquette University, dominated the back wall of the exhibition.[7] Forms suggesting trees, islands, roots, and plants—including the wild mandrake, which possesses medicinal and hallucinogenic properties—appear to float and shape-shift, conjuring nature's mysterious qualities. Nearby, sculptures by Kyoung Ae Cho made from branches, stems, pine needles, beeswax, and wood, such as *Duet III* (2009), echoed the evocative shapes in Colt's large-scale work.[8]

While Colt's work zeroes in on nature's more intimate moments, Uttech's expresses the spiritual, sublime, and epic qualities of nature. Uttech's painting *Untitled (Midsummer Night's Dream)* (1973–74) reveals the painter's early interest in magical realism, a thread that continues to run through his work.[9] Recalling Thiele's film at the museum entrance, a naked woman with a deer head stands in profile, her body turned blue by the moonlight and the flickering northern lights above. A musk ox—an ancient, shaggy, lumbering creature that still survives in the Arctic regions—delicately licks her belly as luna moths flutter around them and pitcher plant flowers droop at their feet. A few years after completing this work, Uttech explained that his paintings "almost always involve northern wilderness and my feelings of the great mystery of it."[10] The exhibition also featured Uttech's *Diptych (Untitled)* (1974), which debuted at the 1975 Whitney Biennial.[11] In the two soaring canvases, turbulent clouds are reflected in still waters filled with dark islands. Gnarled birches seem to peer at us through knots that resemble eyes, marking the trees as wild, mythical witnesses. The permanent collection galleries featured a few of Uttech's more recent works, spectacular narrative landscapes teeming with flocks of birds, herds of deer, and packs of wolves

frantically fleeing an unseen danger.[12] The occasional bear stares out from his paintings, imploring us to behold the exodus. In an essay about Uttech's paintings, the poet and art critic John Yao wrote, "We may finally be starting to see this world, this complex wilderness . . . but it has been watching us all along."[13]

*Magic Wilderness* brought together paintings, photography, sculpture, mixed-media works, and sound to create what the Museum of Wisconsin Art called an "imagined ecosystem." The immersive environment successfully invoked the transformative experience of wild nature, highlighting the myriad ways it continues to enamor and inspire artists, while encouraging viewers to, as Tom Uttech has said, "Get up out of your chair . . . go out into the woods . . . and join the adventure."[14]

[1] "Magic Wilderness: Dreamscapes of the Forest," Museum of Wisconsin Art, last modified December 29, 2022, https://wisconsinart.org/exhibitions/magic-wilderness/.

[2] "The Deer Queen," Brooke Thiele (artist website), last modified January 19, 2021, http://brookethiele.com/film.html.

[3] "Artist Interview: Jacob Bautista," interview by Brianna Cole, Museum of Wisconsin Art, October 19, 2022, https://wisconsinart.org/artist-interview-jacob-bautista/.

[4] "Sculptures," Kevin Giese (artist website), last modified August 4, 2020, https://www.kevingiese.com/home/sculptures.

[5] "Maureen Fritchen," RAM Artist Fellowship Recipients, Racine Art Museum, last modified August 16, 2023, https://www.ramart.org/artist-resources/fellowships/recipients/fritchen/#works.

[6] "John Nicholson Colt," Museum of Wisconsin Art, accessed February 18, 2024, http://wisconsinart.org/artists/john-nicholson-colt.

[7] Bobby Tanzilo, "New MOWA Show Exhibits Colt Mural for the First Time in Nearly 50 Years," *OnMilwaukee*, October 19, 2022, https://onmilwaukee.com/articles/mowa-marquette-mural-john-colt.

[8] "*Duet III*," Kyoung Ae Cho (artist website), last modified December 6, 2022, http://www.kyoungaecho.com/cho/w5-09Duet3.html.

[9] "Past Auction: *Untitled (Midsummer Night's Dream)*, 1973–1974," ArtNet, last modified September 5, 2019, https://www.artnet.com/artists/tom-uttech/untitled-midsummer-nights-dream-CxRD2SmG3EhDWWMQ3Vboxg2.

[10] Quoted in *Jerome C. Krause & Tom Uttech: Visions from the North Woods*, ed. Verna Posever Curtis, exh. cat. (Milwaukee: Milwaukee Art Center, 1977), 5.

[11] "Tom Uttech: *Diptych (Untitled)*, 1974," Artsy, accessed February 18, 2024, https://www.artsy.net/artwork/tom-uttech-diptych-untitled; *1975 Biennial Exhibition* (New York: Whitney Museum of Art, 1975), cat. 119, https://archive.org/details/1975biennialexhi/page/118/mode/2up.

[12] "*Nin Gassinsibingwe*," Collections, Museum of Wisonsin Art, last modified June 7, 2022, https://wisconsinart.org/collections/nin-gassinsibingwe/.

[13] John Yao, "Tom Uttech," in *Tom Uttech: New Paintings*, exh. cat. (New York: Alexandre Gallery, 2004), n.p.

[14] Yao, "Tom Uttech," n.p.

# *Spandita Malik: Jāḷī—Meshes of Resistance*

Kemper Museum of Contemporary Art
Curated by Krista Alba
July 6, 2023–February 24, 2024

Reviewed by Sara Stepp, PhD
Academic Curator, Mulvane Art Museum
Washburn University

*Spandita Malik: Jāḷī—Meshes of Resistance*, a small but impactful exhibition at the Kemper Museum of Contemporary Art, affirmed the continued relevance of traditional forms of craft in present art practices. The featured work, a syncretic composite of textile, photography, and social collaboration by Spandita Malik (b. 1995, India), brought attention to current women's issues using time-honored embroidery techniques. Tucked away in a quiet gallery, the exhibition included nine textile portraits from Malik's series *Jāḷī*. Near the entrance, a monitor with headphones played a short looping video of the artist explaining her process. The installation emphasized the works' materiality; textiles were tacked to wall-mounted planks, allowing them to drape and respond to movement in the air. Portraits were labeled only with title, date, and medium, encouraging viewers to acquaint themselves with the subjects by closely studying the works.

Malik explores issues such as resistance, agency, and community in her art using a socially engaged practice based in photography. Since her graduate work at the Parsons School of Design in the late 2010s, she has focused on issues of gender-based violence and what she refers to as the "colonial lens."[1] She strives to document the lives and experiences of Indian women in a way that empowers her subjects. To create the most appropriate visual language for this task, she pushes the boundaries of various creative forms, including photography, textile art, documentary, and social practice, extracting parts from each and blending them together. The objects she produces are mixed-media photographic textiles that result from a process

of community engagement. The works extend beyond their physical boundaries in an invisible network of solidarity and shared experiences.

*Jāḷī* emanates from a body of work called *Nā́rī*. For these series, Malik traveled to the North Indian states of Punjab, Rajasthan, and Uttar Pradesh, each of which is known for a distinctive embroidery style. There, she connected with local organizations that support survivors of domestic abuse and sexual assault. These centers encourage survivors to use their embroidery skills, passed down through families and communities, as a means of attaining financial independence. Malik came to know the women she met there, spending time in their homes, learning their languages of needlework, and meeting other women through them. She wove a network of survivors, connecting them through group texts and phone calls. The concept of *jāḷī*—openwork in architecture, metalwork, and stitching[2]—shaped this aspect of her practice. In Malik's work, *jāḷī* comes to signify a communal system of support.

Malik received permission to photograph these women in their private spaces. She used a heat transfer emulsion process to print their portraits on local fabric and then invited each work's subject to embroider it in whatever way she chose. Malik says that she "was thinking a lot about documentary photography in India, and as we know, it has been very much colonized through a Western eye. We have these photographers who go to India and come back with photography of poverty. I wanted to do the opposite; I didn't want to become a colonizer. These women with their portraits, they had full agency. They chose to cover their faces, they embroidered themselves with gold jewelry, they adorned the walls behind them in gold."[3] The resulting works are a dynamic balance between Malik's intimate photography and the lush colors and textures of her collaborators' embroidery.

The *Jāḷī* series blends communal and personal modes of expression. *Meena II*, for instance, utilizes *phulkari* needlework, the regional embroidery style of Punjab. The work's red-and-gold border demonstrates the reverse-side darning stitch that can often be found in *phulkari.* Intricate botanical motifs appear to spring from the walls of Meena's bedroom, their perfect uniformity suggesting the use of a stencil. Other stitched areas follow the photographic image: embroidered lines pick out the bedspread's floral design and, most notably, Meena's garment,

accessories, skin, and facial features are sheathed in rows of silk stitches that form a protective armor. The figure is a block of gold and red thread that suggests her general contours but obscures details. Her likeness becomes iconic rather than photographic. Meena allows the viewer a glimpse at some intimate parts of her life—the bed where she sleeps, the pictures that hang in her room, her teddy bear—but effectively bars visual access to others. We see Meena according to her stitching. Her intervention in Malik's photograph functions as a powerful symbol of agency, self-possession, and community connection.

Though *Jāḷī—Meshes of Resistance* was a small show, the Kemper worked to amplify its impact. The exhibition was a feature of many tours, and it inspired well-attended public programs like Beyond the Lens, a series of artist talks by local photographers. It also connected formally and thematically with other Kemper exhibitions. *Sarah Zapata: So the roots be known* and *Hangama Amiri: A Homage to Home*, for instance, both featured the work of artists who use textile methods to communicate women's experiences. Taken together, the three exhibitions made a strong statement about the innovative work women artists are doing to harness the enduring power of textiles as a form of expression. The conversation that *Jāḷī—Meshes of Resistance* staged about autonomy and empowerment felt particularly timely in this moment when women's rights are precarious throughout the world. Malik's collaborative work offered a compelling visualization of the power of women's communities, systems of knowledge, and modes of creative expression.

[1] Quoted in “Meshes of Resistance,” *Aesthetica*, December 12, 2023, https://aestheticamagazine.com/spandita-malik. Malik further explains, “Growing up in India, I often felt that the photography surrounding India, for a long time, was picturesque images of poverty through the lens of the outsider. This project [her series *Nā́rī*] became a very important part of my understanding of my country, of the women of my country through a decolonized perspective.” Quoted in “Women’s History Month: Spandita Malik,” interview by Yuhe Yao, *Musée*, March 12, 2020, https://museemagazine.com/culture/2020/3/17/woman-crush-wednesday-spandita-malik.

[2] “Spandita Malik: Jāḷī—Meshes of Resistance,” Kemper Museum of Contemporary Art, accessed February 1, 2024, https://www.kemperart.org/exhibition/spandita-malik-solo-exhibition.

[3] Quoted in “These Beautiful Images Are A Harsh Critique of Gendered Violence In India,” interview by Pia Peterson, *BuzzFeed News*, Nov. 9, 2021, https://www.buzzfeednews.com/article/piapeterson/spandita-malik-photography-women-india.

# *Scandinavian Design and the United States, 1890–1980*

Milwaukee Art Museum
Curated by Bobbye Tigerman and Monica Obniski
March 24–July 23, 2023

Reviewed by K. L. H. Wells
Associate Professor of American Art and Architecture
University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee

For those who associate Scandinavian design with IKEA's flat-packed furniture, assembled at home with those dreaded Allen wrenches, or with the more recent craze for hygge, in which highly textured, light, and bright surfaces are accompanied by wood-burning stoves and steaming mugs of herbal tea, the Milwaukee Art Museum's exhibition *Scandinavian Design and the United States, 1890–1980* was a revelation. But even for those of us familiar with the "masterpieces" of Scandinavian design, the Aaltos, Jacobsens, Jensens, Risoms, Saarinens, and Wegners that have long enjoyed blue-chip status in the market, this show offered plenty of new discoveries. Instead of reinforcing familiar narratives about these celebrated (male) designers, heroically importing their organic modernism to a US market saturated with historical revivalism, *Scandinavian Design and the United States* took a more multidirectional approach, highlighting the cross-cultural exchanges, mutual influences, and shared interests that produced so many familiar elements of our designed environment. Arguably, the exhibition went so far as to suggest that "Scandinavian design" was produced as much by Americans as by Scandinavians. It demonstrated that designers, manufacturers, consumers, magazine editors, and politicians in the US worked to reinforce Scandinavian design's associations with nature and craft, abstraction and functionality, youth and progress. Objects such as California designer Sam Maloof's near copy of Hans Wegner's Cowhorn Chair or the "Swedish Modern" mixing bowls produced by the Anchor Hocking

Glass Corporation pointed not only to the limits of authenticity but also to the liminality of cultural concepts like "Scandinavian design" that exist somewhere between the desires and realities of historical actors operating across oceans and continents.

*Scandinavian Design and the United States* highlighted how cultural diplomacy and marketing, as well as migration, travel, and study abroad, shaped the production and American reception of design from Scandinavia, which was defined broadly to include Finland and Iceland as well as Denmark, Norway, and Sweden. By considering nearly a century of cultural exchange before 1980, the exhibition provided a corrective history of the pre-IKEA era, reminding us that everyday items from Legos to Volvos are examples of Scandinavian design. The show began its recounting of this history in the late nineteenth century, when members of Scandinavian communities in the United States embraced practices such as handweaving and rosemaling as traditional arts that could reinforce their Scandinavian identity and further improve their status as model immigrants. By beginning with this era, the exhibition allowed for some pleasant surprises, such as attention to the Viking revival that influenced designs by Tiffany and Gorham, as well as the work of Valborg "Mama" Gravander, whose homes in San Francisco and Mill Valley, California, were centers for handweaving, dancing, and festivals for Swedish immigrants, who flocked to California as well as the Midwest. Gravander's work is represented with a plush rug whose field is dotted with abstract shapes and the floating letters of the word "Ekbacken," the name of her Mill Valley homestead.

Textiles like this formed an impressive throughline throughout the exhibition. Since they are so often separated into specialized galleries or shows, it was exciting to see textiles so well integrated with the rest of this exhibition's materials, as well as the wide range of textile types and styles. Long runs of fabrics designed by the Marimekko company and Marianne Strengell were hung vertically to complement fiber art pieces by Jack Lenor Larsen, Ed Rossbach, and Lenore Tawney. Wall hangings such as Lillian Holm's *First Sight of New York* and Ingrid Dessau's *Manhattan* highlight the grid of New York's streets and skyscrapers through flat weaves. In contrast, Astrid Sampe's Pine rug for the United Nations Library is a riot of plush loops of wool, its fuzzy texture reinforcing the depiction of pine needles radiating from the rug's center in a hypnotic swirl.

Howard Smith, the only Black artist in the show, was represented by one of the popular silk wall hangings he designed for the Vallila company in Finland, the bold colors and graphic shapes of its red flowers, green leaves, and black vase contrasting with the thin, sinuous swirls of Smith's signature in the bottom-right corner. Eliel and Loja Saarinen's wall hangings for Cranbrook, including the *Festival of the May Queen* hangings designed for the Kingswood School for Girls and the so-called *Cranbrook Map Tapestry* were impressive highlights. But the real showstopper was Frida Hansen's *Sørover*, a monumental tapestry in which swans carry svelte Norse goddesses across an abstract fish-scale sea. Viewers rounding the corner from one gallery to the next were confronted with this truly impressive work, which speaks to both the eclecticism of Scandinavian design and its longstanding acclaim in the US. *Sørover* was exhibited at the Norse-American Centennial in Minnesota in 1925 and published in *House Beautiful* magazine four years later.

Hansen's tapestry was just one of many exciting visual moments in the show, which teemed with creative display strategies. Paavo Tynell's chandelier for Taito Oy was hung just high enough to be out of reach but low enough to allow visitors to appreciate how its stylized flower shapes rhymed with the iconic *Unikko* textile designed by Maija Isola for Marimekko. The equally iconic Ericofon telephone was displayed with a small mirror beneath it so that viewers could see its keypad. A silver cocktail tray by Gorham was hung vertically in a display case like a mirror. Tapio Wirkkala's Leaf Tray for Soinne et Kni was similarly supported upright on a single thin rod behind the 1954 exhibition catalogue for *Design in Scandinavia* that features a stylized version of the item on its cover.

These kinds of contextualizing pairings were deployed deftly throughout the exhibition. A small ceramic bowl by Grete Prytz Kittelsen for J. Tostrup was displayed next to a photograph and quotation from the *House Beautiful* article that extolled its associations with Norwegian nature and sexuality. The Chair designed by Hans Wegner stood near a photo from the historic 1960 presidential debate between John F. Kennedy and Richard Nixon in which the candidates sat in Wegner chairs to convey their modernity. Nixon later blamed his poor performance in the debate on his discomfort with the unfamiliar chair, only reinforcing Kennedy's associations with youth and progress by

comparison. Alvar Aalto's Savoy vase sat behind his drawing for the Finnish Pavilion at the 1939 New York World's Fair to showcase the similarity of the two works' undulating curves. In these ways, the exhibition invited not just close looking but also a practice of critical visual comparison, encouraging viewers to note relationships between works in disparate media or formats and lending cohesion to an exhibition of great color and variety.

*Scandinavian Design and the United States* built on curator Monica Obniski's previous blockbuster design exhibition at the Milwaukee Art Museum (MAM), *Serious Play: Design in Midcentury America* (2018–19), which similarly expanded narratives of midcentury modernism's greatest hits to contextualize and enrich our understanding of familiar objects. While Obniski has since moved on to the High Museum of Art in Atlanta, MAM remains a modern design powerhouse, with an excellent collection and a new curator, Shoshana Resnikoff, who has relocated from the Wolfsonian-FIU museum. It is unfortunate that the expense and logistical headaches of design exhibitions makes them relatively rare, when—as *Scandinavian Design and the United States* so ably demonstrated—they offer visitors a highly accessible way to engage with the history of art and some of the most pressing debates in our discipline. As visitors marvel at a period BabyBjörn or recognize Olof Bäckström's scissors for Fiskars as a staple of their junk drawer, they are encouraged to ask where their everyday consumer goods come from not just geographically but culturally. The exhibition catalogue ably articulates these scholarly debates and their relevance to our designed environment.[1] An extensive series of thirty short essays by eighteen authors, including the exhibition's two cocurators, bring focused attention to the show's key contributions. Together, the exhibition and its catalogue showcase the museum as an engine of original scholarship and present design as a vehicle for disseminating art history.

[1] Bobbye Tigerman and Monica Obniski, eds., *Scandinavian Design & the United States, 1890–1980*, exh. cat. (New York: Prestel, 2020).

# *Forecast Form: Art in the Caribbean Diaspora, 1990s–Today*

Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago (MCA)
Curated by Carla Acevedo-Yates
November 19, 2022–April 23, 2023

Reviewed by Caroline "Olivia" Wolf
Assistant Professor of Art History
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Beneath strong narrative currents of migration, movement, and exchange, powerful connections between the Caribbean and Chicago pulse within *Forecast Form: Art in the Caribbean Diaspora, 1990s–Today*. Curated by Carla Acevedo-Yates at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago (MCA) and on view from November 2022 to April 2023, the show featured the work of thirty-seven artists associated with diverse countries of the Caribbean.[1] Yet allusions to the close ties between the tropical region and the Midwest surface throughout the show in myriad ways. Historically, the Caribbean connection to Chicago has been as integral as the city's very foundation; its founder, Jean Baptiste Point du Sable, was born in Saint-Domingue (now Haiti), of French and African descent. This fact, and the vibrant Caribbean diaspora that forms a part of Chicago's contemporary cultural landscape—such as the Windy City's Puerto Rican neighborhood Humboldt Park—are keenly referenced in the show's formidable catalogue.[2] In the exhibition, further ties were underscored by careful curatorial choices that allowed viewers to draw their own transregional connections. Such an approach was dynamically embodied by the piece that greeted visitors at the show's entrance by Cuban-born artist Zilia Sánchez, titled *encuentrismo—ofrenda o retorno* (*encounter—offering or return*). In this video work from 2000, the artist tosses one of her paintings, *Soy Isla: Compréndelo y retírate* (*I Am an Island: Understand and Retreat*), into the sea only to see it return to the shore, engaging with diasporic imagery tied to tensions surrounding

movement and displacement. The artist's actions also recall ritual offerings to Yemaya, the Yoruba goddess of the sea. Placed, therefore, within syncretic Afro-Cuban practices, the work nods to the rich African diasporic heritage of the island due to the violence of forced migration by way of the transatlantic slave trade. To the Midwestern viewer, the crashing waves on the shores of Cuba captured in this work also evoked the powerful tides of Lake Michigan, situated only a few blocks from the museum. This curatorial move established a potent visual dialogue between Caribbean and local landscapes and invited reflection on Chicago's own role as an important bridge and migration hub for diaspora communities.

While diaspora served as the exhibition's primary compass, the show also took a strong decolonial stance, challenging Eurocentric narratives of the tropical region. As stated directly in the opening wall text, the show's title underscored that "the Caribbean inaugurated the modern world, and that forms and their aesthetics allow us to analyze the histories and forces that continue to shape our contemporary moment, from emancipation and human rights to colonialism and climate change."[3] This recognition of contact in the Caribbean as the fulcrum of the modern age was furthered by Colombian artist Álvaro Barrios's poignant critique of colonialism that greeted exhibition-goers in the museum atrium. His *El Mar de Cristóbal Colón* (*The Sea of Christopher Columbus*), first installed at the Paris Biennale in 1971, comprises more than one hundred double-sided silk-screen prints featuring a simple, monochrome square at center. The work was inspired by nautical charts but adopted a minimalist visual language to deconstruct traditional cartography. Installed on clotheslines across the large atrium in a mode recalling the display of *literatura de cordel* (cord literature) in colonial Brazil, the prints packed a powerful symbolic meaning. Cyan cubes on one side produced a wave of color evocative of the Caribbean Sea, while the red on the reverse side alluded to the violent legacy of colonization beneath the surface of exported images of tropical landscapes.[4] The positioning of Barrios's work in this key architectural space served as a reminder to the viewer that the dispersal of people from the region, then and today, has been inherently tied to issues of colonization. It also signaled the framing of diaspora within the exhibition as a state of constant movement and transformation, and the contemporary Caribbean itself as a region of constant flux, despite the static

portrayals found in colonial maps and mindsets.

Moving through the galleries, the viewer encountered themes of Caribbeanness: movement, place, and memory, as well as a temporal emphasis on the 1990s to today. Rather than presenting a linear timeline which would reinforce colonial models, Acevedo-Yates invited us to "think around" the 1990s as a decade in which prominent discourses of identity and difference came to the cultural forefront. This time frame is also recognized as the moment of a critical art exhibition boom in Latin America and the Caribbean, as well as a period of increased global interest in the region due to profound political shifts linked to the fall of the Berlin wall and the Soviet Union.[5]

With this in mind, several works on display addressed issues of extraction linked to colonialism in the region. Deborah Jack's 2022 seven-channel HD video projection, titled *the fecund, the lush and the salted land waits for a harvest . . . her people . . . ripe with promise, wait until the next blowing season*, was commissioned by the MCA. Complete with sound and vinyl installation panels, the work juxtaposed vibrant imagery of sea, sky, and tree branches laden with orange pomegranates from the artist's mother's home in Sint Maarten with black-and-white Dutch documentary footage of salt mining on the island from 1948.[6] By draining the color from the paradisical landscapes to produce a granular image, as well as inverting scenery of the shore, the work both visually references and critiques the Dutch-dominated salt industry, alluding to this mineral's corrosive nature.

Similarly, Trinidad and Tobago–born artist Christopher Cozier commented on the extractive oil industry of the Caribbean in his two-channel HD video *Gas Men* (2014). Centrally positioned in the exhibition, the piece was shot on the Chicago shoreline of Lake Michigan but completed in Port of Spain, Trinidad. It features the dominating silhouettes of two men clad in business suits spinning gas pump nozzles overhead as if they were lassos and alternately pointing the nozzles at each other in the stance of a Western showdown. This imagery, evocative of American cowboy film iconography, alludes to toxic Western patriarchal structures at play in the neocolonial practices of foreign oil companies in the region. The video is paired with the musical accompaniment of a sitar, which sonically references the mid-nineteenth-century migration of Indian indentured servants to Trinidad to work on sugar plantations.[7] Together,

these elements acknowledge the continued exploitation of people of color on the island.

By alluding to this and other non-Western migration to the region, the exhibition innovatively highlighted the South-South diversity of various diasporas in the Caribbean. The show notably emphasized not only the African but also strong Middle Eastern and South Asian migrant flows into the region, which are so often overlooked. Just as a dialogue surrounding extraction can be seen in the aforementioned video works, various artists throughout the show visibilized diverse migrations by engaging with regionally informed media and material traditions. A case in point was seen in Suchitra Mattai's use of vintage saris to weave her large-scale tapestry *An Ocean Cradle* (2022), which testifies to the histories of South Asian migration to Guyana, as well as Indo-Guyanese migration to North America.[8] Incorporating gendered garments donated by family and friends, the piece activates these fabrics as carriers of memories and movements of generations of women across vast geographies. The work's engagement with knitting, weaving, and embroidery also references and elevates feminized domestic labor, while ghungroo bells, associated with female adornment in classical Indian dance, are woven into the tapestry to further connote the diaspora's gendered dimensions.[9] In parallel fashion, Kuwaiti-born, Puerto Rico–based artist Alia Farid's *Mezquitas de Puerto Rico* recognizes the legacy of Arab migration to the region by engaging with the Iranian textile tradition of the *kilim*, or prayer rug. The piece, commissioned by the MCA in 2022, forms part of a larger series of work, created by Farid and her collaborator by taking photographs of mosques sponsored by Arab migrants in Puerto Rico, and then sending those images to weavers in Mashhad, Iran, who reinterpreted the imagery while adding their own "signature" embellishments.[10] This contemporary collaboration between Caribbean and Middle Eastern artists established a transregional dialogue that materialized the legacy of the Arab diaspora in the region while fostering South-South solidarities.

Furthering the discussion of diverse migrations in the Caribbean was Cuban-born artist María Magdalena Campos-Pons's 2010 piece *Sugar/Bittersweet*. In this work, the artist alluded to the diasporic legacy of her own Chinese and Nigerian heritage. The installation featured Yoruban spears stacked atop disks of sugar—Cuba's main monoculture export—which vary in shade from refined white to dark

molasses as a symbolic nod to the rigid racialized social structure of the country. The spears themselves were positioned atop Chinese and African stools, alluding to the sugar industry's reliance on and violent exploitation of enslaved Africans and Chinese indentured servants.[11]

Diasporic dimensions that extend beyond geography into the realm of gender and sexual identity were also present in the show. The work of Felix Gonzalez-Torres represented queerness and the Cuban diaspora, alongside various other artists, including the aforementioned Zilia Sánchez. Gonzalez-Torres is perhaps best known for his 1991 work *"Untitled" (Portrait of Ross in L.A.)*, a poignant tribute to his partner, Ross Laycock, lost to the AIDS crisis. Notably, this work is visible today at the nearby Art Institute of Chicago. Gonzalez-Torres's pieces in the exhibition, *"Untitled" (North)* and *"Untitled" (Passport)*, also dating to the early 1990s, invited viewers to engage through play and metaphor. The former invited the audience to interact with the string of hanging lights representing a mythical region to the "north," spurring reflection on the Caribbean's positioning within center-periphery global dynamics.[12] In the latter, a folded white paper "passport" allowed the audience to contemplate the freedoms and opportunities symbolized by both the blank sheet and the document it represents.

Extraordinary for the depth with which it approached themes of diaspora and identity, as well as the notion of the region itself, *Forecast Form* blazed a new path forward for the curation of Caribbean art. The project was striking for its diversity of voices, artists, and agents that comprise the contemporary regional landscape, challenging conventional frameworks to reveal tensions and frictions that remain present due to the legacy of colonization. The exhibition also strategically drove its point home by highlighting its thematic and historical relevance to Chicago as its host city and took advantage of the gallery space's architecture to spotlight key works that provided important theoretical lenses. By considering the complex marginalized diasporic identities and diverse cultural makeup of the region, *Forecast Forum* will leave its imprint on future exhibitions and public discourses tied to the Caribbean and Latin America writ large.

[1] Iris Colburn, Curatorial Assistant; Isabel Casso, former Susman Curatorial Fellow; and Nolan Jimbo, Susman Curatorial Fellow contributed to the curation of *Forecast Forum* and its catalogue.

[2] Madeline Grynsztejn, "Foreword," in *Forecast Form: Art in the Caribbean Diaspora, 1990s–Today*, ed. Carla Acevedo-Yates, exh. cat. (Chicago: Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago; New York: DelMonico Books, 2022), 15.

[3] "Gallery Text: Exhibition Introduction," *Forecast Form: Art in the Caribbean Diaspora, 1990s–Today*, Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, last modified November 15, 2023, https://visit.mcachicago.org/exhibitions/art-in-the-caribbean-diaspora-1990s-today/.

[4] Nolan Jimbo, "Álvaro Barrios," in Acevedo-Yates, *Forecast Form*, 59.

[5] Carla Acevedo-Yates, "Forecast Form: Reframing the Caribbean through the Mechanics of Diaspora," in Acevedo-Yates, *Forecast Form*, 23–25.

[6] Isabel Casso, "Deborah Jack," in Acevedo-Yates, *Forecast Form*, 53.

[7] Carla Acevedo-Yates, "Christopher Cozier," in Acevedo-Yates, *Forecast Form*, 111.

[8] Nolan Jimbo, "Suchitra Mattai," in Acevedo-Yates, *Forecast Form*, 32, 192–5.

[9] Ibid., 193.

[10] Isabel Casso, "Alia Farid," in Acevedo-Yates, *Forecast Form*, 32, 116. Jesús "Bubu" Negrón was Farid's collaborator on the project.

[11] Carla Acevedo-Yates, "María Magdalena Campos-Pon," in Acevedo-Yates, *Forecast Form*, 210.

[12] Isabel Casso, "Felix Gonzalez-Torres," in Acevedo-Yates, *Forecast Form*, 78.