



**Marshall McKay Seminar  
for Empowering Native Knowledge:  
Perspectives on Native Art and Museums**

April 22–23, 2022

*Edited by Joe D. Horse Capture*

**AUTRY  
MUSEUM**  
OF THE AMERICAN WEST



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for Empowering Native Knowledge:  
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Autry Museum of the American West  
4700 Western Heritage Way  
Los Angeles, CA 90027-1462  
323.667.2000  
The Autry.org

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COVER: Gift basket (detail) by Mabel McKay (Pomo, 1907-93), 1960-70. Donated by Sharon Rogers and Marshall McKay.  
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# Table of Contents

Introduction	
by Joe D. Horse Capture (A'aniih) . . . . .	6
Marshall McKay's Legacy Lives On	
by Lynn Valbuena (San Manuel Band of Mission Indians) . . . . .	7
Welcome Remarks	
by Stephen Aron . . . . .	8
Setting the Stage	
by Joe D. Horse Capture (A'aniih) . . . . .	9
Home by the Spring Water	
by David Cartwright . . . . .	10
Epistemological Transformation and New Voices: The National Museum of the American Indian as Case Study	
by W. Richard West, Jr. (Cheyenne/Arapaho) . . . . .	14
<b>Native Curators in Context</b>	
Foregrounding Indigenous Voices and Perspectives at the Met	
by Patricia Marroquin Norby (Purépecha) . . . . .	21
Finding Balance	
by Josie Lee (Ho-Chunk) . . . . .	26
Panel Discussion: Native Curators in Context . . . . .	29
<b>The Role of Tribal Museums</b>	
Tribal Museums and the Native American Museum Ecosystem	
by John Haworth (Cherokee Nation) . . . . .	36
WINIKO: Life of an Object	
by James Pepper Henry (Kaw/Muscogee) . . . . .	45
Panel Discussion: The Role of Tribal Museums . . . . .	47
<b>Defining Native Art</b>	
Panel Discussion: Defining Native Art . . . . .	53
<b>Reflections on California Native Art</b>	
Changing Perspectives: California Native Art at the Autry	
by Amanda K. Wixon (Chickasaw Nation) . . . . .	65
Frank LaPena and the Story of California Indian Contemporary Art	
by Mark Johnson . . . . .	69
Art Is Living Story	
by Weshoyot Alvitre (Tongva) . . . . .	74
Panel Discussion: Reflections on California Native Art . . . . .	80



## Introduction

Joe D. Horse Capture (A'aniih)

Autry Museum of the American West

By their nature, museums contain important knowledge through the works in their collection, the archives, the libraries, and curatorial expertise. Historically, access to these knowledge systems is available to visitors of the museum (assuming there is an exhibition on the topic) or a select few who have dedicated themselves to important research. This proves to be challenging for many Native American community members because museums often contain important cultural knowledge, knowledge that is critical to the well-being of their traditions. Adding another layer of inaccessibility, major museums are often located in large urban centers far from Indian Country. For many, it can be expensive to travel to the big city to research and learn from the works the Ancestors created that are housed in museum collections. This has been an ongoing challenge for decades.

A few museums have worked to create an atmosphere that allows the exchange of knowledge while ensuring Native people far from the institution have access. Under the leadership of George P. Horse Capture, Sr., then curator of the Plains Indian Museum in Cody, Wyoming, the museum held a series of seminars that focused on Plains Indian topics. The seminars brought together Native knowledge, museum curators, scholars, and academics. The Plains Indian Seminar started in 1977, two years before the museum officially opened, with the final seminar held in 2007. During the thirty-year run of the Plains Indian Seminar, six volumes of the proceedings were published. The National Museum of the American Indian–Smithsonian Institution has occasionally held symposiums since 1990, with five of those events published. The first, *The Changing Presentation of the American Indian: Museums and Native Cultures* (1995), is a very important book; it would serve as a guide for many museums across the country.

In the spirit of continuing this legacy, the Autry Museum of the American West has embarked on its own Native-based seminar series. The Marshall McKay Seminar for Empowering Native Knowledge brought together both Native and non-Native curators, scholars, museum directors, and artists to discuss a variety of topics. Named in honor of Marshall McKay, former Chairman of the Yocha Dehe Wintun Nation Tribal Council and the first Native person to serve as chair of the Autry Board of Trustees, the Marshall McKay Seminar seeks to empower Native knowledge. It addresses topics that impact Indian Country—and beyond. The seminar, which was held April 22–23, 2022, at both the Autry's Resources Center and the museum, was live-streamed so those that could not attend in person could view the presentations. To facilitate the distribution of knowledge to Indian Country, over seventy tribal colleges and museums were sent links to the live-streamed proceedings. Furthermore, this publication will be distributed for free to libraries in tribal colleges and museums across the country. We hope to continue the Marshall McKay Seminar for Empowering Native Knowledge in the coming years, and along with the seminar, our responsibility to provide Native access to the discussions and ideas generated.

The 2022 seminar had nineteen participants. The first day focused on Native curators and tribal museums. The second day's topic was defining Native art and reflections on California art. Unfortunately, not all the presentations are published here, but the entire seminar can be found at [TheAutry.org/McKaySeminar](https://TheAutry.org/McKaySeminar). Following is the seminar schedule and list of presenters.

### Friday, April 22, 2022

#### Opening Remarks

Lynn Valbuena (San Manuel Band of Mission Indians)

Stephen Aron, Calvin and Marilyn Gross Director and President and CEO,  
Autry Museum of the American West

Joe D. Horse Capture (A'aniih), Vice President of Native Collections and Ahmanson Curator  
of Native American History & Culture, Autry Museum of the American West

#### Session 1: Opening Keynote: Native Presence in Museums

W. Richard West, Jr. (Cheyenne/Arapaho), President Emeritus and Ambassador, Native Communities,  
Autry Museum of the American West

## **Session 2: Native Curators in Context**

Patricia Marroquin Norby (Purépecha), Metropolitan Museum of Art  
heather ahtone (Choctaw/Chickasaw Nation), First Americans Museum  
Josie Lee (Ho-Chunk), Ho-Chunk Nation Museum and Cultural Center

## **Session 3: The Role of Tribal Museums**

John Haworth (Cherokee Nation), Association of Tribal Archives, Libraries, and Museums  
Delphine Baker (Mandan, Hidatsa, and Arikara Nation), MHA Nation Interpretative Center  
Steven Karr, Agua Caliente Cultural Museum

## **Session 4: Closing Keynote: Looking Forward**

James Pepper Henry (Kaw/Muscogee), First Americans Museum

## **Saturday, April 23, 2022**

### **Opening Remarks**

Stephen Aron, Calvin and Marilyn Gross Director and President and CEO,  
Autry Museum of the American West  
Virginia Carmelo (Tongva)  
Joe D. Horse Capture (A'aniih), Vice President of Native Collections and Ahmanson Curator  
of Native American History & Culture, Autry Museum of the American West

### **Session 1: Defining Native Art**

Ashley Holland (Cherokee Nation), Art Bridges Foundation  
Nancy Mithlo (Chiricahua Apache), University of California, Los Angeles  
Celestina Castillo (Tohono O'odham), United American Indian Involvement  
Dallin Maybee (Seneca and Northern Arapaho)

### **Session 2: Reflections on California Native Art**

Amanda K. Wixon (Chickasaw Nation), Autry Museum of the American West  
Mark Johnson, San Francisco State University  
Clint McKay (Dry Creek Pomo, Wappo and Wintun)  
Leah Mata Fragua (Northern Chumash Tribe)  
Weshoyot Alvitre (Tongva)

### **Session 3: Closing Keynote: Marshall McKay's Legacy and Relationship to California Native Art**

David Cartwright, Chair, Board of Trustees, Autry Museum of the American West

Karimah Richardson, the Autry's Associate Curator of Anthropology and Repatriation Supervisor, and I moderated the sessions. I would strongly encourage all to view the sessions online; there is a passion from the presenters that can't be felt in written form here.

The seminar itself took a lot of coordination and assistance. Keeping in mind that (1) this is a first for the Autry, (2) the event took place in two different locations, and (3) the Resources Center hadn't been opened yet, it was a herculean effort by all parties. We are grateful for the efforts of the following Autry staff: Amanda Wixon, Assistant Curator of Native History and Culture; Karimah Richardson, Associate Curator of Anthropology and Repatriation Supervisor; Laura Florio, Senior Director of Foundation and Government Giving; Ben Fitzsimmons, Associate Director of Programs and Research; Robert Gallagher, Audiovisual Supervisor; Brittany Campbell, Assistant Producer; LaLena Lewark, Vice President of Collections and Conservation; Robyn Hetrick, Director of Programs and Public Events; Sarah Wilson, Director of Education; and Stephen Aron, Calvin and Marilyn Gross Director and President and CEO.

Thank you to the McKay Family for their support and encouragement of this seminar.

This event would not have been possible without the generous support of the San Manuel Band of Mission Indians. We very much appreciate their support and dedication to advancing Native knowledge.



## **Marshall McKay's Legacy Lives On**

Lynn Valbuena (San Manuel Band of Mission Indians)

Hamiintamc!

That is the Serrano greeting! I was proud to welcome guests to this year's inaugural Marshall McKay Seminar at the Autry Museum. The effort is appropriately named just as my friend Marshall would have wanted it: "Empowering Native Knowledge." Marshall dedicated his life not just to preserving but also finding ways to enhance Indigenous culture and history throughout the country. He believed this was a way to properly acknowledge the existence and contributions of the First Americans. This was his interest above all else: to ensure that Native Americans were properly and respectfully recognized.

I am proud and honored to call Marshall McKay a friend, a mentor, and trusted confidant.

I first met Marshall in the 1980s when he was leading the gaming association for California tribal governments. We were facing some very difficult political challenges at that time. For those who have not followed tribal gaming issues, if it were not for California tribes and the leadership of Marshall McKay and other tribal leaders, it is possible that we would not be engaged in tribal gaming today. Marshall was very much a leader who helped to shape the policy and political environment that ultimately supported tribal gaming rights.

The leadership and political skills Marshall possessed were important to building unity among the 109 federally recognized tribes in California. We have all gained so much on a number of issues because tribes were united. Tribal leaders have always agreed that there is strength in numbers, however we are most effective with our education efforts targeting legislators and other public officials when we are united. That unity among tribes was possible because of Marshall's influence, leadership, and mentorship; he treated every tribal leader with the highest respect.

Today, there is no better way to pay tribute to Marshall McKay than the seminar at the Autry, which captures his true passions for tribal culture and history. Marshall was always working, looking for ways to empower Indigenous people and expand their knowledge. He believed that Native people are just as capable of addressing even the most complex issues and finding solutions. After all, our Ancestors solved complex problems and created effective ways to live off the land, care for the land, and preserve the land so that future generations might also benefit.

This is the character of Marshall.

He was instrumental in my joining the board of trustees of the Autry Museum of the American West. At one time, Marshall was the only Native on the Autry board, and he wanted me to join him on the board to help educate the board about Indian Country, tribal cultures, history, and art. He was the first Native American to serve as chairman of the board of trustees at the Autry, a distinction that is not only noteworthy but also an example of his leadership status.

And he opened the door to my joining the Autry board around fifteen years ago! I learned so much from Marshall and serving on the Autry board. That knowledge helped me when I was asked to join the board of trustees of the National Museum of the American Indian in Washington, D.C. This was, again, the result of Marshall's influence. I served two 3-year terms as an NMAI trustee before reaching the term limits for board service.

Today, the influence of Marshall McKay surrounds us in nearly every facet of Native life. We can use his influence and his teachings to help shape the ways that museums present our Native culture, history, and art. They can help us to be better guides—to ensure that museums are not just showcases for ancient civilizations, but that they become teachers of living Indigenous cultures and histories.

I am grateful to Marshall for the trust he placed in me as a colleague, as a fellow tribal leader, and as someone who shared his passion for Indigenous people and communities. It is my sincere hope that his legacy will live on for the next Seven Generations and beyond.

Thank you for inviting me to share my perspectives.

Hakup A'ai.

## Welcome Remarks

Stephen Aron

Autry Museum of the American West

I'm Stephen Aron, and as President/CEO of the Autry Museum of the American West I'm charged with adding my welcome and my thanks—to Joe Horse Capture for organizing this symposium, to the participants for lending their insights, and to Lynn Valbuena and the San Manuel Band for its support of this inaugural Marshall McKay Seminar. The name on what we plan to be an annual seminar honors the “larger than life” life of Marshall McKay. As dreamer and doer, McKay played a key role in the revitalization of California Indian peoples and cultures. And he was vital, too, to the vitalization of the Autry Museum. Indeed, his imprint is very much on this facility.

We'll have more to say about McKay tomorrow. Today, my principal charge is to introduce W. Richard West, Jr., whose very big shoes I am supposed to fill. I don't think he needs any introduction to those in this room and on this Zoom. In briefest brief, Rick West is a citizen of the Cheyenne and Arapaho tribes of Oklahoma. After a distinguished career as a lawyer, he became the founding director of the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of the American Indian. Although he is now retired from his positions at NMAI and the Autry, he remains on the boards of directors of ICOM-US (the International Council of Museums–United States); the International Coalition of Sites of Conscience; the Association of Tribal Archives, Libraries, and Museums; the Denver Art Museum; and the California Association of Museums. Last but not least, he serves as the Autry's Ambassador to Native Communities.

In his remarks today, Rick will focus on his tenure at NMAI and the transformations he helped bring about there and across the landscape of museums. That's appropriate, for it was at the NMAI that West, to the consternation of traditionalist critics, initially upended the customs and curatorial practices of museums. There, too, he oversaw a reset in the relations between Native peoples and the museums in which their creations were collected and exhibited. From the bully pulpit of the NMAI, Rick also broadcast to the world a fresh and inspiring mandate about the principles, the purposes, and the possibilities of museums.

But it's not just local pride that compels me to call the attention of the assembled to the transformations that West wrought here during his near-decade tenure at the helm of the Autry Museum. Here, he reaffirmed the commitments made at the NMAI, again insisting that Native communities be permitted to tell their own stories in their own voices and that museums embrace their duty as a forum for civic and civil engagement. And here, he brought about the construction of this Resources Center, about which you'll hear more—and I hope see more of—as our day proceeds.

I could go on about the signature exhibitions that occurred during Rick's regime, about the contemporary American Indian art collections acquired, about the vision of an intercultural institution that he implanted. But Joe Horse Capture told me to keep my remarks to five minutes, and, as Rick will shortly note, one should pay attention when given “Horse Capture directives.”

So, please join me in welcoming Rick West—and thanking him for his decades of dedicated work to, among other things, “empowering Native knowledge.”

## Setting the Stage

Joe D. Horse Capture (A'aniih)

Autry Museum of the American West

Today's event, the Marshall McKay Seminar for Empowering Native Knowledge: Perspectives on Native Art and Museums, will explore the significant changes that have reshaped museums and their relationship to Native history, culture, and art. This seminar is picking up on a symposium that was organized by NMAI in 1995. The Changing Presentation of the American Indian: Museums and Native Cultures symposium featured Native and non-Native scholars and museum professionals exploring issues concerning the representation of Indians and their cultures by museums in North America. A lot has changed in the twenty-seven years since that symposium that we will hopefully address today.

If I may take a step back and provide a bit of background for the topics that will be addressed today. Native people have always wanted to tell their own story within a museum environment. Looking back several decades ago (and in some museums this is still the case), Native-related museum exhibitions were created with little or no input from Native people and/or communities. I think we can all agree that that philosophy is generally no longer acceptable. It leaves out critically important voices and perspectives, and does not facilitate an environment where Native folks have any authority on how the works from their communities are interpreted or used. And equally important, not working with Native people leaves out an important voice that is critical in the understanding of Native culture and history. I often use the example of organizing an exhibition about women without involving any women.

This need for Native people to tell their own stories within museums dates back as far as the Alcatraz occupation that started on October 20, 1969. During this important event in Native history—certainly the first and one of the most important intertribal protests in the country—the group Indians of All Tribes created a proclamation that addressed their frustrations, concerns, and demands. It starts out, “We, the Native Americans, re-claim the land known as Alcatraz Island in the name of all American Indians by right of discovery. We wish to be fair and honorable in our dealings with the Caucasian inhabitants of this land, and hereby offer the following treaty: We will purchase said Alcatraz Island for 24 dollars in glass beads and red cloth.” What is interesting about this proclamation is the last section of what they want to do at the island:

Some of the present buildings will be taken over to develop an AMERICAN INDIAN MUSEUM, which will depict our native food & other cultural contributions we have given to the world. Another part of the museum will present some of the things the white man has given to the Indians in return for the land and life he took: disease, alcohol, poverty and cultural decimation (as symbolized by old tin cans, barbed wire, rubber tires, plastic containers, etc.). Part of this museum will remain a dungeon to symbolize both those Indian captives who were incarcerated for challenging white authority, and those who were imprisoned on reservations. The museum will show the noble and the tragic events of Indian history, including the broken treaties, the documentary of the Trail of Tears, the Massacre of Wounded Knee, as well as the victory over Yellow Hair Custer and his army.

This portion of the proclamation makes it clear that as early as 1969, Native people were not happy with the way museums were depicting their culture. And to solve that issue, they wanted to present their story in their own museum. The vision of creating their own museum and cultural center never panned out after the occupation, but the perspective of Native people telling their own story continued.

This theme of Native people telling their own stories resurfaces again in 1972 at the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, Minnesota, when then director Martin Friedman insisted they organize a Native art exhibition that approached this important area in collaboration with the Native community. The museum employed Ojibwe scholar Ron Libertus to curate the exhibition *American Indian Art: Form and Tradition*. The gallery included trained Native docents, a full slate of Native programming, and even a committee of local Native community members to vet each work that went into the exhibition. Of course, this set the stage for important museums like NMAI, led by the vision of Rick West, which opened in 2004, and the First Americans Museum that opened recently.

All of these efforts, some dating back fifty-one years, have made a profound impact on how we view Native museums, exhibitions, and the like. On a separate but equally important track is the development of tribal museums. These localized facilities, which tell stories from their own community through the community's eyes, are on a parallel track and add to the texture of reclaiming and redeveloping Native stories, history, and culture. It is through this lens that we approach today's sessions. Today, the panels will explore how Native curators are changing the museum narrative and the role of tribal museums. Tomorrow at the Autry Museum, the panels will include the interpretation of Native art and a deep dive into California Native art.

# Home by the Spring Water

David Cartwright

Autry Museum of the American West

Marshall McKay. Born in 1952. Passed away over the Christmas holiday in 2020 from COVID-19 complications. My predecessor as board chair of the Autry Museum. He served for many years on the Yocha Dehe Wintun Nation tribal council, frequently as its chair. There is a long list of important organizations and causes that were joined, led, and promoted by Marshall. I refer you to the many Internet websites containing biographies of Marshall. You will find these connections to be truly amazing for an individual who seemed to intentionally avoid the limelight, preferring instead to “just get on with it,” as he would say.

I don't intend to speak to Marshall's lifelong biography, important as it is in our memory. No . . . I have another agenda. But let me at least list a few of his longstanding interests, which were never far from his everyday life—and by interests, I also mean actions:

- Land conservation, which was no less than an inviolate contract with the Ancestors of the land and its people.
- Agriculture, as essential to the economic lifeblood of his people. That lifeblood includes olive trees, vineyards, rangeland, and an active participation in the surrounding Cache Creek community.
- Gaming, hotel, and golf course, providing economic sustenance to his people, with participation from the surrounding communities.
- Patwin language preservation and revitalization, for what is our past without language? And what is our culture without knowledge of the past?
- Respect for traditions without sacrificing the need to address and accept the modern. This is particularly true in understanding Marshall's support for contemporary Native arts and tribal economics, yet the baskets of Mabel McKay and her legacy are central to understanding Marshall as well. Those baskets provide an essential transition from the traditional to the modern. They speak in a voice that is strongly Marshall's as well.
- The identification and protection of cultural resources (more on that later).
- Relentless promotion of education at every level, with emphasis on the ecological knowledge of the Ancestors and the real, unadulterated history of the Native experience in post-contact California—but synthesized with the so-called STEM subjects that also received so much support throughout the state from Marshall and the Yocha Dehe, particularly at UC Davis. No, Marshall didn't dwell in the past. He was the link between the past and the future.
- Sharing economic benefits and blessings with surrounding communities throughout Yolo County, the state, and the nation. Where once the Yocha Dehe Wintun people (and other Native Californians) were the object of shameless and mostly violent attacks from immigrating groups, whether Spanish, religious, Mexican, American, or European. From missions to the gold rush to the Dawes Act and beyond. Somehow, against all odds . . . survival and strength and the projection of a unique voice that refused to be silenced.
- Finally, though no such list can really be complete, Marshall was the conduit—no, more like the enforcer—of the promises made by the Ancestors to future generations, and of the obligations of the present generation to the past and the future. That was also Marshall, the teacher, who reawakened memories as lessons.

## But Where Did This Man Come From?

I can't claim a fraction of the knowledge about Marshall that many of you in this audience have. I can't and won't compete on that subject, but please do tell me your stories. I would love to hear more. For now, I already have treasured stories of my own, only a few of which will appear in this narrative.

"Home by the spring water"—that's where Marshall came from, along with all of the Yocha Dehe Wintun people, from the Ancestors to here and now. His family life is complicated, like so many of our own family lives. There are intersections and diversions, maybe even divisions. But we do know that his mother, Mabel McKay, raised him, and that art and culture were always near, even if his early working life was spent assisting the U.S. Defense Department.

Many years ago, when the Autry Museum was merging with the Southwest Museum, several critics argued that it was the "Cowboys versus the Indians" again, and the Cowboys were dominating. To which Marshall responded in feigned anger, "Wait a minute, my father Charley was a cowboy!" And I guess he was.

That says a lot about Marshall too—a man of contradictions. But that isn't the right word here. His lifelong work set a pattern. He lived at the edge, and by that I mean where the convergence of cultures dominates the separateness of our individual lives. He was, in a word, interconnected. He defied and challenged the cliches and petty prejudices of the past that have leached into our present.

Out there in the audience, you no doubt have many examples of his big-tent approach, which inevitably led Marshall to a humorous event or outcome, one which you might find yourself being pulled into, intentionally or unintentionally. I'll give some "Autry" examples:

- A dinner on a mountain outside of Juneau, Alaska, during an offsite meeting of the Autry Board of Trustees. The dinner devolved into a king crab-eating contest, instigated by Marshall.
- A carriage ride with Marshall and some of the trustees—all cigar smoking—and Jackie Autry, where the fumes inside so consumed us that Jackie paid the poor driver a substantial sum for the fumigation after we departed.
- A wagon tour of Canyon de Chelly, put together by then museum CEO John Gray, during which Marshall led the dialogue with the Navajo guide, with Marshall asking leading questions about the Ancestral Puebloans who originally settled the canyon, until the guide finally gave up and said, "Hey, I'm Navajo. We came to this valley later, when everyone was gone." An honest answer to be sure, with Marshall adding something to the effect of "Well, you have a history too."
- Another episode in Navajo country, where several of us were really interested in the beauty of Navajo weavings, perhaps as buyers, but we were frustrated that so many of the trading posts seemed to feature—and I want to be careful here—so I'll just say the "lesser arts." Marshall interjects, "You have to ask them about the back room. There is always a back room, and that is where the good stuff is kept. You tourists only see the surface." And sure enough, Marshall asked, and we were led to the back room, the upper room, and similar rooms at other trading posts. And we were overwhelmed with what we were shown. Marshall, as always, was a buyer. The lesson of that story? You have to ask.
- In another Autry Trustee episode, we were on an expedition from Durango to Chaco Canyon, traveling to meet Zia Pueblo leader Peter Pino for a tour. Someone at the Autry had contracted for a bus to take us there. As it turned out, that bus was outfitted as a cross between a high-school prom after-party and a Vegas casino private room. If you have been to Chaco, you know how bumpy that road is. Marshall, Sharon, and their trustee entourage were in the back. Our Autry CEO was sitting in front, mortified at what was going on in the back: some very lively interaction and loud commentary, culminating in the air conditioning unit collapsing onto Sharon's head, while the rest of us fell into the aisle after a particularly big bump. Marshall, as always, was in the middle of it. You can only imagine the commentary.
- At the Santa Barbara mission, on a tour of the inside, when the guide mentioned the spiritual quality of the sanctuary, Marshall whispered, "I can hear the voices crying out." But that whisper reverberated loudly against the stone of the walls, and the voices truly did cry out, much to the consternation of the carefully curated history of that place.
- Marshall was always a proponent of developing immersive experiences as part of the museum programs. One interesting, albeit very dark, idea of his was the "Boarding School Bus." The Autry, he said, could consider

bringing school kids in for a museum immersive experience. They would be loaded onto the Boarding School Bus outside, given proper uniforms to wear, and then told, “Forget about what you know and who you love. You are off to a new school and will never see your families again.” Needless to say, the museum did not adopt this recommendation. But the import of Marshall’s suggestion was not lost on the rest of us.

To sum up, Marshall believed in the innate ability of people to tell their stories in their own voices, as actors in their own dramas, about events and experiences that were uniquely important to them, and which were part of their destiny. This, he believed, was particularly true for Native artists, and contemporary Native artists were no exception.

### **What About Marshall, Culture, and the Arts?**

Though the list is long, and the genres and methods are many, there are some key artists that Marshall mentored, sponsored, encouraged, and found buyers for—some of whom may be in the audience. For Marshall, it was not enough to befriend and give abstract support. It was also important to bring economics to artists. And that meant buyers. Developing and expanding the audience for contemporary Native art required connecting multiple different cultural worlds. And that is a task that Marshall McKay was well-suited for.

Let’s list some names in the artist world, men and women that Marshall considered inspired:

- Tony Abeyta
- Doug Coffin
- The late Harry Fonseca
- Cliff Fragua
- Leah Mata Fragua
- Doug Hyde
- Frank LaPena
- Clint McKay
- Mateo Romero
- Robert Dale Tsosie
- Kathleen Wall
- Kathy (Elk Woman) Whitman

And there are so many more.

In Marshall’s own words: “For me, the significance of keeping our stories, art, language, and culture alive is personal, because it is central to our own survival as a people. It reflects the promise we have made to generations of storytellers and culture keepers—the promise that we will carry the knowledge of our traditions on into perpetuity—to preserve the core of who we are as Native people.”

And then there are some of the people whom Marshall considered friends and confidants . . . effectively adopted family members who crossed the boundaries of art and emotion into extended friendships and more. People like

- Clint McKay and Doug Hyde, for sure
- Anthony Pico
- Sharon Rogers McKay and his unofficially adopted son, Alex Ander, with whom Marshall felt strong family bonds
- Della Warrior
- Rick West

I know there are many more family and friend names, some of whom have passed. Forgive me, because I don’t know all of you.

Let me briefly recount the story of one of those friends who is in the audience. Rick West became the CEO of the Autry Museum just when most people might have thought he was resting on his NMAI (National Museum of the American Indian) retirement laurels in Washington, D.C. Rick spoke about the origins of NMAI yesterday.

Marshall had been the board chair of the Native Arts and Culture Foundation, and there was a conference, I believe in Seattle, that was attended by Rick West as well. Marshall, knowing that the position of Autry CEO was

about to become available, tracked Rick down in a corridor of the hotel during an intermission. Without going into detail—Marshall and I conspired to feed Rick perhaps overly enthusiastic financial projections—the rest is history. Carpe diem was another trait of Marshall McKay. Seize the moment, and don't let it escape! And don't let negative thoughts get in the way of the art of persuasion. Rick West, happy in retirement, would no doubt never have participated in traditional search efforts. But who could resist the Marshall McKay squeeze?

Marshall and Sharon were first introduced to the Autry by Joanne Hale. Jackie Autry, who is herself somewhat of an authority on Native basketry in California, adored the work of Mabel McKay. Later, Autry CEO John Gray, with Jackie's wholehearted support, brought Marshall and Sharon onto the Autry's board. Marshall, in turn, brought the honored tradition of cigar smoking to trustee retreats. More important, he brought a teaching moment—that one could not understand the history of the West or the culture of the West, without Indian history and culture being at its center, and contemporary Native art being its holy spirit.

Marshall was a listener before his advocacy. A conciliator before supporting a cause. A teacher rather than a lecturer. A voice for tolerance first, and ask questions later. A friend first. Unassuming and without the condescension so often associated with powerful and influential people. A builder of bridges. Someone who did not flinch from memory. Irreverent and with a full sense of the ironies of modern times when measured against the often desperate and destructive events of the past. And in the end, someone who cared deeply and never forgot the things that really mattered. Quoting the Yocha Dehe Tribal Council on Marshall's passing: "May Marshall be warmly welcomed by the Ancestors he sought to honor."

Thank you for listening.

# Epistemological Transformation and New Voices: The National Museum of the American Indian as Case Study

W. Richard West, Jr. (Cheyenne/Arapaho)

Autry Museum of the American West

For today's presentation I was given very specific instructions by Joe Horse Capture. I never ignore Horse Capture directives, whether it be from Joe's father, George, who was my mentor and museum practice muse when I directed the Smithsonian's National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI), or, more recently, from Joe, here at the Autry Museum of the American West. Any museum director who indulges that misstep does so at great risk, and I do not intend to start now, even in retirement.

More specifically, Joe asked that I address, consistent with this symposium's focus on the "empowerment of Native knowledge," the fundamentals of the transformative changes in museology and museum practices regarding the interpretation of Native collections and the defining presence of Native voice that have occurred in the past generation. I intend to do precisely that by returning to the birthplace of my career as a museum director, the National Museum of the American Indian. Without claiming, I believe, too much, it was there that this concept of museology and museum practice—a truth in curating Indigenous culture—first took place in the hands of a large national institution. Along with many other collaborators, here in the United States and globally, the world of interpreting Indigenous communities and their cultural art and patrimony has never been the same since.

I would like to organize my presentation into three sections. First, I want to discuss the "what" of the key area of museum practice—namely, epistemologies, a fancy polysyllable that refers to the substance of interpretive methodologies in museums or, in plainer English, who is doing the talking and is granted the authority to speak. Second, I want to turn to an even more important issue—the "why" of the "what." Why does it matter that epistemological reform happens? Finally, what is the impact of the answers to the "what?" and the "why?" on the future and fundamental nature of this beloved institution we call the "museum"?

To launch this trifecta of inquiry today, I need go no further than the words of my first boss at the Smithsonian, the then-secretary of the Institution. In describing his aspirations for the NMAI, Secretary Robert McCormick Adams declared the following:

This is a national museum . . . [that] takes the permanence . . . the authenticity . . . the vitality and the self-determination of Native American voices . . . as the fundamental reality . . . it must . . . represent.

. . . [W]e move decisively from the older image of the museum as a temple with its superior, self-governing priesthood to . . . a forum . . . committed not to the promulgation of received wisdom but to the encouragement of a multi-cultural dialogue.

Remember these words, because we will come back to them often in all three parts of this presentation.

Let's turn first to the question of the "what?" in contemporary museology and museum practice—with particular reference to interpretive and curatorial approaches. And an introductory note: the broader social and political contexts that birthed the mission imperatives of the NMAI were twofold.

First, the NMAI, in cultural origin and intellectual spirit, was a potent adjunct of the multiculturalism movement that occurred in the United States in the late 1980s and early 1990s. In the museum community, this movement frequently assumed the institutional form of the "ethnic-specific museum"—and thus was born the NMAI. By stated mission, board policy, and programmatic design, its intentions were explicit from incipency—the cultural authenticity and knowledge authority of Native peoples was to be encouraged, respected, and empowered.

Second, the United States Congress also had stated in the NMAI's 1989 authorizing statute and its legislative history that Native America was to have a participatory and collaborative role in the National Museum of the American Indian. In other words, the very curatorial and scholarly foundations of the museum were to be profoundly mutual in shaping the substance of the institution. The cultural self-determination and cultural "self-representation" referred to in Adams's statement had thus been signaled explicitly even if it sat, apparently, in a rather conventional place—a large Smithsonian museum on the National Mall in Washington, D.C.

At the NMAI, museum practices rapidly transformed this framework from the conceptual to the actualized. Long



before programming of any kind became a reality in any NMAI facilities, a series of consultations, some twenty-five to thirty of them over a two-and-a-half to three-year period, established the two important guiding aspirations set forth in the museum's mission statement. First, the NMAI saw Native peoples and communities not as some ethnographic residuum, in an advanced state of dotage or risk, preparing to fall off the stage of history. To the contrary, Native America maintained a cultural present and would insist on a future, and hopefully a better one. Second, its presentation, interpretation, and representation of these peoples, cultures, and communities were premised on a consistent and systematic invocation of the first-person voice of Native peoples.

These aspirations took form early in 1994 at the NMAI's George Gustav Heye Center in New York and were implemented on a far larger scale when the NMAI opened in 2004 on the National Mall in Washington, D.C. The process began with the organization of programming, including most specifically exhibitions—not around collections per se, but instead around large ideas or themes that were based on those early consultations with Native communities. Native representatives from throughout the Americas were invited to participate in all exhibitions, from the selection of objects to the specific content of individual community installations within the larger frame of the transcendent ideas and themes. At the museum on the National Mall, this approach resulted in twenty-four specific installations representing Native communities from all of the Americas: eight from Central and South America, four from the First Nations of Canada, and twelve from the United States.

The process produced a museum with a very different look, feel, and content. Roger Kennedy, the late distinguished director emeritus of the Smithsonian's National Museum of American History, in an essay regarding the opening of the NMAI on the National Mall, characterized what he saw in these terms:

[T]he point of it all is that the Indian Museum is a living Indians' museum, presenting without rancor or unctuousness certain valuable truths about living Native persons having a set of experiences special to them, but important to the rest of us. . . .

This place is different. We will not find labels telling us which dead artist did what, or why a dead object is thought to be pretty, or how it has been authenticated by some expert as "culturally significant." Objects have been selected, as they are in any good museum, because they are significant and because they enhance the significance of other objects to which they are juxtaposed, but at the end of the day this is a companionable place, where it is a *people* [emphasis in original] who are "culturally significant."<sup>1</sup>

Claire Smith, the Australian academic of Indigenous communities there, came to the same conclusion in more purely anthropological terms:

This scheme of knowledge is given . . . substance in the manner that objects in the collections [of the NMAI] are . . . described [in exhibitions]. Deriving from Indigenous conceptual readings of the world, the classificatory systems of the NMAI reveal a holistic concern with the relationships between plants, animals, humans, and places as well as between past and present. This is contrary to non-Indigenous classification systems, being based on neither the Linnean system of linking similarities of features, nor the tradition of Cutter's system of locating items in place, preferably adjacent to other items which share similar features.<sup>2</sup>

Smith's words provide the perfect segue for moving from the first part of this presentation to the second: the "why?" of epistemological practices in museums that justifies changed approaches to interpretive and curatorial practices in twenty-first century museums. As introduction, we need to step back briefly to the origins of the very nature of museums and their knowledge systems that arrived in the United States from Europe. Borne primarily of the Enlightenment and Western rationalism, museums have been driven in organizing and creating knowledge by the binary division of culture and nature. That dividing line resulted in the collateral creation of numerous subdivided disciplines and to their being further split—for example, art and ethnography, art and culture, and history and art, as well as others.

For the National Museum of the American Indian, the substance of the "why?" was a straightforward interpretive proposition, however complex its articulation might be: in the matter of knowledge systems, Native peoples of the Americas often see things in the world differently from Western interpretive paradigms. Ours is fundamentally, and always has been, a world seen whole, as correctly perceived by Professor Smith, and not seen as divisible into the material and the nonmaterial, the tangible and the intangible, let alone the subdivisions of disciplines that populate Western rationalism.

Thus, from a Native standpoint, the museum object itself is no more important, and indeed, probably less so than the processes leading to its creation. It is those aspects of life and culture that speak more completely to the fullness, the totality, and the wholeness of living a Native culture—traditions, songs, spiritual beliefs, and ritual and ceremonial practices.

I believe that access to this dimension of Native meaning requires the direct involvement of those who, in fact, live the heritage. As Richard Kurin, the former director of the Smithsonian Institution's Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage, emphasizes:

[M]useums must have an . . . engaged, substantive . . . partnership with the people who hold the heritage. Such partnership entails shared authority for defining traditions, and shared curation for their representation. . . . [M]useums [cannot] hide behind a history of elitism, ethnic, or class bias that has often afflicted the institution. Charged with the . . . duties of cooperation and respect, museums will have to cross . . . boundaries that have sometimes kept them "above and beyond" the broader populace. They will have to recognize that knowledge exists in homes, villages, slums, out in the fields, in factories and social halls as well as in the halls of academia and in their museums.<sup>3</sup>

This scholarship of inclusion and difference, this turning of the conventional interpretive paradigm on its head—however one wishes to characterize it—is not without implications. Specifically, it signals clearly the presence of new authoritative voices and an accompanying shift in interpretive and representational power relationships. As Professor Smith has pointed out,

In deciding to create a museum in which Native Americans tell their own stories, unfettered by the interpretive lens of the dominant society, the NMAI has realized its potential to provide unprecedented richness in interpretation and to offer rare insights into the lives of Native peoples. . . . [N]ew vistas, directed by Indigenous eyes, are opened to the public. . . .

The empowerment of new voices, however, also can involve a diminution of the authority of established voices. By widening the concept of authority to include the voices of Indigenous peoples, many of whom feel they have been silenced too long . . . the NMAI, either intentionally or inadvertently, challenges the position of non-Indigenous peoples as authorities on Indigenous cultures.<sup>4</sup>

And the National Museum of the American Indian learned very quickly—and often in triplicate—that such fundamental shifts sometime will not be taken lightly, particularly among critics whose museological paradigm emanates from the more conventional Western origins described above. When the NMAI opened, a critic at one of America's most august publications, the *New York Times*, expressed deep regret that the NMAI was moving away from the "museum as a temple with its superior, self-governing priesthood" and opined that it should have moved "in the opposite direction." He opposed the museum's making objects available to tribes "for ritual use," believing that this kind of sensitivity constituted evidence of a "studious avoidance of scholarship." He expressed open indignation about the specific choices made by the Tohono O'odam community of Arizona in one of the NMAI's opening core exhibitions, *Our Peoples*, when asked to describe the ten most important events in their history.<sup>5</sup>

But Director Emeritus Kennedy was still alive and writing, fortunately. In a retort and response that became its own legend, he analyzed this review in the following never-to-be-forgotten words:

The patronizing stench emerging from that passage [about the studious avoidance of scholarship] grows stronger in another, suggesting that Indians' lack of "detailed written languages" (sorry about that, all ye Aztec poets and all ye Mayan historians and merchants) resulted from their having "so little to say." Compassionately, he would have us grant eternal silence to these mute fellow citizens not only because they were linguo-deprived but because "so much trauma decimated . . . the tribes." A little well-applied trauma might be helpful to shake that kind of self-assurance. . . .

If he had a sense of humor, a critic of this sort might be worth attending even though tone-deaf to the numinous, and color-blind to the symbolic. But what can you do with someone who can write with indignation of the Tohono O'odham's response when "they were asked to present 10 crucial moments in this history," and chose, as their first, "Birds teach people to call for rain," and as their last, "In the year 2000, a desert walk for health"? The Tohono O'odham refused to be talked down to. Their little parable says with a smile, "We will listen to the elders who have earned our respect, but we will not be patronized by puppies." I'm with them.<sup>6</sup>

And as the director of the National Museum of the American Indian, so was I. I had an ethical and intellectual commitment to the simple, yet so fundamental, proposition that Native peoples possessed important and authoritative knowledge about themselves and their cultures, past and present, and deserved to be at the museological table of interpretation and representation. I believed that the potential for new scholarship and insight into Native peoples and cultures at the NMAI was real and was to be valued highly,

whatever the intervening and intermittent challenges along the way might be as we introduced new paradigms of interpretation, representation, and inclusion—and in the process, transformed a century of exclusionary epistemological theory and practice.

I now would like to turn, as promised, to the third and final part of my presentation—namely, the implications for museums and cultural institutions more broadly of the NMAI’s transformative journey of the past three decades toward creating in a museum what I can only describe as wider social and civic space and place. What I probably did not see as clearly when I was a “museum director novice” was the great interconnectivity and integration conceptually between the first and second parts of Secretary Adams’s statement, which I quoted earlier in this article.

While the NMAI, to employ a metaphor, was banging on the door of conventional museum curation to grant entry to Native viewpoint and voice as authoritative, several substantial and significant consequences resulted—virtually ineluctably. From the standpoint of the Native interpretive and representational voice, collections were important but hardly the entire story. As I emphasized before, they were considered most valuable by Native peoples as cultural keys and cues to themselves and to the communities in which both objects and peoples lived, past and present. The NMAI was in substance far more akin to a combined “cultural center” and “palace of collectibles” on the National Mall.

And just to hover for a moment—“cultural centers” by definition can be very different places. They are not one-time or single purpose and solely cultural destinations, let alone cabinets of curiosity for the presentation of collections of material culture. They are broader places and wider spaces, where the institution can connect with external interests that relate to the subject of the cultural center. In other instances, external interests may be using the center’s physical and intellectual space as a gathering place for addressing matters of import and relevance to the community that are unrelated to the specific aims of the cultural institution.

In either case, the cultural center is an instrument and catalyzing adjunct of the community—a “community center,” however the adjective *community* may be defined—for engagement, conversation, debate, even controversy, but always, as the late distinguished American museologist Steve Weil described it, a “safe place for unsafe ideas.” In practical and operating terms, this description is what I mean in using the words “civic space.” I am confident it is what Secretary Adams intended when he referred, those many years ago, to the National Museum of the American Indian as a “forum.”

My good friend, colleague, and mentor Elaine Heumann Gurian, a gifted museologist in her own right, describes, among others, the model of the “community museum” in the following—and for the NMAI, instructive—terms:

Community museums look the least like museums and are often named cultural or community centers. They are often a mixed-use space of affiliated organizations and functions, with a blend of meeting spaces, gathering spaces and stages, offices, food service, and teaching spaces. . . .

There have been community-centered museums in many countries and over many decades. Tribal museums of indigenous peoples often concentrate on the societal needs of their people as their primary agenda. Eco-museums are a kind of community-centered museum started to preserve in living history fashion, the work, crafts, or information known only to the elders of the community. . . . Community-centered museums often make their objects available for ceremonial use and study as a matter of course.<sup>7</sup>

The markers of the NMAI as cultural and community center and civic space, functionally, regardless of the name by which it goes, are abundant. The permanent exhibitions, a very conventional museum medium normally, themselves offer cues to the broader and different intentions of the NMAI. The exhibitions did contain objects—thousands of them, to be exact. But they did not determine or define the installations in the often customary way. Broad ideas and themes, Native peoples themselves, and the role of communities held equal sway, and the integration of all of the above in the presentation was key. The focus of the exhibitions, as well as the individual Native community components, were and remain diverse, and address subjects as varied as Native cosmology, casino operations, health issues, urban Indian life, and hunting and fishing rights.

Soon after the NMAI opened, representatives of the Gwich’in Nation of Northeast Alaska and Northwest Canada quite literally set up a day camp across Maryland Avenue from the museum. Through loudspeakers and the distribution of written information, they lobbied any passerby, including numerous visitors to the NMAI willing to listen, regarding their staunch opposition on religious and cultural grounds to legislation then pending in the United States Congress concerning the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge.

I applauded their choice of a protest site, and, in some ways, what I appreciated most—perhaps somewhat ironically—is that they were not invited. The Gwich'in chose us as the site to unfold what I regarded as a potent formula for transformation: the passionate expression of profound aspiration.

What links these examples—exhibitions directly undertaken by the NMAI, and Native activities external to the museum but still associated with us—is this: All intend to promote a broad civic discourse that is engaged, interactive, and mutually participatory regarding Native peoples and cultures of the Americas—truly the museum as forum in action.

And so we now turn to the conclusion of our journey through the early mission intentions and aspirations of the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of the American Indian, as envisioned and implemented almost a generation ago, with an eye on their relevance and pertinence to twenty-first century museology and museum practice. How do we measure and assess their impact for purposes of what many in this room do with such passion, commitment, and competence every day of their professional life as members of the nation's museum community?

Here is the answer I will propose. The words are mine from the concluding paragraph in an article that appeared in the publication *Museum International* addressing the question of the very definition of museums in the twenty-first century:

The popular perception of these great institutions called “museums” is that they are principally cultural destinations and very worthy ones, but somehow ultimately apart from society's mainstream—a delightful weekend side excursion but not a part of everyday life, “over there” instead of “right here amongst us.” These great and important institutions of art, culture, and history, indeed, are often brilliantly pleasant and inspiring stops on the cultural tour bus route.<sup>8</sup>

But they can be and should be far more than that in the twenty-first century. The substantial changes that have occurred in museum epistemologies and interpretive practices, as they relate to representation of cultural communities and especially those that are Indigenous, offer multiple possibilities and potentialities.

I return to the visionary statement of Secretary Adams as he contemplated the future of the NMAI and its impact on museology and epistemological and interpretive practices. He counseled that this new institution should not fear departure from old and historical museum models like “the temple with its superior, self-governing priesthood.” Adams urged, instead that the museum embrace epistemologically the “permanence,” “authenticity,” “vitality,” and “self-determination of Native American voices as the fundamental reality it must represent.” With these observations and envisioning, he suggests a path that has implications, possibilities, and potentialities for the future of many other twenty-first-century museums and museum practices.

His statement explicitly and implicitly rejects the “older image” of the museum and affirms the need for new models. First-person voice, in this case Indigenous, and cultural “self-determination” in museum practice should be a critical interpretive guide. Those voices constitute the “fundamental reality” that the institution “must represent.” The transcendent epistemological—and curatorial practice—message is that those cultural realities well may differ from other cultural constructs, should be respected in being so, and are entitled to authoritative status in the museum's development, articulation, and interpretation of content and knowledge that its audiences see, hear, and experience.

This transformation in approach also has direct impact going forward on the very nature of the museum as a public institution—not solely as a collections depot and temple of objects, but as “a forum . . . committed not to the promulgation of received wisdom but to the encouragement of a multi-cultural dialogue.” We struggle in the twenty-first century and on a global basis to find and implement civic and social space—those gathering places for discussion, discourse, debate, even controversy, but always a forum and safe place for unsafe ideas concerning cultural history and human experience.

But museums represent at least the opportunity to serve as a notable chink in that contemporary armor of political and social polarities—and the disabling cultural and historical gloom they engender. The museum as counterpoint, although not able to do everything, can do something, and a very important something. That hope and aspiration should be the intellectual, museological—and moral and ethical—aspiration of all museums and how we define ourselves and our future in the twenty-first century.

And on that journey so worthy I send all of you today on your way with these Cheyenne words of heartfelt encouragement: [spoken Cheyenne].

Thank you so very much for your kind attention. Good luck and Godspeed.

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<sup>1</sup>Personal correspondence between Roger Kennedy and W. Richard West, Jr., 2004.

<sup>2</sup>Claire Smith, "Decolonising the Museum: The National Museum of the American Indian in Washington, DC," *Antiquity* 79, no. 304 (June 2005): 426, [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/228379134\\_Decolonising\\_the\\_Museum\\_The\\_National\\_Museum\\_of\\_the\\_American\\_Indian\\_in\\_Washington\\_DC](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/228379134_Decolonising_the_Museum_The_National_Museum_of_the_American_Indian_in_Washington_DC).

<sup>3</sup>Richard Kurin, "Museums and Intangible Heritage: Culture Dead or Alive?," *ICOM News* 4 (2004): 7-9, [https://moam.info/museums-and-intangible-heritage-culture-dead-or-alive-the-\\_59dca0c21723ddfc40f5d7ad.html](https://moam.info/museums-and-intangible-heritage-culture-dead-or-alive-the-_59dca0c21723ddfc40f5d7ad.html).

<sup>4</sup>Smith, 435.

<sup>5</sup>Edward Rothstein, "Museum With an American Indian Voice," *New York Times*, Sept. 21, 2004, <https://www.nytimes.com/2004/09/21/arts/design/museum-with-an-american-indian-voice.html>.

<sup>6</sup>Personal correspondence between Roger Kennedy and W. Richard West, Jr., 2004.

<sup>7</sup>Elaine Heumann Gurian, "Choosing Among the Options: An Opinion About Museum Definitions," *Civilizing the Museum: The Collected Writings of Elaine Heumann Gurian* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 52.

<sup>8</sup>W. Richard West, Jr., "Cultural Interpretation in the 21st Century: Transformational Changes in Museum Practice," *Museum International* 71, nos. 1-2 (2019): 59.

# **Native Curators in Context**

**Patricia Marroquin Norby (Purépecha), Metropolitan Museum of Art  
heather ahtone (Choctaw/Chickasaw Nation), First Americans Museum  
Josie Lee (Ho-Chunk), Ho-Chunk Nation Museum and Cultural Center**

# Foregrounding Indigenous Voices and Perspectives at the Met

Patricia Marroquin Norby (Purépecha)

Metropolitan Museum of Art

Nárhi jámaxaki/Hello. I am Patricia Marroquin Norby, Associate Curator of Native American Art at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. I would like to acknowledge that as a woman of Purépecha descent, I am a guest here in the ancestral homelands of the Gabrielino/Tongva Community.

I am honored to be here with all of you today and I would like to thank my fellow panelists, Joe Horse Capture, Ben Fitzsimmons, and the Autry Museum of the American West team for this opportunity and for all of their hard work organizing this very meaningful event honoring Marshall McKay.

Each of us on this panel was offered a series of questions regarding our personal and professional experiences and asked how they influence the ways we navigate the museum world. We were also asked about our roles interpreting and presenting Native American and Indigenous culture, and our methods for balancing those efforts with community needs. What I appreciated about these questions was that they simultaneously acknowledged and demonstrated respect for diverse approaches for foregrounding community voices, experiences, and protocols, while also recognizing that this work does not follow a “one size fits all” process even though, as Indigenous peoples and museum professionals, we share many goals.

Today, I will speak briefly about my long-term scholarly work and its relevance to my curatorial practice, as well as current changes and exhibitions at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City—a 152-year-old institution that is open to change but is also deeply ingrained in its culture and institutional memory. These important, timely changes include the *Art of Native America: The Charles and Valerie Diker Collection* exhibition, which debuted in 2018 and is now officially a permanent installation at the Met and features historical through contemporary Native American works. In 2017, the Met’s acceptance of this promised gift, including ninety-one works representing over fifty Native Nations, raised critical issues of cultural sensitivity, repatriation, and partnerships with sovereign Nations regarding the collection’s appropriate care. I will also share about other projects that amplify Indigenous perspectives and are grounded by collaboration and relationship-building with source communities. This approach has always been a priority in my long-term museum practice, first as a trained fine artist, then in my role in museum leadership as a director, and now in my art scholarship and curatorial approach.

Consider, for instance, that without the voices of Pueblo, Abiqueño, and Hispano communities of northern New Mexico, my current book project, *Water, Bones and Bombs: Twentieth Century Art and Environmental Conflicts in the Southwest*, would not be possible.

Forthcoming through the University of Nebraska’s *Many Wests* series, the book draws directly from my dissertation, *Visual Violence in the Land of Enchantment*, which was published online in 2013 by the University of Minnesota. It centers on twentieth-century American Indian and American art of northern New Mexico and its connections to issues of environmental justice. In my work, I examine the paintings of Tonita Peña (Tewa, San Ildefonso and Cochiti Pueblos), Georgia O’Keeffe, and Helen Hardin (Tewa, Santa Clara Pueblo)—three artists who lived and worked in the northern Rio Grande and Chama River valleys in northern New Mexico, and who had very distinct personal, professional, and aesthetic relationships with the land and landscapes of the northern Rio Grande region.

In my work, I investigate Tonita Peña’s watercolor paintings and their material connections to twentieth-century water politics and agricultural practices. I also expose the connections between painter and printmaker Helen Hardin’s studio practices and art material, and environmental toxin exposure related to nuclear weapons production at Los Alamos National Laboratory.

Finally, I argue that the American art icon Georgia O’Keeffe’s landscape images visually manifest intercultural tensions and are more politically charged than modern art histories and O’Keeffe biographies portray.

My research is grounded by over a decade of building collaborative relationships with local communities in northern New Mexico, as well as extensive research in American Indian law, New Mexican land grants, legal transcripts, local correspondence, and petitions, to spotlight direct connections between O’Keeffe’s Abiquiu landscape paintings and natural resource struggles. I underscore how twentieth-century American aesthetics, specifically in the Southwest, elided American Indian and Hispano voices and their contributions to modern American art

The book’s second chapter centers on the ancient Tewa pueblo Aveshu, or Abiquiu, New Mexico, and local Abiqueño families, and their perspectives of the American modern artist Georgia O’Keeffe who occupied their homelands for nearly fifty years.

Abiquiu, New Mexico, is located on the northern path of the historic Spanish Trail along the Rio Chama River approximately twenty-five miles north of Santa Fe. It was a very active military and trading center during Spanish, Mexican, and U.S. occupational periods.

In 1850, a Southern Ute agency was established at Abiquiu that served both the Ute and Jicarilla Apache until 1882. In 1945, when the population of Abiquiu was around 600, the American painter Georgia O'Keeffe moved there permanently.

Today, Abiqueños convey a sense of dignity when sharing their own American Indian and Hispano histories. Local families will tell you that their Genízaro ancestors lived and died in this desert long before O'Keeffe arrived. Abiqueño citizens identify as the descendants of the original Genízaro community: the children of Pueblo, Dine, Apache, Ute, Pawnee, and Comanche captives and slaves who were purchased by Spanish and Mexican elites.

Abiquiu was federally recognized as an Indian pueblo until the early twentieth century, when it gave up this status to become a village. Despite the long-term presence of Abiquiu's Indigenous communities, American art historians and O'Keeffe fans have insistently referred to the Abiquiu region as "O'Keeffe country."

The popular O'Keeffe myth of the "isolated desert sage" has obscured Abiqueño contributions to O'Keeffe's success throughout the entire second half of her career. In fact, the artist depended upon the Native American and Hispano communities in Abiquiu for their labor and cultural knowledge, their neighborly generosity, and in some cases, companionship and friendship. Local Indigenous communities and their support of the artist are important elements in the O'Keeffe narrative that are regularly omitted from fine art scholarship.

There is no question that twentieth-century American art histories depended on limited interpretations that both assigned meaning to and dismissed specific historical, cultural, and racial information in the promotion of American aesthetics and nationalist agendas. In Abiquiu, key to these messages was the visual conveyance of an empty land. Land that is free for the taking. Land that is waiting for someone to just walk in and appreciate its beauty, its wonderful emptiness, and natural aesthetics. These messages are not limited to O'Keeffe's landscape paintings; they play out every day in art and images, on tourist paraphernalia.

A postcard, for example, which is circulated in local tourist shops in Northern New Mexico, disseminates one of O'Keeffe's most famous and, I believe, most problematic quotes about Tsiping (Cerro Pedernal, or Pedernal Mountain), a sacred natural landmark for Northern New Mexico's Indigenous communities. In this image is the 9,868-foot flat-topped mountain Tsiping, which has always been sacred to northern New Mexico's Indigenous communities. Tsiping's history dates back centuries. Artifacts found on its slopes have been dated to 7,000 BC.

In 1977, to *Newsday* writer Amei Wallach, O'Keeffe made one of her most celebrated remarks. "It's my private mountain," she stated. "God told me if I painted it often enough I could have it." The repeated dissemination of this statement, together with O'Keeffe's "empty landscape" paintings, helped perpetuate Georgia O'Keeffe the myth: the myth of the "isolated" American art icon.

Between 1936 and 1958, O'Keeffe's claims to Tsiping were documented in over twenty-nine different paintings of the mountain. So prevailing were the artist's verbal and visual claims to this landmark that between 1979 and 1984, the National Park and U.S. Forest Services considered honoring the artist by renaming Tsiping "O'Keeffe Mountain." Local responses to the suggestion of renaming Cerro Pedernal were powerful. Abiquiu citizens protested by circulating a petition. Some wrote letters speaking out against this proposal. Others challenged the need (of mostly Euro-American nonlocals) to immortalize the artist by renaming the natural landmark. More community members banded together to form Los Vecinos del Cerro Pedernal (The Neighbors of Pedernal Mountain). Statements from Los Vecinos affirmed their ancestral and spiritual connection to the mountain and critiqued O'Keeffe and her fans. They wrote:

Long, long time ago, El Cerro Pedernal provided the resources for us to survive. It gave us flint so that we could have tools. It also provided us with water and land, so that we could farm. The canyon lands that surround its base offered us protection, but more importantly, it gave us a sanctuary, a place of refuge so that we could seek our own god.

I share about my scholarship because Indigenous voices and perspectives shaped my scholarly approach and have greatly impacted my curatorial vision, my commitment to Native American and Indigenous sovereignty, and my goals of presenting Native American art and its kinship ties to local environments and Indigenous homelands—values reflected in the Met's fresh approach to presenting Native American art.

Currently, institution-wide and collaborative efforts are now underway across the museum that involve cross-departmental collaboration to appropriately highlight Native American perspectives and art while respecting



culturally specific protocols, aesthetic expressions, and sovereignty—important values that allow for the presentation of Native American art along an aesthetic continuum, according to community perspectives, while creating a welcoming space for Indigenous visitors. These efforts include openly acknowledging the original peoples and source communities through land acknowledgments, strategically placed works throughout galleries, and a new Land and Water Statement now permanently installed at the entrance of the *Art of Native America* exhibition space in the American Wing.

#### IN-GALLERY LAND AND WATER STATEMENT

We affirm our intentions for ongoing relationships with contemporary Native American and Indigenous artists and the original communities whose ancestral and aesthetic items we care for.

We understand that these items—vibrant expressions of Native sovereignty, identity, and connections to community and family—embody intergenerational and environmental knowledge, including origin stories, languages, songs, dances, and ties to homelands.

We commit to pursuing continuous collaborations with Indigenous communities and presenting Native American art in a manner that is inclusive of Indigenous perspectives, involves guidance from source communities, and creates space for respectful listening and thoughtful dialogue. We will work to advance Indigenous experiences in the Met's exhibitions, collections, and programs.

We will strengthen our awareness of historical and contemporary environmental issues in the New York region, and throughout North America, in order to thoughtfully reckon with our institutional legacy and its impact on the lands, waters, and original peoples of this place, which are, and always be, inextricable.

Jodi Archambault's (Hunkpapa Lakota) Northern Traditional Dance Dress (2005) was acquired by the Met in 2019. The materials include over fifteen pounds of beads, and its creation was a powerful combination of both tradition and innovation that involved digital technology but also many community hands, including family, friends, community members, and colleagues of the artist. This powerful work demonstrating community collaboration and aesthetic continuity welcomed visitors into our Native American galleries during the 2021–2022 Art of Native America rotation.

I'm also excited to share that for the first time in its history, one recent collaboration at the Met is the inclusion of multiple Indigenous designers in the Costume Institute's 2022 rotation of *In America: A Lexicon of Fashion*. This major exhibition coincides with the Costume Institute's 75th anniversary, as well as the annual Met Gala. This fashion reappraisal presents American fashion as grounded by cultural and emotional resonances, and historical narratives. Included in the exhibition is a "Cascade" ensemble, constructed with Pendleton Blankets and styled after Hudson Bay Company blankets, by the Indigenous designer Korina Emmerich, who identifies as a Puyallup descendant. About this work, Emmerich states that her use of wool materials, inspired by the Hudson Bay Company, refers to environmental sustainability, as well as the company's historically contentious relationship with Indigenous communities, and to her paternal family's history of working for the company throughout the nineteenth century.

Additional partnerships include the Met's American Wing and our Modern and Contemporary Art Department, including exhibitions and ongoing acquisitions of modern and contemporary Native art. Recently installed in the Modern and Contemporary Art Wing are two paintings by contemporary artists Jaune Quick-to-See Smith (enrolled member of the Salish of the Flathead Reservation) and Kay Walkingstick (Cherokee). The paintings, Smith's *August Encampment*, created in 1988 using oil on canvas, and Walkingstick's *Genesis: Violent Garden*, created in 1981 with acrylic, wax, broken seashells, and metal on canvas, speak to family memories, connections to homelands, tribal politics, and creations stories, as well as settler encroachments, violence, and survival. The current installation of these powerful works by two prominent, long-standing leaders of Native American art demonstrates the active, stronger representation of contemporary Native American artists and Native American women at the Met. Working collaboratively, the American Wing and the Modern and Contemporary Art Department, are growing the Met's collections of modern and contemporary Native American art.

Recent exhibitions in the American Wing that involved collaborations with source communities, individual artists, and community members, following their lead on how to best foreground Indigenous voices and experiences, included *Karl Bodmer: North American Portraits*, on view April 5–July 25, 2021, which was co-curated by Annika Johnson from the Joslyn Art Museum and Thayer Tolles from the Met. The Autry's own Joe Horse Capture responded to the impact of Bodmer's watercolors upon his own family's experiences. Another exhibition that involved collaboration with source communities was *Jules Tavernier and the Elem Pomo*, on view August 16–November 28,

2021, curated by Betsy Kornhauser and Shannon Vittoria, also from the Met. Each project (1) included numerous community members as co-curators, advisors, consultants, and contributing authors, and (2) presented nineteenth-century paintings in context with the intergenerational histories, personal lives, and family legacies of contemporary Native American communities and families who hold direct ties to the featured artworks and individuals depicted in the images.

I am thrilled to share that two new acquisitions will soon be featured in the American Wing's Wolf North Gallery in the upcoming exhibition *Water Memories*, which opens June 23, 2022. The exhibition presents intimate connections with and memories of water. *Water Memories* flows as currents of stories and moments that contemplate the impact of water's presence (and absence) on our daily lives.

The first new acquisition featured in *Water Memories* is Chemehuevi artist Cara Romero's 2015 archival photograph, *Water Memory*, which is the signature image and title inspiration for this exhibition and a promised gift from a private collection.

Our second acquisition is by the Ho-Chunk artist Truman Lowe. His elegant 1993 sculpture, *Feather Canoe*, made of willow, copper, and feathers, portrays water as a place of sanctuary, emergence, and regeneration. In his 2004 biography, *Woodland Reflections*, written by art historian Jo Ortel, the artist stated he wanted to create a canoe that conveyed the feeling of gliding on water—a sensation he experienced while floating along the rivers in Wisconsin. The result is a lightweight, minimalist vessel that speaks to connections between water and sky.

Both acquisitions embody the urgent environmental challenges currently faced by numerous Indigenous communities, to protect shrinking homelands and fresh-water sources. The quiet potency of both artworks intentionally draws in viewers to pause, look closely, and reflect on the contextual, cultural, and personal meanings of water.

In *Water Memories*, Lowe's feather canoe is placed in dialogue with the nineteenth-century cyanotypes of the German American photographer Henry Bosse. Hired by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, between 1883 and 1893, Bosse created more than 345 cyanotypes of the Upper Mississippi River prior to its major alterations, including dams, levees, and other flood control measures. In his decade-long visual study, Bosse's cyanotypes inadvertently documented the ancestral homelands and waters of both the Ho-Chunk and Dakota peoples, who were repeatedly removed from their home, at times at gunpoint.

Another highlight of the *Water Memories* exhibition is the 6 1/2-foot-high x 17-foot-wide triptych created by the Luiseño and German American artist Fritz Scholder. Most well-known for his Indian portrait series from the mid-twentieth century, Scholder's *Possession at the Beach* (1989) is one of a few works by the artist that depicts water. I'm excited to share that this will be the very first time this renowned artist will be shown at the Met.

At the Met, efforts to foreground Indigenous voices reach beyond gallery spaces. Currently, the museum has hosted virtual-source community collections to help build positive collaborative relationships with sovereign nations and to discuss culturally sensitive and NAGPRA-relevant issues. Soon we will be hosting in-person community consultations, and I am looking forward to this. I see these important visits as an opportunity to grow and learn and support Native and Indigenous peoples and their perspectives. Building trust with Native American and Indigenous communities is at the heart of what I do. Listening to community needs and respecting protocol for the best care of collections is of the highest priority in this work.

Also ongoing are our educational and public programs featuring Native American artists, scholars, and community experts that highlight current issues in Indian Country. And I'm excited to share that our new *Art of Native America* audio guide, created in collaboration with the Met's digital team, includes the voices of community members, artists, and Indigenous celebrities, and features the award-winning Cree and Métis actor of film and television, Tantoo Cardinal, as narrator.

I am proud to say that at the Met there has been much change and growth. But there is still much work to do. I am a strong believer that effective and long-lasting change takes time. My time at the Met began during the height of the Covid pandemic. My initial year, which was largely virtual, provided me the opportunity to assess the specific needs of the institution and to begin developing institution-wide guidelines for issues regarding NAGPRA, collections care, and exhibition protocol relevant to the Indian Arts and Crafts Act of 1990. These important measures help my colleagues and I in our ongoing efforts to provide a welcoming collaborative space for Native American and Indigenous communities.

Developing new policies and implementing culturally sensitive protocols at colonial institutions, where these practices are very new, can bring about many challenges, but they also encourage the potential for new relationships.

Indigenous art and creative practices have always offered diverse and innovative ways of knowing and understanding the world, unique expressions that are visually and materially realized in established aesthetic systems and community protocols. Creative production and aesthetics are deeply rooted in the places and regions to which Native American and Indigenous communities belong, and to all that is good about who we are as Indigenous peoples; this is one way we connect to our histories and to one another. The ongoing daily work with Native American art collections reminds us that these works carry the hopes and visions of our Ancestors, but also that we must engage in ongoing dialogues, cross-cultural collaborations, and continual re-centering of our self-determination and creative practices. We must also question internalized (settler-colonial) limitations, borders, and boundaries about who we are and how we want to move forward collectively. Thank you.

## Finding Balance

Josie Lee (Ho-Chunk)

Ho-Chunk Nation Museum and Cultural Center

Hanac hinikaragiwi. Haksinaziwiga hiigaire. Caa yakikarac wa'uanaksana. Hi'uni haara Reekumaniga higaire. Hi'aanch haara Tobyga higaire. Hicoke haara caasgaga higaire wanagire. Hixoroke haara hi'ugiga higaire wanagire. My name is Josie Lee and I am a member of the Ho-Chunk Nation. In my very quick Hoocak introduction, I gave you all background of who I am to the Ho-Chunk world and my place within it. Within my community, this information might be used to figure out who I am related to so that you would have the correct relationship to me. In general, I'm a woman of many hats. I am an independent curator, consultant, mom, daughter, wife, doctoral student, and the current museum director for the Ho-Chunk Nation.

The Ho-Chunk Nation is one of a few tribes within the U.S. without a reservation. This means we don't have a contiguous land base. Instead, we are spread among thirteen communities in twenty-six counties across three separate states. Our communities range from Green Bay, Wisconsin, to Minneapolis, and down the I-94 corridor to Chicago. These areas are also part of our ancestral homelands, which the government has tried, unsuccessfully, to remove us from eleven times.

My role as a representative of my people's story requires the ability to balance the needs of all of these communities. Each of them has its own unique stories and ways of understanding our tribal dynamics and politics. Oftentimes, my role is about finding commonalities and showcasing them alongside the differences. For example, all of our communities made baskets at one point in time, but specific communities and makers have baskets that are recognizable by their colors and shapes. Another example is the way that different dialects have held on in different communities. For example, I use the word *kaaka* for my grandmother, but my husband uses the word *gaaga*. And finally, one of my favorite examples is the historical link between families living in communities in the 1880s matching almost identically to the ones living there today.



Example for pop-up museum. Photo by Josie Lee

always provided food and beverages for them. These pop-up events invited our community members to bring an object from home that was significant to them and fit within a theme. One of our first events was under the theme, "What Makes Me Ho-Chunk?" Participants were invited to bring an item from home, create an "object label," and share their story (if comfortable) with the other guests. These events had few initial participants but hugely meaningful impacts.

After the pop-up museum's success, I helped initiate culture camps through the Department of Heritage Preservation. These camps sought out expert artists and knowledge keepers within our community to show off their skills through demonstrations and tables that highlighted their work. This format allows visitors to make connections with those skilled teachers. When these started, the need and hunger within our community for learning our traditional arts was huge, but the museum did not have its own permanent space; it was solely an idea. We had handfuls of people making certain items and gathering specific foods, but

The Ho-Chunk Nation has dreamt about a museum for our tribe since 1963, but the idea has faced a lot of criticism in the decades since. In order to better show the importance of telling our tribal story in our words, I had to get a little creative. First, I held a summer youth program with middle school students on object photography and label writing. Each student wrote about their identity and what was important to them. These students went on to speak before our tribal legislature to advocate for themselves and their teacher a year later, and I'd like to believe that I helped them find the power in their own voices.

The Summer Youth photography project led to pop-up museum events. These were held in many of the different communities, but not all. I never expected tribal members to drive to me for these events, and I



Pop-up museum, Madison, Wisconsin, 2018. Photo by Josie Lee

now, we're seeing a growing number of people learning and teaching others. We have hosted hide tanners, lacrosse stick makers and games, foraging, basket makers, bead workers, yarn belt weavers, storytellers, and more. We have even held Indigenous food cook-offs during these events to provide fully immersive experiences for visitors that highlight not only our artistic aesthetic but also our culinary and ethnobotanical expertise. Last year our own Elena Terry was featured on Andrew Zimmern's *Family Dinner*, highlighting our foods.



Mona Monegar, daughter of Clarence B. Monegar, at Ho-Chunk Nation Museum and Cultural Center Opening, January 2020. Photo by Josie Lee

The success of these programs showcasing our voice and our community allowed for the opening of our museum. We first opened its doors to the public in January 2020. With the expertise of Ho-Chunk artist Tom Jones, we opened with a show of watercolors by Ho-Chunk artist Clarence B. Monegar. When our museum opened, it was important to me and our guest curator to show Ho-Chunk work that did not rely on stereotypes, although we have gotten many requests for beadwork and projectile points since then. This show of Monegar's work was only the second show of solely his work, and the first in almost fifty years. Not only was this an important moment for his family, but it was also important for burgeoning Ho-Chunk artists to show that there are many different ways to express a Ho-Chunk interpretation of the world. Monegar's daughter, Mona, was brought by her family to see her father's work.

As you all know, 2020 was a horrible year. Shortly after opening, we closed our doors due to the pandemic. In fact, all of our businesses closed and over half of the tribal employees were laid off as a result—myself included—so our doors remained closed. During this time, I continued work and began new contracts with a number of area institutions on telling the story of the Ho-Chunk Nation. These included the La Crosse County Historical Society, the Milwaukee Public Museum, the Field Museum, the Wisconsin Historical Society and a handful more. It was important to me that through each of these projects, past stories of Ho-Chunk ingenuity, brilliance, and fortitude be part of a continued narrative of who we are today.

On November 29, 2020, our museum and collections suffered extreme water damage after a fire broke out in the building adjacent to ours. There were no employees in the museum at the time. Through the backbreaking work of our community, we were not only able to remove all of our collection from the four feet of water they were submerged in but also able to save every piece except for two sheets of paper. In the midst of a global pandemic that is hitting Native communities harder than others, one hundred and fifty volunteers, mostly tribal members, came together for two weeks to help dry and triage our collection. If it were not for the tribal community coming to help immediately and providing longer alternatives for care, none of this would have been possible. If it were not for the connections that I had made with our surrounding institutions, none of this would have been possible. The Field Museum was one of the first groups to send photography and object conservators to help.

Even though the museum is currently closed to the public, my work doesn't end. Most of my work these days is just making sure that our building is safe enough to open again someday. Through my official capacity I am currently juggling contractors and trying to prioritize not only the needs of our museum building but also the expectations of our tribal government system and the city government requirements. We want to welcome visitors again, but we can't do that without ensuring visitor safety first.

Our doors will open again in due time, but for now it is just a building waiting for the needs of our people to come first. We spent a year without our ceremonies, we stopped our gatherings. Our people are slowly returning to our doings, but our museum is dedicated to being a place to honor our community, both past and present. We cannot do that if our community doesn't come first. The Ho-Chunk Nation was fortunate enough to find ways to provide medical supplies to families, weekly food distributions, and more during a really trying time. I don't want to toot our own horn too much, but Ho-Chunk really is a fantastic community.

As I mentioned before, I am a woman of many hats and I work with a number of area institutions. Institutions all around the Midwest are beginning to recognize that they have not represented Native peoples in favorable lights and oftentimes unknowingly reinforce stereotypes. Many of these places don't know how to work with our communities or where to begin. Much of my work starts as hand-holding and educating the institutions I'm assisting. It's background teaching before they can begin to approach members of the community so they know how to do it respectfully. I have to be encouraging, while also being stern, and have to constantly remind these places that things won't happen overnight—especially when the community does not know you. It's reminding them that museums

have historically exploited our communities, and unless you are willing to put in long-term work, there might never be a working relationship with the community.

Once that is established, then I can begin my role of balancing the expectations of nontribal institutions with the stories that our community wants shared. One exhibition I am working on has to do with an Indian agent's house, to connect the stories of the past to family stories today. The events highlighted at this historic house are from 190 years ago, but this has been an opportunity to show not only the changes to the landscape since then but also the continued stories of Ho-Chunk families living there.

Another place I am working with is ready to "make their community uncomfortable," but honestly, I don't think the museum, or the community is fully ready for that. The Midwest is known for being "Midwest nice," but that niceness can serve as a buffer for silencing voices, especially BIPOC voices. It pushes problems under the rug with a facade of pleasantries. Oftentimes, museums have shown a singular focus on "vanishing Indians" to visitors, and if they have ever updated their work, it was done in the early 1990s. So much can change within a decade, and so much can change in even a year. The narrative in these spaces is passive, removing the burden of the past from the museum visitors and the effects of the past on people today.

It's part of why, when I worked on this map with the Field Museum, we chose not to use the passive word "removal" for the military escorts from our homelands but put the action back into the doing of the "United States Government" and eager homesteaders. The map ends with a call to action for museum-goers to speak up against injustices against people of color, and to encourage them to be familiar with federal Indian policy because it affects them too. At this point, I'm tired of speaking about removals in exhibition spaces, because our tribal story is so much more than just a horrific fifty-year period.

Don't get me wrong, the story of my tribe is not all sunshine and rainbows. Our past has been tough, but I live in a gilded age of Ho-Chunk life, and we are ready to share our story. We want to highlight our storytellers, our scholars, our weavers, our carvers, our culture keepers. We want people to come to our home and know who we are and where we have been. We want everyone to dream about the future we see for ourselves.

I consider myself to be extremely fortunate. As part of my work, I help push forward the stories that are important to my community. I get to explore topics of culture, meanings behind stories, and artistic expression. I have the extreme honor of being able to learn from our elders. I have the privilege of listening to, learning, and passing on the stories of hardship, forced evictions from our homelands, genocide, and boarding schools. I also have the privilege of hearing the stories of the most intense love for our people, our language, our home, and our way of life. And I have been trusted enough to be one of the people that helps to make sure all of the many facets of who we are as a people are passed along to the next generation. If I didn't love my people and my community didn't love me back, I wouldn't be able to do the work that I do.

## Panel Discussion: Native Curators in Context

Joe Horse Capture: All right. If I could invite the panelists to please take a seat up here, we're going to enter our question-and-answer part of the session for the live audience. If you have a question, please raise your hand. For our good friends who are streaming this event on the Internet, you can type them in on Zoom.

I actually have three questions. And then I narrowed it down. So heather, there's one thing that you said that really was trying to summarize the question I was going to ask, and I'm paraphrasing but something to the effect, like you're the Ancestor to the Ancestors' prayers. The answer.

heather ahtone: I think I said that we are each the answer to our Ancestors' prayers.

Horse Capture: Could you elaborate on that?

ahtone: I think about just that it is not necessarily in response to me as a professional museum person, but it's also in response to the fact that 100 years ago, 100 and almost 200 years ago, just to give you an idea, the Chickasaw people were reduced down to . . . 250 warriors was all that was left. Sorry. You know I cry. This is the first time I haven't cried on stage with Joe in like ten years. So I'm working really hard.

These are not like ethereal, abstract ideas. This is like our freaking survival. Right? And if we don't hold onto our stories and if we don't hold onto carrying that for the future, then there's the risk that in the future, that won't happen. And I am both eternally and deeply grateful to those 250 warriors who fought to hold onto what we have now. And we can look back across those 200 years and we can think about all the atrocities. Right? And I totally am with you, sister, on the whole genocide shit. That stuff is just got to be . . . We have to share the burden of that memory with the rest of America so that we are not the only members of American society holding on to the difficult stories of our Indigenous experience.

And it is through that resilience and persistence of our Ancestors, holding on to those stories of our creation, holding on to our language, holding on to our songs and our ceremonies. And also just the way of being, I mean, you will not go to any place else in the country and not be treated . . . There's no way, I can promise you. If you come into Chickasaw country, you are going to be treated well because that is how we are. And that is how we have been taught to be. But we are also steely tough, and we've had to develop that and cultivate that in every generation in order to create the future. And that future is now, but in the same way those Ancestors were praying for me, the generation now I'm praying for that future. And I'm thinking about that. And when we were building First Americans Museum's exhibitions, I mean, my team, we were an incredibly prayerful group.

We were also . . . Let me just say a little bit if I could about that process to build an exhibition that speaks and creates space for our Indigenous future. We had to subject ourselves to the historical trauma of all of that nastiness, every day. And we had to come to a point as eleven members from different tribes. This is not some kind of like, what did you say? Rainbows and?

Josie Lee: Sunshine.

ahtone: Sunshine. I mean our world and we were working out of a double-wide trailer, had two bathrooms. So it was pretty nice, but it was still a double-wide trailer and we'd come together. And we had to wrestle with which of these stories, when you have a hundred stories to tell, which of these stories gets told. And you know that there's the risk that if

that story doesn't get selected, there's the risk that it may not ever end up in a museum, or it may not get told outside of the family that has to carry that on. These are things that we wrestled with.

And so our conversations were incredibly contentious. They were incredibly aggravated because we were aggravating a history that we were felt challenged to figure out how to tell [about it] in a museum. We also, I will tell you that there's a space in our museum, you guys all have to come. There's a few people in here that have been there, I know. But the rest of you need to come because there's a couple of places, I showed you that black screen where that gentleman is speaking. We have the lights dimmed in there intentionally because people, not just Native people, people come out of there crying because they don't know how awful these things are. And we carry that as people.

So through these exhibitions and through our work as Indigenous individuals, we're thinking about what is the space that we want, not just in ten years or not in just twenty years, but what is the space we want in 100 years? And if we don't lay a foundation as has been done by Rick West and all the good people, your dad, all the good people that have done the work that was needed to be done against every adversarial motivation, then that future won't be possible. And so, yes. We are the answer to our Ancestors' prayers, but we are also now praying as good Ancestors for what that future will be.

- Horse Capture: Thank you. Josie, I think out of all of us, you're probably the only one who works directly with objects, photographs, et cetera, from your people. Right? So we talked about, Heather just talked about that balance between being a professional and also personal. How do you balance that out?
- Lee: I don't know if I do.
- Horse Capture: Because it's really, and this sort of goes back to the previous one. It's a big responsibility, right?
- Lee: It is.
- Horse Capture: And it's a big responsibility to visit our wonderful non-Native friends who come and visit us. And also, it's that responsibility to our neighbors and our Ancestors.
- Lee: Right. So for me, the needs of our community, the tribal members come first. First and foremost, that's who I serve. And it may be different if I was in a different institution or in a different role, but really my community comes first. That's how I was raised. That's why I chose to move back home. And then the needs of other people can come second. I mean, we do serve a number of non-Native students. I have library and archive students from the University of Madison who help document and archive all of our photography exhibits and collections. And we also work with archeology students from the University of Lacrosse to help catalog whatever they are doing with our projectile points. Some of them are studying them just from one specific time period and they go way over my head, but I'm glad they're there. But really, if tribal members are looking for specific things within our collection or within our community, my role is really just kind of a guide to help them figure out what they need. I hope that answers it.
- Horse Capture: Thank you. Thank you. Patricia, I think because you look at the landscape of Native people in museums, particularly within a curatorial position, I think it's pretty clear being at the Met, you probably have the highest profile within that case, within that sense with a lot of responsibility. And as you had mentioned, the work that you've been doing in the direction you've been taking the Met is just like night and day, just night and day. As we try to negotiate the space, as you mentioned, negotiating working with multiple tribes from all of Native America. Negotiating with administration, because we all know no matter what



grade of a museum that you work in, you never always get what you want, unfortunately. But negotiating with administration, negotiating with all of these things. Having said that, we also behind us, or next to us, I guess you could say, we see a younger generation of Native curators who are moving up. So based on all of your experience, what advice would you give?

Patricia Marroquin Norby: I always struggle with what advice would you give younger generations questions because it has so much weight on it. And I'm also in a very prominent position, as you mentioned. And so I want to be thoughtful and careful about what I say, but I think that understanding that every institution is very different, has its own unique culture, but also deeply ingrained histories. Understanding that this work is not a one-size-fits-all approach is really important. And also, in regard to curatorial work, specifically at an institution like the Met, again, foregrounding Indigenous perspectives and needs and voices within everything that we're doing now.

The Met is not the same institution that it was five years ago. And I know you and I have talked about that. So many changes have occurred. And yet we're very aware that this is a process of growth that takes time, that takes a lot of input directly from communities, which is what we're doing at this time. We're undergoing a major inventory of all of our Native American collections and consultation with communities who are represented in our collections. And this takes great time and great care and a lot of listening.

So I would say that listening is incredibly important, and is one of the things that I have expressed many times in my position to my colleagues when [they say] words like, "You're the expert." Phrases like you're the expert, you're the expert. I've consistently had to say I'm not comfortable with that. I am not the expert. The communities are the experts and we need to listen to what the communities have to say and to how they want to present this work. And so I think it's really important to understand that that's what we're doing right now. It's taking a lot of time, but also we're in the process of developing the first Native American art initiative at the Met, which will in the next few years involve an entire team of people, not just one person, who will be engaged in a lot of this care.

But again, starting during a pandemic was an incredible challenge: organizing my first installation on a laptop in my farm in Wisconsin, not too far from Black River Falls. But all of these things, they slowed down that process. And I know a number of you can relate to this. But also, it was an opportunity to pause and to really think about where the gaps are and to really understand that all of the theories that are out there about decolonization or Indigenization or why aren't things happening as quickly as possible. You begin to understand how important it is to pause and take your time with all of this work and not to engage in reactive change because you're receiving public criticism or on social media or in the public eye or all of these things, but to really feel strongly in what you feel is right and what the communities are telling you and following that route. And that's what I've been doing, working with a great team of people.

Horse Capture: Do we have any questions from the audience? Any questions? It's always the chairman of the board.

David Cartwright: Well, as the chairman, I have to also think about audiences. We've heard a great discussion this morning from when Rick West started talking. Sometimes the process is as important as the product to discussions about the product and the interweaving of community into the efforts. But now what about those audiences and who are they and how do you expand them beyond your narrow base? This is a question the Autry has, Joe, as you know, as well. Bringing them back after COVID, but also finding them and empowering knowledge and all the things that we want to do. I don't want us to just be confined to our own communities. I want to know who those audiences are. And I thought maybe the three of you could have some ideas of who they are and how to reach them.

ahitone:

I have thoughts. So one of the things that First Americans Museum has realized since we've been open, and I don't think I'm speaking out of turn, Jim. What are the numbers right now? We've had over 70,000 visitors; 75,000 in the first six months of being opened during a freaking pandemic. (I'm working really hard to quit cussing. So I'm very sorry about all this. I hear it slipping out.) But I have to say the last four years have hardened me a little bit. But let me tell you about the people who are coming. They're not museum people. They're community members who have been waiting to be invited to a space. Museums have historically . . . Museums are built out of this history of the colonial powers taking war trophies from Indigenous communities across the globe, hoarding them, and then putting them on display. Museums have for too long been speaking about us, without us.

And in doing that without us, [it] wasn't just the people represented by those objects. It was everybody else. They could see that they weren't part of the elite power. This is a crux that museums as a field have arrived at. We created a space where people are welcomed. They're allowed to touch things. They're allowed to listen to things. They can hear them. They see people who look like them speaking in the galleries. And I don't just mean our Native American tribes from Oklahoma. I get emails from people who are passing through. Actually, I got an email from a young man who lives here in Los Angeles and he was like, "I was in your museum. And I did the trade network thing where we researched the trade networks, cross continentally." And he saw his own Tongva people represented on that map. And he said it was the first time he felt like he'd been a represented in a museum and it wasn't even in California. And he was really like, "It meant something."

So these museums have been built without us, and in doing so, now all the people with the money that have died off and aren't funding, you're wondering, well, where is the next group of people coming from? The question may or may not be motivated by money, but it, in my mind, it's linked to it. That money generation is dying off. And now you're wondering who is our audience and how do we get them to come in here? And I think the idea of holding on to the old regime of what museums have been has faded. It's time to reconsider what museums are to their communities. It's time to look at who your home base is, who are your people right here? Talk to them and Native people, other people. Right? Jim and I field questions from the Black community. We field, do tours for our Asian community in Oklahoma, because we're all part of that land. And we understand that relationship is key to everything that we do in the future. That's the thought I have.

Norby:

Nobody wants to follow that up.

Horse Capture:

Anybody else have a question?

W. Richard West, Jr.:

First of all, just a brief comment. You're all stunning as far as I'm concerned. And I appreciate what all of you said. And for me it was very interesting that you hit all quarters. In other words, there's somebody who actually sits in the Met, who's talking here about an institution that we do not necessarily associate except in very different, distant ways with Native collections, Native people, et cetera. Somebody who's on the ground right in the middle of it within a tribal institution, community institution, and somebody who's a little bit different. I mean, it's an institution that has roots in the Native community and is implementing them. But in a way it's emblematic of all the bases we have to start touching, I think, in striking museums around about what we're doing.

Now, I did have a specific question for you, Patricia. And that is that I, being at the NMAI, know the Dikers very well, and indeed it was their gift that in a way was generative in some ways in sort of starting things down the road for the Met. And their aspiration was, and I know this from talking to them for a twenty-year period or something, was that Native material be looked at as an important piece of American art. And more recently I happened to have joined another museum board where there's a large Native collection, and there's a lot of debate about whether we want to do that. And this is amongst Native curators. Whether that is what we should be doing, or is, does that reflect some kind of, quote,

“assimilation” that we want to sort of stay clear of, in terms of maintaining this very close connection between the Native community and the art. And I just wonder how you see that and how the Met sees that in putting together the work you are doing.

Norby:

That’s a big question. Coming to the Met with my background in training in fine arts, but also museum leadership followed by my academic work, I’m able to see both sides. And so [I understand] the importance of what, for instance, the Dikers have, this tremendous gift that they have offered because this has helped to propel change at the Met at a speed that may not have happened in the past. Although the Diker collection gets a lot of attention, the Met actually has four Native American collections and a number of items that have never been on view. In regard to the presentation of those items, whether they’re presented as art or something more specific and more personal or deeply meaningful to the communities, I do reach out to communities to ask for their input and how they would prefer for items to be presented in gallery or whether or not they should not be on view at all.

And so that is something that I do directly, reaching out to community members. And so I do leave that up to community members. Because I think those decisions are very important. And although I have my own knowledge in regard to fine art and how it should be presented, I do respect each community and how they want to approach that.

But we also are engaged across the Met. And this goes back to the audience question with contemporary artists and their work. So for instance, the examples of the contemporary Native designers who I showed. That’s reaching an entirely new audience for the Met. So that representation of six contemporary Native designers is something that hasn’t happened in the history of the Met, even though the Costume Institute is now celebrating its 75th anniversary. And so that’s a major change for the museum. And that was through a lot of collaboration, negotiation, all of these things that happen as part of the curatorial process.

I think sometimes there’s a fantasy that curatorial work is simply hanging beautiful images on the wall or putting beautiful things on view. But there’s a lot of negotiating across institutions dealing with politics that are deeply ingrained within an institution. So you’re consistently doing that type of work, also working with communities. In my own role, working with NAGPRA-related issues and [that] in addition to your curatorial responsibilities. So there’s a lot going on there that requires a team of people, which is what we’re working on developing at this time. So I hope I answered your question.

Horse Capture:

heather, Josie, and Patricia, thank you so much for your time.

Audience Member:

I have a question. Can I ask question? Sorry, I’ll go fast. I’m really loud, too. So for all the small tribal museums and cultural centers, how important is tribal leadership? Is it a hindrance or is it beneficial, and how do we get our tribal leaders on board with museums and cultural centers in the smaller tribes, because there’s a million of them. But it’s a challenge to get governance on board or acceptance and ways to do that, to propel this Native knowledge that we’re striving for. And also I think it would really help a next generation of museum, not only curators, but workers in general. So I would like some advice on how to get our tribal leadership on board and for the success, what is the ratio from male to female leaderships? Are you run by women or you run by . . . Is it patriarchal or is it matriarchal leadership?

Lee:

Oh, okay. I can answer a little bit of this. So in the past, Ho-Chunk was matriarchal and I will probably be disenrolled for saying [this], but due to the process of colonization, we have become patriarchal. And part of that is mode of survival. So that is part of it. And today we are very patriarchal as a society and as a government.

For my specific role, I had forty years of people advocating for a tribal museum before I was even brought on board. And I really started off as an annoying twenty-two-year-old on a letter-writing campaign to my tribal government, followed up by going out into our community and finding the people that wanted to advocate for this space alongside of me.

So it wasn't just a singular voice of me as an individual, but multiple community members that have come together that still serve as our advisory board and that are really working to kind of propel our institution as an institution within a tribal government. So I relied on people like Anna Ray Funmaker, who has passed away, but she really led the drive to get a museum up and running for Ho-Chunk Nation, as well as the Tomich family and a handful of others.

And once you find those people within your community that are willing to help, it makes it so much easier. And I think a part of it as well with tribal government is you have to explain that the museum is not just for highlighting those stories of the past. Because within my community, one of the things that I faced a lot of was people didn't want our objects just behind a case. We want to be able to use our items. We want to make sure that people know how to make them. We want to make sure that they're going to continue because our way of life itself is so important. And so having a space where we could not only highlight it, but also pass along those traditions to the future was really, really important to talk about.

ah tone:

I'm just going to add a quick comment, and that is not speaking on behalf of FAM, but on behalf of my own tribal community. One of the investments that our tribe made was looking at the economic factors for the motivations for cultural tourism within Oklahoma. And [it] was identified—and not just by our tribe—as the third largest right behind, I think, the military and medical development or medical field. Cultural tourism is the third largest economic generator in Oklahoma.

When that was sort of raised and brought up to the attention of our tribal leadership and whether we wanted to let someone else tell our story or whether we wanted to be the ones telling our story, that really shifted the sort of priority that was placed, and we now actually have seven tribal museums in a sixteen-county district that our tribe has within our reservation. It's not just museum chairmen who are motivated by money and the economic impacts. It's also our tribal leadership, and that really shifted the conversation within our community specifically.

Horse Capture:

Thank you so much for being here. Thank you for your presentations. Really appreciate you.

# **The Role of Tribal Museums**

**John Haworth (Cherokee Nation), Association of Tribal Archives, Libraries, and Museums**

**Delphine Baker (Mandan, Hidatsa, and Arikara Nation,) MHA Nation Interpretative Center**

**Steven Karr, Agua Caliente Cultural Museum**

# Tribal Museums and the Native American Museum Ecosystem

John Haworth (Cherokee Nation)

Association of Tribal Archives, Libraries, and Museums

Thank you, Joe Horse Capture. And thank you, inspiring speakers who presented earlier today. You encouraged us to embrace diverse approaches in our work to include cross-cultural (multicultural) dialogues. You stressed the importance of including input from people living in tribal communities and striving to look through a “community’s eyes.” There should be no “speaking about us without us.” And certainly, the playing field in the Native cultural field has changed over the years.

Greetings from my home in the Brooklyn, New York, neighborhood of Boerum Hill, which used to be the center of Brooklyn’s Mohawk community, known as Little Caughnawaga, where ironworkers and parachute makers lived, and near to where members of Spiderwoman Theater lived.

## Tribal Museums and the Native American Museum Ecosystem

Native cultural leaders and artists bring depth and perspective to national and international cultural, aesthetic, and political discourse. And thankfully, mainstream cultural institutions are at long last giving greater attention to Native arts and cultures through exhibitions and public programs, collection acquisitions, and including (at least to some degree) Native participation in governance and curatorial work.

With community-based tribal museums and cultural centers continuing to be established throughout the country, traditional cultural practices are recognized along with greater attention to Native perspectives on our most pressing global concerns, especially environmental and social justice issues.

Joe Horse Capture has been a fierce advocate for advancing this public discourse at all levels and from within museums. Joe posed these questions:

- What are the roles and responsibilities of tribal museums and how does their work intersect with the work of larger museums?
- How does the work of tribal museums relate to broader discussions about the role of museums in society?
- How do (or should) tribal museums serve their communities?

To best understand the contributions of tribal cultural organizations to our field, it is critical to put their work in a broader cultural context that includes other kinds of organizations, including mainstream cultural institutions. This ecosystem includes the following:

1. Tribal-led, community-based museums and cultural centers that focus on their own tribal histories and cultural values, including the Museum at Warm Springs and the Chickasaw Cultural Center, among others.
2. Museums and cultural centers that focus exclusively on Native cultures, including the Smithsonian’s National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI), the Heard Museum in Phoenix, the Anchorage Museum, the First Americans Museum in Oklahoma City, and in Santa Fe the Wheelwright Museum of the American Indian, the Museum of Indian Arts & Cultures, and the Institute of American Indian Art’s (IAIA) Museum of Contemporary Native Arts.
3. Native arts service organizations, including the Association of Tribal Archives, Libraries, and Museums (ATALM); Vision Maker Media; and Native Arts and Cultures Foundation (NACF), and Native publications such as *First American Art* magazine (FAAM) and the *Journal of the Native American and Indigenous Studies Association* (NAIS).
4. Mainstream museums and cultural institutions who care for Native collections and organize Native exhibitions and public programs, including art museums in Denver, Seattle, Newark, and Portland, Oregon; the Eiteljorg Museum in Indianapolis; and the Philbrook and Gilcrease in Tulsa.

5. Other major cultural institutions, including the Minneapolis Institute of Art and the Metropolitan Museum of Art (the Met); leading contemporary art institutions such as the Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art (MASS MoCA), SITE Santa Fe, the Whitney Museum of American Art, and the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA); and natural history and cultural museums like the Field Museum in Chicago, the American Museum of Natural History in New York, and the Burke Museum of Natural History and Culture in Seattle, all of which have significant roles in our field.

The work of all these organizations relates to both the local and the global, although the distinguishing focus at tribal museums and cultural centers is local. Place matters, land matters, local history matters. Native communities tell their own histories rather than “entrusting non-Native institutions to define who they are.” Documenting the stories of elders becomes a path for revealing deeper truths about Native people, as are songs, dances, and stories. Tribal cultural organizations are stewards of local material culture and archives, community traditions, and crafts. Tribal cultural workers also frequently take on the role of first responders regarding pressing issues of health and wellness, youth development, education, elder care, the environment, and repatriation.

Though many tribes and their cultural organizations are commissioning Native artists to create public art and including their global perspectives, they generally lack the capacity to organize major contemporary art exhibitions. Rather, they display Native art or material culture from their own geography. Community-anchored and community-informed work includes organizing community murals, language classes, art markets, and ceremonial gatherings, all of which give tribal cultural organizations purpose and strength, as well as deeper connections to their tribal histories. Community issues are at the heart of everything they do.

Some tribes, however, especially those with greater financial capacities, have developed major facilities that are major tourist destinations, as well as serving their own people. Such tribal facilities usually are located near casinos and resort properties and have significant support from gaming and other dedicated tribal revenues.

- The Chickasaw Cultural Center in Sulphur, Oklahoma, is a 109-acre campus with interactive exhibitions, an amphitheater, a 20,000-square-foot specialty library (Holisso: The Center for Study of Chickasaw History and Culture), and a “living village” with cultural demonstrations from the eighteenth century.
- The Ah-Tah-Thi-Ki Seminole Indian Museum opened in 1989 to commemorate the fortieth anniversary of federal recognition of the Seminole Tribe of Florida. With collection loans from the NMAI, this American Alliance of Museums (AAM)-accredited museum has a state-of-the-art collections vault for its 200,000-object collection and a satellite facility near the Hard Rock Hotel and Casino in Hollywood, Florida. This museum is committed to sharing its collection with community institutions through traveling exhibitions and loans.
- The Mashantucket Pequot Museum, which opened in 1998, is a 308,000-square-foot complex that is tribally owned and operated. It has 85,000 square feet of permanent indoor exhibitions with life-size, multisensory dioramas, films, and interactives, as well as a re-created sixteenth-century Pequot village. Located near the casino and resort, the museum is considered one of the region’s major tourist attractions.
- Chartered in 1974, the Museum at Warm Springs, Oregon, is a tribal museum for the Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs. Based on a tribal referendum in 1988 approving \$3.2 million—which at the time was the largest sum committed by a tribe for a museum—and by raising another \$3.5 million, it opened in 1993 with permanent interactive exhibitions, a changing exhibition gallery, a library and archives, and outdoor performance spaces. Its collection includes family heirlooms; trade items from other tribes; and Native American paintings, sculpture, masks, ceremonial clothing, ritual implements, beadwork, and historical archives, including 2,500 photographs dating back to the 1850s. As articulated by Tribal Council member Delbert Frank, Sr., “We wanted the museum to tell the story of our people.”

Across the country, there are many other Native destinations:

- The Southern Ute Cultural Center and Museum in Ignacio, Colorado, a 52,000-square-foot museum and archive facility.
- The Akwesasne Museum (Mohawk) in upstate New York, with its focus on Mohawk traditional arts and culture and a deep commitment to community engagement work within the tribe.

- The Seneca Art and Cultural Center at Ganondagan (near Rochester, New York), which provides educational programs about the Seneca and Haudenosaunee (Iroquois) contributions throughout a 2,000-year history.
- In Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma in Northeast Oklahoma, there are several Cherokee Nation–owned cultural facilities, including the tribe’s Heritage Center, National Research Center, National History Museum, National Prison Museum, National Supreme Court Museum, and National Peace Pavilion; Sequoyah’s Cabin Museum; the John Ross Museum; and the Saline Courthouse Museum.

While not tribal museums per se, there are also significant Native museums that focus on specific geographic areas and have deep connections to the tribes in their regions. The Anchorage Museum and the recently opened First Americans Museum in Oklahoma City are prime examples of these.

### **Native Americans and Global Cultural Discourse**

There is a complementary world made up of Native artists, curators, writers, performers, and activists who are engaged in a complicated global cultural conversation with cultural institutions, major museums worldwide, art fairs, ever more prominent galleries, and publications (both Native and non-Native). Home communities serve as source of strength and inform their cultural production, which intersects with these global networks. The robust ideas that inform this discourse come from Native critics like America Meredith; publications like *First American Art* magazine; and Native curators and scholars, including Kathleen Ash-Milby, Andrea Hanley, Gerald McMaster, Ashley Holland, and Nancy Marie Mithlo, among others.

Indeed, although much headway has been made in the last decade, there continue to be barriers that stand in the way of Native art and critical perspectives being fully considered beyond superficial, even stereotypical levels. The issues have been amplified by the social and political realities of the pandemic and the Trump era, coupled with efforts for racial reconciliation, the removal of offensive statues and place names, and greater emphasis on broader societal participation by artists who are people of color, including Black and Indigenous. Predictably, in the calls for cultural, racial, economic, and social reforms, there has been blowback and resistance. Yet contemporary Native artists have led the way in many of these complex and contested conversations, with backing from Native arts support organizations, including the Native Arts and Cultures Foundation and Vision Maker Media, and philanthropic support, particularly from major foundations such as the Ford Foundation, the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation, and the Mellon Foundation, among others.

While there are contrasts in approaches and perspectives, their work is interconnected and interlocking. Many community-based Native artists have international reputations, are fluent in both global and local discourse, and have deep local roots. Diné photographer Will Wilson, Inupiaq and Athabascan artist Sonya Kelliher-Combs, Haida carver and painter Robert Davidson, Santa Clara Pueblo sculptor Rose B. Simpson, Crow artist Wendy Red Star, and Seneca artist G. Peter Jemison are each fluent in both local and global discourse. All these artists retain and sustain deep ties to their communities as well as having connections to the international art world.

At the grassroots tribal level, local issues can be seen as global ones, and in the contemporary art world, in terms of issue-driven topical work, all is local, all is global. And especially through the contemporary Native art lens, the global can best be understood and illuminated by interrogating and valuing the local. Consider Marie Watt’s blankets, Alan Michelson’s public art installations, Edgar Heap of Birds’ signs, Postcommodity’s *Repellent Fence* installation on the Mexico/USA border in 2015, and Candice Hopkins’s curatorial work, among many others. These artists are deeply informed by local Native values. The local is the universal.

### **Contributions of Tribal Museums and Cultural Centers**

In 2005, NMAI Editions published the monograph *Living Homes for Cultural Expression: North American Native Perspectives on Creating Community Museums*, edited by Karen Coody Cooper and Nicolasa I. Sandoval, which discussed a Native perspective on creating community museums. This publication confirmed there were around one hundred tribal museums existing prior to the establishment of the NMAI in 1989. As a guide for tribes seeking to create tribal museums, one path was creating a community museum or cultural center; another was to start a tourist museum. Advice was provided on Native museum exhibition planning, tribal collections management, public programs, and case studies on working within tribal governments.



In the spring 2013 issue of *American Indian*, Liz Hill's article, "Tribal Museums Endure," took a close look at the varying degrees of tribal government support and participation in the governance and structure for nine tribal museums. Six of the nine museums discussed in Hill's article were supported significantly from tribal gaming revenues. Creating cultural tourism attractions with resort amenities drove the economic development and destination marketing strategies. This approach is not "in the cards" (so to speak), however, for tribes that do not have such dedicated revenue streams.

Amy Lonetree's *Decolonizing Museums: Representing Native America in National and Tribal Museums* (2012) documents and validates the value of Native-led cultural organizations. Lonetree addresses the long-standing issue that museum exhibitions focusing on Native American history "have long been curator controlled," though recognizing the shift to giving Indigenous people a more significant role in determining exhibition content. Lonetree encourages museums to honor Indigenous worldviews and ways of knowing. She challenges stereotypical representations and "speak[s] the hard truths of colonization within exhibition spaces to address the persistent legacies of historical unresolved grief in Native communities." In alignment with Lonetree's view, tribal museums are particularly well equipped and well positioned to address such concerns.

Developing a deeper level of community perspectives, along with embracing diverse historical perspectives, can lead to more informed decision making. As Judith Roof and Robyn Wiegman articulate in their 1995 book *Who Can Speak? Authority and Critical Identity*, there are tensions inherent in the issue of authority coupled with the challenges of including multiple perspectives in our increasingly multicultural society. Such challenges have both philosophical and practical dimensions for museums and other cultural institutions. At the heart of this discussion, at both local and global levels, is the question of authority—that is, who has the authority to speak for any self-identified and self-identifying group, including tribal communities. Who can speak, and more explicitly, who has the authority to speak for these groups? And who has the authority to decide who has the authority? Can only members of these groups speak for themselves? Given the current political divides, especially related to cultural issues, the challenges in the cultural sector have gotten ever more complicated in recent years.

### **Association of Tribal Archives, Libraries, and Museums**

Since its incorporation in 2010, ATALM also has played a leadership and convening role in the overarching development of tribal cultural organizations and facilities, along with providing collections management and technical training for staff members and volunteers. And while ATALM primarily serves as a network of tribal museums and libraries, it is also a forum for a far broader Native cultural field.

Finding tangible, appropriate, and meaningful ways to have Native voices heard—and making sure Native people have both power and influence on artistic and institutional decision making—is indeed challenging for mainstream museums and contemporary art institutions. With artistic control and intellectual authority usually having been bestowed to curators, both within non-Native and Native museums, a driving institutional issue is finding methods for working effectively with curators who lack the necessary depth of experience to take a more inclusive approach for incorporating more diverse and community-based perspectives.

In 2021, with funding from the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation, ATALM analyzed the challenges and needs of tribal museums and cultural centers. ATALM focused on issues of funding, space, staffing and training, technology, and collections care to examine policy and planning issues that can move this field forward. At the community level, the high priorities were to preserve and advance Native culture; to interpret how cultural knowledge is presented; to engage community members in perpetuating culture; and to serve as a repository for cultural materials and resources.

In addition to Native-led tribal cultural organizations, other organizations—including tribal colleges, local arts councils, arts schools, and nationally recognized arts organizations such as New York Live Arts and Creative Time—have stepped up to collaborative on creative projects with contemporary Native artists. NACF supports community-driven projects responding to social, environmental, or economic justice issues through a Native lens. These programs augment the work that tribal museums and cultural centers do. There is no monopoly on any of this work. In terms of building a rock-solid Native cultural field, more is more.

## **National Museum of the American Indian, Native “Voice,” and the Museum Field**

The 2004 inaugural exhibition at NMAI in Washington, D.C., gave the lead to Native “voice” and engaged the tribes every step of the way, from preliminary planning discussions onward. This methodology had considerable pushback, especially from mainstream media art critics, yet this work had positive benefits for the broader museum field. Many critical debates about NMAI’s opening exhibitions took place in the media and the academy, and there was also considerable discussion throughout both the museum field and Indian Country.

An observation: In the late 1990s and early 2000s, many public spaces—from airport terminals and corporate lobbies to shopping malls, sports arenas, casinos, and certainly, cultural facilities—were designed as immersive experiences using interactive technology, elaborate graphic treatments, and elaborately themed environments. Some art and cultural critics in mainstream media thought such approaches were making artificial experiences seem real, tilting more toward mass culture entertainment. Was the Native content being critiqued, or rather, was the design vocabulary being contested? In recent years, there have been major advances and refinement in design technology that brought changes in how immersive environments were development and how technology is used.

The professional field organizations, particularly AAM and the International Council of Museums (ICOM), are giving far greater focus on the role of museums in their communities. Shortly before this seminar, in early 2022, AAM issued *TrendsWatch: Museums as Community Infrastructure*, which emphasized the broad needs of museums to strengthen their networks of community support. The conclusions in *TrendsWatch* are much in alignment with the needs and values that tribal museums have articulated clearly. These values include priorities for educating our children, supporting livable communities for our elders, and human-centered cultural sustainability.

## **Mainstream Cultural Institutions and Native Collections, Exhibitions, and Programs**

Certainly, there continues to be criticism of mainstream cultural institutions for longstanding issues related to representation, inclusion, and authority. And yet the cultural field is taking positive steps to engage Native and other underrepresented voices in the work.

In fall 2018, Native leaders from around the country attended the opening of the Metropolitan Museum’s major exhibition, *Art of Native America: The Charles and Valerie Diker Collection*, in its American Wing. Cultural protocols were followed, blessings given, and honor songs sung. The next year, the Met commissioned Kent Monkman (Cree) to create two monumental paintings for its Great Hall. Then, in fall 2020, the Met appointed Patricia Marroquin Norby (Purépecha) as the museum’s inaugural Associate Curator of Native American Art. Under Norby’s leadership, the Met is doing significantly more to showcase Native art, as well as having Native experts add text on labels and panels. Dr. Norby is committed to partnering with Indigenous American communities, scholars, and artists. She also has confirmed her commitment to using community-based curators from tribal communities.

The Brooklyn Museum invited Choctaw/Cherokee artist Jeffrey Gibson to have a curatorial role in organizing a retrospective of his work in the 2020 exhibition *Jeffrey Gibson: When Fire Is Applied to a Stone It Cracks*. The exhibition included both major art installations and paintings by Gibson along with historic Native works from the Brooklyn Museum’s permanent collection. In reinstalling its Native collections, the museum included active Native participation throughout the exhibition development process.

For the Museum of Modern Art’s 2021 *Greater New York* signature survey show, held every five years at PS1/MoMA (MoMA’s Long Island City, Queens location), curators selected major works from Native artists, including G. Peter Jemison (Seneca), Alan Michelson (Mohawk), Shelly Niro (Mohawk), and Athena LaTocha (Lakota and Ojibwe), all of whom address cultural and environmental issues that have resonance in Native communities. These artists’ connections to their Native communities are deeply rooted, and this quality is articulated powerfully through their work.

Art museums around the country are engaging Native artists and communities at higher, more authentic levels. Examples include the Autry Museum in Los Angeles, the Heard Museum in Phoenix, the Brooklyn Museum, the Seattle Museum, the Denver Art Museum, the Portland (Oregon) Museum of Art, the San Antonio Museum of Art, the Rockwell Museum, the Minneapolis Institute of Art, and the Peabody Essex Museum in Salem, Massachusetts, among others. Through its Native Fellowship Program, which started in 1999, the Eiteljorg Museum of American Indians and Western Art in Indianapolis has become a national platform in which contemporary Native artists are supported and their work collected.

The museums in Seattle, Minneapolis, and Denver have recently reimagined their Native permanent collections and dedicated Native galleries, and the Portland Museum of Art has major plans moving forward to renovate and expand the institution. Included in these plans is reinstalling its Native galleries with focus on its major permanent collections of Northwest Coast art, as well as cultural materials from the Arctic, Plains, Woodlands, Southwest, and California regions.

Likewise, natural history museums, including the American Museum of Natural History and the Field Museum, have all made significant changes in how they engage Native communities and cultural experts in exhibition development, curatorial practices, and collections management. Major art museums, notably the Denver Art Museum, the Met, MoMA, and the Whitney, have in recent years added considerable Native art to their collections, in addition to incorporating Native art in exhibitions and public programs at increased levels. Indigenous artists Rebecca Belmore (Anishinaabe), Raven Chacon (Diné), Candice Hopkins (Carcross/Tagish First Nation), and Duane Linklater (Cree) are included in the 2022 *Whitney Biennial*.

The recruitment of cultural leaders, artists, and educators with broad expertise and diverse generational perspectives as professional partners is in sharper focus. A key goal of engaging Native experts is to grow participation from the Native community as visitors, contributors, and supporters. Building mutual respect between tribal communities and museums is at the heart of this work.

In American history, there have been significant turning points when things changed. Consider the American luminism of the Hudson River School in the post-Civil War period, whose paintings of serene vistas also sometimes included disturbing signs about the loss of land related to westward expansion, the building of railroads, and manufacturing. Consider American civic ambition that was the impetus for developing major cultural institutions modeled after their European counterparts. Consider the WPA era with its murals and documentation of the Dust Bowl, industrial America, and progressive theater movements. Consider Broadway musicals, American jazz, Beat poetry, early television, and later, rap, disco, and hip-hop.

As we consider all this cultural momentum, let us never forget the long traditions of the humble American Indian basket, the Native artists who graduated from the Institute of American Indian Arts, and the establishment of the NMAI and related developments in Indian Country. The rethinking of voice, authority, and the power of the local and the global are significant. The growth in tribal cultural organizations nationally—and how, at long last, Native voices are being respected and honored, Native art collected and exhibited, and active Native participation encouraged—is going stronger than ever.

### **Closing Acknowledgments**

I stand on the shoulders of my family members, especially Earl Boyd Pierce, who advocated for Cherokee rights on the Arkansas River; my first cousin Margaret Verble, the novelist who wrote *Maud's Line*, *Cherokee America*, and *When Two Feathers Fall from the Sky*; and our grandmother, Fannie Anderson Haworth.

I honor the inspiring accomplishments and groundbreaking leadership of Rick West and my NMAI colleague George Horse Capture, Joe's father. I extend my special thanks to the Autry and Joe Horse Capture, who invited me to speak at the Marshall McKay Seminar, and the Autry's staff members Ben Fitzsimmons and Robert Gallagher, who made it all possible.

### **More About Tribal Museums**

Most tribal museums and cultural centers have collections, and about half of them host public programs. A smaller percentage (about a third) currently host traveling exhibitions. More than half of the tribal cultural organizations have community advisory groups, and many rely on visitor surveys, suggestion boxes, and guest book comments to inform their work. Of seventy-five respondents, only twenty had annual budgets over \$500,000. Typically, tribal museums are small organizations with limited capacity. Tribal organizations are supported primarily by tribal government funds and federal support from IMLS and other federal agencies, with some funding from individuals, foundations, and corporations.

Tribal museums want to upgrade (or create anew) their exhibitions, improve collections care, educational outreach, and technology. Almost a third of the respondents are planning new or renovated facilities. Like well-established cultural institutions, tribal organizations want to strengthen their collections and education plans. The analysis concludes that tribal museum staff have, for the most part, extensive cultural knowledge and museum-

related experience, though they have training needs in developing and managing digital collections, exhibition design, fundraising, and technology, including having a stronger online presence.

The driving question for tribal museums and cultural centers is, “What do we want to say about ourselves?” This question also comes into play when tribal perspectives are enlisted by other cultural organizations. Early on, the NMAI needed to find effective ways to respect and honor Native responses to community questions and concerns. What were effective methodologies to document and transcribe participatory community responses? In this mix were demands of managing complex exhibition design and fabrication, and making curatorial, educational, and interpretative choices that not only were responsive to Native community consultations but also respected community views.

In ATALM’s Tribal Museum/Cultural Center Summit, held on April 6, 2021, and which attracted more than 250 participants, there was agreement on training needs related primarily on collections training, preservation, collaborative work, and the need to partner with non-Native institutions. Identifying ongoing sources of support is a high priority, as are developing professional ties to outside funders, including major foundations and local government sources. Managing and caring for collections is particularly important and this also is an area where collaboration with experienced mainstream cultural institutions is valued. Tribal museums seek support from non-Native collecting institutions on repatriation support, access to collections, and training in specialized areas including conservation.

## **Resources**

### **Further Reading**

American Alliance of Museums. *TrendsWatch: Museums as Community Infrastructure* (2022). <https://www.aam-us.org/programs/center-for-the-future-of-museums/trendswatch-museums-as-community-infrastructure-2022/>.

*First American Art Magazine*. <https://firstamericanartmagazine.com/>.

Hill, Liz. “Tribal Museums Endure.” *American Indian* 14, no. 1 (Spring 2013).

Lonetree, Amy. *Decolonizing Museums: Representing Native America in National and Tribal Museums*. First Peoples:

New Directions in Indigenous Studies. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012.

Roof, Judith, and Robyn Wiegman, eds. *Who Can Speak? Authority and Critical Identity*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1995.

### **Museums and Cultural Organizations**

#### ***Native Museums, Native Cultural Centers, and Museums Focused on Native Collections***

Ah-Tah-Thi-Ki Seminole Museums, Florida

Anchorage Museum, Alaska

Autry Museum of the American West, Los Angeles

Chickasaw Cultural Center, Sulphur, Oklahoma

First Americans Museum, Oklahoma City

Heard Museum, Phoenix

IAIA’s Museum of Contemporary Native Arts (MoCNA), Santa Fe

Mashantucket Pequot Museum, Connecticut

Museum at Warm Springs (Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs), Oregon

Museum of Indian Arts & Cultures, Santa Fe

Southern Ute Cultural Center and Museum, Ignacio, Colorado

Wheelwright Museum of the American Indian, Santa Fe

### **Mainstream Museums and Cultural Centers**

American Museum of Natural History, New York  
Burke Museum of Natural History and Culture, Seattle  
Denver Art Museum  
Eiteljorg Museum of American Indians and Western Art, Indianapolis  
Field Museum, Chicago  
MASS MoCA, North Adams, Massachusetts  
Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City  
Minneapolis Museum of Art  
MoMA, New York City  
MoMA PS1, Queens  
Newark Museum of Art  
Portland Museum of Art, Oregon  
San Antonio Museum of Art  
Seattle Art Museum,  
SITE Santa Fe  
Whitney Museum of American Art, New York City

### **Foundations, Service Organizations, and Publications**

Alliance of American Museums (AAM)  
*American Indian* (Smithsonian NMAI magazine)  
Association of Tribal Archives, Libraries, and Museums, [www.atalm.org](http://www.atalm.org)  
Doris Duke Charitable Foundation, New York  
*First American Art Magazine*  
Ford Foundation, New York  
International Council of Museums (ICOM)  
*Journal of the Native American Indigenous Studies Association* (NAIS)  
Mellon Foundation, New York  
Native Arts and Cultures Foundation (NACF), Vancouver, Washington, [www.nativeartsandcultures.org](http://www.nativeartsandcultures.org). (Of special interest: SHIFT-Transformative Change and Indigenous Arts and LIFT-Early Career Support for Native Artists.)  
Vision Maker Media, Nebraska, <https://visionmakermedia.org>

### **Artists, Writers, Curators, and Collectors Referenced in This Article**

Ash-Milby, Kathleen (Navajo), Curator  
Belmore, Rebecca (Anishinaabe), Artist  
Chacon, Raven (Diné), Artist  
Cooper, Karen Coody (Cherokee Nation), Writer  
Davidson, Robert (Haida), Artist  
Diker, Charles and Valerie, Collectors  
Frank, Sr., Delbert (Confederated Tribes of the Warm Springs), Writer, Tribal Leader  
Hanley, Andrea (Navajo), Curator  
Heap of Birds, Edgar (Southern Cheyenne & Arapaho), Artist  
Hill, Liz (Red Lake Ojibwe), Writer

Holland, Ashley (Cherokee Nation), Curator  
Hopkins, Candace (Carcross/Taglish First Nation), Artist, Curator  
Horse Capture, George (A'aniih), Curator  
Jemison, G. Peter (Seneca), Artist, Curator  
Kelliher-Combs, Sonya (Inupiaq and Athabascan), Artist  
LaTocha, Athena (Lakota and Ojibwe), Artist  
Linklater, Duane (Cree), Artist  
Lonetree, Amy (Ho-Chunk), Writer  
McMaster, Gerald (Plains Cree Member of Siksika Nation), Curator  
Meredith, America (Cherokee Nation), Artist, Writer  
Michelson, Alan (Mohawk), Artist  
Mithlo, Nancy Marie (Chiricahua Apache), Writer, Curator  
Monkman, Kent (Cree), Artist  
Niro, Shelly (Mohawk), Artist  
Norby, Patricia Marroquin (Purépecha), Curator  
Pierce, Earl Boyd (Cherokee Nation), Writer, Advocate  
Postcommodity Artist Collective  
Red Star, Wendy (Crow), Artist  
Sandoval, Nicolasa I. (Chumash), Writer  
Simpson, Rose B. (Santa Clara Pueblo), Artist  
Spiderwoman Theater (American Indigenous Women's Ensemble)  
Verble, Margaret (Cherokee Nation), Writer  
Watt, Marie (Seneca), Artist  
Wilson, Will (Navajo), Artist, Curator

## WINIKO: Life of an Object

James Pepper Henry (Kaw/Muscogee)

First Americans Museum

In 1989, through an act of Congress, the collections and property of the Museum of the American Indian, Heye Foundation, were transferred to the Smithsonian to form the National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI), Smithsonian Institution. In 1995, when I was a summer intern at the newly established NMAI, neither the museum facility on the National Mall nor the collections storage facility in Suitland, Maryland, had yet been built, and the museum was just establishing its educational programs and services.

The NMAI launched an internship program to train young Native people entering the museum field at a time when an increasing number of tribal museums were being established. I applied for and was selected to the internship program, focusing on collections management. I was detailed to the old Museum of the American Indian on 155th and Broadway in New York City to help document and pack collections, and close that facility.

At the time, I was serving as the museum director and historic preservation officer for my tribe, the Kaw Nation. We had just completed construction of our tribal museum, the Kanza Museum. The museum was accepting collection items from tribal members and managing cultural materials already in the tribe's possession. I would be the sole steward of our tribal heirlooms in our newly established collections facility. I had previous experience working as a curator and exhibit preparator in other institutions but was seeking more formal training in managing and caring for collections.

That summer, I learned the story of George Gustav Heye. Born in 1874, Heye was a successful New York City investment banker. He became fascinated with First American material culture after collecting a Navajo deerskin shirt in Kingman, Arizona, in 1897.<sup>1</sup> What at first was a hobby soon became a lifelong obsession for Heye, and by the time of his death in 1957, he had amassed over 800,000 material objects, the largest private collection of First American items in the world. To acquire this volume of material, Heye employed surrogates to collect for him, including field archeologist Mark Raymond Harrington. From 1909 to 1914, Harrington spent time in Indian Territory/Oklahoma collecting from many of the tribes that were relocated there from original homelands throughout the contiguous United States. One of those tribes was my tribe, the Kaw Nation.

After the old Museum of the American Indian was packed up, I was detailed to the Heye collections storage facility known as the Research Branch in the north Bronx. There, a team was assembled to pack collections and prepare for the move to the new NMAI storage facility in Suitland. A large amount of the Heye Foundation collection records and catalogue card information was still archived at that facility. I spent some time researching any information and materials associated with the Kaw. I was surprised to find that Harrington had collected several dozen items from Kaw citizens nearly a century before. I was even more amazed to find that one of the items, a medicine bundle, was collected from my great-great-grandfather, James Pepper (Mokómpah). I recognized the family names of other tribal members on the purchase receipts, whose ancestors had sold items to Harrington between 1909 and 1910.

Immediately, I understood the significance of these items to the descendants of their makers. I spent part of my internship documenting and photographing these items (apart from the most sensitive objects) for the Kanza Museum as a resource for tribal members. I also began to realize how important the items collected by Harrington were to the other tribes in Oklahoma. This would be an incredible trove of information and inspiration to descendant families.

In 1998, I was recruited by the NMAI to manage their repatriation program. At that time, plans were underway in Oklahoma to build the American Indian Cultural Center and Museum (AICCM), now the First Americans Museum (FAM), in Oklahoma City. Ground was broken for construction of the new facility in 2006. And in 2007, now serving as the NMAI's associate director for community and constituent services, I helped author a Memorandum of Understanding between the NMAI and the AICCM for an institutional alliance, including the potential for a long-term loan of collections to the AICCM.

This was an incredible opportunity for the items collected nearly a century ago by Mark Raymond Harrington on behalf of George Heye to return home to Oklahoma. Little did I know at the time that I would be director of the AICCM/FAM a decade later, and I would help facilitate the loan of these collections from the Smithsonian Institution. The inaugural exhibition, *WINIKO: Life of an Object, Selections from the Smithsonian's National Museum of the American Indian*, is the realization of this interinstitutional collaboration including the ten-year loan of more than 140

objects associated with all thirty-nine tribal nations in Oklahoma. These items have many stories to tell their extended families and will be an inspiration for all.

I give my heartfelt thanks to Welana Queton (Osage/Muscogee/Cherokee) for envisioning and co-curating the exhibition, and to our colleagues at the Smithsonian National Museum of the American Indian for making the loan of these collections a reality. Special acknowledgments go to Senior Curator Dr. heather ahtone (Choctaw/Chickasaw) and Collections Manager/Registrar Hallie Winter (Osage/Oglala Lakota) for their tireless efforts working on *WINIKO*. Other curatorial team members whose contributions were essential to this exhibition include Exhibitions Consultant Gena Timberman (Choctaw), Exhibitions Specialist Leslie Halfmoon (Caddo/Choctaw), Exhibitions Researcher John Hamilton (Kiowa/Caddo/Cheyenne/Wichita), Media Project Manager Rance Weryackwe (Comanche), Media Project Manager Zach Rice (Pawnee), Administrative Assistant MaryAnn Parker (Kiowa), Image Researcher Chelsea Herr (Choctaw), and Image Researcher Alicia Harris (Assiniboine).

My thanks to everyone who helped make this exhibition a reality. We hope our visitors will enjoy visiting this collection and welcoming the objects that have returned home.

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<sup>1</sup> Kate Duncan, *1001 Curious Things: Ye Olde Curiosity Shop and Native American Art* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2001), 85.



## Panel Discussion: The Role of Tribal Museums

- Joe Horse Capture: I have a lot of questions here. Delphine, you mentioned that it was a—excuse me—that was a place for the Mandan, Hidatsa, and Arikara, both elders and young people in the entire community, to come and learn about their culture.
- Steven, you mentioned that the tribal council gave you a directive. The museum's first priority is for tribal members. Having said that, especially in Palm Springs, you have a variety of audiences, right? You're going to have the tourists come in. Delphine, for you, and I've done the drive from Minneapolis to Montana, and somebody's looking on their Google maps and see that there's the MHA [Mandan, Hidatsa, Arikara] Interpretive Center. Let's go visit. So considering that the museum for both of you, as I understand its directives, is for tribal members, but also you need to accommodate non-Native tourists, how do you develop an interpretive plan for that? How do you create a space where both tribal members could get something out of it and also tourists who may not know anything about Agua Caliente, who may not know anything about the Mandan, Hidatsa, and Arikara? What is that approach?
- Delphine Baker: Well, for us, we had to review our culture, our history, and we wanted to tell our story from the beginning of time. So, it was like our steering committee. Our tribe has a lot of talented people and a lot of historians that have kept our stories alive throughout the years. And to get all these people into one room and to start talking was really great, it was really a great thing to just to be among them and listen to them talking about, well, we should start with this and we should start with that. Where we came from. Our original lands. You talk about time immemorial, we've got our land back to 900 AD. So we had to get the buy-in from our people first.
- And then we reached out to our . . . Then it just gives us the opportunity to reach out to our regional. So we've got the state of North Dakota tourism, they've got this *Medora Musical* where they're doing a museum for Theodore Roosevelt over there. I've started doing partnerships with those organizations. And there's like a little tourism trail that they can come through. If you make North Dakota legendary, they call it. And so that's how I know we're going to get people.
- And of course, like we're a lot of other tribes, we have a casino that's just right there near us, which gives us a chance to teach people about us. They don't have to read it from what somebody else wrote about us, they can come in. They know that everything they get is from what was told to me by my Ancestors, what was told to my husband by his Ancestors, has passed down from our parents and previous generations.
- Steven Karr: I think, similarly, working with tribal membership and tribal council for the museum staff is just that the expectation was that, it's the tribe's voice throughout the exhibition. Whether it's the text, whether it's the video piece, whether it's the narrative that's going on, it's always a tribal voice. And in talking with membership and also council, they said that we really want, we feel that we're going to reach the nontribal audience simply by stating what we believe, because that opportunity has not always presented itself. And I think that was the important part, that for all of us, that as a historian and having worked with tribal communities my whole career, I knew that. So, it was really in the most basic of senses council said, well, if one person walks out and says, I never knew that, then they said that would be a good thing.
- So that's really, it seems a like a minimalist approach, but the expectation had to be, is this going to resonate with membership. That was first and foremost, and then if it resonates with everyone else, great. And, we've got to meet that initial expectation, which is, is it going to aid the youth within our community? Are adults going to see this as a cultural resource? And will the elders say, this is a legacy we want? And, yes, it is. And in terms of the throngs of people, multicultural, who come to Palm Springs on a yearly basis, I think for so many, they don't realize that they are on tribal land. And that in and of itself is a statement, I think that the tribe knew. So just coming onto, walking into a building that says welcome to the Agua Caliente Reservation is a revelation in and of itself. And that's a teachable moment.
- Horse Capture: Great. So I have a two-part question. Delphine, earlier you mentioned the importance of your museum, your tribal museum to the community. And about how its purpose is, one

of its multiple purposes is, cultural revitalization. And you had mentioned that one of the most recent programs that was there was building burden baskets. And, Steve, I know your museum's not at that point, but it would be great if you could reflect on it as well.

It's sort of [in reference] to what Rick West said in his opening remarks of how museums historically have been passive. And how many museums, and in this case, tribal museums are sort of flipping that around where they become very, very active. Very active in cultural revitalization, telling histories, et cetera, et cetera. I wonder about further examples of cultural revitalization within a "museum" context. My second part of the question is, as we think about the term *museum*, and if we think about what Rick said and about both your presentations, is *museum* really the right word? Because when I think of museum, this is not what I think about when I think of museum. It's not what Rick thinks about. Both of your institutions are something completely new, completely different from how we're thinking about museums.

Baker:

I struggled with that, planning this Interpretive Center. Should I call it the tribal museum? What should we call it? Because we want to do more than that. Also, we have a museum, it's called the Three Tribes Museum, but it's just like glass containers with old items. It's really old leather outfits and just different things, but it doesn't really tell a story. It doesn't really tell *our* story. You view these items and you're done, and so hardly anybody ever goes there. It was really just like a dead . . . It's about dead people. And we wanted something to revitalize our people, where people could feel good about who they are. Because drugs and alcohol have taken over, especially drugs have taken over. And we've got to start trying to turn it around. Our fight against that was to get this Interpretive Center going.

Our kids can grow up knowing, being proud of who they are instead of being ashamed of being Indian. We wanted to increase their self-esteem. So that's how we got to the Interpretive Center, because I wanted to make it more alive to them—that this was a place they could come and learn about because they were starting not to get that at home, the way we got taught at home. Some kids aren't getting that today. That's changed over the years. Where your grandparents are telling you stories a long time ago and oral history. A lot of that's changed. And the kids need a place to come to learn about that. And we didn't really have that on our reservation. But now we do. One of the other things we have is language classes there every Monday night.

Part of our language revitalization is that any tribal member can come; it's free, every Monday from 5 to 6 p.m. And I belong to a church group, and in one of our communities we go to two churches every weekend and on the reservation. And we're actually learning how to sing the "Our Father" in our language. It's those types of things that make your community alive and people want to come there. And then we also have our amphitheater. Our plan is that we want to do a play next summer.

And I want the plays to be like our dance troupes from all of our little kids, and I want them to be in the play. I always talk about *Buffalo Bird Woman's Garden*; in there, there's a scene where they always say, from the earth lodge the older grandma and the younger girl went out to watch the gardens every day. And they'd sit there on a bench and then they'd have food with them and they would sing to the garden and that was their job. And, I thought, how beautiful would that be to have that play out there and have some dance performances and just have little snippets of it. It really humanizes us to people; this is how we live.

We lived in earth lodges, but we're human beings. This is how we lived. This is our life. This was normal to us to sing to the plants and to do those kind of things. And life was good. I want to bring that back. We're hoping that's going to come to fruition. I did hire a theatrical director. Because we're so rural, it's challenging to get museum-level people, I'm trying to establish a museum-type workforce on our reservation.

John Haworth:

Just taking off on, I love these two case studies that we heard from the other presenters in this session. Both of you referred to intergenerational, doing it for the next generation. And I just have these, a couple of comments about that point. I very much appreciated Rick West putting the term *forum* on the table, and whatever we call it, museums, cultural centers, whatever we call the tribal-based institutions, but they are forums. And I think that some

of the things that we are having a national debate about these days—school curriculums, how math is taught, about critical race—all that kind of stuff is going on. But I think where we have an opportunity in local institutions is taking a deep dive into concepts like NMAI’s [National Museum of the American Indian] program on Native Knowledge 360 and figuring out, are there tribal adaptations [with which] we can bring that good knowledge from a national partner into our communities?

I think of this incredible work that ATALM [Association of Tribal Archives, Libraries, and Museums] is doing with the Doris Duke Foundation, with the oral history project and their eight university partners. And I think down the road, other tribes can model how will we do oral histories and how will we store them and share them and use them as inspiration.

I think that this kind of intergenerational . . . to individualize some of these national programs is a way to really think about it. I also believe that the Native librarians around the country are doing amazing work in creating appropriate book lists. I know Tim Tingle is doing a lot of incredible work with Choctaw authors. There’s all this that can be read and considered, Natalie Diaz in poetry. There’s all these things that can be instructive throughout all the tribes. And I think it sparks a kind of interest in writing and art making and history. I always thought when NMAI did the big treaty project, the big exhibit, how wonderful it would be if every tribe across the country said, “Hey, we’re going to study our own treaty histories and we’re going to make our teenagers aware of our own histories, as complicated as it is.”

Horse Capture: Thank you. Steven?

Karr: Just to address your question, how is it a museum? Is it not a museum? I think that the Agua Caliente did contemplate that notion, and I think it was why they created the Cultural Plaza and that the spa was considered to be the peer of the museum. And a lot of people might say, “Oh, well, it’s just a spa.” But the waters that feed the spa are from Séc-he and these are sacred waters to the tribe. And the tribe owns these waters, and it was their right to share or not share these waters with the general public. And I think building the spa adjacent to the museum, calling that five and a half acres a cultural plaza and saying, “We invite you nontribal members to come and share our waters”—that’s a very traditional perspective.

Horse Capture: Cultural revitalization. And I know you have a lot of things going on like getting the building, have you gotten to the point of talking about cultural revitalization within the museum?

Karr: Not yet. The tribe has vast programming already, and tribal programs has its own department, with Agua. And they’ve been doing language classes, Oya-making classes, basket-making classes for a very long time. And the archeological monitor classes, that’s part of it. A lot of tribal members are monitors as well. These programs have been ongoing for years. And I think that the museum will become a ready and willing participant of those already ongoing projects.

Horse Capture: Steven, it almost feels like you’re talking about the springs and the museum and this program—it almost feels like that whole area is like a constellation of cultural experiences wherever you go. That’s great. So, John, before we get to question and answers from the audience, thinking about big picture. I’m wondering if you can provide us any guidance in a sense of nontribal museums, midsize like ours and large size like NMAI, or Smithsonian, whatever the case may be. How can museums like us support the efforts of tribal museums?

Haworth: Oh, what a great question. Well, I believe that we got quite a recipe that Patricia Norby put on the table today, and I believe that what’s happening. Certainly the work that Autry Museum has done, and your statement about the collections and sharing the collections; these are methodologies. And I think that I’ve encouraged . . . like I know Jim Pepper Henry has been a national leader on the AAM board and doing lots of interesting things. But I think some of the stories from this seminar today should be shared in very large conferences that are on the international and national level. And I also hope that writers and our publications, or NMAI’s magazine, can start to then document and keep the record on what these institutions are doing. I was just blown away by seeing the work.

I also think what's happened at the Field Museum is really strong. I will wait and see what happens at Natural History in New York. But I think museums are turning their heads around. And I think we need to—as Native institutions we need, and certainly the Native curators and directors in this assembly today, need to—prod as much as we can in the museum profession, and write articles about it and yell it from the rooftops.

Horse Capture: Thank you. Before we get any further, and I want to mention the book Delphine mentioned, *Buffalo Bird Woman's Garden*. It was written by the anthropologist Gilbert Wilson, and it's a very great read. If you haven't read it, it is such a beautiful book.

Baker: Because it was her story. He wrote what she said. We're actually doing the way she was talking about how you plant the garden. We planted the squash the way she said, it was the same squash. And the way she said it and how to do it. And then we planted it the regular way we do it today. And I swear that squash that we got was like ginormous. It was huge. We put it into practice. It was really awesome.

Horse Capture: If there are any questions from the audience. Do we have questions?

Audience Member: And I honor you and thank you and everyone else who's shared today. So hi, to honor John, I promised him I would announce that we have the Native Arts and Culture Councils. We have a call for proposals from all tribes across the nation. It's a Ford Foundation-funded initiative. And we sent out a bunch of social media and emails.

And my comments and questions have to do with furthering that cultural resource sharing. As Delphine knows, I taught the previous generation before at the Berthold tribal college. As far as sharing with tribal colleges, other cultural centers, and museums in your particular regions that may have . . . I like the idea of cultural elements. Where it's a relational way of bringing together water, artworks, language into whatever it is that you want to call your new facilities.

Baker: Well, with the MHA Interpretive Center, I did forget to mention that we have a gallery, so that is interchangeable. And you did see the gallery with the horse, that was our art gallery. So those were all done by our tribal members. Everything in there was done by tribal members. We just commissioned them and said, could you do a piece for our first showing? We're just going to open up. It was just amazing. We have a lot of amazing artists at home and they all came. Because people like to be a part of something.

So we have cultural centers on our reservation. Our reservation has six segments, and the Interpretive Center is the hub. We coordinate it with the other cultural centers, while we also are working with our tribal college and our Language Education department. We have the THPO [Tribal Historic Preservation Officer] coming and doing their meetings there. Because that gives us a chance for tribal people to come out there and be around the museum. And then elders can go in there and say, "Hey, this is what we think is important for us." It creates an environment where people feel more free to discuss their culture.

Karr: I think cultural sharing is, speaking anecdotally about Southern California, Agua is constantly working in some way or another with a lot of the reservations in the area. I think that there's a lot of that, that has already existed for not just generations, for thousands of years. But that continues on with the various classes that go on. They share. But the other part about it is just, I think building the museum and the facility and dedicating a temporary gallery was that opportunity to share at least from an object perspective or that part of the material culture perspective. To be able to bring in objects and art and culture from other communities and share it in their community.

Horse Capture: Any other questions?

Audience Member: Thank you. I've worked with a lot of tribal museums around the country, I helped build my tribe's museum. And a lot of money goes into developing a museum. But what a lot of people don't understand is that, or at least tribal council members think, well, once we open the museum, it's going to sustain itself. It's going to be sustained by people buying tickets, going to the museum. And we know that's not true, that these museums need to be subsidized.

And do you have the support of your tribal councils, or do they understand that they're going to have to continue to subsidize the museum moving forward? A lot of times people are kind of shocked that it's going to take \$4 or \$5 million a year to sustain your museums. And a lot of people don't think about that when they're building the museum. Have you had these conversations with your respective tribal councils and do they understand that they're going to have to continue to support these endeavors?

Karr: My council is wholly aware of that. The entire tribal community is, the tribe at large. They know that this is their investment that they will continue to make. They're committed for generations. They know this and they want to do it. And I, selfishly, I'm the luckiest museum director in the country. And I look at all the other directors or former directors here. And I did ask, what are the fundraising requirements for this job? And at the time, Chairman Grobe said, get the project done, get it done, help us get it done. So those were my directives. I think the tribe knows that there are tremendous commitments, and it just has to be met in a host of different ways. And running it like a business is part of that concept operationally. It has to have that model, that business model.

Baker: Well, for us, our tribal council wasn't quite there yet. We had to kind of put our Interpretive Center at the forefront for them. We had to educate them on what it meant for them, for the sovereignty of our tribe. If you preserve your sovereignty. And I had heard this before at an ATALM conference, if you preserve your culture, you're going to preserve your sovereignty as a tribe. And I brought that back to the council because I was new on this project, and I went back and I said, "You guys always want to talk about saving your sovereignty as a tribe." And, "But you've got to start looking at our Interpretive Center, so we can start preserving some of these things." We want to be able to preserve all of our maps and have a repository for some of the things that our tribe has that make us who we are as a tribe.

So I put a business plan together for our tribal business council. And in that plan I told them, "First of all, we'll get it built." The tribe didn't want to build it at first because they didn't have the money. Then oil came, so we got the money, but then that wasn't the greatest thing in the world to build a museum. Everybody else wanted their business or whatever. We were like fighting to get to the top of the list of getting the building built. But luckily we got a new chairman elected and he was a historian. And then we got another council woman who was a historian, too.

And she's also a medical doctor. And then they were behind the support of this endeavor, our tribe needs this. And so that's how I got the funding to get this building built. I also included in the business plan that we have an endowment fund. We can add the income we earn off of our gift shop, our coffee shop, and then we have meeting rooms and so we sell food.

If you had your meeting in our Interpretive Center, one of our meeting rooms, you'd buy food. And so we get income off that. We're rural, so we don't have the huge population, but the first month we're open, we're making at least \$30,000. That was good, for us that was really, really good. Because we're lucky if any other museums were making a thousand a month, to tell you the truth from where we're at. But because of the activity.

So the big selling point was talking about what the income was going to come in for those meeting rooms. And then the amphitheater, because I'm saying this was going to bring some income in, too.

It took a lot, but once the council got behind us, they know they're going to have to support us and eventually we're going to do grant writing. It just takes such a long time to get everything moving.

Horse Capture: Okay. Thank you very much, John, Delphine, and Steven for your time. I appreciate your presentations and I appreciate y'all coming out here. Thank you so much.

# Defining Native Art

Ashley Holland (Cherokee Nation), Art Bridges Foundation

Nancy Mithlo (Chiricahua Apache), University of California, Los Angeles

Celestina Castillo (Tohono O'odham), United American Indian Involvement

Dallin Maybee (Seneca and Northern Arapaho)

## Panel Discussion: Defining Native Art

Joe Horse Capture: Thank you everybody for being here. You know we had that panel. We had our session yesterday, and it was a lot easier for me to come up with questions [for that session] than it is for this one because everybody . . . There's certainly an interrelatedness, but also each presentation was very tight, I guess you could say. So it's sort of hard to figure out where to come in.

There were a couple of themes that I thought were important, and it was the idea, I think from everybody, about rebuilding, about using Native art to rebuild. So Ashley, you had mentioned that your exploration of Native art helped you move forward with your own identity. I noticed a lot of the images that you referenced were Cherokee.

Yeah. Nancy and Celestina, you had mentioned how there's this connection between these photographs, and what was the time period for the photographs?

Celestina Castillo: Early 2000s. Like 2003, 2005. That's just the paper photos that are in the archive.

Horse Capture: So in a way, at least the way that I was looking at it, there's this portion of history which is captured in photographs and sort of lost. Then you two working with the community is rebuilding that connection, not only for an urban environment, but also for individual families. And Dallin, you had mentioned that how some of your work is rebuilding. That is the way that I interpreted it. Some of your work, not only your—I don't want to say professional work, because that implies that you're an amateur artist—but your two professions and how they sort of interrelate in a way is rebuilding or continuing to build a Native art aspect.

So I think one of the challenges for me, and I'm going to be jumping all over the place because this is honestly a challenging one to narrate because it was really good. One of the challenges that I find with Native art today, as we are defining it here, is all three presentations were very specific, in a sense—Cherokee, Arapaho, and UAI [United American Indian Involvement]—and they all fit in these packages. Then when I think about Native art today, and I have friends and other folks who I know who create Native art, and oftentimes their work is very much focusing on their own tribal traditions, and their photography is focusing on their own tribal traditions. I believe, Ashley, you mentioned the term *art* as a cultural connector.

But one thing I noticed today is, particularly when I was involved in the '90s, a lot of Native artists were doing work from their own tribe. We talked about sort of connecting and this rebuilding. But I'll say probably in the last five or ten years, I've noticed a lot of artists are exploring traditions from other tribes and putting it within their own work.

So as we think about rebuilding our own community, as for me, it's A'aninin or Gros Ventre and Cherokee and et cetera, et cetera. We see this artwork that is, in a way, pan-Native by including your own work and other works from other tribes. Sometimes they don't have any connection as viewers and those that appreciate it, and some of us have a little more in-depth knowledge and some of us don't, and I'm more of the don't. How do we process that? How do we process what the creation of material that's created today that is not necessarily a reflection of their own traditions? Dallin, you made the point of how Native art, it doesn't really, isn't really traditional—which has ties to historic and contemporary—but there should be no wall there. It should all come together because like everything else, it's constantly moving. So how do we wrestle with this sort of pan-Indian creation of Native works?

Nancy Mithlo: I'd be happy to jump in. I'm going to respond as an educator. I guess I would start with thinking about actually Dallin, your slide, so that's our group. Those are Chiricahua Apache babies. I've got all their names if you ever want to have the ID for that slide. So it's the boarding school legacy. Native folks here and at home, I've got cousins that can claim five tribes. So part of it is

the reality of what we're living, and some of it is boarding school, some of it's urban relocation. So we're leading these very complex lives just in terms of our genealogies. I think that's part of it. But I have noticed the same thing that you're talking about.

I like the idea of us being able to be specific and then branch out to global because the other part is global Indigeneity. We're moving within those spaces. I've been curating at the *Venice Biennale* for forever. A lot of Native folks are moving in there and having a common conversation across the ocean. I find that stuff really exciting, but I hear—and tell me if I'm correct—a little bit of frustration because as educators, it's like, well, how do we explain this level of complexity, especially for folks who come into an exhibit and are surprised that Native people are still alive. We're working with a very low bar, often, with the public, and how do we increase that?

I'll just harp back on to what a lot of [what] knowing Native arts was about is that this is an academic field and that we are totally under-resourced. We're totally underfunded in terms of programs for Natives and non-Natives to understand [the questions], What is historic art? What are these regions? Who are the great names? Where are we going in the future? Where have we been in the past? What's happening in museums? I think we need more educational support, and I'm talking about the big money; you guys bring it on. We want some Mellon; we want Ford. We want whoever can. You guys bring it on, because that infrastructure is yet to be built.

I mean, I go to exhibits and I see often our panel sessions, they're using the same title of a show from thirty years ago, but not remembering it was thirty years ago. Or we get *Art Journal*, and they've got essays and all of the authors, they're not even citing any other author from the past, as if we're inventing it anew every generation. I'll let other panelists speak, but for me, that's my main frustration is I just think we need more infrastructure for the discipline, for the field of Native arts.

Dallin Maybee:

I've got some strong feelings about this, unless somebody wants to jump in.

After this presentation, it actually might be surprising to hear that I don't think it's appropriate at all, that I think there are tribal concepts and design elements that should remain within that tribe. Can they be interpreted in a contemporary way? Absolutely. Are there myriad of different exceptions? Absolutely. You've got cross-cultural intertribal marriage is happening. You've got myself; I'm the product of two totally different tribes, one a classic Eastern Woodland, another one very much a Plains cultural tribe. I incorporate both oftentimes into my work. But again, there are things that . . . There's a reason we do our Sun Dance in Arapaho. There are concepts that can't be translated into English. We have to, though, because many of us aren't as fluent as we need to be.

You can take that onion a little further in the layers, right? And look at people who have appropriated an entire identity that they don't belong to, and became academics or became artists who are presenting a culture that they didn't grow up in, that they know nothing about. How do you explain imagery? You can replicate it. So are you a historian or are you just a reenactor? I mentioned our culture being living, breathing, evolving. But some of those things, it's the difference between the sacred and secular again. Those things, that when I first started pow wow dancing, my Northern Arapaho uncle was like, "Oh, that's good. Learning bead work. You're putting designs, Arapaho designs in your work. Just remember this isn't your ceremony. Don't let it become your religion." I didn't even know what that meant at the time. I was like twelve.

But as I got older, I got to reflect on those things and I could see military societies in some of these dances. I could see a tradition of power that these things came from. But at the same time, that pow wow was an intertribal social dance. It was an opportunity to make friends, meet your future ex-wives; it was all those things, all those good things that come from pow wows. But again, it wasn't our Sun Dance. It wasn't our pipe ceremonies.



So when we talk, when we ask that question, is it complicated? Absolutely. Should you try it? Don't do it, man. You're going to mess it up. No, I'm just kidding. But those are great conversations to have because it's not an easy answer and we're not going to define it today, but we can talk about it and see how we feel, and maybe someday down the road, we'll come to some kind of consensus. But again, there are some things that should stay within the tribe. How do I talk about Kiowa culture when I've never been to society dances? I've met lots of Kiowas. I don't even have any Kiowa exes. That's amazing.

But I would feel a little awkward if a Kiowa person said, "Hey, why did you use that symbol?" Because I can tell you exactly why I used every single thing that I do at my artwork. I know what they mean. The beauty of illustrative Plains narrative art is that it was the detail, the devil's in the details. You could tell who they were. Well, partly because they had a name glyph right above their head, right? But their hairstyle, their outfits, the leggings, the moccasin designs, it was all who they were.

Ashley Holland: There's a reason I only talked about Cherokee artists in my dissertation was because I didn't want to step out of a place where I felt comfortable analyzing these artists, making these sort of broad statements about really complicated things such as identity and worldview in a way that only I could understand. I couldn't talk about another community in that same way. It would've been not only disingenuous, but it would've been inappropriate for me. I think that there is something to be said for innovation as opposed to appropriation, that Native people, we have been innovators with our art always. When we meet a new community and they have something we think is really cool, we figure out a way to incorporate it.

But there's also boundaries of cultural things that are not allowed to cross those boundaries. And that's where that uncomfortableness comes, around seeing somebody who has found a really exciting new material that they have learned about through their travels. We're global people now. We exist in a global world through social media, through our travels, but there's a difference between bringing in that sort of innovative aspect to material and to how you're presenting your work and taking something that is not yours, which is where that uncomfortableness comes and where we go, "Oh, I don't think you should have made that. That was not yours to make."

Horse Capture: Celestina, I have a specific question for you. I loved the presentation. As I was looking at those older photographs, particularly the ones in the '70s, it reminded me of a couple things. It reminded me of the photographs from Alcatraz and also a project I worked on with my father a number of years ago, where we had historic photographs and we visited our community with these photographs, some of the elders trying to identify who is who with some limited success. When you see a photograph of your Ancestor that you've never seen before . . . and I know you've been working on this project for a long time, and you had mentioned that you had shown the photograph to some of these families. I'm wondering if you can just reflect on that experience of your interaction with the family and how that experience went for you.

Castillo: I feel like it's very special. I really try to give as much space and be as respectful as I know how to be, but always make sure that I'm asking if we are like, as we're talking, whenever you want to stop, if you want to stop, or if I'm asking something that you don't want to share with me, that's inappropriate, or those things, then just let me know because especially working with photos that are of peoples from . . . Currently UAI serves over 200 different tribes, so people from all over the country, all over the Americas, and I don't think I'll ever know exactly how to share a photo that's maybe of somebody who's passed, or maybe I'm not supposed to do that. There's so many different protocols that I just need to follow whatever the person is telling me about the photo, about how to continue looking at the photo, thinking about the photo.

Also being, again, careful that if we're starting to talk about something that is painful, that you don't have to share that with me or with anybody, or if you want to, I'm willing to listen. So it's exciting, and also I feel very cautious as I go in and talk with people because there have been times where I hear a story and we have to sit with it for a while. But I think it has also been really amazing too over time, where there's been a number of different people who could never identify that person, and then one day you meet somebody and they're like, "That's so and so," and it's like, "Wonderful. What else can you say about them? Are they still around, or where's their family?"

I think it just really gives a foundation for so many generations that have been in Los Angeles now, and also always recognizing that we're in Tongva territory, that this is the ancestral land of the Tongva peoples, and that there's also these generations of people who have called the city home. It doesn't mean that everyone doesn't go back and forth to tribal lands or home, but that there's a lot of time kind of spent here in our everyday, and that there's a lot of power and home and community in that as well.

Mithlo: A little plug for Celestina because she's a third-generation Los Angeleno and her children are fourth generation here. So I think that's kind of standard for a lot of the community.

Castillo: I think it varies, there's myself and then there's so many other families who have been here for so long, that again, I want to make sure that our children, my children feel like they have a community here that has many generations, that has a history that they can also be connected to in addition to their tribal homes.

Horse Capture: Thank you. Ashley, I have a very specific question from one of our viewers on the Internet.

Horse Capture: It says, "Much scholarship has compared the current Palestine situation to that of Indigenous peoples. It's difficult to conceive Palestinians considering their cultural output as a subfield of Israeli art. Another example could be the efforts made by Maoris to distinguish their cultural history and contemporary art from non-Maori cultural production. How do you reconcile your approach to include Native art as a subfield of American settler art or similar efforts by institutions, such as the Met, to interweave Native art as American art with these other efforts to maintain the integrity of Indigenous cultural production?"

Holland: That is a big question.

Horse Capture: It is.

Holland: So I would start by saying there is no America. There is Israel and Palestine and there is New Zealand, but America is . . . There's the United States. There's the continent here. So that's where I'm saying American art doesn't exist because there is no America, and it is this umbrella term that has gotten appropriated to describe something. I really have just started exploring this theme. So I don't have those answers yet. I'm still figuring out how I'm approaching this concept, and it's come out of trying to figure out where Native art can fit in American art, whatever that might be. And so I think that is an obvious next step of thinking about this global movement, then repercussions of that. But also, I'm not an expert in any of those countries and their art production. So I don't have the answer to it.

Mithlo: We're talking about categories, and categories are made to be broken. Like, I love the VEN diagram metaphor that you used. It's let's get off of a linear track and even a regional track. I think part of what's happened with art history, and I was trained as a cultural anthropologist, y'all, so I can take a dig at art history here. You can imagine those color-coded maps. Well, okay, anthro does that too. There's like yellow here, and blue, and you can envision what the United States looks like with these color-coded maps. I mean, who came up with that? I think we need to be really open and attentive to the specifics to start out with how you introduced this Q&A session and to highlight those. If we're making a generalization, to make that generalization on something that makes sense.

So for example, the California Basketweavers' Association here, it makes a lot of sense. They're women that need access to those natural materials. They've got common problems with the environment, with pesticides, with fires. So yes, let's make a basketweavers' association here in California. That makes sense. I'm a product of the Institute of American Indian Arts. I love that school. I do a lot for that school. I feel like it's a home. It makes sense for me to continue in that vein because it is a tribal college, and it's doing the good work. So I can reference freely there, I feel comfortable in a pan-Native kind of approach because I taught there; I went to school there; I published with them. That makes sense. So I think it's, rather than being kind of deductive about this, I think being more intuitive, starting from reality and building theory out from that rather than the opposite.

Horse Capture: Dallin or Celestina, any comments?

Maybe: I think it's very human of all of us to want to categorize things so that we can conceptualize them a little easier. We can classify them in a way that puts other parts of our own lives in context. I would start by saying do we really need to do that with cultures that we don't come from? I don't profess to know the politics and the history of that Israeli-Palestinian conflict, nor with the Maoris. They have a very complicated history as well, much like many of our cultures. But what I do know is that I can appreciate their arts. I can appreciate their cultures for what they are and accept them without my prejudice or bias or perspectives and just try and find that beauty. Maybe it's simple. I don't know. But I don't think it's inappropriate.

Horse Capture: So we have two questions that interrelate to each other, which interrelate to what we're talking about, which all has to do with where do we put Native American art in the museum? Native One says, "Well, Native American art . . ." If we think about, as Dallin had mentioned in his presentation, contemporary art directly related to traditional art, which is directly related because it predates American settler art, and I'm using her term, shouldn't it have its own area? Others say, "Well, are our museums putting Native art on their own, or are they putting Native art within the American art gallery?" And as a second-generation museum person, of course, I have my own opinions, but this is not my show. It's yours. Thoughts?

Holland: Why do we keep having to divide things by culture or by time period or by chronology? Why can't we start thinking about museums as spaces for thinking about themes, about larger ideas. That's really what I am thinking is, let's just throw it all out. Like, let's literally empty out all the museums and rethink them. As I don't currently work in a museum, it's easy for me to say.

Horse Capture: Easier said than done.

Holland: But why don't we do that? Like, why don't we think how museums are done and rethink it in a way that is much more, I think, humanistic in that there are so many cross-cultural moments that can happen through art when you break it down to themes and concepts and ideas and passions rather than, okay, this is the Native art over here, and this is the early American art over here. We have the contemporary art over there and we might mix a couple of things in between each other, but we're going to pretty much keep those things where they are because that makes the most sense. Does it? Wouldn't it be more exciting to go and see a dynamic space that's telling new stories all the time?

Mithlo: I would like a higher level of dialogue also. I think it's possible. I think it's doable in the museum world to do that. I think museums in general, I have to give a shout out to Rick West in the audience. Thank you, Rick, for helping us get that NEA grant. He wrote our letter of recommendation. I always give him full credit.

I worked with a cognitive scientist, Aleksandra Sherman. She was a junior professor and now she's chair of Cognitive Sciences at Occidental College. We did a museum experiment right here at the Autry, and it was called *Seeing American Indians*. We put Edward Curtis photographs up. We ended up getting physiological data from museum visitors, things like

skin conductivity and heart rate. Then we did a lab setting with eye tracking to see where prompts would bring people.

At the end of the day, our findings, we actually didn't want to tell the Autry what to do, but the Education department was like, "Okay, we've done a lot for you. Can you just tell us what to do now?" So we had to make recommendations, and our recommendation was like, "Can we maybe just have museum visitors pause? Because I think there's a gallop towards having an answer, towards checking a box. "I saw this. I conquered that. I get this." There's also a tendency to do what it's sort of like the entrance narrative. It's a theme, if you do museum studies literature, that people want to be affirmed about what they already know in a museum. They actually don't want to learn anything new. They just want to be affirmed that their opinions were always correct, and they just want to see that.

So I think it's a move towards getting visitors and visitors who might be out there to go into a museum with a not-knowing perspective. To pause and say, "I really don't know what's going on here at all. I don't know where this fits. I need to think about this more," and to have that exploratory moment. But I think museums now, it's fast paced and the museum visitor spends, what, three seconds in front of a piece of artwork, right? So I think our challenge is just how to slow down the educational process in the museum setting, which we know is emotionally laden for people. So if you're in a lab and you're looking at a screen, you're not going to get half of what you get when you're seeing the real thing. We know that. Your emotions are heightened. You're in a space. You carved out the time. We just have to slow the process down a little bit and make people feel more comfortable with not having a category to check, and that's going to be a challenge.

Castillo:

Well, my immediate thought after you asked the question was everywhere, and it doesn't have to be in a specific section. But I also started to think about just the museum space as just a broader educational space and a community space, really. I think the Autry has done a pretty good job about opening these spaces up to the community. Like, I've been on the stage with a bunch of kids before. There's a dance workshop here on Thursday nights that UALL does. So to me, this is like, it's more than these gallery spaces, and the art is a piece of it, but it's not the only kind of reason why you come to the museum. It should be to learn, to see other people, to come to community meetings. I just want it to be much more of an active space, which I think the Autry is doing a good job at.

Maybe:

I'll tackle what my colleagues have said. The first step is probably asking, is there even really a right answer? Yes, there are themes, prehistoric arts, Native art prior to contact, 1700s, whatever it is. That's fine to classify. But even with all the right steps, a Native consultant, a Native curator, tribal land acknowledgment happening, armpits and elbows. It's like the opinions are like armpits and elbows. Everybody's got one or two, hopefully, but they can look wildly different. They can present wildly differently. So again, there just may not be the right answer, but there can be good, positive things happening as we look at how we explore these experiences, for sure.

Horse Capture:

So if you don't mind, I'm going to offer my two cents on this. Is that okay?

The Native American experience is an exclusively unique experience in the history of this country. There's nobody else here who has had this experience and had this story. I come from the perspective that the vast majority of non-Native people, I think over the past several years have gotten better, but they don't necessarily understand or have a full grasp of that experience. With that experience, there is the production of what, in this conversation, we're calling art. Historic stuff, depending on how you look at it. In this conversation, we're calling it art. They're saying, "Oh, my gosh, what is that?" So there's this lack of education about Native American art.

So one of the challenges that I have of putting Native American art in an American gallery is, and maybe I'm totally misinterpreting this, is with that, we're assuming all narratives are equal. And in fact, they're not. People understand the American experience, but do not necessarily understand the Native American experience. Oftentimes I see museums where they put a Western settler artwork next to a historic Native American work so they can have this conversation. But the vast majority of people don't know the Native American aspect. So they only hearing one side of the conversation and aren't really knowing the other side of the conversation. So for me, what I'm an advocate for, I think, is to have a gallery of Native American art to share that cultural experience when people go in, they can experience it as the museum organizes it, but also have it spread out throughout the gallery.

Mithlo: I agree. And museum science agrees with you. You get into that heavy-duty, like how do visitors move in a museum? I think often museums have kind of done a knee-jerk to go into, "Okay, ethnic differences. They're all the same, those ethnic differences," and that science shows that the American Indian experience, just as you said, is so unique. It's so weighty. Even the way museum visitors respond to Native experiences differs from other American experiences, whether it's an immigrant experience, whether it's a Black experience, it differs. The salience is leaning towards, as you can imagine, the one-dimensional stereotypes. The power of those popular culture images exceeds— I think I'm going to argue, I'm kind of going out on a limb here—what we think about as a generic American difference frame. So even the way people learn is something that I just want to kind of keep in the conversation because it's justified there too, not only from an aesthetic experience, but from an educational experience.

Horse Capture: I think I'm dealing more at an emotional level as opposed to a museum guide level. One of the things that drives me a little bit crazy is saying, "Well, we're going to expose our gallery to Native American art in this conversation with something else." And my knee-jerk reaction is, "Well, when are we going to have a place to tell our own stories on our own terms about our own culture, about our own ways without these other voices?" I think for the vast majority of museums, that is lacking. Here at the Autry, we clearly have a need from our audience to tell these stories. I was talking with Sarah Wilson, the head of education, and she said that the most requested education materials we get from schools is Native American. The most.

Audience Member: Thank you guys for being here. I work locally in Ventura with the unified school district, K-12. I've been involved in music, social activism. It was very touching to see Winston Street, as it was called when I was there a few years back, Indian Alley, to get the shout-out from Steven. What I was curious about was how is it that we reach children today in the midst of all this technology, in the midst of all this culture that continues to be immersive in a way that will inspire them to pick up the torch from where you guys are from where I am? Because that's something that I personally and professionally, I really believe strongly in how do we actually inspire kids, so it's not just a matter of putting it in front of them and hoping they don't fall asleep or hoping they don't get distracted on how cool something might look, but to actually move them in a way that makes them want to personalize it and take it on as something that they believe in?

Castillo: Well, I hope that it's through finding or showing them where they are in it, because then they see the connection to whatever they're learning, that they're actually a part of that or that they have some connection to it and then what they want to do with it. I think I mentioned this already, but like when I started to work with the photos, I really was grappling with how do I tell my children? How do I raise my children here in L.A., fourth generation in L.A., about who they are, where they're from, amongst a lot of other Native people from all over the country, right? How do I make sure they hold onto something that's uniquely theirs but also connected to this broader community and special and unique and all these things?

So I'm constantly trying to figure out, how do I show other children? But I think, I'm hoping that other children and other people, when they see these photos, they're like, "Oh, yeah, that's my family or somebody who reminds me of my family. I'm just as important as anybody else who's been here," right? Or who comes here later.

Horse Capture: How do we inspire the next generation to continue these things, not only these discussions and through, in this particular case, art? And earlier, we've talked about these cultural connections, how do we ensure that we work with and pass it on to the next generation?

Mithlo: Yeah. As an educator, I really feel you when you ask that question and that's probably like the area, because I'm in higher education, that's furthest from my reach. First of all, just let me thank you for the work that you're doing. I just admire it and I'm happy to help if we could exchange information. I'm happy to kick around ideas afterwards.

For me, as just a generic educator, I always say I have on a toolbelt, and just drop me into a room and you just have to figure out what's going to work. Again, it's pretty specific, but I think we're back to that quandary with the audience. Can you teach a child who's culturally imbued and knows a lot in the same context with a classroom that's going, woo hoo and doing the paper headdresses? Like, is that even possible? I actually just want to go take that tribal child to the side and say, "Do you want to go to the library and do something else right now?" Because mixing them is almost a disservice. I'm a grandmother. I've got grandchildren, tribal citizens here in Los Angeles, long way from Oklahoma. So the work that we do in Oklahoma is very different than anything they're ever going to get in L.A. I'm glad they have the L.A. experience. They're global citizens.

But I don't even know that any school could teach them anything about their culture here in Los Angeles. I just don't even hope for that, honestly. Like, I just want to bring them home. IAIA in Santa Fe, for a while, they played with the idea of being Institute of American Indian Alaskan Native Arts and Cultural Development. They added cultural development at the end, huge firestorm, you can imagine, because tribal people were like, what? You're going to develop culture at that school? Like, no. Right? And they cut the cultural development part out of the title. So it is sensitive. I just think we have to stay really attuned to that.

Audience Member: Okay. So defining Native art. You found the imagery and it's like all of a sudden this is Native art. "We're going to do an exhibit. We're going to talk about this." So what if, for instance, I'm sure it's not, but what if, for instance, the photographer of all these images is a white person, and is that Native art? Okay. So when we have these found images, like people open up boxes and find these beautiful images of Native Americans or cultural situations, and it's not photographed by a Native person, is that Native art? I think for your thing, curriculum.

Mithlo: Well, just to make it really clear, the UAII approached us with this group of photographs that they own and asked us if we could do an exhibit for them. But the authorship . . . This is good. I want for the audience just to have that part be clear. So I asked for a hard question. We got one. I love it. Thank you. I think it's evidence. I want Celestina to for sure chime in here. But for me, when I was looking at that image of that father being tender with a child and how that's such a rare image for us to see . . . So for me, I have aesthetic appreciation for things, but that picture for me is evidence. It's like, "Don't try to tell me that Native dads aren't good parents. I have evidence here of this photograph of the tenderness of this moment." There's thousands of these.

I would say that my need, my desire, my passion for humanity, for our communities is that I love that evidence, and I don't care who took that photograph because I'm going to mobilize that and use it. That's a tool. Again, it's a tool for me.

In terms of aesthetics, I think it does matter, 100%. I think it does matter. So if you're a commercial artist, your vision is going to be very different, I think, than someone who's deeply immersed. And the Horace Poolaw photograph project taught me so much with

this because when you look at his photographs, so this is a book, it's P-O-O-L-A-W, the photographs are being exhibited under *For a Love of His People*. And I think, Rick, you can tell me, or someone, I think it's traveling still. Because I spent fifteen years with those photographs, I can see his eye. I can see his heart. I can see everything. I mean, it's his vision and it's a unique vision. It's not like any of the other photographs. So yeah, I think aesthetically, it does matter.

Castillo: If it's not taken by a Native person then is it still Native art?

I don't agree that Curtis is Native art. I don't know if that's a terrible thing to say in public on Zoom and everything. But I think that it's about how people are being looked at, how they're engaging with the person who's taking the photo with them and kind of also what the purpose is. Even though I can't even say there was one purpose to these photos from UAI. But I think that my gut reaction is no, but I think that there's probably some nuances in there where if the person taking the photo has a different type of engagement with the people that they're taking the photo of, then maybe.

Maybe: I would just say it's not. I think Native photographers might look at their subjects a little differently than non-Native photographers, but what are we really talking about? I think as Native peoples, we're fiercely protective of our culture. We don't feel a sense of ownership inasmuch as it's just stuff that's been given to us for specific reasons, whether it's ceremonial, whether it's narrative art expressions. These are things that we've seen exploited, that we've seen abused, that we've seen commodified and commercialized.

But is the theme Native? Absolutely. Are they able to capture certain elements that people respond to? For sure. I've seen fathers taking care of their kids every weekend for forty years at every pow wow dance you ever go to. That's not novel to me. That's just who we are. We take care of our children. We take care of each other. Is it novel to somebody else? Probably. But we're talking about a cultural context that we can absolutely be fiercely protective of and still share, I think, with the world. So . . . I don't think that was an answer, but I did say at the beginning, no, it's probably not Native art, but is it a Native topic? Yes. So maybe that's the answer.

Holland: Well, and I think that the importance of the images isn't who took them. It's what's portrayed in them and that sort of purpose of how they're being used is a really integral part of it. So I don't know how these were displayed, if they were displayed as photographer unknown, but that sort of open-endedness of it, I think is one of the least interesting things about it. It's what's in those images, what those images mean to people that's the really fascinating and important part of them as a part of our visual culture and our Native art conversations.

Maybe: I'm absolutely grateful for projects like that because it is part of our culture. It is part of our historical narratives. It tells a story about how we have fought against assimilation policies and relocation efforts and how we are resilient and how we survived and how we all have families that were relocated. It actually shocked me to know that like 65% of the Native population in the United States lives outside of tribal trust lands, outside of reservation lands. That actually made me feel a little better because I often feel disconnected because I don't live on my reservation, but we're making that fight.

Audience Member: I have a question about we who are not Native collecting Native American Indian art. It starts with this. We at the Autry sponsor a marketplace. It's maybe 120 Native American Indian artists come, and we try to create a marketplace where lots of people come and buy that art and that's contemporary art, the Santa Fe markets and so on. But that was also going on, I would observe, in similar context but also somewhat different context. Back in the 1890s, let's say, if you were in Juneau, Alaska, and you saw Tlingit women selling baskets

they had made to the tourists who came through on steamships, or in the Southwest, when the railroad came through—really from when the railroads first arrived and for decades after that—there would be women bringing pottery that they had made or other art.

Here's the question I'm asking. It's the temporal question. How do you view a collector collecting contemporary Indian art made in the 2020s versus a collector collecting art that was made to be sold into broader culture in the 1930s or 1890s? Is there a time at which the art made and sold into the market as contemporary art somehow becomes less appropriate to collect fifty years later? Should your art be collected fifty or a hundred years later through secondary markets?

Maybe:

That's a great question. So probably my first response is do we really need to compare the two? Because in the 1890s, it was contemporary art, right? It was a traditional medium. We look at it as a traditional medium. We can look at things like Native jewelry. When did we really start doing silver work and absorb and label it as traditional? When did we really start embracing mediums like oil paints and acrylics versus natural earth dyes? I mean, that's where it gets complicated, right?

In the cultural context of the time, you're absolutely right. Tourism drove huge amounts of interest in Native cultures. There was an accessibility shift where they had prior been just simply reading about the Indian wars or Indian culture. Maybe they were exposed to some Eastern seaboard tribes at some point. There's a fascination with things that are different, and it's no different today. But when is it appropriate for things that are like sacred? That's hard to say. We can look at the way certain museums or certain collectors have acquired sacred objects and to try and determine, was it ethical? Was it moral? Was it okay in the cultural context of its time?

If you have a collection built off the bodies of massacred tribes and individuals, that's probably never okay. But if you have a collection where you've approached an artist and they've created a piece and it's not within the constraints of their tribal spiritualism, probably still okay.

Now let's say that for some weird reason, they decide to define something as sacred down the road and they decide that, "Hey, we need that back." Or it is of such cultural importance that maybe it's not sacred, but it's a part of our tribal community history. Should we be the caretakers of it? Absolutely. There is no separation between often very utilitarian objects and some of our cultural traditions and spirituality. Our relationship with . . . Let's take an elk, for example. Let's say we see a carved elk spoon, horn spoon. There are elk medicine societies. I still use some of those medicines. I have a bull elk ivory necklace that I feel . . . Anyway, but is it appropriate to sell? I don't know.

Maybe down the road that does happen, but at some point I think we can move beyond this definition of is it appropriate or not and just say, I have a friend and my friend has decided that this is how they feel. Am I a good enough friend that I will take that into consideration, regard their feelings and act appropriately? Or will I ignore it because I aesthetically enjoy this too much? Or I need to own these pieces because it makes me feel somehow . . . Again, there's no real easy answer. But I would say let's let the tribes decide. We can launch into some other stuff, but I don't know how to answer it any other way.

Holland:

I think that's a great answer though, because I was thinking about how these works were acquired. There's a difference between selling something that you've made specifically to sell to tourists and selling something because your entire culture is being systematically destroyed and you need to make money somehow, and this is the one way you're able to do it because people are coming in and telling you that they will give you money for the things that are precious to you and you need to feed your children. So those sort of backgrounds of how the works are acquired are very important in considering that, and the Indian market



today is relatively considered a safe space to purchase Native art because there is that idea that that is why it exists, to avoid those other types of situations. Also, it's people's jobs. It's their livelihoods. They are working artists; this is a venue where they are able to sell their art to people.

But I love that idea that at some point somebody could come and say, "You know what? Dallin has been gone for a hundred years. We have decided everything he ever made was sacred. Give it back."

Maybe: Yeah.

Holland: And my hope would be that there would be an openness to that, that there hasn't always been an openness to.

Maybe: I do have one experience to share because it seems kind of applicable. I went to a pretty well-known art gallery that deals in historical Native objects. I came around the corner, and there was this experience that I had. I homed in on this wand, and it was a simple, short eight-inch wand. It had a carved head at the top, but I knew it was powerful. I looked, I was like kind of taken aback. I'm not from the culture. We're a related Plains culture, but I'm not from that tribe. But I was talking to my friend who was the manager of the gallery. I was like, "Hey, where'd you guys get that?" And he wouldn't tell me at first. He's like, "Well, it came out of a collection and we're selling it on consignment for \$100,000, \$110,000." Simple.

I was suitably horrified. I was like, "Oh, my god." Because eventually he did tell me that it was a tribal member who had sold it. I was like, "Oh, my god, this seems like it would be an object of such incredible medicine and importance that it needs to stay within the confines and the protection of the tribe."

But then I had a little bit of an epiphany. I was like, "Well, conversely, why am I so arrogant to profess to know or tell them what is still sacred, what is not sacred?" I don't know the story behind that object. I don't want to even talk to him about it because I don't want to know the story. But what I do know is that maybe that object, once it's used and done, is no longer a sacred object. I don't know. That's not the case for every tribe, but maybe it is for his. Maybe he had gotten permission from their medicine societies to sell that piece. Maybe he was in dire straits and he needed to sell that piece and he had to trust that Creator would bring that piece back to his people at some point. I don't know.

But what I do know is that I shouldn't judge whatever reason it was that took that piece to that place and wherever it ended up. Because what I have seen is incredible pieces that have gone out into the world through a variety of different methods, some good, some not so good, make their way back to you. So I have my own repatriation project going on. We have these false faces that we use in our Long House ceremonies, and they're not supposed to be sold. But there was a tourist initiative in the 1920s and '30s, where they paid Seneca, Mohawk artists to create masks, regalia outfits, you see a lot of those incredible beaded pin cushions and whimsies.

But those false faces, they've made their way into museums. I've been able to consult and go in and talk to these masks, and my friends, they take care of these masks. But when I see them on the market, I buy them. So by definition, I'm engaging in the commodification of a sacred object, but am I ever going to sell them again? No. I have them in my house. I take care of them, feed them. At some point, they'll go back to the Long House. I try to educate those dealers as to what they are and how important they are. About 50% of the time they say, "Yeah, I don't think I'll deal in those anymore." So it's a small step, but it's an important step forward. I just want to get them off the market. One mask, one spirit at a time.

Horse Capture: Thank you everybody for the great sessions today, for the great presentations, for the great panel and discussion. I really appreciate everybody coming here.

# Reflections on California Native Art

Amanda K. Wixon (Chickasaw Nation), Autry Museum of the American West

Mark Johnson, San Francisco State University

Clint McKay (Dry Creek Pomo, Wappo and Wintun)

Leah Mata Fragua (Northern Chumash Tribe)

Weshoyot Alvitre (Tongva)

## Changing Perspectives: California Native Art at the Autry

Amanda K. Wixon (Chickasaw Nation)

Autry Museum of the American West

When Joe Horse Capture, who among many titles is also my boss, asked me to present at this seminar, I admit I was and am still a bit intimidated. I *am* a Native historian, and I *do* work with our Native collections, but I do not generally give presentations on Native art in front of the very same people that wrote the books on it. I do not, as a rule, provide any sort of deep dive on Pomo basketry in front of the likes of Clint McKay. Nor have I ever lectured on the finer points of museology in front the founder of the National Museum of the American Indian or any other directors of our significant cultural institutions.

But as we learned from Rick West yesterday, we do not ignore directives from a Horse Capture. So, here I am. Chokma! My name is Amanda Wixon and I am the Associate Curator of Native History and Culture. Today I am going to speak a bit about different ways to approach the Autry collections, for Native and non-Native viewers. Although we can never really see things entirely from some else's perspective, we can consider these different perspectives when accessing the works in the collection to gain a better understanding and appreciation for the exceptionally rich artistic traditions found within.

### Telles Basket

Let's go back a bit first and look at the beginning of the Southwest—now Autry—collection. It is no secret that Charles Lummis, founder of the Southwest Museum, was an avid collector of Native cultural items himself. He was well associated with many other wealthy, non-Native collectors who shared his affinity for Native culture, and especially art. By the early 1900s, interest and demand for Native art was growing. The nineteenth century saw the Trail of Tears and other large removals and displacements of Native people, the murderous gold rush, the Indian Wars, the Long Walk, Wounded Knee, and other tragic events that caused huge losses of life in Native communities, and the general public believed the Indians would soon be gone. Underscored by this notion of the “vanishing Indian,” wealthy collectors sought to obtain what they believed would soon be rare commodities.

During this period, times for Native people were hard. Economic prospects were limited, and Native people were heavily discriminated against, despite federal programs such as off-reservation boarding schools, which aimed to “civilize” and assimilate Native people into a predominantly white Christian society. Within these schools, many Native cultural practices were openly attacked, and while some administrators encouraged students to make so-called “Indian art,” it was taught in a nonculturally correct way. Native California students did not learn to harvest or process materials, nor did they learn the patience and technical skill required to weave. Often the art they did produce was sold for the benefit of the school, and the money earned did not improve Native lives or increase opportunities for Native people. Outside of these federally run institutions, however, some California Native basketweavers were able to capitalize on their artistic skills. Using Indigenous knowledge passed down through countless generations, they maintained their cultural practices while supporting their families through the sale of their work to collectors. Today, their pieces are important examples of the resiliency of Native peoples in California and demonstrate the strength and determination to survive in the face of adversity.

Many of these early collections have been passed to the Autry and are now a large part of an exceptional Native collection, which I am honored to work with. Although some of these early collecting practices are now heavily criticized for undervaluing and exploiting Native artistic labor, there is no denying that within these first Southwest collections lie arguably some of the finest art ever to be produced in this region of the world.

This is an example of one such piece. This beautiful basket is by famed weaver Lucy Telles (Yosemite Miwok-Mono Lake Paiute) who was from Yosemite Valley, California. This piece, made circa 1925, is made of sedge root



Basket made by Lucy Telles (Yosemite Miwok-Mono Lake Paiute), circa 1925. Donated by Mrs. Camilla Chandler Frost. Autry Museum of the American West; 2011.22.3

coiled on a three-rod foundation, with a design in bracken fern root and redbud, and is about 11 ½ inches in diameter. As I mentioned earlier, as the popularity of Indian art increased nationally, California Native artists were at the forefront, and their art attracted collectors far and wide.

Historically, the Native collection at the Autry has been approached through the lens of the collector. But since then, private collections have become public. Museum practice has changed to accommodate different audiences, and many institutions have turned outward, inviting research and outside interpretation of their Native collections. Using multidisciplinary approaches, students and scholars—an increasing number of them Native—now engage more directly with Native works in museum collections, providing new contexts and perspectives.



Glass and metal beaded collar, Paiute, before 1935. The Caroline Boeing Poole Collection, Autry Museum of the American West; 648.G.136

### Olla, Beaded Collar

As I noted, a large part of our collection is from Native California. And these lands have been blessed by generations of families in hundreds of communities that have taken care of this land since time immemorial. During this time, Native people nurtured their relationship with the land and gained encyclopedic knowledge of their environments, creating a system for using their resources that ensured the survival of future generations. Using what was provided by the land, many Native communities developed a rich basket tradition with materials that were gathered in a culturally correct way that maintained the relationship with the land, and using various motifs, beautifully depicted the world through Native eyes.



Olla, Cahuilla, 800 BCE to contact. Autry Museum of the American West; 491.P.2485

Although California baskets dominate the Native collection from these regions, I would be remiss if I did not mention other works in the collection that represent certain Native communities in California. Ceramics are another part of the artistic tradition and include early ollas with geometric designs. Beaded collars, as well as a wide array of hats, were worn by Native people in many communities. I don't have a slide example of these, but many of the historical Native hats are quite striking, with a very contemporary design aesthetic. I encourage everyone to check out the basket hats as examples of sartorial excellence.



### Ohlone Basket

As a historian, context is important. Understanding the history of Native California in the post-contact era is crucial to considering California Native art and ways to approach the Autry collection. This basket, currently on display in the Autry's permanent *Human Nature* exhibition, represents some of this painful history.

Before Spanish invasions, Native people lived as they had for countless generations, within vibrant, healthy communities. They interacted with their environments in countless ways and carefully managed their resources, both environmental and spiritual. They traveled extensively, were part of sophisticated trade networks, spoke multiple languages, and enjoyed rich cultural lives. They intermarried and raised their children to respect the ways of the Ancestors and to contribute positively to their communities.



Basket, Ohlone, early to mid-1800s. Autry Museum of the American West; 2011.41.1

But after the arrival of the Spanish in 1769, life for Indigenous people changed drastically. The Spanish, seeking to strengthen their position in New Spain, continued an earlier mission-building project that extended upward from Baja California with the notion of converting Native people who had lived on those lands for thousands of years into loyal Catholic Spanish citizens. Life in the missions and under the religious zeal of the Spanish padres was anything but idyllic. Disease was rampant, and Native people and their labor were exploited in terrible ways. Corporal punishment—and in some cases, torture—was employed to coerce Natives into the “correct” way of living, according to Spanish notions of cultural superiority and their disdain—if not hatred—for Indigenous cosmologies and belief systems.

For seventy years, Native communities endured this harsh treatment, and in some cases managed to resist both actively and passively. By 1830, due to changing Spanish fortunes and their declining global position, the mission system collapsed and was secularized. For better or worse, Native communities who has been under the control of the padres were left to fend for themselves. After the Mexican-American war and American conquest of Mexico in 1846, Native lands were transferred to the U.S. government.

When gold was discovered in 1849, Native people and communities came under even more serious threat. Now actively hunted under a state-sponsored program of genocidal actions, Native populations declined dramatically. Native lives became criminalized, and many Indigenous people endured a form of legalized slavery that wreaked even more havoc on an already fragile population. Pushed off their lands, and discriminated against at almost every turn, Native communities still managed to survive. It was within this context that many of the works within our historical collection were made.

The Ohlone people of the San Francisco Bay area were one of the hardest hit communities. They suffered terribly under the mission system. Devastated by disease and violence, their population dwindled, and few people were left to pass on their traditions. By the turn of the twentieth century, no Ohlone weavers had survived, making this work a rare example of Ohlone visual art. But we know that Native culture cannot ever be diminished entirely, and by studying this basket and a few others existing in other collections, Ohlone weaver Linda Yamane revived the tradition and reconnected her community to this practice. As a conduit, this basket guided and continues to guide Ohlone hands, renewing an artistic tradition that had been tragically lost.



*Milky Way*, Mission Indian basket made by Juana Apapas (Soboba Reservation), late 1800s. The George Wharton James Collection, Autry Museum of the American West; 421.G.1541

### ***Milky Way* Basket**

For many Native people in California, some of the Native art in the collection has a deeply personal significance. These works are often made by family members. Sometimes they record a memory of the Ancestors or perhaps their journey to somewhere else. For the Cahuilla people, the Milky Way was where their Ancestors lived, a place for people who had passed.

This basket was created by Cahuilla basketweaver Juana Apapas. It is currently on display in our *Human Nature* exhibition. To better understand this basket, Autry staff consulted with Lorene Sisquoc, also a well-known basketweaver and a descendent of the Mountain Cahuilla, who had a close relationship with the family of Juana Apapas. In her interview, she shared that Juana had described how she would lie at night

and look at the sky and the Milky Way, knowing her Ancestors were up there. And that she wished that she could join them because things were so bad here for her people. She said that if she was able to join her Ancestors, she would look down on people that harmed her people and would wish bad on them. Sisquoc was surprised to hear that because she had always been told that she had to weave good thoughts. But she knows that life was very hard for Juana and her family, and that when she looks at the *Milky Way* basket, she can feel Juana’s feelings in the basket.

During the hard times that Native communities endured, these works were made and survived and have become emotional resources for many Native people. As such, the Autry is especially honored to work with communities associated with these meaningful items.



Feathered basket, Pomo, early 1900s. Acquisition made possible by June and Paul Ebensteiner in honor of their friend, Joanne D. Hale, founding Autry President and CEO, 1984-1999. Autry Museum of the American West; 98.109.1

### **Pomo Basket**

Now, I said I wouldn't go into a deep dive on a Pomo basket in the presence of Clint McKay, but I have included this basket for a good reason. California Native art is rich, complex, and deeply significant not only to the art of the West as a whole but also to a diverse range of people who view this art through their individual lenses—as experts, scholars, students, and community members who are often all of these things, and as family connecting with their own through art.

But sometimes we approach this art, like this piece, the only way we can. In awe. In delight. In tears. In wonder. And with the understanding that sometimes we aren't meant to know. As Joe mentioned yesterday, these works say different things to different people. What a source community is willing to share is entirely up to them, and we as a museum want to give as much voice to these communities as they want. As we move our collection practices and interpretation into the future, I look forward to more meaningful and collaborative work with the California Native communities that are represented in the Autry collection.

# Frank LaPena and the Story of California Indian Contemporary Art

Mark Johnson

San Francisco State University

In Frank LaPena's epic eight-panel signature work, *Diaspora: California Indians*, a repeated outline of a long-haired skull fills every image in the sequence. Each skull has an arrowhead-shaped nose; all are backlit by a prismatic, colored sky. Every one of the hand-printed lithographs also features text.

The first four panels recount the history of atrocities that decimated the Indigenous people of California, factors including the mission system, diseases, massacres, wars, and government policies that paid bounties for genocide.

The fifth panel acknowledges 20th-century achievements, including citizenship and civil rights.

The sixth and seventh contrast the cultural losses associated with federal termination policies and challenges to religious freedom with the gains of activism for self-determination, including the 1969 Occupation of Alcatraz Island in San Francisco Bay and the 1971 Toyon occupation of ancestral Wintu lands in which LaPena himself played a key role.

In the eighth and final panel, LaPena acknowledges his search for family and cultural identity by naming his own Towndolly family ancestors, as well several elders from whom the artist sought out traditional knowledge. The latter include Henry Azbill (Mechoopda Maidu/Hawaiian, 1899–1973), Wallace Burrows (Wintun, 1887–1988), Frank Day (Konkow Maidu, 1902–1976), and Mabel McKay (Pomo, 1907–1993).

Frank LaPena's interest in recognizing the elders responsible for passing Indian culture on to successive generations became a hallmark of his career. This essay recounts the story of his long path toward documenting the contributions of California Indian contemporary artists, which led to the development of the survey exhibition *When I Remember I See Red: American Indian Art and Activism in California*. In his own text for the exhibition's catalogue, LaPena wrote that he hoped we might see in the art that is featured and read in accompanying catalogue essays "the powerful quality of art that reflects both the traditions of our ancestors and the changes of these new and contemporary times."<sup>1</sup>

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Frank LaPena (Nomtipom Wintu, 1937–2019) was born in San Francisco but was sent to an Indian boarding school at the age of seven. When he arrived at Stewart Indian School in Nevada, he was sick and scared but found a lifelong friend in Julia Parker (Pomo, born 1928), later an acclaimed basket weaver, who was his teenage nurse at the infirmary. After a few years at the Stewart Indian School and then a few more years at the Chemawa Indian School in Oregon, LaPena was placed in foster care, found work on a ranch in the Klamath Mountains, and graduated from Yreka High School in 1956. He later graduated from college at Chico State and completed a teaching credential at San Francisco State, by which time he had already established a growing reputation as an artist.

In San Francisco, LaPena drew inspiration from the ambitious American Indian art exhibitions being organized by Patrick Swazo-Hinds (Tesuque Pueblo, 1924–1974) at Kaiser Aluminum headquarters and the Oakland Museum, and also from a new artist association that included Swazo-Hinds, R. C. Gorman (Navajo, 1931–2005), and Earl Livermore (Blackfoot, born 1932), which incorporated as American Indian Artists in 1966. In 1967, the American Indian Historical Society founded in 1964 by Rupert Costo (Cahuilla, 1906–1989) opened a museum program at its Chautauqua House headquarters on Masonic Avenue and hired Leatrice Mikkelsen (Diné/Wyandotte, 1937–2016) to be its first curator. Mikkelsen was born on Oregon's Klamath Agency Reservation and grew up between the Bay Area and Arizona, where she attended elementary school inside the Poston Japanese Internment Camp. She attributed her lifelong involvement with ink painting to early training in sumi-é at Poston. Mikkelsen aspired to become an artist while attending San Francisco's Lowell High School and was introduced to Clara Barney (Karuk, 1906–1952) at Barney's Mission District art studio near the end of Barney's life, around 1950.

The programs at the American Indian Historical Society included publishing, convening forums including the first convocation of American Indian scholars and artists at Princeton University,<sup>2</sup> and mounting exhibitions. These exhibitions featured work by artists like Gorman, Swazo-Hinds, and a younger generation then studying at the San Francisco Art Institute including Linda Lomahaftewa (Hopi/Choctaw, born 1947), who became Mikkelsen's close friend. Lomahaftewa recalled Gorman taking her aside at one American Indian Historical Society opening to encourage her to be more gregarious and outgoing to advance her career.<sup>3</sup>

LaPena first met Frank Day in 1967 at Day's solo exhibition at the American Indian Historical Society, and that introduction proved especially fortuitous as Day had grown up steeped in traditional culture in the first decades of the twentieth century. In conjunction with a 1973 exhibition of Day's work at the Pacific Western Traders gallery in Folsom (founded in 1971), a conversation led to the founding of the Maidu Dancers and Traditionalists, which brought dances back to the roundhouses in central California. Day was the group's mentor, and LaPena eventually became the dance leader. LaPena's student Harry Fonseca (Nisenan Maidu/Hawaiian/Portuguese, 1946–2006) danced with this group early in his own career.

In addition to the many changes impacting Indian Country, it is significant to remember that this period also saw transformational changes in other California communities, including the 1966 founding of the Black Panther Party in Oakland and the 1968 Third World Liberation Front strikes at San Francisco State University and University of California, Berkeley—as well as the founding of American Indian Studies programs at several California universities in 1969. College students like Richard Oakes (Mohawk, 1942–1972) played a key role in the Occupation of Alcatraz. Artist Earl Livermore, who had been the director of San Francisco's American Indian Center, was another leader of the Alcatraz Occupation. He proposed repurposing the site as the home for an American Indian “culture and educational facility.”<sup>4</sup> Many Native artists, including Brian Tripp (Karuk, born 1945) and arts professionals such as George Horse-Capture (A'aninin, 1937–2013), visited Alcatraz during the eighteen-month occupation, and in turn took its message of activism and sovereignty home to their respective Indigenous communities and professional lives.

I first met LaPena, Mikkelsen, and Tripp in the mid-1980s. I was then teaching painting at Humboldt State University, and that community was then in the midst of a rich Native American cultural renaissance. In 1971, LaPena had been hired as Native American studies faculty at Sacramento State University—a campus he subsequently transformed into a hub for exhibitions of contemporary Native American art. LaPena occasionally lectured at Humboldt in the 1980s while visiting his brother who lived locally, as well as artists including Brian Tripp.

Tripp was a central figure on the north coast because of his role in reviving the Karuk Brush Dance after a twenty-year lapse, for his fierce commitment to his culture and his work, and because he organized several exhibitions of regional contemporary artists both at his studio and community art spaces. Artistically, Tripp is recognized as the first artist to create abstract paintings based on the geometric design of basketry and ceremonial regalia, often with titles drawn from his own edgy poetry.<sup>5</sup>

Tripp first met multidisciplinary artist George Blake (Hupa/Yurok, born 1944) in a second-grade class in Klamath, the reservation town at the mouth of the river, and they remained lifelong close friends. Blake became a curator at the Hoopa Valley Tribal Museum and is acclaimed for his work carving exquisite redwood dugout canoes—a subtle form he learned working alongside Yurok elder Haynes Moore—and for creating finely embellished sinew-back bows, traditional forms in ceramics, and acerbic figurative sculpture in all media.

Other regional artists included visionary painter Karen Noble (Chimariko/Karuk, born 1955), whose paintings referenced creation stories and whose finely polished abalone and button necklaces are unparalleled. In the 1980s, that circle grew to include Charley Burns (Yurok, 1960–2018), an artist and dance leader trained by Yurok elder Dewey George; artist and linguist Julian Lang (Karuk, born 1951); artist, muralist, and book illustrator Lyn Risling (Hupa-Karuk-Yurok, born 1950); and mixed-media artist and regalia maker Franklin Tuttle (Yuki/Wailakki-Konkow Maidu, born 1957). All of these individuals were involved with ceremony, either creating regalia or as singers and dancers, as well as contemporary artists. Because of the absence of a robust art market in this rural community, the strong, regional Northwestern California Indian community itself became these artists' audience and support network. LaPena paid Tripp's studio rent for a period; Blake supported his family by creating jewelry for all manner of special occasions on the Hoopa Valley Indian Reservation where he lived.

Shortly after my own 1983 hire at Humboldt, Leatrice Mikkelsen phoned me out of the blue to ask if I might help track down information about the art of Clara Barney. It took decades before Julian Lang ultimately located examples of Barney's circa-1940 oil paintings in Yreka's Siskiyou County Historical Society. These depict landscapes and Indian life in a regionalist representational style; her unfinished, ambitiously large-scale, incomplete canvases gifted to Mikkelsen in 1950 with an invitation to complete them, remain unfinished.

Both Frank LaPena and Brian Tripp expressed interest in learning about the identity of Joe Waano-Gano (aka Joe Noonan, Cherokee, 1906–1982), who, shortly after the Alcatraz Occupation, had released a portfolio of lithographs reproducing his own earlier works that included imagery of the Klamath River Jump Dance. It also took decades to learn that Waano-Gano was an award-winning artist in Los Angeles beginning in the 1920s, had married Christine Ruben (Karuk, 1910–1989) in 1935, and that they sometimes traveled to the Klamath Mountains to visit family and participate in ceremony. Some of his portraits depict his wife's extended family. Now we can imagine that Barney and Waano-Gano must have known one another—Indian oil painters working along the remote upper



Klamath River during the 1930s. Even after generations of curiosity, the careers of painters like Barney and Waano-Gano who were active in the early twentieth century remain obscure and require further research and study.

Other critical artists who emerged in the 1970s include renowned muralist and printmaker Jean LaMarr (Northern Paiute/Achomawi, born 1945) who was inspired by the California arts activism of the early 1970s. She became an influential teacher at Bay Area colleges and universities, at Santa Fe's IAIA, and in workshops she presented at her home studio on the Susanville Rancheria.

George Longfish (Seneca/Tuscarora, born 1942) was hired at UC Davis in 1973, where he began a long curatorial appointment at the C. N. Gorman Museum and presented early exhibitions of figures including James Luna (Payómkawichum [Luiseño]/Ipi [Diegueño]/Mexican American, 1950–2018)—then a painter and later an internationally renowned performance artist—1975, and Leatrice Mikkelsen and Linda Lomahaftewa in 1973. Longfish often incorporated unusual materials and provocative ironic humor in his own mixed-media work.

Self-taught artist Dalbert Castro (Nisenan Maidu, 1934–2018) began painting in 1973, often on a small scale. He depicted animal stories and historical events including the deadly long march of the Maidu to the Round Valley Reservation.

A multicultural sensibility was also being kindled in California during this decade, and group exhibitions like *Other Sources: An American Essay* at the San Francisco Art Institute in 1976 featured the work of artists such as Day and Lomahaftewa. College art department faculty positions were also newly available for some Native artists during that time. These include LaPena's tenure at Sacramento State and Longfish's hire at UC Davis; Rick Glazer-Danay's (Caughnawaga Mohawk, born 1942) position at UC Riverside and then Cal State Long Beach; LaMarr's teaching at the College of Marin, San Francisco State, and the California College of Arts and Crafts; Sylvia Lark's (Seneca, 1947–1990) faculty positions at Sacramento State beginning in 1972 and then UC Berkeley in 1977; Lomahaftewa's early faculty positions at Sonoma State and then UC Berkeley before she relocated to the IAIA; Tripp's appointment at Humboldt; and later, Lewis deSoto's (Cahuilla, born 1954) tenured position at San Francisco State. More recently, James Luna taught at schools including UC Davis, UC Irvine, UC San Diego, and Stanford; Hulleah Tsinhnahjinnie (Seminole-Muscogee-Navajo, born 1954) eventually took over as director of the Gorman Museum at UC Davis; and Leah Mata Fragua (Northern Chumash) currently serves on the faculty of the IAIA.

The decade of the 1980s saw a spike in activity as new artists appeared on the scene and as exhibitions proliferated. Work by photographers including Dugan Aguilar (Northern Paiute/Maidu/Achomawi, 1947–2018), deSoto, and Tsinhnahjinnie documented different aspects of the Indian community. Aguilar traveled to many Native gatherings and sought out artists and veterans to shoot portraits; deSoto often created poetic compositions based on the magic of the landscape; and Tsinhnahjinnie focused on urban Indian issues.

Also in the 1980s, work by painters including Rick Bartow (Wiyot, Mad River Band, 1946–2016), L. Frank (Tongva/Ajachmen, born 1952), Judith Lowry (Maidu/Pit River, born 1948), and Mario Martinez (Yaqui, born 1973) appeared regularly in exhibitions in the Bay Area, Sacramento, and beyond, all of whom incorporated mythic narratives. In 1983, Janeen Antoine (Sicangu Lakota, born 1953) co-founded a Native art gallery in San Francisco, American Indian Contemporary Arts (AICA), which offered an important forum for the next sixteen years, regularly displaying the work of California-identified artists including Aguilar, Bartow, Blake, Burns, Castro, deSoto, L. Frank, Fonseca, LaMarr, Lang, LaPena, Lowry, Mikkelsen, Noble, Parker, Risling, Tripp, Tuttle, and others. AICA also organized important museum exhibitions, which circulated nationally or internationally in the 1990s.

The historiography of exhibitions presented at community venues like the American Indian Historical Society, the Gorman Museum at UC Davis and other college galleries, Pacific Western Traders, AICA—and later the Maidu Interpretative Center in Roseville and today the Native American Center for Art and Culture in Placerville—illuminate an aspect of the rich profile and contributions of these artists. They provide another perspective that adds to the important history of more high-profile exhibitions like the 1999 *Venice Biennial* curated by Nancy Mithlo at which LaPena's *Diaspora: California Indians* was premiered.

It was during this 1980s moment of expanding activity that Frank LaPena conceived his first museum curatorial project, *The Extension of Tradition: Contemporary California Native American Art in Cultural Perspective*, which opened at the Crocker Art Museum in 1985 and traveled to the Palm Springs Museum of Art. LaPena wanted to focus on contextualizing the work of artists from California tribes, including Blake, Noble, and Tripp, who were integrally involved with the revival of tradition and ceremony, and whose work reflected a relationship to California ceremonial imagery, creation stories, and a California Native worldview. Although he was supportive of artists like Longfish and Tsinhnahjinnie, who were so deeply connected to the California scene and whose work LaPena collected, and was participating in many pan-Indian exhibitions himself that reflect the histories of removal and relocation, LaPena wanted to especially highlight the work of artists involved with California traditional culture. He often complained that California

Native art and culture seemed invisible, even though it was the most populous state nationally for Indian people. He further wanted to establish California's role in sparking artistic developments in Santa Fe by recognizing that artists Fritz Scholder (Luiseños, 1937–2005), Bob Houzous (Chiricahua Apache, born 1943), and many others had studied there.

Roughly a decade later, in 1994, LaPena led a curatorial delegation that approached the Crocker Art Museum again, this time about presenting an exhibition documenting the rise of California's contemporary Native American art movement that would have a more art-historical orientation. Although the institution expressed interest at that time, staff changes soon derailed those plans. For the next decade and a half, LaPena and I met up to unsuccessfully shop the idea of a historical survey to multiple Bay Area and Central California museums, including the Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive (BAMPFA), the Oakland Museum, and Yerba Buena Center for the Arts (YBCA). LaPena would sometimes head out from Sacramento before dawn to avoid traffic, driving to early-morning appointments at these venues, only to be told discouraging news. One curator even said to his face that an exhibition of contemporary Native American art in California seemed too esoteric and risky as their audience likely assumed that California Indians were extinct.

During the 1990s, California Native American art was occasionally featured in high-profile local and distant exhibitions. Hulleah Tsinnahjinnie's 1993 Adeline Kent Award exhibition at the San Francisco Art Institute, *Nobody's Pet Indian*, addressed the politics of the 1990 Indian Arts and Crafts Act. Brian Tripp's daily newspaper drawings were featured in a 1992 multiethnic exhibition titled *Trade Routes* at NYC's New Museum. Shortly afterward, his sculptural assemblage referencing the surveying of California was included in the de Young's 1995 landscape survey, *Facing Eden*, which also featured an installation by Lewis deSoto. LaPena exhibited in several exhibitions of religious art, including at St. Louis University's Museum of Contemporary Religious Art (MOCRA).

Fortunately, twenty years after the initial conversation in 2014, Scott Shields, the chief curator at the Crocker, phoned to say that their new museum trustee, Loren Lipson, was a strong advocate for the project and it could finally be calendared. Lipson soon acquired and gifted works by many artists to support the initiative. Works by Bartow, Blake, LaMarr, and Cara Romero (Chemehuevi, born 1977) came to the Crocker, and works by Gerald Clarke (Cahuilla, born 1967), Risling, and deSoto went to the Autry Museum of the American West. Soon after, W. Richard "Rick" West, Jr. (Cheyenne/Arapaho, born 1943) signed the Autry on as a co-presenter.

During the long road from project conception to realization, many of the artists whose work LaPena planned to feature in *When I Remember I See Red* had died. What was first envisioned as a documentation of work from a twenty-five-year period became a survey of the work of fifty artists active over fifty years. Although the exhibition included the work of some artists who achieved prominence in the 1990s and twenty-first centuries such as Clarke, Spencer Keeton Cunningham (Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation, born 1983), and Romero, the focus was primarily on those artists who were LaPena's contemporaries and documenting the decades in which he was most active, the period he knew perhaps better than anyone.

LaPena insisted that the catalogue be structured to begin with profiling the fifty artists and their work, rather than with contextual essays. Essays followed, authored by writers including AICA co-founder Janeen Antoine, Crocker curator Kristine Perea Gilmore, artist Julian Lang, publisher and California Native advocate Malcolm Margolin, scholar Nick Rosenthal, LaPena, and myself, with forewords by former governor Jerry Brown and Rick West.

Sadly, only a few months before the exhibition's opening, Frank LaPena died. But just as the final panel of his *Diaspora: California Indians* acknowledged by name those to whom he felt indebted for their role in safeguarding Indian culture for his own generation, LaPena ultimately saw through a project that documented the contributions of contemporary California Indian artists from his own lifetime. His goal of personally recognizing artists who were often his close friends, whose works "reflect both the traditions of our ancestors and the changes of these new and contemporary times," was achieved. That exhibition and catalogue represent a milestone, adding to LaPena's earlier writings about his own work<sup>6</sup> as well as his essay published in the 1997 Frank Day exhibition catalogue,<sup>7</sup> an article in the California Historical Society's quarterly magazine,<sup>8</sup> and a host of articles in *News from Native California* magazine and other publications.

However, although some of these artists' works are now in institutional collections and documented in catalogues (sometimes accompanying important recent solo retrospectives, such as those of Rick Bartow at the Jordan Schnitzer Museum of Art, Gerald Clarke at the Palm Springs Art Museum, and Jean LaMarr at the Nevada Museum of Art), it is important to remember that there is no centralized repository for the archives of Native American artists in California. A few months before the exhibition opened at the Crocker, Malcolm Margolin and the California Institute for Community Art and Nature convened a group of statewide arts leaders to discuss the fact that many of these artists' archives were at risk. Sonia Tamez led a California Native archives research initiative, from which we learned that many California Native communities prefer to keep their archives close to home, rather than

see them centralized far away. Tamez shared some of the study's findings in articles for *News from Native California* magazine.<sup>9</sup> As part of the same initiative, tribal archivists including Cherity Bacon from the San Manuel Band of Mission Indians Cultural Resources Archive,<sup>10</sup> Lisa Woodward from the Pechanga Band of Luiseño Indians Cultural Resources Department,<sup>11</sup> and Karuk archivist and librarian Susan Gehr<sup>12</sup> all contributed insightful essays, which were published in ensuing issues of *News from Native California*, and in some cases, made very specific recommendations about working with artists. Margolin's team secured a modest grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities that led to placing several Native artist archives at institutions. The Oakland Museum of California agreed to accept and digitize the archives of Dugan Aguilar, which includes over 2,000 photographs; Humboldt State University agreed to take the archives of artists George Blake and Brian Tripp, and to publish some of Tripp's poetry as a freely downloadable ebook; and Stanford University agreed to accept the archives of the American Indian Contemporary Arts Gallery. Independently, the Autry acquired the estate of Harry Fonseca, a collection of more than 600 paintings and drawings.

In spite of the placement of these important collections and the acquisitions by mainstream museums of artworks by a handful of these artists, the stories of the rise of a California contemporary art movement are far from complete. The goals of finding archival homes for documentation of the lifework of Native California artists; inventorying and stabilizing the materials and developing appropriate guidance for their security, privacy, and access; and building a collaborative institutional network of tribal museums, universities, and mainstream museums to integrate and share these resources remains only a dream. We feel lucky to have next-generation Native archivists to help conceptualize such a project, and to have learned from a statewide team of advisors who continue to consult in this effort. It has been a great honor to share some of these stories and ideas in this forum. But I want to conclude by suggesting that there is more work to be done and by sharing my hope that we can extend Frank LaPena's vision together.

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<sup>1</sup> Frank LaPena, "The Continuity of Change," in *When I Remember I See Red*, edited by Frank LaPena, Mark Dean Johnson, and Kristina Gilmore (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2019), p. 19.

<sup>2</sup> LaPena participated in the 1970 four-day conference and exhibition at Princeton; related papers were edited by Rupert Costo and published as *Indian Voices: The First Convocation of American Indian Scholars*. See <https://eric.ed.gov/?q=costo&id=ED048957>. The Rupert Costo papers at UC Riverside were once partially digitized and many documents were available online, but over time the links became broken and only a summary is now viewable: <https://oac.cdlib.org/findaid/ark:/13030/tf0489n6kc/>.

<sup>3</sup> Linda Lomahaftewa, personal communication, Santa Fe, August 18, 2016.

<sup>4</sup> Excerpt from an interview with Earl Livermore about the Indians of All Tribes (IOAT) occupation of Alcatraz, 1970. Digital Public Library of America, accessed April 24, 2022: <https://dp.la/primary-source-sets/the-american-indian-movement-1968-1978/sources/1329>.

<sup>5</sup> Tripp attributes his interest in the use of poetic titles to strengthen abstract designs to his discovery of Louisa Keyser's titling of a funerary basket: *All My Friends Are Dead or Dying*.

<sup>6</sup> Frank LaPena, *Dream Songs and Ceremony* (Berkeley: Heyday Books, 2004).

<sup>7</sup> Rebecca Dobkins, Frank LaPena, and Carey Caldwell, *Memory and Imagination: The Legacy of Maidu Indian Artist Frank Day* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1997).

<sup>8</sup> Frank LaPena, "Contemporary Northern California Native American Art," *California History* 71, no. 3 (1992): 386–40.

<sup>9</sup> Sonia Tamez's report on her survey about California Native archives appeared in the Fall 2020 issue of *News from Native California*, and is reproduced here: <https://californiaican.org/saving-our-stories-fall2020/>.

<sup>10</sup> Cherity Bacon, "The Stone Soup Approach to Building an Archive," California Institute for Community, Art & Nature, <https://californiaican.org/california-indian/savingourstoriessurvey/cherity-bacon-building-a-tribal-archive/>.

<sup>11</sup> Lisa Woodward, "Pechanga Cultural Resources Department Tribal Archives," California Institute for Community, Art & Nature, <https://californiaican.org/california-indian/savingourstoriessurvey/lisa-woodward-pechanga-archives/>.

<sup>12</sup> Mark Johnson and Susan Gehr, "Safeguarding Visual Artist Stories," California Institute for Community, Art & Nature, <https://californiaican.org/california-indian/savingourstoriessurvey/gehr-and-johnson-safeguarding-visual-artist-stories/>.

## Art Is Living Story

Weshoyot Alvitre (Tongva)

What is Californian Native Art?

Is it a tattoo placed on the chin?

Is it a basket finally finished with the soft scents of the plants and hands that made it?

Is it a painting? Or a photo? Or a story?

Is its value greater than or less than based on the government's acknowledgment of the artist?

Is it federally recognized?

Is it state recognized?

Is it recognized as art at all?

Is it deemed watered down if my mother was not Indian?

What *is* California Native art?

Is it old and pecked of stone?

Is it part of ceremony?

Or only authentic when our lost words are spoken over it?

Is it permanent? Is it tangible? Is it seasonal? Or temporary or ephemeral?

What *is* California Native art? What is California? And what is a Native?

How do we gauge the power of a federal government over what comes out of us innately?

Is there a power in the state government to determine what we do is of importance or not?

Who determines the power of a state of being?

Who determines the power in a state of mind?

Is California Native art federally recognized?

Or is it a sovereign entity?

Does mixed blood cut on a basket awl leave a trace of its maker?

Is a strand of her silver hair woven in the coils of blood red juncus?

Does a piece of DNA caught in the deergrass bundles determine a basket's authenticity?

Where in that DNA strand are those books of story stored, in that spiral bookcase of our genetic makeup?

What is the call number for our Ancestors' stories?

Or are they kept permanently in the reference library only?

Are our stories something we can just check out with no late fees?

I'm not sure there's a tribal library card for that.

Does our very existence today make a statement? In whole or in part?

Is that art? Is our very act of existing, art?

Do we belong in museums? As viewers . . . As people . . . As Indians . . . As artists?

I am Weshoyot Alvitre.

I am a Tongva and Scottish comic book artist and illustrator.

I sat with these words for weeks, because I often have felt torn and placed in this strange limbo between the past and the present, the Indian and the not.

My parents were both artists, *are* both artists. They approach life giving their fullest, their most authentic selves and facets of that. And I have seen the beauty of sharing that transparency with the world, as well as the draining effects, the pains, and the hurt in sharing your own authentic self with the world because it is the only way we, as artists, know how to live.

I feel small being asked to a place such as this. A place such as the Autry, in an overwhelming cityscape such as this town, a stranger on my own homelands. I feel inconsequential amongst peers I admire, doing work that is so important, with families spanning generations through the history of California as we know it, to beyond; to lands with names only their own people can roll off their tongues with ease and familiarity, whose stories follow each drop of their language pouring from their mouths like honey.

I have never fit into a box neatly, even here, at a place like the Autry: on tribals lands masked in asphalt and cement, advertising, and distractions. I feel outside of myself and outside of this museum, looking in and watching myself perform, like a theatre actor. I am art. I am an artist. But what exactly am I? And how exactly do I fit into this thing defined as California Native art and why?

A few years ago, I received a book called *Mabel McKay: Weaving the Dream* as part of a lot of books I purchased online. It sat with me for a long while before I finally sat down and read it. At the time I read it I was working with a writer, Chag Lowry, about a story involving basketweavers and narrated by baskets themselves. When my art and my life align, I dive in, submerge myself entirely, because it's the only way I know how to navigate both honestly in those waters. I was struggling to write a partial script for this story, reflecting on my relationship with baskets, basketweavers, and the art of basket-weaving, which is shared up and down the western coast of this continent, within the borders of what is now known as California. I was struggling to relate to an art form I had always felt drawn to, although due to the lack of access to traditional basketweaving materials, it always felt outside my grasp and potential, like waking up too early from a dream not yet finished, and being unable to get back to sleep to complete it.

Once I finished reading the book on Mabel, I took it over to my dad's, as I often share good reads with him. He fostered my love of books at a young age, along with my mother who worked as a librarian. I asked if he had read it and offered to lend him my copy. And wouldn't you know it, the sheer act of sharing such a beautiful little book ended up with my being told a story that I had never recalled hearing in the thirty-seven years of my life. Apparently, when I was a baby and my dad running the Satwiwa Cultural center in Newbury Park, Mabel McKay had come down to lead a basket workshop in the old stall out back and stayed with us overnight. She had brought some family, and there was some issue with a new Walkman my older sister had; details are sparse. But the morning after, she gifted my parents with a star blanket, which was then stored, along with this story, and carried along with them through many moves and many more kids along the way.

I went home that day, after my dad telling me this story for the first time, and my mother recounting parts of it as well, baffled by the long lack of knowing this story and overwhelmed by sheer amazement that the woman whose life story I had just devoured in a few days' worth of reading had been in our home when I was a child. I thought of happenstance, I thought of connectiveness and story. I wondered if she had made the quilt, or how she knew (or perhaps didn't know) the meaning of my name in a gift that just happened to be in my most favorite shades of golden yellow and burnt orange, sewn diamond next to diamond, in a quilt that held this all, tucked away in a closet for decades. Thinking about it again, she probably knew.

That is what art is. That feeling. That response. That connection. Art is that beautiful thing existing in the world, and how the story behind it makes it that much more beautiful. But what is art without story? What is California Native art without story? Are they one and the same? Story through repetition becomes mantra. Story by holding that memory and sharing it with the world becomes art.

Before writing this, I spent a few weeks quizzing my parents about the quilt and its whereabouts. Turns out my mother had given it to me (or thought she had) after my daughter was born, and ironically, I had found its exact twin at a flea market and stored the two together. My name means "two stars." My mother hadn't told me the quilt's story when she gifted it to me, perhaps because she didn't quite know the details. Or perhaps it was because the truth was that the quilt she gave me reminded her of the one Mabel had given her when I was a baby. Perhaps her memory needed that prodding, the act of me asking. She very well may have never known who Mabel McKay was, as I didn't until I read the book. Perhaps the twist here is that this wasn't the star quilt we were looking for.

Art is a strange thing that can be carried with us across a lifespan and mold and change and become more or less meaningful depending on who owns it, how it's cared for, and who knows its secrets. The secrets and the

story create the value. This gift from Pomo basketweaver Mabel McKay, who just so happens to be related to the man we are honoring this weekend, as well as related to my fellow presenter today, tells me that the art is living still, regardless of which star quilt was *the* star quilt.

But that's not the end of the story, because my mind was feeling unsettled by letting the story continue full of holes and popped stitches, in need of mending. So, I inquired further. It took about two weeks. I carried the two quilts back and forth with me to my parents' home during our weekly visits. I tried to engage each time to see if there were more parts to this story—dates, for example, or something else. Memories are fleeting like that, like the way the sun glimmers on walls in late afternoon: glimmers of feelings here now, then gone, but leaving warmth behind them. I wanted to learn more, and so I continued to sit and to listen. This is another factor of our art: being able to be silent and listen without interrupting. Sometimes the stories take time to emerge. Sometimes the art takes longer to birth itself into this world so we may finally name it. The space in which we are listening is ceremony, be that time with a skilled teacher or time working inward with our Ancestors from the past. No one can quite say how long that ceremony takes. But we know when it is finished. Oftentimes that ceremony lingers in the hearts and minds of our artists for far longer than it took to make the art.

It turns out there was a third star quilt to the story. It was the last one we found after spending hours sorting through family albums from my childhood this week. This third one ended up with my second-oldest brother. It stayed with him through a really scary bout with croup and pneumonia; it was medicine. We have it in a blurry photo, bundled on the couch, with its tie downs hanging like tassels of willow, its lumped batting showing the three children's lives it lived through. Telling stories of the greenest fresh grass covered in morning dew from Satwiwa mornings, from watching clouds in warm sun and soft breezes whispering, to an abrupt move in a U-Haul truck down the 101 grade to the sea. It told of being laid out on sand and listening to the waves and screaming gulls as children threw stale breadcrumbs. It told of the smell of the ocean waters, tying it to our stories about grandpa abalone diving and Newport beach, the steatite bowl my dad returned to the sea: sharing the world it came from up north to our lands here in Southern California. An exchange of stories. A conversation. Over time, it became heavy with story. So heavy that one day the seams popped open and new kittens played hide-and-seek within its belly. So heavy that it would catch tiny toes on loose diamond patches, the way old, wrinkled fingers grasp new babies' toes in play.

The star blanket of my story was not the one my mom gave me after my daughter was born, after all. The star quilt was also not the twin I found at a flea market. The star quilt, the art, the story, the intangible thing that makes this story so valuable is now no more. It eventually was irreparable and lost to the sands of time and the years of children. It is captured as a memory in a photo, maybe two? But it cannot be here with us today, as much as I wanted it to be.

The one hanging behind me is one I made in college. I think these faint childhood memories nudged me to make it. I think the colors I chose were subliminally trying to connect back to the quilt I grew up with from my childhood; a way of remanifesting the memory into being. It is a novice attempt at Mabel's quilt, an attempt to restore the memory and all that it held: telling a story without my yet knowing that story. I would finally hear it more than fifteen years later.

I reflect this week on this disappointment, the sadness of not having the quilt to share. I wondered how I was going to rearrange this talk for you, to try to have the feelings make sense in my comparisons to what California Indian art truly is. There was no happy ending here that would make you well up with joy and happy emotions, to end this on a high note, with applause, like in a movie. And it made me think, too: art is not always beautiful. It is sometimes sadness. Art is sometimes frustration. Anger. And especially California Native art, because so much of it is a response to loss, to trauma, to intergenerational flaws and pains, that perhaps this story is still quite on point, as much as each star point was on that quilt. Part of California Native art is navigating these painful spaces and working through them. Sometimes that's in reaction, sometimes it's in care, sometimes it's in mending scraps that have come loose over the years, just like the original star quilt eventually did.

One consistent thing within California Native art is the nature of paying attention to what came before you: whether it be story or process or a combination of things. While previous artists from California have paved the way for us to be here today and to have our creative freedoms, we must not forget the work they put out into the world to soften it, to make it more gentle for us to create new art inside and feel safe in doing so; to not feel so alone. We also must be aware that even if they are not here with us now, they still can teach us so much if we take the time to listen: by observing, by being attentive, and by showing respect for them and their work, as much as we can. For we would not be here today without previous California Native artists, in the same way we owe our very existence to our Ancestors' steadfastness and strength in knowing they would leave things for us generations into the future time.

The star quilt pattern is shared amongst quilters, and it has been made for generations and generations, with no name. Each interpretation is unique in its own color palette, fabric, sewing skill, and finish. However, the underlying essence of the quilt as art and story has lasted generations, so much that star quilts and star quilt motifs have been deemed almost traditional. The quilt, too, is a metaphor for a foreign form of self-expression being adopted and turned into something of our own, as Native people. It holds story and comfort in an object of beauty, regardless of flaws, regardless of technique. We, as Native people, are all sewn together by a connective stitch. We, as Native people, are all tied into the artwork structure in some way, either as a participant in its creation or as a viewer. We are California Native art. And it is us.

But what is California Native art then? Because star quilts are not traditional for us. Neither is cotton, or sewing machines. In fact, I don't know if Mabel made this quilt or if it was given to her to give to someone else; perhaps there's another layer of story there, in fact. However, the story with the quilt and the interaction between viewer and physical piece is art. You listening to this story are now tied down into the quilt, into the art. You are now a knot that holds it in place, strengthens it, so it lasts just a little bit longer. The hands this quilt has gone through and how they have molded the story that it is now, is art. And we are California Indians, as they like to label us, and so it becomes California Indian art. California Native art. We are creators. We are forever participating in story. We are art.

I use this story as an example, as I felt joy in sharing this tiny moment, in reconnecting. However short it may have been and significant or insignificant at the time, thirty-seven years later, as I have been working on reconnecting myself to plant and traditional knowledge regarding weaving and basketweavers, the story, for me, is priceless and exceptionally meaningful to myself as a person and an artist. Meaningful as a California Native. As a California Indian.

I share with you, because it's a simple exchange, ephemeral at this point: a story and a metaphor. Yet with how the story is held and carried, the meaning therein becomes eternal: to outlast each stitch, each square of cotton, beyond that star quilt's life. The story may survive moth nibbles and sun fades, broken stitches and cotton wefts, tiny kittens, and babies' toes. Isn't that how art is? Individual always, and yet collectively participatory to those it is shared with, a bit like memories. Isn't that what California Indians have in common with each other? Individually displaced, separated, cut from cloth scraps and remnants of survivors and mixed cloth, and yet still collectively a people: holding memories.

The quilt is reflective of so much trauma we share as California Native people: different shades of cloth, different degrees of mixed bloods and intertribal relationships in those hues of golden yellows and burnt orange: collecting memories. Stitched together into a strong, beautiful piece of artwork, that took time and care to assemble, yet brings us joy in viewing and warmth in its use: beautiful and useful. The art is a quilt. The art is a memory. It is a basket. It is a tattoo. It is abalone jewelry, regalia, braided dogbane cordage, and gathered tulle. The art is our voice. It is a song. It is repetition. Ceremony. It is the marks our hands make in echo, repeating patterns our Ancestors made on rock, in sand, on paper, on skin.

*It is art.* We are artists, and the thing we live is art. It's breath. It's blood. It oozes from us. It is our life, our very being. And it reflects all those who came before us that made it possible for us to retell our stories, continue our songs, and create something meaningful in this world with our hands and minds and hearts.

Why, you ask, is it art? Because we live and breathe the things we make, with the sincerity and focus that what we are creating is meaningful to us individually and meaningful to us collectively. When we make art, we are in ceremony. There's a headspace we get into, practicing our crafts that share pieces with our Ancestors and pieces of our future selves, in innovating the things that come out of our hands and into the world. There are prayers involved, and sometimes profanities. There are successes made, and strengths more so, in working through our failures to reach levels of realization only those who make it their life's work to pursue may see. Art. California Native art.

Are the things we create outside the realm of today's parameters for success? Yes, oftentimes they are. We are navigating ways to show respect for the world we are living in through our art, using materials as vessels for the work we are birthing, in the sounds of new songs we breathe out while we make art. It goes beyond any measured material success in this modern world. And it is fitting, because we are not of this time, and yet we fill it with our being. We build those connections to materials, to spaces, to land, to those before us and those who survived so we can be here today, up here in front of you. We built those connections to our community by trying to explain what it is we do and why it is important for the well-being of all.

Is my life meaningful to you? Individually? Collectively? In community? Because my life is my art, and my art is my life: without one, I will fade away indefinitely. Like breathing: inhalation, exhalation. Breath without art? I may

simply cease to exist. Would I be living if I wasn't making a living off of my way of living? Yes, because you cannot pay me to breathe each day. Creating art is involuntary, like breath. It's immeasurable, like blood. It's coded in us, climbing ladders and fish traps, like DNA.

Does mixed blood and mixed heritage keep us from breathing? Does having mixed heritage and mixed blood keep me from making art? No. But it can make me take pause. It sometimes manages to take my breath away in quiet sobs and gasps. We are all human beings at our core, and our output, our stories, our breath is ours alone: individual. And yet our stories, our art, as California Indians also belong to each other collectively, as community. It's how we share, how we heal, how we crawl out from and move beyond these dark spaces we have had to live in to protect our lives, protect our spirits from being eaten, after all we have endured and all we will become. Sometimes we must make art in the dark, alone, away from everyone. Art is ceremony. In the same way sometimes we must practice, sweat, reflect, and emerge from dark spaces. Art is flowing through our veins and dripping off our bodies like salted beads off our skin, emanating from every pore. We can taste art. It will always be reflective of who we are, who we all are, in story, in memory, and in present today, in presence of the future.

So, what brought me here? Here. To this point now. I recently have been reading the new book *Becoming Story* by Greg Sarris—the same Greg Sarris whose words captured me with *Mabel McKay: Weaving the Dream*. I read that book not too long ago, and actually was reminded of when I read it for the first time just the other day on Facebook, almost one year to the day. Its story. I am here to remember the impact of Marshal McKay, who was taken too soon from the virus in this pandemic we have all been existing through. And truth be told, I didn't come in person, because I am grappling with what is safe for myself and as a caregiver to my children and family, weighing responsibility with risk every day. Marshal McKay seemed to be also navigating the world of survival and survivance in these modern times, through the work he did for his tribal people, and in the work he did for artists. He understood the importance of story and expression and its ties with reinstating sovereignty in this dominant culture we are constantly navigating. He supported those culture bearers, those storytellers, those artists, and creators, like the stitches that hold quilt blocks together. And he understood the larger picture, that strong, even threads create structure and reveal the larger beauty of the community, just like this star quilt. He spoke similarly on this metaphor, too, in a lecture at UC Davis thirteen years ago. His final thought was this:

I like to think of California Native tribes as a beautiful tapestry created by a beautiful artist, a Native artist. Each thread and material that goes into creating this tapestry is unique and beautiful. Each thread varies in size, length, width, texture, color, and is unique in its own way. Each thread must be in place in order to see the entire picture. A half-finished tapestry does not present the clearest or most beautiful picture. If one simple thread is taken out of that tapestry or becomes loose, the entire picture begins to disintegrate and the overall product begins to unravel and lose its form. The tribes in California are no different. Each tribe in California is a thread with a different background, history, membership, and interests. When we work together, we create a beautiful tapestry: an image of the tribes living in California. This is especially true, and we assert our sovereignty and create a picture of what the California tribes are. We are not another population demographic that can be controlled by the state. We are each our own sovereign nation that can do and is doing much to contribute to the human race.

What does it mean to be a California Indian? It means moving forward with what you are given in your lifetime, to continue and persevere out of respect for those who came before you, and to leave footprints of familiarity and softness for those in the future to step into and feel in their whole body.

What does it mean to be a California Indian artist? With so much loss, with so many scraps of who your people were before you, and so many missing pieces in-between? It means you put those pieces back together and don't discard them. You carefully line them up, and slow down to process your thought. You try to create something beautiful through repetition and placement, and through repetition you heal, through prayer you find placement. You put those pieces back together with care and add some cloth from your own skin to complete something of beauty. You practice ceremony. It will never be the same—the thing you create with your hands—we will never be carbon copies of those who came before us. Our duty as California Indian artists is to take what we know, the things that make up our whole being, and put them back together in a way uniquely our own and yet reflective of the fabric from which we have been woven. The basketry stitches that make up our very being. The quilt pieces that complete us as a whole of many parts. The bundle foundations at our core.

This also means embracing our flaws, our skipped stitches, and buckled seams. This means identifying those feelings that slip in and make us miss a stitch: as material memory of what makes us human, as intentional flaw of a perfect pattern to let spirit pass through. California Indian art contains these marks—not flaws, but the intentional



mistake of humbleness. Basketweavers know we are unique as our coils and counts and leave room for Creator's meticulous skill to speak through. Rug weavers understand this too, and make sure to add to their art to show they, as a people, are defined by the finished ebb and flow of churra and patterns given to them by Creator.

The requirement of imperfection within the art we create is the most human trait we can all share. It is what keeps us evolving into the future. It keeps us humble. It allows us to continually strive to learn more about what makes us tick. What makes us want to make art. What makes us exhale. Breathe. It reminds us of our creation stories, of the conversations of the original people, of repetition, of prayer, of time. We make art to mark the passage of one generation to the next, to reflect backward to our past, and forward to our future. California Native art shows we have an incredible future ahead, and it is in thanks to all who have been here before us.

Thank you.

## Panel Discussion: Reflections on California Native Art

- Karimah Richardson: Thank you all so much! That was a very powerful and enlightening set of presentations. I'm going to turn it over to the audience to see if anyone has any questions.
- W. Richard West, Jr.: Well, first of all, I want to thank all of you for every word you spoke. It was quite an experience. My question goes to my friend from the faculty of the Institute of American Indian Arts in Santa Fe and what you said about what happens with respect to California Native artists. May I ask you the question, is there something that would effect a fix that could be done by the state legislature in California?
- Leah Mata Fragua: Correct. So according to my sources, it would take legislative action in California. The Indian Arts and Crafts Act does allow for a state to recognize tribes to participate as Indian artists, with the exception of California.
- Reason being is that the feds and the state disagree on how that acknowledgment and that scope works. In order for us to legally be under the Indian Arts And Crafts Act, it would take legislative action. However, that will take forever. And the federal government and the state of California are in no rush to fix this.
- However, there are fixes. The Autry and Robin Hetrick [director of programs and events] and staff here has found a workaround.
- West: Oh, yes. That I'm well aware of.
- Fragua: There are workarounds. It's just institutions have to be progressive enough to adopt those workarounds. And a lot of people are archaic in their ways of thinking and don't realize the complexity of California or what happened to us here.
- And like I said in my presentation, I have to educate other curators and people too about California Indians, and it's exhausting. Any support that people hear or through these networks of curators and institutions and lobbyists and leaders, any support for California Indians is much appreciated. But there are fixes. There are like quick fixes.
- West: Let me suggest a couple of things. First of all, I can't—since I no longer hold the title [of director]—but I'm sure anybody at the Autry would be perfectly willing to try to help other institutions do the same fix that we did. The other thing which occurs to me is whether an organization like the California Association of Museums might be willing through its operation, which often deals with the California state legislature, to do something about this. And I happen to sit on that board, so I would be happy to talk with you about whether something might be worked out from that angle, too.
- Fragua: Much appreciated. Thank you.
- West: Of course.
- Richardson: Any other questions for our wonderful panelists? No? Joe.
- Joe Horse Capture: Thank you for your great presentations. One of the things I was struck by, and this is more of a comment hoping to elicit some discussion, is when we had the exhibition *When I Remember I See Red* and we had some of Frank Day's work. Researching it and reading the text and the labels that were produced, he never considered himself an artist. He said, "I am not a shaman. I am not an artist. I'm a person who's trying to keep our culture alive." And Clint, when you were talking, I was thinking, "Wow, what a phenomenal connection with Frank Day back then," and Clint, how you were speaking today, I thought it was interesting to point out that connection. How we think of California Native artists are generally as artists. And *artist* is very much of a Western term, right? Anyway, any comments on that sort of relationship or perspective?
- Clint McKay: In the first place, thank you, because this is the first time I ever heard that he had said that as well. I think to me, it just cuts to our struggle to survive and to be recognized. And again, I try to pick my words carefully, but a lot of times I tell people when they talk about basketry and art, I say, "To us, I'm speaking for my Pomo people, basketry is much more than an art form. It's the very essence of who we are as Pomo people." I don't mean this

as a slight, I just don't know how else to say it. To me to label it as art, for me, because I'm not there yet internally, it loses significance by saying it's art. It's not art, it's us. It's me as a person. It's me as a people. So to label me an artist, it's like you're taking something away from me. That's the best way I can explain it.

Mark Johnson: So I come from a different world, and my world is one where I'm trying to encourage. Here I've been a teacher for such a long time and encourage people to express themselves visually in every way that they can and whether it's young kids or college kids or adults. And it's totally true what you said about Frank Day. And at the same time, Frank Day's magic is still alive and I've experienced it. This presentation was so moving. I thought the magic of that star quilt is still alive. And so I use the word *art* to describe that magic.

Weshoyot Alvitre: Yes. In regards to that question, too, I think by labeling what we do as art disregards the knowledge and the relationships that we have to have to our materials and whatever it is that we create. Today's world, it's very easy to say, "Oh, I want to pursue art as a career." And this is the roundabout way to go do it, go to an art school. "These are the expensive art supplies that you need to buy in order to become an artist or to be taken seriously as an artist." And in college, that was something I couldn't afford, proper art tools. And I had a teacher that actually sort of put me down as an artist, that I wasn't taking my craft seriously enough, because I wasn't buying the top-of-the-line art supplies at the time.

And it was solely from the fact that I couldn't afford it. I was putting myself through college through scholarships, which weren't Indian-based scholarships. And once again, the lack of federal recognition comes into play here. But in regard to so much of what the people in this panel do using traditional materials, from abalone regalia to basketry materials, we have to not only be brought up in that type of life to learn about those plants and learn about their growth cycles and learn about the reciprocity that we need to have with these materials. But we also need to think about that in selling art or as a professional artist. Because when that happens, we also have to reflect back on, "Is it exploiting our materials?"

And Leah, I know, has spoken to this in regard to some of the shell jewelry that she does. She talks about the significance of the environmental factors, that we can't go out and harvest abalone anymore. And it was one of our traditional food sources. We don't have that relationship anymore. It's been taken away from us at in this point in time, and that affects the materials that she uses. And I'm sure the same goes for the basketry materials. The pollution has taken away so many of the areas where we would normally be able to harvest those things. So all of those side things which take so much time and so much knowledge to be able to let us do the things that we do.

And I'm an illustrator. I use ink and paper because those are the tools that I use. But so many California Native artists try to use traditional materials. And there's so much more knowledge and effort that goes into those relationships with those materials that are disregarded when you call them *art* or you call that person an *artist*. And I think that maybe the wider world needs to sort of learn more about those relationships and relationships with tools, and that not all tools are a commodity that you can go out and purchase at an art supply store to do your craft.

Richardson: Thank you. I think that ties perfectly with this last question that we received online, which is, "Can you speak about how traditional land ecological knowledge keeps everything in balance as artists? And state if you are doing anything truly meaningful to include Native stewardship practices, and if so, how much of your artwork is dependent on TEK [traditional ecological knowledge]?" Leah, I know that's one of your passions.

Fragua: Another one of my soap boxes, right? Resources that we use in place-based art in California are incredibly impacted by climate change. And it's becoming increasingly difficult for us to have access to those materials. And hence, for my own journey I'm having to pivot because I don't want to deplete those resources because I need to save them for my own community. And I can't let them go out as I once was able to. I'm pivoting and working with more sustainable mediums and looking for alternatives to still kind of be rooted in place-based arts, but using other mediums, is that the word? Right? So using other materials.

One of the things that I've started transitioning to is working on—and I'm not a sculptor—but I'm learning to make dolls. And I can use all my scrap material to continue making what I love to do, but just doing it on a smaller scale and using all of my scraps so that nothing is wasted. Which is very typical of California people. We eat abalone, but we also use the shell. So almost everything that we use never went to waste. It was always eaten and used for other purposes. But again, access to a lot of those food ways are also impacted by climate change. And because in California we don't have treaty rights, we often have to jump through several hoops just to access materials, and that doesn't include the knowledge and relationship you have to have with those materials. But it also includes jumping through all these bureaucratic hoops just to get materials and then navigate climate change. There's a lot of layers to producing place-based work in California.

Richardson: Thank you. Clint, did you want to add?

McKay: So again, here's another place where I don't know how I feel. Obviously fortunate and blessed and sorry, because here's another opportunity for my family, that my sister here is having to experience that we don't. I'm very, very fortunate for the work that my family has done, that my aunties and them have done, and that we're still able to create the work that we do from a sustained source. And what I mean is that because of the federal recognition we have, because of the tribal lands and the long-term relationships we've had with a lot of people in the area, I still have pretty much unfettered access to the materials my family needs. And we are able to carry on that intergenerational relationship. Meaning my grandchildren are still gathering material from the same plant communities and families that my aunties and great, great, great-grandmas and -grandpas and all of them did.

We're happy for that, obviously. And we're very fortunate and blessed, but it breaks our heart when we hear stories of our neighboring tribes that don't have that anymore. And perhaps we both get ourselves in a little bit of trouble sometimes. But when it comes to abalone and things like that, and I say, that's our traditional food. And the reason that it's so difficult for us to get now is because the state of California shut down abalone season and it's been that way for about three years. And they tell us that they don't know when it's going to happen again. It may never open again.

So we're forced with, what do we do? Recognized tribe or nonfederally recognized tribe? And I might be making some calls for some help here pretty soon, too. But my dad is eighty-six years old and he was raised on that; that's something we had our whole life. And I'll just say, when we have ceremony or when my dad says son, "I'd like to have me a dinner," we practice food sovereignty. Let me just say that. And I might give myself an opportunity to wiggle out of something, but we absolutely do. We practice food sovereignty.

Richardson: Thank you to our panelists. Let's give them a round of applause. And I will hand it over to Joe.

Horse Capture: I realize that we're very much into overtime, that we've gone over our allotted time. However, virtually all of the previous sessions that we've had this morning and the two yesterday, we were looking at this work from an objective point of view. This session allowed us to look at it from a first-person point of view, from California Native artists themselves. And for me, going half an hour overtime, hearing their voices, feeling their emotion was certainly worth it. I know we're going to have a reception soon, and I know we're going to have some food. And I know we may be a little bit hungry, but to me it was worth it. So thank you for your patience.



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