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BLANKET STORIES AND BLURRING BINARIES: CONTEMPORARY NATIVE AMERICAN ART AND THE DISCOURSE OF AUTHORSHIP

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By

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BLANKET STORIES AND BLURRING BINARIES: CONTEMPORARY NATIVE AMERICAN ART AND THE DISCOURSE OF AUTHORSHIP

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SCHOOL OF ART AND ART HISTORY

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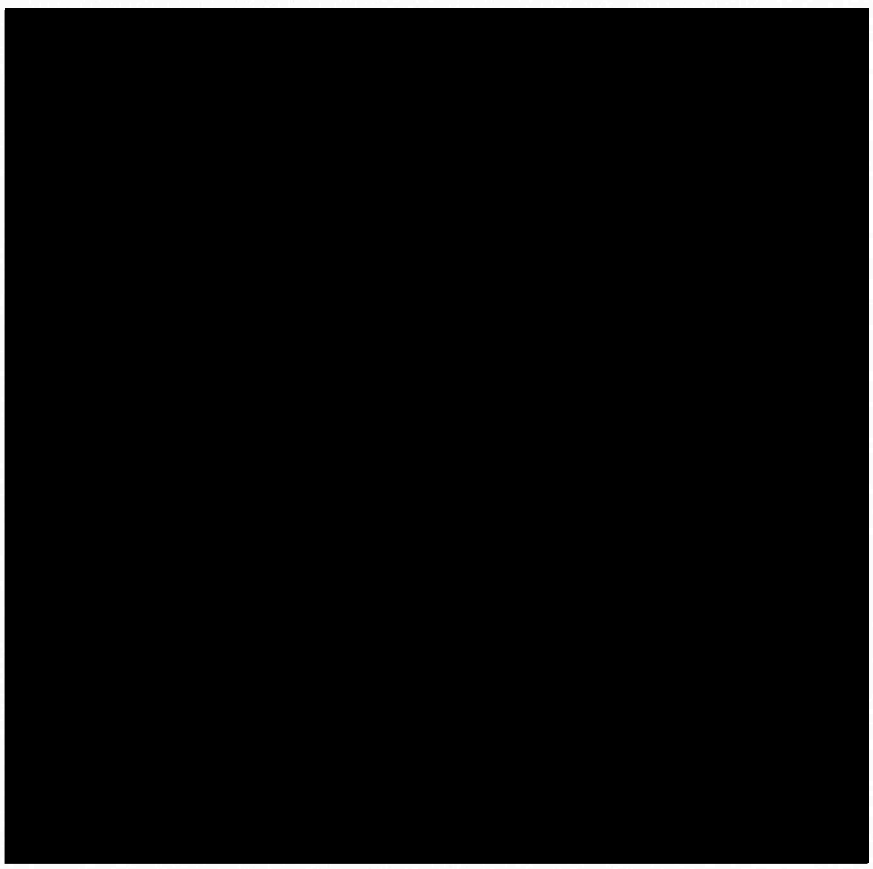

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I decided to write this thesis largely based on questions Marie Watt's work raised for me about authorship. I am indebted to Marie, and to her studio manager Madalyn, for entertaining my yearning to better understand these works. This thesis would be nowhere near as dynamic without the generosity and good humor of Marie and the gracious welcome I received in Portland. The DAM staff also graciously gave generously of their time and I am grateful for how seriously my research was taken during my visit and through my follow-up correspondence. Thank you to Eric Berkemeyer, Jodie Gorochow, Jenna Madison, and John Lukavic for taking the time to have conversations with me about Native American art and the DAM's role in presenting it. Of course, this research would never have been possible if not for the generous funding I received from the Graduate College and the School of Art and Art History at the University of Oklahoma. I appreciate my institution's commitment to student research.

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Abstract

This thesis explores the relationship between Native American art and the recent rise in participatory art. In this thesis I question the precedents for the subversion of single authorship and collective creation, how Native American artists assert and articulate indigenous epistemologies through contemporary practices, and what form it takes when Native artists internalize Euro-American artistic practices and blur the influences between indigenous and Western backgrounds. The current discourse on participatory art and social engagement construes it as an unprecedented phenomenon, which fails to take into account intercultural exchange between Western art and art from other cultural traditions. I argue that contemporary participatory art and traditional Native American art share a subversion of the solo artist and invoke contemporary Native participatory artists to demonstrate how the lack of a Great Artist tradition allows for more fluid authorship in order to destabilize the binary opposition between collective and individual artistic production. This fluid authorship also articulates visual sovereignty for contemporary Native artists who are free to explore more traditional artistic practices. This thesis seeks to locate contemporary Native American art within a broader global contemporary context by investigating how cross-cultural exchange shapes contemporary art.

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Introduction

Art historian Grant Kester opens his 2011 text, *The One and the Many: Contemporary Collaborative Art in a Global Context,* with the question, "Why have so many artists over the past decade and a half been drawn to collaborative or collective modes of production?"[1] Kester indeed, is one of many art critics and historians working to understand the explosion of collaborative, collective, or participatory practices in contemporary art that have gained in popularity since the mid 1990's. Collective and collaborative modes of production have existed in various iterations throughout the history of art, sometimes peripheral to, sometimes central to the mainstream art world. Although such practices are consistent, the mid 1990s to the present has seen a dramatic rise too widespread to ignore. As articulated by Boris Groys, "a tendency toward collaborative, participatory practice is undeniably one of the main characteristics of contemporary art."[2] In this thesis, I critique the boundaries by which Kester and his peers define art to argue that multicultural influences are overlooked in contemporary art because their ongoing nature does not fit into the linear narrative of Western art history. Considering art rooted in non-Western traditions, and how such traditions have influenced contemporary art presents an opportunity to explore unrecognized ongoing influences in global contemporary art.

Kester indicates that the examples of works he analyzes *in The One and the Many* "often challenge the traditional perception of the work of art as event or object

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[1] Grant Kester, *The One and the Many: Contemporary Collaborative Art in a Global Context* (London: Duke University Press, 2011), 1.

[2] Boris Grays, "A Genealogy of Participatory Art," in *The Art of Participation: 1950 to Now* (San Francisco: San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, 2008), 19. See this essay for a more complete historiography of participatory art.

authored beforehand and subsequently presented to an audience."[3] This "traditional perception" suggests a passive viewer or audience, and connotes art that is single-authored and primarily visual. Native American artists, however, have employed shared authorship and non-autonomous art-making practices that stretch the "traditional" definition of art for centuries. Art can also exists outside of the limitations of "traditional perceptions," as evidenced by scholars of Native American art history Janet Berlo and Ruth Phillips in their comprehensive text *Native Arts of North America:*

> It is also important to note … that the singling out of **visual** arts … reflects a privileging of the visual sense that has characterized Western cultures for much of their history. One of the effects of Western domination over Native American cultures has been to devalue the importance of other expressive forms, such as oratory or dance, that have traditionally been equally, if not more highly, valued in Native societies.[4]

In *The One and the Many,* Kester works in a global context and his examples of collective practice focus on such collaborations as Park Fiction (Germany), Ala Plastica (Argentina), and Dialogue (Indian).[5] My project focuses on artists working in North America, but it is into this contemporary global art world that I seek to insert the influences and presence of Native American art. I position Native American participatory artists in relation to contemporary participatory artists and historic Euro-American artists who characterize the challenging of "traditional perceptions." Prominent figures in recent discussions of contemporary participatory art include

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[3] Kester, 3.

[4] Janet Berlo and Ruth Phillips, *Native Arts of North America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998) Kindle Edition, location 362.

[5] Kester, *The One and the Many.* I will not address these groups Kester focuses on in this book again; they merely serve as illustration of what he perceives to "challenge the traditional perception."

international artists Rirkrit Tiravanija, (Thai-American) Thomas Hirschorn, (American) and Santiago Sierra, (Spanish).

In questioning why Kester suggests that integrated or multi-authored art "challenges traditional perspectives," I consider three different examples of collaborative creation that undermine his suggestion including Native American dance, contemporary participatory art, and Marie Watt's participatory sewing circles. First, Native American dances combine visual, aural, kinetic and relational aesthetics. For example, the social dances of the Haudenosaunee (Figure 1) combine performance and dance, and include vocal and instrumental music. The dynamic, painstakingly created regalia provide an aesthetically beautiful visual component. Furthermore, the dances function as socialization. Through this interdisciplinary event, children socialize with their clan and family group, learn dances and songs, and are introduced to the various roles of tribal members. The event provides a platform for social interaction and cooperation: those in attendance create and reinforce community bonds, share meals and the chores associated with hospitality, and reinforce elements of their cultural identity through conversation and participation.[6] The realization of Native American dances requires social cooperation, and the relationality between members of the community is of utmost importance to the event.

Next, at the 1993 Venice Biennale, large metal pots of boiling water were nestled inside a large metal gondola. Stacks of boxes containing a seemingly endless supply of instant noodles piled up against the walls. Visitors entered the gallery,

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[6] Ron LaFrance, "Inside the Longhouse: Dances of the Haudenosaunee," in *Native American Dance: Ceremonies and Social Traditions* Charlotte Heth, ed. (Washington: Smithsonian Institution, 1992): 19-33.

bemused and curious. If they sat, made themselves some noodles, and shared conversation over their free meal, social engagement and participatory artist Rirkrit Tiravanija's piece succeeded. Tiravanija is a US-based Thai artist and like many contemporary participatory artists, creates work that confronts social interaction in an increasingly digital age. Successfully enticing visitors to stop and speak to one another face to face reinforces social bonds. The success of such works is located in this relational experience.

Finally, Seneca-American artist Marie Watt's artistic process frequently features a group of varied ages and genders, heads bent, faces screwed up in concentration, hands working carefully to stitch together a colorful, sculptural wool textile. As the stitches emerge, those sewing break their concentration to laugh at a joke, the shortcomings of their own sewing experience, or to share an anecdote. Because they work toward the shared goal of sewing the artwork, whether they are strangers or acquaintances, participants already share a connection. Social cooperation, a creative outlet, and aesthetically beautiful yet familiar materials work together to elicit unique stories and relations between those in the sewing circle.

Nicolas Bourriaud, one of the first art critics to comment on the explosion of collective artistic practice, suggests in his 1998 book *Relational Aesthetics* that artists such as Tiravanija in no way draw on any precedents in the history of art to inform participatory practices,[7] but contemplating this set of works undermines that.

Although these examples seem divergent, they signify shared characteristics between the recent rise in participatory art and Native American art. Considering integrated,

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[7] Nicholas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics,* trans. (1998), 44. Original quote: "… in no way draw sustenance from any re-interpretation of this or that past aesthetic movement."

socially oriented and collectively authored artworks to be a challenge to traditional perceptions of art is an insufficient reading of these works. Scholars of participatory art including Kester, Claire Bishop, and Rudolf Frieling, all locate the precedents for the past two decades' preoccupation with socially engaged art in what Kester names the "collaborative and collective traditions of the interwar years," the creative hotbed of Dadaism and Surrealism.[8] Still, even when scholars recognize precedents for non-autonomous, non-individual artistic production, they continuously position this type of production as an anomaly in the linear narrative of the history of Western art.[9] Although my thesis does not dwell on the political or racial marginalization of Native American art, its place on the periphery of the history of art owes much to the discipline's linear structure. The linear narrative of Western art history suppresses the potential for understanding art in the more integrated context of non-Western cultures.

In this thesis, I argue that Native American artists engaging in the intertwined practices of participatory and collaborative art illustrate cross-cultural exchange in the contemporary art world. I argue that these practices reflect interplay between European and indigenous artistic traditions. This interplay or exchange refers to Native artist's combining of indigenous and Euro-American values, and the combination of indigenous epistemologies with Euro-American artistic training. This interplay reflects a progression away from activist art and towards a breakdown of

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[8] See Claire Bishop, *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship* (London: Verso Books, 2012) and Rudolf Frieling, ed., *The Art of Participation 1950 to Now.*
In the literature on participatory art, scholars use these various terms in interchangeable ways that are quite daunting to a reader just becoming familiar with the concepts. The three scholars I draw on the most from this literature, Bishop, Kester, and Tom Finkelpearl, all define the myriad terms used in this discourse, and then identify which of those terms best suits their scholarship. I follow suit here by defining terms later in this introduction.

[9] Kester, *The One and the Many,* 4.

established binaries separating the "dominant" (Euro-American) society from the "Other" (here, Native American). This thesis is driven by the following research questions: What are the precedents for the subversion of single authorship and collective creation that are central to contemporary participatory art? How do Native artists assert and articulate indigenous epistemologies and values through their contemporary practices? What does it look like when Native American artists internalize Euro-American artistic practices and blur the influences between indigenous and Western backgrounds?

I discuss the blurring of cross-cultural influences framed through analysis of Native American art. Scholarship and criticism on Native American artists engaging in participatory and collaborative practices often focuses on an allegedly entrenched connection to community rooted in the artists' heritage. The claim that artists from a Native American cultural background have a heightened sense of community is not necessarily erroneous, but an overemphasis on this connection fails to locate their work in relation to other contemporary participatory artists. Similarly, taking this heightened sense of community for granted misses an important opportunity for examining cross-cultural influences. How these embedded communal considerations relate or contribute to the increasingly popular field of participatory art is an unexplored avenue in scholarship. By examining Native American artists engaging in participatory art, my thesis examines how both Euro-American influences shape Native American contemporary art, but also, how Native American culture informs contemporary participatory practices.

Although a number of artists fit the criteria for consideration, I have chosen to restrict my main focus to works by the artist Marie Watt and the artist collective Postcommodity. Watt is a Seneca-American Pacific Northwest Coast based mixed-media sculpture and print artist. Watt and Postcommodity are specifically relevant as their practices share a primary concern with investigating intersections between cultures and therefore illustrate and complicate cross-cultural exchange. Postcommodity is an interdisciplinary collective comprised of Kade Twist, Cherokee, a writer and visual artist; Nathan Young, Pawnee, Kiowa, and Delaware, a commercial video maker; Raven Chacon, Navajo, a sound, music and performance artist and educator; and Cristobal Martinez, an artist and a doctoral candidate at Arizona State University. These artists have previously spoken eloquently about their work and its implications, and self-reflexive artists are imperative to understanding the state of the field. In order to limit the scope of my project to a manageable size, one selected artist works primarily with community participation, while the selected artist collective works collaboratively together. The aesthetic concerns of collaboration and participation differ. Participatory art situates human interaction centrally in the artwork, while collaborative art simply implies artists working together. Although the aesthetic concerns of each practice differ, the subversion of the ego of the single author or "Great Artist" – the idea of the singular, exalted, artist-as-creator – intertwines collaboration and participation.

Interviews I conducted with Watt at her studio provided great insight into my research questions and consequently, her voice and my analysis of her works are the strongest throughout. Working closely with Watt was central to this thesis in order to

align my methodologies with claims made. In addition to Watt and Postcommodity, I will invoke other artists briefly to support the thesis that Native American artists frequently factor community involvement into their practice. This includes artists who work with the community in a less direct way, including working with Native youth, promoting other artists, and sharing practices with community members. Even if those practices do not result in an artwork with shared authorship, such examples demonstrate the privileging of multiple voices.

Although I seek to prove a connection between collaborative and participatory practices and Native American art, I do not wish to paint all contemporary Native artists with the same broad brush and suggest that all Native American artists engage in community-driven practice. Participatory and collaborative artistic practices do not pertain to or are even important to all artists of Native American descent. Recognizing this, I argue that participatory art offers an opportunity to investigate the contributions of multi-cultural influences on the history of Western art.

In the process of blurring cross-cultural influence and breaking down binaries, my thesis contributes to advancing the dialogue on Native American contemporary art by continuing to critique the dated analysis of Native art as representing "walking in two worlds." Scholars across multiple disciplines have already taken the phrase to task.[10] This phrase, often used to characterize contemporary Native American art, refers to artists working in the transitory space between adapting to the dominant Euro-American culture and maintaining tribal traditions. Indigenous cultural

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[10] See, for example, Rosemary C. Henze and Lauren Vanett, "To Walk in Two Worlds: Or More? Challenging a Common Metaphor of Native Education," *Anthropology and Education Quarterly,* (1993): 116-134.
For an Art History source, see Cynthia Chavez Lamar et. al, ed., *Art in Our Lives: Native Woman Artists in Dialogue,* Santa Fe: School for Advanced Research Press, 2010.

traditions and values are often important to the analysis of Native American art, but enforcing separation between these and Western influences over-emphasizes and imposes difference on artists of Native American descent, and most importantly, implies an erroneously simple division between the "two worlds." The artists involved in Cynthia Chavez Lamar's *Art in Our Lives: Native Women Artists in Dialogue* engage with the discourse of "walking in two worlds." *Art in Our Lives* gathered eleven Native American female artists from culturally and geographically varied backgrounds to convene in a series of seminars on the campus of the School for Advanced Research in Santa Fe, NM, during which they discussed gender, ceremony, community, healing, and art. Lamar writes in the introduction, "'Two worlds' indicates an acceptance of one world, often characterized as Native and primitive, and an adaptation to the other, characterized as non-Native and civilized. Today, this dichotomy does not hold true for many Native individuals [who have a] varied upbringing."[11] Indeed, a primary component of contemporary art is the recognition of simultaneity in artistic traditions and the potential for interaction between diverse cultures. Contemporary Native American artists engage with and complicate this division in their works, and recognize that "walking in two worlds" implies that cultural exchange only works in one direction. It implies that artists from outside of the Euro-American culture keep their own traditions and adapt to new influences, while the Western tradition remains impervious to outside influence, and mistakenly locates contemporary Native American art outside of contemporary art.

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[11] Chavez Lamar et. al, ed., *Art in Our Lives: Native Woman Artists in Dialogue,* 4. To emphasize this point, contemporary artists Erica Lord and Eliza Naranjo are quoted in this text, respectively, "I reject the idea of walking in two worlds," and "There are not two worlds. There is just one world I'm living in."

In addition to the literature on Native American contemporary art, I contribute to the growing discourse on participatory art. Artistic collaboration is a natural process, but academia and art criticism over-theorize art created by multiple authors. Analyzing artworks by artists with indigenous backgrounds demonstrates the fluidity of collaboration, and illustrates that the lack of tradition of a "Great Artist" in indigenous North American culture influences Native American artists' fluidity between social and solo practices. This fluidity advances the discourse of participatory art and social practice beyond the binary defined by Claire Bishop as "collective=good/individual=bad." The works by Native American artists I analyze consistently engage with community involvement, often while not defining their process as "social practice." To argue that contemporary artists engage in cross-cultural exchange is not a novel claim, but the rapid pace of advancement in contemporary global society complicates relations between cultures. Examining exchange between Native American and Western artistic traditions provides a framework for the manifestation of such exchange. The scope of my thesis is limited to focus solely on artists of indigenous descent in North America and their interaction with Euro-American artistic traditions, but could have possibilities for considering contemporary non-Western art from various other cultures. Similarly, I acknowledge that artists of many and varied cultural backgrounds are capable of exhibiting this fluidity between solo and social practice.

Review of the Literature

My research draws on the fields of contemporary art history and criticism, Native American art history, anthropology, and indigenous aesthetics. The work of multiple scholars in the fields of Native American art history and participatory art criticism and history are integral to this thesis. I highlight selections from this scholarship here to situate my project in these fields, and to demonstrate connections between these various disciplines.

Art history and criticism focused on participatory art currently occupies a very prominent place in the contemporary art world. Nicholas Bourriaud's *Relational Aesthetics,* 1998, provided the seminal framework for discussing art that concerns itself with human interactions as its primary focus, and uses human interaction as its primary medium. Bourriaud argues that a lack of opportunities for face-to-face interaction in the increasingly digitally connected world creates the primary inspiration for contemporary artists. Bourriaud's book focuses on artists such as Rikrit Tiranavija as exemplary of artwork that manifests in the relations between people sharing a space or experience.

While this branch of art history and criticism has grown into a robust field, marked by lively debate, the most important springboard for my thesis is Claire Bishop's *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship,* 2012. Bishop is one of the most prominent scholars in the literature on participatory art criticism. Her scholarship tracks the history of participatory art through European art history and roots participatory art practices in the early twentieth century in Futurism in Italy, the post-Revolution landscape in Russia, and Dada in France. Importantly,

Bishop seeks to dispel the binaries between collectively created art as good and individual authors as bad, and between active/passive spectatorship, and also wants to problematize the discourse on participation as being equivalent to collectivism. The pressure she puts on these binaries opens up important issues in the field. Despite Bishop's invaluable primary research, her book does not consider of artistic cultural traditions outside of Western art history, importantly creating the opportunity for examination of an alternative history of participatory art.

Bishop's *Artificial Hells* focuses on a European framework, but other scholars have examined the history of participatory art from an American perspective. Tom Finkelpearl's *What We Made: Conversations on Art and Social Cooperation* (2013) investigates the American history of participatory art, rooting the practices in civil rights and what he terms "participatory democracy." Finkelpearl names second-wave feminism and black civil rights activism as essential to the development of participatory practices in American art, but notably fails to acknowledge Red Power movements and American Indian civil rights activism, creating an opportunity to insert this into the dialogue on the history of participatory art. Importantly, Finkelpearl's text takes the form of conversations, practicing and modeling an alternative route to theorizing cooperation and collaboration.

In order to explore an alternative, indigenous narrative of participatory art, it is essential to have an understanding of indigenous aesthetics and the history of Native American art. Steven Leuthold's *Indigenous Aesthetics: Native Art, Media, and Identity,* 1998, provides a vocabulary for values integral to indigenous aesthetics. His work focuses largely on film, but the model of analysis need not be restricted to

any specific media. Leuthold's text critiques the idea that the Western definition of art can be used to analyze Native art, a critique that should be intrinsic to any project addressing indigenous cultural production. The lens of indigenous aesthetics as separate from Western aesthetics is essential to this project in order to delineate truly cross-cultural exchange. Unfortunately, Leuthold reduces the experience of contemporary Native American artists to the aforementioned "walking in two worlds." Despite the work Leuthold does to provide Native American artists with independence and agency, he still perpetuates binaries and stereotypes.

Other scholars of Native American art history provide a more complicated framework for Native art. Haudenosaunee scholar Jolene Rickard's writings on art and sovereignty including "Sovereignty: a Line in the Sand"[12] and "Visualizing Sovereignty in the Time of Biometric Sensors"[13] provide a culturally specific framework for understanding Native American art. Rickard argues in her writings that only by recognizing the dual importance of art-making and of sovereignty to self-determination can we begin to properly incorporate Native American art into a transnational discourse. Rickard's writings provide one of very few theoretical approaches specifically for analyzing Native American artistic production, and her theory is crucial to understanding contemporary Native art.

Some scholars of Native American art history have provided a starting point for examining the importance of the interplay between European and Native histories of art. Jackson Rushing's *Native American Art and the New York Avant-Garde: a*

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[12] Jolene Rickard, "Sovereignty: A Line in the Sand," in *Strong Hearts: Native American Visions and Voices* (New York: Aperture Foundation, 1995): 51-54.
[13] "Visualizing Sovereignty in the Time of Biometric Sensors," *The South Atlantic Quarterly,* 110 (2011): 465-486.

History of Cultural Primitivism, 1995, maps out cross-cultural exchange between Native American aesthetics and modern American art. This text is one of a few to question how Native American aesthetics and cultural traditions informed the development of American art, encouraging scholars of art history to continue this investigation. This thesis will continue to trace the cross-cultural exchange from modern art through to contemporary art.

A contemporary text that considers Native American art in relation to European art history, and which pertains specifically to my thesis, is *Lodge,* 2012, by Rebecca Dobkins. *Lodge* accompanied a major mid-career retrospective of Marie Watt's work of the same name. As an active artist for the past fifteen years, Marie Watt has attracted a significant amount of scholarly attention. Critics and scholars of Watt's artwork understand and articulate its power to transcribe both personal and national stories. However, they almost universally overlook the importance of Watt's dialogue with modern art and elect to focus instead on the interpretation of storytelling as it relates to Watt's Seneca heritage. In *Lodge*, Dobkins strikes a balance between explaining Watt's consideration of her indigenous heritage and her knowledge of and dialogue with modern and contemporary art.

Defining Terms

Contemporary scholarship on participatory, collaborative, or socially engaged art consistently begins with the author establishing their particular preferred terminology. Authors represent art with shared authorship by a number of terms.

These share seemingly similar definitions, but the nuances in connotation are important to recognize.

In art history and criticism, "collaboration" specifically refers to artists working together and sharing authorship. As Finkelpearl explains in *What We Made: Conversations on Art and Social Cooperation*, "It implies start-to-finish co-authorship."[14] "Collaboration" does not connote blurring lines between author(s) and audience. Rather, scholars and critics employ this term to refer to artwork created by collectives or teams of artists.

All facets of participatory art strive to put pressure on the distinctions between production and reception, between author and audience, but are described by various terms depending on how the participation manifests. Bourriaud's theory of "relational aesthetics" remains consistently present in the discussion of participatory art. It refers to art that considers how people function in a social space and analyzes the choices made in human interaction. Bourriaud's theory responds to the idea that contemporary artists address a major truth of their time, and since the 1990s, that has meant humans confronting interaction in the digital age. Similarly, Bishop defines participatory art as "a definition of participation in which people constitute the central artistic medium and material."[15] Finally, Pablo Helguera defines socially engaged art as dependent on social intercourse as a factor of its existence.[16] Although these differing terms have nearly identical definitions, they carry distinct connotations in the literature. Artists who seek to observe and not to change their world characterize

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[14] Tom Finkelpearl, *What We Made: Conversations on Art and Social Cooperation*, 2013.
[15] Bishop, *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship,* 1.
[16] Pablo Helguera, *Education for Socially Engaged Art: a Materials and Techniques Handbook* (New York, Jorge Pinto Books, 2011), 2.

"relational aesthetics." Bishop's brand of "participatory art" focuses on art seeking rupture and disjuncture, while "social engagement/social practice" is defined by a social focus, and typically is concerned with improving circumstances.

As a comparatively fledging field,[17] the theoretical frameworks for Native American art history are similarly emergent. Rickard advanced *visual sovereignty* as one such framework in "Sovereignty: A Line in the Sand."[18] Visual sovereignty asserts that indigenous artists use visual self-representation as one avenue for negotiating cultural space and as a means to articulate indigenous place outside of the confines of "the Other" or identity politics. Accordingly, I use visual sovereignty as a framing device for Native American artists' incorporation of traditional communal processes into contemporary participatory practices.

Chapter Overview

Chapter One, "How Social Have We *Turned?*" explores the shared tradition in Native American art and participatory art of subverting the Western tradition of the "Great Artist" by examining artists' ability to move between solo and social works, demonstrating that this ability destabilizes the binary between artists who work collectively and artists who work individually. This chapter examines the influence of Native American art and culture in midcentury America, and how Native American art influenced artists who would go on to shape contemporary participatory art. This

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[17] Since Giorgio Vasari wrote *Lives of Artists* in the mid-16th century, the subjects and methods of art history have grown and changed tremendously, and the study of Native American material culture or contemporary art as *art* and not artifact has barely developed over the past century. For a more complete picture of Native American art history, see Janet Catherine Berlo, ed., *The Early Years of Native American Art History: The Politics of Scholarship and Collecting* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2005).

[18] Rickard, "Sovereignty: A Line in the Sand."

demonstrates the importance of the connection of art to everyday life in Native American traditions, supporting the claim of fluid movement between community involvement and solo work in contemporary Native artistic practices. To illustrate the fluidity between social and solo practice, this chapter investigates Watt's participatory sewing circle practice, her lithographs and small sampler works, framed by relevant conversations from interviews I conducted with the artist. Postcommodity's individual identities and collaborative projects similarly demonstrate this fluid movement and subversion of the Great Artist.

Chapter two, "Articulating Visual Sovereignty through Asserting Community," argues for the articulation of visual sovereignty through interdependence, rather than through binary activist agendas.[19] Native American art has been marked by a period of aggressive activism between the period of the Red Power movement in the 1960's and the identity art of the 1990's. This chapter analyzes selected works by Native artists in the 1990's and address how a shift away from activist art illustrates moving into an intercultural art world. Activism, much like the phrase "walking in two worlds," implies a clear division between groups, while moving beyond activism recognizes that such divisions indicate that individual cultures are not closed or isolated. In the second chapter, works by Watt and Postcommodity exemplify various cultures participating in shared experience. Works by recent residents in the artist in residency program at the Denver Art Museum illustrate that the physical act of participation encourages critical thinking about shared experience.

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[19] I credit visual anthropologist Kristen Dowell's *Sovereign Screens: Aboriginal Media on the Canadian West Coast* for providing me with the vocabulary of "visual sovereignty through interdependence." (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2013).

The third chapter, "Edward Curtis and Air Jordans: Positioning Contemporary Native American Art," will synthesize the points raised in those preceding it to demonstrate how Native American artists engaging in participatory and collaborative practices illustrate overlap, rather than binaries, between the "dominant" culture and the "Other" in contemporary art. This chapter analyzes more of Watt's work, and will include analyses of other Native contemporary artists Brian Jungen and Will Wilson that demonstrate community involvement and an awareness of the interplay of indigenous traditions or perspectives and the history of Western art.

Introduction Figures:

Figure 1: Haudenosaunee Moccasin Dance

Figure 2. Rikrit Tiranajiva *Untitled (1271)* (1993 and 2013)

Figure 3. Marie Watt Sewing Circle, Denver Art Museum (2013)

Chapter One: How "Social" Have we *Turned?*

In the brief 1958 article, "Notes on the Creation of a Total Art," Allan Kaprow briefly summarizes the place of a "total art" – one that is not separate from life and does not enforce boundaries between different types of arts, including music, dance, writing, performance – in Western art history. Kaprow locates a more "total art" in pre-Renaissance Western art history when art intermingled with the church and faith. In "Notes," Kaprow proposes a return to a "total art," observing a growing desire among his peers to reunite the arts and life, but states, "a total art could not come about this way. A new concept and new means are necessary."[20] Kaprow and others who shared his ideas certainly were reacting to Greenbergian modernism, but I argue for a more complex lineage of participatory art than a pendulum theory of autonomous art giving way to Kaprow's inclusive happenings.

Nearly five decades later, Bishop's article "The Social Turn: Collaboration and its Discontents" questions the rapid rise in "artistic interest in collectivity, collaboration, and direct engagement with specific social constituencies."[21]In this article, Bishop problematizes the binary nature of participatory art, which she has continued to critique throughout her career:

> For…supporters of socially engaged art, the creative energy of participatory practices rehumanizes—or at least de-alienates—a society rendered numb and fragmented by the repressive instrumentality of capitalism. But the urgency of this *political* task has led to a situation in which such collaborative practices are automatically perceived to be equally important *artistic* gestures of resistance: There can be no failed, unsuccessful, unresolved, or boring works

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[20] Allan Kaprow, "Notes on the Creation of a Total Art" in *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life,* ed. Jeff Kelley (Oakland: University of California Press, 2003) 10.
[21] Bishop, "The Social Turn: Collaboration and its Discontents, *"Artforum* (2006): 178-183, 178.

> of collaborative art because all are equally essential to the task of strengthening the social bond.[22]

As noted, Bishop seeks to strike this "collective = good/ individual = bad" binary that she observes emerging through the rise of social artistic practice. I share this goal, but question just how social artistic practice has *turned*, as opposed to has *returned* to concerns more akin to Kaprow's "total art." The intercultural influences of "non-Western" artists through the global exchange of the contemporary art world, what Bishop characterized as the social turn, may instead actually represent artists both revisiting practices that subvert the Great Artist as an individual, and becoming more concerned with artistic practice as integrated with life. It is through this lens we might consider the deconstruction of a binary between collective and individual practice. Not only need no hierarchy exist between the two, but also art need not fall strictly into one category or the other. By focusing on Native American artists who employ participation and collaboration in their artistic practices, indigenous epistemologies provide a point of reference for these artists to move fluidly between solo and social practices, due to the lack of a Great Artist tradition outside of the history of Western art.

This chapter addresses the subversion of the solo genius or Great Artist by contemporary Native American artists in support of the claim that embedded communal considerations of Native American art have influenced contemporary participatory art. Historical examples of Western appropriation of indigenous art and culture during an earlier wave of popular participatory art set up both this shared subversion as well as the influence of indigenous art and epistemologies on

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[22] Ibid, 180.

contemporary participatory art. The artists Watt and the members of Postcommodity provide contemporary examples of the fluidity of working individually and collectively in Native American artistic practice. Interviews with Watt and quotes from Postcommodity's artistic manifesto supplement analysis of their work to strongly reinforce this fluidity, as well as a commitment to an art more integrated with life.

Modernism and Collectivism: Pendulum Reaction or Intercultural Influence?

In order to delineate the influence of Native American art and culture on the establishment of participatory art as we recognize it today, a brief review of the prevailing narrative of modernism and examples from the history of participatory art will be helpful. The desire to blur the line between art and life is a keystone of participatory art. As Bishop notes, this desire carries the implication that the work reverses the goals of Greenbergian modernism.[23] Clement Greenberg's theory of modern art involves repurposing Immanuel Kant's *Critique of Judgment* to celebrate the autonomy of art.

Although Kant does not directly address art, his philosophy is a point of origin for the theory of an autonomy of aesthetics. Kant writes that judgment of beauty is "disinterested," not purely subjective or objective, but detached because beauty is universal.[24] In his essay "Modernist Painting," Greenberg posits that Kant was the first Modernist. He argues that this disinterested judgment creates enough of a separation from beauty (which Greenberg repurposes to mean aesthetics or art) to

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[23] Claire Bishop, "Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics," *October* 110 (2004): 51-79, 54.
[24] Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, Translated by J.H. Bernard (London: Macmillan, 1914).

create objectivity from beauty/art, which in turn, creates the ability to critique it.[25] Greenberg interpreted Kant to mean that if judgment of beauty is disinterested, then it follows that such judgment is detached from intersecting with essential aspects of life. The theory that art is autonomous is essentially the antithesis of art that concerns itself with dissolving boundaries between art and life. For Greenberg, the self-criticism in art manifested in calling attention to the flatness of the canvas in painting as the most important aspect. Therefore, art that is critical of its own formal techniques is the highest art for Greenberg, and more subjective interpretations or interpretations that account for more than formal qualities of art are deemed insignificant. Greenberg's great influence in the history of Western art creates a puzzling gap between his autonomous modernism and the fervent desire to break down the boundaries between art and life that characterize the history of participatory art and indeed much of postmodern and contemporary art.

The other distinctly, defining Western convention is that of the Great Artist. Western art history has been artist-centric since the Renaissance and the writings of Giorgio Vasari.[26] The artist-as-creator reached a pinnacle just before the first wave of participatory art in the form of the heroic figure of Jackson Pollock forging masterpieces without even touching a brush to the canvas. The narrative of Western art history therefore positions participatory art as reactionary to this celebration of the individual artist. Roland Barthes' 1967 essay, "The Death of the Author" provides a

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[25]Clement Greenberg, "Modernist Painting," originally broadcast on *Forum Lectures* (Washington, DC: Voice of America, 1960) accessed via http://www.sharecom.ca/greenberg/modernism.html.

[26] Conventions of artistic biography are so embedded they are rarely questioned outside of the field of postmodern art history. For a critique of artistic biographical tropes, see Ernst Kris and Otto Kurz, *Legend, and Myth in the Image of the Artist: A Historical Experiment*, trans Alastair Lang and ed. Lottie M. Newman (New Haven: Yale, 1979).

theoretical groundwork for participatory art. Barthes writes that the "reader" or viewer holds more responsibility than the "author" or artist. When the text, or artwork, is attributed to an author, or artist, this imposes what Barthes calls a "stop clause," that restricts interpretation of the work to the idiosyncrasies of the author or artist. Alternatively, when the work involves many different voices and becomes open to many participants, it becomes more important than its creator.[27] Barthes' focus was on literary texts, but the implications of his theory to artistic production are clear. Western art history attributes the explorations in collective authorship of 1960's artists such as Yves Klein and the members of the Fluxus movement to inspiration from Barthes' writings.[28]

This pendulum narrative – that the Author and Artist had been exalted and then dethroned – explains away the failure of participatory and collective practices to penetrate the establishment of the art museum as a reactionary fad. In the established narrative of Western art history, positioning collective and participatory practices as reactionary sets the stage for the following reactionary movement. Instead, the historical influence of indigenous epistemologies and artistic practice on artists at the mid-century provides an alternative narrative that originates at the same point of rupture but sustains participatory practices through the present. The examples in this section suggest that the inception of participatory practices resulted as much from

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[27] Roland Barthes, "The Death of the Author," 1967, trans. Richard Howard, http://www.tbook.constantvzw.org/wp-content/death_authorbarthes.pdf

[28] Yves Klein loved fakery, poking fun at the art world and the art market, and practiced early participatory art, pushing the boundaries and teasing out the limits of authorship. Fluxus existed in various iterations throughout the 1960's and 70's as a loose association of international artists working in a wide range of media. Interest in integrated or applied art, and again, a playing with authorship united the artists. Key figures of 60's and 70's art including Yoko Ono, Allan Kaprow, Joseph Beuys, and Nam June Paik, were associated with the group. For a brief overview of Klein and Fluxus, see David Hopkins, *After Modern Art:1945-2000,* (New York: Oxford, 2000), 78-83,104-108.

indigenous influences and the desire to reach Kaprow's "total art" as from a rejection of Greenbergian modernism. Two seminal figures in the history of participatory art, Allan Kaprow and Joseph Beuys, connect to indigenous influences.

Kaprow cites the rhythmic, performative process of Jackson Pollock's action painting as the catalyst for his investigation into participatory performance art and his development of Happenings.[29] Pollock's departure from traditional easel painting radically altered the aesthetic concerns of Western art. Of utmost importance to Kaprow was the *process* of creating the paintings, rather than their resulting non-referential, abstract, finished product. Modernist art critic Harold Rosenberg identified the importance of process and ritual in action painting,[30] and Jackson Rushing later identified a source for Pollock's focus on the spiritual and ritual. In his illuminating chapter, "Jackson Pollock and Native American Art," in *Native American Art and the New York Avant-Garde: A History of Cultural Primitivism* Rushing explores the connection between Pollock's experimental process and Native American influences.[31] Rushing obtained primary source material pointing to Pollock's deep interest in, and understanding of, Native American culture and art. Pollock observed Indian rituals as a child, traveled to locations of pictographs, and pursued leaning about many aspects of Indian art, including ritual and dance, as well as the visual arts.[32] Rushing concludes, "in both Pollock's and the Navajo singers

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[29] Allan Kaprow, "The Legacy of Jackson Pollock" in *ArtNews* (1958): 24-26, 55-58. "Happenings" refers to a new manifestation of artistic experience, pioneered by Kaprow, in which spectators took an active role in the realization of the artwork.

[30] See Harold Rosenberg, "The American Action Painters" in *ArtNews* (December 1952).

[31] W. Jackson Rushing, *Native American Art and the New York Avant-Garde: A History of Cultural Primitivism* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1995).

[32] Ibid. Rushing's *Native American Art and the New York Avant-Garde* illuminates the role of indigenous influences on modern art and my bridging those influences to participatory and contemporary art owes much to his complete analysis: see the final chapter in *Native American Art and*

situations the process and experience have as much importance as the image created."[33] Rushing stresses here that in both Navajo sand painting and Pollock's drip paintings, healing occurs during the *process* of creating a finished work of art. The ritualistic process and the resulting visual art is where art and life meet and mingle.

Kaprow documented his interest in Pollock's process and performance in "The Legacy of Jackson Pollock," as well as his early interest in collapsing the boundary between art and life.[34] While Kaprow would have been a teen at the time that the New York art world was swept by the 1944 exhibition that greatly influenced Pollock, *Indian Art in the United States,* his college and graduate school education were in the wake of the exhibition's influence and therefore perhaps would have been exposed to the discourse of its critical reception. Kaprow discusses ritual and magic in the same sense that Rushing has identified the importance of ritual, magic and healing in the process of the creation of drip paintings. In "The Legacy of Jackson Pollock," Kaprow writes, "Pollock's near destruction of this tradition [painting] may well be a return to the point where art was more actively involved in ritual, magic, and life than we have known it in our recent past,"[35] which connects to his "Notes on a Total Art" of the same year. The recognition of the importance of non-formal qualities of art is integral to the dissolving of boundaries between art and life.

Joseph Beuys, another major figure in the history of participatory art, was obsessed with shamanism and passionately focused on merging art and life. Though

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the New York Avant-Garde. Also, informing Rushing's and therefore my argument, is Frederic H. Douglas and Rene D'Harnoncourt, *Indian Art of the United States* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1941).

[33] Rushing, *Native American Art and the New York Avant-Garde,* 188.

[34] See Jeff Kelley's introduction in Allan Kaprow, *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1993): xi-xxvi.

[35] Kaprow, "The Legacy of Jackson Pollock," 57.

Beuys was German, not American, these core values locate him within the net of indigenous influence on participatory art. Beuys fits into the history of art as loosely aligned with the Fluxus[36] movement although his ideals and theories were more enigmatic, and his pedagogical philosophy was unique. His place in the Western lineage of participatory art fails to acknowledge indigenous influences, most likely because they were influences Beuys himself refused to acknowledge. Beuys's careful construction of his self-myth eclipses his true influences, evidenced by the fact that the origin of his "shamanism" is believed to derive from a crash landing of his fighter jet during World War II. Beuys claimed to have been rescued by Tartars, the indigenous people of Crimea, who wrapped him in felt and fat to keep him warm. This mythic origin story masks Beuys's true influences. Beuys has been critiqued for naming himself a modern-day shaman.[37]

Although like the artists of Fluxus, Beuys sought to dissolve the space between art and life and proclaimed everyone an artist, his philosophies spoke less to the rupture and disruption of Dada or Fluxus. In a 1984 interview, Beuys stated, "Art must not end where the museum exists, where the art historian exists, the so-called art education … Lives are not determined by this activity," and "… what I call anthropological art – therefore is also very interesting for a farmer, for a forester, for people in every field of activity."[38] Bishop underscores the significance of Beuys's place in contemporary participatory art. Investigating connections between pedagogy

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[36] Kaprow, too, was loosely associated with Fluxus. This is of interest as Fluxus was similarly serious about dissolving the boundary between art and life.

[37] See, for example, Matthew Gandy, "Contradictory Modernities: Conceptions of Nature in the Art of Joseph Beuys and Gerhard Richter," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 87(1997): 636-659.

[38] Bernice Rose, *Thinking is Form: The Drawings of Joseph Beuys* (Philadelphia: Philadelphia Museum of Art, 1993), 21.

and participatory practice, she notes, "very little attention has been paid in Anglophone art history to Beuys's activities of the 1970's, despite the fact that they form the most central precursor of contemporary socially engaged art, intersecting artistic goals with social, political, and pedagogic ambitions."[39] Beuys's belief that art should not be separate from life, but entwined with all people in all things, resonates with Berlo and Phillips's description of the qualities of Native North American art as well as with Fluxus. Elsewhere in the same interview, Beuys seeks to separate himself from but displays considerable knowledge about the popularity of shamanism of Native American cultures.[40] His discussion of affinities for indigenous religions, coupled with his adoption of the "shaman" persona and his 1974 performance piece, *Coyote: I Like America and it Likes Me* (Figure 4) all undermine his claims to have not been influenced by indigenous cultures. In *Coyote,* one of the artist's most famous performances, Beuys spent ten days living in a New York gallery with a coyote. Beuys chose a coyote due to its importance in many Native American cultures. He claimed to be seeking reconciliation between the human and animal worlds, as well as between the West and indigenous peoples. Beuys clearly aligned himself with a shamanistic healer, stating in regards to the performance, "I believe I made contact with the psychological trauma point of the United State's energy constellation: the whole American trauma with the Indian, the Red Man. You could say that a reckoning had to be made with the coyote, and only then can the trauma be lifted."[41] By linking Native American culture to communal living and primordial beings, Beuys

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[39] Bishop, Artificial Hells, Kindle Edition, location 4787.
[40] Ibid,18.
[41] Gandy, "Contradictory Modernities: Conceptions of Nature in the Art of Joseph Beuys and Gerhard Richter," 644.

participates in primitivizing indigenous peoples, but also reinforces the connection between Native American communal ways of living and participatory practices. Furthermore, although Beuys would never relinquish authorship and remained very much at the center of his artistic practice, his Social Sculpture teachings stressed his belief that everyone is an artist. Although he did not practice what he preached, Beuys was a prolific teacher, and his concepts of Social Sculpture reached massive numbers of students. In spite of Beuys' messy appropriations of shamanism, his teachings helped subvert an uncritical acceptance of the singular artist and the autonomy of art.

Examining Western appropriation of indigenous artistic and cultural elements helps us to understand the intercultural history of participatory art. These historical connections between indigenous art and participatory artists counter the prevailing narrative about contemporary participatory art. As Bishop explains in *Artificial Hells,* scholars including Guy Debord, Kester, Bourriaud, and Blake Stimson position participation and social interaction in opposition to and as a solution to capitalism and the spectacle; that action, rather than passive viewership, turns towards repairing the "social bond."[42] Defining this binary more concretely, she states, "alongside a discourse of spectacle, advanced art of the last decade has seen a renewed affirmation of collectivity and a denigration of the individual…. "[43] Bishop rightly critiques this binary explanation, which repeats the reactionary, pendular narrative assigned to the first wave of participatory post-Pollock art. By providing historical evidence examining participatory art through the lens of the "non-Western"[44] tradition,

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[42] Bishop, *Artificial Hells,* Kindle ed., locations 234-235.
[43] Ibid.
[44] "Non-Western" is a problematic term as it implies something from outside of the civilized Euro-American Western culture, especially here because my argument seeks to dispel the division between

capitalism and social interaction need not be set at odds. Rather than subscribing to the pendular narrative that eclipses intercultural influences in the global art world, the continuity of indigenous influence through contemporary participatory practices possibly point to a more integrated art and disseminated authorship.

Steven Leuthold and Lucy Lippard both underscore the anomaly of Western art's preoccupation with autonomy and individual authorship. Lippard deftly acknowledges the Great Artist convention as an obstacle in *Overlay: Contemporary Art and the Art of Prehistory*, (1983) "the reintegration of art into social life means risking 'exposure' and the denial of the treasured myth of embattled individualism, of the artist as alienated hero."[45] Leuthold provides support against the erroneous nature of explaining artistic interest in participatory and collective practices as reactionary to societal ills. In *Indigenous Aesthetics,* Leuthold argues that the developed West is the outlier in the global and historical context. He notes, "the comparative study of art as it has been conceptualized and experienced throughout much of world history requires us to come to terms with indigenous concepts related to Western ideas of spirit, soul, sacred, ritual, morality…that motivate much non-Western and historically Western art."[46]

Both the contemporary fields of Native American art history and participatory art recognize and share the critique and subversion of the Great Artist type. In *Art in Our Lives,* Elysia Poon recognizes the difficulty of altering perceptions of who is an

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"Western" and "non-Western." I call attention to the problematic nature of employing this term making it contingent whenever I cannot avoid using it.

[45] Lucy Lippard, *Overlay: Contemporary Art and the Art of Prehistory.* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1983), 6.

[46] Steven Leuthold, *Indigenous Aesthetics: Native Art, Media and Identity*, (Austin: University of Texas Press), 57.

artist: "Historically, art and its history have been defined as something that is largely linear, created by the male genius at work, and documented by men. Five centuries after Vasari's *Lives of Artists,* we are still struggling with the effects of his treatise, including who is important in history[47]." Likewise, Kester writes in *The One and the Many:* "the figure of the singular, auratic artist, reinforced by notions of artistic genius first formalized by Kant, remains the bulwark of the long history of modernism, and the epistemological template for much contemporary criticism and curatorial practice."[48] Such statements reinforce the shared subversion between Native American art and participatory art.

This historic and scholarly framework demonstrates how the presence and appropriation of indigenous art disrupted the prominence of the Great Artist. The following examples illustrate how Native American contemporary artists continue to complicate authorship and autonomy by exhibiting a more fluid practice of collectivism and collaboration while retaining authorial voice in the role of the artist.

Native American Contemporary Participatory Artists

Thus far, this chapter demonstrates how the influence of indigenous epistemologies helped to shape participatory art and how "non-Western" cultural practices contribute to an alternative narrative of what Bishop has termed "the social turn." Historic examples of cross-cultural exchange elucidate the intertwined nature and shared characteristics between participatory art and Native American art. The remainder of this chapter explores how the shared subversion of the single-authored

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[47] Elysia Poon, "Space, Memory, and Landscape: Women in Native Art History" in *Art in Our Lives: Native Women Artists in Dialogue*, ed. Lamar et. al,, 68.
[48] Kester, *The One and the Many,* 3.

artwork manifests in the work of contemporary artists Watt and Postcommodity. In an analysis especially informed by interviews I conducted with Watt, examples of her work and Postcommodity's demonstrate the fluidity of authorship in their participatory practices.

Watt, a Seneca-American Pacific Northwest based artist, practices a deceptively simple brand of participatory art. She elicits participation from the community in two main ways: holding "sewing circles" in order to create large-scale textile sculptural wall works, and collecting donated blankets for her stacked sculptures. Watt requests blanket donations from participants along with their blanket stories. These stories, as well as the community created at sewing circles, are of equal importance to her completed works of art. Watt currently works primarily with blankets (she collects blankets of natural fibers, typically anything under five dollars from a thrift store) although she has explored diverse media throughout her career. She also practices printmaking.

Watt crowd-sources sewing participation to create the majority of her large-scale works. In 2003, the National Museum of the American Indian invited Watt to participate in the show *Continuum.* She explains that her large hand-stitched works were simply too involved, and that "something would have to change for me to deliver."[49] Needing help to complete a piece called *Braid* (2004) (Figure 5) and to maintain sanity and a social life, she asked friends over to lunch, and would feed them as they stitched. Watt observed the richness of interaction occurring between friends and new acquaintances as they sewed, and eventually institutionalized sewing circles as a tenet of her participatory practice. Watt's sewing circles facilitate a

[49] Marie Watt, in a discussion with the author, January 13, 2015.

similar environment to Tiravanija's. Both artists create a setting in which participants' hands are occupied – in Tiravanija's, with food, in Watt's, with fabric – and made to feel comfortable to encourage face-to-face interaction. Crucial to Watt's practice, however, is the fact that her facilitation of the interactive environment focuses around creating an actual object. Tiranajiva or artists with similar practices' construction of an interactive environment can feel contrived because they are contrived. Because participants are working towards a common goal in Watt's sewing circles, conversation and interaction are not forced. Watt does not conceptualize her works around community or audience interaction or collaboration. Rather, the community element often stems from an interest in intersections of story or history, a site-specific idea, or at the request of an institution. As Watt explains, the combination of eyes diverted, hands occupied, and the humble nature of the cloth creates an environment where there is no pressure to talk, but stories easily tumble out.[50] To connect back to Kaprow's notion of a total art, I read Watt's sewing circles as organic interaction and production. Importantly, she manages to make work that is about participation while not only being about participation. Watt recognizes communal production's relevance to indigenous teachings, noting,

> I think that one of the things that happened when I started working in a collaborative way, having the sewing circles or even having people donate blankets to the project, I could really see how that related to a more traditional way of making things in our community. Where, you would learn how to make something with somebody, you would make your own things but this tradition of helping each other make things ....[51]

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[50] Ibid. I experienced this firsthand on a studio visit to Watt's Portland studio. I worked on a piece just with Watt and her studio manager Madalyn, but the ease of conversation while I worked to try to figure out embroidery was uncanny.
[51] Ibid.

Watt's large-scale pieces concern participation, but they are not exclusively about participation. Because she rarely conceives her pieces in order to be participatory or collective, Watt retains single authorship but celebrates and appreciates the labor of participants, adhering to an organic and more indigenous method of creating art. Consider how her sewing circle practices compare to artist's workshops, institutionalized in the Renaissance and continued by contemporary artists, most visibly Damien Hirst and Jeff Koons. Artist's workshops question what constitutes authorship due to the multitude of hands involved in the final creation, but firmly confirm that authorship is singular; even when this process is transparent, the hired labor remains anonymous while the artist's name is exalted. Unlike the anonymous artist's workshop in which the extra hands contribute only labor and nothing conceptually, the contributions made by community members are essential to Watt's large-scale works. She articulates this, stating, "where collaboration is a predominant element is, I feel like, as much of the part of the work once it's hanging up. I can't separate the places and the people where the work was sewn. Those communities become part of the identity of piece."[52] This illustrates how Watt's authorship is more fluid than a single artist's hiring labor for production, or an artist who constructs an environment in which the audience becomes the author. Speaking about her own role as author, Watt recognizes this and rejects rigid the rigid boundaries of labeling one's practice as social or solo, starting, "I think there's a balance … I want to make work that involves communities but I don't think that's going to be true for everything I do and nor do I think that it should be."[53]

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[52] Ibid.
[53] Ibid.

Watt acknowledges the importance of community or social considerations in all aspects of an artist's practice, rather than defining art by institutionalized jargon. During my interviews with Watt, our conversation shifted to the artist Juane Quick-to-See Smith, a well-known and critically acclaimed contemporary artist and an enrolled member of the Flathead Nation. While Smith's visual arts are not created through any sort of shared authorship or collective production, Watt referred to Smith's practice of introducing the work of other Native artists in her lectures as an inspiration, noting especially the significance of this practice as an elder. We conferred that this sort of "walking the walk" highlights the importance of community practice in manifestations outside of the limitations of more narrowly Western defined iterations of social or community conscious artistic practice. The significance of Smith's practice is in promoting many voices, rather than a singular authorial voice or eliminating the significance or any one voice. In other words, Smith embodies this concept of fluid authorship by diminishing her self-importance to honor the voices of others.

Illustrating her point regarding creating work outside of a community context, Watt does not exclusively create large-scale pieces that necessitate collaboration. She also creates prints and small-scale sampler pieces. While these are often vehicles for working out an idea, they also exist as discrete, quiet contemplation of concepts. These small-scale pieces typically function as true samplers, in which Watt works through an idea for a full-scale work, such as in *Generous Ones: Blue Sky* and *Generous Ones: Pink Sky* (both 2014, figures 6 and 7). Watt's samplers frequently manifest in more than one version, as these do. Many of Watt's lithographs also serve

the process of working through an idea. They often depict concepts and texture, translating the three-dimensionality of her preferred medium, wool, into two-dimensional form. *Lodge,* 2005 (figure 7) belongs to Watt's Blanket Stories series but does not precede any specific large-scale work. When asked if she views these pieces as separate from or connected to her larger scale works, though, Watt deems it unnecessary to view her practice in such terms. Typically, Watt produces sampler pieces and prints alone, but each could also be a filter for community engagement. Her lithographs factor significantly into her collaborative sewing-circle practice; she trades a small print for the time and labor of every participant in her sewing circles. Figure 7 shows the small silkscreen print Watt has exchanged for stitches or blanket donations for the past two years. Clearly, Watt's practice disrupts the binary between collective practice and individual authorship.

Postcommodity, a Native artist collective, originated at the University of Oklahoma in 2006-2007. Twist, Young, Chacon, and Martinez define themselves as an interdisciplinary arts collective whose art "functions as a shared Indigenous lens and voice to engage the assaultive manifestations of the global market."[54] Their shared indigenous heritage lends to a shared interest in questioning continued colonialism. As part of their manifesto or artist's statement, Postcommodity contends that that no one force remains in control of colonialism. Rather, materialism makes us all participants in colonization. Their philosophy underscores the lack of a binary between Western and non-Western societies and instead emphasizes the shared nature of societal issues in the increasingly interconnected capitalist and digital world. They also engage in the subversion of the discourse of "white vs. Indian" in modern media.

[54]"Postcommodity: About" http://postcommodity.com/About.html.

The group is self-aware about the Western convention of the Great Artist and actively seeks to subvert that convention. Their credo emphasizes the lack of that figure in indigenous traditions, acknowledging that working as a collaborative unit provides an "opportunity to subvert and to sidestep the art world ego."[55] Additionally, the group prizes the flexibility allotted to them by working collaboratively. Collaboration allows room for both artistic practice and a career that the members feel passionately about. Indeed, some of the members give back to their communities through the jobs they hold outside of Postcommodity. Chacon is an educator in the Albuquerque area, and Young makes films promoting healthcare for Oklahoma tribes. The group's additional occupations further reinforce their rejection of the Great Artist convention by refusing to exalt the profession of artist. Exalting the profession of a working artist often obscures the economics of art. Postcommodity instead chooses to be transparent about how they make a living as well as who funds their complex, large-scale artistic projects.

Postcommodity's embrace of solo ambitions and collaborative group undertakings demonstrates their fluidity between social and individual practice. Their involvement in the relational long-term collaboration *People of Good Will* (2014-2015) demonstrates their flexible cooperative practice, as well as the nature of their work as "total art." *People of Good Will* provides a new public venue in downtown Guelph, Ontario, aiming to provide a space for "culturally diverse peoples to share voices, creative visions and experiences."[56] Fugitive former slaves who arrived in Ontario via the Underground Railroad built the location, Heritage Hall, supplying the

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[55] Postcommodity, public lecture, University of Oklahoma, 9/23/2014.
[56] "People of Goodwill" http://musagetes.ca/project/peopleofgoodwill/.

space with the complexity of North American history, creating an ideal location to spark conversation about shared experience, a "metaphor of self-determination."[57] *People of Good Will* is a collaboration between Postcommodity, the Guelph Black Heritage Society, and Musagetes, a public arts foundation whose manifesto aligns closely with that of the Native American collective's.[58] Postcommodity inaugurated *People of Good Will* with "Feast on the Street," accentuating the importance of non-autonomous art in community driven artistic endeavors. Postcommodity's creation of original content and participation in a series of collaborative events over the course of the year of *People of Good Will* illustrates a concern for an integrated art, rather than a one-off constructed environment for social engagement. Certainly, *People of Good Will* shares characteristics with the types of social practice undertakings bemoaned by Bishop as "important *artistic* gestures of resistance ... equally essential to the task of strengthening the social bond."[59] Not having attended any of Postcommodity's events or performances during their year-long involvement, I cannot address Bishop's concerns. However, the diverse groups involved in *People of Good Will* clearly subvert the idea of the necessity of a single, Great Artist figure. Furthermore, the creation of a space as a "metaphor for self-determination" resonates with the long-term goals of truly integrated art, rather than "gestures of resistance."

Watt's artistic practice and ambition to best serve her community outside of art-making demonstrate the importance of disrupting the notion of the singular artistic genius. Postcommodity's reflexive manifesto and artistic projects further reinforce the importance of complicating the definition of the artist. Because these contemporary

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[57] Ibid.
[58] For more information on the Musagetes, see http://musagetes.ca/manifesto/.
[59] Bishop, "The Social Turn", 180.

artists identify strongly with their indigenous heritage, it is viable to attribute this subversion somewhat to the imposition of the Great Artist figure in Western art and its incongruence with Native American historical artistic concerns. Uncovering the origin and exposing the fraudulence of the myth of the "Great Artist" is necessary to complicate the established narrative of art history. This unearthing of an alternative narrative is not intended to dispel the importance of solo artists; Watt definitely retains authorship, and by any definition is an artist with a capital "A." The work of Postcommodity and Watt demonstrate the significance of inserting intercultural narratives into the discourse on contemporary art.

Chapter One Figures

Figure 4. Joseph Beuys, *Coyote: I Like America and America Likes Me* (1974)

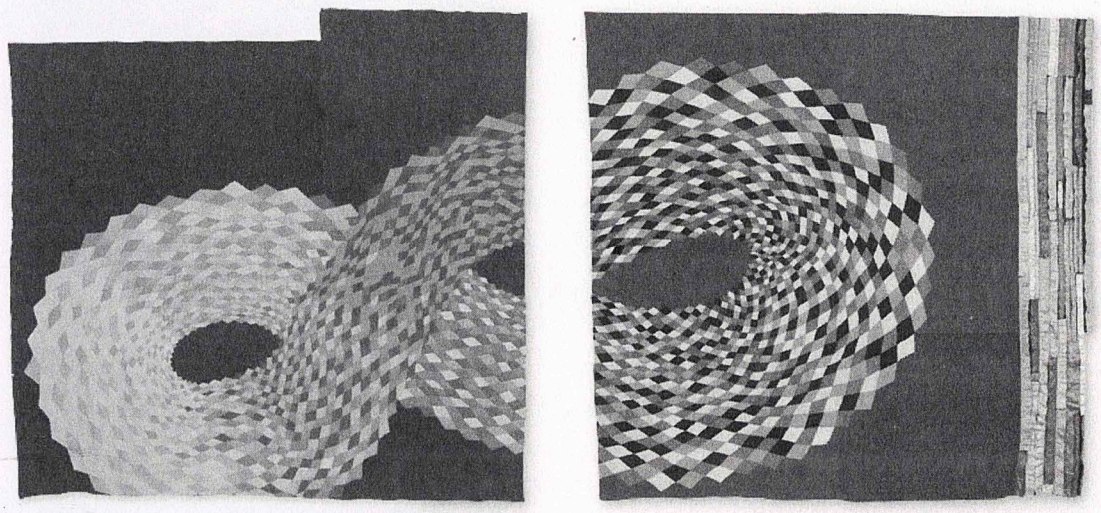

Figure 5. Marie Watt, *Braid* (2004)

Figure 6. Marie Watt, *Generous Ones, Pink Sky* (2014)

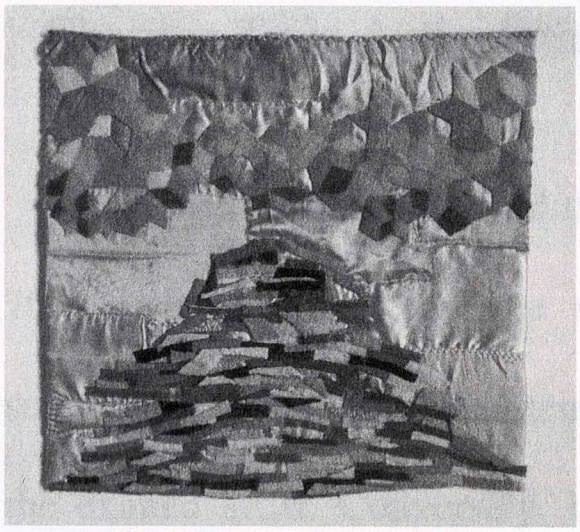

Figure 7. Marie Watt, *Generous Ones, Blue Sky* (2014)

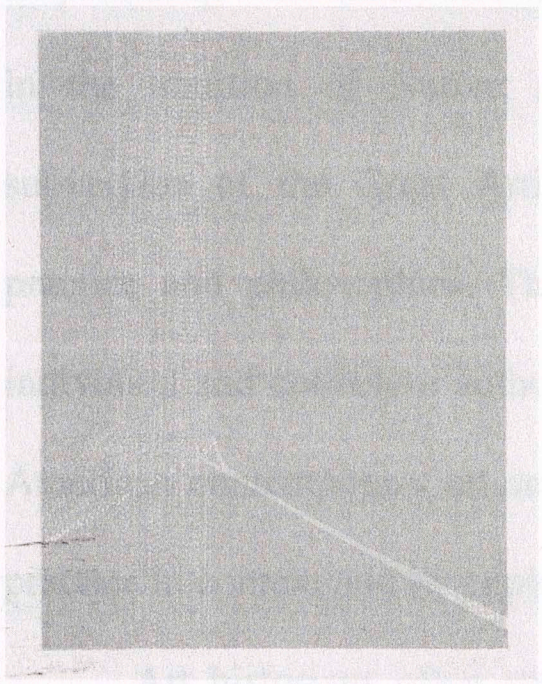

Figure 8. Marie Watt, *Lodge* (2007)

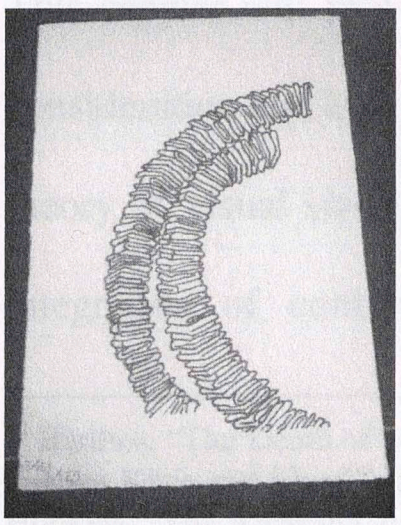

Figure 9. Marie Watt, Lithograph for sewing circle participation or blanket exchange, (2013)

Chapter Two: Articulating Visual Sovereignty Through Asserting Community

When Barthes declared the "death of the author,"[60] artists in the 1960's and 70's such as Klein and the members of Fluxus[61] created sometimes chaotic, sometimes hostile, and consistently avant-garde situations responding to the death of the exalted artist. Conversely, lacking the Western baggage of the exalted, single artist-as-creator, contemporary Native American artists fluidly share authority, emphasizing community and the elevated importance of non-autonomous art implicit in the tradition of Native American art. The previous chapter addressed the subversion of the Great Artist type by individual artists through their personal practice and philosophies. This chapter continues to complicate binaries between individual and collective authorship as well as the binary between Western or Euro-American contemporary art and contemporary Native art by considering community practice in context and by exploring the progression away from activism-driven art.

Art historians often refer to the notion that contemporary Native American artists emphasize "community" in their practice, but rarely define what this means.[62] This chapter will provide some examples in context of the importance of collective consideration and how it factors into Native American artistic practice, employing the theory of visual sovereignty. I argue for the articulation of sovereignty through the integration of communal practices as a forward progression from the visual

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[60] Barthes, "The Death of the Author."

[61] Yves Klein and Fluxus played with and teased the boundaries of authorship. See, for example, Hopkins, "The Artist in Crisis," and "Blurring Boundaries: Pop Art, Fluxus, and their Effects," in *After Modern Art,* 67-93 and 94-129.

[62] As Native American art history and criticism is still a comparatively fledgling field (see note 15) the tenets of what makes Native American art unique are still being negotiated, but in the absence of clearly defined tenets, scholarship and criticism defaults to a "connection to land" or "connection to community."

sovereignty of activist-driven Native American art of earlier decades. The experience of Native artists at the Denver Art Museum's artist in residency program provides an exemplary opportunity to consider both community and visual sovereignty in context. Because the Denver Art Museum's (hereafter, DAM) education department is closely aligned with the museum's role as a leader in the display of Native American art, this artist in residence program provides the perfect platform from which to analyze Native artists' systematic engagement with the surrounding community. Analyzing this engagement and the works created provides examples of a shift from an articulation of visual sovereignty through activism to an articulation through interdependence.

Defining Community

Properly teasing out the ways in which communal considerations inform Native American artistic practices would require an ethnographic review of many and varied tribal histories and ontologies far beyond the scope of this thesis. In lieu of such an encompassing analysis and without falling back on a vapid turn of phrase, I will cite a few supporting examples of how community roots deeply in indigenous worldviews.

Maori scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith effectively outlines the abundant parameters of "community" in *Decolonizing Methodologies*: *Research and Indigenous Peoples*: as "physical, political, social, psychological, historical, linguistic, economic, cultural, and spiritual spaces."[63] Colonization and the infliction

[63] Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples,* 2nd ed., (New York: Zed Books, 2012), 128.

of colonial policies have complicated community for indigenous peoples by both imposing community boundaries through reservations, and rupturing traditional community bonds through removal and residential schooling. Communal considerations, therefore, are not restricted to the romanticized historical pre-contact bonds of Native societies. Rather, for contemporary North American indigenous peoples, community ties represent resistance against devastating upheaval and cultural loss. For contemporary Native Americans, community is a traditional value, but also a modern manifestation of sovereignty and active endurance. Certainly, then, for some artists at least, communal considerations carry much weight in contemporary Native American artistic practice.

In terms of traditional or historic community ties, specific roles and ceremonies for assuming one's role characterize tribal society, placing high importance on one's place in one's community that is fundamentally different from Western society. Similarly, kinship and family ties typically factor far more prominently into identity for Native peoples than in the Western worldview. For Native societies, accountability to one's family and original community is important and taken seriously. Some Canadian institutions present examples in attempting to implement this community awareness into art museum practices and environments. For example, the 2003 symposium and accompanying publication, *Making a Noise! Aboriginal Perspectives on Art, Art History, Critical Writing and Community* held at the Banff Centre in Alberta collects the perspectives of indigenous museum professionals. As indicated by the inclusion of "community" in the title and some titles of included papers, consideration of community is paramount to Aboriginal

curatorial values. Marie Bouchard's contribution, "Curating in Relation to Community," explicates some of the challenges and barriers to, but also the utmost importance of, involving indigenous communities in order to serve self-representation and self-determination. Bouchard presents the example of carefully curating a solo exhibition for Marion Tuu'luq, an Inuit mixed media and textile artist. (See Figure 8, 1978) Tuu'luq, born in the early twentieth century, lived a traditional nomadic lifestyle for five decades, and began creating art late in her life. Bouchard endeavored to honor Tuu'luq both in the institutional sense, with a solo exhibition acclaimed by contemporary art critics, and in the Inuit sense, to honor Tuu'luq and her family's contributions and priorities. Bouchard emphasizes that Tuu'luq did not aspire to individual recognition, underscoring the importance of curating an exhibition that would be "relevant and meaningful both in the institutional setting and locally."[64]

Visual Sovereignty through Interdependence and Shared Experience

Visual sovereignty, a concept advanced by Tuscarora scholar Jolene Rickard, frames contemporary Native American art history. Rickard and others have argued for the adaptation of sovereignty outside of legal considerations. In "Sovereignty: A Line in the Sand," Rickard writes, "one might wonder if the issue of sovereignty belongs in the cultural debate. I would strongly suggest that it does.... as part of an ongoing strategy for survival, the work of indigenous artists needs to be understood through the clarifying lens of sovereignty and self-determination, not just in terms of

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[64] Marie Bouchard, "Curating in Relation to Community" in *Making a Noise! Aboriginal Perspectives on Art, Art History, Critical Writings and Community,* ed. Lee-Ann Martin (Alberta: Banff Centre, 2003), 217-219.

assimilation, colonization, and identity politics."[65] To adopt visual anthropologist Kristen Dowell's definition, visual sovereignty refers to indigenous people's assertion of their "distinctive cultural traditions, political status and collective identities through aesthetic or cinematic means."[66] Although Dowell's work analyzes film, her locating of visual sovereignty in the *act of production* frames my investigation of how the literal act of participation allows Native artists to assert their place in contemporary art while simultaneously asserting traditional values and practices.

The articulation of visual sovereignty for contemporary indigenous artists previously manifested itself in art marked by aggressive activism. Contemporary Native American artists practicing collaborative or participatory methods represent a shift from activist art to art concerned with visual sovereignty through interdependence. Anthropologist Jessica Cattelino argues against the idea that globalization erodes autonomy and therefore sovereignty by articulating her theory of sovereignty through interdependence, or the ways in which sovereign nations assert their presence and role through interactions with other nations.[67] Although Cattelino's theory of interdependence literally refers to the interdependence of various sovereignties in global economics and is far removed from artistic practice, adapting this concept illuminates the navigation of Native artists' integration into the global contemporary art world. In short, contemporary Native American art need not exist as a category outside of contemporary art. As Dowell notes in *Sovereign Screens,*

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[65] Rickard, "A Line in the Sand," 51.

[66] In adapting the concept of visual sovereignty, I borrow from indigenous media and film studies, and largely draw my understanding of visual sovereignty from Kristen Dowell's excellent *Sovereign Screens: Aboriginal Media on the Canadian West Coast.* Also see:
Michelle Raheja, "Reading Nanook's Smile: Visual Sovereignty, Indigenous Revisions of Ethnography, and Atanarjuat (The Fast Runner) *American Indian Quarterly* 59 (2007): 1159-1185.

[67] Jessica Cattelino, *High Stakes: Florida Seminole Gaming and Sovereignty* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), 17.

"Aboriginal media makers do not exist in a vacuum outside of engagement with dominant…institutions or mainstream society."[68] By incorporating traditional values and practices while participating in non-Native artistic outlets, Native artists articulate visual sovereignty through interdependence. In shifting from a program of activism to one of interdependence and recognizing that Native American artists do not create in a vacuum, we can read works of contemporary participatory art by Native artists as focused on shared experiences rather than promoting a singular agenda. This chapter analyzes artworks that emplify this.

Native American Activist Art in the 1990's

Marie Watt noted in our interview, "I think you can't be a Native person … without feeling political and being the outcome of a lot of political decisions that were made with and without the consent of our people."[69] Watt concedes that artistic intent does not thwart political readings of artworks. However, while political undertones and colonial critiques characterize assertions of visual sovereignty, Native American contemporary art has often promoted an *activist* agenda, foregrounding political issues. Artists such as Juane Quick-to-See-Smith, James Luna, Edgar Heap of Birds, and Jimmie Durham mark this period in Native American art history through their interrogation and denunciation of continued colonialism.

Although activist art manifests in a great many ways and at myriad points in time, I use the 1992 Columbus quincentennial as exemplary of a moment in Native American art marked by activism. In "Street Chiefs and Native Hosts: Richard Ray

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[68] Dowell, *Sovereign Screens,* Kindle edition, location 876.
[69] Watt, interview, 1/13/15.

(Whitman) and Hachivi Edgar Heap of Birds Defend the Homeland," Jackson Rushing examines works by Whitman and Heap of Birds from the late 1980's and early 1990's as expressions of tragic loss.[70] In fact, Rushing quotes Northwest Coast art historian Charlotte Townsend-Gault's illuminating explanation of why "Native American art" exists apart from "American art" in a contemporary context: "What is the point...of perpetuating a category called 'Native art' when the work is irreconcilably diverse and the category restrictive or discriminating? The answer is that it is not an art category at all, but a sociopolitical situation."[71] Tellingly, Townsend-Gault ascribes the category of Native American art not to any shared positive attributes, but to a shared "sociopolitical situation," inferring that this shared situation underlies all Native American contemporary art, and therefore that contemporary Native art is characterized by a reaction to sociopolitical issues.

Rushing's article focuses on the work of Richard Ray (Whitman) (Creek) and Edgar Heap of Birds (Cheyenne). Both artists support the definition of Native art as articulated by Townsend-Gault, but Heap of Birds' work illustrates this reactionary sociopolitical work particularly well. He produces public signage pieces to achieve effective intervention through "the reduction and dramatic intensity of the declarative statement itself."[72] (Figure 9) Heap of Birds employs materials that visually duplicate innocuous public signage, but his messages are anything but mild. The signs mark space by commenting on the ways in which Euro-American culture has thoroughly erased the presence of the initial inhabits of North America by imposing new place-

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[70] W. Jackson Rushing, "Street Chiefs and Native Hosts: Richard Ray (Whitman) and Hachivi Edgar Heap of Birds Defend the Homeland," in *Green Acres: Neocolonialism in the US* (St. Louis: Washington University Gallery of Art, 1992), 23.
[71] Ibid, 24.
[72] Rushing, "Street Chiefs and Native Hosts," 31.

names and associating places with new meaning, communicated by signifiers such as public signs. In *Building Minnesota,* Heap of Birds created 38 signs recognizing a member of the Dakota tribe hanged by the United States at the end of the United States-Dakota Conflict.[73] As in *Building Minnesota,* public signage often responds directly to specific events, historical or contemporary.[74]Reacting to specific events and seeking recognition for historical injustices underscores this work as activism. Heap of Birds' public signage actively does *not* comment on shared societal issues, but on the rupture induced by one group on another.

Juane Quick-to-See Smith also created a topical work for the quincentennial of Columbus's "discovering" of America in 1992. Smith's work sparks more dialogue in its delivery than Heap of Birds's brazen signage, but her body of work absolutely aligns with Townsend-Gault's designation of Native art as entwined with a sociopolitical situation. Her 1992 piece, *Trade (Gifts for Trading Land with White People),* (Figure 10) is a seminal work of contemporary Native American art. This large mixed-media canvas is divided into three large parts, creating a triptych to evoke a medieval altarpiece. The canvas is covered in collage riddled with various kitsch imagery of Native American stereotypes, painted over with a life-size canoe and expressionist brushstrokes of red, white and green. Above the canvas hangs a clothesline strung with various Native American mascot paraphernalia. *Trade* concerns the "fundamental misunderstanding between the Native and non-Native worlds – especially the notion of private ownership of

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[73] Walker Art Center, "Ma-ka'tal-na'-zin (One Who Stands on the Earth) Label Text," 1998. http://www.walkerart.org/collections/artworks/ma-katal-na-zin-one-who-stands-on-the-earth

[74] For example, Rushing analyzes *Building Minnesota* (1990), 31.

land ...."[75]

These examples serve to illustrate the somewhat us-versus-them binary opposition that characterized much Native American art in the 1990's. It would be insultingly naïve to suggest that the outrage demonstrated by Heap of Birds and Smith is overly polarized. Clearly, the work of these activist-driven artists is an essential element of understanding the colonial destruction of indigenous life. The following examples of contemporary participatory art demonstrate the possibility of articulating sovereignty through shared experiences rather than continuing to emphasize difference.

From Activism to Shared Experience

I recognize that the structure of this chapter sets up activism and interdependence as oppositional concepts; in my thesis that seeks to dispel binaries, I do not wish to create a binary between activism and shared experience, or between activism and interdependence. Through participatory and collaborative practices and subverting the Western Great Artist, Native American contemporary artists enact visual sovereignty by participating in the global contemporary art world while drawing on traditional and tribal practices. We need not declare activism dead, outdated, or unnecessary. Instead, these examples are meant to emphasize a lack of a binary opposition between the experiences of groups, and explore what is gained from acknowledging interdependence and shared experience.

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[75] Suzanne Frick, "A Non-Celebration," *Khan Academy*..
https://www.khanacademy.org/humanities/global-culture/identity-body/identity-body-united-states/a/jaune-quick-to-see-smith-trade-gifts-for-trading-land-with-white-people
For more on Smith's work, see *Engaged Resistance*

Marie Watt rejects the appellation of activist as an artist. She concedes that her work may often invite readings of political activism or commentary, but expresses concern about being "one-note" or oversimplifying an important investigation into human experience.[76] Watt's work typically investigates points of commonality and intersections between various groups or experiences. At times, these intersections and shared experiences concern political subject matter, such as in *Forget-me-not: Mothers and Sons* (2008). (Figure 11) *Forget-me-not* combines textile with large-scale sculpture. The base of the piece is a ten-foot tall steel fence-like structure. Cut reclaimed wool blankets create the illusion of chain-link fencing, secured to the steel frame. Adhered to the faux-fencing are small cameo portraits of the "sons," men from Watt's extended community who lost their lives in Iraq and Afghanistan, and "mothers," women who touched the lives of and influenced different men Watt has know. The wool chains become a web interconnecting the mothers and sons. The steel structure curves into an almost complete circle, twenty feet in diameter, with a doorway-width opening in one end to allow viewers to come inside, creating an experiential, activated space. Stitched satin bindings anchor the right side of the opening, while extra wool webbing bunches up around the left. Entering the fence to view the cameos creates an experience akin to viewing a war memorial, slowly following the line of the memorial to read the names inscribed. Of course, Watt's cameos create a far more personal encounter than inscribed names, which reveal nothing of the humans they describe. Furthermore, the colorful display of various reclaimed wool blankets create an entirely different mood than the somber materiality

[76] Interview with Watt: "I know the reasons that I steer clear of making work that's outwardly political, which is that I'm fearful of the one-liner aspect of it. Where…you can agree with sentiment or you can reject the sentiment but then it doesn't have resonance beyond that moment."

of a traditional war memorial. Other associations with entering the space of *Forget-me-not* may evoke the sacred space of a chapel, or as Watt explains it, inclusion in a storytelling circle.[77] Indeed, *Forget-me-not* invites the viewer to digest the stories of individuals whose voices and lives Watt highlights.

One of Watt's more politically conscious pieces, *Forget-Me-not* responds to the media coverage at the height of the Iraq war and the discourse surrounding "our troops." Watt critiques this collective identity not by making an aggressive anti-war statement, but by seeking to give voice to those affected by the conflict and learning more about specific mothers and sons from her community. In keeping with shared voices and discussion of shared experiences, the cameos of *Forget-me-not*: *Mothers and Sons* were stitched in sewing circles among discussion and community. As demonstrated in chapter one, Watt's inclination to give voice to others in her artwork is representative of the importance of community and dissemination of authority. Furthermore, a work about the war that does not seek to condemn any political agenda but to investigate the individuals affected by it indicates a preoccupation with shared human experience over a binary activist agenda.

While Watt acknowledges potential activist or political readings of her work, the artist collective Postcommodity clearly articulates its lack of an activist agenda. They explain their art as lacking an "agenda of opposition," instead exploring and illustrating a twenty-first century shared experience. Rather than promoting one correct epistemology, Postcommodity creates space for varied and different worldviews by the nature of their multi-sensory installation projects.

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[77] Rebecca Dobkins, *Lodge* (Salem: Williamette University, 2012), 72.

Postcommodity particularly engages with non-activist, shared twenty-first century experience in the plan and design for their forthcoming ephemeral installation, *Repellent Fence* (October 2015), (Figure 13), which seeks to shift the discourse of immigration to emphasize the human element. The proposed project will take the form of a two-mile long ephemeral sculpture consisting of Postcommodity's Repellent Eye balloons. Postcommodity previously has deployed the Repellent Eye in works including *Repellent Eye Over Phoenix* (2008) (Figure 14) and *Repellent Eye Winnipeg* (2011). These balloons replicate a "scare eye balloon," a method of repelling unwanted birds that seldom proves effective for more than a few days. (See Figure 15) However, Postcommodity also appropriates the scare eye balloon for its red, yellow, and black colors, which they identify as traditional medicine colors for many indigenous American tribes. Postcommodity's giant, ten-foot diameter version of the scare balloons therefore renders visible the often invisible indigenous presence. In *Repellent Fence,* the balloons will hover over the contested borderlands between the United States and Mexico. The contestation of these borderlands typically ignores the indigenous presence along them and the violence done to indigenous homelands by the imposition of colonial borders.[78] Postcommodity plans for the ephemeral sculpture to reach across the border "as a suture that stitches the peoples of the Americas together."[79]

When, even if, Postcommodity realizes *Repellent Fence* does not diminish the logistical weight of planning such an undertaking. In analyzing *Repellent Fence* as a work of relational aesthetics, the significance lies in conceptual weight of the

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[79] Postcommodity, "Repellent Fence – Installation Forthcoming in October 2015" postcommodity.com.

exchanges and interactions that attempting to realize this project necessitated. *Repellent Fence* exists beyond an activist context because, again, the piece seeks not to promote the agenda of any particular group involved in immigration debates, but to emphasize the humanity of immigration. Immigration debates affect a broad range of people and therefore illustrate our shared experience. The logistical planning of *Repellent Fence* necessitates that Postcommodity engage with border patrol, drug cartels, government agencies, ranchers and farmers – borderland stakeholders, the vicious and innocuous alike. Forcing a discourse in the name of realizing this artwork speaks to the unavoidable interdependence of various sovereignties. Like much of Watt's work, *Repellent Fence* demonstrates Postcommodity's ability to create works that are about participation and politics, while not being exclusively about either. Furthermore, in addition to signifying the interdependent relationship between indigenous groups and colonial nations, the complicated nature of their interdisciplinary, collaborative, and participatory work speaks to their rejection of the alleged genius of the solo artist or the activist politics of a singular-minded group.

Both *Forget-me-not: Mothers and Sons* and *Repellent Fence* represent the possibilities of investigating political subject matter from the perspective of shared experience. The collaborative and participatory components of these works underscore the erasure of binaries between groups.

Sharing Experiences in Context at the Denver Art Museum

Watt and Postcommodity's collaborative investigations into shared experience represent interdependence between various groups by exploring global issues. While

the Banff Centre is one of several non-Native Canadian institutions reaching out to Native artists, the Denver Art Museum is the primary comparable in the States.[80] The DAM's Native artist-in-residence program fosters interdependence by positioning Native American artists within the encyclopedic art museum, as well as connecting Native artists to the museum's diverse constituency. Before outlining the residency's connections to interdependence and visual sovereignty, the exclusively Native American program deserves critique for its potential essentialism and potential link to historic practice of Native Americans demonstrating arts and crafts in museums and at world's fairs. As the museum staff acknowledges, a "real Indian" working in a museum can quickly create such associations and have a fishbowl effect. The institution combats this by working very closely with the artist to ensure their comfort. Furthermore, the explanation for the exclusivity of the program is definitive. The DAM has lead museum representation of American Indian objects. In 1925, the institution founded its Department of Native arts and was among the first American museums to collect American Indian objects as art, rather than artifacts, and in 2011, the institution unveiled a radical reinstallation of their American Indian galleries focusing on artists as individuals, rather than as categorized tribal identities. The residency program exists as a culmination of that effort to foreground Native American *artists.*[81]

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[80] Other examples of collaboration with Native artists and curators in Canada include the Beat Nation exhibition initiated by the grunt gallery (http://www.beatnation.org) and exhibited at the Vancouver Art Gallery, and the community outreach efforts of the Art Gallery of Ontario. See Janna Graham and Shadya Yasin, "Reframing Participation in the Museum: A Syncopated Discussion," in *Museums After Modernism* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), 157-172.

[81] This information was gleaned from conversations and observations with DAM staff through a research visit in January 2015 and follow-up email correspondence for the remainder of the Spring 2015 semester, as well as an unpublished blog entry for the DAM website by John Lukavic.

The DAM foregrounds artistic and creative practice and process across all of its departments, but the residency program with a community outreach element may resonate particularly strongly with Native American artists. In a conversation with the original coordinator of the artist in residency program, we concluded that although Native artists are obviously not the only artists that desire a connection to their own community or the institution's community, there is no shortage of contemporary Native artists excited to take part in this opportunity. The residency also sheds light on degrees of participation in participatory practices; not all artists' end result is participatory or collaboratively created, but the vague explanation of Native artists' connection to community describes a true social consciousness in their concern for the well being and voice of others. The coordinators of this program agree that the artists involved with the Native artist in residency exhibit fluidity between their solo and social practice. In this section, I will examine art works created by residents in the program as representative of a propensity for traditional community-oriented process.

At the time of this writing, the DAM residency has hosted eight Native artists. They include Melanie Yazzie, Navajo painter and printmaker; Walt Pourier, Oglala Lakota painter and community activist; Will Wilson, a Navajo photographer; Marie Watt; Linda Aguilar, Chumash horsehair basket weaver; Rose Simpson, Santa Clara sculptor and performance artist; Jeffrey Gibson, Choctaw-Cherokee painter, sculptor, and new media artist; and Kevin Pourier, Oglala Lakota buffalo horn and jewelry artist. The program seeks to represent artists from local, regional, and national locales

and communities. In addition to these eight, the museum has a full schedule of Native artists booked through the end of the year.

The inclusion of Walt Pourier, as one of the DAM residency's first participants illustrates the scope of the program's community outreach. Pourier is a graphic designer and painter and owns Nakota Designs Advertising and Graphics, but also is the executive director of Stronghold Society, a non-profit dedicated to outreach for Native youth. Artistically, Pourier creates arresting, boldly graphic designs for skateboard decks. (see figure 15) Beyond the strong visual method of painting updated Native imagery on skate decks, asserting the presence of Native peoples in contemporary urban society, Pourier uses art, design, and skateboarding to empower Native youth. DAM's use of the artist-in-residence program as a platform for Pourier to showcase his work but also to connect with local youth and advance the mission of Stronghold Society demonstrates the intertwined relationship of art and communal considerations for Native artists. Pourier's residency provides an example of artists whose finished works are not necessarily created through any collaborative process, but the artists' philosophy and practice nonetheless prominently feature community involvement and exchange.

Will Wilson, DAM resident for March 2013, used the residency to work on his ongoing project, "Critical Indigenous Photographic Exchange." For this project, Wilson uses the medium of choice for documentation of the West in the nineteenth century: tintype photography. Like Watt, Wilson promotes true collaboration and reciprocity by gifting his sitters the original wet-plate photograph he created. (see Figure 16). Wilson gifts the original photograph, and creates digital version of the

image to keep for his ongoing project. Wilson creates large-scale prints of the digital images for exhibition display. During his residency, the DAM put out a call for participants to Native community members who would sit for an hour at a time, while other members of the museum might sit for briefer periods. Wilson's work highlights the intersection of community outreach and participatory art that this residency program provides.

During Watt's participation in the DAM's residency in Summer 2013, she produced numerous works involving the Denver community, illustrating the importance of community collaboration to her. *Trek* (2014) (Figure 18) and *Blanket Story: Confluence, Heirloom, and Tenth Mountain Division* (Figure 19) best exemplify Watt's community component during her residency. *Trek,* a sculptural textile wall work, is comprised of a riot of bright pinks, reds, and blues set in triangular patterns. The triangular abstraction illustrates the wide variety of blankets Watt employed to create this piece; few of the thin strips creating the patterning are the same color. Watt deploys pinks, purples, red, and blues in addition to plaids that add subtle depth though their color variations. The grouping of the colorful triangles, anchored around a center of shining satin blanket bindings, evokes the Pleiades or Sever Sisters constellations, and the triangle patterns themselves evoke a basket motif from of Oregonian or Californian tribal origins. (See figure 20) An olive colored wool background sets off the colorful patterning. Over the entirety of the abstract scene, Watt embroidered the Starship Enterprise, rendered almost imperceptibly delicately.

Trek encapsulates Watt's interest in commonality and intersections, bringing together seemingly disparate imagery and themes in a single work. By combining

these disparate motifs, Watt represents the contemporary world she, other Native artists, and viewers of her work all inhabit. The mash up of space, Star Trek, and indigenous themes obviously comments on the experience of an indigenous person in a Western world, but the specific Star Trek reference has deeper implications. The television show broke racial barriers by imagining a racially inclusive future. The show depicted women and people of color as doctors and scientists, and aired the first television multi-racial kiss. Its creator, Gene Roddenberry, conceptualized the show as a vessel to tell more sophisticated stories than classic adventure tales normally did. The show's writers often addressed topics such as slavery, warfare, and discrimination.[82] *Trek* developed out of sewing circles held at the DAM. Watt created *Trek* during her residency at the DAM and the hand-stitched textile comprises stitches from a hoard of individuals, all of whose stitches Watt honors and considers integral to the piece, structurally and metaphorically. Star Trek may initially seem like a trivial or inconsequential theme, but Watt is able to generate powerful associations regarding race and other inequalities by incorporating diverse cultural references into the sewing circle practice. Eliciting conversation through the sewing circle around images that call attention to cultural difference creates space to acknowledge and discuss those differences and shared experience.

In addition to hosting sewing circles and facilitating communal connections resulting in works such as *Trek*, Watt elicited the Denver community's blanket stories through a blanket collection for her installation, *Blanket Story: Confluence, Heirloom, and Tenth Mountain Division.* Although Watt had collaborated with institutions to

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[82] Dwayne Day, "Star Trek as a Cultural Phenomenon."
http://www.centennialofflight.net/essay/Social/star_trek/SH7.htm

collect blankets in the past, the Denver project was the largest collection to date. Most importantly, the institution recorded and collected every single accompanying story from every participant in the collection. The familiarity of Watt's primarily material creates quite literal associations with the warm and fuzzy that may incite critique as not sophisticated or conceptually advanced. However, the subtlety of using such a commonplace material to explore intersections and points of commonality works as a quietly brilliant strategy for dissolving the boundaries and binaries of authorship. Blanket stories spill out so easily that participants do not seem to experience the hesitancy of self-consciousness or of not being sophisticated enough to understand fine art, which I believe impedes many from connecting to autonomous art. The accessibility of *Blanket Story: Confluence, Heirloom, and Tenth Mountain Division* does not reduce its conceptual depth. Rather, Watt manages to elicit meaningful participation by discerning a method of making participants comfortable enough – through the familiarity of wool blankets - to defer the narrative them.

Postcommodity will be in residency at the DAM in late March 2015. The group has plans to put pressure on the singular nature of the institution's focus on Native American artists in their forthcoming participation. Their residency project will take further the opportunities provided by the program to explore intersections with the surrounding community. Although their residency will not be completed until after the time of this writing, it is indicative of the DAM artist in residency program as a culmination of decades of visual sovereignty in which Native American artists have shifted from activist art reinforcing difference to investigating shared experience. The DAM and *Making a Noise!* represent institutions' recognition of the

importance of collaboration with Native Americans, not only in exhibition design or as consultants, but using the institution as a space to enact visual sovereignty through the act of production. By opening up the authority of institutions to create a space for Native American artists to enact community processes, institutions participate in sovereignty through interdependence.

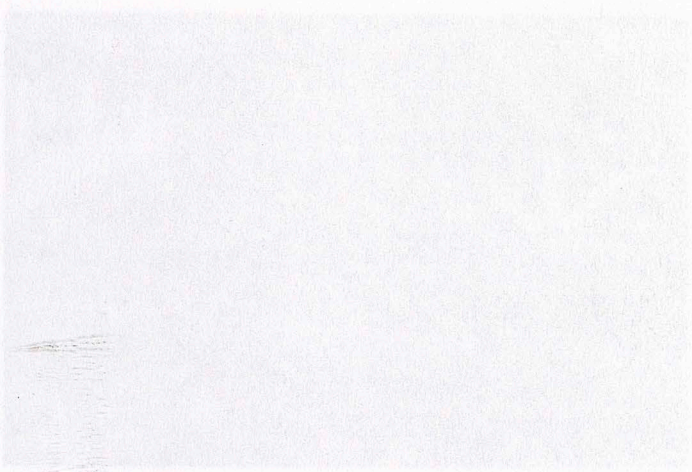

Figure 10. Marlon Two Bull, *People, Memories, Spirits* (1975)

Figure 11. Edgar Heap of Birds, *Building Minnesota* (1990)

Figure 12. Jolene Quirk-to-See Smith, *Treaty (Gifts for Dealing/Land with White People)* 1992

Chapter Two Figures

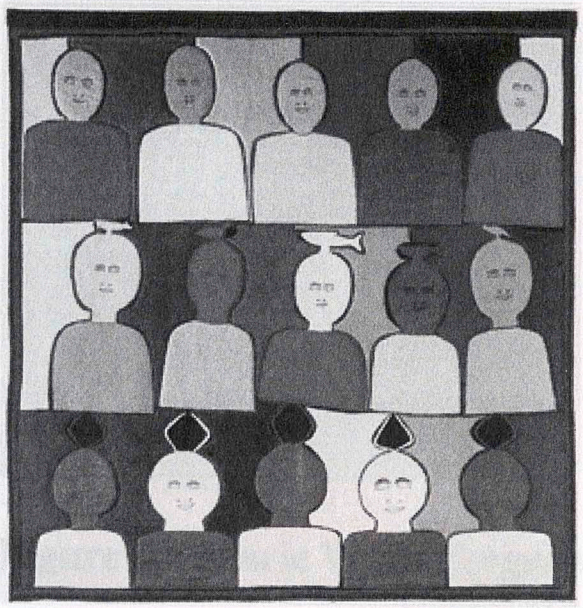

Figure 10. Marion Tuu'luq, *People, Shamans, Spirits* (1978)

Figure 11. Edgar Heap of Birds, *Building Minnesota* (1990)

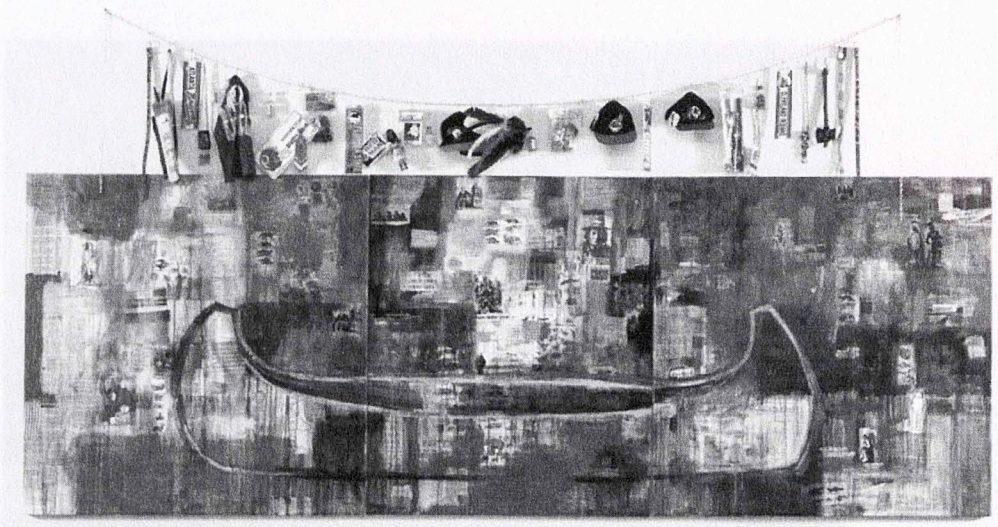

Figure 12. Juane Quick-to-See Smith, *Trade (Gifts for Trading Land with White People)* 1992

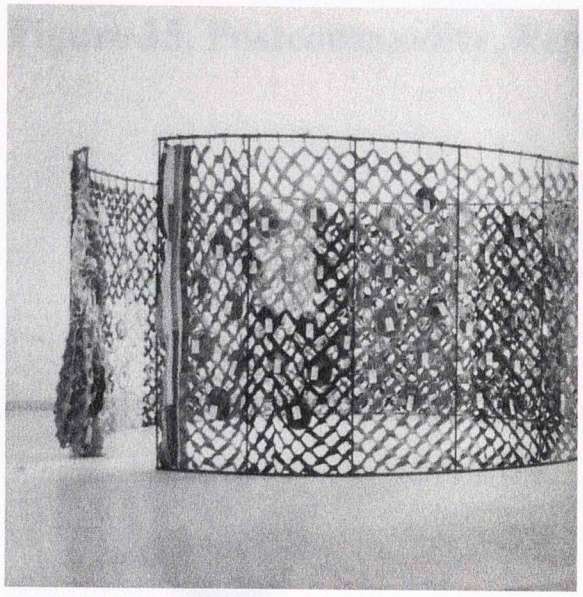

Figure 13. Marie Watt, *Forget-me-not: Mothers and Sons* (2008)

Figure 14. Postcommodity, Plan for *Repellent Fence,* (forthcoming 2015)

Figure 15. Postcommodity, *Repellent Eye Over Phoenix* (2008)

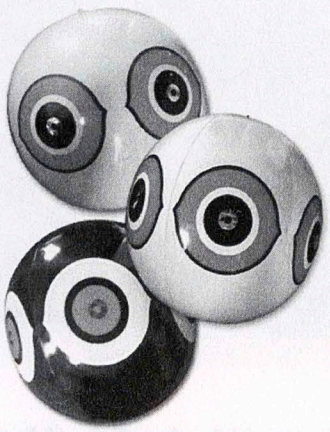

Figure 16. Scare Eye Balloon

Figure 17. Walt Pourier, pictured during residence at Denver Art Museum (2014)

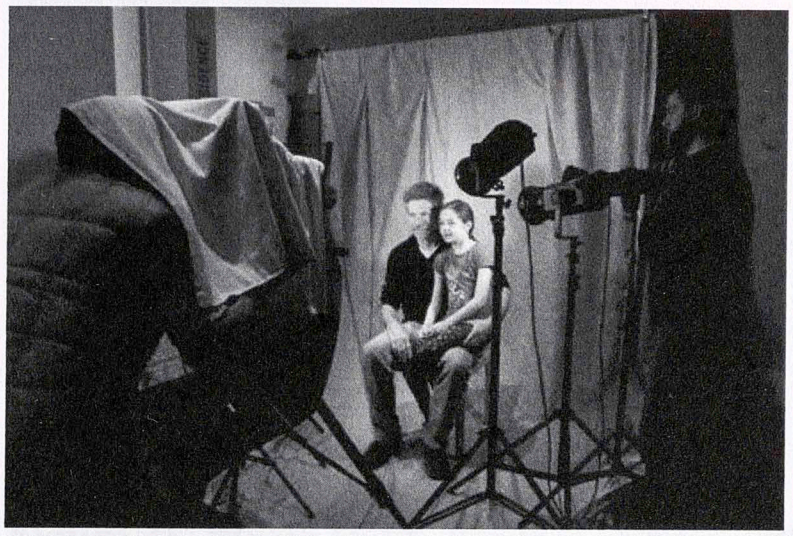

Figure 18. Will Wilson, sitting for Critical Indigenous Photographic Exchange (2013)

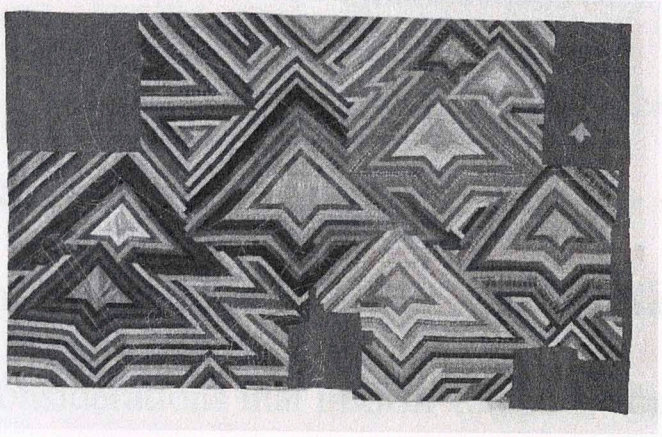

Figure 19. Marie Watt, *Trek* (2014)

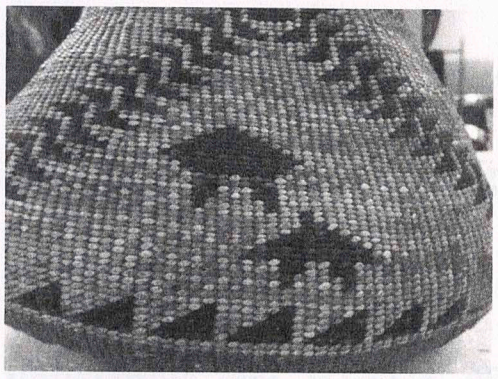

Figure 20. Basket

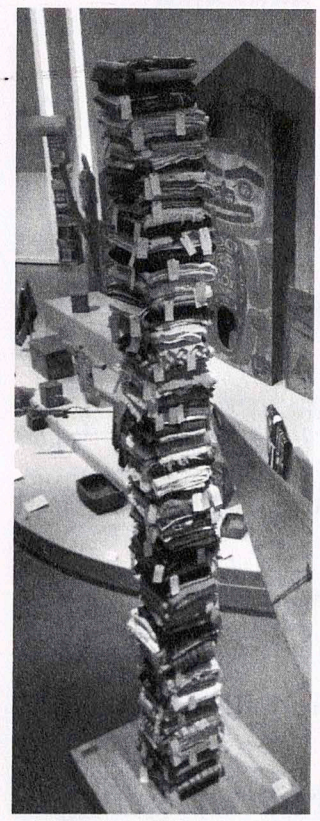

Figure 21. Marie Watt, *Blanket Story: Confluence, Heirloom, and Tenth Mountain Division* (2013)

Chapter Three: Edward Curtis and Air Jordans: Positioning Contemporary Native American Art

The preceding chapters have focused on the factors that intertwine indigenous North American art with the discourse on participatory art. I have elucidated the ways in which I believe that certain Native American art demonstrates communal considerations that inform and participate in the current trend of participatory art. The first and second chapters focused on what is unique and important to Native American art. Now, I turn to situating Native American contemporary art within the broader contemporary art context. The work of the artists in this thesis carries significant conceptual weight, transcending the reduction of its importance to any single dimension. In this chapter, I turn to synthesizing influences between indigenous and Western art history to demonstrate the lack of a binary between Western and "non-Western" contemporary art.

Although this thesis does not rehash claims about Native American art as peripheral to the contemporary art world for political or racially biased reasons, a brief explanation of the position of contemporary Native art within the broader art contemporary context is in order. Although Native American artists constantly adapt to new influences, navigating contemporary art production and promotion has proven to be difficult, due to lingering prejudices and stereotypes about authenticity and the horizon of expectations for indigenous art. Jennifer Kramer summarizes this paradox in *Switchbacks: Art, Identity, and Nuxalk National Identity.* She notes, "there is a lingering scholarly belief that material collected in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and housed in Western museums represents the pinnacle…by which traditionalism in Native art is judged. Traditional art-historical analysis plots

art styles on a bell curve of innovative nascence, classical apex, and decadent and static denouement."[83] Although I demonstrated in the previous chapter that contemporary Native American art has a long history outside of such constricting expectations, this is the context in which contemporary Native artists work. Therefore, it is important to position Native contemporary art within the context of the broader art world and not from a single perspective. Five years after the publication of *Switchbacks,* Jennifer Complo McNutt addresses positioning Native American contemporary art within contemporary art (and how seemingly inane it is to have to do so) in the 2011 Eiteljorg Fellowship catalogue. The Eiteljorg Museum of American Indians and Western Art's Contemporary Art Fellowship changed its name in 2011 from "Fellowship for Native American Fine Art," shifting the program's focus to contemporary art. She writes, "the contemporary art world has misinterpreted or mistranslated Native art…many Native contemporary artists want to be seen as Native, within the context of contemporary art. Most non-Native individuals…cannot translate their image of 'Indian' into contemporary context."[84] This chapter provides examples intended to rectify McNutt's anxiety over the fissure between contemporary and Native American contemporary art. The examples provided here add to McNutt's list of artists that help to continue the closure of that fissure.

The works analyzed in this chapter continue to complicate the binary between individual and collective authorship. In *Artificial Hells,* Bishop critiques Kester's enthusiasm for collectively authored art. She writes, "Kester's emphasis on

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[83] Jennifer Kramer, *Switchbacks: Art, Ownership, and Nuxalk National Identity* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2006), 3.

[84] Jennifer Complo McNutt, "What's next?" in *We Are Here: the Eiteljorg Contemporary Art Fellowship 2011,* ed. McNutt and Ashley Holland (Indianapolis: Eiteljorg Museum of American Indians and Western Art, 2011) 11-18.

compassionate identification with the Other is typical of the discourse around participatory art…it represents a familiar summary of the intellectual trends inaugurated by identity politics and consolidated in 1990's theory: respect for the Other, recognition of human difference."[85] The examples in this chapter support Bishop's critique of reducing artworks to the relationship between the dominant culture and the Other.

Marie Watt and Joseph Beuys

Watt's work encapsulates the congruence of communal considerations and the internalization of the history of Western modern art through art-school training. Her work draws comparisons to many modern artists including Jasper Johns, Faith Ringgold, and Constantin Brancusi, but most relevant to the discourse on complicating authorship and intercultural influences is her affinity for the previously discussed Joseph Beuys. Parallels with Beuys' notions of Social Sculpture are not difficult to discern in Watt's work. Beuys worked to expand the definition of art and sculpture. He considered his debates, discussions, and teaching as part of his art, and employed fat, honey, and blood, as well as movement and sound as materials. Beuys defines Social Sculpture as, "how we mold and shape the world in which we live." He claimed that Sculpture is an evolutionary process and that everyone is an artist:[86]

> …Many object that not everyone can be an artist. But that's precisely the point to make the concept into one that once more describes the essence of being human…So what we have here is an anthropological concept rather than the traditional middle-class concept of art, as it currently exists.[87]

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[85] Bishop, *Artificial Hells,* 25.
[86] Volker Harlan, ed., et al, *What Is Art? Conversation With Joseph Beuys* (West Sussex: Clairview, 2004), 9.
[87] Ibid, 10-11.

Watt understands the subtlety of Beuys' claim, saying of her 2009 installation *Heirloom,* "I think when artists make work there's sometimes an assumption that it's a completed thought, but one of my goals is to have something that the community helps continue. So it's not about completion in that regard. Like heirlooms, the stories grow with each generation."[88] Watt's ongoing experimentation with audience participation demonstrates a commitment to Social Sculpture. Her interest in collecting and combining the stories intrinsically found in blankets, the stories flowing freely around the table at a sewing circle, stories shared on album pages, or tags left for museum and gallery visitors, are a way for the artist to examine the same concept Beuys sought to understand – the essence of being human. Underscoring the importance of convergence with Western art history, Watt is forthcoming about her affinity for Beuys. This is visually evident in the small piece *Demokratie is Lustig (Democracy is Merry)* (2008, figure 21). Watt also cited Beuys as an influence in an interview with the author, referencing his concept of the Free University, admiring his ideas for bringing together those who want to teach and those who want to learn.[89]

Another overlooked connection between Beuys and Watt manifests in the artists' choice of materials. Beuys employed materials that conveyed warmth or energy, and believed these to be powerful metaphors for spiritual and physical transformation – the transformation he believed to be necessary for society. [90] Warmth and energy work as metaphors for the creative and spiritual energy that art

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[88] Erika Fredrickson, "Never Ending Story: Marie Watt Sparks Nostalgia With Heirlooms, *Missoula Independent,* March 19, 2009.
http://missoulanews.bigskypress.com/missoula/never-ending-story/Content?oid=1147844

[89] Watt interview, 1/13/15.

[90] Tate ,"Joseph Beuys: Actions, Vitrines, Environments: Room 1," accessed November 1, 2013.
http://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-modern/exhibition/joseph-beuys-actions-vitrines-environments/joseph-beuys-actions-1

should bring to the individual viewer and society as a whole. There is a visual connection between Watt's blankets and Beuys' theories on warmth evident in his felt stacks and her blanket stacks. Beuys' *Fond III* (Figure 22, 1968) consists of stacked felt with copper plates, while *Ja Ja Ja Ja Ja Nee Nee Nee Nee Nee* (Figure 23, 1969) is comprised of felt sheets stacked around an audiotape. These pieces represent the creation and storage of energy. The audiotape embedded in *Ja Ja Ja Ja Ja Nee Nee Nee Nee Nee* to Watt's projects such as *Heirloom* relates (see figure 24) where recorded stories play on repeat in the gallery. Watt's blanket stacks relate conceptually to the same principles as Beuys' felt stacks. The stacks store the creative energies in the emotions embedded in their accompanying stories, both creating and storing narrative.

Dwelling, (2006, fig 25) the most visually similar piece of Watt's to Beuys' felt stacks, resonates with Beuys' notion of a middle-class concept of art.[91] Watt conceived and implemented *Dwelling* for the exhibition *No Reservations* at the Aldrich Museum of Contemporary Art in Ridgefield, CT, but a serendipitous and circumstantial blanket drastically altered the conceptual weight of the work. *Dwelling* consisted of unfolded, stacked wool blankets, partially collected through donations from area residents along with their blanket stories. The remainder were purchased new and later donated to area shelters. Watt collaborated with a nearby senior center to sew uniform satin bindings on all of the wool blankets, effectively eliciting participation in the piece as well as functioning as community outreach for the institution. One of the donated blankets came from New York resident Peter Kucibek,

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[91] Harlan, *What is Art?,* 10.

a Holocaust survivor, who donated the blanket issued to him in a Nazi concentration camp decades prior.[92] Watt's openness and determination to explore community and collaboration allows the possibility for unforeseen elements to provide new meaning. Coming back to her connection to Beuys, *Dwelling* embodies every aspect of Social Sculpture. Watt's vision for a community venture that would take on the importance of the stories donated by area residents acknowledged that everyone is an artist in the Beuysian sense. Kucibek's incredible blanket story evidenced the importance of considering everyone as an artist, as his contribution magnified the meaning of the work. Then, by donating the blankets, Watt shaped or molded the world she inhabits. The sculpture did not exist in a vacuum, or what Beuys refers to as the middle-class concept of art.[93]

Watt's purposeful engagement with Beuys's concepts demonstrates the congruence that positions the work of contemporary Native American artists within the context of the history of Western art. The following examples demonstrate the similar convergence of Western art history, social issues, and visual culture.

The previous chapter introduced the work of Will Wilson in the context of the community exchange fostered by his photography projects, but his photography style also reflects historical cultural interplay between Western and indigenous cultures. The solemn portraiture of Critical Indigenous Photographic Exchange (CIPX), rendered in traditional wet-plate technology re-appropriates the archetypal

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[92] Kucibek's powerful and evocative story is reproduced in Dobkins, *Lodge,* 54.
[93] Harlan, 10.

photographs of Edward Curtis. (see figures 26) Curtis's legacy is in documenting the "vanishing race" and salvaging Native American culture. The standard reading of Curtis is that instead of representing Native culture, his photography froze Native Americans in his romanticized depictions and prescribed the accepted perception of the race. This interpretation of Curtis's body of work stems from his removal of any indication of industrial modernity.

Wilson's CIPX responds to the fact Curtis's cataloging of Native Americans contributed to an internalized vision of indigenous people. By mimicking the process and style of Curtis's photography, Wilson directly and very deliberately responds to preconceived notions of indigeneity in order to destabilize them. His method complicates authorship and collaboration, calling attention to the fact that portrait photography is always collaborative to some degree. Rushing addresses the agency of Curtis's Native sitters in "Native Authorship in Edward Curtis's 'Master Prints,'" an article written in conjunction with the exhibition, "Edward Curtis: the Master Prints" at the Peabody Essex Museum (2002).[94] Rushing asserts, "the Native Americans visible in this exhibition were collaborators in the best sense of the word."[95] Underscoring the agency of the individuals in Curtis's photographs, Rushing quotes Lakota artist Thomas Haukaas: "Recognizing the opportunity he provided, they often allowed him to photograph approximations of various rituals; such images could accompany the oral history that would be passed to future generations."[96] Wilson's CIPX visually reinforces these statements, forcing us to reconsider the circumstances

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[94] Rushing, "Native Authorship in Edward Curtis's 'Master Prints,'" *American Indian Art Magazine,* 29 (2003): 58-63.
[95] Ibid, 63.
[96] Ibid, 63.

of Curtis's photography, and in doing so, complicating authorship not only in his contemporary practice, but the authorship of Curtis's iconic historical photographs. CIPX underscores the importance of examining how cross-cultural exchange enriches our understanding of art history.

Brian Jungen, a Dane-zaa-Swiss sculpture and installation artist from British Columbia creates works that precisely hone in on these issues of how cross-cultural exchange enrich an understanding of the history of art and the history of shared experience. Jungen's adaptation of cultural objects both elevated and banal, such as Nike Air Jordans and plastic lawn chairs, into work concerned with commodification, stereotyping, and exploitation present a nuanced, sophisticated, almost shocking and aesthetically arresting commentary on the conditions of globalization.[97] Jungen's best known works, *Prototypes for New Understanding,* (such as in figure 28) reconfigure Air Jordans into masks that evoke Northwest Coast art. In these clever and visually engrossing pieces, Jungen manipulates the leather of Nike sneakers into the formline designs of the Northwest Coast and exclusively uses Jordans with a red, black, and white palette, mimicking the indigenous Northwest Coast's bold, graphic aesthetic. *Prototypes for New Understanding* uses humor to suggest that these indigenous communities' sacred masks have been reduced to fetish objects akin to Nike sneakers.

Jungen has also explored relational aesthetics in pieces that reduce the lofty ambitions of the genre. His 2002 *Beer Cooler* consisted of a cooler carved with cartoonish flames and reductive native imagery, filled with cans of beer, inviting

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[97] Diana Augaitis, "Prototypes for New Understanding" in *Brian Jungen* (Vancouver: Vancouver Art Gallery, 2005), 5. Augaitis opens her catalog essay by noting "In the past decade, Brian Jungen has emerged as a force in the contemporary art world because of the commentary his sculptures and installations bring to the conditions of globalization."

gallery visitors to partake. *Beer Cooler* (figure 29) borrows from Western art history while inserting a Native commentary. The offering of beer to visitors in the gallery quotes Tom Marioni's *The Act of Drinking Beer with Friends is the Highest Form of Art* (1970), but Jungen adds an intercultural commentary by describing *Cooler* as giving alcohol back to the Europeans. Despite the weighty implications of this work, Jungen's subtle humor keeps it in the realm of exploring confluence rather than reinforcing binaries.

Another unusual relational work, *Habitat 04 – Cite radieuse des chats/Cats Radiant City* (2004) again combines this investigation into shared issues of globalization with a playful riff on the history of Western art. *Habitat 04* provided a service to the city of Montreal in support of the Service for the Prevention of Cruelty to animals. The installation consisted of carpeted plywood boxes arranged to evoke the pre-fabricated concrete forms that make up Habitat 67 in Montreal (see figure 30). Architect Moshe Safdie sought to provide a solution to the problem of housing people. Jungen appropriated both the forms and concept to apply Safdie's solution to the problem of Montreal's population of feral cats. In lieu of a gallery opening, Jungen organized a fundraising dinner for SPCA and for the duration of the exhibition, established a network of relations to find homes for the eight cats that occupied the space. Despite its whimsicality, *Habitat 04* worked toward a solution to a community problem, commenting on shared urban experience. Like Watt's sewing circles, participants worked towards a tangible goal, and like Watt, Jungen played with Western imagery and popular culture to familiarize the experience.

In an unorthodox pairing of visual media, Watt's *Catastrophe* (2007, figures 33 and 34) responds to the entrenched place of visual culture in global contemporary society. The imagery associated with the attacks on the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001 reinforced and escalated the reality of Guy Debord's society of the spectacle.[98] Since then, the emergence and proliferation of the Internet, social networking, and hand-held devices enabled the spread of images at unprecedented speeds. Since the rise of these elements which characterize the 21st century, we often cannot avoid seeing upsetting, unsettling, or disturbing imagery due to the nature of our increasingly connected and visual culture. *Catastrophe* responds to this condition by confronting photographic evidence of American soldiers torturing prisoners at Abu Ghraib. The Abu Ghraib photos, leaked in 2004, were among early indicators of the now-normalized rapid spread of disturbing imagery.[99]

Part of a larger project employing army and disaster relief blankets, pointing to their storied nature, *Catastrophe* is one of Watt's more figurative works. Several abstracted human figures huddle in a pile in the center of the plane, heads covered, recognizable by the feet sticking out of the pile at odd angles. *Catastrophe* consists of four unevenly pieced together dark wool blankets, the human figures rendered in neutral tones. The dark, neutral palette differs from the bright colors of many of Watt's works, including *Braid, Trek,* and the dynamic individual cameos of *Forget-*

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[98] For an analysis of how September 11 impacted 21st century visual culture, see, for example, Thomas Stubblefield, *9-11 and the Visual Culture of Disaster* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2015). Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, trans. Freddy Perlman (Kalamazoo: Black & Red, 2000).

[99] I read *Catastrophe* as a convergence with Western imagery simply through how widely shared and widely viewed they have been, but the Abu Ghraib photos actually were inserted into the context of contemporary art when displayed at the International Center of Photography in New York City and at the Warhol Museum in Pittsburgh. See Michael Kimmelman, "Abu Ghraib Photos Return, This Time as Art," in *The New York Times,* (2004). http://www.nytimes.com/2004/10/10/arts/design/10kimm.html?_r=1&

me-not, affirming the somber subject matter. However, the figurative rendering of bodies is only one element of the piece; *Catastrophe* goes further than an interpretation of Abu Ghraib photos in fabric. Brown ribbons dangling around the central figures allow for the optional attachment of a pink and army-green-floral striped blanket Watt created to cover up the distressing imagery. The ribbon attachments allow the overlay to drape naturally over the scene, and the uniform satin binding around the blanket likens it to the type of wool blanket childhood memories are made of. *Catastrophe* represents Watt's active avoidance of the disturbing imagery and the experience of dealing with that imagery once it has been seen. She explained her experience in our interview:

> I did not look at the Abu Ghraib photos for, I want to say, a few years. And then…one of the occasions where NPR … was looking back at the story, I decided I would. … the intent wasn't necessary a political one … if somebody goes through a catastrophe, then, my impulse, when I see these bodies on the ground is to cover and protect and give comfort through the offering of a blanket.[100]

If we return to Bourriaud's definition of relational aesthetics as art from human interaction in an increasingly visual world, *Catastrophe* provides a method of addressing relational experiences subtly and quietly. Although when exhibited the piece does not construct a relational environment, it does request that its audience confront the humans depicted. The human aspect and relationality of *Catastrophe* is underscored by how figurative it is in comparison to much of Watt's other work. Furthermore, it depicts Watt's very human reaction to a traumatic event: to offer comfort. While Watt acknowledges a potentially politically charged reading of this

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work as the government "covering up," her empathetic intention puts the piece in dialogue with the issues of face-to-face human relations.

Watt, Wilson and Jungen's work represents intersections between Euro-American artistic practices and indigenous experience. These artists, among many others, check McNutt's anxiety over non-Native artists understanding of Native contemporary artists. The examples provided here continue to complicate the binaries between individual and collective creative practice, as well as between Native American and Western art.

Chapter Three Images

Figure 22. Marie Watt, *Demokratie ist Lustig (Democracy is Merry)* (2008)

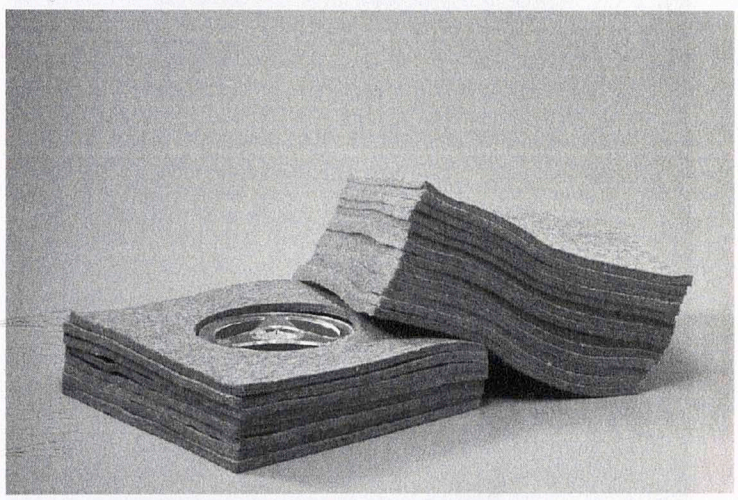

Figure 23. Joseph Beuys, *Ja Ja Ja Ja Ja Nee Nee Nee Nee Nee,* (1969)

Figure 24. Screenshot from film about Marie Watt's *Heirloom* (2009)

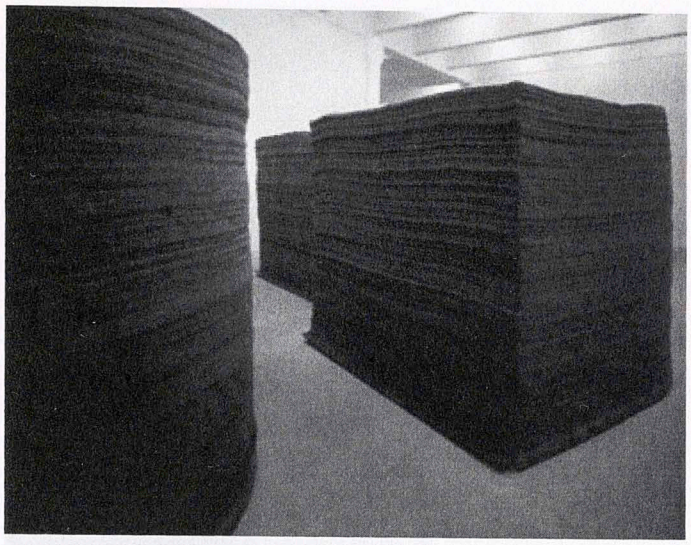

Figure 25. Joseph Beuys, *Fond III* (1968)

Figure 26. Marie Watt, *Dwelling* (2006)

Figure 27. Edward Curtis, A Diegue?o Woman of Campo

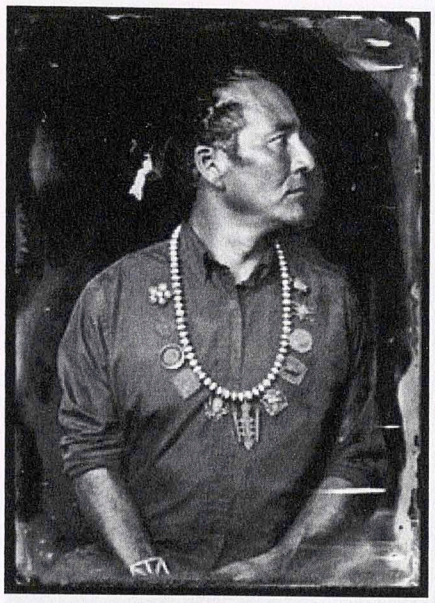

Figure 28. Will Wilson, Image from *Critical Indigenous Photographic Exchange* (2013)

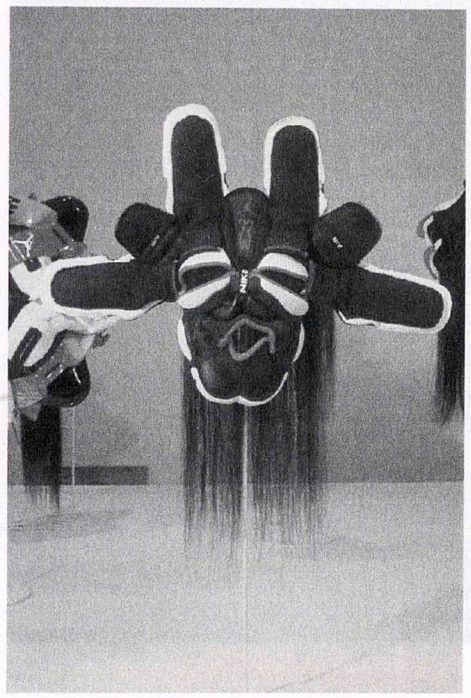

Figure 29. Brian Jungen, Prototypes for New Understanding #

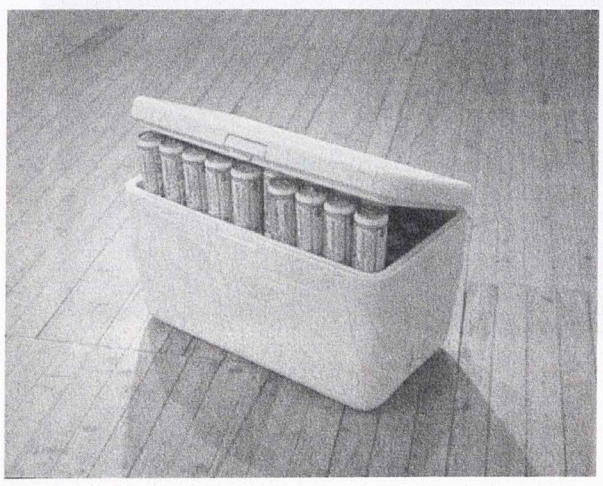

Figure 30. Brian Jungen, Beer Cooler (2002)

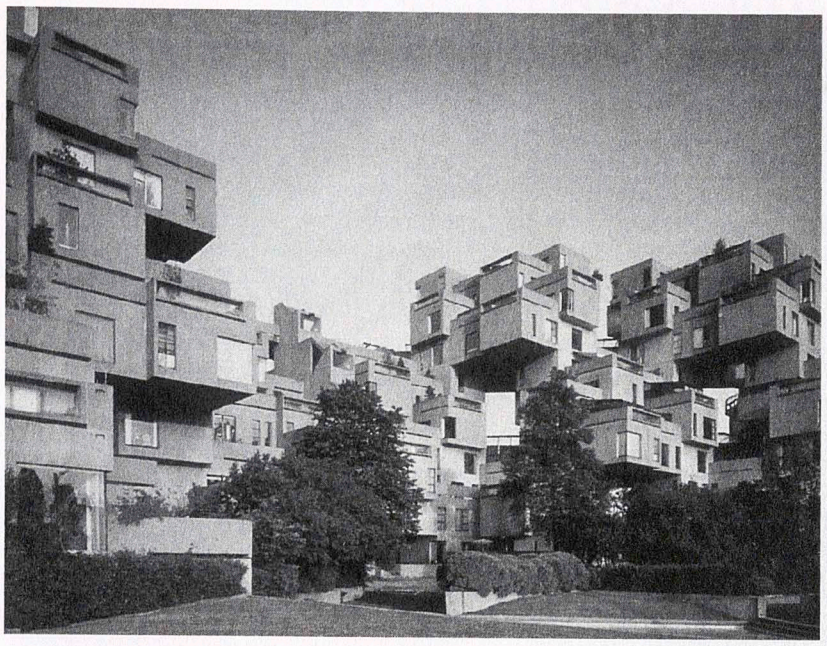

Figure 31. Moshe Safdie, *Habitat 67*, 1967

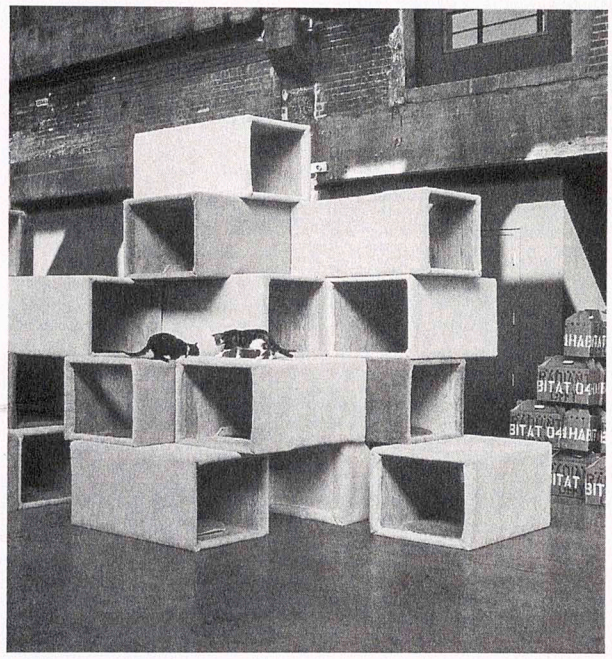

Figure 32. Brian Jungen, *Habitat 04 - Cats Radiant City* (2004)

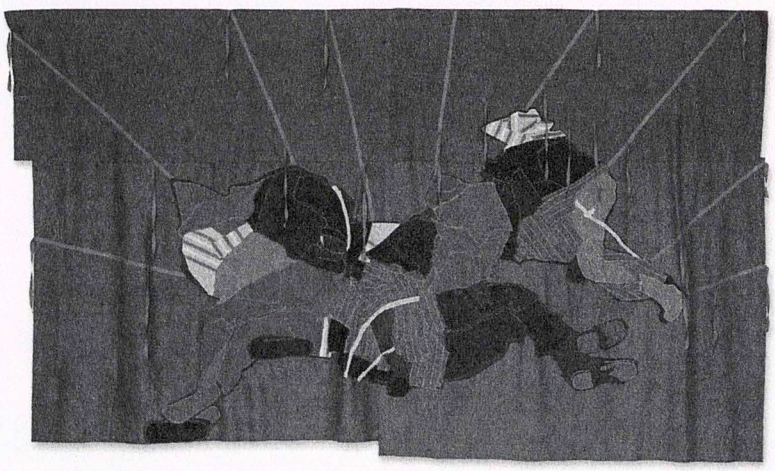

Figure 33. Marie Watt, *Catastrophe (uncovered)* (2007)

Figure 34. Marie Watt, Catastrophe (covered) (2007)

Conclusion

The concept of *community* prominently informs my argument in this thesis. The artworks examined here demonstrate a blurring of binaries between the single author-as-self-serving and collective-practice-as-visionary through examples of Native artists as fluid collaborators. This does not mean that community engagement and consideration automatically create a successful or sensitive artistic atmosphere. Similarly, it is important to recognize here that participation is not equivalent to community. Participatory artists have employed audience involvement or multiple authorships for as many antagonistic reasons as for positive collaborations. As one of the best-known and most influential participatory performance artists, Marina Abramovic uses participation to discomfort audience members and elicit savage, cruel reactions in order to examine human nature. One significant piece of this nature, *Rhythm O* (1974, Fig x), Abramovic laid seventy-two items on a table and invited the audience to do whatever they wanted to her. This participatory performance demonstrated the dangerous aspect of inviting strangers to group together: the potential for a hostile mob mentality. Interestingly, presenting antagonistic participatory art in contrast to the works analyzed in this thesis reinforces the falsehood of the "death of the author." Comparing Abramovic to Watt or Wilson illustrates the importance of the original author setting a tone for the interaction. Similarly, the artist Santiago Sierra does not create scenarios for audience members to freely participate but represents how sinister the decision to involve so-called collaborators can be. Sierra uses hired labor as his medium. His works force us to consider whether involving other human in art necessitates seeing them as humans

and therefore as autonomous and in a collaborative role, or if humans are just another medium to be manipulated at the hand of the artist. The titles of Sierra's works provide insight into the difficult, uneasy relationships and negotiations set up in his works: *160 cm Line Tattooed on Four People (*2000), *A Person paid for 360 Continuous Working Hours* (2000), and *Ten People Paid to Masturbate* (2000). Unlike the works I examine in order to argue for progress towards the breakdown of binaries between historical inequalities, Sierra explains that his work demonstrates that he does not "believe in the possibility of change."[101]

These antagonistic examples do not contradict the claims made about the possibility of community involvement for beneficial social change. Rather, they reinforce the lack of binaries implicit in collective versus individual authorship. Furthermore, the use of participation or collectivism to illuminate the darkness of human nature does not undermine the overlap between indigenous practices and participatory practices. I have not intended to discredit the existing history of participatory art, which as demonstrated in Chapter One, has often manifested as very reactionary to the established narrative of Western art history. I only intend to suggest that there is also an alternate, overlooked narrative of contemporary art.

Throughout this thesis, I have sought to illustrate the intercultural exchange between indigenous art and Western art through participatory art as representative of a backtracking of aesthetic concerns. As Steven Leuthold writes in *Indigenous Aesthetics*, "in global and historical terms, it is the developed, industrialized west that

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[101] Quoted in Bishop, "Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics," 71. For original quote, see Bishop's note 55. For a deeper analysis on the antagonistic possibilities of participation and collectivism, see this article.

is an exception by not viewing art as an expression of the sacred."[102] Collective practices have always bounced around the peripheries of the art world, but have been treated since the mid-1990's as an unprecedented phenomenon, indicative of a Western refusal to complicate a linear historical narrative. Community, collaboration, participation, and collective, applied arts dissolved in favor of the focus on the singular artist in the writing of art history, not in multi-cultural artistic practice. In support of this, consider how Euro-American patrons introduced signatures on Pueblo pottery. Pottery was often not considered the work of an individual before the introduction of the art market. Paula Gunn Allen reiterates Leuthold's reminder that the industrialized West forgets to look back in "Who is Your Mother? Red Roots in White Feminism," an article that largely applies the same theory to feminism as this thesis does to collaborative art. She writes, "rejection of tradition constitutes one of the major features of American life, an attitude that reaches far back into American colonial history…The American idea that…that history, like everything else in the past is of little value and should be forgotten as quickly as possible. This all too often causes us to reinvent the wheel continually."[103]Reading collectively created non-autonomous art as a radical, late twentieth century innovation exemplifies this unnecessary reinventing of the wheel.

This reinventing of the wheel and neglecting to accommodate myriad influences in favor of the pendular, reactionary discourse characterizing much of the existing literature on participatory art obscures ongoing multicultural influences. By

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[102] Leuthold, *Indigenous Aesthetics,* 57.
[103] Paula Allen Gunn, "Who is Your Mother? Red Roots in White Feminism," in *The Gray Wolf Annual Five: Multi-Cultural Literacy: Opening the American Mind,* Rick Simonson and Scott Walker, ed. (Saint Paul: Graywolf Press: 1988) 14.

questioning how contemporary Native American art fits into the broader discourse on global contemporary art in tandem with exploring the precedents for the recent influx of participatory, collective and collaborative artistic practices, the examples of Native American contemporary artists provided illustrate cross-cultural exchange. Investigations of the recent boom in participatory and collective creation need not continue to be marked by the binary opposition as though collaborative processes will radically change the landscape of the global art world. To erase binaries between individual and collective production, contemporary art and its critics might look out from behind the Western art lens and recognize the ever-present history of intercultural exchange.

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