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CULTURAL PARADIGMS OF CONTEMPORARY INDIGENOUS ART: AS FOUND IN THE WORK OF SHAN GOSHORN, NORMAN AKERS, MARIE WATT, AND JOE FEDDERSEN

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in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the

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By

HEATHER P. AHTONE
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BY

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This dissertation is dedicated to my ancestors and the generations to come who will have a heart for the beauty of our Indigenous cultures and the arts that tell our stories, and to Miko, Talullah, Mary, David, Adrian, and Isabella who have been an ever-present reminder that I could not lose faith in myself. Chiholloli.

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Abstract

This dissertation is the product of an ongoing inquiry into the relationships that exist between artists, their Indigenous cultures, and their aesthetic pursuits as materialized in the contemporary art they produce; and, with the closer focus on the objects, how each work is the product of and producer of cultural knowledge. The four case studies analyze and interpreted four selected objects of study, created by professional Indigenous artists from disparate tribal and geographic spaces using a diverse array of materials and processes. The analytical framework draws upon the history of materials and their uses, the relationships that exist within Native American communities, the use of metaphors and symbolism to communicate dynamic and complex cultural concepts, and the position of each artist within his or her unique temporal conditions. The methodology for research draws upon existing practices in Art History, Anthropology, and Native American Studies. The purpose of this dissertation is to propose that by expanding current methods for analysis and interpretation of Indigenous arts, the art will gain in potency as products of both creative individuals and dynamic cultural communities; that the art can be seen to be a product of and a force for the continued vitality of Indigenous cultures mediated through the vision of the artists; and to examine the important role artists perform within a continuum of artistic production despite rapidly shifting social and cultural landscapes.

Chapter 1: Introduction

This dissertation is the product of an ongoing inquiry into the relationships that exist between Indigenous artists, their cultures, and their aesthetic pursuits as materialized in the contemporary art they produce; and, with the closer focus on the objects, how each work is the product of and producer of cultural knowledge. The four selected objects of study are works of art made for the purpose of being commodified within a fine art market, each created by a professional Indigenous artist, and collectively representing a diversity of Native American cultural backgrounds and geographic spaces. The purpose of this dissertation is to propose that by expanding current methods for analysis and interpretation of Indigenous arts the art will gain in potency as products of both creative individuals and dynamic cultural communities; that the art can be seen to be a product of and a force for the continued vitality of Indigenous cultures mediated through the vision of the artists; and to examine the important role artists perform within a continuum of artistic production despite rapidly shifting social and cultural landscapes.

Imagining, that is to think beyond the physical constraints of proscribed cultural spaces as sites of exchange, that contemporary art can be a conduit of and for culture is based largely on personal experience with the objects and through participation in the Indigenous arts community. This inquiry began many years ago, when as a twelve year-old seventh grader I encountered my great-grandmother's cradleboard at the Denver Art Museum, where it was on exhibit in the Native American art galleries. As my sister and I played hide-n-seek in the museum, a common pastime on weekdays with no school, I probably passed it several times before I realized I recognized the designs that ran along

the vertical sides. I stopped in my tracks and read the label. There was a disconnection from what the label said about a woman, of whom I had heard many stories, and the contents of those stories, particularly about her beadwork. That disconnection between the person I felt that I knew and the object didactic left me wondering how the museum people (I did not yet understand the role of curators) could look at that object and not understand what I, as a young adult, understood implicitly.

This same disconnection was experienced when in 1993, during my first museum job, as the Public Relations Liaison at the Institute of American Indian Arts Museum, I was asked to write about Lawrence Paul Yuxweluptun's impending exhibition. I could see how closely related his imagery was to the cultures of the Northwest Coast region, their regionally specific aesthetic, and his interest in expressing their cultural relationships to the environment. However, everything I read of him at that time only addressed him as a Surrealist interested in the abstraction and deconstruction of reality. Those art scholars placed his imagery very far away from the Northwest Coast cultural context within which I read it, contextualizing his work as responsive to the Euro-American art canon. Where was the writing about Native art that addressed the artist, the object, and the culture without privileging a Western cultural paradigm?

Expecting that I simply had not read enough, I poured over books and scholarship trying to find an author whose voice resonated with my own reading of the arts. I discovered poets, Joy Harjo and Simon Ortiz, whose lyrical exploration of the relationships between culture, experience, and art expressed the culture experience in a manner that felt familiar. When the scholarship I read fell short of connecting these in analysis, I sought a graduate degree in Art History believing that I simply had not read

enough. My formal education has provided an introduction to a breadth of theory and history, certainly many artists, but it did not provide a framework with which to acutely address how contemporary Indigenous artists use cultural concepts within their fine art. From that experience, and since, I have received formal training about how to "read" art, to interpret it, and to analyze art through theoretical and historical contexts. Despite my training, I have yearned for a methodology to guide my analysis and interpretation of contemporary art by Native artists, especially those that work outside of the vein of historically made cultural materials. While it is not so uncommon for Indigenous artists to choose to work outside of tribal customs, many artists with whom I've spoken on the topic have expressed their active engagement through these non-traditional forms and materials to engage with their cultures. How, then, can the objects' interpretation bridge an Indigenous epistemology, recognizing the role of the artist, and the cultural influences within a scholarly approach?

While I have considered this question, I have watched the artists continue to create – giving voice to history, ways of being, affirming and validating our Indigenous lifeways, creating new ways of imaging ourselves into the future. The artists remained unfazed by the limitations of Native scholarship on their work and continued to create in new materials, new forms, and, meanwhile, grounding themselves within their culture. They were creating the links from the past, sometimes from the beginning of human time, to the present through their visionary art.

I recognized that link because it was something I had been raised to see. My childhood was filled with art and material culture from my family's complex cultural network. My Choctaw grandmother had married a Kiowa man when my mother was a

small child. The only grandfather I knew, I was raised in my grandfather's Kiowa community, often dressed in Kiowa camp dresses for special occasions. My earliest memories are rooted in Carnegie, located in southwestern Oklahoma, though I have been told we lived in other places around the state before we returned to his home. My grandmother made a special effort to teach me about being Choctaw, instilling a love for sewing and cooking before I had reached the age of ten. I was surrounded by beautiful things made to concretely represent my relationships: between me and other family members in beadwork designs, with our tribal community through particular dress forms, and painted images displayed with a sacredness akin to biblical imagery. I cannot remember a time when I did not feel connected to the broader Native American inter-tribal community through shared art forms such as shawls and dancing – both done with a highly refined sense of beauty and cultural aesthetics. As I learned to make these cultural materials at home and was later trained as a printmaker in college, I have remained a cultural participant despite having lived in many parts of the American West.

Growing up in Oklahoma provided a distinctly diverse environment in which our family traveled to cultural events across the state, a practice I have continued as an adult. As a Choctaw community member and Chickasaw citizen, with family ties to both the Kiowa and Navajo communities (the latter through marriage), I have been blessed to have participated in or observed many ceremonies from across the Plains and Southwest. Participating in my own tribal events and supporting many in my family, both intimate and extended, has allowed me to see first-hand the actions taken to relate to our world as Native people from tribally-centric ontological perspectives. My broader

travels have allowed me the privilege of witnessing many ceremonies and rituals in diverse tribal communities, including the Pueblos, the Apache, the Lakota, and participating in several Navajo ceremonies with my extended family. At each, I have experienced an acute awareness that Native artists make choices of forms and materials, aesthetically selected using a system that integrated what was available to use in concert with ontological concepts of Native-ness. This understanding has informed many conversations held with practicing artists as they describe their work to me, as a colleague in the arts.

My access to the Native arts community is both as a participant, scholar, and, always, as an observer. This observation has been broadened as I have pursued a career as a professional art curator and author, my connection to the artists has been mediated as a participating member of the national Native American community. It is because of my ongoing relationship to the Native arts community that I desire to produce this dissertation. I have an obligation to contribute to the study of Native arts because the artists have been so generous to me. All credit is due to the artists for much of what I know about Native arts, and any errors evident remain the product of my own shortcomings.

The access to the artists is a product of my professional, personal and familial relationships, not the least of which is the result of being married to a Native artist. The material explored here is the product of engaging through innumerable private and public discussions with artists about their art, and related motivations and intentions. Listening to the artists describe how the process of making their art resulted in growing their cultural knowledge and about how their experiences as artists expressing that

knowledge through the art has heightened my own desire to resolve the issues described herein. Having learned so much from the artists, I want to find a way to help others to access the knowledge that is being shared by them through our conversations, in whatever small way contributes to the vacuum acknowledged here.

My career as a curator has granted me the position of recognizing that the cultural knowledge that has been materialized by the artists remains partially inaccessible from two fields of inquiry into objects, anthropology and art history, and I believe that this gap merits discussion and further examination. My doctoral program and interdisciplinary approach has been guided by this inquiry. What has become apparent is that there are valuable tools in three disciplines discussed and utilized here: Art History, Anthropology, and Native American Studies. Through the proposal of an interdisciplinary analytical framework, my ambition is to offer new methods of interpretation and analysis for use with contemporary Native art.

Since 2010, I have given numerous conference and symposia papers using the framework proposed here for multiple types of audiences across the United States. The response has been overwhelmingly positive and I have been encouraged by the interest of curators and scholars of other types of non-Western art for whom the analytical framework may also be of some value. This dissertation is written in hopes that it might contribute towards a growing discourse on the topic of Native American art, as part of a global dialogue on Indigenous art.

The three fields from which this dissertation draws are Art History, Anthropology, and Native American Studies. Each provides an important theoretical and scholarly perspective contribution to the analytical framework. This

interdisciplinary approach is guided, also, by the existing structure of the University of Oklahoma's academic programs. Other fields might also be considered for similar studies, for instance Visual Studies, Folklore, or Philosophy; however, at this university the interest in supporting this research is grounded within the listed departments – an important consideration to fully cultivate the ideas being explored. The diverse faculty experiences represented on the committee hasve had an indescribable positive influence on cultivating the ideas represented herein.

Art History

The research for my project began in Art History, in search of an existing methodology to guide a comprehensive interpretation of contemporary Native American art, incorporating both the artist and the culture through the object. This investigation has led me on a path through several fields emerging as an inter-disciplinary project, with contributions made from Art History, Anthropology, and Native American Studies to construct an analytical framework that provides a process for considering Native art beyond currently accepted practices. My objective is to provide a deeper reading of contemporary Native art, one that addresses the conceptual content intended by the artist, incorporating the breadth of cultural and historical information engaged through the object. Through this discussion of Art History, my intent is to provide a historical survey to describe what methodologies exist in Art History that have been used with Indigenous art, how these relate to prevailing theories, and how my framework connects these with the disciplines of Anthropology and Native American Studies.

My interests are rooted in Native American art, which has a relatively recent arrival in the field of art history. In order to understand the perspectives currently held in the field, one must consider art history's extended temporal context. The discipline grew from a desire to categorize and document contemporary art within European history. That history begins in the earliest writings in the field, beginning with Vasari, the Italian artist and historian who wrote the first history of art by documenting the "master" artists of his contemporaries through biographical sketches written during the Italian Renaissance in 1550.[1] Developed in Europe, the field grew through the categorization of artists by region and style. As it evolved during the nineteenth century, when Heinrich Wölfflin and the Vienna School of Art History formalized the field of art History, issues of historical analysis (looking to develop the field of Classical art history) and formalist categories of periods, styles, and schools emerged (considering art movements), while maintaining the "master" artist paradigm. During the early twentieth century, documenting artist biographies, stylistic schools, and artistic movements continued as the primary manner of organizing subjects of study, continuing a masterworks narrative.

Contributing to the discourse on styles, the study of mark making emerged in the early twentieth century as a categorical system, evolving a canon on iconography, and contributing toward the establishment of the field of semiotics within Art History. Semiotics is a method of engaging with the surface designs in the examination of the "meaning" of things. Saussure's theory of linguistics, originally published

[1] Giorgio Vasari and George Bull, *Lives of the Artists* (Harmondsworth, England; New York: Penguin Books, 1987).

posthumously in 1916, was informative for these developments.[2] Panofsky further suggested that visual materials are a form of language requiring three levels of analysis: the primary subject matter, the iconography, and the iconology.[3] Roland Barthes' *Mythologies* built on Saussure's theory and complemented Panofsky's work. Barthes was fully engaged in Structuralism at the time, and expanded the concept of meaning as an intentional function of signs and symbols.[4] During the postmodern era, the use of Panofsky and Barthes' theories on semiotics remains applicable, especially as non-Western cultural arts were initiated into the Art History discipline.

Though Structuralism's reliance on a universal lexicon of meaning is no longer accepted, semiotics is accepted broadly as a theoretical approach for analyzing art. Semiotics has the potential to engage the cultural context of the designs as fully developed metaphors and mnemonics functioning within a non-Western ontologically based epistemology. However, because it developed within a Euro-American cultural a priori, analysis of non-Western art remains limited within this system. Semiotics has an important role to play and it is my contention that it must be engaged with research on the artist's specific cultural epistemology. The role of designs and symbols as a language continues as a practice used by Native artists, as it has for millennia, requiring further investigation into the history of the designs and their uses within the appropriate

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[2] Ferdinand de Saussure, Simon Bouquet, Rudolf Engler, Antoinette Weil, Carol Sanders, Matthew Pires, and Peter Figueroa, *Writings in General Linguistics* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2006).
[3] Erwin Panofsky, *Meaning in the Visual Arts* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1955); Erwin Panofsky, *Studies in Iconology: Humanistic Themes in the Art of the Renaissance* (New York: Harper & Row, 1972); and, Erwin Panofsky, *Perspective as Symbolic Form*., (1st ed. New York: Cambridge, Mass.: Zone Books; Distributed by the MIT Press, 1991).
[4] Roland Barthes, *Mythologies* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2012).

cultural milieu, particularly design elements that are contained within an object or guiding an overall composition considered within a hegemonic cultural system. Further, metaphoric meaning, the relationship between image and story, merits consideration as an additional layer of language, through both designs and materials. Metaphors function as critical components of the complex knowledge systems used within and by Native communities.[5]

In 1962, George Kubler's *The Shape of Time* argued that art history had developed into a field limited by its formalist approach. Kubler, an art historian who specialized in Pre-Columbian art, saw the inter-relationship between culture and contemporary art, writing, "Everything made now is either a replica or a variant of something made a little time ago and so on back without break to the first morning of human time."[6] He compared the strategies of relevant fields, describing that Anthropology classified objects by their uses, materials, and related ideas; Art History classified by "types, schools, and by styles."[7] Kubler wrote,

> Our choice of the 'history of things' is more than a euphemism to replace the bristling ugliness of 'material culture.' This term is used by anthropologists to distinguish ideas, or 'mental culture,' from artifacts. But the 'history of things' is intended to reunite ideas and objects under the rubric of visual forms… all materials worked by human hands under the guidance of connected ideas developed in temporal sequence. From all these things a shape of time emerges…. This self-image reflected in things is a guide and a point of reference to the group for the future, and it eventually becomes the portrait given to posterity.[8]

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[5] Historically, the study of visual metaphors is an area studied within the field of Anthropology, rather than Art History, because of its relationship to the transmission of knowledge through cultural practice.
[6] George Kubler, *The Shape of Time* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008), 2.
[7] Ibid.
[8] Ibid, 8.

The reprinting of Kubler's book in 2008 emphasizes the continued value of Kubler's concerns and scholarship as timely observations, despite the half-century that has passed since its original publication.

Kubler's acknowledgment of the relationship between the origin stories of humanity and the contemporary expressions of the descended cultures describes a relationship that remains integral to the foundation of cultural identity and, thus, is formative to my research. His contributions were in context with the emergence of Leví-Strauss' structuralism that were profound at the time of the original publication, but have been exposed for their foundation upon assumed false universalisms. However, his assertion that art is part of a continuum remains waiting for further development and is incorporated into the framework proposed through this research. Kubler recognized that in order to fully understand an object, one must see its relationship to what came before and after within a cultural lens. Despite Kubler's recognition of the importance of engaging with non-Western cultures as part of an investigation, he writes, "The value of the situation to us is that we know beyond doubt of the incompleteness of the native series: it was cut off before its time."[9] His resignation that these cultures were no longer available for consideration reflected the prevailing identification of non-Western art and culture as "primitive," colonized beyond further authentic consideration. It is my contention that, though his dismissal was in error and premature, his intention to consider the art in relationship to the culture remains valid and merits further exploration by scholars who can speak for those non-Western cultures, particularly Indigenous scholars. His comments remained potent for

[9] Ibid, 101.

the field, but as Structuralism began to ebb from its position as a guiding methodological system, art history was on the verge of a major critical self-examination.

During the late 1960s, the field of art history began to shift away from primarily using formal analysis and historical interpretation with the development of more theoretical concerns, as encouraged by many of the modernist art movements. Those artistic manifestos, such as Malevich (non-objectivity) and Breton (Surrealism) from the inter-war years and, later, several by the Abstract Expressionists (Pollock and de Kooning), among others, guided the field of art history to consider the artist's intention, as a form of conceptual and theoretical works. The artistic manifestos stirred a critical discourse engaged by scholars Walter Benjamin and Theodor Adorno who challenged the designated boundaries of modernisms and examined their evident potential exhaustion as ideas. Theory provided a means to consider meaning and intention beyond what was evident physically.

By the early 1970s, and during the 1980s, the Postmodern era was in full effect, with many academic disciplines pausing for a moment of self-reflection to consider what the concept of "modern" could mean in the latter twentieth century. Art History was not least among these, as the movements of Modernism began to resolve into the historic canon, theorists became more affirmed that the exhaustion of the concepts of modernity were imminent, and, thus, the end of the modern era. Francoise Lyotard defined *postmodern* as "incredulity toward metanarratives."[10] French philosophers led

[10] Jean-François Lyotard, "The Postmodern Condition." in *A Postmodern Reader*, ed. Joseph P. Natoli and Linda Hutcheon, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993), 72.

the ensuing movement by levying challenges to what foundational values were contained within the field and whether these values were, in reality, valid. Michel Foucault challenged the role of authorship, particularly by the artist, suggesting that authorship was both a function of power and authority and subject to critical examination as a false pretense of the masterworks narrative.[11]

Jacque Derrida suggested that rather than Structuralism's interest in seeking what was alike (relying on universalisms), that by deconstructing concepts, one could more fully examine what was different, thus parsing out similarities and differences for a more vibrant examination.[12] Jean Baudrillard further argued that the concept that anything could be perceived as original should be contested, especially in the plastic arts where everything is a form of rhetorical imitation.[13] These varied postmodern approaches challenged the role and authorship of the artist, resulting in a disconnection between the accountability of the artist to the work. This further amplified the concepts of "art for art's sake" that correspondingly isolated the artist from the social construction within which the art was made.

For art history, like many academic fields, this turn involved the heightened awareness that art history was constructed under a Euro-American, white male dominated paradigm, evident in its methodologies and its subject emphasis. Linda Nochlin's essay, "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?" targeted the lack

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[11] Michel Foucault, "Authorship: What is an Author?" *Screen* 20, no, 1, (March 1979): 13–34, https://doi.org/10.1093/screen/20.1.13 (accessed 8/28/17).
[12] Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatolog* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976).
[13] Jean Baudrillard, and Sheila Faria Glaser, *Simulacra and Simulation* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994).

of female representation within the canon of Art History.[14] As part of the feminist movement that was in full force at this time, politically and socially, art history began to recognize that the discipline required an expansion beyond the myopic focus from which it had developed.[15] Initially, this expansion included consideration for women, largely in response to the emergent Feminist theories that were focused on the *otherness* absent in the discourse, particularly a lack of female representation and agency within documented historic eras and seeking gender equity within the historical record. Within another decade, scholars recognized that the inherent Euro-American paradigm within the Western-founded discipline would need to embrace non-Western art, if it was to withstand the full scope of the Feminist turn.

Native American artists have been a particular challenge to the field. Some of the challenge was in the overlaid political and geographic structures of sovereign Native nations existing within the nation-state of the United States, both non-Western and inherently American. An additional challenge has been because of the relationship that Native American art had to other academic disciplines. Until the 1980s, Native American art objects had almost solely been studied as material culture in the field of anthropology as objects representing cultures on the cusp of demise. Though political movement supported the development of Indian art as part of a market, particularly through the Indian Arts and Crafts Act (1935) and the agency's subsequent establishment of three museums strategically located around the Midwest, including the Sioux Indian Museum (1939), the Museum of the Plains (1941), and the Southern

[14] Linda Nochlin, "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?" *ARTnews* (January 1971): 22-39, 67-71.
[15] Ibid.

Plains Indian Museum (1947-8), the acknowledgement within academic disciplines was slow to follow-suit.

There were a few exceptional museological moments when the art received recognition for its sheer aesthetic beauty, including the inclusion of Native artists in the WPA programs in Oklahoma and New Mexico, Rene d'Harnoncourt's seminal exhibition, "Indian Art of the United States" (1941) at the Museum of Modern Art, and at the various art markets that promoted Native art institutionally, including significantly, among others, the Gallup Inter-tribal Ceremonial (held since 1921), the Philbrook Indian Annual (1946-1979), and the Santa Fe Indian Market (held since 1922 when it was called the Indian Fair). For the most part, though, Native art was categorized as objects of cultural production, when deemed authentic, or considered solely as contemporary art, when the artist was not using recognizable materials and motifs.[16]

A few sites and exhibitions continued the dialogue seeking to consider art from an Indigenous perspective. The Institute of American Indian Arts was founded in 1962 to foster the development of a generation of contemporary Native artists who were taught by Native faculty. The institution began collecting work from the students upon its inception and fostered exhibitions by the students and other Native artists as part of its curricular practices. The American Indian Community House, New York City, was founded in 1969 to "foster intercultural understanding" and was for many years perceived as a progressive site for presenting Native American art in their gallery for

[16] One need only compare the art of Maria Martinez and George Morrison, professional artists, to more readily understand that for both their cultural experience and knowledge informed their imagery and visual interests and yet they were categorized very differently as artists, Martinez as the potter and Morrison as an Abstract Expressionist.

the diverse public audience in the megacity.[17] Seattle saw the establishment of the Daybreak Star Arts Center in 1977; a center that has continued to be a prominent location for the exhibition of contemporary Native American art. In San Francisco, American Indian Contemporary Arts was founded in 1983, as a gallery to exhibit art by contemporary Native American artists.[18]

Though some recognized the cultural importance of Native art, it largely remained categorized as material culture or folk art at best, and as evidence of cultural demise in the post-Colonial era at worst. There were other The continued dismissal of art made by non-Western artists was duly confronted by Lucy Lippard's essay in her books, *Overlay* (1983) and *Mixed Blessings* (1990), where she eloquently argued that non-Western art, including Native American art, should be considered alongside Western art as a valid contemporary artistic voice. [19]

During the 1980s a popular interest emerged about Native Americans, possibly spurred by the movie *Little Big Man* (1970) and the "Longest Walk," an action taken by the American Indian Movement protesting anti-Indian legislation by walking from Alcatraz Island, CA, to Washington, D.C.; a 3,200 mile spiritual walk to raise public awareness and unify tribal representation as a collective single voice around shared political issues. By the 1990s, Native Americans were regularly the protagonists in feature film productions, including the broadly celebrated award-winning *Dances with*

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[17] American Indian Community House. *About*. https://aich.org/about/ (accessed 13 April 2018).
[18] Karen Coody Cooper, *Spirited Encounters: American Indians protest museum policies and practices* (Lanham, MD: AltaMira Press, 2008).
[19] Lucy Lippard, *Overlay: Contemporary Art and the Art of Prehistory* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1983); and, Lucy Lippard, *Mixed Blessings: New Art in a Multicultural America* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1990).

Wolves (1990) and followed by *Thunderheart* and *Last of the Mohicans* (both 1992). Though one cannot suggest that academic interest in art by Native Americans was spurred by the surging popular interest of the times, it also should not be dismissed as a motivator for the visibility for the artists. Particularly because the celebrities associated with these films often used their platform to draw attention to the plight of the Native communities associated with their projects and became regular attendees at Native art events, like Santa Fe Indian Market.[20]

In 1992, Janet C. Berlo published the seminal account of the canon on Native American art, *The Early Years of Native American Art History*.[21] W. Jackson Rushing III published his dissertation in 1995, *Native American Art and the New York Avante-Garde*, making significant contributions to the field by analyzing the role that Native arts played within the Modernist styles, both as inspirations (as with Picasso's use of African masks in his Cubist paintings) and as guides (as with Pollock's observation of Navajo sand painters that he then translated into his stylized gestural brushwork) moving toward validation of Native American art materials. [22] Berlo and Ruth B. Phillips then contributed *Native North American Art* (1998) and Rushing published *Native American Art in the Twentieth Century* creating the foundation upon which art history departments were able to build courses teaching the subject, often adding

[20] When I arrived in Santa Fe, NM, as a student at IAIA in 1991, Kevin Costner, Val Kilmer, Graham Greene, and Sam Shepard were the celebrities most popular to look for when attending the various art opening. After *Dance Me Outside* (1994) and *Smoke Signals* (1998) were released, Adam Beach and an emerging group of Indigenous celebrities became regular art collectors and supporters for Native arts events.
[21] Berlo, Janet Catherine. *The Early Years of Native American Art History* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1992).
[22] W. Jackson Rushing, *Native American Art and the New York Avante-Garde: A History of Cultural Primitivism* (Austin, University of Texas Press,1995).

readings from the plethora of museum exhibition projects that also emerged during the period.[23]

The emergent scholarship enacted historical analysis of Native art, activating the role and impact of Native artists in context of American art. The field of Native American art history had seemingly fully emerged into the discipline. With the publication of *Shared Visions* by the Heard Museum in 1993, an Indigenous vision for the practice of curating began to emerge through the direct contributions of Margaret Archuleta and Rennard Strickland, the latter was also the law professor who also served as faculty curator at the University of Oklahoma's art museum.[24] However, Native artists eagerly waited for an approach to emerge that incorporated their cultural identity as more than simply part of the artist's biography or inspiration, recognizing that the artist was the product of relationships that extended beyond time, space, and family.

To this point, Kay Walkingstick addressed the need for such a framework as it continued to effect contemporary Native artists, "Critics often avoid writing seriously about Native American art because what they consider 'universal art values' are actually twentieth-century Eurocentric art values."[25] Walkingstick's criticism of the "universal art values" is echoed, persisting in more recent scholarship that bemoans the lack of a methodology to address the role of Native American art within a culturally appropriate context. Aaron Fry wrote in 2008, "Even more troubling is that after 150

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[23] Janet Catherine Berlo and Ruth B. Phillips. *Native North American Art* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998); and Rushing, W. Jackson *Native American Art in the Twentieth Century* (London, New York: Routledge, 1999).
[24] Margaret Archuuleta and Rennard Strickland, *Shared Visions: Native American Painters and Sculptors in the Twentieth Century* (Phoenix, AZ: Heard Museum, 1993).
[25] Kay Walkingstick, "Native American Art in the Postmodern Era." *Art Journal* 51, no. 3 (Autumn 1992): 15.

years of ethnographic studies of Pueblo peoples, art historical examinations of twentieth-century Pueblo arts have failed to fully engage Pueblo concepts and perspectives on the production of these arts."[26] Few artists have had their artistic oeuvre analyzed with a culturally sensitive perspective. And while scholars have written about the lack thereof, there remains a vacuum for analytical frameworks that explore Indigenous aesthetics and provide a guide for conducting an analysis or interpretation for Native American arts.

This begs the question about how such a framework would be organized and upon which theories it would rely? Leroy N. Meyer suggested that an Indigenous cultural paradigm is foundational for such a framework:

> In traditional culture that is deeply integrated, unlike the fragmented, cosmopolitan culture of the dominant society, the ways in which traditional peoples engage in and value their arts are dependent upon a dynamic cultural network. Thus, appreciation and understanding of indigenous art requires considering more broadly and more deeply, the cultural web.[27]

Though scholars are seeking that "cultural web" within the art history field, it has not yet emerged through current methodologies, resulting in a void that has been recognized by leaders in the field. Berlo pointedly acknowledges that the lack of Native voices in the scholarly discourse is limiting the development of methodologies for how Native American arts are interpreted and analyzed. Berlo wrote in 2008,

> Key issues that remain to be worked out [in Native American art history] include how to insert a plurality of indigenous voices and indigenous epistemologies into a new transdisciplinary practice that is more than a simple anthropology *or* history of art, and how to ensure that Native American art histories are narrated in ways that respect the local as well as the global –

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[26] Aaron Fry, "Local Knowledge & Art Historical Methodology: A New Perspective on Awa Tsireh & the San Ildefonso Easel Painting Movement." *Hemispheres: Visual Cultures of the Americas* 1 (Spring 2008): 46-47.
[27] Leroy N. Meyer, "In Search of Native American Aesthetics." *Journal of Aesthetic Education* 35, no. 4 (Winter, 2001): 27.

> something too often neglected in both traditional art historical and anthropological ways of telling."[28]

Her repeated admonition, "there are still too few indigenous voices in the mix" directly identifies the need for non-Western perspectives to drive this practice and calls for participation by representatives from within the Native community to engage in the discourse.[29] Considering that many have asked, why does it remain difficult to bridge Indigenous arts between the artist and the culture? It is my contention that it is difficult because this relationship may not be a significant consideration for Euro-American artists working in the fine arts community, so the existing methodologies do not consider this relationship.

Jürgen Habermas, who cites Daniel Bell in *The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism,* writes that the "crisis of the developed societies of the West are to be traced back to a split between culture and society."[30] Habermas provides an account for the rise of Modernist culture and the disintegration of the relationship between art and its social origins, "The idea of modernity is intimately tied to the development of European art."[31] Referencing Max Weber's theory on the separation of reason into the three autonomous spheres of science, morality, and art, which inherently isolated art within their worldview from concepts of knowledge and truth, justice and morality, from, most importantly for this discussion, taste. It is precisely because of this rift between society

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[28] Most recently, Berlo discusses this issue in "Anthropologies and Histories of Art: A View from the Terrain of Native North American Art History," in *Anthropologies of Art* (Clark Studies in the Visual Arts, New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008): 178-192.
[29] Ibid.
[30] Jürgen Habermas, "Modernity – An Incomplete Project." in *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture*, ed. Hal Foster (New York: New Press, 1998): 4-5
[31] Ibid, 7.

(as a body of knowledge and morals) from concepts rationalized as culture (isolated as tastes) that Western paradigms cannot be adequately applied to non-Western cultures.

Art history, following this rationalization, has integrated all arts within a unified discourse under the Western paradigm of tastes, a point addressed by Pierre Bourdieu in *Distinction*, and hence the concentration on aesthetic systems of style, schools, and collectors.[32] Non-Western cultures have, to a great extent despite Colonization, been able to retain the relationship between culture and society. This is to say that tribal cultures have retained the integration of philosophy, ontology, epistemology, incorporating the natural sciences and religion within the cultural and social structures – the sum of which are potentially coded visually within the arts. And it is for this reason, primarily, that any deep reading of Native American art is improved by an interdisciplinary approach that engages all these fields actively.

Art history has grown to recognize Native art as the product of a creative individual and recognizes that culture provides a context, especially in relationship to the interpretation of the semiotic references. However, in doing so, the artist and art are contextualized within the immediate context of their contemporaries and as part of movements or styles related to their chosen media, but not within a culturally guided context. There are, yet, steps to be taken before the field of art history has fully reached its potential in addressing the study of Native American art. To do so will require that an Indigenous approach be considered foundational, allowing that these cultural considerations be considered in relationship, integrated as a whole, rather than considered separately. The question, than, is how can this be theorized?

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[32] Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984).

Berlo suggested in a recent essay that Relational Aesthetics might be a useful theory, when she drew parallels between Indigenous concepts of kinship and Nicolas Bourriaud's theory that takes "as its theoretical horizon the realm of human interactions and its social context, rather than the assertion of an independent and *private* symbolic space."[33] In her essay, "Will Wilson's Cultural Alchemy: CIPX in Oklahoma Territory," Berlo writes,

> While relational aesthetics as a construct has held great currency in the art world during the last two decades, it actually describe a mode of "being-in-the-world" (in the Heideggerian sense) that was instrinsic to most Native North American worldviews for centuries before Martin Heidegger or Bourriaud set pen to paper."[34]

Berlo gives an accurate account that Native communities hold a great value for respecting relationships and reciprocity, certainly that this value pre-existed current contemporary art movements, such as the movement for socially engaged art. However, Bourriaud's theoretical concept of kinship upon which she relies, as has been used in Anthropology, does not go far enough into the system of relationships that exist within and between tribal communities, and extending into the natural environment.

Further, the need to recognize the semiotic relationships between signs and symbols needs to be expanded beyond the Saussurian model to consider the metaphoric references embedded, or coded, into designs. This concept is so deeply developed within Indigenous American communities for whom knowledge was often carried across generations within mnemonic and metaphoric narratives, further coded into designs, symbols, and materials, that it can take a lifetime of studying and practicing the

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[33] Nicolas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics* (France, Les impresses du reel, 2002): 14.
[34] Janet C. Berlo, "Will Wilson's Cultural Alchemy: CIPX in Oklahoma Territory," in *PHOTO/SYNTHESIS*, ed. heather ahtone (Norman, OK: Fred Jones Jr. Museum of Art, 2017): 41.

culture to become fully versed in the visual discourse, allowing for a complete reading of the multivalent use of culturally-specific aesthetic systems.

As these designs have been carried along a continuum through creative individual expression (borrowing from Kubler), the meanings have become varyingly lost and retained, and reborn (revived and redefined), and the full participation with the arts often relies on active cultural engagement for the meanings to be understood as multivalent symbols. It is at this juncture that the methodological practices of anthropology may provide a significant contribution to art history. Combing both academic fields has provided for the development of research that engages the culture with the art and the artist. Supported by a century of research documenting ceremonies, rituals, and, often importantly, languages, these methods can be used to more deeply engage with the art, whether made as cultural material or as fine art. At this time, despite the emergence for a disciplinary priority for cultural arts over the last twenty years, as described above, a significant shift in the practice of studying Native American art from a cultural perspective remains, still, out of reach. The prevailing methodologies used within art history and anthropology remains ensconced within the Western cultural paradigms, despite some movement in acknowledging the importance of recognizing Indigenous concerns.

Anthropology

Anthropology considers art a significant component of the collective cultural experience and has considered cultural materials from different theoretical perspectives that have shaped the field. Evidence is found back to the 19th century, and perhaps earlier in nascent archaeology, that art has been an important component for

understanding cultures and that researchers have addressed art as a distinct form of culture, including consideration for the formal qualities of material and form, associated symbolic meaning, and assigned values as a form of cultural capital. This discussion will briefly survey the historical anthropological perspectives that are used with art through key moments found within the literature. Relevant scholars will be used to parse any distinctions between art and material culture. This discussion will conclude by exploring the role of anthropology in considering Indigenous American art, specifically within my research. My research interests are to better understand the role between an object, the artist, and the cultural within which it was made. This research is informed by the foundation of the relationship between the object and the culture, grounded within anthropology, integrated into an interdisciplinary project.

The term "arts" is often used to make reference to the creative expressive forms, including objects, images, literature, and the performance arts of music and dance. When humans make things conceptualized within a cultural aesthetic, the objects are considered cultural arts. For many communities, the whole experience of the creative process may be included within the conceptualization of what is meant by the term art, including the preparations for creative work, fostering the relationship between human and natural resource during the collecting of materials (i.e., the prayers offered when collecting clay for pottery), fostering of relationships between humans in the process of the preparation and participation, the presentation and sharing of the expressive form with the community, and, even, the long-term caring for the art. It is not my intention to disregard the significant role of the holistic approach embodied within many communities for the concept of art. However, for the purposes of this

essay, the discussion will be directed at consideration specifically for the visual art forms of creative expression and their related processes, as appropriate to an interdisciplinary research project that connects Anthropology with Art History.

In "The Value of Disciplinary Difference: Reflections on Art History and Anthropology at the Beginning of the Twenty-First Century," Ruth B. Phillips wrote, "Although material and visual objects make up the whole field of art historical study, visual art comprises only one category within a small and – for most of the twentieth century – minor subfield of anthropology."[35] Phillips' essay frames the emphasis in anthropology on art as a "subfield" because the primary interest was in the culture and, so, the art as an important expression of culture, was collected primarily as ethnographic specimens. This is in contrast to art history's focus on the object as the product of an artist's creativity, with research on culture, if done at all, a tertiary consideration to understanding the art. My research has led me to the conclusion that art history and anthropology are both needed in order to conduct a deep analysis of Indigenous art, engaging the object, as the product of an individual agent, acting within and contributing towards a cultural framework.

In order to fully understand the relationship anthropology has to art, one must necessarily consider the impetus and trajectory of the discipline. Emerging from the nineteenth century most scholars were working with the theory of cultural evolutionism.

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[35] Ruth B. Phillips, "The Value of Disciplinary Difference: Reflections on Art History and Anthropology at the Beginning of the Twenty-First Century," in *Anthropologies of Art*, ed. Mariët Westermann (Willamstown, MA: Clark Studies in the Visual Arts, 2005): 242.

In the early twentieth century, scholars in the field recognized that they would need to foster new research methods, including conducting their own research, with extended stays in the local community, extended participant observations, and incorporating more scientific-based data collection methods within their research.[36] All of these practices contributed toward the observation of the culture as a more significant factor within the research process. This extended exposure presented researchers with more access to the arts made by the local community, particularly as many Indigenous arts are made for use within cultural practice, both ceremonial and utilitarian. It is for this reason that the arts are often referred to as cultural materials, because the scholars were interested in how the objects materialized the culture.

During this early period, there were significant national investments that helped the field to grow both in ethnographic research and scholarly participation. In the U.S., the American Bureau of Ethnology, a predecessor to the Smithsonian Institution, supported foundational work by Franz Boas and many of his students.[37] In addition to formalizing research methods for interviews and participant observation, Boas, and his students, established a practice of taking copious notes that provided early diagrams and scientific illustrations for the objects made within the communities researched. His attitude towards these cultural objects helped to foster the theory of Cultural Relativism,

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[36] Émile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008); Émile Durkheim and Marcel Mauss, *Primitive Classification* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963); Bronislaw Malinowski, *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* (Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland Press, 1984); A. R. Radcliffe-Brown, *The Andaman* Islanders (England: Cambridge University Press,1933).

[37] Perhaps relevant to this historical moment, though not the intention of the essay is to acknowledge that Salvage Ethnology permeated the practice at this time. The effect of collecting all types of cultural materials for preservation in the museums as study objects and evidence of cultures expected to be in a state of decline and imminent demise.

that in order to understand any component of the culture, one must see its relationship to the rest of the cultural milieu, writing, "The art and characteristic style of a people can be understood only by studying its productions as a whole."[38]

Boas' studies across many cultures in North America provided enough visual material references to form important critical understanding about art that he published in *Primitive Art*.[39] His theory of cultural relativism is echoed in George Kubler's *The Shape of Time*, where he describes that objects made by human hands connect humanity through history, "Everything made now is either a replica or a variant of something made a little time ago and so on back without break to the first morning of human time."[40] This evidence reflects how Boas brought anthropology closest in relationship to the field of art history. However, in this same publication he provided an important concept that was further developed specifically in anthropology, and not in art history, "We have seen that in the art of primitive people two elements may be distinguished; a purely formal one in which enjoyment is based on form alone, and another one in which the form is filled with meaning."[41] It appears to me that Boas borrows from the modernist approach to effect a distinction between art and material culture within this statement, without distinguishing that these objects are necessarily different, only acknowledging that how the object is studied has different objectives. This approach remains valid within anthropology as evident in Howard Morphy's recent definition of art from "Anthropology of Art", "art objects are ones with aesthetic and/or semantic

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[38] Franz Boas and George W. Stocking, *A Franz Boas Reader: The Shaping of American Anthropology, 1883-1911* (Midway Reprint ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989): 33.
[39] Franz Boas, *Primitive Art* (New York: Dover Publications, 1955).
[40] George Kubler, *The Shape of Time* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008): 2.
[41] Ibid.

attributes (but in most cases both), that are used for representational or presentational purposes".[42]

While the attitudes towards Native American art in the United States within anthropology have changed only slightly in the last century, the understanding of art has grown significantly. There were significant theoretical developments mid-century, as scholars further progressed the idea of form filled with meaning, cultivating the relational areas of arts and linguistics. This is critical to understand because for many, there was a significant recognition that both were forms of communication that merited further examination.[43] Sharing an interest in the relationship between linguistics and art, Alfred Kroeber's research and scholarship was complementary, most notably in California, where he used an early form of structuralism to organize cultural and linguistic groups.[44] Kroeber, a student of Boas, incorporated many illustrations and diagrams based on his observations of art within the extensive categorization of material culture, often analyzing the names for objects as part of his linguistic analysis for kinship.

Claude Lévi-Strauss explored art as evidence for his seminal argument that theoretical structuralism was a means to examine underlying cultural foundations in *Structural Anthropology* (1963). He notably considered the relationship of split-

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[42] Howard Morphy, "Anthropology of Art," in *Companion Encyclopedia of Anthropology : Humanity, Culture and Social Life*, ed. Tim Ingold (London: Taylor and Franics, 2002). Morphy's essay provides an excellent discussion on the relationship between Colonialism with the attitudes that formed the disciplines between anthropology (looking at *Others*) and art history (looking at *ours*).
[43] Umberto Eco, *A Theory of Semiotics* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1979).
[44] Alfred L. Kroeber, *Handbook of the Indians of California,* American Indian Law Collection (Washington: Smithsonian Institution and Government Printing Office, 1925).

representation used in the arts and facial tattooing practices of the Northwest Coast of the U.S., the Chinese, the Maori of New Zealand, and the Gauicuru of southern Brazil as evidence of universal structures within unrelated cultures.

> We are still faced with the question of finding out whether these hierarchical societies based on prestige appeared independently in different parts of the world, or whether some of them do not share a common cradle…. But even if there were ground for invoking diffusion, it would not be a diffusion of details--that is, independent traits traveling each on its own and disconnected freely from any one culture in order to be linked to another--but a diffusion of organic wholes wherein style, esthetic conventions, social organization, and religion are structurally related.[45]

Lévi-Strauss was interested in how structures found within cultures could be compared, potentially establishing prehistoric relationships, and used to better understand other cultures and, then, how meaning and signification were constructed through cultural production. He borrowed from Saussure in creating structural reference systems for tribal groups when he applied his theory most effectively to kinship and social structures. This theoretical approach sustained through the 1960s.

Into this theoretical environment, Victor Turner introduced structuralism as a form of symbolic anthropology with the publication of *The Forest of Symbols.*[46] Clifford Geertz's suggested an approach in *The Interpretation of Cultures*, proposing that analysis of the symbols of culture could lead to more intimate understanding of the forms of communication within social systems.[47] Sherry Ortner succinctly distilled this significant approach,

> Geertz's most radical theoretical move was to argue that culture not something locked inside people's heads, but rather is embodied in public symbols, symbols

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[45] Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology* (New York: Basic Books, 2008).
[46] Victor W. Turner, *The Forest of Symbol: Aspects of Ndembu Ritual* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1967).
[47] Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973).

> through which the members of a society communicate their worldview, value-orientations, ethos, and all the rest to one another, to future generations."[48]

Geertz would go on to suggest that the study of art had a significant potential contribution to understanding culture, writing, "To be of effective use in the study of art, semiotics must move beyond the consideration of signs as a means of communication, code to be deciphered, to a consideration of them as modes of thought, idiom to be interpreted."[49] Though Geertz' work was never formalized into a system, in fact criticized for its lack of scientificity, his argument for understanding symbols within a broader cultural context remains important for my own inquiry.

By the 1980s, following the crisis of representation and the introduction of postmodernism, structuralism could not sustain against the criticism that it was based upon assumptions of universalisms from a Euro-American a priori. Into this discourse, Bourdieu introduced practice theory, arguing that cultures shifted from the effect of human agency and practice, not simply as the result of an inherited structure or set of symbols.[50] Destabilizing Lévi-Strauss's concept that there were universal cultural structures that could be used to compare cultures, Bourdieu proposed that *habitus*, the embodiment of a locally guided, cultural logic was the product of these ideas inculcated through one's participation in society. Habitus explains the formal practices that one comes to accept through living within a culture to the point of not recognizing that these practices are necessarily unique or defined, perhaps not even existing to consciously be understood.

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[48] Sherry B. Ortner, "Theory in Anthropology since the Sixties." in *Comparative Studies in Society and History* (Cambridge University Press) 26, no. 1 (January 1985): 129.
[49] Clifford Geertz, "Art as a Cultural System." *Modern Language Notes* (The Johns Hopkins Press) 91, no. 6 (1976): 1473-1499.
[50] Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of* Practice (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

In *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, Bourdieu addresses the role of "coding" knowledge, "Understanding ritual practice is not a question of decoding the internal logic of a symbolism but of restoring its practical necessity by relating to it the real conditions of its genesis, that is, to the conditions in which its functions, and the means it uses to attain them, are defined."[51] Bourdieu also identified different forms of capital, including cultural capital, a phrase used to value one's intellectual benefit to society as a form of power.[52] Like many coming out of the 70s resurgence of Marxist analysis, Bourdieu argued for consideration of social hierarchy and related forms of capital, which he defined as institutionalized, objectified or embodied.[53] His theoretical work has been instrumental in the revaluation of art within anthropology, and particularly in many postmodern discussions of the role of museums.

More recently, art has gained traction as critical evidence for the identification of culture, particularly as the idea of material culture has lost its clarity as a definition of the *other*. Anthropologists have begun looking at art as a form of cultural currency involved in a global exchange, creating unprecedented equitability between Western and non-Western cultures. Phillips considered the conference proceedings of the Clark Institute's topic of "Anthropologies of Art" as resulting in the recognition that there are common and interdisciplinary concerns about art, speculating,

> these responses reflect not only the new and de-hierarchized consciousness of world artistic traditions produced by post-coloniality and globalization, but also

[51] Ibid, 114.
[52] Pierre Bourdieu, "The Forms of Capital," in *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*, ed. J. Richardson (New York: Greenwood, 1986.): 241-258
[53] Ibid.

> the shared anxiety that is being generated by the dematerialization of objects through electronic imaging.[54]

Phillips' description is sympathetic to the work of folklorist Henry Glassie who suggests that by integrating history and art through methods that incorporate compositional and associational strategies, we can "connect formal properties in the object with cultural data from beyond, allowing each to explain the other, in order to understand the act that left us an artifact."[55] It appears that what has emerged most recently is a porosity between disciplines that intersects through the object, providing the potential for understanding the role of the art, the artist, and the culture as independent and interdependent structures. While not advocating for a return to the use of broadly applied universalisms, these developments may recognize that internally functioning universalisms exist within hegemonic cultural systems, particularly within non-Western cultural paradigms, that merit further specific exploration.

Any reader will recognize that the above descriptions and synthesis of these theoretical movements is both shallow in discussion and limited in its scope of the field. However, I have selected major theoretical shifts, paying particular attention to those scholars whose work informs my own. It is not intended to be a survey or complete discussion, as I have simplified the discussion to be able to direct it towards the topic of my research.

The types of art that Boas, Geertz, Lévi-Strauss, and Bourdieu address within their scholarship are, almost exclusively, objects used within cultural rituals,

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[54] Ruth B. Phillips, "The Value of Disciplinary Difference: Reflections on Art History and Anthropology at the Beginning of the Twenty-First Century," in *Anthropologies of Art*, ed. Mariët Westermann (Willamstown, MA: Clark Studies in the Visual Arts, 2005): 254.

[55] Henry Glassie, *Material Culture* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999): 65.

ceremonies, initiation rites, and as functional implements. It is evident from their descriptions, in general, that as they looked at the materials made within these cultures, they had little, if any, interest in the agency of the individual artist with regards to the making of the objects, save perhaps Bourdieu whose emphasis on practice does, at least, share an interest in the artist as independent agent sympathetic with art history. Even though Bourdieu places the perpetuation of cultures in the hands of the individual as an agent, he considers the materials a tool for cultural practice. Within this scope of consideration, the objects they discuss are generally considered material culture, or the tangible evidence of the knowledge that is translated through materials into the culture. From this perspective, these objects have historically been referred to as material culture, even when they have been recognized as being made within a refined aesthetic system and, as is often the case, referred to as art.

The term art has been used since the early years of anthropology in reference to cultural objects. Boas offered that, "An examination of the material on which our studies of the artistic value of objects of primitive manufacture are founded shows that in most cases we are dealing with products of an industry in which a high degree of mechanical skill has been attained."[56] His evident admiration for the objects upon which he wrote were, nevertheless objects of utilitarian value, adornment, ceremonial objects, and, even, architecture. Those anthropologists who followed him were interested in the

[56] Franz Boas, *Primitive Art*, 17.

same categories because, it seems, that these objects were material evidence of the culture.[57]

My own research with art borrows significantly from anthropology and art history for its generative foci. That is to say that while anthropology is interested in the role that art has to culture and art history is interested in the object and its relationship to the artist, I am interested in the relationship that the object mediates as a creative expression by the artist, responding to the artist's cultural knowledge, and how it performs a role in generating new forms of culture. In order to structure my research, I am following Boas by placing the art within a cultural paradigm, which means that for each object I believe that it is necessary to see how the formal properties of the object fit within a local and tribal aesthetic relationship [Kincentricity]. Like Geertz, I believe that meaning, though not comprehensively, can be interpreted through understanding how the artist has synthesized their knowledge into the materials and forms used in the object [Metaphors/Symbolism]. From Lévi-Strauss I borrow a belief that there are underlying structures of cultures, defining universalisms as specifically hegemonic within tribal cultures, that can be assessed given guidance by the artist of their relationship to their tribal culture and considering the cultural epistemology and value for language and kinship [Materiality and Kincentricity]. However, the artist as an independent agent cannot be ignored and, so, I borrow from Bourdieu an interest in understanding the artist's habitus, including their cultural capital and personal

[57] Many were also Boas' students, including Ruth Benedict and Alfred Kroeber. However, the same can be said of Margaret Mead and others who came out of different anthropological schools.

influences, which likely include more than the tribal cultural epistemology [Temporality].

The gateway that makes the research possible is a constructed marriage between the practices of ethnology and art history, both of which often include personal interviews with the subject and participant observation. The latter is made possible because of my professional role as a curator. But I recognize the trap of generalities that could weaken the potential of my research plan. To this point, I think it valuable to discuss how the research with the objects was conducted, particularly in regards to placing it within a cultural milieu.

With each of the lenses referenced above, it will be important to place the objects selected for a case study within a tribal aesthetic, a process to best explore how the artist has participated within an epistemological perspective that values the creative expressive forms. While exploring this topic with each tribal group included in my case studies, let alone every tribal group, would be difficult to complete in an encyclopedia set, for the purposes of this essay, I would like to provide an accessible point of evidence for the value of this point in my discussion. If we select the Navajo culture as a case study, we can focus on the Navajo concept of *hózhó*, or beauty. In *Dynamic Symmetry and Holistic Assymetry*, Gary Witherspoon and Glen Peterson wrote,

> Dynamic symmetry and holistic asymmetry are universal themes in Navajo culture, expressing a particular feeling for life and for the world. To one degree or another and in one way or another, most Navajo works of art express these universal themes. The creative experience in Navajo culture must be seen and understood in this context, for, in a wide variety of artistic endeavors, as well as in ordinary pursuits, Navajos experience and express this theme. Navajo culture – like other cultures – is not just a food gathering strategy. It enriches

> experiences by placing it in an aesthetic as well as a meaningful context…. Art is not a separate or a distinct domain of Navajo culture.[58]

The consideration that art is simply another form of expressing a paramount epistemological tenet lies outside a Western perspective, but for the Navajo, and, I would argue, many Indigenous communities, the creative pursuits are a manner of living within the culture, or moreover, the arts are a matter of activating the culture as a matter of course.

If taken from this perspective, the objects of material culture are simultaneously art, and vice-versa. This is in contrast to the Western definition of art that has held sway in the twentieth and into the twenty-first centuries, where the distinction between art and material culture has been a measure of taste, often based upon the types of materials used and preference for particular processes, commodified through an assigned market value and resulting in cultural imperialism and elitism. But if one were to recognize the arts, and for my purposes, fine art, as a form of material culture, then the argument can be made that the object is both a product of and producer of culture, one which I have already mentioned, is important to considering and interpreting Indigenous arts. It is this very element that has left art history's myopic focus on the object and the artist blind from seeing the critical role that the artist plays in generating new cultural knowledge as cultural people.

It is perhaps through consideration of the semiotic language of Native American art that the role of the object as a mediator of and for culture is most apparent. The role of semiotics is well-developed in anthropology through the work of Roland Barthes and Umberto Eco. Both formed theoretical approaches to Semiotics that leveraged the

[58] Gary Witherspoon and Glen Peterson. *Dynamic Symmetry and Holistic Assymetry in Navajo and Western Art and Cosmology* (New York: Peter Lang, 1995): 51.

relational aspects of language (again, Saussure) to interpret signs and symbols.[59] Their work was related enough that both semioticians have been influential in my own skill development to understand the role of signs, symbols, and indexical relationships. This basis for understanding the role of symbols within art as cultural materials made other approaches quite accessible. Abraham Rosman and Paula G. Rubel addressed the approach passed on from Boas to his students that considers art styles to be determined as a product of the technical processes, formal elements, and systems of arrangement, which together convey meaning as an artistic device.[60] Thus the aesthetic objects and process are tools for conveying culture across generations. This opens up the impact and role of culture within the materialization of cultural knowledge and describes art's impact as a tool for the generation of new culture. This approach, though, ignores the role of the artist, who is perceived within this approach as an expressive member mediating between the cultural community and the subject.

Anthony Shelton seems to recognize this lack of attention for the artist when he acknowledges that,

> If we try to examine Huichol material representations from the perspective of an anthropological or art-historical discourse, we are confronted by a double paradox…. Aesthetic judgements are predicated on a system of values, fixed, situated, and manipulated by rules which are, for the most part, culturally specific and historically determined."[61]

Shelton seems to recognize that relying only on a Western paradigm for the interpretation of the objects, even in the context of other cultural frameworks, does not

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[59] Umberto Eco, *A Theory of Semiotics* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1979).
[60] Abraham Rosman and Paula G. Rubel. "Structural Patterning in Kwakiutl Art and Ritual." in *The Anthropology of Art*, eds. Howard Morphy and Morgan Perkins (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006): 339-357.
[61] Anthony Shelton, "Predicates of Aesthetic Judgement." in *Anthropology Art and Aesthetics*, eds. Jeremy Coote and Anthony Shelton (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992): 209-244.

improve the analyst's capacity to fully engage without incorporating the object's ontological impetus. But anthropology remains an important discipline because of the depth of scholarship on non-Western cultures, including published research on ceremonies, the role of language, and the transmission of designs across disparate cultural communities. Additionally, anthropology has made significant strides to address the issue of the researcher's position within the community and to engage Indigenous values within the discipline. Key among those whose work has inspired me in the field are Keith Basso, Audra Simpson, and Daniel C. Swan. Each has approached the communities with whom they worked exhibiting a willingness to learn as much as to study. Only recently have the same efforts been made in art history, often at the hands of an Indigenous scholar, such as Kathleen Ash-Milby, Emil Her Many Horses, and Heather Igloliorte, or a non-Native art historians that willingly places Indigenous voices as partners within the process, such as Rebecca Dobkins, Karen Kramer, among a few others.

Another condition that has contributed to the disconnection between these scholarly fields has been the modern realities of Indigenous American people. As we have transitioned from being uniquely situated communities, often interwoven within the dominant American settler state, our worldviews have remained an important part of our identity though our geographic location may be separated from our specific tribal community. Unlike the immigrants that participated in the growth of the nation-state, coming from Europe and Asia to seek "the American dream," or being forcibly removed from our home continent as our African American neighbors and kin, tribal citizens have retained a relationship to our home spaces, despite centuries of political

impositions and removals. What has resulted are tribal people with dual citizenship functioning within the capitalistic economy while maintaining uniquely woven tribal identities. Native Americans enlist their knowledge of a world that was created from the narratives of tribal genesis while seeking methods to provide for their families, intentionally contributing toward a future where their culture survives. The artists of this study offer a vision for how that survival is enacted through contemporary art. The topic remains a significant scholarly concern in the discourse addressing Settler Colonialism and modern interpretations of sovereignty.

It is apparent to me that anthropology struggles with fully embracing culture that is difficult to sift when it is embedded within the broader American experience. Major efforts to change this over the past fifteen years can be seen in the work of Jessica Catelino and Audra Simpson.[62] Similarly, art history struggles to address non-Western cultural perspectives on the importance of culture beyond an approach mediated by addressing biography and social-political influences. However, the role of American Indian culture within an artist's worldview is more than simply mimicking designs or borrowing technical practices as part of craft tradition. Therein lies a significant point, one addressed by Donald Fixico in *The American Indian Mind in a Linear World* and Paula Gunn Allen in *The Sacred Hoop: Recovering the Feminine in American Indian Traditions*. While both seek to open up the dialogue on how American Indian culture impacts their respective fields of history and literature, respectively, they convey an

[62] Jessica Catelino, *High Stakes: Florida Seminole Gaming and Sovereignty* (Duke University Press, 2008); and Audra Simpson, *Mohawk Interruptus: Political Life Across the Borders of Settler States* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014).

important point – that as American Indian people we seek to connect through our stories and cultural practices to the beginning of creation, and additionally, to create the potential of our future abiding by the tenets we have carried forward. Tribal creation stories remain important to contemporary artists.

In conclusion, the convergence of anthropology and art history within my research borrows significantly from each field. Anthropology plays a critical role in better understanding the relationship that an art object has in expressing culture and in reproducing culture. That in order to understand the object, one must look at its role and relationship within the culture, understanding the use of metaphors, symbols, and materials within an epistemologically guided paradigm. More recently, anthropology explores the role of the individual as a cultural agent in producing and constructing culture through objects and this remains an important consideration in my research. Finally, borrowing from anthropology's interest in the relationship between language and kinship, these topics will be explored as components of my research about the artist. Through a comprehensive analysis of these converging points of culture within an object, it is my ambition to provide a useful framework for a deep interpretation of art that positions it as a conduit for better understanding the art as an object and the relationship that contemporary artists have to their cultures. In search of guidance for how to shift this paradigm to be better suited to the research subject, the field of Native American Studies offers new methods for conducting research that incorporate the aforementioned and culturally guided concerns.

Native American Studies

In order to address this concern, I have looked to the discipline of Native American Studies as a field that has embraced Indigenous-guided theoretical approaches to relevant cultural issues, though they have entered the discourse through a variety of disciplines. In 1999, Linda Tuhiwai Smith published *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*, an openly critical reprimand of the historical practices used by academic disciplines to study Indigenous people. She critically exposed scholarly research for its imposition of Western paradigms on Indigenous communities as continuous acts of Colonialism. She wrote,

> Research is implicated in the production of Western knowledge, in the nature of academic work, in the production of theories which have dehumanized Maori and in practices which have continued to privilege Western ways of knowing while denying the validity for Maori of Maori knowledge, language and culture.[63]

Smith called for Indigenous researchers to become responsible to their Indigenous community as much as they were to the academic community. The timeliness of Smith's contribution to the scholarly discourse, following the cultural turn in the humanities from the 1980s, opened a flood-gate of proposed practices that have since become collectively referred to as Indigenous methodologies. This essay will identify what constitutes an Indigenous methodology, who can use it, and to provide examples of how it can be done effectively.

Smith's was not the first criticism by an Indigenous scholar of researchers working with Native subjects. One need only reference Vine Deloria's 1969 essay, "Anthropologists and Other Friends," from *Custer Died for Your Sins,* in which he

[63] Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies* (London: Zed Books, 2013): 183.

faulted the relationship between anthropologists and Native communities as creating an objectifying situation that bode ill for the subject communities. He wrote, "The fundamental thesis of the anthropologist is that people are objects for observation, people are then considered objects for experimentation, for manipulation, and for eventual extinction."[64] While Deloria's essay is often cited and remains a seminal essay taught as an impetus for anthropology's crisis of representation in the 1970s, the methodologies used in that field and others, remained grounded within a Western cultural paradigm and epistemology. The cultural turn of the 1980s, however, shifted academia's focus from an examination of the position of the researcher to considering the role of academic disciplines that resulted in an expansion of cultural studies programs, specifically.[65] Given departments whose focus was on the study of non-Western cultures, a growing body of Indigenous scholars has emerged, scholars looking to their respective tribal cultural paradigms in an effort to create methodological practices to guide their research process, making their professional work congruent with their cultural epistemology.[66] What has emerged in the last decade is a growing body of

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[64] Vine Deloria, Jr., *Custer Died for Your Sins* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1988): 81.

[65] In the United States, the earliest Native American and African American studies programs were formed during the period known as the cultural turn, driven by the Civil Rights Movement and the assertion of agency by people of color to validate the study of their own cultural group. These departments are often driven by a cross-disciplinary research and participation.

[66] Stephen Muecke, *Ancient & Modern: Time, Culture and Indigenous Philosophy* (Sydney: University of New South Wales, 2004); Rauna Johanna Kuokkanen, *Reshaping the University* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2007); Renya K Ramirez, *Native Hubs* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007); Shawn Wilson, *Research is Ceremony* (Black Point, NS: Fernwood Publications, 2008); and Donna M. Mertens, Fiona Cram and Chilisa Bagele, *Indigenous Pathways into Social Research* (Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press, 2013).

scholarship that shifts the research paradigm founded on Indigenous worldviews and perspectives.

An Indigenous methodology is more complex than a single method or technique used within the research process. Maggie Walter and Chris Andersen clarify in *Indigenous Statistics* that the term "*methodology"* addresses the whole process,

> We argue that it is the methodologies within which data are collected, analysed, [sic] and interpreted that shape the pictures that the statistics produce, rather than the research method of statistical analysis itself. Methodology is the active element in constituting the portrait of the realities that statistical techniques eventually create; it determines why and how particular research questions are asked (and why others are not); how, when, and where the data are gathered; how they are explored; and how the resulting data are interpreted and, significantly, eventually used.[67]

Indigenous methodologies address the research practices that incorporate culturally responsive values within the process of creating research projects, conducting research, developing data, and reporting the analysis and interpretations. Many examples of the new methodologies have entered the scholarly discourse as dissertations published by Indigenous people who, like Smith, were emergent professionals working on research projects that engaged their own cultural communities, seeking to establish practices guided by their locally held knowledge, protocol and value systems.[68] These methodologies are valuable, though, beyond the Indigenous community and have the potential benefit to the academic community to diversify research concepts. In *Indigenous Methodologies*, Margaret Kovach succinctly describes the value that Indigenous methodologies bring to the academic community broadly:

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[67] Maggie Walter and Chris Andersen, *Indigenous Statistics: A Quantitative Research Methodology* (Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press, 2013): 10.
[68] Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* and Shawn Wilson, *Research Is Ceremony: Indigenous Research Methods*.

> As the academic landscape shifts with an increasing Indigenous presence, there is a desire among a growing community of non-Indigenous academics to move beyond the binaries found within Indigenous-settler relations to construct new, mutual forms of dialogue, research, theory, and action. As long as the academy mirrors a homogenous reflection of bodies, minds, and methods, our move in this direction is stalled.[69]

Kovach also discussed the interest of Indigenous scholars to contribute not only to the body of knowledge held by the academy, but also to actively use their own community's knowledge system. By doing so, they activate the knowledge held within this system for themselves and their community, engaging these systems and contributing to their community's cultural vitality. By engaging Indigenous knowledge systems, four core tenets have emerged from these practices that bind them within the collective term of Indigenous methodologies: relationships, *accountability*, *respect*, and *reciprocity*.

In "Indigenous Research with a Cultural Context", Australian Aboriginal scholar Fiona Hornung clarifies the "basic elements for a researcher of Indigenous peoples and communities" as placing the cultural epistemology at the center of actions that are guided by (1) Accountability through "consultation, negotiation and mutual understanding;" (2) "Respect for land, people, and culture;" and (3) Reciprocity through "agreed outcomes and benefits."[70] These tenets shift the research paradigm in favor of Indigenous communities through the establishment of relationships that produce mutually beneficial results, not only serving the academic community. Shawn Wilson pointed out in *Research is Ceremony*, that an inherent hierarchy was created in Western

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[69] Margaret Kovach, *Indigenous Methodologies: Characteristics, Conversations, and Contexts* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009): 12.
[70] Mertens, Cram, and Bagele, *Indigenous Pathways into Social Resarch: Voices of a New Generation*, 140-1.

academic methodologies practiced historically by non-Native researchers that did not favor the Native subjects of research:

> Another, more subtle, problem with 'outsiders' researching Indigenous peoples is that there is always a comparison made between the culture of the 'studied' and that of the 'studier.' The language, tone and focus of research reflects this comparison, with the inevitable consequence of rating of one over the other.[71]

Researchers using Indigenous methodologies seek to enact equality within the relationship between the researcher and the subject/community, a measure being undertaken in other disciplines.[72] The effect of this equitability will be the incorporation of non-Western cultural knowledge within the broader body of knowledge that is being taught and further developed within the academy. These tenets help to shift the research paradigm in a manner that creates equitability between epistemological values systems, creating the potential for research to contribute to a more heterogeneous and dynamic body of scholarly discourse.

Accountability describes the foundation of the research having a benefit for the researcher and the subject. Scholars describe that this begins before the research and continues after the research is concluded.[73] Accountability is effected through on-going communication between the researcher and the Native community, maintained throughout the process to ensure a mutually agreed upon understanding of the major

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[71] Wilson, Shawn. *Research Is Ceremony: Indigenous Research Methods*, 17.
[72] Further reading on this topic can be found in Luke Eric Lassiter's *The Chicago Guide to Collaborative Ethnography* (2005) and Daniel C. Swan and Michael Jordan's *Contingent Collaborations: Patterns of Reciprocity in Museum(s) – Community Relationships* (2015).
[73] Maggie Walter and Chris Andersen, *Indigenous Statistics: A Quantitative Research Methodology* (Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press, 2013); Margaret Kovach, *Indigenous Methodologies: Characteristics, Conversations, and Contexts* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009); and, Lori Lambert, *Research for Indigenous Survival: Indigenous Research Methodologies in the Behavioural Sciences* (Pablo, MT: Salish Kootenai College Press, 2014).

components of the research: the who, why, what, and when. Scholar Lori Lambert, of the Mi'kmaq and Abenaki communities, wrote in *Research for Indigenous Survival*,

> Axiologoy defines the ethics (making a good decision about right and wrong behavior) and aesthetics (the beauty) of something. Indigenous axiology is built on accountability. Ethics in Indigenous communities is more than human subject protection. It is protection of the cultural ways, ceremonies, language, and relationships with the data, which go back to time immemorial in our history.[74]

Through the process of conducting research, power is exerted over a subject. The development of the process, research question(s), and result(s), no matter how well intended, should be coordinated with the host community as a mutual exchange.

Like Smith, Lambert places that responsibility on the shoulders of the researcher to ask questions of the process, "Does the community collaborate with the researcher? Not the researcher's agenda, but the agenda of the community is important. It is not what the community can do for you… but what does your research do for the community?"[75] It is through this constant self-reflexive checking that the process can be mutually productive and beneficial and shift the history of research with Indigenous communities to something that disrupts the ongoing oppression of Colonialism. As Cram, Chilisa, and Mertens write in their introduction to *Indigenous Pathways*, "So the 'bad name' that research has within Indigenous communities is not about the notion of research itself; rather it is about how that research has been practiced, by whom, and for what purpose that has created ill-feeling."[76] Indigenous methodologies seek to rectify the value of research for Indigenous communities and accountability is key to this process.

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[74] Ibid, 63.
[75] Ibid, 64.
[76] Mertens, Cram, and Bagele., *Indigenous Pathways into Social Research: Voices of a New Generation*, 11.

Respect describes the foundational approach of all aspects of working with the research subjects and their extended cultural community. While a basic human value, respect has not historically been placed as a priority within the relationship between researcher and Indigenous subject. Using Indigenous methodologies mandates it as foundational to the establishing of the relationship. Practitioners are tasked to position the researcher as working *with* the subject community, not just *on* (again the language of hierarchy). This disruption of the hierarchy engages mutual respect from the initial steps, which can include seeking out guidance from the host community to determine what the research question should even address. In order to achieve this, researchers are expected to conform to the tribal community's protocols, seeking guidance and participation from local authorities.

While Western research paradigms have positioned knowledge and the acquisition of knowledge as paramount in practice, actively respecting the tribal community through mutually beneficial relationships should include an extension of respect to tribal paradigms. The researcher must recognize that the process of conducting research in Indigenous communities be done with respects for the local cultural epistemology. Specifically, recognizing that tribal peoples are often in active relationships with the land and spiritual practices that create a holistic environment. As Hornung describes,

> Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have a unique relationship to the land and waters of their particular country. This association requires Indigenous peoples to be responsible in protecting the spiritual and environmental well-being of their country, which includes acknowledging and paying respect to spirit ancestors who created the land and introduced customs and languages.[77]

[77] Ibid, 142.

Research conducted in this environment should be practiced sensitively to the local protocols, gendered roles, and cultural hierarchy. Impositions of Western knowledge in Indigenous spaces are considered a form of active disrespect.

Placing respect as a primary tenet invokes an exchange through the research process, engaged speaking/listening through reciprocating relationships, asking for access rather than assuming privilege, and adjusting the research process to allow for an equitable treatment for Indigenous knowledge systems and ways of being. To this last point, the allowance for "ways of being" is more than valuing intellectual information, a point that Kovach addresses extensively. She describes that integration of academic values with cultural values will always require 'strategic concessions,' a description she borrows from Maori scholar Graham Smith, because there will be necessary gaps between the epistemological worldviews.[78] An example of such a concession is the imposition of conceptual frameworks on cultural research.

> Edward Buendía contends that conceptual systems traditionally utilized in Western higher education are culturally and racially loaded mechanisms that privilege European epistemological thought. Conceptual frameworks put at the centre 'acceptable' epistemological positions that make sense to the dominant culture…. There are indeed a range of conceptual frameworks applied to research methodologies, and the problem is that they inherently centre Western epistemology, thus manufacturing and reproducing Western epistemology as a normative standard within research…. If we see them as aids to elevate tribal epistemology, and if we are willing to acknowledge their limitations, conceptual frameworks can be intermediary tools for putting forth a tribal-centered research methodology.[79]

From this position, Indigenous methodologies do not simply dismiss academic protocol or standards, but position them within a framework that is guided by tribal epistemology. This re-centering of whose epistemology is being reproduced is a

[78] Kovach, *Indigenous Methodologies: Characteristics, Conversations, and Contexts*, 40-41.
[79] Ibid, 41.

powerful point of cultural advocacy that creates the potential for the benefit of the research to extend beyond the data and its interpretation. Referring back to what Walter and Anderson identified, how the data is used and what choices are made based upon the data can be profoundly different when the host community is able to guide the intention of the research. This is an effect of respect that has been woefully missing in the vast majority of research done on Indigenous communities because the intent of the research data is for it to be used by outsiders, likely to influence decisions that have directly effected the subject communities. It also positions tribal communities to actively guide the wrestling that necessarily takes place when individuals carry multi-ethnic situations (with sometimes contradictory epistemologies) or when members of the same community have different opinions or interpretations.[80]

Reciprocity is an expectation that the researcher, through a relationship based upon accountability and respect, will seek to provide a benefit to the host community. Establishing respect lays the foundation for a mutual intention of the research and the use of the results. However, invoking reciprocity is not simply saying the researcher will provide the research data and analysis in return for cooperation to produce the data. The purpose of invoking reciprocity as a primary goal between the researcher and the host community is to seek out mutually beneficial results, not in the data, but in the

[80] The issue of multi-ethnic situations is one that the author has wrestled with personally, having been raised in a culturally diverse community that included my Choctaw grandmother, Kiowa grandfather, and my phenotypical presentation influenced by my Norwegian/Irish father. This has become further complicated as I have raised my children, borne from inter-marriage with a Navajo man. This is an ongoing complicated experience to manage for all of us; there is no guide and every ceremony (funerals) and natural phenomenon (like an eclipse) requires consultation to find a best practice.

relationship. Hornung offers the following guide of what can be mutually agreed outcomes and benefits,

> When involved in research within an Australian Indigenous community, there should be an understanding between the researcher and participants that the results of a particular study should be transparent and that the participants will benefit in a positive manner from the study.[81]

Lambert argues that what is most critically at stake in the exchange are the stories, the personal histories that become part of the research, which cannot be owned by a researcher. She writes, "It is morally and ethically right for the community to own the stories that are collected as data, not the researcher, not the university, or the government [or funding agency]…. Countless numbers of Indian people regard the telling of stories as a sacred ceremony."[82] Lambert went so far to suggest that the data and subsequent reports belong to the community, stating, "The community has to own the data. Researchers are borrowing the stories and the data from the community members and should return and acknowledge the members of the community who shared their stories and interviews."[83]

Scholars will recognize this as in direct conflict with the Western research paradigm in which the researcher publishes as the author and owner of the data. While not in argument with Lambert, others offer that the exchange can be based on the research and its results, especially when the research question has been developed with the community through ongoing communication. Kovach describes that the value of

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[81] Mertens, Cram, and Bagele., *Indigenous Pathways into Social Resarch: Voices of a New Generation,* 142.
[82] Lori Lambert, *Research for Indigenous Survival: Indigenous Research Methodologies in the Behavioural Sciences*, 33.
[83] Ibid, 215.

creating knowledge cultivated through Indigenous methodologies into the scholarship is a significant contribution that is mutually beneficial,

> Indigenous scholars' desire to transform the exclusive domain of knowledge creation immersed in Western thought and held in the dominion of Western universities has its basis in at least three reasons: (a) to carry on a struggle borne by historical momentum; (b) to make visible the connection between cultural longevity, Aboriginal rights, and post-secondary education (with research being inherent to academic higher learning); and (c) to bring not only Indigenous bodies but Indigenous knowledges into the academy.[84]

While all of the scholars quoted above are Indigenous people, it is critical to understand that Indigenous methodologies are not limited for use by Indigenous community members. To clarify, the potential use of Indigenous methodologies as important conceptual framework s is for creating knowledge cultivated with Indigenous communities as equitable partners in the process and reporting. This effort is needed to shift away from the Western paradigm, which is foundationally biased as an extension of Colonialism. As a Black woman in South Africa, Kholeka Constance Moloi wrote in "The Journey of an Indigenous Social Researcher in South Africa" that,

> As I grapple with understanding and working as a social Indigenous researcher, I am beginning to clearly understand that research involves construction of meanings about social phenomena and that meanings are socially constructed by individuals and mediated by the tools that they use, be it language, artifacts, or culture. For example, I have discovered that research is about how individuals make sense of the world around them and how, in particular, the philosopher (researcher) should bracket his or her preconceptions in his or her grasp of that world.[85]

The need for Indigenous methodologies, guided and developed by the non-Western scholars who perceived their own participation within academic fields could be responsive to Indigenous priorities, has spurred the creation of this methodological

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[84] Kovach, *Indigenous Methodologies: Characteristics, Conversations, and Contexts*, 158.
[85] Mertens, Cram, and Bagele, *Indigenous Pathways into Social Resarch: Voices of a New Generation*, 110.

approach. However, what is also evident is that any researchers who desire to treat their subjects in a manner that incorporates the four tenets can actively engage their research using these methodologies guided by the host community's cultural epistemology.

Several non-Native scholars have actively engaged Indigenous methodologies in their research practice. I would argue that Keith Basso's research had evolved in response to his relationships with the Western Apache into an Indigenous methodology when he was developing the research for *Wisdom Sits in Places.*[86] His work set a precedent that was rapidly followed by others who recognized that by positioning the cultural epistemology as a primary perspective within the research, the results promoted an understanding of social dynamics otherwise inaccessible.[87] Rather than focusing on the researcher's identity, the important focus must necessarily be on the Indigenous subjects identity and epistemology and the suitability of the type of research being conducted. Saying this, then, it could be possible to implement the tenets of an Indigenous methodology with any research subject. However, if the subject resides in a cultural milieu in which the Western epistemology is shared, it would not be an Indigenous methodology because the methods are being guided by a shared Western epistemology. It would also not be possible for an Indigenous methodology to be used in a blind study, such as in medical research practice, where participants know little more about the study other than providing consent and the "potential" for a benefit to participants. While there may yet be room to negotiate accountability, respect, and reciprocity into the research process with an Indigenous community with scientific and

[86] Keith H. Basso, *Wisdom Sits in Places: Landscape and Language among the Western Apache,* (Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Press, 1996).
[87] Again, directing the readers attention to the work of Jessica Catellino and others, already cited.

blind studies, the specific inability to engage the participating subjects in a manner that honors them as individuals, unable to respond to their individuality in the situation, would inhibit fully embracing the capacity and intention of an Indigenous methodology.[88] However, it is important to recognize that these manners of conducting research are still in development. One can imagine that a clever Indigenous researcher is figuring out how to work within his/her cultural paradigm to conduct valuable medical research on their local community.

In the eighteen years since Smith's seminal publication, research practices known as Indigenous methodologies have become accepted in a range of humanities fields, including Education, Sociology, and Anthropology.[89] Given that Indigenous methodologies are to be used as a research model by researchers who are working with Indigenous communities, one is left with the remaining question of how? There are several models that have been developed and shared to discuss. Lambert provides diagrams of three different models, including the "Medicine Wheel Model," "Australian Indigenous Research Model," and the "Spider Web Conceptual Framework." Smith cited four models that have emerged in the Maori community that are culturally appropriate for working with that community: *Tiaki*, or mentoring model; *Whangai*, or

[88] This paper addresses research specifically within the humanities, however a search on "Indigenous methodologies" in medical journals resulted in an extensive body of emerging literature that addresses methodologies referred to in the medical community as "Community-Based Participatory Research, often citing Indigenous methodologies as a critical component. See: Nina Wallerstein, Bonnie Duran, "Community-Based Participatory Research Contributions to Intervention Research: The Intersection of Science and Practice to Improve Health Equity", *American Journal of Public Health* 100, no. S1 (April 1, 2010): pp. S40-S46.

[89] There are numerous research projects that have been published using Indigenous methodologies beyond those included in this essay's bibliography. One that I have found particularly useful is Audra Simpson, *Mohawk Interruptus: Political Life across the Borders of Settler States*, 2014.

adoption model; Power-sharing model; and Empowering Outcomes model. These four models have varying levels of responsibility by the researcher to become embedded and integrated within the Maori community, making a lifetime commitment to do so.

Each model used is guided by culturally-grounded structures and centralizes the cultural epistemology as the fulcrum around which the rest of the research priorities coordinate. Kovach developed her methodology using her Plains Cree knowledge, after which it is named, "Nêhiýaw Kiskêýihtawmowin." She used the diagram of six tipi poles to create a visual guide that could be borrowed. She wrote, "This route was chosen so that this conceptual framework and methodology could be more easily translatable to non-Indigenous researchers."[90] As Kovach invites, her methodological approach is available to be used by other scholars seeking to work with the Plains Cree community. Her confirmation echoes that of others, that the methodology is not only for use by Indigenous scholars, but by those seeking to work with Indigenous communities.

The frameworks are being developed in concert with a growing body of Indigenous theory, creating the potential for a profound shift in the body of knowledge about Indigenous communities. Bryan Brayboy's theory, Tribal Critical Race Theory, is seminal among these.[91] Constructed, like Indigenous methodologies, from an Indigenous paradigm, Brayboy argues that a criticism against Indigenous knowledge has been the lack of theory is short-sighted. He described listening to the accounting through stories of gratitude by graduating students, from which he realized,

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[90] Kovach, *Indigenous Methodologies: Characteristics, Conversations, and Contexts*, 45.

[91] Bryan McKinley Jones Brayboy, "Toward a Tribal Critical Race Theory in Education." *The Urban Review* 37, no. 5 (2005): 425-446.

> They were not simply telling ‘‘stories;’’ rather, they had clearly shown me that for many Indigenous people, stories serve as the basis for how our communities work. For some Indigenous scholars (and others), theory is not simply an abstract thought or idea that explains overarching structures of societies and communities; theories, through stories and other media, are roadmaps for our communities and reminders of our individual responsibilities to the survival of our communities. These notions of theory, however, conflict with what many in the ‘‘academy’’ consider ‘‘good theory.’’ At the heart of this conflict are different epistemologies and ontologies.[92]

Brayboy positions tribal stories as a form of valid theory, lenses through which data can be analyzed and interpreted, and from which scholars can negotiate a more representative approach upon which to base their research.

Indigenous methodologies emerged in response to a growing field of Indigenous scholars seeking to work with their own and other Indigenous communities as research subjects without imposing Western cultural paradigms upon the process. From these independent projects, diverse models have emerged that share in common the positioning of the tribal epistemology at the fulcrum and guided by three tenets of accountability, respect, and reciprocity. Applying an Indigenous methodology expects that researchers are working on research of Indigenous subjects, are working with the host community to design the research the process, and contribute towards a growing body of knowledge that decenters the Western paradigm and ends the imposition of colonialism in the research process. This model provides a template to follow for this research project.

In order to address this concern, I have looked to the discipline of Native American Studies as a field that has embraced theoretical approaches to relevant cultural issues, though they have entered the discourse through a variety of disciplines. One of considerable importance to this project was authored by Brian Brayboy, who has

[92] Ibid, 427.

suggested in his emergent approach of Tribal Critical Race Theory that one of the greatest challenges that is keeping tribal knowledge from receiving validation within scholarly fields has been the apparent lack of theory.[93] Brayboy posits that this is a false assumption levied on historic presumptions of primitivism and an inherent inferiority of oral historical communities. In contrast, he believes that tribal creation stories are a form of oral literature that are most accurately perceived as tribal theory. That, in order to better understand a tribal philosophy, one must necessarily look at the narratives that have been passed down through the continuum of tribal memory. In these stories, scholars and tribal people can locate keys to understanding tribal ontologies and epistemologies, the theoretical guidance from which community members continue to form their understanding of the world and guiding their daily practices and beliefs.

Brayboy's emphasis on the value of the creation narratives resonates with my interest in considering the contemporary art from a culturally-centric perspective and will inform my analytical framework, to be described in greater detail below. In consideration of Brayboy's theory, combined with the primary tenets suggested by Smith to work with respect, reciprocity, and accountability, Native American Studies becomes a foundational discipline guiding my research. However, the question remains, how can one bridge these three disparate disciplines with the ambition to more fully interpret and analyze contemporary Indigenous art?

The gap that exists between existing anthropology and art history methods can be resolved, to some extent, by employing a framework that incorporates the key

[93] This is a point that has been openly stated by non-Native scholars in OU's Art History department questioning the validity of Native American art history to peers and students.

components of Indigenous methodologies. Though this collective term has been widely used and remains to be refined for further adoption, the desire by Indigenous scholars to assert tribal a priori merits consideration, especially for this project. Since Linda Tuhiwai Smith wrote her groundbreaking argument, *Decolonizing Methodologies*, Indigenous scholars have been eagerly challenging the protocols by which the research is conducted, seeking to vocalize within the academy the validation of Indigenous perspectives and priorities for their own research and for other researchers working with Indigenous communities. Shawn Wilson's *Research is Ceremony* offered a perspective that expanded aligning academic scholarship with cultural practice. Within Anthropology, the most effective voice for this kind of culturally grounded research is visible in the work of Audra Simpson. *Mohawk Interruptus* prioritized a Mohawk relationship to the experience of crossing borders that fully encompassed the complexities of the multiple layers involved in those encounters.[94] At this time, few comparisons can be borrowed from within Art History that similarly embrace methods founded within culturally grounded research. However, the artists have done the work to imagine the potential for a culturally grounded future and, so, the scholars must also assume responsibility to consider our role, as well.

It is because of the artist's expressed interest for creating the potential of our future – that I have found an interest in *Virtuality*, a theory proposed by film and art theorist Gilles Deleuze. He postulates that 'history' is the collective term referring to the stories that have been passed from the past to the present. The past is the collective whole of what has happened, but we only know history through the stories. In other

[94] Simpson, *Mohawk Interruptus : Political Life across the Borders of Settler States*. 2014.

words, what any of us knows of the past are the pieces of what has happened that were bound as a story to be carried forward. This is a critical assertion for tribal communities, because it validates our knowledge of the world as equally as any other historical premise.

Though a complex philosopher to fully embrace, Deleuze may offer an important theoretical perspective for how to more fully incorporate an artist's ontological and epistemological vision. Deleuze has suggested that all 'reality' is constructed upon the *simulacra* with which we are surrounded. In trying to distill his theory of *Virtuality*, Claire Colebrook wrote,

> Against the idea that there is an actual world and its virtual copy, we have said, Deleuze argues for the simulacrum. What any thing is is its power to become other, to produce face or masked images of itself, to not be faithful to itself. … The simulacrum produces the effect of an original, producing new selves and originals with each performance.[95]

I have found Deleuze to be an interesting post-structuralist philosopher who may be able to guide my research, at least to add layers to the interpretation. The concept that all reality is a construction based on an inherited history allows for multiple simultaneous foundations from which reality can be constructed, and that any of these can be used to create the potentiality of the future. Taken to the task at hand, I believe that Deleuze's theory of virtuality provides a foundation to consider for the work of Native artists.

As the artists work from their cultural ontology to make contemporary art, they are forming the potential for a future reality that is grounded in their culture, based on the history of what they believe. What makes this a powerful theoretical approach to consider is that this resonates with what the artists have told me directly. That as they

[95] Claire Colebrook, *Gilles Deleuze* (New York: Routledge, 2002): 100.

make art grounded in their culture's history, they set a path for that culture to survive into the future. Deleuze's Western-based philosophy may be flexible enough to be used to benefit the interpretation of non-Western art in concert with Brayboys' assertion that our creation stories are our theory.

The Problem

While Art History, Anthropology, and Native American Studies have informed my knowledge about methods and theories related to the interpretation of contemporary Indigenous art, my emic knowledge of the cultures informs me that there remains an absence for a framework that guides the analysis. A framework that incorporates American Indian cultural paradigm is important because interpretation without it leaves information that the artist uses intentionally within the object absent from the analysis. I believe that there is value in bringing together methods from these academic disciplines, in concert with Indigenous methodologies, to create a framework that will increase the interpretative value of the art and broaden the discourse around the objects and their role as cultural mediators. This dissertation begins the steps necessary to consider how to bring these fields together.

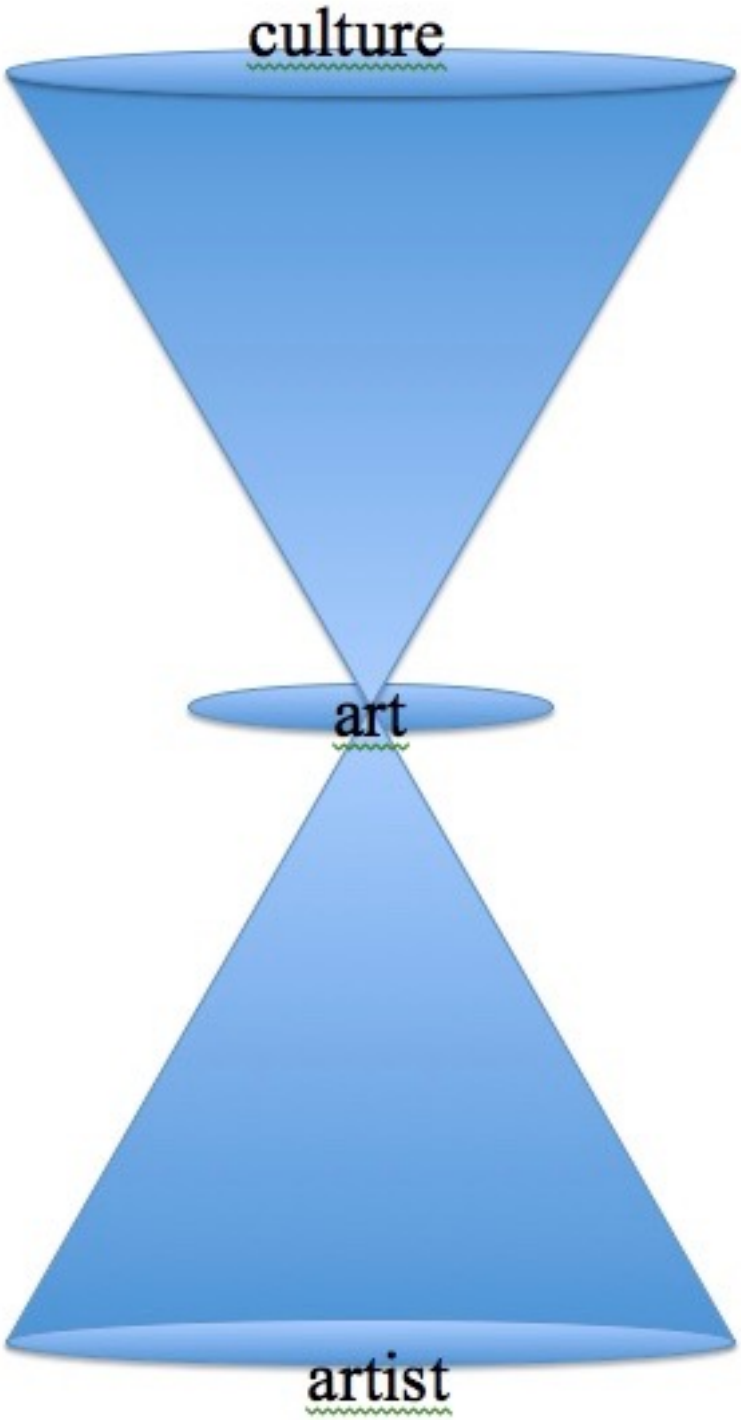

Table 1: Model for regenerative relationship for contemporary Indigenous art between artist and culture as part of cultural continuum.

Art History focuses on the artist and the object, using Western models of categorization and lenses to analyze contemporary context for object interpretation. What Art History misses in current methodologies is the non-Western cultural impact through the artist on the object and, importantly, the object's generative effect to create new culture. As artists innovate, a highly valued contribution within the discipline, they are seen to be rejecting what came before as historical, static, or outdated. In contrast, many Native artists see innovations within their art as a means of contributing vitality to their culture. Many non-Western objects are constructed as an intentional form of participation by the artists in the creative continuum of their culture.

In contrast, Anthropology focuses on the object as a product of a cultural dynamic – precisely recognizing the creative continuum, however the artist is primarily perceived as a conduit to make material culture, rather than as an independent cultural agent and visionary. Anthropology looks at the role that the object performs as a cultural device produced by the broader cultural forces, while the artist is often seen as only an actor within a cultural realm. However, artists –even though working in a customary cultural milieu – act with conscious intent as individuals. Individual intent is often dismissed by Anthropology methods as acting outside of the culture, and therefore, regarded as less important. At worst, innovation is dismissed as being inauthentic culturally. At best, it is seen as the introduction of new cultural forces. However, innovation, even in customary practices, is a signal of a vital cultural dynamic. Considering what constitutes innovation offers insight into how artists integrate new materials, methods, and forms into a dialogue of that creative continuum that generates cultural adaptation, lending towards cultural survival.

Refining what can be done to construct an analytical framework remains my primary scholarly focus. In summary, the research for this dissertation attempts to address these questions: How can analysis and interpretation be conducted on a contemporary Native American fine art object that engages the artist's cultural epistemology and ontology, in concert with the overall composition of the art? What benefits emerge from such an analysis?

Research Subject/Community

My research interest is the intersection between Indigenous American cultural knowledge (ontologies) and the materialization by the culturally grounded artists of this perspective through contemporary art objects. The research is located within an arts community diverse in tribal affiliations and geographic spaces, but bounded by a shared participation of members in the fine art market as producing artists. While the spatial breadth makes it difficult to concentrate on a single, cohesive area or region, this community actively engages through temporarily designated specific spaces, including museum exhibitions and Native art markets. The artists within these spaces that are of particular interest to me are those who are not working in materials commonly considered "traditional" Indigenous sources, though some have both knowledge and historical practice of doing so. The research recognizes the cultural importance of continued generation of traditional forms and practices and, in fact, is interested in how the subject participants are often informed by philosophical knowledge that is mutually informing the broader Native arts community.

The artists with whom I am focusing my research as participants, each addressed through a case study analysis of their art, are Joe Feddersen, Marie Watt, Norman

Akers, and Shan Goshorn. I have become closely acquainted to each of the artists individually, and, through their generosity, have been engaged with their art through my previous publication and exhibition projects, remaining in touch with each because they have expressed directly to me an interest in having their work engaged in a deeper discussion exploring how the art engages with their culture.

Joe Feddersen

Joe Feddersen was born in 1953 and is an Okanagan member of the Colville Confederated Tribes located in Washington. He is a printmaker, painter, and mixed-media artist. The object I will analyze is *Parking Lot* [Figure 1], one of a series of objects made in collaboration with Tlingit glass-blower, Preston Singletary. The form is borrowed from a Great Basin form commonly called a "Sally Bag." The interpretation into glass is mediated by the surface etching treatment that directly references the woven form with a design motif that references Mother Earth in milky opaque glass overlaid with a parking lot diagram in solid black.

Marie Watt

Marie Watt was born in 1966 and is a member of the Seneca Tribe. She is a printmaker, sculptor, and installation artist. The object I will analyze is *Blanket Stories: Three Sisters, Cousin Rose, Four Pelts and Sky Woman* [Figure 2]. In her constructed series of free-standing sculptural objects, which have been compared to monumental obelisks and stone cairns as place markers, Watt employs a proto-feminist perspective of Seneca ontology in the creation of these "soft landing spots for Sky Woman," who is the Seneca progenitor of humanity.

Norman Akers

Norman Akers was born in 1958 and is a member of the Osage Nation. He is a painter and printmaker. The object I will analyze is *Okesa II* [Figure 3]. This oil on panel painting of a landscape is conflated with an overlaid cartographic map and incorporates symbols that reference Osage ontological philosophy of the creation of the world and references to the ongoing recreation of Osageness.

Shan Goshorn

Shan Goshorn was born in 1957 and is a member of the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians. She is a multi-disciplinary artist. The object I will analyze is *Separating the Chaff* [Figure 4]. A traditional Cherokee sifting basket, woven from archival paper printed with appropriated images from 1970s textbooks teaching about Native Americans, is a metaphor for the constant requirement for Native Americans to sift through the misinformation that has been taught to the American public through the exercise of knowledge taught from school books.

My access to this selected community is mediated by my position as a curator of contemporary Indigenous arts, both independently and through my job at the University of Oklahoma's art museum, and has been developed over a twenty-plus year history of working in the Native arts community. As an arts professional working through museums and, significantly, as the business manager for the Southwestern Association for Indian Arts which produces the Santa Fe Indian Market – the largest Native American art market in the world, I have participated with many artists in the network of the arts community. This privileged point of access has lent towards the creation of

direct, personal relationships with the artists listed, as part of a larger network of existing relationships within the contemporary Native art community.

Materiality	**Metaphor/Symbolism**
Analyzing the use of materials, forms, and designs that provide cultural context about the art and the artist. This necessarily incorporates the attributes of the natural materials within the tribal cosmology. The materiality of an object explores how cultural context provides a necessary link from historical practices to contemporary expressions.	Examining designs as a visual function of Indigenous knowledge, including their representation of cultural narratives within an oral tradition, imbues meaning beyond the visual description/evidence, including consideration for mnemonic devices. The metaphor/symbolism contained within Indigenous art can be interpreted through a complex system of coding accessible through the interconnection of the multi-faceted systems of traditional knowledge.
Kincentricity	**Temporality**
Using culturally-based systems of protocol, relationship, and accountability, the art and artist can be seen to work within a complex system of cultural values and beliefs. Recognizes the interwoven meaning of artist, materials, art, and audience. The kincentristic placement of an art object reflects the shifting nature of the cultural vortex that binds Indigenous people together. Reciprocity (give/take) within cultural paradigms between artists across time, generations, and materiality.	Recognizing how important observation and experience is to the cultural landscape and identity, both collectively within a tribe and individually. Facilitates the discussion of time as both linear, cyclical, and simultaneously working within communities. Addressing the evolution of knowledge and how it is reflected within art, linking the past to the present. Encompasses the artist's individual and personal experiences as they are expressed within art.

Table 2: Analytical Framework with narrative description.

Analytical Framework

The analytical framework employed for this research uniquely borrows from Art History, Anthropology, and Native American Studies. With a four-lens approach, each object and artist will be analyzed considering:

Materiality

This lens considers what is being represented within the object and how the object becomes both a material embodiment of ideas while also becoming a generator of culture as an agent participating in a continuum of cultural production using the same material or its referent. In order to examine an object's materiality, inquiry will be made into what materials are being used? How are they being used? Are there direct or nuanced references to how these materials have been used historically within the artist's cultural community? How does the artist integrate new materials? What ontological references are being made, if any? What motivations have influenced the use of materials? Does considering the materials from a culturally-guided perspective provide broader intended/unintended meaning within the art? How is the object producing new culture? By considering these questions, how the materials are intentionally used by the artist and how they perform a role to serve as conduit for cultural knowledge will become evident.

Metaphor/Symbolism

Metaphor and Symbolism is a lens that considers the semiotics of the designs, form, and overall composition. The role of semiotics is critical for an oral-based community, as knowledge was often coded into visual references that make specific reference to ceremony, natural sciences, and social morays. Questions guiding this

inquiry include asking what visual devices does the artist employ? What history exists for these designs? Is there a cultural history of using designs in similar manners? What ontological philosophy is conveyed through the metaphoric and symbolic references? What intentions are conveyed as meaning through the use of metaphor/symbols? Are there unintended meanings being conveyed? When multiple visual devices are employed, how does that enact a complex visual dialogue? Are there multiple meanings being referenced and, if so, how do they contribute to the deeper reading of the art?

Kincentricity

Kincentricity is a term coined by Dennis Martinez to express the importance of relationships within an Indigenous cosmology, addressing: familial, tribal, animate and in-animate, human and non-human, spiritual and metaphysical.[96] Because relationships form cultural roles of ordering social responsibilities, political hierarchy, and ceremonial ordinances, these must be explored beyond the familial and intellectual links. Questions that guide this inquiry include, what relationships are expressed through the object between the artist and his/her tribal community? With other artists? How is the object informed by ontological relationships with creation story figures and the artist? Does the artist draw kinship through the object to others – if so, how? What role do relationships have on the object?

Temporality

As a creative individual, the artist is positioned within a time space continuum that is informed by personal experience, family and tribal history, and works within a

[96] Dennis Martinez, interview by David E. Hall, *Native Perspectives on Sustainability: Dennis Martinez (O'odham/Chicano/Anglo)* ed. Price McCloud Johnson & Michelle Emery., January 3, 2008.

network of influences and possible materials. Certainly the importance of one's political position must be considered here, as well. Other questions to consider include, what position does the artist enact through the object to history? What position does the artist enact through the object to the future? What influences contribute to the artist's interest in the construction of the object – personal, familial, tribal, national, global? What characteristics of the object are positioned through the artist's personal, educational, and physical experiences? What elements within the object relate it to historical cultural practices? What elements within the object are delimited to a contemporary experience?

Through the application of this analytical framework, the object can be examined as both a product of an artist's uniquely creative vision, generated from an Indigenous cultural perspective, and enacting the potential for new Indigenous cultural production. While existing methods have long been interested in the artist, the art and its meaning, Indigenous American art is often left disconnected from the cultural community. This analytical framework seeks to examine the relationships that are encoded through the application of ontological philosophical referenced by selection of materials, use of metaphor/symbolism, and kincentristic a priori, and incorporating tribal and personal history.

Dissertation Overview

This dissertation is organized through four case study chapters, each an extensive discussion of the selected object to which I apply the entire analytical framework. Through this structured examination, it is my ambition to explore how effective the framework is for discussing a diverse group of tribes, unique Indigenous experiences that range from living within and outside of the artist's cultural body

(exploring what forms the cultural body), and to a wide spectrum of art media. The objects will be discussed within the entire framework, however each lends to a stronger application of one lens, further exploring the importance of each lens to the entirety.

Chapter Two examines Shan Goshorn's woven basket, *Separating the Chaff*. Goshorn (Eastern Cherokee) uses ancient Cherokee basket weaving techniques to bridge these traditional forms with imagery exploring history, politics, and representation, merging them into a beautiful composite. Through an examination of how Goshorn, as a photographer, uses these broad implicating images with a form that is distinctly linked to her cultural traditions, this chapter will explore the role of identity, time, and place to express the role of temporality.

Chapter Three considers the metaphor/symbolism found in Norman Aker's *Okesa* exploring place through cartography and migratory animals. The multi-layered surfaces of Aker's paintings are full of symbols and metaphors. Akers (Osage) builds painted surfaces that address issues of identity, culture, including Osage mythos, place, and the dynamics of personal and cultural transformation. By deconstructing the visual layers, including the semiotic references, and the geographic identifiers, the metaphoric and symbolic meanings will be examined as semiotic references to traditional Osage knowledge.

Chapter Four will explore kincentricity through Marie Watt's *Blanket Stories: Three Sisters, Four Pelts, Sky Woman, Cousin Rose, and All My Relations.* A sculptural construction of stacked wool blankets, part of a series of similarly installations, through which Watt (Seneca) is exploring the symbolism of a single blanket's intimate history multiplied into a column that can serve as a soft landing spot for the Seneca progenitor

Sky Woman. Watt's artistic role within the Seneca matrilineal culture and proto-feminist perspective will be analyzed in relation to her sculptural exploration of the tribal creation story as a form of kincentricity.

Chapter Five will consider Joe Feddersen's *Parking Lot,* a blown glass form from the Urban Indian series by printmaker Joe Feddersen (Okanagan). These three-dimensional forms were a culmination of several ideas coming together for Feddersen through a new medium. Within the cylindrical form, Feddersen integrated references to the Okanagan basket forms he had been weaving since the mid-90s, the traditional symbols found in his tribe's Plateau-based cultural materials, and the signs that marked his two-dimensional print work. Guided by the objects' direct references to baskets, the work's materiality will be considered most intensively.

Chapter Six will be a Conclusion that draws together the outcomes produced from the application of the framework, engaging the work in a culturally meaningful manner that expresses the artists' Indigeneity and contemporaneity. Using cultural paradigms to analyze Native American art will support understanding how traditional and contemporary Native American identity are expressed through contemporary arts. This dissertation will contribute towards the dearth of scholarship available on the four artists. It will introduce the framework comprehensively into the discourse of contemporary Native American art. In addition, considering the cultural paradigms that inform the production of contemporary Native American art will promote continued critical analysis of contemporary indigenous art.

Chapter 2: Shan Goshorn's *Separating the Chaff*



Figure 1: Shan Goshorn *Separating the Chaff (2013)* Arches watercolor paper splints, archival inks, acrylic paint, 20 1/2 x 20 1/2 x 7 in. Fred Jones Jr. Museum of Art, University of Oklahoma, James T. Bialac Native American Art Collection. Image courtesy of artist.

As her hands wove *Separating the Chaff* [Figure 1], binding together the encyclopedic illustrations into a sieve basket form, Shan Goshorn was participating in a continuum of Cherokee weaving that extends back to the story of *Kanane-ski Amai-yehi*, the Water Spider, weaving a *tusti* bowl for the purpose of bringing fire to the people.[97] This chapter will analyze how Goshorn's basket, *Separating the Chaff*, is a product of the artist's cultural heritage and expresses the artist's identity and intentions,

[97] Sarah H. Hill, *Weaving New Worlds* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997): 36. This excerpt is a direct quote by Hill from James Mooney's *Myths of the Cherokees*, 1972, 241-242. The Cherokee language used is edited by Hill and upon discussing the accuracy with Cherokee linguist Candessa Tehee I was advised that "tusti," which means 'boil,' may have been erroneously used in the original instead of usdi, which means 'little' and makes more sense within the context of the story.

and will include a formal analysis of the basket considering how the basket performs as contemporary Cherokee art.

About the Artist: Shan Goshorn (b. 1957, Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians)

Shan Goshorn is a professional artist and mother who lives with her husband in Tulsa, Oklahoma.[98] She grew up in Maryland as the daughter of a Cherokee mother and white father. Her parents made regular visits with their children to the Qualla Boundary in North Carolina to visit Goshorn's maternal grandparents fostering an abiding relationship between Goshorn and her tribal community home. Starting in her teen years, Goshorn had one summer of employment at the Qualla Arts and Crafts Mutual, a cooperative that provides direct access to the arts of the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians (EBCI) managed by a local office of the Department of the Interior, Indian Arts and Crafts Board. Her cultural experiences in the Cherokee community in North Carolina included visits to local artist studios, usually as an extension of being with her grandparents who were visiting community neighbors.

> I didn't have any artists in my family, at least not in my immediate family. You know how the tribes are, we are all related all the way around, but in the immediate group of people at family gatherings, there were no artists. But my grandmother introduced me to other artists that were her age, who were the great masters, of course.[99]

Though exposed to Cherokee artists through this social network, Goshorn did not receive any informal or formal training in customary Cherokee arts practices. She remembered being invited occasionally to the home workshop of Goingback Chitoskey,

[98] Two interviews were conducted with Shan for this research, on April 10, 2017, and September 30, 2017. Both were conducted by phone with the artist in Tulsa, OK, and the author in Norman, OK, and recorded as digital files. All quotes by the artist are from these interviews; the transcripts were edited by the artist for this text.
[99] Shan Goshorn, interview by author, April 10, 2017, transcript.

a Cherokee carver, who described his process for making sales, which was to offer his most recent finished project to collectors whose names were on a hand-written list. This served as an inspiration to Goshorn, from an early age, that it could be possible to earn enough income as an artist to make a living. She describes herself as always feeling drawn to be an artist, "The thing that really concerned me most was that when it came to choosing a career, I was like - what? You only get to choose one thing? Because I had lots of interests, but art was always at the top."[100] She described that she received significant encouragement during her final two years of high school for her art and was encouraged to pursue art as a professional at college.

From 1975-1980, Goshorn received formal art training at the Cleveland Institute of Art and at the Atlanta College of Art (now incorporated as the Atlanta campus into the Savannah College of Art and Design), where she received her bachelors of fine art with a double major in painting and photography. Her current repertoire of artistic skills further developed while in school as she studied silversmithing, painting, and photography. During her final year, she was already exploring conceptual projects that integrated her skills across media. Following graduation, Goshorn continued to make art and from a lifetime of making art since, combined with her formal training, she is now a skilled illustrator, adept in oil and acrylic painting, black and white photography, and Cherokee basketry. In addition, Goshorn has skill working with additional materials that are not her primary media within her current practice, including beadwork, silver, and fused glass. She also considers herself a "wordsmith," often preparing statements that are associated with each basket, and recognizes that with the baskets math has become

[100] Shan Goshorn, interview by author, September 30, 2017, transcript.

another critical component of her art. Pursuing a career in art was "never not an option," and while she has many interests, the art has been a conduit for her creative expression and activism.[101]

While an undergraduate student, Goshorn continued to work in Cherokee, NC, at the Indian Arts and Crafts Board for several summers. Her field supervisor there, Stephen Richmond, was influential to Goshorn's artistic exposure.[102] He provided introductions to people and would take Goshorn with him on studio visits. She described, "Working with him – I worked with him all through college – it really opened my eyes to not only what Cherokee artists were doing but what Native artists were doing around the country."[103] His office library included exhibition catalogues and gallery brochures, including all those published by the Indian Arts and Crafts Board at its several operating museums. Goshorn distinctly remembered that there were very few publications on contemporary Native art at the time and the catalogues were an important exposure to what other Native artists were doing. Perhaps most importantly, Richmond had a subscription to *American Indian Art Magazine*, a publication that Goshorn took a subscription to while a student in Cleveland. While *American Indian Art Magazine* primarily published articles on historic materials, the ads often featured contemporary art. She remembered specifically monthly Elaine Horwitch ads that featured paintings by Fritz Scholder as particularly inspiring, saying, "I had never seen

[101] Ibid.
[102] During Goshorn's review of the essay text added that Steve Richmond's role as supervisor in Cherokee was the lone position working in the field at the time, that all other federal employees had been moved to D.C.
[103] Shan Goshorn, interview by author, April 10, 2017, transcript.

anything before like that in my life."[104] The connection Goshorn found through this publication was "doubly important to me as I was the only Native student in the five-year art school program, so any link to Native people was cherished."[105]

Goshorn described that the access to published materials on Native art "was really influential in educating me during a time when it was hard to find information about Indian art. This was before the internet."[106] Goshorn mentioned two institutions as also being influential, including the Museum of the Cherokee Indian, under the direction of Ken Blankenship, and the Oconaluftee Indian Village, a tribally-operated tourist attraction in Cherokee where she was able to "hang around booths" and through observation, learned about many traditional Cherokee crafts.[107]

Following graduation from the Atlanta College of Art, Goshorn spent the better part of a year working as she tried to figure out her next move. During this time, she received a commission by the U.S. Department of the Interior. She was tasked with making twenty illustrations for *Contemporary Southeastern Basketry Techniques and Patterns*, a book that was never published though Goshorn completed the illustrations [Figures 2 & 3]. It was during the process of preparing the illustrations that Goshorn became familiar with the basket weaving techniques. "By the time I got halfway through those drawings I had a pretty good understanding of the math and the rhythm, and felt I understood the basket weaving process." These drawings sat in her memory, seeding a desire to make baskets that would come to fruition in another two decades.

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[104] Ibid.
[105] Shan Goshorn, personal communication with author, November 6, 2017.
[106] Shan Goshorn, interview by author, April 10, 2017, transcript.
[107] Ibid.

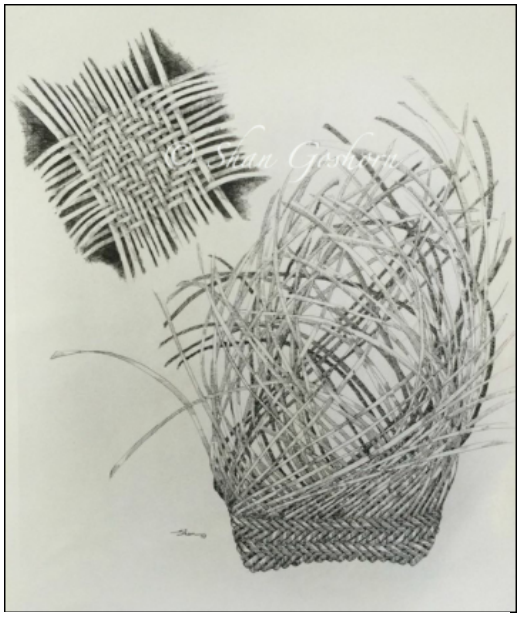

Figure 3: Shan Goshorn's illustration of basket weaving processes.

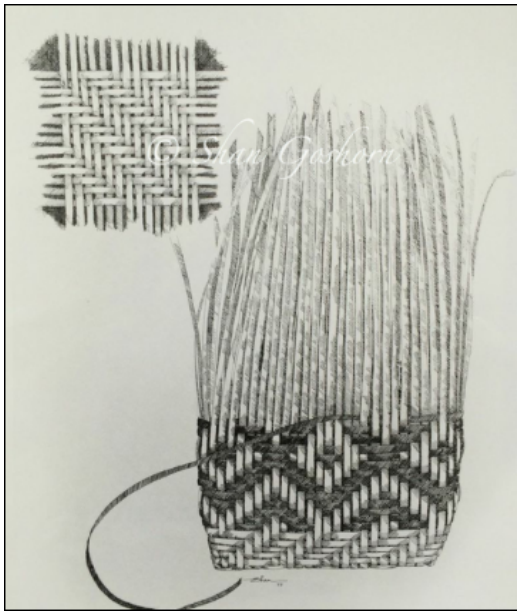

Figure 3: Shan Goshorn's illustrations of basket weaving processes.

After she completed her illustrations, a former classmate from Oklahoma invited Goshorn to Tulsa for a visit. She could not have known that she was making a long-term move in 1981. She described her initial response to Oklahoma,

> Yeah, this place is really flat. [laughing] But I thought, well, what the heck. It seemed like a good place to think about things. I always thought of that move as something temporary but I ended up liking Oklahoma very, very much… I am really drawn to the intertribal community here.[108]

It was in Tulsa that Shan began to receive encouragement from other Native artists, including Kay WalkingStick (Cherokee) and Enoch Kelly Haney (Seminole), when both were already prominent artists. Through her participation in the local Native community, she received invitations to share in the diverse Native cultural activities in Oklahoma, exposing her to tribal dances and ceremonies across the state.

After living in Tulsa for a decade and becoming familiar with the Native and arts community, Goshorn was invited to participate in an exhibition, *Makers*, that

[108] Ibid.

included Edgar Heap of Birds, Richard Ray Whitman, Patricia Mousetrail Russell and Joe Dale Tate Nevaquaya. She explains, "That was my first foray into political art aside from issues that dealt with women. Women have always played a key figure in my work, even from high school. But I wanted to explore issues that were more driven by Native American politics."[109] Goshorn's activism stems, largely, from her self-perception as "a link." She explained,

> Having a white father and an Indian mother, I see myself as a bridge between Native and non-Native. I see myself as a link between the people, tribal members who have never left the Boundary, to the bigger world beyond that. I see myself as a link between Native and non-Native people who need to be educated a little more about the first people of this country… I was always comfortable on my grandfather's knee, it didn't matter if he was white or red. On a broader level, I see myself as a connector for Native issues with a non-Native audience.[110]

The invitation to participate in *The Makers* was a critical moment. In an interview with the National Endowment of the Arts, she explained,

> I became very influenced by their work about social issues that affected native people…. [Edgar] heard me talking about this idea that I had of exploring some of these issues and he challenged me. He said, "Listen, Amnesty International is coming to Tulsa and they're coming because of the native issues and we've been invited to submit work. I think you should try to follow up on some of these ideas and exhibit here." And so that was really my first political statement beyond work that addressed women's issues. This was my first body of work. It was called *Honest Injun* and it really was addressing the issues unique to Indian people that affected all Indian people.[111]

Goshorn's art at this time was primarily in the medium of photography. On her website, she describes *Honest Injun*,

> I became politically active with my art in the early 1990's in response to America's quincentennial (the country's 500 year celebration of Columbus

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[109] Shan Goshorn, interview by author, September 30, 2017, transcript.
[110] Shan Goshorn, interview by author, April 10, 2017, transcript.
[111] Shan Goshorn, interview by Paulette Beete, *Art Talk with visual artist Shan Goshorn* https://www.arts.gov/art-works/2015/art-talk-visual-artist-shan-goshorn (accessed November 18, 2015)

> blundering onto our shores). Using a variety of multi-media techniques with photography, I created several bodies of work that addressed human rights issues unique to native people, such as *Honest Injun*, a series of hand-painted black and white photographs of commercial products that use Indian names or images to hawk their wares.[112]

Goshorn described that the intertribal community in Oklahoma was significant to her conceptual development as an artist. Being in Tulsa was the first time she had been around a diversity of tribal people. As a young person, her Native experiences were either Cherokee-centric or one of being isolated as the only Native person, as it



Figure 4: Shan Goshorn, *Honest Injun*, installation view.

was in college. She explained, "As I went to different events around the state, I became much more out spoken as a social activist. I became more involved in grassroots efforts."[113] The intertribal community and, resulting Native artist network, has remained critical to her work and thematic foci, particularly the as it relates to her activism.

[112] Shan Goshorn, interview by Julie Pearson-Little Thunder. *Oral History with Shan Goshorn*, Oklahoma State University: Oral History Project, February 15, 2011.
[113] Shan Goshorn, interview by author, April 10, 2017, transcript.

Goshorn has maintained an ongoing connection to her Cherokee community in North Carolina, while she recognizes the need to address the broad issues that face Native people. In Cherokee, she has participated as a mentor in EBCI leadership training programs that cultivate a younger generation for community service, including the Right Path program.[114] Because of her active engagement in programs that served the tribal community while experiencing the ongoing dissonance from the public towards the history of Native people, Goshorn recognized that the public needed a better education about Native history and the reality of Native experiences. *Honest Injun* was her first series of art as activism, a thread she continues to work with conceptually. The importance of addressing stereotypes remains an ongoing focus.

To address the issues of stereotypes, Goshorn continued using photography as a medium because of its capacity to provide direct insight into the Native community's experiences. She created a series titled *Reclaiming Cultural Ownership; Challenging Indian Stereotypes* that documented Native peoples' lives and their relationships "to traditional teachings while also living contemporary lives."[115] These black and white photographs provided a visually stark glimpse of Native people at home, at work, in fellowship.

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[114] Ibid. The Right Path program is offered by the Cherokee Preservation Foundation to all Cherokee people, including tribal members of the EBCI, Cherokee Nation, and United Kituwah Band, as a 12-month leadership training program. For more information: http://cherokeepreservation.org/what-we-do/cultural-preservation/lifelong-leadership-development/the-right-path/.

[115] Shan Goshorn, personal communication with author, November 6, 2017.



Figure 5: Shan Goshorn, from the Reclaiming Cultural Ownership; Challenging Indian Stereotypes series.

Un-posed and often taken en situ, within the actual homes and community settings being represented, they provided a commentary akin to photojournalism. While revealing the humanity of the subjects in a raw and insightful manner, the emotional content was sometimes difficult to translate for audiences whose cultural insights were limited to reading only the lower socio-economic experience of Native people. While well received artistically, Goshorn does not believe that the images were successful for her intention.

> Unfortunately, a lot of those attempts, those early photographs, were just not successful. I could make my point but people didn't know what to do with that information. The work was more divisive than persuasive. It became an "us versus you," it made people feel defensive – and even hostile - to have it pointed out that their viewpoints were based on racism.

Goshorn remained committed to addressing politically and socially engaged topics, though her art was often met with a common response that Native history was not relevant to contemporary American experience through comments like, "Oh, this happened so long ago – You people need to get over that."[116] In contrast, she recognized that many tribes share common experiences that have spilled over through generations as historic trauma, even within their own specific history.

Expanding upon this concept, Goshorn developed a series that expressed Native peoples' relationship to place and culture, titled *Earth Renewal*. This series of double-exposed black and white photographs were hand-tinted, allowing Goshorn to control the use of localized color within the composition. Initially, Native people in their tribal clothing were placed in context of the natural environment. These poignant portraits were technically complex images to create and were well received by audiences and the Native community. Goshorn's artist statement on the series described,

> [This] series illustrates the responsibility we have to take care of our first mother, the earth. I am concerned about social and human rights conditions and strive to show this sensitivity in my work, often addressing concerns that affect Indian people which go largely unnoticed by the dominant white society.[117]

The *Earth Renewal* series was extended in 2000 to include layering images of friends and family with historic cultural materials housed in museum archives; the extension was entitled *Earth Renewal, Earth Return*.

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[116] Shan Goshorn, interview by author, September 30, 2017, transcript.
[117] Shan Goshorn. "Shan Goshorn: Statement." in *Looking Indian*, ed. heather ahtone, (Oklahoma City, OK: Untitled [ArtSpace], 2007).



Figure 6: Shan Goshorn, *Bringing the Dawn*, Earth Renewal series. Hand-tinted black and white photograph print.

Through her continued interest in addressing Native issues, she began to research to better understand the topics she was discussing in her work. Part of her artistic practice has included doing presentations on the issues she addressed in her art, including stereotypes, water and land rights, and human rights violations. As she worked to improve her presentations, she began searching for the historical data that would support her information.

> The more work I do, the deeper I look for issues that are both interesting to me and I'm especially curious about intertribal issues. So, for instance, boarding schools – they have affected so many tribes. The far-reaching impact may be what attracted me to research that particular topic to begin with. But at the same time, as I'm learning so much about other people, I see how it is a reflection, or an extension, of my own tribe. Native people are more alike than different.

In the process of acquiring this information, she began to see the direct relationships between the historical treaties, political dealings, and commercialism to contemporary issues. The research began to serve as a cornerstone for her work. She describes,

> I think, really, research has been the pivotal motivator for what I'm doing now… It was my first dealings with museum archives that inspired my historical interest, so, consequently, I began doing more research. That was right around the time when computers became real common, in the 90s and the early 2000s, so I became acquainted with research from that angle, too.[118]

She developed a strong understanding of the political and social importance of Native representation and history. She began to make research a direct component of the conceptual development for the art. Her first formal experience as a researcher was in 2001, "when the Smithsonian approved me as a Native Scholar. And that astounded me – to receive permission to do archival research for a series I was working on addressing repatriation, but even more so to be identified as an Indian scholar."[119] Research has continued to be an important component of her artistic process.

When asked whose scholarship she has studied, she dismissed that it has been anyone beyond the usual suspects, including Vine Deloria and, early on, her avid study of the images in the book *Songs of the Earth,* a collection of native art authored by the now exposed imposter Jamake Highwater. She mentioned that she, "studied all the books I could find on the subject of Native American art but libraries did not seem to carry very many examples of this genre."[120] She said her most productive research has primarily been within historical archives, though she named Duane King, former director of the Helmerich Center for American Research, University of Tulsa, as an important resource on Cherokee art and culture, "Holy cow, does that guy know a lot

[118] Ibid.
[119] Shan Goshorn, interview by author, April 10, 2017, transcript.
[120] Shan Goshorn, personal communication with author, November 6, 2017.

about Cherokee culture… He knows so much about the Cherokees. The research that I did at HCAR has really informed and expanded my cultural knowledge about my tribe." She has continued to make archival research a part of her art practice.

Goshorn was interested in addressing Native issues through fostering dialogue and a positive interaction, but could not generate that dialogue through the photographs, which required explanation and, often, caused a negative reaction.

> So I'd been looking for a way to encourage this dialogue and it wasn't until I stumbled on the idea of doing the baskets that I realized you could inform without being in-your-face. It was really accidental. I had no idea that you could inform without being so confrontational. I also had no idea this medium would be that venue….
>
> Before, my art and presentations always felt so defensive. I was always pointing out what was wrong with mascots, what was wrong with commercialism, what was wrong with stereotypes. But I didn't give the audience a way to feel good about changing it. So, rather than only blatantly showing how Native people are used as a commodity, I can present additional support documents showing the impact of such usage to give people the opportunity to change their opinions. This approach wasn't preconceived. It is a conclusion I have reached from observing people's reactions to my work.[121]

Her frustration with the response to the photographs was also compounded with her ever-present interest in improving her technical skills. Goshorn worked primarily with photography until she began making baskets as an experiment in 2007,

> I wanted to explore a new medium because I felt like all my photographs were the same dimension as the trays in my darkroom. I was experimenting with ways to change them. I wondered how could I make something 3-D? Then, why didn't I start with a photo? Well, I don't know how that happened. But, somehow, I began experimenting with weaving and, things started happening the way they were meant to happen. Of course, the shape and the weave - that's continued to be influenced by my heritage because I'm Cherokee.[122]

Once she had experimented enough to attempt a full-size basket form in 2007, she wondered if there was a way to integrate her research mterials with the structural form.

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[121] Shan Goshorn, interview by author, September 30, 2017, transcript.
[122] Ibid.

Her first attempt to do so was materialized when she began to weave *Pieced Treaties; Spider's Web Treaty Basket* (2008). Her emphasis was primarily on the formal techniques needed to construct the basket, but she utilized printed historical texts, where the legibility of the text on each splint was important, but it was not necessary for the text to align as a complete document. *Pieced Treaties* was a single-weave basket that remained unfinished at the top, a metaphor for the ongoing relationship that tribes have with the federal government, negotiating for the fulfillment of the original treaty rights and obligations.

The early baskets were Goshorn's opportunity to use the knowledge she had developed from preparing the basket making illustrations for the Department of the Interior in the 1980s. She admitted that she always knew she would want to weave Cherokee baskets after preparing those illustrations. Her statement about *Pieced Treaties* reads:

> Woven in the traditional Cherokee basket pattern called Spider's Web, this is the first basket that I ever wove; the result of an idea to illustrate the tangled rewriting of the Oklahoma and Cherokee Nation Tobacco Compact. Many non-Indian businesses felt that tribal sovereignty gave Indians an unfair advantage in regard to the sale of tobacco products (no state tax on tribal land) and were lobbying to completely do away with Native sovereignty. The original Tobacco compact was active from 1993 to 2003- during that decade much in the tobacco world changed. The revised compact was very complicated and the compromises unsatisfying; both the State of Oklahoma and the Cherokee Nation felt the compact was being interpreted incorrectly by the other party. Immediately after the rewriting they were (and still were when this basket was made) in arbitration trying to sort it out.
>
> This basket is woven with sliced reproductions of this compact; it was left deliberately unfinished as negotiations appear to be ongoing. [123]

[123] Shan Goshorn, "Oral History with Shan Goshorn," 15 February 2011.

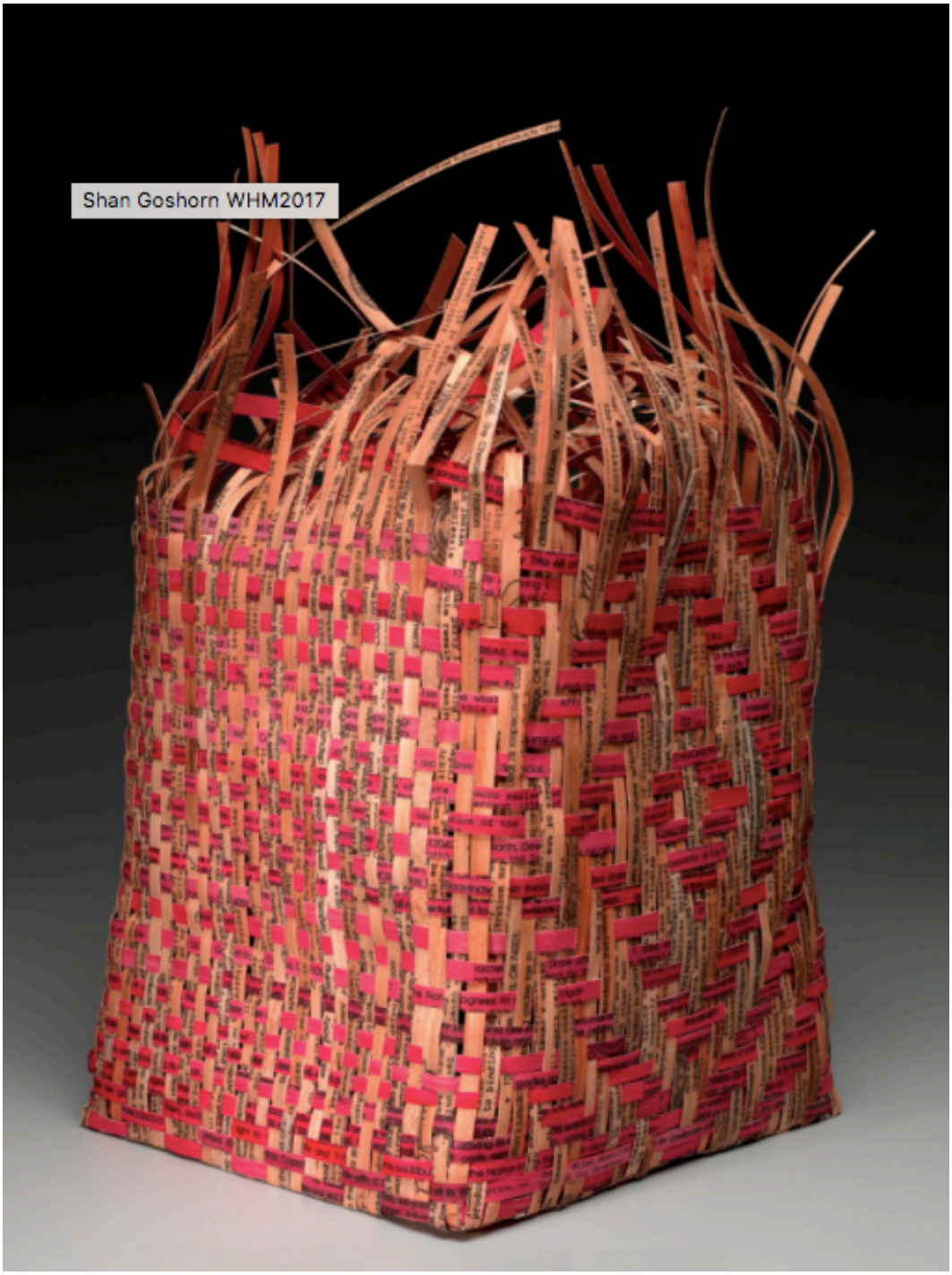

Figure 7: Shan Goshorn, *Pieced Treaties; Spider's Web Treaty Basket*, (2008) Paper splints, commercial inks, acrylic paint, 20 x 20 x 28 inches. National Museum of the American Indian.

The audience response to the basket was unexpectedly positive. It was purchased by the National Museum of the American Indian and placed in their exhibition, *Nation to Nation: Treaties Between the United States and American Indian Nations.* The audience response had an immediate impact on Goshorn's direction and baskets became her primary art medium, though the complexity of the baskets has become increasingly more difficult.



Figure 8: Shan Goshorn, *Educational Genocide: The Legacy of the Carlisle Indian Boarding School* (2011) Archival watercolor paper splints first printed with archival inks, acrylic paint; 12 x 20 x 12 inches.

Her first basket with photographs was *Educational Genocide* (2011), a basket made to address the legacy of boarding schools. Using three different historical references to the Carlisle Indian Industrial School, Goshorn created a Cherokee double-weave basket form. The splints were prepared with printed archival inks and acrylic

paint printed on archival paper. Integrated with the faces of the children from the Carlisle class of 1912, Goshorn used two specific text references. One was the student roster from 1912, which serves to stand in for the 10-12,000 names of the Native students who attended the school,[124] printed in black text on a red background and the second was the text of Colonel Richard Pratt's speech to the U.S. Congress in which he coined the phrase "Kill the Indian, Save the Man,"[125] printed in black text on a cream background. Pratt was credited with developing the boarding school model through the Carlisle School that would be used nationally. Boarding schools have a mixed legacy because many students were forcibly removed from their homes, punished for practicing their culture, and for speaking their language. Boarding schools received federal support and were part of national assimilationist policies to eradicate American Indian culture. The legacy of these institutions throughout Indian Country remains a form of historical trauma to which not only former students, but also their descendants, respond emotionally.

The basket form she had followed, as Goshorn learned after making it, is the same used for coffins, creating another level of meaning for viewers to experience. Addressing this basket in 2013, I wrote,

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[124] Goshorn corrected my original reference to the "complete student roster" that a complete accounting for all the students does not exist, personal communication, November 6, 2017.

[125] The full text of the speech can be found in Richard H. Pratt, "The Advantages of Mingling Indians with Whites," *Americanizing the American Indians: Writings by the "Friends of the Indian" 1880–1900* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1973): 260–271. For more information on the legacy of boarding schools within the Native American community, please visit the website for the National Native American Boarding School Healing Coalition, at http://boardingschoolhealing.org (accessed 10/11/17).

> This solemn-shaped basket posits the children looking at the twenty-first century viewer as a metaphor for the innumerable lost childhoods, and even children, victims of the institutional boarding school system that created an ongoing legacy of historical trauma. This cultural legacy is, unfortunately, still festering over a century later in tribal communities in the form of endangered languages and lost cultural heritage. *Educational Genocide* was a pivotal piece for Goshorn. Through this basket, she connected with an audience broader than ever before, often emotionally, and viewers were eager to lean in on their own to try to understand what Goshorn was saying about the Native American subjects. The baskets are beautifully woven, but it is her choice of visual imagery combined with carefully selected texts and forms that makes them keen messengers.[126]

Audiences positively responded to the integration of text and basket, but even more so to the integration of visual images. The photography created a trigger for audiences for which Goshorn was unprepared, though grateful. I can attest that I had to look at the basket three times before I could gather myself enough to speak with Shan about it at the Red Earth Festival in Oklahoma City (2011). Goshorn assured me I was not alone in having such a strong emotional response to this basket, as many others, like me, felt compelled to tell Goshorn about their own connections to this history, for instance, that their relatives had attended Carlisle and the basket felt very personal to their family's story.

The collective experience of making these baskets from historical materials has positioned Shan Goshorn as one of the preeminent basket weavers of the early twenty-first century. Though her work is simultaneously Cherokee and feminine, it speaks with a voice that invites the dialogue that Goshorn was seeking. As an artist, Goshorn sees the potential of continuing to make these baskets as her art form, but she is also very

[126] heather ahtone, "Leaning in to Shan Goshorn's Baskets." in *RED: The Eiteljorg Contemporary Art Fellowhsip, 2013*, eds. Jennifer Complo and Ashley Holland McNutt (Indianapolis, IN: Eitelojorg Museum of American Indians and Western Art, 2013): 82.

clear that she perceives herself as someone who is more than just focused on her art. When asked, Goshorn described herself,

> Well, professionally, I consider myself a multi-media artist. One who chooses the best medium to express a statement. When people say what kind of art do you do? I have censored my response to say, "I'm a political artist." I just love how sassy and badass that sounds… But in general, as a human being, I consider myself a mother and a wife. A daughter and a sister. A loyal friend. I consider myself an active member of the Eastern Band of Cherokee and of the Native community at large. I consider myself a human rights activist. I consider myself to be gregarious, deeply spiritual, funny, tall [laughing] – funny and tall, these go together [laughing] – physically active, and someone who is really engaged in life. I can't tell you how many times I look at Tom [her husband] sitting across the table and I say, "Oh, my gosh, I just love our life… I'm grateful, I'm joyous."[127]

Goshorn's description of herself as "grateful" is evident through how she carries herself, how she is so proud of Cherokee baskets as a voice for her art, but also on behalf of her community. She continues to push herself to make baskets that remain strong in the message they carry, softly inviting dialogue with both Native and non-Native audiences.

The Art: *Separating the Chaff*

While Goshorn has developed quite adept weaving skills with a variety of forms, it remains particularly challenging to compose a legible image in the baskets. The challenge exists because the warp and weft have to be precisely cut and interwoven in the opposing splints, whether perpendicular or diagonal, but because of the audience response, it has become a mainstay of her baskets. *Separating the Chaff* (2012) was an early attempt to integrate images. "I don't think there were a whole lot of baskets in between *Educational Genocide* and *Separating the Chaff* that used imagery," She

[127] Shan Goshorn, interview by author, April 10, 2017, transcript.

explained, "I was looking for a way to challenge myself with a new shape and a new way to incorporate an image."[128] Her friend, jeweler Heidi Bigknife (Shawnee Tribe), purchased an encyclopedia at a yard sale that she later shared with Goshorn, who saw an affinity between the found book and the encyclopedic set of her childhood home. "We looked up the article on Native Americans and it was just exactly like I was eleven-years old again, looking at them in my bedroom."[129]

Beyond the nostalgia, though, Goshorn recognized that the images were fundamentally faulted, as both too generalized while also incomplete, to represent the diversity and complexity of being Native American. The images were organized by geographic regions, as is commonly done, and then a selected culture is used to represent that region, despite the erroneous inference that all cultures from this region are represented by the singular tribe. So, for instance, the Hopi represent the Southwest with an image of a Pahlikmana, or Water Maiden, and a Makatsina,[130] or Hunter Katsina, though these cannot possibly represent the pantheon of 300+ katsinam from the Hopi cultural community, much less the breadth of the spiritual pantheon within the multitude of cultural systems located in the Southwestern region. Thus the tribes represented within the encyclopedia were given as "types" and examples, but for many, Shan recognized, this type of exposure may be the extent of their education about Native American cultures. This struck Goshorn, "I began to think that this is still the

[128] Shan Goshorn, interview by author, September 30, 2017, transcript.
[129] Ibid.
[130] The katsina represented is a Makatsina, which as an example of Hopi culture is a complex reference because the spiritual being is originally from Laguna Pueblo and was adopted by the Hopi in reference to the intercultural relationship between the two communities. This is why generalizations are dangerous misrepresentations of culture.

way that people are being educated all around the world about Native American people."[131]

The paintings in the encyclopedia serve as a form of simulacra, a term applied by Gerald Vizenor in *Manifest Manners*, to describe simulations for an absent "tribal real."[132] Vizenor's application of Baudrillard's theory of simulacra mirrors Goshorn's concern that the encyclopedic images abbreviated or truncated the breadth of what can be known about Native communities, issues that are further amplified by the stereotypes she addressed in *Honest Injun*. Goshorn's comment about this remaining a form of education recognizes that the broad absence of acknowledged Native presence socially positions the encyclopedia as the simulation symbolically representing Native people for American society. Goshorn, like many Native artists and writers, subverts the misrepresentation by positioning the simulacra in the recognizable form of a sieve in *Separating the Chaff*. Goshorn's appropriation of the encyclopedic images enacts what Mark Shackleton described in his discussion of what Native authors have done when writing about Postcolonialism, "They use what Vizenor calls the "simulations of survivance" to overcome the 'simulations of dominance.' In other words, it takes a simulation to fight a simulation."[133]

To use the encyclopedic images of Native peoples as splints, Goshorn scanned the images from the encyclopedia and reordered them into a continuous visual narrative, no longer interrupted by the limitations of the page size. Once assembled into a visual

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[131] Shan Goshorn, interview by author, September 30, 2017, transcript.
[132] Gerald Vizenor, *Manifest Manners* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1999): 4.
[133] Mark Shackleton, "Native North American Writing and Postcolonialism." *Hungarian Journal of English and American Studies* (Centre for Arts, Humanities and Sciences, University of Debrecen) 7, no. 2 (Fall 2001): 79.

narrative following the juxtapositions of regions, side-by-side, she printed multiples of each constructed page onto large sheets of archival paper. Once printed, Goshorn necessarily has to create the splints, cutting them apart through carefully measured opposing perpendicular incisions. This physical deconstruction is in keeping with Derrida's theoretical deconstruction, interrogating the printed image from the meaning in the encyclopedia, which is then reconstructed into the form of a sieve. The purpose of a sieve is also to separate, physically separating the chaff, or outer layer, from the grain or kernel. The process of physically deconstructing the images and then using these strips to weave them together in the form of the basket attaches the concept of the sieve to the process of interpreting the information – a process that often requires that the superficial or stereotypical images be separated from the truth that lies beneath. Using the Cherokee basket form of a sieve is an act of survivance, as described by Gerald Vizenor,

> Survivance is an active sense of presence, the continuance of native stories, not a mere reaction, or a survivable name. Native survivance stories are renunciations of dominance, tragedy, and victimry. Survivance means the right of succession or reversion of an estate, and in that sense, the estate of native survivancy.[134]

Goshorn's appropriation of the encyclopedia's myopic representation of Native people serves as a form of visual storytelling, and retelling of Native survival. By dissecting the stereotypes and reforming them within the material of a Cherokee basket form, she affirms the active presence of Cherokee people through her own handwork, affirms the vitality of the forms through the structural form, and creates a potent metaphor for the relationship between the images and the truth as chaff and the corn. She uses what is available in the form of text and image, as information, to reformulate

[134] Vizenor, *Manifest Manners*, p. vii.

the connections, attaching them to the weaving process and, like a reed that must be cut and soaked in order to make it pliable, transforms the information into a symbol of unthreshed grain, from which a kernel of truth might be found.

Through the use of the sieve form, one can see the gaps in the materials, intentionally so in the basket bottom, as a metaphorical exposure of the gaps in the information that is being presented as knowledge. The spaces in the basket's bottom become a visual emptiness standing in for what is unsaid, and the open spaces between the weaving become a conduit for the appearance of truth or for the misinformation to fall away. One cannot ignore the passage of light through these same gaps, particularly when the artist intentionally had it photographed with the basket lifted up so that the light casts a dark shadow contrasted with the light as it falls through the sieve onto the pedestal below.

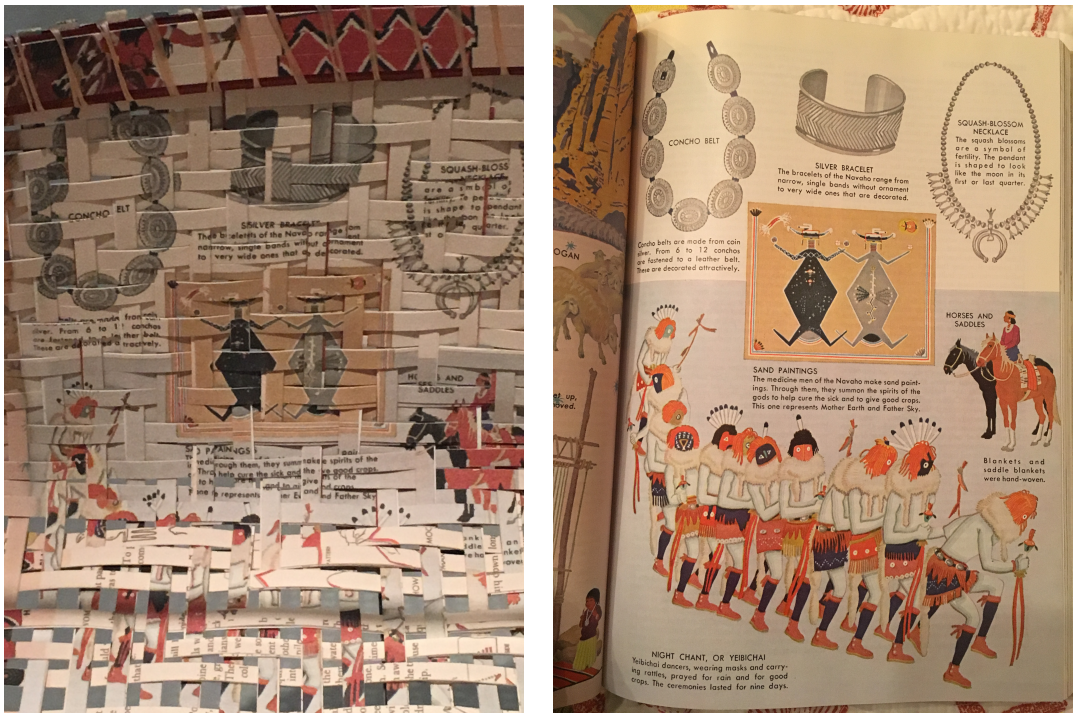

Figure 9: Comparison between woven page and original book page. Access to the original encyclopedia was made possible by Heidi Bigknife, whose willingness to locate the book and support this research is greatly appreciated.

As one looks at the basket's interior surface, the encyclopedic images are reformed but not exactly reproduced. As evident in the side-by-side comparison of the original page with the finished section of the basket [Figure 9], the physical deconstruction matches the metaphoric intention of the sieve form. Goshorn has manipulated the images digitally to create a composite whole, forming a continuous ribbon of tribal representation as the interior wall of the basket. The organized images flow from one to the other, though not in a discernible order. However, the images collectively reveal that the tribes being represented are done so through a historical lens. The images are of dancers in traditional clothes, historical architecture, material culture, and, occasionally, of types of food or adornment. What becomes evident is the complete lack of a contemporary form of representation. This is not to say that the images provided are only historical, but these images become markers of indigeneity, and without contemporary representation of people in street clothes or recognizable leaders in their suits and maps to locate the national capitals of the tribes, the present Indigenous experience is rendered invisible.

Goshorn addresses this invisibility through the use of the red pigment on the exterior of the basket; red representing the blood memory, the stereotype of the "redman," and the DNA within which our Native identity is encoded from our descendancy. The red exterior is an inversion of what is hidden within the contemporary Native community. The side-walls upon which the red stands also hide the strength of the walls. Goshorn described that prior to weaving she recognized that the form would pose a challenge to the conceptual intention of presenting the images as a woven internal wall.

> I knew how hard it would be to keep that image together on a sifter basket because the base of the sifter basket is spaced differently… it's got to have the holes to allow the separation of the chaff from the kernel. I knew that would be really hard, and could be an obstacle to keeping an image together. So, I actually wove the image that went around the entire interior of the basket as a flat mat first. Then went back and pieced together the bottom, then finished up the top. It's hardly a traditional way to make a basket, of course….
>
> I also had to weave a second layer on the sides because I didn't feel it was strong enough. It just felt too flimsy, otherwise.[135]

The metaphor of the basket became more important than the function of the basket. As an artist, Goshorn exercises the right to place the emphasis of the form over function, as she constructed what is visibly a traditional Cherokee basket form. In a manner of consideration, the reinforced red walls are functionally sound because of the strength that is found within. Using the time honored practice of basket weaving to make a conceptual object, Shan challenges the misinformation that Native Americans struggle against by asking audiences to sift out the truth from what is taught.

The form of the sieve is, in itself, an indexical marker for the artist and the process. The basket forms that Goshorn has been making since 2007 have primarily been Cherokee, "I like being associated with my tribe. So most of my baskets are Cherokee inspired – by shape, by pattern, and, often, by imagery, and even theme." As she has become more adept at the technical skills of making baskets, she described that she recently began exploring other forms, including a seven-pointed star form, titled *The Fire Within,* and a zigzag form, titled *Swept Away*, though each remains inspired by her Cherokee culture. She described,

> The seven-sided star is important to the Cherokee. That's our emblem, it represents the seven clans, which is how we are represented in the Council House. And the shape of the zigzag, that's the three-dimensional interpretation of the Water/Mountain basketry pattern. So, even though they are different

[135] Shan Goshorn, interview by author, September 30, 2017, transcript.

> shapes [from what has been made by Cherokee], they are still very much Cherokee.[136]

Making baskets has become the vehicle for Goshorn's creativity and commitment to seeking a better future for the intertribal Native American community, including her own Cherokee family.

Conclusion

By applying the framework to Goshorn's basket, *Separating the Chaff,* the relationship between the basket as a cultural practice, as a vessel for voicing Goshorn's activist message, and the use of found images from an encyclopedia are revealed as part of the a complex continuum of Indigenous-cultural creativity (Table 2, page 93). When one considers the history of Cherokee basket making that extends from the genesis narratives about Kananeski amayi ehi, the Water Spider that brings fire, to *Separating the* Chaff, the act of making a basket is a continuum of proto-feminist creativity. Goshorn's participation within this continuum proactively joins the other Cherokee women who also make baskets, carrying forward a customary practice that is as much about the making of the baskets as participating within the culture. Though all hand-woven baskets are collectively a valid form of art, Goshorn's choice of materials and consideration for the conceptual meaning embedded within the objects creates numerous additional layers of meaning to the tribal custom.

Interpreting her baskets from this perspective, one can see that Goshorn is also introducing a new vernacular into Cherokee art. Not alone, there are many weavers who are using non-customary materials with traditional forms. This group includes Sarah

[136] Ibid.

Sense (Chitimacha/Choctaw) who weaves together photography, Carol Emarthle Douglas (Northern Arapaho/Seminole) who weaves hemp, silk and raffia in a traditional coiling method often creating three-dimensional forms on the surfaces of her gathering basket forms, Joe Feddersen who weaves Sally bags using linen and incorporates urban design forms [his work is further discussed in Chapter 5], Dawn Walden (Chippewa) who weaves cedar into abstractions that resemble bird's nests as often as her customary birch bark forms, and Cherish Perrish (Match-e-be-nash-she-wish Band of Pottawatomi Indians) who creates figurative baskets from black ash.

If the act of weaving is an assertion of Cherokee-ness and identity, it can, through Goshorn's baskets, also be seen as a practice that is extended through the hands of the weaver into the future. As Goshorn makes her baskets, she is contributing towards a future for the tradition of baskets and introducing a new vernacular of materials from which Cherokee baskets can be made, extending the vitality of the form for at least another generation. When asked if she had noticed if anyone was picking up on her artistic innovations, she denied seeing anyone really taking it on. But she accepts that it may happen and considered the possibility, "Part of me wants to say 'don't take my idea,' but another part of me is excited to see what someone else would come up with. Let's face it, that kind of competition spurs us to do better."[137] Goshorn's comment about doing better reveals another layer of the meaning of baskets and the role they play in generating new forms of culture. Her message is that there is more to be done and that the potential of that future lies in the hands of the artists. She also speaks to the expectation for change. Without qualifying or quantifying what that 'better' will

[137] Ibid.

be, Goshorn's comment is a message of expectation for a future in which baskets will be made.

The potentiality of those future baskets is a powerful message and one that positions Goshorn's expectations in line with Gilles Deleuze's theory of virtuality. When he suggests that the future can be based on any accepted history, then the Cherokee descendants of the Water Spider can be imagined as still making Cherokee baskets in the future, generated through Goshorn and her fellow basket weavers' hands. Goshorn's introduction of new materials and the additional layers of meaning conveyed through those materials and the metaphor and symbolism they carry expands beyond what has been done as a custom and broadens that future to what a young Cherokee woman (or man) may imagine for themselves.

What can be seen from Goshorn's baskets is that the continued rigor and passing of knowledge between artists about the basket making techniques and the designs contributes to both a reinvigoration of Cherokee identity, a connection to the community through the arts, and the generation of new knowledge about baskets. The new knowledge about baskets can be the sharing of existing knowledge with people who did not know before, but it can also be the creative leap to explore and create new forms, as certainly Goshorn has proven she can explore through the materials–these are forms of temporality, when new knowledge is formed. Through Goshorn's imagination that her woven paper baskets could work, Goshorn has introduced a new material that becomes subject to the hands of weavers. There are others who have woven images, Sarah Sense who showed with Goshorn in 2015 at the Hardesty Arts Center has received recognition for the weaving together of photographs using her Chitimacha and

Choctaw ancestor's weaving patterns. However, Sense's work has largely remained two-dimensional. Goshorn's exploration of three-dimensional forms transcends the tradition of Cherokee baskets, which have often been relegated to the secondary tier of craft, rather than as fine art. Goshorn's baskets defy the term craft, both as a matter of their non-functionality as baskets, but more significantly because of the way that she uses the metaphor of the basket and its functional purpose as a conduit for challenging common misinformation about Native people. As she dissects social and cultural issues, particularly inter-tribal topics, Goshorn uses the visual bedrock of Cherokee women's creative inheritance to form cogent and compelling dialogue where so often there is invisible silence.

MATERIALITY	**METAPHOR/SYMBOLISM**
baskets > Cherokee (identity) red > inverted external/internal photos > "Reality"; form of Simulacra Encyclopedia > informational resource river cane > images as enduring material	basket > cultural vessel/carrying knowledge and culture weaving > form making connections sifting > separating truth v. fiction power of images generalizations/regionalism red > blood/DNA/"blood memory" walls > strength & hidden layers
KINCENTRICITY	**TEMPORALITY**
Cherokee baskets: women/artists/culture intertribal personal experiences + activism issues = connections to other local Native artists; seeing compatibility between tribal histories/trauma; "our story is a shared story" encyclopedia images > related to photography and painting > forms of representation experience as a Native kid with encyclopedia that is shared intercultural experience of learning about the "other".	this is 1st woven image (3rd basket) baskets invited conversation seeking way to make activist art without creating a defensive audience archival inks/printing using time-honored practice to address contemporary issues wanted to break away from photography's 2D limits

Table 3: Analytical framework applied to Shan Goshorn's *Separating the Chaff.*

Chapter 3: Norman Akers' *Okesa II*



Figure 101: Norman Akers *Okesa II* (2010) Oil on panel, 48 x 44 inches. Image courtesy of the artist. Collection of Arrowhead Stadium, Kansas City, KS.

The relationships between place and identity are common subjects for Indigenous artists and have become a mainstay within the paintings and prints of Norman Akers. He has spent his mature career exploring concepts of being Osage, as a specific Native American experience, through his image making practice as an artist. While he has developed a visual vernacular that regularly plays with ideas of place, Osage ontology, and history through a dialogue that uses the tropes of classical painting intersecting with Osage epistemology, it is through his continued use of the elk by which he is most profoundly anchored to his home. In *Okesa II*, Akers' central placement of the elk connects his work to his Osage identity, to early accounts of Osage epistemology, and creates a map that transcends space and time, creating the potential for an Osage presence in the future. This chapter will analyze how Akers's *Okesa II* is a product of the artist's cultural heritage and expresses the artist's identity and intentions, and will include a formal analysis of the painting considering the role for performing as contemporary Osage art.

About the Artist: Norman Akers (b. 1958; Osage)

Norman Akers is currently a faculty member of the School of the Arts, Department of Visual Art, at the University of Kansas.[138] His professional position places him in Lawrence, KS, just three and a half hours driving from his home in Pawhuska, OK, located within the Osage Nation tribal boundaries. Highway 99, a route

[138] Two interviews were conducted with Norman Akers for this research, all given on the University of Kansas campus, Lawrence, KS, during an in-person studio visit on September 15, 2017; one was given in two-parts at his KU School of Art studio on the same day, and another on September 16, 2017, given at the KU School of Business, where a related painting, *Calling Home*, is permanently installed. Both were recorded as digital files. All quotes by the artist are from these interviews, which have been edited by the artist for this text.

that Akers describes as an "umbilical cord", connects the fairly close proximity of his two homes.[139] His relationship to Grayhorse can be traced back to his paternal 3rd grandfather, Roan Horse (*Kah-wah-ho-tsa*), whose family set up camp in the area after the Osage removal into Indian Territory in 1870 and after whom the Grayhorse village is named.[140] Akers recalled personal memories of his and, even, living in Roan Horse's home as a child. Akers and his sister were raised by their Osage father, Victor, and Anglo mother, Judy, in the Osage community, though Akers was often attended to by their great-grandmother, Eva Star.[141] Akers credits his great-grandmother, who he calls Grandma Eva, for her guidance, describing, "She was the one who put things in order for me so that I can dance."[142] His reference to dancing is a specific reference to the Osage protocols involved in participating in the In-Lon-Schka dances, the highest annual ceremony practiced by the Osage Nation.[143] Understanding the importance of

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[139] Norman Akers, interview by author, September 15, 2017, transcript.
[140] Howardean Rhoads, "*Gray Horse*," *Oklahoma Historical Society, Encyclopedia,* (2009), http://www.okhistory.org/publications/enc/entry.php?entry=GR028 (accessed 12 14, 2017). The discrepancy between the name listed at the website, Ka-wa-ko-dsa, and the name listed on the Osage Rolls, Kah-wah-ho-tsa-as-ga-ny, is a matter of varied uses of orthographic systems. While the spelling varies, the translation of both is consistent in reference to a single person. Thanks to Hallie Winter, Director/Curator at the Osage Nation Museum for confirming this research (email dated 12/13/17).
[141] Eva Star is the daughter of Roan Horse. Her given name was Eva McKinley, then Eva Little Star upon her marriage. She elected to drop the "Little" and was known in the community as Eva Star, mother to Eleanor Star Akers, mother to Victor Akers, father to Norman Akers. This information was provided by Norman Akers in the interviews and confirmed by Osage genealogy sites
[142] Norman Akers, interview by author, September 15, 2017, transcript.
[143] The Osage received the In-Lon-Schka dance from the Ponca and the Kaw communities upon arrival in Indian Territory. In keeping with Osage history, their relocation served as a point of religious transition for the community that is discussed with historical context by the Osage scholar Alice Ann Callahan (Callahan 1990). There are variations in the orthographic systems used to name the In-Lon-Schka Dance, including E-Lon-schka, I'n-lon-schka, and perhaps others. This author is using the spelling that is in current use by the Osage Nation on their website and in recently

this dance and Akers participation within it is contextualized by Alice Callahan's description found in *The Osage Ceremonial Dance I'n-Lon-Schka*.

> *I'n-Lon-Schka* means "playground of the eldest son." The Osages place much importance on being the eldest—whether eldest son, eldest daughter, or eldest member of the family. The term *I'n-lon*, therefore, is used by the Osages for the oldest son in a family, while *schka* is the root for words having to do with sport or play.[144]

Akers' father, Victor Akers, had been drumkeeper for Grayhorse, an auspicious position given only to young men who are the eldest sons in their family.[145] Within the patrilineal tribe, Akers affirmed that, as his father's first son, he believed he was treated well by his Grandma Eva, "she kind of doted on me. I just really… there was something about being with her, even as a small child I had this connection to her."[146] That connection persists to this day in innumerable ways beyond participating in the dances that includes hearing his great-grandmother's name cited as a revered cultural advisor by his elders and teaching his nephews to do things how she had, likewise, taught him.

Though his personal story has tragic moments that, for others, might have distilled the links, Akers retained his community connection. He credits the continued support of the matriarch's in his life beginning with Eva and including his Aunt Lorena, who stepped up upon Grandma Eva's passing, and his mother, who showed a commitment to learn enough about being Osage to nurture it within her children. He

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published materials. While there have been changes in the spelling, this is primarily a reflection of an oral language transitioning into text and not a judgment on previous published scholars' desire to be accurate. Quotes have not been altered and, so, variations exist within this text.

[144] Alice Ann Callahan, *The Osage Ceremonial Dance I'n-Lon-Schka* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1990): 19.

[145] Osage historian John Joseph Mathews describes the assignment of three communal allotments at Pawhuska, Hominy, and Grayhorse within the Osage Reservation for the maintenance of traditional villages. These sites are the locations where the annual In-Lon-Schka dances are held; one at each village. (Mathews 1961, p. 773)

[146] Norman Akers, interview by author, September 15, 2017, transcript.

proudly recalled the day his mother expressed feeling accomplished at having learned how to properly cook an unborn calf for dinner. Through his family, Akers has felt connected throughout his life to his Osage community and culture, which was affirmed when he rejoined the dance arena after an extended term of grief, a period he describes simply as, "there was a lot of loss."[147] Since his return to the dance, that persistence through participation has earned Akers the respect of his fellow community members, as represented in his appointment to the Grayhorse In-Lon-Schka dance committee and as Chairman of the Osage Nation's Traditional Cultural Advisors, positions Akers has dutifully served, though humbly so.

His relationship to the Osage community began in those early years as a child living in the Fairfax area. A self-avowed shy child, Akers recalled, "I was one of those kids who kind of stayed in my own place…. drawing, painting, I tended to make things out of mud, figures. That was just a real early kind of experience… the drawing and the painting was just a way, how I could kind of entertain myself, communicate."[148] He went on to describe that, "I was a strangely obsessive kid… I tended to really obsess on things. If I read history, I really read everything about it. If I drew a picture of an airplane, let's just say, I tried to put every rivet in."[149] That attention and interest to detail has never left and remains evident in his artwork, to be discussed later.

Though, as a child, he did not have a great deal of exposure or connection to the broader art community, he cited two experiences as contributing towards the cultivation of his appreciation for art. He is a self-described "collector of things," which began as a

[147] Ibid.
[148] Ibid.
[149] Ibid.

child collecting commemorative stamps. These accessible and affordable, small format art works would then be glued to the baseboards in his home. He reflectively remarked that when he lay on his belly, "it was like an art gallery of paintings."[150] Akers also recalled that when playing with his friends Tom and Bob Couch at their grandmother's house, that of Helen Bear,

> She would have these Bacone School paintings she hung salon style. They would go from the ceiling to the floor. There were all these paintings. That was like the first art gallery I ever went to, you know what I mean. I would go and play with them and I would always find time to admire the paintings.[151]

Akers confessed that he was not a diligent pupil in school, but that he did receive encouragement from his high school counselor, community members, and family to pursue art in college. He mentioned the ongoing support he received from Osage painter, sculptor and curator Carl Ponca (1983-2013), whom he knew for a long time and who was a significant guide for his artistic development, including his eventual attendance at the Institute of American Indian Arts (IAIA) where Ponca taught.

However, another influential community member would guide his initial path to take an alternate route. Akers immediate direction after high school was shaped by a singularly important visit. It was upon the invitation of one of his counselors that a well-regarded painter, Brummet Echo Hawk (Pawnee, 1922-2006), visited Akers for a critique while he was still in high school.

> One of the counselors invited him to come and give me a critique and talk to me about possibilities about where to go. I was looking at going to the Institute of American Indian Arts, which was a two-year program at that time. And he came in and actually gave me a very good critique. He was supportive but he was also very critical. He talked to me about cultural aspects of art and art history training, and that. He was really great in that he convinced my parents to look at a four-year program and investing in going to an art institute…

[150] Ibid.
[151] Ibid.

> I went to the Kansas City Art Institute. I think at that time when I met him, I knew it was important, and he knew my grandfather and other people in Pawnee. So there was a connection there in that.[152]

Akers described that going to the Kansas City Art Institute (KCAI), where Carl Ponca had also attended, was a significant transition for him, particularly after growing up in the rural community of Fairfax.[153] He describes that, "when I got there, I was kind of so aware of what I didn't know."[154] The transition to a city and the access to the museums had a critical impact, but significantly so, "meeting people form Chicago, other places, was important."[155] Akers took advantage of the proximity of the Nelson-Atkins Museum, adjacent to the KCAI, by studying the great masters through the practice of actively drawing in the museum.

> I did a lot of time drawing in the museum, because I understood I didn't know a lot about art history. There's something about actively drawing in the museum, these pieces of work that were 300… 200 years old…. What amazed me about making drawings of those paintings and, this is what I want to go back to, it was about making connection. It wasn't necessarily about "that's a pretty picture." I would look for certain things – the formal composition. But the discovery part about it is that when you got into a drawing, when you did the study, the pieces that sustained themselves were the ones that I realized I could make a connection to. Whether it was emotional… there was something in that work that I could begin to find, that discovery. I never really thought of them as formal exercises, though they were, thy were about learning how to compose a painting. I think that's why my compositions are the way they are, because I really did embrace it. It was completely absorbing that experience, for the most part, I didn't know about art history or anything like that.[156]

Akers believes that he gained critical skills to be both resourceful and a problem solver through his training at the KCAI. The experience broadened his understanding of

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[152] Norman Akers, interview by author, September 15, 2017, transcript.
[153] Hunsaker-Wooten Funeral Home. *Obituary: Carl Francis Ponca, Jr. (1938-2013).* (March 27, 2013). http://www.hunsakerwootenfuneralhome.com/services.asp?page=odetail&id=43068&locid=80 (accessed 14 December 2017).
[154] Norman Akers, interview by author, September 15, 2017, transcript.
[155] Ibid.
[156] Ibid.

the world, in general, and provided skills that continue to be part of his artistic practice. He recalled that he was not the only Native student there and that he enjoyed attending at the same time as Alex Jacobs (Mohawk, b. 1953). During his third year, he and textile artist Wendy Ponca, Carl's daughter, shared an apartment, creating a transition for her as a new incoming student, and giving Akers a sense of connection back to Oklahoma. Akers completed the program and earned a bachelor of fine art degree in painting in 1982.

After returning home to Fairfax, Akers elected to revisit the opportunities presented through the IAIA. He attended the Museum Studies program from 1983-84, but gained much more than the formal training through the certificate program. When asked about informal training, Akers remembered fondly his time in the IAIA printmaking studio,

> When I was at IAIA, we had free reign of the print studio. So, Michael McCabe (Navajo), Joe Maktima (Hopi/Laguna Pueblo), Bobbi Emerson-Kitsman (Navajo) and myself. This is right before Tony Abeyta, he kind of came in at the tail end of it, but we were in there because we were on our own and just did prints on our own because we had a key to the studio.[157]

Craig Locklear (Lumbee) was the printmaking professor who gave Akers unlimited access to the equipment and supplies. Though Locklear was an encouraging mentor, Akers describes the benefits of working so freely as an artist, "When students get away from their instructor they have a different kind of conversation sometimes. There's a different result from that."[158] Akers' experimentation and practice in the IAIA print studios is particularly evident within his continued printmaking practice.

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[157] Ibid.
[158] Ibid.



Figure 11: Norman Akers, *Madrid Hike* (1987), Oil on canvas, 23 x 25 inches. Image courtesy of the artist.

The experience at IAIA provided a range of experiences that were personally beneficial to Akers. He thrived in the diverse Native student body and admired the Native faculty members with whom he worked. He mentioned sharing a house with friends while living in Santa Fe as a student. This experience shifted tentatively depending on everyone's financial situation. But the home became a space for those who lived there, as well as other students, to work freely as creative people. He remembered seeing people stay on the floor all day, beading, in a safe and undisturbed space.

Akers also recalled sharing his appreciation for the landscape in the Southwest with a Navajo student. They would go on plein air painting expeditions, though fellow students often hazed them for painting such a western subject by. Akers, whose practice of painting landscapes continues, described the critical importance of being in an environment as it informs how the landscape is represented.

> There's something interesting about going out to do landscape paintings. At a certain point you get knowledge that comes from observing the land. It's not about training yourself to paint a likeness of the landscape, it's about the peripheral information. When you look at the hill, you see geologic time. You see an anomaly where something in the earth caused the rocks to move this way, versus that way. Or you see erosion that reveals a history. Or you're out on a mesa, looking around in the Southwest. You start seeing rocks that have slid down at the edge of that hill. You make that connection to time and history.[159]

The time in Santa Fe, including the unique studio access, the camaraderie with the Native student body, and the exposure to a new geographic space affirmed for Akers an interest in pursuing art as a career, rather than pursuing a path working in museums as his certificate may have afforded. It was while he was at IAIA that he and two fellow students were recruited to the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign for the masters in fine arts program.

It was in January 1984, just prior to completing his certificate at IAIA, that Akers' father was tragically murdered. In the wake of assuming responsibilities for his father's estate and attending to his family's needs, Akers was delayed from pursuing his graduate degree. He recalled that members of the community provided support, particularly Raymond Lasley and Ted Mashburn. However during this period, despite the community presence, he said he, "just kind of felt like I was somewhat on my

[159] Ibid.

own."[160] It would take a few years before Akers could put his affairs in order and re-engage with his professional development path. In 1988 he was able to join his IAIA colleagues, Char Teters (Spokane, painter) and Marcus Amerman (Choctaw, beadworker/painter), at the University of Illinois. Teters and Amerman had taken the interim to complete their bachelor degrees and were similarly ready to matriculate into the graduate fine arts program.

The situation for Akers, Amerman and Teters at the University of Illinois was likely more complicated than is necessary to explore for this chapter. However, some context will contribute to understanding the impact of this period on Akers's development of a visual vernacular system. These three Native American students were recruited and arrived at the university as the sole representation of Native people in the College of Fine and Applied Arts, a stark contrast to the diverse and enveloping Native community at IAIA. Additionally, the University of Illinois mascot ,Chief Illinwek, was at that time being performed as a contentious composite stereotype of Native culture "to honor the former Native inhabitants of Illinois.[161] While the university was publicly promoting the values of diversity and recruiting to achieve this goal, the oppositional contrast of the policy with the mascot's masquerade, was unresolvable for Teters, who in Spring 1989 began protesting the mascot. In response to the protests, Teters reported that all three students were targeted by the campus supporters of the mascot.[162]

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[160] Ibid.

[161] The chronological history of the Chief Illiniwek mascot and the regalia can be found in Julia Wurth, "Sioux Request Prompts Look at History of Chief Illiniwek Garb," *The News-Gazette* (01/27/07) http://www.news-gazette.com/news/local/2007-01-27/sioux-request-prompts-look-history-chief-illiniwek-garb.html (accessed November 15, 2017).

[162] For a discussion on the controversy of the mascot, more information can be found in Jason Edward Black, "The "Mascotting of Native America: Construction, Commodity,

Amerman left before the end of the same semester; both Teters and Akers remained and completed their master of fine art degrees in 1991.

Akers did not address this aspect specifically in any of the interviews when questioned about influences or artistic intent. However, he repeatedly mentioned the pressure he received as an artist in graduate school. Of these pressures, Akers described that he received questions from his colleagues about his imagery's lack of connection to his personal history. It was evident in considering Akers' continued interest in landscapes that his work may not have resonated visually for that audience as representing Akers' identity, though his relationship to landscape was and continues to be a manner of connecting to the place he calls home. This disjuncture was expressed through questions, like, "Why are you not painting about your culture?"[163] This question may have been more of an expression of an expectation that Native culture be expressed in recognizable tropes. However, given Akers' personal and family history with the specific place of Grayhorse in Oklahoma and the locale's rolling prairie hills, that relationship for Akers was more than evident in his paintings. He primarily focused on painting but, while in graduate school, explored glass blowing. He enjoyed creating the translucent forms, though recognizing that when he returned to Oklahoma

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and Assimilation," *The American Indian Quarterly* (University of Nebraska Press) 26, no. 4 (Fall 2002): 605-622; and Rebecca Johns, "Interview: Charlene Teters on Native American Symbols as Mascots," *NEA Higher Education Journal* 16, no. 1 (Summer 2000): 121-130. After graduating from University of Illinois in 1991, Teters was a founding member of the National Coalition on Racism in Sports and Media, http://aimovement.org/ncrsm/index.html. The author initially met Teters in 1993, when her exhibition, "It Was Only an Indian," was presented at the Institute of American Indian Arts Museum, Santa Fe, NM. We have remained in contact as friends and colleagues since and this story is familiar to the author.

[163] Norman Akers, interview by author, September 14, 2017, transcript.



Figure 12: Norman Akers, *I Hope You Got There* (1993) Oil on canvas, 60 x 48 inches.

he would not have access to a glass blowing facility, deciding eventually to terminate his exploration of the medium. Akers continued painting, though it seemed irreconcilable to paint what mattered to him, to resolve the disconnection he felt enveloping him as a product of missing Oklahoma, and the demands for him to create images that resonated as culturally appropriate. Despite their requests that he paint

about his culture, Akers continued his practice of painting landscapes, though by his own account, they were "fragmented landscapes."

As seen in *I Hope You Got There*, the images from this period are boldly dark, emotional, and the compositions are full of rotating motion. The surfaces are raw, pigmented anger. Akers explained, "They didn't see the notion of fragmented or fractured landscape being related to this notion of removal or displacement or disconnect or the land."[164] His frustration with this disconnection between subject and meaning resulted in a painting of a landscape with a singular hill. Sitting atop this hill was a black metal lunchbox. In response to the continued questions, Akers describes,

> So one day I painted a black lunch box and it was just sitting on a hill… I didn't paint it to become part of my symbology. I painted it because it was something from home. After I painted it, that question from my colleagues came back to me–what is it? What is the lunch box about? And I said, you asked me to paint something about home, from home.



Figure 13: Image to represent the type of lunchbox referenced in Akers' paintings.

> I thought of a black lunchbox, because when we put people away, I remember that lunchbox going in with them. You know, that lunchbox, the cook's would put food in that. It would come from the person's meal. It was a blessing there. For most Indian people, we know that that connection to food, and how special it is. So, as I said, it was something really done on a whim, in a way. Sort of also being frustrated People wanted recognizable imagery, stereotypes, in a sense of. And I was not doing that.

[164] Ibid.

> At home, we use a black lunchbox when we put people away, that lunchbox is going with them, it contains food from their meal. For most Indian people, we understand that connection to food, it's special. When I included the lunch box in my painting, my colleagues continued to ask, what is it, what is its connection to you culture. In some ways it was done on a whim, being frustrated, yet it was more important that I had originally thought. People wanted to see recognizable, stereotypical imagery of Native peoples. And I was not interested in doing that.
>
> What I like about the lunchbox is that it's pressed metal. It could have been manufactured in the Midwest. The exterior is this metal skin, that when we use it and the interior. There's something about our belief system that is connected to that meal, that food, that blessing.[165]

The lunchbox was the first symbol that Akers placed within his paintings that seeded the beginning of a visual vernacular that has grown to include other equally simplistic iconic images to represent often dense references to Osage culture and practice. From the initial appropriation of the lunchbox, Akers began to expand his use of quotidian objects as symbols that he needs to express the dynamic and multivalent experience of being Osage. To this single and, otherwise, unobtrusive motif, Akers has added electrical cords to represent the energy that surges through both the physical and metaphysical world by which we are all connected; tornado siren horns to represent the call for wariness about approaching mythical, spiritual, and literal storms; and spinning tops that symbolize the urgency of "time running out" and the ongoing cycles to which we are all party.

The other motifs that Akers began to interrogate while in graduate school were those that emerged from his scholarly readings of Francis LaFlesche (1857-1932), the Omaha ethnologist who researched and published on the Osage culture from 1910-1929, including detailed notes on the ritual practices of the tribe from the 19th century and the tribe's social organization as it was upon arrival in Indian Territory, as well as

[165] Ibid.

collecting wax cylinder recordings of songs, many of which are available through the Library of Congress. LaFlesche's research focused on the "traditional" practices of the Osage at a time when the tribe was in the process of having a paradigm shift, rejecting the cultural practices from their pre-reservation period in favor of practices that were perceived as suited to the new world that their community needed to adapt and survive in their contemporary circumstances.[166]

The In-Lon-Schka was introduced to the Osage by the Ponca and Kaw communities as early as 1880 and adopted shortly thereafter as the most significant annual ceremony. The peyote religion, known as the Native American Church, was introduced at the end of the nineteenth century and many tribal members adopted this practice for which ceremonies are held year-round. Both were adopted and remain in use, non-exclusive of each other, as the preeminent cultural practices for the Osage.[167] As Garrick Bailey describes in *The Osage and the Invisible World,*

> Contrary to popular conceptions about American Indians, the traditional Osages were, and the contemporary Osages continue to be, strongly future oriented…

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[166] I have placed the term traditional within quotation marks to signify that while this term is often used to refer to the customary cultural practices of Indigenous communities prior to or upon contact with Euro-Americans, the term generalizes these same and infers a form of cultural stasis to a particular historic moment and the term does not reflect that by nature, Indigenous cultures have evolved and adapted throughout history to the communities' contemporary circumstances. La Flesche was researching the cultural practices in place for the Osage community prior to and just at their arrival in their present day home at the turn of the twentieth century.

[167] This statement is not meant to generalize that no other religious practices are used by any Osage people, wherein each individual Osage community member is free to choose and act of their own will in regards to their religious practice. An argument can certainly be made that Christianity has also become an important religious practice amongst Osage community members, as may other religions that have been adopted by individuals. For the purposes of this discussion, a focus will be made on those aspects of Osage religious practice, which are relevant to the work of Norman Akers, who through his art and interviews made reference only to the In-Lon-Schka as being personally relevant.

> … Rituals were the means by which a people, particularly a nonliterate society, preserved and transmitted knowledge. This knowledge was transmitted not just in words but also through the formal restructuring of the physical behavior of individuals and through the use of a variety of material symbols. Any formal institution could be made "Osage."[168]

Bailey's description conveys the cultural mechanisms by which the Osage people remained Osage as they adapted to their circumstances post-removal into Indian Territory. As they adopted new practices, their beliefs and identity remained Osage. Upon reflecting and applying this as a principle, it could be argued that this practice resonates with Akers' employment of the lunchbox, and other icons, as symbols of Osage identity within his art. His adoption and continued use of a material symbol to represent knowledge gained from Osage practice is, inherently, a historically and culturally valid way of remaining Osage.

From LaFlesche's notes and recordings, Akers was drawn to two particularly evocative images, the *O'-po^{n} to^{n}-ga*, or Great Elk, and the *Ho'-e-ga*, or Snare of Life.[169] These iconic images reverberate within Osage rituals as documented by LaFlesche. The Great Elk is an important symbol to the Osage, appearing in the creation narratives in several occasions. The elk is present within historic Osage culture as the symbol of the Elk clan, one of the Earth People social groups related to Land. For this reason, the elk features in several of the genesis songs of the Osage by name. Further, the Great Elk performs a significant act within the creation of this world for the Osage People. La Flesche recorded the narrative in *The Osage Tribe: Rite of the Chiefs, Sayings of the Ancient Men*, where the Great Elk appears to the *Ho^{n}'-ga*, or Sacred People, who are in

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[168] Bailey, Garrick, and Francis La Flesche. *The Osage and the Invisible World.* Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1995, p. 6.

[169] The Osage terms for the Great Elk and the Snare of Life are borrowed from La Flesche, *War Ceremony and Peace Ceremony of the Osage Indians* (1939): 90, and La Flesche, *The Osage Tribe: Rite of the Chiefs; Sayings of the Ancient Men* (1921): 484.

a world covered with water. The Great Elk, who self identified also as a *Ho^{n}'-ga,* performed "mysterious acts" by throwing his body repeatedly upon the water covered earth and, in so doing, exposed the surface of the soil and eradicated anger replacing it with peace. In the repeated acts of throwing himself on the earth to prepare the world for the *Ho^{n}'-ga*, he deposited his hairs to seed the multitude of grasses that cover the earth. And upon these acts of creation, the Great Elk describes to the *Ho^{n}'-ga* how his body is a manifestation of the earth's surface through the rise and fall of his muscular form, with his antlers referencing the riverine system of streams and creeks.[170]

The Great Elk, through this reading, is a physical metaphor for the local environment in which the Osage lived historically in the Midwestern range that extended from Eastern Kentucky to the Missouri River, from lower Illinois into northern Oklahoma, where they now reside. The Great Elk is also a symbol of the relationship that the Osage have to the earth's surface, it having been prepared by this resonant metaphor for them to live peacefully and abundantly.

It is through the Great Elk's relationship to the intersection of the earth and sky (symbols of the opposing Osage moieties), specifically at the earth's surface, that the Great Elk becomes conflated with the more complex symbol of the snare. The importance of the Earth and the Sky moieties, which provide both social and political structure for the community's benefit are accounted for in the Osage genesis narrative, when some *Ho^{n}'-ga* arrived upon this earth from the stars, joining the *Ho^{n}'-ga*, who were of the earth. From these two sacred peoples, the Osage tribe was formed. As the

[170] La Flesche's extended and detailed narrative is translated in English for readers to access in La Flesche, *The Osage Tribe: Rite of the Chiefs; Sayings of the Ancient Men* (1921): 112-115.

sacred people went about organizing themselves, the accounts within the geneses narrative reflect a continued acknowledgement of the necessary presence of the Ho'-e-ga, the great snare, as a point from which the people can find rejuvenation and the site where all life forms resolve their deaths. La Flesche describes in *Osage War Ceremony* that,

> Ho'-e-ga is a term for an enclosure in which all life takes on bodily forms never to depart there from except by death… It also stands for the earth which the mythical elk made to be habitable by separating it from the waters.[171]

The relationship between the Great Elk and the Ho'-e-ga is further cemented through, a ritual LaFlesche documented in *War Ceremony and Peace Ceremony of the Osage Indians,* called the *Ho'-e-ga Wi'-gi-e*, or Mythical Elk Ritual, in which the relationship between the Great Elk and the Ho'-e-ga are made further explicated,

> A, ni-ḳa-wa-ça-e
> O, ye valiant men
>
> A, Ho-e-ga gi-tha bi wi^{n} e-dsi the a bi a, ni-ḳa-wa-ça-e,
> There is an animal that was made to be the Ho'-e-ga
>
> A, Opon-to^{n}-ga a bi a, ni-ḳa-wa-ça-a,
> This animal is the great elk
>
> A, pe-o-to^{n} thi^{n}-kshe, ni-ḳa-wa-ça-e,
> It is the forehead of the animal
>
> A, Ho-e-ga wi-kshi-tha bi a-thi^{n} he ta tse a bi a, ni-ḳa-wa-ça-e,
> That I am authorized to use as a Ho'-e-ga for you.
>
> A, Ho-e-ga wi-kshi tha bi a-thi^{n} he tho^{n} shki, ni-ḳa-wa-ça-e,
> When I use the forehead of the great elk as a Ho'-e-ga for you.
>
> A, o-ga-ço^{n}-thi^{n} xtsi thi^{n}-ge, ni0ḳ-wa-ça-e,
> Then, even before the break of day,

[171] La Flesche, Francis, "War Ceremony and Peace Ceremony of the Osage Indians," in *101st Annual Report* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution, Bureau of American Ethnology, GPO, 1931): 71.

A, ho-e-ga o^{n}-ta-pa bi a-thi^{n} he ta tse a bi a, ni-ḳa-wa-ça-e,
The enemy shall be drawn toward my Ho'-e-ga,

A, o-pa-çe tho^{n}-dsi shki, ni-ḳa-wa-ça-e,
As also in the evening,

A, Hoe-e-ga o^{n}-ta-pa bi a-thi^{n} he ta tse a bi a, ni- a, ni-ḳa-wa-ça-e,
The enemy shall be drawn toward my Ho'-e-ga.[172]

Through the repetition of cycles enacted as the acts of life and death, the Ho'-e-ga also represents the necessary cycles through which the earth's natural cycles and energy flow, and like other life forms, continue through a series of generative forms.[173] As Garrick Bailey noted in his Introduction to *The Osage and the Invisible World*,

> I recalled one of the basic teachings of the ancient priests: "Nothing in the cosmos moves backward." Contrary to popular conceptions about American Indians, the traditional Osages were, and the contemporary Osages continue to be, strongly future oriented.[174]

It is Bailey's observation that the Osage are "future oriented" combined with the Osage capacity to adapt their beliefs to any institution that lays the foundation from which Akers has worked, continuing to do so, through art creating a future for Osage expressions. Akers provided confirmation for this reading of the lunchbox when asked to elaborate on it

> I'm really intrigued with it in the sense of that transformation in a really strange twist. That box that you pick up at Big Lots or Wal-Mart becomes a sacred object. It's also an object that we appropriated from the West. Because it's functional, it works. It's what we can use. Before that it might have been a parfleche, it might have been a pail, it might have been that bundle that Anita

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[172] La Flesche (1931), English cited from p. 72, Osage cited from p. 165.
[173] While this essay remains focused on Osage concepts and art made by Norman Akers, it is worth noting that this concept of the earth's surface as an ongoing point of active regeneration between earth and sky resonates interestingly with Gary Witherspoon's discussion of the Navajo concept of *Hozhó* and "Cosmic Symmetry" in (Witherspoon and Peterson 1995, pp. 32-45), wherein the earth's surface is metaphorically represented by the geometric form of a diamond that allows for the dynamic flow of energy to move through all life forms.
[174] Bailey and La Flesche, The Osage and the Invisible World (1995), p. 6.

> [Fields] was doing. But it also, sort of, speaks to that exterior and the interior – what's seen in our culture – what's visible and invisible.[175]

For Akers, the cycles of life and death that generated for him the importance of the lunchbox and the electrical cord, symbols of the cultural ontology held in shared reverence with his home community, were closely related to the conceptual images of the elk and Ho'-e-ga as presented in La Flesche's detailed notes and diagrams.

When asked how important La Flesche's scholarship was to his work, Akers thoughtfully considered the question, responding,

> People back at home had questions about La Flesche's materials. I remember coming across the Smithsonian Journals when I was in graduate school. La Flesche's writings on the Osage fascinated me. I always saw the writings as a resource. At that time, I never thought of illustrating the stories in my paintings.
>
> It's interesting how we come to understand our culture. The things that I read were Mysterious, but I was connected to them. The first creation story I knew was from Genesis. But when I started to look at the Osage creation stories, I felt a certain Connectedness. I didn't necessarily understand everything about what I read. In some ways this interested me, the connection, knowing and not knowing. But early on I was aware of that using this information was not about trying to recreate the past. This was about seeing what was there to help you move forward as a person.
>
> We look back at our histories to understand where we come from. It's not that we want to in historic time period. All we are doing is trying to understand where we came from. I think a lot about the things La Flesche recorded, but I don't find myself wanting to illustrate the stories. It's more about understanding the world in which we exist. That's what tribal stories, narratives, saying do for us. It's different from Western science, in that sense. What interested me was that the stories were very visual, and there was a sense of order to them.
>
> In the process, I culled through the materials to see what was important and to figure out what I could and couldn't paint about. In a sense, I was trying to find the right information to include in a composition that allowed past and present to coexist in a work. At the same time, I was searching for something future oriented, if that makes sense. [176]

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[175] Norman Akers, interview by author, September 14, 2017, transcript.
[176] Ibid.

The power of the universe must surely have felt in a state of chaos as Akers sought to reconcile his desire to pursue a career as a professional artist articulating cultural concepts that were personally and culturally significant for an audience for whom the tropes of Native American art were largely represented in stereotypical imagery and, quite likely, had no, or limited, sensitivity for the epistemological relationship to Osage culture or its history. The faculty could not see what they did not understand, while Akers refused to cooperate with producing stereotypes to meet their expectations. One can only imagine the depth of emotion from which Akers worked to produce his MFA series, which he did completing his degree in 1991, and after which he remained at the University of Illinois, serving until 1993 as a Visiting Professor for his alma mater.

By 1995, Akers had developed the majority of the visual vernacular elements that he continues to work with in his current practice. In *St Eustace's New Suit* (1996) the background continues to have an element of chaotic movement reminiscent of his MFA work, though it evokes more spatial dimension and an ensuing order, one that circulates around the drum, though everything remains, to some extent in transition between being material and immaterial. The Elk is referenced as a drawn diagram above the suited male figure, a reference to the abstracted head, seeking to take strides through the potential of earth's surface, as the state of being for all represented seems in a state of unresolved flux.

Though the surface has a strong sense of fluidity, the colors are no longer expressive of the raw and violent emotions as were present in *I Hope You Got There*. The transition from chaos to recognizable humanity is embodied in the male figure, the



Figure 14: Norman Akers, *Eustace's New Suit* (1996) Oil on canvas, 75 x 60 inches. Image courtesy of the artist.

centering of the drum as if locating it within the protocol of ceremony, and the arcing landscape underneath a blue sky imbue an order that, to this Native curator, recalls the primordial time of the giants before the world was ordered for human occupancy. The painting seems to express that Akers was beginning to find an order for his world,

expressed by the presence of the landscape and the riverine systems, possibly boding that he was in search of his way home to Oklahoma, to Pawhuska, to Grayhorse.

Between 1994-1999, Akers committed himself to painting, when he maintained a rigorous schedule of juried national exhibitions that ultimately garnered Akers the attention of significant granting foundations. In 1999, Akers received a grant from the Joan Mitchell Foundation for painting, an exclusive and highly regarded award received only through anonymous nominations by well-seated curators and members of the fine arts community. This was followed in 2002 by a Power of Art award by the Robert Rauschenberg Foundation. The culmination of resolving a method for exploring his identity through a medium that had no history of practice as Osage cultural expression had gained Akers national recognition and, in 1999, Akers returned to IAIA in New Mexico as a painting instructor. Having come full-circle and returning to an environment which had provided a sanctuary for his creative exploration, Akers remained in Santa Fe as a faculty member until 2009, when he could move closer to Oklahoma by accepting a tenure-track teaching position at the University of Kansas.

During that period, Akers began to refine his surfaces. In *Rebirth* (2000) we can see that Akers has begun to organize the iconic images within a landscape that reads as a contemporary moment with finished roads and telephone poles along the horizon. He continued to utilize the circularity of time as an organization device. But the landscape has begun to flatten out, not unlike the expansive space between New Mexico and Oklahoma. He was using acorns and truncated oak trees as symbols to refer to the act of growth, relocation and migration, though protecting the potential for setting new roots. The elk continued appearing, sometimes bisecting the plane of the landscape as if just

emerging from the Osage genesis narrative, or, sometimes exploring the landscape with a passing Ford Thunderbird driving past. Akers was beginning to create an order in the contemporary present through his images, the landscapes communicated a lack of permanency and rootedness, while also expressing a desire to find one's home.



Figure 15: Norman Akers, *Rebirth 2000* (2000) Oil on canvas, 66 x 60 inches. Image courtesy of the artist.



Figure 116: Norman Akers, *Okesa* (2006) Oil on panel, 66 x 60 inches. Image courtesy of the artist.

By 2006, while still an instructor at IAIA, Akers introduced into his images a road map of northeastern Oklahoma that included the boundaries of the Osage Nation, a literal road map to visualize his Grayhorse home. In *Okesa* (2006), the first painting of a related series that includes *Okesa II* (2010) and *Calling Home* (2010), the map has been placed along the ground plane, providing an alternate way of knowing the earth and

spatial relationships between places. The landscape remains flattened below an expansive sky in which float a truncated oak tree, acorns, the rotating top and its corresponding shadow, a series of disconnected road segments and a translucent sun form that, according to Akers, was inspired by the translucent glass he had cast in graduate school, now functioning as a source of light, as well as a compositional device to organize the surface. Akers considers his experience working with different media, including glass blowing and casting, to have influenced his work.

> I think particularly with the influence glass, had on the layering in my painting. Definitely. Any of my work after graduate school, particularly when I started overlaying the maps and things, because you realize that when you put a map in it, it kind of occupies a space of its own. While it's there, it's not completely relating to what's happening behind it. There's a little bit of tension. The visual elements may become harmonious, in a sense, but there's still that edge.[177]

As Akers was finding his way home in a literal path professionally, his paintings were exploring that act of transition, through images that reflect his personal transformation as an artist and the physical act of returning to Fairfax. The elk is figured in the lower right corner, a shadow of the form, though the antlers align with the road pavement, perhaps aligning the historic transit of the riverine system with the highway system Akers was using each time he traveled home. Centered along the bottom edge of the painting, a rock cairn, historically used as grave markers, creates a bridge between the cartographic map and the landscape Akers has painted, possibly from memory of his home. Placed above the rock cairn, the outline of a figure reminiscent of the petroglyphs so abundant in New Mexico overlays the truncated oak. It is a compelling image of loss and dislocation. The ghosts of Akers' past seem to centrally figure in this image, though unlike his earlier and more chaotic images, the loss is counterbalanced with the high sun

[177] Ibid.

and the verdant deep landscape. Through these images, Akers seems to be resolving his relationship to place and community, finding resolution to the losses suffered. By Akers' own account, this painting was about connecting with home, "… this is very much about a sense of place. It's about an order, Okesa is right there… right on the horizon."[178] The Osage term *okesa* translates to "half-way," perhaps a titular commentary by Akers on his physical location between Illinois and Oklahoma, via Santa Fe, where he was teaching when the image was painted.

The Art: *Okesa II*

Okesa II was completed four years after *Okesa*, and after Akers had changed professional positions as instructor at the Institute of American Indian Arts, Santa Fe, NM, to the tenure-track position of Assistant Professor at the University of Kansas, Lawrence. Many of the motifs that Akers was using in New Mexico reappear, however, and perhaps due to the relocation that placed him in much closer proximity to his home, the image is anchored through the materialization of the elk as a centralizing figure, intersecting simultaneously with the deep horizon of the landscape and the map placed as a transparent overlay. The depth implied between the elk and the horizon is overlaid with a transparent cartographic reference to Osage County, Oklahoma, a geographic and political space equal to the Osage Nation reservation geography. Akers has intersected vertical and horizontal space through the placement of a map of the Osage community over the same realistically painted landscape and the elk, three multivalent interpretive abstractions that each represent the Osage relationship to the earth and place, specifically Akers' home. While playing with ancient Osage metaphorical imagery,

[178] Ibid.

working with the historical practice of painting landscapes, and incorporating symbols coded with his personal construction, Akers can be seen as creating a vortex for the continuation of Osage culture through this Western traditional form.

Okesa II is an oil painting on panel that features a centrally placed elk, standing in shallow water at the edge of a rolling plain. The distant horizon bisects the canvas midway with an expansive sky filling the upper half of the canvas and the landscape fills the lower half, which is further divided between exposed land and a river running along the lower and closest ground plane. In contrast to his earlier paintings, the landscape has become more prominent, placed in balance to the space occupied by the sky. This balance between earth and sky resonates with concepts of social balance located within Osage epistemology. In his collected works book, *The Osage and the Invisible World*, Francis LaFlesche addresses this relationship when he described:

> Humans and other living things existed on the surface of the earth, the space between earth and sky… They further noted that the earth portion of the cosmos was divided between land and water. Associated with each of these major divisions was a wide range of life forms – animals, birds, plants, celestial bodies, and other moving, changing things. The Osages recognized these spatial divisions along with the temporal divisions present in the universe.[179]

This story conveys several important themes. One theme is that according to Osage ontology the first people originated in and descended from the Above World to find the Below World. The other is that the animals, and elk in particular, played an important role in making the Middle World habitable for people and animals. Humans and animals belong to a single, primordial community in many indigenous creation stories. Finally, it also reveals the Osage recognition that nature provided an order they could choose to follow.

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[179] Bailey and La Flesche, *The Osage and the Invisible World*, 31-32.

This was a critical point of discussion for Akers:

> I do think about when I'm looking at any of my work, particularly the landscapes and the paintings, I really think about that horizon line so much because that point between earth and sky is so important. There's a duality there. Of course, Osages talk about earth and sky, but I still think it's a metaphor on so many other levels. You know, too, as well. I look at myself, I'm mixed-blood, my father was Osage and my mother was Anglo – there's duality there. To also equate it back to home. As a child, when you look at that.
>
> When I look at the landscape, I really think about the horizon line. That point between earth and sky is so important. There is a duality there. Osages talked about earth and sky, but I still think it's a metaphor on many other levels. I look at myself, I'm mixed blood, my father was Osage and my mother was Anglo- there's a duality there. Home is equated to duality, since I live away from my ancestral home to make a living. That moving back and forth from place to place.
>
> What fascinates me about the prairie is this invisible world. Not necessarily making the reference to Mr. Bailey's book, but in a sense that what happens when you you're out there and you're looking, you know, there's so much beyond your physical sight that you can't see. It also makes reference to when you're walking through grass, if there's tall grass there are things close to you that you can't see. It's obscured. I'm really interested in that notion of what's invisible, in that sense.
>
> What fascinates me about the prairie is this invisible world. It's not necessarily a reference to Dr. Bailey's book. It is what happens when you are out on there on the prairie. So much is beyond your physical sight. When you walk through the tallgrass, there are living things close to you that you can't see. They are unseen. I'm interested in the notion of invisibility.
>
> I think about how visual information is formally constructed. There is something about the in-between space in a painting. One might call it the negative space. What's happening between the objects, is more important than the objects themselves. That space becomes the catalyst for how a work is read. I don't mean this in a cliché way- but it's a journey. Moving through the composition. I navigate the space of the painting. [180]

[180] Norman Akers, interview by author, September 14, 2017, transcript.

It is through his reference to navigation that I think that Akers' is describing the transitions between physical places and the spiritual space of being Osage. He has created visual relationships that support this interpretation.

The cartographic references include an interconnected series of blue lines referencing the river system, a motif echoed through the related arcs and curves of the elk's antlers. The map provides a series of inter-related solid black lines, some in sharp angles and others that likely follow the natural curvature of the landscape. As such the map lines are an abstraction of the relationship that humans have to the earth's surface. The map is not just an organizational device, it serves as a guide to the viewer to read the place Akers is referencing. Akers elaborated on his painting process, both conceptually and mechanically,

> It started out as a landscape. I just wanted to paint the hills associated with home. As the work evolved, I saw this happening in stages. The [sun] goes back to earlier work, a time when I was working with glass, and became aware of layering. After the landscape was painted, I put in the image of the elk. Both are connected and reference the land. This was the first time I decided to use a projector to paint the map. Before this, I did them by hand, which was way too laborious.
>
> Something happened when I projected the map. This was a manipulated map that I had reworked. Using Photoshop, I took out place names. The actual border between Kansas and Oklahoma has been removed. That was a reference to the fact that our land still exists in Kansas. This goes back to my idea of creating a place that goes beyond the defined boundaries of Osage land in Oklahoma. The work involves a process where I'm trying to align all these visual elements to make a connection to the history of place.
>
> Here's how it comes together. Once the elk was here, then came the connection to the river. The antlers are connected to the water, the river. So, you see this clear earth/sky reference, this is important… you have an inkling about how they're going to come together. Something new begins to happen, for me a painting is successful when it goes beyond my intent.

The role of the map, already coded by the field of cartography, is additionally coded with multiple layers of meaning that required an understanding of Osage epistemology

and history to discover. Across the horizontal middle of the canvas, a bold red line transects the painting as an element of the map, visually suspended between the landscape and the elk and connecting the earth with the sky. Its placement implies a highway running along the lower portion of the Osage reservation. Akers confirmed that this was a "heart line, in a sense, but it's also the highway that we travel on, too."[181] Through this double entendre, the red line becomes a conduit for the flow of Osage identity through the canvas in relationship to this place. On the upper left corner of the image plane, an abstracted sun descends from above as a yellow ovoid, though it has not completely transitioned into the picture plane, perhaps connecting what is not seen with what is visible. Partially obstructing the sun are three floating acorns. Of these, Akers explained,

> The tree, the little sprout, the sapling, the acorns, you know, they represent different stages of life. I do deal a lot with hybrid symbols in my work. Instead of painting that tree trunk in [referring to the truncated tree trunks located on the middle right of the image], it seemed much more appropriate to me to paint the acorns dropping down. Because, you know, they fall from trees, but more so because the acorns symbolize a potential for growth, for doing things. Its been awhile since I thought about these symbols, but when I painted the three acorns I was thinking of my dad, my uncle, and my aunt – all three of them died very young and under tragic circumstances.[182]

Additionally, the acorns actually perform an important role collectively as a visual device, largely as a product of the variation in their scale. The largest one is so significantly larger to the farthest and smallest one, though all three are viewed in front of the sun shape, thus implying a deep spatial order. The largest acorn is positioned closer to the viewer, who recognizes that it must be quite close to the front in reference to its natural scale. This placement visually pushes the elk away from the viewer

[181] Ibid.
[182] Ibid.

through the mechanisms of perspective, further placing the elk in the middle ground, or reiterating okesa as a theme.

One cannot ignore that the map and the forward ground plane intersect at the site where the elk's legs break the river's surface. The placement of the elk in the water, where his antlers then bridge into the sky, draws a distinct visual relationship between the sky and the earth-bound water – rivers, which are metaphorically presented in the form of the antlers. The map's network of roads and intersections become a visual reference to the network that also exists within the tribe's complex system of relationships, such as the clan and moiety systems that continue to organize members and families. Akers discussed the importance of reading maps to elaborate on creating spatial relationships.

> To me, the map is something that you hold up and you read. It helps you find a place. It's definitely an overlay on the landscape. I think in many ways, when maps are superimposed over the physical representation of the landscape, it becomes an acknowledgement of how land and places change for us. Because with the maps I see evidence of roads, the city names, the borders and the boundaries filling the space. You get a sense of the extent of colonialism looking at that. It's all of the things that are a part of it, too. The map itself is really, as I've said, primarily a record of colonialism when it's superimposed with other representation of land. It's very coded, much like the iconography I'm using.…
>
> It's a real place, not an imagined place. That's what I'm hoping to accomplish. The map begins to do that, because it's very literal. When you think about how maps the history of maps, in a traditional way, they document the landscape for navigational purposes. They record how one gets from one place to another. [183]

The use of place names anchors this cultural diagram to geographic space, reiterating the relationship that the Osage have to the cartographic description. The three sites of the In-Lon-Schka dance are materialized both on the map and by the elk's body. Grayhorse is located just below the elk's hindquarters, perhaps a relationship

[183] Norman Akers, interview by author, September 15, 2017, transcript.

between the elk's generative physical parts to Akers' spiritual place. Pawhuska is located just to the left of the elk's heart and is, interestingly, the only named site located along that "heart line" that Akers activated with the strong red line. Hominy is placed where the elk's left leg enters the water, the ripples serving as a reiterative circle emphasizing the importance of this place. These connections that are visualized by Akers in his painting also express this idea that remembering those relationships are a critical part of his identity and of being Osage.

In the lower right of the image, within the area identified as a river, a small land form emerges with a budding acorn tree located just on the left edge of the island. The small island placed within the river and its corresponding budding oak tree serves as an additional bridge intersecting earth and sky. The tree is budding despite the destruction that exists in the trees that have been visibly cut down in the valley just above and behind. This budding oak speaks to the hope represented by the acorns that float around like the seeds of germination from which the Osage people originated, descending from the sky in search of a new home. The tree buds while located on an island, isolated and, yet, inhabiting the same space as the elk. This emergent growth might also be seen as a metaphor alike Akers' own spiritual recovery and reinvigoration of his participation within Osage cultural practices after relocating to Kansas.

Just to the upper left of the island, a series of bubbles rest atop the watery surface. Akers described that he uses bubbles, circles, and ovals as visual devices to draw attention to important places within his image. He aligned the circular form of the bubble to a "transitional thing."[184] He explained that the bubbles were delicate worlds

[184] Norman Akers, interview by author, September 15, 2017, transcript.

all unto themselves, subject to immediate extinction upon being popped. "I do think of it as a doorway that has the potential to be an alternate space… It exists in a different space and time."[185] The alternate space that Akers references quite gently reminded the author of developing scientific concepts of multiple and simultaneous dimensions in the field of string theory. But it can also be alternatively read as a metaphor for how Indigenous communities live within larger worlds, both as hegemonic philosophies independent of the larger social structures and delicately subject to the ecological disruptions that occur beyond their control.

The delicate branches of the tree bud can also be seen as mimicking the fluid lines of the elk's antlers. The relationship between the elk's metaphorical symbolism and the oak tree bud are links between earth and sky, read together they form the strongest suggestion that Akers has painted a broader conceptual image, that of an abstraction of the concept of the Ho'-e-ga, the snare that is the conduit of life and death. This was confirmed with Akers, who when asked if the almost invisible series of triangulating white lines within the sky on either side of the elk's antlers were a reference to the wind-generating towers common in Oklahoma, described them,

> They're kind of like snares – that Ho'-e-ga. I've had conversations with other Osage artists about the snare of life. I've been playing with it in different ways of including them in the work. So that's what you're seeing, kind of a fragmented thing. It's kind of an interesting thing, because this painting was done before the windmills now at home….
>
> When I'm home, driving by those windmills, as you look at them, there's something about how those blades cut through the land and sky. The horizon is obstructed, those rotors interrupt that relationship between earth and sky.

So, the additional layers of the almost unseeable white lines, which are barely visible against the pale light of the sky serve as a confirmation that Akers has painted the

[185] Ibid.

Osage cosmology as both a personal experience and as an Osage epistemological site. The placement of the elk's open, bellowing mouth, just at the direct center of the painting, may also serve as an invocation of the snare as a place where the energy of life must flow, activated at the very center of *Okesa II*.

While these elements are evident within a simplistic formal analysis, it is at this point that this author struggles with further elaboration upon the significance of the topic of the Ho'-e-ga. Though the artist acknowledges the powerful presence and naming of this motif and its significance as an artistic intention, there exists a recognition that there are aspects of cultural knowledge that are not appropriately shared with, or to be discussed by, audiences composed of culturally uninitiated folks, scholars and laymen, alike. During the discussion with Akers, while he acknowledged the importance of the snare, upon arriving at the topic, he also twice expressed his need to exercise censorship, changing the topic in deferrence to what the Osage community would consider acceptable. Out of respect for the artist and the Osage community, the author would like to draw the reader's attention to this point in the research. Because of other research with Osage artists who shared with Akers a hesitancy to explore the topic in more depth, this author seeks to encourage other scholars to exercise restraint in feeling compelled to decode or elaborate on cultural beliefs for which the extant regard for its sacredness suggests that a shallow reading, as might be conducted by someone without an accountability back to the community directly, may serve to do more harm than benefit.[186] I am, here, reminded of the importance that Akers placed on the

[186] This exploration of the snare, interestingly, also came up when the author was interviewing another Osage artist, Anita Fields, about her work. She, also, mentioned the snare as an intentional motif within her work but asked that it not be discussed out

concepts of the "invisible world," which might also be perceived as unknowable, the things we don't know are there or, more specifically to this point, that we cannot or should not know.

Returning to a consideration of the painting formally, the way that Akers has handled the paint is worth discussion. So many elements of the image are painted in a manner that makes them recognizable as realistic subjects. One reads the landscape as a deep environment and the elk as the strong, migratory animal known in North America. The map is a transparent layer with the landscape visible behind, but the solidity of the lines, and their measurable invariability are recognizable. Within these realistic images, looking closely at the surface one can see that Akers applies the paint with gestural brushmarks, allowing the physicality of the application to suggest a layer of abstraction, and activating the painted construction that is otherwise resolved within the overall composition. This gestural mark making practice is often described as emotional and creates a certain subjectivity in the surface. This layer of abstraction reiterates what Akers described as the "invisible world." Knowing that he described himself as one who sought to provide the minutest details of his childhood images, the use of abstraction is not a default at lack of technical skill. Given this contrast, one has to consider that the loose brushstroke and the varying levels of visibility and transparency are part of the artist's intentions to give us what was most important without providing a distracting level of detail.

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of respect for the sacred nature of this motif to Osage epistemology. Neither artist did more than mention the Ho'-e-ga.

Conclusion

The framework applied to Akers' painting identifies the most potent elements as the manifestation of the landscape, the cartographic guides to its specific location in combination with the symbolic elements of the elk, the acorns, and the seen and unseen layers of the painting's surface, which lend to considering Akers' painting as a vortex for Osage identity and as a metaphor for Osage ontology (Table 3, page 134). Akers is expressing that dynamic through his repeated use of the acorn, the presence of the earth and sky, and the elk as the mediator that makes human experience in this place possible – place being a site that anchors both the mythical moment of creation and the present into the future.

It is important to recognize the mechanisms that convey knowledge within the Osage cultural system, carrying their philosophy, and that knowledge was the product of,

> empirical observations of natural phenomena and from reasoning. These beliefs and their associate religious institutions were the conscious creations of the priests... and were subject to periodic revision by humans in response to changes they perceived in the world of the living.[187]

Moving through time, both mythical and real, seeking connections and finding chaos at the intersection of his culture and lived experience, Akers uses Osage philosophy to construct harmony in this chaos, an action in Osage called *ga-ni-tha*.[188] The artist is well aware that his use of these iconic references follows in the tradition of his cultural traditions. La Flesche described that:

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[187] Bailey and La Flesche, The Osage and the Invisible World (1995), p. 277.
[188] Mathews, John Joseph. *The Osages, Children of the Middle Waters.* Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1961, p. 9.

> … the true collective knowledge of the Osages was recorded. In words, symbols, and actions, these rituals described the nature of the cosmos and the development of the Osage people. In essence, these rites recorded Osage history, theology, and philosophy while defining the socio-religious organization in highly metaphorical terms.[189]

where LaFlesche is describing that prior to contact Osage people already relied heavily on the use of symbols and songs to code their knowledge. The coding, referring to the metaphoric process, created the potential for allowing multi-valent application of the symbols. Knowledge could be attained, guided by various levels of initiation, and couched within the specific use of color, combination, and application of symbols. The role of metaphor was and continues to be, critical to the conveyence of tribal knowledge and identity.

In a manner, Akers' invocation of the primordial time of creation, matierialized through the elk, activates a cultural symbol that, to some great degree, draws upon a historical construction of Osageness. Akers has spoken about the importance that Francis LaFlesche has played in his construction of the Osage universe. Akers has repeatedly used the icons of the elk, an oak tree and its acorn, the cedar tree, maps, rivers, roads, and rotating space. He plays with doorways, sirens, and the linear function of power chords to express the relationship that Osage have to the past, the present, and the future.

Considering Akers's art through this historic lens, it becomes aligned with Nicholas Bourriaud's Relational Aesthetics, which expresses the potential for "a set of artistic practices which take as their theoretical and practical point of departure the whole of human relations and their social context, rather than an independent and

[189] Bailey and La Flesche, The Osage and the Invisible World (1995), p. 62.

private space."[190] Bourriaud's concept of relation aesthetics, though, is limited to a human experience. For the Osage, as with other Indigenous cultures, the relationships extend to incorporate local flora and fauna, certainly elements of the spiritual realm. These have been incorporated with the Indigenous concept of kincentricity – considering the relationships that exist between people and extends to the surrounding world, including animate and inanimate forces. For Akers, the map he has depicted on the surface of the painting creates a map to his world, drawing from the concept of the Ho'e-ga through the elk and the map, to the surface of this landscape.

Gilles Delueze's theory of virtuality can be conjoined with kincentricity to consider how Akers' paintings can be seen as portals, windows to the future. Deleuze theorizes that through the time-image of cinema, one is provided a concept of reality, that once understood, informs the actualization of the story. Given this actualization as a means to create the world from its beginnings through story, Indigenous people use their creation stories to understand their place in the world in the present. Each time they conduct a ceremony, perceive their experience as related to the primordial time of creation, or visualize their ontologies into the present, such as in a painting, the future becomes potentially informed by that moment of creation–a form of kincentricity.

Akers uses his paintings and the iconographic symbols of his Osage world to map the potential future for Osage people. Though his cartographic system may be one constructed in his own imagination and actualized into the painting, his use of the Osage creation story, nevertheless, regenerates the Osage experience from the past into the present. As he continues to invoke these symbols, he understands that he is keeping

[190] Bourriaud (2002), p. 113.

Osage culture alive, actualized in his paintings and is immediately new potential fodder for other Osage people to borrow or expand into the future. This is a profound act of artistic agency from a cultural perspective.

The act of making the art object is a personal act of sovereignty that expresses the importance of cultural ontology, tribal distinction and cultural autonomy.[191] The objects are made with the expectation that they will be presented, published, and discussed within the context of Native American and contemporary arts discourse. However, they are also made with the ambitions of imagining how tribal culture can be materialized into forms that draw upon history but create new future potential. As metaphorically illustrated, the acorns fall from the sky symbolizing the Osage people, who hold the potential to continue regenerating the earth and transforming the future through their potential. Akers activates the Osage past by visually mapping his relationships to the places of earth and sky while generating the potential for an Osage future through the image itself.

[191] This comment is inspired by the writing of Jolene Rickard on the general topic of artistic sovereignty.

MATERIALITY	**METAPHOR/SYMBOLISM**
Oil > Non-Osage medium | Western practice > European art canon 2D plane > conflating deep space + cartography as abstractions of space becomes an imagined space that refers to a place that is known. SNARE > place where all life is formed and ends.	Great Elk = making world hospitable for humanity = making earth & rivers SNARE = open mouth (at center of composition) > white blades > elk horns balance = earth | sky; horizon line; acorns, trees highways = heart line (pulse)
KINCENTRICITY	**TEMPORALITY**
SNARE = Osage cultural ethos of interconnectedness cartography = map to/of/away from home roads = arteries, connecting the body; connecting the heart to the head; pulsing vibrancy of living Western icons + Osage icons = NA personal experience of learning to speak as an artist.	2009 > NA arrived in KS finding way home to Osage community KCAI > learning from Masters at Nelson-Atkins Museum IAIA > learning to paint the landscape (plein air) UI-UC > began drawing his way home through his paintings.

Table 4: Analytical framework applied to Norman Akers' *Okesa II.*

Chapter 4: Marie Watt's Blanket Stories: Three Sisters, Four Pelts, Sky Woman, Cousin Rose, and All My Relations



Figure 17: Marie Watt, *Blanket Stories: Three Sisters, Four Pelts, Sky Woman, Cousin Rose, and All My Relations (2007)* Wool blankets, satin binding, with salvaged industrial yellow cedar timber base, 150 x 40 x 40 in. Seattle Art Museum, General Acquisition Fund, in honor of the Seattle Art Museum. Image courtesy of the artist.

Following Marie Watt's creation of *Sieve* (2002), an alabaster sculpture about sleep and sleeplessness inspired by a bout of insomnia, she wanted to create a sculpture of folded and stacked blankets as symbols of rest, warmth, and intimacy. While conceptualizing the materials in preparation she also saw that this assembly would serve as an acknowledgement of blankets as honoring gifts, a practice that creates relationship through the act of gifting blankets that, for Watt, is rooted within her Seneca tribal philosophy and shared with many other Indigenous American communities. After constructing an initial concept piece, *Stack* (2003) that was installed at Evergreen State



Figure 18: Marie Watt, *Sieve* (2002) Alabaster, dimensions variable – shown here 60 x 96 x 4 inches. Image courtesy of the artist.

College's Longhouse, Watt pushed the concept further. She was struck by the response of audiences to the metaphor of a blanket as a repository for stories. "The blankets on one hand were these ubiquitous objects, but I quickly recognized that these were storied objects."[192] From this impetus, her Blanket Stories series emerged. This chapter will analyze how Watt's sculpture, *Blanket Stories: Three Sisters, Four Pelts, Sky Woman, Cousin Rose, and All My Relations*, is a product of the artist's cultural heritage and expresses the artist's identity and intentions, and will include a formal analysis of the sculpture considering how the sculpture performs as contemporary Seneca art.

[192] Marie Watt, interview by author, September 21, 2017, transcript.

About the Artist: Marie Watt (b. 1967; Seneca/German-Scot)

Marie Watt is a professional artist who lives with her husband and two daughters in Portland, Oregon.[193] She and her sister grew up in the suburbs of Seattle, Washington, the daughters of a Seneca mother and German-Scot father. Though raised quite a distance from her Seneca tribal community, her mother's position as the local school district's Indian Education program coordinator provided access to a vibrant inter-tribal community that embraced the Watt family as part of the collective and diverse local Native community. Watt describe her access to the Native community,

> While we did occasionally see family on the East Coast, I grew up in the Pacific Northwest and Seattle's suburb's Native urban Indian community. We'd visit them and alternating years my Mom's family would visit us…. Flying was really expensive, so seeing family always involved a road trip from Seattle to Wyoming to New York, and back.[194]

Watt described that her father, Dave Watt, was raised on a homesteaded ranch in Arvada, Wyoming, though as a young man, he was moved around to accommodate his parent's teaching positions. The Watt family trips to New York were primarily to visit her maternal and tribal community on the Cattaraugus Reservation, just west of Buffalo, New York. Watt's early years were located in the Seattle area as a result of her mother's migration west with other nurses for employment at the University of Washington Hospital and her father's employment at Boeing.

Romayne Watt, Marie's mother, played an important role in the formation of Marie's early identity as a Native person. Foundationally, her mother was the direct link

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[193] Three interviews were conducted with Marie Watt for this research, two given in Portland, OR, during an in-person studio visit on September 21, 2017 (one at her gallery, PDX Gallery, and one at her studio) and an additional interview by phone on October 02, 2017. All three were recorded as digital files. All quotes by the artist are from these interviews, which have been edited by the artist for this text.

[194] Marie Watt, interview by author, September 21, 2017, transcript.

to her matriarchal Seneca community. That mother-daughter relationship is particularly key for the Seneca people for whom tribal membership can only be established through a Seneca mother.[195] As a woman descending from a Seneca mother, and, later, as the mother of two daughters of her own, Marie Watt fulfills the role created by Sky Woman during the creation of Turtle Island for the Seneca people perpetuating the pivotal and critical roles of mothers who contribute to a continuum of Seneca presence. While she has never lived in residence on the Cattaraugus Reservation, Watt remains connected to her community in numerous forms to be discussed more specifically below and her identity is important to her in all her roles as a daughter, mother, wife, and artist.

Beyond her role as mother, the significance of Romayne Watt's position as an educator was a recurrent theme in the interviews. Marie Watt repeatedly discussed the impact and importance of attending the after-school programs that her mother coordinated. She revisited her mother's storytelling program in two of the interviews, recognizing that she experienced these events as critical points of intergenerational Native gathering where participants received affirmations of the value of individual voices, regardless of age or knowledge base.

> At a time when storytelling was not having the kind of resurgence that it is right now. Think Story Corps, or podcasts, or Snap Judgment. So many things in our culture are story based, right now. My mom, during the 70s, one of the educational programs that she started for her Indian education constituents, or community, was this story telling program. It's interesting because I see a really huge parallel between what my mom did and how my own practice of sewing

[195] Seneca Nation of Indians, "Enrollment" (https://sni.org/culture/genealogy). As stated on the Seneca Nation of Indians' genealogy website, "… enrollment/membership in the Seneca Nation Of Indians is based on MATRILINEAL descent. In other words, the mother must be an enrolled member in order for the children to be enrolled. Keep in mind that our census records list ONLY members. If an enrolled Seneca man married a non-Seneca woman, the names of the wife and the resulting non-enrolled children DO NOT APPEAR in our records."

> circles has evolved. What my mom did was she started a storytelling program for students. It was an evening program. I can't remember how frequently it happened, maybe once a month or something like that. She saw the value of storytelling and people knowing their stories. And if they didn't know their stories, it was an opportunity to learn their stories. Instantly, I think the very first storytelling group, and these were potlucks. Of course it would be a potluck in the Native community. We love our food.[laughing]
>
> ... So quickly there were toddlers and grandparents, and school-aged children and parents. Everyone who wanted to be there was there. My mom has always been a good listener in that way. ~~S~~She saw what was happening and instantly just responded to that need for everyone to be part of this story circle. The activity began with a "talking stick." In this case the stick was once part of a cactus and had pod-like beads that I used to think sounded like rainwater. Whoever had the stick would introduce themselves, their tribe or ethnic identity, tell a story or share something about their day. Often, it was something a person was grateful for--which I better understand now--by extension resonates with Seneca and indigenous notions of expressing gratitude. Part of the storytelling circle was that it would be a way for kids to become public speakers, but also to become better listeners, because whoever had the talking stick was sharing their story. But everybody in that circles' voice was important and equal. Then that circle expands and contracts to include everyone, so it [was] always really inclusive. You see what I do now and it's like when you were younger you think you're going to fall far from the tree. But when you get older you get smarter and maybe you realize the tree is really good.[196]

Watt followed that description of what has become a highly regarded childhood memory with a comment that, "While I now acknowledge the obvious impact of this program and community as being foundational, my Dad teasingly and accurately reminds me that as a kid I loathed going to these events. I can only imagine how stubborn and bull headed I must have been, especially as a teen. I think it's important to share that my Dad was super active in these programs as well, both supporting my Mom, but also in participation."[197] As a mother now, Watt recognizes the role she has as a parent for introducing her children to experiences they may not immediately embrace.

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[196] Marie Watt, interview by author, September 21, 2017, transcript.
[197] Ibid.

In addition to her parents' influence, Watt recognized the important role that her aunts and uncles and grandmother had on her cultural identity. Watt mentions that she learned to understand her extended family's role after the passing of her grandmother.

> Maybe not as more significant, but I understood these relationships on their own terms, not only in relationship to kinship networks that I so intimately associated with my grandmother. My grandmother's home was the place where everyone gathered, so visiting Cattauragus and gathering takes on a different sort of effort and exchange. The internet is also an incredibly useful tool for connecting with family and keeping up to date on each other's news. I suspect this is true for most people who live far away from their extended families.
>
> We have ancient and modern tools at our disposal for connecting with one another. So now I understand these relationships in a new light. In a way, I feel closer to my aunts and uncles.[198]

Watt admits she wasn't sure how her family would be organized without the leadership of the matriarch, "I remember questioning—Whose house will we meet at when we go? Will we go as often?"[199] She describes that while there were uncertainties, what emerged were stronger direct relationships to her aunts and uncles that were no longer mediated through her relationship to her grandmother.

> In that really family way, I think of how they embraced what I was doing, as a Seneca person, as a family member, as an artist. So they would say, 'Hey, we need to go see this show." When I'm home they would take me to a show of carved antlers or things that they thought I would be really interested in. I feel grateful that they have long encouraged my artistic pursuits.[200]

Her extended family's support for Watt as an artist has been an important source of connection, not only through familial ties, but through the arts to the extended Seneca community. She explained,

> I do feel strong ties to extended communities, some who are also Iroquois and similarly engaged in education, arts, and culture ecosystems. Lisa Watt, Marissa

[198] Marie Watt, personal communication with author during editing of text, January 18, 2017.
[199] Marie Watt, interview by author, September 21, 2017, transcript.
[200] Ibid.

> Corwin, Peter Jemison, Jeanette Miller—these people are like family because of Seneca notions of kinship, but this way of relating or literally being related, exists beyond Iroquoian or even Indigenous realms. In some ways the notion of the Seneca marker of the axis mundi, is the marker for a host of relationships that connect us.[201]

While family remains a critical part of her connection to the Seneca community, she recounts the importance of creating a national and culturally centric network of arts professionals to her growth into the role as artist. This network is significant because, though Watt grew up in a strong inter-tribal community, the potential of being an artist didn't reveal itself until she was in her early twenties. She recalls that she enjoyed making things growing up but never aspired to become an artist. However, as an undergraduate student in Speech Communications at Willamette University, Salem, Oregon, she was encouraged to take an art class, one that she enjoyed quite a bit. The next year, she was encouraged, as the recipient of the Hallie Ford scholarship and by her instructors, to consider her artistic talent seriously by becoming an art major. Interested in the arts and intrigued to continue making her own, Watt added a second major and graduated with a double major in Speech Communications and Art. This decision to consider pursuing art would prove to be fortuitous.

Not quite feeling prepared to explore graduate art school options, during her final year at Willamette she learned about the Institute of American Indian Arts, Santa Fe, New Mexico, a small two-year fine arts college, at a Portfolio Day event in San Francisco.[202] Watt was completing her undergraduate degrees but the opportunities at Willamette had not provided access to a strong Native American community. Watt

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[201] Marie Watt, personal communication with author during editing of text, 18 January 2018.

[202] Portfolio Days are recruiting events targeted at art students, where multiple schools convene in a single location reviewing student portfolios to discuss opportunities that may exist to match artistic interests, faculty offerings, and creative environments.

explained, "I felt there was a void at this small liberals arts college that I needed to understand. I hoped attending the Institute of American Indian Arts (IAIA) would be a place where I could find connections that might ground me further."[203] Interested in the potential of being in a strong Native arts community, Watt applied and was accepted into the Museum Studies program at the historically significant IAIA.[204] In 1990, IAIA conferred only Associate degrees, which may have been perceived as a step backwards, but the redirection proved to be beneficial.

> For me, going to IAIA was a lateral move. Being in New Mexico was a transformative experience from the standpoint of seeing people… not just people, Native people and professionals, making a living as artists. Seeing how art was being positioned in world-class museums. And getting a broader exposure to this mini-United Nations, tribes and indigenous people from all over the USA and Canada, and other places in the world… But also, living in this community where there was a very strong Hispanic community. Just pretty different from my experience of living in the suburbs of Seattle and going to this small liberal arts college in Salem, Oregon. It was diverse and dynamic and stimulating. There were so many conversations that excited me.[205]

While a student at IAIA, Watt began to grow a network of Native artists that has continued to have an influence on her professional career. Other students who were attending at the same time include several who have become nationally significant artists, such as Da-ka-xeen Mehner (Tlingit/N'ishga), Chris Pappan (Kaw/Osage/Cheyenne River Sioux), Heidi Bigknife (Shawnee), and Marwin Begaye

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[203] Marie Watt, interview by author, September 21, 2017, transcript..

[204] The IAIA was founded in 1962 at the Santa Fe Indian School, New Mexico, by a committed group of Native artists, educators, and arts advocates who believed that there were economic and cultural benefits to training Native Americans to pursue careers in the artistic fields. Initially an upper-level high school program, it grew into a college program that began by offering certificates, then associate degrees. It now offers bachelor degrees in Studio Arts, Creative Writing, and Museum Studies, with a master's degree offered in the field of Creative Writing. For further reading on IAIA, a detailed history has been written by Joy L. Gritton, *The Institute of American Indian Arts: Modernism and U.S. Indian Policy* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2000).

[205] Marie Watt, interview by author, September 21, 2017, transcript.

(Navajo). Watt majored in Museum Studies where she studied with Charles Dailey and Maneulita Lovato (Santo Domingo). Additionally, many of the faculty members with whom Watt worked directly as a student or, later, as a museum staff member are important members of her arts network, including Melanie Yazzie (Navajo), Duane Slick (Mesqwaki/Ho-Chunk), C. Maxx Stevens (Seminole), Jean LaMarr (Paiute/Pit River), Ada Medina (Tejano), and Dirk DeBruycker (Belgian), Larry McNeil (Tlingit/Nis'gaa), among others. Marie Watt was a student at IAIA from 1990-1992, the final year as an intern at the IAIA Museum with Nancy Marie Mithlo (Chiricahua Apache), after which Watt transitioned into her position as Curator of Education (1992-1994).[206] During the interim summer, Watt interned at the National Gallery of Art and met scholars David Penney and George Horse Capture.[207] To the importance of these relationships, Watt commented, "It has been this series of encounters and relationships that have brought me to the place I am today as an artist."

In addition to attending IAIA and receiving an Associates of Fine Art in museum studies, Watt continued taking art classes. When considering whose influence she felt most on her cultural identity, she revisited this period accounting on the people whose impact she had felt. Initially, she was considering her experience working under the leadership of Paul Gonzales, IAIA Museum Director, who provided a leadership example that was based on community-centric accountability and collectivity, "Working with Paul was empowering… if he had confidence in you and you did good,

[206] It was during this latter period that the author met Watt, as co-worker at the IAIA Museum.
[207] Rebecca Dobkins, *Marie Watt Lodge* (Salem, OR: Hallie Ford Museum of Art, 2012): 26-27.



Figure 19: Marie Watt, *Untitled* (1995) Oil on linen, 8 x 10 inches. Image courtesy of artist.

or ideally exceptional, work that he felt that it brought up the whole team."[208]

Expanding beyond Gonzales, Watt considered the rest of her time at the IAIA Museum, specifically.

> Previously, I worked under Rick Hill (Tuscarora) at the IAIA Museum and that was meaningful too. I enjoyed having Iroquois mentors. Ray Gonyea (Onondaga) was also at the museum then. There was a joke that IAIA was becoming the Iroquois mafia because there were a lot of Haudenosaunee people working there at the time. The poet Alex Jacobs (Mohawk) and the playwright Bruce King (Oneida) were also part of the count.[209]

She described later that being in New Mexico included multiple points of influence on her decisions about her future. "I saw that people in New Mexico were able to make art and make a living doing this thing called being an artist. That was

[208] Marie Watt, interview by author, digital recording, Portland, OR, 2 October 2017.
[209] Ibid.

something that really stuck with me."[210] She went on to describe how powerfully affirming it was for her to be surrounded by a vibrant arts community that was filled with Native people actively engaged in the process. "And I was on the fence about taking a curatorial direction or becoming an artist. Ultimately, I took the direction of being an artist, as it naturally suited my personality."[211] In 1994, Watt left her position at the IAIA Museum to pursue graduate studies in painting and printmaking at Yale University's School of Art. She describes,

> I think that was an important stepping-stone in shaping my identity as an artist, but also in shaping my direction. I went to New Haven from Santa Fe, New Mexico and, again, that was a radically different cultural experience. The dearth of culturally different voices at Yale, and the absence of an indigenous support system probably ended up shaping my work. I explored materials and themes that referenced my Seneca identity and worked from the inspiration I found from the conversations that were a part of my experience at the Institute of American Indian Art.[212]

During her residency in New Haven, Connecticut, Watt also pursued other opportunities for her artistic development, including a summer intensive program at Skowhegan School of Painting & Sculpture in 1995 between her two years in graduate school. Being in a program where her experience as a graduate student in a rigorous academic program was shared with the other attendees who came from a variety of graduate arts programs helped Watt put her experience into perspective. She recounted the importance learning about Eva Hesse, Ann Hamilton, Anna Mendietta, and Annie Albers as a young artist. Her studies in art history also included close readings on many of the men in art history, including both Jasper Johns and Constantin Brancusi, whose influence will be discussed in greater detail later.

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[210] Ibid.
[211] Ibid.
[212] Ibid.

Upon completing the program at Yale in 1996, Watt returned to the Pacific Northwest. While serving as an art instructor at Portland Community College, Watt continued developing her conceptual ideas, working for a period in both painting and sculpture, though painting remained prominent in her focus. However, she had introduced materials from her Seneca culture into her process, exploring corn husks in particular. The introduction of this medium with a customary history within her tribe's practice effected a shift in her examination through other materails how one explores the world.

In one work, from this period, *Untitled* (1995), an interest in constructed layers was already becoming evident. Like several paintings from this period, *Untitled* expresses strong horizontal movements in a series of applied bands of earth-toned colors. The portfolio on her website includes a variety of sketches and finished work that reveal the evolution of her ideas through diverse materials exercising her conceptual development of layers.

> I was looking at cornhusks, holding them up to light and saw these intricate cellular and modular patterns that recalled mapping and masonry. So the striations became drawing marks and, eventually, modular sculptural elements as a way of contemplating and even expressing this source material in relationship to similar phenomena in nature and the built environment. The outcome had many references: abstraction, landscape, the natural world, and architecture.[213]

As early as 1996, Watt was beginning to imagine through her sketches the formation of layered stones or bricks, as visual extensions of the internal structure of the cornhusks she had been working with. This is evident in *Light on the Path* (1996), a series of sketches drawn in walnut ink on pre-printed book pages. She continued

[213] Marie Watt, personal communication with author during editing process for this text, January 18, 2018.

developing the idea of layers, evolving them into structural bridges through her sketches. Eventually, Watt's exercises were being proposed as public art projects, as seen in *Pedestrian* (2000), a site-specific bench temporarily located on the campus of Portland Community College, Sylvania Campus, that both mirrors the arcs of the nearby transportation bridges and emulates the local geographic slate layers.[214]

It was during the early years of her return to the Northwest Coast that Watt began to integrate into the network of Indigenous artists in the region. She recounts meeting painter James Lavadour (Walla Walla),

> One person who is really significant in that journey then was Jim Lavadour, the founder of Crow's Shadow Institute of Art in Pendleton, Oregon. Jim was a person who made a living as a full-time artist, and is one of Oregon's most celebrated painters. Not only was Jim a role model for me, but Crow's Shadow became this conduit to other sorts of relationships that have impacted my life and artistic growth since.[215]

It was at James Lavadour's invitation that Watt participated in a symposium held at Crow's Shadow Institute of Arts (CSIA) in 2001. "Conduit to the Mainstream" was held to consider what role CSIA would play in promoting contemporary Native American artists through the medium of printmaking. With many of the leading Indigenous artists, including James Luna, Kay WalkingStick, Truman Lowe, Joe Feddersen, and Edgar Heap of Birds, Watt participated in the conversations that set a path for the Native arts center since. Following her symposium participation, Watt completed five residencies (2002, 2003, 2005, 2011, and 2017) at CSIA working with Frank Janzen, a Tamarind-trained Master Printer.[216] At each residency, Watt was able

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[214] While the bench's outdoor installation was site-specific and temporary, the bench remains in the Portland Community College permanent art collection.
[215] Marie Watt, interview by author, October 2, 2017, transcript.
[216] Crow's Shadow Institute of Arts, *Crow's Shadow Institute of Art/Print Gallery/Marie Watt,* http://crowsshadow.org/artist/marie-watt/ (accessed November 15, 2017).

to explore through lithography and woodblock printmaking concepts that were in dialogue with contemporary art, while uniquely exploring her ideas of mark making. Watt recognizes her participation in this event as a seminal moment in her career, opening doors through her contact with the senior artists in the group that would culminate in new opportunities for the national recognition she has received since.

Like many artists, Watt has an ongoing practice of research to invigorate her process with new material. At the time, she was considering the self-portraits of Edvard Munch (Norwegian), particularly one titled *Between the Clock and the Bed* (1940-1943). Munch painted himself looking somewhat trapped, standing just inside the doorway between a standing clock and a bed, covered in a blanket.



Figure 20: Edvard Munch, *Self Portrait. Between the Clock and the Bed* (1940-43) Oil on canvas, 47 3/4 x 58 3/4 inches.



Figure 21: Jasper Johns, *Between the Clock and the Bed* (1981) Encaustic on canvas, three panels; 72 1/8 x 126 3/8 inches. Image provided by Museum of Modern Art (#104.1982.a-c).

The Metropolitan Museum of Art described Munch's painting:

> *Self Portrait: Between the Clock and the Bed*—is also one of the last works the artist painted. It will serve as a touchstone and guide to the other works on view. This remarkable painting shows the artist's bedroom, with a door opening to the studio beyond. The artist stands emotionless between the grandfather clock, which—having no face or hands—exists outside of time, and the bed, in which the span of a human's life takes place.[217]

Jasper Johns, who had been playing with crosshatch marks independently since *Untitled* (1972)[218], looked at the same Munch painting and went on to focus on the repetitive marks for the next decade. He borrowed Munch's title for three different works, the final of which was created as a triptych panel that was covered in crosshatch marks

[217] Metropolitan Museum of Art, *Edward Munch: Between the Clock and the Bed*, an exhibition held November 15, 2017 – February 4, 2018. https://www.metmuseum.org/press/exhibitions/2017/edvard-munch (accessed 11/16/17).

[218] *Untitled* (1972), is an oil, encaustic and collage on four-interrelated canvases with objects, 72 1/16 x 193 inches, held in the permanent collection of the Museum Ludwig, Cologne.

related to what Munch had used to describe his bed cover. The crosshatching was a motif that was repeated by both Munch and Johns to express tension located within the human experience.[219]

At the time that she was thinking about Munch and Johns' use of the hatch

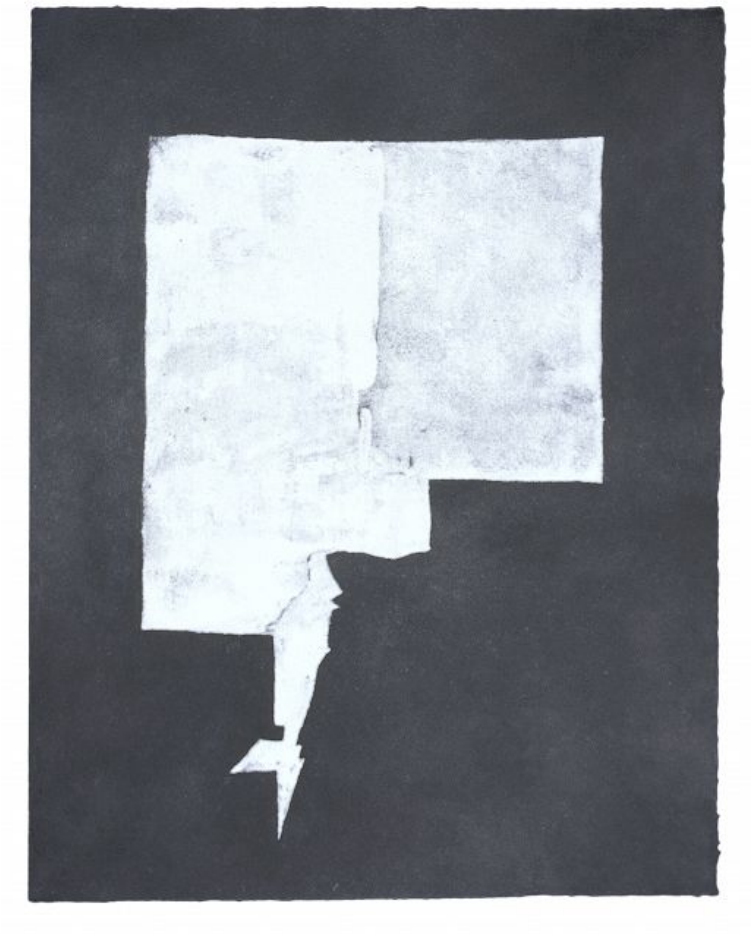

Figure 22: Marie Watt, *The Space Between Clock and Bed* (2002) Alabaster dust, binder, handmade paper; 18 x 12 inches. Image courtesy of the artist.

marks, marks that correlated to her interests in the intrinsic qualities of the cornhusks, Watt was experiencing recurring bouts of insomnia. Perhaps finding an affinity for the tension expressed by both artists, Watt created a painting to which she applied the same

[219] Ravenal, John B. *Jasper Johns and Edvard Munch: inspiration and transformation.* Richmond, VA: Virginia Museum of Fine Arts and Yale University Press, 2016.

title. Using the alabaster dust created from the creation of *Sieve*, Watt added a binding medium and paints the dust on hand-made paper. The dark gray background of the paper became the silhouette indicating the location of the bed and the clock sitting on an adjacent end table. The white is an indication of the space, both as a body of light and as a type of psychological distance that represents the time that is lost from rest. The field of white, while mostly solid, reveals the application marks in a manner that evokes an awareness of the space marked by time, hopefulness expressed through the contrast of light and shadow and solemnity knowing that the white space is the product of the durability and vulnerability of the alabaster, the dust resulting from the drilling and shaping that had occurred. This is the only title that Watt shares with both iconic painters, interpreted through her own experience and the residue of her creative labors.

From a review of her online portfolio one can see that the repeated use of parallel lines and primary colors in Johns' painting became fodder for her continued exploration. The crosshatching became an interesting motif that Watt borrowed in her lithograph edition printed at CSIA in 2002, *Guardian* (2002). Thus, this homage to the work of Munch and Johns begins a conversational series that Watt extends for several years. In her lithographic work, the drawn and compulsive repetition married with the layers of shadows created through the printing process, which also relies on repetition of laying inks on the plates, construct a feminine response to Johns' painted hatch marks.

This is most evident in her lithographs, where she uses the hatch marks, while also making references to the stitches of quilts and loose, hanging threads. In so doing, she creates a dialogue between the painted hatch marks with the visible stitches in hand-sewn textiles. Interestingly, the abstraction into hatch marks executed in Munch's original paintings is likely derived from those hand-sewn textiles that Watt circulates back to revisit.



Figure 23: Marie Watt, *Guardian* (2002), Lithograph, Ed. of 12, 17.5 × 18 inches. Printed at Crow's Shadow Institute of Arts. Image courtesy of artist.



Figure 24: Marie Watt, *Cover* (Between Clock and Bed) (2002) Reclaimed wool, satin binding, silk thread; 12 x 12 inches. Image courtesy of artist.

The same year, Watt explores the hatch marks as a three dimensional painting in *Cover (Between Clock and Bed)* which completes the circle from Munch's painting of suffering to Johns' distilled studies in mark making to the textile from which they emerged. In Watt's use of a repurposed wool blanket's pink satin binding to express the crosshatching, she invigorates Johns' nuanced painting into an interpretation that evokes memories of safety and comfort, countering the tension that both Munch and Johns evoked. Watt's application of the blanket as a material defies the original symbolism often interpreted with Munch's placement of the bed, as a symbol of an

unavoidable death.[220] Watt's use of the textile materials expressing the hatch marks lends the repetitive marks with the hope of childhood, the role of memory, and the use of blankets as intergenerational vehicles of comfort and relationship. From these repetitive marks, Watt continues using the motif repeatedly in her work, both as prints and through textile-embodied paintings. Her natural inclination for the repetition and compulsive attention to mark making seems suited to the hatch marks as a motif.

This natural inclination may have a relationship to Watt's interest in printmaking. Crosshatching is a basic technique within printmaking to create both texture, shadow, and form within an etched surface. The qualities of crosshatching include repetition and a strong sense of linearity, all resonant with her close inspection with cornhusks. Through printmaking her interests converged with her studies of art history. She shared an interest in printmaking with Johns, who is often credited with his pivotal use of the medium, in promoting printmaking as a fine art medium, beyond the commercial purposes with which it is most associated.[221] However, there emerges an interesting contrast between Watt's interpretation of Johns' mark making, particularly in the endowment of meaning within the final image. Johns' early paintings of flags and targets were intended as a rejection of meaning in response to the work of the Abstract Impressionists, who were the leaders in the contemporary art work at the time of Johns' early years as an artist. Johns is quite famous for his open dismissal of an intended

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[220] John B. Ravenal, *Jasper Johns and Edvard Munch: inspiration and transformation.* (Richmond, VA: Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, 2016). The Virginia Museum of Fine Arts recently held an exhibition exploring the relationship specifically between Munch and Johns, using as its cornerstone the "Between the Clock and the Bed" paintings by both artists, including the installation of Munch's blanket for reference.
[221] Elizabeth Armstrong, Sheila McGuire, Walker Art Center, *First Impressions: Early Prints by Forty-six Contemporary Artists* (Hudson Hills Press, 1989).

meaning in his art. As art critic Sebastian Smee wrote in the Boston Globe, discussing an exhibition of John' work in 2012,

> One of the reasons Johns's work is so difficult to write about — so tender to the touch — is that it is stuffed with allusions and clues that amount to a kind of secret order or logic, and thence to what might be thought of as "meaning." And yet, frustratingly, it goes out of its way to obscure meaning.
>
> That's because Johns is not interested in clear meanings. Clear meanings are for children and lawyers. He is interested instead in life, and is rightly contemptuous of critics and academics who try to act as village explainers of his work.[222]

Johns' was openly disinterested in the signs and symbols for which Abstract Expressionism had gained its following. Instead, he professed an interest to paint "what is known," dispelling the assignment of a stagnant meaning to any imagery. Carolyn Lanchner addressed this in relationship specifically to the crosshatch marks,

> With infinite finesse – in pictures such as *Between the Clock and the Bed* – he retooled the hatch mark, converting it from a sign signifying a turn into depth to an abstract trajectory inscribing the planarity of its support. In so doing he devised a singular sort of abstraction, neither geometric nor gestural but combining aspects of both.[223]

What for Johns was an abstraction of the surface, Watt appropriated for her own purposes. Borrowing not only the hatch marks, but also several of Johns images that were, like the reclaimed wool blankets, previously used for other purposes.

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[222] Sebastian Smee, *Meaning, mystery in prints by Jasper Johns Harvard exhibit narrow but deep.* (https://www.bostonglobe.com/arts/theater-art/2012/06/09/meaning-mystery-johns-prints/iRdaheFbQZEbGMvwyHYJ4K/story.html#, accessed 11 17, 2017).
[223] Carolyn Lanchner, *Jasper Johns: a print retrospective* (New York, NY: Museum of Modern Art, 2009).



Figure 25: Marie Watt, *Flag* (2003) Reclaimed wool blankets, satin binding, thread; 132 x 123 inches. Image courtesy of artist.

Watt went on to engage in a playful dialogue with Johns directly for the next several years. Remaining diverse in her image construction, she explored Johns' iconic images through a variety of media, including printmaking and repurposed blankets until 2015. She engaged with the iconic images made by Johns in both form and palette, but most often materialized the image through the repurposed wool blankets. One of particular interest to this discussion is *Flag* (2003), made of wool, satin binding, and thread. Watt has organized the repurposed red, yellow, and blue wool sections into the symmetrical and centrally located target in the format for which Johns is well known. Notice, however, that Watt has borrowed the title referencing Johns' encaustic paintings

of the American flag and used it with the iconic image of the target. In so doing, Watt has positioned the target into a signaling form, one that is often used to identify a group or movement. This was explained during a conversation in 2010, during a visit to her home at the time in Brooklyn, New York, when Watt described to me that the repeated concentric circles were not a symbol only of the iconic target, but in her hands shifts to have a specific meaning, representing the generations of subsequent belly buttons that through the birthing process describe the Seneca matrilineal descent system.

> For flag, I was thinking a lot about circles as a primordial form that connects human experience across time. Depicting it out of wool was a way of steering the conversation back to its origins, as well as a way of repatriating it from a certain commercial retailer. I was thinking of belly or bellies, but also the sun, moon, planets, stars, eyes, balls, etc. Circles are one of the first shapes children draw. So from here it seems fit to expand on the belly buttons, or even the word Omphalos.[224]

The reference to navels, matrilineality and women, in general, is further compounded through the use of textiles that naturally allude to the handiwork of women, as mended objects and those made by seamstresses. Her implication of feminine constructions within the contemporary art dialogue she has created can be read as a feminist response to the dominant male-centric perspectives with which contemporary art history continues to be fraught. However, her intentions exceed the casual feminist priorities, borrowing most directly from the Seneca proto-feminist worldview with which she was raised. This can be seen in the intended meaning, the titles, and the description of materials. Specifically her identification of the textiles as "reclaimed" wool. Janet C. Berlo provides an interpretation of the significance, "This modifier suggests agency,

[224] Marie Watt, personal communication with author during editing process, January 18, 2018. Omphalos is the ancient Greek word for navel and has been used to reference Delphi, or the Omphalos of Delphi, a stone that was mythically dropped by two eagles commanded by Zeus to find the center of the world.

activity; she is reclaiming the blankets and their meaning for a post-colonial Native American art, reclaiming the histories of ownership, and even the histories of sensation and emotion inherent in them."[225] By doing so, Watt invites the viewer to read the sewn stitches and overall compositions to be discussed in concert with referent works, without diminution. Watt's intentionality can be, therefore, seen as acts of feminist reclamation of the circle as a marker.

The artist, who considers these hanging textiles as a form of painting, embraces this allusion, constructing them so that they are shown hanging against a wall, a two-dimensional presentation. When Watt describes the textiles works as paintings, she is positioning them as "fine art," thus inviting the materials to be discussed as a codified medium but also it is a nuanced criticism of the field of Native art.

> My insistence that this is an extension of painting and interdisciplinary work comes from the place of academic training, but more importantly a belief that contemporary art by native artists deserves to be understood and interpreted beyond a lens of craft, archeaolgy and anthropology. I am not trying to separate myself from a creative and dynamic history, but to exist in a more expansive domain; they way I perceive Indigenous people always have. This conversation is changing radically in academic circles, but it has a lot further to go on the ground.[226]

This intention of retaining the "fine art" presentation is an act of artistic sovereignty, playing with the tropes that often are often imposed between arts and crafts, a criticism that draws attention to these definitions as possibly extensions of Colonialist priorities.

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[225] Janet C. Berlo, "Back to the Blanket: Marie Watt and the Visual Language of Intercultural Encounter," in *Into the Fray: The Eiteljorg Fellowship for Native American Fine Art, 2005*, ed. James H. Nottage (Indianapolis, IN: Eiteljorg Museum of American Indians and Western Art with University of Washington Press, 2005): 114.
[226] Marie Watt, personal communication to the author during editing process, January 18, 2018.



Figure 26: Marie Watt, *Water/Sky* (2004) Reclaimed wool blankets, satin bindings, thread; 115 x 126 inches. Image courtesy of the artist.

Watt's insistence on these constructions being perceived as fine art was also likely a result of her training at Yale, where she met a great deal of resistance to her work, particularly because she often incorporated non-fine art materials, working with cornhusks at the time. For Watt, the husks represented one of the primordial sustenent forces of life, but for the formal painting/printmaking program, they were the stuff of tribal crafts. The inability to imagine the cornhusks as fine art materials was anathema to Watt's resourceful nature and interest in working as a Seneca artist.

She described in *Lodge*, the challenges she faced as a female student in an art department without any tenured women professors and a disinterest in exploring materials,

> At this time, some graduate programs were becoming multidisciplinary; Yale, however, was still very medium-specific… While I wasn't discouraged from making sculptures in the painting department, I can't say I was really encouraged either. I think it did pique some people's interest as I was attempting to make connections to my personal visual and familial experiences, but there was also a concern about my work being craft and this, to them, was problematic.
>
> I found great comfort, if not allies, in the Bauhaus movement, whose artists saw the connection between art and life and embraced it fully in practice, not just in the school.

She went on to credit her interest in the work of post-war German artists as, those of the Bauhaus for whom there was no distinction between art and craft and life, and the Neo-Expressionist painters, saying, "I have a fascination with German artists that I struggle to articulate. "[227]

In discussing the issue of German artists further, Watt explained that while she appreciated the geometric abstraction often associated with their work, that there also exists an affinity for her between post-World War II German and Jewish artists,

> I am drawn to their abstract narratives driven by historical displacement and artists' attempts to understand their identity in a precarious post-war state in which some people have fled and others have stayed. While hearing about Indian Wars and Relocation policies directed at Native people, I think it is interesting that contemporary Native art hasn't been assessed under this "post-war" lens, maybe because I identify with it. Sadly the reality is that the assault on Native people, Native lands, Native natural resources continues to this day. Contemporary Indigenous artists have been addressing similar issues for some time now, and I have been trying to understand this aspect of my self and my history, in the work I make.[228]

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[227] Dobkins, *Marie Watt Lodge,* 29.
[228] Marie Watt, personal communication with author during editing process, January 18, 2018.

One can imagine that there are elements of German philosophy that converge in her embodiment as a Seneca and German/Scot person, to which all of these contribute. Watt, further explained that,

> I don't know that it was the geometric abstraction [often associated with Bauhaus] that interested me, as much as the Bauhaus notion that art and craft are intrinsically linked to culture and life. This seemed more akin to a model of creative traditions in Seneca and Indigenous communities. This was a place where there wasn't a distinction between high and low art. The high/low conversation always bothered me.[229]

All of these cultural, hierarchical and gendered influences climax in her appropriation of Johns' target.

The target form would be a regular motif in her work for several years, reimagined over a series of works into her own palette and into a series of interpretations for whom the titles suggest Seneca worldviews of the sky, water, and relationships. In *Water/Sky* (2005), Watt synthesizes a field of hatch marks with the target into parallel relationships through the textiles. Though addressed several times as a lithograph, it appears that the textile work is where Watt fully develops her concepts into their final forms. In *Water/Sky*, the target is located to the left of center with the full extent of the right border composed of hatch marks enunciated through satin binding. The use of the bindings is repeated on the target through their application on the opposing side within the third, of five, concentric circle. While this works seems to serve as a resolution by Watt of the relationship of her work to Johns, one cannot ignore the partial circle that is separated from the concentric group and breaks the lower left border of the textile. This seemingly emergent circle acts as a bridge to the continued use of concentric circles that Watt enacts, though they are no longer restricted to the

[229] Ibid.

sequence of five, which is how Johns used them restrictively. The emergent circle provides the expansion of the sequence to a seventh circle.

As Watt continued to use the circles, in whole or part in later works, they began to be transformed into concentric sequences of seven, and beyond, while also shifting in scale to circles that are irregular in widths, shifting even within a single image. This is in contrast to Johns' targets, which are always scaled relative to one another within a single image. In Watt's continued uses, the circle seems to take on more boldly a relationship to Seneca worldviews, which may be a shift from the conversation with Johns to one with her cultural identity and the role of the circle therein. The repeated use of seven, as in the number of circles, or circular layers, is a visual interpretation of a well-known concept within Iroquoian philosophy of seven generations, describing the responsibility each generation holds in their decision making responsibilities for the impact to be held in the subsequent seven generations. If, as Watt describes, the concentric circles represent the sequence of Seneca belly buttons, their enumeration as a sequence of seven generations harnesses even broader cultural significance. It is in this shift in her work and its intentionality, that we see Watt's interest in the relationship of the target begin to be matched by an interest in the use of textiles, specifically how she is using the reclaimed wool blankets.



Figure 27: Marie Watt, *Ladder* (2004) Reclaimed wool, satin bindings, thread, embroidery floss; 10 x 13 inches. Image courtesy of the artist.

The Art: Blanket Stories: *Three Sisters, Four Pelts, Sky Woman, Cousin Rose, and All My Relations*

In 2003, as the relationship to the target and the hatch marks begins to align with Seneca worldviews, Watt seems to begin conceiving of the folded blanket as the potential enunciation of the sequence of hatch mark lines, or perhaps the hatch marks as folded blankets. Potentially, this layering is an interpretation of the layers of cellular structures located in the cornhusks, or a culmination of these references together. In *Stack*, Watt's conversation with contemporary art extends beyond her references to

Johns and Munch. Particularly as the hatch marks transition from being repeated at an angle to being horizontal and stacked vertically, lending towards alternative interpretations through the satin binding, as in *Untitled* and *Ladder* (both 2004). Watt's repetition of the lines are both hatch marks that are layered horizontally, but as they start to move upward, one can also see them as exposed segmented layers of the target, flattened if imagined on a grand scale of reference. This is particularly evident in *Ladder,* where the concave pull of the satin bindings mimics the arc of the lower portion of the target. Moreover, a folded blanket is so commonly folded in layers, that her emphasis on at least a sequence of three hatch marks seems to support the possibility for this conceptual relationship. Again, we can see Watt using Seneca philosophy represented by the seven segments of binding, reiterating the reference to the seven generations.

In *Ladder*, a new concept emerges in the embroidery located on the surface of the horizontally layered silk bindings to the right of center where Watt has outlined a drawing of stacked blankets. This surface application of philosophical reference is bound to the lower layers of cloth through the embroidered drawing of a series of stacked blankets, visually transporting *Stack* to the surface of the inferred ladder. So why place the blanket stack in relationship to the seven generations?

To answer that question, the sculpture of *Stack* merits further analysis. The interpretation of hatch marks as folded blankets, and the interest in the blanket as a symbol of receiving contribute to an emergent concept resulting in *Stack* (2004). Her first sculptural installation of a tower of folded blankets was made for installation at the gallery located in Evergreen State College's Longhouse Education and Cultural Center,

which is a gallery established for the presentation of Indigenous art specifically, unlike the several gallery and museum installations at which the previous work was exhibited. It may be that Watt felt a freedom to create a work for that space that, to some degree, initiated out of a cultural impetus. *Stack* was composed of blankets that were all reclaimed from thrift stores and showed evidence of the lives that were "imprinted" on them by their previous owners. This was an important value to be found in the blankets, according to Watt, who was quoted in *Lodge* by Rebecca Dobkins,

> We are received in blankets, and we leave in blankets. The work… is inspired by the stories of those beginnings and endings, and the life in between. I am interested in human stories and rituals implicit in everyday objects… I find myself attracted to the blanket's two- and three-dimensional qualities: On a wall, a blanket functions as a tapestry, but on a body it functions as a robe and living art object. Blankets also serve a utilitarian function. As I fold and stack blankets, they begin to form columns that have references to linen closets, architectural braces, memorials (Trajan's Column), sculpture (Brancusi, for one), the great totem poles of the Northwest, and the conifer trees around which I grew up. In Native American communities, blankets are given away to honor people for being witnesses to important life events – births and coming-of-age, graduations and marriages, namings and honorings. For this reason, it is considered as great a privilege to give a blanket away as it is to receive one.[230]

The blankets, a quotidian object, are wielded as powerfully multivalent symbols in Watt's sculptural and painterly works. While her impulse to incorporate them within her art was based in response to the subject of *Sieve*, they participate in a century of Duchampian appropriation of things that we know. Like Johns, who used the targets and flags for the same purpose, Watt's use of the blankets, even the stacking of blankets, feels at once familiar and out of place. In addition to the dialogue that Watt intentionally engaged with contemporary art history, she simultaneously employs a Seneca worldview, endowing the blankets with a meaning that is less evident to the untrained eye, but no less powerful for those familiar with the story of Sky Woman.

[230] Dobkins (2012), 43.



Figure 28: Marie Watt, *Stacked* (2003) Wool blankets, salvaged cedar; 96 x 20 x 20 inches. Image courtesy of the artist.

While discussing the *Blanket Stories* series over dinner in 2011, Watt explained in a casual conversation that for her, the blanket stacks were imagined as homage to the earliest of the Seneca creations stories.[231] She imagined each stack of blankets as a way to prepare a space for the progenitor of the Seneca people, Sky Woman (*Awe^{n}ha'i'*), who was wife to the Ancient One, the masculine deity "who ruled the sky world and lived in the great celestial lodge beneath the celestial tree."[232] To better understand Watt's conceptual interpretation, a brief synopsis of the Sky Woman story provides context:

> When a young, pregnant woman fell through a hole near the uprooted Celestial Tree above the dome of the sky, no one knew where she would go. The world below was inhospitable to her, covered in water. As Sky Woman fell, duck-creatures carried her on their wings to rest on the back of a great turtle [often referred to as Turtle Island]. A muskrat then emerged from the water carrying a bit of soil from the sea floor. Smearing it on the back of the turtle, the earth grew wider. Sky Woman walked across the expanding ground, beginning Seneca inhabitance of the earth.[233]

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[231] In 2011, the College Art Association was held in New York City, February 9-12. At this conference I delivered a paper that was a preparatory essay on Joe Feddersen' *Parking Lot*, the foundational research for the chapter on Feddersen included in this dissertation. Marie Watt and her family were living at the time in Brooklyn and served as hosts to me, and my daughter, during the conference. Because of Watt's interest in the research topic upon which I was presenting, Watt and I discussed how important culture can be to contemporary Indigenous artists, but that this relationship is often ignored in the scholarship. It was during these casual and personal conversations that Watt came to explain similar elements in her work that remained absent from the several monographs that had been published on her art. These nascent conversations both continued an important dialogue and inspired this essay's formalization as part of a dissertation project.

[232] Arthur Caswell Parker, *History of the Seneca Indians* (Port Washington: Empire State Historical Publication, 1926): 5.

[233] This abbreviated version was published by Alexander Brier Marr, "Rochester and Native Art in the 1930s," *InVisible Culture: An Electronic Journal for Visual Culture* (University of Rochester's Graduate Program in Visual and Cultural Studies, October 7, 2013). Marr cites Arthur Caswell Parker's *Seneca Myths and Folk Tales,* 1989. Readers who would like to have the full-length version are referred to Parker (1989, pp. 59-69).

In Seneca philosophy, every Seneca woman is a direct descendent of Sky Woman and it is from this lineage that the corpus of Seneca people emerges: former, present and future. Understanding this story, then one can see that the blanket stack serves as a soft landing spot for Sky Woman, for whom the Seneca people are in an ongoing and perpetual state, awaiting her imminent arrival.

Based upon the several conversations with Watt in which I have discussed her art, I suggest that the *Blanket Stories* series emerges from her exploration of the targets. When one is looking at the targets, specifically when they are placed on the wall as two-dimensional imagery, though created in a quasi-three-dimensional form, as in the blankets, the center of the target, becomes a visual reference to Sky Woman. As the progenitor of the Seneca people, she and her daughter's twin boys create the world in which we live and it is through their hands that Seneca people are formed of the earth's mud. Through this interpretation, the innermost circle of the target becomes a metaphor for this beginning and is a visual reference to that first moment of creation of her daughter, the second circle. If one were to shift the axis of the target so that it lay horizontally flat on the back of Turtle Island, the target becomes a sited space with the central circle a potential target for the arrival of Sky Woman's descent; much like skydivers use to guide their safe arrival. The blankets, stacked one upon another, form a square, but also a landing space for Sky Woman's safe arrival. Through the inversion of the target as a site, the stacked blankets physically enact the philosophical belief in the imminent arrival of Sky Woman's daughters.

Further, through the placement of the *Blanket Stories* series in its repeated installations across North America, one might also conceive of Watt as subversively

marking each of these varied gallery spaces temporarily as Seneca space, at least for the duration of the installations. In this interpretation, Watt's *Blanket Stories* become markers of space, perhaps more actively enacting space within the gallery, extending her intentions embodied in *Flag*, to signal viewers of the Seneca a priori with which Watt is working.

As a vertical tower of blankets, Berlo and Dobkins have both discussed the *Blanket Stories* series, each making reference to the sculptures as being in conversation with art history canon's of obelisks and monuments, an astute and relevant comparison. In her essay for the exhibition catalogue for *Lodge,* Watt's solo museum exhibition at the Hallie For Museum of Art, Willamette University, curator Dobkins wrote,

> Watt's Blanket Stories are at once specific and inclusive. Her references to landmarks of the western sculptural canon – to Trajan's Column of second century Rome, with its continuous spiral bas-relief telling the tale of imperial victory, and to the *Endless Column* (1938) of Constantin Brancusi (Romanian, 1876-1957), a work of modernist abstraction honoring the Romanian heroes of the First World War – comfortably stand alongside references to the totem poles and monumental cedars and Douglas firs of the Northwest Coast.[234]

In her essay for the Eiteljorg's 2005 Native American art fellowship exhibition, *Into the Fray*, Berlo (who is herself an avid quilter) focuses on the material and history of blankets,

> In *Column*, 2003, the artist references blankets stacked for distribution by white traders as well as Native chiefs. The vertical tower of folded blankets also evokes totem poles, that quintessential Indian icon, and *Endless Column*, 1938, by the Romanian modernist Constantin Brancusi…
>
> But it all starts with a modest, worn, domestic item, the blanket. As early as 1611 in New France (eastern Canada), Jesuits described Indians wearing wool trade blankets, some of them fashioned into *capotes* – loosely tailored overcoats. Throughout the next three centuries, blankets were central to economic exchange with Native peoples. Traded first for the highly prized beaver pelt so sought after in Europe for the manufacture of felted hats, blankets later were

[234] Dobkins, *Marie Watt: Lodge*, 43.

> exchanged for many different skins and hides. French and English mills supplied the wool blankets. …
>
> In addition to these histories of creativity, adaptation, and generosity, the trade blanket also brings to mind a more nightmarish history: the smallpox blanket. The deliberate infection of Native peoples with smallpox through the distribution of blankets taken from epidemic victims is a truism of American oral history.

Through these collective references, in Watt's hands, the blankets become a marker of Native history, a feminist response to art history, and a subversive marker of Seneca space, Indigenous space, shared space, through the placement of the axis mundi through the blankets.

These discussions miss the comparison to work by other women whose use of quotidian objects en masse intentionally fostered a feminist discussion of space, absences, and lives lived. In *Untitled (Plastic Cups)* (2006), Tara Donovan used plastic drinking cups to fill the floor of the PaceWildenstein Gallery, approximately fifty feet by fifty feet. As Eleanor Heartney wrote in *Art & Today*,

> Donovan arranged the cups in stacks of various heights, creating an undulating mountainous terrain in which the cups closest to the lights suspended from the gallery ceiling seemed to glow, while lower stacks suggest shadowy valleys. The individual cups retained their familiar shape, and hence began to operate a bit like pixels – tiny points that together created the topography of the space. Such works are at once inviting and inaccessible, conveying a sense of fragility and poetry quite at odds with the banality of the material out of which they are created.[235]

Another comparison can be made to Doris Salcedo's *1,550 Chairs* installed at the Istanbul Biennial in 2003, where the common dining chair was repeatedly used filling the air of an alley between two buildings several story's tall was interpreted as a commentary on both the entanglements of war, as the chairs served as markers of absent human bodies chaotically congested beyond use. Watt's employment of a quotidian

[235] Eleanor Heartney, *Art & Today* (New York: Phaidon Press, 2008): 53.

object, like Donovan and Salcedo, draws upon the relationships that naturally exist with the object in a broader context. However, as Donovan and Salcedo's works suggest absence and emptiness, Watt's invites community engagement and participation, suggesting embodiment by filling the space.

It is just as Watt is synthesizing these complex historical narratives with her potent use of the blanket, that she is invited by the National Museum of the American Indian to participate in the *Continuum* series of six exhibitions featuring twelve contemporary Native American artists. Each iteration of this series paired artists, whose works were seen as complimentary though not similar, intended to extend the dialogue presented in the coterminous exhibition of George Morrison and Allan Houser, both of whom were deceased. It was likely a curatorial effort to ensure that Native art would not be bound as historical or "dead" without contemporary voices, succinctly phrased as the website describes, "*Continuum* displays the work of their present successors."[236] Watt was incorporated into the final installation of the series as a result of her introduction to Truman Lowe, exhibition curator, at the "Conduit to the Mainstream" project hosted by Crow's Shadow Institute of Arts.[237] Watt described,

> As I think about this time [around the Conduit to the Mainstream], I feel like I need to put it in context. The internet was still in its infancy at this time. I had three books that I treasured and still do...the catalogue from the *Decade Show*, *Mixed Blessings* by Lucy Lippard, and *Land, Spirit, Power* from the National Gallery of Canada. To meet the artists I met at Crow's Shadow was a seismic event in my life. Subsequently, I had a studio visit with Gerald McMaster, who initially was a co-curator with Truman for the exhibition.[238]

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[236] National Museum of the American Indian. *CONTINUUM: 12 artists.* 2004. http://nmai.si.edu/exhibitions/continuum/subpage.cfm?subpage=introduction (accessed 11 19, 2017).
[237] Marie Watt, interview by author, September 21, 2017, transcript..
[238] Marie Watt, personal communication with the author during the editing process, January 18, 2018.

She was one of several of the artists from that artist gathering in 2001 that were featured in the NMAI series; the others were Kay WalkingStick, Joe Feddersen, and Hachivi Edgar Heap of Birds.[239] The youngest of the invited artists, she was paired with Jaune Quick-to-See Smith, and recognizing the scope of this opportunity, prepared an ambitious installation plan, including several lithographs, large hanging textile works and a large, site-specific sculpture – *Blanket Stories: Three Sisters, Four Pelts, Sky Woman, Cousin Rose, and All My Relations* (abbreviated to *Three Sisters* in following text).

The concept behind *Stack* was expanded, both in scale and form, into *Three Sisters*. Recalling that this series began in response to the issues of sleep and sleeplessness, Watt described the nascent motivation,

> After making this bed form [referencing *Sieve*] I really wanted to create a sculpture of folded and stacked blankets that would be ladder-like, referencing this space between earth and sky, where Sky Woman arrived to Turtle Island. I was interested in how it related to a linen closet. I was interested in how it would relate to other sculptures, like Brancusi's.[240]

The relationship to the Sky Woman story combined with the bed references of the blankets was initially the core of the idea. When asked to describe the influences and materials for *Three Sisters*, Watt provided a description of the context for the sculpture,

> *Three Sisters* is one of my earlier sculptural works. The only previous Blanket Story column that I had made was done at Evergreen State College and it was a precursor to the invitation show at the Smithsonian National Museum of the American Indian at the George Heye location (NMAI-NYC). [241]

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[239] Prudence F. Roberts, "Crow's Shadow Institute of the Arts at 25: A History." In *Crow's Shadow Institute of the Arts at 25*, ed. Rebecca Dobkins (Salem, OR: Hallie Ford Museum of Art, Willamette University, 2017): 10-29.
[240] Marie Watt, interview by author, September 21, 2017, transcript..
[241] Ibid.



Figure 29: Marie Watt, *Blanket Stories: Three Sisters, Four Pelts, Sky Woman, Cousin Rose, and All My Relations* (2004) Folded and stacked reclaimed wool blankets, salvaged cedar. Installation view, National Museum of the American Indian, George Heye Center, NYC. Image courtesy of the artist.

Watt extended the scale of *Stack* so that the tower of blankets was planned to connect the floor to the ceiling, undulating in the space of the gallery. The undulation was an important part of the installation, perhaps mimicking the extended umbilical cord that connects each generation to the next. In a manner of thinking, Watt ambitiously took the center of the target as the original umbilical cord and stretched it into the gallery's space, scaled to represent the time of the giants, in which the story of Sky Woman is set. Watt added, "I thought it was truer to the nature of the material. Blankets aren't square; they take on the shape of the bodies that inhabit them, pelt and skin-like. Wool blankets also remind us that sheep are our relations."[242]

The schedule demand to prepare the works for the NMAI-NYC exhibition became an inhibitor to Watt's capacity to socially engage with her friends and family. Watt prepared an installation plan that would include *Three Sisters* and *Braid*, both created for this exhibition from reclaimed wool blankets. *Three Sisters* was prepared to be two interwoven and winding towers of folded blankets that connect the floor to the ceiling and in a seemingly gravity defying extension of textiles. *Braid* is a monumentally sized hanging textile work that is 128 x 259 inches, composed of two sections that hang adjacent to one another horizontally. The break between the two sections bisects a Mobius strip composed of hundreds of diamond sections, a shape reminiscent of the shape used on Plains star quilts. On the left section, the strip's coloration follows the natural order of light, starting with reds and leading to blues. On the right section, the remaining strip section is composed of varied tones of

[242] Marie Watt, in personal communication with author during editing process, January 18, 2018.

monochromatic black and white, bound on the far left border with a series of interlayered and colorful satin bindings.

The variety of blankets needed to create both the hanging work and the sculpture created a demand for Watt to accumulate copious amounts of wool blankets. While opportunities were becoming more affordable, the ambitiousness was not met with a great deal of financial resources from which to work. For this practical reason, Watt formalized her blanket collecting practice to keep with the resources she had available.

> So this piece has wool blankets that I scavenged for from different thrift stores, I was looking for anything that was five dollars or under. I wasn't picking out blankets for aesthetic reasons, but I did have a preference for anything wool. For me there are a few different reasons for the wool blanket. They are often passed down from generation to generation. They are mended. They aren't something easily discarded. That was the starting point and then I would say that I learned so much more about wool blankets all the way to where I am right now, today. But this was the very beginning.[243]

She described the shift that occurred during the preparatory process as she collected the blankets,

> This piece really marks the beginning of me collecting wool blankets, or as I like to say, scavenging for them. I also like that wool blankets are fleece that comes from sheep or by extension animal relations/first teachers. Most of the blankets in the column were found in thrift stores. One of the things that I realized while working with them, starting with friends and family, was that they would say, "Oh, my grandmother used to have a blanket just like that," and they would quickly launch into a story.
>
> The blankets on one hand were these ubiquitous objects, but I also quickly recognized that these were storied objects. My initial impulse to use blankets was because I saw a Seneca tie to blankets and by extension an Indigenous tie to the material, but I began to see how this material had connections beyond this initial frame of reference.[244]

One of the conduits for Watt's recognition of blankets as "storied objects," was the isolation that she experienced. Working to fulfill her ambitious goals and meet the

[243] Ibid.
[244] Ibid.

necessary deadlines, Watt was unable to participate within the community in any meaningful manner. This isolation resulted in a need to invite her friends and family to gatherings she now calls "sewing circles." These gatherings were the product of necessity, as Watt described,

> I didn't really know how I'd meet the deadline. Craving social interaction, I started to invite friends over to stitch with me, saying I'd feed them and no sewing experience was necessary. Using the Internet, pre-social media days, I began inviting groups of friends and urged others to extend the invitation to others. My studio was at my house at the time, and I remember using sawhorses and hollow doors to extend the length of the table to fit the large work, but also to fit everyone who was participating.[245]

Through their collective labors Watt was able to meet the deadline for the exhibition. The sewing circles had been instrumental in the completion of the projects, but they had also revealed to Watt the importance of the stories. Inspired by the synergetic power of these gatherings to create a place where stories were generously shared, Watt implemented a plan to engage this relationship between the blankets and an interest in stories at the NMAI-NYC,

> While working in my home studio,, I started realizing that the blankets were storied objects, or markers for memory. So then at the NMAI, I put out a blank book where people could put their blanket story. I shared a blanket story, as did my parents and some people from the musuem staff--these prompts signaled how the book was could be used without a lot of instructions. know how to use it without a lot of instructions. What for me was powerful was reading peoples stories.. What was so moving was that people shared very personal stories about these objectsin their lives. It really opened up the way that I perceived the object's purpose. It's construction wasn't the end goal, but instead the object's life was the ongoing conversation. This has shaped everything I've done since.[246]

What Watt originally conceptualized as being a sculpture about the blankets and the marker for her Seneca identity shifted to embrace the stories that the blankets

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[245] heather ahtone, "Seneca Installation Artist Marie Watt." *First American Art Magazine*, 2016.

[246] Marie Watt, in personal communication with author during editing process, January 18, 2018.

embody. While this shift can be seen as a growth from the original concept, drawing back to the relationship of the stacked blankets as a landing spot or ladder-like form, for Sky Woman, one can see that they had always had a strong relationship to stories. Perhaps what had significantly shifted was the expectation that the stories would be primarily Seneca or Indigenous, or even belonging to Watt. She recognized that the act of sharing stories is a powerful means of sharing culture, knowledge, and respect. Without an intention, the sewing circles were a reimagined form of her childhood experience attending her mother's storytelling circles. This connection has held, becoming a profound component of her creative work.

When asked about connecting the blankets to the story of Sky Woman and the stacked form, Watt provided clarity on her own experience with the work.

> The cultural references are mindful and intentional. For me, using the blankets was first and foremost, a way of acknowledging my culture. Also, I I liked that it was a way of using a material that has resonance in other Indigenous communities. Having grown up in the Pacific Northwest, and attending potlatches before, I knew that blankets had this significance in the Coast Salish tribes, in particular. That was my starting point.
>
> What was unanticipated, for me as a person who had very little experience in making sculpture, was how the material was so loaded for other people and communities. Coming from a Seneca, German- Scotch heritage, I appreciated how wool blankets revealed stories that connect accross cultures. It also spoke to my sense of community, which is broad and dynamic. It is a material that has continued to engage me in a way that I never expected. I'm surprised to be talking to you in 2017 and discussing my work in blankets. There is no way that I could have I foreseen that. I was recently reading a New Yorker story about the artist Sanford Biggers in which he talks about code switching and I think part of what I like about this material is its ability and mean different things for different people.[247]

Three Sisters was exhibited at the NMAI-NYC gallery from September 11, 2004–January 3, 2005, in concert with art by Jaune Quick-to-See Smith. Near the close

[247] Marie Watt, interview by author, September 21, 2017, transcript.

of the exhibition, Watt would learn that she had been selected as a 2005 recipient of an Eiteljorg Native American Art Fellowship, where *Braid* was exhibited as part of, *Into the Fray*, the Fellowship exhibition and, later, acquired by the Eiteljorg for their permanent collection. *Three Sisters* traveled from New York to Portland, scheduled for installation at the Hoffman Gallery, Lewis & Clark College, Portland, Oregon, where Watt's next solo exhibition was schedule.

Marie Watt, Blanket Stories: Receiving was an exhibition of recent work that was promoted to include, "quilts, sculptures and prints."[248] From very early on it was difficult for writers to contextualize the work that Watt was doing with textiles, despite her continued assertion that the hanging textiles are paintings. At the Hoffman Gallery at Lewis and Clark College, the installation of the columns expressed subtle movement, but not the pronounced undulations as presented at NMAI-NYC. Each exhibition space offered its own spatial parameters and potential.

The Hoffman Gallery space begged for three columns, which echoed the reference to the Three Sisters. Watt adapted the sculptural work to suit the space and installation capacity of the Hoffman Gallery, by breaking up the two columns into three, free-standing columns, each with their own unique base, triangulated within the space, collectively still titled as *Blanket Stories: Three Sisters, Four Pelts, Sky Woman, Cousin Rose, and All My Relations*. It was on view in this format from January 20-March 13, 2005. Following the Hoffman Gallery exhibition, the work was packed away.

[248] Lewis & Clark College. *Ronna and Eric Hoffman Gallery of Contemporary Art.* (January 20, 2005). http://www.lclark.edu/live/news/1563-marie-watt-blanket-stories-receiving (accessed November 23, 2017).



Figure 30: Marie Watt, *Blanket Stories: Three Sisters, Four Pelts, Sky Woman, Cousin Rose, and All My Relations* (2005) Folded and stacked reclaimed wool blankets, salvaged cedar. Installation view, Hoffman Gallery, Lewis & Clark College, Portland, Oregon. Image courtesy of the artist.

The Seattle Art Museum collected the sculpture work to be part of the museum's 75th anniversary in 2007. An arrangement was made for the museum's acquisition of the sculpture, however, again the sited space for the work's installation prohibited any of the previous arrangements. In its final form, Watt worked with the museum to combine all the blankets into two towers, exploring the full height of the gallery. With this placement, the sculpture explores a proto-feminist Seneca voice in dialogue with the history of obelisks and totem poles (which are historically male-gendered forms) within a gallery of regional Indigenous art.



Figure 31: Installation view at Seattle Art Museum.

While it did not begin its journey as a vaulted, towering form, which has informed the rest of the Blanket Stories series, its final evocation gained an additional layer of meaning for Watt.

> One of the things that is important to me about the culture, and I think you and I've discussed this before, I'm really interested in how this columnar form connects sky and ground, and not just sky and ground, but the sky world and earth. It intentionally subverts the horizon line, which is this Western approach to place oneself in the world, based on a specific axis line, and the blankets suggest an axis mundi… That's something that's important to me about the column. It was a way to be really specific of inserting me in a way that could have these other layers of interpretation.[249]

Watt's reference to the importance of the columnar form as a connection to the earth and sky is a reference to our previous discussions about the role of the axis mundi. Within Indigenous cultures, we have discussed, the importance of the axis mundi can be seen in the location of a drum in a pow-wow circle or the fire in a stomp dance circle.

[249] Marie Watt, interview by author, September 21, 2017, transcript.

Within so many Native cultures, we had noticed a shared regard for marking a place by creating an axis mundi that becomes, for the duration of that ceremony or the gathering, whatever the purpose, and in so creating that center, the world has a temporary mechanism for drawing things into order. Through the use of the space for whatever the purpose, the axis mundi immediately creates a center around which the participants share a common understanding of how order should be guided. Through this consideration, her Blanket Stories series, in each of its installations, potentially serves as an axis mundi around which things can fall into order. The order may simply be slowing down traffic and causing people to look up where they are so often prone to looking down, or causing people to circulate within a gallery akin to the circulation of a ceremonial gathering. While Watt is not invoking a necessary ceremonialism in the art she is making, these observations are the result of seeing that the form creates a natural response that merits consideration.

Marie Watt's *Blanket Stories: Three Sisters, Four Pelts, Sky Woman, Cousin Rose, and All My Relations* is a towering stack of folded blankets that defies the simplicity of its primary material, reclaimed wool blankets. Through the process of making this sculpture, in concert with the variations of the forms it took through its exhibition journey to the Seattle Art Museum, *Three Sisters* became a lightning rod for people to share their stories and make connections within the community. As curator Ben Mitchell wrote in the monograph *Marie Watt, blanket stories: almanac*,

> In our stories, the urges and impulses of history, tradition, image, narrative magic and surprise are all woven together – like blankets are – yielding a remarkably strong fabric of continuity and custom that connects us to our often troubled but nonetheless shared pasts and our rich and potential futures. This is

> Marie Watt's essential subject and her compelling vision, the transformation of the ordinary into the extraordinary.[250]

Watt's creative vision is akin to an alchemist's, both transforming the ordinary into that which is most desired. Through the use of the quotidian object, Watt's sculptural embodiment creates a physical mechanism that holds the potential of providing order where it may not have abided before.

Conclusion

Considering Watt's sculptural tower of blankets through the framework, the most potent elements that serve as signifiers are found in the use of the blankets and the assertion of a Seneca proto-feminist worldview on the meaning located within the object (Table 3, page 182). Watt's pursuit of sculpture and painting as fine art expressions defies many of the rhetorical stipulations defining the discourse between art and craft. In doing so, she reasserts the priority of culture and identity through blankets, a medium readily at hand that as storied objects are also coded with multivalent meanings for the previous owner transferred into a collective of stories in the tower. While her formal training can certainly be credited for the intellectual vigor of her concepts, what is also evident is that her Seneca/German/Scot identity and the strong role of family and community are mutually integrated within her process. Her naturally social personality created a method, the sewing circles, for community engagement that has become not only a mainstay of her creative process, but a critical method for art institutions to engage with their local communities in a profoundly meaningful

[250] Ben Mitchell, *Marie Watt: Blanket Stories: Almanac* (Casper, WY: The Nicolaysen Art Museum, 2006): 11.

manner.[251] As temporal events, each one generates a community that is synergistically convened through the willingness of participation and cemented through the long-term relationship of the blankets and marks made by the participants as a collective effect on Watt's art.

By considering Watt's work as a form of virtuality, one can see that through her art, she claims space as an Indigenous artist marking the site as one bound through kincentricity to the previous and new owners of the blankets and enveloping the viewers as they transit through the space. She claims the galleries with the totemic markers as a place where order can be established and community can be engaged. The repeated installations of the Blanket Stories towers of blankets as landing spots for Sky Woman also claim these sites as Seneca space, specifically, affirming the imminent arrival of Sky Woman's granddaughters.

[251] In 2015, at the National Gallery of Canada, Marie Watt was invited to host a sewing circle where anyone could contribute to one of her textile works. Nobody expected that they would have as many as 230 people join them in a single day. A time-lapse video was made and is accessible at https://youtu.be/BUvyahlqddo.

MATERIALITY	**METAPHOR/SYMBOLISM**
blankets > wool [natural material] (original blankets were hides/pelts; relationships to animals) tower form = axis mundi [tree of life] = cosmic center = Indigenized space [birds | above world turtle | underworld]	blankets = reciprocity [gifted blankets] = depositories [smallpox] = storied objects [intimate memories] layers of blankets > skywoman [potential landing spot = continued regeneration of tribe/culture Pendleton blankets > blending of Native American design with European materials as trade blanket
KINCENTRICITY	**TEMPORALITY**
"talking circles" > "sewing circles" Skywoman > matriarchal cultural descent blankets as storied objects that connect family history/ human:human sewing circles > community [temporary/intergenerational] PNW intertribal community > IAIA > national intertribal community relationships through stories	Yale MFA > push towards contemporaneity Modern art MASTERS ➢ Jasper Johns "targets" > belly buttons as metaphor for matriarchal descent ➢ Constantin Brancusi "endless column" > how to feminize a phallic form? hard/dogmatic form > soft/malleable form, both are about endurance relationships with NWC arts community as support/encouragement/embracing faith 3 iterations of "3Sisters": @NMAI(2004), @Lewis&Clark(2005), @SAM(2007)

Table 5: Analytical framework applied to Marie Watt's *Blanket Stories: Three Sisters, Four Pelts, Sky Woman, Cousin Rose, and All My Relations*.

Chapter 5: Joe Feddersen's *Parking Lot*



Figure 32: Joe Feddersen, *Parking Lot*, 2003, Blown and sandblasted glass. Courtesy of Froelick Gallery, Portland, OR. Collection Nerman Museum of Contemporary Art, Johnson County Community College, Overland Park , Kansas. Photo credit: Bill Bachhuber.

While Indigenous aesthetics remain an underdeveloped field of knowledge outside their local community domains, what can broadly be stated with any conviction is that artists have long responded to the world around them and incorporated their observations into art that has the potential to transcend a particular time and, sometimes becomes multivalent through the repeated use of a design, form or material. While that remains to be developed as a scholarly topic, and may only be done with consideration given to the hegemonic cultural systems within which they are constructed, considering a single artist provides some insights into how observations transpire into artistic motifs and gain meaning through their material manifestation. For such a purpose, Joe Feddersen provides an excellent discussion of the relationship between observation, community participation, and identity through art.[252]

Feddersen's glass basket, *Parking Lot*, is the product of the application of an urban migratory diagram over a historical design motif from the Okanagan creation narratives that has been applied to a form closely associated with the Plateau cultural region. This object, then, allows for a critical examination of the relationship that 21st century Americans have to the natural world, a relationship that extends beyond the present moment as form of cultural practice. This chapter will analyze how Feddersen's *Parking Lot* is a product of the artist's Okanagan identity and interest in borrowing from his ancestor's practice and interpreting this practice through artistic process and

[252] Three interviews were conducted with Joe Feddersen for this research, on March 12, 2010 (for previous publication purposes), April 10, 2017 and September 30, 2017. All were conducted by phone with the artist in Omak, WA, and the author in Norman, OK, and recorded as digital files. All quotes by the artist are from these interviews, which have been edited for this text.

innovation, including a formal analysis of the blown glass work that considers how this object performs as contemporary Okanagan art.[253]

About the Artist: Joe Feddersen (b. 1953; Colville Confederated Tribes)

Joe Feddersen is a prolific artist who works in several media, including printmaking, painting, glass, ceramic, and basketry. After retiring from a teaching career in 2009, Feddersen relocated his primary residence to his hometown of Omak, where he now lives in a small urban community located on the Colville Confederated Tribes' reservation in north-central Washington. He remains Professor Emeritus at Evergreen State College, Olympia, WA, where he also continues to maintain a home and participates in Indigenous artistic cultural events and gatherings. As an Okanagan & Lakes member of the Colville Confederated Tribes, he is part of the extended Syilx community that extends from deep into British Columbia where the Salish communities are located to the north in Canada and extend southward to central and eastern Washington. The Salish people are found within the Plateau cultural exchange region. They are part of the Plateau inter-tribal community located between the Cascade and Rocky Mountain ranges and extend from the northernmost part of the Syilx homelands in British Columbia down to northern California, where the Modoc reside. This collective relationship to the land has had a significant influence on Feddersen,

[253] Portions of this chapter were originally delivered as a paper given on February 9, 2011, as part of the College Art Association's 99th Annual Conference panel session titled "Toward an Indigenous Artistic Sovereignty: Theorizing Contemporary Native Art," chaired by Dylan A. T. Miner. The original paper was subsequently published in *Wicazo Sa Review* in a previous form. The present version reflects the author's preparation of the essay for inclusion in this dissertation, including both additional research and an expanded discussion of the artist's oeuvre.

established during his childhood in Washington and continuing through his present practice.

Feddersen grew up in a moderately large family with his parents raising him and his five siblings in Omak, though his mother was from Penticton, British Columbia, Canada. His father, Ted Feddersen, was German and his mother, Jeanie [Alex] Feddersen, was Okanagan. He considers his mother the most important contributor to his cultural identity, though his participation in the community was often mediated through his family's travels to visit his extended family in Penticton, B.C., where Lucille Alex, his maternal grandmother, lived. "I've always thought of home as Penticton. That's where my mom, my aunt, and my cousins, all of them are still there," he explained. Feddersen's fondness for the Okanogan Valley, which includes a significant portion of the Columbia River and extends in the north from Shuswap to the convergence of the Okanogan and Columbia Rivers in the south, is evident in his art and in his description of the area,

> I love the landscape here. You saw the landscape coming here but the landscape here is going from Omak to Penticton. It's the vistas and, I think, the water. You see, Omak means "good medicine." The town's name comes from a lake that is like seven miles away. It's a medicinal lake and that why it's called good medicine…. But the valleys, I'm just in awe of the landscape. I think of my relatives and how they would go up and down this valley all the time. They would probably go on the river, instead of the roads. But it was the roads that I grew up with, because we'd all be piled into the old car.[254]

He explained that his relationship to his tribal community is deeply rooted in the valley between Omak and Penticton, through the landscape and his maternal family's history in that space. "It's the whole idea that you belong here. This is where our ancestors have been for thousands of years," he recalled. When he had lived away for some years, he

[254] Joe Feddersen, interview by author, October 16, 2017, transcript.

described remembering his grandmother's call to return, "You need to be back here. You need to be with your people. Your people need you." An admonition to which he agreed, "And that's really important."[255]

While his family has a deep relationship to the Okanogan land and community that continues to permeate his art, as well as living through his siblings, cousins, nieces and nephews, Feddersen dismissed having a relationship to the trappings often associated with "traditional" Native culture, such as sweat lodges and powwow. "I don't think of any of [the family] as 'traditionalists,' as they just lived however they felt. But it's not to say that things weren't around. Like we would go down, as a kid, you'd go down to the creek and you'd see the sweat lodges and everything. These things were all around, but we just never did anything with them."[256] The issue for Feddersen seemed to be attached to the term "traditional," a concern that has gained informal traction within Indigenous arts circles.[257] Feddersen later used the problematic term again, when he described himself as a "lazy traditionalist, because I know how hard people work at it."[258] While he was dismissive of his effort level as a cultural participant, a comment made as he compared himself to his friend, Corky Clairmont, someone Feddersen considers a culturally engaged person, Feddersen's relationship to the landscape and the Salish community was a consistent theme that became nuanced

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[255] Ibid.
[256] Ibid.
[257] The concern has been raised in multiple informal conversations between art historians and artists about the application of the terms *traditional* and *contemporary* to Indigenous arts, particularly because in the field of Art History these terms are historically used in opposition and as mutually exclusive realms, whereas in Native communities, traditions are practices that are more often highly regarded, followed, and practiced in the contemporary as part of a continuum of Indigenous cultural expression. See *First American Art Magazine*, Editorial, Issue 8, p. 12.
[258] Joe Feddersen, interview by author, October 16, 2017, transcript.

within the discussion of being Okanagan. Moreover, the issue of participating in culture, once the term "tradition" was laid aside, became clearest through the other component of his identity, that as artist.

Feddersen denies having a clear epiphany about being an artist, describing that, "I've always loved making things… as a kid I always remember that we talked and we had a lot of freedom as kids running around and doing whatever we wanted to a lot."[259] Feddersen recalled that he and his brothers would often make things using his father's power tools in the basement of their family home, though his parents may not have been aware of the extent. "We made bookshelves and whatever using the table saw. And we had piles of wood to make things. So we always had stuff and we could make whatever we wanted to."[260] Feddersen worked in a ceramic shop while in high school and used his earnings, "buying brushes and art paraphernalia… I think I still have some of those today."[261]

Feddersen knew he would attend college after his high school graduation in 1971. After an errant form letter from the University of Washington informed him that his test scores had not been high enough to be accepted (which was later revealed to be inaccurate), Feddersen enrolled at Wenatchee Valley College. He considers this accident fortuitous as it brought him into contact with Robert Graves, art faculty at Wenatchee, who Feddersen describes as, "one of my mentors and he was really wonderful."[262] It was as a student at Wenatchee that Feddersen met Glen Alps, renowned printmaking professor at the University of Washington and mentor to Graves,

[259] Ibid.
[260] Ibid.
[261] Ibid.
[262] Ibid.

during Alps' visit to the community college. Feddersen had completed a year at Wenatchee when his aunt told him that she had a job for him at the Public Utility District (PUD). The job was a highly desirable job working at the Grand Coulee Dam. "People love these jobs. It's like security forever. You never get fired." Feddersen described,

> It was like a primo job! And I went to work there and I spent seven years there. I worked as a utility man. I became a hydro-mechanic… And I thought, maybe I want to sit behind a desk and watch the dials, so I became a hydro-operator… I was twenty-six years old and I was second in command at the dam. And I thought, I'm twenty-six years old, I have twenty-three more years until I can retire…. so, I cashed in my retirement and went to school… Graves encouraged me, "What are you doing that for? Why don't you do something with your life?" Basically I couldn't imagine spending the next twenty-three years looking at dials.[263]

Feddersen had completed a second year's worth of college credits while working for the PUD, and entered the University of Washington (UW) with junior standing. Because of his previous encounters with Alps at Wenatchee, Feddersen enrolled in printmaking at UW and worked for Alps as a studio assistant (1979-1983).[264]

The experience working for Alps proved to be an important foundational guide for his art making practice. Feddersen said that when Alps passed away, people "wanted me to tell them secrets about Glen's printing."[265] Feddersen said there were no secrets to tell. That rather than teaching Feddersen about printing techniques, Alps had passed on his philosophical approach to the work, "I think that influenced how I approach *how* I do my work."[266] Feddersen described that they "would talk about the world perception

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[263] Ibid.
[264] An extended history of Feddersen's biography can be found in Rebecca J. Dobkins, *Joe Feddersen: Vital Signs* (Salem, OR: Hallie Ford Museum of Art, Willamette University and the University of Washington Press, 2008).
[265] Joe Feddersen, interview by author, October 16, 2017, transcript.
[266] Ibid.

around us and how that related to what you were doing. Glen was really philosophical… He would talk about the Zen-like qualities of your artwork, about how you approached your work, rather than how to do a print."[267] The lessons learned from working with Alps continue to inform Feddersen in his strong sense as a colorist and through an ongoing interest in the process of developing his images, rather than a focus on the particular outcome.

As Feddersen transitioned from being an art student to being a professional artist, he found financial success through a series of paintings called *Rainscapes*, "abstracts that convey the rich complexity of the rainy Northwest weather-scape."[268] Feddersen recalled of the *Rainscapes*, "Well, they were really popular….I looked at people's work and I saw #500 of [a series] and I thought, I don't want to do 500 *Rainscapes*! This thing I love would just turn into hell."[269]

From this point of searching, Feddersen began to employ lessons learned from his photography professor at UW, Ron Carraher, to create a series of self-portraits that reflected his self-inquiry. With these, Feddersen began receiving national acclaim, as when Lucy Lippard included *Self Portrait* (1984) in her seminal study of multicultural art, *Mixed Blessings*.[270]

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[267] Ibid.
[268] Dobkins. *Joe Feddersen: Vital Signs,* 21.
[269] Joe Feddersen, interview by author, October 16, 2017, transcript.
[270] Lucy R. Lippard. *Mixed Blessings: New Art in a Multicultural America.* New York: Pantheon Books, 1990, p. 29.

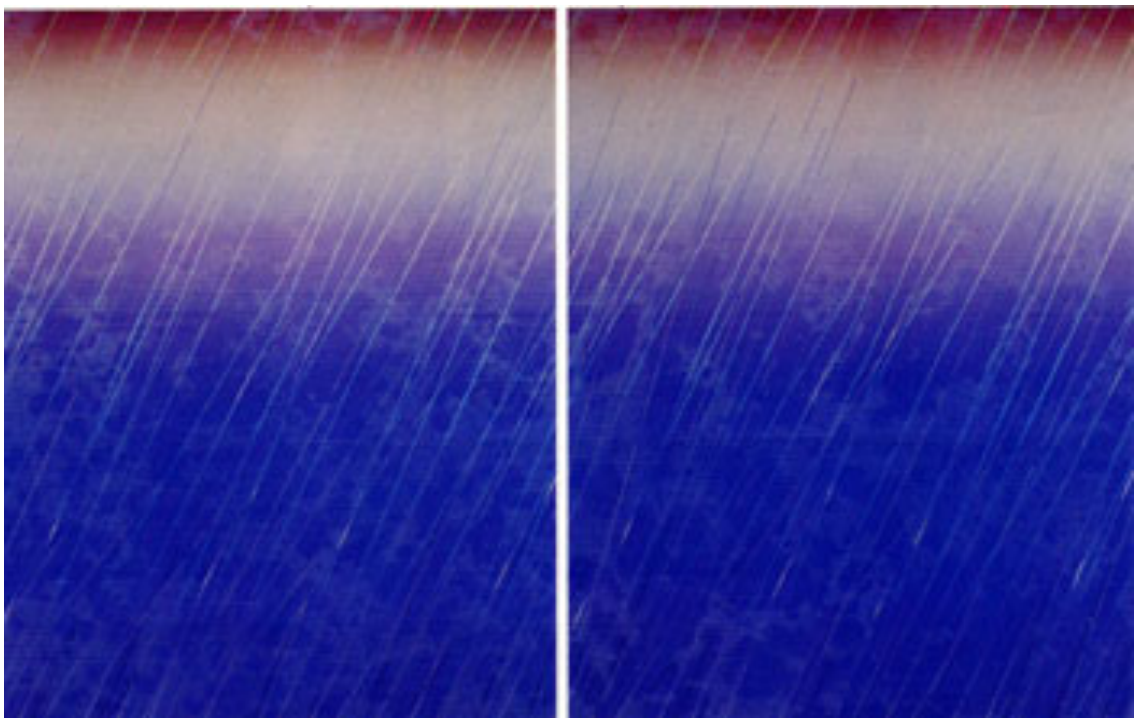

Figure 33: Joe Feddersen, *Rainscape I* (1980s) Lithograph. Image courtesy of the artist.



Figure 34: Joe Feddersen, *Self Portrait* (1984) Photograph, collage; 9 x 18 inches. Image courtesy of the artist.

Lippard describes the image,

> His concern has long been the relationship of the human to the environment, or 'the delicate balance between self and an external force.' Mixing photography and computer graphics, he has often used himself—in the form of a straightforward self-portrait or a mysterious silhouette—as a stand-in for humanity.[271]

While Feddersen did not describe the work from this period with the same kind of approach, he expressed an interest in the process—that of deconstruction and playing with how an image is organized, he was, "Trying to think about other ways to produce artwork that wasn't the rainscape, and had personal meaning."[272]

With that apparent self-awareness, Feddersen "accepted the invitation of Truman Lowe to study at the University of Wisconsin, Madison."[273] He described that, "I had committed to going to Madison to kind of reinvent myself and to think about how do you make artwork? How do you break from that thing that is so easy and you're getting validated by people buying the work? How do you go beyond that? And it was a real struggle."[274] His studies in Madison prepared him for the teaching career he would launch upon graduation, accepting the position of printmaking professor at Evergreen State College in 1989.

Feddersen described that he faced challenges as an artist while taking on the responsibilities of teacher. He explained, "I thought teaching is really hard to keep a focus, to keep momentum."[275] For many printmaking professors, teaching regularly

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[271] Ibid.
[272] Joe Feddersen, interview by author, October 16, 2017, transcript.
[273] Rebecca J. Dobkins. *Joe Feddersen: Vital Signs.* Salem, OR: Hallie Ford Museum of Art, Willamette University and the University of Washington Press, 2008, p. 23.
[274] Joe Feddersen, interview by author, October 16, 2017, transcript.
[275] Ibid.

involves the demonstration of one of the multitude of techniques possible within the medium. Feddersen added,

> I needed something that capitalized on all these printmaking techniques I knew because the list is kind of long. And I just love process. But I wanted to steep it in Okanagan culture. And I saw the baskets as a really excellent way to ground it in Plateau culture, because I love, in part, the ambiguity about the traditional designs.[276]

He explained that his series *Plateau Geometrics* emerged out of his desire to work with designs that were a part of his culture while also playing with the processes located in the medium of printmaking. In 2010, during our interview for "Reading Beneath the Surface," Feddersen explained, "I think back in the early to mid 90s, I decided I wanted to do work about home, about the Plateau area, because I was really intrigued by how much we use abstract designs…. I didn't want it to be didactic or anything. I just wanted to align the form and color."[277] In 2017, Feddersen expanded on the relationship of the designs to the process:

> So when you look at the Plateau Geometrics you might have etching, monoprint, relief, silography, they have all these processes, but they are grounded on a basic flat bag… So the thing about layering, printmaking things that are kind of reflexive, and printmaking is layering. Printing has the same thing and turning it, just the whole act of… building a surface up through textures… So, that's why the Plateau Geometrics were really important to me. It grounded me on Plateau culture, icons, but at the same time, I'm printmaking.[278]

From this period, Feddersen's work transitioned from being about the experience of the Northwest Coast, as in the *Rainscapes* series, into being about his personal relationship to the land and the culture of the Plateau people materialized through his prints. The body of the *Plateau Geometrics* series became a catalyst for Feddersen to engage his interests in printmaking and, later, expanded the designs into painting. The subtle

[276] Ibid.
[277] Joe Feddersen, interview by author, March 12, 2010.
[278] Joe Feddersen, interview by author, October 16 2017.

conversation that Feddersen began with the landscape was mediated through his interpretation of Plateau designs found on the woven flat bags into two-dimensional fine art.

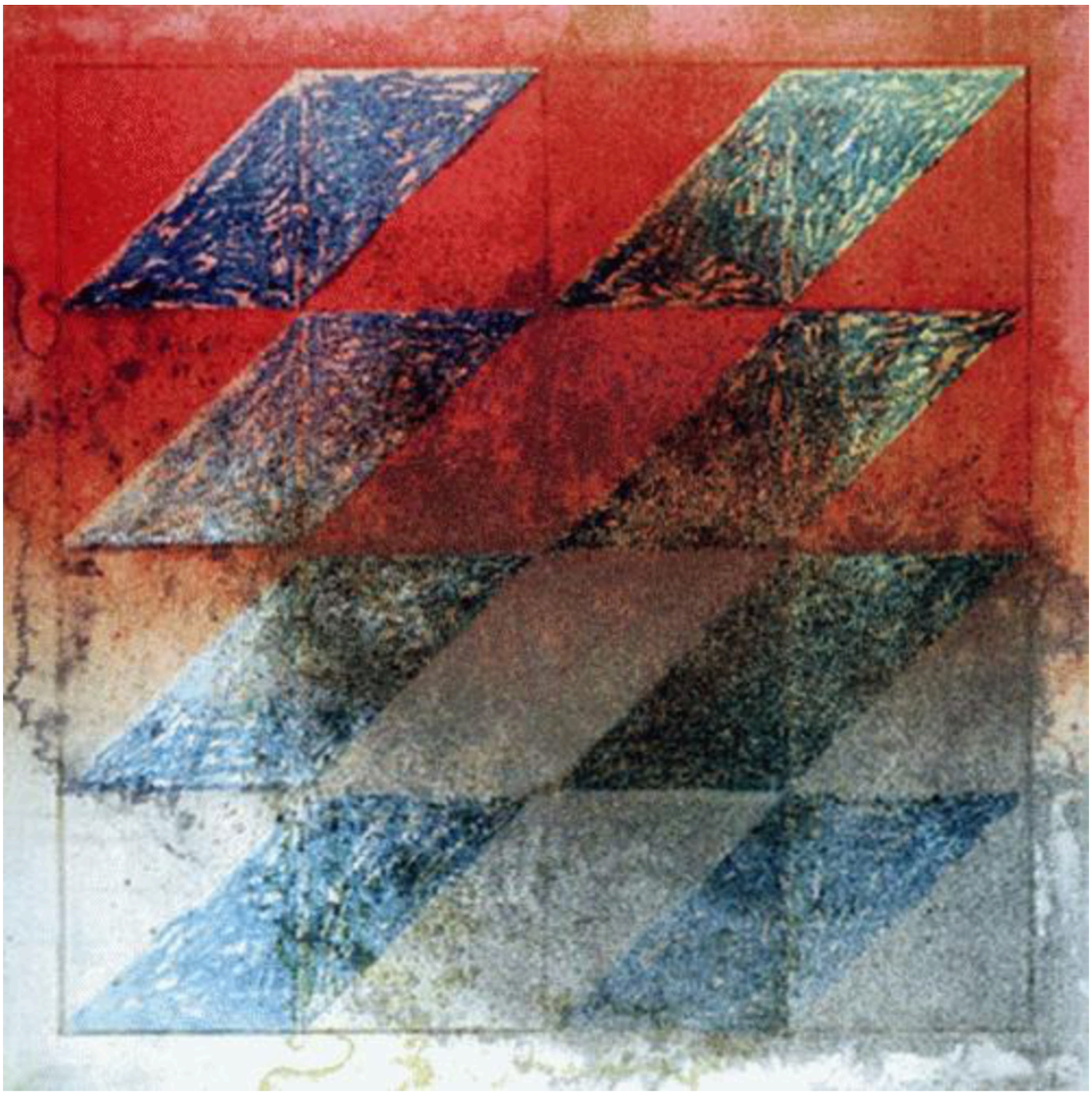

Figure 34: Joe Feddersen, *Plateau Geometrics #107* (1997) Silography print, relief ,stencil; 12 x 12 inches. Image courtesy of the artist, provided by Froelick Gallery.



Figure 36: *Basketry Flat Bag* (n.d.) Indian hemp, cornhusk. Image from Burke Museum, University of Washington [Object #2-1969].

To fully understand the significance of the relationship between Feddersen's art and the customary designs used in Plateau baskets, one has to look to the original source for comparison. Lillian Ackerman provides a concise description of the Plateau designs in *A Song to the Creator: Traditional Arts of Native American Women of the Plateau:*

> Designs used in bag weaving also changed in response to the changes taking place in Plateau life. Early bag designs were usually composed of simple geometric shapes—triangles, diamonds, lines, squares, and rectangles—repeated

> over the entire surface of the bag… During the latter part of the nineteenths century, weavers also began to introduce new types of designs based on their observations of Euro-American materials. Representations of flowers, animals, and people appeared…"[279]

After he had been working on this series for a period, he became curious about the relationship between the designs and the original sources – the baskets. Because the environment at Evergreen fostered curiosity and exploration for both students and faculty, Feddersen explained,

> When I was doing that for a while, I thought, being at Evergreen, maybe I should learn how to make a basket. Things kind of happened serendipitously because Lizzie was learning how to make baskets from Mary Schlick.[280]

Feddersen's affectionate reference to poet, artist, and activist Elizabeth Woody (Wasco/Warm Springs/Navajo, b. 1959) is an accurate expression of their longstanding relationship as friends and collaborators. He described,

> So, Lizzie showed me how to make [a basket]. It seemed very intuitive. I started making baskets. In part, I didn't want to copy the old ones. I didn't want to mimic the past. I wanted to make things that reflected myself and where I was. But I still wanted them to look traditional.[281]

As part of Feddersen's inquiry into the process of basket making, he became more adept at making the sally bag form. This skill gave him the idea to visit with accomplished basket weavers in his community. One such visit, with Elaine Emerson (Colville Confederated Tribes/Methow), whom Feddersen knew since his childhood when he was her paperboy, provided a significant insight for Feddersen,

> I did spend a weekend talking with one of our tribal elders. She's known for her baskets and I spent a day talking with her. I wanted to learn about the designs and all of the reeds and their relationship and we talked. . . . And then she does this really wonderful thing where she said at the end of the day this design

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[279] Lillian A. Ackerman, *A Song to the Creator: Traditional Arts of Native American Women of the Plateau* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1996): 46.
[280] Joe Feddersen, interview by author, October 16, 2017, transcript.
[281] Ibid.

> means this, but in the next valley over it means something totally different. So this whole thing about the culture and the context is also kind of idiosyncratic depending on where you're from. The interpretation can be different from just a few miles away.[282]

That moment of recognizing that the designs need not be interpreted as didactic seems to have been a catalyst for Feddersen to draw upon his observation of his natural environment. He expanded on this visit, "It gives you a basis that things aren't, like, this is the same for all over the Plateau area or anything, but your different bands have different things and they have different relationships to them. The context is really important."[283]

Emerson's comment that the name and meaning of designs can shift is part of the Plateau region's history. The geographic location of the Okanagan people in Washington State implicates the historic regional economy that was the result of an expansive trade system with other tribes of the Plateau area and the Northern Plains that resulted in the sharing of ideas, designs, and forms across a broad geographic area. The Okanagan are situated within one of the most important trade centers in western North America at the confluence of the Columbia, Fraser, and Dalles River systems. The interactive range of this trade system was instrumental in connecting people from the upper West Coast with the Northern Plains cultures and beyond. These multiple influences have imposed limitations for scholarship in that the provenance of specific forms and designs is difficult to ascertain.

As Gaylord Torrence points out in his analysis of the parfleches materials from this region, in reference to a trade material comparable to baskets within this economic

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[282] heather ahtone. "Reading Beneath the Surface: Joe Feddersen's Parking Lot." *Wicazo Sa Review* 27, no. 1 (2012): 79.
[283] Joe Feddersen, interview by author, October 16, 2017, transcript.

system, that designs become difficult to attribute to a particular tribe: "Parfleches were freely traded throughout the region, to the extent that all types were almost equally dispersed among all the tribes by the time substantial collecting had begun. With this trade occurred the continuous exchange of design concepts, so that any design developed by one group was very likely to have been appropriated by others."[284] Since baskets were used in the trade commerce of the region, it is logical to expect that baskets and related designs were likewise shared and appropriated. One might consider dismissing the history of Plateau baskets as relevant to Feddersen's baskets, particularly in light of his stated disinterest in mimicking historic designs. However, one cannot dismiss the relationship to Plateau baskets because it is precisely his interest in using the environment that most closely ties his work to the Plateau community.

While seemingly a modern interpretation for designs, it would be more accurate to recognize that Feddersen's conceptual process became similar to the time honored practice of many Plateau communities by using his personal observation to guide his aesthetic concerns. Rather than looking at the historic baskets as a guide or, much less, a measure or rule, Feddersen rejected the idea of mimicking the historic designs in favor of using the visual elements he saw within his own experience. One can find a relationship to this practice in a Plateau story about the origin of weaving, such as in this Yakama story, paraphrased here for space, the story follows:

A young woman at White Salmon River was not as developed as her peers and was shunned by her people for it. At that time, when the animals and plants were also people and could communicate with humans, a cedar tree took pity upon the girl and gave her the lessons to learn basket weaving. Within the lessons of gathering and preparing the materials and the weaving process, the tree admonishes the girl, "Now

[284] Gaylord Torrence, *The American Indian Parfleche: A Tradition of Abstract Painting* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1994): 229.

you must go out in the woods and find some designs. Seek out the things of nature and bring them back pictured in your mind. That is when you will be able to make beautiful things." Once these things were accomplished, the girl became a skilled basket weaver and gave her first waterproof basket to the oldest person of her tribe. For this reason, the Klickitat people are famous for their cedar baskets and weavings.[285]

We see from that narrative that observation of one's surroundings has historically been valued as a reference source for the development of new designs within this cultural space.

In addition to Feddersen's personal interest in the relationship between the Plateau cultural designs and his capacity to explore them through process, the period of this conjuncture is timely. Considering the highly geometricized designs found on customary Plateau baskets, a natural correlation can be seen to broader contemporary art interests of the 1990s, including the ongoing topical interest in Minimalism—which can be aligned with the simplicity of the Plateau designs, to the emergence of Identity Politics as a recurrent theme addressed by people of color, such as found in the work of Carrie Mae Weems and Fred Wilson, and, finally, compounded by the interest in Native American art in response to the sesquicentennial "celebration" of Columbus's arrival in the Americas. Feddersen was positioned in a unique period, nationally, when diversity and culture were being celebrated within the contemporary arts field as the discourse *du jour.*

While Feddersen does not make direct reference to these issues, he openly admired Martin Puryear and Rufino Tamayo during our walk through of his studio.

[285] Complete story and quote found in Ackerman (1996): 35-39.

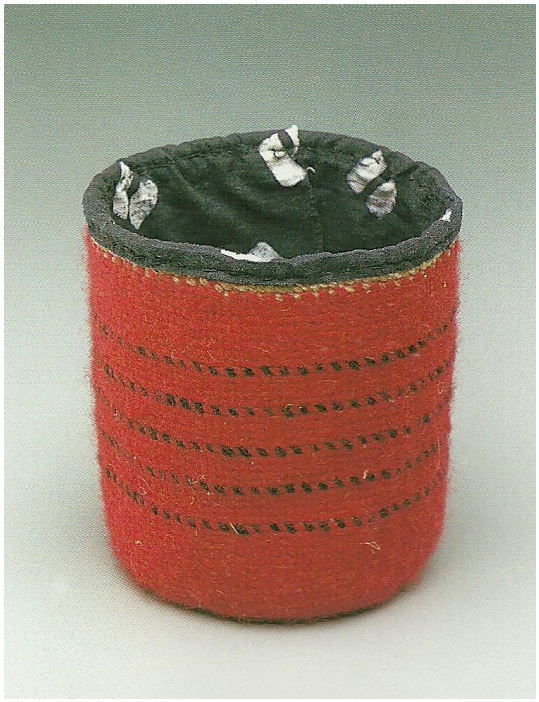

Figure 37: Joe Feddersen, *Red Treasure Basket* (1994) Wool lined with cloth, 3 ¼ x 3 ½ x 3 ½ inches. Image courtesy of the artist.

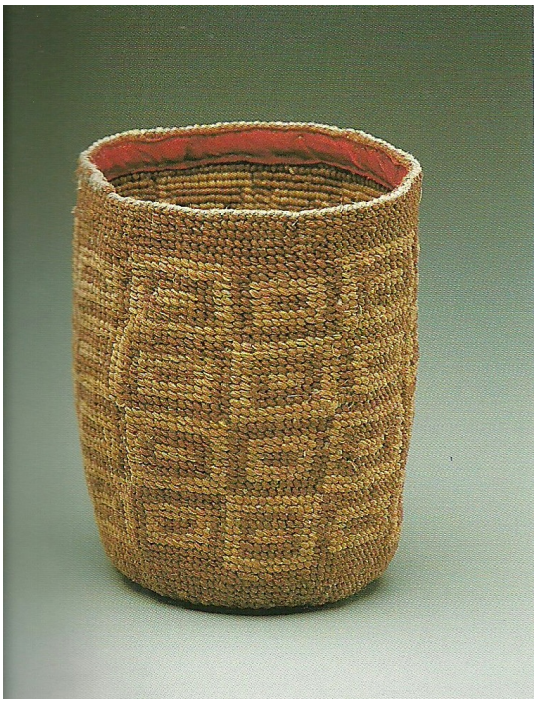

Figure 38: Joe Feddersen, *Target Basket* (1999) Waxed linen trimmed with ribbon, 4 ¾ x 4 x 4 inches. Image courtesy of the artist.



Figure 39: Joe Feddersen, *Pin Wheel* (1996) Pencil drawing on paper and wax, 5 x 4 ½ x 4 ½ inches. Image courtesy of the artist.

He mentioned that he admired Tamayo, "I just love his work, the way that he mixed Mexican culture with Modernism."[286] Puryear, like Tamayo, was represented in Feddersen's extensive library with multiple books. Observationally one can see a similarity between Feddersen's interest in process and exploring technique with design as sympathetic to Puryear's sculptures, which the Museum of Modern Art described as, "rich with psychological and intellectual references, examining issues of identity, culture, and history."[287] That capacity to draw from one's culture and explore it through contemporary processes and a uniquely personal vision is shared by Feddersen with both Tamayo and Puryear. And like both, Feddersen has a continued interest in developing technical skills that foster his own creative exploration in a variety of media.

It was soon after his epiphany about the potential use of his own observations as design motifs that he became one of the recipients of the 2001 Eiteljorg Fellowship for Native American Fine Art. The award brought him the financial support to continue his artistic exploration and the associated national recognition for his art. The body of work, prints, baskets, and mixed media works created during this period became the body of his exhibition for the Eiteljorg Fellowship exhibition. The baskets were still in an experimental stage, though one can see that Feddersen borrowed the logo from the big-box chain of general merchandise stores, Target, for his *Target Basket* and was developing a strong sense of color and technique with the *Red Treasure Basket.* Feddersen's contribution to the Eiteljorg Fellowship exhibition in 2001 embodied the *Plateau Geometrics* prints and the early explorations with the basket form and

[286] Joe Feddersen, interview by author, October 16, 2017, transcript.
[287] Museum of Modern Art. *Exhibitions and events/Martin Puryear: November 4, 2007-January 14, 2008.* (New York: MOMA, 2007).

materials. However, he had already begun a new body of work, though it was not included in the 2001 exhibition at the Eiteljorg.[288]

It was in the early 2000s that Feddersen began experimenting with the early works for his *Urban Indian* series. The organic nature of Feddersen's process allow designs to move fluidly between media and forms, so the designs emerged into both the prints and the baskets at around the same time. The stark geometry of the *Plateau Geometrics* began to be interrupted by the placement of diagrams of urban experience. Feddersen was acting on his own intuitive reading of the environment to adopt the signs and symbols of the contemporary, urban migration patterns – like parking lots and cul-de-sac diagrams, and, even, tire treads. Rather than using only those things that are a product of nature, Feddersen draws from the environment that is man-made. Through consideration of the history of baskets one can see that Feddersen's incorporation of designs located from his environment is as much a historic method for the Plateau people as much as it is a contemporary expression through a fine art object. The resonance of these, often, linear arrangements and forms is the connection that is drawn through Feddersen's vision back to the creation of baskets and into the twenty-first century as observations of the artist's environment.

[288] A complete exhibition list is available in W. Jackson Rushing III, "Joe Feddersen: Sacred Geometry." in *After the Storm: The Eiteljorg Fellowship for Native American Fine Art, 2001*, ed. W. Jackson III Rushing (Indianapolis, IN: Eiteljorg Museum of American Indians and Western Art in association with University of Washington Press, 2001).



Figure 40: Joe Feddersen *Parking Lot* (2002) Woven waxed linen, 5 x 4 x 4 inches. Collection of Preston Singletary, Seattle. Image courtesy of artist.



Figure 41: Joe Feddersen, *Continuum 12*, Installation view at Heye Center, New York City, NY.

Feddersen was invited to participate in a series of exhibitions, *Continuum 12*, curated by Truman Lowe for the George Gustav Heye Center in New York City's extension of the National Museum of the American Indian. For this exhibition, Feddersen was challenged by his encounter with Nora Naranjo-Morse (Santa Clara Pueblo, b. 1953) who was, likewise, part of the *Continuum 12* project and at that time visiting Evergreen. He described this encounter to America Meredith for *First American Art Magazine*:

> Around 2000 It was really funny; I was talking to Nora Naranjo-Morse. She was up at Evergreen. She was the ceramic artist [in the *Continuum* series], and she had to do something really impressive, because she was *the* ceramic artist. It made me think—I was just going to give a bunch of work—but then I thought, "Well, I'm the printmaking artist of this whole group, I should make them a print." I made a print for them that was 12 feet high and 60 feet across. If it weren't for Nora, I would have never thought about pushing it that much. Then I was going to offset it with the baskets, but the baskets were only six inches high and four inches across. They would have been dwarfed by this piece.

> I talked to my friend Cappy Thompson and told her, "Cappy, I want to make these in glass," and she introduced me to Preston Singletary. I worked with Preston to make these basket forms based on my smaller pieces. They were 16 and 18 inches high and about 12 inches across—they were pretty good-sized baskets. Black and white, like the pieces I was working on—the sally bags.[289]

Among the group Feddersen created in 2003 with Singletary for NMAI's *Continuum 12* exhibition series was *Parking Lot.* Using a series of different contemporary designs related to urban migration laid over the surface of basket works large enough to hold the space across from the large print, Feddersen used his environmental observation interpreted through non-customary materials to create a commentary on the shifting human relationship with the earth. Somehow, the humor of these observations, an intentional element suited to the artist's personality, is that they are as much Indigenous as they are contemporary and modernistic, particularly when placed on the customary forms of the baskets in the material of glass.

The Art: *Parking Lot*

Parking Lot (14 x 10¾ in.) is from the *Urban Indian* series, initiated when Feddersen began working with glass artist Preston Singletary to create a new body of work to be exhibited at the NMAI. The group of seven three-dimensional forms were a culmination of several ideas coming together for Feddersen through a new medium. Within this work, Feddersen integrated references to the Okanagan basket forms he had woven since the mid-1990s, the traditional symbols found in his tribe's Plateau-based cultural materials, and the urban signs and forms that marked his two-dimensional print work.

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[289] America Meredith, "Joe Feddersen: Okanagan-Sinixt Printmaker, Glass Artist, and Basket Weaver," *First American Art Magazine* (Winter 2014): 26.

The milky white glass of *Parking Lot* is presented in a wide cylinder form, which has been referred to as a wide-mouthed Plateau-style storage basket called a "sally bag". With three layers of textured designs on its exterior surface, the form carries a juxtaposition of designs that bridge the historic Okanagan natural environment to mundane contemporary urban spaces. Over the entire surface is a shallow etched grid of irregular tiny squares that reference the warp and weft texture of a twined Plateau basket. The surface of this basket texture is etched with a contrapuntal chevron design that repeats four times around the exterior of the form, forming what Feddersen described as an "hourglass form."[290] On the surface, in each of the four voids between the chevron designs, is laid a diagram of solid black glass lines with four vertically oriented linear arrangements—the eponymous parking lot. The interior of the vessel is smooth and has a contrasting glassy sheen to the matted exterior. The rim of the vessel has an olive green band. The base is slightly rounded along the exterior edge, referencing the curve of a hand-woven basket. The scale of the vessel is slightly larger than a customary gathering basket. Simply viewed, *Parking Lot* is a striking modernist spare form with the gentle glow of the etched white glass underneath the simplicity of the black lines.

Parking Lot is based specifically on Plateau baskets. In all three essays in Feddersen's mid-career retrospective exhibition catalog, *Vital Signs,* the authors reference the form of a "sally bag" as an inspiration for Feddersen's own weaving work and as a formal reference in the shapes of the glass vessels.[291] Within a Plateau cultural

[290] Joe Feddersen, interview by author, March 12, 2010.
[291] According to the University of Washington Burke Museum's online guide to Northwest coast basketry, "Although there are numerous interpretations explaining the

premise, women would use these twined bags specifically as gathering baskets, for roots and, sometimes, berries. A brief comparison between the glass vessels and the basketry reflects the three-dimensional reading as similar, but there is a slight difference in the proportion and scale. Sally bags are generally smaller, sometimes small enough to be worn on belt loops (though some have been known to be as large as two feet high and set on the ground). The straight sides are softened as a result of the pliability of the Indian hemp fiber that was most often used in its customary construction.[292] The sally bag forms have a wide, open mouth and a slightly curved base. Feddersen worked with Singletary to mimic the natural curves found in the handwoven fibers translated into the material of glass for *Parking Lot.*[293] When asked about the structure of the glass basket, Feddersen said,

> Part of that is that I was working with somebody, and trying to have a glass form makes it more difficult, because it goes against everything that the glass wants to do. I was working with Preston and he can make beautiful cylinder forms because the glass wants to do that and it's hard for him not to do that. . . . And it's also about referencing and mimicking. Sometimes you use the basket as a departure point in creating something, but I don't think I have to mimic the designs.[294]

The reference to mimicking explains the autonomy that Feddersen exercises with the application of the traditional designs and forms within his art. This autonomy makes the glass vessel more complex to interpret formally, because it is difficult to

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origin of this name, there is not one definitive explanation." See http://www.washington.edu/burkemuseum/baskets/ Teachersguideforbasketry.htm.

[292] There are a broad variety of forms referred to as sally bags within museum collection records found in the area. Most identified as sally bags are smaller, freestanding with twined exteriors, and lined on the interior with cloth. Joe Feddersen was very patient and generous in providing information about these forms and guiding my understanding of how his work relates to the customary forms.

[293] The "horse basket" form is also similar in scale, but these baskets were oblong and coiled, rather than twined. Feddersen learned to make sally bags and his reference source is used here throughout.

[294] Joe Feddersen, in conversation with the author, March 12, 2010.

gauge what is a direct act of cultural mimesis and what is artistic innovation. For this reason, Feddersen's cooperation has been instrumental in the research for this analysis.

The glass cannot be dismissed as simply an exploration on the artist's part into new materials, though this plays an important role to be discussed further. Feddersen's knowledge of basket making and previous work in installation could certainly have been used to fill the spatial expanse he was seeking for the gallery at the NMAI. Additionally, glass is not limited in color or scale, as exemplified in Singletary's diverse body of work. The choice to use milky white glass for the entire group has to be considered more closely. Elizabeth Woody, who wrote the essay used in the gallery guide for Feddersen's work in *Continuum 12*, wrote, "Feddersen's use of glass speaks of our human fragility."[295] One can read the glass as a delicate metaphor for the relationships that Indigenous people have to the natural environment as well as to their cultural materials. The rapid decline of land base and customary art forms over the last two hundred years, for many tribes, has had a significant impact on the process of passing cultural knowledge between generations. Using the glass in concert with a traditional form, the color white can be seen as Woody describes, "the shell of the basket with the ephemeral density of a cloud."[296] Perhaps the white glass can also be seen as a transformation of the wax paper Feddersen used in his previous experiments with basket forms, which like glass is altered by the hand and heat. The range of interpretations Feddersen allows in the materiality, through the tribally specific use and reference to materials, is repeated in his direct invocation of design symbols.

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[295] Elizabeth Woody, "Joe Feddersen: Geometric Abstraction—the Language of the Land," *Continuum 12* (New York: National Museum of the American Indian, 2003), 3.
[296] Ibid.

Using the references Feddersen provided for the sally bag form and the cultural designs as guides invites interpretation of the symbols on the surface of the glass vessel.[297] In *Parking Lot,* Feddersen offered critical information necessary for reading the chevron design etched into the surface. He said, "When you're looking at the chevron design, those are actually the designs for *woman* in Plateau culture, kind of like an hourglass design, kind of a winding vase."[298] The symbolic reference to woman is directly drawn from his local community.

Feddersen has described above learning from Okanogan basket makers the designs and materials related to this artistic tradition. The idiosyncratic nature of Indigenous designs and symbols puts a responsibility on the artist and art historian to consider these as semiotic references in context with their meanings. In this case, when Feddersen uses the symbol for woman, he invigorates it as a continued part of the cultural dialogue and, by doing so, also contemporizes the language in its usage.

Further, by placing the symbol of woman on this form, Feddersen calls into play the concept of woman as the Okanogan people understand it. With this translation of the symbol defined by Feddersen, it cannot be ignored that within Okanogan culture, as part of the larger community of Colville traditions—woman is a living metaphor for the earth. While some may consider this a chauvinistic construct to be used by this male artist, it is necessary to see that aligning the concept of woman with the earth is not held

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[297] The difficulties of establishing an Indigenous cultural provenance for the form also apply to the designs. For this reason, this analysis will limit any specific reading of Indigenous designs to the western Plateau area, except for those that Feddersen identifies as belonging to his community, specifically. It may require intensive local research with the Okanagan people to establish the designs as distinctive to a particular tribe or subgroup. For the purposes of this analysis, conversations with Feddersen have been instrumental in clarifying details in relation to *Parking Lot.*

[298] Feddersen, in conversation with the author, March 12, 2010.

here within the Western dynamic of "woman as nature," with the subtext that both are to be dominated by men. Rather, one must look with the eyes of an Okanogan person, for whom the earth is described as a woman "who gives birth to life forms."[299] The source of this epistemological concept is located in the genesis story for the Colville community where it becomes evident how woman is a symbolic description of the relationship that people have with the earth:

> Old One, or Chief, made the earth out of a woman, and said she would be the mother of all the people. Thus the earth was once a human being, and she is alive yet; but she has been transformed, and we cannot see her in the same way we can see a person. Nevertheless she has legs, arms, head, heart, flesh, bones, and blood. The soil is her flesh; the trees and vegetation are her hair; the rocks, her bones; and the wind is her breath. She lies spread out, and we live upon her.[300]

The familial affection that many Indigenous community members have for the earth is far deeper than can be examined from a Western perspective, which largely sees the earth as a natural resource, if not simply a form of property. Seeing the earth as a woman, as a mother who is the source for nurturing and creation extends beyond the feminine object and into a broader relationship, which Dennis Martinez has coined as *kincentricity*.[301] Martinez uses this term to describe the circular interaction between humans and the earth, which makes their relationship more closely guided by principles evident in nature seeking a harmonious balance. For the Colville people, as with many communities, the creative force of woman is evident not only in the role of the human

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[299] John A. Grim, "Cosmogony and the Winter Dance: Native American Ethics in Transition," *Journal of Religious Ethic* 20, No. 2 (1992): 389.
[300] Susan Staiger Gooding, "Interior Salishan Creation Stories: Historical Ethics in the Making," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 20, no. 2 (1992): 357.
[301] Dennis Martinez (interviewee) and D. E. Hall (interviewer), "Native Perspectives on Sustainability: Dennis Martinez (O'odham/ Chicano/Anglo)," 2008 interview transcript. See the Native Perspectives on Sustainability project website: http://www.nativeperspectives.net.

mother but also in the earth's capacity to provide and nurture all that lives on her surface. Feddersen's use of this hourglass symbol is not just an aesthetic design choice, but the invocation of deep emotional and cultural ties to womanhood and all this represents. Feddersen has also symbolically layered the subtle texture of a basket weave on the surface of the glass. By doing so, he draws the reference between the natural weaving materials of grass, seen symbolically as the hair of the earth, and the glass, thereby aligning the delicate nature of the glass to the delicate relationship between Indigenous people and their homelands. The chevrons, thereby, become a highly charged semiotic message constructed in the delicate material of glass and reiterated through the use of a basket form.

Etching this highly charged symbol for earth below a parking lot design then merits consideration for the practical and metaphorical reading of their combination. The parking lot design, really a diagram, was developed in the late 1920s to allow for the development of large department stores and facilitated the advent of the automobile culture.[302] These diagrams can be seen to represent the daily migration patterns of contemporary society—driving to work, to the grocery store, to school, and so forth. Migrating within these terms also requires that we consider that this is done largely on asphalt- or cement-finished roads. Organizing patterns of contemporary migration, here represented by a parking lot diagram, form the basis of how most Americans relate to the earth—through a mediated system of transit routes, either roads or sidewalks that "improve" the surface to become more suitable for automotive use. The roads and sidewalks become a way of marking where humans are encouraged to travel, to move

[302] John A. Jakle and Keith A. Sculle, *Lots of Parking: Land Use in a Car Culture* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2004).

over the surface of the earth, which in Colville cultural beliefs is mother of us all. The simplicity of the glass surface comes to be seen as revealing a very antithetical relationship between the people and their mother. This juxtaposition of symbols also draws into relationship the two designs as markers of place, movement, and belonging, here revealing a contrast between Indigenous and Euro-American ideals of relating to the earth.

The interplay of culture, through layers of visibility, might also read as a metaphorical rendering of the conflicts located in the urban Indigenous American experience. Feddersen achieves a subtle tension because of the shared relationship the designs have as simplified geometric symbols. Also, the form of *Parking Lot* as a vessel is closely tied to Feddersen's western Plateau baskets. Through his syncretistic use of abstract designs on this vessel, Feddersen reveals an Indigenous aesthetic emphasis on symbolism and metaphor as a codified subtext to the visually appealing layers.

An emphasis on symbolism and metaphor is intrinsic to the role of reciprocity within Indigenous art. Reciprocity is largely an act of gratitude by an artist for their cultural heritage. By using traditional art forms and designs, artists are actively participating in the continuation of their cultures. Feddersen recognizes this role and sees the need and the potential for evolving the Okanogan traditional forms and designs to reflect a contemporary Indigenous experience. He describes it as follows:

> A lot of times our signs are from our surroundings and our landscape. I've always been cognizant of how place is related to the culture. To think about people from the Plateau area going out and recording the landscape for thousands of years and having this relationship is like a coming of age – a personal vision quest. This tie with the land goes beyond the hundreds or thousands of years of people going out into the land and the way that the land was forming the culture. I think that's really important also. I think part of that is embedded in the visual culture. It's not a singular kind of thing. It was repeated

> for centuries. We've been in our present place for over a thousand years now. Everyday we see the railroad tracks and we've incorporated that into our traditional designs. I've incorporated the electric lines that got put up in the '20s and '30s. It's not like what I'm doing is anything new, it's just carrying on a tradition.[303]

The marks made by human and animal are an important feature of the landscape for Feddersen. He drew my attention to the marks on the hillside made by generations of people and animals traversing across the space, each one adding to the history of the marks on the land, "Each foot step placed on the hillside adds to the pattern honed over thousands of years!"[304]

Feddersen uses the term "vital signs" to describe this incorporation of signs into his contemporary visual vocabulary. The term is most often associated with the measurable bodily pulses that signify human life. In reference to his work, *vital signs* is used to reference the cultural designs, signs, and symbols that have been used within his tribal culture as a contemporary recording of their experience for millennia. He intends the ambiguity of this term, saying,

> We think that to carry on the traditions, the mere act of using them enlivens them as active rather than not using them. By using the traditional signs we talk about what the meaning is and they become part of our visual vocabulary rather than something that is purely historical.[305]

It would seem, then, that *vital signs* signifies the pulse of the culture as it is represented by the designs and located within the ongoing act of artistic creation within the community.

The act of using Indigenous designs is a form of cultural reciprocity, participating in a cycle of accountability that contributes toward the perseverance of

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[303] Joe Feddersen in conversation with the author, March 12, 2010, transcript.
[304] Joe Feddersen, commentary made during the editing process, February 10, 2018.
[305] Joe Feddersen in conversation with the author, March 12, 2010, transcript.

traditional culture. When Indigenous people actively practice, participate, and perpetuate their cultures, this is the most basic form of gratitude to those ancestors who made the effort to carry the culture into the future, into our present.

Feddersen sees the greater advantage of working toward making traditional values vital in the contemporary world. Artist–writer Gail Tremblay in *Vital Signs*, succinctly describes this:

> For this series, Feddersen used his new abstract visual language to express the importance of honoring traditional patterns of culture and maintaining its vitality; at the same time, he refused to allow his artwork to lock American Indian people in some strange ethnographic present where they must not be modern if they are to be authentically 'Indian.' In these works, Feddersen makes both tradition and modernity present in contemporary American art and reflects the real lives of people living in twenty-first-century urban Indian culture."[306]

Perhaps it is because Gail Tremblay is an artist whose art mediates between customary historical references and a twenty-first century experience but her use of the term *traditional* seems to hold together the very best of what is meant by that word when it is used by Native people and about the arts.

It is necessary to pursue this kind of cultural and artistic analysis in order to realize the fullest value that the work offers. These references of shape and subtly etched design elements mark *Parking Lot* as an extension of the traditions of Plateau baskets and Okanagan culture. Through their applications in a contemporary and nontraditional medium, they refute the historicized context within which Indigenous art is so often placed. It is this invocation of the past into the present that reflects an Indigenous concept of circular time, the importance of cycles and repetition as a conduit to cultural persistence.

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[306] Gail Tremblay, "Speaking in a Language of Vital Signs," in Rebecca J. Dobkins, *Joe Feddersen: Vital Signs* (Seattle: Hallie Ford Museum of Art, Willamette University, in association with the University of Washington Press, 2008): 48.

Conclusion

Applying the framework to Feddersen's *Parking Lot* fosters an understanding about the object as an extension of a customary Plateau practice that extends the continuum of baskets into the medium of glass. These kinds of innovations invigorate artistic practice and challenge categorical expectations for Native American art. The historical practice of Plateau basket making provides an important continuum to which Feddersen adds both the continued practice of basket weaving and the introduction of design elements that any artist might call "their own," though in Feddersen's work they take on additional meaning as Indigenous motifs. His choice of forms and designs translated into the non-customary material of glass invigorates the concept of Okanogan art, as much as it does for the broader Native American art community. His capacity to build layers and textures, as prints and in glass, are in themselves metaphors for the layers that exist within the cultural experience Feddersen lives.

One of the most interesting components of the conversation with Feddersen was the ease with which he practices his culture, both as a thinker and as a community member. He mentioned that while he has started to get comfortable in Omak after his retirement, that, "It's very difficult to come home. You don't just pick up where you left off. It takes a big effort to become part of the community again."[307] He has done just that—become part of the community again—through his artistic practice. He leads regular meetings of local weavers, mostly women in keeping with the gendered tradition of weaving, who look to him to guide their hands as they learn to twist the twine and wool of the baskets together. When asked what he did to relate to his tribal

[307] Joe Feddersen, interview by author, October 16, 2017, transcript.

community he joked, or at least I took it as a joke, that gambling was a form of cultural participation. During the course of my research I saw multiple references to the role of gambling in the Plateau region. While this essay is not about gambling, I realized that in the same way that Feddersen is an artist, he is also an Okanagan—by simply being himself. Feddersen also observed to me how "Gambling is important [to the community] because the casinos are the new gathering places today – especially in small rural communities."[308]

From that position of acting on his natural curiosity and inclinations, Feddersen creates works that continue a practice that is historic and, in his hands, creates the potential for future innovation as simultaneously an act of individual conception while participating in regional Plateau expression. This analysis borrows from the Plateau cultural region's relationship to baskets and the act of seeking out designs from one's environment to consider Feddersen's baskets. Borrowing from Brayboy's idea that Indigenous creation stories are our theory, one can see that Feddersen acts within his cultural traditions to form a link to the future in diverse materials and interpretations of the local environment. He does this while resisting the restrictions that might come from aligning himself as a "traditional practitioner" and engaging an interest in process and curiosity.

Merging Brayboy's argument that Indigenous creation stories are a valid form of theory with Deleuze theory of virtuality within the body of Feddersen's glass basket is a matter of ease, relying on the history of Plateau baskets and the convergence of this history into the new material of glass, treated on its surface with a diagram of

[308] Joe Feddersen, comment made during editing process through personal communication, January 5, 2018.

contemporary migration. Feddersen uses the present as a visual mediator materializing a continuity of Okanagan/Plateau artistic expression. This is further mirrored in Feddersen's ease as a customary practitioner of baskets carrying design motifs into other media, printmaking and spray paint alike. Through *Parking Lot* we are transported as easily to the ethereal and metaphorical relationship with the referential basket made from the natural source of the earth mother's grasses as we are to the milky glass that emerges transformed by the element of fire. *Parking Lot* is the pinnacle of these case studies in providing evidence that the future of Indigenous communities is imagined by the artists into a realized future reality. Indigenous artists are, at their core, storytellers and from their hands we make our way into the world as Indigenous communities.

During the course of the interviews with Joe Feddersen, there were many pauses in the conversation on the part of the artist, which in the moment felt like they were weighted with deep thought. After listening to them for the translation into the transcripts used for his case study, it became clear that Feddersen's pauses may have been his intentional pacing, taking his time, to allow me to catch up with the depth of the concepts he was sharing. He reminded me that I was asking him questions about an object he made almost twenty years ago and that he wasn't sure if he should give me the answer from when he made it, or from the present. When asked, I advised him to answer the questions as he saw fit and, in retrospect, I recognize that he was speaking in the present, and that my interest in the meaning that might be found in *Parking Lot* was of interest to me, but not to him. He shared a lesson he had learned from one of his mentors, Glen Alps.

> He would talk about this thing of when you would go to the doctor and the doctor tells you to take a deep breath, and exhale, and inhale. Then after that

> they say—now you can breathe naturally. I think about that when you think about culture. A lot of times things are really hyper—a hyperreality—and then you just put that aside and you just become, you act naturally. I think that is what I try to do.[309]

Feddersen's comparison of his creative work to breathing was reiterated through another reference about coyote stories. I had been asking him about the context of his work, his artistic intentions and choices. He replied,

> You know that when you tell the [coyote] stories it helps bring things out in people. And there are a hundred different interpretations. And they're all right. It's that thing that stimulates them and brings out that idea within. That's more important to me. If I can create that much ambiguity to kind of transcend… it's not meant to be didactic or anything. It's meant to make you think of something or to think in a different way. A lot of times it has what you're thinking about seeps into your interpretation… And that's really important. When you're thinking about what the coyote stories mean, what you get out of them is very much from you. And so, I look at that when people look at these and they get something different out of it. And that's okay. Does that make sense?[310]

This series of comments, when taken as a whole, began to connect conceptually as his essay took form.

At the beginning of this research project and the preparation of these case studies I had hoped to show that from considering contemporary Indigenous art using the proposed framework provides a lens to better understand the art. It is my hope that this argument has been effective. But what also emerged was my understanding that each of us brings to the work our own perspectives and that any interpretation may encounter what the artist was intending, but that the beauty of considering the art is that these works considered here, have more to offer when dependent on what the viewer brings. As Feddersen said to America Meredith in his interview for *First American Art*

[309] Joe Feddersen, interview by author. March 12, 2010, transcript.
[310] Ibid.

Magazine, "Like in coyote stories, there's lots of answers to everything, and that sounds like a really wonderful way of thinking about it."[311]

MATERIALITY	**METAPHOR/SYMBOLISM**
glass = delicate etching = eating away the surface basket as a practice > JF learned this before making glass	Earth = Creation = Mother = Relationships parking lot = improvements ➢ migrations Modernist form V Traditional Form [inspired by Tamayo] Designs > Observations [Plateau history]
KINCENTRICITY	**TEMPORALITY**
Earth = Mother relationships to basket makers [student > teacher] [artists community through cultural practice] Preston as part of NW Coast artists community/family Salish cultural group of artists > "Terrain"	Preston Singletary | + Heye Center | Continuum 12 art as product of curiosity + exploration of processes supported by a cultural conduit of "making"

Table 6: Analytical framework applied to Joe Feddersen's *Parking Lot.*

[311] Meredith, "Joe Feddersen: Okanagan-Sinixt Printmaker, Glass Artist, and Basket Weaver," (Winter 2014): 27.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

This dissertation is the product of an ongoing inquiry into the relationships that exist between artists, their Indigenous cultures, and their aesthetic pursuits as materialized in the contemporary art they produce; and, with the closer focus on the objects, how each work is the product of and producer of cultural knowledge. The case studies analyzed and interpreted four selected objects of study, created by professional Indigenous artists from disparate tribal and geographic spaces using a diverse array of materials and processes. The analytical framework draws upon the history of materials and their uses, the relationships that exist within Native American communities, the use of metaphors and symbolism to communicate dynamic and complex cultural concepts, and the position of each artist within his or her unique temporal conditions. The methodology for research draws upon existing practices in Art History, Anthropology, and Native American Studies. The purpose of this dissertation is to propose that by expanding current methods for analysis and interpretation of Indigenous arts, the art will gain in potency as products of both creative individuals and dynamic cultural communities; that the art can be seen to be a product of and a force for the continued vitality of Indigenous cultures mediated through the vision of the artists; and to examine the important role artists perform within a continuum of artistic production despite rapidly shifting social and cultural landscapes.

The research draws from art history's practice of formal analysis of an object, particularly with the use of symbols, metaphors and forms. The research borrows from anthropology's ethnographic practice while also positioning the object as a product of cultural worldviews, and as a producer of new culture. Finally, I have formulated a

research method that is based upon the tenets of Indigenous methodologies, an important development in the allied field of Native American Studies: reciprocity, responsibility, and respect manifested through relationships. My ambition has been to construct a framework that is potentially useful to further develop a culturally-centric method for analysis, effectively bridging and decoding work by Native artists for a deep interpretation of contemporary Indigenous art and exposing the cultural grounding that these fine artists are using as they construct new works and methods for creatively expressing themselves and their cultures.

The project has been executed as four case studies on specific objects made by four different Indigenous artists: two men, two women, each from a different tribe from across the United States, and each object is made using a different medium. My intention for planning a project that looks at disparate artists, tribes, and types of materials was to see if the framework can be applied outside of any particular or specific cultural region or worldview, if it worked on any kind of material, and to consider explore if there were limits for its application to Indigenous artists with a range of experiences, education, and cultural identity.

Using the data gathered through research, I have applied an original framework to analyze the work of 4four contemporary artists: Shan Goshorn (Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians, lives in Tulsa, OK); Norman Akers (Osage Nation, lives in Lawrence, KS); Marie Watt (Seneca, lives in Portland, OR); and Joe Feddersen (Okanagan of the Colville Confederated Tribes, lives in Omak, WA).

For this project I have formulated an Indigenous research method that uses multi-sited ethnographic practices and formal art historical analysis. The method seeks

to assert a priority for Indigenous cultural protocols, both formal and social, in developing a relationship with each artist. The artists with whom I worked were identified as a result of my position as a curator and member of the Native arts community. Without invitation, each sought to help me understand their art, explaining how their culture influenced their ideas. Because of these informal preliminary conversations, I asked each if they would be willing to participate in my dissertation project. These conversations have taken place over the last ten years and it is a great relief to have brought this project to the committee at this time.

Borrowing from the nascent field of Indigenous Methodologies, the research was conducted implementing the primary tenets of respect, reciprocity, responsibility, and relationships. These tenets were implemented through the process of research, writing, and editing. While the research was not positioned within my tribal construct, as many Indigenous researchers have done when conducting research on their own community. Instead, it was my contention that to apply my own tribal values created the risk of usurping the artist's own culture. Therefore, through preliminary anthropological research, candid conversation and speaking with a deep level of humility, I worked with each artist to respect their culture within the research related to their art.

It was my intention and practice to allow the artists to guide the discussion of their art. Additionally, maintaining that if the artists were invited to participate as partners, their editorial preferences would be given priority in the process. To this end, each artist was made a partner in the research process as the primary informant through interviews, was given an editorial role for the drafted essay and the content development, and, upon publication, will be credited as a co-author of their chapter.

Once the artists were engaged, this project began to be formulated through the proposal and subsequent coursework. This past spring, I applied for and received approval to conduct this research within IRB oversight. The research began with each artist by conducting an initial interview and studio visit. Following the preparation of a transcription of the interview, I pursued research on those events and sites that seemed to be of significance to the artist, as well as researching any cultural elements that repeatedly appeared within the interviews (designs, stories, or materials). Based upon the initial interviews and subsequent research I drafted the chapters that included my formal analysis of the object. Recognizing the role of story, analysis required research utilizing secondary sources on the artists' tribal cultural narratives, as well as considering art historical references. At this point, I provided the interview transcripts and the initial essay drafts to the artists for review, after which I conducted a second interview with each artist to identify any factual errors, to discuss the preliminary findings, to explore whether the interpretation was appropriate and to further expand the discussion. These second interviews often provided more in-depth discussion about the cultural references and affirmed the value of researching the culture in concert with the analysis of the object. The essays were amended to most fully represent these second interviews.

Implementing a multi-sited ethnographic inquiry, each artist and their body of work are discussed using the analytical framework created for this project: exploring Materiality, Kincentricity, Symbolism & Metaphor, and Temporality. These lenses provide a means of exploring the interdependent influences of culture, community, materials, visual semiotics, and personal experience.

Materiality considers the use of materials, and any pre-existing relationships to materials or historical references. Seeks references to customary practices with these materials and cultural relationships that are expressed through these practices, and how the artist may be using the materials to reference these relationships.

Kincentricity considers the role of relationships as a culturally informing process for the artist and their ideas. This lens recognizes that relationships for Indigenous people extend beyond human family and engages the extended human forms of relationships through community, clan, and culture, as well as those relationships that are located in creation stories that bind human people with other forms of peoplehood, including animals, plants, supernatural beings, and natural forces, including cosmological relationships.

Symbolism & Metaphor considers the aesthetic systems being employed that are found within the artist's tribal culture, including other cultural systems to which the artist has formed a relationship, both Indigenous and Western. These aesthetic systems can be both historical and/or contemporary and may be found within any of the formal elements, including color, form, or design.

Temporality considers the artist and object within temporal context, particularly considering the artist's formal and informal education, cultural and historical knowledge, and use of materials from a historical perspective of customary practice. Considering the emergence and introduction of materials, as well as the artist's access to innovations within the broader creative fields is an important contribution to understanding how the artist fits within their cultural artistic continuum.

I have prepared a diagram that shows the interdependence of these lenses and helps to convey that these lenses are each only one way of looking at the culture and its influences on the object and the artist. It is my contention that in order to help others conduct a deep interpretation of Native art, that providing a framework is fundamental in order to allow for people from a multitude of cultural backgrounds to participated in a shared conversation. There are likely other lenses to use, but these appear to me to be the most useful in discussing contemporary Native art. I am not proposing that this framework can be applied to historical art and I feel confident that using this framework would require the active engagement of the artist in order to fully explore the lenses.

As previously stated, my professional practice as an Indigenous curator and member of the Native arts community has exposed a gap between the artistic intentions of Indigenous artists and the analytical frameworks and methods used to analyze their art. While I can imagine that this can be done better by someone more inventive than myself, I am impatient for the development of a research method and framework that can be used to interpret contemporary Native American art and considers how the art is both a product of and producer of Indigenous culture.

By documenting how that dynamic functions through contemporary art, this research lends toward a greater understanding of the role that Indigenous art plays within the cultures and for communicating Indigenous culture to both fine art audiences and the Indigenous community.

Shan Goshorn arrived at making customary Cherokee basket forms only recently in 2007, though she grew up familiar and with access to tribal culture and community. A formally trained artist, she has worked in photography, sculpture, painting, and as a

silversmith. She has used her art as an activist tool since her early days as an artist in the 1980s. She had previously created images that provided a counter-narrative to the often-absent story of Native people. She credits her arrival in Oklahoma's rich inter-tribal community to create the relationships and experiences that contributed to her confidence as an artist to address such critical issues. It was when she asserted her experiences with Cherokee baskets, a medium for which she is only informally exposed, that she began to make forms that addressed tribal issues as body of work for which she has received the most acclaim.

Separating the Chaff, only her third basket from the current series, is made in the form of a customary Cherokee sifter basket woven from archival paper printed with images appropriated from a 1970s encyclopedia for the intention of teaching about Native Americans. The object is a metaphor for the constant requirement for Native Americans to sift through the misinformation that has been taught to the American public through the exercise of knowledge taught from schoolbooks. She surrounds the exterior with the color red, thereby inverting the concept of "blood memory," an internally generated cycle of inheritance to the exterior. This applied color is also a visual reference to terms often association with Native people, including redskins and red man. Collectively, the use of a customary cultural form with the appropriated images provides a nuanced and inviting point of discussion to engage viewers on topics that are often too sensitive to broach.

Norman Akers was raised in Pawhuska, Oklahoma, in one of the primary centres of Osage ceremonial life. Raised within this tight-knit community, Akers remembers an interest in art and visual detail back to his childhood days. Through a series of

experiences that included formal education in locations that separated him from his culture and private tragic events, Akers emerged as a painter with a well-developed series of personal icons and images that are painted in conversation with historic and cultural motifs. In *Okesa II*, he has made an oil on panel painting of a landscape that conflates a realistic landscape with an overlaid cartographic map as an abstraction of the landscape and incorporates the Osage symbol of the Great Elk, a symbol that references the Osage ontological philosophy of the creation of the world. The painterly layers contribute to a complex image that is both vertical, horizontal, and transcends temporal limits and formulates a visual portal for the ongoing recreation of Osage-ness.

It is within this image that I was able to consider a motif, the snare or Ho-e-ga, that is a sacred image as a point for drawing a boundary for knowledge that might be evident within an image that is not inherently accessible for the layperson or scholar. I believe that while this framework and research method may reveal a sacred motif, it does not give one license to further explore or expose knowledge that may be considered culturally proprietary.

Raised in the inter-tribal suburban community in Seattle, Marie Watt was familiar with her Seneca tribal heritage through her mother and was, likewise, proud of her German-Scot father's resilient family of ranchers. While in college, she began to channel her creativity into the arts while also completing a Communications degree in art history. After attending the Institute of American Indian Arts and the Yale University MFA program, Watt began to reinterpret art through her own cultural perspective. This resulted in her attendant use of feminine materials, including wool and blankets. *Blanket Stories: Three Sisters, Four Pelts, Sky Woman, Cousin Rose, and All*

my Relations is a series of blankets that were initially composed for her installation at the National Museum of the American Indian. While the group of blankets remained the same, the installation changed from a curvilinear structure, to a triad of towers, to the compilation of a single and totemic structure at its final destination, the Tacoma Art Museum.

In her constructed series of free-standing sculptural objects, which have been compared to monumental obelisks and stone cairns as place markers, Watt employs a proto-feminist perspective of Seneca ontology in the creation of these "soft landing spots for Sky Woman," who is the Seneca progenitor of humanity. Making the *Blanket Stories* series has been a means for claiming space for Seneca people. Additionally, it is a process that invites for the viewing community to become part of the series, through the sewing circles organized for receiving gifts of blankets and to participate in the construction of her hanging textile works. This activation of the community within the process is as much a statement of Seneca identity as is the construction of landing spots.

Joe Feddersen was raised in his mother's Okanagan community of Omak, Washington, where he has since retired after a career teaching at Evergreen State College and working as a professional artist. He received formal training as a printmaker and painter. In 2003 he worked with Preston Singletary in preparation for his exhibition at the National Museum of the American Indian. He had prepared a monumental scale print and wanted to augment the exhibition with objects that could hold the space in opposition. The collective body of work is called the *Urban Indian* series. The form of *Parking Lot* is referential to a Great Basin basket commonly called a "Sally Bag." The interpretation into glass is mediated by the surface etching treatment

that directly references the woven form with a design motif that references Mother Earth in milky opaque glass overlaid with a parking lot diagram in solid black. The glass basket becomes a visual commentary on the complex relationship between American society and the Mother Earth, drawing in references to migration and order. While the modernist simplicity of the form is aesthetically pleasing, the dialogue Feddersen invites is critical of the delicate relationships that we assert with our natural environment.

The complexity of Native American cultures are rooted in the uniquely interpreted individual construction of identity, particularly as Indigenous people live within urban spaces while remaining connected to their cultural communities. This is an area that merits further exploration as Indigenous cultural people live as diasporic communities that are strengthened by the intertribal exchange that occurs nationally in a variety of experiences.

While Native cultures are passed through generations, each generation contributes to new ways of knowing the stories and interpreting them for future generations. The arts are a critical form of constructed knowledge, that through the hands of the artists creates a shared vision for how all of us imagine ourselves as cultural people in the future. For this reason, the variety of forms and materials are a form of cultural adaptation and resilience, extending a continuum of practice that has brought us as Indigenous people to this moment. As we examine, analyze and learn about the arts, it is a doorway for us to move forward to better understand ourselves and one another. The value of gaining understanding is that through this process we all benefit in the process.

How we are Indigenous continues to be mediated by our relationships to the land, to the language, and to one another. Kincentricity speaks to the ways that we form communities, like Shan Goshorn, with an intertribal community that supports her capacity to give voice to the issues that were silenced while she remained isolated prior to moving to Oklahoma. Marie Watt's village is formed as much by her maternal link to the Seneca people and Sky Woman, as it is to her Northwest Coast neighbors who recognize in her work their own connections to the land and their ancestors. The blankets she uses have meaning for everyone, and like in the coyote stories that Joe Feddersen referenced, everyone brings their own meaning to these objects as they get stacked into communities of their own and with each installation. Norman Akers provides to us the lens to recognize that we are all in the same snare, sharing the space on the earth's surface, where the sky looks over us standing on the earth.

Perhaps this seems like a prosaic end to a dissertation, and likely it is. But what this research revealed in the end is that we owe it to the artists to improve our methods for analysis and interpretation. The art challenges us to better seek out the connections it reveals to the culture, that these connections are a reflection of our own humanity. This is not just what the artists' need, because as Feddersen proved, his work goes on with out it. That need exists for all of us who are world citizens. If we are to really understand what it means to be in this place, on this landscape, and in this snare together, Indigenous and non-Indigenous alike, there is a need to recognize that the diversity of our cultures is what makes us unique.

The nationalist movements of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries that called for us to shed our cultural differences is precisely why we do not recognize others in

ourselves—many of us have lost our own identities as previous generations were encouraged to become American. In a nation with so much cultural diversity, one must ask what does it mean to be White? What does it mean to be Black? And when we look at the broad category of what it means to be Native American, we can see that the diversity is part of the strength. Recognizing that and asking the same questions of other cultures, perhaps the art will help us to learn about one another and seek the measure of beauty that waits to be found.

During the process of conducting the research and preparing the case studies, I have had the privilege to read on scholarly topics that time has previously made prohibitive. One of the essays that was most interesting, and timely, has been Margo Neale's "Whose Identity Crisis? Between the Ethnographic and the Art Museum." Written by an Aboriginal curator in Australia, she addressed the challenges faced by Indigenous curators rising in the museum field and identified tensions I have perceived but been unable to identify. Speaking of museums,

> These institutions had been established one hundred years earlier to authenticate the difference between European civilization and Indigenous cultures. Like heaven and hell, they were two different domains: one reserved for those who would inherit the earth, its large well-lit white walls showing off the splendor of Western civilization; and the other for those doomed races, their savage practices displayed like relics in glass cases.[312]

Neale goes on to say that in the last two decades this division has started to fall away, often led by Indigenous artists whose works refuse to be so qualified, and the Indigenous curators have, "instigated their own process of institutional liberation."[313] Perhaps as I have desired to have the knowledge of our Indigenous cultures reflected in

[312] Ian McLean, *Double Desire: Transculturation and Indigenous Contemporary Art* (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014): 290-291.
[313] Ibid, p. 291.

the museums and in the literature, I follow on the heels of so many who have laid the path before me. For that I am grateful, and to the artists who have allowed me to find myself in their art, I am indebted.

What Feddersen and the other artists do through their art is provide a lens into what it is to be part of the Indigenous American cultural prism. Each provided access through the objects for the viewer to consider what is being done through the materials, in their use of symbols and metaphors as a form of cultural language, and as part of the multitude of relationships that bind us to this continent. Their work is of the here and now, but the now is connected as much to the moment of creation as it is to the future. In this moment, and at this time, each artist has experiences that position him and her in relationship to the Western world, conceptually and experientially. However, unlike the ambitions of historical policies that suggested participating in American society and in the capitalist economy would create Americans of the Indigenous peoples of this land, what happened is that the artists, like so many other Indigenous people (the author included among them), have found a way to connect this moment with the moments of creation that provide us with stories that are the foundations of our tribal identities. Transcending temporal restrictions, we are living in the time of the creation stories, stories that we are in the process of writing for our descendants in the same way that our ancestors prepared stories and prayers for each of us. And while we have necessarily formed relationships beyond the restricted communities of our own tribe or local geographic space, we have built communities through the shared spaces of museums, markets, and, even, books, as the art gets reproduced and the stories are shared. We are making the future through our hands believing that our cultures will survive.

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