

UNIVERSITY OF OKLAHOMA GRADUATE COLLEGE

COMMUNITY, (SETTLER) COLONIAL COLLECTING, & COMMERCIALIZATION:
PATKÁŠA KŠÚPI WÒTAWÉ AS A CASE STUDY FOR INTERPRETING (DIS)POSSESSED
INDIGENOUS BELONGINGS

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE FACULTY

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the

Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

By ABBY MIKALOUSKAS

Norman, Oklahoma

2025

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A THESIS APPROVED FOR THE
SCHOOL OF VISUAL ARTS

BY THE COMMITTEE CONSISTING OF

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Acknowledgments

I'd firstly like to thank my thesis chair, Dr. Alicia Harris. The countless hours of sitting in Dr. Harris' office brainstorming, editing, venting, and clearing the candy dish were foundational to the development and subsequent completion of this thesis. I could not have done it without her willingness to hold space for our weekly meetings, her steadfast support, and the occasional "auntie advice" that lifted me out of the all too frequent rut. My other committee members, Drs. Yve Chavez and Alison Fields have also given me invaluable insight and guidance that has positively impacted the trajectory of this thesis. Additionally, special thanks to the National Museum of the American Indian for allowing me into the collections and the opportunity to physically engage with patkáša kšúpi wòtawe.

I am also incredibly grateful to Holly Young. Her willingness to talk to me openly, honestly, and respectfully about her experiences in life and her practice has been the highlight of this whole thesis process. Furthermore, I immensely appreciate her giving me permission to share our conversation, with the hopes that other readers gain as much from it as I did.

Thank you to my cohort, Siraye, Travis, and Morgan, and our honorary cohort member, Elaine. Our monthly dinners provided a much-needed reprieve from the daily academic grind and kept the motivation flowing. Particularly, thank you to Siraye and Elaine, whose almost daily phone calls and Facetimes not only helped me finetune my writing, but kept me sane.

Lastly, I'd like to dedicate this thesis to Howard Frederick Stringer – *Illegitimi non carborundum*.

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Abstract

Keywords: Umbilical amulet, ethnographic collection, community, settler colonialism, commercialization, semiotics, Indigenous belongings, patkáša kšúpi wòtawe.

This research examines how the meaning and function of dispossessed Indigenous belongings has been and continues to be produced within the broader context of settler colonialism. Centering two Dakḥóta patkáša kšúpi wòtawe, or turtle umbilical amulets, in the collection of the National Museum of the American Indian, as well as the work of the living maker Holly Young (Thizáptaŋna/Wičhíyena Dakḥóta), this thesis proposes a three-part analytical framework to analyze how the function and meaning of these belongings has been altered due to settler colonialism. In the first phase of the analytical framework, how Indigenous belongings function within community, I highlight how patkáša kšúpi wòtawe function as a microcosm for land-based epistemologies, specifically kinship and cyclical conceptions of time. Phase two, which focuses on colonial or settler colonially dispossessed Indigenous belongings, highlights how the structures of settler colonialism relegate patkáša kšúpi wòtawe as an ethnographic specimen, negating the individuality and sovereignty of their maker. The final phase, commercialization, gives a brief overview of the history of Native artists explicitly engaging with the art market and how living makers, such as Holly Young, can be seen as facilitators of tribal resilience and resist ongoing settler colonialism.

Ultimately, this thesis aims to destabilize and challenge the steadfast settler colonial epistemological and semiotic structures of knowledge production regarding removed Indigenous belongings. Theoretically framing my analysis within post-structuralist semiotics, I employ a combination of anticolonial methodologies, such as centering oral histories and scholars, and the voice of living makers with Western art historical methods like close visual analysis and archival research.

Introduction

*When the grandmother was out and there was outside work for Blue Bird to do, she placed Waterlily in the center of a huge spread-out buffalo robe and barricaded her all around with long, hard pillows of skin stuffed with deer hair. She handed Waterlily her wooden playthings, the ring “teethmaker,” and the little turtle with its entire back worked in colors to simulate the design on a real turtle. In a peculiar sense this was Waterlily’s very own turtle, for was she herself not inside of it? Somewhere in the stuffing of down was the bit of withered navel that fell from her shortly after her birth. When she was old enough to wear an elaborately decorated gown, this turtle would be attached to the center back of her belt both as an ornament and as a talisman ensuring long life to her.¹ – Ella Deloria, *Waterlily**

Sitting on the shelves of ethnographic museum collections are thousands of Indigenous belongings. Removed from their community through force, coercion, war, and other opaque extractive methods, these belongings are dispossessed. They are evidence of a settler colonial empire we today call the United States of America. In this thesis, I propose a three-part analytical framework to understand how dispossessed belongings function in response to their imposed setting. Focusing on two Dakḥóta umbilical amulets, patkáša kšúpi wòtawe, in the National Museum of the American Indian’s collection, as well as two made by the living Thizáptaŋna/Wičhíyena Dakḥóta maker, Holly Young, I demonstrate how this analytical framework can be used to illuminate the structure of settler colonial knowledge production.

As underscored in the above quote from Iháŋkthunwaŋ Dakḥóta ethnographer Ella Deloria, patkáša kšúpi wòtawe are personal, sacred, and meant to function within community. They are relatives. They are lovingly made for a child by their relatives and meant to be carried with them throughout their lives. They are not meant to be removed and relegated as taxonomical types or specimens, as has been upheld by museums such as the National Museum of the American Indian. Tracing the lineage of removed belongings and their revitalized extensions,

¹ Ella Cara Deloria, *Waterlily*, new edition ed. (University of Nebraska Press, 2013), 23.

like patkáša kšúpi wòtawe, I propose a framework that analyzes how a belonging's function changes in response to how they work in community, in museum collections, and in a commercial market, highlighting how the settler colonial structure of dispossession has historically produced harmful scholarship. By exposing this framework, I also hope to give agency and power back to other patkáša kšúpi wòtawe who wait to be returned home.

The need for such work comes amidst growing scholarship advocating for a reconfiguration of academia and museums. Contrary to Eurocentric standards that have dictated scholarship, calls for change highlight, value, and prioritize Indigenous knowledge systems and ways of being. Growing movements, spearheaded by artists, academics, community leaders, etc., repeatedly elucidate that the historical, settler colonial systems and frameworks that dominate the reception and dissemination of Indigenous belongings have always been inadequate for engaging with and understanding these cultural items. Moreover, as this thesis explores, these systems continue to reinforce harmful and distorted settler colonial perceptions of Indigenous peoples and their cultures.

Scots-Lakhóta art historian Carmen Robertson explains that “objects hung on a wall or kept in a vault, narrowly appreciated aesthetically through a Western art lens, reproduce certain ways of seeing Indigenous arts that negate decolonial change.”² Furthermore, as Chiricahua Apache scholar Nancy Marie Mithlo explains,

it is clear now that the dynamism and vibrancy of American Indian arts cannot be expressed in the fine arts vocabulary currently available. In fact, the field of current Native art production exceeds our capacity to engage its intellectual parameters productively. Identifying and critiquing patterns of previous discourse is a prerequisite to the development of any intellectual inquiry.³

² Carmen Robertson, "Beading Back and Forth: Upending Temporality through Knowledge Transmission," *Inquiries into Art, History, and the Visual* 5, no. 1 (2024): 51, <https://doi.org/10.11588/XXI.2024.1.102974>.

³ Nancy Marie Mithlo, "No Word for Art in Our Language?: Old Questions, New Paradigms," *Wicazo Sa Review* 27, no. 1 (2012): 123, <https://doi.org/10.1353/wic.2012.0005>.

Especially within a settler colonial nation like the United States, it is imperative to not only have discussions about the changes that are needed, but also to have examples of how to do that.

While I use terms such as “art,” “artistic,” and “art form,” I am not claiming patkáša kšúpi wòtawe are “art.” As Mithlo further points out, for many Native American communities and artists, there is an inherent hesitancy to associate their culture with the word “art.”⁴ As she explains,

museums, cultural centers, galleries, and scholarly texts [are] contexts that imbue fine arts with the Western values of individualism, commercialism, objectivism, and competition, as framed by an elitist point of reference. A rejection of the term ‘art’ is then a rejection of Western culture as capitalist, patriarchal, and ultimately, shallow, one that does not value the central principles of Indigenous identity, such as land, language, family, and spirituality.⁵

I do not wish to negate the sovereignty of Dakḥóta community members who do not wish for these belongings to be understood by a Western audience as “art.” Rather, in using an art historical lens, where terms such as “artistic” are difficult to avoid, my thesis allows for patkáša kšúpi wòtawe to be understood and interpreted differently than historical approaches which have relegated them as “specimen” or a non-individualized taxonomical type.⁶ That being said, in keeping with Dakḥóta makers like Walter LaBatte Jr. (Sisíthuŋwaŋ/Waḥpéthuŋwaŋ Dakḥóta), I do my best to use the term “beautifully made,” in place of art, whenever possible.⁷

Another note about terminology: building off scholarship from Carolyn Smith (Káruk) and Candice Hopkins (Carcross/Tagish First Nation), I also use the term “belonging” rather than object, artifact, or specimen. Candice Hopkins describes how a museum, in itself, is a settler

⁴ Mithlo, “No Word for Art in Our Language?” 113.

⁵ Mithlo, “No Word for Art in Our Language?” 113.

⁶ Memorandum by Zev Cossin, “NMAI Accession Lot Form,” February 3, 2012, The National Museum of the American Indian.

⁷ Teresa R. Peterson and Walter LaBatte, *Voices from Pejuhutazizi : Dakota Stories and Storytellers* (Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2022), 80.

colonial framework with specified protocols, which include the labeling of material culture as “artifact,” “object” and “specimen.”⁸ A rejection of this settler colonial framework includes resisting harmful terminology such as artifact and object. Hopkins explains that material culture deposited in museum collections are “belonging[s] – not artifacts, never artifacts, and not objects either. These are things with agency, these are our cultural belongings.”⁹ Carolyn Smith further explains that the use of the term “belonging” returns agency back to the community and allows for a deeper understanding of how belongings “embody the continuity of intangible forms of knowledge.”¹⁰ A belonging is not a mere possession, despite the framework which aims to claim them as such. In using the term belonging, I aim to support that while they may not be my relatives, they are somebody’s relatives. They function “with their people, their history, their land, their ceremony, and their everyday world.”¹¹

As an emerging settler scholar whose family immigrated to Philadelphia at the end of the nineteenth century from Germany and what is present-day Ireland, and Lithuania, I acknowledge the ingrained perspective of my Western upbringing. I recognize the fact that I lack, and will continue to lack, an intimate relationship with my research focus, especially when compared to a community member. As L’Nu (Mi’kmaq) scholar Marie Battiste states, “there [is] a limit to how

⁸ Candice Hopkins, “Repatriation Otherwise: How Protocols of Belonging are Shifting the Museological Frame,” in *Constellations: Indigenous Contemporary Art from the Americas* (Hyundai Tate Research Centre: Transnational and The Museo Universitario Arte Contemporáneo, 2020), accessed February 25, 2025, <https://muac.unam.mx/constelaciones/assets/docs/ensays-candicehopkins.pdf>.

⁹ Hopkins, “Repatriation Otherwise.”

¹⁰ Carolyn Smith, “Weaving pikyav (to-fix-it): Karuk Basket Weaving in-Relation-with the Everyday World” (PhD diss., University of California Berkeley, 2016), 2; While I was familiar with using the term “belonging” rather than “artifact,” “object,” or “item,” prior to this thesis, I first became aware of Smith’s work at the spring 2025 symposium by the Charles M. Russell Center “Belonging: Native American Art in Settler Contexts,” where a recent paper of hers was presented.

¹¹ Smith, “Weaving pikyav,” 2.

far Indigenous knowledge can be comprehended from a Eurocentric point of view.”¹² Also, as an emerging non-Native settler scholar, I actively remain cognizant of the ramifications of “grafting” Indigenous knowledge systems into an inherently non-Indigenous, settler colonial, academy. As explained by Nêhiyawak scholar Cash Ahenakew, this “grafting” has the ability to perpetuate the homogenization of Indigenous peoples.¹³ Glen Coulthard, a Yellowknives Dene First Nation member, expands upon this idea in his book *Red Skins, White Masks: Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition*. Coulthard explains that when settler colonial academics recognize Indigenous knowledge systems, it can be used as an excuse to further exploit Native communities, an endeavor that has, and continues, to negate the sovereignty and individuality of Indigenous peoples and nations.¹⁴ Lastly, I believe that continually using an anglophone term for where Dakhótiapi (Dakhóta language) is available inevitably perpetuates this extractive and Eurocentric research that Coulthard and Ahenakew discuss. Relying on an unpublished manuscript by Ella Cara Deloria, titled *Lakól-wačázeyatápi wa – A Dakota Naming of Things*, I strive to use Dakhótiapi wherever possible and appropriate.¹⁵

¹² Marie Battiste, "Indigenous knowledge and pedagogy in First Nations education: A literature review with recommendations," *National Working Group on Education and the Minister of Indian Affairs, Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC)*, October 31, 2002, 2.

¹³ Cash Ahenakew, "Grafting Indigenous Ways of Knowing Onto Non-Indigenous Ways of Being: The (Underestimated) Challenges of a Decolonial Imagination," *International Review of Qualitative Research* 9, no. 3 (2016): 333, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26372211>.

¹⁴ Glen Sean Coulthard and Gerald R. Alfred, *Red Skin, White Masks: Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition* (University of Minnesota Press, 2014).

¹⁵ Ella Cara Deloria, *Lakol-wacazeyatapi wa – A Dakota Naming of Things* (unpublished manuscript, Sioux Indian Museum, Rapid City, SD, 1961).

What is a Patkáša Kšúpi Wòtawe?

Broadly speaking, “umbilical amulet” is an anglophone term given to a beaded hide pouch – generally in the shape of a turtle or lizard – that holds a dried portion of a child’s umbilical cord.¹⁶ Various adorned with beadwork, porcupine quillwork, metal cones, bells, pigment, horsehair, and feathers, umbilical amulets are symbolically dense and artistically nuanced.¹⁷ The amulets’ small size – able to fit in the palm of one’s hand – allows them to be attached to a child’s cradleboard and then on their person, as described in the excerpt from *Waterlily*.

Communities throughout the Great Plains make umbilical amulets. Therefore, it is important to highlight their individualistic and personal nature and the fact that I only focus on Dakḥóta turtle amulets, or patkáša kšúpi wòtawe, specifically. This individualism is apparent in adornment, differences in terminology, symbolic significance, and cultural treatment. For example, Métis and Nêhiyawak scholar Kim Anderson describes that “among the Plains Cree, the cord bag was worn around the child’s neck, which hung down the child’s back... [the amulet] had two compartments: in one the cord was stored, the other was filled with tobacco.”¹⁸ Another anecdote from Rosebud Yellow Robe, a Lakḥóta elder and educator, details the story of her father’s amulet. She states that

a few weeks after his birth, his mother, Tahcawin, made a keya, or a small turtle of deerskin. She stuffed the turtle with down and the dried navel cord belonging to Chano (her father). Tahcawin sewed two strings on the underside of the turtle. She believed that if Chano wore the keya tied to his belt he was bound to her as much as during birth as before.¹⁹

¹⁶ Rosebud Yellow Robe and Jerry Pinkney, *Tonweya and the Eagles, and Other Lakḥóta Indian Tales* (Dial Books for Young Readers, ©1992) 122.

¹⁷ Dana Carlisle Kletchka and Rhonda Friday, "Instructional Resources: Continuity and Change: Native American Beadwork," *Art Education* 53, no. 3 (2000): 30, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3193870>.

¹⁸ Kim Anderson and Maria Campbell, *Life Stages and Native Women: Memory, Teachings, and Story Medicine* (University of Manitoba Press, 2014), 15.

¹⁹ Yellow Robe, *Tonweya and the Eagles*, 22.

While these anecdotes are similar, the tribal specificity highlights the individuality of these amulets. In giving a brief, general overview of umbilical amulets, my aim is to provide necessary background information for the audience, not to homogenize these beautifully made belongings. As many scholars have elucidated, homogenization is not only a product of, but contributes to, ongoing settler colonialism.²⁰ Therefore, in this thesis, I focus only on Dakḥóta patkáša kšúpi wòtawe. While they are part of a broader artistic continuum of beading and quillwork among the Dakḥóta, I also importantly acknowledge and uphold the fact that these belongings are animate relatives of their communities, and they will be respected as such in this thesis.²¹

While Dakḥóta patkáša kšúpi wòtawe share similar characteristics to other communities, it is imperative to be culturally specific.²² Made by the child's mother's female relatives, patkáša kšúpi wòtawe are most commonly understood as protection for the child, in the present and in the future.²³ Louis Garcia, Spirit Lake tribal historian and teacher at Cankdeska Cikana Community College, highlights the importance of this protection, saying that babies are considered "treasured gifts."²⁴ Dr. Deborah Myran, a Dakḥóta scholar originally from the Cankaga Oti community in Manitoba, further explains that "the keeping of the umbilical cord crosses cultural boundaries and crosses through centuries of generations," emphasizing the

²⁰ Coulthard and Alfred, *Red Skin White Masks*.

²¹ For more information about the importance of not negating the "relational value" of Indigenous belongings, please see David Garneau's *From Colonial Trophy Case to Non-Colonial Keeping House*, in *The Routledge Companion to Indigenous Art Histories in the United States and Canada*, ed. Heather Igloriorte and Carla Taunton (Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2022).

²² Ahenakew, "Grafting Indigenous Ways of Knowing Onto Non-Indigenous Ways of Being," 333.

²³ Deborah Myran, "Kunsi Ksapa and Wisdom: Dakota Kunsis' Hitunkankanpi of the Hekta and Dehan" (master's thesis, The University of Manitoba, 2014), 60; in traditional kinship structures there is a variation between maternal female relatives, evidenced through Dakhótiapi. For example, the mother's sister, inádaŋ, "little mother," has a different function than the father's sister, thuŋwín, referred to as "auntie." For more information, see *The Dakota Way of Life*.

²⁴ Louis Garcia, "The History and Culture of the Spirit Lake Dakota: Umbilical Amulets," *Whispering Wind* 49, no. 5 (2022): 7, <https://search.informit.org/doi/10.3316/informit.781330715740757>.

importance of the intergenerational sharing of knowledge for the present generations and the future.²⁵ Lastly, among different scholars and community members, terms for umbilical amulets vary. These terms include “patkáša kšúpi wòtawe,” “čekpá ognake,” “kéya” or “umbilical amulet,” a facet which highlights the fluidity and vitality of Dakhótiapi. I choose to use the term “patkáša kšúpi wòtawe,” as it is the most culturally specific and because that is the term used by Ella Cara Deloria, whose combined scholarship heavily influences and supports this work.

Community, (Settler) Colonial Collecting, & Commercialization

For my proposed analytical framework, I build off the work of Chikasha (Chickasaw) and Chahta (Choctaw) curator at the First American Museum, Dr. heather ahtone and Métis art critic David Garneau. Both ahtone and Garneau identify that most Indigenous art or material culture can be broken into three categories: material culture made for community, material culture colonially/settler colonially collected, and finally commercialized art made with the intention of engaging in a cash market.²⁶ Garneau explains that each of these categories, or structures, “operate in its own art and evaluative worlds.”²⁷ Garneau importantly highlights that each of these structures functions within its own contextually dependent construct.²⁸ Similarly, ahtone elucidates that the existing Western field of art history has dictated the production of scholarship while routinely negating Indigenous communities’ knowledge and sovereignty.²⁹ By providing a specific case study and a more holistic analysis that analyzes how three interdependent structures

²⁵ Myran, “Kunsi Ksapa,” 60.

²⁶ heather ahtone, “Designed to Last: Striving toward an Indigenous American Aesthetic,” *The International Journal of the Arts in Society* 4, no. 2 (2009): 373.

²⁷ David Garneau, “Writing About Indigenous Art with Critical Care,” C Magazine, last modified March 15, 2020, <https://cmagazine.com/articles/writing-about-indigenous-art-with-critical-care>.

²⁸ Garneau, “Writing about Indigenous Art with Critical Care.”

²⁹ ahtone, “Designed to Last,” 373.

relate to and inform each other, I see my work as adding to this discourse of illuminating knowledge production and structures of meaning.

The first category of my proposed analytical framework focuses on belongings made for, and intended to remain with, community. Called “customary culture,” Garneau importantly makes the distinction that art or material culture made for and within the community “can only be regulated by traditional makers and knowledge keepers. While customary art welcomes appreciation from outsiders, what differentiates it... is its immunity to their criticism.”³⁰ These belongings, which may include sacred and ceremonial objects like patkáša kšúpi wòtawe, are often shaped by the intergenerational sharing of tribal-specific knowledge and stories. Carrying intrinsic meaning and purpose, belongings made by and for community frequently require protection from outsiders. Safeguarding these belongings, as well as their embedded knowledge, pushes back against mechanisms of settler colonialism, such as the mass dissemination and accumulation of knowledge for capital gain.³¹

The second category of my framework is belongings that were colonially, or settler colonially extracted. Since first known contact, the Western world has been fascinated with the Indigenous groups of the Americas. Subsequently, thousands of people - ethnographers, anthropologists, political leaders, explorers, military personnel, businessmen, teachers, and laymen - collected and studied the objects extracted by them from Indigenous communities to support their personal and professional agendas. Garneau identifies that this theft of material

³⁰ Garneau, “Writing about Indigenous Art with Critical Care.”

³¹ Francis Adyanga Akena, "Critical Analysis of the Production of Western Knowledge and Its Implications for Indigenous Knowledge and Decolonization," *Journal of Black Studies* 43, no. 6 (2012): 600, JSTOR.

culture actively works to subjugate Indigenous communities.³² By “editing” and “freeze-drying” Indigenous belongings, “colonial curators cured, and they preserved. They exhibited and celebrated a select, ‘authentic’ and dead Indianness in order to delegitimize and eventually repress the possibility of contemporary Indigeneity.”³³ Although some belongings being collected were meant to stay within community, they were removed. Once removed from their communities, these belongings function differently. Furthermore, not only does the function and intrinsic meaning of these belongings change, but in a way, they fundamentally become a different belonging.

Disconnected from their original cultural context and often collected without regard for their cultural significance, these belongings have historically and contemporaneously been framed through Western settler colonial perspectives. As a result, they have been labeled as “simplistic,” “primitive,” “craft,” or “specimen.”³⁴ However, increasing scholarship, including this thesis, pushes back against this imposed understanding. By elucidating that while belongings removed from their communities cannot function *within* their intended setting, they still can function *for* their maker and their kin, I highlight how these belongings actively resist imposed frameworks and biased misrepresentations.

The last category of this analytical framework belongs to beautifully made belongings, sometimes explicitly called art by the maker, made to enter a commercialized market or to be shared with those outside the community. This category spans from makers at the turn of the twentieth century, who adapted ancestral art forms to align with Western market demands, to

³² David Garneau, "From Colonial Trophy Case to Non-Colonial Keeping House," in *The Routledge Companion to Indigenous Art Histories in the United States and Canada*, ed. Heather Igloirte and Carla Taunton (Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2022), 237.

³³ Garneau, "From Colonial Trophy Case to Non-Colonial Keeping House," 235.

³⁴ ahtone, "Designed to Last," 373.

living artists reviving ancestral practices while selling and sharing their work. This category emphasizes how the past continues to inform the present. Highlighting how commercialized objects function when explicitly intended for the market underscores the adaptability and resilience of Indigenous makers. It also illuminates how belongings adapted for the commercial market but have a lineage in ancestral practices and/or were colonially collected are part of a rich artistic continuum that is a larger part of Indigenous futurity and the future of Native American art history as a whole.

While scholarship has repeatedly and implicitly discussed each of these three categories in varying ways, few, if any, condense them into one analytical framework. I believe that while looking at each individual category is enlightening, a more holistic and well-rounded approach is more useful in working toward a field that values, as Nancy Mithlo says, “critical contemporary thinking and Indigenous epistemologies.”³⁵ Using this framework collectively can not only illuminate the barriers of settler colonial frameworks, but also aid in producing scholarship that works against it.

The important distinction must also be made that the categories of community, (settler)colonial collecting, and commercialization, are not mutually exclusive or strictly bound. Rather, each section exists along a fluid continuum, where each informs and interacts with the others. These categories should not be understood as linear stages through which a belonging engages with in a fixed sequence. For example, when a belonging leaves community, transitioning into a different context such as when colonially collected or introduced to the commercial cash market, community-rooted meaning is not rendered null and void. Instead, that

³⁵ Mithlo, “No Word for Art in Our Language?,” 123.

meaning remains implicitly present, despite the current context that dictates how the belonging is explicitly understood and activated.

State of the Literature

The state of the literature concerning patkáša kšúpi wòtawe is sparse. While there are a handful of writings from nineteenth and early twentieth century Western writers and artists, like George Catlin, James Mooney, and James Dorsey that discuss umbilical amulets broadly, in these early extant texts, umbilical amulets are treated as specimens, reflecting extractive settler colonial structures that will be discussed throughout this thesis. To these ethnographers, these beautifully made belongings, like other belongings extracted during this time, acted as a tangible record of a people that white, Eurocentric ethnographers and society, believed were destined to disappear.

The earliest example, taken from George Catlin's journal from between 1832 and 1839, later published as *Letters and Notes on the Manners, Customs, and Conditions of North American Indians*, remarks that

in the little toy that I have mentioned and which is suspended before the child's face, is carefully and superstitiously preserved the umbilicus, which is always secured at the time of its birth, and being rolled up into a little wad of the size of a pea, and dried, it is enclosed in the centre of this little bag, and placed before the child's face, as its protector and its security for "good luck" and long life. There are a number of forms and different tastes of these little toys, which I have purchased from the women, which they were very willing to sell for a trifling present; but in every instance, they cut them open and removed from within a bunch of cotton or moss, and the little sacred *medicine*, which to part with, would be to 'endanger the health of the child.'³⁶

³⁶ George Catlin, *Letters and Notes on the Manners, Customs, and Condition of the North American Indians*, 3rd ed. (Tilt and Bogue, 1842), 134.

The use of words such as “superstitiously,” “good luck,” “bag,” and “tastes” connotes a superficial and trivial undertone, demonstrating Catlin’s inherent bias and lack of understanding of this belonging. Catlin does, however, unknowingly acknowledge the resistance of the women he interacts with when he mentions their intentional removal of the umbilical cord. An act that marks a resistance to settler colonial oppression, while at the same time protecting their children and the futurity of their community, underscoring the sacredness of this belonging.

A second early source appears in *A Study of Siouan Cults*, published in 1894 for the eleventh annual report of the Bureau of Ethnography, almost sixty years after Catlin’s notes.³⁷ Written by James Owen Dorsey, one of the most prominent ethnographers and linguists of his time, this excerpt provides a glimpse into the stagnancy and lack of knowledge on umbilical amulets.³⁸ In his report, Dorsey writes that

when the navel string is cut, a small bag is made of deerskin, cut in the shape of a small tortoise, known as patkasala. In this bag is placed a piece of the navel string and sweet-smelling leaves, with which the bag is filled. The infant has to carry this bag on its back. Part of the navel string is buried, and when the child is large enough to get into mischief they say, “he is hunting for his navel string.”³⁹

Even shorter than Catlin’s description, Dorsey recorded the most basic information. While the quote reveals a potential level of personal communication between Dorsey and the “Siouan” tribe he was investigating, evident in the specific term patkasala, there is no discussion about the importance of the belonging, nor of artistic design choices.⁴⁰ Like Catlin, Dorsey’s use of the word “bag” can be seen as a reflection of both men’s self-upheld racial hierarchy and superiority

³⁷ James Owen Dorsey, *A Study of Siouan Cults*, (Washington, 1894), Pdf, <https://www.loc.gov/item/16005511/>.

³⁸ J. N. B. Hewitt, "James Owen Dorsey," *American Anthropologist* 8, no. 2 (1895): 181, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/658675>.

³⁹ Dorsey, *A Study of Siouan Cults*, 483; The use of the word “patkasala” indicates that Dorsey was speaking to a Lakḥóta community.

⁴⁰ “Siouan” is not my term. I understand the derogatory and Eurocentric nature of this term, but as it is included in the quoted text, I cannot change it.

complex, implicit beliefs which supported the extractive settler colonial framework that led these men to collect Indigenous belongings in the first place.

The last early source document comes from James Mooney, a contemporary of Dorsey and a founding member of the American Anthropological Association.⁴¹ Published in 1904 in the *Journal of American Folklore*, his article titled “The Indian Navel Cord” briefly introduces the umbilical cord practices of the Ka’igwu (Kiowa).⁴² Though not related to the Dakḥóta, Mooney’s focus on the Ka’igwu demonstrates the lasting interest and tendency to describe them as ethnographic specimen. In the excerpt, Mooney writes,

The disposal of the navel cord among Indian tribes is always a matter of considerable attention...among the Kiowas the navel cord of a girl baby is sewn up in a small, beaded pouch of diamond shape, called *pepot*, “navel,” which is worn at the child’s belt as she grows to womanhood...when at any time the mother consents to sell the belt with the appended pouch, the pouch is cut open and the cord carefully extracted before the trade is consummated.⁴³

Even though Mooney’s description is brief, this is the first instance where an umbilical amulet is described as beaded. Additionally, both Mooney and Catlin describe how the umbilical cord would be removed before being “sold,” an important distinction that again speaks to the sacredness of the umbilical cord and the resistance of the women he was interacting with.

While all three of these sources discuss umbilical amulets, their information is ethnographic or anthropologic, an important distinction because the bulk of umbilical amulets rest in ethnography or anthropology collections and not “art” museums. Regarding art historical scholarship, the available information is equally sparse. One source by Carmen Robertson (Scots-Lakḥóta), “Land and Beaded Identity: Shaping Art Histories of Indigenous Women of the

⁴¹ Hewitt, “James Owen Dorsey,” 210.

⁴² James Mooney, “The Indian Navel Cord,” *The Journal of American Folklore* 17, no. 66 (1904): 197, <https://doi.org/10.2307/533966>.

⁴³ Mooney, “The Indian Navel Cord,” 197.

Flatlands,” discusses the Lakǰóta and Plains Cree practice, and while related to the Dakǰóta, they are not the same.⁴⁴ In her article, Dr. Robertson writes

in a further discussion about a wide variety of cultural practices associated with the umbilical cord, [Kim Anderson] adds that Plains Cree and Lakǰóta placed the cord in a small bag that was decorated with quills or beads and then hung around the neck of the baby as a form of sacred protection, one that reveals the layers of significance accorded to such decoration.⁴⁵

In addition to Robertson’s article, Deanna Tidwell Broughton’s (Tsalagi) *Hide, Wood, and Willow: Cradles of the Great Plains Indians* and Colette Hyman’s *Dakota Women’s Work: Creativity, Culture, & Exile*, also mention umbilical amulets, or in Hyman’s case, patkáša kǰúpi wòtawe, but the inclusion is very brief.⁴⁶

Spirit Lake tribal historian Louis Garcia does discuss patkáša kǰúpi wòtawe specifically. In his article, he says that “the mother removed the dried umbilical cord from the child's navel and made a decorated case in the shape of a turtle.”⁴⁷ Discussing a traveling exhibition of Dakǰóta, Lakǰóta, and Nakóda, art, which included three umbilical amulets, Garcia remarks that “scores of elderly reservation residents commented on their own, and the memories it brought to see the ones on display.”⁴⁸ Using the sources above both as fuel and fodder, I enhance the conversation surrounding patkáša kǰúpi wòtawe by illuminating how settler colonial structures of extraction produced, and continue to produce, knowledge concerning these belongings.

⁴⁴ Carmen Robertson, “Land and Beaded Identity: Shaping Art Histories of Indigenous Women of the Flatland,” *RACAR: Revue d’art Canadienne / Canadian Art Review* 42, no. 2 (2017): 15, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/44378612>.

⁴⁵ Robertson, “Land and Beaded Identity,” 15.

⁴⁶ Deanna Tidwell Broughton, *Hide, Wood, and Willow : Cradles of the Great Plains Indians* (University of Oklahoma Press, 2019); Colette A. Hyman, *Dakota Women's Work: Creativity, Culture, and Exile* (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2012).

⁴⁷ Garcia, “The History and Culture of the Spirit Lake Dakota,” 7.

⁴⁸ Garcia, “The History and Culture of the Spirit Lake Dakota,” 7.

As shown, there is very little art historical literature concerning patkáša kšúpi wòtawe, and umbilical amulets broadly. I posit this lack scholarship is due to two reasons: One, I believe that canonical Western art history, which has historically been used to discuss Native American art and material culture, privileges the “biggest” and “best” examples of Western culture. Patkáša kšúpi wòtawe however are small, and to a Western perspective, seemingly simplistic, regarded as a “specimen.” Due to this, they are literally and metaphorically able to slip through the cracks, evading scholars who do not take the time to seek them out. Two, I do believe that there has been a hesitance to discuss these belongings due to their sacred nature and the fact that certain parts of their role and importance are meant to be safeguarded from outsiders. I do my best in this thesis to respect the sacredness of these belongings by only discussing aspects that have been previously shared by Dakḥóta community members.

Methodologies & Theories

For my thesis I combine anticolonial and art historical methodology.⁴⁹ To do this, I firstly center Dakḥóta scholars and knowledge bearers, such as Charles Alexander Eastman (Isányathi Dakḥóta), Ella Deloria (Ihánkthunwan Dakḥóta), Vine Deloria Jr. (Ihánkthunwan Dakḥóta), and Philip Deloria (Ihánkthunwan Dakḥóta), Teresa Peterson and Walter LaBatte Jr (Sisíthunwan & Wahpéthunwan Dakḥóta), Holly Young (Thizáptan̄na/Wichíyena Dakḥóta) and Cynthia Lindquist (Spirit Lake Dakḥóta). I secondly focus on other Očhéthi Šakówiŋ, Native American, and Indigenous scholars. These anticolonial methods, in conjunction with art historical methods,

⁴⁹ Rather than decolonial methodology, which I understand as an approach which *exposes* the colonial structures imbedded in society, I employ anticolonial methodology which explicitly works to *resist* and *deconstruct* systems of colonialism; Leanne R. Simpson, “Anticolonial Strategies for the Recovery and Maintenance of Indigenous Knowledge,” *American Indian Quarterly* 28, no. 3/4 (2004): 381.

such as close visual analysis, in-person handling, and archival research, serves as a foundation for my inquiry. In terms of sources, I importantly make the distinction that when I am talking about broad concepts or giving overviews of terms, such as kinship, I employ other Indigenous scholars. However, when I am being tribally specific and discussing only Dakḥóta topics, I make the point to prioritize Dakḥóta sources. For example, when discussing Dakḥóta-specific epistemologies in chapter one, I solely rely on Dakḥóta scholars. In chapters two and three, I open my discussion to broader topics such as settler colonialism writ-large, and therefore, I rely on other sources that do not come from Dakḥóta communities.

My combined methodology frames my analysis of patkáša kšúpi wòtawe in post-structuralist semiotics. Concerned with the interpretation and construction of signs and corresponding signifiers specific to a certain community, semiotics focuses on the production of knowledge and meaning.⁵⁰ Examining the structures and mechanisms of settler colonialism, which dictate function and meaning, I investigate how the knowledge of patkáša kšúpi wòtawe has been and continues to be, produced and disseminated. The knowledge embodied by, and embedded within, culturally specific signs and signifiers of patkáša kšúpi wòtawe has been altered because of the context in which they have been historically removed from (ceremonial), subjected to (colonial collecting), or reframed within (commercialization). Because of this, I also employ poststructuralism.

Poststructuralism opens the prescribed and secure systems of meaning to disruption.⁵¹ Developed by Ferdinand de Saussure, poststructuralism investigates the prescribed interpretation

⁵⁰ Mieke Bal and Norman Bryson, "Semiotics and Art History," *The Art Bulletin* 73, no. 2 (1991): 174, JSTOR.

⁵¹ James Williams, *Understanding Poststructuralism* (Routledge, 2014), 3.

model of a dominating society.⁵² It “asserts that we – you and I, the reader or subject and the ‘text,’ or any object out there – are not freestanding autonomous entities but beings that are culturally constituted by interpretative frameworks or interpretive strategies that our culture makes available to us.”⁵³ Thus, when using a poststructuralist approach, theorists, like myself, investigate the contextually dependent frameworks, but in a manner that works against “settled truths.”⁵⁴ In my thesis I challenge the “settled truths” that have dictated the understanding and acceptance of patkáša kšúpi wòtawe, like the historic Western settler colonial framework of the academy that is responsible for the ethnographic classification of patkáša kšúpi wòtawe.

An additional important aspect of poststructuralist semiotics is the exploration of how the functionality of language in time dictates the interpretation of the sign.⁵⁵ The interdependence between sign and language, and ultimately understanding, is another primary reason why I use Dakhótiapi whenever possible, because as the adage goes “things get lost in translation.” For example, the Western term “umbilical amulet,” is not culturally specific, and it is not semiotically dense. “Patkáša kšúpi wòtawe” on the other hand, which Ella Cara Deloria has literally translated as “turtle, beaded charm,” gives the viewer a deeper understanding of the significance of the patkáša kšúpi wòtawe.⁵⁶ When translating each term individually, there are even more layers. Using the “Dakhód Iápi Wičhóie Wówapi,” a Dakhóta created and led dictionary, “patkáša” is specifically a water-dwelling, Western Painted Turtle (*Chrysemys Picta*

⁵² Jane Tompkins, “A Short Course in Post-Structuralism,” *College English* 50, no. 7 (1988): 733-34, <https://doi.org/10.2307/377671>; To read further about Ferdinand Saussure’s poststructuralism, please see his *Course in General Linguistics* published in 1916.

⁵³ Tompkins “A Short Course in Post-Structuralism,” 734.

⁵⁴ Williams, *Understanding Poststructuralism*, 3.

⁵⁵ Tompkins “A Short Course in Post-Structuralism,” 743; To read further about Jacques Derrida’s poststructuralist linguistics, please see *Différance* published in 1968.

⁵⁶ Deloria, “*Lakol-wacazeyatapi wa*,” 31.

Bellii).⁵⁷ “Kšúpi,” explicitly in the past tense, means “beaded or ornamented with beadwork.”⁵⁸

Lastly, “wòtawe” refers to “war medicine” or “a medicine bundle.”⁵⁹

Semiotics is inherently Western because of the fact that Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure spearheaded it.⁶⁰ However, this does not mean that Indigenous scholars and artists, cannot or do not use semiotics. Carmen Robertson explains that,

porcupine quillwork, a sacred art form connected to the ceremonies, societies, and protocols of the Plains peoples, served *semiotically* as a direct *signifier* of the land...beads, then, operate as floating *signifiers* for the land, narrative traditions, and ceremony, but also for how colonial presence cross-pollinates to create meaning.⁶¹

In this passage, Robertson maintains explicit connection to the Western theory through her use of the terms “semiotically” and “signifier.” Sherry Farrell Racette similarly applies semiotics in her analysis of removed Indigenous belongings in Canada. In discussing Nêhiyawak women’s roles in knowledge production, she says, “women were charged with the responsibility of visually communicating respect and soliciting the approval of the animals.”⁶² Farrell Racette continues to provide a linguistic analysis of different animate and inanimate words in the Nêhiyawak language, again a semiotic analysis. Robertson and Farrell Racette’s positionality and application claim this Western theory for an Indigenous purpose. Heather Athone echoes Robertson’s approach. Responding to Joe Feddersen’s use of Plateau specific symbols in his 2003 *Urban Indian* series, Athone explains that “the idiosyncratic nature of Indigenous designs and symbols puts a responsibility on the artist and art historian to consider these as semiotic references in

⁵⁷ Dakhód Iápi Wičhóie Wówapi, patkáša, 1.1.0, accessed October 26, 2024, <https://dakhota.org>.

⁵⁸ Dakhód Iápi Wičhóie Wówapi, kšúpi, 1.1.0, accessed October 26, 2024, <https://dakhota.org>.

⁵⁹ Dakhód Iápi Wičhóie Wówapi, wòtawe, 1.1.0, accessed October 26, 2024, <https://dakhota.org>.

⁶⁰ Bal and Bryson, “Semiotics and Art History,” 175.

⁶¹ Robertson, “Land and Beaded Identity,” 16; italics added for emphasis.

⁶² Sherry Farrell Racette, “Looking for Stories and Unbroken Threads: Museum Artifacts as Women’s History and Cultural Legacy,” in *Restoring the Balance: First Nations Women, Community, and Culture*, ed. Eric Guimond, Gail Guthrie Valaskakis, and Madeline Dion Stout (University of Manitoba Press, 2008), 287.

context with their meanings.”⁶³ Ultimately, ahtone, Robertson, and Farrell Racette’s work can serve as a model for how to appropriately apply Western theories to Indigenous art forms and artistic belongings and I build upon their work in this thesis.

Structure of the thesis

I break my thesis down into three chapters. The first, titled “Community,” centers on an entirely quilled patkáša kšúpi wòtawe (patkáša kšúpi wòtawe 18/2137) in the collection of the National Museum of the American Indian. In chapter one, I investigate how this patkáša kšúpi wòtawe works within community. Paying explicit attention to this belonging’s materiality and temporality, I demonstrate how, when in community, it functions as an embodied kinship network and reinforces cyclical conceptions of time. In chapter two, titled “(Settler)Colonial Collecting,” I examine how an entirely beaded patkáša kšúpi wòtawe functions within a museum context. I explore the available provenance records for this patkáša kšúpi wòtawe, challenging the written and omitted record as it relates to settler colonialism. In this chapter, I investigate how the function of this belonging has been altered due to this extraction and how the structures of settler colonialism have relegated this belonging as a stagnant specimen. Lastly, in chapter three, titled “Commercialization,” I bring the work and voice of Holly Young, a living mixed media artist, into the conversation. By looking at her contemporary patkáša kšúpi wòtawe, I investigate how her artistic production is influenced by ancestral community belongings as well as those resting in museum collections. Focusing on Holly’s role in rematriating knowledge to

⁶³ heather ahtone, "Reading Beneath the Surface: Joe Feddersen's Parking Lot," *Wicazo Sa Review* 27, no. 1 (2012): 79.

her community, this chapter highlights how a belonging's meaning is altered while functioning within the larger settler colonial art market.

Chapter 1: Community

Introduction:

Working within community, beautifully made Indigenous belongings are multivalent and multifunctional. These belongings, both artfully made and not, convey individual identity within their tribal community, serve as mnemonic and didactic aids for tribal histories and values, and facilitate the intergenerational sharing of knowledge.⁶⁴ The function of these belongings is culturally and contextually dependent.⁶⁵ Leroy N. Meyer describes, “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.”⁶⁶ When removed from their communities by force, coercion, or other opaque means, culturally and contextually dependent meanings of these belongings change. However, just because these belongings have physically left the community they were made for, does not mean that they should be relegated as stagnant, static, objects, void of knowledge and meaning. Instead, by considering and conceptualizing how removed belongings function within community, I aim to demonstrate how the prescribed structures of meaning dictated by settler colonial structures have misrepresented these belongings, the effects of which are damaging to living and future communities.

Entirely encapsulated in vibrant, multicolor porcupine quillwork, the focus patkáša kšúpi wõtawe for this chapter, made by an Isányathi Dakhóta maker, was collected for George Gustav Heye’s Museum of the American Indian (Figure 1.1).⁶⁷ “Gifted” to George Gustav Heye by Jay

⁶⁴ ahtone, “Designed to Last,” 375.

⁶⁵ ahtone, “Designed to Last,” 375.

⁶⁶ Leroy N. Meyer, “In Search of Native American Aesthetics,” *Journal of Aesthetic Education* 35, no. 4 (2001): 27.

⁶⁷ Letter by Jay Noble Emley, May 4, 1932, The National Museum of the American Indian.

Noble Emley, a New York City attorney, this patkáša kšúpi wòtawe, or as it will be referred to throughout this chapter, patkáša kšúpi wòtawe 18/2137, was removed from the Niobrara Reservation sometime before 1932.⁶⁸ By deconstructing the confines of the National Museum of the American Indian, a starkly different setting than intended, and imagining how patkáša kšúpi wòtawe 18/2137 is meant to work within the community, this part of chapter one demonstrates how my analytical framework outlined in the introduction can be applied.⁶⁹

Composed of a slightly oblong, almond-shaped, central body, tapering at the northern and southern ends, patkáša kšúpi wòtawe 18/2137 stretches roughly four inches from head to tail and an inch and a half across the belly. The hide body provides the anchor for intricate, vibrant quillwork. Tightly plaited and evenly dyed, the technique used to apply the quillwork applique speaks to the expert skill of the maker and the intergenerational sharing of knowledge. A vertical line of quillwork, composed of thirteen alternating sections of eggplant and off-white rectangles, descends the back of the turtle, bifurcating the shell into two halves and providing the mainstay for additional quillwork. Three rows of blood orange/bright red quills provide the bulk of the adornment for the top of the shell. Dwindling in length as they extend outward from the central line, this series of quillwork mirrors the shape of the shell, creating a bulging half-dome on each side.

Branching off from the central line of quillwork at the head and the tail, an undulating mustard-yellow line of quillwork encapsulates the blood-orange halves. When viewed from

⁶⁸ "Accession Log," table, 1932, 1932.0050, The National Museum of the American Indian.

⁶⁹ An important distinction must be made between the two main branches of the NMAI. One, the National Museum of the American Indian – George Gustav Heye Center, is located in the same building as Heye's Museum of the American Indian in New York City. This has been the location for this branch since the Smithsonian took over in 1989. The second location, The National Museum of the American Indian, opened on the National Mall in Washington, D.C., in 2004. This location is what most people conjure when they hear the acronym NMAI.

above, the mustard-yellow line is the most prominent perimeter of patkáša kšúpi wòtawe 18/2137. However, looking at it from the sides, two sinuous lines of quillwork extend and fold down over the edges. Nestled between the first and the third sections, the second wrapping line of quillwork, solidly composed of eggplant-colored quills, complements the central spine atop the shell. Effectively encasing both sides of the shell, the last line of quillwork adorning the body similarly matches the central line, but instead of eggplant quills, the maker used the same pomegranate/blood orange quills, totaling eleven rectangles rather than the usual thirteen.

While the head and base of the tail emerge as a continuous part of the body, leaving no hard edges, the limbs and length of the tail are made out of additional portions of hide fastened to the underbelly. Teal and bright yellow quills wrap two-thirds of the way around each limb and the tail, allowing small, tassel-like pieces of hide to emerge from the tip of each limb. These fringes add dynamism and movement to patkáša kšúpi wòtawe 18/2137, metaphorically simulating the movement of a real turtle.

Employing lenses such as materiality and temporality, I center patkáša kšúpi wòtawe 18/2137 to highlight how when functioning within community the belonging acts as a physical embodiment of land-based epistemologies such as kinship and cyclical conceptions of time. As patkáša kšúpi wòtawe 18/2137 is an example of a multivalent belonging with ceremonial and sacred meaning – parts of which are protected by community from outsiders – I take care to work alongside the existing knowledge already shared by Dakḥóta community members, such as Vine Deloria Jr. (Ihánkthūwaŋ Dakḥóta), Ella Cara Deloria (Ihánkthūwaŋ Dakḥóta), and Charles Alexander Eastman (Isáŋyathi Dakḥóta). Additionally, by referring to the focal point of this chapter as patkáša kšúpi wòtawe 18/2137, I inherently comply with the settler colonial structures that have relegated this belonging as a specimen, as will be discussed in chapter two.

Furthermore, in using the Dakḥóta language, instead of the full NMAI classification of “Object Number” as I do in chapter two, I aim to draw attention to the differences between the two and how language can be used to further subjugate Indigenous ways of being and knowing.

The first part of this chapter centers on kinship between human and non-human kin and how the materials used in the production of patkáša kšúpi wòtawe 18/2137 serve to reinforce an extended Dakḥóta kinship network. In the second part of chapter one, my discussion turns to how Dakḥóta-specific cyclical conceptions of time are fostered in the form and movement of the patkáša kšúpi wòtawe. I anchor this discussion in the physical movement of a patkáša kšúpi wòtawe throughout a woman's life; appearing first as a toy - as Ella Cara Deloria describes in *Waterlily* - affixed to her cradleboard, then on her ceremonial adolescent dress, and finally on her belt in adulthood.⁷⁰ This progression, combined with the Dakḥóta lunar calendar represented by the physical form of patkáša kšúpi wòtawe 18/2137 being a turtle, reinforces tribal ties to interrelated cycles of life and death, creation and destruction.⁷¹

Part One: Hide, Quills, and Kinship

Materiality as an analytical framework is an emerging approach increasingly employed by both Indigenous and settler art historians. Dr. heather ahtone extensively highlights the value and validity of exploring materiality. She explains that by examining the materiality of the belonging, the audience is provided with a glimpse into the cultural context of when and how it was made, linking ancestral, historical, and contemporary practices.⁷² ahtone highlights that “this

⁷⁰ Deloria, *Waterlily*, 23.

⁷¹ Vine Deloria and James Treat, *For This Land: Writings on Religion in America* (New York: Routledge, 1999), 150.

⁷² heather ahtone, "Cultural Paradigms of Contemporary Indigenous Art: As Found in the Work of Shan Goshorn, Norman Akers, Marie Watt, and Joe Fedderson" (PhD diss., The University of Oklahoma, 2018), 66.

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 reference.”⁷³ By looking at the materiality of patkáša kšúpi wòtawe 18/2137, specifically the use of porcupine quillwork, dyes, and hide, I highlight the interconnected relationship between the maker and their kinship network.

One could not discuss the materiality of patkáša kšúpi wòtawe without first addressing what the exterior of patkáša kšúpi wòtawe 18/2137 is meant to protect, the umbilical cord. Considered to be sacred and carrying medicinal properties, the umbilical cord is integral to the function and meaning of the patkáša kšúpi wòtawe within community.⁷⁴ Without the umbilical cord encased inside, its function, for example, how it works as a “talisman of protection,” entirely changes.⁷⁵ However, given the sacred and ceremonial aspect of the umbilical cord and my position as a non-Native settler scholar who strives to respect the sovereignty of Indigenous communities, I will not be discussing umbilical cords further and will instead focus on the exterior materials.

The maker’s use of hide and porcupine quillwork reflects, respects, and fosters Dakḥóta-specific kinship networks. Acclaimed Iháŋkthūŋwaŋ Dakḥóta scholar Vine Deloria Jr., elucidates in *For This Land* that within the general tribal perspective,

there is a sharing between the various species. This sharing involves information, technical skill, mutual experiences, and a responsibility to the immediate environment. Some relationships are so close that humans can change into other animals and other animals can become human in form. The individual is always a responsible representative

⁷³ ahtone, “Cultural Paradigms of Contemporary Indigenous Art,” 66.

⁷⁴ Myran, “Kunsi Ksapa and Wisdom,” 59.

⁷⁵ Garcia, “The History and Culture of the Spirit Lake Dakota,” 7.

of his or her species and each species is considered a family which has certain obligations to other families or peoples.⁷⁶

I acknowledge the fact that brief and broad conversations about complex topics such as kinship have the potential to perpetuate settler colonial homogenous or “pan-Indigenous” understandings of Native American art and culture.⁷⁷ Tsalagi (Cherokee) literary scholar Daniel Heath Justice underscores this, stating that generalizations, such as broad oversimplifications of kinship systems, are a keystone of imperialism.⁷⁸ However, in discussing kinship broadly, I aim to give a contextual explanation of the concept, not to perpetuate settler colonial scholarship and misunderstandings of Indigenous communities.

According to Ella Cara Deloria, for the Dakḥóta, “kinship law was tribal law.”⁷⁹ Through complex and exacting kinship networks, both between human and non-human kin, Dakḥóta society is maintained and prospers.⁸⁰ In her *Speaking of Indians*, Deloria highlights that kinship held “all Dakḥóta people ...together in a great relationship that was theoretically all-inclusive and co-extensive with the Dakḥóta domain.”⁸¹ Furthermore, in *In the Beginning the Sun: The Dakota Legend of Creation*, Isányathi Dakḥóta doctor, author, social reformer, and relative of patkáša kšúpi wòtawe 18/2137, Charles Alexander Eastman enforces the relationship between human and non-human kin, saying that “before this time the creatures who inhabited the Earth were called the animal people, they were our forerunners, our relatives.”⁸² Eastman’s *Red*

⁷⁶ Vine Deloria Jr., “Christianity and Indigenous Religion: Friends or Enemies?,” in *For this Land*, ed. James Treat (Routledge, 1999), 149.

⁷⁷ Robertson, “Beading Back and Forth,” 66.

⁷⁸ Daniel Heath Justice, “Go Away, Water! Kinship Criticism and the Decolonization Imperative,” in *Learn, Teach, Challenge: Approaching Indigenous Literatures*, ed. Linda M Morra and Deanna Reder (Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2016), 150-151.

⁷⁹ Ella Cara Deloria et al., *The Dakota Way of Life* (University of Nebraska Press, 2022), 11.

⁸⁰ Deloria et al., *The Dakota Way of Life*, 11.

⁸¹ Ella Cara Deloria and Vine Deloria, *Speaking of Indians* (University of Nebraska Press, 1998), 24-25.

⁸² Charles Alexander Eastman, Gail G. Johnsen, and Sydney D. Beane, *In the Beginning, the Sun: the Dakota Legend of Creation* (Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2023), 75.

Hunters and the Animal People is one of the best literary articulations of this human and non-human kinship network.⁸³ Eastman's shared oral histories, rooted in his Isáñyathi upbringing, recount the land-based kinship networks between the Dak'hóta and different animal relatives. Throughout the chapters, and the many relational lessons told, Eastman cements that "it is no wonder that the Indian held the animals to be his brothers."⁸⁴

For example, chapter eleven, "The Challenge," tells the story of a great hunt and in doing so underscores the importance of relational and respectful protocols. Told from the primary perspective of Tawahinkpayota, or Many Arrows, "The Challenge" details the physical and spiritual preparation needed for a hunt and the lives and customs of various animal relatives like the "Elk Folk." Tawahinkpayota explains that

[we] all agreed to use no weapon save the bow and arrows... that no pony should be used in running down the game. Thus the rules which should govern the character of the hunt were all determined upon in advance... Do as we are doing now, hunt on foot with only the bow and arrow or the knife and stone for weapons, for these were the weapons of our people for untold years.⁸⁵

The "rules," in other words the protocols, not only protect the hunt's integrity, but they are relationally dictated by oral traditions and values, like reciprocity and respect, that are rooted in the Dak'hóta way of life and their relationship to their animal kin.⁸⁶ Notably, the orally dictated protocols, grounded in reciprocity and respect, also exemplify traditional ecological knowledge, or "TEK."

⁸³ Charles A. Eastman, *Red Hunters and the Animal People* (Harper and Brothers, 1904), v.

⁸⁴ Eastman, *Red Hunters and the Animal People*, v.

⁸⁵ Charles Alexander Eastman, "The Challenge," in *Red Hunters and the Animal People* (Harper and Brothers, 1904), 204, 210.

⁸⁶ Christopher J. Pexa, "More Than Talking Animals: Charles Alexander Eastman's Animal Peoples and Their Kinship Critiques of United States Colonialism," *PMLA* 131, no. 3 (2016): 652.

Traditional ecological knowledge, commonly intertwined with traditional ecological practice, "TEP," broadly refers to the culmination of experiences, practices, and values that have been "acquired through experience and observations on the land or from spiritual teachings and handed down from generation to generation."⁸⁷ Specific to each community, TEK is often the foundation for societies and is reflected in their epistemologies, ontologies, and cosmologies, and the Dak'hóta is no different. For example, in "The Challenge," one unnamed speaker proclaims that "there are no finer animals than the elk folk. I have studied their ways, because, as you know, we have followed their customs in courtship and warfare as much as those of any nation. Doubtless all our manners and customs were first copied from the ways of the best animal people."⁸⁸ This clearly defined relationship with the elk and the Dak'hóta not only establishes them as kin but helps maintain their respectful and reciprocal relationship between themselves, the elk, and the land, a perfect embodiment of traditional ecological knowledge.⁸⁹ While TEK has been commonplace in other disciplines, such as anthropology and ecology, it remains an emerging discourse in art history.

Through his work Eastman cements that "not only are animals exemplary peoples but also that their peoplehood, as with that of human beings, inheres in maintaining kinship norms of intergenerational respect and obedience."⁹⁰ Furthermore, Christopher Pexa summarizes that *Red Hunters and the Animal People* "refuses any absolute ontological distinction between human beings and animals," cementing the fluidity and encompassing nature of Dak'hóta kinship

⁸⁷ Tristan Pearce et al., "Inuit Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK), Subsistence Hunting and Adaptation to Climate Change in the Canadian Arctic," *Arctic* 68, no. 2 (2015): 235. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/43871322>.

⁸⁸ Eastman, "The Challenge," 210.

⁸⁹ Clementine Bordeaux, "Wówayupike: Relational Practices between Art, land, and Culture" (PhD diss., University of California Los Angeles, 2023), 82, <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/6558h8j4>.

⁹⁰ Pexa, "More Than Talking Animals," 653.

networks.⁹¹ While the above excerpt is an oral example, Scots-Lakḥóta art historian Carmen Robertson explains that specific kinship obligations reflecting the articulated dynamics of relatives, such as the treatment of the animal before and after death, are expressed in not only language and stories, but in “other cultural expressions.”⁹² Patkáša kšúpi wòtawe 18/2137 is one such “cultural expression.”

The protocols surrounding the preparation and handling of the specific materials for patkáša kšúpi wòtawe 18/2137, including the killing of the animal itself, as outlined in “The Challenge,” are one way that patkáša kšúpi wòtawe 18/2137 embodies and fosters this kinship network. As Ella Deloria explains in *Waterlily*, it was essential to skin the animal, whether that be elk, bison, deer, bear, etc., carefully, “as the hides were as important as the meat.”⁹³ The careful attention to skinning hides, similarly to the preparation of the porcupine quills is not only a technological necessity dictated by the subsequent use of the hide, but again ensures relational accountability between kin and is another example of Dakḥóta traditional ecological knowledge. In *Singing for a Spirit: A Portrait of the Dakota Sioux*, Vine Deloria details the process of Dakḥóta brain tanning hide.⁹⁴ Deloria writes that women were responsible for the tanning and preparation of all hides.⁹⁵ He explains that brain tanning is

a long a difficult process... first the thick fat was scraped from the inside with a horn, and a mush or paste made of the [buffalo] brain, liver, and gall was rubbed over it again and again. The hide was turned toward the sun for a day or two and then soaked for some time in an infusion of sage brush. It was dried thoroughly and rubbed all over with a large stone. This careful preparation of the hide made it soft and pliable.⁹⁶

⁹¹ Pexa, “More Than Talking Animals,” 652.

⁹² Robertson, “Beading Back and Forth,” 56.

⁹³ Deloria, *Waterlily*, 79.

⁹⁴ Vine Deloria, *Singing for a Spirit: a Portrait of the Dakota Sioux* (Clear Light Publishers, 1999), 121.

⁹⁵ Deloria, *Singing for a Spirit*, 121.

⁹⁶ Deloria, *Singing for a Spirit*, 121.

This process, like the protocols for porcupine quillwork, simultaneously speaks to their kinship relations and the intergenerational sharing of knowledge needed for this process and that is facilitated through a close kinship network. Furthermore, the result of a pliable and elastic hide is technologically and aesthetically necessary for later applications of quill work, as the tanned hide closes up around the punctured quills, fastening the applique indefinitely.⁹⁷ Lastly, Kanien'kehá:ka (Mohawk) scholar Joel Monture says that Native American art done on hide was done on the “grained outside – the natural side – of the animal so that the garments were worn the way the animal wore its hide: flesh side in, hair side out. This way respected both animal and nature.”⁹⁸ While the top shell of patkáša kšúpi wòtawe 18/2137 is entirely quilled, leaving little-to-no hide visible, the underside of the body exposes the hide. Importantly, while hide is often visibly obscured by adornment, it does not mean that it is less valued. Quillwork and hide are interdependent. Pre-contact, there could be no quillwork without the hide, and just because quillwork is more vibrant and eye-catching, does not mean that the maker's use of hide is diminished.

Like hide, the use of porcupine quillwork, considered by Ella Deloria to be the “original art” of the Dak'hóta, has strict and precise handling protocols.⁹⁹ Not only do these protocols have practical applications similar to the treatment of hide, but they also ensure kinship protocols. For example, in her *Lakol-wacazeyatapi wa – A Dakota Naming of Things*, Ella Deloria details how

I once watched a woman sorting quills. She sat with a blanket over her lap. Taking a handful of the quills, she set them upright on the blanket by their spiked ends. For only the quills remained planted, so that she could toss the loose hairs out. Then she carefully gathered all the tallest and coarsest, then the next size, and finally the finest qu[il]ls...

⁹⁷ Janet Catherine Berlo, "Quillwork: An Art of Inspiration, Industry, and Generosity," in *Plains Indian Art of the Early Reservation Era*, ed. Jill Ahlberg Yohe and Janet Catherine Berlo (Saint Louis Art Museum, 2016), 76.

⁹⁸ Joel Monture, *The Complete Guide to Traditional Native American Beadwork : a Definitive Study of Authentic Tools, Materials, Techniques, and Styles* (Wiley Pub., 2007), 10.

⁹⁹ Deloria, *Lakol-wacazeyatapi wa*, part III, 13.

later she w[a]s going to dye some of them red, others yellow, green, blue, and so on...she would never mix them up... very carefully she would keep them from scattering, for the whole operation was too exacting and delicate to be repeated.¹⁰⁰

As briefly described by Ella Deloria, the process is laden with aesthetic, spiritual, and relational significance rooted in their relationship to their porcupine kin. In her memoir about growing up on Pine Ridge Reservation, Delphine Red Shirt (Oglála Lakḥóta), demonstrates this relational connection. She describes the knowledge learned from the land and her female relatives, saying that “the largest and coarsest quills come from the back and tail of the porcupine...the slender and delicate quills come from the neck of the porcupine, and the finest quills from the belly.”¹⁰¹ Based on the quality, size, and thickness of the quills, the maker would sort them, as described above, and use them for the appropriate project.¹⁰² After this processing, the quills are soaked in water, making them pliable, and flattened from its tubular shape.¹⁰³ This millennia-informed knowledge, exemplified in patkáša kšúpi wòtawe 18/2137, is transmuted to the aesthetic techniques of flattening, dyeing, and plaiting quills, again an example of TEK.¹⁰⁴

Equally dyed, uniform in size and spacing, and so tightly plaited that they form a seamless line (Figure 1.2), the quills of patkáša kšúpi wòtawe 18/2137 simultaneously speak to the maker’s status as an established and gifted quill worker, and the network needed to make this beautifully made belonging. For example, looking at the top and underside, two different quilling techniques are present, again speaking to networks, such as quillwork guilds, necessary to share this knowledge.¹⁰⁵ On the top, composing the bright red semicircular halves that bracket either

¹⁰⁰ Deloria, *Lakol-wacazeyatapi wa*, part III, 13.

¹⁰¹ Delphine Red Shirt, *Bead on an Anthill: a Lakota Childhood* (University of Nebraska Press, 1999), 28.

¹⁰² Red Shirt, *Bead on an Anthill*, 28.

¹⁰³ Berlo, “Quillwork,” 76.

¹⁰⁴ Red Shirt, *Bead on an Anthill*, 28.

¹⁰⁵ For more information about quillwork guilds see Mary Jane Schneider, “Women’s Work: An Examination of Women’s Roles in Plains Indian Arts and Crafts,” in *The Hidden Half: Studies of Plains Indian Women*, ed. Patricia Albers and Beatrice Medicine (University Press of America, 1983), 112.

side of the purple and white vertebral axis are three “registers” of individual sections of quillwork. Anchored by individual thin strips of hide, each visible plait of the red-dyed porcupine quills wraps around the foundation provided by the hide, seamlessly blending into the preceding and proceeding quill.¹⁰⁶ Continuing the whole way up, these individual strips of quills are then applied to the hide composing the body of patkáša kšúpi wòtawe 18/2137, evidenced by the slight gap between each register, revealing the hide below.

On the underside of the belly, the maker uses the sewing down technique rather than wrapping. Looking at the red cross motif on the tail and hide ends of the underbelly, the edges of the quills appear to dissolve into the supporting hide.¹⁰⁷ Starting at the top and bottom, a quill is tacked down on either side of the small portion of the quill visible. After securing the quill, the maker diagonally folds the quill the opposite direction, creating the appearance of a solid line. When done by a skilled maker, like the maker of patkáša kšúpi wòtawe 18/2137, the appearance is a flush line that blends with the hide. The combination of techniques and the precision with which they are executed in patkáša kšúpi wòtawe 18/2137, speaks to the maker’s standing as an accomplished quill worker, and therefore a seasoned bearer of the associated cultural knowledge.

Not only do the handling protocols and techniques of quillwork physically connect generations of women to their sacred oral histories, but through the use of quills, patkáša kšúpi wòtawe 18/2137 itself becomes a conduit for the transmission of sacred knowledge.¹⁰⁸ Carmen Robertson elucidates this by explaining that the animacy embedded within quills hold stories that

¹⁰⁶ "Postcards: Quill Working, Walter 'Super' LaBatte," video, posted 2019, accessed January 14, 2025, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SfKSunFXEcA>.

¹⁰⁷ For more information about the red cross motif, see Philip J. Deloria’s "Conclusion: Luta and the Double Woman," In *Becoming Mary Sully: Toward an American Indian Abstract*, 261–80, University of Washington Press, 2019. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctvg2542n.11>.

¹⁰⁸ Daniel Radus, "Hydes, Hymns, Quills, Crosses: An Embellished Nineteenth-Century Dakota-Language Hymnal," in *American Contact: Objects of Intercultural Encounters and Boundaries of Book History*, ed. Rhae Lynn Barnes and Glenda Goodman (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2024), 310.

connect the maker, the recipient, and the porcupine, to the land.¹⁰⁹ Through the production of patkáša kšúpi wòtawe 18/2137, the maker acts as an active participant in this network.

Like the porcupine, elk, bison, or deer, the Dak'hóta view plants as part of their kinship network.¹¹⁰ The pigments used to dye the quills, made with their plant relatives, are yet another way in which the materiality of patkáša kšúpi wòtawe 18/2137 speaks to land-based kinship networks. In name and material, each color is physically tied to the land. In her unpublished manuscript, Ella Deloria describes two categories of colors: “earth” colors and “secondary derived” colors.¹¹¹ The earth colors include red, blue, brown, white, black, and earth yellow.¹¹² Secondary colors include pink, dark blue, bright yellow, off-white, light blue, pale yellow, green, paler green, purple, and gray.¹¹³ Ella goes on to describe the origins of certain colors, further connecting the colors, and in effect, the materials to the land. She explains that the secondary brighter yellow, zí, comes from sumac, purple, áwíyapehe iyústakapi, is “crushed in wild grapes,” and that the red, šá or lúta, commonly comes from the Vermillion River.¹¹⁴ The maker’s use of both earth colors and derived colors, the vibrancy of which has stood the test of time, in patkáša kšúpi wòtawe 18/2137, connects the maker to the land and to the vast lineage of experience, knowledge, and kinship that these colors embody.

¹⁰⁹ Robertson, “Beading Back and Forth,” 63.

¹¹⁰ Diane Wilson, “Making Relatives,” in *Kinship: Belonging in a World of Relations*, by Gavin Van Horn, Robin Wall Kimmerer, and John Hausdoerffer (Center for Humans and Nature Press, 2021), 55-59; Diane Wilson is an enrolled member of the Rosebud Reservation and is of Mdewákhantunwan descent.

¹¹¹ Deloria, *Lakol-wacazeyatapi wa*, part III, 6.

¹¹² Deloria, *Lakol-wacazeyatapi wa*, part III, 6.

¹¹³ Deloria, *Lakol-wacazeyatapi wa*, part III, 6.

¹¹⁴ Deloria, *Lakol-wacazeyatapi wa*, part III, 6.

Part Two: Patkáša, A Thirteen-Month Lunar Calendar & Cyclical Conceptions of Time

In part two of chapter one, I expand upon Dakḥóta land-based epistemologies by discussing cyclical conceptions of time. Firstly, I explore the most explicit connection to the land, the physical form of patkáša kšúpi wòtawe 18/2137 representing a patkáša (Western Painted Turtle). I analyze the significance of turtles and how this identity corresponds to Dakḥóta oral histories and the thirteen-month lunar calendar. Secondly, centering the work of Ella Deloria, namely her posthumously published *Waterlily*, I investigate her description of the physical movement of a patkáša kšúpi wòtawe.¹¹⁵ Described first as a toy, then a “talisman” on a young girl’s dress, and finally an addition on a woman’s belt, I position patkáša kšúpi wòtawe 18/2137 within this movement to highlight how it functions as a secondary calendar specific to women and young girls.¹¹⁶

Temporality, like materiality and TEK, is gaining headway in art historical scholarship. As heather ahtone explains, “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 network of influence.”¹¹⁷ Understanding how this “time-space” continuum impacts the maker, as well as the reception of their work is integral to the future of the discipline. In *Beyond Settler Time*, Mark Rifkin expands upon the importance of temporalities, explaining that “rather than approaching time as an abstract, homogenous measure of universal movement along a singular axis, we can think of it as plural...there is no singular unfolding of time, but, instead, varied

¹¹⁵ Deloria, *Waterlily*, 23.

¹¹⁶ Deloria, *Waterlily*, 23.

¹¹⁷ heather ahtone, “Shifting the Paradigm of Art History: A Multi-sited Indigenous Approach,” in *The Routledge Companion to Indigenous Art Histories in the United States and Canada*, ed. Heather L. Igloliorte and Carla Taunton (Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2023), 65.

temporal formations that have their own rhythms.”¹¹⁸ By highlighting the multiplicity of temporalities, as well as the differences between “Native” and “non-Native” conceptions of time, Rifkin allows space for “temporal sovereignty” and destabilizes settler colonial structures.¹¹⁹ Carmen Robertson underscores this as well, stating that “linear time frames tend to defang colonial practices because of the naturalized pervasiveness in museology and within the academic discipline of art history.”¹²⁰ By focusing on how patkáša kšúpi wòtawe 18/2137 fosters cyclical conceptions of time and, in doing so, is an active facilitator of temporal sovereignty, this part of chapter one works to resist settler colonial frameworks, interrupting the oppression of the museum within which it is confined.¹²¹

Like kinship between human and non-human relations, cyclical conceptions of time are a land-based epistemology and an example of TEK. Broadly described by Vine Deloria Jr., “the tribal perspective generally sees the universe as a cyclic pattern of creation and destruction.”¹²² Furthermore, distinguished Thâkîwaki (Sac & Fox), Šaawanwaki (Shawnee), Mvskoke, and Seminole historian Donald Lee Fixico highlights that “Indian Thinking” generally views the world as a series of interdependent cycles cemented in the natural order of the universe.¹²³ Manifested in different, but interrelated ways, these cycles appear in all aspects of life: birth and death, solar and lunar movements, menstrual and pregnancy cycles, tidal variations, seasons and patterns of movement.¹²⁴ Like the denigration of other Indigenous ways of knowing, denying, or

¹¹⁸ Mark Rifkin, *Beyond Settler Time: Temporal Sovereignty and Indigenous Self-determination* (Duke University Press, 2017), 2.

¹¹⁹ Rifkin, *Beyond Settler Time*, 2.

¹²⁰ Robertson, “Beading Back and Forth,” 55.

¹²¹ Rifkin, *Beyond Settler Time*, 3.

¹²² Deloria and Treat, *For This Land*, 149.

¹²³ Donald Lee Fixico, *The American Indian Mind in a Linear World* (Routledge, 2013), 43.

¹²⁴ Lois Elizabeth Edge, “My Grandmother’s Moccasins: Indigenous Women, Ways of Knowing, and Indigenous Aesthetic Beadwork” (PhD diss., University of Alberta, 2011), 153.

not exploring, cyclical conceptions of time reinforces settler colonialism, and implicitly justifies the continuation of the dispossession and destitution of Indigenous communities.¹²⁵ While these overarching themes are prevalent in many Indigenous communities, a discussion of Dakḥóta-specific understandings of time is imperative.

Grounded in the twelve legends of the creation cycle, Dakḥóta cyclical conceptions of time are anchored in the land.¹²⁶ One example explained by Dr. Cynthia Lindquist and Albert Red Bear details how “traditionally the Dakota Oyate (Nation) lived with the Tatanka Oyáte (Buffalo Nation) and followed their migration patterns...the buffalo moved by the seasons to where there were different grasses, plants, and berries.”¹²⁷ This example of following the migration paths of buffalo highlights how the Dakḥóta are guided by the natural cycles of life and the seasons.¹²⁸ Stretching four inches in length and an inch and half in width, the small size of patkáša kšúpi wòtawe 18/2137, enables it to move with the bison herds and their community. Held in the palm of a hand or attached to a cradleboard, dress, or belt when in community, patkáša kšúpi wòtawe 18/2137 moves alongside their human relatives, further supporting the kinship networks described in part one. However, as Dr. Deborah Myran (Cankaga Oti/Birdtail Sioux First Nation) explains, due to environmental degradation, forced removal and assimilation - in general, settler colonialism - the cyclical path of the Dakḥóta is “long over” for most people.¹²⁹ Despite this, the physical embodiments of cyclical conceptions of time are manifested

¹²⁵ Ahenakew, "Grafting Indigenous Ways of Knowing Onto Non-Indigenous Ways of Being," 324.

¹²⁶ Eastman, Johnsen, and Beane, *In the Beginning The Sun*.

¹²⁷ Cynthia Lindquist and Albert Red Bear, "Returning to Local Tribal Values: To Think Dakota, Live Dakota," *Humanities North Dakota Magazine*, May 1, 2011, accessed January 31, 2025, https://issuu.com/humanitiesnd/docs/208141_ostmag_spg11_think-indian/10.

¹²⁸ Lindquist and Red Bear, *Returning to Local Tribal Values*.

¹²⁹ Myran, "Kunsi Ksapa and Wisdom," 125.

in the material and cultural practices of everyday life, and patkáša kšúpi wòtawe 18/2137 is no different.

According to Crow Creek Húnkpati Dakḥóta member Janice Bad Moccasin, the moon was, and for some is, used to track the passing of time.¹³⁰ Each full moon “mark[s] the passing of one month” and each month has precisely twenty-eight days, culminating in a 13-month calendar.”¹³¹ Instead of the Christian-imposed settler colonial Gregorian calendar, which tracks time according to a linear twelve-month calendar, with a different number of days for each month, the Dakḥóta use a thirteen-month calendar, where each month has exactly twenty-eight days.¹³² Not only do the Dakḥóta use this thirteen-month calendar, but when looking at the names of each moon, or month, the connection to the cyclical rhythm of the land is reiterated.¹³³

Similarly anchored in oral histories such as “Turtle and his War Party,” turtles are commonly associated with longevity, bravery, strength, and femininity.¹³⁴ Along with these characteristics, turtles are also employed to track the passage of time.¹³⁵ Winona Runsabove Killeagle, a Nakóda, Ihánkthunwaŋna Dakḥóta, Lakḥóta, and Só'taeo'o (Northern Cheyenne) researcher for the Fort Peck Assiniboiné and Sioux Tribes' Language and Culture Department explains that when “we examine a turtle's shell, we find the same pattern of numbers of lunar months in a year and days in a lunar month” (Figure 1.3).¹³⁶ Specifically, the thirteen inner scutes

¹³⁰ Janice Bad Moccasin et al., *Two-Eyed Seeing: NASA & D(L)akota Astronomy and NASA Moon to Mars* (n.p., 2020), 3.

¹³¹ Bad Moccasin et al., *Two-Eyed Seeing*, 3

¹³² Bad Moccasin et al., *Two-Eyed Seeing*, 3

¹³³ 2024 Dakota Wiyawapi Kin: *The Dakota Moon Calendar of the Sákpé Mdewákhantunwaŋ* (Sákpé Mdewákhantunwaŋ Community, 2024).

¹³⁴ Amos E. Oneroad, Skinner, Alanson B., and Anderson, Laura L., *Being Dakota Tales and Traditions of the Sisseton and Wahpeton* (Minnesota Historical Society Pr, 2005), 169-172; Deloria et al., *The Dakota Way of Life*, 294.

¹³⁵ Bad Moccasin et al., *Two-Eyed Seeing*, 3

¹³⁶ Winona Runsabove-Kill Eagle, "Nakóda/Nakóna Language Bowl Study Guide" (unpublished manuscript, 2024).

of the shell correspond to the thirteen months, while the outer twenty-eight scutes correspond to the days. Together, this alignment, symbolized by patkáša kšúpi wòtawe 18/2137, serves as a system for marking time based on the lunar calendar and Dakḥóta understandings of cyclical conceptions of time. In *Waterlily* Ella Deloria alludes to the thirteen-month lunar calendar, explaining that the entire back of the patkáša kšúpi wòtawe was “worked in colors to simulate the design on a real turtle.”¹³⁷ However, Ella importantly makes the distinction that while the back of the patkáša kšúpi wòtawe is adorned to represent the “fancy designs” of a turtle’s shell, the adornment was “not always a faithful replica.”¹³⁸ The explicit visual connection to a turtle’s shell, and therefore the lunar calendar, further supports a patkáša kšúpi wòtawe functioning in this way.

When looking at the quillwork adorning the shell of patkáša kšúpi wòtawe 18/2137, two bifurcated halves starkly stand out. Encapsulated by three nestled layers of bright yellow, eggplant, and white quills, these bifurcated halves draw attention to the central vertical delineation of purple and white quills descending the spine. While the quilled adornment does not directly evoke the overlapping scutes of a turtle’s shell, the implicit connection is present. For example, the central line of descending quillwork comprises seven eggplant-colored sections, interspersed among six white sections. When counted together, this repeating pattern totals thirteen equidistant and symmetrical divisions, eliciting the thirteen lunar months. Additionally, the three wrapping layers of quillwork running the perimeter of the shell can be seen as a visual evocation of the external scutes, while the inner halves, mirror the total interior scutes of a turtle’s shell. While lacking a naturalistic reproduction of a turtle’s shell, the

¹³⁷ Deloria, *Waterlily*, 23.

¹³⁸ Deloria, *Lakol-wacazeyatapi wa*, part II, 6.

elongated body, tapered tail and head, and hide limbs of patkáša kšúpi wòtawe 18/2137 clearly conjure a turtle. Three-dimensional, the smooth curvilinear sides mimic the natural shape of a real turtle's sleek and durable body. When resting on its pilled underbelly, the height of the body, contrasted against a stark, flat white museum table creates a sense of movement and dynamism. The quill-wrapped hide limbs attached to the underside aid in creating an animate, moveable turtle.

As demonstrated, when functioning within community, patkáša kšúpi wòtawe 18/2137 acts as a tangible manifestation of the thirteen-month lunar calendar, helping maintain tribal movements and events. However, looking at how the patkáša kšúpi wòtawe physically moves in the community also illuminates a secondary method of keeping time. Beatrice Medicine, Sihásapa/Miniconjou Lakǵóta anthropologist and scholar, explains that “in the life cycle of the Plains Indian women, each major rite of passage was observed with ceremony and ritual and was based upon the ethos or worldview of each unique nation.”¹³⁹ While each of these ceremonies plays an integral role in Dakǵóta society, given my position as a non-Native settler scholar, I will not be discussing them further, as I aim to respect living communities that do not wish for their closed ceremonies to be shared outside of the community. Patkáša kšúpi wòtawe 18/2137, therefore, serves to mark this ceremonial passage through time and ultimately supports cyclical patterns of life.¹⁴⁰

In *The Dakota Way of Life*, Ella Deloria distinguishes between the phases of maturation in Dakǵóta society: infancy, adolescence, preadolescence, and adulthood.¹⁴¹ Though each phase

¹³⁹ Beatrice Medicine, “Women’s Roles,” in *Memory and Vision: Arts, Cultures, and Lives of Plains Indian Peoples*, by Emma L. Hansen, (Buffalo Bill Center for the Wild West, 2007), 94.

¹⁴⁰ Deloria and Treat, *For This Land*, 149.

¹⁴¹ Deloria et al., *The Dakota Way of Life*.

is independent, they are all part of an interconnected cycle of life and death, as highlighted in *Waterlily*. Historian Colette Hyman identifies that for Dakḥóta communities, belongings “carry spiritual meaning and embody family and community relationships. This is especially true for [belongings] created for an individual, for a special accomplishment, or for a life cycle.”¹⁴² Moving through a child’s life, patkáša kšúpi wòtawe 18/2137 is one example of this kind of belonging. Furthermore, because of the inclusion of the own child’s umbilical cord, patkáša kšúpi wòtawe 18/2137 is not just a belonging, but, as described by Ella Deloria, the child itself, a relative that accompanies the child through life.¹⁴³

Attached to the cradleboard throughout infancy, a patkáša kšúpi wòtawe first functions as a “toy.”¹⁴⁴ As seen in patkáša kšúpi wòtawe 18/2137, a small hoop is affixed to the underside of the belly, allowing it to be tied onto a cradleboard (Figure 1.4). This contemporary example (Figure 1.5) made by the Growing Thunder Collective – a multigenerational group of Sisíthun̄waŋ/Waḥpéthun̄waŋ Dakḥóta and Wadópona Nakóda quill workers and beaders comprised of Joyce Growing Thunder, Juanita Growing Thunder Fogarty, Jessa Rae Growing Thunder, Camryn Growing Thunder and other Growing Thunder grandchildren – demonstrates how the patkáša kšúpi wòtawe can be attached. Fastened to two brass-studded wooden boards, Juanita Growing Thunder Fogarty encapsulates this cradleboard in intricate beadwork. A base of bright white glass seed beads runs the length of each vertical side of the cradleboard. Providing a base for sections of vibrant multi-color, the base of white beads highlights community-specific motifs, like the geometric “U” along the bottom and top of the vertical sides. Attached toward the top of the cradleboard, the patkáša kšúpi wòtawe, also made by Juanita, rests right below a

¹⁴² Hyman, *Dakota Women's Work*, 11.

¹⁴³ Deloria, *Waterlily*, 23.

¹⁴⁴ Deloria et al., *The Dakota Way of Life*, 294.

baby's line of sight. On a mother's back and undulating with her every step, or pushed by a passing breeze, the patkáša kšúpi wòtawe is a sensory tool, encouraging the child, even at its youngest age, to engage with it and learn from it. While unable to attach patkáša kšúpi wòtawe 18/2137 to a cradleboard, its bold contrasting colors and shapes – bright red laid against purple, white, teal and yellow – create a graphic visual interface with the baby, speaking to this sensorial function.

During the next phases of this life cycle, preadolescence, and adolescence, the patkáša kšúpi wòtawe is no longer a toy. Following and supporting the child through this next phase of life, the patkáša kšúpi wòtawe was often seen as an ornament for ceremonial dress.¹⁴⁵ While a decorative accompaniment to the dress, the patkáša kšúpi wòtawe also becomes a “talisman for longevity.”¹⁴⁶ As boys do not often carry their own patkáša kšúpi wòtawe after infancy, girls' ceremonial dresses are sometimes seen with one or two extras fastened alongside her own.¹⁴⁷ While exact ceremonies are kept within community, the placement of the patkáša kšúpi wòtawe on the back symbolically alludes to the next phase of her life – a caretaker and leader. As a matrilineal society, the patkáša kšúpi wòtawe represents that Dak'hóta community rests upon the backs of the women, literally and figuratively.

When one reaches adulthood, a patkáša kšúpi wòtawe takes its place on a woman's belt, as seen on this belt made by a Lak'hóta maker (Figure 1.6). Similarly in the collection of the NMAI, the belt features a band and awl cases engulfed in a hodge podge of various seed beads, highlighting the solid pattern work primarily displayed in blue, red, white, and green beads on both the patkáša kšúpi wòtawe and knife sheath. This belt presents a woman's everyday

¹⁴⁵ Deloria et al., *The Dakota Way of Life*, 294.

¹⁴⁶ Deloria, *Waterlily*, 23.

¹⁴⁷ Deloria et al., *The Dakota Way of Life*, 294.

activities, such as beadwork and tanning, as indicated by the awl case and knife sheath. These objects, markers of her role in society, hold equal importance alongside the patkáša kšúpi wòtawe. In this way, the patkáša kšúpi wòtawe is no longer seen as a “toy” but remains a talisman of longevity. It also signifies the woman’s status as a valued member of the Dakḥóta community. This progressive change in the function of a patkáša kšúpi wòtawe ultimately tracks the passage of time. Combined, the progression through a woman’s life and the form and adornment evoking the thirteen-month lunar calendar, the patkáša kšúpi wòtawe acts as two different but interrelated calendars that cyclically orbit around one another, keeping track of a woman’s journey through time and life.

Conclusion:

Throughout this chapter, I have demonstrated how when in community, patkáša kšúpi wòtawe 18/2137 functions as an embodiment of Dakḥóta kinship and cyclical conceptions of time. The importance of positioning removed belongings back into community is underscored by countless scholars, such as Carmen Robertson, Sherry Farrell Racette, David Garneau, and Amy Lonetree, who solidify that “when trapped within colonial structures of time and Western ways of knowing art... [belongings] found in ethnographic collections often continue to be treated as relics of the past rather than as relations, who when visited, share their stories.”¹⁴⁸ By resituating this quilled patkáša kšúpi wòtawe within community, this chapter works to destabilize the settler colonial collecting practices and provides a stark juxtaposition for how knowledge surrounding these belongings has been produced and shared in museum settings, which will be expanded upon in chapter two.

¹⁴⁸ Robertson, “Beading Back and Forth,” 54.

Chapter 2: (Settler) Colonial Collecting

Introduction:

Since Columbus' arrival, Europeans have been intensely captivated with the collection and extraction of the material culture of Indigenous groups of the Americas.¹⁴⁹ Seen as “savage,” “uncivilized,” and ripe for conversion, European, and subsequently American forces continuously documented, stole, and ravaged Indigenous communities to support their Christian colonial and later settler colonial agenda.¹⁵⁰ Museums are not only a direct by-product of colonialism and settler colonialism, but they have become the repositories for many of the belongings removed from the community. Sherry Farrell Racette (Métis/Timiskaming First Nation) describes museums as “colonial treasure chests, the material evidence of empire.”¹⁵¹ Not only are these institutions, including the National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI) repositories, but through their treatment of Native American belongings as an artifact and an “ethnographic specimen,” they perpetuate the paradigms and beliefs that dictated the belonging's initial collection.¹⁵²

Nestled within ethafoam padding and acid-free boxes, patkáša kšúpi wòtawe 20/4595 – or Object Number 20/4595 as the NMAI presents it and how it will be referred to throughout this chapter to emphasize this classification and the extents of settler colonialism's mechanisms – is confined by the imposed handling protocols dictated by the National Museum of the American Indian (Figure 2.1). Made by a Waǰpéthuŋwaŋ Dakḥóta maker, most likely a woman, Object

¹⁴⁹ Kirsten Fischer, *The Imperial Gaze: Native American, African American, and Colonial Women in European Eyes*, (Blackwell Publishers, 2002), 198.

¹⁵⁰ Gretchen M. Bataille, ed. *Native American representations: First encounters, distorted images, and literary appropriations*, (University of Nebraska Press, 2001), 4.

¹⁵¹ Sherry Farrell Racette, “Looking for Stories and Unbroken Threads: Museum Artifacts as Women's History and Cultural Legacy,” in *Restoring the Balance: First Nations Women, Community, and Culture*, edited by Eric Guimond, Gail Guthrie Valaskakis and Madeline Dion Stout (University of Manitoba Press, 2008), 283.

¹⁵² Christian F. Feest, *Native Arts of North America* (Thames and Hudson, 1980), 10.

Number 20/4595 was collected between 1890 and 1893 by Major J.H. Waugh from the Devils Lake Reservation, today known as Spirit Lake Reservation, in Fort Totten, North Dakota.¹⁵³ Donated to the NMAI in 1941 by J.H. Waugh's son, Object Number 20/4595 has remained at the NMAI ever since its donation.¹⁵⁴ Removed from community, this belonging or object as ascribed by the NMAI no longer functions as it would in community.

Deviating from the ancestral quillwork in *patkáša kšúpi wòtawe* 18/2137 I analyze in chapter one, Object Number 20/4595 is entirely encapsulated with vibrant, multicolor beadwork. Weathered with age and handling, evidenced by the faded beads, pilled and discolored hide, and slight dirt wedged between the crevices, Object Number 20/4595 stretches four and a half inches from head to tail and two and a quarter inches across the width of the belly. Beautifully proportionate, the body, almost a perfectly symmetrical circle, anchors the tail, head, and hide fringe limbs and supplies the base for intricate beadwork affixed with sinew. Sky blue seed beads wrap around the bottom half of the turtle's shell, following the curvature of its body and providing the background for the rest of the applique (Figure 2.2). Standing out against this blue background, the maker's use of vibrantly contrasting colors accentuates the central motif of what I perceive as a smaller figurative turtle resting upon its back. Running from head to tail, a line of forest green beads vertically descend the spine of the physical and motif turtle, creating an axis for further applique.

Nestled within the spine of beads, two salmon pink crosses with a red square center, stand out against the forest green. Complementary colors, forest green, and salmon pink, extenuate and balance each other. While appreciated as a whole, each seed bead within the composition is a

¹⁵³ "Accession Catalog" (unpublished manuscript, The National Museum of the American Indian, Washington, DC, 1941), 4.

¹⁵⁴ "Accession Catalog," 4.

testament to the maker's resilience and ingenuity, reflecting their ability to preserve and adapt in the face of settler colonial systems designed to eradicate their culture and life. Unlike the head and tail, which emerge as a continuation of the body, three small, fringed pieces of hide, affixed to the corners and wrapped half of the way in navy seed beads, create the illusion of limbs. A beautifully made belonging, Object Number 20/4595 has been removed from its community and relegated as an ethnographic specimen. This imposed classification, however, does not mean however that dispossessed belongings are stagnant and static. Instead, by, as in the words of Diné art historian and curator Kathleen Ash-Milby, "thinking about these objects not just as part of a deep history but as containing energy," we can change how these belongings can be engaged with while still confined by their oppressor.¹⁵⁵

In this chapter, I trace the lineage of Object Number 20/4595 within the broader artistic continuum of Native beadwork. I highlight women's adaptation of beadwork from quillwork to resist settler colonial constraints, demonstrating their continued resilience. In part two, I analyze the available provenance records for Object Number 20/4595, illuminating how the settler colonial structure that dictates the NMAI has been used to justify the removal and subsequent denigration of Object Number 20/4595 as a "specimen." By focusing on the NMAI, the largest "colonial treasure chest," as well as a belonging that has never left the ethnographic collection, rather than on a singular exhibition, I open a dialogue for destabilizing conversations regarding how dispossessed belongings continue to be treated in ethnographic collections.

¹⁵⁵ Kathleen Ash-Milby, "Wisdom in Beauty: Respect in Indigenous Curation," in *The Routledge Companion to Indigenous Art Histories in the United States and Canada*, ed. Heather Igloliorte and Carla Taunton (Routledge, 2022), 100.

Part One: Beads, Cultural Continuity, & Resilience

Beadwork made by Native women is one of the most recognizable Native American art forms.¹⁵⁶ While not used pre-contact, Native women tactfully and strategically adapted beadwork to preserve and resist settler colonialism, demonstrating their continued resilience. Once thought of as “frozen-in-time” and “void of knowledge,” increasing scholarship and public exhibitions, like *Radical Stitch* (2022-2024), for example, demonstrate the multivalenced power of beadwork.¹⁵⁷ In highlighting the multiplicity of beadwork, scholars, activists, community members, and artists illustrate its ability to embody Indigenous epistemologies, transmit knowledge, be a powerful tool of visual storytelling, and lastly, a marker of resilience and survivance, all of which work to resist the “ethnographic specimen” classification where much Indigenous beadwork continues to rest.¹⁵⁸

Emerging out of psychology, the concept of resilience has gained headway as an interdisciplinary approach to address related issues of trauma and Indigenous futurity.¹⁵⁹ Hilary Weaver, a Lakhóta social worker, scholar, and chair of the board of directors for the Council on Social Work Education, defines resilience as “an ability to resist, persevere, survive, and grow despite significant challenges.”¹⁶⁰ Kanien'kéha:ka (Mohawk) curator Lee-Ann Martin expands upon this definition, saying that resilience embodies “endurance, adaptability, and sovereignty in relation to historical practices and contemporary identities.”¹⁶¹ In the face of ongoing settler

¹⁵⁶ Kletchka and Friday, “Instructional Resources,” 26.

¹⁵⁷ Carmen L. Robertson, Judy Anderson, and Katherine Boyer, *Bead Talk Indigenous Knowledge and Aesthetics from the Flatlands*, (University of Manitoba Press, 2024), 2.

¹⁵⁸ Robertson, Anderson, Boyer, *Bead Talk*, 2.

¹⁵⁹ Laurence J. Kirmayer et al., “Rethinking Resilience From Indigenous Perspectives,” *The Canadian Journal of Psychiatry* 56, no. 2 (2011): 84, https://doi.org/10.1177/070674371105600203open_in_new.

¹⁶⁰ Hilary Weaver, *Trauma and Resilience in the Lives of Contemporary Native Americans: Reclaiming our Balance, Restoring our Wellbeing* (Routledge, 2019), 8.

¹⁶¹ Jen Zoratti, “Showing Resilience: MAWA exhibits works from Indigenous women from coast to coast,” *The Winnipeg Free Press*, March 15, 2018, accessed February 19, 2025, <https://www.winnipegfreepress.com/arts-and-life/entertainment/arts/2018/03/15/showing-> find the actual citation from the resilience article

colonialism, resilience has become a powerful catalyst in many Indigenous communities. Scholars Stephanie Rotorangi and Darryn Russell (Ngāi Tahu) cement that Indigeneity and resilience are inextricably intertwined.¹⁶² Indicators of Indigenous resilience are arguably interwoven into all aspects of life, including beadwork. As beader Malinda Joy Gray, member of the Lac Seul Band of Ojibwe, explains, as a visual language, beads have the power to transcend traditional settler colonial linguistic signifiers, becoming powerful tools of resilience.¹⁶³ Like resilience, survivance is another formidable catalyst for change.

Originally coined by Gerald Vizenor, a writer, literary critic, activist, and member of the White Earth Band of the Minnesota Chippewa Tribe, survivance explicitly combines “survival” and “resistance.”¹⁶⁴ A multifaceted term that also encompasses resilience, “survivance is an active sense of presence over absence, deracination, and oblivion; survivance is the continuance of stories, not a mere reaction, however pertinent.”¹⁶⁵ Native beadworkers are agents of survivance. Through the tailoring of glass seed beads, their work resists nihilism and victimry and pushes back against the dominant narrative of settler colonialism. While survivance is most commonly attributed to living makers, it can also be seen in dispossessed beadwork in museum collections.

On either side of the vertebral beadwork axis of Object Number 20/4595, the maker adorns each half of the shell with almost perfectly symmetrical designs (Figure 2.3). Stretching nearly from the neck of the turtle to the base of the tail, an elongated semicircle of shiny, black

¹⁶² Stephanie Rotorangi and Darryn Russell, "Social-Ecological Resilience Thinking: Can Indigenous Culture Guide Environmental Management?," *The Royal Society of New Zealand* 39, no. 4 (2009): 209.

¹⁶³ Malinda Joy Gray, "Beads: Symbols of Indigenous Cultural Resilience and Value" (master's thesis, University of Toronto, 2017), 19.

¹⁶⁴ Gerald Vizenor, *Manifest Manners: Narratives on Postindian Survivance* (University of Nebraska Press, 1999).

¹⁶⁵ Gerald Vizenor, "Aesthetics of Survivance," in *Native Liberty: Natural Reason and Cultural Survivance* (University of Nebraska Press, 2009), 86.

seed beads, nestles against either side of the forest-green seed beads of the spine. Within these semicircles, two horizontal lines of salmon pink beads visually interrupt the middle of the black, creating space for dark navy, almost black, seed beads between. An angled triangular portion of cobalt blue seed beads emerges from the upper and lower sloped edges of the black semi-circle, providing a stark visual contrast to the bright, sky-blue seed beads that wrap the base of the shell. Identical in shape, a series of mustard-yellow seed beads connect, creating the illusion of a turtle's limbs. When viewed as a whole, this combination of abstract, geometric shapes – semicircles, elongated triangles and rectangles – creates a design that mirrors the physical form of Object Number 20/4595. The combination of contrasting colors and intricate designs also speaks to the makers' abilities as a skilled woman. Furthermore, through the intricate stringing of each bead, the maker connects herself to a lineage of knowledge and production in the past, present, and future.

Introduced to North America in the early 1700s, glass seed beads quickly became prolific throughout the Great Plains.¹⁶⁶ While there were beads – broadly referring to a small round object with a hole through it – made of bone, ivory, stone, seeds, berries, shells, metals, clay, wood, and semi-precious stones, before contact, it is the small, glass, seed beads, introduced from Europe that have become inextricably entwined with Native American art.¹⁶⁷ After becoming widely accessible, Native women adapted their techniques and knowledge passed down through the generations of women and, from their ancestral quillwork and painting practices, and applied them to the newly introduced medium of glass seed beads.¹⁶⁸ Tailoring beadwork to meet their needs, Indigenous makers have transformed seed beads - a marker of

¹⁶⁶ Edge, "My Grandmother's Moccasins," 133.

¹⁶⁷ Edge, "My Grandmother's Moccasins," 132.

¹⁶⁸ Edge, "My Grandmother's Moccasins," 132.

settler colonialism - into powerful “beings that claim space and cultural identity; they hold stories and serve as a medium of resilience.”¹⁶⁹ Through the stringing and stitching of each bead, and through the evolutionary lineage linked to quillwork, as discussed in chapter one, a maker connects themselves to the land, Indigenous epistemologies, and generations of women. Their work can be seen as actively asserting their resilience against oppressive settler colonial structures and an agent of survivance.

The techniques employed in quillwork, including the methods used for attaching applique, the use of a vibrant color palette characterized by contrasting hues, and the ongoing presence of geometric abstract patterns are seamlessly integrated into the adaptation to beadwork, as demonstrated in Object Number 20/4595.¹⁷⁰ For example, looking turtle’s sides, the lines of seed beads are raised and buckled, indicative of the lane stitch technique used for the applique. While slightly different from the sewing down of porcupine quills, as seen on the underside of patkáša kšúpi wòtawe 18/2137 analyzed in chapter one, the fundamental technique of tacking down on either end of a row or section of quills/beads metaphorically and literally stitches the two together. The color palette, specifically the use of highly contrasting colors, similarly seen in chapter one and accentuated when looking at Object Number 20/4595 through a black and white filter (Figure 2.4), also speaks to the artistic lineage connecting quillwork and beadwork. Lastly, the maker’s use of bold geometric designs, a hallmark of Dakḥóta women’s artistic expressions, as described above, additionally speaks to the continuation of quillwork through the process of beadwork. Furthermore, through this adaptation, the beads are

¹⁶⁹ Robertson, Anderson, and Boyer, *Bead Talk*, 3.

¹⁷⁰ See chapter one for a discussion about quillwork techniques, color choices, and applique.

transformed into “floating signifiers for the land, narrative traditions and ceremony,” which were facilitated and embodied by pre-contact quillwork.¹⁷¹

Carmen Robertson highlights that improvements in scholarships, museums, and beadwork, including Object Number 20/4595, are essentially “trapped within colonial structures of time and Western ways of knowing art...[ancestral and historic] beaded works found in ethnographic collections often continue to be treated as relics of the past rather than as relations, who when visited, often share their stories.”¹⁷² Resting within the ethnographic collection of the NMAI, Object Number 20/4595 is no outlier to this phenomenon.

Part Two: An “Ethnographic Specimen”

Removed from the Devils Lake (Spirit Lake) Reservation in Fort Totten, North Dakota, sometime between 1890 and 1893, patkáša kšúpi wòtawe 20/4595 now rests in the ethnographic collections of the National Museum of the American Indian.¹⁷³ Donated to the NMAI with forty-one glass plate negatives taken by JH Waugh Sr’s son, along with seventy other belongings, Object Number 20/4595 has never been loaned and never put on display.¹⁷⁴ The ethnographic collections of the NMAI evoke a sense of sterility and stagnancy, starkly contrasting the intended function within the maker’s community, as discussed in chapter one.

Like all Indigenous communities in the United States, the Dakḥóta have faced oppressive legal frameworks, broken treaties, and settler colonial impositions aimed at eradicating and assimilating the Dakḥóta way of life. While the Dakḥóta have been in treaty relations with the

¹⁷¹ Deloria, "Interpretation," 114; Robertson, "Land and Beaded Identity," 16.

¹⁷² Robertson, "Beading Back and Forth," 57.

¹⁷³ Accession Catalog," 4.

¹⁷⁴ "Loan Roaster," July 1941, 1941.0081, The National Museum of the American Indian.

United States since 1805, after the 1862 Dakḥóta uprising, a marked increase in overt, widespread, genocidal campaigns enacted by the United States was experienced.¹⁷⁵ Exile, imprisonment, forced removal, boarding schools, as well as other brutal assimilationist tactics, were commonplace and all part of the campaign to “kill the Indian in him, and save the man.”¹⁷⁶ Just one example of this brutalist campaign is the 2,100 Dakḥóta men, women, and children that went on a “death march” from the Lower Sioux Agency to Fort Snelling and Mankato, an event which Waḥpéthuŋwaŋ activist and scholar, Waziyatawin Angela Wilson, calls the “first phase of expulsion.”¹⁷⁷

Officially formed on May 2, 1867 after a treaty between the United States Government and Sisíthuŋwaŋ and Waḥpéthuŋwaŋ bands, Spirit Lake Reservation is today the removed home of Sisíthuŋwaŋ, Waḥpéthuŋwaŋ, and Pabaksa bands of Iháŋkthuŋwaŋ Dakḥóta community members.¹⁷⁸ At the time of the removal Object Number 20/4595, the reservation was also home to Nakóda, Isáŋyathi, Thíthuŋwaŋ, and Iháŋkthuŋwaŋ members, totaling 2,496 people.¹⁷⁹ Described as “stock” in the 1890 census record for North Dakota, the people living at Spirit Lake Reservation were subjected to poor living conditions, unreliable water sources, food unfit for human consumption, and oppressive constraints.

¹⁷⁵ Sarah Hernandez, “‘I Was Now an Exile as Well as Motherless’: Charles Eastman and the Matriarchal/Patriarchal Shift,” In *We Are the Stars: Colonizing and Decolonizing the Oceti Sakowin Literary Tradition*, 56, (University of Arizona Press, 2023), <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv33pb3qg.9>.

¹⁷⁶ Richard Henry Pratt, “The Advantages of Mingling Indians with Whites” (paper presented at Proceedings of the National Conference of Charities and Correction, June 1892), 46.

¹⁷⁷ Waziyatawin Angela Wilson, “Decolonizing the 1862 Death Marches,” *American Indian Quarterly* 28, no. 1/2 (2004): 185, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4139057>.

¹⁷⁸ “History,” Spirit Lake Tribe, <http://www.spiritlakenation.com/history/#:~:text=The%20Spirit%20Lake%20Tribe%20reservation,in%20East%20Central%20North%20Dakota.>

¹⁷⁹ “North Dakota: Total Indian Population as of June 1, 1890,” in *United States Census Bureau* (1890), 509, accessed February 28, 2025, https://www2.census.gov/prod2/decennial/documents/1890a_v10-22.pdf.

Removed by JH Waugh, Indian Agent at Spirit Lake from 1890 to 1893, Object Number 20/4595 serves as a testament to the racial hierarchy that governed the reservation, Waugh's actions, and even the standards and protocols of the NMAI where this belonging now rests. Waugh, an Indian Agent at both Spirit Lake and Turtle Mountain Reservation, routinely removed community member's belongings without regard for the maker's name, their family, the significance of the belonging, or mention of payment; actions which facilitated blurry exchanges of belongings and contributed to the dehumanizing nature of life on the reservation. In a letter between his son and George Gustav Heye, the founder of the NMAI, Waugh is described as being "in charge of the Sioux," a description, which speaks to the hierarchical, racial superiority that was, and is, the crux of the United States' settler colonial structure.¹⁸⁰ This deep-seated belief in this racialized power dynamic was not a one-off occurrence for Waugh. In another letter, a report to the Secretary of the Interior from 1890, Waugh includes how he, along with the Mother Superior of the Gray Nuns of Montreal – the congregation that ran the boarding school on the reservation - believes the 224 children under his jurisdiction, could be made more "civilized." The report reads

The one great obstacle to the advancement in civilization of the Indian children is permitting them to spend the vacation months with their families in the tents. There they come under the influence of, and to a certain extent are compelled to resume their uncivilized customs, live in dirt and idleness, imbibe pagan ideas, hear and speak only the Sioux language; in a word, they undo in two months all that has been done for them in ten. If a law could be made to compel the children to remain here during vacation you would soon see the improvement, but as it is at present we must begin each year, for after having run wild for two or three months, it requires weeks before they are as they were when they left us, hence so much time lost in their education both in and outside of the school-room. Again, if the Government would admit children in the schools under six

¹⁸⁰ JH Waugh Jr. to George Gustav Heye, May 31, 1941, 1941.0081, The National Museum of the American Indian, Washington, D.C.; unlike belongings collected directly for the NMAI at the direction of Heye, Waugh's collection was for his family's personal collection and wasn't donated until 1941 under the direction of his son, JH Waugh Jr.

years of age, even when they are only three or four years old, they would then grow up in.¹⁸¹

This decree of forced assimilation highlights the foundational belief that Indigenous communities, including the Dak'hóta, were seen by Waugh as “lower on the evolutionary scale and thus less intelligent and civilized...helpless victims deserving of the government’s aid.”¹⁸² This racialized classification was not only applied to entire communities but their material culture as well, further supporting the settler colonial hierarchy of domination. When collected between 1830 and 1930, Indigenous belongings like Object Number 20/4595, became “toys of the white child” and were “rearranged according to the taxonomies of science or admired as objects of the aestheticizing gaze.”¹⁸³ Object Number 20/4595 is no different. Placed in the ethnographic collections of the NMAI, this belonging now functions within their confines.

The opening of the new National Museum of the American Indian in 2004 marked a turning point in the cultural and academic treatment of Indigenous art and culture in the Americas.¹⁸⁴ Dr. Amy Lonetree, a Hock (Ho-Chunk) historian, notes the opening of the NMAI directly challenged the American narrative surrounding its Indigenous history, particularly regarding genocide.¹⁸⁵ Furthermore, Lonetree asserts that the “NMAI has become the most visible model for community collaborative exhibitions with Indigenous groups.”¹⁸⁶ However, despite the NMAI’s positive influence on public and academic perceptions of Native American

¹⁸¹ The Secretary of the Interior, Fifty-Ninth Annual Report of the Commission of Indian Affairs to the Secretary of the Interior, H.R. Rep., at 515 (1890).

¹⁸² Katherine Ellinghaus, *Blood Will Tell: Native Americans and Assimilation Policy* (University of Nebraska Press, 2017), xiii.

¹⁸³ Janet Catherine Berlo, Ruth B. Phillips, Carol Duncan, Donald Preziosi, Danielle Rice, and Anne Rorimer, “The Problematics of Collecting and Display, Part 1: Our (Museum) World Turned Upside Down: Re-presenting Native American Arts,” *The Art Bulletin* 77, no. 1 (1995): 7, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3046076>.

¹⁸⁴ Amy Lonetree, “Missed Opportunities: Reflections on the NMAI,” *American Indian Quarterly* 30, no. 3/4 (2006): 636, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4139033>.

¹⁸⁵ Lonetree, “Missed Opportunities,” 637.

¹⁸⁶ Lonetree, “Missed Opportunities,” 637.

history, art, and culture, one must not overlook that the NMAI is a direct byproduct of settler colonialism and remains the largest “colonial treasure chest” containing hundreds of thousands of belongings that are rarely displayed and seldom visited. When removed from their communities and confined in museums, these items no longer fulfill the same role as they would in their home communities; the removal fundamentally alters their very essence.

Driven by the belief that Native American populations were dying - ultimately to the point of extinction - archaeologists, ethnologists, anthropologists, and laymen entered a frantic race to collect as many “authentic” Native American objects as possible. This rapid collection includes Object Number 20/4595 and the founder of the NMAI, George Gustav Heye. Sociocultural anthropologist Sonja Dobroski states that this quick harvest of Native material culture “accompanied ideas that supported both the assaults on Indigenous sovereignty and the memorialization and preservation of a perceived ‘dying race’.”¹⁸⁷ It was believed that “each new phrase, physical object, or picture was conceptualized as a valued data point that might never be possible to collected again,” leading private collectors and national institutions, including George Gustav Heye, to quickly fill their shelves with as much material as possible.¹⁸⁸ Through the subsequent organizing, retaining, and displaying of these extracted Indigenous belongings, museums perpetuate their colonial legacy, “construct[ing] a trajectory of development that classifies human societies along a continuum that ranges from the primitive to the civilized,” which reinforces settler colonial frameworks that contributed to the initial removal of these belongings.¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁷ Sonja Dobroski, “‘This Stuff Speaks to Me’: Settler Materiality, Identity and Nationalism among Collectors of Native American Material Culture,” *History and Anthropology* 35, no. 2 (2024): 276, doi:10.1080/02757206.2022.2037583.

¹⁸⁸ Samuel J. Redman, *Prophets and Ghosts: The Story of Salvage Anthropology*, (Harvard University Press, 2021), 6.

¹⁸⁹ Farrell Racette, “Looking for Stories and Unbroken Threads,” 284.

Heye's own mission statement for the Museum of the American Indian – the foundation of the National Museum of the American Indian – perfectly refers to and continues this legacy of settler colonialism. He states that “this museum occupies a unique position among institutions, in that its sole aim is to *gather* and to *preserve* for students everything useful in illustrating and elucidating the anthropology of the aborigines of the Western Hemisphere, and to disseminate by means of its publications the knowledge thereby gained.”¹⁹⁰ Lipan and Mescalero Apache contemporary artist John Paul Rangel elucidates that the explicit power to remove Indigenous belongings from one context to another, for example, from their own community into the ethnographic collection of the NMAI is a keystone of “maintaining Euro-American hegemony.”¹⁹¹

Donated to the NMAI with forty-one glass plate negatives taken by JH Waugh Sr's son, JH Waugh Jr, along with seventy other belongings, Object Number 20/4595 has never been loaned and never put on display.¹⁹² The ethnographic collections of the NMAI where it now rests, and as presented to me during my in-person research appointment in November, evokes a sense of sterility and stagnancy, serving as a stark contrast to the intended setting of the maker's community. Situated among seven other similarly confined belongings, (Figure 2.5) Object Number 20/4595 was exhibited to me as a taxonomical type. A specimen. Set atop a massive table draped in disposable white paper; I was struck by the expansiveness of the ethnographic collections and the industrial organization of the building. Rows and rows of moveable storage,

¹⁹⁰ Museum of the American Indian, Heye Foundation, *Aims and Objects of the Museum of the American Indian*, Heye Foundation, 1929, doi:10.5479/sil.957407.39088015624984; this italic emphasis is my own and is not original to the document.

¹⁹¹ John Paul Rangel, "Moving Beyond the Expected: Representation and Presence in a Contemporary Native Arts Museum," *Wicazo Sa Review* 27, no. 1 (2012): 34, JSTOR.

¹⁹² “Loan Roaster.”

all of which house hundreds of removed belongings, are stacked atop one another and preserved for future generations, sustaining Heye's initial goal.

Looking toward the central box in Figure 2.5, five *patkáša kšúpi wòtawe* are all contained alongside one another. With only a minimal affiliation tag, the positioning evokes that each of these belongings are interchangeable with one of the others clustered around the perimeter. The stark white covering on the table and the padding in each storage box mimic a sterile, scientific field, further contributing to the "specimen" classification. This presentation of these belongings solidified for me that these are intended to be understood in this setting as a taxonomical type. The written correspondence between JH Waugh's son and Edwin K Burnett, the assistant director at the NMAI, also explicitly used the term "specimen," supporting that, as presented by the NMAI, these objects are meant to be a taxonomical type (Figure 2.6).¹⁹³ Furthermore, in the accession record from 2012 for *patkáša kšúpi wòtawe* 18/2137 analyzed in chapter one, the term "specimen" was again used, demonstrating the perpetuity of this dehumanizing association within the NMAI's system.

Imposed upon the belongings in their collection, the NMAI has strict handling and conservation protocols, including wearing gloves, no pens, acid-free boxes, and ethafoam padding meant to preserve the object for future generations. While perceived by some as "best handling practice," these protocols directly contradict Indigenous community's intellectual sovereignty. Furthermore, unlike other institutions like the Minnesota Historical Society that restrict open viewing access of umbilical amulets for "cultural sensitivity" reasons, the NMAI pointedly does not. This variation in museum protocols, which will be further explored in chapter

¹⁹³ Edwin K. Burnett to John H. Waugh Jr., August 2, 1950, 1941.0081, The National Museum of the American Indian.

three, not only signifies a tension among institutions, but importantly room for increased community engagement. Candice Hopkins explains that these museum protocols convey an implied assumption that home communities are not equipped to steward their own belongings, justifying their continued theft and retainment.¹⁹⁴ When institutions like the NMAI retain this specimen classification and these imposed handling protocols, they continue to “sublimate Native peoples and cultures into an imagined or romanticized past” and implicitly support racist beliefs, such as the “ignorance and savage condition” of Native communities, that have remained a keystone of settler colonialism.¹⁹⁵

Anthropologist Aldona Jonaitis explains how museums “assume responsibility for the presentation, dissemination, and creation of culture... reveal[ing] a hierarchy of social validation.”¹⁹⁶ Nancy Marie Mithlo similarly highlights this reality, stating that “cataloging systems for researching American Indian art also reflect biases rooted in Western intellectual traditions. Institutional cataloging and classification practices are not neutral but are informed by colonial values of nationhood and conquest.”¹⁹⁷

Like many belongings collected as an ethnographic specimen, the provenance records for Object Number 20/4595 are sparse, particularly regarding their female maker. Carmen Robertson explains that “conventional museum documentation surrounding Indigenous beadwork focuses mostly on ethnographically organized cultural groups and linear time periods attributed to the piece. Seldom is the maker or the signification of the work included in the archival record.”¹⁹⁸

¹⁹⁴ Hopkins, “Repatriation Otherwise.”

¹⁹⁵ Rangel, “Moving Beyond the Expected,” 32; Secretary of the Interior, Sixty-First Annual report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs to the Secretary of the Interior 1892, H.R. Doc., at 971 (1892).

¹⁹⁶ Aldona Jonaitis, *Franz Boas, John Swanton, and the New Haida Sculpture at the American Museum of Natural History*, In “Early Years of Native American Art History,” Janet Berlo, (University of Washington Press, 1992), 41.

¹⁹⁷ Nancy Marie Mithlo, “The Manner in Which Knowledge Grows,” in *Knowing Native Arts*, 15, (University of Nebraska Press, 2020), <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv13qftg2.6>.

¹⁹⁸ Robertson, “Beading Back and Forth,” 54.

This fact is even more true for Indigenous women. Due to settler colonialism's patriarchal foundations, Indigenous women - their lives, their contributions, and their voices - are "often conspicuously absent from historic documents."¹⁹⁹ Therefore, this lack of provenance information for Object Number 20/4595, specifically pertaining to the makers' female identit(ies) and their role within society, may not simply be an oversight, but an implicit tactic to support settler colonial, patriarchal, hierarchical classifications that regarded the belonging's collection and its maker. This reality is demonstrated in the information recorded, and omitted, for Object Number 20/4595. One contextual avenue to investigate this phenomenon, aside from Object Number 20/4595 itself, are the photographic records taken by JH Waugh's son, JH Waugh Jr.

The forty-two glass plate negatives consist mainly of landscapes of the reservation, formal group portraits of reservation and agency employees, notably the Indian police, and in-motion photos of events such as sham battles. Of these photos, only one Waḥpéthuŋwaŋ woman is included (Figure 2.7). Standing in front of a white-sided agency building, this photo, titled "Wahpetonwan Dakota Family," presents a family of four. To the left, the matriarch of this small family stands with a baby wrapped to her back and peeking over her shoulder. A man, presumably her husband, stands to her side with a pipe hanging out of his mouth. Their son, approximately seven or eight years old, stands to the man's side, stock straight. Pointedly, none of these figures are named. By contrast, in a lone portrait of Strikes the Eagle, an older Sisíthuŋwaŋ Waḥpéthuŋwaŋ man sits cross-legged in front of a white-picket fence, this sitter is named (Figure 2.8). While this naming of Strikes the Eagle, as well as multiple other men in the

¹⁹⁹ Racette, "Looking for Stories and Unbroken Threads" 285.

photographic record, could merely be an example of homosociality, I posit that it also speaks to the patriarchal foundations of settler colonialism.²⁰⁰

The anonymity cloaking the female maker of Object Number 20/4595 also masks the circumstances of the belonging's removal. For example, we do not know if it was forcibly taken, coerced, stolen, or given freely. Janet Berlo and Ruth B. Philips illuminate the carefully hidden politics of collection in their article "The Problematics of Collecting and Display."²⁰¹ They highlight how the majority of belongings in collections today, including the NMAI, are the result of bloody seizure or deliberately blurred "exchanges."²⁰² These exchanges, which were common on reservations, "cloaked the process of appropriation in a normalizing fiction...ensur[ing] peaceful surrenders [and reassuring] that Native Americans were making [progress] toward assimilation through their participation in the rituals of commodity exchange."²⁰³ Only being able to assign this belonging with a number, courtesy of the lacking provenance information, or as an "ethnographic specimen," highlights this hierarchical, dehumanizing settler colonial structure. However, just because the NMAI upholds the "specimen" classification, does not mean that people have to engage with these belongings as such. There are other ways, as further demonstrated in chapter three, to interact with dispossessed Indigenous belongings that defies the ethnographic specimen classification.

²⁰⁰ Racette, "Looking for Stories and Unbroken Threads" 285; homosociality often refers to how men are interested in activities and interactions of other men, commonly supporting male dominance.

²⁰¹ Berlo and Philips, "The Problematics of Collecting and Display, Part 1," 7.

²⁰² Berlo and Philips, "The Problematics of Collecting and Display, Part 1," 7.

²⁰³ Berlo and Philips, "The Problematics of Collecting and Display, Part 1," 7.

Conclusion:

My aim in this chapter is not to negate the substantial work that has come on the heels of widespread calls for increased community engagement and a reworking of museum practices, collections, and exhibitions. Amy Lonetree elucidates the lengths to which change has positively been implemented in many museums across the country in her book *Decolonizing Museums: Representing Native America in National and Tribal Museums*. Lonetree says, “today, Indigenous people are actively involved in making museums more open and community-relevant sites,” a reality which speaks to the continued efforts of tribal nations across the country.²⁰⁴ However, the bulk of ethnographic collections – the majority of which are never displayed, loaned, or visited with - remain largely invisible to the public and, therefore, criticism. Most articles focus on singular displays or exhibitions. These singular exhibitions, while they gain mass attention, allow only for a miniscule glimpse into the mass of belongings in an institutions collection. The NMAI for example, boasts a collection of over 800,000 belongings, while only roughly one percent are ever put on display.²⁰⁵ However, by highlighting the continued, lived, reality, of a belonging that has never gone on display, never loaned, and rarely visited with outside of research appointments, I aim to demonstrate the settler colonial structures that persist, and how they produce meaning.

²⁰⁴ Amy Lonetree, *Decolonizing Museums: Representing Native America in National and Tribal Museums* (University of North Carolina Press, 2012), 19.

²⁰⁵ Lonetree, *Decolonizing Museums*, 87.

Chapter 3: Commercialization

Introduction:

The commercialization of Native American art has taken the market by storm. Made explicitly to be shared outside community, commercialized Native art functions as an intercessor between Native and non-Native and becomes a tool of resistance. Initially viewed by Anglo collectors as a “craft” and “primitive,” Native art has long been unequally compared as a “lesser” form than the Western classification of “Fine Art.” For example, in 1991, H Gene Blocker ascribed the category of primitive art to “the traditional arts of Black Africa, Precolumbian Mesoamerican Amerindian art, and the art of the South Seas.”²⁰⁶ Published in *The Journal of Aesthetic Education* a year before the Columbus quincentennial and a year after cataclysmic legal changes like the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA), Blocker’s implied juxtaposition against Western art, as well as his homogenizing lumping of vastly different cultures, pointedly upholds the racist, settler colonial hierarchy that has plagued Indigenous artistic productions since 1492. Thanks to grassroots organizations, non-profits, Indigenous-led coalitions, and a general increase in living Native visibility in academic, professional, and public spheres, including the art market, Native American art is quickly becoming mainstream.

Like the advent of museums and ethnographic collections as examined in chapter two, the “market,” a capitalist endeavor and direct byproduct and extension of settler colonialism, is simply defined as the organized buying and selling of art for economic gain.²⁰⁷ Métis art critic David Garneau solidifies that Indigenous art explicitly made to be commercialized is “an

²⁰⁶ H. Gene Blocker, "Is Primitive Art Art," *The Journal of Aesthetic Education* 25, no. 4 (1991): 88, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3332906>

²⁰⁷ Alessia Zorloni, “Strucutre of the Contemporary Art Market and the Profile of Italian Artists,” *International Journal of Arts Management* 8, no.1 (2005): 61, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41064863>.

epiphenomenon of colonialism,” explaining that such art is “syncretic, a conceptual, sometimes physical, co-production between First Peoples and settlers.”²⁰⁸ In other words, the relationship between commercial Native artists and their buyers is interdependent.

Historically, the art market was seen as a mechanism of settler colonialism geared towards assimilation. Early Native art made for the market, specifically productions exhibited or collected for private use - referred to as “handicrafts” by art historian Elizabeth Hutchinson - was seen by the Euro-American viewer as “exemplary evidence” of assimilation.²⁰⁹ Intimately entwined with the forced removal of belongings from communities, art historians Janet Berlo and Ruth B. Phillips further identify that the early collection of Native art is steeped with violence, plunder, and seizure.²¹⁰ Today, however, the market makes room for Native artists to be active participants and agents, in this settler colonial construct, supporting the production and assertion of their Indigeneity through their art. Explained by heather ahtone, “every time an Indigenous artists creates an object that reflects concepts rooted within [their] culture, this same artist is perpetuating their culture one more day as an act of self-determination.”²¹¹

Furthermore, thanks to the art market, artists are increasingly revitalizing forms that have gone dormant because of oppressive settler colonial pressures, particularly during the latter half of the eighteenth and beginning of the nineteenth century. Seen in tribal communities throughout North America, with the material evidence of this movement ranging from Anishinaabeg Moose hair embroidery, Tlingit totem poles, Pamunkey feather mantles, Chitimacha rivercane basketry,

²⁰⁸ Garneau, "Writing about Indigenous Art with Critical Care."

²⁰⁹ Elizabeth Hutchinson, *The Indian Craze: Primitivism, Modernism, and Transculturation in American Art, 1890-1915* (Duke University Press, 2009), 6; Marinella Lentis, "Art education in American Indian boarding schools: Tool of assimilation, tool of resistance" (PhD diss., The University of Arizona, 2011), 14.

²¹⁰ Berlo and Phillips, "The Problematics of Collecting and Display," 7.

²¹¹ ahtone, "Reading Beneath the Surface," 73.

to pre-contact Tsalagi (Cherokee) pottery and beyond. This revitalization also includes patkáša kšúpi wòtawe and the work of Holly Young (Thizáptaŋna/Wičhíyena Dakhóta), who shares her work with those outside her community.

Young, a self-taught artist, woman, and mother from Standing Rock Reservation, links her artistic practice to those of her ancestors through her use of materials such as brain-tanned hide, porcupine quillwork, vintage seed beads, horsehair and metal cones, and similar dimensions in her patkáša kšúpi wòtawe made for the Minnesota Historical Society (Figure 3.1). Through specific attention to materials, Young connects herself to “both continuous and broken ‘lines of descent’ as the knowledge for gathering and processing materials, techniques, and patterns has survived and transformed over generations,” allowing Young to be a powerful agent of resistance and resilience for her community.²¹²

Providing a soft and visually contrasting base to the adorning beadwork, the body of Young’s patkáša kšúpi wòtawe, including the tail, head, and external limbs, are all from one continuous piece of hide stretching five and a half inches long and three and a half inches wide. Attached with additional pieces of rawhide, two metal cones with horsehair are attached to the tips of each limb. The shiny patina of the metal, combined with the vibrant red of the dyed horsehair emerging from the base of each cone, accentuates other colors like pink and orange used on the body of the patkáša kšúpi wòtawe. The downward-facing positioning of the metal cones follows the body, providing a sense of dynamism and movement.

Using aqua blue seed beads, Young spells “Mni Wiconi” down the body of the turtle. Descending the head and tail of the turtle, these words, which translate to “water is life” in

²¹² Sherry Farrell Racette, “Tuft Life: Stitching Sovereignty in Contemporary Indigenous Art,” *Art Journal* 76, no. 2 (2017): 115, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/45142477>.

Dakhótiapi, visually bifurcates the shell and accentuate Young's attention to symmetry.²¹³ Using vintage glass seed beads, Young adorns the shell with floral beadwork designs, a direct signifier to the Dak'hóta relationship built between themselves and their land kin. Young says, "We have relied upon the existence of plants since time immemorial to assist in our survival as well as the curing of any ailment that we may have suffered. Arranging design elements [tells] the beautiful love story between human and land and of reciprocity."²¹⁴ Sitting just above the "W" of Wiconi, the floral motifs are anchored by a central cluster of leaf-shaped applique. Surrounding this central cluster, alternating beige and brown seed beads create a perimeter border, reflecting the outline of a heart-shaped leaf. The tip of this perimeter faces upward, drawing the eye up the shell and pointing toward the moth or butterfly resting at the base of the head.

Branching off from each side of the internal perimeter, three symmetrical floral designs emerge. Closest to the legs, Young uses bright orange seed beads to create a lanceolate leaf, again pointing upward to the head of the turtle. Nestled within this leaf, a small nucleus of aqua seed beads creates visual contrast. Further up, a similar lanceolate leaf made with dark navy blue seed beads and an orange nucleus continues to draw the eye upward. Lastly, a trio of bright pink berry-like designs sprouts from the top of the perimeter. Anchored together by a stem of translucent bright green beads, each clusters berry is topped with shades of blue and orange, creating small tufts atop each. Although the exact species of the floral motifs along and within the leaf-like perimeter are not individually specified, they remain visually distinct.

Centering the work of Holly Young, in this final chapter, I examine how revitalized Indigenous art forms function within the broader context of the commercialized art market. In

²¹³ Holly Young, videoconference interview by the author, Zoom, March 13, 2025.

²¹⁴ Holly Young, "Dakota Floral," Instagram, last modified January 27, 2024, https://www.instagram.com/holly_young_artist/p/C2ld1xqLxr1/.

the last part of my analytical framework, I demonstrate how, through the revitalization of pre-contact and ancestral art forms, such as patkáša kšúpi wõtawe, living makers actively resist settler colonialism. Through their active participation in the settler colonial, capitalistic art market, while asserting their Indigeneity, artists like Holly Young, are leaders of material anti-colonial change. In part one, I briefly trace the history of Native participation in the art market, contextualizing my later discussion of Holly Young's artistic practice.²¹⁵ When discussing the commercialization of Native art, I include both formal market spaces and the broad category of when Native artists sharing their art outside of their communities, whether or not the piece is made with the intention to be sold. In part two of this chapter, I introduce Holly Young and present an edited-for-context conversation between myself and Holly. Ultimately, this chapter highlights how, through the revitalization of an ancestral artistic practice, specifically one that has been removed from community and relegated as an ethnographic specimen within museum collections, Holly Young rematriates this knowledge for her own community.

Part One: Rematriation, Resistance & Revitalization

Emerging out of locations like Niagara Falls, various parts of California, and Santa Fe, New Mexico, the advent of the "Native American art market" has taken the world by storm.²¹⁶ Starting as early as the 1840s in Niagara Falls, Native creators began selling their goods to eager traveling tourists, encouraged by Anglo-American traders for economic gain and as a form of

²¹⁵ Several art historians and museum professionals, such as Bruce Bernstein, have thoroughly outlined the lineage of Native participation in the art market. My discussion is not meant to be extensive, but rather introductory and to give the audience general information needed.

²¹⁶ Taylor Elaine Wray, "The Economic and Educational Impact of Native American Art Markets" (master's thesis, University of California Los Angeles, 2015), 4; Ruth B. Phillips, *Trading Identities: the Souvenir in Native North American Art from the Northeast* (1998).

subtle resistance. Notably, this phenomenon occurred alongside the emergence of the transcontinental railway and the tourism market, with these creators strategically responding to oppressive assimilationist tactics aimed at eradicating their tribal culture.²¹⁷ Companies such as the Fred Harvey Railway profited from and exploited travelers' desire to glimpse the fabricated "authentic Native past."²¹⁸ Such imaginary constructs as the "authentic Native" are not only dangerous for upholding fetishized, racist beliefs about living Native communities, but they also privilege the patriarchal, Euro-American hegemony that serves as a keystone of the United States.²¹⁹

As travelers encounter Native creators and often purchased art for their personal collections, this newly acquired Native art quickly became a topic of fascination across the country, expanding from stands along the railway to World's Fairs, like the Panama-California Exposition (1915-1917). While the modern Native art market undoubtedly exploited many tribal communities, it is essential to highlight the role of early creators as trailblazers of resistance, given their ability to subtly counter persistent settler colonial confines and maintain their tribal ways of life through skillful adaptation and participation in the art market.²²⁰

In 1925, Mary Austin, a Euro-American benefactor of Native arts, expressed her concern and desire to "preserve" traditional artistic techniques and created the Indian Arts Fund.²²¹ Austin's efforts, combined with new formalized art markets, such as the Santa Fe Indian Market (SWAIA), first formed in 1922, spurred increased interest in Native American art. Outside of

²¹⁷ Bruce Bernstein, *Santa Fe Indian Market: A History of Native Arts and the Marketplace*, (Museum of New Mexico, 2012), 30.

²¹⁸ Wray, "The Economic and Educational Impact," 5.

²¹⁹ Gareth Griffiths, "The Myth of Authenticity: Representation, Discourse, and Social Practice," in *De-scribing Empire: Post-colonialism and Textuality*, ed. Chris Tiffin and Alan Lawson (Routledge, 2004), 70-71.

²²⁰ For more information about these early trailblazers see Ruth B. Phillips, *Trading Identities: the Souvenir in Native North American Art from the Northeast* (1998), and Chitimacha basket weaver Christine Paul (1847-1946).

²²¹ Wray, "The Economic and Educational Impact," 5.

Santa Fe, places like New York and Los Angeles also saw public support and correlated growth for Native American artists. However, despite increasing interest, the racial hierarchy that had facilitated and enabled the forced and coerced removal of Indigenous belongings from community and into cabinets of curiosity and ethnographic collections, as examined in chapter two, remained steadfast in the burgeoning art market and into the twenty-first century.²²²

In the decades following the first SWAIA and the formation of the Indian Arts and Crafts Board (1935), an organization created through an act of Congress meant to “promote the economic development of federally recognized American Indians and Alaska Natives through the expansion of the Indian arts and crafts market,” Native artists have made a name for themselves and their work.²²³ Through participation in the art market, artists represent and advocate for their tribes and Indigeneity, moving beyond assimilationist ideals of “authentic” art. Furthermore, these artists not only push back against these constructs, but they become active agents of resilience and survivance “as it is [Indigenous people’s] resistance and survival that make certain that colonialism and settler colonialism are never ultimately triumphant.”²²⁴

The 1990s - marked by the quincentennial of Columbus’ arrival to the Americas and monumental changes to legislature such as the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA, 1990), the Indian Arts and Craft Act (1990), and the NMAI Act – saw an unparalleled increase in living Native visibility on a public scale.²²⁵ The years following the 1990s have seen Native American artists unequivocally thrive, both in the United States and

²²² Bernstein, *Santa Fe Indian Market*, 17.

²²³ “Who We Are - IACB,” U.S. Department of the Interior, accessed March 8, 2025, <https://www.doi.gov/iacb/who-we-are>

²²⁴ Lorenzo Veracini, “Introducing Settler Colonial Studies,” *Settler Colonial Studies* 1, no. 1 (2012): 3-4 <https://doi.org/10.1080/2201473X.2011.10648799>.

²²⁵ Kathleen Ash-Milby and Ruth B. Phillips, “Inclusivity or Sovereignty? Native American Arts in the Gallery and the Museum since 1992,” *Art Journal* 76, no. 2 (2017): 14, JSTOR.

Canada, with growing attention placed on artists' interventions and calls related to increased visibility concerning Native agency, sovereignty, and leadership.²²⁶ As Numúnuu (Comanche) curator, art critic, and essayist, Paul Chaat Smith elucidates "there was a genuine doubt about whether we (Native Americans) were going to be around or not, and if we were, whether we could cut it or not. Those doubts have vanished."²²⁷ When artists like Holly Young participate with the art market, they bolster Chaat Smith's claim and make even more room for other Native artists in the future.

Today, the art market is not confined to the streets of Santa Fe or in galleries and museums. Increasingly, artists use new technologies and networking platforms, such as Instagram, TikTok, Etsy, and other online platforms, allowing them to share their work and culture with a broader audience. Holly Young is one of these artists. With over sixteen thousand Instagram followers, Young routinely shares her beautifully made belongings and her Dakḥóta culture. While not all of the pieces she shares on Instagram are meant to be sold commercially, by sharing her work with a non-community audience Young implicitly engages with the art market. In sharing Dakḥóta specific teachings and knowledges on her Instagram, Young teaches her audience, resists settler colonial tropes and stereotypes, asserts her Indigeneity and rematriates knowledge back to her community.

Rematriation has gained in the past decade, holding different meanings for different women and communities.²²⁸ In the words of sociologist Robin R. R. Gray, Ts'msyen from Lax

²²⁶ Kate Morris, "Twenty-Five Years of Native American Art," introduction to *Native Art Now! : Developments in Contemporary Native American Art since 1992*, ed. Veronica Passalacqua and Kate Morris (Eiteljorg Museum of American Indians and Western Art, 2017), 2.

²²⁷ Paul Chaat Smith, "The Meaning of Life," in *Reservation X*, ed. Gerald McMaster (University of Washington Press; Canadian Museum of Civilization, 1998), 39.

²²⁸ Robin R. R. Gray, "Rematriation: Ts'msyen Law, Rights of Relationality, and Protocols of Return," *Native American and Indigenous Studies* 9, no. 1 (2022): 1, <https://doi.org/10.1353/nai.2022.0010>.

Kw'alaams and Mikisew Cree from Fort Chipewyan, repatriation is “an Indigenous feminist paradigm, an embodied praxis of recovery and return, and a sociopolitical mode of resurgence and refusal.”²²⁹ Repatriation is an Indigenous methodology that produces material change. It encourages Native women to restore “intergenerational kinship and balance, guide[s] how women understand love, show support, navigate challenges, and find connectedness,” helping Indigenous women push back against settler colonialism.²³⁰ Regarding belongings in museum collections specifically, Sámi archaeologist Eeva-Kristiina Nylander says that when members of a belonging's community join together and engage with them, “resocializing” and repatriation happens; an event which she describes as “a unifying process in which the creative discussion between the parties serves as a basis for creating new meanings for the objects.”²³¹

Thanks to the same technologies that have allowed the market to be more accessible, artists like Holly Young are able to reconnect with belongings that have been dispossessed from their communities. The increased visibility and accessibility of museum collections, driven by the demand of community, the digitization of collections, and the beginnings of increased inclusion of community members, has allowed artists to powerfully engage with their belongings. Through this process, artists and makers actively revitalize and repatriate once perceived by non-Native audiences and scholars as “dead” practices, reclaiming the knowledge for their communities in the present and those in the future. Scholar Emily Van Alst highlights

²²⁹ Gray, “Repatriation,” 1.

²³⁰ Pilar E. Gauthier, “‘This Is About (Native) Women's Repatriation’: Indigenous Methodology Storying a Rebirthing of Kinship and Balance Across Women's Work and Life Roles” (PhD diss., The University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2024), 147.

²³¹ Eeva-Kristiina Nylander, “From repatriation to repatriation : dismantling the attitudes and potentials behind the repatriation of Sámi heritage” (PhD diss., University of Oulu, 2023), 31.

the role of social media in this revitalization, specifically in regard to beadwork.²³² Van Alst says that “by using social media platforms such as Facebook and Instagram, Indigenous women are (re)beading, which is a form of (re)claiming our traditional artistic practices despite ongoing threats of erasure.”²³³ Importantly, while Young does not revitalize patkáša kšúpi wòtawe for non-community members, through engaging with social media and using it as a platform to sell other forms commercialized art, like jewelry and ledger art, Young asserts her agency as a living Dakhóta woman.

In addition to the patkáša kšúpi wòtawe made for the Minnesota Historic Society, Young also makes patkáša kšúpi wòtawe for her relatives and close friends. One of them, (Figure 3.2), made for her hunjá daughter, was shared with her Instagram community in January of 2020.²³⁴ A striking electric blue spine of porcupine quills descends the back of this patkáša kšúpi wòtawe. Splitting the shell into two halves, the deep, rich, saturation of the quillwork provides a stark contrast to the lighter quills and the array of seed beads used to adorn the bulk of the shell. For example, on either side of this visual bifurcation, Young uses miscellaneous beads or “bead soup.”²³⁵ Collected from the leftover beads of previous projects, there is no rhyme or reason to the arrangement of colors in this area. Colors, such as white, red, black, yellow, orange, burgundy, and gold, all stand out against the solid-colored quillwork and adorn the two large halves of the shell, created by the dissecting spine of quillwork. Young further uses quillwork to encapsulate the perimeter of the beadwork around these two beaded halves. Using white, light

²³² Emily Van Alst, “(Re)Writing and (Re)Beaded: Understanding Indigenous Women’s Roles in the Creation of Indigenous Futurisms,” in *The Routledge Handbook of CoFuturisms*, ed. Taryne Jade Taylor, et al. (Routledge, 2023), 165.

²³³ Van Alst, “(Re)Writing and (Re)Beaded,” 165.

²³⁴ For more information about hunjá relationships, see “The Making of Relatives – Hunjápi” - <https://aktalakota.stjo.org/seven-sacred-rites/hunkalowapi-the-making-of-relatives/>

²³⁵ Holly Young, videoconference interview by author, Zoom, March 13, 2025.

blue, and the same richly saturated electric blue of the spine, Young diagonally plaits alternating sections of these colors, which, when observed from afar, visibly undulate around the perimeter of the shell.

The limbs, head, and tail of this patkáša kšúpi wõtawe emerge as a continuous part of the body, similar to her patkáša kšúpi wõtawe made for the Minnesota Historical Society (Figure 3.1). Symmetrical in size and shape, the bottom half closest to the body of each limb is adorned with the “bead soup.” Solid portions of shiny, cornflower-blue seed beads cap off the limbs, finishing the top halves. Emerging from the underside of each, two metal cones with rawhide strips, stretch from the tip of each limb, providing the same sense of movement and dynamism seen in her patkáša kšúpi wõtawe for the Minnesota Historical Society. While slightly longer than the limbs, the tail shares the same pattern block of bead soup and cornflower blue seed beads. Lastly, the sloped curves of the rhombus-shaped head, varying from the squat, rectangular shape of the limbs and tail, are again adorned with various seed beads. Wrapping around the curved edges of the head, Young uses the bead soup. Providing a contrasting base for two much larger electric blue beads, the bead soup nestles the two “eyes” of the turtle. Finally, cornflower-blue beads blaze down the head of the turtle, popping against the base of bead soup.

Through her work, Young is part of “a growing movement of artists reclaiming the materials of their grandmothers, reinvigorating traditional practices, and moving them from the past into the future.”²³⁶ Specifically, as a self-taught maker, Young’s combination of ancestral and pre-contact techniques and materials, like porcupine quillwork and brain-tanned hide, as well as her desire to seek out these methods, is a marker of her community’s resistance to settler colonialism and her role as a knowledge carrier and bearer of cultural futurity. For example, the

²³⁶ Farrell Racette, “Tuft Life,” 115.

lane-stitch technique used to affix the rows of seed beads, evidenced by the slight buckling of the beaded rows, as well as the diagonal plaiting of porcupine quills along the spine and external scoots of the turtle's shell, speaks to the makers that came before her and the role women played in facilitating this transference of communal knowledge. Young says that people, non-Natives, generally think that "a lot of the work is done by one person, and that's just not necessarily true. A lot of our art, our traditional crafts, were communal. The grandmas, the aunties, they all took turns."²³⁷ Furthermore, Young's attention to materials such as porcupine quills and brain-tanned hide reflects and fosters kinship networks explored in chapter one. Young says that

my art is a purposeful reflection of the love, patience, and resiliency that my ancestors left and to the land and animals that have sustained us since time immemorial...creating art using supplies gifted by animals such as porcupine quills and brain-tanned leather for example, I am able to respect/honor that sentiment.²³⁸

By sharing this patkáša kšúpi wòtawe with the public, Young emphasizes these teachings and the role that women play in the production of beautifully made belongings such as this patkáša kšúpi wòtawe. Through sharing her patkáša kšúpi wòtawe via Instagram, she also educates both her Native and non-Native followers, work, which simultaneously rematriates her knowledge to her own community and destabilizes settler colonialism.

Part Two: A Conversation with Holly Young

Using "traditional mediums using contemporary vision and inspiration," Young works in ledger art, public murals, beadwork, and quillwork.²³⁹ On a journey to revitalize the artistic productions of her ancestors and actively working to give back to her own community through

²³⁷ Young, videoconference interview by author.

²³⁸ Holly Young, "Hihanna Waste," Instagram, last modified January 19, 2020, accessed March 17, 2025, <https://www.instagram.com/p/B7gwJtlX7m/?hl=en>.

²³⁹ Artspan, "About," Holly Young, accessed March 17, 2025, <https://hyoung.artspan.com/biography>.

sharing her research and knowledge, Young ensures that her work and community has a place in the future. During our over hour-and-a-half long conversation on zoom on March 13, 2025, Holly shared with me not only her knowledge about patkáša kšúpi wòtawe, but other related topics, such as protocols in museums, the “No Dakota Access Pipeline”, NoDAPL, and the ongoing effects of settler colonialism. Minimally edited for clarity and content, Holly has graciously given me permission to share our conversation, the bulk of which is included below. In speaking with Holly, I am reminded of the importance of sharing and uplifting the voices of community members and how prioritizing these can be part of ongoing anticolonial change.

Abby: I think we are living in a shifting point regarding the visibility of Native American artists, especially considering media such as yours – beadwork, quillwork, etc. – however, I rarely see, if at all, artists making amulets and sharing them. [Additionally], there is no art historical scholarship on them at all. Can you talk a little bit about your personal motivations for making umbilical amulets and also sharing them with non-community members.

Holly: Yeah, you know what, I was thinking this was a great intro question because it really made me think. When I first made my first amulet, and I believe that was almost ten years ago, I don’t even know if I posted it. But ten years ago Holly to today’s Holly is different. I’m feeling differently. Amulets are so personal, and I don’t think – you know I’m not very young, but I was younger – I really ever thought about making an amulet and posting it, it was kinda more for I was learning beadwork, and I was proud of making something. But, from then until now, and knowing what an amulet means to our community, its different. I feel different. When I read your question, I [thought] really should think about that, because if you know what an amulet is, it holds the baby’s belly button. That is a tradition, or a life way or whatever you want to call it, that is precious to us because our children are obviously precious to us. The significance of the belly button connects us to the spirit world. So before our babies come earthside we believe that they live in the spirit world, the Star Nation, we call it, and so that history, knowing that, and then knowing that your baby’s belly button is actually in the amulet is very personal. So now I don’t know that, from here forward, I don’t know if I am comfortable with that (sharing them publicly). Also... I will also say that I grew up with this tradition. I have seen people make belly button holders, or we call them čekpá ognake’s, and my daughter has one. So, it’s very personal and it has part of your baby in it. But, when I was researching, when I began, this was about 2015, I started going into collections and researching work. And that was a different journey, that was learning about floral beadwork, but I got to look at whatever I wanted. I remember being in one place and I remember looking for amulets, because [they were] showing me tobacco bags and moccasins, and all of these things, where are the amulets? And they said that we have amulets in a different area, because these are protected. They are considered, not funerary items, there’s a technical term –

Abby: NAGPRA?

Holly: Yes! It was protected under NAGPRA. And it was weird, because I was like “what?” I’m broadly familiar with NAGPRA, but I was just like put off that I wasn’t allowed to look at it, as an Indian person myself. But then, again, as I read your question, and I was thinking about my journey I thought “well yeah,” it is respectful to maybe not go handle those things because they have human body parts, or remains, or whatever you want to call it, in there. But we also believe that they have part of, we call it your spirit, your “naǵí,” is in there, that’s part of your baby. So it would be odd, for me to go in and handle [them]. A lot of them, sadly, museums will tell you “oh this was gifted to us, or oh it came through a family,” but you know I don’t really believe that for the most part, that could be the case for some unique situations, but most of it is taken. My mind goes to war. Because when a family has that [an amulet], that’s protected. You keep it in a safe place. In your belongings. In my mind there is no way that this would be just out somewhere where somebody can just acquire it. There would never be a person selling an amulet, back in the day. So these things in collections are definitely not something that was acquired by sale or by gifting. Absolutely not. They aren’t things that you make for sale. They’re not trinkets. They’re very personal. So I don’t make mine, personally, for sale. I’ve never made one for sale. I usually make them for my loved ones, my relatives, and my close friends.

Abby: I think you bring up a lot of things. The two amulets I am focusing on in my thesis, they are in the collection at the NMAI, and I had the opportunity to visit with them at a research appointment and I was just taken aback. I had that baseline understanding that these are someone’s child, this is a relative. And it was just so sterile and so dehumanizing.

Holly: Yup.

Abby: They were all laid out on a big white table... and with their provenance records as well, like you mentioned, “these were gifted,” and [in my mind] no they weren’t.

Holly: Yeah. Museums must have their own set of rules, but I know that I have been in five or six different collections in different cities, and I know there was one of them, and they had the amulets laid out, all different kinds. And, I have social media. I like to give an insight of my study. I like to show people what I’m learning. I like to teach my own people what I’m learning, because I come from that too. I’m self-taught. I like to move things along like that, you know, helping, mostly my community members. But I had a video, I remember, of amulets, and I posted it on my Instagram story. It was just a pan over, and it was *beautiful* work and that’s where my mind was. I was looking at the color palette, the seed beads, from that perspective, and I lost the perspective that matters the most. The sensitivity issue, how that is probably not good, to share for just anybody. It’s just so personal. And I took it down. I had it up maybe, like I don’t even know, for five minutes. And I am learning too. I can’t say that I have always been respectful. I am learning as I go along too. And I do have some lessons from relatives, but you know sometimes it takes people to tell me “maybe you shouldn’t say that, or maybe you shouldn’t talk about that.” Or I am starting to think that. Because social media is like a whole other level. Once you put it on there, it’s out there for anybody. And then you run the risk of dehumanizing, and taking away that sensitivity, then everyone normalizing, sharing these deeply

personal things to anybody where there not going to exactly be respectful of your culture, your lifeways, and they may take it and reproduce it and sell it, commercialize it, and then “oh my gosh, I just created this whole tornado.” So yeah, I am learning as I go along.

Abby: I have seen in a couple of your posts and other interviews that you have spoken about your grandmothers a lot, was this, and we talked about this, that you grew up with this lifeway, but is this something that they passed on to you specifically?

Holly: No, they didn't. But I have a funny story about that. When a child is young and they like to dig in things, and be nosy, you tell them “no” and they want to do it anyway. Even with my daughter, when she was a toddler, she would just want to go and look anyway. So part of my childhood, my grandma raised me. We lived very humbly, two-bedroom house, and I actually was in the bedroom with my grandma. She had these trunks in her bedroom. They were huge! They were like the trunks off of the Titanic, those trunks. They were very, very old, and they are still there. I would crawl all over them and sit on them, but after a while I got nosy, and I wanted to know what was in them. She would catch me every time though. I don't know if I got really quiet, so then she suspected that I was digging around or what. But she would pop in, and she would be like “hey what are you doing get out of there,” and then it became “hey what are you doing? Are you looking for your belly button?” I never knew what that meant. As I grew up, other relatives would say it too, and then I took it to mean that you're missing a part of yourself. You are going to try and reconnect with that belly button. And then she passed away in the 80s and those trunks stayed there, they are still in her house. My uncle's family built his house next to my grandma's, and then I moved in that house with them. I would think “those trunks still have to be there.” And then it was one Turkey Day, and I was thinking about it, and I said to my cousin “you think those trunks are still in grandma's house?” And she's like “yeah they've always been there, do you want to go look in them?” and I said yeah! My grandma wasn't there anymore. It was weird, though when I was going through them, because I felt guilty, like she was watching me and like she was mad. We found so many treasures in there, connected to our family history, and our relatives that came before us. It was definitely worth it, and it got me to where I am today because I found beadwork in there. It was the beadwork that I was like “wow.” Studying it, what are these? What do they mean? Who wore them? What is this material? It got my brain going and then I started my journey on teaching myself beadwork and researching everything. There were two trunks, and they were packed. We were just going through quickly; we weren't opening every single thing. After that, I had another relative that moved into that house, and I was telling her the story of how grandma would be like “oh are you looking for your belly button,” and she said, “oh that's so funny because your belly button really is in there.” I said “what do you mean? Is my belly button really in there?” and she said “yeah.” She had gotten nosy too and she went through the trunk, and she found it, I think it was wrapped up in a cloth and it had “Holly's belly button” on it. I have never seen it, though, but it must still be there.

Abby: Wow that is so interesting and I think that shows how things and lessons can come full circle, even when you don't realize it in the moment.

Holly: Yeah, it opened the doors for me.

Abby: You mentioned beadwork and vintage seed beads, so do you want to talk about how you see your work relating to the revitalization of using old seed beads or other similar ancestral materials or quillwork?

Holly: I think when I started, I didn't have a knowledge of seed beads at all. I know I didn't. I just knew that we used beads. But then I came to find out that there were so many different types of beads. There were old beads, and then I started to speak to other artists, and we would talk about beads. Just kind of a nerdy artist talk. "What materials are you using, what techniques, how did you do that?" But then it became different. I actually wanted to use old seed beads. It was more of a challenge at first because when you look at old beadwork, there is only a limited amount of colors. Our ancestors, our grandmas, they made do with it, and they made beautiful, meaningful, heartfelt work. And I thought "wow what a challenge." But that's all they had. They made do. But that's just how we are taught. You use what you have, and you don't waste. And that's why you'll even see what we call "bead soup," and it's just the leftover beads.

But in my younger beading years, I just wanted to challenge myself with those colors and see if I could make it work and see if I liked it. Then, as I started to learn more, and see more in collections, how they made it work, and how they jazzed it up – you can see people's personalities in their work – and I wanted to do that. It also made me feel like I was following in their steps. They used these colors; I want to use these colors. They used these beads; I want to use these beads. But also vintage beads are really good beads. They are very irregular, but they don't fade. And that's what I am afraid of too in my work. If I am using other beads, contemporary beads, someday, fifty or one hundred years from now, my beadwork will all be faded, and I don't want that. You want to make things that will hold up over time, and that's how I started. Now, I've grown, I've changed and evolved. Now, I like to use different colors, but I run the risk of them fading or breaking, and I really love color now. So, I challenge myself to use as many colors as I can.

Abby: I'd assume vintage beads are harder to come by?

Holly: Yeah, they are, but there are places that sell them. Sometimes they're not the greatest or they are more pricey because they are harder to come by. There is a place on the coast called "Shipwreck Beads," but they kind of specialize in vintage beads. And so, when I was in one of my residencies in the beginning years of learning beadwork, I had a stipend, and I bought so many vintage beads from them. And they come in different sizes too, and you'll learn that you like certain sizes for certain kinds of work that you do, and certain cuts because there are certain cuts that shine more than the others. Then there are colors that you might see in an old piece in the collections, and then that becomes a challenge, and that becomes fun. You want that color, where can I find it? Then you are searching and searching, or asking other artists where they got theirs?

Abby: I feel like that would be a strenuous but very rewarding process, doing the work to find the beads and then actually finding them.

Holly: It is! But then you covet it, and you want to save it for a special project. Then you have them and you are almost hoarding them. I hope that one day I'll get to all of my vintage beads.

Abby: You brought up your early residencies. Was one of the earlier ones the Minnesota Historical Society?

Holly: Yeah.

Abby: I saw the two amulets [you made] during your time there, and it got me thinking about proper protocol practice. I noticed that in their collection, the ancestral amulets are restricted and they say “culturally sensitive.” That is the first time that I have seen a museum restrict umbilical amulets, because the more I learn about them the more I think they should be restricted, especially for a non-Native audience. So I was interested if you could talk about your decision to make those two amulets for the historical society. Was that something they came to you with? I am also assuming they don’t have a relative’s umbilical cord inside them?

Holly: No they don’t. And they [Minnesota Historical Society] didn’t ask for anything specific, but they had said that “at the end of your residency, whatever you make, we will be willing to buy from you, so you can make whatever you want.” So I had made some amulets, and I made a vest, a tobacco pouch, and they purchased all of those. So, I didn’t go in thinking “I am going to make an amulet for them,” but I knew they were going to purchase something, and I was just trying to figure them out. There are a lot of different types. Some have no head, or you can’t distinguish a head, but they might have bells or beads. You know they are amulets, and then some really look like salamanders and turtles. So starting from scratch, I had to make my own patterns, and how do I go about beading it. I was figuring it out. Then during that time was when my community was going through NoDAPL, which was really awful and really a difficult time.²⁴⁰ It was so stressful. I am here in Bismarck, but my community is an hour south. I started to learn about the [NoDAPL] process, how they were first going to come through Bismarck, but because of the population, they were going to direct it toward the reservation. The thoughts and feelings going along with not feeling like we are worthy of clean water as well, just because the non-Natives are here in Bismarck, that’s what you assume they were thinking. They don’t want to poison the community here [in Bismarck] or run the chance of doing that, so they redirected it toward the rez. It was just so unfair, and it gave you ugly feelings. It created such an atmosphere here even in Bismarck. Like I lost friends over it. My daughter was in school, and she had incidents, other children saying things to her, and it was because their parents were uninformed and maybe ignorant and [it was] dehumanizing us. It was such a hard time. I was beading that

²⁴⁰ Between the summer of 2016 through the winter of 2017, upwards of three hundred Native communities came together in solidarity to protest the proposed installment of the Dakota Access Pipeline. With plans to run the pipeline - which would carry half a million barrels of crude oil a day - through North Dakota, South Dakota, Iowa, and Illinois, the pipeline posed a massive threat to Indigenous communities’ sovereignty, environmental wellbeing, and access to water. Bluntly stated, the introduction of the DAPL was seen as an attack on Indigenous communities. The movement against the pipeline, which largely consisted of prolonged peaceful protests, is referred to as “No Dakota Access Pipeline” or “#NDAPL.” The efforts to stop the pipeline, which were successful when the Obama administration denied the Army Corps of Engineers the easement to build, became a rallying point for calling attention to, and subsequently protesting, the continued infringements imposed by the United States, which remains a settler colonial nation. This explanation is for contextual information, so please excuse its brevity. For a more detailed explanation about #NoDAPL see Nick Estes, “Fighting for Our Lives: #NoDAPL in Historical Context,” *Wicazo Sa Review* 32, no. 2 (2017): 115-22.

turtle, thinking about what a turtle means to us in general. A turtle lives in water, and that's what we were fighting over – clean water. You know, the turtle amulet goes to the woman and the salamander to the boy, it represents longevity. And, also, when you kill a turtle, its heart will continue to beat. There is a tradition too, that I don't know if this is a family tradition, but a cousin of mine did it in front of me when I was a little girl. They caught a turtle, they killed it, and he took the heart and ate it in front of me. Of course, not explaining the significance to me. But believing that the turtle lives so long, and that's taking on that. Back to the amulet, I was having those thoughts. How weird is it that I am creating this amulet and that we are fighting for water? What does this all mean? It felt like a moment for me, personally. So then, I decided to put "Mni Wiconi" on the amulet because in our language that means "water is life" and that is what we are fighting for. So that's how that came to be. I didn't expect it to be purchased or anything like that. And that's what beadwork is. It's a narrative. It's personal. It's your own life experiences, your inner thoughts, your feelings, your emotions, they all come through your beadwork, and that amulet is just an example of that.

Abby: Your amulet was the first time that I have come across a living artist making them and I also saw how this amulet was on a poster...

Holly: Yeah, I was thinking of that too, how they made a poster with it outside the historical society. Thinking about how personal that is, and then I thought "oh well, I didn't make it for a baby or a relative." It is almost like writing a song, I was just getting my feelings out, and that's what I was doing. And then they said they'd purchase it.

In talking about the dehumanization and classifications of museum's Holly said

Holly: It's in a way how [western society] views plants. Like they are not living beings. So we can destroy the prairie or do this or that. But in our minds, in my community's way of thinking, our world view is that these are relatives, and they are living. A lot of times, we also think that when the maker, I was going to say artist, but these [amulet] aren't art. It's a life way. It's a traditional practice. When they are making those, they are putting their energy, their love, and their thoughts, into it. [In museums], they are very cold. They are laying in a drawer, on a piece of paper, pushed, and stored. It's sad, because those are beings, those are relatives, those are living. And when you make them initially, they go to a family that interacts with them. That cherishes them, and loves the thought that it came from, so that's energy they are putting back into it when it comes to them. But now, they are sitting in drawers, so now it's sad. Amongst ourselves, us artists, we talk about how if you go into museum collections, and you view your tribal communities' items, interact with them. Speak good words over them. Maybe even pray. I know some people will go in there and smudge and sing. They want to let them know that they are still important and still thought of. They aren't put away. We still know they are there, under weird circumstances that are kind of out of our control. But we still love them.

Abby: I heard you use the term čekpá ognake. I have seen that used, as well as keya, and I am using patkáša kšúpi wõtawe from Ella Deloria's *A Dakota Naming of Things*. Do you have any insight for the differences between these terms?

Holly: Yeah, I had never heard that word, but this just comes from communities and dialects where you grow up. So it can change from families, your band of people, it could be geography. There are just different words used. [Patkáša kšúpi wõtawe] is specific. It is like the “red-eyed turtle,” a water turtle. Kšúpi is the beadwork. This term is specifically to the turtle amulets. The salamander amulet is called “ahdėška” and that means salamander. And then čekpá oganke, čekpá is the belly button, and ognake means to cover or put inside. So, čekpá oganke is just a general word for amulets. A kéya is just another word for a turtle, but general, and not specific. My family called it čekpá oganke, and that’s why I use that word. I’ve understood [patkáša kšúpi wõtawe] but I’ve never used it.

Abby: After this conversation, and all you have shared with me, do you have any future wisdom for me or other researchers, or hopes for the afterlife of this research and thesis?

Holly: It’s a whole new territory. I am not really in that community of writing about these things, and while Ella Deloria writes about them, to me it just seems abnormal and foreign because it is so personal. In a perfect world, and there isn’t a perfect world, but ceremonial items are left alone. They are so sacred to us, and you are afraid that other people not in our way of life aren’t going to understand them. You can try and make them understand, but you aren’t sure how that will come about. The one question is how does this benefit the community that it is coming from. What are you going to do with your research or the information, that is going to come back to the community in a good way? We don’t want it out there to be misused or misunderstood. How are we going to benefit? But I don’t know what that looks like. Personally, I am not speaking for the community as a whole at all, but the first way of doing that is actually speaking to a tribal community member that is knowledgeable about those ways. And full disclosure on myself; I am self-taught, and I didn’t grow up in a very, very traditional family. We lived a different type of life. A life of survival really. We all have a little bit of that trauma and those survival ways of living. Being poor, even though we don’t ever call it that. In my community, we are all in the same boat. We all had to struggle. The reservation is a hard life. But it is also a beautiful life. It depends how you see it, and how you’re brought up in it. So I had a little bit of both. I had hardship, and then I had beautiful ceremonies and things that taught me values. Our traditional work, and it’s so strange to call it art, I feel like that’s such a western term. For us, it wasn’t art. It was a lifeway. And that’s why I call myself a maker, I almost prefer to call myself a maker, because what we made teaches values, and our worldviews, what’s important to our tribal community and our Dakhóta way of life. But back to your question, if this must be done, and in some ways, it should be, so we can look back and we can learn from it but going into a community and speaking with the actual members, is nice and helpful. Also, amongst ourselves, when we are teaching and sharing with each other, we gift. It’s a gesture of respect. If I ask an elder, not even an elder, but someone younger than me or in my age group, and I ask them for knowledge about something, I will gift them something. Because that’s just showing that I respect what you are giving me, and I will gift them something. That’s what we’ve always done. It’s showing that “I respect what you are giving me, and I want to give you something back.” It sounds transactional, but it’s not cold like that. It’s really personal. It’s just telling that person, “I appreciate your energy, I appreciate you taking time for me, and teaching me something that I don’t know.”

Abby: The reciprocity...

Holly: Yes, exactly. And that's something I talk about in my beadwork. It's definitely a give and a take but be respectful of that relationship.

I am deeply grateful to Holly for her time, insight, and willingness to engage in this conversation, which has reinforced the significance of engaging directly with living makers. I am also left with further questions for consideration. For instance: To what extent can the voice of a single maker influence an entire community, both academic and tribal? How might academics, specifically non-Native scholars like myself, engage with and amplify community voices in ways that are respectful and mutually beneficial, while actively avoiding the perpetuation of extractive research practices? Additionally, how do other Dakḥóta community members perceive this topic, and what are their perspectives on how these belongings should be represented, or not, and cared for within museum collections?

Throughout this conversation, I am also reminded of the cyclical and interconnected nature of my proposed framework. Holly's graciousness in sharing personal anecdotes underscores the inseparability of community from the belongings held in museum collections or circulating within the commercial art market. Her reflections highlight the inherent interdependence among these categories, particularly as she recounts the influence of her ancestors on both her current practice and the future.

Conclusion:

Native artists engaging with an inherently settler colonial art market can be a powerful agent of resilience and resistance. Through Indigenizing a Western space to facilitate the revitalization of once deemed "dead" artistic productions, Native artists such as Holly Young, assert their Indigeneity and create room for artists to share their tribal culture with their own

community and beyond. In speaking with Holly, I am reminded of how far the field has come, the importance of centering the voice of living makers, and of having, what at times, can be difficult conversations that directly grapple with the realities of the omnipresence of settler colonialism. Additionally, I feel that much of art history is written posthumously, without input from the actual artist or maker, allowing the writer more alleged objectivity, but lacking accountability to community. Engaging with living makers not only humanizes the research but also provides much-needed accountability for the writer, helping ensure that settler scholars do not perpetuate extractive, damaging scholarship.

Conclusion

Throughout this thesis I have presented an analytical framework working through and questioning how Native belongings function within the imposed structures of settler colonialism. Providing a focused, tribally specific case study, in this instance *patkáša kšúpi wòtawe*, to engage three contextual phases – community, (settler) colonial collecting, and commercialization - this thesis aims to highlight how prescribed modes of knowledge production have been and continue to be shaped by settler colonialism, providing an analytical framework for future engagements with other dispossessed belongings. The importance of this study is grounded in the reality that thousands of Indigenous belongings remain confined by oppressive mechanisms of settler colonialism, perpetuating tropes such as “primitive” and “specimen” and negating the sovereignty of living Indigenous communities. By analyzing the roles of these confines this thesis contributes to various angles of anticolonial and destabilizing dialogue, including but not limited to epistemological violence, Indigenous agency, shifting narratives of dispossession, and, broadly, multiple expressions of settler colonialism’s structures.

As pointed out in the introduction, the categories of this framework are not mutually exclusive. Community, (settler)colonial collecting, and commercialization exist alongside and inform one another. To engage each of these categories fluidly, rather than in a static, linear manner, allows for greater insight into how these categories are complementary and interdependent. A belonging’s transition from one context to another does not erase primary meaning; instead the meaning and function resonates implicitly. Furthermore, highlighting how these contexts exist as part of a continuum allows for the possibility and hope that dispossessed belongings can return back to community.

Centering an entirely quilled patkáša kšúpi wòtawe (patkáša kšúpi wòtawe 18/2137), in chapter one, I investigated how it functions within community. Employing lenses such as materiality and temporality, I focused on the maker's use of animal hide, porcupine quills, and natural dyes, as well as the physical form and movement of this patkáša kšúpi wòtawe, demonstrating how it embodies and fosters land-based epistemologies such as kinship and cyclical conceptions of time. In chapter two, I expose the provenance records held in the National Museum of the American Indian for a beaded patkáša kšúpi wòtawe (patkáša kšúpi wòtawe 20/4595) taken from Niobrara Reservation. In explicitly engaging with the disturbing and traumatic legacies of settler colonialism via the available and omitted provenance records, this chapter aims to expose how the function and meaning of this patkáša kšúpi wòtawe have been produced in a museum setting, deviating from its intended function within community. In chapter three, I turn to a living maker of patkáša kšúpi wòtawe, Holly Young. Centering her voice in this chapter, I contextualize our conversation with an overview of Indigenous maker's engagement with the commercial art market, framing her intervention and demonstrating how by making patkáša kšúpi wòtawe she rematriates tribal knowledge back to her community.

I see my intervention as being multifaceted. Broadly, I see this thesis contributing to future anti colonial scholarship by exposing and challenging pervasive mechanisms of settler colonialism as they relate to academia and art history and the knowledge being disseminated. I believe that if we are not careful, these productive advancements can be used to further obscure and uphold the settler colonial foundations of this country. More minutely, I also see my intervention as highlighting the reality for many, often times the overwhelming majority, of dispossessed Indigenous belongings that are never put on display, never loaned, never interacted with, and never repatriated.

Regarding future research, I would love to see other applications of this framework and echo calls for community engagement and invitation into museum collections. Ultimately, I believe that the future of Native American Art History, especially concerning museum collections, rests on community work. However, like Holly Young, I do not know what that community engagement explicitly looks like at this moment in time, especially as a young, emerging scholar. I welcome discussions for potential ways forward and a way to have this work and its potential outcomes benefit Dakḥóta community members.

In a perfect world, I would not have picked patkáša kšúpi wòtawe to be my focus case study as they would not be in ethnographic collections to begin with. However, we do not live in a perfect world, and we may never. These belongings, unequivocally, should be repatriated/rematriated and returned home. They are not stagnant, inanimate objects, and while they are not *my* relative, they are somebody's. They are somebody's child. Patkáša kšúpi wòtawe are deeply personal, sacred, and sensitive, and they should be treated as such. As it stands, patkáša kšúpi wòtawe, and umbilical amulets broadly, are treated as an inanimate, taxonomical, specimen, an imposed classification that actively negates Indigenous epistemologies and ontologies, agency, and sovereignty. Given the fact that the bulk of these belongings have not been repatriated, I believe that engaging with them in this manner, in a way that is respectful, humanizing, and one that exposes how they have been wrongfully upheld in academia, can illuminate a path for future engagements with other dispossessed belongings.

Figures



Figure 1.1:

Patkáša Kšúpi Wòtawe, Isányathi (Santee) Dakhóta Maker, before 1932, tanned hide, porcupine quills, dye, National Museum of the American Indian, 18/2137



Figure 1.2:

Patkáša Kšúpi Wõtawe 18/2137 (detail), before 1932, tanned hide, porcupine quills, natural dyes, National Museum of the American Indian

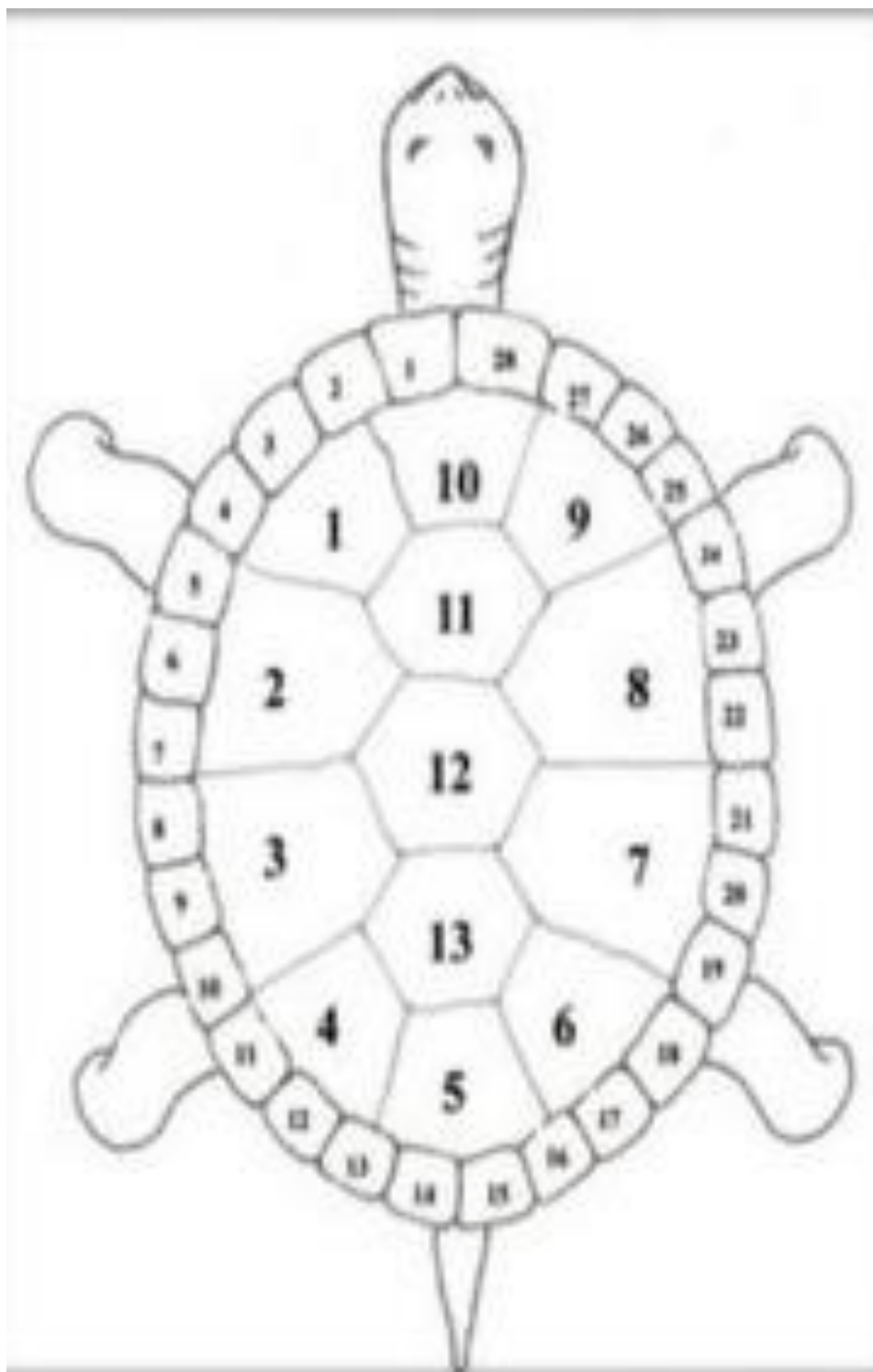


Figure 1.3:

Potgasha (Turtle), *Winona Runsabove-Kill Eagle*, "Nakóda/Nakóna Language Bowl Study Guide," *unpublished manuscript*, 2024.



Figure 1.4:

Underside of *Patkáša Kšúpi Wòtawe 18/2137 (Detail)*, before 1932, tanned hide, porcupine quills, natural dyes, National Museum of the American Indian



Figure 1.5:

Cradleboard, Juanita Growing Thunder Fogarty (Sisítuwan & Wahpétuwan Dakḥóta, Wadópona Nakoda), 1997, hide, glass beads, cotton cloth, felt, wood, hide thong/babiche, ribbon, twine/string, metal tacks/bosses, wood stain, National Museum of the American Indian, 27/720



Figure 1.6:

Woman's belt with knife sheath, awl case, and umbilical amulet, Lakshota Maker, between 1896 and 1906, glass beads, tanned hide, metal cones, feathers, National Museum of the American Indian, 23/8314



Figure 2.1:

Patkáša Kšúpi Wòtawe, Waḥpéthuŋwaŋ (Wahpeton) Dakḥóta Maker, before 1893, glass beads, tanned hide, trade thread, dye, National Museum of the American Indian, 20/4595



Figure 2.2:

Patkáša Kšúpi Wõtawe 20/4595 (detail), before 1893, glass beads, tanned hide, trade thread, dye, National Museum of the American Indian



Figure 2.3:

Patkáša Kšúpi Wòtawe 20/4595 (Detail), before 1893, glass beads, tanned hide, trade thread, dye, National Museum of the American Indian



Figure 2.4:

Patkáša Kšúpi Wõtawe 20/4595 (Through black and white filter), before 1893, glass beads, tanned hide, trade thread, dye, National Museum of the American Indian



Figure 2.5:

Photo of “ethnographic” collection of umbilical amulets presented at my research appointment.
Includes patkáša kšúpi wòtawe 20/4595, located bottom center.

August 2, 1950

Mr. J. H. Waugh
441 Delaware Avenue
Belvidere, New Jersey

Dear Mr. Waugh:

Replying to your letter of July 28 addressed to Mr. Heye, we beg to inform you that we have located the one odd moccasin which came to us in the permanent loan collection deposited by your sister and yourself in July 1941.

You state in your letter that our part of Major Waugh's collection contained two unmated moccasins. The list sent you does not show this to be the case. At any rate, we are shipping you this moccasin, from the Wahpeton Sioux, our catalog number - 20/4592, by insured Parcel Post, tomorrow. With it we are sending the roach, also from the Wahpeton Sioux, our catalog number - 20/4601, which you request in your letter above referred to. For packing purposes, and the better to insure delivery without breakage, we have detached the spreader and feather from the roach proper. You will find a matchstick placed in the aperture of the headdress, and it is a simple matter to pull through the thongs which attach the spreader and tie them on the under side of the tailpiece.

Please be good enough to write us a letter of acknowledgement of the receipt of these specimens, and in it note their removal from the ~~permanent loan here~~, for our records. We should appreciate it if you will make such acknowledgement using the actual specimen numbers.

Very truly yours,

Assistant Director

EKB:T

Figure 2.6:

Letter between JH Waugh Jr and Eric K. Burnett, Assistant Director at the National Museum of the American Indian



Figure 2.7:

Wahpetonwan Dakota Family, c. 1891, JH Waugh photographs from Spirit Lake Reservation (Devil's Lake), #N20181, NMAI.AC.143; National Museum of the American Indian Archives Center, Smithsonian Institution



Figure 2.8:

Strikes the Eagle, c. 1892, JH Waugh photographs from Spirit Lake Reservation (Devil's Lake), #N20179, NMAI.AC.143; National Museum of the American Indian Archives Center, Smithsonian Institution

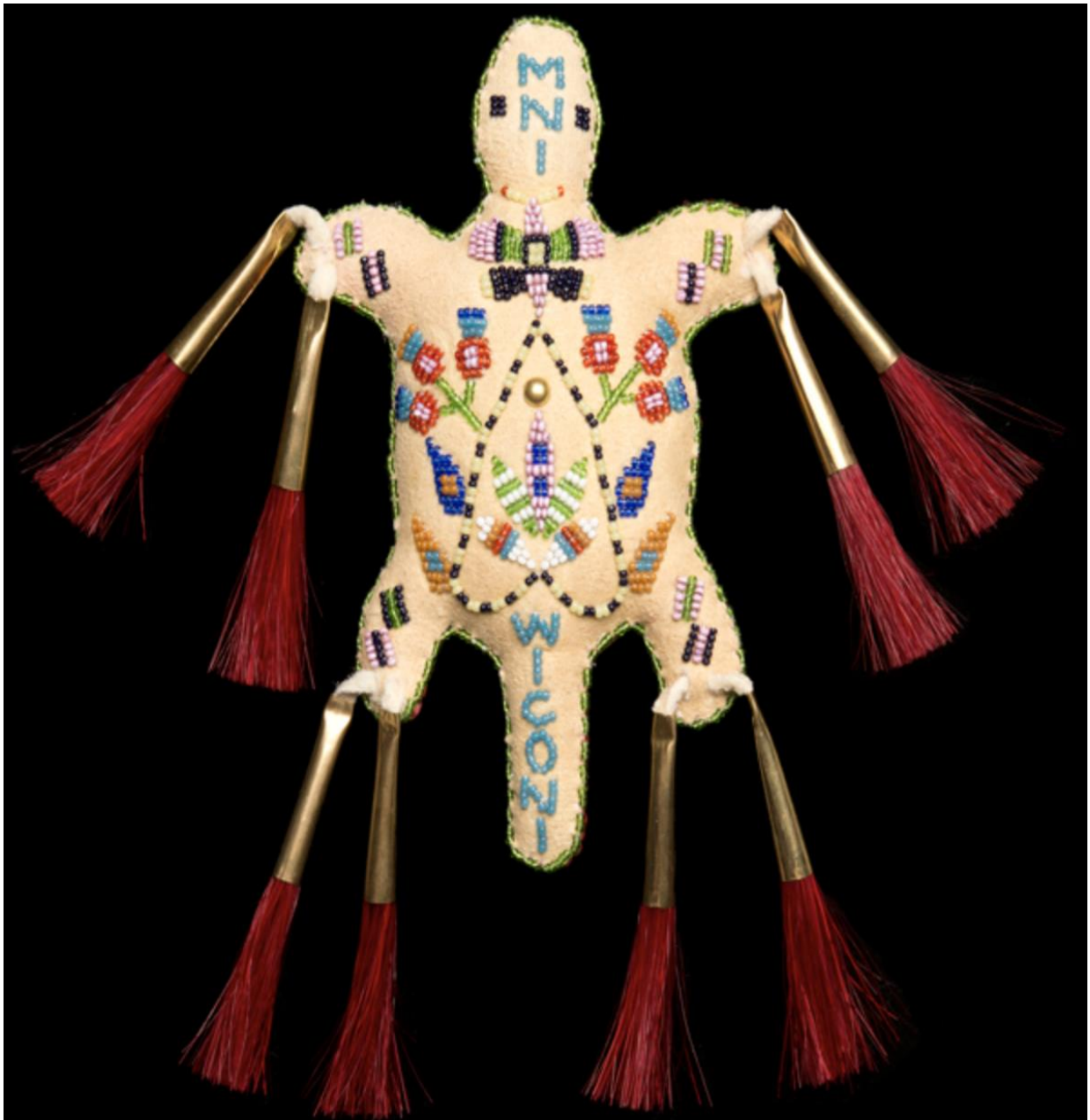


Figure 3.1:

Patkáša Kšúpi Wõtawe, Holly Young (Thizáptan̄na/Wičhíyena Dakhóta), 2016, glass seed beads, metal cones, horsehair, dyes, buckskin, rawhide, 5 ½ x 3 ½.

Minnesota Historical Society, 2017.30.1.

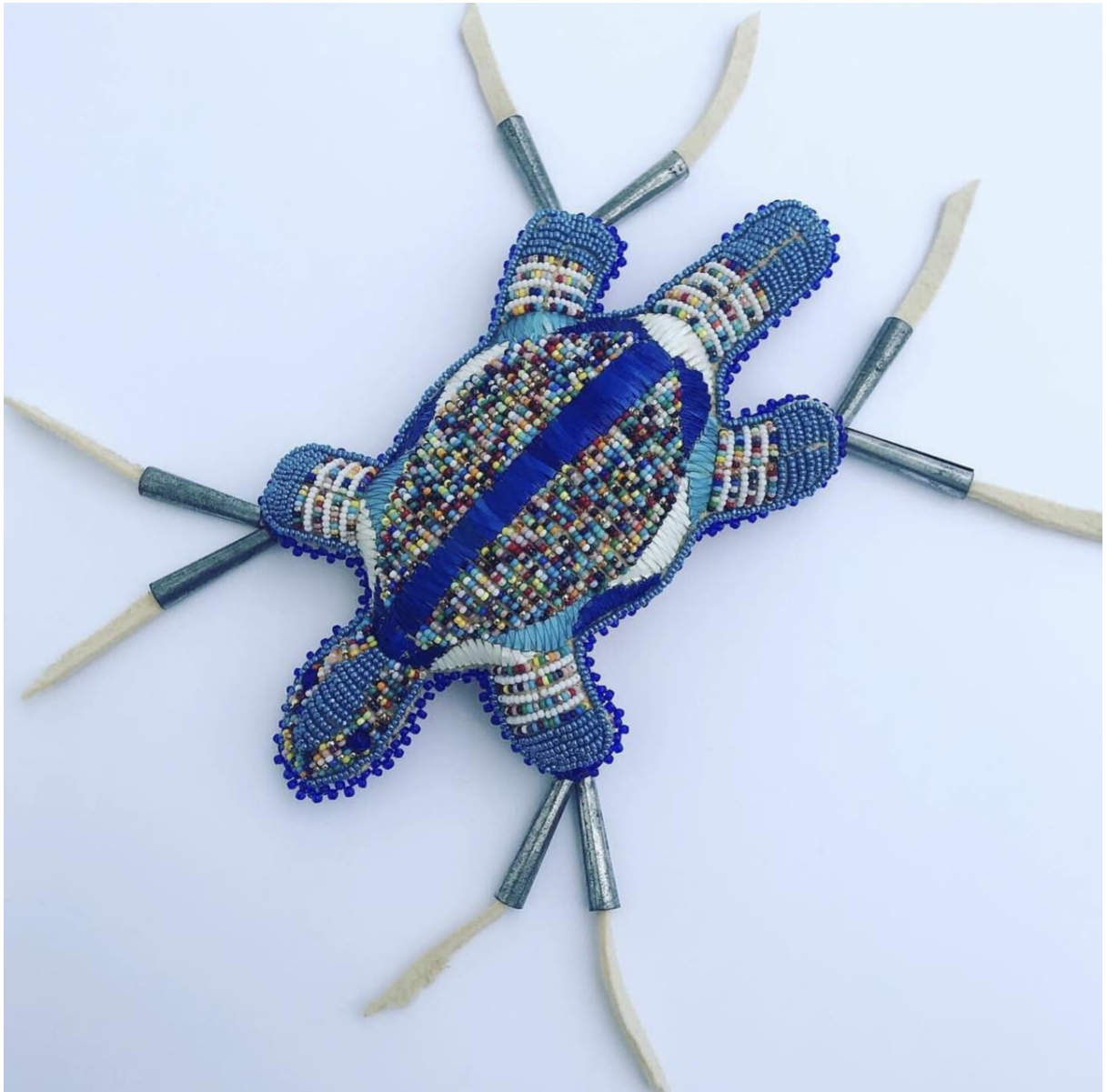


Figure 3.2:

Patkáša Kšúpi Wòtawe, Holly Young (Thizáptan̄na/Wičhíyena Dakhóta), 2020, glass seed beads, metal cones, porcupine quills, dyes, buckskin, rawhide.

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