

Cada gente de Indios tienen sus
Bailes, En Europa se baila por
alegría por fiestas por alguna nove-
dad fausta. Pero los Indios de
California no se baila por pliz bailan
mas tambien antes de empezar la
Guerra, por llanto, porque han perdido
la victoria y por recuerdos de los
ancestros, los Padres, ya muertos.
Aora que somos nosotros Christianos
En esta ceremonia El baile es
lo es con el baile.



AN INTRODUCTION TO THE INDIGENOUS ARTS OF NORTH AMERICA

1

Native North American art, after more than five centuries of contact and colonialism, is extraordinarily rich and diverse. Today, Native artists, male and female, trained in their communities and in professional art schools, and living in cities and on reserves, work in a broad range of media, conceptual modes, and expressive styles. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, James Luna (b. 1950) might have been creating his installation and performance work *Chapel for Pablo Tac* for presentation by the National Museum of the American Indian at the 2005 Venice Biennale (fig. 1.1). Honoring the memory of a twelve-year-old boy from Luna's Puyukitchum (Luiseño) community who was sent from California to Rome in 1804 to be trained as a priest, the piece reflects on the similarities that link Christianity with the Indigenous spirituality that Tac's future missionary activity was expected to eradicate. At the same time Odawa artist Yvonne Walker Keshick might have been at work in her Michigan studio inserting porcupine quills into birch bark to form a pictorial composition. Her work takes an art form invented by her ancestors for the nineteenth-century curio trade to a new level of conception, skill, and artistry (fig. 1.2). And as they worked, Dempsey Bob (b. 1948), a Tahltan-Tlingit artist from British Columbia, might be carving a mask in traditional Tlingit style that will be used at a community potlatch. Equally, he might be using the Tlingit form-line style to create a modern sculpture in cast bronze that will be appreciated as a work of art by visitors to a large urban art museum (fig. 1.3).

These three moments of art-making, chosen from many possible examples, encompass realms of the ceremonial and the commercial, the sacred and the secular, the personal and the political. An Odawa woman's consummate skill in quillwork captures her inner vision and imaginative reworking of the materials and imagery of the natural world for those who see it in a home or a museum. When used in a potlatch, a Northwest coast mask makes an important statement about the location of political power by displaying publicly the image of a nonhuman being from whom its owners inherited valuable powers and prerogatives. Equally, it can provide aesthetic pleasure as a wall-mounted work in a museum or private collection. In the hands of Native North American artists, more recent forms of artistic expression such as performance, video, and installation have become powerful tools of historical revisionism and cultural critique that challenge and change the place of Native people in the art world and contemporary society.

The vitality of Native North American art today is evidence of an extraordinary story of survival. A century ago, most non-Natives (and some Native

◀ 1.1 James Luna, b. 1950 (Puyukitchum/Luiseño), *Chapel for Pablo Tac*, 2005. Image Courtesy National Museum of the American Indian (26/7735). Photo by Katherine Fogden.

Luna's installation was one of two he created as part of his "Emendatio" project for the Venice Biennale in 2005. Emendation, or improving accuracy, was also a goal for Pablo Tac. During his missionary training in Rome during the 1830s, he recorded the Luiseño way of life and language in a manuscript intended to correct the misunderstandings of outsiders—a task continued by contemporary artists such as Luna.



▲ 1.2 Yvonne Walker Keshick (Binaakwiwe, Falling Leaves Woman), b. 1946 (Odawa/Ojibwe), *Four Directions Box*, birch bark, porcupine quills, thread. Private Collection.

Both Indigenous spirituality and the contemporary environmental movement hold that all living things are interconnected. Keshick links animals, plants, earth, and sky with four lines that radiate from a great turtle on the lid. They read as the four directions, branches of one great tree, and the energizing power of lightning. “This box,” she writes, “symbolizes the past, present, and future of all things.”

people as well) had become convinced that Aboriginal arts and cultures would soon disappear. Yet today these arts are thriving and receiving renewed attention within Aboriginal communities and from non-Native students, art lovers, and international museums. As the following chapters will demonstrate, the visual arts have long played a critical role as carriers of culture within Native North American societies and are today among the most eloquent and forceful articulations of contemporary identities and struggles for sovereignty.

ART HISTORY AND NATIVE ART: THE CHALLENGE OF INCLUSION

This book introduces readers to the richness of Native North American visual arts in all their temporal depth and regional diversity. It also serves to make readers aware of the problems we now recognize in the ways these arts have

been represented in museums and scholarly writing and how contemporary writers—Indigenous and non-Indigenous—are revising those histories. As art historians, we approach this enormously challenging task in the belief that the wide-ranging historical overview is a useful exercise, even though it must always be highly selective and can never be definitive. It encourages us to look for both unity and diversity, to recognize the many shared beliefs and practices revealed in these arts at the same time that we savor the distinctiveness of local and regional artistic traditions. The temporal dimension of the historical survey complements this spatial breadth as it reveals both change and continuity.

Yet the survey, like all forms of narrative, shapes the story it tells. Aboriginal conceptions of time are often organized around principles of cyclical renewal rather than linear unfolding. Western traditions of historical narrative that privilege moments of change are appropriate to a history of Native North American art in the sense that much of the story of this art over the past five centuries tells of successive visual responses to crises such as epidemics, forced removals from homelands, repressive colonial regimes, religious conversion, and contact with foreign cultures and their arts. It is also, however, a story of the enduring strength of traditions. The many moments of transformation, rupture, and renewal in art traditions recounted in this book reveal the importance of visual arts in maintaining and transmitting spiritual, social, political, and economic systems. These arts are, then, important contributors to Aboriginal people’s success in resisting assimilation and maintaining their active presence in their lands. Anishinaabe literary theorist Gerald Vizenor has termed this achievement “survivance,” a word that combines “survival” and “resistance.” For Vizenor, it signifies “more than survival, more than endurance or mere response; the stories of survivance are an active presence.”¹

Aboriginal oral traditions and Western scholarship account differently for the origin of the world and the human presence in it. Stories of creation are as various as the peoples of North America, although those of neighboring peoples often share common features. They are “histories” in the sense that they are chronological, eventful narratives that explain the origins of present realities. But they are posited on a different notion of authority, that of inherited, transmitted truth that has the force of moral explanation, rather than that of scientifically verifiable fact that has no moral force. In discussing the art of each region, we provide an example of Indigenous knowledge about creation and a summary of Western archaeological knowledge in order to suggest that Western and Indigenous knowledge offer coexistent and different paths to truths that are complementary rather than contradictory.

Western scholars characteristically divide their historical narratives into two large epochs: before and after European contact. This fundamentally Eurocentric periodization is largely determined by the kinds of recordkeeping Europeans introduced; postcontact history can make use of written texts, depictions, photographs, and films, while precontact history relies on archaeological evidence and Aboriginal oral traditions themselves. Yet the notion of the “prehistoric” is misleading, for it implies a clear dividing line between eras of “history” and “before history.” It appears to deny the momentous changes and developments that occurred prior to 1492. Archaeological sources make clear that during the thousands of years that preceded the arrival of Europeans, the cultures of Indigenous people changed and adapted many times to new features of the environment and contacts with other peoples. Although also Eurocentric, the term “precontact” is preferable to “prehistoric.”

All surveys are, of course, arbitrary in their selection of examples. In a book such as this, where strict limitations on length and illustration are imposed, we have been able to write only briefly about some artistic traditions and have had to omit many others of great interest and beauty. In choosing specific examples and traditions to illustrate our thematic and regional discussions, we have inevitably been influenced by the state of the literature in the field as well as by the areas of our own scholarship and research. Although this literature has grown rapidly in recent years, as indicated by the bibliography at the end of the book, much more study is needed, particularly by Native authors able to offer multiple Indigenous perspectives on the role of visual art within their civilizations.

Our choices have also been guided by our belief in the importance of addressing Native North American arts in terms of a specific set of issues.



▲ 1.3 Dempsey Bob, b. 1948 (Tahltan), *The Messenger*, 2000. Cast bronze, 47.4 × 36.6 × 25.7 cm MOA ID# 2648/1. Photograph by Jessica Bushey. Courtesy the artist and UBC Museum of Anthropology, Vancouver, Canada.

“Our art has to evolve, otherwise it will die,” Dempsey Bob affirms. His mastery of the technically demanding medium of cast bronze follows in his ancestral tradition of openness to innovation and an eclectic use of different media. In this mask, created as a sculpture rather than for use, the lively frogs represent transformation and communication, as they do on traditional Northwest Coast rattles.

Some of these—such as the role art plays in the expression of political power, group identity, cosmological beliefs, and the presentation of the individual self—are long-standing concerns of art-historical work. Others, such as the impact of gender, colonialism, and touristic commodification on the production of art, have been advanced by several developments within the discipline of art history that occurred during the last three decades of the twentieth century, notably “new” art history, the social history of art, and advocacy for the broadening of art history’s scope from “fine arts” to “visual culture.” Alongside these trends, awareness of the profound changes offered by globalization has stimulated scholars to consider the ways that transnational circulations of objects, ideas, and people have shaped artistic development not only in the present but also in earlier historical periods.

Intercultural exchanges—or “entanglements,” in anthropologist Nicholas Thomas’s phrase—have a particular relevance to the arts of colonized peoples. Native North American art histories are no exception. But long before the arrival of Europeans, the desire for exotic objects and materials for ceremonial and personal use had stimulated trade in raw materials and finished works of art across vast distances of the North American continent. Technologies, ideas, and beliefs traveled together with traders and their wares, as is clear from the dissemination of artistic imagery and ideas across vast distances of the continent—the kinship between the temple mounds of Pre-Columbian Mexico and the Mississippian earth mounds of the Southeastern United States (see chapter 3), or the animal imagery associated with shamanistic practices from Siberia to the Northwest Coast and the high Arctic are but two examples (chapters 5 and 6).

The arrival of Europeans in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries brought about much more violent and traumatic forms of cross-cultural encounter and resulted in more profound challenges to existing Aboriginal concepts and styles of art. The impact of contact on cultural and artistic traditions varied at different times and in different places. Trade, invasion, and colonization began in the sixteenth century in the Southwest and Southeast and in the seventeenth century in the Northeast. On the Northwest Coast, sustained contacts did not occur until the late eighteenth century, while in most parts of the West and North they began only in the nineteenth century. In each region artistic exchanges and collecting histories reflected the particular understandings of art and cultural hierarchy that prevailed at the time among the peoples involved. Historian Richard White coined the term “middle ground” to describe the new intercultural forms of diplomacy, ritual, and art that emerged in the Great Lakes in response to the new patterns of trade, warfare, displacement, and cultural mixing.² Following White, we might think of all of North America during the five centuries since Columbus as a metaphorical middle ground, a space of negotiation of social, political, and aesthetic values and ideas that is often reflected with particular vividness in postcontact arts.

Modes of Appreciation: Curiosity, Specimen, Art

An art history is always contingent on a corpus of known works, however accidental their survival and however arbitrary (from the producers’ vantage points) the reasons they were prized by collectors. We need to understand the

criteria applied by collectors in different times and places in order to assess the fragmentary ways in which these collections represent Indigenous traditions. The kinds of objects collected and the information that accompanied them depend, first of all, on the values current among collectors in a given period. Thus, although a seventeenth-century Jesuit missionary is likely to have destroyed masks or amulets surrendered by his converts, these are exactly the kinds of things a late nineteenth-century museum collector on the Northwest Coast would most have wanted to preserve (fig. 6.14). Because European contact with Indigenous peoples across the continent occurred in different centuries, the nature of the collections made also varies regionally. In writing the history of Native North American art, then, it is important to be aware of which paradigm of collecting, study, and appreciation was used in forming a collection or writing a description. Such awareness also allows us to recognize the gaps and silences that have been produced by the histories of encounter, collection, and representation.

We realize, first of all, the incompleteness of the archaeological record as a representative sample of visual aesthetic expression. Since organic materials survive only in unusual circumstances, whole categories of visual art—almost everything made of wood, fiber, or hide—can only be guessed at or reconstructed on the basis of depictions preserved within surviving artworks. Most of what exists today from the precontact period is either architectural or is made of stone, metal, or pottery (fig. 1.4). Apart from these objects, a relatively small number of artworks from the first three centuries of European contact have been preserved. They are complemented by descriptions and sketches by explorers, missionaries, and travelers of the things people made, used, and wore.

The generalized concept of the exotic object as a “curiosity”—something that excited wonder and interest because of its craftsmanship, its use of unfamiliar materials, or because its forms appeared strange or grotesque to Europeans—governed the collecting of Native North American art from the sixteenth through the early nineteenth centuries. The seventeenth-century curiosity cabinet of an English cleric and traveler named John Bargrave was representative of the eclectic composition of these collections. Along with several rare North American Aboriginal items, it included antique Roman cameos, an anatomical model of a human eye, a preserved chameleon, and “the mummified finger of a Frenchman.”³ The story behind the acquisition of a beautiful set of Cree quilled ornaments from northern Ontario dating to about 1670—the earliest known examples—is equally marvelous (fig. 1.5). Bargrave tells us in his handwritten catalogue that he was given them by a British sailor just returned from one of the first voyages into Hudson Bay as a token of the man’s gratitude to Bargrave for having ransomed him a few years earlier from North African pirates.



▲ 1.4 Archaic Period Woodland artist, Michigan, Notched ovate bannerstone, 2000–1000 BCE. Banded slate, H. 12.7 cm, W. 14 cm, Detroit Institute of Arts, Courtesy Bridgeman Art Library International © Dirk Bakker.

Banner stones deposited in graves as gifts to the dead for use in the next world often display extraordinary workmanship and aesthetic sensibility. With consummate skill and judgment, the maker of this spear weight created a highly refined form and revealed the symmetrical pattern lying at the heart of the stone.



▲ 1.5 James Bay Cree artist, Set of quilled ornaments, 1662–76. L. 88 cm; belt, L. 82 cm; garters, L. 27 cm. Courtesy Dean and Chapter of Canterbury Cathedral.

Collected on the voyage of one of the first Hudson Bay company ships to reach James Bay, these ornaments were in an English cabinet of curiosities by 1676. They are probably the earliest extant postcontact objects from the Eastern Subarctic. The neck ornament, belt, and armbands testify to sophisticated techniques of quillworking and a cultural value for fine ornaments that were established at the time of contact.

and its more “scientific” modes of classification are seen in a view of Sir Ashton Lever’s large private museum in London, where many of the Northwest Coast items collected by Captain Cook were first displayed (fig. 1.6).

The establishment of anthropology as an academic discipline during the second half of the nineteenth century resulted in the introduction of new modes of classification and material culture study borrowed from the prestigious field of natural history (fig. 1.7). Native-made objects came to be regarded as specimens that could be studied scientifically to reveal information about the technological development, belief systems, and practices of their makers. Ethnological collectors assembled huge quantities of Native North American material in museums newly built to receive them. They studied such collections in order to demonstrate the ways in which human arts, technologies, and societies had evolved progressively through time from the “primitive” (as represented by the Indigenous) to the “civilized” (as embodied by the European). Like their contemporaries, early anthropologists also accepted the widespread view that Indigenous arts and cultures inevitably became corrupted and weakened by contact with Europeans and were doomed to vanish as modernization proceeded. Such evolutionist studies were used to support laws and policies designed by the American and Canadian governments to assimilate Indigenous peoples into settler societies and erase their languages and cultures. Around the turn of the twentieth century, anthropologist Franz Boas

The earliest postcontact objects from the East date to the sixteenth century and were originally preserved in such curiosity collections. Most, unfortunately, are not nearly as well identified as the Cree ornaments in Bargrave’s collection, and only rarely can we determine their specific dates or communities of origin. Not only did Europeans misunderstand Native linguistic, cultural, and political affiliations, but what little information they did record has all too often been lost as collections were confiscated in wars, sold on the art market, or donated to museums.

During the eighteenth century, a more systematic approach to collecting information and artifacts was introduced by the philosophical historians of the Enlightenment. They took a particular interest in North American Indigenous peoples as archetypal “noble savages,” and their more rigorous studies encouraged the better documented and more comprehensive collections made toward the end of the century along the Northwest Coast. The early collections made among Plains and Subarctic peoples during the first half of the nineteenth century also benefitted from this more systematic approach, although the notions of curiosity and the romance of the noble savage also lingered. Both the eclecticism of late eighteenth-century collecting



◀ 1.6 Sarah Stone, *Perspective View of Sir Ashton Lever's Museum, London, 1785*. Watercolor. Courtesy of Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales, Sydney, Australia.

The dense but carefully ordered displays of natural and artificial curiosities displayed in this private museum located near London's Leicester Square are recorded in the watercolor he commissioned from the young artist Sarah Stone. An Inuit kayak is visible high on the wall, and Lever's collection also included many of the artifacts collected by Captain Cook on the Northwest Coast of North America and in the Pacific.



◀ 1.7 Installation of Nuxalk (Bella Coola) masks, American Museum of Natural History, New York, 1905. Image #386, American Museum of Natural History, Library.

During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, ethnographic museums used a taxonomic display style borrowed from natural history museums, as seen in this view of the permanent exhibitions installed by Franz Boas at the American Museum of Natural History. Such grid-like arrangements fostered systematic processes of comparison intended to yield information about human historical development, cultural differentiation, and diffusion.

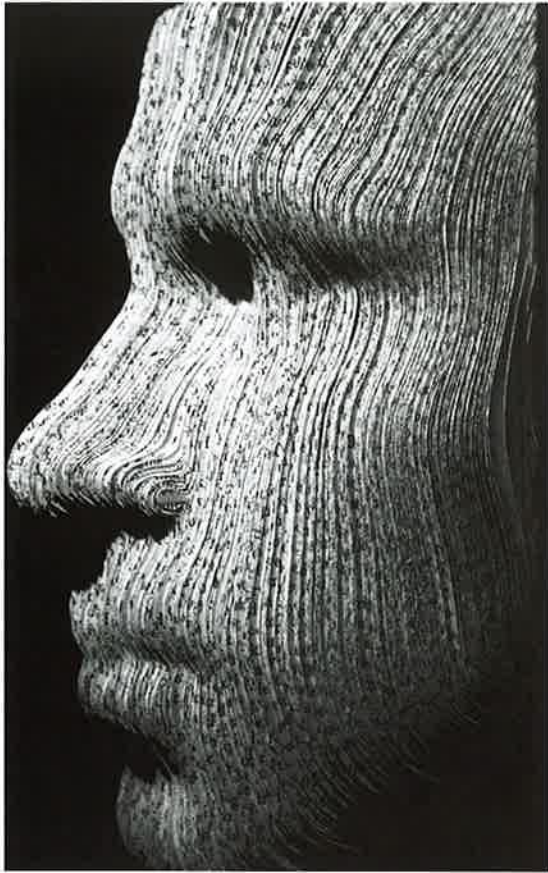
developed an approach to the study of Indigenous cultures that contrasted in important ways with that of the cultural evolutionists. His more relativistic view presented cultures as dynamic and changing, and formed by unique sets of factors that are historical and local. He instilled in the many students he trained at Columbia University rigorous and comprehensive methods for the documentation of Indigenous cultures and fostered a particular interest in their arts.

In both the United States and Canada, the work of documenting “disappearing” Indian cultures was sponsored by a network of research institutions

such as the Bureau of American Ethnology at the Smithsonian Institution. The comprehensiveness of the “salvage” paradigm—the saving of the “last remnants” of authentic Indian culture—that informed their collecting activities is suggested by one dramatic but representative example: between 1879 and 1885 the Smithsonian collected over 6,500 pottery vessels made by Pueblo women from Acoma and Zuni, villages of just a few hundred inhabitants.⁴ Stripping communities of the objects that supported their domestic, political, and spiritual life and could serve as models for young artists compounded the loss of artistic and ritual continuity that was being engineered during the same years by the forcible removal of many Aboriginal children to boarding and residential schools to become “civilized.”

The collections of artifacts and documentation amassed during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries thus present us with a number of paradoxes. Many contain inaccuracies and gaps, yet they also preserve much that might otherwise have been permanently lost. Although historically implicated in oppressive assimilationist regimes, such collections offer today a precious resource for cultural renewal. In the contexts of their own historical era, furthermore, many early ethnogra-

phers, like Boas, were liberal and humane people who worked to counter poverty and cultural erasure and to preserve the knowledge of their Indigenous “informants.” As Dakota scholar Philip Deloria has written, salvage anthropology was based on a fundamental contradiction, for “salvage workers are required to believe in both disappearing culture and the existence of informants knowledgeable enough about that culture to convey worthwhile information.”⁵ We should read these ethnographic sources critically, attending both to what they contain and what they distort or omit. Not only outsiders, but Indigenous people too, are today assessing the degree to which ethnographic texts have defined their identities. One of the sharpest critiques is offered by Tlingit/Aleut artist Nicholas Galanin in his sculptural self-portrait, *What Have We Become, Vol. 5* (fig. 1.8). His likeness is “carved” of the pages of *Under Mount St. Elias: The History and Culture*



▲ 1.8 Nicholas Galanin, b. 1979 (Tlingit/Aleut), *What Have We Become, Vol. 5*, 2009. 5 × 9 × 4 in. Courtesy Nicholas Galanin.

In carving his self-portrait out of the pages of an ethnographic study of his own people—literally remaking this “definitive” work in his own image—Galanin reclaims and transforms the knowledge the anthropologist, and through her the Bureau of American Ethnology, had acquired from the Tlingit.



◀ 1.9 Installation of Northwest Coast art at the exhibition *Indian Art of the United States*, Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1941. Digital Art © The Museum of Modern Art/Licensed by SCALA/Art Resource, NY.

The innovative modernist installations at the 1941 MoMA show set the pattern of art museum display up to the present. Individual “masterpieces” were isolated against luxurious expanses of wall space with a minimum of label text. The intent of such displays is the promotion of intense visual experiences of the objects’ formal and expressive qualities rather than of their specific cultural meanings.

of the *Yakutat Tlingit*, a classic ethnographic study of his own ancestral culture written in the mid-twentieth century by respected anthropologist Frederica de Laguna, a student of Boas.

Like Boas, many early ethnologists were interested in “art,” but the concepts widely accepted during their own period have proved problematic for Indigenous artistic traditions in a number of ways. The influential aesthetic theory formulated in the eighteenth century by Immanuel Kant maintained that the creative freedom of the artist was curtailed when objects had to serve functional purposes and that the highest intellectual and aesthetic achievements were therefore to be found in the “fine” arts of painting and sculpture. Because much Native North American artistic expression occurs in the making of “useful” items such as pots, clothing, or weapons, these items were assigned to the categories of applied art or craft, which were long thought to be inferior. It was not until the beginning of the twentieth century, when a number of European modernist artists began to promote the formal virtues of African and Oceanic sculpture, that Western art collectors began to view Indigenous arts as fine art. Native North American masks and other art forms soon attracted similar appreciation. The artists, critics, and collectors who advocated a break with the European academic tradition found inspiration and validation in the apparent resemblances of “primitive” art forms to their own radical formal experiments. Landmark exhibitions in Canada and the United States in 1927, 1931, 1939, and 1941 displayed Northwest Coast masks, Pueblo pottery, and other objects in large urban galleries and art museums for the first time (figs. 1.9 and 2.8).

Unlike ethnographic collectors, the promoters of “primitive art” deemed necessary only a minimal understanding of the objects’ original uses and meanings. In North America, promoters were also motivated by a nationalist desire to break away from the dominance of European cultural

influences. The painters Georgia O’Keeffe (1887–1986) and Emily Carr (1871–1945) and New York abstract expressionists Jackson Pollock (1912–56) and Barnett Newman (1905–70), among others, appropriated images of the Southwestern *katsina* and Northwest Coast totem pole to satisfy a desire for imagined primeval wholeness and to sever their own neo-colonial dependency on European art.⁶ European artists who fled to the United States during World War II felt an affinity between their Surrealist interests in dreams and the emphasis on visionary experience of Native North American religions (fig. 1.10). As we discuss in chapter 7, a number of pioneering Indigenous painters and sculptors further complicated this movement by adopting modernist genres and styles to serve their own needs for self-expression and cultural preservation.



▲ 1.10 Artist Max Ernst with *katsina* dolls in New York City, photograph by James Thrall Soby, spring 1942. Digital Image © The Museum of Modern Art/Licensed by SCALA/Art Resource, NY.

European artists arriving in the United States during World War II became fascinated by the Native art they found in New York’s ethnographic museums. They were particularly eager to collect *katsina* dolls, Alaskan masks, and other genres that appealed to their interest in dream experience and strange—to them—juxtapositions of materials and forms.

OBJECT IN FOCUS

The National Museum of the American Indian

On the morning of September 21, 2004, a remarkable sight greeted visitors to Washington D.C.'s Mall, the mile-long strip of grass running from the Capitol building to the obelisk of the Washington Monument that is bordered by many national museums. A vast crowd of 80,000 people facing the Capitol filled the space as far as the eye could see. Most were Indigenous people who had come from North, Central, and South America to celebrate the opening of the newest Smithsonian museum, the National Museum of the American Indian, or NMAI (fig. 1.11). This extraordinary gathering—the largest assembly of Indigenous peoples since European contact—was evidence of the importance attributed to the event. For most, the NMAI offered a powerful promise: to transform the damaging stereotypes of Native North American heritage, history, society, and contemporary life to which conventional museums had so centrally contributed.⁷

The NMAI was created on paper in 1989 when the United States Congress passed Public Law 101-185, the National Museum of the American Indian Act, which provided for the establishment of a new Smithsonian museum that would be a "living memorial to Native Americans and their traditions." As prescribed by the law, this museum, unlike comparable museums, would be directed and administered by Native North Americans themselves. The back story to the creation of the NMAI suggests the full extent of this transformative promise, for the stimulus for its establishment was the transfer to the Smithsonian of the collections of New York's Museum of the American Indian (MAI), an enormous collection of the Indigenous art

and material culture from the Americas. That institution had been the creation of George Gustav Heye (1874–1957), a wealthy New York businessman who first encountered Native American art in 1903 as a young engineer working in the Southwest. Collecting Native North American art became a lifelong obsession; during the following decades he used his wealth to buy up major collections from North America and Europe and to employ ethnologists to venture "into the field" to sweep up everything they could find in Indigenous communities. When the collection outgrew his private home, Heye recreated it as a public museum opened in 1922 on upper Broadway in Manhattan. For the next sixty-five years the museum and its vast storage building in the Bronx attracted school children, scholars, and artists, but its out-of-the-way location kept visitor numbers low. By the 1980s its displays (installed in the typological style—in which objects are grouped by type—typical of early twentieth-century anthropology museums), had become out-of-date and increasingly controversial. When the museum's financial problems converged with the growing pressure from Native Americans to create a site of self-representation in the national capital, the NMAI was born. Since Heye had left his museum to the state of New York, the NMAI also provided for the establishment of the George Gustav Heye Center in New York's financial district, where portions of the collection are always on view. Visitors to this building—a mid-nineteenth-century customs house built in French Empire style and adorned with murals celebrating the triumph of trade and commerce—are usefully reminded of the history of Native North American economic exploitation and dispossession that created the conditions for the formation not only of Heye's but many other museum collections as well.

The NMAI's new building on the Washington Mall and its innovative Cultural Resources Center in suburban Maryland (designed to store and study the vast collections according to Indigenous protocols of preservation and access) are, in contrast, examples of the dramatic museological innovations of its Native American conceptualizers. The Mall building was designed by Blackfoot architect Douglas Cardinal in the organic flowing style he had first created for the Canadian Museum of Civilization in Canada's national capital region. The curving forms of its layered stories evoke the topographies of land, just as the plants and water features that surround the museum reference Indigenous knowledge and ideals of harmony with the land. Inside the building, during NMAI's first decade, three major installations devoted to cosmology (Our Universe), identity (Our Lives), and history (Our

(cont.)



▲ 1.11 National Museum of the American Indian, Washington, D.C. Photo by Michael Ventura/Alamy.

(cont.)

Peoples) greeted visitors. Each consisted of a central exploration of the theme incorporating vibrant installations and works by contemporary artists and thirteen modular exhibits created by specific Indigenous communities working with the museum's professional staff. The stress on contemporary lives and beliefs in these exhibits frustrated some critics who had hoped to see more of the museum's great historic collections on view; yet such exhibits spoke eloquently to the felt need to emphasize

survival and contemporaneity. At the time of writing, a new set of exhibitions is being planned to replace them; these will undoubtedly open up new issues. The NMAI, in its first decade, however, began the gargantuan task of dismantling and revising a centuries-long history by which Native North American histories, cultures, and arts had been presented from the perspectives of outsiders, often distorting and silencing the issues most pertinent to Native North Americans themselves.

Expanding Art History's Inclusivity and Defining "Art"

During the last decades of the twentieth century, three movements within art history began to develop the discipline's capacity to better represent and narrate artistic traditions that had been marginalized by its Eurocentric biases. Beginning in the 1970s, the "new art history" worked to reveal and undo the hierarchies of race, class, and gender embedded in the classic narratives and canons of Western art history. These approaches, in turn, encouraged an expansion of art history's scope from the traditional "fine arts" of painting, sculpture, graphic arts, and architecture to a broader field of "visual culture" that includes crafts, commercial and popular arts, film, photography, video, electronic media, and performance. Such a scope favors not only the ritual arts, performances, and popular and touristic arts that Aboriginal people have used as channels of artistic expression, but also critical analysis of stereotypes of Aboriginal people that have long circulated in the popular media.

A third interrelated development has been a renewed emphasis on the social history of art and the role of art forms in shaping social interactions among people. Art historians have always been interested in how the meanings of art objects change as they move through time and space into new contexts of use and viewing. In a 1986 essay, anthropologist Igor Kopytoff urged the value of tracing an object's "cultural biography" in order to understand how its meaning changed as it moved through different contexts. Scholars of Native North American art today attend to these changes as collected works move from their original ritual or social contexts to become marketable collectables, scientific specimens, or works of art (see chapter 5, Object in Focus box and fig. 5.20). Such studies have potential affinities, too, with theories of the active and autonomous agency of works of art advanced by Alfred Gell and other anthropologists. Such theories resonate in interesting ways with Indigenous North American intellectual traditions, which affirm that some material objects can harbor qualities of personhood and spiritual power.⁸

New art history, visual studies, and the social history of art have been further amplified by the emergence of the more global perspective generally referred to as "world art history." This further attempt to broaden art history's scope fosters interest in the diverse ways that visual aesthetic

expression is conceptualized and its history recorded in different parts of the world. The “world” perspective is most clearly adapted to contemporary Native North American artists, who today show their work at biennial exhibitions held from Germany to Australia, engaging not only with Western traditions but also with a global community of other Indigenous and non-Western artists and critics. Although the historic arts of Indigenous peoples have received relatively less attention within world art history than those of the so-called Great Civilizations such as China or India, they stand to benefit from the future expansion of this approach.

The definition of “art” is highly unstable, changing from one culture and time period to another. It is thus important to have a working definition of the way we use the term “art” in this book. In relation to historical (generally pre-twentieth-century) objects, where acts of classification are retroactive, this volume uses the term “art” to refer to a work whose form is elaborated to enhance its visual and material qualities and its rhetorical power. The impulse and the capacity to elaborate form appear to be universal in human beings, as Boas eloquently argued at the beginning of the twentieth century.⁹ His stress on the importance of practiced skill in achieving the control over materials and

technologies, the regularities of form and pattern, and the expressive inventions that evoke aesthetic responses is an essential corollary to his definition—and is well illustrated by the work of the three artists with whom we opened this introduction. The capacity for making art is also useful; an artfully made object will draw and hold the eye (fig. 1.12). Skill, virtuosity, and elaboration, therefore, confer what anthropologist Warren D’Azevedo has termed “affective” power on an object, a capacity that can be exploited to focus attention on persons or things of importance, or to enhance the memorability or ritual efficacy of an occasion (fig. 1.13).

However carefully we distinguish certain objects or performances as “art” (and, by implication, relegate others to the realm of “nonart”), we inevitably enter a cross-cultural morass. As a judgment made in relation to historical objects, the distinction imposes a Western dichotomy on things made by people who do not make the same categorical distinctions and whose own criteria for evaluating objects have often differed considerably. In relation to modern and contemporary Native art, the use of Western categories is less problematic, for many contemporary artists were trained in Western art schools and work in full awareness of the discourses and



▲ 1.12 Anasazi artist, Mogui Canyon, Utah, Bi-lobed basket, c. 1200 CE, plant fibers. Courtesy University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology & Anthropology #150615.

Basketry is perhaps the oldest indigenous American art; in many regions artists have produced works of enduring use and beauty out of coiled, twined, and wrapped plant fibers. Although objects made of organic materials do not usually survive from the precontact period, the dry desert climate has allowed this fine basket to last for 800 years.



▲ 1.13 Anishinaabe artist, Feast bowl, nineteenth century. Ash wood, 48.3 × 33.3 × 21 cm. Detroit Institute of Arts, Courtesy Bridgeman Art Library International.

In the Great Lakes region, individuals brought beautifully carved bowls to communal feasts. Often carved from the tight-grained and durable wood burl, their rims sometimes display stylized animal motifs that transformed the bowl into the body of an animal of special spiritual significance to its owner. The representation of human figures on bowls is less common; here they extended out from the slanting sides of the bowl, creating a dramatic visual tension.

debates current in New York, Santa Fe, Vancouver, or Toronto—although they often contest aspects of the integrated system of scholarship, collecting, museum display, and market value that James Clifford has called the Western “art and culture system.”¹⁰

When speaking of historical Native objects, the statement is often made that Native languages have no exact equivalent for the post-Renaissance Western term “art.” The implication of this statement—that Native artists in the past were unreflexive about their own art-

making and lacked clear criteria of value or aesthetic quality—is manifestly untrue, as scholars have repeatedly demonstrated.¹¹ Though specific criteria vary, Native North Americans, like people everywhere, value the visual pleasure afforded by things made well and imaginatively. They also value many of the same attributes that make up the Western notion of “art,” such as skill in the handling of materials, the practiced manipulation of established stylistic conventions, and individual powers of invention and conceptualization. There is also ample evidence, however, that in Native traditions the purely material and visual features of an object are not necessarily the most important in establishing its relative value, as they have come to be in the West. Other qualities or associations, not knowable from a strictly visual inspection, may be more important. These may include soundness of construction to ensure functional utility, or ritual correctness in the gathering of raw materials, or powers that inhere because of the object’s original conception in a dream experience, or the number of times it was used in a ceremony.

In the past, Western-trained scholars have tended to dismiss the Indigenous intellectual traditions that lie behind such modes of evaluation. Yet the deep knowledge that makers of objects carry in their heads and hands is a fundamental way of knowing the complexities of an object’s material being. Such knowledge, sometimes termed “ethnoscience” by outsiders, is based on the close observation, experimentation, and transmission through Indigenous systems of apprenticeship and teaching by untold generations of makers. It is also tied to a deep knowledge of the land and its life forms. To a Native artist, some of this knowledge may simply be regarded as part of what it means to be an adult with the skills and experience necessary to make one’s way in the world. For a Pueblo potter, for example, it may entail knowing exactly where to find clay with exactly the right properties, what tempering material to choose to achieve the desired result when firing the vessel, how to make paints from Rocky Mountain bee weed, how to stack pots for firing in an outdoor kiln, or which kind of manure to use to feed the fire in order to get the desired color—all activities that may look natural and simple, but that are based on a thousand years of expertise (see chapter 2). In many parts of North America, the losses of such forms of Indigenous knowledge that occurred when Aboriginal children were separated from their families and taken to distant boarding schools have been

The five major subdivisions of Native North American art as discussed in this book



severe, but in many places successful projects of recovery have been under way in recent years.

In the next five chapters, devoted to the historical arts of the major regions of the continent—the Southwest, the East, the West, the Northwest Coast, and the North—we regularly interrupt our chronological accounts with examples of modern and contemporary art. We do this to intervene in the outmoded narrative that authentic Native North American arts have been “lost” or are in unstoppable decline. These contemporary works open a dialogue with today’s Aboriginal communities, whose members affirm both the continuities that their artistic traditions manifest against all historical odds, as well as the authenticity—and universality—of processes of aesthetic and technical innovation. Whether historic or contemporary, works made by Aboriginal artists offer insights into particular philosophies and historical experiences that are especially valuable because, until recently,

we had so few written sources authored by Native people. As Mohawk historian Deborah Doxtator has written: “Visual metaphors impart meanings that sometimes do not have words to describe them.”¹²

COLONIAL LEGACIES

We have already noted the ways in which Western interests and tastes determined what was collected and preserved after contact and that the majority of the objects surviving today were selected because they appealed to Western collectors’ criteria of value and beauty. These histories also provide insight into ethical questions that arise today in relation to the ownership and display of many Native objects, because these problems are often linked to the circumstances in which objects were collected. In the next section we look in more detail at contemporary debates around three issues that are direct legacies of the colonial imposition of Western concepts and systems of art and culture: rights of ownership and modes of display, production for the market, and definitions of what is authentic and who is an Indigenous person.



▲ 1.14 Edward Chatfield, *Nicholas Vincent Tsawanhanhi, Principal Christian Chief, and Captain of the Huron Indians*, 1825. Handcolored lithograph, 33.1 × 45.8 cm. Photo no. C-38948, Library and Archives Canada.

This image shows the Grand Chief of the Wendat nation when he was presented to King George III in London on April 7, 1825. To defend Wendat lands against incursions from settlers, he displays the wampum belt as evidence of the political agreement they had made with the British. Woven of purple and white shell wampum beads, it displays the image of a tomahawk, a symbol of war and a reminder that the historic alliance and promises of mutual support are still binding.

Ownership and Public Display

In the past, collectors rarely respected the ritual purposes for which many Native objects were made. Some of the finest pieces of art were made as burial offerings intended to accompany the

dead into the next world. Many Aboriginal people believe these should now be returned to the earth, regardless of whether they were scientifically excavated or plundered by grave robbers. Other objects have been carefully conserved by Native people over many generations because of their inherent medicine power, their importance in ceremony, or as historical record (fig. 1.14). Woven belts of shell wampum beads, for example, were made for diplomatic exchange during the early contact period in the Northeast and Great Lakes. These were given to outsiders and some remained in their communities, passed on from generation to generation along with their detailed meanings, in order to maintain a record of important diplomatic agreements. Some were sold from these communities.¹³

Although some of these objects have never left Native hands, a great many were given or sold to ethnologists during the early decades of the twentieth century because of poverty or as a last hope for their preservation at a time when many Native people despaired of the survival of their cultures. Still others were stolen, seized illegally, or sold by people who had no right to do so. The last and largest category of historical art available for study and appreciation consists of nonsacred and nonceremonial objects. (The distinction is often hard to make because the sacred/secular dichotomy is another Western overlay on Indigenous modes of thinking.) These

were acquired by Western collectors, mostly through trade, purchase, or as gifts but also by violence and theft.

Native communities are today emerging from the dark days of official assimilationism, and many are requesting the return of certain museum objects. In recognition of their moral rights and past injustices, laws and official policies adopted in the United States and Canada in the early 1990s require repatriation to the legitimate descendants of the original owners of objects that are sacred, illegally acquired, found in burials, or belong to a category that the American law terms “objects of cultural patrimony.”¹⁴ These often go on display in community centers or museums from which they can be removed for use in ceremonies or for study by artists.

An early and influential example of repatriation resulting from effective Aboriginal activism occurred in the 1980s, when major museums in Ottawa, Toronto, and New York returned an important collection of Kwakwaka’wakw (Kwakiutl) coppers, masks, rattles, boxes, blankets, and whistles that had been illegally confiscated by a Canadian Indian agent at a great potlatch held in 1921 by Chief Daniel Cranmer. In 1885, the Canadian government had banned the holding of potlatches, key ceremonies that affirm and renew the political and social order of Northwest Coast communities. Many people had defied this ban, but in 1921 a local Indian agent decided to make an object lesson of Daniel Cranmer’s potlatch. He arrested forty-five people, most of high rank, and released them from jail sentences only on condition that they surrender all their potlatch masks and other objects (some 450 items), which were then sold or placed in distant museums.

The Kwakwaka’wakw never forgot this loss and in the late 1960s began to lobby actively for the return of their treasures, using a number of strategies, including the making of two widely circulated documentary films. The National Museum of Canada responded first, agreeing to return its holdings on condition that an appropriate building be constructed to house them. The portion returned to the people of Alert Bay is now displayed in the U’mista Cultural Centre (fig. 1.15). Chief Cranmer’s daughter, Gloria Cranmer Webster, an anthropologist who was the first director of the Centre, explains the meaning of its name. “In earlier days, people were sometimes taken captive by raiding parties. When they were returned to their homes, either through payment of ransom or by a retaliatory raid, they were said to have ‘u’mista.’ Our old people said that the return of the collection was like an u’mista—our treasures were coming home from captivity in a strange place.”¹⁵

The U’mista Cultural Centre is not, however, a museum and the new ways in which it has chosen to display the objects demonstrate the belief in the importance of affirming Indigenous historical memory as part of the recovery from the colonial era. The returned objects are displayed in the open rather than behind glass, and in the order in which they would appear at a potlatch rather than in conventional typological groupings. They are accompanied, as James Clifford has observed, by texts that do not give their original uses and symbolism but record the memories of specific community members, speaking directly of their recent history of captivity and return.¹⁶

u'mista

► 1.15 Kwakwaka'wakw masks at the U'mista Cultural Centre, Alert Bay, British Columbia. Photograph by Aaron Glass, 2003.

The repatriated masks and other regalia seized from Chief Dan Cranmer's potlatch are displayed around the sides of a room built in the shape of a traditional Northwest Coast big house. Installed in the open, they are accompanied by text panels that commemorate their illegal seizure and the active campaign waged by community members for their return.



Across North America, Native representatives have also requested that certain kinds of objects be permanently removed from display and, in some cases, that photographs of such objects and related ceremonies not be reproduced. These requests are motivated both by beliefs in the inherent powers of such objects to cause harm to casual viewers and by a desire to maintain the privacy of ceremonies and rituals that were intended to be seen by knowledgeable people able to conduct them correctly, effectively, and respectfully. The Hopi Cultural Preservation Society in Arizona, for example, has put in place research protocols to address past “thefts” of information about sacred rituals such as the Snake and Antelope Ceremony, or “Snake Dance.” This ceremony has attracted intense attention from outsiders fascinated by what they regarded as a quintessential primitive ritual. For the Hopi, it is a centrally important rite that invokes the rain that is vital to human subsistence in the arid Hopi lands. It is one example of many sacred rituals that have, as the Hopi write, “been exposed to others out of context and without Hopi permission,” and the community has sought to prevent the unsanctioned exposure of objects and images. For this reason, too, no images of Iroquois *Ga’goh’sah* (medicine, or “False Face” masks) are reproduced in this book, although these masks, which represent forest spirits assigned by the Creator to lend their healing powers to human beings, were featured throughout the twentieth century as a major form of Iroquois “art” in art and anthropology exhibitions and publications. For more on such issues, see the Issue in Focus box.

ISSUE IN FOCUS

"Who Owns Native Culture?"

The question of "Who owns Native culture?" was posed by anthropologist Michael F. Brown in a thought-provoking book that examines the complex ethical issues raised by the circulation of objects and cultural knowledge.¹⁷ Ownership and the restitution of objects illegally or improperly obtained often intersect with other equally important issues that arise from different definitions of the sacred and the power associated with tangible and intangible Native heritage. In a volume that surveys Native Art, such issues command attention; we address them here and elsewhere in this book.

The enactment of The Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) in the United States in 1990 and the 1992 Canadian *Report of the Task Force on Museums and First Peoples* established legal and policy guidelines for—as NAGPRA puts it—the repatriation of "funerary objects, sacred objects, and objects of cultural patrimony." Both have opened new dialogues not only about ownership but also about the proper treatment of sacred objects and knowledge in museums. They have led to the return of human remains and items of material culture as well as to remarkable collaborations between museums and Native peoples.

Most readers are unaware that Native North American efforts to recover items of central cultural importance began over a century ago when Haudenosaunee representatives sought the return of wampum belts sold to museums by people without the authority to do so.¹⁸ More recently, but before NAGPRA, the Brooklyn Museum, the Smithsonian, and other museums repatriated to Zuni Pueblo their *ahayu:da* (sacred effigies also known as "War Gods"). Zuni people believe these should not be on display in museums, for the proper role of *ahayu:da* is to guard the world from high atop sacred hilltop shrines, where they eventually decompose.¹⁹

Both the Zuni and Hopi believe that the details of private religious ceremonies divulged to anthropologists and other outsiders in earlier generations should now be accessible only to tribal members—and often only to specific people such as elders or those initiated into particular religious societies. Some have asked archives and museums—including those with a legal mandate to be accessible to all—to limit access to photos, objects, recordings, and documents that they believe to be culturally sensitive. As Brown reminds us, "sorting out the unhappy legacies of the past will require years of discussion and pragmatic compromise."²⁰

We offer two examples illustrating how complex and singular each case is. The first concerns replicas of sacred sandpaintings made by Navajo ritual practitioners

working collaboratively several generations ago to keep knowledge alive and promote cross-cultural understanding. The Wheelwright Museum in Santa Fe was founded in 1937 as The Museum of Navajo Ceremonial Art by philanthropist Mary Cabot Wheelwright in collaboration with renowned chanter Hosteen Klah (see p. 41, this chapter). It owns many replicas of sandpaintings, as well as recordings and texts used in ritual. In recent decades, advisors from the Navajo Nation Cultural Center have asked that only Navajo ceremonial practitioners be allowed access to certain records of sacred knowledge. Today, contemporary practitioners can learn the lengthy ceremonial songs (see chapter 2) by listening to recordings deposited at the museum by Klah and other early twentieth-century holy men. When the museum opened, the walls of its hogan-shaped structure displayed large replicas of sandpaintings painted by museum staff under direction from Navajo practitioners. Some fifty years later, the museum's Navajo advisors asked for the return of some of these to



▲ 1.16 Replica of sandpainting of four female supernaturals, the Long Bodies, from the Mountain Chant, originally painted by Paul Jones of the Wheelwright Museum. Based on published sources. Displayed at the Walmart in Gallup, New Mexico, photo J. C. Berlo, 2009.

(cont.)

(cont.)

the community. Surprisingly, for some years in the early twenty-first century these six-by-six-foot replicas hung in the Walmart Supercenter in Gallup—the largest place to shop on the edge of the reservation (fig. 1.16). While some might consider this to be an indigenization of corporate spaces, it could equally be seen as a co-optation of local interests by corporate marketing.

A second example concerns the contrast between the legal “harvesting” of archaeological objects by Yup’ik people in Alaska and the different local customs for the handling of archaeological heritage in other Northern communities. About 1,400 Yup’ik live in two villages on St Lawrence Island, in the Bering Sea, where a wealth of marine animals, including walrus, have supported human habitation for over 2,000 years. As archaeological finds show, over the centuries the Yup’ik and their ancestors have worked tons of walrus ivory into artifacts ranging from prosaic tools to elegant sculptures desired by collectors (fig. 5.10). St Lawrence Island Yup’ik see the excavation of archaeological sites as a subsistence activity. Archaeologist Julie Hollowell’s account of their relationships to and knowledge of land suggests the broader context of this practice: “The right to continue to practice a subsistence lifestyle occupies a focal place in the ongoing struggles for Native sovereignty that St Lawrence Islanders share with other Alaska Natives and with Inuit across the circumpolar regions as well as with Indigenous peoples worldwide.”²¹

In general, state and federal laws regulate the excavation and sale of ancient objects. But marketing their excavated artifacts by St Lawrence Islanders is not illegal. The Native Corporations on the island hold full title to their

lands, and their regulations allow only “shareholders” (i.e., local Yup’ik themselves) to dig up and sell ancient materials. Outside buyers ranging from shop owners, to wealthy collectors, to Native artists buy everything from ancient tools, to so-called fossil ivory, to rare art objects. Exhibition catalogues from distant cities serve both as guides to what collectors value and evidence of what has come out of the ground.²²

Elsewhere in Alaska, another Native community has taken a different approach to their ancient patrimony. Alutiiq people on Afognak Island (not far from where the 1,500-year old stone lamp in fig. 5.13 was discovered) have been collaborating with archaeologists to understand the deep history of their people. In a project called *Light the Past, Spark the Future, Dig Afognak*, graduate students in archaeology teach Alutiiq youth about archaeological methods, while elders teach spiritual values. In 1996, an ancient stone lamp was lit for the first time in centuries to mark the opening of Spirit Camp, where youthful campers explored both of these realms. About her community’s collaboration with archaeologists, Ruth Alice Olsen Dawson, former president of the Afognak Native Corporation said, “scientific research has helped me find my Native heart.”²³

These examples suggest the many local traditions and responses that make the application of one national policy a complex and challenging process. They also illustrate the ongoing need for mutually respectful and creative processes as discussions about archaeology, repatriation and a host of other issues continue to unfold in future years.

It is also important to note, finally, that the singling out of *visual* arts in this discussion reflects a privileging of the visual sense that has characterized Western cultures for much of their history.²⁴ One of the effects of Western domination of Native North American cultures has been to devalue the importance of expressive forms such as oratory or dance that have traditionally been valued as highly—if not more highly—than works of visual art within Native societies. Many contemporary Native writers and artists are working to restore a balance and integration among art forms more typical of their historical cultures, and they often work in more than one expressive medium, or collaborate with writers, dancers, and dramatists.²⁵ Native artists are thus part of a contemporary process of debate and critique in which the boundaries that separate art from non-art, visual art from music, dance performance and other arts, fine art from other forms of visual culture, and the graphic and plastic arts from print culture and new electronic technologies are being called into question. As these explorations proceed, they will also, undoubtedly, bring new insights to the understanding of historical aesthetic expression.



Commodification and Authenticity

Despite their differences, the art and artifact paradigms of collecting shared a common assumption about the nature of authenticity in Native North American art. Both defined those objects that dated back to the early period of contact and displayed a minimum of European influence as the most interesting and valuable. This definition of authenticity is part of a widespread tendency to romanticize the past of Native peoples at the expense of their present, and such judgments carry important implications. Although the image of the Native man as “noble savage” or of a Native woman as “Indian princess” may appear to express unqualified admiration for Native culture, such images can also crowd out, in a damaging way, the possibility of engagement with the modern lives, problems, and accomplishments of contemporary Native people—in art as in everything else (fig. 1.17). Such stereotypes, furthermore, are based on early but enduring fantasies about Indigenous culture and society that have little or no basis in fact. The critique of stereotypes has been a central theme of modern and contemporary Native artists (fig. 1.18).

In more recent studies of Native North American art, the definition of authenticity has been reevaluated in relation to the commodification of Native art and issues of stylistic hybridity, and particularly in relation to art forms produced for the souvenir market during the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Nineteenth-century tourists sought out sites that offered sublime

▲ 1.17 Left: Poster for Buffalo Bill's Wild West show. Color lithograph. Courtesy of Buffalo Bill Historical Center, Cody, Wyoming, U.S.A.; Gift of George Fronval, through the courtesy of Nick Eggenhofer, Cody, Wyoming. 1.69.48.

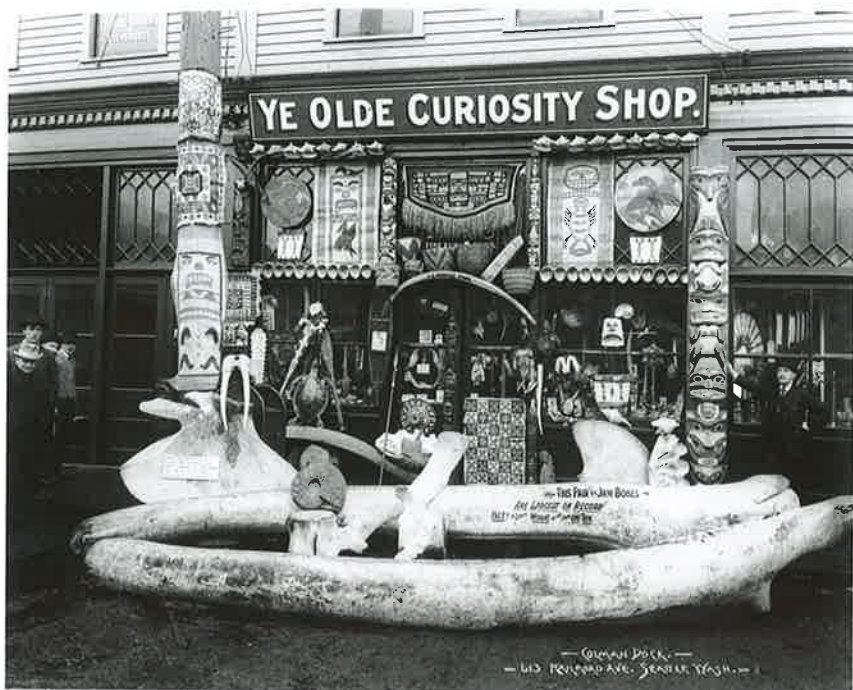
“Buffalo Bill” Cody’s immensely popular Wild West show toured North America and Europe between 1883 and 1913. The reenactments and posters seen by hundreds of thousands of people fixed in the popular imagination the stereotype of the Indian as a stoic figure in a feathered war bonnet. The reenactments of hunting and warfare that they staged provided for many of these men a welcome relief from the poverty and confinement to reservations Plains peoples endured during these years.

▲ 1.18 Right: Horace Poolaw, 1906–84 (Kiowa), *Horace Poolaw, Aerial Photographer, and Gus Palmer, Gunner, Mac Dill Air Base, Tampa, Florida, c. 1944*. Gelatine silver print, 31.1 × 23.8 cm. © The Horace Poolaw Family/Horace Poolaw.

During his two years in the U.S. Army Air Corps during World War II, Poolaw taught aerial photography. In this slyly humorous image, the photographer plays on stereotypes about the noble Indian warrior of the Plains photographically recording an image of twentieth-century warfare.

► 1.19 Unknown photographer, Ye Olde Curiosity Shop, early twentieth century. Postcard. Courtesy University of Washington Libraries, Special Collections, CUR540.

This postcard for Seattle's popular tourist shop, established in 1899, makes evident the enduring contexts of natural history and curiosity in which native North American objects were presented. In the jumble of wares, it would have been hard for buyers to distinguish quality. The totem poles, for example, are crudely carved and nontraditional while the finely woven Chilkat blanket over the doorway would undoubtedly have been worn at a potlatch by a high-ranking chief.



experiences of nature, among which Niagara Falls was preeminent. During the middle decades of the century, visitors eagerly bought finely made examples of the beadwork, moosehair embroidery, and other arts of Haudenosaunee (Iroquois), Wendat (Huron), and Anishinaabe (Ojibwe and Odawa) artists. By the end of the nineteenth century these productions had extended across the continent. As Jonathan Batkin has written, “curio dealers and Native North American craftspeople had collaborated to invent and market objects that had no purpose but to satiate a nearly irrational desire to own Indian artifacts.” J. E. Standley’s “Ye Old Curiosity Shop” in Seattle, Washington, exemplifies the marketing of Indian curios in the early twentieth century and the way that it confused the issue of authenticity (fig. 1.19). Crowded with basketry, jewelry, natural history specimens, ivory carvings, and other items then classified under the rubric of “curios,” this emporium sold its wares to anthropologists, serious collectors, and casual tourists alike. Some were replicas carved by Native entrepreneurs from drawings in Franz Boas’s *The Social Organization and the Secret Societies of the Kwakiutl Indians* (1897) a mere ten years after this pioneering anthropologist published his important treatise on Kwakiutl culture. Other items for sale were ivory carvings made by Inupiaq and Yup’ik men (see chapter 5) sold to Standley through middlemen in Barrow, Nome, or Juneau. As Kate Duncan has demonstrated, pieces from this shop ended up both in the parlors of middle-class collectors, where they were displayed as souvenirs of interesting travels and vacations, and in major museums such as the Horniman Museum in London and New York’s Museum of the American Indian (now the National Museum of the American Indian).



Souvenir production and the economic needs that lay behind it were long deplored by scholars and art connoisseurs, but they are now recognized both as important stimuli for creativity and cultural preservation and as sites of active Aboriginal intervention in the stereotypes circulated through popular art and performance. A satirical painting by Woody Crumbo foregrounds the discomfiting dimensions of intercultural exchange. Its title, *Land of Enchantment*, is the state motto of New Mexico, which had become a major tourist destination by the 1940s when the drawing was made. Crumbo turns the table on the usual stereotypes by placing a Navajo woman and her daughter in the foreground, presenting a rug for the inspection of a white tourist family (fig. 1.20). The battered and crooked wooden sign, “Land of Enchantment,” suggests that from the Native perspective, the days of enchantment are long gone.

Who Is an Indian? Clan, Community, Political Structure, and Art

Particular forms of social organization and subsistence strategies are closely tied to the kinds of objects people make and their choices of medium and scale. In groups where populations are small, for example, the distribution of power tends to be relatively egalitarian and the systems of leadership more informal. The autonomous power of each individual is recognized and expressed in a range of different artistic contexts, often centering on

▲ 1.20 Woody Crumbo, 1912–89 (Potawatomi), *Land of Enchantment*, 1946. Watercolor, 17.5 × 23 in. Gift of Clark Field, 1946.45.4. © 2014 The Philbrook Museum of Art, Inc., Tulsa, Oklahoma, courtesy Minisa Crumbo Halsey.

In Crumbo’s satirical painting, each family member is a caricature, from the goofy freckled child, to the fleshy mother bursting out of her revealing play clothes, to the camera-toting father wearing a bohemian beret and holding a briefcase. The Indian crafts they are buying look absurd against their outlandish clothes. As they examine a Navajo rug, the weaver peeks shyly from behind her textile, while her daughter looks down sadly. Even the horse, bearing more weavings, has a dejected cast.

personal adornment and the artistic elaboration of weapons, tools, pipes, and other objects that make reference to their owners' sources of personal empowerment. Certain individuals—shamans, healers, chiefs, elders—whose special wisdom and powers of healing or vision are called upon by the group, may arrange for the creation of particularly elaborate ritual equipment or dress. If a group's way of life is nomadic, works of art will tend to be small and portable, and skills in weaving, embroidery, hide painting, and body decoration are often brought to a level of consummate artistry (fig. 1.5). Architectural structures are typically lightweight and made of articulated components—a feature that does not preclude the monumental marking of land and rock surfaces or the building of large-scale structures that can shelter an entire community on ceremonial occasions, such as the Anishinaabe Midewiwin lodge, the Plains Sun Dance lodge (fig. 4.14), or the Eskimo winter dance house.

Other Indigenous nations—including Pueblo peoples of the Southwest, Mississippian societies of the ancient Southeast, Iroquoian peoples of the Northeast, and Northwest Coast peoples—developed political systems in which authority was more formally assigned within families, clans, or hereditary classes. Their subsistence systems permitted the creation of permanent villages and favored the building of large structures of wood, earth, or masonry. Such settled communities were more likely to use larger, heavier, or permanently installed art forms, including carved masks, monumental sculptures, and mural paintings.

In Native North America, as elsewhere, many works of art are created primarily to help people conceptualize the social and political bonds (both ideal and actual) that unite them. Art forms can present models of collaboration and cooperation with which members of a community are asked to concur. The specific designs strung or woven into belts of wampum beads displayed by leaders in the Northeast and Great Lakes, for example, reminded viewers of specific contractual agreements (fig. 1.14). And there are innumerable examples of art forms that make visible through clothing, body art, and ritual objects the authority or special powers of an individual.

The names applied to the Indigenous peoples of North America are integral to the construction of individual and group identity. In the early years of contact, Europeans frequently assigned inaccurate names to communities or nations either because they misunderstood Aboriginal political organization or wished to interfere with political structures that hindered their colonial aspirations. Native people are today correcting erroneous names assigned by outsiders, some of which are actively offensive. The word “Indian” reflects, of course, an even more fundamental error: the mistaken idea of early explorers that they had arrived in the East Indies. Today, although the term “Indian” remains acceptable to many, terms such as “Native,” “Aboriginal,” “Indigenous,” and “First Nations” are often preferred, for they convey more clearly the primacy of Indigenous peoples as occupiers of the North American continent.

Even with these adjustments, in an important sense the term “Native American” in the phrase “Native American Art” represents the imposition of

Western notions of political and ethnic identity just as foreign to Indigenous people as was, historically, the aesthetic construct signaled by the term “art.” For most of the original peoples of North America the most fundamental unit of membership is the clan or lineage, a group of kin descended from a common ancestor. An individual’s clan membership is inherited through the mother in a matrilineal system or through the father if the system is patrilineal. Clans may, in turn, be grouped into two larger divisions or “moieties.” The original ancestor or associated being of a clan or lineage is usually an animal such as a turtle, eagle, wolf, or crane. The Anishinaabe term for such a being is *dodem*, from which we derive “totem” in English. Images of clan animals are important in many art traditions, appearing in graphic or carved form on tall poles, masks, personal belongings, grave markers, or other objects where they act as identifying marks and sometimes as a kind of “signature” (fig. 1.21). Today, images of clan animals often figure in fine contemporary jewelry and clothing worn by Native people.



The Canadian government has defined the basic Aboriginal political entity as the “band,” while the U.S. government uses the term “tribe.” Although these terms have different meanings in anthropological theory, both are used today to describe individual Native communities and are often identified with the reservations (reserves, in Canada) to which Aboriginal people have been assigned since the second half of the nineteenth century. Both terms are, however, inadequate as descriptions of other historical group identities that are equally important. In many areas complex and sophisticated forms of political and military alliance were in existence long before the arrival of Europeans. (The Iroquois Confederacy, which, some have argued, provided a model for the federal structure of the United States, is a good example.) All over North America, too, small hunting groups came together seasonally for purposes of ceremonial observance, trade, and sociability and were linked through shared clan identities. Today, contemporary Aboriginal people, especially in Canada, have appropriated the Western term “nation,” to assert their sovereignty and to name the larger groups to which they belong.

To be legally identified as an Indian (to have “status” in Canada, or to be “enrolled” in the United States), one must be listed as a member of a recognized band or tribe. The control of Indigenous populations by such means is a classic tool of colonial domination. It is also a strategy of exclusion that denies Native identity to many people whose ancestry is no more or less mixed than that of those who are legally recognized by laws

▲ 1.21 Detail from document recording Aboriginal agreement to the St Joseph Island Ontario Cession, June 20, 1798. RG.10, Vol 1841, IT 035, Indian Affairs, Consecutive Number 11, Library and Archives Canada.

The *dodem* (totem) or clan system shared by peoples throughout the Great Lakes and Northeast established kinship and conferred individual identity. It also created a visual language of clan emblems through which people expressed their origin in ancestral lands. *Dodem* marks, such as the caribou, eagle, crane, marten, sturgeon, and thunderbird with which Anishinaabe leaders signed a treaty, were often elegant and lively evocations of animals and plants.

and policies that derive from outmoded racial theories, patrilineal bias, or geographical segregation.²⁶ Contemporary critical thought about identity, in contrast, stresses the importance of an individual's subjectivity—of the identity developed as a result of personal and family history. Yet legal definitions continue to place many Native people in invidious positions.²⁷ The subject remains a painful and difficult issue for many Aboriginal people, and it is regularly addressed in the work of contemporary artists (fig. 8.5).

SPIRITUAL PRACTICES AND THE MAKING OF ART

Identity is not only—or even primarily—a matter of legal definition. On a more profound level, it is constructed from the way an individual understands his or her relationship to place, to community, and to the cosmos. Contemporary Aboriginal people are heirs to unique knowledge systems that have developed out of thousands of years of living, dreaming, and thinking about the lands, waters, plants, animals, seasons, and skies of the North American continent. These epistemological systems explain the fundamental structures of the cosmos, the interrelationship of humans and other beings, the nature of spirit and power, and of life and death. They have provided the basis for the development of specific ritual practices that make human beings effective in the most critical of activities—hunting, growing crops, creating families, working in offices or factories, curing disease, making war, and accomplishing the journey through this world to the next. The unique worldviews of Native North Americans have been amplified over the centuries by encounters with other spiritual systems, and particularly with Christianity, which many Native people have accepted either in place of, or alongside, traditional ones.

Since the second half of the nineteenth century, the U.S. and Canadian governments have collaborated directly with Christian missionaries as part of a formal policy of directed assimilation. For more than a century both governments used their power to remove tens of thousands of Native children from their families to residential and boarding schools, mostly run by missionaries. There it was expected that they would, within a single generation, become Christian and “civilized,” and that their ties to Aboriginal languages and cultures would finally be severed.²⁸ The effect of these schools is evident in remarks made in the 1930s by a Native graduate of a U.S. boarding school, the Hampton Institute: “What does the Indian of today care about his art? Or about some ancient tool that a scientist might uncover? That time is past, and should be kept there. Personally, I wouldn’t give up the experiences I have had for all the old-time ceremonies and ‘Indian culture.’”²⁹

Schools did accomplish some of their educational goals and—often unintentionally—set a number of pioneering Aboriginal artists on the path to careers as professional artists. Yet for many, such benefits have been far outweighed by other issues: the anguish of separation experienced by parents and children, the abuse that was common in the schools, and the legacy

of family breakdown and cultural rupture they caused.³⁰ The orderly transmission from one generation to the next of Native languages, traditional beliefs, practices, and arts was radically disrupted. In 2009, the Canadian government at last issued a formal apology for the residential school system, offered compensation to victims, and established a Truth and Reconciliation commission to reveal the full extent of the damage and help them heal. As Indigenous peoples struggle to repair the losses, many museums are seeking ways to use their collections of Indigenous art and material culture to support their efforts.

The combination of missionary activity and Western schooling drew many people away from traditional spiritual practices and resulted in new forms of religious syncretism. The very brief account of Indigenous worldview to which we now turn is, then, an abstraction that describes neither the many individual combinations of belief and practice that have resulted from the history of contact and directed assimilation nor any one traditional worldview. Rather, it attempts to point out some broad historical patterns of worldview that underlie and link the rich diversity of contemporary Aboriginal life—and that also link the spiritual systems of Native North Americans with those of Indigenous peoples in Mesoamerica and South America, Siberia, and the Pacific Rim with whom they have many ties of history and blood. These shared beliefs concern the nature and location of “spirit,” the fundamental structures of space and time, the concept of power (including that of “medicine”), the value of visionary experience, the role of shamans, and the importance of feasting and gift giving in the validation of blessings received from spirit protectors.

The Map of the Cosmos

A fundamental feature of a worldview is the way it “maps” space. Native North American cosmologies divide the universe into distinct spatial zones associated with different orders of power. A supplicant’s proper orientation in relation to these zones is vital to the efficacy of ritual. Because space is experienced in relation to specific configurations of land, sky, and water, the specifics of cosmology in each region reflect and reflect upon particular environments and ecologies. In the Plains and Woodlands, for example, cosmic space is subdivided into three zones: sky, the earth’s surface, and the realms beneath earth and water. Earthly space is also conceived of as circular, divided into quadrants identified with the four cardinal directions and with winds that blow from these directions bringing the changes of season. On the Northwest Coast, in contrast, the significant spatial zones define a water realm of sea or river, a coastal zone where human settlements are located, and a realm of forests and mountains. Everywhere in North America the zones of earth, water, and sky are also linked by a central, vertical axis that provides a path of orientation along which human prayers can travel between realms of power. This axis is visualized in various ways: as a great tree, an offering pole, or a path along which smoke travels from a central hearth through the smoke hole above it (figs. 1.22 and 1.23).

► 1.22 Innu (Naskapi) artist, Shaman's painted hide, c. 1740. Unsmoked caribou skin, porcupine quills, paint, fish glue, hair, 105 × 118 cm. Canadian Museum of History, III-B-588, S86-2534.

At the center of this sacred chart is the image of the sun, the most important spiritual power and the source of growth and life. Around it are arrayed rows of double curves that may represent plants and the caribou that feed on them, each in its season. Innu shamans exposed hide robes painted with sacred designs to the rising sun and wrapped them around their bodies with the designs on the inside surface to aid in spiritual meditation.



The beings that inhabit the separate zones of the cosmos are sources of danger, power, and wealth. Sacred stories explain how the powers and knowledges essential to survival may be transferred to human beings, how this occurred in the time of creation, and how it occurs in the present. They also explain how power can be transferred among humans by inheritance or exchange, and how humans can seek it through prescribed rituals. The rights and privileges conferred by lineage ancestors of Northwest Coast families are, for example, clearly identified with particular power zones in the sky, the sea, or the forest. The spirit beings (*katsinam*) who are called by Pueblo peoples in annual rituals to bring rain and fertility from sky and mountains to human villages are also located in particular zones of earth and sky. Spirit beings that embody the different cosmic zones are, finally, interconnected by relations of complementarity and oppositionality; these relationships are expressed in sacred stories and illustrated in art by images of the great spirits of the upper world and underworld—Thunderbird and Underwater Panther, Eagle and Killer Whale—locked in great battles that energize cosmic space.

The Nature of Spirit

Such beliefs and rituals are posited on a concept of “power as spirit” that is widespread throughout North America. In Aboriginal belief, soul or spirit, understood as an animating and personifying principle, is not

Trung-Hallowell

confined to human beings as it is in the Abrahamic religions (Judaism, Christianity, Islam). It resides in animals, features of land and water, plants, and the heavenly bodies. (The notion of “medicine” as a substance imbued with active and affective power is a part of this larger conception of potential animacy.) The presence of what the anthropologist Irving Hallowell called the “other-than-human persons” often manifests itself through the ability to transform or change shape. Native creation stories account for many familiar features of our world as the products of magical transformative acts performed by tricksterish culture heroes—figures such as Raven on the Northwest Coast, Coyote on the Plains, or *Nanabozo* in the Great Lakes who traveled the earth after the Creator had finished the basic acts of creation.

The interrelationships of the material world, animate force, and powers of transformation are complex, as an anecdote related by Hallowell suggests. After being told by a *Saulteaux Ojibwa* consultant that certain stones were imbued with thunderbird powers, Hallowell asked whether all stones shaped in this way were animated with power. “No,” he was told, “but *some* are.”³¹ The ability to recognize and draw upon the powers of plants, animals, or the features of the earth requires learned techniques, attentiveness, and an attitude of profound respect for the created world (fig. 1.23).

Dreams and the Vision Quest

Human beings need to acquire power from the other-than-human beings if they are to be effective in the world. Liminal states of being (a dream or trance) and bordering places (shorelines that offer access to waterlands, heights of land that reach toward the sky, and crevices in rock that are channels to realms below the earth’s surface) all aid in contacts between human and nonhuman beings. Native North Americans have developed a repertoire of techniques that facilitate the crossing of boundaries between conscious and unconscious experience and between spatial zones of power. The vision quest, widely practiced throughout the continent, requires fasting, sleeplessness, and isolation—sacrifices designed to provoke the pity of other-than-human beings and to induce them to confer blessings of power. Historically, such powers were maintained with the help of visual images—the symbolic image received in a vision could be painted on a tipi, a shield (fig. 4.1), a body, or even in the pages of a book (fig. 1.24). It could be embroidered on a medicine bag or carved as a mask. Equally, of course, it was



▲ 1.23 Blake Debassige, b. 1956 (Ojibwa), *Tree of Life*, 1982. Acrylic on canvas, 120 × 240 cm. Courtesy the artist.

Native cosmologies structure space around a central axis, often pictured as a great tree that links the realms of under earth, earth, and sky. In this large painting commissioned for a Catholic spiritual center near his Manitoulin Island home, Debassige visually aligns the tree with the Christian cross, discovering in this and other Christian symbols fundamental principles shared by the two belief systems.



▲ 1.24 Black Hawk, c. 1832–c. 1889 (Sans Arc Lakota), *Dream or Vision of Himself Changed to a Destroyer and Riding a Buffalo Eagle*, 1880–81. Pencil, colored pencil, and ink on paper, 9 ½ × 15 ½ in. T0614 Gift of Eugene V. and Clare E. Thaw, Thaw Collection, Fenimore Art Museum, Cooperstown, New York, Photograph by John Bigelow Taylor, NYC.

For the Lakota and other peoples of the Great Plains, Thunder Beings are powerful supernatural creatures who appear to supplicants in vision quests. They often combine attributes of eagle, horse, and buffalo, all sacred animals. Here a horned and taloned figure rides a similarly endowed beast. Both steed and rider are covered with small dots, representing hail, and are connected to each other by lines of energy. The beast's tail forms a rainbow through which the figures travel, Black Hawk's vivid image of his vision conveys the potency of these awesome sky dwellers.

expressed through the songs and dances performed on ceremonial occasions. Today, some of these representational practices continue in the regalia worn at powwows, traditional dances, and potlatches and in more private ritual contexts.

Shamanism

All Native societies recognized that certain individuals were exceptionally receptive to visionary experience, allowing them to be in touch with powerful spirit protectors. These individuals, or shamans, could be of either sex, though they have most often been men. They could put their powers at the service of other people to heal, to guide a hunter, or for other constructive purposes. Oral history and sacred stories account for the existence of evil in the world by explaining how such powers can also be used destructively.

According to Mircea Eliade's influential formulation, shamanism has diffused over a large portion of the globe during thousands of years from a place of origin in central Asia. Shamanism is associated with a specific complex of beliefs, including the distinctive patterns of cosmological mapping discussed earlier, particularly the notion of a world axis that opens a channel of communication between zones of power. Shamans have commonly used drumming to induce trance states, and public performances involving visual and dramatic arts to relate their experiences of out-of-body travel. Distinctive dress, amulets, and masks display the images of their power beings, among which the bear is especially prominent across northern North America. A specific iconography associated with shamanism is derived from these beliefs and practices. It features such motifs as skeletal markings to represent the liminal state the shaman occupies between life and death; the marking of the joints, which are points of entry and exit for the soul; and hollowed-out or projecting eyes that signify the shaman's extra-human powers of sight (fig. 1.25).³²

One of the distinctive features of Native North American art is that shamanism and its typical iconography provide the fundamental metaphors that convey notions of power in a wide variety of contexts. Esther Pasztory has made a useful distinction between "shamanistic" societies, where the shaman is a central authority figure, and others in which individuals wielding power display "shamanic traits" but are not actually shamans. Shamanic traits, for example, mark the art and practice of Pueblo men's societies and Haudenosaunee healing societies.³³ Among Northwest Coast peoples, high-ranking individuals, whose authority is primarily political, display shamanic motifs on their ceremonial dress and masks, and the shamanistic trance is reenacted in the initiation rituals of the Hamatsa society into which members of the highest ranking families are inducted (see chapter 6).



▲ 1.25 Dorset artist, Dorset culture (Prehistoric Inuit), Canada, Shaman's tube, c. 500 CE. Ivory. Canadian Museum of History, NiHf-4:115, IMG2013-0146-0002-Dm.

Shamanic practice and shamanic art are both concerned with transformation. In this small item used in medicine rituals, the tube has a human face, but out of its head spring two walrus tusks who interlock their tusks, perhaps in struggle or in assistance.

SOCIAL PRACTICES AND THE MAKING OF ART

Although no hard line can be drawn between spiritual and social practices in Native North American art, some forms of ritual are designed to ensure the transmission of customs, laws, and traditions that ensure the cohesion

→ Pharaoh? God like?

of the community as a whole. We turn here to a brief examination of the role that the production and display of art plays in such rituals of regulation and unification.

Public Celebrations: Displaying and Transferring Power and Authority

A corollary to the importance of spiritual empowerment is the need to acknowledge and validate the acquisition of power through public forms of celebration. Throughout North America people do this through events that combine feasting, dance performances, and the lavish distribution of gifts. In the Great Lakes “eat-all” feasts were held to celebrate occasions such as a boy’s first successful hunt. Participants would attend wearing fine dress and bearing beautifully carved feast bowls and spoons. In her novel *Waterlily*, the Dakota linguist Ella Deloria recounts the year-long production of quillwork and other fine gifts to distribute at a feast held following the death of a woman of great stature in the community.³⁴ The most famous example of feasting and gift giving, however, is the Northwest Coast potlatch, held by a high-ranking family to mark transfers of wealth, power, and titles to one of its members. All these were and are occasions not only for lavish hospitality and eating but also for the production of visual art of all kinds—from masks to rich clothing, to the decoration of the site of celebration and the making of gifts to give to guests (see figs. 1.28, 6.22, and 6.23).

Ella Deloria

The Power of Personal Adornment

Lakota artist and scholar Arthur Amiotte observes that, in his culture, people have a phrase for fine ceremonial dress—*saiciye*—meaning “being adorned in proper relationship to the gods.”³⁵ Similar aesthetic principles were widely shared across Native North America. Because of the way in which European art has developed over the past few centuries, we tend to forget the importance that the body can have as a canvas for art. In Native North American traditions body decoration and clothing have been important sites of artistic expression—a tradition that is carried through into contemporary powwow dress, as captured in a work of photographic art by Jeff Thomas (fig. 1.26). The use of body painting was also widespread, and it was as important as clothing in the construction of a chosen self-image. Many early travelers recount watching Native people stop to apply face paint and other body ornamentation before entering a settlement or another Native encampment. For historical traditions, all we usually have left are written descriptions, occasional visual images, or fragments of cloth, yet these arts should be thought of as creative multimedia assemblages. Many of the most important body arts practiced at the time of contact have disappeared, suppressed by missionaries and government authorities who disapproved of what they regarded as a state of “nakedness.” Tattooing, for example, was widely practiced by Woodlands, Inuit, and Dene peoples in the early contact period as a medium for the representation of guardian spirits, for the marking of gender, and



▲ 1.26 (left) Edward Curtis, *Swallow Bird-Apsaroke*, c. 1908. Courtesy Edward S. Curtis Collection, Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, LC-USZ62-106767. (right) Jeffrey Thomas, b. 1956 (Onondaga), *Joseph Crowe-Saulteaux*, 1990 from the series *Strong Hearts*. © Jeffrey Thomas.

Jeffrey Thomas creates a “conversation” with Edward Curtis’s much-reproduced early-twentieth-century romantic portraits of Native Americans. He pairs them with his own images of contemporary Aboriginal life and powwows because, as he writes, “I believe that Curtis thought that there was potential for The North American Indian project to engage in a future dialogue with their descendants. Technology has allowed me to “rebind” Curtis’s images and bridge the void between myth and reality.”

personal beautification (fig. 1.27). Contemporary Inuit and Northwest Coast First Nations people have revived tattooing as proud marks of beauty and individual and group identity.

The treatment of the body could also signal important passages in an individual’s life. In the Great Lakes and elsewhere, people deliberately ceased to groom themselves during times of mourning; in many regions, marriages were occasions for ritualized displays of excess finery. Pueblo and Navajo people often wear their wealth: turquoise and silver necklaces, bracelets, concha belts, and rings often represented a family’s entire fortune. The Plains aesthetic of personal adornment and self-display was a highly idiosyncratic one. Men, in particular, incorporated into their clothing items they made after visionary experiences (fig. 4.1) or objects obtained in battle, as well as exotic trade materials and accessories.



▲ 1.27 Attributed to Louis Nicolas (1675–1703), *Man of the Outaouak Nation*, c. 1700. Page from the *Codex Canadensis*, 8 ½ × 13 ¼ in. Courtesy Gilcrease Museum, Tulsa, Oklahoma.

Jesuit missionary Louis Nicolas made 180 images of the plants, animals, and Aboriginal people he saw during eleven years of missionary work in New France between 1664 and 1675. In this drawing, an Odawa (Ottawa) man displays a tattooed image of the sun, signaling power acquired through visionary experience. He holds a tobacco bag in his left hand and a long calumet pipe in his right, and wears quilled head, leg, and arm bands.

“Creativity Is Our Tradition”:

Innovations and Retentions

We have borrowed this subheading from the title of a path-breaking book about contemporary Native art, for it is applicable to the entire long history of Aboriginal art.³⁶ As the next five chapters will demonstrate, for thousands of years before contact Indigenous artists of North America used materials from distant sources in their art. Later, trade goods from European sources were welcomed by Aboriginal people who responded with tremendous creativity to the new textures, colors, techniques, and objects that began to circulate after contact. Manufactured materials added new possibilities for richness and diversity of self-display. Like artists everywhere, Native artists were eager to experiment with new materials, iconographies, and techniques, and to incorporate them in their own repertoire. They were also proud to wear and use items made by outsiders. A photo taken at a Tlingit potlatch in Sitka, Alaska, in 1904 is a visual encyclopedia of the diverse materials that

Northwest Coast women were using in their art by the turn of the twentieth century (fig. 1.28). Tlingit access to all of these foreign goods through commerce in furs and fish sparked a creative explosion in women’s textile arts. Wearing the products of their cosmopolitan artistry, the ranking participants of this Northwest Coast society make an emphatic statement about their status, wealth, power, and ability to assimilate goods and ideas from both distant and neighboring worlds.³⁷

For many years Westerners looked at such images as examples of the “degeneration” or “corruption” of Native arts because of the incorporation of imagery and materials from elsewhere. All Native North American art should, however, be thought of as sets of objects that are in a perpetual dialogue with other objects and their makers. When glass beads were first introduced, for example, they were incorporated into preexisting Indigenous systems that valued light-reflective materials such as shell and quartz crystal. The new beads were similarly named with words that identified them as gifts from the spirit world. Frank Speck reported, for example, that the Innu (Naskapi) of the Labrador Peninsula termed glass beads “eyes of the *manito*,” or spirit.³⁸ Numerous other examples will be discussed in this book.

When the explorer Prince Maximilian of Wied (1781–1867) and the artist Karl Bodmer traveled up the Missouri River in 1833 and 1834, they explored lands on the Northern Plains that very few non-Indians had seen. Yet long-distance trade goods were already an accepted part of Mandan and Blackfeet societies. In 1738, a French trader saw evidence of



◀ 1.28 Photo of Tlingit Indians in ceremonial finery at a potlatch, Sitka, Alaska, December 9, 1904. Image #328740, American Museum of Natural History, Library.

Wearing Chilkat blankets woven by Tlingit women, trade cloth cloaks, and ermine-skin coats modeled on Russian and American military officers' garments, the people pictured here show how the creative transformation of diverse goods produced a striking visual display of wealth and cosmopolitanism. Much of the floral beadwork was learned from Northern Athapaskan women upriver. Most of the faces are stamped and painted with ephemeral tattoo-like images.

a lively exchange between the sedentary Mandan in their villages on the river and other Indigenous groups. This trade included goods of European manufacture acquired from French and British traders in New France, as Canada was then called. At Fort McKenzie in August 1833, Prince Maximilian was surely surprised when high-ranking Blackfeet chiefs distributed gifts to his party that included a British officer's scarlet coat given to the Blackfeet in a previous intercultural encounter. In his diaries, the Prince recorded his distress at seeing the chiefs wearing such overcoats and European hats as finery.³⁹ Bodmer deliberately omitted any such "tainted" influence from his portraits of the Mandan and Blackfeet, yet he unwittingly painted one man wearing a Navajo trade blanket as well as a neck pendant of trade silver, both of which were prized by Indians across the Plains (figs. 1.29 and 2.23). In their fascination with new types of cloth and styles of clothing, Native North Americans demonstrated the same human interest in new ideas about dress as did French enthusiasts for imported Japanese and Chinese wares during the eighteenth century, or the Victorians for textiles from India and other distant places in the nineteenth century.



▲ **1.29** Karl Bodmer, 1809–93, *Kiasax (Bear on the Left), Piegan Blackfoot Man*, 1833. Watercolor on paper, 32.1 × 24.1 cm. Joslyn Art Museum, Omaha, Nebraska, Gift of the Enron Art Foundation, 1986.49.395.

Swiss watercolorist Karl Bodmer was one of several nineteenth-century artists, including George Catlin, Paul Kane, and Rudolf Kurz, whose pictures of traditional Indian life on the Great Plains were widely exhibited and reproduced, providing a potent visual image of “Indianness” that remains paradigmatic.

All across Indigenous America, people have long enhanced their status not only through personal displays of trade goods but also by incorporating new and exotic motifs and images. Chumash basketmakers on the West Coast incorporated into their coiled baskets motifs from Spanish heraldry (fig. 4.28). Northern Plains beadworkers, in the decades after 1880, created marvelous hybrid objects, as they appropriated the American flag and alphabetic inscriptions into their beadwork, sometimes beading valises, purses, bible covers, and lace-up shoes (fig. 1.30). The floral designs that are ubiquitous in European and American decorative art were even more powerfully influential in the development of new Native iconographies. Floral designs were highly regarded during the nineteenth century when assimilationist policies discouraged the continuing use of motifs associated with “pagan” spirituality. Thus, floral imagery often replaced older traditions (fig. 1.31).

Changes in personal adornment continued throughout the twentieth century, as artists at powwows and regional art fairs adopted pan-Indian styles of dress with a truly cosmopolitan artistic vocabulary. Choctaw artist Marcus Amerman

► **1.30** Ida Claymore, dates unknown (Lakota), Fort Yates, North Dakota, Beaded Suitcase, c. 1900. Beads, hide, metal, oilcloth, thread, 17 × 10.5 × 10 in. Minneapolis Institute of Arts, Accession number: 2010.121, The Robert J. Ulrich Works of Art Purchase Fund.

While some hybrid objects were made as commodities for the tourist market, this leather bag was meticulously beaded by the artist and kept within the family until the death of its last Native owner, Mary Anne Victoria Claymore. On the front of the bag the artist signed her name in beads above a camp scene that is familiar from late-nineteenth-century Plains ledger book drawings.



(b. 1959) uses the traditional medium of beadwork in a near-photographic realist style. In pendants and bracelets as well as pictorial panels, he draws upon sources ranging from nineteenth-century photographs of Indians to icons of global music culture, such as a *Rolling Stone* magazine cover of pop singer Janet Jackson.⁴⁰

Although such contemporary artists challenge the preconceptions of authenticity and tradition common in much of the older literature on Native arts, many collectors continue to seek the oldest or the most pristine examples of an artifact type and to celebrate those that show no evidence of contact with non-Native materials or methods of manufacture. As Jonathan King has pointed out, the museum collections on which such judgments depend were made between about 1860 and 1930, and thus “the standards by which traditionalism in Indian art is judged depend upon these collections for purposes of definition and comparison.”⁴¹ Paradoxically, of course, these were years of tremendous change and upheaval in Native North American societies, and much of the art collected in the West and North during these years (like that collected during the previous century in the eastern half of the continent) reflects that upheaval. These problems in defining authenticity will be discussed further in subsequent chapters.

Gender and the Making of Art

In almost every traditional society in the world, distinctions are drawn between arts that are under the purview of men and those in the realm of women. Native North America is no exception. In some regions, men’s arts tended to be representational, while women’s were abstract. Usually, carving was a male prerogative, while women controlled arts associated with clay, fiber, and basketry. Among some Pueblo peoples in New Mexico, for example, only women excavated sacred clay from the body of mother earth and shaped this living material into pottery (see chapter 2). On the Great Plains, men traditionally carved ritual pipes out of catlinite—said to be the blood of sacred buffaloes which had seeped into the earth and hardened to stone as a gift to humans—while women embroidered with porcupine quills in a method taught to them by female supernaturals (see chapter 4).

It is important to remember that in the Native worldview, male and female endeavors are complementary parts of a whole, each necessary to the existence of the other. A Plains woman’s quillwork might serve as fulfillment of a sacred vow. When joined with a man’s figurative painting, both gave efficacy to a warrior’s shirt. In a similar way, Innu women of Arctic Quebec and Newfoundland painted geometric designs on the caribou-skin coats worn by male hunters, for “animals prefer to be killed by hunters whose clothing is decorated with designs”⁴² (fig. 5.3).



▲ 1.31 Potawatomi artist, Men’s Leggings, c. 1885. Wool, cotton, silk, sequins, glass beads, 74.3 × 20.3 cm. Detroit Institute of Arts, Courtesy Bridgeman Art Library International.

The floral motifs that in the nineteenth century replaced earlier geometric and figurative designs in Woodlands art continued to express beliefs in the spiritual powers that inform the natural world. The prominence of berries (an important ceremonial food), the symmetrical four-part structures of some flowers, and the clarity with which the inner structures of leaves are depicted are clues to the visionary inspiration behind much women’s art.

Value judgments based on a Eurocentric, patriarchal approach to art history color much of the writing on Native art before 1970. Male arts were often valorized as sacred and individualistic, growing out of a personal visionary experience, while women's arts—such as weaving, basketry, and beadwork—were characterized as quotidian, secular “craft.” Too often, items made by women and used in daily life—coiled baskets, beaded moccasins, woven blankets—were not seen to be connected to spiritual or political power, while men's carvings or paintings were. This reflects the bias of the Western observer on two levels. European observers tended to privilege the art associated with political, military, and ceremonial life most similar to their own and which seemed to them attributable to Native men. European concepts of art, furthermore, have been grounded in the assumption that artists take inert raw materials and make them into meaningful human creations. Finally, the European classification divides art forms into separate realms of the sacred and the secular. These concepts are alien to Native worldviews which are founded on the notion that all artistic creation involves the utilization of materials in which power may reside, including wood, stones, grasses, and pigments. When human beings undertake to transform these powerful materials for another purpose, they engage in relationships of reciprocity with nonhuman powers. This is no less true of a woman gathering sweet grass for a basket than for a man taking wood for a mask from a living tree.

Ethnographic evidence, when closely scrutinized, makes it clear that both male and female artists gain inspiration for their work in dreams and visions. Interviewing renowned Ojibwe beadworker Maggie Wilson in the 1930s, anthropologist Ruth Landes reported that she “devotes herself incessantly to this form of embroidery, and receives visions in connection with it, just as a man would receive visions in connection with hunting, divining, or war” (fig. 1.31).⁴³ In women's textile arts of the Great Lakes region there are, thus, intimate connections among perfection in a skill, the conceptualization of design, and the possession of extrahuman powers. Outstanding talents and achievements are understood to be evidence of extraordinary power. As discussed in chapter 2, a finely woven Navajo blanket, made by a woman, projects *hozho* (beauty and harmony) into the world as does a finely constructed sandpainting made by a male healer (figs. 2.21 and 2.23).

While gender roles may seem to have been strictly defined in pre-twentieth-century Native life and art, they could also be transgressed under certain conditions. In general, men painted the narrative or visionary scenes on Plains tipis and kept the historical records or winter counts. Yet individual circumstances existed where women transgressed these boundaries—one Blackfoot woman painted her husband's war experiences on his tipi because she was such a good artist, and several Southern Plains women were entrusted with the keeping of a pictorial calendar count by a male relative. In Native North American societies, artistic and technical knowledge is a form of property or privilege, which can be transferred from one individual to another as a gift or through a financial transaction. If an uncle sees fit to bestow such property on his niece, her rights of ownership abrogate the “rules” of gender that usually define artistic practice. Power associated with shamanism can transcend gender rules, too. Transsexuals commonly practiced the art of the “other” gender. A famous example of this was the Zuni potter We'wha

(1849–96), who was born a man but by inclination was a woman, both in terms of dress and artistry.⁴⁴

Shamans sometimes have physical characteristics that distinguish them from others. A famous Navajo medicine man, Hosteen Klah (1867–1937), practiced both the male art of sandpainting and the female art of weaving, having great powers in both realms. Klah was both left-handed and a hermaphrodite. In Navajo thought, a *nádleehí*—one who combines the physical attributes and/or talents of both genders—is a person honored by the gods. Klah did not attend school but apprenticed with a succession of ritual experts. The great aptitude for memorization he demonstrated from childhood allowed him to learn the arduous visual and aural details for the necessary completion of ceremonies that could last many nights. It was said that, by age ten, he was able to choreograph all the complex components of the Hail Chant learned from his uncle.⁴⁵

As a young man, Klah also showed interest in both male and female realms, and mastered the female arts of spinning, carding, and weaving wool. He built his own looms on a much larger scale than was customary for weaving an ordinary Navajo blanket or rug (fig. 2.20). He demonstrated weaving at the World Columbian Exposition in Chicago in 1892–3 and sandpainting at the Century of Progress International Exposition in Chicago in 1934. Klah was an expert weaver; in 1919, he was among the first to make textiles as large as ten square feet depicting the supernaturals ordinarily seen only in ephemeral sandpaintings (fig. 2.21). The reproduction of such designs was considered dangerous since the ritual process requires that the paintings made of crushed minerals and pollens be destroyed as part of the ceremony. But Hosteen Klah flourished both as a healer and a weaver and taught his nieces to weave sandpainting designs with no ill effects befalling any of them. His work is a good example of the way in which a superior artist who has spiritual powers can transgress the gender roles of his culture, transforming the arts of that culture in the process.

In most regions, gender roles in art production have relaxed considerably within the last fifty years. There are male potters in the Southwest, female wood-carvers on the Northwest coast, and male beadworkers in many regions. Contemporary artists freely take inspiration from both male and female realms in style, materials, and iconography. In Colleen Cutschall's series of paintings *Voice in the Blood*, the tiny hatchings and densely dotted patterns of her brushwork are a homage to the quillwork and beadwork patterns of her female ancestors. Like beadwork artist Ida Claymore a century ago (fig. 1.30), Cutschall draws upon the pictorial narratives found in male graphic arts on the Great Plains (see chapter 4).⁴⁶ Contemporary artists who are gay or transgendered draw strength from the artists of the past such as We'wha and Klah, who were able to transgress gender norms. Kent Monkman draws both on these models and on his comprehensive knowledge of Western art history to intervene in historical settler representations of Native North Americans (see Artist in Focus box). His paintings and ambitious multimedia works—which we discuss further in chapter 8—use gender, sexuality, and eroticism as sites for provocative, tricksterish reversals of the colonial power relations we have discussed in this chapter and which continue to inform many aspects of contemporary visual culture.

ARTIST IN FOCUS

Kent Monkman—Repainting Art's Histories

Contemporary Aboriginal artists have played a central role in revising the way that the history of art is told. This grand project lies at the heart of Cree artist Kent Monkman's work, which engages with historical narrative and conventions of gender and sexuality on multiple levels. With a knife-sharp critical edge and devastating accuracy, Monkman's art disassembles the paralyzing stereotypes that have frozen Native North Americans into romantic noble savages with no place in the modern world. In his paintings, videos, and installations, the conquering settler becomes the conquered, the eroticized other becomes the sexual exploiter, and high art is undercut by high camp.

Monkman came to prominence during the 1990s through a series of pictures that "repaint" the romantic depictions of Indian life of nineteenth-century artists such as Albert Bierstadt, George Catlin, Paul Kane, and the artists of the Hudson River School. In keeping with his early training as an illustrator and his work as a set and costume designer for Toronto's Native Earth Performing Arts, the artist shows us what it would mean to switch roles on the stage of history that has been constructed in the Western imagination by museums, textbooks, and

movies. In his work across all media, Monkman subverts the messages of white male dominance conveyed by historical works of art by inserting white men into the positions usually occupied by Indians. Eroticized, seduced, and objectified, they become passive and disempowered. So great is Monkman's mastery of the art historical canon, so skillfully are the paintings executed, and so inventive is his imagination that even viewers who know what to expect are taken by surprise. The impact is visceral, forcing viewers to experience how colonial oppression works to damage its victims' sense of self.

Not surprisingly, Monkman has engaged most extensively with artists whose work has been particularly influential in fixing stereotypes, including painter George Catlin (1796–1872) and photographer Edward S. Curtis (1868–1952). He has focused on Catlin's activities as a showman who employed a troupe of Aboriginal dancers to perform before European audiences during the 1840s as an enhancement to the public exhibition of his traveling "Indian Gallery." Monkman repaints a well-known self-portrait in which Catlin proudly depicted himself painting Indian portraits at his easel, portraying himself in the guise of his alter ego, Miss Chief Eagle Testickle, who adopts the



▲ 1.32 Kent Monkman, b. 1965 (Cree), *Artist and Model*, 2003. Acrylic on canvas, 20 × 24 in. Courtesy the artist.

camp Indian persona of late twentieth-century singer and pop star Cher (fig. 1.32). Miss Chief's punning first names indicate that she is up to no good, but, like the Amerindian tricksters Coyote and Raven (see chapter 8, p. 297), Miss Chief offers serious lessons laced with humor. Rather than an easel with stretched canvas, she paints in pictographic style on a birchbark scroll that rests on the kind of tripod used by Plains warriors to display their shields. Her subject is a modern-day Saint Sebastian or a victim of Cupid, a naked and buff white man wounded by arrows shot from Miss Chief's quiver. Monkman/Miss Chief has captured him as an artist captures a subject, pinning him to the tree, like an insect pinned for examination in a nineteenth-century

scientist's laboratory. And what was the crime of this figure, clad only in cowboy boots and hat? He had tried to capture Miss Chief photographically with his folding box camera, which lies overturned on the ground.

As Kiowa scholar Tina Majkowski has observed, Monkman's particular strength as a virtuoso painter (a far better painter than Catlin, in fact) is that he critiques nineteenth-century idyllic landscapes and portraits of Indians by working from within the tradition he critiques.⁴⁷ While some artists reject imagery and genres that reflect colonialism, others such as Monkman rework the offending imagery. Rather than disavowing it, he turns the tables on a colonialist narrative.