

CREATING AN OSAGE FUTURE: ART, RESISTANCE, AND SELF-REPRESENTATION

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## ABSTRACT

Jami C. Powell: *Creating an Osage Future: Art, Resistance, and Self-Representation*  
(Under the direction of Jean Dennison and Rudolf Colloredo Mansfeld)

*Creating an Osage Future: Art, Resistance, and Self-Representation*, examines the ways Osage citizens—and particularly artists—engage with mainstream audiences in museums and other spaces in order to negotiate, manipulate, subvert, and sometimes sustain static notions of Indigeneity. This project interrogates some of the tactics Osage and other American Indian artists are using to imagine a stronger future, as well as the strategies mainstream museums are using to build and sustain more equitable and mutually beneficial relationships between their institutions and Indigenous communities.

In addition to object-centered ethnographic research with contemporary Osage artists and Osage citizens and collections-based museum research at various museums, this dissertation is informed by three recent exhibitions featuring the work of Osage artists at the Denver Art Museum, the Field Museum of Natural History, and the Sam Noble Museum at the University of Oklahoma. Drawing on methodologies of humor, autoethnography, and collaborative knowledge-production, this project strives to disrupt the hierarchal structures within academia and museums, opening space for Indigenous and aesthetic knowledges. Although this research is grounded in an analysis of the Osage Nation, its focus on the intersection of art and self-determination contributes to imperative and timely interdisciplinary discussions about participatory research, decolonization, Indigenous knowledge production, and museum representations with which Indigenous communities across the globe are currently struggling.

For my Grandma Georgeann whose work inspired  
my research and whose legacy I aspire to continue.

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Even though Jean left UNC after I finished my qualifying exams, she remained my advisor and chair throughout the process. From my first visit to UNC, which included an amazing conversation about Osage ribbon work and constitutional reform, I knew I wanted to work with Jean. I continued to learn from her throughout my coursework and our weekly—and eventually monthly—check-ins. The fact that I had an Osage anthropologist as my PhD advisor is still kind of mind boggling. In fact, when I defended my MA thesis at UNC, I had a committee of all American Indian women with Jean, Jenny (Kiowa), and Valerie (Choctaw). Although we never looked it up, we were certain it was a first for UNC. Once again, while this may seem minor, it is an important means through which we are creating space for Indigenous knowledge in academia.

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## PREFACE

### **Intersectionality, activism, and allyship**

I grew up knowing and understanding that racism was wrong. Still, I witnessed a number of my friends' experiences with prejudice and racism. I have always passed for White, and although I have always identified as Osage, I have certainly benefitted from White privilege.<sup>1</sup> When I was a kid, my father was in the Navy. We lived in a number of places and I was always surrounded by lots of people from different racial and ethnic backgrounds. That being said, in my experience, a majority of the folks who are in the military—either directly or through marriage—could be described as somewhere between moderate and extremely conservative in terms of political and social “values.” Even while we lived away from home, we would often spend summers in Oklahoma. Then, when I was in junior high, my family moved to Lawrence, Kansas. The formative years of my childhood were spent in red states—the Bible belt, specifically—where there was not a lot of intersectional diversity.

In fact, as I use the term intersectional, I realize this is not a concept I was introduced to until I was a graduate student. Because I was raised within fairly conservative communities, I was simply not exposed to other possibilities. My expectations for the ways people were supposed to be, and look, and act, were extremely limited. In fact, when my “friends” would say things to me like, “you’re not a real Indian, you’re way too smart,” I would chuckle uncomfortably and take the “compliment.” Over the past decade, my understandings about diversity and its importance in our society have shifted dramatically. Through my professional and interpersonal experiences with folks from different

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<sup>1</sup> For an important, thoughtful, and critical interrogation of this issue, see Mays, “The Souls of White-Indians: A Letter to My White Indian Friend.”

backgrounds, my teaching, my conversations with students, and my own work, I have learned a lot about the difficulty and complexity of structural oppression in its various forms. This work is often difficult, and as a White-passing, hetero-cis female, it can be uncomfortable to address these issues and the ways I benefit from the systemic, historical, ongoing, and often unmarked oppression of other groups of people.

I recently began teaching at Tufts University, a private school in New England that is known for its civically-engaged students. On our first day of class, I had each of the students take name tags and write their names as well as their preferred pronouns on them. I wanted to visualize their names and pronouns, so it would be easier for me to remember both. We skimmed through the majority of the syllabus, but spent several minutes talking about the section titled, “Creating a Climate of Diversity and Inclusion.” As a student, I have experienced what it is like to be in a classroom with someone speaking “as an expert” about the savagery, primitivism, and disappearance of Indigenous peoples and practices. These are the narratives that continue to motivate me to this day and the reason I strive to create an environment where all of my students from multiple and diverse backgrounds and experiences feel comfortable asking tough questions, considering various perspectives, and challenging the status quo. In my class, I also ask my students to recognize that many of us are still in the process of learning about diverse perspectives and identities—myself included—and if something was said in class that makes them uncomfortable to come and talk with me about it.

About halfway through the semester, I got an email from a student about the fact that I had been using the incorrect pronouns with some of their peers. Through my unintentional misgendering of these students, I was failing to fully recognize their humanity and I was making their presence and ability to learn in my class more difficult. As I read the email, I felt awful, particularly because I had experienced similar feelings when I was an undergraduate. I immediately responded to the student

and thanked them for approaching me. In an absurd kind of way, I was pleased my student felt as if they could approach me with this information. On the other hand, I was embarrassed and concerned about how to move forward. After talking with one of my colleagues—who mentioned she often struggled with using the appropriate pronouns—I was relieved that I was not the only instructor who was having difficulty with shifting these embodied practices.

The following week, I apologized to my class and asked them to help me as I continue to work on using they series pronouns as well as people’s names more consistently. I explained that as someone who had grown up where and when I had, my use of binary gender pronouns is deeply embedded in the way I speak and think. I also explained that I am committed to doing better and learning more, and that I would rely on their knowledge and experiences to help me. Ultimately, this was an important lesson for all of us about the value in disrupting hierarchical power relations and being a good ally. Although this was a difficult moment for me on a personal and professional level, it was also a really transformative experience that helped me to understand how hard it can be to shift our way of looking at and living in the world. Our upbringings and experiences, the places we live and visit, the people we interact with, and the communities we are a part of shape and mediate everything we do.

My dissertation research with Indigenous artists and community members, other scholars and museum professionals—and particularly my conversations with Osage elders—have had a major impact on the way I see activism within broader movements for social justice. When I began my graduate studies, I had an unnerving sense of urgency about the work ahead of us. Some days, I still fight that feeling. However, my conversations with people in communities and at institutions, along with my research on activism in art as part of an ongoing legacy of Indigenous resistance, have made me think more deeply about the multitude of strategies and perspectives that are necessary for this work. This project has taught me a lot of things, but I think the most important lessons I learned were

the importance of slowing down—both in the ways we react to things and the pace we make ourselves work—and of engaging with people with generosity.

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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

When I arrived at the Field Museum for my first day as a research intern, I was nervous. ~~Actually, more than nervous, I was sweaty and gross. I was six months pregnant, and had walked almost a mile in 95-degree weather from the bus stop. Luckily, I was there early enough to go to the restroom and gather myself before meeting with the human resources department. As I walked into the bathroom, I saw a display of American Indian items arranged to advertise the kinds of items that could be purchased in the Museum's gift shop. Shocked by the absurdity of this moment, I found myself bent over laughing so hard I made myself snort. Another woman was washing her hands and seemed quite confused about what had induced my hysteria. Luckily, I had reached the point in my pregnancy where I had a free pass to laugh or cry whenever I wanted without people thinking too much of it—one of the few perks of pregnancy, in my opinion.~~

After the woman left, I got out my phone to take a picture. As I snapped the photo, a wave of emotions hit me and I began questioning my presence at the Museum, and a host of other issues: *What am I doing here? How can I expect an institution with dreamcatchers in a bathroom display case to understand the importance of representing Indigenous peoples in more ethical ways? Why am I laughing? Should I be upset? Is this real life?*

Uncertain about whether or not I should say something, I consulted an American Indian artist friend who happens to run an art gallery back in Oklahoma. Upon sending them the photo and explaining my location, they responded with the following text: “Well, if there was ever a place for shit, it's in the bathroom... which is why I always get a little offended when I find out people have hung my art in the bathroom. LOL. That weaving is nice though, but those Katsinas look pretty touristy. It's

hard to tell from this picture, and are those dream catchers in the top?”<sup>1</sup> Confused about what to do, but excited about the possibility to title a chapter of my dissertation, “The Commodification of Culture,” I continued along with my first day without mention.



Figures 1.1-1.2. Bathroom display case at Field Museum. Photo by author.

After filling out paperwork and getting my badge I received a brief tour of the massive building. As we walked into Stanley Field Hall, I felt a sense of excitement and accomplishment. I had dreamed about working at the Field Museum as a kid, and here I was. I looked up in awe at the incredible neoclassical elements of the building, and a spot of red caught my eye. As we walked closer, I began to recognize the profile of the Chicago NHL mascot, which was on a flag, hanging from the mouth of a pterodactyl. When I asked why in the world they would display something like that in the Museum, I received a response about the Chicago NHL team’s Stanley Cup victory the month before my arrival. My tour-guide informed me that this was something they did to support local sports teams, and that the

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<sup>1</sup> Personal communication; see also “Chicago Brachiosaurus Will Not Wear Blackhawks Jersey This Year.”

Museum's brachiosaurus had, in previous years, sported a giant jersey. Unfortunately, they explained, the jersey had been damaged and they were not able to use it this year.



Fig. 1.3. Pterodactyl with Chicago NHL team flag and baby statue wearing jersey in Stanley Field Hall. Photo by author.



Fig. 1.4. Brachiosaurus on west side of Field Museum wearing Chicago NHL team jersey. Photo by author.

When I again asked why an institution would endorse the use of a mascot that was so highly contested and disparaging, my guide seemed confused about why anyone would be offended. They went on to comment that if a Red Wings fan came into the museum and was offended by an institutional display of support for their local community and its sports teams, that would be ridiculous. Clearly, this person did not comprehend my question or the broader issues at stake with the prominent display of this type of image within the space of such a renowned institution. ~~Although, I guess dinosaurs did eat Indians, and that's how we went extinct. Yes, it's a stretch, but~~ it also illuminates the problematic aspects of these kinds of representations within museums.

Once again, I took a deep breath and endeavored to continue my day with a positive outlook on the work that was ahead of me. A bit later, I met with my supervisor to see my workspace and to chat about my research plans for the summer. As we headed down the long, dimly lit hallway, passing the Museum's library, I could smell something awful. I asked what I was smelling, and she explained that we had to pass by the ornithology department to get to the anthropology department. While she had gotten used to the smell over time, ~~my heightened olfactory perception — one of the worst aspects of pregnancy, in my opinion —~~ made me incredibly wary of my surroundings, and frankly, nauseous. We walked further down, and I was struck by a display of beautifully artistic pictures of taxidermy bird specimens (fig. 1.5). As we passed a corridor, there was another set of "artistic" photographs. However, these weren't bird specimens: they were Edward Curtis portraits of American Indians (fig. 1.6). I couldn't help but think about the connection of the dead birds and dead Indians I was seeing within the broader context of The Field Museum and the collection of American Indians and American Indian objects as specimens.



Fig. 1.5. Photographs of ornithology specimens in Staff Only area of Field Museum. Photo by author.



Fig. 1.6: Edward Curtis photographs in Staff Only area of Field Museum. Photo by author.

The images I confronted on my first day at the Field Museum are symbolic of the myriad microaggressions American Indian peoples face in our daily lives, and do not exist at The Field Museum alone. These experiences, and my reflections on them, have made me think more deeply about the co-constitutive nature of pop-culture (mis)representations and the display of American Indian “cultures” in museums and other well-respected educational institutions. The power relations embodied within these images are deeply entangled and omnipresent within many of the spaces we occupy each day. These are the kinds of visual representations that American Indian children—and everyone else—see every single day. For Indian kids, these images limit the possibilities and opportunities they see in their futures.<sup>2</sup> In fact, there is scientific research confirming the damaging effects of some of these images.<sup>3</sup> Ultimately, these images work to dehumanize American Indian peoples, which makes it easier for people to dismiss our problems, for the government to break our treaties, and for courts to erode our sovereignty.

The debate around the use of American Indian mascots provides a well-known and timely example of how popular media representations work to marginalize American Indian peoples and how Indian peoples continue to push back and fight for the right to represent ourselves. Popular representations are all too often constructed by non-Indians in ways that do not reflect the multiplicity and complexity of our experiences. Movie and television characters like Pocahontas and Tonto, mascots like Chief Wahoo, and hyper-sexualized Indian princess costumes circulate in the lives of mainstream Americans more ubiquitously than representations created by Indian people themselves. Even still, when Indian-made objects, images, and narratives are circulated to mainstream audiences, they are often mediated by non-Indian curators or editors. These representations define what it means to be an Indian within mainstream American society and limit

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<sup>2</sup> Kaphar, “Can Art Amend History?”

<sup>3</sup> Fryberg et al., “Of Warrior Chiefs and Indian Princesses.”

possibilities for contemporary Indian people to assert their rights or to imagine their own futures. While it is important to critically engage with the various processes that contribute to the marginalization and elimination of American Indians, it is even more important to examine the ways American Indians have resisted, manipulated, upheld, and shifted these representations.

This dissertation project examines these acts of resistance—and in particular, acts of resistance that employ artistic expression as a tool of creative self-representation—and the ways they operate within broader movements for decolonization and self-determination. Focusing on Osage artists and the interventions they are making within three mainstream museums as well as within mainstream media and public spaces, this project interrogates the ways that some artists are creating space for Osages and other American Indians to imagine stronger futures. I use colonial entanglement as a frame to ground my analysis and to show how Osage artists have appropriated “the colonizers’ tools” and reimagined them “as statements of empowerment” for building and strengthening an Osage future.<sup>4</sup> Colonial entanglement disrupts the binary of colonizer and colonized and allows for a discussion of the complex and dynamic power relations that are interwoven into issues of Indigenous self-representation, museum spaces, popular media, and the ways Osage art and artists are working through and within myriad entanglements to shift (mis)representations.

In chapter two, “Aesthetics and ambiguity: The ongoing entanglements of Osage ribbon work” I trace the importance of ribbon work and its use within Osage social practices as well as the ways it is used as a visual language to express localized Osage knowledge and values. Ribbon work—itsself and as metaphor for colonial entanglement—is the thread that is woven throughout this dissertation and throughout the works of many contemporary Osage artists. I also explore how ribbon work emerged as a unique Osage practice through a series of historical, political, social, and

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<sup>4</sup> Rickard, “Uncovering/Recovering: Indigenous Artists in California,” 159; Dennison, *Colonial Entanglement*.

economic processes. The conversations about ribbon work within this chapter traverse geographic boundaries, but the main research site within this chapter is the Denver Art Museum (DAM). Here, I examine the ways that the formation of DAM collections was entangled with the non-Indian hobbyist movement of the mid-twentieth century, and how the institution has built a legacy of working with American Indian communities and artists. The entanglements of curators, non-Indian hobbyists, Osages, and ribbon work culminate in the co-curated exhibition, *Why We Dance*, which is reviewed. Through an analysis of research conducted in preparation for this exhibit, this chapter demonstrates how art and object-centered ethnographic interviews within museum collections can help inform future material culture research and create more equitable relationships between museums and descendant communities.

Above all, the second chapter of this dissertation is about the complex web of colonial entanglements that are interwoven throughout a great deal of Osage—as well as other American Indian—art and material culture, collecting, and exhibition. One of the most complex entanglements explored in this dissertation is the relationships between non-Indian hobbyists and some Osages over the past sixty years. Like all communities, non-Indian hobbyist cannot be described as a homogenous group without diversity and multiplicity. In order to better understand the spectrum of non-Indian hobbyists, as well as the possibilities and limitations of their practices, this chapter examines more deeply the relationships Osage ribbon worker—and my grandma—Georgeann Robinson formed with hobbyists and what I call her methodology of generosity, a legacy that I wish to continue through this and my future work.

While chapter two examines entanglements through material culture, chapter three, “A pillar of ‘The Field’: institutional entanglements and future possibilities” examines the entanglements with a particular focus on an institution—The Field Museum of Natural History. This chapter recognizes the awesome power of mainstream museums, and natural history museums in particular, to engage

audiences and shape the ways we see our world and the peoples in it. As one of the largest and most popular natural history museums in the U.S., it has the power to shape mainstream expectations of Indigenous peoples. However, this institution also has a complicated history that is entangled with the founding of anthropology and the ethically questionable practices of collecting objects and categorizing humans that characterized that era. Although a number of American Indians were implicated and active in various ways through these processes, this chapter examines the entanglements with a particular focus on the Osage Nation. Even still, this involves a conversation about the 1893 Chicago World's Fair, the 1904 Louisiana Purchase Exposition, George Amos Dorsey, and social evolutionary theory.

After laying the groundwork for understanding the institutional entanglements, with which the local urban-American Indian community and many other Indian peoples are familiar, I provide a walkthrough of the American Indian Cultures exhibition space, "Hall 8." This walk through is informed by a number of conversations with Chicago-based Indian folks as well as published critiques of this space. Drawing on my work identifying new acquisitions for the Field Museum's collections as well as a series of temporary exhibitions with contemporary artists Bunky Echo-Hawk, Rhonda Holybear, and Chris Pappan, I suggest how contemporary art can and should inform the reinstallation of Hall 8, which was announced in 2018.

Shifting from an institutional exploration of entanglements, chapter four, "'Generosity, not rocket science': long-term community engagement at the Sam Noble Museum," examines academic and community-based work of anthropologist Daniel Swan. Swan is the Curator of Ethnology at the Sam Noble Museum of Natural History in Norman, Oklahoma, and his work with the Osage Nation began in the 1980s. In this chapter, I explore the personal entanglements that impact scholarly research as something that can be used in productive ways through Swan's involvement with the non-Indian hobbyist movement and how his unique perspective informs his work. This chapter

examines two recent projects which Swan co-curated with Osages: *A Giving Heritage: Wedding Clothes and the Osage Community*, a traveling show that opened in 2017, and *Fluent Generations: The Art of Anita, Tom, and Yatika Fields*, a contemporary art show that opened in 2018. Taking a closer look at the creative acts of self-representation curated by Osage ceramicist Anita Fields, her husband, Creek and Cherokee photographer Tom, and their son, painter and muralist Yatika, *Fluent Generations* reveals possibilities for thinking about art as activism and shifts expectations about what kinds of exhibitions belong in natural history museums.

As these chapters will show, museum representations work to uphold, explore, and disrupt the kinds of images of American Indians that are prevalent within mainstream society. In many ways, these images are co-constitutive and inform one another in interesting ways. With that in mind, chapter 5 examines the work of Osage artists who are working within mainstream media, the art market, and public spaces. Beginning with an analysis of Ryan Red Corn's activist performance art and graphic design, this chapter interrogates how Red Corn and other artists are (re)appropriating media (mis)representations as tools for self-representation. This chapter also examines the work of Addie Roanhorse, a painter and mixed media artist as well as the graphic designer for the Osage Nation, and interrogates the entanglements of her art practice and professional position. Norman Akers' recent mural explores the role of public art within ancestral Osage territory and his use of subversion as a means to engage the public in conversation. Finally, this chapter returns to ribbon work and my ongoing project with the Osage Nation to document this important practice within the Osage Nation past, present, and future.

### **On Positionality, Profanity, and Humor**

As a citizen of the Osage Nation and an anthropologist, my ability to conduct research with and within my own community and family is built upon the foundation established by the Indigenous

scholars who have come before me.<sup>5</sup> The growing body of Indigenous scholarship, and my own conversations with some of these scholars about positionality, commitment, and false notions of objectivity have given me the confidence to pursue my research project without hesitation. In 2012, I was fortunate enough to have lunch with anthropologist K. Tsianina Lomawaima, a descendant of the Muscogee (Creek) Nation. Her book *They Called It Prairie Light: The Story of Chilocco Indian School* examines the creativity, adaptability, and resistance of American Indian children at this school. The reminiscences, thoughts, and memories of her own father, Curtis Carr, who attended Chilocco in the 1920s and 1930s, anchor her narrative. During our conversation, I spoke with her about whether or not a scholar can be "too close" to a research project. She told me that throughout her career, and especially during her research on the Indian school her father attended, she was approached by many people who thought she was "too close" to her research. She told me that there is nothing wrong with Indian people studying their own communities and nations, and made the following comment that has stayed with me throughout this project: "Michel Foucault is a white French Man, studying white French men. People don't question his research, so don't let them question yours."<sup>6</sup> This type of feedback and encouragement, which I have also received from various Indigenous mentors and colleagues at UNC and beyond, has been incredibly helpful throughout my research.

In *Decolonizing Methodologies*, Maori scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith concludes that in order for an Indigenous scholar to conduct research on issues that are important within their own communities, they must first situate their own perspective.<sup>7</sup> Osage scholar Robert Warrior has talked

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<sup>5</sup> See Medicine, Learning to be an Anthropologist and Remaining Native; Ramirez, Native Hubs: culture, community, and belonging in Silicon Valley and beyond and "Henry Roe Cloud: A Granddaughter's Native Feminist Biographical Account"; Lomawaima, *They called it Prairie Light: the story of Chilocco Indian School*; Lambert, *Choctaw Nation: A Story of American Indian Resurgence*; Dennison, *Colonial Entanglement: Constituting a Twenty-first-century Osage Nation*; Deloria, *Playing Indian, Indians in Unexpected Places*, and "Thinking about Self in a Family Way." In 2009, a special issue of *American Indian Quarterly* (vol. 33, no. 4) focused on "Working from Home in American Indian History," which also speaks to these issues.

<sup>6</sup> Personal communication, November 6, 2012.

<sup>7</sup> Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies*, 12.

about the ways these perspectives shape “the many versions of Indigenous studies.”<sup>8</sup> For him, this strategy allows him “to clearly and ambitiously define the scholarly tasks that drive my research, thinking, and writing... [to] establish a basis for addressing the many tensions that typically confront those of us working in Native and Indigenous studies.”<sup>9</sup> Following Smith, Warrior, and others, I would like to situate my perspective as an Osage citizen, nationalist, mother, teacher, and novice ribbon-worker who believes in the incredible potential of the Osage Nation and its citizens.

Throughout the text, I have also included personal narratives that demonstrate how my own experiences have influenced this research in various ways. In *Blood Politics: Race, Culture, and Identity in the Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma*, anthropologist Circe Sturm examines the social and political constructions of race and national identity within the Cherokee Nation. Throughout the text, Sturm incorporates what she calls a “southern storytelling aesthetic.”<sup>10</sup> This stylistic tool—marked in her book with a line drawn down the page, adjacent to the text—allows Sturm, as she explains “to present an angle on events, experiences, and even myself, that I otherwise could not.”<sup>11</sup> Furthermore, this technique also highlights the “highly subjective nature of ethnographic writing,” which Sturm describes as a form of non-fictionalized storytelling. In using this “narrative southern voice,” Sturm conveys the “crafted, filtered, and subjective nature” of her descriptions in particular, as well as the project of ethnographic writing more broadly.<sup>12</sup>

In addition to describing how subjectivity, anthropological theory, and the ethnographic gaze permeate her research, Sturm also marks time as an important filter impacting the production of

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<sup>8</sup> Warrior, “Practicing Native American and Indigenous Studies,” 2010.

<sup>9</sup> Warrior.

<sup>10</sup> Sturm, *Blood Politics*.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

knowledge. Similarly, Philip J. Deloria addresses this issue within his own work in his descriptions of the complex connections between self and subject. Deloria recounts a story about his experience riding the bus as a sixth grader near the Lummi reservation in Washington State; the story evokes ideas about identity, race, culture, and space. Deloria, however, recognizes this particular history is not the story of his sixth grade self, explaining, “I am certain I did not experience it in the way I have recalled it.”<sup>13</sup> This 2002 telling of an experience that occurred in 1971 is not incorrect, but rather, as Deloria explains, “codified out of direct experience and then slowly altered with time.”<sup>14</sup> The use of personal stories raises important questions about the way the present engages with the past in various ways and allows Deloria to situate himself and his subjects within his work.

Drawing upon these ideas, each chapter of this text begins with a personal narrative, which is followed by a shift to a more formal academic narrative. As Sturm argues, “even though experience has always been a great source of legitimization for anthropologists, I find it is more honest to acknowledge these filters up front.”<sup>15</sup> Agreeing with Sturm, I have placed these personal narratives at the beginning of each chapter. It is my hope that the reader will be able to better understand this project through my own situated—and internally unsettled—perspective.<sup>16</sup> Furthermore, these narratives are intended to foreground the experiences that have filtered and shaped my research. Although they are most often located at the beginning of a chapter, these narratives are also woven throughout the research. Most often, these moments signal spaces and moments where the complexity of a situation is better conveyed through a narrative and not by forcing it to fit neatly into an academic text.

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<sup>13</sup> Deloria, “Thinking about Self in a Family Way.” 27.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid, 27.

<sup>15</sup> Sturm, *Blood Politics*, xviii.

<sup>16</sup> See also Dennison, *Colonial Entanglement*, 12.

Throughout the personal narratives, I utilize humor and ~~strikeout~~ certain sections of the text. These strikeouts signal my recognition of the "undesirable" or "inappropriate" inclusions of profanity, discussions of motherhood, struggles with apprehension, and even the inclusion of candor within certain institutional and academic spaces. Although I am particularly aware of the precariousness of my position as a graduate student—and I certainly want a job—I see humor, profanity, and admissions of uncertainty as important instruments for the larger project of decolonizing the academy. More than a tool for decolonization, humor is also an essential aspect of Indigenous survival, or rather, survivance.<sup>17</sup> Survivance, as Gerald Vizenor describes, "is an active sense of presence, the continuance of native stories, not a mere reaction, or a survivable name. Native survivance stories are renunciations of dominance, tragedy, and victimry."<sup>18</sup> In *Manifest Manners*, Vizenor goes on to describe strategic use of "trickster hermeneutics of liberation," and reminds us that "the uncertain humor and shimmer of survivance denies the obscure maneuvers of manifest manners, tragic transvaluations, and the incoherence of cultural representations."<sup>19</sup> As a creative strategy, humor provides a "tribal counterpoise to the literature of dominance,"<sup>20</sup> and as a methodology, humor compliments other terminological and visual strategies used in this dissertation.

In using humor within my interviews, my writing, and in my classes, I also strive to convey sincerity and to build a genuine rapport with my audience, students, and interlocutors. Furthermore, researching and teaching within American Indian and Indigenous Studies is complicated, and the issues American Indians and Indigenous communities throughout the globe continue to struggle with—dispossession, violence, genocide, forced removal and assimilation—are difficult to confront. I

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<sup>17</sup> Vizenor, *Manifest Manners: Narratives on PostIndian Survivance*, vii.

<sup>18</sup> Vizenor, vii.

<sup>19</sup> Vizenor, 66.

<sup>20</sup> Vizenor, 95.

find humor to be an effective strategy for making people feel at ease before diving into an examination of the ongoing colonial and institutionalized violence that permeates the daily lives of American Indians and other marginalized peoples.

My use of humor to open up space for dealing with the contradictions and constraints of American Indian experiences builds upon the legacy of scholars and writers like Vine Deloria, Joy Harjo, Leslie Marmon Silko, Paula Gunn Allen, Sarah Winnemucca Hopkins and Sherman Alexie—among others—who have used humor, irony, and sarcasm as discursive strategies.<sup>21</sup> However, if there is one “truth” I learned during my fieldwork, it is that Osages and other Indian folks love to laugh, and so we are always drawing on humor that emerges from within our communities, families, and oral histories. While I often use humor or sarcasm to open a conversation or to work through the absurdity of my research as an Osage anthropologist working on decolonizing inherently colonial institutions, I also see the laughter within our communities as expressions of resilience, resistance, and hope.

Lastly, this text utilizes humor and emphasizes irony as a decolonizing tool to convey the humanity and contradictions that characterize American Indian lives.<sup>22</sup> Above all, the continual, contentious, and ever-changing aspects of Osage art and nationhood reflect and recognize the diversity of the Osage Nation. As one Osage citizen asserted in a public forum during the Osage constitutional reform process, “We are a nation—nations have diversity.”<sup>23</sup> Reflecting the multiplicity of Osage experience, Osage ideas about art, museums, society, and politics fundamentally resist attempts at meaningful generalization.<sup>24</sup> I have attempted to demonstrate the diversity and

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<sup>21</sup> Squint, “Choctawan Aesthetics, Spirituality, and Gender Relations”; Carpenter, “Choking Off That Angel Mother”; Coulombe, “The Approximate Size of His Favorite Humor”; Andrews, “In the Belly of a Laughing God.”

<sup>22</sup> See Smith, *Everything You Know about Indians Is Wrong*, 2009.

<sup>23</sup> Dennison, *Colonial Entanglement*, 65.

<sup>24</sup> Lambert, *Choctaw Nation*, 114.

complexity of Osage and American Indian experiences throughout this text. However, academic writing is inherently limited and incomplete, and this examination is representative of my ongoing research on the dynamic processes of creative self-representation, ongoing movements for greater self-determination, and collaborative and decolonizing research methods.

### **Terminology and text**

The majority of words used to describe Indigenous peoples and concepts are problematic in some way or another. Recognizing the thorny nature of such language and elucidating the reasons for using specific terminology contributes to decolonization. Therefore, I would like to make a few clarifications about the terms I have chosen to use within this text. Even though there are numerous American Indian and Indigenous artists who are making interventions in mainstream museums, this project examines how artists from the Osage Nation are engaging in this work. Therefore, I will use the term “Osages” most often. However, in some instances, this project speaks to broader issues surrounding Indigenous communities throughout the United States and Canada. While there is no term that remains unquestionable, I have chosen to use “American Indian” and the abbreviated form “Indian”—the term most commonly used within Osage communities—in reference to these trends. When speaking about more widespread issues of settler colonialism that pertain to the global population of communities and people that reach beyond American Indians, I will use the term “Indigenous.”

In my previous research, I have often used the words “tribe” and “member,” terms widely used to describe American Indian polities and the people that belong to them. While these terms remain important tools that contribute to the empowerment American Indian polities, particularly within legal contexts, these terms work differently in the context of academic writing. Speaking of this particular phenomenon, former president of the Navajo Nation, Albert Hale, said, “I beg you, those of you who are in academia, when you are writing papers, watch out for these things. Don’t refer to us

as tribes when you're trying to build our nationhood or advance our sovereignty. Refer to us as nations."<sup>25</sup> While Hale specifically references the use of the word "tribe," the concept of "membership" similarly works to undermine political authority. As Dennison argues, "citizens belong to sovereign nations, while you can be a member of any number of clubs or groups with little real authority."<sup>26</sup> In an effort to contribute to a scholarship that engages with decolonization and advances the sovereignty of Indian nations, in almost all cases, I prefer to use the terms "nation" and "citizen" in my own writing.

In 2010, the Osage Nation Congress passed a resolution (ONCR 10-30) that proposed, "the Osage Nation Constitution be amended to replace all references to 'membership' with 'citizenship' and to replace 'eligibility for membership' with 'right to citizenship.'"<sup>27</sup> This legislation, sponsored by Congressman William Supernaw, was enacted with eleven of the twelve members of the Osage Nation Congress voting in favor of the resolution.<sup>28</sup> ONCR 10-30 was one of seven proposed Constitutional Amendments placed on the ballot for the June 4, 2012 General Election, and each of the seven amendments failed to meet the required approval of 65% of the Osage electorate.<sup>29</sup> ONCR 10-30 reflects the particularly complicated nature of using these four words, and the fact that each of the terms is used within Osage communities. Therefore, while I have made the decision to use the terms "nation" and "citizen" in my own writing, I also use direct quotes from other Osage citizens and scholars who use the terms "tribe" and "member."

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<sup>25</sup> Lemont, *American Indian Constitutional Reform and the Rebuilding of Native Nations*, 88–89.

<sup>26</sup> Dennison, *Colonial Entanglement*, 13.

<sup>27</sup> Resolution Number ONCR 10-30, November 8, 2010, 2<sup>nd</sup> Congress, 1<sup>st</sup> Session.  
[http://www.osagetribe.com/congress/info\\_sub\\_page.aspx?subpage\\_id=239](http://www.osagetribe.com/congress/info_sub_page.aspx?subpage_id=239)

<sup>28</sup> The twelfth Congressperson was absent for the voting on this piece of legislation. See ONCR 10-30.

<sup>29</sup> Amendments to the Osage Nation Constitution must be approved by 65% of the Osage electorate, and only 47.6% of the Osage electorate voted in favor of ONCR 10-30. 2006 Osage Nation Constitution, 18.

Lastly, in my discussion of the Washington D.C. NFL team, I make the choice not to use the disparaging name of their mascot. I will instead refer to the R-word or the Washington NFL team. This is not something that comes easy, as it is a term I have used throughout my life, although I have always found it to be offensive. The goal of my refusal to write this word and its subsequent absence from this text is to call attention to the violence and prejudice it signifies. My choice to use or refuse specific words within this text enacts self-determination at the level of method and representation.<sup>30</sup> As anthropologist Audra Simpson argues in *Mohawk Interruptus*, “sovereignty matters, as a methodological issue in and of itself, because it speaks from jurisdictional authority: the right to speak, and in this case, to not speak.”<sup>31</sup> Here, Simpson links the dispossession and juridical control over Indigenous lands to the control over texts and writing, and draws on what Robert Warrior refers to as “literary sovereignty” to mark her ethnographic work—and the practice of ethnography itself—not only as a political project, but as one that recognizes sovereignty.<sup>32</sup>

In addition to analyzing the textual data gathered during this research, I also utilize in-line images of Osage art and material culture. The inclusion of these images as a key component of the dissertation composition is my attempt to push back against text as the dominant narrative within anthropological knowledge production.<sup>33</sup> For too long, knowledge has been, “classified as 'western scientific' discourse,” as Sonia Smallacombe explains, “and appropriated as the property of white academics to enhance their careers.”<sup>34</sup> However, just as knowledge has been wielded as a powerful tool to deny future possibilities for Indigenous peoples, Indigenous researchers can also use it as a

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<sup>30</sup> Simpson, *Mohawk Interruptus*, 104.

<sup>31</sup> Simpson, 104–5.

<sup>32</sup> Simpson, 105; Warrior, *Tribal Secrets: Recovering American Indian Intellectual Traditions*, 98.

<sup>33</sup> Schneider “Three Modes of Experimentation with Art and Ethnography.”

<sup>34</sup> Smallacombe, “On Display for Its Aesthetic Beauty: How Western Institutions Fabricate Knowledge about Aboriginal Cultural Heritage,” 156.

tool to open future possibilities.<sup>35</sup> Within this dissertation, art is not simply aesthetic, but also performs an ethnographic function through which the artist—author and producer of knowledge—communicates and interprets the world through visual language.

### **Conducting research at the intersections of art and sovereignty: collaboration and creative self-representation**

As many American Indian nations throughout the United States and Indigenous communities throughout the world, the Osage Nation has a significant history of artistic expression and production. The wide-ranging work of contemporary Osage artists is both compelling and diverse, and reflects the multiplicity and complexity of the Osage Nation and its citizens. While Osage artists produce and create works of art for a variety of reasons—as objects for aesthetic appreciation, as marketable commodities, as expressions of individual or group identity, as reflections of physical and social landscapes, or as objects to be used—their works are, above all, creative acts of self-representation that resist static notions and expectations of Indigeneity. With this in mind, this project envisions a new approach for examining Indigenous artistic expression within anthropology and other disciplines.

One of the challenges of producing academic work that resists rendering Indigenous communities as static or homogenous is the problematic use of “culture” as an analytic category. Even though diversity and heterogeneity are widely acknowledged as key characteristics of nationhood, Indian nations are often expected to be homogenous entities, located in a mythical past.<sup>36</sup> The strategy of rendering the Indigenous population as “out of time and place” in contemporary society have been used to justify the elimination of Indigenous peoples and the appropriation of their lands. As Osage Congressman Otto Hamilton explains<sup>37</sup>:

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<sup>35</sup> Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies*, 3-4.

<sup>36</sup> Dennison, *Colonial Entanglement*, 77.

<sup>37</sup> Hamilton, Ribbon Work Documentary Project.

There's so many people involved ... when it comes to culture, culture means something different to each and every one of us, so one family might do it differently ... another family does it differently, then you have another district that does it differently. In my experience, the best way if you want to find something out and you want to learn about something is to go and ask them, don't just use one source, because everyone does things differently.

For Hamilton, and other Osages, culture is an important part of community and nation-building, but the meaning of culture varies between individuals, families, and districts, and changes over time. The act of defining culture stifles its inherent fluidity and diversity.

Anthropologist Kirk Dombrowski has addressed this issue in his work, and argues for what he terms “culturing,” which sets aside “the notion of culture as a fixed way of looking at the world” in order to examine the processes by which people create, disseminate, and contest shared meanings.<sup>38</sup> Dombrowski's concept recognizes the contested and multiple meanings of “culture” and how it is constructed through various social, historical, and political processes. However, in order to avoid slippage between 1) the multiple, contested, and emic processes that are used to create “culture” within the Osage Nation and 2) the analytic category of “culture” that can be used against the decolonizing goal of this research, this project moves away from the analytical frame of “culture” entirely. However, the terms “material culture” or “expressive culture,” which most often refer to things made for use in specific Osage practices, are still used, as are quotes from interlocutors who use the term in their own statements.

The primary focus of this project is to examine the ways that Osage art is used to imagine and build an Osage future. Here, art is envisioned as playing an active and dynamic role in the ongoing political movements for sovereignty and decolonization, not as a static representation of “culture.” This project interrogates how Osage artistic expression emerged through, against, and entangled with the settler colonial process, becoming a tool for Osage self-representation and resistance. Osage art

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<sup>38</sup> Dombrowski, *Against Culture*, 184–85.

means different things to different people, and my research will explore some of these contested meanings. Above all, Osage art exemplifies the ways that Osage people creatively engage with the past as a means for serving present needs and securing an Osage future.

My examination of Osage art as entangled with Osage nation-building and settler colonialism is informed by the work of other scholars who see the importance of recognizing Indigenous artistic expression as key discourses that contribute to activism and movements for greater sovereignty. For example, artist, curator, and visual historian Jolene Rickard places art within a narrative of colonization and resistance. She examines how art operates within Indigenous nations by asking, among other questions, “How does one articulate the relationship between art and sovereignty in Native nation-building?”<sup>1</sup> Rickard makes the significant point that examinations of Indigenous resistance and expressions of nationalism have been limited to recognizable and straightforward events like the occupation of Alcatraz, whereas examinations of Indigenous art focus on “‘traditional’ cultural expressions.”<sup>2</sup> Working away from this, she introduces the concept of “retraditionalization,” arguing that “even the most ‘traditional’ form like basket-weaving, is actually a demonstration of Indigenous renewal, survival, and political and environmental awareness ... the notion of retraditionalization is tied to resistance.”<sup>3</sup> For Rickard, artistic expression challenges colonization, calls for self-determination, and “serves the larger goal of sovereignty.”<sup>4</sup>

Similarly, in her work on Indigenous and ethnographic filmmaking, literature and film studies professor Michelle Raheja examines how the film *Atanarjuat (The Fast Runner)*, directed and produced by Inuit filmmakers, addresses a dual Inuit and non-Inuit audience. Raheja explores the spaces within and between resistance and compliance in order to examine the ways Indigenous filmmakers and actors engage with ethnographic film conventions while simultaneously “operating within and stretching the boundaries” drawn by these conventions.<sup>5</sup> For Raheja, the resistance deployed by myriad colonized peoples “is not created equal in all situations,” but rather, “is located

along a spectrum of political and social efficacy.”<sup>6</sup> Calling her analytical approach “visual sovereignty,” Raheja argues:

This strategy offers up not only the possibility of engaging and deconstructing white-generated representations of Indigenous people, but more broadly and importantly how it intervenes in larger discussions of Native American sovereignty by locating and advocating for Indigenous cultural and political power both within and outside of Western legal jurisprudence.<sup>7</sup>

For Rickard and Raheja, creative acts of self-representation and resistance contribute to Indigenous sovereignty and decolonization.

Drawing upon Indigenous visual studies, and the works of Raheja and Rickard in particular, historian Jenny Tone-Pah-Hote demonstrates the ways that “Kiowa men and women” have used expressive culture as a means of asserting their “national interests in public venues not traditionally viewed through the lenses of Federal Indian law and policy.”<sup>39</sup> By focusing on the contributions of men and women, Tone-Pah-Hote speaks to the often-undervalued roles that women play in Indigenous nation building. Looking specifically at the period between 1875 and 1939, Tone-Pah-Hote further argues that, “Kiowa people engaged expressive culture as a way of articulating ideas about their nation both for themselves, for other American Indian people in Oklahoma and elsewhere, and for Euro-American audiences.”<sup>40</sup> This research reveals the various expressive forms—such as dancing, beading, peyote jewelry, and painting—Kiowa people have used to maintain their autonomy and imagine Kiowa nationhood. Tone-Pah-Hote’s work provides an important example of the ways in which American Indians use creative self-representation in nation-building projects. Tone-Pah-Hote’s emphasis on the role that women play in imagining and articulating nationhood pushes us to look more closely at the way gender operates within self-representation and self-determination.

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<sup>39</sup> Tone-Pah-Hote, “Envisioning Nationhood: Kiowa Expressive Culture, 1875-1939,” iv.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

In *Engaged Resistance: American Indian Art, Literature, and Film from Alcatraz to NMAI*, Dean Rader examines the importance of contemporary creative productions of art, film, and literature as a means to “resist erasure, bind communities, and articulate a discourse of survivance.”<sup>41</sup> In his introduction, Rader includes the following passage from Acoma poet Simon Ortiz:<sup>42</sup> “It is entirely possible for a people to retain and maintain their lives through the use of any language. There is not a question of authenticity here; rather it is the way that Indian people have *creatively* responded to forced colonization. And this response has been one of resistance; there is no clearer word for it than resistance.”<sup>43</sup> Building upon the work of Ortiz, Rader argues that creative resistance, or “aesthetic activism,” is enacted through both verbal and visual languages. Although *Engaged Resistance* represents a scholarly publication, its commitment to visual language through the inclusion of a large number of photographs of the sculptures, paintings, and texts allows the reader to engage directly with the visual materials. The format of this work also challenges the text-based paradigm of academic discourse,<sup>44</sup> which has contributed to this project as well.

The works of these scholars, as well as my research and conversations with Osage artists, have helped me to think more clearly about the importance of articulating the ways that Osage and other American Indian artists are contributing to movements for Indigenous sovereignty. Rather than utilizing the terms re-traditionalization, visual sovereignty, or aesthetic activism, however, I have chosen to use (creative) self-representation. The concept of self-representation is comprehensible and direct, and more importantly, signals the work of an individual. Too often, American Indian art is

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<sup>41</sup> Rader, *Engaged Resistance*, 1.

<sup>42</sup> Ortiz, “Toward a National Indian Literature: Cultural Authenticity in Nationalism.”

<sup>43</sup> Rader, *Engaged Resistance*, 1.

<sup>44</sup> See Schneider, “Three Modes of Experimentation with Art and Ethnography.”

interpreted as representative of entire cultures and societies. However, self is generally understood as an individual concept, and foregrounds the individual aspect of these works.

As previously stated, this project engages with Osage art as creative expressions of self-representation that complicate static notions and expectations of Indigeneity. It is one thing, however, to recognize the multiple, dynamic, and often contradictory characteristics of Osage art, and another to produce academic knowledge that conveys these assertions in clear and meaningful ways. Western scholarship has claimed the power to name, categorize, define, and therefore “own” Indians—and subsequently our art.<sup>45</sup> These narrowly defined categories and discourses, or what Rickard describes as the “flattened space of the Indian in the hegemonic West,” act to limit American Indian art and its critiques in various ways.<sup>46</sup> Articulating a rejection of these narrowly defined categories in favor of forms that provide space for the dynamic and vibrant work of Indian artists marks an important starting point for reclaiming the authority of self-representation.<sup>47</sup>

In order to create such a space within the academy, however, it is necessary to shift existing power dynamics and privilege the work of artists as “knowledge” in the same way that we privilege the work of other scholars. Therefore, within this project, I have worked with Osage artists in communities, academic spaces, and museums to co-produce knowledge about Osage art and creative self-representations. As previously described, this co-production of knowledge emerges through a privileging of my collaborators’ art as visual language, but also in my creation of space for their spoken and written words as well. In order to disrupt the power relations of the ethnographic encounter, I spent a great deal of time “just visiting” with my collaborators. My delay in recording community members and artists emerged from my lingering discomfort about the ways ethnographic

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<sup>45</sup> Mithlo, “No Word for Art in Our Language?,” 113.

<sup>46</sup> Rickard, “Indigenous and Iroquoian Art as Knowledge,” x; 34; Mithlo, “No Word for Art in Our Language?,” 120.

<sup>47</sup> Mithlo, “No Word for Art in Our Language?,” 112; Rickard, “Indigenous and Iroquoian Art as Knowledge,” ix, 5, 64–65.

data has been used to colonize, capture, and define Indigenous peoples. However, as I began talking with people about visiting as a methodology,<sup>48</sup> it also became about me not wanting to take more than I needed or more than they wanted to share. Through these visits, I would jot down interesting stories or comments that I wanted to ask them about later.

IRB consent makes it clear that research participants can leave a project or ask to stop recording at any moment. However, I wanted to build a deep rapport and trust with the folks I was interviewing so they would not only know they could stop the recording or ask me to keep something off the record, but also, so they would feel comfortable doing so. In their discussion of the *Montreal Life Stories* project, Anna Sheftel and Stacey Zembrzycki describe the creation of interviewee-led spaces, “where survivors and scholars can work together to not only understand the stories that are told but also determine their significance to the larger community,” spaces that are “focused on knowing and learning *with* not *from* interviewees.”<sup>49</sup> They also discuss the time, commitment, flexibility, patience, empathy, and ability to listen deeply that this type of work demands.

The words of Athabaskan and Inupiaq artist Erica Lord have also helped to guide this co-production of knowledge. She states, “through art and media, the cultural shapers of this generation, it is time for us to self-determine, to control our representation, and to address modernity, the merging of blood, and the myth of an authentic culture.”<sup>50</sup> In just these few words, Lord calls our attention to the goal, the barriers that stand in our way, and the methods that will lead our path. In calling for the self-determination and control over our representations, Lord reminds us that this work is political, and that artists are activists. Some of the artists I work with see their work as

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<sup>48</sup> See also Simpson, “Land as Pedagogy.”

<sup>49</sup> Sheftel and Zembrzycki, “Only Human: A Reflection on the Ethical and Methodological Challenges of Working with ‘Difficult’ Stories,” 194.

<sup>50</sup> Mithlo, “No Word for Art in Our Language?,” 120.

activism and speak about it in that way. However, others do not, and there are political and economic reasons for their views on these issues. Regardless of whether or not they see themselves as activists, the fact that they are asserting control over representations is an inherently political project.

In “Beyond the Mirror: Indigenous Ecologies and ‘New Materialisms’ in Contemporary Art,” Janet Berlo and Jessica Horton provide a pointed critique of the type of self-reflexive scholarship that turns the anthropological gaze back at Euro-American societies while simultaneously excluding Indigenous voices.<sup>51</sup> As Berlo and Horton rightly point out, too often post-colonial work ends at the point of deconstruction. In simply deconstructing texts produced by non-Indigenous we remain in conversation with them and only them. Through an intellectual engagement with contemporary Indigenous art, or those “who are too often left out of the conversation,”<sup>52</sup> however, we do not merely contribute a counter-argument or a separate intellectual space, but instead create a shared intellectual meeting ground that more clearly reflects the shared globe we inhabit. Horton and Berlo argue:

While there is evidence of the Indigenous philosophical precepts that inform [their] work, the artists locate their practices in an extensive and shared contemporary landscape that includes the space of exhibition, thus short-circuiting a romantic gaze that might locate Indigenous art or bodies in nature somewhere else. Their works issue an invitation to a wider audience – including us, a pair of non-Native, English-speaking scholars writing this article – to seriously consider the relevance of Indigenous intellectual traditions to the contemporary global challenges of co-habitation.<sup>53</sup>

Berlo and Horton go beyond adding “a few neglected figures to the canon” of new materialism or simply making a contribution to material culture scholarship.<sup>54</sup> Instead, these authors work to create

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<sup>51</sup> While I agree with the main argument of this piece, and I find it to be incredibly useful for thinking about building bridges to shared intellectual spaces, I disagree with their unproblematized use of Jimmie Durham’s work and their reference to him as a Native American artist. For more on the controversy and debates surrounding Durham’s claim of Cherokee identity, which has been denied by all three of the Cherokee nations, see (insert citation to *FAAM* piece, Mithlo, Whitney panel).

<sup>52</sup> Horton and Berlo, 18.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

<sup>54</sup> See also Bill Anthes, xiii.

a shared intellectual space that shifts the power dynamics between Indigenous knowledge and the academy.

Privileging the knowledge of Osage artists and engaging in these conversations will not only inform an understanding of the contemporary lived realities of American Indian peoples and communities, but also reveal the discord and resilience within our communities.<sup>55</sup> Although the creation of art is inherently a political project, the politics embedded within images and objects can easily be erased through their mediation in Western academic and museum contexts. The following quote from Mohawk curator Steven Loft provides another way for thinking about the importance of privileging Indigenous knowledge production:

When members of a community assert control over their own lives and culture, politically, socially, and artistically, they go beyond oppression. Thus, control of ‘our’ image becomes not only an act of subversion, but of resistance, and ultimately liberation... what is at stake here is not how the image is presented (aesthetics aside) but who controls it. This is the fundamental challenge to Aboriginal artists and cultural producers.<sup>56</sup>

As producers of Western scholarship, we play an important role in how these images are controlled and presented. Rather than creating a separate space for American Indian art, we must work to claim this space within and in relationship to Western scholarship.<sup>57</sup>

In addition to thinking about the (re)claiming of space as it relates to land, museums, and the academy, we must also consider the ways that physical spaces and the interactions within these spaces impact the work of Osage and other American Indian artists. More specifically, how do Osage artists “perform” in different spaces and for different audiences? How do they play on the predetermined tropes of their audience within different spaces to engage and shift these expectations? In many scenarios, the artists I worked with were confronted with what Tina Majkowski

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<sup>55</sup> Mithlo, “No Word for Art in Our Language?,” 123.

<sup>56</sup> As quoted in Igloliorte, “The Inuit of Our Imagination,” 255.

<sup>57</sup> See also Rickard, “Indigenous and Iroquoian Art as Knowledge,” 41.

has called “fictive expectations of nativeness.” While some artists attempt to meet these expectations—particularly within the context of the Santa Fe Indian Art Market—other artists push back and demonstrate how such expectations are “often at odds with the fleshly materiality of native persons and communities.”<sup>58</sup> Through performance—even those as simple as an interaction—Osage artists grapple with expectations and misrepresentations of their audiences and interlocutors as a means for opening spaces and imagining alternative futures.

In order to examine these performances, as well as the complexities of Indigenous creative self-representations, I draw on the concept of colonial entanglement. As an analytic frame, colonial entanglement provides a means for disrupting binary constructions of alterity, and the works of anthropologists Nicolas Thomas and Jean Dennison inform my use of this concept. Rather than focusing on the divergence between colonial and Indigenous societies, entanglement moves us toward recognition of the important—and often unevaluated—roles that Indigenous people have played in colonial exchanges, without minimizing the imbalance of power and wealth that characterizes these processes.

Drawing upon the work of Achille Mbembe<sup>59</sup> and Ann Stoler,<sup>60</sup> Dennison uses the concept of “colonial entanglement” in order to highlight the moments of complexity that contemporaneously work to strengthen and undermine Osage nationhood. Colonial entanglement resists privileging or avoiding the colonial forces with which colonized peoples must negotiate.<sup>61</sup> Dennison uses the Osage practice of ribbon work—the cutting, folding, and sewing of colored ribbons into geometric patterns— as a metaphor for colonial entanglement:

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<sup>58</sup> Blomberg and Denver Art Museum, *Action and Agency*, 109–11.; See also G. Vizenor (1999) on the “postindian”; R. Chow (2002) on “coercive mimeticism”; P. Deloria (1998) on “playing Indian”; and M. Raheja on “redfacing” (2007).

<sup>59</sup> Mbembe, *On the Postcolony*.

<sup>60</sup> Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power*.

<sup>61</sup> Dennison, *Colonial Entanglement*, 7-8.

In picking up the pieces of fabric, both those torn apart by the colonial process and those created by it, and stitching them into their own original patterns, Osage people have artfully formed the tangled ribbons of colonialism into their own statements of Osage sovereignty. Osage ribbon work thus reminds us that it is possible to create new and powerful forms out of an ongoing colonial process. Likewise, the twenty-first-century Osage Nation, with its six-year-old tripartite constitutional government, provides a rich example of how Indigenous people are taking the entangled threads of settler colonialism and beginning to weave them into new forms.<sup>62</sup>

For Dennison, ribbon work provides a visual metaphor that represents how the Osage Nation has taken the tools and raw materials obtained through the settler colonial process and twisted them into something that is uniquely Osage. Even though settler colonialism has attempted to deny future possibilities for Osage peoples, colonial entanglement provides an analytic for recognizing the ways that these processes have actually contributed to the practice of ribbon work. As a metaphor, ribbon work exemplifies how the materials obtained through these—and other—colonial processes can be manipulated and negotiated in ways that create powerful expressions of Osage sovereignty.<sup>63</sup> More broadly, the concept of colonial entanglement emphasizes how the settler-colonial process does not simply deny future possibilities for Indigenous peoples, but can provide tools which Indigenous peoples use to build a strong future.

In his work on the historical and colonial interactions of mutual appropriation and inequitable exchange throughout post-colonial Pacific societies, anthropologist Nicholas Thomas also draws on the concept of entanglement for the study of material culture in particular. Thomas seeks to displace essentialist claims about Maussian gift economies and antithetical commodity-based economic systems through an examination of objects, consumption, and circulation that pays particular attention to the mutual entanglement, rather than the divergence, between European and

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<sup>62</sup> Dennison, “Stitching Osage Governance into the Future,” 117.

<sup>63</sup> Dennison, *Colonial Entanglement*, 7; Rickard, “Uncovering/Recovering: Indigenous Artists in California,” 147.

Indigenous societies.<sup>64</sup> Thomas's use of entanglement recognizes the ongoing "recontextualization" and "reauthorship" of material objects and grounds the fluidity of Indigenous cultures as dynamic and ongoing processes of negotiation.<sup>65</sup>

For Thomas, the concept of entanglement provides a means for disrupting anthropological "discourse[s] of alterity ... in which us/them distinctions are central, and which necessarily distances the people studied from ourselves."<sup>66</sup> Here, entanglement becomes a rhetorical tool that moves material culture analysis in particular—and anthropological discourse more broadly—away from us/them binaries. Similar to Dennison's metaphor of Osage ribbon work, Thomas's work recognizes the Indigenous appropriations of European goods and the colonial collection of Indigenous objects. Here, Thomas recognizes the imbalance of power and wealth<sup>67</sup> that characterizes the colonial exchange of objects while simultaneously recognizing the important—and often unevaluated—roles that Indigenous peoples have played in this process.

Colonial entanglement also works to "disfigure the anthropological project toward an accurate account of one stable culture."<sup>68</sup> Here, entanglement repudiates the notion that Indigenous societies represent "authentic, meaningfully stable domains" and marks the inherently political and ambiguous nature of anthropological discourse.<sup>69</sup> Just as objects are subject to "creative recontextualization" and "reauthorship," so too are the products of anthropological research. As Osage and other American Indian artists appropriate anthropological knowledge and museum representations within their work and recontextualize them, these self-representations draw on the

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<sup>64</sup> See also Fred Meyers, *Painting Culture: The Making of Aboriginal High Art*.

<sup>65</sup> See also James Clifford, "On Collecting Art and Culture," 273.

<sup>66</sup> Thomas, *Entangled Objects*, 3.

<sup>67</sup> For more on this topic see Sally Price, *Primitive Art in Civilized Places*, particularly the chapter "Power Plays."

<sup>68</sup> Thomas, *Entangled Objects*, 6.

<sup>69</sup> Thomas, 2.

expectations embedded within these discourses and create a familiarity for the audience. Here Indigenous artists challenge colonial narratives and resistance by working quietly, on the boundaries of expectation.<sup>70</sup>

Finally, the concept of entanglement, and its ability to disrupt binaries, is also a productive tool for understanding the tensions within our academic work as being “productive in and of themselves rather than as obstacles to overcome.”<sup>71</sup> As museum professionals, curators, academics, and artists, we also have our own interconnected networks of entanglements that inform our work and our practice. In paying closer attention to our own entanglements and how we, as Osage citizen and American Studies scholar Robert Warrior explains, “engineer and navigate our way across dialectical distances.”<sup>72</sup> Here, entanglement goes beyond self-reflection and positioning oneself in their work, but recognizes the ways that we share intellectual space. This is—and has been—relevant to those of us engaging in research within American Indian studies. However, my hope is this particular use of entanglement can inform the work of other scholarly endeavors, lead to a broader recognition of shared intellectual spaces and ultimately, the privileging diverse knowledges and understandings.

Utilizing the framework of colonial entanglement to inform this work, my dissertation examines the ways that Osage artists are making interventions within mainstream museums and through mainstream media, and how this work contributes to the larger nation-building project of the Osage Nation. In order to examine the role creative self-representation plays in Osage nation-

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<sup>70</sup> For more on expectations in relation to colonial relations of power see Deloria, *Indians in Unexpected Places*.

<sup>71</sup> Warrior, “Practicing Native American and Indigenous Studies,” 2014.

<sup>72</sup> Warrior. Although Warrior uses the term “dialectical practices,” in his address, entanglement encompasses these ideas without having to enter into a conversation about the Western philosophical construction of dialectics. As Warrior explains, “Traditional Osage thought has many dialectical features to it, and I know that other find in Indigenous thought systems an appreciation for skillful philosophical movement between two seemingly opposed or incommensurable ways of thinking.”; See also Mathews, *Talking to the Moon*; La Flesche and Bailey, *The Osage and the Invisible World*, 29–35.

building as well as broader movements for sovereignty and self-determination, I initially posed the following questions: *How does Osage art contribute to nation building? What is the relationship between Osage art/artists and sovereignty? How does artistic expression speak to the multiplicity and complexity of the Osage Nation? How is art used to imagine an Osage future?* These questions guided my preliminary research and the design of my dissertation project. Throughout my dissertation research, these questions were refined, and my project was reimagined ~~more times than I would like to admit~~ as I came to better understand the realities of truly working with communities and institutions.

As a citizen of the Osage Nation and an anthropologist, I set out to conduct a community-based research project through an engagement with decolonizing methodologies. As Linda Tuhiwai Smith explains, decolonization “does not mean ... a total rejection of all theory or research or Western knowledge. Rather, it is about centring our concerns and world views and then coming to know and understand theory and research from our own perspectives and for our own purposes.”<sup>8</sup> Embracing Smith’s assertion, I conducted preliminary and ongoing research with Osage community members to ensure that this work is meaningful and relevant to Osage peoples. Through this process, I learned about both the values and drawbacks of collaborative research, and the kind of commitment this type of work demands.

In 2014, I conducted preliminary research within the boundaries of the Osage Nation. This research enabled me to establish relationships with Osage artists and citizens, the Osage Nation Museum, the Wah-zha-zhi Cultural Center, and the Historic Preservation Department. During my informal conversations with various Osage citizens and Osage Nation stakeholders, it became clear that Osage opinions about art reflect the multiplicity and complexity of Osage experience. Therefore, I set out to structure my research in a way that utilized this multiplicity and complexity in productive ways. Namely, I set out to conduct three distinct projects to analyze how Osage art operates in

different spaces and for different publics. Ultimately, the three projects I proposed were not the three projects that were studied in this dissertation. Instead, this research developed around three institutions and interrogated what the diversity of localized knowledge in these distinct spaces could reveal about entanglements.

In 2004, the St. Louis Art Museum (SLAM), in conjunction with representatives from the Osage Nation, curated an exhibit titled *Art of the Osage*. The exhibit was coordinated to coincide with the bicentennial of the Lewis and Clark expedition and the formal transfer of the upper Louisiana Territory from France to the United States, which itself works as a decolonizing strategy by demonstrating the continued existence of the Osage and American Indians more broadly. However, within the exhibit and catalogue, a tension emerges between “the continuity of Osage culture” and Osage art as “dynamic and evolving.”<sup>73</sup> One of the most difficult aspects of presenting American Indian art and expressive culture is the desire to demonstrate that even in the face of settler colonialism, American Indians are still living and creating art. This survival, or as it is labeled in this exhibit, continuity, of art is not predicated on a continuation of the exact forms, but rather, on the capacity that American Indian people have for change. Although the objects selected for the exhibit—which were largely composed of clothing and material objects used within specific Osage social practices—fail to reflect the diversity of contemporary Osage experiences, the inclusion of recordings of Osage people within the exhibit provided a counter-narrative.

*Art of the Osage* represents the only large installation devoted solely to Osage art at a mainstream museum. However, many Osage artists are working within mainstream museums on various other projects. I selected three of these institutions—The Field Museum of Natural History, the Denver Art Museum, and the Sam Noble Oklahoma Museum of Natural History—as the primary

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<sup>73</sup> Nunley, “Acknowledgements,” vii; ix.

sites for my dissertation research. Each of these institutions, as well as the different artists and curators collaborating on various projects, has a unique set of entanglements and localized practices that work to limit and create possibilities for exhibitions. In focusing my research on contemporary Osage art and what it can communicate about creative self-representation within three museums, this dissertation speaks to the plurality of possibilities, rather than a silver bullet, that will decolonize museums and other inherently colonial institutions. Furthermore, this work demonstrates how each of these institutions is able to draw on their unique entanglements as a productive source for future collaborative work.

Initially, my research was planned to culminate in the co-curation of a virtual museum exhibit with the Osage Nation Museum (ONM). When I first started my fieldwork, Kathryn Red Corn was the Curator and Director of the Osage Nation Museum. She retired just a few weeks before we were set to begin on the project. The virtual exhibition was my way of sharing the product of my research with Osages, a way to give back and to recognize the ways I have benefitted from Osage knowledges. It was also meant to interrogate the ways that collaborative research and contemporary art could be used to shift power relations between institutions and communities. I was not ready to give up on the project. When Hallie Winter took over as the new ONM Curator, we had several visits, and she was interested in the project, but she had a lot on her plate in terms of getting settled into her new role and within a community that was new to her. For nearly three years, we exchanged emails and phone calls about the exhibition, and had a decent plan of what we wanted. However, the ONM website simply did not have the capacity to host the exhibition, and that was non-negotiable for both of us.

The fact that we have postponed this project is not a failure; it exemplifies some of the practical difficulties—and entanglements—that characterize this type of work. Collaboration—at least the kind of meaningful collaboration I intended—is difficult and time consuming. As curator Chip

Colwell explains, “collaboration is neither easy nor straightforward nor always welcomed.”<sup>74</sup> ~~My committee tried to tell me it was going to be too much, but I did not listen.~~ All parties involved have to be fully committed to realizing the project. When I was able to devote time to the project, Hallie was busy with collections storage renovations or fire suppression installations, not to mention reinstalling the permanent collections and producing a series of temporary exhibitions. Conversely, when Hallie had time to work on things, I was busy with teaching or doing fieldwork outside of Oklahoma. ~~To be honest, I was also busy having a second son, within months of my first born son’s diagnosis of autism spectrum disorder. Between speech therapy, occupational therapy, food aversion therapy, social skills groups, and taking care of a newborn, I nearly quit not only the project, but this dissertation more than once.~~ Both of us approached our collaborative project as something that would happen eventually, but it became more and more clear that it was not going to happen within a timeframe that would work for my dissertation. As much as we wanted to, we simply did not have the time, money, or resources to do the exhibition in a way that felt worthy of our community.

However, throughout my dissertation research, people often wanted to talk with me about ribbon work, and I was almost always happy to oblige. In preparation for the virtual exhibition, I had already spent time with contemporary Osage artists and citizens within museum collections: Chris Pappan at the Field Museum, Norman Akers at the Sam Noble Museum, Kathryn Red Corn at the Denver Museum of Nature & Science, and other members of my family at DAM. The kinds of conversations that emerged around objects and within museum collections were quite distinct from the conversations produced through standard life-history and focus-group interviews. When I was doing my last few interviews, I reached out to Hallie to ask if I could use the ONM to chat with a few

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<sup>74</sup> Colwell-Chanthaphonh, “The Problem of Collaboration? Reflections on Engagements of Inclusivity, Reciprocity, and Democracy in Museum Anthropology,” 50.

Osage ribbon workers. I wanted to have a quiet space where we could lay out some of their work. I invited Hallie to join us, and we had some really wonderful conversations.

During these interviews, things clicked and Hallie and I decided this was the project we could make work for us. It was also a project that would be appreciated and utilized by our community. In January, we filmed our first round of individual, group, and round-table interviews. Within a few months, many of these will be transcribed and clips will be made available on the ONM website. We will have several rounds of interviews, we will also film at the Wah-zha-zhi Cultural Center classes and film some ribbon work-inspired educational activities at the Wah-zha-zhi Early Learning Academy. We are also going to make some video tutorials for Osages—and others—who are unable to attend classes, but would like to learn how to ribbon work.

As I conducted this research, one thought crossed my mind again and again: I wonder if my Grandma Georgeann would be proud of the work I'm doing? In many ways, this dissertation was inspired by my desire to know more about her work. As I learned more about her ribbon work practice and her involvement in movements for Osage and American Indian self-determination, I wanted to continue that legacy. In the beginning, I treated her ribbon work and her work in the National Congress of American Indians as separate, however, these parts of her life were entangled and informed one another in interesting and creative ways. Time and time again, when people spoke with me and took time to share their knowledge with me, it was because she did the same for them in the past. Nearly everyone I spoke with told me about her generosity and her desire to work with anyone and everyone to create a better future for Indian peoples.

Like so many American Indian women, my grandmother used a methodology of generosity to shift expectations and create spaces for Indian people to have a voice and a chance to represent themselves. Lakota anthropologist Beatrice Medicine has written about generosity as a cultural mandate—a practice of sharing or hospitality—an important means by which with familial and interpersonal

relationships are regulated.<sup>75</sup> In his 2010 Native American and Indigenous Studies Association (NAISA) Presidential Address, Warrior talks about Medicine's generosity as a call for broader inclusion in reference to remarks she made in 1970 at the First Convocation of American Indian Scholars. Two of her statements resonate with the goal of this work:

The most critical and crucial component for Indian power might be termed, for lack of a better phrase, 'intellectual' power ... This portion of power would stem from wisdom and an awareness of the structure of power in the dominant society.

Common bonds of 'Nativity' and 'Indianness' and a touch of tolerance may eventually cause us to rise above injurious punitiveness on all levels.

Medicine's words speak to a number of issues that we continue to wrestle with today. Medicine's source of "Red Power" was intellectual, and she used it within the ongoing fight for greater American Indian sovereignty and self-determination.

What also continues, are the limitations placed on activism and what kinds of activism are viewed as legitimate contributions to struggles against colonialism and oppression. Medicine's statement serves as a reminder of our commonalities within our communities and scholarship. Many of us have shared goals and common aspirations, but our disagreements about how to get there impede our ability to work together in ways that draw on our multiplicity and diversity in productive ways. This does not only pertain to our Indigenous communities, but our academic and institutional communities as well. In presenting the various ways that contemporary Osage artists are working with mainstream museums, one of the goals of this dissertation is to unsettle the hierarchal evaluation of these projects. Drawing on the localized contexts and entanglements of the works that follow demonstrate the various paths we can use to create shared intellectual and creative spaces.

My commitment to generosity and my willingness to cede authority in this project seemed chaotic and even irresponsible at times, particularly when parts of my proposed research fell away.

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<sup>75</sup> Medicine, *Learning to Be an Anthropologist and Remaining "Native,"* 242–43.

However, the collaborative foundation of this research guided the project and the use of other qualitative and community-based methodologies—multi-site study, object-centered ethnography, visiting and generosity—ultimately (re)shaped my understandings of American Indian art and material culture, museum representations, ethnographic methods, and academic knowledge production.

## CHAPTER 2: AESTHETICS AND AMBIGUITY: ONGOING ENTANGLEMENTS OF OSAGE RIBBON WORK

While writing this dissertation, I made an impromptu trip to New York City. A friend had invited me to see *Don't Feed the Indians*, a play written, directed, produced, and cast by American Indians. I should have stayed home to write, but I had too many excuses—~~and a lifelong dedication to procrastination~~—not to go: *Transformer: Native Art in Light and Sound* had just opened at the National Museum of the American Indian in Battery Park, one of my good friends had just started a tenure-track job at NYU, and of course, there was always the Osage pilgrimage to Hyman Hendler & Son's. What, you may ask, is Hyman Hendler & Sons? Only the most magical place on earth if you're an Osage ribbon worker. Okay, I may be over exaggerating, but it is a ribbon and trim store in the garment district that has the most incredible selection of vintage rayon picot taffeta, the preferred material of many Osage ribbon workers. During my fieldwork, I heard a story about a ledger book at Hendler's, and I had been wanting to check it out. "This is part of my dissertation," I told myself as I packed my bag.

~~As someone who struggles with anxiety and claustrophobia, riding the subway in NYC is my version of Hell.~~ When I finally made it to my stop at Times Square, I rushed to get outside, and I felt a sense of relief as the cold November wind hit my face. The fresh air made shuffling through the crowds more bearable, but I peeled off from the masses as soon as I could to walk on less populated pavement. I had forgotten the address for Hendler's, so I looked it up on my phone. When I arrived, the windows were boarded up. In that moment, I remembered they had moved and changed the name, but I couldn't remember what the new name was; I figured by now they would have updated their website. The @aol.com email address on their website should have made me think otherwise.

~~“Shit,”~~ I muttered. Okay, maybe I didn’t mutter, because the nice gentleman who was sweeping the sidewalk in front of the building turned around to look at me. “Hey, are you looking for Hendler’s?” he asked. “Yes,” I responded, “I am. Do you know where they moved?” He stepped closer and said, “I do. They’re just four blocks down the street, on the other side.” I thanked him and walked toward my new destination with a sense of purpose.

When I finally arrived to Hendler’s—or rather, East Coast Trimming as it has been renamed—it was just as I’d remembered it. All of the walls are lined with eight-foot tall shelves with spools and spools of ribbon. I walked past sections of velvet and beaded brocade ribbon, through aisles of striped, checked, and polka-dotted gross-grain ribbons, before arriving at the taffetas. As I looked at the ribbons behind the glass doors, I had to remind myself that I was there to ask a question, not to spend all my money. I asked the woman cutting ribbons at the counter if the owner was in, and she pointed me towards a petite woman, wearing black glasses and a white oxford shirt. Her hair was pinned up in a bun and had a pencil sticking out of it. After determining she was the owner, I introduced myself. “Hi, my name is Jami Powell, and I am doing some research about Osage ribbon work for my dissertation. Do you have time to visit with me?” “Yes,” she responded. “What are you researching again?”



Fig. 2.1-2.2: Display cases of taffeta ribbon at East Coast Ribbon and Trim. Photo by author.

As I explained my research again, I included a description of ribbon work as something that many American Indian communities used on our clothes, “like for dances and powwows” or something similar. “Oh yeah, we get orders sometimes from people who are making that stuff,” she said, “but I don’t get why they want to pay this much for it when they could just as easily use taffeta fabric, which is a heck of a lot cheaper. I try and explain to them, but I don’t think they understand. By the way, how did you choose such an obscure research topic?” My eyes widened as she hinted at the backwardness of these women who prefer to use a particular type of ribbon over what is cheapest and most readily available. I explained that I was Osage and my great-grandmother was a prolific ribbon worker. “In fact,” I went on as I pulled out my phone, “the last time I was here, I went to The Met to see some of her work that is in their collections.” As she looked at the ribbon work, she commented on how beautiful it was, but once again asked about why we insisted on the picot edge rayon taffeta.

I explained to her that there are some women who do, in fact, use taffeta fabric and other kinds of ribbon, but that the picot edge taffeta ribbon seems to be more tightly woven, so it doesn’t fray as much as the other ribbons or fabric. “Plus,” I said, “this is the kind of ribbon that Osage women have been using for generations, so there’s some nostalgia involved as well.”

She shook her head and muttered something under her breath and excused herself to help a customer. She clearly didn’t get it. In fact, I don’t always get it either, it’s just what we’ve always used. If I’m making something that is going to be in my family for generations, I don’t mind spending the extra money to get the highest quality materials possible. On the other hand, the colors that we want aren’t always available, so we compromise and use something else. There’s also a part of me that enjoys using the same materials that my grandmother would have used. As I stood by those cases thinking about why many of us do cherish that particular type of ribbon, I nearly forgot why I was there.

After she had finished helping a customer, I approached her again. “Excuse me,” I said, “I just have one other question for you. I was talking with a lady who mentioned there was a ledger book that had a record of all of the transactions from Hendler & Sons that goes back to the 1920s and 1930s. Are you aware of this?”

“No,” she responded as she shook her head. “I went through everything when we moved the stuff here, and the only book I know of is the book of swatches. There is no record of transactions. Why would you want that, anyway?”

“Oh, well first of all, I wanted to ask on behalf of my friend who had shared the story with me. I am also interested in seeing the pages of the book over the years to see how many orders went to my community in Oklahoma,” I said.

“Well, I have never seen one, but I can ask around and see what I can find,” she responded and gave me her card. I thanked her, left a couple of my cards for her, and went along my way. I was disappointed about the ledger—or lack thereof—but this experience also helped me to realize something. In many ways, Osage ribbon work is something that is unique to our nation and the practice and use of ribbon work is not always easy to explain. It just is.

### **Ribbon work is the dance and the dance is ribbon work: Osage aesthetics as an embedded practice**

As an Osage practice, ribbon work emerged from the historic, economic, social, and aesthetic choices Osage people—and more specifically Osage women—made when incorporating specific European materials into their daily lives. Ribbon work—the cutting, folding, and sewing of layered pairs of different colored ribbons into geometric or curvilinear designs—is a form of appliqué that is practiced by various American Indians throughout the Great Lakes and the Prairie regions today.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> For more detailed descriptions of ribbon work techniques and styles see Ackerman, “The tradition of Meskwaki ribbon work: Cultural meanings, continuity, and change”; Abbass, “Contemporary Oklahoma Ribbonwork: Styles and Economics”; Pannabecker, “Ribbonwork of the Great Lake Indians: The Material of Acculturation” and “‘Tastily Bound with Ribands’: Ribbon-bordered Dress of the Great Lakes Indians, 1735-1839”; Conn, “Native American cloth applique and ribbonwork:

The origins of ribbon work can be traced to American Indians obtaining silk ribbons through trade with Europeans in the eighteenth century. Even though the trade of silk ribbon bound American Indians to Euro-Americans, “ribbon-bordered dress incorporated the European-produced textile in a unique, non-European way, thus establishing a boundary between what was and what was not Indian.”<sup>77</sup> In recent years, the use of ribbon work outside of its placement on Osage clothing has grown tremendously. Osage ribbon work designs appear in a wide variety of places including on t-shirts, handbags, neck ties, jewelry, tattoos, campaign signs, and the Osage Nation website. These examples point to the ways that Osage ribbon work has become a symbol of Osage nationhood and community.



Figures 2.3-4. Osage “Vote” button (left) and t-shirts (right) designed by Buffalo Nickel Creative on behalf of the Osage Nation Election Office, which feature a four-ribbon pattern. Images originally published by the Osage News ([osagenews.org](http://osagenews.org)) and used with permission.

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their origin and diffusion in the Plains”; Horse Capture, Fourth annual Plains Indian Seminar: ribbonwork and cloth applique; and Neill, “Emblems of ethnicity: ribbonwork garments from the Great Lakes region.”

<sup>77</sup> Pannabecker, “Tastily Bound with Ribands,” 273.

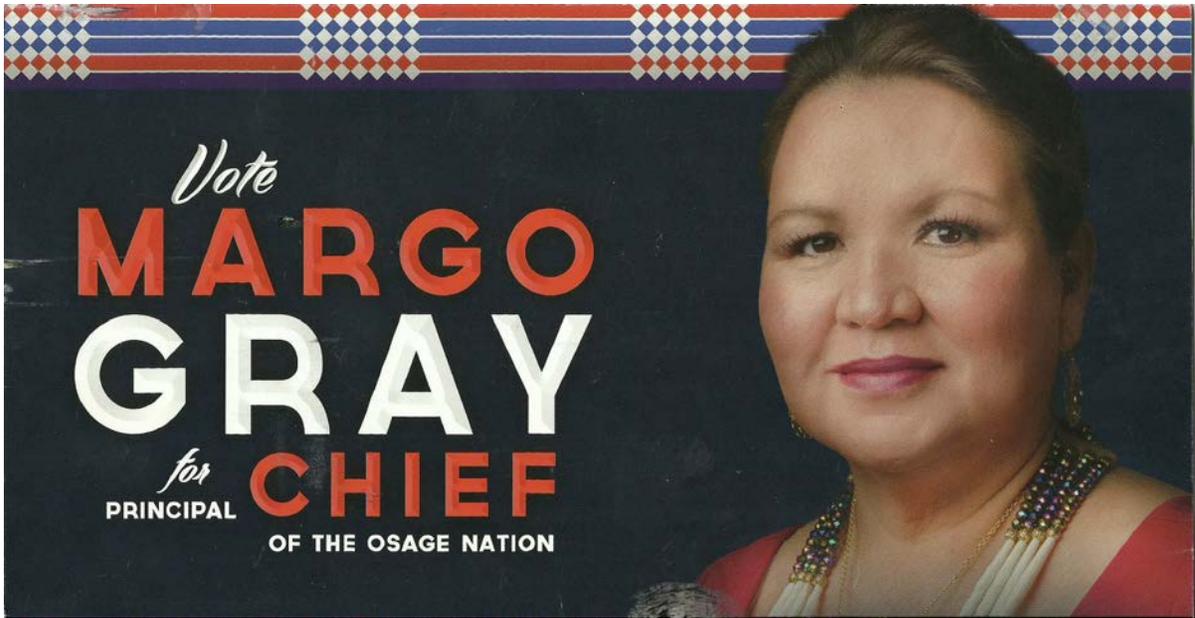


Figure 2.5. Scan of the brochure sent to Osage constituents by 2014 Principal Chief Candidate Margo Gray.



Figure 2.6. Graphic design work for the Osage Nation by [Name] of [City] by [Name] of [City].

Part of what makes the practice and use of ribbon work unique to the Osage Nation is its use within the Osage In-lon-schka. For many—but certainly not all—Osage people, the In-lon-schka is one of the most important events of each year. Participation the In-lon-schka, or “the dances” as they are often called, represents one of the most important social institutions by which Osages build and strengthen nationhood outside of formal political structures.<sup>78</sup> While the In-lon-schka represents a central community-building space for the Osage Nation, it is also a practice that many Osages experience as deeply personal and familial. The In-lon-schka is also space where Osage knowledge and values are embedded through localized practice.

In the mid-1880s, the In-lon-schka came to the communities of Pawhuska and Hominy from the Kaw, and the Grayhorse community received the dance from the Ponca.<sup>79</sup> Even though the dance developed through trade networks with the other nations—similar to ribbon work—the Osage made the In-lon-schka an Osage practice by adding their own songs and adapting the dance over time.<sup>80</sup> In a 2013 blog post about the In-lon-schka, Osage author and my uncle Charles Red Corn echoes this sentiment; he states “this bringing together, those things from the past, watching them work for the present, gives the Osage People a feeling of solidarity. It is a feeling that will endure.”<sup>81</sup> While the structure of the dance itself emerged from the Kaw and Ponca as a War Dance<sup>82</sup>—and some Osages

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<sup>78</sup> For more on this, see Powell, “Osage Ribbon Work and the Expression of Osage Nationalism.”

<sup>79</sup> Callahan, *The Osage Ceremonial Dance I'n-Lon-Schka*, 24; Granberry, “The Expression of Osage Identity,” 41.

<sup>80</sup> Dennison, *Colonial Entanglement*, 83.

<sup>81</sup> Charles H. Red Corn, “I lo'n schka,” *Osage News* (blog), July 26, 2013, <http://osagenews.org/blog/i-lon-schka>.

<sup>82</sup> There is some debate about whether or not the dance was received by the Osage as a War Dance. Some scholars assert that the dance was no longer a war dance by the time it was received by the Osage, see Granberry, “The Expression of Osage Identity: Ethnic Unity and the In-lon-schka,” 41; and Callahan, *Osage Ceremonial Dance I'n-Lon-Schka*. Some scholars claim that it was received as a War Dance, see Meadows, *Kiowa Military Societies: Ethnohistory and Ritual*, 261. Still, others trace its origins to the Grass Dance, see Ellis, *A dancing people: powwow culture on the southern Plains*, 52; and Swan, “Osage Dancing Societies and Organizations,” 158. Regardless of its origin, the In-lon-schka has never functioned as a War Dance within Osage society. However, many Osage community members past and present refer to the In-lon-schka as a War Dance, which is why I have chosen to include this interpretation in the text.

still refer to it as such—rather than preparing participants for battle or celebrating victory, the In-lon-schka is best conceived as a social institution that ensures an Osage future by communicating, reinterpreting, and reinforcing important aspects of Osage experience.<sup>83</sup>

Red Corn's statement about the past, present, and future also marks another key aspect of the In-lon-schka; it is also a practice that disrupts Western understandings of time and hierarchical order. In an interview for *First American Art Magazine*, Norman Akers talks about this disruption in his own art practice<sup>84</sup>:

In terms of hierarchy, I usually situate the work on the picture plane in a dialogue between the pieces, I tend to have these fields with many symbols because it allows the viewer to engage with the work at different points in time. What's in between the symbols, the negative space, is also an important element in the work because it's about transition, revealing that sometimes the journey is more important than the destination.

The images themselves come from a variety of sources. I'm looking at little books, science manuals, and some are carried over from drawings. I do a lot of collage when I'm cutting out and pasting images together. I will scan images into the computer and when the scan is too mechanical, I will draw over them. Through the process, there is a nonlinear layering, and each layer reveals something important about a specific unified theme. No layer is more significant than another.

Past, present, and future are blurred in these layers. There is a blur when you come from a tribal community. Regardless of your place in the present, you can't help but think about your history, and you can't help but think about your home, because these are the things that form you as a being. At the same time, as a tribal person, as an artist, as a community, you want to move forward. There is a danger to looking back too much, and I try to find a place where all three, past, present, and future, exist. The future that exists in these works is creating opportunities for new ideas—the third space.

As I was reading this passage, I immediately noticed the connection between Akers words and those of ~~Uncle Charley~~ Red Corn. Using the above techniques of layering and blurring images, Akers is able to capture the complexity of the In-lon-schka and its irreconcilability with Western constructions of time and order in a single image.

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<sup>83</sup> Callahan, *The Osage Ceremonial Dance I'n-Lon-Schka*, 20; Granberry, "The Expression of Osage Identity," 41.

<sup>84</sup> Merz-Edwards and Akers, "Osage Painter and Printmaker Norman Akers," 53. Emphasis added.

In the first paragraph of his statement, Akers emphasizes the importance of the journey, which resonates with the ways that Osages will often talk about “getting ready” for the dances throughout the year. While the dances take place in the month of June, families spend time preparing their clothes, their travel, their time off from work, and even their contributions to family and community meals over the course of the year, or even years. Even still, when it comes time for the dances, people spend time eating together and visiting with one another before getting dressed, which is also a communal activity, and entering the arbor as districts and families. Although the act of dancing itself is often elevated within academic discourse, in practice, the meals and the communal aspects outside of the dance are just as important as the dance itself.

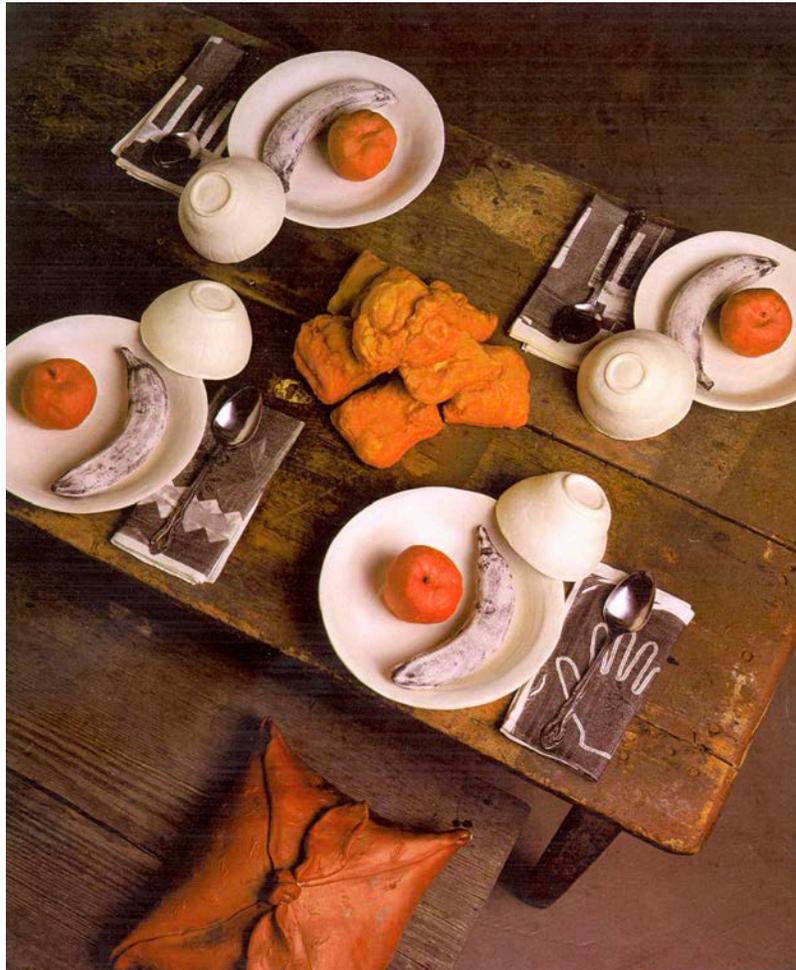


Fig. 2.9 *Wa-nam-bre*, Anita Fields, clay and textile installation. Image courtesy of the artist.

Akers also discusses this disruption of hierarchical categorization in the second paragraph. He draws on the idea of bringing disparate images together from a variety of sources. Each of these sometimes-disparate elements contributes to the larger idea he is addressing in his work. This, too, is a reflection of the In-lon-schka. As Herman “Mogri” Lookout, former Director of the Osage Language Program and Head Committeeman for the Pawhuska District explains: “it’s a place that gathers; nothing gathers Osages more than these drums do ... *It seems like nothing gathers people*, but the fellowship and the relationships we form, that’s the beauty of it ... It’s getting along with one another, treating one another good, respecting one another, and that’s what it does. It makes a good life.”<sup>85</sup> The In-lon-schka brings Osages together in a space that is removed from the divisiveness and politics that characterize many interactions throughout the other months of the year, and Akers’ work reflects that practice.



Fig. 2.10. Portrait of Mogri Lookout (2016). Courtesy of Ryan Red Corn.

The final paragraph from Akers’ statement delves into ideas about Western constructions of time as linear and the kinds of limitations that are placed on Indigenous peoples. These expectations place assumptions of Indians as backwards in contrast to the forward motion of Anglo-American

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<sup>85</sup> Herman “Mogri” Lookout. “2012 Pawhuska In-Lon-Schka Dances.” *Osage News* video, 3:01, July 18, 2012. <http://osagenews.org/video/2012-pawhuska-lon-schka-dances>.

progress.<sup>86</sup> As Philip Deloria explains, “broad cultural expectations are both the products and the tools of domination.”<sup>87</sup> While the binary of past and future are limiting, within the space of the In-lon-schka, these times come together in the present. Dancing around the drum, wearing something made by your grandmother, watching generations of families come together, seeing children learn these practices and from an early age understand their importance— in these moments, time is nonlinear, the past and future exist in the same space. Visual references to the In-lon-schka throughout the remainder of the year serve as a reminder of this in our daily lives.

Previous scholars have attempted to categorize the In-lon-schka as an institution that occupies a sacred space, separate from the secular daily lives of Osage people. In her book, *The Osage Ceremonial Dance I’n-Lon-Schka*, Alice Callahan focuses largely on the history, organization, and practice of the In-lon-schka. Callahan describes the In-lon-schka as “the Osages’ most important ceremonial dance.”<sup>88</sup> In his own research, Daniel Swan describes the In-lon-schka as, “a ceremonial society of male members that preserves and perpetuates many traditional Osage values while providing a focal point for the ethnic identity of the OsaHalge people.”<sup>89</sup> One researcher even describes how the In-lon-schka “pulls Osage dancers away from everyday life.”<sup>90</sup> These descriptions demonstrate how the In-lon-schka dances are often categorized as “ceremonial,” “traditional,” “religious,” or “spiritual,” and set in opposition to the everyday experiences of Osage people. Although these categorizations are not incorrect—Osage people often use this type of language in their own descriptions of the In-lon-schka—these categorizations can limit possibilities for other

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<sup>86</sup> Deloria, *Indians in Unexpected Places*, 141.

<sup>87</sup> Deloria, 4.

<sup>88</sup> Callahan, *The Osage Ceremonial Dance I’n-Lon-Schka*, 7.

<sup>89</sup> Swan, “Osage Dancing Societies and Organizations,” 157–58.

<sup>90</sup> Granberry, “The Expression of Osage Identity,” 67.

aspects of the lives of Osage people. In other words, describing participation in the In-lon-schka in terms of binary constructions such as modern/traditional or secular/sacred is in danger of marking the “everyday experiences” of Osage people as “inauthentic” or “less Indian.”<sup>91</sup>

The In-lon-schka defies the type of categorization and definition that scholarly work often demands. Having participated in and experienced the In-lon-schka for nearly thirty years myself, I still find it hard to describe in writing.<sup>92</sup> During a conversation with one of my aunts several years ago, she reminded me that the In-lon-schka “is for us and no one else.” In this moment, I came to the realization that there are certain aspects of the In-lon-schka that intentionally defy and resist description. As anthropologist Beatrice Medicine explains, “even when they are dealing with ‘one of their own’” people can be wary of how interpretations and analyses of their communities might be used.<sup>93</sup> This concern stems from the use of written interpretations of Osage and other Indigenous practices in ongoing colonial efforts to collect, categorize, and control such practices.<sup>94</sup>

As a focal point of the In-lon-schka, the attire worn by participants marks belonging within this space, and ribbon work is a core component of this clothing. In the film *Ribbons of the Osage: The Art and Life of Georgeann Robinson*, Jan Jacobs describes the connection between ribbon work and the In-lon-schka as explained by Robinson<sup>95</sup>:

Mom always said, and I as I get older, I realize this more. That, ribbon work is the dance and the dance is ribbon work and by saying that, I think she was saying that without the clothes, the dance wouldn't be the same, we would be out there, but we would just be men and women, but when we're out there and the men in their straight dance clothes and the women in their skirts and their fingerwoven belts and their yellow-dyed leggings then we are

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<sup>91</sup> See Deloria, *Indians in Unexpected Places*, 11; and Bruyneel, *Third Space of Sovereignty*, 8, 21.

<sup>92</sup> In his own work, anthropologist Darren Ranco explains, “I experienced difficulty writing something that seemed anthropological without treating my friends and family in disrespectful ways.” See Ranco, “Toward a Native Anthropology,” 65.

<sup>93</sup> Medicine, *Learning to Be an Anthropologist and Remaining “Native,”* 5.

<sup>94</sup> Dennison, *Colonial Entanglement*, 80.; See also Simpson, “On Ethnographic Refusal.”

<sup>95</sup> Swearingen, Swearingen, and Robinson, *Ribbons of the Osage the Art and Life of Georgeann Robinson*.

a part of that dance, we mesh together and we become one, and you can't separate one from the other.

Disentangling ribbon work from the dances and the dances from ribbon work is an impossible task, and this was an idea that was echoed throughout my dissertation research. Ribbon work designs used outside of the In-lon-schka, and used within art and design, serve as visual markers of the In-lon-schka throughout the remainder of the year. As ONM Curator Hallie Winter said, “it [ribbon work] is very symbolic of the perseverance of the Osage and it brings back all these feelings ... ribbon work and the patterns are something that are still so solid and concrete and are still here after all these years and continue to be taught to our younger generations.” For Winter and others, ribbon work serves not only as a marker for the In-lon-schka, but also for the various ideas, feelings, and emotions the In-lon-schka represents—which are as diverse as the Osage dancers, drummers, singers, cooks, and community members who do and do not participate in the dances.



Figures 2.11-2.12. These images depict “Vote” posters designed by Buffalo Nickel Creative on behalf of the Osage Nation Election Office, which feature an Osage woman (left) and man (right) voting in the clothes that are typically worn during the In’lon-schka and other Osage social institutions. Images courtesy of Ryan Red Corn.

In her analysis of Osage ceramicist Anita Fields' work, art historian heather ahtone describes how this entanglement is echoed within A. Fields' ceramic figures. She writes,<sup>96</sup>

The play between the known and the unknown is also evident within her dress forms. Borrowing from Osage women's dresses, Fields plays with the concepts of textiles as soft and delicate forms that materialize the relationships between the wearer and her family, her community, and her identity. Fields has a self-professed affinity for cloth and textile as manifestations of a creative spirit, both by the person who makes it and the person who keeps it. She described that the things that are worn as Osage articles, including clothes and woven pieces, are also signifiers of the relationships that exist between community members, objects that signify connections.

For A. Fields, Osage clothing connects Osage community members, and her works often use ribbon work imagery to signify these connections. In drawing on the visual language of ribbon work designs within her work, A. Fields is, in turn, connecting her art work to herself, her family, and her community. Not only does A. Fields utilize textiles in her art practice, but she also makes ribbon work and clothes for her children and other family members for the In-lon-schka. Here, her art practice and her ribbon work are connected to teaching her children to know who they are, because making these clothes and participating in the dances is how she was taught by her grandmother.<sup>97</sup>



Figures 2.13-14. (right) Anita's daughter, Welana, wearing a blanket passed down from her grandmother. Photograph by Tom Fields; (left) Anita Fields, *Collage Figurine A*, 2014, ceramic. Used with permission of artists.

<sup>96</sup> ahtone, "Anita Fields Honors an Osage Way of Thinking."

<sup>97</sup> Fields, interview.

Throughout my research, I talked with various artists about the experience of participating in the In-lon-schka as formative and enduring, and as an experience that shapes their work in conscious and unconscious ways. Representations of ribbon work and other elements of the In-lon-schka signify the ideas and values that are communicated, practiced, and embedded as Osage knowledge. Within Akers' paintings and prints, he utilizes ribbon work and other imagery as a means to signify this connection to the dances, and to home. During one of our conversations, Akers explained,<sup>98</sup>

I do feel like, ribbon work is very much a part of our heritage, and it's extremely important, that it has a real connection to home. You know, when we have people in the community making the work, it brings a certain life to the community that I think is vital. I mean, when you, and we've talked about this in the past, when you know who made your suit, and you know where they come from, you know, you have that link. You know, it's kind of like the things that we have in our cedar chest in our own home, we know where they came from, and that type of story, that type of connection to place is extremely important. It's funny, while all these materials, like ribbon, beads, and broadcloth were imported and brought to our community as trade items, likewise, we take them and we make them our own. There's something about the making, the taking of those materials and physically manipulating them and making them in the community, and then them being distributed back out.

Landscape and dislocation are central to Akers' work. He often talks about the imagery he uses within his works as "a metaphor for being away from home."<sup>99</sup> Akers addresses dislocation on a personal level, but also the impact of colonization and dislocation on the Osage and other American Indian nations. Akers uses maps with boundaries and borders he has distorted to reclaim place within his paintings. When asked about this strategy he states, "every time I modify a map in my work, I am defining place on my terms."<sup>100</sup> Just as maps have been used as a colonial tool for dispossessing Indigenous lands, maps can also be (re)appropriated and used to engage audiences in a conversation, and perhaps, to shift understandings.

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<sup>98</sup> Akers, interview.

<sup>99</sup> Merz-Edwards and Akers, "Osage Painter and Printmaker Norman Akers," 55.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid.



Figure 2.15. *Okesa I*, Norman Akers. Used with permission of artist.

This strategic modification and disruption is a strategy that Akers has developed over time, through his experiences as an artist, a teacher, and as an Osage citizen. When I asked him about his use of maps as a subversive tool to engage people in conversation about difficult or violent topics, he explained<sup>101</sup>:

It is violent. I want to address these issues about colonialism, land, what's happened to us, but I want to do it in a way that you can have a conversation about it. Likewise, I don't want to necessarily make paintings that appease the people who want to keep us in the past. I want to make works that can be contemplated, you know those landscapes, and I love what heather ahtone said to me a while back, she said, "your painting addresses this issue of sovereignty, you as an artist are defining your sense of place through those *Okesa* paintings, you've got this rich history that's there, it's your concept of home." I thought it was just a beautiful thing for her to say.

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<sup>101</sup> Akers, interview.

Within his work, Akers uses self-representation as a means to define his sense of place and home, and the Osage landscape, on his own terms. He continues, "That's in a sense what those *Okesa* paintings are really about. They're also about halfway there, that notion of being at home and not being at home. There's a duality to them, but *that duality is also in ribbon work* when you look at it."<sup>102</sup> Just as the layered imagery within Akers work is able to grapple with the complexity, violence, and hope of ongoing colonial entanglements, so does the layering of ribbons within ribbon work and their use within the Osage Nation.



Figure 2.16. Norman Akers, *Okesa II*, used with permission of artist.

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<sup>102</sup> Akers.

## Ribbon work as an Osage practice

I look out there and I can see things that I've made ... it just has a lot of meaning, and *the ribbon work is, of course, the thread that's interwoven into many things in my life*. To me it is an art. It is just as much art as a beautiful painting or a lovely melody. It has that much significance, to me, because it has a deeper meaning. This is a part of my people, and if I don't do something, or if I didn't ever try to do anything about it, in time, it could be lost.

Georgeann Robinson



Figures 2.17-18. (left) Georgeann Robinson, talking with her hands, as she often did, while doing a ribbon work demonstration. Photo courtesy of Craig Robinson. (right) 1961 NCAA Executive Council Meeting, Georgeann Robinson top row, middle. Images accessed through Smithsonian Digital Archives.

I never met my great-grandmother, Georgeann. She passed away the year before I was born. ~~She, like many Osage women before and after her time, was a badass.~~ She was the first female Vice President for the National Congress of American Indians, and she opened her own business with her sisters Louise and Genevieve in 1957. In her "spare time" she was an advocate for American Indian higher education and spent time helping young Indian people apply to college and scholarships to fund the costs of attendance. So much of my research has been about her legacy as a ribbon worker. Sometimes I forget I never actually knew her when she was alive. I wrote about her and her sisters in my master's thesis. For my dissertation, I set out to do a project that had very little to do with ribbon

work, because I assumed I had covered enough in my previous work. As I spoke with community members, artists, and even museum professionals, though, I kept hearing the same things: “Why don’t you write more about your grandma?” “Why don’t you write some more about ribbon work?” I questioned whether or not the community input on my project was worthwhile in this instance, but I stuck with it. There was more to learn, and there always will be. Ribbon work is, of course, the thread that’s interwoven into many things in my life, and my research.



Figures. 2.19-2.20. Ribbon work applique on jean jacket, made for author by Lisa Powell and Georgeann Robinson. Photo by author.

While the origins of ribbon work are tied to American Indian engagement in the eighteenth-century consumer revolution,<sup>103</sup> Indian peoples traded and incorporated new materials into their lives well before the arrival of settlers. Prior to the establishment of colonial trade networks, Indian women ornamented clothing with highly valued goods such as paints, shell beads, elk teeth, and dentalium shells obtained through wide-ranging intertribal trade.<sup>104</sup> Indigenous involvement in international trade preceded the arrival of Europeans, and framing ribbon work—or other Indigenous

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<sup>103</sup> For more on American Indian engagement in the eighteenth-century consumer revolution see Timothy Shannon, “Dressing for Success on the Mohawk Frontier”; James Axtell, “The First Consumer Revolution”; and Ann Smart Martin, “Material Things and Cultural Meanings.”

<sup>104</sup> Her Many Horses, *Identity by Design*, 24.

practices—as a simple reaction to Western imposition diminishes the importance of preexisting aesthetic, social, and economic processes. Furthermore, as Richard Conn, former Curator of Native American Art at DAM, once explained during an interview:

When European traders first started coming to this country and offering the Indians their goods, they must have been surprised over and over again at the unexpected ways that the Indians would use these things. Ribbons are one good example ... I think what it shows of course is a great deal of ingenuity on the part of Indians in general to have taken these European trade goods and seen possibilities in them that the Europeans themselves had not seen.

In these examples, entanglement becomes a means for historically and politically situating localized practices of exchange, and colonial interactions, within the larger field of power relations.

The expansion of trade networks through the fur trade and competition between the French and the British led to an increase in the availability of silk ribbon and other goods. Renowned Osage ribbon worker Georgeann Gray Robinson attributed the proliferation of ribbon work to the French Revolution, “for it was in the wake of the French Revolution that merchants exported large stockpiles of silk ribbon to North America”<sup>105</sup> due to post-Revolution regulations on “luxury dress.”<sup>106</sup> While the first documented account of ribbon-adorned clothing occurred among the Iroquois in 1735, it was not until the mid-nineteenth century that examples of appliqué style ribbon work began appearing in the material record.<sup>107</sup> By the mid-nineteenth century, the practice of ribbon work had also expanded from the Great Lakes region to the Prairie communities through the process of Indian removal.<sup>108</sup> The exchange networks that emerged during settlement, the increase in the availability of silk ribbons as a

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<sup>105</sup> “NEA National Heritage Fellowships: Georgeann Robinson,” accessed August 12, 2013, [http://arts.gov/honors/heritage/fellows/georgeann-robinson?id=1982\\_12&type=bio](http://arts.gov/honors/heritage/fellows/georgeann-robinson?id=1982_12&type=bio).

<sup>106</sup> Pannabecker, “Ribbonwork of the Great Lake Indians: The Material of Acculturation,” 107.

<sup>107</sup> Pannabecker, “Tastily Bound with Ribands,” 268; Swearingen, Swearingen, and Robinson, *Ribbons of the Osage the Art and Life of Georgeann Robinson*.

<sup>108</sup> Pannabecker, “Ribbonwork of the Great Lake Indians: The Material of Acculturation,” 105.

result of the French Revolution, and the subsequent expansion of the practice of ribbon work during Indian removal signal the ways that ribbon work is deeply entangled in colonial processes.



Figure 2.21. Ribbon work blanket in the collection of the Denver Art Museum. (Cat. No. 1953.151)



Figure 2.22. Ribbon work blanket in the collection of The Met. (Cat. No. 2002.602.7)

While the nascence of Osage ribbon work is undoubtedly related to the broader emergence of its practice among other Indigenous peoples, the execution and style of Osage ribbon work, as well as its contemporary uses, are unique to the Osage Nation. Today, one of the most recognized features of

Osage ribbon work is the prominence of geometric designs. Other “hallmarks of ‘Osage work’” include “precise technical execution,” “an exactness of design,” and a striking “juxtaposition of colors.”<sup>109</sup> As anthropologist Daniel Swan explains, “the Osage have earned a position of great stature based on their distinctive patterns, high standards of quality, and the sheer volume of ribbon work they have produced.”<sup>110</sup>



Figures 2.23-2.24. Women’s broadcloth leggings with ribbon work. (DAM Cat. No. 1956.201A-B)

The unique qualities of Osage ribbon work are products of the distinct history of the Osage Nation. For example, the strength of Osage trade networks through the early nineteenth century—and the fact that the Osage accounted for more than three quarters of the St. Louis fur trade before 1812—played an integral role in the expansion of this practice.<sup>111</sup> The significant control the Osage

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<sup>109</sup> Swan, “Osage Dancing Societies and Organizations,” 164.

<sup>110</sup> Swan, 166.

<sup>111</sup> Burns, “Missionaries, Fur Traders, and Osage Ribbon Work,” 49.

exerted over the fur trade<sup>112</sup> enabled the Osages to have “first choice of the available trade goods.”<sup>113</sup> Osage mastery of ribbon work was also due in part to the fine needlework Osage women learned from religious missions during the first half of the nineteenth century. In the words of historian Louis Burns, “[ribbon work] was the result of sharing the best of what the fur trade offered and the well-intentioned efforts of those searching for souls to save. Above all, however, it resulted from the desire of Osage women to create beauty.”<sup>114</sup>



Figure 2.25. *Women’s Wearing Blanket*, Unknown Osage artist, ca. 1890-1900 (Fenimore Art Museum Cat. No. T0809).

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<sup>112</sup> For further reading on Osage trade networks (1673-1840), see Rollings, *The Osage: An Ethnohistorical Study of Hegemony on the Prairie-Plains*; see also Din and Nasatir, *The Imperial Osages: Spanish-Indian Diplomacy in the Mississippi Valley* which focuses particularly on the interactions between the Osage and the Spanish between 1763—when the Spanish acquired the Louisiana Territory from France—and 1804—when U.S. officials arrived after the Louisiana Purchase.

<sup>113</sup> Burns, “Missionaries, Fur Traders, and Osage Ribbon Work,” 49.

<sup>114</sup> Burns, 49–50.

Even though the skills that Osage and other Indian women learned from missionaries were ultimately aimed at assimilating them into settler society, the expertise these Osage women gained in sewing actually gave them the tools necessary for excelling as ribbon work artists. The access and ability to afford the best ribbon, needles, thimbles, and thread, as well as the missionary training Osage women received as a result of these colonial entanglements all contributed to the establishment of Osage ribbon work as a unique practice beginning in the early nineteenth century.

During the first half of the twentieth century, as a result of settler-colonial processes and broader economic changes, the majority of Osage people—and more Americans in general—began wearing commercially manufactured clothing. This shift resulted from the increased availability of transportation as well as the advent of catalog shopping through companies like Montgomery Ward and Sears, Roebuck and Company. These innovations made it easier for all Americans—not just American Indians—to obtain clothing and household items commercially. However, there were certain items that were not available through catalogs or in department stores that emerged as central markers of Osage community during this time.<sup>115</sup>

Just as ribbon work arose from American Indian desires to establish boundaries between “what was and what was not Indian” during the eighteenth century, the use of particular “Osage clothing” was used to mark Osage community-building spaces in the twentieth century.<sup>116</sup> The clothes worn for the In-lon-schka dances, and other important social institutions, became integral components of Osage nation-building outside of formal political structures. As the meaning of this type of clothing changed, the manufacture of ribbon work and other garments was also impacted. When Osage people began wearing clothing with ribbon work less often, such garments undoubtedly lasted longer, required fewer repairs or replacements, and could be passed down to future generations.

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<sup>115</sup> Swan, “Osage Dancing Societies and Organizations,” 148.

<sup>116</sup> Pannabecker, “Tastily Bound with Ribands,” 273.

By the 1940s, there were only a handful of Osage women who were doing ribbon work. As Robinson explains, “for a good many years, a lot of Delaware ladies were doing Osage ribbon work” for Osage people.<sup>117</sup> By this time, Red Corn and Robinson both had children, and it was important for them to be able to make ribbon work so their children could participate in the In-lon-schka dances. Although Delaware women were making ribbon work in the Osage style, which highlights how the Osage aesthetic continued to shape the market, it was important for these women to engage in the practice of making ribbon work for their own children.

Interviews obtained through the Doris Duke Oral History Project reveal that learning to ribbon work was a self-taught process of trial and error for these sisters. In the following excerpt, Louise Gray Red Corn describes how she began doing ribbon work:

When my boys—I just had three at the time—were little ... Mrs. Fred Lookout sent after me. I lived a block from her. She sent after me. I went over there to see her and she told me... “you have little boys,” and she said, “one of these days those little boys are going to want to dance... and you must be getting them ready.”<sup>118</sup>

Red Corn explains how Mrs. Lookout gave her some broad cloth and ribbons, a completed set of leggings, and a breech for her oldest son. Lookout suggested that she use the finished pieces as a pattern to begin her own ribbon work. According to Red Corn, “I told Mrs. Lookout, ‘I can sew, I can make a dress and I can make little shirts and I can sew just about anything, but ribbon work, that’s just out of the question.’”<sup>119</sup> After making the initial suits for her own sons, community members began to approach Red Corn with the materials needed and asked her to do ribbon work for other suits, blankets, and skirts. Here, we begin to see how ribbon work, as an Osage practice, is about more than sewing, but rather, is about building community and building an Osage future.

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<sup>117</sup> Ibid.

<sup>118</sup> Louise Gray Red Corn, interview by Katherine [Kathryn] Red Corn, August 25, 1968, transcript, Doris Duke Collection, University of Oklahoma Libraries Western History Collections, Norman, OK.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid.

Red Corn goes on to describe how her younger sister, Georgeann, asked her to help make a skirt so her daughter could participate in the In-lon-schka dances:

She brought her material over and we made Jan a skirt, never thinking for five minutes about what side the ribbon work would go on and I just jerked up and put it on the wrong side. So, Jan danced that afternoon over here at the dances and she just went around the drum one time and I think four people came over and told Georgeann and I that her ribbon work was on the wrong side. So, that was another experience with us.<sup>120</sup>

Even though these sisters began ribbon work through a process of trial and error, ribbon work remained a familiar practice and an embedded form of knowledge within the space of the In-lon-schka. I asked Jan Jacobs, the little girl from this story about that experience and she explained:

I vaguely remember that. I remember mostly the getting organized and getting things ready and picking out the fabric for my shirt and things, and it was very exciting. I do remember, you know, conversations with my mom about that we had to redo my skirt. I think they felt that they'd worked really hard and tried really hard so I'd look right. You have to kind of remember in that particular time, we did not have as many people dancing as we do today. There was space when you went around the arbor, and of course the arbor, that was two arbors ago, it was much smaller than today's arbor... not a lot of women dressed either, so when you did go out, you know, you were noticed. So, I have vague remembrances of it, but I remember more my clothes and the excitement of getting to dress, and be a part of the dance.

These moments signal the localized knowledge that remains embedded within the Osage Nation.

Until recently, this knowledge was inaccessible to people who did not have Osage family or friends who were willing to teach them these things.

The fact that the Gray sisters were skilled with a needle and thread facilitated their efforts in learning the art of ribbon work, which, once again, points to the ongoing entanglements that characterize this expressive form. All three of the Gray sisters attended the St. Louis School for Girls, a Catholic boarding school in Pawhuska, Oklahoma where they were taught, among other things, to sew. Like many Osage parents at the time who believed that it was important for their children to receive a certain type of education, Clarence Gray chose to send his daughters to the St. Louis School.

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<sup>120</sup> Ibid.

As Red Corn explains, “the years that I spent at the Catholic Convent were happy years. My Dad sent me there because he felt like I would learn things that I needed to know, and I feel they helped me.”<sup>121</sup> When asked about whether or not she was trained to do ribbon work by artisans, Robinson explained, “when I was at the convent I learned to embroider, I learned to stitch, and I learned to darn and make all kinds of pretty things for Christmas.... I was real small when I first went to the convent but I could take a small needle and I could sew up my sock or do up my clothing or whatever. They taught us to do that ... so ribbon wasn’t all that hard for me to figure out.”<sup>122</sup>



Figure 2.26. Back, left to right: Genevieve Gray Tomey, Georgeann Gray Robinson, Emma Louise Gray Red Corn. Middle: Vivian Cecelia "Mary" Gray Pratt, Clarence Gray Jr., Anna Gray Jones. Front: Andrew Edward Gray. Photo courtesy of Osage Nation Museum.

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<sup>121</sup> In her own research, Lomawaima reveals that alumni of Chilocco Indian School often valued their experiences at the school. See Lomawaima, *They Called it Prairie Light*, 166.

<sup>122</sup> Georgeann Robinson, interview by George Horse Capture, 1982, transcript.

Just as Osage women mastered sewing through their interactions with missionaries in the early nineteenth century, the Gray sisters' experience in boarding school from the late 1920s through early 1930s gave them the skills needed to teach themselves to create ribbon work from photographs and existing pieces. The goal of the St. Louis School, and other boarding schools, was to instill middle class and Anglo- femininity within the daily practices of these young women, and ribbon work existed outside of this expectation. Once again, however, the policies aimed at assimilating Osage women into mainstream American society provided them with an opportunity to excel at a uniquely Osage practice.



Figure 2.27. Photograph of Jennie Garfield Gray, Clarence Gray, holding Georgeann Gray Robinson. Seated in auto: Vivian Cecelia (Mary) Gray Pratt. Standing: Charles Pratt. Little girls: Emma Louise Gray Red Corn, Anna Gray Jones, Genevieve Gray Tomey. Photo courtesy of Osage Nation Museum.

While the statements above reveal that both Red Corn and Robinson practiced ribbon work so their own children could participate in important Osage social institutions, they did this work because it was essential to ensuring a strong Osage future for the nation as a whole. In 1958, the three sisters opened the Red Man Store in downtown Pawhuska. At the store, the Gray sisters made ribbon work, and everything else people needed in order to dress and participate in the In-lon-schka dances and

other important Osage social institutions. As Louise's daughter, Kathryn Red Corn explained, "it made it so much easier for somebody to want to dance and say, oh well go to the Red Man Store, they can get a suit together for you. And to me it was an encouragement to be able to know there was one place you could go and you could get everything you needed."

Here, one of the Gray sisters' nieces, Mary Bighorse, describes her memories of spending summers at the Red Man Store with her aunts: "they all worked there; they sewed for everybody; sewed for the tribe. They made everything; moccasins, shirts, suits, blankets. They had a lot of people in and out of their store. During dance time, it was the hot spot. Everybody who wanted a new shirt or wanted something new, made or mended that's where they went ... and that's where I wanted to be."<sup>123</sup> While the Red Man Store was often busy with Osage customers in the months leading up to the In-lon-schka dances, during the remainder of the year, non-Indian "hobbyists" frequented the store.<sup>124</sup> Robinson often joked that these hobbyists kept her in business. Furthermore, in addition to serving economic needs, selling ribbon work and other "Indian objects" to non-Indian hobbyists served as a creative form of self-representation<sup>125</sup> During one interview Robinson explained "when the white hobbyists came, they challenged us... but they didn't bat an eye on the prices."<sup>126</sup> The hobbyists<sup>127</sup>—wanting to obtain the most "authentic" Indian clothes for dressing up and participating

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<sup>123</sup> Interview transcript, courtesy of Jean Dennison.

<sup>124</sup> Art historian Elizabeth Hutchinson examines the role that "Indian stores" and the mainstream interest in American Indian art played in the development of U.S. Indian Policy. While this is outside of the scope of this research, for a more detailed discussion, see Hutchinson, *The Indian Craze*.

<sup>125</sup> In another publication, *Trading Identities: The Souvenir in Native North American Art from the Northeast, 1700-1900*, Phillips also describes how Indigenous objects created for the market economy carried discrete meanings for Indigenous peoples and non-Indigenous consumers. For more on Indigenous cultural expression within art markets and an analysis of the distinctive roles that objects made for internal and external use play, see also Nelson Graburn, *Ethnic and Tourist Arts: Cultural Expression in the Fourth World*.

<sup>126</sup> Georgeann Robinson, interview by George Horse Capture, 1982, transcript.

<sup>127</sup> See also Deloria, *Playing Indian*.

in powwows and other events—often placed orders for recreations of ribbon work from historical photographs.

Some of the hobbyists asked for unique and intricate patterns with large numbers of ribbon that were difficult and expensive to make. These hobbyists wore the Red Man Store pieces at powwows throughout the country, attracting new business<sup>128</sup> and the recognition of museums. For example, in 2003, a man’s suit made by Robinson was accessioned into the permanent collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York and featured in the exhibit *The Responsive Eye: Ralph T. Coe and the Collecting of American Indian Art*.<sup>129</sup> While some researchers<sup>130</sup> have credited these non-Indian “hobbyists” with revitalizing interest in the art of Osage ribbon work, such interpretations diminish the important work of these women.



Figure 2.28. “Man’s dress outfit,” Georgeann Robinson, 1965-70 (The Met, Cat. No. RTCNA 511a-d).

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<sup>128</sup> For a detailed analysis and case study of the commoditization of Indian art, see Parezo, *Navajo Sandpainting: From Religious Act to Commercial Art*.

<sup>129</sup> Coe, *The responsive eye*, 240.

<sup>130</sup> See Abbass, “Contemporary Oklahoma Ribbonwork: Styles and Economics,” 108.

Even though these entanglements with “hobbyists” and museums supported the Red Man Store and the artistic endeavors of women like Robinson, the Gray sisters’ ribbon work production was motivated by their desire to ensure the continued practice of ribbon working, and its use within important Osage community- and nation-building spaces. For these women, ribbon work and particularly its use within the In-lon-schka dances provided a means for securing an Osage future for their own children and grandchildren. As Bighorse recounts:

I remember my aunts telling me about it ... you have to go through it to realize what you’ve done for your people. And your people... You know you’ve dressed that first time and you’ve helped that person that might not have had money to help you finish... I’ve had a lot of people say I’m kind of short but I’ll pay you. And many times, I’ve said go ahead; you’ve paid me enough. The main thing is that you helped somebody and you know the importance of what they’re getting ready for is to carry on something that’s part of an Osage’s life.<sup>131</sup>

The economic success of the Red Man Store allowed the Gray sisters to build an Osage future by helping their Osage customers who were at times unable to pay their entire bill. Furthermore, by sharing their skills and knowledge with the younger generations, they have guaranteed that these practices will continue.

In addition to teaching her own daughter, granddaughters, and nieces how to ribbon work, Robinson believed that teaching ribbon work and giving demonstrations to Osages and non-Osages was important to maintaining the practice. Robinson taught ribbon work through various local organizations such as the Bartlesville Indian Women’s Club. She also gave demonstrations at the Wheelwright Museum in Santa Fe, New Mexico, the Buffalo Bill Historical Society in Cody, Wyoming, and the American Folklife Festival hosted by the Smithsonian Institution.<sup>132</sup> As Bighorse explained:

My Aunt Georgeann, my last visit with her, she called me over there to her home. She wanted me to be sure to continue with my ribbon work. And she said if you can I want you to teach it because teaching it is preserving it. And if you can preserve it’s going to be around. You give them some way that can take a class with you or have someone come to your home

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<sup>131</sup> Interview transcript, courtesy of Jean Dennison.

<sup>132</sup> “NEA National Heritage Fellowships: Georgeann Robinson,” accessed August 12, 2013, [http://arts.gov/honors/heritage/fellows/georgeann-robinson?id=1982\\_12&type=bio](http://arts.gov/honors/heritage/fellows/georgeann-robinson?id=1982_12&type=bio).

or any way you can, you share that talent with another person; because there's no way one person can sew for this entire tribe ... I've taught classes for 19 years for the tribe and I want to continue teaching ribbon work and sharing that talent with my people. And now I have the opportunity to share it with my younger people and they're interested and I'm happy about that.<sup>133</sup>

Even though the Red Man Store closed in 1978, its legacy continues through the various Osage-operated businesses that sell everything from the supplies needed to make Osage clothes to complete head-to-toe Osage ensembles for both men and women.<sup>134</sup> The entanglements between Osage people and settler-colonial processes and institutions do not simply deny possibilities, but can provide tools which Osage people use to build a strong future. The Gray sisters shared their knowledge and experiences with the young women in their lives. For these women, ribbon work, and particularly its use within the In-lon-schka dances, provided a means for securing an Osage future for their own children and grandchildren. By sharing their skills and knowledge with the younger generations, they have guaranteed this practice will continue.



Figures 2.29-2.30. Genevieve Tomey (left) and Georgeann Robinson (right) at 1967 Smithsonian Folklife Festival. Images courtesy of Smithsonian Digital Archives.

<sup>133</sup> Interview transcript, courtesy of Jean Dennison.

<sup>134</sup> "From high-end Osage regalia to supplies, Osages are open for business," *Osage News*, November 4, 2010.



Figure 2.29. Table of Genevieve Tomey and Georgeann Robinson at 1967 Smithsonian Folklife Festival. Images courtesy of Smithsonian Digital Archives.

### **Everything from the ballet to the In-lon-schka: Collaboration at the Denver Art Museum**

Ribbon work was well-represented in each of the collections I researched, and many of the artists I worked with used ribbon work imagery and designs within their art practice. In the earliest stages of my research, I knew that the Denver Art Museum (DAM) was certainly an institution to keep in mind. DAM has had a number of curators with an interest in Osage material culture—and ribbon work in particular—and with connections with Osage artists and citizens. As the first art museum in the country to establish a curatorial position for American Indian art in 1929, DAM also has a long legacy of collecting and collaborating with Indian artists and communities more broadly. When I interviewed John Lukavic, the current Curator of Native Arts at DAM, I asked him about what made him want to work at DAM, and he described this legacy<sup>135</sup>:

Starting in 1925, the Denver Art Museum identified American Indian Arts as an area where they could make a considerable contribution ... in 1929, the museum had hired Frederic H. Douglas as the curator of Native art at the time. And then, from that point throughout most of his career, he was really the only major curator of American Indian art in a major art

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<sup>135</sup> Lukavic, interview; Feest, *Studies in American Indian Art*.

museum. He really didn't have any competition at the time, but also, he was doing these really ground-breaking exhibitions and programs and scholarship, and you know, he was one of the early board members of the Indian Arts and Crafts Board ... Douglas and René d'Harnoncourt co-curated the *Indian Art of the United States* exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, which has become so famous for its transformational impact on the field of American Indian art. So, there's all of that, but also the long tenures. Frederic Douglas was there from 1929-1956, Norm Feder was there for decades, Richard Conn was there for decades, and Nancy Blomberg's been here since 1990.

Although Douglas was the first curator of an American Indian collection at an art museum, and he was interested in soliciting an appreciation of Indigenous aesthetics from the public, his aesthetic vision was certainly entangled with an ethnographic interest as well as his position on the Indian Arts and Crafts Board.<sup>136</sup>

Norman Feder had no formal academic training, but he did have an understanding of many of the techniques and styles used within American Indian art and material culture from his background as a hobbyist and through the community he built through *American Indian Hobbyist*.<sup>137</sup> He and Richard Conn—as well as a number of other anthropologists, historians, and curators—both came out of the hobbyist tradition. Many hobbyist groups were founded by young men and women who grew up participating in Boy Scouts and Campfire Girls, and became fascinated with performing a certain kind of “authentic” Indianness, making crafts—or “artifakes” as Feder called them—replicating regalia, and meeting to dance in powwows.<sup>138</sup> As Philip Deloria explains in *Playing Indian*, “they dedicated themselves to the public performance of Indian dances and the perpetuation of what they called vanishing Indian culture.”<sup>139</sup> Deloria differentiates two groups of hobbyists that emerged in the mid-twentieth century, object hobbyists and people hobbyists. Object hobbyists held primitivist ideals

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<sup>136</sup> For further reading on the establishment and activities of IACB see Meyn, *More Than Curiosities*; McLerran, *A New Deal for Native Art*; Schrader, *The Indian Arts & Crafts Board*.

<sup>137</sup> Feest, *Studies in American Indian Art*; “Review of <i>Studies in American Indian Art: A Memorial Tribute to No' by Bill Anthes.</i>”; *American Indian Hobbyist* was renamed *American Indian Tradition* in 1960.

<sup>138</sup> Feest, *Studies in American Indian Art*; Deloria, *Playing Indian*.

<sup>139</sup> Deloria, *Playing Indian*.

about Indians as temporal Others, and they believe contact with modern society resulted in degradation and inauthenticity. He explains, “for object hobbyists, the redemptive value of Indians lay not in actual people, but in the artifacts they had once produced in a more authentic stage of existence.”<sup>140</sup>

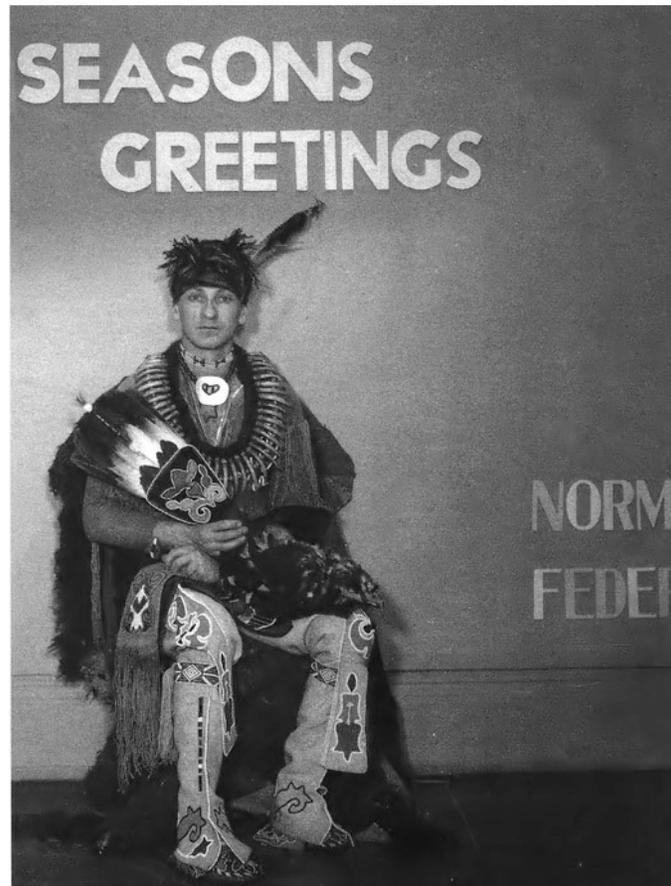


Figure 2.32. Former DAM Curator Norm Feder posing in American Indian attire for his holiday greeting card. Year unknown. Image originally published in Feest, *Studies in American Indian Art*.

People hobbyists, on the other hand, believed that Indian people could simultaneously assimilate to mainstream American economy and society while simultaneously reaffirming cultural differences through particular activities like participating in powwows.<sup>141</sup> Broadly speaking, people

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<sup>140</sup> Deloria, 137.

<sup>141</sup> Deloria, 140; Powers, *Here Is Your Hobby*, 11.

hobbyists enjoyed the social aspects of forming relationships with American Indians, and some of these interpersonal experiences led to a certain amount of reflection and, ultimately, careers in museums and anthropology. Feder and Conn certainly fell within this group, and their hobbyist entanglements and the relationships formed through that community helped inform their curatorial practices in productive ways.

I spent time in the DAM collections during my preliminary research, and I had a conversation with Lukavic, who at the time was the Associate Curator of Native Arts, about my project in its early stages. Fortunately for me, the timing of my fieldwork lined up with the preparation for the exhibition *Why We Dance: American Indian Art in Motion*. *Why We Dance* was co-curated by Lukavic, Chief Curator and Andrew W. Mellon Curator of Native Arts, Nancy Blomberg, and guest curator, Russ Tallchief. Tallchief is an Osage citizen as well as a taidancer and former drumkeeper from the Grayhorse District. As Lukavic explained,<sup>142</sup>

When the art is tied so closely to culture, I felt it was important for us to bring someone in to co-curate the exhibition with us ... We asked Russ to do it for a variety of reasons: one, I've known Russ for a few years, dating back to when I lived in Norman, he is also a tail dancer at Grayhorse, and I knew that... he's on the board at the OKC Ballet, and his aunt was Maria Tallchief, so I mean, in terms of kind of more formal connections to dance in general, but then more specifically within a community, I thought he had a very unique perspective that he could bring to the exhibition in a way that most other people couldn't. Because he understood everything from the ballet to the In-lon-schka if you know what I mean.

Tallchief's experiences as a dancer in various forms provide a unique perspective, and one that was particularly useful in thinking about creative ways to capture the movement of dance as well as the social importance of dances as community building spaces.

The importance of community—both in terms of the ways social dances work to build community and the relationships between DAM and the local American Indian community—is a central theme in the exhibition, which is reflected in the use of the first-person plural in the title *Why*

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<sup>142</sup> Lukavic, interview.

*We Dance*.<sup>143</sup> As Lukavic explains, “we very much wanted to make the exhibition focused on not just the strength of our collection, but really on the local community ... so we decided film at our annual powwow.”<sup>144</sup> DAM’s Friendship Powwow and American Indian Cultural Celebration, which was in its 27<sup>th</sup> year during the filming for the exhibition,<sup>145</sup> is an event that many American Indian families in the Denver area look forward to each year. The powwow is held in the plaza outside of the museum, which is located between DAM and the Denver Public Library’s main branch, across the street from Civic Center Park, and a stone’s throw from the capitol building. This is a prominent location that attracts many passers-by who might not otherwise know about the event, or that Denver has one of the largest urban populations of American Indians.<sup>146</sup> The event also draws visitors who are visiting DAM to view other collections to engage with American Indian community members through observation, participation, and conversation. Before visitors even walk in the museum on powwow day, they see the vibrancy, diversity, and creativity of members of the local Indian community



Figure 2.33. DAM Powwow. (AP Photo).

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<sup>143</sup> “Behind the Scenes of DAM’s ‘Why We Dance.’”

<sup>144</sup> Lukavic, interview.

<sup>145</sup> Berkemeyer, “Community Members Tell Why We Dance.”

<sup>146</sup> National Urban Indian Family Coalition, “Urban Indian America: The Status of American Indian and Alaska Native Children and Families Today.”

Upon entering *Why We Dance*, visitors are greeted by these same images on photo murals and videos taken during the powwow on large screens. The videos—projected on three large walls at the entry—as well as the associated audio were part of a strategy to immerse the visitors in a multisensory experience (See fig #). As Tallchief explained, “That was fun to put together. We wanted to create an immersive environment, and it took different incarnations, but we wanted people to feel like they were in the midst of a powwow or just in the midst of a dance and being surrounded by that.”<sup>147</sup> Foregrounding the local, contemporary, urban community of Indian peoples in this way primes the audience for entering into the second part of the exhibition—which features historic objects from the DAM collections as well as powwow regalia loaned from local families—with an understanding that these are practices and objects that represent continuity and adaptability. Additionally, video screens showing interviews Tallchief did with powwow participants, as well as panels with community member and artist quotes about “why we dance,” reinforce the themes of diversity and vitality throughout the show.



Figure 2.34. *Why We Dance* installation photograph, courtesy DAM.

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<sup>147</sup> Tallchief, interview.

The act of collecting and exhibiting objects not only removes them from context, but also renders them static in their physical display. For the clothing and objects used in dance, this is particularly problematic. Tallchief 's expertise as a dancer contributed to conversations about the ways that static objects could be displayed in a way that indicated movement. As Lukavic explained, “we challenged our mount makers to create mannequins that were fully articulated, so that they could walk in different positions, and I showed them dozens of images for each dance style. I'd say I want this particular mannequin to be in this specific position, because that kind of shows off that particular style of dance. We really wanted to make those connections.”<sup>148</sup> The curators also worked with DAM staff member Patricia Roy-Trujillo (Ojibwe/Meskwaki) and community member Verla J. Howell (Pawnee/Flandreau Santee Sioux) to dress the mannequins and ensure that each piece was displayed correctly.<sup>149</sup> In addition to the powwow regalia, the middle section of the exhibit also had a number of historic objects from the DAM collections which were made for specific community dances and not intertribal powwows, and a number of twentieth century works representing American Indian dance.



Figures 2.35-2.36. Installation shots of middle section of show, images courtesy of John Lukavic.

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<sup>148</sup> Lukavic, interview.

<sup>149</sup> Berkemeyer, “Community Members Tell Why We Dance.”



Figure 2.37. Installation view, photo courtesy of DAM.

This section also included several works by contemporary Indian artists that were inspired by dances within their communities or powwows. One of the most visually and contextually striking pieces in this section is Marie Watt's *Butterfly*. While participating in DAM's artist-in-residence program in 2013, Watt—a citizen of the Seneca Nation—hosted a number of sewing circles, an activity that is a central part of her artistic practice. By inviting community members into her circles to sew and create with her, she is building community through an active engagement. As heather ahtone describes, “For Watt, the location of art and community is much broader than a gallery, she recognizes it takes more than a passive experience such as walking through an exhibit for people to connect. Connection with one another is as important as connecting to the art, but if her artistic process can provide the context for both experiences, then Watt sees both as valuable.”<sup>150</sup>

Watt's sewing circles also inform the art she creates, as was the case with *Butterfly*. Two powwow dancers who participated in one of her sewing circles at DAM explained the jingle dress and

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<sup>150</sup> ahtone, “Seneca Installation Artist Marie Watt,” 65.

dance to her, which served as an inspiration for the piece.<sup>151</sup> Stitching together pink, blue, and red blankets, and jingles into a butterfly motif, Watt and her circles, “collectively form a wall of femininity.”<sup>152</sup> In writing about the power of these circles and the stories shared within him and Watt’s work, ahtone argues, “ The power of the stories, such as those about Sky Woman or the jingle dress, permeate her work. Like a grandmother whose tales create a sense of home and belonging for our children, Watt’s installations serve as markers for our relationships to the stars and each other. Watt is building a community one stitch at a time.” Watt’s work reflects the ways that American Indian social practices, like dances, and the creation of clothing to use within these practices, are deeply important to building and maintaining community.



Figures 2.38-2.39. (left) Installation view, courtesy DAM. (right) Photograph of *Butterfly* by Aaron Johanson.

The third and final section of the exhibit, which features an installation piece called *RoundDance* by Mohawk artist Allen Michaelson, reiterates the power of dance to create community and solidarity, even in the face of ongoing colonialism and violence. The installation featured twelve large television monitors hung vertically and arranged in a circle with synchronized footage of people round dancing at an Idle No More protest. As the people moved around the circle, their images would

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<sup>151</sup> ahtone, 69.

<sup>152</sup> ahtone, 69.

transfer from one monitor to another. The screens were separated by gaps wide enough for people to not only enter the installation to view it, but also, as Lukavic explains, “so visitors could stand between them and symbolically complete the circle and be part of the community that is round-dancing there.”<sup>153</sup> Visitors were not only surrounded by the images of dancers, but also immersed in the sounds of music by the group Northern Cree that was layered with the voices of people speaking at an Idle No More protest. Here, *Why We Dance* conveys that people dance not only to help build and strengthen community, but also as a means to engage in social commentary and protest.<sup>154</sup>



Figure 2.40. Allen Michaelson *RoundDance*. Installation at DAM.

*Why We Dance* was certainly strengthened by the curatorial team’s commitment to collaborating with a variety of community members and artists. In order to facilitate this work, they utilized their ongoing artist-in-residence programs to have American Indian artists create regalia for the exhibition.<sup>155</sup> Although the formalized American Indian artist-in-residence program at DAM did not begin until 2012, the institution has a longer legacy of attempting to understand more about the

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<sup>153</sup> Lukavic, interview.

<sup>154</sup> Lukavic.

<sup>155</sup> The following artists participated in the powwow regalia studio in the summer of 2016: Mary Young Bear (Men’s Woodland Style Dance); Alistair Bane (Men’s Straight Dance); Verla Howell (Men’s Fancy Feather Dance); Andy Cozad (Gourd Dance).

practices of American Indian art and demonstrating the importance of these practices to the museum audience. As Lukavic explains, “The curators at the Denver Art Museum have always seen the importance of connecting arts with artists and with communities ... that's one of the main things we do here, we try to pull back the curtain and reveal the artist's practice and the artist's creativity that goes into making something. It is not just a focus on the object itself or the creation itself, it's the person and the act of making that is important to us.” Here, Lukavic is once again referring to the curatorial leadership at DAM as far back as Frederic Douglas, and particularly his work with Rene d'Harnoncourt at the 1939 Golden Gate Exposition in San Francisco and the 1941 *Indian Art of the United States* exhibition at The Museum of Modern Art (MoMA).<sup>156</sup>



Figure 2.41. Charley Turquoise and Dinay Chili Bitsocy creating sand painting, March 26, 1941, *Indian Art of the United States*.

Douglas was a visionary curator with progressive, yet not wholly unproblematic, ideas about the promotion and display of American Indian art as a means for “the rehabilitation of Indian economic and cultural life.”<sup>157</sup> In the Introduction to the catalogue for the 1941 MoMA show, he writes:

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<sup>156</sup> Parezo and Jones, *Ten Commandments for Effective Anthropological Exhibits*, 5:136.

<sup>157</sup> Frederic H Douglas, *Indian Art of the United States*, 10.

The survival of tribal cultures through generations of persecution and suppression is in itself a testimony to their strength and vitality. It is natural that a new appreciation of these values by the authorities and by part of the American public is now bringing to light in many places traditional customs and traditional thinking that have lived for years carefully shielded from unsympathetic eyes.

But our new willingness to recognize the value of Indian traditional achievement is unfortunately sometimes fostered by sentimentality rather than by true appreciation. There are people who have created for themselves a romantic picture of a glorious past that is often far from accurate. They wish to see the living Indian return to an age that has long since passed and they resent any change in his art. But these people forget that any culture that is satisfied to copy the life of former generations has given up hope as well as life itself, and the fact that we think of Navaho silversmithing as a typical Indian art and of the horsemanship of the Plains tribes as a typical Indian characteristic proves sufficiently that those tribes were strong enough to make such foreign contributions- entirely their own by adapting them to the pattern of their own traditions. Why should it be wrong for the Indian people of today to do what they have done with great success in the past? Invention or adaptation of new forms does not necessarily mean repudiation of tradition but is often a source of its enrichment.

To rob a people of tradition is to rob it of inborn strength and identity. To rob a people of opportunity to grow through invention or through acquisition of values from other races is to rob it of its future. This publication, as well as the exhibition upon which it is based, aims to show that the Indian artist of today, drawing on the strength of his tribal tradition and utilizing the resources of the present, offers a contribution that should become an important factor in building the America, of the future.

In reading this excerpt with generosity—and a recognition of Douglas’s entanglements—it is clear he is attempting to bolster the market for American Indian art and material culture and an appreciation for ongoing innovation. While this is undoubtedly tied to his role on the Indian Arts and Crafts Board, he also champions the adaptability and ingenuity of Indigenous peoples and suggests there is a lesson mainstream American society can learn from these strategies.

One of the strategies that Douglas and d’Harnoncourt used in the MoMA show was inviting American Indian artists to create works of art within the exhibition itself. For example, they hired Navajo sandpainters to work in the space and create sandpaintings for the show. There were also a number of other artists, weavers, and silversmiths who did demonstrations throughout the show’s run. This strategy is still used today, but given the power relations between institutions, artists, and

the visiting public, it can be problematic. During our conversation, Lukavic explained how DAM has addressed this in their artist-in-residence program:

We've always been very mindful to do what we can to subvert the fishbowl effect of kind of putting a Native artist on exhibit. That was never the intention, but we were very cognizant of the fact that that has been done in the past. We've done a variety of things to subvert that to flip it so that the artist feels comfortable. We want the artist to have complete control of what's going on, so they never have to feel that they are in a fishbowl being put on exhibit. One of the ways we've done that ... we basically give all of the creative control and power of how this is going, how the individual residency is going to operate, to the artist.

Osage ribbon worker—and my aunt—Jan Jacobs was one of the artists selected for the residency in preparation for *Why We Dance*. As Lukavic explained, “There was a good strength of Osage material in the exhibition, and knowing that we also wanted to work with Jan, it seemed like the perfect opportunity.” This provided an opportunity for me to spend time in the DAM Collections with my Aunt Jan to talk about her work, but also her mother Georgeann’s legacy, and the history and important role of ribbon work within the Osage Nation.



Figures 2.42-2.43. (left) Jan Jacobs in studio at DAM during artist-in-residence. (right) mannequins dressed in clothing made by Georgeann Robinson and portraits of Jan’s children painted by Osage artist Roxanne Red Corn. Images courtesy of John Lukavic.

During Jacobs’ residency, I also had the opportunity to bring former Osage Nation Museum Director Kathryn Red Corn and my mother, ribbon worker Lisa Powell, to visit with me in the collections. My cousin Ben Jacobs, who is Jan’s son and owns Tocabe: An American Indian Eatery in Denver, even asked if he could join to learn more about ribbon work. This was an incredible

opportunity not only for my research, but for my own ribbon work as well. As we examined over twenty objects, we discussed the practice of ribbon work, how it has changed over time, and the different ways we engage with ribbon work in a museum versus in our community. We also shared lots of laughter during our time at DAM.



Figure 2.44. (left to right) Ben Jacobs, Jan Jacobs, Kathryn Red Corn, and Lisa Powell in the DAM Collections (object in image, Cat. No. 1953.151).

Most often when I visit with my mom or my aunts about ribbon work, it is around pieces that are owned by our family or while viewing pictures that we share over email or text message. However, the ability to see these pieces in person—to touch them, and turn them over, to look closely at the stitches and patterns—was absolutely incredible. There was one piece in particular, a horse blanket that I had seen when it was on display in 2008 and I had studied through pictures during my master’s research. Seeing this blanket up close, being able to study it in conversation with the abundant knowledge present in the collections that day is an experience that certainly stands out from the rest. These interactions—between one another and with the objects— illustrates the significance of

working with the materials themselves and what a close examination of objects can reveal. Here is an excerpt of our conversation<sup>158</sup>:

J. Powell: Yea, this one used to be on display, but it was set back pretty far and at an angle. I've never seen it this close before.

J. Jacobs: Right, so it took the pressure off of the object. Aunt Kathryn, did any of the pieces from this collection go on loan to St. Louis for that exhibit you worked on?

K. Red Corn: Probably, I'm not sure. There were a lot of museums.

J. Jacobs: I like the way that this ends here, or that the sawtooth is over.

K. Red Corn: Yea, I was just looking at that, I hadn't seen that before.

J. Jacobs: The way it just ends, it's like, it looks like the blue goes all the way straight under there, you can see it, but it looks like the design, this goes on top of the...

J. Powell: I've noticed on a lot of the older pieces, they cut the sawtooth pattern into the outside ribbon and then...

L. Powell: Oh, instead of just having one piece of sawtooth.

J. Powell: ... they have the two pieces of ribbon with the sawtooth instead of just the one.



Figures 2.45-2.46. Lisa Powell and Jan Jacobs in DAM Collections (left). Ribbon work on broadcloth with sawtooth design (right). Note the difference in the width of the sawtooth.

Sawtooth, which is most commonly used on women's wearing blankets and skirts, as well as men's tailpieces and otter tails, is a simple pattern of repeating triangles. Today, the majority of

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<sup>158</sup> Red Corn et al., DAM Collections Visit.

Osage ribbon workers leave the finished edge of a piece with a straight seam and have a single row of sawtooth on the edge. Some contemporary ribbon workers will use a straight piece of ribbon in a contrasting color underneath the sawtooth in order to highlight the pattern. However, several of the older museum pieces we saw had this “double saw-tooth,” as we began to call it. It seemed as if the “double sawtooth” was indicative of pieces from the turn of the twentieth century. When I asked ~~my~~ ~~mom~~ if sawtooth was used on any clothing besides women’s blankets and skirts, she said, “no, well wait, on men’s tailpieces, but that is different, and not as wide as this sawtooth. It is more of a piped sawtooth.” Here, she is referring to the width of the ribbon used in these techniques.

E. Berkemeyer (collections manager): So, you asked about how old this was. We acquired it in 1953, we got it from Kohlberg’s, which was the store here in Denver and Kohlberg got it in Pawnee, Oklahoma. But, no history before that.

J. Jacobs: It doesn't say whose collection it was or anything?

J. Powell: I think I saw a date on this before that was like 1890s or early 1900s.

E. Berkemeyer: It says early 1900s was their estimated time.

J. Jacobs: This looks like, though, it’s... did they identify this as silk ribbon or taffeta? Do you know how they identified it?

J. Powell: I think it’s silk, the taffeta doesn't shatter the same way.

J. Jacobs: That's what I was wondering. I just don't remember seeing that water design, that often on silk. I guess it’s there all the time and I just didn't pay attention.

J. Powell: I think the horses are...

J. Jacobs: They're a taffeta. They look like a swiss moiré or something. Don't you think, Lisa?

L. Powell: Yea, can you imagine how beautiful those horses would look while a woman was dancing with it? It would look like they were moving as the light reflected off that moiré ribbon.

Throughout a number of conversations with my mom, aunts, and other ribbon workers, they often talked about their pieces moving around the drum. As we would look at pieces, they would ask me to imagine what this would have looked like while someone was wearing it, dancing in our In-lon-

schka or participating in other social events, using it for its intended purpose. These comments convey the ambiguity surrounding the collection and display of expressive culture within museums.

J. Jacobs: I love those stitches. Those stitches on the sawtooth, Lisa, on the light peach. Almost make it look lacey, doesn't it?

L. Powell: Yea, because they're right on the edge instead of being actually on the face of the ribbon.

J. Jacobs: It's like they catch the edge of the broadcloth and then catch the edge of the ribbon.

J. Powell: You should turn it over.

L. Powell: It's almost like a whip stitch, or a hidden stitch.

J. Jacobs: Yea, a hidden stitch. Oh, and they did it right... see some of it they did, they stitched the ribbon right to the broadcloth.

Older ribbon work items, particularly those from the early twentieth century and before, are loathed by conservators and collections managers across the country. Pieces made during this time used silk ribbons, which are inherently fragile and unstable, that were beautifully hand-stitched directly on to pieces of wool broadcloth. The nap of the broadcloth, directly against the silk ribbon, and particularly when there is an increase in movement and friction, speeds up the rate at which the ribbons deteriorate.



Figures 2.47-2.48. Deterioration and “shattering” of silk ribbons on broadcloth.

B. Jacobs: Is that one copper bead right there?

J. Jacobs: Oh, I see it just now that you've pointed that out.

L. Powell: Just on that one?

B. Jacobs: Just on that one.

J. Jacobs: Isn't that interesting, and I'm just now noticing that there are eyes, and I've never noticed that there were eyes before. And now I notice. Remember what mom used to do on otter hides?

K. Red Corn: On otter hides, she'd put that gold bead right there at the bottom of it.

J. Jacobs: She'd put that gold bead at the bottom.

As contemporary ribbon workers, Powell and Jacobs were able to look at these pieces and see the techniques that the women who made these pieces in the past would have used. We were also able to tell the difference in the materials that were used and the possible signature of the ribbon worker on the blanket. As someone who is both a ribbon worker and a participant in the In-lon-schka, my mom imagined the blanket within the space that it was intended to be used and came up with the likely suggestion that the moiré ribbon was used to indicate movement from the horses.



Figure 2.49. Image showing detail of ribbon work blanket in DAM collections. Arrow depicting single copper bead in horse design.

Another piece that drew us into a conversation about the intended use of museum pieces was a ribbon work blanket made for a little girl. While looking at this piece, Jacobs remarked, “I can just see a little girl running around with that on, just dragging it and getting it in the dirt,” and as she made a tossing motion, “‘come over here,’ just throwing it at someone.”<sup>159</sup>



Figure 2.50 – Jan Jacobs, Ben Jacobs, Lisa Powell, and Kathryn Red Corn in DAM Collections (Cat. No. 1939.8).

As the Osages in the room nodded and chuckled in agreement, Powell noticed an uncomfortable look on the collections manager’s face. She looked at him and joked, “you would just have a fit if you saw our granddaughters in their clothes.”<sup>160</sup>

Berkemeyer laughed and replied, “well, before they are collections objects, they're a thing. They're personal objects.”<sup>161</sup>

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<sup>159</sup> Red Corn et al.

<sup>160</sup> Red Corn et al.

<sup>161</sup> Red Corn et al.

Powell went on to explain, “my first skirt is now [pause] ... My very first one, I was 5, so it’s 48 years old now, and it’s still being worn, and it has been well-loved.”<sup>162</sup>



Figure 2.51. (left to right) Analicia Simermeyer, Adeline Simermeyer, and Paisley Powell giggling during a pause in play while Genevieve Simermeyer attempts to readjust her daughter’s skirt in preparation for the In-lon-schka. Photo by Craig Cossey, used with permission.

This interaction brought up the tension between communities and museums, once again. For many Osages, these blankets are things that are made to be worn, to be used, and although they are beautiful, and many of us are proud that they are in museums, there is a different set of values associated with their care and use in these spaces. This was something that also came up on another collections trip when Powell, Jacobs, and my cousin Genevieve Simermeyer spent an afternoon at The Met to see the men’s ribbon work suit ~~my Grandma Georgeann~~ Robinson made, as well as another

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<sup>162</sup> Red Corn et al.

ribbon work blanket in their collections. During our visit there, we were working with textile conservator Christine Giutini when Jacobs began handling the suit without gloves. After realizing her “mistake,” she apologized to Giutini, who responded by saying, “your mother made it. I certainly wasn’t going to say anything.”<sup>163</sup> Berkemeyer and Giutini’s responses to Powell and Jacobs demonstrate that although these tensions exist, there has been a lot of progress in the relationships between descendant communities and museums in the last few decades. Berkemeyer and Giutini were clearly attempting to cede authority to the community members throughout these interactions.



Figure 2.52. Man’s dress outfit,” Georgeann Robinson, The Met. Photo by author.

As descendants of the artist who made the piece, Powell and Jacobs understand the important role that these museums play in preserving these objects. When I asked Powell about these experiences later, she explained<sup>164</sup>:

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<sup>163</sup> Jacobs, Powell, and Simermeyer, Collections Visit at The Met.

<sup>164</sup> Powell and Powell, interview.

My grandmother's work was exceptional, not always perfectly formed, but truly beautiful in color and design. When I was young, I didn't always appreciate what she did in respect to cultural preservation. Ribbon work and the Red Man Store was her work. I didn't understand the significance of her work as art. Seeing her pieces in the collections at DAM and The Met was an incredibly moving experience. I am so glad her ribbon work is appreciated and has been chosen to represent not only her art, but Osage culture.

She thought about her ribbon work as art. Her "masterpiece" was a museum piece during her lifetime because her goal was to preserve ribbon work as an art form. I believe objects in collections are necessary to preserve our tribal history and culture. On the other hand, grandma, Aunt Jennie and Aunt Louise opened the Red Man Store to clothe Osage people for the In-lon-schka. The growth of the In-lon-schka and the number of people who practice the art of ribbon work today is a testament to their hard work and dedication. The few pieces in collections do not impact the In-lon-schka and the continuation of our dance.

Although we often joked about stealing things while we were in museum collections, the entanglements of emotions surrounding museum collections can be used in productive ways, to ask important questions, and to share knowledge with the institutions charged with caring for these objects.



Figures 2.53-2.54. Jan Jacobs, Lisa Powell, and Genevieve Simermeyer in the collections at The Met. Closeup of ribbon work blanket detail. Photos by author.

As we discussed other ribbon work objects in the DAM Collections, we talked about the imperfections that we could see in these pieces. One conversation that we had led to a conversation about the importance of those imperfections within our community:

B. Jacobs: The lines aren't as exact as the previous one. I know there's a lot more, but just looking at how all the cuts are.

L. Powell: It's really interesting, if you look at a lot of the ribbon work now that people do, that's almost mass produced, it is perfect. What they are doing, they aren't doing it the

traditional way. They are having patterns cut out of real light weight steel film. And they wet the ribbon, and they lay it across it, and they make the cuts and they fold it and they steam press it almost, and then when they lay it out, it is practically perfect. And so, but they're not traditionally sitting there, folding it and cutting it by hand the way we do, and so when you do it the way we do, it's practically impossible to get it that perfect, because of the nature of the ribbon.

J. Jacobs: And like, you'll have a corner and you'll finally just give up and say that's just as good as that corner is gonna get. I can't get it any better.

L. Powell: The only place that you'll ever see my sawtooth that's that perfect is because I actually draw the sawtooth on and I fold on the lines, but on a stripped ribbon pattern, it's almost impossible to do that.

J. Jacobs: On a strip, you just put the little lines so you know where to fold.

L. Powell: And you just hope that they are coming out right. But the way they do it is that they have a die cut for each ribbon, and then they do that. And so, it's a very different process, and it comes out looking like it was made on a machine. I don't care for it, I think it's too perfect.

B. Jacobs: Yea, because each one is unique.

L. Powell: You lose that human... and if you look at Grandma's ribbon work, it's not perfect. You can tell hers is all hand done, you know, so it's not going to be. It's going to look like this.

J. Jacobs: I remember her saying, that side just... I was so glad to be done with that, because that design just about did me in.

L. Powell: Well, that one yesterday, the skirt, that pattern is really hard to do, because the points on the fingers, it's hard to get those to be the right width as you go through.

J. Jacobs: That's why I explain to people how we start with that outside ribbon, and that creates your design and then you work to the middle, and then thinking about going out, you gotta just make sure that those points are right where they need to be.

L. Powell: It gets very wonky if you don't do it just right. And that ribbon is flexible enough that it wants to move on you.

For Osage ribbon workers who continue to use the cut and fold method, other techniques, and particularly mechanized techniques, do not carry the same weight or significance that the cut and fold pieces do.



Figure 2.55. Detail photo of ribbon work blanket in the DAM Collection. Photo by author. (Cat. No. 1952.208)

The human touch of these pieces, and their inherent imperfections are an important characteristic, both for the ribbon, and for us as Osage people. As another Osage ribbon worker, Janet Emde, later explained to me:

Here's what I was told about this. I think you have to have a piece of OCD in you to do this. I would be like, "ahhh." I had this artist friend that came up for the dances. He said, just exactly what you're describing, and he told me, he said, "when I was going to art school, they called that wiggle. When it's too perfect, your eye just glides right on past, but if there's a very subtle wiggle to your work, the eye lingers a bit longer. Not long enough to really go, oh my gosh they left out a whole section. But your eye and your brain are trying to figure out what's going on with that, and there's this wiggle." And it's so true with this, because the too perfect stuff is not us. And *you* have to make it...

Seeing the imperfections in these museum pieces, and ourselves, is an important reminder as we engage in ribbon work and other Osage nation-building projects. These ribbons can get wonky or unruly, and it can be difficult to get the ribbons to lay perfectly. However, sometimes we just have to move on and continue the work.



Figure 2.56. Detail photo of ribbon work blanket in the DAM Collection. Photo by author. (Cat. No. 1952.208)

### **This is not a costume... entanglements with hobbyists**

The following week, I returned to the DAM collections with my Aunt Jan and my grandpa, Keith Robinson, to look at a piece that was, unfortunately, still in the freezer in the conservation department during our visit the week before. DAM was able to get a suit that my Grandma Georgeann had made for the *Why We Dance* exhibit. This suit, which was on loan, was made for a German hobbyist, Hans Dudenhouse. I later spent an entire day learning about Germany's national fascination with American Indians through the legacy of Karl May and *Winnetou*. Unfortunately, this is outside of the scope of this project, but is definitely an interesting possibility for future research.<sup>165</sup> Although we were unable to find out any more information about Dudenhouse, DAM was able to

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<sup>165</sup> The New York Times, *Native Fantasy*.

confirm that he purchased the suit from the Red Man Store in 1965, and that the suit was currently owned by a hobbyist as well.



Figures 2.57-2.58. Keith Robinson (top) and Jan Jacobs (bottom) with ribbon work suit made by their mother, Georgeann Robinson. Photos by author.

A few months later, I found out who the current owner of this suit was. Not only is this man a hobbyist, but he is a well-respected ribbon worker, and actually makes Osage attire that a number of people wear for the In-lon-schka. He sells Osage attire on his own and through some Osage-owned

businesses. As I dug a bit deeper and spoke with more people, I learned that there are several non-Indian hobbyists who are making Osage ribbon work that is sold to Osage people. The ongoing entanglements between Osages, hobbyists, and museums are, for lack of a better term, awkward. Throughout the dissertation, grappling with this topic has been challenging in various ways, but it has also been one of the most interesting aspects of my research.

When I first learned about non-Indian hobbyists and read about the political, social, and historic emergence of these groups in Deloria's *Playing Indian*, I assumed that this movement had died out, that non-Indian hobbyists had gone extinct—like the Indians who were eaten by the dinosaurs at all the natural history museums through the US—and what remained were the tattered remnants of a long-lost “culture,” whose “traditional” practices had been assimilated into mainstream society. Rather than dancing at powwows in their “authentic costumes,” the only vestiges of their glorious but vanishing past were patchouli cologne, tie-dyed t-shirts emblazoned with their anthropomorphized spirit animals, and the dreamcatchers hung from their rearview mirrors—a troubling symbol of the way they hang on to their made-up fantasies of what it means to be Indian.

While the above paragraph is satirical, it is also useful in reiterating the fluidity of culture as an emic concept and how using it as an analytic frame works to homogenize groups in problematic ways. It also reveals my own biases and discomfort with non-Indian hobbyists. As a group, hobbyists have (mis)appropriated certain ideas and practices from American Indian communities without consideration of the ways their actions impact individuals and Indian nations. However, categorizing them in this manner fails to acknowledge the diversity and multiplicity of people who are involved with Indian hobbyism.

While conducting my research, I met a number of hobbyists, many of whom knew my grandma Georgeann. Throughout this research, I struggled to understand why she had become

friends with a number of hobbyists. When she passed away, she was actually at a hobbyist powwow in Tipton, Indiana, where she was being honored by the group who organized that dance. However, as I learned more about these interactions through my research, I came to understand that she was utilizing her knowledge and skills to do what she thought was best for the future of Osages and other American Indian peoples. Although her work on the Executive Council of NCAI and her ribbon work seemed disparate, she used them both as a means to secure a better future for Indian people. A big part of her success and legacy was her generosity towards people. This does not mean she was not a strong person or she let people take advantage of her.

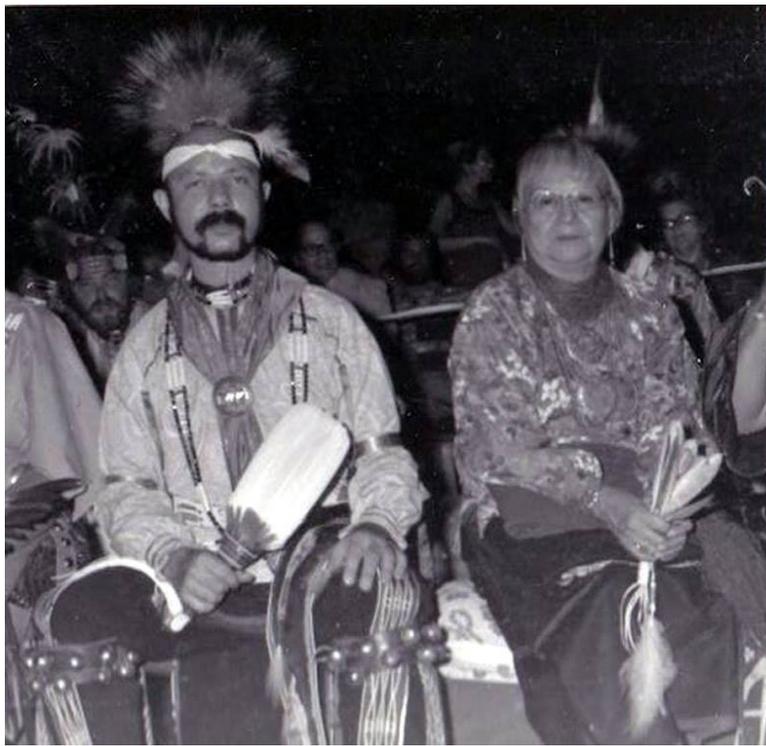


Figure 2.59. Dean Gardner and Georgeann Robinson at National Powwow in Tipton, Indiana (1985). Picture courtesy of Earl Fenner.

During her years on the Executive Council for the National Congress of American Indians, she was involved in the American Indian Chicago Conference and was on the steering committee for the

Declaration of Indian Rights.<sup>166</sup> During a ribbon work event I organized at the Wah-zha-zhi Cultural Center, an Osage gentleman brought in a suit my grandmother had made him when he was a young man, and shared this story<sup>167</sup>:

Well, you know my Mom and your grandma, they were real close, and they went to all of those Congress [NCAI] meetings together. I remember sitting in the back and just listening to them visit. Usually, your grandma had sewing to do, so she'd sit in the passenger seat with a pillow in her lap and some ribbon work while my mom drove. One time, I remember her sittin' there, working on that edging for an otter hat.

We got up to that meeting, I forget which one it was, but it was when the younger folks were getting involved with AIM and those other groups. Your grandma was the Vice President at the time, and she was opening the convention. A younger man, I want to say Clyde Warrior, but it wasn't him. It was someone like that though, he got up there and tried to take the floor. I think he figured since she was a woman, she'd let him take over. Apparently, he'd never met an Osage woman before, aye!

Your grandma held her ground. Man, she was not giving up the floor for anyone, and she stood her ground. Afterwards, I would have been real upset, you know? So, your grandma, she went over there and walked right up and asked to talk with him. I thought he was going to get it, and I was maybe twelve or thirteen. I snuck over so I could listen, and she let him have it, but not too bad. Then, she asked him to tell her about his concerns and how she could help him. She wanted to show him how to do things in a good way, and that always stuck with me.

Over and over again in my research, people have told me how much she wanted to bring people together. Rather than writing this person off, she engaged him in a conversation in order to learn about his perspective and his concerns. This was the way she approached everyone, and when hobbyists started coming into The Red Man Store to ask her questions and learn, she saw it as an opportunity to educate people.

As many museum professionals and anthropologists know, the names and labels given to a number of objects in museums are incorrect. One of these errors—in judgement anyway—

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<sup>166</sup> Lurie, "The Voice of the American Indian"; Fixico, "'All My Relatives': Pan-Indianism and Sociopolitical Organizations"; Cobb, *Native Activism in Cold War America*.

<sup>167</sup> Swearingen, Swearingen, and Robinson, *Ribbons of the Osage the Art and Life of Georgeann Robinson*.; I have not been able to find any records of this, I talked to some other people who were there, and they corroborated. Kathryn Red Corn, who was there, said, "Aunt Georgie would not let him take it over, and she held her ground with him all the way."

particularly bothered her. In the *Ribbons of the Osage* film about her ribbon work, Robinson makes a point that she made within nearly every museum she visited. In this remark, she also makes a subtle reference to hobbyists:

Time has changed, but not a whole lot, because basically the attire of the men and the women both stays basically the same, and I am one who feel like we should call this our dress. I hear Indian people saying even that this is a costume, or they had on their costumes. *Because, on that, I'm very definite about it, because when I get into my Osage dress, I'm not pretending, and that's what costume makes me think of you go to a costume party, and you're pretending to be thus and so and so, but not for me. When I put on my clothes, it's for real. I'm not pretending I'm anything but what I am, so that's one word that kind of bothers me.*

In this statement, Robinson makes it clear that what she does in the In-lon-schka, and with her community, is not the same thing that hobbyists do in their powwows. However, she also saw her relationships with these folks as economic and educational opportunities for her to do things that would help her people in the future. In other words, she was creating space and possibility while working within the limitations and expectations of her experience.

Utilizing this methodology of generosity, I set out to learn more about the hobbyists and to talk with them about Osage ribbon work. One of the first hobbyists I got to know was a man named Earl Fenner. Someone once described him as the “the Grand Poohbah” of Southern-style singing. As someone who grew up outside of the powwow circuit, I was unaware of how many non-Indian singers are involved with powwows, particularly on the East Coast. Historian Clyde Ellis, whose interest in his research emerged from his involvement with hobbyist groups, has been helpful in navigating some of this history. An excerpt from one of Ellis’s interviews with Cochise Littleturtle (Lumbee) and Derek Lowry (Tuscarora), is helpful in thinking about these entanglements for Indian communities, specifically those in North Carolina. Littleturtle said, “we used to go to all-hobbyist dances because that's all there was. And that's a fact. And they treated us good—besides, they knew

more about this than we did.”<sup>168</sup> Here, Littleturtle makes reference to something that Osages often joke about, which is the fact that some non-Indian hobbyists know more about our past than we do. What this joke fails to grapple with is the power relations involved with access to this knowledge. Many people in American Indian communities simply do not have the time and resources to conduct this research, and the important aspects of belonging within a number of Indian nations exist outside of powwows.

Lowry continued, “if the Creator sends a non-native person to us, and that person has a gift and we can help one another, what's the problem?”<sup>169</sup> Here, Lowry speaks to a key component of collaborative methodologies, utilizing a diversity of knowledges and skills to achieve a common goal.

“At that drum it's only singers, not Indians or whites. It was a sad commentary about us that we had to go to the non-Indians to get this, but we have to give credit where it is due,” Littleturtle added.<sup>170</sup> The entanglements between non-Indian hobbyists and American Indian communities are not easy to understand, but in certain communities, these relationships appear to be mutually beneficial.

Moving forward in the spirit of generosity and reciprocity, I hosted a ribbon work event at the Wah-zha-zhi Cultural Center, and a number of hobbyists came at the urging of Sam Noble Curator, Dan Swan. Fenner was one of the folks that came to the event, he brought a suit my grandmother had made with him. He did not purchase it from her directly, but he had all of the documentation, including the invoice as well as letters that had been exchanged with ribbon and yarn samples. Robinson and her sisters were not finger weavers, but they would often work with other women in

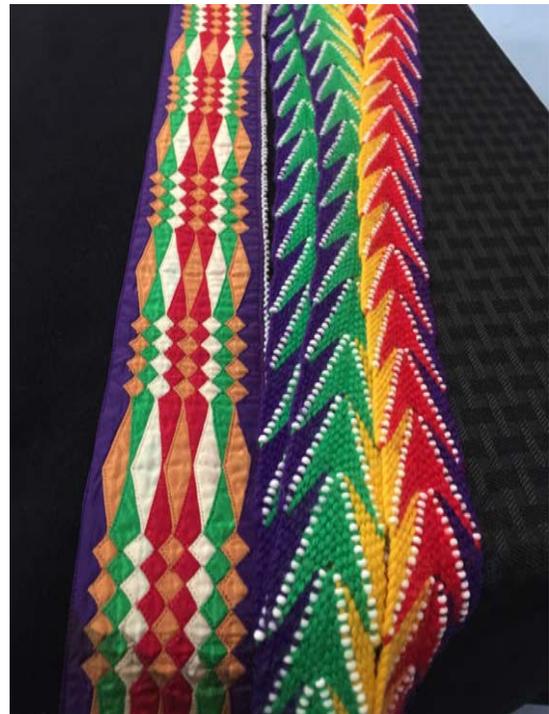
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<sup>168</sup> Ellis, “My Heart Jumps Happy When I . . . Hear That Music,” 13; Ellis, “There’s a Dance Every Weekend: Powwow Culture in Southeast North Carolina,” 98.

<sup>169</sup> Ibid.

<sup>170</sup> Ibid.

the community to have them make things for orders. What Fenner brought in was a full man's suit, complete with an otter tail and a matching yarn set made by Maudie Cheshewalla.



Figures 2.60-2.61. Earl Fenner (left) with men's ribbon work suit made by Georgeann Robinson, and detail of suit (right). Photos by author.

Fenner, who passed away during my fieldwork, was one of the hobbyists who, along with his wife, made Osage attire for people wear to the In-lon-schka. It was the Thursday of the Pawhuska dances, and he had some last-minute orders to fulfill and was unable to stay to visit. I started to help him pack up the suit and he said, "why don't you hang on to it so the rest of your family can see it?" He said he would meet me at my Aunt's camp for dinner the next evening. The next evening, he brought his wife and their daughter over for dinner and visited with us. My son Callum was about five months old at this time, and I was trying to calm him and eat while chasing my three year old. Fenner said, "bring that baby over here, you've got your hands full." I went to hand him the baby and he said, "oh, not for me, hand him to one of these ladies," as he looked over with a grin on his face. "They love babies, and this way, I'll make sure we get the suit back." Fenner was a nice guy. I am not quite sure what I expected, but I got along with him and he was very generous with his knowledge.

A few weeks later, as my family and I made our way from Oklahoma to Boston, we drove through Terra Haute, Indiana, where he lived. He had invited me to come over and visit with him, so I took him up on the offer. I went over to their house around four o'clock in the afternoon, not sure of what to expect. Part of me felt like I was going to walk up and see a teepee or a totem pole in the front yard, which was not the case. When we first started talking, I asked him a question about how he became a hobbyist. I had clearly offended him, but he explained to me that he felt hobbyists were the people who just pretended to be Indians without actually taking the time to get to know any Indian people. I was a little taken aback that he had taken offense. I had never really thought of "hobbyist" as a pejorative term, but would come to find that it is certainly a point of contention within that community. He and his wife were so gracious in showing me their collections and their sewing room and his workshop. His wife showed me some techniques for getting the newer fabric to work with the cut and fold style of ribbon work. I did not leave their house until about midnight, and when I left he said he would put me in touch with a few folks to talk about my grandma.

A classic method of cultural anthropologists is the use of gatekeepers to gain entry into a community.<sup>171</sup> Earl Fenner was my gatekeeper, my entry into the world of hobbyists. Whoever told me he was the "grand poohbah" was not lying. When I contacted folks and introduced myself as Osage, they were usually pretty hesitant; after they heard me say I was an anthropologist, they softened a bit; by the time I told them I had heard about them through Fenner, they would often laugh and ask why I had not lead with that information. Fenner put me in touch with some great people who shared some wonderful stories with me. For example, one gentleman, Jim Cooley, a hobbyist and a researcher, shared the following story<sup>172</sup>:

I was trying to get my suit together so I could dance at the In-lon-schka ... I needed the ribbon work, and we found out about your grandmother making it. I had heard about her even

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<sup>171</sup> Musante, "Participant Observation"; "Gatekeeping: An Ongoing Adventure in Research - Barbara B. Kawulich, 2011."

<sup>172</sup> Cooley, interview.

before that because I had a friend who had gone to the Red Man Store a couple of years earlier ... we went up there and it was closed, but she had a sign in the window that had her phone number on it. She was living outside of Bartlesville in a ranch-type house... We drove up there ... she sat there and she talked to us, she was very nice and was very knowledgeable. I remember one thing. Two things I remember. One, she was very opposed to the idea that Native Americans had come across on the Bering Strait. We were always here she told me and she resented that idea. The second thing was that she didn't like the outfit referred to as a costume. She didn't like that either.

We talked about getting a suit made and placed an order, and I can't remember how long it was, she hadn't made it yet, I remember we went back up to see her again and she was saying, "well, I'm getting behind." ... She explained to us, I get backed up at times, because what happens is people will, Osage people, my people will want an outfit for their son or daughter and it will be real close to the June dances or whatever and I just have to do this first, because I have that obligation to do that first, so I have to put these other ones back. She said, "if you don't want to wait I can show you how to do it" .... she told us how she did it ... told us where to get the ribbons ... and gave my wife—who was a talented quilter—some tips and the confidence to do it herself.

Cooley said he was so grateful for her honesty and willingness to share, which was something he found among other Osages when he went to our dances. By the time he got his suit together, he explained he no longer felt like it was right for him to participate. He told me, “there is kind of this problem with White people who are into Indians getting into this dance and not quite understanding that this dance is for the communities and not for outside people. The dance is for the Osage people. They have always been very generous, gracious, and hospitable, but sometimes that hospitality is put to the limit.”<sup>173</sup> In some ways I agree with Cooley, and I certainly appreciate that he made connections to the community and put thought into his actions. However, there are a number of hobbyists who dance in our In-lon-schka, and I can also see the ways certain relationships reflect a Maussian gift economy more than hospitality alone.<sup>174</sup>

As I was talking with the “hobs” that Fenner had put me in touch with, I noticed they were all pretty nice, and a number of them were actually quite close with American Indian families

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<sup>173</sup> Cooley.

<sup>174</sup> Mauss, *The Gift*.

throughout the Osage Nation and Oklahoma. A number of the people I talked with had been “adopted” by families and brought into the dances. One man in particular jokingly explained, “I was adopted, but not like Johnny Depp.” In speaking with many of these folks, I would often begin by asking how they became interested in the hobbyist movement, or if they had an alternative word they preferred to use. In many cases, answers were quite similar to Fenner’s, or that it depended on how the person intended the word. However, a few times, the reactions I received and the discussions that unfolded were uncomfortable and even violent.

Unsure of how to describe these interactions and the complexity in a meaningful way, I set this aside and focused on other aspects of my research. Then, there was a conversation I witnessed in a Facebook group called “Prairie Material Studies” (PMS). The group is an interesting mix of hobbyists, enthusiasts, collectors, academics, curators, and American Indian artists and makers—and it should be noted these labels are not mutually exclusive. Broadly speaking, the site is more or less a forum for retired old men with very deep knowledge about the communities they study to share photographs of their collections, of reproductions they have made, and museum objects. The description for the group reads:

Like Trump? Go away!

Stealing material habits of Native Americans & others from the Great Lakes to the Cascades. Prairie here is a landscape not a cultural area.

Artist are inspired by many sources, but copiers are turds!

ALL reproductions posted need to cite the work they copied (or were inspired by if its original work based on historic examples). Where images were gotten. NO reproductions that are verbatim copies.

Warning! Mob moderated. NO GRAVE GOODS!!!!!! NO CUSTER, LITTLE BIG HORN, NOR HOLLYWOOD INFORMED INFORMATION (addressing errors is welcomed!). Focus on Native made items, unless it is to illustrate a process or point.<sup>175</sup>

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<sup>175</sup> PMS facebook page (accessed 1.10.18).

As a researcher, the PMS group has actually been quite useful. There have been a number of times when I have posted a question or a photograph of something related to my research, and I have gotten immediate feedback from folks willing to talk to me.

In order to gain access to this knowledge and the resources that people share, however, American Indian folks in the group must sift through a certain amount of ~~racist bullshit~~ inaccurate knowledge and harmful rhetoric. As mentioned earlier, the term hobbyist is considered to be a pejorative term among a certain segment of folks in the community. After witnessing a few discussions on this page, I can certainly understand why there are people who would not want to be lumped in the same group as these folks. One particularly troubling post that quickly devolved into an ugly debate amongst hobbyists without community ties on one side and hobbyists and researchers with community ties and American Indians on the other was when a man posted a photograph with the following caption, “My impression of a Crow Scout I did for a documentary.”<sup>176</sup>



Fig. 2.62. Image of PMS member’s “Impression of a Crow scout.”

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<sup>176</sup> Prairie Material Studies Facebook page (posted February 2, 2018).

Almost immediately after this image was posted, people raised questions about his use of red face. The discussion thread illustrates the tensions in this group in particular, but among hobbyists themselves and between hobbyists and American Indian folks more broadly. Although these comments were posted in a public forum, in an effort to respect people's privacy and to avoid including every single one of over two hundred comments, the excerpt includes the comments of the poster and the only first few commenters on each thread.

**Commenter 1:** Perfect

**Commenter 2:** Red face is as bad as black face

**Poster:** It make me handsome

**Poster:** Wasn't yet finished with the paint

**Poster:** Its vermilion

**Commenter 3:** The point is, wearing red face is as racist as actors wearing black face in old minstrel shows. This is never ok.

**Poster:** Untrue, Warriors painted up, what are you missing

**Poster:** So, I guess this is double racist!?! [picture included]



**Commenter 3:** You're playing Indian. At the end of the day, you can wipe that paint off and go back to your own life. You aren't experiencing what it is to be a Native person 24/7. You're picking and choosing what you think looks cool without any consideration for rights to access certain paints. You didn't earn those rights. You stole them.

Keep in mind that during long periods of US history, like in the early to mid 20th century when little white kids were running around suburbia playing cowboys and Indians, Native people were prohibited from practicing their culture or speaking their language. Have you considered the fact that when you do something like this it reminds Native people of those times and the trauma it caused?

**Commenter 2:** Are you an enrolled Native American in a federally recognized tribal nation?

**Poster:** My mother is full blood Tuscarora, so, nobody stealing anything, you assume to much sir

**Commenter 3:** But you aren't Apsaalooke, are you?

**Poster:** I'm done with you. If you had a clue you wouldn't have been that insulting. Lots of research has gone into that. And you throw stones, ha, ok.

**Poster:** That picture is from a documentary film on Crow scouts. I'm not Crow, are you?!

Already in this conversation, the entanglements of blood and culture emerge as a way to define American Indian identity. When one of the commenters asks about the individual's political status, he fails to answer the question and instead invokes the idea of blood. He then uses his research and its accuracy as a means to gloss over the racist implications of his actions. The fact that he is doing this for a documentary film demonstrates the ways that non-Indian "experts" are given opportunities to define what it means to be American Indian.

**Removed Comment:** Aww pretty sad that you bash on some one trying to help your people sad its sad that a white guys knows more than you rez snowflakes

**Commenter 2:** [site admin] how long will you allow some of these people to remain on this page who want to reenact native American history and costumes etc... and collect native items but completely disregard and disrespect modern native people.... that as oxymoronic as possible... the irony and bigotry is overwhelming and I expect far more educated people to be participating on this form.... many of you here are vetted and adopted and implanted men in our native communities and ways and have our respect but these others don't deserve to be around.

**Site Admin:** Mob rule

The comment from this individual was removed by the individual who posted the comment or the site administrator, along with a number of other vile comments, shortly after the administrator shut down the comments for the entire post. The patronizing language this commenter used is a strategy that is often evoked in these debates, and is used as a tactic to legitimize and lift up playing Indian as a service to American Indian peoples.

**Commenter 4:** It boils down to respect.

I've met and became friends with some of the hobbyist on here. Many of them are incredibly knowledgeable and respectful people.

Some natives may disagree, but my personal opinion is that non-Indian interest in our culture helps us. It inspires more craftsmen and women, museums. Even events, like craft teaching, dance exhibitions, and powwows.

Many of them love to go around to native communities and develop relationships and participate in dances where they have been made welcome.

Respect is very important to Native people, and probably all people. I would just ask you to read about black face to understand why it's not respectful.

**Poster:** Perhaps you need to study your history more closely

**Commenter 4:** I was courteous enough to respectfully provide you with a very specific and thought out response on why many people are bothered by one thing and not another.

There is a place for reenactors I suppose but most natives are leery of it and most feel it is disrespectful especially when the individual is not from a tribal community.

I have no idea exactly what you meant by your ambiguous statement, but it doesn't change my standpoint

**Poster:** I really don't care about your opinion, thank you though. I'll stick with reality

As the initial comment thread devolved into insults, a well-meaning person tried to appeal to the original poster's reason and uses an approach that was very generous. The response to this is once again that this individual's accurate historical interpretation of what it means to be a "traditional" American Indian is more important than the values and standards of living communities.

**Site Admin:** Doing something well, does not mean it is best to do.

**Poster:** Yea, who gives a shit about real history, yer right

**Site Admin:** Well, it is history and then we have to be who we are. The world is free and open. But, you will be not well received in most native communities reenacting on their behalf. Just sharing a human thing. Relax, most of history is forgotten. The everyday forgotten. Some battles get remembered too much.

**Poster:** Well, have fun being the history-less world police

At this point, the site administrator joins the conversation to try and allay some of the parties in the discussion. The earlier threads are really out of control at this point, and several of the American Indian people in the group left as a result of this discussion.

**Commenter 1:** I do not know You personally, but I want to say, that the reenacting You are doing is just great and wonderful. Do not listen to the voices of negative people here.

**Commenter 5:** Are you Native American?

**Commenter 1:** What do you think? Do I look that way?

**Commenter 5:** After 500 years of colonization, Indigenous people from my continent come in all shapes, sizes and colors and have been scattered across the planet. So to answer your question, I don't know. A Native American can look many different ways.

**Commenter 6:** Criticism doesn't equal negativity. Anybody who thinks that way is going to have a lot of trouble in this world. A person who wants to portray another culture, but refuses to be subject to criticism from actual members of that culture needs to get their priorities straight.

**Commenter 1:** Well, no, I am not Native American, but certainly I am Native European 😊

**Commenter 5:** what sparked your interest in our cultures? I am curious.

**Commenter 1:** Interest in nature, wilderness camping, reading books about Vinetou by Karl May, who is very popular here in Europe, but almost unknown in America.

**Commenter 1:** Yes, criticism does not equal negativity, sometimes criticism can be good, but this is not certainly the case. I am also part of some culture and I do not mind, I even do not care, if someone emulates my culture or not. Here in Europe are people emulating Vikings, Slavs, Germans, American Civil War, Celts, whatever, even American Indians and nobody other complains, only some individual Indians.

The first commenter, unlike the other participants in the above conversation, does not live in the United States. There are a number of European and Russian hobbyists in the group. This individual clearly defines American Indians as a phenotype, and his interest is in the mythical fantasies of a man who wrote a book about American Indians before ever traveling to the United States. However, he also raises the issue that Europeans participate in a number of re-enactments, and the only people who ever complain are Indians. This individual, and others, fail to recognize the privilege they have in these situations and how their hobby is damaging to contemporary American Indian nations.

Ultimately the gentleman who posted the image as well as several of the unabashedly racist commenters left the group along with a number of American Indian members. As I was reflecting on this discussion—which I refused to waste my time with—and my own experiences with the non-Indian hobbyists who fail to recognize the humanity of American Indian peoples and the sovereignty of our nations, I did not know how to grapple with it in text alone. However, part of this research is about how creative expression and visual language can help us wrestle with the complexity and multiplicity that characterizes American Indian experiences, and also to convey it to a broader audience. Cultural anthropologist Rudolf Colloredo-Mansfeld describes his use of drawing and creating art with his interlocutors as a “device of discovery” in his research on Andean aesthetics.<sup>177</sup> This work raises important questions about the “possibility of artistic practice at the heart of ethnographic work,” as a research method.<sup>178</sup> For Colloredo-Mansfeld—who was interested in the politics and economics of these artists’ work—this method widened his perspective and allowed him to see the Indigenous forms of expression. Building on this, is it possible to use artistic practice at the heart of ethnographic knowledge production?

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<sup>177</sup> Colloredo-Mansfeld, “Space, Line and Story in the Invention of an Andean Aesthetic,” 3.

<sup>178</sup> Colloredo-Mansfeld, 3.

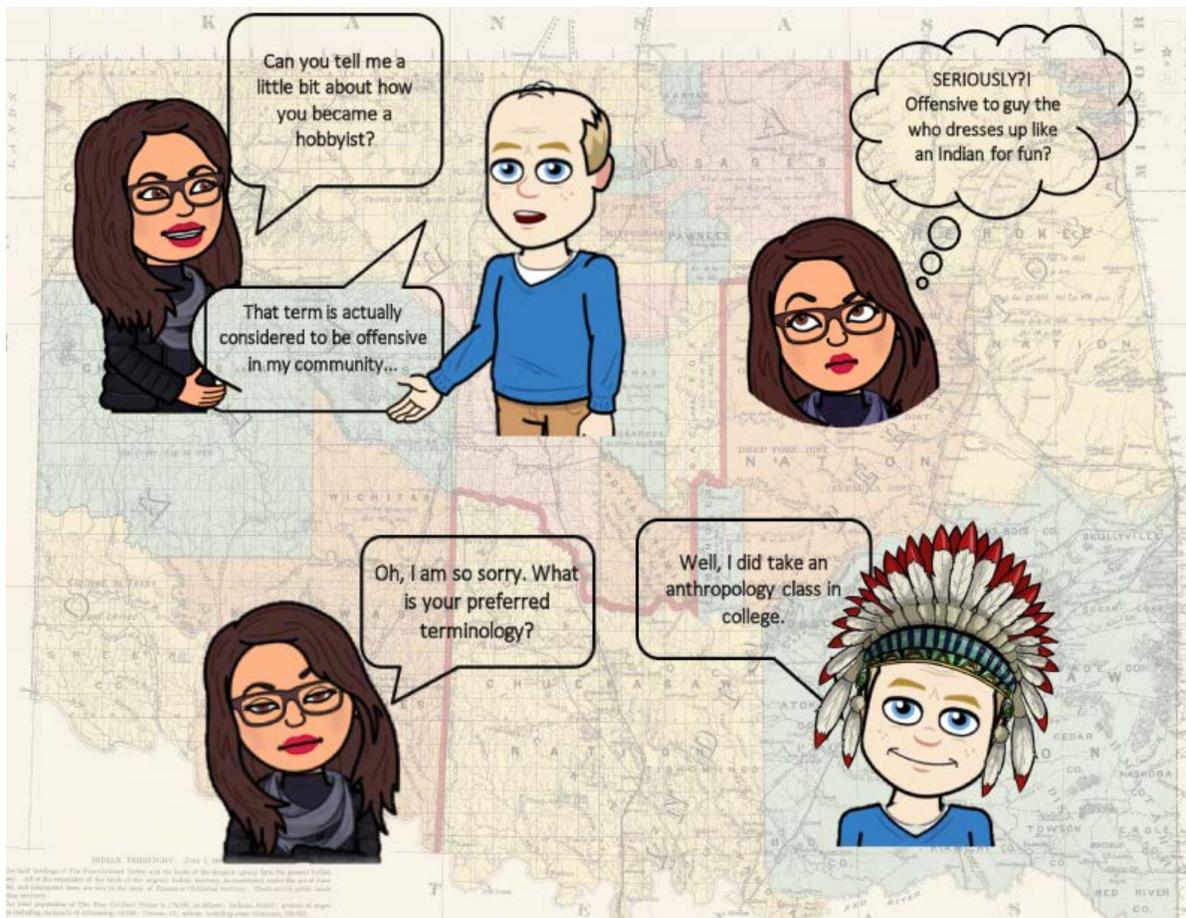


Figure 2.63. Digital media collage/cartoon by author using bitmoji, vector art, and vintage map of Oklahoma.

### Osage aesthetics and self-representation

The diversity and multiplicity of Osage—and American Indian art—and its display in museums works to represent the diversity, vibrancy, and potential of our communities. Osage art means different things to different people, and like culture, should not be rendered static through definition or categorization. Through this research and my conversations with contemporary Osage artists, the terms Osage aesthetics or an Osage visual language were often used. Osage art also has the capacity to speak to multiple audiences. Within the work of many contemporary Osage artists representations of Osage attire like ribbon work, images from Osage oral histories, or symbols from the NAC convey a connection to home, to community, and to Osage knowledges and values. The

central space where this knowledge is communicated is through the experience and localized practice of the In-lon-schka.

Representations of the In-lon-schka—which are common in the works of a number of Osage artists—serve as reminders of that knowledge. As former Pawhuska Committee Chairman, Ed Red Eagle, explained about the In-lon-schka:

It's just one of those activities, customs, in and around what our people have had, all these years, 100 years that draws. As this drum gets ready, as that drumkeeper and that committee gets ready and they set the dates and they get ready, here they come. They have their differences some of them, they have fallouts about some, just like anyone else, but when that dance comes off, they're there, they're right there. And when it's all over, everybody is everything is back in harmony again, for a while.<sup>179</sup>

In a world of violence, conflict, and chaos, visual representations of the In-lon-schka remind us of a space where the past and present come together, where we come together and actively create an Osage future.

As N. Akers said about why he never misses the dances, “you're imprinted when you're young, you know its home, you know you have a responsibility.”<sup>180</sup> As he continued talking about responsibility, he began talking about his grandmother, Eva Little Star who was the matriarch of his family<sup>181</sup>:

I was talking to my mother, and she always says to me, "your grandma would have been proud that you're doing this." When I make work, regardless of how identifiably Osage it is, you know in a sense when I make these paintings about land and about place, yea I'm thinking about home, I'm thinking about the people, I'm thinking about the people who gave me a sense of place and somehow in their period, in whatever time they had, in whatever time I had with them. They were able to instill a sense of home that was so rich that it carried beyond their time, and that place is really important.

I would say, every day I think about it. When I make work, when the work is good, and its making that connection, that's what I'm thinking about is, it's that they gave, it's that I was given something. And we talk about blessings and that, and I was given something that can

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<sup>179</sup> Swearingen, Swearingen, and Robinson, *Ribbons of the Osage the Art and Life of Georgette Robinson*.

<sup>180</sup> Akers, interview.

<sup>181</sup> Akers.

give to other people. I think in the day that we live in now, that sense of having a home and a place is so important because so many people don't have it. You know, that's what makes us who we are.

For Akers, his art practice and his teaching is how he fulfills his responsibilities to his grandmother, those who taught him lessons, to his community. Georgeann Robinson fulfilled her responsibilities through her ribbon work and her participation in the NCAI and other organizations. Those who came before us created space for us to continue as an Osage people, and Osage aesthetics serves as a reminder of those responsibilities we must carry forward.

### CHAPTER 3: A PILLAR OF THE FIELD: INSTITUTIONAL ENTANGLEMENTS AND FUTURE POSSIBILITIES

Growing up, I spent my elementary school years at a naval base north of Chicago. A number of our class field trips were visits to the Field Museum. I remember climbing through the pyramids of Egypt and seeing amazing fossils. Like many of my peers, I imagined what it would be like to work at such an amazing place. My experiences at the Field were the kind of transformative experiences that museums write mission statements about. Being in these spaces made me want to become a scientist.

It wasn't until we visited the North American Indian exhibits that I had a desire to become a curator—not that I knew that's what it was called at the time. I have vivid memories of exploring the Pawnee Earth Lodge with my classmates and my anticipation to see if there were any Osage materials in the exhibit. As we walked through the exhibit hall and approached the Osage display case, I felt a sense of confusion. I thought to myself, this isn't Osage. At least, it wasn't the kind of Osage stuff we used today. The exhibit I saw did not reflect my experiences or knowledge of what it meant to be Osage. In fact, the exhibit made me feel like I wasn't really Osage at all.

Although this was not necessarily a positive experience, it was certainly a formative experience. Over the years, as I pursued my anthropological education and training, the experience of being at the Field Museum—and other institutions—made me want to change the ways museums represented Osages and other Indigenous peoples. It made me want to figure out how to represent Indigenous peoples in ways that reflected our complexity, our diversity, and our humanity. Although I was exposed to images and representations that narrowly defined what it meant to be an Indian, it

made me want to create— or rather, curate—representations that were empowering and opened up possibilities for future generations of young Indian kids.

By the time I returned to the Field Museum more than twenty years later in 2014, I was a graduate student interested in exploring the ways museums shape mainstream perceptions of American Indian peoples. Although I wasn't sure what to expect as I walked in the museum, I certainly didn't expect the exact same display cases I had seen as a child. Nevertheless, that is exactly what I found. In the gallery, just past the exhibit hall, however, there was an exhibit featuring the works of Bunky Echo-Hawk which was a hopeful addendum to the outdated, and frankly offensive, permanent exhibition hall dedicated to Native North Americans.

During my time in Chicago, I was able to meet with curator Alaka Wali, and talk with her about the co-curation of the exhibit and some of the institutional challenges of updating the permanent American Indian exhibition. As a museum professional, I understood the budgetary and institutional issues that often work to limit these projects—particularly because these exhibits are not the “blockbuster” or one-of-a-kind shows that bring visitors through the doors. Several months after our visit, I got an email from Wali, inviting me to apply for an internship conducting research in the Native North American collections.

With the future reinstallation in mind, I spent my time at the Field Museum researching possible acquisitions for the Native North American collections, talking with Chicago-based American Indian artists, and conducting research on the Museum's Osage objects for dissertation research. While my time at the Field Museum was difficult and at times tenuous, just as the many of the artists I have worked with, museum professionals are also operating within the limitations placed upon them by institutional expectations, budget constraints, and audience expectations. However, just as the Bunky Echo-Hawk show demonstrated, even with the limitations placed on artists and curators, there are possibilities for shifting expectations.

This chapter critically examines the role of the Field Museum of Natural History<sup>1</sup>—a pillar of anthropological thought—in the ongoing construction of a narrative in which American Indians are out of time and place in contemporary American society. As a leader in the discipline of anthropology and one of the top 20 most visited museums in the United States,<sup>2</sup> the Field Museum has played and continues to play an important role in shaping mainstream perceptions of American Indian nations and peoples. Furthermore, as the repository of 770,000 North American Indian objects,<sup>3</sup> the Field Museum has both a legal mandate and an ethical commitment to the descendants of the communities from whom these objects were collected. The Field Museum claims to take their legal and extralegal responsibilities seriously, and even states on their webpage, “since its founding The Field Museum has devoted considerable attention to the Native peoples of North America. The result is a series of collections of striking depth, strong in recent history and contemporary culture. Staff collaborate actively with Native American groups, who come regularly to visit and study the collections of their nations.”<sup>4</sup> Here, the museum highlights the strength of their collection in terms of contemporary American Indian culture and recent history.

The extent to which the Field Museum “actively collaborates” with American Indian nations and peoples is an issue that has been debated within Indian country and within the field of museum anthropology for decades.<sup>5</sup> The majority of the collaborations—both contested and commended—

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<sup>1</sup> There have been a number of name changes for what is now the Field Museum of Natural History, but I use “Field Museum” throughout this text.

<sup>2</sup> “National Museum Day.”

<sup>3</sup> Lewis and Kelly, “Number of Objects in NA Collection.”

<sup>4</sup> wparkinson, “Cultures of North America.”

<sup>5</sup> Beisaw and Duus, “Repatriation as Inspiration”; Colwell-Chanthaphonh, Maxson, and Powell, “The Repatriation of Culturally Unidentifiable Human Remains,” 2011; Martin, “THE BEGINNING OF RESPECT”; “REPATRIATION SYMPOSIUM,” ///; Fred, “Law and Identity”; “REPATRIATION SYMPOSIUM,” ///; Mithlo, “Red Man’s Burden”; Moore, “PROPATRIATION”; Schwenger, “Lost and Lonesome”; Poremski, “Voicing the Bones”; Black, “Maturing Gracefully?”; Boyd, “Museums as Centers of Controversy.”

between the Field Museum and American Indian nations often involve objects within the museum’s collection that fall under the purview of NAGPRA.<sup>6</sup> While NAGPRA played an important role in establishing and shaping the collaborative relationships between American Indians and the Field Museum, that is not the focus of this research. Rather than examining the ongoing legally mandated collaboration between the Field Museum and American Indian nations, I am interested in the ways that the Field Museum engages in various collaborations—ranging from trivial to meaningful—in regard to the presentation of their American Indian collections and particularly the permanent exhibition on North American Indians in Hall 8. Additionally, I examine more deeply recent temporary exhibitions with contemporary American Indian artists, and particularly their collaboration with Osage, Kanza, and Cheyenne River Sioux ledger artist Chris Pappan, as projects that will guide the renovation of Hall 8 in the coming years.

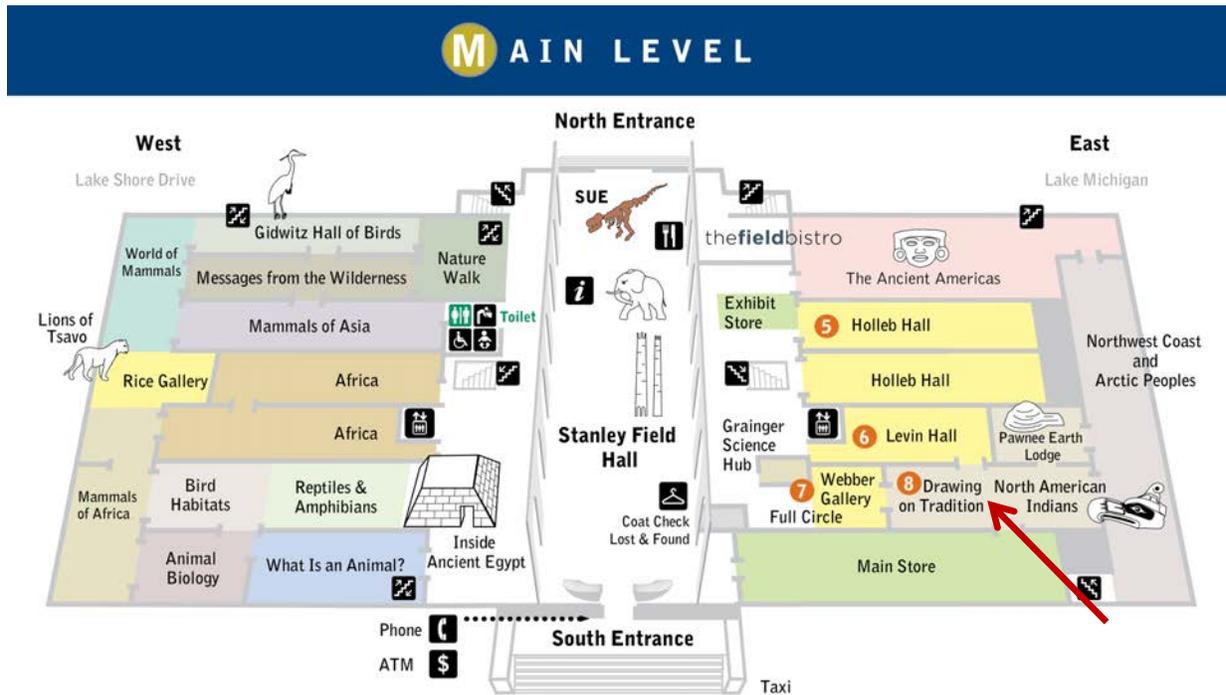


Figure 3.1: Map of the first floor of the Field Museum; arrow showing Hall 8 and Webber Gallery.

<sup>6</sup> McKeown and Hutt, “In the Smaller Scope of Conscience: The Native American Graves Protection & Repatriation Act Twelve Years After.”

In order to fully understand and evaluate the Field Museum's ethnographic exhibition of American Indian art and material culture, it is important to consider the deeply entangled relationship between the Museum, the founding of American Anthropology, and ongoing colonial processes. Building on scholars who have examined these entanglements, the following section pays particular attention to George A. Dorsey, the Curator of Anthropology who oversaw the collection of the majority of Osage and other American Indian objects at the Field Museum. Dorsey's curatorial practices established not only the foundation of the Museum's vast North American ethnographic collections, but also set the sometimes-problematic tone for the Field Museum's enduring relationships with American Indian nations.<sup>7</sup> This section also reviews the role the Field Museum played in popularizing and exhibiting the broader anthropological project of social evolutionary theory.

After an overview of Dorsey's participation in the collections race at the turn of the twentieth century and the Field's entanglements with constructing race in the following decades, I turn to an analysis of the permanent exhibition in Hall 8, paying particular attention to the ways Chicago-based American Indian artists and community members perceive the exhibition and what they suggest the institution do moving forward. While the Field Museum recognizes the need to update this space, many of the temporary solutions they have utilized in the last decade have failed to make a significant impact. In the last three years, however, under the guidance of Curator Alaka Wali, the Field Museum has engaged in a deeper collaborative process with three contemporary American Indian artists—Bunky Echo-Hawk, Rhonda Holy Bear, and Chris Pappan—to co-curate exhibitions in conversation with Hall 8. While these temporary exhibitions are not a solution to the urgent need for a complete

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<sup>7</sup> Come back and add citations to *Fieldiana* 109 years issue and Parezo; Welsch

reinstallation of the Native North American collections, they make important interventions in the Museum and are worth examining more deeply.

Drawing on the collaborative work with Echo-Hawk, Holy Bear, and particularly Pappan, Wali is working strategically to develop a plan for the future reinstallation, building a case to garner institutional, foundational, and community support for this larger project. These co-curatorial engagements provide an important framework that the institution can draw upon as it moves forward with the reinstallation of the permanent exhibit. Furthermore, the recent acquisitions to the museum's Native North American collections, a project that I worked on during my time in Chicago, suggest the ways that contemporary American Indian art and material culture can work in conversation with the Field's existing collections.

### **Building a foundation: the collections race & the construction of race**

As Stephen Nash and Gary Feinman reveal in their introduction to the edited volume, *Curators, Collections, and Contexts: Anthropology at the Field Museum, 1893-2002*, even a casual reading of the Field Museum history, and anthropology in particular, is complex. This history, as they state, "constitutes a rich tapestry of interweaving strands of scholarship, philanthropy, politics, competition, cooperation, success, failure, ego, ambition, chutzpah, tragedy, and all the other vagaries and contingencies that make life, particularly, scholarly life, so interesting."<sup>8</sup> There have been a number of scholarly texts dedicated to analyzing the colonial entanglements of the 1893 Chicago World's Columbian Exposition, the founding of American Anthropology as an academic discipline, and the establishment of what is now The Field Museum of Natural History.<sup>9</sup> There is also a

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<sup>8</sup> Nash and Feinman, "Introduction: A Glorious Foundation: 109 Years of Anthropology at the Field Museum of Natural History."

<sup>9</sup> Parezo et al., *Anthropology Goes to the Fair*; HINSLEY and WILCOX, *Coming of Age in Chicago*; Nash and Feinman, *Curators, Collections, and Contexts: Anthropology at the Field Museum, 1893-2002*.

growing body of scholarship within American Indian studies that examines the various ways Indigenous peoples were implicated and actively participated in these histories.<sup>10</sup>

This chapter is not about the founding of The Field or the role it played in popularizing colonialist anthropology. However, it is about the ways the Native North American Cultures exhibition at the Field continues to portray American Indian peoples as homogenous entities, trapped in an idealized “authentic” past, and what possibilities exist for the future of this space. Therefore, a general—and likely too general—understanding of these entanglements is useful. American Indian people have been racialized in terms of blood and culture in ways that conflate the political status of Indian peoples with these problematic categories. When I teach this concept to undergraduates, I almost always use Cher’s *Half Breed* music video to start the class.<sup>11</sup> An analysis of the song’s lyrics, which begin with “My dad married a pure Cherokee,” evoke ideas about blood and biology as key markers of Indian belonging, and the repetitive use of the term “half-breed” reinforces this idea and contributes to the dehumanization of American Indians. A visual analysis of the video (see fig #) which features a half-naked Cher wearing a ~~super-tradish~~ rhinestone bikini astride a horse, with fire and totem poles entering the frame at various points during the video. The visual aspects of this video emphasize the ways that Indian belonging has been marked in terms of homogenized and problematic cultural expressions. The legacies of blood and culture as racialized markers for American Indian identity continue to circulate in mainstream understandings—and community understandings—of what it means to be an Indian person today. These ideas are reified in various ways at museums throughout the United States, not just the Field Museum. However, The Field’s

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<sup>10</sup> Beck, “Fair Representation?”; LaPier and Beck, *City Indian*; Deloria, *Indians in Unexpected Places*; Rinehart, “To Hell with the Wigs! Native American Representation and Resistance at the World’s Columbian Exposition.(Special Issue”); Bank, “Representing History.”

<sup>11</sup> *Half Breed*.

founding and its entanglements with the 1893 World's Fair and the establishment of academic anthropology requires attention.



Figure 3.2: Still of Cher's "Half Breed" music video.

Cher's video is also useful in opening a dialogue around the complexity of social evolutionary theory, and ameliorates students' hesitance to talk about the violence of creating a hierarchical system with "Black" and "Red" peoples at the bottom and "White" folks at the top. This construction, which legitimized the dispossession of Indigenous lands and the enslavement of Africans and their descendants born in the "New World," was fundamental to the formation and expansion of the United States. While these ideas certainly existed prior to the establishment of American Anthropology as an academic discipline, early American anthropologists like Frederic W. Putnam, John Wesley Powell, Daniel G. Brinton, and Lewis Henry Morgan were central to the acceptance of conflated notions of race as related to "social progress" as scientific truths.<sup>12</sup> Putnam was hired to direct the organization of the Anthropology building at the 1893 World's Fair and he hired Franz

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<sup>12</sup> Baker, *From Savage to Negro*, 5; Parezo et al., *Anthropology Goes to the Fair*, 8.

Boas<sup>13</sup> to assist him.<sup>14</sup> As anthropologist Ira Jacknis points out, “Anthropology existed in many places at the fair...there’s multiplicity at the fair and nothing is simple or straightforward.”<sup>15</sup> Although there were other anthropological, ethnological, and even commercially-driven exhibitions of American Indians at the 1893 World’s Fair, the focus of this section relates to the exhibition organized by Putnam.

Putnam and Boas relied on “a number of fledgling anthropologists” whom they sent on collecting expeditions throughout the Americas, and the materials collected ultimately formed the founding collection of the Field Museum.<sup>16</sup> One of the fledgling anthropologists was George Amos Dorsey, who would go on to earn the first PhD in Anthropology under the direction of Putnam at Harvard University in 1894.<sup>17</sup> Dorsey was tasked with collecting objects from South America and took trips to Bolivia, Ecuador, Chile, and Peru in the years preceding the fair.<sup>18</sup> Putnam later placed him in charge of Archaeology for the Exposition’s Department of Anthropology.<sup>19</sup> Ultimately, Dorsey accepted a position at the Field Museum in 1896 as an assistant curator and was named curator of anthropology in 1899.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Need note and source for Boas and historical particularism, how he pushed against the idea of Social Darwinism, although his work was problematic in its own right.

<sup>14</sup> There was also a Smithsonian-run anthropology exhibition in the U.S. Federal Building at the 1893 World’s Fair, which was directed by Otis Mason and William Holmes with the field assistance of Frank Cushing and James Mooney of the Bureau of American Ethnology; See Jacknis (2017).

<sup>15</sup> Jacknis, *All the World Is Here*.

<sup>16</sup> Parezo et al., *Anthropology Goes to the Fair*.

<sup>17</sup> HINSLEY, “[ESSAY ONE Introduction].”

<sup>18</sup> Almazan and Coleman, “George Amos Dorsey.”

<sup>19</sup> Almazan and Coleman.

<sup>20</sup> Almazan and Coleman.



Figure 3.3. Map of 1893 Chicago World's Columbian Exposition; arrow pointing to anthropology building where Putnam, Boas, and Dorsey worked.

In his position at The Field, Dorsey was driven by—his ego and arrogance—a desire to challenge the museums and academic institutions of the East, and to elevate Chicago and the Field Museum to a position that was equal to or superseded the earlier formed anthropology departments and collections at the Smithsonian, American Museum of Natural History, and Harvard.<sup>21</sup> In the beginning of his time at The Field, Dorsey and a team of field assistants in his employ gathered objects—and little information—from American Indian communities in North America. Between 1897 and 1907, Dorsey and his team collected, purchased, exchanged, and stole objects representing

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<sup>21</sup> McVICKER, “[ESSAY SIX Introduction],” 383; Jacknis, *All the World Is Here*.

30,000 catalogue numbers.<sup>22</sup> Dorsey's ambition to elevate Chicago to the position of East Coast institutions overtook the scientific training he received from Putnam, and although he amassed a massive collection in a brief period of time, his questionable collections practices also garnered a great deal of criticism. As Berthold Laufer wrote in a letter to Boas in 1908, "According to the Dorsey method ... it is possible for every ethnologist to work in any territory; he photographs a little bit, buys indiscriminately everything he can get his hands on, has a good time with the people, and that settles the matter."<sup>23</sup>

Not only did Dorsey's collecting practices damage his standing within the field of academic anthropology, but it has also had a lasting impact on the Field Museum's relationships with American Indian communities. In a letter written in 1900 to assistant curator of Ethnology, Stephen Simms, Dorsey explains<sup>24</sup>:

When you go into an Indian's house and you do not find the old man at home and there is something you want, you can do one of three things; go hunt up the old man and keep hunting until you find him; give the old woman such a price for it as she may ask for it running the risk that the old man will be offended; or steal it. I tried all three plans and I have no choice to recommend.

Dorsey was operating under institutional pressure to amass a collection and a belief, held by many anthropologists at this time, that if he did not collect these objects and record what little information he did, in a short time, it would be gone as Indians went extinct. When Dorsey was collecting in the Plains in the first decade of the twentieth century, he hired James Murie, a Pawnee man, and Cleaver Warden, who was southern Arapaho.<sup>25</sup> He deployed these men to collect ethnographic information

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<sup>22</sup> Almazan and Coleman, "George Amos Dorsey."

<sup>23</sup> McVICKER, "[ESSAY SIX Introduction]," 400.

<sup>24</sup> Almazan and Coleman, "George Amos Dorsey."

<sup>25</sup> Almazan and Coleman.

and objects from their communities, inform him of dates for important social and religious events, and published on their work without citing them, as was common at the time.<sup>26</sup>



Figure 3.4. George Dorsey and Tehuelche “Giant” Colojo at the St. Louis World’s Fair, 1904. Charles Carpenter, photographer. Courtesy of the Field Museum CSA13257.

One of the communities Dorsey studied, collected from, and wrote about during this time was the Osage. In the preface to his 1904 publication, *Traditions of the Osage*, Dorsey writes:

The tales here presented were collected by the author while engaged in making an ethnological collection among the Osage for the Field Columbian Museum, in 1901-1903.

The Osage are of Siouan stock, and made their home, when first known to the whites, in southern Missouri, northern Arkansas, and eastern Kansas. In 1871, they were removed to a reservation in the northeastern corner of Oklahoma, which they still occupy. They are

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<sup>26</sup> Parezo et al., *Anthropology Goes to the Fair*, 87–88; 428; Almazan and Coleman, “George Amos Dorsey,” 89.

*degenerating rapidly, are very lazy and much addicted to drink*; the use of the peyote or mescal among them is rapidly increasing.

It must be admitted that *this collection of tales does not adequately represent the traditions of the tribe. This is largely due to the difficulty of engaging the attention for any length of time of the old men of the tribe*, for reasons above mentioned.

A number of the objects Dorsey—and his field assistants—collected during his trips to Oklahoma during this time are actually under the purview of NAGPRA and therefore not included within my research. In fact, they are part of an unresolved claim the Osage Nation Historic Preservation Office has made to the Field Museum. However, in visiting with people from Oklahoma and other scholars, Dorsey was collecting during a transitional period for our community. As historian Louis Burns reminds us, “removal back to Oklahoma from Kansas in 1871 was the third displacement within forty-six years. The previous removals were bad, but the 1871 expulsion was worse in terms of lives lost and hardships. This move almost destroyed the Osage people. Old tombstones indicate the greatest toll was among young mothers and infants. Yet the old people who made the move never spoke of the deaths and sorrows.”<sup>27</sup>

The 1871 move to Oklahoma is what anthropologist Valerie Lambert refers to as a rupture, and this move ultimately led to what she calls a rebirth.<sup>28</sup> After the Osages arrived in Oklahoma, the geographical change was coupled with an economic change as hunting—buffalo in particular—failed to provide food for Osages and the Nation began to rely on quarterly payments from federal trust accounts to survive.<sup>29</sup> During this period, there was also a massive loss of religious and spiritual leaders, which ultimately led to the acceptance of the In-lon-schka from the Kaw and Ponca in 1884 and peyote religion from John Wilson in 1898.<sup>30</sup> After the rupture of removal, the loss of knowledge

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<sup>27</sup> Burns, “Osage”; Burns, *A History of the Osage People*.

<sup>28</sup> Lambert, *Choctaw Nation*, 20; 251.

<sup>29</sup> Bailey and Swan, *Art of the Osage*, 67.

<sup>30</sup> Bailey and Swan, 67.

and subsistence, Osages did not want their children to be burdened by the trauma and violence of this time, and as anthropologist Garrick Bailey writes, “put away” older practices and teachings in order to move forward.<sup>31</sup> Although Dorsey alludes to this in his preface, he fails to see this as a strategy for building a future, and instead refers to it as degenerative and lazy. Furthermore, even though Osages at the turn of the twentieth century, and still today, talk about how we “put away” these practices or say things like, “those were our old ways,” it certainly does not mean that the objects and expressions of these practices were intended for the Field Museum or any other collection.

In *Traditions of the Osage: Stories Collected and Translated by Francis La Flesche*, Bailey describes the difference between the stories collected and translated by Dorsey and those by the Omaha ethnographer LaFlesche, whose own language is mutually intelligible with Osage. He includes a statement LaFlesche made in 1903<sup>32</sup>:

The myths, the rituals, and the legends of the race have been frequently recorded in such a manner as to *obscure their true meaning and to make them appear as childish or as foolish*. This has been in a large measure due to linguistic difficulties. The Indian tongues differ widely from the English language, not only in the construction of sentences but in general literary form. Moreover, *the imagery of the Indian speech conveys a very different meaning to the mind of the Indian from that which it conveys to the mind of the white man*. The Indian looks upon nature, upon all natural forms, animate and inanimate, from a different standpoint and he draws from them different lessons than does one of the white race. So, when scholars give a literal translation to an Indian story, both its spirit and its form are lost to the English reader. Or when the myth is interpreted by an Indian who has picked up a scanty and colloquial knowledge of English, even if by chance he has himself a comprehension of the meaning of the myth he translates, his rendition will be one that no intelligent Indian can accept as a true presentation of the mythic story. *It is from translations such as these that the mental capacity of the Indian has been judged*.

Here, LaFlesche—who certainly had his own colonial entanglements and collected these stories in 1910 as an ethnographer for the Bureau of American Ethnology—is highly critical of anthropologists

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<sup>31</sup> La Flesche and Bailey, *The Osage and the Invisible World*, xi.

<sup>32</sup> La Flesche and Bailey, xii.; emphasis added

and scholars like Dorsey whose work conflated ethnocentric understandings of American Indian practices with their biological capacity for achieving “civilization.” For Dorsey, the stories he collected represented a rupture with a “traditional” past, but for LaFlesche, they represented a way forward, and emphasized the humanity of Osages. In writing about these stories, Bailey states, “[they] tell of individuals capable of great love, courage, generosity, sacrifice, and wisdom, as well as of others capable of jealousy, selfishness, deceitfulness, vindictiveness, and foolishness. Collectively these stories put a human face on traditional Osage life ... It is this quality of humanness that makes these stories important in not just understanding the Osage past but the Native American past in general.”<sup>33</sup>

During the same trips to Oklahoma in which Dorsey collected the stories published in *Traditions of the Osage*, he was also building relationships with Osage families and laying the groundwork for their participation at the 1904 Louisiana Purchase Exposition (LPE). The 1904 LPE was intended to commemorate the centennial of the United States’ purchase of the Louisiana Territory in 1803,<sup>34</sup> just as the 1893 Chicago World’s Columbian Exposition was intended to mark the quartercentenary of the year ~~Indigenous peoples discovered Christopher Columbus lost at sea~~ Christopher Columbus “discovered” the Americas in 1492. ~~Personally, I find it quite hilarious that not once, but twice they had to push back their colonial celebrations because of poor planning.~~ For the LPE, Dorsey was contracted as a special agent to negotiate with Osage families—as well as Arapaho, Pawnee, and Wichita—and serve as their escort to the fair, supervising the construction of “traditional house types” that reflected the old-ways of groups who lived in the Louisiana Territory.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> La Flesche and Bailey, xiii.

<sup>34</sup> Parezo et al., *Anthropology Goes to the Fair*, 1.

<sup>35</sup> Parezo et al., 88.

Just as with the Chicago World's Fair, the Indian Villages at the LPE were arranged to reflect social evolutionary ideas, and the organizers wanted visitors to see their "traditional" lifeways.



Figures 3.5-6. (left) Henry Red Eagle at the 1904 LPE, photograph by Charles Carpenter. Courtesy of Field Museum-CSA13354; (right)

Dorsey and the LPE organizers wanted Osage—and other American Indian—representatives at the LPE as the fair was taking place on ancestral Osage land. However, as Nancy Parezo and Don Fowler point out, “the public did not pick up on this point; they were more interested in hair styles and apparel quality.”<sup>36</sup> While Dorsey and the fair organizers saw this event as means to convey traditional aspects of Osage life, the Osages who attended the LPE saw it as an opportunity to demonstrate the often-overlooked tradition of sovereignty. As Parezo and Fowler note, Che-sho-hum-kah, also known as Claremore, brought an 1804 treaty between the Osages and the federal government that had been written on a sheepskin, and wore an 1849 peace medal, both of which he

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<sup>36</sup> Parezo et al., 119.

would share with visitors as a means to educate them about sovereignty.<sup>37</sup> At the time of the LPE, the Osage Nation had started reaping the benefits of oil royalties on the reservation, and were actually wealthier than many of the White fair-goers. Although the Osages lived in contemporary homes, and many employed maids and cooks in their homes, at the fair, they were expected to live in the dwellings constructed in the old-ways. This was displeasing to many of the Osage attendees, and as Parezo and Fowler's research uncovered,<sup>38</sup>

A group of Osage tourists camped on the fairgrounds in September. They were considered noteworthy because they purchased so much Indian art and for their spectacular attire. "When twenty-one Osage Indians [came], the [Indian School] aisles were blocked with people eager to get a glimpse of this proud tribe. Their shaved heads and little top-knots of 'crowning glory' attracted a great deal of attention ... They were gorgeously attired in gay blankets and the [women wore] silk in the new 'plaid effects.'" They returned to Oklahoma on September 16 along with the demonstrators who were not pleased with the Indian Village and made their displeasure known. As one exposition official judgmentally remarked, "In one respect the Osage lead all other Indians; they were extremely hard to please. They were continually objecting to conditions as they found them. They had lived too well at home."

Here, the Osage representatives used their participation and attendance at the fair to represent themselves in a way that reflected their lives as they were, not as the fair organizers wanted them to be, emblematic of a mythical and pure past. LPE organizers also tried to keep the Indians from influencing one another or being influenced by the civilized people surrounding them, but they often failed. For example, Osage representatives would often hire White people to watch their property so they could attend events at the fair and explore the grounds, and when one fair organizer complained about it, the Indian Boarding School director at the LPE, "had no sympathy, [because] he had warned him that the Osages were independent."<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Parezo et al., 119–20.

<sup>38</sup> Parezo et al., 133.

<sup>39</sup> Parezo et al., 281.



Figures 3.7-3.10. Photographs taken by Charles Carpenter at LPE.

Dorsey and his contemporaries may not have had the same collecting methodologies, but nearly all curators at this time were engaging in attempts to salvage ethnographic data and materials for their respective institutions. As Alaka Wali explained about the American Indian collections at the Field Museum, “a lot of it came here, like in the early 1900s, soon after the World's Fair. That time when, you know, Dorsey and other anthropologists were like, 'let's go get everything before those

people die.”<sup>40</sup> Dorsey’s participation in the 1893 Chicago World’s Columbian Exposition and the 1904 Louisiana Purchase Exposition was also entangled with performances of American Indian participants and the ways Osages and other Indians met and resisted the expectations of the organizers.<sup>41</sup> These entanglements certainly helped shape the foundation for the Field Museum’s future relationships with American Indian communities, and ongoing struggles for increased self-representation.

### **Limitations and Possibilities: Hall 8**

Chicago has the eighth largest American Indian population in the United States with an urban Indian population of nearly 30,000 people.<sup>42</sup> Chicago also has an incredible legacy of American Indian activism, from the American Indian Chicago Conference and the writing of the Declaration of Indian Purpose to playing a role in the formation of the National Indian Youth Council, and D’Arcy McNickle’s ongoing legacy at the Newberry Library which supports a great deal of academic work within American Indian and Indigenous studies.<sup>43</sup> The city of Chicago represents an important space within American Indian politics and movements for greater sovereignty. As one of the top twenty most visited museums in the United States, the Field Museum and the Hall of Native North Americans, or “Hall 8,” represents an important space for the representation of American Indian peoples not only within the city, but within the United States more broadly.

The Field is a natural history museum with an incredibly large and diverse collection, as well as a number of major rotating temporary exhibitions each year; Hall 8 does not draw people into the

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<sup>40</sup> Wali and Pappan, Hall 8 Walkthrough.

<sup>41</sup> Deloria, *Indians in Unexpected Places*.

<sup>42</sup> Norris, Vines, and Hoeffel, “The American Indian and Alaska Native Population: 2010.”

<sup>43</sup> LaPier and Beck, *City Indian*.

exhibit in the same way that Sue the T-rex does. An American Indian college student who was living in the Chicago area while I was doing my research explained:<sup>44</sup>

The fact that it is a natural history museum, makes it, I think, even more important to stage an intervention compared to something like NMAI where people are going for, FOR American Indians. People are going to the Field Museum for Sue the Dinosaur and other things. But you know ... they have a massive job to do and I think it's, I mean, I think it's truly insane because they're placed, because the exhibits are made for a broader audience. I think they have even more of an imperative to make an intervention and I don't really feel like the Field Museum, with that hall has lived up to that. They've done some other things with programming, but first and foremost that hall, that hall really needs to change, for sure.

As we continued the conversation, it became clear that the existing exhibition made this individual feel as if the Field Museum put more effort into their exhibitions about dinosaurs than the exhibition about American Indians. "I think it just shows the overall institution's lack of interest in putting money into that hall, where they're putting money into this like Jurassic Park play land with Sue the dinosaur," they explained while rolling their eyes. They continued, "Sue's the main kind of icon of the Field Museum, but ... for people who have things from their community and if you're going to have to put up and endure with that anyway, you want those items to at least be treated well and to be honored."<sup>45</sup> For this person, the lack of institutional commitment to updating Hall 8 sends a strong message from the Field Museum about where their priorities reside.

These sentiments were reiterated by Jemez Pueblo and Korean artist, Debra Yepa-Pappan, who now works as the Field Museum's Community Engagement Coordinator for the Hall 8 reinstallation. As an American Indian person who grew up in Chicago, the Field Museum was a formative place for Yepa-Pappan. When I asked if she spent time at the Field Museum when she was younger, she told me, "Definitely, you know that, every school kid in Chicago goes to the Field Museum for field trips, so I had been there a number of times as a young person." She continued,

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<sup>44</sup> Interview with Chicago-based American Indian student, August, 28 2017.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

“my dad used to take me there during the summer when I was off of school. I remember one time my father and I going there...I remember him pointing at certain things and saying ‘you know that’s not labeled correctly, that should be, you know, that looks like it’s from Jemez, but it’s labeled as something else’ ... So yeah definitely, I definitely spent a lot of time at the Field Museum as a kid.”<sup>46</sup>

After attending school at the Institute of American Indian Arts (IAIA) in Santa Fe, where she met her husband, Chris, they returned to Chicago where their daughter Ji Hae was born. After attending college and becoming a mother, her view of the Field Museum, and Hall 8 in particular, changed:

After I came back I kind of avoided going to the Field Museum because ... I had a better understanding of just how... how non-representative the exhibit halls felt to me. I didn’t feel like I was being represented accurately. Then when my daughter Ji Hae was born I pretty much avoided going to the Field Museum, then also when she was younger. Although I did take her to see the other exhibits, you know, the dinosaurs, all the stuffed animals and things like that. We would go to the other exhibits and I would try to avoid that exhibit all because, no, it had not changed. It was pretty much the same, whereas you know the dinosaur exhibit was updated and modified to, you know, look more contemporary. It was more exiting and fun and you could see other parts of the museum getting updated, except for the Native American hall which just, you know, was the same as it was when I was younger.

Yepa-Pappan echoes the sentiments above, and as someone who grew up in Chicago, was able to see for herself the ways that other exhibitions at the Field changed while Hall 8 remained the same.

When I asked her about why she specifically chose to keep her daughter away from Hall 8, she explained, “I didn’t want to take my daughter in there because we would always hear kids and groups of people, you know, just making very ignorant statements and always very stereotypical about Indian people. A lot of the talk was about Natives, or Indians living in the past. And a lot of, you know, of talk which I didn’t want my daughter to hear that.”<sup>47</sup> Not only was the exhibition representing American Indian experiences in incomplete and inaccurate, but it also created a space where visitors felt as if they could talk about Indian peoples as if they were extinct.

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<sup>46</sup> Yepa-Pappan, Hall 8 Interview.

<sup>47</sup> Yepa-Pappan.

Tuscarora artist, writer, and curator Richard Hill wrote about this phenomenon in “The Museum Indian: Still Frozen in Time and Mind.” For Hill, the museum Indian is not an individual, but a cultural type that is the generic creation of natural history museum curators. The museum Indian often resides within dioramas, which “tend to keep Indians in the natural history arena next to the stuffed animals and frozen specimens.”<sup>48</sup> As institutions where children go to learn, museums have an important role to play in dispelling the stereotypes and tropes confronting young people in their daily lives through mainstream media and popular culture, which, as Hill points out, “have done more psychological damage to our perceptions of Indians than any other form of image-making.”<sup>49</sup> However, within the Field Museum—and certainly other institutions—the representations on display work to reinforce rather than disrupt the kinds of images seen within popular culture. Even still, as the introductory narrative of this dissertation demonstrates, the display of Chicago Blackhawks ephemera within the Field Museum points to the ways these representations are often co-constitutive.

To enter Hall 8, there are four points of entry—through the main gift store; from Stanley Field Hall through the Webber Gallery; through the Pawnee Earth Lodge; and through the Northwest Coast and Arctic Peoples Hall. To get to the latter two entry points—which are the intended entry points—visitors walk through the *Ancient Americas* exhibition, which opened in 2007. *Ancient Americas* presents a temporally linear narrative of “the ancient cultures of North, Central, and South America and the Caribbean, from the earliest humans in the Western Hemisphere to the end of AD 1400.”<sup>50</sup> Although there is a thematic section at the end of the exhibition called “Living Descendants,” as this quote suggests, the exhibition ends in 1491. *Ancient Americas* was developed without input from

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<sup>48</sup> Richard W. Hill, “The Museum Indian: Still Frozen in Time and Mind.”

<sup>49</sup> Richard W. Hill, 43.

<sup>50</sup> Kcook, “The Ancient Americas Educator Guide.”

Indigenous communities and, after a bit of controversy, the “Living Descendants” section was added. However, in order to get to the Living Descendants section, visitors walk through two hallways and pass by a stairwell. The physical separation of this section from the rest of the exhibition is a clear indicator that it was an afterthought, as are the “Contemporary Voices” panels that were added throughout the gallery.

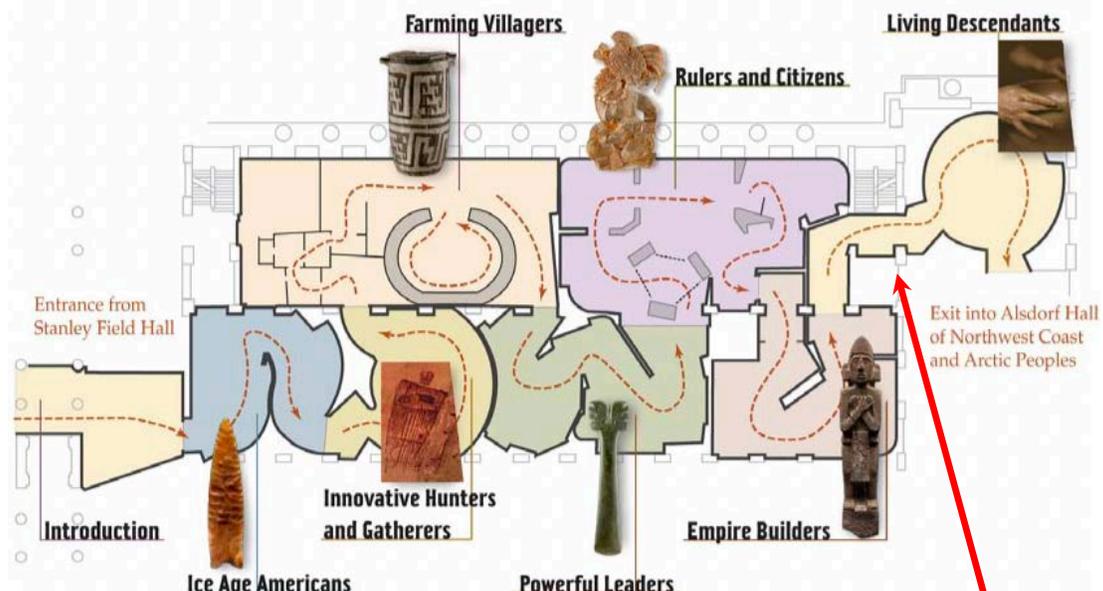


Figure 3.11. Map of *Ancient Americas* exhibition with arrow pointing to hallway to get to “Living Descendants”



Figures 3.12-13. Gallery view of “Living Descendants” section of *Ancient Americas* and panels featuring “Voices of Our Peoples” within exhibit.

The “Living Descendants” section does have a selection of videos that feature Indigenous peoples living in the Chicago area today, but the space itself is noticeably disconnected from the rest of the exhibition, and as a result, any messages about the continuity, presence, and resilience of Indigenous peoples today are also disconnected from the material culture in the previous sections of the exhibition. Upon exiting this space, visitors arrive in the Northwest Coast and Arctic Peoples hall, which features overwhelmingly crowded cases of the Field Museum’s incredible collections from these regions. This Hall, which was installed in the 1970s, is not part of the Hall 8 reinstatement. It is through the Northwest Coast and Arctic Peoples hall that the intended entrances to Hall 8 are located. One doorway goes directly into Hall 8, but the “main entrance” is through the Pawnee Earth Lodge, a full-size replica that was built in 1977. The Field Museum’s website indicates that the Pawnee Earth Lodges were used in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. However, within the exhibition there is no indication that these domiciles are no longer being used.<sup>51</sup> As one of the most popular visits for school-age groups, the lack of context is highly problematic.



Figure 3.14. Pawnee Earth Lodge, courtesy of the Field Museum.

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<sup>51</sup> admin, “Pawnee Earth Lodge.”

During my fieldwork at the Field Museum, there was an Odawa artist who was spending the summer as an intern within the North American Indian collections. As a digital-dome artist and student at the Institute for American Indian Arts (IAIA) who grew up in the Chicago area, Feather Metsch has a unique perspective on Hall 8 at the Field Museum. When I asked her about her experience with the Field Museum, she explained:

I've been going to it my whole life; all of my field trips have been here. I've probably been here 80 times and given my particular situation where I was raised with an adopted family, the majority of what I knew about Native Americans is from the Field Museum. I grew up my whole entire childhood not knowing that contemporary Native American culture even existed. The way Native American culture is presented at the museum, I mean, I said this to you I'm sure, I say this a lot, but I'm trying to explain why I wanted to come to the Field Museum. It's like taxidermy, dinosaurs, Native Americans, they're all dead, they're all in the past. That's the vibe the museum gives off.

As an important space for educating both Indian and non-Indian young people, the Field Museum has certainly failed to communicate the resilience—or even existence—of contemporary American Indian peoples.

When *Ancient Americas* was installed in 2007, a welcome message was created as a preface to the North American Indian cultures hall, which exists just before you enter the Pawnee Lodge antechamber. It reads:

Native North American Peoples from the 1500s Onward

This gallery displays beautiful and important objects from several Native North American cultures. But the exhibits were created decades ago, and don't reflect our current perspective. Throughout this hall, you'll find many labels that need to be updated.

In the future, we will renovate this gallery to complement *The Ancient Americas*, and communicate our understanding of Native American peoples, past and present.

This sign has been up for over a decade and goes unnoticed by a majority of visitors to the exhibition. Furthermore, the sign indicates that the renovation of the gallery will “communicate *our* understanding” of American Indian peoples. Who gets to be a part of this process and of representing American Indian peoples in this space? Is there only one understanding of American Indian peoples?

Also, this panel only references the past and the present. As I visited with American Indian folks at the Field Museum, a majority of them spoke about how the renovated exhibition might go beyond representing the past and passively indicating “we’re still here,” to ways it might create space for imagining the future.

During my research at the Field Museum, I spent a lot of time in Hall 8—with colleagues, with community members, and with artists. As someone who is not a resident of the Chicago area, I wanted to better understand how Chicago-based American Indian folks feel about this space and what they would like to see happen if and when the exhibition is renovated. Their insights about this space are important, not only for understanding Hall 8’s existing limitations, but also to gain some perspective on the most productive ways to move forward. The people I spoke with were not only critiquing the existing exhibition but were also describing the things they would like to see in that space throughout our conversations. Their suggestions included bringing together various technologies, audio-visual work, contemporary art, and input from the community, as well as highlighting the Field Museum’s existing historic collections. These interviews revealed the cautious optimism that my collaborators have for the future of this space, and certainly an understanding of the power the exhibition has to shape perspectives about American Indians throughout the US, and particularly those living in Chicago.

Moving into Hall 8, visitors are surrounded by glass vitrines filled with ethnographic objects like clothing, tools, and household items. The cases that currently stand in Hall 8 were originally installed in 1949 through 1950. Although the cases themselves have moved to different locations within the Field Museum over the past sixty-plus years, the contents of the cases have not changed since 1950. In some of the cases, as with a number of Osage objects, certain objects had been removed from the cases for conservation or as the result of a repatriation request. As Chris Pappan explained to Alaka Wali and I during a walkthrough of the exhibition, “my first thought is that I don't

know if any of these objects... should be on display. I don't know what I should be looking at, you know? Because I know that... there are things that people say shouldn't be on display. But, I just kind of have to put my trust in... that things that are on display are okay to be viewed. Um. That's my first thought."<sup>52</sup> Pappan's comments were reiterated by community members throughout my time at the Field Museum. In fact, there were a number of people I spoke with who refuse to enter Hall 8, because of ongoing issues with the display of sacred objects.



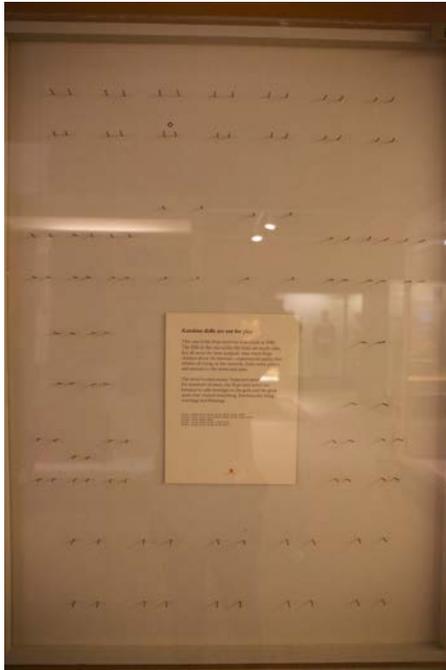
Figures 3.15-3.16. Photograph of case featuring Osage “man’s costume” as originally installed in 1950. Photo courtesy of Field Museum (A92983); (right) photograph of case in July 2015, photo by author.

The most startling aspect of the absence of objects that American Indian nations have requested be removed from display is the lack of acknowledgement about these instances. The signs hung in the cases do not indicate the Museum repatriated the objects or removed them on behalf of the request of an Indian nation. All of the signs posted either simply state “artifacts temporarily removed” or indicate they were removed for conservation. The vague descriptions and the existence

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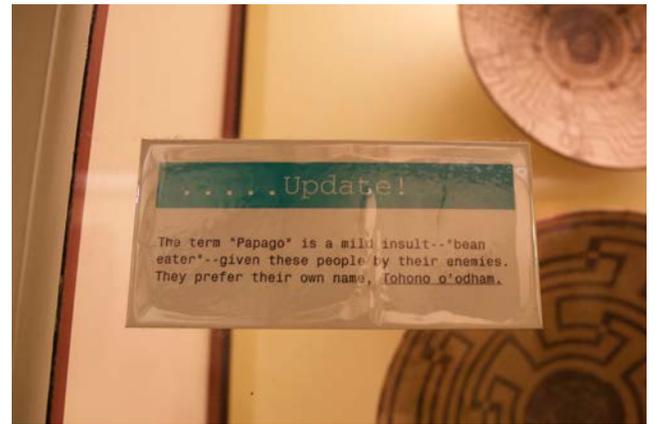
<sup>52</sup> Wali and Pappan, Hall 8 Walkthrough.

of empty and half-empty cases throughout the exhibit indicate a lack of engagement with the material or with questions surrounding issues of repatriation and self-representation. Regardless of the intent of the institution—or the attempts of individual curators to do more in this space—these cases send a message that American Indians are unimportant; that we do not matter or at least we do not matter as much as dinosaurs.



Figures 3.17-3.21. Images of empty cases in Hall 8 and close-ups of the labels hanging in some of the cases. Photographs by author

In addition to the empty cases, problematic terminology lingers in this space, causing discomfort for American Indian peoples and confusion among visitors about what kinds of language are appropriate when talking about American Indian communities and material culture. As the university student I spoke with mentioned, “It just felt old and not well thought of or cared for ... I do remember being struck by—they have a piece of laminated paper I think around like the Papago/Pima where basically it’s just like ‘oh, we used to describe these people in this particular way, but that’s derogatory, so we try not to do that now.’”<sup>53</sup> This same label came up in my walkthrough with Pappan and Wali. While reading the label, Pappan began laughing and sarcastically remarked, “Update! Newsflash!” as he pointed to it.<sup>54</sup>



Figures 3.22 3.23. Text in case using offensive terminology to describe the Tohono O’odam, and a label on the outside explaining the error.

As Wali stepped closer, a look of embarrassment washed over her face and she remarked, “ayy yay yay,” while rubbing her brow bone in a gesture signaling her bewilderment.<sup>55</sup> A number of times while working with Wali, she expressed her frustration that the Field Museum was a world-class institution that consistently fell short of its obligation to American Indian peoples.

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<sup>53</sup> Interview with Chicago-based American Indian student, August, 28 2017.

<sup>54</sup> Wali and Pappan, Hall 8 Walkthrough.

<sup>55</sup> Wali and Pappan.

After a moment of uncomfortable laughter from the three of us, Pappan asked, “I mean, if you're just, if you're going to put that up there, why can't you just go in and just, you know? Just, go right over that and just say Tohono O'odam?”<sup>56</sup>

In this moment, and when Pappan brought up the use of the word “costumes” to describe the clothing and attire in the exhibition, there was an awkward laughter. It was not a laughter that came from a place of joy, but from a place of not knowing what else to do in that moment. This uncomfortable laughter resonated throughout my interviews with American Indian folks at the Field and other museums. It is both a strategy for survivance and a generous deflection that allows people in positions of power to feel a sense of comfort when confronted with the violence of their institutions. This creative use of humor opens a space for dialogue. For example, when Pappan, Wali, and I approached one of the dioramas in Hall 8, Pappan said, “personally I think there's an artistry in the diorama, but you know, when it was done, it's all based on the scholarly or anthropological idea of what it is supposed to be. If you had a diorama with more Indigenous input, it might change it a little. I don't know. But this guy, right here, he's my favorite. That's a real Indian guy right there.”<sup>57</sup> As he pointed to a figure of a portly man in the diorama, we all laughed.

As I looked a bit closer, I remarked, “It kind of looks like my grandpa, actually.”<sup>58</sup> We all chuckled, and then I clarified that while it was funny that this figure looked like my grandpa, it is also important that the images in museums are reflective of the peoples within our communities, ~~even those of us who are chunky.~~

Wali remarked, “It is true that the dioramas are loved. I loved the dioramas when I came here ... The craftsmanship, we had people here who we don't have them anymore. People who were

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<sup>56</sup> Wali and Pappan.

<sup>57</sup> Wali and Pappan.

<sup>58</sup> Wali and Pappan.

craftspeople, who were artists.”<sup>59</sup> Certainly there is a nostalgia associated with dioramas, and because dioramas pervade natural history museum exhibits of American Indian peoples, we expect to see them. In fact, while giving a job talk at the University of Denver in 2009, anthropologist Jennifer Shannon discussed her research on the community-curated exhibition *Our Lives* at NMAI. At one point, she remarked on the sense of frustration some of the museum professionals felt as they were working with communities and expected to push the boundaries of what a museum is supposed to be when, in reality, a number of community members suggested things like dioramas and mannequins.<sup>60</sup>

I mentioned this example to them, and Pappan brought up the possibilities of using three-dimensional printing techniques to create people for dioramas in the future, and using mounts instead of mannequins for displaying clothing. He described, “even if it were just you know, like a modern, not even a mannequin, but just you know, a simple mount or display. It would be much better ... the fact that they don't have faces, its just a faceless person. You know? It feels dehumanizing.”<sup>61</sup> Like in his art practice, Pappan’s suggestion wrestled with how self-representations can both meet expectations while also pushing the boundaries and shifting perspectives in subversive ways. This led to a conversation about what a diorama about American Indian peoples today might look like, and the possibility of having a series of dioramas created by different people on a rotating basis. What started out as a joke led to a thoughtful discussion about the possibilities and limitations of dioramas. This exemplifies how the creative use of humor can contribute to academic and scholarly work in important ways.

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<sup>59</sup> Wali and Pappan.

<sup>60</sup> Although this story was not included in her book, see Shannon, *Our Lives: Collaboration, Native Voice, and the Making of the National Museum of the American Indian.*, for more on the process of community curation at NMAI.

<sup>61</sup> Wali and Pappan, Hall 8 Walkthrough.



Figure 3.24. Diorama in Hall 8 that we were discussing.



Figures 3.25 – 3.26. Two additional dioramas in Hall 8. Photos by author.

Another person who used creativity in their critique of the Field Museum was Frank Waln, one of the most prominent American Indian voices surrounding the issue of the Field Museum and its representation of American Indians. In 2014, Waln—a Sicangu Lakota hip-hop artist, producer, and performer from the Rosebud reservation who now resides in Chicago—made a short film about Hall 8 at the Field Museum. In the video, Waln is featured walking through Hall 8 and looking at the display cases as he talks about his experiences and delivers a biting critique of the Field Museum and other institutions. He states:

Museums tend to perpetuate that stereotype that we're a dead culture of the past, and they're never going to see us how we are today, contemporary people, living, breathing, dressing like everyone else, rapping, painting, you know. And when I come here to the Field Museum and I see our culture put on blast like we're a people of the past, it makes sense, you know. A term symbolic annihilation: if you portray a people who are underrepresented in the media as a dead culture, as a culture of the past, to a lot of society, they're not going to exist, they're going to be extinct. We are a people with a past, not a people of the past.<sup>62</sup>

As a young Lakota performer, Waln is conscious of the ways that misrepresentations operate in the media and the power they wield in shaping societal understandings of American Indians. This is a common theme within his music and statements he's made during interviews. Furthermore, Waln does not distinguish the ways American Indians are represented in the media and within museums or academia as separate phenomena.

In "What Made the Red Man Red," Waln mixes electronic beats and sampled audio clips from Peter Pan in the opening of the song. As he begins to shift the listener's perspective by isolating and highlighting particular phrases, he delivers the following lyrics about "what made the red man red":

Your history books, your holidays, Thanksgiving lies and Columbus Day  
Tell me why I know more than the teacher  
Tell me why I know more than the preacher

Tell me why you think the red man is red  
    Stained with the blood from the land that bled  
Tell me why you think the red man is dead  
    With the fake head dress on your head  
Tell me what you know about thousands of nations  
    Displaced and confined to concentration camps called reservations

We died for the birth of your nation  
Hollywood portrays us wrong  
History books say we're gone  
Your God and church say we're wrong  
We're from the Earth, it made us strong

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<sup>62</sup> Originals First, *Originals First - OF*. Emphasis added

Savage is as savage does  
The white man came and ravaged us  
Caused genocide, now look in my eyes and tell me  
Who you think the savage was?

Manifest destiny arrested what's best for me  
They kill my culture  
America made a mess of me  
You inherited everything we die for and all we get is a got damn mascot ...<sup>63</sup>

Waln begins the song with recognizable music from a Disney film, drawing the listener in with the familiar before delivering his piercing critique of the ways Indigenous peoples have been stereotyped through academic and popular representations. The lines, “Tell me why you think the red man is dead / With the fake head dress on your head,” take us back to his video critique of the Field Museum. While looking at a case of mannequins wearing nineteenth century Plains clothing, he states, “I’ve heard from other Natives in Chicago that they feel the same way about the Field Museum. These things that are most sacred to us are just ripped and put on display like this, and I could see how people think it’s okay to appropriate those images when personally I feel offended by it as a Lakota person.”<sup>64</sup> For Waln, the fact that museums put these representations on display gives the public permission to use them. Here, Waln uses the exhibition space at the Field Museum to make an argument about the connection between ethnographic and pop-culture representations of American Indians. Although his medium is unique, Waln’s struggle to convey complexity and multiplicity with brevity and creativity is a goal he shares with other artists and museum professionals.

Yepa-Pappan also connected popular culture representations with the exhibition as she explained what she would like to see in the future:

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<sup>63</sup> Waln, *What Made the Red Man Red*.

<sup>64</sup> Originals First, *Originals First - OF*.

I think it will be a positive thing for Native people and non-Native people to have a better understanding of who we are and the things that we are passionate about, the things that we find issue with. We need more understanding from non-Native people so that there's more respect for Native people. When they have a better understanding of why Standing Rock was important, why, you know, mascot issues are quite important, that would be, that would mean in the end they have more respect for who we are as a people.

If well-respected institutions like the Field Museum do not demonstrate respect and understanding for American Indian peoples and issues facing our communities, how can we expect the general public to respect or understand these issues? One of the issues that Yepa-Pappan and a number of other people I spoke with were most adamant about was their desire for the institution to cease the public display Chicago Blackhawks flags and jerseys.

Another theme that emerged among the people I interviewed was their desire to see the urban Indian population in Chicago represented within Hall 8. During one of our conversations Metsch talked about the ways that American Indian artists are often expected to create work that deals with life on reservations, while more than seventy percent of Indian peoples live in urban areas.<sup>65</sup> In one of our meetings with Wali, she brought up these statistics. When I asked her about this, she said<sup>66</sup>:

I really wanted to make it clear that there are more stories than just the reservation stories ... there's a pressure to make work that can be easily categorized and boxed into what the rest of America conceives of as "Native Americanness" ... there are many other story tellers and lots of other angles to tell, and I mean, this museum is in Chicago, so wouldn't it be more relatable and interesting to have actual Chicago resident Native perspectives instead of just these reservation perspectives? And obviously, you need both in a dialogue amongst everyone, but I think urban Indians get cut out of the picture of, like, what's considered Indian really often.

As a Chicago-based institution, the Field Museum has a responsibility to the ancestral inhabitants of the region, but also to the urban-Indian population—many of whom moved to Chicago or whose parents and grandparents moved there as a result of termination era relocation programs. For Yepa-

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<sup>65</sup> Norris, Vines, and Hoeffel, "The American Indian and Alaska Native Population: 2010."

<sup>66</sup> Metsch, interview.

Pappan, engagement and collaboration with the Chicago American Indian community is a central aspect of for approaching the reinstallation. In fact, before she was hired as the Community Engagement Coordinator, she volunteered to help with community outreach and trying to engage more people after being involved with her husband, Chris Pappan's exhibit in Hall 8.

The critiques from Chicago-based American Indian artists and community members demonstrate a recognition of the power that the Field Museum has to shape mainstream understandings of American Indian peoples. They also demonstrate a willingness to collaborate with the Museum in thinking about how to correct the existing (mis)representations and to demonstrate a diversity of narratives that reflect contemporary American Indian experiences in more accurate ways. These conversations were also influenced by the collaborative curation projects that began before my fieldwork in Chicago.

### **Existing interventions: Contemporary Artist Exhibitions**

Although the Field Museum placed a "preface" at the entrance to the exhibition, and a few labels recognizing their use of inappropriate terminology, there have been no significant attempts to update the exhibition in decades. After the "Voices of Our People" panels were added to the *Ancient Americas* exhibition, they placed some of the images and quotes on pedestals throughout the exhibition in celebration of American Indian Heritage Month. The pedestals were never removed. These pedestals and the introductory text represent interventions that fail to address the underlying issues within Hall 8, the Field Museum, and the fact that American Indian collections exist in natural history museums in the first place. However, in 2013, a temporary exhibition co-curated by Wali and Pawnee and Arikara artist Bunky Echo-Hawk began that work in a more meaningful way.



Figures 3.27-3.28. Voices of Our People pedestals in Hall 8 featuring Wilma Mankiller and Winona LaDuke. Photos by author.

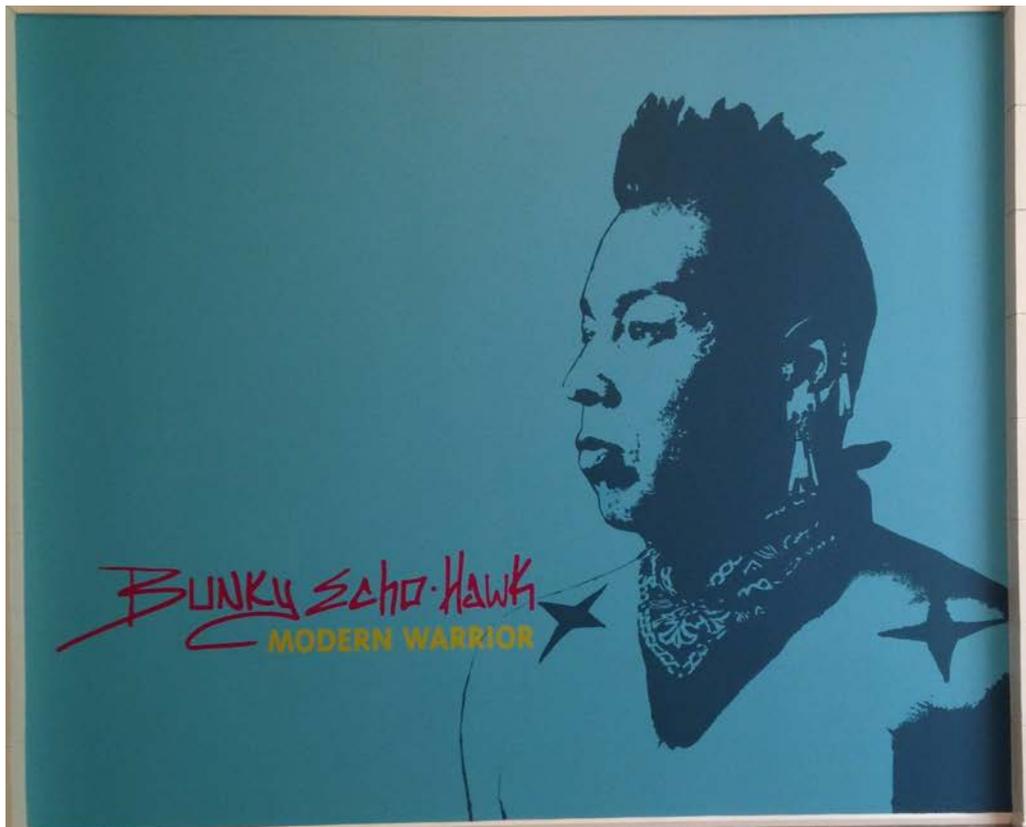


Figure 3.29. Image of signage for *Bunky Echo-Hawk: Modern Warrior* exhibition. Photo by author.

*Bunky Echo-Hawk: Modern Warrior* (September 27, 2013 to Monday, September 28, 2015) was the first of three exhibitions Wali co-curated with American Indian artists. The first time I entered *Modern Warrior* was as I was exiting Hall 8. As I crossed into the Webber Gallery, I experienced an immediate departure from the outdated and problematic portrayal of American Indian “cultures” in the permanent exhibit, and was greeted by a smiling photograph of Echo-Hawk and the sound of “NativElectro” music by BunkHaus Wax, another of Echo-Hawk’s artistic endeavors.<sup>67</sup> Throughout the exhibit, objects from the Museum’s historical collections are juxtaposed with Echo-Hawk’s brightly colored acrylic paintings. This exhibit, juxtaposed with the adjacent Hall 8, challenges visitors’ expectations about what it means to be a contemporary American Indian.



Figures 3.30-3.31- . Cases in *Modern Warrior* display historic objects from Field Museum collections in conversation with pieces made by Echo-Hawk. The panel on the right describes how Field Museum collecting practices have changed since George Dorsey with a picture of Wali and Echo-Hawk with a pair of his shoes that were accessioned into the collections for the exhibition. Photos by author.

<sup>67</sup> BunkHaus Wax Facebook page, accessed September 19, 2014, <https://www.facebook.com/BunkHausWax/info>.

The exhibit was also popular with a number of the Chicago-based American Indian artists and community members I interviewed during my time at the Field Museum. Metsch described the show as inspiring, and said, “the Bunky Echo-Hawk exhibit is an awesome example for non-Natives even. It really shows someone with pride in where they come from that contributes to their community. I mean, he's so active in what he does to give back to his community, and I think that's important in any community, not in just Native American communities.”<sup>68</sup> Through *Modern Warrior*, the Field Museum was providing an image of an American Indian artist and individual who Indian and non-Indian visitors could see as a role model or as someone to respect. The university student I spoke with described their experiences of the exhibit in this way:

The thing that I really liked about that show was... they had some of his, what is it called, I think Bunkhaus Wax. They had some of his music playing in the space, and so I thought that was interesting because if you come through, if you go through kind of the long way through ancient Americas... you know, all of the sudden... you hear these beats happening, and you're like, “oh, I don't expect to kind of hear electronic music.” Especially when you're surrounded by cases of old mannequins, this huge buffalo thing, and these old dioramas. So, I thought that was cool, because it was another way to kind of tap into museum goers' sensorial experiences, and we don't think of hearing music in museums. If you hear sounds, it may be nature sounds, or water sounds or whatever, to try to create an immersive environment. So, I thought that was a really nice way to do that, and especially because he works in music to have that—to try and create a more immersive space.

Entering through the *Ancient Americas* and Hall 8, the sounds and bright colors of *Modern Warrior* draw the visitor out of exhibitions which privilege curatorial voices and outdated anthropological assumptions and towards a space where a contemporary Indian artist engages in self-representation. However, while the exhibition is privileging the voice of an American Indian artist, there were some people within the Chicago American Indian community who felt as if the artist selected for this opportunity should have been a Chicago-based artist, instead of Echo-Hawk who resides in Oklahoma.

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<sup>68</sup> Metsch, interview.



Figure 3.32. View from Hall 8 into *Bunky Echo-Hawk: Modern Warrior*



Figure 3.33. Case in *Modern Warrior* with a 19<sup>th</sup> century parfleche bag and a label explaining the connections between the symbols on the bag and Echo-Hawk's tattoos.

The co-curatorial method of working with a contemporary artist did not come without critique from people who did not like the show, felt Echo-Hawk's art was too political, or people who simply do not feel that contemporary art belongs in a natural history museum. As Wali explained, some of the critiques were coming from her fellow colleagues who were concerned, and she explained, "that I'm focusing on collecting art from Native peoples and, like, not stuff."<sup>69</sup> She went on to explain, "I guess the critique is that I'm collecting the artist, and maybe ... Then, what happens to the collective voice of the community. Like who, if I was to have gone to the Pawnee for example as a community and did something with them rather than Bunky as an individual artist. Would it have made a difference?"<sup>70</sup> Here, Wali reveals the ongoing—and problematic—idea that museum exhibitions or individual artists can or should speak for an entire group of people.



Figures 3.34-3.35. Two of Echo-Hawk's paintings in the gallery that were described as "too political," for featuring issues of toxicity and increased suicide rates within American Indian communities.

<sup>69</sup> Wali and Pappan, Hall 8 Walkthrough.

<sup>70</sup> Wali and Pappan.

This is an issue that Frank Waln has also addressed. Waln, recognizes and appreciates not only the dangers of misrepresentation, but also the limitations and expectations that continue to be placed on Indigenous artists. In a 2016 interview, he explained,

The *Playboy* interview was the first time in my life I feel like I was treated like a dynamic artist. People approach me as if I'm an "activist" or just an "Indian." Sometimes I don't get the privilege to be treated like an artist. As I'm becoming more visible outside of Indian Country, I'm learning not to fall into these paths of "this is what a Native should do" or "this is what a Native can talk about." My manager and I really discuss every opportunity that comes our way, we're really careful about how I'm portrayed for that reason. There's also this pressure to speak for all Indians. You have to let the world know "this is my perspective, but I do not speak for all Indians." It's extra work and it's tiring at times, but it's just part of the path.<sup>71</sup>

Here, Waln articulates the struggle many American Indian artists, scholars, and average folks face in their daily lives and his attempt to resist the trap of authenticity. Furthermore, he makes it clear that he does not speak for anyone other than himself, which is something that is all too often expected from Indigenous peoples.

Nearly every single artist I have spoken with during my research has addressed this problem while also making it quite clear their works are not representative of any narrative or story but their own. ~~Something those of us within the academic and museum fields could certainly do a better job of articulating.~~ While these visual narratives may relate to broader community, national, or global issues, they are from the perspective of the individuals or collectives who create them. Today, there are a multitude of contemporary American Indian artists creating work, and the diversity of this expression renders the multiplicity of American Indian experiences visible. As Wali, Pappan, and I continued our discussion, Wali said, "Its one lens ... That's why I had the whole idea of an individual artist coming to interpret the collection is because that way they see things so differently. You know, and then if you just have a series of that going on, people will eventually get the sense of the diversity

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<sup>71</sup> "Native American Rapper Frank Waln Talks Decolonization And 'Dirty Sprite 2.'"

of perspectives and the salience of this or that, it seems to me.”<sup>72</sup> For Wali, the interaction between the Field Museum’s historic collections and the contemporary art is an essential aspect of these projects.

One artist whose work is deeply entangled with their relationship to the Field Museum collections is Rhonda Holy Bear, who is an enrolled member of the Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe. As a young artist in the 1980s, Rhonda Holy Bear was accepted as a student at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, but she was unable to afford tuition and could not attend. Holy Bear was eager to research and create, however, so she took advantage of the Field Museum’s weekly “Free Admission Night.”<sup>73</sup> *Full Circle/Omani Wakan*, which explores Holy Bear’s journey as an artist who spent a great deal of time early in her career at the Field Museum. The exhibit features a selection of objects from the Museum’s collections that inspired Holy Bear as well as 16 of her own incredibly intricate dolls which demonstrate various techniques including beading, ribbon work, and quill work.

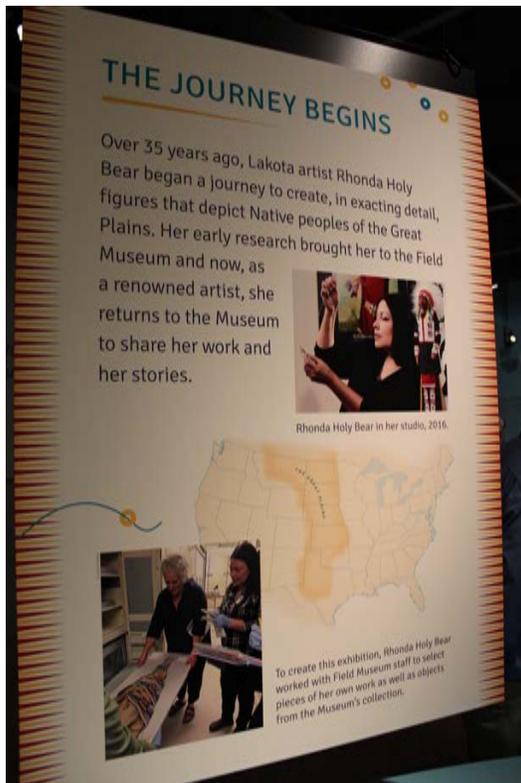


Figure 3.36. Installation view of *Full Circle/Omani Wakan: Lakota Artist Rhonda Holy Bear* will run from © John Weinstein, The Field Museum.

<sup>72</sup> Wali and Pappan, Hall 8 Walkthrough.

<sup>73</sup> “Rhonda Holy Bear.Com.”

As co-curator for the exhibit, Wali explained, “when Holy Bear was a teenager, The Field Museum was an important place for her to learn about her heritage—she would come here and spend time with the artifacts behind the scenes in our collections. This exhibition marks her return to a place that’s meant a lot to her throughout her life.”<sup>74</sup> For the Museum, working with Holy Bear and other artists allows them to highlight objects from their collection and the continuity of their importance within American Indian peoples’ lives. For the artists, it provides a unique opportunity to showcase their work to a mainstream audience.



Figures 3.37 – 3.38. Panel text with map the Great Plains region and images of Holy Bear working with Field Museum staff in collections. (right) *The Last Lakota Horse Raid*; Basswood, Native-tanned and commercial leather, glass seed beads, pigment, cotton cloth, hair, dentalium shells, abalone shells, German silver, metal cones, and brass tacks, by Rhonda Holy Bear. The pure white background of this dress is reminiscent of the mythological White Buffalo Calf Woman. The beaded pictorials on her dress commemorate the last time Lakota warriors raided horses from the Crow in 1879.

<sup>74</sup> kgolebiewski, “Field Museum to Open Two New Exhibitions Featuring Contemporary Native American Art.”

*Full Circle/Omani Wakan* is in the Webber Gallery, just as Echo-Hawk's exhibit was, and both exhibits provide a counter narrative to the exhibition in Hall 8. Holy Bear's work, however, uses artistic techniques that are more easily recognizable as "American Indian." However, these dolls, and the accompanying images and quotes from Holy Bear still present a narrative of ongoing continuity and resilience. Holy Bear explained, "My figures represent my relatives, past, present, and future. Without them, I could not be who I am today. My ancestors and their stories are connected like each vertebrae of my spine. I carry their story with me in my back. It's a strong place to be."<sup>75</sup> Within the same space, two American Indian artists who use different mediums presented their work to a mainstream museum audience.

The differences between Holy Bear and Echo-Hawk's works and their approach to the collections allow the exhibitions to convey compelling stories to diverse groups of visitors. While some people may have been put off by the "political" commentary within Echo-Hawk's work, those same people may have found it easier to engage with Holy Bear's work. Conversely, the people who are more drawn to painting and the use of color within Echo-Hawk's work may have had a deeper connection to that exhibit. The idea behind these exhibits is not that one is better than the other, but rather, that by including a number of these shows over time, different peoples will be able to engage with the material in new and meaningful ways.

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<sup>75</sup> Panel text.



Figure 3.39. Exhibit banners for *Full Circle/Omani Wakan* and *Drawing on Tradition* hang prominently in Stanley Field Hall.

***Drawing on Tradition: Kanza Artist Chris Pappan***

*Drawing on Tradition: Kanza Artist Chris Pappan* features the contemporary ledger art of Chicago-based Kanza, Osage, and Cheyenne River Sioux artist Chris Pappan. The exhibit opened in October 2016 alongside *Full Circle/Omani Wakan*. Unlike the Holy Bear and Echo-Hawk exhibits, however, *Drawing on Tradition* is not located in the adjacent changing exhibition gallery. Rather, Pappan’s work occupies space in Hall 8, the Field Museum’s permanent exhibition hall for the North American Indian collections. *Drawing on Tradition* features 17 original drawings and paintings, as well as a multimedia installation. The main corpus of Pappan’s original work is located near the center of Hall 8 and marks a clear intervention in the permanent exhibition space.



Figure 3.40. Installation view of *Drawing on Tradition*. © John Weinstein, The Field Museum.

Pappan's images of distorted American Indians on historic ledgers and maps of appropriated lands raise questions about the misperceptions of American Indians, and the ways American Indians sometimes conform to these expectations. By working in a style that is recognizably "American Indian," Pappan is able to push boundaries and challenge his audience in provocative and subversive ways. For *Drawing on Tradition*, Pappan worked with Wali and Justin Richland, an Associate Professor of Anthropology at the University of Chicago. I was also fortunate enough to be a part of Pappan's earliest visits to the Field Museum's collections and spoke with him about how he was conceptualizing the exhibition and his role as a contemporary ledger artist.



Figures 3.41-3.42. Chris Pappan in Field Museum collections in October, 2015. Photos by author.

As one of the only Osage artists I worked with who was raised entirely outside of the Osage Nation, and without participating in certain Osage social institutions, he has a unique perspective. Pappan is an enrolled citizen of the Kaw (Kanza) Nation, but he was raised by his non-Indian mother and stepfather in Flagstaff, Arizona. When I asked him about how his upbringing has influenced his art, he explained:<sup>76</sup>

When I was being raised, you know, it wasn't on the reservation. It wasn't with, you know, really a lot of my Native side of my family. So I guess, for me it's— it's really been a journey of self-discovery. You know, finding out what this culture means to me, what it means to be Native, and I think I'll always be learning that. You know, just because I didn't grow up that way, so you know, it's still just a learning process. So I think it's influential in that way, and I guess maybe sometimes I'm putting myself in places where maybe I shouldn't, just out of ignorance, or you know, doing things that I shouldn't ... I would say that my influence is just learning about myself, basically.

Pappan is not alone in growing up outside of his community, and when it came time for him to attend college, he jumped at the opportunity to attend IAIA. As discussed earlier, the majority of American Indians live in urban environments, so the fact that the Field Museum is featuring Pappan's work in this space has the ability to resonate with other people who may be feeling disconnected from their own communities.

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<sup>76</sup> Pappan, Life-history Interview.

When I asked him about whether or not he thought about his audience when he created his work, he explained, "I mean, for the most part, when I think of the audience, it's mostly in terms of people who aren't educated about Native peoples, because that's been the bulk of my experience when showing my work."<sup>77</sup> One of the experiences that allows him to better understand the perspectives of people who are viewing his work without any background knowledge was an artist residency program he participated in in Australia. He explained to me how his experience in Australia helped him to see how his expectations were not reflective of the peoples he met while in Australia<sup>78</sup>:

It was a really eye-opening experience, because I went to Australia with a preconceived notion of the Indigenous people there, and you know, what their artwork was going to be like, and that was all just blown out of the water when I got there, and then it made me realize, "well, that's why people have that same idea about us here," so now I understand why people all kind of lump us into one category, because I did the same thing with them. Because I only had a limited scope of view of who they are and what they did.

This experience, his own upbringing, and his interactions with people in places like the Southwestern Association for Indian Artists (SWAIA) market in Santa Fe were called upon in Pappan's co-curation of *Drawing on Tradition*.

One of the most successful interventions within *Drawing on Tradition* was the use of additional graphic representations of Pappan's work, which were enlarged and placed on the glass of the exhibition cases throughout Hall 8. These graphics are accompanied by panels inviting the visitors to "take a closer look" at the images that have been layered on the museum's existing displays. These semi-opaque images obscure the objects behind the glass and mediate the visitors' gaze upon the ethnographic artifacts. On the case featuring "Copper Tools and Weapons of Early Northern Hunters," for example, the descriptive text is blocked by a map section from one of Pappan's pieces. One of his ledger drawings *Thank You Grandmother* (graphite/pencil on ledger paper, 2009) impedes

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<sup>77</sup> Pappan.

<sup>78</sup> Pappan.

the visitor's ability to see the points and arrowheads displayed in the same case. Here, Pappan's work disrupts the narrative of the twentieth-century museum and the lasting image of the American Indian as hunter-gatherer. He doesn't fully block these representations of the past, but rather asks visitors to take a closer look at the peoples who are supposed to be represented by these objects.



Figures 3.43-3.46. Installation views of *Drawing on Tradition*. Photos by author.

The images on the cases are similar in color to the back panels of the cases, and the other images throughout the gallery blend in very well. The visual blurring of what is part of the permanent exhibition and what is part of the temporary installation utilizes entanglement as a means to disrupt the binary assumptions about what is traditional and what is contemporary. When I asked him about subversion in a conversation before the exhibition was designed, he explained:<sup>79</sup>

We're the ones who are dictating what it is now that is our culture. We're in control. People are hearing our voice now, and a lot of credit goes to the younger generation who are standing up and saying, "hey we're not going to take this anymore, this is who we are." I think, you know, kind of my stance, I've mellowed out quite a bit, in my younger days I'd get all riled up and angry, and you know, "screw the system," and "I want to knock it down," and all that kind of stuff without really understanding what it means. But then, as you grow and learn these things, you understand ways you can change ideas and perceptions in a more subtle and positive way.

Entanglement, as a subversive strategy, is a means to draw people into a conversation in a more productive way. This was a technique used throughout the exhibition with great success.



Figure 3.47. Ledger drawings as well as Chris Pappan's work added to the glass of a diorama and a panel on a case with Plains Indian clothing.

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<sup>79</sup> Pappan.

Another intervention that had a major impact within the space of Hall 8 was a multimedia installation that is suspended from the ceiling of the gallery. Pappan worked with musician Santiago X and photographers Adam Sings in The Timber and Debra Yepa-Pappan to create an immersive audiovisual experience. In this multimedia installation, which can be heard and seen throughout Hall 8 the artists used sampled footage from an 1894 Thomas Edison “Buffalo Dance” film and audio from 1983 pow wow in Macy, Nebraska, and music by Santiago X. The Edison film footage was distorted and obscured by photographs of contemporary American Indians. As the university student I spoke with explained, “I like how they took over space in the Native North American Hall, either through music or physically, and I wish they could do more ... the objects and art are great, but I love the multimedia piece, because I think it’s doing another type of work for the museum goer.”<sup>80</sup>



Figure 3.48. Multimedia installation in *Drawing on Tradition*. Photo by author.

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<sup>80</sup> Anonymous interview.



Figures 3.49-3.50. Multimedia installation in *Drawing on Tradition*; Images from *Drawing on Tradition* multimedia installation, featuring Debra Yepa Pappan, and one of her works *Hello Kitty Tipi* as well as a young #NoDAPL protester.

Just as Pappan's drawings are layered over the artifact display cases in the exhibit, the photographs of contemporary American Indians are layered over the ethnographic film. The historic footage of the dancers comes in and out of focus as vibrant images of smiling, confident, and pop-culture savvy American Indians obscure the black and white footage. The footage of the dancers does not disappear, and once again, the entangled images challenge the audience to dig deeper, to go beyond the binary of the past vs. the present. An accompanying text panel reveals Pappan's thoughts regarding these interventions: "I want to remind visitors that we will not be relegated to the past nor be considered mere victims of historical trauma. We are a thriving people, and we have not abandoned the things that make us unique in the world. Our culture isn't stagnant, it changes with the times and is a living thing." The idea of cultural change is a consistent theme in Pappan's work and within the exhibition. Cultural adaptation and transformation are also emphasized in a digital reading rail in the exhibit that explores ledger art within the broader historical context of Plains narrative art. The interactive display invites visitors to explore the changes within Plains narrative art, the development of ledger art, as well as the work of other contemporary ledger artists such as Linda Haukaas, Dwayne Wilcox, and John Isaiah Pepion.

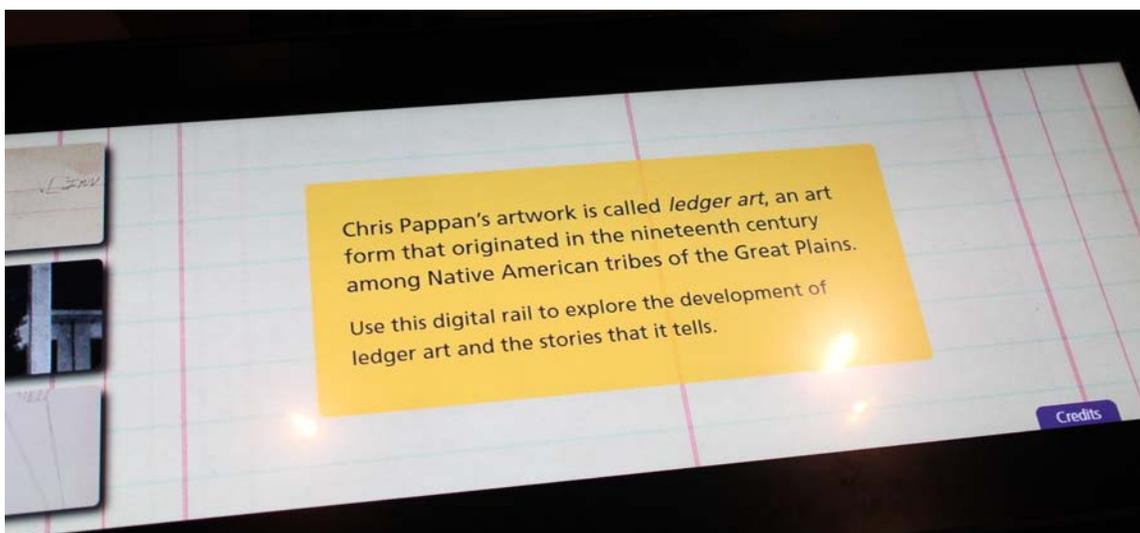
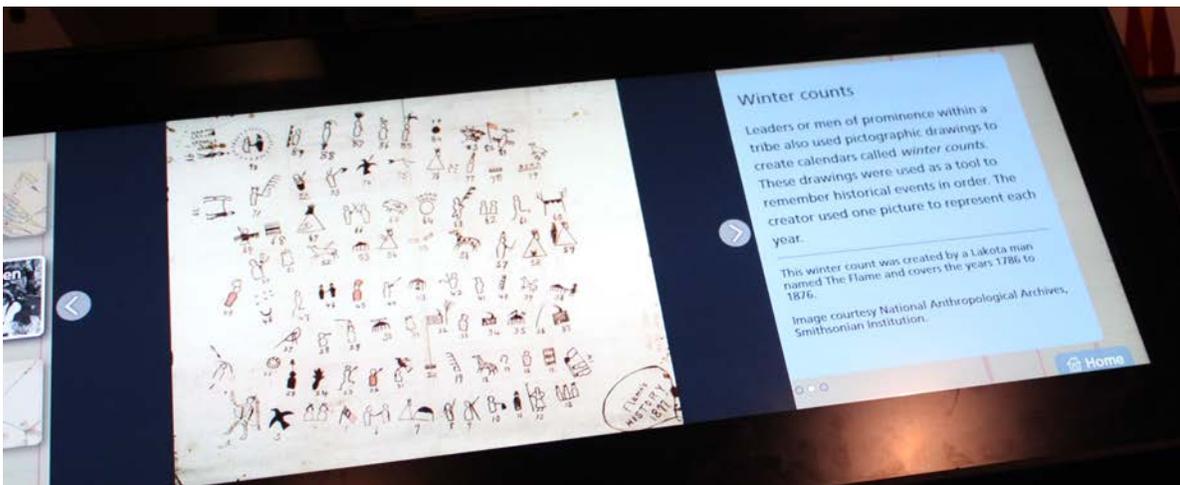
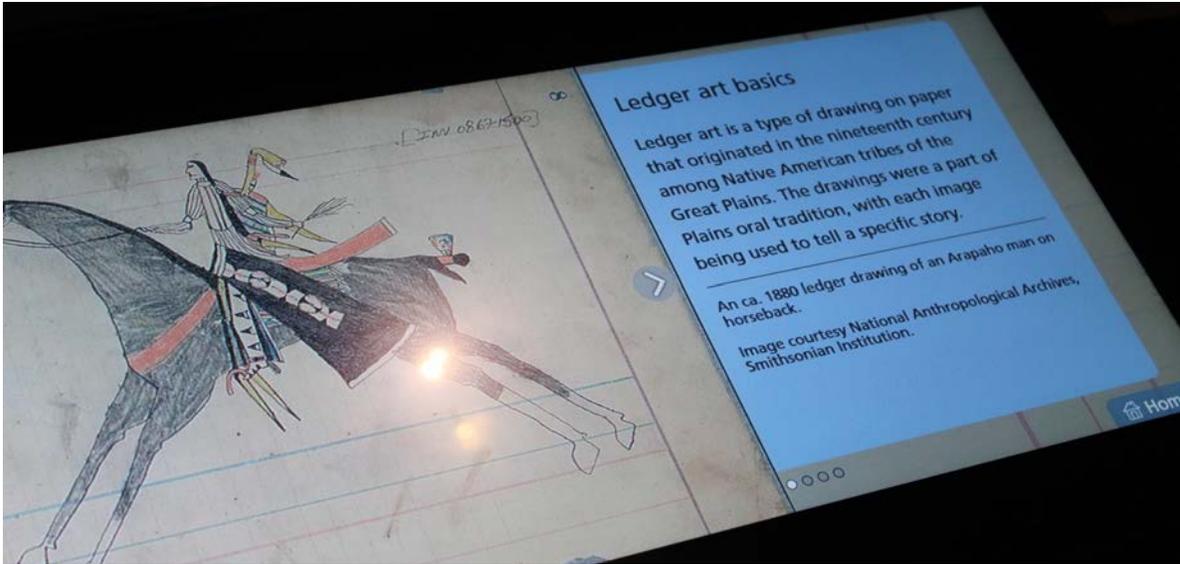
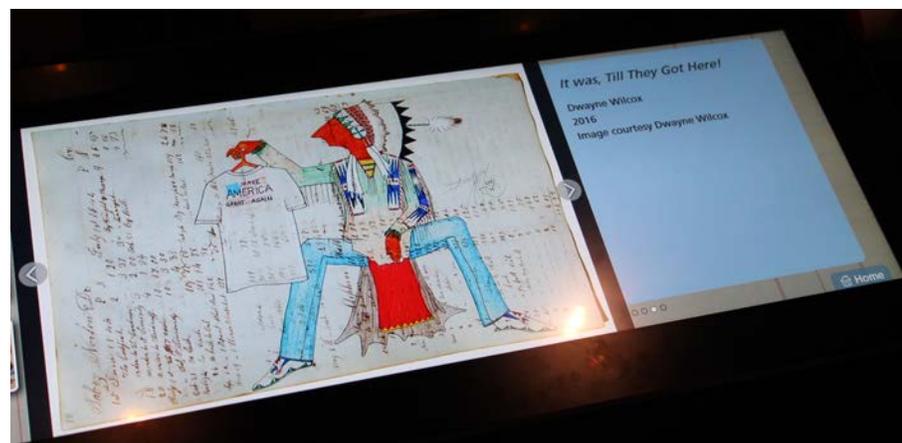
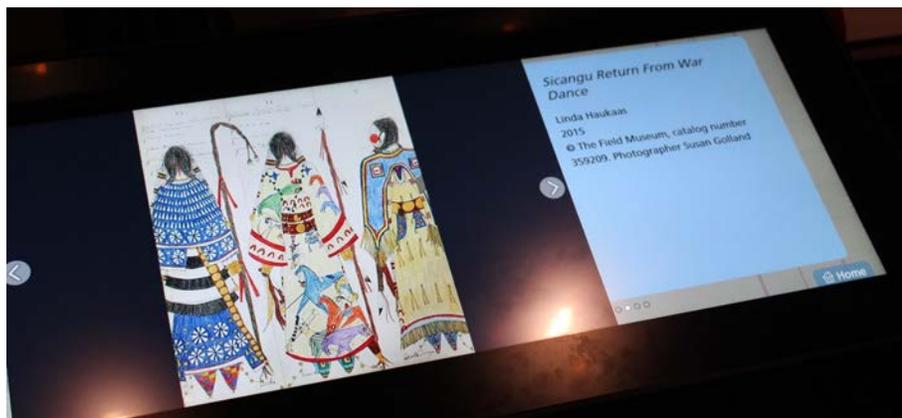
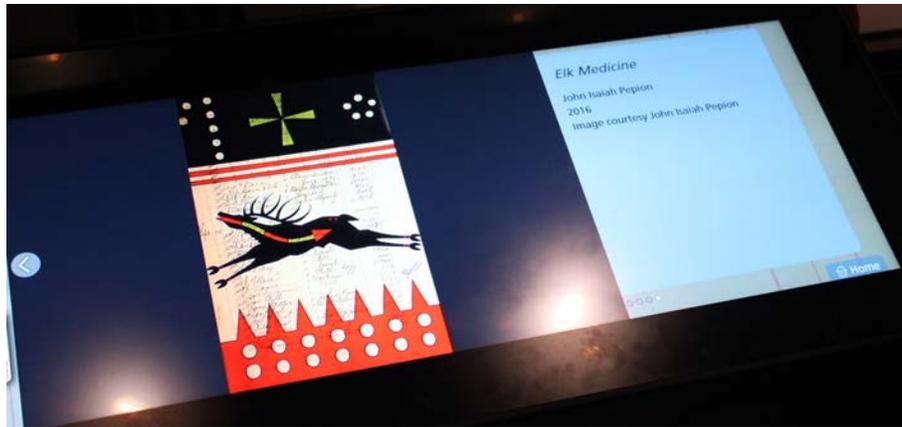
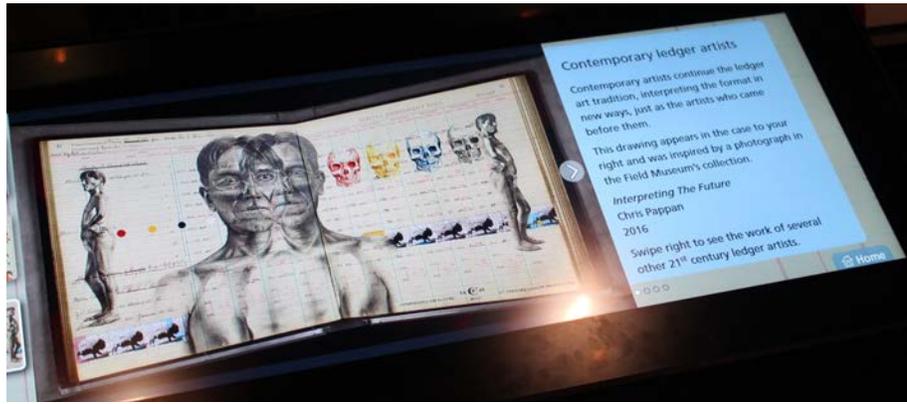


Figure 3.51. Digital reading rail in *Drawing on Tradition*. Photo by author.



Figures 3.52-3.54. Digital reading rail in *Drawing on Tradition*. Photos by author.



Figures 3.55-3.58. Digital reading rail in *Drawing on Tradition*. Photos by author.

The images and descriptions available to visitors through the digital reading rail give the visitors an opportunity to learn more about the ways that Plains narrative art—and American Indian practices more broadly—have changed over time. For Pappan, change is essential for Indigenous survival. He explores this issue in *The Martyrdom of Princess White Deer (Imatio Esther)*, a mixed-media portrait featuring Mohawk vaudeville performer Esther Deer. Deer—who performed with the Zeigfield Follies and started her own Wild West Show in the early-twentieth century—is depicted in triplicate wearing an eagle feather headdress. Gold leaf on the painting creates a stage ambience in the portrait of the “princess,” who was, in fact, a “princess” due to her six-month marriage to a Russian/Polish count. Pappan sees Deer as more than a performer; he sees her as a martyr. He states, “she adopted a type of ‘Indian’ persona that was palatable to the general public, but she had to sacrifice part of her identity to do that. I can relate to her struggle for cultural survival.”



Figure 3.59. *The Martyrdom of Princess White Deer (Imatio Esther)* 2014, graphite/pencil, gold leaf, and map collage on ledger paper; Loan courtesy of the Fred Jones Jr. Museum of Art, The University of Oklahoma; The James T. Bialac Native American Art Collection

In this piece and others, Pappan raises interesting questions about the ways American Indians perform and distort themselves to meet mainstream expectations about what it means to be an American Indian in the past, present, and future. When I asked Pappan about the use of distortions in his work he explained:<sup>81</sup>

At first, I did it because that was kind of, like, a thing I noticed a lot of artists did in the low-brow movement. They distorted the figures and made giant heads and small bodies. I started doing that with photographs of Native people, but I quickly realized that this could be a metaphor for the distortions that are put upon us, the expectations that are put upon us as Native people. Now I see it more as, like, history being viewed through a lens or a filter, because the truth of the history is not really known to us. We have some aspects of what the truth might be. Whatever it is, an idea, or somebody's actions, or what they did, but we'll never really know ... with photographs and all these other things, the truth and people's motives that aren't always with good intentions... people will distort the truth to their own advantage...

A lot of times in American society, they don't tell the truth about us, because they need to keep us oppressed, because, you know, if we have all the rights to this, to all of this, and if we all realize that and we all stand up, then there's gonna be a problem for the colonizer ... there's also an element of my work where I do the mirrored image and blend it together, and that's a metaphor for being a person of mixed background, but you know it's also the old and the new coming together, and then a lot of importance is placed on what's happening when those two things come together. You know, it's creating a new image, it's creating a new idea, and people will see things in there that I don't always see or intend, so that's another thing.

For Pappan, these distorted images of what it means to be an American Indian—an ahistorical and pure representation of a singular Indian culture<sup>82</sup>—were constructed not only through the work salvage anthropology and subsequent appropriations by popular media in movies like *Pocahontas* and television shows like *The Lone Ranger*, but have also been perpetuated by Indian people themselves.<sup>83</sup> In *Drawing on Tradition*, Pappan urges his audience—both Indian and non-Indian— to

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<sup>81</sup> Pappan, Life-history Interview.

<sup>82</sup> Raibmon, *Authentic Indians: Episodes of Encounter from the Late-Nineteenth-Century Northwest Coast*, 9.

<sup>83</sup> Jessepe, "Homecoming." For more on this idea, and examples of other ways Indian people have been complicit in the perpetuation of certain images—particularly within the context of performance and filmmaking—see Deloria, *Indians in Unexpected Places*.





Figure 3.61. *Deer Clan*, Chris Pappan. Image courtesy of artist.

Although *Drawing on Tradition* makes an important intervention within the Field Museum's Hall 8, the North American Indian exhibition is the oldest permanent exhibit at the museum, and as previously stated, many of the cases were originally installed in 1949-1950. The reinstallation of the Native North American collections is long overdue, and this exhibit—as well as the Holy Bear and Echo-Hawk exhibitions—highlights the possibilities for contemporary artists to engage in fruitful dialogue within the Field's historical collections. *Drawing on Tradition* challenges visitors' expectations about American Indian experiences and opens up space for continued dialogue as the Field Museum approaches the larger reinstallation project.

### **Social Media and Contemporary Art Collecting in the Natural History Museum**

The three exhibitions Wali has curated with contemporary American Indian artists highlights the possibilities for engaging mainstream museum audiences in conversations about creative self-representation. Museums all over the country, and throughout the world, are grappling with issues of

(mis)representations and exhibitions that fail to convey the multiplicity and complexity of Indigenous peoples. When I spoke with Pappan about the role of contemporary art and activism within museums, he said: “I think art is a very integral part of activism. There's, you know, there's the visual art aspect of it, there's music, I think music is like a huge part of that. I know for myself, personally, that, you know, music was a huge driving force in forming some of my activist type attitude or tendencies. And writing. So, yea, I think all of those things together are all integral to creating change.”<sup>84</sup> There are numerous strategies and possibilities for creating space to shift expectations and the power relations between museums and communities. At the end of our walkthrough, Pappan explained to Wali and I his concerns that his exhibition would be a band-aid that would work to extend the existence of Hall 8. Instead, it seems as if *Drawing on Tradition* has reignited a passion among the Chicago American Indian community and Indian country for creating change in this space.

As, Waln has discussed in his work, Indigenous artists and peoples are not waiting for institutions to ask for their opinions or stories any more. In a 2015 interview for *Playboy*, Waln was asked about his statement that American Indians are “a people with a past, not of the past” and the persistence of the ways in which Indian peoples are thought about or spoken about in regard to the past and not the present or future.<sup>85</sup> He explained,

I think because it's so ingrained in the American psyche to erase Natives out of our conscious and put them in the past. That's what they teach you in the history books. But now, after hundreds of years of erasure, thanks to social media and the Internet, we're able to get more and more of our voices out there. Indigenous people are telling our own story. People are able to see a counter to the narrative. I think it's so easy for people to dismiss us as part of history because this settler state, this country of America, it's built on the destruction and erasure of the Indigenous people. Every day we wake up, we live and operate in a system built on that.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> Pappan, Life-history Interview.

<sup>85</sup> “Bob Marley of the Lakota.”

<sup>86</sup> “Bob Marley of the Lakota.”

For Waln, and other artists and academics, social media and the Internet have opened up space for Indigenous peoples to tell our own stories.<sup>87</sup> These digital arenas provide opportunities for Indigenous peoples—and countless others—to provide context and critique for representations in museum exhibitions, academic settings, and pop-culture in ways that were not previously possible.

Social media has also enabled American Indian artists to share their work with broader audiences. Facebook and Instagram are particularly useful means for keeping track of the work that contemporary artists are doing as well as enabling access to them directly, without having to go through a gallery. While I was at the Field Museum, Wali asked me to identify a number of contemporary American Indian objects that could be accessioned and add to the existing collections in interesting ways. She was particularly interested in collecting contemporary art and the work of American Indian women, who are underrepresented in the collections. Through my research and a lot of social media sleuthing, I was able to put Wali in touch with a number of American Indian artists and designers. Some of the artists that have recently had works accessioned by the Field Museum include Linda Haukaas, Sun Rose Iron Shell, Bethanny Yellowtail, John Isiah Pepion, and Julie Buffalohead.

As the Field Musuem moves forward with their reinstallation of Hall 8, it will be interesting to see the ways these contemporary pieces are woven into interesting conversations with the historic pieces in their collection. As all three exhibitions, and *Drawing on Tradition* in particular have demonstrated, the Field should proceed with an eye to highlight the entanglements that they have previously attempted to ignore or brush aside. Wrestling with the contradictions and messiness of these spaces creates space for self-representations and makes for more compelling and engaging narratives.

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<sup>87</sup> Baldy, “The New Native Intellectualism.”

#### CHAPTER 4: GENEROSITY, NOT ROCKET SCIENCE: LONG-TERM COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AT THE SAM NOBLE MUSEUM

In identifying museums to work with, I had some pretty rigorous criteria: 1) I needed to work with institutions where I could afford the costs of doing research, and 2) they had to be willing to work with the complexity of the research schedule ~~of a mom who was often toting her children—and their I’ko—along for the ride~~. Fortunately for me, the Field Museum, the Denver Art Museum, and the Denver Museum of Nature & Science supported my research with funding. However, it was also important for me to work with an Oklahoma-based museum through this project. Although the Philbrook and Gilcrease museums were certainly closer to Pawhuska, I felt like the Sam Noble Oklahoma Museum of Natural History in Norman was a better choice for the virtual exhibition. Each of the museums I worked with had a particular draw. The Field Museum as an institution has a fascinating and complex history, and their work with Chris Pappan was perfectly-timed for my research. Similarly, the timing for DAM’s *Why We Dance* exhibition and ~~my Aunt Jan Jacobs’~~ artist-in-residence, in addition to their incredible collection of Osage ribbon work, made it a great fit. In selecting the Sam Noble Museum as the third primary site for my dissertation research, their collections were a great fit, but I was also excited about the opportunity to work with Sam Noble’s Curator of Ethnology, Daniel Swan.

Swan was a part of the curatorial team for the *Art of the Osage* exhibition at the St. Louis Art Museum, the first and only show to present a survey of Osage art in a mainstream museum. I had never met him before, so when I emailed him to talk about coming out for a collections visit, I was unsure of what to expect. Sam Noble’s ethnological—and other—collections are available to search

through their website, so I had compiled a list of things I wanted to see during that first trip. The list included a women's skirt, leggings, moccasins, and a shirt made by ~~my Grandma Georgeann~~ Grandma Georgeann Robinson and ~~Aunt Jennie~~ Aunt Jennie Tomey at The Red Man Store. Although I was interested in viewing the objects in their collection—and the pieces ~~my grandmother and aunt~~ my grandmother and aunt had made in particular—the main goal for this trip was to determine if Swan was someone who would be a good collaborator for the ONM virtual exhibition project.

When I arrived for my visit during the summer of 2015, Swan let me know that he was pretty busy and he could only visit for a moment and get me set up with the objects before returning to his other tasks. He took me up to a collections research area, where the collections manager had arranged all of the objects I requested. He visited for a bit and then went back to work. I didn't know if I would see him again, but about 30 minutes later he came back to check in and see how things were going. We got to talking about my project and my interest in digitizing some of the Osage objects from their collections. We also talked about the Osage weddings project he was collaborating on with ONM and the Wah-zha-zhi Cultural Center. Instead of returning to his work, Swan spent the remainder of the afternoon in collections storage showing me the various Osage objects from their collections.

Swan and I stayed in contact, and the next summer I put a call out for an event at the Wah-zha-zhi Cultural Center I had organized per my family's request. We were interested in gathering stories, photos, and ribbon work or other clothes made by ~~Grandma Georgeann~~ Grandma Georgeann Robinson and her sisters at The Red Man Store. Swan let me know he might be stopping by, and when we showed up to the event, he was there with a number of hobbyists who owned her work or who had met her in the past. He also brought The Red Man Store pieces from the Sam Noble collections with him so my family could see them. His willingness to support not only my research, but also my family's interest in my Grandma Georgeann's legacy at that event was truly a transformative moment for this

dissertation. Until that day, I had not met any hobbyists and, to be honest, I was not really sure I wanted to involve them in my project. However, Swan encouraged me to reach out to them, and between my professional relationship with him and the fact that I'm Georgeann Robinson's granddaughter, many of them were willing to talk with me.

**Do you have ribbon work that was  
made at The Red Man Store?**



**Was your ribbon work made  
by Georgeann Gray Robinson?**



Our family is working to collect images and stories associated with these pieces, and we would love to hear from you.

We will be at the Wah-Zha-Zhi Cultural Center (1449 W. Main, Pawhuska, OK) the following days and times:

- Thursday, June 16, 9:00 am- 1:00 pm
- Friday, June 17, 9:00 am- 1:00 pm
- Thursday, June 23, 9:00 am- 1:00 pm
- Friday, June 24, 9:00 am- 1:00 pm

Refreshments will be served.  
We look forward to visiting with you!



*If you have any questions or are interested but unable to attend, please contact Jami Powell:*

Figure 4.1. Flyer designed by author to promote ribbon work event.

Swan's support of my research, and the study of Osage art and material culture more broadly, is tied to his deep interpersonal connections to the Osage Nation and many Osage families. He has spent more than thirty years conducting research with Osages, and his knowledge of Osage practices, people, and places is unparalleled. His respect for Osage citizens— for their own personal knowledge and their experiences of Osage belonging— is evident in his interactions, in which he

continually demonstrates his willingness to learn. Swan's work—and particularly his most recent projects with the Osage Nation and Osage artists—exemplifies the kinds of meaningful collaborative relationships that can be built between anthropologists and curators through long-term, sustained engagements with Indigenous communities.

This chapter will more closely examine the ways meaningful collaboration and interpersonal relationships can lead to a shift in understandings and contribute to the development of ongoing research through Swan's recent projects during his tenure at the Sam Noble Museum. In order to better understand Swan's relationship with the Osage Nation, this chapter begins with an overview of Swan's career and his own personal entanglements with hobbyist culture. This chapter analyzes his collaborative work through the Osage weddings project, and how this work incorporated the collections and research of hobbyists with localized community knowledge. Lastly, this chapter provides an in-depth overview of the 2018 exhibition *Fluent Generations: The Art of Anita, Tom, and Yatika Fields*.

### **From hobbyist to anthropologist of the Osage**

Like a number of anthropologists and curators—including former DAM curators Norm Feder and Richard Conn—Dan Swan's interest in pursuing anthropology came out of his experiences as a Boy Scout and what he refers to as “the hobbyist tradition.” As discussed in Chapter 2, hobbyists exist on a spectrum, and I argue that an individual's participation in Indian hobbyism should be generously and thoughtfully considered in relation to their experiences and relationships with Indigenous communities. At an early point in our conversations about ribbon work and The Red Man store, Swan and I discussed hobbyists and he told me that when he was younger, he was a hobbyist himself. I appreciated his openness about this and his willingness to help me navigate the sometimes-rough waters of dealing with Indian hobbyists.

Throughout our conversations, Swan wanted to make it clear that he only spoke for himself, and was careful— just as he is when speaking about Osages or other communities— to not make broad generalizations. In telling me about how he got into, and then quickly out of, the object-hobbyist and powwow participant type of hobbyism, he explained<sup>88</sup>:

I mean it's very multifaceted, and often times difficult to characterize and generalize about, but ummm, I came out of that tradition. My interest in, maybe fascination, I don't know exactly how to characterize it, in Native North America, members of Native communities came out of being a Boy Scout in upstate New York.

I guess you'd say I graduated from that into the hobbyist movement, but it never really set well with me. I'm not a real crafty person, so I didn't become consumed with craft work and the art forms associated with it. I think, you know, I was real comfortable going to hobbyist dances in Massachusetts and Long Island and things like that, it was kind of like [pause] I really want to be careful here. I don't want to insult anybody or speak for anyone but myself, but I increasingly became uncomfortable with that, and when I moved to Oklahoma in 1975, I went to a lot of dances and danced a little bit out here, and I felt horrible. It was just so weird, I just felt it wasn't right for me.

Some people that I know, some Anglos who come out here and dance at Indian dances, are totally at ease, they're in their element, a lot of them are invited by people and have strong relationships with those families. It just didn't work for me. It's not what I wanted to do. I didn't, and I'm not, again that's not a value judgement, it was a personal decision.

For Swan, the kinds of dances he experienced—and undoubtedly the people attending them—in Massachusetts and Long Island were hobbyist dances. While sometimes American Indian peoples living in the area would attend these powwows, most Indians who went saw it as an economic opportunity to make money by singing or selling art and clothing items to hobbyist attendees. In Oklahoma, the dynamic of powwows was—and is—different from those on the east coast. Rather than being hosted by hobbyist groups, Oklahoma powwows and other dances are often hosted by American Indian nations or Indian social groups.

In addition to his feelings of unease around participating in powwows, when Swan began his PhD Program in anthropology at the University of Oklahoma, his advisor was John Moore. As Swan

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<sup>88</sup> Swan, interview.

revealed, “in every anthropology department, there are a lot of people who come out of the hobbyist movement,” so in the beginning of his program, Moore gathered Swan and his peers to address the ~~fake Indian in the room~~ situation.<sup>89</sup> Swan told me, “Moore sat a bunch of us down and he said, ‘listen guys, do you want to be known as that white boy from OU who dances this style or that style? Or do you want to be known as an anthropologist who is working with Native communities to address issues, concerns, and community agendas?’”<sup>90</sup> In the 1970s, it was quite common for anthropologists and other scholars to mix their academic work with their hobby. Unlike Indigenous scholars whose work is entangled with their own communities, the entanglements between hobbyists and the communities they study are inherently unable to be productive in the same way. As an Osage anthropologist and museum professional, I am accountable to my community and our values in addition to the ethical standards of my academic disciplines. Along with a number of Indigenous scholars, I situate myself within my research and articulate the many entanglements involved with my research. Hobbyist anthropologists, on the other hand, are not always held accountable to community standards, or to the kinds of reflexive work expected from those of us who work with communities we have close ties to.

For Swan, this interaction with Moore was “the moment where it really came home to roost,” and he made the decision to put hobbyism to rest. Although he no longer participated in dances or other activities, he maintained a network of friends and contacts within hobbyist groups. Over the years, Swan’s ability to “walk in two worlds” has allowed him to act as an intermediary and facilitator between hobbyists and American Indian communities.

The training Swan received while working with Moore also influenced his approach to collaboration. He explains:

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<sup>89</sup> Swan.

<sup>90</sup> Swan.

He was very community oriented, I was very fortunate to be trained by him. He comes out of the 1950s-action anthropology, so we were taught that, if a community—this was ahead of its time, John was a visionary— we were taught that if a community does not want you to look at something or to research it or doesn't really want it investigated, move on. He taught us not to have an agenda with respect to, "I want to investigate x or learn about y." He taught us to go to communities, find some common ground between academic and community agendas, and to work to the benefit of both. So, it's back in the days where we thought we could satisfy two disparate agendas through the same project, but nevertheless, he got us on that right road...

Moore's practice emphasized the importance of finding mutually beneficial projects that served community needs and contributed to academic knowledge. While Swan acknowledges the myriad divergences of academic and community agendas, this approach pushed Swan to recognize the importance of communities, and of people maintaining control over their own knowledge and representations.

In 1984, Swan, who had worked for the Oklahoma Historical Society since 1980, was transferred to serve as Director of the White Hair Memorial in Fairfax, which was established through the Lillie Morrell Burkhart estate. During his eight-year tenure, Swan worked with Osages to form the White Hair Memorial Learning Resource Center, which is a repository of various documents, objects, and oral histories. In order to establish relationships with the community, Swan reached out to each of the three drumkeepers from Grayhorse, Hominy, and Pawhuska, and hosted a series of community dinners. Sharing meals within the Osage Nation, and in many communities throughout the world, is one of the most important ways we build community, share knowledge, and express gratitude. ~~In reality, we love to eat. The best way to form a collaborative relationship with Osages is to feed us. Well, feed us and tell us how great we are. If you can do them simultaneously, which Swan has learned over the years, most of us will be happy to work with you.~~ At these dinners, Swan explained

the role of the historical society and the types of projects the Whitehair Memorial could facilitate.

One of the projects that emerged ultimately became his dissertation on the Osage peyote religion.<sup>91</sup>

During these years, Swan lived in Hominy with his family, doing research with a broad segment of Osages from all three districts while also working on other community projects through the Whitehair Memorial. Swan established deep personal ties to the community, and developed a unique sense of accountability. A'aninin curator Joe Horse Capture has talked about this in terms of a difference between consulting and partnering with communities. He argues, "The problem with a consultant is that you can read your book over here, you can go through your archives over here, you can look at your photographs over here, and talk to Native people over here, but in a consultant relationship, you can reject their opinion."<sup>92</sup> Horse Capture sees possibilities for improving the relationships between mainstream museums and Indigenous communities through partnerships. As he explains the ways partnerships should work, ~~I am reminded of the work his father, George Horse Capture, did with my Grandma Georgeann Robinson, and a story I often heard growing up. Grandma Georgeann talked with her hands, and G. Horse Capture, among others, had joked with her that if he tied her hands behind her back, she would not be able to speak.~~ Horse Capture raises his index fingers parallel to one another while asserting, "I advocate a partnership where the museum professional works with Native American people in a partnership way."<sup>93</sup> Moving his fingers forward, he continues, "the presentation, the display, and the philosophies that are presented in the exhibition

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<sup>91</sup> Swan, "West Moon-East Moon."

<sup>92</sup> Joe Horse Capture, "SWICH Workshop: Co-Collecting."

<sup>93</sup> Joe Horse Capture.

need go together like this. It's not like this."<sup>94</sup> Horse Capture raises one finger above the other, then lowers his raised finger and reiterates, "they need to go together like this."<sup>95</sup>

Swan's eight-year partnership with the community through his role at the Whitehair Memorial transformed his research and gave him meaningful insights into the lived realities and experiences of Osages<sup>96</sup>:

I did become part of the community, I'm not trying to say I became Osage, which I certainly didn't, but I was definitely part of that Hominy community. I saw people going to get gas, and when I went to the post office once a day to get the mail. What was cool about it was that I had that level of community discourse. Which was really very healthy when I began writing my dissertation while living out there. It was very humbling and created this great check on things. I'd be sitting there in the morning working on my dissertation, writing about a family, and then I'd go in town and see the person's granddaughter at the Get-n-Go. I mean, there's something really healthy about that, right? So that you don't get that distance between the community and the dissertation or the work, so that the two remain interconnected throughout the process, which I think was really important.

Swan's unique position as an anthropologist working for a community museum and learning center, and living in the community he was researching with, is certainly not something that is possible for many scholars. However, the experiences of participating in the daily tasks of mundane life with the same people he was having conversations with about the peyote religion or the In-lon-schka set his work apart from his peers. When I asked him about this, he replied<sup>97</sup>:

My commitment and obligation to the community was very different because of that experience. You know, I think a lot of times it's fair to say that anthropologists' interests in a community and their members is as fleeting as that of a tourist. The tourist wants to snap a few pictures and have a little adventure, and take home a souvenir, a curio, and then they're gone, they're off to the next thing. Unfortunately, that continues to be true of a lot of anthropologists who work very closely with a community for two or three years, get their degree, and I certainly understand that life moves on. I've been particularly fortunate ... I've been able to maintain this intergenerational and multi-decade relationship. That's not logistically or practically possible for a lot of people. I still think that it causes me to really see an obligation there, that this is very much a two-way street. You know, I'm not going to say

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<sup>94</sup> Joe Horse Capture.

<sup>95</sup> Joe Horse Capture.

<sup>96</sup> Swan, interview.

<sup>97</sup> Swan.

the end, but I'm definitely down-trending in my career, the publications and grants and such aren't as important to me career-wise as they were 20 years ago, but in some ways *while my interest in those types of things has waned with age, I think my commitment to the Osage community, if anything, is stronger the older I get, the more I realize how much I've benefitted from the kindness and the support of that community.* I just owe that community an incredible amount ... It's impacted me professionally, personally— I'm willing to admit that those 8-9 years in the Osage as a full-time resident changed my life, and it changed my life for the better. I think that the forms and levels of gratitude and appreciation I have for the community are really multifaceted in a lot of ways. I'm not trying to say that my experience was unique, but I think that— I do recognize it as an incredible opportunity.

Here, Swan acknowledges the ways that the knowledge, materials, and community that Osages have shared with him have benefitted his career. Because of this, and certainly his ongoing research interests, his most recent projects privilege Osage voices and understandings, and cede an even greater amount of authority.

### **Osage wedding project**

In thinking about the next steps and continuing to create a model of how museums should work with American Indian peoples and communities, Horse Capture advocates that museums build partnerships with tribal museums. For him, institutions are already doing the work of representing their communities, already know the community, and for decades have disrupted ideas about what museums are supposed to be by acting as cultural centers, classrooms, and gathering places. Tribal museums have and continue to work within their communities to preserve and disseminate important community knowledge, and “rather than reinventing the wheel,” museums should build partnerships with these organizations.<sup>98</sup> In his lecture, Horse Capture actually uses Swan and his work with the Kiowa Black Leggings Society<sup>99</sup> and with the Osage Nation Museum as an exemplar of how

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<sup>98</sup> Joe Horse Capture, “SWICH Workshop: Co-Collecting.”

<sup>99</sup> Swan and Jordan, “Contingent Collaborations”; Jordan and Swan, “Painting a New Battle Tipi.”

anthropology museums in particular can work in productive ways with communities moving forward.<sup>100</sup>

The project Horse Capture refers to in his lecture is the Osage Weddings Project<sup>101</sup> which began a few years after Swan was hired as the Curator of Ethnology at the Sam Noble Museum in 2007. It actually began when a Research Associate for the Sam Noble Museum, whose scholarship also emerged from his participation as an on-Indian hobbyist, Jim Cooley, purchased a set of photographs that included images of an Osage wedding. The goal of this project was to engage in a collaborative research project about Osage wedding practices and their material culture beginning in the latter half of the nineteenth century.<sup>102</sup> A central aspect of their methodology was to utilize a series of community conversations to promote direct community participation in the project. To facilitate this, Swan and Cooley partnered with the Osage Nation Museum (ONM) and the Wah-zha-zhi Cultural Center (WCC), and the public events, which included lectures, workshops, and discussions, brought together hundreds of people into the conversation. These events led to an informal community exhibition of Osage wedding clothes at the WCC in May of 2015.

Through the use of photographs, historic records, material culture analyses, and ethnography, Swan and Cooley's research reveals not only the continuity and change in Osage wedding attire over this period, but also how localized understandings of these practices are quite divergent. While the practice of arranged Osage weddings as they existed in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century no longer takes place, Osage wedding attire remains an important part of the In-lon-schka when a new drumkeeper's family pays for the drum.<sup>103</sup> Swan and Cooley were able to

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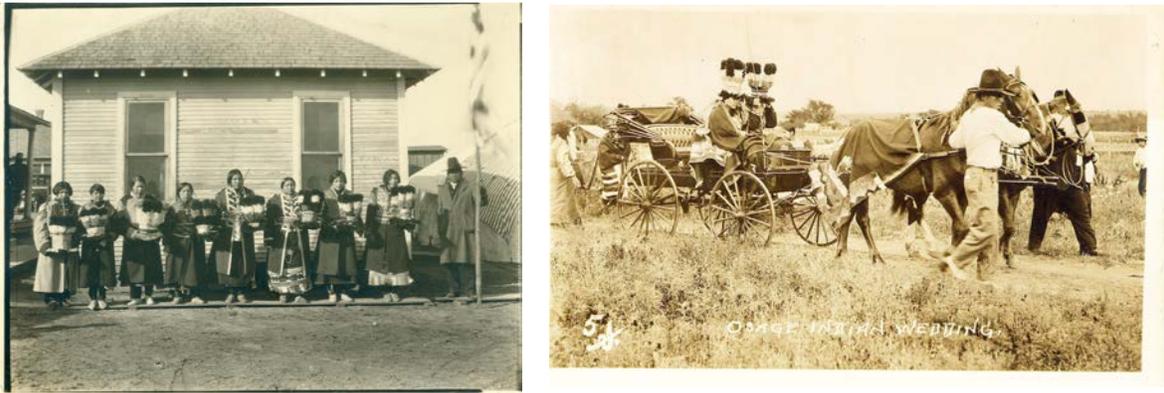
<sup>100</sup> Joe Horse Capture, "SWICH Workshop: Co-Collecting."

<sup>101</sup> "Osage Weddings Project."

<sup>102</sup> "Current Projects."

<sup>103</sup> Swan and Cooley, "Chiefs, Brides, and Drum Keepers," 160.

weave together oral histories from the Doris Duke Oral History Project recounting Osage weddings, photographs and accounts from families and archives, as well as examples of wedding attire in museums and belonging to families to piece together a better understanding of the transition of wedding attire from use within weddings to paying for the drum. As Jason Baird Jackson argues, their methodology—which exists at the intersection of oral history and expressive culture—is valuable for the field of material culture studies more broadly.<sup>104</sup>



Figures 4.2-4.3: Jim Cooley Collection S1-1; Osage Nation Museum P01-1041



Figure 4.4. Osage Nation Museum P01-2436b

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<sup>104</sup> Jackson, “Material Vernaculars;” 5.



Figures 4.5-4.7: Osage Weddings event at ONM, photos courtesy of Dan Swan; Osage Wedding Coat, Osage County, OK, ca. 1930. Courtesy of the Sam Noble Museum

### **Ceding authority, collaborating generously**

During my time as a NAGPRA Research Assistant—among other roles—at the Denver Museum of Nature & Science (DMNS), I learned a lot about working with communities around incredibly difficult issues. While at DMNS, I was working with Chip Colwell on the repatriation of culturally unidentifiable human remains in the Museum’s collections.<sup>105</sup> The main part of my role was to plan and facilitate inter-tribal consultations to determine what nation or group of nations would assume responsibility for their repatriation. In preparation for these meetings, I would book flights,

<sup>105</sup> Colwell-Chanthaphonh and Powell, “Repatriation and Constructs of Identity”; Colwell-Chanthaphonh, Maxson, and Powell, “The Repatriation of Culturally Unidentifiable Human Remains,” February 1, 2011.

arrange for rental cars, reserve hotel rooms through direct-billing, and prepare per diem checks for people upon their arrival. As a DMNS employee, when I traveled I was able to use my company card for all of my expenses. This is a privilege that a lot of people who work for Indian nations, and other places, do not have. Knowing that it would be difficult for me to travel cross-country using my own money and having to wait for reimbursement, I always made sure to offer to book flights and hotels. On several occasions, people thanked me for this work and talked about how they wished other institutions they consulted with would work in the same way.

The hotel where folks would stay had a free breakfast included with their stay, and I remember Chip asking me why I always got coffee and food for the beginning of our day. In terms of staying within the budget, buying breakfast twice was somewhat odd. However, food is important, and I was taught that, when you have guests, you offer them food. For me, as an Osage woman, although I was working on behalf of a museum, I was still representing myself and my community in this role. Even if I had to pay for it out of my pocket—which I didn't—I was going to have something there to share. At the beginning of our consultations, we would always offer to turn off the Museum's fire suppression system if they wanted to burn cedar or sweetgrass. I never presented this option as an assumption, but I wanted them to know it was an option that was available to them. One of my favorite memories is of the time after a group had finished praying and I asked if it was okay to call and have the fire system turned back on. An elder raised his hand and said, "wait a minute, I have one more thing I need to do." I paused and watched as he reached his hand into his chest pocket and pulled out a pack of Marlboro Reds. I never figured out if he just didn't want to go outside or if he was trying to shift the power relations between their group and the museum staff, but it was probably a little bit of both.

Although I did not really realize it at the time, the things I did while working as a NAGPRA Research Assistant formed the foundation for the ways I approach collaborative methodologies. For

me, the most effective ways to build partnerships with people and institutions are by working generously and privileging the knowledge and experiences of your collaborators. When I asked Swan how he approaches collaborative work, he replied, “to me, it’s just common sense ... You know, so much of this is—it’s really not rocket science, it’s just courtesy, really. To look at it, that in my opinion what it really boils down to, almost always, are issues of privilege and authority. I think that if an individual is willing to question those, starting with their own perceptions and their own privilege and their own use and abuse of authority, then I think that that's a critical first step.”<sup>106</sup> For Swan, ceding authority and recognizing his privilege in working with museum collections that community members do not often—or ever—have the opportunity to see, are essential to building collaborative relationships. As he continued to talk about the idea of authority, he cited an example he often uses when teaching students. He said,

The example that I tell my students is, you know what, I could probably do a Hopi katsina show here at the Sam Noble and you know, I could probably play a little loose and fast and, you know, would I go out to Hopi Pueblo and get permission? I could get away with that. There's not a huge Hopi contingent, and let's face it, a lot of museums slide over that line with respect to, are these touristic or religious, or representations of deities, and so on and so forth. But, every exhibit I do, I act like I'm doing it in that community. So, if I'm going to do a Hopi katsina show, which I'm not, but if I was going to do a Hopi katsina exhibit, just because I feel fairly safe here in Norman, Oklahoma that I'm not going to face a lot of criticism or inquiry from the Hopi community, umm, that's just not the way I work. I act like my audience is going to be the Hopi for that show.

Here again, the importance of accountability emerges as a central aspect of collaboration and partnership building.

For Swan, however, ceding authority is not only an important means for shifting the power relations between institutions and communities; it also leads to better work. When I asked him for an example, he responded with an answer about his most recent show, *Fluent Generations*, which opened at the Sam Noble Museum in January 2018. He said, “I think the show downstairs is stronger

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<sup>106</sup> Swan, interview.

because I ceded authority. I was real clear with the Fields family that I didn't want to curate the show, which they found a bit disconcerting at the beginning. But, who am I to curate some kind of retrospective show where I pick the pieces and tell the story that I wanted to tell?"<sup>107</sup> Rather than leading the curation of the exhibition, Swan assumed the role of a facilitator and made space for the Fields to select the pieces that reflected the stories they wanted to tell, without the kinds of curatorial or editorial mediation that typically characterize co-curative work between artists and museums.



***Fluent Generations: The Art of Anita, Tom, and Yatika Fields***

As you walk past the admissions desk and enter the Sam Noble Oklahoma Museum of Natural History, your eye is drawn toward the end of the grand hall, where a bronze mammoth stands in a light-filled rotunda. To the right is an Orientation Gallery and the cavernous Hall of Ancient Life, which displays the Museum's paleontology collections. While the mammoths and the dinosaurs signal extinction, the gallery on the left signals something else completely, something that departs from what we expect to see in a natural history museum. In this space, *Fluent Generations: The Art of Anita, Tom, and Yatika Fields* presents the diverse and vibrant works of American Indian artists—Anita

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<sup>107</sup> Swan.

Fields (Osage), her husband, Tom (Muscogee and Cherokee), and their son, Yatika (Osage, Creek, and Cherokee).



Figures 4.8-9. *Fluent Generations* gallery view, photo by author.

In *Fluent Generations*, each of the artists curated a representative selection of their own works, which are impressive enough to stand on their own. However, the placement of their multigenerational bodies of work within a shared space creates a deeper, more meaningful aesthetic dialogue. This show is about more than their art; it is also about their family, and the way they utilize art to make a better world. The introductory text panel for the show includes the following:

The Fields family is comprised of extraordinary individuals, whose creative talents are not limited by medium, style, or outside expectations. They explore the present, the future, and the past as vehicles to expand their own distinct creative expressions. Together, Tom, and Anita have facilitated their family's creative life journey by raising their children in an 'artful' world.

Although the Fields each work in distinct mediums—Yatika is a painter and muralist, Tom is a photographer, and Anita works in ceramics and textile arts—all three of them speak about their artwork as visual stories. In this show, these stories come together to form an evocative narrative that disrupts ideas of time and space, and addresses themes of individuality, strength, beauty, violence, hope, dignity and ambiguity. Unlike the exhibition across the hall, visitors will not leave this space thinking that American Indians—like dinosaurs and mammoths—are extinct.



Figures 4.10-4.11. Gallery views, photos by author.

## TOM FIELDS—PHOTOGRAPHY

One of the goals of Tom’s work is to expand and complicate definitions of American Indians through his photography. In his artist statement within the exhibition he explains, “To accurately portray Native people, one must understand the soul of what makes us persevere. For me, it’s being able to experience the depth of our culture, which is more than just artifacts, art, or dance. It is held in the everyday moments of life, such as the dinners, adoptions, namings, births, graduations, and spiritual ceremonies.” For Tom, the activities that happen around American Indian social institutions are just as important as the event itself, because these events form a “dynamic network of cultural beacons that guide us through our daily lives.”<sup>108</sup>



Figure 4.12. *Big Moon Altar*, 2009; *U ne la nv i u we tsi*, 2008 ; *Osage Dance Procession*, 2009; *Osage Dinner*, 1981

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<sup>108</sup> Panel text (look up citation format)

A central theme and focus of Tom's photography is the people who are important in his life: his family, his friends, and his communities. He photographs people as a means to continue their legacy and to inspire future generations. Tom's photographs do not glorify his subjects, but rather, invite viewers to be inspired by the humanity of these individuals. Of these photographs, he states, "I want my children to see and hear stories about their accomplishments and be inspired by them as I was."<sup>109</sup> His work presents heroes as accessible and their work as attainable.



Figures 4.13-4.14: *Cherokee Man*, 1985; *Concharty*, 2007

Although Tom is Cherokee and Creek, his wife and children are Osage and their family lived in Hominy for a number of years. The Fields family is also part of the Lottie Shunkamolah Chapter of the Native American Church in Hominy. As a husband and father to Osages, and as someone who has been around Osages for over forty years, his art often includes Osage themes and subjects.

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<sup>109</sup> *ibid.*



Figure 4.15. *Retreat Ceremony* (2017)

One of Tom’s most recent photographs—and most popular among visitors to *Fluent Generations*—is a group photograph of the Lottie Shunkamolah NAC Chapter holding a #NoDAPL banner. The photo was taken in the fall of 2016, at the height of the Water Protectors movement at Standing Rock. While some members of the Fields family and the Lottie Shunkamolah NAC Chapter traveled to Standing Rock to support the Water Protectors in person, this photograph was a means to demonstrate the group’s solidarity and support from Oklahoma. This is a powerful image that demonstrates the ways that arts can support movements for ecological and social justice in multiple ways.

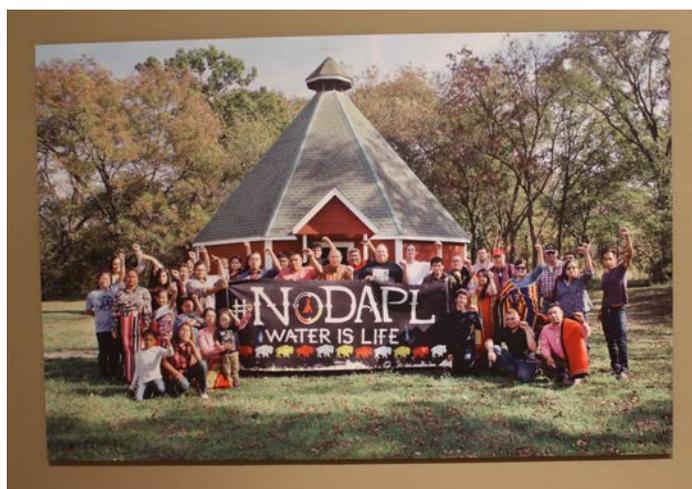


Figure 4.16. *Stands with Standing Rock*, 2016

## YATIKA FIELDS—PAINTINGS

One of the members of the Fields family who went to Standing Rock was Yatika, and *Fluent Generations* includes three paintings that were inspired by his time at the camps. Yatika's vibrant and energetic work—most often on large canvases or on the sides of buildings—embraces abstraction and dynamism. His work demonstrates the physicality of his technique and a freeness of expression. In terms of his technique, he explains, "I kind of let it evolve on the surface and let it come to a culmination, like an end point, and that's the painting. I have fun with it and let it emerge as it will."<sup>110</sup> As indicated by his artist statement, Fields seeks to bend the rules of form and expectation within his work<sup>111</sup>:

I am motivated in my work fundamentally by the search for freedom in all forms. I seek to create a contemporary terrain in the juxtaposition of my living memories. Playing with elements of space and time, I create a synthesis of symbolic objects floating and bending on the canvas at all angles; negating the horizon and the rule of linear experience. In this suspended dichotomy between nature and the urban environment a new world is made. The creation mythology of this space is narrated in my work where Oklahoma meets NYC meets Boston meets Santa Fe. In the end, *exploding the expectations of current experience*.

Fields encourages his audience to reimagine their relationships with the world around them and draws on his lived experiences of attending the Art Institute of Boston, living in New York City and Oklahoma, and spending time in Santa Fe and elsewhere.

Yatika's experiences also include travel abroad, including a trip to Malaysia as a Native American arts ambassador for the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) conference. He describes this trip as a formative experience<sup>112</sup>:

It was in 2000 and I worked with all these other Indigenous artists from the Pacific Rim, and I was the youngest one there. I got to meet Bill Clinton and Vladimir Putin and all the major players in the world in a gallery, and had an exhibit there. I saw the world arts and the global

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<sup>110</sup> Fields, Yatika, interview.

<sup>111</sup> Fields, "Artist Statement," accessed September 16, 2014, [http://www.yatikastarrfields.com/yatika\\_starr\\_fields/artist\\_statement.html](http://www.yatikastarrfields.com/yatika_starr_fields/artist_statement.html) (emphasis added).

<sup>112</sup> Fields, Yatika, interview.

arts for the first time and how big that was, and it made a big impression on me and I knew right then and there that I had to step it up a bit from where I was and what I wanted to do. I knew I needed to do this and wanted to do this, but yea, realized it was going to take a lot of work and that is going to be a lifelong endeavor.

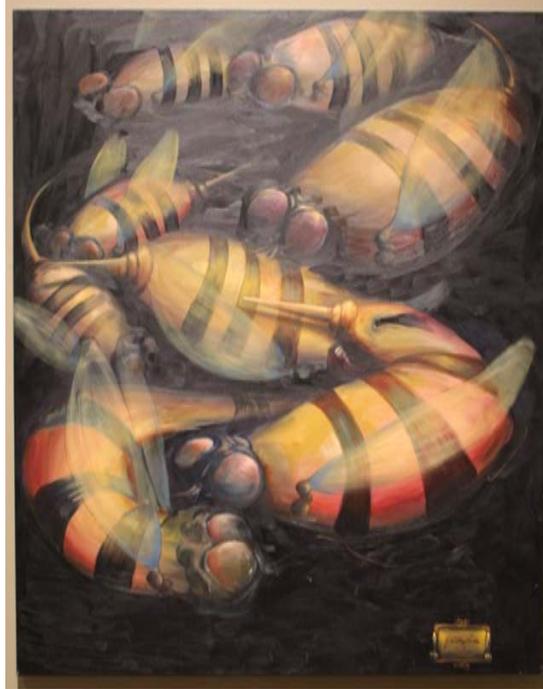
Growing up with artist parents, traveling to the Southwestern Association for Indian Artists (SWAIA) Santa Fe Indian Market, or to museums across the country for different shows, Yatika has always understood the importance and possibility of what art can do in the world. For him, art is the means to express ideas, convey emotions, and work through problems; it is “just a way of life.”<sup>113</sup> More recently, however, the inspiration to create art as a means to address global political issues was reignited.



Figures 4.17-4.18. *Saturday Night Traditions*, 2009; *Prayer for the Return of the Bees*, 2008

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<sup>113</sup> Fields, Yatika.



Figures 4.19-4.20 *Sting of Life*, 2005; *Sage and Sweetgrass*, 2017

During the #NoDAPL movement, Yatika made two trips to Standing Rock. For him—and certainly others—this was a powerful moment. He explained, “it ignited things, it ignited the passion

to create work against the oppression ... it created kind of a new forum for activism and resistance.”<sup>114</sup> He later continued<sup>115</sup>:

I went as an artist and as a Native person, I wanted to go there and see it, but you know, my perception changed going there because it was such an awe-inspiring moment to see the faces of it on the front lines and to see people’s devotion and heart towards it and to see the comradeship and solidarity that happened within the camps. It was just mind-blowing and powerful and truly, I would have never thought I would have seen anything like that in my entire lifetime. To see a camp fluctuating with so much movement and spiritual power, just miles away from where Fort Rice once stood and Sitting Bull and his crew were attacking that because of the expansion of the Yellowstone Gully or the Fort Laramie Treaty. You know, I mean *the same battles are being fought, the same lands, only miles away, the same thing*, and I was on a hilltop looking at an encampment with tipis; it was like a blast from the past with the same stuff happening. It’s not going to stop, but what can be created is the dialogue and the art, and the knowledge, and the words to keep that, umm, that idea to fight it and to survive it and to get people knowledge, to teach them about it, you know?

Here, Yatika draws out the possibilities of this violent, oppressive period. Yes, this was a colonial imposition on the sovereignty of an American Indian nation, with a view to transport resources extracted from other occupied lands over water that a community relies on for life. To many people, this was new, but for Yatika, and for others who know and have experienced this history, it was not novel. From this experience, Yatika—and many others—saw past the limitations, and found possibilities.

Yatika did not go to Standing Rock to be at the front lines; the front line was not where he could make his greatest contribution to the movement. While at Standing Rock, Yatika painted, photographed, and thought about ways to capture the generosity, solidarity, and beauty he saw in the face of violence in a way that “might touch people on a different level.”<sup>116</sup> When I asked him about his artistic engagement with activism through Standing Rock, he explained that he wanted to put the images he saw at Standing Rock in front of his collectors, in front of people who collect

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<sup>114</sup> Fields, Yatika.

<sup>115</sup> Fields, Yatika.

<sup>116</sup> Fields, Yatika.

Indigenous art, and in front of people who “aren’t able to see the front lines, or who could only see the violence of the front lines.”<sup>117</sup> While there, Yatika painted a number of landscapes that push back against the unpopulated landscapes made famous by artists like Thomas Cole and Albert Bierstadt and perpetuated by photographers like Ansel Adams.



Figures 4.21-4.22. Yatika Fields painting in plen air style (left) and finished painting, *Mni Wiconi, Oceti Sakowin Camp*, images courtesy of the artist.

Although Yatika’s landscapes were not included in the show, three of his paintings inspired by his experiences and informed by the knowledge he learned during his time at Standing Rock were. For him, these paintings required a different approach than his previous work. When I asked him about this new body of work, he said, “I had to take a new approach to this, because it was going to be about something, and those past paintings have the movement and everything and the colors ... but with the Standing Rock pieces they're about something in particular, they're going to be about a story, so I had to approach it differently with a sketch.”<sup>118</sup> These paintings still have the movement and the vibrant colors indicative of his work, but they demonstrate a maturity and a growth.<sup>119</sup>

Yatika’s own descriptions accompany his Standing Rock paintings in *Fluent Generations*. Rather than interpret and mediate his descriptions here, this section ends with his own words:

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<sup>117</sup> Fields, Yatika.

<sup>118</sup> Fields, Yatika.

<sup>119</sup> Yatika Fields painted these images during the first year of his Tulsa Artist Fellowship (TAF), and was grateful for the time he had to figure out his new process.



Figure 4.23. *Sami Solidarity* (2017)

This painting speaks to the solidarity among Indigenous peoples in the struggle to protect our lands. This issue brings us together to support each other in times of need and action. On October 1<sup>st</sup>, 2016, in Standing Rock, North Dakota these two Samí women, Indigenous people from northern Norway, Sweden and Finland, were departing the Oceti Sakowin, a resistance camp against the Dakota Access Pipeline (DAPL). I took a photo of them because it was a moving moment—one that introduced the beautiful reality of our shared experiences on a divided landscape. We need to unite and demonstrate solidarity in the face of government oppression. Today's struggles are ever apparent in our daily lives and it's important to remember the loving human spirit that exists. As an artist capturing this spirit of cooperation is something I've found important to do and share.

They are wearing traditional clothes called gákti. The gákti is worn both in ceremonial contexts and while working, particularly when herding reindeer. The traditional Samí outfit is characterized by a dominant color adorned with bands of contrasting colors, a high collar embroidery and tin art. In the Norwegian language, the garment is called a 'kofte'.



Figure 4.24. *America Realized* (2017).

This painting reflects the struggle and hardships that occurred during the winter at Oceti Sakowin camp at Standing Rock, North Dakota. The play on the American people and Indigenous communities is an ongoing theatre; the will to fight and survive is a re-occurring act. The northern cold winds blow tobacco and prayer ties into the atmosphere, circling but holding tight in hopes of healing the sacred landscape. Broken tents protrude through the snow as metaphors for broken treaties, twisted imagery caters to the energy that was present during the cold nights of uncertainty. Fire and flames erupt from propane accidents. A drone hovers over capturing all to share and see: new warfare, new times. In the distance (DAP) Dakota Access Pipeline) lights replace the stars, dotting the ghostly landscape. The skull is a symbol of our existence, mortality and humanity, it is connected to our ancestry. We learned many things through this experience. Some agree and disagree but it's clear to me. There is no longer a camp but my heart and thoughts are in the memories of that important time. When painting this piece, I wanted to share my unique view on this experience. To give it justice and pay my respects, I wanted to share the story in a visual manner for the future to witness.



Figure 4.25. *White Buffalo Woman Calf March* (2017).

This painting respectfully depicts the female-led movements I witnessed at the NoDAPL camp. The White Buffalo Calf Woman March happened on November 27<sup>th</sup>, 2016, along Highway 1806 at the Oceti Sakowin Camp in Cannon Ball, North Dakota. This was a women's prayer march. White flags and skirts were used to demonstrate solidarity but also to invoke the strength and power associated with the White Buffalo Calf Woman story-coming together in collective prayer to stop the Dakota Access Pipeline.

A few moments were particularly powerful for me while at Camp Oceti Sakowin, moments I never thought I would see in my lifetime. Some provided a look into the past when the strength of our Indigenous Nations came together to concentrate our beliefs and cast them on hope and perseverance. We demonstrated that unity exists and there is strength in our numbers. I wanted to depict that day, the strength of unity, marching boots on the ground, the middle road "HW 1806," the buffer zone between good and bad, and the front lines. The median represents the connection between past and present. We have fought this fight before and continue to do so.

## ANITA FIELDS—CERAMICS

With her husband Tom and son Yatika's work running along the walls of the gallery, Anita Field's intricately decorated hand-shaped clay pieces occupy the center of the space, a curatorial decision that is both practical and symbolic. Anita, whose black and white ceramic sculptures reflect the black and white photographs of her husband, and whose abstracted text imagery reflects her son's graffiti inspired murals, is deeply influenced by her family, her role as a mother, and her Osage upbringing. She often talks about her work through stories about her children and her grandmother.<sup>120</sup> Anita's ceramic sculptures have been exhibited both nationally and internationally and speak to issues of global importance from her deeply personal experiences and her localized knowledge. For example, *Reconstruct, Conversion, Here* was inspired by a trip to Mexico and speaks to the Spanish practice of using Indigenous slaves to tear down their own religious monuments to build Christian monuments on the same space. She explains, "A prehistoric clay figure sits on a stack of gold leafed bars, representing the melting down of gold ornaments to ship back to Spain for the creation of gold bars. Despite all efforts to destroy an ancient culture, the figure indicates the continuation of Native people and their cultures."<sup>121</sup> This story of colonization, resistance, and continuity resonated with her and was reflected through her unique aesthetic.

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<sup>120</sup> Catalog to be published in March, need final citation for heather ahtone article.

<sup>121</sup> Panel text



Figure 4.26. *Reconstruct, Conversion, Here*, 2002.

In an interview in *First American Art Magazine*, she explains, “Even to this day, it is hard to commit the time—time in the studio and time to make the work. I think it is harder for women, because commitments to family, and I have commitments to my Osage community. They are all important, and all of this feeds into the things that inspire me as an artist.”<sup>122</sup> Here, Anita places her family and community obligations in front of her work, not because they are more important, but because they drive and inspire her work. As an Osage woman deeply committed to her responsibilities within her communities—her role as a cook for the Hominy district and her participation in the NAC—she often talks about her work in connection to these experiences. Through her contemporary ceramics, she honors her localized Osage knowledge and narrates that knowledge for a broader audience.

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<sup>122</sup> Denise Neil-Binion, “Anita Fields,” *First American Art Magazine*, no. 0, Spring 2013. 18-23.



Figures 4.26-4.27. *Begin with your Left Foot*, 2012; *Purse*, 2008

To create the unique surface texture of her work, she presses objects into the soft, malleable surface of the clay. In describing this process, she states,<sup>123</sup>

On small bits of torn clay, I create repetitive textures by impressing objects that are meaningful to me. The fragments are layered onto sculpted clay forms, creating depth, design, and dimension. The objects used for impressions are varied and can be as simple as twigs, a favorite pair of earrings, ribbon work patterns from our traditional clothing, or imprints from a beaded purse. I incorporate photo-image transferred textiles and paper collage to further the visual vocabulary for my personal aesthetic and cultural ideologies.

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<sup>123</sup> "About Anita Fields."

Combining these techniques with slips painted on as impasto, Fields works almost exclusively in black and white, using texture to create the illusion of more colors. She also lets the red clay serve as a visual reminder of the Earth which represents Osage lands, but also Osage divisions of Earth and Sky, with the sky being represented through the use of gold leaf.

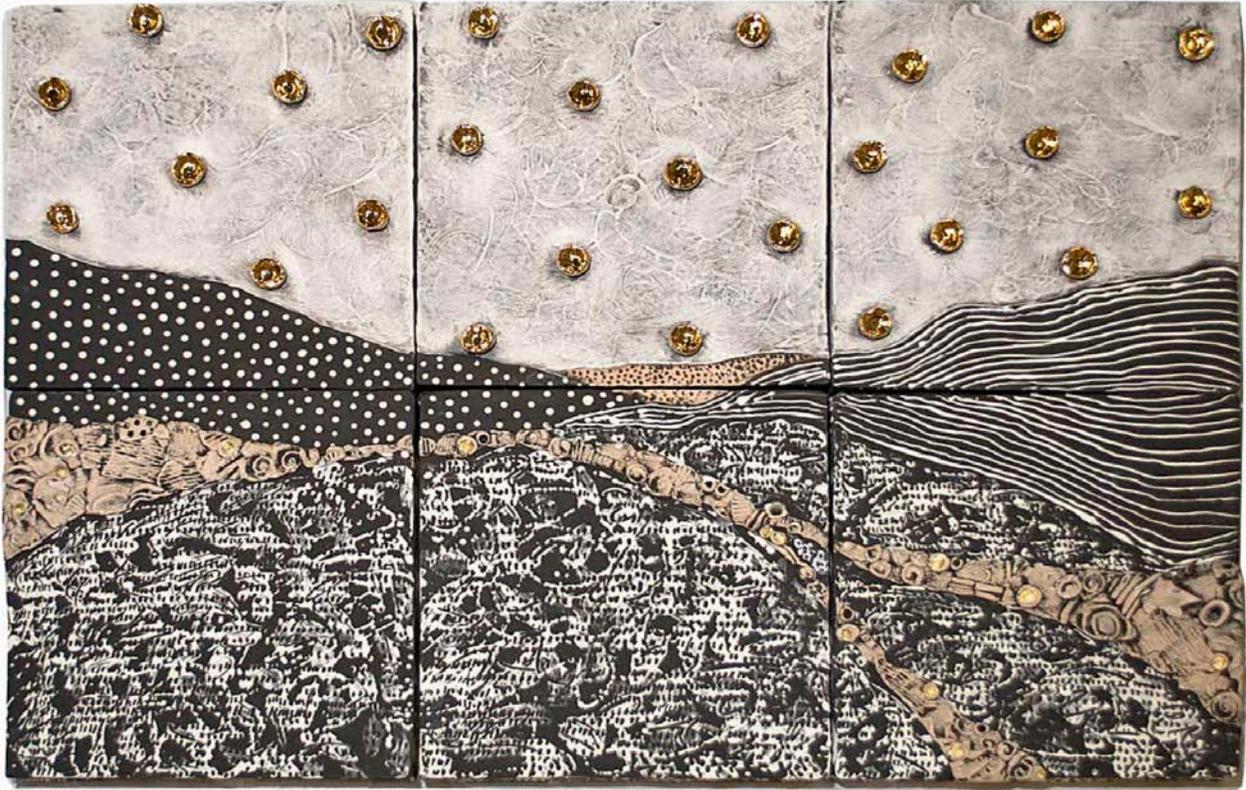


Figure 4.28. *Movement of the Sun II*, 2011



Figure: *Looking Over the Invisible Line*, 2002

The duality of Osage philosophical concepts—which Anita learned through her participation in Osage social institutions like the In-lon-schka and oral histories—informs nearly all of her work. For Anita, the concept of duality provides a productive tension, which resonates with Robert Warrior’s discussion of dialectic practices. Anita draws on this duality in a myriad of ways in her work, but the one I find most intriguing is her material use of clay and textiles. In addition to her art practice, Anita is a ribbon worker, and makes many of the clothes her family wears for the In-lon-schka. Her affinity for textiles emerges from the importance of Osage clothing, but its use as juxtaposed to the clay and the way she imprints images and symbols on both deserves greater attention.



Figures: *Finding Our Way to the Earth*, 2016

### It's a Direct Voice: Contemporary Art and Natural History Museums

*Fluent Generations: The Art of Anita, Tom, and Yatika Fields* is an incredibly thought-provoking show, which gives each of the artists their own space to narrate what is important to them. These works also speak to one another, and build a larger narrative about contemporary American

Indian art and the role of museums in displaying their work. This show disrupts the idea of what kinds of work multigenerational artist families produce, and when I asked Swan about this, he explained<sup>124</sup>:

I wanted to kind of provide a counter to this model of Native American artist families working in a single genre so you get these dynasties of ceramicists and jewelers and weavers, and that's great, that's a wonderful pattern, but here I thought that we had this wonderful opportunity to examine how traditional belief and practice, and community aesthetic, community participation and practice manifested itself in diverse media. So that all of those pieces are working together to talk about a story of an artistic family. So, they're all reacting to very similar stimuli, but they're just expressing it through different media.

This show shifts viewers' preconceived notions about diverse media and the ways works can speak across disciplinary boundaries.

Another disciplinary boundary this show traverses is the exhibition of a contemporary art show in a natural history museum. I went into this show thinking that the Fields family's work would be placed in conversation with historic objects from Sam Noble's ethnographic collections. I certainly did not expect to walk into the gallery and see a contemporary art show. During our conversation about the show, I asked Yatika about this, and he said<sup>125</sup>:

Kids will come there to see the dinosaurs, and they will come there and be inspired by a new understanding of art. Maybe they didn't walk in there and expect to see it, but then they'll see it and something changes in their lives. You're going to have people coming into museums who only want to come in there to see that, and yet people who will come in there to see more nature oriented stuff, if they're open-minded they're going to see the art, and I think it's going to be good, because it's going to expand it into the community. It's going to expand it and broaden the views of the community, of the viewers, of Oklahoma as a whole... It's not just art to view and see, but it's work to be taught and to feel and to be educated with, and so I think it's a great museum for that.

Here, Yatika emphasizes the opportunities this show has to bring an entirely new audience to not only his family's work, but also to American Indian art more broadly.

For Swan, it comes down to the mission of the Sam Noble Museum, part of which is to "inspire understanding and appreciation for peoples," and as the state of Oklahoma's natural history

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<sup>124</sup> Swan, interview.

<sup>125</sup> Fields, Yatika, interview.

museum, they have an obligation to serve a dynamic and vibrant American Indian population. As he explained, "I think it's imperative that we bring contemporary forms of expressive culture into the museum... If we are only going to embrace Native peoples in the past through our Archaeology and Ethnology collections, then I think we have violated our mandate and fallen short of our mission." By acknowledging the fluidity, ambiguity, and diversity of contemporary expressive culture, natural history museums have an opportunity to go beyond the "we're still here" trope of new museology. It also delivers the "Native voice" that is so often called for within museums; it is a visual voice, "and it's a direct voice, it's not an interpreted or filtered voice."<sup>126</sup>

Swan even offers advice for curators and other museum professionals who work in natural history museums:

I really see absolutely no difference in putting up a painting by Yatika Fields completed in 2017 and displaying a piece of Osage ribbon work from the 1930s. They're the very same thing to me. They are objects, if you will, or works, or forms of expressive culture, created by a member of that community, so if we're going to be good scientists, if you will (I'm not a scientist), if we're going to be good scholars, good curators, good academics, we have to include the whole story. I don't think I have a colleague in this building who would be willing to chop off the timeline in the areas they study and say, "oh, nothing important happened in the Cenozoic." It's like, I mean, why do we do that in anthropology. So, to me, it's one of the simplest and one of the easiest explanations associated with the type of work that I do.

Swan's approach to collaborative museology is not novel or innovative. However, his methods are grounded in his accountability to all of the communities he works with and his deep and sustained interpersonal relationships. Through his ongoing interactions with Osages, he too, has a localized understanding of generosity as method.

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<sup>126</sup> Swan, interview.

## CHAPTER 5: OSAGE ART IN OTHER SPACES

When I first arrived in Boston, I looked forward to building a network of folks who were doing work in Native American and Indigenous Studies (NAIS). Writing is such an isolating aspect of academic work, and I knew I needed real human people, not just virtual people, to talk to. Within the first couple of weeks of settling in, I found an announcement for a workshop, “Native American & Indigenous Studies, Colonialism, and the University.” I couldn’t tell if the event was open to the public, so I emailed to introduce myself and make sure I could attend. As always, I introduced myself as an Osage citizen and an anthropologist. Within an hour, I received an email back from the organizer, Matt Hooley, inviting me not only to attend, but to come early to have my tin-type portrait taken by Will Wilson. ~~“Fuck yea, I’ll certainly come over early! Thank you for the kind invitation, and I’ll try not to be a total fangirl when I meet Will Wilson. I look forward to meeting you tomorrow,”~~ I replied. Luckily, I had a moment to compose myself before sending the email, because if Matt had asked me in person, I likely would not have been able to filter my response.

I arrived at Tufts the next morning and headed to the studio that had been set up for Will. I was the first one there, so I was immediately directed to the chair. Will explained the process, which included a blindingly bright flash, and a mandate to stay absolutely still for seven seconds. While he was getting the plate ready, I tried holding a smile for seven seconds. ~~“Crap, I don’t think I can do it,”~~ I thought to myself. ~~I have a super cheesy smile and my cheeks are on the large side, so it takes extra effort to hold these suckers up. My internal dialogue continued, “maybe I’ll just do a subtle Mona Lisa type smile. Yea, that will be easier, especially because I’ll have to concentrate on holding my eyes open from the flash.”~~ Will returned with the plate, and asked if I was ready. “Yes, but I’m worried I

won't be able to smile for that long, what do you think?" I asked. "Yea, it can be a bit tricky. If you're worried about it, do a subtler smile," he responded.

After a very long seven seconds, he invited me to come out to his "dark room" to watch him process the plate. As we entered through the zippered door of his portable ice-fishing tent, I could see the tubs of chemicals he would use to process the films and a single red bulb dangling from an extension cord hooked to the center poles. He explained the process, and told me a bit more about his project and his desire to disrupt notions of the stoic Indian that had been created by Edward Curtis. As he explained this to me, he transferred the plate to the second tub and the image began to appear. I looked on with anticipation, and as my face appeared, I looked ... stoic. ~~Actually, I looked kind of pissed.~~ I laughed and said, "so much for me disrupting any notions of stoic Indians." As we left the tent, Adrienne Keene and Liz Hoover had arrived and were ready for their portraits. They looked at mine and jokingly commented on how dark and stoic I looked. "I tried to smile," I explained, "but you have to hold it for seven seconds, and I didn't think I could do it." When their images were processed, they both remarked on how they looked more serious than they expected, too. As we were talking about the experience, I joked, "Maybe it is just this type of camera. Edward Curtis wasn't actually trying to make us look dark and defeated, it was just his camera."



Figure 5.1. Portrait of Jami Powell by Will Wilson, 2016. Image courtesy of artist.

Edward Curtis's images are beautiful and haunting, and they have certainly shaped the American imaginary to hold certain assumptions about American Indians. Will Wilson and a number of other American Indian artists—including Wendy Red Star and Zig Jackson—have (re)appropriated Curtis's images, technology, and aesthetics to draw a broader audience into conversations about contextualizing and challenging this, and other works.

Osage photographer, comedian, and graphic designer Ryan Red Corn created a series of photographed portraits for the video "Smiling Indians," which he produced with Sterlin Harjo of The 1491s and dedicated to nineteenth century photographer Edward S. Curtis. As Red Corn explained in a 2011 interview on NPR's "All Things Considered," Curtis's images do not provide "a full picture" of Osage—or American Indian—experience.<sup>127</sup> Therefore, Red Corn's images of smiling Indians work to counteract non-Indian representations of American Indians as romanticized noble savages. Ryan's work as a comedian and graphic designer are largely focused on addressing popular representations of Osages and American Indians in the media. However, he is not the only Osage artist who is engaging in this work. Other contemporary Osage artists like Addie Roanhorse and Norman Akers are creating self-representations in interesting ways as well. The Osage Nation museum is also contributing to these efforts by featuring the work of contemporary Osage artists, hosting workshops, and partnering with myself and other researchers on projects.

### **Ryan Red Corn: Art and Activism in a Changing Media Landscape**

Although the mascot of the Washington D.C. based NFL team has been a subject of debate since the 1970s,<sup>128</sup> in the past four years, arguments in favor of changing the team's nickname—a

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<sup>127</sup> Abby Verbosky, "'Smiling Indians' Depicts a Lighter Side of Native Americans," March 9, 2011, <http://www.npr.org/blogs/pictureshow/2011/03/09/134394893/smiling-indians-depicts-a-lighter-side-of-native-americans>.

<sup>128</sup> Dan Steinberg, "The Great Redskins Name Debate of ... 1972?" Washington Post, June 3, 2014, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/dc-sports-bog/wp/2014/06/03/the-great-redskins-name-debate-of-1972/>.

dictionary defined racial slur that is disparaging to American Indians<sup>129</sup>—has gained traction within the mainstream media.<sup>130</sup> The initial push for the current movement can be attributed to the “Change the Mascot” advertising campaign launched by the Oneida Indian Nation in September 2013,<sup>131</sup> and the subsequent support of the National Congress of American Indians (NCAI) and the Native Voice Network (NVN) in addition to various individual activists. The most recent push to change the name has been widely promoted and popularized through the production of videos and other artistic media.<sup>132</sup> One example of this is a video urging people not to use FedEx—the corporate sponsor of the team—that was released in early September 2014 to coincide with Washington’s season opener.<sup>133</sup> Commissioned by NVN, the “FedEx Fail” video was written and directed by Osage graphic artist and comedian, Ryan Red Corn. The video stars Choctaw and Kiowa artist Steven Paul Judd as a FedEx employee who refuses to ship a series of items that are widely considered to be racially offensive, such as Ku Klux Klan paraphernalia. When Judd’s character is asked to dispatch items representing the NFL team, he states: “As a Native American, I actually find the term \*\*\*skins to be

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<sup>129</sup> “‘Redskins’ is Officially a Dictionary-Defined Racial Slur,” *Indian Country Today*, July 2, 2014, <http://indiancountrytodaymedianetwork.com/2014/07/02/redskins-officially-dictionary-defined-racial-slur-all-cases-155614>.

<sup>130</sup> Although mainstream media coverage of this issue has ebbed and flowed for decades, in the last twenty years, a growing body of scholarship has protested the use of American Indian mascots by high school, university, and professional sports teams. See C. Richard King, Charles Springwood, and Vine Deloria Jr., *Team Spirits: The Native American Mascot Controversy*; Cornel Pewewardy “The Deculturalization of Indigenous Mascots in U.S. Sports Culture”; Laurel Davis, “Protest Against the Use of Native American Mascots: A Challenge to Traditional American Identity.”; C. Richard King, Ellen Staurowsky, Lawrence Baca, Laurel Davis, and Cornel Pewewardy, “Of Polls and Race Prejudice: Sports Illustrated’s Errant ‘Indian Wars’”; Richard Lapchick, “Race and College Sport: A Long Way to Go”; Ellen Staurowsky, “An Act of Honor or Exploitation? The Cleveland Indians’ Use of the Louis Francis Sockalexis Story,” “‘You Know, We Are All Indian’: Exploring White Power and Privilege in Reactions to the NCAA Native American Mascot Policy,” and “Privilege at Play: On the Legal and Social Fictions that Sustain American Indian Sport Imagery.”; “Stolen Identities: The Impact of Racist Stereotypes on Indigenous People,” Hearing Before the Senate Committee on Indian Affairs; Stephanie Fryberg, Hazel Markus, Daphna Oyserman, and Joseph Stone, “Of Warrior Chiefs and Indian Princesses: The Psychological Consequences of American Indian Mascots.”

<sup>131</sup> Joel Barkin and Brett Stagnitti, “Oneida Indian Nation Launches ‘Change the Mascot’ Ad Campaign Against D.C.’s NFL Team” September 5, 2013, <http://www.changethemascot.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/pressrelease.pdf>.

<sup>132</sup> For example, NCAI sponsored a commercial titled “Proud to Be” that aired during the Superbowl.

<sup>133</sup> Simon Moya-Smith, “New Anti-Redskins Video Says FedEx ‘Embraces Racism,’” September 4, 2014, <http://indiancountrytodaymedianetwork.com/2014/09/04/new-anti-redskins-video-says-fedex-embraces-racism-156746>.

highly offensive. It is, after all, a dictionary defined racial slur. But ... you are in luck, because here at FedEx we are Washington \*\*\*skins' corporate sponsor; we embrace this sort of racism."<sup>134</sup> Here, the video draws on public understandings of overt racism as unacceptable and urges viewers to think about the mascot in the same way.



Figure 5.2. Ryan Red Corn, *FedEx Fail*, 2014.

According to Red Corn, the video was intended to present the argument against the team's name as a human issue, "one that can be comprehended by all races and ethnicities."<sup>135</sup> In this video, and the majority of discussions surrounding the mascot controversy, the issue of the Washington team name is addressed as an example of racism.<sup>136</sup> Although this designation is not incorrect—and it

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<sup>134</sup> Native Voice Network. "FedEx Fail," September 4, 2014. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OXr-xNjljcg#t=42>. Emphasis added.

<sup>135</sup> Moya-Smith, "New Anti-Redskins Video Says FedEx 'Embraces Racism.'"

<sup>136</sup> Cornel Pewewardy refers to the particular type of racism enacted within the use of American Indians as mascots as "dysconscious racism," in which dominant white norms and privileges are unconsciously accepted. See "From La Belle Sauvage to the Noble Savage: The Deculturization of American Indian Mascots in American Culture."

represents the most straightforward argument for mainstream discourse—it maintains problematic racialized constructions of American Indian identity. More specifically, “American Indian” is not a racial category,<sup>137</sup> but rather, it is a political status based on the right of the 566<sup>138</sup> individual sovereign Indian nations within the United States to establish their own citizenship requirements. While racialized discourses of American Indian identity work to delegitimize the political authority of Indian nations, as the above discussion suggests, they have also become an ambivalent means for countering the use of Indian mascots. Therefore, at the same time activists and various American Indians work to eradicate offensive mascots, they are obliged to articulate their arguments in ways that simultaneously perpetuate damaging notions of American Indians.

The “FedEx Fail” video targeted Washington’s corporate sponsor rather than the team, which has mounted its own vehement advertising and public relations campaign in favor of keeping the name. In fact, in March 2014, Dan Snyder, the team’s owner, launched the Washington Redskins Original Americans Foundation (OAF), which is aimed at providing, “meaningful and measurable resources that provide genuine opportunities for Tribal communities”<sup>139</sup> that are supportive of the team and its desire to keep the name. In August 2014, OAF visited the Zuni Pueblo in New Mexico, and the event was promoted as an opportunity for Zuni artists to sell original artwork, particularly those items using the team logo or the team colors.<sup>140</sup> In response to this event and the creation of

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<sup>137</sup> In *Morton v. Mancari*, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that Indian does not constitute “a discrete racial group,” but, rather refers to status “as members of quasi-sovereign tribal entities,” 417 U.S. 535, 554 (1974).

<sup>138</sup> Michael S. Black. “Indian Entities Recognized and Eligible To Receive Services From the Bureau of Indian Affairs,” *Federal Register* 77, no. 155: 47868. August 10, 2012.

<sup>139</sup> Dan Snyder, March 24, 2014, “<http://files.redskins.com/pdf/Letter-from-Dan-Snyder-032414.pdf>.”

<sup>140</sup> This event, and more specifically the way it was publicized within the Zuni community, received a great deal of backlash because the letter sent out stated: “Be respectful when you arrive. Do not smell of alcohol or marijuana, or be under the influence.” “Redskins Want Native-Made Art. No Drunk Artists, Please,” *Indian Country Today*, August 8, 2014, <http://indiancountrytodaymedianetwork.com/2014/08/08/redskins-want-native-made-redskins-art-no-drunk-artists-please-156312>; and Sean Newell, “For Sale: Native-Made Washington ‘Foreskins’ Logo,” *Deadspin*, August 11, 2014, <http://deadspin.com/wanted-native-art-with-redskins-logo-and-colors-drunk-1618686583/1619788490/+Sean-Newell>.

OAF—which has been interpreted as a disingenuous attempt from the team to buy American Indian support of the name—Red Corn and the other members of the sketch comedy group The 1491s posted a piece of artwork on their Facebook page, and asked for people to share it with OAF.<sup>141</sup> The image largely resembles the logo of the team, however, in place of the Indian head, features male genitalia, and the word “foreskins” in lieu of the team’s nickname. This image and the “FedEx Fail” video are examples of what Red Corn calls “brandalism,”<sup>142</sup> or the use of original advertisements and existing symbols—as well as the brand equity they carry—in ways that subvert the discriminatory symbols and the corporations behind them.<sup>143</sup>



Figure 5.3. Ryan Red Corn, *Foreskins*, 2014.

The “FedEx Fail” video and the “foreskins” image demonstrate the ways that Red Corn and other American Indians artists—like Pawnee and Yakama artist Bunky Echo-Hawk<sup>144</sup>—are using their art and social media as means for raising awareness and support surrounding this issue. The current

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<sup>141</sup> 1491s Facebook page, accessed August 11, 2014, [https://www.facebook.com/1491s?hc\\_location=timeline](https://www.facebook.com/1491s?hc_location=timeline).

<sup>142</sup> As explained in *Words You Should Know 2013: The 201 Words from Science, Politics, Technology, and Pop Culture That Will Change Your Life This Year*, “brandalism is a new movement among socially conscious street artists that first started to gain traction ... in 2012. The word brandalism—a combination of brand and vandalism—seems to have roots in Anne Elizabeth Moore’s 2007 book *Unmarketable: Brandalism, Copyfighting, Mocketing, and the Erosion of Integrity ...* Brandalism involves super-stylized, subversive graffiti, street art, and posters created on top of or in conjunction with preexisting billboards or advertising. The movement has also been referred to as subvertising, due to the kind of anti-consumerism messages it creates.” Nicole Cammorata, *Words You Should Know 2013*, 40.

<sup>143</sup> Tanvi Misra, “Native American Artists Reclaim Images That Represent Them,” August 31, 2014, <http://www.npr.org/blogs/codeswitch/2014/08/31/344306508/native-american-artists-reclaim-images-that-represent-them>.

<sup>144</sup> “Bunky Echo-Hawk Says ‘Honor YOU’ to Racist Sports Mascots,” September 5, 2014, <http://indiancountrytodaymedianetwork.com/2014/09/05/bunky-echo-hawk-says-honor-you-racist-sports-mascots-156763>.

movement to change the name of Washington’s NFL team has garnered the attention of the mainstream media, with various news outlets and commentators choosing to ban the term from their coverage. However, as the movement to change the name has gained momentum, the rhetoric against changing the name has shifted.



Figure 5.4. Bunky Echo-Hawk, *#Not Your Mascot*, 2014, acrylic on canvas, 40 in. x 40 in.

For decades, arguments in favor of keeping the name have surrounded the idea that Washington’s team name is not intended as a racial slur, but rather, as a term that honors American Indians. In 2013, WaPo published the following op-ed by Linnell Broecker titled “A Native American Mascot is an honor”<sup>145</sup>:

I am from Wisconsin, but I went to high school in Richmond. Our mascot was the Rebel, and our school song was “Dixie.” Growing up in a more naive time (I graduated in 1964), I was unaware of how politically incorrect we were. I was even called “Yankee” by my classmates.

When I went to college at William and Mary, our mascot was the Indian, and we were (and still are) proudly called the Tribe. Because of political pressure, the school changed the

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<sup>145</sup> “A Native American Mascot Is an Honor.” Emphasis added

mascot to the Griffin, a ridiculous, imaginary creature. I would rather be called the Fairies, Elves, Ogres or Hobbits.

I wish that Native Americans would recognize the honor of having a sports team named after them. Teams choose Native Americans as mascots and role models because people admire these people. We view them as strong and courageous with many other positive qualities, not as negative stereotypes (although, admittedly, “Redskins” is on the edge). Sorry, Maryland, but who wants a turtle for a mascot?

As a white woman, I cannot walk a mile in the shoes of Native Americans, but I admire their way of life and religion more than those of most groups I see today.

Society is fraught with division. There are more important issues for us to tackle.

Even in defending the name, Broecker recognizes the offensive connotation of the term. Why then, is she still defending it? As Suzan Shown Harjo points out, it is because people like Broecker do not attach rights to American Indians and these images and representations sustain themselves in insidious ways. She explains, “If you have an attitude about something, about a people, that they’re less than human, you don’t attach rights to them. They don’t have ancestral rights ... religious rights ... water rights because they don’t have, as cartoons, as stereotypes, any of these things.”<sup>146</sup>

In recent years, arguments in favor of keeping the name have been reframed in a way that further silences American Indian voices by claiming that liberal sports writers and, in the words of Sarah Palin, “the politically correct police,”<sup>147</sup> are the real driving force behind the objections to the name. Drawing on the populist rhetoric of political correctness, supporters of the Washington NFL team are able to mark this issue as something that can be easily, if not automatically, dismissed by a majority of the population.<sup>148</sup> However, there is also something more insidious going on with this assertion. As Navajo and Yankton Sioux writer and activist Jackie Keeler points out,

This idea that the fight against the mascotting of Native people is something new and led by white folks is an oddly insular and navel-gazing way to understand the issue—and yet another

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<sup>146</sup> Little and Little, *More Than a Word*.

<sup>147</sup> Dave Zirin, “The Assassinating of Native American Voices by the Cowards Palin, Ditka, and Snyder,” *The Nation*, August 27, 2014, <http://www.thenation.com/blog/181372/assassinating-native-american-voices-cowards-palin-ditka-and-snyder#>.

<sup>148</sup> Weigel, “Political Correctness.”

way of cutting Native people out of the American discourse about things that matter to us. By reframing the issue this way, the Washington NFL team continues to make real, modern Native people to disappear, much as their mascot does. It's a continuation of the extinguishment of the Native voice and the appropriation of our identity and lands.<sup>149</sup>

Here, Keeler makes an important connection between the rhetoric of the "PC-police" and the damaging effect the Washington NFL name and logo has on American Indian communities. By eliminating contemporary American Indians from the conversation, both the reframed arguments in favor of keeping the name and the name itself contribute to the marginalization and erasure of contemporary American Indian experience.

In contrast, the work of Red Corn and other artists emerges from within these spaces of marginalization and serve as expressions of creative self-representation. Following the release of the "FedEx Fail" video, The 1491s and other American Indian activists were invited to appear on Comedy Central's "The Daily Show with Jon Stewart." Although the episode, which was taped on September 13, did not air until September 25, it garnered national media attention following the September 19 publication of a Washington Post (WaPo) article titled "The Daily Show springs tense showdown with Native Americans on Redskins fans."<sup>150</sup> The WaPo article reported that one of the Washington fans "felt so threatened" by the American Indian activists during the "The Daily Show" taping that she contacted the District of Columbia police in order to file a report. Although the police informed the Washington fan that "no crime had been committed," the article positioned the Washington fans as victims and the American Indian activists, who "celebrated the experience on social media," as aggressive and violent.<sup>151</sup> In a blog post about the taping and the subsequent WaPo article, postdoctoral researcher and citizen of the Cherokee Nation, Adrienne Keene argues:

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<sup>149</sup> Ibid.

<sup>150</sup> Ian Shapira, "The Daily Show Springs Tense Showdown with Native Americans on Redskins Fans," September 19, 2014, [http://www.washingtonpost.com/local/the-daily-show-springs-showdown-with-native-americans-on-redskins-fans/2014/09/19/c6c5f936-3f73-11e4-b03f-de718edeb92f\\_story.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/local/the-daily-show-springs-showdown-with-native-americans-on-redskins-fans/2014/09/19/c6c5f936-3f73-11e4-b03f-de718edeb92f_story.html).

<sup>151</sup> Ibid.

As I always say, you ask me why representations matter. They matter because in 2014 a panel of Native lawyers, artists, journalists, and activists, with several advanced degrees and decades of experience working with and in our communities, are still framed as aggressors, violent, confrontational, angry, and yes, implicitly savage. You can't tell me that it's not all connected. Our identities are erased and replaced with the stereotypes you see every weekend on uniforms at FedEx field.<sup>152</sup>

Here, Keene points to the larger issue at stake with the name of the team and representations of American Indians in the mainstream media, and it is worth reiterating. Although a group of highly talented, intelligent, and accomplished American Indian activists were brought on a show to have a discussion about their work and the legitimate reasons they oppose the use of a racial slur that is disparaging to their communities, subsequent media coverage of the taping perpetuated existing tropes by representing those involved as violent, angry, and confrontational. Therefore, it is not that “representations matter,” as Keene rightly argues, but also, that self-representations matter.

In the days following the WaPo article and the “FedEx Fail” video, Geoffrey Standing Bear, Principal Chief of the Osage Nation, issued Executive Directive No. 14-18, which directed all Osage Nation employees to “refrain from using FedEx.” The directive, which was issued on September 23, was initially reported on the Osage News Facebook page, but was subsequently reported by various news outlets within Oklahoma.<sup>153</sup> By September 25, both national and international news organizations had run the story.<sup>154</sup> Chief Standing Bear further commented, “Mr. Snyder, owner of the Washington, D.C. NFL franchise, chooses to stick with a brand which dictionaries define as

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<sup>152</sup> Adrienne Keene, “White Tears and Aggressive Indians: Native Activists on the Daily Show,” September 22, 2014, <http://nativeappropriations.com/2014/09/white-tears-and-aggressive-indians-native-activists-on-the-daily-show.html>. Note, Keene is now an Assistant Professor at Brown University.

<sup>153</sup> Osage News Facebook page, accessed 23 September, 2014, <https://www.facebook.com/OsageNews>; See also, K. Query “Native American tribe in Oklahoma asking employees to boycott business over NFL mascot,” KFOR-TV, September 23, 2014; “Osage Nation to boycott FedEx over Redskins name,” KOKI Fox 23, September 23, 2014; and Russell Hulstine, “Osage Nation to Boycott FedEx over Support for Washington Redskins Name,” News On 6, September 23, 2014.

<sup>154</sup> See Elliott C. McLaughlin, “Tribal Chief: No FedEx until Redskins Change Team Name,” CNN, September 24, 2014; “Native American chief urges boycott of FedEx over ‘Redskins’ name,” Sports Illustrated, September 25, 2014; and “Native American Chief tells tribe to boycott FedEx until the Redskins—who play at FedEx Field—change team name,” Daily Mail, September 25, 2014. A Google News search conducted on September 26, 2014 showed that 60 individual news outlets had reported on ON Executive Directive 14-18.

disparaging and offensive. FedEx chose to endorse that brand through their sponsorship of Mr. Snyder's organization. The Osage Nation chooses not to use FedEx services. We encourage other tribal nations to consider similar actions."<sup>155</sup> Chief Standing Bear's directive demonstrates not only a boycott of FedEx, based on the company's corporate sponsorship of the Washington NFL team, but an exercise of tribal sovereignty in which the political status of the Osage Nation became part of the conversation.

In 2015, it appeared that the momentum created by American Indian activists and others opposed to the name would lead to a significant change. In July of 2015, a federal judge ordered the US Patent and Trademark Office to cancel the trademark registration for the Washington NFL team. This victory was a major win, but the cancellation would not go in effect until the NFL team had utilized their appeals.<sup>156</sup> Then, in 2017, the United States Supreme Court dealt a harsh blow to the federal lawsuit against the Washington NFL team. On June 19, the Supreme Court declared that the key section of the 1946 Lanham Act—which banned trademarks that “may disparage” people—violated the First Amendment right to free speech.<sup>157</sup> Although this ruling emanated from a separate case involving an Asian American rock band named “The Slants,” who sued the US Patent and Trademark Office after being denied a trademark based on the same disparagement clause American Indian activists and the Justice Department relied on in their case against the NFL team.<sup>158</sup> This ruling left the American Indian activists with little legal recourse, and the case was dropped. However, these events brought the debate over the use of Indian mascots into the realm of mainstream consciousness.

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<sup>155</sup> Shannon Shaw Duty, “Osages protest ‘Redskins’ name with FedEx boycott,” *Osage News*, September 24, 2014, <http://www.osagenews.org/en/article/2014/09/24/fedex-boycotted-until-washington-nfl-team-changes-name/>.

<sup>156</sup> Shapira, “Federal Judge Orders Cancellation of Redskins’ Trademark Registrations.”

<sup>157</sup> Shapira and Marimow, “Washington Redskins Win Trademark Fight over the Team’s Name.”

<sup>158</sup> “The Slants Win Supreme Court Battle Over Band’s Name In Trademark Dispute.”

In 2017, brothers John and Kenn Little, enrolled citizens of the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe released the documentary *More Than a Word*. The film features conversations with a number of stakeholders involved in conversations around the mascot debate, including scholars, activists, sportscasters, and Washington NFL fans on both sides of the issue. As I watched the film at a screening, I wondered how they would end the film, and I hoped it did not finish with the result of the trademark case. Although the juridical fight around this issue has been decided by the courts, there are a number of other arenas where American Indians are fighting for control over our representations. At the end of the film, the Little brothers showed footage from Indigenous Comic-Con and a conversation with its founder, Lee Francis. Indigenous Comic-Con is an incredible organization that supports Indigenous graphic novelists and creates spaces where Indige-nerds can geek out and feel confident in themselves. They then cut to a number of the people interviewed in the film including Tara Houska and Joe Horse Capture predicting that the name will change within the next decade.

The film also addresses the people who argue we have bigger problems to solve than changing the name of an NFL team. This is a common defense within Indian country, too. What Deloria says about this gets at the root of this dissertation:<sup>159</sup>

It seems to be untenable to let the current situation go unchallenged. The struggle for rights, for sovereignty rights, for treaty rights, for human rights, for Native American people has to take place across a broad array. On the one hand, it has to be fought in the cultural domain, where we take on questions like this. It has to be fought in the social, the political, the economic, the environmental domains as well. And those things all get mushed together in important kinds of ways, but it's wrong to say we shouldn't contest this. We should contest it. It's just part of a bigger, broader kind of front.

While Deloria uses the highly academic terminology of “mush” to explain how the political, social, cultural, and economic domains all play a role in this issue, which is part of a broader fight for

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<sup>159</sup> Little and Little, *More Than a Word*.

sovereignty and self-determination. Entanglement is, yet again, another way to think about the ways these struggles overlap various domains.

The mascot issue is not the only recent instance in which American Indian activists captured national media attention. In 2015, Energy Transfer Partners (ETP) announced plans to run an oil pipeline through the treaty lands of the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe. The Dakota Access Pipeline (DAPL) was set to cross over sacred sites, through burial grounds, and to pass under the reservoir that provides the majority of the drinking water for the SRST reservation. Despite objections by the Standing Rock Sioux, in the spring of 2016, ETP began the construction of DAPL. In the months that followed, a historic resistance led by Indigenous women—and supported by an unprecedented coalition of inter-national Indigenous peoples and allies—blocked the path of the pipeline along the Cannon Ball River in protest of the construction.<sup>160</sup>

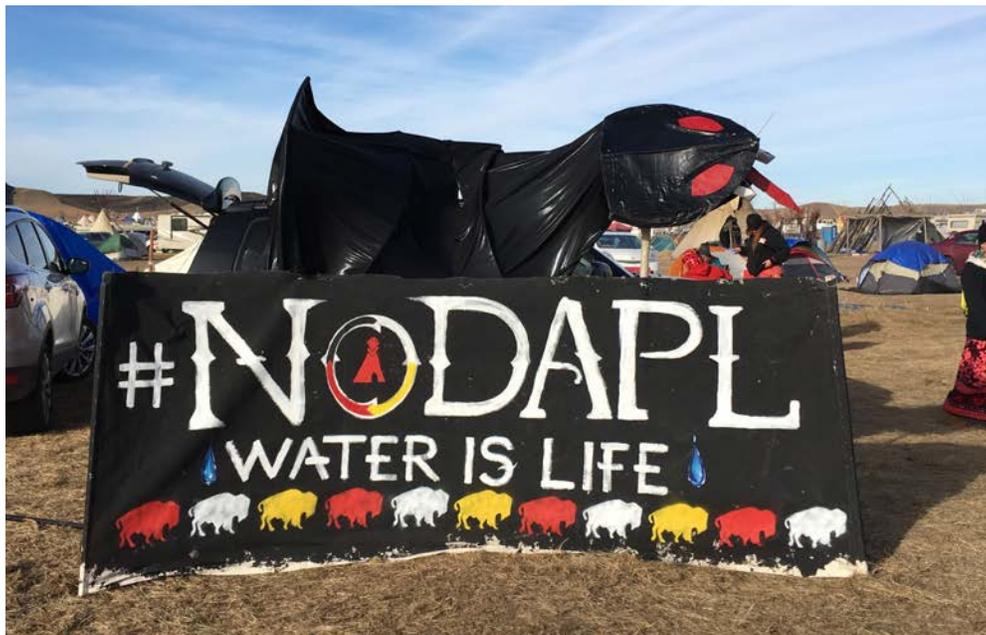


Figure 5.5. Interactive art installation at Standing Rock created by Welana and Yatika Fields, where participants could count coup on the black snake. Image courtesy of the artists.

<sup>160</sup> "Something Extraordinary Is Happening at Standing Rock"; Merlan, "Meet the Brave, Audacious, Astonishing Women Who Built the Standing Rock Movement"; Levin, "At Standing Rock, Women Lead Fight in Face of Mace, Arrests and Strip Searches"; "The Standing Rock Resistance Is Unprecedented (It's Also Centuries Old)."; See also, forthcoming volume edited by Nick Estes and Jaskiran Dhillon; Nick Estes (forthcoming) *Mni Wiconi: Water is Life, Death, and Liberation*

The Osage Nation and various Osage citizens supported the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe against the DAPL. In addition to issuing a Proclamation declaring the Osage Nation's solidarity with the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe on September 1, 2016,<sup>161</sup> the Nation provided emergency supplies to the protestors.<sup>162</sup> An Osage veteran, who was wounded in combat in Afghanistan, walked more than 250 miles from the capitol of the Osage Nation in Pawhuska, OK to join Veterans for Standing Rock in Cannon Ball, ND.<sup>163</sup> In a Facebook post about his trip, he explained:

Well, here it is everyone. This is the next chapter and journey in my life. This is a personal decision, anyone who knows me knows I am a warrior of this country, and I love it with all my heart. I am also a Native of this country and I'm showing my support for Standing Rock. On one side of my pack is the Osage Nation flag and on the other side is the US flag. I am walking in support of Standing Rock. I am walking for those that can't. I am walking for those who continue a daily struggle with thoughts of taking their own lives. I am walking for those who battle PTSD daily. I am walking for my fellow veterans. I am walking for those deployed right now. I am walking for the FALLEN. thank you everyone who supports this. I love each and every one of you. Please share this and let's get the word out! Anyone is welcome to join me, but I caution you to join at your own risk and please be safe and know your limits. God bless.<sup>164</sup>

The text above accompanied an image created by Ryan Red Corn, which emphasizes Turley's military service, his solidarity with Standing Rock, and his commitment to raise awareness for suicide prevention among Native Veterans. Although Turley clearly recognizes the complexity and contention of being a veteran and an American Indian, he draws on these as a means to bring awareness and understanding to the #NoDAPL movement.

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<sup>161</sup> "Osage Nation," September 2, 2016.

<sup>162</sup> "Osage Nation," September 2, 2016.

<sup>163</sup> Duty, "Osage Joins Veterans Stand for Standing Rock in North Dakota."

<sup>164</sup> Chris Turley's Facebook page, accessed November 18, 2016.  
<https://www.facebook.com/chris.turley.144/posts/10154546404700943>

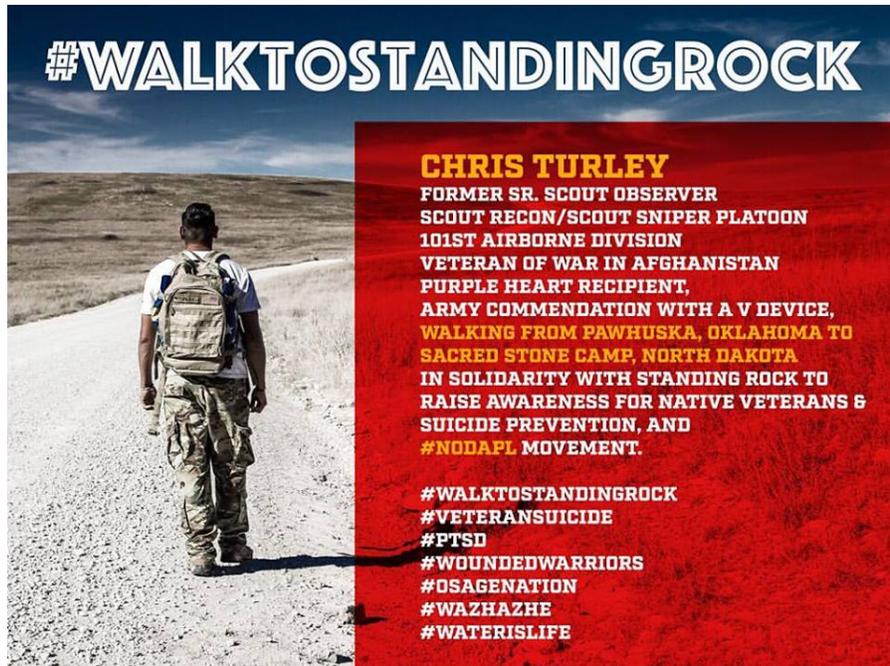


Figure 5.6. Image courtesy of Chris Turley and Ryan Red Corn.

Although the Osage Nation and many Osage citizens draw income from oil/resource extraction, the Nation and a number of Osage citizens—like Turley—openly supported the #NoDAPL movement. The broad support of Indian nations throughout the US for the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe emanated from concerns over tribal sovereignty and the rights of American Indians to control their lands and resources.<sup>165</sup> In writing about his conversations with Turley, journalist David Grann describes the “deep resonance” between the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe’s struggle with DAPL and the Osage Nation’s own struggles over land and oil rights at the turn of the twentieth century.<sup>166</sup> These historic struggles lead to the murders of dozens of Osages during the 1920s, a period which has been deemed the Osage “Reign of Terror.”<sup>167</sup> This dark period of Osage history is the focus of *Killers of the Flower Moon: The Osage Murders and the Birth of the FBI* by Grann. The New York Times Bestseller

<sup>165</sup> Grann, “Slaughter of the Osage, Betrayal of the Sioux.”

<sup>166</sup> Grann.

<sup>167</sup> “NDepth: Greed, Collusion Lead to Osage Murders | News OK.”

and National Book Award Finalist has been featured on numerous television shows, was Amazon's number one selling book for 2017, and is being made into a film by Martin Scorsese and Leonardo DiCaprio.<sup>168</sup> This book has already shaped mainstream understandings of the Osage Nation, and the stakes will only get higher when the film is released. The following narrative reveals the incredible power of *Killers of the Flower Moon*.

Boston is a strange place to be Osage. Indigeneity is at once omnipresent and invisible in this landscape that is such an integral space for defining America. Until 2005, it was actually illegal for American Indian people to set foot within the city of Boston without permission of the governor and being under the guard of two musketeers.<sup>169</sup> I have lived in Boston for a little over a year, and during my time here, I have met at least ten people who revealed in the course of our conversation that they'd "never met a real Native American Indian before." Their revelation is usually followed by asking if they're allowed to say Indian or if there was more appropriate terminology they should be using. Upon meeting these folks, my initial thought is "I'm sure you've met Indians before, we just don't write it on our foreheads or walk around in buckskin and headdresses." Of course, I don't actually say this to anyone. Over the years, I have developed enough of a filter to avoid letting these thoughts escape the dark, sarcastic, crevices of my mind.

On one occasion, while I was working at a museum in the area, I met a woman at a cocktail party. Let's call her Dot. She was a very petite woman in her seventies, who wore a safety pin on her lapel even though it had been months since the forty-fifth president's inauguration, and she wore a beautiful brooch. Osage women, broadly speaking, love brooches. We wear them during our annual In-lon-schka dances. I approached Dot and complimented her brooch and introduced myself. Dot

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<sup>168</sup> ; <http://osagenews.org/en/article/2018/01/25/imperative-entertainment-executives-tour-osage-nation-killers-flower-moon-film/>

<sup>169</sup> "Massachusetts Law about American Indians."

thanked me and introduced herself. She told me she had a PhD and owned a successful consulting business but was slowing down so she could spend more time with her grandchildren. In return, she asked me to tell her a little bit about myself. Like most academics, I had my elevator pitch ready, and delivered the abridged version, "My name is Jami Powell, and I am a citizen of the Osage Nation and PhD candidate in anthropology; I am here for the summer working on a project." Dot cocked her head to the side and squinted her eyes, "I'm sorry," she said, "it is quite loud in here, what country did you say you were from?" Uh oh, I thought to myself, how can I explain this in a way that she'll understand? "I am a citizen of the Osage Nation, I'm Native American," I responded.

"Oh, I've never heard of them," Dot said abruptly, "but I just read this fascinating book about these Indians from Oklahoma who were murdered for their oil money. It was absolutely riveting," she said. I must have had a look of horror on my face, because after an awkwardly long pause, she continued, "and so sad, of course." The excited tone with which she described the book and the murders of Indians as if it was a work of fiction was somewhat unsettling, but I knew what book she was talking about. "Yes, *Killers of the Flower Moon*," I said, "that book is actually about my community, the Osage Nation." She cocked her head again, pursed her lips, and started shaking her head, "no, no, no, I read this book, and it was not about them," she explained, "it was written by this young man who is a columnist for *The New Yorker*." At that point, I thought about excusing myself and walking away. Instead, I took a deep breath, mentally engaged my filter, and responded, "yes, his name is David Grann. I actually met him while he was writing the book. It is about the Osage."

We stood there awkwardly for what must have only been 15 to 20 seconds, but it felt like an eternity. Dot's eyes moved from side to side, up and down, as if she was searching the pages of the book in her mind. "Oh," she beamed, "I don't think you're saying it correctly. It's pronounced 'oh-sauge.'" "Ummmm," I muttered, stalling for time while I tried to think of a good, or at least appropriate and respectful, way to respond. "Yes, it is pronounced 'oh-sauge,'" she repeated in a self-

congratulatory, but not malicious, tone. Unfiltered Jami was trying to break free. As I was trying to figure out what to say, I was distracted by the tiny cartoon version of myself who was screaming inside of my head, screaming things like, “~~Are you fucking kidding me?~~” “Who is this person, and why would anyone correct another person in that situation? ~~Holy shit, can I borrow your phone, I need to call up the Chief and let him know we’ve made a huge mistake! We’ve been saying it wrong all these years! Thank you for enlightening me and showing me the err of our ways!~~”

Luckily for me, and Dot, none of these comments actually escaped my lips. Instead, I said to her, “You know what. I think I know where that pronunciation comes from. You see, our name for ourselves is Wah-zha-zhi, but when the French first translated it, it became Ousauge, which eventually became Osage in English. I can assure you, however, I have been Osage my whole life, and that’s the way we’ve always said it.” Dot looked at me pensively. Meanwhile, unfiltered cartoon Jami shouted, “~~just shut up and go away.~~” Just then, a third person joined our conversation and I had a chance to excuse myself. Dot thanked me for a “pleasant and informative” visit and said she hoped to see me in the future.

“Dot” had never heard of the Osage Nation before reading this book, and it quickly became her one frame of reference for not only Osages, but other American Indians as well. Even as I stood before her and introduced myself as a citizen of the Osage Nation and a PhD candidate, she refused to believe that I was correct. Armed with the knowledge from a single book and a mispronunciation of a single word, Dot felt confident enough to challenge and speak down to me. This experience makes me incredibly nervous about all of the ways the film production will (mis)shape understandings of Osages for generations to come.

### **Addie Roanhorse**

Another Osage citizen who shares my concern about the legacy *Killers of the Flower Moon* will create is artist Addie Roanhorse, the graphic designer for the Osage Nation and the descendant of

Henry Roan, one of the people whose murder was written about in Grann’s book. Roanhorse, along with Osage designer Chad Renfro, has been appointed by Chief Geoffrey Standing Bear to work as a liaison between Imperative, the production company for the film, and the Osage Nation. Roanhorse, who is also my cousin, and I have grown much closer over the course of my research and through our conversations about the power of Osage art to create a brighter future for our children.

Within a few days of the book’s release, Roanhorse and Renfro approached Chief Standing Bear to relay their concerns. As Roanhorse explained to me<sup>170</sup>:

Because, you know, a lot of people can take certain ideas and run with them and the next thing you know we're just another big-blanketed Indian movie kind of thing, you know, or it's, um... it's important to us to... that they know that we have our own language, and that we have our own, customs, that are similar but, you know, very unique to us. When they came to visit, I think we were successful in showing them that ... I've seen how— how the portrayal of something can... can, you know, hang on to that identity for generations. It's... it's kind of scary in the same— it's just— I really hope that we are portrayed in the right light.

One of the things Roanhorse is able to share with the production company to relay some of the complexity around these issues is her artwork. Two of her paintings in particular speak to the violence that characterizes this history in a way that is incredibly beautiful. Within these mixed media paintings, Roanhorse’s aesthetics render the violence poetic and eloquent to illicit empathy, not fear from her audience.<sup>171</sup>

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<sup>170</sup> Roanhorse, interview.

<sup>171</sup> The idea of moving from fear to empathy came up during a conversation I had with Yatika Fields in February 2018.

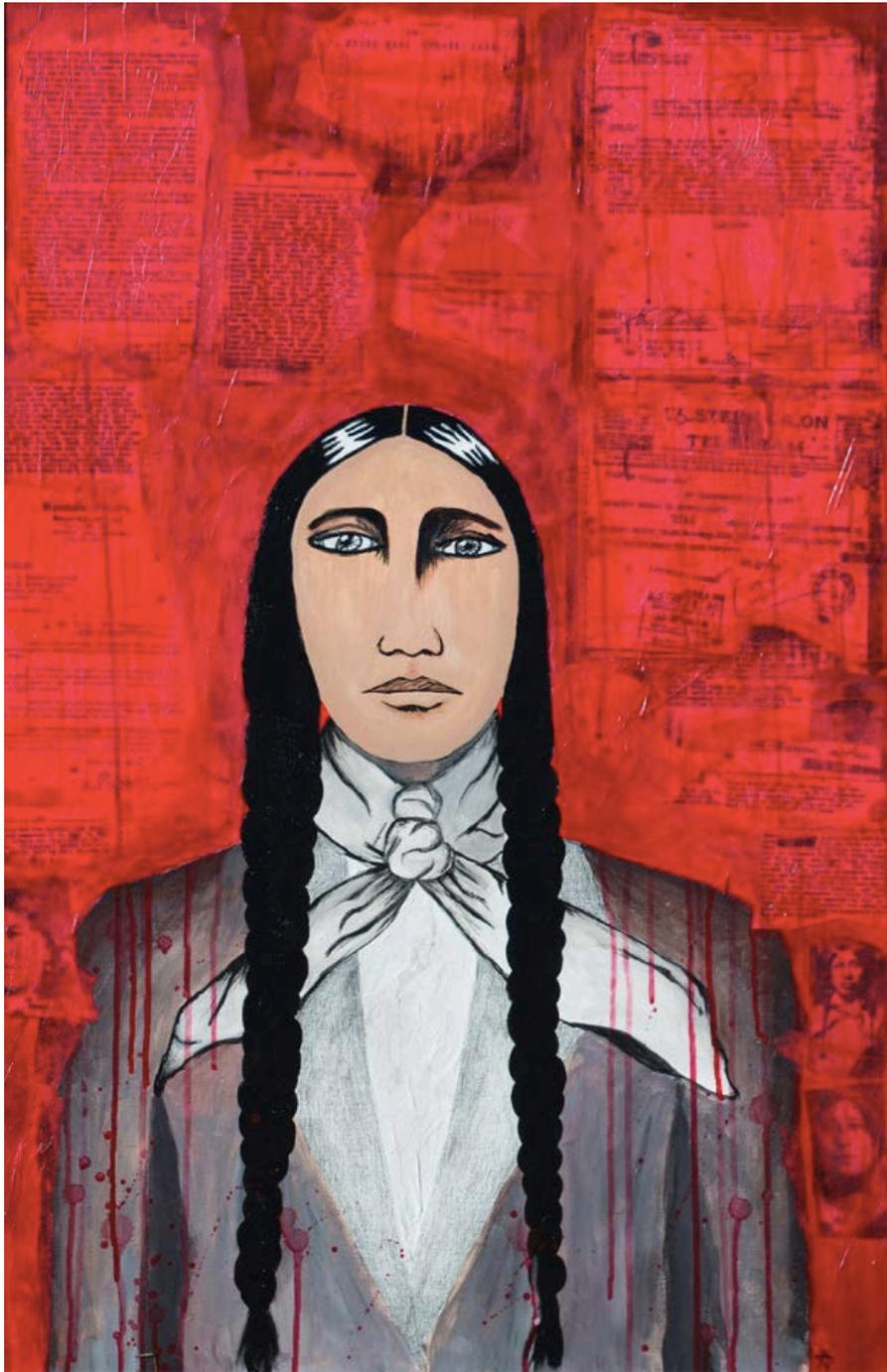


Figure 5.7 *Henry Roan*. Image courtesy of Addie Roanhorse.



Figure 5.8. *Bloodland*, 2018. 36 x 36. Shirt is made of map of Osage oil leases.

When I asked Roanhorse to describe what she would like the audience to understand about Osage people after viewing the film or her artwork, she said<sup>172</sup>:

Um... of survival. Of, you know, of maintaining what we have, what we had, as best as we can. There's so much trauma that's been put upon our people, even, you know, generations that don't even know, there's definitely this, like, cultural trauma that continues to happen and we continue to rise. Just the strength, you know, of our community. On many levels. You know, there's so many... there's so many amazing Osages that do amazing things, and

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<sup>172</sup> Roanhorse, interview.

especially in the art world and in the professional world, you know there's just– they're out there doing it, and you know, it makes you proud to see them out there.

Despite the limitations and violence faced by Osages and other American Indian nations, we continue to not only survive, but to thrive, and to create, and to do amazing things. Roanhorse paints a number of images of androgynous figures, who were initially inspired by her mother, Gina Gray's warriors, who were almost always men. She told me, "I want to depict our women in these warrior positions that– we are strong, and it may, you know– the war paint may be for the men, but I believe that we've always had the war paint on, you know? I believe that's where our strength comes from."<sup>173</sup> As a contemporary Osage artist and mother, she pays close attention to the representations she creates, both in her art practice and in her graphic design work for the Osage Nation.

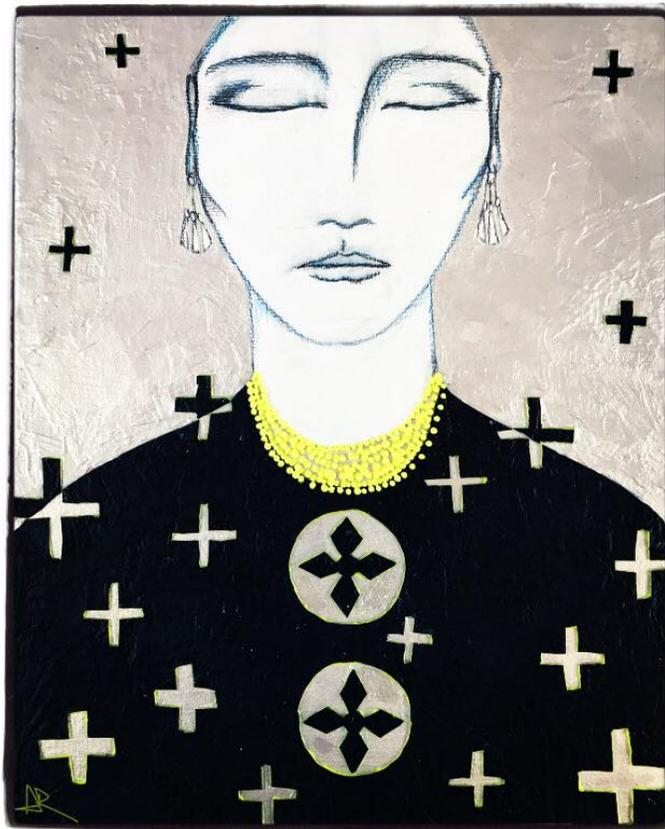


Figure 5.9. Image courtesy of Addie Roanhorse.

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<sup>173</sup> Roanhorse.

As the graphic designer for the Osage Nation, Roanhorse is tasked to create images and promotional material for a number of Osage Nation programs, and events. In describing her aesthetic for the design work she creates for the Osage Nation, she uses terms like relevant, home, and meaning. She strives to create design work that communicates Osage values and ideas in subtle ways, using simple designs with clean lines.



Figures 5.10-12. Logos for the Wah-zha-zhi Early Learning Academy, Ballet, and Environmental and Natural Resources Departments. Courtesy of Addie Roanhorse.



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Figure 5.13. Graphic design work for ONM by Addie Roanhorse.



Figure 5.14. Graphic design work for Osage Nation by Addie Roanhorse.

## Norman Akers and Osage Public Art

In September of 2017, a delegation of Osages, including Chief Geoffrey Standing Bear traveled to Cuba, Missouri to celebrate the completion of the *Osage Trail Legacy* monument and the mural *Meeting in Missouri*. The steel monument which stands 35 feet tall, is located at the Cuba Visitor's Center along Interstate 44—which was previously route 66. As the website for the project states, before those names were attached to it, it was the Trail of the Osage<sup>174</sup>:

At the dawn of this nation's expansion this trail carried furs and lead ore to St. Louis and brought back food, clothing, and supplies from St. Louis to the rural areas of Southwest Missouri. But this trail carried more than merchandise, it also carried ideas and innovation. It carried the ideas that would form a young, energetic, and growing republic of the early 1800's. But, who were these trail blazers and what happened to them?

This project, which was the idea of non-Osage artist Glenn Tutterow, began with a bit of controversy and without consultation or input from the Osage Nation. After the Nation was contacted, however, a more meaningful collaboration began, and the project was approved with the support of Chief Standing Bear.



Figure 5.15. Osage Trail Legacy monument in Cuba, MO. Photo courtesy of Osage Trail Legacy project.

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<sup>174</sup> "Osage Trail Legacy – Monument Project."

As part of this larger project, Norman Akers was brought on to create a forty-foot-long mural in the town of Cuba's mural district.<sup>175</sup> When I spoke with Akers shortly after the discussions about the design for the mural began, he said:<sup>176</sup>

It's been interesting to kind of go down and to visit with them and to talk to them about the project. One of the things that we were looking at... because Missouri, you know, and particularly with the early contact with the French, the fur trade, is that the mural project that I'm working on is really dealing with that kind of connection, you know, that notion of trade. Particularly in the early 19th century, so we're looking at both the Osage and the French traders, and keeping in mind, too, that Missouri was this sort of meeting place, but there was a network of trails and roads that existed *long* before the French were there. That's pretty much the theme of the mural.

When I asked him about input from the community, he elaborated, "I've found that the people I've worked with, they're really looking at this degree of authenticity," while rolling his eyes. He continued "They say, 'well, we need to know, is the clothing right?' and I explained, 'This becomes really hard, because you're trying to talk about something, a period of time before photography, and let's face it, the physical material, the material culture did survive.'"<sup>177</sup> Through this public art project, which began without any interest in collaboration from the city of Cuba, Akers was engaging in meaningful conversations with the residents and leaders of this city which was founded on ancestral Osage lands.

As we talked about the design for the mural, a grin that I'd come to recognize as indicative of a great story came over his face. He explained, "It was kind of funny, because in the mural proposal, one of the things I did was—and I know you'll love this—was I had a piece of ribbon work." A grin came over my face and I leaned in as he continued:

It was a design element that I needed because the mural is a very sort of... it's a very horizontal space that I have to work with, so it's trying to figure out how to break that space up. In one area I have this landscape of rolling hills and these two figures meeting, but then I

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<sup>175</sup> "Osage Nation," September 2, 2016.

<sup>176</sup> Akers, interview.

<sup>177</sup> Akers.

have this one section I need to break up using this almost rainbow shape of ribbon work. They asked, "What is that?" and I said, "its ribbon work, it's a ribbon work design," and they asked if it was connected to that time, and I said, "mmmmmmmmmmmm it's probably a bit more modern, but it is a product of that exchange, of that trade." So, they are very enthusiastic people, and they are trying to do what's right, and that I think is important.

Within his design, which depicts the "original" meeting of the Osage with French fur traders, he used ribbon work, an important marker of Osage nationhood. Although ribbon work did not exist at the time of that meeting, it grew out of the resulting fur trade and continues to be an important image within Osage aesthetics. In including this design element, the ribbon work connects the past to the future in a visually meaningful way.



Figure 5.16. *Meeting in Missouri* mural by Norman Akers (2017). Photo courtesy of the Osage News.

Through this project, and its focus on the historical and ongoing entanglements between the Osage Nation and non-Osage settlers, Akers was able to create a mural that will educate future generations and “answer a lot of necessary questions.”<sup>178</sup> Akers’ work, and the larger Osage Trail Legacy project, demonstrates the ways material objects can be employed as a means for traversing intellectual, social, cultural, and political boundaries. The monument and mural create a bridge to a shared space of understanding and intellectual engagement that is accessible by a broad audience. When I asked Akers about this, his response turned into a question about this project in particular, but also his other work. He explained<sup>179</sup>:

If the sculpture and the mural come together... what happens is, it creates a link. It creates a place where there could be... where communities could meet. Just the fact of having the monument and the mural there and all the previous trips that the tribe has made up there. It’s creating a connection, we are strengthening these connections to our homelands, which is probably just as important as anything. It makes us more aware of our own history, and for our young people ... those trips to Missouri, for our youth, it helps them have a better understanding of our story at home. That’s why when I use maps, I like to use Kansas and a little bit of Missouri in that. The paintings that I’m doing, they’re sort of mental sort of concepts of place, but they go beyond our boundaries. Part of that is that I’m trying to create landscape paintings that go beyond just the physical boundaries of Osage county.

For Akers, the mural and his art practice are about imagining an Osage future that is informed by the past in meaningful ways. It is also about creating space for that future through his work. Within Akers’ work, the idea of place and the physical space of Osage land is a constant theme. However, through these depictions of physical space, his work also creates a shared intellectual space, which is integral to promoting greater understandings between Indian and non-Indian communities.

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<sup>178</sup> “Osage Nation,” September 2, 2016.

<sup>179</sup> Akers, interview.



Figures 5.16-5.17. (left) *Why Did the Birds Quit Singing?*, oil on canvas (2008); (right) *Okesa*, oil on canvas (2006). Images courtesy of Norman Akers.

In order to create space for a stronger Osage future, Akers uses subversion in his work to invite people to interrogate his images. This is also a strategy that a number of other Osage artists I have worked with use. As Yatika Fields explained, “it is about using aesthetic strategies to move people from a place of contemplation to a place of empathy.”<sup>180</sup> As Akers and I continued our discussion, he explained how he uses these moments of interrogation or entanglements as productive means for opening conversations<sup>181</sup>:

The reality is that people like to see pretty scenes, they don't want to be confronted with the ugly history, and that's it. Kind of in a weird way, those maps that I put in, it's a very quiet way of talking about colonialism. I'm not the kind of person who screams at people, because screaming and yelling at someone doesn't change things. It just alienates people. I'm always fascinated with subversion, the notion of putting something in that makes people aware. I've got a painting at the Arrowhead Stadium collection, which they approached me a couple of years ago about buying a piece, and you know, I have a feeling some of my colleagues would have said "well, why would you sell it to them?" First of all, I needed the money, and there's no way I was going to pass up that money, and they got a really good painting. They got one of the OKeesa paintings. And I kind of thought about it for a while, and I thought, that's a good painting for their collection. They're really trying to create an educational component

<sup>180</sup> Fields, Yatika, interview.

<sup>181</sup> Akers, interview.

around it. I just kind of catalogued what I got back, it was in the mail. I opened it up and looked at it, and they had comments from young people who had come through to visit the collection and the comment from this child from the middle school said, "The painting is full of emotion, the elk looks sad, like we did something wrong." And I thought, you know, the young person got it. But also, they published it.

Akers, like Roanhorse, Fields, and other artists, uses beauty in his work to invite empathy instead of fear. He describes his tactic as engaging people in "a quieter kind of conversation." For him, this is a strategy that has developed through age and experience, and "making a painting that expresses all of these things in a way that you can have a conversation about it is important."<sup>182</sup>

Engaging in more meaningful conversations with a goal of understanding and empathy should be a strategy that all people, not just Indigenous people, strive for. At the time of our interview, it was an incredibly tumultuous time in the US presidential elections in the lead up to the 2016 election. Like many Americans, Akers was concerned about the rhetoric and violence that has come to characterize politics. He explained<sup>183</sup>:

We live in a society where there's a lot of yelling and chaos, I mean I look at the elections right now. It just, it's hideous how people treat each other ... It is violent, but if you make a work that people can, that people are attracted to, and then all of the sudden they are like wait a second. Then, they come to a realization that there are issues here. 'I'm having to deal with this notion, my own history related to your own history,' and making those, making people aware that way I think is much more important, too.

At this point, Akers and I had been talking for nearly two hours, and the conversation had been pretty serious for an extended time. In a move that is typical of many Osages when things get too heavy, he brought some levity to the conversation and joked, "And you know, let's face it. People don't spend a lot of time looking at art." As we both laughed, he continued, "But you create a situation where you catch someone, and you sort of draw them into the work."<sup>184</sup>

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<sup>182</sup> Akers.

<sup>183</sup> Akers.

<sup>184</sup> Akers.

Throughout my conversations with Akers, and other Osage artists, humor was our constant companion. Like the aesthetic strategies these artists use to invite contemplation and empathy, humor brings people into difficult conversations in productive ways. As I started thinking about humor within my research, a story Akers told me about the lunch boxes in a number of his pieces kept coming to my mind. I had confused this narrative with another one of Akers' experiences that ended in him asking a woman in the audience who kept pressing about authenticity, "What do you want me to tell you, that I rode her on my buffalo?!" during a panel at the Eiteljorg Museum. Although I had confused lunch boxes with buffalos, I am glad I asked him to tell it to me, once again, but this time, on the record. He generously obliged, and began, "I painted a little black lunch box because everybody kept on asking me 'how come you're not painting about your home?' And I remember the general response was, "what is this?" and I would say, 'well, you asked me to paint something about home and I just did.' And they were still somewhat kind of baffled, and they were asking how it connected."<sup>185</sup> He continued<sup>186</sup>:

They were looking for these stereotypical images, and I finally I explained to them, I said, "this is something we use at home when we put people away, it is something that I've seen all my life, you know, and the beauty about that, you know, is that, and kind of the story with that, that little lunch box is pressed metal, and the exterior is very Western, and it was manufactured somewhere outside of the home, but when we take it, what is inside of it is uniquely Osage, and people don't see that. And I think that's very much how a lot of us sometimes live our lives, too. There's an external shell for when we're in the world and when we're navigating places, but there's also something inside us that, that is just so uniquely us, and people don't ever see that.

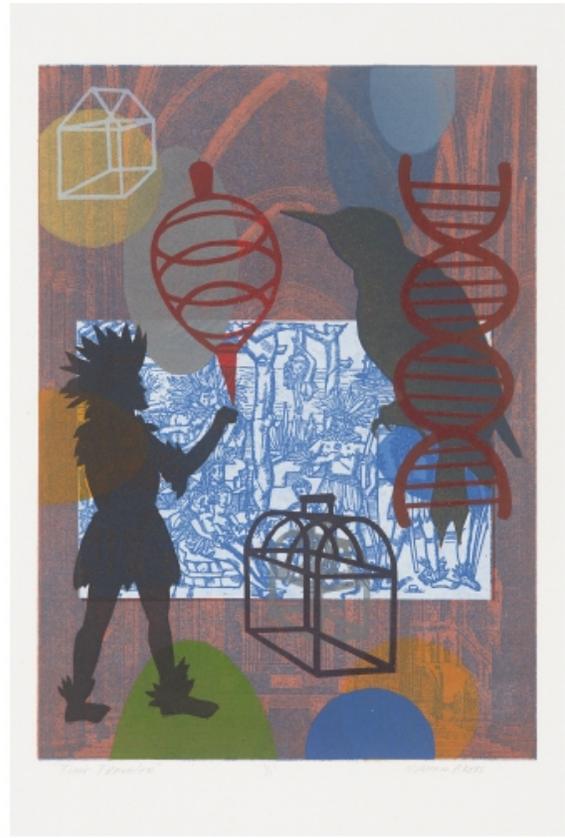
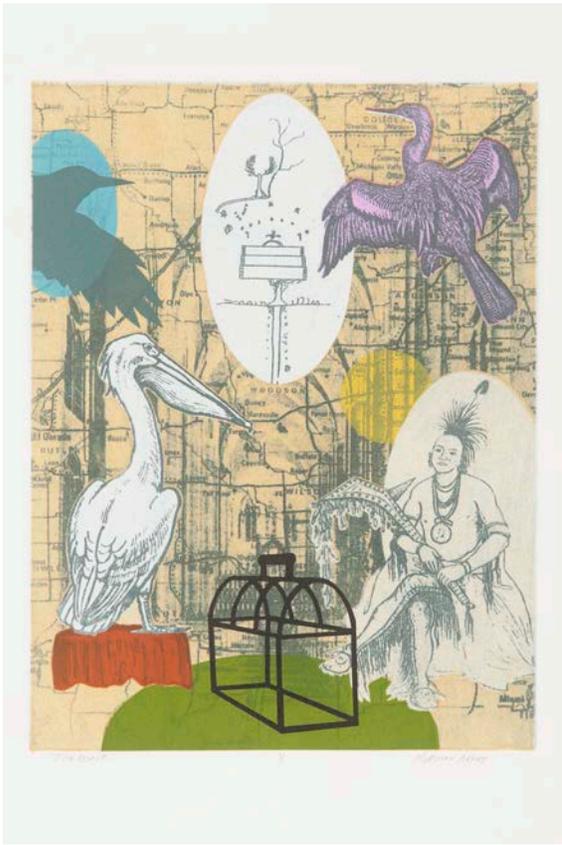
The unfortunate thing, still, I think, today, is that when people look at Native art, they're looking for things that identify it as Native art, and sometimes they look at stereotypes to define that as being Native, but there's such a group of young artists now who are not doing that. They're working with other ideas and imagery, and they're taking a deeper probe into Native life and culture, but they're expressing that in newer forms, in a sense they're also finding a new visual vocabulary to work with today, and that's really kind of a sign of things,

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<sup>185</sup> Akers.

<sup>186</sup> Akers.

of a progression of moving forward—a progress instead of going back and painting images from just the past.



Figures 5.18-5.19. (left) *The Wait*, monoprint (2011); (right) *Time Traveler*, monoprint (2010). Images courtesy of Norman Akers.

### Osage Nation Museum Ribbon Work Documentary Project

Akers is an incredibly talented and thoughtful artist, and his narratives about his experiences and his work have been incredibly helpful in thinking about entanglements and the ways that visual narratives can create shared intellectual spaces. Not only is Akers a painter and printmaker, but as a true Osage Renaissance man, he is also a bead worker and a ribbon worker. When Hallie Winter, the Osage Nation Museum (ONM) Curator and I decided to transition to a ribbon work documentary project instead of the virtual exhibit in the immediate future, Norman was one of the first people I called about participating. As a well-respected artist and a member of the Traditional Advisory Committee, Akers' participation lends a certain level of credibility to our project for some Osages who

may not otherwise participate. We were also keen to have male ribbon workers participate in our conversations.

The ONM ribbon work documentary project, which is being co-sponsored by the Osage Nation Foundation and supported by the ONM Communications Department, began in January of 2018, and will continue filming during scheduled times in April and June. Our initial conversations with individuals and object-centered focus groups have been incredibly informative and have already shifted my understandings about certain aspects of Osage ribbon work. In addition to the hope and pride expressed throughout our interviews with Osages about ribbon work, the other thread that has been woven throughout these discussions is humor. One conversation in particular comes to mind, and it emphasizes the ways that humorous narratives can teach us important lessons. During an interview with ribbon worker Janet Emde, she told us<sup>187</sup>:

It's funny, the best thing about being an Osage woman--besides being able to boss Osage men around--is dishes and fabric. We went into this fabric store and I'd forgot my cell phone and Mom's wasn't charged up and my aunt was in the car. Well, here's all these women, these quilting women. They're like "do I want an eighth of a yard or do I want a quarter of a yard of this." And there's this huge line. Not me man, I'm like "Do you have another bolt of that, just give us the whole bolt. What's in the back room, can you check the back room? Do you have this in another color?" I mean, that's how Osage women buy fabric. And if it's a sale it's even better.

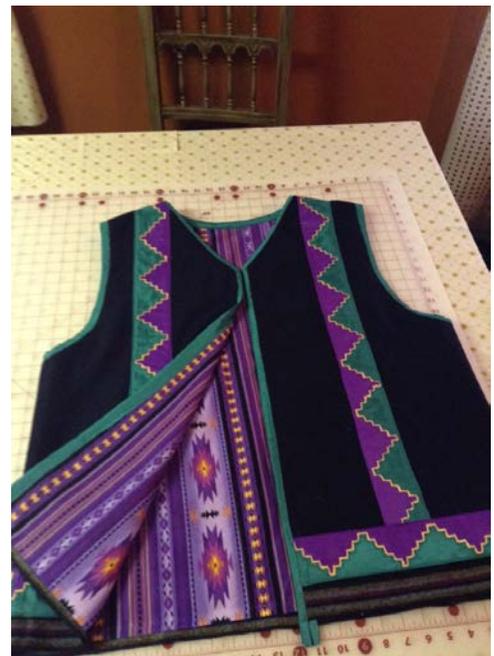
But the humbling thing is, I mean we had two carts...and we got to the line and we were kind of on a roll and we were a little annoyed. I mean we weren't stomping, but in our minds, we were thinking "oh if you'll just get your quarter of a yard and get out of my way, I'll be glad to pay for it."

So, we get up there, and it's like \$600, and we're like that's fine, that's fine. My card wouldn't work. Mom's card wouldn't work. The bank had suspended our cards because we were out of town. We were out of our normal area, and we were just going wild. Anyway, fortunately for us the bank called and thought there was fraud going on and they released her account. My phone, they'd been calling me, but it was at the hotel. But we got our fabric. We were humbled I guess you could say.

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<sup>187</sup> Emde, Ribbon work documentary project, life history interview.

Emde, and other Osages we have had the opportunity to work with, has been so generous with her knowledge and experiences. As an elder in our community, Emde’s understanding about the complexities of contemporary American Indian experiences are entangled with her experiences as a ribbon worker. When we were discussing the meanings of colors within ribbon work and the desire many non-Osages express about colors as symbols for various ideas, she said, “you know, yes, that used to be the case, but those colors, as our understandings and practices have changed, so have those meanings.”<sup>188</sup> As we continued our discussion, she remarked, “Hey, I did a Seattle Seahawks suit last year and it’s not any less Osage.”<sup>189</sup>



Figures 5.20-5.21. Examples of Emde’s ribbon work.

Winter replied, “I think that’s true not only in ribbon work, but for so many things in our culture. The original meaning is lost, but we have adapted, we’ve adapted it to suit our needs for today. That’s what people have done for thousands of years ...even though that very specific meaning

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<sup>188</sup> Emde.

<sup>189</sup> Emde.

is not there, that general meaning is still alive and well, and as you [Janet] said, it just symbolizes more about bringing us together as one people under the arbor.”<sup>190</sup>

Just as the In-lon-schka brings Osages together as an important space for nation-building, it is our hope that this ribbon work documentary project can bring people together. Janet was one of many ribbon workers and community members we have interviewed. The ribbon work documentary project is an ongoing project that will examine the historical and ongoing entanglements of Osage ribbon work, as well as how it is incorporated into the works of Osage contemporary artists. Like my grandmother, ribbon work is the thread that has woven its way throughout my career. As I look to future research projects and continue the work started within this dissertation, ribbon work will certainly be a lifelong project.



Figure 5.22. Painting by Yatika Fields (2018), inspired by the work of Georgeann Robinson, commissioned by the author.

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<sup>190</sup> Emde.

## CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

In 2017, I attended the Southwestern Association for Indian Arts (SWAIA) market, which is held annually in Santa Fe. The “Indian market” as it is often called is a critical space for many American Indian artists who make a significant portion of their annual income in this one weekend. As an ethnographer, I was interested in learning about how different Osage artists view the market and how it shapes their art practice. However, I was also conscious of the pressure many artists feel within the space of the market, and I was cognizant of the economic stakes at hand. With this in mind, I prioritized their interactions with collectors by stepping aside if someone approached. I also spent some time booth sitting for a number of artists, so they could take coffee and bathroom breaks. SWAIA Market—just as other spaces—has its share of entanglements and limitations, however, as I was walking the streets, surrounded by Spanish colonial architecture, and seeing the awesome works of diverse American Indian artists from all over North America, the resilience and creativity of American Indian peoples filled my visual field, and a palpable sense of pride and hope filled the Plaza.

As I was heading over to the Santa Fe Community Convention Center for the SWAIA preview, I received a text message from my cousin, Addie. Her eleven-year-old daughter, Anya, who had entered a silkscreen into the show, had received a ribbon. Addie told me where to find them in the crowded ballroom, and I headed straight to them when I arrived. Before we could even say our hellos, Anya motioned for us to follow her. Clearly, she couldn’t wait to show off her prize. I was so proud of her, and I told her that I would be at she and her mother’s booth when the market opened. This was Anya’s first market, and I wanted to have the honor of being her first sale. Before we parted ways, Anya reminded me that the market opened at 7:00 am, and I needed to be there early.

The first morning of SWAIA, artists begin setting up their booths between 4:00 and 6:00 am. Some of the more established artists have lines of people waiting at their booths before the market opens at 7:00 am. In fact, some collectors will pay people to hold their place in line, so they can be first without actually having to wait in line themselves. That morning, my cell phone started ringing at 4:45, and when I answered it, Anya was on the other end. "Hello," I grumbled. "Hi auntie, it's Anya, I just wanted to make sure you were up. Don't forget you need to get here early so you can be my first sale!" she said with a youthful exuberance that immediately quelled my irritation. "Okay, sister," I said as I crawled out of bed, "I'm up, don't worry, I'll be there."

After spending some time catching up on emails and caffeinating, I got ready and realized I was going to be cutting it close. I drove as near as I could to the plaza and paid a ridiculous amount to park close. I awkwardly jogged to their booth and arrived just as they opened. The night before, my cousin and I had discussed me getting the family rate of \$50 for her print. Anya was not having it. "That will be \$100," she said with a smirk. "Seriously?!" I asked jokingly. "Yep," she replied, "this won a ribbon, and I know it is worth it." Her mom and I laughed, and as her mom started to plead with her, I stopped her and said, "No, it's good that she knows the value of her work and she is confident enough to demand its worth."

I walked around for a couple of hours and returned to their booth to visit. Anya had sold three more of her prints. As Addie and I visited, she grabbed one of her prints and excused herself to go and make a trade. "Where are you going?" asked her mom. "The booth right next to Uncle Dante's," she replied. "I want to see if Cara will trade me for one of her photographs of the girl boxing." I looked at Addie and said, "you're raising one badass little Wah-zha-zhi!" A few minutes later, Anya returned from Cara Romero's booth with her trade. I booth-sat for a few minutes while Addie went over to talk to Cara. When she returned, she explained that Cara was excited to support a young artist, and how impressed she was with Anya's confidence. As we continued talking, I said to

my cousin, “Can you imagine if you had that kind of self-assurance when you were her age? She’s going to change the world.”



Figure 6.1. Author and Anya Roanhorse at 2017 SWAIA Market.

In *Everything You Know About Indians is Wrong*, Paul Chaat Smith challenges us to acknowledge the complexity that is reflected in American Indian experiences and to find new avenues for investigation. He argues, “simply reversing the bogus dichotomies doesn’t get us anywhere. The project isn’t about the good guys being bad, and bad guys being good, but about finding new ways of seeing and thinking about the history that is all around us.”<sup>1</sup> Agreeing with Chaat Smith, I have worked to apply this challenge throughout my research and in writing this dissertation. Drawing on the concept of colonial entanglement, my examination of the interventions contemporary Osage

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<sup>1</sup> Smith, *Everything You Know about Indians Is Wrong*, 2009, 75.

artists are making within mainstream museums disrupts the false binaries that all too often define our understandings and expectations of Indigenous peoples.

Visual representations play an important role in shaping our experiences and our understandings of American Indians, and these representations are all too often constructed and defined by non-Indian peoples in popular culture, museums, and the academy. Through my research, I came to understand the ways that popular representations and museum representations are deeply entangled with one another and in many cases are co-constitutive. American Indian artists are certainly aware of these entanglements and draw on them within their work to create expressions of self-representation. The visual narratives created by Osage and other American Indian artists challenge mainstream understandings of our communities. Although these self-representations are expressions of individuals, they speak to broader issues. By foregrounding the individuality of these expressions, mainstream museums can utilize contemporary art as an incredibly effective means for presenting unfiltered narratives and for displaying the diversity and multiplicity of American Indian experiences.

In order to better understand the role of creative self-representations, this dissertation examined the ways Osage artists are participating in this work at three museums: the Denver Art Museum, the Field Museum, and the Sam Noble Museum. It also explored the work that a number of Osage artists are doing in public spaces. Paying close attention to the particularities of each institution, I found that in many cases, the entanglements—whether individual or institutional—can actually provide spaces for interesting conversations. For example, the historical and ongoing legacy of the non-Indian hobbyist movement within American Indian art and material culture is certainly a space that needs deeper reflection. During my fieldwork, I was able to build some networks of people within the hobbyist community and better understand the multiplicity and diversity of this group,

which I had characterized in a very narrow way prior to my research. I hope that my work with these folks within my dissertation will lead to some fruitful and thought-provoking research in the future.

My research with hobbyists was not an easy task and was a difficult topic for me to approach at first. However, through a better understanding of my Grandma Georgeann Robinson's legacy and the thoughtful scholarship of Beatrice Medicine, I pushed myself to engage in this endeavor through a methodology of generosity. The idea of approaching research with generosity also speaks to the ways that scholars within American Indian and Indigenous studies and museums are quick to critique one another's work in ways that recognize only the limitations and not the possibilities. We are all guilty of this, and just as the diversity of American Indian art allows access by a broader audience, so too can a diversity of scholarship.

The localized contexts of each institutions in this dissertation allowed for an examination of the unique aspects of collaborative work within art and natural history museums. DAM's strong legacy of collaborative work has built a foundation upon which they have formed a highly successful artist-in-residence program. DAM curators draw on these resources in the exhibitions they create. The Field Museum as an institution has an incredibly complex and captivating history that has the ability to push audiences to wrestle with their own assumptions about American Indians and the collection of art and material culture. Their work with contemporary artists brings their holdings of historic objects into conversation with the experiences of American Indians today, and particularly those living in urban areas like Chicago. The Sam Noble Museum benefits from its geographic proximity to the Osage and other American Indian nations, while the curator, Dan Swan, has built sustained collaborative relationships with these communities over the past several decades.

The push for decolonizing museums and the academy is absurd in a certain sense because both are inherently colonial institutions. However, it is possible to create space within these institutions for more relevant and empowering representations controlled by Indigenous peoples.

This work is not singular, and a diversity of strategies are needed in order to create space for self-representations. My contribution to this ongoing project will draw on my own entanglements and experiences and utilize the methodologies of collaboration, generosity, and humor in order to disrupt existing expectations and power relations to create space for my children and future generations of Osages.

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