

School for Advanced Research
Global Indigenous Politics Series

James F. Brooks
General Editor

No Deal!

Indigenous Arts
and the Politics of Possession

Edited by Tressa Berman



**SAR
PRESS**

School for Advanced Research Press
Santa Fe

School for Advanced Research Press
Post Office Box 2188
Santa Fe, New Mexico 87504-2188
sarpress.sarweb.org

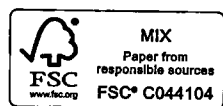
Managing Editor: Lisa Pacheco
Editorial Assistant: Ellen Goldberg
Designer and Production Manager: Cynthia Dyer
Manuscript Editor: Merryll Sloane
Proofreader: Margaret Moore Booker
Indexer: Catherine Fox
Printer: Cushing Malloy

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

No deal! : indigenous arts and the politics of possession / edited by Tressa Berman.
p. cm. — (Global indigenous politics series)
Includes bibliographical references and index.
ISBN 978-1-934691-47-2 (alk. paper)
1. Indian art—North America. 2. Art, Aboriginal Australian. 3. Appropriation (Art)
4. Possession (Law) I. Berman, Tressa Lynn.
E98.A7N6 2012
704.03'97—dc23

2012022267

© 2012 by the School for Advanced Research. All rights reserved.
Manufactured in the United States of America.
Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 2012022267
International Standard Book Number: 978-1-934691-47-2
First edition 2012.



Cover illustration: Jennifer Herd, *No Deal*, 2004. Courtesy of the artist.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are respectfully advised that photographs of deceased persons as well as images of their work appear in this book, and that this may cause distress.

The School for Advanced Research on the Human Experience (SAR) promotes the furthering of scholarship on—and public understanding of—human culture, behavior, and evolution. SAR Press publishes cutting-edge scholarly and general-interest books that encourage critical thinking and present new perspectives on topics of interest to all humans. Contributions by authors reflect their own opinions and viewpoints and do not necessarily express the opinions of SAR Press.

*For Minnie,
In memoriam*

Contents

	List of Illustrations	ix
	Acknowledgments	x
	Introduction: Situating Indigenous Arts and the Politics of Possession Tressa Berman	xii
<i>Part 1</i>	<i>Aesthetics and Meanings</i>	
1.	(Art)Writing: A New Cultural Frame for Native American Art Lea S. McChesney	2
2.	Whose Photographs? Native American Images on the Internet Nancy J. Parezo	32
3.	Revisiting an Inuit Perspective: Baker Lake Sculpture Marie Bouchard	54
4.	Literate Savages: Central Desert Painting as Writing Jennifer Biddle	72
<i>Part 2</i>	<i>Possession and Identity</i>	
5.	Bad Aboriginal Art Eric Michaels	88
6.	The Problematic of the Signature: Indigenous Arts and the Politics of Possession Tressa Berman	109
7.	Up for Grabs: Assessing the Consequences of Sustained Appropriations of Navajo Weavers' Patterns Kathy M'Closkey	128

Part 3 Public Reception

8.	Stop Sign at the Cultural Crossroads: Public Art at the University of New Mexico Suzanne Newman Fricke	156
9.	Censorship from Below: Aboriginal Art in Australian Museums Fred Myers	174
10.	"Silly Little Things": Framing Global Self-Appropriations in Native Arts Nancy Marie Mithlo	188
11.	"Cultural Copy": Visual Conversations on Indigenous Art and Cultural Appropriation Tressa Berman with Marco Centin	206
	About the Contributors	220
	References	223
	Index	250

Illustrations

Figures

1.1	Nampeyo, or Harmless Snake	13
1.2	Nampeyo family genealogy in <i>Seven Families in Pueblo Pottery</i>	16
1.3	Nampeyo family genealogy in <i>Fourteen Families in Pueblo Pottery</i>	17
2.1	"American Indian Tribes: Apache"	36
2.2	"Pre-Ball Game Dance, 1888"	42
2.3	"Zuni Silversmith inside an Adobe House Making a Squash Blossom Necklace, Zuni, 1898"	43
3.1	<i>A Mother Jigging for Food</i>	66
5.1	Dreamings painted on Yuendumu school doors	97
7.1	Teec Nos Pos and Two Grey Hills knockoffs	137
7.2	Mary John and Darcy displaying Mary's Yei rug	139
7.3	Crownpoint, New Mexico, rug auction	142
7.4	Grace Joe	149
8.1	<i>Cultural Crossroads</i>	157
8.2	<i>Cultural Crossroads</i> maquette	159
9.1	The Art-Culture System	183

Table

2.1	Sample Internet Search Results by Search Terms	34
-----	--	----

Plates

Color plates follow p. 108

1	<i>Indian Country Today</i>
2	Thirtieth-anniversary issue of <i>American Indian Art Magazine</i>
3	Twentieth-anniversary issue of <i>American Indian Art Magazine</i>
4	Sikyatki Polychrome bowl
5	Hano Polychrome (Sikyatki Revival) bowl
6	<i>Seed Dreaming</i>
7	<i>Imposter Rollcall</i>
8	<i>The Makings</i>
9	<i>YAM Dreaming, I AM Dreaming</i>
10	Loretta Benally
11	Navajo knockoff
12	<i>Border Crossing</i>
13	<i>Kirrpinga</i>
14	<i>Wirulynga</i>
15	Lori Blondeau performing <i>States of Grace</i>
16	Shelley Niro and Ryan Rice
17	<i>Biblica Australis</i>

10 "Silly Little Things"

Framing Global Self-Appropriations in Native Arts

Nancy Marie Mithlo

Focusing on self-generated curation projects at the Venice Biennale over three project periods, Mithlo examines the public reception of Native American art through processes of inclusion, boundary making, marking, and appropriation. Focusing on international events, such as the Venice Biennale, this chapter shows how the articulation of core differential value systems gives rise to approaches that challenge current notions of hybridity by situating Native American nationalism within the context of sovereignty. This key factor of Native nationhood defines it as distinct from other "ethnic art" forms, especially in relation to national pavilions that aim to showcase nationhood through art.

The other seems to preserve an elusive quality; he or she never yields completely to incorporation within the framework of the familiar. (Corbey 1995:72)

I don't recall exactly when word reached me about the slur. It could have been after midnight on the Grand Canal, waiting for the vaporetto. It might have been even later in the shared apartment in the heart of Venice, at the round wooden table where rowdy conversations were traded over candlelight with wine and cigarettes. Likely though, it was already morning and I heard about it over coffee. Whenever the news arrived, all I know is that my senses were jarred by the impact. It was not so much shock as a deep disappointment that registered. What was the guy thinking after all? A respected Native American writer, asking the artist—get this—at the nicest Biennale opening party our exhibit group could ever hope to attend: "How was your silly little thing?" Not "Congratulations on your exhibit," or "How did you manage to find funding to travel to Italy?" or even, for many of us, "How did you talk

yourself into this private soiree without an invitation?" but rather "How was that silly little thing of yours?" This comment sent me back to thinking how, years before, after our art collective's first Venice Biennale exhibit in 1999, an equally esteemed Native arts curator had challenged us by asking, "Who let you go?"—as if her permission were required. After the exhibit came down, she casually tossed "How was that thing of yours?" during a public opening at her museum.

Don't get me wrong, I'm not simply oversensitive and insecure. Sure, there are a few sour people in any organization and we all have our off days. But these internal challenges to the legitimacy of clearly non-institutional, collective, and fairly subversive arts actions on the global stage, consistently aimed and delivered from the safety of post-imperial arts machineries, got me thinking. Can indigeneity exist simultaneously with institutionalization? What if my own politically aware and collectively attuned organizations and colleagues suddenly became solvent, established, you know, mainstream—could we maintain our healthy disrespect of the power relations inherent in a bureaucratic structure? Would we become one of them? Most minority professionals have encountered these moments of self-doubt—are they selling out or still part of the cause? Scholar Michael Harris aptly terms this quandary "signifying" or "shining" (2003:6). "Signifying" indicates a healthy dose of self-knowledge as you incorporate the mandates of the mainstream. "Shining" means a sellout, an Uncle Tom, or, in the Native American context, an "apple" or even an "Uncle Tomahawk." (Thank goodness I've never actually heard these terms used in practice; I think they mainly exist today in e-mail correspondence.)

I'm a big believer in the power of institutions to make major contributions to social justice, education, the environment, and any number of fields pursuing progressive aims. Although my own participation in international exhibitions has been largely through non-institutional means, I have successfully partnered in these endeavors with large, majority-run museums and educational institutions. In 2003 the Indigenous Arts Action Alliance (IA3), whose activities I chronicle here, teamed up with the Smithsonian's National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI) to showcase the work of artists Shelley Niro and Sherwin Bitsui at the Venice Biennale. The IA3 desired the NMAI's support, the NMAI desired the IA3's visibility. It was largely a mutually beneficial arrangement. Yet even in such positive interactions with bureaucratic entities, a translation of sorts must occur between an organization informed by a hierarchical arrangement of power with supervisory control and an organization that openly strives to make decisions by consensus and that follows a more horizontal mode of leadership where power is diffuse. These mechanisms of arts production have the ability to either transform Indigenous participation in

the arts or neutralize Indigenous knowledge. (By "Indigenous knowledge," I mean the acts of tribal or pan-tribal entities striving to emulate the protocols, values, and beliefs of their nations in accord with the teachings and behaviors of individuals recognized as leaders of their communities.)

By the year 2007, remarkably, a Native American art presence was a standard feature of the Venice Biennale, the oldest international arts exhibition and, some would argue, the most prestigious. This began in 1995, when Edward Poitras represented the Canadian pavilion, with Gerald McMaster curating; in 1997, Brenda Croft, Hetti Perkins, and Victoria Lynn co-curated artists Emily Kame Kngwarreye, Yvonne Koolmatrie, and Judy Watson at the Australian pavilion. The year 1999 marked the first exhibit sponsored by the Native American Arts Alliance (later renamed the Indigenous Arts Action Alliance) with artists Harry Fonseca, Bob Haozous, Jaune Quick-to-See Smith, Kay WalkingStick, Frank LaPena, and Richard Ray Whitman and poet Simon Ortiz participating. In 2001, IA3 returned with artists Bob Haozous, Gabe Shaw, and Richard Ray Whitman and poet Sherwin Bitsui. In 2003, the IA3 featured the work of Shelley Niro and Sherwin Bitsui at the University of Venice with the Smithsonian's NMAI hosting the opening events. In 2005, the NMAI exhibited the work of James Luna with no IA3 participation. And in 2007, the Canadian-based arts collective the Requickening Project, in collaboration with IA3, exhibited Lori Blondeau and Shelley Niro at the University of Venice with myself and Ryan Rice as co-curators and Elisabetta Frasca directing (plates 15 and 16). The NMAI chose artist Edgar Heap of Birds as its exhibiting artist, with Truman Lowe and Kathleen Ash-Milby as co-curators. The year 2007 marked the first time that the collective efforts I have been part of since 1999 did not receive acknowledgment by the Venice Biennale as a parallel or officially recognized and included exhibit, although we did apply for this recognition. The NMAI did receive this official inclusion in 2007.

Thus, the IA3 collective, inspired by our Indigenous colleagues in 1995 and 1997, pioneered the first solely American Indigenous representation at the Venice Biennale in 1999, co-sponsored and then lent the exhibit to the Smithsonian, and the Smithsonian Institution ultimately gained recognition alone by 2007. What is the significance of these institutional and non-institutional representations? What can be made of these inclusions and exclusions, of these challenges to the legitimacy of non-institutional endeavors? Obviously, conflicting agendas and practices are at play as contemporary Native American arts make their way into mainstream international settings.

While the factor of commercialization continues to vex the reception of Native American arts as fine arts in the United States and Canada, the variable of prestige informs the equation in international contexts. The Biennial circuit

(Venice, São Paulo, Sydney, Johannesburg, Kassel, Dakar) is all about presence—who can manage to exhibit, who can manage to attend. As the presence of Native American arts in sites like Venice continues to grow, attendance and therefore prestige alone do not suffice; an analysis is called for. No longer can simply showing up count for much if a contemporary Native American presence in international arts contexts is not conceptualized in light of other frameworks, whether they adhere to or reject those standards.

I chose to start this chapter with the "silly little things" anecdotes—insults from inside the contemporary American Indian art scene—in order to talk about intent and institutionalization in the arts. By institutionalization, I reference the bureaucratization that results from the incorporation, formalization, and legitimization of previously maligned and exiled arts communities. Is the price of inclusion actually alienation from Indigenous values? My aim here is to problematize the ways in which appropriations are typically cast as majority rule versus minority presence rather than the more complex ways in which imposed power structures are internalized by the minority participants themselves.

My analysis examines the processes of inclusion, boundary marking, and appropriation as they emerge within Native arts contexts. Elsewhere, I have referenced these dichotomous ideologies as forms of "internal colonization," yet equally viable are constructs of liberation via the articulation of core differential value systems (Mithlo 2003). This articulation can occur in many ways, but I'll be examining two approaches: inclusion into the mainstream and, alternately, appropriation of the mainstream's faults, that is, the incorporation and reworking of damaged images and portrayals of Natives by non-Natives. (This redemptive strategy has been the focus of much of my work since the late 1990s, and the reader will likely get the sense that I favor this perspective.)

Both approaches are tethered unabashedly to enduring and currently unfashionable structuralist principles. Cultural hybridity as a postcolonial concept may function well for other ethnicities, but the nationalism inherent in Native American political sovereignty effectively prevents this collapsing of categories into trendy talk of cultural pluralism or global democratization. I realize my reliance on the seemingly static categories of inclusion and exclusion is a contentious position in a globalized world, so let me also note that, in a Native American context, these seemingly inert mental categories also have realist and materialist consequences. Not only does Native American citizenship imply specific rights and responsibilities, but the federal government itself helps frame the conception of Native arts via institutions such as the Smithsonian. I will examine the ideology of nationalism that frames such seminal projects as the Smithsonian's NMAI, a federal institution.

My scholarship looks at the shift in conversation from one of colonial control and commercialization to one of Indigenous competition over resources and the varying internal methodologies and value systems at play. I am interested in what happens when the equation is less about powerful, elite non-Natives censoring Native people to one where Native elites can (and do) censor non-Natives and even each other. In the broadest sense, I'm asking what it means when minorities enter the mainstream. I will propose in this chapter a model of Indigenous arts curation born of the tribal cultural center movement in the 1970s and tested at the Venice Biennale since 1997. What I suggest is that Indigenous curation, like Indigenous arts, is less about a product and more about a process, less about content and more about intent. The process of getting to the Venice Biennale is complex, layered, and diffuse and includes such variables as funding, location, publicity, management, and coordination. While an institutional structure might divide these functions among several dozen staff members, in a smaller organization, these activities are managed by a handful of individuals who learn these tasks in the doing of the show. It is this internal transformation that characterizes the aims of the Indigenous curation I describe here.

And just what is this intent? The Requickening Project dealt with primarily Indigenous experiences, which were cast as general human experiences of life, death, and survival. "Requickening" chose as its audience Indigenous scholars, students, fellow minority artist pavilions, and Venetian academics. Edgar Heap of Birds's 2007 Venice Biennale exhibit, *Most Serene Republics*, engaged Native American history with the purpose of including established international artists. The desired audience was the prestigious international arts circuit. Both exhibit teams were deeply invested in seeing the wisdom of Native peoples showcased in an international setting, but to what ends—self-knowledge or knowledge of self by others?

I believe the exposure of key conceptual differences in Native American exhibition practices, particularly aspects of audience and institutionalization, will lead ultimately to the increased legitimacy of contemporary Native American art theories in all their complexities. Until these segmentations, these unspoken boundaries, are communicated, the field will remain forever caught in the celebratory mode of American Indians as showcases of exoticism alone. Recognition of our internal differences is a necessary precursor to the movement beyond objectified and colonized victims to empowered postcolonial subjects. A final disclosure: my complicated involvements in the two exhibition endeavors showcased here lend an insider's perspective to the curatorial projects profiled—which both enhances and potentially biases the interpretation. It can be no other way, but I'll be as transparent as possible about my positioning.

A Binding Dichotomy

Some productive insight into the process of exhibiting in international fine arts contexts is available by examining the phenomenon of historic world's fairs. The scholarship on this topic is fairly rich and diverse (Benedict 1983; Breckenridge 1989; Gold 2005; Hinsley 1991; Rydell and Carr 1993), yet the standard narratives of imperialism, progress, and modernization are similar. These large exhibitions, historically staged by colonial powers and economic interests from the mid-nineteenth century until the 1930s, featured narratives of scientific progress, mechanical wonders, and consumer goods in tandem with the display of exotic primitives from conquered lands (see Harper 2001; Holmes 2007; Rony 1996). The unilinear progress from "primitive" peoples to the "civilized" nations of the world was intended as a didactic exercise, justifying colonialist wars, mass genocides, and the appropriation of human bodies, natural resources, and Indigenous knowledges under the aegis of natural progression via the construct of evolution. International arts exhibits were not immune to the nationalistic posturing of these more scientifically themed presentations, but their narratives typically chronicled the apex of those celebrated civilizations alone rather than employing the compare-and-contrast model inherent in world's fairs.

The Venice Biennale, in particular, has a history of featuring Italian mastery in concert with international arts developments. The use of permanent national pavilion buildings (the main Italian pavilion is flanked by those of other "developed" countries) attests to this standard exhibition technique, which encourages an invited-to-dinner type of exhibition style. For those artists chosen to officially participate as part of the Biennale di Venezia, either as an exhibiting artist in a national pavilion or in a recognized, parallel exhibit with Biennale sanction, this methodology appears to be an inclusive model of participation among equals. This was certainly the positioning desired by the Native arts organization I helped to establish, the IA3.

The Biennale as perceived by the IA3 in 1999 represented the primary site of a global arts stage. Our nonprofit organization petitioned and was accepted by the Venice Biennale offices for the exhibition "Ceremonial" at San Stae in 1999, marking the first contemporary Native American arts exhibition in the Biennale's hundred-year history curated and sponsored by a Native American group. Inclusion as a parallel exhibit indicated a recognition of sovereign political status for our small grassroots organization. Certainly, the past legacy of Native Americans as spectacle still existed in the collective memory of Venetians and Native participants alike; addressing this history, however, was not a primary concern of this particular initiative. Originating in the Indian arts market-saturated region of Santa Fe, New Mexico, our art

collective had as its mission "to allow Native artists the opportunity to present their work on an international stage outside of market constraints." Thus, while originating from a legacy of past exploitation (notably, Buffalo Bill's Wild West show, discussed below), the model of sovereign inclusion overrode the conquering narratives of the past. Native arts were therefore liberated by the appropriation of a vehicle for colonialism (the world's fairs and, by association, arts biennials) for more progressive ends (escape from commercialism). While the product (American Indians in Venice) may appear as a sign of assimilation, the process and intent were rich with ulterior aims.

Inclusion in the Biennale could conceivably be interpreted as assimilationist in character if the mandate of the Indigenous organizers was total acceptance by the mainstream. This analysis would be congruent with the historic model of international exhibitions, which sought what anthropologist Raymond Corbey terms "neutralization" of the exotic Other in order to "mediate the basic contradictions between the two perceived states of mankind":

One aspect of these spectacles, pictures and narratives was that they neutralized the cognitive dissonance and threat to Western middle-class identity constituted by the baffling cultural difference of new peoples. Colonial others were incorporated narratively. In a mise-en-intrigue, they were assigned their roles in the stories told by museum exhibitions, world's fairs, and colonial postcards. They were cast as contemporary ancestors, receivers of true civilization and true religion. The radical difference of the other was made sense of and thus warded off by a narrative discordant concordance between "civilized" and "savage." (1995:72)

We must consider what the difference is between inclusion as neutralization (historic world's fairs) and inclusion as a political act of sovereignty (IA3). In both instances, Native peoples' participation is at the discretion of the organizers. Of course, contemporary participation does not regulate the bodies of Native participants as objects of display the way historic exhibits did, yet regulation does indeed occur in other aspects, such as where and when participants may stage their art. Our collective has historically prided itself on not objecting to the mandates of the Venetian Biennale offices, seeing the Venetian people as sovereign entities and ourselves as their guests. This perspective was not universally accepted, however, even within our collective. At times, invited artists have objected to the level of participation our Venetian collaborators have desired, the baffling array of regulations on where one may post publicity, and how the Biennale chooses which exhibits will be accepted for inclusion.

Exhibiting in Venice is extremely challenging, materially and socially.

Venice is an island, and a fragile island at that. Every product must be brought in by boat; every historic building must be protected from destruction. Simply hanging art on walls is often a major endeavor involving permits, contractors, and subcontractors. The social landscape of Venice demands equal attention. It is a tourist destination, and visitors may assume that the city is theirs for hire, that American values of consumerism are at play above all else. This is simply not the case, as ancient systems of balance, of structure, of complementarity are constantly being negotiated in daily interactions. Business is not simply business, but a social engagement between collaborators invested in a joint project. Like most social mandates, these systems are rarely articulated, so unless one is paying careful attention, the subtleties may not be apparent. Fortunately, I have had patient teachers over the years and have learned when to break for snacks and drinks at the local bar, when to stop negotiating over details, and when to simply trust that the process will work, even in my absence. Is this assimilation or cultural respect?

Incorporation, Assimilation, or Sovereignty?

To return to Corbey's analysis, how do global institutions now interact with the former objects of display as contemporaneous actors? The movement between the articulation of difference and the minimization of cultural specificity continues to hold special resonance in the reception of Native American arts. The perceived poles of ghettoization (explicit cultural reference, or *discordance*, in Corbey's terms) and assimilation (denial of cultural identity, or *concordance*, in Corbey's terms) continue to be rehashed not only in contemporary Native American fine arts reception, but also in Native American curatorial practices.

As a witness to the organization of many Native arts symposiums over the years, it is clear to me that current curatorial practices fall along a continuum between these two opposing poles of reference—a desire for inclusion in majority fine arts institutions, on one hand, and an embrace of Indigenous references and knowledges, on the other. For example, "Museums and Native Knowledges" at Arizona State University in 2006 examined "Native American Knowledge Systems and their contribution to curatorial practices and the development of tribal museums as well as changing ideologies within mainstream museums," while in 2005 the NMAI's conference "Vision, Space, Desire: Global Perspectives and Cultural Hybridity" attempted to "explore artistic and curatorial practices in relation to the ever-changing realities of the contemporary art world." While an obvious interpretation of these diverse positions might be to segment the opposing orientations into a rural-urban, regional-national, community scholar-academic scholar, small tribal center-large

bureaucracy divide, I don't believe these binaries are entirely accurate. Tribal cultural centers are often run by professionally trained staff, tribal members often move between rural home communities and cities, national and international projects take pains to contract community experts as advisers.

Considering a different approach for a moment, can we imagine a similar conflicted orientation to, say, tribal colleges versus elite colleges, tribal political organizations versus national pan-tribal entities? I don't sense that these apparent divides appear as insurmountable choices Native Americans face today, but I see them as contemporaneous manifestations of diverse perspectives, needs, and contexts. Why then do Native arts dialogues seem to be frozen in a binding dichotomy of what constitutes proper aims in international arts contexts—are we seeking inclusion as “artists first, Indians second,” or do we emphasize our Indigenous perspective? Could it be that the field is new enough that we feel obligated to choose? Is it that the arts hold some type of special, precious connotations that make their debates inextricably tied to notions of power, class, and consumerism that education and politics lack?

I suggest that the arts do occupy a unique position in global Indigenous dialogues, precisely for the historic reasons cited above (world's fairs, evolutionary theory). This is not to say that these qualifications do not also have resonance for other aspects of contemporary Native American lives, but that their poignancy is felt in unique ways that are directly tied to historic precedents of display, entertainment, and, ultimately, trauma. The gaps that have been established since the 1860s, which define how Native peoples are received in these globalized and institutionalized contexts, have created a platform—in Corbey's words, a “plot”—that permeates how current subject positions are received. My analysis finds congruence with Corbey's conclusion that these narratives are inescapable and cannot simply be erased: “The resultant *concordance* will never be complete; the attempt to harmonize is ultimately bound to fail. For as the plot develops, the initial *discordance* between civilized and primitive, white and black, Christian and heathen, is slowly, but never totally overcome.... The other seems to preserve an elusive quality; he or she never yields completely to incorporation within the framework of the familiar, stubbornly resisting a textualizing closure of spontaneous experience, of fascination, of wonder” (Corbey 1995:72, emphases added). Yet, does this somewhat dire conclusion preclude other uses of these narratives, other formulations of the discordance? Specifically, can empowerment be enacted even in circumstances that appear to be defined by the contours of colonialism?

Indigenous studies scholar Jane Lydon (2005) mobilizes the colonial gaze of photography to discover how Aboriginal peoples spoke through the intended conventions of evolutionary chronicles by the appropriation of western

visual typologies. In a striking example, she dissects a photograph and a resulting line drawing of an Aboriginal man, Garrak-coonum (Timothy is his western name), to demonstrate the Aboriginal appropriation of white forms to communicate with whites. Garrak-coonum's photograph, in which he is posed in a European suit holding a Bible, was taken in 1866 by Charles Walter at Coranderrk Station, Victoria. The photograph was displayed with similar portraits of the Kulin tribe and was intended to be seen as evidence of racial typologies at the Melbourne Intercolonial Exhibition of 1866, one of the early world's fairs.

In an act that Lydon describes as a type of transformation, Garrak-coonum composed a line drawing in which he recreated this same photo portrait below a traditionally rendered hunting and ceremonial scene. In addition to sketching himself as the white photographer saw him—in a suit clutching a Bible—he also utilized his western name, Timothy, as his signature. In this early instance, straight from the era of world's fairs, photography was deployed as a way to express a new self-consciousness and to reflect on the future (Lydon 2005:106–121). Importantly, however, the type of photograph (the portrait, the props, the half facial position, the averted gaze that configure this as a western representation), this visual narrative style (Corbey's “plot” in the narrative of evolution), is preserved and presented alongside more traditional Indigenous representations (hunting and ceremonial pursuits). The drawing thus speaks two languages simultaneously through two visual registers.

Garrak-coonum, as a cultural broker of the mid-nineteenth century, chose to employ a type of communication that would find congruence with the white spectator, the recipient of the drawing. Does this appropriation of colonial plots and narratives indicate sovereignty or assimilation? For Lydon and many other current visual theorists (Fatimah Rony on world's fairs and ethnographic film, for example), the selective use of colonialist narratives, whether they be conventional representations, counter-narratives, or simply participation in the language of the colonial order (international arts exhibitions), indicates agency, not victimhood. How can this theoretical perspective inform interpretations of a Native presence in international arts contexts, given what I perceive as the inescapable plot narrative of discordance and enduring dichotomization?

The Burden of Bureaucracy

Let us move from this more general discussion of inclusions, exclusions, and appropriations of mainstream mandates to consider the case study of Indigenous representation at the 2007 Venice Biennale. Art exhibits are complex

endeavors with funders, organizers, directors, artists, and curators; international art exhibits are exponentially more complex with an equal number of participants from the host country. Although it may be a disservice not to include all parties, due to the brevity of this analysis, I will focus primarily on the artists and their publicly available work, dialogues, and exhibit statements. It is important also to note that the 2007 Biennale curator, Robert Storr, issued a statement describing his exhibit aims as follows: "Among the considerations raised by the work will be the fragility of culture in violent times. Another will be the role of art in the face of death" (Storr 2006). Both exhibits described below had this general curatorial direction.

Above, I described two exhibit strategies: inclusion into the mainstream and the appropriation of the mainstream's faults (the incorporation and reworking of damaged images and portrayals of Natives by non-Natives). The redemptive strategy was openly adopted by the artists of the Requickening Project (Lori Blondeau and Shelley Niro), both in content and intent. The inclusion strategy was evident in the efforts of the artist Edgar Heap of Birds, representing the Smithsonian's NMAI with the exhibit *Most Serene Republics*. The curatorial statement for *Most Serene Republics* by Lowe and Ash-Milby (2007) describes two installations:

The exhibition Most Serene Republics refers to Heap of Birds's interest in the creation of republics or nation-states through acts of aggression, displacement, or replacement of populations and cultures.... Two temporary public installations of signage seek to engage Venetians, passing tourists, and members of the international art community who temporarily occupy this unique place, steeped in its multifaceted history....

The first installation is in the Giardini Reali near Piazza San Marco... of 8 signs [and] examines and deconstructs elements of Venetian history, including the Fourth Crusade, stolen plunder, and Venetian achievements, both artistic and nautical. Yellow borders on the signs underscore parallels between the first "ghetto" established in Venice to contain and control the Jewish population and Indian reservations created to contain and control Native people. This work is both an examination of the past and a critical dialogue about present-day global conflict and "crusades."

The second installation... along the Viale Garibaldi... pays homage to the Native actors/warriors who traveled to Venice and other European cities as part of Wild West shows in the 1880s while simultaneously commenting on their displacement both from and within their own country. Heap of Birds's choice of this location—a space with both symbolic and literal reference to the end of Venetian independence and existence as a sovereign entity—adds further depth and resonance to the memory of these events. The words "HONOR" and "RAMMENTARE" repeat in

a fugue of 16 signs, reciting the names of Native "Show Indians" who perished during 19th-century European tours.

Most Serene Republics reexamines the past while questioning our complicity in events of the present.

It is not entirely clear who the "our" is in the reference to "our complicity in events of the present," but one gathers that this is a universalist message regarding all of humanity. The *Most Serene Republics* exhibit, like the NMAI's 2005 "Vision, Space, Desire" conference, assertively looked to engage "members of the international art community" as a primary audience. In support of this outwardly directed goal, as a component of the exhibit, a public dialogue titled "This Must Be the Place" was hosted by the NMAI with noted international artists Sam Durant of Los Angeles and Steve McQueen of London; the discussion was moderated by Lucy Lippard of Galisteo, New Mexico. This discussion neglected to include any Native American artists or intellectuals as participants with Heap of Birds, although the 1995 Canadian pavilion commissioner, Gerald McMaster, and NMAI director C. W. Richard West Jr. delivered opening remarks.

The evocation of Buffalo Bill's Wild West (a logical outgrowth of the world's fairs phenomenon) was a subject for Edgar Heap of Birds's 2007 NMAI exhibit as it was for Edward Poitras's 1995 Biennale exhibition for the Canadian pavilion. Clearly the salience of Native Americans in Venice as performers has an enduring resonance with contemporary Indigenous artists. Buffalo Bill was a former US scout who developed and toured from 1883 to 1913 an outdoor exhibition recreating the drama of the West. The show toured Europe from 1889 to 1893, when it returned to the States to exhibit in Chicago near the world's fair. Bill called his show "an educational exposition on a grand and entertaining scale" and incorporated Indian performers, cowboys, and trick shooters (Buffalo Bill Museum n.d.). Many accounts note that Buffalo Bill favored American Indian rights and included the families of the male Native performers on-site in recreated villages in order to show the human side of Native Americans. In Europe, in particular, many of these performers and their families died, presumably of disease. Heap of Birds's public art at the Venice Biennale sought to honor these Native American performers with the signage medium effectively summoning connotations of grave markers. The artist indicated in interviews that he intended to locate and even perhaps return the remains of the performers who died overseas to their Native American home communities, thus engaging in a more literal or realist sense with the politics of the United States, since the repatriation of human remains is authorized by federal laws such as the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act of 1990.

The general approach of the NMAI contemporary arts curatorial practice is a call for the legitimacy of contemporary Native American art and lives by means of incorporation as members in good standing of the elite international arts community. This aim in itself is unassailable. Problems develop in the implementation of this goal, what I will term a mimesis (Taussig 1993) of mainstream museum methodology characterized by individualism, hierarchical power relations, and the inclusive instinct. This approach is one that Corbey might describe as concordance and that I will simply term universalism, the belief in a unity of human experience. More extreme forms of universalism as an exhibit methodology have historically been seen in, for example, the turn-of-the-century typological exhibit technique whereby standardized forms of material culture (pots, weapons, basketry) were exhibited in chronological order from the "primitive" to the "civilized" (Jacknis 1988). Other manifestations of universalism in exhibition technique rely upon the ahistorical celebratory embrace of common human experience, as evidenced by Edward Steichen's 1955 photo exhibit, *The Family of Man* (Museum of Modern Art n.d.). Universalism is thus a fairly contested field historically, and it has largely negative connotations, especially for the display of Native American culture. The primary issue, from the standpoint of Indigenous curatorial methodology, is the concern that if reference to ethnicity is no longer desired for inclusion, has difference been effectively neutralized, as Corbey indicates?

Does institutionalization enact neutralization? One can easily think of African American curator Thelma Golden's famous term "post-black," which was employed in her 2001 exhibit, *Freestyle* (Cotter 2001:1). This denial of cultural poignancy in an age of globalized influences was mirrored six years later by the contemporary Native American art exhibit titled *Postidentity* at the Nicole Fiacco Gallery in Hudson, New York, which proclaimed it represented artists "of Native American descent whose work defies the narrow definitions of 'identity art' that continue to pigeonhole serious artists." In something of a manifesto statement, the brochure reads:

In no other contemporary art markets other than indigenous ones do governments regulate art and identity together... Consequently, serious artists of Native American descent must contend with false boundaries of culture, market and law that are irrelevant to their work and person. For artists, the difference between "Native American Artist" and artist who happens to be Native American is of great significance and can mean the difference between having to recapitulate an imposed "identity" versus the type of self-actualization to which artists are especially entitled. (Nicole Fiacco Gallery 2007)

This call for freedom is especially burdensome, not only because Native American art scholarship since the 1970s has repeated the same issues of constricted identity (without significant progress in the conversation), but importantly because the argument of universalism inherent in post-identity discourse imagines that ethnicity is no longer a viable construct in an American culture permeated by race hate. The NMAI's stance is complicated further by its engagement in post-identity dialogues while it continues to rest in the security of an explicitly ethnically identified museum. This disingenuousness was explored in a special issue of *American Indian Quarterly*, "Decolonizing Archaeology and Critical Engagements with the National Museum of the American Indian" (Atalay and Lonetree 2006).

The Requickening Project sought to openly embrace a unique Indigenous philosophy while still demanding a place at the forum. The collective statement scripted by Rice and myself advanced the following pro-cultural curatorial aim: "Our efforts seek to make an intellectual statement concerning Aboriginal wisdom in the visual and expressive arts." We continued:

Aboriginal artists have a proactive role in our diverse communities. Whether they are urban, suburban, rural, or reserve, they secure, critique, innovate and share the cultural knowledge, spirit and traditions of our nations. Artists, curators, art historians and cultural workers continue into the new millennium as participants of our own legacy; writing, producing, documenting, administrating and defining a distinct art historical discourse we can claim as our own. While the margins created by a Western culture may still be present, this Aboriginal arts community stakes a passionate claim to be seen, heard and acknowledged within each artistic discipline. The Aboriginal arts movement traverses and widens the sphere of contested spaces in this age of globalization.

... Contrary to inclusion models that require self-sacrifice of ideals, our collective agenda calls upon indigenous knowledges to contribute to the conversation initiated by the Biennale curator Robert Storr. Our presence seeks to speak of how indigenous people conceptualize the fragility of life, how art speaks to understanding death and destruction as well as the process of healing.

Blondeau will create, re-assemble, disassemble and perform States of Grace, inspired by her recent work Grace. Shelley Niro will project her short film Tree across the Italian city's facade. Both works will invite audiences to witness the relevance and criticality which traditional knowledge has upon global issues and the human condition. States of Grace will reveal many instances of human vulnerability through Blondeau's acts of memory, home, displacement, and decolonization.

Her performances will expose an Aboriginal perspective of suffering and pain, healing and hope. Niro's short film Tree pays homage to the "Keep America Beautiful" campaign from the early 1970's where stoic actor Iron Eyes Cody gazes at the environment and sees it is no longer being cared for or respected. Niro replaces Cody, the perpetual Indian stereotype, with a matriarchal figure who witnesses the same environmental degradation, some 30 years later. (Rice and Mithlo 2007; see also Berman and Mithlo 2011)

This approach claims a separate space, one Corbey might label as discordance. In style, this approach mirrored the conference "Museums and Native Knowledges" at Arizona State University that examined Native American knowledge systems and their contributions to curatorial practices. The effort was an embrace of alternative, separate theoretical bases and their contributions to the overall field of museum studies. Although a conversation was desired with alternative audiences, the Indigenous was foregrounded in *The Requickening Project*. The public dialogue hosted by the University of Venice's Department of Post-Colonial Literature featured the exhibit participants explaining their aims and taking questions from the audience of Italians, First Nations people, Americans, and American Indian artists.

In a similar fashion to the NMAI's Heap of Birds exhibit, the art of "Requickening" was entirely public. Lori Blondeau performed *States of Grace* for five days, at dawn and dusk, a physically and emotionally demanding schedule. Niro's film, *Tree*, was screened each night after Blondeau's performance on the broad Zattere facing the University of Venice's façade. An outdoor bar provided electricity, and prayer candles were lit in a circle surrounding Blondeau as she regally took her place each evening and morning in a colonial brocade chair and donned an exaggeratedly long skirt of iridescent green. In the evening, an audio recording in which Blondeau poignantly related cycles of birth and dying was broadcast, competing with strolling lovers, dog walkers, children yelling, and bar patrons looking on. By the time Niro's film was run, the patrons had settled in, and typically became rapt at the elegance of her black-and-white canvas, depicting a lone young Native woman traversing the urban landscape in despair. This earth mother, like Blondeau's protagonists, found peace and rebirth via the land and the people. Notions of time passing, or cyclical rounds of birth and loss, of women's courage and their stubborn grasp on life, were all available to the viewer. Importantly also, both artists freely appropriated the mainstream's faults, with Niro's piece directly challenging the stereotype of the Native American as environmentalist and Blondeau's work negating the ever-available Indian interpreter—her solo presence was mute, her face hidden behind her hands.

This combination of refusal and free appropriation of the negative portrayals of Natives defined an Indigenous visual register that was unique and resilient.

In addition to the prayer candles, the collective also produced prayer cards written in Italian explaining the exhibit's goals and our recognition of a founding artist of the IA3 collective who had recently died, Harry Fonseca. These Italian interpretive cards were distributed to pedestrians by students who participated as interns and assisted in the documentation of the project. As a non-institutional exhibit, we relied upon grant funding, receiving significant sponsorship from public entities, such as the Canada Council for the Arts' Aboriginal Peoples Collaborative Exchange and the Ontario Arts Council, and private funding from the Institute of International Education and Smith College.

My aim in describing these two parallel exhibits in a compare-and-contrast model is not to elevate one above the other, for a Native American presence in Venice is a mutual aim of both organizations. In addition, as a producer of *The Requickening Project* it is difficult for me to apply the same critical analysis that I can with the NMAI's *Most Serene Republics* exhibit. I hope that other art scholars will pursue this task. However, I must articulate the differences in curatorial aims, for the analysis that both exhibits were the same or that we were not in competition with each other is simply false. Not only did the NMAI seek and gain status as a recognized Biennale exhibit while *The Requickening Project* remained unrecognized, but the NMAI's curatorial purpose of concordance, or universality, was directly at odds with the "Requickening" collective's emphasis on discordance, or unique Indigenous knowledge systems. This insistence on difference seeks not an acceptance by the mainstream as *one of them* but seeks the mainstream's acceptance of the Indigenous *as we are*. The concept of assimilation can no longer accurately characterize this divide of purpose, for this term connotes a linear progression into the inevitable condition of modernity. A more productive analysis will consider the impact of institutionalization and intent.

The non-institutional arts collaborative the Requickening Project intended to remain distinct and so, in a similar fashion to the initial 1999 exhibit, *Ceremonial*, sought an inward development of self-knowledge and transformation through the construct of the Venice Biennale. Like Garrak-coonum's adoption of colonial photography, we sought self-transformation by the appropriation of a western construct—the Biennale. Even the rejection of Biennale status, while the NMAI garnered this reward, ultimately had a freeing effect upon us, for as nonplayers in the officially recognized Biennale, in essence we could do anything. The Indigenous curatorial practice of non-linear, intuitive collaboration was importantly made available outside of institutional and bureaucratic constraints, thus we were able to avoid the

neutralization that seems dangerously a part of the institutional structure.

A key factor in all of the debates of Indigenous cultural performances, besides the intent described here, is the audience. As a nonprofit endeavor, *The Requickening Project* (as well as previous IA3 exhibits) did not need to garner an audience. Our efforts have consistently followed the original mandate of the 1999 exhibit to "allow...artists the opportunity to exhibit on an international stage." This self-transformation, the experience of presenting the work, takes precedence over any concern with who happens to see the work. The operative belief is that each participant (and by "participants," I am including all the students, artists, writers, and friends who take part in any given year) will come away from the Venice experience inspired—inspired by their own abilities, by the environment, by the other global arts on display. Their experience will then be translated to others, in their home communities, at conferences, anywhere they get the opportunity to reflect on the process. This inattention to audience also has a pragmatic base: as organizers on a limited budget, all of the resources (time, energy, money) of any given exhibition year are channeled solely to what one of our early board members called the "get in"—just getting the art up. We typically had little or no resources to track audience reception, beyond the direct daily experiences of the exhibit itself.

A large national museum, by contrast, operated with public funds, cannot afford to ignore its audience. As a federal institution, the Smithsonian is beholden to its audience and their reception of the work. A broad, engaged public is a necessity. The question then is: Can (or should) Indigenous knowledge be presented for primary consumption by an unversed audience? Is this possibility available both from the perspective of the majority institution (public funds, public reception) and from the source communities (tribal, pan-tribal, First Nations groups)?

As an educator, I spend a lot of time in front of classrooms talking about Native American arts and culture. The perspective that college students bring to contemporary Native American topics is pretty shocking—both in its incorporation of false ideas (stereotypes) and in the lack of information overall. I recently asked my class to name a contemporary Native American woman. Silence. One student offered, "Sitting Bull?" "No, I said a Native woman." More silence. I prompt, "One of your textbooks was written by a Native American woman." A quick shuffling of backpacks. "Oh, yeah. Bea Medicine is a Native American woman!" Heavy sigh on my part. As Alfred Youngman has famously stated, most college students possess a child's knowledge of Native American histories. How those of us in the arts and cultural scene alter these gross mischaracterizations and general lack of information about contemporary Native realities is a real challenge. As critical as I am of the

strategies adopted by large national institutions to gain inclusion into the arts mainstream by catering to audiences, it is a viable strategy. In many ways, the work of institutionally based cultural workers is the more difficult path; although they may often have the funding base and administrative support that those in smaller organizations do not, they must consistently, as I do in the classroom, observe that sea of faces with no idea (or with an equally problematic set of ideas) about Native American life. This educational task is monumental. My work has aimed to alter another monumental problem—the internal world of Native American arts, including the self-censorship, the lack of opportunities, the colonization of the mind.

This chapter could have addressed many other poignant stories of the 2007 endeavor, since the multiple overlaps of people, institutions, and concerns are substantial. Indigenous curation is a newly articulated field that will hopefully have room for both bureaucratic and more grassroots organizations simultaneously. The fear displayed when we label the Other among us as pursuing "silly little things" does not have to define the future of the field, but honest self-appraisals should. In this way, appropriations of the mainstream and each other can be viewed as simply developments in an ever-expanding array of possibilities for our nations.