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**Towards an Indigenous History: Indigenous Art Practices from Contemporary Australia  
and Canada**

**Rolande Souliere**

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at  
Sydney College of the Arts, University of Sydney

*This is to certify that to the best of my knowledge, the content of this thesis is my own work. This thesis has not been submitted for any degree or other purposes.*

*I certify that the intellectual content of this thesis is the product of my own work and that all the assistance received in preparing this thesis and sources have been acknowledged.*

*Rolande Souliere*

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Chi Migwetch!

## **DISCLAIMER**

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders are to be advised that this thesis contains names of Aboriginal and or Torres Strait Islanders people who have passed away.

## ABSTRACT

The debate of Indigenous art as contemporary art in Western art discourse has been ongoing since the acceptance of Indigenous art as contemporary art in the early 1990s. This has resulted in a collision of four diverse fields; Western art history, Western art criticism, anthropology and Indigenous cultural material. The debate stems from the problematised way the term contemporary is defined by globalised Euro-Western art and its institutions. This thesis considers the value of applying the concept of the contemporary to Indigenous art practices and art, in particular as a mode for cultural self-determination in order to avoid the historical domination of Western art history, history and its discursive power arrangements.

The term, concept or theory of the contemporary remains elusive, indefinable and widespread in Western art discourse. Various definitions exist and are based on notions of openness, newness or plurality. Criticism of the contemporary's openness has led to speculation of the contemporary as a valid concept or theory and or as a field of art practice, particularly its claim to social or political engagement and its inability to historicise current art.

This thesis contends that the openness of the contemporary concept provides a gateway in which to situate it in a much broader cultural analysis that embraces different historiographies and worldviews. Thereby directly contributing to the ongoing critical discourse of Indigenous art as contemporary art debate.

This thesis contributes to addressing this debate by proposing a definition of the contemporary that bridges history, art history and contemporary art and explores the potential for administering a contemporary art practice within this view. It highlights the historical analysis of the journey of Indigenous art from the ethnographic to the contemporary art museum by examining Indigenous rupture and transformation through Western history and art history. The thesis examines Terry Smith's recent contextualisation of contemporary theory, as Smith is the only art historian to include Indigenous art in the discussion on contemporary theory.<sup>1</sup> Richard Meyer's theory on the contemporary is also examined as Meyer is unique in approaching contemporary theory from an artistic practice that embraces co-temporalities, art production and modes of trans-historicity. In 'rendering the past as newly present', this thesis proposes methods of contemporary art analysis in the examination of contemporary Indigenous artworks in the context that the socio-political and cultural use of contemporary art as a form of history production.

### Description of Creative Work

An exhibition of one large installation took place at Sydney College of the Arts Galleries, Sydney in September 2016. Media included two- and three-dimensional artworks that were hung on the walls and placed on the floor. The installation used Indigenous forms, designs, processes and

<sup>1</sup> Terry Smith, *What is Contemporary Art?* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 133.

social, political, and cultural content as a result of the thesis research and demonstrated Indigenous artists are creating their Indigenous histories within the context of contemporary art. Photographic documentation is available in Appendix 3.

## GLOSSARY

The following definitions are intended to provide a general understanding of the some of the terms used throughout the thesis.

**Aboriginal:** A term used for the descendants of the original inhabitants of Australia and Canada. In Canada Aboriginal is used by government institutions to acknowledge all Indigenous peoples - First Nations, Metis and Inuit peoples. In Australia this term acknowledges one of two Indigenous peoples – Aboriginal Australians. When acknowledging or referring to all Indigenous people in Australia the preferred term is Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples.<sup>2</sup>

**Aboriginal Missions:** Parcels of land granted by the Australian government for Aboriginal peoples to reside under the guardianship of the church or a religious person. As a form of assimilation, Aboriginal people were trained in the Christian faith and prepared for the work force. The missions offered physical protection from the violence of pastoralists and others.<sup>3</sup>

**Aboriginal Reserves:** Parcels of land put aside by the Australian government for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples from the late 1700s onwards due to the increasing numbers of settler migration. Relatively speaking these parcels were often land preferred by Aboriginal peoples, such as existing camping grounds. Aboriginal people on the reserves were responsible for their own housing but did receive blankets and rations from the Aborigines Protection Board (APB). These reserves were unmanaged by the government and their officials.<sup>4</sup>

**Aboriginal Stations:** Established from 1883 onwards in Australia, stations were similar to reserves but were managed by officials appointed by the APB. This could either be a non-Indigenous individual or the local police. They sometimes are referred to as “managed reserves”. Housing, schooling and rations were provided and controlled by the manager. The manager also controlled who could reside on the station, the daily movements of Aboriginal people and had legal guardianship of their children. Aboriginal people living on these stations basically had no citizenship rights. Missionaries also visited some managed reserves. Rations, housing and training for the workforce were provided to Aboriginal peoples who lived on the station. The station manager controlled who could live on the station and as such many people were forcibly moved on and off the station.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Indigenous People in Canada see "Indigenous Peoples terminology guidelines for usage," 2016, accessed April 1, 2018, <https://www.ictinc.ca/blog/indigenous-peoples-terminology-guidelines-for-usage>. For Australian Indigenous Peoples see

<sup>3</sup> See "Mission and reserve records," 2018, accessed April 1, 2018, <http://aiatsis.gov.au/research/finding-your-family/family-history-sources/mission-and-reserve-records>. 1.

<sup>4</sup> Studies, "Mission and reserve records."

<sup>5</sup> Studies, "Mission and reserve records."

**Anishinabe:** Alternate spellings include Anishinaabe, and Anishinabeg.

The Anishinabe are part of the Algonquian language group. This group includes the nations of the Ojibwa, Saukteaux, Chippewa, Potawatomi, Cree, Miq'ma, Odawa and many others. The Anishinabek, formerly known as the Ojibway or Ojibwa, have reverted to their original name for the term Ojibway was a Western term imposed upon them and is no longer used. Anishinabe in the native tongue means the "good beings".

**Art:** In this paper, "art" refers to any cultural art form that is exercised by Indigenous artists regardless of date of execution. This encompasses all the arts in the Western disciplines as well as Indigenous basket weaving, carving, storytelling, beadwork, etc.

**Band:** A body of First Nations people of Canada for whose collective use and benefit lands have been set apart or is held by the Crown, or declared to be a band for the purposes of the Indian Act. Each band has its own governing band council that consists of a Chief and councillors. Both are elected by the community or sometimes through custom. The members of the band usually share common traditions anchored in their ancestral heritage. Today, many bands prefer to be addressed as their land followed by the wording First Nations: For example, Cape Crocker First Nation.

**Bill C-31:** The Canadian pre-legislation name of the 1985 Act to Amend the Indian Act. This act eliminated certain discriminatory provisions of the Indian Act, including the section that resulted in Indian women losing their Indian status when they married non-status men. This bill enabled the affected people to apply to have their status restored.

**Custom:** A traditional practice of Indigenous people(s).

**Dodems:** Also known as Totems. Both Indigenous peoples in Australia and Canada use Dodems. Many Indigenous language groups are assigned a clan system in which they are born into. These clans' systems represent a spirit often affiliated with an animal and its particular characteristics. Each dodem symbolises an ideal to be sought and attained. For example, the turtle symbolises communication and peace negotiation.

**First Nation(s):** A term used to define the first people to reside in the Americas as defined in *Understanding Aboriginal Arts in Canada Today*.<sup>6</sup> The term came into being in the 1970s to replace the word "Indian", which became offensive to Indigenous people due to Christopher Columbus incorrectly identifying them as Indians in the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> century. Columbus mistakenly believed he had landed in India when he had reached the east coast of American and thus named

<sup>6</sup> "Understanding Aboriginal Arts in Canada Today: A Knowledge and Literature Review," Canada Council for the Arts, 2012, <http://canadacouncil.ca/research/research-library/2012/05/understanding-aboriginal-arts-in-canada-today>.



the people as such. This term does not include Metis and Inuit people, which are their own entities. Presently, First Nation replaces the word “band” in the name of their community.

**Indian:** In Canada three Indigenous groups are identified in the Constitution Act, 1982: Indians, Inuit and Metis. Indians are then further classified as status, non-status and Treaty Indians. Today, this term is considered offensive to First Nation and Metis peoples and is no longer used in contemporary society.

**Indian Act:** In 1876 the Canadian federal government passed an act that was aimed at assimilating Indigenous peoples. This act regulated Indian money, reserves and resources. Law forbade cultural expression, such as language, clothing and ceremonies. The Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development oversees the management of certain Indian affairs including the approval of First Nation by-laws. It has since undergone a few minor changes yet remains a controversial document to this day.

**Indian Status:** The legal status of an Indian as defined by the Indian Act under the Canadian constitution.

**Indigenous:** A term that addresses the diverse populations of peoples who reside on ancestral lands and have distinct languages and cultures from those who have colonised and control their lands. It is a political term that addresses shared cultural meanings, historical memory and the specific political interests of the descendants of the original habitants of their homeland or country in which they reside. Francesca Merlan, Professor of Anthropology in the school of Archaeology and Anthropology at the Australian National University, Canberra defines the term as being used to, “*distinguish between those who are ‘native’ and their ‘others’ in specific locales and also becomes a term for a geocultural category, presupposing a world collectivity of ‘indigenous peoples’ in contrast to their various ‘others’.*”<sup>7</sup> Others in this instance refers to descendants of settlers who refer to themselves as ‘Indigenous’ because they were born in the place of question or through their employment and land settlement over several generations. The term is capitalised.

**Maps of Indigenous Nations:** Maps are included of Indigenous Nations and languages across Australia and Canada. These are available in Appendix 1: *AIATSIS Map of Indigenous Australia* and Appendix 2: *Canadian Aboriginal Language Map*.

**Non-Status Indian:** An individual who is not acknowledged as an Indian under the Indian Act in North America.

<sup>7</sup> Francesca Merlan, "Global and Local," (2008), Jstor. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1086/597667>.

**Ojibway, Ojibwa, Ojibwe:** Defunct name previously used to describe an Indigenous language group from the southern part of Ontario, Canada. See *Anishinabe*.

**Off-reserve:** Used to describe First Nations people, objects or services that are not part of a reserve but correspond to First Nations.

**Potlatch:** A First Nation ceremony that consists of dancing, singing and the giving or accepting of gifts from other First Nations. At times, the ceremony may even include the symbolic destruction of a particular object such as a copper shield.

**Registered Indian:** previously known as Status Indian.

**Reserve/Reservation:** A colonial model to restrict First Nations physical and cultural movement in North America by setting aside a portion of land for First Nation bands. The Crown also owns legal title of the land.

**Residential Schools:** A form of assimilation from the Canadian government that separated First Nations, Inuit and Metis children from their parents and community in an effort to erase Indigenous knowledge and culture. Contracts to religious sectors were often distributed and in return accepted to administer such schools. Unfortunately, physical and sexual abuse, disease and death were encountered amongst a number of their residents. Residential schools were active from 1876 until the mid-twentieth century.<sup>8</sup>

**Shapeshifter:** A mythological spirit from the Lakota First Nation, who gifted the seven sacred ceremonies.

**Status Indian:** An individual who is acknowledged as an Indian under the Indian Act.

**Status Card:** A Canadian federal government identity document card issued by Indian and Northern Affairs Canada that identifies the individual with a number and language group for government-related services.

**Stolen Generation(s):** The name assigned to the group of Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, and also other children of non-Aboriginal descent, who were forcibly removed by the Australian Federal and State governments and church missions under acts of parliament. Also known as the Stolen Children.

<sup>8</sup> The Museum of Contemporary Native Arts and Institute of American Indian Arts, *Manifestations: New Native Art Criticism* (Sante Fe: The Museum of Contemporary Native Arts, 2011), 13. [www.iaia.edu/download/IAIAPDFFINAL2.pdf](http://www.iaia.edu/download/IAIAPDFFINAL2.pdf)

**Surrender:** A legal agreement where a First Nation band agrees to withdraw all or part of its rights and interests in a reserve. Certain conditions apply in order for these lands to be surrendered for lease or sale.

**Town Camps:** Australian fringe camps on private property, normally on the outskirts of towns, riverbanks or beaches where many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people lived who did not live on reserves, missions or stations.

**Teachings:** Indigenous cultural teachings passed down orally by Elders or family members. The purpose of these traditional teachings is to learn, share and pass down knowledge from generation to generation.

**Traditional Knowledge:** Indigenous knowledge includes songs, dances, herbal and plant medicine, artistic design, pattern, styles, forms and techniques, ancient stories and legends, ceremonies, traditional architecture and agriculture and other various forms. In international forums Traditional Knowledge is called Indigenous Knowledge and the two terms are interchangeable. However, some argue that Traditional Knowledge does not include contemporary Indigenous Knowledge, which is derived from a combination of traditional and contemporary sources.<sup>9</sup>

**Treaty:** An abiding agreement between specific North American Indigenous peoples and the Federal government.

**Treaty Indian:** A status Indian who is affiliated with a First Nation that signed a treaty with the Crown.

**Turtle Island:** The North American Indigenous name for the Americas. Many North American Indigenous peoples do not recognize the national boundaries and borders between Canada and the United States. The creation story in First Nations' cosmologies and worldviews considers this area as Turtle Island, as many First Nations travel routes and settlement homes crisscross this area.

**Two Spirit(ed):** Among certain First Nations peoples a person can identify with both genders and assume the social status, dress and role of their biological sex and be accepted.

**Wampum belts:** Particular to the Haudenosaunee (Mohawk, Oneida, Onondaga, Cayuga, Seneca and Tuscarora First Nations). Confederacy, wampum belts are material objects made out

<sup>9</sup> For further information see Trepanier and Creighton-Kelly, "Understanding Aboriginal Arts in Canada Today: A Knowledge and Literature Review."

of beads and leather. Wampum belts are powerful symbols and act as a legal binding agreement, it is similar to that of a signature when presented to another group.

**White Buffalo:** Is a prophecy in First Nations culture and means many things to different nations though most commonly the White Buffalo's return to Turtle Island would mark a significant change.

**White Paper:** A Canadian government document that was introduced by the Canadian Liberal Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau in 1969, which proposed the removal of special status for Indians and disassembling of Indian Affairs Branch. First Nations, Metis, and Inuit people rejected this paper and it was not implemented, though a system of categorisation remains.

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## **PREFACE**

### **MY ART STORY**

#### **ART MAKING THROUGH FIRST NATION CULTURE**

I am Anishinabe from Toronto, Canada and a member of Michipicoten First Nation. I grew up in a “traditional” First Nations culture where acknowledgment of our ancestors and the teachings were part of our daily lives. The only art I was exposed to was from my own culture. This art included dancing, drumming, singing, painting, making of regalia and storytelling. I spent my childhood (from 5 to 16 years old) attending an afterschool program for Native children sponsored by the Canadian government. Various elders taught the program. Here I learned many aspects of my Indigenous culture; from “traditional” craft processes such as basket weaving, quilling, quilting, beading, to the making of regalia such as shawls and moccasins, to learning traditional dance and ceremonies procedures to worldviews and legends.<sup>10</sup>

My entire social life circulated around my First Nations culture. On the weekends, I also attended the Native Children’s program sometimes we would participate in traditional dance ceremonies, otherwise known as Pow Wows. At other times, the Native Children’s program was asked to perform at government or corporate events to highlight First Nations culture. If I was not attending a function with the Native Children’s Program, I was attending Pow Wows and other First Nations cultural events with family members on different reserves or at First Nations cultural centres throughout Ontario.

<sup>10</sup> See Glossary.



Figure 1. Rolande Souliere, age 6 at the Indian Friendship Centre, Toronto, Canada. Basil Johnson's art print is in the background. Photo courtesy of Betty Anne O'Brien.

As a child, one of the places I frequented with the Native Children's Program was the Native Friendship Centre in Toronto, Canada. It was here that I first saw paintings and prints by First Nations artists (Figure 1). These included Norval Morrisseau, Carl Ray, Jackson Beardy, Todd Jackson Baker, Martin Panamick and Basil Johnson, although at the time, I did not know their names.

I learned the names of these artists and their contributions to the art world from my postgraduate research and subsequently my immersion into the contemporary art world. To this day, I still go to the Native Friendship Centre when I am in Toronto to attend First Nation cultural events and to admire their First Nations art collection. I continue to participate in First Nation cultural events when I am in Canada.

## **ART MAKING IN TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS**

I migrated from Canada to Australia with my Australian husband in the mid 1990s. In 2000, I decided to pursue my artistic interests by becoming art school trained by enrolling in a Bachelor of

Fine Arts degree at Sydney College of the Arts (SCA), The University of Sydney. Prior to this my visual language was anchored in my First Nations culture.

My undergraduate degree at SCA focused on developing conceptual, theoretical and technical skills in an immersive studio environment that one would expect from a practice of contemporary art. I was exposed to a wide range of different technical workshops that would assist in the interdisciplinary art projects assigned to students through the studio component of the degree. To complement the studio, Critical Studies in the field of contemporary art practice were included: The Critical Studies component provided art students with an in-depth understanding of the Western theoretical concepts, themes, debates and historical context of contemporary. At this time, there was no Indigenous content included in the undergraduate degree program.

Yet despite this Western influence, the basic values and traditions of my Indigenous ancestry continue to fuel my thinking and behaviour, and this comes through visually in my art works, namely through my use of line, colour and material processes such as felting, weaving, binding, threading and stacking.



Figure 2. Rolande Souliere, installation view at newspace, *hairyworks no. 1*, 2004. Human hair, cardboard and soap, 4 meters x 3 meters. Photo courtesy of the artist.





Figure 3. Rolande Souliere, detail, *hairyworks no. 3*, 2004. Human hair and soap, dimensions variable. Photo courtesy of the artist.



Figure 4. Rolande Souliere, detail, *hairyworks no. 3*, 2004. Human hair, plate and soap, 20 cm x 8 cm. Photo courtesy of the artist.



Figure 5. Rolande Souliere, detail, *hairyworks no. 2*, 2004. Human hair and soap, dimensions variable. Photo courtesy of the artist.

During my Undergraduate Degree I explored many materials and processes. One of the materials I became obsessed with was human hair. For one year I collected massive amounts of human hair from various hair salons throughout Sydney. I would sort the hair into piles based on length and colour and began experimenting with the material: I glued hair onto furniture and onto the walls, tied it up, and felted it. From here I used the processes I liked best to make sculptures and installations as shown in Figure 2, 3, 4 and 5.

Interestingly, the theoretical implications, symbolism and metaphors for human hair are rich, diverse and also offered an intriguing medium to work with. At the time, the critical theory classes concentrated on philosophy and contemporary art. This provided a gateway for me to discuss my human hair artworks in terms of the abject and the transformation of it into beauty. I was able to draw upon Bulgarian–French philosopher Julia Kristeva and psychoanalysis. In hindsight, I completely ignored my own cultural significance of the material and the processes involved and the influence my childhood experience had on my art practice.





Figure 6. Rolande Souliere, *Materiality*, 2004. Mixed media, dimensions variable. Photo courtesy of Peter Endersbee.



Figure 7. Rolande Souliere, detail, *Materiality*, 2004. Water balloons and chicken wire, dimensions variable. Photo courtesy of Peter Endersbee.



Figure 8. Rolande Souliere, detail, *Materiality*, 2004. Water balloons and chicken wire, dimensions variable. Photo courtesy of Peter Endersbee.





Figure 9. Rolande Souliere, detail, *Materiality*, 2004. Edible rice paper, dye and metal, dimensions variable. Photo courtesy of Peter Endersbee.

Continuing with my interest in material processes and also being introduced to the notion of painting as an extension beyond the traditional means of the canvas and into installations where colour can come from other avenues other than paint, I made the installation titled *Materiality*, 2014 (Figures 6, 7, 8, and 9).



Figure 10. Rolande Souliere and Emma Daniels, *wearing aspects of Materiality*, 2004. Photo courtesy of unidentified security guard.

The installation incorporated material processes of weaving and dying, processes I learned at the Native Children's Program where we learned to make traditional baskets decorated with porcupine quills. We learned how to de-quill the porcupine, dye the quills and sew them onto birch bark disks. I used the same skills but used contemporary materials such as water balloons and edible rice paper (the one uses to make spring rolls) to make this installation. The new materials used in regalia, after attending a Pow Wow on trips to Canada in 2012, inspired me. The idea behind this installation was that one can put the costumes on and become part of the artwork, as seen in Figure 10.



Figure 11. Rolande Souliere, detail, *Hubba Bubba*, 2005. 1 of 3. Digital photography, 60 x 40cm. Photo courtesy of Peter Endersbee.



Figure 12. Rolande Souliere, detail, *Hubba Bubba*, 2005. 2 of 3. Digital photography, 60 x 40cm. Photo courtesy of Peter Endersbee.



Figure 13. Rolande Souliere, detail, *Hubba Bubba*, 2005. 3 of 3. Digital photography, 60 x 40cm. Photo courtesy of Peter Endersbee.

It was not until I was immersed in my postgraduate studies and the Indigenous art community in Australia and Canada that I became aware of the influences of my First Nation culture and the critical issues surrounding Indigenous art in the contemporary art realm. This included the myth of primitivism and cultural appropriation (Figures 11, 12 and 13) and Indigenous art as contemporary art debate. In fact, during my master's degree a couple of lecturers asked me whether I considered myself a 'contemporary artist' or an 'Indigenous artist'. My response was both, however; admittedly, I was unaware of the depth of critical discourse surrounding this debate at the time.



Figure 14. Rolande Souliere, *Aspects of the Skyworld*, 2006-2008. Mixed media, 300 cm x 400 cm x 60 cm. Photo courtesy of Peter Endersbee.





Figure 15. Rolande Souliere, detail, *Aspects of the Skyworld*, 2006-2008. Lamp shades, wool and wire, 70 cm x 40 cm x 35 cm. Photo courtesy of Peter Endersbee.



Figure 16. Rolande Souliere, detail, *Thunderbirds*, 2006-2007. One headlight, one transformer, wire, and metal, 70x30x15cm. Photo courtesy of Peter Endersbee.

During my Master of Visual Arts degree, my artworks addressed the worldviews of the Anishinabe, specifically the spirit creatures that resided in the sky as demonstrated in Figures 14, 15, 16 and 17. In these artworks when shape, texture and processes are combined, it can animate the object. In Figure 14, the objects remind me of birds in flight and it is here I am reminded of the powerful spirits that reside in the Skyworld; The Thunderbirds. The Thunderbirds are feathered creatures that are half human/half bird.

In Anishinabe culture, the Thunderbirds are seen as responsible for the thunderstorms we hear, as they create lightning, thunder and rain. It is said that the thunderous sound heard in the midst of a storm is the flapping of the Thunderbird's almighty wings and the lightning is the flashing of their brightly lit eyes. When I look at headlights and brake lights during the day and particularly at night,

the almond shapes of these objects resemble eyes; eyes that could easily belong to some sort of bird like creature-especially when they light up at night.



Figure 17. Rolande Souliere, *Young Binessiwags (Thunderbirds)*, 2008-2009. Rear brake lights, transformers, wire and light bulbs, dimensions variable. Photo courtesy of Peter Endersbee.

There are two types of Thunderbirds, one good and the other evil. Young thunderbirds are often associated with evilness because of their immaturity, volatile tendencies and outright naughtiness. The intensity and vibrancy of the red light and the plumpness of the rear brake lights are associations I equate with these youngsters. In Anishinabe language they are called Binessiwags, hence the title (Figure 17).

The increasing number of Indigenous issues in the Canadian and Australian news has resulted in a shift in my artworks to socio-political and cultural issues. As a First Nations person born and



raised in Toronto, Canada and living and working in Sydney, Australia, a country that has a large Aboriginal population, I can relate to the socio-political and cultural issues and concerns of Australian Aboriginal people. Canada is not without their problems as there has been a long history of federal government involvement in Indigenous affairs. The below artworks in Figures 18, 19 and 20 demonstrate how I utilise common construction materials to address the Australian Northern Territory Intervention and First Nation land claims in Canada.



Figure 18. Rolande Souliere, *Connections/Disconnections*, 2008. Street barriers, reflective sheeting, y-frames and metal stand, dimensions variable. Photo courtesy of Peter Endersbee.



Figure 19. Rolande Souliere, *Point of Origin*, 2008-2009. Metal, reflective sheeting, galvanized poles and cement footings, dimensions variable. Photo courtesy of the artist.



Figure 20. Rolande Souliere, *On the Good Red Road*, 2013. Two variable message boards, trailers and witch hats, 350cm x500 cm x180 cm. Photo courtesy of the artist.



Figure 21. Rolande Souliere, *Platform*, 2008-2009. Street barriers, plinths, mirrors, clips and reflective sheeting, dimensions variable. Photo courtesy of Peter Endersbee.

The ongoing debate of the categorisation of Indigenous art in the contemporary art realm by Western art scholars, art historians, art workers and critics has sparked my interest and raised awareness of the complexity of antecedents and consequences of categorising Indigenous art as contemporary. Shortly after I completed my Master of Visual Arts program, I created the artwork titled *Platform*, 2008-09 as seen in Figure 21 to address the categorisation of Indigenous art and to open up a discussion; a platform on Indigenous art in the contemporary art realm.

This artwork 'Indigenises' street barriers and plinths by replacing the standard geometric shapes with Indigenous forms and motifs. It uses the materiality of the reflective tape and mirrors to reflect on how Indigenous art was perceived in the Western art, historically and currently.

The combination of First Nation culture with my selection of universal materials in the form of the assisted readymade can be seen as me, integrating Indigenous aesthetics and cultural perspective into the art discourse as I navigate my way through the contemporary art world.

## **HOW TO READ THIS THESIS**

The thesis is a practice-based PhD in contemporary art, consisting of 50,000-word paper and a body of artwork. Together, the written component and the exhibited artwork (Appendix 3) form a single thesis. The written paper is the supporting text that describes the cultural setting, artistic, historical, political, social and aesthetic contents. The original contribution to the field of contemporary art is found in the unity of the thesis, and not separated in either of its parts nor in the written paper alone.

The use of two different Indigenous cultures is to emphasise that the art practice-based doctorate stemmed from the thesis's author coming from a North American First Nations tradition yet is geographically located within another Indigenous tradition; Australian Aboriginal. It is by no means a comparative study of the two Indigenous cultures. The thesis is in alignment with the recognition that there is an emergent global Indigenous history being expressed within contemporary art.

Lastly, the thesis is written from an Indigenous perspective. Efforts have been made to include as many Indigenous artists, writers and curators in the thesis. The thesis is also in keeping with how I was taught about art in my cultural upbringing and importantly is in line with Indigenous worldviews relating to time as cyclical. Western history, art history and contemporary art have been set out in a linear timeframe. This does not allow for how Indigenous peoples view themselves or present their cultures. This thesis sets to bring Indigenous frameworks into the Western art discourse.

## INTRODUCTION

*If one attributes the same critical reflexivity to Indigenous arts, for example, given the problematic relationship between 'Western' and 'Indigenous' arts as it is often credited to 'contemporary art', then one must allow for the possibility of practices that simultaneously problematise the term 'contemporary art' as well as 'indigenous' and 'non-indigenous'.<sup>11</sup>*

This thesis is framed by my own artistic journey and the way in which the artistic decisions and choices I made were influenced by the various critical discourses on contemporary Indigenous art in the art world milieu. Particularly the political, social and cultural issues embedded within contemporary Indigenous art discourse and the role aesthetics played within these issues. A special concern here is the position allocated for Indigenous art within my own artwork. What are the different uses and needs of Indigenous culture within my own art practice? These processes were informed by the research conducted and documented in the thesis.

The majority of Indigenous art created over the past five centuries reveals visual responses to colonial encounters, religious conversions, environment disasters, and massacres.<sup>12</sup> Yet, the art created during this timeframe also maintained the unity of the social, political and spiritual structure of Indigenous culture. For example, Indigenous worldviews and cosmologies were represented through the origins of the world and the ancestral beings residing within it.

Despite this abundance of visual art and its diversity in concepts and subject matter Indigenous art was misrepresented, misunderstood and classified in Western art. For instance, Indigenous people and their art have been represented as 'other' peoples' art through the lens of Western museums of anthropology and ethnography.<sup>13</sup> Western institutions classified the artworks as decorative, religious symbols, expressions of social relations or other meanings outside of the objects themselves.<sup>14</sup> Indigenous masks and other artefacts portrayed a world of the exotic to the West that drew on the fantasies of primitivism during colonisation. At this time Indigenous peoples' cultural material was exhibited as 'artefacts' or the ethnographic photographs used for

<sup>11</sup> Stephen Pritchard, "The Artifice of Culture: Contemporary Indigenous Art and the work of Peter Robinson," *Third Text* 19, no. 72 (2004): 67.

<sup>12</sup> Catherine Janet Berlo and B. Ruth Phillips, *Native North American Art* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998). Howard Morphy, "Seeing Aboriginal Art in the Gallery," *Humanities Research* 8, no. 1 (2001); Catherine Janet Berlo, *The Early Years of Native American art history: the politics of scholarship and collecting* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1992). Wally Caruana, *Aboriginal Art*, Third ed. (London: Thames & Hudson, 1993). "Urban Representations: Cultural expression, identity and politics," AIATSIS National Indigenous Studies Conference AIATSIS Research Publications, 2012, <http://aiatsis.gov.au/publications/products/urban-representations-cultural-expression-identity-and-politics>.

<sup>13</sup> Nicholas Thomas, *Possessions: indigenous art, colonial culture*, Interplay, arts, history, theory., (New York, N.Y.: Thames and Hudson, 1999), 17.

<sup>14</sup> Morphy, "Seeing Aboriginal Art in the Gallery," 38.

scientific reasons were displayed as objects for Western entertainment.<sup>15</sup> In this respect Indigenous peoples were documented as a dying species by the colonising countries. This has resulted in the defining of Indigenous art in a minimal social context, with no political or cultural frame of reference.

In the 1950s, Indigenous art in Australia and Canada was acknowledged as an important valuable art form in Western art and was collected as 'art' though under the unfortunate premises of Primitive art.<sup>16</sup> Yet despite this, some museums curators were opposed to objects of non-Western material culture in their collection being classified as art objects.<sup>17</sup>

It was not until the early 1990s that Indigenous art was viewed outside the 'primitive' lens and accepted into the contemporary art realm. At this time Indigenous art in Australia and Canada flourished with a strong visual language to national and international audiences. Indigenous artists became Western 'art schooled trained' and as resulted were exposed to contemporary art theories, materials and art processes. Inspired by their Indigenous heritage and the use of contemporary materials and processes, Indigenous artists began addressing issues of self-representation, identity, land rights, self-determination and self-government.

Inarguably, post-modern and post-colonial theories provided the means to critique meta-narratives, the bureaucratic nature of modernism, the reconstitution of artistic practices, cultural disintegration, the embracement of social and cultural groups previously marginalised by high culture, the development of a comprehensive approach to the use of culture and its objects and a view that more than one history exists.<sup>18</sup> In this view, Indigenous art was positioned within post-colonial and post-modern discourses. Writer Charlotte Townsend-Gault posited post-modern discourse enabled Indigenous artists to position their art within Western art and the much broader reach of cultural and political power.<sup>19</sup>

Yet, the inclusion of Indigenous art as contemporary art came with ramifications. Many Indigenous artists, at the time, felt excluded from mainstream art institutions due to the multiplicity of influences these artists undertook in their art practice. The previous inclusion of Indigenous art as a concept of primitive art generated a new division for Indigenous art and also the Western art discourse of binary opposition: traditional verses the contemporary or authentic verses the

<sup>15</sup> Morphy, "Seeing Aboriginal Art in the Gallery.;" Thomas, *Possessions: indigenous art, colonial culture*; 17th Biennale of Sydney & Campbelltown Arts Centre, *North-South Dialogue Forum* (Campbelltown2010), CD-ROM.

<sup>16</sup> See Morphy, "Seeing Aboriginal Art in the Gallery," 39. Also 17th Biennale of Sydney & Campbelltown Arts Centre, *North-South Dialogue Forum*.

<sup>17</sup> Morphy, "Seeing Aboriginal Art in the Gallery," 38.

<sup>18</sup> Colin Trodd, "Postmodernism and Art," in *The Routledge Companion to Postmodernism*, ed. Stuart Sims (London and New York: Routledge, 2001), 89-100.

<sup>19</sup> Diana Nemiroff, Robert Houle, and Charlotte Townsend-Gault, *Land, Spirit, Power: First Nations at the National Gallery of Canada* (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 1992), exhibition catalog, 77.

inauthentic. As such Indigenous art as, contemporary art was met with resistance within Western art and generated a debate which is currently ongoing, amongst Indigenous and non-Indigenous art historians, anthropologists, curators, writers, scholars, artists and art workers.

Many Indigenous artists, writers, scholars, curators and art workers viewed their inclusion as another divisive or categorical factor in Western art and again a misrepresentation of Indigenous cultural existence and artistic expression. Texts reflecting the debate include Howard Morphy<sup>20</sup>, Ian McLean<sup>21</sup>, Terry Smith<sup>22</sup>, Djon Mundine<sup>23</sup> and Brenda L. Croft<sup>24</sup>, to name a few. As well, in the forum *North South Dialogue* for the 17<sup>th</sup> Biennale<sup>25</sup>, in the lecture by Mohawk curator and art writer Steven Loft at Ryerson University in Toronto<sup>26</sup>, Canada and in an interview with Indigenous curators Candice Hopkins and Christine Lalonde by Bryne McLaughlin for the International Indigenous exhibition *Sakahan* at the National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa in 2013.<sup>27</sup> Most notably, in Ian McLean's recent publication *How Aborigines invented the idea of contemporary art*, 2011 where under the sub-heading *What is Aboriginal Contemporary Art?* nineteen art writers, anthropologists, artists and art historians (six who are of Australian Aboriginal heritage) have written articles regarding what *is Australian Aboriginal art?* Here are some of the titles to show the diversity in definitions:

Eric Rowlinson, "Aboriginal art is cultural adaptation, 1981",  
Philip Jones " Aboriginal art is intercultural, 1992",  
Hetti Perkins "Even 'traditional' Aboriginal art is contemporary, 1993"  
Charles Green "Aboriginal art is international art", 2001",  
Rex Butler "Aboriginal art is universal, 2003" and  
Judy Watson "Aboriginal art is country and western, 2003".

To further complicate the Indigenous art as contemporary art debate, the contemporary concept is relatively a new theory, with art historian Terry Smith the first to introduce it in 2001 as fundamentally a new condition.<sup>28</sup> Since then, numerous contributions in defining the

<sup>20</sup> Howard Morphy, *Aboriginal Art* (London: Phaidon Press, 1998).

<sup>21</sup> Dr Ian McLean, *How Aborigines invented the idea of contemporary art* (Brisbane: Institute of Modern Art and Power Publications, 2011).

<sup>22</sup> Smith, *What is Contemporary Art?* .

<sup>23</sup> Djon Mundine, "A Personal History of Aboriginal Art in the Premier State" (Premier State: First State, First People, Campbelltown, Campbelltown Arts Center, 2008); Djon Mundine, "Between two worlds," *Art Monthly Australia* 150 (2002).

<sup>24</sup> Brenda Croft, "Cultural Con/Texts: Apologists vs Apologies" (Art Museums and Sites of Communication, paper presented at Queensland Art Gallery, Brisbane, February 26-27, 2010 2010).

<sup>25</sup> 17th Biennale of Sydney & Campbelltown Arts Centre, *North-South Dialogue Forum*.

<sup>26</sup> "Towards Forever an Indigenous Art historical Worldview," October 28, 2010, 2011, <https://Ryecast.ryerson.ca/27/watch/832.aspx>; Morphy, "Seeing Aboriginal Art in the Gallery."

<sup>27</sup> "Curator Q & A: How Indigenous Art Took Centre Stage in Sakahan," Canadian Art, updated May 24, 2013, 2013, <https://canadianart.ca/interviews/sakahan-national-gallery-of-canada/>.

<sup>28</sup> E. Terry Smith, "What is Contemporary Art? Contemporary Art, Contemporaneity and Art to Come," *Critical Issue Series* 6 (2001), [http://www.terrysmith.net/web/?page\\_id=2](http://www.terrysmith.net/web/?page_id=2).

'Contemporary' concept have been made by art historians, scholars, writers, curator and artists, with each having their own speculation of the 'Contemporary' concept. These include the viability of the contemporary's concept to its affiliation with a de-bordered post-colonial world, as a term and field of art practice and its hold on social and political engagement. Nonetheless the 'Contemporary' as a term, theory or concept remains open, allusive and widespread field in Western art.

Therefore, the question that frames this thesis is how are Indigenous artists from Australia and Canada establishing an Indigenous history through the avenue of 'Contemporary' art? The study has four objectives:

1. To locate and research contemporary Indigenous artists from each country and observe their visual practice in terms of the aesthetic and cultural and political strategies (if any).
2. Is the examination of how distinct and diverse Indigenous cultures shape and are represented in the works of contemporary Indigenous artists.
3. How artistic perspectives based on distinct Aboriginal cultural origins provide new vocabularies for the critique of contemporary art in general and transform prevailing notions of art history and contemporary culture.
4. How Indigenous artists have an intimate relation to the larger Indigenous visual arts community in the New World and yet are exploring and creating different avenues in their production, presentation and critical discourses.

The aim of this study is to bring insight and critical analyses surrounding the notion of the 'Contemporary' in Indigenous art from an Indigenous artist's perspective that embeds cultural agency and revitalisation in a move towards a right to self-determination, self-representation and sovereignty. The contemporary artworks by Indigenous artists are avenues in which to understand and situate social, cultural and historical progress, specifically how Indigenous art is and has been defined in the Western art institutions and the problematic designation of the term 'Contemporary' in the art milieu.

The research question how Indigenous artists from Australia and Canada are establishing an Indigenous history through the avenue of contemporary art is addressed in the following five chapters.

*Chapter One, Methodology*, discusses the strategy for gathering material and investigating the subject matter of Indigenous art. The chapter includes the limitations of the study, relevant issues, language used throughout the paper (as



multiple definitions are used for Indigenous peoples with the majority of the terms stemming from the discourse of colonisation), existing literature, theoretical perspectives of contemporary theory, decolonisation and postcolonial theory, anthropology, ethnography, history and art history, identity and postmodernism, and methods of contemporary Indigenous art analysis. The methods of art analysis include Palimpsest Through Cut, Paste and Overlay, Postmodern Irony and The Trickster, Decolonising Through Storytelling and Sharing and Bearing Witness in Audience Participation.

*Chapter Two, Setting the Scene*, is a brief discussion on important social, political and cultural achievements of Australian and Canadian Indigenous peoples in the 1990s. It includes land rights and resistance, royal commissions and proactive policies, repatriation, global alliance and the momentum in Indigenous art. This section addresses Indigenous artists global mobility in terms of art collaborations, exchanges and collectives, the rise of Indigenous curators and specialised Indigenous exhibitions. As well as a brief outline of the Indigenous art as contemporary art debate propelled by Indigenous active visibility in the 1990s.

*Chapter Three, Indigenous Rupture and Transformation in Western History and Art History*, addresses the systematic structures and systems of imperialism and colonialism imposed upon Indigenous peoples. This provided colonial means to codify and dominate the world and the people who reside within it. Various processes of exclusion and inclusion of Indigenous people are also discussed including the imperialist's processes of negations, constructs of time and space, Western classification and criteria of art, commodification and commercialisation of Indigenous art and the redefinition of what can be considered art in Western art.

*Chapter Four, Contemporary and Indigenous Art*, demonstrates the widespread and undefinable term of the 'Contemporary' concept. Numerous art historians, art writers, scholars and art workers including art historian Hal Foster, Boris Groys and Zdenka Badovinac have defined the 'Contemporary' though none of them have reached a unified definition of the 'Contemporary'.

This chapter closely examines Terry Smith's work on Indigenous and Contemporary Art, as well as art historian Richard Meyer's work on the contemporary. Smith was the only art historian to include Indigenous worldviews into the contemporary art discussion. As such Smith's text *What is Contemporary Art*, (2009) is critiqued.<sup>29</sup> Meyer's text *What was the Contemporary?* (2013)<sup>30</sup> is discussed as it offers an intriguing definition of the contemporary that has parallels to Smith's in regard to time and trans-historicity though views the contemporary concept from the perspective of the artist's practice.

<sup>29</sup> Smith, *What is Contemporary Art?* .

<sup>30</sup> Richard Meyer, *What was Contemporary Art?* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2013). .

*Chapter Five, The Presence of Histories in Contemporary Indigenous Art Practices*, is the heart of the thesis that brings all the elements of the research together. The chapter bridges the theoretical underpinnings of contemporary methods of analysis such as Palimpsest, Postmodern Irony and the Trickster, Decolonising through Storytelling and Sharing, and lastly Bearing Witness in Audience Participation.

The Conclusion provides a summary of the thesis, highlighting the significant points of the study as well as offering a larger scope into the investigation of unfinished business of decolonisation and the growing awareness of ideological alliances amongst Indigenous peoples in the politics of Indigeneity.

## CHAPTER ONE

### METHODOLOGY

*Indigenous peoples across the world have other stories to tell which not only question the assumed nature of [Western] ideals and the practices that they generate, but also serve to tell an alternative story: the history of Western research through the eyes of the colonized.*<sup>31</sup>

This thesis is a practice-based doctorate consisting of both an exhibited contemporary art practice and a research paper of 50,000 words. Neither part can be considered on its own. The original contribution to the field of contemporary art is found in the unity of the thesis and not solely in either of its parts, especially the written paper alone. On this note, a moment of departure from the written paper and my visual art practice marks an instance of how the two are brought together.

This study is not a complete and original coverage of an art historical field of Indigenous art from Australia and Canada since contact with the West. Nor is it a definite history of the subject matter. Rather, it is an exploration into Indigenous art practices from the two countries and how these art practices might be approached - from an Indigenous perspective - in light of the ongoing debate of Indigenous art as contemporary art in Western art discourse.

The creative work concentrated mainly on installation, sculpture, painting and collage in a variety of materials (including the assisted readymade) that drew upon North American Indigenous forms, patterns, processes and socio-political and cultural content. The creative work focused primarily on the use of the shapes and forms and the various constellations that the Indigenous presents, a point of connection not only for me as an Indigenous person from North America but also as a 'Western art school trained' contemporary artist living and working in Australia. Appendix 3 provides photographic evidence of the exhibited artwork that was shown at Sydney College of the Art, University of Sydney in 2016 and an artist statement.

The study is significant because it addresses, from an Indigenous perspective, Indigenous art and its integration into the contemporary art realm. By concentrating on the Indigenous aspects and attributes as the core basis for the production of artworks, rather than merely "decorating" the Western aesthetic paradigm, my creative processes will switch the priorities towards an Indigenous interest.

<sup>31</sup> Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* (London: Zed Books, 1999), 2.

A special concern here is the position allocated for the Indigenous within the artwork, be it formal or otherwise. What are the different uses and needs of Indigenous culture within my own artwork? These processes were informed by the research conducted and documented in the study. The preface provides an orientation and demonstration of my art making through First Nation culture and tertiary education.

## **WRITTEN THESIS**

The written thesis is a supporting text that describes the cultural setting, the artistic context and the intellectual, political and aesthetic content of the exhibited artwork, which is specific to my art practice. The written paper is a critical tool in analysing contemporary Indigenous art with historical aspects of Indigenous art and provides a unique perspective that situates Indigenous artists themselves at the centre of the thesis. While this study is rooted in contemporary theory, it deploys a trans-national and trans-cultural approach in order to bring to light striking parallels between Australian Aboriginal and First Nations visual art practices in the context of two settler-colonial states: Australia and Canada.

This study specifically seeks to understand the reception of Indigenous art from Australia and Canada as contemporary art in the Western art canon, addressing questions such as:

- 1) How Indigenous art has been written about and received in Western art discourse?
- 2) How Imperialism affected Indigenous art and culture in Western history and therefore art history?
- 3) How the political, social and cultural climates in both countries impacted Indigenous artists at the time of its acceptance as contemporary art?
- 4) And how can contemporary art theory accommodate Indigenous perspectives?

As such the study draws upon ideas from fields of anthropology, ethnology, art history, history, contemporary art theory, decolonising studies and Indigenous culture.

A strong influence in the determination of this argument is Australian anthropologist Howard Morphy. In 2001 Morphy raised three important points regarding the inclusion of Indigenous art in the mainstream contemporary art world:

- 1) a shift in the notion of what can be considered art;
- 2) a critical evaluation of primitive art;
- 3) an increased awareness of art as a commodity.<sup>32</sup>

<sup>32</sup> Morphy, "Seeing Aboriginal Art in the Gallery," 37.

Morphy contended that these three processes in conjunction with the increase in globalisation, both politically and economically, have in some circumstances endorsed the agency of Indigenous artists.<sup>33</sup> The points Morphy has raised are relevant in this thesis as they pinpoint the issues and concerns inherent in the visual arts of Indigenous people colonised by West. These points correlate to the specific set of issues that the role art plays in the pronouncement of political power, group identity and cosmological belief, individual self, others, tourist commoditisation on art production and colonialism as identified by Catherine Janet Berlo and Ruth B. Phillips' book *Native North American Art* (1998).<sup>34</sup>

## RELEVANT ISSUES

Contrary to Indigenous art as often being perceived as passive artifacts commemorating or illustrating a "primitive" lost past, the dynamic changes, contemporary use of materials by Indigenous artists point to the political ambitions of the art to communicate at the most immediate and advanced levels, historical, social and political issues pertaining to, for example, identity, land rights, self-government and poverty.

In this regard, Indigenous arts' distinctive characteristics act as both a custodian for their own culture as well as informing the dominant Western art discourse as possible models for connection. The role of Indigenous art in contemporary art focuses on an area that has been the subject of curatorial, cultural and intellectual debates for the past few decades, becoming predominately visible in the early 1990s.<sup>35</sup>

The few studies done on the Indigenous art in contemporary art have largely been about post-colonialism, abstraction and cultural appropriation. Still fewer are studies specifically on Indigenous aesthetics by Indigenous artists in a contemporary art environment. In contrast, there are a significant number of exhibitions discussing Indigenous motifs used by non-Indigenous artists during modernism.

The history of Indigenous art caused many circumstances of disconnection and renegotiation where Indigenous artists were subjected to a lack of understanding in relation to Indigenous expression within dominant modes of contemporary art. This thesis demonstrates a vision that will not be constrained by such divisions and supports cultural development and creative expression of Indigenous people. As such this thesis includes the artistic practices of emerging and established

<sup>33</sup> Morphy, "Seeing Aboriginal Art in the Gallery," 38.

<sup>34</sup> Berlo and Phillips, *Native North American Art*

<sup>35</sup> McLean, *How Aborigines invented the idea of contemporary art* 13.

Indigenous artists in Australia and Canada and how they connect, contribute to and transform Western art history, history and critical thinking in contemporary art.

## LANGUAGE

A glossary has been included to address the terms used throughout this paper as the current vocabulary of Indigenous people consists of a multitude of definitions. For example, in North America I have encountered the following terms: Aboriginal, Indian, Native, Indigenous, First Peoples, Original Peoples, Aboriginal-Canadian, Native American Indian, Native-Canadian or Native-American; whereas in Australia; Aboriginal, Aborigines, Aboriginal people or Black Australian were (and still are) the terms used. Many terms are colloquially used and still remain prevalent today as the vocabulary was comprised from the discourse of colonisation and remains the language used by the dominating societies. The majority of these terms were deemed official via legislation but are disputative due to the criteria imposed on Indigenous communities, such as enforced notions of genealogy and habitation in controlled geographical locations. Different art critics, artists, art workers, scholarly writers and the general public use these words in different contexts and although these terms are political, it is not my position to correct individuals nor speakers or writers I have cited.

I found that being considered Aboriginal most of my life in Canada, I was unable to identify myself as such in Australia as the term does not translate internationally. When I attempted to identify as First Nation in Australia, people were unfamiliar with the term. Though over the past few years I have noticed in Australia the shift to the term 'First Nation' or 'First Peoples' to acknowledge the original inhabitants of Australia. So, to avoid the complexities of such terms, in this paper I use the term Indigenous to embrace a larger Indigenous community on a global scale.<sup>36</sup> The term 'Indigenous' is problematic for some individuals as it appears to organise under one umbrella many unique and distinct populations whose imperialist encounters and experiences may have been immensely different. This is not my intention; on the contrary, I use the term in light of my current situation and also more importantly to include all Nations and their diverse language groups. I realise the current vocabulary of Indigeneity consists of a multitude of definitions that are used worldwide, and this has contributed to the debates regarding their appropriateness. It is not my intention to continue such a debate here; rather I employ the term to embrace and empower the globalisation of Indigenous peoples. The pluralisation of Indigenous peoples is deliberate and attributed to activists who have taken a strong stance in the recognition that distinct Indigenous peoples exist and that each distinct society have a right to self-determination.<sup>37</sup> On this note, and

<sup>36</sup> The term surfaced in the 1970s from the activism of The American Indian Movement (AIM), and the Canadian Indian Brotherhood in a stance towards self-determination. For further information see Wilmer, F (1993), *The Indigenous Voice in World Politics*, Sage, California and Merlan, Frances Indigeneity <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1086/597667> accessed July 6, 2011]

<sup>37</sup> Julian Burger, *The Gaia Atlas of First Peoples: a future for the indigenous world* (New York: Doubleday, 1990).

in acknowledgment of Indigenous peoples worldwide, the word "Indigenous" will be capitalised in all contexts.

In Australia and Canada, 'Aboriginal' is used to define the original peoples of the land. Canadian and Australian writers, critics, curators, art workers and speakers use this term. However, in Canada the Indigenous population consists of First Nations, Inuit and Metis and like Australia, persons often identify themselves with their ancestral peoples, such as the Anishinabe, Cree or Arrente, to name a few. In this thesis Indigenous individuals will include their language group. For example, Steve Loft

## **NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL INDIGENOUS CONFERENCES AND SYMPOSIUMS**

Symposiums, conferences, lectures and artist presentations I have attended in Canada and North America have provided insight into the concerns, interests and issues that surround Indigenous art.<sup>38</sup> Recent conferences and symposiums held within Canada such as *Revisoning the Indians of Canada Pavilion Ahzhekewada (Let us look back)* and the *Native American Art Studies Association (NAASA)*, both in 2011 and *Indigenous Aesthetic, and the Remaking of Art History* in 2012, addresses the criticality of Indigenous art in the past and the need to challenge Western notions of Indigenous art production. Mohawk curator and writer Steven Loft's lecture at Ryerson University in Toronto, Canada in 2011 was more direct in criticising the Western art canon for its definitions of Indigenous art.<sup>39</sup> Loft stated, "issues of otherness, marginality and cultural context still dominate Indigenous cultural production and we ask why this is the case?"<sup>40</sup>

On an international front this subject matter was evident in the public forum *North South Dialogue*, part of the 17<sup>th</sup> Biennale of Sydney, 2010,<sup>41</sup> and also recently in an interview with Tlingit curator Candice Hopkins and Christine Lalonde by Bryne McLaughlin for the international Indigenous art exhibition *Sakahan* at the National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa in 2013.

Djon Mundine's lecture on the five phases of Aboriginal art was influential in offering a historical antecedent to his theories on the contemporary, from an Indigenous perspective.<sup>42</sup> Mundine's approach identified five key periodic stages:

<sup>38</sup> "North South Dialogue" at the 17<sup>th</sup> Biennale of Sydney, May 12-August 1, 2010, Sydney; Aboriginal Curatorial Collective [ACC] conference "Revisoning the Indians of Canada Pavilion: Ahzhekewada [Look us look back]", October 15-October 16, 2011, Toronto, Canada; Black 2 Blak Conference, Campbelltown Arts Centre, Sydney, 2007, 2011; The 18<sup>th</sup> Native American Arts Studies Association [NAASA] conference October 26-29, 2011, Ottawa; Second Aboriginal Triennial "UnDisclosed", May 12, 2012, Canberra.

<sup>39</sup> Loft, "Towards Forever an Indigenous Art historical Worldview."; Morphy, "Seeing Aboriginal Art in the Gallery."

<sup>40</sup> Loft, "Towards Forever an Indigenous Art historical Worldview."

<sup>41</sup> 17<sup>th</sup> Biennale of Sydney & Campbelltown Arts Centre, *North-South Dialogue Forum*.

<sup>42</sup> Mundine, "Short A Personal History of Aboriginal Art in the Premier State."

- 1) From time immemorial when Aboriginal art shifted from our own to being described as Primitive Art, if not craft and kitsch.
- 2) From 1950-60s Aboriginal art began to be collected as “art” under the premises of Primitive Art.
- 3) In the 1970s the emergence of the Papunya Tula movement and the authenticity debate emerged in art discourses.
- 4) In the 1980s rise of new affirmative action empowered a younger generation of Aboriginal artists to become trained in Western art schools.
- 5) In the 1990s the rise of Aboriginal art writers, curators and artists took to writing their own stories and history.

Mundine’s approach represented a point of departure allowing other Indigenous models to surface and also served to provide a space for social and political content in Indigenous art. Furthermore, Mundine’s approach was influential, as other Indigenous curators from different countries presented their “personal history of Indigenous art” at international forums and conferences. For example, Maori curator Megan Tamati Quenell’s presented a Maori art history at the *The North South Dialogue (2010)* forum at the 17<sup>th</sup> Biennale and Native American Art Studies (2011) conference held in Ottawa.

## EXISTING LITERATURE

There is a large amount of material published on Australian and North American Indigenous people, though much of the material resides within the Western traditions of anthropology and ethnology and often in dialogue with colonial history. Very little of this material incorporates Indigenous epistemology, pedagogy, worldviews or contextualises these views in relation to the historical nature of Indigenous art.

The specific literature that explores the methods and interpretations of Indigenous art in Australia and North America is limited to a small quantity of books, podcasts, lectures, newspaper articles, exhibition catalogues, artist’s monographs, art reviews and art journals. Over the last few decades there has been an increase in the number of publications addressing this imbalance in Indigenous art, with the majority of such literature produced by Indigenous scholars and art workers. There are monographs on Indigenous artists working in a wide range of styles and media, such as; Emily Kame Kngwarreye, Richard Bell, Fiona Foley, Gordon Bennett, Brian Jungen, Rebecca Belmore, Jane Ash Poitras and Lawrence Paul Yuxweluptun, although these are relatively small in number compared to those on Western artists. Also, art historians have written only a few of these publications. If, as writer Mark Roskill has noted, the monograph is “*the most basic type of publication art historians produce,*” then this suggests that there is a lack of scholarship on Indigenous art, and this is a significant area of study.<sup>43</sup>

<sup>43</sup> Susan Lowish, "Writing/righting a history of Australian Aboriginal Art," *Humanities Research* 15, no. 2 (2009).



Howard Morphy's *Aboriginal Art* (1998), *North American Indian Art* (2004), *The Oxford Companion to Aboriginal Art and Culture* (2000), *World Art Series Aboriginal Art* by Wally Caruana (1993), and *Native North American Art* (1998) by Ruth B. Phillips and Janet Catherine Berlo are notable written works that endeavour to either depict the history of movements or styles in Indigenous art, or are within colonial or nationalist context. Furthermore, none of these can be considered a history of Indigenous art in respect to the country they are addressing. At present, there are no published texts that offer a focused discussion on an Indigenous history from Australia or North America that include the twentieth first century or any comprehensive books pertaining to an Indigenous history in a national or international contemporary art context with key Indigenous artists. There have been a number of articles and lectures advocating for the need to write an Australian Aboriginal art history or First Nation art history, such as Susan Lowish's *Writing/Righting a History of Australian Aboriginal Art* (2009).<sup>44</sup>

Linda Tuhiwai Smith's book *Decolonizing Methodologies*, (1999) provided a critical analysis of the construction of Western history as a series of concepts that privileged the philosophies, attitude, logic and assumptions of the Western world.<sup>45</sup> Tuhiwai Smith wrote, "*the negation of indigenous views of history was a critical part in asserting colonial ideology.*"<sup>46</sup> In fact many of these concepts are in opposition to Indigenous worldviews, traditional knowledge and culture and therefore expand into pertinent and contentious issues for Indigenous people, many of which, arguably, remain to this day. Inarguably they also contributed to the need for Indigenous self-determination and decolonisation. Listed below are several of the ideas Smith identifies as interconnected with Western history:<sup>47</sup>

1. The notion that history is totalizing discourse. The notion that totality undertakes the probability and worth of being to be being inclusive, that is all known knowledge into one logical whole. The development of classification systems, rules of practice and methodologies justified this through a selection process that stands in for history.
2. The notion that there is a universal history that draws upon the notion of totality in that all human beings and societies share rudimentary characteristics and values and it is the development of such universal interests that provides historical analysis and reflection.
3. The notion that history is chronological. As a method chronology is significant because it enables an event to be marked at a particular time and place and is valuable in going back to a particular point for comparative analysis and explanation. In order for chronology to

<sup>44</sup> See Lowish, "Writing/righting a history of Australian Aboriginal Art."

<sup>45</sup> Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*

<sup>46</sup> Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* 30.

<sup>47</sup> Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* 32.

commence a point of “discovery” is required.

4. The notion that history is constructed around binarism. Connected to binarism are beliefs and or concepts embedded in discovery, literacy and social development that are chronologically linked. Anything prior was considered as prehistoric, illiterate and viewed in ‘opposition to’.
5. The notion that history is about development. Tied to the notion of progress, development assumes societies move forward through stages of development, the earliest development being primitive, irrational and simple. As the being develops he or she becomes less, primitive, more civilized, rational and engaged in complex social structures.
6. The notion history is about a self-actualising human subject. The notion that the human subject develops through a variety of stages; emotional, intellectually etc. and is at its most advanced capable of controlling their faculties.
7. The notion that history as a discipline is innocent. This notion embodies the belief that history is pure as a discipline and not affected by other disciplines. The basis for this rational is on the emphasis of factual information, simply arranged by the historians.

Recent and significant contributions to the discussion of contemporary Indigenous art since the late twentieth century are *How Aborigines Invented the Idea of Contemporary Art (2011)*<sup>48</sup> by Ian McLean and *Transference, Tradition, Technology (2005)*<sup>49</sup> written by several First Nation scholars and artists. *Transference, Tradition, Technology* explores visual and digital culture from a First Nation point of view and constructs a Native art history within these disciplines. Both publications offer insight into cultural and socio-political issues surrounding Indigenous art. These publications include essays by Indigenous writers who examine contemporary Indigenous art from an empowered perspective.

*Indigenous Australia for Dummies (2012)* by Larissa Behrendt offers in-depth insight into Australian Indigenous peoples’ experiences from colonisation to contemporary times.<sup>50</sup> *Native American Art in the Twentieth Century (1999)*<sup>51</sup> by W. Jackson Rushing is a wide discourse on twentieth-century Native North American art. Issues range from the historical to the theoretical with articles by well-known writers and theorists Ruth Phillips, Gerald McMaster and Lucy Lippard. The contributors examine the politics of art criticism, the aesthetic power of Indigenous knowledge, and museum practices.

<sup>48</sup> McLean, *How Aborigines invented the idea of contemporary art*

<sup>49</sup> Dana Claxton, Stephen Loft, and Melanie Townsend, *Transference, Tradition, Technology* (Banff: Banff Centre Press, 2005).

<sup>50</sup> Larissa Behrendt, *Indigenous Australia for dummies* (Milton, Queensland: John Wiley & Sons, 2012).

<sup>51</sup> W. Jackson Rushing, *Native American Art in the Twentieth Century: Makers, Meanings, Histories* (London, New York: Routledge, 1999).

Ian McLean's recent article in *Broadsheet, Volume 4 Issue 3 (2013)*, titled "Surviving the Contemporary," presents an intriguing argument surrounding the contemporary in Indigenous art. McLean suggests the term contemporary is essentially a new condition and introduces the notion of Indigeneity.<sup>52</sup> McLean asserts Indigeneity "can only be contemporary through how it is made here and now in the crossroads of contemporaneous traditions."<sup>53</sup> McLean stated in his recent anthology on Aboriginal art:

*Social and political issues are addressed in their relation to the meaning and reception of the art, and not the wider politics of race and Aboriginality. This is because the latter are not generally a feature of art discourse.*<sup>54</sup>

However, McLean's stance seems difficult to comprehend, given that race and Aboriginality were amongst the core themes reinforced in Indigenous art practices along with issues of identity, shared traditions and customs, relationships to the land, shared experiences of colonisation and the journey to self-determination. As such McLean's views are contested by Indigenous people.

The online three year research (2007-2009) project *This Side of the Frontier: Stories Lines Full Report*<sup>55</sup> by Professor Vivienne Johnson, Tess Allas and Laura Fisher addressed the conceptual and cultural concerns of Indigenous artists from remote or rural areas of Australia without the prevailing categorisation of such artists as 'traditional' but rather 'contemporary'.

Further writings on Indigenous art are found in the special edition of *Art Journal* by guest editors First Nations scholars W. Jackson Rushing and Kay WalkingStick, titled "Recent Native American Art" in 1992.<sup>56</sup> Lawrence Abbott's book *I Stand in the Center of the Good: Interview with Contemporary Native Artists* (1994)<sup>57</sup> features substantive interviews with over a dozen contemporary First Nation artists and reveals how processes and innovations; both traditional and contemporary coincided.

<sup>52</sup>See Dr Ian McLean, "Surviving the "Contemporary": What indigenous artists want, and how to get it," *Broadsheet* 42, no. 3 (2013): 169.

<sup>53</sup> McLean, "Surviving the "Contemporary": What indigenous artists want, and how to get it," 173.

<sup>54</sup> McLean, *How Aborigines invented the idea of contemporary art* 13.

<sup>55</sup> "This Side of the Frontier: Storylines Full Report," 2009, <https://www.storylines.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2009/12/STORYLINESFINAL.pdf>.

<sup>56</sup> W. Jackson Rushing and Kay WalkingStick, "Recent Native American Art," *Art Journal* 51, no. 3 (1992).

<sup>57</sup> Lawrence Abbott, *I Stand in the Center of the Good: Interview with Contemporary Native Artists* (1994) (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1994).

In Australia, the critical writings by Howard Morphy,<sup>58</sup> Ian McLean,<sup>59</sup> Terry Smith,<sup>60</sup> Dion Mundine,<sup>61</sup> Fiona Foley,<sup>62</sup> and Brenda L. Croft were significant texts that assisted in the development of the thesis.<sup>63</sup> McLean's recently published anthology *How Aborigines Invented the Idea of Contemporary Art* (2011) provides a useful chronology of the period from 1945 to 2007 of the art discourse on Australian Aboriginal art with reference to most of the original texts. It provides a clear indication of the problematic relationship in defining Australian Aboriginal art between Indigenous and non-Indigenous academics, anthropologist, artists and the art world at large. For example, under the subheading "What is Aboriginal Contemporary Art?" nineteen art writers, anthropologists, artists and art historians (six of whom are Australian Aboriginal) have written articles defining (in their view) what constitutes Australian Aboriginal art. A variety of definitional terms were used and range from 'esoteric' to 'international' to 'intercultural.' Inarguably, in Canada similar definitions have also been encountered.

## THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

### Contemporary Theory

Central to this thesis is contemporary theory. The emergence of contemporary theory over the past few decades has contributed to a plethora of writings by art historians, art critics, art writers and artists, which is why modern European philosophy at London's Kingston University, Peter Osborne (1958) defines the contemporary as a critical term.<sup>64</sup> Yet the notion of the contemporary is not new. Philosophers such as Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770-1831) and Martin Heidegger (1889-1976) reflected on the term in art in the nineteenth century.<sup>65</sup> However, art historian Terry Smith was the first to introduce the contemporary as a "fundamentally new condition" in 2001.<sup>66</sup> In 2008, Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben asked the question what is the contemporary with the genesis to "separate those who are living at a particular time from those who are truly contemporary with their times."<sup>67</sup> More than a decade later, McLean asserts the contemporary is the master narrative of our time by its very presence in the artworld discourse.<sup>68</sup>

In his text *What is Contemporary Art?* (2009) Smith was the only art historian to include Indigenous culture and art into the contemporary art discussion. <sup>69</sup> Smith explains:

<sup>58</sup> Morphy, *Aboriginal Art*.

<sup>59</sup> McLean, *How Aborigines invented the idea of contemporary art*

<sup>60</sup> Smith, *What is Contemporary Art?* .

<sup>61</sup> Mundine, "Short A Personal History of Aboriginal Art in the Premier State."; Mundine, "Between two worlds."

<sup>62</sup> Fiona Foley, *The Art of Politics The Politics of Art* (Southport: Keeaira Press, 2006).

<sup>63</sup> Croft, "Short Cultural Con/Texts: Apologists vs Apologies."

<sup>64</sup> McLean, "Surviving the "Contemporary": What indigenous artists want, and how to get it."

<sup>65</sup> See 84

<sup>66</sup> Smith, "What is Contemporary Art? Contemporary Art, Contemporaneity and Art to Come."

<sup>67</sup> "Lost in thought," Claremont McKenna College, accessed April 23, 2015, 2013, <http://www.cmc.edu/pages/faculty/.../Lost%20in%20Thought.pdf>.

<sup>68</sup> McLean, *How Aborigines invented the idea of contemporary art*

<sup>69</sup> Smith, *What is Contemporary Art?* .

*because the notion of the modern is the central organising idea in histories of art from the previous two centuries, art historians ... have not so much 'overlooked' [Aboriginal Art], as found it impossible to navigate.*<sup>70</sup>

Contemporary art theory is largely positioned in contrast to the modern, as evident in the Hal Foster's *Questionnaire on the Contemporary* (2009)<sup>71</sup> and in Terry Smith's book *What is Contemporary Art?* However, art historian Richard Meyer offers a theory of the contemporary in alignment with the modern in his book *What was the Contemporary*, (2013).<sup>72</sup> Here, Meyer makes visible that the modern was also open to interpretation much like how the definition of contemporary currently stands. Meyer's concept also offers the inclusion of history within the contemporary.

### **Decolonisation And Postcolonial Theory**

Encompassing a variety of disciplines including post-structuralism and postmodernism, postcolonial theory is concerned with the continuing effects of Western imperialism (and colonialism) on the conceptualisation of culture, race, identity and the power relations inherent within binarism. Through imperialism, views of the 'other' became more formalised – explicit classification systems and the racialisation of the human subject provided comparisons between 'us' of the West and 'them' the other, between 'fully human' and 'sub-human'. The other was not regarded as human but rather prehistoric, primitive and incapable of self-actualisation.<sup>73</sup> This positioned the West as superior to the non-West through binarism and as such a dominant relationship over the other occurred.

Specialist on postcolonial studies, Professor Edward Said (1935-2003) wrote "*imperialism and the culture associated with it affirm both the primacy of geography and an ideology about control of territory.*"<sup>74</sup> Said's *Orientalism* continues to be an important text on the ingrained binary opposition and power relations and is a valuable source in the postcolonial re-evaluations that can be connected to decolonisation.<sup>75</sup> Revisiting and critiquing Western history is a significant aspect to decolonization and although it may appear to be out of date to expound on imperialism, the attitudes of imperialism, which includes colonialism, are still present. Maori scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith confirms by stating "*we are still in imperialist times.*"<sup>76</sup>

<sup>70</sup> Ian McLean, "Historicity and Aboriginal art: how long will it take for Aboriginal art to become modern?," in *Crossing Cultures: Conflict, Migration and Convergence - The Proceedings of the 32nd International Congress of the History of Art (Academic Monographs)*, ed. Jaynie Anderson (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2009), 922.

<sup>71</sup> Hal Foster, "Questionnaire on 'The Contemporary'" *October* 130, no. 3 (2009).

<sup>72</sup> Meyer, *What was Contemporary Art?* .

<sup>73</sup> Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*

<sup>74</sup> Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994).

<sup>75</sup> Edward Said, *Orientalism* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978).

<sup>76</sup> Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*

One of the key tenets to this study is the decolonising processes put into effect by Indigenous people to counteract the dominance of imperialism and colonialism codes of practices that have severely affected Indigenous subjectivities and histories. Linda Tuhiwai Smith's seminal text *Decolonising Methodologies*, (1999) was influential in counteracting imperial practices and offered an avenue to decolonise concepts of Western history and Indigenous identity through resistance strategies. Resistance strategies aid in helping deconstruct and reconstruct how identities of Indigenous people were formed during colonisation. In *Gender, Race, and the Regulation of Native Identity in Canada and the United States: an Overview*, writer Bonita Lawrence states, "Decolonization, then, must involve deconstructing and reshaping how we understand Indigenous identity."<sup>77</sup>

Post-colonial thinkers Homi K. Bhabha (b 1949) and Gayatri Spivak (b 1942) argued realised that many of the preconceptions that underlie the premises of Imperialism (and colonialism) are still active forces today. Indigenous cultures in Australia and the Americas are still in a state of neo-colonialism despite diverse regions and cultures throughout Africa, Asia and elsewhere who have gained independence from European colonisers.<sup>78</sup> Yet as art critic, writer and feminist Lucy Lippard points out in *Path Breakers* (2003), there are multiple ways of negotiating cultural space in contemporary Indigenous art.<sup>79</sup>

### **Anthropology, Ethnography, History and Art History**

From the late 1800s the Western scholarly discipline of anthropology and art history were established. These academic disciplines were the main producers of knowledge and dissemination of Indigenous peoples and their way of living. Indigenous people and their cultural material became regarded as vital scientific specimens pertaining to the stages of technological development and human evolution and thus needed to be collected, classified and displayed. Newly built museums were used to showcase this historical evolution of humankind. Official Victorian policy believed Indigenous culture could not exist in the modern era and therefore needed to be preserved before the race vanished or disappeared.<sup>80</sup> In addition, early 19<sup>th</sup> century photographers J.W. Lindt (1845-1926) and Edward Curtis (1868-1952) shared the same notion of Indigenous people as a dying race and captured this period in their infamous portraits of Indigenous people from Australia and Canada.<sup>81</sup>

<sup>77</sup> Bonita Lawrence, "Gender, Race and the Regulation of Native Identity in Canada and the United States," *Hypatia: Native American Issue* 18, no. 2 (2003): 3.

<sup>78</sup> National Museum of the American Indian, *Vision, Space, Desire: Global Perspectives and Cultural Hybridity* (Washington and New York: Smithsonian Institution, 2006), 19.

<sup>79</sup> G. Suzanne Fox and R. Lucy Lippard, *Path Breakers: The Eiteljorg Fellowship for Native American Fine Art, 2003* (Washington: University of Washington Press, 2003), 22.

<sup>80</sup> Berlo and Phillips, *Native North American Art* 13., and Trepanier and Creighton-Kelly, "Understanding Aboriginal Arts in Canada Today: A Knowledge and Literature Review," 46.

<sup>81</sup> As discussed in Christopher Pinney's book *Photography's Other Histories* [www.http://books.google.com.au/books?hl=en&lr=&id=ZYPdHJaE6yMC&oi=fnd&pg=PA23&dq=Jw+lindt+criticism&ots=hZU2W9VLj&sig=QODkougNfSLMkmkXSVhC8ueY-](http://books.google.com.au/books?hl=en&lr=&id=ZYPdHJaE6yMC&oi=fnd&pg=PA23&dq=Jw+lindt+criticism&ots=hZU2W9VLj&sig=QODkougNfSLMkmkXSVhC8ueY-)

Anthropology and ethnography were complicit with colonisation in their embracement of research, classification and representation of Indigenous peoples and their material culture. A representation that idealised an authentic past of a race on the brink of vanishing and with that a desire to preserve such objects of authenticity of non-Western cultures existence before assimilation became apparent. In this sense, anthropology and ethnography contributed to the labelling of Indigenous peoples as uncivilised, primitive and a dying race.<sup>82</sup> This view stems from an attitude that can be traced to early explorers in their romanticised depictions of Indigenous peoples as noble savages.<sup>83</sup>

At the end of the nineteenth century, ethnologists shared the theories of art in general. Included amongst these theories was the notion embedded in German philosopher Immanuel Kant's (1724-1804) aesthetic theory<sup>84</sup> that stipulated in order for a work of art to achieve formal beauty and to articulate ideas it should be removed of all functionality.<sup>85</sup> Since Indigenous art forms included functionality, they were excluded from this line of universal aesthetic appreciation.<sup>86</sup> As a very small number of Indigenous art forms have no 'established function' in daily life as in Indigenous culture everything made served a purpose.<sup>87</sup> In this regard, Indigenous people did not have a tradition of art and thus their art forms were allocated to an inferior status of "*craft or applied art*" by Western art.<sup>88</sup>

[U#v=onpage&q&f=false](#) [accessed January 12, 2013], Sharon Lowry's Natives of the Far North: Alaska's Vanishing Culture in the Eye of Edward, [http://books.google.com.au/books?id=1sl1NFTqUFcC&pg=PA1&dq=Edward+curtis+criticism&hl=en&sa=X&ei=fZ7TUu\\_mD8jDkgXZ7IDICw&ved=0CCIQ6AEwAA#v=onpage&q=Edward%20curtis%20criticism&f=false](http://books.google.com.au/books?id=1sl1NFTqUFcC&pg=PA1&dq=Edward+curtis+criticism&hl=en&sa=X&ei=fZ7TUu_mD8jDkgXZ7IDICw&ved=0CCIQ6AEwAA#v=onpage&q=Edward%20curtis%20criticism&f=false) [accessed October 22, 2011], Rodger D. Touchie's Edward S. Curtis Above the Medicine Line [www](http://www).

[http://books.google.com.au/books?id=E2TMhpCMGkYC&pg=PA183&dq=Edward+Curtis+criticism&hl=en&sa=X&ei=Zp\\_TUq3NK429kQWW4IDoAQ&ved=0CCoQ6AEwAg#v=onpage&q=Edward%20Curtis%20criticism&f=false](http://books.google.com.au/books?id=E2TMhpCMGkYC&pg=PA183&dq=Edward+Curtis+criticism&hl=en&sa=X&ei=Zp_TUq3NK429kQWW4IDoAQ&ved=0CCoQ6AEwAg#v=onpage&q=Edward%20Curtis%20criticism&f=false) [accessed October 22, 2011].

<sup>82</sup> As indicated in the writings of Richard Bell in "Bell's theorem of Aboriginal art: it's a white thing," Brisbane Institute, 2003, <http://www.kooriweb.org/foley/great/art/bell.html>., Croft, "Short Cultural Con/Texts: Apologists vs Apologies.", Tim Bonyhady, "Sacred Sights," *Sydney Morning Herald* (Sydney), December 9, 2000 2000, Spectrum., Loft, "Towards Forever an Indigenous Art historical Worldview.", and "Message Stick: Brook Andrew [Transcript]," (transcript), Accessed February 2, 2011, 2004, <http://www.abc.net.au/tv/messagestick/stories/s1242475.htm>.

<sup>83</sup> Trepanier and Creighton-Kelly, "Understanding Aboriginal Arts in Canada Today: A Knowledge and Literature Review."

<sup>84</sup> In *Critique of Aesthetic Judgment*, Immanuel Kant discusses the aesthetic experience and judgment, in the first part of *Critique of the Power of Judgement*. For a general overview of the complex philosophy see Kants Aesthetic and Teleology <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/kant-aesthetics/> [accessed December 18, 2013].

<sup>85</sup> Berlo and Phillips, *Native North American Art* 15.

<sup>86</sup> Morphy, "Seeing Aboriginal Art in the Gallery," 38.

<sup>87</sup> Trepanier and Creighton-Kelly, "Understanding Aboriginal Arts in Canada Today: A Knowledge and Literature Review," 15.

<sup>88</sup> As noted in Angela Philip, "Life and Art? Relocating Aboriginal art and culture in the museum," (2006). [http://recollections.nma.gov.au/issues/vol\\_2\\_no\\_1/papers/life\\_and\\_art/](http://recollections.nma.gov.au/issues/vol_2_no_1/papers/life_and_art/). and Berlo and Phillips, *Native North American Art* 15.

Further, it adheres to the notion of the primitive. The primitive is a particular ideological construct in Western culture, a classification within an evolutionary view which locks non-European people like the Australian Aboriginals and First Nations people of Canada, into an earlier stage of human development and denies their art the possibility of being a mature, complex and contemporary expression.

### **Identity and Postmodernism**

Postmodernism's critique of master narratives and the interrogation of identity politics in the last two decades of the twentieth century provided a gateway for Indigenous artists (and other marginalised groups) to enter the contemporary art realm. This timeframe is crucial, as in the late nineteen eighties an influx of Indigenous art began to predominately surface within mainstream art institutions. Gerald McMaster confirms, "*it is this basis that catapulted the discourse on contemporary Indigenous art.*"<sup>89</sup>

The allowance of multiple voices enabled marginalised groups to critique and deconstruct the modernist sensibility. It is here, the visibility of artworks by Indigenous artists who relied on the objectivity of modernism and the subjectivity of postmodernism to bring non-traditional materials and processes such as text and/or photographic documents and archival imagery into their artworks becomes evident. Their artworks indicate the biases inherent in the construction of Western history; confront issues of stereotyping, silencing, overlooking Indigenous people and their rights, cultures, histories, oppression and the attempted erasure of Indigenous people and culture.

## **METHODS OF CONTEMPORARY INDIGENOUS ART ANALYSIS**

This section provides the theoretical framework through which to position and analyse the creative works of Indigenous artists from the 1990s onwards. Methods used to put forth an Indigenous history and deconstruct Western history via Indigenous art aesthetics are the Palimpsest, Bearing Witness, Decolonising Methodologies, Postmodern Irony and Humour and the Trickster in Indigenous mythology.

### **Palimpsest: Cut, Paste and Overlay**

Critical negotiations of histories impregnated with Western control, subordination and domination were permitted within postcolonial theoretical models. One of the substantive concepts that appeared within postcolonial theory over the past few hundred years was the palimpsest.<sup>90</sup>

<sup>89</sup> 17th Biennale of Sydney & Campbelltown Arts Centre, *North-South Dialogue Forum*.

<sup>90</sup> Often considered as a trope, the palimpsest has resurfaced in theoretical discourse over the last few centuries. In the 1987 article "Writings of the Mind: Thomas De Quincey and the Importance of the Palimpsest in Nineteenth-Century Writing", Professor Josephine McDonagh observes Thomas De Quincey's reluctance towards the figuration of the palimpsest in regard to history. McDonagh



Regarded as a theoretical trope, palimpsests are sheets of writing that have been erased so that the sheets can be reused for new inscriptions.<sup>91</sup> Professor Carla Taunton's master's thesis "*Lori Blondeau: High-Tech Storytelling for Social Change*," (2006) addresses the postcolonial discourse of the palimpsest and how it exemplifies the postcolonial condition.<sup>92</sup> Taunton's discussion on the palimpsest utilises performance art as the avenue for decolonisation.

However, in this thesis, the palimpsest is utilised in artworks by Indigenous artists who employ cut, paste and layering aesthetics in their art practice. The cut and paste aesthetics are the means to deconstruct colonisation. Taunton forwards the view that the palimpsest infers that colonial trauma is a long lasting all-inclusive recurring characteristics of writings and erasures on colonised land and people.<sup>93</sup> Hence in postcolonial discourse the metaphor of the palimpsest is interchangeable with colonial history. In this view, the palimpsest serves as an Indigenous resistance to present Western subjugation and violence as well as a remembrance of the past whilst informing the present despite there being a residue of official historiography.<sup>94</sup> In regard to the palimpsest in the above context, there is an understanding of how the rewritings or over-writings of colonial discourse onto the histories of the colonised does not eliminate or erase Indigenous presence entirely. What the imperial naming process of lands by the coloniser did was dismiss previous Indigenous ownership and claim it for its own, however this can never eliminate what had originally existed.<sup>95</sup>

The notion of the palimpsest then is important in that it demonstrates the avenues in which precolonial culture and colonisation processes are aspects that proceed to influence a developing postcolonial society's cultural identity. A good example of this is Paul Carter's *The Road to Botany Bay*, namely in its discussion of place as palimpsest where the constructions of places are affiliated with identity. The colonial processes of naming and mapping "*empty uncolonized spaces*" become claimed places in the creation of a dominant cultural identity.<sup>96</sup>

In the Australian and North American context, colonial discourse tried to erase Indigenous

writes, "Built on a contradiction, a mode that both erases and retains the past, the palimpsest disrupts a sense of temporality; and the kind of history facilitated by its retentive function is at one restorative and violating." McDonagh notes, "the palimpsest became a recurrent metaphor in the nineteenth century for the human psyche and for history," 214. "See Writings on the Mind: Thomas De Quincey and the Importance of the Palimpsest in Nineteenth-Century Writing". / McDonagh, Josephine in: *Prose Studies*, 1987, p. 207-224.

<sup>91</sup> "Palimpsest," 2017, <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/palimpsest>.

<sup>92</sup> Carla Taunton, "Lori Blondeau: High-Tech Storytelling for Social Change" (MA Thesis MA Thesis, Carleton University, 2006), 15-16, <https://curve.carleton.ca/system/files/theses/29265.pdf>.

<sup>93</sup> Taunton, "Lori Blondeau: High-Tech Storytelling for Social Change," 17.

<sup>94</sup> Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, *Postcolonial Studies: The Key Concepts* (London and New York: Routledge, 1998). As quoted in Taunton, "Lori Blondeau: High-Tech Storytelling for Social Change," 15.

<sup>95</sup>A. Greg Hill, Candice Hopkins, and Christine Lalonde, *Sakahan: International Indigenous Art*, ed. National Gallery of Canada (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 2013), exhibition catalogue, 14; Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*

<sup>96</sup> Paul Carter, *The Road to Botany Bay* (London: Faber and Faber, 1987).

constructions of land and place, enabling them to appear empty and belonging to no one. An insightful example of this is in Australia: "*British colonisation policies and subsequent land laws were framed in the belief that the colony was being acquired by occupation or settlement of Terra Nullius (land without owners).*"<sup>97</sup> Similarly in the North American context, artist Jimmie Durham conveys:

*The master narrative of the United States proclaims that there were no Indians here, just wilderness. Then the Indians were savages in need of the United States.*<sup>98</sup>

Justification for land acquirement was based on the idea that the Indigenous people were too primitive to understand sovereignty and that there was no hierarchical structure in place for the British to negotiate with.<sup>99</sup>

In a neocolonial setting Indigenous people are metaphorically removing the layers of colonisation. In doing so, Indigenous knowledge systems resurface, revealing that they were never erased. This action can be viewed as a process of decolonisation in the post and neocolonial sense as to reveal a form or the making of an Indigenous history. This action also reflects Indigenous sensibilities in relation to stories, images and identities. In this sense, it is an action where the colonised are decolonising via the erasure of colonial discourse from Indigenous history.

The strategies used by colonial powers to control the histories of the colonised are complex. The palimpsest as a metaphor serves as a valuable theory in which to comprehend the complexities of postcolonial culture. In her book *Rednecks, Eggheads and Blackfellas*, Professor Gillian Cowlishaw draws awareness to the "*active layering in cultural meanings and racial power in Australia,*" wherein the coloniser's socio-cultural meanings are dominant and superior, distorting those of the colonised Indigenous peoples.<sup>100</sup> In many Indigenous cultures, orality is the avenue by which to relay Indigenous histories. These oral histories were then (and continue to be) 'written' and overlaid with colonial writings that were often mistranslated and misunderstood due to cultural differences.

The inclusion of the palimpsest as a metaphor for this thesis serves to highlight that colonial

<sup>97</sup> Accordingly to the late 18<sup>th</sup> century International Law of Europe, the ways in which the British could take possession of another country are; if the land was uninhabited; if inhabited the British could request permission from the Indigenous people to use some of the land; or if inhabited the British could invade the country. None of these three options applied in Australia. See <http://treatypublic.net/content/terra-nullius-0> and Law "Documents of Reconciliation Briefing Paper," Accessed January 8, 2015, 1998, accessed January 8, 2015, <http://www.austlii.edu.au/au/orgs/docrec/policy/brief/terran.htm>.

<sup>98</sup> William Richard Hill, "Representation and Problems for Indigenous North American Agency," *Act 4: Finnish Sampi*, no. June 16 - July 9, 2006 (2006).

<sup>99</sup> *ibid*

<sup>100</sup> Gillian Cowlishaw, *Rednecks, Eggheads and Blackfellas: Racial power and intimacy in North Australia* (Michigan and Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1999).

trauma is a continuing and all-inclusive structure based on colonial writings and erasures on colonised lands and people. Firstly, by focusing on the mechanisms of the art productions, namely the aesthetics principles of artmaking and secondly on the intent of the works by Indigenous artists, will demonstrate the attempt to remove the layers of colonial history by cutting, slicing and pasting to expose underlying traces of Indigenous histories.

### **Postmodern Irony and The Trickster**

It could be said a door opened for Indigenous artists to critique authority, and historiography in Western art with the onset of postmodern and postcolonial discourses. These movements posited that “*all viewpoints are unstable and insecure and thus, humour, parody and irony are the only positions that cannot be overridden by critique or revision.*”<sup>101</sup> This reference supports the proposition that enables Indigenous artists to mix the canonical with a familiar cultural sensibility, that of humour and irony in art production, as humour and irony permeates much of Indigenous cultural expression. In this view, Indigenous artists are able to straddle Western and Indigenous discourses as both a critical repositioning of history and also as a reflection of culture.

For example, in Western discourse, Canadian academic and specialist in postmodernist culture Linda Hutcheon discusses in *Irony's Edge: The Theory and Politics of Irony*, 1994<sup>102</sup> how irony is an occurrence that relies on complicated acts of cultural framing, and how particular ironies overlap and interconnect with several different communities who are just as quick to understand and use them.<sup>103</sup> Hutcheon's primary understanding is that irony is derived from the relationship between reader and listener, rather than a deliberate message signalled or implied by an artist. In this sense irony is “in the eye of the beholder.”<sup>104</sup> This sets irony apart from an Indigenous perspective where irony is part of the culture, embedded in Indigenous mythology and deliberate in its intention.

Recently has irony been widely recognised as a facet of Indigenous culture. This is evident in recent reviews of past ethnographic writings that reflect the use of humour and irony amongst ethnographic studies and the valuable and complex devices they employ.<sup>105</sup> In his book *Custer Died for Your Sins: An Indian Manifesto*, Lakota writer Vine Deloria Jr. remarks, “*it has always been a great disappointment to Indian people that the humorous side of Indian life has not been*

<sup>101</sup> Revisionism in this instance refers to historical revisionism as a new reading of orthodox views on facts and decisions regarding a historical event, as defined in [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Postmodern\\_art](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Postmodern_art)

<sup>102</sup> Linda Hutcheon, *Irony's Edge: The Theory and Politics of Irony* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994).

<sup>103</sup> Robert Phiddian, "Irony in the Eye of the Beholder," *Southern Review* 28, no. 2 (1995).

<sup>104</sup> Phiddian, "Irony in the Eye of the Beholder."

<sup>105</sup> M. J. Michael Fischer, "Ethnicity and the Post Modern Arts of Memory," in *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*, ed. James Clifford and Marcus. E. George (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 229.

mentioned by professed experts on Indian Affairs,<sup>106</sup> even though humour and irony were largely embedded in Indigenous culture.

Many Indigenous artists credit the Trickster as having a direct impact on some facets of their practice by taking inspiration from Trickster qualities. These qualities provide the most creative freedom—irony, joking, teasing, wordplay, crucial references and layering are basic traits of the Trickster.

Surpassing geographical limits and tribal affiliations, the Trickster is a comic spirit informing a communal worldview and lies at the core of mythology in Indigenous cultures. The Trickster is known as many different names in the many different language groups by Indigenous peoples. For example, the Trickster is known as Nanabush in Anishinaabe, the Coyote in Cree and Bamapana in Murngin.<sup>107</sup>

The Trickster has entertained, informed and educated many generations of Indigenous peoples with its endless journeys and comic acts. Mostly these stories are used to teach appropriate cultural protocol.<sup>108</sup> Anthropologist Paul Radin describes the Trickster as:

*[At] same time creator and destroyer, giver and negotiator, he who dupes others and who is always duped himself. He wills nothing consciously. At all times he is constrained to behave as he does from impulses over which he has no control. He knows neither good nor evil, yet he is responsible for both. He possesses no values, moral or social, is at the mercy of his passions and appetites, yet through his actions all values come into being.*<sup>109</sup>

Carl Beam (Anishinabe) (1943-2005) said:

*The Trickster shift is perhaps best understood as serious play. The ultimate goal is to evoke a radical shift in the viewer's perspective and political positioning by imagining and re-imagining alternative viewpoints.*<sup>110</sup>

In this respect, layering becomes the foundation for Trickster tactics and aspects of layering open the gateway for humour and irony to emerge. With the onset of the Europeans, humour (and by

<sup>106</sup> Jr Deloria, Vine, *Custer Died for Your Sins: An Indian Manifesto* (London: Collier-Macmillan, 1969), 71.

<sup>107</sup> "Bamapana," 2017,

<http://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803095444110>.

<sup>108</sup> J. Allan Ryan, *The Trickster Shift: Humour and Irony in Contemporary Native Art* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1999), 6.

<sup>109</sup> Paul Radin, *The Trickster: A Study in American Indian Mythology* (New York: Schocken Books, 1972), xxiii.

<sup>110</sup> Radin, *The Trickster: A Study in American Indian Mythology*, 5.

extension irony) became more crucial as a means for survival. Gary Farmer (Mohawk) captures its relevance in this passage:

*Because Native communities have gone through probably the worst situation in North America that any peoples have gone through, they had to have the ability to laugh. If they didn't, they wouldn't be existing today. So, humour has been a means of survival, the only means... For the last two hundred years they've had everything taken away from them, their ability to think, what language they could speak, what religion they could do, and the things they couldn't do. It was all set out for them. They couldn't even make money in order to create a decent living for themselves. All those decisions were taken away from them. The only thing they had was their ability to continue to laugh their way through life because if they didn't'...they would vanish.<sup>111</sup>*

Further to this, Anishinabe writer Marie Annharte Baker (1942- ) explains:

*Sometimes our laughter is our only weapon. In spite of efforts to declaw, de-tooth, detail the Coyote or trickster within us, we continue to find something about our oppression as Aboriginal people as funny.<sup>112</sup>*

To understand historical trauma and to fight against difference, humour is employed as a means to survival and also a means to heal.<sup>113</sup> M. J. Fischer writes:

*Recent American Indian autobiographies and autobiographical fiction and poetry are among the most sophisticated exemplars of the use of ironic humour as a survival skill, a tool for acknowledging complexity, a means of exposing or subverting oppressive hegemonic ideologies and an art for affirming life in the face of objective troubles.<sup>114</sup>*

To substantiate this Hutcheon characterises irony as a culturally volatile commodity that posits an ironic position on ideology, genre and representation, which works to *politicize* representation and within this process reveals interpretation as ideological.<sup>115</sup> Hirsch confirms:

<sup>111</sup> Ryan, *The Trickster Shift: Humour and Irony in Contemporary Native Art* 72.

<sup>112</sup> Ryan, *The Trickster Shift: Humour and Irony in Contemporary Native Art*

<sup>113</sup> For Smith, survival is a form of resistance as a decolonization process where Indigenous people celebrate their success in retaining their cultural and spiritual values, whereas non-Indigenous research was focused on documenting Indigenous peoples' demise and cultural assimilation. See Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* 145.

<sup>114</sup> Fischer, "Ethnicity and the Post Modern Arts of Memory," 224.

<sup>115</sup> Phiddian, emphasis in Phiddian, "Irony in the Eye of the Beholder."

*Humour is a means of drawing attention to a range of serious issues, from the perpetuation of foster parenthood to land claims, residential schools, forced integrations, benighted government policy, environmental destruction and attempted annihilation.*<sup>116</sup>

The Trickster is employed and in line with the Western use of parody and irony as a means for activism and resistance in contemporary Indigenous artworks. Allan J. Ryan's *The Trickster Shift* (1999) explores contemporary First Nation aesthetic expressions using parody and irony as postmodern tools to question pre-established notions of Indigenous peoples, whereas Linda Hutcheon's book *Irony's Edge: The Theory and Politics of Irony* (1994) provides a solid basis of how irony functions in the ways that are politically charged and can be the means to disrupt the space between expression and understanding and offer a new perspective.

### **Decolonising Through Sharing and Storytelling**

Tuhiwai Smith, in her book *Decolonizing Methodologies* (1999) substantiates Indigenous artists' participation within the larger processes of Indigenous decolonisation. Smith advocates for making Indigenous research part of the decolonisation processes. Smith demonstrates how types of research have been used as vehicles for the colonisation of Indigenous peoples and their land, notably the mechanisms of scientific research and its involvement with imperialism—which remains a powerful remembered history for many Indigenous peoples.

Additionally, Tuhiwai Smith outlines how Indigenous people through a Western paradigm were researched as the 'other' through the objective gaze by explorers, travelers and colonisers. Smith references Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978) to articulate how explorers' and travelers' representations of Indigenous peoples as 'other' were regarded as the factual representation of Indigenous people, thereby becoming instilled in the dominant discourse and attitudes through which Indigenous peoples were regarded.

Tuhiwai Smith further addresses how Western ways of knowing are embedded in specific cultural and social systems that associate explicit values and conceptualisations of time, space, knowledge and subjectivity—all of which Smith contends require decolonisation. She reminds us that decolonisation cannot be restricted to deconstructing the dominant narrative and disclosing underlying texts. Instead the process of decolonisation needs new critically evaluated methodologies and culturally acceptable approaches to the study of Indigenous issues. This would enable Indigenous research to break free from Western epistemological frameworks and set a new agenda for Indigenous cultures that is part of the decolonisation process and advocates for Indigenous peoples' right to self-determination.

Tuhiwai Smith identifies twenty-five research projects that Indigenous communities were engaging

<sup>116</sup> Ryan, *The Trickster Shift: Humour and Irony in Contemporary Native Art*

in (at the time) to reconstitute and reclaim Indigenous cultures and languages. Research projects, Tuhiwai Smith believed, were very strategic in their purpose and activities, and relentless in their pursuit of social justice.<sup>117</sup> Such research projects include claiming, storytelling, Indigenising, remembering, representing, reframing and sharing. Claiming as a process enables Indigenous people to write family and tribal histories in order to legitimise their claims to resources, territories and past injustices.<sup>118</sup> These claimed histories function as teaching tools for Indigenous and non-Indigenous audiences and for generations to come. Storytelling has long been a tradition for Indigenous peoples. It can be seen as a tool for resistance, a survival strategy and as a method of intervention. Importantly, it is an act of recounting and sharing the histories of Indigenous people, the day-to-day lives: events and encounters of love and war are conveyed via the act of storytelling.

Indigenising privileges Indigenous voices and embraces Indigenous cultural action and the politics of Indigenous identity.<sup>119</sup> It is viewed as a positive affirmation rather than negative, and as Ward Churchill writes, the concept of Indigeneity means:

*That I am one who not only takes the rights of Indigenous peoples as the highest priority of my political life, but who draws upon the traditions—the bodies of knowledge and corresponding codes of values—evolved over many thousands of years by native peoples the world over.*<sup>120</sup>

Remembering is connected to healing and transformation in that it involves remembering the painful past of colonisation and the individual responses to it. There is no collective response per se as part of the colonisation process was the separation of communities, Nations and children.<sup>121</sup>

Self-Representation is also important as it comes with a long history, as since the beginning of colonisation Indigenous peoples and their cultures were misrepresented and misunderstood. Indigenous peoples now require representation by Indigenous people as a fundamental right, and the rejection of the dominant society's portrayal of Indigenous people, their customs and lifestyle.<sup>122</sup> Reframing positions Indigenous social issues in a new context, one that is outside the paternalistic manner which has arisen through past colonisation policies and practices and now firmly situated within Indigenous communities and its histories of colonisation.<sup>123</sup> It is proactive in defining and taking control of Indigenous issues and finding ways to best solve the issues that avoid labeling and categorisation of Indigenous peoples.

<sup>117</sup> Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* 147.

<sup>118</sup> Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* 143.

<sup>119</sup> Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* 146.

<sup>120</sup> Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*

<sup>121</sup> Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*

<sup>122</sup> Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* 150.

<sup>123</sup> Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* 153.

Closely connected to storytelling is sharing. Sharing is a form of oral literacy that networks and circulates knowledge between Indigenous people, locally and globally.<sup>124</sup> Sharing is both a form of resistance and a collective benefit where communities of Indigenous people are kept informed and educated about a wide range of issues and are also reactive to the marginalised contexts they are situated in.<sup>125</sup> Sharing can also be about demystifying knowledge and information by breaking it down into basic information for the community. These processes of decolonisation, based on Tuhiwai Smith's research projects within an Indigenous framework, are approaches and processes that can be used in conjunction with other strategies in a visual art context, which will inform this thesis' approach to the claim that the contemporary works by Indigenous artists are the means to establishing an Indigenous history.

### **Bearing Witness in Audience Participation**

The concept of 'bearing witness' is used to address the idea that the artworks by Indigenous artists are sites for social change. In *Specters of Marx*, Jacques Derrida (1930-2004) writes: "...to bear witness would be to bear witness to what we are insofar as we inherit, we inherit the very thing that allows us to bear witness to it."<sup>126</sup> It is here that artworks by Indigenous artists entice the audience to remember and look for traces of histories. In essence, the audience is participating in acts of bearing witness by looking at the work, whether as a reproduction or in an exhibition space. Thereby, the artworks by Indigenous artists act as sites of public memory enabling the remembering of colonial history as well as providing a space for the reconsideration of what has been hidden from society.

### **CONCLUSION**

This chapter provided an overview of the methodology employed in a practice-based doctorate consisting of an exhibited contemporary art practice and a research paper of 50,000 words of which neither part can be considered on its own. The chapter outlined that the creative artwork produced concentrated primarily on the use of the shape and forms and the various constellations that contemporary Indigenous art presents, a point of connection not only for me as an Indigenous person for North America but also as a 'Western art school trained' contemporary artist living and working in Australia.

This chapter provided the various influences and theoretical underpinnings employed to gather, analyse and process data to identify pertinent variables that substantiate the thesis hypothesis of how are Indigenous artists from Australia and Canada establishing an Indigenous history through

<sup>124</sup> Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* 159.

<sup>125</sup> Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*

<sup>126</sup> Quoted in Sam Durrant, *Postcolonial Narrative and the work of Mourning: J.M. Coetzee, Wilson Harris, and Toni Morrison* (New York: SUNY Press, 2012), 64.



the avenue of contemporary art? Relevant issues pertaining to the reception of Indigenous art in Western scholarly disciplines of anthropology, ethnology, history and art history were outlined along with theoretical perspectives of postmodernism and identity, decolonisation methodologies, postcolonial theory and contemporary theory. The palimpsest, bearing witness, Tuhiwai Smith's decolonising methodologies through sharing and storytelling and postmodern irony and the Trickster in Indigenous mythology were identified as methods in which to analyse the contemporary artworks by Indigenous artists from Australia and Canada and to substantiate that Indigenous history is created within Indigenous art practices.

The next chapter, Chapter Two sets the scene of the thesis by outlining the social, political and cultural accomplishments and affirmative action and activism of Indigenous people in Australia and Canada in the 1990s. This timeframe is significant because it marked a time when Indigenous art was finally viewed outside the anthropologically defined 'primitive lens' and accepted as 'contemporary' art. It also demonstrates how socio-political and historical issues for Indigenous people carried over into the contemporary art domain by Indigenous visual art practitioners.

## CHAPTER TWO

### SETTING THE SCENE

*The idea of contested stories and multiple discourses about the past, by different communities, is closely linked to the politics of everyday contemporary Indigenous life.*<sup>127</sup>

Chapter Two sets the scene of the thesis to the 1990s. The 1990s marked a time when Indigenous peoples regained control of their affairs through a series of social, political and cultural activism and resistance. This provided new engagements for Indigenous people on a national and international scale. As such it could be argued that the 1990s was the second wave of political uprising for Indigenous people-the 1970s being the first.

Chapter Two lists the social, political and cultural achievements of Indigenous peoples in Australia and Canada during the 1990s. The following sections are a compilation of literature that demonstrates the significant social, political and cultural gains of Indigenous peoples in the 1990s. They are listed under the following sub-headings; Land Rights, Royal Commissions and Proactivity, Apologies for Injustices, Repatriation, The Rise of Indigenous Curators and Exhibitions and Indigenous Artists: Affirmative Action and Activism. The Chapter then outlines the Indigenous art as contemporary art debate in Western art that also occurred in the 1990s and is a debate that is currently ongoing.

The list brings an awareness to the following; 1) how Indigenous social, political and cultural issues and concerns have ventured into the contemporary art domain; 2) the period when Indigenous art was accepted into the contemporary art realm; 3) how Indigenous social, political and cultural issues and concerns are represented in the contemporary artworks by Indigenous artists and make visible the making of Indigenous histories through contemporary Indigenous art practices.

### INDIGENOUS SOCIAL, POLITICAL AND CULTURAL ACHIEVEMENTS IN THE 1990S

#### Land Rights

Land Rights were at their peak in both countries and were marked by court decisions and negotiated agreements. In Australia, the most notable victory was Native Title and was recognised when the High Court overturned the doctrine of Terra Nullius in the Mabo case in 1993.<sup>128</sup> Subsequently the Wik and Thayorre peoples of Queensland filed a similar case and it was ruled

<sup>127</sup> Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* 33.

<sup>128</sup> 'Terra nullius' was the legal justification when Britain laid claim to Australia in 1770. Further information, see Gary Foley, "The Inevitable Collision between Politics and Indigenous Art," accessed February 16, 2011 (2005). <http://kooriweb.org/foley/essays/collision.html>. [Accessed February 16, 2011].

that Native Title rights and pastoral leases could co-exist.<sup>129</sup> In Canada, over 4 million square kilometers with capital transfers of \$2.2 billion Canadian dollars were covered in the settlement of over a dozen land claims in various areas through the country (including the Nunavut Territory).<sup>130</sup> In British Columbia, agreements to implement procedures for land claim negotiations took place between First Nation peoples, the province of British Columbia and Canada, marking the first time Federal and provincial governments came together in light of Indigenous land claims.

Indigenous resistance to further land encroachment by non-Indigenous people was also visible in different provinces throughout Canada. Well-publicised examples in the media included the blockade of the Canadian Air Force base in Goose Bay, Labrador by Innu women who challenged the destruction of their land by the military industrial complex encroachment; the boycotting of 1988 Calgary Winter Olympics; the Glenbow Museum exhibit *The Spirit Sings* by the Lubicon Cree First Nation; and the Oka crisis.

The infamous Oka conflict, a 78 day standoff, took place on July 11, 1990 between the Mohawk First Nation Kanesatake, the Canadian armed forces and the Quebec provincial police was a significant historical event.<sup>131</sup> Indigenous people from across the nation participated in further road and rail blockades of major transport routes in their hometowns in support of Indigenous sovereignty.<sup>132</sup>

### **Royal Commissions and Proactivity**

This resistance catapulted into a Royal Commission report on First Nation people to “investigate the abusive relationship that had clearly developed between Aboriginal peoples and the Canadian state”.<sup>133</sup> This investigation led to an awareness of the mistreatment of First Nation peoples at the hands of the Indian Residential School System (IRSS). In 1996 The Royal Commission published a report of its findings along with recommendations.<sup>134</sup>

In 2005 a class action lawsuit was filed by The Assembly of First Nations against the Canadian Government for the long-lasting effects of the IRSS. This led to the largest class action settlement

<sup>129</sup> In 1997 the Howard government introduced a Ten Point Plan known as the Native Title Amendment Act in response to Wik Decision. It continued to be a vexed issue in Australia, particularly Indigenous claims to Native title. See Land, Rights, Laws: Issues of Native Title - AIATSIS, [www.aiatsis.gov.au/ntru/docs/publications/issues/ip99n29.pdf](http://www.aiatsis.gov.au/ntru/docs/publications/issues/ip99n29.pdf)

<sup>130</sup> See Resolving Aboriginal Claims [www://adnc-aandc.gc.ca/eng/1100100014174/1100100014179](http://www.adnc-aandc.gc.ca/eng/1100100014174/1100100014179) [Accessed August 1, 2011].

<sup>131</sup> "Canada's First Nations: A History of Resistance," 2013, <http://www.globalresearch.ca/canadas-first-nations-a-history-of-resistance/5318199>.

<sup>132</sup> "First Nations Historical Timeline," <http://bctf.ca/IssuesInEducation.aspx?id=5678>.

<sup>133</sup> Coulthard, "Canada's First Nations: A History of Resistance."

<sup>134</sup> The report is located at "Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples," 1996, accessed June 9, 2015, [http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/webarchives/20071115053257/http://www.ainc-inac.gc.ca/ch/rcap/sg/sgmm\\_e.html](http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/webarchives/20071115053257/http://www.ainc-inac.gc.ca/ch/rcap/sg/sgmm_e.html).

in Canadian history in 2006, known as the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement.<sup>135</sup> As part of this agreement the Canadian government and the churches involved agreed to financially compensate residential school survivors and establish a Truth and Reconciliation Commission to allow IRSS survivors to share their experiences with each other and family members in a non-confrontational environment. In doing so it aimed to “*facilitate reconciliation among former students, their families, their communities and all Canadians.*”<sup>136</sup> Similarly, in Australia a national inquiry into the separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from their families was established in 1995. Two years later, *The Bringing Them Home*, document reported on the separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from their families, was published by the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission.<sup>137</sup>

Also and in parallel with First Nations’ history, in 1991 an Australian Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody was conducted. This resulted in the bill for establishing the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation, which was passed with full support from the Federal government in the same year.<sup>138</sup> Indigenous peoples also targeted resistance to enforced government legislative policies in an effort to regain control of Indigenous affairs. The most notable were the 1969 White Paper in Canada,<sup>139</sup> and in 1998 the Ten Point Scheme (otherwise known as The Native Title Amendment Act) in Australia.<sup>140</sup>

Furthermore, proactive policies progressed into new directions, away from land claims and towards the protection of Indigenous people(s) biological resources such as DNA from exploitation, and also the promotion of Indigenous art and artists. In 1998 the Indigenous Peoples Coalition Against Biopiracy was formed, along with two notable organisations: the Australian Aboriginal Arts Boards (AAB) and the Canadian Aboriginal Curatorial Collective (ACC).

## **Apologies for Injustices**

<sup>135</sup> "The Residential School System," 2009, accessed July 25, 2015, [indigenousfoundations.arts.ubc.ca/.../the-residential-school-system.html](http://indigenousfoundations.arts.ubc.ca/.../the-residential-school-system.html).

<sup>136</sup> "Truth and Reconciliation Findings of Indian Residential School System," 1998, accessed June 1, 2014, <http://www.trc.ca/websites/trcinstitution/index.php?p=890>.

<sup>137</sup> "Bringing Them Home: Report of the National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families," 1995, [https://www.humanrights.gov.au/sites/default/files/content/pdf/social\\_justice/bringing\\_them\\_home\\_report.pdf](https://www.humanrights.gov.au/sites/default/files/content/pdf/social_justice/bringing_them_home_report.pdf).

<sup>138</sup> "A Short History of Indigenous Resistance 1950-1990," 2010, <http://www.kooriweb.org/foley/resources/pdfs/229.pdf>.

<sup>139</sup> The White Paper is a Canadian government policy introduced by the then Canadian Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau (1919-2000) in 1969. This policy aimed to remove claims of Aboriginal land title. In 1971 the policy was aborted.

<sup>140</sup> This was an Australian Native Title Law implemented by the then Prime Minister John Howard. This law placed restrictions on native title claims by Australian Aboriginal peoples. Further information can be found at Timeline: Native title in Australia <http://www.sbs.com.au/news/article/2012/06/03/timeline-native-title-australia>

The 1990s was a decade of apologies for the injustices inflicted upon Indigenous peoples in Australia and Canada as a result of government-imposed assimilation policies. In 1993 The Anglican church publicly apologised for its role in the Indian Residential School System, followed by Presbyterian Church in 1994, and the United Church in 1998.<sup>141</sup> In 2008, at the recommendation of the Royal Commission's report, the Prime Minister of Canada at the time, Stephen Harper, publicly apologised for the abuse the students of the IRSS experienced.<sup>142</sup> In addition the Royal Commission recommended an apology from the Pope for the role the Catholic Church played in the IRSS. In April 2009, the Vatican issued a press release from Pope Benedict XVI that read, "*the Holy Father expressed his sorrow at the anguish caused by the deplorable conduct of some members of the Church and he offered his sympathy and prayerful solidarity.*"<sup>143</sup> In July 2015, Pope Francis added, "I humbly ask forgiveness, not only for the offense of the church herself, but also for the crimes committed against the native peoples during the so-called conquest of America."<sup>144</sup>

In 1997 the state governments of Australia - Western Australia, South Australia, Queensland, the Australian Capital Territory, New South Wales, Tasmania and Victoria formally apologised to The Stolen Generation(s).<sup>145</sup> This was followed by further apologies from the Religious Orders of Australia, Canberra Baptist Church and the Seventh-Day Adventist Church in 1997 for the role these organisations played in the separation of Australian Aboriginal children from their families.

A year later acknowledgement and apology statements were issued by Rev. Konrad Raiser, General Secretary of the World Council of Churches (WCC), the Anglican Church of Australia, the Victorian Baptist Union, the Australian Catholic Social Justice Council of the Catholic Church in Australia, Rosanna Baptist Church and Australian Catholic bishops.<sup>146</sup> The Northern Territory formally apologised in 2001.<sup>147</sup> In February 2008, the then Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd

<sup>141</sup> See Chapter 4 for further discussion.

<sup>142</sup> For Prime Minister Stephen Harper's full apology see <http://www.pm.gc.ca/eng/news/2008/06/11/prime-minister-harper-offers-full-apology-behalf-canadians-indian-residential>.

<sup>143</sup> Communiqué of the Holy See Press Office, April 24, 2009.

<sup>144</sup> Indian Country Today Media Network, "Pope Francis Apologizes to Indigenous Peoples for 'Grave Sins' of Colonialism," (2015).

<http://indiancountrytodaymedianetwork.com/2015/07/10/pope-francis-apologizes-indigenous-peoples-grave-sins-colonialism-161030>.

<sup>145</sup> See Chapter 4 for further discussion.

<sup>146</sup> For apology and sorry statements see "Social Justice Report 1998: Chapter 3: Church Responses," 1998, <https://www.humanrights.gov.au/publications/social-justice-report-1998-chapter-3-church-responses>.

<sup>147</sup> "Stolen Generations timeline," 2015, <http://www.creativespirits.info/aboriginalculture/politics/stolen-generations-timeline#axzz3iNBQWmbf>.

followed suit and apologised for past injustices to Australian Aboriginal people(s) who were members of the Stolen Generation(s).<sup>148</sup>

## Repatriation

In the words of the National Director of Museums Australia, Bernice Murphy, the 1990s also represented a shift from “*ethnographic representation to creative agency*.”<sup>149</sup> Previously, Indigenous objects were frequently presented as ‘stand-ins’ for Indigenous people in anthropological or natural history museums. These objects were collected from government agencies, missionaries, collectors and anthropologists during the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century and into the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century in the belief that Indigenous culture was disappearing. This propelled what is known as the “*salvage paradigm*”—a rush to collect as many Indigenous objects as possible.<sup>150</sup> For example, Indigenous people’s burial sites and their contents were often excavated without their consent or regard for spiritual beliefs of the deceased. These items were collected as objects of curiosity and for the purpose of scientific study.

Efforts to repatriate sacred ancestral burials and cultural patrimony from museums, private collectors, universities, and federal agencies were successful in the implementation of laws such as the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act of 1990 (NAGPRA), as well as the implementation of repatriation programs and policies in 1992 under the Museum Act in Canada. The Return of Indigenous Cultural Property (RICP) program in 2000 saw the largest repatriation of ancestral remains in Australia, with the remains of 300 Australian Aboriginal people returned to the Ngarrindjeri people of the Lower Murray Lakes and Coorong area in South Australia.<sup>151</sup> On the Canadian side, in 1991 the Six Nations Confederacy was successful in the return of three sacred wampum belts: the Circler of the League; the Mohawk Chief’s wampum; and the Three Sisters, a Seneca wampum.

Moreover, human remains and artifact repatriation became commonly addressed in land claims agreements. These agreements specified the government’s responsibility for assisting Indigenous peoples to repatriate artifacts from their areas. For example, in 1999 the Nisga’a signed a treaty agreement that transferred 2000 square kilometers of Crown land to the Nisga’a Nation along with the agreement to return two hundred artifacts from the Canadian Museum of Civilization and the Royal British Columbia Museum. Included in these were human remains and ceremonial objects

<sup>148</sup> For Kevin Rudd’s Apology See Apology to Australia’s Indigenous peoples/[australia.gov.au](http://australia.gov.au) <http://australia.gov.au/about-australia/our-country/our-people/apology-to-australias-indigenous-peoples> [accessed June 8, 2012].

<sup>149</sup> "Transforming culture: Indigenous art and Australia art museums," National Museum Australia, 2011, [http://nma.gov.au/research/understanding-museums/BMurphy\\_2011.html](http://nma.gov.au/research/understanding-museums/BMurphy_2011.html).

<sup>150</sup> This is discussed in more detail in Chapter Three.

<sup>151</sup> See "Repatriation of Indigenous Cultural Property," 2006, <https://www.environment.gov.au/node/22561>.

belonging to the Nisga'a peoples.<sup>152</sup> Several First Nations are establishing their own facilities to safeguard and exhibit repatriated objects. My own Nation, Michipicoten—under the guidance of chief Joe Buckell and the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sport—was successful in the facilitation of the return of more than sixty sacred objects to our Nation in Wawa, Ontario in late August 2015. This event was marked by a special ceremony that honored the rightful return of the sacred objects to the Michipicoten. The empowerment of having cultural objects returned to their communities is a direct result of the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act established in 1990. This law required institutions receiving government funding to reassess their inventory and identify objects such as human remains, sacred objects and objects of cultural significance that are eligible for repatriation.

## **GLOBAL ALLIANCES AND THE MOMENTUM IN INDIGENOUS ART**

Indigenous peoples have formed numerous international alliances as means to seek greater autonomy and bring awareness of issues that pertain to Indigenous peoples. In this view, postcolonial critic Homi K Bhabha articulates political mobility as a “*more equal distribution of power and influence in the cultural conversation among the contentious and competing language that form the metropolitan canon.*”<sup>153</sup> Land resources, human rights, self-government, discrimination, health, education, language, cultural survival and cultural property rights are among the issues that concern Indigenous peoples on a global scale. These no doubt stem from a shared colonial experience.

Indigenous organisations, artists, and cultural workers were successful in their requests to promote cultural integrity through national and international cultural events. Australian Prime Minister Paul Keating marked 1992 as the Year of Indigenous People, followed by the International Year of the World's Indigenous People declared by the United Nations in 1993.<sup>154</sup> A year later, an International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples was marked by the United Nations General Assembly whom later declared the International Decade of the World's Indigenous People in 1994.<sup>155</sup> In the same year, the United Nations' Working Group on Indigenous Population (WGIP)<sup>156</sup> completed the draft Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.<sup>157</sup> Shortly thereafter, the WPIG's parent body, the Sub-Commission on the Promotion

<sup>152</sup> "Domestic and International Repatriation: Returning Artifacts to First Nation Communities in Canada," [accessed October 2 2015], [http://www.kanada-studien.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/08/06\\_Mauze\\_Repatriation.pdf](http://www.kanada-studien.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/08/06_Mauze_Repatriation.pdf).

<sup>153</sup> The Museum of Contemporary Native Arts and Arts, *Manifestations: New Native Art Criticism*.

<sup>154</sup> Timeline of Significant Moments in the Indigenous struggle <http://www.kooriwebb.org/foley/timeline/histimeline.html> [accessed March 17, 2013].

<sup>155</sup> The Second International Decade began in 2005. International Day of the World's Indigenous People 9 August, <http://www.un.org/en/events/indigenousday/> [accessed March 12, 2011].

<sup>156</sup> Established in 1982 by the United Nation Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC).

<sup>157</sup> The Working Group was appointed by the UN Economic and Social Council. For further information see [http://www.umbunna.uts.edu.au/pdfs/JIHLBP8\\_111\\_07.pdf](http://www.umbunna.uts.edu.au/pdfs/JIHLBP8_111_07.pdf).

and Protection of Human Rights, approved the draft.<sup>158</sup> This marked a significant victory for Indigenous people globally for it recognised and acknowledged contentious historical issues facing Indigenous peoples and their rights on these issues after twenty five years of debates amongst Indigenous peoples and world governments.<sup>159</sup>

In 2007 the draft was adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations as the *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*.<sup>160</sup> The importance of the Declaration is that it provides a universal framework for the minimum standards for Indigenous peoples' rights (both individually and collectively) pertaining to self-identification, rights to re-establish culture and communication of traditions, ceremonial objects; language and oral histories and the right to education, and promotes the entitlement for inclusion in government institutions and Indigenous institutions. The Declaration also acknowledges freedom from genocide, assimilation, the involuntary reallocation of land and self-determination.

Such events provided a high profile for Indigenous people(s), art and artists. Australia, Canada, New Zealand and the United States—all Western countries with significant Indigenous populations—signed the declaration, which provides the basis for broader political dialogues to take place at a global level. In doing so Indigenous presence becomes a multivalent space of the local and the global.

In Australia, the New South Wales government launched five Aboriginal fellowships along with art awards such as the Heritage Art Award and the Botany Arts Award.<sup>161</sup> Indigenous artists participated in collaboration and exchanges on a national and international level, including Brenda Croft, REA and Robert Houle. Indigenous art collectives and artist run initiatives (ARIs) also materialised such as the Campfire Group, Boomalli Aboriginal Artists Co-operative, ProppaNow in Australia, and First Nation collectives such as the Society of Canadian Artists of Native Ancestry (SCANA), Aboriginal Curatorial Collective (ACC) along with ARIs Urban Shaman, Nation to Nation and Tribe Inc. to name just a few.<sup>162</sup> Campfire orchestrated cultural exchanges in Finland and Norway with Sami artists and Boomalli with First Nation artist Edgar Heap of Birds and British

<sup>158</sup> Replaced by the Human Rights Council in 2006. See <https://www.humanrights.gov.au/human-rights-explained-fact-sheet-8promoting-and-protecting-human-rights-un-system>

<sup>159</sup> "Indigenous peoples," United Nations Human Rights, Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, 1996-2015, <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/IPeoples/Pages/Declaration.aspx>.

<sup>160</sup> Canada, Australia, New Zealand and the United States voted against the Declaration in 2007. In 2009 Australia and New Zealand reversed their positions, with Canada and the United States of America to follow in 2010. "Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples," United Nations Human Rights, Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2007, <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/IPeoples/Pages/Declaration.aspx..> The Declaration can be found at "United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples," United Nations, 2008, [http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/documents/DRIPS\\_en.pdf](http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/documents/DRIPS_en.pdf).

<sup>161</sup> "Aboriginal voices: after the Year of Indigenous Peoples," [accessed March 12, 2011], 1994, <https://www.greenleft.org.au/node/7389>.

<sup>162</sup> An important 1960s and 1970s precedents in Canada was the Professional Native Indian Artists Incorporated (PNIA) Inc. otherwise known as "the Indian Group of Seven"



artist Eddy Chambers.<sup>163</sup> On the Canadian side international exchanges were held with Urban Shaman in Winnipeg.<sup>164</sup>

### **Rise of Indigenous Curators and Specialised Exhibitions**

New curatorial positions in specialised areas such as Indigenous art were established at mainstream art museums and institutions. In Australia Hetti Perkins (Eastern Arrernte/Kalkadoon), became the senior curator of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art at the Art Gallery of New South Wales from 1998-2011. Brenda Croft (Gurindji/Malngin/Mudpurra) was appointed the curator of Indigenous Art at the Art Gallery of Western Australia from 1999-2001, then from 2002-2009 as senior curator of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art at the National Gallery of Australia. Djon Mundine (Bundjalung) became the curator at Bula'Bula Arts in Ramingining, Northern Territory from 1979-1995, the Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney from (1983-1993), the Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney from 1996-1997, Queensland Art Gallery, Brisbane from 2004-2005, and Campbelltown Arts Centre, Campbelltown from 2010 to 2012. Carly Lane (Kalkadoon) was appointed curator of the 2<sup>nd</sup> National Indigenous Art Triennial from 2010-2011, and Jonathon Jones (Wiradjuri) held the position as senior curator of Indigenous art at the Art Gallery of New South Wales from 2011-2013.

In Canada, Greg Hill (Mohawk) was appointed curator and head of the Department of Indigenous Art at the National Gallery of Canada in 2007. Prior to this Hill was the assistant curator of Contemporary Art at the National Gallery of Canada from 2002-2007. Hill also held the position of curatorial researcher for First Nation Peoples project at the Canadian Museum of Civilization. Ryan Rice (Mohawk) held positions held at the Iroquois Indian Museum, Indian Art Centre (INAC), Carleton University Art Gallery and the Walter Phillips Gallery. In 2009, Rice became the chief curator at the Museum of Contemporary Native Arts, Santa Fe, New Mexico. In 2017, Rice became the Chair of the Indigenous Visual Culture at the Ontario College of Art and Design (OCAD). Rice was also one of the founders of the Aboriginal Curatorial Collective (ACC). From 2008-2010 Stephen Loft (Mohawk) was curator in residence at the National Gallery of Canada. Prior to this, Loft was the director at Urban Shaman from 2002-2008, Aboriginal curator at the Art Gallery of Hamilton from 2000-2002 and producer and artistic director of the Native Indian/Inuit Photographers' Association from 1993-1998. Candice Hopkins (Tlingit) maintained several curatorial positions at the National Gallery of Canada, and also at the Western Front, an art gallery and the Walter Phillips Gallery in Banff. Currently, Hopkins is the chief curator at IAIA Museum of Contemporary Native Arts (MOCNA) in Santa Fe, New Mexico. Cathy Mattes (Metis) was the curator at the Art Gallery of Southwestern Manitoba between 2003 and 2005 and presently is an associate professor in Visual and Aboriginal Art at Brandon University, Manitoba, Canada. Michelle Lavallee (Anishinabe) is currently the associate curator of MacKenzie Art Gallery in

<sup>163</sup> Bonyhady, "Sacred Sights," 32.

<sup>164</sup> Urban Shaman, *Urban Shaman - Retrospective* (Winnipeg, Manitoba: Urban Shaman, 2009), Exhibition catalogue, 8.

Regina, Saskatchewan. Lavallee held the position of assistant curator from 2007-2011. Lastly, Wanda Nanibush (Anishinaabe) is the content researcher and programming advisor at the Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto, Canada.

The appointments of Indigenous people to these positions have contributed to the rise of national and international Indigenous exhibitions. Most notably were the Australian Aboriginal contemporary exhibitions such as *Balance* (1990) at the Queensland Art Gallery; *Tagari Lia: Contemporary Aboriginal Art From Australia* (1990), which travelled to the UK; *Re-Take: Contemporary Aboriginal & Torres Strait Island Photography* (1998-2000); *Aboriginal Women's Exhibition, Papunya Tula: Genesis and Genius* (2000); *Crossing Country: The Alchemy of Western Arnhem Land Art* (2004) at the Art Gallery of New South Wales; and *Aratjara: Art of the First Australians*, which toured Germany, the United Kingdom and Denmark. Other significant Australian Aboriginal exhibitions were the Australian National Indigenous Art Triennale (2007) (2012); *Beyond the Pale* (2000); *Clandestine: Destiny Deacon* (2008); *Utopia: The Genius of Emily Kame Kngwarreye* (2008), which travelled to Osaka and Tokyo; *Deadly: In-between Heaven and Hell* (2012); and *Our Country Our Home* (2013).

First Nations exhibitions have included *Land, Spirit Power* (1992) at the National Gallery of Canada; *Indigena* (1992) and *The Submuloc Show/Columbus Wohs* (1992) at the Museum of Civilization, Hull, Quebec; *Reservation X*, (1997) at the National Museum of the American Indian in New York; and *Indian Time: 10 Contemporary Indian Artists from Canada and the United States* (1994) at the Kunsthallen Brandts Klaedefabrik, Odense, Denmark. Indigenous artists from Canada and Australia also participated in the 1990, 1995 and 1997 Venice Biennales.<sup>165</sup> To emphasise the increase in Australian Aboriginal and First Nation exhibitions from 1990s to 2016 a selected list of exhibitions is included (Appendix 4). Artworks by Indigenous Australians and Canadians has been discussed in art historical monographs about Australian and Canadian art and analysed in art journals such as *Canadian Art*, *Artlink*, and *Art and Australia*, to name a few. Further, major institutions have dedicated spaces for the display of Indigenous art.

### **Indigenous Artists: Affirmative Action and Activism**

Disenchanted with the compartmentalisation of their art and the denial of their Indigeneity, Indigenous artists and art workers took affirmative action. From the 1990s on, new Indigenous art collectives such as Boomalli Aboriginal Artists Co-operative,<sup>166</sup> proppaNOW (Australia), cyberTribe, and the Aboriginal Curatorial Collective (ACC) (Canada) were formed.<sup>167</sup> These art

<sup>165</sup> Rover Thomas and Trevor Nicholls in 1990, Edward Poitras in 1995, Emily Kamee Kngwarreye and Judy Watson in 1997 and Rebecca Belmore in 2005.

<sup>166</sup> The word 'Boomalli' means to strike, to make a mark, in the language of Kamilaroli, Wiradjuri and Bundjalung peoples, as stated in [www.boomalli.com.au](http://www.boomalli.com.au)

<sup>167</sup> Other collectives such as the Indian Group of Seven, Society of Canadian Artists of Native Ancestry (SCANA) (Canada), Professional Native Artists Inc. (PNIA)(Canada) and Campfire

collectives were active in having their work shown in a contemporary art context by deciding how, where and when their art would be shown, promoted and marketed. They employed self-liberating strategies and challenged the histories that defined them as other.

These new collectives advocated for self-identification that emphasised their art as part of a continuum that addresses the past, present and future. These collectives were committed to demonstrating the contemporary dynamism of their culture(s) and their continuing innovation and evolution. They chose to demonstrate the fluidity of identity in its complexity of shifts and various positions and interrelationships.

In this regard, the art collectives challenged and expanded on preconceived notions of Indigeneity in their explorations through the visual arts. Language played an important role in asserting one's identity. Language specific to the artist's tribal affiliation or language group was included in either the artwork or in the exhibition's title. For example, Anishinaabe artist Rebecca Belmore's artwork *Ayum-ee-aawach OomM-mown: Speaking to their Mother* (1992) and in the exhibition title *Koori Art '84*, which refers to people in the language group of Australian Aboriginals from South Eastern Australia.<sup>168</sup>

In the Australian context, Boomalli was proactive in their desire for self-representation, self-determination and formalising significant connections between traditional and urban Aboriginal artists. This included many Aboriginal artists from cities and rural areas in Australia. The Boomalli collective claimed these artists are "*all contemporary, all Aboriginal*".<sup>169</sup> Whereas, proppaNOW's focused more on self-liberating strategies that challenged the histories that defined them as 'other'. They provided a voice for Aboriginal artists from the city, who did not work out of remote regions of Queensland or did not have a distinct style nor have the range of network opportunities available to them compared to other Aboriginal artists who worked out of government-funded art centres.

ProppaNow sought to question previous notions of Aboriginal art and identity imposed by the Western art world. They wanted to breakdown stereotypes of Aboriginality and provide a public space for excluded Aboriginal artists who did not fit the mainstream art institutions idea of what constitutes Aboriginal art. Senior Research Fellow, Senior Curator and Principal Indigenous Advisor to the Director at the National Museum of Australia, Margo Neale asserted:

(Australia) were already in existence from the late sixties onwards and addressed similar issues. See Introduction for further discussion on this topic.

<sup>168</sup> "Meanings and origins of Australian words and idioms," 2016, [http://andc.anu.edu.au/australian-words/meanings-origins?field\\_alphabet\\_value=161](http://andc.anu.edu.au/australian-words/meanings-origins?field_alphabet_value=161).

<sup>169</sup> Boomalli and Association of Northern and Margo Neale, "Learning to be Proppa: Aboriginal artists' collective proppaNOW", *Artlink* 30, no. 1 (2010). Central Australia Aboriginal Arts (ANCAAA) exhibited together under the heading *Artworks Produced and Managed by Aboriginal People* in 1988. Brenda Croft, "Boomalli," *Artlink* 10, no. 1 & 2 (1990).

*The issue of race discrimination presented through the lens of urban Aboriginal artists whose communities have borne the brunt of colonisation, displacement from ancestral land and marginalisation by the dominant colonial culture is of significant importance to the collective.*<sup>170</sup>

The ACC was proactive in advocating for Aboriginal curators and art critics in the field of Aboriginal Arts in Canada and implemented a long-term strategic plan for employment and publication opportunities for Aboriginal curators and art critics. They also adopted Indigenous models of exchange such as sharing circles, knowledge keepers and Elders in their meetings for sharing and promoting knowledge of Indigenous Nations, nationally and internationally.

Moreover, there was an influx of Indigenous curators in the 1990s, filling the void of such position in galleries and museums.<sup>171</sup> Indigenous curators began taking responsibilities for the presentation, acquisition, maintenance and publication of Indigenous cultural materials—duties that were previously performed by non-Indigenous curators. Indigenous curators were active in articulating the diversity of Indigenous art by reclaiming the past and generating new knowledge and new art histories for the future. Through their actions these curators also assisted in dismantling the dichotomies of traditional/contemporary and urban/rural. Most importantly, they expanded on what Indigenous art is by redefining the way one views and comprehends historical, modern, social and cultural dynamics within and outside of Indigenous realities.

Indigenous curators (along with non-Indigenous curators) contributed to the recognition of contemporary Indigenous artists' right to self-representation and helped to challenge fixed and "essentialising" ideas of Indigeneity. For example, various curators, such as Gerald McMaster (Cree), Diana Nemiroff, Robert Houle, (Anishinaabe), Djon Mundine (Bundjalung), Vivien Johnson, Wally Caruana of the National Gallery of Australia, Hetti Perkins (Eastern Arrernte) and Brenda L. Croft (Gurindji, Malngin and Mudpurra), to name a few, were resolved to position Indigenous art as contemporary. These curators employed various strategies including publications, forums, conferences and exhibitions, in order to make this point.

As part of their efforts significant national and international exhibitions were staged such as; *Tagari Lia* (1990) (Australia), *Balance* (1990) (Australia), *Land Spirit Power* (1992)(Canada) and *Indigena* (1992) (Canada).<sup>172</sup> Individual Indigenous careers blossomed and in the 1990s artists from Australia and Canada were included in the Venice Biennale.<sup>173</sup> Inarguably, the combined efforts of collectives and Indigenous curators provided new exhibition opportunities for Indigenous artists to utilise the museum as a public arena to showcase the diversity in Indigenous art forms and

<sup>170</sup> Neale, "Learning to be Proppa: Aboriginal artists' collective proppaNOW " 34.

<sup>171</sup> See Introduction.

<sup>172</sup> See Introduction.

<sup>173</sup> See Introduction.

enhance cultural concerns, on both a national and international front. The reasoning is as Croft has pointed out that:

*If the national culture is resistant in promoting artists both as international and Indigenous, then artists need to consolidate their local base with international exchange.*<sup>174</sup>

Rickard agrees:

*if Indigenous artists are not recognized in the international dialogue as Indigenous, [then] we are aesthetically present, but we are invisible, colonial subjects.*"<sup>175</sup>

The formation of the new art collectives and the uprising of Indigenous curators created a space where the continuity of Indigenous people is realised within both the nation states and globally. This space was not limited to the standard exhibition space but extended to gathering places, symposiums and conferences nationally and internationally.<sup>176</sup>

Here, narratives of art and art history through Indigenous ways of knowing and worldviews were formed. Scholar Jean Fisher succinctly reveals that these narratives:

*insinuate[d] other narratives of history from repressed cultural spaces that challenged the Eurocentric master narrative and the museum's privileged site of a triumphalist art historical and evolutionist scholarship of collecting, classifying and interpreting.*<sup>177</sup>

This creation and, ultimately, recognition of an Indigenous space addresses what it means to be Indigenous in contemporary Australia and North America through stories that are as diverse and complex as the language groups and Nations from which they originated. Indigenous artists reside and practice in highly disputable places that collide and mix with one another, such as on or off the reserve, reservations, mission, and rural and urban areas.

Indigenous mobility includes a variety of environments that are both traditional and contemporary and make art for many reasons, including exploring notions of identity, resistance, self-determination and sovereignty. Contemporary Western art forms have become influential tools for Indigenous artists in providing cultural critique pertaining to the representation of Indigenous peoples, culture and art. Additionally, Indigenous artists comprehend the dominant discourse and are skilled in a variety of mediums to produce work that is critical of the colonial regime and aims

<sup>174</sup> Indian, *Vision, Space, Desire: Global Perspectives and Cultural Hybridity* 46.

<sup>175</sup> Indian, *Vision, Space, Desire: Global Perspectives and Cultural Hybridity* 60.

<sup>176</sup> See Introduction.

<sup>177</sup> Indian, *Vision, Space, Desire: Global Perspectives and Cultural Hybridity* 46.

to illustrate the past, presence and continuation of Indigenous culture by asserting legal ties to country, international engagement and giving insight into some of the world's oldest cultures.

This recognition addresses a life remembered, strengthened and most importantly continued in light of immense change. As Nikos Papastergiadis eloquently said, Indigenous artists “*find powerful crosscurrents that shape their ideas of where they have come from (in a sense of their tradition) and also where they are now (I am referring to their place in the contemporary).*”<sup>178</sup>

Restrictive affirmations of tradition, such as the fallacy of classifying tradition as a state of stasis or locked or frozen in time, has propelled Indigenous artists to critically reframe representations of Indigenous peoples and their histories.<sup>179</sup> In doing so, Indigenous artists advocate that tradition is an open ended process that includes a set of values and principles that have educated and shaped a person over many generations, and which carries itself into the present. These artists employ biographical details and historical imagery or “*historical consciousness,*” a term used by Papastergiadis, as art materials to engage and deal with “*the fullness of their history and their very presence within it.*”<sup>180</sup> In this sense, Indigenous artists engage in a dialectical engagement with history.

## **INDIGENOUS ART AS CONTEMPORARY ART DEBATE**

The acceptance of Indigenous art as contemporary occurred in the late 1980s and early 1990s in Australian and Canadian art histories when Indigenous art was finally viewed outside the anthropologically defined “primitive” lens.<sup>181</sup> At this time Indigenous artists, like non-Indigenous artists based in urban areas, became art school trained and as a result were exposed to Western art history and theory. Inspired by their Indigenous cultural heritage and the use of contemporary materials and processes, Indigenous artists began addressing historical, social and political issues pertaining to self-representation, identity, land rights, colonialism, and self-government, to name a few. As a result, Indigenous art in Australia and Canada flourished with a contemporary visual language seen by national and international audiences, which positioned their art within postmodern and postcolonial discourses.

This acceptance of Indigenous art as contemporary art has generated debate (which is currently ongoing) amongst anthropologists, art critics, art writers, artists and cultural workers in Australia and Canada. This is a sensitive area as each profession has their own divergent views on critical matters of contemporary art and Indigenous art, such as: definitional categories, aesthetics, ethics, modernity and tradition, and political, cultural and social issues that are intertwined and complex

<sup>178</sup> Brook Andrew and Geraldine Barlow, *Brook Andrew: Eye to Eye* (Clayton, Vic.: Monash University Museum of Art, 2007), 14.

<sup>179</sup> Thomas, *Possessions: indigenous art, colonial culture*, 197.

<sup>180</sup> Andrew and Barlow, *Brook Andrew: Eye to Eye* 14.

<sup>181</sup> See Introduction for significant exhibitions and events contributing to this.

and result in divisive positions. These debates have generated some of the most stimulating and dynamic art criticism in Western art in the last few decades and, as McLean has pointed out, offered “*new and richer modes of art historiography.*”<sup>182</sup>

This is understandable as contemporary art brings together two rich and conflicting fields - art history and art criticism. This is due to the nature of a Western viewpoint of art criticism that chronologically approaches the subject of contemporary art from the present to the past whereas art history’s approach is from the past through to the present. When Indigenous art is added to the discourse on contemporary art, further division is inevitable, as a result of the collision of four diverse fields –anthropology, art history, art criticism and a body of Indigenous cultural material.<sup>183</sup> An additional layer to how Indigenous people perceive themselves (including their cultural material) and the historical flaws of exclusion and inclusion in understanding Indigenous people is explored in Chapter Three, within this thesis.

Further, the fields of anthropology and art history are in opposition to one another because of their different traditions and conceptual frameworks, even though both were established as Western scholarly disciplines in the 1800s. The nature of anthropology is scientific in its approach to ordering and understanding the world in its embracement of research and classification systems. Yet, art history’s approach is at the opposite end of the spectrum with an emphasis on the aesthetics of influential artists within the sociocultural contexts of the Western world. Hence, when the anthropological paradigm opposes cultural meanings derived from the Western art history approach, critical debates are inevitable, despite both disciplines being Western.

What does become apparent is any issues pertaining to the body of Indigenous cultural material only reside within anthropology, art history and art criticism: Any input or understanding from Indigenous people regarding their body of Indigenous cultural material continues to be excluded from discussion. Writer Richard West Jr. explains:

*To be sure, the representational focus almost always has begun - and, unfortunately, often has ended - with native material culture, to the sometime exclusion of the complex native thinking that produced the objects in the first instance. This statement has been particularly true where a conventional European art history analysis has been employed that emphasized aesthetics rather than cultural context. On the other hand, disciplines such as anthropology, while approaching native material from the standpoint of its context, sometimes have minimized its aesthetic qualities, which are often considerable. The debate about whether native cultural material is ‘art’ or ‘artifact’ has its origins in these very different approaches to cultural interpretation and representation. As a Southern Cheyenne, I am bemused by the sometimes-thunderous academic salvos that go back*

<sup>182</sup> McLean, *How Aborigines invented the idea of contemporary art* 22.

<sup>183</sup> The term “cultural material” is used here as Indigenous objects only came into existence as “art” when acknowledged as such by the West.

*and forth between the art historians and anthropologists in this argument. Ironically, it is not the making of native peoples themselves, who had little to do with defining the terms of this debate. To the contrary, the whole discussion derives from intellectual constructs and systems of academic analysis that came from Western Europe.* <sup>184</sup>

The main issue of the debate, as Dr Ian McLean has pointed out, is the relationship between the art world concerns as to what constitutes contemporary art and traditional Indigenous art practices.<sup>185</sup> To be defined as Indigenous art the museums and institutions stipulated that the artworks had to be “authentic,” “in continuity” with Aboriginal traditions and part of a trajectory that stretched backwards to the pre-colonial era.<sup>186</sup> Evidently, the multiplicity of influences Indigenous artists undertook in their practices jeopardised their art as not being considered “real” Indigenous art by the mainstream art world because their work was not traditional.<sup>187</sup> This implies that in order to be ‘real’ Indigenous art, tradition cannot encompass change or advancement in its culture and therefore cannot be seen as contemporary.<sup>188</sup> Such a view embellishes Indigenous art with the standard stereotype of a static culture with its art viewed as artefact or curios.

Many Indigenous artists and art workers view this new inclusion as problematic, seeing it as a divisive factor in Indigenous cultural existence and artistic expression. As such, it is disputed by a number of Indigenous artists and art workers. For instance, artist Fiona Foley (Badtjala) remarked that traditional, urban and intellectual categories undermine Indigenous art.<sup>189</sup> Foley continues:

*The art establishment take the politics out of the traditional art and in turn the country is taken out of urban artist’s work, rendering both neutral entities.* <sup>190</sup>

Whereas film maker Lorretta Todd (Metis) states:

*By reducing our cultural expression to simply the question of...whether we are contemporary or traditional, we are placed on the edges of the dominant culture, while the dominant culture determines whether we are allowed to enter into its realm of art.* <sup>191</sup>

<sup>184</sup> Tom Hill and Richard W. Sr. Hill, eds., *Creation's Journey: Native American Identity and Belief* (New York: NMAI and Smithsonian Institution Press, 1994), 39.

<sup>185</sup> McLean, *How Aborigines invented the idea of contemporary art* 94.

<sup>186</sup> Morphy, "Seeing Aboriginal Art in the Gallery," 46.

<sup>187</sup> See Croft, "Boomalli."; LeeAnn Martin in Nemiroff, Houle, and Townsend-Gault, *Land, Spirit, Power: First Nations at the National Gallery of Canada.*; Gerald McMaster and Lee-Ann Martin, eds., *Indigena: Contemporary Native Perspectives in Canadian Art* (Vancouver, Canada: Douglas and McIntyre, 1992).; Indian, *Vision, Space, Desire: Global Perspectives and Cultural Hybridity*

<sup>188</sup> See Patrick Flores, "Revisiting Tradition and the Incommensurate Contemporary," *Broadsheet* 41, no. 4 (2012).

<sup>189</sup>Foley, *The Art of Politics The Politics of Art.*

<sup>190</sup> Foley, *The Art of Politics The Politics of Art.*

<sup>191</sup> Berlo and Phillips, *Native North American Art* 238.



Curator and art writer Steven Loft has also argued that he does not see Indigenous art as postmodern, and that positioning it as contemporary is “*always in relation to the Euro-Western canon of ‘isms’ and co-opts it into the art historical homogeneity without Indigenous input.*”<sup>192</sup>

Moreover, for most Indigenous people, the difference amongst cultural practice and craft and art are not addressed the same way as in the Western art canon. First Nation writer Tom Hill discloses:

*It is interesting to observe that in the traditional languages there is no word for "art". Only a few Aboriginal art forms have no established function in daily life. To the North American Indian, everything made served a purpose; the idea of hanging a painting on a wall or mounting a sculpture on a pedestal just to admire it was complete foreign.*<sup>193</sup>

Mohawk art historian Deborah Doxtator has stated that the very category of art as an autonomous material object disrupts the Indigenous expressive systems in which the material objects serves, that is, as cultural conduits amongst the people.<sup>194</sup> This supports the general view that art in this context refers to any art form that is exercised by Indigenous artists regardless of date of execution and includes all the arts in the Western disciplines as well as Indigenous basket weaving, storytelling, bark work and beadwork, and so on.<sup>195</sup>

Importantly, Indigenous artists have responded to this debate, but their input has not been recognised in the contemporary debate art discourse. Indigenous artists have exchanged ideas on the topic of traditional and contemporary art practices, along with issues regarding identity and the ‘art versus craft’ debate in the First National Native Artists symposiums.<sup>196</sup> Position statements by many Indigenous artists on whether they are traditional or contemporary artists were published from the 1987 National Proceedings from National Native Indian Artists Symposium in Lethbridge, Alberta.<sup>197</sup> Anishinaabe artist and curator Robert Houle’s essay also portrayed Indigenous artists as embracing both Indigenous and Western aesthetics by creating works that are inspired by tradition but expressed using new concepts and techniques.<sup>198</sup>

<sup>192</sup> Loft, "Towards Forever an Indigenous Art historical Worldview."

<sup>193</sup> Trepanier and Creighton-Kelly, "Understanding Aboriginal Arts in Canada Today: A Knowledge and Literature Review," 15.

<sup>194</sup> Berlo and Phillips, *Native North American Art* 238.

<sup>195</sup> As defined in Trepanier and Creighton-Kelly, "Understanding Aboriginal Arts in Canada Today: A Knowledge and Literature Review."

<sup>196</sup> The first symposium was held in 1978 in Manitoulin Island, Canada followed by further gatherings in 1979 (Regina), 1982 (Hazelton), 1987 (Lethbridge) and 1993 in Halifax. See Daniel J. K. Beavon, Cora Jane Voyageur, and David Newhouse, eds., *Hidden in Plain Sight: Contributions of Aboriginal Peoples to Canadian Identity and Culture* (University of Toronto Press, 2005), 150.

<sup>197</sup> See Alfred Young Man, ed., *NETWORKING: Proceedings from National Native Indian Artists' Symposium IV* (Lethbridge, Alberta: University of Lethbridge, 1987).

<sup>198</sup> Robert Houle, *New Work by a New Generation* (Regina: McKenzie Art Gallery, 1982), exhibition catalogue.

Anthropologist Peter Sutton wrote that Aboriginal art is 'traditional' and emphasised that it is a culture with a rich past that uses its traditions as a present resource.<sup>199</sup> Supporting this, curator and writer Hetti Perkins (Eastern Arrernte) wrote, "*Even 'traditional' Aboriginal art is contemporary.*"<sup>200</sup> Artist Judy Watson (Waanyi) supports Perkins view stating that Aboriginal art is both country and Western, simply meaning both traditional in its ties to country and simultaneously contemporary with those ties in the present.<sup>201</sup> This view supports the idea that the contemporary is formed in the amalgamation of events of tradition and change. Artist Jimmy Durham writes:

*Traditions exist and are guarded by Indian communities. One of the most important of these is dynamism, constant change—adaptability, the inclusion of new ways and new material—is a tradition that our artists have particularly celebrated and have used to move and strengthen our societies.*<sup>202</sup>

This insight has parallels with Gerald McMaster (Cree) who also said:

*Tradition can mean change. Even though our art is steeped in tradition our ancestors were constantly changing. Tradition seemed to be change.*<sup>203</sup>

Loft, on the other hand, positions tradition in relation to a historical lineage of Western art. Loft remarks:

*There are two main ways that Indigenous art is looked at through this canon. One is our historical art is viewed as traditional as artefact. What this does is freezes it in the pre-contact, pre-civilized, ethno-anthropological western view. Artefact you existed - you don't exist now. The other way is to look at it as contemporary art, which has been acknowledged somewhat at the museum level and university level. What this creates is scepticism—traditional verses the contemporary...it separates contemporary art from its past and historical art from the contemporary and separates our history yet again.*<sup>204</sup>

## CONCLUSION

<sup>199</sup> McLean, *How Aborigines invented the idea of contemporary art* 103.

<sup>200</sup> McLean, *How Aborigines invented the idea of contemporary art* 104.

<sup>201</sup> McLean, *How Aborigines invented the idea of contemporary art* 109.

<sup>202</sup> Nemiroff, Houle, and Townsend-Gault, *Land, Spirit, Power: First Nations at the National Gallery of Canada*, 37.

<sup>203</sup> The quote is from the opening speech by Gerald McMaster in Brantford, Canada at the Woodlands Art Centre for its 30<sup>th</sup> Annual First Nation Art exhibition. See "Tom Hill says his goodbyes at 30<sup>th</sup> annual art show," 2005, <http://www.ammsa.com/publications/ontario-birchbark/tom-hill-says-his-goodbyes-30th-annual-art-show>.

<sup>204</sup> Loft, "Towards Forever an Indigenous Art historical Worldview."

This chapter focused on setting the scene for the thesis by pinpointing certain social, political and cultural achievements of Indigenous people in Canada and Australia in the 1990s. Included within this timeframe were the global alliances that formed and contributed to the momentum in Indigenous art.

The chapter then outlined the Indigenous art as contemporary art debate in Western art that also occurred in the 1990s. By drawing attention to these events, the chapter demonstrated how Indigenous social, political and cultural issues, concerns and events have ventured into the contemporary works by Indigenous artists. The contemporary Indigenous artworks therefore make visible the making of Indigenous histories through contemporary art practices.

The next chapter, Chapter Three addresses imperial and colonial processes of Indigenous exclusion and inclusion in Western history and art history.

The chapter addresses imperialist and colonial rules of practice, negation and constructs of time, space and art, primitive art and redefinition of Western art and commercialisation and commodification.

### CHAPTER THREE

## INDIGENOUS RUPTURE AND TRANSFORMATION IN WESTERN HISTORY AND ART HISTORY

*We have finally come to a point in our history as First Nations of sharing our art as a contemporary expression, derived from our cultural memory and our hidden history—a composite knowledge of icon, symbol and concept; of interpretation and visioning; of experimentation and experience; of movement and of new creation—ever aware that we take responsibility for our creations, to guard them and to use them well.* <sup>205</sup>

Indigenous peoples have struggled against a Western view of history under colonialism. This has resulted in the voicelessness and invisibility of Indigenous peoples. Indigenous peoples want to tell their own stories in their own way and for their own purposes. Oral traditions were the means for many Indigenous peoples to relay their histories, as these stories reflected discoveries, encounters, attitudes, perceptions and experiences of the people. However, colonisers subsequently discounted these oral histories.

As a result, Indigenous peoples from both Australia and Canada have critiqued and contested the way Western history was constructed and written from the perspective of the colonisers. Indeed, as art historian Howard Morphy points out, in the past “*non-Western arts were only thought to have a history at the moment of their discovery by the West.*”<sup>206</sup> In response to such anachronistic attitudes, Gerald McMaster (Cree) writes: “*that moment of convergence and subsequent merger with the newcomer was a mere five hundred-year moment in Native history.*”<sup>207</sup> For Australia it would similarly be a mere two hundred-year moment in Aboriginal history.

Colonial history has provided a way of viewing and comprehending the world that privileged the philosophies, attitudes, logic and assumptions of the Western world: An intricate matrix of anthropology, politics and history with complications for art history and art discourse, as colonialism provided the means in which to codify and dominate the world and the people who inhabit in it. Australian Aboriginal academic and author Aileen Moreton-Robinson (Goenpul) uses the concept “*possessive logics*” to define how the nation-state’s ownership, control and domination are put into use within discourses to “*circulate sets of meanings about ownership of the nation, as a common-sense knowledge, decision making and socially produced conventions.*”<sup>208</sup> Moreton-Robinson continues that colonisation constructed multiple contexts that formed Indigenous

<sup>205</sup> "First Nations Historical Timeline."; Trepanier and Creighton-Kelly, "Understanding Aboriginal Arts in Canada Today: A Knowledge and Literature Review."

<sup>206</sup> Morphy, "Seeing Aboriginal Art in the Gallery."

<sup>207</sup> McMaster and Martin, *Indigena: Contemporary Native Perspectives in Canadian Art* 12.

<sup>208</sup> Aileen Moreton-Robinson, *The White Possession: Property, Power, and Indigenous Sovereignty* (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2015), xii.

subjectivities that were and continue to be placed within “*discursive formation of history relative to a particular space country and time.*”<sup>209</sup>

This intertwining of imperialism and colonialism is referred to by Said (1935-2003) as discussed in Chapter One, who wrote, “*Imperialism and the culture associated with it affirm both the primacy of geography and an ideology about control of territory.*”<sup>210</sup> Within these quotes both Said and Moreton-Robinson reveal the associated sociology, psychology and politics embedded in the history of imperialism and colonialism are based on possession.

Undoubtedly, Indigenous is written in the Euro-Western discipline of history as if it were ‘other’. As such, Indigenous ‘other’ presupposes the centrality of the Euro-Western discipline of history and through its presupposition maintains a colonial orientation through its use of language. Postcolonial theory, often written by an ‘other’ has attempted to overturn this linguistic arrangement-to some extent successfully. Yet within a Euro-Western written discipline of history, otherness remains the definitive meaning of Indigeneity.

Another mode for history is possible, one familiar to Indigenous people and yet which is resisted by the scholarly English-speaking tradition: the making of history through art practices. The very gesture of putting forth an Indigenous history within Indigenous art practice is a form of activism and resistance to the Euro-Western tradition. It allows Indigenous people a mode of writing history that resides outside of the assumed power relations of that tradition and a mode of history built within a community’s own traditions, worldviews and epistemologies.

This chapter outlines the lingering effects of imperialism that have caused severe fragmentation amongst Indigenous peoples, who continue to struggle to regain their histories. It looks at modernity as a series of negations that expand into pertinent and contentious issues for Indigenous peoples and their cultural materials. In the context of contemporary art, the chapter addresses the historical origins as to why Indigenous art has been excluded from - then subsequently included in - the Western art canon and how this has contributed to the difficulty in defining Indigenous art as contemporary. This provides a succinct overview of Indigenous art’s inception from the ethnographic to the contemporary art museum from an Indigenous perspective.

## **IMPERIALISM AND COLONIALISM AS PROCESSES OF INDIGENOUS EXCLUSION AND INCLUSION**

### **Processes of Indigenous Exclusion**

<sup>209</sup> Moreton-Robinson, *The White Possession: Property, Power, and Indigenous Sovereignty*, 13.

<sup>210</sup> Said, *Culture and Imperialism* 78.

In order to expose the significance of artistic debates that seek to define 'contemporary art' in Western art, the following discourses must be situated within their charged historical context. They occur against the backdrop of histories of colonial violence and imperial ideologies that have sought to dispossess, dehumanise, exclude and erase Indigenous people from not only artistic domains but also Western society.

Attitudes of imperialism still prevail as it has not only become standardised with the passing of time but continues to transform itself in contemporary times. Tuhiwai Smith asserts we are still in imperialist times for "*imperialism frames the Indigenous experience.*"<sup>211</sup> In this regard, Tuhiwai Smith has addressed how Indigenous histories were interrupted and severely altered by imperialism as both imperialism and colonialism codified the world.

Here, Tuhiwai Smith references critical theorists Frantz Fanon (1925-1961) and Ashis Nandy (1937-), both of whom have claimed colonialism and imperialism brought disarray to Indigenous people, disconnecting Indigenous people from their histories, languages, social relations and their own feelings, thinking and engaging with the world.<sup>212</sup> Rules of practice that regulated and legitimise imperialism were as Nandy then referred to as "*code*" or "*grammar*" of imperialism.<sup>213</sup>

#### Rules of Practice

These rules of practice stemmed originally from the definition of European imperialism in the fifteenth century and are as follow: (1) imperialism as economic expansion; (2) imperialism as subjugation of others; (3) imperialism as multiple forms of realisation; and (4) imperialism as a discursive field of knowledge.<sup>214</sup> This list describes the manner in which imperialism and colonialism imposed a systematic structure (and systems of classification) upon Indigenous peoples that resulted in severe fragmentation amongst their communities and societies. A prime example is how classifications are embedded in government legislation, policies that discriminate against Indigenous people, of which the Indian Act (Canada) and the Australian Constitution are but two examples.<sup>215</sup> Nevertheless, before the arrival of the Europeans, Indigenous societies and their established order systems were already in place, yet they were forced to discard them.

#### Series of Negations

Systematic structures and classification systems can be linked to a chronology of Western events that contribute to the formation of a Euro-Western history. Such events pertain to discovery, conquest, distribution, exploitation and appropriation. These subject areas are included as part of

<sup>211</sup> Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* 19.

<sup>212</sup> Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* 28.

<sup>213</sup> In the beginning of the twentieth century, historians such as J. A. Hobson (1858-1940) and Vladimir Lenin (1870-1924) assigned the term imperialism to explain a number of developments that lead up to Europe's economic expansion bid

<sup>214</sup> Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*

<sup>215</sup> See Glossary for definition of Indian Act. In the Australian Constitution, drafted in 1901, Australian Aboriginals are excluded, and remain so at the time of writing.

the contemporary method analysis used in contemporary Indigenous artworks in Chapter Five of the thesis. Further, in order to assert a colonial ideology, a series of negations were employed that ultimately resulted in the submersion, invisibility and the attempted erasure of Indigenous histories. Author of numerous sociological studies, Albert Memmi addressed these negations as follows:<sup>216</sup>

1. The negation of Indigenous peoples as fully rational, self-actualising human beings capable of possessing a social order and therefore a history. This notion stems from the Enlightenment era where new conceptions of society and the individual were formed to create a rational, cultivated and progressive society. Rationalism, individualism and capitalism were the guiding principles prescribed for success in formulating a modern industrialized state. This contributed to Western's society transition to a new manufacturing process brought on by the Industrial Revolution (1760-1840). History then began with the contrast between the "modern" and "pre-modern." It became the determinant with which to reinforce the modern industrialised state inclusive of rational individuals.<sup>217</sup> Here, poststructuralist critiques of history are evident in that history is viewed as a modernist project formulated alongside the imperial beliefs of the Other.<sup>218</sup>

Conceptions of the 'other', although in existence in Europe for centuries, became more pronounced and reinforced the idea that Indigenous peoples were subhuman, prehistoric, primitive, uncivilized and incapable of possessing a history, for "*history was the story of people who were regarded as fully human.*"<sup>219</sup> This conception of the 'other' relied on non-Indigenous being regarded as self-actualising, rational and fully human who created history in light of progress and generated a modern industrialised society. While non-Indigenous people were also othered, the othering of Indigenous people occurred in distinctive ways tied to these conceptions of the 'primitive' and accompanied by colonisation.<sup>220</sup> The people responsible for social change in the underlying development of the states, including scientists, anthropologists and philosophers sought to control and manage Indigenous people and how their culture were viewed by Western societies.

2. The negation of Indigenous peoples' oral histories. Earlier Aboriginal histories were discarded because the colonial view equated "oral" with "pre-literate" and therefore of lesser human significance.<sup>221</sup> Alfred Young Man writes:

<sup>216</sup> See Albert Memmi, *The Colonizer and the Colonized* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1991), 83.

<sup>217</sup> Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* 32.

<sup>218</sup> Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* 29.

<sup>219</sup> Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* 32.

<sup>220</sup> Memmi, *The Colonizer and the Colonized* 32.

<sup>221</sup> Trepanier and Creighton-Kelly, "Understanding Aboriginal Arts in Canada Today: A Knowledge and Literature Review," 32.

*No credence was given to the notion that in the preceding centuries North American Indians were viable social, political, and economic social organisms in their own right with artistic and cultural paradigms to match. After all, it was presumed, what kind of history or social system could these pre-literate societies build without written languages?*<sup>222</sup>

The written word was considered to be a sign of intellectual thought and provided the means to document important events, happenings, encounters, exploration and scientific discoveries. In the eyes of the West, oral histories were seen as lacking critical, cognitive and objective thought.<sup>223</sup> Therefore, writing or literacy was seen as the mark of a superior civilisation. This is despite the fact that the tradition of orality—commonly referred to as storytelling—is a common practice amongst Indigenous peoples and plays a number of significant roles, such as in teachings cultural resistance, survival and activism.<sup>224</sup>

3. The negation of Indigenous peoples as a living race. Early conceptions of Indigenous cultures were of people fixed in time and place, who would eventually die out, become extinct. During the Victorian period (1837-1901) government policies believed Indigenous culture could not exist in the modern era and therefore needed to be preserved before a given race vanished or disappeared altogether.<sup>225</sup> Indigenous objects were then salvaged, collected and stored in newly built museums to “*preserve the continent’s so called ‘prehistory’ of native artefacts.*”<sup>226</sup>

The newly built museums marked the beginning of the ‘museum age’ and were used to showcase the historical evolution of humankind: Indigenous peoples and their cultural material were regarded as vital scientific specimens that pertained to the stages of technological development and human evolution. Scholarly disciplines of anthropology and art history were established and regarded as the main producers of knowledge and dissemination of Indigenous peoples and their way of living.

These negations encompass and expand into pertinent and contentious issues for Indigenous people. Art is relevant in this area as it provides Indigenous people with a voice to showcase these issues that otherwise may be too difficult for viewers to consider outside of an art context. Author

<sup>222</sup> Alfred Young Man, "Towards a Political History of Native Art " in *Visions of Power: Contemporary Art by First Nations, Inuit and Japanese Canadians* (Toronto: Earth Spirit Festival, 1991).

<sup>223</sup> Trepanier and Creighton-Kelly, "Understanding Aboriginal Arts in Canada Today: A Knowledge and Literature Review," 32.

<sup>224</sup> See Glossary for the term “teachings.”

<sup>225</sup> Berlo and Phillips, *Native North American Art* 13.

<sup>226</sup> As quoted in Candice Hopkins, "On Other Pictures: Imperialism, Historical Amnesia and Mimesis," in *Sakahan: International Indigenous Art* (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 2013), 29.



and cultural critic, bell hooks, addresses the significance of the arts in conveying these issues for historically subjugated peoples by,

*connecting art with lived practices of struggle...they provide a cultural location for the construction of alternative readings of history told from the standpoint of the oppressed, disinherited, or those who are opened to seeing the world from this perspective.*<sup>227</sup>

The arts assist Indigenous artists and other marginalised people(s) in transforming the colonised views of Western history by revisiting history. In doing so, revisiting history by post-colonial or neo-colonial practices provides a strategy to interact, comprehend and act upon this history by retelling, revealing, reclaiming and providing testimony to the past. Indigenous peoples, particularly Indigenous artists, struggling for justice commonly employ these strategies as they act as powerful forms of social, cultural and political resistance.

#### Imperial Constructs of Time and Space

Tuhiwai Smith argues that Western's thinking of time and space are colonial constructs that have (and continue to have) long-term ramifications for Indigenous peoples and are in direct opposition to their ways of thinking about the world and their worldviews.<sup>228</sup> For example Western notions of time and space are embedded in science, philosophy and language and are divorced from one another whereas concepts of time and space are approached differently in Indigenous culture.

In Indigenous cultures the past does not exist in a fixed, far distant time as it does in Western thought. It is alive through the acknowledgement of ancestors, Aboriginal worldviews and the creation stories.<sup>229</sup> Whereas in some Indigenous languages there are no words for time or space and in others there are many words that represent the idea of time and space<sup>230</sup> though these are not considered definitive categories of thought.

Time is therefore cyclical-concurrent with the present, embodied in present generations who preserve and perpetuate the creation stories. It sits outside the Western idea of linear.<sup>231</sup>

<sup>227</sup> As quoted in The Museum of Contemporary Native Arts and Arts, *Manifestations: New Native Art Criticism*, 16.

<sup>228</sup> Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* 53.

<sup>229</sup> In the First Nation context time is not fixed and the emphasis is on Aboriginal worldview and the creation stories. For further information see Trepanier and Creighton-Kelly, "Understanding Aboriginal Arts in Canada Today: A Knowledge and Literature Review," 30.

<sup>230</sup> In my own language group the Anishinabek, there are no words for time and space for further information see The Ojibway People's dictionary <http://ojibwe.lib.umn.edu/ojibwe/search>. Further, in the Maori language there is no distinction between the concepts of time and space thus only one word represents the two ideas. Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* 50.

<sup>231</sup> As per discussed in Berlo and Phillips, *Native North American Art* Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* 50.

Importantly it locates that time can be intellectually manipulated as cultural perceptions that embody belief systems.

Whereas in Western society, the transition to new manufacturing process brought on by the Industrial Revolution, protestant ethic imperialism, the arrival of the missionaries, science and the working class evangelical movement (which associated labour with preservation from destruction and evil) contributed to the growth of an orderly colonialism, Smith contends.<sup>232</sup>

Time and the management of it became important contributors to generating wealth amongst the emerging lower English middle class. The division of time into structured components emerged with designated mealtimes and the separation of work, religion and leisure were in alignment with notions of progress.<sup>233</sup>

These work practices and religious views and values of the lower middle class English contributed to the vast colonial view of Indigenous peoples' lifestyles as archaic, static, primitive, unambitious with no concept of time and thus as indolent people.<sup>234</sup> These views became constructed stereotypes of Indigenous people that still exist today.<sup>235</sup>

Space is considered separate and static from time in Western thought and was responsible for investigations into the relationship (if any) between time, space and measurement. These have led to the development of scholarly disciplines, such as mapping, physics and geography and subsequently were responsible for producing a spatial vocabulary specific to colonialism.<sup>236</sup> For example, mapping, boundaries, borders, and the survey of land are all colonial constructs that involve processes of defining, marking and controlling space, and is evident in the construction of bridges, roads and the removal of natural resources.<sup>237</sup>

Within this line of enquiry, Smith equates these terms with three concepts: 1) the line, 2) the centre and 3) the outside. Space is viewed as made up of line, whether parallel or elliptical and is used in the denotation of boundaries, borders and colonial power. The center is the gravitation towards a system of colonial power whereas the outside positions people on the periphery, specifically marginalised people.<sup>238</sup>

<sup>232</sup> Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*

<sup>233</sup> Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*

<sup>234</sup> Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*

<sup>235</sup> As seen in the writings of Loft, "Towards Forever an Indigenous Art historical Worldview."; Trepanier and Creighton-Kelly, "Understanding Aboriginal Arts in Canada Today: A Knowledge and Literature Review."; Philip, "Life and Art? Relocating Aboriginal art and culture in the museum."

<sup>236</sup> Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* 53.

<sup>237</sup> Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* 53.

<sup>238</sup> Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*

This analysis has exact parallels with the surveying of land, the establishment of treaty rights and the allotment of reserves in Canada; and missions and stations in Australia. As well as the notion of Terra Nullius, meaning "empty land" in Latin - Terra Nullius was the logic used by Captain Cook to claim Australia for Britain.<sup>239</sup>

#### Western Classification and Criteria of Art

For most Indigenous people(s) the difference amongst cultural practice, craft and art are different from the Western art canon. As for most Indigenous people the difference amongst cultural practice, craft and art are not addressed the same way in Western art canon. First Nation writer Tom Hill states,

*It is interesting to observe that in the traditional languages there is no word for "art". Only a few Aboriginal art forms have no established function in daily life. To the North American Indian, everything made served a purpose; the idea of hanging a painting on a wall or mounting a sculpture on a pedestal just to admire it was completely foreign.*<sup>240</sup>

Additionally, Mohawk art historian Deborah Doxtator voiced that the very category of art as an autonomous material object disrupts the Indigenous expressive systems in which the material objects serves, that is, as cultural conduits amongst the people.<sup>241</sup> This supports the general view that art in this context refers to any art form that is exercised by Indigenous artists regardless of date of execution and includes all the arts in the Western disciplines as well as Indigenous basket weaving, storytelling, bark work and beadwork.<sup>242</sup>

#### Primitive Art

Indigenous arts from Canada and Australia were not acknowledged by Western societies as significant art forms until the 1950s, and it was not until the 1980s that Indigenous art began to enter main art institutions and galleries.<sup>243</sup> Prior to this Indigenous peoples and their art have been represented as 'primitive' or 'other' peoples art through the lens of Western museums of anthropology and ethnography. These institutions classified the artworks as decorative, religious symbols, expressions of social relations or other meanings outside of the objects

<sup>239</sup> Further insight into the meaning of Terra Nullius can be found at [http://www.atsiphj.com.au/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=887:the-meaning-of-terra-nullius&catid=279:law](http://www.atsiphj.com.au/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=887:the-meaning-of-terra-nullius&catid=279:law).

<sup>240</sup> Australian Museum, "Indigenous Australia Timeline," (February 20, 2013 2011), 15. [australianmuseum.net.au/Indigenous-Australia-Timeline-1901-to-1969](http://australianmuseum.net.au/Indigenous-Australia-Timeline-1901-to-1969)

<sup>241</sup> Berlo and Phillips, *Native North American Art* 238.

<sup>242</sup> As defined in Trepanier and Creighton-Kelly, "Understanding Aboriginal Arts in Canada Today: A Knowledge and Literature Review," 15.

<sup>243</sup> Morphy, "Seeing Aboriginal Art in the Gallery." See also 17th Biennale of Sydney & Campbelltown Arts Centre, *North-South Dialogue Forum*.

themselves.<sup>244</sup> Furthermore, some museums curators were opposed to objects of non-Western material culture in their collection being classified as art objects.<sup>245</sup>

Masks and other forms of Indigenous African American and Oceanic art inspired 20<sup>th</sup> Century Western artists such as Pablo Picasso, Henri Matisse and Max Ernst to name a few. Indigenous masks and other artefacts portrayed a world of the exotic that drew on the fantasies of primitivism during colonisation where Indigenous people, whether through the exhibition of their material culture as 'artefacts' or the ethnographic photographs for scientific reasons were made objects of Western entertainment. In this light Indigenous people were documented as a dying species by the colonising countries. The problem of defining historical Aboriginal art production as artefact—as traditional, as authentic—positions the art in a pre-contact, pre-civilised and ethnography Western context with the implication "*you existed then, but you don't exist now.*"<sup>246</sup>

This has resulted in the defining of Indigenous art in a minimal social context, without a political or cultural frame of reference. The concept of primitive art contributed to the Western art discourse of binary opposition: traditional verses contemporary or authentic verses inauthentic. Many contemporary Indigenous artists at the time felt unappreciated and excluded from mainstream art due to the multiplicity of influences these artists undertook in their art practices and being considered as 'unauthentic' by mainstream art institutions. Indigenous artists and art workers have responded to this discourse by forming artist collectives as a backlash against the authentic/unauthentic binary, as well as consolidating their local base with international exchange, in order to challenge Western notions of Indigenous art.

### **Processes of Indigenous Inclusion**

#### Redefinition of Art

In 2001 Australian anthropologist Howard Morphy raised three important processes regarding the inclusion of Australian Aboriginal art in the mainstream contemporary art world. The processes are: 1) A shift in the notion of what can be considered art; 2) A critical evaluation of primitive art; 3) An increased awareness of art as a commodity.<sup>247</sup> Morphy also contended that these processes in conjunction with the increase in globalisation, both politically and economically, have in some circumstances, endorsed the agency of Indigenous artists.<sup>248</sup> In this respect, editors Nicolas Peterson, Lindy Allen and Louise Hamby of *The Makers and Making of Indigenous Australia Museum Collections*, (2008) admit the conceptualisation of Indigenous art have been created by competing value systems.<sup>249</sup> Paradoxically these three processes prior to reconsideration arguably

<sup>244</sup> Thomas, *Possessions: indigenous art, colonial culture*, 17.

<sup>245</sup> Morphy, "Seeing Aboriginal Art in the Gallery," 38.

<sup>246</sup> Loft, "Towards Forever an Indigenous Art historical Worldview."

<sup>247</sup> Morphy, "Seeing Aboriginal Art in the Gallery," 37.

<sup>248</sup> Morphy, "Seeing Aboriginal Art in the Gallery," 38. This aspect is also discussed in the Introduction.

<sup>249</sup> As quoted in Murphy, "Transforming culture: Indigenous art and Australia art museums," 2.

were the reasons why Indigenous art was excluded from being seen as contemporary in the first instance.

Globalisation, colonialism, tourist commodification and the effects of commercialisation on the production of art represent more recent concerns for an Indigenous history than inclusion into the contemporary art realm. Hence, it is relevant to briefly discuss Morphy's processes in order to provide a brief overview of how Indigenous cultural material (including art) was perceived, as well as why and how it was prevented from being seen as contemporary.

Prior to the 1950s, Indigenous arts in Australia and Canada were not recognised as possessing a tradition of art in the Western sense and thus were barely recognised as a notable art form by art historians, critics and writers.<sup>250</sup> In fact, anthropologists and museums curators dismissed seeing non-European objects within their collections viewed as art for fear of misinterpretation, namely "through the imposition of universalistic aesthetic concepts and in the creation of difference at the level of meaning and significance."<sup>251</sup> This view is in alignment with the period at the end of the nineteenth century when ethnologists proposed theories of art in general. Amongst these theories was the notion embedded in German philosopher Immanuel Kant's (1724-1804) aesthetic theory that in order for a work of art to achieve formal beauty and to articulate ideas it should be removed of all functionality.<sup>252</sup> Indigenous art forms were therefore excluded from this line of universalistic aesthetic concepts due to the functionality of their material objects.<sup>253</sup> Hence, Indigenous art forms were allocated to the inferior status of craft or applied art. As such, Indigenous art was largely confined to ethnographic museums and situated amongst the artefacts with the material culture of 'other' peoples and viewed as curios.

A significant shift in the notion of what can be considered art occurred in North America in 1941 and in Australia in 1959, when Indigenous cultural material was exhibited in an art gallery context. In North America, many objects collected from anthropologists and ethnographers, Frank Cushing (1857-1900), Franz Boas (1858-1942) and Stewart Culin (1858-1929) along with works from private collectors and First Nations artists were exhibited at the Museum of Modern Art (MOMA) in New York in 1941 when Alfred H. Barr was the director.<sup>254</sup> The exhibition title was *Indian Art from the United States* and was curated by Rene d' Harnoncourt of the Indian Arts and Crafts Board of the Department of the Interior, and Frederic H. Douglas, director of the Denver Art Museum.<sup>255</sup>

<sup>250</sup> Morphy, "Seeing Aboriginal Art in the Gallery," 40.

<sup>251</sup> Morphy, "Seeing Aboriginal Art in the Gallery."

<sup>252</sup> See Ruth Phillips in Berlo and Phillips, *Native North American Art* 15.

<sup>253</sup> This includes objects such as baskets, regalia, shields and utensils, to name a few. Trepanier and Creighton-Kelly, "Understanding Aboriginal Arts in Canada Today: A Knowledge and Literature Review," 15.

<sup>254</sup> Berlo, *The Early Years of Native American art history: the politics of scholarship and collecting*.

<sup>255</sup> As previously mentioned First Nation people do not recognise the boundaries between Canada and United States despite treaties being formed. The exhibition catalogue acknowledges this. See H. Frederic Douglas and Rene D'Harnoncourt, *Indian Art of the United States* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1941), exhibition catalogue, 4.

The exhibition's presentation premises were in keeping Barr's curatorial preference, that being not to favor any chronological period, particular style or national school of thought.<sup>256</sup> Barr said:

*At the present time, the museum is concerned primarily with the work of those early 20<sup>th</sup> Century artists who seem progressive and alive, together with the work of the past especially the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, which is related to the present either by direct ancestry or analogy.*<sup>257</sup>

Eighteen years later, in Australia, the Australian Commonwealth Government distributed to museums and state galleries half of its collection of the 500 artworks obtained from the 1948 American-Australian Scientific Expedition to Arnhem Land (AASEAL) led by Charles Percy Mountford (1890-1976).<sup>258</sup> The artworks consisted of bark paintings, works on paper, weaving and sculpture from the Arnhem Land communities of Kunbarlanja, Yirrkala, Milingimbi and Ayangkulumuda (Groote Eylandt).<sup>259</sup> The Art Gallery of New South Wales (AGNSW) was gifted twenty-four AASEAL artworks. At this time, it was seen as remarkable because their inclusion in an art gallery's collection reflected, "*changes in western conceptions of what art is.*"<sup>260</sup> Indigenous art was clearly being recognised in its own rights.

The then Assistant Director of AGNSW, Tony Tuckson (1921-73) was inspired by these historic gifts and three years later, commissioned works by the Tiwi community members from Melville and Bathurst Islands.<sup>261</sup> In 1959 these works were exhibited in the grand court of the AGNSW. By placing them in an art gallery environment, Tuckson "*shattered the anthropological paradigm.*"<sup>262</sup> However, many critics opposed the placement of these works in a gallery context.<sup>263</sup> The general view (at the time) was that "*gallery walls were to remain free of 'primitive art' and Indigenous cultures were to remain confined to museums and ethnographic studies.*"<sup>264</sup> Tuckson on the other hand was adamant that the objects be considered as art and believed the character of these objects portrayed universal attributes in regards to the human aesthetic appreciation of pure form: "*an universality of art so to speak, irrespective of provenance.*"<sup>265</sup>

Morphy contends that the theory of the universal is interconnected with a theory of viewing that

<sup>256</sup> Meyer, *What was Contemporary Art?*, 116.

<sup>257</sup> Meyer, *What was Contemporary Art?*, 117.

<sup>258</sup> Morphy, "Seeing Aboriginal Art in the Gallery," 45. "Master Artists of Arnhem Land," 2009, [media.agnsw.org/downloads/files/Arnhem\\_Land\\_notes.pdf](http://media.agnsw.org/downloads/files/Arnhem_Land_notes.pdf) (14).

<sup>259</sup> collection, "Master Artists of Arnhem Land," 9.

<sup>260</sup> Morphy, "Seeing Aboriginal Art in the Gallery," 37.

<sup>261</sup> Tuckson also travelled with Dr. Scougall to East Arnhem Land and had bark paintings commissioned by Rirratingu leaders such as Mawalan (1908-67), Mathaman (1915-70) and Wandjuk Marika (1930-87). Djan'Kawu creation story was depicted on these commissioned works. See the collection, "Master Artists of Arnhem Land," 12.

<sup>262</sup> Morphy, "Seeing Aboriginal Art in the Gallery," 40.

<sup>263</sup> Morphy, "Seeing Aboriginal Art in the Gallery," 38.

<sup>264</sup> collection, "Master Artists of Arnhem Land," 8.

<sup>265</sup> Morphy, "Seeing Aboriginal Art in the Gallery."

places the gallery and the natural history museum in opposition to one another.<sup>266</sup> As such, opposition to non-Western objects in an art gallery context arises because “*it insists on a different kind of history that threaten[s] to disrupt pre-existing values.*”<sup>267</sup> The exhibitions mentioned above provided an alternative meaning—one derived from an art history approach for looking at Indigenous cultural material. This Western art history approach, based solely on aesthetics without any cultural interpretation or identification of the artists, has changed the conception of what can be considered art. It also ignited the debate on Indigenous cultural material—is it “*art*” or “*artefact*”?<sup>268</sup>

#### A Critical Evaluation of Primitive Art

Following on, other significant events in Western exhibition history were two legendary and controversial exhibitions that juxtaposed Western forms and non-Western ‘artefacts’ and embraced new forms of expressions, such as postcolonial installations. These exhibitions were a point of departure for art criticism and other theories to surface. The infamous exhibition *Notions of Primitivism in 20<sup>th</sup> Century: Affinity of the Tribal and Modern* (1984) was paramount in drawing parallels between the modern and the tribal arts of Oceania, North America and Africa. Crucial to this was the critical evaluation of the exhibition in showcasing Indigenous cultural material as ‘primitive art’ stemming from “*nineteenth-century science’s interest in ‘primitive’ stages of society.*”<sup>269</sup> Modern art employed the forms, motifs and ideas that valued the primitive. Artists, art connoisseurs and modernists critics were intrigued by the primeval depths of humanity in terms of spirituality and sexuality that this subject matter offered to the visual arts within the Western canon.<sup>270</sup> Masks and other forms and motifs of Indigenous African, American and Oceanic ‘tribal’ art had inspired twentieth-century Western artists such as Pablo Picasso, Henri Matisse and Max Ernest. Ironically, the construction of a primitive concept was created for peoples who had no idea or knowledge of such a concept, as unquestionably it was Western in its origins.

The critical examination of *Notions of Primitivism in Twentieth Century Art* proved it to be controversial on many levels. Firstly, the exhibition “*patronized the creators of the original works*” in that it suggested that the creators of the work were unaware of the aesthetic and complexity of their own objects.”<sup>271</sup> Secondly, the aesthetic and creative value of the artefacts was only truly appreciated in the hands of intellectual Western artists. Thirdly, there was no respect given to the cultural context in which the works were produced; instead the works were seen as manifestations of outmoded and tightly defined traditional belief systems. Lastly, there was no room for personal

<sup>266</sup> Morphy, "Seeing Aboriginal Art in the Gallery."

<sup>267</sup> Morphy, "Seeing Aboriginal Art in the Gallery," 44.

<sup>268</sup> Trepanier and Creighton-Kelly, "Understanding Aboriginal Arts in Canada Today: A Knowledge and Literature Review."

<sup>269</sup> Morphy, "Seeing Aboriginal Art in the Gallery," 38.

<sup>270</sup> Mundine, Djon, "A Personal History of Australian Aboriginal Art". Forum, Campbelltown Arts Centre, Campbelltown, NSW, May 21, 2010.

<sup>271</sup> Susan Hiller, *The Myth of Primitivism* (London; New York: Routledge, 1991, 1991), 29.

interpretation; any creative input by the artist was seen as possessing an innate sensibility ascribed to them by the nature of their culture.<sup>272</sup>

Due to the amount of criticism the exhibition received in its portrayal and un-naming of non-Western artists, there is little doubt that it propelled the critical evaluation of primitive art and generated a paradigm shift in the recognition of non-Western artists. This was evident five years later in the *Magiciens de la Terre* (1989) at the Centre Pompidou in Paris, curated by Jean Hubert Martin. In this regard Martin commented: "*If (contemporary) Aboriginal artists do produce work of recognized value, then the categories reigning in our institutions are in dire need of revision.*"<sup>273</sup>

With a renewed interest in primitivism, Martin attempted to engage in new critical discussions outside the aestheticised norms of exotic cultures without destabilising Western definitions of fine art, modernism or identity.<sup>274</sup> Non-Western and Western artists were exhibited on an equal footing with no hierarchical preference, nor were they shown to be "*footnotes to Western modernist art history.*"<sup>275</sup> The identities of non-Western artists were acknowledged, including Indigenous artists from Canada and Australia such as legendary First Nation artist Norval Morrisseau (Anishinabe)(1932-2007), and Australian Aboriginal artists John Mawandjul (Eastern Kunwinjku)(1952-), Jimmy Wululu, (Gupapuyngu)(1936-2005), Jack Wunuwun (Murrungun)(1930-1991) and people from the Aboriginal community of Yuendumu.<sup>276</sup> Fifteen burial poles by Wululu along with several bark paintings by Mawandjul were exhibited. This inclusion of Indigenous artists, although problematic, signified a major break within the stringently defined notions of modernism.

#### Commodification And Commercialisation

Partner to the concept of 'primitive art' in Western art discourse and its related critiques is the increased awareness and understanding of the commoditisation and trade in Indigenous cultural material. The primitive is, as argued above a particular ideological construct in Western culture, a classification with an evolutionary view that locks non-European people like the Australian Aboriginals or the First Nations of Turtle Island into an earlier stage of human development. During the Victorian period (1837-1901), Indigenous cultures were regarded as not being able to survive the modern era and therefore preservation of their material objects was required before the effects of assimilation became too apparent. The high regard for these objects was based on the differences between culturally engaged bourgeois Europeans and the romanticised primitive 'other'. Further, anthropologists and ethnological collectors viewed these objects as most valuable

<sup>272</sup> Hiller, *The Myth of Primitivism*

<sup>273</sup> As quoted in Morphy, "Seeing Aboriginal Art in the Gallery," 47.

<sup>274</sup> As per Candice Hopkins in her presentation "Artistic Centres of the Art World." See Native American Art Studies Association, "The 17th Biennial Conference" (Ottawa, 2011).

<sup>275</sup> Quoted by Thomas McEvelley. See Thomas McEvelley, "Documenta 11," *Frieze* September, no. 69 (2002).

<sup>276</sup> Various spellings exist for John Mawandjul or Mawurndjul. This spelling is used as found in the *Magiciens de la Terre* catalogue.



and 'authentic' and there was a surge to collect as many objects as possible. As outline above, the objects became part of a scholarly project formulated to rebuild the historical evolution of mankind and were housed in newly built museums as part of natural history.<sup>277</sup>

Anthropologist and historian James Clifford (1945-) named this imperative the "salvage paradigm" where at the turn of the twentieth century the remnants of pre-contact primitive societies need to be rescued and preserved as artefacts of the most authentic non-Western cultures existences.<sup>278</sup> In reference to this, scholar Lee-Ann Martin writes:

*Authentic objects were defined as works that were created early in a particular historic tradition, and thus free from European influences. The concern with the 'authentic' object revealed prevalent European preoccupation with cultural purity and historical traditions that continued intact (despite colonial intrusions into all aspects of life for the original North American).*<sup>279</sup>

The social, political and multi-cultural colonial conditions in which these cultural materials were acquired for ethnographic collections are no doubt complex and would form the basis of a separate paper altogether. However, what is important here is how Indigenous cultural material was viewed and collected based on its authenticity—a notion that still places Indigenous cultural material (including art) as if it was from before European contact and therefore primitive. First Nation cultural material, particularly on the West Coast of Canada was largely collected for their intricate masks, totem poles and heavily carved objects. Australian Aboriginal material culture on the other hand produced few masks or carvings and as Morphy writes, "*Aboriginal art has never been a major token in the primitive art market.*"<sup>280</sup> Authenticity for Australian Aboriginal art came into consideration on a different trajectory, that is through commercialisation—although similar issues surrounding commercialisation and authenticity outside of the primitive art market also apply to First Nations of North America.

During the mid to late nineteenth century the world trade expositions, the Arts and Crafts movement (1880-1910), consumer culture, and tourism and its linkage to industrialisation contributed to the commercialisation of Indigenous art and its authenticity. This is evident in that world trade expositions were divided into three eras: industrialisation (1851-1938), cultural exchange (1939-1987) and Nation Branding (1988-present).<sup>281</sup> Inarguably across these eras these

<sup>277</sup> Berlo and Phillips, *Native North American Art* 13.

<sup>278</sup> As referenced in Trepanier and Creighton-Kelly, "Understanding Aboriginal Arts in Canada Today: A Knowledge and Literature Review," 2; Berlo, *The Early Years of Native American art history: the politics of scholarship and collecting*.

<sup>279</sup> Trepanier and Creighton-Kelly, "Understanding Aboriginal Arts in Canada Today: A Knowledge and Literature Review," 49.

<sup>280</sup> Morphy, "Seeing Aboriginal Art in the Gallery," 45.

<sup>281</sup> See Tjaco Walvis, ed., *Three eras of World Expositions 1851-present*, Cosmopolite: Stardust World Expo & National Branding Newsletter (Amsterdam: Stardust New Ventures, 2004).

expositions can be seen as contributing to an increase in commercialisation and the labelling of Indigeneity as authentic. World trade expositions, in their colonial pursuits, were aimed at demonstrating an advanced level of modernity and civilisation, and conversely portrayed Indigenous people as exotic, dying races and their objects as evidence of non-European influence and essentially authentic.<sup>282</sup> In addressing the rhetoric of the expositions engineer Sir William Henry Preece (1834-1913) in 1907 said:

*They 'stimulate enterprise', 'encourage national emulation' and ... advertise novelties, they excite invention, they impart knowledge, and they tend very much indeed to promote the progress of industry, craftsmanship and art.*<sup>283</sup>

These exhibits were supplied from a number of contributors including private collections within anthropological and ethnological museums, educational and cultural organisations, government agencies such as jails and the Aborigines Protection Board.<sup>284</sup> Both Australia and North America participated in world trade expositions. For example Australia participated in colonial displays at the inaugural Great Exhibition of the Works of Industry of All Nations in London's Crystal Palace in 1851, and in 1855 and 1867 at the Exposition Universelle in Paris, and in 1910 at the Manufacturers Exhibition in London, to name but a few.<sup>285</sup> Bark paintings and objects relating to ceremony were exhibited, along with photographs of Australian Aboriginal people.<sup>286</sup> Motivated by economic development, these expositions diluted the ability for Indigenous cultural material including art to be regarded as alive and a current art expression.

Additionally, as a result of the Arts and Crafts movement (1880-1910), objects made by First Nations gained popularity in the stylisation of the North American parlour.<sup>287</sup> These objects of 'indianness' were used to enhance the imagination of non-Indigenous peoples. Many buyers, "displaced and alienated by many aspects of industrialisation and urbanisation" embraced "indianness."<sup>288</sup> Buyers romanticised their purchases as a connection to nature and viewed the items as "precious traces of lost authenticity" due to their anti-modernist aesthetic.<sup>289</sup> Regardless, many First Nations turned to art production for survival. The political climate, (at the time), saw many First Nation peoples denied the use of their traditional hunting grounds and farming lands.<sup>290</sup>

<sup>282</sup> For a brief history of World Expositions and world trade see "Representing Colonial Australia at British, American and European International exhibitions," 2008, [http://recollections.nma.gov.au/issues/vol\\_3\\_no\\_1/papers/representing\\_colonial\\_australia](http://recollections.nma.gov.au/issues/vol_3_no_1/papers/representing_colonial_australia).

<sup>283</sup> As quoted in Douglas, "Representing Colonial Australia at British, American and European International exhibitions."

<sup>284</sup> Douglas, "Representing Colonial Australia at British, American and European International exhibitions."

<sup>285</sup> Emma Timbery showcased her shell work at the Manufacturers exhibition. See Chapter 5.

<sup>286</sup> Douglas, "Representing Colonial Australia at British, American and European International exhibitions."

<sup>287</sup> Berlo and Phillips, *Native North American Art* 212.

<sup>288</sup> Berlo and Phillips, *Native North American Art* 212.

<sup>289</sup> Berlo and Phillips, *Native North American Art* 212.

<sup>290</sup> Berlo and Phillips, *Native North American Art*

Producing items for sale provided them with some income and an outlet for Indigenous cultural expression in terms of identity, traditional beliefs and values. This has direct parallels with the peoples of Pintupi, Arrernte, Luntja, Walpiri and Anmayyere who suffered the hardship of being removed from their land and forced to relocate to Papunya and assimilate into Western society by the Australian government in the early 1970s.<sup>291</sup>

The Papunya Tula Movement can be summarised as commencing in 1971 when South Australian school teacher Geoffrey Bardon encouraged children to paint a mural that depicted “*the traditional ceremonial body and sand art.*”<sup>292</sup> Later, painting sessions included senior tribesmen from different Nations working together and negotiating the patterning as well as the ownership of the story. As artists took advantage of the materials the paintings became more elaborate. When ceremonial ground paintings, sacred objects, vast song cycles and body designs never painted before in a Western style were transferred to boards, a phenomenon started. It laid the foundation for a multi-million-dollar industry and what would become internationally known as the ‘Papunya Tula painting movement.’

From 1972-75 the Papunya Tula paintings included a label to assure the public that these paintings were authentic and ethnographically coherent in regards to the Western Desert tradition and that they were high art.<sup>293</sup> To authenticate and raise the profile of Australian Aboriginal art, the Aboriginal Arts Board (1973) supported this claim by commissioning large canvases from the Papunya artists for national and international exhibition purposes.<sup>294</sup> This collection was later transferred to the custodianship of the National Museum of Australia in 1990.<sup>295</sup> Though from 1974 through to 1981 the Papunya paintings were not considered ‘authentic traditional’ nor were they viewed as ‘modern art’. Instead they were rejected by museums and galleries because of their un-classification as the general consensus was that, in order for it to be considered authentic, Aboriginal art had to be “*traditional and preferably from pre-European contact.*”<sup>296</sup>

However, when marketed as ‘authentic ethnographic art’ the paintings were seen as indicators of a more ancient Australia and a label and concept of authenticity was created.<sup>297</sup> This concept was created for specific Indigenous cultural material to protect, legislate and police, as well as prevent misuse and appropriation of Indigenous cultural objects and/or images.<sup>298</sup> This assured “*the public that Papunya paintings was both ethnographically coherent within the Western Desert tradition*

<sup>291</sup> Ann McGrath, "Papunya Art," *Aboriginal History* 32 (2008 2008): iv.

<sup>292</sup> Geoffrey Bardon and James Bardon, *Papunya: A Place Made after the Story* (Victoria: The Miegunyah Press, 2004), 10-12.

<sup>293</sup> McGrath, "Papunya Art," 215.

<sup>294</sup> McGrath, "Papunya Art."

<sup>295</sup> McGrath, "Papunya Art."

<sup>296</sup> Philip, "Life and Art? Relocating Aboriginal art and culture in the museum."

<sup>297</sup> An authentication mark or document ensures consumers that they are purchasing art from an Indigenous artist or cultural worker.

<sup>298</sup> Pritchard, "The Artifice of Culture: Contemporary Indigenous Art and the work of Peter Robinson."

*and were high art.*"<sup>299</sup> This system is still used within Australia and New Zealand. Writer Stephen Gray has argued that although such use of labelling helps prevent "rip offs", it is "symbolic of how far Aboriginal art has become commodified."<sup>300</sup>

Along similar lines, on the North American side traditional items such as jewellery, woven rugs, and baskets are frequently copied by non-First Nation people and sold as 'Indian' art. To counteract this the *Indian Arts and Crafts Act of 1990* made it illegal to sell, display or offer any 'Indian art' or 'Indian arts and craft organization' product(s) that make false claims as to their origins. This law "covers all Indian and Indian-style traditional and contemporary arts and crafts produced after 1935."<sup>301</sup> Violations of the act can incur fines and prison terms. In North America, many artists who were previously considered First Nation had difficulty proving their tribal affiliations due to the effects of colonialism and assimilation policies. Under this act, to be identified as an 'Indian' one must have 'status' in Canada or be enrolled in the United States of America, in both cases the artist needs to be listed as a member of a recognised band.<sup>302</sup> The unintended repercussions of this law and its effects on contemporary art practice, as Gerald McMaster has noted, "have given rise to a number of questions regarding the relevance of this condition within the contemporary art world."<sup>303</sup> Cherokee artist Jimmie Durham<sup>304</sup> was one of the artists affected by this law, as he was unable to prove his 'authenticity'.

The difficulties and ramifications of assigning authenticity to Indigenous art are multiple. Systems of authentication proved to be an exploitative tactic to market Indigenous art from a Western art aesthetic that feeds on the notions of spirituality. As Aboriginal artist Richard Bell (Kamilaroi) points out, "there is no doubt that attaching 'spirituality' during a sale of Aboriginal Art helps greatly in closing a deal."<sup>305</sup> Aboriginal artist Bronwyn Bancroft stated, "It is no accident that 'traditional' artists are more valued in the marketplace than 'urban artists.' It ties directly to these galleries policies."<sup>306</sup> A prime example is First Nation 'legend painter' Norval Morrisseau's exhibition in

<sup>299</sup> McGrath, "Papunya Art," 215.

<sup>300</sup> As quoted in Pritchard, "The Artifice of Culture: Contemporary Indigenous Art and the work of Peter Robinson," 67.

<sup>301</sup> This law does not cross over to First Nations in Canada. As noted in Indian, *Vision, Space, Desire: Global Perspectives and Cultural Hybridity 2*.

<sup>302</sup> This issue is extremely complex. Colonial domination over the control of First Nations ancestry is vexed by denials of First Nation identity based on blood quatom in America, and also by laws that are geographically specific, by outmoded racial theories, and patrilineal bias, to name only a few factors. See Berlo and Phillips, *Native North American Art* 19.

<sup>303</sup> Indian, *Vision, Space, Desire: Global Perspectives and Cultural Hybridity* 19.

<sup>304</sup> Jimmy Durham has been considered a Cherokee artist by self-definition and the artworld but in recent years it has been determined from the Cherokee nation that he is not Cherokee.

<sup>305</sup> Bell, "Bell's theorem of Aboriginal art: it's a white thing."

<sup>306</sup> Debra Jopson, "Whitefella Dreaming," *Sydney Morning Herald* (Sydney), November 15, 2003 2003.

Toronto, Canada in 1962 that sold out within twenty-four hours.<sup>307</sup> The image of the 'Noble Savage' (from whence comes the spirituality) implies a position of "racial superiority."<sup>308</sup>

As this suggests, "the question of who judges, polices, and legislates this system of authenticity opens up a debate of the politics of art and cultural property where self-determination and sovereignty are also part of the discourse."<sup>309</sup> Hal Foster's statement in "The Artist as Ethnographer" sits appropriately in this discussion, as Foster cites First Nation artists James Luna and Jimmy Durham as examples of artists who play the authenticity game in order to reveal its duplicity.<sup>310</sup> Ironically, as writer Mario A. Caro noted in his essay on market value, "for Foster, Native artists are the only ones authentic enough to do so."<sup>311</sup>

Additionally, this positions Indigenous people living in rural communities or reserves as authentic, 'real Aboriginal' people leading authentic cultural lives with culturally authentic expressions. This has maintained the illusion that Aboriginal people living in remote communities belonged to a past that was separated from contemporary life. Aboriginal people living in urban areas are often viewed as inauthentic and lacking in cultural knowledge.

Curator, writer and artist Brenda L. Croft confirms "it was constantly put to us by academics and students alike that we were not 'real' or 'true' Aboriginals."<sup>312</sup> Croft continues: "There has been little allowance for progression, adaption or change as happens with any other culture."<sup>313</sup> Further, because they were based in the city, urban artists' identities were often challenged or ignored by academics and the media. In essence, Indigenous artists living in the city faced a politics of recognition. The media portrayed urban Indigenous art in a negative manner, often citing their work as "inauthentic" and "too political."<sup>314</sup>

Mistaken notions of contemporary art and a lack of career opportunities associated with the category of contemporary Indigenous art were some of the reasons Indigenous artists such as

<sup>307</sup> Morrisseau was considered a traditional artist due to the rudimentary formal education, his depiction of spirituality and living in a remote area of Ontario, Canada. See Greg Hill, *Norval Morrisseau: Shaman Artist* (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 2006), exhibition catalogue, 43.

<sup>308</sup> Bell, "Bell's theorem of Aboriginal art: it's a white thing."

<sup>309</sup> Pritchard, "The Artifice of Culture: Contemporary Indigenous Art and the work of Peter Robinson."

<sup>310</sup> Hal Foster, "Artist as Ethnographer," in *The Return of the Real: The Avant-Garde at the End of the Century* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1996), 171-204.

<sup>311</sup> The Museum of Contemporary Native Arts and Arts, *Manifestations: New Native Art Criticism*, 69.

<sup>312</sup> Croft, "Boomalli," 108.

<sup>313</sup> Croft, "Boomalli."

<sup>314</sup> "Contested Categories: Brook Andrew, Christian Thompson and the framing of Contemporary Australian Art," *Australian Humanities Review*, 2013, <http://www.australianhumanitiesreview.org/archive/Issue-November-2013/riphagen.html>.; Croft, "Boomalli."

Tracey Moffatt, Gordon Bennett and Brooke Andrew rejected the ethnic categorisation of their work.<sup>315</sup> As artist Fiona Foley observes:

*Aboriginal artists who make art in the cities are denied their knowledge systems and have the label of urban artist imposed upon them—confining them to the realm of political art.*<sup>316</sup>

It could be argued that political motivation was the driving force behind new expressive forms of Indigenous art that emerged at the beginning of the 1990s, especially considering the political climate at that time, where the efforts of Indigenous peoples political struggle for justice was highly visible.<sup>317</sup> Croft confirms, “*socio-political circumstances always impact upon, and are reflect in Indigenous cultural expression.*”<sup>318</sup>

Chapter Two of this thesis discussed Indigenous social, political and cultural achievements brought on by activism. Chapter Two also discussed the Indigenous art as contemporary art debate and the categorisation and discrimination Indigenous artists faced.

As a result of categorisation, the contemporary artworks by Indigenous artists faced prejudice and received minimal representation in galleries and exhibitions and were excluded from collections by major art institutions. As anthropologist Lorraine Gibson writes, “*Aboriginals faced marginalization in their efforts to justify a traditional culture and to be contemporary.*”<sup>319</sup>

Issues such as those listed above, some of which are currently ongoing have impacted cultural expression of Aboriginal people in Australia and First Nations people in Canada. These issues have become visible in contemporary Indigenous art practices.

## CONCLUSION

Chapter Three discussed the rupture and transformation of Indigenous art in the Western art canon by noting the various processes of negation of Indigenous people and their cultural materials during imperialism, colonialism and Western art history. It addressed the multiple forms of colonial practice and constructs that assisted in the destruction, attempted erasure and rupture in Indigenous histories and culture. The chapter also looked at the subsequent processes of inclusion of Indigenous art in the contemporary art realm. This process of inclusion provides a succinct summary of the journey of Indigenous people and their cultural material from ethnography to the contemporary art realm. In doing so, it made visible the Euro-Western ‘possession logics’ of Indigenous people and their cultural materials were subjected to and continue to be in neo-colonial

<sup>315</sup> Riphagen, "Contested Categories: Brook Andrew, Christian Thompson and the framing of Contemporary Australian Art," 97.

<sup>316</sup> Foley, *The Art of Politics The Politics of Art*.

<sup>317</sup> See Introduction.

<sup>318</sup> Foley, "The Inevitable Collision between Politics and Indigenous Art."

<sup>319</sup> Kleinert and Koch, "Urban Representations: Cultural expression, identity and politics."

times. This extends to contemporary art discourse despite Indigenous affirmations of their cultural existence, practice and artistic expressions in contemporary Australia and Canada.

The next chapter, Chapter Four, looks at the plethora of contemporary art definitions as defined by Western art critics, art historians, authors, writers, and artists. This chapter analyses and critiques art historians Terry Smith's and Richard Meyer's theories on the contemporary as both advocate for co-temporalities and trans-historicity. This is in line with Indigenous worldviews pertaining to time as cyclical and as such positions Indigenous art as 'contemporary' and in so doing, adds a perspective to the 'Indigenous art as contemporary art debate'.

## CHAPTER FOUR THE CONTEMPORARY AND INDIGENOUS ART

*If history is always present in the works of Indigenous art, how do we define the contemporary?*<sup>320</sup>

This chapter provides an overview of the widespread and undefinable concept of the contemporary in Western art discourse by outlining the various definitions put forth on 'What is contemporary art?' by art critics, art historians, curators and art writers. Out of the plethora of writings on this subject matter, art historian Terry Smith is the only art historian to include Indigenous art in the discussion.<sup>321</sup> As such, Smith's theory on the contemporary will be summarised and critiqued from an Indigenous perspective before embracing the concept of the contemporary put forward by art historian Richard Meyer. Meyer's concept has parallels to Smith's in that Meyer also posits the contemporary as a continuum of time, both past and present. Smith and Meyer's concepts are in line with a common unity found within Indigenous peoples' worldview of the concept of time, which is structured around cyclical principles rather than the Western linear order.<sup>322</sup> The acknowledgement of an Indigenous worldview within the role of contemporary art offers a new Indigenous perspective on the Indigenous art as contemporary art debate.

The chapter will address how Meyer advances contemporary theory by firstly addressing the contemporary from an artistic practice rather than the standard curatorial perspective that most commentators do on the contemporary. This means from the point of view of an artistic practice it is more about a way of seeing things rather than addressing the contemporary as a classification of objects. Secondly, Meyer offers a hybridity of art criticism and art history that puts the 'history' back into contemporary art, achievable through multiple temporalities, art production and modes of trans-historicity. 'Rendering the past as newly present' provides the structural framework to posit that a socio-political and cultural historical archive is embedded within contemporary art. This proposes that the contemporary artworks by Indigenous artists make visible Indigenous histories and therefore marks the beginning of such a history through the avenue of the contemporary. It also validates the contemporary art's claim to political and social engagement and as a valid field of art practice.

This chapter brings Indigenous voices into the contemporary art discussion by acknowledging Indigenous worldviews, specifically the concept of time and Indigenous art practices in relation to the notion of the contemporary. Smith addresses this in his theory on the contemporary by including Australian Aboriginal art and worldview. Meyer also includes the concept of time as the 'past is newly present' though does not acknowledge it as part of Indigenous culture. Though

<sup>320</sup> McLaughlin, "Curator Q & A: How Indigenous Art Took Centre Stage in Sakahan."

<sup>321</sup> See Smith, *What is Contemporary Art?* .

<sup>322</sup> Berlo and Phillips, *Native North American Art*



despite this, the idea of time Meyer addresses is in line with Indigenous worldviews. However, an important element Meyer does raise is the idea of the contemporary resides within artistic practice.

## THE UNDEFINABLE CONTEMPORARY

What does it mean to be contemporary? Does it mean being up-to-date in the latest trends? If so, is the contemporary interchangeable with the modern? Or is it a matter of being here, right now? If so, how does the contemporary treat time? If something was contemporary ten years ago, is it still contemporary now? Or does the contemporary interact with the “simultaneous present-ness of contemporary worlds”?<sup>323</sup>

Currently, the definition of contemporary remains elusive as it is simply not confined to one subject area but multiple fields that include globalisation, commercialisation, capitalism, religion, and geopolitics, to name a few. After expanding on contemporary’s multiplicity of relationships between being and time in his text, Smith notes “*What is contemporary art?*’ requires further answers, drawn from wider perspectives.<sup>324</sup> At its basic level the concept of the contemporary is a condition that has been and still is an important part of human experience.<sup>325</sup> This explains why philosophers have also engaged with the concept, particularly in the twentieth-first century. For instance Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben asked the question ‘What is the Contemporary?’ in 2008 with the aim “to separate those who are living at a particular time from those who are truly contemporary with their times.”<sup>326</sup> Whereas British philosopher, Peter Osborne defined the contemporary as an utopian idea; meaning utopian is “nowhere” and seeing that the “contemporary is everywhere around us there is nowhere from which we can view it clearly.”<sup>327</sup>

If the question ‘What is the Contemporary?’ Is extended to include art, further entanglement occurs. As ‘contemporary art’ is a double loaded term, as individually the terms ‘contemporary’ and ‘art’ are contentious in the Western art milieu. International curator Dieter Roelstraete explains:

*“What is contemporary art?” is (clearly) not the same question as “What is art?” The former basically asks us to define what is particularly “contemporary” about art—not, significantly enough, what is particularly artistic about it.<sup>328</sup>*

<sup>323</sup>A phrase used by from Ian McLean to define the contemporary. See McLean, "Surviving the "Contemporary": What indigenous artists want, and how to get it," 169.

<sup>324</sup> Smith, *What is Contemporary Art?* , 244.

<sup>325</sup> Smith, *What is Contemporary Art?* .

<sup>326</sup> De La Durantaye, "Lost in thought."

<sup>327</sup> Peter Osborne, *Anywhere or Not At All: Philosophy of Contemporary Art* (London: Verso, 2013), 34.

<sup>328</sup> Julieta Aranda, Brian Kuan Wood, and Anton Vidokle, "What is Contemporary Art? Issue Two " *e-flux*, no. 12, accessed June 1, 2017 (2010). <http://e-flux.com/journal/what-is-contemporary-art-issue-two/>.

Art historian Terry Smith was the first to introduce the contemporary in 2001 as a “*fundamentally new condition*.”<sup>329</sup> Since then the interest in the contemporary as a condition or concept or theory has grown, becoming “*the master narrative of our time*”, as appropriately noted by art historian Ian McLean, due to its dominance in publications, seminars, lectures, university courses and conferences by influential art critics, art historians, art writers, contemporary philosophers and Indigenous and non-Indigenous artists.<sup>330</sup> The infatuation with ‘What is contemporary art?’ has contributed to its institutionalisation and relevancy to the Indigenous art as contemporary art debate:

*‘Contemporary art’ has become an institutional object in its own right: In the academic world there are professorships and programs, and in the museum world departments and institutions, all devoted to the subject, and most tend to treat it as apart not only from pre-war practice but from most post-war practice as well.*<sup>331</sup>

The following resources demonstrate academia’s attempt to try to understand and define the contemporary at field; philosopher Giorgio Agamben’s series of lectures subsequently followed by an essay of the same title *What is the contemporary?*<sup>332</sup>; two issues devoted to the subject by the online art journal *e-flux*, *Journal 11* (December 2009)<sup>333</sup> and *Journal 12* (January 2010)<sup>334</sup> that Sternberg Press published as a book under the same title *What is Contemporary Art?*; art historian Terry Smith’s book *What is Contemporary Art?* 2009; and art historian and critic Hal Foster’s *Questionnaire on The Contemporary* 2009 published by October magazine<sup>335</sup> and *Contemporary Extracts*, 2010; <sup>336</sup> seminar series with publications by Hans Belting, Andrea Buddensieg and Peter Weibel;<sup>337</sup> Peter Osborne *Anywhere but Not At All*, 2013;<sup>338</sup> and Richard Meyer *What was Contemporary Art*, 2013.<sup>339</sup>

<sup>329</sup> Smith, "What is Contemporary Art? Contemporary Art, Contemporaneity and Art to Come."

<sup>330</sup>McLean, *How Aborigines invented the idea of contemporary art*

<sup>331</sup> To support this statement in 2009 Hal Foster wrote a questionnaire on the contemporary to the editors of the art journal October. The large findings were grouped together based on similar ideas and published a year later in e-flux journal. See Foster, "Questionnaire on 'The Contemporary' ".

<sup>332</sup> In 2007 Giorgio Agamben conducted a lecture on contemporaneity at the European Graduate School that was later published as Giorgio Agamben, "What is the Contemporary?," in *What is an Apparatus* (Stanfor: Stanford University Press, 2009).

<sup>333</sup> See Julieta Aranda, Brian Kuan Wood, and Anton Vidokle, "What is Contemporary Art? Issue One," *e-flux*, no. 11, accessed May 1, 2017 (2009). <https://www.e-flux.com/journal/11/61342/what-is-contemporary-art-issue-one/>.

<sup>334</sup> Aranda, Wood, and Vidokle, "What is Contemporary Art? Issue Two ".

<sup>335</sup> Foster, "Questionnaire on 'The Contemporary' ".

<sup>336</sup> Hal Foster, "Contemporary Extracts," 12 1 (2010).

<sup>337</sup> Belting Hans and Andrea Buddensieg, eds., *The Global Art World: Audiences, Markets and Museums* (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2009). Andrea Buddensieg and Peter Weibel, eds., *Contemporary Art and Museum: A Global Perspective* (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2007).

<sup>338</sup> Osborne, *Anywhere or Not At All: Philosophy of Contemporary Art*

<sup>339</sup> Meyer, *What was Contemporary Art?* .

Yet what standouts out from these resources is the 'contemporary' is lacking one unified definition, there is an inclination to resist grand narratives, as well as the complexity, openness and ambiguity of the contemporary art field. e-flux editor explains why this is,

*There is some agency in the idea that they remain open: how can we also take advantage of this to develop our own criteria for browsing and historicizing recent activity in a way that affirms the possibilities of contemporary art's still-incompleteness, of its complex ability to play host to many narratives and trajectories without necessarily having to absorb them into a central logic or determined discourse.*<sup>340</sup>

The undefined parameters or the openness of the contemporary field may appeal to some in a utopian expectation of the 'new' or for its all-inclusiveness though the contemporary field 's openness has been met with criticism, Smith said,

*Other theories pertaining to contemporary, such as globalization and fundamentalisms, are overreaching and as a repercussion contemporary art has become thoroughly questioning in nature, extremely wide-ranging in its modes of asking and in the scope of its inquiries.*<sup>341</sup>

From the above list of publications on the contemporary, two publications stand out for their comprehensive inquiry into the question, 'What is contemporary art?' These publications are first the, e-flux journals 11 and 12 that included essays by many well-credited art critics, curators, art historians and artists, such as Boris Groys, Hal Foster, Hans Ulrich Obrist, Cuahtemoc Medina, Terry Smith and Martha Rosler. The second is Hal Foster's "Questionnaire on 'The Contemporary art'"<sup>342</sup> that was distributed to over seventy art critics and curators in the United States and Europe. What these publications disclosed was the undefinable nature of the contemporary art field simply by the diversity and the conflicting responses and inability to answer the question.

The diversity of responses in the writings focus largely on complex theoretical overviews of defining the 'contemporary' or 'contemporaneity' within the field of visual art. For example, Zdenka Badovinac advocates one of the key concepts of contemporaneity resides within points of connections, "*both in global exchanges and in particular spheres of life*"<sup>343</sup> that equate to a plurality of narratives that intertwine unstructured or structured forms of knowledge, hegemonic art system and self-definition. Badovinac writes, "*The imperative of contemporaneity became the idea that we ourselves would be producers of our own knowledge.*"<sup>344</sup> Whereas Boris Groys defines

<sup>340</sup> Aranda, Wood, and Vidokle, "What is Contemporary Art? Issue One."

<sup>341</sup> Smith, *What is Contemporary Art?* .

<sup>342</sup> Foster, "Questionnaire on 'The Contemporary' " .

<sup>343</sup> Aranda, Wood, and Vidokle, "What is Contemporary Art? Issue Two " .

<sup>344</sup> Aranda, Wood, and Vidokle, "What is Contemporary Art? Issue Two " .

contemporary as “*comrades of time*”<sup>345</sup> that involve aspects of time that can be in the present, the past, the future, non-historical, non-teleological and or collaborating with time.

e-flux editor Anthony Vidokle positions the contemporary as a set of “*evasive manoeuvres*”<sup>346</sup>: Evasive manoeuvre number one being “*the summation that does not admit to being critical or projective (in the grand tradition of modernist ideological voices)*,”<sup>347</sup> and evasive manoeuvre number two as,

*de-centered field of contemporary art that stretches across boundaries, a multi-local field drawing from local practices and embedded local knowledge, the vitality and immanence of many histories in constant simultaneous translation.*<sup>348</sup>

Whereas James Elkins posits the definition resides within the intertwinement of four initiatives: postcolonial theory, world art history, art criticism and visual studies, visual culture, visual communications, and iconology.<sup>349</sup>

The results of Hal Foster’s *Questionnaire on ‘The Contemporary’*<sup>350</sup>, confirm its widespread and undefinable characteristic. A general reading of the 124-page publication reveals the diversity of responses, with a general consensus focusing on its global and postcolonial nature, its relevancy to contemporary issues, its impact by capitalist’s stratagems and art world politics. In e-flux’s *What is Contemporary Art?* Issue two, in the article titled “*Contemporary Extracts*”<sup>351</sup> Foster writes about the results of his “*Questionnaire on ‘The Contemporary’*” based on connections that exist between them.

In the summation of Foster’s article, 8 out of 12 writers’ concept of ‘the contemporary’ resided within the problematic discourse of Western art history. Historian Grant Kester explains “*the problem of ‘the contemporary’*” is rooted in a tension that emerged when Western art history was first formalised as a discipline.<sup>352</sup> In the mid nineteenth century historians and philosophers’ were concerned with how contemporary viewers would ‘transcend’ the cultural differences of the artefacts collected during colonial expansion, as access to the cultures was inaccessible due to time and space.<sup>353</sup>

<sup>345</sup> Aranda, Wood, and Vidokle, "What is Contemporary Art? Issue One."

<sup>346</sup> Aranda, Wood, and Vidokle, "What is Contemporary Art? Issue Two "

<sup>347</sup> Aranda, Wood, and Vidokle, "What is Contemporary Art? Issue Two "

<sup>348</sup> Aranda, Wood, and Vidokle, "What is Contemporary Art? Issue Two "

<sup>349</sup> Foster, "Questionnaire on 'The Contemporary' " 10.

<sup>350</sup> Foster, "Questionnaire on 'The Contemporary' ".

<sup>351</sup> Aranda, Wood, and Vidokle, "What is Contemporary Art? Issue Two "

<sup>352</sup> Aranda, Wood, and Vidokle, "What is Contemporary Art? Issue Two "

<sup>353</sup> Aranda, Wood, and Vidokle, "What is Contemporary Art? Issue Two "

Currently tensions continue in the exclusion of contemporary art from the discipline of art history, as noted by theorist James Elkins.<sup>354</sup> Elkins writes “*its position outside or before art histories or exemplary of the discipline, because of its newfound universality.*”<sup>355</sup> Yet, if ‘contemporary art’ history is to be included in the art history domain further tensions rise.

This is due to the problematic approaches of art history’s approach that involves subdivisions in the organisation of Western and non-Western developments. For example, Western developments are organised chronologically whereas non-Western developments are organised geographically and as cultural groups. In this regard, art critic Miwon Kwon writes:

*If ‘contemporary art history’ marks both a temporal bracketing and a spatial encompassing, a site of a deep tension between very different formations of knowledge and traditions, and thus a challenging pressure point for the field of art history in general.*<sup>356</sup>

Kwon argues that the contemporaneity of world histories must be acknowledged as a continuum and as separate entities that contribute to and are vital in comprehending the present as whole.<sup>357</sup> Kwon raises important questions such as What is the status of contemporary Chinese art history? What is the time frame for such a history? How closely should it be linked to Chinese art?<sup>358</sup> Kwon’s questions can be extended to Indigenous cultures (and other cultures for that matter) and opens up yet another critical issue regarding World Art and its positioning outside of Western art history.

## **THEORISING THE CONTEMPORARY**

Terry Smith is the only author to include Australian Aboriginal art in the discussion on ‘the contemporary’ in his book *What is Contemporary Art?* (2009).<sup>359</sup> Smith’s book is a significant contribution, yet confusing and at times contradictory to the complex and diverse terrain of the contemporary theory field: Smith attempts to create understanding by dividing the contemporary terrain into classifications, sub-classifications and hypotheses. Overall, Smith presents three core meanings (and a fourth marked by brackets) of the term contemporary, two contentions characterising contemporaneity and three currents of which one contains a ‘sub-current’.

The three core meanings of the term contemporary as described by Smith are: the immediate, the contemporaneous and the co-temporal. Smith also identifies three different but overlapping

<sup>354</sup> Aranda, Wood, and Vidokle, "What is Contemporary Art? Issue Two".

<sup>355</sup> Aranda, Wood, and Vidokle, "What is Contemporary Art? Issue Two".

<sup>356</sup> Aranda, Wood, and Vidokle, "What is Contemporary Art? Issue Two".

<sup>357</sup> Aranda, Wood, and Vidokle, "What is Contemporary Art? Issue Two".

<sup>358</sup> Aranda, Wood, and Vidokle, "What is Contemporary Art? Issue Two".

<sup>359</sup> Smith, *What is Contemporary Art?* .

currents: the first current is the “*aesthetics of globalization*”<sup>360</sup> which contains two aspects. The first aspect, named by Smith as “*retro-sensationalism*,”<sup>361</sup> embraces the positives and negatives fluctuations of “*neoliberal economics, globalizing capital, and neoconservative politics pursued during the 1980s*” and thereafter through the repeats of twenty-first century “*avant-garde shock tactics*.” Artists included in this stream are Young British Artists (YBAs) Julian Schnabel and Jeff Koon. The second aspect named “*remodernism*” is a relapse of modernism visible in the “*constant efforts of institutions of modern art to reign the impacts of contemporaneity of art*”<sup>362</sup> and also to revisit and reactivate modernist imperative and impulses.<sup>363</sup> Artists associated with the second aspect are: Richard Serra, Gerhard Richter and Jeff Wall. When these two aspects merge, as is the case with artworks by Matthew Barney and Cia Guo-Qiang and architecture by Frank Gehry and Daniel Libeskind, the result is “*aesthetics of excess that might be tagged as ‘Art of the Spectacle’ or ‘Spectacularism.’*”<sup>364</sup>

The second current Smith identifies as “*postcolonial art*” shaped by local, national, anti-colonial and independent values such as identity, critique and diversity. Although it has transformed art practice in the 1990s and at the beginning of the twenty-first century, postcolonial art has not formed into any movements rather postcolonial art has gained international currency through biennales, travel, new markets and expatriates.<sup>365</sup> Prevalent on the international art scene, this art “*matches the changing world geopolitical and economic order*” through postcolonial critique. Artists explore, research and critique capitalism, global movements of new order, and social and natural sustainability as well as investigate the conceptual, social and material structures of electronic communicative media. Artists aligned with the second current include: Cildo Meireles, Jean-Michel Bruyere, William Kentridge and Zoe Leonard.

The third current Smith outlines is associated with younger artists who are less concerned with “*power structures and struggles*” and more with “*the interactive potentialities of various material media, virtual communicative networks and open-ended modes of tangible connectivity*.”<sup>366</sup> These artists investigate and explore the nature of temporality, media immersion interactivity and “*place making vis-à-vis dislocation*”<sup>367</sup> through the changing nature of time. The art tends to be personal, small scale and the artists themselves are “*indifferent to the generalisations about art itself that remain important for the remodernists*.”<sup>368</sup> Unfortunately Smith does not associate any artists with this current.

<sup>360</sup> Smith, *What is Contemporary Art?* , 264.

<sup>361</sup> Smith, *What is Contemporary Art?* , 265.

<sup>362</sup> Smith, *What is Contemporary Art?* , 265.

<sup>363</sup> Smith, *What is Contemporary Art?* , 265.

<sup>364</sup> Smith, *What is Contemporary Art?* .

<sup>365</sup> Smith, *What is Contemporary Art?* .

<sup>366</sup> Smith, *What is Contemporary Art?* , 267.

<sup>367</sup> Smith, *What is Contemporary Art?* , 267.

<sup>368</sup> Smith, *What is Contemporary Art?* , 269.

To demonstrate the unfolding of the three currents in contemporary art practice and art institutions, Smith aligns each current in subsequent chapters: such as, “*Museums: Modern/Contemporary*” and “*Spectacles and Architecture/Sculpture*” relate to the first current where the aesthetics of globalisation pressured museums to revisit their collections’ narratives and adopt new exhibition strategies that promote the exhibition rather than the collection. In doing so they remain part of the infrastructure of significant art entities but by default become tourist attractions, spectacles so to speak, within the “*globalizing culture industry*.”<sup>369</sup> Prime examples Smith cites are: Frank Gehry’s Guggenheim Museum, Bilbao; and Matthew Barney’s Cremaster Cycle (1994-2002), at the Guggenheim, New York.<sup>370</sup>

Smith’s chapter “*From the Desert to the Fair*” addresses the primary and secondary art markets of two kinds of contemporary art: “*remodernist and retro-sensationalist*” and “*Australian Aborigines*”.<sup>371</sup> Here Smith outlines the top contemporary art sales prices by Western artists and Australian Aboriginal people and provides a brief ‘compare and contrast’ analysis. Smith concludes that what makes the two groups contemporary “*despite everything that is utterly different between them*”<sup>372</sup>, is “*being of their time*” and both have profited from the collapse of distinctions between commercial galleries, art dealers and auction houses.

In his, Chapter Eleven “*Taking Time*” Smith looks at the different kinds of time such as eternal time, measuring presentness and historical time and how these kinds of time are treated within contemporary art. Smith argues the current situation, that is the contemporary, is different from “*modern times*” in that it is identified by the “*insistent presentness of multiple, often incompatible temporalities*” and is not of an “*incessant shifting from past into the present, processes that occurred in the name of the future*” that were often affiliated with “*modern time*”.<sup>373</sup> Rather “*the kinds of time*” in the “*current situation*”, a term Smith uses often to describe a “*coming into being of a new condition*” of which is contemporaneity, is moving in a non-linear manner that is experienced differently yet simultaneously all over the world by different places, people and distinct cultures.<sup>374</sup>

Smith equates art museums as temples and cathedrals, he references MOMA, Guggenheim Museum, Bilbao and Dia: Beacon as prime examples. In terms of contemporary artists articulating a ‘spiritual’ or ‘eternal’ temporality Smith uses artists James Turrell, Bill Viola, Paul Chan and Pintupi Elder Turkey Tolson Tjupurrula. “*Measuring presentness*”, on the other hand, Smith looks at how artists, such as Andy Warhol, are using and abusing common technology and procedures for measuring time by injecting the randomness of everyday life. In this regard, Warhol would

<sup>369</sup> Smith, *What is Contemporary Art?* , 9.

<sup>370</sup> Smith, *What is Contemporary Art?* .

<sup>371</sup> Smith, *What is Contemporary Art?* , 10.

<sup>372</sup> Smith, *What is Contemporary Art?* , 139.

<sup>373</sup> Smith, *What is Contemporary Art?* , 196.

<sup>374</sup> Smith, *What is Contemporary Art?* , 197.

make use of 'kinds of time' peculiar to media, such as film and photography that expose the temporalities of contemporary life in its banality and sameness.

"*Historical time now*", an oxymoron, is defined by Smith as "*art historical time*" or "*artistic time travel*"<sup>375</sup> and used by artists to address the complexities and contradictions of historicity. This could entail the historicity of everyday life, machinery, artistic labour and places of political happenings and is crucial to the postcolonial turn.

In his final chapter, Smith defines "What is contemporary art?" by stating:

*Contemporary Art is the institutionalized network through which the art of today presents itself to itself and to its interested audiences all over the world. It is an expansionist and proliferating global subculture with its own values and discourse; communicative networks; heroes, heroines, and renegades; professional organizations; defining events; meetings and monuments; markets and museums –in sum, distinctive structures of stasis and change.*<sup>376</sup>

According to Smith the answer has been obvious since the 1980s<sup>377</sup> though he does not mention why it has taken several decades for his response to surface. Instead, Smith embarks on a complicated recount of his original hypothesis of contemporaneity as intertwined with the three currents and the various modes of displays, such as those outlined in his chapter headings. Smith posits:

*...it might suggest that the classic logic of the dialectic is in operation. From this perspective, institutionalizing remodernism and retrosensationalism would be the thesis, postcolonial multiplicity the antithesis, and remix, relational survivalism the synthesis. A further implication would be that the last will soon turn into a thesis, then attract an as yet unimaginable antithesis, and so on...*<sup>378</sup>

The thesis, antithesis and synthesis process Smith addresses will continue to "*unfold, the structures remain in place, the history of art will go forward in essentially the same way.*"<sup>379</sup>

However, the powerful shifts provoked by contemporaneity that made the dialectic possible will evaporate, causing the synthesis not to occur.<sup>380</sup> Smith finishes by stating the three currents are the "*actual*" kinds of art produced by these conditions.<sup>381</sup>

<sup>375</sup> Smith, *What is Contemporary Art?*, 208.

<sup>376</sup> Smith, *What is Contemporary Art?*, 241.

<sup>377</sup> Smith, *What is Contemporary Art?*, 241.

<sup>378</sup> Smith, *What is Contemporary Art?*.

<sup>379</sup> Smith, *What is Contemporary Art?*, 268.

<sup>380</sup> Smith, *What is Contemporary Art?*.

<sup>381</sup> Smith, *What is Contemporary Art?*, 268.



Smith's attempt at defining contemporary art clearly displays the complexity, openness and resistance of metanarratives in contemporary art however Smith's answer remains vague. Instead in his final chapter title Smith adds another layer of critical complexity to contemporary art by asking "*what the outcome would be in art practice, art criticism and art theory if contemporary art was subjected to a certain kind of art historical analysis?*"<sup>382</sup>

### **Critique of Terry Smith's Account of Contemporary Art**

In Smith's book *What is Contemporary Art?* the chapters indicate an avoidance of stylistic matters or movements in defining contemporary art and are indicative of a move away from modernity. In acknowledging the grand narratives of modernity and "*the roles of art as mirror, leisure, or licensed dissent*"<sup>383</sup>, Smith declares these narratives "*have had their day.*"<sup>384</sup> This negation and incompleteness of Western art narratives is carried over into the contemporary art realm, Smith states:

*the achievements and failings of modernist, colonial and indigenous art continue to pose inescapable challenges to current practice, but none of them, singly or together, can provide an overarching framework for practice or interpretation.*<sup>385</sup>

Is this the underlying reason why Smith quotes mainly European and or American artists in his currents and sub-currents? In respect to this thesis, Indigenous artists such as: Richard Bell, James Luna, Rebecca Belmore, Skeena Reece, Fiona Foley, Destiny Deacon, R E A and Julie Gough, to name a few, through their blatant exposure of ethnographical fantasy, colonial violence and brutality in their visual artworks could be included in Current One – '*retro sensationalism*'. As the subject matters of the artworks by these artists are radical, controversial and went against the widely accepted Western ideas and forms, of what constitutes 'Indigenous art' in Western art milieu.

In Current Two – 'postcolonial art' does not include one Indigenous artist despite its relevancy to postcolonial critique regarding the governance and colonial rule of Indigenous people and the colonial structures and classifications systems that enabled them. This was explored in this thesis', Chapter Three. Further, Smith does not align any Indigenous artists to Current Three, despite it being aligned with younger Western artists who explore the nature of temporality, media immersion interactivity and "*place making vis-à-vis dislocation*"<sup>386</sup> through the changing nature of

<sup>382</sup> Smith, *What is Contemporary Art?* , 241.

<sup>383</sup> Smith, *What is Contemporary Art?* .

<sup>384</sup> Smith, *What is Contemporary Art?* , 6.

<sup>385</sup> Smith, *What is Contemporary Art?* , 6.

<sup>386</sup> Smith, *What is Contemporary Art?* , 267.

time. This criterion has direct affiliations with younger Indigenous artists who disrupt linear time through multi-media: Skawennati (Mohawk) and Steaphan Paton (Guna) use interactive media, avatars and virtual reality in their visual art practices to disrupt time and would be most fitting for this Current.

In Smith's Chapter 8 'From the Desert to the Fair', Smith provides a brief overview of the global art market, that includes analyses of art market trends by economists, 'the 200 Top Collectors list'; and the entwinement of Australian Aboriginal art in a global context largely through the reiteration of Sotheby's and Christie's record high auction sales of Aboriginal art over the past few decades. In this regard Aboriginal art is only appreciated economically and considered 'high art' because of its success in the art market. It is no surprise that Smith references the art works and sale prices of Johnny Warangkula Tjupurrula, (Pintupi/Luritja) (1925-2001) *Water Dreaming at Kalipinya*, 1973<sup>387</sup>, Emily Kame Kngwarreye, (1910-1996) (Anmatyerr) *Earth Creation*, 1995 and *Untitled (Spring Celebrations)*, 1991<sup>388</sup>, and Clifford Possum Tjapaltjarri, (Anmatyerr) (1932-2002) *Warlugulong*, 1977<sup>389</sup>- all of whom are desert painters. Richard Bell's artwork *Scientia E Metaphysica (Bell's Theorem)*, 2003 is also referenced but only in the context of winning the 2003 *Telstra National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Award* and for its political message on racism in Australia, though Bell is critiquing the rising commodification and commercialisation of Indigenous art.<sup>390</sup> Smith uses Bell's artwork as a gateway to enter into the discussion on 'contemporary' Australian Aboriginal art, though falls short by not being willing to engage and elaborate on the critical art discourse and debates surrounding Indigenous art as contemporary. Smith writes of:

*The emergence of the Australian Aboriginal art movement in the years around 1970 at the isolated settlement of the Papunya in the Western desert of Central Australia, and its subsequent growth throughout the Australian continent, is a great and by and large inspiring story, yet is too complex for me to tell here.*<sup>391</sup>

The approach taken by Smith glosses over crucial issues pertaining to the historical reception of Indigenous art by anthropologists, art museums and institutions and its acceptance as contemporary art. The rise of the Australian Aboriginal art movement stems from specific historical, socio-political and colonial contexts that are pertinent to the movement's inception. At the core of this movement lies authenticity where the marketing of such works focused on myth and ancestral spirituality. Chapter Three of this thesis outlined the pertinent issues of the Papunya Tula movement and its relevancy to Indigenous art as contemporary art debate.

<sup>387</sup> Smith, *What is Contemporary Art?*, 134.

<sup>388</sup> Smith, *What is Contemporary Art?*, 136.

<sup>389</sup> Smith, *What is Contemporary Art?*, 136.

<sup>390</sup> Smith, *What is Contemporary Art?*, 133.

<sup>391</sup> Smith, *What is Contemporary Art?*, 133.

Smith footnotes this important history and identifies four books for reference; unfortunately, none of the books' authors are Indigenous anthropologists or scholars and are predominately by non-Indigenous anthropologists. These are Fred Myers, Howard Morphy and Peter Sutton. Smith has also included art historian Wally Caruana and art consultant Jennifer Isaacs.<sup>392</sup> By literally footnoting the Papunya Tula movement history Smith diminishes its significance to Australian art history and art criticism, reinforces the impact of anthropological categorisation of Indigenous art and side steps its relevancy to the contemporary art debate which resulted in two unfavourable hierarchies of Indigenous art – authentic style and hybridity.

Smith summarises the Papunya Tula movement in one sentence, "*the big shift from the early 1970s to now have been an upmarket one, from the intermittent provision of tourist artefacts to a fully-fledged contemporary art movement.*"<sup>393</sup> This brief statement bypasses the authenticity issues and labelling inherent in the 'contemporary art movement' that are responsible for the commodification and commercialisation of the artworks. In this respect writer, Barbara Ashford outlines:

*[There] was a process by which objects produced by Aboriginal people became accepted and exhibited as 'art', although similar objects had been categorised previously as ethnographica. In the market, artists, dealers and buyers are socially involved in acts of cultural representation and persuasion. These acts take place in frameworks of broader discussions regarding art, social justice, political action, authenticity and economics.*<sup>394</sup>

Chapter Three of this thesis discussed the marketing of authenticity and its relevancy to identity politics and commoditisation of Indigenous art and its role in the Indigenous art as contemporary art debate.

Smith is correct in acknowledging the large number of Australian Aboriginal art centres are government funded and "*staffed by white professional officers versed in local, national, and international artworld*"<sup>395</sup> and are part of the key distributors to major markets specialising in contemporary Aboriginal art. Yet the negative aspects of the Australian Aboriginal art centres are not addressed in Smith's text. These include corruption of cultural authenticity, the ill effects of the market economy on producers' lives and exploitative appropriation.<sup>396</sup>

<sup>392</sup> Smith, *What is Contemporary Art?*, 133.

<sup>393</sup> Smith, *What is Contemporary Art?*, 134.

<sup>394</sup> Kleinert and Koch, "Urban Representations: Cultural expression, identity and politics," 51.

<sup>395</sup> Smith, *What is Contemporary Art?*, 134.

<sup>396</sup> See Tony Fry and Anne-Marie Willis, "Art as Ethnocide: The case of Australia," in *The Third Text Reader: On Art, Culture and Theory*, ed. Rasheed Araeen, Sean Cubitt, and Ziauddin Sardar (London: Continuum, 2002); Tony Fry and Anne-Marie Willis, "Aboriginal art: Symptom or success?," *Art in America* 77, no. 7 (1989).

Further, the ongoing debate on the categorisation of Indigenous art in critical contemporary art discourse is glossed over and contemporary Indigenous art is confined and limited in its conceptual scope. Smith's writes:

*An important part of the picture is art produced by Aboriginal artists living in the cities, usually presented in hybrid styles and often devoted to issues of minority living and ethnic identity.*<sup>397</sup>

Smith's use of 'hybrid styles' in the identification of Aboriginal artists living in the cities is problematic. Indigenous art curator Djon Mundine explains why this is: "*There was an attempt to describe urban Aboriginal art as 'hybrid art', but it failed in Australia due to its botanical and zoological origins.*"<sup>398</sup> Also, Smith's confining urban Aboriginal artists' issues to only 'minority living and ethnic identity' discounts the fraught historical, political and socio-economic contradictions and complexities of Aboriginality within Australia peaking in the late 1970s and early 1980s, at the same time that which the Papunya Tula art movement commenced.<sup>399</sup>

Ashford confirms:

*The interpretive frameworks through which the work of 'urban' Aboriginal artists is understood, the political activism in which artists are engaged and the continued questioning of identity are indicative of the wider social relations that prevail.* <sup>400</sup>

In his Chapter Eleven, Smith discusses the different commitments to time in art in the conditions of contemporaneity and how the nominated currents treat time. For Smith the remodernist's pursuit for transcendence of time through art continues in contemporary art as it did in Modernist painting, sculpture and architecture.<sup>401</sup> The retro-sensationalist art, a sub division of remodernist, treats time as instant, simply by being current or "*cool as the most up-to-date fashions.*"<sup>402</sup> Smith posits that the main proclivity in contemporary art is when re-modernist and retrosensationalist join and when time and space become consumed by sameness. As such any differences it may have contained are obliterated and time becomes a universal flow and "*those closest to the power source are the de facto managers.*"<sup>403</sup> The de facto managers 'are essentially the European nations who have the power to inflict their time-measuring systems on their colonies, for example Greenwich Mean Time or the regimes of the Industrial Revolution.'<sup>404</sup> This is what Smith equates as "*modern time*" and acknowledges that modernity's dominance did not view Indigenous peoples as equal

<sup>397</sup> Smith, *What is Contemporary Art?*, 136.

<sup>398</sup> Djon Mundine, *The Importance of In/visibility* (New York: American Indian Artists Inc., 2009), Exhibition catalogue, 6.

<sup>399</sup> See Kleinert and Koch, "Urban Representations: Cultural expression, identity and politics."

<sup>400</sup> Kleinert and Koch, "Urban Representations: Cultural expression, identity and politics," 24.

<sup>401</sup> Smith, *What is Contemporary Art?*, 197.

<sup>402</sup> Smith, *What is Contemporary Art?*, 197.

<sup>403</sup> Smith, *What is Contemporary Art?*, 197.

<sup>404</sup> Smith, *What is Contemporary Art?*, 197.

participants and were viewed, as Smith terms it “*non-contemporaneous beings*”, unmodern and frozen in time.<sup>405</sup>

The concept of time and the management of it generated wealth amongst the English lower middle class as they become more productive in society. The division of time into structured components emerged with designated mealtimes and the separation of work, religion and leisure were in alignment with notions of progress. These work practices and religious views and values of the lower middle-class English contributed to the vast colonial view of Indigenous peoples' lifestyles as: archaic, static, primitive, unambitious with no concept of time and thus indolent people. The impingement of imperialism (including colonialism) and its time measuring systems has had multiple effects on many generations of Indigenous people and as such is a vital aspect of Indigenous cultural politics and is the foundation for Indigenous critique. For example, restrictive affirmations of tradition, such as the fallacy of classifying tradition as a state of stasis or locked or frozen in time, has propelled Indigenous artists to critically reframe representations of Indigenous peoples, their cultures and their histories.<sup>406</sup> It also explains why Indigenous art has been excluded from the Western art canon and how this has contributed to the difficulty in defining Indigenous art as, 'contemporary'. The historical origins as why Indigenous art was excluded then included in Western art were addressed in Chapter Three of this thesis.

Smith, furthermore, addresses imperialism's ethnic cleansing by means of displacement of unmodern peoples into past or frozen time.<sup>407</sup> Smith writes,

*But these people have come to claim their places, in history, in time, and, through migration, in place – that is to say, in the places of modernity, the neighbourhoods of the north. . . .*<sup>408</sup>

It is certain that post colonialism has generated new forms of resistance for migrants. However, Indigenous people are not migrants, nor have they migrated from their homelands but were forced to relocate and assimilate into Western culture due to colonial attempts at racial and cultural disappearance. Racial and cultural disappearance were inarguably aspects of colonial governance and politics that contributed to settlers' national identity. As elaborated in Chapter Three, Tuhiwai Smith's critique of colonial and postcolonial research underscores the importance of interrogating 'postcolonial discourse'. As she argues “*post-colonial discourse has been defined in ways that still leave out Indigenous peoples, our ways of knowing and our current concerns.*<sup>409</sup> As elaborated in Chapter Three, Tuhiwai Smith's critique of colonial and postcolonial research underscores the importance of interrogating postcolonial discourse. As she argues, colonial constructs are ways of

<sup>405</sup> Smith, *What is Contemporary Art?* , 197.

<sup>406</sup> Thomas, *Possessions: indigenous art, colonial culture*, 197.

<sup>407</sup> Smith, *What is Contemporary Art?* .

<sup>408</sup> Smith, *What is Contemporary Art?* .

<sup>409</sup> Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* 21.

controlling and codifying the world and the people who reside within it with “*spatial vocabulary specific to colonialism*”.<sup>410</sup>

Smith delves into the proposition that “*certain kinds of contemporary art are the main components of a contemporary religion*.”<sup>411</sup> Smith states, “*it is commonplace in the discourse surrounding culture that art, along with sport, has taken the place of organized religion in modern societies*.”<sup>412</sup> As previously stated, Smith equates that for centuries “*museums have evoked the ethos of temples*”, and this remains current for museums of contemporary art, as in today’s society contemporary art museums can be perceived as “*cathedral(s) for contemporary culture*”, of which Smith cites Guggenheim Museum, Bilbao and Dia: Beacon as examples. Following along this line of amazement or wonder in spectatorship and architecture, Smith carries the concept and its sacral mood to that of art and the art spectator. Post-minimalist artists James Turrell and Bill Viola artworks are discussed as evoking a “*certain kind of spirituality that is no longer foreign*.”<sup>413</sup> The Viola’s artworks cited are predominately rooted in the eternal/sacred time of Christianity in the temporalities of “*spiritual*” and “*human*”<sup>414</sup> Smith compares some of these works to the likes of Caravaggio’s *The Taking of Christ*, (1602).

Contemporaneity is manifested in the aesthetics of Caravaggio’s painting and that of Viola’s in the new visual offerings of an ancient time and the emotional invocation of art spectatorship. It is here Smith introduces another eternal time that of which is found in the artworks of contemporary Aboriginal artists, namely those that address their Dreamings and he references Pintupi Elder and chairman of the Papunya Tula Artists Pty Ltd<sup>415</sup> Turkey Tolson Tjupurrula’s (1938-2001) mural sized painting *Straightening Spears* (1998). This painting addresses the outcome of an ancestral awareness of other people and the threat and foreseeable battle. Smith writes:

*In the current situation, however, Christian hope – however strong its revivals, its new formulation – Aboriginal belief – however embattled yet persistent – and contemporary art and architecture – however well financed – are just several among many routes towards hoped for redemption, isolated pathways along a multiplicity of roads that go in many other directions.*<sup>416</sup>

There are a number of crucial gaps in Smith’s allocation to Australian Aboriginal art in light of contemporaneity. Firstly, Aboriginal belief is only viewed as, “*embattled yet persistent*” in the eyes of the settlers due to colonisation. Secondly, Smith suggests “*hope for redemption*” is an

<sup>410</sup> Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* 50-53.

<sup>411</sup> Smith, *What is Contemporary Art?*, 200.

<sup>412</sup> Smith, *What is Contemporary Art?*.

<sup>413</sup> Smith, *What is Contemporary Art?*, 201.

<sup>414</sup> Smith, *What is Contemporary Art?*.

<sup>415</sup> Bardon and Bardon, *Papunya: A Place Made after the Story* 78.

<sup>416</sup> Smith, *What is Contemporary Art?*, 203.

unfavourable choice of words considering the ugly history of Christianity and Assimilation and the key role missionaries played in implementing assimilation policies of Indigenous people. The Christians believed Aboriginal cultures were pagan and it was only through Christianity that the Aboriginal population could be saved from extinction.<sup>417</sup> Thus the missionaries carried the dual message of civilization and salvation through the church. Moreover, assigning the term religion to Australian Aboriginal belief systems separates Aboriginal life and history from its culture. In Chapter Five case studies of Indigenous art practices are used to discuss observations of the role and effects Christianity played in the assimilation policies of Indigenous people.

Thirdly, the choice of Tjupurrula, a remote Australian Aboriginal artist and part of the Western Desert Movement, bypasses authenticity issues. With the illusion that Aboriginal people living in remote communities belonged to the ancient past that is separated from contemporary life and were leading authentic cultural lives and cultural authentic expressions: Aboriginal people living in urban areas were viewed as unauthentic, not real and lacking in cultural knowledge. An account of this was discussed in Chapter Two of this thesis in the section on the contemporary debate.

Lastly, it is unfortunate that the meaning of “Dreamings”, an English term first coined by anthropologists Walter Baldwin Spencer (1860-1929) and Francis James Gillen (1855-1912),<sup>418</sup> is not explained. In not doing so it provides a false universality of the Dreamings, discounts and makes invisible a significant and comprehensive Australian Aboriginal cultural concept. Chapter Two and Three of the thesis discussed how culture has impacted and effected contemporary Indigenous art practices. Aboriginal environmentalist and writer Fabienne Bayet-Charlton (1970-2011) (Bundjalung) briefly explains the Dreamings:

*Dreamings lay down the laws concerning the accessing of resources from the environment. The environment relates directly to social organisation, kinship and social obligations, sacred law, offences against property and persons, marriage, and an individual's relationship with the land.*<sup>419</sup>

Artist Richard Bell summarises the Dreamings as “*the dreamtime is the past the present and the future. Urban [contemporary] artists are still telling their Dreamtime stories, albeit, contemporary ones.*”<sup>420</sup>

<sup>417</sup> Andrew Armitage, *Comparing the Policy of Aboriginal Assimilation: Australia, Canada and New Zealand* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1995).

<sup>418</sup> See Glossary in Brenda L. Croft, *Culture Warriors: Australian Indigenous Art Triennale* (Parkes, NSW: National Gallery of Australia, 2007), Exhibition catalogue, 207.

<sup>419</sup> Michele Grossman, *Blacklines: Contemporary Critical Writing by Indigenous Australians* (Carlton, Victoria: Melbourne University Press, 2003), 173.

<sup>420</sup> Bell, "Bell's theorem of Aboriginal art: it's a white thing."

Smith's book clearly provides a wealth of conceptual material on contemporary art and culture and demonstrates his extensive knowledge in the field of the contemporary theory.<sup>421</sup> Smith is the only Western art historian to include Australian Aboriginal art and culture in contemporary discourse, even though Aboriginal art's entwinement, histories and culture were allocated to a small section of his text. The fact that Smith is the only Western art historian to include Indigenous art in the contemporary art discussion is the crux of thesis and a determining factor in the Indigenous art as contemporary art debate as discussed in Chapter Two.

Smith's interdisciplinary value and richness of ideas of the multiple ways Indigenous people experience contemporaneity in art and the "*multiple ways of being with, in, and out of time, separately and at once, with others and without*"<sup>422</sup> provided a gateway for a broader cultural analysis. This enabled the inclusion of Indigenous worldviews, namely time as cyclical rather than linear which incorporates the past, present and the future. In light of this thesis's argument, Smith disables the categorisation of Indigenous art by non-engagement with the distinctions between the contemporary and the traditional through inclusion of Indigenous culture's worldviews. This is a major breakthrough, as anthropological depictions of culture were one of the reasons that prevented Indigenous art as being seen as contemporary, as discussed in Chapter Three of this thesis in the exclusion section.

In his final chapter of *What is Contemporary Art?* Smith proposes, "*What are the implications for art practice, art criticism and art theory of posing the possibility that it is time that contemporary art was subject to a certain kind of art historical analysis?*"<sup>423</sup> Smith's colleague, historian Richard Meyer examined such a notion in his book *What was the Contemporary?* (2013) and posits the definition of the contemporary in art "*is a relation between an ever-shifting present and the volatile force of history.*"<sup>424</sup>

### **Embracing Temporalities and Trans-historicity: Richard Meyer**

Unlike Smith, Meyer views the contemporary as in dialogue with, rather than in opposition to the modern, by advocating the contemporary is a "*dialectical engagement with history.*"<sup>425</sup> Meyer argues that by thinking in trans-historical terms, the 'now-ism' (a term used by Meyer) of the contemporary is shifted to the margins by looking at a 'longer history' of the 'new' rather than the last few decades, as previous scholars have.

<sup>421</sup> Smith has written extensively on the contemporary for over a decade, for a list of books and articles see [http://www.terryesmith.net/web/?page\\_id=2](http://www.terryesmith.net/web/?page_id=2)

<sup>422</sup> Smith, *What is Contemporary Art?*, 6.

<sup>423</sup> Smith, *What is Contemporary Art?*, 241.

<sup>424</sup> Meyer, *What was Contemporary Art?*, 280.

<sup>425</sup> Meyer, *What was Contemporary Art?*.



By looking at a 'longer history' of the contemporary Meyer looks beyond the present, indulges in the distortion of time and situates the contemporary within a newly explored and highly critical field - that of art history. Professor of Art History at the University of California, Grant Kester confirms its newness "until perhaps a decade ago, the field of contemporary art wasn't formally recognised within the discipline of art history."<sup>426</sup> Whereas art critic Irving Sandler succinctly explains why this is a vexed subject matter in Western art:

*Art history and art criticism are often distinguished on the grounds that one treats the art of the past, distance in time from its subject and the other deals with recent art or with older art from the vantage point of contemporary experience.*<sup>427</sup>

Meyer advocates that to theorise the contemporary does not necessarily have to come at the expense of history.<sup>428</sup> To argue his position, Meyer unravels "the idea of modern art as a coherent period style that neatly precedes the contemporary."<sup>429</sup> Meyer highlights that there once was a time when the modern was undefinable and "multiple versions were unfolding, jockeying alongside and sometimes contradicting one another."<sup>430</sup> Evidence of this is inherent in the questionnaire *What is Modern Art?* by the American art critic Edward Alden Jewell (1888-1947) that was circulated to a number of directors, art historians, and artists in 1931 that Meyer referenced in his critical investigation.<sup>431</sup> Although Meyer does not acknowledge the direct co-relation with Hal Foster's *Questionnaire on the Contemporary*, (2009) addressed at the beginning of this chapter, similar questions were proposed to that of the modern such as *What is Modern Art? or How do we know it when we see it?*<sup>432</sup> This provides weight to Meyer's critical position that the modern, like the contemporary, was also an open, elusive and undefined field and therefore positions the modern beyond the purist abstraction or formalist constraints it largely became associated with in Western art history.<sup>433</sup>

To support his argument Meyer focuses on different institutional narratives, national contexts and visual art objects in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century residing predominately within the Museum of Modern

<sup>426</sup> Foster, "Questionnaire on 'The Contemporary' " 8.

<sup>427</sup> Meyer, *What was Contemporary Art?* , 259.

<sup>428</sup> Meyer, *What was Contemporary Art?* , 260.

<sup>429</sup> Meyer, *What was Contemporary Art?* , 115.

<sup>430</sup> Meyer, *What was Contemporary Art?* , 115.

<sup>431</sup> Reference to this questionnaire can be found at "Definition of Modern Art for E. D. Jewell of Times - with notes from A. H. Barr ", 1931, [https://www.moma.org/momaorg/shared/pdfs/docs/press\\_archives/50/releases/MOMA\\_1929-31\\_0050\\_1931-01-21.pdf](https://www.moma.org/momaorg/shared/pdfs/docs/press_archives/50/releases/MOMA_1929-31_0050_1931-01-21.pdf).

<sup>432</sup> See article by Edward Alend Jewell in the New York Times in 1931. See "Again a Storm Rages over Modern Art," 1931, <https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy1.library.usyd.edu.au/hnpnewyorktimes/docview/99480895/fulltextPDF/228482EE03954A74PQ/27?accountid=14757>.

<sup>433</sup> Meyer refers to an interview in 1985 published by October in 1994 between Benjamin H. D Buchloch and Andy Warhol and notes Warhol refused to locate his artwork within a genealogical schema of influence and innovation. See Meyer, *What was Contemporary Art?* , 261-65.

exhibition programming in New York, the undergraduate course at Wellesley College and the renaming of Boston's Institute of Contemporary Art. Using these as case studies Meyer is able to promote a new understanding of contemporary theory that juxtaposes art events, developments and exhibitions from the past with that of the present in modern culture. Meyer refers to the crucial role Alfred H. Barr (1902-1981) played in the development, conceptualisation and validation of contemporary art in modernism's history when Barr was the first director at the Museum of Modern Art in New York in the early twentieth century: Barr refused to favour or promote any chronological period, national school or particular style in the exhibitions he curated.<sup>434</sup> Instead Barr wanted to include everything that came under thought as contemporary. This meant anything that could be understood as an aesthetic practice could be considered contemporary - it did not have to be but could be.



Figure 22. Installation view, *Indian Art of the United States*, January 22-April 27, 1941. Photograph copyright 1999 The Museum of Modern Art, New York.

<sup>434</sup> Meyer, *What was Contemporary Art?*, 116.



Figure 23. Navajo Charley Turquoise and Dinay Chili Bitsocy executing sand painting, March 26, 1941 at *Indian of the United States* exhibition at Museum of Modern Art, New York, United States of the America. Photography copyright of The Museum of Modern Art, New York.

As an early example of ‘the past as newly present’ Meyer refers to an exhibition in 1941 titled *Indian Art from the United States* at the MOMA that Barr included in the exhibition program. The exhibition showcased First Nations’ art from various historical periods (including the twentieth century) (see, Figure 22) across the three floors of the museum.<sup>435</sup> In this exhibition First Nations twentieth-century paintings, performances and installations were juxtaposed with beadwork, pottery, silver-smithing and a range of other objects.

To contextualise the exhibition and enforce the dialectical connection of present cultural production to the historical Meyer builds upon Thomas Crow’s concept whereby art that continues over time can become “*newly relevant to later social-historic contexts, disrupting distinctions between then and now by rendering the past newly present.*”<sup>436</sup> In *The Indians from the United States* exhibition differentiation between the now and then becomes obsolete by this reinterpretation of the past as newly present. The twentieth-century First Nations’ paintings and performances illustrate that the contemporary is embedded in an art historical progression of the present that assists in the contextualisation of the work in history. For example, the performance of the Navajo artists executing a sand painting (see, Figure 23) in 1941 is sacred act and importantly a living entity that

<sup>435</sup> In this section Berlo is addressing the new Indian painting from the 1930-1960s that was included in the MOMA exhibition. Berlo writes that at this time the language of presentation remained tied to a discourse of primitivism, as the new Indian paintings were considered folk art and not fine art. See Berlo and Phillips, *Native North American Art* 218.

<sup>436</sup> Meyer, *What was Contemporary Art?*, 17.

is passed down from generation to generation.<sup>437</sup> In this regard, the performance resides outside of the canonical timeline and clearly illustrates how this can be historical yet contemporary, archival yet current. It demonstrates a trajectory that stretches far beyond the 'nowism' of the modern in 1941 and is in line with Indigenous worldviews of time as cyclical rather than linear. It also confirms that the Indigenous artists live, circulate and practice in many different environments, from missions to reserves to reservations to city dwellings to rural places in national and international Indigenous and non-Indigenous contexts and make contemporary artworks regardless of residence. Importantly it highlights history is in the making of contemporary Indigenous artworks.

Confirmation of embedded historical traits in contemporary performance is found in David Roman's book *Performance in America: Contemporary U.S. Culture and the Performing Arts*, (2005). Roman posits that contemporary performance has historical performances embedded within them by examining American performances from 1994-2004. From this Roman was able to establish that an archive of British and American culture from the 18<sup>th</sup> century through to the 20<sup>th</sup> century was embedded within those performances.<sup>438</sup>

In stepping nearer to the present, Meyer cites the contemporary artworks of American artists Glenn Ligon and Kara Walker. Kara Walker's wall sized cut paper seventeenth century silhouettes that "not only disrupt temporality but reconfigure historical perception through dialectical engagement."<sup>439</sup> Walker is known for her large black cut out silhouettes that address the racial history of the American South. Meyer could have included First Nation artists such as George Longfish (Ojibway) and Allen Michelson (Mohawk) into this analysis, as these artists as well as many other Indigenous artists operate along similar lines.

The contemporary artworks (including performance) by Indigenous artists from Australia and Canada are working with a dialectical engagement with history. It is part of Indigenous worldview that is alive in the notion that the past is always present: it can be found in Indigenous artists who preserve and perpetuate the creation stories and the continuity of Indigenous culture.<sup>440</sup> It can be found in the Indigenous notion of time and space as cyclical rather than the Western idea of linearity.<sup>441</sup> For example, the Australian Aboriginal people of the Central Desert regions

<sup>437</sup> "Navajo Sandpaintings," 2013, <http://navajopeople.org/navajo-sand-painting.htm>.

<sup>438</sup> David Roman, *Performance in America: Contemporary U.S. Culture and the Performing Arts* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), 12.

<sup>439</sup> Meyer, *What was Contemporary Art?*, 280.

<sup>440</sup> In some Indigenous languages there are no equivalent words for the terms such as time or space, and in others there are many words that represent the idea of time and space, although these are not considered definitive categories of thought. For example, in the language group, Anishinabek, there are no words for time and space. See <http://oibwe.ibl.umn.edu/ojibwe/search>.

<sup>441</sup> As per discussed in Berlo and Phillips, *Native North American Art*, 87; Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* 50.

distinguish time as *Jukurrpa*, which artist and linguist Jeannie Herbert Nungarrayi (1953-2014) has explained:

*The Jukurrpa is an all-embracing concept that provides rules for living, a moral code, as well as rules for interacting with the natural environment ...it isn't something that has been consigned to the past but is a lived daily reality.*<sup>442</sup>

It can be found in historical Indigenous craft processes and techniques that are relived through contemporary experience. It can be found in past socio-political, historical and cultural events that were exempt from Australian and Canadian histories and now these histories are being made visible through contemporary art.

The significance of 'history' residing within contemporary art practices as perpetuated by Meyer is that it does not advocate to rewrite or revise history or a world history per se-that would be a huge task but to provide a theory that attends to a history that looks beyond the presentness of the contemporary and offers an alternative to Western traditional art historical discourse. This in itself would offer the inclusion of multiple claims of interpretive authority that reside outside the standard Euro-Western construction of history.

## CONCLUSION

Chapter Four addressed the undefinable characteristic of the concept of the contemporary in Western art discourse through engagement with art critics, theorists, historians and art writers' viewpoints on the subject matter. Art historian Terry Smith was the only Western art historian to include Indigenous art in the discussion of contemporary art in a significant text *What is Contemporary art?* (2009). Smith posits the contemporary in a broader cultural analysis that asserts different Australian historiographies that enables the inclusion of Australian Aboriginal art. On the other, Richard Meyer's argument on the contemporary as a "*relation between an ever-shifting present and the volatile force of history*" was put forth as the means to define the contemporary in relation to Indigenous art practices.<sup>443</sup> The importance of Meyer's theory on the contemporary is the existence of co-temporalities (similar to Smith's) and its emphasis on trans-historicity. It is here Meyer's concept triggers events that upset the relationship between history and the 'nowism' of the contemporary. Meyer's account of Alfred Barr's curatorial premises of exhibitions, which included an exhibition of First Nations art from a range of periods and disciplines, provided a theory to assert all forms of Indigenous art are contemporary. In this regard, Meyer draws attention to the idea that the contemporary is a way of seeing and posits Barr wanted

<sup>442</sup> Christine Nicholls, "'Dreamtime' and 'The Dreaming'-an introduction," *The Conversation*, January 23, 2014 (2014). <http://theconversation.com/dreamtime-and-the-dreaming-an-introduction-20833>.

<sup>443</sup> Meyer, *What was Contemporary Art?* .

to include everything that came under thought as 'contemporary'. Furthermore, Meyer's theory on the contemporary brings awareness that the contemporary is viewed from artistic practice rather than the standard curatorial perspective. To validate that the contemporary is defined by artistic practice Meyer refers to visual artists such as Kara Walker and Glen Ligon as examples.

The consolidation of Terry Smith's acknowledgement of situating the contemporary in art in a broader cultural analysis and historiographies that included Indigenous worldviews and Meyer's argument of 'putting the history back into contemporary art' through avenues of temporalities and trans-historicity have provided the theoretical foundation to argue how Indigenous artists are establishing their own history within the context of contemporary art.

The next chapter looks at a variety of Indigenous artworks and uses the methods of a contemporary art analysis outlined in Chapter One of this thesis to substantiate that Indigenous aesthetic art practices are constitutive of establishing an Indigenous history within the field of Contemporary Art.

## CHAPTER FIVE THE PRESENCE OF HISTORIES IN CONTEMPORARY INDIGENOUS ART PRACTICES

*The long gestation of the Indigenous as meta-discursive beings means, for example, the end of traditional anthropology-in the sense of Peoples. We read, write, and critique ourselves into contemporaneity.*<sup>444</sup>

Chapter Five demonstrates the crux of the thesis hypotheses that an Indigenous history is being made through the avenue of contemporary art. This chapter will showcase a diverse selection of contemporary Indigenous artworks from Australia and Canada from the late twentieth century onwards to provide evidence that history resides within contemporary Indigenous art practices and artworks.

The range of Indigenous artists used within this chapter is to provide evidence that a vast number of Indigenous artists are making visible Indigenous histories through the avenue of contemporary art. This thesis alone should not be considered as a complete coverage of an Indigenous art historical field. As such it is not a claim per se about being the first, but rather Indigenous artists, including myself, are partaking in an emergent form of art practice-contemporary Indigenous art, within which Indigenous history is being narrated.

Since the primary place of history is conveyed within contemporary Indigenous art practice, it makes Indigenous history the center of the idea and not the periphery. This centering is crucial as it challenges the exoticisation of the 'other'. As such, this work contributes to a history of 'us'. It is about 'us' - Indigenous artists are the ones making the histories. Therefore, it is about shifting the center to Indigeneity.

By making visible Indigenous histories within Indigenous art practices it provides:

1. The cultural, political and social use of contemporary art as a form of history production.
2. An alternative, albeit an Indigenous one to the problematised way the term contemporary is determined for Indigenous art and undefined by Western European art and its institutions.
3. An Indigenous perspective on the 'Indigenous art as contemporary art debate'.
4. A resistance to institutional determination of Indigenous art practices in Western art discourse.
5. A mode for cultural self-determination in order to deter the historical domination of Western art history, history and its discursive power arrangements.

<sup>444</sup> "Necessary Essentialism and Contemporary Aboriginal Art," National Museum of the American Indian, New York, 2011.

In critiquing Smith's and Meyer's texts on contemporary theory as discussed in Chapter Four of this thesis, it is clear that both art historians include the existence of co-temporalities and trans-historicity in their definition of the contemporary. This means the continuum of time as both past and present that is in line with Indigenous worldviews of time as cyclical, as discussed in Chapter Four of this thesis. The synthesis of Smith's acknowledgement of situating the contemporary in art in a broader cultural analysis and historiographies that included Indigenous worldviews and Meyer's theory of 'putting the history back into contemporary art' through avenues of contemporary art practice, co-temporalities and trans-historicity have provided the theoretical foundation to demonstrate how Indigenous artists are establishing their own history within the context of contemporary art.

The following methodological frameworks, as discussed in Chapter One of this thesis are employed to provide evidence that Indigenous artists are establishing an Indigenous history through the avenue of contemporary art. Methods used in the analysis of contemporary Indigenous artworks and the aesthetics of contemporary Indigenous art practices include: the palimpsest through cut, paste and overlay; postmodern irony and the Trickster; decolonising through storytelling and sharing; and bearing witness in audience participation. All of these methods of analysis can be applied to contemporary Indigenous art. However, a limited number of artworks will be closely assessed for each method.

### **THE PALIMPSEST: CUT, PASTE AND OVERLAY**

The section will discuss the art making techniques of cutting, pasting and over layering as metaphors for the palimpsest. As discussed in Chapter One, the palimpsest is a piece of writing that have been written, erased and rewritten<sup>445</sup> and as such can be seen to symbolise the historiography of the postcolonial condition. As a metaphor the palimpsest is synonymous with colonial history and provides a powerful framework in which to analyse the contemporary artworks by Indigenous artists.

The contemporary art making techniques of cutting, pasting and over layering when employed by Indigenous artists literally enables Indigenous artists to 'cut' into Euro-Western history, 'paste' their own perspective and thus overlay Euro-Western histories with Indigenous histories. In this regard, the palimpsest structure of colonial writings, its erasures and rewritings of colonised lands and peoples become visible.<sup>446</sup> Importantly it can also be considered as embodying and rendering visible the violence that has occurred during the process of colonisation of Indigenous peoples.

This first section will critically analyse the contemporary artworks by Indigenous artists Richard Bell (Kamilaroi), Jane Ash Poitras (Cree), Danie Mellor, (Mamu, Ngajan and Ngagen), Tony Albert

<sup>445</sup> Dictionary, "Palimpsest."

<sup>446</sup> The palimpsest is discussed in more detail in the Introduction of this paper.



(Girramay and Kuku Yalanji), Christopher Pease, (Minang, Wardandi, Balardung, Nyoongar), Gordon Bennett<sup>447</sup> (1955-2014), Kent Monkman (Swampy Cree) and Rolande Souliere (Anishinaabe) (thesis author).

The physical act of cutting—whether it is slicing, slashing, gashing or tearing—implies a certain degree of symbolic violence in its efforts for deletion, division, detracting and minifying. For instance, a jagged, sharp and irregular cut could represent an impulsive, destructive narrative or implication, whereas a clear, regular cut can imply an abrupt and deliberate termination. On the other hand, a tear in the material displays energies of direction and speed in a destructive act that is visible in the jagged edges of the tear. Either way, the act of cutting clearly sets up certain expectations in the visual reading of contemporary Indigenous artworks. The irregularity of the shapes produced by the physical act of cutting leads itself to a different type of ordering, one that is more narrative in its intentions and less iconic.

Additionally, the physical act of pasting, or gluing down or over layering onto another material offers new possibilities of reading a visual artwork. This methodology of overlapping or layering has parallels with Indigenous art expression.<sup>448</sup> Shelly Niro (Mohawk) confirms the process of layering in her work: "*it does not start out that way but in the end becomes layered and then it is a critique.*"<sup>449</sup> Critique is the key word as the physical act of pasting and or overlaying and its various aesthetic compositions implies a reframing, repositioning, reconfiguration or a transformation of materials. Together, the congruent elements of pasting and layering offer new combinatory possibilities that liberate them from the confinements of mimesis or discursive logic and produce new meanings and perspectives.<sup>450</sup> In this view, the pasting and overlaying technique contribute to the palimpsest metaphor in that they overwrite colonial discourse and in doing so do not eradicate Indigenous stories completely.

Importantly, the cut, paste and overlay techniques serve as a palimpsest metaphor in the contemporary artworks by Indigenous artists in two ways: firstly, as an act of resistance to assimilation, violence and subjugation; and secondly, as a remembrance of the past that informs the present, (as discussed in Chapter Four) despite the insufficient evidence of what can be considered the lack of or 'silenced histories' of Indigenous peoples.

<sup>447</sup> Gordon Bennett refused to be identified solely as an Australian Aboriginal, see Chapter Two of this thesis. As such no language group is attached to his name.

<sup>448</sup> This is evident in the collages of Picasso during 1912-1913.

<sup>449</sup> Ryan, *The Trickster Shift: Humour and Irony in Contemporary Native Art* 64.

<sup>450</sup> Both David Banash and Elza Adamowicz see collage as liberating. See Elza Adamowicz, *Surrealist collage in text and image: dissecting the exquisite corpse* (Cambridge;New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 43; David Banash, "From Advertising to the Avant-Garde: Rethinking the Invention of Collage," *Postmodern Culture* 14, no. 2 (2004).

Moreover, the images used to cut, paste and overlay in the artworks are equally important as often this material is borrowed or appropriated from ethnographic photographs (where Indigenous people were portrayed as 'other' as emphasised in Chapter Three) and mass-produced materials such as newspapers and advertising material. These sources are Western forms of recording history and have the capacity to become embedded in people's mind as authentic or 'true' sources. In this respect, images are reclaimed by Indigenous artists as an artistic strategy and used as a response 'in kind' to the symbolic violence and in many cases the actual violence of silenced Euro-Western histories.



Figure 24. Richard Bell, *The Story Unfolds*, 1992. Synthetic polymer paint and paper on canvas, 114.8 x 214.2 cm. National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne Purchased, 1995 copyright Richard Bell, courtesy Milani Gallery, Brisbane.

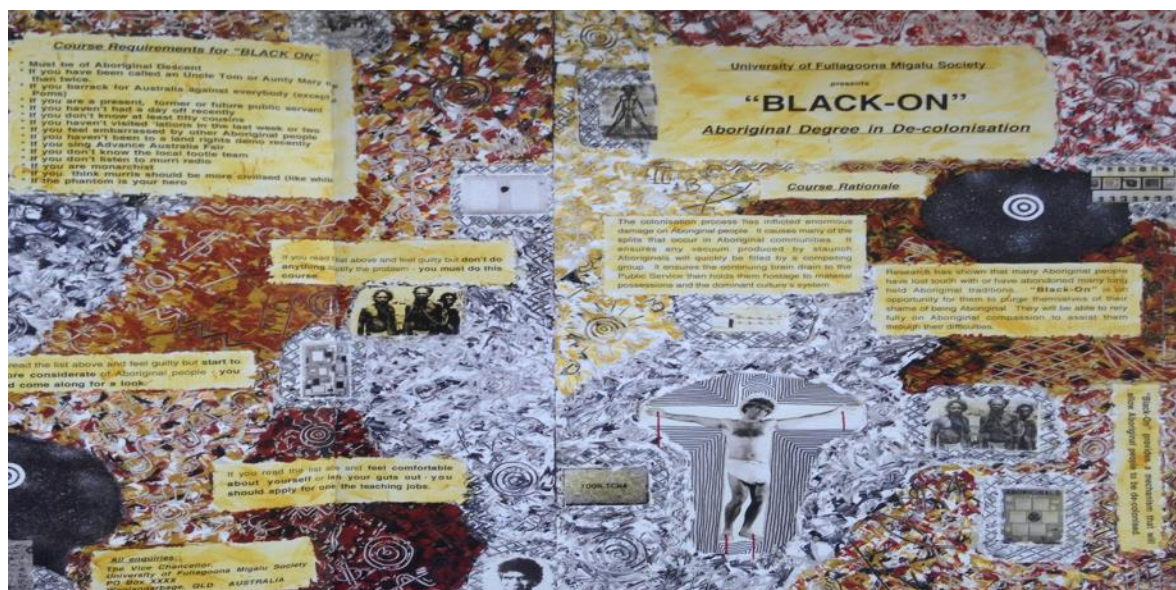


Figure 25. Richard Bell, *Out to Dry*, detail, 1993. Image reproduced courtesy of the artist in



Richard Bell: *Lessons on Etiquette and Manners*, (Caulfield East, Victoria: Monash University Museum of Art), 10.

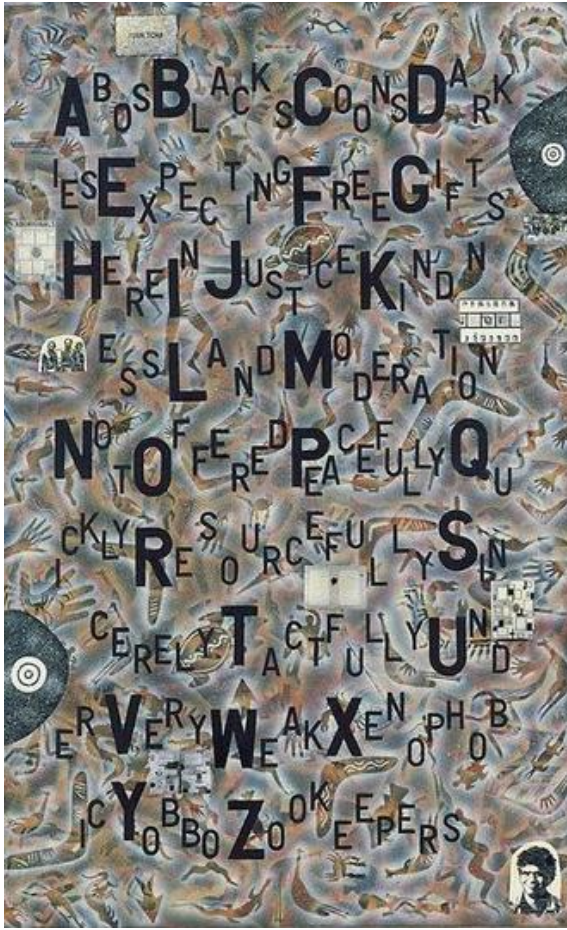


Figure 26. Richard Bell, *Devine Inspiration*, 1993. Synthetic polymer paint and collage on canvas; text panel, painting; 239 x 149.6 cm, text panel 19.5 x 22.5 cm. Contemporary Collection Benefactors 1993. Copyright of Richard Bell, courtesy Milani Gallery, Brisbane.

In *The Story Unfolds*, (1992) (Figure 24), *Out to Dry*, (1993) (Figure 25) and *Devine Inspiration*, (1993) (Figure 26) Bell manifests his political consciousness by cutting imagery from sources of ethnography and newspapers. The selected newspaper articles and ethnographic photographs are cut from their original sources and pasted onto canvas. The cut is straight and reflects the artist's focused criticism of the forces of colonialism and the memories that go with it. The unsettling 19<sup>th</sup> century ethnographic images of Australian Aboriginal males with massive chains around their necks and bodies, images of children forced into assimilation and news headlines on the artwork such as: 'South Africa leads call for sanctions against Australia' and 'White guilt won't help black cause' are blatant political messages found in *Devine Inspiration*, *The Story Unfolds* and *Out to Dry*. The sources of ethnographic imagery and newspaper articles are considered authentic or 'real' items and thereby legitimatise past events and views by triggering remembering. Bell uses mass media as a means to remember, reclaim and represent an Indigenous history.

For example, In *Devine Inspiration*, hand-painted letters of the alphabet are spread across the canvas. A closer examination of the alphabet reveals words associated with each letter of the alphabet such as 'Abos', 'Blacks' and 'Coons'. This is clearly the ABCs of a racist language specific to Australia. These are terms of insult inflicted by colonisers onto Australian Aboriginal people. The ABCs of racism are still part of many people's thinking, embedded in their psyche and as such are a reminder of aspects of Australia's shameful colonial history that unfortunately still continues to breed new generations of racism.

Bell's use of language and Frank Devine's newspaper article "*White Guilt Wont' Help Black Cause*"<sup>451</sup> from *The Australian*; dated March 13, 1992 "*strips bare the newspaper's true meaning and reconceptualises language with visual imagery to reveal unhidden truths.*"<sup>452</sup> Bell makes the connection to the number of Australian Aboriginals presently in jail by drawing attention to the racist undertones and mistruths in Devine's article and through the 19<sup>th</sup> century ethnographic image of chained Aboriginal people.

Mistreatment of Aboriginal people is still present in the twentieth first century with the death of Cameron Doomadgee from Palm Island, Queensland who died in police custody in 2004.<sup>453</sup> Vernon Ah Kee's (Kuku Yalandji, Waanji, Yidinji and Gugu Yimithirr) art practice addresses this subject matter. The ABCs of racism are still part of many people's thinking, embedded in their psyche and as such is a reminder of Australia's shameful colonial history that unfortunately still continues to breed new generations of racism. The outcome of the Australian Human Rights Commission's investigation into the number of Australian Aboriginal deaths in custody and also the historical ill treatment of Australian Aboriginal people, who were chained liked animals are prime examples.<sup>454</sup> Canada also had a Royal Commission investigation into the treatment of First Nations people, namely deaths in custody and the mistreatment of First Nation children in the

<sup>451</sup> In this article columnist Frank Devine questions the federal government's acceptance to all but one of the 339 recommendations as policy in the 1987 Royal Commission's report into Aboriginal deaths in custody. Devine disputes the need for specific policies for Indigenous Australians and recommends the government should dissolve all Aboriginal departments, institutions and policies. It is here Bell reveals Devine's attitude is embedded in ending all race-based laws. See Richard Bell, "Richard Bell: Lessons on Etiquette and Manners: Monash University Museum of Art - MUMA, 5 February-13 April 2013," (Caulfield East, Victoria: Monash University Museum of Art, 2012 2012), 13.

<sup>452</sup> Eddie Wolfram, *History of Collage* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc., 1975, 1975), 56.

<sup>453</sup> "30M payout over Palm Island riot over Doomadgee death in custody," *The Australian*, updated January 4, 2018, 2018, <https://www.theaustralian.com.au/national-affairs/indigenous/30m-payout-over-palm-island-riot-over-doomadgee-death-in-custody/news-story/d923e652a9a55e839d1baa57ec62c572?nk=31b8d32d687f0779160d09fbb9b354dc-1544037570>.

<sup>454</sup> "Indigenous Deaths in Custody," 1996, <https://www.humanrights.gov.au/our-work/aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-social-justice/publications/indigenous-deaths-custody>.

Indian Residential School System.<sup>455</sup> These are Indigenous histories, both within Australia and Canada.



Figure 27. Jane Ash Poitras, *Shaman Never Die V: Indigena*, 1990. Three panels, mixed media on canvas, 106 x 76.2 cm, each panel. Collection of Canadian Museum of Civilization.

<sup>455</sup> Canada Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, "Chapter 10: Residential Schools," in *Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, Volume 1, Looking Forward, Looking Back*, (Ottawa: Supply and Services Canada, 1996).

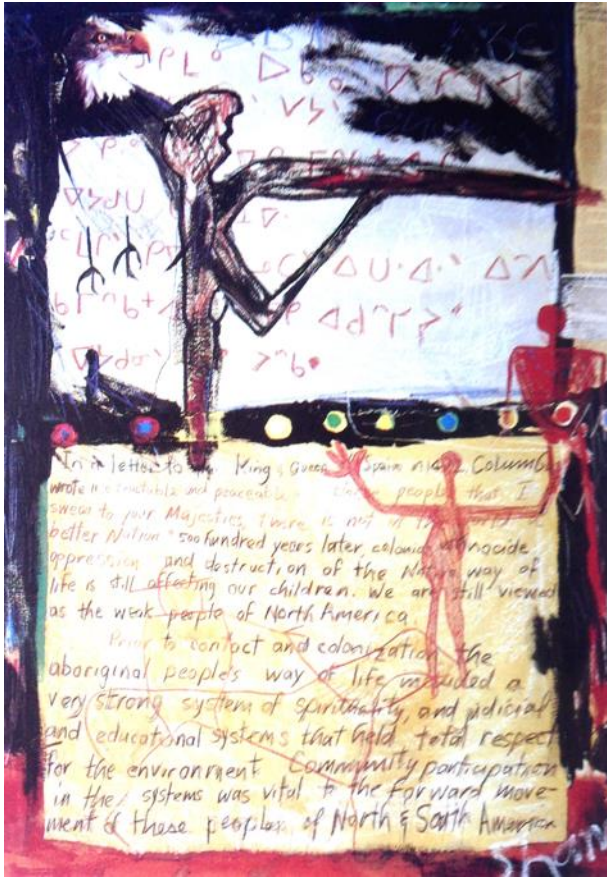


Figure 28. Jane Ash Poitras, *Shaman Never Die V: Indigena*, 1990. Detail. Image reproduced courtesy of the artist in *Indigena*, Gerald McMaster and Lee-Ann Martin, (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre), 166.

In *Shaman Never Die V: Indigena* (Figure 27), Poitras also makes use of newspaper articles to expose unhidden colonial truths and present Indigenous histories of activism, resistance and culture. The panel on the right side portrays newspaper articles irregularly cut and emphasises the speed of the artist's intent to expose Indigenous realities. The visible text from the artwork reads "struggle in Quebec an old one." The upper portion of the panel contains hand drawn Cree syllabics<sup>456</sup> and the lower portion contains a handwritten letter from a child addressed to the King and Queen of Spain of 1492 (Figure 28).

An image of an eagle is visible on the left-hand side, which in First Nations culture in Canada generally represents the symbol of honour, respect, power and love. Roughly painted caricatures of people are also present in the artwork. The person painted primarily in black is pointing a rifle. Two stick-like figures are painted in red; one looks to be surrendering as his hands are held up and the other appears to be advancing forward. The last one is a basic outline in red of a Royal Canadian Mounted Policeman, his hat and horse being the identifiers. First Nation chiefs, namely

<sup>456</sup> A writing system developed by Methodist James Evans to communicate with Cree. See <http://creeculture.ca/?q=node/59> for further info.



Elijah Harper and fragmented newspaper articles titled “*Missing the bigger picture at Oka*”, “*Manitoba chiefs to meet Government on Meech*”, “*A New Native here*”, “*Fourteen hundred and ninety-two*” and “*Natives desperate*” are randomly cut and predominately visible in the artwork.

The newspaper articles contradict one another. It is here Poitras utilises contemporary art, politics and the commercialisation of Indigenous culture to emphasise that the messages of mass circulation of newspapers are openly mixed with various views. Through juxtaposition of the newspaper articles their cumulative and interrelated reasoning becomes neutralised. Literary historian Richard Terdiman writes, “*newspaper[s] systematically ‘rationalize disjunction; they are organized as disorganization.’*”<sup>457</sup> Terdiman draws upon nineteenth-century writers where newsprint came to stand for the commercialised and dishonest discourse of the bourgeoisie.<sup>458</sup> It could be implied through the display of contradictory articles that Poitras draws on this historical knowledge and uses it to transform and critique ideology and transform reality by presenting aspects of Indigenous histories that pertain to Indigenous activism, resistance and ways of culture.

Bell and Poitras takes advantage of the 1990s Indigenous social, political and cultural activism in the news and uses the newspaper as a strategy for people to remember. Not only at the time of execution of these works in the 1990s but also going forward to highlight the effects of colonisation and the significant historical successes of Indigenous interventions; such as the Meech Lake Accord and the Oka Crisis. The Meech Lake Accord was a “*failed constitutional amendment package negotiated in 1987 by then Prime Minister of Canada, Brian Mulroney, and the ten provincial premiers.*”<sup>459</sup> Manitoba Chief Elijah Harper prompted a filibuster due to its disregard for First Nations political concerns, successfully preventing the package from passing into law. The other significant resistance was the Oka Crisis which occurred in July 1990 when the Mohawks armed 78-day standoff with the Royal Canadian Mount Police and the Quebec police over Indigenous land rights.<sup>460</sup> First Nations from across Canada conducted rallies in their own provinces in support.

Through the use of contemporary artworks Bell and Poitras present Indigenous histories through art processes of cutting and pasting to trigger memory by using ethnographic imagery, newspaper headlines and text to expose colonial language, historical dates and to reframe political and social issues. These artistic tactics could be associated with what Tuhiwai Smith views, as “*governments and social agencies have failed to see many indigenous social problems as being related to any sort of history.*”<sup>461</sup>

<sup>457</sup> Mark Antliff and Patricia Leighton, "Pasted Papers and Revolution," in *Cubism and Culture* (London: Thames & Hudson Ltd, 2001), 176.

<sup>458</sup> Patricia Leighton, *Re-Ordering the Universe: Picasso and Anarchism 1897-1914* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1989).

<sup>459</sup> Coulthard, "Canada's First Nations: A History of Resistance."

<sup>460</sup> Coulthard, "Canada's First Nations: A History of Resistance."

<sup>461</sup> Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* 153.

Whereas the letter to the Queen of Spain by a child in Poitras's artwork (Figure 28) recognises Indigenous culture's attributes, the child's letter reads,

*the aboriginal peoples way of life included a very strong system of spirituality and judicial and educational systems that held total respect of the environment. Community participation in the systems was vital to the forward movement of these people.*

The technique of overlapping or over layering in contemporary Indigenous art practices is significant to the concept of the palimpsest as it enables Indigenous artists to erase what was previously 'written' by the West through the art technique of 'over layering'. This brings to the forefront the importance of the palimpsest trope in that it is counter responsive by Indigenous art practitioners. For example, by overlaying onto selected or appropriated material Indigenous artists are erasing colonial written text that previously 'overwrote' or 'overlaid' Indigenous histories. The palimpsest then becomes a powerful strategy for Indigenous artists to put forth Indigenous histories.

For example, many Indigenous artists use the technique of overlay whether in paintings, prints, collages or video in their contemporary art practice to reveal Indigenous histories. Indigenous artists such as Bennett, Boyd, Pease, Mellor, Monkman (Swampy Cree) and Souliere use the overlay technique to override colonial narratives and reveal Indigenous histories. In reconsidering colonial history from an Indigenous perspective. Boyd writes,

*With our history being dominated by Eurocentric views it's very important that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people continue to create dialogue from their own perspective to challenge the subjective history that has been created.<sup>462</sup>*

<sup>462</sup> Croft, *Culture Warriors: Australian Indigenous Art Triennale 71*.





Figure 29. Gordon Bennett, *Possession Land*, 1991. Oil and synthetic polymer paint on canvas, 162 cm x 260 cm (overall). Image courtesy of The Museum of Sydney on the site of First Government House, Historic Houses Trust of New South Wales. Purchased with funds from the Foundation for the Historic Houses Trust, Museum of Sydney Appeal, 2007 copyright courtesy of the artist. Photography: Xavier Lavictoire.

In Bennett's painting *Possession Island*, 1991 (Figure 29), Bennett takes a well-known historical image of Captain Cook taking possession of Australia which includes all the symbols that go with Australian colonial discovery: the rising of the Union Jack, the presence of soldiers, the onset of agricultural development and the dutiful Australian Aboriginal servant. However, Bennett negates the discovery of Australia by Captain Cook in the painterly overlay of the colonial image in the colours of the Aboriginal flag, black, red and yellow. Bennett also uses a mix of Western and Indigenous paintings styles, such as that of American painter Jackson Pollock (1912-1956) and Australian Aboriginal Western Desert painting in his overlay technique to challenge the Eurocentric language of discovery, exploration as an encounter and present Indigenous perspectives.



Figure 30. Christopher Pease, *New Water Dreaming*, 2005. Oil on canvas 100 x 180 cm, image courtesy of National Gallery of Australia. Purchased 2005.

In Figure 29, the only elements that do not have a painterly overlay are the Aboriginal person and the modernist grid, this can be seen as highlighting the untruth of Australia as a newly found land that was claimed as Terra Nullius (land without inhabitants) prior to European colonisation: The modernist grid stands in as a metaphor for the rigid structured systems of knowledge within Western civilisation that were imposed upon Aboriginal peoples. The grid is also used in a similar vein in *New Water Dreaming*, (2005)(Figure 30), Pease appropriates and overlays Louis Auguste de Sainson's *Aiguade de l'Astrolabe au Port du Roi (Nelle Hollande) [Taking on water—the Astrolabe—King George's Sound. New Holland]* (1826) with a modernist grid. Here, Pease addresses the way Western discovery and exploration impacted Nyoongar culture from the early 1800s until the present.

Western notions of progress, development and social structure led to the scholarly disciplines of mapping, physics and geography, which in turn introduced the spatial vocabulary specific to colonialism, i.e. surveying of land, mapping and marking of boundaries.<sup>463</sup> This is evident in Pease's reference to the extraction of resources such as water, as illustrated in Sainson's image of the loading of water from King George Sound in Western Australia onto the long boats by members of Dumont d'Urville expedition—a concept foreign to Minang peoples.<sup>464</sup>

<sup>463</sup> Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* 53.

<sup>464</sup> Croft, *Culture Warriors: Australian Indigenous Art Triennale* 144.



Figure 31. Kent Monkman, *The Triumph of Mischief* (detail), 2007, Acrylic on canvas, 213x335 cm Collection of The National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, (accessed April 12, 2015).

In the North American context, Monkman reframes the “*discovery of the New World*”<sup>465</sup> through the use of a historical painting by Alfred Bierstadt’s <sup>466</sup> *Looking Up the Yosemite Valley*, (circa 1863-75,) in *The Triumph of Mischief* (2007) (Figure 31). Monkman overlays the vast emptiness of the landscape painting by populating the romantic wilderness with many people from the Western art canon such as Marcel Duchamp, Paul Kane, Piet Mondrian and Pablo Picasso, as well as First Nation characters such as two spirited people<sup>467</sup> and mythical and prophecy figures such as the Shapeshifter<sup>468</sup> and the White Buffalo.<sup>469</sup>

Here Monkman fills the wilderness with the riddles and utopian fantasies that W.J.T. Mitchell spoke of, to expose the ideologies of their colonial makers. Further, by overlaying the historical painting with individuals from a variety of timeframes, Monkman disrupts the Western linear progression of time and challenges Western ideologies that frame perception, cultural knowledge as well as discovery.

<sup>465</sup> See "European discovery of the New World," 2018, <https://new.gilderlehrman.org/history-by-era/timeline-terms/european-discovery-new-world>.

<sup>466</sup> The Hudson River School was an American art movement in the mid nineteenth century which consisted of a large group of landscape painters of America’s wilderness such as Thomas Cole, Frederic Church and Alfred Bierstadt, to name a few. See <http://www.artcyclopedia.com/history/hudson-river-school.html> accessed May 2, 2014.

<sup>467</sup> See Glossary.

<sup>468</sup> See Glossary.

<sup>469</sup> See Glossary.





Figure 32. Danie Mellor, *Bayi Minyjirral*, 2013. Pastel, pencil and wash on Saunders Waterford paper, nine panels, overall 300 x 360 cm, private collection, Brisbane.

Mellor also populates the landscape with Indigenous people in *Bayi Minyjirral*, (2013)(Figure 32). Using his signature aesthetics of mezzotint, Mellor places Australian Aboriginal people 'in' the landscape and renders them in full colour. Mellor draws on the landscape as a particular convention in Western history yet upturns this notion with the way Indigenous people see 'landscape as Country' rather than a surveyed piece of land or a resource.<sup>470</sup>

Much like Bennett's paintings, Mellor disrupts the viewer's perception of European discovery and re-enforces Indigenous genealogies within the landscape—the landscape that had defined the way of life for Indigenous people and their ancestors. In overlaying these images of historical landscapes, Bennett, Mellor, and Monkman override colonial notions of discovery in Western history. As the concept of discovery was important to colonialism, Tuhiwai Smith confirms, "*in order to begin a chronology, a time of 'discovery' has to be established.*"<sup>471</sup> Yet these artists override the notion of discovery by placing Indigenous people within the landscape. In doing so, the artists deny the logic of Terra Nullius (land without people).

<sup>470</sup> "Danie Mellor: Exotic Lies Sacred Ties," 2014, <http://artmuseum.uq.edu.au/filething/get/11713/MELLOR-Media-Images-for-Download.pdf>.

<sup>471</sup> Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* 30.



Figure 33. Rolande Souliere, *The Alice*, 2013. 1 of 12 collages. Collage on 285 gsm Fabriano paper. 34x50 cm. Photo courtesy of Peter Endersbee. Copyright of the artist.



Figure 34. Rolande Souliere, *The Alice*, 2013, 2 of 12. Collage on 285 gsm Fabriano paper. 24 x 39 cm. Photo Peter Endersbee. Copyright of the artist.

The landscape as a particular convention in Western history is made visible in Souliere's collage series *The Alice*, 2013 (Figure 33 and 34). In this artwork significant Australian Aboriginal cultural land sites, which have become tourist attractions, are cut up and overlaid on top of each other. The tourist landmarks include Karlu Karlu (the Devils Marbles), Kata Tjuta (The Olgas) and Uluru (Ayers Rocks) in the Northern Territory of Australia. Through the techniques of cutting and over layering these significant Australian landscapes, it illustrates colonial ideologies and processes of land: accumulation, economic expansion and development and commercial profit. Imperial and colonial constructs of space in terms of processes of defining, marking and controlling space was discussed in Chapter Three of this thesis. In Figure 34, Souliere draws attention to the 'players' within the real estate marketplace. The word play on 'Elders' is deliberate. The knowledge and importance of the land as a way of life is generally passed down by Indigenous Elders, yet 'Elders' is also an Australian real estate agency franchise. Real estate agents are the major players in the ebb and flow of the marketplace and are inextricably entwined with resource control. Monetary gain therefore becomes the driving force behind resource control.

In this collage, the market place is akin to a circus where commercial profit or monetary gain overrides the care of sacred Indigenous land and culture. For example, much controversy has been made on how tourism is affecting Uluru (Ayers Rock), Northern Territory, which is sacred to Australian Aboriginal people. The controversy lies within the prevention of people climbing on the sacred site, as banning such an activity will result in monetary loss for the tourist industry. Yet, in not preventing such an activity, shows disrespect for activities that are not permissible at Uluru.<sup>472</sup>

These contemporary artworks by Indigenous artists clearly demonstrate how palimpsest is used as a metaphor through the aesthetics of cutting, pasting and over layering to tell Indigenous histories, within, over and under Western histories.

### **POSTMODERN IRONY AND THE TRICKSTER**

This section discusses the Trickster within contemporary Indigenous art. The Trickster is a common mythological icon found in many Indigenous cultures, and is a symbol of pranks, jokes, teasing and tricking people. The Trickster is at play in contemporary Indigenous art practices and the use of 'Trickster' is located *within* Indigenous art practice and not as an ethnographic study. The Trickster is employed in line with the Western use of irony, parody and humour in contemporary Indigenous art practices and artworks.

It is no doubt that many Indigenous artists credit the Trickster as having a direct impact on their art practice with Trickster qualities such as wordplay, teasing, joking and irony providing the most creative freedom. These qualities have given visual form to present Indigenous histories such as colonial misrepresentation and misconstruction. Allan J. Ryan writes,

*Artists have become particularly skilled at representing cultural stereotypes in humour and ironic fashion to reveal not only their ideological underpinnings but also the ways in which historical misconceptions have hindered cross-cultural understanding and interaction.*<sup>473</sup>

An example of this is in the representation of Indigenous people(s) defined as 'other' from the dominant Euro-Western perspective. Contemporary Indigenous works can re-establish and convert this representation and thus the identity of Indigenous peoples.<sup>474</sup> To disrupt what colonialism is, tools of humour and irony are employed to bring awareness to historically and socially-grounded misconceptions of Indigenous realities, their existence and identity.

<sup>472</sup> See "Why we are banning tourists from climbing Uluru," 2017, <http://theconversation.com/why-we-are-banning-tourists-from-climbing-uluru-86755>.

<sup>473</sup> Ryan, *The Trickster Shift: Humour and Irony in Contemporary Native Art* 14.

<sup>474</sup> See Introduction on Linda Tuhiwai Smith's "Decolonization Methods and Methodology".



A prime example of this is discoverer Christopher Columbus, who incorrectly labelled First Nation peoples as “Indians” as Columbus had thought he landed in India.<sup>475</sup> This misrecognition of Canadian First Nations as ‘Indians’ is, as scholar Gerald Vizenor (Anishinaabe) states, “oppressive and constructs a prison of false identities.”<sup>476</sup>

Artists such as George Longfish (Seneca-Tuscarora) captures the effect stereotypes leave on Indigenous people in his artwork ironically titled *Lightly Salted* (1990) (Figure 35). Longfish appropriates colonial stereotypical representation of the ‘Indian princess’ used by the food and agricultural company, Land O’Lakes, to illustrate lingering stereotypes. As well as how such depictions objectify and devalue First Nations people. The title *Lightly Salted*, is an ironic twist on the terminology used to market one of the many varieties of butter to North American consumers.

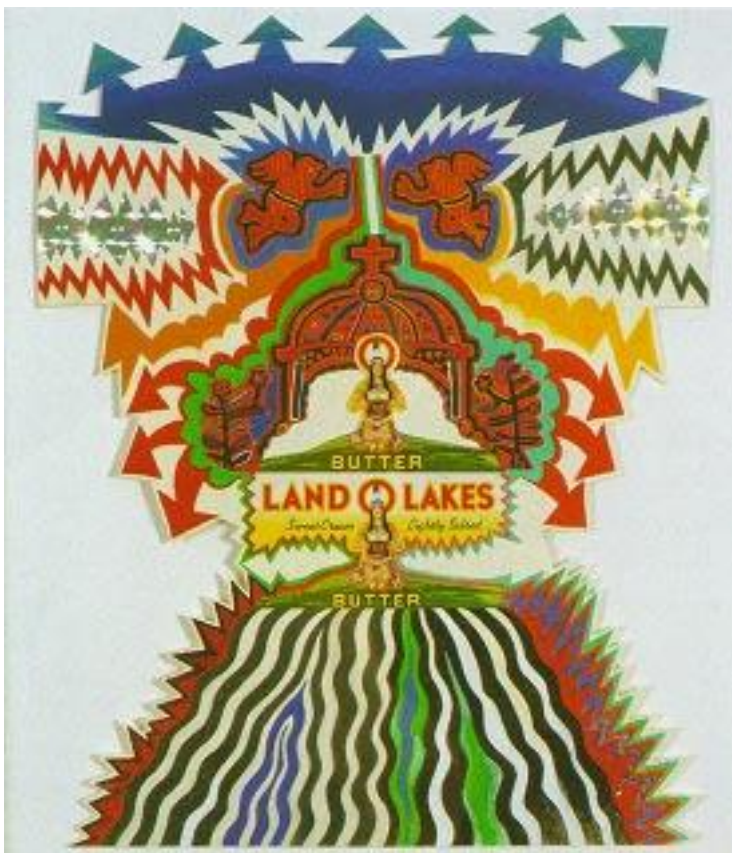


Figure 35. George Longfish, *Lightly Salted*, 1990. Collage on paper, 48.26 x 40.64 cm. Accessed March 12, 2012, National Museum of the American Indian.

The imagery of ‘Indianness’ was marketed for mass produced goods, such as Land O’ Lakes butter and therefore was used as a commodity for Euro-Canadian consumption. This imagery

<sup>475</sup> McMaster and Martin, *Indigena: Contemporary Native Perspectives in Canadian Art* 25. See also National Museum of the American Indian, *Do All Indians Live in Tipis?: Questions and Answers from the National Museum of the American Indian* (New York: HarperCollins, 2007).

<sup>476</sup> Gerald Vizenor, *Fugitive Poses: Native American Indian Scenes of Absence and Presence* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1988), 22.



dates back from the earlier period of the twentieth century where the Indian princess was the main representation of a First Nation woman in popular culture.<sup>477</sup>

The princess or maiden often was portrayed in a red tunic paddling a canoe in a picturesque landscape filled with mountains and waterfalls. The imagery was more than likely inspired by literature, as the maiden represented a symptom of “white culture’s feelings of enticement by the indigene and what the indigene symbolises in the land.”<sup>478</sup> Terry Goldie remarks, “the maiden represents the ‘optimism that the land holds’.”<sup>479</sup> As this suggests, the imagery was ideal for promoting the land development of North America. Furthermore, the words “land of the free” are included in the American national anthem.<sup>480</sup> Gail Guthrie Valaskakis (1939-2007) succinctly reveals, “these statue-like figures of the imagination marketed the North American West as alluring, unoccupied, available and now open to railroad travel.”<sup>481</sup> When applied to the current and historical situation of First Nation peoples forcibly moved off their land to make it ‘free’-the irony becomes visible in Longfish’s artwork.

The artwork simultaneously manages to reinforce yet undermine and subvert by highlighting what it is subverting through the process of doubling. *Lightly Salted* is doubly coded in political terms to decolonise the imagery of First Nation women and also to reveal the untruth that North America was unoccupied and available. This semantic transformation is visible in the work’s title and through the doubling of patterns and stereotypical imagery of a First Nation woman, which work together to expose Western society’s contradictions.

<sup>477</sup> Guthrie Gail Valaskakis and Marilyn Burgess, *Indian Princesses and Cowgirls: Stereotypes from the Frontier* (Montreal: Oboro, 1992), 135.

<sup>478</sup> Terry Goldie, *Fear and Temptation: The image of the Indigne in Canadian, Australian and New Zealand Literature* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1989), 72.

<sup>479</sup> Goldie, *Fear and Temptation: The image of the Indigne in Canadian, Australian and New Zealand Literature*.

<sup>480</sup> America’s National Anthem, see [www.harisingh.com/newsMemorialAnthem.htm](http://www.harisingh.com/newsMemorialAnthem.htm) [accessed January 28, 2015]

<sup>481</sup> Valaskakis and Burgess, *Indian Princesses and Cowgirls: Stereotypes from the Frontier*, 136.

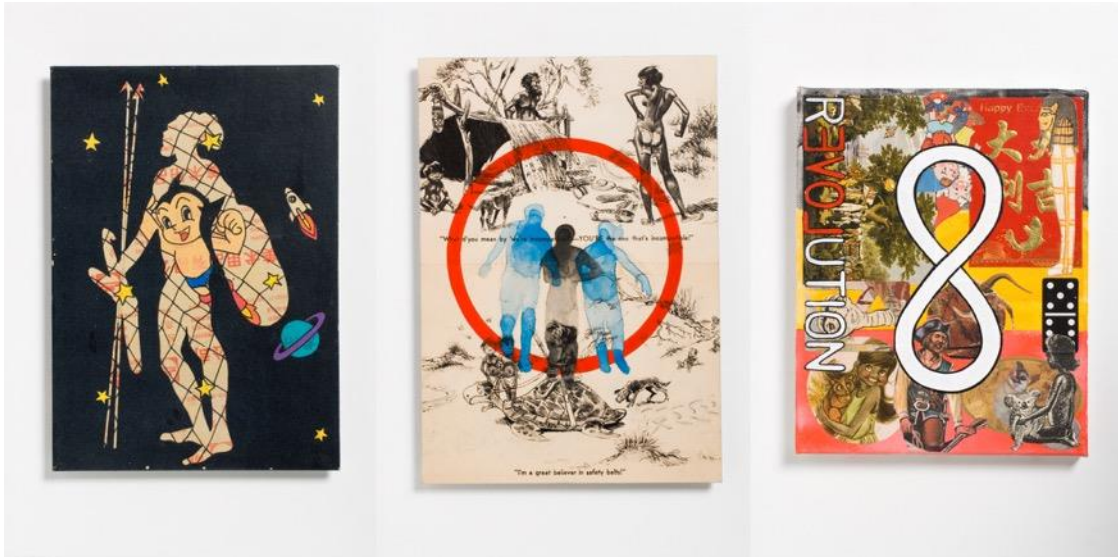


Figure 36. Tony Albert, *108 (detail)*, 2011-2013. 99 mixed media collages and 9 houses of cards, various dimensions. Private collection Hong Kong. Courtesy the artist and Sullivan+Strumpf, Sydney.

Longfish's willingness to play with society's contradictions in relation to stereotyping and consumerism provides the means to subvert, dislodge and therefore liberate its subject matter from an Indigenous history of commodification and the prison of false identities. In this respect, the artworks ironically plays with "*the constraints of the dominant while foregrounding those constraints as constraints and thus undermining their power.*"<sup>482</sup>

Similarly, Tony Albert draws from his extensive collection of Western produced Aboriginal kitsch (cartoons, ashtrays and paintings on black velvet) much like fellow artist Destiny Deacon (K'ua K'ua and Erub/Mer) to reveal aspects of the history of misrepresentation by interrogating stereotypical views of Aboriginal identity and culture in *108* Albert's (Figure 36). By including images of popular culture in his artwork, Albert brings awareness to this aspect of Indigenous history and also dismantles the power of stereotypical images had in defining Aboriginal peoples as such.

<sup>482</sup> Linda Hutcheon, *Splitting Images: Contemporary Canadian Ironies* (Toronto, New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 81.



Figure 37. Rolande Souliere, *The Wooden Indian From Wagga Wagga Series 1 of 12*, 2012. Collage on 280 gsm Fabriano paper, 64 x 64 cm. Photo credit Peter Endersbee



Figure 38. Rolande Souliere, *The Wooden Indian from Wagga Wagga Series 2 of 12*, 2012. Collage on 280 gsm Fabriano paper, 34 x 70 cm. Photo credit Peter Endersbee.

Souliere's collage series *The Wooden Indian from Wagga Wagga* (2012) (Figure 37 and 38) it is not without a small degree of irony that her collages incorporate several enduring stereotypes, such as the buckskin doll, Indians traveling in canoes and the stoic warrior. Complexities in colour, shape, composition and imagery are visible along with images of real Indigenous people such

Gerald McMaster (Cree), Mundine and Megan Tamati-Quennell (Maori). The juxtaposition of 'imagined' and 'real' Indigenous people is employed to make visible ill-informed stereotypes and as argued in Chapter Two. This demonstrates how stereotypes are incorrectly invoked to categorise 'Indigenous Art' and in so doing challenges the questioning of Indigenous art as 'contemporary'.

The cultural stereotypes depicted in the collages are either doubled or in a circular pattern to demonstrate the continuous use of stereotypical representations in Western society of First Nations people. The evolution of the Indian stereotype can be traced back to first contact with early explorers. First Nation dolls dressed in reproduced clothing from Cree or northern Anishinabe along with miniature canoes constructed from birch bark were popular souvenirs in the early 1800s.<sup>483</sup> So-called 'Cigar Store' Indian statues appeared as early as the 1600s in Europe as a visual advertisement for tobacco to a Western population that was mostly illiterate.<sup>484</sup>

Female Indians were initially depicted much like their male counterpart—as a warrior with a stoic stance wearing a feathered headdress and carrying a hatchet and tobacco leaves. Artisans not knowing what a 'real' Indian looked like drew inspiration from the early explorers' illustrations and an erroneous perception of reality occurred. Traditional clothing attributes from various other First Nations, largely the Plains Indians, were added to the statues and this assisted in creating a pan-Indian identity of First Nation peoples. Often the early cigar store Indians looked more like African enslaved peoples than they did Indigenous Americans.<sup>485</sup>

The transition from the American Indian as a noble warrior to noble savage was a gradual process. New England Puritans played a key role in the stereotyping process as they viewed themselves as god's chosen people who were living out their divine destiny.<sup>486</sup> The Puritans became intimidated by the Indians savage warfare and thus in the eyes of the Puritans became the agents of Satan.<sup>487</sup> In this view, the 'savage Indian' was created to justify England's use of religion in their expansion and soon became an American staple.

With the onslaught of colonisation, the notion of the disappearing Indian surfaced. Expansion of white population to the west and the effect of disease, starvation and displacement of First Nation peoples decreased in numbers significantly. The tragedy of the 'dying Indian' changed the

<sup>483</sup> Berlo and Phillips, *Native North American Art* 88.

<sup>484</sup> The Taino People first introduced tobacco to Christopher Columbus in 1492, when he landed on the Americas. From this point onwards the association of tobacco and First Nation people was established.

<sup>485</sup> National Museum of the American Indian, *Do All Indians Live in Tipis?: Questions and Answers from the National Museum of the American Indian* 69-70.

<sup>486</sup> The noble savage reached its peak in France during the enlightenment period of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. See C. F. Robert Berkhofer, *The White Man's Indian: Images of the American Indian, from Columbus to the present* (Michigan: Vintage Books, 1979), 75-76.

<sup>487</sup> Berkhofer, *The White Man's Indian: Images of the American Indian, from Columbus to the present*, 81.

stereotype from 'savage and blood thirsty' to 'American noble savage' in the nineteenth century. Western writers and artists embraced the idea of the 'disappearing Indian' and the last of his tribe became an artistic sensibility. North American visual artists such as George Catlin and Paul Kane, photographer Edward Curtis and novelist James Femore Cooper are prime examples of individuals who used this theme.<sup>488</sup>

It is noteworthy that the 'Indian' can be considered stoic and suffers injustices with resignation or says very little and still contains all the world's wisdom. This transformation of the American Indian was substantial: The 'Indian' changed from being associated with nature, to warrior, to savage and then sentimentally in the face of the potential disappearing from the human race. Historian and curator Deborah Doxtator (Mohawk) captures this in the statement:

*Non-Indian images of Indians are either at one extreme of the 'ranking' spectrum or the other—either Indians are depicted as 'savages' below Euro-Canadian 'civilisation' or as 'noble savages' who are moral, faster, stronger, kinder than any Euro-Canadian.*<sup>489</sup>

Further, Francis's states, "*The imaginary Indian is almost anything whites want it to be.*"<sup>490</sup> These archetypal images of the North American 'Indian' used throughout Souliere's collage series are images people have been exposed to through advertising, logos, mascots and art for hundreds of years. These are images that Western societies have learned to recognise and relate to despite the fact that First Nation people have not existed in that guise for hundreds of years, and incidentally that the guises are incorrect.

<sup>488</sup> Berkhofer, *The White Man's Indian: Images of the American Indian, from Columbus to the present*, 81.

<sup>489</sup> Nemiroff, Houle, and Townsend-Gault, *Land, Spirit, Power: First Nations at the National Gallery of Canada*, 90.

<sup>490</sup> Daniel Francis, *The Imaginary Indian: The Image of the Indian in Canadian Culture* (Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press, 1992), 99.



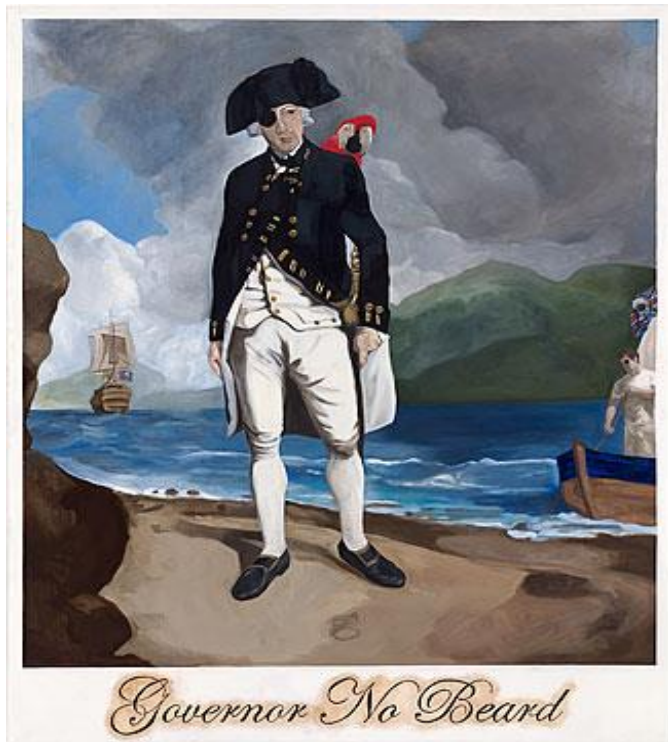


Figure 39. Daniel Boyd, *Governor No Beard*, 2007 Oil on canvas, 195 x 158 cm  
Courtesy of Kay O'Donnell. Copyright of the artist and Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery.



Figure 40. Jason Wing, *Australia was Stolen by Armed Robbery*, 2012. Bronze, 60x30x30 cm,  
edition of three. Collection of National Gallery of Australia. Photo credit Garrie Maguire.

Boyd (Figure 39), Wing (Figure 40) and Niro (Figure 41) illustrate the irony inherent in the concept of colonial discovery as well as the use of irony to critique notions of discovery within their artworks. As such, it is both an uncovering of colonial discourse as discoveries of irony, as well as the presentation of contemporary Indigenous art practices as the narrative of that irony.

To contextualise, with the onset of the 1990s the words ‘discovery’, ‘exploration’ and ‘encounter’ were quickly establishing new meanings amongst Indigenous people, particularly Indigenous artists. This was largely attributed in Australia to the bicentennial anniversary of Captain Cook as discoverer of Australia in 1788 and the quincentennial anniversary of Christopher Columbus’s discovery of the Americas in 1492— both of which are highly contested events amongst Australian and North American Indigenous peoples.

In *Governor No Beard*, (Figure 39) and *Australia was Stolen by Armed Robbery* (2012) (Figure 40), Boyd and Wing portray significant colonial figures, such as Governor Arthur Phillip and Captain Cook, who are also affiliated with imperialism, as pirates and thieves, indirectly partaking in acts of piracy in their possession of Australia<sup>491</sup> Boyd writes,

*I’d come across documents such as the Secret Instruction Cook had in his possession during three voyages from 1768 to 1779. They stated that Cook was ‘with the Consent of the Natives to take possession of Convenient Situations in the Country in the Name of the King of Great Britain (King George III).’ I immediately drew parallels between a common practice of the time, the act [of] Piracy.*<sup>492</sup>

In the Canadian context, Shelly Niro (Mohawk) parodies the lousy American t-shirt trope to portray the effects of colonisation on First Nation people in *The Shirt*<sup>493</sup> (2003) (Figure 41). The artwork consists of nine colored photographs with each photograph depicting an urban First Nation woman wearing an American flag bandanna around her head, aviator sunglasses, t-shirt and jeans. In each photograph, Niro is posed against the North American landscape. This is deliberate as images of the landscape were important for developing newly found country for the colonisers. The landscape was also an aid in forming a visual identity that would build nationhood—an important factor for British or European settlers who were interested in establishing an identity separate from the “*motherland*.”<sup>494</sup>

Art historian W.J.T. Mitchell comments on the landscape as a wilderness awaiting settlement,

<sup>491</sup> Croft, *Culture Warriors: Australian Indigenous Art Triennale 72*.

<sup>492</sup> Croft, *Culture Warriors: Australian Indigenous Art Triennale 72*.

<sup>493</sup> This was exhibited as a video work at the Venice Biennale in 2003 as part of the Pellerossasogna exhibition.

<sup>494</sup> Thomas, *Possessions: indigenous art, colonial culture*, 7.

*[These landscapes] might be seen more profitably as something like a dream work of Imperialism, unfolding its own movement in time and space from a central point of origin and folding back on itself to disclose both utopian fantasies and the perfected imperial prospect and fractured images of unresolved ambivalence and unsuppressed resistance.*<sup>495</sup>

<sup>495</sup> W. J. T. Mitchell, "Imperial Landscape," in *Landscape and Power* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 10. As quoted in Hill, Hopkins, and Lalonde, *Sakahan: International Indigenous Art*, 25.





Figure 41. Shelly Niro, *The Shirt*, 2003. Film stills. Reproduced from The National Museum of the American Indian, <http://filmcatalog.nmai.si.edu/title/1879/> (accessed March 12, 2012).

In this artwork, a sequential series of texts are displayed on a t-shirt worn by a First Nation woman. They comprise a discourse on colonialism. With each photograph progressively revealing injustices committed to First Nation peoples. For example, the texts read “*My ancestors were annihilated, exterminated, murdered and massacred*”, “*They were lied to, cheated, tricked and deceived*” and “*Attempts were made to assimilate, colonise, enslave and displace them.*” The final text ends on a humorous note with “*And all I get is this shirt.*” Here, Niro depicts a brief summary of Indigenous history of colonial deceit and brutality over land possession. Through humour Niro is able to draw attention the devastating effects colonisation has had on Indigenous people, as discussed in Chapters Two and Three. In this view, humour is used as a weapon to

expose the ill effects of colonial history on Indigenous people and therefore humour becomes as psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud has said, “*Humour is not resigned, it is rebellious.*”<sup>496</sup>

This section outlined how postmodern irony and the Trickster were used as key constructs to demonstrate the presence of Indigenous histories within the contemporary Indigenous artworks and Indigenous art practices in general. The artworks made visible Indigenous histories pertaining to stereotypes, cultural misconstruction and misrepresentation and Indigenous denial of colonial discovery.

## **DECOLONISING THROUGH STORYTELLING AND SHARING**

A long tradition of Indigenous culture is that of storytelling. Storytelling is an act of conveying and sharing Indigenous histories; the everyday lives of the community, recounts of great leaders, bloody massacres, long journeys, incredible hunts or magical legends. Since colonial invasions, and in the face of ongoing colonisation and colonising practices, many Indigenous people are telling stories that need to be told, to understand the history behind assimilation policies and to ensure this aspect of history is not silenced, repeated or buried. Stories are coming out of the archives of residential schools, reserves and missions from Australia and Canada. These are stories that are deeply inscribed in Australian Aboriginal and Canadian First Nation stories and are filled with a wide range of life stories and personal experiences that address Indigenous histories.

As an Anishinaabe person, stories and the sharing of stories are vital. The importance of storytelling is shared by Indigenous peoples from different nations and is linked to oral traditions, Tuhiwai Smith writes of the connection between the storytelling and oral tradition,

*intrinsic in storytelling is a focus on dialogue and conversations amongst ourselves as Indigenous peoples, to ourselves and for ourselves. Such approaches fit well with the oral traditions, which are still a reality in day-to-day Indigenous lives.*<sup>497</sup>

Moreover, storytelling is crucial to Indigenous people because storytelling;

1. Enables trans-historicity, by bringing the past into the present from one generation to another thereby connecting people to the land and the land to the people via through the story.
2. Is the passing down of cultural knowledge from generation to generation.
3. Gives voice to family members who are deceased.
4. Circulates Indigenous knowledge locally, nationally and internationally.

<sup>496</sup> In a 1928 essay Freud writes about humour as a psychic mechanism that rescues the ego from unpleasant encounters in the material world. Quoted in Edward Erwin, *The Freud Encyclopedia: Theory, Therapy, and Culture* (New York and London: Routledge, 2002), 293.

<sup>497</sup> Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* 145.

5. Provides a collective benefit where the community is informed and educated about a range of issues.
6. Can be about demystifying knowledge.
7. Can be a decolonising tool.

Moreover, when placed in the hands of Indigenous artists, storytelling can be a powerful visual tool to provide a stronger Indigenous presence in contemporary art realm by reviving and revealing Indigenous histories. As describe in Chapter One, Tuhiwai Smith views storytelling and sharing as forms of resistance, survival strategies and as means of intervention.<sup>498</sup>

This section will discuss how Indigenous artists are using their contemporary artworks to tell stories of Indigenous histories. This is not unusual as historical narratives often appear in the artworks of Indigenous artists.<sup>499</sup> The artworks often encompass encounters between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples through time in an archival manner. These artworks show strong aspects of personal and community experiences that highlighted historical episodes that have had dire effects on Indigenous communities throughout the colonial processes of domination, subordination and oppression. Inarguably both negative and positive histories have been included in these narratives. The sharing of these experiences are in fact Indigenous histories via the avenue of storytelling. Tuhiwai Smith explains,

*Stories are ways of passing down the beliefs and values of a culture in the hope that the new generations will treasure them and pass the story down further. The story and the storyteller both serve to connect the past with the future, one generation with the other, the land with the people and the people with the story.*<sup>500</sup>

Stories act as a common thread, connecting Indigenous artists to past and present histories. In this regard, contemporary Indigenous artists are seen by their communities as the new generation of storytellers, whatever their medium, Indigenous artists highlight our histories and struggles, since colonisation. They celebrate our leaders and achievements. Importantly they record our stories and therefore our histories through their art.

Stories of great Indigenous leaders who resisted and fought for Indigenous peoples and their rights are visible in the contemporary artworks of Indigenous artists. Many Indigenous artists such as Julie Dowling (Badimaya/Yamatji/Widi), Ryan Presley (Marri Ngarr), Ron Hurley (Goreng Goreng), David Garneau (Metis), Bennett, Souliere and Jason Wing (Biripi) remember and pay tribute to the historical legacy of great leaders in their artwork. In this way, the artworks contribute to an Indigenous history. Writer Carol Dowling said:

<sup>498</sup> Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* 144.

<sup>499</sup> See Chapter 1 on the contemporary

<sup>500</sup> Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* 144.

*Aboriginal people must have the freedom to navigate our history of resistance, because the stories of these warriors have shaped our contemporary Aboriginal consciousness.*<sup>501</sup>



Figure 42. David Garneau, *Persistence of Vision (Gabriel Dumont)*, 2008. Acrylic on canvas, 152 x 122 cm. Saskatchewan NAC, accessed January 18, 2015. <http://www.sknac.ca/index.php?page=ArtworkDetail&id=10>

Dowling paid homage to historic warriors in works such as *Walyer* (2006) and other resistance fighters in her exhibition titled *Widi Boornoo* (Wild Message) held at the art gallery, Fortyfive Downstairs in Melbourne, Victoria in 2006. Garneau provides a way of situating an Indigenous history from the standpoint of portraying a great resistance leader. In *Persistence of Vision (Gabriel Dumont)* (2008) (Figure 42) Garneau portrays a Metis resistance leader Gabriel Dumont (1837-1906). Dumont was a prominent leader in campaigning and organising petitions and delegations for land rights of the Metis people in the Dominion Survey of the West in the early 1880s.<sup>502</sup> He was appointed the 'adjutant-general' of the Provisional Government of Saskatchewan and participated in the 1885 North-West Resistance as a military commander, who organised around 300 soldiers for the resistance battle. In painting Dumont, Garneau brings awareness and tells the story of the violent five-month long Metis and Aboriginal resistance battle against the Canadian government in the late 1880s.

<sup>501</sup> Croft, *Culture Warriors: Australian Indigenous Art Triennale 96*.

<sup>502</sup> Canadian Encyclopeida, "Gabriel Dumont," (accessed May 5, 2015: Canadian Encyclopedia, 2014). <http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/dumont-gabriel/>.



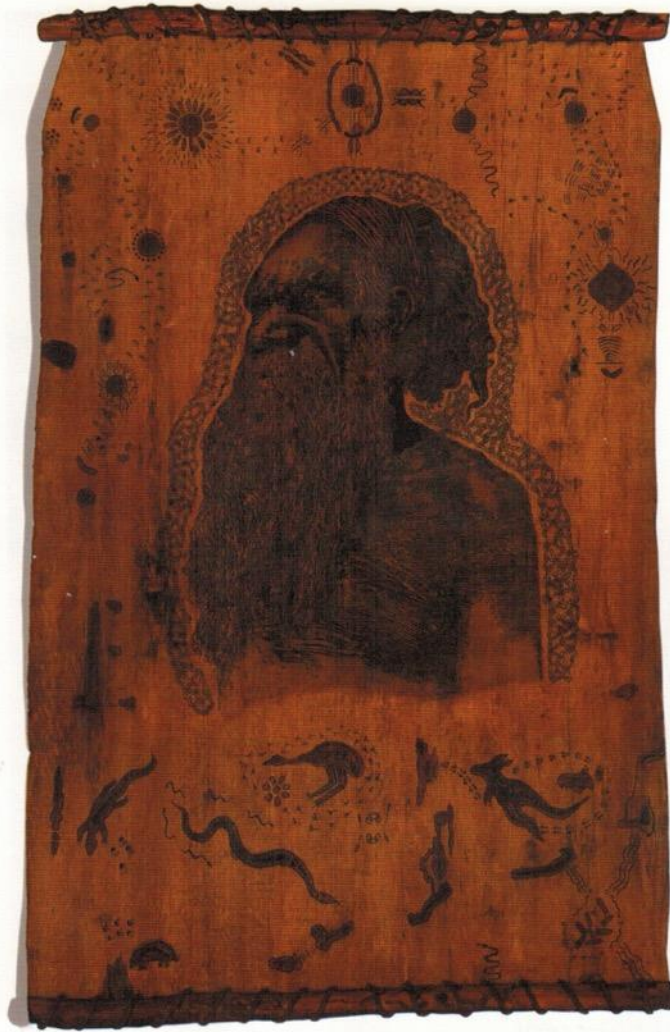


Figure 43. Myangah Pirate, *One Pound Jimmy*, 2007-2008. Burnings on stringy bark and leather 202 x 126 cm. Reproduced by Campbelltown Arts Centre in 2008 Parliament of New South Wales Indigenous Art Prize exhibition catalogue (Sydney: Campbelltown Arts Centre), 30.

Prominent leaders feature in many Australian Aboriginal artworks, such as Pemulwuy (c1750-1802) of the Bidjigal Clan of the Eora Nation, Bungaree and Djungarrayi: Tribute to Bungaree was made by Djon Mundine, who curated an exhibition titled *Bungaree: The First Australian* at Mosman Art Gallery in 2012. Fifteen Australian Aboriginal artists were commissioned to make works about Bungaree. Myangah Pirate (Wadi Wadi) paid tribute to Gwoja Djungarrayi (Anmatyerre) (ca. 1895-1965) in *One Pound Jimmy* (Figure 43).<sup>503</sup> Djungarrayi was notable for his portrait, which featured on the Australian 'two and six' postage stamp issued by Australia Post, but had initially been published in the magazine *Walkabout* in 1950.<sup>504</sup> The stamp sold over 99 million copies and as result Djungarrayi's portrait became "the" image of an Australian Aboriginal to the

<sup>503</sup> Other spellings of Gwoja surname include Tjungurrayi, Jungarai and Jungarrayi. Djungarrayi was the father of Western Desert artist Clifford Possum Tjapaltjarri.

<sup>504</sup> "Gwoja Tjungurrayi: The Man Behind the Image," [http://press.anu.edu.au/aborig\\_history/transgressions/html/ch05s06.html](http://press.anu.edu.au/aborig_history/transgressions/html/ch05s06.html).

world, albeit in the eyes of the explorers.<sup>505</sup> A few decades later, Australian Ainslie Roberts's, AM (1911-1993) portrait of Djungarrayi became the image for the Australian \$2 coin in 1988 and remains as such today.

"*One Pound Jimmy*" was Djungarrayi's anglophone nickname and was established by him selling his 'artefacts' for one pound each to tourists.<sup>506</sup> However, behind his infamous images on Australian monetary items, lies a darker history. Djungarrayi, was not only a Country Elder responsible for passing on tribal knowledge to his people, but also a survivor of the Aboriginal massacre of Walpiri-Anmatyerre men, women, and children near Coniston in 1928, otherwise known as 'the killing times', where Aboriginal people resisting arrest were shot.<sup>507</sup> Pirate later appropriated this image in 2007-08.

Pirate's use of Robert's drawing is an acknowledgement of a great leader and survivor in contemporary art with storytelling. This is made visible in that Pirate surrounded *One Pound Jimmy* with dreaming tracks, song cycles and bush tucker—a reminder of the strength of his character, his survival and culture despite bloodshed and displacement from his ancestral land.

<sup>505</sup> Press, "Gwoja Tjungurrayi: The Man Behind the Image."

<sup>506</sup> Press, "Gwoja Tjungurrayi: The Man Behind the Image."

<sup>507</sup> The massacre resulted from a punitive expedition that was led by Mounted Constable Murray and other local pastoralists seeking justice for the murder of a white dingo trapper. The massacre occurred at a time when tension between settlers and Aboriginals were high due to drought and lack of fresh water and food supplies. Press, "Gwoja Tjungurrayi: The Man Behind the Image."



Figure 44. Rolande Souliere, *Mediating the Treaties* (detail), 2017, public art commission by City of Winnipeg. Stainless steel, acrylic paint, granite, 210x160x30cm. Photo courtesy Neone.

*Mediating the Treaties* (Figure 44) tells the story of the negotiations that delayed the signing of the first Treaty in Manitoba, Canada. First Nation Chiefs Miskookeneew (Red Eagle or Henry Prince) and Kakekape-nais (Everlasting Bird or William Pennefather) pictured mid center, were two of the seven First Nation Chiefs who signed Treaty Number One with the British Crown in 1871. These are the only portraits of the seven Chiefs in the Canadian archives and their graves are unmarked.

In the negotiation process of the treaty Chief Red Eagle was successful in negotiating better terms for Treaty One that included assistance for seed and equipment for farming.<sup>508</sup> Chief Red Eagle became Chief of St. Peter's Band/Reserve after the death of his legendary father Chief Peguis (1774-1864), famous Chief of the Saulteaux and negotiated the Selkirk Treaty in 1817.<sup>509</sup> Chief

<sup>508</sup> Ibid. 72.

<sup>509</sup> The Selkirk Treaty included the transfer of land from the Saulteaux and Cree to Lord Selkirk. When Selkirk died the land revert back to the Saulteaux and Cree. See Kirk Sheldon Krasowski, "Mediating the Numbered Treaties: Eyewitness Accounts of Treaties Between the Crown and

Red Eagle knew how to read and write and was familiar with negotiating tactics with the Canadian government, a skill no doubt he learned from his father.

During the treaty negotiations Lieutenant-Governor Adams G. Archibald (1814-1892) often referenced her Majesty, Queen Victoria (1819-1901). Archibald claimed that the Queen “*will deal fairly by all her Red people.*”<sup>510</sup> Yet despite this, several disputes arose. One dispute is the chiefs believed a debt was owed regarding right-of-way for enabling the Canadian Military to safely pass through their land. This is because ‘Indian’ Commissioner Wemyss M. Simpson had previously agreed to a payment of three dollars per person for continuous use of the road.<sup>511</sup> Disputes arose as to whether this was a once off payment or an annual payment.<sup>512</sup> This is addressed in the public artwork in that Queen Victoria’s clothing is fabricated out of manufactured street barrier and hazard road tapes.

Another story told through the contemporary artworks of Indigenous artists, such as Julie Gough (Trawlwoolway), Julie Dowling (Yamaji) and Fiona Foley (Badtjala) is that of slavery of Indigenous people. Gough brings to light the slavery of Aboriginal women on the penal colony of Van Diemen’s Land, renamed Tasmania in 1856; in her work *She was sold for one guinea*, (2007, Figure X). Here Gough visually represents historical stories that directly reference her matrilineal history, that of the Tasmanian history of settlement. History writer James Boyce, in his book *Van Diemen’s Land*, captures the essence of Gough’s work in the testimony of ‘Mary’:

*The Aboriginal female Mary informed me that the sealers at the straits carry on a complete system of slavery; that they barter in exchange for women, flour and potatoes...they took her away by force, tied her hands and feet, and put her in the boat; that white men beat black woman with a rope.*<sup>513</sup>

Indigenous Peoples, 1871-1876" (Dissertation, The University of Regina, Canada, 2011), 71, [https://ourspace.uregina.ca/bitstream/handle/10294/3575/Krasowski\\_Sheldon\\_PhD\\_History\\_Fall2011.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y](https://ourspace.uregina.ca/bitstream/handle/10294/3575/Krasowski_Sheldon_PhD_History_Fall2011.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y).

<sup>510</sup> Krasowski, "Mediating the Numbered Treaties: Eyewitness Accounts of Treaties Between the Crown and Indigenous Peoples, 1871-1876," 62.

<sup>511</sup> Krasowski, "Mediating the Numbered Treaties: Eyewitness Accounts of Treaties Between the Crown and Indigenous Peoples, 1871-1876," 55.

<sup>512</sup> Krasowski, "Mediating the Numbered Treaties: Eyewitness Accounts of Treaties Between the Crown and Indigenous Peoples, 1871-1876."

<sup>513</sup> James Boyce, *Van Diemen's Land* (Melbourne: Black Inc., 2008), 90.





Figure 45. Julie Dowling, *The Nurse Maid (Biddy)*, 2005. Synthetic polymer paint, plastic, gold leaf on canvas, 142 x 91 cm. Image courtesy of The National Gallery of Australia, purchased 2006. Copyright Ms. Julie Dowling.

Across Australia, Aboriginal children under the age of eighteen were employed as domestic servants in the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century and early 20<sup>th</sup> Century.<sup>514</sup> Europeans were compliant in using Aboriginal children from the age of ten to 12 years old as domestic servants. Between the period of 1842 and 1945 it was estimated that 448 Aboriginal children were domestic servants in Queensland alone. However, considering European employers were under no obligation to report their Aboriginal employees until 1897, the number of actual Aboriginal domestic servants under the age of eighteen was significantly higher than what has been recorded.<sup>515</sup> During this period the demand for young Aboriginal girls was high.<sup>516</sup>

<sup>514</sup> "'We do not want one that is too old': Aboriginal child domestic servants in late 19th and early 20th century Queensland," 2011, <http://press.anu.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/2011/05/ch1033.pdf>.

<sup>515</sup> Robinson, "'We do not want one that is too old': Aboriginal child domestic servants in late 19th and early 20th century Queensland."

<sup>516</sup> Robinson, "'We do not want one that is too old': Aboriginal child domestic servants in late 19th and early 20th century Queensland."

Furthermore, European employers were keen to have the young Aboriginal girls work as 'nurse-girls' to their own children and used as sexual objects.<sup>517</sup> Julie Dowling addresses this tragic historical period in her 2005 painting *The Nurse Maid (Biddy)* (Figure 45).<sup>518</sup> 'Biddy' (Brewan) was the nursemaid for Mr. and Mrs. J.S. Gordon of Brewon Station in Walgett, New South Wales. The infant the nursemaid is holding is John Kenneth Gordon. The duress and emotional turmoil the child worker have experienced is visible in the expression on Biddy's face and there's a haunting sadness in the child's expression as she holds the settler's plump progeny on her lap.

In the historical realm, the painting is of personal significance to Dowling's and her family. In her biography for the National Indigenous Art Triennial in 2007 held at the National Gallery of Australia she wrote:

*My great-grandmother, Mary Oliver, was a nursemaid to her own white half-brother and sisters from a very young age after being taken from her mother, my great-great-grandmother, Melbin.*<sup>519</sup>

European employers did not consider the severity of the workload these girls were required to perform and the majority of the children were overworked, underfed, underpaid (or not paid at all) and emotionally, sexually and physically abused.<sup>520</sup> The duties these Aboriginal children, normally female, were required to perform were excessive and included: ironing, cooking, washing, sorting, chopping wood and caring for children. Remunerations for Aboriginal child domestic help was very low compared to other non-Aboriginal help. There is little documentation whether the child domestic servants (and Aboriginal people in general) received any wages for their work. In 1901 Archibald Meston wrote that no wages were being distributed to Aboriginal people in return for their labor.<sup>521</sup> In this sense, they were placed in a slave environment as sociologist Orlando Patterson has argued that slavery is not a simple definition of having legal ownership over another human being, slavery is much more complex and is a historical condition of significant power imbalances.<sup>522</sup> Further, The Aboriginals Protection and Restriction of the Sale of Opium Act

<sup>517</sup> Robinson, "'We do not want one that is too old': Aboriginal child domestic servants in late 19th and early 20th century Queensland," 166.

<sup>518</sup> The image is appropriated from an original archival photograph of a nursemaid, photographer unknown. See "National Indigenous Art Triennial '07: Culture Warriors, Julie Dowling," National Gallery of Australia, 2005, accessed May 11, 2015, <http://nga.gov.au/Exhibition/NIAT07/Detail.cfm?IRN=32619>.

<sup>519</sup> Dowling, "National Indigenous Art Triennial '07: Culture Warriors, Julie Dowling."

<sup>520</sup> Robinson accounts many examples of injustices done to childcare workers in Queensland. For further information see Robinson, "'We do not want one that is too old': Aboriginal child domestic servants in late 19th and early 20th century Queensland," 171.

<sup>521</sup> Robinson, "'We do not want one that is too old': Aboriginal child domestic servants in late 19th and early 20th century Queensland," 170.

<sup>522</sup> Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and social death: A comparative study* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1982). Cited in Robinson, "'We do not want one that is too old': Aboriginal child domestic servants in late 19th and early 20th century Queensland," 170.

1897<sup>523</sup> amended in 1901, which saw the average age for Australian Aboriginal domestic service narrow its range to 12 and 14 year old's.

Foley tells the story of significant power imbalances and the various aspects of slavery, including kidnapping, acts of violence of Aboriginal women and unfair wages, in a number her works such as: *The Oyster Fishermen* (2011), her exhibition *Vexed* (2013) and *Let a hundred flowers bloom*, (2010, Figure 46). In *Let a hundred flowers bloom* Foley draws attention to the use of opium by colonial power and the ill effects it had on Aboriginal peoples.



Figure 46. Fiona Foley, *Let a hundred flowers bloom*, 2010. Mixed media: 3 opium pipes, stool, packing case, sketch book, 36 brass opium poppy sculptures, and 34 photographs on inkjet print, various 21.0 (h) x 21.0 (w) cm. Reproduced courtesy of the artist, Andrew Baker Art Dealer and Niagara Galleries in Undisclosed: 2<sup>nd</sup> National Indigenous Art Triennale, Carly Lane and Franchesca Cubillo (Canberra: National Gallery of Australia), 2012, 59. Copyright Fiona Foley.

Many Indigenous artists tell the fond memories of life on the Missions or Reservations through their art. For example, Elizabeth Homer (Nunnawai), Elsie Black (Barkindi), Elaine Russell (Kamilaroi), Garry McGrady, (Goomeeroi) and Pauline Moran (Nyoongar) pay homage to their daily experiences at the Missions by depicting memories of lush landscapes, peacocks roaming freely, children playing and neighbours conversing amongst one another, all for other people to see. In *Beyond the Pail* (1999) Ian W. Abdulla, (Ngarrindjeri) includes personal narratives in his artworks to capture the working and living conditions on Gerard Mission. In this sense Abdulla's paintings rely on cultural memories about a particular place and time.

<sup>523</sup> "Aboriginals Protection and Restriction of the Sale of Opium Act 1897 (Qld)," accessed April 23, 2017, <https://www.foundingdocs.gov.au/item-sdid-54.html>.

Whereas Roy Kennedy (Wiradjuri) is more specific in his outlook, 2008's *Warangesda Mission (Camp of the Mercy)* (Figure 47) maps out the layout of Warangesda mission located on the Murrumbidgee River at Darlington Point, Griffith. The Mission includes: a butcher, a ration store, a church, a school and houses for families and single men. These were built in the late 1880s out of local eucalyptus timber and saplings by the preacher John Gribble and the Aboriginal people that lived around the area, as there were no finances available for timber and iron.<sup>524</sup> Kennedy writes of,

*my wish is that people realise and don't feel ashamed of where they come from. I'm a mission born and raised Aboriginal from the Wiradjuritirr at Darlington Point back in the 1930s til 1948.*<sup>525</sup>

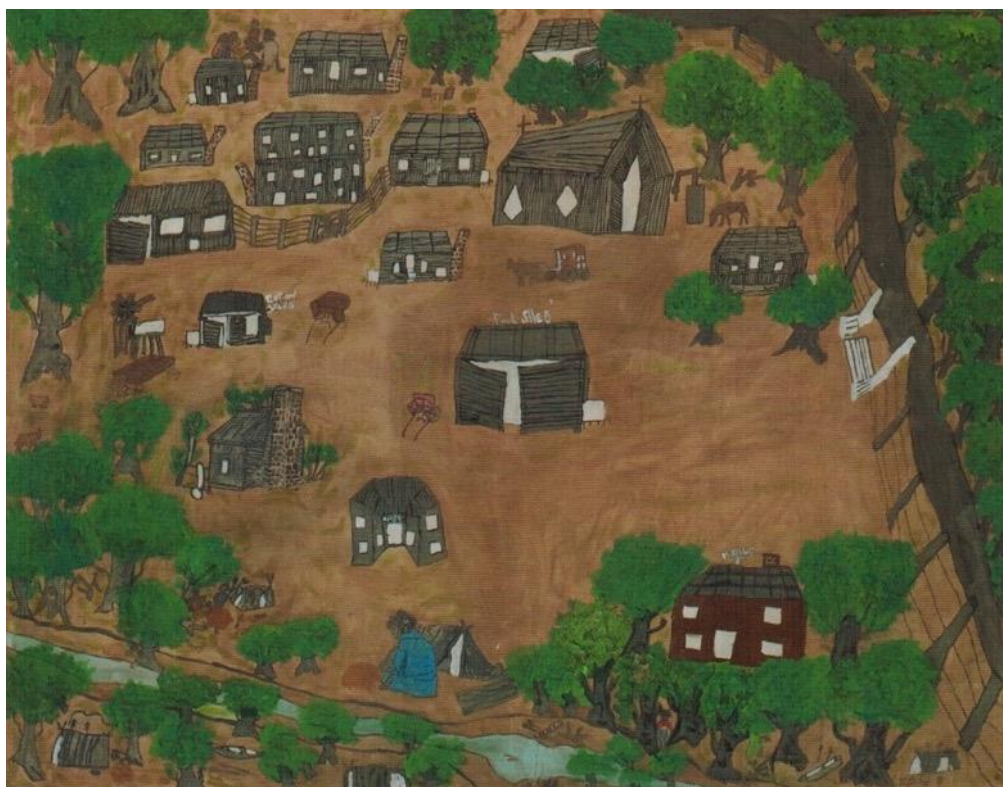


Figure 47. Ron Kennedy, *Warangesda Mission (Camp of the Mercy)*, 2008, acrylic and pencil on plywood 118 x 146 cm.

<sup>524</sup> Carly Lane, *2008 Parliament of New South Wales Project Team*, ed. Campbelltown Arts Centre (Campbelltown Arts Centre, 2008), exhibition catalogue, 26.

<sup>525</sup> Lane, *2008 Parliament of New South Wales Project Team*.





Figure 48. Gertie Huddleston, *Painting the Country*, detail, 1998. Synthetic polymer on canvas, 125 x 162 cm, Karen Brown Collection, photography Clayton Glen.

Whereas in *Painting the Country* (1998) (Figure 48) where Huddleston illustrates stories of living on the Roper River Mission alongside traditional stories. Through its grid format, the painting provides a window into the many aspects of life on the Mission where children were assigned daily chores such as: gardening, attending to animals, making butter and schooling at night.

The many particular seasons of the tropical north are also captured through the depiction of richly coloured birds, flowers and plants. Woven baskets are visible and indicate that Huddleston and her family know the right time to pick seasonal produce. Aspects of sewing and embroidery feature in Huddleston's work as it is reminder of the time her mother worked at the Mission as a seamstress, making clothes for the mission children including her own five daughters. Furthermore, Huddleston was taught to make lace dollies by the missionaries.<sup>526</sup>

<sup>526</sup> Adelaide Biennial of Australian Art, *Beyond the Pale: Contemporary Indigenous Art: 2000 Adelaide Biennial of Australian Art* (Adelaide: Art Gallery of South Australia, 2000), Exhibition catalogue, 38.

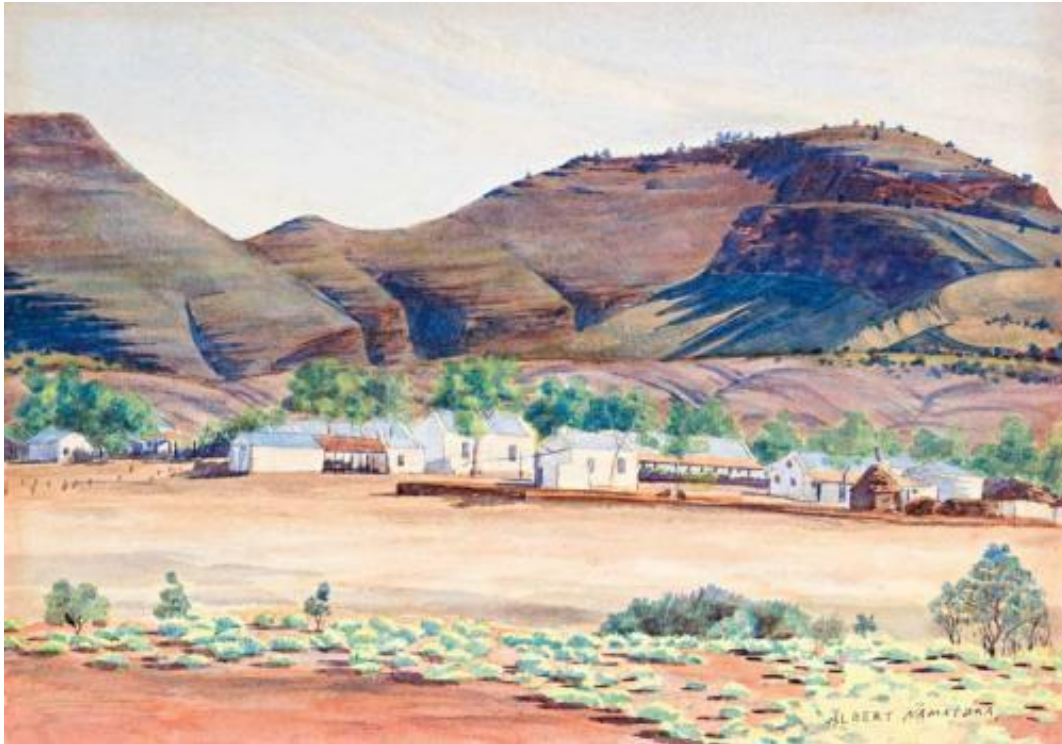


Figure 49. Albert Namatjira, *Hermannsburg Mission with Mt Hermannsburg in Background*, 1936-1937. Watercolour over pencil on paper, 28 x 38.7 cm.

It was not uncommon for Aboriginal people on the missions to learn new skills in the visual arts domain; in fact, many use new skills to illuminate their cultural history. For example, Albert Namatjira, born Elea Namatjira (Western Arrernte) (1902-1959) is one such person. Although Namatjira's art was produced over 70-80 years ago, his work can be considered contemporary in his time because of the new craft skills he learned. Namatjira's interest in craft was spurred by the growing craft industry at the Finke River Mission in Hermannsburg, Northern Territory. Pastor Friedrich Wilhelm Albrecht introduced craft products as a source of income for the poverty-stricken mission.<sup>527</sup> Initially Namatjira produced plaques and artefacts with 'poke' work and painted images, often accompanied by Christian messages, as seen in his *Mulga Plague (Other Refuge I Have None)* (ca. 1930-34).

Later, Namatjira interests turned to painting due to visits to the mission in 1932 from artists such as Rex Battarbee and John Gardner. Battarbee taught Namatjira to paint in watercolours in return for information pertaining to the specific places they illustrated.<sup>528</sup> As such Namatjira's earlier paintings from the period 1934-1940 are examples of storytelling as they illustrate the lively world around him, as in *Dog Chasing Kangaroo* (ca. 1934), and other subject matters that include ceremonial events, hunting scenes and of course the Finke River Mission, along with *Hermannsburg Mission with Mt Hermannsburg in Background* (Figure 49). Arguably, this could be

<sup>527</sup> Allison French, *Seeing The Centre: The Art of Albert Namatjira 1902-1959* (Canberra: National Gallery of Australia, 2002), exhibition catalogue, 5.

<sup>528</sup> French, *Seeing The Centre: The Art of Albert Namatjira 1902-1959* 9.

a factor indicating positive times at the Mission, where staff were helpful in assisting Namatjira in obtaining paint supplies and also building a galvanized home for himself.<sup>529</sup>

This section looked at how contemporary Indigenous artworks use storytelling and by default sharing, as the two are intertwined as a means to tell aspects of Indigenous histories. Storytelling is vital in passing down culture knowledge from generation to generation, is a tool of resistance, an education tool and a means of keeping the community informed of cultural happenings and issues. Indigenous artists are pro-active in using the means of storytelling in their contemporary artworks to tell the stories of great leaders, slavery, maintaining culture and life on Missions. These are Indigenous histories. Storytelling in contemporary Indigenous art shares these stories and as such is a vital contributor to Indigenous histories.

### **BEARING WITNESS IN AUDIENCE PARTICIPATION**

The construction of a contemporary artwork, whether through technique, medium, juxtaposition and or dislocation of imagery invites different interactions with one another. This invites multiple readings, whether political, historical, ironic, playful or otherwise, and challenges the viewer to solve the enigma through their own configuration and conceptual analysis.<sup>530</sup> This expects from the viewer a certain level of pictorial literacy that will enable them to read the image according to their own reading habits and skills.

The artworks invite the viewer to project associations onto an image that appears incomplete or contains gaps. The viewer resides between these 'gaps', aiming to minimise the disparity of elements by gravitating towards narrative models as an attempt to decipher the image. In this sense, the viewer becomes active in the interpretation and thus becomes engaged in the art making process.

For example, the presence of newspapers found in Bell's, and Poitras's painterly artworks represent a 'real' newspaper yet metonymically also stand for something else, as art critic Clement Greenberg notes, "*forcing the audience to rethink the very notion of painting itself.*"<sup>531</sup> The viewer perceiving the artwork is no longer a passive spectator or reader stationed outside the picture frame but an active participant who will make the necessary connections and thereby become actively engaged. In doing so, the participant 'bears witness' to the narrative residing within the contemporary artwork.

<sup>529</sup> Australian Museum, "Indigenous Australia Timeline," 39.

<sup>530</sup> Adamowicz, *Surrealist collage in text and image: dissecting the exquisite corpse*, 28.

<sup>531</sup> In this statement Clement Greenberg is referring to the invention of collage and the means of representation. Banash, "From Advertising to the Avant-Garde: Rethinking the Invention of Collage," 14.

In Indigenous artworks, the artists share and make connections pertaining to colonial histories, such as the Oka Crisis<sup>532</sup> or the Stolen Generation.<sup>533</sup> Some of the viewers of these artworks could be survivors of these traumatic histories or have gained knowledge of these events through storytelling, education, the media and the community. Others may be unaware of these events, resulting in the recognition of the gaps in their understandings of Indigenous histories and learning about them. In this regard, the participants bear witness through personal presence and perception in looking at the artworks.

For example, Australian Indigenous contact history reveals a significant number of massacres of Indigenous peoples that are not widely acknowledged or written about, and perhaps even forgotten as part of Australian history.<sup>534</sup> This is not surprising as encounters between settlers and Indigenous peoples became more severe with the expansion of the British Empire, and Indigenous populations began to decline in both Canada and Australia.<sup>535</sup> By the nineteenth century the Aboriginal people of Australia and Canada became minorities in their own countries.<sup>536</sup>

The reference to historical bloodsheds of Indigenous people in art is Rebecca Belmore's (Anishinaabe) commissioned work for the 2005 Venice Biennale, *Fountain*, (2005, Figure 50). Here, Belmore addresses the massacres of First Nation people that occurred on native land. Belmore remarked "*water changes into blood, blood into water and history into art.*"<sup>537</sup>

<sup>532</sup> See Introduction for explanation of this historical event.

<sup>533</sup> See glossary for definition.

<sup>534</sup> "Massacres," 2016, <https://www.commonground.org.au/learn/massacres>.

<sup>535</sup> In Australia Aboriginal populations declined from 500,000 to 100,000 between 1788 and 1930. See [http://www.countriesquest.com/oceania/australia/history/expanding\\_colonization/colonial-aboriginal\\_conflict.htm](http://www.countriesquest.com/oceania/australia/history/expanding_colonization/colonial-aboriginal_conflict.htm) [accessed May 19, 2015]

In Canada the population of First Nations in 1492 was approximately 80,000,000. 200 years later the population was 4,000,000 due to European colonization. See McMaster and Martin, *Indigena: Contemporary Native Perspectives in Canadian Art* 175.

<sup>536</sup> Armitage, *Comparing the Policy of Aboriginal Assimilation: Australia, Canada and New Zealand*, 1.

<sup>537</sup> Daina Augaitis and Kathleen Ritter, eds., *Rebecca Belmore* (Vancouver: Vancouver Art Gallery, 2008), 69.





Figure 50. Rebecca Belmore, *Fountain* (video still), 2005. Single-channel video with sound projected on falling water. Photo credit Robideau. Reproduced from *Witness*, edited by Daina Augaitis and Kathleen Ritter (Vancouver: Vancouver Art Gallery), 69.

In another one of her works *Blood on the Snow*, 2002, Belmore bears witness of the event of December 29, 1890 when the United States Cavalry massacred some three hundred unarmed Sioux people, many of whom were children and women. After the massacre the bodies were left to decompose and rot in the open field. However, a deep freeze took place shortly thereafter freezing the dead and covering them with a blanket of soft white snow. The symbolism of such an event is vividly illustrated through the materiality of the work, her use of the colors red and white and the contemporary aesthetic of bearing witness.

Other artworks that bear witness of brutality and massacres are Danie Mellor's sculpture *Hundreds and thousands* (2009)— a dead branch bearing multiple skulls encrusted in beads; in Ricky Maynard's photographs of a massacre site titled *The Healing Garden, Wybalena, Flinders Island, Tasmania* (2005), in George Longfish's collage *Winter Still Life Landscape, South Dakota, 1893*, (2002) depicting Chief Spotted Elk dying in the Wounded Knee Massacre; and Fiona Foley's *Annihilation of the Blacks* (1986). Foley references the massacre that took place along the Susan River, Maryborough in the mid-nineteenth century. This work is being on display in the exhibition *With Secrecy and Dispatch* at Campbelltown Art Centre, Campbelltown, 2017. Curated by Tess Allas and David Garneau, the exhibition deals with the massacre at Appin, NSW in 1816. These

Australian Aboriginal and First Nations artists exhibit artworks that either deal with the Appin massacre directly or respond to the shared brutalities of massacres across Indigenous Nations.



Figure 51. Nici Cumpston, *Ringbarked, Nookamka Lake*, 2008. Inkjet archival print on canvas, hand-coloured with pencil and watercolour, 75 x 205 cm. Reproduced courtesy of the artist and Gallerysmith, Melbourne.

Nici Cumpston (Barkindji) captures the effect colonisation has had on the environment in her photographic series *Tree Stumps* and *Attesting*, 2008 (Figure 51). Most of the works in the series are panoramic in scale to capture a freshwater lake situated in the Riverland region of South Australia known as Nookamka or by the settlers as Lake Bonney.<sup>538</sup> Carly Lane writes: “*the lake has two intertwining histories: one Indigenous, the other Western; one of abundance, the other of depletion; one of occupation the other of abandonment.*”<sup>539</sup> On the Indigenous side, Nookamka was one of nine Indigenous meeting places in the Riverland regions and since colonisation was also frequented by drovers.<sup>540</sup> In the 1930s the lake was deliberately flooded by the settlers in an attempt to control the water flow to and from the Murray River—neither of which recovered from the intervention.

In 2007, the federal government decided to stop the flow of water into Lake Bonney thus causing further environmental damage. The water became stagnant and putrid and started to rapidly recede, causing an increase in salinity levels. Cumpston in this photographic series bears witness as she captures the fragility and rapidly deteriorating effects of a lifeless river. Importantly, what was revealed through the work and its environmental damage is that the lake and its surrounding area was a ceremonial site and meeting ground for Cumpston’s people, the Barkindji as Cumpston

<sup>538</sup> Carly Lane and Franchesca Cubillo, *Undisclosed*, ed. National Gallery of Australia (Canberra: National Gallery of Australia, 2012), Exhibition catalogue, 52.

<sup>539</sup> Lane and Cubillo, *Undisclosed*, 52.

<sup>540</sup> Lane and Cubillo, *Undisclosed*.

found spearheads and fire sticks .<sup>541</sup> Later an elder informed her that the tree with the rings around it and a few branches tied together are signs to Aboriginal people that this place is filled with abundance—fresh water and fish.<sup>542</sup> Further, Aboriginal people tell of the brutality that occurred at this site and this is confirmed in a confidential archaeological report to the South Australian Government, which also revealed the uncovering of ancestral bones that were supposedly used as infill for the foundation of a local bridge in 1915.<sup>543</sup>



Figure 52. Lawrence Paul Yuxweluptun, *Indian World My Home and Native Land*, 2012. Acrylic on canvas, 304 x 213.36 cm. Macaulay & Co. Fine Art, accessed May 29, 2016.

Calling himself a history painter,<sup>544</sup> Lawrence Paul Yuxweluptun (Coast Salish) in a style mimicking the Group of Seven,<sup>545</sup> addresses environmental destruction in *Indian World, My Home*

<sup>541</sup> "Review of Nici Cumpston, Attesting," Flash, 2009, <http://www.ccp.org.au/flash/2009/02/nici-cumpston/>.

<sup>542</sup> "Nici Cumpston (blog)," Indigenous Art, Culture and Design (blog), 2014, <http://rhgilbertson.blogspot.com.au/2012/09/week-4-roads-cross-exhibition.html>.

<sup>543</sup> Lane and Cubillo, *Undisclosed*, 52.

<sup>544</sup> "On a Good Day: Lawrence Paul Yuxweluptun stands his ground ", Canadian Art, 2014, <http://canadianart.ca/features/2014/03/14/lawrence-paul-yuxweluptun-stands-his-ground/>.

<sup>545</sup> The Group of Seven were well-known Canadian landscape painters from 1920-1930s, who used the psychic possession of the land to construction a national Canadian identity. The group consisted of Franklin Carmichael (1890-1945), Lawrence Harris (1885-1970), A.Y. Jackson (1882-

*and Native Land* (2012), (Figure 52). Like many of Yuxweluptun's paintings, the trees, land and sky are constructed from Northwest Coast Salish designs, namely the ovoid, a form specific to the Coast Salish, to address the impact colonisation and its extraction of natural resources, management and development have had on the environment. In Northern British Columbia, Canada, forestry implemented by the settlers had a major impact on the environment and the people with its severe extraction of trees on Native land for export to the global market. This has caused concern not only for Indigenous owners of the land but environmentalists as well.<sup>546</sup>

Many Indigenous artists use their contemporary artworks to bear witness of the history of assimilation policies on Indigenous people. Catholicism, Protestant and Presbyterian streams of Christianity played a significant role in the history of Australian and Canadian governmental assimilation policies for Indigenous people(s). These policies were based on the racialisation of the human subject and a social order that enabled comparisons amongst people that were classified as either "fully human" or "subhuman." *"History was the story of people who were regarded as fully human. Others who were not regarded as human were prehistoric, savage and uncivilized."*<sup>547</sup> This statement by Tuhiwai Smith acknowledges the underlying principles within the context of European settlers' rationale regarding human achievement.

1974), Frank Johnston (1888-1969), Arthur Lismer (1885-1969), J.E.H. MacDonald (1973-1932), Frederick Varley (1881-1969), A.J. Casson (1898-1992), Edwin Holgate (1892-1977) and Lemoine FitzGerald (1890-1956).

<sup>546</sup> Ritchie, "On a Good Day: Lawrence Paul Yuxweluptun stands his ground".

<sup>547</sup> Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* 32.



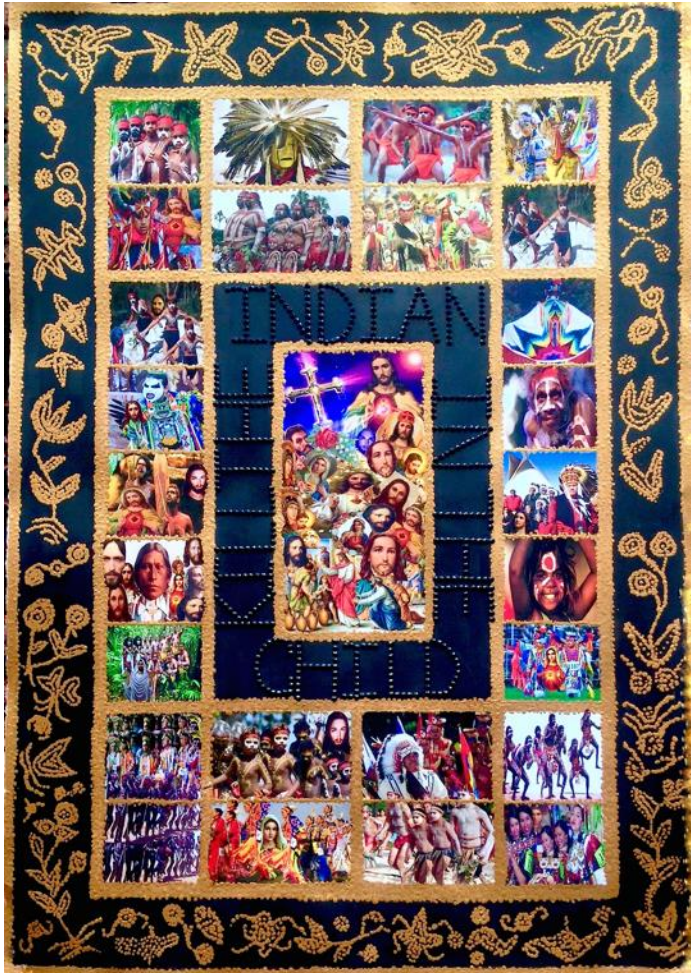


Figure 53. Rolande Souliere, *Assimilate*, (detail) 2015-17. Mixed media on 280gsm Fabriano watercolour paper, 100 x 70cm. Courtesy of the artist.

In the nineteenth century the Australian and Canadian governments along with the missionaries held a belief in “civilising” Indigenous people(s).<sup>548</sup> In both countries, the missionaries carried the dual message of civilization and salvation through the church. The Christians believed Aboriginal cultures were pagan and it was only through Christianity that the Aboriginal population could be saved from extinction.<sup>549</sup> To illustrate the mindset at the time, Anglican minister Samuel Marsden in 1819 said: “*The Aborigines are the most degraded of the human race.*”<sup>550</sup>

<sup>548</sup> The missionaries in both countries were from various denominations. This is evident in the apologies received from the various churches in light of assimilation policies. See Introduction.

<sup>549</sup> Armitage, *Comparing the Policy of Aboriginal Assimilation: Australia, Canada and New Zealand*.

<sup>550</sup> John D'Arcy May, *Transcendence and Violence: The Encounter of Buddhist, Christian and Primal Traditions* (New York, London: Continuum, 2003), 27.



Figure 54. Rolande Souliere, *Assimilate*, 2015-17. Mixed media on 280gsm Fabriano watercolour paper, 100 x 70cm. Copyright of the artist.

Souliere captures aspects of assimilation belief system in *Assimilate*, (2015-2017) (Figure 53). Here, Souliere illustrates one of the civilising slogan of the Canadian government and the church – “*kill the Indian in the child.*”<sup>551</sup> This slogan is beaded around the decorative border of the collage. In the installation (Figure 54) each collage contains a civilising slogan such as the “*smooth the dying pillow*”, and “*bred them white.*”<sup>552</sup> These were some of the slogans used in Australia to assimilate Indigenous people. Images within the collages juxtapose Christian iconography with Indigenous regalia to address the poor living conditions, inferior education, abuse and malnutrition Indigenous children experienced when they were institutionalised during the assimilation process.

Colonised ways imposed upon Indigenous people are evident in the type of treatment Indigenous students were subjected to through indoctrination, processes included: group delousing; mandatory wearing of uniforms; cutting of hair, in particular sacred braids (in the case of First Nations); and the assignment of numbers in place of their names.<sup>553</sup> These indoctrination processes are made visible in the works such as Faye HeavyShield’s (Kainai-blood) *Numerous*,

<sup>551</sup> Canada, "Truth and Reconciliation Findings of Indian Residential School System," 39.

<sup>552</sup> "Bringing Them Home Report: Part 2 Tracing the History," 1997, <https://www.humanrights.gov.au/publications/bringing-them-home-chapter-2>.

<sup>553</sup> As noted in Scott Watson, *Witnesses: Art and Canada's Indian Residential Schools* (Vancouver: Morris and Helen Belkin Art Gallery, 2013), exhibition catalogue, 10.; Bruce McLean, *My Country, I still call Australia home: contemporary art from black Australia* (Queensland: Queensland Art Gallery, 2013), exhibition catalogue, 15.

(2013); Yhonnie Scarce's (Kokatha and Nokunu) *N0000*, *N2359*, *N2351*, *N2402*, (2013, Figure 55) and Dale Harding's (Birdjra/Ghungalu) *Unnamed*, (2009) (Figure 56).



Figure 55. Yhonnie Scarce, *N000*, *N2359*, *N2351*, *N2402* (detail), 2013. Blown Glass, archive photographs, dimensions variable, large dome approximately 35 x 16 cm. Courtesy of the artist and Dianne Tanzer Gallery & Projects.



Figure 56. Dale Harding, *Unnamed*, 2009, lead and steel wire. Collection: Queensland Art Gallery, Image courtesy: QAGOMA.

In Harding's work the inscription W38 on the appropriated lead crescent-shape King Plate (King Plates were used in the nineteenth century as identifiers of Aboriginal peoples of importance by colonial authorities) references the alphanumeric code assigned to his grandmother for identification by the mission authorities. "W" represents the Woorabinda Aboriginal Mission, Harding's grandmother resided on, and the number 38 is her identity. HeavyShield, a former residential school student remarks, "*I can recall all the names of the teachers, nuns and priests, and most of the numbers I was for those years.*"<sup>554</sup>

In this section 'Bearing Witness' is demonstrated in contemporary Indigenous artworks through personal presence and perception as an avenue to present Indigenous histories in the contemporary artworks by artists such as : Belmore, Cumpston, Yuxweluptun, Scarce, Souliere and Harding. By 'Bearing Witness' through audience participation in the contemporary artworks by Indigenous artists Indigenous histories are presented that pertain to their histories in aspects of massacres, poor living conditions, abuse and malnutrition as a result of Australian and Canadian government assimilation policies.

## CONCLUSION

This chapter explored the fundamental aspect of the thesis –that Indigenous history is expressed and created through contemporary Indigenous art practices.

<sup>554</sup> Watson, *Witnesses: Art and Canada's Indian Residential Schools* 42.



The aesthetics of art making in contemporary Indigenous art practices are the means to discuss Indigenous histories. Much of the content of these contemporary artworks pertain to discovery, life on missions, massacres, great leaders, slavery and culture. The 'palimpsest through cut, paste, and overlay', 'postmodern irony and the Trickster', 'decolonising through storytelling and sharing' and 'bearing witness through audience participation' were the methodologies used to analyse the contemporary artworks. In fact, all of these methodologies can be applied in some form to all contemporary Indigenous artworks. Indigenous artists were listed within these methodologies to provide evidence that an Indigenous history is being generated through the avenue of contemporary art.

By making history within contemporary Indigenous art practices it affirms; a mode of cultural self-determination that avoids the historical domination of Western art history, history and its colonial power structures: an aversion to institutional determination of Indigenous art in the Western art milieu: an alternative reading to the way Indigenous art is defined: particularly in the Western art discourse; an Indigenous perspective to the Indigenous art as contemporary art debate; and the cultural, political and social use of contemporary art as a form of history production.

## CONCLUSION

*We all come into worlds that are already formed by others who are contemporaries in various stages of negotiation, and who are themselves continually striving to grasp the arrangements in play between the non-contemporaries before, now, after them. History is born out of this disjunction. So, too, is art.*<sup>555</sup>

The 1990s was an exciting time in history and art history as it marked a period filled with Indigenous activism and resistance, the emergence of a new art theory otherwise known as 'the contemporary' and the influx of contemporary Indigenous art which subsequently generated a critical art debate within Western art discourse.

In the 1990s Indigenous art in Australia and Canada flourished to national and international audiences. Indigenous artists' use of contemporary materials and processes and the political, social and historical content inherent in their artwork positioned them within the contemporary art realm. Yet the acceptance of Indigenous art as 'contemporary' art was met with resistance and generated a critical art debate (which is currently ongoing) amongst Indigenous and non-Indigenous anthropologists, art historians, art scholars, writers, artists and art workers.

What this debate revealed was out-dated imperial art historical methodologies that inadequately contextualised Indigenous aesthetics and cultural imperatives, rendering them 'primitive' or 'frozen' in time or 'static' in time resurfaced in critical Western art discourse.<sup>556</sup> Further, by Indigenous art being categorised as contemporary art, it created unfavorable binary oppositions, such as traditional verses contemporary. This negatively impacted contemporary Indigenous artists in terms of exhibition opportunities within art museums and institutions. Dissatisfied with the compartmentalisation of their art, Indigenous artists took affirmative action in the visual arts domain to counteract the categorisation of their art and thus their actions contributed to the Indigenous activism that was prevalent in the 1990s. Chapter Two, *Setting the Scene* captures the environment of the time by listing Indigenous social, political and cultural achievements in the 1990s that included land rights, Royal Commissions into the treatment of Indigenous people in Australia and Canada, apologies for historical injustices of Indigenous people during the imposition of government assimilation policies, repatriation of sacred Indigenous cultural objects and human remains.

Chapter Two also demonstrated the formation of Indigenous global alliances and the successes of Indigenous organisations, artists and cultural workers in their efforts to promote Indigenous cultural integrity, self-determination and self-representation. In this regard, the United Nations'

<sup>555</sup> Smith, *What is Contemporary Art?*, 3.

<sup>556</sup> See Loft, "Towards Forever an Indigenous Art historical Worldview."; Kleinert and Koch, "Urban Representations: Cultural expression, identity and politics."

draft on the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples<sup>557</sup> was paramount in providing a universal framework for the minimum standard for Indigenous peoples' rights, both individually and collectively. Appointments of Indigenous people in curatorial positions in mainstream art museums and institutions lead to the rise of national and international Indigenous exhibitions. Appendix 4 shows a list of Australian and Indigenous exhibitions that occurred in the 1990s.

Included within the rise of Indigenous exhibitions was the drive of Indigenous artists to critically reframe representations of Indigenous peoples and their histories in their art.<sup>558</sup> Undoubtedly Indigenous is written in the Euro-Western discipline of history as if they were the 'other'. 'Otherness' remains the definitive meaning of Indigeneity despite postcolonial theories successes in overturning some aspects of colonial orientation and domination. However, another mode of history is possible, one familiar with Indigenous people yet resisted by the scholarly English-speaking tradition of the Euro-Western written discipline of history: the making of history through contemporary art practices.

Although the making of Indigenous history through contemporary Indigenous practices is inarguably considered a form of activism, it allows Indigenous people a form of writing history that resides outside the colonial power relations. It also enables a mode of history built within a community's own traditions, worldviews and epistemologies. This is important because Indigenous people have struggled with a Western view of history under colonialism and have critiqued the way Western history has been written. Chapter Three, *Indigenous Rupture and Transformation in Western History and Art History* outlines this critique by identifying the multiple forms of colonial practice and constructs that assisted in the negation, destruction, attempted erase and rupture in Indigenous histories and culture.

For example, in order to assist a colonial ideology a series of negations were utilised that resulted in the attempted erase of Indigenous people. Writer Albert Memmi identifies the negations as follows: the negation of Indigenous people as rational, self-actualising human beings incapable of possessing a social order and therefore a history; the negation of Indigenous peoples' oral histories; the negation of Indigenous people and as a living race.<sup>559</sup> Imperial constructs of time and space also played a significant role in the exclusion of Indigenous people and histories. Tuhiwai Smith addresses how imperial constructs of time and space are embedded in science, philosophy and language with ramifications for Indigenous people. These ramifications included the colonial view of Indigenous peoples lifestyles as archaic, static and primitive and the controlling of space through mapping and surveying the land.<sup>560</sup>

<sup>557</sup> United Nations Human Rights, "United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples."

<sup>558</sup> Thomas, *Possessions: indigenous art, colonial culture*, 197.

<sup>559</sup> Memmi, *The Colonizer and the Colonized* 83.

<sup>560</sup> Smith, *What is Contemporary Art?*, 53.

Aspects of colonial constructs filtered into the visual arts where Western classifications and criteria of art excluded Indigenous art, classifying it as 'primitive' or 'other' peoples' art through the lens of Western museums of anthropology and ethnography.<sup>561</sup> It was not until the 1990s that Indigenous art was included into the contemporary art realm. Anthropologist Howard Morphy identified three processes that enabled the inclusion of Australian Aboriginal art into the mainstream contemporary art worlds. The processes being: 1) a shift in the notion of what can be considered art; 2) a critical evaluation of Primitive art; and 3) an increased awareness of art as a commodity.<sup>562</sup> These processes of inclusion marked a fast track journey of Indigenous people and their cultural material from the ethnographic to the contemporary art realm. In doing so it made visible Euro-Western 'possession logics' of Indigenous people and their cultural material were subjected to and continue to be in neo-colonial times.

The concept of the contemporary also comes with drawbacks. Chapter Four, *The Contemporary and Indigenous Art* provides evidence of the widespread and undefinable concept or theory of the contemporary and its validity as a field of art practice. It also makes visible the plethora of writings and diverse opinions on what is the 'contemporary' by Western art historians art critics, scholars, curators and writers. In researching the contemporary field art historian Terry Smith was the only art historian to include Indigenous art in the contemporary art discussion in his text *What is Contemporary Art?*<sup>563</sup> Here, Smith posits contemporary theory in a much broader cultural analysis that asserts different Australian historiographies that include Australian Aboriginal Art and cultural worldviews. Smith interdisciplinary value and richness of ideas of the multiple ways Indigenous people experience contemporaneity in art and "multiple ways of being with, in and out of time, separately and at once, with others and without"<sup>564</sup> provided a pathway for Indigenous art's inclusion. Smith noted Indigenous worldviews on the concept of time, that being Indigenous peoples concepts of time are based on cyclical principles rather than Western linear order and includes the past, the present and the future.<sup>565</sup>

Art historian Richard Meyer also includes the continuum of time in his definition of the contemporary in his text *What was Contemporary Art?*, 2013. Meyer advances contemporary theory by defining the contemporary from artistic practice rather than from the standard curatorial rationale, like most writers, critics and scholars' have in their attempts at defining the contemporary. Meyer also draws attention that the concept of the modern was once an open and undefinable field too. In this light Meyer positions the modern outside of the purist abstraction and formalist constraints it is commonly associated with.<sup>566</sup> What makes Meyer's definition stand out is

<sup>561</sup> Thomas, *Possessions: indigenous art, colonial culture*, 38.

<sup>562</sup> Morphy, "Seeing Aboriginal Art in the Gallery," 37.

<sup>563</sup> Smith, *What is Contemporary Art?*, 133.

<sup>564</sup> Smith, *What is Contemporary Art?*, 6.

<sup>565</sup> Berlo and Phillips, *Native North American Art* 87.

<sup>566</sup> Meyer, *What was Contemporary Art?*, 261-65.

that he offers a hybridity of art criticism and art history that puts 'the history back into contemporary art' through multiple time temporalities (similar to Smith's), contemporary art production and modes of trans-historicity. By rendering the 'past as newly present' Meyer provides the structural framework to postulate that a social, political and cultural historical archive is embedded within contemporary art practice.

The consolidation of Smith's acknowledgement of situating the contemporary in a broader cultural analysis with different historiographies that include Indigenous worldview's concept of time and Meyer's argument of 'putting history back into contemporary art' through contemporary art practice, co-temporalities and trans-historicity lay to rest the categorisation of Indigenous art but importantly provide a theoretical foundation to answer the research question How are Indigenous artists establishing an Indigenous history through the avenue of contemporary art?

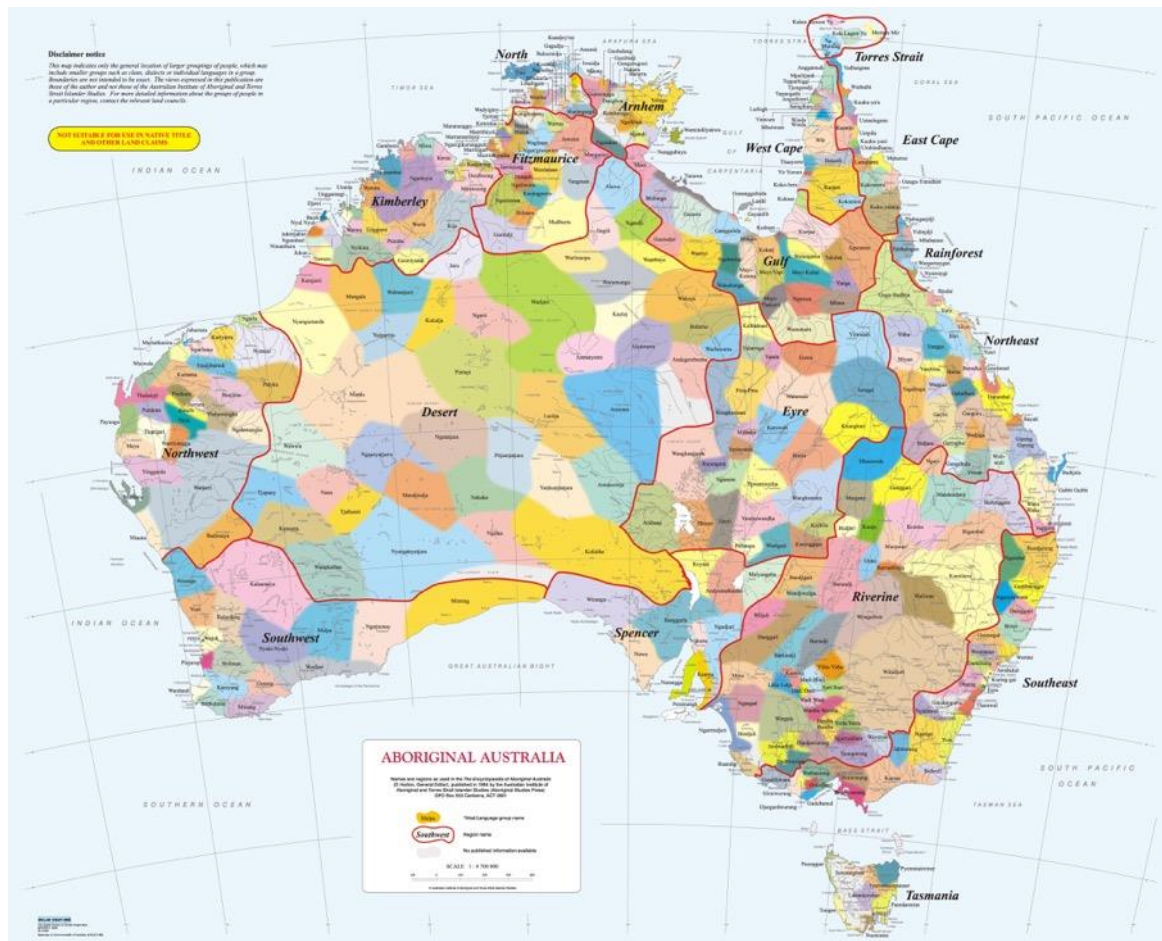
The final chapter, Chapter Five, *The Presence of Histories in Contemporary Indigenous Art Practices* is the fundamental aspect of the thesis and provides visual evidence of the research question and validates the methodologies outlined in Chapter One, *Methodologies*. Case studies of contemporary Indigenous artworks for each method of contemporary art analysis are provided to discuss and present aspects of Indigenous histories. The methods of analysis, Palimpsest: Cut, Paste and Overlay; Postmodern Irony and The Trickster; Decolonising Through Storytelling; and Sharing and Bearing Witness in Audience Participation were employed to reveal Indigenous histories within the contemporary artworks.

This chapter illustrates that the cultural, social and political use of contemporary art as a form of history production is visible in the contemporary artworks by Indigenous artists. By making history visible within contemporary art practice it answers the research question: How are Indigenous artists establishing an Indigenous history through the avenue of contemporary art? Importantly the results of the research affirm: an alternative reading to the way Indigenous art is defined in Western critical art discourse; an Indigenous perspective on the Indigenous art as contemporary art debate; an aversion to institutional determination of Indigenous art in the Western art milieu; and a mode of cultural self-determination that bypasses the historical domination of Western history, art history and its colonial power structures.

Still much work needs to be done on writing the various facets of an Indigenous history. One insight that has eventuated from this research is that this project is both Indigenous and global in its growing awareness of artists networks and ideological alliances amongst Indigenous peoples and artists. As such it provided the basis for further research into the shared struggles, common political interests and historical memory of a world collectivity of Indigenous peoples. Certainly, it would provide an intriguing investigation into global debates on the unfinished business of decolonisation that includes issues about social justice, natural resources, ecologies environments, reconciliation/reparation movements and cultural diplomacy in the politics of

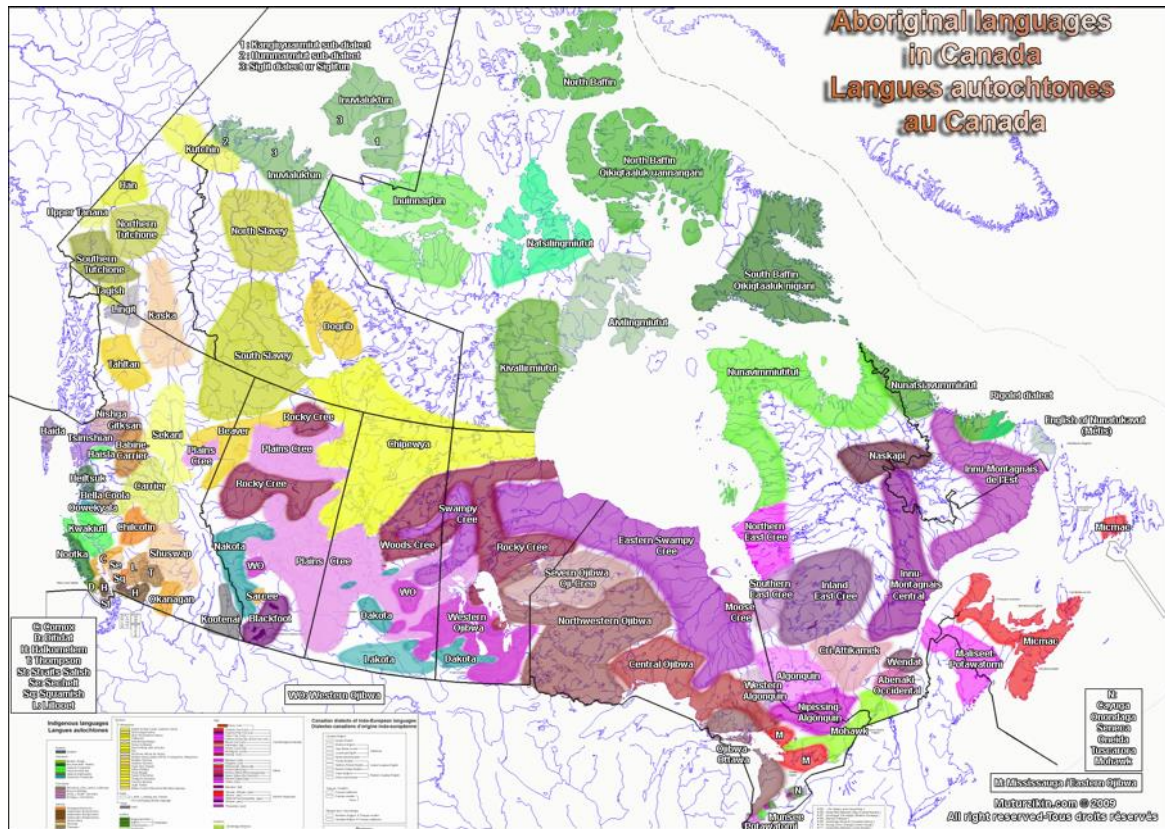
Indigeneity. This would embrace the Indigenous cultures of the Americas, Africa and Oceania and the transnational connections between them and how broader issues of Indigeneity are materialised in visual culture

## APPENDIX 1: AIATSIS MAP OF INDIGENOUS AUSTRALIA



Reproduced with permission AIATSIS, Rhonda Black, 2013. © Aboriginal Studies Press, AIATSIS. This map is just one representation of many other map sources that are available for Aboriginal Australia. Using published resources available between 1988–1994, this map attempts to represent all the language, social or nation groups of the Indigenous people of Australia. It indicates only the general location of larger groupings of people which may include smaller groups such as clans, dialects or individual languages in a group. Boundaries are not intended to be exact. This map is NOT SUITABLE FOR USE IN NATIVE TITLE AND OTHER LAND CLAIMS. David R Horton, creator, © Aboriginal Studies Press, AIATSIS and Auslig/Sinclair, Knight, Merz, 1996.

## APPENDIX 2: ABORIGINAL LANGUAGES IN CANADA



Reproduced courtesy of Muturzikin, all rights reserved, 2009 <http://www.muturzikin.com/cartesusa/imagesusa/languesautochtones.png>



### APPENDIX 3: EXHIBITED ARTWORKS

#### Artist Statement

The installation includes two artworks, *Three of a Kind*, 2015 and *Modern Day Syllabics*, 2008-15. *Three of a Kind* addresses Indigenous activism and resistance in regard to cultural appropriation in Western art.

Within Western art history Euro-Western artists employed new ways of using colour, line, perspective and movement to not only rebel against European art academia but also to seek artistic freedom outside the establishment constraints. Western artists looked to non-Western art as a source of inspiration and 'borrowed' imagery from non-Western cultures.

It is documented that masks and other forms of Indigenous African American, First Nations and Oceanic art and culture inspired nineteenth and twentieth century Western artists. The first well-known contender was Pablo Picasso (1881-1973). In 1907 Picasso appropriated African masks and sculpture in *Nude with raised arms*.<sup>567</sup> The other infamous contenders to follow suit included Canadian artist Emily Carr (1871-1945), Australian artist Margaret Preston (1875-1963), American artist Jackson Pollock (1912-1956) and Berlin artist Joseph Beuys (1921-1986)<sup>568</sup>.

By using portraits of these artists in conjunction with street barrier and caution tapes and the material processes of traditional First Nation beading, the artwork *Three of a Kind*, presents a counter-hegemony based on reverse appropriation on a global level. By going to the heart of Western art history and literally puncturing, piercing, stitching and suturing every orifice of these 'heavy weights' in Western art, the installation is an act of resistance and activism.

The street barrier and caution tapes, materials that are often used in government legislation, regulation and control of boundaries and borders provides the backbone to address that boundaries need to be put in place in regard to Indigenous cultural material and knowledge to prevent further cultural appropriation which is happening on a global level.

The artwork also signifies to use 'caution' when exercising artistic freedom in relation to cultural property whether locally or globally. As cultural appropriation carries over into unresolved and continuing discourses of settler-colonial control and assimilation. This was recently highlighted in the performance *Self Portrait Camouflage*, 2017 at MOMA PS1 by Latifa Laabissi, who performed naked wearing a faux Plains style headdress. Laabissi refused to not wear the headdress after pleas from Crystal Migwans claiming it is her artistic right and freedom.<sup>569</sup>

The artwork, *Modern Day Syllabics*, 2008-16 draws upon the beauty and simplicity of the 'Canadian Aboriginal Syllabics'<sup>570</sup> and its resemblance to geometric abstraction. *Modern Day Syllabics*, through form and content addresses the innate social-political, cultural and historical issues inherent in the revitalisation and renewal of Indigenous languages.

<sup>567</sup> Paul Gauguin (1848-1903) was the first to appropriate Tahitian culture in 1893 with his work *Nave Nave Fenua* (Delightful Land). See "'Gauguin: Metamorphoses'" at The Museum of Modern Art," 2014, <https://mnaves.wordpress.com/2014/04/01/gauguin-metamorphoses-at-the-museum-of-modern-art/>.

<sup>568</sup> Canadian artist Emily Carr (1871-1945) in the early 1910s in her appropriation of Gitksan, Haida and Kwakwaka'wakw First Nation's art and culture,<sup>568</sup> Australian artist Margaret Preston (1875-1963) in the 1940s appropriated the designs and motifs of Australian Aboriginals, in the mid 1940s American artist Jackson Pollock appropriated the techniques of Navajo sand painters and lastly in the early 1970s the infamous performance of Berlin artist Joseph Beuys appropriated First Nation shamanistic rituals in "*I love America and America loves me*".

<sup>569</sup> "The Violence of Cultural Appropriation," 2017, <http://canadianart.ca/features/violence-cultural-appropriation/>.

<sup>570</sup> Syllabics chart can be found at "Canadian Aboriginal Syllabics," 2016, <https://www.omniglot.com/writing/ucas.htm>.

The title *Modern Day Syllabics* is a word play on the 178 year-old language writing system. The syllabics system is still in use today by a number of Indigenous nations such as the Ojibwe, Cree and Inuit.

*Modern Day Syllabics* is a system of delineator bases that have been Indigenised by replacing the standard chevron panels with the characters from the 'Canadian Aboriginal Syllabics'. In this regard, delineators take on a political turn by directing road users through an Indigenous language.

The 26 meter long sculpture serves as a deterrent by preventing its audience from changing their direction and keeps them on a particular pathway. Thereby bringing awareness to the social-political and cultural circumstances that contributed to the near loss of Indigenous languages during colonialism. This includes the efforts to assimilate Indigenous people via rules and practices that regulated and legitimatised imperial and colonial ideologies. These resulted in the negation, submersion, invisibility and attempted erasure of Indigenous peoples and their culture.

The main causes of loss of Indigenous languages include the Indian Residential Schools System, mission schools, public schools and the media. Including the political forces that advanced national and state constitutional amendments to make English the official language of the country.

Traffic barriers also offer protection by keeping vehicles within their roadway and preventing them from colliding with other vehicles. It could be said that by Indigenising one aspect of the government's codified road communications for directives/directions for drivers *Modern Day Syllabics* creates a path of empowerment, revitalisation and self-determination for Indigenous people and their languages.

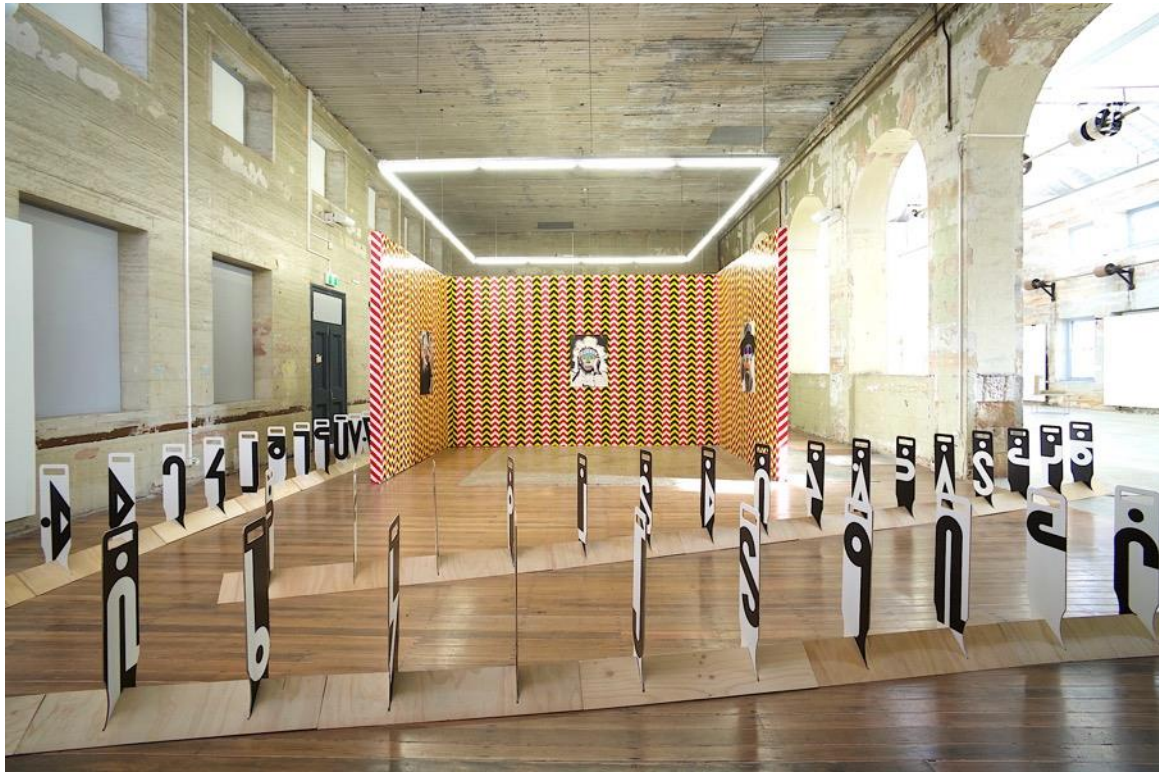
As a protective barrier, this is in keeping with the *United Nations Declaration on Rights of Indigenous Peoples* that states Indigenous people to have a right to use revitalise and develop their language(s).<sup>571</sup>

Canadian Aboriginal Syllabics was created in 1831 by missionary James Evans.<sup>572</sup> This writing system was created to communicate and spread the Christian word to Indigenous people in Canada. The Anishinaabe, Cree and Inuit adopted the syllabics, with each nation having their own 'version' to suit the phonetics of their language.

<sup>571</sup> See United Nations Human Rights, "United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples."

<sup>572</sup> Ager, "Canadian Aboriginal Syllabics."

ARTWORKS



Rolande Souliere, *Three of a Kind*, 2016, installation view, mixed media, dimensions variable. Photo courtesy Ian Hobbs.



Rolande Souliere, *Three of a Kind*, 2016, installation view, mixed media, dimensions variable. Photo courtesy Ian Hobbs.





Rolande Souliere, *Three of a Kind*, 2016, detail, mixed media, dimensions variable. Photo courtesy Ian Hobbs.



Rolande Souliere, *Three of a Kind*, 2016, detail, mixed media, dimensions variable. Photo courtesy Ian Hobbs.





Rolande Souliere, *Three of a Kind*, 2016, detail, mixed media, dimensions variable. Photo courtesy of Ian Hobbs

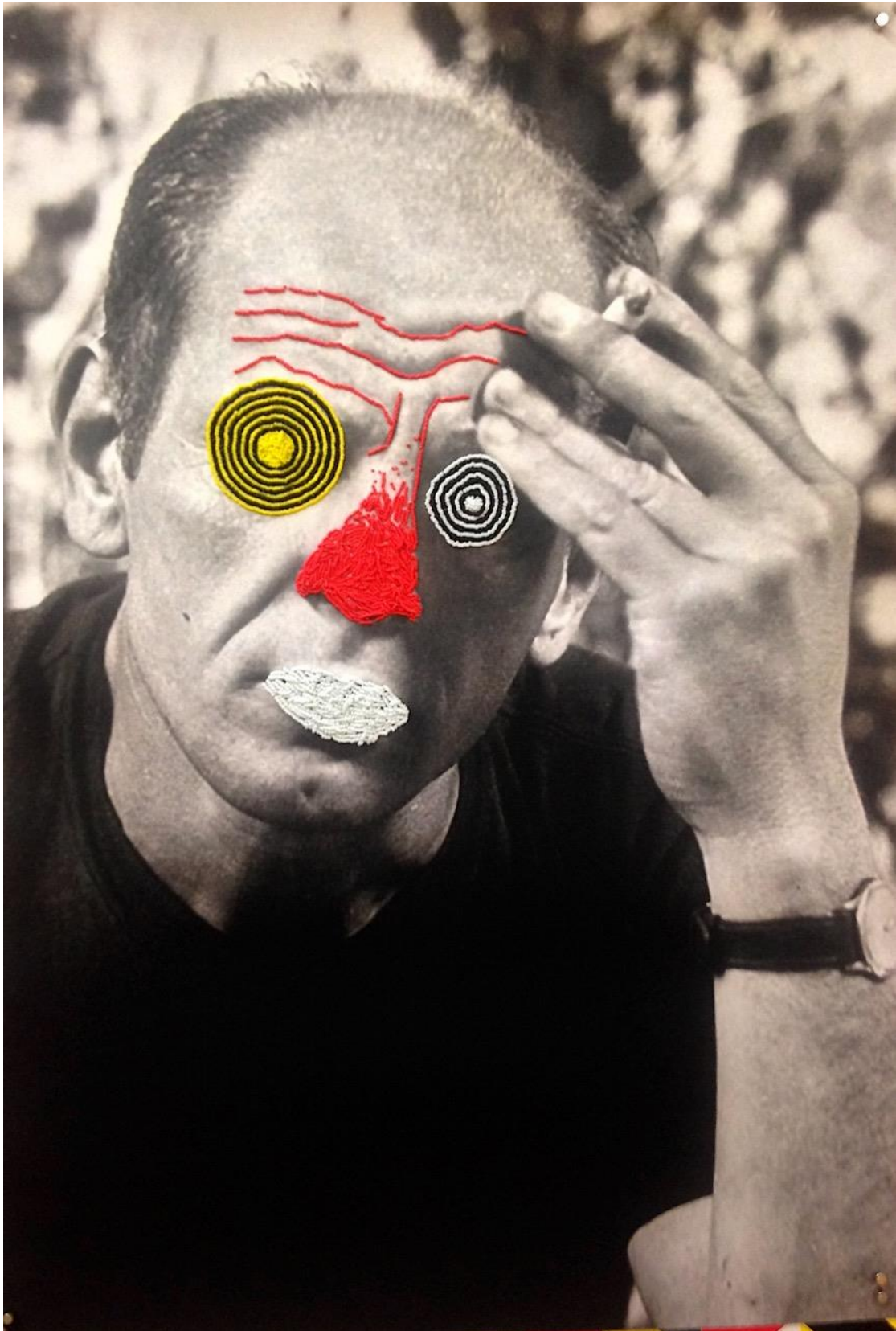


Rolande Souliere, *Three of a Kind*, 2016, detail, mixed media, dimensions variable. Photo courtesy of Ian Hobbs





Rolande Souliere, *Three of a Kind*, 2016, detail, mixed media, 70 x 100cm. Photo courtesy Ian Hobbs.



Rolande Souliere, *Three of a Kind*, 2016, detail, mixed media, 70 x 100cm. Photo courtesy Ian Hobbs





Rolande Souliere, *Three of a Kind*, 2016, detail, mixed media, 70 x 100cm. Photo courtesy Ian Ho



#### APPENDIX 4: 1990S TO 2017 INDIGENOUS EXHIBITIONS

- 1990 First Nations Art '90, Woodland Indian Museum, Brantford, Canada
- 1990 Urban Aboriginal Art, Hogarth Galleries, Sydney, Australia
- 1990 Contemporary Aboriginal Art 1990, Third Eye Centre, Glasgow
- 1990 Venice Biennale, (Rover Thomas and Trevor Nicholls), Venice, Italy
- 1990 Five Contemporary Artists (curated by Michael O'Ferrall), Queensland Art Gallery, Brisbane
- 1990 Balance 1990, Queensland Art Gallery, Queensland, Australia
- 1990 Tagari Lia: My Family, Glasgow, Swansea, Manchester, United Kingdom
- 1990 Contemporary Aboriginal Art from the Robert Holmes a Court Collection, Carpenter Center for the Visual Arts, Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts
- 1991 Contemporary Aboriginal Women's Art, (curated by Hetti Perkins), Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney, Australia
- 1991 Kudjeris (curated by Fiona Foley), Boomalli, Sydney, Australia
- 1991 Ian Abdulla & Harry Wedge. Boomalli, Sydney, Australia
- 1991 Strengthening the Spirit, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, Canada
- 1992 Tyerabarbowaryaou: I shall never become a white man, (curated by Djon Mundine and Fiona Foley), Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney, Australia
- 1992 Ayumee-aawach Oomama-owan: Speaking to their Mother, YYY Artist's Outlet, Toronto, Canada
- 1992 Land, Spirit, Power (curated by Diana Nemiroff,) National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, ON
- 1992 Indigena, (curated by Gerald McMaster and Lee Ann Martin) Canadian Museum of Civilization, Hull, Quebec,
- 1992 Crossroads – Towards a New Reality, Aboriginal Art from Australia, National Museums of Modern Art, Kyoto and Tokyo, Japan
- 1992 Wiradjuri Spirit Man, Boomalli, Sydney, Australia
- 1992 Aratjara: Art of the First Australians, (curated by Djon Mundine), Dusseldorf Kunstsammlung, Dusseldorf, Germany, Hayward Gallery, London, United Kingdom, Louisiana Museum, Denmark
- 1994 Strange Fruit, Performance Space, Sydney, Australia
- 1994 Roads Cross: The Paintings of Rover Thomas, National Gallery of Australia, Canberra, Australia
- 1994 True Colours: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Artists Raise the Flag, (curated by Boomalli), (toured), Bluecoat Gallery, Liverpool; South London Gallery and City Gallery, Leicester, England and Perth Institute of Contemporary Art, Western Australia
- 1994 Blakness: Blak City Culture!, (curated by Boomalli), Australian Center for Contemporary Art (ACCA), Victoria, Australia

- 1994 INDIAN TIME: 10 Contemporary Indian Artists from Canada and the United States, Kunsthallen Brandts Klaedefabrik, Odense, Denmark.
- 1994 Rebecca Belmore -Wana-na-wang-ong, Contemporary Art Gallery Vancouver, Canada
- 1995 Unjustified, (curated by Tess Allas), Project Contemporary Art Space, Wollongong, Australia
- 1995 Edward Poitras, Canadian Pavilion (curated by Gerald McMaster) XLVI Bienale di Venezia, Venice, Italy
- 1995 Nations in Urban Landscapes (curated by Marcia Crosby), Contemporary Art Gallery, Vancouver, Canada
- 1996 The Native Born (curated by Djon Mundine), Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney, Australia
- 1996 Native Title Now (curated by Doreen Mellor), Tandanya National Aboriginal Cultural Institute, Adelaide, South Australia
- 1996 The Eye of the Storm: Eight Contemporary Indigenous Artists, National Gallery of Modern Art, New Delhi
- 1997 Reservation X, National Museum of the American Indian, New York, United States
- 1997 47<sup>th</sup> Venice Biennale, Australian Pavilion, Venice, Italy, (curated by Hetti Perkins, Brenda Croft, Victoria Lynn) with Emily Kae Kngwarreye, Judy Watson and Yvonne Koolmatrie, Venice, Italy
- 1997 Six of the Nation, Nation to Nation collective, Kanien'kehaka Raotiohkwa Cultural Center, Montreal, Canada
- 1997 Tattoo Nation, Nation to Nation collective, The Other Gallery, Banff, Canada
- 1997 Utopia: The Genius of Emily Kame Kngwarreye, (toured internationally,) National Gallery of Australia, Sydney, Australia
- 1998 Reservation X, (curated by Gerald McMaster), The National Museum of the American Indian, New York, United States
- 1998 Re Re-Take, Contemporary Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Photographer, National Gallery of Australia, Canberra, Australia
- 1999 Flyblown, (curated by Boomalli), Dubbo Regional Gallery, Dubbo and Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney, Australia
- 1999 Ceremonial, 1999 Venice Biennale, sponsored by the Native American Arts Alliance (NA3), Venice, Italy
- 2000 Genesis and Genius, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney, Australia
- 2000 Beyond the Pale: Contemporary Indigenous Art (curated by Brenda Croft ), Adelaide Biennial of Australian Art, Adelaide, Australia
- 2000 John Mawurndjul, Biennale of Sydney, Sydney, Australia
- 2000 2000 Venice Biennale, Venice, Italy sponsored by Indigenous Art Action Alliance (IA3), Venice, Italy

- 2001 Ochre, (Bark painting form 1950s and early 1960s) Art Gallery of NSW, Sydney, Australia
- 2001 2001 Venice Biennale, Jacqueline Fraser and Peter Robinson, New Zealand Pavilion, Venice, Italy
- 2001 The Native Born: Objects and Representations from Ramingining, Arnhem Land (curated Djon Mundine), Sprengel Museum, Hannover, Germany
- 2001 Blanket[ed], (co-curator Jonathan Jones), Urban Shaman Gallery, Winnipeg, Canada
- 2002 Blood on the Spinifex, Ian Potter Museum, University of Melbourne, Melbourne, Victoria
- 2002 Ngurra Kutu (Going Home), Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney, Australia
- 2002 Dancing up country: The art of Dorothy Napangardi, Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney, Australia
- 2002 Biennale of Sydney, Harry J Wedge, Sydney, Australia
- 2002 Vee Thornbuy, Boomalli, Sydney, Australia
- 2002 Darren Cooper, Boomalli, Sydney, Australia
- 2003 Venice Biennale, Venice, Italy, sponsored by the IA3, Venice, Italy
- 2003-4 Clifford Possum Tjapaltjarri, Retrospective
- 2004 Crossing Country: The alchemy of Western Arnhem Land Art (curated by Hetti Perkins), Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney, Australia
- 2004 Cold Eels and Distant Thoughts, (curated by Djon Mundine), Tandanya National Aboriginal Cultural Institute, Adelaide, Australia
- 2005 New York New Tribe, American Indian Museum Heye Center, New York, USA
- 2005 Remix: New Modernities in a Post-Indian World, Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto, Canada
- 2005 Fountain, 2005 Venice Biennale, Canadian Pavilion, Venice Italy
- 2005 Emendatio, 2005 Venice Biennale, (sponsored by the Smithsonian's National Museum of the Native American Indian, New York), Venice, Italy
- 2005 John Mawurndjul, Tinguely Museum, Basel, Switzerland
- 2005 The American West, (curated by Jimmie Durham and Richard W. Hill), Compton Verney Gallery, Warwickshire, United Kingdom
- 2006 Norval Morrisseau- Shaman Artist, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, Canada
- 2007 The Drawings and Paintings of Daphne Odjig: A Retrospective Exhibition, (curated by Bonnie Devine), National Gallery of Canada in collaboration with The Art Gallery of Sudbury, Ottawa, Canada
- 2007 Culture Warriors: National Contemporary Indigenous Triennale (curated by Brenda Croft), National Gallery of Australia, Canberra, Australia.
- 2007 Oh So Iroquois, (curated by Ryan Rice), Ottawa Art Gallery, Canada

- 2007 Michael Riley: Sights unseen, (national tour), National Gallery of Australia, Canberra, Australia
- 2008 Clandestine: Destiny Deacon, Tandanya, Adelaide, Australia
- 2008 Face the Nation (curated by Catherine Crowston), Art Gallery of Alberta, Alberta, Canada
- 2008 ANTHEM: Perspectives on Home and Land, curated by Ryan Rice
- 2008 Ngadhu, Ngulili, Ngeaninyagu-A Personal History of Aboriginal Art in the Premier State, (curated by Djon Mundine), Campbelltown Art Centre, Campbelltown, New South Wales
- 2009 Steeling the Gaze (curated by Steven Loft), National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, Canada
- 2010 Carl Beam, (curated by Greg Hill), National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, Canada
- 2011 Rethinking Abstraction from an Indigenous Perspective (curated by Steven Loft), Art Gallery of Alberta, Alberta, Canada
- 2011 Setting: land, (curated by Suzanne Morrissette), Thunder Bay Art Gallery, Thunder Bay, Canada
- 2011 Stop [The] Gap, (curated by Brenda Croft), SamStag Museum, Adelaide, Australia
- 2011 Stop (the) Gap: International Indigenous art in motion (lead curator Brenda Croft with curators Kathleen Ash-Milby, David Garneau and Megan Tamati-Quennell), Adelaide, Australia
- 2011 Frontrunners, Urban Shaman Gallery and Plug-In ICA, Winnipeg, Canada
- 2011 Close Encounters: The Next 500 Years, (curated by Candice Hopkins, Jenny Western, Steven Loft and LeeAnn Martin), PLUG-In, WAG, Urban Shaman, Winnipeg, Canada
- 2012 Shapeshifters: Transformations in Native American Art, Peabody Essex Museum, Salem, United States
- 2012 Ghost Citizens: Witnessing the Intervention (curated by Djon Mundine), Cross Art Projects, Sydney, Australia
- 2013 Ghost Dance: Activism, Resistance, Art (curated by Steven Loft), Ryerson Image Center, Toronto, Canada
- 2013 Sakahan, (curated by Greg Hill, Candice Hopkins and Christine Lalonde), National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, Canada
- 2013 Witnesses: Art and Canada's Residential School, Morris and Helen Belkin art Gallery, Vancouver, Canada
- 2014 KWE: The work of Rebecca Belmore (curated by Wanda Nanibush), Justina M. Baricke Gallery, Toronto, Canada
- 2014 Nation to Nation, Museum of the American Indian, New York, United States
- 2015 Bungaree: The First Australian (Curated by Djon Mundine), Mosman Art Gallery, Sydney, Australia
- 2016 With Secrecy and Despatch (curated by Tess Allas and David Garneau), Campbelltown Art Gallery, Campbelltown, Australia

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