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## **Fine Art and Clandestine Identity: American Indian Artists in the Contemporary Art Market**

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Fine Art and Clandestine Identity: American Indian Artists in the  
Contemporary Art Market

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Staten Island, NY

Bachelor of Arts, Purchase College, 2008


A Thesis presented to the Graduate Faculty  
of the College of William and Mary in Candidacy for the Degree of  
Master of Arts

Department of Anthropology

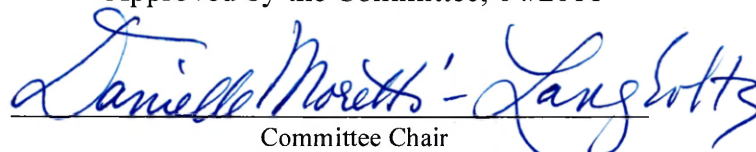
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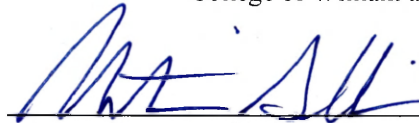
  
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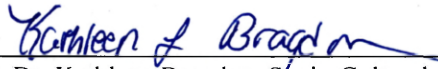


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## COMPLIANCE PAGE

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## ABSTRACT PAGE

The struggle felt by many creatively inclined indigenous individuals to adhere to the label of “artist” inadvertently thrusts them into the originally Westernized industry known as the Fine Art Market, which reinforces social hierarchies and the commodification of art pieces. This study focuses primarily on interviews with five artists whose work exhibits political and personal statements addressing traditional and representational dynamics in clashing worlds where promulgating one’s multiple forms of identity is necessary; Where culturally significant art pieces enriched with symbolism are consumed forever altering them along their social lives. Through a theoretical framework of Practice Theory, this study analyses the level at which artists’ acknowledgement of their role within the fine art industry affects its reproduction as well as that of the larger capitalist ideology.

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I dedicate this thesis to my consultants, without whom this would not be possible:  
Werewolf Micah; Dennis Zotigh; Star Wallowing Bull; Ukjese Van Kampen; Thomas  
Poolaw, and to some friends met along the way, SunRose; Daniel; Sinté; and Jonah, who  
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## **Introduction**

It was late October of 2009, my professor and I had just gotten out of a day's worth of fascinating sessions about painting from Native artists' perspectives, questions of cultural ownership to authenticity, performance, avant-garde, kitsch and more at the Native American Art Studies Association Conference in Norman, Oklahoma, but our day was hardly over. "We're not done," she said, "...we still have to see that Live Paint at the gallery down the street." Upon arrival at the gallery, we made our way around looking at paintings and prints, which at the time I didn't even think of purchasing. To my surprise, one of the guest painters, Micah The Werewolf Wesley also known as Werewolf Micah, was a friend whom I had met and interviewed two years earlier. We were both undergrad art students then who were fond of discussing art, culture, identity, and how they were all tied together. But I realized that things had changed. He was embarking on the career of a fine artist with his work already being displayed in that very gallery, holding its own quite well among the other more widely known artists, and I, in graduate school, was on my way to making an academic name for myself as a socio-cultural anthropologist.

When the time was up and the auction began, Micah's piece, a painting depicting the popular mass-produced "kawaii" Japanese popular culture character, "Hello Kitty," holding an assault rifle with Micah's trademark feather in her hair sold for just over what I was willing to bid. Shortly after the auction finished, and the crowds began dispersing, my professor and I came upon a beautiful bison painting that emanated tranquility. Upon looking at the artists' name, I was a little taken aback to see that it was one of Micah's pieces; I was used to seeing more of his activist work. I did not even think of purchasing the painting until my professor, also an art collector who was familiar with how certain

pieces were priced in that market, had mentioned that it was an excellent price. For a second I entertained the thought of owning my friend's piece, of being happy that the money would in part go to him, and of him one day becoming very famous. The gallery owner, noticing that we were interested in the painting, mentioned that if I did not purchase the piece, his own mother would. Needless to say, I bought it, which I do not regret to this day in part because my professor also left the gallery with a new piece by a famous Native artist. "I began collecting art in graduate school, like you..." she said.

Her words never left me and that night I had left that small gallery in Norman, Oklahoma with a new desire I had not felt before. I could not believe I had purchased that painting. The next evening, meeting Micah and friends at a local bar for a drink, Micah mentioned the Hello Kitty piece. "I know you wanted that one. Don't worry, I'll make you one." I was more than delighted to hear him say those words. But what was this sudden desire I felt to own art pieces that did not exist prior to taking that conference trip? Immersed in the atmosphere of fine art buyers, dealers, collectors, etc. I also could not help but wonder if the slight change I had noticed in some of Micah's work was due to that venue? Was this atmosphere also what caused my mindset to suddenly switch from being the silent observer to the one who entertained purchasing pieces?

Usually when asked about how life has changed since becoming an anthropologist, I would reply that there was an anthropology switch in one's mind that could no longer be turned off. This switch might also be seen as a postmodern mindset, allowing one to be aware of their subjectivity in as many situations as possible, it can be combined also with the concept of Mills' (1959) sociological imagination, allowing one to question every decision made, rule observed, commercial viewed, and practice

undertaken. But there was something odd about being in that gallery, buying that painting, talking with Micah, the gallery owner, and my professor in that specific venue. I did not know whether my switch was on or off! There was a fog, and I wasn't even sure then of my switch's existence. Is this why so few social scientists, for example: Berlo (1998; 1999); Phillips (1998; 1999); Clifford (1988); Graburn (1976); Gritton (1991; 1992); Rushing (1991); Townsend-Gault (1999); Markusen (2008; 2009); and Steiner (1999), have even touched on the task of studying the inner workings of contemporary American Indian artwork within the Fine Art Market?

In an attempt to "clear the fog," so-to-speak, and understand the complexities involved in the self-perpetuating structure that is the Fine Art Market, this study focuses on late 20<sup>th</sup> to early 21<sup>st</sup> century American Indian artists who produce what is termed "fine art" and the social lives of those art pieces. As Jackson Rushing has explained, the term *contemporary* Indian art would encompass a variety of art forms such as craftwork in textiles ceramics, woodcarvings, beadwork, basketry, etc. (Rushing 1992: 6). However, for the purposes of this study, an analysis of accounts given by artists identifying as American Indian who predominantly produce works for and within the Fine Art Market will be the central theme. It is important, however, to acknowledge the clear presence and association of other art forms existing as *contemporaries* to those looked at here, which are not un-influential.

Five to ten artists, over the age of 18, identifying as American Indian, Canadian or Alaskan Native are this study's key subjects. With no gender preference, they were recruited through networking at Native Art Studies conferences, recommendations of gallery owners, friends of friends, and those who advertise their skills/services within the

public domain, such as having their own websites or through gallery and/or museum websites. The subjects consist specifically of painters, sculptors, printmakers, photographers, and performance artists (those who exhibit their performances in museums or similar institutions). This study, however, is not restricted to subjects who solely create art to be sold. The interviews entail questions regarding the nature and purposes behind the creation of this artwork so as to better understand the dynamics involved, which might reflect the artist's cultural sentiments, identity, and sociopolitical and economic milieu. From here on, the piece's "social life," as Arjun Appadurai terms it, or "biographical profile" as it is understood by Igor Kopytoff, may be tracked so the details and social structures surrounding the piece's commoditization can be clearly identified and questioned regarding its significance and that of the artist's future. This particularly concerns artists' consciousness of their life's trajectory from novices to professionals and the course taken by their works as aesthetic pieces, commodities, and singular objects.

Nelson H.H. Graburn describes such artists as being a part of the "Fourth World."

Such a concept requires extensive quotation:

The Fourth World is the collective name for all aboriginal or native peoples whose lands fall within the national boundaries and techno-bureaucratic administrations of the countries of the First, Second, and Third Worlds. . . . Not only are they no longer isolated or autonomous peoples as they perhaps once were, but *their arts are rarely produced for their own consumption or according to their own unmodified tastes*. In many ways these peoples have become dependent part-societies whose very thought and culture reflect the differences from, and *accommodation to*, the realities of the majority peoples surrounding them [emphasis added] (Graburn 1976:1-2).

Graburn speaks to the collective "Fourth World Arts" and not just the commodity sphere of "fine arts" as it is understood in the Western world. The focus here lies in the *changing*

of these arts resulting from a common history of colonization and coping with the present reality of existence within a global market economy that runs on a Capitalist ideology. Although the concept of “fine art” is a Western one, originating in European society, its widened scope and social longevity, due to assimilation practices, causes it to still be applicable in Graburn’s analysis of Fourth World arts. Fine art pieces created by individuals who identify and are recognized as American Indian or Native, are unique in that they not only circulate within an enclave and sphere that reinforces social hierarchies while showcasing the struggle of a marginalized ethnic group, but they do so while allowing Anglos to “eat the Other,” to use bell hooks’ (1992) terminology. Thus, a demand is created for the exotic “Other,” and change in multiple Fourth World art forms reflect that demand. For as is known, *demand* is a socially complex entity expressed through praxis that is intricately tied into shifting dynamics of political economy and culture across time.

This study is important because, through an anthropological framework of Practice Theory, it seeks an answer to the question of whether the reinforcement of the social hierarchies surrounding art buyers, dealers, and artists in the Fine Art Market is intentional or unintentional and if so, to what extent\*? Do artists feel compelled to participate in the Fine Art Market? In addition, this study explores the relations between the fine art dealing world, museums, and the differing politics within these. Other questions addressed are: What happens to promulgated culture and/or self-identity once

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\* Although there are many avenues through which this question could have been addressed, i.e. through analyzing the positionality of art buyers/collectors, gallery owners, art critiques, etc., this study primarily focuses on artists’ perspectives and their recognition of the industry’s larger structure. Additionally, this study does not directly address historical issues pertaining to the rise of art forms or the historicity of American Indian art.

an individual's piece of art shifts from the hands of its creator, to fine art dealers, to museum curators, to buyers? Is it lost, muted, or emphasized, and why? Are art pieces solely being handed off or are other things embedded within them and passed along as well? How discreet is this? With the knowledge that museums are temporary landscapes and liminal spaces, one might ask what is foreign in a museum and what is not? To what degree does the actual landscape in which a work is displayed dictate what is evoked? The findings of this study will be available for dissemination and will serve as a source for information that would otherwise be overlooked or unanswered. Future generations might then be able to grasp the concept of their choices as artists more easily, or rather, freer of pretexts or misjudgments.

The first chapter of this paper lays a foundation for the greater work through situating the industry of the Fine Art Market and those agents who participate in it within a theoretical framework centered upon Pierre Bourdieu's concept of *habitus* and Arjun Appadurai's take on commoditization and objects' social lives. The following two chapters work through and beyond that framework, highlighting direct consistencies and their examples, but also gaps and avenues un-explored, such as issues with the categorization of art and identity struggles. Chapter four deals with influences of the many institutions that help the Fine Art Market to function, such as schools, galleries and museums. Chapter five focuses on the case study at hand and the analysis of findings as well as addressing possible answers to the problems brought up in the previous chapters. It is acknowledged, however, that this paper is not the be-all and end-all of [intended] constructive commentary on American Indians' creation fine art as existing within a

larger industry. Art, after all—like culture—is always changing and evolving and as a result, so must literary/academic discourse and critique.



## Chapter 1 – Art and Practice: A Theoretical Orientation

The creation of art has long been a *process*, which many Westerners—past and present—consider to culminate with civility. As Graburn explains, “even the label ‘art’ itself reflects the elitist traditions of ‘high civilizations’ concerning the value of arts vs. crafts, the importance of creativity and originality, and specializations and distinctions that emerged in Europe and China”(Graburn 1976: 3). Ruth B. Phillips and Christopher B. Steiner also state,

The standard Western system of art classification has its origins in the sixteenth century in the emergence of the concept of the artist as an autonomous creator...“The role of art,” Podro summarizes, “was seen as overcoming our ordinary relations to the world.” Within the realm of the aesthetic, therefore, the highest forms are the most free—“art for art’s sake”—and the lowest are those that are the most utilitarian (Phillips and Steiner 1999:6).

“Art,” a Western term and concept brought upon colonized Fourth World peoples along with dominant alien culture(s), was highlighted as something the colonized had not yet achieved, or if they had in some form, it was seen as lacking. This became another reason for the legitimization of subordinate status and subjugation of the “Other,” however, the introduction of the Westernized concept of “art” has had counter affects to those initially intended during contact period, but not to the failure or deconstruction of the “Fine Art Market” as an industry.

A common recurring theme that will be seen throughout this paper is the dichotomy between the individual versus the collective. As Scott B. Vickers notes, “If Indian history since 1492 has been ‘written’ (authored) by white authority, then how can Indians attain or retain authentic identities in the present? The author of history also assumes the power of the author of identity and the arbiter of authenticity”(Vickers 1998:9). This point not only highlights the need for an ethno ethno historical approach,

coined by Raymond Fogleson, which in essence would be “Indians writing Indian history” or the colonized writing and representing themselves, but it also draws attention to the fact that since history up to the present was written by colonizers, then their particular emphases on definitions of value, authenticity, etc. were accepted on a larger scale than if they were not recorded under the title of “history.” As a result, the centuries’ old concepts of “fine art” as the most highly valued type of art, over forms like crafts or culturally specific genres of art that are made into homogenous styles, is preserved.

The Fine Art Industry has thrived off of the creation of unique art drawn from an artist’s own individuality, identity, experiences, and interpretations. The work’s acceptance as “fine art” also grants the artist a certain extent of social prestige. Everything about this industry relies heavily on the individual, and for so many years, art created by indigenous peoples or non-Westerners, has had great difficulty permeating the barrier into this ultimate level: fine art, because these artists are seen as a homogenous exotic collective and are blocked by the external treatment in the form of predispositions which lump their work into monolithic sub-categories such as “African Art,” “Oriental Art,” “Native Art,” etc. Graburn terms these art forms, “Commercial Fine Arts,” “...although they are made with eventual sale in mind, they adhere to culturally embedded aesthetic and formal standards”(Graburn 1976:6). These often become collector’s items, and although Graburn uses the term “Fine Art” in his definition of them, and they may possess specific unique qualities, overall they lack that touch of individual identity, which is why they cannot be considered fine art in the same respect as the term is used in this study.

This paper focuses on artists from the “Fourth World” who have made their way into the Fine Art Industry but continue to struggle with constant hostile critique and labeling of their work as “Native Art,” which restricts their efforts to stand alone as unique *individual* artists. Such critiques draw attention away from their personal creative processes, views, and standpoints. These artists forced their way into an industry, which was meant as an exclusive sphere for—originally colonizer—social elites and for the reinforcement of social hierarchies. This industry, centered on the Capitalist consumption of art pieces that showcase individuality, currently faces a paradox in which the “Other” is no longer the object of fixation and consumption, but rather the producer and arbiter of what will be consumed. “The makers of objects have frequently manipulated commodity production in order to serve economic needs as well as new demands for self-representation and self-identification made urgent by the establishment of colonial hegemonies”(Phillips and Steiner 1999:4). But are these artists now more autonomous? Do they control the dominant image of their ethnic and personal identities? Are they now the arbiters of authenticity? The answers to these questions are more complicated than “yes” or “no.”

The Fine Art Industry, although not existing specifically in any tangible location under any one organization, is indeed a structure that has come about through and is sustained by the routinized process of value placement on individual artistic expression and the consumption of those material manifestations, which in a final stroke, legitimizes their uniqueness and *belonging* within that venue, that industry, and that class of consumer. Although the pieces made, exhibited, bought and sold are distinct from one to the next on multiple levels, their construction and injection into this Fine Art Market are

practices that facilitate the greater structure and its adjoining economy. These processes, which create and allow the Fine Art Market to exist, can also be known as what the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu has called *habitus*.

The habitus, the durably installed generative principle of regulated improvisations, produces practices which tend to reproduce the regularities immanent in the objective conditions of the production of their generative principle, while adjusting to the demands inscribed as objective potentialities in the situation, as defined by the cognitive and motivating structures making up the habitus...these practices can be accounted for only by relating the objective *structure* defining the social conditions of the production of the habitus which engendered them to the conditions in which this habitus is operating, that is, to the *conjecture* which...represents a particular state of this structure [emphasis original] (Bourdieu 1977:78).

In other words, habitus is the unconscious structuring of milieu, or social environment/social structure by those who make up and partake in its functioning on a regular basis. The practices that people undergo to create habitus are those which are presently visible symbolically in its structure, and are those that reinforce that structure.

According to Bourdieu, *doxa* translates as that which is unconsciously taken as natural or naturally occurring; *heterodoxy* can equate to individual autonomy; and *orthodoxy* is then an attempt to consciously alter doxa into a mechanized reality that suits the needs and/or desires of the dominant classes (Bourdieu 1977). Heterodoxy is what artists that maneuver through the Fine Art Market are thought to enjoy—and this is true to an extent—though the reality is that orthodoxy exists as an invisible encompassing force written into the social structure. Whatever art is ushered through the Fine Art Market fits into this larger theoretical framework because it is allowed to enter, function, and change within that market, and the art created by artists hailing from the Fourth World is no exception.

“...Even ‘economic’ capital cannot act unless it succeeds in being recognized through a conversion that can render unrecognizable the true principle of its efficacy. Symbolic capital is this denied capital, recognized as legitimate, that is, misrecognized as capital...”(Bourdieu 1990:118). Art, from the moment of its creation, begins to accumulate value, and the artist, prestige. There is a point when an art piece is made that it becomes, in addition to a piece saturated with symbolism and meaning, symbolic capital, i.e. in the instance when a piece is accepted as a gift or exchanged with the anticipation on the part of the recipient that it will one day be worth a great deal monetarily. In some cases, art can clearly have a price attached to it depending on the artists’ popularity, the period, the style, or whether the artist is living or deceased, etc. Thus, along its lifespan, an art piece may oscillate between roles of symbolic capital or economic capital as it switches hands and its monetary value becomes altered or dematerializes. As Bourdieu explains,

When one knows that symbolic capital is credit, but in the broadest sense, a kind of advance, a credence, that only the group’s belief can grant those who give it the best symbolic and material guarantees, it can be seen that the exhibition of symbolic capital (which is always very expensive in material terms) is one of the mechanisms which (no doubt universally) make capital go to capital (Bourdieu 1990:120).

Social elites are the main consumers of fine art, who through their actions and influence, facilitate the industry and power that which causes the capital face of a piece to change.

As Arjun Appadurai advocates, value placed on a commodity is created by the economic *exchange*, which is politically orchestrated. The traceable value of those objects (in this case, art pieces) that become commodities can be expressed as their “social lives”(Appadurai 1986). The system and process through which these art pieces shift from symbolic capital to commodities or economic capital *is* the habitus.

Acknowledging this, it may be understood that value is created through habitus because the exchange occurring reinforces this particular capitalistic system and the affiliated social hierarchies.

In Appadurai's discussion, he states that:

The economic object does not have an absolute value as a result of the demand for it, but the demand for it, as the basis of a real or imagined exchange, endows the object with value. It is exchange that sets the parameters of utility and scarcity, rather than the other way round, and exchange that is the source of value (Appadurai 1986:4).

When artists propose a commission to a potential client, there exists an imagined exchange; and the price or value can be one of the first things discussed. The exchange determines the value of the piece because the notion of exchange as an action or practice is attributed to preconceived voluntary sacrifice on the parts of each party. Artists sacrifice their piece, an object of specific significance, symbolism, and function in the context of their creation, with the knowledge that the piece will lose much of this once it changes possession or is placed in a new "social arena" such as a museum or gallery. For the buyers, if they are non-Indian and unfamiliar with the cultural or personal significance with which the art piece was initially created, the piece does not hand off anything and, in the eyes of that buyer, becomes simply a commodity that is viewed as capital exchangeable for the socially legitimized monetary value of their labor (within their job/profession). It is as Marx explains in *Wage Labour and Capital*, "The bodily form of capital may transform itself continually, while capital does not suffer the least alteration...*But though every capital is a sum of commodities, i.e., of exchange values, it does not follow that every sum of commodities, of exchange values, is capital*" [emphasis original] (Marx 1969 [original copyright 1933]: 29). The ability for these art pieces to

switch between “*regimes of value* in space and time,” as Appadurai terms it, exemplifies their ability to retain social lives that exist as separate from the individuals that create them. This process is accelerated especially among artists who *consciously* enter the Fine Art Market, such as those who are ushered in after receiving formal training at an institution for the visual arts.

Typically, formally trained artists produce art pieces for the purpose of subsistence—it is their profession. Therefore the pieces are almost initially birthed into a commodity mode. “This mode of production must not be considered simply as being the reproduction of the physical existence of the individuals. Rather it is a definite form of expressing their life, a definite *mode of life* on their part” [emphasis original] (Marx and Engels 1965:32). There are inescapable attributes that are built into pieces, such as those values or significances afore mentioned specific to artists personal identities and preferences that shape creation. In Sahlins’ discussion, he states, “men produce objects for given *social* subjects, in the course of reproducing subjects by *social* objects...Not even capitalism, despite its ostensible organization by and for pragmatic advantage, can escape this cultural constitution of an apparently objective praxis” [emphasis original] (Sahlins 1976:168). These associated “cultural constitutions” are of course either emphasized or muted depending on the piece’s location, function, and value along the span of its social life.

An important factor to understand before further discussion is that art pieces and artists themselves on occasion may be inadvertently incorporated into the fine art industry, if they are financially obligated to sell their work to the highest bidder, for example, in which case they would find themselves among peers who intentionally

function in such marked venues and cater to such clientele. With the Marxian concept in mind that commodities can be anything intended for exchange, the reader must recall that not all art pieces currently in the Fine Art Market were created as “fine art” pieces, in the Western sense of the term. The pieces, upon intended or unintended displacement, are susceptible to commoditization thereafter. Because of this changeability, such art is part of that which Appadurai terms a *commodity ecumene*, “...that is, a transcultural network of relationships linking producers, distributors, and consumers of a particular commodity or set of commodities”(Appadurai 1986:27). This ecumene, in a possible paradigm of the Fine Art Market, might not always detract from an art piece’s original significance and functionality, but it certainly introduces it into a new “regime of value,” of which it was not contextually conceived. As Appadurai specifies,

...The term *regimes of value*, which does *not* imply that every act of commodity exchange presupposes a complete cultural sharing of assumptions, but rather that the degree of value coherence may be highly variable from situation to situation and from commodity to commodity [emphasis original] (Appadurai 1986:15).

Since specific situations and venues alter a commodity’s value, value determination is not solely contingent on the typical commodity definition of any one cultural framework. A value settled upon once the piece is considered fine art is even further removed from the piece’s initially intended purpose, if it was not created as a commodity. As Graburn explains, “...these processes—indeed, the arts themselves—are ‘open-ended’ and in a continuous state of transition”(Graburn 1976:30). But how do artists of such pieces reconcile the devaluation or misrecognition of their work, as they once knew it?

Westernized conceptualizations of art entailed style/fashion and taste as the root of demand, which is reflected within the fine art industry. Essentially, the objects passing through this market succumb to commodity fetishism involving both cultural biographies



*and* social histories. If a piece exhibits cultural/ethnic markers through symbolic imagery, or if the artist simply is known to be indigenous, colonized, or of the Fourth World, the piece is Othered, exoticized, and popularized. The anxiety created by this process along with the masking or confusion of the pieces' initial significance as it switches hands, collides with the acknowledgement that these, once in the Fine Art Market, become luxury goods in that they then meet the criteria for that register. The pieces become restricted to consumption by elites, yet they are still embedded with complex social messages, they require "specialized knowledge as a prerequisite for their 'appropriate' consumption"(Appadurai 1986:38), and buyers seek out personal links with the pieces (i.e. for a piece to match their personality, emotion, or home décor). "This tension, at the level of demand and consumption, is of course linked to the tensions between indigenous and introduced production systems and goods, and indigenous and introduced media of exchange"(Appadurai 1986:39). The social milieu that Fourth World individuals must operate in is emotionally and financially taxing because they simultaneously undergo assimilation and "Othering." In an attempt to remain active in the cash economy, some artists have no choice but to have their work commodified and fetishized.

Though, as previously explained, even their participation in the fine art industry does little to alter the perpetuation of existing social conditions.

...As Baudrillard (1981) and Bourdieu (1984) have shown so well, the establishments that control fashion and good taste in the contemporary West are no less effective in limiting social mobility, making social rank and discrimination, and placing consumers in a game whose ever-shifting rules are determined by "taste makers" and their affiliated experts who dwell at the top of society (Appadurai 1986:32).

The point being, as demand is controlled, so positions of social privilege are secured, and the fine art industry is yet another hegemonic structure immune to detrimental

infiltration. What is significant, however, is how specific cases negotiate connections between identity, representation, and political-economic issues. Although the system may survive unharmed, the projections of the art objects that pass through that system are recorded in their social lives unlike any other object. Even if the record or file on an art piece is lost, or if the last owner could not be detected, the fact that the piece is aesthetic by purpose and infused with imagery sheds light on the birth of its social life, going beyond details of function in a way other artifacts may not.

## Chapter 2 – Picking Up Where Theory Leaves Off: Contemporary Application

There is always a certain extent of unease that follows strict theoretical application within contemporary anthropology of previously oppressed indigenous peoples. This is because when taking a culturally relative and postmodern approach, it becomes difficult (morally for oneself and of course when anticipating larger application) to legitimize the use of European inspired theories while studying and analyzing, in this case, the artwork and creative expressions of peoples who have drastically different worldviews. For this reason, I feel it is crucial to undertake such research with the previously mentioned ethno-ethno historical approach. There remains a need to surpass hierarchical assumptions of the academy, which are based on mass accounts of abstract knowledge complexes under the label of epistemology. The adoption of an inter-cultural dynamic, that examines and embraces diverse knowledge and cosmological systems would be of great benefit to this study considering the symbolism embedded within various visual art pieces. As Daniel Heath Justice describes it,

The academy can also be a site of significant cultural recovery work, a place where all people who are disconnected from their histories can begin their journeys homeward...Perhaps the biggest concern I have about Native literary studies is the fact that there are too many scholars—mostly non-Indians, but some of our own, too—who approach the work as though Indians aren't really even a part of the work at all or, if present, exist only as antiquated museum pieces who should just look exotic and keep quiet. There are many non-Indian scholars in the field who approach it with respect and who bring incredible insight to their readings of the work, and many of these—A. La Vonne Brown Ruoff, Frances W. Kaye...have demonstrated a significant commitment to decolonization efforts in both their academic work and in personal activism. Yet there are others who treat Indians—by implication or directly—as obstacles to their research *about* Indians (Justice 2004:102-105).

This is not to say that certain theoretical approaches do not apply to various social situations/milieus, just that there is potential for synthesis in perceptions of understanding

and promising opportunities for anthropologists to hand over the microphone, so-to-speak. This study attempts to embrace the indigenous perspective with respect to tribal specific heritages through artists' description and explanation of their work and the sentiments felt surrounding their works' potential social lives. But before delving into specific cases, a point disrupting the theory being applied from easy application with that which is presently coming to pass must be negotiated. Up to this point, Bourdieu's take on Practice Theory advocating for cultural practices' reinforcement of social hierarchies through habitus is examined. But what about those hyper agents who are *conscious* of their role in society, and who command agency? For that matter, what of those who offer potential to change social order? Craig Calhoun, in *Bourdieu Critical Perspectives*, notes Bourdieu's possibility of social change but does not offer an explanation of why such change might arise.

His concepts of habitus and field direct our attention to crucial phenomena. But his other most distinctive notion, that of capital as multiform – social, cultural, economic, and symbolic – grasps only an aspect of capitalism. It grasps primarily the aspect which is distributive and/or central to relations of power. It does not grasp equally the sense in which capital itself – on an alternative reading of Marx...is a form of mediation...More generally, Bourdieu's work so far shows an insufficient attention to the nature of mediation, the constitution of actors, and the modes of coordinating action in contemporary large, complex societies (Calhoun 1993:83-84).

This, a point where Bourdieu leaves off, is where we should pick up, because this study goes beyond the simple fact that hegemony exists within this economically Capitalistic Fine Art Industry through coercive forces that cause artists, buyers, and dealers to abide by pricing and value placement standards unconsciously. It analyses these artists' existence within the different social organizations, communities, and class-oriented

groups but in addition to this, the study takes into consideration their specific individual sentiments regarding their work and identity.

Maxine Leeds Craig addresses this issue by suggesting that “in racialized situations, gaps form in the cycle of social reproduction creating spaces for change in racial order”(Craig 2002:10). Acknowledging her very different study, which focuses on female minorities, media, perception, and identity, the point she makes is still very significant in that she sees inconsistencies in the self-perpetuating social order as occurring in resistance to racial oppression. I am in support of this approach and will go a step further in suggesting that indigenous artists create change and reinforce the current social order in terms of how certain races and ethnicities are perceived, as well as reinforcing the class system by catering to certain buyers within the Fine Art Market.

...It is unaware that the controlled mobility of a limited category of individuals, carefully selected and modified by and for individual assent, is not incompatible with the permanence of structures, and that it is even capable of contributing to social stability in the only way conceivable in societies based upon democratic ideals and thereby may help to perpetuate the structure of class relations (Bourdieu 1973:71).

Indigenous artists' niche within the Fine Art Market *is* a catalyst for a specific type of social change, though since it reinforces the industry's social order, it is typically overlooked as such. Avant-garde artistic expression that is racially and/or politically charged might harbor change in a muted or clandestine way that inadvertently perpetuates the social hierarchy though encourages new modes of perceiving indigenaity. Though not all viewers are receptive to such methods.

By labeling, buying, and keeping fine art in circulation, social hierarchies are reinforced, as afore mentioned, and underlying messages or initially intended symbolism within the art is ignored or is understood solely by a target few (perhaps other artists or

people within Native communities). What then? Is this intentional? Do they feel they have any choice in altering this process? My aim is an attempt at taking these issues, views, and identities off the canvas, where they would occasionally be hung on the wall and misunderstood or ignored, and reify the message and voice of the artist with words. That which separates what is occurring in the Native art community from what Craig describes is that there is no gap being formed. Change is struggling to occur and the desire is there, though there is a great disparity in the level and method of activism from what occurred in the 1970s with AIM (American Indian Movement) to now in the art community.

More often than not artists need to attain economic capital and rely on the sale of their work as the sole mode of employment and Fourth World artists are not able to remain independent of the dominant market economy. Phillips and Steiner state:

These new art forms, typified, for example, by the wares Woodlands Indians made to sell at Niagara Falls, signal the entry of colonized peoples into industrial-age consumerism, an economic integration forced on many by the destruction of their former models of subsistence and on others by the introduction into traditional material culture both of labor-saving manufactured materials and of attractive new mass-produced Western commodities that could only be acquired with cash (Phillips and Steiner 1999:9).

In addition, the desire to function as both client *and* patron in the Fine Art Market arises due to popular demand for artists in the U.S., which is linked to the necessity for possession of social capital. The acknowledgement of this necessity remains unconscious on the part of many because it is taken as a given or common sense, and one of the key questions this study seeks to answer is regarding this awareness by some of these artists. As Adrienne Pine, an anthropologist who's main research surrounds race and class in Honduras, explains: "...symbolic capital is the intrinsic knowledge of how and when to

employ manners in order to achieve social distinction by demonstrating superior taste, and those manners and tastes themselves are embodied in habitus”(Pine 2008:27). There is a demand for artists to produce, and specifically for the Fine Art Market, not only to produce but also to produce work that is edgy, “in fashion,” or avant-garde. Appadurai touches on this when he states,

...the consumption demands of persons in our own society are regulated by high-turnover criteria of ‘appropriateness (fashion), in contrast to the less frequent shifts in more directly regulated sumptuary or customary systems. In both cases, however, demand is a *socially regulated* and *generated impulse*, not an artifact of individual whims or needs [emphasis added] (Appadurai 1986:32).

Above, I explained how I felt upon leaving the gallery in Oklahoma, with the strange desire to start my own collection of art pieces. This social “regulation” and “generated impulse” are undoubtedly the cause of that desire, controlled by the framing of the art pieces and the illusion of their edginess/subversive-ness, which translates to something that is more common than one realizes: high fashion. This being the case, how then are these fine artists of the Fourth World active conscious agents that attempt to create new perspectives?

In Graburn’s *Ethnic and Tourist Arts: Cultural Expressions from the Fourth World*, he assigns different categories to fine arts. One of the categories he labels is: “Traditional or Functional Fine Arts,” which is explained as retaining culturally symbolic meaning. This is separate from that which we are interested because not only can the art we are examining convey traditional heritage-specific symbolism, but often times it also incorporates Western-inspired symbols. For example, a friend of mine who is Lakota, Sioux made beaded earrings in the image of the “baby phat” pop culture clothing line brand label of a slender seated cat. In another instance, I observed a piece of Micah’s—

the Kiowa and Creek artist afore mentioned—that depicted a fashion conscious Indian playing basketball. Other times traditional symbolism may be absent all together.

Graburn goes on to label “Commercial Fine Arts” (which we have touched on briefly above) as those traditional arts created intentionally for sale. This again, is not our category in question and neither is the one labeled: “Souvenirs.” Those examined here most closely fit Graburn’s definition of “Assimilated Fine Arts,” or “Popular Arts.” In his description of “Assimilated Fine Arts” he states, “...the conquered minority artists have taken up the established art forms of the conquerors, following and competing with the artists of the dominant society. These are characteristic of extreme cultural domination and hence a desire to assimilate”(Graburn 1976:7). However, these pieces might not exemplify a desire to assimilate so much as a *need* to adhere to the economic specifications of the dominant society out of dependency for survival. Graburn’s “Popular Arts” are in fact those closest to these being discussed: “An artistic elite has arisen whose arts often take the forms of European traditions, but in content express feelings totally different, feelings appropriate to the new cultures that are emerging”(Graburn 1976:7). Many pieces by “Fourth World” artists circulating through the Fine Art Market are expressive of sentiments regarding the colonization experience and one’s ethnic group. This is accomplished through the use of Western mediums such as oil or acrylic painting; various forms of printmaking such as lithography, intaglio, woodcut; photography; and multiple mediums of sculpture.

Accepting that these arts can be categorized in such diverse ways, what can be said about the levels of change in occurrence? The artists in question do not blatantly alter the structure of the Fine Art Market with their work, though they do achieve a level



of *internal change* without halting the reinforcement of the larger structure. McGuire states that,

praxis refers to the uniquely human ability to knowingly and creatively make change in the world...Praxis is theoretically informed action. In a capitalist world, when Marxist theory informs action it is subversive. Marxist praxis implies a dialectical relationship between gaining knowledge of the world, critiquing the world, and taking action in the world (McGuire et al. 2005:356).

Some of these artists exercise praxis because they create with an awareness of their social situation: as dependent disparaged Fourth World peoples. Though, McGuire's use of the term "action" would probably not coincide with the creation of these art pieces because the process does not combat the dominant Capitalistic ideology. I do not wish to dismiss it as not igniting change, however, because this work is subversive in appearance and under the surface, some of it speaking to experiences of cultural annihilation *from within the dominant schema/the core*, in which they never were really allowed *as equals*. Their participation within the Fine Art Market is that change; that "informed action."

### **Significance Of An Historical Lens**

Prior to categorizing specific types of art, as Ruth B. Phillips and Christopher Steiner explain, since the 19<sup>th</sup> century people were trying to fit art created by cultural "Others" into this "binary schema of art and artifact"(Phillips and Steiner 1999:4) but as time passed, especially since the turn of the century, art pieces were repeatedly produced that did not fit within these delineated categories, or rather that occasionally seemed to hover somewhere suspended in between the two. Can we really say that fine art produced by indigenous artists is viewed the same way as fine art produced by non-Indians? We cannot. This is because a level of racial consciousness has not been reached in which labeling does not occur. A historical view seems necessary to pinpoint key moments in

time that help define how perceptions of fine art and ethnographic artifacts were constructed. Once this is understood, a view of what these indigenous Fourth World artists are dealing with will become clearer.

Much of the literature on the reception of non-Western arts takes the dualistic art/artifact distinction as a given and focuses on its ambiguities and inadequacies. Confining the problem within these parameters, however, puts us in danger of validating the very terms that require deconstruction (Phillips and Steiner 1999:5).

Clean assimilation does not occur, especially if it is within a class-based, prestige driven field or industry that is reluctant to alter its terms of exclusivity. Collecting, a trend taken up by consumers participating in the industry, and also a process that James Clifford (1988) explains as facilitating Western identity formation, parallels assimilation.

As Clifford notes, “the critical history of collecting is concerned with what from the material world specific groups and individuals choose to preserve, *value*, and exchange” [emphasis added] (Clifford 1988:221). Perceptions of specific objects are formed surrounding what values are placed on them, as mentioned in Chapter 1. Clifford goes on to explain that “commercial, aesthetic, and scientific worth in both cases presupposed a given system of value...Old objects are endowed with a sense of ‘depth’ by their historically minded collectors”(Clifford 1988:222), this he stated upon citing a *New York Times* article from 1984 on illegal looting of Anasazi archaeological sites alongside similar historical artifacts such as Bronze Age pots salvaged in a Phoenician shipwreck. The sense of “depth” that Clifford refers to can be understood as culturally specific cognitive perception of significance or meaning that helps assign value. This is the precursor for the establishment of demand among collectors and it can occur for a variety of different objects, not just “old” ones, although the consumption or collection of the latter is a significantly consistent historical trend.

But Graburn's categorization of art types can also be understood in Appadurai's discussion on "tournaments of value." In discussing these tournaments of value, he states that:

Baudrillard notes that the art auction, with its ludic, ritual, and reciprocal aspects, stands apart from the ethos of conventional economic exchange, and that it "goes well beyond economic calculation and concerns all the processes of the transmutation of values, from one logic to another logic of value which may be noted in determinate places and institutions"(Appadurai 1986:21).

Appadurai calls attention to the fact that tournaments of value are separate from routinized consumption in economic life. We can see that through this example of the auction, although a class-based ritual, such a context can serve as a venue for the shifting of perceptions of value and of functionality. It operates as a transportation center for these objects as they move along the journey of their social lives.

But the transition from one category to another is not a recent occurrence. It in fact can be viewed as one that is more intrinsic in regards to the larger ideological structure. Clifford does an excellent job of organizing specific art categories—that he calls zones—and their contexts into a diagram called: "The Art-Culture System" (see figure 1).

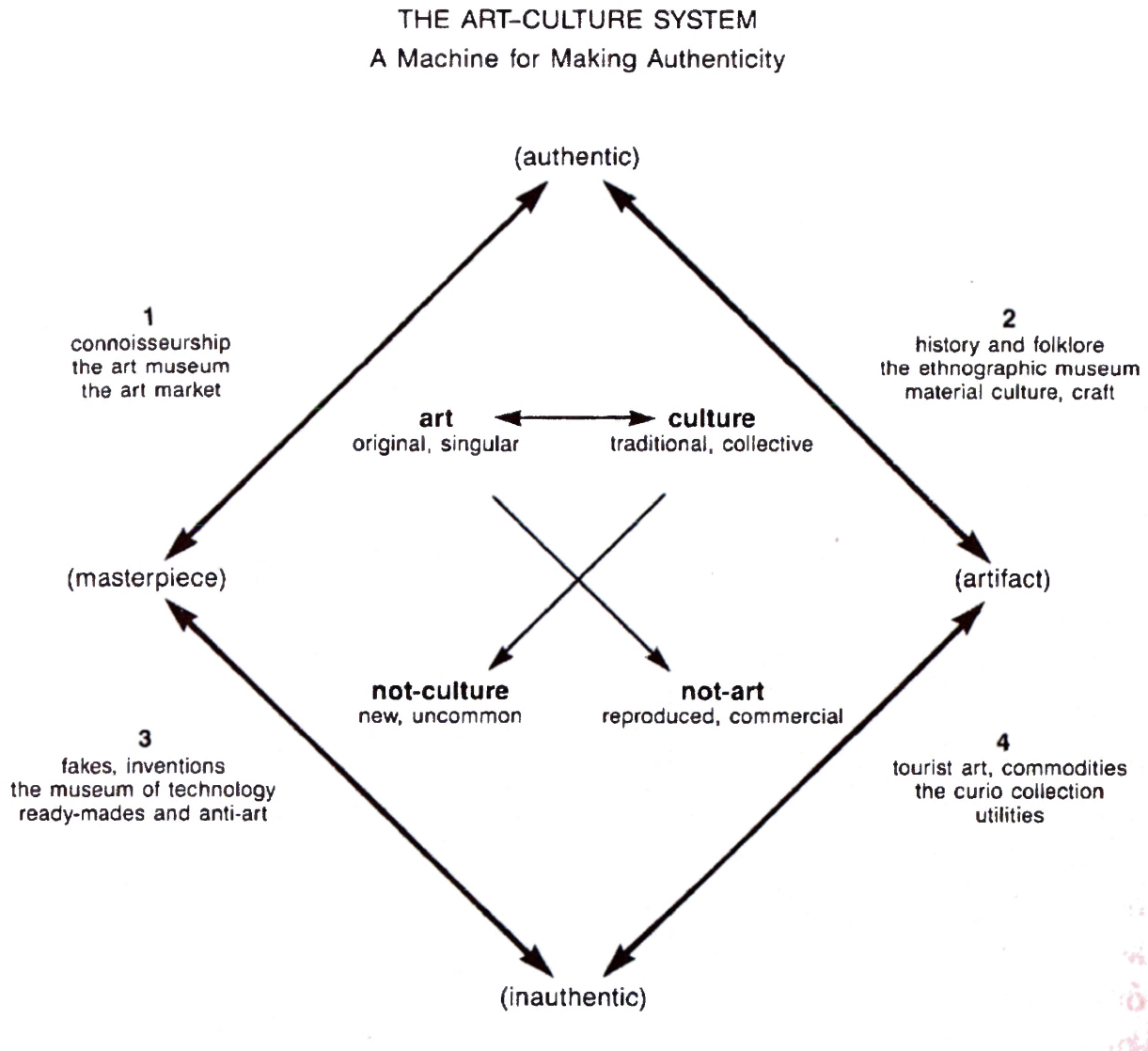


Fig.1\*

In his words,

Most objects—old and new, rare and common, familiar and exotic—can be located in one of these zones or ambiguously, in traffic, between two zones. The system classifies objects and assigns them relative value. It establishes the “contexts” in which they properly belong and between from bottom to top and from right to left. These movements select artifacts of enduring worth or rarity, their value normally guaranteed by a “vanishing” cultural status or by the selection and pricing mechanisms of the art market (Clifford 1988:223).

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\* 1988 Clifford, James. *The Predicament of Culture*. Harvard University Press. Cambridge, Massachusetts, and London, England. Pp.224.

This structural approach exhibiting taxonomy of binary oppositions highlights the active attempt to control those individual—almost dangerous—artists through classification of their work and ethnic selves under the façade of collecting for connoisseurship. The metaphorical “chink in the chain” is the existence of an art piece created by an indigenous Fourth World artist within a category such as “fine art” that is unable to undergo a swift transition into that category, causing it to have an irregular existence among its fellow fine art pieces done by different artists. So in actuality, these specific pieces—works of art—of interest do not always hover in limbo between categories or tournaments, but tend to exist awkwardly within them.

What different fine art categories have in common are their ever-changing levels of consumption demand. Appadurai states, “1. On the one hand, demand is determined by social and economic forces; 2. On the other, it can manipulate, within limits, these social and economic forces. The important point is that from a historical point of view, these two aspects of demand can affect each other”(Appadurai 1986:31). This is exemplary of Bourdieu’s habitus in that although demand was created and manipulated by society, it actually steers the direction of society through influence on the economy, structuring its own outcome in a way. Objects can move, for example, from ethnographic material culture—Clifford’s zone 2 above—to tourist art—Clifford’s zone 4—however their assigned value, demand, and place within either “The Art-Culture System” is contingent on their *ability* to move within that system so as to appeal to those participating in and consuming from it.

*If* there is concern outside the monetary value for whether an object is a cultural artifact or a masterpiece produced by an individual, it is usually *unconscious*. Yes,

collectors may conceive of their specific collections as distinct from other collectibles, but they rarely ponder an objects' existence outside the system, unless of course the social life journey of an object in some way adds to its specific value or the artist's prestige, which can be thought of as a pedigree—a historical record contributing to current value or esteem.

The social history of things and their cultural biography are not entirely separate matters, for it is the social history of things, over large periods of time and at large social levels, that constrains the form, meaning, and structure of more short-term, specific, and intimate trajectories. It is also the case, though it is typically harder to document or predict, that many small shifts in the cultural biography of things may, over time, lead to shifts in the social history of things (Appadurai 1986:36).

If an art piece created by an American Indian artist is sold to a collector within a fine art venue such as a gallery, that piece might sit uncomfortably within Graburn's "Popular Arts" or "Assimilated Fine Arts" category because the buyer can label it as [expensive] "Indian Art." But the piece cannot transition into a cultural or ethnographic piece—as other art pieces sometimes do—if, for instance, it was created for sale within that gallery venue because it has no preexisting functionality to fall back on, and new functionality for this piece is not so easily created because of its stylistic hybridity. The piece possesses familiar elements of both tournaments: that of the creator's personal and cultural situation and also that of the high-end commodity market. This is a new and unique existence. Art such as this might create its own niche in each category or separate from both, changing the "social history of things" through how the artist's community members, peers and buyers view such work. This is discussed further in Chapter 4 along with singularization.

Viewing an art piece or object through a historical lens is looking both at its social life and the factors determining its place within that life, which do not exclude linked ideology. Igor Kopytoff terms social life as "social biographies." Diachronically

acknowledging these social lives or social biographies, whichever one prefers, better illuminates why certain pieces struggle in purpose and with adhering to the criteria of their consumers. Kopytoff stresses that multiple social biographies can be attributed to an object, the main three being: the economic biography; the biography of personal and cultural ties to different owners or consumers; and the biography of a piece's general significance within specific societies (Kopytoff 1986:68).

An analysis focusing on an object's biography concerning general significance within society causes one to consider the historical moment at which the European model of "art" was applied to works by American Indians. Elizabeth Hutchinson explains,

Conventional wisdom tells us that Americans did not look at Indian art aesthetically before World War I. Indeed, an exhibition arranged in New York's Grand Central Galleries in 1931 claims to be the very first exhibition that treated Native American art from a "purely aesthetic standpoint" (Hutchinson 2009: 94-95).

Prior to this, similar works were seen as artifacts or functional ethnographic pieces.

Clifford speaks of another similar instance, that of the Museum of Modern Art Show of 1984, "'Primitivism' in Twentieth Century Art," which marked another moment when artifact seemed to transition into a generic "art" category (Clifford 1988:229). In regards to the 1931 Grand Central Galleries exhibit, Molly H. Mullin makes an important note of the direct intentions and sentiments of contemporaries at the time, which sheds light on political involvement and similar future exhibitions that would then chart such works' economic biography:

According to John Sloan, the New York-based painter and one of the key organizers of the Exposition, "spreading the consciousness of Indian art in America affords [a] means by which American artists and patrons of art can contribute to the culture of their own continent, to enrich the product and keep it American"(Mullin 1992:395).

This statement is exemplary of the attempt to associate American Indians with an American National Identity. Additionally, this occurred at a time that was still very much pre-multiculturalism when the concept of the “melting pot” was still accepted though an attempted transition to a more culturally plural view was being made on a political scale. The homogenizing concept of an American identity in this way provided an outlet for the monolithic grouping under one racial-ethnic symbol, the American Indian—usually seen as a Sioux warrior wearing a headdress—while allowing non-Indian immigrants turned U.S. citizens to maintain their valued perceptions of what they called “art.” Though, because this view placed an emphasis on one racial-ethnic group—the projected image of which was homogenizing in itself—, it left an avenue for the birth of an accepted multicultural view through highlighting the celebration of culture in a positive light.

As mentioned earlier, the Western concept of art is associated with both the individual and *class*, specifically. Mullin notes further on a relativistic feel, anthropological in origin, which was harnessed politically in agreement with the U.S. government’s sentiments:

...attempts to use art—an honorific category intimately related to class-structured distinctions—and taste as a way of reimagining American national and regional identities. These newly imagined identities celebrated cultural pluralism, particularly as expressed through commodities *validated* as art [emphasis added] (Mullin 1992:395).

Although sponsored by the nonprofit Painters and Sculptors Gallery Association and not government funded, calling these works “art” was a strategic way of legitimizing them for the purpose of appearing more diverse, relative, and forgiving. This would help bolster the image of non-Indian capitalist organizations and simultaneously that of the promulgated national identity.



Although class is always a key factor in Western-defined art, it can also be de-emphasized or fade into the background, as was the case in the 1930s according to Mullin (1992:396-397) with the development of the discipline of anthropology. Cultural pluralism, multiculturalism, cultural relativism, whichever you prefer, was highlighted, as were issues of race; This left room for homogenization of art specific to certain cultures and exploitation through cultural appropriation and commodification under the façade of being “cultured” by acknowledging diversity. In this case, art created by indigenous peoples were seen more as ethnographic pieces and the Fine Art Market was emphasized as an elitist institution.

With the new focus on American Indian artwork in the early 1900s came a specific showcasing of art from the Southwest region, which caused a shift in American art-collecting trends.

Rejecting tastes that mimicked the European aristocracy...these travelers and settlers in the Southwest sought instead a humble authenticity, a reverse form of conspicuous consumption. They quickly discovered, in the words of one Indian art patron, “the value of Indian culture and art”...in so doing, they reacted against the coercive, assimilationist policies of the federal government, and of Christian missionaries, as well as against a more pervasive contempt for those characterized as primitive (Mullin 1992:398).

Although this occurred, instead of dismantling the structure that sought to prize certain art pieces over others, there was reinforcement of it through the creation of a new trend and taste within the Fine Art Market.

The creation of new art trends and fashions—and by extension new categories— together with their ordering along specific time periods [i.e. Impressionism-late 19<sup>th</sup> century, Realism-mid to late 19<sup>th</sup> century, Cubism-early 20<sup>th</sup> century, Modernism-late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, Postmodernism-late 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> centuries, etc.]

creates a pattern to be followed and standards to be met, which involve anything from authenticity markers to regional symbolism. Indigenous art produced in the Southwest becomes its own art form or style that is then ushered into this larger structure. As

George Kubler states,

When an important work of art has utterly disappeared by demolition and dispersal, we still can detect its perturbations upon other bodies in the field of influence... Works of art resemble gravitational fields in their clustering by "schools." And if we admit that works of art can be arranged in a temporal series as connected expressions, their sequence will resemble an orbit in the fewness, the regularity, and the necessity of the "motions" involved (Kubler 1962:17).

The "necessity of the motions involved" speaks to patterning in the Fine Art Market, incorporating it into habitus. Art types are ordered into periods and labeled by trends because they are seen as moving through a pre-determined chronological framework. They continue to be labeled regardless of their varying values and levels of demand because it is routine within this society, and now more broadly, this growing global market.

Similar labeling or categorization occurs for ethnographic artifacts. But more can be seen in the similarities between art and artifact than the simple fact that they are both categorized within a symbolically conscious diachronic system and what we have seen in that they can shift from one function or label to another. While discussing the "pop art" of Yuxweluptun, Charlotte Townsend-Gault explains,

The surrealist mode, which disrupted any idea that there was a simple or obvious relationship between art and life, had a close affinity with both the methods and results of early twentieth-century ethnography; they exchanged discoveries. Both surrealism and ethnography depended heavily on artifacts and epiphanies gained from "primitive" societies. The process of taking (some of this) back, in his turn, appropriating their style to do so, has given Yuxweluptun his manner... his work brings out the productive, defining relationship between aboriginality and modernism that has largely been obscured in this region by decades of ignorance and prejudice (Townsend-Gault *In* Rushing 1999:115).

This speaks to the artists' reappropriation of culture and autonomy ironically through adoption of a Western art form, something previously touched upon. Yet it also highlights how art trends or movements such as Modernism/Surrealism can signify multivocal significance contingent on the artist's socio-cultural situation, which was previously overlooked since race relations addressed in fine art were never linked to the artist on a level that exceeded simple observation and recognition in terms of stereotypical conceptions.

This chapter draws attention to dynamics of race and class tied within artists' scope of functionality in an industry that adheres to unconscious social rules, though it departs from theoretical links that only partially define what is currently coming to pass. It is an analysis of the multiple forms of arts' labeling and classification not only in a generic sense, but also in the particular category of "fine art." Within these pockets of classification, there is room for transition from one label or function to another along an art piece's social life, yet as with the pieces this study chooses to focus on, some art tends to either struggle in transition or exist in its new position uncomfortably following this transition. This chapter also shows that if perceived in a historically conscious manner, art trends and the development of the discipline of anthropology are more closely linked than many acknowledge.

### Chapter 3 – Identity Struggles

Most people that struggle with personal and outside perceptions of racial/ethnic identity are usually able to conceptualize those issues separately from their professional lives—*usually*. For artists from the Fourth World, there is no deliberate distinction between the two because perceptions of their artwork remain tied to that “Othered” view, and without clarifying a piece’s intended ability to stand alone at each of its viewings, it is seen as an extension of the artist not only in creative individual expression but in racial identity as well. This gives rise to the question of whether there is a possibility for being an artist who is American Indian without the label of “American Indian artist.” In this case, can there really be fully “Assimilated Fine Arts?”

The 2009 Native American Art Studies Association Conference addressed some of these very concerns in their opening keynote speeches. Anita Fields, a sculptor identifying as Osage and Creek explained that art was unique to one’s experience and that her particular pieces were about her own personal ideology *and* culture. She expressed that her sculptures were not forms of practiced cultural tradition, but they were “more to do with the self.” “Osage” pieces, she stated, are functional and have much to do with compassion for families, but “*artists* will make art no matter what...regardless of tools or conditions...art is about making a living in the way you enjoy...the language of art has no boundaries”[emphasis added]. This statement is an attempt to redress the confusion surrounding material culture and the art piece. Fields emphasized that the title of artist is a cross-cultural state of being, though stating that art is about “the self,” she appears to be in agreement with the European or Western view of the artist—being someone who’s artwork is drawn from the individual. Fields also stated that artwork was itself a language

indicative of personal journey i.e. the landscape one encounters; strong emotions; social issues such as poverty or domestic abuse, etc. This is in support of the view of the artist as a cross-cultural title. The fact of the matter is that all identities are formed by situational issues, spheres, and associations.

Because American Indian identities are also linked to the larger constructed national identity, it is increasingly difficult for their artwork to be viewed as something beyond a cultural expression or representation. Though it is interesting to see how individuals such as Anita Fields choose to define their artwork and the title of “artist,” with the understanding that perceptions shift from person to person in terms of what they value and whether or not they personally choose to be cultural representatives in certain situations or venues. Though still, it is understood here that it is a *personal* choice. More of these perceptions will be explored further in Chapter 5.

Identity formation entails more than simple description of one’s profession or ethnic background. It is the collective definition of all things significant, i.e. social, cultural, political, in making a person who they are culminating in one label that without proper analysis might leave obscurities, which is why people might identify in different ways under different circumstances. All artists uniquely produce pieces that not only make them chroniclers of their time, but that also offer aesthetic representations of identity markers. From them, what impacts an artists’ identity formation is visible if carefully sought.

Works of art specify no immediate action or limited use. They are like gateways, where the visitor can enter the space of the painter, or the time of the poet, to experience whatever rich domain the artist has fashioned. But the visitor must come prepared: if he brings a vacant mind or a deficient sensibility, he will see nothing. Adherent meaning is therefore largely a matter of conventional *shared*

*experience*, which is the artist's privilege to rearrange and enrich under certain limitations [emphasis added] (Kubler 1962: 23-24).

Identity formation is very much about how one sees themselves as part *of* or distinct *from* their communities. This can be seen through art, but the larger concept is that both roles—a community member and an individual—are necessary for the creation of art.

From a different viewpoint Parezo states,

But never can one be an artist because it is a form of work, a way to earn a living. The artist has special abilities, according to this social illusion, that places him or her beyond the confines of society. This means that an artist cannot be concerned with whether her or his work is *of* society, only that it is *necessary for* society. True artists must disregard commercialism; they ignore whether the artistic creation sells or not, for to be concerned with sales renders the art impure [emphasis original] (Parezo 1996:499-500).

Parezo is, of course, speaking of the very European inspired *prestigious* artist. Habitus is again visible in this instance considering how one conceives of art as a necessity for society, implying that artists play key orchestrating roles in maintaining certain social processes and specific circulations, i.e. of objects and of replenishing social networks. Because there is a demand for art within society, practice occurs in that some artists feel it is *natural* to attend a school for formal training to meet that demand. As previously emphasized, the struggle for Fourth World artists lies in their inability to shed the perception of their work as something “of society.” This is due not only to the fact that there is a lingering ever visible connection to an American national identity, but also to the fact that there is no way of concealing the struggle undergone for the legitimate acceptance into an industry—the Fine Art Market—which grants one the title of affluent participant and contributor to society. Non-Indian artists within the Fine Art Market are not viewed as constantly attempting to maintain their place in the industry. Though even if artists identifying as American Indian have gained prestige, they constantly have to

explain or define their work for others so their place in the industry is secured instead of allowing their art to be defined by other labels such as tourist art.

The emergence of a Southwest art trend is a fruitful avenue for analysis into identity issues among artists from the Fourth World. In 1964, the Institute for American Indian Arts' (IAIA) assistant arts director, James McGrath, was responsible for designing the "First American Indian Performing Arts Festival," which included displays of both traditional material culture and contemporary visual art pieces made by students. McGrath's intention was to evoke evolution from traditional to contemporary art forms as well as the cultural ethos still embedded within the more recent work, showcasing a hybridized student art style. "In aesthetics class students heard much about abstraction and distilling the 'essence' of their Indian cultures"(Gritton 1992:30). To emphasize his point, McGrath included student statements about their work within the festival catalogue. For example, Earl Edgar stated:

I find myself in *two cultures*: in this I find my art. I try to incorporate different old Sioux artifacts and things that the Indian valued, into new modern ideas. Also I draw sources from poetry, myths, and Indian folklore. Now being exposed to new modern concepts I can express myself. As a contemporary painter I feel this is a new moving type of Indian Art [emphasis added] (Earl Edgar *In* Gritton 1992:29).

Edgar's remarks on "two cultures" being incorporated within his work resonate as W.E.B. Du Bois' concept of double consciousness. Similar to the popular fiction writer Sherman Alexie's description of a personal identity struggle during which he realized he was both "an immigrant and indigenous."\* But was Edgar and his peer's artwork more a reflection of pride for new directions one's work takes—as fine artists—or a reflection of cultural loss and grappling at some form of revitalization or continuity? It is difficult to

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\* Alexie on September 22, 2009—From his acceptance speech upon receiving the George Mason Award at George Mason University.

say and contemporary student perspectives are bound to be multivocal and lined with an eagerness to broaden one's artistic scope with advancements in new technological innovations and globalization. But they can also be weighted down by a sense of responsibility upon choosing to embrace the role of representative of one's culture[s], which many are often pressured into doing.

Art created in a community by multiple community members, Fields explained at the 2009 NAASA Conference, acknowledges interdependence of all things between the earth and sky. Yet, this type of work can be easily homogenized. It is when the pieces are created in isolation from the community that they are more heterogeneous and have more fine art potential, even though the individual artist creating the piece might hold the same sentiments for interdependence between the earth and sky. The change of environment is reflected in the style. As Janet C. Berlo and Ruth B. Phillips clarify,

With this change has come a decentering of the particular sequences demonstrated by the history of Western art, a reorientation that has begun to 'decolonize' art history. Postmodernism has, thus, established a climate in which it is possible to reposition the work of Native modernists within a much longer engagement with Western visual arts...For Native art, we propose, the modern is defined not by a particular set of stylistic or conceptual categories, but by the adoption of Western representational styles, genres, and media in order to produce works that function as autonomous entities and that are intended to be experienced independently of community or ceremonial contexts (Berlo and Phillips 1998:210).

Postmodern painting, which has become popular among many contemporaries such as Thomas Poolaw, Fritz Scholder [now deceased], Jane Ash Poitras, etc., is allegorical, offering a bricolage setting in which true sentiments can exist clandestinely under the veil of avant-garde. Postmodern painting, according to art critiques, has become known as the anti-thesis to "Native art," this is because it allows the work to retain some form of ethnic ambiguity. As explained in the previous chapter, Fourth World artists gain access into the



previously exclusive Fine Art Market through such means, yet although they were there for decades, their presence is still an anomaly *because* of questions raised regarding identity that inadvertently translate to how their artwork is defined.

Upon speaking to two IAIA professors at the 2009 NAASA Conference about upcoming students' artwork, they stated that many make fun of contemporary artists who are sold out, and their own artwork is very pop-media oriented—which is how many Postmodern pieces are oriented—“but they haven't found themselves their own style.” These students clearly utilize a Western representational style because it is in the mainstream media, readily available to draw from. The generic stylistic category could easily be labeled Postmodern for many of these young artists, but the style this professor clearly referred to was one concerned with personal identity formation, something all visual art professors want reflected within their students work because it demonstrates accretion or growth. When accomplished non-Native fine artists evoke this within their work, it is not that ethnicity or culture is left out. That culture is simply disguised as the norm, as common because it is the dominant culture. When individuals coming from marginalized populations achieve this level of style, their ethnic identity is not so easily concealed. The crisis is that, in some circumstances, the label “Native art” may be appropriate, though in others, the art piece is still significantly individual and such a label only holds work back in terms of possible monetary gain or achievable prestige.

But all this hiding behind generic stylistic categories to conceal a deeper style results from popular consumption patterns. “Intrinsic meaning constitutes the study called iconology, and they pertain to the explanation of cultural symbols. Iconology is a variety of cultural history, in which the study of works of art is devoted to the extraction of

conclusions concerning culture”(Kubler 1962:24). This is what consumers of “Native Art” aim to achieve through viewing, owning, and commodifying such art. They wish to extract the cultural and ethnic ethos of the piece. But many Fourth World artists in the Fine Art Market are in that industry because they do not want their work to be consumed for the further objectification and othering of their ethnic group(s). After re-emphasizing that art cannot be a free autonomous creation unless it is held within the classification system of Western fine art, Phillips and Steiner state that, “its hegemonic implications for race have, however, been less clearly set out, in large part because the highly selective promotion of non-Western art by modernist artists has constructed the illusion that a universalist inclusiveness has been achieved”(Phillips and Steiner 1999:7). But of course, this *is* an illusion.

Another complicating element is that of the Pan Indian identity that many American Indians embrace. As Steven Leuthold explains, “Interest in how aesthetic practices lead to collective identification does not proceed from the physical fact of the aesthetic object but from individual or collective experiences of the physical fact”(Leuthold 1998:8). This identity rises out of collectively felt historical annihilation or ethnocide. Pan Indianism has become a large contributor to American Indian identity formation, especially in the years following 1968 and the American Indian Movement, which sought Indian unity, sovereignty and action against issues such as poverty, police harassment, political injustice dealing with broken treaties, housing and health issues. Pan Indianism, reflected in art such as *AIM* by Star Wallowing Bull (fig.2), is not a shield for hidden identity, as less explicit pieces can be. Rather, it is an unabashed statement of

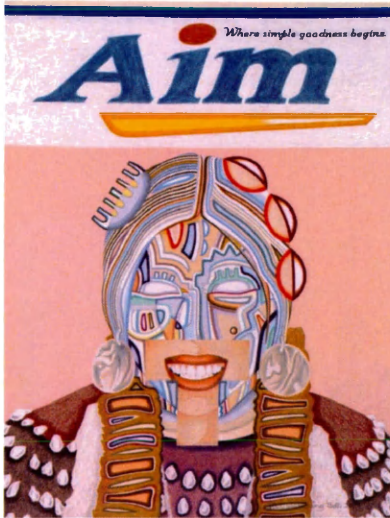


Fig. 2\*

influence. In speaking about the piece, Star Wallowing Bull states that he chose to employ abstraction and realism. One might say that this is a Postmodern piece in that it employs both these elements while in addition, making a political statement. This piece can easily fit into the Fine Art Market, and it should be noted that other pieces by Star are transnationally consumed and observed. It is labeled “fine art” because of the style, yet some may consider it “Native Art” because of the content. What remains unique about artistic expression of Pan Indian identity, aside from its political aura, is that it homogenizes a collective racial group instead of othering a specific ethnic group. Yet, should one have to choose between the two evils? In addition, it is unjust that artists like Star should be concerned with how Native or non-Native their art appears when other artists can effortlessly insert symbols of identity into their work without fear of an “othered” gaze.

Identity formation that can actually grant a certain amount of power and social capital to these artists is developed through the accrual of prestige. In his discussion of

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\* Star Wallowing Bull, *AIM*, 2009. Prismacolor pencil on paper. Courtesy of the artist.

the Kula system, Appadurai explains how shells and men define each other's value reciprocally. A similar relationship exists between artists and paintings—or other visual forms of fine art—early on in one's career. Once he/she gains enough prestige, they can then set a monetary standard for their work that others operating within the social environment of the Fine Art Market cannot contest, this is heterodoxy or individual autonomy utilized through the industry, though it is also practice—not praxis—because such accrual of prestige falls in line with expectations of a routinized/natural path for artists on the way to success. A socially prestigious identity is attainable apart from content in one's paintings, which is why art vendors outside the Fine Art Market can also gain prestige, though within the confines of their specific art category. Though, as Appadurai states, "...the thrust of commoditization at the production end is toward standardization of technical (how-to) knowledge"(Appadurai 1986:42). This is the difference between kitschy souvenir art, or tourist art, and fine art. Knowledge concerning the production of the latter is not standardized. As a result, any prestige gained by an artist within the industry of for example, tourist art, can only reach a level in which the ensuing social capital is associated with skill-level or strict adherence to one particular style. The artists looked at within this study are allowed more flexibility and can be pushed forward even holding their place within the Fine Art Market with the aid of prestige, however, this particular type of identity is not the only factor taken into consideration by those who consume the artwork, as seen above. This is another reason why Fourth World artists such as these may function within the Fine Art Market, yet not exist adequately within it, or should we say not as others of non-Native descent do.

This chapter deals with the multifaceted properties of identity, which lend themselves to the often times turbulent struggles Fourth World artists face. Identity struggles for these artists mainly revolve around issues of attempting a negotiation of the dichotomous ethnic and professional/prestige identities. Such struggles result from unconscious “Othering” through the socially conditioned gaze of art connoisseurs and a more general public, which have gained a hyper awareness of Indian-ness. Because as an ethnic or racial group, American Indians are marginalized and homogenized, there is a tendency to label their artwork as “Native art,” which may not always be in line with its initial intentions for reception. This is due to fear of the then questioned validity of their work’s place within the Fine Art Market. On a similar analytical note, Appadurai explains,

What is being negotiated...is authenticity. That is, as the pace of mobility and the crowding at the top of Western society become more marked, and as technology permits the multiplication of prestige objects, there is an increasingly ironic dialogue between the need for ever-shifting criteria of authenticity in the West and the economic motives of the producers and dealers...The only way to preserve the function of these commodities in the prestige economies of the modern West is to complicate the criteria of authenticity (Appadurai 1986:44-45).

When the value of an art piece is, for the consumer, contingent on whether or not the artist identifies as a “Native artist,” what is actually being negotiated is authenticity. If a piece is meant for sale, then the consumer/buyer holds the power, for they are the ones who’s subjective definition of “authenticity” will be the determining factor of a sale and of whether or not the art piece in question lives up to its intended social life. As Jaune explains, “authentication is an imperial rationalization for increasing or decreasing value”(Quick-to-See-Smith 2009:1). Authenticity is just a term used to validate the monopolization of power by one group who passes judgment on another. “Complicating

criteria of authenticity” allows for artists to re-appropriate some autonomy in that they can create potential for new artistic trends, types and styles, because if they are giving the audience something they cannot immediately categorize, i.e. a Postmodern piece with Native elements, but not traditional or folk elements, the piece then has the ability to be seen as a fine art piece that is hierarchically more legitimate than other art categories. This might be seen as gaining a newfound advantage *to an extent*.

But there is always an expectation for American Indians to live up to these essentialized models in association with an American National Identity; this is true even for artists in the Fine Art Market. This poses the problem of contradictory purpose and function of the art. Fine art is about the individual’s creation! But they are Native, so where are the elements of their traditions expressed? This is usually where the confusion unfolds. As Townsend-Gault points out,

The argument, commonly attributed to anthropologists, but in fact made in many quarters, that if Native artists abandon tradition they lose their identity, even betray it, raises the question of what “tradition” is, and by cosigning their cultures to a past seems to overlook its present (Townsend-Gault *In Rushing* 1999:115).

As stated toward the beginning of the chapter, identity deals with a multitude of representations and issues. An artists’ present is not just their temporary circumstances but rather something that largely encompasses social, political, historical, and ethnic elements. Therefore identities are diverse and *malleable* as well. Circumstances influencing the creative decisions made to exclude or include certain symbolic heritage should be taken into account, which would help to understand their present as well as the art itself. Graburn said it best in *Ethnic and Tourist Arts: Cultural Expressions from the Fourth World*:

...The study of the arts of the Fourth World...must take into account more than one symbolic and aesthetic system, and the fact that the arts may be produced by one group for consumption by another. The study of Fourth World arts is, par excellence, the study of *changing* arts—of emerging ethnicities, modifying identities, and commercial and colonial stimuli and repressive actions [emphasis original] (Graburn 1976:2).

As will be seen through more examples in Chapter 5, indigenous artists presently participating within the Fine Art Market are more and more choosing to identify solely as artists, in the Western sense of the term. If they additionally choose to incorporate an *ethnic* identity, they often embrace their multi-cultural state of being by claiming an identity of two—or possibly more—cultures, that of their ethnic heritage, and that of the dominant culture in which they were partially raised.

## **Chapter 4 – Institutionalization and Artists’ Advancement**

The Fine Art Market, as explained earlier, is an industry that has no concrete form. It functions through smaller institutions that aid in perpetuating the dominant ideology of a capital market economy and reinforces the inner social hierarchy common to all these institutions. It is within these smaller institutions, such as museums, galleries, and visual art education facilities, that artists shape the ways in which they perceive, orient, tailor, and promote their work. For this reason, an analysis of these institutions’ structures and missions are crucial to the understanding of these artists’ place within the larger more abstract Fine Art Market.

### **Educational Facilities**

An important place to begin is a focus on educational institutions. The 1904 superintendent of Indian schools, Estelle Reel, encouraged the implementation of courses in “Native American artistic traditions at both day and boarding schools, using local Native craftspeople as teachers. Indian service publications came to refer to this as the ‘Native industries’ curriculum”(Hutchinson 2009:51). This is important because it highlights a time at which the U.S. government began exercising more control over Native education. Reel’s curriculum also greatly influenced the ways in which art was taught to Native students and how Native traditions were perceived. As Hutchinson goes on to say,

Reel’s programs borrowed heavily from mainstream efforts to ameliorate industrial work through handicrafts...Close analysis of photographs and written accounts reveals that Native industries courses gave Indian school students a rigorous grounding in mainstream ideas about both art and cultural identity (Hutchinson 2009:54).



It is evident that government-backed scholastic institutions deliberately ushered Native students into a process of learning through assimilation. This is an example of orthodoxy or hegemony in that students began to accept the Western concept of art readily—as natural. The teaching of that concept was fostered in institutions that were originally created to assimilate colonized peoples into mainstream society, and assimilation was then favorable to dominant mainstream society. Any type of craft or artistic creation naturally needed to fit within a system that enabled the accrual of monetary profit to capitalize on such production to the fullest. In 1875, when ledger art done by captives held at Fort Marion began being sold, art created by American Indians was considered to be advancing toward what was thought of as “fine art.” Berlo and Phillips write, “Many contemporary Native artists consider these ledger artists the first modernists”(Berlo and Phillips 1998:213). However, Reel’s curriculum shows strategic government-supported advancement into this direction within schools for Native students.

Through these educational visual art institutions, a deeper level of dominance over indigenous culture is suggested; Jaune refers to this as the “hegemony of economics.” It consists of all those forces that have influenced and continue to alter indigenous art for its heightened commodification and injection into a global market. “They have slicked up, industrialized surfaces, high tech designs to fit the taste of these buyers and collectors today”(Quick-to-See-Smith 2009:4). Art by American Indians created specifically for commodification is termed “Neonative.” As Alfred Young Man explains, “Neonativism is a lack of will, a lack of character, a lack of independent free spirit—it all depends on nostalgia, it’s very naïve, and I think fundamentally it caters to the dominant concept of what Natives should be”(Young Man 1991:17).

As seen earlier, Graburn's analysis would call this "Neonative" art "Commercial Fine Arts" or "Souvenirs," which in the case of the latter, "the symbolic content is so reduced, and conforms so entirely to the consumers' popular notions of the salient characteristics of the minority group, that we may call these items ethno-kitsch..."(Graburn 1976:6). Many souvenir or tourist arts cater to Anglo consumer's stereotypical perception of Nativeness, though the art looked at in this particular study is set apart because it reflects the creative expression and identity of the artist. Although it is probably created with the knowledge that it will be sold, that is not the sole driving force behind the piece's creation. Such pieces may use Native stereotypes as aesthetic symbols of colonization and forced acculturation in an effort to express statements that speak to contemporary social conditions. For example, Micah's piece *Bringing Home a White Boy*, (fig. 3), uses stereotypical images such as a feather in the hair and two braids while



Fig. 3\*

hinting at contemporary issues such as inter-racial relationships or dating. Such pieces hold power because they use Anglo perceptions of Nativeness in a way that counters the stereotype's negative association and redirects it for the intended purposes of the artist.

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\* Micah The Werewolf Wesley, *Bringing Home a White Boy*, 2007. Mixed Media. Courtesy of the artist.

Pieces such as *Bringing Home a White Boy* are created within educational art institutions today such as The Institute of American Indian Arts in Santé Fe, New Mexico, not as blind products of a specific curriculum, but as *individual* interpretations of that curriculum. In recalling identity formation, it should be mentioned that notions of inter-tribalism or Pan-Indianism were rooted within the minds of younger generations as a result of forcing Native children into boarding schools, forever altering “traditional” Native art in terms of functionality and cultural relevance. Constructions of different versions of “traditional” art were created. IAIA may have facilitated the projection of Westernized models of art onto indigenous work through perpetuating foreign *techniques* so artists might cater to a larger Fine Art Market, but they have changed artists’ styles and pride themselves on encouraging pluralistic art in *subject-matter*.

In her article, *Cross-Cultural Education vs. Modernist Imperialism: The Institute of American Indian Arts*, Joy Gritton addresses the fact that during its founding in 1962, IAIA prided itself on fostering a “New Indian Art.” Gritton calls attention to the descriptions of this new art as one which removes

...stereotypic expectations to allow for innovation in technique, style, and subject. Students were encouraged to use their “cultural difference as a basis for creative expression,” and to develop strategies for modern application of traditional forms... The Institute’s curriculum and reward system initiated through selective exhibitions, special events, and publications favored a Western, modern aesthetic dominated by *individualism*. Simultaneously it encouraged and stressed commercial success in the non-Indian art market [emphasis added] (Gritton 1992:28).

According to Gritton, the result of such a curriculum is an evolution of traditional heritage into Modernism. But as explained in Chapters 2 and 3, the art created by American Indian fine artists who have received formal training today does not fit happily within this category because consumers wish to label it “Native art.” Confusion arises

surrounding these works, Chapter 3 has explored identity formation as part of understanding that confusion, though further understanding lies within an analysis of the desire to create such an institution as IAIA that sought to unite American Indian traditions and cultures with Western fine art. There exists more than simple colonization tactics in this history.

The IAIA initially received great support from the federal government and the international arts community. Even its first exhibit in 1964 was orchestrated and held in the offices of the Department of the Interior in Washington. The political backing offered by officials such as Stewart Udall, Secretary of the Interior, and Philleo Nash, commissioner of BIA, and the frequency with which the school served as a host to foreign dignitaries gave the institute a nationalistic feel. This is explicit of the desire to associate American Indians with an American National Identity and it reflects a resonating desire for renewed accountability by the U.S. government for past injustices and genocide committed against American Indians. As the late 1960s and early 1970s approached, IAIA was considered a political benefit to the U.S. government, focusing on minority education with a respect for cultural difference at a time of Native American activism and the civil rights movement.

Strategic molding of its earliest curriculum in the 1930s, when IAIA was still a boarding school, appeared as such:

In the 1930s, their style was institutionalized by the Santa Fe Indian School, where a white professor, Dorothy Dunn, taught what is now called the “Santa Fe Indian style” or “Traditional Indian style”: characters are depicted in traditional and religious activities in flat, two-dimensional paintings with no background, in gouache or tempera (Dunn). These works acquired a certain visibility on the national and international levels in the 1930s, that is to say, during a period when there was a national effort to define a “true” American art. Thus, the art of the

native peoples of the nation was accepted for its American specificity for a few years (Baldit 1997:27).

The “Santa Fe Indian style” resembled the 2-dimensionality and subject matter of ledger art, which was produced independently of training by white teachers. This style’s adoption highlights the institution’s early attempts at cultural continuity *and* the shaping of a national image. Joy Gritton and Jackson Rushing acknowledge that “American Indian art came to be touted as the vital root of an untainted, uniquely New World tradition by those critics, scholars, institutions, and artists endeavoring to give shape and form to an independent *American art*”(Gritton *In* Archuleta and Strickland 1991:25).

Gritton also points out that IAIA was founded (1962) *lacking* a Native Influence. The director of the Museum of Modern Art, René d’Harnoncourt, through the support he received from the Rockefeller Foundation and his ability to secure the Indian Commissioner Glenn Emmons for establishing IAIA on the grounds of the old Santa Fe Indian School, had a hand in associating IAIA with a “non-Native context and application for Indian arts” (Gritton 1992). This was done to boost the dwindling income of an ethnic-art market. The shift in context was ethnological to aesthetic. Gritton notes the Department of Interior’s “First Annual Invitational Exhibition of American Indian Paintings” taking place in the fall of 1964, which she describes as being “a visual juxtaposition of source and departure, which served at the time to legitimize through association and promote appreciation through disassociation”(Gritton 1992:29). She goes onto explain how the exhibit caused the image of the IAIA to be one of revitalization of Native American art. The pieces in the exhibit, which represented the talent of then students and professors, showed audiences enough to associate them with American

Indians, but then sought to satiate their desire for “fine art” through departing from tradition. Thus indigenous fine art was produced.

This reassessment of IAIA’s history shows artistic evolution for those American Indian students who receive formal training and the politics involved therein. Over the years IAIA has embraced cultural artistic or symbolic traditions to different degrees, though the Western fine art training techniques impacted how the artists came to think of themselves and their work. Now these artists are a product of their time and circumstance in that they are taught within institutions that place an emphasis on exploration and advancement of the individual’s creative expression. They are descendents of colonized peoples and their work reflects the ensuing socio-cultural milieu. Catherine Baldit’s discussion of once IAIA professor, Fritz Scholder, is one such example,

Influenced by pop art and Francis Bacon’s expressionism, Scholder was the first artist of American Indian ancestry to dare express the harsh reality of what it meant to be an American Indian in the 1960s and 1970s, thus supporting the Pan-Indian movement. One of the methods he used was to adopt the white stereotypes associated with American Indians—the physical appearance of the Indian as a Plains warrior wearing a war bonnet, as well as the drunken or lazy Indian—and to use them in his art to show the state of the American Indian at a time of social and political instability. Many articles refer to him as an American Indian although he himself maintains that he has always insisted on the fact that he is “an artist, not an Indian”(Baldit 1997:30).

The similarity between Scholder’s work and that of Micah’s, seen above, is in their adoption of stereotypes. Such work is interesting because it offers personal commentary on one’s social environment while broaching topics such as decolonization.

The fact of the matter is that cultural traditions and symbols are no longer products of the post-colonial present, which students are forced to address and work within. Scholastic institutions for these artists have become hegemonic powers that help to alleviate identity and socio-economic struggles through validating the use of traditional

symbols within and alongside present commentary. As Bourdieu explains, "...the sociology of educational institutions...is capable of making a decisive contribution to the science of the structural dynamics of class relations, which is an often neglected aspect of the sociology of power"(Bourdieu *In* Brown 1973:72). Formal artistic training legitimizes the work produced by these artists for consumption as a specific type of commodity within the larger market economy, reinforcing social hierarchy, yet facilitating the creation of changing art styles that may attempt subversion as long as they remain under the label of avant-garde—yes this is paradoxical. If the artists are pleased with the work they produce within these institutions, and they then go onto sell pieces to those who are happy to consume them as fine art, then everyone is happy...*aren't they...?*

### **Museums and Galleries**

It is now necessary to shift to a focus on American Indian fine art in a museum and gallery context. As institutions, museums are liminal spaces that objects, art, and material culture pass through. Collections are transferred in and out of them with the movement of time and they may even be re-exhibited in a new light once perceptions surrounding the objects have changed, or once the objects shift from one zone or category to another. Being an elitist institution, a museum amounts to that which those who run it aim to achieve. Therefore this institution is important because it is a space that sets certain pre-determined perceptions of the collections within. Here again is an example of orthodoxy, a practice of structuring what others not in the dominant position will come to accept as natural or doxa. How curators and art patrons perceive fine art produced by American Indians is how others will receive it because the museum and gallery are the framing venues, which they control.

Mullin discusses how Indian art patrons are not threatened by differences posed by American Indians and their art because they were simply those “who were generally being offered cultural preservation, and some political and economic power, but little cultural authority—that is, *the power to determine classifications and hierarchies of value*”[emphasis added] (Mullin 1992:413). Although American Indians are themselves becoming patrons in addition to their role as artists/clients, and even though those prestigious enough are able to have a large amount of control over their works’ pricing, they still have difficulty determining larger hierarchies of value. They also do not have *complete* control over how their work will be classified, because the consumers hold much of the power. Only recently are these social boundaries being pushed, and although progress is made, they are met with difficulties. For example, if a few American Indians open a gallery or museum, they are able to define the work within that venue to their consumers and set the prices they wish, however they cannot control the other ways—outside their gallery or museum—art created by American Indians will be marketed and priced. Such differences will inevitably be compared and conflict with their work when consumer’s perceptions of work can be shallow or underdeveloped, for example if their interest lies solely within aesthetic appeal.

The changes occurring the most are changes *within* the gallery or museum not *of* the actual institution or hierarchies of value. Those are the shifts of classification of the objects moving in and out of them. Clifford notes,

A less dramatic movement from zone 1 [the art market or art museum] to zone 2 [the ethnographic museum, material culture, and craft] can be seen in the routine process within art galleries whereby objects become “dated,” of interest less as immediately powerful works of genius than as fine examples of a period style (Clifford 1988:225).



This movement is a temporal process, rarely initiated by patrons or clients then quickly changing in that instance. What art by Fourth World fine artists go through however is different. As Clifford points out, “Though specific artists have come to be known and prized, the aura of ‘cultural’ production attaches to them much more than, say, to Picasso, who is not in any essential way valued as a ‘Spanish artist’”(Clifford 1988:225). This again speaks to an “othered” view of these artists’ work, in such a case, labeling of the art is not a temporal process, but rather an action that is coming from external means, quick and un-meditated. For this reason, artists of the Fourth World seek formal training in an institution for visual artists, in the hopes of expediting a shift in perception of their work, which can now be seen as legitimate within the fine art category. The double standard exists through taking advantage of the fact that American Indians are “othered” and therefore must seek such training that uses assimilating methodologies, but also in the initial issue of being put up in these rigid institutions that are specifically for either material culture or fine art.

The museum—or gallery—specializes in chronotoping, or setting the stage, through curation, that aids in associating an object with specific contexts and histories.

The term *chronotope*, as used by Bakhtin, denotes a configuration of spatial and temporal indicators in a fictional setting where (and when) certain activities and stories *take place*. One cannot realistically situate historical detail—putting something “in its time”—without appealing to explicit or implicit chronotopes [emphasis original] (Clifford 1988:236).

Such a process, because of the institutions’ European origins, adheres to a Western conceptualization of time. This is also why art is organized into periods, however, this process, which collectors and patrons practice, is one of the reasons why American Indian fine artists struggle with getting their work to be classified as fine art. The source

of these issues is that the idea of fine art is originally a Western conception that was used in perpetuating ethnocentrism, making pluralistic application difficult. Graburn states, “European and Western society in general, while promoting and rewarding change in its own arts and sciences, bemoans the same in others”(Graburn 1976:13). He then reiterates Lévi-Strauss’ (1963) understanding of how the powerful view “others” use of “nature” to describe experience and existence, and then demarcate nature and “others” from civilized “culture.”

But in addition to specializing in chronotoping, museums and galleries are unique spaces that serve as sites for transnational interlocking cognition. As Appadurai explains,

Auctions accentuate the commodity dimension of objects (such as paintings) in a manner that might well be regarded as deeply inappropriate in other contexts. Bazaar settings are likely to encourage commodity flows as domestic settings may not. The variety of such contexts, within and across societies, provides the link between the social environment of the commodity and its temporal and symbolic state (Appadurai 1986:15).

The museum and/or gallery is that one specific context that represents a neutral space to be filled with art or material culture and in so doing, unites conceptualizations surrounding the objects on display that are linked to their specific “social environments” and “temporal and symbolic state.” This is permitted because these are arenas open to a diverse variety of consumers and the space, much like scholastic institutions, is intended for education and interpretation in addition to consumption. Though instead of achieving a precise placement of significance for the viewer combined with objective appreciation and respect, what is often felt surrounding *fine art* within such venues is a cacophony of perceptions due to the knowledge that the pieces represent individual expressions. This becomes even more confusing if the artist is “othered.” The constant recalling that fine art is something linked to class also distracts from swift harmonious consumption and the

viewer falls back on such perceptions of terms such as avant-garde, Modern, or Postmodern to help situate themselves in relation to what they are viewing and what knowledge should come naturally: A Postmodern piece of what medium? By what artist? Of what size and what date? Coming from whose previous possession? Oh yes, of course that will surely be above this price. The categorizations are safety zones and the curated exhibits help to condition the viewer for prepared reception of information in which they may apply those categorizations. This is a material culture exhibit, prepare to learn about other cultures; this is a fine art exhibit, prepare to be confused yet be ready to form a positive or negative opinion of the work.

Museums and galleries create specific tournaments of value for art pieces produced. The Fine Art Market is a paradigm of those tournaments because it is the umbrella industry under which exchanges within these institutions are made. “Tournaments of value are complex periodic events that are removed in some culturally well-defined way from the routines of economic life. Participation in them is likely to be both a privilege of those in power and an instrument of status contests between them”(Appadurai 1986:21). Artists are considered privileged to have their work exhibited in a museum or gallery. Openings of these exhibits are social events that garner prestige and that may be compared to other such showcasing of art. It is in such settings, artists or curators may frame the art pieces displayed. The Fine Art Market is distinguished from “the routines of economic life” in that it is a hybrid industry by maintaining a connection to the larger market economy in the employed use of monetary value, but additionally facilitating a type of *specialized* supply and demand.

...What are exchanged are tokens of value that can be transformed into other media only by a complex set of steps and only in unusual circumstances...there is

an agonistic, romantic, individualistic, and gamelike ethos that stands in contrast to the ethos of everyday economic behavior (Appadurai 1986:50).

There is most definitely a romanticism about museums and galleries as well as the larger more amorphous industry of the Fine Art Market.

Those who make exchanges that initiate new exhibitions orchestrate this romanticism, and therefore, the ethos of the Fine Art Market. These are typically art dealers, traders, gallery owners, curators, and other such patrons typically of a high middle or elite class. These individuals are also those with the power to decommoditize or singularize—attributing a specific value unique to that one piece—the art in exchange. Appadurai states that unless decommoditized formally, things like these art pieces will remain potential commodities. “This deactivation leaves them open not only to the various kinds of singularization...but also to individual, as opposed to collective, redefinitions”(Appadurai 1986:76). The potential for redefinition along the social life of a piece created by an artist from the Fourth World is particularly dangerous, for even if the piece continues to hold an exchange value, it does not guarantee the accurate portrayal of the artist and the type of work they wish to produce. Singularization of a piece, however, can be beneficial because it can accentuate the artist’s meaning and call attention to the piece’s message and unique qualities. According to Igor Kopytoff,

Singularity, in brief, is confirmed not by the object’s structural position in an exchange system, but by intermittent forays into the commodity sphere, quickly followed by reentries into the closed sphere of singular “art.” But the two worlds cannot be kept separate for very long; for one thing, museums must insure their holdings. So museums and art dealers will name prices, be accused of the sin of transforming art into a commodity, and in response, defend themselves by blaming each other for creating and maintaining a commodity market (Kopytoff *In* Appadurai 1986:82-83).

This is a perfect example of habitus, or how the structure of the commodity market is perpetuated through a need to “insure” one’s holdings. This process is unconscious because the need to protect one’s business or institution linked to the market economy and expenditures made for insurance are common. Though dealers of art often consider themselves cultured and above commodity fetishism, which is why the exposition of commoditization can be seen as taboo and singularization or decommoditizing is more greatly favored.

To give an example, Danielle Moretti-Langholtz, my mentor and art patron, has kindly shown me her collection of fine art pieces, created by a range of artists including some close friends of hers such as the late Mirac Creepingbear. During that time she had made it known that her intention for those pieces was never to re-sell them—pulling them out of a commodity market and decommoditizing them—but rather, she would donate them to her alma mater, The University of Oklahoma. Not until a more detailed interview with her took place did it become clear that this was also singularization. Upon inquiring about the meaning of the donations, Moretti-Langholtz explained that her donations to The University of Oklahoma or to the Fred Jones Jr. Museum of Art would be an act of “reciprocity for the institution you donate to.” Pieces by artists like Rance Hood and Mirac Creepingbear “are very much appreciated there because it’s the Southern Plains [where these artists were from].” Such gifts, she said, “redefine my relationship with the museum. I know the value, and I know [they] know the value, and I’m going to give it to [them].” Donations to the Fred Jones Jr. Museum of Art, she explained, show knowledge of what *they* value in addition to an awareness of the market value. Such knowledge bases are the means by which patrons like Moretti-Langholtz measure reciprocal values.

Although these pieces have become gifts, knowledge of their market value is never forgotten and it is that knowledge that helps solidify social connections made. Appadurai even points out that "...knowledge *about* commodities is itself increasingly commoditized"[emphasis original] (Appadurai 1986:54). An object is made singular because it is re-defined as *a gift*, emphasizing dual or reciprocal understandings of that piece's meaning or newly acquired meaning. In this process, participants ensure their prestige and the piece's underlying value as well. Fine art pieces are ideal for this type of exchange.

Another example of singularization can be seen in art auctions or private gallery viewings through restricted commoditization, "in which some things are confined to a very narrow sphere of exchange"(Kopytoff *In* Appadurai 1986:74). This confinement is also another way in which the Fine Art Market is kept structured in an exclusive manner mainly for social elites. The way singularization can be a drawback for work by American Indian fine artists is when it occurs as a result of unintended attention paid to culture. "Culture ensures that some things remain unambiguously singular, it resists the commoditization of others; and it sometimes resingularizes what has been commoditized"(Kopytoff *In* Appadurai 1986:73). This is in reference to the mistake of labeling fine art by American Indians "Native art," which mixes it in with crafts and mass-produced cultural pieces that may or may not have functionality. As Brenda Jo Bright and Liza Bakewell explain, "...remember that debates within and about museums only intermittently reveal the ways in which ordinary people act in the arenas open to them. When they do, they often focus on folk art and *ethnic art*, not popular arts"[emphasis added] (Bright and Bakewell 1995:3). Those important in the acts of

decommoditizing and singularizing, exchanging, gifting, and exhibiting are the arbiters of authenticity, the art dealers, curators, and patrons through whose politics those decisions will be made.

This chapter calls attention to the sub-institutions of the Fine Art Market and the ways in which they steer art production—through educational facilities—and manipulate art categorization, value placement, and gain of prestige—through museums and galleries. History and politics are largely responsible for the ways in which these institutions function today, the result being the reinforced dominance of a class-exclusive Western-originating ideology currently centered on fine art's existence as a hybrid commodity with one foot in the larger market economy and one in a restricted zone of exchange. In addition to legitimizing the work as "fine art," formalized artistic training through schools prepares artists for accepting that their work will undergo various re-definition along the path of its social life.

## Chapter 5 – In The Words Of The Artists: Interviews and Analysis

As seen in Chapter 3, the thing that fine artists identifying as American Indian commonly struggle with is the influence of tradition and assimilation on their work and how that translates to a conception of their role as an artist. Incorporating both one's heritage and the popular media into art should not be a problem for fine art artists since it has always been about individual self-expression; Unless of course that artist is American Indian and is subjected to judgments having to do with stereotypical racial perceptions in addition to conceptions of an American National Identity. This issue is exacerbated by the fact that American Indian Tourist Art is a booming industry within the United States. It becomes a competing category because it confuses consumers' perception of symbolism. According to Townsend-Gault, "That assimilation is the enemy is agreed upon by artists as different as Dick Yuxweluptun, and the Haida artist Robert Davidson, as is the fact that it is best resisted by maintaining a defining tradition, or by showing that the tradition is un-constraining"(Townsend-Gault *In Rushing* 1999:114). This does not address how creating fine art is logistically an assimilated practice itself, but rather highlights the ways American Indians try to combat that fact through placing an emphasis on tradition in their work. "Historical deception, contemporary bureaucracy, and environmental devastation have given Yuxweluptun his subject: a clash of ideologies and of social and spiritual goals, in wild and surreal intermingling"(Townsend-Gault *In Rushing* 1999:114). For the artist Townsend-Gault mentions, the goal is to make a commentary on political and social circumstance, as is the goal of many artists. Although the Fine Art Market is a representation of elitism and capitalism, it is also the perfect tool for that goal.



Before broaching the question of artists' awareness of their place and role within the larger fine art industry, it is important to first establish an understanding of their perception of "art" itself. Touching on this, the artist Star Wallowing Bull, member of the White Earth (Minnesota) Reservation, states:

SWB: Some people have stated that my art is not "Indian Art." I never said it was "Indian Art," it's just art. People seem to be confused about how to label me these days....It's not really necessary to label my nationality. Like I said before, I'm more than happy to share my heritage, pride and culture with people. Let me give an example: Swedish, Norwegian artist James Rosenquist. Slovakian artist, Andy Warhol. Irish, Hungarian artist Georgia O'Keefe, and German and Cherokee artist Robert Rauschenberg. Why aren't these great artists nationalities labeled on them?

Star understands the dynamic in place that causes viewers and consumers to have the desire to label artwork by artists of a marginalized ethnicity, though he emphasizes his desire for his art to be seen as something that can stand alone, seen for the message or story it tells without preconceived judgments. Even in our first interview, when asked how he self identified, Star replied "American," as if to draw attention away from any other identity, because he knew that I would be asking him questions about his art. Star stated, "Art is what one creates. It can be anything...Art comes from the heart and soul of our imagination." That he feels the need to address this labeling, however, is a testament to the fact that this is still a large problem for American Indians creating fine art.

It seems consultants have trouble answering the question: "What do you consider 'authentically Indian art'?" In a response to this question similar to point above made by Star, Thomas Poolaw—identifying as an Enrolled member of the Kiowa Tribe of Oklahoma (Cauigu), Delaware Tribe of Western Oklahoma, and (Turtle Clan) (Lenape)—states: "I know who I am...the People of this continent who made their art are the authentic artists regardless of the label attached to them...now let's consider authentic

white art, authentic black art and authentic Asian art and authentic mixed culture art...what is the answer?" Through this statement, Poolaw wishes to combat the commonly held belief that full-blood 'authentic' Indians create "authentically Indian art". Such a belief contributes to the confusion in the reception of fine art made by American Indians because it carries with it notions of how outsiders perceive "real Indians," usually through blood quantum and not through cultural values and up-bringing. Poolaw points out that the art is authentic and real because "...it is art made by human beings."

For many viewers of this art, stereotypes and tradition are discussed in the same breadth. As Star explains,

SWB: ...I'm not creating traditional Native works of art such as using images of teepees, or wolves howling at the moon. But I do incorporate my world as I see it now, what I create from my dreams and the world around me and of course learning about my ancestry through books and through my own family, especially from my father, Frank Big Bear, and my grandmother who recently passed away...My work often reflects my life, a past event in history or today's mainstream culture. My imagination is infinite.

Star knows there are stereotypical views of Native tradition, and he wants his own work to be a reflection of both tradition in the form of historical and cultural awareness as well as of his current social environment. It is important to understand that traditions do not just exist in stasis. They are created and shaped by people. Whether undergoing assimilation, cultural revitalization, or embracing cultural continuity, tradition is what a people make it to be. As Anita Fields stated at the 2009 NAASA Conference, "...it is important to make art reflective of who we are today...it should reflect the time so that they remain recorded in history." For Kiowa performance artist Dennis Zotigh, "In my opinion, 'Art is expression interpreted through an individual's life time of experiences.'" The role of the artist commonly valued here is one that frames history, culture and

politics through an individual's perspective, even if that means using art for commentary on group solidarity, that commentary is still from the individual. Take for example the following pieces by Star:



Fig. 4\*

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\* Star Wallowing Bull, *Taking the Shortcut*, 2007. 22" x 15" Prismacolor pencil on paper. Collection of the British Museum of Art. Courtesy of the artist.

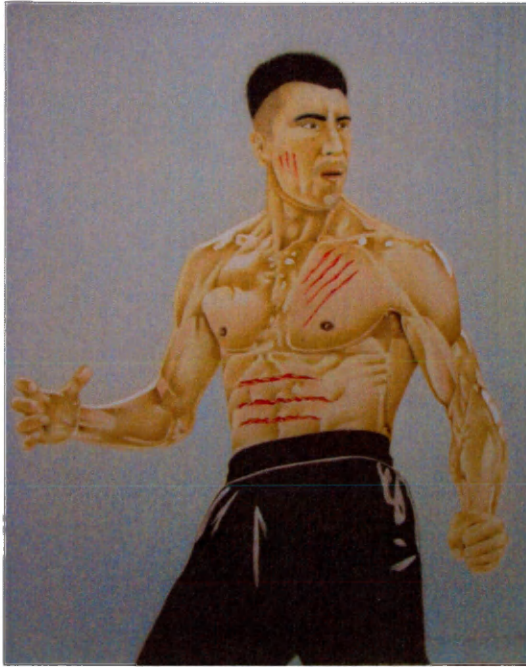


Fig. 5\*

The first image, (fig.4) *Taking the Shortcut*, was bought by the British Museum of Art. Its reception in such a venue could be as a piece of fine art by an American Indian artist. Since it is a museum of *Art* it would probably not be seen as material culture, but it might additionally be seen as a representation of American Indians in general. Here is an excerpt

of a conversation with Star about the piece:

JK: Who are the three men? What does the piece signify for you?

SWB: No one in particular. Natives on a reservation always say, “We’ll take a short cut”. Yet we usually would end up in a ditch, dead end or lost. I like using humor to connect with my art and in life in general. Humor goes a long way in my culture.

For Star, the piece is a humorous take on a personal experience common to a select few. In an earlier interview, Star also said, “I don’t represent my tribe through means of speaking but I do represent my tribe through my art. I don’t feel like it’s a responsibility but an honor. I don’t consider myself a traditional artist.” The second piece (fig.5), *Self Portrait, on the Warpath*, is also Star’s way of using humor, though its inspiration was drawn from a popular media source, the common image of Bruce Lee. “I got this idea while researching China’s Coal Industries and I came upon a Bruce Lee photo. As usual,

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\* Star Wallowing Bull, *Self Portrait, on the Warpath*, 2009. Prismacolor pencil on paper. Courtesy of the artist.

my imagination started and I came up with this self portrait to be humorous.” This is an example of how one does not need to draw from specifically “Native” experiences or traditions—though they may, as seen in (fig.4)—, but also draw from the popular culture and one’s present reality.

This adaptability and innovation is nothing new to these artists, one might even say it makes up the very role of “the artist.” According to Townsend-Gault,

Referring to a demonstrable ability to adapt to new ways and new materials, many First Nations artists have articulated the notion that “our tradition is to innovate.” The often cited example is the imaginative extension of the woodworking tradition made possible with the arrival on the coast in the nineteenth century of metal tools and commercially available paint (Townsend-Gault *In Rushing* 1999:117).

Some may argue that this drive to innovate is the result of assimilation, however it can also be seen as a more autonomous adapted response. For Thomas Poolaw, “Art is the attempt to relate concepts and make them manifest in the physical...or something like that...when a person tries to be a creator...a ‘maker’ so to speak.” In creating a physical manifestation of a concept, it is less about raw methodology / medium, and more about the process of creation and accurately expressing the concept. It does not matter if one uses traditional methods of making one’s own paint, or uses a commercially available acrylic or oil-based paint as long as the end product appears as intended.

This industry is fraught with many expectations, one such expectation is always a commanding individual autonomy, but when this is exhibited by American Indians, it is always followed with confusion. Truman T. Lowe and Paul Chaat Smith, curators of the James Luna *Emendatio* piece for the National Museum of the American Indian, state, “Indian agency has often been read as a demand to return to a utopian past that never was”(Lowe and Smith 2005:44). Contemporarily, art patrons have come to expect a

certain level of political subversion in fine art, especially that of American Indians, for obvious reasons pertaining to colonization. This expectation is a strategic development for the routinized consumption of such activism as a popular style, taste, or fashion. In consuming such pieces, viewers and buyers feel informed, cultured, and chic.

In James Luna's recollection of publicity concerned with his *Artifact Piece*, he explains how during 1992 he received heightened invites and calls by museums and other venues for his performance due to the fact that it was the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Columbus' voyage. These calls were laden with expectations. Luna states, "Curators want a certain kind of Indian and a certain kind of Indian art...they want you to be angry, they want you to be talking it up. So when people call me I have to ask 'Why didn't you call me before? You're calling me now, but will you call me in '93?'" (Luna *In* Lowe and Smith 2005:35). Luna's work pushes the boundaries of peoples' perceptions surrounding American Indians through humiliation. He entices viewers to observe him in an objectified form as "a real Indian," he then proceeds to make them uncomfortable with his silence and stoicism—in both *The Artifact Piece* and the *Take a Picture With a Real Indian* piece—until they come to the realization that he is a real person existing in the same present that everyone else is, dealing with contemporary issues and problems, not just something transposed from a historical past. By declining to perform at the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Columbus' voyage, Luna was making a statement saying that he would not furnish these institutions with their expectation of the avant-garde. His work should not be the newest taste or fashion; it should be recognized for Luna's initial intention.

This process of innovation and expectation is summed up in Graburn's words,

...Once the trade in art and artifacts becomes established as an ongoing enterprise, subject to the laws of the international marketplace, the process of

change and innovation becomes ever more accelerated. Depending on the state of the culture, such changes generally take the form of secularization and standardization, although increased cultural autonomy is often reflected in new, exciting, and reintegrated arts (Graburn 1976:30).

This is the cycle as it exists today, class-based and self-perpetuating. However, as seen above, some artists are still able to use their agency to conduct personal acts of subversion against an industry they are bound to. Participation within the Fine Art Market is often times a sacrifice worth making *because* of moments when artists are granted that un-policed use of agency, excused solely for their role as artists.

...Members of the dominant society inherently respect artists, even while often despising other members of an ethnic group. These artists, designated, of course, by the dominant society, are almost like religious leaders, being at the forefront of contact in movements of assimilation or resistance. In such cases, the arts have the power of carrying cross-culturally those messages that might be rejected in any other form (Graburn 1976:23).

Therein lies the draw in attending a visual arts university and making a living as an artist, it allows for an acquired status that validates entitlement to express oneself. We see explicit evidence of this in the difference between an ethnographic museum and an art museum. In an art museum, Clifford explains, an individual sculptor is identified and given praise. However, in an ethnographic museum sculptures may be seen as statues having cultural significance among other utilitarian artifacts. When speaking of the sculpture labeled fine art, Clifford states, “Its place in everyday cultural practices (including the market) is irrelevant to its essential meaning. Whereas in the ethnographic museum the object is culturally or humanly ‘interesting,’ in the art museum it is primarily ‘beautiful’ or ‘original’”(Clifford 1988:227).

An artist well known for playing with this exact dichotomy is Canadian Native, Brian Jungen. Jungen is primarily a sculptor known for his unique technique of



deconstructing commodities and re-creating them into something new that often appears as a material culture sham. Observe the following pieces by Jungen:



Fig.6\*



Fig.7\*

“He begins with objects that are ordinary, useful, and comforting. When he’s through, they are unique, expensive, and useless.”(Chaat Smith *In Pickworth* 2009:3). Jungen is singularizing previous commodities; by altering their shape he alters their monetary value and their significance. In doing so, he is making a statement about capitalistic perceptions. When he is done, the pieces take the shape of something viewers expect ethnographic material culture to resemble, although it is clear that they were made from Nike sneakers or Champion backpacks, for example. “Culture is our biggest

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\* [Left] Brian Jungen, (Left to Right) 1980, 1970, And 1960, 2007. Photo by Craig Boyko, Art Gallery of Ontario. Pickworth 2009:2.

\* [Right] Brian Jungen, *Prototype For New Understanding #23*, 2005. Pickworth 2009:3.



business...”(Chaat Smith *In Pickworth* 2009:4). He challenges people’s expectations of what *should* be a specific type of art. He is able to do this *because* he is an artist.

Visual artists participating in the Fine Art Market are able to push the limits of these social boundaries in many different ways. Usually for ‘Native’ artists creating fine art, the subject matter of their work is often a commentary on their struggle fitting into the industry due to racialized perceptions—that they feel need correcting—or lingering connections to tradition—that they feel shouldn’t be sacrificed. The artists Dyani Reynolds-White Hawk and Shonto Begay deal with issues of the latter in the following pieces:



Fig.8\*



Fig. 9\*

\* [left] Dyani Reynolds-White Hawk, c. 2000, 2008. Acrylic on canvas. Photography by Addison Doty. Lamar and Racette 2010:70.

\* [right] Shonto Begay, *Our Chiefs*, 2010. 60 x 40 Acrylic on canvas. Mark Sublette – Medicine Man Gallery. <http://www.medicinemangallery.com/>

As seen above, Reynolds-White Hawk in this piece addresses her attachment to both her traditional culture and her urban culture. “She doesn’t ‘fit’ wholly into either, yet both are an integral part in her journey”(Reynolds-White Hawk *In Lamar and Racette* 2010:70). Begay’s piece is a humorous depiction of perceptions of leadership. They are expressions of the artists’ identity struggles in conversation with contemporary circumstances, this can be agreed upon. But what style does one attach to such pieces? Do they call Reynolds-White Hawk’s Surrealist? What can they call Begay’s piece? Subject matter for these artists is just one issue they [the artist] must address, but labeling their artistic *style* is yet another issue to broach that deals with more generic art categorization.

Chapter 2 discussed categorization of artistic trends forms and styles. It also showed how many ‘Native’ artists did not fit well in or transition smoothly into their specific labels. This poses the question of stylistic hybridity, which many of these artists play with, because how an artist’s style is received determines what art categorization their work will fall into—i.e. Tourist Art; Folk Art; Activist Fine Art, etc. Stylistic mixing is not always looked upon favorably when done by ‘Native’ artists because it confuses perceptions already in existence. Suddenly the work is not “Other” enough, yet it does not exemplify full assimilation either. This is why artists in the Fine Art Market identifying as indigenous have trouble fitting into pre-packaged labels. When it is accepted, it is considered “avant-garde,” as seen above; this is the default answer to the confusion. Understanding the source of this confusion—Eurocentrism—is different from understanding the reason it still exists, which can be glimpsed in the artists’ influences. The following is an excerpt from an interview with Star,

JK: Would you consider yourself having a specific style? If so, how would you describe it?

SWB: My work is of abstraction and realism combined on one piece or either separately. It's always challenging and interesting to combine the art forms together. When I was a boy, my abstraction style was influenced from my father (Frank Big Bear) and going to the museums with my father or just going alone... It does a disservice to anyone to pinhole art into the style or who the artist is or the medium of what they create. Yes, I am a Native American, but I am an American that creates life into each piece of art that I create.

In speaking about the influence of his own technique in playing with and combining styles, Star references his trips to museums as a child. This shows that European styles did affect his conceptualization of art. Though, he finds it an injustice to label an artist or to limit him/her to one style. This shows Star's dissatisfaction with the Fine Art Market and his actions in divorcing himself from it while still benefiting from its existence through connections to venues—such as museums and galleries—and advancement opportunities—such as art scholarships or grants.

From a different perspective, in an interview with Thomas Poolaw, he states:

TP: If I have a style, it's not intentional. I don't think style says much about anything. If I have a current style I think it has to be said that it is heavily influenced by the larger dominant culture since my mind was trained in their school system and since the art of the world is dominated by the ART culture which was born out of Europe...but I am slowly waking up and hopefully will someday discard the European influence...evidence of that is that I am currently tanning my first buffalo hide by hand...a very enjoyable process because of the love involved.

JK: What would you say your art is a reflection of?

TP: My art is a reflection of my consciousness at a particular point in time.

JK: How do you feel about artists preserving their culture through art? Do you think such an act is possible considering the large exposure of recent generations to non-traditional culture through the media?

TP: I think it's an honorable and courageous effort, much like Don Quixote charging a windmill. As long as Don Quixote can remain in a dream he can accomplish the task, but the "Real World" will do everything it can to destroy him.

JK: Can there be a happy medium?

TP: I hope so...

Poolaw studied painting at the University of Oklahoma School of Art. He additionally states,

TP: My ideas about art were influenced by the Native American artists of southwest Oklahoma who were working and exhibiting during the 1960's and 70's. Then as I entered Art school T.C. Cannon and Fritz Scholder were powerful influences. As I began to study Art history I became aware of Francis Bacon, Wayne Thiebaud, and all of the modern painters. Andy Warhol has remained an important artist until today because of his mixing of paint and photographic means of printing as well as Gerhard Richter.

Like Star Wallowing Bull, Poolaw highlights his European and dominant culture influences on style. However, unlike Star, he has had other influences from 'Native' artists already operating within the Fine Art Market. He is also more explicit in expressing his desire to digress from them. Poolaw's comparison of preserving culture through art to Don Quixote charging a windmill exemplifies his clear understanding that such a feat would be like going across the current of a self perpetuating ideology and social structure.

Many of these artists' influences have involved their training—formal or informal. As Star explains,

SWB: I find it interesting for an art instructor to actually give grades for something a student creates. What makes it "A" work?...I'm doing just fine with what I'm doing. Grading art is subjective. I'm sure my techniques to some professors would not warrant an A for the class for my work. I have met numerous artists who are not able to shed their art teacher's influences from their work once they have graduated. A friend of mine James Rosenquist had told me once before to stay away from art teachers. James wants me to be untouched and original. After all I'm a self-taught artist, which is bothersome to some in the art academic world. I feel like it's personal success with my years of hard work. Although getting a college degree in the arts does bring knowledge of history and technique that perhaps one day I can do. I believe I am artist by birth, not my degree. I may be going at my art career backwards than those at the university.

Star's disenchantment with formalized artistic training speaks to the fact that there are expectations for artists in the fine art industry and that adhering to them is an act of conforming often resulting in the sacrifice of other forms of self-potential. Micah, who learned composition and styling from his father and skateboard graphics and received formal training at IAIA states,

MWW: ...deprogramming art school out of my psycheeee. Its taken a year almost, and I'm still some what too critical of 'what is the work saying' and 'is it cohesive' that I don't even get anything done.

...

JK: In your opinion, what is the purpose of art school? For example, is it a prerequisite for success? Why or why not?

MWW: Art school is not a prerequisite for success, but it can help you drastically. My work suffered from going to school. I was better off not questioning and having my work questioned and cross examined too deeply. It was a mess. School does help in finding like minds and peers...you can't pay for that. I learned a lot at school, but I learned more helpful stuff from working with other students and bouncing off of their energy. And yes, there were instructors that went above and beyond for me. So yes, art school can be successful. Besides it helps you to see far more that just what is around you. I know amazing artists that were self-taught and are successful. But it really helps in seeing what level you are at, and if you're near the bottom, it makes you strive to be better and the best, healthy competition. I didn't paint before I went to school, now I paint, print, sculpt and write. I can even take good photographs. You don't need it, but it helps. If you want to be well rounded and go places, I'd suggest it. I've always had a problem with authority, but art school is for people like me.

Micah is appreciative of the stylistic spectrum and approaches offered by different culturally based views. Though, he emphasizes that they are not necessary for achieving art that satisfies the artists' intent. Formal techniques, he shows, can even be a hindrance to productivity, if, like Micah, one chooses to produce only that which satisfies the self and does not betray any pre-held sentiments.

Appadurai makes an important point: "...there are important differences between the *cultural biography* and the *social history* of things. The differences have to do with

two kinds of temporality, two forms of class identity, and two levels of social scale”(Appadurai 1986:34). There is the piece as the artist understands it, existing within a bubble where it is appreciated for just that one meaning. It travels for a while just so, until the bubble breaks and the piece is ushered into a system where it can be perceived and understood in a variety of ways, being put to a range of purposes. The piece’s initial understanding is not completely lost, just tangled. The following is an excerpt from a statement made by Ukjese Van Kampen, an artist identifying as Northern Tutchone:

UVK: ...when I found out I was not a Northwest Coast Tlingit Indian, as I always thought, but in fact a Tutchone from the Athapaskan people, I began using what examples of my own Tutchone culture that I could find. I started learning more about my people’s art and culture and I continued using the western culture to make my own culture more recognizable and therefore hopefully more known. The unique art style I was developing was partly because of my fascination with western art and culture...

I have visited Europe over a dozen times since 1985 and have stayed a number of months on some occasions, even having an apartment in Amsterdam once... The art I saw and studied in Europe had a major impact on my art. You will see hints and influences of western art in much of my art. I have asked myself why I was so fascinated with European/western culture. What I came up with was that the Europeans love their own art and culture; they embrace and adore it. I admire that aspect and think we, as First Nations people in the Yukon, do not embrace our culture nearly as much as Europeans do. Our visual culture always takes a second place to economical development and politics. My view is that we’re copying the negative side of western culture, that is the money and bureaucracy. Western society has a better balance between the two sides...

Here again we see the influence of European or Western art forms. But Ukjese also speaks about the different levels in which Yukon Natives and Europeans embrace their culture. The reason why indigenous populations focus so heavily on economic development and politics today is evident, they still struggle with the aftermath of colonization that deals with forced assimilation and the need to conform to a dominant market economy. Issues such as these are the reason why art pieces have both cultural

biographies and social histories. It deals with shifting perceptions in different social contexts added to multiple cultural values, but all operating under one dominant hegemonic ideology. It is this capitalist ideology that encourages the commoditization and singularization of art for the reinforcement of the social hierarchies in place that benefit collectors and art dealers. In Kopytoff's words:

Most of the conflict, however, between commoditization and singularization in complex societies takes place within individuals, leading to what appear to be anomalies in cognition, inconsistencies in values, and uncertainties in action. People in these societies all maintain some private vision of a hierarchy of exchange spheres, but the justification for this hierarchy is not... integrally tied to the exchange structure itself; rather, the justification must be imported from outside the system of exchange, from such autonomous and usually parochial systems as that of aesthetics, or morality, or religion, or specialized professional concerns (Kopytoff *In* Appadurai 1986:82).

This clarifying overview helps to situate an analysis of consultants' voiced understanding of their place in the Fine Art Market. I will not shorten many of the following excerpts from interviews because this study is about the artists' perspectives and having their voices heard on the subject of their industry. In Phillips and Steiner's discussion on shifting discourses concerning the fine art industry, Vaquez is quoted in the following way: "The artist is subject to the tastes, preferences, ideas, and aesthetic notions of those who influence the market...[and] cannot fail to heed the exigencies of this market; they often affect the content as well as the form of a work of art"(Phillips and Steiner 1999:15). This may be true under some circumstances, but as the subjects of this study indicate, it is not always the case.

JK: If you can think of the progression of your work as displayed on a blank chart or graph, what would the labels read? Could you plot your trajectory? You might want to begin with the bottom reading: "start" and the top reading: "success." This involves you defining what success is and what one must achieve before reaching it.

MWW: The chart would be an endless up and down wave pattern, with varying degrees of rise and dive. Creating art has become an art of problem solving. How do I execute when I'm on the rise and full of ideas, energy and focus? As to what do I do waiting for the spark to come back after it has abandoned me again and again. I don't force the work if I cannot find a focus of some sort. I have numerous times forced work and it was never finished or I'm ashamed of it still... I feel I've always been successful by standing behind what I say in a painting, print, sculpture, or graphic. I don't like to lie in the work, even though the work can be interpreted quite different by the viewer. Also, my views change constantly...right or wrong, as long as I stick by them, I feel successful. As far as monetary success, strikes and gutters. Usually gutters, but I still feel a sense of pride at the bottom, why? I don't know.

Micah avoided giving an in-depth definition of success. This was perhaps because he doesn't think in those terms. He believes if he is true to himself and "stands behind what [he says]" in the art piece, then he is successful. His description of his chart "with varying degrees of rise and drive" indicates more autonomous forms of motivation for creating art.

JK: For you, to what degree is financial success linked to personal success?

MWW: If I can buy the motorcycle I want, pay the bills and take the fam and friends out eat and have fun, hell I feel personally successful. I don't feel financial success is personal success, I know and see, artists that suck or lack in technical ability and they are doing great financially, and they know it too. The only time I feel financial success linked to personal success is when I'm walking to the bank with checks from museums or galleries, that's it. Just that short time between going to the bank with checks.

Again, Micah avoids defining personal success because in being true to his opinions [political and other], all the work he profits off of can be considered personal success, so there is no need to define it. So he moves on to defining financial success, the benefits of which are short lived.

Thomas Poolaw's answer to the same questions were,

TP: "Start" would be a description of the birth of self and evolution of becoming an artist, then the practice and becoming and being an artist. Success would be the death of the Artist. In my mind all art is important. All Art attempts, failure,



success etc. are valuable in the long chain of human endeavors of mind and consciousness.

JK: For you, to what degree is financial success linked to personal success?

TP: Financial success is financial success. Personal success is personal success. In my life and my art career the two have absolutely nothing to do with one another. In my mind, making art has nothing to do with making money. If I wanted to make money I'd be a banker.

Similarly, Poolaw places value on the “birth of the self,” emphasizing the importance of agency and justifying the creation of art only to oneself. His belief that death would be success for the artist demonstrates that the artist has achieved all that he/she is capable of in a lifespan and now that they are gone, it is okay because the art—their legacy—remains and it stands alone. Nothing could take away the importance of experiencing the process of creating all their works. This is linked to his views on personal success because he does not see value in creating art for money. Financial success, for Poolaw, would be superfluous in the matter.

Star Wallowing Bull thinks of himself as “climbing the ladder” and does not define success, just mentions that it happens when he does not expect it. This indicates that Star is more closely tied to the industry perception in that he accepts the economic notion of success, which would be the sale of a piece of his work. Star is tied to the industry in such a way because he is more financially dependent on it than the other artists mentioned, i.e. he currently received the Bush Fellowship. But there is more behind this reasoning.

SWB: I've been fortunate that I can sell my artwork. What's really strange is that when the recession started in 2008, I managed to make it financially. People continue to purchase my work. My art dealer, Todd Bockley sells most of my work yet I do part time on my own. In a way I feel like it's personal success. I've been sober for 10 years now. It's because of my sobriety, that I'm successful with my art. I find it to be a personal achievement in life. My artwork keeps me sane

and sober. That's the reason why I moved to Fargo, North Dakota, as I went to a treatment center here ten years ago to turn my life around.

Star's mention that his art keeps him sane and sober indicates that it can be a form of healing for him, which he has come to rely upon for *personal success*, and as a result of additional monetary gain on top of that, it parallels his financial success. Star's selling of work "on the side" does, however, exemplify his desire for autonomy within his career. This he also equates with personal success.

Lastly, Ukjese Van Kampen's answer to this question ties in well with the on-going theme among the artists thus far.

UVK: An early 'success' is when I felt I was indeed an artist...before this I often would say, "I'm suppose to be an artist." That would be sometime between 1989 and 1993. Sometime at this point I guess I felt that I was indeed an artist and would be staying an artist for the rest of my days...not like many who start off pretending to being artists and then later take on another role in life leaving the art behind. The next success was sometime in the mid-2000s when I felt that I did not need the local recognition as an artist...I never and still do not receive it but at that point that was no longer important to me. I became sure of myself and did not need their acceptance or approval. This also meant I do not need to be a commercial success...mmm...which I also am not. As a result my focus is to be more of an academic success...and it seems that is coming as I end up showing my work more often in public galleries and am noticed by some universities.

Ukjese values personal growth without need of external validation, much like Micah.

Because he takes an interest in academic recognition and appreciation of his work, he is receptive to the teaching and understanding of different knowledge bases—art's application to epistemology.

UVK: For me financial success is not success for me...academic recognition would be my measure of success...and recognition as an artist, not a Native artist but an artist. An artist who is using both his cultures in his work, not like those artists like Picasso who were influenced by Indigenous Art and used it in there art. They were outsiders borrowing other cultures' art where I am an insider to 2 cultures and use them both.

...

JK: If you had to rank the top five Native artists living today, who would they be and why?

UVK: In Canada I would say Lawerance Paul Yuxweluptun, Jane Ash Poitras, Faye Heavyshield, Rebecca Belmore, and Kent Monkman, because they have all made it into the Canadian art history texts...they are recognized as ARTISTS, not Native Artists but artists. I am not saying being a Native artist is not a success, but when you are born into a category but can bust out of it then you are a success!

Ukjese favors the European model of the artist as the expressive individual. Though, he also is very much aware of the different art categories and the existence of a separate market for “Native art,” which artists identifying as indigenous can be boxed into.

Subverting or undermining such strategically placed restrictions and labels equate success for Ukjese.

Micah’s answer to the “top five Native artists” question was,

MWW: Douglas Miles, Chris Pappan, Bob Haozous, Rose Simpson, Cannupa Hanksa Luger

Douglas Miles is at the top to me, cos he has extended beyond just native art and native skateboarding. He does shows with people from the likes of Juxtapose magazine, he has Volcom creating his shoes, shirts, belt buckles and stuff. Punk rockers, rappers, honky tonkers, gangsters, squares...he reaches out to them all. He lives on the grind, he falls, he climbs...he’s a real artist. He lends a hand to artists, he helps put them on...no other artist with these kind of connections does this.

Chris Pappan, his technical and concepts are out there and there. Amazingly humble guy and good family man, that Chris. I respect an artist that can stand by his work and mean what he says.

Bob Haozous, he is a heavy cat. He’s in a whole other category of art. The man is a monster. His sculptures, paintings and drawings, draw a response. They can be as cold as the steel or warm and vibrant as the enamel he paints with. I’ve had the pleasure of working and house-sitting for bob. An artist of his caliber, reaching out to me is amazing. He demands more than just art, he demands living the art or putting the art to action. He strives to empower Native Americans with art, its really art for Native Americans. Bob gets a lot of criticism, but he’s tough enough to take it and use it.

Rose Simpson, she is amazing with a block of clay, a sharpie, a spray can, and she sings like the rattling of the pillars of heaven. I'm proud of Rose, she is determined and extremely talented...extremely. She demands far more from the viewer than they expect. Rose takes strong and often violent stances on politics and the oppression of women.

Cannupa Hanska Luger, never have I come in contact with an artist like this. His inspiration and work ethic go far beyond that which I can comprehend. I'm always amazed at what this cat can come up with. Humble about his work, yet uncompromising with his abilities is what makes Cannupa unstoppable. He is multimedia talented, yet his ceramics totally amaze me lately. He stopped going to school for 2 semesters to go farm in California. Cannupa is also an amazing poet, he won't tell you that, but he is a murderer with the pen.

From this answer, it can be established that Micah values an artist that is not afraid to give his/her personal perspective on life, politics, the industry, etc. He also values artists that can express unabashed reflections of their social condition/environment. Reasoning behind Micah's values unfold more in the answer of the following question:

JK: At what point on your trajectory do you think you can sell your work? What do you make that you know sells?

MWW: I can sell things at all points of the trajectory and have. People project a different view from the work, even my best work, in my opinion, was looked upon as sub par and praised by others. Recently since the summer of 2009, I've been infatuated with painting a single buffalo. I've never painted the animal or animals for that matter, but I noticed people have enjoyed the repetition. Since the notice of them, I have been changing the buffalo drastically, in my opinion. I didn't know at first what the significance the buffalo meant to me, but now I do.

Sometimes artists go on searches to find the meaning within their work. This indicates that the work is a visceral creation and artists go on a discovery of meaning about something that was already created whole and complete in their subconscious. This is why it is important to trust oneself and be true to it.

For the same question, Ukjese answered:

UVK: Wow...I do not know. I have always been selling my work, for over 35 years now...but never often and never enough to live on. As it is not important for me to make sales (my last work sold in 2008, the one before that in 2006.) I

would guess that some of my work may be sought after after I pass away...bummer! Ha! Won't do me much good!

I initially began this study under the impression that these artists made some kind of living off of their art. But I was wrong. All my consultants expressed to me the difficulty of selling work, hence the phrase “the starving artist.” But this speaks to the fact that these artists, even though they reinforce social hierarchies in an industry that keeps them, in particular, in a double standard, care immensely about the *process* of their creation. They do it to satisfy the self. Some are aware of the larger scheme and some are not, but even when informed of it, they do not care and would not stop being artists. To emphasize this point, later in the interview Ukjese additionally states,

UVK: Those who are artists, those who cannot live without creating art, those people really do not need art school...all art school does is compress 10 years of the artists own learning into 4 years. The most important classes in art school for me were art history [classes] because it showed me the way art was and how it changed to become what it is now.

All the consultants in this study have in fact mentioned art school’s lack of meaningful necessity. This underscores the notion that *meaningful* art may not need affiliation with the Fine Art Market. In returning to the point about the significance of process, Thomas Poolaw is one such artist that values the process of creating one’s art above all else. He states,

JK: When you create a piece, do you sometimes think of its lifespan? For example, while creating it do you picture it in a museum or in someone’s home?

TP: No, not really. For me painting or working on a print is a process. The activity of process is the life of the piece, the final object is merely residue of activity or process.

This touches again on the concept of art’s creation often being a journey for discovery of meaning or of the self.

In conducting this study, I have found that sometimes artists will exchange pieces between each other. This emphasizes the recognition of prestige gained by each party, but also admiration and respect. In such a situation, the art piece exchanged is not commoditized, but rather, retains its original meaning and purpose through recognition. It may even take on an indexicality of solidarity between the artists, perhaps displaying shared understanding of a hidden meaning such as specifically cultural or Pan Indian sentiments. As Appadurai notes, “Barter appears to be the form of commodity exchange in which the circulation of things is most divorced from social, political, or cultural norms”(Appadurai 1986:10-11). However, as just explained, such an exchange can induce cultural solidarity. This type of exchanges is explained as a segue into Ukjese’s answer to the above question, now stated again:

JK: When you create a piece, do you sometimes think of its lifespan? For example, while creating it do you picture it in a museum or in someone’s home?

UVK: I have some works in museums and they are on display. That’s nice! I see many of my works down the road ending up in museums. I like it when my friends have my art also. I trade a lot and also do give quite a few away. The works I create to make some sort of statement I do see ending up in some art collection...the fun ones, well, who knows.

Note Ukjese’s mention of enjoying trading or gifting art to his friends...and even colleagues apparently since he has been generous enough to send me a piece. Micah answered the following to the same question:

MWW: I like to think the art is going to someone that hides the piece in a secret room and only they can see it. I like to think that, but I know, and have witnessed, people that love to show their painting by me. I’m not too thrilled about a piece in the collections of a museum. Just seems lonely, and stored away. Perhaps the pieces will have impact and life after I’m gone. Maybe they’ll make sense, hopefully they wont be reminders of what not to do or maybe what to do! Hahahaha! I always wanted stolen precious art that only I could see and couldn’t let anyone else see. Always wanted that.

Micah's answer speaks to an appreciation of the art as it exists outside a commodity sphere, which is why many artists trade pieces. This puts one in tune with the raw essence and meaning of the art, what Micah craves.

But when the pieces are kept within a commodity sphere, the question of what is passed off with the pieces following an exchange remains to be seen. "Problems involving knowledge, information, and ignorance are not restricted to the production and consumption poles of the careers of commodities, but characterize the process of circulation and exchange"(Appadurai 1986:43). Observe the following excerpt from an interview with Star,

JK: Have you ever worked on a specific commission for a client or institution? If so, did you have free reign or did they want a specific design or theme?

SWB: I did work on a few commissions in the past...I think three all together. There were a few that asked for this and that and wanted it to match their furniture, but I said no. I don't do those kinds of commissions. I told them to go to Wal-Mart. I consider myself self employed...

Star is exercising his autonomy as an individual artist here in that he is being selective with his buyers/patrons. But it is unclear whether the would-be buyer understood why Star declined their commission. Usually, these are situation-specific exchanges and artists may feel knowledge concerning a piece's intended meaning is unwarranted or is particularly exclusive. For the same question, Micah answered:

MWW: I've always been a hired gun or cowboy for commissions and haven't been asked to do anything that I did not like or that was outside of my imagery or esthetic. The Kiowa Casino commissioned me to do a piece and they gave me the dimensions and specifically told me to paint something that was Kiowa themed and (specifically for me) leave out communist politics, nudity, and vulgar language. I was fine with all specifics, I mainly wanted to paint my family...*but I put some subtle gestures in there that hint my politics and statements.* Even with commissions, I can take some dictation, but I still do what I want to do, I figure that's why they want painting specifically by me with certain motifs and emotive qualities. *If the commission is too much out of what I do and I do not like the*

*project or person, institute, etc...I won't do it. I have infuriated some people for not taking their commission, I've burned some bridges for being not able to compromise and missed out on some money. But hey, it feels like I've been in a recession my whole life, no biggie [emphasis added].*

Here again Micah's unwillingness to conform to the market—or client—standards can be seen. But specific clandestine acts of subversion against restrictions on creative expression can also be seen. What's more interesting is that these acts manifested themselves in a public mural concerning Micah's personal political views.

In a related note, consider Star's answer to the following question:

JK: Has your work always been well received?...

SWB: ...A few people bought my work because they were investing, but I think that's a bad reason to buy artwork, I think people should buy artwork because they like it. I guess it does help get an artists name out there. I just find it to be strange. I'm getting a bigger picture of the art world now though. I guess I wasn't really aware of it until we started talking about it. There are a few drawings and paintings that I've done that were personal and I explained them to the buyer and they liked them more. They do sell more, the personal ones. I feel in my heart that these pieces will always still be with me.

This is an example of shared knowledge that is handed off with the art piece, which in this case singularized the piece by increasing its value as a result of the new understanding on the part of the buyer.

I will finish this analysis with the following questions answered by the following two consultants. The first is by Ukjese:

JK: Would you consider yourself having a notion of what is popular in the art market?

UVK: Yes I know what is popular in the art market in the Yukon and that is pretty close to the art market in Canada. If you're an older artist you should be painting landscapes, if you're a younger artist you should be doing abstracts and if your a Native American artist you should be doing what is deemed as traditional Native American art. In the United States it is different, Americans are not scared to take risks and not scared to pay what is asked for, for a work of art. That is why my art



is more recognized in the USA than in Canada. Oh...there is not a marketplace for my art. Remember it doesn't sell.

Ukjese seems to have hit the nail on head. He is aware of the larger ideology and thus, not lost in the unconscious cloud of habitus. Like all the artists in this study, Ukjese paints for himself. If his work is labeled in a certain way, he is of the attitude that such labels do not affect his perception of the work, that perception is what he values.

JK: Has your work always been well received?

UVK: My art gets received better the further away I am from the Yukon. Since I am not deemed an artist in the Yukon where I live I do not get much criticism...what little has been about me painting white women instead of Native American women. I deal with that by painting more White women!

JK: How do you deal with criticism? What would you say were your vulnerabilities?

UVK: Vulnerabilities? Huh? What vulnerabilities? My work is a commercial failure, I am pretty well unknown in my hometown and territory but yet I paint and create what I want and do not care if it's a success or if it sells or if anybody or nobody likes it. I have faith that my work will receive its recognition down the road some time.

Ukjese's technique of painting white women is interesting because it is an ironic reversal of roles in which the 'Native' is "othering" and objectifying the dominant ethnic group and class. It also can be seen as very controversial, because the women are usually depicted in the nude and as being submissive.

Micah answered the questions in the following way:

JK: Would you consider yourself having a notion of what is popular in the art market? Are you in touch with people that keep you informed with such things? Where is the marketplace for your work?

MWW: I'm out of touch a lot, but I am in touch with what looks good. The marketplace for my work lives and eats off the fact of what looks good and is technically sound, or the fact that they can reference the imagery, that's very important to me sometimes...sometimes. My marketplace is from people that like to hell raise, like fast cars and women, full sleeve tattoos, graffiti, educated minds,

lust to see something they like. Art and music have always inspired me, so I try to do what they did for me for someone else. I don't really have select audience, but in a sense I do.

JK: Has your work always been well received? How do you deal with criticism? What would you say were your vulnerabilities?

MWW:...All artists are lying if they say they don't care about what people say about their work. They are artists, ego has to be a driving force or they wouldn't do art. Of course it's not all about ego, but 95% of it is for some artists. You can tell a bullshit artist from a humble artist...the work also suggests it. The work should reflect the artist and vice versa.

Micah is very much in the Fine Art Market but pays little attention to its significance or the fact that it is a self-perpetuating elitist industry. This is because such things are not important to him. His art and its correct reception and appreciation by a select few *are* important to him. His participation in the Fine Art Market, like the other artists interviewed, is a toleration...done for the sole reason of its existence in their same social environment.

This chapter analyzes the views and perceptions of Dennis Zotigh, Thomas Poolaw, Micah The Werewolf Wesley, Star Wallowing Bull, and Ukjese Van Kampen concerning their visual "fine" artwork through interviews. Commentary by and about artists such as James Luna, Dyani Reynolds-White Hawk, Shonto Begay, Anita Fields, and Brian Jungen are also taken into account in this chapter through excerpts from statements made publicly or that can be found in sources available through the public domain. These artists touched on views surrounding their art such as tradition and assimilation, what art and its production means for them, and dynamics within the larger industry of fine art. Stylistic preferences are explained as products of one's social condition. Many mentioned their strong exposure to European art styles and how those have influenced their own work. But the artists emphasize an ability to learn about styles

set in historical contexts, adapt their work with or without influence of those styles, and then digress from the adopted style's initial meaning to create a work of art that incorporates *multiple* elements and reflects a unique meaning. The artists interviewed do not particularly acknowledge a strong connection between financial success and personal success, though they did equate personal success with agency, autonomy, and unrestrained artistic expression. Awareness of one's place as a reinforcing agent of social hierarchies within the Fine Art Market range in degree, however, there is a unanimous opinion that one's work, although it may be commoditized in that market, should remain the product of a truthful creation; That the process of its creation is the most important point in that piece's social life and that its initial meaning will always be embedded within it, regardless of whether the knowledge is passed on with the piece during exchanges.

## Conclusion

For artists identifying as indigenous and participating—voluntarily or not—within the Fine Art Market, production of the art that they love can result in a social career for the piece that is difficult and laced with complexities upon its commoditization. The art may adopt incorrect labels and unintended meaning during consumption and following commodity exchanges. The labels adopted may range anywhere from “Native art,” “Tourist art,” “Political art,” even to extremes such as ethnographic material culture. These categorizations result from contact period conceptualizations of European or Western “art” as superior creative manifestations exemplifying the pinnacle of civility and elite social class. The remnants of this combined with perceptions evolving out of the young field of anthropology, such as multiculturalism, initiated the desire to distinguish what was considered “art” from artifact or material culture. This process exhibits a tendency for the dominant classes to structure art industries, and institutions such as museums, schools, and commercial venues to their benefit and according to their views, which “other” and further marginalize colonized peoples and their descendents. Similarly speaking on social representations and taxonomies, Bourdieu states, “They thereby rank among the institutionalized instruments for maintenance of the symbolic order, and hence among the mechanisms of the reproduction of the social order whose very functioning serves the interests of those occupying a dominant position in the social structure”(Bourdieu 1977:165).

The Western conception of art established that art was a product of *individual* creative expression. This supported the splitting of art and material culture into binary oppositions in that the latter was seen in association with *the collective*. These material

culture pieces came to stand as representations of a culture, which encouraged the creation of stereotypes, tropes, and essentialized perceptions. But since artists identifying as indigenous have broken into the Fine Art Market, they have confounded previously held perceptions surrounding work that American Indians or “Natives” produce. Their pieces are therefore mislabeled and they themselves are held against expectations out of a desire for viewers to duplicate the comfort the above-mentioned delineated categories had maintained for them. When this art is easily accepted as fine art, it does not always exhibit easily recognizable cultural or stereotypical Native symbols. Take for example, Fritz Scholder’s piece, (fig.10) *New Mexico #1*:



Fig. 10\*

As Aleta M. Ringlero describes it,

A landscape of abstracted arrangements in horizontal bands of color reflected Scholder’s early encounter with the Southwest. The visual reference to striations on the land evoked the intense sun-drenched color use of Pierre Bonnard and the saturated palette of Claude Monet...He possessed the sophisticated artistic vocabulary and worldly perspective that enabled him to transcend the limited discourse applied by a conservative mainstream art market and audience whose

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\* Fritz Scholder, *New Mexico #1*, 1964. 60 x 60 Oil on canvas. Ringlero 2008:22.

expectations for Indians were founded in 19<sup>th</sup> century photographic images and 20<sup>th</sup> century Hollywood film clichés (Ringlero 2008:22).

If it does however exhibit such symbols, or if it makes political or social commentary, it is then lumped into the avant-garde category and is seen as popular high fashion. Take for example the mixed media painting (fig.11) by Micah:



Fig. 11\*

Micah’s appropriation of the Japanese Hello Kitty icon is an example of the globalized popular culture today’s youth are exposed to. “At the producer end, one sees traditions of fabrication...changing in response to commercial and aesthetic impositions or temptations from larger-scale, and sometimes far-away consumers”(Appadurai 1986:47). His use of the stereotypical feather and the communist star is commentary on personal political and historical views. Although pieces such as this are consumed by social elites,

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\* Micah The Werewolf Wesley, *Socialite*, 2010. 16 x 20 Acrylic on canvas. Courtesy of the artist.

Micah, through the use of his social networking page on the Internet, makes sure other audiences consume them as well.

As Mullin states, “By showing, however, that even the most avant-garde of tasters may serve to legitimate and reproduce inequalities, and by blurring the boundaries between culture and power, Bourdieu suggests complications for ideas of cultural pluralism”(Mullin 1992:396). Yes, these artists’ production, display, and sale of individually expressive artwork reinforces inner social hierarchies and the larger ideological system through offering outlets for the process “eating the ‘Other.’” But the key point, as observed through this study, is that the artists do not value such technicalities. The fine art industry is a structure that is self-perpetuating, and it would continue to be just that with or without these artists’ participation. However, these artists take pleasure and receive personal gain from the process of creating something culminating their sentiments on a range of issues. Through participation in the Fine Art Market they are celebrated for functioning as autonomous individuals, causing them to gain prestige and be observed by social elites but also by many other members of various social classes and communities. As Parezo notes,

An artist earns a living producing, publicly displaying, and distributing “art,” thereby placing the corpus of works in the public domain where they can be noticed and assessed in the process. He or she thereby earns a reputation so that the works are seen, discussed, and appreciated. Artists, like bourgeoisie and elite consumers (i.e. collectors), do not work in social vacuums. They are players in the ‘art worlds’ in all societies (Parezo 1996:500).

The artist, as an individual within society, functions in and through many industries, however they are not defined by those industries. They identify as they please, and often times in a multitude of ways. Their art is an outlet for that.

Fine art produced by Native individuals has come to a point at which the initial meaning can be better solidified through a firm foundation at the birth of its social life. This is due to artists and community member's adoption of new roles as patrons. Clifford explains,

Surveying these developments, Michael Ames, who directs the University of British Columbia Museum, observes that, "Indians, traditionally treated by museums only as objects and clients, add now the role of patrons." He continues: "The next step has also occurred. Indian communities establish their own museums, seek their own National Museum grants, install their own curators, hire their own anthropologists on contract, and call for repatriation of their own collections"(Clifford 1988:248).

They cannot completely steer the perceptions of those who consume fine art, yet through these new roles, they have more control over the reception and consumption of their work, offering an avenue for passing on specific sets of knowledge dealing with anything from history to social commentary and identity. Narrative is limitless, since it is *an individual's* expression. In title of this study, "Fine Art and Clandestine Identity: American Indian Artists in the Contemporary Art Market," "Clandestine Identity" does not refer to the attempt at concealing one's ethnic identity, although such an identity does play a role in these dynamics. But rather, this clandestine identity refers more to one's social, political, and moral views that, with a few recent exceptions, undergo masking along the journey of the art piece's social life. Although the artists may be pleased overall with simply creating the art for their own personal sense of fulfillment, they, like all others, are viewers and consumers of art and for that reason they would agree that one should not be satisfied solely with one explanation of a piece. Art is multifaceted and polysemous, one should be able to learn from it continuously; as an aesthetic piece, it has that ability, and this separates it from other objects that have social lives.



Further pursuit for research through alternative avenues lie in the use of new up-and-coming technological innovations such as GRASAC, an online tool used for collaborative museum collection research that facilitates revitalization through sharing community based knowledge. The process itself has been described as the recontextualizing of digital objects, and such research involves establishing who the owners of knowledge are. Tools such as GRASAC and the larger global market, made available to artists through the Internet, offer a wide range of material in the form of symbols and imagery that these contemporary artist may draw from, expanding their palette so-to-speak. This offers countless opportunities for creative bursts bringing in the new wave of contemporary fine art done by Native youth.

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