

Wokiksuye: The Politics of Memory in Indigenous Art, Monuments, and Public Space

by

Erin Genia

Master of Public Administration – Tribal Governance  
The Evergreen State College (2010)

Submitted to the Department of Architecture  
In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

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Signature of Author: \_\_\_\_\_

Department of Architecture  
May 4, 2019

Certified by: \_\_\_\_\_

Judith Barry  
Professor of Art, Culture and Technology  
Thesis Supervisor

Accepted by: \_\_\_\_\_

Nasser Rabbat,  
Aga Khan Professor  
Chair of the Department Committee on Graduate Students

## **Thesis Committee Members**

Mario Caro, Lecturer

Judith Barry, Professor of Art, Culture and Technology

Kim TallBear, Associate Professor, Faculty of Native Studies, University of Alberta

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## ABSTRACT

The powers of creativity and symbolism that art draws upon have been used in the public realm to uplift and also to oppress. Within this context, art, from Indigenous perspectives, can positively influence the collective imaginations and wokiksuye (memory) of society. Indigenous intervention into the practice of public art can powerfully contribute to the process of decolonization and Indigenization in America. Considerations embedded in notions of public space within a settler colonial society, such as the attempted erasure of Indigenous peoples and histories, and the supplanting of Western doctrines over Indigenous cultures, influence the production and reception of this work. Erin Genia, a Dakota artist, analyzes the politics of memory in public space by scrutinizing monuments celebrating the American colonial project and describes the impacts of Western imperialism on Indigenous arts and cultures. By presenting her own artwork, as well as that of prominent Indigenous artists working in the public sphere, she shows how understandings of place and relationship underpin Dakota/Indigenous methods, and argues that public art is an arena where an evolution of thought and practice in approaches to the world can come to fruition.

THESIS SUPERVISOR: Judith Barry

TITLE: Professor of Art, Culture and Technology

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## Introduction

Art in America's public sphere appears in many contexts: in cities and squares, on roadsides and bridges, as sculptures and murals, on flags, as historic monuments and memorials, and in street art, museums, architecture, landscaping, and other infrastructure. From my perspective as a Dakota artist, America's public art is loaded with challenges. Western arts and culture have been effectively used as tools to force the assimilation of Indigenous people into American society. Museums have undermined the culture and creative arts of Indigenous peoples, perpetuated an ethos that casts us within restrictive narratives, and placed limitations on the roles of art. Monumental works have expropriated tribal territories and sacred sites. All affect the political and social realities of Indigenous people by influencing public opinion and reifying colonial attitudes that justify the occupation of Indigenous lands and subjugation of Indigenous peoples.

While art in America's public realm has so often been used to oppress, it is also used to uplift. It can address colonial harm by providing an arena where Indigenous art forms can flourish. It can bring people together to address key community needs and promote justice through the creative process. Works of art can spark learning, critical thinking, healing, understanding, and connection through *wokiksuye* (memory). This thesis asserts that Indigenous intervention in the practice of public art offers a powerful platform for transforming humanity's collective consciousness and improving society through Indigenization and decolonization.

Dakota understanding of place, art and creativity, history, relationality, time, property, and the nature of reality—which differ significantly from Western constructs—have continued to sustain our people, despite centuries of colonization, genocide, and assimilation. Understanding the underlying political and historical layers that affect the production of art and culture and finding ways to address them will help move Indigenous arts forward. From my perspective as a Dakota artist, the fundamental question at the heart of this inquiry is: What does it mean to be an Indigenous/Dakota artist working in the public sphere today? For me, it requires that I make work that is accountable not only to my own vision, but to my communities, my *tiospaye* (extended family), my ancestors, and future generations. These responsibilities shape my interactions with the art world and the discipline of art, in its many forms. Through a research method based upon the Dakota epistemology of *Wodakota*, I seek to spark different approaches

to thinking about the complex issues facing Indigenous peoples, marginalized communities, and humanity as a whole.

The thesis is organized according to the key issues surrounding the politics of memory in public space with regard to Indigenous art and monuments. For each topic, a relevant history will be given alongside the ethical considerations unique to Indigenous peoples' art and issues. In chapter 1, I describe my research methodology, which is based on the Dakota epistemology of Wodakota. Chapter 2 illustrates Dakota and Western paradigms and the power dynamics between them. Chapter 3 considers the complex legacy of Indigenous art and identifies the challenges Indigenous artists face in creating work in a context dominated by Western art norms. Chapter 4 discusses the impacts of museum spaces on Indigenous art as well as their role in communicating narratives that influence public understanding of Native peoples. In chapter 5, I include my own story as a Dakota artist and researcher, drawing upon relevant experiences that inform my arguments. After building this foundation, chapter 6 examines the complexities of public space as they relate to Indigenous peoples by describing sites, monuments, and public works of significance to Dakota peoples, such as Six Grandfathers/Mount Rushmore, Bdote/Fort Snelling, the pipestone quarry at Pipestone National Monument, the Lincoln Memorial, and Stone Mountain. Chapter 7 discusses public art and Indigenous artists, and chapter 8 contains the transcripts of three interviews with the Indigenous artists Nora Naranjo Morse, Alan Michelson and Lyonel Grant.

Through this work, I hope to help create a just future by clarifying these complexities, contributing to the ongoing discourses around the politics of public art from my perspective as a Dakota person, and providing visibility and presence to Indigenous peoples' issues and history through art and memory.



## Chapter 1: Method

The major difference between American Indian views of the physical world and Western Science lies in the premise accepted by Indians and rejected by scientists: the world in which we live is alive. Many scientists believe this idea to be primitive superstition and consequently the scientific explanation rejects any nuance of interpretation which could credit the existence of activities as having partial intelligence or sentience. American Indians look at events to determine the activity supporting or undergirding them. Science insists, albeit at a great price in understanding, that the observer be as detached as possible from the event he or she is observing. Indians thus obtain information from birds, animals, rivers, and mountains which is inaccessible to modern science. Indians also know that human beings must participate in events, not isolate themselves from occurrences in the physical world.<sup>1</sup>

As a Dakota artist, scholar, community organizer, and cultural worker, I examine art in the public sphere from my layered perspectives as a multicultural Indigenous person. Using Dakota methods, I center my arguments from my own life experiences, art practice, and community-based work. The scope of *Wokiksuye: The Politics of Memory in Indigenous Art Monuments and Public Space* incorporates secondary, primary, and artistic research. Secondary research on Indigenous issues, public space, monuments, and public art, provides facts and points of departure to advance my perspective. Primary research includes interviews with three prominent Indigenous artists: Nora Naranjo Morse (Tewa), Alan Michelson (Mohawk), and Lyonel Grant (Ngāti Pikiāo and Te Arawa). They communicated their insights about the multifaceted processes of public art-making, as well as about art in relationship to land, monuments, and memory. I share my relevant artworks and associated research to illustrate examples, strengthen my arguments, and add to the discourses on Indigeneity, Dakota history, sacred sites, and art forms. My approach to these topics is colored by the fundamental paradigmatic dissonance between Indigenous and Western philosophies, the nuances of which can be revealed through creative expression.

The thesis format is part of an academic tradition that hasn't always benefited Indigenous peoples.<sup>2</sup> Academic research has often been used as an instrument of dispossession. The history

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1. Vine Deloria Jr, *Red Earth, White Lies: Native Americans and the Myth of Scientific Fact*. (New York: Scribner, 1995), 56.

2. Devon Mihesuah, *So You Want to Write about American Indians? A Guide for Writers, Students, and Scholars*. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2005).

of its exploitation of Indigenous peoples is well documented. In undertaking my own research and this thesis, I related to the work of Indigenous scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith, who wrote, “it appalls us that the West can desire, extract and claim ownership over our ways of knowing, our imagery, the things we create and produce, and then simultaneously reject the people who created and developed those ideas and seek to deny [us] further opportunities to be creators of [our] own culture.”<sup>3</sup>

In previous scholarly pursuits, I have tested different research methodologies, finding the critical, decolonization, and Indigenous paradigms helpful but limited.<sup>4</sup> As a research-based practitioner, I have investigated the relationship between research and Indigenous peoples. In 2010, I organized the “Research Protocols in Indian Country” conference for the Northwest Indian Applied Research Institute at The Evergreen State College. The question of how to conduct research without perpetuating the harmful practices of Western approaches is salient. “As more and more scholars begin to engage with imperialism and colonialism in research, make choices on what they research, and delve into areas that colonial epistemologies dismissed...they are confronted by the real limitations of Western hegemonic research practices.”<sup>5</sup> While Western praxis has been detrimental to Dakota knowledge production and dissemination, these methods remain reliable and relevant to life and inquiry. They are therefore essential to this thesis, in which I have experimented with a mixed formulation that includes elements of Indigenizing, decolonization, critical race theory, and community-based research methodologies, with a foundation in Wodakota.

In my life and work as an artist, my responsibility to live by Wodakota is a central concern. Wodakota is a set of values and rules for how to behave and live in a civilized manner, based on Dakota tenets. In the context of this thesis, Wodakota has been applied in numerous ways. My methods for research in data collection, analysis, and presentation rely on Dakota

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3. Linda T. Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies, Research and Indigenous Peoples*. (New York: Palgrave, 2000), 1.

4. Erin M. Genia, “The Landscape and Language of Indigenous Cultural Rights.” *Arizona State Law Journal* 44, no. 2 (2012): 653.

5. Chilisa Bagele, *Indigenous Research Methodologies*. (Los Angeles: Sage Publications, 2012), 4.

paradigms. First, I avoid the “othering” of a third-person perspective by centering myself and my observations in the research.<sup>6</sup> Second, I use a conversational, narrative style of writing, influenced by oral tradition, and privilege Dakota language terminology wherever possible to define my voice and place within the story I tell. Next, data evaluation occurs through the lens of Wodakota, as well as the philosophy of Mitakuye Oyasin, a Dakota relational ontology that is later discussed at greater length. In the artist interviews found in chapter 8, I prioritize my ongoing relationships with respected elders. I employ a place-based approach to histories and events to emphasize the connection to the Earth as the source of life. I also attempt to foster the non-linear evaluation of my findings within a thesis format which has traditionally presented facts linearly. Finally, I emphasize the inherent strength of Dakota philosophies and practices rather than the record of victimization so often found in literature and research about Indigenous peoples.

Since the issues I consider here are inseparable from the land, it’s important for me to acknowledge and express appreciation to the first peoples of the land where I live and work—the Wampanoag, Nipmuck, Ponkapoag, and Massachusett tribes of what is today known as Medford, Massachusetts. In preparing this thesis, I organized and conducted a workshop called *Monuments in Perspective*, which was held as part of the *Experiments in Pedagogy* program for the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of MIT’s School of Architecture and Planning.<sup>7</sup> In this workshop, MIT students and community members traveled to sites of tribal cultural, historical, and sacred significance, including Aquinnah Cliffs, Sacrifice Rock and the Blue Hills quarries. In visiting these locations, we demonstrated that there is no substitute for experiencing their significance through body, breath, and senses. Listening to the perspectives of Indigenous people whose knowledge of site history extends back thousands of years, makes a deeper understanding of the spirit of a place possible.

I hope this work will be accessible to many people, including Native artists, Indigenous people, scholars, scientists, leaders, curators, art critics, arts administrators, community workers,

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6. Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism*. (New York : Knopf , 1993).

7. Department of Architecture, “150 Years of Architecture at MIT: Experiments in Pedagogy,” *School of Architecture and Planning, Massachusetts Institute of Technology*. <https://architecture.mit.edu/150>

people interested in history, philosophy, climate change, and ecology, people working on public art, and others.

### **Terminology: Indigenous**

Indigenous peoples' cultures and ways of life, which are diverse from place to place and cannot be generalized, do share a common thread marked by reverence for land and a deep awareness of the interconnectedness of life. This consciousness has developed over millennia by aligning values and practices with the processes of the natural world to ensure survival. Although there are similarities across global Indigenous peoples, I cannot speak of them all accurately. As a Dakota/Odawa person, and a product of longstanding United States assimilation policies, reclaiming and speaking of my own heritages is challenge enough. To avoid the problematic approach of pan-Indianism, I focus on my own value system, which is based on Wodakota, and stems from my citizenship in the Dakota Oyate within the Oceti Sakowin (Great Sioux Nation).

There are many names, often used interchangeably, to identify tribal peoples in the US and other European-colonized anglophone countries such as New Zealand, Canada, and Australia, but all have nuanced meanings and different contexts in which they are appropriate or inappropriate: Native American, American Indian, Indian, Aboriginal, First Nation, Native Hawaiian, Alaska Native, Indigenous. Within tribal groups, there are also different names; for example, Dakota is a group within the Oceti Sakowin, which also includes Lakota and Nakota, all of whom share a common language. Americans have called us Sioux, but that's generally not what we call ourselves. The tribe I am enrolled in is the Sisseton-Wahpeton Oyate on the Lake Traverse Reservation, where bands of Sisseton and Wahpeton Dakotas were allotted land in the late nineteenth century. There are other Sissetons and Wahpetons whose reservations were designated elsewhere in the diaspora. Terminology is bound up in language, historical associations, and the ways in which colonization impacted our peoples. For my purposes, I refer to the specific name of the tribe, and as a general term, I mostly use the word Indigenous. To assist in the understanding of the meaning of Indigenous, the description of Indigeneity as an identity by Taiaiake Alfred and Jeff Corntassel is helpful:

Indigeness is an identity constructed, shaped and lived in the politicized context of contemporary colonialism. The communities, clans, nations and tribes we call *Indigenous peoples* are just that: Indigenous to the lands they inhabit, in contrast to and in contention with the colonial societies and states that have spread out from Europe and other centres of empire. It is this oppositional, place-based existence, along with the consciousness of

being in struggle against the dispossessing and demeaning fact of colonization by foreign peoples, that fundamentally distinguishes Indigenous peoples from other peoples of the world.

There are, of course, vast differences among the world's Indigenous peoples in their cultures, political-economic situations, and in their relationships with colonizing Settler societies. But the struggle to survive as distinct peoples on foundations constituted in their unique heritages, attachments to their homelands, and natural ways of life is what is shared by all Indigenous peoples, as well as the fact that their existence is in large part lived as determined acts of survival against colonizing states' efforts to eradicate them culturally, politically and physically. The challenge of 'being Indigenous', in a psychic and cultural sense, forms the crucial question facing Indigenous peoples today in the era of contemporary colonialism--a form of post-modern imperialism in which domination is still the Settler imperative but where colonizers have designed and practise more subtle means (in contrast to the earlier forms of missionary and militaristic colonial enterprises) of accomplishing their objectives.<sup>8</sup>

During the period of colonization, a process of genocide evolved over hundreds of years with the goal of dispossessing and disappearing Native peoples to claim their land and resources.

Indigenous people who have survived this onslaught for centuries, live in a world that is engineered to reinforce the colonizers' dominance, which can be clearly seen through the public monuments and art strewn throughout the contested space of America. By embracing the values that have allowed us to survive and thrive as peoples, from the time our oral histories tell us we were created through the catastrophes of genocide and assimilation in the recent past and present, Indigenous artists can engage in work that builds culture within a dominating society that has attempted to silence and rob us of our agency, livelihoods, land, and civilization.

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8. Taiaiake Alfred and Jeff Corntassel, "Being Indigenous: Resurgences against Contemporary Colonialism". *Government and Opposition* vol 40 no. 4 (2005): 597-614.

## Chapter 2: Wodakota and Mitakuye Oyasin

One time  
I was visiting with my relatives  
The clouds the mountains the sky  
The trees  
My relatives touched my spirit  
Nudged it lovingly  
Listen to us impatient one  
We are forever  
You must remember the gentleness of time  
You are struggling to be who you are  
You say you want to learn the old ways  
Struggling to learn  
When all you must do is remember  
Remember the people  
Remember the sky and earth  
Remember the people  
Have always struggled to live  
In harmony in peace  
Struggle against selfishness and  
Weakness so the people may live  
As Nations  
The old ways are hard  
The people have always had  
To work together  
Remember impatient one  
Remember and live  
Do not be afraid of truth  
Respect discipline  
Share your life so the people may live  
Honor sky and earth  
Honor yourself  
Honor your relations  
Remember impatient one  
The gentleness of time<sup>9</sup>

Wodakota is at the heart of Dakota epistemology and governs our interactions with each other and the world at large. The values set forth in Wodakota provide a powerful basis for people to behave in a good way in the world. They are evident in our understandings of matter, relationships, and time, and are expressed through kinship, oral tradition, the intergenerational transfer of knowledge and connection to place, for example. Wodakota is embedded within my artistic practice, research and work, and Mitakuye Oyasin is an underlying assumption I carry.

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9. John Trudell, "Listening/Honor Song," *Tribal Voice*, Effective Records, 1983.

Understanding the ways in which Dakota epistemology differs from, and has been minimized by Western colonization, is essential to understanding the dynamic of Indigenous art in the public realm of this settler colonial state.

Wodakota consists of seven laws or values: wa’ohoda (respect), wa’onšida (compassion), wa’wokiye (generosity), wi’kšape (wisdom), wo’wičake (honesty), wo’čekiye (prayer), and wañ’wada (humility). So much of our sacred cultural and intellectual property has been expropriated, misinterpreted, and exploited. Due to this, there are many aspects of our culture that should not be disclosed. The foundational doctrine of Dakota as presented above are aspects that are universal. Dakota scholar Waziyatawin wisely states that, “If we are struggling for Indigenous liberation on Indigenous lands, all people are going to have to practice Indigenous ways of being in some form. We will all need to engage in sustainable living practices and Indigenous cultures, including Dakota culture, offer excellent models for all people. That does not mean former colonizers can appropriate our spirituality and ceremonial life, but it will mean they need to embrace Indigenous values such as balance and reciprocity.”<sup>10</sup> The key lesson of Wodakota is that the reality we create begins with our thoughts. We must pay the utmost attention to them, and how we act upon them, in order to create a world that is a better place for future generations. This is the embodiment of the value of wi’kšape, (wisdom). Artists and creators of culture play a unique role in this process because they take their visions, ideas, feelings, intuitions, and thoughts and make them into something valuable—sometimes tangible, and sometimes intangible.

Mitakuye Oyasin is an important concept and practice in the constellation of Dakota epistemology, one that has become popularized by New Age spirituality. It means, “we are all related,” which goes far beyond the distorted understanding of those who expropriate it. We are relatives of not only our families and other people, but also of animals, plants, rocks, air, electricity, water, and everything in existence, connected by interrelationships in a continuum of life. “The ultimate aim of Dakota life, stripped of accessories, [is] quite simple: One must obey kinship rules; one must be a good relative . . . Without that aim, and the constant struggle to

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10. Waziyatawin, “Understanding Colonizer Status.” *Unsettling America*. September 6, 2011. <https://unsettlingamerica.wordpress.com/2011/09/06/understanding-colonizer-status/>

attain it, the people would no longer be Dakotas in truth. They would no longer even be human.”<sup>11</sup>

That everything is alive and we are a part of everything is basic to Wodakota, and Dakota people have always expressed this philosophy. In 1902, Dakota activist, musician and scholar Zitkála-Šá wrote in *The Atlantic Monthly*, “I fain would trace a subtle knowledge of the native folk which enabled them to recognize a kinship to any and all parts of this vast universe . . . I feel in keen sympathy with my fellow creatures, for I seem to see clearly again that all are akin.” Many other Indigenous peoples share that conviction. According to the Tewa artist Nora Naranjo Morse, “Objects are alive. That is basic to our worldview. I am always comforted knowing it is a very spiritual thing to have. It is a gift knowing that rocks, trees, clouds passing above are alive. We carry this worldview into the rest of our lives.”<sup>12</sup>

This profound understanding of the nature of existence incorporates a deep awareness of time, which is connected to place and subject to elemental forces. Ancestors and future generations are prominent figures in day-to-day life, converging on each moment in the same way that the past and future exist within the present to varying degrees. This long-range thinking bears upon the discussion of public art and monuments, specifically on the aspect of permanence. Monuments have been cast in bronze and carved into mountains to create objects that, it is believed, will last. However, societal norms in the United States and human historical epochs stand in great contrast to geologic or climatic periods and the life spans of living beings.

Our ways have been transmitted through the intergenerational transfer of knowledge and the oral tradition of telling our stories through our language, which have all been targeted for erasure by US assimilation policies of boarding schools.

Within Dakota culture, history is an interpretation of the past that becomes active only when a relationship has been developed between a storyteller and a listener. For thousands of years, stories deemed significant enough to perpetuate have been handed down orally through generations, always reliant on the generosity and veracity of the storyteller and the eagerness and capacities of the listener. Most important, the continuation of these stories has been dependent on the meaning of the stories being

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11. Gwen Westerman and Bruce White, “Mni Sota Makoce: The Land of the Dakota.” (Minneapolis: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2012), 15.

12. Gerald McMaster, *Reservation X*. (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1998), 85.



conveyed and understood within the context of the worldview inherent in the Dakota language. This distinguishes it markedly from the Western academic historical interpretations of the Dakota past, which rely on documents written within the framework of the Western-European worldview.<sup>13</sup>

Today, Dakota people and Indigenous people in general are actively engaging in practices that seek to reclaim, preserve, protect, and advance the fundamental aspects of who we are. Pointing the way are the Dakota intellectuals who have existed at the intersections of Western pedagogy and Dakota philosophy since treaties were made with the US. Brilliant Dakota scholars, creatives, and thinkers such as Vine Deloria Jr., Elizabeth Cook-Lynn, Ella C. Deloria, Zitkála-Šá, Charles A. Eastman (Ohiyesa), Floyd Red Crow Westerman, John Trudell, Kim TallBear, Waziyatawin, and Philip J. Deloria have articulated Dakota philosophies in their influential works. They have served as critics, educators, leaders, and creatives, empowering our communities and enlightening American settler society, while adding to the Dakota knowledge base and the larger realm of Indigenous thought and practice, and benefiting humanity.

To non-Dakota or non-Indigenous people, the concepts embedded within Wodakota and Mitakuye Oyasín may seem exciting and new in comparison to Western methodologies. Those who expropriate these concepts and insert them into their scientific or artistic practices are considered to be on the cutting edge of their fields, but without crediting their sources, they are robbing our people and culture.<sup>14</sup> This form of continued colonialism is prevalent in academic disciplines.

Native peoples often assert cultural rights as a way to assert a central claim for “cultural survival.” The need for cultural survival is particularly compelling for Native peoples, who have been subjected to nearly two centuries of government laws and policies designed to destroy Native cultures and political systems and forcibly assimilate them into the dominant society. Of course, contemporary policymakers argue that the United States is now committed to “pluralism” and respects basic civil rights, providing an appropriate barrier to governmental overreaching. Native peoples are not convinced, however, that the modern norms of “equal citizenship” or “liberty” will be used to preserve their cultural context. All too often, these norms mask policies that have severe and detrimental results for Native peoples as distinctive cultural groups. Yet group rights

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13. Waziyatawin and Eli Taylor. *Remember This! Dakota Decolonization and the Eli Taylor Narratives*. (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2005), 23.

14. Zoe Todd, “An Indigenous Feminist’s Take On The Ontological Turn: ‘Ontology’ Is Just Another Word For Colonialism.” *Journal of Historical Sociology* 29, no. 1 (2016): 4–22.

(including cultural rights) are often perceived to be “dangerous” and antagonistic to liberal values.<sup>15</sup>

Indigenous science is increasingly recognized by Western science as valid, but in the past, our knowledge was demeaned and used to discredit us in order to validate our dispossession. It is ironic though that Western science is gradually progressing towards making “discoveries” that more closely align with Indigenous understanding. For example, scientists only lately figured out that Indigenous peoples stewarded entire ecosystems with sophisticated techniques, such as managing forests through controlled burning.<sup>16</sup> A recent study found that Indigenous peoples cultivated the Amazon as a food forest over thousands of years.<sup>17</sup> While these findings are new to Western science, they are not news to us: these practices are fundamental to our societies. That it has taken the splitting of the atom, an incredible loss of biodiversity, and the possibility of destroying life as we know it in order to begin to comprehend how to live sustainably on Earth demonstrates fundamental problems in Western epistemology.

“There is no word for science in our language,” said artist Marlena Myles (Spirit Lake Dakota, Mohegan, and Muscokee Creek), who stressed the relationality of Dakota philosophy about the laws of nature. “It’s awareness, observation. When we observe the deer, we treat it as a relative rather than as a subject.”<sup>18</sup> Her characterization reflects that of the Dakota author and historian Vine Deloria Jr., who wrote extensively about science as practiced by Indigenous peoples:

By observing the behavior and growth of other organic forms of life they could see that a benign personal energy flowed through everything and undergirded the physical world. They understood that their task was to fit into the physical world in the most constructive

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15. Rebecca Tsosie, "Cultural challenges to biotechnology: Native American genetic resources and the concept of cultural harm." *The Journal Of Law, Medicine & Ethics: A Journal Of The American Society Of Law, Medicine & Ethics* 35, no. 3 (2007): 396-411.

16. George Nicholas, “How Western science is finally catching up to Indigenous knowledge.” *Macleans*. February 15, 2018. <https://www.macleans.ca/society/how-western-science-is-finally-catching-up-to-indigenous-knowledge/>

17. Field Museum, "Ancient peoples shaped the Amazon rainforest: Trees domesticated by pre-Columbian peoples remain more common in forests near ancient settlements." *ScienceDaily*. March 2, 2017 [www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2017/03/170302143939.htm](http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2017/03/170302143939.htm)

18. Marlena Myles, Personal communication, March 20, 2019.

manner and to establish relationships with the higher power, or powers, that created and sustained the universe. They sought to learn a way of living that would most efficiently accomplish these tasks. Observations, however, were not enough. People had dreams to which aspects of the living universe came forward to urge them to take certain well-defined paths of behavior... the people had no good reason to doubt these dreams, because their content was always later empirically verified in their daily lives – the things they dreamt about happened.<sup>19</sup>

Dakota methods operate from the understanding that metaphysical realms—which can be understood through theoretical physics as interdimensional realms—exist and affect us, suggesting a deeper comprehension of reality than is possible under current Western approaches. Dakota scholar Kim TallBear observed:

Indigenous thinkers have important contributions to make to conversations in which human societies rethink the range of nonhuman beings with whom we see ourselves in intimate relation and, precisely because of the varied ways indigenous peoples relate, our possibilities for being in the world. The advantage of analytical frameworks that are not secular is that they are more likely to have kept sight of the profound influence in the world of beings categorized by Western thinkers (both the church and science) in hierarchical ways as animal, or less animate. Now that theorists in a range of fields are seeking to dismantle those hierarchies, we should remember that not everyone needs to summon a new analytical framework... Bringing indigenous thought into these conversations does not simply increase intellectual rigor and expand multiculturalism in the academy. And by “indigenous thought” I do not mean some static notion of indigenous “traditional” knowledge, but rather engagement with the thinking that indigenous people do today.<sup>20</sup>

Her analysis stems from a perspective that can be illustrated by the principle of wa’onsida (respect), for non-human beings as well as Indigenous peoples. Respect must be applied to the theoretical as well as the practical arenas of science, governance, politics, the economy, the arts, and culture because all of these fields are interconnected. By breaking down the walls separating spheres of understanding—the categorization and compartmentalization of knowledge that is characteristic of Western thinking—we have the chance to comprehend the nature of life in a richer way.

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19. Vine Deloria Jr, *The World We Used to Live In*. (Golden, CO: Fulcrum Publishing, 2006), xxv.

20. Kim TallBear, “Beyond the Life/Not Life Binary” in *Cryopolitics: Frozen Life in a Melting World*, ed. Joanna Radin and Emma Kowal (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2017), 193.

As humanity evolves, Indigenous peoples, who have carried holistic knowledge for millennia, must be heeded in all aspects of information production and problem-solving. Indigenous approaches to life, illustrated in Wodakota, remain as relevant and powerful as they have been for thousands of years. For this reason, Indigenous artists have much to contribute to discourses on art and beyond.

### **Thought Imperialism**

To inform definitions and conceptions of art, public space, monuments, power, and the experience of histories and realities outside of the dominant societal context, this section discusses the politics of memory in the public sphere by exposing the imperialism of thought in American life, which manifests as cultural supremacy. This power imbalance has created an environment of hostility toward Dakota people and philosophies. Indigenous people must reconcile a world that is both antagonistic to us and also fascinated by us. We suffer from the environmental destruction of our land and desecration of our sacred places by people who do not appreciate the land or see relationality in the world.

Western thought imperialism was occurring long before settlers came to this continent, and it has been compounded over many centuries, beginning in Europe itself. An excellent way to describe the phenomenon, which Indigenous people in the US have experienced through assimilation policies and facile cultural norms, is the concept of the “captive mind.” Nigerian sociologist Ifeanyi Onwuzuruigbo describes it as:

A way of thinking that is dominated by western thought in an imitative and uncritical manner. Uncritical imitation pervades all levels of the scientific enterprise, thus affecting problem-definition, conceptualisation, description, explanation, interpretation and generalisation. The captive mind is characterised by a lack of creativity and capacity for raising original problems, as revealed in the inability to create innovative analytical methods devoid of existing stereotypes; and the inability to separate the particular from the universal and localise universally valid knowledge...It is unconscious of its own captivity and the factors responsible for it. In addition, the captive mind is fragmented in outlook and alienated from the major issues of society. Found in all fields of knowledge, the captive mind is the result of western dominance over the rest of the world.<sup>21</sup>

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21. Ifeanyi Onwuzuruigbo, “Indigenising Eurocentric Sociology: The ‘captive mind’ and Five Decades of Sociology in Nigeria.” *Current Sociology* 66, no. 6 (2018): 842.

In examining the thought imperialism of Western epistemologies—loosely and inclusively defined as a legacy built from Indo-European, Greco-Roman, Judeo-Christian, imperial, and colonial approaches to life—it becomes possible to trace a common cause of today’s poverty, military conflicts, widespread unrest, mass extinction, emergent climate change, and environmental destruction to their basis in the Western individual’s separation from the natural world. This fundamentally misaligned system is maintained through unbalanced hierarchies of power and extreme violence, and it overshadows the existing value inherent in aspects of Western thought.

Alienation from nature is sustained by thought imperialism, which sows destruction in many forms to maintain its hegemony. Thoughts become reality. When applied to life, the disconnection expands outwards from the individual to the family, the community, the government, and the economy, creating imbalance on the scale of societies, and inevitably, as we are witnessing with climate change, on a global scale.

Since Descartes, philosophy has articulated a form of individualism where the individual is thrown back on his or her own responsibility, requiring him or her to build an order of thought for themselves, in the first person singular. This process produces a dichotomy in the form of binary oppositions such as us/them, public/private, friends/enemies, individual/community, and so on... which require, for their definition and maintenance, a sense of otherness and exclusion.<sup>22</sup>

Extreme individuality, which is fundamental to Western epistemologies, cannot align with the laws of the natural world. The ideologies spread by thought imperialism maintain that Indigenous people are primitive and savage, which allows our voices to be easily dismissed when we point out those limitations. When our voices are dismissed, our lands and resources can be plundered. Examined from a Dakota perspective, the legacy of Western thought could be considered both primitive and savage. Under its control, humanity has caused such severe ecological destruction that our own survival and that of all life on Earth is endangered, while wars, colonization, genocide, and poverty have triggered deep divisions among the peoples of the world. Nonetheless, there are always apologists for Western culture who employ “‘imperialist amnesia’: a tendency on the part of ‘agents of postcolonialism’ to either ignore the history of

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22. Patrick Fitzsimons, and Graham Smith. 2000. “Philosophy and Indigenous Cultural Transformation.” *Educational Philosophy & Theory* (2000), 32.

colonial domination...or to present a sanitised version of colonialism from which evidence of exploitation, persecution, subjugation and genocide has been effectively effaced.”<sup>23</sup> In the face of this tactic, truth-telling is a necessary strategy.

In another age and context, Dakota people could have afforded to respect the differences in values and worldviews of other peoples around the globe without making value judgments about those other ways of being or attempting to change them. In today’s world however, we cannot afford to take such a benign and tolerant approach. We all have to challenge the Western European ways of being that are leading everyone on a path to global catastrophe. Many of the values dominating the leading industrialized nations of the world are destructive to the planet and no one will be able to sustain them indefinitely. We simply will not survive if we continue on this harmful trajectory.<sup>24</sup>

In dismissing Indigenous peoples’ voices and contributions to humanity, a severe imbalance has been created in the world. Although we have borne the worst of Western praxis, it is also a failure for many others who are marginalized, displaced, and dispossessed as a matter of course.

Thought imperialism fortifies all kinds of Western institutions—cultural, academic, governmental, economic, religious. Through colonial mechanisms, it has caused destabilization around the world. Communities dealing with its legacy are in various states of chaos and conflict. Earth-based and local subsistence ways, developed over millennia, have been destroyed or targeted for destruction. Neoliberal capitalism, a creation unique to Western thought, is dangerously unsustainable and responsible for incredible suffering and widespread environmental devastation. Western-based political doctrines stymie homegrown systems, resulting in sweeping corruption and tyranny. The disruption caused by the brutality inflicted through colonization has led to long and terrible wars and conflicts. Western cultural and intellectual norms of toxic individuality, which seem to accentuate the worst qualities of human nature, are promulgated and maintained as the dominant thought-form with the help of academic institutions. By expounding classical principles of arts and sciences and delegitimizing other ways of knowledge production, these institutions set a tone of supremacy. They offer solutions to

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23. Robert Fletcher, "The Art of Forgetting: imperialist amnesia and public secrecy." *Third World Quarterly* 33, no. 3 (April 2012): 423–39.

24. Waziyatawin. *What Does Justice Look Like: The Struggle for Liberation in Dakota Homeland*. (St. Paul, MN: Living Justice Press, 2008), 143.

the direst issues of our time, not by implicating Western praxis, but by fostering it through the promotion of short-term technological or market-based fixes instead of addressing root causes. The correlation of the spread of Western praxis and the misery faced by people affected by colonization is matched by the exponential ecosystemic collapse being simultaneously committed by it.<sup>25</sup> Artists living in this context create work that responds to their world.

Thought imperialism becomes possible when collective memory is expunged. Monuments play an important role in this process by supplanting Indigenous presence with shrines to colonization and occupation. A key pursuit of colonial empire-building is the forced erasure of memory. In this, colonizing powers have been so successful that people in the Western world are generally ignorant of their origins or their natural connections to the continuum of life. Knowing where you come from and what sustains you should be staples of consciousness for people of any culture. But the practice of eliminating memory and language has been taking place for so long that this fundamental knowledge is increasingly absent. The trajectory of world history has been dominated by those who have used their might to subjugate and take power from others to enrich a few chosen ones, using methods that wipe out the memory of the subjugated. Great thinkers, artists, scientists, and leaders within the Western tradition have condemned such oppression, offering both salient critiques and solutions, and yet, without examining the problematic basis of Western thought—man’s separation from nature due to his perceived supremacy—these critiques and solutions fall short.

The field of art is an arena where these imbalances and fallacies can be challenged. To reach solutions to the problems caused by Western thought imperialism, we must address root causes. Continuing along the same path will not lead to a different result. The problems will only get worse. If the foundational philosophies of the dominant culture are inherently problematic, we must repair or replace them. The creative process, of which artists are masters, is an important avenue of redress.

From my perspective as a Dakota person, Western thought imperialism incorporates a pathological mentality that holds sway over the thinking, imaginations, practices, and policies of

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25. Oren Lyons, John Mohawk, and José Barreiro “Basic Call to Consciousness,” *Akwesasne Notes*, (Rooseveltown, NY: Mohawk Nation, Akwesasne Press, 1986), 52.

people belonging to the dominant culture.<sup>26</sup> Assimilated people who are indoctrinated as captive minds perpetuate the cycle through economic entrapment and cultural supremacy. Thought imperialism is so deeply embedded in the issues we face as humans that it has become hard to see as a root problem. What are the long-term consequences for peoples who are disconnected from their origins and source of life—the land they live on and come from? Indigenous peoples have always challenged this paradigm, and because of the work and struggles of those who came before us, we carry the memory, understanding, and knowledge that have the power to undo it.

Remembering our essential connections can increasingly occur through the avenues of the arts, culture, and creative expression, especially within the public realm. Western colonization, genocide, and all that has accompanied these extreme forms of repression, has interrupted our evolutionary trajectory as Dakota people, and, as a result, we have many issues to address as we look ahead to future generations. What could be more compelling than to focus our efforts on the recovery and reclamation of our Indigenous truths and reject those of the dominant cultures that do harm? As Vine Deloria Jr. wrote, “The imminent and expected destruction of the life cycle of world ecology can be prevented by a radical shift in outlook from our present naive conception of this world as a testing ground of abstract morality to a more mature view of the universe as a comprehensive matrix of life forms.”<sup>27</sup>

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26. Jack D. Forbes, *Columbus and Other Cannibals*. (New York: Seven Stories Press, 1979), 49.

27. Vine Deloria Jr, *God Is Red*. (Golden, CO: Fulcrum Publishing, 1973), 288.



## Chapter 3: Indigenous Art

The body of Indigenous art in America is vast, underappreciated, and unfamiliar to most Americans. Created by lineages of Indigenous artists over thousands of years and across millions of square miles, it not only predates Western colonization of the Americas by millennia, but also that of Western-colonizing cultures themselves. Its foundations are built upon centuries of development of unique tribal histories, locations, interrelationships, voices, traditions, stories, values, and practices. It is bound by geography, ancestry, natural hybridity, Indigeneity, and resistance to colonization. It encompasses tribes that long interacted with each other throughout the hemisphere, around the Pacific Rim, and beyond. Although the immense aggregate of Indigenous art arises from many tribes, each tribe, band, and clan within could be considered to have a canon of its own, a set of rules by which creativity, design, expression, and technique are accomplished. Indigenous artists, architects, leaders, and culture bearers have been creating unique “public” works, which are the result of their own philosophies and practices on this continent, for millennia.

In discussing Indigenous arts in the public sphere, understanding the complexities of Indigenous art in America is important. Ample literature exists on issues surrounding public art, and most of it builds upon, or is created in reaction to, the Western canon of art. Due to cultural supremacy, there are less resources for and about art in the public sphere from the perspective of Indigenous people in America. While an increasing number of Indigenous artists work in the public sphere, and are therefore increasing public awareness of Indigenous art, there are still many misconceptions and misunderstandings that should be addressed. Indigenous artists today navigate a host of entanglements related to the history and framing of our output.

### **Definitions of Art in Context**

The very definitions of art, as established by dominant Western discourses, conflict with those of Indigenous art when applied to the reading and purpose of a work or a body of work. Using the creative process to produce forms is universal across humanity, but how it is done from place to place, within different cultural contexts, is incredibly diverse, impossible to classify in a Western sense, and worthy of understanding. The basic concepts that determine the output of the creative process—technique, form, material culture, style, usage, appreciation—can

all be evaluated from subjective standpoints, which adds further layers of meaning and significance.

Native Americans, like people everywhere, value the visual pleasure afforded by things made well and imaginatively. They also value many of the same attributes that make up the Western notion of ‘art’, such as skill in the handling of materials, the practiced manipulation of established stylistic conventions, and the individual powers of invention and conceptualization. There is also ample evidence, however, that in Native traditions, the purely material and visual features of an object are not necessarily the most important in establishing its relative value, as they have come to be in the West. Other qualities of associations, not knowable from a strictly visual inspection may be important. These may include soundness of construction to ensure functional utility, or ritual correctness in the gathering of raw materials, or powers that inhere because of the object’s original conception in a dream experience, or the number of times it was used in a ceremony.<sup>28</sup>

These examples of the ways Indigenous art forms differ from Western art are instructive, and are not well understood by art enthusiasts who operate within Western norms. In my studies of Dakota and Odawa art and the art of other Indigenous peoples in museum collections—which has involved spending time with ancient and modern pieces—and community-based work with artists and culture-bearers, I have seen firsthand the different definitions of what constitutes art, how it is evaluated, and what purpose it serves. When definitions do overlap, they are proof of our association to the human condition, not of the cultural supremacy of the West.

The legacy of creative processes that produced the art and material culture of Indigenous people in the Americas cannot be adequately evaluated from a Western standpoint because Western art, as a force, is not an irreproachable player in the discussion. As an arm of Western epistemology, it has been used as a tool to force Indigenous peoples to assimilate, and is implicated in cultural harm through expropriation. It has also served to maintain false narratives about Indigenous people that continue to reverberate within a major sphere of its influence—the collective imaginations of American society. To paint a more complete picture, Indigenous art must be disseminated from the perspectives of the peoples whose birthright it is, and we need access to spaces and resources to do that.

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28. Janet C. Berlo and Ruth B. Phillips, *Native North American Art*. (Oxford University Press, 1998), 9.

Defining art from an Indigenous perspective within a Western context is complex. The facets of complexity include, but are not limited to: the arts legacy we have inherited as tribal peoples, the legacy of assimilation which is tantamount to cultural genocide, the expropriation of our practices by Western practitioners, the disappearance and destruction of our great masterpieces and cultural property through colonial looting, and the ongoing pressure to adopt the Western canon. In addition to the questions surrounding what constitutes art are the challenges faced by Native artists. These include confronting disparaging narratives about Native people, as well as colonial notions that occupy the imaginations of those in the dominant society. On top of this, we also have to do what other cultural producers do: learn and master techniques, understand our materials, and make our livings as artists with few opportunities to do that within a capitalistic economic system.

To begin to understand the fundamental incongruities between the different views of art, I am struck by this piece written by Ohiyesa in 1915:

...Such is the strange philosophy of the white man! He hews down the forest that has stood for centuries in its pride and grandeur, tears up the bosom of mother earth, and causes the silvery watercourses to waste and vanish away. He ruthlessly disfigures God's own pictures and monuments, and then daubs a flat surface with many colors, and praises his work as a masterpiece! The Indian did not paint nature not because it he did not feel it, but because it was sacred to him. He so loved the reality that he could not venture upon the imitation. It is now time to unfold the sources of his genius...[a] sense of the aesthetic, which is closely akin to a religious feeling.<sup>29</sup>

This perspective illustrates the incredible dissonance between Dakota and Western paradigms. It is a rare perspective, and its significant departure from mainstream thinking is why we need to have more Indigenous voices at the table.

The forced assimilation of Indigenous peoples through boarding schools and other means, accompanied by the outlawing and denigration of our traditional practices, languages, and religions, has instilled the superiority of Western culture over Indigenous ways into the cultural fabric of America. This hegemony manifests itself in many ways and has been institutionalized in US arts and cultural organizations that are based on Western constructs. Americans have been

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29. Charles A. Eastman. *The Indian today: the past and future of the first American*. 1915. 148-156

conditioned to view Indigenous people, and by extension, Indigenous artists, through an anthropological lens, which automatically relegates us to the past and turns our high art, which is easily on par with anything being made today, into handicrafts. It also makes Indigenous arts and culture invisible.



Figure 1. Erin Genia, *InVisible*, photo by Gary Zhexi Zhang and Zacharia Jama, 2017, pieced organza

I created a piece about this called, *InVisible*, a 60” x 60” hand-pieced textile. Here is my artist statement about the piece:

Anpa O Wicahnpi, the Morningstar, is a visual representation of a Dakota philosophy and approach to life. Normally, the Morningstar is created in all colors of the rainbow—it appears on quilts and in powwow regalia. Here, color is absent and the sheer quality of the gossamer fabric is almost invisible. Colonization imposed a cultural supremacy that is actively perpetuating itself every day. Cultural supremacy sets itself as the standard and limits the interpretation of reality. Its systems coerce people of other cultures to change in order to reinforce dominant structures and institutions. With this work, I grapple with the paradigmatic dissonance I experience as an Indigenous Dakota/Odawa person living within this system. *InVisible* resembles a skeleton, but it also shimmers, reflecting color in a certain light, and it possesses its own beauty which draws from very old and powerful Dakota iconography. Where do I as an Indigenous artist fit into the mainstream

art world, which is dominated by Western colonial thought? How do I fit? Do I fit? What remains after the erasure of histories, erasure of people, cultures, species, ecosystems? I seek to arise from and add to the rich canon of Indigenous art which developed, and continues to develop, over many thousands of years on this continent.

The ongoing structures perpetuating Western supremacy continue to dominate the circumstances under which Indigenous art is seen, traded, appreciated, and created. Indigenous art should not be judged only by Western art norms and definitions, since they differ so greatly from those inherent in Indigenous art.

### **Construction of the Imaginary as Cultural Harm**

Art is a field where the creative powers of the imagination reign, and yet, for Indigenous peoples, the imaginary narratives constructed about us have been repeated with such authority and frequency that they have become the entry point for most people to relate to us—to our detriment. Native Americans and Indigenous peoples are often seen as objects of fascination, due to narratives prevalent in historical records, media, and popular culture that romanticize us through stereotypical depictions. These imaginary stories cast us as ritualistic, close to nature, and therefore primitive, rather than as complex contemporary peoples who possess the entire spectrum of humanness. The perpetuation of false narratives causes a host of issues that must be considered when considering Indigenous art, because the medium of art, and its discourses, is largely responsible for upholding the fabrications.

As I mentioned earlier, the oversimplification of the concept of Mitakuye Oyasín/we are all related, as expropriated by practitioners of New Age spirituality has perpetuated the stereotype that Indigenous people are closer to nature than non-Indigenous people, which equates us with the primitive. “Substituting the ecological Indian for the work of Native thinkers and makers reinforces images of American Indian people as localized reactionaries under perpetual threat from large-scale ruptures such as colonization and climate change, rather than as purveyors of imaginative forms of global collectivity and connectivity.”<sup>30</sup> This stereotype denies both the sobering and amazing realities of what it means to actually be an Indigenous person

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30. Jessica L Horton, “Indigenous Artists against the Anthropocene.” *Art Journal* 76, no. 2 (2017): 48.

while leaving our work and perspectives out of important conversations about how to address significant societal issues.

Some settlers take the fascination with our romanticized stereotypes to the next level and expropriate our identities. This been a significant problem in our communities for a long time and is a source of cultural harm. These settlers, who sense the fallacies of dominant systems and structures, seek an easy, if unethical, way out by using Indigenous identity and spirituality to deal with the void created by Western thought's separation from the natural world. It is also a convenient way to avoid settler accountability. Throughout American history there are many examples of this "playing Indian," as it is called by Philip J. Deloria, who found that this tendency is actually foundational to American colonization and approaches to Indigenous peoples.<sup>31</sup> The most prominent example in the art world is Jimmie Durham, whose debunked claims of Cherokee heritage have not diminished his standing as a successful artist. His works draw directly from the false narratives and stereotypes surrounding Native Americans, and yet he continues to be a widely celebrated figure who—to the influential leaders of the Western art world—represents a legitimate Indigenous perspective.<sup>32</sup>

The typecasting includes a special kind of discrimination that is reserved for Indigenous peoples—the myth of authenticity. Artist and scholar Dyani Reynolds-White Hawk wrote:

In Native art circles it is often only the most traditional work that is highly regarded in the fine art circles and collections—works that are perceived to have been the least tainted by European influences. This limitation discredits a contemporary Native existence and contemporary Native arts and concerns. Many Native artists have produced a great deal of work confronting these issues. Their work leaves us with visually tangible evidence of the efforts to address stereotypical nostalgic and romantic misconceptions of Native life—and the public's expectation for these misconceptions to be reflected through Native arts.<sup>33</sup>

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31. Philip J. Deloria, *Playing Indian*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998.)

32. Ashley Holland, "Issues & Commentary: The Artist Formerly Known as Cherokee" *Art in America Magazine*. August 15, 2017. <https://www.artinamericamagazine.com/news-features/magazines/issues-commentary-the-artist-formerly-known-as-chokeee/>

33. Dyani Reynolds-White Hawk, "Unexpected Parallels: Commonalities between Native American and Outsider Arts" *Wičazo Ša Review* 27, no. 1 (2012): 47.

One way I speak to the issue of authenticity in my own work is with the words of Hazel Pete (Chehalis), who, through her dedication to her people, brought weaving and other arts from the back from brink of disappearing during the assimilation period. In teaching her daughters, Yvonne and Trudy Marcellay, to continue the traditions through the Hazel Pete Institute of Chehalis Basketry, her legacy has continued and impacted the next generations. She said, “We have always used what is available to us, and today we have the world.”<sup>34</sup> These words profoundly illustrate a complex reality in a straightforward way. Despite losing land, people, and ways of life through genocide, cultural destruction, and occupation, Indigenous ways have not only survived but evolved in response to a changed world. It is a testament to the flexibility, tenacity, and strength of our people and worldviews.

### **Creators of Culture**

Indigenous artists are at the forefront of the struggle to combat imaginary narratives. We also have a responsibility to address cultural loss that has occurred from colonization. As individual artists grapple with the challenges inherent in the field and strive to revive and continue tribal arts traditions, tribes and tribal, legal, and arts organizations are working in tandem on issues of cultural significance. This is illustrated by a December 2018 press release issued by the Association on American Indian Affairs on the ongoing struggles of tribes to keep their cultural property off the auction blocks:

There is a long history of looting and stealing American Indian burials and important American Indian cultural and sacred patrimony. These items often end up in private collections and ultimately auction houses and institutions all over the world. In many cases possession of these items outside their communities of origin contravene Tribal laws, and in some cases federal and state laws. For instance, federal law provides that certain types of objects are inalienable from their Tribal Nations as they are held as national or religious patrimony that have an “ongoing historical, traditional, or cultural importance central” to the Tribe. Auctioneers, consignors, and dealers have professional and ethical responsibilities to deal honestly with the public and validate the ownership of any item for sale. Yet, it is currently not standard practice to reach out to potentially affiliated Tribal Nations to determine whether Native American Ancestral remains, burial belongings, and objects of sacred and cultural patrimony are rightfully in the market. For Tribal Nations, these communally nation-held items are not “art” and should not be

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34. Yvonne Peterson and Trudy Marcellay, personal communication, March 18, 2019.

displayed or sold, but rather are living and breathing entities that are essential to the continuation of diverse American Indian cultures, traditions and religious practices today.<sup>35</sup>

The statement was signed by numerous tribes, the National Congress of American Indians, Affiliated Tribes of Northwest Indians, The Institute of American Indian Arts, First Peoples Fund, the International Indian Treaty Council, and other prominent organizations. It also urged “collectors and auction-goers interested in purchasing American Indian ‘artifacts’ and ‘antiquities’ to exercise cautious due diligence. Rather, collectors interested in American Indian art should instead support contemporary American Indian artists and their creations made for the art market.”<sup>36</sup> Establishing that artifacts and items of antiquity are not art in the Western sense of the word is a key step for tribes that are trying to get their items of cultural patrimony back. This is also important for Indigenous artists because it helps to develop frameworks from which to view cultural objects and practices that are outside the dominant paradigm and portrays them in a wider angle as culture bearers and/or creators of culture. It defends our rights to our cultural heritage, material culture, and art as an issue of justice.

### **Fine Art Hierarchy**

In the hierarchical Western system, the art of Indigenous peoples has typically been classified as craft, primitive art, outsider art, or folk art. Since our creative making draws from traditions that are not seen as high art from Western perspectives, these classifications fundamentally misunderstand our creative output. Masterful contemporary carvings, weavings, pottery, garments, and other items that stem from tribal creative traditions—and may also serve a purpose aside from being visually stunning—are considered works of high art from an Indigenous perspective. In the context of Mitakuye Oyasin, these works have a life of their own. Indigenous art is also designated as identity art, a category applied to anything that doesn’t

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35. Eldred D. Lesensee, “Buyers should invest in contemporary American Indian art instead of American Indian antiquities.” *Association on American Indian Affairs*. December 6, 2018. [https://www.indian-affairs.org/uploads/8/7/3/8/87380358/2018-12-06\\_final\\_joint\\_statement\\_buyers\\_should\\_invest\\_in\\_contemporary\\_art.pdf](https://www.indian-affairs.org/uploads/8/7/3/8/87380358/2018-12-06_final_joint_statement_buyers_should_invest_in_contemporary_art.pdf)

36. Ibid.



conform to the standards of whiteness that underlie the Western canon. In categorizing it this way, it can be easily dismissed. Author Nancy Mithlo noted:

A subjective, contextual approach to Indian Arts runs counter to the basic premises of the art world. Essential to understanding how these differences are played out is the concept of freedom. Artists who choose to identify with a certain community (Indian artist, Chicano artist, African American artist) simultaneously forfeit their perceived “freedom” by embracing a cultural identity. The word Indian placed before the word artist triggers a response laced with stereotypes. Notions concerning the “cultural baggage” of Native artists (as opposed to the perceived individual freedom of their non-Native peers) invalidate Indian contemporary art from consideration as fine art. This marginalization results in real consequences for Native artists, especially those who wish to be included in a fine arts realm offering higher prestige and economic payback.<sup>37</sup>

Indigenous artists and cultural workers have different sets of circumstances surrounding their practices than non-Indigenous artists. These may include responsibility to simultaneously address aspects of cultural loss that occurred as a result of the founding and continuation of the United States of America and responsibilities to our communities, as well as our own visions. Often, Indigenous artists must labor to educate people about the historical and cultural context of their work because our histories have been obscured. In this context, Native artists challenge dominant structures and modalities by default, because of who we are.

### **The Legacy of Modernism in Indigenous Art**

Over time, Western art follows trends, repudiating past techniques and ideas in favor of new ones. Modernism, one of the most influential movements in Western art, was at its height during the early 20th century, when the US was embroiled in the reservation system, where conditions of extreme poverty and other problems for Native people were rampant and national questions about tribal self-governance were occurring. Modernism set the stage for the kind of art that a new generation of Native Americans—who lived through boarding schools where the Western canon of art was taught—would produce.

In the early twentieth century, no cultural movement in Europe had a greater impact on American artists than modernism. Modernist painters, composers and novelists, shattered the esthetic conventions, and philosophical faiths of the nineteenth century... it was also

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37. Gerald, McMaster, *Reservation X*. (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1998), 57.

a response to the phenomena that we have all been living with for over one hundred years: urbanization, the revolution in science and technology, the acceleration of news and information, new kinds of entertainment, and the displacement of entire populations in the midst of war, totalitarianism and terror.<sup>38</sup>

Although the Western canon was forced upon Indigenous peoples and supplanted their own tenets, within the spaces of survivance, the practice of art through the modernist lens offered Indigenous artists a way to express and respond to their realities.<sup>39</sup>

A custom of Western epistemology is to extract and appropriate colonized peoples' property. This is also a key aspect of modernism and postmodernism. It is well understood that a major cultural shift took place in Europe and America as artists and other cultural producers looked to Indigenous, African, and other non-Western art forms for inspiration in seeking new approaches and began to create new kinds of artwork drawing from their perceptions of Indigenous art.<sup>40</sup> This contributed to the demand for Indigenous artifacts and fueled false narratives around issues of authenticity and perceived cultural purity. It also contributed to a culture of appropriation that Indigenous peoples face to this day. Of modernism, Cree/Blackfoot curator Gerald McMaster wrote, "modernity was indeed about breaking things down, about finding truth behind appearances, and now things must be put back together."<sup>41</sup>

The ways in which Indigenous artists today interface with Western art movements, and consider their own creative works, is bound up in modernism. With the course set by modernism, artists in each succeeding generation reject the art and thinking of the past generation, in favor of a new approach. This is different from the trajectory of Indigenous arts and creative practice, which builds upon the lessons and wisdom of our ancestors, and does not view the past as something to rebuke. Through proven and demonstrable methods over time, Dakota people

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38. Richard H. Pells, *Modernist America: Art, Music, Movies, and the Globalization of American Culture*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011), 2-3.

39. Gerald R. Vizenor, *Survivance: Narratives of Native Presence*. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2008).

40. Ruth Phillips, "Aesthetic Primitivism Revisited: The Global Diaspora of 'Primitive Art' and the Rise of Indigenous Modernisms" *Journal of Art Historiography* 12 (June 2015): 1-25.

41. Biennale of Sydney, M. Catherine de Zegher, and Gerald McMaster. *18th Biennale of Sydney 2012: all our relations*. (Woolloomooloo, N.S.W. 2012), 307.

create works that meet cultural needs because our worldviews and practices are both reliable and flexible.

What is at the heart of this tradition of rejecting the past and seeking something new? There is a strong tradition of Western theorists who see the injustices of Western epistemology and speak out and work against it. Historian and thinker Howard Zinn wrote about how he views creative processes in his book *Artists in Times of War*:

So, the word transcendent comes to mind when I think of the role of the artist in dealing with the issues of the day. I use the word to suggest that the role of the artist is to transcend conventional wisdom, to transcend the word for the establishment, to transcend the orthodoxy, to go beyond or escape what is handed down by the government or what is said in the media... It is the job of the artist to transcend that—to think outside the boundaries of permissible thought and dare say the things no one else will say.<sup>42</sup>

Artists and thinkers who understand that the philosophies underlying the Western canon are fundamentally imbalanced have contended with that legacy over generations. In 1972, Hungarian artist and former director of the MIT Center for Advanced Visual Studies György Kepes wrote:

Disregard for nature's richness leads to the destruction of living forms and eventually to the degradation and destruction of man himself. And although an increasing number of people realize the urgent need for change, we are all carried along by the uncontrolled dynamic of our situation and continue to develop ever more powerful tools without a code of values to guide their use."<sup>43</sup>

In the same work, *Art and Ecological Consciousness*, he goes on to discuss the role of the artist and the potential for art to be a site for solving the problem:

A concerned man is compelled to look into himself and gauge his own strengths and weaknesses. He must examine closely the nature of his relationship with his fellow man and with the world. Our unresolved and troubled lives compel us to reassess ourselves, and nowhere is our questioning of goals and means more evident than in the visual arts. Perhaps these responses can indicate what went wrong and where we should look for answers."<sup>44</sup>

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42. Howard Zinn. *Artists in Times of War*. (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2003),1-4.

43. György Kepes, "Art and Ecological Consciousness" in *Public Space? Lost and Found*, ed. Gediminas Urbonas (Cambridge, Massachusetts : SA+P Press, MIT School of Architecture and Planning, 2017), 106.

44. Ibid. 109

Kepes' words remain relevant today. Each new wave of artists in the Western tradition seeks to remedy the mistakes of the past through the latest movement or countermovement or institutional critique. Still, I would argue that much of this work continues to adhere to the basic underlying principles of Western epistemology—the separation of humans from nature and upholding of the hierarchy of man, which privileges chosen humans over other forms of existence. Two questions arise: Can people change their worldviews? If we can shift the conversation to a deeper level of understanding about the world, with the knowledge of the harm caused by Western cultural supremacy, can we overcome it?

### **Social Practice in Indigenous Art**

In order to make art more accessible to more people, social practice artwork is now in vogue, and pieces that engage communities are sought after by Western institutions. Such work is nothing new for Indigenous peoples as it has always been done in Dakota and Indigenous communities to teach, learn, and share resources. In fact, it is an essential component of our cultural fortitude. The sharing of culture, which includes language, stories, creative arts, songs, ceremonial acts, and memorial acts, ensues through tribal community-based arts organizations, tribal museums, and seasonal or annual events like powwows, giveaways, potlatches, gatherings, canoe journeys, and commemorative walks and processions, such as the Dakota 38+2 riders. The myriad cultural practices making up Dakota and Indigenous creative work are interlinked and dependent on each other; they are not secular, they do not exist in a vacuum, and they are not separated into classifications. As we strive to strengthen and develop our arts and cultures, understanding these distinctions is key to lifting the repression of the dominant paradigm.

### **Calls to Action**

Indigenous artists, working in many kinds of media, bring multidimensional perspectives and critical approaches to creating while exposing our deep relationships to each other and the world around us through creative expression. The spectrum of unique challenges that Indigenous artists face has functioned to keep us out of elite art spaces and from being represented at the top levels of art world events, despite the fact that our works are slowly gaining international recognition.

Indigenous peoples' voices were brought to the forefront of collective consciousness in 2016, when the movement against the Dakota Access pipeline at Standing Rock captured the attention of the media and the world. The struggle to protect Dakota, Oceti Sakowin lands and people from the destruction of continued colonization through the oil industry showed the world the extent to which America and other colonizing powers have tried to silence us. Dakota artists as well as Indigenous artists from many places responded to the situation by creating urgent and varied artworks. Since then, arts and culture institutions have paid more attention to Native artists and have slowly begun to take the work we are doing seriously. That it takes mass acts of civil disobedience and a worldwide movement to make changes is both infuriating and an object lesson in how we can assert our rights to our culture. Standing Rock revealed to the world that the rights and responsibilities we have to our land, people, and cultures are inalienable.

While this new awareness by the dominant culture is heartening, a sustained effort to make headway on issues of cultural importance is what is needed—our work is not another trend in Western art. Still our presence in mainstream art world events is minimal.

Art Basel Miami annually attracts thousands of artists, collectors, art critics and the public to an art fair that is international in scope. Visitors come from Africa, the Americas, Asia and Europe. On the surface, this year's Art Basel seemed inclusive; diversity and social justice themes were prevalent, and crowds of people at the Miami Convention Center spoke several languages and looked like a UN gathering. But despite this rainbow appearance, only two American Indian artists exhibited this year.<sup>45</sup>

In December of 2018, I was lucky to attend a panel consisting of artist Edgar Heap of Birds, and curators Kathleen Ash-Milby, and Candice Hopkins, who discussed Native art and artists within the international art market scene at Art Basel Miami. The words of Edgar Heap of Birds remain in my mind. He emphasized that our market-based model of art making, stemming from the Santa Fe Indian Market world, was not helping our people get out of the dire situations facing our communities. He said more is needed from Indigenous artists to move us forward as peoples. From my recollection, he said Indigenous artists need to be thinking about the ways our art can uplift our communities to deal with the complex legacies and realities we have been handed.

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45. Phoebe Farris, "Where Were the Native Artists? Reflections on Art Basel Miami 2017," *National Museum of the American Indian Museum Magazine*. (Washington, DC: Smithsonian, Spring 2018), 9-13.

His words were inspiring and urgent. As an artist, I took them as a call to action to utilize art and the creative process to address real-world questions that can lead to solutions for our people and our world. “My people will sleep for one hundred years, but when they wake, it will be the artists who give them their spirit back”<sup>46</sup> This quote is attributed to the Métis revolutionary Louis Riel. His prophetic words can also be read as a call to action for Indigenous artists and supporters today.

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46. Gregory McNamee, “Louis Riel.” *Native Peoples Magazine*, (September 2012) 52.

## Chapter 4: Museums and Culture Loss

Museums play a major factor in categorizing Indigenous art as “other.” Works selected for display in museum settings are privileged over those that are not. Museums operate in the public space because their programming is generally meant to interact with a public audience, even though they are often inaccessible to people from different walks of life. As an artist, I have worked with museums through their outward-facing programs: exhibitions. As a student of art, predominantly the Western canon, I was taught to create art for the white boxes of exhibition spaces. These are spaces of exclusivity—and that governs the audience for whom artwork is created. My experiences led me to want to understand more about museums, which I both value and find incredibly problematic. As a researcher, I have worked in the collections of museums, which has given me many insights. I will discuss my museum research later in this thesis.

### **Kunst- und Wunderkammer**

During my 2018 residency in Salzburg, Austria, as an American Austrian Foundation Seebacher fellow at the Salzburg International Summer Academy of Fine Arts, I visited the “Kunst- und Wunderkammer,” or “cabinet of art and curiosities,” at the lavish Dom Quartier Museum in the center of the old city. The Wunderkammer is a wing in the Dommuseum at the Residenzplatz that is filled with ornate cabinets containing myriad artifacts categorized into animal, mineral, plant, and man-made groups—showing man’s dominion over nature. Innumerable treasures are kept in these cabinets, sourced by the wealthy archbishop princes who ruled Salzburg for centuries and collected items from around the globe that were obtained by hired explorers. I was struck by the variety of objects within the Wunderkammer. There were so many amazing little pieces; each cabinet was a whole world of curios unlike anything I had ever seen. An exhibit in an adjoining gallery, “Wunderkunst Erlesenes aus der Kunstkammer Würth” (“Art to Wonder At, Treasures from the Würth Collection”), held more valuable articles made from gold and other precious materials. The curators of the show wrote,

The appeal of most of the small artefacts from the golden age of the cabinets of curiosities has always lain in the sheer inventiveness and artistic virtuosity of their creators. The combination of natural and artistic forms was popular; rare and costly items

from the natural world were transformed into amazing new creations —such as a precious nautilus shell, shaped into a splendid goblet.<sup>47</sup>

I noted exquisite gold cups made with spiral shells from nautilus and ivory from elephants and rhinos, all of which are today imperiled due, in part, to collecting by humans who perceive more beauty and value in the animal parts than respect for the lives of the animals from which they come. The wealthy nobility commissioned pieces to be made for these cabinets, contributing to the artist-benefactor relationship that has been a mainstay of Western art.

The cabinet scheme, I soon realized, was a predecessor to modern museums: The aesthetic of the white box space can be traced back to this practice of royalty collecting items from all over the world to show off their knowledge and wealth. The Western epistemology of scientific classification, systematically categorizing things within strict boundaries, is also exemplified in the Wunderkammer, where items were labeled according to taxonomic divisions. In the context of collecting things, the classification system has had far-reaching repercussions for art in museums, as well as for how Indigenous people and Indigenous art appear in museums. I thought of the words of György Kepes:

But the world is not made of discrete fixed entities. The boundaries that separate and connect them are fluid. The world's infinitely complex fabric is in a process of never-ending transformation; biological forms social groups, human feelings and understandings undergo continuous changes. They may merge into larger, more encompassing, more complex configurations or fall apart into smaller, simpler constituents.<sup>48</sup>

As I learned more, I found that the first public museum, the Ashmolean, which opened in 1683 in Oxford, England, was created to showcase a particularly extensive cabinet of curiosity—the Tradescant collection.<sup>49</sup> Within it was *Powhatan's Mantle*, an incredible, intricately beaded hide

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47. DomQuartier Salzburg “Wunderkunst Erlesenes aus der Kunstkammer Würth,” *DomQuartier Salzburg Dommuseum*. Salzburg, Austria, 2018.

48. Kepes, “Art and Ecological Consciousness,” 107.

49. Ashmolean Museum of Art and Archaeology. “Powhatan's Mantle, First encounters in North America.” *Ashmolean Museum of Art and Archaeology, Oxford University*. <https://www.ashmolean.org/powhatans-mantle>



that was thought to be a robe. I have never seen anything quite like it in the museum collection work I have done.



Figure 2. *Powhatan's Mantle*, 93" x 63", deer hide with shell bead decoration and sinew, 17th century (1601 - 1700), said to have been owned by Wahunsunacock, place of creation: Virginia Colony. Image © Ashmolean Museum, University of Oxford

From pictures alone, I was struck by the power of the piece, and I was immediately saddened because I know that Indigenous people don't often have access to our own treasures. The tribes and peoples that created works like *Powhatan's Mantle* have been decimated by colonization, and the same mentality that was used to deprive peoples of their lands, lives, and cultural properties still exists in the successor to cabinets of curiosity—museums. Furthermore, that a piece of such cultural significance as *Powhatan's Mantle* ended up in the world's first museum as an oddity, a prize, and a specimen, set the tone for how museum spaces thereafter have treated Indigenous peoples. Recognizing that Wunderkammer are a cornerstone of today's museums, and the initial place occupied by Indigenous people in them, is essential to understanding how Indigenous people are currently considered by museums—and how that reverberates into public space. In modern-day museums, the way objects are collected, shown, and stored is based upon these early collections.

As well as supporting a narrative of materialism, objects were also important in supporting new claims to knowledge. For the museological discourse on authenticity, originality and presence supported a claim to knowledge on the part of museum curators. By studying the fabric of these objects, museum curators could classify them and order them into taxonomies. These classifications and taxonomies were themselves supported by a historical framework which used the exhibition space of the museum to popularize a narrative of Western society as the pinnacle of civilization.<sup>50</sup>

Can the current reality be unsettled by creating art in the public sphere? I was so deeply affected by these considerations that I created a piece in response to seeing the Wunderkammer and learning about *Powhatan's Mantle*, called, *After Powhatan's Robe*. It is a large mixed-media work done in my studio space in the Festung Hohensalzburg, an ancient fortress atop a mountain in Salzburg. It is a response to the loss of Indigenous peoples and cultures and the injustice of our masterpieces ending up in the collections of colonizers. As I was making it, I tried to artistically recreate the spirals embroidered on the original hide, using handmade ceramic shells with gold leaf, but I was unsuccessful. That failure made me reflect on the difficulty of producing such a work. I thought about who made it, how incredibly skilled they were, and how

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50. Andrea Witcomb, *Re-Imagining the Museum: Beyond the Mausoleum*. (London; New York: Routledge, 2003), 107.

long it must have taken to finish it. My best efforts produced one large spiral – a recurring shape within the artwork described this thesis – in which the shells are spaced to represent culture loss, loneliness, but also continuity.



Figure 3. Erin Genia, *After Powhatan's Robe*, 2018, ceramic, gold leaf, acrylic on canvas

### **Anthropological Perspectives**

Anthropology, ethnology, and archaeology have been the primary disciplines that researchers of the dominant culture have employed to interpret and disseminate information about Indigenous peoples. By upholding the research done in these areas of study, museums have been at the forefront of the exploitation of Indigenous peoples' lives and cultural rights. The frameworks for the fields rest firmly in Western cultural supremacy, and their findings have been

used as a scientific basis for policy. They are domains that have fundamentally and largely been used in bad faith toward us to rationalize our dispossession.

They have contributed to the exploitation of Native peoples by presenting incorrect or demeaning views that perpetuate harmful stereotypes.<sup>51</sup> Anthropologist Johannes Fabian concedes the harmful application of his discipline on colonized peoples. In *Time and the Other*, he stated:

conventions of our discipline have been analogous to the exploitation of natural resources found in colonized countries. Talk of ‘geopolitics’ and the predominance of *spatial* images such as Western ‘expansion’ cloud the fact that our exploitative relations also had temporal aspects. Resources have been transported from the past of their ‘backward’ locations to the present, of an industrial, capitalist economy. A temporal conception of movement has always served to legitimize the colonial enterprise on all levels. Temporalizations expressed as passage from savagery to civilization, from peasant to industrial society has long served an ideology whose ultimate purpose has been to justify the procurement of commodities for our markets.<sup>52</sup>

It is from an anthropological interpretation that people in the Western world regard Native peoples, and by extension, our arts and cultures. Museums have relied on this framing for the works they keep in their collections and exhibit to the public.

As an arm of empire, museums have obtained and displayed the spoils of colonization that have been stolen from Indigenous people: art and material culture, sacred objects, and human remains alike. By keeping and showing the bodies of Indigenous ancestors, sacred objects of cultural patrimony, and items of cultural importance to tribal people, museums dehumanize Native peoples. “Among the many problems that American Indians have to contend with today is the removal of their ancestors’ remains along with sacred tribal items from burial grounds for the purpose of scientific study and museum display, or for sale through the underground market and at art auctions.”<sup>53</sup> With much of our cultural property kept far from our communities, inaccessible to most of our people, Indigenous artists and culture bearers must seek out, and fight for, access to our ancestral art forms in order to maintain and develop cultural continuity.

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51. Genia, “Landscape and Language,” 670.

52. Johannes Fabian, *Time and The Other*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), 95.

53. Devon Mihesuah, *Repatriation Reader: Who Owns American Indian Remains* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2000), 95.

Because they are gatekeepers that decide who can access tribal material culture, the tyranny of museums that refuse to respect or acknowledge tribes' wishes regarding their own cultural heritage is reprehensible.

There is an intimate relationship between cultural genocide and Western academic attempts to understand Indigenous peoples through anthropology, ethnology, and the museum practices of collection, preservation, display, and interpretation of Indigenous peoples' cultural property. A common practice of obtaining Indigenous art and culture objects for museum and private collections during the colonial period was through looting graves or massacre sites. My former professor and mentor, Alan Parker (Chippewa Cree), who guided my work as I earned my Master of Public Administration - Tribal Governance degree, served as chief counsel and staff director to the United States Senate Committee on Indian Affairs under the tenure of former Senator Daniel K. Inouye. Among Inouye's accomplishments was his support of the 1990 Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA). NAGPRA is a federal law requiring museums that receive federal funds to document their collections and notify tribes if they are in possession of any items that are eligible to be repatriated, such as human remains, funerary items, and items of cultural patrimony.<sup>54</sup> In Parker's memoirs, he recounts a series of events that led up to its enactment:

In our research for creating a new National Museum of the American Indian, we were advised that the Natural History Museum possessed a great collection of artifacts and goods that could perhaps be transferred to the new Indian Museum in the future. Senator Inouye was eager to see this collection to compare with the Heye Foundation's collection and Patricia Zell and I accompanied him on an arranged tour with the secretary of the Smithsonian, Robert McAdams. We toured the Natural History Museum and were invited to see a collection that was kept out of the public's view in a suite of offices on the basement level. When we saw this collection, we were indeed impressed with the articles, and in response to the Senator's question of "where did these goods come from?" we were informed that many of them had come from old Indian graves scattered across the West. We were also shown scalps and other human remains that were in storage among the Smithsonian's collections in the Natural History Museum. Patricia and I told the senator that over many years, as different tribes discovered that these grave goods had been taken from their ancestors, they had begun to request that they be returned to them, but the Smithsonian refused to give them back to the tribes. Secretary McAdams informed Senator Inouye that he was not sure, but he thought they needed to have legal authority to make such a return as they had become public property in the possession of the Smithsonian. Senator Inouye was appalled that this collection even existed in the first

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54. Genia, "Landscape and Language," 671.

place and that the Smithsonian thought they did not have legal authority to return them, even when a request had been made by a tribe who had done their own research and could convincingly show evidence that the grave goods had been stolen from their ancestors. He quickly asked Patricia and me to schedule a series of congressional hearings so we could hear from those tribes who had these concerns, and from various physical anthropologists, who could inform the committee as to the scientific value for the federal government in keeping these goods in the face of urgent requests that we knew would be coming from a great many tribes. Thus was born the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act.<sup>55</sup>

Without NAGPRA, museums would still be collecting, retaining, and exhibiting human remains en masse. The law has affected the field of museums at large, by setting a standard of repatriation of tribal cultural property to their respective tribes, but challenges to its full implementation remain.

Since museums are establishments that can powerfully define and embody culture for a society's ideologies, and epitomize the views of those who founded and operate them, they have been a crucial element in indoctrinating the public about Indigenous peoples and tribes. "Stereotypes about Indians and other indigenous peoples invade the thinking of even the most enlightened museum visitor. Visitors have preconceived ideas that they want verified by your museum."<sup>56</sup> Such attitudes are prevalent in the field of Western art and also in the output of experts who rely on museums: art critics, curators, and historians.

More subtly, Western art experts set their perspectives as the standards. In the 2009 text, *Ancient American Art in Detail*, Colin McEwan, archaeologist and head of the Americas collection at the British Museum, wrote, "Since their inception, museums have played a pivotal role in bringing 'the arts' of the Americas to the attention of international audiences."<sup>57</sup> This statement whitewashes the role of museums in collecting Indigenous peoples' cultural treasures, through widespread genocide and colonization, while also making non-Western international audiences, such as those who have also been subject to colonization, invisible.

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55. Alan R Parker. *Pathways to Indigenous Nation Sovereignty: A Chronicle of Federal Policy Developments*. (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2018), 163.

56. Richard W. Hill, "Roadmap for Native Museum Exhibition Planning," in *Living Homes for Cultural Expression: North American Native Perspectives on Creating Community Museums*. eds Karen C. Cooper and Nicolasa I. Sandoval (Washington, DC: Smithsonian National Museum of the American Indian, 2006), 18.

57. Colin McEwan, *Ancient American Art in Detail*. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009), 6.

Helen Molesworth, former director of the LA MoCA, critiqued the museum as an institution in her *Artforum* article, “Art is Medicine”:

The museum, the Western institution I have dedicated my life to, with its familiar humanist offerings of knowledge and patrimony in the name of empathy and education, is one of the greatest holdouts of the colonial enterprise. Its fantasies of possession and edification grow more and more wearisome as the years go by... I confess that more days than not I find myself wondering whether the whole damn project of collecting, displaying and interpreting culture might just be unredeemable.<sup>58</sup>

### **Tribal Museums as Self-representation**

To shift this context, tribes have worked hard to control their own ancestral objects and narratives. Since the 1970s, the number of tribally founded museums in the US has surged. With the help of important federal restorative actions like the 1978 American Indian Religious Freedom Act and NAGPRA, tribal museums are actively reversing conditions by empowering Indigenous people themselves to preserve, protect, and revive their cultures. Today there are over 200 tribal museums in Canada, Mexico, and the US<sup>59</sup>

Tribal museums share some of the same objectives as conventional museums, such as public history education; but the practice for which they are celebrated, extensive community involvement and collaboration, helps reproduce tribal values within a museum setting... Tribal museums have been an important site of collaboration, one that has successfully engaged a new generation of tribal leaders and indigenous intellectuals.<sup>60</sup>

These museums are setting new standards of curatorial excellence and challenging the damaging old museum standards by showcasing and celebrating tribal voices. They are able to care for and protect objects of ancestral importance in ways that non-tribal museums cannot. The protection of tribal cultural resources and property is a main governing concern for many tribes, and one way this can be done is through establishing tribal museums.

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58. MTL Collective, “From Institutional Critique to Institutional Liberation? A Decolonial Perspective on the Crises of Contemporary Art” in *October: Art, Theory, Criticism, Politics* eds. Leah Dickerman and MTL Collective, 2018.

59. Karen Coody Cooper, *Living Homes for Cultural Expression: North American Native Perspectives on Creating Community Museums*. (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution National Museum of the American Indian, 2006), 8.

60. Susan Sleeper-Smith, *Contesting Knowledge: Museums and indigenous perspectives*. (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2009), 252.

## **Smithsonian National Museum of the American Indian and United States Holocaust Memorial Museum**

The Smithsonian National Museum of the American Indian was established to house the vast collection of George Gustave Heye and to be a national space where tribal objects and art could be stored, researched, interpreted, and exhibited. In 2009, I worked at the museum as a student intern, in the Office of Public Affairs, where I did the day-to-day work of the press office, and learned skills in contributing to respectful and culturally relevant public discourses on Native peoples' issues. It was there that I also began my museum research. This journal entry, from my first day at the museum, sheds light on my initial experience of seeing ancestral artifacts up close:

Having the unique opportunity to visit with some of the objects from one of the tribes I come from, the Sisseton-Wahpeton Dakota nation, was overwhelming. I was unprepared for the intense emotions of seeing firsthand the evidence of genocide. I was very saddened by what I saw. Some of the objects I viewed were clothing, such as shirts, dresses, leggings, ghost dance shirts, buffalo robes, children's clothing, moccasins. I also saw games, toys, dolls, weapons, everyday objects such as hide containers, baskets and spoons. I have been pondering the weight of being in such close proximity to the items ever since, and I look forward to going back to the CRC [the museum's Cultural Resources Center] to view items from the other tribe I come from, the Little Traverse Bay Bands of Odawa. I think the next time I go I will have to spiritually prepare myself. One of the good things about the CRC is that it was designed with the input from the consultation process with tribes. Through consultation, the people who built this incredibly important facility were able to include elements that are not present in the storage facilities of other museums. They built a room to perform ceremonies where sage, sweetgrass, or cedar could be burned. They also built windows into the great rooms that house the collections so that the ancestors' spirits, which many tribal people—myself included—believe are present within the objects, can have natural light. So, even though the CRC is a sad and serious place, through collaboration with tribal communities, the situation is much better than in museums that hold articles sacred to tribes that have not consulted with tribes.<sup>61</sup>

Collecting Native artworks and artifacts has long been a popular pastime of wealthy individuals like George Gustave Heye, a businessman who began amassing his holdings in the late nineteenth century. He was driven by a “near obsession,” fueled by the desire to gather and

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61. Erin Genia, journal entry. July 2009.



preserve Native American belongings before what he and his contemporaries saw as our eventual extinction.<sup>62</sup> “Indians were seen as doomed to vanish before the steam engine of westward expansion.”<sup>63</sup> This attitude was an outcome of the Monroe Doctrine, popularly known as Manifest Destiny. His hobby “result[ed] in the most extensive collection of Native American art and artifacts in the world.”<sup>64</sup> It became the public property of the American people with Congress’s 1989 creation of the National Museum of the American Indian. Hundreds of thousands of items from tribes around the Western Hemisphere are kept in trust at the Smithsonian NMAI in Suitland Maryland, on the National Mall in Washington, D.C., and in New York City. The museum’s permanent exhibits as well as its buildings and grounds were developed in partnership in partnership with tribes, and are a testament to the work of Native people.

Author Amy Lonetree has written at length about the significance of NMAI. In the book she edited, *The National Museum of the American Indian: Critical Conversations*, she says,

I am profoundly disappointed about this missed opportunity to challenge the American Master Narrative—a narrative that has silenced and even erased the memory of the genocidal policies of America’s past and present. That the National Museum of the American Indian allows for silences around these issues, articulates an abstract historical message that is confused and confusing, and does not hold accountable those who walk through this museum for the colonization of Native Americans, speaks to a historical amnesia that is tragic for a national museum of such prominence and one that has such potential as a site where new understandings of American history could have taken place.<sup>65</sup>

This differs from the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, also located on the National Mall, which critically engages the topic of genocide to memorialize its victims and promote a future in which this could never happen again. America, unlike Canada has never gone through a truth and reconciliation process, and has not even begun to come to terms with the innate

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62. Smithsonian Institution, National Museum of the American Indian, “Map and Guide,” p. 14

63. Kim TallBear, *Native American DNA*, (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2013), 2.

64. Smithsonian Institution, National Museum of the American Indian, Map and Guide,” (Washington DC: Scala Publishers, 2004), 14.

65. Amy Lonetree and Amanda J. Cobb. *The National Museum of the American Indian: Critical Conversations*. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2008), 311.

corruption of its founding on Indigenous land.<sup>66</sup> As a federal institution, the NMAI is limited in what it can do by Congress. Clearly, it is far easier for the US government to acknowledge the horrors of genocide that the country fought against in World War II than those of the one inextricably tied to the establishment and maintenance of America. At the NMAI, the tensions between celebrating Native culture through art and displaying the realities of what happened to us are apparent.

In contrast, researchers at the Holocaust museum have engaged in documenting the scope of the Holocaust, and in 2013, the museum published a report of their findings that upended extant knowledge. They found:

42,500 Nazi ghettos and camps throughout Europe, spanning German-controlled areas from France to Russia and Germany itself, during Hitler's reign of brutality from 1933 to 1945... The documented camps include not only "killing centers" but also thousands of forced labor camps, where prisoners manufactured war supplies; prisoner-of-war camps... The maps the researchers have created to identify the camps and ghettos turn wide sections of wartime Europe into black clusters of death, torture and slavery—centered in Germany and Poland, but reaching in all directions. The lead editors on the project, Geoffrey Megargee and Martin Dean, estimate that 15 million to 20 million people died or were imprisoned in the sites that they have identified as part of a multivolume encyclopedia. (The Holocaust museum has published the first two, with five more planned by 2025.)<sup>67</sup>

What would a national effort into research of this kind reveal for Indigenous peoples in America? It is almost unimaginable to consider, since the breadth of American genocide extended over centuries and vast territories. What would a monument to mark the genocide of American Indians look like? Would it be similar to the Holocaust museum? How would it change the realities of life for Native people? I am reminded of the words of the late Cree artist Kimowan Metchewais in discussing his 2006 work, *Without Ground*. He said, "I think North America is a crime scene. I hate to say it, but what happened to the land and people here was/is a

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66. Gabrielle L'Hirondelle Hill and Sophie McCall, *The Land We Are: Artists and Writers Unsettle the Politics of Reconciliation*. (Winnipeg: ARP Books, 2015).

67. Eric Lichtblau, "The Holocaust Just Got More Shocking." *The New York Times*. March 1, 2013. <https://www.nytimes.com/2013/03/03/sunday-review/the-holocaust-just-got-more-shocking.html>

crime. People today don't see that. They understand it, they know it, but it doesn't seem to mean that much to them. To me, it means a lot, in many ways."<sup>68</sup>

### **Indigenous Art and Cultural Self-determination**

In considering Indigenous art and the public spaces of museums, all of these issues come to bear and they expose the many associated layers that affect the issue of memory as it relates to Indigenous people. The horrors of genocide, the ongoing struggle to deal with the ramifications of culture loss engendered by US assimilation policies, and the erasure of Indigenous ways of knowing, being, and creating are inseparable from this consideration. Through museums, and other methods, Western society asserted its cultural supremacy. However, the more I examine its claims and centuries-long trajectory, the more I see its authority as invalid. I look to what the tribes are doing to affirm their natural rights, as laid out in an article in the United League of Indigenous Nations Treaty:

To establish a foundation for the exercise of contemporary Indigenous nation sovereignty, without regard to existing or future international political boundaries of non-indigenous nations for the following purpose—protecting our cultural properties, including, but not limited to sacred songs, signs and symbols, traditional ecological knowledge and other forms of cultural heritage rights by affirming the principle that our own indigenous laws and customs regarding our cultural properties are prior and paramount to the assertion of any other laws or jurisdiction including international bodies and agencies.<sup>69</sup>

These matters are tied to the self-determination of Indigenous peoples, and moving forward, this must be a focal point. We know Western museums have included us as subjects of study in their programs much more than they have included us as artists and creators of culture sharing our creations, so tribes have started their own museums to change that. Outside of museum spaces, public spaces are venues where art can be created that can lead, as artist Edgar Heap of Birds inferred, to solutions for Indigenous communities.

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68. Kathleen Ash-Milby, *Off the Map: Landscape in the Native Imagination*. (Washington, DC: NMAI Editions, 2007), 18.

69. United League of Indigenous Nations, "United League of Indigenous Nations Treaty, Goal 2a." August 1, 2007.

With all this complexity, there is a need to expound the critical frameworks for understanding Indigenous art. As Nancy Mithlo stated in 2012, “It is clear now that the dynamism and vibrancy of American Indian arts cannot be expressed in the fine arts vocabulary currently available. In fact, the field of current Native art production exceeds our capacity to engage its intellectual parameters productively.”<sup>70</sup> We know that Western art norms are not inclusive of Indigenous peoples’ perspectives, so we are building our own arts and cultural infrastructure and generating discourses that reflect our unique needs, desires, and experiences. Community-based, local, and tribally supported arts and cultural institutions are facilitating art creation and cultural reclamation, providing a backbone to sustain artists engaged in these efforts.

As Jaskiran Dhillon noted: “[T]here is a growing cadre of scholars who are opening up space to (re)imagine, (re)invent, and (re)vision how Indigenous creativity, the act of creation itself, is a necessary strategy for survivance, for new ways of imagining the world, reclaiming Indigenous presence and transforming reality.”<sup>71</sup> Indigenous art will evolve according to our ideals, worldviews, histories, cosmologies, and as aspects of the human condition at large. Despite a fraught history, the field of art remains a place where there is freedom of thought and action that can be harnessed with the tools we have available to us. As we use the power of creativity and imagination to bring form to vision, the fertile ground of creative practice can be the place where we invent a better future.

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70. Nancy Mithlo, “No Word for Art in Our Language? Old Questions, New Paradigms” *Wičazo Ša Review: Special Issue: American Indian Curatorial Practice*, 27 no. 1 (2012): 123.

71. Jaskiran Dhillon, *Prairie Rising* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2017), 247.

## Chapter 5: Ohetika, To Be Brave

Being an artist involves ohetika, bravery. To express yourself in the public realm, for all to see and judge, courage is essential. I have chosen to reveal my story and perspectives in this thesis because they are an important part of it. In this section, I will give a biographical sketch of the relevant details of my existence as a multicultural Dakota person. I then will talk about the ongoing project, *Canupa Inyan: Researching the Carvings of My Ancestors*, and my performance *Mitakuye Oyasin/We Are All Related*, at the 2018 Venice Architecture Biennale. Placing myself directly in this thesis, adds the depth of personal significance and allows me to center my research from my own perspective.

My life can be described through the family that has helped me along the way: my grandparents, parents, uncle, sisters, children and mentors. My mother's family hails from Europe and eventually settled in New York. Her Irish ancestor entered the US from St John's, Newfoundland, and immigrated to Cambridge, Massachusetts where he worked as a newspaper printer. His descendants continued to work in the print media industry, eventually moving to New York, where my grandfather owned a bar in Greenwich Village and was a stereotyper for *The New York Times*. His daughter, my mom, is a journalist, writer, and editor in the same tradition.

My father's family settled on the Sisseton-Wahpeton Reservation in South Dakota. My Odawa ancestors came from the Great Lakes region, living in what is today known as Michigan and Ontario. My grandfather was Odawa and my grandmother was Dakota, and they have a large family based on the Lake Traverse reservation. Dakota people originate from the region that is now known as Minnesota, and our traditional territory extended outward from there into the midwestern US, the Great Lakes area, the Great Plains and into Canada. The tribes that make up the Dakota Oyate are members of the Oceti Sakowin, the Seven Council Fires, peoples who are related through kinship, landscape, and oral traditions, and share different dialects of a common language.

As a multicultural person, I have considered how the makeup of who I am has influenced my path. Indigenous identity is often heavily scrutinized, and subject to colonial standards of racial purity. Throughout history, people have naturally come from different cultures; their genetic makeup is a statement of the political and social life of a place, and that is no different

today. The colonial project of America has imported many different kinds of people to this land, and we who live here are products of that. One of the most powerful essays I've read about the subject of mixed identity is from the musician and scholar Lyla June Johnston, who asks us to remember the ways in which Western history has impacted Indigenous Europeans over centuries.

The parallels between the genocide of Indigenous Europeans and Native Americans are astounding. It boggles my mind that more people don't see how we are the same people, who have undergone the same spiritual assault. The only difference between the Red Story and the White Story is we are in different stages of the process of spiritual warfare. ...Just as some Native American people have been contorted and twisted by so many centuries of abuse, so too were those survivors of the European genocide...This ancient Indigenous European culture is just as beautiful as Native American culture and was just as tragically murdered and hidden from history books.<sup>72</sup>

The tyranny that was exported to the Americas, and all over the globe, stemmed from empire building, particularly the Roman Empire, which destroyed Indigenous cultures and tortured its people to gain power in Europe. Western culture in America is built upon the foundations of that empire, and the settlers who arrived here had long been assimilated into it. This little-remembered history impacts the present enormously.

I honor my own complexity, but I am Dakota because of my lineage, culture, and citizenship in my tribal nation. This means I have obligations to my communities. The American Indian Religious Freedom Act was ratified the year I was born, making me part of the first generation of Native American people who are able to freely practice and preserve our living cultural traditions since they were outlawed. For me, this is a daunting task because it is a both a sacred responsibility to my communities, and to future generations, and because it often places me at odds with dominant structures and attitudes. As an artist, I use the creative process to grapple with these realities.

I come from a family of artists. My grandmother was descended from a line of Italian silversmiths and leather tanners. She was a born artist who ended up being a housewife. In high school, she asked her father to help her go to college, but he refused, telling her that women

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72. Lyla J. Johnston, "The Story of How Humanity Fell in Love with Itself Once Again." *News Story Hub*. January 25, 2018. <http://newstoryhub.com/2016/01/the-story-of-how-humanity-fell-in-love-with-itself-once-again-by-lyla-june-johnston/>

didn't do that; they got married. Her artistic ambitions were hindered due to gender discrimination, but she continued to make art, nevertheless and instilled creativity in the rest of the family. Her son, my uncle, is a gifted and prolific painter. My son and daughters are also artists. On my dad's side, my uncles, aunts and cousins make beautiful beadwork, star quilts, regalia and other artwork.

My uncle was my first mentor. He was a student of the painter Paul Georges, and he taught me to how to look at art, and to paint with oils from the time I was small. Under his tutelage I learned about the great masters and influential epochs in Western art. I was also deeply educated in school about Western art history. It wasn't until I was 19 and a student at the Institute of American Indian Arts in Santa Fe, New Mexico, that I began to learn about the art of the Americas before European colonizers came to claim the continents. My education there, after growing up in public schools and then attending Cornell University for a year, was a powerful lesson in the myopia of the dominant culture's approaches to Indigenous art. Learning about pre-Columbian art of the Americas and the ancient mound cultures opened my eyes to the vast legacy of the Indigenous people of this continent which has been hidden from most Americans. At IAIA, I received training in studio arts, in both two- and three-dimensional forms. Living in Santa Fe, which is the home of the largest and most active Native arts market in the world, the Santa Fe Indian Market, I became aware of the problematic connections of the market to the production and appreciation of Native art, which arises from the prevalence of dominant stereotypical narratives.



Figure 4. Erin Genia, *Dakota in the Pacific Northwest*, 2017, cotton, ribbon, jingles, buttons, clay, wire, found object

I'm a Dakota in the Pacific Northwest, living in the diaspora that was created as a result of the Dakota War of 1862, when our people were exiled from our homeland of Minnesota. The Indian Relocation Act further dispersed Dakota people, from reservations around the Midwest and in Canada to cities around the country. Suspended from a cascade of rain jingles and fluffy clouds, Anpa O Wicanh'pi, the morning star form embodies the beauty and resilience of our people, even when far from home.

I left school after starting a family of my own, and worked, for a dozen years as a community organizer in Olympia, Washington. My days of activism first began in high school, and I continued this as a young mother of three, working on all aspects of human rights advocacy, organizing events and campaigns. This community-based work has deeply influenced my thinking about issues of justice and bolstered my belief in the potential of collaborative strategy and action. I have sought to incorporate the lessons of these experiences into my art.

I returned to school at The Evergreen State College, propelled by the goal of making a better life for my young family. While there, I collaborated with my mentor, Gary Peterson (Skokomish), to develop an independent course of study in Native American studies, the arts, and social justice. After earning my bachelor's degree, I went straight into Evergreen's Master of Public Administration – Tribal Governance program. With the help of my teacher, Alan Parker, I focused my graduate research on Indigenous peoples' cultural rights and heritage resource protections. Within the discipline of tribal governance, I studied treaties and policy, tribal self-determination and cultural sovereignty, research protocols in Indian Country, tribal economies, tribal natural resources, and tribal museums. Through this academic work, I developed a definition of decolonization, which has helped me in my subsequent work:

Decolonization is the concept and practice that indigenous peoples all over the world are using to break free from the cycles of violence, discrimination and despair that have been created by hundreds of years of colonization. To accomplish this, tribes are relying on traditional methods or values, and applying creative, collective, resolute thought and action to help them evolve to meet the needs of their people in a rapidly changing world. Decolonization can mean relying less on structures imposed by the dominant colonizing power, and is directly linked to tribal sovereignty. The act of decolonization is an effective and essential path towards restoring cultural rights. Decolonization involves telling the truth about history, acknowledging the damage done by assimilation, working towards gaining justice, and achieving true self-determination.<sup>73</sup>

I published my capstone research in the 2012 issue of the Arizona State Law Journal. After graduating, I was hired as the assistant director for Evergreen's tribal governance graduate program. Our goal was to produce professionals with the knowledge, skills, and abilities to expand their tribes' capacities as sovereign nations. A few years later, I transitioned to

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73. Genia, "Landscape and Language," 653.



employment within a public service center at Evergreen, The Longhouse Education and Cultural Center. I was eager to return to the field of art, to support other Native artists, and learn how an arts organization is run. While there, I worked to promote Indigenous peoples' arts and cultures by coordinating projects such as workshops, artist trainings, residencies, grant programs, exhibitions, and other culturally responsive programming.

A life-changing event came in 2014, when I participated in the Seventh Gathering of International Indigenous Artists of the Pacific Rim in Kaikohe, New Zealand. Working side-by-side with more than one hundred dedicated, incredibly talented, and accomplished Indigenous artists on the land of the Ngāpuhi iwi, I was inspired to continue on my path as an artist, and since then, have been committed to this path. In 2016, I was asked by Evergreen faculty to fill in for a teacher who was on sabbatical. As a result, I developed and taught two undergraduate and graduate level courses: "Creative Solutions: Activism, Advocacy and Self-Determination in Indian Country," on policy issues affecting Indigenous people and the role of artists and culture bearers in creating positive change, and "Cultural Sovereignty: Indigenous Peoples' Cultural and Heritage Governance Issues," which provided an overview of legal structures and mechanisms affecting tribal cultural sovereignty, repatriation, sacred sites protection, and intellectual property. The experience of teaching allowed me to recognize the necessity of pursuing both my scholarly and artistic research more fully, in order to contribute to the dissemination of information and creative expression surrounding the issues of Indigenous arts, from my perspective as an Indigenous person. There is a need for more research in these arenas. With the support of Longhouse advisory board member, Mario Caro, with whom I had worked on the planning of a Master of Fine Arts in Indigenous Arts program at Evergreen, I prepared to pursue a terminal degree in art.

I entered MIT's Arts, Culture and Technology Program in 2017. As a student, I have sought to create space at MIT for Indigenous arts on campus by organizing events and workshops featuring Indigenous artists. My arts practice has expanded to include the technologies of digital fabrication and sound, and I have added performance into my repertoire. I have also had the incredible opportunity to have my work in the Venice Biennale. My teacher, Gediminas Urbonas was a curator of the Lithuania Pavilion at the 2018 Architecture Biennale, and he included my sound sculpture *Acoustic Tipi* there. I then performed at the closing of the US Pavilion, which I discuss in more in detail below. *Acoustic Tipi* is also in the 2019 Venice

Art Biennale satellite event at the European Cultural Centre's Palazzo Mora. As I prepare to graduate, and sum up my research and experiences, I am looking ahead to the possibilities of doing more work in the public sphere, specifically in the realm of public art.

### Artist Statement

I am a multidisciplinary artist whose practice follows various strands: merging cultural imperatives, pure expression, and exploration of materiality, with a response to past, present, and future matters. I pursue work that creates a powerful presence of Indigeneity, with a goal of fostering an evolution of thought and practice in societal instruments that are aligned with the cycles of the natural world and the potential of humanity. As an artist, I can contribute to this process through the act of creative inquiry and expression, based upon Dakota ways. Learning to apply and pass along Wodakota, as well as Dakota language, stories, and other cultural elements is central to my work. I am also interested in addressing questions that test the boundaries of what art is, from my perspective as an Indigenous person. I seek to connect the transformational possibilities of art and the creative process to community-based work, and as a student and practitioner of Wodakota, I am led by yuhapi c'ante waste – with a good heart.

I find value in applying the creative process to other areas of life too. For example, I worked with a team to develop a model for climate change mitigation at the site of a stressed urban stream near my residence. By using a combination of Indigenous methodologies and



Figure 5. Erin Genia, *Acoustic Tipi*, photo by Nicolás Kisic Aguirre, 2018, mahogany, cow hide drums, acrylic, steel hardware, bungee cords, drum sticks.

The tipi sound amplifier is a drum interface that invites people to create audible vibrations which reverberate directly towards the earth and sky. It is home to four drums of different sizes, painted in the colors of the four directions, each playing a different tone. Painted on its surface is the legend of the battle between the supernatural beings Wakinyan/ Thunderbirds and the Unkehi/ Water Monster, which describes the catastrophic effects of present-day climate change. Through the power of rhythm and the possibility of an organic collaboration, vibrations will reach outward forever into infinity like a synesthetic prayer.

creative, artistic thinking, we found that the tributary, Alewife Brook, would be best served by returning it to its natural state as a wetland, and we developed a plan to carry that out with consideration for its state as an urban watershed.<sup>74</sup> This project showed me that artists and skilled creative thinkers have much to contribute when it comes to addressing some of the most difficult issues of our time, such as climate change and ecological destruction.

### Canupa Inyan: The Carvings of My Ancestors

Before attending the gathering of Indigenous Artists of the Pacific Rim in New Zealand, my father brought me a slab of pipestone he had dug from the quarry, and he encouraged me to begin using this material that, as he stressed, is part of our heritage. My dad's grandmother, Bessie, came from the Derby family, stewards of the pipestone quarry in Minnesota for generations. Canupa inyan (pipestone) is an important carving material for our people, and it holds special



Figure 6. Erin Genia, *Stone Person*, 2015, pipestone

spiritual significance because it is used to create ceremonial pipes, and is a part of Dakota origins and history. Knowing its importance in cultural uses, including sacred protocols, I wanted to learn more about its traditional forms. The legacy of US assimilation and cultural genocide meant that this information was not readily available to me. However, I knew from my visit to the NMAI collections, and from the work of Tlingit artist Tommy Joseph, that I would have to go into museums to learn.<sup>75</sup> I met Tommy at the gathering in New Zealand, when he was carving

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74. Erin Genia, Katie Hoyt and Timothy Robertson, "MIT Climate Changed Ideas Competition: Menotomy River Watershed Restoration." May 4, 2018 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lnR0Q5fRh8>

75. Tommy Joseph, "Tommy Joseph Tlingit Carvings." November 8, 2009. <http://tommy-joseph.blogspot.com/>

and I was working in clay. He told me about his research of Tlingit ancestral pieces in museums around the world, and he inspired me to do the same.

As a Dakota person, I have felt distress over the injustice of our items of cultural significance being kept behind closed doors away from our people, while outside these repositories, our people have experienced cultural genocide. I have interfaced with various museums so I could gain access, and always felt lucky, indeed privileged, to be in the presence of our treasures, which in Dakota philosophy are regarded as ancestors, having a life of their own. To spend time with these ancestors, and to see the spoils of genocide has, at times, been overwhelming. From 2015 onward, I have visited and documented pipestone in the Washington State History Museum, the Burke Museum, the Minnesota Historical Society, the National Museum of Natural History, the National Museum of the American Indian, and the Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology. Accessing museum collections has provided me with invaluable moments spent with Dakota and Odawa ancestral pieces. I've also viewed articles from other tribes in the Oceti Sakowin, as well as tribes from all over the hemisphere. Museum collections provide material evidence of worlds that have been hidden, stowed away in dark cabinets, viewed only in glimpses by a few people who have the privilege to look. There is a need for repatriation and for our people to readily access Indigenous works that are currently found in museum collections in order to learn from them and maintain our cultural continuity.

I have researched canupa inyan (pipestone) pieces in both ethnological and archeological collections. Historically, our people created earthen mounds for a variety of purposes. Colonial settlement caused many mounds to be razed, exposing ancient canupa inyan pieces that have ended up in museum collections. I have noticed that for every piece displayed in a public museum exhibition there are numerous others are never shown, perhaps because they have some flaw, or they are not considered to be worthy, based on a curator's limited knowledge. Pieces that are put on public view may be those that appeal to a Western eye and sensibility. For the pieces that remain in the back-room cabinets, their nuances often go unnoticed, their significance unrecognized. Oftentimes, pieces are misidentified, or their provenance is limited to one or two sentences about how they were acquired, or goes unrecorded.

Through my research in this field, I document the pieces I encounter with photos, drawings, and written observations. I have compiled visual data on hundreds of our sacred creations. I spend time with them, and pray for and with them. When I get home to my studio, I

re-create certain forms in pipestone or clay and other materials so that I can learn traditional Dakota two- and three-dimensional form. I have received support from tribal arts organizations to conduct this work, including a grant from the Potlatch Fund, and a fellowship from the First Peoples Fund. Although I've been engaged in this work for several years now, I have barely scratched the surface of what needs to be done in the enormous arena.



Figure 7. George Catlin, *Pipestone Quarry, on the Coteau des Prairies*, Smithsonian American Art Museum, 1836-37, Washington DC

In museum collections, canupa inyan or pipestone is called catlinite, after George Catlin, a nineteenth-century painter who documented tribal people in the West.<sup>76</sup> It comes from a quarry in Pipestone, Minnesota, where people from many tribes came for centuries to dig for canupa inyan to use for their tobacco smoking pipes. Dakota people were, and continue to be, stewards of the quarry. Because it has been used ceremonially for millennia, and is recognized as sacred, it is a site of truce and pilgrimage. In my talk with Dakota artist Marlena Myles, she described the

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<sup>76</sup> George Gurney and Therese T. Heyman, *George Catlin and His Indian Gallery*. (New York: Norton Press, 2002.)

significance for tribal people from all over the regions, saying that going there “was like taking a trip to Mecca.”<sup>77</sup>

The quarry site and the pipestone itself are part of our origin stories and are therefore sacred. In her article, “Beyond the Life/Not-Life Binary,” scholar Kim TallBear wrote,

I want to investigate the life that inheres in a particular stone, and the social relations that proliferate as the stone emerges from the earth, is carved into pipe, and is passed from hand to hand...we can describe pipestone as vibrant because without it, prayers would be grounded, human social relations impaired, and everyday lives of quarriers and carvers depleted of the meaning they derive from working with the stone.<sup>78</sup>

According to oral histories, a great flood drowned many ancestors. Their blood became the red pipestone and that is why this stone is so sacred. Settlers called the town they established there Pipestone, and later, in 1937, the US government established Pipestone National Monument under the Antiquities Act to protect the area.<sup>79</sup> The protected area has trails, a picnic area, a campsite and an interpretive center.

US Park Service pamphlets from the Pipestone, Minnesota quarry represent pipes as artifacts, as craft objects, and detail the geology and history of white incursion in the quarry in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, as well as the regulatory response of the US government. These material and regulatory histories are important, but...Western politics and knowledges surrounding the quarry in effect maintain a knowledge binary between the material and immaterial. That said, in good liberal multiculturalist tradition, the Park Service also acknowledges indigenous spiritual beliefs and practices related to pipestone.<sup>80</sup>

The national monument preserved the pipestone quarry, but it also fundamentally changed the nature of Indigenous people’s relationship to the land, as carvers must now apply for a permit and wait upwards of ten years for a chance to access the site. The Three Maidens – huge granite boulders there, are also considered to be sacred. They are located on along a hiking trail, and

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77. Marlena Myles, personal communication, March 20, 2019.

78. TallBear, “Beyond the Life/Not Life Binary”, 195.

79. William, P. Corbett, *Pipestone: The Origin and Development of a National Monument. Minnesota History*, Fall 1980, 88.

80. TallBear, “Beyond the Life/Not Life Binary”, 196.

people climb on them and take selfies, despite signage forbidding this behavior.<sup>81</sup> What are the implications of turning a holy, culturally significant site into a tourist attraction? Conducting museum studies to strengthen my arts practice and commitment to Wodakota, and learning about the quarry site, has led me to an interest in monuments and the politics surrounding them.

In my research, I have spent time with many kinds of pieces, including those of historical significance. Little Crow's pipe, in the collection at NMAI, is one such example. Little Crow was a Dakota leader during the US- Dakota War, who was hunted down and murdered after the war. I sensed his pipe as incredibly charged with emotion, as well as historical and cultural significance, and have come across many such pieces of this nature.

After spending time with a piece, I write my observations and sketch or photograph it. The next step involves looking into its provenance. By combining information available from museum records, which is usually very limited, my understanding of history and Dakota form, and secondary research, I am able to make conclusions or hypotheses about aspects of the piece's history. It's time consuming work for each piece. An illustration of this comes from a remarkable piece I spent time with in the Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History, labeled as number E326313-0, a Devils Lake Sioux Treaty Pipe. Carved from solid pipestone, it consists of two parts, a pipe bowl and stem. On segments of the pipe's stem are the words, "In the passing there are tears and hearts that are breaking Let us hope that what we give shall equal that we're taking Inyan-sa-candupa/smoked at the signing of Devils Lake Sioux Treaty November 2, 1901 Presented to Mrs Marie Berri Hansbrough by friends of the council. Marking the passing of the Indian." It's one of the few pieces I have seen inscribed with script, so based on that and the fact that the language use seems unusual for a Dakota, it is my assumption that it was written by a non-Native person. When I researched Marie Berri Hansbrough, I learned she was a poet and an artist living at the time of the treaty signing.<sup>82</sup> Did etch this sentimental expression on the piece? Was it commissioned as a gift for her? More research is needed to find out. I also researched the treaty itself to verify that it could indeed have been at the Devils Lake

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81. National Monument Minnesota. "Three Maidens." *Pipestone National Monument*.  
<https://www.nps.gov/pipe/learn/historyculture/three-maidens.htm>

82. Humanities DC. "Mary Berri Chapman Hansbrough" *DC Writers Homes*.  
<https://dcwritershomes.wdchumanities.org/mary-berri-chapman-hansbrough/>

Treaty signing (now known, and better translated from Dakota, as the Spirit Lake Treaty signing.)<sup>83</sup> It appears that it could have been. Looking at the pipe, there is residue from smoked tobacco in its bowl. This is an example of the nature of the follow-up research that could be done for every piece in every museum collection. Learning about their journeys and origins sheds light on our own, and that is a huge undertaking.



Figure 8. Spirit Lake Treaty Pipe, photo by Erin Genia, 2016 collection of the Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History, Suitland, MD

Through this study in museum collections, I have learned firsthand the complexities surrounding the issue of repatriation of Dakota and Indigenous peoples' cultural art forms. A recent case involved a canupa (pipe) that belonged to the Dakota chief White Dog, a leader who was hung in the largest mass execution in US history in Mankato, Minnesota, in 1862, an event of major significance that is discussed in the next section. The pipe and stem are both made of pipestone and

are inlaid with ornate Dakota imagery in lead. It is an incredibly beautiful and culturally important work, which was taken from White Dog before his execution. Franky Jackson, compliance officer for the Prairie Island Indian community, said,

We knew that many of those prisoners had things taken from them at that time...an item like this would never have been given up so easily.' A handwritten document at the Minnesota Historical Society supports Jackson's theory. The shorthand account of scenes from the fall 1862 military trials of imprisoned Dakota near Redwood Falls, Minn., describes White Dog as 'Fine looking, straight as an arrow.' It then describes a fight, date unknown, between a soldier and the chief over White Dog's pipe. The soldier threatens to kill White Dog unless he hands over the pipe, but White Dog resists. Finally, the soldier takes possession of the pipe, proclaiming, 'I have the greatest relic.' 'This was taken from White Dog when he was a prisoner of war,' said Jackson. 'It was taken forcibly.' The notes say the soldier who stole the pipe turned it over to Army

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83. Wayne G. Sanstead, *The History and Culture of the Mni Wakan Oyate (Spirit Lake Nation)* (Bismark, ND: North Dakota Department of Public Instruction, 1997).



officers under threat of punishment. Later, it was displayed in the offices of a newspaper, but then disappeared into unknown private hands.<sup>84</sup>

In 2018, the pipe came up for bid at the Skinner auction house in Boston, and the Prairie Island Indian community was unable to stop the sale.<sup>85</sup> In a stroke of luck, or compassion, an anonymous buyer purchased the pipe, for double what the auction house had estimated –\$40 thousand – and returned the pipe to the tribe. The return of the pipe has ushered in a cultural resurgence for the tribe.<sup>86</sup>

### **A Dakota Aesthetic**

By examining these old pieces, I have gained some fluency in a Dakota aesthetic, which is different than what I expected to see. So much of what is considered to be Native art today comes from the market's influence, which is guided by Western conceptions of Native people's cultures. These notions paint an incomplete, and erroneous picture of our cultural works, and lives. Through studying the material evidence in these collections, an accurate picture emerges. The works I have seen include many pipes, as well as associated pipe stems and pipe bags, other Dakota carvings, Dakota artwork, items of cultural patrimony, clothing, and everyday items. Inspecting many kinds of works, created by different people over many time periods reveals an incredibly rich and developed aesthetic and there is a need for much more of this kind of research.

Aside from ceremonial use and treaty-making, Dakota people have also used pipestone for other purposes. I have also seen it made into small figurines, as well as objects that could be worn on the body as adornment; pipestone slabs that were used as a plate or surface; and pigments for religious and non-religious use. Also present in the collections are pipestone carvings that were created for economic survival, around the time of settlement: things like letter openers, paperweights and inkwells that were sold in gift shops in the town of Pipestone and at

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84. Mark Steil, "Come to take you home": A pipe, a tribe, a quest to reclaim the past." *MPR News*. December 19, 2018 <https://www.mprnews.org/story/2018/12/19/minnesota-prairie-island-tribal-pipe-reclaimed-auction>

85. Skinner Auction House, "Fine Plains Catlinite Stem and Bowl," May 5, 2018 <https://www.skinnerinc.com/auctions/3099B/lots/291>

86. Steil, "Come to take you home".

world's fairs. It's clear that the stone has been used as an economic source for a long time. There are also pipestone forms that, after careful scrutiny, can be differentiated as having been made by non-Native people in imitation of Native styles.

Within Dakota communities today, there is controversy over the use of pipestone for economic or artistic ends, with some insisting that any use outside of ceremonial use should be taboo. On this issue, Kim TallBear observed,

The Park Service and some concerned federally recognized tribes currently struggle with the ethical issues raised by the sale of pipestone objects at the quarries. There is a debate taking place in Indian Country and in federal meetings about 'sacred' stone that can only be seen as such if we indigenous peoples simultaneously embrace the idea of the profane. This stance is potentially at odds with a view of relationality that would acknowledge that indigenous peoples and the stone have long existed in more intimate and complex sets of relations than the notions of 'sacred' and 'profane' can represent.<sup>87</sup>

Pipestone is sacred because of its deep connections to Dakota people and other Indigenous peoples, as well as the important roles it has played in our culture. As I see it, everything is sacred, but certain objects are imbued with more significance based on their interrelationships with people and places. Sacredness can be determined by the closeness of our relationships to something over time and its significance to our lives. With this definition, it can mean different things to different people in differing degrees. Due to these issues, there are many ethical considerations to take when viewing, handling, studying, working with, or even discussing pipestone in different contexts. As a limited resource, there are also concerns about mining and exploitation.

The next steps in my ongoing research are to continue to spend time with canupa inyan residing in museum collections, as I greatly enjoy visiting with my pipestone relations. I also plan to go to Pipestone and spend time there, working the quarry. While there, I will visit and speak with quarriers, listen to their stories and look at their work. I will continue to make work that is based on this research and pass along the knowledge my ancestors gave me to others. The Dakota aesthetic as it appears in our material culture bears only a passing resemblance to works that are created for non-Native audiences or customers who expect stereotypical representations, and I will continue to study and disseminate the imagery and form of our artistic and creative

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87. TallBear, "Beyond the Life/Not Life Binary", 196.

legacies through my artistic and research practice. This work has already begun with my son, Samuel, who is an accomplished and dedicated artist. At some point, I will compile all the data I have collected and write more about it with the goal of adding to the discussion on repatriation and cultural continuity.

### *Mitakuye Oyasin/We Are All Related*

At the closing of the US Pavilion, Venice Architecture Biennale, in November of 2018, I brought my pipestone work to the venue through performance. The performance was a response to a historical injustice related to pipestone glyphs belonging to the Three Maidens site at the pipestone quarry.

In the early 1880s, a prominent settler of Pipestone, Minnesota, Charles H. Bennett, who was the owner of a drugstore that sold pipestone trinkets, removed dozens of pipestone panels bearing ancient petroglyphs from the foot of The Three Maidens. He entered them into a competition at the 1904 Louisiana Purchase Exposition, also known as the St. Louis World's Fair, where they won a silver medal. At this, and other World's Fairs exhibits and pavilions, the so-called races of the world were displayed as primitive and Western culture as supreme in "triumphs of hegemony."<sup>88</sup> There were originally 79 petroglyph stones, and today only seventeen have made it back to the quarry site; the others have not been returned.

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88. Robert W. Rydell. *All the World's a Fair: Visions of Empire at American International Expositions, 1876-1916*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 2.



Figure 9. 'Charles H. Bennett removed these rock panels showing pictographs from the Pipestone quarries at the foot of The Three Maidens in the 1880s.' Courtesy of Minnesota Historical Society, Minneapolis, MN.

This episode is emblematic of the looting of our cultural property that took place during white settlement of our land, which has been a major part of the campaign of cultural genocide perpetrated on us. This looting and desecration of sites of cultural and sacred significance to Indigenous peoples continues to be a current major issue across the continent, and was a factor in the recent designation of the Bear's Ears National Monument in Utah.<sup>89</sup>

*Mitakuye Oyasin/We Are All Related*, at the "Dimensions of Citizenship" exhibition was a ceremonial performance centered on healing, finding lost cultural knowledge, and telling the story of climate change through the lens of the Dakota legend of the Wakinyan/Thunderbirds and

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89. Jenny Rowland-Shea, "Bears Ears Cultural Area: The Most Vulnerable US Site for Looting, Vandalism, and Grave Robbing," *Center for American Progress*. June 12, 2016 <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/green/news/2016/06/13/139344/bears-ears-cultural-area-the-most-vulnerable-u-s-site-for-looting-vandalism-and-grave-robbing/>

Unktehi/Water Serpent spirits.<sup>90</sup> The performance was in conversation with *Acoustic Tipi*, which was exhibited at the Lithuania Pavilion at the time. There were many aspects of the forty-five minute performance, but for the purposes of this thesis, I will describe only those related to *Canupa Inyan*.



Figure 10. *Mitakuye Oyasin/We Are All Related*, 2018, US Pavilion Courtyard, Biennale di Venezia Venice, Italy, performance by Erin Genia

When I carve pipestone, I save the dust that is a byproduct of the process because it can be used as a pigment, and I don't want to waste any of the stone. With the pigment dust, I made chalk to draw images of the stolen glyphs on the courtyard surface. The images brought an ancient Dakota presence to the site, at an event that is in the tradition of World's Fair-type expos, which have a troubled legacy for Indigenous and colonized peoples. This act brought attention to the looting of Indigenous peoples' culture within a Western context, the Venice Biennale, the most venerated art venue in the world and the US Pavilion is an important American cultural embassy. I asked my kids to participate in the performance. They are artists and creators of culture in their own right, and they always play an important part in my creative process. Together, my daughters and I drew the imagery with the pipestone pigment. Their participation in *Mitakuye Oyasin/We Are All Related* was an important part of the intergenerational aspect of my work that is aligned with Wodakota.

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90. Erin Genia "Mitakuye Oyasin/ We Are All Relate." Dimensions of Citizenship. November 24, 2018. <http://dimensionsofcitizenship.org/events/mitakuye-oyasin-slash-we-are-all-related/>

## Chapter 6: The Politics of Memory in Public Space

The power of place is undeniable. Many of us have experienced it in different ways during our lifetimes – returning to ancestral homelands or family burial sites, visiting spectacular places of worship or historic battlefields, or standing in awe of remarkable natural beauty. These places tell us stories and provide us with long-lasting memories. It is through stories and experiences that we understand the power of place. For Dakota people, this place, Mni Sota Makoce, embodies all of those characteristics. It has been described as our ‘Garden of Eden,’ where the first Dakota people – the Wicaŋǰpi Oyate – walked upon the land given to them by the creator, The Maker of All Things.<sup>91</sup>

Public art, monuments, and historic markers that perpetuate outdated colonial perspectives about Native American and Indigenous peoples are everywhere across America, and yet, art in the public realm, memorial or not, offers a fertile ground for educating the public about Indigenous peoples, and creating a strong Indigenous presence in public spaces that have historically excluded us. With an increasing number of Indigenous artists entering the public realm, this work is underway. As this thesis has argued, conceptions of memory and time, land and place, history and narrative, have a profound effect on how this work is produced and received. In a Western liberal democracy, public space holds essential functions that public art and monuments draw their strength from.

How have histories, figures, and events important to Dakota people been portrayed in the public sphere through monuments, memorials, and public art? The American colonial project is celebrated at such places as Fort Snelling, the Lincoln Memorial, and Mount Rushmore. No acknowledgement is given to the genocide and ethnic cleansing that ensued from it. Only the settler colonial perspective is shown, the villainy is downplayed or erased, resulting in the continued marginalization of Indigenous peoples.

The narratives heralded by such highly visible, permanent monuments like these, openly preserve a worldview that allows for the desecration of sacred and culturally significant Indigenous sites. In some cases, they have been built right on top of them. Sites may be protected by monument status but then become exploited as tourist attractions by the ethos of “public” lands, as in the case of Pipestone National Monument. From mound cities in the Midwest to

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91. Westerman, 222.

historic village sites in the East, to sacred places flooded by hydropower dams in the West, cultural sites important to the original inhabitants of this continent remain unmarked and mostly unprotected.

In this context, how are tribal people memorializing history and protecting sacred sites? How are Indigenous artists doing their work in the public sphere to address these issues, honor the land, and create a strong presence of Indigeneity? As I consider my own work in the public realm, I argue that monuments celebrating the American colonial project can be rethought to become spaces of decolonization and re-indigenization. I believe that the process of creating art in the public realm can become a beacon for bringing communities together to remember, learn, and create better futures.

### **What is the Meaning of Public Space?**

What is public space? Is it a central square in the middle of town, is it found in urban streets, is it in a national park? Where the land is carved up by private ownership, people of all kinds depend on public spaces for leisure, to gather, as a place to traverse between destinations.

Public space has a near-mythical standing in democratic culture, and for good reason. It is perceived, however vaguely, as essential infrastructure for human flourishing and well-being: it harkens back to the ancient agora and the ideal of direct democracy; it promises a stage for utopian experiments, for new islands. It is a space for collective amusement, as well as productive friction, debate and exhibition – the incubator of that enlarged mentality we call “worldliness.”<sup>92</sup>

It is a space of commonality, shared, like people of a common society share culture. Much has been said of the necessity of public space in a liberal Western democracy. Public spaces are where people can gather and perform acts of citizenship. What is public space when people do not share culture, or are oppressed by the existing legal and regulatory framework? Author Chantal Mouffe writes, “the public space is the battle ground where different hegemonic projects are confronted, without any possibility of final reconciliation...we are not dealing here with one single space...public spaces are always plural and the agonistic confrontation takes place on a

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92. Gediminas Urbonas. *Public Space?: Lost and Found*. (Cambridge, MA: SA+P Press, MIT School of Architecture and Planning, 2017), 9.

multiplicity of discursive surfaces.”<sup>93</sup> Her ideas of the function of public space as a place of political discourse unsettles utopian conceptions of public space. In the pluralistic US, public space is a site where people of many kinds can come together to work out pertinent democratic issues in a public setting. However, this perspective neglects how that space was obtained, how it is occupied and maintained, as a product of genocide and ongoing settler occupation.

In contrast to the ways that public space can act, discursively at least, as a symbol for the utopian possibilities of a civic life, contemporary practitioners and theorists also point to the parallel darkness that always accompanies talk of the contemporary commons... discourses of participation, democracy and openness can mislead or offer facades behind which global capital and unchecked power continue unabated and uninterested in, or even hostile to the promotion of a thriving culture in/of public space. This carries over into how public spaces are designed, governed and instrumentalized.<sup>94</sup>

The territory of the US – both public and private – was seized from Indigenous tribes by force in order to establish a settler society. It was accomplished through ethnic cleansing, corrupt treaty-making with tribal leaders under duress, land grabs for military bases and national parks, allotment, and other methods of thievery, over centuries. As ideas of public space and the commons shift, Indigenous people must be part of those conversations because of the ways this history impacts the present.

As discussed earlier, the definitions of art for Western culture and Dakota culture are very different. This is also true for the definitions of public space. Indigenous peoples’ land tenure is a complicated subject and beyond the scope of this thesis, but what is material to this argument is that complex societies existed in America before colonization and their history and even existence has been hidden by Western institutions. Public space as we know it in this country today as a concept and reality, is an invention of settler society. Vast settlements existed all over the continent. One such place is known today as Poverty Point, the site of an ancient mound city built by Indigenous people on the banks of the Mississippi River more than three thousand years ago. The city remains consist of mound pyramids and complex earthworks showing that sophisticated people thrived there for a long time. The site is a UNESCO World

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93. Chantal Mouffe, “Art and Democracy” *Art as a Public Issue*, No. 14, 2008.

94. Urbonas, 10.



Heritage site.<sup>95</sup> Countless other places like Poverty Point existed all over North America, but their presence has been hidden and their histories have been whitewashed or have vanished from records. Hardly anyone in mainstream America knows about them because schools do not teach students about them. In the Midwest, and in Dakota territories, mounds built by our ancestors were leveled to make way for development. Few are officially recognized. Indian Mounds Regional Park in St. Paul, Minnesota, is a rare exception. It's where six burial mounds sit atop limestone and sandstone bluffs that rise above a Dakota sacred place, Wakan Tipi, Carver's Cave.<sup>96</sup> Understanding the history of a place, and the ways in which people have existed there, is an important part of Indigenizing public space in America.

Before colonization, Dakota people governed the land through intrinsic epistemologies of land and space, property, kinship and relationship. The passage of the Dawes Severalty Act, also known as the General Allotment Act of 1887, officially ushered in the period of coercive assimilation, because it required that each head of household register to receive a predetermined allotment of tribal land that they were expected to farm. Land not allotted to Native people was sold for a pittance to white settlers. Allotment effectively broke down the fabric of tribal life by fragmenting our societies. The *tiospaye* (extended family) system of kinship meant that under Dakota law, the head of household in a Western sense—the father in a nuclear family—was not necessarily the head of the family in a Dakota sense. Christian reformers were among the main advocates of allotment, and “through severalty, or individual allotments of land, they intended to force the tribes into an Anglo-American system of tenure and inheritance, which they believed would quickly assimilate the Indians,” because, “communal landholding hindered the Indians progress towards ‘civilization.’”<sup>97</sup> Before allotment, Indians were relatively resistant to missionaries’ efforts to convert them. Through communal living, traditional religious and social practices were preserved. After allotment, reservations were divided up, causing the destruction of tight-knit communities, with families isolated from each other.

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95. Jenny Ellerbe and Diana M. Greenlee, *Poverty Point: Revealing the Forgotten City: a UNESCO World Heritage Site*. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2015).

96. Indian Mounds Regional Park, “About Indian Mounds Regional Park”  
<https://www.stpaul.gov/facilities/indian-mounds-regional-park>

97. Thomas W. Cowger, *The National Congress of American Indians: The Founding Years*. (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1999), 13.

Allotment turned the land into a checkerboard of ownership and dominion over local ecologies. Buffalo, a main source of sustenance, were prevented from running free in herds over vast spaces, and were targeted for elimination due to their role as a food source for tribes. The traditional economies of Indigenous peoples across the land, that were based on ecological continuity were destroyed, forcing dependence on American economic institutions and welfare. Land expropriation for both private and public spaces was inherent in the forced assimilation of Indigenous people into American, Christian culture, and it forever changed the country's environment.

For Dakota and other Indigenous people, this history is a strong presence and colors how we remember and perceive public space, as it is defined in this settler colonial state. The dramatically altered landscapes and ecosystems, cities and roads, buildings, place names, monuments, and public artworks reinforce Western domination over Indigenous peoples for everyone to see. The recently coined term, solastalgia, describes the pain of experiencing such extensive land transformation.

Solastalgia is a new concept developed to give greater meaning and clarity to environmentally induced distress. As opposed to nostalgia – the melancholia or homesickness experienced by individuals when separated from a loved home – solastalgia is the distress that is produced by environmental change impacting on people while they are directly connected to their home environment.<sup>98</sup>

All of the land in America, including its public spaces was stolen from Indigenous nations, setting up a power imbalance between Native people and non-Native people. The immensity of this historic legacy underpins public space in American and other settler colonial societies.

Public space is experienced differently depending on where a person falls in the hierarchy of social importance. While it can be a refuge for some, it is a place of danger for others. Indigenous people and people of color can be subject to racial profiling by police in public spaces, putting their safety at risk. Native women and girls can become targets there for gender-based violence and murder. In rethinking public common spaces as sites for dealing with the legacy of colonization and the current realities of injustice, “the struggle to reclaim the commons should thus give way to a process of decolonization that transforms settler relationships with the

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98. Glenn Albrecht, Gina-Maree Sartore, Linda Connor, et al., “Solastalgia: The Distress Caused by Environmental Change.” *Australasian Psychiatry* 15 (January 2, 2007): S95–98.

land, Indigenous peoples and with each other.”<sup>99</sup> Within this context, the ethics of public space is an urgent concern.

### **Memorializing Dakota Dispossession**

The US - Dakota War of 1862 was the culmination of decades of compounded land theft coupled with the blatant disrespect of Dakota people, and breaches of treaties by the US government. After waiting for months for food rations, as payment for land deeds, the people were starving. A series of events led several Dakota leaders to declare war on the US. The war ended with 38 of our leaders being hanged in the largest mass execution in American history, in Mankato, Minnesota, at the behest of Abraham Lincoln. Furthermore, nearly two thousand of our people were interned at Fort Snelling, and thousands more were exiled from the state.

Fort Snelling was a prominent military outpost that played an important role in the settling of the West. The Dakota internment camp was established just below the fort on Wita Taŋka, (Pike Island), a site of sacred significance to Dakota people at the confluence of the Minnesota and Mississippi rivers. Known as Bdote to Dakota people, it is a sacred site tied to our origin stories. When they were interned there, hundreds died of sickness and starvation in the concentration camp over the winter of 1862-63. In the aftermath, Dakota people were expelled from their ancestral homelands and have since lived in a diaspora of reservations around the Midwest, the plains, and central Canada.

In 2010, I created a mixed-media sculptural piece called *Self-Decolonization: On the Dakota Uprising* about what took place then. It has been shown in many museum and gallery exhibitions over the years, which has given me the chance to educate audiences about a major event in American history that is not taught in schools. I wrote about my motivations for making the work:

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99. Craig Fortier, *Unsettling the commons: social movements within, against, and beyond settler colonialism*. (Winnipeg: ARP Books, 2017), 59.



Figure 11. Erin Genia, *Self-Decolonization: On the Dakota Uprising*, 2010, glazed terracotta, plaster, acrylic, cedar, map of Minnesota

This piece is a symbolic attack on an icon of imperialism—Abraham Lincoln, who presided over the largest mass execution in United States history—of 38 Dakota men who took part in the 1862 Dakota Uprising. It is a window into the past that revisits a hidden history of how this country came to be what it is and revises landscapes to reflect our ever-present ancestors. I am a descendant of survivors of genocide, ethnic cleansing, expulsion, relocation, and internment. My ancestors have asked me to revisit this painful past because there is healing that needs to be done and restitution that needs to be made to the Dakota people for the diaspora that was created when we were expelled from our

place of origin and forbidden to return. Here, I explore the concept of blood money and subvert the ideals of American mythology while asking myself, “Who are my heroes?” This work is part of a series called Self-Decolonization. The act of creating works for this series is a potent vehicle for decolonizing my own mind and bringing sanity to my life. In learning the truth about my history and trying to make sense of my world, I seek to shed values that have been imposed on me and reclaim those that are my birthright.

Today, the site where the mass hanging occurred has been memorialized as Reconciliation Park in Mankato. For decades, a gravestone-like slab was erected to mark the spot. Early this year, KEYC Mankato News 12 ran a story about how the monument went missing.

Former Mankato Mayor Stan Christ says, “There was a very, very negative feeling about the monument.” It also became a popular target for vandals who often poured red paint to represent the blood of the Dakota who were hanged... “Others looked at it and saw it as white triumphalism.” Then in the 1970s, as protests were sweeping the nation, the monument was taken down and placed in a storage shed at Sibley Park...for more than 20 years the monument stayed in storage until... Stan Christ says, "It just disappeared."<sup>100</sup>

President Lincoln is one of the most important figures in American history. He is of course credited with keeping the union together during the civil war and abolishing slavery, but the



Figure 12. Former monument to the mass hanging of Dakota men in 1862, courtesy of Blue Earth Historical Society, Mankato, MN

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100. KEYC News 12. “Former Mankato Mayor Explains Disappearance of Dakota 38 Monument.” *KEYC News 12*. February 12, 2019. <https://www.keyc.com/story/31208109/former-mankato-mayor-explains-disappearance-of-dakota-38-monument>

national narrative of his life almost never focuses, or mentions, his role in the US-Dakota War. He was no friend to Indigenous peoples, having served in the Black Hawk War in 1832.<sup>101</sup> During his administration, corruption went unrestrained. Many fortunes were made by politicians and businessmen who cheated tribes. For example, Henry Hastings Sibley, who would go on to become the governor of Minnesota, skimmed \$145,000 from the \$475,000 promised to Dakota people for ceding twenty-four million acres of land.<sup>102</sup> Lincoln viewed Indigenous people as savages, saying, “we are not as a race, so much disposed to fight and kill one another as our red brethren,” an ironic statement to make during the bloodbath of the Civil War.<sup>103</sup> The Abraham Lincoln Peace Medal, minted in 1861, and now in the collection of the NMAI, depicted the national attitude towards American Indians, as embodied by the president at the time.

[The] medal depicts a Native man scalping another, and compares it to a bucolic scene of an Indian farmer plowing his field. The imagery was intended to convince Indians to reject tribal culture and adopt the customs of a “civilized” life which, for Lincoln included Christianity. Lincoln told Congress that “sound policy and our imperative duty to these wards of the Government demand our anxious and constant attention to their material well-being, to their progress in the arts of civilization, and above all, to that moral training under the blessing of Divine Providence will confer upon them the elevated and sanctifying influence, the hopes and consolations of the Christian faith.”<sup>104</sup>

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101. Richard Drinnon, *Facing west: the metaphysics of Indian-hating and empire-building*. (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1980), 198.

102. Clifford E. Trafzer, *American Indians/American Presidents: A History*. (New York: Collins, 2009), 92.

103. *Ibid.*, 92

104. *Ibid.*, 100



Figure 13. *Abraham Lincoln Peace Medal*, 1862, National Museum of the American Indian, Smithsonian Institution (24/1213).

The level of hatred towards Native people at the time was great, as American settlers felt they had a divine right to the land, that they were entitled to it because tribal people were savage and primitive, as demonstrated by Manifest Destiny. When Indigenous people resisted, they were brutalized.

In 1862, white settlers could understand wanting to kill people who were attacking them in their homes and towns, but they could not see the same for the Dakota defense of our homeland. Indeed, they considered Dakota use of violence in defense of a homeland as savage. They felt they had a superior right to Dakota homeland, because, well, they were superior and White.<sup>105</sup>

Several years ago, I painted a piece called *Self Decolonization: Winter of Our Internment*. It is derived from a photo of the prison camp at Fort Snelling/Bdote and based on the winter when hundreds of Dakota people died there. I wrote up a statement describing my reasons for creating the piece:

*Winter of Our Internment* depicts the prison camp on Pike Island - located at the confluence of the Mississippi and Minnesota Rivers in what is today known as the Twin Cities of Minneapolis and St. Paul. The families rounded up after the Dakota uprising of 1862 were forced to spend the winter within this open-air prison. The loss of life from hunger and sickness was immense, and the survivors were exploited in every way. Any words I have for this atrocity seem incapable of describing the impacts for these ancestors

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105. Waziyatawin, *What Does Justice Look Like: The Struggle for Liberation in Dakota Homeland*. (St. Paul, MN: Living Justice Press, 2008), 43.

and for all the generations to follow... This work is a part of the "Self: Decolonization" series in which I reflect upon my true history, with the purpose of seeking justice for my ancestors, my elders, my generation, future generations and myself. I wanted to express this event in a significant way, so I chose to paint it as a Winter Count. A Winter Count is a great buffalo hide that holds the history of the tribe. Each winter, the year's most significant, defining event is painted on the hide. After many years, the images wind in a spiral, filling the entire robe. The winter of 1863 deserves its own hide as a Winter Count, since for every year after, we have felt the effects of genocide and continued colonialism that can be traced to that winter.



Figure 14. Erin Genia, *Self-Decolonization: Winter of Our Internment*, 2010, acrylic on canvas

Bdote is the name of the point on Pike Island that is a sacred place. It is connected to our origin stories and has been a site of cultural and religious significance for millennia. At the same time, it is also a place of great tragedy. With the military post of Fort Snelling erected nearby, the US government brutally established dominion over the land to break our spirits and claim authority



over Dakota people. The fort is still there to this day and is a National Historic Landmark. Waziyatawin has written about the campaign to take down the fort in her book *What Does Justice Look Like, The Struggle for Liberation in Dakota Homeland*, saying,

When the violence and nastiness of the imperial business is unmasked, we must question the morality of continuing to celebrate Minnesota's imperial and colonial icons. With that unmasking, not only do we realize that we cannot celebrate those icons, we also realize we must pursue a campaign to 'Take Down the Fort,' both literally and metaphorically.<sup>106</sup>

In 2017, I was in Minneapolis for a First Peoples Fund convening, and was researching canupa inyan in the collection of the Minnesota State Historical Society. I made a pilgrimage to Bdote and went with a friend and First Peoples Fund fellow, Marlena Myles, bringing a stone person I carved to leave as an offering at the sacred place of Bdote. The act of bringing the carving to this spot made me reflect on the action of performing memory as part of my artistic practice. As we walked from the parking area by the fort, down the bluff, over a bridge, and onto the island, I observed the signage and realized that there was no site recognition by the informational or interpretive signs of the crimes against humanity that occurred there. I also noticed people walking their dogs and jogging on the trails.



Figure 15. Fort Snelling, photo by Erin Genia, 2017, St. Paul, MN

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106. Waziyatawin, *What Does Justice Look Like: The Struggle for Liberation in Dakota Homeland*. (St. Paul, MN: Living Justice Press, 2008) 12.



Figure 16. Signage at Wita Tanja, Pike Island, photo by Erin Genia, 2017, St. Paul, MN

Marlena led me to Bdote and later said, “There is no signage to tell you where to go—you would have gotten lost without me.” We discussed moves being made to add to the interpretive life of Fort Snelling, Bdote. She said, “There is funding going into changing the space with Dakota people involved, perhaps it can be changed from a tourist destination of a historic military fort to recognizing that it is a sacred place for people.”<sup>107</sup>

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107. Marlena Myles, personal communication, March 20, 2019.



Figure 17. Interpretive Sign at Wita Tanjka, Pike Island, photo by Erin Genia, 2017, St Paul, MN

I considered my act of pilgrimage to be both a ceremonial act of healing for myself and as a part of my creative practice. The piece I placed there, *Girl with a Dimple*, was created to counter the “stoic Indian” stereotype instilled into American culture by Western artists like George Catlin and Edward Curtis. She is a smiling and happy little girl, looking towards the future with hope. I dug a shallow hole in the shoreline at the confluence of the rivers and placed her there, for the ancestors to see.



Figure 18. Erin Genia, *Canupa Inyan: Girl with a Dimple*, 2016, pipestone



Figure 19. Erin Genia, *Placing an offering in the sand at Bdote, Mni Sota*, 2017, St. Paul, MN



Figure 20. *Bdote*, 2017, photo by Marlana Myles, St. Paul, MN

Through the act of placing her in the ground at that site, I was participating in a lineage of performative acts of memory. The *Dakota Commemorative March* was a one-hundred-and-fifty-mile walk to commemorate the forced walk that Dakota ancestors took in 1862.<sup>108</sup> The Dakota 38+2 horseback ride that takes place each year in December, from the Lower Brule Indian Reservation to the site of the mass hanging in Mankato, brings participants together to memorialize the victims of the war.<sup>109</sup> These acts connect the past to the present and bring healing. Of the *Dakota Commemorative March*, Waziyatawin writes:

We can never completely alleviate our grief, but it is in this grieving space that we can use our grief as a conduit to a state of empowerment. That is, we will never stop grieving

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108. Waziyatawin, *What Does Justice Look Like*, 80

109. Silas Hagerty, *Dakota 38*. Smooth Feather Productions, 2012.

over the genocide perpetrated against our people by White Minnesotans. No people can ever heal completely from such a devastating wound. However, we can strengthen our people and pick up the struggle for liberation our ancestors initiated in the 1860s.<sup>110</sup>

In recent years, Dakota people have begun to reclaim the Bdote area with an annual event marking the historic and cultural significance of the site. Dakhóta Omníciye, the Dakota Gathering, is a time during the spring when people come together for workshops and cultural events. These gatherings are important acts of self-determination and healing for Dakota people, and as new generations rise, will continue to gain in strength and number.

In confronting the ongoing psychological assault of monuments that whitewash— even celebrate—these crimes against Indigenous and Dakota people, we must remain vigilant and continue to tell the truth about history. President Lincoln will always be mythologized and canonized as a force for good in America, but we can continue to unsettle public understandings of his legacy.

In 2016, I traveled to Washington, DC and visited the Lincoln Memorial with my kids to look for any indication at the monument of his historical legacy on Dakota people. Of course, I found none, but while inspecting the site, I realized that the giant throne he is sitting in has fasces on the arms. Fasces are an ancient Roman symbol of power and authority depicting a bundle of bound rods. “Fasces’ is the root word for ‘fascism,’ a political ideology marked by nationalism, totalitarianism, and imperialism that cast such darkness over global politics in the 1930s and 1940s, most infamously in Germany's Nazi Party, which was modeled on the Italian



Figure 21. Fasces apparent on arms of Lincoln’s throne, Lincoln Memorial, photo by Erin Genia, 2016, Washington, DC

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110. Waziyatawin, *What Does Justice Look Like*, 82.

fascist movement.”<sup>111</sup> The implications of this symbol on a monument celebrating an American hero are clear for Indigenous peoples.

### **Monuments Celebrating the Colonial and Confederate Roots of America**

Lincoln also famously appears in stone at Mount Rushmore. Mount Rushmore was built in the Paha Sapa (Black Hills), a place both culturally significant and sacred to Dakota and all Ojibwe peoples. The mountain known as “Six Grandfathers” was blasted to smithereens to chisel the American presidents, George Washington, Abraham Lincoln, Thomas Jefferson, and Theodore Roosevelt into our sacred place.

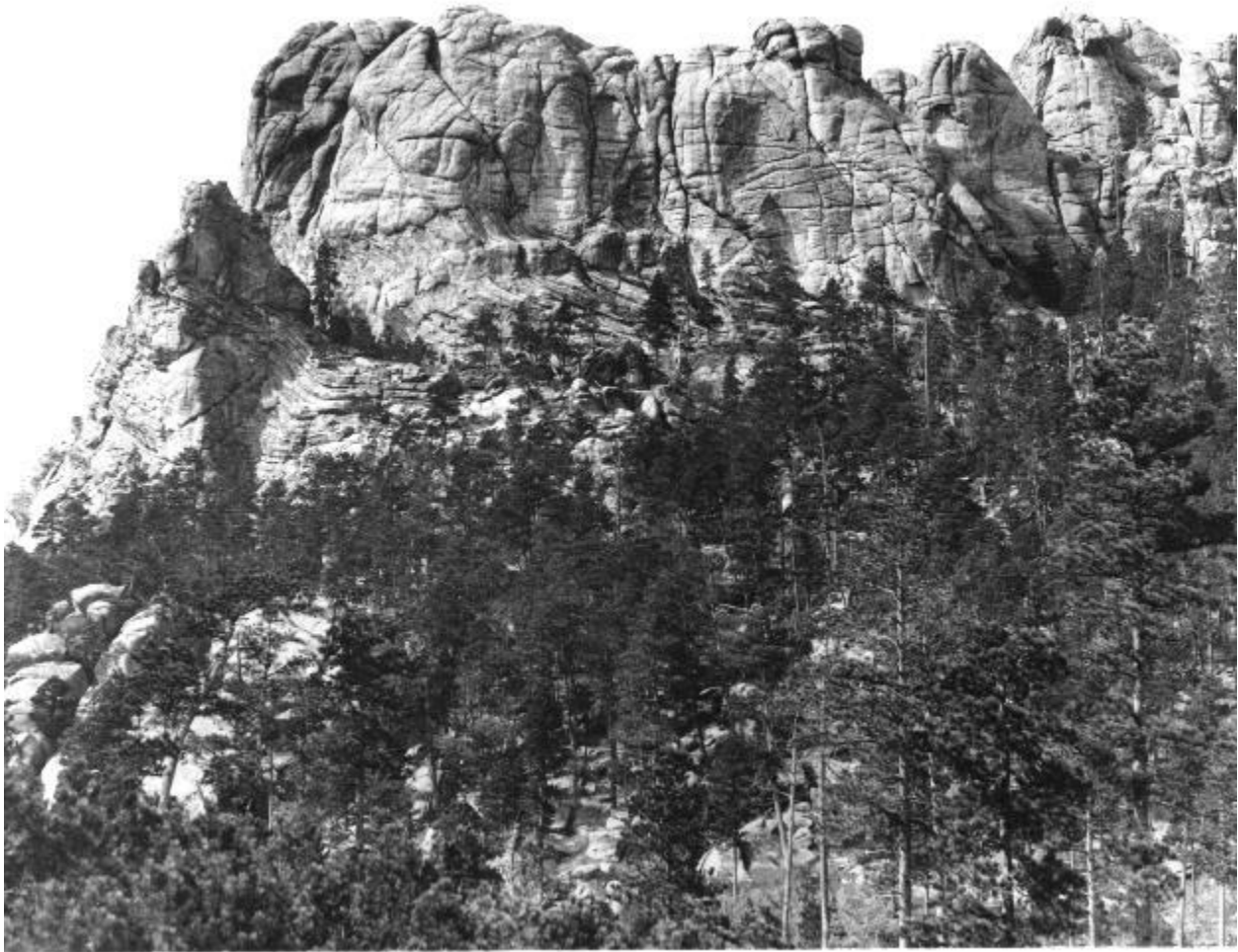


Figure 22. Six Grandfathers before the construction of Mount Rushmore National Monument, National Park Service

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111. Nathan King, “Secret Symbol of the Lincoln Memorial.” *National Mall and Memorial Parks District of Columbia*. June 23, 2013. <https://www.nps.gov/nama/blogs/secret-symbol-of-the-lincoln-memorial.htm>



Figure 23. Mount Rushmore National Monument in the Paha Sapa (Black Hills), viewed from Iron Mountain Road, note the pile of debris from carving below it, National Park Service.

*Mount Rushmore, Shrine of Democracy*, as it is officially known, is a major tourist draw to South Dakota.

In 1885 non-Indians renamed it Mount Rushmore, after a New York attorney who was visiting the Black Hills of South Dakota on business. In 1923, a local booster promoted the idea of a tourist attraction, and a year after, the artist Gutzon Borglum was invited to consider sculpting a monument...between 1927 and 1941, Borlum and four hundred workers blasted and removed four hundred and fifty thousand tons of rock, carving four gigantic heads measuring twenty-one feet from head to chin.<sup>112</sup>

To Dakota and other Oceti Sakowin people, the Shrine of Democracy at Mount Rushmore is a desecration and an affront to what we hold dear.

It's important to invent alternative pasts for a culture that finds it hard to accept the real one. It's paradoxical that a Shrine of Democracy is placed in the center of land acquired

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112. Trafzer, *American Indians/American Presidents*, 3.



through well-documented rape – the most blatant example of 500 years of genocide and hemispheric conquest. Rushmore implies that the European has always been here. It obscures a painful memory and eases racial guilt much the same way an individual represses thoughts that remind him of a painful experience.<sup>113</sup>

The artist who sculpted Mount Rushmore, Gutzon Borglum, was a white supremacist sympathizer who first worked on the world's largest Confederate monument, located at Stone Mountain outside Atlanta, Georgia.

Stone Mountain is a unique geologic feature of the region, and in the early 1900s it was owned by leaders of the Klu Klux Klan.<sup>114</sup> The memorial recognizes President Jefferson Davis and generals Robert E. Lee and Thomas J. "Stonewall" Jackson. The heinous carving “measures three-acres, larger than a football field and Mount Rushmore. The carving of the three men towers 400 feet above the ground, measures 90 by 190 feet, and is recessed 42 feet into the mountain.”<sup>115</sup> It looks like a scar on the incredibly beautiful hill. Before settlement, Stone Mountain was a place of truce for tribes of the area, including the Cree, and many unique Indigenous-made structures, such as rock walls and carved depressions for fire pits, have been found on the site.<sup>116</sup>

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113. Harriet Senie, and Sally Webster, *Critical Issues in Public Art: Content, Context, and Controversy*. (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1998), 249.

114. Debra McKinney, “Stone Mountain: Some see the monument as the largest shrine to white supremacy in the history of the world” *Southern Poverty Law Center*. February 10, 2018. <https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/intelligence-report/2018/stone-mountain-monumental-dilemma>

115. Stone Mountain Park. “Memorial Carving.” *Stone Mountain Park*. Accessed March 5, 2019 <https://www.stonemountainpark.com/Activities/History-Nature/Confederate-Memorial-Carving>

116. Charles Colcock Jones, and Frank T. Schnell. *Antiquities of the Southern Indians, Particularly of the Georgia Tribes*. (Tuscaloosa, Ala: University Alabama Press, 1999.)



Figure 24. *Confederate Memorial Carving, Stone Mountain, Georgia*

[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Stone\\_Mountain,\\_the\\_carving,\\_and\\_the\\_Train.jpeg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Stone_Mountain,_the_carving,_and_the_Train.jpeg)

In recent years—especially since the deadly rioting in August 2017 in Charlottesville, Virginia—controversies over monuments, particularly Confederate monuments, have increased in recent years, and more attention has been paid to them.<sup>117</sup> In light of the movement to take down and reassess Confederate Monuments around the country, Stone Mountain remains a controversial topic.<sup>118</sup> Because of its size, and location, it will be challenging to remove. The memorial is also the site of a weekly laser light show, and an attraction of the Stone Mountain amusement park.<sup>119</sup> The connections between Confederate monuments, colonial monuments, and those

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117. Jess Bidgood, et. al. “Confederate Monuments Are Coming Down Across the United States” *New York Times*. August 28, 2017. <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2017/08/16/us/confederate-monuments-removed.html?module=inline>

118. Southern Poverty Law Center, “Whose Heritage: Public Symbols of the Confederacy” Accessed June 22, 2018. <https://www.splcenter.org/data-projects/whose-heritage>

119. Katharine P. Zakos, “Truth Is Marching On: The Lasershow Spectacular at the Stone Mountain Park Confederate Memorial and the Changing Narratives of History.” *Journal of Heritage Tourism*. 10, no. 3 (2005): 280-295.

memorializing the founding of America are numerous and disturbing. Of the pressure to remove confederate monuments from federal land, former Department of the Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke said, “Where do you start and where do you stop? It’s a slippery slope. If you’re a native Indian, I can tell you, you’re not very happy about the history of General Sherman or perhaps President Grant.”<sup>120</sup>

The controversy surrounding the Stone Mountain memorial can be seen in the wider movement to remove or recontextualize monuments to imperialism, colonialism, and institutionalized racism all around the world. The Southern Poverty Law Center report on Confederate monuments around the US documented “114 Confederate symbols that have been removed since the Charleston attack — and 1,747 that still stand.”<sup>121</sup> Some examples of this worldwide movement include the removal of a statue of Gandhi at the University of Ghana;<sup>122</sup> a debate in New York City about the presence of a prominent statue of Christopher Columbus;<sup>123</sup> defacing a statue of Don Juan de Oñate in New Mexico;<sup>124</sup> removing a monument to John A. Macdonald in Kingston, Ontario;<sup>125</sup> as well as contentious disputes over monuments to Cecil J. Rhodes in Cape Town, South Africa;<sup>126</sup> Edward Cornwallis in Halifax, Nova Scotia;<sup>127</sup> John

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120. Chris D’Angelo, and Dana Liebelson, “Trump’s Interior Head: If We Take Down Confederate Statues, American Indians Will Complain Next.” *Huffington Post*, October 10, 2017. [https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/ryan-zinke-confederate-statues-native-americans\\_us\\_59dd166fe4b01df09b769dce](https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/ryan-zinke-confederate-statues-native-americans_us_59dd166fe4b01df09b769dce).

121. Southern Poverty Law Center, “Whose Heritage: Public Symbols of the Confederacy.” Accessed June 22, 2018. <https://www.splcenter.org/data-projects/whose-heritage>

122. Damola Durosomo, “A Statue of Gandhi Has Been Removed From the University of Ghana” *OkayAfrica*. December 13, 2018, <https://www.okayafrica.com/statue-of-gandhi-racist-removed-torn-down-university-of-ghana-student-protests/>

123. William Neuman, “No Traveling for New York’s Columbus Statue, Mayor Decides” *New York Times*, January 12, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/01/12/nyregion/no-traveling-for-columbus-statue-mayor-de-blasio-decides.html?module=inline>

124. Simon Romero, “Statue’s Stolen Foot Reflects Divisions Over Symbols of Conquest.” *New York Times*, Sept. 30, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/09/30/us/statue-foot-new-mexico.html>

125. Ian Austen, “Canada, Too, Faces a Reckoning with History and Racism” *New York Times*, August 28, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/08/28/world/americas/canada-john-a-macdonald-kingston.html>.

126. Kim Gurney, “Zombie monument: Public art and performing the present.” *Cities* 77, 2018.

127. Justin Brake, “Cornwallis Statue Removal Marks Historic Day for Mi’kmaq” *APTNews* February 1, 2018, <http://aptnews.ca/2018/02/01/cornwallis-statue-removal-marks-historic-day-for-mikmaq/>

Batman in Melbourne, Australia;<sup>128</sup> and the list goes on. Monumental representations of these historic figures whose actions marginalized whole groups of people in order to further colonial regimes, or racist ideologies, are under heated discussion all over the world.

### **Public Space for Whom?**

Sam Durant, an American artist who has done significant work criticizing hegemonic monuments, created a large sculpture called *Scaffold* as a piece decrying execution. The structure was inspired by the gallows that were used during the hanging of the 38 Dakota leaders in Mankato, as well as other gallows used at infamous state executions. *Scaffold* was purchased by Walker Art Center director Olga Viso who first spotted it “at a German exhibition in 2012 and subsequently championed [it] as one of 17 new works for the Sculpture Garden.”<sup>129</sup> Due to the painful and unresolved history stemming from the events surrounding the 1862 execution, the presence of the piece generated significant outcry and was the subject of protest by Dakota people. The piece was removed by the Walker at the behest of Dakota community members. In a letter regarding the matter, “Durant said he made a ‘grave miscalculation’ in how the work would be received, and apologized for not consulting with the Dakota community. ‘My work was created with the idea of creating a zone of discomfort for whites; your protests have now created a zone of discomfort for me.’”<sup>130</sup>

Since that time, the piece was dismantled, and the Walker Art Center committed to the inclusion of Dakota voices in its programming.<sup>131</sup> Sam Durant wrote a piece appearing in the summer 2018 issue of the art journal *October*, stating:

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128 Miki Perkins, “Historic Statues: Where Indigenous People and Women Go Missing,” *The Age*. September 2, 2017, <https://www.theage.com.au/national/victoria/historic-statues-where-women-and-indigenous-people-go-missing-20170831-gy8ev2.html>

129. Jenna Ross, “Walker Art Center director Olga Viso steps down after tumultuous year.” *Minneapolis Star Tribune*. November 14, 2017. <http://www.startribune.com/walker-art-center-director-olga-viso-stepping-down/457475003/>

130. Tim Nelson, “Walker Art Center's sculpture garden to reopen later, following 'Scaffold' controversy” *MPR News*. May 29, 2017. <https://www.mprnews.org/story/2017/05/29/walker-delays-sculpture-garden-open-scaffold>

131. Walker Art Center. “Reaffirming our commitments, a *Scaffold* update.” Jan 29, 2018. <https://walkerart.org/magazine/reaffirming-our-commitments-a-scaffold-update>

The recent removals of symbols of the Confederacy, both spontaneous (Bree Newsome's Confederate flag taken down at the South Carolina statehouse, the toppling of the Confederate statue in Durham, North Carolina) and official (the removal of statues in New Orleans and elsewhere, the recommended removals of some public monuments in New York City), show a level of outrage that, while triggered by recent events, has been building for generations. The question today is whether these iconoclasm signal the beginning of systemic change or if they will act as a safety valve releasing stress while leaving the status quo in place. We have to do more than destroy symbols. We need to begin a truth-and-reconciliation process with our past, and that will involve a national reckoning with the foundational catastrophes of our history – slavery and genocide.<sup>132</sup>

Durant's *Scaffold* revealed the open wound of Dakota history in Minneapolis to settlers who had the privilege of not knowing about it. His audience was white people, not Dakota people, and the incident shows the kind of tone-deafness of the mainstream art world with regard to Indigenous people. In an Interview with the *New York Times*, Viso and Durant answered questions about Indigenous audiences in public space. Viso said, "there's a different responsibility of artwork in civic space. That's where I hold the Walker and myself accountable and apologize for really misunderstanding the context and impact it would have on the Dakota people... We need to engage broader public discussion and communities in that process." And Durant said, "I've learned a huge amount about how I need to be much more mindful and aware when I'm working with things that have to do with a minority community of any kind."<sup>133</sup>

With enough outcry and protest, artists and institutions working within the Western canon, who often exemplify liberal values, can be persuaded to shift practices. Throughout history, the same posturing of people professing liberal democratic values, and claiming to be sympathetic or allied to Indigenous people, have always caused harm. Linda T. Smith describes this phenomenon of Western thought:

From the nineteenth century onwards, the processes of dehumanization were often hidden behind justifications for imperialism and colonialism which were clothed within an ideology of humanism and liberalism and the assertion of moral claims of civilized 'man.' The moral justifications did not necessarily stop the continued hunting of

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132. Leah Dickerman and MTL Collective, "A Questionnaire on Monuments: 49 Responses." *October*. Issue 615. (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2018.) 39

133. Hilarie M. Sheets, "Dakota People are Debating Whether to Burn 'Scaffold' Fragments" *New York Times*. June 5, 2017. <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/06/05/arts/design/dakota-people-are-debating-whether-to-burn-scaffold-fragments.html>

Aborigines in the early nineteenth century, nor the continued ill-treatment of different indigenous peoples even today.<sup>134</sup>

Change will not automatically happen. Without struggle, without movement building and collective action, starting with our communities, things will go on as they have.

The mass hanging of Dakota leaders at the behest of Abraham Lincoln is a legacy that must be reckoned with. Although Lincoln is a revered American, his legacy is not untouchable. Earlier this year, a billboard of Lincoln went up next to the American Indian Community Housing Organization in Duluth, Minnesota, whose building has a large mural on it painted by an Indigenous artist. Staff at the center asked the billboard company to remove it and they eventually complied. Of the incident, the staff person recalled a conversation with a local business leader, “They mentioned how beautiful it was to have the current billboard of President Lincoln next to our building and the mural. I then told him a little about the history. He didn’t know. He was never taught that history. He thanked me for this education.”<sup>135</sup> Lack of public education about history, low visibility of Indigenous people, and Western cultural supremacy are all factors that impact issues of public space and the resulting monuments and art that are placed there.

This is also evident in ongoing struggles regarding the re-naming of public places with their original, Indigenous names. For example, Lake Calhoun in Minneapolis has been officially re-named Bde Maka Ska, its original name, which means White Earth Lake,<sup>136</sup> after a years-long struggle by Dakota people and a contentious community debate about the merits of changing the name. These cases show how Dakota people are often excluded from non-Indigenous people’s concepts of public space. It is only through outcry and struggle that we have been able to make our voices heard on the issue of public invisibility.

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134. Linda T. Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*. (New York: Palgrave, 2000), 26.

135. Dan Kraker, “Lincoln billboard removed in Duluth after outcry over forgotten history” *MPR News*, January 31, 2019. <https://www.mprnews.org/story/2019/01/31/lincoln-billboard-removed-in-duluth>

136. David Chanen, “The state officially changes Lake Calhoun to Bde Maka Ska” *Star Tribune* January 19, 2018 <http://www.startribune.com/the-state-dnr-approve-changing-lake-calhoun-to-bde-maka-ska/469990923/>

## Public Space, Public Opinion, Public Policy

How do various monuments, memorials, and artworks in the public sphere, that people interact with on a regular basis, color perspectives about Native American people, or other peoples who have been marginalized? Presenting an erroneous, incomplete, romanticized, tragic, offensive, or no image of Native Americans to the public, influences not only how tribal people are seen in society at large, but inevitably, public opinion. Public opinion leads to policy. The results of applying policy solutions based upon public opinion that has been tainted by misinformation, has been devastating for tribes. A correlation exists between the level of public ignorance about Native Americans and the extent to which the dominant society is willing to exploit tribal people. Public ignorance about indigenous people and a willingness to cast them as the “other” has fueled the process of colonization and today paves the way for continued colonialist attitudes. “The power to narrate, or to block other narratives from forming and emerging, is very important to culture and imperialism, and constitutes one of the main connections between them.”<sup>137</sup> The implications for tribes and tribal people are numerous and serious, for even the best governance practices by a tribe, or self-determining acts by Indigenous peoples, can be thwarted by negative public perceptions.

In discussing the memorializing of the US-Dakota War in public space, along with its associated events and figures, questions arise. How can we acknowledge brutal histories respectfully? Can we face the societal crimes of the past truthfully in the public sphere with a goal of creating a future in which these crimes could never again occur? There are many more monuments all around the US, that also do not acknowledge the genocide and ethnic cleansing upon which the United States was founded. They do not acknowledge that advanced peoples lived here before settlement. Instead, colonial perspectives are presented, facts are whitewashed and histories omitted. Monuments to colonialism in the US celebrate the fabric of America and engender difficult conversations about the founding of the country that many people are not open to discussing. How can art and the creative process contribute to these conversations? In the spirit of truth-telling and acknowledging the legacy of colonization, Indigenous artists working in the public sphere must be vigilant.

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137. Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism*. (New York: Knopf: Distributed by Random House, 1993), xiii.

## Sacred Sites and National Monuments

The discussion of public space, monuments, and public art is not complete without a look into the practices, or lack thereof, regarding places that are wakan (sacred). As has been described in this thesis so far, places considered to be sacred to Dakota people—the pipestone quarry, Bdote, Six Grandfathers—have been transformed into tourist destinations, places for the public to celebrate and commemorate the American colonial project.

Sacred sites exist all over the continent. In 1978, the American Indian Religious Freedom Act was ratified, providing some legal protections to American Indian people to practice their sacred cultural traditions in designated sacred sites, but did not provide protections against development of industry, development that has razed and destroyed sites.<sup>138</sup> Some sacred sites have protections as National Monuments, but many others such as Mauna Loa in Hawai‘i, the San Francisco Peaks in Arizona, and Snoqualmie Falls in Washington, remain vulnerable.

The UN Declaration on the rights of Indigenous Peoples, adopted by the UN General Assembly in 2007, contains clear language that supports the principal that Native American sacred sites deserve protection under the laws of the United States. The language is in the Declaration because other Indigenous Peoples share the same concerns about “sacred place” locations that not only carry special meaning in their historical stories, but are special places that exude powers from a world of which we have only a limited understanding.<sup>139</sup>

Pipestone National Monument, Devil’s Tower National Monument, and Bear’s Ears National Monument<sup>140</sup> are three sacred places to Native American tribes that have been designated national monuments. They exist on protected land set aside and managed by the federal government and are home to places of cultural and religious significance to tribal people.<sup>141</sup>

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138. Deloria, *God Is Red*, 271-286.

139. Parker, 49.

140. Charles Wilkinson, “At Bears Ears Canyon we can hear the voices of our ancestors in every canyon and on every mesa top: The Creation of the First Native National Monument.” *Arizona State Law Journal* 50, no. 1 (2018): 317.

141. National Park Service. “A Sacred Site to American Indians” *Devil’s Tower National Monument Wyoming*. October 5, 2016. <https://www.nps.gov/deto/learn/historyculture/sacredsites.htm>



With this protected status comes a fundamental shift in the regulatory environment of the site, and these places become sites claimed by the narrative of American exceptionalism. Many more sacred sites remain unprotected and innumerable places have been destroyed or desecrated. The dynamic of cultural supremacy and the power of settler politics over Indigenous peoples are contribute to the way these places fit into discussions on public space, monuments and Dakota art and culture.

The complicated political, historical, psychological, and symbolic realities embedded in the land, monuments, and discourses occupying the conceptual and tangible aspects of public space must be examined in order to fully understand how Indigenous artists engage with it. The next chapter will move the conversation away from monumental art, memorials and sacred places to public art that engages with the politics of memory and land through expression.

## Chapter 7: Public Art and Indigenous Artists

Indigenous artists face the unique challenge of having to traverse a line between prevailing Western concepts of art making and public space and the truths of our own experiences and responsibilities to our own cultures. Working in the public realm is an opportunity to bring our distinctive perspectives to the forefront of discussions, which can have a wide impact on society. In what ways can we decolonize spaces? How can we use social, political, natural history to educate people? These are some of the questions considered here.

There have been many movements within the Western public art discourses that have grappled with questions of monumentality and anti-monument status, memory, the confines of urban and architectural space, time-based public art production, performativity, and the environmental. There has been little done to discuss the ways in which Indigenous peoples and perspectives fit into these conversations. As described in previous sections, the limits of Western thinking about Indigenous peoples is part of the foundation of art, and by extension, public art. This thesis aims to provide entry to these issues, with the goal of using public art as a tool to both decolonize and Indigenize spaces.

Both monuments and public art use symbolism to communicate ideals, drawing from the artist's beliefs about the assumptions of the public audience.

The very concept of public art, defined in any meaningful way, presupposes a fairly homogenous public and language of art that speaks to all. These two prerequisites were never present in the United States. Western European art was, for the most part, the art of monarchs and the church, not the product of a democratic society. Understandably, there were conflicting attitudes surrounding a tradition of art that is elitist in origins but still admired by many. Art was, from the nation's beginnings surrounded by an aura of distrust and admiration and it has been viewed by a heterogeneous audience with mixed feelings ever since... art in the public domain, a sign of the power of its patrons, frequently becomes the focus for discontents that often have nothing to do with the art. Small wonder that public art and controversy seem to have joined at birth.<sup>142</sup>

New movements in public art “find artists affecting geological and physical displacements, conjuring mirages that enter the social imagination, setting in motion quiet infections that

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142. Senie and Webster, 171.

fundamentally remake place and space, and proffering utopian urban futures.”<sup>143</sup> The trajectory of Western art approaches – vilifying past movements to promote new ideas or trends is present in public art.

### **Land Art and Ecological Art**

One of these movements was land art. Land art is interesting because it offers ways to think about the elements of a place. Beginning in the 1960s, landscaping and public art joined in the earthworks sculptures of Robert Morris, Richard Serra, Robert Smithson, and others, combining the large scale and temporal with an emerging awareness of ecological fragility.<sup>144</sup> The works directly engage with the land itself, but do not approach Indigenous peoples’ long traditions of respect for local ecologies. More recent works have attempted to go beyond the aesthetic of piling of dirt into forms that affirm human dominance over nature toward making statements about human relationships to land. Agnes Denes’s *Wheatfield: A Confrontation: Battery Park Landfill*, was a two-acre piece, made in 1982, that was a “meditation on the tension between the man-made and the natural. It was also an experiment in urban farming that was a solid 30 years ahead of its time.”<sup>145</sup> It transformed a landfill located in one of the only undeveloped spaces in Manhattan, in view of the World Trade Center. The work, which lasted until its wheat was harvested, “‘was a meaningful attack’ on the divide between rich and poor, between the pastoral and the technocratic, and how people embrace progress.”<sup>146</sup>

Another example, Mel Chen’s *Revival Field*, sought to go beyond purely aesthetic considerations by rehabilitating a polluted site through the artistic process.

*Revival Field* is a conceptual artwork with an intent to sculpt a site’s ecology. In a traditional sculpture, the artist with an idea approaches a material and fashions it into a concrete reality. Here the idea is the radical transformation of a hazardous site incapable

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143. Claire Doherty, et. al., *Out of Time, Out of Place: Public Art (Now)*. (London: Art Books Publishing, 2015), 13.

144. Senie and Webster, 250-260.

145. Karrie Jacobs, “The Woman Who Harvested a Wheat Field Off of Wall Street.” *New York Times*. June 14, 2018. <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/06/14/t-magazine/agnes-denes-art.html>

146. Ibid.

of supporting life. The material will be toxic earth and the tools will be a scientific process utilizing heavy metal leaching plants called “hyperaccumulators.” The aesthetic reality will be recreated Nature. The sculpting process starts unseen in the ground below in order to reveal the eventual work, a living, revitalized landscape above.<sup>147</sup>

Previous land art practitioners, whose monumental works seem to be exercises in vanity and chauvinism through scale, were disconnected from the ecosystemic character of the sites in which they appear. Chen sought to create something that provided a service to the site in which it was situated. In collaborating with a scientist from the US Department of Agriculture, he identified

organic material with the capacity to extract heavy metal contaminants from a toxic waste site in St. Paul, MN. The project—a hybrid of artistic and scientific experimentation—yielded one of Chen’s most well-known and controversial works to date, due in part to the public funding fiasco that it ignited when the chairman of the National Endowment of the Arts refused to acknowledge the concept of an “invisible aesthetics” used to designate the project as a work of art...Chen’s proposal that aesthetic merit can reside in the non-perceptual features of a work (e.g., the decontamination of soil) began to dismantle some of the more conventional assumptions about what constitutes public art.”<sup>148</sup>

This marriage of art and science has since been utilized in other contaminated sites around the world. Denes and Chen used the creative process to produce works that are not only visually stunning and operate within the spectrum of art, but go beyond the visual to affect the land they are on, contributing to their ecologies. Their functionality was not limited to the strict confines of any one field—they were the products of cross-disciplinary approaches. They came from the Western canon, and yet, they also spoke to methods of creativity that are consistent with the trajectory of art as I see it from an Indigenous perspective—works that are beautiful and seek to enhance, but also serve a purpose and are integrative. They emanate from the land they are on.

The field of Indigenous art has much to offer in the realm of breaking down the walls separating disciplines to better understand the nature of life. Considering the Indigenous tradition of manipulating materials and aesthetics to arrive at something useful or necessary, public art can be a real locus for restoring ecologies, habitats, and communities.

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147. Tom Finkelpearl, and Vito Acconci. *Dialogues in Public Art*. (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2000), 385.

148. Jason Miller, 2016. "Posthumanist art: interview with contemporary artist Mel Chin." *Text & Performance Quarterly* 212-213.

## **Fostering Indigenous Public Art in the Pacific Northwest**

The *Confluence Project* is a public art effort spanning the length of the Columbia River, which divides the states of Washington and Oregon. Designed by Maya Lin, the creator of the Vietnam Memorial in Washington, DC, it consists of six installations along the trail of the explorers Lewis and Clark, whose expedition served to open up Western portions of the continent to increased settlement. Its mission is to “connect people to the history, living cultures and ecology of the Columbia River system through Indigenous voices.”<sup>149</sup> The project collaborated with local tribes and Indigenous artists to create site-specific pieces that use landscape art and architectural elements to draw attention to features of the land. One of the artists, Lillian Pitt (Warm Springs/Wasco), used petroglyph images to symbolize the site’s ancestral memory and a large sculptural canoe paddle to show the connection between the tribal people of the place and the water. Of her work, she says,

The site I worked on was built to honor the Chinookan people, who were awesome traders. They lived and traded from the mouth of the Columbia River in Astoria, all the way upriver to the area where my ancestors lived at Celilo. This particular area within modern-day Vancouver was a major gathering place for them at the time, as well as a major place for trade. And because trading was so well established, the Hudson Bay Company decided to put the first European trading post in the Pacific Northwest at that site. So when Lewis and Clark came along years later, they were also welcomed and had a great place to camp. So there’s a lot of history there...I created several large works of art at the Vancouver site, and I hope my contribution helps to make a difference.<sup>150</sup>

The *Confluence Project* is a unique consortium of public, nonprofit, local, and tribal organizations working together to reflect the region’s history, with Indigenous voices at the center. Some of the works include bridges, seating, a fish-cleaning table, landscaping with native plants, and riverside walkways to enhance visitors’ experiences. The focus on places passed by Lewis and Clark conceptually places the sites under the psychological jurisdiction of settlers, but it does so in a way that highlights the original people of the area by giving Indigenous artists a platform to express themselves.

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<sup>149</sup>. Confluence Project. “What is Confluence?” <http://www.confluenceproject.org/about/>

<sup>150</sup>. Lillian Pitt, “Confluence Project Reflections.” <http://lillianpitt.com/public-art-confluence-project/>

Two other localities in the Pacific Northwest are also working to foster Indigenous voices. The City of Seattle’s Office of Arts and Culture has adopted a Race and Social Justice Initiative, in which it works to “eliminate institutional racism in our programs, policies and practices.”<sup>151</sup> I participated in the initiative’s Public Art Boot Camp, in which I learned how to compete for public art commissions. As a result, I submitted a proposal and received my first commission from the city for a temporary installation at the Seattle Center—a thirty-five foot long banner called “Resilience, Anpa O Wicahnpi: Dakota Pride Banner,” featuring the full rainbow spectrum of colors rendered in Dakota morning stars.



Figure 25. Erin Genia, *Anpa O Wicahnpi, Dakota Pride Banner*, 2017, pieced ripstop nylon, Seattle Center, Seattle WA

The site-specific piece stayed up for a year. My artist statement for the banner, written in 2017, says:

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<sup>151</sup>. City of Seattle, “Office of Arts and Culture.” <http://www.seattle.gov/arts>

Using a rainbow palette to signify the celebration of diversity that is at the “Heart of the City” – the theme of this year’s Seattle Center Sculpture Walk, I sewed a hand-pieced Morningstar banner to hang along the ceiling in the International Pavilion Covered Walkway, creating a festive ambiance below as people make their way to and from the activity at Seattle Center. As an urban Dakota person, whose traditional home is far away, it’s rare to see images from my culture reflected in local art. I know there are many people like me, living in a diaspora. This piece is an homage to our journey and a shout out to fellow Oceti Sakowin, Great Sioux Nation people who reside in the Pacific Northwest – there are many of us! ... the rainbow Morningstar banner draws comparisons to the pride flag which is meant to celebrate diversity and solidarity with the LGBTQ community and was created in the Castro District of San Francisco. This year, the City of Philadelphia updated the pride flag to include new brown and black and black stripes. The additional colors symbolize the City’s Office of LGBT Affairs’ commitment to inclusion of people of color. I was inspired by this and also included brown and black in Anpa O Wicahnpi... [It] is a celebration of the diversity in Seattle, within our tribal communities and in all communities. Many different kinds of people, many ways of thinking and being make us stronger if we embrace our differences as well as our similarities. This piece activates the space in a lighthearted way while also carrying a message that diversity is beautiful and pays homage to urban Native people’s resilience through vibrant cultural expression.

The second place in the Pacific Northwest that is fostering Indigenous arts in the public sphere is the city of Vancouver, British Columbia, where funding from the national Truth and Reconciliation Commission has led to projects that draw attention to the first peoples of the territory, the Coast Salish tribes. They never ceded their land to the Canadian government, so it is a highly contested space of ownership.<sup>152</sup> This dynamic is present in the public art created there. In *The Land We Are—Artists and Writers Unsettle the Politics of Reconciliation*, the City of Vancouver is said to possess a “civil infrastructure of redress”:

Such redress is concerned with what it means to formally recognize Vancouver’s location on unceded Coast Salish territories through signs, sculptures, and other artworks in the public realm... these material practices contribute to and resist the self-congratulatory narratives about nation building that also support Vancouver’s claim to world-class city status. In the ongoing contest between integration and self-determination, such public art hails the viewer to take a position, spatially and ideologically, on national belonging. The viewer can recoil from this hail... feel a sense of belonging, or further still a sense of solidarity with the assertion of Indigenous visibility in Vancouver.”<sup>153</sup>

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<sup>152</sup>. Hill and McCall, 48.

<sup>153</sup>. Ibid., 23

In this description of Vancouver's public art, the concept of interpellation, as coined by French Marxist philosopher Louis Althusser in 1972, is apparent. Interpellation describes the feedback loop between an individual and a dominant power structure, in which the individual is aware of their role as a subject of a hegemonic power, but remains complicit.<sup>154</sup>

Within a settler colonial society, interpellation is a dynamic that allows continued oppression of Indigenous and marginalized people. Viewing public artworks that draw attention to contested histories and cultural dissonances may elicit a range of reactions on the spectrum of complicity. Interpellation is determined by the identity of the viewer, how they see themselves, and how they are seen by others, within the power structure.

Other aspects that determine how a piece is received include where they come from, what their cultural background is, their socioeconomic status, their knowledge about the issues presented, whether they are Indigenous, what their affiliations may be, and no less significantly, their state of mind at the time they see the work. All these aspects and more may factor into an individual's response to a piece, and all must be considered by the artist in the process of creating and siting a work.

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154. Jan Rehmann, *Theories of Ideology: The Powers of Alienation and Subjection*. (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 174.



## Chapter 8: Artist Interviews

In my quest to understand the politics of memory with regard to Indigenous public art, and to understand how Indigenous artists working in the public sphere are addressing issues of public space, site specificity, history and heritage, I interviewed three artists, Nora Naranjo Morse (Tewa) artist, Alan Michelson (Mohawk), and Lyonel Grant (Ngāti Pikiao/Rangiwewehi/Te Arawa). These artists, working in the public sphere, provide diverse bodies of work that encourage their viewers and participants to consider different ways of existing with the land. Each has produced significant and masterful works that have been influential in the field of Indigenous art. I had the good fortune to work with Nora and Lyonel in my past professional life as an arts administrator, and the excellence of their work and their profound approaches continue to influence me greatly. I had learned about the work of Alan Michelson through study and word of mouth, and asked to interview him. Piwada (I am grateful) to all three of these incredible artists for taking the time to speak with me and share their wisdom.

These works create a strong presence of Indigeneity in public space which is powerful in America and other settler colonial places like Aotearoa (New Zealand), where Lyonel Grant is from, which have historically made Indigenous people publicly invisible.

I developed the interview questions to understand deeper issues and also to help me learn how to successfully navigate the process of creating art in the public sphere for myself and to share with other Indigenous artists. Given the challenges of working in public space, it's important to me to hear whether these three respected artists have negotiated difficult terrain, politically in public space, and how they have approached community with this work. I was also curious to learn about how the artists worked with the particulars of each place, and in and Indigenous context, this can mean the non-human entities living in the space where a piece will be established, which is a factor in site-specificity that often gets overlooked.

### **Nora Naranjo Morse**

When speaking to Nora Naranjo Morse, we discussed *Numbe Whageh*, a public art piece located at the Albuquerque Museum, and *Always Becoming*, onsite at the Smithsonian's National Museum of the American Indian in Washington, D.C.

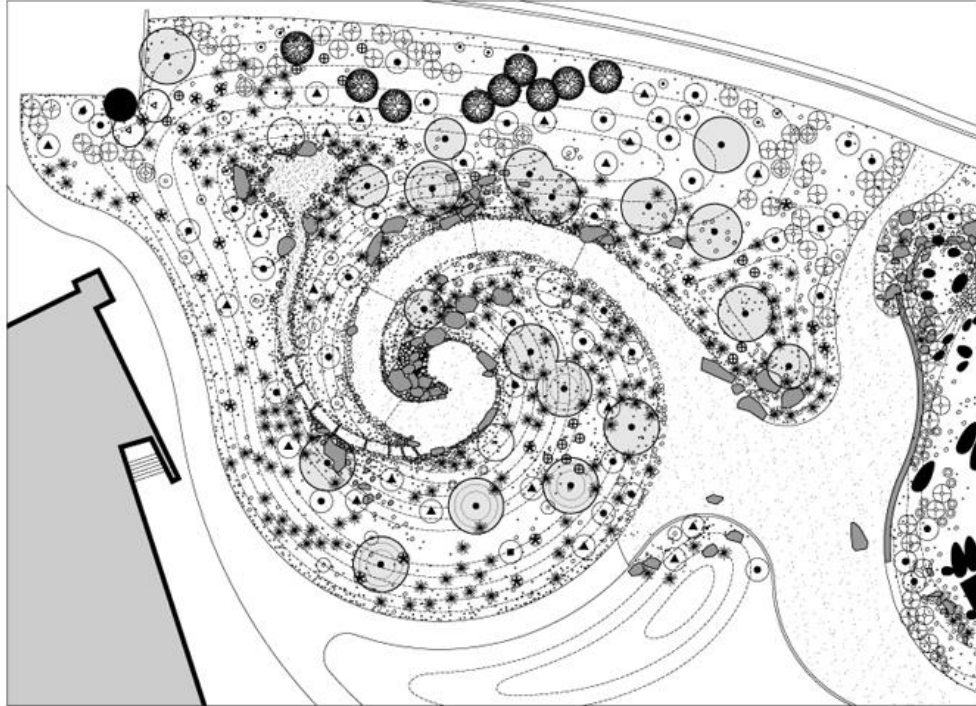


Figure 26. Nora Naranjo Morse, *Numbe Whageh* drawing by Landscape Architect Richard Borkavetz

Nora Naranjo Morse is a multidisciplinary artist whose primary medium of clay is a family tradition. Naranjo Morse received the commission to complete *Numbe Whageh*, alongside two other artists: a settler-descended artist and a Hispanic artist, in order to bring her perspective as a Tewa Pueblo person to the work memorializing the legacy of Spanish conquistador, Don Juan de Oñate, through public art. The process of creating the artwork was contentious, and took several years with many ensuing changes before it was completed. *Always Becoming* is probably her most important piece to date, located on the grounds of the NMAI at the National Mall. Both pieces are earthworks, and both are site-specific. Each of these pieces is unique and came about through a set of distinct processes, but clearly articulate works of beauty that confront Indigenous issues. I spoke with Nora by phone on September 19, 2018, and I asked her a series of questions regarding her practice for public work, and about specific considerations for the medium of public art.

*How do you approach your work in public space? Is there anything you do differently with work you create that is meant to inhabit public spaces vs. gallery or museum spaces?*

The approach is different from the beginning; when I'm in the studio I'm in the cocoon of my own making and I'm able to experiment and develop. I stopped being in galleries recently, I am not focusing so much on commercial works. I work things out in the studio. It's a very individual process of what I choose, and what I bring to the experience. That creative process is really quite wonderful because when I'm not in the studio I'm out in the community, part of the community. Public art is largely dealing administratively within institutions – a completely different experience that is more about a pre-described process that must be followed in order to get results, art is somewhat contrary to that idea. I'm mindful of bringing the community into this process. I'm mindful of who I represent and my creative intentions, all of these considerations take a lot of thought when I accept a Public Art project.

With *Numbe Whageh*, the Cuerto Centenario land art piece in Albuquerque, the process lasted for ten years and it was very controversial. "Numbe Whageh" means our center place in Tewa. The site that was originally given was retracted because the community didn't want it there. The next space was retracted, too. Public outcry on all sides was very vocal and very angry. The last time my space was taken away, I realized something bigger was happening and ultimately the space I was given was the space that was meant to happen. The piece created a dialogue of how history should be remembered. I was told at one of the open city meetings by a woman that I should do a monumental female sculpture of a corn maiden giving food to one of Oñate's soldiers. I wanted to honor her by listening, even though I disagreed with her. But that is part of the work in the public realm. It builds fortitude and character. We as a culture have become colonized in our approaches to even each other, so how do I listen without judgement or fear because I understand people want to be heard because for so long, people of color have been denied their voice. The Cuerto Centenario Project taught me how to navigate those processes while staying true to the creative process and myself. The on-going effects of colonization and generations of trauma has yet to be resolved and working in Public art, I've become more committed to giving voice to unresolved issues and communities I'm not only a part of, but have a responsibility to. I visited people in the communities because these conversations are so important. I wanted to understand how to use this opportunity to acknowledge this – how do we look at what we have, and what we have learned to create something that is true?



Figure 27. Nora Naranjo Morse, *Always Becoming*, photo by Ernest Amoroso, 2015, Smithsonian National Museum of the American Indian, Washington, DC

*Do you consider any impact on local wildlife, water or ecosystem when designing or building a piece for public art?*

*Always Becoming* has become a sanctuary for wildlife in the city, as part of the landscaping of the NMAI. I thought about another monument in DC, the Jefferson Memorial, which is a very static, self-aggrandizing monument to a human being that had to be preserved through a permanent sculpture and be indestructible. I wanted to look at the material that my Pueblo people would use: earth, which is changeable. When I last visited *Always Becoming*, Mason bees were burrowing into the sculpture, and there were two robin's eggs in the sculptures, collaborating between the animal life, and the earth in the organic nature of that interaction. They will eventually dissolve and go back to the earth. Things are always in transition and in the continuum – how do we take care of them while we are here? I see the worth in it – our children will come to these things and get reminded. Each public art project is different and brings different challenges. With each project this is a consideration. And you don't know that unless you keep doing it. Each public art project challenges me but the results are socially, culturally and personally meaningful. My intentions are-how do we follow our passion and life's work to bring it outward for other people? This is lifelong work. It's powerful and it becomes about something bigger – our purpose?

## Alan Michelson

Speaking with Alan Michelson on September 28, 2019, I learned that his works are products of extensive research, and seek to bring Indigenous legacies back into spaces where they have been marginalized. Like Nora's works, they are also closely connected to the land of each site. *Third Bank of the River* is beautiful piece created in 2009 for the US Port of Entry in Massena, NY, an international border crossing site. He constructed a two-row wampum pattern using photographs of the landscape at the river crossing site of complicated jurisdictions – American, Canadian, and Mohawk. We also discussed *Mantle*, a 2018 landscape installation located at Capital Square in Richmond Virginia. It is based upon *Powhatan's Mantle*, and names the local tribes and waterways of the area while offering visitors to the capital campus respite. It is an alternative to the other chauvinistic monuments on the site. Michelson's work is thoughtful, relevant, and aesthetically tied to the visual culture of the Indigenous people from each site.



Figure 28. Alan Michelson, *Third Bank of the River*, 2009, etched glass, Massena, NY

*How do you approach your work in public space? What do you do differently with work you create that is meant to inhabit public spaces vs. gallery or museum spaces?*

There is different sense of the temporal in relation to the work. There is a time limit built into the gallery experience. Most people go only once and don't spend that much time with the work. You can expect a level of initiation and experience of the viewer in a gallery so you can create more nuance on a more intimate scale. Whereas with public art, visibility, scale, and permanence are considerations that are different than those of a temporary white-box show.

*Third Bank of the River* was my first permanent public commission, for the US Land Port of Entry at Massena, New York. It was a somewhat complicated work because the border there on the St. Lawrence is a very complicated place. The border divides Akwesasne Mohawk Territory in Ontario and Quebec from the St. Regis Mohawk Reservation in New York. There are many jurisdictional issues there, and the Jay Treaty applies. There is significant bias against Natives by the border guards on both sides. It's a hostile environment and smuggling across the St Lawrence River occurs there.

After 9/11, there was funding available for border development, because it is a US port of entry. The port is a very paranoid building, built with bullet-proof glass. I proposed a glass mural window. I went into the community and shot hundreds of images from a boat, of the four shorelines at the crossing, each encompassing over three miles.

There have been many stresses to the river over time. It is a Superfund site from the industries which arose along its banks after the construction of the Moses-Saunders Power Dam, and the St. Lawrence Seaway. There used to be rapids there, and there were sturgeon. It was a place for harvesting. The river was dredged, which ruined the rapids. There was hydropower and mining along the river, and it was polluted.



Figure 29. Alan Michelson, *Mantle*, 2018, Richmond, VA

*Do you consider any impact on local wildlife, water or ecosystem when designing or building a piece for public art?*

Yes. For *Mantle*, I wanted to re-imagine the hill as a hill, not as just a pedestal for white supremacist, colonial heroic-iconic monuments, but as a Native space. So, I looked at material – I do a lot of research as part of my process, and I ran into *Powhatan's Mantle*. The disks on the mantle are thought to represent the constituent nations of the Powhatan confederacy. I imagined the whole thing (the deer skins) as the landscape. If you look at the snail shell from the top, it's the spiral shape, and the shells were beaded as a spiral and its everywhere in nature, and it is also present in the ancient mounds. The

slope of the hill was at a greater angle than what was required for ADA compliance. In order for me to work with the site, I needed to do some cutting and filling. Through this, the piece became an earthwork, it became an experience of motion, of movement. Rather than deal with the fraught history of Native and African people, I re-imagined it as Native space, and as a site where Native nations of Virginia were functioning as hosts rather than wards of the state, victims of history. The piece is meant to allow the visitor to get off the normal urban grid, and enter a kind of Indigenous circular space where you move around. The aggregate path is made of the local river stone; there is low seating; it is a welcoming place. You can sit in a circular arrangement, rather than linear. There is a water feature at the center, a fountain, patterned after the fall lines. The three major native groups' territories are along rivers, mountains, natural boundaries of the area. The native names of the rivers are placed in relation to each other on the fountain onsite. It makes a nice sound. It is a welcoming space; we used all native plants. For *Mantle*, I worked with scale and permanence to create an experience that is not of idol worship, adoration, heroic, but features the land and the spiral, and embodies an Indigenous sense of time.

## Lyonel Grant

Lyonel Grant is a preeminent carver who has created works of magnificence that are astounding in their detail and conceptual depth. I worked with Lyonel during his time as Toi Māori Artist-in-Residence at The Evergreen State College Longhouse Education and Cultural Center, through a partnership with Toi Māori Aotearoa in 2014. During that time, he created the design and carved sculptural elements for the Fiber Arts Studio that is a part of the Indigenous Arts Campus. His most famous work is the Te Noho Kotahitanga meeting house, built onsite at the Unitec Institute of Technology outside Auckland, New Zealand. The work is a whare nui, a traditional Māori meeting house, stunningly carved as an incredibly beautiful and meaningful work of art and architecture.

The centrepiece of the marae is a magnificent whare whakairo (carved meeting house) ‘Ngākau Māhaki’, which was built and designed by Te Arawa master carver Dr Lyonel Grant. Opened in March 2009, Ngākau Māhaki was the first whare whakairo in nearly a century that has been created using traditional architectural approaches.<sup>155</sup>

The process of creating whare whakairo, a decorated meeting house, is steeped in cultural protocols, which focus on family and tribal histories, known as whakapapa.<sup>156</sup> Lyonel works within these protocols to develop work that is highly respected by his communities.

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155. Unitec Institute of Technology. “A Vision Before its Time: Marae Te Noho Kotahitanga” <https://www.unitec.ac.nz/marae/>

156. Lyonel Grant and Damian Skinner, *Ihenga: te haerenga hou: the evolution of Māori carving in the 20th century*. (Auckland, NZ: Reed, 2007), 26.





Figure 30. Lyonel Grant, 'Ngākau Māhaki' Te Noho Kotahitanga, 2009, interior view,  
Unitec Institute of Technology, Auckland, New Zealand

*Ka mihi ki a tākuta Lyonel Grant, te ohu raranga me wāna kaitautoko katoa.*

*Me nga mihi ki te ahikā o Te Marae o Te Noho Kotahitanga i whakaae mai kia whakaatu i ngā whakaahua nei.*

I would like to acknowledge Lyonel Grant, the weavers, his support team and Te Noho Kotahitanga for allowing me to use images of the whare.

Although I wasn't able to reach Lyonel by phone, he did send me written responses to my interview questions.

*How do you approach your work in public space? What do you differently with work you create that is meant to inhabit public spaces vs. gallery or museum spaces?*

Ok I've five commissions on simultaneously, perhaps via elements of them all, and others I've done, I will be able to respond to your patai (ask). I am of the opinion that any public space I populate with an art statement should be a reflection of myself, my heritage, the historical drivers that pertain to that space, and hopefully on a very rudimentary level, aesthetically pleasing! By using a combination of those drivers, i.e. 'mixing' and blending those influences the composition and eventual outcome will flow. By that method works can be tailored to suit the site or application. For example, a modern hotel; perhaps the aesthetic/combined with material choice and historical connotations would probably have influence or feature more prominently. Whereas, an intimate gallery setting may require a smaller more intense subject –

or perhaps the title or theme of the show would play a stronger roll. In short, it's about navigating the tensions that each application presents. However, as time rolls on I'm less inclined to care as much in that provided what I do, I do with conviction, I'm happy for it to represent me.

*Do you consider any impact on local wildlife, water or ecosystem when designing or building a piece for public art?*

One of the commissions I'm doing currently is a living entity. I'm using customary Māori iconography, topiary, sculptural form, water reticulation, plant propagation, etc. I'm hoping that bird and insect life will find the sculpture a desirable habitat. However, I am also mindful of the propensity of people to do stupid things; therefore, I'm mindful of the fragility of the sculptures componentry. However, I never intentionally set out to have a negative impact on the environment regarding anything I do. In fact, there are ture (lore not law) that govern the process of carving. All care is taken not to abuse the habitat from which we receive our materials. All due care and respect is afforded this precious product of the forest once it is destined for its new use. Consequently, the chips, or alter ego of the carvings, are gathered up and returned from whence they came (I did this for the Evergreen project where possible). In fact, from "Ngākau Māhaki," I actually carved what we term a Takoha (a gift of recompense) to the land and placed it where the wood originated from, after the project was complete.

*What are the most important factors in creating a public piece? Is their permanence important?*

The relevance, or indeed 'right,' to place artwork anywhere is an honour. It is incumbent on the artist to do his or her best to add something to the space where the sculpture or artwork resides. Therein lies the musings and preamble required to hopefully achieve that goal – lest we create more visual pollution in this world! (Classic case for ephemeral art statements you might say...) I'm reminded of one particularly obstinate piece of wood that, try as I might, I could not decide what it would be. So, over the eight-year period it took me to create *Ngākau Māhaki*, I would momentarily pause, and look at this piece, which stood for the majority of those years in my studio, in my face! The resolution was that it became part of the whare as is! Totally untouched! The whare is arranged or laid out in a chronology. The piece in question occupies the 50's, 60's, 70's eras – and is indicative of our attitudes at that time, of cutting down native

timber just to plant exotic trees for harvest – a governmental law was passed in the 70's to stop that practise; the piece was literally part of the carnage.

*What public work are you most proud of or happy with and why?*

I have to say that the four where that I have created will probably be the works that I will be most remembered by. While I'm very proud and happy with how they turned out, when describing them harshly, the critic could argue that they could be termed derivative, of a lineage, classical, despite the innovations they may contain? However, in response to your question, perhaps I haven't created it yet? I am focused on creating a universal art language, while not overtly Māori per se, will have a quality that reflects my heritage and influences. For example, if I make a suggestive free-standing figure, and its shown in a gallery in Paris, people will have enough visual clues to know it's a figure, but theoretical or traditional art school training will not be of much use in discerning its origin?

*As a Māori artist, have you faced issues of discrimination with working in the public realm? How have you handled them?*

Not really; in fact quite the opposite. There is a whakatauki (proverb) that precisely covers this very issue: He Toi Whakairo He Mana Tangata (Where one strives to achieve artistic excellence, the only possible outcome will be human dignity).

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Nora Naranjo Morse, Alan Michelson, and Lyonel Grant engage with materials and concepts to create important pieces that offer the public a look into profound ways of seeing and imagining, extending beyond the limitations of Western approaches. Their works are deeply connected to land, to their own cultural heritages, and to a dignified beauty that reflects the patterns of nature, such as the spiral. They each approach their work with respect for the natural processes inherent in each site, and of the histories of place. These artists initiate and inspire their public viewers to think deeply by pushing boundaries of creativity and understanding. Their work in the public realm is inclusive of the issues we are facing as Indigenous peoples, and as humanity as a whole. Their work as leaders in their fields have laid strong foundations for future generations of artists, and I am grateful to them for sharing their insights in this thesis.

## Conclusion

Indigenous interventions in public space create openings that can bring profound physical, psychological, and symbolic healing to colonized people and places. Beginning with the land we live on, there is much to do to move our society in the direction of justice, and it necessarily starts with shedding the Western praxis and remembering our origins as Earth-based peoples. Freedom of thought and action can be harnessed with the tools of the creative process to bring form to our visions for a better world. Using the strategies available through the production of public art, we can address the ongoing consequences of colonization and imperialism by setting our communities on course for a more humane, Indigenized future.

Indigenous artists and creators of culture are doing powerful work to shift the frameworks of how our arts and cultures function. Through creative expression, tribal community work, advocacy, struggle, and movement building, they convey our connections to the continuum of life and our heritage, setting the stage for future generations to live and thrive. Indigenous artists in the public sphere navigate complex circumstances: cultural supremacy, erased histories, public invisibility, incongruous definitions of public space, harmful imaginary narratives, and public ignorance about underlying ecologies of place. These factors increase the challenge and significance of their efforts.

As I consider my own work as a Dakota artist, I clearly see the need for much more research on our ancestral art forms and attention to be devoted to achieving repatriation of our cultural objects, which hold so much memory and meaning, from museum and private collections. We must also still contend with the protection and preservation of vulnerable sacred sites. On this issue, Alan Parker advises, “never give up the fight.”<sup>157</sup>

In the interest of truth and justness, as a society, we must collectively rethink public monuments and artworks that obscure reality to maintain national fictions that serve to subjugate Indigenous and marginalized peoples. Colonial monuments can and should be taken down, but the colonial mentality that continues to pervade the psyches of those who live in Western-dominated cultures is a more difficult and pressing problem to address. What would happen if we discarded the indoctrination of the most harmful aspects of Western thought, such as contrived

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157. Parker, 48.

hierarchies and the conviction that humans have dominion over nature? The world has an abundance of intellectuals, artists, and scientists who are operating within the Western framework. We need more who are focused on our own ways of thought, like Wodakota, that are aligned with the cycles of the natural world.

To Dakota and other Indigenous peoples, the mountains, quarries, lakes, rivers, rocks, cliffs, and other natural features are monuments and works of art in of themselves, to be venerated and protected. They contain powerful memories and represent our relationships to the Earth, to each other, and to the source of life. This perspective is expressed in the words of Ohiyesa,

In his sense of the aesthetic, which is closely akin to a religious feeling, the American Indian stands alone. In accordance with his nature and beliefs, he does not pretend to imitate the inimitable, or to reproduce exactly the work of the Great Artist... in creative imagination, he is a born artist—it lies with his point of view... he holds nature to be the measure of consummate beauty and its destruction as sacrilege.<sup>158</sup>

This view is distinct from Western understandings of art and public space and must be taken seriously.

Looking ahead, Indigenous people must play a role in the direction of human evolution as we grapple with such challenges as economic, political and ecological upheaval, global migration, and technological change. Public spaces, monuments, and art are prime sites of conflict and discourse, where worldviews clash in the open and collective memory and realities can be conveyed and witnessed. If handled conscientiously, dialogues arising from these spaces can ultimately lead to greater understanding, awareness, and action.

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158. Eastman, Charles A. *The Indian today*, 149.

## Appendix A: Monuments in Perspective

In preparation for this thesis, I organized a series of site visits called *Monuments in Perspective*, which took place on April 6 and 7, 2019. My proposal, for *Monuments in Perspective*, was selected from an open call from the MIT School of Architecture and Planning's 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary, and was chosen as an "Experiment in Pedagogy," to be part of a series of events, workshops and courses marking the occasion. Over a weekend, a group of 20 students, faculty, and MIT affiliates, traveled to sites of significance to the Wampanoag, Nipmuck, Ponkapoag and Massachusetts peoples of this region. Tribal council member and culture-bearer Jonathan James-Perry (Aquinnah Wampanoag) led the group to several locations on Noepe/Martha's Vineyard: Manitouwattootan/Christiantown, Aquinnah Cliffs and gave the



Figure 31. *Monuments in Perspective* workshop participants visit Christiantown on Martha's Vineyard, photo by Matthew Ledwidge, 2019

group a tour of the traditional wetu house he built. He also led our group to Sacrifice Rock and Plymouth Rock. At each location, he presented significant history and facts about each site. Jean-Luc Pierite, (Tunica-Biloxi), president of the North American Indian Center of Boston, read aloud the "1675 Order of Removal by the Massachusetts Bay Colony," which has had lasting impacts not only for tribal people of this region, but for the settlement of America. He also discussed his work on repatriation and protection of sacred sites. The following day, city archeologist of Boston, Joseph Bagley through ancient rhyolite, Braintree slate, and Massachusetts hornfels quarry sites within the Blue Hills, which he described as "not only one of the most significant archaeological and

group a tour of the traditional wetu house he built. He also led our group to Sacrifice Rock and Plymouth Rock. At each location, he presented significant history and facts about each site. Jean-Luc Pierite, (Tunica-Biloxi), president of the North American Indian Center of Boston, read aloud the "1675 Order of Removal by the Massachusetts Bay Colony," which has had lasting impacts not only for tribal

historical features of New England, but... essentially unchanged from the moment they were made thousands upon thousands of years ago.”<sup>159</sup>

### **Workshop Description**

*Monuments in Perspective*, is a way of understanding this region better through site visits. By embodying a place-based methodology that is practiced by Indigenous peoples, and can also be described through *genius loci*, participants will visit sites of significance to Native peoples of this region: the Nipmuck, Ponkapoag, Wampanoag and Massachusett. Engaging local tribal leaders and experts who can lead students on site, we will pursue an understanding of the land that is inclusive of the Indigenous peoples who live here and whose experiences are often erased. Critical discussion of historical legacies, public space, ethics of memory and the growing movement of Colonial and Confederate monument removal, will inform the work of students of art, architecture and urban studies.

Students will explore questions of site-specificity in public art and historic monuments. What hidden histories lie under a housing development, public park, parking lot, or high rise? What pieces of human and natural history have been glorified or erased from a given location over time? With a focus on marginalized histories, we will consider how monuments marking Native American sites of cultural significance inform the public about historical events and shape public opinion about Native Americans today. Exploring case studies of monuments, historic markers, museums, and public art, we will consider the ethics of memory and how our shared past can be honored in order to influence a positive future. Students in this course will investigate how communities are developing shared visions for honoring sites of significance through public art, and learning methods that artists, designers, architects and others employ to create site-specific work that incorporates the historical, ecological and perhaps intangible elements of a place.

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159. Joseph Bagley “The Blue Hills: Archeological Wonder of Epic Proportions,” *Friends of the Blue Hills*. October 9, 2014. <https://friendsofthebluehills.org/keynote/>

## Appendix B: Metacom's Seat, Seat of King Philip

A major source of inspiration for this thesis came from a pilgrimage I took, with my mother, to the seat of Metacom in 2013. Metacom's Seat is a site in Rhode Island where Wampanoag sachem Metacomet, also known as King Philip, conducted affairs of state. It's on a little-known and visited rural property owned by Brown University's



Figure 33. Metacom's seat, courtesy of Haffenreffer Museum



SEAT OF KING PHILIP

Figure 32. Seat of King Philip  
courtesy of Haffenreffer Museum

Haffenreffer Museum. The site is a natural seat carved into a huge boulder that faces east, where the rising sun can be seen. King Philip was one of the most important figures in history and yet this site is relatively hidden, hardly acknowledged for its significance. King Philip governed from this location, and as I stood in the place where Metacom would have stood, I imagined I, too, could see the rising sun. Visiting the site had a profound effect on me, and ever since that time I have been asking whether public acknowledgement of the places, and historical events of Native Americans pre-settlement could encourage respect for the cultures of this continent, which have existed and thrived for thousands of years.



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