



# MANIFESTATIONS

NEW NATIVE ART CRITICISM

# BACKGROUND

## **AMERICAN INDIAN CURATORIAL PRACTICE IS AN EMERGING FINE ARTS FIELD THAT RECOGNIZES THE UNIQUE CULTURAL REGISTERS INFORMING THE PRODUCTION, RECEPTION, CIRCULATION AND INTERPRETATION OF INDIGENOUS ARTS.**

The codification and legitimization of indigenous arts from an indigenous perspective is essential to self-representation in settings such as galleries, museums and classrooms.

This 2011 educational guide is produced by the Museum of Contemporary Native Arts (MoCNA) of Santa Fe, New Mexico as a component of The Vision Project. The MoCNA is a center of the Institute of American Indian Arts, a tribal college that has served as the epicenter for Native fine arts practice for almost half a century. The Vision Project is supported by a grant from the Ford Foundation's Advancing the Dialogue on Native American Arts and Culture in Society. Nancy Marie Mithlo, Ph.D. Assistant Professor of Art History and American Indian Studies, University of Wisconsin – Madison is the guide's author.

The goal of this educational curriculum guide and the accompanying book *Manifestations: New Native Art Criticism* is to provide leadership in the field of contemporary Native arts practice internationally, but especially in the United States and Canada, home to our constituents - the Institute of American Indian Arts students, staff and faculty.

The terms indigenous, Native, First Nations, Aboriginal and American Indian are used interchangeably throughout this guide to reference this target community of the Native peoples of the U.S. (American Indian, Alaskan Native and Native Hawaiian) and Canada (First Nations, Métis and Inuit).

We hope that the suggested curriculum will aid educators in grades 9 to 12 and college-level instructors in integrating American Indian visual arts into their existing lesson plans or even building new course offerings that focus solely on the practice of contemporary Native arts.

A team of arts professionals – Patsy Phillips, MoCNA Director; Ryan Rice, MoCNA Chief Curator/Vision Project Director; Will Wilson, Vision Project Manager; Dr. Nancy Marie Mithlo, Senior Editor, *Manifestations* and Dr. Robert Martin, President of the Institute of American Indian Arts – are responsible for conceptualizing the spirit and direction of The Vision Project. The artists and writers for The Vision Project however, deserve the utmost recognition, for their talents and insights have provided a template of action for future generations. We dedicate this project to them – our artists, our intellectuals, and our hope.

# INTRODUCTION

## WHAT DOES ART DO?

There are many ways in which one might go about learning American Indian history, aesthetics and culture. Books, articles, web-based databases, tribal websites, radio, television and film are typical sources for educators developing materials for use in the classroom. This Vision Project curriculum guide will provide these types of references, but we also suggest that another starting place for research – the visual arts of Native North America.

What can art do that the other secondary reference materials might not? Art is an open-ended, evocative resource that provides multiple avenues for entry, exploration and findings. While the written word may productively serve rote or formal forms of learning, referencing visual resources allows for an alternative type of knowledge-acquisition – one that is non-linear, self-directed and non-coercive. In other words, the visual arts are an ideal platform for acquisition of indigenous knowledge in an indigenous format.

## THE INDIGENOUS PRESENCE IS CONTINUAL AND CONTEMPORARY

Of the many learning outcomes one may strive for in American Indian studies, this guide will focus on a select few. The knowledge that the indigenous peoples of the Americas continue to live, survive and thrive in contemporary society is the key premise this guide will seek to convey to learners. This contemporary presence is further enhanced by the assertion of a Native intelligence – a way of knowing that may encompass or even exceed the terms and patterns that we have come to associate with American Indian identities, cultures and histories to date.

These assertions – contemporaneous identity and intellectual complexity - apply to American Indians and First Nations peoples whose physical appearances, forms of art and various locations present in a vast constellation of patterns. Established notions of “Indianness” - Indian art and people as limited in time and place - restrict our collective competency as members of a diverse society. This guide will introduce learners to the background, skills and attitudes that will enhance their ability to speak knowledgeably about contemporary indigenous realities.

# LEARNING OUTCOMES

## CONTINUITY AND CHANGE

Art enables commentary or Native “agency” – the ability to critically comment and therefore own a perspective on historic change, appropriation and place in society.

## POLITICS AND IDENTITY

Works of art are key to creating and maintaining cultural identity; they can also be a means of depriving people of identity and reinforcing stereotypes.

## ADAPTATION AND SURVIVAL

People from different cultures view the same event differently. Art records and retells cultural histories.

## RECLAMATION AND REVIVAL

American Indian and Canadian First Nations histories are often missing, invisible or silent. Art demonstrates the resiliency and power of Native legacies, even those of trauma, pain and suffering.

The Vision Project guide has adopted the following content standard from The National Standards for Arts Education developed by the Consortium of National Arts Education Associations.

## CONTENT STANDARD #4: UNDERSTANDING THE VISUAL ARTS IN RELATION TO HISTORY AND CULTURES

## ACHIEVEMENT STANDARD, PROFICIENT:

Students differentiate among a variety of historical and cultural contexts in terms of characteristics and purposes of works of art.

Students describe the function and explore the meaning of specific art objects within varied cultures, times, and places.

Students analyze relationships of works of art to one another in terms of history, aesthetics, and culture, justifying conclusions made in the analysis and using such conclusions to inform their own art making.

## OBSERVABLE AND MEASURABLE OUTCOMES MAY INCLUDE THE FOLLOWING:

Learners will critique a select work of Native art in a short verbal response using a minimum of three new vocabulary terms.

Learners will demonstrate an understanding of American Indian iconic symbols by comparing and contrasting two works by different artists.

Learners will identify two political issues facing American Indian communities today drawing from a sampling of contemporary American Indian art.

# CONTINUITY AND CHANGE

Pop Sensibilities  
Artistic Appropriation from  
Western Conventions

## MODERN ART LARGELY DEFINES WHAT WE CONSIDER FINE ART IN THE PERIOD OF THE LATE 19TH TO THE MID 20TH CENTURY.

The definitive impulse of this time period was to pursue one's own individual vision and to extend the creative mannerisms and techniques of the past, particularly in painting and sculpture. The non-indigenous European artists who pioneered the abstract art movement modernism often drew inspiration from the knowledge and insights of so-called "primitive" peoples. African masks, Northwest Coast carvings and Navajo sandpaintings are frequently cited as inspiration for artists such as Pablo Picasso and Constantin Brancusi.

What does this historical pattern imply for indigenous artists from an indigenous perspective? Today this adoption of tribal art is known as appropriation. This term reflects the perspective that Native people resent the use of their cultural icons in contexts divorced from their original manufacture and use. The wholesale adoption of tribally-specific motifs are especially problematic when their original use is religious in nature.

Cochiti artist Mateo Romero comments on this one-way taking of Native culture with his own adoption of a Western icon – "The Kiss." The theme of this classic embrace may be considered universal, or standard convention given the several examples of works titled "The Kiss" produced by well-known modern artists. Romero's adaption of this theme can be interpreted as a form of re-appropriation or inversion. Romero's version of "The Kiss" has several unique design registers such as the pueblo Keresan manta, headdress and feathers.

## SOME SCHOLARS OF INDIGENOUS ARTS BELIEVE THAT THE INCORPORATION OF EUROPEAN STYLES AND IMAGES BY NATIVE ARTISTS IS AN EFFORT TOWARDS ESTABLISHING COMMUNICATION BETWEEN DISPARATE GROUPS:

"Although artwork prior to colonization was almost entirely confined to distinctive markings that transmitted Aboriginal insider knowledge between groups, following the arrival of Europeans, it seems that Aboriginal people ... sought new ways of transmitting their stories and ideas. This included finding ways of making sense of colonisation. Along with exchanges of material culture with outsiders, there is evidence of Aboriginal groups ... attempting to communicate their experiences to the newcomers by incorporating other styles and images in their artwork. These new approaches meant that art was no longer restricted to Aboriginal insider knowledge but was perhaps one way of allowing outsiders to understand Aboriginal culture" (Edmonds and Clarke 2009).



## MATEO ROMERO

*The Kiss*

2004

Linocut

22" X 30"

Photo courtesy of Towa Artists



# MATEO ROMERO

BY JESSICA R. METCALFE

## CONTEMPORARY COCHITI PAINTER MATEO ROMERO EXPLAINS THAT HE HAS ALWAYS FELT DRIVEN TO MAKE ART

— at an early age by his innovative and artistic family (including his potter grandmother Teresita Chavez Romero, painter father Santiago Romero, and artist brother Diego Romero), later by his need for self-expression, and finally as a lifelong vocation and commitment to inspiring thought. Romero studied at the San Francisco Academy of Art and in 1989 earned a B.F.A. at Dartmouth College. He continued his fine arts training at the Institute of American Indian Arts before completing his M.F.A. in printmaking at the University of New Mexico in 1995.

Throughout his body of work, Romero provides snapshots of Native life — from the ancient to the contemporary, the mundane to the ceremonial, and the beautiful to the unpleasant. He observes and documents moments in time, creating social landscapes where figurative elements blend with abstract symbols. Some of his paintings derive from his sense of responsibility to create artwork that raises questions about contemporary social issues affecting Indian communities. In these pieces he confronts historical violence or religious intolerance. His work, such as his Indian gaming paintings, can be controversial, and like the pop art references in Andy Warhol's paintings, Romero points out self-imposed addictions and double standards.

Other paintings offer counterpoints to these darker moments. These pieces investigate his tribe's sense of community and connection to the past, or portray Puebloan ceremony and dance. Romero's latest paintings incorporate photographic imagery that he recontextualizes, creating an historical dialogue and visual narrative of his people. Some subject matter includes Pueblo dancers and traditional figures, such as the Deer Dancer who seeks to reaffirm balance and regenerate life and is a vital aspect of the Puebloan world by representing continuance, resistance, and renewal. Since much of Pueblo ceremonial life is restricted to outsiders, Romero turned to abstraction as a means to express himself and depict his culture without violating tribal protocol. He practices a form of "withholding" by sharing information that is permissible while protecting culturally-prohibited knowledge.

Romero sees the act of "mark making" to be as old as time itself and associated with prehistoric drawings on ancestral canyon walls such as those at Bandelier National Monument. His images are large scale, powerful, and imposing. They feature swirling, thick gestural marks that relay movement and emotion. Some of his work is influenced by 1960s Abstract-Expressionist painting, such as Franz Kline's calculated spontaneity and attention to brush strokes, William de Kooning's paint drips and figure ground ambiguity, and Richard Diebenkorn's figurative work. Romero's work also references Robert Rauschenberg's assemblages and complex painting surfaces. Romero's paint-handling is clearly labored and textural — with layers that are sometimes splattered, scraped, and applied with palette knife and brush. He combines archaic elements of Pueblo culture with formal qualities of easel painting, and the result is rhythmic, hypnotic, and trancelike, reflecting the metaphysical space of the Pueblo and the dances.

Thinking in terms of both the past and future, Romero examines Puebloan cultural traditions and how they have been influenced by external values, the marketplace economy, and the expectations of stereotyped Indian art. He explores how Native cultures and symbols, either consciously or intuitively, cross generations and time. Viewing art as a powerful form of communication, he seeks to make his work not only meaningful to himself and his community, but also to reach a broader audience, provoke thought, and affect change.

# RESOURCES

Edmonds, Fran and Maree Clarke. 2009. "Sort of Like Reading a Book: A Community Report on the Survival of Southeast Australian Aboriginal Art Since 1834." Cooperative Research Centre for Aboriginal Health. [www.apo.org.au/research/sort-reading-map](http://www.apo.org.au/research/sort-reading-map)

## The Kiss:

Constantin Brancusi, *The Kiss*, 1916.  
(limestone, 58.4 x 33.7 x 25.4 cm)  
Philadelphia Museum of Art. <http://www.philamuseum.org/collections/permanent/51306.html>

Gustav Klimt, *The Kiss*, 1907/08.  
(oil and gold leaf on canvas, 180 x 180 cm) Österreichische Galerie Belvedere, Vienna, Austria.  
<http://www.belvedere.at/jart/prj3/belvedere/main.jart?rel=en&reserve-mode=active&content-id=1169655781728&gid=1173178733677&imgid=1173178733681>

Pablo Picasso, *The Kiss*, 1969. (oil on canvas)  
Musée Picasso, Paris, France. Keep website intact  
Picasso website: <http://www.pablo-ruiz-picasso.net/>

Auguste Rodin, *The Kiss*. (marble, 1.84 m, 1886) Musée Auguste Rodin.  
<http://www.royalacademy.org.uk/exhibitions/rodin/>

Modernism and Appropriation of Indigenous Culture:  
<http://filer.case.edu/~ijd3/authorship/modern.html>

Native Appropriations - Blog on American Indian Appropriation:  
<http://nativeappropriations.blogspot.com/>

Mateo Romero:  
<http://www.towa-artists.com/mateo-g-romero/art-work.php>

Schneider, Arnd. 2003. "On 'Appropriation'. A Critical Reappraisal of the Concept and Its Application in Global Art Practices." *Social Anthropology* 11, no 2: 215-229.



# POLITICS AND IDENTITY

The Right to Self-Representation:  
Mascots

## THE USE OF AMERICAN INDIAN PEOPLE AS SPORTS MASCOTS HAS A LONG AND CONTENTIOUS HISTORY IN NATIVE COMMUNITIES.

While some sports fans see the use of Indian mascots as a means of “honoring” Indian peoples, from an indigenous perspective it is clear that the loud, drunken and competitive nature of team sports in the United States and Canada does not lend itself to this interpretation. As C. Richard King states, “The use of Indian imagery in athletics reiterates false renderings of indigenous peoples. It reduces them to cartoon characters and well-worn cultural clichés of the Chief, the brave, the warrior, the clown. It traps Native Americans with the past, in perpetual, unwinnable conflict with the superior white man. It confines them most often to the horse cultures of the plains, adorned in flowing headdresses and beautiful buckskin. It misappropriates and reinvents indigenous spirituality, dance, and material culture for the pleasure of largely white audiences” (King 2008).

The fight for the elimination of sports mascots as a means of ensuring the human rights of Native peoples has had mixed outcomes in the courts. In 2005 the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) ruled in favor of curtailing the Indian mascot by adopting a policy that “prohibit(s) NCAA colleges and universities from displaying hostile and abusive racial/ethnic/national origin mascots, nicknames or imagery at any of the 88 NCAA championships.”

Spokane artist Charlene Teters’s political advocacy against the use of Indian mascots is apparent in her installation art. As a mother to two teenagers who were exposed to an Indian mascot at the University of Illinois, (where she was a graduate art student) Teters chose to take a stand for her children. The simple action of holding a sign that declared “Indians are human beings, not mascots” soon propelled her into a movement for Native dignity and collective action.

## TETERS’S ART SERVES AS A PLATFORM FOR THE PUBLIC TO BECOME AWARE OF THE HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS THAT ARE TAKEN FOR GRANTED IN AMERICAN POPULAR CULTURE.

Commodification of American Indian signs, sayings and representations such as the Indian headdress or the phrase “Indian country” are exposed for the racist attitudes of their makers. From an indigenous perspective, these insensitive portrayals create powerful and persistent stereotypes that damage American Indian self-identity. Teters’s skill in isolating, naming and aesthetically conveying these conflicted and problematic attitudes has resulted in a body of work that continues to poignantly inform the field of indigenous self-representation.



## CHARLENE TETERS

*Route 66 Revisited: "It Was Only an Indian"*

1999

Multi-media installation

Photo courtesy of the artist

# CHARLENE TETERS

BY MICHELLE MCGEOUGH

**“INSTALLATIONS ARE MORE A POWERFUL WAY TO MAKE STATEMENTS ABOUT HOW MY PEOPLE ARE USED AS OBJECTS. I DON’T MAKE ART THAT PEOPLE CAN BUY AND TAKE HOME WITH THEM. INSTEAD MY ART IS A FORUM THROUGH WHICH I CAN MAKE PEOPLE ADDRESS THE ISSUES I SEE AS IMPORTANT”**

For Charlene Teters, art is not about creating objects of beauty, but rather art is a way to communicate ideas, stimulate conversation and create change. Born on the Spokane Nation reservation in Washington State, Teters has distinguished herself as an activist, artist, educator and writer in a career that spans over two decades. Her formal training includes a M.F.A. degree from the University of Illinois, a B.F.A. from the College of Santa Fe and also an A.F.A. from the Institute of American Indian Arts, where she is currently a painting instructor. In 2000, Teters was the recipient of honorary doctorate of fine arts from Mitchell College in New London, Connecticut.

As a graduate student at University of Illinois in 1989, Teters brought national attention to the inappropriate use of Native American symbols and in particular the use of Native Americans as mascots by both professional and college sports teams. Teters describes herself as a reluctant activist, yet her multimedia installations, writings and lectures challenge dominant narratives by exposing how popular culture and negative stereotypes continue to reinforce the racist notions of manifest destiny, still active in the American psyche. Teters’s thought-provoking installations, *Route 66 Revised: “It Was Only an Indian,”* (1999) *Baseball and Playing Indian*, (2002) and *Home of the Brave* bombard the viewer with imagery and objects from popular culture. She utilizes these American icons to demonstrate how popular culture normalizes racism and dehumanizes Native American people. Teters’s campaign to eliminate racist symbols that degrade and dehumanize American Indians and Alaska Natives led to the founding of the National Coalition on Racism in Sports and Media. She also established the Office of Racial Justice for the National Congress of Native Americans. Her struggle to eliminate racist stereotypes is featured in two documentaries: *In Whose Honor?* (1997) and *False Traditions, False Idols* (1994).

Her monumental earthwork structures explore America’s collective history revealing an alternative perspective that is often silenced and made invisible. Teters’s *American Holocaust* (1992) and *Mound: To the Heroes*, make visible the desecration of Native American burial sites, a practice that according to Teters continues because of contemporary American society’s failure to see Native American people as more than the constructed caricatures produced by pop culture.

In 1999, Teters exhibited in the Third International Biennial, SITE Santa Fe. The venue and her installations *Obelisk* and *Mound: To the Heroes*, brought her to the attention of international curators and marked a turning point in her career. The following year she was invited to participate in Belgium’s *Over the Edge: The Corners of Ghent* and *EV=A 2000, Friends and Neighbors* an exhibition hosted Limerick City Gallery in Ireland. In 2003, Teters’s work was included in *Only Skin Deep*, an exhibition co-curated by Coco Fusco and Brian Wallis that explored the evolution of race and the American identity through the photographic lens.

# RESOURCES

Charlene Teters's website:  
<http://www.charleneteters.com/Welcome.html>

Blue Corn Comics:  
<http://www.bluecorncomics.com/>

King, C. Richard. "Teaching Intolerance: Anti-Indian Imagery, Racial Politics, and (Anti)Racist Pedagogy." 2008. *The Review of Education, Pedagogy, and Cultural Studies* 30, no 5:420–436.

National Coalition on Racism in Sports and Media:  
<http://www.aimovement.org/ncrsm/>  
<http://www.aics.org/NCRSM/index.htm>

NCAA Executive Committee Issues Guidelines for Use of Native American Mascots at Championship Events, August 5, 2005.  
<http://fs.ncaa.org/Docs/NCAANewsArchive/2005/Association-wide/moic%2bforwards%2brecommendations%2bfrom%2bmascots%2breview%2b-%2b7-4-05%2bncaa%2bnews.html>

Social Psychology Network:  
<http://www.understandingprejudice.org/nativeiq/>



# ADAPTION AND SURVIVAL

Storytelling  
Reflecting on History  
Boarding School

## FROM THE MOMENT OF CONTACT, THE PROCESS OF UNITED STATES AND CANADIAN GOVERNMENT ASSIMILATION EFFORTS HAS BEEN PARTICULARLY HARMFUL FOR NATIVE CHILDREN.

The favored institutional methodology for erasure of indigenous knowledge was the government program known as residential boarding schools. This systematic process separated tribal children from their family and community in an effort to extinguish their language and culture and to alienate them from their traditional land base. Religious sectors often accepted government contracts to administer these schools, frequently with tragic results including disease, death, sexual exploitation and abuse. In some cases, however, Native children drew positive results from the boarding school experiences including the formation of pan-tribal friendships and subsequent viable political organizations. According to one scholar, “the boarding school experiences, both positive and negative, became fundamental components of twentieth-century Indian people’s identities, as individuals and as communities” (Davis 2001).

Seminole artist C. Maxx Stevens comments on the boarding school legacy drawing a comparison with the tribal setting of an outdoor arbor where traditional knowledge might be shared by observation, joking, gossip or storytelling. These experiential forms of knowledge transfer are equally valid ways of knowing as the rigid classroom setting, offering a potent example of Native intelligence in action. Her use of audio registers, the voices of family remembrances, resonates with a personal and evocative power.

## THE GENERATIONAL IMPACT OF THE BOARDING SCHOOL EXPERIENCE KNOWN AS INTERGENERATIONAL TRAUMA IS IMMENSE.

Dr. Henrietta Mann addresses one of the dangerous outcomes of the colonial educational system that concerns artist Stevens – that of the role of Native women in society. She calls for a form of “gender forgiveness” to balance the power of patriarchy introduced by non-Native educational systems, “Our grandparents taught us that we live in these societies where there is an equal emphasis upon the men and women. We know the impact of the kind of education brought to this land by our brothers and sisters that come from the white direction and their orientation toward patriarchy, which certainly came into a clash with those traditional societies, ours here, who put a great deal of emphasis upon matriarchy and the respected and esteemed role of the women. We know that the impact of education has resulted today in an unequal view of gender so that I think that last group on intergenerational trauma is really on the mark. We have to talk about gender forgiveness. It’s very important if we are going to be whole again to treat each other as equal partners” (Mann 2005).



## C. MAXX STEVENS

*If These Walls Could Talk*  
2000

Installation

Photo courtesy of the Smithsonian National Museum of the American Indian

# C. MAXX STEVENS

BY MICHELLE MCGEOUGH

## FOR C. MAXX STEVENS, STORYTELLING IS AN ESSENTIAL PART OF HER ARTIST PRACTICE.

Formally trained in sculpture and ceramics, she received her B.F.A. from Wichita State University and her M.F.A. from Indiana University in 1987. She is the recipient of numerous awards, which include an Eiteljorg Fellowship in 2005, the Andrea Frank Artist Foundation award (2000), and the Joan Mitchell Foundation, Painters and Sculptors Grant (1998). She has also exhibited nationally and internationally. Stevens was a part of the group exhibition *Reservation X* curated by Gerald McMaster. In 2003 her work was exhibited at the University of Saskatchewan's Gordon Snelgrove Gallery.

Although her practice includes mixed media drawing, and printmaking, Stevens is best known for her installation work, in which she creates conceptual narrations of her life as a woman, an artist and a Seminole/Muskogee person. Stevens describes her art as “a way to explore both my individual and collective identity, a way to share, beliefs, philosophy, a world, a past, family and culture.” At the core of Stevens’ work is an understanding that culture, tradition and identity are not static but reflect constantly changing circumstances, whether these changes are put in to motion by our own volition or shaped by social, economic or political conditions.

The role of political histories, and more specifically the role residential and boarding schools played in enacting government assimilation policies, is addressed by Stevens in *If These Walls Could Talk*, an installation for the exhibition *Reservation X: The Power of Place* (1999). *Reservation X* was a pivotal exhibition that included the work of eleven other Native American artists from Canada and the United States. The installation not only confronts the legacy of the residential school system, but also interrogates the authority of history. Stevens asks, “who and what defines us as native people, is it in a book or is it through stories. Is it full of visions abstractly told in a tribal gathering or in a typed manuscript? What is true and what is false, who questions what and when do we ask questions to challenge.”

Stevens is interested in issues of identity; her own identity, and how it relates to roles within her family and her community, and in particular, how it speaks to the role of women. Stevens states that “coming from a patriarchal society I have always felt a sense of responsibility, not just to my family but also to my community and culture. In many of my artworks I have drawn upon this belief of a cultural foundation based on lineage going from grandmothers to mothers to daughters. I have seen this strength in my mother and her sister and how this responsibility continues within my own family of seven sisters.” In the installation *The Gathers: Seven Sisters* (1999), Stevens constructs baskets of intricately woven willow branches. The baskets, which are suspended from the ceiling, cast shadows and shapes on the floor and walls, where light and dark interplay and overlap each other, visually recreating the complexities of human relationships. The loosely woven qualities of each basket belie a utilitarian purpose, but speak to their individuality. The complexity of the personalities, relationships, and interplay of roles between Stevens and her two eldest sisters is examined more intimately in *The Three Graces* (2004). As the three eldest women in a family of nine siblings, Stevens and her two eldest sisters are the matriarchs, the decision makers, the ones who hold the stories and the traditions. Stevens sees her work as a visual record of herself as a woman, an indigenous person and a contemporary artist.

The titles for her more recent installations *Sugar Heaven* (2007) and *What's for Dinner* (2007) are dark references to diabetes, a new epidemic that is decimating Native American communities, and to the economics and politics of food. Presently Stevens is the area coordinator of the University of Colorado Foundation Arts Program and a teacher and lecturer in the program.

# RESOURCES

Art Libraries Society of North America, Women Artists of the American West, 2008:  
[http://www.arlisna.org/news/conferences/2008/proceedings/ses\\_20-summary.pdf](http://www.arlisna.org/news/conferences/2008/proceedings/ses_20-summary.pdf)

Carlisle Indian Industrial School Research:  
<http://home.epix.net/~landis/index.html>

The Cumberland County Historical Society:  
<http://www.historicalsociety.com/ciiswelcome.html>

Davis, Julie. "American Indian Boarding School Experiences: Recent Studies from Native Perspectives." *OAH Magazine of History* 15 (Winter 2001). ISSN 0882-228X  
Copyright (c) 2001, Organization of American Historians  
<http://www.oah.org/pubs/magazine/deseg/davis.html>

*Reservation X* at the Smithsonian National Museum of American Indian:  
[http://www.nmai.si.edu/exhibitions/reservation\\_x/eXtras/media/stevpanoA.htm](http://www.nmai.si.edu/exhibitions/reservation_x/eXtras/media/stevpanoA.htm)

Mann, Henrietta. 2005. "The Grassroots Speaks...About Intergenerational Trauma." *Wellbriety, White Bison's Online Magazine* 6 no 7.  
<http://www.whitebison.org/magazine/2005/volume6/no7.htm>



# RECLAMATION AND REVIVAL

Gender Constraints  
Violence Against Native Women  
Control of Exhibitions  
Increasing Public Awareness

## ALASKAN NATIVE ARTS ARE OFTEN DISTINGUISHED FROM NATIVE ARTS OF THE MAINLAND UNITED STATES;

artists are frequently characterized by their village's remoteness or their perceived marginal existence in a challenging environment. These selective characteristics also position the arts of the north as uniquely pristine and authentic. Modernist fine artists and curators are inspired by the sparse lines, sculptural forms and evocative spiritual aspects of Alaskan indigenous arts. As scholar Emily Moore notes, "Alaska Natives were especially prized under the modernization paradigm, as they represented the most remote and 'untouched' of indigenous peoples in the United States" (Moore 2008). This selective viewing and the subsequent government regulation of an Alaskan Native arts and crafts industry has created a field of practice incorrectly defined by commodity, consumption and the male art of carving to the exclusion of other practices and concerns.

Artist Susie Silook has defied these constructions both by her medium of carving and by the choice of her contemporary and pertinent subject matter. Silook chose to use her own biography of abuse and recovery as her artistic inspiration and in this way has authored a new form of aesthetic expression and political advocacy. Her choice to visualize and verbalize the silence surrounding the sexual abuse of Native women is significant given the alarming conditions that work to minimize the awareness of violent hate crimes.

According to a 2003 study by Amnesty International more than one in three Native American or Alaska Native women will be raped at some point in their lives. Most do not seek retribution because they know they will be met with inaction or indifference, resulting in a denial of justice for survivors. The U.S. Department of Justice statistics show that Native American and Alaska Native women are more than two and a

half times more likely to be raped or sexually assaulted than women in the USA in general and that 86% of the reported crimes are committed by non-Native men. A complex jurisdictional maze and a chronic lack of resources for law enforcement and health services contribute to this epidemic loss of human rights for indigenous women.

The trauma following sexual abuse can be long lasting. Silook notes "What retraumatizes us most is hearing about continued unsolved assaults on Native women." Silook organized the 2001 exhibit *Ceremony of Healing*, with fellow artist Susie Bevins to publicize the high rates of violent crimes committed against Native women before a scheduled state hearing on Civil Rights in Alaska. One of her works exhibited titled *All the Rage* was described by a journalist who attended the opening as "...work that screams out so explosively. *All the Rage* is a fanged, howling female. Her beaded eyes glare wildly. One raised hand holds an ulu, symbol of Eskimo womanhood; the other flashes claws and a bloody cross. Paint balls blotch her body" (Dunham 2001).

Diane Benson, a Tlingit author and activist summarizes the intersections of art and advocacy in an indigenous context in the following passage:

## "FOR MANY OF US ARTISTS, ART IS NOT FOR ART'S SAKE.

I have learned instead that I must be a thoughtful and responsible writer always speaking to truth to create my art... My responsibility, as a writer, as a poet, as a human being, is to find the speech that will speak the truth and will uplift a nation. My nation. To write for any other reason is, for me, an empty choice" (Benson 2003).



## SUSIE SILOOK

*Sedna with Mask*  
1999

Walrus tusk, sea mammal whiskers, baleen, whale bone, metal, and pigment  
12 7/8 x 10 x 4 1/4 in.

Photo courtesy of Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco,  
Bequest of Thomas G. Fowler, 2007.21.389

# SUSIE SILOOK

BY HEATHER IGLOLIORTE

**WHILE THE FORM AND AESTHETIC APPEARANCE OF SUSIE SILOOK'S (1960 -) IVORY ARTWORKS REFERENCE THE CENTURIES-OLD CIRCUMPOLAR TRADITION OF CARVING IN WALRUS TUSK, HER SUBJECT MATTER IS DECIDEDLY MORE CONTEMPORARY.**

Her works, usually carved from a single piece of ivory and mounted on a base so they stand upright, are deeply embedded in the oldest Inuit carving traditions, yet her subject matter diverges from the typical historic and pre-contact imagery of hunting and camping scenes or land and sea animals that you might expect to see carved in walrus ivory. Instead, Silook uses her considerable talents to depict themes that confront contemporary Native Alaskans, including issues of identity, spirituality, conflict and adaptation, as embodied by the female form. Her sculptures of women are so graceful and lithe that they have been compared to Modigliani's nudes and Léon Bakst's depictions of Diaghilev's dancers in the Ballets Russes, (Berlo 2001) yet these are not portraits of delicate or timid women. Silook's heroines resist colonization, critique violence and oppression, and represent an unwavering faith in Native belief systems and Eskimo worldview.

Silook, who is of Siberian Yupik, Inupiaq, and Irish descent, is originally from the Siberian village of Gambell, on St. Lawrence Island, Alaska, on the Bering Sea. Her works reflect her determination to maintain the trace of the past in the future, particularly evident in her lyrical portrayals of the female deity Sedna. One such piece, *Seeking Her Forgiveness* (1993), depicts an intricately carved shaman untangling the hair of the Central Arctic sea goddess Sedna in order to placate her, and thus ensure the future harvests of sea mammals and the transmigration of animal souls. Sedna is an incredibly powerful deity in the worldview of many circumpolar Inuit cultures, and the Inupiaq oral history of this goddess resonates with the artist. *Yupik Angel* (1994), in contrast, made only of walrus ivory and sinew, is a graceful meditation on religious syncretism, conveying a spiritual message simultaneously about traditional and contemporary religious beliefs.

Mining not only Inupiaq belief systems but also her own personal and community histories, Silook has contributed a significant body of work to Native American art that critiques the legacies of colonization in the Arctic, and the ongoing violence against women. As one of the first female carvers to gain critical acclaim in a male-dominated field, Silook has used this platform to issue powerful statements such as *Mask of Post Colonial Trauma* (1994), made of ivory, wood and sinew, and *All the Rage* (2001), a mixed media sculpture created in reaction to the horrific violence against women. These critical assessments of the impacts of colonization and assimilative strategies are belied by the poetic forms of her skillfully carved ivory works, demanding that you pay close attention, that you get up close. The precarious balance between provocative subject matter and sinuous form is what make Silook's work such a compelling inclusion in the history of Native American art.

Silook's work has been shown and sold all over Alaska and the United States, and her sculptures can be found in the collections of the de Young Museum, the Eiteljorg Museum, the Anchorage Museum of History and Art, the Alaskan Native Heritage Centre, as well as in many other public and private collections. In 2000 she was awarded the Governor's Award for an Individual Artist, in 2001 she held a prestigious Eiteljorg Fellowship, and in 2007 she was United States Artists Rasmuson Fellow.

# RESOURCES

Amnesty International, Violence Against Native American and Alaska Native Women. 2007. *"Maze of Injustice – The Failure to Protect Indigenous Women from Sexual Violence in the USA."*  
<http://www.amnestyusa.org/violence-against-women/maze-of-injustice/page.do?id=1021163>

Berlo, Janet. 2001. "Susie Silook: 'Simultaneous Worlds' and the Yupik Imagination." In *After the Storm: The Eiteljorg Fellowship for Native American Fine Art*, edited by W. J. Rushing III. Indianapolis: Eiteljorg Museum.

Benson, Diane. 2003. "Standing Up Against the Giant." *The American Indian Quarterly* 27, no. 1&2: 67-79.  
[http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/american\\_indian\\_quarterly/v027/27.1benson.html](http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/american_indian_quarterly/v027/27.1benson.html)

De Young Museum, Yua, Spirit of the Arctic: Eskimo and Inuit Art from the Collection of Thomas G. Fowler, Opening August 28, 2009:  
<http://www.famsf.org/pressroom/pressreleases/yua-spirit-arctic-eskimo-and-inuit-art-collection-thomas-g-fowler>

Blog on exhibit at De Young Museum:  
<http://www.examiner.com/x-/x-13996-SF-Museum-Examiner~y2009m8d27-Spirit-of-the-North-New-gallery-opening-at-the-De-Young>

Dunham, Mike. 2001. "Art of Outrage: Native Rape Victim Finds Selfexpression and Healing in Mixed Media." Anchorage Daily News, May 24.  
<http://nativeamericancultures.com/articles/ADN-Artofoutrage.htm>

Moore, Emily. 2008. "The Silver Hand: Authenticating the Alaska Native Art, Craft and Body." *The Journal of Modern Craft* 1 no.2: 197-219.

# SAMPLE CURRICULUM RESOURCES

## THIS GUIDE HAS UTILIZED THE FOLLOWING EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES FOR INSPIRATION, ACHIEVEMENT STANDARDS AND PROFICIENCY.

The National Standards for Arts Education  
Developed by the Consortium of National Arts Education  
Associations  
[http://artsedge.kennedy-center.org/teach/standards/  
standards\\_912.cfm#04](http://artsedge.kennedy-center.org/teach/standards/standards_912.cfm#04)

Powerful Images: Portrayals of Native America: A Teacher's Guide  
[http://www.ed-resources.net/guide/  
musewest@museumwest.org](http://www.ed-resources.net/guide/musewest@museumwest.org)  
Written and produced by Jim Angus, Kim Milliken (Autry Museum  
of Western Heritage), Kathy Talley-Jones  
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consortium member reviewers.

Art Through Time, A Global View  
Annenberg Media, the Anneberg Foundation  
<http://www.learner.org/courses/globalart/about.html>

Reflections in Black: Smithsonian African American Photography  
[http://museumca.org/exhibit/exhi\\_rib.html](http://museumca.org/exhibit/exhi_rib.html)

Reflections in Black : A Teacher's Guide  
[http://www.fristcenter.org/site/files/cm/File/pdf/  
ReflectionsInBlackTeacherGuide.pdf](http://www.fristcenter.org/site/files/cm/File/pdf/ReflectionsInBlackTeacherGuide.pdf)

Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History: Lakota Winter  
Counts: A Teacher's Guide, developed, written and designed by  
Anh-Thu Cunnion.  
[http://wintercounts.si.edu/html\\_version/html/learning\\_teachers.  
html](http://wintercounts.si.edu/html_version/html/learning_teachers.html)

'Sort of like reading a map' by Fran Edmonds and Maree Clarke.  
Cooperative Research Centre for Aboriginal Health, Cooperative  
Research Centre for Aboriginal Health. Australian Policy Online.  
<http://www.apo.org.au/research/sort-reading-map>

Education Indigenous to Place: Western Science Meets Native  
Reality by Angayuqaq Oscar Kawagley and Ray Barnhardt: Alaska  
Native Knowledge Newtwork: The University of Alaska Fairbanks.  
[http://ankn.uaf.edu/curriculum/Articles/BarnhardtKawagley/EIP.  
html](http://ankn.uaf.edu/curriculum/Articles/BarnhardtKawagley/EIP.html)

# SAMPLE CURRICULUM QUESTIONS

How is gender portrayed in the artwork sampled in this curriculum? Is the role of women in Native cultures unique from American culture? In what ways?

What is the definition of a portrait? How is the medium of portraiture employed in the arts of Native North America that you have been introduced to? What is the artist's intent in depicting an individual sitter? How does the concept of identity inform your appraisal?

What iconic symbols are used in the examples of American Indian art provided? Are these symbols the same as for other cultures? Are their meanings specific to the artist's community or tribe? How are these symbols used in other objects from this community? Why are they used?

How is history used in contemporary American Indian arts? Are historic referents meant to illustrate or to critique?

How is race depicted in the artwork you have been exposed to? Does one "see" race or is race a concept that exists in our minds? Are the contemporary works you have viewed authentic to Native culture? What does authenticity mean? How are commercial interests implicated in the definition of authentic Native arts?

What do you think is a stereotype of indigenous arts? Are stereotypes the same as conventional representations? What are the differences?

Provide a definition of colonialism. Does colonialism exist today in the Native experience?

# VOCABULARY

## **ASSIMILATION**

The imposition of a dominant society's values and norms over another, usually less powerful society's values and norms. Assimilation may also be self-driven as in self-assimilation when unique cultural values are forgotten or rejected.

## **COLONIZATION**

The process by which a political body takes possession of another country or community, typically for the purpose of exploiting land and resources for economic ends.

## **COMMODIFICATION**

The commercialization of objects and services for economic development. Commodification is often seen as an outgrowth of capitalism.

## **INTERGENERATIONAL TRAUMA**

A spiritual and psychological imbalance that negatively impacts the children and grandchildren who experienced extreme forms of colonization such as massive loss of life in warfare, boarding school abuse and other forms of oppression.

## **MODERNISM**

A 20th century western art movement that emphasized abstraction rather than realism. Modernism may also refer to a societal movement towards progress and technology and away from land-based knowledge.

## **NATIVE INTELLIGENCE**

A knowledge system defined by shared values of reciprocity, respect and traditional teachings. A Native intelligence is also evident in new and emerging paradigms such as sovereignty, autonomy and collective rights.

## **THE ROLE OF NATIVE WOMEN IN SOCIETY**

The rights of women and environmental rights are connected. Women create and sustain life, ensuring the longevity of future generations. Indigenous lands similarly provide for the health and survival of first nations peoples. Attacks on the rights of indigenous cultures typically degrade women as leaders while similarly appropriating land resources.

## **SELF-REPRESENTATION**

To create art, one must become a subject, an observer of life, rather than an object that others depict as they choose. Self-representation in Native arts is essential to the accurate and sensitive depiction of Native life and values.

## **PAN-TRIBAL**

The experience of colonialism has resulted in similar treatment of American Indians, despite their unique tribal affiliations. Collective organizing for similar political goals is an outcome of this treatment. Similarly, the shared experience of forced relocation or compulsory education has also resulted in people of different tribal backgrounds choosing to have children who are of pan-tribal heritage.

# VOCABULARY

## UNIVERSAL

While some human experiences such as marriage, childrearing and death may be seen as universal, other applications of this term are more problematic. In the arts in particular, an assertion of universal aesthetics may privilege a select western standard while minimizing the importance of unique cultural registers.

## RE-APPROPRIATION

A strategy for critically questioning the logic of damaging stereotypes is the creative application of these conventional narratives in new forms. Appropriation in this instance is exercised for progressive social ends.

## RESIDENTIAL BOARDING SCHOOLS

For a hundred year period, roughly 1850 to 1950, the governments of Canada, the United States and Australia enacted policies of assimilation that forced indigenous children into institutional educational settings where their language and culture were systematically stripped from their consciousness in an attempt to erase their culture and language.

## INVERSION

The strategy of adopting a mirror-image opposite in an attempt to achieve a critical realization. A powerful critique of discovery might be achieved for example if an indigenous artist claims ownership of a public park on the grounds that she was the first of her race to encounter it. This inversion of discovery opens a critical space for realization for bias and exercise of power.

## STEREOTYPE

Perceived in largely negative terms, a stereotype is often used as a shorthand method of understanding someone or something that is different from your own point of reference. The use of “conventional representations” as a descriptive frees up the process of describing the new and unfamiliar.



# CREDITS

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