Rituals of Erasure and Transcendence: Exhibiting Indigenous Objects in Art Museums

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I know there is something larger than the memory of a dispossessed people.

We have seen it.

-Joy Harjo[1]

In December of 2020, shortly after the Heard Museum in Phoenix re-opened for visitors with pandemic protocols in place, I visited its exhibition *Larger Than Memory: Contemporary Art from Indigenous North America*. Founded in 1929, the Heard Museum's stated mission is to advance American Indian art.[2] *Larger Than Memory* furthered this goal by presenting recent works by Indigenous artists from the United States and Canada, focusing on art produced between 2000 and 2020. While the Heard Museum's larger permanent collection contains many examples of "traditional" Native arts and crafts—including weavings, beadwork, pottery, jewelry, and figural sculptures—more conventional examples of these historic forms of Native North American expressive culture were absent from the exhibit.[3] Works in *Larger than Memory* included many styles of painting, prints, fiber art, sculpture, photography, film, assemblages incorporating found objects, mixed media pieces, and videos of performance art. This was truly an of-the-moment exhibition.

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In the past, museums presented Native art as ethnographic objects, remnants of bygone cultures, antiquated crafts produced by nameless creators, or sources of inspiration for well-known Western artists. Despite repeated interventions from artists, curators, and art historians, many of these practices continue. As David Roche, director of the Heard Museum, writes in the foreword to the exhibition catalog, "this limited Euro-American perspective often results in the presentation and interpretation of contemporary Indigenous art within an ethnographic context, rather than within a large framework of international contemporary art practice."[4] The works featured in *Larger than Memory* challenged these stereotypes, spotlighting Indigenous artists' creative engagement with modern and post-modern art forms as mediums to channel history and culture.

Indigenous media scholars Jarrett Martineau and Eric Ritskes argue that "Indigenous art… occupies a unique space within settler colonialism: both as a site for articulating Indigenous resistance and resurgence, and also as a creative praxis that often reinscribes indigeneity within aesthetic and commodity forms that circulate in the capitalist art market. Against colonial erasure, Indigenous art marks the space of a returned and enduring presence."[5] Art in the *Larger than Memory* exhibit reflected a number of significant, related themes. The curators highlighted some of these for visitors in the exhibit text: artistic themes included "the human impact on the environment, race, gender, equality, the importance of Indigenous sovereignty, and the impact and ramifications of colonization." These issues, and more, were visible in the art. The artists' skill and the aesthetic quality of the pieces were apparent. Yet, beyond the compelling visual aspects of the works on display, the exhibit offered more: the pieces reflected on history, made political statements, celebrated cultures, and probed the complexities of identity. The exhibit created an explicit space for both acknowledging the heaviness of the history that many of the pieces reflect, as well as a space for celebrating vibrant Indigenous expressive culture.

In her 1995 book *Civilizing Rituals,* Carol Duncan proposed a novel way of thinking about art museums. She argued that art museums may be understood as ritual spaces, wherein individual and national identities are shaped through visitors' engagement with physical galleries and the collections they contain. Up to the point at which *Civilizing Rituals* was published, she argued, scholarship on art museums had primarily focused either on museum collections or on the architecture housing the collections. Duncan proposed a different type of study: one that considered the social spaces in and around museums and the types of performances they facilitated. In other words, rather than looking only at museum buildings, Duncan sought to explain the social structures that they upheld. And rather than focusing on collections, she sought to highlight the forms of collective activity—or the rituals—that they inspired. As she explained, her book was "concerned with the way art museums offer up values and beliefs—about social, sexual, and political identity—in the form of vivid and direct experience."[6] Examining art museums as ritual structures, she proposed, would enable scholars to better understand the social and political functions of museums.[7]

Civilizing Rituals focused primarily on Western art museums, exploring the rise of the museum, theoretical and practical developments in art history, and the power structures at play in museum collection and exhibition. She was primarily concerned with Euro-American conventions, turning a critical lens on the production of Euro-American social and political values in museum spaces. While it was not the focus of her book, Duncan did stress the importance of attending to Western museums' portrayals of Indigenous art. In her words, "the issue of what western museums do to other cultures, including the minority cultures within their own societies, has become especially urgent as postcolonial nations attempt define and redefine their cultural identities and as minority cultures in the West seek cultural recognition."[8] This is even more crucial today, thirty years

after *Civilizing Rituals* was first published. Since 1990, when the U.S. Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act was passed, museums have been working to repatriate objects to the nations from which they were taken via dubious means (at best). Numerous museums and cultural centers created by and for Native nations have opened over the past few decades, enabling communities to tell their own stories.[9] Conversations about critical issues such as authenticity and appropriation have become more mainstream.[10] And, while Native artists still face unique challenges, widespread appreciation for Indigenous art has arguably increased.[11]

This chapter adds to the conversation about art museums as ritual spaces by taking up and building upon Duncan's brief but incisive comments about Western portrayals of Indigenous art. She notes that, in mainstream European and American art museums, "displays of 'primitive,' 'Third World,' or non-western art often misrepresent or even invent foreign cultures for what are ultimately ideological purposes."[12] Due to her focus on Euro-American museums, Duncan did not write in great detail about Indigenous art or objects, or Western museums' representations of non-Western cultures. But I would argue that, in discussions of art history, we should not assume that discussions of Western and Indigenous art are self-evidently separate topics. Indigenous art is not tangential but *essential* to broader discussions about art and museum practices. Aesthetic ideals are not formed in a cultural vacuum. For centuries, Western ideas about the creation, interpretation, and very nature of art—about beauty, aesthetics, skill, and artistic expression—have developed as European and Euro-American nations have engaged in contact with other cultures from around the world. In many instances, this "engagement" has been in the form of imperial contact situations, in which powerful nations have colonized cultures in other parts of the world, justifying these actions through ideologies of cultural superiority. A consideration of Indigenous art helps us better understand the larger, intercultural social and political forces shaping museum practices.

In her analyses of power structures in *Civilizing Rituals*, Duncan focuses primarily on European and Euro-American class and gender dynamics. When discussing non-Western cultures, she writes, "Western representations of Western culture hold implications for the way non-Western cultures are seen."[13] However, I would further argue that *Western representations of non-Western cultures hold implications for the way that Western culture is seen*. In other words, Western cultural sensibilities have developed, not in isolation from non-Western cultures, but *in relation to* other cultures. Western aesthetics are connected to evaluations of non-Western material productions. Indigenous cultural production has served as a racialized foil against which colonial entities have developed ideas about the highest art forms.[14] This helps to explain why it is only relatively recently that Indigenous art has been included in the category "fine art".

In what follows, I examine two classes of rituals that museum spaces have facilitated in their practices of collecting and exhibiting Native objects: settler colonial rituals of *erasure*, which limit and constrain the category of Indigenous art, and decolonial rituals of what I am describing as *transcendence*. These decolonial rituals not only push back against rituals of erasure by asserting the presence of Native art, but challenge the confines of the category of art itself. Rituals of erasure historically occurred (and, in some instances, still do occur) in art museums when they exclude Indigenous art and stories from relevant collections and exhibits or use Native material culture in a way that furthers the ideological or actual dispossession of Native people from their arts, cultures, and the lands out of which the work was developed. Over the past few decades, more art museums have begun to include Indigenous art and exhibits address issues of Indigenous history, sovereignty, decolonization, and self-representation. These changes have broadened the canon of art history and facilitate rituals of transcendence, which occur when art museums are transformed into spaces for more than art—when they become spaces to encounter Indigenous history, politics, and culture. In the past, Native art was relegated to anthropology and history museums. Today, Indigenous work exhibited in art museums offers aesthetic value as well

as political, historical, and cultural significance, exceeding the original purpose of art museums and creating new possibilities for encountering art.

Rituals of Erasure

Gallery text welcoming viewers to the *Larger than Memory* exhibit signaled that its intent was to "[enter] into conversation with and [revise] the canon of art history"—a canon that, for many years, has excluded Indigenous art. This is one form of ritual erasure, a museum practice that ignores or downplays Indigenous presence, or that uses Native objects in a way that furthers colonial rather than Indigenous stories, perspectives, and goals. There are four forms of ritual erasure that I wish to highlight, to different degrees, in this chapter: rituals of extraction, differentiation, suspension, and supersession. First, the extractive methods used to collect Indigenous objects for anthropology and, later, art museums, has served as a form of ritual of erasure in removing cultural objects from their original creators. Next, a significant form of erasure is the presentation of Native expressive culture as "artifact" rather than "art," which can happen in two ways: the differentiation between art *versus* object or the treatment of art *as* (historical) artifact. The differentiation *between* art and artifact was tied to the denial that Indigenous people are capable of creating art. The presentation of Indigenous art *as* artifact occurs when Native art is presented in a strictly historical or pre-historical fashion, suspending Indigenous peoples and cultures in the past. Finally, even after the category of "art" expanded over the course of the twentieth century to include Indigenous works, the designation of "primitive art" has continued to distinguish Indigenous expressive culture from that of "Western" artists. This terminology carries with it a supersessionist assumption: that "primitive" art was the foundation out of which more sophisticated or "civilized" art would later develop. While its meaning may have changed, the term

maintains earlier assumptions about the essentially basic or unsophisticated characteristics of Indigenous art. In what follows, I will describe these rituals of erasure in more detail.

Rituals of Extraction: Early Museum Collection Practices

Many historical Indigenous cultural objects that are now in museum holdings were collected over the course of a century, from roughly the years of 1830 to 1930.[15] Historians of anthropology describe the extractive practices characterizing early American museum anthropology as "salvage ethnography" or "ethnographic salvage."[16] Euro-American scholars in the nineteenth century assumed that Indigenous cultures would soon be "dying out" due to their ongoing contact with outside cultures and gathered pieces of material culture as remnants of a "vanishing race."[17] According to the Tuscarora artist and museum professional Richard Hill, "the dominant view [was] that Indian cultures were in varying stages of decay, and museums had to rush to preserve evidence of pre-contact peoples."[18] Euro-American scholars collected objects from makers themselves, but also from archaeological excavations, ruins, and grave sites. Native Americans, they assumed, would be assimilated into mainstream U.S. culture; the U.S. government attempted to hasten the process through federal Indian assimilation policies that explicitly and violently targeted Native lifeways.[19] Anthropology and art museums can each trace their histories to these same rituals of extraction, motivated by the same ideologies of decline, and authorized by the same colonial powers. While some anthropologists during this era did advocate for Indigenous communities, governing intellectual and administrative bodies promoted assimilation policies and salvage practices until the 1930s.[20]

Scholars have likened early museum collecting practices to the "harvest," "vacuum sweep," "hunt," or even "rape" of cultural patrimony.[21] They have described these practices as "abductions" or acts of "plundering."[22] The collections of many major museums in the United

States grew out of these extractive methods, including the Smithsonian Institution, American Museum of Natural History, Brooklyn Museum, and Museum of the American Indian (which was incorporated into the Smithsonian Institution in 1990 as the National Museum of the American Indian). As scholars of Native American art Janet Berlo and Ruth B. Phillips stress, "great violence has been done to Native American communities in the names of salvage anthropology and, since the early twentieth century, primitivist art collecting."[23] Early on, anthropology and art history were fueled—and anthropology and art museums were filled—via the same imperial agendas.[24]

Salvage ethnography is at once an ideology and a practice. Museum studies scholar Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett has suggested that the process through which objects are removed from their original locations is governed by a "poetics of detachment." In her words, "detachment refers not only to the physical act of producing fragments, but also to the detached attitude that makes the fragmentation and its appreciation possible."[25] The drive and purpose of extractive collection is to remove objects from their original cultures for the intellectual and aesthetic benefit of others. Non-Natives analyzed objects and data taken from Native communities to benefit Western knowledge systems.[26] This contributed to the dispossession of Indigenous people from their own material culture, and, at the same time, from their own narratives and histories.

Rituals of Differentiation: Artifact vs. Art

Two precursors to modern museums emerged in the fifteenth century: the private art gallery and the cabinet of curiosity. The earliest displays of Native American objects in "museum" settings occurred in the latter category.[27] Private art galleries grew in popularity among rulers and elites in Europe and North America, who collected pieces of art for display in dedicated hallways or rooms. The purpose of these galleries was to elevate viewers through their experience with art,

but in the context of private galleries, they also functioned to display wealth, legitimate the current system of rule, and authorize existing social structures.[28] The cabinet of curiosity also served to display wealth, but housed different types of objects: seemingly strange specimens illustrating "exotic" life and landscapes from around the globe. Collectors sought to amass an array of objects to display in these cabinets, including "natural curiosities," or plant and animal specimens, and "artificial curiosities," or objects created by people from faraway lands. In these early examples of museum exhibition, Europeans and Euro-Americans categorized objects created by Indigenous peoples not as art, but exotic curiosities on par with animal and plant specimens.[29]

In *Civilizing Rituals*, Duncan describes these differences in the categories of *artifact* and *art*, a distinction that, she notes, "marks the divide between the disciplines of anthropology on the one hand and art history and criticism on the other."[30] Historically, some critics presented ethnographic knowledge and beauty as oppositional.[31] Art and artifacts were viewed, not just as different, but fundamentally incompatible. According to Berlo and Phillips, "they have been constructed as a binary pair of opposites comprising a closed system."[32] This was not just a difference in kind but a difference in worth, as pieces of art were judged to be more valuable and meaningful than artifacts. In Duncan's words, this hierarchy was "built on the assumption that only works of art were philosophically and spiritually rich enough to merit isolated aesthetic contemplation, while 'artifacts,' as products of presumably less evolved societies, lack such richness."[33] These distinctions also point to objects' different relationships to *culture*: art represented "high" culture while artifacts represented everyday culture.[34]

Art and anthropology museums thus held different purposes, creating distinct spaces for visitors to engage with objects in different ways. Art museums showcased beautiful, significant, and meaningful works that represented great skill or value. In the words of art historian Allan Wallach, "Art museums sacralize their contents: the art object, shown in an appropriately formal setting,

becomes high art, the repository of society's loftiest ideals."[35] On the other hand, as Duncan writes, artifacts were "normally distinguished from works of art both conceptually and as objects of museum display."[36] Anthropology museums served another purpose: to educate visitors about history, science, and culture.[37] The very distinction between anthropology and art museums reinforced the hierarchy of objects and what they are capable of signifying. In museums, the purpose of the artifact was to educate, while art was to behold.

Art vs. Craft

As the discipline of anthropology developed in the United States, Euro-American ethnographers began to appreciate the skill of Indigenous creators and the aesthetic qualities of the material culture they produced. A swell of mainstream U.S. interest in Native American material culture fueled a rise in the production of "trade goods," artistic goods that resembled cultural objects but that were produced specifically to sell to non-Native collectors.[38] While mainstream interest in Native art increased, a conceptual divide persisted that distinguished Indigenous from non-Native art. In the early twentieth century, terms such as *craft*, *handiwork*, *trade*, and *industry* were often used in reference to Indigenous expressive culture, distinguishing it from "high art." One concept of aesthetics, which can be traced back to Kant, holds that in its purest form, art serves no functional purpose aside from offering aesthetic value.[39] This idea has been used to discredit the significance of what we now classify as decorative arts. This category includes the artful production of pottery, baskets, clothing, and tools—which has characterized much Indigenous expressive culture over time. As Stuart Levine has argued, "It is especially difficult to distinguish art from craft when dealing with traditional societies."[40] Expanding the category of "art" has involved looking beyond the classic Western mediums of painting and sculpture to objects with aesthetic value and a functional purpose.

Rituals of Suspension: Indigenous Art as Historical Artifact

Over the course of the twentieth century, ideas about Indigenous objects changed as a movement within the art world challenged earlier stereotypes about Native North American objects.[41] Museum professionals, dealers, and collectors wanted to "get Indian art out of what were felt to be the musty halls of anthropological museums and into the art museums."[42] There were a few key moments in this movement. In 1910, the Brooklyn Museum was the first to exhibit Indigenous objects as "serious art." The museum dedicated large parts of its exhibition space to Native North American arts.[43] In 1941, The Museum of Modern Art in New York City unveiled a significant and groundbreaking exhibition, Indian Art of the United States. According to art historian Evan Maurer, this is the first time that Native objects were presented as art on par with non-Indigenous art.[44] In the early 1970s, this trend continued at the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York City, which again featured Indigenous objects as "high art." Norman Feder, recruited from Denver to serve as the guest curator of the Whitney exhibit, insisted that "the finest Indian art can certainly be judged and appreciated by the highest Western standards."[45]

Amidst this growing interest in Native American art, museums that deal with wider culture and society, including anthropology and history museums, have continued to exhibit Indigenous art in ways that reinforce earlier assumptions. Critics have pointed out that anthropology and history museums still often present Indigenous cultures as suspended in time or frozen in the past.[46] In his analysis of local history museums that cover Native American history, anthropologist James Nason has argued that there are two main issues with what I am terming "rituals of suspension." First, "Indians are virtually always presented as elements from the community's past… that no longer have any importance or bearing on current life in the

community."[47] In other words, Native peoples are not presented as currently existing in the modern era. Second, many objects are unattributed. This creates a disconnect between the items on display and the people who created each object. "This is not just distance of time or possible relational aspects, but a distancing of a reality."[48] Historian Jean O'Brian has similarly described the process through which local history archives in the Northeast essentially wrote Native people out of existence in their constructions of New England history.[49]

Art museums have facilitated similar representations. These rituals of suspension present Indigenous art as a historical artifact, suggesting that Indigenous cultures are only remnants of the past and *not* ongoing in the present. American Studies scholar Stuart Levine makes this suggestion regarding an exhibit from 1976-77, *Sacred Circles: Two Thousand Years of North American Indian Art*. He described the exhibit's goal as teaching visitors about "the beauty of American Indian art."[50] He questioned whether we should expect art exhibits to comment on society, culture, and history—which was not the purpose of the show.[51] However, while the goal of the show was to spotlight Indigenous art forms, the show inadvertently reinforced the stereotype that Native people were vanishing. It conveyed a few themes that reinforced earlier notions from the salvage era: that particular forms of art are "pure," that Indigenous cultural forms will vanish, that Native peoples will assimilate fully into mainstream culture, that there is only a single form of Indigenous art, that the past was static.[52] In a similar vein, the lack of artistic attribution in history or anthropology museums sometimes carries over to art museums, which are arguably more concerned with the identity of creators. In these ways, exhibitions of Indigenous art have subtly or overtly presented objects as fragments of history, suggesting that Native individuals and communities are suspended in time, distant, and inaccessible.

Rituals of Supersession: The Category of "Primitive Art"

Museum studies scholars have traced a process through which Indigenous material culture, initially regarded as ethnographic objects, came to be regarded as art. During this process, these works were elevated: "for in the hierarchy of material manifestations, the Fine Arts reign supreme."[53] But this categorial inclusion was conditional. Initially, art by Indigenous artists was classified as "primitive art." Art historians have offered robust critiques of the category of "primitive art." In examining the category, art historian Sally Price identifies these features that are often attributed to this category of art that distinguish it from "Western" art. She argues that so-called "primitive art" is often defined by outsiders. Assumptions embedded in this category include the ideas that "primitive art" art is created by people whose knowledge is limited, who have not developed written forms of writing, who are undeveloped technologically, whose societies have no classes, who produce work that's childish or similar to work that would be produced by someone who is mentally ill, and who are uncivilized. Art falling in this category is assumed to includes elements of Pagan rituals, and artists' names may not be attached to their pieces that are presented in exhibits.[54]

As Sally Price notes, it is challenging to discuss and exhibit Indigenous art when the of "primitive art" is operative. One serious (yet seemingly innocuous) issue is the tendency to universalize so-called "primitive art." As interest in Indigenous art increased in the early twentieth century, many non-Native artists looked to it for inspiration. They interpreted "primitive art" as a primal, primary, or original form—a precursor to modern art. Some theorists of art held that "primitive art emerges directly and spontaneously from psychological drives."[55] Rather than recognizing it as art produced within particular cultural communities, "primitive art" was interpreted as timeless and universal; in this way, all artists could claim to continue its legacy. This process can be understood as a ritual of supersession: a form of cultural appropriation in which outsiders seek to extract, build upon, and ultimately replace an earlier cultural form.

Rituals of Transcendence: Indigenous Art in a Public Art Museum

In the wake of historic (and ongoing) rituals of erasure that contribute to the marginalization of Indigenous art, some museums have identified powerful ways to reframe it. One example comes from Chicago's Field Museum, an expansive, historic natural history museum featuring anthropological exhibits. In the exhibit *Drawing on Tradition*, which ran from 2016 to 2019, two-dimensional art by contemporary visual artist Chris Pappan (Osage, Kaw, Cheyenne) was layered on top of glass cases containing dated displays of traditional art forms. At the Denver Art Museum, the recently renovated Indigenous Arts of North America galleries contain examples of historic and contemporary art. Older pieces sit beside work of contemporary artists who have introduced innovation into traditional art forms. Exhibit text emphasizes the connection between art and historical memory. Unlike these examples, the Heard Museum's *Larger than Memory* exhibit was unique in that it featured art that reflected traditions—*without* utilizing traditional Indigenous art forms.

The Heard Museum's exhibit *Larger than Memory* was their largest exhibit of Native North American art to date. The title for the exhibit was taken from a poem by Joy Harjo (Choctaw), the 23rd Poet Laureate of the United States. Harjo's poem contains the line: "I know there is something larger than the memory of a dispossessed people. We have seen it."

Three related features of this exhibit exemplified the decolonial potentialities of art museums: artistic forms, themes, and the scale of the art on display. Taken together, these features offered a powerful intervention into art history, a history that has often excluded or marginalized Indigenous expressive culture. First, while "traditional" forms of art were absent, many of the contemporary works in the exhibit gestured to longstanding Indigenous art forms and the histories they hold. Thus, the thoroughly modern pieces were not so much departures from traditional

Indigenous forms as they were expressive innovations that linked the past to the artistic present. For example, glass beadwork framed Cherokee and Choctaw artist Jeffrey Gibson's colorful, large-scale acrylic painting "BRIGHTER DAYS" (2019), which incorporated elements of Cherokee quilt work while also featuring lyrics from an underground 1980s-era house song. Mike Patten's piece "Native Beating" is a baseball bat covered in red and white seed beads. Native beading—inspiration for the title's play on words—became popular in North America after contact with European traders who sold seed beads. The bat, which from a distance appears to be splattered in blood, highlights this popular traditional art form while commenting on Canada's violence toward First Nations.

A number of pieces explicitly addressed the history and legacy of colonialism, which has continued to adversely impact Native communities. In the life-sized installation *The One Who Checks, The One Who Balances* (2017-2018), Cannupa Hanska Luger (Lakota/Mandan/Arikara/Hidatsa) depicted two figures dancing in a way that was reminiscent of longstanding communal dance forms. However, they wore what the exhibit text described as "futuristic Indigenous regalia" made of colorful crocheted blankets and beadwork by Kathy Elkwoman Whitman, the artist's mother. They danced around a huge, snake-like monster constructed out of tires and garbage, a sculpture entitled "This is Not a Snake" (2017-18). Hanksa Luger explains that she has used the regalia from her piece *The One Who Checks, The One Who Balances* in ceremonial protests of "capitalistic colonialism," settler colonial resource extraction, capitalism, and environmental degradation—all of which have endangered Native lands and communities. "Last Supper," an installation by C. Maxx Stevens (Seminole/Mvskoki) filled a room: A huge white table covered in wax replicas of sugary, processed junk food: waffles, cakes, and fry bread, and cheeseburgers, all painted white and covered in glitter, as if each item was constructed of pure sugar. The piece represented the ways that many Indigenous communities' diets shifted due to colonialism. As Ho-Chunk museum studies scholar Amy Lonetree argues,

while highlighting colonial history can be painful, and it must be done sensitively, is important to tell these stories.[56] The purpose of recounting difficult histories is not to romanticize or reinscribe them, but to identify past and present-day realities that continue to shape Indigenous and non-Native experiences and interactions. And, even more importantly, acknowledgement of these realities helps to underscore the persistence of Native cultures despite settler colonial attempts to erase them. Some of the art celebrated and affirmed native sovereignty and the ongoing presence of Indigenous life. For example, Cara Romero's photographs "Kiyanni" (2018) and "No Wall" captures young Chemehuevi boys in traditional dress in the urban space that now exist in their ancestral homelands. Romero celebrates the way these youngsters will carry forward their tribe's cultural heritage into the future. In her words, "they make our Tribe very proud by staying on the path to keeping our culture strong."[57]

This assertion of continuing Indigenous presence is encapsulated in the concept of *survivance* from the work of Anishinaabe literary theorist Gerald Vizenor.[58] As art historian Christopher T. Green describes in the exhibit catalog, Vizenor offers an additional concept, *transmotion*, that theorizes another powerful aspect of Native art. Green writes, "if survivance is an ongoing presence, transmotion is a related assertion of sovereignty by means of the freedom of motion through both physical space and the imagination."[59] It is, in Vizenor's words, a "visionary resistance to cultural dominance."[60] Artists exhibited in *Larger than Memory* engaged with but also moved beyond the shadow of colonialism. Their work broke out of traditional stereotypes, highlighting the ability of Indigenous creative expression to transcend expectations and boundaries.

This theme of transcending boundaries relates to the final noteworthy feature of the artworks in *Larger Than Memory:* their scale and scope. Walking into the large foyer leading into the exhibit space, visitors were greeted by enormous pieces of jewelry hanging from the ceiling. When

approaching the pieces, visitors could see that they were crafted from fiber. Created by Diné artist Eric-Paul Riege, the pieces, entitled *jaatłoh4Ye'iitsoh no. 1-2* (2020), set the stage for the larger exhibit. Upon entering the exhibit hall, exhibit text encouraged viewers to "make room for new ideas and ways of thinking about contemporary art from Indigenous North America." The massive scale of the pieces *demanded* visitors expand any limited understandings they might have of what Indigenous art looks like. Presented sparsely in a "white cube" exhibition space with soaring ceilings and clean lines, the pieces of art themselves were the center of attention. The exhibit conveyed an important message: Indigenous artists transcend colonial histories and the limitations that scholars and curators have placed them in.

Building on the innovations seen in previous exhibits of Indigenous art, the exhibit challenged viewers to expand their expectations for what Indigenous art can be. But the significance of the exhibit was even greater than this. *Larger than Memory* also pushed the boundaries of what constitutes "art"—and the meaning, purpose, and possibilities of art museums. *Larger than Memory* was a space to experience and appreciate skillful, beautiful, visually compelling, and thought-provoking works. It was also a space for history, politics, culture, and even healing—which are ge-nerally associated with history and anthropology museums, cultural centers, and memorial sites.[61] Indeed, reviews of the exhibit reinforced the sense of historical meaning present in many of the pieces. As art writer Lynn Trimble noted in her review of the exhibition, it "[demonstrated] that thoughtful consideration of contemporary works by Indigenous artists can lead to a greater understanding of this particular moment in American life…." [62] Through its exhibition of contemporary Indigenous art that self-reflectively engaged important themes, *Larger than Memory* demonstrated that art museums can be a space for more than art.

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[1] These lines are from the poem "Grace," originally published in the collection *Mad Love and War* (Wesleyan, 1990). Reprinted in the exhibit catalog *Larger than Memory: Contemporary Art from Indigenous North America* (Heard Museum, 2020), 17.

[2] The full mission statement reads: "The mission of the Heard Museum is to be the world's preeminent museum for the presentation, interpretation and advancement of American Indian art, emphasizing its intersection with broader artistic and cultural themes." The museum was initially founded and run by non-Natives; since 2013, an American Indian Advisory Committee has offered guidance to the staff and Board of Trustees. Heard Museum, "About Us" https://heard.org/about/. Last accessed January 27, 2023.

[3] The concept of "traditional" Native art is contested—there are many art forms that vary by Native nation, and multiple traditions within a given community, and these traditions have changed over time. In addition, the terms used to describe Native material culture—e.g., "art" versus "craft"—can carry gendered and racialized connotations. See Jenny Tone-Pah-Hote, *Crafting an*

Indigenous Nation, 3-5. Tone-Pah-Hote advocates for the use of the term "expressive culture," which encompasses a broad range of material creations.

[4] David Roche, "Forward," 12.

[5] Martineau and Ritskes, "Fugitive Indigeneirty," 1-2.

[6] Duncan, *Civilizing Rituals*, 1.

[7] Duncan, *Civilizing Rituals*, 6.

[8] Duncan, *Civilizing Rituals*, 3.

[9] See King, *Legible Sovereignties* and Cobb, "The National Museum of the American Indian as Cultural Sovereignty."

[10] For example, see Deloria, *Playing Indian*, and Garroutte, *Real Indians.*

[11] See Rushing III, ed., *Native American Art in the Twentieth Century*.

[12] Duncan, *Civilizing Rituals*, 3.

[13] Duncan, *Civilizing Rituals*, 3.

[14] See Harney and Phillips, eds., *Mapping Modernisms* on the co-construction of ideas about "modern" and "primitive" art.

[15] Berlo and Phillips, "Our Museum World Turned Upside Down," 7.

[16] See Gruber, "Ethnographic Salvage": "'Before it is too late! Before it is too late!' The refrain runs through so much of the developing discipline [of anthropology] that the needs of recovery of preservation, of salvage in the face of the impending extinction of peoples and their cultures dictated much that came to be anthropology both as science and as a view of man" (1296).

[17] Ibid.

[18] Hill, "The Indian in the Cabinet of Curiosity," 103.

[19] See Graber, *The Gods of Indian Country.*

[20] See Holm, *The Great Confusion in Indian Affairs*.

[21] Berlo and Phillips, "Our Museum World Turned Upside Down," 8.

[22] Price, *Primitive Art in Civilized Places*, 69-75.

[23] Berlo & Phillips, "Our Museum World Turned Upside Down," 7.

[24] Berlo & Phillips, "Our Museum World Turned Upside Down," 6.

[25] Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, "Objects of Ethnography," 387.

[26] Hill, "The Indian in the Cabinet of Curiosity," 103.

[27] Maurer, "Presenting the American Indian," 19.

[28] Duncan, *Civilizing Rituals*, 22.

[29] Hill, "The Indian in the Cabinet of Curiosity," 103.

[30] Duncan, *Civilizing Rituals*, 5.

[31] Price, *Primitive Art in Civilized Places*, 87.

[32] Berlo and Phillips, "Our Museum World Turned Upside Down," 6.

[33] Duncan, *Civilizing Rituals*, 5.

[34] See Masuzawa, "Culture."

[35] Wallach, *Exhibiting Contradictions*, 3.

[36] Duncan, *Civilizing Rituals*, 5.

[37] Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, "Objects of Ethnography," 395.

[38] See Hutchinson, *Indian Craze* (the term she uses to describe the interest).

[39] Haskins, "Kant and the Autonomy of Art," 43.

[40] Levine, "Sacred Circles," 115.

[41] Penney, "The Poetics of Museum Representations," 50.

[42] Levine, "Sacred Circles," 120.

[43] Maurer, "Presenting the American Indian," 23.

[44] Ibid.

[45] Phillips, "200 Years of Indian Art on Display at Whitney."

[46] See LaVaque-Manty, "There are Indians in the Museum of Natural History."

[47] Nason, "'Our' Indians," 38.

[48] Nason, "'Our' Indians," 38.

[49] See O'Brien, *Firsting and Lasting.*

[50] Levine, "Sacred Circles," 108.

[51] Levine, "Sacred Circles," 110.

[52] Levine, "Sacred Circles," 114-17.

[53] Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, "Objects of Ethnography," 416.

[54] Price, *Primitive Art in Civilized Places*, 2-3.

[55] Price, *Primitive Art in Civilized Places*, 34.

[56] Lonetree, *Decolonizing Museums*, 6.

[57] Cara Romero, "Puha (The Path)," *Cara Romero Photography*, https://www.cararomerophotography.com/editions/puha-the-path. Accessed February 15, 2023.

[58] Vizenor outlined this theory in his 1999 book *Manifest Manners*.

[59] Green, "Tacit, Visionary, and Natural Motion," 22.

[60] Cited in ibid.

[61] Art is obviously a cultural form—here I am referring to culture in a more anthropological sense, culture as a complete whole, rather than "high culture" that includes a society's finest artistic achievements. See Masuzawa, "Culture," 72-82.

[62] Trimble, "Indigenous Artists Elucidate the Trump Era."