From a Native Worldview: The Concept of the Traditional in Contemporary Native American Art Practices

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ABSTRACT
This article explores tradition and ceremony in contemporary Native American art. Indigenous scholars and artists use traditional knowledge to navigate contemporary contexts. Shared perspectives challenge binaries, problematic due to Indigenous peoples' relationship to colonization. The study used Indigenous research incorporating critical theory (Grande, 2015), decolonizing and Indigenous Research Methodologies (Tuhiwai Smith, 2021), and Indigenous research rooted in relationality (Wilson, 2008). We examined traditional meanings for Native Americans in contemporary art through reflection and dialogue. Research components included a historical overview, an examination of literature, interviews, and oral histories. *Transforming Our Practices: Indigenous Art, Pedagogies, and Philosophies* (Ballengee Morris & Staikidis, 2017) was consulted, in which Indigenous artists described artmaking as regenerating collective memory. Suggestions were made to reconsider traditions in Native American art to promote new outcomes in visual arts research and pedagogy informed by Indigenous epistemologies.

KEYWORDS: Tradition; Indigenous Research Methodology; Indigenous Ways of Knowing; Relationality; Contemporary Native American Arts

This study used an Indigenous[1] research paradigm incorporating components of critical theory (Grande, 2015) decolonizing and Indigenous Research Methodologies (Tuhiwai Smith, 2021), and Indigenous research grounded in relationality (Wilson, 2008). In her book, *Red Pedagogy: Native American Social and Political Thought* (2015), Sande Grande (Quechua) articulates the importance of critical theory as an act of "refusal," which critically "reimagine[s] and rearticulates assimilative logics in all of their (low and high intensity) forms" (p. 7). She urges that Indigenous knowledge becomes a "space of *epistemic disobedience* that is 'delinked' from Western, liberal, capitalist

1 In this article, we use many identity terms such as American Indian, Native American, Native, Indigenous, First Nations, and tribal names when appropriate. Different geographic areas use different terms, different tribes or Nations use different terms, and it is our stand to be as inclusive as possible.

understandings," and in turn an "alternative site" (p. 7). Likewise, in the Introduction to the 3rd edition of *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* (2021), Linda Tuhiwai Smith (Maori) observes that the challenge for researchers of decolonizing methodologies is still that of centering Indigenous concepts of knowledge and epistemic approaches, while simultaneously decentering colonial concepts of knowledge: "Decolonizing methodologies are about forcing us to confront the Western academic canon in its entirety…and the stories it tells to reinforce its hegemony" (p. xii). She adds that decolonizing methodologies necessitate that we decolonize "our minds, our discourses, our practices, and our institutions" (p. xiii). Shawn Wilson (Plains Cree) (2008) advises that Indigenous research must be guided by the three R's – Respect, Reciprocity, and Responsibility, and grounded in a practical fashion, not in the world of ideas. In *Research is Ceremony: Indigenous Research Methods*, Wilson explains that Indigenous ontology and epistemology are rooted in relationality which means relationships "do not merely shape reality, they are reality" (p. 7). This means that of primary importance in Indigenous decolonizing methodology is accountability to relationships. Furthermore, the shared aspects of relational accountability are actualized through the choice of research topic, data collection methods, forms that the analysis takes, and the written or spoken presentation. For Wilson, idea development of Indigenous research is felt through the formation of relationships. We made a conscious effort throughout this research study to connect to Grande's (2015) concepts of criticality, Tuhiwai Smith's (2021) focus on centering Indigenous perspectives, and Wilson's (2008) overall idea of relational accountability. For this evolving study, we used a critical decolonizing and Indigenous methodology based on respect, reciprocity, and responsibility. As the cornerstone of this work, we actively searched through the writings of the authors we worked with, the words of the artists and scholars we interviewed, and conducted our own dialogues with contemporary Indigenous scholars and artists built upon our relationships with them, and with each other. Speaking of decolonizing methodology, Tuhiwai Smith (2020) observes, "The right, the space, the voice to 'tell our own stories from our own perspectives' has been an important aspect of decolonizing knowledge" (p. xi). It is our hope that through our dialogues with Indigenous scholars and artists, and through our readings and conversations, the reader will also share in the relational research story as we have attempted to bring the life of each dialogue into these pages.

Through a dialogic process, which includes reflection, our study explores concepts and differences among the definitions and meanings of the traditional in contemporary art for Native Americans. We have applied key research components that include both a historical overview and an examination of literature, interviews, oral histories, and recommendations based on reflections. Tuhiwai Smith (2021) presents the core ideas of Indigenous research as breaking up the story, analyzing and discussing underlying texts, and giving voice to aspects of our lives that are known innately as foundational concepts and processes in Indigenous Research. This study attempts this process and hopefully serves as an example.

The Story Begins

We conceived of our book *Transforming Our Practices: Indigenous Art, Pedagogies, and Philosophies* (Ballengee Morris & Staikidis, 2017) with a series of conversations that we recorded as we dialogued about the need for a book in art education based upon Indigenous perspectives on Indigenous art, pedagogies, and philosophies. We asked what we could learn from Indigenous perspectives, and how we might help art educators approach Native cultures differently. We presented Native artists as agents of social change with important stories to tell, research as an emancipatory practice rooted in connection, and teaching as holistic and egalitarian.

After publishing our edited book, *Transforming Our Practices: Indigenous Art, Pedagogies, and Philosophies* (Ballengee Morris & Staikidis, 2017), book authors presented their chapters at multiple venues and conferences. At a National Art Education Conference, after presenting major concepts of our last chapter in which we discussed respectful ways to work and teach with contemporary Native Artists and communities, an audience member stood up and asked a question: "Why do you only focus on the contemporary, instead of the traditional?" This question caused us discomfort as it implied that the traditional and the contemporary in a Native worldview were separate entities, and both of us knew that this was not the case. That a non-Native woman had asked this question gave us pause as we realized we would need to think about how to answer, not from a Western empirical compartmentalizing view, but from a Native worldview.

In *As We Have Always Done: Indigenous Freedom Through Radical Resistance,* Leanne Simpson (2017) clarifies that to come from a Native worldview means to emerge from a distinct set of intellectual practices from those historically privileged in the academy. She states, "It adheres to a different set of theories on how knowledge is constructed, generated, and communicated. It uses a different set of methodologies to generate those ideas" (p. 29). For this study, much the same as in our book, we ask Indigenous scholars and artists to tell their own stories in their own voices from their perspectives, which is an important framework for decolonizing knowledge.

As with our book, this current research began with dialogue. We started talking about the word *tradition* and how that term was defined differently for American Indians and non-Native people. Christine identifies as a Cherokee descendent through her father but

is not a citizen of tribal nations, while Kryssi labels herself as non-Native. As in our first book, we chose to employ a dialogic approach, which included Christine adhering to Cherokee values. She observes, "There are many Cherokee values, such as *gadugi*, a Cherokee word which means coming together as one and helping one another, and *detsadaligenvdisgesdi*, all must take responsibility for each other's wellbeing" (Ballengee Morris, 2018). The overarching values are respect and responsibility. The principles of respect and responsibility, like Shawn Wilson's (2008) description of relationality, are integrated throughout this study. We take responsibility for sharing Indigenous understandings by listening carefully to those Indigenous scholars and artists with and about whom we have written and spoken. Christine observes, "The responsibility of doing research in such a way that you do not shame your relationships is overarching in the ethical stance of an Indigenous researcher" (Ballengee Morris, 2018). Also taking these values into consideration, our book was from a predominantly Native worldview as more than half of the authors were Indigenous, along with those of Brayboy, Wilson, Kovach, and Atalay, whose academic works echo those values as key concepts.

Here, in discussing the concept of *tradition*, we came to think that for non-Natives the term often included time and materials when referring to visual items. The non-Native perspective, filtered through our audience member's question, reflected a limited understanding of time, which for her could be separated into "long ago" versus "now," 'traditional,' or 'contemporary,' without the understanding that an Indigenous perspective of temporality is unique and embodies the integration of past, present, and future. The non-Native audience member's question revealed the concept she labeled as "tradition" was to be perceived as "either-or," rather than as part of a continuum belonging to the whole. We therefore decided to examine the multi-layered concept of tradition from Indigenous perspectives through the writings of scholars and pedagogues, and our dialogues with Indigenous researchers, scholars, art curators, and artists.

Our Trajectory

In the introduction of *Indigenous and Decolonizing Studies in Education* (Tuhiwai Smith, Tuck, & Yang, 2019), Maori ethnographer Linda Tuhiwai Smith reflects on her work since 1999 stating,

> My critique of colonialism was not just about looking at the colonizer but also looking at what colonial hegemony was doing within our own Indigenous minds, spirits, and behaviors. I saw the need for a decolonizing agenda that dealt with the whole of the dialectic of colonizer-colonized and recognized the role of education as a means to transform colonialism at deep levels of knowledge, pedagogy, the shaping of minds and discourses. (p. 6)

In the same spirit as Tuhiwai Smith et al., we initially published our book *Transforming Our Practices: Indigenous Art, Pedagogies, and Philosophies* (Ballengee Morris & Staikidis, 2017 in art education as a vehicle to examine and act on the ways that Indigenous epistemologies might both inform and transform the hegemonic settler colonial beliefs that our field centers. We too hoped the book with its twenty-nine authors who looked through the lens of Indigenous Research Methodologies, Indigenous pedagogies, and Indigenous arts practices would help to transform the Eurocentric gaze. But, when this recent question about tradition by an audience member arose, we realized we had more work to do. We decided to read our book again to see if any of the authors addressed the term tradition and what was stated.

We found that in each section of *Transforming Our Practices: Indigenous Art, Pedagogies, and Philosophies* (Ballengee Morris & Staikidis, 2017) many of the Indigenous authors referred to traditional knowledges and protocols. The authors in the book found that exploring new Indigenous theories of artmaking/teaching/learning invites open engagement with and regeneration of collective memory of traditional knowledges and histories. Judith Thompson (Tahltan Nation) found that traditional ways give a sense of coherence producing knowledge of who we are and who we might become. Charlene Teeters (Spokane) and Wilma Mankiller (Cherokee) are cited as stating how the personal, historical, and contemporary are woven together. In her articles about Hawaiian research and pedagogical projects, Sachi Edwards described traditional ways through learning what it means to see, feel, and understand the world through Indigenous eyes to preserve and protect Indigenous cultures. Mark Graham and Malia Andrus (Kānaka Maoli) continued this idea by intertwining relationships with land, which encourage maintaining traditional practices that nourish spiritual, physical, and educational well-being; authors state that relationships to the land are paramount and that land holds stories of the ancestors, of creation, of being. Courtney Elkin Mohler (Santa Barbara Chumash) explored cultural transformation and endurance through storytelling, artistic practice, and collective creative genesis finding that a Native worldview is holistic, complete, dynamic, and reflective of an interconnectedness of Native traditional and contemporary life – traditions are metaphorical touchstones for Native views of the world that are spatial rather than temporal. Christine Ballengee Morris (Cherokee Descendant) gives the example of earthworks built millennia ago whose shared knowledge reflect the relevance to our world today. Without collective traditional ways, the earthworks would not exist. Their knowledge unfolds in the everyday and the story of the everyday is passed down generation to generation, connecting who we are and who our ancestors are. Paul Chaat Smith (Choctaw) states that Native art is holistic, inseparable

from daily life, or ceremonial life interwoven into life, which keeps art relevant and meaningful in the real world. Shanna Ketchum-Heap of Birds (Diné) states that Native artists retain a deep respect for their heritage and artistic/cultural traditions having departed from the clichés and stereotypes popularly found in traditionalist and revivalist Indian art today. Charlene Teters observed,

> The oppressor uses your history to deflate you, and he can do that in the way he tells the story. Our story has been told by the conqueror for so many years. But when you use your history, you can use it in a way that inspires you…. My art, lecturing and teaching [have] centered around achieving a national shift in the perception of Native people. All too often we are still seen as objects or as a people trapped in the past tense. We are twenty-first century people and must be seen as such in order to deal with the serious issues that face us today. (Ballengee Morris & Staikidis, 2017, pp. 60-61)

Therefore, our preliminary examination of Indigenous scholars, researchers, pedagogues, and artists enabled us to see clearly that Indigenous authors speak about Indigenous research, pedagogy, and arts practices as inseparable from traditional ways. Below we further explore Indigenous philosophies and their relationship with the traditional.

Indigenous Epistemologies

Porsanger (Saami) (2004) iterated that an Indigenous paradigm recognizes knowledge as grounded in Indigenous ways of being, knowing, and doing in everyday life. Cree scholar Shawn Wilson (2008, 2013) used an Indigenous paradigm or theory of knowledge to investigate the experience of being an Indigenous academic within a university system. One of his recommendations is Indigenous scholars need to remember relationality, storytelling, and ceremony. Ceremony includes considering cultural components in academic life such as honoring storytelling. Kovach (Cree/Saulteaux) (2021) placed storytelling as central to the transmission of Indigenous knowledge and teachings. Hart (2010) found that Indigenous epistemology is a fluid way of knowing as it is derived from teachings transmitted from generation to generation through storytelling because each story is alive with the nuances of the storyteller. Cook-Lynn (Crow Creek Sioux) (2008) argued that storytelling and incorporating tribal culture, knowledge, and historical perspectives assist in both defining what Indigeneity is and clarifying the purpose of Indigenous origins in modern thought. Not only the stories coming through to American Indian people from the past, but also the Indian stories being told today, she argued, are bearers of traditional knowledge, history, and myth. Alohalani Brown (Kānaka Maoli) (2019) observed,

> It bears saying that everything we consider a tradition was once an innovation. Traditions come into being when the community finds a practice or a process useful or important enough to replicate, teach, and transmit across generations …. Significantly, innovations are rooted in tradition…. (p. viii)

Here, Alohalani Brown confirms what scholars Wilson (2008), Kovach (2021), and Cook-Lynn (2008) observe, that tradition is rooted in generational transmission, which is important over time as a means to teach what is not only essential, but what is inseparable from the innovation of today.

The Traditional in Indigenous Research Methodologies

Rooted in Indigenous epistemologies, Wilson-Hokowhitu (Kānaka Maoli) and Aluli Meyer (Kānaka Maoli) (2019) noted that Indigenous Research Methodologies hold the capacity to be both "specific and universal, localized and global" (p. 3). Authors stated that the nature of Indigenous thinking embodies wholeness which is a point of continuity. In describing the book, *The Past Before Us: Mo'okū'auhau as Methodology*, Wilson-Hokowhitu (2019) noted that the title actually refers to the importance of "the time in front" (p. 1) in Hawaiian thinking. He observed that Indigenous Research Methodologies demonstrate that "… sailing into the future guided by the past articulates mo'okū'auhau [genealogical lineage]" by using genealogical knowledge from the past to guide research methodologies. Wilson-Hokowhitu noted,

> Sailing into the future, guided by the past, represents the way in which we negotiate our traditional and contemporary realities …. The practice of wayfinding and voyaging are both ancient and transforming, sailing into the future while remaining deeply connected to ancestral vision and guidance. (p. 126)

Therefore, in a Native worldview, Indigenous research embodies Native ways of knowing rooted in Indigenous holistic epistemologies. Tuhiwai Smith et al. (2019) argued that when centered in Indigenous philosophy, decolonizing studies resist narratives that support assumptions about the linearity of history and support images of time and place that go beyond coloniality and conquest.

In her book *Indigenous Methodologies: Characteristics, Conversations, and Contexts* (2009, 2021), Margaret Kovach had conversations with six Indigenous scholars, all of whom stated that Indigenous Research Methodologies must integrate Indigenous cultural knowledges as the core of their research frameworks including knowledge from the sacred and ceremonial. Kovach noted that all the conversations she held with Indigenous researchers were of significant scholastic value because they held within them the richness of oral culture. She realized

there was a knowledge source she could not access through written publication given the orality of Indigenous traditions. Like Wilson (2008), Kovach also honors the place of relationality and story in Indigenous knowing and researching. Ethics, positions of reciprocity, community relevance, respect, honoring, and collectivist traditions are acknowledged as integral and necessary aspects of Indigenous research. Like Tuhiwai Smith et al. (2019), Kovach (2009) reinforced a very important point: "Indigenous approaches to seeking knowledge are not of a Western worldview, a matter that colonialism (and its supporters) has long worked to confuse" (p. 21). Kovach (2021) noted that Indigenous methodologies flow from tribal epistemologies which require the embodiment of culturally influenced paradigms incorporating a relational worldview:

> The proposition of integrating spiritual knowings and processes, like ceremonies, dreams, or synchronicities, which act as portals for gaining knowledge, makes mainstream academia uncomfortable, especially when brought into the discussion of research. This is because of the outward knowing versus inward knowing dichotomy. (pp. 67-68)

Kovach (2009) continued that tribal epistemologies are esteemed because they emerge from ancestral relationships connected with place. In speaking of her own Plains Cree knowledges, Kovach noted that rather than a linear process, her research "followed more of an in and out, back and forth, and up and down pathway. I see Nêhi´yaw knowledges as a nest that holds within it properties full of possibility for approaching research" (p. 45). She reinforced that Plains Cree culture is non-fragmented, holistic, in which segregating values from ceremony, place, language is not possible and therefore inseparable from tradition. Adding to our overview of the literature, which confirms the continuity inherent in a relational worldview, below we focus on the power of dialogue to center concepts of the traditional as they are interwoven with the contemporary.

Dialogues and Discoveries

In the Foreword of Wilma Mankiller's book *Every Day is a Good Day: Reflections by Contemporary Indigenous Women* (2011), the renowned Indigenous scholar Vine Deloria Jr. stated,

> The discussions focus on the continuing role each person sees herself playing, and it would not be amiss to say that without the translation of complex problems into solvable activities we could not go forward. Thus the women provide a different function today than they did in the old days, and we can see that everyone's favorite word, "traditional," emerges time and time again in new clothes, is accepted by friends and relatives as the proper course of action, different from other times yet applicable today. (p. xiii)

In this same spirit of dialogue and discussion, our next section focuses on our conversations with Indigenous scholars, researchers, and artists, in the hopes that the stories of those we spoke with will come through our writing to better illustrate the complex meanings ascribed to the concept of tradition from a Native worldview.

Bryan Brayboy

In preparing for this study, we found we wanted to review an interview that took place between Christine and Professor Bryan Brayboy (Lumbee) who visited The Ohio State University in October 2016. Brayboy is the President's Professor of Indigenous Education and Justice in the School of Social Transformation at Arizona State University. At ASU, he is senior advisor to the president, director of the Center for Indian Education, associate director of the School of Social Transformation, and co-editor of the *Journal of American Indian Education*. He is the author of more than 90 scholarly documents, including multiple policy briefs for the U.S. Department of Education, National Science Foundation, and the National Academy of Sciences.
Tribal Critical Race Theory (TribalCrit) was developed by Bryan Brayboy to understand the experiences of Indigenous peoples in education. TribalCrit is a powerful tool that exposes the complex positioning of Indigenous peoples in the context of colonialism on the one hand and Indigenous traditions, knowledges, and inherent rights to self-government on the other. Thus, Indigenous communities must be at the heart of any educational endeavor if we are serious about liberation for all peoples. TribalCrit addresses the racialized and political status of Indigenous peoples as members of sovereign nations and is guided by nine tenets:

1. Colonization is endemic to society.
2. U.S. policies toward Indigenous peoples are rooted in imperialism, White supremacy, and a desire for material gain.
3. Indigenous peoples occupy a liminal space that accounts for both the political and racialized natures of our identities.
4. Indigenous peoples have a desire to obtain and forge tribal sovereignty... and self-identification.
5. The concepts of culture, knowledge, and power take on new meaning when examined through an Indigenous lens.
6. Governmental policies and educational policies toward Indigenous peoples are intimately linked around the problematic goal of assimilation.
7. Tribal philosophies, beliefs, customs, traditions, and visions for the future are central to understanding the lived realities of Indigenous peoples, but they also illustrate the differences and

adaptability among individuals and groups.
8. Stories are not separate from theory; they make up theory and are, therefore, real and legitimate sources of data and ways of being.
9. Theory and practice are connected in deep and explicit ways such that scholars must work towards social change. (Brayboy, 2005, pp. 429-430)

The tenets state the needed means to create a path toward autonomy and sovereignty.

It was through this lens that Brayboy observed the earthworks in Newark, Ohio. After the tour, Dr. Brayboy stated that viewing the earthworks was a life altering moment. He expressed that the builders were architectural marvels, and the earthworks illustrate the builders as having ingenuity and craftsmanship based on how well built the earthworks seem to be. He explained that Indigenous Knowledge systems connect four philosophical concepts:

- How we come to know (epistemology; what counts as knowledge)
- How we engage with the world (ontology)
- What our values are (axiologies) spiritual aspect, perpetuation of people
- How we teach people to be Lumbee…. (pedagogy)

Observing events year after year becomes cumulative knowledge that is passed on to the next generation, which is so important. Our relationship to something sets up the responsibility that reassures that connections continue. This is the tradition.

Sonya Atalay

Another scholar we consulted in *Transforming Our Practices: Indigenous Art, Pedagogies, and Philosophies* (Ballengee Morris & Staikidis, 2017) was Dr. Sonya Atalay. She is Anishinabe-Ojibwe, an anthropologist, archaeologist, and a prominent advocate for community-based and participatory research (CBPR) and arts-based research. Dr. Atalay is one of the first of her people to undertake tertiary studies in archaeology.

Atalay's book, *Community-Based Archaeology* (2012), clearly defined Indigenous research through the lens of archaeology, but Indigenous research applies to many fields. She works in the area of engaged (public) anthropology, particularly in community-university partnerships and utilizes community-based research methods to conduct research in partnership with Indigenous and local communities. Her work crosses multiple disciplines such as cultural anthropology, archaeology, heritage studies, material culture, and Native American and Indigenous studies. In an earlier article, Atalay commented regarding Indigenous Ways of Knowing:

> We, as Native peoples, have many stories to tell. We have a unique way of viewing the world, and it is one that has been severely affected by colonization yet is ever changing and resilient. Bringing Native voices to the foreground to share these experiences and worldviews is a critical part of readjusting the power balance to ensure that Native people control their own heritage, representation, and histories. (p. 615)

In this statement Atalay confirms that Native shared experiences rooted in tradition support resiliency and accurate representation of tribal histories. In October 2020, Atalay gave a virtual presentation at Mount Holyoke College, *Repatriation, Reclaiming and Indigenous Wellbeing: Braiding New Research Worlds*, which explored the use of arts-based research and knowledge mobilization methods as part of Indigenous storywork. Atalay noted that The Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act was both defined and gave clarity:

> Repatriation is a way of helping with healing and it's a teacher. It teaches us about the importance of relationships for solving the complex problems facing our world, such as the climate crisis…. Indigenous knowledge systems challeng[e] and chang[e] universities. Repatriation is one really good example. We see that bringing Indigenous ways of knowing into the academy challenges and changes things…
> (Virtual Presentation, Sonia Atalay, Mount Holyoke College, October 2020).

Connecting concepts such as humility, respect, sharing, humor, integrity, wisdom, non-interference, strength, and reciprocity are part of the holistic and cyclical views of Indigenous knowledge systems. Native pedagogy is based on a spiral, the process is a journey.

Paul Chaat Smith

It is also important to discuss spirituality in everyday life, the significance of ceremonies and healing processes, and the emphasis on unity with nature. Such an approach is paramount when reading American Indian scholars such as Paul Chaat Smith and his book *Everything You Know About Indians is Wrong* (2009). Paul Chaat Smith is an Associate Curator at the National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI), as well as an author who writes books and curates exhibitions that focus on issues of Indian space and representation. His projects include the NMAI's permanent history gallery, as well as *Brian Jungen: Strange Comfort* (2010), *Fritz Scholder: Indian/Not Indian* (2009), and

James Luna's *Emendatio* at the 51st Venice Biennale (2005).

One of Chaat Smith's strengths is his ability to scan histories and objects reflecting publicly on them in the presentations or exhibitions he curates. At a talk at the Walker Art Center in 2018, he stated the following:

> Despite all the public campaigns and great scholarship, in terms of an average American's knowledge of Indians, it's still almost at zero. What that tells me is, it's not about more information, and it's not about correcting false ideas about history or stereotypes—because we've been doing that forever, and it hasn't moved the needle …. The radical notion of the "Americans" exhibition is that we're telling visitors, you're part of the Indian experience by virtue of being an American—Indians are so embedded in American national identity, in visual culture, that this really is about you. With this show we're trying to say, you are part of this construct. There is no you without us: everything about this country is entangled with Indian consciousness, identity, history, continuing up to this day—it's in all our heads. That's what I'm trying to get to. A lot of it is helping people feel that it's just kind of cool to think about. Museums are organized around didactics and messaging and all of that—I just think humans are so complicated. I never want to be prescriptive. If I get people with the spectacle, and they're thinking about how Indian experience is part of their own individual life in a different way—that's success.
> https://walkerart.org/magazine/paul-chaat-smith-jimmie-durham-americans-nmai-smithsonian

Taking what Chaat Smith stated into consideration, he challenges us to begin with what the non-Native knows about Native Americans. In this last exhibition about stereotypes, he brought those items, words, and multiple meanings to the forefront to be explored. This approach encouraged us to explore the histories of these items, the impact that the meanings have, and the need to reform.

Melanie Yazzie

Connected to ideas surrounding an exploration of the impact of meaning, Kryssi also dialogued with Melanie Yazzie (Diné), printmaker, painter, sculptor, and Professor of Printmaking at the University of Colorado, Boulder. According to her professional website, her work "draws upon her rich Diné cultural heritage by following the Diné dictum 'walk in beauty,' literally creating beauty and harmony," (https://www.colorado.edu/artandarthistory/melanie-yazzie) and thereby incorporates her traditional life philosophy into all she does. "As an artist, she serves as an agent of social change by encouraging others to learn about the social, cultural, and political phenomena shaping the contemporary lives of Native peoples in the United States and beyond" (https://www.colorado.edu/artandarthistory/melanie-yazzie). Her work incorporates both personal experiences as well as events and symbols from Diné culture. She often collaborates with people from different cultures and places to demonstrate how the collaborative art process can be used to evoke shared meaning.

The evolution of Melanie Yazzie's unique artistic voice began in childhood when her immediate family encouraged Yazzie's artistic individuality. Yazzie observed that her home is the Navajo nation in the little town she grew up in Ganado, Arizona. Her grandmother's traditional weaving practice had a great impact on the young Yazzie. She recollected what it was like to grow up with her maternal grandmother, Thelma Baldwin, a well-known Diné weaver whose work was highly valued in the community: "When I was growing up, she would take a weaving into a car dealership in Gallup, and she could trade a large rug for a vehicle. My grandmother was a breadwinner" (Ballengee Morris & Staikidis, 2017, p. 162). Her grandmother encouraged Yazzie to be an individual by insisting that she did not have to follow in her footsteps as a traditional weaver but could create her own artistic path.

Because of her parents' and grandparents' support in her childhood, Yazzie became strong in who she was and continued to listen to her own artistic voice. This freedom and respect for young Yazzie's artistic identity seemed to create the space for choices later in life when she also felt pressures as a Diné artist to make certain kinds of art. The expanse of Yazzie's individual and collectively determined artistic voice, her artistic process, content, artistic philosophy, and teaching all reflect her Diné ways of knowing.

Our conversations with Bryan Brayboy, Sonia Atalay, Paul Chaat Smith, and Melanie Yazzie revealed that storytelling, collaboration, cumulative knowledge, and personal and historical narratives are woven together, all becoming factors that contribute to the creation of the contemporary.

Putting It Into Practice: In Their Own Words

The dialogues we have presented here thus far include Indigenous conceptions of research and scholarship rooted in an embodied multilayered concept of tradition ensuring that cumulative knowledge is passed on to the next generation, a responsibility reassuring that connections continue. In this section, we turn to conversations with Indigenous contemporary artists whose work also reflects the interconnectedness of the traditional as it contributes to the creation of the contemporary.

In the concluding chapter of *Transforming Our Practices: Indigenous Art, Pedagogies, and Philosophies* (Ballengee Morris & Staikidis, 2017) contemporary Indigenous artists discuss key issues and essential questions in their work examining Indigenous ways of knowing, their concerns as Indigenous artists, and their social realities. Honoring Shawn Wilson's (2008) advice that Indigenous research be grounded in a practical fashion, and not just in the world of ideas, we attempted to summarize the artists' reflections below to demonstrate that in their active art studio practice, artists traverse the traditional in the realms of the dialogic, the relational, and in their community-driven approaches, always referring to traditional knowledges and protocols.

Integrating the traditional with the contemporary, Terry Asbury (Cherokee/Sioux) notes that she uses cornhusks in her work because, like the act of making dolls, corn husks are a traditional form of material. The dolls she makes are placed in situations that tell a story, a creation story for example such as the *Three Sisters.* Asbury's work exists within a spiritual space since her content explores creation stories. Like Terry Asbury, Daniel Bigay (Cherokee) also uses different traditional materials which he considers living such as wood, gourds, and shell, all connected to his Native Mississippian designs for his jewelry. He observes, "From the first time I saw those designs, I felt that they spoke to me…what I have come to realize is that the designs are language and living…the water spider for example is a symbol used in Cherokee stories, it tells the Cherokee story about the origin of the first fire" (Ballengee Morris & Staikidis, 2017, p. 221). Bigay's work exists within a spiritual space, like Asbury's, which means it should be heard and studied, not copied. Both artists include traditional materials as the cumulative knowledge that is passed on through generations.

Much like Terry Asbury and Daniel Bigay, Linda Lomahaftewa (Hopi/Choctaw) is an artist whose work is shaped by her Hopi heritage. Lomahaftewa's abstract paintings and research explore the use of symbolism to demonstrate cultural connection. The petroglyphs, square topped mesas, kachina shapes and colors, and corn maidens of Hopi culture are central to her artwork. Her father encouraged her "to sing and pray because that's what makes your work good" (Ballengee Morris & Staikidis, 2017, p. 222.) Her works at once express personal and communal identity and the spirituality in everyday life that Paul Chaat Smith discussed.

Likewise, America Meredith (Swedish/Cherokee) shares that her creative expressions come through her cultural understandings and research connected to the past and present. Similar to Kovach (2009; 2021) and Tuhiwai Smith (2020) who speak about the essential centering of Indigenous perspectives, Meredith observes, the Pan-American Indian Humanities Center reveals:

> …that all the wisdom is at the tribal level…[is] encased in our own tribal languages, worldview, philosophy, logic, and diplomacy. Our tribes ground us in the free-for-all contemporary art world. Basically, I don't believe we can speak for all Indigenous American artists. We need a common forum so that artists can speak for themselves, and we can then identify common causes and concerns. (Ballengee Morris & Staikidis, 2017, p. 223)

For example, Meredith notes that in her series of paintings, *Medicinal Formulae*, incantations protect identity and shape events on a practical level. In her work *Awi Unohalidasdi (To Hunt Deer)*, the text is a Natchez deer hunting song that became a part of Cherokee use. Therefore, Meredith's philosophy related to her art work's functions connects the traditional with the contemporary and enables what Atalay (2020) referred to as "a way of helping with healing…teaching us about the importance of relationships for solving the complex problems facing our world" (virtual presentation, October 2020, Mount Holyoke College).

Artists Terry Asbury, Daniel Bigay, Linda Lomahaftewa, and America Meredith connect their own symbolism directly to Contemporary Native arts as well as to earthworks. Thousands of years ago, earthworks were central to the public architecture of many Indigenous cultures in the world. Earthworks closely relate to cultural identity, connecting space and spirituality, which give a conceptual basis for understanding place and space within traditional Native cultures.The earthworks represent the continuance of cultural traditions and provide for the incorporation of the use of some of the signs and symbols in the work of Linda Lomahaftewa and Daniel Bigay. Certain earthwork symbols represent spirituality, which Terry Asbury and America Meredith also investigate in their art. Connecting their own symbolism to earthworks the four contemporary artists uphold the artistry used by the earthwork builders to ensure relevance today; they also remind us that the artist builders of earthworks were communicating their cultural ways.

Another contemporary artist whose artwork and research are rooted in traditional teachings is Dylan Miner (Métis). Focused on Native identity and politics, Miner's artistic work involves socially engaged collaboration with Indigenous communities, both youth and elders. His research is embedded in Indigenous language; traditional teachings, and socialist, anarchist, and working-class struggles. One of his collaborative pieces entitled, "Anishnaabensag Biimskowebshkigewag (Native Kids Ride Bikes)" is a socially engaged art project that uses bicycles as an entry point into thinking about migration stories, traditional modes of transportation, and health for contemporary Indigenous youth. For Miner, the bicycle stands for the "Red River

cart (li michif sharey), [which is] a common and important marker of Métis identity and communal livelihood, [and symbol for] the way that Indigenous communities have commonly migrated from one location to another" (Ballengee Morris & Staikidis, 2017, p. 225). Miner uses bicycles as a contemporary metaphor for freedom of Indigenous peoples connecting with a past before colonization and national borders. In these ways, his work reflects the traditional in the contemporary.

Like Dylan Miner, Nora Naranjo-Morse (Santa Clara Pueblo) is an artist whose work represents themes of growth and adaptation and represents Indigenous peoples' unique relationship to the environment. Her sculpture *Always Becoming* is installed at the National Museum of the American Indian in Washington DC. She observes, "Native culture and the environment served as the inspiration for my sculpture design" (Ballangee Morris & Staikidis, 2017, p. 226). Each of the tipi-like forms that comprise this sculpture are created out of non-toxic, organic materials: straw, sand, clay, wood, dirt, and moss. The artist chose organic materials in order that the forms might take on a life of their own. Naranjo-Morse observes, "The sculpture's metaphor of home and family not only conveys a universal theme to all peoples, but also enhances the visitors' experience that they have entered a Native place when they step foot on the museum grounds" (p. 226). Like Miner, Naranjo-Morse intermingles traditional cultural knowledge with contemporary universal themes.

Marianne Nicolson (Dzawada'enuxw), Shelley Niro (Mohawk), and Maxx C. Stevens (Seminole/Muscogee) are three women artists whose contemporary perspectives are founded upon traditional knowledge and whose work embodies the knowledge that culture, tradition, and identity are fluid, each incorporating traditional forms in contemporary styles. Marianne Nicolson, an artist whose self-identity has been strongly impacted by community, incorporates Northwest Coast design along with Western imagery because her painting emerges out of her bicultural experience as the Dzawada'enjxw Tribe of the Kwakwaka'wakw First Nations and Scottish descent. She uses traditional forms also incorporating contemporary styles to convey ideas about her Indigenous community (McMaster, 1998). Nicolson has explained that her artworks embody contemporary expressions of traditional Kwakwaka'wakw concepts. Nicolson comments,

> In the early 1990s I apprenticed with a master carver in traditional Kwakwaka'wakw design. Since 1992 I have exhibited work locally, nationally, and internationally, mostly in public art galleries and site-specific works. I create both strictly traditional works for ceremonial purposes connected to the Kwakwaka'wakw community, and conceptually based works for public art spaces. (Ballangee Morris & Staikidis, 2017, p. 227)

She also adds that her work stems from a strong belief in the worth of Indigenous philosophies and ways of being on the land.

Shelley Niro is a multidisciplinary artist from the Mohawk Nation of the Haudenosaunee (Iroquois Confederacy). She is a member of the Turtle Clan from the Oshwekon, Six Nations Reserve in Ontario, Canada. Her hereditary right to belong to traditional territory overlaps with colonial borders and such a space distinguished by her multi-nationality informs her fluid creative perspectives. Niro states,

> My work gets created through cultural identity. I don't start off saying I'm going to make something with an Iroquois look to it. But those elements impose themselves on my work. In the end it has enormous impact, and my own identity seeps with this cultural construct. In the beginning, I was very aware of my role as an artist, creating work that would reflect a feminine cultural identity. In the past, I wanted to create opposing views of how Indian women were seen. By playing with what was already there, I could deconstruct and invent new personalities. In the end, I came back to what is culturally embedded. I present images that speak loudly of Indian women who happen to be Iroquois. (Ballengee Morris & Staikidis, 2017, p. 228)

Niro's practice as sculptor, painter, photographer, and filmmaker reflects her contemporary Indigenous perspective founded on traditional knowledge: "…my sense of community and colonial critique is re-contextualized through matriarchal wisdom, metaphor, masquerade and related expressions of sovereignty" (p. 228).

Maxx C. Stevens is most recognized for her installation work through which she generates conceptual narrations of her life as an artist, a woman, and a Seminole/Muscogee person. At the heart of Stevens's work is the knowledge that culture, tradition, and identity are fluid and reflect consistently changing circumstances, whether caused by her own volition or informed by political, social, or economic conditions. Stories are at the center of Stevens's work. Stevens notes, "Tribal history needs to be carried on. If you still have that strength of holding on to who you are, you can do anything" (Ballengee Morris & Staikidis, 2017, p. 229). Stevens intermingles symbols and artifacts that represent her immediate family, her extended tribal family, and the greater pan-Indian community. While her works embody a sense of longing, they do not live in the past. Their focus is on the importance of maintaining family and cultural traditions and of asserting self-identity. In our conversations with Indigenous artists through their works and words, it became clear to us that in their studio practices, Indigenous artists traverse concepts of tradition through temporal dialogues, relationship, and from within their community-centered

positions, constantly embracing traditional knowledges and protocols.

Conclusion

In this study, our research process of dialogue and reflection was based on the suggestions of Grande (2015) and Tuhiwai Smith (2021) who clarified that our study needed to be wholly grounded in Indigenous perspectives. Additionally, we have based this work on Wilson's Research is Ceremony (2008) whose research model of reciprocity, respect, and responsibility is rooted in relationality, enabling us to rely on relationships as the center of reality. This means that of primary importance to us through the ideas we discussed and developed here was a direct accountability to relationships, and representing the ideas presented through the voices of the scholars and artists as told by them, not us. Therefore, we did our best to remain true to the voices of the Indigenous scholars and artists about and with whom we studied and spoke.

Our conversations with each other led us to further explore concepts and distinctions in the definitions and meanings of the concept of the traditional in Native American contemporary art. Examining the idea of tradition specifically, it was clear that the essence of Indigenous knowledge systems is holistic. A Native worldview embodies holism, which is reflective of intimate interconnectedness, and which perceives nature in a continual state of flux, suggestive of a cyclical view of the natural world incorporating balance, harmony, and beauty. Therefore, traditional knowledge unfolds in the everyday, and the present everyday becomes a story passed down from one generation to the next—collective knowledge. Bryan Brayboy (2015) recommended recognizing the importance of origin stories that help us to understand sovereignty, seeing stories as data, collecting stories as essential for sustainability, and hearing stories as essential to applying Native ways of knowing. There are also always present the elements of the relationship to colonization and the dynamics of constant change and adaptation required of contemporary culture. Relying on the Indigenous voices of scholars and artists who spoke about the traditional in the contemporary, we were able to see that the traditional encompasses the dynamics of constant change and adaptation that Brayboy refers to as the requirements of contemporary culture.

We may never know how many generations maintained and accumulated the knowledge required to visualize and design what we see, hear, and experience today through the contemporary American Indian Arts. Heritage is what the elders' share; traditions are the bridge; and contemporary culture works to communicate today for the next generation. And when our children, the next generations, gather or observe these contemporary works, the stories will be told from tribal histories and informed by specific Indigenous cultural knowledges for them to continue.

Educators who guide their students to make meaning out of this complex and ambiguous world help students to make sense of their place and space. Learning how to make connections and not see subjects or people in isolated, unrelated ways is a lifelong skill, and vitally important for our students to learn.

We leave you with a few ideas about how to consider or reconsider traditions when referring to Native American art. Whether it is a piece from 1880 or 2023, the three R's - Respect, Reciprocity, and Responsibility, grounded in relationality, should be considered. What does that mean when examining an art piece? What is the artist's story as a tribal member and as an artist? Shawn Wilson (2008) defines Indigenous epistemology as "our cultures, our worldviews, our times, our languages, our histories, our spiritualties, and our places in the cosmos. Indigenous epistemology is our systems of knowledge in their context, or in relationship" (p. 74). In comparing the practice of ceremonies to conducting research—where ceremonies are meant to forge better relationships—the research we do as researchers is a ceremony that allows an increased consciousness and perspective. Tradition is an act of knowing, remembering, reflecting, and being.

The authors report there are no competing interests to declare.

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