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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA
RIVERSIDE

The Trickster Critique:
How Parody in Contemporary Native American Art Challenges Authenticity and
Authority Within Mainstream Museums

A Thesis submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

in

Art History

by

Sara Morgan Rowe

September 2017

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Introduction

Native American cultural objects have a history deeply embedded within the framework of the mainstream Western museum, a relationship that at points has been highly contentious.¹ As Comanche author Paul Chaat Smith puts it, “If there is any people on earth whose lives are more tangled up with museums than we are, God help them.”² Museums have to now be conscious of their status as institutions that have played such a significant role in the violence perpetuated against Native people and their history. Museums have continuously objectified Native American people through the research, study, and systematic collecting of Native artifacts and the classification of Indigenous people as specimens.³ In essence, the museum had become a tool of colonization, achieving domination through collection and possession; reenacting the colonial narrative. Amanda Cobb, the director of the Native American studies program at the

¹ Throughout this paper, both Native American and Indigenous peoples/nations will be used interchangeably, when speaking “generally.” I want to acknowledge the continued debate about the preferred identifying “terminology” used when referring to Indigenous people and that the preference often varies from tribe to tribe. When discussing a specific tribe or community, I have done my best to use the terms that the group prefers, or solely refer to the tribe specifically by name. The terms “Indian,” “American Indian,” and “primitive [art]” will only be used in a historical context or in quotes due to the fact that these labels are highly outdated and inaccurate. On that note, I also want to recognize that the overarching label of “Native American” can itself be highly problematic as it suggests that all tribes can be encompassed in a singular term and under a single cultural umbrella. Therefore, while at points in this thesis, I speak more generally of “Native American Art,” etc., I do not intend for my understanding of the trickster and its invocation in artistic practice to be universally applied for all tribes and individual Indigenous artists. Rather, I suggest a potential frame through which to view the trickster as one possible avenue of Indigenous institutional critique, specifically seen amongst the artists discussed in this paper. For further reference, see Kathryn Walbert, “American Indian vs. Native American: A note on terminology.”

² Paul Chaat Smith, “Luna Remembers” in *Everything You Know About Indians is Wrong* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), 94.

³ Amanda J. Cobb, “The National Museum of the American Indian: Sharing the Gift” in *American Indian Quarterly* (Summer-Autumn 2005), 363.

University of Oklahoma, so precisely sums up the relationship between the Native community and Western museums by stating:

...in spite of a very real anger and bitterness that Native Americans harbor for them [museums], Native peoples, at the same time, love and value museums for no less than the reason we hate them- for the simple fact that... “they have our stuff.”⁴

On the one hand, museums take a Native object and exploit it for the museum’s own gain, but also, to a certain extent, the museum preserves the object and holds the current authority over the object, thus giving the museum, as well as the object itself, a specific power and purpose within the Western construct.⁵ This tension between the museum and Native objects has raised important questions about the process of collecting and exhibiting. What gives the museum the authority to select the objects that in their eyes are worth preserving? What qualities make certain objects more valuable than others for the museum’s purpose? How does one justify the removal of an object from the cultural context of its creation and intended use? How do these objects within the museum context construct a narrative of identity for Indigenous peoples? These questions have no singular, definitive answers, as seen in the multiple approaches from various artists and scholars critiquing the structure of Western museums.

The relationship between Native American objects and museums has also been principally predicated upon economic benefits, most typically at the expense of the

⁴ Cobb, “The National Museum of the American Indian,” 364.

⁵ Jane Blocker, “Ambivalent Entertainments: James Luna, Performance, and the Archive” in *Grey Room* No. 37 (Fall, 2009), 57. Whether or not this authority is ethical is another question that will be explored further in this paper.

Native maker. According to art critic and historian Richard Schiff, the colonizer-collectors control what is to be expected of and what is desirable in Indigenous art objects and therefore define the market for such goods, thus shaping the art that is produced.⁶ Museum stores and other similar sites of cultural tourism all serve the purpose of representing this economic exploitation of the Native maker. Commercial gain can also be a motivation for Native producers to take advantage of this established set-up and produce objects that fit within the Euro-American expectation of what is defined as “Indigenous.” This can be seen for example in the gift stores of many museums, which sell “authentic” Native baskets, blankets, and other goods. This economic driving force has also increased the production of “inauthentic goods” that do not originate from an “authorized” source, but rather simply mimic Native works and traditions.⁷ It is beneficial for museums and other cultural tourism sites to collect such objects that correspond to the Western expectations of Native items, that is to say those that encompass “traditional” forms and tribal identities, even though these may differ from how the tribal community defines itself. Once placed in the museum, the aesthetics of the objects can be emphasized, which causes no social or political disruption to the colonial narrative that is inherently being promoted in the museum’s framework.⁸ The objects become static and therefore unproblematic within this construction.

⁶ Richard Schiff, “The Necessity of Jimmie Durham’s Jokes,” in *Art Journal* Vol 51 No 3 (1992), 74.

⁷ Schiff, “The Necessity of Durham’s Jokes, 74.

⁸ Schiff, “The Necessity of Durham’s Jokes, 77.

Museums have also had a major role in the imposition of identity upon Native individuals through this institutional framework, which, even after the turn of the 21st century, remains. The interactions between museums and Native peoples have been based on a system of hierarchical relations that hold to strict boundaries: civilized/ primitive, researcher/ subject, dynamic/ static.⁹ Museums in this system then serve primarily as definers: they define an imposed identity upon Indigenous people. Of course, by defining “the other,” one is, in turn, attempting to define one’s own identity. These imposed definitions are not consigned solely to informal frameworks within the context of the museum, but also enacted legally with regard to the classification of Native art objects and people on a larger scale. This, for example, is made clear in the Indian Arts and Crafts Act of 1990. It specifies what can be represented as “United States Indian products,” as distinguished from all other works resembling or imitating them, which might otherwise be sold on the same market.¹⁰ The IAC Act, of course, speaks to the fact that Native American craft products had been gaining greater commercial value. The more that these products fit in with the Western definition of Native American art and craftwork- emphasizing the ideas of valuing natural materials and hand-crafted production that was typically associated with Native goods- the more mythology was attached to the pieces, adding to their worth. Through its implication regarding what qualifies as “authentic Native” art, the law also defines the identity of an “Indian”

⁹ Cobb, “The National Museum of the American Indian,” 363.

¹⁰ Schiff, “The Necessity of Durham’s Jokes, 74.

producer as “a member of a federally-recognized or state-recognized tribe, or a person who is certified as an Indian artisan by such a tribe.”¹¹ This represents a massive generalization of Native identity, as recognition of membership, for some tribes, may require as little as 1/64 Indigenous blood, while others do not rely on blood and racial identity at all.¹² It has only further confused the issues and created many gaps with regard to recognizing Indigenous people’s identity and demonstrates the ability of Western institutions to inflict a constructed “identity” on Native individuals.

These imposed identities become even more problematic when considering that they are primarily based in nineteenth century understandings of “Nativeness,” making Native culture seem inherently static. This freezing of Indigenous culture within the “glass box” of the museum makes Native survivance and sovereignty that much harder to obtain.¹³ Mirroring the attempted definition of Native identity legally, museums also tend to ignore tribal differences, instead conceptually consolidating different tribes into a singular entity. Instead of functioning as a platform for non-Native and Native peoples to interact and cross over these imposed hierarchical boundaries, museums have traditionally functioned as a place for non-Natives to observe Native bodies preserved in time and space.¹⁴ The growing emphasis on new museology beginning in the 1960s and resurgence in the 1980s encouraged the museum’s acknowledgement of the its own

¹¹ Schiff, “The Necessity of Durham’s Jokes, 74.

¹² Schiff, “The Necessity of Durham’s Jokes, 74.

¹³ Cobb, “The National Museum of the American Indian,” 363.

¹⁴ Cobb, “The National Museum of the American Indian,” 364.

power as institutional colonizers. This led museums to incorporate museal criticism into exhibitions, thus challenging their own authority, without yet completely surrendering their power.¹⁵ Increasingly, museums have turned to Indigenous people to serve as curators as a means to relinquish some control to Native peoples over the representation of themselves and their culture in mainstream Western museums. In turn, exhibitions featuring contemporary Native art have embraced the critique of the very institution that houses them. Perhaps counter-intuitively, humor has become a popular means of this challenge to the institutional framework of the Western museum. Parody has been used by contemporary Native artists as a method of deconstructing the notions established by the traditional collecting and exhibiting of Native objects. It is through parodying the framework of the mainstream Western museum and its practices that Native artists directly point out the absurdity of the representation of Native bodies and objects within the museum context and challenge the viewer to consider *how* they are viewing these objects.

In this thesis, the work of contemporary Crow artist, Wendy Red Star, will serve as a running reference, as it stands as a poignant example of the invocation of the trickster figure as one method of contemporary Indigenous institutional critique. Although she considers herself a multimedia artist, Red Star's work relies heavily on the use of photography, a crucial medium choice with regard to the notions of authenticity and authority established by the Western museum that she is challenging. Following in the footsteps of other modern parodic Indigenous artists like Jimmie Durham and James

¹⁵ Cobb, "The National Museum of the American Indian," 364.

Luna, Red Star uses humor- more specifically parody- as a method to question and potentially dismantle the institutional structure of the museum. Her series, *Four Seasons*, is one of her most direct (and earliest) responses to the structural make-up of the museum and its display techniques. In this series of four photographs, Red Star inserts herself into parodic renditions of an exceptionally popular exhibition format, the diorama. She mimics the format exactly, but further emphasizes the absurd artificiality of such displays by including plastic foliage, inflatable animals, cardboard cutouts, and Astroturf. In the series, she makes no attempt at conjuring an illusion of reality, the principle on which the original museum diorama was so reliant upon. By revealing of the obvious construction of the photographed scene, Red Star in turn reveals the observable construction of the museum diorama at large. She achieves this, I would argue, through the invocation of the trickster, a figure prominent in many tribes' mythology and literature. This specific kind of parody can function as an elemental aspect of Native-based institutional critique.

Chapter 1 will contextualize the role that identity has played in the larger framework of institutional critique in relationship to the Western museum, specifically with regards to an Indigenous-based form of critique. Beginning in the 1980s with artists like Jimmie Durham and James Luna, there is a much more direct invocation of Native identity in critiques of the museum as an institution, with parodying serving as the mode of this critique. Wendy Red Star's work certainly seems analogous to the earlier work done by these two artists, as all three invoke the trickster discourse as a method to challenge the museum's handling of identity.

Chapter 2 will expand upon the groundwork laid for the understanding of identity's role in institutional critique and analyze the crucial concepts of authenticity and authority, as well as their relationship to the reading of Native objects in the museum. The exploration of these two conceptions is a necessary step in understanding the framework that is inherently challenged by the use of parody by modern and contemporary Native American artists. Authenticity lies at the core of Western understanding of Indigenous artifacts and art; and within the institution of the museum, it becomes the defining factor of value, both economic and aesthetic. In relationship to contemporary Native art, the term "authentic" becomes even more problematic and challenging to define in any kind of substantial manner. Authenticity and the Western construction of "Nativity" are deeply intertwined. Authority is the other essential aspect that defines the relationship between Native objects and mainstream museums. Historically, non-Native curators and collectors have been given authority over the presentation and display of Indigenous items, often leaving the voices and identities of the object makers outside the scope of the exhibition. This, of course, relates directly to the Western understanding of the function and purpose of the museum, that is to say that museums are constructed to seem like cultural authorities, not to be challenged. This chapter serves to point out and problematize these two terms in their relationship to the museums and Native people, as well as demonstrate the need for the trickster figure as a method of critique.

Finally, Chapter 3 will examine the use of humor, specifically parody, as a method to deconstruct the framework established by Western museums. Through the

implementation of the trickster figure and discourse as described in Native American myth and literature, it becomes evident how parody can be viewed as a direct response to the notion of authority and authenticity as discussed in Chapter 2. The *Four Seasons* series will serve as the primary example of the invocation of the trickster figure, as related back to the importance of humor and clowns within Apsáalooke (Crow) cultural practices. The trickster also makes appearances in the works of artists like James Luna and Jimmie Durham, again showing the importance of this specific type of critique when addressing issues of identity within the context of the museum.

It also becomes evident that it is necessary for all of these parodic works to be displayed within the Western museum themselves, although that is the precise institution that they critique. Works like Red Star's, Durham's, and Luna's would not have the same impact if they were displayed solely in tribal-centered museums, but function so well as critique of the institution because they are placed where a non-Native audience is more likely to come into contact with them, as well as adding an additional layer of ironic humor. Therefore, while mainstream Western museums certainly have problematic frameworks with regards to their display of Native collections, with the increasing focus on adding Native voices to the conversation and the use of the trickster figure to undermine some of the assumptions established by earlier museum practices, these museums also have the potential to become critical sites of institutional critique, as seen in these Native artists' works.

Chapter 1: Identity in Institutional Critique

Institutional critique has taken on many forms since its inception and initial popularity, yet what remains constant is the artists' challenging of the norms and the framework established by the museum. While identity was certainly implicated in early forms of institutional critique in the 60s and 70s, it truly came to the foreground of the artists' confrontations with the museum during the 1980s, when it focused on the ways the museum's problematic framework influenced conceptions of individual and collective identity. There was also a later, more radical push from some artists that became associated with institutional critique who were interested in side-stepping the museum entirely and finding alternatives for exhibiting their work. In essence, these artists were interested in truly incorporating art into "lived reality," eliminating the need for specially designated spaces like museums or galleries to exhibit art.¹⁶ By the 1990s, a division rose between these two camps of institutional critique: on the one hand, there were those who believed that the structure and framework of the institution could only be challenged from within, and on the other hand, there were those who argued for entirely leaving the construction of the museum or gallery behind. Among contemporary Native artists like Wendy Red Star, there seems to be a continuation of artists choosing to work within the museum itself to confront the institutional construction of identity. In this scenario, the museum becomes the site of both the problem and the potential solution, promoting, in theory, a more critical discourse surrounding its own practices. These artists' critique of

¹⁶ Alexander Alberro, "Institutions, Critique, and Institutional Critique" in *Institutional Critique: An Anthology of Artists' Writings*, Alexander Alberro and Black Stimson, eds. (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2009), 15.

the museum then is successful *because* of their ironic situation within the museum itself. By examining the historical development of institutional critique as an artistic practice, one can see the increasingly important role that identity has played in shaping challenges to the museum's framework, particularly for modern and contemporary Indigenous artists who must navigate the problematic handling of Indigeneity by mainstream Western museums historically.

When institutional critique first appeared in the late 1960s and early 70s, artists and scholars like Hans Haacke, Marcel Broodthaers, and Daniel Buren began to acknowledge the highly problematic nature of museums' frameworks as part of their artistic practice. The museum was viewed as an institution that was not fulfilling its originally intended public, "democratic" role. These artists' works juxtaposed the theoretical self-understanding that the museum officially supported as an institution of art with the actual, contradictory implementations of its practices, exposing the rupture and the tensions between the ideal and the practical.¹⁷ This initial grouping of artists was primarily concerned with addressing the framework of the museum, meaning that their critiques were largely directed at those who were viewed as managers of the institutions and somehow responsible for the preservation of the established cultural order within the museum space.¹⁸ Their concerns with the framing of the museum's structure stressed the relationship between the museum and society and in many ways fundamentally changed

¹⁷ Alberro, "Institution, Critique, and Institutional Critique," 3.

¹⁸ Alberro, "Institution, Critique, and Institutional Critique," 4.

the role of the director, the curator, the Board of Trustees, and others who would have been perceived as having any influence in the system of framing within the art museum. It mattered (and still matters) greatly who was in charge of selecting the works shown in these museums. These artists also pointed to the disjunction between the museum and its social surroundings, since those in charge, like the Board of Trustees, for example, typically did not represent the population that the museum claimed to serve. The museum's frame, according to these artists, was found to have over-determined the objects it encompassed and was highly ideological, subject to influence by cultural, social, and political elements.¹⁹ The fundamental goal of 1960s materialization of institutional critique as an artistic practice was to intervene and disrupt the standing order of things in regard to the structure of the museum, in the belief that these interventions would somehow lead to actual change in the structure of power.²⁰

In the 1980s, building on the momentum of this initial moment of institutional critique, identity became a more integral element of the movement. By this time, it was widely accepted that the museum could no longer operate as a sterile, white cube and that it must begin to acknowledge the power structures that shaped its existence and framework.²¹ From the late 1980s to the early 1990s, artists such as Mark Dion, Renee Green, and Fred Wilson attempted to link the reformation of museum structure with

¹⁹ Alberro, "Institution, Critique, and Institutional Critique," 8.

²⁰ Alberro, "Institution, Critique, and Institutional Critique," 3.

²¹ Lisa G. Corrin, "Mining the Museum: Artists look at Museums, Museums Look at Themselves," in *Mining the Museum*, Fred G. Wilson (Baltimore: The Contemporary, 1994), 4.

identity politics and new forms of artistic subjectivity, an area that was not fully explored by the earlier incarnation of this practice.²² This meant that these artists' practices would often connect with the social and political struggles of the time. Perhaps one of best-known exhibitions from an artist associated with the practice of institutional critique that directly confronted how the museum portrayed identity was Fred Wilson's *Mining the Museum*, mounted at the Maryland Historical Society from April 4, 1992 to February 28, 1993. The exhibition was a collaboration between The Contemporary, an experimental art museum, the Maryland Historical Society, one of the oldest and most traditional historical museums in the area, and artist, Fred Wilson.²³ The goal of the collaboration was to critique the decision-making processes that governed the museum, and to show how any museum's permanent collection, no matter how traditional, could become a site for a dynamic dialogue regarding the museum's treatment of identity, particularly that of minority groups. Wilson, in the works installed in *Mining the Museum*, clearly attempted to restore identity and give voice to those traditionally left outside the realm of museological discourse, recovering the history of individuals within these objects from the museum's permanent collection. For example, he restores the identity of slaves that were depicted in a rare painting of plantation workers. Their names were added to the label accompanying the painting after an inventory book listing their names along with other household items and animals owned by the plantation was found in the Society's

²² Alberro, "Institution, Critique, and Institutional Critique," 14.

²³ George Ciscle and Charles Lyle, "Foreword," in *Mining the Museum*, Fred G. Wilson (Baltimore: The Contemporary, 1994), lxxi.

archive.²⁴ Perhaps more pertinent to the specific discussion of Native identity in relationship to institutional critique, another room of *Mining the Museum* features “cigar store Indians” with their backs turned towards the viewer, while the statues instead face photographs of “real Natives,” addressing that Indigenous element of Wilson’s identity (Figure 1.1). The label accompanying the piece suggests that these statues reveal more about the stereotypes held by those who made them than about actual Indigenous identity, reinforcing the notion that one defines others in many ways to define themselves.²⁵

This exhibition brought about a heightened sense of how much the museum can actually shape the way cultures are presented and interpreted within society at large.²⁶ It was at this point, that museums could no longer sidestep identity politics and had to become part of the discourse directly. It highlighted the tension within the framework of the museum between how the museum presents itself as democratic and free of discrimination or any kind of partisan ideology and the actual highly-gendered, -raced, and -classed space ideology that shapes the formation of the museum.²⁷ In essence, the art institution mimics and reproduces the injustices that characterize the society surrounding it, and yet the museums had historically ignored becoming involved in any

²⁴ Corrin, “Mining the Museum: Artists look at Museums,” 14.

²⁵ Corrin, “Mining the Museum: Artists look at Museums,” 14.

²⁶ Ciscle and Lyle, “Foreword,” lxxi.

²⁷ Alberro, “Institution, Critique, and Institutional Critique,” 12.

form of “identity politics.”²⁸ As Lisa G. Corrin writes in her essay “Mining the Museum: Artists Look at Museums, Museums Look at Themselves,”

This tidy formula for codifying human experience has provided museums with a comfortably detached position from which to observe the revisionist dialogue that has reshaped art history and cultural studies over the past decade. Until recently, the museum community has been resistant to the issues raised by this dialogue, fearful, apparently, of controversies that have always arisen whenever critical art history has been translated into museum practice.²⁹

This was exactly what made the *Mining the Museum* exhibition so important: it was the first well-publicized attempt to address how the ideological apparatus of the museum had ignored the histories of people of color, and accordingly has become one of the primary examples when discussing identity and museum practices.³⁰ Through the exhibition, Wilson was interested in deconstructing the framing of the museum to open up the works for ongoing cultural debates. He also fully embraced the irony and power of exhibiting his work within the very institution that he was critiquing, perhaps to a further degree than many other artists associated with institutional critique had up to this point. Crucial to his argument, Wilson used the museum’s own permanent collection to make his critique, showing that any collection could be used in this manner.³¹ While much of

²⁸ Alberro, “Institution, Critique, and Institutional Critique,” 12.

²⁹ Corrin, “Mining the Museum: Artists look at Museums,” 1.

³⁰ Corrin, “Mining the Museum: Artists look at Museums,” 8. Although as we will see later in this chapter, Native artists like Durham and Luna were performing similar critiques of the museum’s handling of identity in the 80s before Wilson’s exhibition. However, it seems that Wilson’s work has been more incorporated into the literature on the movement and the establishment of institutional critique as an artistic practice. Therefore, Wilson’s work often serves as the primary example of an artist bringing identity into the discourse of institutional critique.

³¹ Corrin, “Mining the Museum: Artists look at Museums,” 8.

his work before this moment had dealt with the museum and its framework, it had never been deployed within the museum itself to provoke a critical dialogue.³² With *Mining the Museum*, identity became a more integral part of institutional critique as a movement and museums were pushed to participate directly in the conversation.

Wendy Red Star's contemporary work falls into the same vein of institutional critique that was spearheaded by artists like Fred Wilson, a movement that is deeply concerned with issues of identity and how this plays out in the museum setting. She also follows in the footsteps of other Indigenous artists like James Luna and Jimmie Durham, who use parody as a means to get at this problematic structure of the museum's handling of "Nativity." Like Luna and Durham (as well as Wilson), a crucial element of Red Star's practice seems to be operating within the mainstream Western museum itself. As part of the attempt to undermine the preset structure and traditions of the museum, their works are most effective when inserted directly into the site of the standards they are challenging. Because of this fact, throughout her career, Red Star has worked (and continues to work) closely with numerous museums, often in collaboration or as a guest curator for an exhibition. While her series, *Four Seasons*, created in 2006, was not made for a specific museum as part of a collaboration, it has been shown in numerous established museums including the Metropolitan Museum of Art in 2015. The series' subject matter also directly invokes the idea of the museum and critiques its guiding display principles. The series of four photographs, one to represent each season, replicate a typical museum diorama, each image displaying a highly constructed environment -

³² Corrin, "Mining the Museum: Artists look at Museums," 10.

featuring a painted backdrop of a natural scene, like mountains or a lake, as well as artificial foliage and animals. In the four images, Red Star herself sits in the center of the composition, wearing a traditional elk-tooth dress and accessories, staring directly at the camera in all but one of the photographs. In *Fall*, Red Star is surrounded by red and orange leaves against a scene of golden-grassed plains. An inflatable elk is propped up against the background behind her, while a plastic cattle skull rests at her feet (Figure 1.2). *Winter* features her encompassed by Styrofoam packaging peanuts meant to imitate snow. A cellophane lake is set in front of her and clear, plastic snowflakes are suspended in the air. She clutches a Styrofoam snowball in one of her hands, presumably plucked from the small stack beside her, as stuffed crows settle by her feet. The mostly white, blue, and gray composition is disrupted only by bursts of red seen in the artificial berry-covered stems emerging from the ground, the four cardinals that sit upon the crown of the same artificial cattle skull from *Fall*, and Red Star's own clothing (Figure 1.3). This painted background seems to be the most abstract used in the four photographs, which typically depict some kind of natural scene. Dark gray cloud-like formations swarm around the edges while a thin patch of brilliant blue can be seen breaking through the center, perhaps meant to invoke the idea of a snow storm. The only distinguishable forms included in the background are what seem to be branches of trees, one in the upper left corner and a second that sprouts from the middle of the cloud formation above Red Star's right shoulder. *Spring*, justifiably so, is the brightest and most saturated of the set. Vivid pink flowers dominate the middle ground to the left of Red Star. Amongst the flowers, a cardboard cutout of a deer stands, glancing back in Red Star's direction. A small, brown

rabbit sits almost directly behind her on the right side, and further over, the cutout of a coyote can be seen amongst the foliage. White flowers are sprinkled across the Astroturf and again an animal skull, this time much smaller, with a small bird perched upon it, rests at Red Star's feet. A lake with a small island covered by trees and distant mountains are included in the painted background (Figure 1.4). The last of the photographs is entitled *Indian Summer*. Here, Red Star sits in a similar pose to the other three images, but looks off into the distance instead of directly back at the camera. By her hands, a plastic animal skulls rests, this one being much more obviously artificial than the one included in *Fall* and *Winter* due to its emphasized and abstracted features. An orange monarch butterfly rests upon the skull. To the left of the composition, another cardboard cutout of a deer stands amongst the orange and yellow flowers, looking back in the direction of the viewer. In the background, there is a glistening lake with a partially snow-covered mountain range in the distance (Figure 1.5).³³ The highly constructed composition seen in the arrangement of these objects for the photographs mirrors the rules of arrangement that guided the layout of museum dioramas, which often featured Indigenous people. There is an additional layer of humor added to the situation of standing in front of one of these images in these well-established museums, like the Met, as the viewer stands in front of the photographs questioning the structure of the museum, while also standing in the institution itself. This ironic situation is what aligns Red Star's work with the most recent

³³ *Indian Summer* stands out from the rest of the series not only because it breaks away slightly from the naming pattern used in the rest of the series, but also because it is the only image in which Red Star does not look back at the camera/viewer but rather gazes off into the distance to the viewer's right.

incarnation of institutional critique as an artistic practice used to address serious issues regarding identity. It also seems common among many Native American artists since the 1980s to use a certain level of humor or sarcasm in addressing these issues that face their community.

During the 1980s, there was a significant rise in Native artists bringing issues of identity into their works that corresponded in some ways to the rising interest in identity amongst artists practicing institutional critique, and Red Star's work certainly seems to be a continuation of this practice. Many Indigenous artists challenged the museums on their previous standards of determining "Nativity" and was a response to the handling of identity by these museums. Typically, in these large American museums, the presentation of historic Indigenous cultures and objects had overshadowed all other considerations, such as political and social issues. This makes logical sense in many ways, as most of the mainstream Western museums' collections of Indigenous objects come from the nineteenth and early twentieth century.³⁴ Museum-goers were encouraged to be passive in their viewing of objects, and to cede authority to those who, in managing the displays and exhibitions, shaped the message put forth about collective identity. The objects in museums would be arranged in a "progressive" manner, implying that as the objects became increasingly more technical and sophisticated (by the museum goer's standards), so were the people who made them. This structure "froze" the art made in the historical

³⁴ JoAllyn Archambault, "American Indians and American museums," in *Zeitschrift für Ethnologie* Bd, 118 H. 1 (1993), 9.

far past, labeling it as primitive and insisting about evolutionary narratives of humanity.³⁵ These kinds of display methods have certainly come under attack and there has been a slow shift away from them, driven by a growing concern that museums had become anachronistic forms of communication and education, a thought that emerged primarily during the 1960s and re-emerged in the 1990s.³⁶ This tension forced the museum to address identity politics and confront their role in contributing to the issue. Of course, the museum's promotion of a collective national identity has become increasingly complex in recent years as societies become ever more hybrid, and flooded with images, information, ideas and peoples.³⁷

The increasing role that identity played in Native artists' critiques of the museum first seen in the 1980s and continued into the present also reflected changes in self-representation with Indigenous artists' works. Historically, Native Americans were viewed as subjects to be displayed rather than authors and producers. Examples of our Western understanding of self-representation in terms of portraiture were not common in early Native American art before the nineteenth century. However, right after World War II, there was boom in self-representation amongst Native American artists and increased visibility of Indigenous artists in museums and gallery spaces.³⁸ This increase in self-

³⁵ Anastasia Loukaitou- Sideris and Carl Grodach, "Displaying and Celebrating the "Other": A Study of the Mission, Scope and Roles of Ethnic Museums in Los Angeles," in *The Public Historian* Vol 26 No 4 (Fall 2004), 52.

³⁶ Corrin, "Mining the Museum: Artists look at Museums," 2.

³⁷ Loukaitou- Sideris and Grodach, "Displaying and Celebrating the "Other"," 50.

³⁸ Zena Pearlstone, Allan J. Ryan, and Joanna Woods-Marsden, *About face: self-portraits by Native American, First Nations, and Inuit artists* (Santa Fe, NM: Wheelwright Museum of the American Indian,

representation is directly connected to negotiations of cultural conflicts and the corrections of history that were being engaged at large. The increased visibility of Native artists in the representation of themselves had dramatic political implications itself, and exposed the multi-layered and controversial nature of Native American identity, which could not be contained by terms like “authenticity.” Once Indigenous artists were “allowed” into the conversation, it became clear that there was not a singular “Native American identity”- certainly no definitively “authentic” one as laid out in the Euro-centric construction. And so this increased attention to self-representation amongst Native artists is directly reflected in the increasing invocation of identity within this specific branch of institutional critique.

The importance of identity as a component of Native American artists’ criticism of the museum was also reflective of the political and social climate of the 1980s. During the 50s and 60s, there were massive termination and relocation programs that attempted to force Native assimilation into American society with the result, however, of increased poverty on reservations.³⁹ Also between the 60s and 80s, record numbers of Native Americans were entering colleges and universities at a time when these institutions were becoming increasingly sites of political protest and unrest. Through the American Indian Movement (AIM) and the Red Power movement, Native American youths were

2006), 5-6. This meaning that there was an increase in self-representation by the Western standard definition.

³⁹ Michelene Fixico, *American Indian Identity: Today’s Changing Perspectives*, ed. Clifford E. Trafzer, (Sacramento: Sierra Oaks Publishing: 1986), 30.

challenging the institutional inequities through protests, marches, and occupations.⁴⁰

There was, of course, the general distrust of establishments by much of the American youth population largely because of the Vietnam War, part of which made university campuses and the like activism hot spots. Many young Native protesters, however, were focusing on Native-specific issues such as the conditions of reservations, the failure to uphold treaties, and the general failure of the federal government to acknowledge the Indigenous Nations.⁴¹ The general unrest with regard to the relationship between Western institutions and Native peoples bled into the art world.

It makes sense that at a time when Native American identity was so politically and socially engaged, Native artists' works would play a crucial role in critiquing museums for their handling of Indigenous identity. As mentioned earlier, two Native artists, Jimmie Durham and James Luna, serve as earlier examples for the concentrating on Native identity specifically within the context of the museum during the 1980s and 90s; and anchor Red Star's contemporary work in connection to this moment when identity is becoming increasingly involved in institutional critique. Jimmie Durham, for example, is most well-known for his installation entitled *On Loan from the Museum of the American Indian* (1991). In this installation, he parodied museum displays with fabricated and found artifacts, all meant to undermine the image of the Native American as the noble savage. Items included in the exhibition were a piece of paper with a bloody handprint that was accompanied by the text "Real Indian Blood," pictures of his various

⁴⁰ Fixico, *American Indian Identity*, 31.

⁴¹ Fixico, *American Indian Identity*, 31.

family members (Figure 1.6), and a pair of red panties decorated with dyed chicken feathers and beads (Figure 1.7). The accompanying didactic text claimed that this pair of underwear belonged to the “princess” Pocahontas. The inclusion of this piece not only speaks to the sexual fetishization of Native women, but also to the conception of the museum as authorized to analyze and offer insight into every aspect of the Native subject’s private life, even something as intimate as undergarments. In essence, it promoted the idea that anything related to Native American life is suitable to be shown within the context of the museums, whether it be underwear or old family photographs. This point is driven home by Durham’s inclusion of rather mundane and private objects throughout the entirety of the exhibition. The irony seen in this work becomes an important humorous critical strategy, and distinguishes from the work done by Fred Wilson in *Mining the Museum*, which used actual artifacts from the museum’s collection and more subtly than Durham’s incarnation pointed out the absurdities of museum display techniques.

Concern with Native identity is inherent in Durham’s works, although he has had at points a contentious relationship with definitions of identity. Durham has claimed before in interviews that his work is not identity art. In one of his essays, he recollects,

I remember a young woman in New York admonishing me for continuing to make ‘identity art’ when it was so obviously passé (they were keen on knowing when things become passé), I had not heard the term ‘identity art’ before, and did not imagine I was guilty of it.⁴²

⁴² Jimmie Durham, “The place of art in art places,” in *Institutional Attitudes: Instituting Art in a Flat World*, ed. Gielen, Pascal, (Amsterdam: Valiz, 2013), 56.

This idea that he was not making identity art becomes even more challenging to grasp when one acknowledges his involvement in political and social movements concerning the revival of concern in Native American identity during the 80s and 90s. Durham sat on the Central Council of AIM, as well as served as a founding director of the International Indian Treaty Council at the United Nations.⁴³ He was deeply involved in the Native sovereignty movement at this time. It seems that Durham was not against invoking Indigenous identity within his work, but rather that he understood the dangers of these kinds of labels, as one can see in discussions of labels like “authentic.” Basically his refusal to label himself as an “Indian artist” or an artist dealing with identity, breaks with the Western systems desire to classify him and his work. While he may not consider himself as a maker of “Indian or identity art,” his work certainly grapples with stereotypes regarding Native peoples and challenging the museum’s use of objects to support these stereotypes, as well as addressing the highly problematic nature of labels in themselves.

Slightly before Durham’s *On Loan from the Museum of the American Indian*, around 1986, James Luna, a Luiseño performance artist and photographer, performed his work, *Artifact Piece*, where he installed himself in an exhibition case inside the San Diego Museum of Man (Figure 1.8). He wore only a leather cloth and had various personal items with him inside of the glass case. Some of these “artifacts” included his

⁴³ Nikos Papastergiadi and Laura Turney, *Jimmie Durham on Becoming Authentic*, (Cambridge: Prickly Pear Press, 1996), intro.

college diploma, divorce papers, contemporary ritual objects, and political buttons. All of these items and the stories behind his scars were diligently noted in the label accompanying the installation.⁴⁴ Surrounding Luna on all sides were mannequins and other props that were meant to show the “lost way of life” typically associated with being Native American as displayed in a museum setting. The performance was meant to directly challenge the romanticizing of Native peoples and objects by the institution of the museum. Through the use of these visual stereotypes, *The Artifact Piece* reflects back upon the audience their own presumptions and projections about Nativeness as established by the museum.⁴⁵ It was also meant to invoke the notion of the Native body as being a specimen, a point of view that becomes uncomfortable and invasive once the viewer realizes that the person inside the case is still alive and breathing. Like Red Star, Luna must also navigate being “mixed blood” throughout his body of work: he is half Luiseño and half Mexican and as a result, his work deals with the complex nature of being from two different identity groups.⁴⁶ For example, his photographic triptych, *Half Indian/Half Mexican*, shows him divided in two parts (Figure 1.9). On the left is his “Indian half” with long hair, no facial hair and wearing an earring, while on the right, his Mexican half is shown with short hair and a moustache. Accompanying the image, Luna includes the text:

I’m half Indian and half Mexican

⁴⁴ Dan Smith, “The Artifact Piece,” MOOC, 2016, <http://artofthemooc.org/wiki/the-artifact-piece/>.

⁴⁵ Elizabeth Archuleta, “Refiguring Indian Blood through Poetry, Photography, and Performance Art,” in *Studies in American Indian Literatures* Series 2, Vol 17, No 4 (Winter 2005), 17.

⁴⁶ Wendy Red Star is of Apsáalooke (Crow) and Irish backgrounds.

I'm half many things.
I'm half compassionate/ I'm half unfeeling.
I'm half happy/ I'm half angry.⁴⁷

Luna juxtaposes these seeming contradictory descriptors of his identity to expose the exceptionally complex nature of identity once someone tries to create a label for it, and emphasize that a single individual can embody many different characteristics. His work attempts to add a greater level of humanism to our understanding of what makes up identity, beyond these strict labels, which as we have often seen, fail to do the subject any justice.

What distinguishes Durham's and Luna's installations from an exhibition like Wilson's is the distinct use of parody, specifically the employment of the trickster, in the context of critiquing the museum and its framework. While Wilson certainly plays with irony and contradictions, it seems to be a different form of parody enacted in Durham's and Luna's installations, and later Red Star's work. To begin with, Durham's entire exhibition and all of the included objects are fabricated, items that he either made or found. The "artifacts" included in Luna's piece are also not from a museum's collection, but rather from his own personal "collection." Unlike Wilson, Durham and Luna are not pulling items from a museum's permanent collection and then ironically setting them up in the exhibition space. Instead, Durham is creating this collection of fantastical objects and mimicking the construction and structure of the museum. The same can be said to an extent of the objects that Luna includes: they are not actual artifacts collected by the museum. And perhaps the use of these "inauthentic" objects within the museum's

⁴⁷ Archuleta, "Refiguring Indian Blood," 18.

framework points out the absurdities of the museum framework more poignantly. It is this difference that is important in understanding the potential unique strand of Indigenous-based institutional critique and how this can have a different manifestation from the more widely used examples of identity in institutional critique as seen in Wilson's work. Another crucial aspect of Durham's and Luna's pieces is that the parodying of the museum is subtle in both of their works, as it is in Red Star's *Four Seasons*. As Durham has stated in earlier interviews, "Often people don't [realize his work is parody] because we are taught not to be very subtle and parody takes a kind of subtle understanding. As well, people don't expect it from us, Indians."⁴⁸ Durham highlights the primacy of vision as the medium of "authenticity" within the Western order, as many visitors to this exhibition take at face value that these "artifacts" are indeed authentic simply because of their placement within the framework of the museum, again reinforcing the idea of the museum as being an unchallengeable cultural force.⁴⁹ This inherently leads the viewer to having a different interaction with these types of installations as compared to one such as Wilson's. The way that Wilson handles the museum objects makes it clear to the viewer that it was not a typical museum exhibition (i.e. placing objects in a way that the viewer cannot see them clearly as is the case with the "cigar store Indians"). However, it seems to be both Durham's and Luna's intention to lead the viewer astray by directly mimicking the frameworks of the museum almost exactly, so that on the surface nothing seems out of the ordinary. The same can be said of

⁴⁸ Alberro, "Institution, Critique, and Institutional Critique," 79.

⁴⁹ Schiff, "The Necessity of Durham's Jokes," 76.

Red Star's *Four Seasons*, as she purposefully arranged the objects to appear natural from a distance, only to unravel upon closer inspection. Like Red Star's work, these Durham's and Luna's installations require a much more active audience in order to uncover its meaning. As part of this specific Indigenous embodiment of institution critique, all three of these artists challenge and undermine the pre-existing expectations of what it means to be Native. By mimicking the structures exactly while inserting humorous and parodic elements, Red Star, Luna, and Durham point out the arbitrariness of the structure and its labels.

The main difference between Red Star's *Four Seasons* and Durham's and Luna's earlier invocations of identity in service to institutional critique, is that *Four Seasons* is not a direct intervention into the physical museum space like Luna's and Durham's who establish a kind of "artificial" exhibition space that the viewer can physically stand in. However, *Four Seasons* still calls out the arbitrariness of exhibiting practices regarding Indigenous art and objects, and the use of photography adds an additional layer of critique. It is important to note that beyond *Four Seasons*, Red Star has made several physical interventions into the museums space more in line with the work from Durham and Luna. For example, in her installation titled *Peelatchiwaaxpaash Medicine Crow (Raven & the 1880 Crow Peace Delegations)* for the APEX series at the Portland Art Museum, she addresses the appropriation of Native identity by outside entities, whether it be the museum or companies who use Native American imagery to sell their products (Figures 1.10 and 1.11). Much like Wilson and Luna, she attempts to reclaim the identity of those who have been removed to serve the purpose of the institutional narrative. As

Red Star states while discussing her participation in the exhibition, Medicine Crow became the stand-in for a variety of different agendas, commercial and political; a figure reduced to a stereotype of Nativeness.⁵⁰ Her main goal through this exhibition was to humanize Medicine Crow and his experience through her artwork, naming and individualizing him in order to personalize him.⁵¹ Again, as in Luna's work, there is an attempt to bring more focus to the humanistic aspects of these stereotyped individuals and to point out the arbitrariness of these labels. It is through this added level of humanism that Native artists like Luna and Red Star can begin to break down this image of an Indigenous person as created and promoted by pre-existing institutional frameworks. The inclusion of more humanistic aspects supports the expansion of identity labels, and adds complexity to our understanding of "Nativeness."

It becomes evident not only looking at *Four Seasons*, but at Red Star's entire oeuvre thus far that identity is a fundamental aspect of Red Star's work in critiquing Western institutions, particularly the museum. As she states in one interview,

One of the messed-up questions you always get from audiences and critics alike is, "Do you ever think about making work that has nothing to do with Indigenous culture, and what would that look like?" It's insulting because that's who I am. It's my experience of the world. It can feel like I'm an island, but that's partially why I make the work. It's also why I use social media the way I do – to connect with other Indigenous artists. If I can't find or keep community here, I'll do what I need to in order to keep it in other ways.⁵²

⁵⁰ Portland Art Museum, "Apex: Wendy Red Star," 2014, https://portlandartmuseum.org/wp-content/upload/2015/07/2014_Apex_WendyRedStar_Brochure.pdf.

⁵¹ Portland Art Museum, "Apex: Wendy Red Star."

⁵² Ashley Stull Meyers, "Interview with Wendy Red Star," *Daily Serving*, March 2017, <http://www.dailyserving.com/2017/03/interview-with-wendy-red-star/>.

Identity is ingrained in all of Red Star's work, particularly when it is articulated against the institution of the museum. As she describes, her identity and her work seem almost inseparable. Perhaps stating that Red Star comes out "against" the institution of the museum is a bit too harsh of a characterization, as it is crucial to Red Star's work that she exhibits within a mainstream Western museum space. She certainly takes issue with past museum collecting and exhibiting practices and principles, yet recognizes the importance of these spaces as forums to open up discussion on these difficult issues regarding the handling of identity. Her use of humor seems to be much more about bridge-building and inviting the viewer in, rather than the biting sarcasm more commonly seen in Durham's work. Humanism lies at the core of Red Star's work and her critique, as she not only argues for not only the rejection of stereotypes associated with Native identity, but also for the respecting of cultures and cultural traditions and the valuing of each individual and cultural group.⁵³ In this manner, her work is effective within the framework of the mainstream museum because it calls upon the viewer to recognize the absurdities of the frame without completely isolating them. Her work seems to call for a restructuring of the museum, rather than its total destruction.

Addressing issues of identity within museums as a form of institutional critique has high stakes for Native makers and for Native People as a whole. Nancy Marie Mithlo, Associate Professor of Art and Art History and Chair of American Indian Studies at the Autry Museum of the American West, in her essay "The First Wave... This Time

⁵³ Portland Art Museum, "Apex: Wendy Red Star."

Around,” outlines why the claiming of Native identity is so crucially important, rather than simply accepting a “post-Indian” conception of identity. She concludes,

... we are all here at the table because we want to see what happens when there’s enough weight and momentum and pure evidence that it becomes undeniable that the presence of contemporary Native art made from the broke legacy of America’s attempt to our communities is powerfully compelling, stark and well, I’ll just say it, beautiful... So there you are- we are all here at the table because we want to be in the first wave, this time around.”⁵⁴

The claiming of Native identity and understanding how it inherently affects many Indigenous artists’ responses to the institutional framework of the Western museum is a critical aspect in the building of a potential Native-based institutional critique. As Mithlo states, modern and contemporary Indigenous artists like Red Star are putting their weight behind this insistence of acknowledging Native identity and voices in the museum space. The handling of identity by institutions such as the museum is also crucial and it is necessary to recognize the implications of this handling within society at large. The institution of art is internalized, embodied, and performed by individuals, and therefore it is not necessarily about only being “against” the institution of art, but rather about considering what kind of values are institutionalized and what kind of practices we encourage as a society.⁵⁵ By invoking the trickster figure as an avatar element of institutional critique, contemporary Native artists like Wendy Red Star can highlight the imperfections of the framework from within and call upon the viewer for their active participation in breaking down these conventions. The invocation of parody and humor

⁵⁴ Nancy Marie Mithlo, *Manifestations: new native art criticism*. (Santa Fe, NM: Museum of Contemporary Native Arts), 2012, 19.

⁵⁵ Alberro, “Institution, Critique, and Institutional Critique,” 15.

lies the fundamental groundwork to challenge notions of authenticity and authority that have, for so long, guided the organizing principles of collecting and exhibiting in the museum space.

Chapter 2: Authenticity and Authority in the Museum

Authenticity and authority are two terms that often come up when discussing Native American objects in the museum setting, and serve as two major points of contention that modern and contemporary Native artists have come up against in their development of institutional critique. These terms prove to be highly problematic in many ways; they nonetheless play a crucial role in the current discourse surrounding Native art objects and artifacts. Understanding authority and authenticity in relationship to Native American objects' standing within the Western construction of the museum institution is necessary for examining how these assumptions then play out and are challenged in modern and contemporary Indigenous artists' works. Beginning in the nineteenth century and continuing to a certain extent today, authenticity was the fundamental standard for collecting works from Indigenous makers. However, authenticity is a complicated and evolving term; its definition mostly relying on who gets to set the requirements an object must meet to be considered "authentically Native." For the most part, it has been museums and non-Native collectors that were setting this standard, with no input from the Indigenous creators themselves. Thus the authority over defining the authenticity of Native objects lay in the hands of those outside of the Native community. The "authenticity" attributed to certain objects gave them a sense of aura once they were removed from the cycle of exchange and placed within the context of the museum exhibition. Therefore, authenticity was a central contributing factor to the value ascribed to the objects, supported by the notion that if it is in a museum, it must be valuable, both economically and aesthetically. Western definitions of Native

“authenticity” also dictated which items were most desired by museums and shaped what non-Native audiences expected to see when they are viewing a Native object, whether or not these characteristics were truly “Native.” In essence, authenticity serves as the backbone for the construction of the Western museums’ display of Native materials and stems largely from the museums’ ability to claim “authority” over these objects.

On a larger scale, the idea of authenticity has been a concern of modern philosophical and legal discourse for some time now, especially in relation to Indigenous people. Within this context, authenticity has most often been related to concepts of identity, both individual and collective. These questions of authenticity become even more complex when dealing with the establishment of collective identity. What does it mean to authentically be one tribal identity or another, for example? The encouragement of integration and assimilation with regard to minority groups has further muddled any attempt to answer a question like this. This, for example, shows how authenticity can appear to be as much of an issue for groups as for individuals in that it presupposes that the identity of the group is something distinct from the individual identities of its members.⁵⁶ This can, in some cases, seem to put individual identity and collective identity at odds with one another. There is a common fear that by promoting the conception of collective authenticity in terms of identity, individuality may be compromised and it would force individual identity to be defined in a static way, that would be difficult to negotiate.⁵⁷ In essence, this is problematic because individuals who

⁵⁶ Andrew J. Pierce, “Authentic Identities,” in *Social Theory and Practice* Vol 41, No 3 (July 2015), 436.

⁵⁷ Pierce, “Authentic Identities,” 436.

do not fit the mold of what is prescribed to the group can become excluded when determining the authenticity of that identity. Inauthenticity then inherently lies in the relationship between the individual and the group, rather than solely in the individual.⁵⁸ One becomes inauthentic when there is a disjunction between individual identity and collective identity, commonly an expected identity. This attempt to label authenticity in opposition to inauthenticity can become complicated as there is not truly an “uncontroversial fact” to check an individual’s claim against. The only way to verify someone’s “authentic identity” is through collectively agreed upon criteria that people have that defines what it means to be that particular identity. In the case of Native identity, this could be any law enacted by the federal government defining what qualifies someone as being Native American, such as blood quantum laws, or it could be something like recorded memberships in a recognized tribal organization.⁵⁹ This structure allows one to “check” an individual’s claimed identity against the institutional claim of what it means to be said identity. This, however, can become problematic in terms of Native identity and asserting “authenticity” of Native peoples when these defining factors of what Nateness means has not historically been controlled by Native peoples themselves, but rather controlled by outsider governments and institutions. Notions of the authenticity or inauthenticity of one’s identity can therefore be greatly impacted by the various institutions (including the museum) that attempt to define it.

⁵⁸ Pierce, “Authentic Identities,” 443.

⁵⁹ Pierce, “Authentic Identities,” 442.

To begin, it is necessary to examine how and why Native art and artifacts have become highly desired objects for museums' collections and to acknowledge the important role that authenticity played in the development of these collections. Once this history is reviewed, it becomes evident how embedded the notion of "authentic" identity- both of collected and collector- is within museum practices around procuring of Native objects. At the time of first contact, Native art and craftworks were typically featured in private collections. Most of the items were received through the traditional exchange of goods and then used to construct stories about the collective identity of "the Indian."⁶⁰ The purpose of these objects, in essence, was to create a Euro-American construction of what Native identity consisted of as opposed to Euro-American identification; effectively defining the "other" in order to define oneself. This function continued when the objects were transferred from mostly private to public collections in the form of "cabinets of curiosities," collecting structures that began to lay the groundwork for what would later become the institutional framework of the modern Western museum. The "curiosities" in these collections, gathered from places far from Western Europe, were meant to show the advancement of European society in comparison to the "primitive" nature of the Indigenous tribes and set up the fundamental dichotomy of identities that would ultimately inform museum exhibition practices, consciously or not.⁶¹ The "primitive" label of Native objects was meant to be seen as the marker of their authenticity, and

⁶⁰ Susan Sleeper-Smith, "Introduction" in *Contesting Knowledge: Museums and Indigenous Perspectives*, ed. by Susan Sleeper-Smith, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2009), 1.

⁶¹ Sleeper-Smith, "Introduction," 2.

therefore this characteristic became highly prized and sought after by museums and collectors. “Primitive” in this context meant that the object was “untouched” by the modern, civilized Western societies, making it “authentically” Native. The objects themselves become the building blocks of the history presented within the museum itself, with the Western museum decontextualizing the object in order to fit it into their preconceived narrative. Through this de-contextualization, museums have promoted the dominant ideology and paradigm of the Euro-American, something so deeply engrained in the structure of the museum system that it persists to this day, regardless of increased consciousness of its problematic construction.

The construction of authenticity dictates the value, economic and aesthetic, that is assigned to a Native object. An authentic object in this context is one that exhibits no influence of Western society, therefore placing the most value on the oldest objects, ideally those from before European contact. As a guiding principle for collecting, this “pre-contact” valuation is troublesome for many reasons. First, the search for “untouched” Indigenous objects is somewhat paradoxical because at the same time that collectors were searching out these “authentic” artifacts, Native communities were being pressured to assimilate into mainstream American culture and society, thus challenging the very structure of Indigenous culture that was producing these highly sought-after objects.⁶² Secondly, the emphasis on Native objects free from any Euro-American influence characterizes Native Americans as being a vanishing or dying race- a belief that

⁶² Amy Lonetree, *Decolonizing Museums: Representing Native America in National and Tribal Museums* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2012), 10.

was popular in the nineteenth century, and whose implications of this belief can still be felt to this day.⁶³ It thus became the paternalistic (and condescending) duty of the early Euro-American collector to save and preserve Native culture before it disappeared forever. Lastly, while the objects collected by early museums and private collectors were authentic in a general, Western understanding of the term, they were completely removed from their actual, “authentic” cultural context, in order to be placed within the exhibition display of the museum, consequently negating the intentions of their creators and ultimately complicating the notion of authenticity within the object itself.⁶⁴ The objects would no longer be in circulation to be used for their intended purpose, but rather placed inside the “sterile” environment of the Western museum for observation by primarily non-Native viewers. In essence, the subject and object are split from one another, leaving the Native voice outside of the museum space. This framework and the lack of concern for contextualizing the pieces in many cases allows for a lot of information to be lost in translation and all circumstances of the objects’ creation to be disregarded.

The image of “the Native” put forth by the Western museum framework has helped to propagate a popular (mis)understanding of colonial history and what it means to be “authentically” Indigenous. Authenticity in the case of Native American people has severe implications within the museum as well as legally and politically. There is an automatically established dichotomy between the characterization of Europeans as

⁶³ Lonetree, *Decolonizing Museums*, 14.

⁶⁴ Susan Vogel, “Always true to the object, in Our Fashion,” in *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display*, eds. Ivan Karp and Lavine (Smithsonian Books, 1991), 191.

colonizing, dynamic, and modern while on the other hand the Native people are viewed as colonized, passive, anti-modern, and disappearing, if not already completely gone.⁶⁵ This conception of distinct difference between the two identities underpins the colonizing effort, the concept of “terra nullus.” Upon contact, North America was viewed as wilderness, an empty, untamed space waiting for European colonization. As Craig Cipolla, an archeology lecturer who worked closely with the Brothertown Indian Nation, argues, this conception of “terra nullus” continues to be implemented in contemporary colonial politics through the narratives of authenticity regarding Native Americans.⁶⁶ This dichotomy inherently frames Indigenous populations as homogenous and anti-modern. In his article, “Native American Historical Archaeology and the Trope of Authenticity,” Cipolla discusses the use of the “terra nullus” concept in regard to landownership and archaeology, stating that any Indigenous response to colonialism or modernity that is not complete stasis is then framed by the institution as being inauthentic.⁶⁷ This justification for the treatment of Native peoples has certainly been carried over into other Western institutions, such as that of the museum. Authenticity provides the mode for non-Natives and colonizers to evaluate and classify contemporary Native peoples. The label of “inauthenticity” becomes attached to contemporary Native peoples and cultures within this construction as an attempt to weaken the connection of

⁶⁵ Craig N. Cipolla, “Native American Historical Archaeology and the Trope of Authenticity,” in *Historical Archaeology* Vol 47 No 3 (2013), 12.

⁶⁶ Cipolla, “Native American Historical Archaeology,” 12.

⁶⁷ Cipolla, “Native American Historical Archaeology,” 12.

Indigenous people to their lands and cultural heritage, by claiming that there has been too much cultural change for these contemporary people to be considered truly “authentic.”⁶⁸ And so the complications of authenticity in regards to identity becomes evident in much of the work of modern and contemporary Native makers. Authenticity has become the primary tool of colonialism, and therefore must be the first thing challenged and dismantled within the framework of the Western museum.

The assignment of authenticity also functions in the classifying of what are considered “ethnographic artifacts” versus what is considered “art,” highlighting the shifting distinguishing factors between the two categories with regard to Native objects. “Art” is typically assigned this almost magical, aesthetic quality within the Western paradigm. However, historically, early Native pieces were often disregarded in terms of aesthetics due to the fact that attributing some kind of aesthetic value to Native works would have afforded Native culture the same status as that of the Euro-American.⁶⁹ Art was considered an indicator of civilized society, something that Native American communities were not considered in the nineteenth century. This meant that most Native American art pieces were viewed as being “ethnographic evidence” or as souvenirs for the non-Native masses. Archaeologists of the nineteenth century placed great importance and transparency to the objects themselves, believing that they could tell a story in a way

⁶⁸ Cipolla, “Native American Historical Archaeology,” 13.

⁶⁹ Elizabeth Hutchinson, “Playing Indian: Native American Art and Modern Aesthetics” in the *Indian Craze* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009), 94.

nothing else could.⁷⁰ This effectively took authority away from Native voices and instead placed the onus on the object alone to tell a story of authentic Native life and being. Early Native art was also often classified as handiwork or craft, distinguishing it from the European conception of “Art” that belonged in the museum. The view of Native artworks as being ethnographic evidence rather than “Art” also contributed to the lack of attention paid to individual Native makers before 1900.⁷¹ This seems to have been carried in to the framework of the museums as it can still on occasion be rare to see an early piece of art or craft being assigned to an individual maker.⁷² Instead, it is usually associated with the tribe from which it came or a larger communal identity. When viewed as simply being a means to document a way of life, the importance of the individual maker’s history melts away and hold less weight in the object’s story. And so the desire to historically exclude Native works from the realm of the aesthetic and instead place them within the category of “ethnographic evidence” reinforces the importance of the Western conception of authenticity as it relates to Native art: the work only holds value as evidence if it is considered “authentic.” This notion is reflected in many exhibitions that rely on these

⁷⁰ Steven Conn, “The Past is Underground: Archaeology and the Search for Indian History” in *History’s Shadow: Native Americans and Historical Consciousness in the Nineteenth Century* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2004), 117.

⁷¹ Karen Kramer Russell, “Raising the Bar” in *Shapeshifting: Transformations in Native American Art*, ed. Karen Kramer Russel (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012), 21.

⁷² There are rare cases of seeing the assignment of an individual maker, for example, in the case of Maria Martinez and her pottery. Of course, in Martinez’s case, as well as other Native American artists that are attributed in this individual sense, her work became highly commercialized. Once the works began to gain popularity, it was then common to see the pottery being signed. See Susan Peterson, *The Living Tradition of Maria Martinez* (New York: Kodansha America, 1992).

romantic constructions of authenticity to contextualize the work, all in order to validate this created image of “Nativeness” in the Western viewer’s mind.⁷³

So what happens when these “ethnographic objects” are transferred from a natural history museum to an “art” museum? Or what happens once Native American makers began to identify themselves as “artists” and their products as “art”? As stated, many of these objects were not originally created as “art,” at least according to the Western understanding. As Carolyn Dean, a scholar of the cultural histories of Native Americas and colonial Latin America, points out that there is no globally accepted conception of “art.” In her essay, “The Trouble with (The Term) Art,” she raises fundamental questions about what the imposition of the concept of art has on societies in which such a construct did not exist. She argues that assigning the label of art to these objects suggests that these societies ought to have had the conception of art according to Western standards and that they somehow benefit from this construction.⁷⁴ Labelling these objects as “art” then superimposes the Western paradigm over these pieces that was not originally intended. This may be true for older objects as their meaning within the Western context is truly changed when they are moved from a natural history museum to an “art” museum. They are then imbued with a certain sense of aura that aligns more so with the Western understanding of what “art” is. This shift could affect how the objects are displayed, with their aesthetic qualities being highlighted and emphasized once they reach the “art”

⁷³ Theresa Harlan, “As in Her Vision: Native American Women Photographers” in *Reframings: New American Feminist Photographies*. ed. Diane Neumaier. (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1995), 123.

⁷⁴ Carolyn Dean, “The Trouble with (The Term) Art,” *Art Journal*, vol 65, no 2 (2006), 26.

museum. There are also many implications when modern Native artists begin to label their work as “art.” As Dean and other authors such as Nancy Marie Mithlo in her essay “No Word for Art In Our Language?: Old Questions, New Paradigms” have noted, “art” is perceived as a Western construction. Mithlo distinguishes three categories of Indigenous artists: those who reject the fine arts categorization established by Western institutions, those who claim that they are an artist first and a Native person second, and lastly, those who desire to create new categories that reflect Indigenous values of cultural reclamation and sovereignty.⁷⁵ The rise of Native artists claiming this “no word for art in my language” stance corresponds to the rise of New Museology and institutional critique between the 1970s and the 1990s.⁷⁶ According to Mithlo’s divisions, however, it would seem that artists such as Wendy Red Star and James Luna desire the third category. They stand in between the two drastic standpoints of dissociating themselves from the category of fine art and a proclamation of being an artist above all else. Rather, they desire to shift the categories of what is defined as fine art according to Western institutions. Thus steps in this specific Indigenous-based institutional critique. The shift from Native objects being exhibited primarily in natural history museums to their now prominent place in many major art museum collections, is still under the process of construction. However, it is safe to say that these modern and contemporary artists recognize the need to push the restrictive boundaries of what is authentic Native art and what is classified as fine art. It

⁷⁵ Nancy Marie Mithlo, “No Word for Art in Our Language: Old Questions; New Paradigms” *Wicazo Sa Review*, vol 27, no 1 (2012), 112.

⁷⁶ Mithlo, “No Word for Art,” 112.

may prove to be that like notions of authenticity and authority, these categorizations are rather arbitrary.

Authenticity not only plays a significant role in what is collected by museums, but also serves as a guiding principle for the exhibition format of Native objects. Until recently, dioramas have been a popular exhibition method in mainstream museums to showcase Native objects and peoples. A great many natural history museums featured such displays, typically depicting Indigenous people frozen in a simulated, natural scene populated with taxidermy animals and artificial plants.⁷⁷ The diorama as a display method is deeply embedded in the construction of the authentic. In essence, to remain authentic, it was necessary for Native culture to remain static, a concept that was easily put forth by the dioramas as an atavistic method of display. The experience of the diorama is that of an uncanny encounter between the living and the dead, in which the spectator looks into a framed scenario that no longer exists, peopled with “specimens” that are long gone.⁷⁸ Dioramas of Native people were even often featured near dinosaur or other extinct animal exhibitions, which used similar framing methods, further emphasizing the historically static nature of the culture depicted. As Jeffery M. Thomas states in his essay “Strong Hearts: Native American Visions and Voices,”

Because assimilation policies have segregated Indians from white society so successfully, and because Indians so often are depicted as mannequins in natural-

⁷⁷ Lonetree, *Decolonizing Museums*, 14.

⁷⁸ Carolyn Kastner, “Collecting Mr. Ayer’s narrative” in *Acts of Possession*, ed. Leah Dilworth (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2003), 149-50.

history museums, to this day many non-Native children believe that Indians have disappeared altogether.⁷⁹

Western museum exhibition practices regarding Native objects, specifically dioramas, incorrectly assert that there are no longer “authentic” Native peoples or living Native cultures because they are a thing of the past, to be displayed static in a glass box. It becomes immediately apparent that this mode of representation is problematic in regards to the ways museums are shaping the perception of Native identity and being.

As a case study, one can for example look at the situation that unfolded at the University of Michigan’s Museum of Natural History. In 2009, 14 dioramas depicting Native American cultures were removed due to concern over the display method and its influence on the understanding of Native cultures. During the process of the exhibition’s removal, the then director of the museum, Amy Harris, addressed the problems that had been raised through the use of this display format specifically. The first of these was the imposition of extinction upon Native cultures by the association of the exhibition method with already extinct animals, such as dinosaurs. The other issue that was raised by the dioramas was the attempted illusion that they create of an entirety of a culture behind glass, the sense that what was displayed was truly authentic and complete. Harris stated in an interview,

Each of these Native American dioramas purports to represent an entire culture, inevitably resorting to stereotypes and simplification. This overlooks the vast multiplicity of real people, who lived in real time, and whose descendants continue on in modern society.⁸⁰

⁷⁹ Jeffrey M. Thomas, “Strong Hearts: Native American Visions and Voices,” in *Aperture* No. 139 (Summer 1995), 104.

⁸⁰ Kevin Brown, “Native American dioramas undergo changes,” in *The University Record Online*, (2009).

This attempt at an all-encompassing display framework leads to vast simplifications and ignores the continuance of Native culture today.⁸¹ In a sense, dioramas are the perfect enacted display form of the desire for authenticity. The authenticity of Native culture within the typical construction of the Western museum relies on stability, something that the self-contained, unchanging nature of the diorama provides. This stability is disrupted by any acknowledgment of the survival of Native culture. As the situation at the University of Michigan's Museum of Natural History indicates, there has been a recent shift away from the use of diorama-like displays, but their historical popularity and implication for the rest of the museum structure is undeniable.

Basically, an emphasis on displaying the so-called authenticity in Native objects consigns Native culture to the past, as doing so gives authenticity a more stable meaning. However, issues of authenticity become ever more complicated when discussing the work of modern Native artists, who have to deal with the effects of attempted assimilation and the evolving nature of Indigenous culture. Many contemporary Native artists have begun to combine traditional materials and techniques with those of the twentieth and twenty-first century Western art principles to create a kind of hybrid art that inherently challenges the basis of authenticity typically sought after by museums and collectors, a practice more in line with Mithlo's last category. Photography, for example, becomes an interesting site of these tensions because of the complicated history between the constructed authenticity and the medium itself.⁸² The employment of photography as a

⁸¹ Brown, "Native American dioramas undergo changes."

⁸² For example, the long history of photography being used as a means of ethnographic documentation.

modern medium by Native artists then becomes difficult to fit in with the emphasis on the authentic that is typically associated with ethnographic-centered understandings of Native objects. Because photography is not directly associated with a traditional Indigenous cultural art form or practice, it is clearly distinct from the types of art typically emphasized by anthropologists and art historians. This allows Native photographers to resist conventional notions of what it means to be a Native artist, specifically in regard to expectations of authenticity.

Perhaps this is the reasoning behind Wendy Red Star's choice to use photography in her series *Four Seasons*, which is a direct critique of dioramas and their relationship to the authenticity of Native people in museums. Each of these scenes feels like something one might see behind the glass of a diorama at a natural history museum, and this is a very intentional invocation of this museum format. In fact, it was a visit to the Los Angeles History Museum's exhibition of Native peoples that inspired Red Star to create this series. In an interview pertaining to her works' disrupting the notion of what is expected from Native art, she states, "There's a whole notion of being authentic... Your art is supposed to look like the 19th century, like we're a dead culture that never evolved."⁸³ This sentiment is reflected in her choice of the museum diorama as a source for her parody. However, she transforms the format when she moves it from being a guiding format for "ethnographic artifacts" into fine art, through her use of construction and photography. The use of modern items like inflatable animals and materials like

⁸³ Zach Dundas, "Wendy Red Star Totally Conquers the Wild Frontier," in *Portland Monthly*. April 2, 1015. <http://www.pdxmonthly.com/articles/2015/4/2/local-artist-wendy-red-star-totally-conquers-the-wild-frontier-march-2015>.

cellophane, Styrofoam and Astroturf, undermine the core assumption made by dioramas of static, “purely authentic” Native culture being completely separated from anything considered modern. The use of modern material and a modern medium, photography, push back against and complicate the standards that have been used when discussing Native American art.

As demonstrated clearly in Red Star’s *Four Seasons* series, the conception of authenticity becomes exceptionally tricky to handle in terms of discussing the exhibition of modern and contemporary Native American art. Jean Fisher, an art critic concerned with issues of colonialism, illuminates the relationship between contemporary Native art and the notion of authenticity as it is played out in the museum. In her essay “In Search of the “Inauthentic”: Disturbing Signs in Contemporary Native American Art,” Fisher explores this entangled relationship, rooting her discussion in an exhibition coordinated by Jimmie Durham and herself entitled “We the People.” The exhibition featured works from Native artists of many different tribal backgrounds. The pieces selected for the exhibition were meant to intervene in the assumption about Native Americans in relation to contemporary life and modern society. The mediums of the work on display ranged from stone carvings to videos, but were connected through the ways they consistently challenged the boundaries that defined “authentic” Native art within the Western imagination.⁸⁴ Fisher is fundamentally interested in the strategies employed by contemporary Native artists to disintegrate these categories assigned through mainstream

⁸⁴ Jean Fisher, “In Search of the “Inauthentic”: Disturbing Signs in Contemporary Native American Art,” in *Art Journal*, Vol 51 No 3 (Autumn, 1992), 44.

Western institutions. One of the most crucial strategies for shifting away from this Western institutionalized standard of authenticity has been simply allowing Native American artists to speak for themselves. Fisher states:

When the Native Artist speaks as the author rather than a bearer of (an other's) meaning, she or he precipitates an epistemological crisis, which exposes the fundamental instability of those knowledges that circumscribe the social and political place of colonized peoples.⁸⁵

The crisis she is referring to is caused by the disruption of the coherence of the colonial text, by de-stabilizing the narrative established through the museum's exhibition practices. Western exhibition methods seem to crave this stable, static image of the Native, which is challenged when contemporary Native voices interject their own dialogue. The static and the authentic, invariably intertwined with one another, are unraveled by living Native speech.

Fisher examines a couple of different exhibitions mainly citing "Lost and Found Traditions: Native American Art, 1965-1985" and "Magicien de la terre," to demonstrate the problematic nature of the mainstream museum's display of Indigenous objects and how this directly relates back to a continued emphasis on authenticity. For example, "Lost and Found" was described by the curators as a collection of "contemporary traditionalists" and was an attempt to demonstrate the survival of Native American traditions through contemporary examples. However, despite the subtitle, works that engaged with modernist strategies were largely absent from the exhibition, reinforcing a tendency to position the discourse surrounding Native Americans as being outside the

⁸⁵ Fisher, "In Search of the 'Inauthentic,'" 44.

modern experience.⁸⁶ Rather, the objects were still deeply rooted in this search for the authentic in Native art, which can be translated to the search for the traditional. Even in an attempts to show contemporary Native art, there is always seems to be a drawback to tradition and authenticity. In the exhibition, “Magicien de la terre,” tribal artifacts were promoted as signifiers of “authentic” Native works. Here the curators looked for objects that were “uncontaminated” by Western influence, a long-standing and common collecting practice in regard to Native pieces.⁸⁷ These works were juxtaposed with the work of Euro-American artists, as a means, according to Fisher, to suggest that modernist practices possess less “authenticity” when used as a means to express experience from non-Western artists.⁸⁸ There is constant insistence that the notion that authenticity can only be found in Native American works from before Western contact and “influence.” Fisher concludes that there is a continuous reduction of Native arts, even contemporary work, to “ethnographic” studies and spectacles that continue to have severe implications for Native peoples.⁸⁹ Because of the persistent view that aesthetics are distinct categories from sociopolitical life, institutions that can control the discourse have not been held responsible for interrogating the ideological assumptions of their own practices. This is problematic as many of these exhibitions continue to reinforce the notion of a vanished Native American race through the de-contextualizing of “premodern” objects from their

⁸⁶ Fisher, “In Search of the “Inauthentic,” 44.

⁸⁷ Fisher, “In Search of the “Inauthentic,” 45.

⁸⁸ Fisher, “In Search of the “Inauthentic,” 45.

⁸⁹ Fisher, “In Search of the “Inauthentic,” 45.

cultural background or emphasizing natural history. The refusal to include a Native voice outside of acceptable signs of “Indianicity” within these exhibitions secures control and authority of the “explorer”/ curator over the coherent, colonial narrative.⁹⁰

“Indianicity” or authenticity of Native identity is given meaning through the symbolic order that produces it. In the case of Native American identity, this means the dominant Euro-American society. Thus the colonial text creates and controls an identity that might be internalized by Native Americans. This has been succinctly described by Jimmie Durham as he states,

We do not feel that we are real Indians. But each of us carries this ‘dark secret’ in his heart, and we never speak about it... For the most part, we just feel guilty, and try to measure up to the whiteman’s definition of ourselves.⁹¹

Durham’s statement is, of course, much like his work, a bit tongue in cheek. Yet it expresses this notion of an expected definition of Indigeneity from a Western perspective and how this has been imposed upon Native people, thus resulting in the push back against these institutional definitions. The importance of the authenticity as inscribed within the museum context is deeply embedded in conceptions of self-identity as well. The Euro-American centered system is totalizing rather than accepting the coexistence of different totalities. This disjunction continues to provide a place for mis-identification and leads to Fisher’s main question: “is the colonized individual irrevocably trapped in his or her assigned roles, or does a space exist for him or her to develop some form of

⁹⁰ Fisher, “In Search of the “Inauthentic,” 45.

⁹¹ Jimmie Durham, *Columbus Day: Poems, Stories and Drawings about American Indian Life and Death in the 1970s* (Minneapolis: West End Press, 1983).

emancipatory action?”⁹² She begins by asserting that the totalizing system set up by the colonial text often falls short in creating perfect structures of inclusions and exclusions, leaving behind “unassimilable elements” that become expressed through contemporary art.⁹³ Fisher turns to two major case studies: Jimmie Durham’s and James Luna’s installations involving the ethnographic gaze. Durham’s and Luna’s artistic careers become interesting examples of the direct influence of authenticity upon modern Native artists and their works, as well as establishing the type of critique that seems to have been continued by artists like Red Star’s in terms of addressing authenticity, parody, and Indigenous identity.

The importance and implications of Native authenticity have followed Jimmie Durham throughout the entirety of his career. He was one of the first artists to be affected by the attempt to create a legal definition of “authentic” Native work. He did not have a registration number that was deemed necessary to validate his Native identity, and therefore was not considered Native by the legal definitions established by Euro-American institutions. This confusion led to the cancellation of several of his shows including one at Exit Art in New York, one at the American Indian Contemporary Arts in San Francisco, and another at the Center for Contemporary Art in Santa Fe.⁹⁴ He responded to this situation in an open letter writing, “I am Cherokee, but my work is simply contemporary art [and] not ‘Indian art’ in any sense... I do not want a Cherokee

⁹² Fisher, “In Search of the “Inauthentic,” 47.

⁹³ Fisher, “In Search of the “Inauthentic,” 47.

⁹⁴ Schiff, “The Necessity of Durham’s Jokes,” 75.

license to make money selling ‘Indian’ art or any other art.”⁹⁵ Yet his work in many ways reflects his Cherokee background, and the label “Indian art,” seems hard to escape. But Durham claims that his art deals more directly with how the white viewers identify themselves and the world, rather than with Native American identity. He recognizes though that the kind of “white art” he makes is not what the market wants from Native producers, and ironically, the ability to prove the authenticity of his Native identity became all the more important because his work did not fit with preconceived notions of the kind of art that Native Americans should be producing.⁹⁶

While Durham claims that his work is not concerned with these notions of Native identity and authenticity, what I believe he points to is that the views this conception of authenticity in terms of identity to be restrictive and even damaging to the Native community. In essence, he does not want to claim that his art is “Indian art,” as that will be too restricted by preconceptions. Again, this raises the same questions that Dean, and Mithlo argued that the assignment of the term “art” and fine art categorizations can be rather damaging. He clearly declares in the same open letter quoted earlier that “authenticity is a racist concept which functions to keep us enclosed in ‘our world’ (in our place) for the comfort of a dominant society.”⁹⁷ Durham argues that “Indian crafts” can be destructive to Native communities when they attempt to fulfill this preconceived notion of what it means to be authentic. He states that there is a kind of desire for some

⁹⁵ Schiff, “The Necessity of Durham’s Jokes,” 75.

⁹⁶ Schiff, “The Necessity of Durham’s Jokes,” 75.

⁹⁷ Schiff, “The Necessity of Durham’s Jokes,” 74

Native peoples to “prove” their Indigenous identity, which they then translate into making the crafts such as beadwork or weaving that are defined as being authentically Native according to the government and other Western institutions. In another interview, he reiterates this point:

If you do things that are “Indian” to sell commercially I think that you are necessarily destroying your community because you are destroying the identity by doing it as though it was the identity and then doing and selling it. Every time someone buys it, it is reinforced that is your identity. That’s the trap that artists also have.⁹⁸

As demonstrated by Durham’s discussions of authenticity and its relationship to Native identity, it becomes clear why the term itself can be extremely dangerous when employed by institution like museums. Historically, museums have collected those objects that fit within this “authentic framework” and do not challenge the dominant status quo. It can be in many ways confining for contemporary Indigenous artists as there is kind of imposed expectation. Durham continues, “We’re given [authenticity]... We have it inflicted upon us. So Indians want to be authentic, to see ourselves as authentic, especially for those who see us as authentic.” In this way authenticity operates at this double level, referring to the fact that Euro-Americans not only construct notions of Native identity, but also that these Western institutional frameworks and mindsets push Native people to personify authenticity itself.⁹⁹

⁹⁸ Papastergiadi and Turney, *Jimmie Durham on Becoming Authentic*, 36.

⁹⁹ Schiff, “The Necessity of Durham’s Jokes,” 76.

The dependence on institutional definitions of cultural “authenticity” often seem to retreat into nostalgia rather than addressing the the conflicts of the present, and this is part of what makes it so problematic. The emphasis on “tradition” and the importance of authenticity lies not within the object itself, but rather in the organizing principles of thought in a museum setting. By disrupting this implementation of authenticity, the Euro-American concept of progress is challenged, as this produces art that is transgressive rather than progressive, and that cannot be easily be turned into a commodity.¹⁰⁰ The concept of authenticity functions at the core of Western understanding of Native art in the museum. However, there has been a strong movement by contemporary Native artists, as exemplified by Durham, Luna, and Red Star, to directly dispute this construction through performative actions and parody. The historical Western framework of the museum, built sturdily upon the principles of authenticity and authority, is inherently contested by the inclusion of Native voices that disrupt the continuous colonial narrative through the development of their own categorizations and framing using Native-based parody as institutional critique.

¹⁰⁰ Fisher, “In Search of the “Inauthentic,” 52.

Chapter 3: Native Humor in the Museum

Museum environments typically inspire an air of seriousness around their exhibitions and the works that they display, deeply rooted in their commitment to promoting an aura of authenticity. Within the Western context, museums have traditionally been viewed as a “treasure house, educational instrument,” and “secular temple.”¹⁰¹ This sensation stems from the architecture of the museums themselves to the exhibition design and layout, which encourage a ritual-like interaction with the museum’s collections.¹⁰² Solemnity has so often become the basis of viewers’ interaction with works of art within an institutional setting. Because of this conception of the museum, humor and parody are typically not highlighted in exhibitions, particularly with regard to Indigenous objects. This is perhaps because, as previously discussed, these Native objects must align with the preconceived notion of authenticity that is directly associated with the economic and socio-political value of these pieces. However, humor has been increasingly used within the context of contemporary Native American art, often challenging the role of the museum in perpetuating stereotypes about Native Americans through their display methods. The question then becomes how can humor be viewed and implemented as an institutional critique of this Western construction of a “serious” museum by challenging the traditional methods of exhibition in regard to Native objects. Humor, specifically parody, can serve an important role in exposing the absurdities and

¹⁰¹ Michael Baxandall, “Exhibiting Intention: Some Preconditions of the Visual Display of Culturally Purposeful Objects” in *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display*, ed. Ivan Karp and Steven D. Lavine, (Washington: Smithsonian Institution, 1991), 33.

¹⁰² Carol Duncan and Alan Wallach, “The Universal Survey Museum” in *Museum Studies: An Anthology of Contexts*, ed. Bettina Messias Carbonell, (Malden: Blackwell, 2012), 450.

issues when discussing the relationship between the institution of the museum and Native American peoples and objects. Understanding the role of the trickster figure from discussions of Native American writing and how this can be translated into a discourse about contemporary Native American artists' use of parody in the visual arts can give insight into the effectiveness of humor in challenging these stereotypical conceptions of "Nativity" supported by exhibitions in Western institutions like that of the museum.

The trickster discourse employed by many modern and contemporary Native artists can be viewed as a specifically Indigenous form of parody. Describing this discourse as parody as opposed to another term such as satire, pastiche, imitation, etc. is an important theoretical distinction about its seeming function within this Native art context. Linda Hutcheon, a professor of English and Comparative Literature, specializing in postmodern and critical theory, posits a definition and understanding of parody versus these other terms in her book, A Theory of Parody. While she spends most of the first chapter of the book distinguishing parody from other terms that are commonly used as synonyms, for the purpose of this thesis, the most important distinction is that between parody and satire, as it could be argued that many of these works seem to rest on the borderline between the two terms. Hutcheon comes to the conclusion that parody can be defined as...

an alleged representation... of... a representation of a "modelled reality," which is itself already a particular representation of an original "reality." The parodic representations expose the model's conventions and lay bare its devices through the coexistence of the two codes in the same message.

Satire, on the other hand, is defined as

a critical representation... of "non-modelled reality," i.e. of the real objects (their

reality may be mythical or hypothetical) which the receiver reconstructs as the referents of the message. The satirized original “reality” may include mores, attitudes, types, social structures, prejudices, and the like.¹⁰³

According to this construction, there is an important distinction between the two, mostly concerned with the fact that satire is viewed as being embedded in social and moral mores. Of course, this distinction does not exclude parody from having some kind of ideological or social implications, but rather states that these are not inherently necessary.¹⁰⁴ Satire also almost always has the connotation of being highly critical and demeaning of the original text, while parody, can have a more flexible relationship to the original text. In the past parody has often been grouped as a subcategory of satire or viewed as being “parasitic and derivative.”¹⁰⁵ However, as the definition of parody states, parody’s purpose is truly only to reveal the model’s (original text’s) conventions, and can have either a positive or negative relationship to it.

Modern parody can have a wide variety of different intentions, meaning that there is not always a negative relationship between the parody and the source material. Rather, parody can be viewed as “the process of transfer and reorganization of that past,” again not solely in a negative manner. Hutcheon argues, that modern artists are highly aware that any kind of change also requires a certain level of continuation.¹⁰⁶ Parody allows for

¹⁰³ Linda Hutcheon, *A Theory of Parody: The Teachings of Twentieth-Century Art Forms* (New York: Methuen, Inc., 1985), 49.

¹⁰⁴ Hutcheon, *A Theory of Parody*, 16.

¹⁰⁵ Hutcheon, *A Theory of Parody*, 3.

¹⁰⁶ Hutcheon, *A Theory of Parody*, 4.

this to happen by giving the past a new context, which is often based on around irony. This use of ironic context is not always at the expense of the original material.¹⁰⁷ Irony then becomes the main rhetorical mechanism to make the viewer aware of the dramatization that takes places between the two incarnations.¹⁰⁸ Parody places more demand upon the reader or viewer as it requires his or her knowledge as well as their willingness to play.¹⁰⁹ Critical distance from the source material is also required for parody, in that parody highlights the difference between the two texts rather than the similarity.¹¹⁰ Modern parody in Hutcheon's understanding becomes a process of "revisioning, replaying, inverting, and "transcontextualizing" previous works of art."¹¹¹ Parody, while it can be affirmative towards its source model and serve as a conservative force, it can also be transformative.¹¹² Elements of Hutcheon's theoretical understanding of modern parody and how it functions are reflected in some aspects of this Indigenous-based institutional critique that employs parody as a means to break down these pre-established conventions and is important to keep in mind while examining this potential framework.

¹⁰⁷ Hutcheon, *A Theory of Parody*, 6.

¹⁰⁸ Hutcheon, *A Theory of Parody*, 31.

¹⁰⁹ Hutcheon, *A Theory of Parody*, 5.

¹¹⁰ Hutcheon, *A Theory of Parody*, 6.

¹¹¹ Hutcheon, *A Theory of Parody*, 11.

¹¹² Hutcheon, *A Theory of Parody*, 20.

The role of humor has been discussed at length with regards to Native American literature, and yet is rather limited when examining the potential function of humor within the context of the art museum. Eva Gruber, for example, has written extensively on the role that humor plays in regard to Native literature in her book Humor in Contemporary Native North American Literature: Reimagining Nativeness.¹¹³ She argues that humor is, in fact, of central importance to contemporary Native American literature and plays a significant role in (re)defining Nativeness. Gruber asserts that within the Western construction, the terms “humor” and “Indian” almost seem to be an oxymoron because so much emphasis was placed historically upon the depiction of Native peoples as being stoic, fierce, and noble. This notion is also relevant to the dialogue surrounding the depiction of Indigenous people in the visual arts. Look for example at the photographs of Edward Curtis, who often only included images of Native Americans that appear stoic and severe due to the fact that he (and the consumers of his photographs) believed he was photographing a “vanishing race.” Any image that did not fit within the Western preconceived image of what an “Indian” was, would not be included in the final publication.¹¹⁴ Gruber asserts that the representation of Native Americans has been

¹¹³ Eva Gruber, *Humor in Contemporary Native North American Literature: Reimagining Nativeness* (Rochester: Camden House, 2008).

¹¹⁴ See James Faris, “Navajo and Photography.” Here he discusses how Curtis was consciously making choices about the manner in which he was photographing the Navajo people in order to fit the desired Western image, that is to say to represent Indigenous people as being a conquered and vanishing race. This meant that any pose or emotion that might hint at happiness or a flourishing culture would be edited out. He cites a specific example of this conscious edit through the image entitled *Navajo Woman*. In the published image she is somber, however, uncovered in Curtis’ unpublished photographs at the Library of Congress shows another photograph of the same woman, but this time smiling and in a less contrived pose than the published, more formal portrait. See pages 91-96.

disassociated with humor in writings specifically, but on a more general level as well, because humor may have been seen as a sign of shared humanity.¹¹⁵ This image of Native people has continued to endure to this day, with the popular images of the stoic Native chief being etched deeply into Western collective imagination.¹¹⁶ To the contrary of this popular imagery, humor has actually had a long history in Native culture and writing. Gruber argues that it is hard to find examples of Indigenous humor in earlier writing often because of the reliance on oral traditions within tribal culture and the fact that written sources documenting Indigenous stories were often transcribed by white ethnographers and anthropologists and therefore could have been altered or lost in translation. Just as Curtis made a conscious effort to “edit” his photographs, many other Westerners interacting with Native people early on could have been constructing the image of Native Americans to fulfill the Western conception of what it meant to be Indigenous, fueling the obsession with preserving an “authentic” image of Nativeness. This is crucial because the reclaiming of the importance of humor by contemporary Native writers allows them to redefine the conception of what “being Native” means. Gruber also notes that there has been a shift in the use of humor employed by Native American writers. Native writers throughout the twentieth century were often marked by a biting sense of sarcasm, whereas contemporary Native writers continue to raise the problematic questions around colonization and cultural identity, but now with a less bitter

¹¹⁵ The reasoning for the lack of humor could also be as James Faris stated about the selective process of Curtis photographs: that any sign of a smile or more natural pose might have suggested a flourishing and growing culture as well.

¹¹⁶ Gruber, *Humor in Contemporary Native North American Literature*, 12.

humor, something that may also be applicable to the use of humor in the visual arts.¹¹⁷

This shift perhaps reflects a change from a more satirical use of humor to a more parodic use amongst more contemporary Indigenous artists, such as Red Star.

Examined at length in Gruber's book and featured in the larger discourse of Native American literature is the figure of the trickster. The trickster is a central character in most tribes' oral traditions, frequently appearing in the form of Coyote. While the term trickster seems to have a negative connotation in the Western context, this is not the case within most Indigenous traditions. According to many traditional mythologies, the trickster (Coyote) often embodies seemingly contradictory characteristics. For example, they are both unprincipled and calculating. The trickster Coyote also often gets killed, yet never dies. Somehow, he/she always perseveres.¹¹⁸ This figure is viewed as defying all categorization and academic definition, being strongly rooted in these kind of contradictory understandings of their characteristics. These trickster tales have various functions, but perhaps most commonly invoked is their use in the "reexamination of existing conditions," or in other words their ability to expose the accepted patterns of society that are no longer a necessity and reveal, in fact, that any kind of ordering may be arbitrary. He/she brings about change without whom the world would become static.¹¹⁹ Embracing this role, the trickster frequently undermines authority and rules, challenging

¹¹⁷ Gruber, *Humor in Contemporary Native American Literature*, 13.

¹¹⁸ Amando Cockrell, "When coyote leaves the Res: Incarnations of the Trickster from Wile E. to Le Guin" in *Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts Vol 10* (Winter 1998), 64.

¹¹⁹ Cockrell, "When Coyote leaves Res," 65.

the existing status quo. In more contemporary writings, the trickster figure has commonly been used as a mediator between Euro-American and Native peoples. For example, the contemporary trickster can disrupt stereotypical representations of “Nativity” as well as renegotiate the cultural values between the Western and Native worlds, changing the relationship and understanding between the two. The trickster becomes viewed as a necessary even benevolent character in some cases.¹²⁰

The trickster is not only confined into a single character, but can also embody an entire discourse. As Gruber defines it, “Trickster discourse is a rhetorical principle in Native narrative, a multivocal presence in narrative form and structure that disrupts conventional patterns of representation and expectations as they relate to how (linear) narrative ought to proceed.”¹²¹ Rather than the physical character of the trickster, we see the trickster’s characteristics come out through the rhetoric that the author is using. A trickster narrative also situates a participant audience, as does parody. This often means that the audience cannot be passive; that there is something left within the writing that must be discovered or puzzled together by the audience. The use of humor by contemporary Native artists often requires this same active, participant audience. The trickster as a narrative principle bypasses traditional (Western) narrative conventions, and in the process liberates the readers’ imagination from restrictive distinctions and predetermined expectations. This freeing of imagination through the implementation of this specific mode of discourse can lend itself well to the reworking of the restrictive

¹²⁰ Gruber, *Humor in Contemporary Native American Literature*, 103.

¹²¹ Gruber, *Humor in Contemporary Native American Literature*, 103.

images of Nativeness. In essence, introducing new, imaginative truths that oppose a Euro-centric Truth, can seem to create a seemingly stable deceptive narrative surface that eventually, however, can reveal rather than conceal the fact that reality is a construction itself.¹²²

Many Native writers and scholar to some extent invoke a form of the trickster figure within their writings and emphasize the importance of humor within Native culture in general. Two such scholars important to opening up the understanding of Wendy Red Star's work include Gerald Vizenor and Vine DeLoria. They explicitly discuss the importance of trickster-like figures in Native writings for the express purpose of the renegotiation of Native self-identity and to challenge the dynamics of the interaction between Euro-Americans and Native peoples. For example, in his book, *Manifest Manners: Postindian Warriors of Survivance*, Vizenor introduces the concept of the "postindian warrior." The "postindian warriors" purpose is to reveal the invention of the "invented indian" through the use of humor, new stories, and simulations of survivance.¹²³ Vizenor's "postindian warrior" serves as a kind of trickster figure as laid out by Gruber. The "postindian warrior" is meant to draw attention and challenge the existing stereotypical representations of Native Americans. These notions fit in with Vizenor's larger understanding of survivance that often involves "playing" with pre-

¹²² Gruber, *Humor in Contemporary Native American Literature*, 111.

¹²³ Gerald Vizenor, *Manifest Manners: Narratives on Postindian Survivance*, (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1999), 5.

conceived conditions that have been imposed on the Native community.¹²⁴ Just like the trickster/ Coyote, the “postindian warriors” are meant in some way to serve as preservers of Indigenous culture. He writes that “survivance stories honor the humor and tragic wisdom of the situation not the market value of victimry” and he labels the subjects of his writing as being “tricky not tragic, ironic not heroic, and not the comfy representations of dominance.”¹²⁵ In essence, Vizenor’s characters reflect the characteristics of the mythological trickster and highlight the essential importance humor and irony in contemporary Native writing. Vine DeLoria in a similar way encourages the use of humor and employs a kind of trickster discourse himself to undermine stereotypes and to address real, heavy problems facing the Native community. In his essay simply titled “Indian Humor,” DeLoria emphasizes the importance of humor in solving problems that Native Americans face concerning identity and colonization.¹²⁶ He writes that,

The more desperate the problem, the more humor is directed to describe it. Satirical remarks often circumscribe problems so that possible solutions are drawn from the circumstances that would not make sense if presented in other than a humorous form.¹²⁷

¹²⁴ Larry McCaffery, Tom Marshall, and Gerald Vizenor, “Head Water: An Interview with Gerald Vizenor,” *Chicago Review* 39, no. 3/4, (1993), accessed March 10, 2016, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25305716>, 54.

¹²⁵ Gerald Vizenor, ed., *Survivance: Narrative of Native Presence*, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2008), 61.

¹²⁶ It is also important to note that in his discussion about the importance of humor in the Native community that he himself uses humor throughout his writing, often telling jokes and funny stories to demonstrate the underlying importance of humor.

¹²⁷ Vine DeLoria Jr., “Indian Humor,” *Literature of the American Indians: Views and Interpretations* (1996), 40.

Through trickster discourse, humor thus becomes the language by which to discuss these major problems currently facing the contemporary Native community including the lasting effects of colonization and negotiating relationships to Euro-American centered institutions.

The prominence of humor in Native American literature is reflective of the importance of humor on a larger scale in many tribal ceremonies and traditions, as well as everyday life. As Gruber suggests, humor has always played an important role in Native culture and writing, even if this fact is often lost in translation. Within many tribes, humor extends into religious ceremonies, a place where most Westerners would not view humor as being appropriate based on Euro-American constructions and understandings. Specifically looking at Crow culture as an example in relationship to Wendy Red Star's work, traditional akbi-arusacarica, or disruptive clowns, are often featured heavily in ceremonies and celebrations. The clowns wear masks and remain anonymous, often appearing unexpectedly at otherwise rather serious tribal events and gatherings.¹²⁸ Having a seemingly contradictory function, these ritual clowns ridicule the established customs while simultaneously functioning as guardians of the tradition, much like the trickster character that is established in Native writing. They challenge accustomed patterns, subvert authority, and discuss issues that would otherwise go unaddressed.¹²⁹ The purpose of these clowns is reflected in the function of the trickster character in

¹²⁸ Thomas H. Lewis, "Traditional and Contemporary Ritual Clowns of the Crow," in *Anthropos* (1982), 892-895.

¹²⁹ Gruber, *Humor in Contemporary Native American Literature*, 8-9.

Native writing and can be extended to the visual arts as well: they are meant to make the reader or viewer stumble, laugh, and then reconsider their frame of reference.

The use of this sort of interchangeable figure of the clown and trickster is prominently featured in Red Star's work. She directly uses these Crow clowns as the subject matter for one of her series with a self-explanatory title, *Crow Clowns*, which features these purposefully ridiculously dressed people against bright backgrounds of weaving (Figure 3.1). Speaking of this series in an interview at the Portland Art Museum, Red Star comments on the role of the clowns in tribal meetings saying that if they sense any tension, they will begin to joke around to lighten the mood.¹³⁰ It seems to be a rather common occurrence for humor to be used in the face of problems or tensions, as echoed in the earlier words of Vine DeLoria, and many contemporary Native writings and art pieces. The use of humor is highly characteristic of Red Star's other works as well. The first way that she employs this kind of trickster discourse in her work is in a very obvious "laugh-out-loud" kind of manner. This can, for example, be seen in her series, *White Squaw*. *White Squaw* features image of Red Star in goofy poses superimposed onto the covers of racist 1980s paperbacks of the same title (Figure 3.2). The original images from which Red Star drew inspiration featured a white woman posing as a Native woman, and often being labelled as being from a different tribe in each cover, furthering stereotypes about all Native Americans being able to be defined in a singular way. In her versions, Red Star maintains the same background and text that were included in the original

¹³⁰ Portland Museum of Art, "Artist Talk: Wendy Red Star," March 24, 2011, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hKREHsEw35I>.

covers, while replacing the image of the woman she labels as “Becky” with her own self-image. One of Red Star’s covers, as an example, features her eating a giant spoonful of butter out of a Land-o-Lakes container, while to her right the text proclaims: ‘she’s got to blow off steam from a hot situation!’” (Figure 3.3). Below her are the original illustrations from the book cover featuring the “white squaw” character clothed in a small red dress clutched in the arms of a “rugged, cowboy looking” man. Many of the original covers such as the one being mimicked here include text that hint at sexual or erotic situations that were featured heavily in the books. Red Star’s series attempts to draw attention to the stereotypical representation of Native women as sexualized objects that was often presented in Old Western books and movies, similar to Durham’s invocation of fetishization through the inclusion “Pocahontas’ undergarments” in *On Loan from the Museum of the American Indian*. Her over-exaggerated poses highlight the absurdity of the image that was originally printed on the front covers. The humor present here is evident to all viewers and not much needs to be read into the pieces due to it being this kind of shallow-level humor. There truly is not much subtext, the humor being revealed and explained on the surface. Some writers such as Christopher Hutchinson, have argued that this series might have only reinforced Native iconography as spectacle. Hutchinson believes that Red Star’s insertion of herself into the cover somehow validates the original novel, rather than investigating the relationship between Euro-Americans and Natives. He asserts that Native Americans and other groups labelled as “Others” within the Western

construct cannot control their own dialogue using spectacle and satire.¹³¹ However, it seems to me by employing the trickster discourse within their parodic critiques of the museum, Native American artists can in fact open up a productive discourse addressing the interaction between Indigenous people and Western institutions, perhaps something that is not quite achieved in a series like *White Squaw*. Parody rather than this more obvious “laugh-out-loud” surface humor is a much more effective means and correlates more directly to the figure of the tricksters as examined earlier in Native American writing.

This trickster sensibility is far more present and successful in Red Star’s series *Four Seasons* in which she directly parodies the Western treatment of Native Americans in museum dioramas. In a more general sense, the use of subtle parody rather than this “in your face” kind of humor within Native American artists’ work seems to an extent to be a more successful response against this insistent notion of authenticity that is associated with Indigenous objects in museums. Using parody directly calls this association into question and pokes fun at its influence in a museum setting. As mentioned briefly earlier, *Four Seasons* is Red Star’s response to a personal experience with seeing dioramas of Native people within the museum. While in graduate school at UCLA, Red Star experienced an incredible longing for home and knew that, as she describes it, “in some sick way” that she would be able to get a piece of home at the natural history museum in Los Angeles. However, once standing in front of the diorama

¹³¹ Christopher Hutchinson, “Postcolonial Thoughts: Wendy Red Star’s Native Spectacle and Satire,” *Creative Thresholds* (Jan 2016), accessed November 30, 2016, <https://creativethresholds.com/2016/01/28/postcolonial-thoughts-wendy-red-stars-native-spectacle-satire/>.

featuring the Crow tribe, she was struck by the fact that one of the mannequins was wearing a dress very similar to the one that she had sitting in her closet back at her dorm room. She also described the cold and distant feeling of the diorama, that the set up inherently made it seem as though Native people were gone and of the past. This association of Native Americans with the past was further emphasized by the fact that she had to walk through the dinosaur exhibition in order to reach the dioramas of the Native people.¹³² This experience laid the basis for her desire to critique the treatment of Native objects and people through parodic constructions of sets that mimicked the popular museum diorama displays.

Looking at the four photographs included in the *Four Seasons* series, we can clearly see the involvement of the trickster figure into their construction, or at the very least the use of the trickster narrative, specifically be analogous to how both Vizenor and DeLoria describe the use of humor with Native writing. The trickster figure seen in Native American literature, as previously discussed, is often seen as embodying seemingly contradictory characteristics within a single entity. Contradiction seems to be the foundation of the humor built up in the *Four Seasons* series through the use of parody. Two major contradictions are at play in the photographs: authenticity vs. artificiality and the modern vs. the traditional. The photographs seem to embody and carry all four of these characteristics at the same time, although on the surface these characteristics seem to be strongly opposing one another. These contradictions also draw

¹³² Portland Museum of Art, "Artist Talk: Wendy Red Star," March 24, 2011, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hKREHsEw35I>.

attention to the problems facing the Native community specifically in this case with regard to their representation in museums. Through the use of trickster discourse in visual form, Red Star is able to reveal that these labels and contradictions are arbitrary to an extent when considering the representation of Native peoples in museums. The use of parody is also better situated than surface humor in the trickster narrative as it often requires a more active and engaged audience, slowly revealing the constructed narrative of Nativeness, primarily by dismantling these indiscriminate juxtapositions of labels.

The first contradiction that Red Star questions in *Four Seasons* is that between the “authentic” and the “artificial.” Authenticity is a term deeply embedded within the discussion of Indigenous objects within the museum, so it seems only appropriate that it is one of these labels and opposing forces that Red Star addresses within *Four Seasons*. In terms of this photographic series, the “authentic” would typically be associated with Red Star’s own body and the traditional garments and accessories that she uses. However, Red Star’s dress itself can become an examination of the true arbitrary nature and complexities of the label of “authenticity.” Red Star in *Four Seasons* and much of her other work is often seen wearing her traditional red Crow elk-tooth dress.¹³³ The elk-tooth dress is highly symbolic of Crow culture and the teeth were traditionally seen as the symbol of wealth due to the fact that only two teeth could be harvested from a single elk.¹³⁴ It also could potentially suggest the status of a woman being well-provided for by

¹³³ Luella Brien, "Wendy Red Star on the Rise," *Native Peoples Magazine*, November 2014, accessed February 19, 2016, <http://www.nativepeoples.com/Native-Peoples/November-December-2014/Wendy-Red-Star-on-the-Rise/>.

¹³⁴ Brien, "Wendy Red Star on the Rise."

male relatives, who would have to be good hunters to acquire enough teeth to make a dress of this nature.¹³⁵ However, Red Star's version of the dress contains only plastic teeth.¹³⁶ Part of the reasoning for this is practical, as it has become increasingly difficult to acquire real elk-teeth due to the fact that the Crow were forced onto reservations and lost a good portion of their hunting grounds.¹³⁷ However, the use of plastic teeth can go beyond the practical reasoning, and play more with the idea of authentic versus artificial, as Native American artists have been forced to turn to artificial materials such as plastic to create what would be considered authentic garments. Through the use of the plastic teeth, the dress itself also becomes an interesting exemplification of the limitations of labels such as "authentic." Is this particular elk-tooth dress considered "authentic," even though it uses plastic teeth, especially with authenticity being so deeply rooted in economic value in the relationship between Native objects and the museum? Or does its authenticity derive from the fact that Native people made it, fashioning it after traditional garments, rather than through the use of "authentic" materials? In essence, who decides its authenticity? There may be no definitive answer to any of these questions, but Red Star's use of both elements of artificial and authentic can raise many important issues about the limitations of such labels and how the definition of "authentic" may not be so cut and dry. With regard to authenticity as played out in this series, Red Star stated that:

¹³⁵ Judy Ostrowitz, "The *Plains Indians* Exhibition: A Milestone for the Met," *The Met*, March 9, 2015, accessed March 12, 2016, <http://www.metmuseum.org/blogs/now-at-the-met/2015/plains-indians>.

¹³⁶ Ostrowitz, "The *Plains Indians* Exhibition."

¹³⁷ Portland Museum of Art, "Artist Talk: Wendy Red Star," March 24, 2011, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hKREHsEw35I>.

The *Four Seasons* series is a remark on everything being constructed and fake except me and my culture. This is the beauty of the series, the confusion of stereotypes, where the lines begin to blur from truth/reality.¹³⁸

This statement relates directly back to Gruber's imagining of the trickster figure. The trickster works at breaking down these stereotypes and expectations through the use of play as Red Star does here. Red Star embodies the trickster discourse through the use of contradictions and exposing unnecessary labels that reveal the highly constructed nature of reality itself.

On the other hand, Red Star also uses "artificial" elements that accentuate this exploration of the label of authenticity. The "artificial" elements of the photograph are, of course, more apparent in the highly constructed picture nature that Red Star creates. Each of the four photographs features painted mural backdrops of natural scenes, such as mountains and lakes.¹³⁹ Red Star seems to make a conscious effort to photograph the backgrounds and other elements in such a way as to make their artificiality evident upon closer inspection. From a distance, the photographs appear as the stereotypical scene of a Native American figure surrounded by natural elements. However, upon approaching the images, this illusion disintegrates and the true construction is revealed. Looking at the backdrops, for example, one can still see the creases and folds of the paper, as well as the glare of the camera flash reflected on the painted background, as seen in "Indian

¹³⁸ Saint Louis Art Museum, "New in 2014: *Four Seasons* by Wendy Red Star," *Saint Louis Art Museum*, December 22, 2014, accessed March 9, 2016, <http://www.slam.org/news/?p=1070>.

¹³⁹ Jen Graves, "Maybe Don't Wear a Warbonnet to the First-Ever All-Native Art Exhibit at Bumbershoot," *The Stranger*, August 20, 2014, accessed February 19, 2016, <http://www.thestranger.com/seattle/maybe-dont-wear-a-warbonnet-to-the-first-ever-all-native-art-exhibit-at-bumbershoot/Content?oid=20410649>.

Summer” (Figure 1.5). Also after examining *Spring* closely, one can even see the plastic grips on the deer’s and coyote’s back that prop the cardboard cutout ups, and the thin wire that gives the butterfly the illusion of floating in air (Figure 3.4). These small factors break any possible illusion of truly representing an “authentic” nature or creating an illusion of reality. Here, she again takes on the characteristics of the trickster by revealing the constructed nature of reality through her mimicking of dioramas, which were a highly popular exhibition method for Native objects in mainstream Euro-American museums. The use of artificial elements, such as the leaves, flowers, and animals, as well as the photomural backgrounds, demonstrate how the view of Native Americans as being contained within the past as seen in dioramas is actually “inauthentic.”¹⁴⁰ There often seems to be a quest for museums and Western traditions to find and label “authentic” Native art that has not been “contaminated” by Western influences, which in effect, reduces Native American arts to an “ethnographic” spectacle.¹⁴¹ Red Star is able to use this obvious artificiality in order to challenge these notions and establish the “inauthenticity” of the assumption that the idea of completion plays in terms of Native history.¹⁴² Through her questioning of stereotypes and use of photography as a medium, Red Star confronts the form of the “invented Indian,” in the same way as Vizenor suggested in his model. According to Vizenor, survivance is accomplished by revealing the constructed nature of these stereotypes, just as Red Star reveals the constructed and

¹⁴⁰ Ostrowitz, “The *Plains Indians* Exhibition.”

¹⁴¹ Fisher, “In Search of the “Inauthentic,” 45.

¹⁴² Ostrowitz, “The *Plains Indians* Exhibition.”

limiting notion of the “authentic” Native representation in *Four Seasons*. Photography in the way that Red Star employs it within this series helps to show how complicated the labels “authentic” and “true” have come to be, a fundamental function of parody and the trickster discourse.

The *Four Seasons* photographs also contend with the complex interplay between the modern and the traditional, again revealing the shortcomings of such labels. Often, it seems that these two are placed in conflict with one another as polar opposite. However, in *Four Seasons*, Red Star attempts to show how these two perceptions can actually coexist and how the understanding of each individually is important to analyzing the stakes of Native American visual representation. Red Star has said that she views herself as “a cultural archivist speaking sincerely about the experience of being a Crow Indian in contemporary society.”¹⁴³ She attributes the examination of this duality to her background of growing up on a reservation in Montana with her Crow father and Irish mother.¹⁴⁴ Because of this background, her work often explores the experience of “being from two worlds,” dealing with the relationship between modern and traditional aspects of Native life and culture, much like what one sees in Luna’s earlier work. By speaking to “both sides,” Red Star and many other Native artists force viewers to realize that Native

¹⁴³ Russ Crest, “Made with Color Presents: Wendy Red Star’s Native American Perspectives,” *Beautiful/Decay*, November 26, 2013, accessed March 5, 2016, <http://beautifuldecay.com/2013/11/26/made-color-presents-wendy-red-stars/>.

¹⁴⁴ Graves, “Maybe Don’t Wear a Warbonnet.”

culture is neither static nor consigned to the past.¹⁴⁵ Again, this slow dissolution of reality versus construction that occurs when a viewer is interacting with images not only speaks to issues of authenticity, but also the overlapping of modern and traditional elements of Native culture.¹⁴⁶ For example, looking at *Spring* from a distance may create the illusion of a picturesque lakeside scene featuring vibrant colors and a thoughtful composition, contributing to the aesthetically pleasing nature of the overall photograph (Figure 1.4). Yet, as one approaches the image, it begins to collapse. It becomes evident that this picturesque view is actually created by the use of modern, artificial elements such as the Astro-turf and fake cutouts of a deer and a coyote, which all do their part in dislodging the image away from the view that Native Americans traditionally have a deep connection with nature as means to separate them from the “modern” West. And yet again we see the assumption of the trickster discourse within these photographs. Red Star challenges this conventional view through her use of the modern, unnatural elements replacing the natural world, which all has deep implications with the notion of authenticity as well. The images and contradictions again function as elements of the trickster discourse by questioning and destroying the Western narrative. The conflation of the historical and the contemporary also has the potential to critique museum displays that often lump Native works from different time periods together without regard to

¹⁴⁵ Susan Kloman, “Questioning Good Intentions: The Photography of Hulleah Tsinhnahjinnie,” in *Dimensions Of Native America: The Contact Zone*, ed. by Jehanne Teilhet-Fisk and Robin Franklin Nigh, (Tallahassee: Florida State University, Museum of Fine Arts, 1998), 121.

¹⁴⁶ Brien, “Wendy Red Star on the Rise.”

context.¹⁴⁷ Red Star's photographs undermine this model of thinking where the modern and traditional can be combined without any context because Native American history is viewed as being unchanging, void of the sense of "progress" that is crucial to the Western understanding of the modern. Red Star's clothing is really the only element of the scene that would be labelled as traditional, but even the dress shows the complexity and fluidity between the two categories. The clothing and accessories that Red Star wears in these photographs are crafted by herself and her family based on traditional elk-tooth dresses.¹⁴⁸ This act in itself demonstrates the blurring between these two positions as it shows contemporary individuals interacting with tradition through the making of the dresses, as well as reworking traditional elements to fit within the modern context. In this way, Red Star's technique "addresses both continuity and changes in Native aesthetic."¹⁴⁹ When looking at this work, it becomes obvious that Red Star hopes to complicate the understanding of the relationship between the modern and the traditional, as well as show that Native American culture and history is a living entity, continuously evolving. These contradictions and interplay between different labels provide the basis of the humor and parody which Red Star employs as the fundamental driving force behind her critique of Western museums interactions' with Native peoples.

¹⁴⁷ Marissa Katz, "Review: Wendy Red Star in Portland Art Museum," *GoLocalPDX*, October 28, 2014, accessed March 2, 2016, <http://www.golocalpdx.com/arts/review-wendy-red-star-in-portland-art-museum>.

¹⁴⁸ Saint Louis Art Museum, "*Four Seasons* by Wendy Red Star."

¹⁴⁹ Saint Louis Art Museum, "*Four Seasons* by Wendy Red Star."

Photography also seems to be the appropriate medium for exploring these complex notions of authenticity and the juxtaposition between the modern and the traditional. Photography serves as an effective tool of the trickster discourse in the visual arts. As a medium, photography has often been associated with relaying the truth; however, new approaches can come to confront the suppositions about photography and its relationship to knowledge, power, and the conception of it simply documenting reality.¹⁵⁰ Photography has often been viewed as a modern medium on the outside of the traditional modes of Native American art making.¹⁵¹ However, photography has had a long history within the Native community and as a medium, has shaped Native American representation both in the past and present. Photography became closely associated with anthropology in the nineteenth century, which became a means to document and record colonial subjects, such as Native Americans, for classification and judgment.¹⁵² The act of labeling and naming that is often associated with this use of photography has deep roots in the colonial project.¹⁵³ Photography in the past was often used to create this fixed identity for Native Americans, by outsiders.¹⁵⁴ Sara Blokland and Asmara Pelupessy write in the introduction to *Unfixed: Photography and Postcolonial Perspectives in Contemporary Art*: "...we focus in on photography as it becomes detached from the

¹⁵⁰ Sara Blokland and Asmara Pelupessy, *Unfixed: Photography and Postcolonial Perspectives in Contemporary Art* (Heijningen: JAPSAM Books, 2012), 7.

¹⁵¹ Harlan, "As in Her Vision," 123.

¹⁵² Blokland and Pelupessy, *Unfixed*, 6.

¹⁵³ Kloman, "Questioning Good Intentions," 120.

¹⁵⁴ Kloman, "Questioning Good Intentions," 120.

secure territory of accepted, linear histories, author-subject hierarchy and two-dimensional display and perception.”¹⁵⁵ Many contemporary Native American photographers, such as Wendy Red Star, have come to use photography as medium to break out of the fixed position of a strictly linear tradition of history and “progress.” This falls directly in line with the function of the trickster narrative and character. Red Star also overturns the author-subject hierarchy due to the fact that she functions as both as discussed earlier in her use of self-representation. By breaking the mold that photography shows the truth about the past, the

photograph ceases to be a univocal, flat, and uncontestable indexical trace of what was, and becomes instead a complexly textured artifact... inviting the viewer to assume many possible different standpoints-both spatial and temporal- in respect to it.¹⁵⁶

This understanding of the photograph seems more in line with the way in which Red Star uses photography, in terms of highlighting the limitations of borders such as that between the labels of traditional and modern. Contemporary Native artists using photography as a medium helps to break down the stereotypical image that photography was “modern” and therefore kept out of “authentic” and “traditional” Native American art practices.

Photography can in many ways be a mediator between the traditional and the modern aspects of Native American culture.

The lens of survivance also helps to suggest a way in which photography can be analyzed outside of Western frameworks. Christopher Pinney in his introduction to

¹⁵⁵ Blokland and Pelulessy, *Unfixed*, 6.

¹⁵⁶ Christopher Pinney, “Introduction,” in *Photography's Other Histories*, ed. by Christopher Pinney and Nicolas Peterson, (London: Duke University Press, 2003), 5.

Photography's Other Histories, briefly mentions that “under the influence of theorists such as [Susan] Sontag and John Tagg, much writing on photography has- in its concern with the ideological effects of picture *taking*- lost sight of the dialogic space that frequently emerges during the process of picture *making*.”¹⁵⁷ Native American theories about and uses of photography come to revolve much more around a sense of making and interaction with the photographic material rather than viewing it as an act of domination and a power move. Under Western theorists, such as Sontag and Tagg, the camera becomes a weapon, a symbol of domination as is evidenced through the word “taking.”¹⁵⁸ However, Pinney suggests that some contemporary Native photographers focus on the process of “making,” which like Vizenor’s construction suggests a more active role of agency. Photography in this model becomes focused on the process of creation, rather than a structure of power, lending itself well to the project of survivance. Lastly, the use of photography by Native American artists also forces the viewer to redefine their conceptions of Native American art production as photography is not within the realm of the “traditional,” “marketable” Native art.¹⁵⁹ Stereotypical Native Americans arts and crafts have been a large part of consumer culture and it seems that often times basket-weaving and pottery are the central mediums of “authentic” Native art.¹⁶⁰ However, photography does not fit as neatly within the marketable structure, as it eliminates the

¹⁵⁷ Pinney, “Introduction,” 14.

¹⁵⁸ Susan Sontag, *On Photography*, (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1977), 14.

¹⁵⁹ Kloman, “Questioning Good Intentions,” 120.

¹⁶⁰ Jennifer McLerran, *A New Deal for Native Art: Indian Arts and Federal Policy, 1933-1943*, (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 2009), 65.

focus on the “hand-madeness” that is often associated Native American art. Photography in many ways has played an important role in Native American art creation and the understanding of visual representations of Native subjects. Photography as a medium used by Native American artists can become an opportunity to show how the modern and traditional do necessarily have to exist separately and can be understood in terms of one another. One could even argue that Red Star’s choice of color photography disrupts the Euro-American construction of Native people through this medium even more. Thinking back to earlier, more ethnographic oriented images of Native people, the photographs were always black and white or sepia, an element that contributes to this notion of Indigenous people being resigned to the past. Instead, Red Star chooses to use bright and vibrant colors, which is an aspect of Indigenous culture that is often ignored or underplayed.¹⁶¹ Color photography also, in a sense, modernizes the images.

Utilizing these seemingly irreconcilable contradictions and encouraging the involvement of the viewer, Red Star’s *Four Seasons* series aligns with the trickster narrative as described by Gruber, Vizenor, and DeLoria in relation to Native writing. In essence, *Four Seasons* is able to become a visual example of the trickster discourse at play and works in a similar way to its function within writing: disrupting the established institutions and conventions. The juxtaposition and exploration of these different labels in fact reveals at the basis level the arbitrary nature of labelling things, particularly in regard to Native objects and culture. The elements of parody within this work break down the

¹⁶¹ Dundas, “Wendy Red Star Totally Conquers the Wild Frontier.”

illusion of a firm reality, revealing the true highly constructed nature, especially when thinking about these issues within the context of how museums present identity. The photographs, like the trickster discourse that runs throughout contemporary Native writing, also require a participant viewer, as it is necessary to have some sense of the relationship of Indigenous objects with museums in order to unpack the parodic humor that Red Star uses in this series. These false narratives or realities that are set up in these parodic environments require the viewer to unravel the joke, rather than it being blatantly obvious on the surface, as would be more evident in a series like *White Squaw*.¹⁶² The trickster also appears as Red Star not only tries to question these stereotypical depictions of Native peoples, but also acts a preserver. This is particularly evident in the exploration of the contrasting conceptions of the modern vs. the traditional and the very blurring of these two seemingly contradictory labels within the Western construction. However, Red Star in *Four Seasons* shows that these labels can actually work side by side, a statement especially crucial in collapsing the museum's construction of Native people in displays as being consigned to the past, such as dioramas. In a way by exploring these contradictions between modernity and tradition, Red Star demonstrates that these two categories do not have to be mutually exclusive, as well as the fact that Native culture has continued to grow and evolve, rather than being confined to the static museum space.

The use of this trickster dialogue, which, in the case of Wendy Red Star's *Four Seasons*, becomes evident through parody, seems to be a potentially more successful way

¹⁶² Viv Golding and Wayne Modest, ed. *Museums and Communities: Collectors, Collections, and Collaboration* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2013), 209.

to address some exceptionally complicated and sensitive issues regarding her experience as Native person than the use of blatant surface level humor. Humor can, of course, be a delicate thing to handle as it can potentially create a sense of an in-group versus an out-group. However, humor also has the ability to open the conversation about these delicate topics to an audience that might not normally be confronted with these issues on a daily basis. So while humor at times could potentially be viewed as divisive, it can also be unifying, tying back to Hutcheon's placement of parody as neither being solely a negative or positive re-interpretation of the original text. This is important regarding the use of parody within *Four Seasons* as Red Star views humor as being a gateway to encourage people to investigate issues such as that of colonization or the role of identity in Western institutions.¹⁶³ In one interview, Red Star directly reflects this stating:

I'm dealing with really heavy topics pertaining to Crow and Native culture and the colonization of people. You can be very heavy handed about it, but people don't want to be around that. You can find an in by using humor. Humor or wit can be very healing, by getting viewers to crack a smile or laugh I can get them in, that way they can investigate my work further.¹⁶⁴

The use of humor to reach audiences that might be considered to be in the "out-group" reveals the exceptionally delicate balance in the use of parody. Humor can be used to negotiate these intercultural relationships between Native communities and Euro-Americans, opening these issues up to a Non-Native audience. As Lucy Lippard writes in her discussion of Native American artists' self-portraiture,

¹⁶³ Golding and Modest, *Museums and Communities*, 199.

¹⁶⁴ Brien, "Wendy Red Star on the Rise."

Jokes can serve as decoy, or cover-up. Humor is a good bridge to other cultures if- and it's a big if- it is understood by those on the other side of the canvas. Sardonic parody has long been recognized by all genders as a prime way to get their message across, or paradoxically, the best way to be serious, the way clowns are often the bearers of significant messages in Pueblo ceremonials. "Serious Indian art," on the other hand, is vulnerable to manipulation by an adoring ignorant non-Indian audience.¹⁶⁵

Lippard's emphasis here is an important one. The essence of humor, parody specifically in this case, being effective relies on both sides of the equation, the artist and the viewer, understanding the "joke." Because with the use of parody there is an inherent subtext within the image, it makes the image less likely to be manipulated, as Lippard sees it, to fit within the context of authenticity in regards to how Western institution and audiences can handle Indigenous objects. One can see the manipulation of what Lippard labels as "serious Indian art" when discussing the notions of authenticity in a museum setting.¹⁶⁶ This "serious" art is seemingly more susceptible to being molded to fit in with the Western construction of Native art because of this desire to tie it to authenticity, something that is lacking with parodic or satirical works of art as the critique of such a practice is essentially built in to the fabric of the piece. This subtext of the image is exactly what makes parody an effective means of institutional critique as seen in Red Star's *Four Seasons*.

Red Star's use of humor also fits within Gerald Vizenor's model of survivance, as much of Vizenor's definition centers on the ability to "play" with dominant structures.

¹⁶⁵ Lucy Lippard, "Differing Difference" in *About Face: Self-Portraits by Native American, First Nations, and Inuit Artists*. Zena Pearlstone and Allan J. Ryan, eds. (Santa Fe: The Wheelwright Museum of the American Indian, 2006), 72.

¹⁶⁶ Lippard, "Differing Differences," 72.

The trickster figure again emerges in Vizenor's conception of survivance as not only a challenger of norms, but also a preserver. This is an important dynamic as not only does *Four Seasons* chip away at these established sets of norms with regard to the treatment of Native objects in the museum, but Red Star's constructions also emphasize the sense of Native culture as still being a living and flourishing culture, especially looking for example at her playing with the understandings of modern and traditional elements. It is through this power of "play" and "simulation" that Native writers and artists are able to reveal the invention of the "Indian," highlighting the important implications that this created identity has on the Native community.¹⁶⁷ DeLoria best sums up how humor is a crucial element in Native survivance as he concludes his essay on humor declaring: "When a people can laugh at themselves and laugh at others and hold all aspects of life together without letting anybody drive them to extremes, then it seems to me that that people can survive."¹⁶⁸

Humor, specifically parody, can be used to call for a politically revolutionary stance in that it disrupts the status quo that maintains hierarchies of privilege, serving as a critical way to challenge authority. It seems as though this very purpose can directly connect the implementation of parody within Native American artworks to the function of the trickster narrative. As Eva Gruber states,

Native artists have become particularly skilled at re-presenting cultural stereotypes in humorous and ironic fashion to reveal not only their ideological underpinnings but also the way in which historical misconceptions have hindered

¹⁶⁷ Vizenor, *Native Presence*, 61.

¹⁶⁸ DeLoria, "Indian Humor," 53.

cross-cultural understanding and interaction. Needless to say, there is also great satisfaction to be derived from merely portraying the ironies of everyday life and revealing in pure play. This is no less trickster's agenda.¹⁶⁹

Parody serves as crucial tool in undermining the established order of arbitrary labelling within the museum context and revealing the highly constructed nature of reality itself. This is what makes parody such an effective use of humor in institutional critique of museums' treatments of Native cultures. Parody in regards to Native American art can prove to be an effective manner to open up crucial conversations about identity and the role that it plays within the context of the museum.

¹⁶⁹ Gruber, *Humor in Contemporary Native American Literature*, 11.

Conclusion

It is evident that the framework of the mainstream Western museum and other Western institutions is problematic with regard to the understanding of Native identity. Ideas of authenticity often lie at the root of these issues, as authenticity, as understood by a Western audience, is very much a construction that has been inflicted upon Native people and their art. Applying labels such as authentic to Native artists' work has been proven to be arbitrary by the work of artists like Durham, Luna, and Red Star. Through the use of the trickster critique in their art, these artists have been able to undermine and challenge the very structure of the museum from within, critically calling for the re-visioning on the relationship of the museum to Indigenous art objects. It is necessary that these interventions continue to happen within the mainstream Western museum itself as opposed to in alternative space. The trickster operates best when directly entrenched in the structure they are trying to upturn and change, essentially acting as a form of parody that reveals the nature of its original source material. And so the assertion of Native voices into the art world seems to come in a two-pronged state. On the one hand, one can see the steady growth of tribal and ethnic museums within recent years, promoting and celebrating specific cultures and giving a space to those who have been commonly left outside of the mainstream construction. And on the other hand, there are artists like Durham, Luna, and Red Star fighting for Native voices to be heard within the institution that they are so often excluded from. As Iain Chambers states in the introduction to *The Postcolonial Museum*:

What is at stake here is not a pacific integration of the missing chapters of the forgotten, excluded and subaltern voices into inherited accounts, but rather a

deconstruction and rewriting of those histories through the irrepressible presence of these other narrations... Avoiding the risk of reducing art to an expedience for inclusive and moribund accounts of the transcultural present, postcolonial aesthetics invites us to consider art as the possibility through which our connection with otherness... is problematized and activated, in unexpected and unpredictable ways.¹⁷⁰

The invocations of the trickster by the contemporary Native artists examined within this paper contribute significantly to this attempt to deconstruct and rebuild the Western museum. The trickster allows Native artists to point out the absurdities in the structure of the museum and encourage change. The trickster activates the viewer's interaction with these problems, which is crucial when the audience is non-Native. In these works, the trickster threatens the framework of the mainstream Western museum and points the finger at those in charge, making the museum take responsibility for their past and promise change for the future.

¹⁷⁰ Iaian Chambers, Alessandra De Angelis, Celeste Ianniciello, Mariangela Orabona, and Michaela Quadraro, *The postcolonial museum: the arts of memory and the pressures of history* (London: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2016), 3.

Appendix A



Figure 1.1 Fred Wilson, *Mining the Museum*, 1992-93, installation, Maryland Historical Society.



Figure 1.2 Wendy Red Star, *Fall* from the series *Four Seasons*, 2006, Archival pigment print on Museo silver rag mounted on Dibond, 35.5 by 37 inches, Nerman Museum of Contemporary Art.



Figure 1.3 Wendy Red Star, *Winter* from the series *Four Seasons*, 2006, Archival pigment print on Museo silver rag mounted on Dibond, 35.5 by 37 inches, Nerman Museum of Contemporary Art.



Figure 1.4 Wendy Red Star, *Spring* from the series *Four Seasons*, 2006, Archival pigment print on Museo silver rag mounted on Dibond, 35.5 by 37 inches, Nerman Museum of Contemporary Art.



Figure 1.5 Wendy Red Star, *Indian Summer* from the series *Four Seasons*, 2006, Archival pigment print on Museo silver rag mounted on Dibond, 35.5 by 37 inches, Nerman Museum of Contemporary Art.



Figure 1.6 Jimmie Durham, *The Real Indian Family* from *On Loan from the Museum of the American Indian*, mixed media, variable dimensions, 1985, Collection Roger Pailhas.



Figure 1.7 Jimmie Durham, *Pocahontas' Underwear* from *On Loan from the Museum of the American Indian*, 1985, feathers, beads, fabric, fasteners, 31 x 25 cm, Private Collection.



Figure 1.8 James Luna, *Artifact Piece*, 1986, performance/installation, various dimensions, San Diego Museum of Man.



Figure 1.9 James Luna, *Half Indian/ Half Mexican*, 1991, inkjet print, 30 1/16 in x 72 3/16 in, Denver Art Museum.



Figure 1.10 Wendy Red Star, *Peelatchiwaaxpáash Medicine Crow (Raven) & the 1880 Crow Peace Delegations*, 2014, mixed media, various dimensions, Portland Art Museum.



Figure 1.11 Wendy Red Star, *Peelatchiwaaxpaash Medicine Crow (Raven) & the 1880 Crow Peace Delegations*, 2014, Artist-manipulated digitally reproduced photographs by C.M. (Charles Milton) Bell, various dimensions, Portland Art Museum.



Figure 3.1 Wendy Red Star, *Crow Clowns*, 2014.

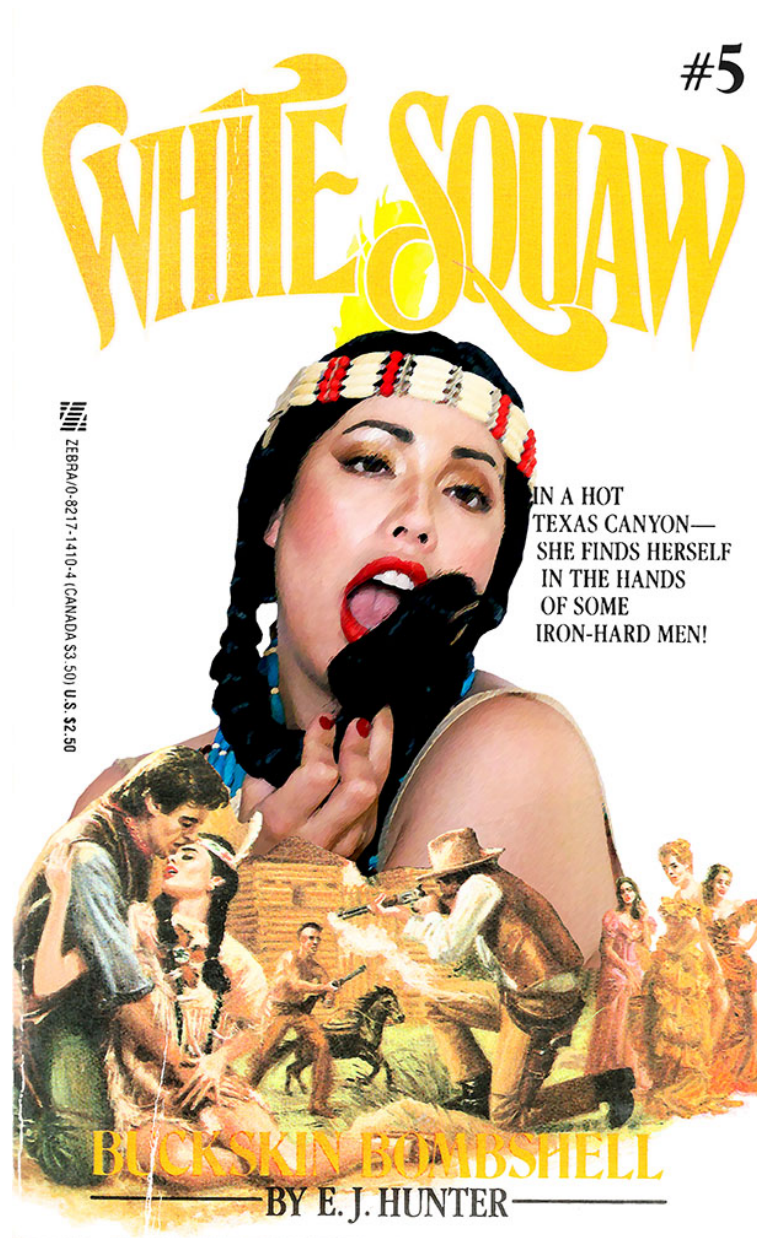


Figure 3.2 Wendy Red Star, #5 from the series *White Squaw*, 2014.

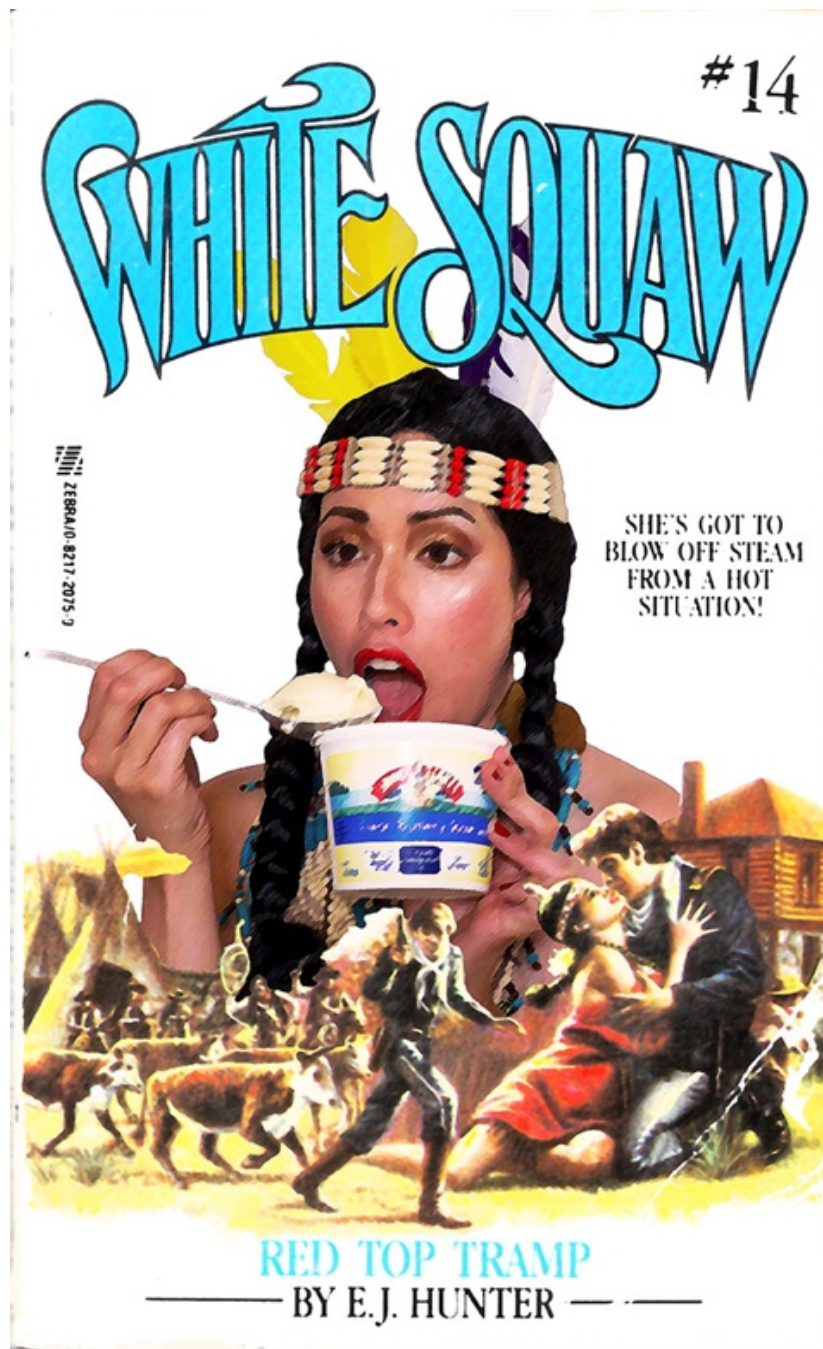


Figure 3.3 Wendy Red Star, #14 from the series *White Squaw*, 2014.



Figure 3.4 Wendy Red Star, Close up of *Spring* from *Four Seasons*, 2006, Archival pigment print on Museo silver rag mounted on Dibond, 35.5 by 37 inches, Nerman Museum of Contemporary Art.

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