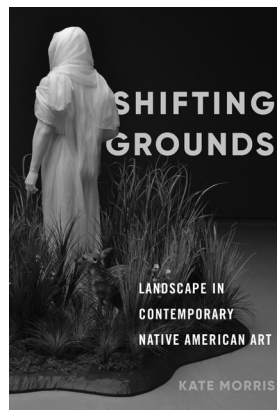
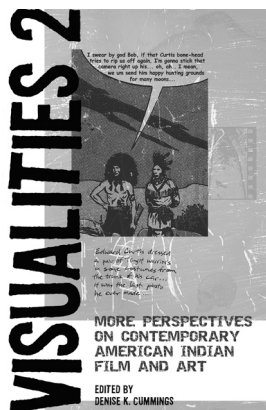
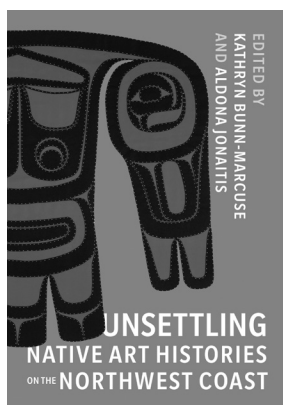


Review Essay

Self-Determination, Categorization, and the Unsettling of Indigenous Visual Studies

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UNSETTLING NATIVE ART HISTORIES ON THE NORTHWEST COAST. Edited by Kathryn Bunn-Marcuse and Aldona Jonaitis. University of Washington Press. 2022.

VISUALITIES 2: More Perspectives on Contemporary American Indian Film and Art. Edited by Denise K. Cummings. Michigan State University Press. 2019.

KNOWING NATIVE ARTS. By Nancy Marie Mithlo. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press. 2020.

SHIFTING GROUNDS: Landscape in Contemporary Native American Art. By Kate Morris. University of Washington Press. 2019.

PICTURING WORLDS: Visuality and Visual Sovereignty in Contemporary Anishnaabe Literature. By David Stirrup. Michigan State University Press. 2020.

Interest in and studies of Indigenous visualities and visual cultures are not new. From anthropological texts claiming a particular understanding of Indigenous visual cultures and representations, to photography projects documenting the “vanishing race” (the most famous being that of Edward Curtis), to contemporary representations of Indigenous people in film, there has been a continued interest in the visualities of indigeneity. Only relatively recently, however, have scholars begun to consider visibility from the perspective of Indigenous communities themselves—their experiences, ontologies, cosmologies, etc. Of course, the bulk of this work is being led by Indigenous scholars whose knowledge and lived experience is helping to open scholarly understandings of Indigenous visual cultures away from these colonial formulations toward a self-determined engagement with visibility evident in particular Indigenous and communal contexts.

It is within this context that scholars are beginning to ask questions about how we approach Indigenous visual cultures, how we study Indigenous visualities, and how Indigenous visual artists are included or excluded from certain spaces like museums and galleries. How do Indigenous artists get work on display when sources of funding and curation privilege a particular approach to visual artwork that may not be immediately compatible with Indigenous approaches? How do we understand Indigenous visual cultures without the overdetermination of colonialism that so often defines parameters for understanding? How can we begin to complicate historical understandings of visibility in a way that breaks down binaries, categorizations, and distinctions, which help to support colonial institutions and approaches?

Nearly all these questions, along with many others, are taken up in Nancy Mithlo’s (Chiricahua Apache) *Knowing Native Arts*. Through art, Mithlo considers larger questions about institutional and governmental structures that continue to ignore and oppress Indigenous communities. As Mithlo writes of her book,

"Knowing Native Arts identifies and debates the central frames of Native arts scholarship, including the institution of the museum and the academy, forms of Indigenous aesthetic analysis, the receptive scope of Native arts in new global and digital realms, and models of exhibition practices in light of current American Indian curatorial mandates" (4). Mithlo's "musings," as she calls this collection of essays, are indispensable in considering the contemporary art world that many Native artists are navigating.

The breadth of topics and considerations Mithlo takes up in a relatively short book is nothing less than incredible. Her opening essay builds on the scholarship of Nancy J. Parezo, considering the complexities of Native Arts and art scholarship today through the areas of research and publication, funding, self-determination, and globalization. She argues for more individuals from disenfranchised communities in leadership roles in museums, a clearer understanding and consideration of historical arguments in art history scholarship, and an increase in Native arts research at national and international Native Studies organizational conferences like the Native American Indigenous Studies Association (NAISA) annual conference.

While Mithlo's arguments continually return to and reconsider the current state of Native arts practice and scholarship, she offers some nuanced considerations of art itself as it operates in particular social, political, and communal contexts. Throughout the book, Mithlo remains demonstrably interested in what I see as three central strands in Native visual cultural studies today: self-determination, the fallible categorizations of orality/visuality/writing, and the colonized histories of art into which scholars often try to "fit" Native artwork. Throughout this review essay, I will trace these concepts throughout five new books from various disciplines in the academy to consider the current state of Indigenous visual studies.

Before moving on, it is important to note the academic positionality of both Native American and Indigenous Studies and Visual Studies as distinct, yet intertwined, academic fields. Central to both of these fields are their distinct existences in the liminal spaces of disciplinary categorization, especially in North American institutions. While Native American and Indigenous Studies departments are growing and becoming more common, the work done in those departments is necessarily and inherently interdisciplinary given the ties to various other departmental areas of study including political science, legal studies, English, writing and rhetoric, visual studies, and art or art history, among many others. Visual Studies, especially in a contemporary world of digital production, exists in various departments including art and art history, visual or graphic design, English, writing and rhetoric, and many others. Thus, as we approach an understanding of what these authors call Indigenous visual culture, Indigenous visual studies, or Indigenous visualities, we are necessarily colliding the often-cordoned worlds of study that many of us are so comfortable residing within at U.S.-based institutions. While the academy is interested in the benefits

of interdisciplinary, it certainly is not built around such an approach; these fields undercut those expectations and connect many of these spheres of thought in an effort to understand the complexity of Indigenous lives, creations, and communities.

Self-Determination and Visual Sovereignty

The importance of self-determination for Native artists over their own visual works, what some scholars call visual sovereignty, is central to thinking about Indigenous visual studies, but Mithlo's specific approach complicates the larger relation of aesthetics and politics in some fruitful ways. For instance, in her consideration of the politics of Native art she claims, "the politicized nature of Native arts is more than a direct aim at colonization" (105). Referencing Cayuga artist Tammy Rahr, Mithlo explains that political responses should not be predetermined by a colonial context and that "Indigenous political perspective exceeds the political designations allowed under state control alone" (107). Native arts exist in both temporal and social relations beyond those determined or affected by colonialism; to consistently overdetermine their meaning infringes upon the self-determined nature of Indigenous communities apart from their relations with settler nations.

Furthermore, the relationality between Indigenous visualities and settler ones are not always directly opposed, as Michelle H. Raheja explains in her *Reservation Reelism* with the concept of visual sovereignty. Likening visual sovereignty to the Haudenosaunee Tow Row Wampum Belt Treaty, Raheja defines it as "a visual manifestation of their inherent right to retain their geographic, cultural, political, linguistic, and economic sovereignty" (Raheja 2010, 199). What is central to Raheja's understanding of visual sovereignty is how it creates space built on Indigenous traditions and community representations while also drawing on conventions of non-Native visual practices as well. Writing specifically about film, Raheja notes, "visual sovereignty recognizes the complexities of creating media for multiple audiences, critiquing filmic representations of native Americans, at the same time that it participates in some of the conventions that have produced these representations" (200). To simply read Indigenous visual culture and settler visual cultures as existing in binary and oppositional relations is to ignore the history of influence Indigenous peoples and settlers had on one another.

This strand of visual sovereignty is most clear in Kate Morris's *Shifting Grounds: Landscape in Contemporary Native American Art*. Central to Morris's argument is that the landscape, rather than disappearing from Native artistic practices, has in fact evolved to become a source of communal reclamation over space and political resistance to dispossession. Whether it is in the diptychs of Kay WalkingStick (Cherokee), which mix abstraction with a more realist form of representation, or Kent Monkman's (Fisher River Band Cree) tongue-in-cheek deconstructions of idealism, especially moral idealism, landscape becomes a central practice in contemporary Native arts. For Morris, the ways that Native

artists take up landscapes offers “an assertion of Indigenous presence, a transmission of place-based knowledge, a depiction of *landbase*” (11). She continues, “the desire of Indigenous artists to express and strengthen their connection to the land—without reproducing the tropes or ideologies of the European landscape tradition—has been a motivating factor in the development of Indigenous art in the postmodern period” (29). While eighteenth- and nineteenth-century European and American artists used the landscape to mark land, especially the American West, as relatively devoid of inhabitants and lush with materials for consumption, Native artists mark the land as something tied to their very essence and the being of their communities.

Tied to Morris’s central arguments about the sovereignty of visualities in landscapes are the ways in which Native artists utilize motifs from landscapes in new ways to continually create relationships even between abstraction and the land. Morris’s argument is focused on the use of the horizontal line, primarily in works by George Morrison and James Lavadour. She argues that the continued use of the horizontal line effortlessly “transforms an abstract image into a landscape because it orients the viewer in space” (77). Contemporary approaches that connect abstraction with the land are often concerned with notions of perspective; rather than the modern approaches to landscape that often rely on aerial views downward and give a sense of power to the viewer, postmodern landscapes, whether abstract or not, focus on the horizontal line as a viewer would see the horizon at ground level.

The final two chapters of *Shifting Grounds* extends the importance of visual sovereignty as it relates to land through Morris’s explorations of a focus on site-specific works and relationships between the land and the body in various artworks. As Morris writes, she is interested in “exploring the ways that Indigenous artists have employed site-specific works to literally ground themselves and their viewers in the particulars of place” (81). She examines works like Alan Michaelson’s (Mohawk) *Third Bank of the River* and Bob Haozous’s (Chiricahua Apache) *Cultural Crossroads of the Americas* to consider how place becomes a central thematic in understanding relationships between communities, individuals, and the land and the body for Indigenous artists. She takes up this last point in the final chapter, where she argues that there is an implied association between the canvas and the afflicted body, most obviously in Kay WalkingStick’s later works.

In a final turn, Morris expertly examines the work of Kent Monkman, and specifically the figure of Miss Chief, to coalesce some of the major points of her book. Morris argues that Miss Chief’s “very existence in the landscape disrupts the rhetoric of settler colonialism” by consistently contradicting the common stereotypes of Indigenous people (131). The ways Monkman depicts Miss Chief as an embodied contradiction to settler colonialism also disrupts the stories often told about land in the era of Manifest Destiny, including the narrative that the land was empty or being “misused” by Indigenous communities. The centering

of the landscape in Monkman's paintings, according to Morris, is not itself a disruption of the colonial narrative; rather, it is the way that Indigenous bodies are centered in that landscape that shifts our understandings of place and land in the larger constellation of relations. Thus, Morris leaves us to consider how contemporary Native artists align land, bodies, and relationality in complex webs of representation in visual realms that consistently reorient, or shift, the grounds of visual cultural studies more broadly.

The use of visual sovereignty to rethink the relationship between Indigenous communities and settler ones is central to the contemporary moves of visual studies. This approach and reorientation also courses throughout the essays in *Visualities 2: More Perspectives on Contemporary American Indian Film and Art* (Cummings 2019). Essays range from Chanette Romero's examination of *The Spirit of Annie Mae* and the sexism and violence within the American Indian Movement that often gets ignored or glossed over to Penelope Myrtle Kelsey's (Seneca) comparison of the genocide of Native communities to the decimation of the buffalo population on the American plains. Overall, the collection takes up questions of representing issues of community, trauma, and intracommunal violence in a way that keeps from discounting the important work of activists while also furthering communal-led representations of Indigenous peoples in popular and public spaces.

Throughout *Visualities 2* there is a continual return to the specific moves of Indigenous artists to recreate, reclaim, or "indigenize" various facets of visual culture. In Jennifer Gautier's essay, she argues that Australian Aboriginal filmmaker Rachel Perkins "Indigenizes popular Hollywood genres to undertake political interventions" (128). By analyzing Perkins's use of a variety of genres—melodrama, musical, Western, comedy, romance, road film—Gautier contends that Perkins's films "speak back to national narratives, calling into question the official history of Australia and of Australian national cinema" (128). Similarly, Laura E. Smith examines the "indigenization" of settler monuments in Canada, especially through the use of moccasins created and added by DJ Ehren "Bear Witness" Thomas (Cayuga Six Nations). These reclamations of various Indigenous figures in Canadian monuments recontextualizes Indigeneity away from stereotypes and towards "Native beings as complex and multilayered" peoples and communities (195).

Of course, the issue with "indigenizing" genres and media remains; indigenizing something implicitly marks the move as starting from a non-Indigenous, Western, or colonial standpoint. It is reminiscent of calls for recognition that are heavily critiqued by Dene scholar Glen Sean Coulthard. There are clearly benefits for remaking genres or media that are already codified in common understanding through Western ideals of epistemologies. Yet, there are scholars that might argue the need for centering the Indigenous-defined genres and media that, while affected by colonialism, can and do exist without being always overdetermined by it. We see this work in Lee Schweninger's and Molly McGlennen's essays in *Visualities 2*.

Schweninger is interested in what he calls “an Indigenous particularity,” which he defines as an “intrinsic linking of politics and aesthetics” (162). He examines the notion of a “national cinema” to examine the challenge Indigenous film poses for this popular narrative. For Schweninger, importantly, a central challenge lies in the literal and figurative border crossings common in and surrounding Indigenous film in maintaining relations with the land; the centrality of borders, and thus a Western definition of the nation, is not a central concern to the aesthetics or politics of Indigenous film. Similarly, McGlennen (Anishinaabe) examines Inuit art cooperatives in order to show how Inuit artists resist by infiltrating “institutionally constructed logics regarding Indigenous peoples and their creative works,” logics that “perpetuate various settler colonial enterprises in the broader art world” (219). It is through what many of these scholars call visual sovereignty that Indigenous artists push against colonial approaches to art while also existing beyond the spaces of understanding constantly defined by colonialism. Attention to these moves in Indigenous art has also brought attention to the often problematic and nearly invariably limiting categories and dichotomies used to understand spheres of practice or knowledge making.

Binaries and Categories are Colonial Tools

The problem of categories and binaries courses through much of Mithlo’s *Knowing Native Arts*. For instance, she considers the contemporary turn to the “post-Indian,” following in the steps of Gerald Vizenor, but argues that the term has become rife with connotational issues. She writes, “A post-Indian platform may sound liberatory, but this stance actually reifies the power of a colonial mindset by allowing the audience to maintain a status quo narrow interpretative field while jeopardizing the legal status that sovereign nationhood provides” (Mithlo 2020, 122). In other words, contemporary moves to mobilize the concept of the “post-Indian” have been usurped by the categorizations of settler colonialism. Beyond the identity of the “Indian,” in a settler colonial society, there is no tie to tribal community and therefore no connection to the sovereign nation. An attempt to move away from the stereotypical categorizations of the “Indian,” discourse surrounding “post-Indian” has been redirected in a similarly harmful way.

Mithlo further considers the way these stereotypes coalesce in photographic aesthetic practices as a way to visually mark Indigenous bodies as “Indian,” with all the attendant diminutions included, and as a way to visually resist categorization and binary thinking. Mithlo examines nineteenth-century photography and the popular use of the contrast picture—a photo seemingly depicting a before and after in regard to the civilizing project of Native communities—primarily to show the ways Indigenous photographers pushed against these binaries to deconstruct settler colonial understandings of Native people. Writing about Kiowa photographer Horace Poolaw, Mithlo contends, “Poolaw has made available evidence that Native peoples do not live in cleanly demarcated worlds of tradition and modernity but occupy the same space and time as the rest of America” (144). However, even as Mithlo shows the ways that

Native photographers undercut these problematic categorizations, she also notes how the project of photography and cataloguing life can be imbricated in the colonial project because of the problem of representation. In this section, she leaves the reader with more questions than answers as she is still struggling through these issues herself, but they offer an imperative step into thinking about the inherent problems of categories in aesthetic practice that we can see elsewhere in contemporary Indigenous visual culture.

Perhaps nowhere is the discussion of binaries and categories clearer than in David Stirrup's *Picturing Worlds: Visuality and Visual Sovereignty in Contemporary Anishinaabe Literature* (2020). From the title, it is clear how Stirrup's project works to disrupt the categorizations of the oral, textual, and visual, following on Indigenous studies scholars like Lisa Brooks, Dean Rader, and Birgit Brander Rasmussen, among others. Stirrup argues that the literary works in his study "blur the category distinctions between oral, visual, and written traditions, actively unsettling the binary within Native literature scholarship into which the oral and written have commonly been inserted" (2). The common distinctions of these categories are themselves a form of oppression and subjugation; they have remained a backbone for colonial epistemes that mark Indigenous peoples as ahistorical, backward, or savage as compared with the settler's own history, progression, and civilization. Stirrup continues, "The singular fact of the prioritizing of orality as a singular mode of expressive life simultaneously serves to emphasize the fact of nonliteracy. It services, in other words, the imperialistic binary that has conventionally maintained notions that Native peoples had no literature" (24). The correlations between the issues of categorization that Stirrup introduces with the turn toward visual sovereignty is clear. Throughout his book, Stirrup highlights the literatures of Anishinaabe writers and considers how their works complicate these distinctions and, therefore, complicate the imperial project itself.

Early in the book, Stirrup examines the work of George Copway and Jane Johnston Schoolcraft. Copway argues, in the 1850s, that the graphic tradition "is writing that precedes European contact and is commensurate with the act of writing that constitutes his *Traditional History*" (Stirrup 2020, 42). Both Copway and Schoolcraft work the resistance of colonial epistemologies into their art by reconsidering the relationship between the visual and the alphabetic and highlighting the ways the landscape carries a particular knowledge. As Stirrup turns to more contemporary literary works, he shows the ways in which these same attitudes of Copway and Schoolcraft have continued into the era of New Media. Examining writers like Gerald Vizenor, Kimberly Blaeser, Gordon Henry, Louise Erdrich, and Heid Erdrich, among many others, Stirrup offers a deep and intricately nuanced consideration of Anishinaabe literary practice that reaches beyond the confines we often place around the notion of the "literary."

In his examination of Heid Erdrich's "Pre-Occupied" Stirrup focuses on Vizenor's concept of transmotion, which Vizenor in *Fugitive Poses* has described as "personal, reciprocal, the source of survivable, but not territorial" and "an ethical

presence of nature, native stories, and natural reason" (Vizenor 1998, 182–83). For Stirrup, transmotion is "the condition of encounter in which connection does not lead to substation or absorption of the other" (75). Transmotion then becomes a way to consider the ontological differentiation between a visual/written/oral categorization of settler societies and the visual/written/oral continuum that marks the communicative and artistic practices of Indigenous communities, and specifically Anishinaabe communities. These systems, which Stirrup traces throughout his book, accentuate the ways that Indigenous artistic practices based in epistemologies beyond settler ones can consistently rework and resist settler understandings of the visual, the written, and the oral, which relatedly aids in rethinking the entrenched narratives of colonial histories and the stories settlers tell of Indigenous peoples.

Away from Colonized Histories

In the second essay in her book, "Native Arts's Visual Remix," Mithlo describes a methodology that she calls "talking back" to histories constructed around images produced by non-Native artists, primarily photographers. Rather than continue to centralize these manipulative images that tell a specific history of Indigenous peoples, Mithlo argues that contemporary Indigenous artists are developing a "process of cultural revitalization [that] takes the form of reclamation: reclamation of photographs, stories, places, and ultimately assumptions" (Mithlo 2020, 52). Focusing on the archive of images taken of Kiowa, Comanche, Chiricahua Apache, Caddo, and Cheyenne prisoners held at Fort Marion (now the Castillo de San Marcos) in St. Augustine, Florida, in the 1870s and again in the 1880s, Mithlo highlights the ways remix develops an engagement with the past that blurs a strict relationship with chronology.

In later examining Ho-Chunk photographer Tom Jones's artworks and photographic manipulations, Mithlo clarifies that talking back "is not simply a reactive measure of asserting one's contemporary presence, it is a dialogic force that changes the nature of the conversation from one of potential victimhood or simple reworking to a significant and, in this case, sassy case of 'back talk'" (63–66). The remixes of Jones or Emily Arthur, whose print *Re-Remembering (Not History)* superimposes images of the Fort Marion Prisoners onto a Florida swamplands scene, talk back to history in order to reconsider the narratives we tell and ways that we might unsettle those narratives.

In her introduction to the collection *Unsettling Native Art Histories on the Northwest Coast* (2022), Kathryn Bunn-Marcuse outlines four tenets that follow from their call to "unsettle" art histories. She writes:

The authors in this volume reflect the current ethics in our field, which recognize that:

- Native artists have shaped the record of Native history with their creations, which constitute recorded history through various media.

- The histories recorded in artistic creations belong to the communities from which they come.
- Indigenous artists, scholars, and communities are the experts on their own histories.
- Scholarship and museum practice have obligations to Indigenous communities and thus must respect these ethical tenets (Bunn-Marcuse and Jonaitis 2022, 4).

As is clear in these tenets, the move toward “unsettling” involves a rethinking of the work of research. Following scholars like Shawn Wilson, Bunn-Marcuse explains that while approaches that devalue Indigenous knowledges are still popular in the academy, Indigenous scholars are beginning to reorient scholarship and question the continual centering of Western knowledge systems. It is in this reorientation and questioning that the turn toward unsettling, specifically art histories, arises by centering Indigenous knowledges that consider the centrality of the community and communal histories above those deemed “correct” and/or “rigorous” by the standards of the Western academy.

However, much like visual sovereignty, this process of unsettling is not a total turn away. Bunn-Marcuse, following Megan Smetzer, writes that unsettling can “create new productions woven from fragments of older work, weaving continuous threads from long-held beliefs and practices into contemporary forms that have never existed before” (2022, 14). In highlighting a form of scholarly hybridity then, Bunn-Marcuse reminds us that even if we unsettle, it can never undo the settling itself. That is, moves away from settler histories or settler methods of historical research cannot entirely undo the changes made to art history, the academy, or society. There is no way to return to a time before the prelapsarian moment, the colonial fall.

The contents of *Unsettling Native Art Histories* are split into four sections. The first, “Cultural Heritage Protection: Questions of Rights and Authority,” considers who carries the authority to tell history and where that authority originates. For instance, Emily L. Moore traces the history of the Seward Shame Pole, a series of three different Tlingit ridicule poles that memorialize the affront William H. Seward showed to the Tongass village and their Chief Ebbets. Moore juxtaposes these ridicule poles with the construction of a bronze monument to Seward erected at the Alaskan State Capitol, which relies on a much different historical account than the one offered and passed down among Tlingit communities. Kaitlin McCormick similarly considers who has the right to create Northwest Coast art, focusing on argillite and those who carve it as a practice embedded within Haida cultural expression. Finally, both essays by Christopher Green and Berlo and Jonaitis take these questions of cultural expression into the specific territories of (re)appropriation (Green) and replication (Berlo and Jonaitis) to consider positionality as deeply rooted in any approach to history or the project of unsettling history.

The second section, “Women’s Work: Stories, Art, and Power,” unsettles art

history of the Northwest coast by recentering the work of Indigenous women so pivotal to the community. This section depicts what scholars Maile Arvin, Eve Tuck, Angie Morrill explain: the artwork of Indigenous women has been “hidden by the gendered logics of settler colonialism” (14). From the Haida art and scholarship examined in Jisgang Nika Collison’s (Haida) essay, to Smetzer’s own examination of resilience in the art of Tlingit artist Shgen George, through Lou-ann Ika’wega Neel’s personal examination of the carving art of her grandmother, Ellen Neel, a Kwakwaka’wakw artist, these essays show how the artwork of Indigenous women contribute to the survivance of Indigenous communities of the Northwest coast.

The third section, “Changing Museums,” considers the role of institutions, especially as scholars and community members rework the telling of history and prioritize narratives differently. The chapters in this section consider what in museums must change to center the world of tribal community members, whose stories have so often been kept on the margins of institutionalized histories. Sharon Fortney (Northern Coast Salish) considers these concerns within the contexts of Canada’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission and the changing approaches at the Museum of Vancouver. She highlights the ways the Museum of Vancouver is incorporating the communities and stories of local Indigenous peoples that have often remained excluded from these spaces. In their essay, “The Museum Disappeared,” Karen Duffek, Peter Morin, and Karen Benbassat Ali explore an experimental installation by Morin, a Tahltan artist, which considered the museum from a Tahltan perspective, “that is, as a way of not only containing artifacts but of organizing, holding, and exchanging knowledge” (Bunn-Marcuse and Jonaitis 2022, 178). The final two essays consider the importance of local community stories and the stories of Indigenous artists themselves to rework the way a museum can operate with historical collections. Bunn-Marcuse focuses on the histories mobilized by Indigenous artists; Lucy Fowler Williams shows how museum personnel can work within protocols and relationships that center Indigenous communities, which can transform the museum as an institution.

Finally, in “Beyond Art,” the authors push against the ways Northwest coast art has been framed in order to “demonstrate how past creations are living documents carrying information critical to today’s inquiries” (Bunn-Marcuse and Jonaitis 2022, 13). As such, the essays here work beyond the hegemonic confines of what is determined as “art” in order to rethink the relationship between art and community throughout the Native Northwest coast. Evelyn Vanderhoop (Haida) discusses the ways women’s artwork, especially the weaving of pieces like Ravenstail Sky Robes, can embody the intangible in our world, especially natural forces like weather. Denise Nicole Green examines “the textiles and regalia used in one particular potlatch to analyze how the body, memory, and material culture intersect to make the potlatch ceremony as a site of creative, spiritual, and cultural production” (259). Finally, Tlingit and Inupiaq poet and scholar Ishmael Hope argues the need for a deep understanding of

Tlingit cultural context to understand Tlingit aesthetics because, as he notes, "pleasing aesthetic quality... is inseparable from the contextual appreciation of ... history" (289).

A Short Conclusion

Perhaps more than anything, what scholars can glean from these recent moves in Indigenous visual studies is that Indigenous communities exist beyond the confines of settler societies, no matter how hard those societies have tried to reign or box them into specific definitions and understandings. The interdisciplinarity at the heart of Indigenous studies itself is clear in these texts; the disciplinary confines of the contemporary academy are no more successful at cordoning than the settler societies whose ideologies those institutions advance. What all these works taken together help me to further understand is that artworks by Indigenous peoples are inherently resistant in their very existence. Their presence and their resistance to colonial knowledge continues to crack open the foundations of the settler colonial project, revealing the need for unsettling colonized histories, disposing of strict binaries and categorizations, and expanding visual sovereignty as a method for visually marking the inherent rights and powers of Indigenous peoples over their own communities and (hi)stories.

When I was approached to write this essay, the journal hoped to highlight the work of scholars writing about Indigenous comics. I had to regrettably inform them that there is very little work produced in that area of study, especially in book-length format. (See Aldama [2020] and Sheyahshe [2016] as the current two primary works.) However, what heartens me as a scholar of Indigenous visual studies, and comics particularly, is that future works coming out in these areas have a strong and continually strengthening foundation of work that complicates singular approaches, deconstructs the ancestral dichotomies of the settler colonial academy, and highlights the inspiring and incredibly complex works of Indigenous visual artists. As Denise Cummings notes in her introduction to *Visualities 2*, "We eradicate or ignore history and its symbols at the peril of repeating, but... we can certainly reinterpret it in ways that opens our eyes" (Cummings 2019, xiii–xiv). These works certainly open our eyes, bring us to a complex understanding of various Indigenous visual practices, and ask of us, "What next?"

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