

EXPLORING NOTIONS OF CULTURAL HYBRIDITY IN CONTEMPORARY  
AMERICAN INDIAN ART:  
RICK BARTOW, A CASE STUDY

by

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While the use of Native and non-Native elements in recent American Indian art is well documented, the work of contemporary Northwest artist Rick Bartow is frequently discussed almost exclusively in terms of biography. This has led to what is arguably a one-dimensional view of the artist and his work. My project is an attempt to frame this acclaimed artist within a new context: that of his purposeful use of cultural hybridity as a vehicle to explore his own postcolonial identity.

My thesis locates this aspect of Bartow's work within a larger critical examination of how a mix of Native and non-Native iconography is used by some artists of American Indian descent to critique the status and reception of indigenous art in the context of Western art history. Bartow's on-going collaboration with Japanese Master Printer Seiichi Hiroshima exemplifies how Bartow's innovative use of the signs and symbols of other cultures endeavors to shift the language used to discuss American Indian art.

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## CHAPTER I

### CULTURAL HYBRIDITY AND NATIVE IDENTITY

Rick Bartow (b. 1946 Newport, Ore.) has spent the last two decades creating a collage of cultural sources. His artwork is a self-conscious blend of Western, Japanese, Maori, and American Indian cultures, expressed in a variety of traditional media—painting, sculpture, drawing, and printmaking. A member of the Wiyot tribe of Northern California, Bartow incorporates recognizable Native imagery into his work, but combines it with a diverse and evolving body of references sourced from European art history, Japanese parade float art, and Maori statuettes, among others. This thesis will explore the persistent theme of cultural hybridity in Bartow’s work as part of a larger critical examination of how a mix of Native and non-Native iconography is used by some American Indian artists as a tool against the historically constructed notion of authenticity, as a way to exercise self-determination, and as a declaration of what cultural critic Lucy Lippard deems “esthetic sovereignty.”<sup>1</sup> Rick Bartow’s syncretism helps unify and define these terms—authenticity, self-determination, and esthetic sovereignty—while articulating his own hybrid, postcolonial identity. As will be demonstrated in this thesis, Bartow’s use of multiple

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<sup>1</sup> Lucy R. Lippard, “Esthetic Sovereignty, or, Going Places with Cultural Baggage,” in *Path Breakers: The Eiteljorg Fellowship for Native American Fine Art, 2003* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2003): 1-11, 2.

cultural references offers critics a compelling reason to redefine the critical language used to describe contemporary American Indian art.

To understand how American Indian art has been marginalized by the dominant culture, and in order to more broadly contextualize Bartow's work, Chapter One of this thesis will focus on a discussion American Indian art history since the 1960s. Building off the events described in Chapter One, Chapter Two will offer historical and recent definitions of American Indian art and will provide a definition of the term *hybridity* in order to precisely establish the critical method Bartow employs in his work. This chapter will also include examples of work by other American Indian artists whose artwork employs Native and non-Native elements as a means to explore their identity as indigenous artists. Examples of work featured in exhibitions exploring Native artists' responses to Western culture will provide useful counterparts to Chapter Three's examination of Bartow's oeuvre.

In Chapter Three, a series of Bartow's drypoints will be discussed in detail. Due to their relatively small size and process-orientated medium, these intaglio prints illustrate a paring down of Bartow's visual language and pointed use of art historical referencing. In addition to their references to Western art history, these drypoints also feature Bartow's response to Japanese imagery and aesthetics. Additionally, because Bartow is a contemporary artist living and working in the Pacific Northwest, this chapter will include a brief look at how artists from Oregon and Washington have used Japanese imagery historically. These examples, culled from the work of the founding members of the Northwest School, a group of artists active in the Pacific

Northwest during the first half of the twentieth-century, will serve to further contextualize Bartow's efforts according to the more specific genre of Pacific Northwest art. Finally, Chapter Four will consider how Bartow's juxtaposition of American Indian culture with Japanese imagery leads the viewer to reconsider Bartow's own culturally-hybrid, postcolonial identity.

#### Relying on Biography: The Critical Reception of Bartow's Work

Perhaps because Bartow's work is rendered in traditional artistic media—painting, sculpture, drawing, and printmaking—and appears, at least on the surface, to be uncritical of the cultures he juxtaposes, the discourse surrounding it highlights the artist's biography and his personal struggle with addiction, rather than Bartow's frequent use of cultural hybridity as a vehicle to explore his own postcolonial identity. Due to Bartow's highly self-conscious experimentations with cross-cultural referencing seen, for example, in the mix of Western and Native cultures in his found-object sculptures, or in the combination of Japanese and Native imagery in his drypoints, it might seem reasonable to expect that his work should be met with the same critical reception as James Luna (b. 1950) or Hachivi Edgar Heap of Birds (b. 1954), American Indian artists whose work also expresses the convergence of Native and Western cultures. Instead, critics living outside the Pacific Northwest have essentially ignored Bartow's work. The regional critics who do comment on it tend to focus primarily on his biography: Bartow's term of service in the Vietnam War, his

struggles with alcoholism and depression upon his return from term of service, and his subsequent discovery of art “as a means to break through this cycle of self-destructive behavior.”<sup>2</sup> Critics of Bartow’s work also discuss his impulsive working methods, often describing the artist’s process as originating “from the gut”<sup>3</sup> and his relationship to his materials as “passionate,”<sup>4</sup> resulting in work that “harbors secret passions or a tormented history.”<sup>5</sup> This narrative and Bartow’s image of the “bad boy gone good” smacks of the romantic notion of the savage Indian, rescued by the goodwill of European cultural influence. Although critics have failed to recognize it, Bartow’s work actually addresses this issue of identity, albeit in a quietly subversive way.

With their focus on biography, critics often categorize Bartow’s work as “transformative,” the underlying assumption being that his imagery is *only* a manifestation of his experience of recovery.<sup>6</sup> While Bartow’s life experiences have arguably influenced his artwork, critics have, so far, struggled to offer a broader contextualization. For example, critic Sue Taylor writes that Bartow’s canvases

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<sup>2</sup> Details of Bartow’s biography without specific notation can be found in many of the sources cited throughout this thesis, including: Rebecca Dobkins, *Rick Bartow: My Eye* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2002).; Margaret Dubin, “Talking: Rick Bartow (Yurok),” *Indian Artist* (Winter 1999): 36-41.; Abby Wasserman, “Connecting Past and Present,” *Art Week* (April 15, 1989).

<sup>3</sup> Wasserman, 1.

<sup>4</sup> Stanford Shaman, “Rick Bartow: Stories,” Schneider Museum of Art, Southern Oregon University, March 3—April 15, 2000, 2, exhibition catalogue.

<sup>5</sup> Dubin, 36.

<sup>6</sup> D.K. Row, “Art Review: Try to Remember the Quality of November,” *The Oregonian*, Monday, 12 November 2007.; “Review,” Visual Arts, *The Oregonian*, 24 March 2006; and Shaman, 2.

contain a: “draftsmanly sophistication and expressive mark-making,” deeming these “the hallmarks of Bartow’s considerable achievement.”<sup>7</sup> Regarding Bartow’s use of cultural hybridity, Taylor concedes that his work “harmonizes esthetic strategies from diverse cultural sources,” but she neglects to engage Bartow’s work beyond aesthetic issues.<sup>8</sup> It is important to realize that Bartow’s work is layered and represents a multiplicity of ideas. The critical reception of Bartow’s work thus far is arguably due to the fact that the artist claims that his intentions for his work remain neutral. While Bartow will discuss his Vietnam experience, his connection to the material, and to the gestural and therapeutic act of mark-making, he does not discuss his art in theoretical or political terms. And though he acknowledges the diversity of his cultural influences sharing the stories of their introduction into his visual repertoire, he avoids addressing his intentions directly, allowing the work to remain open to interpretation. One aspect of his critical project that Bartow makes clear is that his working methods and use of contemporary media are tactics to prevent his work from approximating traditional American Indian art. While he acknowledges that his identity as an artist of American Indian descent has impacted his work, he counters that it should not be the only factor to consider when critiquing his work. He says, “I work the way I do

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<sup>7</sup> Sue Taylor, “Rick Bartow at the Hallie Ford Museum,” *Art in America*, no. 11 (November 2002): 166-167, 167.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 166.

so that I don't sully, slander, or wish to come close to native artists who are very traditional in their approach. I know that way is long and narrow and very hard."<sup>9</sup>

Bartow often defers to the viewer's interpretation when he discusses his work. In an exhibition leaflet for "Continuum: 12 Artists," a 2003 show at the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of the American Indian, Bartow explains: "If it's a good story and a good image, then really it's up to the viewer. The viewer's interpretation is, to me, as important as anything I put out there. As a communicative device, art is open-ended. I simply use a story to create the best image I can, to make something visually arresting. Once I've been able to capture your attention, it's an open door. You can come in and look around yourself."<sup>10</sup> This lack of fixed explanation has led critics to devise their own stories about Bartow and his process with frequent reference to his troubled past. This has effectively pigeonholed Bartow; while his work has evolved, the commentary on it has not. If Bartow's interest is in the audiences' interpretation of a piece then, arguably, the artist's hybrid visual language is indicative of his attempt to address multiple audiences in his work.

Finally, by combining cultures, Bartow intentionally juxtaposes disparate elements that signal his interest in art history's reception of the Native-made object, as well as his quiet insistence on the presence of the American Indian artist within a contemporary art dialogue. Even while exploring what has been called

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<sup>9</sup> Rick Bartow, 1998 artist statement, quoted in Rebecca Dobkins, *Rick Bartow: My Eye* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2002), 44.

<sup>10</sup> Rick Bartow, quoted in Lara M. Evans, "Rick Bartow: Putting it All Together," in *Continuum: 12 Artists*, National Museum of the American Indian George Gustav Heye Center (New York.: The Smithsonian Institution, 2003), exhibition catalogue.



transformative imagery (figs. 16 and 17), Bartow made work that examined his relationship to art history (figs. 23-26), culminating in a series of drypoints, created as a part of an ongoing collaboration with Japanese Master printer Seiichi Hiroshima (figs. 14, and 19-26).<sup>11</sup>

Through Bartow's apparent disinterest in establishing the terms for the current critical reception of his practice, he appears to have essentially disengaged himself from the art world. But Bartow's apparently humble evasiveness should not be considered the result of a lack of a critical awareness, as his artistic project has remained consistent throughout his career: by using the signs and symbols of other cultures, Bartow's work critiques the status and reception of the American Indian artist in the context of Western art history.

*After Van Gogh* (fig. 1, 1992) is an example of such critique. It features a mottled head emerging from the end of a rough plank of wood. Rusty nails have been driven into the wood at a diagonal, physically joining the sculpture to its base, which is equally marked and scarred. The piece references both Van Gogh, through the title and through the figure's missing ear, and Pieter Brueghel's (ca. 1525/30–1569) painting *The Parable of the Blind Leading the Blind* (fig. 2, 1568), which depicts a series of physically impaired human figures.<sup>12</sup> These deliberate references to European art history are early sculptural examples of Bartow's interest in the interaction of diverse cultural narratives. Through his reference to the damaged

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<sup>11</sup> This thesis examines only part of Bartow and Hiroshima's printmaking collaborations.

<sup>12</sup> Dobkins, 27.

human figure, Bartow's piece could be understood as critical of European art history and its impact on marginalized cultures; perhaps *After Van Gogh* was not constructed to honor a romantically damaged hero of Europe's artistic past, but rather to expose the process of European cultural myth-making as detrimental to the contemporary artist, Native or otherwise. As the title implies, Bartow simultaneously evokes an affiliation with this romantic persona, while insinuating, through the scarred and damaged figure, a negative response to such an association; the figure's patched face and nailed supports suggest a cobbled together history that must be deconstructed and torn apart in order to accommodate indigenous voices.

#### Reclassifying the Native-made Object: American Indian Art in the 1960s and 1970s

It is important to contextualize Bartow within the broader scope of American Indian art history. In many ways this history is still being (re) written. Like other marginalized artistic groups, American Indian artists still struggle to be identified as valuable contributors to a contemporary artistic dialogue. Adding to this struggle is a misconception that indigenous art cannot be contemporary because American Indians still exist in a stereotyped, romanticized past and are not considered a viable part of modern society. In her 2006 essay on Native modernism, art historian Joyce M. Szabo explains: "many Native American and First Nations [of Canada] people are burdened with romanticizing, stereotypical views that have caused Plains war helmets, tipis, and beadwork [...] to be collected by people less interested in them as

art than as nostalgic reminders of times past.”<sup>13</sup> Similarly, art historian Cynthia Fowler describes the “authentic Indian” as “a European-American construct of Indians as timeless people disconnected from modern life.”<sup>14</sup> As I will discuss further, defining American Indian art on the basis of authenticity has proved detrimental to Native artists because the term represents a continuation of the colonizer/colonized relationship of oppression.

Events in the art world in the 1960s and 1970s relating to the collection and subsequent popularity of indigenous art contributed to nostalgia on the part of Euro-Americans, described above by Szabo. The 1980s ushered in much-needed change to the static canon of art history, and introduced critical terms and methods important to contemporary American Indian art. The visual culture model, as well as the interdisciplinary nature of art history and anthropology, has encouraged a critique of American Indian art that acknowledges how power is constructed and maintained, both in and out of an institutional setting. Work such as Rick Bartow’s series of found-object sculptures (figs. 11, 12, and 13) and Hachivi Edgar Heap of Birds’ *Building Minnesota* (fig. 7, 1994) help illustrate how Native artists have reconceptualized historic views of American Indians. Finally, the concept of hybridity, which gained prominence in the 1990s, helped reveal the struggle, on the

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<sup>13</sup> Joyce M. Szabo, “Native American Art History,” in *Essays on Native Modernism: Complexity and Contradiction in American Indian Art* (Washington, D.C.: National Museum of the American Indian, 2006), 70.

<sup>14</sup> Cynthia Fowler, “Hybridity as a Strategy for Self-Determination in Contemporary American Indian Art,” *Social Justice*, Vol. 34, No. 1 (2007): 63-79, 69.

part of many contemporary American Indian artists, of expressing tribal values, while affirming their place in a contemporary art context.

Until the 1970s, many art galleries and large urban museums did not collect or display twentieth-century American Indian art.<sup>15</sup> Prior to the 1970s, many ethnographic museums were hesitant to represent art made by living American Indian artists because these institutions were responsible for organizing, categorizing, and interpreting the objects of the past. As art historians Janet C. Berlo and Ruth B. Phillips observe, “for the most part, ethnographic museums [...] rejected [Native] works in Western media; they saw them as inauthentic and acculturated.”<sup>16</sup> Those that did invest in contemporary Native-made objects did so as a way to document indigenous beliefs and lifestyles, rather than as representations of modern Native expression.<sup>17</sup> As a result, the criteria developed for studying indigenous art came from the perspective of the ethnographic museum where authenticity trumps experimentation with new media and a visual connection to the past is favored over any connection to contemporary society. If Native artists were producing traditional works, they were left out of both cultural institutions because what they were doing was considered not “authentic” enough for the ethnographic museum, and “too authentic” for the fine arts establishment. Yet despite the trepidation of the non-profit arts establishments to feature contemporary American Indian art, Native artists were

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<sup>15</sup> Janet C. Berlo and Ruth B. Phillips, *Native North American Art* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 213.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., .

welcomed in the for-profit sector of the art world: namely the market for “primitive” art. According to anthropologist Bruce Bernstein, developments in the arts market during the 1960s and 1970s aided in the acceptance, nationally, of American Indian art as equal to other “world art traditions.”<sup>18</sup> While their work was not recognized as equal to their European and Euro-American counterparts, contemporary Native artists were valued for their ability to produce handcrafted pots, rugs, and baskets as decorative items. As Bernstein observes, the American Indian connection to the land, tradition, and community was perceived as a more authentic way of life, an alternative to the mainstream, by the 1960s counterculture.<sup>19</sup> At the same time, according to Bernstein, “mainstream” Americans romantically “looked to Indian cultures for a means of recapturing a genuine American heritage.”<sup>20</sup> This connection fueled the market for primitive art, furthering the perception of American Indian art as a decorative commodity.

Despite its popularity in the collector trade, the characterization and display of American Indian cultural materials as “primitive art” is problematic. The designation of “primitive art” undermines the traditional function and meaning of a specific piece,

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<sup>18</sup> Bruce Bernstein, “Contexts for the Growth and Development of the Indian Art World in the 1960s and 1970s,” in *Native American Art in the Twentieth Century*, ed. W. Jackson Rushing III (New York: Routledge, 1999): 57-71, 57-58.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 59. The 1960s counterculture was not the first group to embrace American Indian life as better than the mainstream. In the late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century, many purveyors of Native made goods shared “anti-modernist” tendencies, which held up the American Indian’s connection to the land and to community as positive counterpoints to industrialization and urbanization. For further information, see: Berlo and Phillips, 210-213.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

while favoring the dominant culture's supposed artistic superiority. The association of the term "primitive" with rough simplicity and a naïveté to outside influence, created a barrier between Native art and European and Euro-American modernism. A 1984 exhibition at New York's Museum of Modern Art, entitled "'Primitivism' in Twentieth-Century Art," illustrates the full co-option of American Indian art by a cultural institution. In it, American Indian art was juxtaposed, along with African and Oceanic art, with work by Pablo Picasso, Henry Moore, Henri Matisse, and others in an effort to illustrate influence and affinities between the "modern" European and Euro-American artists and the "primitive" other.<sup>21</sup> By exploring Native art solely on the basis of its stylistic affinities with Western art, the exhibition reinforced an imperialist view of the relationship between Western and non-Western cultures.

This view had far reaching consequences for American Indian art. As indicated in the Heard Museum's 1994 guide to modern American Indian art history: "Considerations of Native American cultural production as "ethnographic" and "primitive" have made it difficult for Native American artists working in innovative ways [...] to achieve institutional recognition. Yet recognition and critical examination of new forms of Native American art and of their connection to the past are necessary if this work is to be accepted."<sup>22</sup> This concern recalls the above statement by Berlo and Phillips that contemporary American Indian artists working in

<sup>21</sup> For further reading on this exhibition, see: William Rubin, ed., *Primitivism in Modern Art: Affinity of the Tribal and Modern* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1984).

<sup>22</sup> Margaret Archuleta, et al., *The Native American Fine Arts Movement: A Resource Guide* (Phoenix, AZ: The Heard Museum, 1994), <http://216.235.201.146/NETCOMMUNITY/Document.Doc?&id=2> (accessed 4 April 2008).

Western media were viewed as inauthentic and acculturated, perpetuating the myth of the “primitive Indian.”

Along with the designation of “primitive,” the question of “authenticity” represents a continued struggle for artists of American Indian descent. “Authenticity” represents an outdated, divisive way to define American Indian identity. The term, which emerged as a tool for determining the worth of the Native-made object in the collector trade, proved detrimental to the acceptance of contemporary American Indian art by many fine art museums, though it remained an asset to the ethnographic and cultural museum. Historically, this discrepancy can be attributed to the perception of the Native made object as something created for marketplace consumption. In the late-nineteenth century, as American Indian tribes were being pushed off their land by incoming European settlers, they turned to artistic production to create commodities necessary to their survival.<sup>23</sup> The art market in the 1970s represents a continuation of this mentality, arguably reducing American Indian art to an “ethnographic” other.

Bernstein identifies the dual impact of the criteria of authenticity and the art market on both pre-modern and modern American Indian art. He notes that the “criteria for determining art or cultural object incorporates a discourse determining the object’s—and therefore the maker’s—level of authenticity. The notion of authenticity is generally an imposed one [...] it is a discursive element which now

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<sup>23</sup> Berlo and Phillips, 212.

permeates all parties associated with the Indian art world.”<sup>24</sup> Authenticity, like the term primitive secures the boundaries between Native and Non-Native and strengthens the dominant culture’s narrative of control over the indigenous “other.” Artist Jean Fisher cautions that if it doesn’t question the responsibility of a cultural institution to examine its own ideologies and exhibition practices, American Indian art is continually reduced to an “ethnographic spectacle.”<sup>25</sup> Authenticity plays a part in the creation of this spectacle by suggesting that the historical “Native America” is gone—its historical objects are already categorized and quantified—ensuring that any contemporary work made by an artist of indigenous descent is measured against its semblance to the maker’s degree of authenticity. In terms of my thesis, authenticity serves as a legitimizing tool that American Indian artists like Rick Bartow attempt to defy. In Bartow’s case, he reacts against the historical notion of authenticity by incorporating elements of Western art history and Japanese iconography into his work, as opposed to exclusively drawing upon indigenous sources.

It is worth noting that legitimizing an artist’s Native ancestry is still a defining aspect for American Indian cultural production. The Indian Arts and Crafts Act of 1990 is a “truth in advertising” law that prohibits the misrepresentation in marketing of Indian goods in the United States.<sup>26</sup> This act was intended to protect the authentic

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<sup>24</sup> Bernstein, 57.

<sup>25</sup> Jean Fisher, “In Search of the ‘Inauthentic’: Disturbing Signs in Contemporary Native American Art,” in “Recent Native American Art,” ed. W. Jackson Rushing, special issue, *Art Journal* 51, no. 3 (Fall 1992): 44-50, 45.

<sup>26</sup> For details of the Indian Arts and Crafts Act of 1990, see: U.S. Department of the Interior, Indian Arts and Crafts Board, <http://www.doi.gov/iacb/act.html> (accessed 24 January 2008).



Native-made object from the inauthentic one, thus securing the “authenticity” of Native arts for a consumer market. The legislation of American Indian artistic identity by the state makes Native artists the only group whose ethnic identity is not self-determined.

The construction at the hand of the primitive collector’s market of Native art as craft or as object to be collected and consumed, rather than viewed critically in the context of art, both Native and non-Native, was detrimental to the growth and development of contemporary Native art. Many contemporary American Indian artists, such as Rick Bartow, Hachivi Edgar Heap of Birds, and Duane Slick, work to counter this legacy of control by creating art that questions assumptions of what constitutes an “authentic Indian.” This work begs the question of whether or not the colonized individual is forever bound to his or her assigned role, and endeavors to create space for what Fisher has termed “emancipatory action.”<sup>27</sup> As exemplified in Rick Bartow’s sculpture *After Van Gogh*, examined above, one form of emancipatory action is the reversal of roles between the oft-examined colonized and the explorer mentality of the colonizer. In *After Van Gogh*, Bartow assumes the role of cultural explorer and attempts to rewrite, rather than maintain, the dominant culture’s master narrative.

Finally, another important component of the reclassification of American Indian art during the 1960s and 1970s was the establishment of the Institute of

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<sup>27</sup> Fisher, 47.

American Indian Arts (IAIA) in 1962.<sup>28</sup> Located in Santa Fe, New Mexico the IAIA was the first government-sponsored art school for American Indians and was created by the Indian Arts and Crafts Board and the Bureau of Indian Affairs. The IAIA developed out of a summer art program, held from 1960-1962, and sponsored by the Rockefeller Foundation. Both the Southwest Indian Art Project, as the summer program was called, and the IAIA instructed students in both contemporary fine art and traditional tribal art, acknowledging their share in both Western and indigenous modes of representation. The IAIA helped establish artists such as T.C. Cannon (1946-1978) and Fritz Scholder (1937- 2005), American Indian painters whose work endeavored to close the gap between popular stereotypes romanticizing Indian life, and the actual twentieth-century life of the American Indian.<sup>29</sup> These important shifts in the recognition of the realities of contemporary American Indian life, coupled with a critical reexamination of art history, helped make the 1980s the decade of the “other” in art, and established new methods for viewing and critiquing non-Western art.

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<sup>28</sup> For more on the Institute of American Indian Arts, see: “1.0 The IAIA,” [http://www.iaia.edu/sub/campusnet/\\_policies\\_manual/Manual.pdf](http://www.iaia.edu/sub/campusnet/_policies_manual/Manual.pdf) (accessed 15 January 2008).

<sup>29</sup> For more on T.C. Cannon and Fritz Scholder, see: W. Jackson Rushing, “Authenticity and Subjectivity in Post-War Painting: Concerning Herrera, Scholder, and Cannon,” in *Shared Visions: Native American Painters and Sculptors in the Twentieth Century*, Margaret Archuleta and Rennard Strickland, eds. (Phoenix: The Heard Museum, 1991): 12-21,

### Identities in Flux: The Legacy of the 1980s

As noted, several historical factors have contributed to an objectifying view of American Indian art. The commoditization and popularization of American Indian art in the first half of the twentieth century, combined with a lack of critical engagement with the work, and the involvement of the United States government in authenticating tribal affiliation, helped serve as a catalyst for American Indian artists emerging in the 1980s to address issues of identity. In addition, new ideologies emerged that were critical of current art historical methods. According to art historian Ruth B. Phillips, three postmodern ideologies: a critique of the ocularcentrist bias, a repositioning of art history within a new field of visual culture, and a strengthened interdisciplinary engagement between visual anthropology and art discourses, proved helpful to both the study of American Indian art and to Native artists interested in (re) establishing their identity.<sup>30</sup> These trends were critical of the outmoded forms of art history and were interested in expanding the discourse to depend less on modernism's interest in the purity of art and the neutrality of the artist's identity and allowing more room for indigenous voices, multiple audiences, and new modes of artistic expression.

In opposition to modernism's call for an anonymous author and for the primacy of aesthetic concerns, postmodern identity politics has been associated with the reevaluation of the artist's identity, an important component for American Indian

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<sup>30</sup> Ruth Phillips, "Art History and the Native Made Object," in *Native American Art in the Twentieth Century*, ed. W. Jackson Rushing III (New York: Routledge, 1999) 97-112.

artists working to confirm, or reaffirm, their identity and presence.<sup>31</sup> Artist and curator Gerald McMaster (Plains Cree) offers a useful definition of postmodernism as it relates to recent American Indian art.<sup>32</sup> He writes: “Postmodernism offered strategies of resistance, articulation, and empowerment. Postmodernists sought to connect art with social and political issues, and critiqued modernism’s universalizing meta-narratives, arguing instead for the viability of local narratives.”<sup>33</sup>

Postmodernism's interest in sociopolitical life and its critique of the dominant culture’s master narrative elicited interest in “new” indigenous voices.

McMaster defines these factors as characteristics of the “post-reservation” condition, which he theorizes as running parallel to postmodernism, while more accurately articulating the critical project of the indigenous artist.<sup>34</sup> Though McMaster writes specifically about the First Nations people of Canada, the term post-reservation, which he equates with postcolonialism, takes into account the relationship of oppression between American Indians and their colonizers, signifying the emergence of a critique towards the reservation as a place of imposed confinement and compartmentalization, both literally and figuratively.

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<sup>31</sup> Charles Harrison, “Modernism,” in *Critical Terms for Art History*, eds. Robert S. Nelson and Richard Shiff (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 193.

<sup>32</sup> Since 2005, McMaster has been Curator of Canadian Art at the Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto, Canada.

<sup>33</sup> Gerald McMaster, “Post-Reservation Perspectives,” in *Essays on Native Modernism*, 47.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 44.

The term post-reservation implies life after the reservation, which McMaster also addressed in “Reservation X,” a 1998 exhibition he curated at the Canadian Museum of Civilization in Quebec.<sup>35</sup> In his catalogue essay, McMaster articulates that “between two or more communities –reserve and urban—there exists a socially ambiguous zone, a site of articulation for the aboriginal contemporary artist that is frequently crossed, experienced, interrogated, and negotiated. This idea argues for a space of radical openness and ‘hybridity,’ or spaces of resistance being opened at the margins.”<sup>36</sup> For McMaster, hybridity exists on the margins of artistic production and has the ability to offer resistance against the dominant culture. By naming the space “Reservation X,” McMaster implies that it is a space-between-spaces, where a mix of cultures is a key factor in negotiation. Itself an in-between space, combining the urban and the rural, Reservation X, like the later term post-reservation, reclaims the reservation as a new discursive space and yields a “new reservation narrative.”<sup>37</sup> McMaster’s terms are useful to a discussion of Bartow’s work because, while he did not grow up on a reservation, his work articulates a sense of occupying a dual space, where boundaries between the indigenous community and the mainstream are permeable.

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<sup>35</sup> Examples from the exhibition “Reservation X” are discussed in Chapter Three of this thesis.

<sup>36</sup> Gerald McMaster, “Living on Reservation X,” in *Reservation X* (Quebec: Canadian Museum of Civilization, 1998): 19-30, 28.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

Postcolonial theorist Homi K. Bhabha calls this the “Third Space,” which he designates as the “precondition for the articulation of cultural difference.”<sup>38</sup> According to Bhabha, the Third Space is accessed through the juxtaposition of cultural signs, which offers a non-polarizing means to articulate culture without resorting to exoticism or focusing solely on difference.<sup>39</sup> Bhabha’s contributions to the discussion of cultural hybridity are important because his recognition of the Third Space helps to redefine the “living in two worlds” syndrome, which as cultural critic Lucy R. Lippard points out, risks becoming a cliché in reference to American Indian art.<sup>40</sup> Bartow confronts this cliché in his artwork by combining rather than isolating his images, addressing multiple cultural sources in a non-hierarchical manner. In *Big Lotso* (fig. 3, 1999), for example, Bartow combines an image of the frog (*lotso* is “frog” in Yurok) with his name in Japanese and with Maori songs, thus combining diverse cultural sources, which occupy equally important spaces in the composition.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 56.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 56.

<sup>40</sup> Lippard, 2.

<sup>41</sup> Dobkins, 53 and 56.

CHAPTER II  
(RE) DEFINING AMERICAN INDIAN ART

Ruth Phillips and art historian Janet C. Berlo, coauthors' of Oxford's Native North American Art, define modern American Indian art as “the adoption of Western representational styles, genres, and media in order to produce works that function as autonomous entities and that are intended to be experienced independently of community or ceremonial contexts.”<sup>42</sup> Berlo and Phillips's definition works because it uses postmodernism's reexamination of modernism's unilaterally Western focus in order to incorporate Native art into Western art history's “master narrative.” The authors explain, “The story of these convergences [between Native and Western art] has most often been told as a series of ‘discoveries’ of ‘affinities’ between tribal and modern art [...] the discovery of affinities has been just as inventive on the other side of the mirror.”<sup>43</sup> The problem with their criteria, however, is that it necessitates the incorporation of Western artistic elements (styles, genres, and media) into the work artists of American Indian descent. In doing this, Berlo and Phillip's definition perpetuates the idea that in order to be relevant, indigenous artists must explore their ancestry in Western art historical terms. Their definition also differentiates between

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<sup>42</sup> Berlo and Phillips, 210.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

“craft” and “fine art,” creating boundaries between two important facets of American Indian art; it effectively separates those contemporary Native artists working in traditional media and with traditional iconography from those who employ Western media, leaving little room for those who do both. This kind of binary thinking is problematic not only because it uses “Western representational style” as one of its qualifying features, but also because it seems to deny any continuity among artists of American Indian descent. Though they resolve that an important aspect to the visual expression of artists of American Indian ancestry is identification with their Native communities, Berlo and Phillips’ definition does not account for those artists who combine imagery, style, and media to create work for multiple audiences, both Native and non-Native.<sup>44</sup>

W. Jackson Rushing, an art historian whose focus is American Indian art, argues that art historians cannot afford to draw such deep demarcations of difference between craft and fine art, and states that these types of demarcations only serve to institutionally segregate American Indian artists.<sup>45</sup> Rushing purposefully avoids categorizing American Indian art as modern or postmodern in order to offer resistance to Western terminology. Performance and multimedia artist James Luna, a Luiseno tribal member, shares a similar sentiment. He states: “For those of us who bridge the gaps within our culture in possession of Indian knowledge, as well trained artists, I

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 209.

<sup>45</sup> W. Jackson Rushing, “Critical Issues in Recent Native American Art,” in Rushing, “Recent Native American Art,” 6:14, 6.



coin the label of ‘Contemporary Traditionalists’.<sup>46</sup> Luna’s definition is relevant because it merges the field of difference between contemporary and traditional artists, expanding upon Rushing’s sentiment that you cannot have the contemporary without the traditional, or the traditional without the contemporary.

Many other Native artists such as Lillian Pitt (b. 1943), of Warm Springs descent, or Haida artist Robert Davidson (b. 1946) and Yup’ik artist Phillip John Charette (b. 1962) align more closely with the definition of “contemporary-traditional” artists, picking up where the historical arts of their ancestors left off and presenting a continuation of meaning and media. Pitt’s reoccurring use of the image “She Who Watches,” (fig. 4) for example, although forged in a variety of new media, remains firmly based on a Columbia River petroglyph representing the last of the Woman Chiefs (fig. 5). Charette’s *Amikuk Mask* (fig. 6, ca. 2006), another example, strongly resembles the traditional masks of the Arctic and Sub-Arctic region from where Charette’s tribe hails. While traditional Yu’pik masks were carved entirely of wood and adorned with beads and feathers, Charette uses new methods and materials, such as porcelain, glass beads, and ceramic feathers, and a Japanese *raku* firing technique, to approximate a historically accurate Yu’pik mask. By mixing contemporary material with traditional iconography, Pitt and Charette endeavor to show their Native ancestry through their work. Pitt, Charette, and Bartow exemplify the varied artistic practices of contemporary American Indian artists, but should not, as Rushing points out, indicate a radical opposition between artists who exclusively

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<sup>46</sup> James Luna, quoted in Fisher, 44.

mine the imagery of their ancestors and those who seek a cultural convergence in their art, performing a kind of reverse primitivism on the dominant culture. In their attempts to define American Indian art, both Luna and Rushing point to a common ancestry among Native artists that they believe is expressed in their work. Rushing and Luna's definitions of American Indian art rely on an artist's Native ancestry to implicitly influence their art, perpetuating the "living in two worlds" concept, which necessitates that American Indian artists keep one foot in the past and one in the present. One possible way to avoid this and to create a new way of looking at and talking about American Indian art is to employ imagery that is both *non-Western* and *non-Native*, exemplified in Rick Bartow's incorporation of Japanese imagery.

There is an expectation among critics and viewers of American Indian art that the work must feature or somehow concern their indigenous heritage. This misconception that native artists must wear their tribal affiliation on their sleeves is a common one, recently explored in relation to black art by scholar Darby English. English writes, "It is an unfortunate fact that in this country, black artists' work seldom serves as the basis of rigorous, object-based debate. Instead, it is almost uniformly generalized, endlessly summoned to prove its representativeness (or defend its lack of same) and contracted to show-and-tell on behalf of an abstract and unchanging 'culture of origin'."<sup>47</sup> As artist Kay WalkingStick observes, a similar critique can be applied to the reception of American Indian art, where an artist's

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<sup>47</sup> Darby English, *How to See a Work of Art in Total Darkness* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2007), 7.

heritage is often the focus of an exhibition, rather than how his or her work deals with more mainstream themes. WalkingStick writes, “Critical questions that would be raised in other venues simply are not considered in ethnic or gender-specific exhibitions. Not to receive serious critical review is a kind of disempowerment.”<sup>48</sup> On the other hand, by engaging in a discourse with their ancestry and by regaining control over their identities, it can also be argued that artists from marginalized ethnic groups recognize their identities as a valuable vehicle for self-determination, helping to recoup the damages brought on by decades of inferior treatment.

For example, *Building Minnesota* (fig. 7, 1990) a site-specific installation by American Indian artist Hachivi Edgar Heap of Birds (Cheyenne/Arapaho), calls attention to the sociopolitical realities of American Indian history. Constructed on the banks of the Mississippi River in Minneapolis, *Building Minnesota*, counters ethnographic and popular stereotypes of Indians by drawing attention to the gap between stereotyped constructions of Native identity and twentieth-century Native lives. Heap of Birds appropriates modern media tools, such as the billboard, the neon sign, or in the case of *Building Minnesota*, the roadside marker, in a memorializing effort dedicated to the indigenous lives lost in the European expansion into the West.

*Building Minnesota* honors forty Dakota men who were hanged in the 1860s for rebelling when their families were starving on reservation lands. In his artist statement for the project, Heap of Birds articulates the following:

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<sup>48</sup> Kay WalkingStick, “Native American Art in the Postmodern Era,” in Rushing, “Recent Native American Art,” 15:17, 15.

The oppression and slaughter of human beings by white American society does not only come from hatred; greed and potential impediment to economic growth also feed the frenzy to kill and destroy people of color and spirits that grow from the soil or move to the surface that is our earth. It is therefore proper that we inform the Minnesota public to honor those forty Dakota tribal citizens who were executed by hanging in Minnesota in 1862 and 1865 by order of Presidents Abraham Lincoln and Andrew Johnson and with the support of the citizens of Minnesota.<sup>49</sup>

The red lettered metal signs, presented in both Dakota and English, honored the Native tribes of the Upper Midwest who were not permitted to provide for their own economic livelihood through hunting and gathering. Heap of Bird's critical project addresses the specific historical realities of the Indian peoples who lived in each region. By providing his audience with both historical documentation and a public art context in which to engage with the issues, Heap of Birds makes a politically meaningful art that links the past with the present.

Issues of identity and the use of cultural hybridity still dominate much contemporary American Indian art. Indeed, these two issues have been at the center of Rick Bartow's work. Since the early 1980s Bartow's work has been featured in numerous individual and group shows and is included in the permanent collections of the Portland Art Museum (Portland, OR), the National Museum of the American Indian (New York, NY and Washington, D.C.), the Heard Museum (Phoenix, AZ), the Museum of Man (Frankfurt, Germany), and Paper Nao (Tokyo, Japan). When the National Museum of the American Indian planned to exhibit contemporary American Indian art at the June 2005 Venice Biennale, Bartow was considered as a possible

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<sup>49</sup> Edgar Heap of Birds, "Public At Gallery: Building Minnesota," [http://www.heapofbirds.com/hachivi\\_edgar\\_heap\\_of\\_birds\\_publ.htm](http://www.heapofbirds.com/hachivi_edgar_heap_of_birds_publ.htm) (accessed 2 November 2007). Similar installations include "Reclaim," various sites New York, New York, 1988; and "Day and Night," Seattle, WA, 1991.

participant, along with artists such as Fritz Scholder, Hachivi Edgar Heap of Birds, Kay Walking Stick, and James Luna.<sup>50</sup> Though his work as an artist is appreciated, especially in the Pacific Northwest, I believe it should be evaluated based on a different set of terms. Bartow's appeal lies in how he plays with the notion of cultural hybridity, employing elements from different cultures, identifying himself as an "artist who happens to be Indian,"<sup>51</sup> rather than as an American Indian artist.

According to art historian Richard Meyer, this kind of duality is present in most, if not all, identity-based artwork. Meyer writes that there is tension inherent in the "affirmation of difference on the one hand and the desire for inclusion and equality on the other."<sup>52</sup> He asks: "by marking off the work of women (or Chicano or homosexual) artists as a discrete field of inquiry, are we thereby ghettoizing that work within a separate sphere of art history?"<sup>53</sup> Though he uses feminist art history as his case study, Meyer's question is relevant to Bartow's work because Bartow is an artist whose art reflects an interest in being considered outside the specialized realm of American Indian art history; Bartow's cross-cultural referencing reflects this desire to be perceived as an artist, though not necessarily a "Native" one.

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<sup>50</sup> Frank LaPena, "The Arts: Images of Identity," *News From Native California* (Winter 2004/2005): 13. Though American Indian artists had participated in the 1999, 2001, and 2003 Venice Biennales, they were not represented by a national pavilion until 2005. Prior to 2005, American Indian artists were sponsored by the indigenous Arts Action Alliance.

<sup>51</sup> Bartow refers to a statement made by artist Joe Fedderson, quoted in Dubin, 40.

<sup>52</sup> Richard Meyer, "Identity," in Nelson and Shiff, *Critical Terms for Art History*, 347.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

Like Meyer, artist Coco Fusco recognizes the potentially dangerous duality present in the tension of desiring inclusion and demanding equality at the same time.

Fusco arrives at a similar sentiment in her essay, “Passionate Irreverence: The Cultural Politics of Identity.” She writes:

While some might look upon the [mid-1990s] wave of multiculturalism as inherently empowering and/or new, others look upon the present in relation to a long tradition of “celebrating” (or rather, objectifying) difference as light but exotic entertainment for the dominant culture [...] these celebrations and the curiosity that drives them are not necessarily disinterested or inherently progressive phenomena. They are, instead, potentially double-edged swords, signaling both the exercising of control over cultural difference through the presentation of static models of diversity and the potential opportunity to transform the stereotypes that emerge with the imposition of control.<sup>54</sup>

Fusco identifies the dominant culture’s control over artists of non-European descent as one of the attributes of an art historical interest in multiculturalism. In doing so, she echoes Meyer’s concern of whether or not art historians “ghettoize” work that has not been traditionally regarded as a part of the standard canon of art history by critiquing it within a separate sphere of. Fusco also recognizes the potential for indigenous artists’ work to alter stereotypes. In this sense, cultural hybridity emerges as way for Native artists to simultaneously employ and critique the dominant culture and to expose its legacy of control over the critical evaluations of their work.

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<sup>54</sup> Coco Fusco, “Passionate Irreverence: The Cultural Politics of Identity,” in *English is Broken Here*, ed. Coco Fusco (New York: The New Press, 1995), 27-28.

Cultural Hybridity and American Indian Identity: Acculturation as Critique?

As art historian Elizabeth Hutchinson observes, “Early historians of Native American art privileged artistic traditions that seemed untainted by Western influences. Hybrid art forms were dismissed as inauthentic, assimilationist, or even degenerate.”<sup>55</sup> More recently, the art of “others,” including American Indian art, has grown increasingly popular. In 1992, *Art Journal* dedicated an issue to recent American Indian art, while museums across the country mounted exhibitions dedicated to indigenous art.<sup>56</sup> That year, the art world was presented with a perfect opportunity for the exhibition and critique of American Indian art, as 1992 was the Quincentennial, marking the 500th anniversary of Columbus’s arrival to the “New World.”<sup>57</sup> The discourse surrounding these contemporary works tended to point out how American Indian artists had repositioned themselves, and their Native identity, within the framework of postmodernism. By combining aspects of the dominant culture with signs of indigenous identity, American Indian artists, especially those working in non-traditional media, were embraced by the museum and gallery system,

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<sup>55</sup> Elizabeth Hutchinson, “Modern Native American Art: Angel DeCora’s Transcultural Aesthetics,” *The Art Bulletin*, Vol. 83, No. 4 (Dec., 2001): 740-756, 740.

<sup>56</sup> Exhibitions include: “The Submuloc Show/Columbus Wohs: A Visual Commentary on the Columbus Quincentennial from the Perspective of America’s First People,” ATLATL, Phoenix, AZ (1992); “Visions from Native America, Contemporary Art for the Year of the Indigenous People,” U.S. Senate Rotunda, Washington, D.C. (1992); “Objects of Myth and Memory,” Brooklyn Museum of Art, New York (1991); “Art of the American Frontier: The Collecting of Chandler and Pohrt,” National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C. (1992); and “Creativity is Our Tradition,” the inaugural exhibition at the new Institute of American Indian Arts, Santa Fe, NM (permanent installation, 1992).

<sup>57</sup> In his introductory essay, “Critical Issues in Recent Native American Art,” for the *Art Journal* special issue on recent Native American art (Autumn 1992), W. Jackson Rushing denies the timing of the magazine’s publication and the Columbian Quincentennial celebration, 6.

both of which were looking for viable ways to diversify their collections in response to the new wave of multiculturalism.<sup>58</sup> In terms of Bartow, this shift is significant because, as anthropologist Rebecca Dobkins points out, characteristic of his work is an “eclectic cross-referencing of multiple cultural and art historical sources. [Bartow] is a cosmopolitan student or, as he might say, a miner of wide-ranging veins of inspiration.”<sup>59</sup> In this sense, Bartow’s work fits the mold. Though Bartow’s experience with other cultures accounts for one aspect of his cross-cultural referencing, the forms which this referencing often takes: small, fetish sculptures and careful drypoint renderings, is also significant. The size and medium of these efforts indicates a break from his larger, more colorful canvases (figs. 15, 16, and 17) and alludes to the possibility that Bartow’s hybrid approach is neither solely experiential nor based on commercial interests. Bartow is aware of how his work evidences “acculturation” and uses his knowledge of multiple cultures as a means to critique the reception of American Indian art, and the Native artist.

### Defining “Hybridity”

In a 2007 essay, art historian Cynthia Fowler describes the emergence of the postcolonial concept of hybridity in the 1990s as a way for American Indian artists to “(re) define their traditions, values, and cultural identities” on their own terms in

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<sup>58</sup> In 1992, Bartow’s work was featured in “The Spiritual World of the Native American,” Shizuoka City, Japan; “The Submuloc Show/Columbus Wohs: A Visual Commentary on the Columbus Quincentennial from the Perspective of America’s First People,” ATLATL, Phoenix, AZ; and “Who We Are: Autobiographies in Art,” Washington State Arts Commission, Olympia, WA.

<sup>59</sup> Dobkins, 27.



order to aid in the process of self-determination.<sup>60</sup> She observes that the use of multiple cultural references in American Indian art has resulted in a form of self-expression that affirms native identity by highlighting the difference between it and the dominant culture. Fowler interprets this as a positive way for indigenous artists to not only assert their identities, but as a means to redefine their culture as a whole.<sup>61</sup> Cultural hybridity proved a fruitful theme for curators, resulting in a range of exhibitions of American Indian art centered on the notion of hybridity as an avenue for contemporary Native expression. By featuring artists who juxtaposed the, at times, competing forces of traditional and contemporary iconography these exhibitions helped define hybridity within an institutional framework. By examining a selection of exhibitions featuring hybridity, I aim to illustrate the paradigm shift in the way museums conceive of contemporary American Indian art. As these examples show, instead of considering them “inauthentic, assimilationist, or degenerate,” as mentioned in the previous section, museums capitalized on American Indian artists’ combination of Native and non-Native elements.<sup>62</sup> However, they also reveal their limited vision by concentrating on artists whose work featured a response to Western media. For example, though Rick Bartow was a part of “Shared Visions,” his work increasingly examines cultures outside both the Native and Western framework.

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<sup>60</sup> Cynthia Fowler, “Hybridity as a Strategy for Self-Determination in Contemporary American Indian Art,” *Social Justice*, Vol. 34, No. 1 (2007): 63-79, 63.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>62</sup> Hutchinson, 740.

“Shared Visions,” curated by Margaret Archuleta and Rennard Strickland for the Heard Museum, Phoenix, Arizona in 1991, featured work by artists of American Indian descent ranging from early nineteenth-century examples of narrative painting in reaction to contact with European settlers, to a group of works from 1990, including a mask by Rick Bartow, specifically reacting to the exhibition’s theme of “encounter and response.”<sup>63</sup> Similar to Fowler, the curators of “Shared Visions” equate American Indian artistic adaptation with survival, though they do not use the term cultural hybridity to describe their curatorial objective. Instead, Archuleta and Strickland speculate on the absence of American Indian art from an art historical dialogue, theorizing that “definitionally the Indian cannot be accepted as a serious, professional artist and that paintings by Indians can be considered only in a primitive, aboriginal context.”<sup>64</sup> According to the authors, this bias has prevented American Indian artists from being considered as part of the artistic mainstream. Their concern is valid considering that less than a decade prior, the exhibition “‘Primitivism’ in Twentieth-Century Art,” in an attempt to show affinities between Western and non-Western art, in fact reinforced difference and supposed Western artistic superiority by sustaining a Western imperialist view over non-Western culture. Archuleta and Strickland are critical of the notion that American Indian art resides in a “primitive”

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<sup>63</sup> Margaret Archuleta and Rennard Strickland, “The Way People Were Meant to Live: The Shared Visions of Twentieth Century Native American Painters and Sculptors,” from *Shared Visions: Native American Painters and Sculptors in the Twentieth Century* (Phoenix: The Heard Museum, 1991), 5.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

past. In response to this stereotype, “Shared Visions” shows how Native artists have borrowed equally from the West.

In examples of work featured in this exhibition, hybridity is employed as a critical tool for American Indian artists, allowing them to remain associated with their Native past, but respond to the postmodern world. According to Archulata and Strickland the survival of American Indian art depends on artists who have achieved this balance; artists who document their indigenous experience through a combination of the preservation of historic values and the introduction of new traditions.<sup>65</sup> For the authors, cultural hybridity is not just a strategy for self-determination, as identified by Fowler, but is the only viable means to represent the contemporary American Indian experience. The problem with this assumption is that it doesn’t take into account those artists, mentioned earlier, who create work within a more traditional framework.

Rick Bartow’s *Salmon Mask* (fig. 8, 1987), included in “Shared Visions” (Plate 67) exemplifies the curators’ notions that contemporary American Indian art frequently acknowledges past traditions, while reflecting a contemporary perspective. *Salmon Mask* combines aspects of a traditional Northwest Coast mask, but reflects Bartow’s individual interpretation in the realistic details of the salmon, exemplified by its snubbed nose and iridescent coloring.<sup>66</sup> The mask is formed from carved wood and mixed media and combines elements of traditional Northwest Coast design with Bartow’s own visual language, illustrating a burgeoning interest in the incorporation

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>66</sup> Dobkins, 22.

mixed cultural elements in Bartow's work. Though the mask is carved from wood, a traditional material, and features the salmon, a species central to Northwest and California coastal tribal livelihood, Bartow has positioned the graphic black and red outlines, a trait highly associated with the Northwest Coast's stylized *formline* tradition, inside the salmon's mouth.<sup>67</sup> By combining stylized and realistic elements, and by placing the traditional Northwest Coast design within the mouth of the salmon, allowing his own design to surround it, Bartow's mask comments not only on the importance of building new traditions around historic supports (a reading that fits in with the theme of the exhibition), but also perhaps about the artist's own creative consumption of cultures other than his own, a theme which has remained relevant throughout his career thus far.

Another exhibition, "Indigena," mounted for the Canadian Museum of Civilization in 1992 addressed the topic of the "contemporary Native perspective" through a series of direct responses to the colonization of Canada by Europeans.<sup>68</sup> The exhibition featured work by eighteen First Nations artists, as well as essays by scholars and artists. "What More Do They Want," an essay from the exhibition catalogue by filmmaker Loretta Todd (Metis), addresses the concerns inherent in

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<sup>67</sup> Here, the Northwest Coast refers to a narrow strip of coastal land and islands that extends south from the Copper River in Southern Alaska to the Oregon-California border. It is approximately 1,500 miles long and is cut off from the rest of the continent by a series of inland mountain ranges. For a detailed discussion and illustrated examples of Northwest Coast *formline* style, see: Berlo and Philips, 183-188.

<sup>68</sup> Gerald McMaster and Lee-Ann Martin, Eds. *Indigena: Contemporary Native Perspectives*, (Hull, Quebec: The Canadian Museum of Civilization, 1992), exhibition catalogue.

attempting to place indigenous art within a Eurocentric framework.<sup>69</sup> She, like Rushing, argues against the use the terms *modern* and *postmodern* to describe work by artists of Native ancestry, explaining the implications of using terms from an art historical vocabulary formulated by the dominant culture without considering the consequences. She explains: “By reducing our cultural expression to simply the question of modernism or postmodernism, art or anthropology, or whether we are contemporary or traditional, we are placed on the edges of the dominant culture, while the dominant culture determines whether we are allowed to enter its realm of art.”<sup>70</sup> It is precisely this tension, however, that Bartow chooses to navigate in his work. The friction between perceived opposites—between past and present history, contemporary and traditional representation, and dominant and indigenous cultures—has been dominant throughout Bartow’s career as an artist.

“No Reservations,” curated by Richard Klein in 2006 for the Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum in Ridgefield, Connecticut, is a more recent example of an exhibition that further explores the notion of cultural hybridity, showcasing examples of work by five contemporary American Indian artists whose art combines signs from both the dominant culture and their own indigenous cultures, and five non-Native artists whose work is influenced by the dislocation of the indigenous population by European colonizers. This exhibition is important to this thesis

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<sup>69</sup> Loretta Todd, “What More Do They Want,” in *Indigena*, pp. 71-79.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 75. While I use the terms *modern* and *postmodern* in my thesis, it is important to point out that some scholars, such as Rushing and Todd, argue that this Western terminology capitulates to mainstream culture’s definitions of art.

because it features artists working contemporaneously with Bartow who engage in similar critiques of Native artistic identity within the context of Euro-American art history.

Marie Watt: *Dwelling*

Marie Watt (b. 1967), an artist whose matrilineal heritage is Seneca, but who was born in Redmond, Washington and continues to live and work in the Pacific Northwest, is one artist featured in “No Reservations.”<sup>71</sup> Watt’s piece, *Dwelling* (fig. 9, 2006), created for the exhibition, consists of a stack of wool blankets over seven feet high, trimmed by the artist in satin and wool felt. The artist obtained 160 blankets through donations, while 900 were provided new through funds provided by The Aldrich Museum’s benefactors.<sup>72</sup> Each donated blanket was each affixed with a tag telling a story provided by its owner, while each purchased blanket was decorated with satin ribbon and felt bindings by volunteers.

The dual nature of the blanket, as both a practical and symbolic object, is reflected in Watt’s project; though she includes the stories and memories behind each donated blanket and worked to customize and personalize the sterile wool purchased ones, at the conclusion of the exhibition, she arranged to donate the blankets to local

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<sup>71</sup> Marie Watt is officially a member of the Seneca tribe of upstate New York.

<sup>72</sup> Richard Klein, *No Reservations: Native American History and Culture in Contemporary Art*, (Ridgefield, Connecticut: The Aldrich Museum, 2006), 23, exhibition catalogue.

homeless agencies.<sup>73</sup> The combination reflects one of the traditional purposes of the blanket in American Indian culture: witnesses to significant occasions are often honored with the gift of a blanket and Watt has shared her own story of her parents giving her a blanket when she graduated from college.<sup>74</sup> The blanket itself is Watt's vehicle to explore cultural hybridity, as each one references a past unique to its owner, while touching on aspects of her own experience as an artist of American Indian descent.

Though her work is sculptural, Watt also recognizes the blanket's affinity to early American Indian ledger drawings. Though she may be speaking metaphorically, Watt draws an interesting connection between blankets and ledgers as both reflect a history of use and express a relationship to memory.<sup>75</sup> Historically, "ledger book art" emerged in the nineteenth century when the Plains narrative tradition of painting intersected with pencils and papers provided by early explorers and traders.<sup>76</sup> Though the Plains artists transferred traditional scenes from animal hide to drawing tablets, ledger book art would also document the changing world of American Indian life on the Great Plains.<sup>77</sup> This quality of change, specifically, is

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<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> Marie Watt, public lecture, Portland State University, 15 April 2008.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> Berlo and Phillips, 122. The genre is called "ledger book art" because the work was sometimes drawn over the records written on the lined pages of ledger books, though blank books were equally used.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 123.

most akin to Watt's *Blanket Stories*, as the blanket, initially documents a specific history, which is altered by the blanket's creation into sculpture and then further by the sculpture's induction into the gallery setting. The continued removal of the blanket from its original setting is like the transition of ledger book art from a forced transition from hide to paper to a form of documentation separate from its original introduction into Native life. In making this association between her contemporary work with blankets and the historic genre of ledger book art, Watt acknowledges both mediums' potential to tell a unique and mutable history.

#### Duane Slick: *Looking for Orozco*

Duane Slick (b. 1961), another American Indian artist featured in "No Reservations," is a member of the Sauk and Fox tribe of the Mississippi Iowa, on his father's side, and the Nebraska Winnebago (Ho-Chunk) on his mother's. Slick creates paintings and artist's books that use characters from traditional Indian stories, such as the coyote or the crow, to expose the realities of being an indigenous artist within contemporary American society.<sup>78</sup> The character Coyote, considered Slick's alter ego, in *Looking for Orozco* (fig. 10, 2006) encounters Western art, which he eventually rejects. The last section of the book, "Coyote Considers Pollock," comments on Jackson Pollock's appropriation of traditional Navajo sand painting

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<sup>78</sup>

Klein, 24.



techniques to help establish his drip painting technique.<sup>79</sup> According to the curator of the exhibition, Richard Klein, Slick's piece illustrates "a play of conflicting forces, pitting painter Jackson Pollock, whose pouring technique was influenced by traditional Navajo sand painting," against the pixelated image of Coyote.<sup>80</sup> In this mixed media collage, Slick juxtaposes a black and white photograph of Pollock, in the midst of creating an action painting, with a close-up view of Coyote's watchful eyes. The image is striking in its cultural collision of Pollock and Coyote, both within the pages of the book itself and as a metaphor for Slick's relationship as an artist of American Indian descent involved in a global art market. According to Richard Klein, curator of the exhibition, Slick's work "speaks of the concern that many Native people have for balancing tribal values with the demands of the marketplace."<sup>81</sup> The question Klein's statement raises is whether or not American Indian artists who employ cultural hybridity in their work do so in order to be successful in the art market, or is their work instead symptomatic of living in contemporary society? This observation points to a second aspect of the incorporation of non-Native imagery in contemporary American Indian art: rather than employed for self-determination, as indicated by Fowler, perhaps hybridity is employed in self-defense in an effort to create work that is more appealing and accessible to both Native and non-Native audiences.

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<sup>79</sup> The proposal that Pollock was inspired by Navajo sand painting techniques is corroborated in Archuleta and Strickland, 9.

<sup>80</sup> Klein, 23.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 24.

### Questioning Authenticity: Rick Bartow's Found-Object Sculptures

Like Slick, Bartow also addresses the cultural collision between Western and Native cultures in an untitled sculpture from 1995 (fig. 11). In this mixed media piece, which is over one foot tall, Bartow assembles a collection of found objects to suggest the complex and ghettoized position of Native people. The use of found objects, which are appropriated by the artist from their original context in order to create new meaning in a work of art, suggests the multifaceted role, both historical and contemporary, of the American Indian in United States history. In Bartow's piece, the figure wears a beaded belt and scarf. His head is adorned with a feathered headdress, and in his left hand, he carries an American flag. The figure's face, with its heavily outlined eyebrows, wide red mouth and prominent nose, recalls the stylized facial features of conventional Northwest Coast carving. Due to its visually arresting manner of representation and its proprietors' use of sculpture and painting, (two historically privileged genres of Western art, both easy for Western viewers to recognize and appreciate), Northwest Coast indigenous art has been historically popular with collectors.<sup>82</sup> In addition, because of these factors, art by Northwest Coast indigenous artists was one of the first genres of Native North American art to be collected by galleries specializing in indigenous art. We have seen Bartow reference Northwest Coast carving before in *Salmon Mask*. By referencing it again in this sculpture, as well as the two sculptures discussed below, Bartow acknowledges

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<sup>82</sup>

Berlo and Phillips, 183.

the popular and recognizable genre and uses it as a defining feature in these figures, which consider American Indian stereotypes.

Through its distinct facial features, *Busy Walker* (fig. 12), another carved wood and mixed media sculpture from 1995, displays similar references to Northwest Coast carving as Bartow's untitled piece. This sculpture, like its untitled counterpart, has multiple legs, which are suggestive of the Japanese folk floats that Bartow encountered while visiting Japan.<sup>83</sup> *Busy Walker* appears almost comical with his multitude of legs and wide, stiff smile, but his nudity, crafted from scarred scrap wood and nailed together haphazardly, reveals a more vulnerable aspect to this piece. The combined characteristics of *Busy Walker* emphasize the disconnect between appearing outwardly content, while barely being held together physically. *Busy Walker*'s forced smile and disjointed appearance place it in the same category of critique as the untitled flag-bearer. In both pieces, Bartow uses traditional effigy carving to comment on the ostracized position of American Indian people in the Western world.

*The Hunter* (fig. 13), another carved wood and mixed media sculpture 1995, also features wide, dark eyebrows and bold red outlining around its nose and mouth, again suggestive of the stylized facial features popular with Northwest Coast carvers. Unlike the previous examples, *The Hunter* is a head without a body. The piece is topped with a set of antlers, tied on tightly with twine, which resembles hair in the way that Bartow has repeatedly wrapped the material across the sculpture's forehead.

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<sup>83</sup> Dobkins, 35.

Its mouth is slightly agape, propped open by a series of red and black thread and silver wire. This technique can also be seen on the mouth of the untitled sculpture. Here, the base of figure's drum-like head is also wrapped with thread, which is placed in the figure's mouth, seeming to hold it open.

Bartow's use of the thread and wire in the mouths of *The Hunter* and the untitled piece, takes even the imaginative possibility of speech away from the figures. Though the figures' hands and legs remain free, the tied mouth recalls a bound hostage, whose mouth his captor has stuffed in order to silence him. It is probable that Bartow chose to give his sculptures a Northwest Coast style of visage because of the carving tradition's commercial recognition, making their features instantly recognizable and marketable as Native to a range of viewers. This trait, combined with the artist's use of antlers, feathers and beads suggests Bartow's creation of stereotypical American Indian figures. Though the untitled sculpture, mutely waving its American flag, arguable responds most clearly to the ghettoized position of American Indian people, all three sculptures with their distinct facial features and adornment, or lack thereof, further explore Bartow's examination of what an Indian does, or is supposed to look like. These sculptures offer insight into a critical aspect of Bartow's oeuvre that has been ignored and counter his professed neutrality about his work. By examining these figures in the context of Bartow's later printmaking efforts, which engage art historical figures and Japanese imagery, Bartow emerges as

an artist more aware of his audience, and his critical project, than he lets on.<sup>84</sup> These prints, considered in the next section, help further illustrate Bartow's pointed interest in the viewer through their small size and deliberate choice of subject matter.

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<sup>84</sup> A quote from Bartow illustrates his interest in the viewer: "It's about making the mark, and it's done in an in-your-face area. I work on paper that's twenty-six by forty inches, so when you look at it, the center's just above eye level of the viewer. It's right there in your face," quoted in Devon Jackson, "Making His Mark," *Southwest Art* (August 2004): 163-165, 165.

CHAPTER III  
RICK BARTOW AND JAPAN: AN ENVOY OF METHOD, IMAGERY, AND  
COLLABORATION

The interest of artists working in the Pacific Northwest in a Japanese aesthetic can be traced, according to scholar Lois Allen, to the founding members of the Northwest School, active in the first half of the 20th-century.<sup>85</sup> Defining the Pacific Northwest as primarily Oregon and Washington, Allen writes that the region's relatively large Asian population and its museums' vast collections of Asian art, "stimulated interest in the philosophies as well as the art of the Far East and sowed the seeds of the mystical quality that became identified with Northwest art."<sup>86</sup> Forced to be insular because of their locale's relative distance from the major art hubs of New York, Chicago, and Los Angeles, Allen proposes that artists in the Pacific Northwest produce art that is arguably independent from national and now increasingly international trends. Writing about the work of the four founders of the Northwest School, Allen explains that, "references to nature, even when oblique and abstracted, the calligraphic markings, and a spiritual dimension, all of which

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<sup>85</sup> The founding members were Mark Tobey, Morris Graves, Kenneth Callahan, and Guy Anderson. These four had an interest in non-Western religions, which arguably impacted their work.

<sup>86</sup> Lois Allen, *Contemporary Art in the Northwest* (Roseville, New South Wales, Australia: Craftsman House, 1995), 10.

characterized their paintings, sprang from a philosophical base.”<sup>87</sup> According to Allen, this mid-century Pacific Northwest interest in non-western philosophies such as Zen Buddhism, Hinduism, and Bahai accounts for the similarities in the work of the artists associated with the Northwest School.

Matthew Kangas, author of *Epicenter: Essays on North American Art*, offers a different take on the artists’ preoccupation with the exotic. He writes: “a learned fascination with many North American and Asian primitive cultures [...] led to an art of indiscriminatory multicultural references.”<sup>88</sup> He also extends his criticism to Mark Tobey and Morris Graves, writing that these artists turned to the decorative aspects of Asian art in an effort to “conceal their own technical limitations.”<sup>89</sup> In his employment of Japanese imagery, Bartow extends the line of Pacific Northwest artists interested in Japanese imagery and a Japanese aesthetic. At the same time, Allen and Kangas’s opposing views on the Northwest School’s penchant for cultural hybridity reveals a question relevant to Bartow’s cross-cultural referencing: does Bartow’s use of Japanese technique and imagery constitute appropriation for formal, visual effect, or is his an artistic project in critique of today’s pluralistic, globalized society?<sup>90</sup> As Bartow’s work reveals, the two are not mutually exclusive.

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<sup>87</sup> Ibid., 10-11.

<sup>88</sup> Matthew Kangas, *Epicenter: Essay on North American Art* (New York City: Midmarch Arts Press, 2004), 161.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

<sup>90</sup> Allen, 8. Allen argues that Northwest art “differs from that of other regions only as it is more likely to draw on relationships between societal issues and aspects of the natural environments than on theory and art history.”

Bartow and Hiroshima: An Enduring Collaboration

Anthropologist Rebecca Dobkins identifies the mid-1990s as Bartow's initial foray into incorporating Japanese aesthetic elements into his work.<sup>91</sup> She points to a 1994 trip to Japan where Bartow attended the opening of his first Japanese solo show at the Yanagisawa Gallery in Urawa, Saitama.<sup>92</sup> She also recalls the connection forged between Bartow and Japanese papermaker Naoki Sakamoto of Paper Nao, Tokyo, writing that Bartow participated in a papermaking workshop with Sakamoto in the early 1990s.<sup>93</sup> In 1991, three years prior to his first solo show in Japan, Bartow traveled to Japan and met Master Printer Seiichi Hiroshima at the Azabu Kasumicho Gallery.<sup>94</sup> By 1997, the two artists had created an ongoing print collaboration, where Bartow would send Hiroshima images he had scratched onto plates formed of found metal and Plexiglas. Hiroshima would then pull the print and send part of the edition back to Bartow.<sup>95</sup> As of 2002, the two artists had generated over 150 drypoint prints.<sup>96</sup> The drypoints discussed in this thesis can technically and stylistically be identified as a part of Bartow and Hiroshima's collaboration, marked by the

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<sup>91</sup> Dobkins, 34.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., 33.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

<sup>94</sup> Ian Boyden, *Envoys: Prints by Rick Bartow*, Sheehan Gallery, Whitman College, January 12-February 17, 2002, exhibition card.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid.



roughness of many of the salvaged plates, the use of a traditional Japanese *chop* to emboss the paper with the identifying symbols of the collaborators and through the use of handmade Japanese paper.<sup>97</sup> They are especially significant in terms of my larger thesis because their size and medium required Bartow to simplify his visual language, more graphically isolating his subject matter. The medium is also important because, historically, prints have been secondary vehicles for artistic expression and often represent the idiosyncratic experimentations of the artist.<sup>98</sup> These prints are also examples of artistic collaboration, reinforcing the concept of a cultural exchange between Bartow and Hiroshima. Finally, through style, medium, and their deliberate choice of subject matter, the following examples illustrate how Bartow endeavors to change the critical language used to describe American Indian art.

Prior to collaborating with Hiroshima, Bartow's work displayed an interest in simplified forms, flattened imagery, and a truncated perspective, all characteristic elements of traditional Japanese printmaking. In *To Cross the River* (fig. 15, 1992), for example, Bartow paints an image of long, narrow canoe occupied by a lone man and a hawk. The boat glides gracefully across the water, slicing the composition in half diagonally. The perspective is somewhat raised, and Bartow articulates his forms with fields of muted acrylic color. The forms of man and hawk are rendered as flat as

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<sup>97</sup> Charles Froelick, in conversation with the author, 18 April 2008. Bartow and Hiroshima composed a chop of a carved "B" for Bartow under a dog jumping over a moon to represent Moon Dog Studios, with locations in Japan and Oregon.

<sup>98</sup> Linda C. Hulst, preface to *The Print in the Western World* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1996): xiii-xviii, xiv.

the wooden sides of the boat and the smooth, blue green water they float upon. Stylistically, *To Cross the River* is sparse in comparison with Bartow's other work of the same period, such as *Siletz Sunday Evening* (fig. 16, 1992) and *Going as Coyote* (fig. 17, 1991). The centered figures, monochromatic hues, simplified lines, and sparse composition of *To Cross a River* foreshadow Bartow's later printmaking efforts.

Bartow used a more overt Japanese aesthetic in his series of flower paintings from 1995 and 1996. In these works, Bartow's flower forms are reminiscent of Japanese Ikebana floral arrangements. *Stolen Magnolia IV* (fig. 18, 1995) for example, shows a single bloom resting in a narrow vase. The handmade bark paper is rough at the edges, but the magnolia flower rests inside a softly painted white border, as if protected from the torn edges of the composition. The naturalistically painted flower is contrasted with stamps expressing Japanese characters. Among them is a reference to the Japanese raven, Karasu, a stamp made for Bartow by his Japanese agent, and one that provides address of a gallery in Japan where Bartow's work is frequently shown.<sup>99</sup> In providing the address of his gallery in Japan, Bartow acknowledges the historical convention, most famously employed by Baroque and Renaissance printmakers, but also prevalent among Japanese printmakers, of advertising along with the print, referencing printmaking's history as a tool for mass-producing images for the tourist trade. By providing the name and address of his gallery, Bartow engages this historic aspect of the medium, injecting a historical

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<sup>99</sup> Dobkins, 39.

convention of the printmaking tradition into his Japanese influenced contemporary piece. All of these aspects combine to suggest that the incorporation of recognizable Native imagery is not a prerequisite for art made by an artist of American Indian descent. Bartow challenges the notions of what Native art “should” look like. In his collaborations with Hiroshima, this confrontation is often realized through, but not limited by, Bartow’s references to Japanese culture.

As stated above, 1998 marks Bartow’s initial experimentations with drypoint. Many of the intaglio prints Bartow produced at this time, in collaboration with Hiroshima, illustrate his preliminary response to the medium, as well as his interest in the incorporation of Japanese subject matter in his work. Like the founders of the Northwest School before him, Bartow’s drypoints are inspired by Japanese aesthetic traditions, specifically Zen Buddhism, but they also tap into Japan’s rich tradition of *ukiyo-e*, a term used to describe the “floating world of pleasure and amusement” of the Yoshiwara, or the red-light district of Edo period Japan.<sup>100</sup> Stylistically, *ukiyo-e* typically features courtesans, Kabuki actors, and fashionable men and women, and though it originated as a painting genre, *ukiyo-e* flourished in the woodblock medium, as a result of printmaking’s cost-effectiveness and ability to be mass-produced.<sup>101</sup> Though Bartow works with drypoint, rather than woodblock, stylistically his prints are in the style of *ukiyo-e*. For example, he uses the popular late eighteenth century

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<sup>100</sup> Hugo Munsterberg, *The Japanese Print: A Historical Guide* (New York: Weatherhill, 1982), 16. The suffix, *e*, applies to painting, but printmaking is included in the *ukiyo-e* genre.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

*ukiyo-e* convention of Kabuki actor close-ups in *Oguni Exhibition Hall* (fig. 20, 1998), *Paper Nao* (fig. 21, 1998), and *Gathering* (fig. 22, 1998).<sup>102</sup> In *Oguni Exhibition Hall* and *Paper Nao*, Bartow fills nearly the entire page with an intense close-up of a man's face. In *Oguni Exhibition Hall* the face is cropped on all sides by the margins of the paper and the figure's coarse beard points at the name and telephone number of the exhibition hall. A similar method is used in *Paper Nao*, where a phone number and the paper shop's name accompany the image of the same expressive face. In both drypoints, Bartow uses techniques drawn from advertising to create graphic prints that communicate his interest in Japanese print history and draw attention to his personal experience in Japan. For example, Bartow's connection with Paper Nao, a specialty paper supplier, was made through papermaker Naoki Sakamoto, who came to Astoria, Oregon in the early 1990s to host a papermaking workshop, which Sakamoto provided under the condition that he would have the opportunity to work with Native artists.<sup>103</sup>

The surface of *Gathering*, another drypoint from 1998, is covered with various views of the same cross-eyed, furrow-browed samurai found in *Oguni Exhibition Hall* and *Paper Nao*. In the cramped, crowded composition of *Gathering*, the expressive features of the samurai are compounded in the tight space, to form a twisted mob of faces. Bartow's use of a similar image in all three of these prints, leads the viewer to question the importance of the character featured. As mentioned

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<sup>102</sup> Ibid., 23.

<sup>103</sup> Dobkins, 33.

above, Rebecca Dobkins identifies this face as that of a “very proud, fierce, and angrily heroic” samurai.<sup>104</sup> The man’s furrowed brow, dramatic moustache, and unfocused eyes are features that also resemble Daruma, the sixth-century Indian monk who introduced Zen Buddhism to Japan and China. The ambiguity of this figure indicates that creating a recognizable image from Japanese iconography is not paramount to Bartow’s critical project. Rather, I would argue that these prints speak to the complexity and contradictions of Native historical and cultural influences. Not only does his work not look “Indian,” in these examples, Bartow doesn’t even incorporate any recognizable Native content. In this respect, his work defies easy categorization, as Bartow looks outside *both* sides of his heritage for inspiration.

Beyond stylistic concerns, it is important to note Bartow’s apparent philosophical interest in Japanese culture as well. As curator and art historian Jeffrey Wechsler points out: “When we look at a work that appears to have borrowed an Eastern method or motif, we are justified in asking whether the Asian influence is ‘properly’ used. Although not necessarily the case, it is more likely that an individual with direct contact with Eastern culture will employ aspects of that culture with understanding and respect, and that any work of art resulting from such borrowing will possess a more authentic cultural resonance.”<sup>105</sup> For example, Bartow’s *Gathering* is an attempt to showcase the fierce heroism of a samurai, as well as an

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<sup>104</sup> Ibid., 53.

<sup>105</sup> Jeffrey Wechsler, “From Asian Traditions to Modern Expressions: Abstract Art by Asian Americans,” in *Asian Traditions, Modern Expressions*, ed. Wechsler, (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1997): 58-145, 82.

attempt to gain woodblock's clarity of contrast with the drypoint medium. According to Wechsler's statement, Bartow's position as an "outsider" to Japanese culture is apparently overcome by his friendship with Hiroshima, which probably helped instigate Bartow's cultural investigation in the first place. However, Wechsler's correlation between "cultural resonance" and "authenticity" is problematic. Why, with the historical implications of authenticity and the Native-made object, would Bartow appropriate another culture's icon, in the case of *Gathering*, the Japanese samurai (or Daruma)? Since Bartow's prints do not attempt to "properly" employ Japanese imagery, suggesting that his critical project is not only about the representational image printed on the paper, we might ask not *what* is Bartow presenting, but *why*. Continuing with works from his collaboration with Hiroshima, the next section examines a series of drypoints that investigate Bartow's relationship with art history. They are important to this discussion of Bartow's work because they illustrate Bartow's use of hybridity as a means to "decolonize" art history. Bartow reverses the exploitative research practices of anthropology and history by creating work that employs non-Native imagery.

Collaboration, Cultural Hybridity and Native Identity

“For me, who has never been in a reservation situation, it would be foolish to try to do tribal art. That’s why I turn to Chagall, who said, ‘Let us find something authentic in our lives.’”<sup>106</sup>

- Rick Bartow, 1999

In a 2003 self-portrait Bartow depicts himself in a similar manner, in terms of pose, style, and medium, as the Dutch painter and printmaker Rembrandt van Rijn (1606-1669). The title of Bartow’s self-portrait, *Harmenzoon* (fig. 14), is a play on the Dutch artist’s full name: Rembrandt Harmenzoon van Rijn. The use of Rembrandt’s middle name is at once familiar and foreign, reflecting Bartow’s desire to pay homage to the Dutch Master, while remaining distant from him. Rembrandt’s *Self-Portrait from 1660* is placed behind Bartow. In this detail, Rembrandt faces the viewer directly, a corner of his hat shading his right eye, while Bartow depicts himself in profile, in the traditional three-quarters perspective, with the right side of his face out to the viewer. Rembrandt’s direct gaze contrasts with Bartow’s profile view and downcast eyes. Though he wears the floppy hat and billowy tunic reminiscent of the Dutch painter, Bartow is in costume, and appears out of place and insecure, while Rembrandt’s great fleshy face hovers over his left shoulder.

A double artist portrait, *Harmenzoon* is at once about self-portraiture and about Native identity in the context of European art history. Like Rembrandt, Bartow is a painter, draughtsman, printmaker, and prolific self-portraitist, several drypoint examples of which can be found in the series of intaglio prints discussed in this thesis.

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<sup>106</sup> Rick Bartow, quoted in Dubin, 36.

In addressing Rembrandt's impact as an historical artist, Bartow fashions himself in the vein of the Dutch artist, imitating him in dress, pose, and medium. By comparing himself to Rembrandt, a fixture in the canon of European art history, Bartow, an artist of American Indian descent, inducts himself into Western art history's "hall of fame." He does so, however, with a sense of humor and irony, self-consciously placing himself before the Dutch Master. *Harmenzoon* can also be interpreted as Bartow's acknowledgement of his awareness of art history. In choosing to pose as such a familiar face, call him by his middle name, and even going so far as to include a rendition of the seventeenth century artist's own self-portrait in his composition, Bartow encourages the viewer to understand how the art of other cultures influences his own work. In doing so, Bartow reverses the history of appropriation exercised on Native cultures and offers evidence to support the idea that "intellectual colonialism" is breached by Native artists' employment of images previously considered off-limits.<sup>107</sup>

#### "Mining" Art History<sup>108</sup>

Popular figures from European and American art history, such as Egon Schiele (1890-1918), Gustav Klimt (1862-1918), Hans Holbein (1497-1543), and Edward Hopper (1882-1967), are also featured in this series of drypoints. Like, *Harmenzoon*, these prints appear at once in homage to artists before him and contain

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<sup>107</sup> Joanne Barker. "For Whom Sovereignty Matters," in *Sovereignty Matters: Locations of Contestation and Possibility in Indigenous Struggles for Self-Determination*, ed. Joanne Barker (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2005): 1-31, 25.

<sup>108</sup> Dobkins, 27. Dobkins points out that Bartow often refers to his artistic process as "mining".



a complex comment on colonialism and artistic license. *For Klimt* (fig. 23, 2000), for example, depicts a skull with antlers attached to an elongated body featuring Klimt-like decorative swirls. The skull and antlers, two of Bartow's oft-used motifs, juxtaposed with Klimt's spiral forms, is suggestive of affinities between the two artists. But, unlike the Museum of Modern Art's "'Primitivism' in the Twentieth-Century" show, Bartow presents viewers with the reversal of the dominant culture's interest in Native motifs. In *For Klimt*, he shows how an artist of American Indian descent borrows equally from Western art. The elongated shape of the creature in *For Klimt* is reminiscent of the eagle in *Eagle Spirit*, discussed above. In both, Bartow uses the same short, vertical drypoint line to create texture on the subject's surface. In *For Klimt* that vertical stroke gives way to a series of spirals, suggesting a new way of looking at the Austrian artist's trademark pattern.

Bartow also suggests references to Western art history in *Eagle Spirit* (fig. 19, 1998), which depicts the head and feathered neck of an eagle in profile. Bartow has emphasized the physical process of printmaking by leaving the plate mark on the page and through the addition of marks a quarter of the way down from the top two corners and up from the bottom left. The artist often removes these printer's marks, which aid in the placement of the image on the page, in order to produce a clean final image. In leaving the marks visible and a part of the final version, Bartow references the process of printmaking, which is an important aspect of the medium in general.

The designation at the top of the page, "no. 12", refers to a museum's cataloging system, giving the impression that the eagle is a specimen, archived by the

institution, rather than a living creature.<sup>109</sup> This combination recalls Marcel Broodthaers's (1924-1976) *Musee d'Arte Modern Departement des Aigles* (1972). In this piece, Broodthaers is critical of the museum as an institution responsible for casting abstract cultural meaning and value over objects. With his fictitious museum of modern art, Broodthaers engages in institutional critique and works to deconstruct the museum by exposing the arbitrary meaning it imposes on objects in its collections.<sup>110</sup> Bartow's *Eagle Spirit* shares this critical disposition. The word "spirit" in the title is in contrast with the image of the rigid, static eagle printed on the page, implying that the eagle's spirit has been reduced and compartmentalized into the museum's cataloguing system. The treatment of the eagle in Bartow's piece, typically an emblem of freedom in the United States, critiques the treatment of American Indian art within an institutional setting.

Through his use of cultural hybridity, Rick Bartow emerges as an artist less interested in using recognizable Native imagery in his work, and more in mixing cultural signs and symbols to create a visual language that reflects his experience as an artist of American Indian descent. As illustrated by his found-object sculptures and his series of drypoints, which draw attention to the marginalization of the Native artist in Western art history, Rick Bartow's critical project indicates his interest in creating a new language for contemporary American Indian art.

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<sup>109</sup> Dobkins, 53.

<sup>110</sup> For more on Marcel Broodthaers, see: David Hopkins, *After Modern Art 1945-2000* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp.165-169; and *Marcel Broodthaers Section Publicite*, (Marian Goodman Gallery: New York, 1995), exhibition catalogue.

## CHAPTER IV

### ACHIEVING “ESTHETIC SOVEREIGNTY”

The images discussed in this thesis point to the use of cultural hybridity by some contemporary American Indian artists as a primary means of negotiating cultural space. As exemplified in the work of Rick Bartow, these cross-cultural references represent a shift from the reliance on Native heritage and a resemblance to “traditional” cultural production to “authenticate” the Native-made object, to the incorporation of non-Native media and subject matter into indigenous art, as a tool against the historically constructed concept of authenticity, as a way to exercise self-determination, and as a declaration of “esthetic sovereignty.”

In 2003 cultural critic Lucy Lippard defined “esthetic sovereignty” as a common goal among contemporary American Indian artists in their search for self-determination, their struggle to reconcile the past with the present, and their relationship to the dominant culture.<sup>111</sup> The term is composed of two important parts: “esthetic,” which refers to art’s ability to engage the senses and “sovereignty,” which implies power or control. When paired together, this term shifts the factors of sovereignty, from an act of assimilation and cultural victimization, to one of empowerment and self-determination. The term can also be used confrontationally, as a way to challenge the imposed power of the mainstream. Rick Bartow’s

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<sup>111</sup> Lippard, 1.

*Hermanzoon* and his other drypoint prints in homage to European greats is an example of this kind of confrontation. As Lippard points out, “In modern art contexts, esthetic sovereignty simply means individualism, self-expression—the bottom line of virtually all contemporary culture. Even traditional Indian artists are not free from this imperative, nor need they be.”<sup>112</sup> Defining American Indian culture on its own terms, as Cynthia Fowler observes, is an essential strategy for self-determination, and one that an exploration of the postcolonial concept of cultural hybridity can help negotiate. Lippard’s concept of esthetic sovereignty shares with hybridity the idea that negotiating cultural space is about power and, for American Indian artists, that power has often been negotiated for them, rather than through self-determination.

Indigenous artists have been put in a double bind by art criticism: they must either remain faithful to continuance and risk being relegated to the realm of “craft,” or use their Native identity as a vehicle to exploit cultural difference, often between Native and Western culture. In reality, many contemporary American Indian artists, like Bartow, endeavor to create work that responds to the social and political conditions of contemporary life. Though this strategy is helpful in negotiating the space between past and present, the “living in two worlds” narrative has become a cliché among critics of contemporary American Indian art.<sup>113</sup> Contrary to this definition, Rick Bartow’s work navigates many worlds, which he seeks to integrate,

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<sup>112</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid., 2.

rather than separate, allowing his work to be appreciated in the sociopolitical context, for which it was in at least part, created. In Rick Bartow's artwork, cultural hybridity emerges as a means to both express and to process the cultural and political contradictions surrounding American Indian life.

## APPENDIX

## FIGURES



**Figure 1.**  
*After Van Gogh (1992)*  
Rick Bartow  
Carved wood, mixed media  
23 x 12 x 8"  
[photo from *Rick Bartow: My Eye (28)*]



**Figure 2.**  
*The Parable of the Blind Leading the Blind* (1568)

Pieter Bruegel

Tempera on canvas

34 x 60"

[photo from [http://capodimonte.spmn.remuna.org/cerca/cerca/Contents/M\\_LocalFS/00900019.jpg](http://capodimonte.spmn.remuna.org/cerca/cerca/Contents/M_LocalFS/00900019.jpg), internet: 05/15/08]



**Figure 3.**  
*Big Lotso* (1999)  
Rick Bartow  
Mixed media on handmade paper  
72 x 50"  
[photo from *Rick Bartow: My Eye* (57)]





**Figure 4.**  
*She Who Watches* (n.d.)  
Lillian Pitt  
Bronze  
[dimensions unknown]  
[photo from <http://www.lillianpitt.com/masks2.html>, internet:05/05/08]



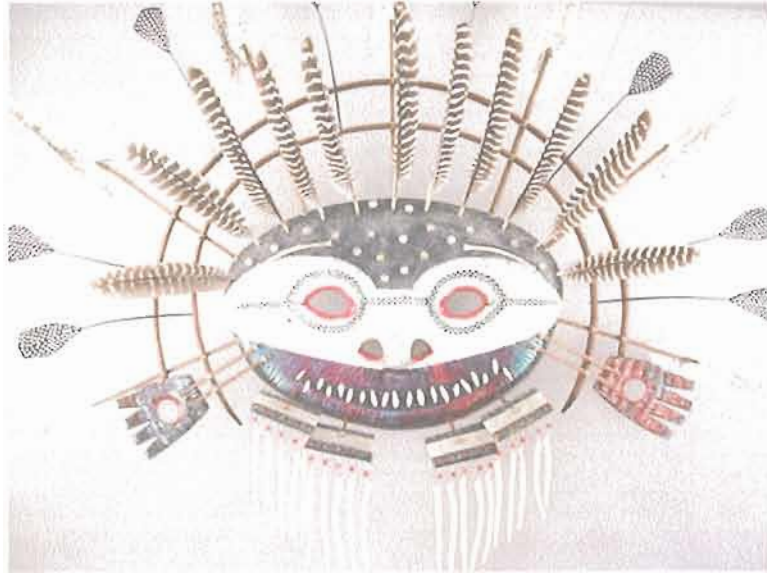
**Figure 5.**

Columbia River petroglyph (n.d.)

[artist unknown]

[dimensions unavailable]

[photo from <http://www.lillianpitt.com/masks2.html>, internet: 05/05/08]



**Figure 6.**  
*Amikuk Mask* (ca. 2006)  
Phillip John Charette  
Mixed media  
[dimensions unavailable]  
[photo from Portland Art Museum, Portland, Ore.]



**Figure 7.**

*Building Minnesota* (detail, 1990)

Edgar Heap of Birds

Installation, printed on aluminum

400 ft. (total)

[photo from [http://www.heapofbirds.com/building\\_minnesota.htm](http://www.heapofbirds.com/building_minnesota.htm), internet:  
05/26/08]



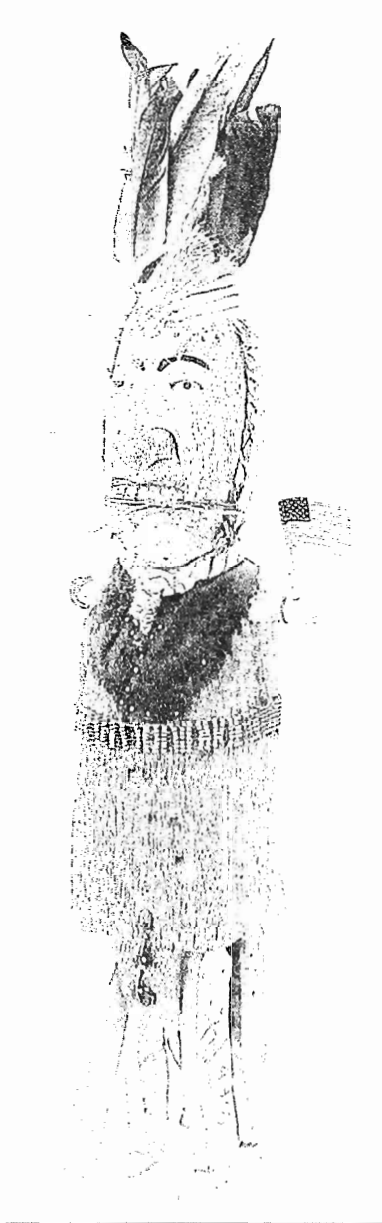
**Figure 8.**  
*Salmon Mask* (1987)  
Rick Bartow  
Carved wood, mixed media  
14 x 23 x 9"  
[photo from *Shared Visions* (65)]



**Figure 9.**  
*Dwelling* (2006) and (background) *Staff* (2006)  
Marie Watt  
Wool blankets, satin and wool felt bindings, thread  
94 x 88 x 70"  
[photo from *No Reservations* (62)]



**Figure 10.**  
*Looking for Orozco* (detail, 2006)  
Duane Slick  
Mixed media artist's book on Mylar  
22 x 15 1/4"  
[photo from *No Reservations* (56)]



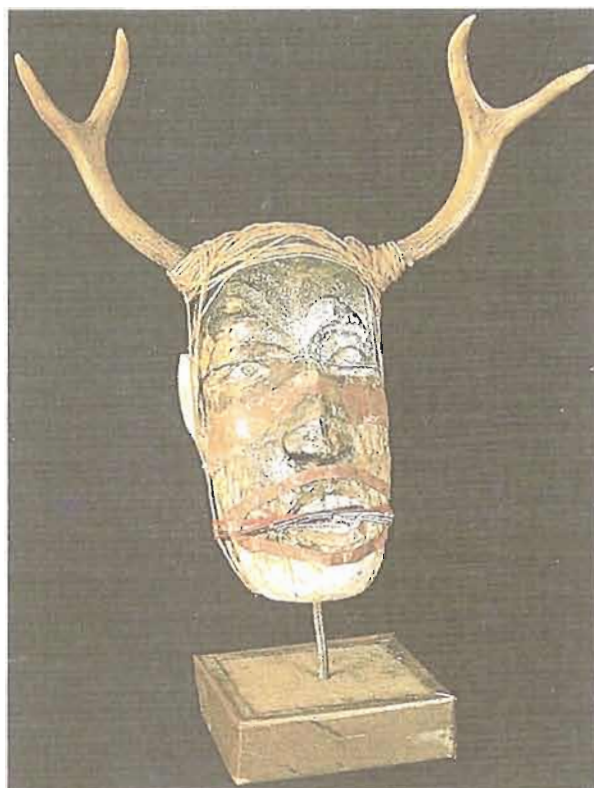
**Figure 11.**  
Untitled (1995)  
Rick Bartow  
Mixed media  
20.5 x 5 x 5 3/4"

[photo from Froelick Gallery, Portland, Ore.]





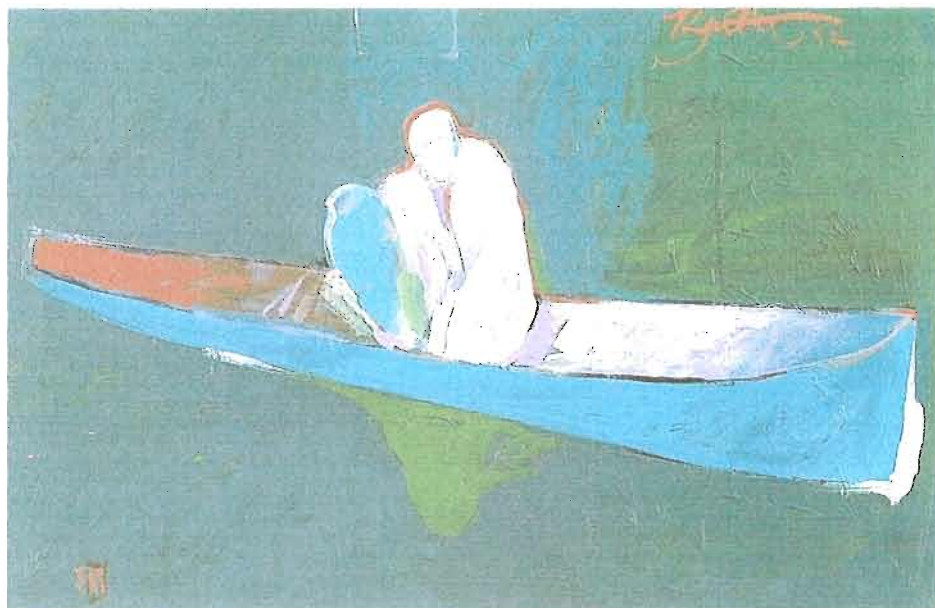
**Figure 12.**  
*Busy Walker* (1995)  
Rick Bartow  
Carved wood, mixed media  
21 x 6 x 6"  
[photo from *Rick Bartow: My Eye* (36)]



**Figure 13.**  
*The Hunter* (1995)  
Rick Bartow  
Carved wood, mixed media  
20 x 15 x 15 ½"  
[photo from *Rick Bartow: My Eye* (36)]



**Figure 14.**  
*Harmen zoon (2003)*  
Rick Bartow  
Drypoint  
4 x 3"  
[photo from the Froelick Gallery, Portland, Ore.]



**Figure 15.**  
*To Cross the River* (1992)  
Rick Bartow  
Acrylic on canvas  
16 x 24"  
[photo from *Rick Bartow: My Eye* (26)]



**Figure 16.**  
*Siletz Sunday Evening* (1992)  
Rick Bartow  
Pastel and graphite on paper  
26 x 40"  
[photo from *Rick Bartow: My Eye* (27)]



**Figure 17.**  
*Going as Coyote* (1991)  
Rick Bartow  
Pastel, charcoal, and graphite on paper  
48 x 60"  
[photo from *Rick Bartow: My Eye* (25)]



**Figure 18.**  
*Stolen Magnolia IV* (1995)  
Rick Bartow  
Mixed media on handmade bark paper  
20 ½ x 30"  
[photo from, *Rick Bartow: My Eye* (39)]



**Figure 19.**  
*Eagle Spirit* (1998)  
Rick Bartow  
Drypoint  
7 x 5"  
[photo from the Froelick Gallery. Portland, Ore.]





**Figure 20.**  
*Oguni Exhibition Hall* (1998)  
Rick Bartow  
Drypoint  
9 x 4"  
[photo from Froelick Gallery, Portland, Ore.]



**Figure 21.**

*Paper Nao* (1998)

Rick Bartow

Drypoint

12 x 16"

[photo from Froelick Gallery, Portland, Ore.]



**Figure 22.**

*Gathering* (1998)

Rick Bartow

Drypoint

6 x 12"

[photo from Froelick Gallery, Portland, Ore.]



**Figure 23.**

*For Klimt* (2000)

Rick Bartow

Drypoint

8 x 4"

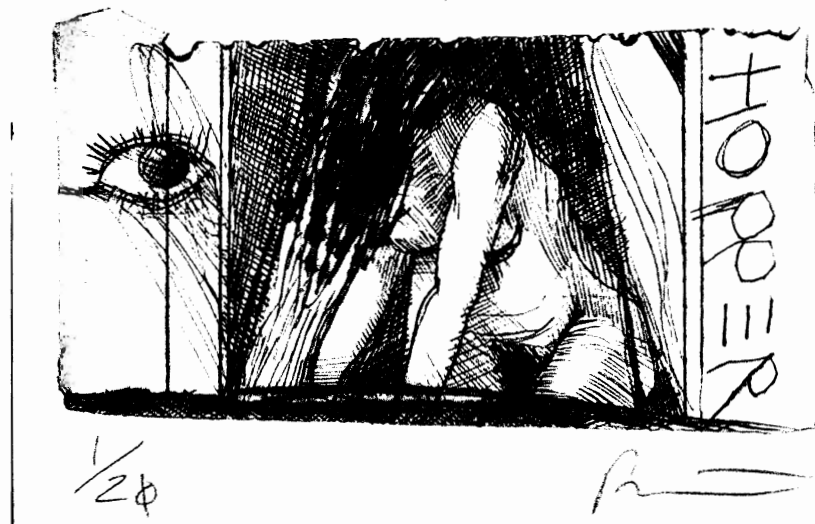
[photo from Froelick Gallery, Portland, Ore.]



**Figure 24.**  
*Nach Hans Holbein* (1999)  
Rick Bartow  
Drypoint  
6 x 4"  
[photo from Froelick Gallery, Portland, Ore.]



**Figure 25.**  
*Nach Schiele* (1999)  
Rick Bartow  
Drypoint  
8 x 4"  
[photo from Froelick Gallery, Portland, Ore.]



**Figure 26.**  
*Nach Hopper* (2001)  
Rick Bartow  
Drypoint  
2 x 4"  
[photo from Froelick Gallery, Portland, Ore.]

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